I'll Be Home For Christmas (If only in your memories)

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I'll Be Home For Christmas (If only in your memories)

by Falafel_Waffel

Summary

The night before Christmas, Shane gives Ilya a part of himself he thought he had to leave behind in Russia.

Notes

So, these two have bewitched me mind, body, and spirit.

Twas the night before Christmas, and all that.

The league broke for the holidays, not long enough for people to travel back to their home countries but enough time to relax and spend time with friends and family. Ilya and Shane would spend the morning feeding his parents breakfast and exchanging gifts, there was a team lunch that started as a way to give the single and far flung guys some sense of family, and finally 'schlepping to Montreal' according to Ilya for dinner with the Pikes.

Shane had tried to get up no less than six times to triple check everything was prepped so they didn't have to rush around tomorrow morning, or worse, have his parents think they have to lift a finger. Ilya was very insistent that since they'd miss Christmas dinner, they'd be sure the Hollander's didn't have to do anything but show up.

He tries *again* to go check but Ilya grabs his sleeve, pulling him back down to the rug where they're laying by the fire under a throw. It started with Ilya playing with the dog, then naturally Shane had to join them, because he was feeling a bit left out. Anya left shortly after, deciding there were better places to lay down and chew on her toys, freeing Ilya to pull Shane down to the plush rug with him. Arms around his middle so Shane falls onto his chest and is promptly squeezed, "*Dusha moya*, everything that can be prepped is. If you get up and check the fridge again Anya will think she's getting cheese. And she's being such a good girl on the couch chewing her bone."

Shane has to roll his eyes, "Because every time *you* go to the fridge she gets cheese." Ilya loosens up his grip and lets Shane roll off him onto his stomach.

Ilya can only shrug and hook a finger under Shane's chin to pull him in for a kiss. "I was actually getting up to get one of your presents," Shane says with his forehead pressed against his husband's.

Ilya takes his hand, rubbing his wedding band between his callused fingers, "Oh? But it is not Christmas. Santa will not come until we're asleep."

"Santa came early," Shane deadpans and pulls away. His knees crack when he stands, he ignores Ilya's glare. Ilya also sounds like bubblewrap when standing, he's got no room to judge. Decorating the tree was an exercise in patience neither man possessed and Anya believed all of the ornaments were hers to play with leading to them buying baby gates and 'putting the tree in prison' as Ilya said. Until Anya showed them baby gates meant nothing and she pulled the thing down on herself. No animals were hurt, only her pride. Plus the small dent in their floor, hence the new rug since thinking about it for too long would make Shane break out into hives.

She's eyed the tree like it was going to jump her ever since. It didn't help that Ilya scolded the tree when Anya looked warily at it and whimpered once. Now the dog thinks it's okay to yell at the tree, which did nothing wrong seeing as it's a tree and incapable of committing dog targeting crimes. Or any crimes come to think of it.

He pulls out the box. There were several ways this could go, in fact when it was handed to him he only managed to check that it was what he asked for before hiding it away. So he truly doesn't know the full extent of his 'purchase'. His husband watches his return closely, "I didn't want you to open this when my parents were here. I'm not sure if this is going to be a good or bad thing." Shane explains. Ilya looks intrigued, "It's not a sex thing."

His husband huffs, "Then what's the point? It's Christmas, I wanted to fuck you in ways that would make god cry. You're not about to tell me you're pregnant, are you?"

Shane rolls his eyes, again, "Try as we may, I don't think we're able to defy biology."

"Shame. Pretty baby with your freckles and my hockey skills-"

"Okay. I'll tell Andi her services are no longer required and she's going to be stuck with a hockey goddess come June"

Ilya gasps, "Never. Our little *pchelka* will grow up here, loved by her fathers, sister, and grandparents. Then maybe she becomes the best player the PWHL has ever seen." He smiles and takes the present, shaking it a little, "Is heavy."

"Yup."

"Not a sex toy?"

"I assure you, it is not."

"Shame."

Ilya rips the paper carefully, which always surprises Shane who figured Ilya would take some small joy in the little bit of destruction he could cause opening a gift. Shane packaged it in a sturdier box than the one Andrei shipped it to Ottawa in, a simple green box with three rows of photos and unlabeled tabs that Ilya will never use but if Shane talks to him about it long enough he'll glean how Ilya sees the pictures and know how to break them down. When Ilya lifts the lid Shane watches the look of curiosity turn to confusion then to wariness at the rows of pictures. Shane places his hand on Ilya's, "We were at my parents a few months ago, and my dad was showing you baby pictures of me and I realized when you came here, when you chose Canada and me you gave up a lot of *you*, your past, your heritage. I don't know how to give that back to you. I think this is a start." Shane pulls his hand away.

