

The Thing About Jane

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The Thing About Jane

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Summary

The body remembers what the mind forgets.

Three days after winning his first MVP award, Ilya Rozanov is critically injured in a serious car accident. Through the fog of head trauma, he struggles to remember certain details of his life, which sends him on a personal journey to find the whole truth.

Chapter 1

The sun peered through the partially closed curtains with an oppressive glare, hot and blinding. Ilya groaned, moving to press his face into the pillow, but was met with the uncomfortable pain that he was still getting used to.

He groaned again, rolling onto his back, his fingertips moving to feel the scar that now ran from his hairline to his eyebrow. The stitches had come out a couple of weeks ago now, but left behind a large searing mark.

It wasn't the scar that hurt, though. He had another matching one running from his bottom lip down to beneath his chin. Both were painless now.

It was the dull ache that sat in his head at all times that drove him crazy. It hurt to look at lights. To look at screens. To press his head too hard into a pillow. Just to exist, really.

It had been a little over a month since the accident now. A week since he'd been back home.

Ilya reached to his bedside table, grabbing a half empty bottle of water. He took a swig, then put a hand over his eyes, trying to block out the light and lessen the throbbing in his head.

The accident had been his fault. That was one of the first flashes of memory that returned to him when he finally gained consciousness 2 days after the crash. He remembered being frustrated. Upset. Feeling reckless. He was driving too fast, too aggressively. He could only be thankful that it was a guardrail he collided with, and not another car. He was the only one injured in the crash.

Broken collarbone. Broken ribs. Contusions. And severe head trauma.

When he had woken up in the hospital, he was aware of who he was. Where he was. What year it was. He knew he played hockey for Boston. Even remembered the name of a few teammates without being prompted.

But there were many, many pieces missing. Details, big and small, that made it impossible to put the whole puzzle back together.

He hadn't remembered winning MVP just days before. Couldn't remember that he had apparently competed in the Olympics. He vaguely remembered hoisting the cup over his head, but it didn't seem like a memory. More like a dream.

These were major milestones, though, ones that were in the media, recorded in history with videos and pictures. Concrete facts.

There were other pieces missing that he wasn't quite sure what to do with yet. When his teammates came to visit him in the hospital, he remembered being struck with the paralyzing realization that he didn't remember if he liked them or not. If they had actually been friends. He knew who they were, but what they were to him...that part was very unclear.

He thanked God over and over that he did, however, remember pieces of Svetlana. A lifelong friend. Someone he knew he could trust. He knew she cared about him. There was safety in that.

Turning his back to the window, Ilya reached for his phone. A bad idea. But he was feeling incredibly isolated from the world being stuck in his house, not watching TV or looking at his phone or doing much of anything besides sleeping.

He winced at the brightness of the screen. "Fuck." He cursed under his breath, staring at the screen now with one eye squeezed shut.

He scrolled Instagram for a few minutes until the dull ache in his head started to bloom into a pounding pain.

But before he could put his phone down, he had to look at it again. The same thing he had looked at now a hundred times since he woke up in the hospital. A series of text messages.

Jane: I really hope you're ok. I've been really worried.

Jane: Just please text me back when you can.

Jane: I just need to know that you're ok.

Ilya blinked at the screen now, the same way he had when he read the messages for the first time. Jane. Just reading the name on the screen made his stomach twist in the strangest way. Like his body knew the importance. But his brain couldn't make any sense of it.

Who the fuck is Jane? Ilya, as far as he knew, hadn't actually forgotten who someone was. Not completely. But he could not, for the life of him, remember anyone named Jane.

He had tried to scroll back through the thread of messages. But he could only ever get so far before the pain in his head was so bad he couldn't bear to see the screen anymore.

It was clear he was hooking up with this Jane. All he could piece together was flirting and addresses.

But why would his booty call be acting so concerned about him? Ilya knew he was great in bed. Really great. But good enough that this Jane was checking up on him multiple times?

It seemed like something more. He couldn't shake the feeling in his gut and in his chest when he looked at the messages. He set the phone face down on the bed, sighing deeply in frustration.

"You alright?" Svetlana peeked into the room. She had been coming by every day to check on him since he'd come home.

"Fine." Ilya mumbled. He had really wanted to ask Svetlana about Jane, to see what she knew. But something in him told him this was somehow private. Like Svetlana wasn't allowed to know. He couldn't make sense of that feeling either. Sure, Ilya and Svetlana had a sexual relationship. They were great friends. But it wasn't anything more than that. They

were not in love, and they didn't shy from telling each other about the other people they slept with.

“Ok.” She said, crossing her arms in the doorway.

