Breathe

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Breathe

by Just_A_Sea_Lion

Summary

Ilya should really talk to Shane about what's been weighing on him, but he can't. He can't because Shane's life is perfect, and he made Ilya's life perfect, and Ilya can't bring himself to change that. So he focuses on the 2025 hockey camp of the Irina Foundation and buries his feelings, because it has always worked so wonderfully for him. But he is sinking.

Notes

Hello everyone! Thank you for clicking on this fic. Like a lot of people, i've watched the TV show, read all 6 books and became totally obsessed with hollanov. Here is a little angsty / hurt/comfort fic that I had on my mind after reading The Long Game, I hope you will like it. TLG ends in October 2021 so when the envents of this fic happen Shane and Ilya have played 4 seasons together with the Centaurs.

Thank you so much to my beta, you know who you are and you are the best.

See the end of the work for more notes

He hadn't even told Galina. He knew it was dumb, and he was being a horrible patient, because what is the point of seeing a therapist – a therapist you trust, who has helped you tremendously in the past – if you're not going to talk to her when you're relapsing?
But he knew what she would do. She would listen to him, comment a few things here and there to prompt him to say more, write a few words on her notebook, look at him thoughtfully, and say: "Don't you think you should talk to Shane about it?"

And she would not be wrong. Except that he couldn't, because then he would put Shane's back against the wall. When Shane finally had everything he ever wanted, Ilya would steal it from him. And he had the nagging suspicion that Shane would let it be stolen. That he would give it away. And Ilya would hate himself for it. So much.
Fuck.

Thankfully, the 2025 Ottawa summer hockey camp of the Irina Foundation, despite being the trigger to his current – not meltdown, nothing that dramatic, but… *episode*, was also a very busy time, so he didn't really have the opportunity to wallow in self-pity. And it's not like it was the first time this was weighing on him. He was used to it, He could deal with it.

"Hmm, you awake already?"

He smiled to his adorable husband on the bed next to him, who was the perfect replica of a sleepy cat struggling to wake up, blinking slowly. But of course, he had immediately noticed that Ilya was wide awake.

"Yeah, I need to go to the bathroom but you were too cute, you held me back." It was not a lie. He did need to go to the bathroom, and his husband's cuteness was to die for.

"Well, don't let me held you up longer." Shane smiled, already bracing to get up and start his very busy day. Suddenly, the thought of Shane leaving the bed became unbearable, and Ilya closed his arms around him, burying his nose in his husband's neck. Shane smiled and hugged him back tightly, kissing the top of his head.

"Only three days left, and then we are going to the cottage and we can cuddle in bed all day long. I can't wait." Shane said, longing clear in his voice.

"Same." Ilya hoped that being muffled by Shane's neck would make it less obvious that his voice was breaking. He took a deep breath, got up and went to the bathroom, locking the door behind him.

Ok. Get it together, Rozanov.

This was literally his dream life. He was married to the love of his life, out and proud, a Canadian citizen, in a wonderful and accepting team (the gayest team in the NHL!), and he had won three Stanley cups, including two with his husband at his side. He was working with an incredible group of people (and Hayden) to teach some hockey to good kids and raise money for the foundation named after his mother.

Stop being a little bitch and go enjoy your fucking great life, Rozanov.

The day at the camp went great. He even ended up getting persuaded to make a demonstration of his signature move, the Rozanov, to a group of starry-eyed children. A fucking good day, if you asked him.

By the end of the next one, he couldn't pretend that everything was fine anymore. He was watching the hours pass, and the day inexorably morph into another. The last day of camp. After this day, when they would all have said their goodbyes and when the coaches would have had a night out together after the kids had left, there would only be Shane and him, at the cottage. Alone together.

It was around noon the last day that the dread looming in his stomach took the shape of this precise thought. It was like someone had poured a bucket of ice on his head.
The cottage had always been his happy place. Spending time alone with Shane had always been the thing he wanted the most in the whole world. Even that very first time, when he had been terrified, when their feelings were still half unsaid, when getting caught would have been the worst thing that could happen to them, he had never dreaded it. That very first time, he was terrified by this leap into the unknown, and he *couldn't wait*. And now, he was there, dreading this time alone with the person he would kill and die for in a heartbeat.

