

1991

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1991

by [marigoldens](#)

Summary

Jane:

It's your birthday.

Ilya stares at the text, taking another drag of his cigarette.

Ilya:

Traditionally, I think you are meant to say happy birthday.

Jane:

Happy birthday.

Ilya smirks.

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Three of Ilya's birthdays, and how they're spent.

Notes

hihiii this is my first hollanov fic, perhaps there will be more? read their book 2 yrs ago, so my memory is not the best, but hoping its all accurate ! <3

2021

On June fifteenth, Ilya changes, but he does not feel it.

This day, for him. This day, this sun, the way the stars will align tonight—all of it marks thirty, another year, another clock reset. The hockey world's reminder that he is aging, that it's the day to do those analyses online of his stats, if he is slowing down.

Ilya doesn't care to look at it, but he knows it happens. What he focuses on is his game, and is he winding down? As long as keeps up with Shane, this is his way to tell. If Shane keeps up with him, that's good, too. Better.

Ilya smiles. He's in the cottage, Yuna and David will be over soon, and Shane had *not* left it burning in the bedroom for once, a shock of its own. It is sweet to imagine Shane waking up early to check the thermostat, and then to pace through the kitchen, looking through recipes for breakfast.

If he was waiting, he does not show it on his face. He'd even let Ilya sleep in. He's in front of the stove, scrambling eggs, watching them intently. Ilya places his hands on his bare shoulders, and feels the tension in them right away.

"Shane," he says, kissing the curve of his neck. "Shane," again, pulling him back against his chest. Finally, his shoulders relax, and Ilya can start to pull the stress from them. "You should not be this tense at seven in the morning."

"It's 10:31," Shane says back.

"Same thing."

"Happy birthday," he whispers, sweeter, and, *damn it*, Ilya wishes he had turned him around to see his smile. It is good from the side too, his dimples curving into his cheeks.

"It will be happy if you kiss me," Ilya says in his ear.

"Brush your teeth first."

"Yes, yes," Ilya mutters, pecking his cheek. After he's back, Shane grants him his wish. It tastes of ginger tea, as it always seems to.

2015

There's a time away, it should feel as it always does. Ilya is thinking about him, but he isn't, not too much, of course. He's always not not thinking about him, and his words in his questions and what they really mean, to ask about Russia but to say, *you shouldn't go back*.

Ilya turns twenty-four, and all he can think of is Shane's jersey. Calling him the number, more inconspicuous in text than *Shane*, less of a lie than *Jane*. He's had the same one forever on his back, said right after his name by announcers, the number Ilya watches when he catches his games on TV, waiting for the inevitable goals he makes, containing an embarrassingly proud smile when he does.

(And what if he did call him Shane? Not through text and not private in his own head like it's a sin aloud, but right to his face, into his mouth, an intimate drawl to it. It's not what scares Ilya most about it—what gets to him is this would allow Shane to call him Ilya, he would call him . . . call him Ilya, Ilya, and there's so much build up to it that Ilya's breath would catch, he would not be able to laugh this one off.)

Ilya spends his birthday with his father. His brother is useless, Polina has fucked off somewhere, and the only thing that will keep him sat down instead of trying to run off to some meeting he had fifteen years ago, or to go and find Ilya's mom, is hockey.

He puts on one of his games. He won't know the difference. He forgets Ilya's number five minutes after he tells him. Ilya watches himself, playing against Shane, and his eyes drift to him, to 24, instead of his own self.

Ilya remembers what he was thinking here, when the score was 2-1, when Shane had just smiled at him when he checked him into the boards, getting him back. He was thinking, would Shane shower with him? Would Shane stay if he told him he was ordering food? Would Shane stay if he told him his flight was late?

He's close to taking the puck from Ilya, half a second away, and then Ilya shoots. That goal had given him confidence to ask, he doesn't know what took it away, maybe the loss, maybe Shane's talk of how excited he was to see his parents the next morning, as he hadn't seen them in two months.

Something always stopped him from reaching out. Maybe for a reason.

“That was a good goal,” his father says in Russian, his deep voice indicating he’s minutes from falling asleep.

Ilya blinks. Asks back, “It was?”

“Are you not paying attention? You could learn something from this player, uh . . .” he trails off.

Yes, Ilya thinks. Yes. If he had even just a bit of the confidence he has on the rink, he’d tell him, *that’s me. This is my game.*

But he says, instead, “Yes.” He always says yes to him.

After helping him to bed, he asks for his wife again. Ilya knows, by this point, it isn’t Polina he wants.