“What?” He pinched the bridge of his nose. “Why are you looking at me like that?”

“You're frustrated.” She walked across the room, perching herself on the side of the bed.

“Yes. My head is fucking killing me.” He put his hands over his face.

“I know.” She said. “Come on. You need to eat. You can't be losing too much muscle in the off season.”

Ilya couldn't help but laugh. That was something he certainly remembered about Svetlana. She was all about hockey. He had to admit, it was nice to have someone by his side who held him accountable.

Chapter 2

He was glad to be rid of the summer. It was too hot. Too bright. Too painful and confusing.

He was ready to start the season. His collarbone and ribs had healed nicely. The doctor was satisfied with the progress he had made with his head injury.

For Ilya, lying to the doctor was an easy choice to make. He knew he couldn't spend another moment sitting at home, waiting around for something to do. He was itching to get back onto the ice.

His headaches were mostly gone. Which, to Ilya, meant telling the doctor they were gone completely. He also told the doctor his memory was great. Because the things he couldn't remember all felt like background noise. Things that didn't actually matter, in the long run.

He remembered how to play hockey. That part was important. What he couldn't remember was what he had felt the moment he got drafted number 1. Couldn't remember exactly why his brother hated him so much. Couldn't remember what it was that he liked to order at McDonald's. And he couldn't remember Jane.

He swore by now those 3 text messages must be burned into his retinas. Even now, sitting at his locker before the first game of the season, he was staring at them. He needed to snap out of it. Ilya sat his phone in his locker, grabbing his helmet.

But his phone gave a loud, echoing buzz. He furrowed his brows a bit, picking the phone up again. He almost dropped it to the floor.

Jane: Good luck tonight.

He felt his heart flip in his chest. He had been trying for months to resist his instinct to text Jane back and ask “who is this?”

Whoever Jane was, he didn't want to seem rude. Or stupid. So he had ignored the messages all together.

Did Jane know he was about to play a game? It was getting reported on everywhere, so maybe that wasn't surprising. But why did Jane care? Why keep texting when Ilya hadn't responded in months?

He needed to concentrate. He threw the phone back into the locker. He could only hope now that no one would knock his head onto the ice. He couldn't let himself care about anything else.

Of course his first game since being injured would be against Montreal. His coach had begged him not to be too physical today, to ease into it. But that didn't seem feasible when their biggest threat was on the ice.

He had to beg his coach to let him do the face off. He was eventually able to convince him that he was ready.

Ilya hopped over the boards and was greeted by a loud eruption of cheers from the Boston crowd. He smiled a bit to himself as he skated to the center, taking it all in. He was lucky to be here doing this. Hell, he was lucky to still be alive.

He hadn't even bothered to look and see who he was facing off against until they were getting into position. He was taking in the crowd for another moment before he finally turned to face his opponent.

He was greeted immediately by dark eyes and flushed cheeks, scattered with freckles.

Shane Hollander. The league's boy next door. His arch rival. This much he remembered.

But Shane kept staring at him, with the strangest look on his face. Ilya couldn't quite place it. It was almost like Shane was relieved to see him, but also had something emotional brewing within him that he was trying to hide.

Ilya swallowed hard. There was a flash of recognition within him. For what, he couldn't say. But his stomach twisted in the same way it did when he read those messages from Jane. Again, his body trying to tell him something that his mind could not remember.

The only thing he could remember in this moment was how to be Ilya Rozanov on the ice. "I almost died a few months ago, you know. Couldn't remember shit. I still can't, really." He sniffed a bit. "But, I will try to remember how easy it is to beat you."

Shane Hollander stared back at him, almost like he was searching for something. He didn't flinch. Didn't get angry or annoyed. Just stared. And there was definitely something more to that stare. A knowingness, laced with confusion. Ilya felt like Hollander was staring into his soul. It was unsettling.

Ilya tried to shrug it off. Maybe he wasn't feeling the competitive edge of playing against someone who probably wasn't 100%. But when he stared back into his opponents eyes, he felt an overwhelming surge. Ilya tried to keep his face even. Fuck, was he going to throw up?

It had been a month since the last time he had. It was a lingering symptom of the head trauma. But if he threw up now, he knew he would get benched. Probably for multiple games. He swallowed hard, switching his gaze to the ice. But he could still feel Hollander's eyes on him. He took a deep breath, waiting for the puck to drop.

