

Somewhere in my memory (Christmas joys all around me)

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by [soul_wanderer](#)

Summary

Ilya never liked Christmas time. Or maybe, he did, once, a long time ago.

Shane understands, and quietly sets out to bring back some of that Christmas magic for Ilya.

Notes

I'm a sap. This is quite literally the first fic I am writing for them, and I randomly decided to give this fandom a Christmas story, because I'm a sucker for some soft hurt/comfort.

Sorry in advance for any discrepancies, I have not read the books yet, so I only did some quick googling to fill my biggest knowledge gaps.

Also, as a neurodivergent person, I am awfully fond of autistic Shane, that's all.

Enjoy, and happy holidays to everyone who celebrates!

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Ilya had never liked Christmas time. Or well, he had, once, but that had been a long time ago.

He told people it was because of the cold, or the lack thereof, because North American winters were a pale imitation of the real thing back in Russia, because Christmas music was repetitive and stupid, and nobody needed that much cinnamon in their lives. He said it like a joke, shrugging it off as if it didn't matter.

Shane knew better than to push. He also knew better than to ignore it entirely and pretend Christmas didn't exist.

Ilya's childhood memories of Christmas existed in fragments. The way their mother would take them to find the "most perfect" Christmas tree. His mother humming Christmas songs while she wrapped presents at the kitchen table, playfully scolding them when they tried to take a peek, them running away giggling, barely able to stay patient in their excitement. The way she tried - always tried - to make it magical, even when their father's mood and temper made the air at home feel sharp and dangerous.

For a few years, she succeeded. Or at least she made Ilya and his brother believe she did. They had cozy evenings, handmade decorations, thoughtful gifts, hot chocolates after spending too much time outside, playing in the snow.

But then the shadows crept in earlier each year. His father's voice, low and furious behind closed doors. His mother's smile getting thinner, eyes losing their sparkle. The last Christmases before her death carried a weight Ilya hadn't known how to name yet, only that something was wrong and that wanting joy had started to feel dangerous.

After she died - after he found her - Christmas became an empty thing. His father barely acknowledged it, and the few times Ilya dared to ask were met with angry yelling that shook him to the core and made him never ask again. Ever. Extended family gatherings weren't much better; they felt stiff, obligatory, cold in a way that had nothing to do with the unforgiving winter taking place outside. When Ilya left Russia, he left Christmas behind with it.

So, when Shane suggested getting a tree, Ilya laughed.

"A real tree?" he asked, incredulous. "You know it dies, yes?"

Shane's mouth twisted in a way that let Ilya know that he had already made a decision and was bracing himself for resistance anyway.

"Yes. That's...part of it."

Ilya squinted at him then, muttering a soft, "You are very strange man."

Shane didn't rise to the bait, not when he knew Ilya's defence mechanisms all too well. He simply added, "We can get a small one."

And that's what they did. Shane measured the space twice before they went out, and then again once the tree was in the apartment, moving it several times before announcing in a quiet, satisfied tone, "*Perfect.*"

Ilya watched, amused, fond, pretending he wasn't already warm in his chest over something as ridiculous as a small, absurdly crooked tree. Shane had told him that crooked trees deserved nice homes, too, and he hadn't even dared to argue with his usually type A personality boyfriend about it, because he found it surprisingly endearing.

Decorating it was chaos, though.

Ilya was objectively terrible at it. He put ornaments wherever his hand landed, heaps of them hanging too close together, tinsel draped like it was hanging on for dear life. Shane rearranged half of it with quiet determination, spacing lights evenly, fixing crooked hooks, stepping back repeatedly to assess the symmetry of it all.

"You know," Ilya said lightly, an amused but soft smile on his lips, "in my country, we put everything on tree and it looks like Christmas explosion. Very festive."

Shane snorted, barely audible, and kept working. Still, he quietly decided to leave some of the spots Ilya had decorated as they were, swallowing his own discomfort and prioritizing Ilya's comfort. That was something he could do, after all.

