

The Long Weekend

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The Long Weekend

by [elephantshoes](#)

Summary

A long weekend at Shane's cottage is meant to be quiet, private, and uncomplicated.

Then Ilya discovers canoes, wildlife, and the exact limits of Shane's patience—and somewhere between turtles, bets, and stolen kisses, Shane realizes he's already given Ilya more than a key.

The cottage is supposed to be peaceful.

That's the whole point of it—Shane's place, tucked into the trees where no one bothers them, where the lake is quiet and the neighbours are far enough away that privacy is a given rather than a carefully maintained illusion.

Shane knows every creak in the floorboards because he chose the wood. Knows every window because he approved the placement. The dock he built with his dad one summer, the stone path Ilya helped lay last fall without being asked.

It's the one place Shane doesn't have to perform, doesn't have to be anything other than himself.

Which is why, when Ilya suggested they spend a long weekend here, Shane didn't just agree.

He gave Ilya a key.

Not permanently. Not with any ceremony or speech. Just—"Here. In case you get here before me."

Ilya had looked at it for a long moment, turning it over in his palm like it was something more than stamped metal.

"Is for cottage?" he'd asked, even though it was obvious.

"Yeah."

"Just for weekend?"

Shane had hesitated, then shrugged, trying for casual. "Or, you know. Whenever."

Ilya's expression had done something complicated—pleased and careful and maybe a little overwhelmed. He'd closed his fingers around the key and said, very quietly, "Okay."

He'd added it to his keyring that same day. Shane noticed.

Now, standing on the dock watching Ilya gesture dramatically at the canoes, Shane thinks he should have known better than to expect a peaceful weekend.

"Is too far," Ilya calls from the shore, hands cupped around his mouth like Shane is somehow going to miss him from thirty feet away.

Shane looks up from where he's securing the second canoe to the post. "It's not too far. It's right there."

"Is **too far**," Ilya repeats, more emphatically this time, gesturing at the water like it's personally offended him. "Why do we need two boats?"

"They're canoes."

“This is what I say. Two boats.”

Shane straightens, pushing his sunglasses up into his hair so Ilya can see he’s not kidding. “We need two because last time you nearly capsized us trying to—”

“Was not capsizing.”

“You stood up.”

“Was looking at bird!”

“In a *canoe*, Ilya.”

Ilya waves this off like it’s a minor detail, already turning back toward the cottage. *Their* cottage, Shane thinks, and the thought sits warmer than it should. “We take one boat. I promise I do not stand.”

“You’re not getting in a canoe with me.”

Ilya stops. Turns around. The key—*Shane’s* key—glints on the ring hanging from his pocket. The look on his face is somewhere between offended and delighted. “You do not trust me?”

“Not even a little bit.”

“Shane.” Ilya presses a hand to his chest like he’s been mortally wounded. “After everything. After all this time. You think I would put you in danger?”

“I think you’d get distracted by a loon and forget physics exists.”

“Physics,” Ilya scoffs, already walking back down the dock with purpose. “I know physics very well.”

“Then you know why standing up in a canoe is a bad idea.”

Ilya reaches him, close enough now that Shane can see the exact moment his expression shifts from mock-injured to something more dangerous—playful, determined, the look he gets right before he does something inadvisable on the ice.

“I make you deal,” Ilya says.

Shane crosses his arms. “I’m listening.”

“We take one boat—”

“Canoe.”

“—*one canoe*,” Ilya corrects, mouth twitching, “and if I stand, you can make me do anything you want for rest of weekend.”

Shane raises an eyebrow. “Anything?”

“Anything.”

“And if you don’t stand?”

Ilya grins. “Then *I* get to make *you* do anything I want.”

Shane considers this. It’s a trap, obviously. Ilya is going to stand. He’s going to get excited about something—a fish, a bird, the way the light hits the water—and he’s going to forget that he’s not supposed to, and Shane is going to have to grab him before they both end up in the lake.

But the confidence in Ilya’s expression is so utterly unearned that Shane can’t help himself.

“Deal,” he says.

Ilya’s grin widens. “Good. You will see. I am very calm person.”

“Right,” Shane says. “Super calm.”