The game came to him with surprising ease. It was like his brain was trying to make up for all the things it couldn't remember by putting hockey in the spotlight of his memory. It all felt like second nature. At one point, Shane Hollander tried to check him. But Ilya moved around him, clipping Hollander with his elbow to send him off his trajectory. When Ilya scored, the crowd erupted again. He couldn't help but flash a smile. He looked back at Hollander, who was staring at him again. He figured Hollander must just be upset that he got scored on. Ilya chose to ignore the way the stare made his chest tighten.

After the final buzzer, Ilya removed his helmet, pushing sweat soaked hair from his face. He was smiling with his team, skating toward the bench, when his eyes caught Hollander's one last time. He felt his stomach drop. What the fuck was it with this guy? Why did he keep staring? Why did it make Ilya feel so strangely? He looked away quickly, swallowing back another surge of nausea.

Chapter 3

When Ilya made it home, he was still buzzing with the feeling of winning, mixed with the confusion that Shane Hollander left in him.

Svetlana was waiting for him with dinner. He kissed her quickly on the cheek before collapsing onto the couch, his plate on the table in front of him.

“You looked great out there.” She said, eyes fixed on the TV. Highlights from the game were playing.

Ilya shrugged “It was easier than I thought it would be.”

Suddenly, the highlights changed to the post game interviews. They showed Shane Hollander first.

He looked exhausted. Dewy with sweat, hair pushed back, eyes laced with disappointment. He didn't meet the gaze of any reporters.

“You really got to him, I guess. That goal was amazing.”

“Yeah.” Ilya said absently, eyes narrowing in focus on the screen.

“He's hot, even when he loses.” Svetlana shrugged, sipping her drink.

“He is hot.” Ilya agreed. And he really was. Shane Hollander had great features. Perfect cheekbones. A pretty mouth. And freckles that Ilya was especially struck by, for whatever reason.

Svetlana turned to look at him. “Oh, you really think so?”

Her tone and the look on her face struck Ilya as odd. He couldn't place it.

“What? Are you jealous or something? I can't find anyone other than you hot?” He cocked his head.

She laughed a bit. “Of course you can. I'm just....surprised you finally decided to admit it.”

Ilya shrugged. “I don't know. He is hot. Maybe you never brought it up before.”

“Oh, I've brought it up.” She sipped her drink again.

“OK, well, clearly I can't remember. I probably didn't want to admit he was hot because I don't want him to compete with me for best AND best looking hockey player.” Ilya shrugged again.

“Hm. Ok.” Svetlana turned back to the TV.

Ilya felt that strange twist in his stomach again. Shane Hollander wasn't just hot. He was beautiful. He found that thought absurdly terrifying for some reason.

He rubbed his eyes, reaching for his phone. He couldn't help but to open the message again.

Jane: Good luck tonight.

He shifted in his seat. "Hey. Do you...do you remember someone named Jane?"

Svetlana turned toward him, a little too sharply. "Jane?"

"Yes." Ilya felt so uncomfortable now, he wanted to crawl out of his skin. "I just...when I woke up, in the hospital, I had messages from someone named Jane. And again tonight. But I don't remember a Jane." He swallowed, looking up at her.

Svetlana chewed her lip. "Well..." she started. "I wish I could help you. But you refused to ever speak about Jane to me." She crossed her arms.

"What?" Now Ilya felt an icy hand of panic gripping at his throat.

Svetlana shrugged. "You had been texting someone named Jane for a long time. Years. You seemed excited by Jane. Distracted."

Ilya swallowed.

"I was curious, I thought maybe this was a serious relationship or something. But when I asked, you got weird. Told me it was nothing. And you never brought it up again."

Ilya felt his brows furrow in confusion. Why would he not tell Svetlana about a girl he was seeing? It didn't make any sense. He had told her about dozens of girls before. She was one of the only people that he was into guys, too. Why would he keep this from her?

"I don't...understand." Ilya looked down at his phone.

"I don't either. Never did." She stood up, gathering the plates. "You should sleep."

Ilya laid down on the couch, crossing his arms over his face. He couldn't rid himself of the overwhelming feeling that he was missing something important. Something that actually did matter.

He felt like he did when he was dreaming, dreaming about running toward something, but his legs would give out. And the world would fall away around him. But he still couldn't bring himself to text Jane. Part of him was afraid of what this relationship actually meant to him.

Sleep evaded him. His mind was racing with thoughts of Jane, thoughts of hockey, thoughts of Shane Hollander. He found himself up at 4am, googling Hollander's name. He scrolled endlessly through images and news articles, trying to search that beautiful face for some kind of meaning. Any clue as to why Hollander had been watching him with such intensity, and why it made Ilya feel like he was going to spiral out of control. Maybe he was just losing his mind.

He decided that had to be it.

