

swim to me

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/77790566) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/77790566>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	kayaks , Shenanigans , Episode: s01e06 The Cottage (Heated Rivalry) , Relaxation , recreational experiences in nature , turtles! , one tiny spider watch OUT , Loons , bad watercraft safety , this is a comedy though don't worry , Humor , being in looooooove , Shane POV , Oneshot , Complete , city boy Ilya you are so special to me , had a posting glitch so sorry if you get this email twice , Slice of Life
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-16 Words: 7,536 Chapters: 1/1

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by [ausgezeichnet](#)

Summary

While at the cottage, Shane takes Ilya on an evening kayak ride across the lake. It goes super well, obviously, because they're both extremely athletic and extremely mature individuals.

"Well? Get in!" Shane said.

"I will fall over," Ilya said.

"No, you won't. You're a professional athlete and I'm holding the boat. Don't be a baby."

Notes

because we can never have enough time at the cottage. title from Kate Bush. also, this doesn't quiiiiite work with the timeline implied in the show, but do me a favor and imagine that the love confessions happen on, like, day 5 at the cottage, and we're good to go

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

One thing Shane had never understood was the number of choices that some grocery stores offered. It was just ridiculous. There was Coke, that was normal. Pepsi and Dr. Pepper, too, but he knew Ilya preferred Coke when he wasn't drinking vodka or beer, so at least that was settled. Diet Coke, okay, but then what was the difference between Diet Coke and Coke Zero? Would Ilya want flavored Coke? No, he didn't seem like a Cherry Coke kind of guy. Or a diet soda kind of guy. Probably better to just stick with the normal stuff. He swung a 12-pack of Coke Classic cans into his cart, and then grabbed a second case for good measure. Better to be overprepared than underprepared.

Shane wasn't nervous, or anything. The cottage was cool enough to show on TV. It was architecturally interesting. Good location. Private. The well water was crisp and delicious. *Wow, well water? So exciting,* mocked Ilya's voice in his head, which had been happening with disturbing frequency recently.

He was picking Ilya up from the airport in Ottawa next week on Tuesday. Ilya was flying Porter Airlines from Boston to avoid a layover in Montreal, and his flight would arrive at 2:03 pm. It took about two hours to drive to the cottage from the Ottawa Airport, so Shane would leave the house at 11:30 am to arrive with plenty of time to spare. Maybe 11:15 am. He would circle, if he had to. Or sit in the cell phone lot. Maybe he should just park. The parking garage was usually more private than the ground transport pick up area at any airport, but making Ilya trek out to the parking garage felt like a rude thing to ask of a guest, especially if Ilya's ribs might still be bothering him.

Imagining what he and Ilya would do together with two weeks of freedom was kind of overwhelming, if he was honest with himself. Obviously he was thinking about all the sex they could have. They'd done most of the sex things you could do, Shane thought. Or at least the stuff he knew about. Maybe Ilya had new ideas. He could show Shane. They would have so much time, they wouldn't even have to plan things out. Ilya could just, like, grab him. Whenever they were in the mood. Show him whatever he had to show him.

Okay, wow. *That* was not an appropriate line of thought for the Super C checkout line. He quickly schooled his expression and focused on placing his groceries on the belt in the optimal order to avoid having his produce crushed or his bagged milk punctured. He gave the cashier his best media smile, and signed a scrap of receipt paper when she asked.

As he drove home, half-listening to whatever bland pop music was playing on the radio as he left the city behind for the trees, he thought a little more about what he and Ilya might do. Maybe it was a little embarrassing, but the main thing that came to mind, maybe even before sex, was just... relaxing. That was his favorite thing to do at the cottage, in the weeks he managed to steal there over the summer. The high summer days blurred together in a lazy mix of swimming, eating, hiking, and reading. Sometimes he would even take a nap, which he normally only did on days when he had an evening game.

In the haven of the cottage, maybe he and Ilya could drop all their pretenses, all the expectations about how they should act and how they should feel about each other. Maybe they could be honest with each other, for once.

The cottage was great. He wasn't worried. Shane really enjoyed the simplicity and slow pace of life, but as he thought about it more, he felt a pang of unease. Would Ilya get bored? He thought Shane was boring, of course. Most of the time he thought Ilya was joking, but also not really. It made sense. Ilya was an asshole, but Shane liked that about him, much to his chagrin. Shane was boring, but Ilya liked that about him, for whatever reason.

Still, they had never spent this much time with each other. Maybe that dynamic would hold over the two weeks, maybe not. Maybe Ilya would be way too much of an asshole and Shane would be way too boring, and it would be a complete disaster. He hoped not. God, he really, really hoped not. He wanted this to go well, so badly. More than he'd ever wanted anything that wasn't hockey.

