

A Hollanov Holiday

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A Hollanov Holiday

by [SuebsWrites](#)

Summary

[Takes place post-TLG. Spoilers ahead.]

“I have bad feeling about this.”

The two men looked up at the two-story suburban Ottawa house. Strings of multicoloured lights twirled around the squat, snow-covered cedar trees in the front yard, and a little cobblestone walkway curved up from the driveway toward the porch.

Shane looked over his shoulder and grinned. “You’re scared of my parents now?”

Ilya raised one dubious eyebrow. “Is not just your parents inside. Also there are aunts. Uncles.” He shuddered dramatically. “You should not have told me about Great Aunt Alice.”

Shane laughed. “It’s fine. Just ignore everything she says, and the rest are all gonna love you.” He leaned up on his tiptoes and kissed Ilya’s rough-stubbed cheek. “Just like I do.”

“Like you do?” Ilya wiggled his eyebrows up and down, and Shane saw the start of a mischievous grin twinkling in his eyes. “This will make this party *much* more interesting.”

Notes

Shane takes Ilya to the Hollander extended family Christmas for the first time.

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



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Shane elbowed his husband—his *husband*; he wasn’t used to even thinking it yet—in the ribs. “Ew. Don’t be an asshole. My little cousins and stuff will be there too.”

Ilya’s face lit up. “Kids? Or boring teenagers?”

“There’ll be a bunch of kids.”

“Why did you not say so before?” Ilya laughed and bounded up the steps, and he’d rung the doorbell before Shane had even reached the porch. Shane hitched the strap of the insulated bag

carrying the dish they'd brought up higher on his shoulder and climbed up the stairs after him.

He hadn't said anything about lots of kids being there before because he didn't want to make his family feel awkward when Ilya arrived having bought out an entire toy store for them.

The door swung open. A wave of sound and warmth blasted out from Shane's aunt and uncle's house. He barely had time to register that his aunt Diane was wearing a Santa hat and an electronic Christmas-light necklace that actually lit up before her face broke out into an open-mouthed, delighted smile.

"Ahhh!" Aunt Diane screamed.

"Ahhh!" Ilya yelled back, startling Shane so much that he flinched, and then Aunt Diane was shrieking and grabbing Ilya and pulling him in for a hug.

"Oh my goodness, I am *so* thrilled to finally meet you!" she exclaimed, her voice muffled by Ilya's scarf. "I'm Diane, Shane's aunt." She pulled back and reached for Shane next. He hurriedly handed the insulated bag to Ilya just before Aunt Diane seized him. "And YOU!"

"Merry Christm—"

"Little Shaney!" Shane coughed as Aunt Diane tried to crush the life out of him, and then she pulled back to beam up at Ilya. "I cannot *believe* you kept this man a secret! How many Hollander Christmases has he missed out on?"

"Too many," Ilya said, but without any sting in his voice. Shane glanced at him and grinned at Ilya's raised eyebrows and amused smile.

"Well come in, come in!" she said, and stepped back to let Shane and Ilya in the door.

Aunt Diane and Uncle Matt's house was warm and full of the sounds of laughter and conversation and bustle, and Christmas music was playing somewhere. Shane showed Ilya the front hall closet where they hung up their coats and scarves, left their boots among the dozen pairs of boots piled haphazardly near the door, and headed past the huge entry-hall staircase through to the kitchen where the smells of turkey and potatoes and several other things cooking were wafting from.

There was more exclaiming, though less shrieking, as they entered the crowded room. Both of Shane's other aunts, his mom, and two of his cousins looked up and all chorused Merry Christmases overtop of each other. Shane's mom came around the island and hugged Ilya—"How's my favourite son?"—then came over and kissed Shane on the cheek as he rolled his eyes.

"I'm never going to be your favourite again, am I?" he grinned wryly.

Ilya took the platter of pelmeni—meat dumplings—out of their bag, careful not to let them spill out of the plastic wrap. "Where do I put this?"

"Oh, perfect—appetizers go on that table," said Shane's cousin Erin, pointing to the table near the big picture window at the back of the house, and Ilya nodded and brought the platter over. Aunt Beth sniffed the air appreciatively as he passed by.

"Those smell delicious!" she said, and smiled at him. "Are they a traditional Russian dish?"