What the fuck was wrong with him. How could he be so selfish, how could he spit like that on Shane's love and devotion? Shane had given him everything, had made him his husband, was loving him despite everything, and he was dreading time with him?
What a fucking disgrace.

He knew, distantly, that it was the depression talking, that his brain was playing tricks on him. It didn't make him hate himself any less. His stupid fucking broken brain. That made him stupidly contemplate how nice it would be if something happened to him. He would never take his own life, he would never do that to Shane, but an accident… an accident wouldn't be his fault. And then he hated himself some more for wishing that when he knew that Shane would probably never recover.

You're not allowed to die, Ilya. Not before I do.

Shane had said these words, years ago, with tears in his voice, and he knew they were still true.

"Ilya, come with me."

Shane's voice startled him, and he realised that he had zoned out next to the rink. And his cheeks were damp. Fuck.

"Ilya, I'm here for you, I love you. I know you won't want the others to see you like that, so follow me, alright? Everyone is busy, nobody noticed. And I don't care if they do, but I think

you would, so trust me, ok?"

There was so much of Yuna Hollander in Shane "crisis mode" voice that Ilya almost burst into tears, but instead, he followed his husband's lead to an empty locker room that Shane locked behind them. A second later, Ilya was sobbing on his shirt. Shane held him tight, not asking him any question, not even offering him a tissue to save his shirt. He just held him, kissing the top of his head tenderly, which only made Ilya cry harder. When the sobs finally receded, Shane tilted his head, looking at him, his eyes shining with tears he was fighting very hard to held.

"Oh, Ilya, my love."

"Sorry, I'm so sorry, Shane, I'm…"

"Ilya, stop. Don't be sorry."

"But you…" he gestured at Shane's eyes.

"It breaks my heart to see you like that, and as much as I want to support you right now, I can't help it. But it's ok, you did nothing wrong, and I'm here with you. We are going to get through this, ok? Whatever it is, we are going to get through it together."

"I'm sorry, it's just… my stupid brain."

"Hey, your brain is beautiful, don't call it stupid. It's just sad sometimes but it deserves to be loved and cherished. Did you talk to Galina about… Whatever's going on right now? It… didn't start today, did it?" Shane was speaking so carefully, reminiscent of someone approaching a wounded animal.

"No." No, I didn't speak to Galina. No, it didn't start today. No, I'm not sure I want to know how long you've worried about me, wondering if you should say something.

"Listen, here is what I suggest: let's go home, and then we can either talk about it, or you text Galina to ask if she can get you on her schedule quickly. Either way, I'll be with you, except if you want me to leave." The last part was said with a slight quaver in his voice, but Shane's face was sporting a determined look, as if "dealing with Ilya's depressive episode" was a challenge of the same kind as "winning the Stanley cup" or "finding the perfect Christmas gift for Yuna." God, Ilya loved him so much.

"But, we can't go home, the camp, it's the last day…"

The last day of camp always ended with a showmatch, where each coach was leading a team and all the families of the kids were coming to see their children on the ice and meet the superstars of the coaching team.

"Ilya, you are my husband, and you need me. Mom will tell them we had an emergency, and the other coaches will take care of the kids and the showmatch."

"What emergency? They will ask…" Not the kids, of course, but the other coaches. Wyatt, Hayden… Ryan was probably too polite, but…

“We can tell them Anya gave us a scare. We’ll think of something. Ilya, it doesn’t matter. You matter, ok? Only you.” Slowly, reverently, Shane kissed his lips, cradling his face. “Ilya, moya lyubov, my love, mon amour. Let’s go home, ok?”

Thankfully, they were able to get to their car without anyone seeing them, and the drive home was only fifteen minutes, Shane holding Ilya’s hand the whole way.

Once home, sat with Shane on the couch, and a bit calmer, Ilya realized he still didn’t want to talk to Shane about it. He still felt cornered, his stupid brain having taken the choice off his hands. He wanted to curl up on the bed, put the cover over himself and never go out again. And Shane was so infuriatingly *perfect*, he was doing all the right things, and Ilya was a fucking monster for being annoyed at that.

“Ilya? Do you want to write to Galina?”

“I don’t think she can help,” he finally said, his voice raspy.

“Ok, and… can I? Help?”