Ilya sits on the bed with him, moving the blanket up his chest. “*Irina*,” he calls. Over and over. “*Irina, Irina*,” as if he is leading her back from death.

“Don’t worry,” Ilya says, almost soothingly. “I would like her here instead, too.”

2021

Yuna loves to hug Ilya, always. It surprises him every time, not that she wants to, but that she does it for so long, each time, that she kisses his cheek.

“I brought you something,” she says, taking the bags from David. “*Two* somethings.”

Shane appears behind him, already letting his gaze fall to the plastic container she holds, and then sits on the table. “I can make a cake,” he exclaims, even though Ilya has never seen him bake in his life. “I was going to.”

She levels him with one look, and says, very seriously, “*Shane*.” Which means a lot of things. One, *you can’t bake*. Two, *Relax*. Three, *Seriously. Relax*.

This is what Ilya has been telling him, but between kisses and the minutes Ilya is able to get him in his lap, he's up. Cleaning, decorating, cleaning again, asking Ilya if he needs anything. "You," Ilya had answered. "Sit."

"I will sit. At the party."

"Shane. You're spiraling."

He'd shook his head, and got back to it.

It's not even a big party. It's Yuna, David, Hayden and his ten kinds, Jackie, Svetlana, and the woman she's bringing. Their circle. Their *small* circle, but good. Ilya likes it how it is, he thinks if there were any more coming, then Shane would be worse. Dusting and shit.

Yuna recites a recipe to him on the way to the kitchen, and David pats Ilya's shoulder. "Happy birthday, kid."

2015

Ilya carries as many bottles of alcohol as he can from his father's liquor cabinet into the bathroom. He sits down in the empty bathtub, cracks the window, and lights a cigarette.

That's bad for you, Shane says, he *always* says, anymore. There are many things Ilya does that are bad for him, and smoking is pretty much the last on that list. At least a cigarette in Ilya's hand usually aggravates Shane enough to where it turns him on and he gets his lips on him. There's no benefit to throwing himself a pity party, alone, in a dark bathroom, other than there's no one else there to drink his vodka.

He goes to finally answer Svetlana's well wishes, her question of when he has a break this summer. He quickly thinks, *when he is dead*, but doesn't text her that. Funnily enough, there's no one in his life he can text that without them taking a few days to answer.

As he goes to shut the phone off completely, another notification comes through.

Jane:

It's your birthday.

Ilya stares, taking another drag.

Ilya:

Traditionally, I think you are meant to say happy birthday.

Jane:

Happy birthday.

Ilya smirks. He not-so secretly enjoys it when Shane snipes back at him.

Ilya:

Where is my present?

Jane:

I'm not sending you nudes.

Ilya:

Of course not! Who said anything about that?

Jane:

Please.

Ilya:



Jane:

What do you want?

That has Ilya furrowing his brows, putting his cigarette out.

Ilya:

You really do not understand how birthdays work, 24.

This is meant to be a surprise.

Jane:

Asshole.

And not all the time. My parents always ask me

After Ilya doesn't answer for a while, he texts again.

Jane:

If you could have one thing.

Ilya:

I have everything.

Jane:

No one has everything.

Ilya:

No one is me.

Shane's the one to stop answering him now. But Ilya doesn't want that. He wants . . . he knows. He can't say.

Ilya:

Tell me what you want.

Jane:

That's what you want?

Ilya:

Yes.

Tell me.

Jane:

I can't say.

But they both want to.

2021

Shane finally sits down when the party is in full swing. And by that, Ilya means that everyone is here and very loud and eating dinner and laughing at Svetlana's story about him from their childhood.

"No, he's *very* loyal. *Very*. So, of course, he agrees to do this for me. I get to watch my dad's practices, and he covers for me with my mom, telling her when she calls that I am sleeping over at his house.

"It works for about, how long would you say, Ilya?"

"You are trying to get me to say I sold you out in two seconds. This is not true."

She throws her hands out. "It *is* true! Literally a week later, I came home to my mom saying she knew I was lying. Ilya felt so guilty about lying to her, because she had made him soup and brought it over when he was sick. The next day, *the next day*—"

"Your mother did not deserve—"

"The next day I get grounded for two whole months, and I'm banned from staying over at Ilya's."

Everyone laughs at the end, and Ilya smiles, remembering the mornings where Svetlana would wake up at five, stepping over Ilya's bed on the floor to go and get ready. She'd come back in and tell Ilya every time, "You should come. Maybe you'll learn something."

"Too early," Ilya would say. And off she'd go. Ilya would continue to lay on the floor, staring at the ceiling.

