

Curiosity killed the cat, indeed.

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by [Myyyr_miu](#)

Summary

“Baby, there’s nothing I haven’t already told you... except maybe—” He glanced up. “For some reason, Shane has a Russian keyboard on his phone. Last week, when my phone died and I texted you from his, I noticed it. English, French... and Russian.”

Oh.
Shit.

Jackie’s eyes lit up with interest.

“A Russian keyboard? ”

// Or: yet another fanfic about uncovering the true identity of the mysterious “Lily from Boston”

Notes

Yes, I know — there are a million fanfics like this. But I read them one after another and I simply cannot stop.

This takes place after the cottage weekend, but before the main drama of TLG. Sorry if it turned into one big cliché, but I am genuinely obsessed with these two, and this fic was necessary for my survival. Oh my god...Ma Sheila...

So, one of my hard canons is Shane trying to learn Russian. Even though he can’t speak it fluently (guys, I’m a native speaker — Russian is freaking hard even for me), he can write and understand some words. (Moi lyubimi 🥰)

One more thing: I know Ilya has a sweet tooth, but I cannot prove it. Still — honey cake is REALLY GOOD. Please try it if you’re not afraid of extremely sweet desserts.

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

“Okay,” Jackie said, settling more comfortably onto the bed she shared with Hayden, generously rubbing a thick, greasy hand cream into her skin. It smelled like chamomile. “Now can we finally talk about the elephant in the room.”

The scent was... an acquired taste, to put it mildly. But honestly, when you have four kids, that’s the last thing you care about. What mattered was that the younger ones weren’t allergic to it. Which, considering everything else, felt dangerously close to a miracle.

Tonight, the entire bedtime operation had been fully delegated to Hayden. And, frankly, the results were written all over his face. He looked exhausted. Completely wrecked. The soft glow of the bedside lamp lit him from the side, and even after all these years together, the sight of this man, wearing a stretched-out T-shirt with a suspicious carrot purée stain, was just as charming to her as the day they’d first met.

God. She loved her husband so much.

“As far as I know,” Hayden said, dropping down beside her with a tired sigh, “we don’t have any pets.”

That was a horrible joke, by the way. Jackie is taking her words back. She responded by lifting a single eyebrow in a way that made it very clear the joke had not landed. Hayden, wisely, pretended not to notice. He peeled off his socks and tossed them straight onto the floor. He wasn’t a neat freak like one of their very close mutual friends, and he allowed himself small freedoms like this. Sometimes. Especially when his wife was deep in a monologue.

“Shane is definitely seeing Lily from Boston again,” Jackie declared, with the confidence of someone delivering a serious analytical conclusion. “And maybe... not just seeing her.”

She paused for a second, trying to mentally gather everything she knew about that eternal situationship.

Lily had always existed. Shane had known her for YEARS. Decades, if she was being honest. And yet, he’d never talked about her directly. Not once. Meanwhile, the entire team had been keeping the topic afloat with impressive persistence, like Lily was some kind of urban legend.

Any remaining hope that the woman who managed to tame that rule-obsessed hockey machine would finally materialize had pretty much died after his relationship with Rose Landry. But, damn it—one week with an actual, real woman ended as quickly as it began, while ten years with semi-mythical Lily, whose name wasn’t even allowed to be spoken, loomed in the background like a massive red spot.

It wasn’t exactly hard to tell who won that battle.

“It’s her,” Jackie added firmly.

That look. The heart-eyes. The ones Hollander got every single time he checked his phone during dinner tonight. Subtle but way too familiar to ignore. And then there was that strange

feeling, like Shane had finally dropped something heavy he'd been carrying for years. It lingered in the air after every one of their recent meetings, almost tangible. And those friend-dates, by the way, had become noticeably less frequent. Thanks to the suddenly very busy captain of the Montreal Voyageurs.

What if—

“What if it actually worked out between him and Lily?” Jackie said out loud.

If you knew Jackie Pike, you knew one thing: she felt things. Deeply. Honestly. With zero brakes. And that was exactly why she cared so much about Shane. Yes, technically, he was her husband's best friend, not hers, but if life ever demanded she choose someone she trusted with their kids in an emergency, Jackie wouldn't hesitate for a second. She'd point at Hollander.

He was the kindest, most reliable person she knew. And she desperately wanted him to trust them the same way they trusted him. To be able to come over in the evening, collapse onto their couch, and talk about Lily. Ask for advice. Invite them on double dates. To stop keeping everything locked inside a chest with three different padlocks.