Ilya didn’t say anything, and Shane took a deep breath.

“Listen Ilya, I feel like there is something you’re not telling me. I’ve felt like this for a few months, and maybe I should have brought it up, but you were taking your meds and going to therapy and I figured you would tell me in your own time, but then it’s making you miserable and I don’t want to overstep or anything but I’m your husband and I really want to help you through this and it’s really hard, I mean, I know it’s harder for you, but I hate to see you like this, and, sorry, I’m rambling, but, er, please talk to me?”

Again, like a nightmarish loop, Ilya felt awful for making his good, perfect husband panic over him. But he was better than this. He had been in therapy for years. He was capable of breaking this loop. He repeated this to himself like a mantra, and tried to go through the steps. Deep breaths. You’re not a horrible person. You’re a human being with qualities and flaws. Shane loves you, and you love Shane. Your mom is with you, and she wants you happy. Ilya took his crucifix in his hand, feeling the little bumps on the metal. *You keep telling me how wonderful he is, that I would have loved him. You should trust him, Ilya.* He shuddered.

“Ok, I’ll… I’ll try. First thing, I’m sorry.” Shane opened his mouth, but Ilya interrupted. “No, no, don’t say I have nothing to apologize for. First of all, it’s ridiculous thing to say when you’re the very Canadian Shane Hollander, and also I am really sorry. I should have talked to you, to Galina. I know why I didn’t, but it was egoistic, wait, no, selfish, ugh.” Ilya’s English

was more than fluent by now, but when he was emotional, he tended to forget words and make frustratingly dumb mistakes again. Shane squeezed his hand in a silent show of support. Ilya took a deep breath, the next sentence feeling like a free fall.

“Lately I’ve been thinking about… Our future plans. Playing hockey until we are older than Scott Hunter, beating rookies’ asses in our forties, you know?”

“Yeah?”

“Well I… I don’t think I want that anymore. But hockey is your whole life, and we always said we would retire together, and…”

“Hm, if I remembered correctly, you said I would retire eight years before you because I got very bad at hockey.”

Ilya let out a wet chuckle.

“Did I say that? It does sound like me.”

“So, tell me more. You know I just want you to be happy, right? If you want to be a stay-at-home husband while you watch me win more Stanley cups, I’ll still have the hottest spouse of any NHL player, so, nothing changes much for me.” Shane joked, trying to diffuse the tension radiating from Ilya. But Ilya didn’t smile.

“I don’t want to be a stay-at-home husband. I want to be a stay-at-home dad.” Shane opened his mouth, but now that Ilya had started, the words kept coming. “I didn’t want to tell you, because we always said we would wait until we are retired, and you want to play for a long time and you love hockey, but I keep thinking about my dad, and my mom, and that they both had illnesses that killed them before their time, and what if we have children after we are forty and I start losing my mind when they are only teenagers, or young adults, and I can’t see my grandchildren? And it won’t be easy for us to have children, and I just don’t want to be 60 when my kid is 15, you know? And when we are at camp, it’s harder, because we are with all the kids, and I just, I just want to have kids. With you. Our kids. And it’s the worst cause I know you don’t want that now and now I’m forcing that on you and I…” his sentence ended in sobs, once again valiantly absorbed by Shane’s poor shirt.

“Ilya, my love, it’s normal to talk about these things in relationships. Nothing is set in stone, and you should talk to me when you feel like that. I’m not going to say I’m not surprised, but also, I see you with kids at camp, you know? So it’s not like, coming out of nowhere.”

Shane kissed him, his mouth fervent and tender on Ilya’s, his hand petting his hair. The silent ‘I love you’ couldn’t have been louder if Shane had screamed. Shane gently moved Ilya until his head was on Shane’s torso, and kept petting his hair, not rushing him to talk. Ilya knew that in theory, now that the cat was out of the bag, he could (should?) let Shane digest it and have the actual conversation in a few days. But he felt frantic, after all this time repressing it, he wanted to give options, ideas, to show Shane that he wasn’t putting his world upside done without a plan. So he said:

“I could… I could be Jackie?”

“Sorry love, what?”

“Like… Jackie. You know.”

“Yes, I know who Jackie is, but I don’t think that you’re planning to divorce me and marry Hayden instead, so I’ll need a bit more than that.”

“You could still play, like Hayden. And we would have children, like Hayden and Jackie. And we would raise them together, and I would take care of them when you’re on the road.”

“Oh.” Then. “Yeah, that… that makes a lot of sense. Most hockey players families work like that.”

“And, when the child is a bit grown, or if we adopt… I don’t know the word, not a baby anymore.”

“A toddler?”

“Yes, that. Well, we could travel with you to support you. Our child will be the cutest child in the world in their Hollander-Rozanov little jersey.”

“Yeah, that does sound really cute.”

Ilya knew his husband. He knew that this wasn’t his “excited” voice. It was his “I want to be happy about it, but I have huge doubts”, just like when Ilya had told him he had adopted Anya. Shane had loved Anya immediately, obviously, but right now this tone meant that he had a hundred objections that he was not voicing because he didn’t want to hurt Ilya. Ilya carefully (and mournfully) raised from his husband’s chest to sit next to him and look him in the eye.

“What’s wrong? I know I sound like a hypocrite, but you need to tell me what you really think. We need to find something that works for both of us. Together.”

“I… I don’t know. It’s a great plan, I’ve always wanted to play hockey for as long as I could, and if your own priorities have shifted it makes sense for you to be a stay-at-home dad. But… It doesn’t *feel* right.”

Ilya’s heart filled with dread, but his voice didn’t break when he asked.

“Having children doesn’t feel right?”

“Oh, god, no, Ilya, I want to have children with you.” Shane answered immediately, sounding horrified. “I… wow, I don’t think I realised how much I wanted that before you asked if I didn’t. Fuck, that’s a lot. I want it very much. Wow.”

Ilya didn’t realise he was crying again before Shane caught one of his tears with the tip of his fingers.

“I’m fine, I’m just…”

“I know. I’m happy too.”

“But, if you want children, then…” You couldn’t blame Ilya for getting side-tracked, okay. He had had a very draining day. Week. Month. Year. Anyway. He suddenly remembered that his husband hadn’t seemed really on board with the whole ‘let’s have children’ thing five minutes ago.

“I… I don’t think I want to play while you take care of the kids. I know the others do it but… I don’t think I could go away and leave the baby, or toddler, or whatever. Even when I’m home, I would have practise, workout, games… I would never be there.”

“But then it’s the same issue. You want us both to raise children when we retire and I…”

“Ilya. Sweetheart, listen to me. I wanted to play hockey because hockey was my whole life. This hasn’t been true for a long time. And yes, I love hockey, but I don’t see a world where I will regret retiring if the alternative is raising our children with you. And we can keep doing the camps, and maybe after a few years we can do more of them, we can still play hockey in other ways. If we want it. We have one more year on our contracts, we’ll tell Farah to not negotiate any extension, and we will research the best way for us to have kids. And then we will retire together, and raise the most wonderful family.”

“Shane, you say that now, but… What if you hate it? What if you resent me for it?”

“I don’t think it will happen. But plans can change. If I realise that I’d rather… Be the Hayden to your Jackie…”

“Gross”

“Then I can always come back to hockey? I don’t know if you’ve heard, but I’m quite good at it, I’m sure someone would hire me.”

“Yeah, you’re not half-bad, being the husband of the best hockey player in the world must have rubbed off on you.”

Shane laughed and threw a cushion at Ilya.

The storm had passed, and the love was overflowing. Ilya looked at his husband, and wanted nothing much than teleport to the cottage with him to show him how much he loved him, on every piece of furniture. Speaking of which…

“I can think of something else I’d like to rub on myself right now…”

“Oh really?” Ilya put his knees on each side of Shane’s thighs, trapping him on the couch. “Good thing we decided to have children, we need to try a lot now.”

“Ilya!”

“I’m just saying, I won’t stop until I get you pregnant.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Shane said, unable to hide his laughter.

“Need to try until it works,” Ilya said, very serious, until his eyes crossed Shane’s and he burst out laughing.

End Notes

Kudos and comments make my days! Despite having watched the show twice and read the hollanov books twice too, I'm not very sure of my characterisation of them, so constructive criticism is welcome (and so are comments about typos/grammar mistakes, my beta and I are not native speakers).
I have a few other ideas in mind that I hope to make into fics.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!