

blessed be the boys time can't capture

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blessed be the boys time can't capture

by [justhockey](#)

Summary

They had so many years of love and joy, so many tender, vulnerable moments that they were never allowed to capture - never allowed to keep.

“We don’t have any pictures together, