lost color in my face

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/77500956.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV), Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, Yuna Hollander
Additional Tags:	Depression, References to Depression, Medication, Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander, Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov, Anxious Shane Hollander, POV Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov Needs A Hug, Depressed Ilya Rozanov, Yuna is sort of there, give them both hugs, Sad, Light Angst, Angst and Feels, Mental Health Issues
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-11 Words: 1,446 Chapters: 1/1

lost color in my face

by Pale_Blue

Summary

"Do not worry," Ilya breathed against his lips.

As if Shane had a choice in the matter. As if worry hadn't kept Shane awake past midnight for weeks, as if he wasn't scared to leave the house for too long in case Ilya did something stupid in his absence. He'd promised he wouldn't. Several times over. Shane wanted to believe him, he did, but the worse Ilya's depression got the more hollow the promise felt.

"I always worry about you," Shane said softly, pushing Ilya's hair back from his forehead.

Notes

title from I Told You Things by Gracie Abrams

See the end of the work for more notes

Shane watched Ilya laugh with his mom and it almost broke his heart.

The performance Ilya was giving was convincing in many ways. His eyes were crinkled the way they always were when he laughed, his hair was too long and hanging in his eyes. Clean clothes, broad hand gestures. Shane knew it would fool his mom, for all that she loved Ilya like a second son.

It wasn't enough for Shane though.

Mere hours ago, they'd argued about medication because Ilya hadn't wanted to take them. Because he said they made him feel like he wasn't in his body. Heated words over coffee going cold, silence on the drive over, Ilya finally taking them just to end the argument.

Now Ilya was giving it his all to show everything was good and fine.

Shane put the plates down harder than necessary on the table. Wanted to slam them down harder still, until cracks split the expensive porcelain.

"Shane!" Ilya called from the kitchen. "Come look at this photo of neighbour's dog."

Of course they were looking at dog photos.

Shane dropped the cutlery onto the table with a discordant clatter, only just resisting the urge to throw a fork at the wall. He took a deep breath, then made his way to the kitchen. To where his boyfriend was laughing like he hadn't spent the past two days unable to get out of bed, like Shane hadn't spent the night trawling medical journals for ways to help.

The photo Yuna was showing Ilya was on her phone. Shane just could make out the pink sweater that their neighbours had insisted their Maltese wear every winter for as long as Shane had been alive. He was pretty sure he'd told Ilya about it before.

"She is so cute," Ilya cooed, snatching the phone from Yuna and bringing it up close to his face to examine it.

"She is," Yuna said. "You and Shane should really get a pet."

"Is not bad idea," Ilya mused. "Shane?"

Shane scowled at him. Between their hockey careers and the fact they technically didn't even live together, a dog was impossible. Ilya knew that.

"No chance."

Ilya pouted at him and his eyes were so blank and dead that it scared Shane to look into them. It was like he wasn't even there. Like he'd dragged his boyfriend's corpse to his mom's house for lunch.

"I need to finish the table," Shane mumbled, fingers twisting his sleeves into knots.

The cutlery was in a heap where he'd left it and he slowly separated the knives and forks. He could feel a tension headache starting behind his eyes, stabbing and impatient. He'd left the ibuprofen in the car.

"Let me help," Ilya said, reaching across the grab the forks from where Shane had piled them. Shane hadn't heard him come in.

Now it was just them again, temporarily alone, the show was over. Ilya wasn't pretending to laugh anymore. His movements were slow, too slow, like it took a monumental effort to move at all. Like each fork weighed a ton.

"Are you ok?" he asked quietly, almost in a whisper. "We can go home again if it's too much."

Ilya shook his head, not meeting Shane's eyes and staring intently down at the table between them.

"Is okay," he whispered. "I will manage."

Shane went around the table and pulled Ilya's face gently towards him, kissed him softly on lips that tasted like peppermint chewing gum. Ilya brought his hand up to rest on the back of Shane's head, to run his fingers through the shorter strands of hair there. Shane fought not to melt into it, not to greedily grasp the smallest intimacy with both hands.