Chapter 4

A few weeks later, Ilya found himself on Montreal's ice. He had tried, unsuccessfully, to quiet his mind since then. But somehow, through the dense fog in his brain, he had been on an absolute tear.

He was playing better than he ever had. It didn't make much sense to him, but he decided to take it for what it was worth.

Ilya was met with a parade of boos from the Montreal crowd when he skated out to the face off. In his typical fashion, he waved and blew kisses to the crowd, which set them off even further. He shook his head, laughing, as he prepared to come face to face once again with Shane Hollander.

He had found himself watching a lot of clips of Hollander lately. Maybe he was studying up to beat him again. Maybe he was studying Hollander for other, more personal reasons. He had to admit, Shane Hollander was near perfection on the ice. He was starting to wonder how exactly he had beat him one on one so easily. Maybe this rivalry had really gotten under his skin. Maybe that's why he had been staring at Ilya so much.

But right now, Hollander would not meet his eye. He kept his gaze evenly on the ice. He almost looked defeated. It gave Ilya pause.

He wanted to be his usual self, to jaw at Shane Hollander and make him squirm. But an inexplicable sadness washed over Ilya with a great rush. He tried to swallow it back, but the cold grip grasped at his throat and wouldn't let go.

Shane Hollander looked almost like a lost puppy. It was horribly pathetic. Why did Ilya even care?

Ilya cleared his throat. "This game will be no fun for any of us if you give up now." He said, with a gentleness that surprised even himself.

Hollander seemed a bit surprised too. His brows pinched together before he slowly lifted his gaze to meet Ilya's. Shane's eyes were a beautiful shade of brown. God. Why did Ilya just think that?

Their eyes stayed locked for a moment. It made something stir in Ilya's chest. Was this just because he found Shane Hollander attractive? It was freaking him out. He needed to collect himself.

Ilya gave Shane a small nod, before moving his eyes back to the ice. Fuck. This was weird. Could the puck just drop already?

The noise in the room was making Ilya's head pound.

Yesterday's loss against Montreal wasn't particularly helping his mood, either. Ilya had scored, but they couldn't fend off Montreal. Shane Hollander had played with a particular hunger, one that likely sealed their win.

All Ilya really wanted to do was fly home and crawl into his bed with the curtains drawn. But he was instead standing in the middle of an MLH Halloween charity event in Montreal, being cohosted by 4 different teams, including Boston.

All the players were to show up in their jerseys and hand out candy to kids with a smile, while the executives got drunk. Ilya would usually be happy to entertain the kids, but his head was killing him. Like maybe, actually, killing him. Or at least that's what he feared.

Between the pain and spiraling, he knew he couldn't keep going like this. A surge of nausea crept up his throat as he tried to take deep breaths. He ended up sneaking off to the stairwell, sitting on a step. He could use a drink. And a cigarette. He pushed his hands through his hair, putting his head down and closing his eyes.

The sound of footsteps coming down the stairs made him squeeze his eyes shut harder. Every sound was like an ice pick to his brain. He rested his head against the wall, groaning.

"You...ok?" A voice came softly, echoing off the walls. Ilya almost didn't even bother to open his eyes.

When he did, his eyes were met with the annoyingly beautiful brown eyes of Shane Hollander, who was leaning back against the railing.

"I don't know." Ilya said, honestly. He was starting to wonder if coming back to play so soon was really a good idea. Right now, he felt like he was being tortured.

Shane nodded a bit. "Don't really seem ok."

"I'm probably not." Ilya grumbled, pinching the bridge of his nose. Suddenly, he felt like crying. He pushed the heels of his hands into his eyes, trying desperately to stop the tears from coming.

He felt Shane slowly take a seat on the step next to him. "Your head?"

"Mm." Ilya laid his head back against the wall again. The cold of the cinderblocks was soothing.

"That's probably not a good sign." Shane was fidgeting with his hands.

Ilya shrugged, turning now to face him. "No. Probably not. But it feels...too late."

He could feel Shane's eyes studying him, moving from Ilya's eyes to the two scars on his face. Ilya absently ran a thumb over the scar on his chin.

“Was a lot of blood, apparently. Wasn't enough to fuck up my head. Had to fuck my face up too.”

“It's not.” Shane said, almost before Ilya could even get all the words out. Shane's eyes widened a bit, as if he had just processed his own words. His face flushed red.

Ilya's lips twinged up into a smile. “No? Still beautiful as ever, yes?”

Shane looked away. “Fuck off.” He said quietly.

Ilya felt his heart squeeze. It was a bizarre feeling, one that felt wildly inappropriate. It once again felt like his body was remembering something that his brain could not.

