

JANE FROM FOREVER AGO
By Ian Kinney

MY FIRST CRUSH EVER was on this girl named "Jane Lastname". I was only about ten years old when I first met her. Her older brother played goalie for my older brother's hockey team. They played together for a few seasons, and Jane would be at every game. Over time, her and my younger sister became pretty good friends. She was a couple years older than my sister though, and that put her closer in age to me. So, over time, I became friends with her too. And I liked her. I remember pretending that I didn't like her, and teasing her, and doing all the dumb things that little boys do when they first start developing feelings that they don't understand...but I liked her. Alas, after years of friendship, when I was about twelve and a half, the time came for our brothers to move on and play for separate teams. And that was it. I never saw Jane again. Until...

JANE FROM FOREVER AGO

Another Lame Love Story

By Ian Kinney

I was seventeen years old.

I had just begun my senior year in high school. I was unjustifiably confident, sorta cute in an awkward way, perpetually stoned, and just basically happy. It was Friday night. My friend, Rob, had just picked me up to head out to a party. The party was at a house in the big city, which was about a thirty minute drive from our small town. I didn't really know the person having the party, but Rob was going there to meet up with some chick, and he had asked me go with him. I had agreed because I liked parties.

We arrived at the house. It was on a quiet street in a pretty nice neighborhood. However, as soon as we walked inside; we were met with chaos. The place was packed. That song, Mr. Brightside by The Killers, was blasting super loud, and kids were dancing everywhere. Rob and I quickly found a couple of drinks, met a few people, and started having a pretty good time. Eventually, Rob met up with his girl, and they sorta disappeared on me. It was cool though. I had started playing a drinking game with some dudes, and I hardly noticed he was gone. After the game, a few guys invited me to get high, and I followed them outback. There was a bonfire going on, and we all sat down around it. As we were smoking, a couple more groups of people came out and joined us by the fire. I figured I should introduce myself to some of these new people, so I stood up and said, "Hey guys, I'm...."

"IAN KINNEY!!"

I spun around to see who had somehow successfully guessed my name. That's when I saw her. It had been years, but I still instantly recognized her. It was Jane Lastname, my old childhood crush. She was standing there, smiling ear to ear. And she looked absolutely amazing. She had grown up to become super, super hot. Before I even had a chance to say anything, she ran right up to me and gave me a giant hug. I was practically in a state of shock and could only manage to utter a simple, "Hey."

"Oh my god! Ian Kinney! You probably don't even remember me! My name's Jane Lastname! Our brothers used to play hockey together. I had the biggest crush on you growing up!"

I didn't know what to say. Of course I remembered her. I hadn't thought about her in forever, but I certainly hadn't forgotten about her. She was the first girl I had ever like-liked. She was the first girl I had ever tried to look nice for. She was the first girl I had ever wanted to do mouth stuff with. And now here she was, looking just unbelievably beautiful, and saying she used to have a crush on me too. This was officially the highlight of my life up until this point. I decided to just do my best to try and play things cool.

"Oh, wow, Jane Lastname. Of course I remember you. How have ya been?"

"I've been great! How have you been? How's your sister?!"

"I've been good. Cait's good. How's your brother, Jason? Is he still playing hockey?"

"No, he gave that up a long time ago. He's actually going to school to become a vet."

"Oh. That's weird. I thought you had to go to war to become a vet."

Jane laughed.

"No, silly. A veterinarian."

"Oooh. That makes more sense. I just don't get why you didn't say kitty doctor."

Jane laughed again. We sat down next to the bonfire and continued catching up. We talked about all the fun we used to have together at the hockey rink. We talked about all that had changed in our lives over the last five or so years. We talked about our families, and our friends, and our pets. We talked about everything. The minutes turned to hours with the two of us just lost in conversation. This crazy ass party kept going on around us, but it was like we were off in our own little world. I really liked talking to her too. She was funny, but even more importantly; she really seemed to find me funny. And I really liked making her laugh. She'd flash this little smile every time she started laughing, and it was just like the prettiest thing ever. It would send fireworks shooting around inside of me every time I saw it.

We had been talking for over two hours straight when we were finally interrupted by one of Jane's friends. She stumbled over to us and started complaining to Jane about having to pee. Jane admitted she had to go to the bathroom as well, and told her friend she'd accompany her inside. But before she got up; she leaned over and kissed me on the cheek. Then she whispered in my ear, "Don't move. I'll be right back."

My heart was racing as I watched Jane and her friend head into the house. It really felt like there was something magical between us. A dude sitting on the other side of me tapped me on the shoulder to offer me a joint. I accepted it; and I started looking around at this giant party I had been ignoring. There were now an insane amount of kids there. And then, all of a sudden, out of like completely nowhere, about half of them shouted, "CCCOOPPPSSSSS!!!!!"

Sirens and flashing lights filled the air while kids scrambled in every direction. I just momentarily froze next to the fire with the joint in my mouth. Finally, my brain caught up to

what was happening, and I decided that I should probably fucking run. So I jumped up and took off. I ran through at least two neighboring yards and then finally leapt behind a little bush. From where I hid, I could still see the back of the party house. And I watched as the cops chased around the unlucky kids.

I sat behind my trusty little bush, watching and waiting for the cops to leave. Then, suddenly, I heard something much scarier than the sound of a siren. I heard a small rustling of leaves. It was coming from inside my trusty little bush. I looked closer. Then I spotted two little eyes staring back at me. And I FREAKED THE FUCK OUT!

Once again, I was up and running. Only this time, I wasn't fearing some dumb underage drinking ticket. I was fearing being murdered by a horrifying, bloodthirsty, bush-dwelling creature. So the running didn't stop. I just kept on going. I probably ran for a good twenty minutes through random yards until I was positive there were no monsters chasing me.

I eventually did force myself to stop running. Kinda because I knew I was being a giant pussy, and kinda because I was just completely out of breath. It was at this point that I realized two things: The first, was that I somehow still had that joint in my mouth. I had apparently neglected to ditch it during my entire chaotic escape. And that was pretty cool. But the second thing I realized, was that I had no idea where I was, no idea how far I'd just run, and no idea how to get back to the party. And that was significantly less cool.

I took a brief moment to survey my surroundings. I deduced that my panicked sprinting had luckily maintained somewhat of a straight line. So it didn't take me too long to make it back out to the road that I was positive the party was on. It was pretty late by this point, and there were no cars to be seen in either direction. So I figured I'd just follow the road until I made it back.

I lit my joint back up and began walking down the dark and lonely street. I prayed Rob hadn't left the party yet since he was my only ride home. But even more so; I prayed Jane would still be there. I wasn't ready for our reunion to be cut short like this. I really wanted to see where things might be going between us.

I kept thinking about her as I continued my surprisingly long walk underneath the stars. I had always believed in that silly notion of "true love". That there was like one perfect person out there for everybody. A "soulmate". And now, I'm not saying that I thought Jane was my soulmate or anything. That'd be crazy. This was the first time I had seen her in forever. But still, I just had this weird feeling that maybe she COULD be my soulmate. I mean, who knows, right?

I had been walking now for quite some time, but I still hadn't made it back to the party. Just then, I noticed a set of headlights approaching in the distance. I quickly tossed my everlasting joint fearing that it may be one of the cops that initially caused this whole mess. However, as the vehicle came closer, it began flashing its headlights, and I realized it wasn't a cop car. It was a Rob car. And the Rob inside looked super fucking pissed.

He pulled over and immediately began shouting at me through his lowered window.

"DUDE! WHERE THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN ALL NIGHT?!?!"

"Oh, hey, man. Umm. There was an incident with a monster."

"What?! What the fuck are you talking about? How stoned are you? Get in the god damn car!"

I climbed in and began to explain to Rob about being by the bonfire when the cops showed up, and then hiding in the neighbor's yard, and then encountering a mysterious beast, and then running like a madman throughout the neighborhood. I continued to explain that we now had to return to the party so that I could meet back up with Jane...

And that's when my heart broke.

Rob explained that, not only was the party on a "completely different fucking road", but also that everybody there had been forced to leave. And that he'd been driving around trying to find me because some dude said I stole his joint and took off running when the cops arrived. And lastly, that there had been a girl looking everywhere for me as the party emptied out. But she had eventually given up and left.

I was devastated. I tried getting Rob to drive back just to be certain Jane was gone, but he assured me that he had watched her leave. He said she had asked him and a bunch of other people if any of them knew where I was; but nobody did. So, she got into a car and left with her friends. He then made a comment about her being super, super hot. And I just felt like crying.

The rest of the ride home from that party was brutal. I kept going over everything that had happened in my head. My old childhood crush had suddenly walked back into my life; only to then walk right back out of it even faster. And worst of all, I apparently still really liked her. And I think she really liked me too. But now none of that mattered. Because I was afraid of monsters. And she was gone forever.

Or so I thought.

THE END

Jane From Forever Ago will return with Episode Two: A Tenth Street Christmas

JANE FROM FOREVER AGO

Episode Two

A Tenth Street Christmas

By Ian Kinney

I was nineteen years old.

