

a marvelous night for a loon dance

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a marvelous night for a loon dance

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Summary

The morning after Scott Hunter comes out in sweaty, ice-swept technicolour, Shane Hollander wakes up with a soulmate loon.

Notes

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

The morning after Scott Hunter comes out in sweaty, ice-swept technicolour, Shane Hollander wakes up with a soulmate goose. Only. It's technically. A soulmate loon.

It's a fucked up loon. It's bird-balding. Like molting, only worse, with a long, featherless neck like a vulture. The checkered plumage on its back is matted in sticky clumps. One of its eyes is completely missing and the remaining one is blood red and unblinking.

Shane's mom regards it with disgust and suspicion, slowly orbiting its bedraggled, battle-worn form. "Are you sure it's a loon?"

"Pretty sure. The bird identification app said it was a loon." It also prompted Shane to call a nearby wildlife rehabilitator, presumably because whatever AI identified it as a loon also determined that it must have recently crawled out of a gutter.

"Does it have mange?"

"I don't know." Shane googles *can loons get mange*, then *knemidocoptic mange*, then *knemidocoptic mange contagious humans*. He scratches his arm absently.

"How do you know it's a *soulmate* loon?" his mom presses, narrowing her eyes at a smudge of mud on its unsettlingly-clawed webbed foot.

"Because, um, watch this." Shane walks out of his parents' front door and shuts it. A moment later, the loon materialises beside him on the lawn, full teleportation crazy style.

His mom appears a moment later, normal corporeal style. She's wide-eyed and slack-jawed, but pulls her features into austere composure with a lid-blink and a tooth-click. "What's the plan?"

"I'm pretty sure it's just supposed to. You know. Lead me to my"—there's no way to say it but the mawkish way—"true love."

His mom eyes the loon dubiously, as if skeptical of its matchmaking abilities. "I don't mean that. I mean the people. The press, your sponsors, the world."

"Oh. Do they have to know?"

She laughs. "Shane. How could they miss it?"

"No, I mean. It's off-season. I can just give it an atlas and it could show me where to go and we could fly private—"

"You have a Rolex campaign shoot tomorrow."

"I'll cancel it."

"We can't cancel it." She paces the lawn. "Soulmate geese look like Emden geese, so a loon would be *more* Canadian, really. Patriotic. But not *that* loon. People will think you *abused* it."

Shane looks at the loon and the loon looks at Shane. “Maybe it plays hockey.”

“That could be something. Soulmate geese are pabulum these days. Thirty percent of people will get one. But a hockey loon...do you think it would wear a little helmet?”

The loon abruptly pecks at its own back in a manner less preening and more self-cannibalism. It spits out a snarl of feathers onto his parents’ manicured lawn.

His mom blinks. “Shane, you’ll just have to hide it.”

“Yeah, okay. I’ll get one of those cat backpacks.”

“You can’t get one with a bubble window. No one can see that thing, Shane. No bubble window. Air holes only.”

“Yeah, okay. No bubble window.”



The loon chews through the cardboard carrier, hisses at the plastic kennel, and makes a low, mournful sound when placed into the soft-sided crate. On the day of the shoot, Shane’s dad presents a cat backpack with a bubble window. “Look at it, Yuna. Its life’s hard enough as it is. It’s only got one eye, for Christ’s sake.”

The Rolex representative at the rink assumes Shane brought an actual cat. As he’s searching for a workable infelicity to shoo her away, she leans toward the bulging plastic only to shriek and recoil from what Shane can only imagine is that single homicidal eye peering back at her.

“It plays hockey,” Shane explains.

Word spreads about the backpack: people give it a wide berth for the duration of the shoot. Everything is fine until craft services brings out smoked salmon and the loon loses its mind. It begins to throw itself against the buyer’s-remorse bubble window until its beak breaks through the centre like a nipple from hell. A perspicacious caterer removes the salmon and the loon lets out a warbling war cry.

Shane flings the backpack on and flees just as the loon’s entire head emerges from the tear in the cat window, snapping and snarling.



The cat is out of the bag. The loon is out of the cat bag. Someone got a video. It’s blurry though. Blurry enough for people to believe that he has a really deformed soulmate goose. *Shane Hollander soulmate loon* yields only one relevant result: a birder on YouTube with 14 followers who isolates the sound of the territorial cry and insists it’s a male loon. Shane debates reporting the video but feels too guilty. In the end, he likes it because it only has 40 views and she’s *right*.

“So you’re a guy,” he tells the loon.

The loon blinks. Or winks. Shane's not sure which one it is. It's actually the first time he's seen that one harrowing eye shut at all.