Twenty minutes later, they’re on the water.

Ilya is in the front of the canoe—because of course he insisted on being in front—and Shane is in the back, paddle resting across his knees, watching Ilya’s shoulders move as he rows with what can only be described as *excessive* enthusiasm.

“You know this isn’t a race, right?” Shane says.

“Is better to go fast.”

“We’re sightseeing.”

“We sightsee faster this way.”

Shane shakes his head, smiling despite himself. The sun is warm on his shoulders, the water calm, the only sounds the rhythmic splash of Ilya’s paddle and the distant call of birds somewhere in the trees.

For about three minutes, it’s perfect.

Then Ilya stops rowing.

“What,” Shane says, immediately suspicious.

“Shh.” Ilya holds up one hand, still holding his paddle with the other. “You hear?”

“Hear what?”

“Listen.”

Shane listens. He hears water. Birds. A faint breeze moving through the pines. Nothing unusual.

“Ilya—”

“There!” Ilya points suddenly, leaning forward, the canoe rocking slightly under the shift in weight.

Shane’s hand shoots out to grip the side. “Don’t—”

“Is beaver!”

“I don’t care if it’s a—”

But Ilya is already shifting, turning to look back at Shane with an expression of pure delight, and the canoe tilts just enough that Shane has to adjust his weight to compensate.

“Did you see?” Ilya asks, oblivious.

“Sit. Down.”

Ilya blinks, then seems to register Shane’s tone. He settles back into his seat, grinning. “Was beaver.”

“I know.”

“Very cute.”

“Adorable. Sit still.”

“I *am* sitting still.”

“You’re vibrating.”

Ilya laughs, bright and unrepentant, and Shane feels something in his chest do an annoying little flip.

They make it another ten minutes before Ilya spots a heron.

The heron is standing in the shallows near the far shore, perfectly still, long neck curved in that prehistoric way herons have that makes them look like they’re contemplating something profound.

Ilya sees it and goes completely silent.

This, Shane has learned, is more dangerous than when Ilya is loud.

“Don’t,” Shane says preemptively.

“I am not doing anything.”

“You’re *thinking* about doing something.”

“I am looking at bird.”

“You’re *staring* at bird.”

Ilya’s paddle has stopped moving entirely. The canoe drifts, slow and aimless, while Ilya watches the heron with the kind of focus he usually reserves for playoff overtime.

“Is very beautiful,” Ilya says quietly.

Shane has to admit, begrudgingly, that it is. The light is hitting the water just right, the heron’s reflection almost perfect in the stillness.

“It is,” Shane agrees. “From here. While sitting.”

Ilya makes a noncommittal sound.

The canoe continues to drift.

The heron, unbothered by their presence, takes one careful step through the shallows. Then another.

Ilya leans forward slightly.

“Ilya.”

“Shh. You will scare it.”

“*I’ll* scare it?”

“You are talking very loud.”

“I’m whispering!”

The heron’s head swivels toward them. For a moment, it seems to consider whether they’re worth worrying about. Then it decides they’re not and goes back to hunting.

Ilya sighs, satisfied, and finally picks up his paddle again.

They make it another thirty seconds.

“We should get closer,” Ilya says.

“No.”

“Just a little bit.”

“Absolutely not.”

“Shane.” Ilya twists in his seat—carefully, Shane notes, still obeying the letter of their agreement if not the spirit—and looks back at him with wide, pleading eyes. “Please. Look how beautiful.”

“I can see it from here.”

“Is not the same.”

“It’s exactly the same.”

“Is better up close.”

“You know what else is better? Staying dry.”

Ilya turns back around, shoulders dropping in a dramatic slump that would make a theater director proud. “You do not appreciate nature.”

Shane bites back a laugh. “I appreciate nature. I also appreciate not swimming back to shore.”

“I would not make us swim.”

“You’re really committed to this bet, huh?”

“I make promise,” Ilya says, with an air of great dignity. “I do not break promise.”

Shane lets him have that one. They paddle in silence for a while, the heron forgotten as they round the bend toward the northern part of the lake. The shore here is rockier, the trees thicker. Shane knows this stretch well—knows where the drop-offs are, where the water gets shallow enough to scrape the canoe if you’re not careful.

