

Don't Duck

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Don't Duck

by [KrissyTutu](#)

Summary

Shane finds Ilya outside the cottage in the middle of the night.

Ilya wants to stop being scared of the loons. Shane just wants Ilya.

Shane reached across the bed, grumbling when he hit the mattress instead of Ilya's ass. He blinked sleepily at his watch - 3:24 am - and then at the en suite. Empty.

Where is he?

Ilya was probably getting water or something. He needed to relax. Shane closed his eyes and counted to 50.

Five more rounds of counting and Shane was out of bed, throwing on the Raiders hoodie Ilya tore off hours before. *So much for relaxed.*

"Ilya?" He called out tentatively. The cottage was silent.

Shane was on his way to search upstairs when he saw him. Ilya, on the dock, his back to the cottage. Two breaths later and Shane was outside, bracing against the cool wind.

"What are you doing?"

Even in the dark, without his glasses, Ilya was like a beacon of warmth built just for Shane. Moonlight reflected off his hair, his shoulders. He was stunning. In fuzzy silhouette, Ilya was still aching clarity.

"I'm waiting," Ilya answered, unmoving, eyes still out on the water.

When he didn't elaborate, Shane fought the quip sitting in his throat. It was always so easy to joke and tease, but Shane wanted the earnest Ilya more than anything. It didn't stop him, though, from feeling like he was flailing for new ground. He hesitated. Despite knowing each other for years, everything was distressingly new. Shane didn't know the new rules of engagement, and it terrified him that he might do something wrong. Shane resisted the unknown like it was a cross-ice puck pass through traffic. In a tied playoff game.

But this was Ilya, and Shane couldn't fight the itch of his feet begging to walk towards him if he tried. And God knows he'd fucking tried.

Shane grabbed a blanket from the deck and walked down the short trail to the dock. Ilya finally turned to look at him, smiling softly as he helped Shane wrap the quilt around them both. Their shoulders brushed against each other, and it felt like being held and struck by lightning all at once. Whatever anxiousness had crept into Shane's chest vanished. *Fuck, I'm a goner. How did I ever think I was straight?*

"Sorry if I woke you."

Shane shook his head. "It's okay. I mean, you didn't. Are...are you okay?"

A loon called in the distance, and Ilya jumped practically ten feet in the air. "Shit." He sighed. "Fucking loon. So fucking loud. And ugly. Fucking ugly evil duck."

"You saw one?"

“I googled it.”

Tension radiated from Ilya, and Shane didn’t know what to make of it. Ilya was so rarely still. He was always moving, fidgeting with something. But right now, Ilya wasn’t just still, he was... frozen. Ilya even seemed to breathe in a way that moved his body as little as possible. It was unnerving.

Another loon called, and Ilya sucked in a breath. He let it back out slowly. “Was better,” he whispered.

Something desperate twisted in Shane’s stomach. “Ilya.”

“Cottage is nice. Being at the cottage with you is nice.”

Shane nodded slowly. Did Ilya regret coming? Did he want to leave?

Ilya snaked an arm around Shane’s waist and pulled him in, dropping a kiss on his shoulder. His lips were so cold, but Shane didn’t mind. He’s always felt at home on the ice.

“I want to come back. Some time. If you want me to.”

“I want you to.”

“Loons make nests in summer. On lakes.” He shrugged. “Not sure how you make nest on a lake.”

“You looked that up?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“We will be here together, in the summers, yes?”

“Probably.”

“The evil wolf ducks will be here, too.”

As if they were listening, a particularly close loon chirped on their left. Shane thought it was still easily 10 meters or more away, but Ilya pulled back like he was under attack. It was startling to see Ilya so scared. Shane hated it.

Ilya rolled his shoulders and breathed deeply, like he was trying to calm himself. Suddenly, realization dawned on Shane so hard he nearly doubled over. Ilya wasn’t pulling away. Ilya was here, at Shane’s cottage, leaning into Shane’s side and rubbing a thumb along his hip. Ilya was letting him see that something was wrong, and Shane knew the kind of gift this trust was. Fuck him if he took it for granted. “Sit down.”

“What?”

Shane didn't give Ilya time to be confused before he was tugging him down onto the wooden slats of his dock. He'd prefer to be somewhere warmer for this, but Shane would make it work. He scooted them back to a large pole so that his back rested against it. "Come here."

"Shane."

"I'm serious. Come here." He pulled Ilya towards his chest.

Ilya still looked worried, but it didn't stop him from crawling in Shane's lap or from letting Shane pull Ilya's head towards his heart.