The loon can't really walk on land. It sort of wobble-hobbles around like a drunk seal. Most of the time, it teleports, a move that genuine soulmate geese only do when impeded in their goal to lead people to their soulmates. The loon doesn't seem overly concerned with finding Shane's soulmate at all. It's been ignoring the atlases and moving only to snack on the salmon sashimi Shane's dad keeps supplying it with.

Shane googles, *loon gay* and finds only a disbanded group called *Lesbians Of Ottawa Now*.

"Are you waiting to lead me to some hockey fan after a game? Because Scott Hunter already did that."

The loon doesn't bother responding.

"Did Scott Hunter's gay energy summon you?" Shane interrogates.

The loon tucks its head under its wing and falls asleep.



"Stop bringing it fish," Shane complains. "My whole house reeks. They don't even need to eat. They subsist on, like, magic."

"You're thinking of soulmate *geese*," Shane's dad reasons. "Loons might be different."

Shane rests his head on the countertop of his kitchen bar, swiveling in his stool. He turns so he can see his dad and feel the cold stone at his cheek. "I think I'm different."

"You should leave the house," his dad awkwardly encourages with a frozen smile.

"Isn't he supposed to shepherd me out of the house?"

His dad peers down at the loon skeptically. It licks the kitchen tile with its slug-like tongue.

"It's a guy?"

"A birder thinks it's a guy."

"Huh. My soulmate goose was a girl."

"A loon isn't a goose," Shane rationalises, feeling a single bead of sweat collect on his forehead.

"Your mom thinks you should go public with the whole loon thing before the NHL Foundation gala."

"I'm not going to the gala."

“You’re going to need to prepare people. They’ll be... People won’t know how to react to that thing if they’re not warned.”

The loon begins its loonian purr, vibrating the floor beneath them.

His dad says, “What is happening?”

“It does that sometimes,” Shane dismisses. It does it whenever the gala is mentioned. The loon is going to publicly humiliate him at the gala, so Shane is not going to the gala.

“You’re going to the gala.”

“He can’t even walk.”

“He can do his beam thing.” Shane’s dad mimes loon teleportation by flicking his index fingers about. “Or you can bring the cat pack. I bought a new one. Reinforced plastic.”

“Hayden’s toddler’s just starting to walk. He says I should bring the loon over and maybe he’ll learn from her.”

“Hayden seems to be playing it fast and loose with child safety.”

Shane shoots his dad an incredulous look hoping to encompass every hockey-related injury of his life.

“Well, we would have never let you play with a rabid loon.” Shane’s dad laces his fingers together uncomfortably. “You were a sheltered kid. I think you’re still sheltered.”

Shane curls his bare toes over the barstool foot rail.

His dad coughs. “You know. We—your mom and I—we’d be thrilled with whoever your male loon chooses.”

Shane repeats, “Male loon.”

His dad coughs again. “We just. You haven’t—you haven’t seemed happy. For a while. We. We want you to be happy.”

“Uh. Thanks.” Shane’s heart beats fast and loud. “I would be happier if my home didn’t smell like loon food.”



Shane’s never actually fucked a guy. He made out with a racing driver on a yacht once. And one time, Ilya Rozanov made lascivious eyebrows at his hardening dick. Shane told him to fuck off and left the locker room, but the moment still features in all Shane’s flashbang fantasies: what might have happened if he stayed. Together on the ice, he feels a circuit between them, some kind of electrified thread of maybes.

“What if your soulmate is Scott Hunter?” Rose asks, clasping a tennis bracelet around her wrist. Shane should help, but he would probably drop it or pinch her or fail in some other way akin to his gay-giveaway sexual performances. “Will he be there? What if your soulmate is Scott Hunter’s *boyfriend*?”

On the floor, the loon convulses in revulsion, slimy tongue lolling out. Rose spares one perturbed glance in its direction and goes back to ignoring it as if it were some diseased pervert asking for an autograph.

Shane runs his fingers down his silk tie repetitively, seeking comfort in the smoothness. “I’m really scared.”

“Aww, babe.” Rose takes his hand. “You’ll be great. It’ll be great. No one will even notice who it chooses. They’re just going to be happy it’s gone.”



The loon rejects the reinforced plastic cat pack. Shane has to carry it down the red carpet to the NHL Foundation gala, which would probably be fine, only the loon has developed a terrible odour. Between all the fish, its lack of interest in lake time, and its violent dismissal of bath time, it’s become...pungent. Rose ditches them almost immediately, so Shane has to witness every newcomer interlocutor struggle not to wrinkle their nose while searching for an excuse to leave. The loon elicits a terrible cycle of tentative curiosity and vehement aversion. When a brave general manager tries to pet its few remaining feathers, it snaps its beak in threat.