He’s just starting to relax when Ilya speaks again.

“What is that?”

Shane looks up. Follows Ilya’s gaze toward the shore.

There’s a turtle sunning itself on a half-submerged log.

“No,” Shane says immediately.

“I did not say anything!”

“You were **about** to say something.”

“I was just **observing**—”

“Observe from here.”

“Shane, is **turtle**.”

“I know it’s a turtle. We’re not getting closer.”

Ilya turns around again, and this time his expression is less pleading and more indignant.

“Why do you bring me to cottage if we cannot enjoy cottage things?”

“We’re **in** the cottage things! We’re literally surrounded by cottage things!”

“But we cannot see them properly from so far away!”

“We’re fifteen feet away!”

“Is too far for turtle!”

Shane laughs before he can stop himself. It comes out loud and startled and entirely against his will, and Ilya’s indignation melts immediately into a grin so pleased with itself that Shane has to look away before he does something stupid like capsize them himself.

“You think is funny,” Ilya says, smug.

“I think *you’re* ridiculous.”

“But funny ridiculous.”

“Unfortunately.”

Ilya hums, turning back around, and Shane can see his shoulders shaking with suppressed laughter.

They paddle past the turtle—at a respectful distance that Ilya definitely sulks about—and make their way toward the small island in the center of the lake. It’s not much, just a rocky outcrop with a few stubborn trees clinging to it, but it’s always been one of Shane’s favorite spots.

“We can stop here,” Shane says as they approach.

“We can get out?” Ilya asks, perking up immediately.

“Yes, we can get out.”

“I can stand?”

“On the *island*, yes.”

Ilya twists around again, eyes bright. “You are very specific person.”

“I’m a *careful* person.”

“Is same thing.”

“It’s really not.”

They beach the canoe on the small stretch of sand, and Ilya is out before Shane has even finished securing it, already scrambling up onto the rocks like he’s got somewhere important to be.

Shane follows at a more reasonable pace, watching as Ilya picks his way across the uneven surface toward the highest point.

“Look!” Ilya calls back, gesturing broadly at the view.

Shane looks. It’s the same view he’s seen a hundred times—the lake spreading out in all directions, the trees thick and green, the sky wide and blue overhead.

But Ilya is standing there like he’s discovering it for the first time, arms spread wide, face tipped up toward the sun.

And Shane thinks, not for the first time, that he might be the ridiculous one here.

Because this—*this*—is exactly why he brought Ilya here. Why he gave him a key.

Ilya stays on the highest rock for longer than Shane expects, arms still spread, face still tilted toward the sun like he’s personally trying to absorb all of it.

Shane picks his way up to join him, settling on a flat boulder nearby. The rock is warm under his palms, almost hot from the afternoon sun.

“You look like you’re about to start narrating a nature documentary,” Shane says.

Ilya doesn’t move. “Is very peaceful here.”

“Yeah.”

“Very quiet.”

“Mm-hmm.”

“No one bothers us.”

“That’s the idea.”

Ilya finally lowers his arms and turns to look at Shane, expression softening into something that makes Shane’s chest feel too small. “Thank you for bringing me.”

Shane shrugs, glancing away because the sincerity is almost too much. “You invited yourself.”

“You let me invite myself.”

“Yeah, well.” Shane picks at a piece of lichen on the rock. “Figured you’d annoy me less up here than in the city.”

“I annoy you same amount everywhere.”

“True.”

Ilya sits down beside him, close enough that their shoulders brush. For a while, they just sit there, watching the water, listening to the birds, existing in the kind of comfortable silence Shane has never been good at with anyone else.

Then Ilya speaks, voice careful in a way that means he's been thinking about whatever he's about to say.

"You are happy here."

It's not a question, but Shane answers anyway. "Yeah. I am."

"Different happy than other places."

Shane considers that. "It's... easier here. I don't have to—" He pauses, searching for the right words. "I don't have to be anything specific."

Ilya nods slowly. "Just Shane."

"Just Shane," he agrees.

"I like just Shane."

Shane feels his face warm in a way that has nothing to do with the sun. "Yeah?"