"My dad and I built this dock." Shane kept his voice soothing and low as he situated the blanket around them again. "The summer after I bought the cottage. The house is so perfect. The big windows, the fireplace, the deck. Everything like I pictured. I love it. But I just wanted something...homemade. Something real."

Shane felt Ilya smile into his hoodie. "Mr. Handyman."

"Don't be too impressed, I got contractors to fix it during the season."

A loon sounded. Shane didn't wait for Ilya to startle to hold him tighter.

"Why are you out here this late, Ilya? Did something happen?" He thought over the day for something he might have missed, something he'd done wrong.

After a few moments, with his ear still pressed to Shane's sternum, Ilya shook his head. "Do you know the Florida rats? They throw fake rats on ice after the game?"

Shane made a face. "Yeah. The rat trick. So gross."

Ilya glanced up, uncombed curls falling around his face. "Yes. Rat trick. Rookie season, I did not know what it was. We beat Florida, I was celebrating. Maybe taunting the crowd a little bit."

Despite Ilya's current distress, it was hard for Shane not to picture him sweaty and jubilant on the ice. He was so gorgeous when he was winning. Not that Shane would ever admit it.

"Then it was time for the rat trick."

"But you didn't know," Shane offered.

"No, I did not know. The very first one they threw hit the back of my helmet. I...freaked out a little. Then everyone was throwing more rats. I thought..."

"You thought...that they were real?"

"No, no, not that. I thought...is silly now...I thought they were all throwing rats at me. I responded badly."

Suddenly, Shane remembered it. The coverage had been brutal. Ilya yelling, picking up and throwing the rubber rats at the glass. Shane had been in the gym watching ESPN pundits debate whether rats were Ilya's kryptonite. They said he was childish. Unprofessional.

"Ilya, you were jumpy. Caught off guard. It happens."

"Not to me. And I was not just jumpy. I panicked. I could not breathe. Had to see team doctor. I thought, okay I only have to deal with them in Florida. Couple times a season. Fine."

Dots connected in Shane's mind. "But it wasn't just in Florida. After that."

"No. People saw I hated the rats, so they brought fake rats to other games. Drew them on signs. Threw them on ice. I got pictures of real rats in the mail."

Shane shuddered. "That's awful." Shit-talking was normal in hockey, but sometimes it really went too far.

"I was always waiting for a rat to appear on ice. Looking in crowd for fucking rat throwers. But, I could not be scared of rats during every hockey game."

"So what did you do?"

Ilya shrugged against him. "I had my teammates throw fake rats in practice. They hid them around locker room. In the whole Boston arena. Over and over, until they were nothing. Until they were just rubber rats."

Shane thought through their games this season. "I haven't seen rats recently. Except in Florida."

"Yes, they still do rat trick in Florida. But after first couple seasons where I did not react to rats, fans got bored. Moved on to other things."

Years. Ilya had dealt with that for years and Shane had no idea. He'd chalked the whole thing up to Ilya being Ilya. He'd assumed he loved the attention, or at least was okay with it. He'd forgotten about it. His cheeks warmed at how callous that had been. "I'm so sorry. That's awful."

"It happens."

Another loon called, but this time only Ilya's shoulders tensed.

"Wait. You told me Florida was your favorite place to play."

"It is."

"After all that? Why?"

"It is good reminder. And very fun to beat them. Plus, they do really like me there. They only throw rats for fun, not because the rats scared me."

Shane didn't know if that was a good indicator of whether Florida liked Ilya, but he didn't push it. "So, you're out here waiting until the loons aren't scary?"

"Until I stop jumping like a rookie playing against Ryan Price."

In the distance to the east, the sky started to lighten, just a little. Shane loved the long days in the summer. He loved waking up to the sun shining through his windows. He loved it almost as much as he loved the moonlight, right now, brightening Ilya's nose. Shane bent over and kissed his cheek once. Twice.

"I won't make fun of you. For being jumpy. You don't have to fix it for me."

Ilya didn't respond at first. Then Shane heard a wet sniff, and another. He just rubbed Ilya's back, peppering more kisses along his jaw and in his hair. He kissed him and held him and used the cuff of his hoodie to wipe the falling tears from Ilya's cheek.

"I mean it, Ilya. There's nothing to fix."

Another loon called in the dark, even softer this time. Ilya still reacted. Shane's legs began to prickle and fall asleep, but he ignored it. He'd stay like this forever if Ilya needed it.

The sun was peaking above the water when Ilya grasped at Shane's damp shirt. "Okay."

"Okay?"

"Yes. Yes, let's go to bed." He laughed, shakily. "Loon will be here after we sleep."

Shane squeezed Ilya's hand. "Yeah. So will I, babe. Let's go to bed."

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