Because if Shane's first love was buried that deep, there had to be a serious reason. And whatever that reason was, Jackie knew one thing for sure: she'd always be on his side.

“I don't know, babe...” Hayden finally settled into his side of the bed, automatically tugging his pillow into place under his shoulder. “The guys used to say he might be seeing a married woman. Maybe—”

“Absolutely not,” Jackie cut in without hesitation.

She finished rubbing in the cream and pulled her hair out of its bun.

“We're talking about Shane—the guy on a microbiotic diet, who neatly folds his clothes in the locker room and washes dishes immediately after eating. IMMEDIATELY. He would have a full-blown panic attack just thinking about something like that. That's not about him. It has to be something else.”

She rolled onto her side, facing her husband. All those movie scenes with couples sleeping wrapped around each other? Total nonsense. Show her ten real couples who fall asleep and wake up tangled in arms. It's a myth, and it's overdue for debunking.

She studied the familiar details of his face: the light stubble, the eyebrow split from a game, his half-closed eyes. And suddenly, desperately, she wanted Shane to have someone who looked at him like this before going to sleep.

“Then what?” Hayden asked thoughtfully. “We always assumed it was an older woman. But I doubt he'd suddenly start dating some fucking superstar in the middle of all this.”

He agreed with her—Hollander's personality ruled out all the obvious explanations.

Jackie absentmindedly rubbed her earlobe, staring at the opposite wall. Yes, they wanted to know the truth. Of course they did. But they'd never cross his boundaries or, God forbid, dig through the life of someone who was practically family.

Which meant they had to latch onto something they already knew. A detail they'd overlooked.

"Okay," she said finally. "Since the All-Star Game—when it feels like things started getting better—did you notice anything weird? A phone wallpaper? Women's stuff at his place? Anything?"

She combed through her memory, trying to find a thread. And honestly, people who think marriage is just soul-killing routine can go to hell. A real marriage is two separate people creating something exponentially stronger together.

"Baby, nothing you don't already know..." Hayden frowned, sorting through his memories. It wasn't easy—Jackie was his best friend, and any piece of information usually reached her about 0.000001 seconds after discovery.

Then something clicked.

"Well... there is one thing," he said, lifting his head. "Shane has a Russian keyboard on his phone. Last week, when my phone died and I texted you from his, I noticed it."

Oh.

Oh shit.

Jackie's eyes lit up instantly.

"A Russian keyboard? On Shane's phone?" She sat straight up. "You can't install a new keyboard by accident. That's not like a weather update or something. He needed it for a reason."

She was thinking out loud now, already feeling that familiar prickle of intuition. Her inner voice was screaming that she'd just struck gold.

"I don't know," Hayden shrugged. "It seemed weird to me too, but I didn't ask."

He watched her carefully. This woman absolutely knew how to dig until she hit the truth.

"What if..." Jackie spun toward him. "Give me your phone. Please."

Her whole body was buzzing with anticipation.

The phone case was one of her birthday gifts, it was covered in all their kids' faces surrounded by hearts and smiley stickers. Her fingers flew over the screen as she was googling something. And when the answer finally loaded, her smirk slowly stretched into a full-blown victory smile.

"Yep," she said, savoring it. "Lily can be a Russian female name. In Slavic countries, especially Russia and Ukraine, there's the name 'Liliya.' It comes from the flower.

Symbolizes purity, beauty, innocence...”

She practically glowed, enjoying the moment and waiting for her husband’s reaction.
And she got it.

“You think...” Hayden froze. “That it’s not Lily from Boston but more like a Russian Lily?”

An image that surfaced in his mind was completely unhelpful, it obviously was the most Russian person in their lives. God, that sounded awful. The most Russian asshole they knew. That is even worse.

Could Shane’s girlfriend really be from Russia? Was that why everything was so secret? He didn’t even finish the thought—Jackie voiced it for him.

“They’re hiding the relationship because Canada and Russia are main rivals on ice,” she said quickly.

“And Rozanov only makes it worse—it could look like Shane is getting back at his biggest competitor.

And Lily could be anyone. What if she’s the daughter of some famous Russian politician? Or even worse. Daughter of someone connected to hockey?”

Hayden stared at the ceiling for a few seconds, then let out the slow sigh of a man who already knew resistance was pointless.

“Okay,” he said at last. “Fine. Russian Lily. Secret relationship. Geopolitics. NHL-level drama.”