The pictures are stuck together from age and maybe humidity, but he finds a way to slowly unstick them from each other. "Oh *mama…"* he whispers, tracing Irina's tired face as she holds newborn Ilya in her arms. Tears well up in his husband's eyes, and even though every part of Shane is screaming that he made Ilya cry, he's relieved.

Because he's smiling. He passes the picture to Shane who studies it, "You have her smile," he says quietly.

"Thank you… I-" Shane kisses his cheek, which does nothing to erode how stunned his husband is. "How?"

“It doesn’t matter.” Shane flips the picture over and stares at the fading black ink on the back of the picture. “What does this say?”

Ilya looks back over the photo, “*Ilya Grigoryevich Rozanov*, that’s my name.”

“No shit.”

“Fifteen, June 1991. That’s also my birthday.” Ilya takes the photo back and stares closely. *“Ilyushka*. Is… nickname.”

“But that’s longer.”

Ilya scoffs, “I didn’t make the rules. It was assigned at birth in Soviet hospital.” He passes the picture back. “I still want to know how this happened.” He emphasizes his demand by tapping the box aggressively.

“I’ll tell you, I just want to see more of you. I can only go so far back Googling you, and when I do that, it’s just boring team pictures. You’re smiling in none of those until Ottawa and then you have that string of the dumbest pictures ever.”

His husband’s eyes light up, “Oh you Google me, huh?”

“Yeah, I was taking out a life insurance policy on you and they needed your weight and I went ‘some dumb ass hockey blog surely has this information’”

Ilya shrugs, “Good plan, if I die, you will be very rich man.”

“I am a very rich man. I have you, Anya, a daughter on the way, and a NHL contract. Oh, and brand deals…”

Ilya cover’s Shane’s face with his hand and pushes him away, “Enough of that. How did you get Andrei to mail these? My brother was cut off from my money, Shane. How much did you pay him?” Because there is no doubt that Andrei would demand financial compensation for even having to think about his brother.

“It’s rude to ask how much someone spent on your gift, plus the amount is meaningless. You have a part of your childhood back.”

“I have my mother’s face back, I was forgetting how she looked full of life.” Shane fully understands the implications there. Ilya digs deeper, pulling out a blurry picture taken at toddler height of his mother. Even unfocused it was easy to see her smile for her son. “Shane, *how* did you do this for me?”

“Well, like I said, it started with my baby pictures, and you calling me a fat baby.”

Ilya hums, stretched out on the floor. He pulls himself and the box closer to Shane and rests his head on his thigh, “I did not mean to upset,” Ilya confesses. “Fat babies are good, well fed, loved. Your parents keep photographs of you as a child all over both of their homes. I never had to doubt how much they love you even the first time I was in their house.”

“Hey, you’re there too now.”

“Our babies will also be fat. Our daughter first, then our next one”

Shane rolls his eyes and runs his fingers through Ilya’s curls, “I think you mean chunky, maybe chubby?”

“Chunky is for soups and sour milk. Chubby is… no good. I like it less.”

“So you, me, Anya, and some fat babies?”

Ilya smiles, “The dream.”

He rests the box on his chest and pulls out another random picture. It’s of his entire family, his mother and father dead center with Andrei on his father’s knee and Ilya in his mother’s arms, “Maybe not so much this one.”

“Do you talk to any of them?” Shane asks.

Ilya sets the photo down on top of the one he took of his mother, “Ah… No. This is my father’s family, most are dead. Those still alive? I am *disappointment, abomination.* Russia was… different place when I was born than it is today. Then it got worse.”

Fundamentally, Shane knows this. The process of getting Ilya declared a permanent resident was complicated slightly by a peculiar stamp on his birth certificate that everyone just ‘had to see’, and the fact that Ilya outlived a nation by the easily forgettable fact he was born six months before the fall of the Soviet Union.

They were told it threw up a red flag to be further reviewed but were convinced the novelty of the documents caused the fuss. The next picture is further in the stack, Ilya now a toddler with a head full of frizzy blonde curls and barefoot surrounded by dogs, “Oh, now there’s a shock. Ilya and every dog in town.”

Ilya smiles, “Some were strays, most were neighbors dogs. I’d feed them every afternoon, until Andrei found out and told our father. Was a waste of food. I’d think old mindset now, but maybe not so much then. We were… comfortable.”