"Yes." Ilya bumps their shoulders together. "Just Shane is my favorite Shane."

"You're such a sap."

"Is not sap. Is truth."

Shane shakes his head, smiling despite himself. "We should probably head back. Before you spot another turtle and lose your mind."

"Was very good turtle."

"It was fine."

"Was *exceptional* turtle."

"It was sitting on a log."

"*Exceptionally*," Ilya insists, standing and offering Shane his hand.

Shane takes it, lets Ilya pull him to his feet. They stand there for a moment, hands still linked, before Ilya tugs him closer.

"What are you doing?" Shane asks, though he's already leaning in.

"Appreciating view," Ilya says, and kisses him.

It's slow and sweet and tastes like the sunscreen Ilya definitely forgot to reapply, and when they break apart, Ilya is grinning at him with that stupid, pleased-with-himself expression that Shane is absolutely not charmed by.

Except he is. He's devastatingly charmed by it.

“Come on,” Shane says, squeezing Ilya’s hand once before letting go. “Let’s get back before the mosquitos come out.”

They make their way back down to the canoe, Ilya already talking about what they should make for dinner, about whether Shane’s grill is still working, about something he saw on TV last week that’s only tangentially related to anything.

Shane listens, helps push the canoe back into the water, settles into his seat in the back.

Ilya picks up his paddle.

They make it approximately four minutes before Ilya sees a fish jump.

“Did you see that?” Ilya asks, already turning around.

“Eyes forward.”

“Was **huge** fish—”

“Ilya, I swear—”

But Ilya is laughing now, bright and unrestrained, and the canoe is rocking but not enough to be dangerous, and Shane finds himself laughing too, helpless against it.

“You are terrible at this!” Shane calls over Ilya’s laughter.

“I am **wonderful** at this!” Ilya shouts back. “I have not stood up even once!”

“You’ve leaned approximately seventy times!”

“Leaning is not standing!”

“It’s the spirit of standing!”

Ilya twists around fully now—still sitting, technically, but barely—and his expression is so delighted, so utterly free, that Shane forgets to be exasperated.

“I win bet,” Ilya says, grinning.

Shane raises an eyebrow. “You really think so?”

“I have not stood. Is the deal.”

“The deal was that you’d be calm.”

“I **am** calm!”

Shane gestures at him—at the way he’s still turned around, at the paddle resting uselessly across his lap, at the general chaos he’s radiating. “This is not calm.”

“Is **my** calm.”

Shane shakes his head, biting back a smile. “Fine. You win.”

“I win!” Ilya pumps his fist in the air, and the canoe rocks sharply enough that Shane has to grab the sides.

“If you capsize us right now—”

“I will not capsize!” Ilya turns back around, picking up his paddle with exaggerated care. “I am winning person. Winning persons do not capsize.”

“You’re impossible.”

“Yes, but you love me anyway.”

And, well. There’s no arguing with that.

“Yeah,” Shane says, softer now. “I do.”

Ilya looks back over his shoulder, something tender breaking through the playfulness. “I know.”

They make it back to the dock without incident, though Ilya does point out two more turtles, one dragonfly, and what he insists is an eagle but is definitely a hawk.

When they’re finally on solid ground, Ilya stretches, arms over his head, looking entirely too pleased with himself.

“So,” he says. “I win bet. What do I get?”

Shane pretends to think about it. “What do you want?”

Ilya steps closer, still grinning. “You make dinner.”

“That’s it?”

“And you let me pick movie.”

“You’re going to pick something terrible.”

“Yes.” Ilya’s grin widens. “And you will watch whole thing without complaining.”

Shane sighs, long-suffering and entirely performative. “Fine.”

“And,” Ilya adds, leaning in, voice dropping lower, “you admit I am very good at canoe.”

“Absolutely not.”

“Shane—”

“You can have dinner and the movie. That’s it.”

Ilya considers this, then nods, satisfied. “Okay. Is good deal.”

He leans in and kisses Shane again, quick and casual, like it’s the easiest thing in the world.

And Shane thinks, watching Ilya walk back toward the cottage, the key—*their* key—
catching the light as it swings from his pocket—

Maybe it is.

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