"Do not worry," Ilya breathed against his lips.

As if Shane had a choice in the matter. As if worry hadn't kept Shane awake past midnight for weeks, as if he wasn't scared to leave the house for too long in case Ilya did something stupid in his absence. He'd promised he wouldn't. Several times over. Shane wanted to believe him, he did, but the worse Ilya's depression got the more hollow the promise felt.

"I always worry about you," Shane said softly, pushing Ilya's hair back from his forehead.

Ilya sighed heavily.

"I wish it was not like this," he said emotionlessly.

"I know," Shane whispered, pulling him around so that he could hug him, could bury his face in the soft sweater he'd decided to wear and inhale him in. Ilya's clothes smelled faintly like smoke. When it got bad, he found it harder to resist cigarettes. Shane hadn't had the heart to chastise him for it, even when he found the butts out by the backdoor.

He'd suggested going to his parents for lunch because he thought it might give Ilya something to look forward to. Now, all he could think was that it had been too much, too soon.

Shane could hear his mom opening the oven, humming to herself as she did so. The smell of roasted vegetables came wafting into the dining room. Shane wondered if Ilya would manage to eat any of them or if he would push things around his plate again.

“I love you,” Ilya said into his hair.

Shane swallowed against his chest, allowed the despair to rest around his face briefly in the unseen moment. Ilya was trying, he knew that. Of course he knew that. He watched him struggle and struggle and struggle and it felt so fucking unfair. Ilya fought so hard, did all the things he’d been assured would help, only to fall anyway.

“Love you too,” Shane said, and he meant it so much it made his lungs ache.

Then he reluctantly pulled back, so he could look into Ilya’s eyes.

“If it’s too much, we go. Ok?”

Ilya exhaled hard and scrubbed a hand over his face. There were bags under his eyes, heavy as bruises.

“Yes, okay,” he agreed. “But is fine. Really. You do not see your parents enough anymore.”

Then he made his way back into the kitchen, clapping his hands together like he couldn’t wait to eat. Like he hadn’t struggled to even finish half a bagel with butter at breakfast. Like Shane hadn’t watched him chew every bite fifty times with his heart in his throat.

Ilya was right though.

Shane was spending less time with his parents than he ever had. Between hockey, his team, and Ilya, there simply weren’t enough hours in the day anymore. Then there were the preparations for the summer camps for the Irina Foundation. So much more organisation than anyone realised went into those. Then there were all the messages he hadn’t answered, from his parents, his grandparents, Rose.

He listened to the low murmur of conversation from the kitchen for a few seconds, then made his way over to the kitchen again. Watched Ilya and his mom stab forks into the potatoes to check they were done and tried to ignore the forced note in Ilya’s otherwise bright smiles.

Ilya had promised that one day he would tell Shane’s parents. About the depression, and how his mother had died. About the weight that kept him in bed for days at a time and wouldn’t let him go.

But he didn’t want to yet. And Shane had no choice but to respect that. It wasn’t his pain to share. Not really.

That didn’t mean he enjoyed watching Ilya act like everything was fine, because Shane knew that the fallout later would be like dull punches to the stomach. Ilya silent in the car, Shane chewing through his bottom lip with concern. Ilya’s deadened eyes in the bathroom mirror while they brushed their teeth, washed out features under the too-bright lights. They’d danced the dance a hundred times and it never stopped hurting.

“Shane told me in car that he is very hungry,” Ilya said to Yuna, moving things out of the way so she could put the oven tray down on the stove.

Shane forced a smile onto his face. It felt fake.

“Yeah,” he said hollowly. “Been looking forward to this all day.”

He allowed his mom to hand him a bowl of fresh salad with his preferred dressing to bring to the table. Watched Ilya fuss about the wine that he shouldn’t have been drinking with his meds. Let his mom pull him into a one-armed hug while Ilya carefully poured water into all of their glasses.

And when they finally sat down, Shane pulled Ilya’s cold hand into his, running his fingers over the soft skin between his knuckles.

It never felt like enough.

End Notes

thank you so much for reading!

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