They could play video games. Watch TV. He had some sports equipment somewhere, he thought – a soccer ball and a baseball plus gloves for sure, although he didn't know if he had a pump to reinflate the soccer ball. He had two adult-sized mountain bicycles in the shed, and sometimes he would bike around the lake with his dad. Could you use a bicycle pump for a soccer ball? Maybe. Even if the soccer ball didn't work out, there was always the lake itself.

He had really learned to swim in this lake, after some childhood lessons at the Y. His parents couldn't afford lakefront property when he was a kid, but there was a public beach in the provincial park on the other side of the lake from his cottage, and his parents' cottage was close enough. He always wore water shoes because the lake weed was gross, but he liked that there were no jellyfish and no sharks. The scariest thing in the lake was probably a pike – the big predatory fish, not his best friend – although he had never seen or caught one.

He wondered if Ilya had ever been to a place like this before. Did they have lakes like this in Russia? Was it too cold for that kind of thing? Did Ilya even know how to swim? He really hoped Ilya knew how to swim. Shane would ask, as soon as he arrived, and hope that the questions wouldn't annoy Ilya too much. He had a lot of questions about Ilya, these days.

Once he was home and the groceries were put away, he walked down the stone path to the dock and the boat house. It was a small, spider-filled wooden structure with a wide barn door, nothing particularly glamorous. He didn't have a real sailboat, or a motor boat, or anything fast or cool. Maybe he should get a jet ski. Ilya would probably own a jet ski if he had a lake house. For himself, he would kind of like a pontoon boat, so he could swim and float and fish in the middle of the lake, but it was way too much maintenance when he was only here for a few weeks in the summer. Paying the plumber to come out and clear the pipes for the season was already enough of a hassle every fall, but it sure beat frozen pipes bursting and causing a flood. He didn't need to add *boat maintenance* to his routine.

He opened the door of the boathouse and looked around. There was a small rowboat on the ground with fixed oars, plus two kayaks, one green and one blue, on the storage rack attached to the wall. On the shelves sat some life jackets and an uninflated innertube from his parents' house that he used to play with as a kid. His rarely used tackle box sat on the shelf beside it, his fishing pole leaning against the wall in the corner. He hadn't bought a fishing license for this year, but he would if Ilya wanted to try it out. Too bad he only had one rod. At least he had two kayaks. That was an idea. Maybe Ilya would like to take the kayaks out.

The kayaks didn't come up until day three of Ilya's stay at the cabin, once they'd done the video games and the soccer ball and the campfire. And the sex. Lots of the sex. As it turned out, Ilya did like to swim, but he had grown up swimming in Moscow pools, and the concept of a kayak was unfamiliar to him.

"Do you want to take the kayaks out?" Shane asked that afternoon as they sat on the deck chairs, staring out at the lake with their empty lunch plates sitting in front of them. The water was choppy with the midday breeze, but it was a bright, humid afternoon, and Shane was struck by the urge to get out on the water.

"What is kayak?" Ilya asked.

"Oh, it's a kind of boat," Shane explained. "Usually pretty small, for one or two people. I have two kayaks, and one person can fit in each."

"Ah, like... fuck, what is word. They have at Summer Olympics. Canoe?"

"Kind of. Canoes are bigger, higher sides, more like actual boats. Kayaks are more like... you know how a leaf sits on top of the water? That's what a kayak does. It's light and thin, so you can glide," Shane said, gliding his flattened hand through the air to illustrate the principle.

"What is this little dance you are doing," Ilya said, and he looked like he was holding back a smile.

Shane dropped his hand and blushed, and swallowed down his planned explanation about how kayak events were actually part of canoeing at the Summer Olympics. An emotion flickered across Ilya's face, too quick for Shane to parse, but Ilya's eyes gentled.

"Okay, okay. We can glide like a leaf. You will show me," Ilya said, flattening his hand and making a gesture that crudely imitated Shane's earlier hand motion.

Shane studied the lake. The water was not as choppy as he'd seen it during the squall of a summer thunderstorm, but there were small waves, and he doubted Ilya could be convinced to wear a life jacket even if he was inexperienced. Kayaking wasn't dangerous, really, on a small lake like this one where you could swim to shore in an emergency, but being able to swim wouldn't help if you fell out of the boat and hit your head on a rock. Plus there was always the possibility of some asshole in a motorboat cutting it too close. Better to wait for calmer waters.

"Maybe we can take them out after dinner," he said. "The lake is always calm in the evening. Plus the sun sets super late here in the summer, since we're so far north. We'll have plenty of time."

"Okay," Ilya agreed, with only a hint of lingering suspicion. It made Shane smile. Ilya really was such a city boy.