He turned his head toward his wife.

“So what do we do with this information?”

“We do nothing,” Jackie replied far too quickly.

Hayden raised an eyebrow.

“...For now.”

She smiled—the exact smile that, after years of marriage, had given him a finely tuned survival instinct.

“We just watch. Very carefully. And if he wants to tell us himself—we’ll be ready. And if not...” she shrugged, “then the universe will accidentally drop a few more clues in our laps.”

“I’ve been married to you for all these years,” Hayden muttered, “and I still don’t know whether I should be scared of you or proud.”

“Both,” Jackie said innocently, settling back onto her pillow.

The next Voyageurs get-together took place at the Pike house, purely because Hayden's parents had graciously descended from the heavens and taken all four kids for the weekend. A miracle. A biblical one. As a result, Jackie and Hayden, being the least socially functional extroverts imaginable, decided to host a casual hangout with players and their significant others.

Because, obviously, seeing the same faces every single day at work wasn't nearly enough—they desperately needed to do it again during their very limited free time.

Totally normal behavior.

After the initial round of small talk and the complete annihilation of a charcuterie board that Jackie had assembled with far more care than it deserved, the group somehow ended up doing what they always did.

Watching hockey.

Of course.

This time, at least, there was nothing particularly serious on the TV. Just a forgettable game between two weak teams. But sometimes these sports-obsessed people genuinely believed that if there wasn't a commentator yelling about puck possession in the background, conversation would become bland and lose all flavor.

The guys were scattered across the couch, beers in hand, mostly talking about everyday nonsense rather than what was actually happening on the screen. It made her wonder—when was the last time any of them had watched a new movie instead of ESPN? Jackie, at least, had the excuse of taking the kids to animated films. It gave her brain a break.

Which reminded her—

Nachos.

She suddenly remembered that they'd recently bought several packs of tortilla chips, and she could throw together some guacamole in about five minutes. Perfect timing too, judging by the empty bottles, everyone was about to open their second Corona.

Slipping away before Hayden could notice her disappearance and insist on "helping" (which usually meant hovering like an anxious camp counselor), Jackie escaped into the kitchen and started digging through the upper cabinets above the stove.

Please don't tell me he ate all of them after night practice.

She was so focused on the search that she physically jumped when someone spoke behind her.

"FUCK! Shane! Jesus Christ," she yelped, clutching her chest and twisting around. "Why do you walk like a ghost?"

Hollander stood there in simple athletic wear, the kind he still defaulted to even after hiring a personal stylist. (Yes, she knew about that. No, Hayden didn't. Checkmate.) His hands were tucked into his pockets, and he was rocking gently from heel to toe like a kid who'd been

caught doing something mildly illegal.

Oh God. Was she really becoming that mom? The one who saw parenting metaphors everywhere?

“Sorry,” Shane said quietly, pulling out a barstool and sitting down. “I wanted to ask you something.”

Only then did Jackie notice he’d left his drink behind in the living room. And that the drink, earlier, hadn’t been ginger ale—but beer.

Beer.

He’d always occasionally allowed himself “extra” when visiting friends, bending his insane dietary rules. But lately, those exceptions were happening more often. And honestly? It was beautiful. Not just she had noticed—Hayden had too. They’d even silently agreed not to comment on it, afraid of scaring off this fragile woodland creature called Shane Hollander.

The man had eaten normal human food twice this week. And accepted dessert.

Progress.

And then—Lily.

What if Lily was the reason?

What if she’d seen his everything-in-a-blender breakfast smoothie and gotten furious? Stereotypical, sure, but judging by Rozanov, Russians were terrifying when angry. What if they lived together now? Or at least saw each other often enough that Shane felt less... rigid? Even the unconfirmed possibility made Jackie feel weirdly emotional.

“Do you remember that recipe book you told me about?” Shane asked suddenly.

Jackie froze.

That was... unexpected. From a man who treated food as fuel rather than joy.

She had, indeed, recently rambled about the cookbook she’d snagged online—a collection of authentic home recipes from around the world. She’d bought it to introduce the kids to different cultures, and it had been one of the best purchases of the month. No “replace this ingredient with ketchup” nonsense. No shortcuts. Everything felt real and authentic.

“Can I borrow it for a couple of days?” Shane added quickly. “Just... to look through.”

He looked painfully neutral while saying it. Like someone trying very hard to appear casual.