Anya drops her bone off the couch with a loud *thunk* that makes both of them jump. She stares at the toy, whines once before hopping off the couch and fully pushing it under with her paws. Shane groans. He reaches behind himself for a pillow so Ilya has a place to rest his head while he fishes out the toy that Anya isn’t interested in now but tomorrow there will be hell to pay if she can’t find it. “Are you okay if I walk her one last time?”

Ilya is staring at another picture, “Hmm? What? Oh, yes. She needs to do her business. When you get back, you need to finish telling me about how this happened.”

Shane really hoped Ilya would forget, and maybe Andrei was too annoyed to yell at his brother over email or a phone call because the wire for the pictures came from the bank account of Shane Hollander, not the team. Pictures in hand, and not wanting to explain family dynamics to the people in payroll he didn’t care to keep up the ruse.

Anya does not care that it's annoyingly cold out and that Shane has just spent the better part of the evening curled up by the fire with her other dad. She sniffs everything and Shane lets her because apparently it's good for her brain. Shane doesn't understand how pressing her nose into the snow and taking a big long sniff is that good, but it makes her happy. She catches a scent, probably from another dog in the neighborhood she likes and her tail begins to swish. Shane might not get it, but the extra long sniff session must be good. Ilya can't totally be wrong and just telling Shane whatever will extend the walk. They're out for a while and find Ilya in the same spot but with most of the pictures out of the box like he spent the time separating them rapidly. Shane takes their mugs and dumps out the old tea before replacing it with decaf and returning to his spot as Ilya's pillow. Ilya is putting the sorted pictures back with no mind for the organizational tabs, leaving out the ones he set aside.

"So, care to tell me how you got my brother to do this?"

"Well, I had help from Harris."

Ilya hums, "And how does Harris come into play?"

"Well, he caught me while I was hanging back in the dressing room and we got to talking. He suggested the team reaches out. Your brother took the bait and a few months later a box arrived from Russia and after confirming your baby pictures were in there, I wired him some money."

Ilya looks up at him, brows furrowed and looking annoyed, "How much?"

"You'll never know."

Ilya engages in what can only be considered 'vigorous Russian swearing' before the English part of his brain is back in the driver's seat, "My *brother* gets none of our money. That is what I told him, again and again, especially after what he said about *you*." Shane shudders at the reminder. The vivid picture Andrei painted about the type of man he thought Shane was, and what his role must have been for his team. It came through on a voicemail because Ilya wasn't interested in taking his call. It was Shane's own fault for translating it.

Shane can only shrug, "I did what I had to, and I'd do it again."

"Why? They're pictures, it's not-"

Shane places his hand on Ilya's chest, "Ilya, it's important. It's important for you to have something of your mother, besides her cross, to hold onto. It's important *to me* that you have something to remember the parts of Russia you love. And maybe most importantly it's important to me that our daughter, when she's old enough to care, will get some part of her father's heritage since we can't take her to Russia. You can tell her all the stories you want, but when she imagines her grandparents, she should have their faces."

Ilya sniffs, "Oh…" Shane gives him his moment to collect himself before Shane leans down and kisses his forehead. "Thank you, my love." It was always going to be an easier pill to swallow if he highlighted the benefit for their daughter.

“You’re welcome.”

Ilya pats a stack of pictures. “I like these the most. I have to go through the rest when it is not late, but… I’d like to introduce you to my mother.”

And so they sat by the fire sipping tea that had gone long cold as Shane finally got to meet his mother-in-law through her son and the memories she wanted to immortalize on film.

“She cried when we got there,” Ilya explains while showing Shane a picture of him dressed for school. “Which I did not understand because she was the one making me go, so I thought I deserved to cry.”

“Aw, she missed you.”

“*Da*. I was with her always. Her shadow. My father hated it, Andrei hated it. I was not a girl, so why did I want to be in the kitchen with my mother?”

They move further through the pictures. Ilya and Andrei looking less than thrilled to be pictured together, Ilya learning to skate, Ilya’s first hockey game, “I did not score a single goal, but I did trip several of the other boys, most of them not on my team.”

“So you were a pest since day one?”

“Well, they weren’t burning…” Ilya trails off, brow furrowing as he tries to search for the word. “effigy! Effigy. They weren’t burning effigies of me, yet.”

“No one does that anymore.”

“Montreal might. I sullied and stole Shane Hollander right from under them. I reduced their hockey god to a tool to benefit only my career. Ignore all his own accomplishments, we all know he functions to benefit only me.” He says it lightly, a joke even, but after years of therapy and space between him and his former team, it still stings.

He huffs anyway, “I can’t believe he let you do that, right under their noses?”

“I moved slowly, over an entire decade. It was impressive. I should try becoming a jewel thief.”