And life was good. I had recently moved out of my parents' house for the first time. I was now sharing a place with four of my best friends. There was Gabe the Gambler, Matt the Nerd, Brandon the Manwhore, and Tony the Troublemaker. Unfortunately, the only house that the five of us could afford to rent was in the absolute worst part of the city. The part of the city known as "Tenth Street".

My parents had tried to talk me out of moving to such a rough neighborhood. They said I'd get robbed and murdered. But I was young and stubborn. I wanted to be with my friends and have parties. So I refused to listen to them. I did, however, eagerly accept their moving out present to me. My very first cell phone. A Motorola RAZR. They wanted me to have it just so they could check in with me from time to time. I didn't complain. I mean, it was like the hottest cell phone out at the time. Just sayin'.

Anyways, everything to do with the new house started out awesome. Every night, my roommates and I had something fun going on and hot girls stopping by. But, unfortunately, it wasn't too long before we started running into problems. First, Brandon's car got broken into. Next, Matt had a package stolen off the front porch. And then one night, we actually caught some guy snooping around and peeking through our windows. It was unnerving to say the least. Still, we tried our very, very best to make that house a home. Especially once Christmas rolled around.

My roommates and I really wanted to do something special for our first Christmas together. And after a drunken brainstorming session; we decided on Secret Santa. We'd each pull the name of another roommate out of a hat, and then we'd buy him a super sweet gift. I pulled Gabe's name. And I was kind of upset. Not because I disliked Gabe or anything. I just had no idea what I was going to get him. But I knew it had to be something awesome. So, one afternoon, about a week before the holiday; I went to the mall to track him down the perfect present.

I arrived at the mall and began walking around. After checking out a few stores and finding nothing, I decided to take a break and grab some lunch at the mall's food court. I got my tray from Taco Bell and sat down to eat. At first, I felt a little insecure about dining all alone, but I glanced around, and I noticed a number of other people also sitting by themselves. And that made me less uncomfortable. One of the people I noticed was a girl seated only a few tables away from me. She had her back to me, and I kept waiting for her to turn around so I could tell whether or not she was hot. Finally, she turned her head ever so slightly, revealing her face...and my heart completely stopped. It was Jane Lastname.

It had been a little over two years since that party where I had first reunited with Jane Lastname, my old childhood crush. And I hadn't seen or spoken to her since that night. I had imagined running into her again so many times, but I never thought it would actually happen. However, here she was. No more than thirty feet away from me. I took a second to get my shit together. I tried to track down all of the charisma and charm that I had inside of me. Then, I stood up, grabbed my tray, and walked over to her table.

"Hi, is this seat taken?"

Jane looked up to respond but then froze. That magical smile of hers began to slowly creep across her face.

"IAN!"

"Hi, Jane."

She jumped out of her seat and immediately hugged me. The same way she had hugged me two years prior when we had first reconnected.

"I can't believe it! What are you doing here?" she said, visibly overjoyed.

"Well, I'm at the mall, Jane. So, ya know...I'm golfing."

"Haha. Shut-up."

"Sorry. But yeah, I'm just kinda shopping. Taking a quick lunch break."

"Yeah, me too. Sit down. How have you been?"

I joined Jane at her table, and we started catching up while finishing our lunch. We talked about inadvertently getting separated that fateful night a couple of years ago. We talked about all the stuff that was currently going on in our lives. We talked about our pets. Even though we hadn't seen in each other in forever; I felt like I was having a conversation with one of my best friends. Plus, there was that damn smile, man. It was just so pretty. It once again began sending fireworks exploding throughout my body every time it flashed across her face.

Jane revealed that she was at the mall trying to find the right Christmas gift for her friend and coworker, Jasmine. I explained that I was there looking to complete a similar task for my roommate, Gabe. So, after we were done eating, I suggested that we finish our shopping together. And she gleefully agreed.

We ended up walking around the mall together for hours. We stopped in almost every single store and just kinda screwed around. It was so much fucking fun, man. We weren't even really shopping. We were just talking, and sharing stories, and making each other laugh. We each kept coming up with horrible suggestions for the other person to buy their friend. She tried getting me to buy Gabe every Meg Ryan movie ever on DVD. I tried getting her to buy Jasmine a \$300 gift certificate to the mall's soft pretzel stand. In reality, neither one of us were getting anywhere near finding an actual present. But we were both having too great of a time to care.

The mall was crowded with other holiday shoppers and completely decked out with festive lights and decorations. Soon, Jane and I came upon the classic staple of Christmastime shopping...SANTA! We stopped to watch some of the little kids sit on Santa's lap and tell him all

the crazy presents they hoped to find under their tree. Unfortunately, it wasn't long before Santa noticed us and shouted over.

"Well, Ho Ho Ho! Look at this cute young couple. How would you two lovebirds like to have your picture taken on Santa's lap?"

I laughed, but quickly interjected.

"Thanks, Santa, but we're actually not a..."

I was cut off by Jane. She grabbed my hand and started pulling me towards him.

"C'mon. It'll be fun."

She smiled that damn smile at me, and I couldn't protest. We climbed up on top of Santa's lap, and posed as the photographer snapped our pic. Afterwards, I paid an extra few dollars for a second copy, so we could each have one. It really was an adorable picture. We both just looked so happy.

We kept walking around the mall and making silly jokes to each other. We eventually came upon a little sports memorabilia store. I had earlier described Gabe as being a big gambler, and Jane pointed out a really nice set of poker chips for sale. I realized that they would actually be like the perfect gift for him. I couldn't believe I hadn't thought of it. I bought them, and we continued strolling through the mall. Soon, we came across The Disney Store. We went in and began browsing, when I noticed a pair of Princess Jasmine pajamas. They looked just like the outfit that the cartoon Jasmine had worn in Aladdin. Jane loved them and thought her friend would find them hilarious. She bought them, and then we both celebrated the fact that we had actually managed to find presents.

Before we knew it, we had spent the entire afternoon and most of the evening together. We covered every square inch of the mall. We finally returned to the food court where our journey had first begun. I knew our time would be coming to a close soon, so I decided I'd better make a move.

"Well, Jane, I guess it's almost time for us to be calling it a night. Unless you wanna do another few laps just to make sure we didn't miss anything?"

"Haha. Yeah, screw that. I'm officially shopped out. Plus, I'm pretty sure they're going to be closing soon."

"Yeah, I know, I'm just kidding. But, umm, I just wanna say; I really had fun with you today. I'm so glad we bumped into each other."

"Aw. Ian. I had a lot of fun today too. You're so damn funny. You really make me smile."

"Well, I'm glad, because you have a really, really pretty smile. It does this whole firework thing to me."

"Haha. Aw. I'm not really sure what that means. But, thanks. We should hang out again."

"We definitely should. What are you doing next week? Wanna grab dinner or something?"

"Well, I actually have this Christmas party at my friend's house on Thursday night. It's probably going to be kinda lame or whatever, but, umm, would you maybe wanna be my date?"

"Absolutely I would, Jane. I fucking love lame stuff."

"Haha. Perfect. Let me give you my phone number."

I pulled out my Motorola RAZR cell phone. I'm not gonna say Jane was impressed by it, but I assume she was. I mean, after all, it was like the hottest cell phone out at the time. Just sayin'. Anyways, she gave me her number, and I programmed it in. I asked her where she had parked her car. I was parked in the same general area, so I offered to walk her out.

It was dark, cold, and snowing ever so lightly outside. Jane grabbed my hand so she wouldn't slip as we stepped off the sidewalk and into the icy parking lot. We continued holding hands until we made it to her car. I knew it was time to say goodbye. But I just really wanted to kiss her. So I went for it. And there in that moonlit mall parking lot, as snowflakes danced to the ground around us; we shared the type of kiss that you would usually see at the very end of a movie. Afterwards, Jane made me promise I'd call her to setup plans for her friend's party, then we finally said our goodbyes, and she drove off.

I left the mall that night in one of best moods of my life. I could hardly contain my joy as I drove home. I thought back to the evening of that party a couple of years ago. I remembered thinking, that night, that maybe Jane could possibly be my soulmate. And I'm still not saying I thought she WAS my soulmate. But, seriously, what were the odds of the two of us running into each other like that today? And then having that much fun just walking around the mall? And then sharing what can only be described as the most perfect first kiss of all time? I just couldn't help thinking that maybe it was fate. Maybe we were just meant to be together. Maybe she really was my soulmate.

I was still lost in my thoughts when I made it back to the parking lot by my house. There was no overnight parking on Tenth Street, so my roommates and I would always use this parking lot about half a block away. I couldn't wait to get inside and tell them all about my day. I wasn't sure if Gabe would be home or not, so I decided to leave his gift in my car just to be safe. I found a parking spot, hopped out, and happily began the short walk to my door.

I wasn't really paying much attention as I made my way to the house. I was just whistling a Christmas carol. And thinking about Jane. And our kiss. And calling her to set up our soon to be first date. When suddenly..