The apartment looked different when he was done - smaller, cozier, warmer, like the world outside was moving on without them for a while.

Ilya leaned against the counter, watching Shane stare at the tree with that satisfied focus he usually reserved for game footage and meticulously planned meals. The very same focus he had grown to love, no matter how much it exasperated him sometimes, especially when it was cockblocking him. Still, he admired Shane for it, the fact that he could get so lost in the things he cared about, the fact that he was now lucky enough to be one of those things he cared about.

"You happy?" Ilya asked.

Shane nodded once. Then, after a moment, added, "Yes."

Ilya couldn't help himself then, pushing himself away from the counter, coming up behind Shane, arms gently wrapping around his waist, chin easily coming to rest on his shoulder, quietly admiring the tree with him, but mostly admiring the way it seemed to satisfy Shane.

Later, Shane made hot chocolate.

This was particularly notable because it did not fit into his usual diet at all. He heated the milk carefully, stirred the cocoa with the same precise movements he used when prepping protein shakes, and insisted – insisted - that tiny marshmallows were a requirement.

"It's Christmas," he said, as if that explained everything.

Ilya didn't argue. He wrapped his hands around the mug, one of the silly Christmas-themed ones Shane had brought into their home not too long ago, and let the warmth sink into him, let himself exist in the moment without bracing for something to go wrong, simply because Shane was there, steadying him with his mere presence.

Afterwards, they watched a terrible Christmas movie, one with a ridiculous romance and a small town that looked nothing like real places, and Shane made dry, perfectly timed comments pointing out inconsistencies and impossibilities that nearly made Ilya choke laughing.

On the morning of the 25th, they exchanged gifts.

It still felt strange to Ilya, celebrating on this day, but he didn't say that out loud. He didn't need to, because Shane had clearly planned this part too, the timing, the order, the quiet morning without interruptions, with just the two of them. The gifts were thoughtful in the way Shane was always thoughtful: things Ilya had mentioned once and forgotten about, things that suited him in ways only Shane would know and understand.

Ilya kissed him afterward, slow and soft, all sharp edges gone, the way he kissed him more often these days, even though he would definitely try to make a joke if Shane tried to point that out.

Eventually, January came. The holidays faded everywhere else, trees dragged to curbs, lights taken down, but Shane insisted they keep theirs just a little longer, tending to it as if his life depended on it, trying to keep it from losing more needles, not once commenting on the mess that would usually drive him crazy.

And then, one evening, Shane handed Ilya a small, neatly wrapped box.

"I remembered," he said, almost a little stiffly.

Ilya blinked. "Remembered what?"

"When you told me...when you used to celebrate Christmas."

January seventh. Orthodox Christmas. A day Shane didn't have any personal attachment to, except that it mattered to Ilya.

Ilya didn't speak for a long moment. He just took the gift, turning it over carefully in his hands, like it might disappear if he wasn't gentle enough.

Shane, on the other hand, held his breath, hoping he hadn't overstepped. Hoping this wasn't going to trigger Ilya's tendency to try to run when emotions felt too big, too hard to face or handle.

"You didn't have to," he said quietly.

“I wanted to.”

Something in Ilya’s chest loosened then, something old and tight, some ache that’s been buried far too long. He opened the gift and laughed softly at what was inside, blinking hard while Shane graciously, lovingly pretended to not see the tears he was holding back.

Later, when Ilya pulled Shane into his arms, he rested his forehead against the side of his head and let himself feel it all, the warmth, the care, the deliberate way Shane had made space for joy without trying to erase or replace his past.

It didn’t erase the few happy memories he had of the holidays while his mother was still alive, and it didn’t replace the love she had given him while she still could.

But it gave him something new, something quiet, something profound. Something to build on. Something to settle into.

And for the first time in a very long time, Ilya thought that maybe Christmas didn’t have to hurt forever.

End Notes

Feedback is appreciated <3

(you can also find me on tumblr under the same user name - so feel free to connect!)

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