Ilya nodded. “I used to make them with—my mother.” The hesitation in his sentence was so short that Shane was pretty sure he was the only one who’d noticed. He walked over and pressed his arm casually up against Ilya’s side, and was rewarded by Ilya glancing down at him and getting to watch his eyes soften and crinkle in the corners.

“You two are adorable.” Shane looked over at his cousin’s wife, Libby, who was shaking her head as she turned away from where she’d been checking on the potatoes on the stove. “Welcome to the family, Ilya.”

“Thank you. Is good to be—”

Three of Shane’s cousins’ kids chose that moment to run pell-mell through the kitchen, doing the loop around the house from the dining room to the living room, all hollering their heads off. Shane and Ilya had to back up against the appetizer table to not get knocked over.

“Sorry for the chaos,” Erin called over the din. “You’re getting thrown into the thick of it.”

Ilya laughed. “I like chaos. And, is happy chaos.”

“Okay,” Shane interjected, nudging Ilya toward the doorway, “let’s go introduce you to everyone.”

In the hallway, Shane’s uncle Matt shook Ilya’s hand and clapped him on the shoulder. “Good to meet you. What a day, having Ilya Rozanov in my house!” He chuckled and shook his head. “Maybe I’ll finally get my NHL autograph!”

“Hey!” Shane protested. “You’ve never asked me to sign anything.”

Uncle Matt waved his hand at Shane. “Pfft, you don’t count.”

Ilya nodded. “This is his first year on this team, no one has even heard of him yet.”

Shane punched him on the arm as Ilya and Uncle Matt laughed.

They poked their heads into the upstairs living room. The tree was decorated perfectly, the warm golden lights illuminating the hodgepodge of decorations and ornaments that had been collected over decades. His mom was just sitting down on the armrest of the couch beside his dad, who was talking politely to—Shane took a deep breath—his great aunt Alice.

“Ellie will be playing the piano for some of the carols this year,” his mom was saying. Ellie was fourteen and the oldest of the great-grandkids’ generation. “She’s very excited.”

“What’s that?” Aunt Alice barked. Her eyes were beady behind her gold-rimmed glasses. She had been going deaf since as far back as Shane could remember, but it had gotten worse in recent years. “Who’s Carol?”

“Oh, hey there!” Shane’s dad said as he saw Shane and Ilya standing there. A smile broke out over his face and he stood up to shake Ilya’s hand, pulling him in for a man-hug. Shane got his hug second, which had been the order of things basically since his parents had met Ilya, and then he smiled warily at his great aunt.

“Hi, Aunt Alice,” he said, tension creeping in between his shoulder blades as she turned her attention toward him. Her iron-gray hair had never gone white, despite Shane being fairly certain

she was approaching two hundred years old—a fact he attributed to his assumption that she was made out of actual iron.

“Who’s that?” she said out of the side of her mouth, leaning toward Shane’s mom while still scrutinizing Shane.

“You remember your great-nephew Shane,” his mom said loudly but gently, “David and my son.”

“Nice to see you, Aunt Alice,” Shane lied politely.

“Right,” Aunt Alice barked. She narrowed her eyes at him. “Come here,” she said, and Shane sighed and took a step forward. “That’s better. Let me look at you!”

Shane tried to make his smile as genuine as he could as she reached up a hand and gestured for him to bend down toward her. He knew Ilya’s eyebrows would be climbing into his hairline behind him. Picturing his expression made the smile easier.

Aunt Alice tsked disapprovingly and patted Shane’s cheek. “Well, at least you’re handsome. Too bad you haven’t found a nice girl yet.”

Shane’s teeth clenched together hard.

It felt like a bucket of ice water had been dumped over the room. He saw his parents glance at each other out of the corner of his eye. He was *out*. He’d gotten *married* this summer, for fuck’s sake. God, he was sick of judgment. This was exactly what he’d been afraid she’d do.

“Hello!” Ilya said cheerfully into the awkward silence, and stepped around Shane to stick out his hand to shake. “I am Ilya. I am Shane’s nice girl.”

Shane felt a rush of warmth and affection for his husband, who always seemed to know what to say, even as embarrassment and anxiety tried to fight for space in his brain. He closed his eyes and pressed his lips together for a moment.

“What?” Aunt Alice shook Ilya’s hand reflexively, squinting up at him as she did so. “Who’d you say you are?”