"How old were you?" Yuna asks, setting her drink down. She's beside Ilya, Shane at his other side.

"Eh, fourteen? And, just saying, she never snuck into my practices."

"*What?*" Svetlana scoffs. "I did, I was just so good at it he didn't notice me."

Ilya—truly, he didn't know. Until now. His dad never showed up, not like the other kids' did, but Svetlana—she was there? That's how she was always able to give him tips on his form, how she knew he was injured?

"You were really there?"

"Yes," she says, softly.

-

After dinner, after the party is done, Shane is pliant in Ilya's arms, sated and exhausted.

"Shane."

He looks up with half-closed eyes. "Yeah?"

Ilya takes a moment, formulating how to communicate what he wants to tell him. "I like how perfect you are."

He grins, then rests his head back on Ilya's chest. "Thanks?"

"I also like when you are not so perfect."

"What do you mean?" He slowly asks. His fingertips draw shapes at Ilya's stomach absentmindedly, because it is Shane, because they are alone and he doesn't give things like affection second thought. He's just comfortable.

Ilya plays with his hair, gentle. "There's times where . . . you know that you are allowed to be—you are allowed to be here. With me, in the present. The future does not have to matter so much. Sometimes the now is—it's okay to not look forward."

Ilya can see his statement working in Shane's brain as he bites his lip. "You're saying you didn't like your party?"

"No, I loved it," Ilya immediately says. Shane's hard work was unnecessary, but it did not mean it wasn't important to him to have done it. "But this is something I want to celebrate with you. I cannot when you aren't with me."

"I just—" Shane shakes his head. "You've never—we've never—"

"We've never done a lot of things," Ilya finishes for him. "I know. It is hard."

"I wanted it to go perfectly for you. I wanted you to just enjoy the day, and get to celebrate it, you know? *Really* celebrate it."

“We have, Shane.” And Ilya doesn’t want him to think his past birthdays with him have meant less. Everything Shane gave him was more than anyone was ever willing to do. Each one was special. “I will have many more. With you. And if they aren’t so perfect? They are still good. Because you will be there.”

He still looks disappointed with himself, but says, “Okay.”

“Don’t,” Ilya whispers, so much love to it he is grateful about. “Don’t do that to yourself. Be here with me, okay?”

Shane exhales, long, and presses his forehead to Ilya’s. “I’m here.”

“I love you.”

“I love you,” Shane echoes, pressing his body on top of Ilya’s. All around him is Shane. Fresh body wash of eucalyptus, the heat of his skin, the promise of his words, his lips on Ilya’s cheek. *Shane, Shane.*

2020

The cottage is quiet, and Ilya realizes it’s six in the morning. The sun isn’t even up yet.

Shane’s on his side, turned towards Ilya, his arm over his waist, nose at his neck. He doesn’t think Shane knows, but sometimes he will whimper in his sleep, and it sounds like the saddest thing Ilya’s heard. Ilya knows the difference from it to pleasure, so clearly the first time he heard it he looked at Shane in bewilderment, as if he would offer up an explanation when he was in a deep sleep.

It breaks his heart. It’s a private thing he gets of Shane, a thing he holds, carries, a lonely noise he tries to subdue and cuddle him closer, reminding him in his sleep that he’s alright. Ilya has done it for years, his quiet obligation to him to remind him he is not alone. “I am here, sweetheart,” he will murmur, and hope that it coaxes what nightmares he’s having out of his mind.

“Ilya?” he rasps, his eyes still closed, going based off touch alone that he is beside him.

“Go back to sleep, yes? It’s early.” He runs his fingers through Shane’s hair, watching as his mouth parts, trying to form thoughts as soon as he’s (barely) awake.

His freckles sparkle with the moon's shine, each special, and Ilya wishes he knew some names of constellations, because he is sure there are a few on Shane's cheeks, some that are only visible during certain seasons, some that are there all year long, constant.

"It's your birthday." He smiles, and kisses the side of Ilya's chest, above his armpit. "Happy birthday."

"Thank you. Think you are more excited than I am."

"Was I the first to tell you?"

Ilya chuckles, then hugs him tight. "Yes, sweetheart." Then, in Russian, "My competitive boyfriend, my beloved." In English— "You are the first."

When he is 29, when it is him and Shane and Shane and him in the dark in the kitchen, they celebrate quietly over a vanilla cupcake, a candle stuck in the middle their only light.

"Make a wish," Shane whispers, holding his hand, his legs over Ilya's lap.

Ilya goes to blow it out. And at the same time, thinks, hopes, wishes—*By this time next year, we'll be celebrating in the sun.*

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