Except when Ilya Rozanov sees the loon, he’s *delighted*. He throws his head back and laughs, the pale column of his throat exposed and open to loon attack.

“Careful,” Shane warns, unused to having to be the more cautious one here, “he bites. And he smells.”

Rozanov sets down his drink to wipe his bright eyes with both hands, still shaking with unchecked chuckles. “Poor Hollander.” He pulls an exaggerated frown, the corners of his lips still twitching like they want to grin. “Poor Hollander with ugly creature. Give him to me.”

Startled, Shane asks, “How’d you know he’s a boy?”

Rozanov gestures to the loon’s entire vulture-rat being. “Look with your eyes, Hollander. Of course he is boy. Give him to me.”

“What—no.” Shane grips the loon tighter. “He bites and—”

“And he smells, yes, yes. You said. To me, Hollander.” Rozanov rolls his long fingers through the air, wrist twirling, like, *come on*.

Shane laughs incredulously. “What—I—” But Rozanov reaches his arms inside the cradle of Shane’s own, scoops the loon out, and begins to walk away with it. Shane stays rooted to the spot like he too cannot walk on land. “Holy shit.”

“Hollander!” Rozanov calls. “Your ugly creature is vibrating.”

Shane jogs to catch up through the throng of people, tucking himself into the wake of Rozanov’s graceful weaving. “He’s—” Shane can’t say *purring*. “He’s a loon.”

Stopping in the middle of everyone, Rozanov tucks the loon under his arm like a football. He pulls out his phone and types something, then shows the screen to Shane. It’s a loon. A lovely, non-balding loon with shiny feathers. “This is loon, Hollander?”

Shane’s cheeks burn. “Yeah. I mean, it’s *a* loon. One loon. An example of a loon.”

Rozanov turns the phone back around and looks between the photo and the loon in his arms, smile getting wider and wider. “Sure. Okay, Hollander. Okay. Is loon. Sure.”

Shane laughs, drunk on all the eyes on them. “Fuck you!”

Rozanov covers the loon’s ears between his own hand and cheek. “Shh, Hollander. Be nice to ugly creature. To *loon*.” Despite holding his phone and the loon, he manages air quotes. He leads them outside into the star-dotted gloam.

“It’s nice out here,” Shane remarks, heart hammering. Soulmate geese go batshit insane when they find a match, honking and flying around. The loon isn’t really doing anything, but Shane’s not sure if they *can* honk and Wikipedia told him they only take flight from water.

“Shh, Hollander. Don’t be boring.”

Shane rolls his eyes. “God, you’re annoying.”

“Don’t listen to Hollander,” Rozanov whispers to the loon. “He is annoying one.”

They’re alone on the dock at the end of the property. After the crush of the party, it’s an oversensitive kind of intimacy, the nerve-burn of freshly exposed skin.

Shane takes his phone out. “I should—I should text Rose so she knows where I am.”

“Ah. *Rose Landry*.” Perplexingly, Rozanov says her name in the exaggerated voice of a southern belle. “The news thinks you will be together now after your soulmate creature.”

Shane should have brought a drink out here. “Ha. No, yeah, we’re. We’re just friends.”

“Okay. You are friends like he is loon?”

Shane barks a big laugh that buzzes across the lake in front of them, but neither Rozanov nor the loon startle. “Yeah. We’re real friends and he’s a real loon.”

Rozanov sits at the edge of the dock cradling the loon. He dangles his legs over the edge. “My mother, her soulmate animal was frog.”

“Not a goose?”

“No, not a goose. Fuck geese. Geese are boring.”

Shane laughs. “I didn’t even know they could be other things. I only found out when my mom researched non-traditional soulmate animals after this guy showed up.”

“Of course you didn’t know, Hollander. You are boring. Why would you know?”

Shane tucks his phone away and sits beside Rozanov, his legs dangling too. The loon shifts and settles his weight between the two of them.

“Tell me about your mom’s frog, Rozanov.”

“She never found her soulmate, because she never wanted to. She would visit her frog sometimes, when she was lonely. It stayed close.”

“Oh. That’s really sad, Rozanov.”

Rozanov shrugs. “Not sad. You have to both want. The animal does nothing. It is up to you to choose.”

Shane grips the dock, running the whorls of his fingerprints over the grain of the wood. “You grabbed my loon.”

Rozanov looks pointedly at Shane’s dick, then raises an eyebrow.

Shane laughs. “Shut up, fuck you. You took my animal—you—you—”

The hinge of Rozanov’s jaw flexes and relaxes. “So? Maybe I chose.”