Jackie narrowed her eyes slightly.

“Of course,” she said, already moving toward the pantry. “You want to make something specific?”

From the kitchen, his voice floated back:

“Uh ...no. Just curious what’s in there.”

Sure.

Sure you are.

And then it hit her.

Recipe book.

Recipes from different countries.

Oh. Oh my God.

She pulled the book from the shelf and flipped to the table of contents.

Fish tacos, Grandma Lopez's way

Ginger congee — soul food from a village near Shanghai

Ceviche made from fish caught at dawn off the coast of Lima

And then—

Page 198.

Russian Honey Cake. The Empress's Favorite Dessert.

There it was.

If Jackie wasn't completely insane and she strongly suspected she wasn't, this was exactly what Shane was looking for.

Page 198 was near the end of the book. Meaning it would be incredibly easy to tell what he was interested in without saying a word.

She took a deep breath, schooling her face into something neutral before returning to the kitchen.

Shane was already holding a bag of nachos, smiling faintly—clearly having guessed why she'd vanished.

"Found them behind the cereal boxes," he said, setting them on the counter, eyes drifting immediately to the book in her hands.

God. He really was the best friend anyone could ask for.

"Here," Jackie said, sliding the book across to him. "You can keep it as long as you want."

She desperately wanted to tease him. Tell me how the cake turns out. Or I can lend you some honey. But she didn't. She didn't want him to shut down before he even started opening up.

So instead, she turned to the fruit basket and pretended to look for avocados.

Shane flipped to the contents page. Found what he wanted. Then carefully turned back to about three-quarters of the book, studying the photograph.

A soft flush crept over his freckled face—definitely not from alcohol. His lips twitched, just barely, into a smile.

Jackie stole a glance from the corner of her eye. Victory.

She could see the heading clearly:

This iconic Russian honey cake, also known as “Medovik,” is something everyone should try at least once. A layered honey dessert soaked in rich cream. Unforgettable.

Jackie was already furious before the puck even dropped.

Early in the season when family tickets usually went on sale they’d been busy surviving Ember’s colic. Surviving being the key word. When your infant screams like a possessed kettle twenty-four hours a day because of broccoli (fucking broccoli), you don’t exactly have the emotional or physical capacity to think about seating charts.

Which was why, on the night of the most important game of the season against Boston, she was watching from God knows where.

It felt like all of Canada had collectively decided to show up and witness what they were convinced would be a public execution of the Americans. Hockey wasn’t just a sport here—it was practically written into the constitution. And this absurdly overpriced “premium” section, where comfort was purely theoretical and the ticket cost roughly the same as a weekend getaway, was not helping her mood.

Free tickets for players’ wives? Of course those existed. If they’d fucking planned ahead. But when your youngest child is screaming around the clock and later turns out to be allergic to vegetables like a Victorian orphan, priorities shift.

“Perfect,” Jackie muttered through clenched teeth as she made her way down the row. “The dream. Plastic seat and hypothermia.”

She scanned the arena: rows packed with people balancing beers and hot dogs, the crowd buzzing, aggressive and loud, ready to destroy their vocal cords for their favorites. Meanwhile, she was just trying to find her stupid seat without tripping over anyone, mentally cursing the price she’d paid.

And that was only half the problem.

There wasn’t a single familiar face around. No friends. No other wives. No one she could quietly commiserate with during timeouts. Just her, her irritation, and a seat that was already making her legs go numb.

When Jackie finally settled in—sitting on her tote bag to avoid freezing her kidneys—she forced herself to breathe and decided to shut out every source of annoyance like swatting away flies.

Fate, naturally, had other plans.

To her right, a stream of meaningless chatter erupted. Two girls. Definitely not hockey fans. Too much laughing. Too many questions. Absolutely no understanding of what was happening on the ice.

“Oh my God, who’s that?” the blonde asked, dressed in approximately three layers too few, pointing at the players warming up.

“No idea... the tall one? With the red beard. Blue jersey, so he’s ours, right?” the second one giggled.

“Why are they sitting on the ice?” the blonde squinted. “This looks like the beginning of some weird sexual foreplay.”

“I saw something like this on YouTube once,” the other said thoughtfully. “Aren’t they supposed to hold that thingy differently?”

Thingy. Okay...

Jackie snorted before she could stop herself.

People attending one of the biggest games of the season, calling world-class athletes “some tall guy with a red beard,” was , against her will , kind of funny. These tickets had clearly fallen into their hands by some cosmic accident, and honestly? It softened her mood.