“Ilya,” he said. And didn’t elaborate. God, did he think he had to protect Shane?

Well, screw Aunt Alice and her judgmental bullshit. Fuck it. “This is my husband,” Shane said. Ilya glanced at him. His eyes seemed to say, *Are you sure?* Shane flashed him a small smile. Yes, he was sure.

Aunt Alice scrunched up her wrinkly old face. “Your what?”

“My *husband*,” Shane said, and reached over to lace his fingers together with Ilya’s. He hadn’t gotten over being able to use that word yet. It was still such a rush to say it out loud.

Aunt Alice narrowed her eyes at their interlocked hands and her face grew even more pinched. “They just let anybody get married these days, huh?” she grumbled.

“Yes, they do,” Shane’s dad said, his voice mild, and Shane bit back a smile as he continued, “Isn’t it wonderful?”

“They got married over the summer,” Shane’s mom added in. “It was beautiful.”

Shane felt his cheeks turn a little pink. “Thanks, guys.”

Aunt Alice let out a sound that was close to something like a *harrumph*. Shane’s mom cleared her throat and held her hand out to Shane. “Honey, I was going to ask, can you come help set the table? And Ilya, you met Aunt Beth, right? Could you help her bring the carol books in from her car?”

Ilya nodded and walked toward the front door. Shane followed his mother back into the kitchen, picked up a stack of fancy china plates where they’d been set on the counter, and brought them into the dining room. His aunt and uncle’s mega-long table only got used for extended family dinners and anytime the royal family came over. Which was, you know, never.

“Sorry about Alice,” his mother murmured to him as Shane walked slowly around the table, placing a plate between each set of silverware. “You know how she is.”

“Yeah, I do.” Shane breathed in and out through his nose. “It’s fine. I didn’t expect anything else.”

“It’s *not* fine,” his mom insisted as she pulled cloth napkins through their rings. “Sometimes I feel like I should say something, but she’s not *my* aunt. It wouldn’t be my place. And you know your father isn’t exactly confrontational.”

“We only see her once a year anyway, Mom.”

“I wish her hearing would get worse. Then maybe she’d shut up.”

“Mom!”

“What? I’m sorry, but I said it.”

Shane looked around to make sure no one was lurking in either of the doorways to overhear her, then shook his head and let himself chuckle. It felt good to have both of his parents in his corner. He didn’t think he’d have made it this far with his sanity intact if they hadn’t pitched their full support behind him and Ilya from the very first day they found out.

By the time he’d finished setting out all the plates and glasses, his stomach was rumbling. He wasn’t dieting as strictly as he had been last year—the last several years, really—and he had been relieved to discover that he hadn’t immediately grown a potbelly or slowed down on the ice. Mainly what it meant was that if he wanted one of Ilya’s mouth-watering pelmeni, then Shane had decided he could just eat one.

He picked one up and popped it into his mouth. Flavour exploded across his tongue: minced meat and onion and spices. His head fell back and he let out a groan that sounded embarrassingly like a sex noise. Damn, that was good. Shane loved Ilya’s cooking. It was something they had gotten back into the habit of doing together now that they lived together—permanently lived together! In the same house! All the time!—which was another thing Shane still wasn’t used to the luxury of.

His aunts eventually got tired of bumping into him in the kitchen and shooed him off to “go socialize”. Shane went through the dining room and poked his head into the front parlour to see if anyone was in there, but after greeting two of his stuffier older cousins, ducked back out and headed to the stairs leading down to the basement. He was determined to avoid the living room, and had a feeling he knew where most of the party had gathered anyway.

Sure enough, the sounds of raucous laughter and conversation grew louder as he made his way down. Shane stepped onto the landing at the bottom of the stairs to the main hangout room that took up most of the basement, and found Ilya playing mini-sticks with a bunch of the kids, while some of the uncles chatted on the couch and looked on.

Ilya was on his knees in front of the miniature net set up in front of the second Christmas tree beside the fireplace, which immediately gave Shane anxiety as soon as one of the kids—Carrie, Erin’s nine-year-old daughter—fired a bright orange rubber puck at Ilya’s head.

Ilya ducked, and the puck missed the tree by maybe an inch. Some of the branches shook a little.

“Unsporstmanlike!” Ilya bellowed. “You will ruin this beautiful face!”

Carrie giggled. “Sorry!”