“Stick to stealing hockey players. We don’t even really wear jewelry.”

Ilya picks up Shane’s hand and kisses his ring, “You don’t *wear* the jewels, you sell them.”

They go through more of the pictures. Some of dogs that are long dead at this point, Ilya doing homework, but mostly of Ilya playing hockey. The last picture, Ilya 12 at the time, is quickly passed to Shane. “That one was the last in the stack. There are two rolls of film in there.”

“I know.”

“I think that was one of the last of my games she ever saw. Before…” he trails off. “My father wanted me in the KHL, but my mother… She told me of the NHL, said it was the best league in the world.”

“It is.”

“You are biased, but also correct.” He snatches the picture back. “She said that players from all around the world went to play in it. Viktor Nechayev, Sergei Pryakhin, Alexander Mogilny, Sergei Fedorov, Vladimir Konstantinov. Defectors, trailblazers-”

“The Russian Five?” Shane asks, as if he didn’t read a book about them years ago when trying to cling to anything that could remind him of Ilya over the long and lonely summers.

“Yes, them. She told me about them, and told me that if I worked hard, and trained harder I might get drafted to play in the NHL. So I did, for her.”

“I didn’t know that.”

Ilya hums, “So I helped Russia beat the boring Canadian team with a Captain no one would shut up about. Some prodigy, a savant of the game but the only thing I ever noticed about him was his freckles. But, we beat them, and I got picked first… for her. Then a few years later, I won the cup. For her.”

Shane’s eyes sting with unshed tears, “She’s so proud of you, I know she is.”

“I hope so. She would be surprised I have pretty Canadian husband and not pretty Russian wife, but I think she’d see how happy you make me and love you all the same.”

Ilya leaves the stack of pictures on top of the box before abandoning it on the coffee table to be sorted at a more appropriate time. He heaves himself into a standing position and Anya takes this as her cue to dash up stairs because it is *finally* bed time, “Come, *vozlublenniy.* Bed time.”

“Are we going to bed, or to sleep?” Shane asks.

Ilya holds out his hand and helps Shane off the floor, “To *sleep*. Santa will not come if we are up all night.”

Shane lets Ilya pull him upstairs without taking their mugs into the kitchen, but Ilya follows him into the shower without Shane arguing that they spent the evening in the kitchen and they changed their sheets today to what Shane calls the good set. After, Ilya gently towel dries Shane’s hair as he does his own skin care before turning on Ilya who refuses to use the products on *himself* when Shane is right there to dab cream under his eyes and tell him he’ll be young and beautiful forever.

Morning comes and with it a light dusting of fresh snow that brings with it the zoomies in Anya. They take time when they get back to release the tree from prison and put the remaining gifts under it, “Make sure we-” Shane starts.

“It’s front and center. And even if it wasn’t, there’s no way you’re going to lose this in our own house.”

“And the gifts for the team?”

“In the car already. We’re good.” Ilya promises before the doorbell rings. “We’re good?” Ilya asks.

Shane nods, “Good.”

They’re all in the living room, watching Ilya put another bow onto Anya’s back who wiggles in excitement, when his mom finally asks about the box on the coffee table. “What’s this?”

Ilya sticks a red bow into Anya’s head, “Oh? Christmas present from Shane. Pictures.” Shane watches his mom’s curious hand retreat, making his cheeks heat up with shame. “Not indecent! We wouldn’t leave those out. These are very innocent.” He reaches forward, taps the stack he left out into a neat pile and hands them to his mother. “*My* baby pictures.” He pulls off the lid. “A lot of pictures.”

They leave them to admire baby Ilya, and even look through the rest of the stack to finish breakfast, where they’ll give them their final present. David comes into the kitchen with a picture and his phone of a head shot Ilya took during his ‘dumbass picture’ era. “Same face,” he concludes, showing the two side by side.

Ilya’s cheeks puff up, “No, completely different. I was eight here, couldn’t even grow a beard.”

“Ha, yeah. That makes them totally different,” he teases.

Ilya grabs Shane’s waist with one hand and pulls out his phone, “Let’s find *your* head shots.” Shane knows them well, he’s only taken a few of them while smiling. The first was when he first made Captain, the season after his name was etched onto the Stanley Cup, and finally his first season with Ottawa. “I’m going to make the best face next media day.”

“No,” Shane whines, “My parents post those when bragging about you and I. Can you *please* just smile like it’s school picture day?”

“I’ve seen a lot of kids making dumb faces in those.” Specifically Ruby and Jade Pike who cannot be paid to take a serious picture. Both Hayden and Jackie have tried.