Maybe the night wasn’t completely ruined.

Apparently dissatisfied with their observational skills, the girls pulled out their phones to research the “main characters” of the evening, loudly reading names like it was a spelling bee.

“Okay, number twelve... Linder? Linder?” one guessed.

“And this one—Boston—Rozan... something,” the other laughed. “God, what is that name? Il-... lily- ...liya... Ilya? Ilya Rozanov?”

Jackie laughed out loud.

She’d just witnessed two people who had somehow existed without ever hearing the name of one of Boston’s biggest stars. Half of all sports segments started and ended with the Russian monster playing for Boston.

She savored the absurdity for a moment.

Ililyya Rozanov.

Make a note. Tell the guys later. Let them lose their minds over it.

And then something clicked.

Ilya.

Lily.

“Oh. Fuck me,” Jackie thought.

It was insane. Completely unhinged. The kind of theory you'd expect to find on the darkest corners of fan forums but—

Ilya was very very Russian. Captain of the Boston Bears. And Lily was from Boston.

Her gaze snapped down to the ice.

Warmups were still ongoing. Players glided in and out of view, testing the ice, getting their blood moving. Music blasted through the arena, making it hard to focus, but then she saw number 24.

Shane.

He circled the net, working on shots. The atmosphere was already hostile—Boston players chirping, staring, trying to provoke Montreal before the game even began. Like captain, like team. Number 81 skated confidently along the imaginary center line, looking for trouble. Jackie tried to convince herself these thoughts were coincidences.

She failed.

Shane drifted closer to the opposing captain. Not rushing. Just... gliding. Detached. When he reached the guy with the messy curls—

Jackie stood up, desperate to see. She needed fucking binoculars.

Shane's cheeks flushed deeper red. His mouth twitched. He smiled. Rozanov lifted one eyebrow. Just slightly. Barely visible. But to Jackie, it landed like a period at the end of a ten-year-long sentence.

Case solved.

Everything snapped into place.

Lily.

That's why Lily was a secret—one even their closest friends couldn't know. And their parents? Did their parents know?

So that meant Shane was gay.

Of course, she had absolutely no problem with any kind of orientation, but—

FOR FUCK'S SAKE, ILYA ROZANOV WAS GAY TOO.

That hyperactive, aggressively masculine specimen, the world-famous womanizer, was—on top of everything else—the very same Lily.

Her heart raced.

The girls beside her kept chatting, oblivious. No one had noticed this for years. Years.

Jackie grabbed her phone like it was a nuclear launch code and typed the name everyone in that building knew. Sorry, everyone except for those two ladies.

@rozanovilya_official.

She scrolled.

And then—

A photo of a cake.

A fucking medovik.

Caption:

“Feels like home” ❤️

“Oh my God,” she whispered, pressing the phone to her chest. “It’s real.”

Curiosity killed the cat, indeed.

The game was unfolding exactly the way everyone had expected it to: dirty, brutal, and right on the edge. A couple of players were already sitting in the penalty box, wearing the same bored expressions as people who’d been caught using inappropriate language during a math lesson. The referees pretended they were in control, the players pretended they weren’t about to run each other over at the first opportunity, and the stands pretended this was all purely about sport.

The timeout was coming to an end.

Jackie caught herself staring at one spot for a good ten minutes, not actually seeing anything at all, and finally decided to return to her improvised “throne.” Talking to someone felt like the best possible idea. She was a damn extrovert, and right now that wasn’t a character flaw—it was a survival mechanism. Her head was already a complete mess, and sitting still, stewing in her own thoughts, was a guaranteed way to spiral into either tears or an impromptu interrogation.

Only a few minutes remained before the game resumed. Maybe that was what she was clinging to like a lifebuoy—the hope that a win might dull this nasty, sticky feeling of confusion. The kind you get when you’ve learned something too big, too important, and have absolutely no idea what to do with it.

It was awful.

And worst of all—she couldn’t turn it off.

Shane really couldn’t tell them anything. Not because he didn’t want to. But because he wouldn’t hear anything in return except “nice joke, dude.” Even from the closest people. Even from those who loved him. Sometimes love simply wasn’t enough to be a safe place.

And as Jackie replayed everything she’d felt over the past fifty minutes, she suddenly realized, with frightening clarity, that she felt sick.

Sick of herself.