“Is no such thing as sorry! Ref! Take her away!”

Felix, who was three, toddled up to Carrie and pretended to blow a whistle, which resulted in him just spitting all over her. “Pen-ally!” he declared, and tugged on her wrist.

“No fair!” cried another one of the kids.

“What is no fair is to have team with one player versus team with four players!”

Felix’s sister Ava, who had also been playing, giggled. Jackson—eleven, and Carrie’s brother—pointed at Ilya with his plastic mini-stick. “But you’re a real hockey player!”

Ilya looked around exaggeratedly. “What? Me? Who told you that?”

Carrie spotted Shane leaning against the banister, smiling in the way he did whenever he saw Ilya interacting with kids, and she pointed at him. “Uncle Shane’s here! He can play too!”

Jackson ran over to the pile of plastic team-branded mini-sticks and shoved one toward Shane. Shane looked down and made a face. “New York? Really? Where’s M—Ottawa?”

He’d almost said his old team name. A quick glance at Ilya showed his husband making a wry face at him. More than ten years of playing for Montreal made for a hard habit to break.

“I have Ottawa ’cause I’m better than Jackson,” Carrie said smugly.

“You are not!”

“Okay, okay,” Shane chuckled, raising his hands and stalling the argument before it got going. “I’ll play. But can I at least have a Canadian team?”

All four of the kids, plus Ilya, chorused together in unison, “You get what you get and you don’t get upset!”

Shane sighed. Stuck with the New York Admirals mini-stick. Ilya would be teasing him about it later. He could already hear it in his head—*Of course, this is the perfect stick for you, you are thirty now! That is basically one hundred. Just like Scott Hunter.* And then Shane would point out that Ilya was also thirty, and Ilya would shrug and say, *But I am not old. Is not the same.*

There was a heated discussion as to what the teams would be now that Shane was getting involved. Carrie declared that he should join them and everyone should team up against Ilya, which provoked a roar of indignation.

“This is horrible plan!” Ilya waved his goalie mini-stick around in the air. “Unbelievable. Should be me and Shane against all of you.”

“But then you’d win!”

“Fine. Go get your dads. And mums. Get your grandma. Get everybody. We will play us two versus one million people. Shane, come here.”

Shane laughed as he tossed his mini-stick from hand to hand. “It’s totally unfair if we’re on the same team.”

Ilya wolf-whistled at him and pointed at a spot on the carpet beside him. “I am your captain now. Is an order!”

All the kids fell apart laughing as Shane’s cheeks turned pink in embarrassment—and not a small amount of desire. Damn it, why did it have to be *hot* when Ilya commanded him to do things? He’d even been *joking*. But Shane’s dick didn’t care. Man, it needed to get the message that this was a *family Christmas party*. Jesus.

Ilya’s eyes danced with teasing light as he held Shane’s gaze, probably seeing right through him. Even more embarrassing heat flooded through Shane’s body. Fuck, fuck, *fuck*. He coughed loudly and went to go retrieve the orange rubber puck that had rolled behind the tree, which gave him an excuse to take a breath and control himself.

Eventually the teams they landed on were Ilya and Jackson versus Shane, Carrie, and Ava, with little Felix still playing referee. There was only one net, so they had to use a makeshift goal between two pillows on the floor. Ava wanted to be the goalie, “Like Ilya is!”, which made Shane’s heart squeeze pleasantly in his chest.

Shane and Ilya both played on their knees. Every time Carrie shot at Ilya, he dove spectacularly to one side and managed to let in more than half her shots, to her and Ava’s delight. On the contrary, anytime Shane got the puck, Ilya dove on top of him and tackled him to the floor.

“Interference!” Shane hollered from underneath Ilya. He craned his neck, looking for Felix. “Ref!”

“Power play!” Carrie shrieked, and leaped at Jackson, tackling her brother into the pile on top of Ilya.

“You cannot just yell power play and wrestle the other team!” Ilya scoffed.

“Why? You did!”

“Is against the rules. I am captain, I make the rules.”

Felix toddled over, declared, “Ev’rybody get a pen-ally!” and flung himself on top of the dog pile.

The game of mini-sticks kind of devolved after that.

Eventually, the call came down announcing that dinner was starting. Everyone scrambled out of the pile and started pushing each other toward the stairs. Shane, going up last, felt a tug on the back of his sweater as he stepped up onto the bottom stair and he fell back a little, against Ilya's warm, hard chest.