“You going to after party thing?” Ilya scratched the side of his nose.

“I don't know. Probably. My team will give me shit if I don't. You?”

“I need vodka or I won't be able to sleep tonight with this fucking headache. So yes.” Ilya stood. “So I will see you, there, maybe?”

Shane tilted his chin up, meeting Ilya's eyes. The look he gave him made the hair on the back of Ilya's neck stand up. It was a look of wanting. Shane wanted to see him again. He could feel it, better than he could feel the ground beneath his feet.

“See you there.” Shane stood up, and they were now almost chest to chest in the narrow doorway. Ilya let his eyes wander down to Shane's mouth. Fuck. Shane Hollander had no business being so pretty. It was throwing him off. Shane licked his lips a bit, a slow gesture that made something stir below Ilya's belt. He watched, almost breathless now, as Shane walked away and disappeared back into the party.

Ilya almost immediately grabbed for his phone, opening his messages. He stared at Jane's name. Was Jane as pretty as Shane Hollander? Why the fuck was he even thinking about this? He shoved his phone hard into his pocket, taking a deep breath before walking back to the party himself.

Chapter 5

When night fell, the players were all invited to the rooftop bar of the hotel where the visiting teams were staying.

As he made his way up the elevator, Ilya checked out his own reflection in the doors. He was glad to be rid of his jersey, now in a black tank top, paired with a black leather jacket and jeans. He pulled his chain out to rest over his shirt, smoothing it down.

Back in his room, he had spoken to his mother. He had sat on the side of the bed, grasping the gold cross of his chain in his hand, and begged her to guide him. Guide him anywhere but here. The inside of his mind was a scary place right now. He felt confused and alone. He was in pain. And he needed a way out. "Please, show me." Maybe it was a stupid thing to wish for. But he didn't care anymore.

When he reached the rooftop it had already filled out. The hulking bodies of hockey players littered his view. He shouldered a few out of the way to get to the bar. When the first drops of vodka hit his tongue, he felt the smallest bit calmer.

But it was still too noisy inside. He ignored the group of his teammates all huddled around a table laughing loudly, and instead chose to walk outside onto the rooftop patio. The rush of cold air was soothing. Ilya moved to the far corner, wedging himself against a wall. Maybe no one would notice him here.

But hopefully Shane Hollander would find him. He hadn't been able to stop thinking about Hollander's mouth. It was absurd. He probably just needed to get laid.

He took a long sip of his vodka, his fingers drumming on the phone in his pocket. It was taking everything in him not to look at the messages from Jane right now.

The cold wind stung his eyes, but it was a welcome feeling. He could feel the ache in his head being numbed by the vodka, and maybe also by the quiet.

The sound of footsteps broke his moment of serenity. He looked over his shoulder, to see Shane Hollander standing next to him, one hand in his pocket and the other holding a glass.

"Figured I'd find you out here." Shane said matter of factly, leaning forward on the railing.

"Mm. Too loud inside." Ilya rubbed at the scar on his forehead. Shane turned to face him, his back to the railing now. He was already flushed, but whether it was from the cold or the alcohol, Ilya couldn't say.

Ilya let his eyes wander over Shane. Most hockey players looked like barbarians to Ilya. But Shane looked like a prince.

Ilya could feel that Shane's eyes were on him too. Ilya reached into his jacket pocket for his pack of cigarettes, letting the jacket slip off one shoulder to reveal his arm. He made sure to

flex it slightly. He wanted to see how Shane would react.

Ilya looked up to watch Shane's eyes move over Ilya's bare shoulder and arm like he was studying a painting. Damn. Shane Hollander really was checking him out. Ilya placed a cigarette between his lips, pulling his jacket back into place as he flicked his lighter, then took a long drag.

Shane, who must have realized he had been staring, moved his gaze to the ground. "So. Your accident, it must have been...scary." Shane shuffled his feet a bit.

"It was." Ilya blew smoke from the side of his mouth.

"And you're still...having symptoms? Your head?" Shane sipped his drink, his cheeks growing more flushed now as the alcohol settled into him.

Ilya bit his lip, wondering how much he should really be revealing. "Yes." He said, hesitant. "I still get headaches. You saw this."

But Ilya could tell Shane was digging for something else. Ilya fixed his gaze to the sparkling lights of downtown Montreal, aglow in the crisp autumn night.

"Did you remember what happened? When you woke up?"

There it was. Ilya knew there were whispers around the league about the severity of his head injury, and the memory issues that came with it. Ilya took a few more drags of his cigarette as he decided what to say.