After dinner, he led Ilya down to the boathouse and showed him the kayaks on their storage rack. He hefted the first kayak off the rack and passed it to Ilya, who carefully stepped around

the rowboat as he hauled the first kayak outside to the lakeshore. They repeated the process with the second kayak, and Shane grabbed both dual-bladed paddles from the top rung of the storage rack. A single kayak wasn't too heavy for one person to lift, but Shane still liked the way that hefting the boats made the muscles in Ilya's arms stand out.

"The blue one is a sea kayak, so there are holes in the bottom," Shane explained, once they were standing on the shore over the boats. Ilya seemed interested, at least. "I can take that one, if you don't want to get wet."

"What is the difference?"

Shane shrugged. "The sea kayak is for the sea, I guess. I don't know."

"We are not at the sea."

"Right. So I think you'll be safe in the normal kayak," he said.

Grabbing the bulkier green recreational kayak, Shane pulled it out into the shallows, then gestured for Ilya to follow him. Since there was more open space inside the body of the recreational kayak, that one did tend to attract more spiders, but Shane decided that he wasn't going to mention that when Ilya already looked so skeptical. Ilya waded out into the shallows after him, then paused by the side of the kayak.

"Well? Get in!" Shane said.

"I will fall over," Ilya said.

"No, you won't. You're a professional athlete and I'm holding the boat. Don't be a baby."

Ilya hesitated another moment.

"Dude," Shane said. "Don't make me stand in the shallows. We're going to get swimmer's itch."

Ilya stared at him. "What the fuck is swimmer's itch?"

"It's this gross parasite that lives in shallow waters in the lakes up here. Gives you these itchy bites on your legs. Super nasty," he explained.

Ilya stared at him some more, and continued, unhelpfully, to not get in the kayak. "This country is a nightmare," he said.

"It would be *fine*, if you would just *get in the kayak already*."

Ilya slid into the kayak with as little grace as Shane had ever seen him move. He initially was crumpled into an odd little ball in the seat, before adjusting his legs out into the hollow of the boat. The kayak wobbled dangerously, but Shane held it steady. He almost felt like saying *good job*, but that felt a little condescending. Ilya didn't look fully comfortable, his long legs an awkward fit, but at least he was seated and ready. Then Shane realized that Ilya wasn't holding a paddle, and was therefore completely helpless at the moment.

“You forgot your paddle,” he said, wading out of the shallows to grab a paddle from the shore, then wading back out to hand it to Ilya.

“Maybe you should wear a life jacket?” Shane asked, watching Ilya as he instinctually attempted to hold the paddle like it was a hockey stick. He suddenly wasn't sure if this was such a good idea.

“I can swim,” Ilya replied. Shane had been afraid of that. Well, whatever. He grabbed two life jackets from the boat house and stuck them under the storage strings of his sea kayak. They would stick close to shore, and it wasn't like he was planning on capsizing. Better to have it and not need it than need it and not have it.

He pushed the blue sea kayak out into the shallows, then got in with one smooth motion, steadying himself with his core muscles. Using his paddle, he pushed out into slightly deeper water with an easy glide. Water began to soak through his swim trunks from the holes in the bottom of the boat, but he was wearing a hoodie against the evening chill, so he didn't mind. He readjusted his sunglasses and turned to look at Ilya, who was squinting against the glare from the evening sun against the water, even though Shane had *warned* him. Ilya also had insisted that a tank top was fine, because he was a stubborn asshole.

“You okay?” Shane asked.

Ilya nodded, and stabbed his paddle into the water like he was trying to spear a fish. Oh, boy. This would be interesting.

“Cool,” Shane said, instead of trying to correct Ilya's paddling technique. “I was thinking we could just go around to the cove. They might not be there at this time of day, but most of the time there's turtles.”

Slowly, to give Ilya the chance to get used to the motion of paddling, Shane began to paddle towards the left, in the direction of the cove. They would stay within a minute or so of the shoreline, avoiding the deeper water in the middle of the lake.

The sea kayak had a very minimal backrest, requiring much more engagement from his core muscles in order to stay upright as he paddled. He leaned backwards and dug the blades of his dual paddle deeper into the water, reacquainting himself with the motion and smiling a little. Shane always enjoyed kayaking. It was a good way to get a workout in at the cottage without feeling like he was pushing himself too hard on vacation, and the sea kayak took smoothly to the placid water. He was selfishly glad he had taken this kayak rather than offering it to Ilya. He much preferred being able to see his feet and know that there weren't any spiders about to run over his toes, even if it meant getting wet.

He turned around to check on how Ilya was doing, and found the other man already lagging far behind him, paddling a little more smoothly but still clearly struggling to find his rhythm.

“You okay?” he yelled, and stopped paddling to give Ilya a chance to catch up.

“Fine!” Ilya yelled back. Shane let his boat drift for a second. The surface of the lake was glass calm and tinged pink from the sun slowly drifting down towards the horizon, so there

was little danger of drifting into shore. Kayaks did well navigating the shallows, anyway.

“Fuck!” Ilya yelled, and stopped paddling, looking down at something in his boat.

“What?” Shane yelled. Ilya was perhaps five feet away now, boat still drifting forward from momentum even though he’d also stopped paddling.

“There is a spider!”

“Oh, yeah, sorry,” Shane said, as Ilya drifted closer. Shane paddled in reverse, adjusting their path so that Ilya didn’t hit him as he glided closer. It looked like he was trying to catch the spider one-handed, while still maintaining a hold on his paddle.

“What do I do with it?” Ilya asked, as he drifted closer.

“Squish it? I don’t know. Just don’t hit me with your kayak.”

Ilya pulled up side-by-side with Shane, and he leaned over to look at the spider frantically dancing across Ilya’s hand. Thankfully it was nothing more than a spindly cellar spider, not a black widow.

Ilya looked at him for a second, and then reached over to deposit the spider right onto Shane’s lap.

“Hey!” he said, and instinctively thwacked Ilya across the back with his paddle.

“Ow!”

And then they were whacking each other with their paddles until the motion pushed them too far away from each other. They stared at each other across the small stretch of water between them, and Ilya cracked up, doubling over, making his kayak wobble perilously.

“You fucking asshole,” Shane said. “You didn’t have to make it my problem. I chose this kayak for a reason, you know.”

“Oh, so you knew there would be spiders in my boat? Wow, Hollander. Nice way to treat a guest.”

Speaking of spiders, Shane looked down at his own kayak. Sure enough, there was the cellar spider, scrambling across the raised plastic ridge between his legs. Looking at the spider did send an instinctive frisson of repulsion down his spine, but it wasn’t like cellar spiders were dangerous. Maybe he would just... leave it alone. If it fell into the water, then it fell into the water.

He turned to look at Ilya, then smirked. Payback time. “Race you to the cove,” he said, and stopped holding back as he dug the blades of his paddle into the water, switching from side to side with his paddle as fast as he could. His core started to burn with the effort, and Shane dug his heels harder into the footrests. He heard Ilya yell his name in protest, but he was already sliding through the water, picking up speed and pulling far ahead of Ilya.

“Hollander!” came one last anguished cry from behind him, but Shane only laughed. It wasn’t often that he could so clearly outcompete Ilya, and he let himself enjoy the sensation of exercise and movement and victory.

He did start to feel a little guilty once he rounded the point and pulled into the shallow waters of the cove. The trees on the point and his neighbors’ boat house blocked his view of the part of the lake where they had started, so he couldn’t really see if Ilya was behind him. Ilya was new to this, and also wasn’t wearing a life jacket. Hell, he didn’t even *have* a life jacket, since both of their flotation devices were strapped to the back of Shane’s kayak. What if something went wrong, and Shane wasn’t there to help?

Just as he was beginning to wonder if he should turn back, Ilya rounded the point, paddling awkwardly and breathing hard. Shane’s shoulders relaxed, and he let himself drift, waiting for Ilya to catch all the way up to him. He was so relieved that he didn’t realize they were on a collision course until the point of Ilya’s kayak rammed the back of Shane’s kayak, sending him spinning slowly through the water.

“Hey!” Shane said. “Be careful! These boats aren’t cheap!”

Ilya rolled his eyes at him. “Ah, Montreal does not pay you enough?”

Shane put his paddle down across his lap so he could cross his arms, to show Ilya that he meant business. “I’m serious, Ilya. That could have been dangerous. You need to take this seriously.”

“Yes, yes,” Ilya said. “Very serious Canadian boat business.”

Shane squinted at him, reaching down to roll his paddle in his hands. He couldn’t tell whether Ilya was really mad at him or not. Now that he was thinking about it, it was possible that the collision had been accidental— kayaks didn’t exactly have brakes. Was Ilya enjoying himself? He didn’t really look upset, but so far things had been going far less smoothly than Shane would have liked. “Do you want to go look for turtles?” Shane asked as an olive branch.

Ilya lit up with one of his boyish grins. “Sure,” he replied.

Gripping his paddle firmly once more, Shane began to slowly paddle across the cove, moving at a speed that he hoped Ilya would be able to match. He wasn’t going to leave him behind again.

He was aiming for the dead tree at the corner of the cove, flopped over on its side in the water. The bare twisted branches poking out of the water created a habitat where turtles loved to sun themselves in the warmth of summer. Sure enough, as they drew closer, he could see the telltale dark lumps lined up on the logs still illuminated by the fading sun. He smiled. He always loved seeing the size variation, the baby turtles jockeying for space next to the giant adults.

“Turtles,” he said, pointing.

“Where?”

“Right there, dumbass.”

Ilya squinted, probably still blinded without sunglasses even though the sun was getting lower, but his face didn't light up with recognition. For a moment, Shane was seriously concerned for his eyesight. Did Ilya need glasses? How did he track the hockey puck if his vision was this bad? Or had he simply never seen a turtle before? Did they even have turtles in Russia?

As they drifted closer to the capsized tree, one of the larger turtles slipped off the log into the water, and a few more followed behind in wary anticipation of the large creatures approaching them.

“Oh!” Ilya said. “There are so many.”

“I've seen way more than this,” Shane replied. “We'll have to come back in mid-afternoon, when the sun is really strong.”

They sat for a moment, watching the turtles. Since Shane and Ilya had stopped paddling, a few of the turtles climbed back onto the log. Another one fell off, pushed by a new arrival. After a moment spent watching the turtles, however, Shane turned to watch Ilya instead.

Ilya seemed entranced, his eyes sparkling with interest. Shane felt his heart give a painful squeeze at the sight. Ilya's curls shone golden in the light of the setting sun, and he looked painfully young, more relaxed and open than Shane thought he had ever seen him before.

There were times when Shane wasn't entirely sure that what he was feeling was love. His own feelings were often difficult for him to conceptualize and articulate. It took a long time before he was ready to say them out loud. But sitting there, in those kayaks, watching the golden hour sunlight play across Ilya's skin, he had to physically restrain himself from saying those words that still remained unspoken between them: *I love you. I love you so much.*

“We should probably head back,” he said instead. “Sun is starting to set.”

Ilya nodded, still staring at the turtles.

Shane smoothly turned his kayak, paddling forwards on the right side and backwards on the left side so that the kayak rotated in the water. Ilya tried to imitate him, still awkward with the paddle, but in the corner of his eye, Shane watched as Ilya transferred his weight too quickly, leaned too far to one side, and tipped out of the kayak into the clear water. The turtles scattered, spooked by the splash.

For a moment, Shane felt a surge of panic. They were only in about six feet of water, so Ilya might be able to touch the bottom, but he wasn't wearing a life jacket. But then Ilya erupted from the lake, spluttering and laughing. He grabbed onto the side of his empty kayak, one hand thankfully still on his paddle. Shane relaxed. Ilya was fine. It was all fine.

“Fuck!” Ilya said, still laughing, pushing his wet hair out of his face. “Water is cold.”

Shane paddled a little closer to him and maneuvered his kayak until he was perpendicular to the end of Ilya's kayak, holding onto the handle at the end to keep them tethered together. "Are you alright?" he asked, laughing a little at the thought of Ilya gliding on ice skates but failing to turn in a kayak.

"Fine," Ilya replied. "How do I get back in this thing?"

Shane considered this. Swimming to shore would probably be the easiest option, if Ilya couldn't manage to get back into the kayak out here – they were only fifty feet out from shore, but there were houses lining parts of the cove that were technically private property.

"I dunno," Shane said. "Use your muscles. Figure it out."

Ilya tried to heave himself over the side of his kayak, but only succeeded in tipping the boat towards him. His hands slipped off the wet plastic side of the boat, and he was back in the water again.

"Maybe we should just go to shore," Shane suggested. "Much easier that way."

Ilya nodded at him, but then paused. He stared at Shane, and there was a competitive glare in his eye that Shane didn't like. Letting go of his kayak, Ilya swam closer to Shane, until he was holding onto the side of the sea kayak. With Ilya's soaking wet hair streaming around his shoulders, Shane was struck with the fanciful impression that Ilya looked like a vengeful merman.

"What are you doing?" Shane asked, and then Ilya was surging through the water, ducking under the surface to push off from the bottom of the lake and shove at the bottom of Shane's kayak with all the power of a professional hockey player, sending Shane flying over the opposite side of the kayak into the water.

Shane swallowed an entire mouthful of lake water as he hit the surface, briefly disoriented, but he had spent a lifetime throwing himself into this lake. His feet hit the sludgy bottom, and he was grateful that he was wearing his water shoes. He propelled himself to the surface, pulled himself up so he was hanging on the edge of the sea kayak, and glared at Ilya, who was holding onto his own kayak again and laughing uproariously.

"You fucking asshole," Shane said.

"You look like kitten who fell in bathtub!" Ilya said, still chuckling.

"I didn't want to get this hoodie wet!" Shane said.

That only made Ilya laugh harder. "Then why did you wear it in a boat?" he asked.

"Because I knew I wasn't going to fall over, dipshit!"

"Ehhhh, wrong. You fell over. Sorry."

"You're a dick."

“You like my dick.”

Shane glared at him, then grabbed his paddle where it was floating in the water and began swimming towards shore, towing his kayak behind him in the water. He couldn't believe he'd been thinking about how much he loved Ilya only a minute prior. It was deeply unfortunate that this didn't make him love Ilya any less.

As soon as he reached water that was shallow enough, he stood up and stepped back into the kayak, resettling himself. He shivered at the light breeze that whispered across the lake. July days at the cottage were warm and humid, but it could get down to 17° at night. There was a reason that he hadn't wanted to get in the water.

Ilya, the fucker, had apparently managed to tow his kayak over to the shallow water too, and was now struggling to hold it steady as he tried to get back into it. Shane was *not* going to help him. Sure enough, Ilya stepped into the kayak and then capsized again into the three feet of water they were standing in, which was ridiculous. Shane watched him splutter, then softened. He steered his kayak closer and grabbed hold of Ilya's kayak.

“I hope you get swimmer's itch,” Shane said, even as he held Ilya's kayak steady.

At the reminder, Ilya somehow found the wherewithal to get back into his kayak, his hair dripping rivulets of water down his back. “You think that will be a problem?” Ilya asked.

Shane shrugged. “We'll just rinse off with the hose,” he said. “It's worse in the spring, anyway. Dibs on first shower.”

Ilya settled his legs back into his kayak, squinting suspiciously into the hollow space as if checking that there weren't any more spiders. Shane checked the position of the sun, which was slipping ever lower on the horizon. They had enough time to safely get back to the house, but the evening chill was beginning to set in as the sunlight faded. They should definitely shower first, but maybe it would be a nice night for another campfire, once they were dry and dressed a little warmer.

“Well,” Shane said. “We should head back.”

Twisting to look behind him, he unstrapped the life jackets from the back of the kayak and pulled one life preserver over his shoulders. He had the vest style, rather than the silly-looking orange style that pulled on over your head. He snapped the buckles in place, then grabbed the other life jacket and tried to hand it to Ilya, who refused to take it.

“Here,” Shane said, starting to get genuinely annoyed for the first time that evening.

“I don't need it,” Ilya replied.

“Take it.”

“I tell you earlier, I know how to swim.”

“You already fell over. Twice.” Shane said. “Imagine if that happened in the middle of the lake, and you had to swim your kayak all the way to shore.”

“Why would we go in the middle of the lake?” Ilya asked.

“I don’t care,” Shane replied. “Put. The damn. Life jacket. On.”

“Okay, okay, Hollander,” Ilya said, and took the life preserver. He looked a little petulant, but strapped it onto his body. “Okay?” he asked.

“Okay.”

Shane studied him for a second. He seemed steady in the kayak, now, at least. They would take it slow on the way back, no sudden turns. Shane was struck with a strange sense of responsibility, like he was shepherding a rookie through their first game. He wasn’t the most outdoorsy person in the world, but he’d grown up on this lake, and he knew how to handle himself in a kayak. Ilya clearly didn’t. Taking someone out, even if it was just on a kayak, put the responsibility on his shoulders to keep them safe, especially when it was someone that he loved. Even if Ilya seemed determined to make the task of keeping them safe on the water as difficult as possible.

He leaned back in the kayak, resettling into paddling position. His core was starting to feel the burn already, which was a little embarrassing given that he was a professional athlete. He probably needed to put in more time on the rowing machine, if one kayak sprint had his core feeling this winded. Then again, he had just been injured. He would need to train harder than ever to be ready for the season by fall.

“You good?” Shane asked Ilya, who nodded at him. Shane began paddling, settling into a sedate pace as they headed back towards the cottage. They barely spoke a word, Ilya trailing slightly behind Shane but clearly growing a little more confident with the paddle. At least the silence between them was companionable.

As they rounded the point and the cottage came back into view, Shane spotted a familiar white-and-black bird in the water, about twenty feet away to their right.

“Look!” Shane said, pausing for a moment to let Ilya pull up alongside him. “It’s a loon.”

“You are joking,” Ilya said. “*That* is a loon? A bird that small cannot make a noise that big.”

As if determined to prove him wrong, the loon called out into the evening. Ilya jumped in his kayak, and Shane was briefly worried that he was going to capsize again. At least he was wearing a life jacket.

“What the fuck,” Ilya said.

Shane smiled a little. “Did you know they have red eyes?”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “Of course they do. Demon bird.”

They watched the loon swim a moment longer, and Ilya still jumped when the bird called again. All at once, the loon slipped under the water with hardly a ripple, leaving the glossy surface of the lake behind.