"Hey, man. You got the time?"

I looked up. There were two guys walking towards me on the sidewalk. Two very big guys. I should've thought about things for a second before replying. But I didn't. I was just feeling really awesome, and they were simply asking me for the time. So, I said, "You betcha." Then, I pulled out my Motorola RAZR cell phone. Ya know, the hottest phone out at the time. And I held it up in front of the two very big guys. Who were going for a walk. Late at night. In the middle of winter. Through my really bad neighborhood.

"It looks like it's just after 10 o'clock, guys."

"Hey, that's a really nice phone."

"Oh, thanks. It's actually a Motorola RA--"

I never got that last syllable out. Everything happened so fast. I'm honestly not even sure which of the two guys hit me. But one of them suddenly did. Right in the stomach. Really fucking hard.

The punch instantly knocked the wind straight out of me. I dropped my phone and fell to the ground in unimaginable pain. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't move. I couldn't shout for help. I couldn't do anything. I could just lay there coughing. And I could simply watch, through my tear-filled eyes, as those two fucking assholes picked up my phone, laughed, took off running down the street, and eventually disappeared into the night.

I stayed there, lying on that cold sidewalk, crippled by pain and struggling to catch my breath, for what felt like an eternity. I couldn't even believe what had just happened. I fucking loved that phone. I just felt like crying. And then I realized something. It wasn't only the phone that I had just lost. I had also just lost Jane Lastname's fucking number! And that's when I actually started crying.

I eventually crawled to my house, made it inside, and explained to my roommates everything that had happened. They all flipped out and got super pissed about it. Except for Gabe. He was pretty pissed; but he was also just really happy that I had left his Secret Santa gift in my car, and that it was safe. I ended up calling the cops and filing a police report, but nothing ever really came from it. I also called my parents. They had always said I'd get murdered and robbed living on Tenth Street. It sucked, but I had to tell them that they'd only really been half-wrong.

The next few days I did everything I could do to try and come up with Jane's number. But I never did. She wasn't in the phonebook. I couldn't find her on MySpace. I even called my brother to see if he happened to have her brother's number from when they played hockey together like ten years ago; but he obviously didn't. I searched far and wide, but I just couldn't find a way of getting in touch with her.

And so that was it. Thursday arrived. The day that we were supposed to be going on our first date together. But since I had no way of reaching her. There was no date.

Well, at least not yet.

THE END

Jane From Forever Ago will return with Episode Three: Ian and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Break-Up

JANE FROM FOREVER AGO

Episode Three

Ian and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Break Up

By Ian Kinney

I was twenty years old. Only about a week away from turning twenty-one.

And I was in love. Well, kinda.

Her name was Ella. I had met her about three months earlier at this nightclub called, Pleasuredome. It was a pretty crummy place, but my friends and I would go there all the time because they never ID'ed anyone. Anyways, one night I was in there, and I noticed my non-single buddy talking to this gorgeous girl. Afterwards, I asked him to introduce me to her. Before I knew it; we were sharing a drink. One thing led to another that night, and I woke up beside her the next morning. She was cool, and I liked her. So we started hanging out. And then pretty soon; we were dating.

Now, shortly after my mugging on "Tenth Street", my roommates and I had all moved out and gone our separate ways. However, that had resulted in Matt the Nerd finding a small house in a nice neighborhood, and needing somebody to share it with. So, I had moved in with him. And at first, everything was awesome. Matt and I had always been good friends, and we got along just great. But goodtimes can only last so long. Soon, Matt met a girl. Her name was Melanie. They started seeing each other, and it wasn't long before she was spending everyday at our place. And to be honest, I actually really liked Melanie. She was nice, and she was a perfect match for Matt. However, it just sorta seemed like she was constantly around. And eventually that started to make me kinda feel like a third wheel. Fortunately, that had all changed once I met Ella. Then, I finally had somebody to hang out with when Matt and Melanie were off doing couple stuff. And I really liked that.

Alright, so again, it was about a week until my twenty-first birthday. Ella had been making a big deal about it all month. She had turned 21 earlier in the year, and she was extremely excited at the thought of us finally getting to go to some nice bars together. She was also planning a birthday party for me. I really didn't want a party, but she was adamant about having it. My birthday was to fall on a Friday. And she had reserved the back room at, The Brickyard, a popular restaurant/bar for the evening. She swore it would just be a small get together with some friends. However, word had quickly spread, and more and more people kept telling me they'd be there.

It was Saturday night. My birthday, and my party, were six days away. Matt and Melanie had just left to go see a movie. Ella had said she was going out to dinner with her parents, but she hadn't invited me to join, so I kinda had the feeling she was really out shopping for my present. Either way, I was just hanging around my house, bored, looking for something to do. And that's when my old friend, Mike, stopped by.

Now, Mike and I had been buddies for years. And I'm not embarrassed to say it; but he was probably my best looking friend. He was down right handsome. And he knew it. So he used his looks to his advantage, and he just straight up crushed pussy. Seriously, the dude got more ass than a young Clooney. So, when he stopped by, on a Saturday night; I had a pretty good idea as to why. And I wasn't wrong. He wanted to go out and pick up some chicks. But he needed a wingman. And so I agreed to go out with him, for the mere fact that, I simply had nothing better to do.

We ended up heading out to this really popular nightclub in the big city. The place was massive, and it was one of the few spots where you only had to be 18 to get in. You still had to be 21 to drink obviously, but it was pretty easy to get your hands on a beer or two once you got inside. Being Saturday night, the place was insanely crowded. We had to wait in line for a good twenty minutes just to make it through the door. But we finally did. And we were immediately met with blasting music, flashing lights, and an endless sea of young party people.

Mike and I headed straight for the bar. Fortunately, there was a female bartender working. And Mike immediately used his charm on her to easily score us a couple of drinks. We then began to squeeze our way through the crowded mass of bodies to try and find some space to breathe. We ended up over by the wall on the side of the dance floor. The dance floor was actually sunken into the ground a bit, which left us elevated above most of the crowd. However, we were only standing there for maybe fifteen seconds before a ridiculously hot girl grabbed Mike's hand and said, "Let's do a shot." Mike just turned, smiled at me, and said, "I'll be back."

So now I stood there alone in the middle of this giant, crazy club. I was kinda pissed Mike had immediately abandoned me, but I couldn't really blame him. The whole reason we were there was for him to pick up a chick. I couldn't really fault the guy just because he worked fast. Either way, I looked out at the countless number of people enjoying themselves on the dance floor below me. From my viewpoint, I could see over everyone's head, and clear across to the other side of the club. And that's when I spotted her.

The place was dark. There were probably a hundred people jammed into the dance floor in between us. But somehow I still saw her. And at first I thought I was crazy. I thought it couldn't actually be her. But it was. There, standing on the opposite side of the club, was Jane Lastname.

It had been about 18 months since Jane and I had spent the day together at the mall. And I hadn't seen or spoken to her since. I had tried so fucking hard to find a way of getting in touch with her. But I never did. So, I eventually had no choice but to just look back on her fondly as the one that got away. And yet here she was.

I watched, from my side of the dance floor, as Jane, on the other side of the dance floor, laughed with some other girls. I still couldn't believe that it was actually her. She turned away from her friends and casually began looking around the club. I followed her eyes as they

scanned the sunken dance floor that stood in between us. I really wanted to catch her attention, and I just prayed she'd look up a tiny bit. Then she did. And our eyes met. A look of shock momentarily filled her face, but it was quickly replaced with a smile. THE smile. That same smile that had been burned inside my brain for years. I raised my hand to the side of my face, gave her a little wave, and did my best to mouth the word, "Hi." Her smile grew, and she waved back. I pointed towards the bar and then tried my best to convey a "Meet me over there?" type gesture. She kinda laughed, but she nodded.

I began to make my way over to the bar. It felt like everything was happening in slow motion. I don't know what crazy ass dance song was blasting throughout the club, but it didn't matter. All I heard was Mr. Brightside by The Killers playing softly inside my head. I squeezed and wiggled my way through the crowd until finally I reached my destination. And there she was.

We just stood there for a moment looking at each other. I knew it would be impossible for us to talk inside the chaotic club. So I quickly leaned in and whispered to her, asking her to follow me. She nodded, and together we made our way over to the side door. It led us out to the club's patio, which was a popular spot for smoke breaks. It was much quieter and a lot less hectic out there. I turned to tell Jane how incredible it was to see her, but she cut me off before I could speak.

"You never called."

"I know, Jane. But you don't understand..."

I went on to explain to Jane about having my phone stolen that night after the mall. I told her all the different ways I tried to come up with her number, but that I just couldn't find it. I continued apologizing, but she finally stopped me. She admitted she had been pretty pissed off at first; but she said it was a long time ago, and that she had since gotten over it. I was glad.

We ended up hanging out on that patio, talking, for a good half hour. We caught each other up again on everything currently going on in our lives. We chatted about our jobs, and our families, and our pets. I made some stupid jokes, and she laughed. She kept flashing me that smile. I quickly began to remember how much I liked this girl. There was just something so incredible about her. However, our conversation was suddenly interrupted when my old friend, Mike, came bursting through the patio door.