"Sort of. Was like..." Ilya's lips twinged. "Was like when you try to remember what happened in a dream. Maybe you remember some parts. But other things are...lost." He tossed the butt of the cigarette, shoving his hands into his pockets. "Not just about the accident. Whole life, I guess. Things are hard to remember sometimes."

Ilya was trying his hardest to sound like he was indifferent about this. After all, why shouldn't he be? He still had Svetlana. He was still great at hockey. The best, maybe. Though he had a feeling he and Hollander would be battling each other for that spot for a long time.

But his face must have betrayed him, because to his horror, he looked up to see Shane Hollander with a look of pure pity. Just when he was about to tell Hollander and his stupid, beautiful face to fuck off, Shane spoke.

"I'll get you another drink. Stoli?" Shane grabbed both of their empty glasses.

"You....yes...but how-" God, Ilya was bumbling like an idiot. But how did Shane Hollander know to get him top shelf Russian vodka?

"You're from Russia, aren't you?" Shane gave a smile that was almost teasing, over his shoulder as he walked away.

Ilya shook his head, laughing partially in disbelief and partially because Shane Hollander was adorable. Oh god. Maybe more vodka was not a good idea.

But he loved the cool air on his warm skin and the way he could feel his blood rushing and his head buzzing. He didn't want to call it a night. Not yet.

Chapter 6

Ilya and Shane were now sitting on the ground opposite each other, multiple empty glasses littering the space around them. Their shoes were touching slightly, and Shane was leaned forward, resting his upper body on one leg that was pulled toward his chest.

The growing intensity in the way they had been looking at each other was not lost on Ilya. 2 hours had probably passed by now. Hours of them talking about a little bit of everything. Hockey, working out, Russia, chasing each other for the best accolades in the MLH. Ilya even made a bet that he would end up on the cover of the MLH video game before Shane did.

His rapport with Hollander came shockingly easy. And maybe it wasn't even a rapport. It felt almost like...chemistry. Something natural and undeniable that flowed between them, blocking out the rest of the world.

Had he somehow forgotten he was best friends with Shane Hollander? Because it was starting to feel like it. When was the last time he even had a conversation this long with anyone? Ever?

And now Shane was looking at him again with those eyes. Sparkling brown and slightly glassy from drinking. And looking at Ilya with interest.

“You have girlfriend?” Ilya wasn't sure what possessed him to ask this just then.

“Uh...I...no. I don't. Why?” He watched Shane shift a bit, eyes moving to their shoes touching in front of them.

Ilya shrugged.

“Do you?” Shane moved his eyes slowly back to meet Ilya's.

“Nope.” Ilya said plainly, playfully kicking at Shane's foot. He could swear he saw Shane blushing.

Ilya pulled his jacket off, sitting it on the ground next to him before stretching his arms out. “Mm. That feels nice. You like the cold too, yes? Canadians like cold?”

But Hollander's eyes were wandering all over Ilya's body. Ilya loved a tight tank top. He knew his body looked great, and he liked when people stopped to look.

Maybe he liked Shane Hollander looking a little too much.

“Uh. Yeah.” Shane swallowed.

Ilya leaned in closer to Shane. “You like men?”

Shane sat back so quickly, you would have thought Ilya punched him in the face. This made Ilya laugh. “Wow. Ok. Relax.”

Shane Hollander looked like he was about to have a panic attack. Ilya placed a hand on Shane's knee. "Hey. Relax. You were just looking at me like you wanted me to.." Ilya let his words trail off. He figured Hollander had enough imagination to fill in the blanks.

Shane's face was so flushed now that Ilya felt a little bad. Ilya now had hands on both Shane's knees, squeezing slightly. And Shane's body seemed to relax against Ilya's touch. Ilya leaned back against the wall.

"I do." He said casually, adjusting the chain around his neck.

"Do...what?" Shane asked without looking at him.

"Like men. Sometimes."

Shane looked up at him, but he didn't look surprised. Only like he was waiting for Ilya to say more.

"Only the pretty ones though, hm?" Ilya reached forward, placing a hand on Shane's cheek. Ilya watched as Shane's eyes immediately fluttered shut.

A dizzying feeling flooded Ilya's senses. The feeling of Shane's skin on his own felt intoxicating. He could feel his heartbeat in his chest.

Ilya swiped a thumb gently over Shane's cheekbone, then pushed his fingertips into Shane's hair. Shane kept his eyes closed, leaning into the touch.

Ilya had to let his hand fall in that moment if he was ever going to stop himself. He moved his hand back into his lap, feeling like he had just been struck by lightning. He needed to gain his composure, quickly.