Of how easily they all including her had allowed themselves to make snide comments, roll their eyes, toss out “harmless” jokes whenever the white-toothed smile of the Russian captain appeared on screen. She didn’t care that Shane didn’t like women. Not at all. God, how many times had she tried to set him up with her friends—and now that felt almost insultingly stupid.

But the fact that his guy was one of the most unpleasant people she knew... that hurt in a completely different way.

She’d always assumed it was mutual. That the entire team shared the same almost instinctive dislike of Rozanov. But what if that wasn’t true? What if Shane heard those comments every time and stayed silent?

Did he feel shame? Uncertainty? Loneliness?

And were they even boyfriends at all? Or was everything far more complicated than that? Lost in these thoughts, she made her way back toward her section, weaving through people, repeating the same questions over and over in her head.

She found herself standing right behind the glass near Boston’s bench, where the team was about to head back onto the ice. The roar of the crowd was muffled here, reduced to background noise, like white static. Voices, on the other hand, cut sharply through the air.

A broad back with the number 81 caught her eye.

Rozanov.

She slowed her steps without understanding why. The corridor behind the benches was narrow, saturated with the smells of ice, rubber, and adrenaline. Somewhere nearby, the arena hummed, but here the noise felt dampened, as if wrapped in cotton.

Jackie walked on, clutching her jacket to herself, already about to turn away when she caught a familiar intonation.

She stopped almost automatically and tried to pick out fragments of the conversation drowning in the general hum.

“Montreal, Roz,” a mocking voice drawled. “Waiting for the end of the game to see Jane?” The name hit like a snap against an exposed nerve.

Cliff Marleau.

Jackie’s jaw clenched instantly. A wave of anger washed over her almost physically, rising from her stomach to her throat. While her friend stood in a kitchen, baking that damn cake with all his heart, this fuckbo—

“Marleau, don’t say MY Jane’s name with your stupid mouth. Yes?”

Jane came out with a heavy Russian accent, sounding almost like... like—Shane.

And it felt like Jackie had been punched in the gut.
Oh God.

My Jane. Said softly, in the same tone her husband used when talking to anyone about their family. The kind of tone people use when they talk about home.
And suddenly, everything clicked.

Too easily. Ridiculously easily.

Shane — Jane.
Ilya — Lily.

They'd just changed the names so they could almost not hide.
And that realization made Jackie feel both absurdly amused and unbearably sad.

It was wrong. Completely at odds with the image. Didn't fit in her head at all. Rozanov—the one she knew from television, from headlines, from vicious fan comments—wasn't supposed to speak like that. Wasn't supposed to save that intonation for one specific person. Wasn't supposed to soften around a single name.

“So what, hot night ahead, Roz?”

There was no irritated sigh in response. Just a short pause, stretched tight like a wire.

“Jealous?” She couldn't see their faces, but even by voice alone it was obvious the bastard was smirking.

Jackie could almost see it: the crooked smile, the narrowed eyes, the relaxed posture of someone who knew exactly where to hit—and wasn't afraid of the consequences.

“How long's it been? Five years? Why doesn't Jane have the Rozanov last name yet?”

“Eight years. And shut the fuck up before I break your tiny dick, Marleau.”

Cliff didn't take the threat seriously, laughing it off.

“Wow,” he snorted. “That intense. So when's the wedding?”

“For now, no wedding,” Ilya said—and for the first time, something slipped into his voice. Something... vulnerable. Barely noticeable. “But later, I will marry him.”

Jackie's breath caught.

Not because of the words—but because of how they were said. Without challenge. Without bravado. Like a fact.

“Him?” Cliff immediately mocked. “Rozanov, you've been speaking English for years and you still mess up the basics.”

“Yeah,” Ilya said dryly. “Now grab your balls and get your ass on the ice.”

Jackie stood there, unmoving.
She didn't see his face. Didn't see his eyes.
But she didn't need to.
She heard it.

Heard how the timbre changed. How the roughness fell away when it was about him. How something quiet, protective, real appeared in his voice.

When her heart finally settled and she forced herself to move, her steps felt much lighter. And a faint smile played on her lips. Maybe, for the first time in her life, she had a secret. A real one.

The kind she wouldn't tell even Hayden.

End Notes

When I imagined Ilya's Instagram post, that was the caption I had in mind. So when he typed home, he definitely meant Shane — not his actual home in Russia.

And please don't kick me for the hockey part being unrealistic. I was basically one of those two girls who know nothing and ask stupid questions.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!