"Ian, dude, I've been looking everywhere for ya." Mike stopped when he noticed Jane. "Oh, snap. Who's this?"

"Hey, man. Sorry to disappear. This is Jane Lastname. She's...umm...well...she's an old friend. Jane, this is my buddy, Mike."

"Nice to meet you," Mike said, extending his hand.

Jane shook it and responded, "You too."

Mike then turned back to me.

"So dude, I invited like thirty chicks I just met to your birthday party next weekend."

"What, man? Why?"

"Why not?"

Jane interrupted. "Wait, next weekend is your birthday?"

"Yeah, it's on Friday. I'm having a party at The Brickyard down in Lewiston."

"Oh, I've been there before. I like that place," Jane responded.

Before I even knew what I was saying, I just instinctively blurted out, "You should come."

Mike chimed in. "Oh yeah, you gotta come. It's going to be epic. Maybe bring some friends too."

Jane seemed to ponder the idea for a moment, but then she responded. "Well, I am free Friday night. I guess I could swing by. As long as I can really bring some people with me."

I honestly wasn't thinking very clearly at this point. I was just amazed by the fact that I had finally found Jane again. And at that moment, she was literally the only thing that mattered to me. The thought of finally getting to hang out with her after so long was just too exciting.

"Yeah, of course you can bring people. You can bring whoever you want. It's no big deal at all."

"Alright, well then Friday night it is," she responded.

Mike once again interrupted us. "Alright, cool, now that that's settled, listen, bro, we gotta get out of here."

I turned to him. "What? Why?"

"Because. I just ran into this girl I fucked last weekend. And she's here with her boyfriend. I think he might know about us. That's why I've been looking for ya. We gotta bounce before he stabs me."

I turned back to face Jane. I wasn't ready to leave. I wanted to keep talking to her. But she once again cut me off before I could say anything.

"Yeah, I should probably be getting back to my friends too. I'm sure they're wondering what happened to me."

"Oh. Well, alright. But you are really coming Friday night, right?"

"Yeah. I'll be there," Jane said smiling.

"Awesome. Well, I guess I'll see you then. I'm so glad I ran into you tonight. I was kinda afraid you were gone forever."

"Aw. Haha. Well, don't worry. I'm still here. And I'll see you Friday."

Jane leaned in and gave me a little hug. Then, she turned and headed back into the club.

Mike and I snuck out the side exit to avoid any confrontations with murderous boyfriends. We got to his car and began the ride home. He turned to me and spoke up.

"So, dude, who exactly is this Jane girl? She's fucking hot."

"I know, right?...."

I went on to explain to Mike the entire story of Jane Lastname. How she began as my childhood crush, how I was twice-convinced she could be my soulmate, and then how she had inevitably

become the one that got away. Mike seemed to really enjoy the story, but when I finished telling it; he said he was sorta confused.

"What do you mean? What are you confused about?"

"Well, it just sounds as though you really like this girl. So, ummm, what are you going to do about Ella?"

And that's when I remembered Ella.

I had been so shocked and astonished to find Jane in that club. I had spent so long dreaming about seeing her again. And then suddenly I just did. I looked out into an enormous crowd of people, and I unexpectedly spotted the lost love of my life. Unfortunately, it had caused me to very briefly forget the fact that I sorta had a girlfriend. Even worse, I started to realize that I had just invited Jane to my birthday party, which was being thrown for me BY ELLA.

I immediately felt sick to my stomach. I liked Ella. A lot. She was cool, and pretty, and a really great girlfriend. But she just wasn't Jane. And I couldn't help but wonder if this party was the last time I'd ever get to see Jane. What if this was life's way of giving me one last opportunity to be with her? But now I wouldn't be able to be with her. Because I was already with someone else. I didn't know what to do. Eventually, Mike dropped me off at my house. I just went inside and flopped down on my bed, worried, befuddled, and confused.

I awoke the next morning to the sound of my cell phone ringing on my desk. I reached over and grabbed it. It was Ella calling. I took a long, deep breath, and then I picked up.

"Hello?"

"Hey, babe. I came by your house kinda late last night, but you weren't there."

"Oh yeah, sorry. I went out in the city with Mike."

"Oh, I see. Well, did you guys have fun?"

"Umm, yeah, it was an eventful evening."

"Nice. What do have planned for today? Wanna do something?"

"Umm, actually, I was gonna see if maybe you wanted to come over. I feel like we should talk."

"Uhh, oookay?"

"I'm sorry. I know that sounds bad. But really I just wanna talk to you. Could you maybe come by in a little bit?"

"Yeah, I guess. Give me about an hour. I gotta jump in the shower."

"Alright, I'll see ya then."

"Bye."

I hung up the phone. I really hadn't gotten much sleep the night before. Instead I just stayed up thinking. About Jane. About Ella. About love in general. And I decided what I had to do. I had been dating Ella for about three months. But not once, had I ever wondered if she was "the one". I had never considered whether or not she could be my "true love". And I had never thought for even a split second, that she could possibly be my "soulmate". But Jane, well, I

thought all of those things about Jane like constantly. And I'd only seen Jane like three times in the past eight years. And that's when I realized: I liked Ella...but I was in love with Jane.

Ella arrived at my house and came inside. She took one look at me and knew something was definitely wrong. I didn't want to lie to her, but at the same time; I didn't necessarily want to tell her the truth. So I just tried my best not to do either. I brought her into my room. I sat her down on the bed. I looked her in the eyes. And I told her I wanted to break up.

She immediately started to tear up and demand to know why. I kinda started to tear up too because it killed me to hurt her like this. I tried to explain to her that I just felt like our relationship wasn't really going anywhere, and even though I liked her a lot; I just felt we needed to end things. She was confused and didn't understand. I couldn't blame her. It was a shitty excuse for breaking up with someone. But I still felt like it was better than telling her about Jane. Ella started getting pretty angry. She told me about how she had lied about going to dinner with her parents the previous night, and how she had really gone out and bought my birthday present. Even though I had already assumed that, hearing her say it, still made me feel terrible. I tried to apologize to her, but she just didn't want to hear it. She just sat there crying on my bed. I sat down next to her, and I put my arm around her to try and calm her down. But it didn't work. It just made her more upset. She pushed me off of her, stood up, and stormed out of my room. I followed her. She got to the front door of my house and opened it, but then she stopped and turned to face me. She looked at me through her watery eyes and simply said, "I hope you have fun at your fucking birthday party." And with that, she left.

That was hands down the absolute worst morning of my life. I had never experienced so much guilt over doing what I honestly believed to be the right thing. I felt like complete and utter shit.

However, having said that, I also felt just a tiny pinch of excitement as I watched Ella drive away. Because now, my birthday, and my birthday party, were only five days away. And Jane Lastname, the girl whom I now truly believed to be the love of my life, was actually going to be there.

And there was nothing stopping us from being together.

THE END

Jane From Forever Ago will return with Episode Four: Happy Birthday to Me

JANE FROM FOREVER AGO

Episode Four

Happy Birthday to Me

By Ian Kinney

It was the morning of my twenty-first birthday.

And I felt fan-fucking-tastic.

I woke up with an overwhelming sense of excitement. I had been waiting for this day for so long. I could finally walk into a bar and not have to use a fake ID. Even more than that; I felt like this was the last big milestone of growing up. I could now drive a car. I could vote or join the army. And I could buy a case of beer. This was it. I was officially an adult.

However, having said all of that, what really excited me the most about today, was my birthday party. More specifically, it was the fact that Jane Lastname, my old childhood crush, would be coming to my birthday party. I couldn't wait to see her. I had always thought she could be "the one". My "true love". My "soulmate". But I had never gotten to find out for sure, because I just kept fucking losing her. Cops, monsters, and phone thieves had all succeeded in temporarily hiding her from me. But I had finally found her. And now I couldn't wait to see what the night would bring.

The day itself began quite spectacularly. I had taken off of work and slept in. When I finally did get out of bed, I discovered my roommate Matt and his girlfriend, Melanie, had gotten me a bunch of birthday donuts, and some other little gifts. It was pretty awesome to wake up to. Then, after only being awake for about an hour, my longtime friend, Rob, called and offered to take me out for a birthday lunch. I couldn't pass up his generosity no matter how many donuts I'd just eaten. So I agreed to go, and I took off to meet Rob at the sub shop across town.

As the two of us ate, we both discussed how excited we were for my party.

"Man, I've talked to a shitload of people who said they're coming tonight. It's gonna be awesome," Rob remarked.

"Yeah, dude. I can't wait," I replied.

"I'm still surprised you didn't call off this party after dumping the girl who was throwing it for you. Don't get me wrong, I'm happy you're still having it, but it kinda seems a little fucked up," Rob said.