"Well. Now you tell me a secret." Ilya put his hands in his lap, willing himself to not put them all over every inch of Shane Hollander on this rooftop.

"What?" Shane opened his eyes again.

"I told you a secret about me. Now you tell me one." Ilya leaned forward again, closer to Shane's face.

Shane exhaled a bit. "I don't know."

Suddenly, Ilya's mind darted to Jane. Why did he always think about Jane when his mind started to undress Shane Hollander? Was it guilt for betraying this relationship with Jane by wanting after someone else?

It didn't feel like that. It felt like an alarm was blaring in his head. Like every cell in his body was shouting different parts of the answer, but he couldn't piece it all together over the cacophony. He ran a hand through his own hair, trying to ground himself.

"Maybe..." Shane said quietly, his shoe nudging at Ilya's foot ever so slightly. "Maybe you already know it."

Ilya felt his body ignite like a lighter. His mind was still doing laps, but his body...

He reached out and put a hand on Shane's jaw, resting the pad of his thumb on Shane's lower lip. The way Shane's mouth fell open slightly, so immediately and without hesitation, made Ilya shudder with excitement.

The wet warmth of Shane's tongue on the tip of his thumb sent shockwaves through Ilya's body. He exhaled, slowly pulling his hand away. This was a horrible idea. But Shane was looking at him like a hungry animal.

"Maybe here is not..." Ilya heard his own voice trailing off.

"I have an apartment." Shane said quickly. "It's not far from here."

Ilya could feel the tightness in his pants. "What is address?"

Shane stood, smoothing out his shirt. "I'll text it to you."

"Let me give you my number." Ilya held his hand out for Shane's phone, but Shane just gave him a slight smile.

"I have your number."

Ilya's brows furrowed. "You...do?" He was trying to imagine any situation in the past that could have possibly warranted giving Shane Hollander his number.

"I do. See you soon." Shane disappeared into the bar, leaving Ilya feeling breathless. This was probably the strangest night of his life.

Chapter 7

Ilya rushed back to his hotel room to brush his teeth. Was he really about to go get laid by... Shane Hollander? Fuck it. That sounded pretty hot to him.

He was trying desperately to push down any deeper feeling than that. Because he was definitely feeling something on that rooftop. And it terrified him. For now, he just needed to focus.

His phone buzzed in his back pocket just as he was spitting mouthwash into the sink. He smirked to himself, pulling the phone out, ready to immediately copy this address into Uber.

When he looked at the screen, he felt his mouth go dry. He rubbed one eye, thinking he must be drunk. Or seeing things. Or completely losing his mind.

There was a text on his screen. With a Montreal address.

From Jane.

He felt himself slide down the wall and onto the bathroom floor. What the fuck. What the fuck? Panic gripped at the base of his throat, icy and sharp.

This didn't make any sense. Something was wrong. Like, really wrong.

His mind jumped back to the way he felt when he put his palm to Shane Hollander's cheek. To the way Shane looked at him with such intensity. To the way he felt when he saw Shane at center ice during the first game of the season.

How it all made him think about Jane.

Jane. Jane, who felt like a secret. Jane was a secret, apparently. He hadn't told Svetlana. Ilya felt sweat glistening over his skin.

He jumped up off the floor, one hand in his hair, the other shakily opening the Uber app. This was a dream. Or a mistake. It had to be. Right?

There was only one way to find out.

The entire ride there felt so surreal, he might as well have been in a spaceship. Buildings and cars and street lights streaked by in a nonsensical blur. Ilya tried to focus on keeping his breathing even.

The uncontrollable lust he had felt rushing to his hotel room had been drowned out by sheer, paralyzing shock.

Pieces were starting to click themselves uncomfortably into place. Svetlana's comment about Ilya never admitting that Shane Hollander was hot. The invisible string that seemed to run between Shane and Jane in his mind.

Shane...and...Jane. Oh my god. He put his head into his hands. Holy fuck. A swell of feeling rose up in his gut. He couldn't shake it. He desperately needed to make sense of it all.

So he had hooked up with Shane Hollander in the past? Honestly, good for him. Shane Hollander was the league's shining star. A squeaky clean image, on and off the ice. But apparently not so squeaky clean that he couldn't fuck his rival.

But Ilya could not rid himself of the thoughts that this was something more than that. When he looked at those messages, he felt something. Not lust. He felt...

The car stopped in an alleyway, large brick buildings looming overhead. Ilya was too distracted to even care if this was right or not. He heard the car drive off behind him as he stared at the numbers on the doors. He looked at the address again. This was definitely it.