Shane felt his cheeks colour again as Ilya's arms went around him. His rough-stubbled cheek nuzzled into the crook of Shane's neck and Shane lifted his hand to reach back and tangle in Ilya's curls. They both took a few slow breaths just standing there, holding each other.

Ilya murmured something in Russian that Shane didn't quite catch, his voice muffled by Shane's sweater. "What was that?" he asked quietly.

Ilya raised his head and rested his chin on Shane's shoulder. "I like seeing you with them. Kids."

Shane's heart squeezed again. "You know I think about that All-Star weekend, when you were playing in the pool, all the time? I think that was the first time I saw you really interacting with kids."

Ilya paused for a beat, and then his arms tightened around Shane's waist. "You remember that?"

"Yeah," Shane chuckled. "I mean, most of what I remember from that weekend was that it felt like the first time we...you know, we really..." *Almost admitted that we might be in love.*

"Yes." Ilya's deep voice rumbled as he nodded. "I know." He pressed his mouth to the side of Shane's neck and sent shivers tingling all down his side, and Shane suddenly started straining against the front of his pants. *Down, boy.* They were about to have Christmas dinner, for god's sake.

Shane refused to allow Ilya's tongue teasing against his skin to distract him and pressed on, wanting to get this out, wanting Ilya to hear it. "But I remember other stuff too. Like you pretending to be a shark and letting all the kids win." He heard Ilya's breath catch, close to his ear. Shane gave a slightly embarrassed little shrug. "I dunno. It was cute."

It was a few moments before Ilya responded. He pressed a kiss to Shane's jaw and then spoke slowly and deliberately, making sure his words were clear. "It means very much to me when you remember things like that."

The warmth that seeped through Shane stayed with him as they went upstairs and walked into the dining room hand in hand.

Dinner was a chaotic and very loud affair. The kids had their own table set up in the adjoining room, including a very grumpy-looking Ellie who at fourteen definitely thought she should be at the grownups' table. Shane personally thought it was very brave of Aunt Diane and Uncle Matt to have the kids eating in a carpeted room without putting a sheet or plastic mat or something down to catch spills.

Ilya somehow ate twice as much as anyone else. Shane had no idea where he put it all. And he made sure to find out who had made each dish and compliment them on it specifically, which was both embarrassing because it made Shane feel bad for not being that thoughtful himself, and heartwarming because it so clearly endeared his husband to every single person at the table. Shane was so used to having to defend his relationship with Ilya—because he was *Ilya Rozanov*, basically famous for being an asshole—that to see his whole extended family be so charmed by him was...kind of amazing.

What was really amazing, actually, was that so few people seemed to see Ilya for who he actually was. How thoughtful and compassionate and *funny* he was. How the teasing and joshing were signs of respect, if you knew to look for it. How clearly a front it all was to protect his soft heart.

The heart that belonged to Shane now. And would for the rest of their lives.

God, he couldn't afford to start getting emotional overtop of the mashed potatoes.

After dinner it was all the men's job to clear the table and do the preliminary work on rinsing the pots and dishes. Turned out that being married to each other didn't excuse Shane and Ilya from being men. It felt vaguely sexist to Shane somehow, especially since he had helped set the table, but that didn't stop Aunt Beth from handing him the huge pan with the turkey carcass and saying, "Your turn, hon."

They always sang carols at the end of the evening. The singing took place in the basement, around the fireplace and the tree. The kids were shooed downstairs ahead of time to clean up the evidence of their mini-sticks game from earlier.

Neither Shane nor Ilya offered to help Great Aunt Alice down the stairs, leaving that job to Shane's uncle, and instead they chatted with Shane's cousins on the way down. Shane made sure Ilya sat on the big leather one-and-a-half chair where Shane could sit on the armrest, at the opposite end of the couch where his uncle had settled Aunt Alice beside the piano so she could hear.

Ilya didn't know many of the songs. Shane and his parents had taught him some of the classics over the past couple of years that he'd been able to spend with them, of which his favourite turned out to be, unexpectedly, *Silver Bells*—"I can see the city and snow in my head when singing, is perfect song!"—but he knew more of the popular modern songs than the older carols.