"Yeah, well I'm certainly not proud of that. But what was I supposed to do? Everyone had already been invited, and everything was already planned out. It just seemed easier to go through with it then to try and cancel it all at the last minute. Plus, I mean...Jane's gonna be there."

"What? Who the fuck is Jane?"

"Dude. Jane Lastname."

"Jane Lastname?" I watched Rob rack his brain over where he had heard that name before. Then, I saw his eyes light up as soon as he figured it out. "No fucking way! Jane Lastname! The girl from that party like four years ago?! You're so-called 'soulmate'?"

"Yep. That's the one. She's gonna be there tonight."

"Man, that's fucking crazy. How'd you find her?"

I told Rob the story about running into Jane at the mall about a year and a half ago. Then sharing an amazing day together that culminated in our first kiss. And then getting mugged and losing her phone number. I continued to tell him how after thinking she was gone forever; I finally ran into her at a club this past weekend. Which was when I had invited her to my party. And when she had agreed to come as long as she could bring a couple of people. Lastly, I confessed to Rob, that Jane saying she'd come to my party, was the main reason I had broken up with Ella.

"Dude, you know you sound fucking nuts, right?" Rob said, once I had finally finished. "You've seen this girl what, like three times, since you were kids? How could you be so sure that you two are supposed to be together? It just seems a little crazy."

"I dunno, man," I replied. "But there's just something about this girl. I know I haven't seen her a lot, but the few times I have seen her have all just been so incredible. We just have this magical connection between us. I can't even describe it. But I've never felt anything like it with anyone else. And now I get to reunite with her on my twenty-first birthday. I just truly feels like it's meant to be. Like it's all just fate."

Rob just kinda stared at me for a second. Then he said, "Wow, I never realized how gay you are when it comes to girls."

"Haha. Shut up. Dick."

"Well, either way, it is your birthday, so I'm rooting for ya. If there's anything I can do to help tonight, just let me know."

"Thanks, man."

Rob and I soon finished eating and walked out of the sub shop. I thanked him for buying me my birthday lunch, and told him I'd see him later tonight.

The rest of the day flew by. First, my buddy, Skip, stopped by my house to give me a present. The present ended up being a bunch of pot, which the two of us then smoked while playing Tony Hawke Pro Skater 4. After he left, I drove down to my parents house and hung out there for a couple of hours. My mom, dad, and brother all gave me the gifts they'd gotten me. My sister, however, was planning on coming to my party tonight, so she wanted to wait and give me her gift there. Eventually, my mom made me a special birthday dinner. We all sat down and enjoyed it. Before I knew it; my party was only about an hour away. So I said goodbye to my parents, and I drove back up to my house to get ready.

When I got home, I found a note from Matt and Melanie telling me they'd already left to go set up for the party, and that they'd see me down there. They'd both offered to help earlier in the week after finding out that I'd ended things with Ella. I felt really fortunate to have such great

friends. I also felt fortunate to have the whole house to myself while I got ready. I took a nice, long, relaxing shower. I shaved, and played with my hair until it looked just right. I threw on my luckiest pair of socks, my least-ripped pair of pants, and my absolute favorite shirt. Then, I just took a few minutes to look into the mirror, and remind myself how awesome I am. Finally, I left my house and drove down to the party.

The sun was just setting as I pulled into the parking lot at The Brickyard. It was an absolutely gorgeous night. I made my way to the side entrance of the restaurant, opened the door, and walked inside. I immediately spotted Matt by the bar and walked over.

"Hey, man."

"Hey, Ian! Happy Birthday!"

"Thanks, dude. And thanks for the donuts this morning. And also thanks for getting this party all set up. I really owe you, man."

"C'mon don't sweat it. It's your birthday. Plus, Ella had already done all the hard stuff. Mel and I basically just decorated."

"Yeah, well, still. You're the man. So, is anybody here yet?"

"Dude, what do you mean is anybody here? Haven't you been in the back room?"

"Ummm. No. I just walked in."

"Aw, dude. Hold on, let me just get my change."

I waited until Matt was done at the bar, and then we headed towards the back room. As we reached the entrance, Matt turned to me, smiled, and just said, "Happy Birthday, buddy". Then, he pushed the door open and inside; I saw everyone. Like, literally, everyone. Rob. My sister. Skip. My hot friend, Mike. My old roommates Gabe the Gambler, Brandon the Manwhore, and Tony the Troublemaker. All of my old friends from school. All the coworkers I didn't hate. Kids I grew up with. Girls I used to have crushes on. Everyone I liked and cared about was waiting for me inside the back room of this restaurant ready to celebrate my birthday. Well...everyone except Jane.

My party had only really officially started about twenty minutes ago. So the fact that Jane wasn't there yet didn't seem like a big deal. In fact, I couldn't even begin to believe how many people were there. It seemed insane. I had never felt so loved before in my life. Everyone kept coming up to me, saying Happy Birthday, and offering to get me a drink. And I couldn't help but to notice the long table on the side of the room covered in cards and presents. That left me a bit excited to say the least.

Matt and Melanie had done an incredible job with the decorations, and the entire room looked phenomenal. There were streamers and balloons everywhere. I started to mingle and tried my best to say hi to everyone. But to be honest, more and more people kept showing up, and I eventually just gave up and decided to let people find me.

I had been at the party for about an hour when Rob grabbed me and challenged me to a game of bubble hockey. I accepted. The bubble hockey table was out front in the main part of the

restaurant, so Rob and I left the back room to go play. As soon as we started the game, he asked the same question that I had slowly begun asking myself.

"So, dude, where's Jane?"

"Yeah, I don't know. It's still early though. I'm sure she'll be here."

"Yeah, I bet you're right. But, umm, if she doesn't show up; are you gonna be okay?"

"Dude, c'mon, of course I'm gonna be okay. But don't worry. She'll be here."

Our game was suddenly interrupted when Matt and Melanie came running up to the bubble hockey table.

"Hey, Ian. You gotta get in there. They're gonna bring out your cake," Matt said enthusiastically.

"Aw. You guys got me a cake?"

"Of course we got you a cake. It's your birthday! Now, c'mon, we gotta sing to you!" Melanie said.

Rob and I quickly finished our game, and the four of us hustled back to the party.

All the lights in the room were turned off and the entire party sang Happy Birthday to me. I just watched in disbelief as a spectacular looking cake was carried out and placed on the table in front of me. There were twenty-one brightly lit candles on top of it. The singing soon subsided, and I went to blow out the flames. However, before I could, somebody suddenly shouted out, "Make a wish!" So, I looked out into the dark room filled with a ton of my friends on what was so very, very close to being the absolute perfect night; and I made the only wish there was to make. I wished Jane was there.

And with that, I blew out my candles.

Everybody clapped and cheered. There had been music playing in the back room throughout the night, and it was quickly turned back on and cranked up loud. People started shouting for somebody to turn the lights back on, but it seemed like nobody could find the switch. I was distracted by that music though. Like I said, there had been music playing in the back room throughout the night. And as soon as I had made my wish, it was suddenly turned back on and cranked up loud. But it wasn't just any random song that started playing. It was Mr. Brightside by The Killers. This was the same song that had been playing years ago when I walked into that house party where I first reunited with Jane. Ever since then, the song had always reminded me of her. So much so in fact, that I had mysteriously heard it in my head when I ran into Jane at the club just one week earlier. And now it had magically come on during my party.

Just then, somebody finally managed to find the light switch, and the room suddenly lit up...

And that's when I saw her.

Have you ever had one of those moments that just seemed to last forever? This was one of those moments for me. It was like that scene in *She's All That* where the chick walks down the stairs in slow-motion and Freddie Prinze Jr. just can't believe his eyes. But instead of a

staircase, it was the door of the back room. The lights came on, the door swung open, and my birthday wish came true. In walked Jane Lastname.

I watched as she entered the room with three other people. Two girls and one guy. I knew she was planning on bringing some people so this was no big surprise. Rob had still been standing next to me this whole time, and I kinda nudged him a bit. He turned to see what I wanted, and I nodded in Jane's direction. He looked out, saw her, turned back to me, smiled, and said, "Wow, she actually came." I smiled back, and then I quietly said, more to myself than to Rob, "Yeah. She actually came."

Jane had barely made it into the room when I saw my sister run over to her. They too had been childhood friends, and I knew they hadn't seen each other in years. I watched as they hugged.

"Hey, wait a minute, I totally know that dude she's with," Rob suddenly stated. "It's Tom Guy. We used to play football together. I gotta go say hi!"

Rob left my side and began making his way over to Jane and her friends. I excitedly began to follow, but I was immediately interrupted by my buddy, Skip.

"Yo, bro. You trying to sneak outside and spark this J?" Skip said, stepping in front of me and holding up a little joint.

"Oh, dude. Thanks, but umm, I can't right now. I gotta go say hi to some people."

"C'mon, bro. I rolled it specifically for you. It's a birthday joint."

"Haha. Dude, I appreciate it, but you gotta give me a little time. I'll let you know when I'm ready."

"Pshhh. Fine."