“Oh! Where did it go?” Ilya asked.

“Just diving for food, I think,” Shane replied. “It’ll be back in a second.”

Shane was watching Ilya again. He still looked fascinated, like he had with the turtles, if a little scared. Ilya audibly exclaimed when the bird did reappear, about fifteen feet away from where it dove under the water. Shane still hadn’t asked whether they had lakes like this in Russia, but it was clear that all of this was very new to him. Ilya was also starting to shiver a little bit, which was no wonder given how lightly he was dressed. Shane began paddling again, suddenly struck with the need to have Ilya safely back inside the house.

Shane was shivering too by the time they reached the cottage, because his cotton hoodie was drenched with water, sapping the energy from his limbs. Thankfully they hadn’t gone too far. He didn’t want to know what would have happened if they had capsized on the far end of the lake.

He beached his kayak with as much speed as he could manage, then stepped out into the shallows and picked up the boat under one arm to haul the kayak up the shoreline, flipping it upside down and leaving it in the shade of a large pine tree to dry without cracking in the sun. He shucked off his life jacket and left it to dry on top of his kayak. Ilya copied him without a word.

The boat house had an attached spigot and hose, and he turned the spigot on, rinsing off his legs and scrubbing at his skin lightly with his hands. He really wasn’t too worried about swimmer’s itch this time of year, but he’d had it once as a kid after playing in the shallows at the provincial park and he was *not* eager to repeat the experience. He handed the hose to Ilya, who copied him by rinsing his legs, hissing at the cold water against his already cold limbs.

While Ilya rinsed off, Shane walked over to grab their beach towels where they had been drying on rocks down by the lake. As soon as Ilya had finished with the hose, he walked back over and gently wrapped the towel around Ilya’s shoulders, stepping close to him.

Ilya was still shivering. Shane had to get him inside soon. Maybe they could shower together, rather than taking turns. But first, after their eventful evening, he felt a strange need to check in. *Be honest. Be brave.*

“You okay?” he asked. Their body heat was starting to warm the space between them, at least, as they huddled together in the cocoon of both of their towels.

Ilya nodded at him. “Thank you for showing me turtles and demon bird. Sorry that I push you into the water.”

Shane smiled at him. “No, you’re not.”

Ilya stuck out his bottom lip in an exaggerated pout. “No, is true! I learn many things from boat safety expert Shane Hollander. Is very bad idea, he says.”

Shane searched his eyes, and found only gentle amusement. Ilya seemed tired, he thought, but not in a way that was bad. Content. Lazy. Relaxed, exactly in the way that Shane had

hoped when he invited him to come to the cottage.

“Would you want to take the kayaks out again?” he asked. It would be okay if the answer was no, but he wanted to be able to plan out the rest of their week. He would make sure they kept their life jackets on, next time.

Ilya smiled at him, and nodded. “Was fun. And you promised more turtles,” he said.

“Good,” Shane said, and a thought occurred even as he spoke. “Because I just realized I was wearing my sunglasses when we left. They must have fallen off when you knocked me into the water.”

“Sorry,” Ilya said, and this time Shane believed him. “I will go scuba diving tomorrow. Find them for you.”

“Okay,” Shane said, then grabbed Ilya’s hand and turned to lead him up to the house.

As they made their way up the stone steps to the house, trekked across the floor to the ensuite bathroom and stripped bare, stumbling into the glass shower cubicle together, Shane was once again struck by how *nice* this was. He loved the cottage. He loved the lazy rhythm of summer life, the weeks that he stole away from his duties and obligations to the rest of the world. But he had never had someone to share it with before, not like this. He had never had a partner.

As Ilya kissed him lazily against the wall of the steamy shower, Shane found himself glad his mouth was occupied, because those words were threatening to rise in his chest again. *I love you. I love you so much.*

They stepped apart and began to wash. The words hung in his mouth, and he bit down on the tip of his tongue to swallow them back as he soaped up his arms. Shane stood under the spray and thought of the moment when Ilya tipped into the water. He found himself blinking back deeply embarrassing tears. Today had been lovely, despite their little misadventures. Their time together had been everything he ever wanted. He didn’t know what he would do if he lost this, if Ilya hadn’t resurfaced in the lake. If the words that were threatening to spill out of him ruined things between them forever.

Ilya kissed him again, gently, as they traded positions so Ilya could wash the shampoo out of his hair. Shane watched Ilya closely as he rinsed his hair, tipping his chin back to catch the spray at the right angle. He was gorgeous and golden, entirely unselfconscious of his nudity, but also still relaxed in a way that Shane had never seen him before. Entirely unconcerned with performing.

