

Home for Christmas

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76283261) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76283261>.

Rating:	Not Rated
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Yuna Hollander & Ilya Rozanov , David Hollander & Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Yuna Hollander , David Hollander
Additional Tags:	Christmas Fluff , Fluff and Humor , Comfort No Hurt , Book 2: Heated Rivalry (Game Changers) , Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander , POV Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov , Established Relationship
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-23 Words: 2,602 Chapters: 1/1

Home for Christmas

by [ompalompap](#)

Summary

Ilya stands in the hallway of Shane's parents' house with his boots still on, shoulders slightly hunched, fingers worrying the sleeve of his sweater. He's been here before, plenty of times, but tonight feels different. Tonight means something. Christmas lights glow along the banister, warm gold reflected in the windowpanes, and somewhere deeper in the house there's the low murmur of voices and the clink of dishes.

He leans toward Shane and whispers, for the third time since they parked the car. "Are you sure it's okay? Like, really okay?"

Shane smiles at him, soft and fond, the way he does when he understands exactly what's going on in Ilya's head. He cups Ilya's elbow, thumb brushing reassurance into skin. "Yes," he says gently. "They want you here. I want you here."

Ilya nods, even though his chest still feels too full, like something might spill over if he breathes wrong. Christmas with a family. A real one. Not a hotel, not a team dinner, not a quiet night pretending it doesn't matter. This matters so much it scares him.

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Ilya's first Christmas with the Hollanders.

Notes

Merry Christmas everyone! <3

The snow has been falling since morning, soft and patient, the kind that makes the world quieter instead of colder.

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The door opens before he can spiral further.

"Ilya!" Yuna's voice is warm and bright, wrapped in cinnamon and excitement. She's already pulling him into a hug, careful but genuine, the way she always is, like she knows he might break if she squeezes too hard. "You made it. Gosh, you must be freezing."

David stands just behind her, smiling in that calm, steady way of his, nodding once like this is settled, like Ilya belongs here and always has. "Merry Christmas," he says, and there's something solid in it. Something real.

"Merry Christmas," Ilya replies, voice a little thick. He hopes they don't notice. He hopes they do. The two of them are ushered inside, Yuna shutting the door behind them. As Shane

is embraced by his parents, Ilya takes in his surroundings.

The house smells like food and pine and candles, vanilla and cloves and something buttery baking in the oven. A record plays quietly in the living room, old Christmas music that crackles a little at the edges. The lights aren't harsh; everything is warm, soft, lived in. There are framed photos on every surface, Shane at different ages, awkward and smiling, missing teeth, hockey jerseys too big for his body.

Yuna and David walk off into the kitchen. Shane peels his jacket off, Ilya mirroring him. Ilya's hand finds Shane's waist without thinking. It rests there like it's always belonged. Shane doesn't flinch or pull away. He leans into it, easy, natural, like this is the most obvious thing in the world. They share a quick kiss, before walking into the dining room.

Dinner is already waiting for them, steam curling lazily from serving dishes as Yuna ushers them toward the table like it's the most natural thing in the world that Ilya should be there. The table is set carefully, real plates, folded napkins, candles lit low enough not to intrude but bright enough to glow. It feels intentional. Thought through. Like space has been made.

"Sit, sit," Yuna says, waving them into their chairs. "You must be starving."

Ilya pulls out Shane's chair without thinking, fingers brushing his back as he passes behind him. Shane flashes him a giddy smile. He murmurs a quiet thank you and sits, knees almost touching Ilya's beneath the table.

They start with easy conversation at first, how the drive was, how the snow came down earlier than expected, how the break feels too short and too long all at once. Laughter comes easily, overlapping and warm, the kind that fills a room instead of bouncing off the walls.

Yuna pours water, then pauses, eyes lighting up. "Oh, do you remember this?" she asks Shane suddenly, turning toward David with a conspiratorial smile. "When he used to refuse us to wash his jersey? Because it ruined the luck it brought?"

Shane groans immediately. "Mom."

David chuckles, shaking his head. “Three weeks,” he adds. “You wouldn’t let us touch it until we got complaints from your teammates about your ‘weird smell’.”

“I was nine,” Shane protests, blushing as he looks down at his food.

“A very smelly seven-year-old,” Yuna points out, with a wide smile on her lips.

Ilya laughs before he can stop himself, a soft, surprised sound that slips out of him. Shane looks at him, mock-offended, but smiling too, eyes crinkling at the corners.

“You’re enjoying this,” Shane accuses lightly. Ilya watches him, absolutely wrecked with love.

“I am,” Ilya admits, still smiling. “Very much.”

Yuna beams at him. “Oh good. I have so many more.”

Dinner stretches on like that, stories folding into stories, plates being passed, glasses refilled without asking. Yuna tells tale after tale of a younger Shane; the time he tried to sleep in his hockey helmet because he was afraid, he’d miss practice in the morning; the Christmas he cried because his skates were the wrong shade of red; the year he insisted on setting an alarm every hour on Christmas Eve “just to check” if morning had arrived.