I left Skip and continued making my way through the crowded room until I finally reached Jane. Her and the two girls she came with were still talking to my sister, and she hadn't looked up yet. Meanwhile, Rob was now talking to that dude she'd walked in with just a few feet away from me. Finally, Jane glanced up and saw me. My heart skipped a beat as that ultra-incredible smile crept across her face.

"Hey, Jane. I'm so glad you could make it," I said.

"Ian! Happy Birthday!" She immediately gave me a giant hug.

"These are my friends, Sarah and Tara."

I shook hands with the two girls and thanked them for coming. Jane pulled an envelope out of her purse.

"Soo, umm, I got you a gift," she said, handing it to me. "I may have gotten a little carried away, but I really hope you like it."

"Aw. You didn't have to get me anything. But don't worry, I'm sure I'll love it."

I took the envelope and slipped it in the back pocket of my pants.

"So can I get you guys some drinks?" I asked.

Jane, her friends, and my sister all accepted my offer, and I disappeared to track them down a few beers. I succeeded in my task and was carrying four bottles back to the group, when Rob suddenly popped up in front of me.

"Dude, I gotta talk to you."

"Hold on, man. I'm getting drinks for Jane and her friends."

"No, dude, like, seriously, I gotta talk to you right now."

I looked at Rob. He had always been a pretty goofy looking guy, but right now he had an insanely serious look on his face.

"Umm, okay, what's up?"

Rob told me to follow him. We left the back room, and then we walked out the side door of the restaurant. He finally stopped when we were on the patio outside.

"Alright, dude. What the fuck's going on?" I asked nervously.

"So, umm, yeah. I don't know how to say this..."

"Dude, you're freaking me out. Just tell me what's up."

"Well, umm, I was just talking to Tom Guy. You know, the dude who came here with Jane..."

"Yeah, so?"

Rob just looked at me. Finally, he spoke. "They're dating, man."

"What?"

"Tom and Jane are dating. He called her his girlfriend. He said she dragged him here tonight."

I felt like I had just been punched in the stomach by a phone thief all over again.

"Dude, no way. You must've misheard him. He was probably talking about one of the other girls they came with."

"Ian, man. I asked him what he was doing here, and he literally said, 'My girlfriend, Jane, made me come with her.' I didn't mishear him. I'm sorry."

I just wanted to cry. It didn't make any sense. She was supposed to be "the one". My "true love". My "soulmate". HOW THE FUCK COULD SHE HAVE A BOYFRIEND!?!?

We stood there in silence for a while. Rob finally asked if I was okay, and I said I was. I told him I just needed a few minutes alone. He made me promise I wouldn't prematurely leave my own party, and then he walked back inside. I just sat out there thinking. So much for having the perfect night. So much for it all being "meant to be". So much for fate.

It was my twenty-first birthday. I was now officially an adult. And I finally realized that the notion of "the one"...that the thought of "true love"...and that the whole idea behind finding a "soulmate"...had all just been silly childhood fantasies.

The rest of the night was hell. I eventually forced myself to go back inside. I put on a fake smile and did my best to pretend that I was enjoying the party. But I wasn't. I was miserable. I couldn't even look at Jane. I was terrified that I'd just break down into tears in front of everybody. I managed to avoid her for a decent amount of time. But she soon found and confronted me.

"Hey, you," she said. "I've been looking everywhere for you. Where'd you go? You were supposed to be getting me a drink."

"Oh, yeah. Sorry."

I responded, but I didn't make eye contact with her. I just couldn't.

"Haha. Don't worry about it. I found one."

"Alright. Cool."

I spoke again, but I still didn't look at her. She seemed to kinda pick up on how dismissive I was being.

"Umm, Ian. Is something wrong?"

I wanted to say yes. I wanted to tell her that she wasn't supposed to bring a fucking boyfriend to my party. I wanted to tell her that she was supposed to be with me. But I didn't. I just said, "No." Then I spotted my friend, Skip, and I shouted, "Hey, Skip. I'm ready for that thing." And I just walked away.

Skip and I went out by his car in the parking lot and smoked the birthday joint he had rolled me. As we were out there, I saw Jane, her two friends, and her stupid fucking boyfriend, leave the bar and head to their car. Just as she was getting in, Jane looked up and we connected eyes. We stared at each other for a brief moment, but then I turned my head and looked away. They pulled out of the parking lot and drove off.

The night wore on and soon my party was all but over. Everyone had left with the exception of Rob, Matt, Melanie, and myself. They had stuck around and were now helping me load all my presents into the my car as The Brickyard, itself, was preparing to close. Once my car was full, Matt and Mel said they'd see me back at the house and took off. So, it was then just me and Rob.

"Well, man," Rob said, turning to me. "I know things didn't exactly go the way you planned tonight. But you gotta admit; that was a pretty great party."

"Yeah, I know. Thanks for being here for me."

"Wouldn't have missed it for the world."

Rob and I gave each other a totally non-gay, manly hug, and he got into his car to leave. He backed out of the parking spot, but before he pulled away; he lowered his window and shouted out to me. "Hey, man. When all is said and done, just remember, you still have an entire car full of presents." And with that, he drove off.

I smiled to myself as I got into my car. He was right. I did have a shitload of presents. And then something dawned on me. I leaned up, reached into my back pocket, and pulled out the envelope Jane had given me. It simply said, "To Ian". I thought about things for a moment. And I decided to open it.

I tore the envelope and pulled out the card. It just had some generic Happy Birthday stuff on the front, but it had a long message and a gift certificate inside. I began to read the message.

"Dear Ian,

I hope this present doesn't make me seem too crazy. But I still think a lot about you and that day we spent together at the mall. And I distinctly remember you being convinced that this would make for the perfect gift.

Love,
Jane"

I looked at the gift certificate. And an enormous smile began to form across my face. She had gotten me a \$300 gift certificate to the mall's soft pretzel stand. I looked back to the card. There was more.

"PS....My phone number's 555-1969. Don't lose it this time."

I slowly put the card down next to me in my car. I didn't know what to think. I was considerably confused. Jane had a boyfriend. Why was she giving me her phone number? Why did she spend \$300 dollars on my birthday present? And why does she still think a lot about me?

I didn't know the answers to any of these questions. But the one thing I did know for sure, was that the story of Jane From Forever Ago, still wasn't quite finished.

THE END

Jane From Forever Ago will return with the fifth and final episode.

JANE FROM FOREVER AGO

Episode Five

The Search for a Perfect Ending

By Ian Kinney

It was Friday night.

It had been exactly two weeks since my birthday party.

I was sitting alone in my room. I had my phone in one hand. And I had the birthday card Jane had given me containing her phone number in my other hand. All I had to do was dial. But I just couldn't.

Every night for the past two weeks had gone the same exact way. I'd sit there and stare at the card, but I just couldn't bring myself to call her. And before you just accuse me of being a giant fucking pussy; put yourself in my shoes for a second. She was dating some other dude. For all I knew, she just considered me an old friend. Sure, she had gotten me an awesome birthday present with the whole soft pretzel gift certificate, but she had also brought her fucking boyfriend to my party. So yeah, I was just a tiny bit confused.

And more than that, I guess I was just scared. For so long, I had thought of Jane Lastname as "the one". My "true love". My "soulmate". And now I finally had her phone number. But what happens if I call her, and I find out she does only see me as a friend. What happens if her and this guy she's dating are super happy together. What happens if they're in love. What happens if it turns out, this whole time, I've just been a weirdo with a creepy obsession.

In the end, I just didn't know what to believe. I didn't know what to think. And I didn't know what to do.

I was still sitting there, holding my phone, when it suddenly rang. It was my roommate, Matt. I answered.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Ian. What are you doing?"

"Meh, nothing, really. Just sitting around the house. What are YOU doing?"

"I'm down at my dad's house. He's out of town for the weekend. He asked me to look after the place."

"Oh, nice."

"Yeah, so Mel and I just got down here and discovered a shitload of beer in the fridge. So we were thinking about maybe having a few people over here tonight."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah, not like a big party or anything. Just like our friends or whatever. You down to come by?"

I looked at the birthday card in my other hand. Then I sighed. And I put it down.

"Yeah, man. I don't have any plans tonight. I'll come by."

"Alright, cool. I'm gonna call Gabe, Brandon, and Tony, and let those guys know. Why don't call like Rob, Mike, and Skip, and invite them too."

"Alright, sounds good. I'll be down later."

"Word."

"Word."

I ended the call with Matt, and I began to call my other friends. Skip said he wasn't doing shit and he'd be glad to come. Mike agreed to swing by as long as he could bring a girl or two. And then lastly, there was Rob. He said he was tired and he didn't really wanna come. But I told him I didn't care and that I was picking his ass up. And eventually he just gave in and said he'd get ready.

I took a quick shower, got dressed, and prepared to leave my house. I took one last look at the birthday card that was now lying on my bed. Again, I sighed. And then I left.