That said, he gamely hummed along to the best of his ability, and fa-la-la-la-la'd with everyone else on *Deck the Halls*. Ilya had a surprisingly strong baritone voice and it gave Shane fluttery feelings to hear him sing.

When they all got to *Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer*, however, Ilya couldn't contain his offense at the narrative. "Is outrageous!" he sputtered once the song was done, amid general laughter from Shane's family. "They think Rudolph will forgive them being so mean before and just forget? No! Rudolph form his own team. No more Dasher and Dumber and Vomit and Stupid. Only Rudolph pull the sleigh, that is it."

Somewhere around eight, the younger kids started to crash. Little Felix and Ava disappeared for a bit with their mom, Libby, and came back downstairs in bright red Christmas pajamas. Felix climbed sleepily into Shane's lap for a snuggle, which Ilya took shameless advantage of as they were sitting on the same chair, and then the three-year-old asked if Shane would read him a book.

"I think everyone's starting to get ready to go home now, sweetie," Libby said, but Shane shrugged at her.

"I could read to him while you pack up, if you want," he offered.

Libby smiled and nodded. "I'll go grab the book."

A few minutes later Shane found himself surrounded by half a dozen of his cousins' kids, draped sleepily on top of and around him and Ilya on the big armchair by the fire, as he read *The Night*

Before Christmas out loud. Even Ellie sat at their feet and listened.

“’Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse...”

Shane didn’t mind reading to the kids. Making impromptu speeches was his worst nightmare, but reading from a script he could do, despite feeling self-conscious. He glanced at his husband more than once as he read, feeling less embarrassed every time he met Ilya’s gaze, which was full of all the mushy words Shane knew he was bursting to say in Russian.

“...Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.”

Shane slowly closed the book. They all stayed silent for a few seconds as the hushed magic of the story lingered in the air, and then Felix yawned, breaking the spell. Carrie and Jackson stirred and stretched. Shane glanced up to see his mom leaning against the wall at the bottom of the stairs, looking misty-eyed, and then Ellie picked up Ava and they all started heading upstairs.

Ilya kissed Shane’s temple. “I like that book. Is creepy and wonderful.”

“Creepy?”

“Yes. Strange man in red suit sneaks into the house to eat their food, is caught, and fills socks with presents. You do not find this creepy?”

“It’s *Santa*, dude.”

Ilya shrugged. “We have Ded Moroz in Russia. Is like Santa, brings presents to good boys and girls. He is better dressed though. Of course.”

Shane shook his head and chuckled. “If you say so.”

They retrieved their platter from the kitchen—all of Ilya’s pelmeni had been eaten, which pleased him—and joined the throng of people crowding into the front hall putting on their boots and coats. Choruses of “Merry Christmas!” were called over and over again as everyone got ready to leave, practically on top of each other, and both Shane and Ilya were hugged approximately thirty times.

The hushed quiet of the snow-covered street outside was a stark contrast to the warm chaos inside his aunt and uncle’s house. Snow crunched under Shane and Ilya’s feet as they walked back toward their car, parked around the corner. Lights twinkled on almost every house in the neighbourhood.

Shane hunched his shoulders up around his neck against the cold and glanced at Ilya. The taller man had his head back, looking up at the sky as he walked, hands in the pockets of his coat.

“So, you survived,” Shane teased.

Ilya smiled. “Yes. I was glad to meet everyone. Even Great Aunt Alice was not too bad, right?” He lifted his eyebrows as Shane made a face.

“Ugh, I guess.”

Ilya took a hand out of his pocket to boop Shane on the nose. “You know something? I am nuts for this scrunchy nose you do. I love it.”

Shane blinked, and then burst out laughing. “What?”

“Is one of my favourite Shane faces.”

Shane stopped and tugged on Ilya’s coat, suddenly overwhelmed with wanting to be close to him. He turned his face up, feeling needy. Ilya stopped immediately and faced him on the sidewalk, slid his hands into Shane’s hair, and kissed him, as fat snowflakes started to drift softly through the air around them.

Shane was starting to breathe harder by the time Ilya slowly pulled his lips away. “I love you,” Shane said, voice rough.

“Love you more.”

Shane grinned. “Impossible.”

“No. My heart is like the Santa bag. Bigger than it looks.” Ilya winked. Shane’s heart fluttered. Sometimes he still couldn’t believe this man was his. There was a question he wanted to ask his husband, but he had to work up the nerve.