Shane can feel his pulse in his fingertips. “You chose...*me*?”

Rozanov shakes his head at him, grinning rakishly. “I take it back. Already I take it back.”

Shane laughs and it comes out high and catching. “I don’t understand.”

“Here, Hollander.” Rozanov loosens his grip on the loon, whispering, “Show Hollander. Show him, ugly creature.”

“He’s not ugly,” Shane defends, even though he demonstrably is.

Rozanov regards Shane like he’s a very stupid child. “Hollander. He is. Loon is very ugly and you are very boring.”

“Did no one ever teach you manners? *Why* are you—why are you *like* this?” Shane gestures to Rozanov, to the loon, to the lake, to the planet.

Rozanov frowns clownishly. “Poor Hollander does not like honesty.”

“I mean, you’re *choosing* to be here while listing all the things you don’t like about us.” Shane’s unclear as to when he and the malodorous loon became a single unit.

Rozanov grins like he's charmed, hugging the loon who purrs in response. "No, no. You misunderstand, Hollander. You are boring and loon is ugly, but I like you both very much."

Shane's lips form silent words like shape sorters, trying to find something to fit. "Oh."

"Watch this, Hollander. Are you watching?"

"Yeah, I'm...I'm watching."

Rozanov whispers something to the loon, too low to discern. It drops down to the lake with a haunting, elegiac call.

Rozanov laughs, delighted, gripping Shane's shoulder. "I did not know he would sound like that. It is very beautiful. Very scary, but very beautiful."

"Yeah."

The loon swoops and dives and calls, mournful, returning to the two of them again and again like partners in this dance. When he finishes, he runs across the water and takes flight, getting smaller and smaller in the covering sky.

Rozanov stands. "Okay. Goodnight, Hollander."

Shane scrambles up after him. "*What?*"

"I said, *Goodnight Hollander.*"

"No. I—what—that was a"—Shane lowers the volume of his voice—"That was a *mating dance.*"

In his suit, Rozanov is an otherworldly level of handsome and a high level of insouciant. "Okay. Are you going to mate me, Hollander?"

"What—I—we're—we—you're just going to leave?"

"Like you left me in the locker room and made big sad eyes at me for years like I am one who did wrong?" Rozanov asks casually, the historical ledger of his observations the only thing giving him away.

"I...you think about it too?"

Rozanov rolls his own earlobe between his thumb and forefinger. "I chose. Will you choose, Hollander?"

Shane thinks on it, studying the strange patterns of the lake light, wondering how to say, *I think about you when I fuck myself and I'm not sure I even like you and I want to eat your bones.*

Rozanov grins ruefully. "Goodnight, Hollander." He begins to walk away, crossing the dock up to a copse of trees near the water's edge.

Shane says, “Wait,” but Rozanov doesn’t stop, so Shane rides the wave of the first impulse that crashes over him and makes a loon call after him. It’s shockingly loud and ululating, sounding more like a boar trying to yodel than a loon.

Rozanov stops in his tracks and turns around, an expression of disbelieving triumph scrolling across his face. “Hollander?”

For lack of anything else to do, Shane does it again.

People are definitely watching. Rozanov is openly laughing. When Shane walks up to him, he pulls them behind a tree, pinning Shane by his shoulder and winding the tail of his tie around his palm. “You are crazy, Hollander.”

Shane laughs, euphoric. “Not boring?”

“Yes, boring. Not always boring but boring mostly. Boring and crazy. It’s okay, you can suck my dick, Hollander. You do not need to make these monkey sounds anymore.”

Shane shoves at him, still laughing. “Shut up.”

“Okay, make sound again, Hollander. Maybe I like it. Maybe it gets me hard, maybe I like your sound of mountain goat in heat—”

In the dubious privacy of the leafy shadows, Shane kisses him. Rozanov kisses back like he skates, sharp and deliberate and relentless. They only break to breathe.

“I liked it when you whispered to him,” Shane divulges, brain-fucked on the taste of his mouth. “The loon. I wished it was me you were whispering to.”

Rozanov leans in and scrapes his teeth over the shell of Shane’s ear. He whispers, “I will make you make that sound again, Hollander. On my dick.”

Shane laughs and shivers and softly loon-calls back but Rozanov swallows the sound.

End Notes

this is only the second fandom i've ever written for! 🥰 thank you @bigdicric3 for telling me that loons have mating dances! ❤️

i'm over on [tumblr](#) if you want to be pals! i have a [fic post](#), [soulmate goose tag](#), and one other [ao3 fic](#) of the trope.

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