I got to Rob's house, and he came outside and jumped in my car. We started heading over to Matt's dad's place. I didn't want Rob to know I was still all stressed out over Jane so I did my best to act normal. We got to Matt's and went inside. Gabe, Brandon, Tony, and Skip had all already arrived. They were playing a drinking game around the kitchen table joined by Matt and Melanie. Rob and I both grabbed a beer and sat down. The only person missing from our group was Mike.

I sat amongst my closest friends drinking, laughing, and having fun. The thought of Jane still hung in the back of my mind, but I gradually found myself becoming more and more pleasantly distracted.

There was a quick break in our game, and Matt got up to grab a few more beers. As he was walking away, Brandon told him to throw on some music. Matt grabbed his iPod, walked over to the stereo, hooked it up, and asked us what he should play. Everyone shouted something different, and we all began arguing. Matt just laughed and said, "Shuffle mode it is." He hit play, and then walked back over to the table.

At first, there was nothing. But then, suddenly, the opening notes hit.

"Do-Do-Do DoDo. Do-Do-Do DoDo."

And I just couldn't fucking believe it.

"I'm coming outta MY CAGE, and I've been doing JUST FINE. Gotta gotta GET DOWN because I want it all..."

I mean, of all the possible songs in the fucking world, man.

"It started out with A KISS. How did it end up LIKE THIS? It was only a kiss. IT WAS ONLY A KISS!..."

I couldn't take it anymore. I jumped out of my seat, knocking my chair to the floor behind me, ran over, dove at the iPod, and skipped to the next track. A Radiohead song started playing and I took a giant sigh of relief. And then I turned around to see all my friends staring at me like, dude, what the fuck.

"Alright, guys. I know that probably seemed weird, but I honestly just can't deal with this fucking song right now."

The all looked at me like I was crazy. And justifiably so. Then, Skip spoke up.

"Umm, dude, I don't mean to be a dick or anything, but you suck balls. That song's awesome."

"I know," I responded. "I love that song."

"So then why'd the fuck you turn it off, asshole?" Gabe shouted.

I took a deep breath. I was surrounded by my best friends. There was no point in lying.

"It just reminds me of this stupid fucking girl I'm in love with."

Melanie, being the only female in the room, let out a loud, "Awww".

Brandon said, "Wait, what, dude? Who are you in love with?"

Matt interrupted, saying, "Is it Ella? Do you want to get back together with Ella?"

Rob responded before I could, "No. It's not Ella. I'm assuming it's the girl he dumped Ella for."

Melanie retorted, "Wait! You didn't say you dumped Ella for another girl! Who is she?!?"

Rob responded again before I could, "I believe her name is Jane."

Suddenly, Tony jumped into the conversation. "Wait, a minute! Not THE Jane?!"

Gabe shouted, "The-phone-mugging-causing-you-cry-for-months-when-we-all-lived-together-at-tenth-street Jane?!? No fucking way!!"

Brandon yelled, "Wait, does this mean you finally found her?!"

And lastly, Skip said, "What the hell are you guys talking about? Who's Jane?"

And with that, everyone stopped talking, and looked over at me, awaiting an explanation.

I didn't even know where to begin. My friends all knew different bits and pieces, but nobody knew quite everything. Even Rob was unaware of the birthday card Jane had given me. I decided that I had no choice but to just tell them the entire fucking story.

So I did. I told them everything. The childhood crush. The house party reunion. The cops. The monster. Running into Jane years later at the mall and spending the day together. Sharing the perfect first kiss. Getting punched and having my phone stolen. Finally finding her at a club. Inviting her to my party and breaking up with Ella after she'd agreed to come. Seeing her and her friends show up at the exact moment I blew out my candles. Discovering that one of those friends was actually her stupid fucking boyfriend. And lastly, opening the card she had given me and finding, not only an incredibly thoughtful gift, but also her phone number.

I finally finished the story, looked up, and saw the entire group was just sitting there staring at me. Nobody said a word.

"So, umm, yeah. That's it," I said, as I was beginning to feel somewhat awkward.

"Wait, what? What do you mean that's it?! You can't tell us a story like that and then not tell us the ending!! What happened when you called her?!" Brandon asked anxiously.

"I didn't call her. Or at least, I haven't. Yet."

Tony shouted, "What do you mean you haven't called her?!"

Matt cut him off, "Dude, he can't call her. She has a boyfriend."

Melanie chimed in, "If she didn't want him to call; she wouldn't have given him her phone number! She likes him!"

Rob spoke up, "So if she likes him, why would she bring her boyfriend to his party?!"

Gabe shouted, "Dude, fuck her boyfriend!"

And lastly, Skip just said, "Oh my god, I am so fucking confused."

Suddenly, the front door of Matt's dad's house burst open, and in walked Mike. You may remember Mike as my super attractive friend who "crushes pussy".

"Yo, losers. Sorry, I'm late. What'd I miss?" Mike said, walking into the kitchen.

"Just Ian telling us this ridiculously long and incredibly anti-climatic story about a girl," Tony responded.

"Ah, so the usual," Mike said laughing.

"Speaking of which," Rob interrupted, addressing Mike, "Where's your girl? You always bring a girl."

"Haha, yeah, don't worry, I actually brought two," Mike replied. "They should be right in. They're just out front finishing a cigarette."

"Two, huh?" Gabe responded. "So who are your victims this time?"

"Eh, just a couple of skanks," Mike answered. "I actually met them a couple weeks ago at Ian's birthday party. I couldn't decide which one I liked more; so I figured I'd just try to fuck 'em both."

My friends all laughed at Mike and his pussy crushing ways. I was confused though.

"My birthday party? What skanks did you meet at my birthday party?"

And then right on cue, the front door of Matt's dad's house burst open again, and in walked the two female friends that Jane had brought to my party. Sarah and Tara.

They immediately spotted me and shot me the meanest, dirtiest looks ever. I couldn't really remember which one was Sarah and which one was Tara, but the taller one pointed right at me and shouted, "What the hell are YOU doing here?!"

The room went silent.

"What do you mean, what am I doing here?" I replied. "Who do you think invited Mike?"

She turned to Mike, "You didn't say HE was going to be here!"

Mike went to respond, but I cut him off.

"I'm sorry, but what are you talking about? Why the hell does it matter if I'm here?"

"Because, if you're here; I don't want to be here!"

"What, why?"

"Because you're a fucking asshole," she screamed. "And you broke Jane's heart."

You would've heard a pin drop anywhere in the house. Nobody spoke. Nobody moved. Everybody was just frozen.

Gabe finally shattered the silence and softly whispered, "Well, this just got interesting."

I was completely dumbfounded.

"Ummm, yeah, you're gonna have to help me out here. How exactly did I break JANE'S heart? She's the one who brought her boyfriend to my party."

"Boyfriend?!" the shorter girl shouted. "Who Tom Guy?! He's not her boyfriend!"

Rob shot up from his seat at the table. "Wait a minute! That dude specifically told me Jane was his girlfriend."

"Yeah, he wishes," the shorter girl replied. "He's been in love with Jane for years, but she only likes him as a friend. She let's him hang out with us sometimes just because she's way too nice and feels bad for him."

"If you ask me, he's just a weirdo with a creepy obsession," the tall girl said. "I guarantee he just said they were dating because he was jealous of the fact that she loves you."

I couldn't believe it. This whole time, I had had it all backwards. Jane's so-called boyfriend was the one she only liked as a friend. HE was the weirdo with the creepy obsession. And, most importantly of all...

"She loves me?" I asked.

"Well, she did," the taller one replied. "For years, she talked about you as 'the one'. Her 'true love'. Her 'soulmate'. She even kept a picture of you and her with Santa on her bedroom wall."

"Yeah, but that was all before you were an enormous asshole to her at your party," the shorter one added.

I couldn't breathe.

"Dude, this is crazy! You gotta call her and tell her how you feel!" Brandon shouted.

"So, wait a minute, you do love Jane?" her taller friend asked.

Rob answered before I could. "Oh my god, you have no idea. This dude has been in love with your friend since like the nineties."

"Seriously," Matt added. "He literally hasn't stopped talking about her all night."

"Holy shit. You have to tell her! She's going to be so happy!" Jane's shorter friend proclaimed.

Tony chirped in, "For real, man. Call her right now!"

"No, don't call her!!" Melanie shouted. "You can't do that over the phone! You have to tell her that you love her in person!"

"Yeah, bro," Gabe yelled. "You gotta go sweep this chick off her feet!"

"They're right," Jane's taller friend said. "You should go surprise her at her apartment!"

"Oh my gosh, that would be so romantic!" said Skip.

We all stopped and looked at him.

"Well, it would be!" he shouted.

I couldn't argue with him. I couldn't argue with any of them. They were right. It was time for this little lovesick loser to go get his girl. I looked out into the room full of both mine and Jane's closest friends, and I simply said, "Alright, guys. Let's do this."