Shane let out a little sigh. *Don't overthink it, Hollander.* They had two weeks together, and that was more than Shane ever thought he would get. And after that... who knew? Things certainly felt different between them now. Even if he didn't manage to tell Ilya how he felt during these two weeks, there was no denying that they cared about one another. They fit together naturally, like the loon and the lake, in a way that was starting to feel like a long-term thing.

He grabbed the bottle of shampoo for himself, took a deep breath of warm shower steam, and decided to let himself hope.

The next afternoon, they took the kayaks back out to the cove. As soon as they were back in the spot near the fallen tree where the glasses should have fallen, Ilya slipped out of his life jacket and slid into the water, carefully balancing his paddle inside his kayak. He already looked much more confident wielding the paddle today. Soon, Shane thought, Ilya would be able to compete with him in kayaking as in everything else.

Ilya spent about twenty minutes diving in the cove before he started to look frustrated. Shane was trying very hard not to laugh at him. His normally curly hair was hanging straight down around his face with the weight of the water, and with the goggles he had borrowed from Shane, he looked delightfully silly. The sight made something light up in Shane's chest.

"You can give up, it's okay," Shane said. "Come look at the turtles."

Ilya only glared at him and continued to dive for another twenty minutes, taking occasional breaks to hang off the side of his drifting kayak and take heaving breaths, spitting up lake water. Shane gave up on watching him search and lay back on the sea kayak, letting his legs drop into the water on either side of the boat. He closed his eyes against the afternoon sunlight and let himself float, glad that he had applied plenty of sunscreen.

Just when Shane was about to propose that they head back to the house, Ilya emerged from the lake in an enormous spray of water and swam over to Shane with a shit-eating grin. Shane's Ray-Bans were clutched in Ilya's hand, glinting in the sunlight.

"Holy shit," Shane said, and sat back upright. "You did it!"

As Ilya reached the side of the sea kayak and pushed his borrowed goggles up onto his forehead, Shane saw that Ilya had that competitive gleam in his eyes again. "Don't tip me again," he warned.

Ilya pouted at him. "I would not," he said, and with one arm leveraged against the side of Shane's kayak, Ilya reached up to gently place the sunglasses back on Shane's nose. The sweetness of the gesture was only undermined by the fact that Ilya dripped cold water all over Shane's body as he returned the sunglasses to Shane's face.

After ensuring the sunglasses were in place, Ilya slid his body back down into the water and folded his arms on the edge of Shane's kayak. He pursed his lips in a ridiculous kissing gesture, and Shane indulged him by leaning down to press a gentle kiss against his lips. Although Shane's kayak rocked in the water with the motion, especially under Ilya's added weight, Ilya remained true to his word.

Ilya dropped his head to rest on top of his crossed arms, slipping lower in the water. He grinned up at Shane as he hung off the side of the boat, kicking his legs idly in the water. He was probably tired, after diving for nearly an hour. With goggles tangled in his hair and his boyish grin, he didn't quite look like the siren of yesterday. It didn't matter. Looking into his

wide hazel eyes as they sparkled in the sun, Shane still felt like he was drowning in the depths.

Once Ilya pulled his kayak to the shallows and successfully climbed back in, they spent another ten minutes watching the turtles before Shane noticed that Ilya's shoulders were starting to burn lobster red. They headed back towards the cottage in companionable silence, as Shane made plans for rubbing aloe vera into Ilya's shoulders and reducing his sun exposure over the next few days.

There were a lot of things that Shane was still worried about. Ilya was drinking about one Coke per day, which meant that Shane was on track to be left with ten extra cans. That probably wasn't his most pressing concern, but it *was* going to be an issue. Dark soda tasted like licorice to him, and he didn't like licorice – part of why he preferred good, old-fashioned Canada Dry. His options were either to drink the Coke himself or pour it down the drain, neither of which sat well with him. If there was anything he hated more than the taste of licorice, it was wasting perfectly good groceries.

Also, he still had to figure out how you knew when it was the right moment to tell someone you loved them.

He touched the sunglasses that Ilya had gently placed back on his face, and decided that both of those problems, the soda thing and the love thing, could probably wait until they got back to shore. For now, Shane was warmed by the sun and warmed by the care that Ilya took with him, glowing all the way to his core.

End Notes

thanks to my Canadian cultural consultants from the Haven discord server, to my friend Annie for looking this over and helping figure out the ending, to my grandparents for living on a lake, and last but not least, to my fiancée, who once capsized a kayak in about three feet of water for no good reason.

I'm on tumblr [@oldguardians](#) if ya wanna hang out.

edit 1/28: this fic has fanart, once again courtesy of the lovely lunarblue11!! [go check it out!](#)

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