His mother comes in next with a picture of Ilya on Irina’s hip, “Can I get these digitized? That way no matter what happens you’ll have them, and I can print a copy of this one. I have a picture of me holding Shane at about this age and I think both of them would look so cute together.”

Ilya hesitates, probably at the thought of temporarily losing custody of the images of his childhood, “You would put my mother up in your house?”

His mom rests a hand on Ilya’s cheek, “Of course, sweetheart. She’s family.”

They pretend to not notice Ilya tear up. “Uh, yes. Take all of them. There’s other film in there, not developed.”

Breakfast is eggs benedict because Ilya had to brag about how good he is at poaching an egg, and making sauce while leaving Shane in charge of salad and a vinaigrette while all four nurse coffee. Shane lets himself get distracted by how annoying the cleanup will be because they’re talking instead of cleaning up. Ilya must notice because he scoops up the plates and kisses Shane’s temple, “No, stay. I got this.”

“Can you get the-”

“Once I rinse these.” He gives him one last kiss before disappearing into the kitchen.

“So what are your plans for the rest of the day?”

“Lunch with the team, then we’re heading to Montreal for dinner at the Pike’s. What are you two up to?”

“Bottle of wine, turning on some Christmas movies and being very lazy tonight. Might pull out the pictures of Christmas when you were younger to remember the glory days. Want us to watch Anya tonight so you don’t have to rush back?”

“And deprive the Pikes of their quarterly Anya visit? Fat chance.”

Ilya returns and sets a wrapped box in front of them while taking a long sip of his coffee, “Plus, Pike made the kids a rink in the backyard. We have to take advantage of that while we can.” Ilya takes his seat next to Shane again, and rests his arm across the back of Shane’s chair. “Get pointers.”

Shane taps the box with a knuckle, “I think you might be able to guess this one.”

At least he hopes judging by the way his parents attack the wrapping paper. Inside, in a nest of tissue paper is a picture of a sonogram of their daughter and a little sign Ilya put his heart into making.

Baby Hollander-Rozanov, due June 28th.

The debate on who’s name should go first was never ending, neither order seemed to flow better than the other so they flipped a coin. They say goodbye to his parents after many happy tears over the impending arrival of their first child, and his parents first grandchild. Yuna and David quickly switched gears into planning a shower, asking if they had a registry, and talking about finally converting Shane’s childhood bedroom into a room for their grandchild since obviously they didn’t need to be asked to watch her for road trips. They take the box of photos, much to Shane’s surprise, promising to return them before they see each other for New Years.

The team lunch comes with another round of announcements and after the team presents their Captain with his gift, they spare no time in complaining it would have been a lot easier to get Ilya gifts for the baby since he’s annoying to shop for. Ilya’s never met an impulse purchase

he didn't give into. They hand out the gifts they got for the team, and regardless of how polite it is, leave for their third and final destination.

"God, who is even on the road right now?" Shane complains from the passenger seat.

Ilya shrugs, "Other children of divorce."

"Neither of us is a child of divorce."

"Explain that to Montreal."

Okay, so fair.

Jackie tries to crush Shane when they tell them about their daughter. Ilya's argument that she can't break Shane's ribs to give her husband's team an easier time, Ilya and Hayden gear up for yet another verbal sparing match, though this one with significantly less heat to it than the ones before it.

Which is a blessing two days before the trade deadline when Hayden Pike becomes a Centaur.

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Emilya Irene Hollander-Rozanova was born on a rainy day in June and immediately overshadowed the other major life event her father achieved only one week prior. By shear force of will the pair were not hungover when called by their surrogate's husband that she had gone into labor. Her birth was announced to the public in early August when Shane's day with the cup came and went.

By the time they reach their first Christmas, his parents house is already mostly taken over by pictures of their grandchild, but with them pictures of her father's and happy snapshots of both their childhoods. Almost a year after regaining possession of this part of his childhood and mother, Ilya still gets misty eyed when he sees him and his own mother placed prominently on his in-law's walls alongside their son and grandchild.

Shane watches him closely as he descends the stairs with their daughter after changing her.

"And you see that?" he asks their baby. "That is your father, not much into fishing. Is ok, he's a half decent hockey player." Shane would argue, feels compelled to argue, but he doesn't want to ruin this moment. "And there is you, your grandpa took that one when you rolled on your tummy for the first time for them." Ilya leans in and whispers something to her and Shane would bet that he's telling her that she had already been doing that, but didn't want to ruin the moment for the new grandparents.

"And this one is me and your *babuskha*. She did not get a chance to meet you, but she's in here," he taps a finger to his heart and then their daughters. "Always in your heart, *Emunia*."

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