Everybody pitched in. Gabe, Brandon, and Tony went outside with a flashlight and were able to steal some pretty nice flowers from the neighbor's garden. Matt raided his dad's wine collection and found me what he called "the perfect bottle". Jane's taller friend, which I now learned was Sarah, wrote me out detailed directions on how to get to Jane's building. Melanie forced me to let her fix my hair. Skip agreed to give Rob a ride home so I didn't have to. Even Mike gave me one of his lucky condoms. And lastly, Tara, Jane's shorter friend, called Jane. It was about 11pm. Tara made sure Jane was home, and then lied saying that she desperately needed to stop by and talk to her. And with that; the stage was set.

Everyone followed me out to my car as I prepared to leave. They all wished me luck and made me promise to call and tell them how it went. I thanked them all for everything they'd done. And I knew the rest was up to me. So I got into my car. And I drove off.

Jane's apartment building was on Sheridan Drive. It was one of the busiest streets in the big city. I knew it would take me about a half hour to get there. But I honestly didn't mind. Remember how I once mentioned those moments that just seem to last forever? Well, I guess I almost wished that this would be one of them. I'd never felt so alive. For so long, I had dreamed about this happening. About telling Jane I loved her, and hearing her say it back. Now it was a beautiful night. I had flowers. I had wine. And all of my dreams were about to come true. I could hardly contain myself.

Before I knew it, I reached Jane's street. I checked my directions and realized that her building was only a few blocks away. I started to get incredibly nervous. But I refused to let those nerves get the best of me. I kept my shit together. I continued driving. And then there it was.

I pulled into the parking lot of the apartment building. It wasn't an enormous place, but it was pretty big, and really nice looking. The only open parking spot was in the back corner by some bushes. I backed into the spot and turned off my car.

I still couldn't believe that this was all really happening. I took a few minutes to just sit back and think about everything that had occurred to get me to this point. It all just seemed like it

really was meant to be. Like it really was fate. I grabbed my flowers. I grabbed my wine. I opened my door. And I stepped out of my car.

Unfortunately, I neglected to realize that the piece of paper containing my directions was still on my lap as I stood up. And it dropped to the ground in front of me. I maneuvered the flowers and wine bottle in my hands, and I reached down to grab the sheet. But the wind blew it out of my grasp at the last second. It landed right in front of the big bush a few feet away from me. I walked over and put my foot on it before it could get blown further away. Then, again, I reached down to grab it...

And that's when I heard an absolutely horrifying sound.

I heard a rustling of leaves.

I heard a rustling of leaves coming from the bush in front of me.

I looked into the bush. And, suddenly, I spotted two little eyes looking back at me.

And I just couldn't fucking believe it.

THE MONSTER HAD FOUND ME!!

I turned to run just like I had so many years ago. But just before I could take off; something happened that stopped me in my tracks.

I heard the terrifying monster let out a thunderous...."meow".

I paused. I turned back to face the bush. I leaned down. I moved some of the leaves out of the way. And I discovered my monster. It was a little kitty.

"Awwww," I said, looking at the little guy. "Well, you're not very scary."
Just then, the little kitty turned its head. And I immediately screamed, "HOLY FUCKING SHIT!!!"

The little kitty was hurt. Badly. The whole other side of its face was covered in blood. It needed help. And I was the only one around.

I didn't know what to do. I wished I hadn't found the god damn cat. I was so fucking close to Jane. She was like right there. All I had to do was walk away. But I couldn't. I couldn't leave this poor little kitty to die. Hell, the thing was right outside of Jane's building. For all I knew, this could be her cat. And how would I live with myself if I had a chance to save it, but didn't.

As much as it killed me inside, I knew what I had to do. I threw my flowers and wine back into my car. I walked back over to the bush, I carefully reached in, and I pulled out the injured kitty. I don't know if the tiny animal was just really out of it, or if it just knew that I was trying to help;

but either way, it didn't fight with me. I cradled it in my arms, jumped into my car, and pulled out of the parking lot.

Having been a lifelong pet owner, I knew there was only one emergency animal hospital in the city. Fortunately, it wasn't too far away. I sped there doing my best to comfort the ailing feline.

I reached my destination and quickly parked my car. I jumped out, carrying the hurt little kitty, and sprinted inside. The place was completely empty with the exception of one lady behind the desk. She saw me, and my small bloody friend, and she immediately shouted for the doctor. A young guy in a white coat came running out into the lobby, spotted the cat, and frantically asked me what happened. I stared at the doctor for a second. Then I clicked back in, and I attempted to explain that I had simply found the cat that way. The doctor wasted no time in carefully grabbing it out of my hands and disappearing with it out back.

The lady behind the desk told me to take a seat, and that the doctor would do everything he could to save my cat. I went to tell her that it wasn't my cat, but the doctor shouted for her from whatever back room he was in. And she quickly scurried away saying she'd be right back.

So I sat down in the waiting room of the emergency animal hospital. And for about the fifth or sixth time of the day; I just couldn't fucking believe what was happening. The whole night had been such an insane emotional roller coaster. And it had all come so fucking close to having the perfect ending. But instead, it had just become another giant letdown.

But you know what?

It was okay. Because I hadn't lost Jane forever. It was only a matter of time until we'd be together. So, as I sat there in that empty waiting room, I closed my eyes, and I slowly started to dream about all the possibilities that our future may hold.

I woke up the next morning to the sound of numerous dogs barking. And I quickly realized that I was still in the lobby of the animal hospital. The same lady was still sitting behind the front desk, and she smiled when she noticed me waking up.

"Well, hey there, sleepyhead!" she said. "Good news, your little kitty is gonna be okay! He's just gonna need some rest. It looks like you did too."

"Yeah, sorry," I said. "What time is it?"

"It's almost 9. I kept thinking I should wake you up, but your kitty wasn't quite ready to go home, so I figured I'd just let you both keep sleeping. He should be about good now. You may wanna get an owner's tag for him though. The doctor was convinced he was just a stray."

"Ummm..."

Six hundred dollars later, I walked out of the animal hospital with a little crate containing my new cat. I started heading down the sidewalk towards my car. I was still pretty upset about the way everything had worked out. Sure, I had gotten a cat; but I still hadn't gotten the girl. It

really sucked, but I had to accept the fact that the perfect ending to my story of Jane From Forever Ago would just have to wait until another...

"Ian?"

I stopped walking and looked up. Then I froze. It couldn't be. It wasn't possible.

"Jane?"

There she was. Standing right in front of me on the sidewalk. Holding a cup of coffee.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" she asked.

"Ummm," I replied, still in a state of complete and utter shock. "It's kind of a long story. But what are you doing here?"

"My brother's the vet here. He works doubles on the weekends, so I like to drop him off coffee on Saturday morning," she replied.

And that's when it clicked. When the doctor had first run out into the lobby; I had stared at him for a moment. And now I realized why. I had recognized him. It was Jason Lastname. I suddenly remembered Jane telling me that he was going to school to become a vet. I AGAIN couldn't believe what was happening. My entire plan of confessing my feelings to Jane had completely gone to hell. But life had still found a way to deliver her to me.

Because we were meant to be.

It was fate.

And I wasn't going to give myself any more opportunities to screw it up.

"Jane, I have to tell you something," I said.

I looked into her eyes. She looked back into mine.

"Okay?" she responded.

"I'm in love with you."

She froze.

And I continued.

"I've been in love with you ever since we were kids. And then when we were teenagers. And even now that we're adults. You have been, and still are, literally, the love of my life. I'm so sorry about how I treated you at my party. I thought you were dating that dude you were with

and it broke my heart. Because you shouldn't be dating anyone but me. You and I are meant to be together."

She just stood there. Not saying anything. But then, slowly, that magical smile of her's began to creep across her face.

"Yeah, I know," she said.

"Umm. What do you mean 'you know'?" I asked.

"I know you love me. I woke up to like thirty voicemails from Sarah and Tara wondering how last night went. I called them back, and they told me everything."

"Oh," I said, somewhat letdown.

"Yeah," she said, slightly giggling.

"So, umm, like...do you love me too?" I asked.

She flashed me that unbelievable smile one more time. And then she just replied, "Dude, you have no idea."

And that was all I needed to hear. I put down my kitty crate. I walked right up to her. And I kissed her with all of the love in a million hearts.

Our lips finally parted after what felt like a blissful eternity. I asked Jane if she wanted to grab some breakfast, and she agreed. She ran inside, dropped off her brother's coffee, and then came back out to me. I grabbed my cat crate, and the two of us began walking down the sidewalk together.

"So what exactly happened to you last night?" she asked. "Sarah and Tara said you were supposed to come sweep me off my feet at my apartment."

"Yeah, well," I responded. "I ran into a little incident with a monster. I'll tell you all about it over breakfast. Is there anywhere particular you'd like to go?"

"No," she replied. "Anywhere is fine."

"Perfect," I said. "I know this great little soft pretzel place...."

And thus began my relationship with Jane Lastname. It would be a relationship that would change my life forever. And it would play a gigantic role in turning me into the man I am today.

But that's a whole different story. So, for now, I just wanna thank you all for reading this. And I just wanna remind you:

Never

Ever

Give Up On Love

The End

Jane From Forever Ago will return.