Ilya looped Shane’s arm through his as they kept walking. “Feels good to be part of your—your big family,” he said. “Not just parents. Lots of people.”

“Extended family,” Shane supplied quietly.

“Yes, this.” He held his breath for a second and then said, “I did not think...for many years, many, I did not think I would have this. My family in Russia was small. Not happy. No cousins close, just my parents and brother, so there was not this...extended family to have around.” He blew out the rest of the breath he’d been holding. “Sometimes at parties when my team would bring their families, I would pretend it was what it was like. Or All-Star weekends, same. To have kids running around, playing, that sort of thing. Was the closest I could get to this feeling.” Ilya smiled. “Exactly like this. Like your family.”

Shane’s throat tightened. “My family’s your family now, too.”

“Yes.” Ilya’s eyes grew bright. “I am very glad for it.”

“Well, I’m glad you like them.”

“They are great. And the kids are fun.”

Shane had to blurt it out before he could get too anxious and talk himself out of it. “Would you want to start...looking into having one?” He swallowed. “With me?”

Ilya stopped walking.

Shane swallowed hard and stuffed his hands deep into his pockets.

Ilya opened and closed his mouth. “You mean a kid. A baby.”

“Yeah. I mean...we could just start thinking about it,” Shane hurried on. “And talking about it. I was thinking we could look at options for surrogacy. That’s where someone else carries the baby for people who can’t—”

Ilya stared at him, his eyes intense. "I know what is surrogacy."

Shane's cheeks started to burn and he started talking faster. "I was doing a bit of research on it, like looking into the laws and stuff on it in Ontario, and it shouldn't be too hard for us I don't think. The wait for the whole process is usually two or three years anyway so it wouldn't be for a while yet, but I thought we could maybe start the process going, you know? The cost doesn't really matter for us so it'll mostly be finding the right person and figuring out an egg donor and—"

Ilya kissed him.

Fiercely, his hands cradling Shane's head, Ilya kissed him, and everything else in the world seemed to evaporate. He kissed him like he'd just found something he'd been searching for his whole life inside Shane's mouth. Shane pulled at the front of his coat to get him closer and marvelled at the fact that they were outside on the street in an Ottawa suburb, and he didn't have to care if anyone was watching because the whole world already knew they were *married*.

"Yes," Ilya murmured against Shane's mouth. "Yes, yes, yes. One million yeses."

Shane let out a shaky laugh and threw his arms around Ilya's neck. "God, I love you. I don't know what our careers are going to be like in a few years when it actually happens, but—"

"You will have to wear the baby on your chest during practice."

Shane blinked. "What?"

Ilya gestured to his chest. "In the little sling. Is okay, your pads will protect him. Our baby will be strong."

Laughter bubbled up out of Shane's belly and he whapped Ilya on the arm. "You can't wear a baby to hockey practice!"

"Right, *I* cannot. *I* am team captain. Would set bad example. So, you will wear the baby."

"You're ridiculous." Shane shook his head and kept walking toward the car. "Maybe I'll have replaced you as captain by then."

"In your dreams, Hollander."

"But you really want to start trying? Or thinking about it?"

Ilya took a few moments to respond, his expression turning serious and thoughtful. "I have...some things to talk to my therapist about. About..." He swallowed. Shane waited, giving him space to speak, and finally Ilya said, "My father. Some of my fears are...being like him. But there is time."

"Fuck that guy," Shane said firmly. "You're *nothing* like him. And you are going to be the best dad in the whole world, Ilya. Anything I can do to...to help, with all that stuff, even if it's just talking and listening, I'll do it. You name it, anything you need."

Ilya looked at him and smiled. "This is what will make *you* a good dad."

Shane's cheeks heated up again. "Well, I'm serious."

"I know."

They reached the car. The little *bleep bleep* as Shane unlocked it echoed on the sleepy street. His insides were skipping and fluttering all over the place, nervous and excited and amazed that they were going to start considering this next huge step. There wasn't anyone else in the world he could imagine becoming a parent—a *parent!*—with.

Ilya turned on the radio, and they both sang along to Christmas songs all the way home.

End Notes

I hope you enjoyed my first foray into this fandom! Be gentle with me (lol). Thank you for your kind words and kudos, they mean so much!

Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night!! <3

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