As he approached the door, it swung open in front of him, Shane Hollander standing in a fluorescently lit stairwell.

An intense rush of recognition overloaded Ilya's senses. This stairwell. The feeling of his own heart pounding. His lips pressed to...

He moved his eyes to meet Shane's, feeling the slightest sensation of tears stinging his eyes.

"Come on, it's cold." Shane held the door open wider. Ilya took a shaky breath, stepping inside. He couldn't bring himself to look back at Shane. He felt like his mind was going to break. He just wordlessly walked up the stairs, every step echoing.

Ilya stepped aside slightly to let Shane open the door to the apartment, stepping in behind him.

Warm, dim light flooded the space. Ilya's breathing hitched.

"You ok?" Shane leaned back against the kitchen island.

Ilya felt like he was going to be sick. Or cry. Maybe pass out. Maybe all three. He leaned back against a couch, putting his head in his hands. "I don't know."

"We...we don't have to..." Shane sounded nervous, like he had done something wrong.

"No. Is not..." Ilya sighed heavily, pushing his hands into his hair. "Were you ever going to tell me?" Suddenly, Shane looked blurry through Ilya's eyes.

The dam had burst. All of these emotions that he could not for the life of him understand came down like a crashing wave. Months of confusion and frustration. Hot tears ran down his

cheeks, and he tried to turn his face away from Shane before he could see.

Shane quickly moved closer, but stopped in his tracks, like he was stunned, unsure of what to do. "Tell you?" Shane swallowed.

Ilya sank to the floor, unable to stop himself from crying now. "Fuck." He covered his face. "I'm sorry."

"No-" Shane got down on his knees in front of Ilya. "Hey." He put his hands on Ilya's shoulders. "Talk to me. Please."

"I don't know. I don't know what's happening." Ilya wiped the tears from his face. "I just...I want to fucking remember." He moved his eyes to meet Shane's. Shane hesitantly put a hand on Ilya's face, his thumb gently running over the scar on his chin.

Shane then pressed his lips to Ilya's, tender but firm. Ilya felt his whole body sink into the kiss, his eyes fluttering shut.

His mind flashed back to a hotel room. Ilya's hands on Shane's face, their mouths pressed together, a surge of heat and electricity running through them. His heart was pounding now.

Shane pulled away, but kept their lips close. "I'm sorry. I didn't know how to.." Shane's voice trailed off. "Fuck. I miss you." Shane's hand moved into Ilya's hair, giving it a familiar tug.

Ilya moved forward to meet Shane's lips again. It was better than anything he had ever felt. Slowly, he pushed his tongue into Shane's mouth, feeling heat rush over him. Shane moved into Ilya's lap, both hands in his hair now, the kiss deepening.

It felt real. It felt right. Ilya didn't want to ever stop kissing Shane Hollander. But he pulled himself away, breathless.

"When?" Ilya put a hand on Shane's neck. "When did this start?"

"Rookie season. Well...the summer before."

Ilya huffed out a laugh of disbelief. "Your hotel room..." He closed his eyes. "Was...was after promo shoot, yes?"

He saw Shane's eyes light up. "You remember?" Shane nipped at Ilya's bottom lip.

"I think so. I remember...feeling you." He wondered if Shane could feel how hard his heart was pounding. He kissed him again. He needed to keep feeling Shane. It was like a drug.

Shane was pressed so closely to Ilya now, their body heat exchanging. "I have to tell you something." Ilya said quietly.

"Hm?" Shane pressed his mouth to Ilya's jaw.

"When I woke up in hospital, I had text messages. From someone I did not recognize. I knew it was important, but..." He tilted his head back, exhaling as Shane kissed down his neck.

“But I could not figure it out. Has been torturing me for months. I knew I must really, really like this person.”

Shane pulled his mouth away, looking back up at Ilya. “And?”

“And...” Ilya pushed Shane's hair back. “I think I may be cheating on Jane right now.” A knowing smile spread across Shane's lips when Ilya said the name.

“The thing about Jane is...she has same address as you.” Ilya smirked, pressing his forehead to Shane's.

“Jane was really worried about you.” Shane said softly, pulling back to look at Ilya's face again. He let fingers dance across the scars that now marked it.

“I'm sorry. That I forgot.” Ilya swallowed.

“I want to help you remember.” Shane whispered. It sent chills through Ilya's whole body.

But he was relaxed now. His brain was no longer running like a faucet. He no longer felt like he was chasing something in a dream. The details hadn't made themselves clear, not yet. But feeling Shane Hollander's touch right now was everything that he needed.

The body remembers what the mind forgets.

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