“I was committed,” Shane mutters, face warm, and Ilya’s knee presses gently into his under the table, a quiet show of solidarity.

At some point, Yuna turns the focus gently, naturally, toward Ilya.

“And what about you, Ilya?” she asks, tone curious but careful. “Did you celebrate Christmas growing up?”

Ilya hesitates for half a second, old instincts flaring, measure your words, don't overshare, don't make it heavy. But something about the table, the candlelight, Shane's leg warm against his own, makes honesty feel safe.

"Yes," he says slowly. "Not always like this, but... yes. My family- well, it is different, in Russia."

Shane gives him a concerned look, as if saying *I'm sorry for their questions*. Ilya doesn't mind the questions. Christmas hasn't always been bad, his mother used to make it magical when he was younger. It used to be good.

David nods encouragingly. "Want to tell us about it?"

Ilya smiles, he does want to. He talks about smaller spaces, louder kitchens, traditions that shifted year to year depending on where they were and who could come. He talks about his mother's cooking, her laughter, her gifts, about music playing too loudly, about the crazy amounts of snow. He doesn't say everything, but he says enough.

Yuna listens like every word matters. She doesn't interrupt, doesn't rush him. When he finishes, she reaches across the table and touches his hand briefly, warmly.

"I'm really glad you're here," she says. "With us."

Something tight in Ilya's chest loosens. He nods, swallowing past the lump in his throat. Under the table, his hand slips into Shane's without thinking, fingers curling, holding on. Shane squeezes back immediately, solid and sure.

After dinner, they move into the living room. The lights are dimmer there, the tree glowing softly in the corner, ornaments catching the light. Wrapped gifts sit beneath it, some neatly stacked, others clearly rushed and lopsided.

They sit close on the couch. Shane curls toward Ilya instinctively, It's easy. Comfortable. Like they've been doing this forever. Yuna enters the living room, clasping her hands together.

"Alright," she says, eyes bright. "Since you two won't be here in the morning, I think we're allowed to bend the rules a little."

Shane lifts an eyebrow. "Bend the rules?"

"Open presents," David supplies calmly, flopping down onto the couch.

"Now?" Shane chuckles.

Yuna nods, already moving towards the decorated tree. "Now. Christmas is about being together, not the clock."

Yuna watches them with a small, knowing smile, pretending to focus on the wrapping paper while very obviously clocking how naturally they fit together. David glances over once, then looks away, but his expression is gentle. Content.

When it's time to open presents, Ilya almost insists he doesn't need anything. "Really, I-this is already-"

"Nonsense," Yuna says, pressing a gift into his hands. "Open it."

His hands shake a little as he does. Inside is a thick, soft scarf in deep blue, knitted carefully, patiently. He swallows hard, tears rushing to the corner of his eyes.

"I made it," Yuna admits quietly. "I wasn't sure about the color, but Shane said-"

“It’s perfect,” Ilya says immediately, voice breaking just a little. He wraps it around his neck without thinking, holding the ends like an anchor. “Fits perfectly. Thank you. Thank you so much.”

Yuna just smiles and nods, sinking back into the couch with her husband. Ilya could die of happiness. Shane watches him like he’s witnessing something holy.

When Shane opens his gifts, Ilya barely looks at the paper. He looks at Shane instead, the way the lights warm his face, the way his smile goes crooked when he laughs, the way his hands move with familiar confidence and surprising tenderness. Ilya memorizes him in the glow of the room, in the safety of this moment.

This is my favorite thing, he thinks. Watching you be loved.

Later, when the evening slows and the record plays its last song, Shane leans in and murmurs, “You okay?”

Ilya nods, then shakes his head, then laughs softly. “I’m just... really happy.”

Shane presses a kiss to his cheek, brief but full of meaning. “Me too.”

Christmas lights blink softly. Snow continues to fall outside. And for the first time in a long time, Ilya doesn’t feel like he’s borrowing joy. He feels like he belongs.

Eventually, the evening begins to wind down, the way it always does, slowly, reluctantly, as if none of them quite want to say it out loud yet.

Yuna stands first, collecting empty mugs and folding the last scrap of wrapping paper. “It’s getting late,” she says gently. “And you have a drive.”

Ilya's chest tightens at the thought of leaving, surprised by how quickly this place has come to feel like something he doesn't want to let go of. He stands with Shane, slipping his scarf back on. Shane gathers his gifts into a bag.

At the door, Yuna pulls Ilya into another hug. This one is longer. Firmer. Warmer.

"Come back anytime," she says quietly. "You're always welcome here."

Ilya nods, unable to trust his voice. He presses his face briefly into her shoulder, breathing in the familiar scent of her perfume and something warm and clean beneath it.

David shakes his hand, then surprises him by pulling him into a quick, solid embrace.

"Drive safe," he says. "Text when you get there."

"I will," Ilya promises.

Outside, the cold bites sharper after all that warmth. Snow crunches under their boots, the night clear and bright. Ilya turns once more to look at the house, all glowing windows and soft light, and something tight and tender settles in his chest.

The drive to the cottage is hushed, intimate. The road is empty, headlights cutting through drifting snow. Shane's hand finds Ilya's almost immediately, fingers lacing together without thought. The radio plays low, some slow holiday song neither of them is really listening to.

After a while, Ilya exhales a laugh that sounds like relief. "Tonight was- I was smiling the whole time."

Shane glances over at him, eyes soft in the dashboard glow. "I'm glad you were happy."

“I was,” Ilya says quietly. “I am.” He squeezes Shane’s hand. “Your parents... they made me feel like I was already part of something.”

Shane swallows, nods. “They see how much I love you.”

That makes Ilya turn his head fully toward him. He doesn’t say anything, he just looks. Shane keeps his eyes on the road, but the faint flush on his cheeks gives him away.

The cottage greets them with silence and cold air, dark wood and the familiar creak of the door. Shane turns on the lights, starts the heat. Ilya shrugs out of his coat, scarf still around his neck, the one Yuna knitted. He doesn’t take it off.

Once the place warms, the quiet becomes something else. Not empty, private.

“I have your gift,” Ilya says, suddenly nervous despite everything. He pulls a small package from his bag, wrapped carefully, corners neat. “I wanted it to be just us.”

Shane sits beside him on the couch, knees brushing. “You didn’t have to,” he says softly.

“Of course I did,” Ilya scoffs. Ilya hands it over. Shane opens it slowly, reverently, first revealing a Boston Bears cap. Ilya snorts at the dumbfounded look Shane flashes him. “Your favorite team. You can be my cheerleader.”

“Asshole,” Shane chuckles.

““There’s more,” Ilya says, nudging Shane’s knee with his own, eyes bright and a little mischievous.

Shane looks back down, fingers still curled around the cap, then reaches into the box again. Beneath the tissue paper is a smaller, slimmer case. Black. Simple. His smile fades into something quieter as he opens it.

Inside is a bracelet. Not flashy, but elegant. A thin silver chain with a small, engraved plate at the center. Shane lifts it carefully, like it might be fragile, and turns it in the light. The metal catches warm gold from the lamp. He reads the engraving silently at first. *home*.

His throat tightens.

“Ilya...” he murmurs.

Ilya watches him closely, heart pounding. “I know you don’t wear rings much,” he says, softer now. “And I know ‘home’ is... complicated. But you make it feel simple. With you, it is.”

Shane swallows, eyes shining. He looks up, and there’s so much feeling there it almost knocks the breath out of Ilya.

“Still an asshole?” Ilya smirks.

Shane laughs, blinking fast. “Fuck off.”

Ilya reaches for Shane’s wrist without asking, fastening the bracelet there. The metal is cool against his skin, grounding. Ilya’s thumb lingers over the engraved word, like he’s committing it to memory through touch. Shane looks at him with those soft, now teary, eyes.

“I love it,” Shane says quietly. “I love that it’s yours first.”

Ilya’s chest aches. “It felt wrong if you didn’t put it on me.”

They sit there for a moment, knees pressed together, gifts forgotten on the table. The cottage hums softly around them, heat finally settling in, snow ticking faintly against the windows.

Shane exhales, then shifts. “Okay,” he says, suddenly a little shy. “I have something for you too.”

Ilya’s eyebrows lift. “Really?”

Shane nods, reaching into his jacket pocket. His movements are slower now, more deliberate. He pulls out a small box, smaller than Ilya’s, darker. His fingers hesitate just a fraction before he opens it.

Inside is a ring. Gold, simple, perfect. Not loud. Not showy. Just intentional.

Ilya’s breath catches hard. “Oh.”

“It’s not-” Shane starts, then stops, trying again. “It’s not a proposal. I just-” He laughs softly, embarrassed. “I wanted something that says I’m choosing you. That I want this. Us.”

Ilya’s lips curve immediately, eyes shining. “So,” he says lightly, “a promise ring?”

Shane nods. “Yeah.”

Ilya grins wider. “For marriage.”

Shane groans, face flushing red. “You’re the worst.”

Ilya takes the ring gently and slips it onto his finger. It fits like it was always meant to be there. He holds his hand up, admiring it, then looks back at Shane, completely undone.

“I love it,” he says softly. “I love you.”

Shane doesn't answer with words. He leans in, kissing Ilya slow and sure, like a vow spoken without sound. When they part, he rests his forehead against Ilya's. The snow keeps falling outside. Inside, wrapped in quiet and warmth and promises they're still learning how to say, they stay exactly where they are.

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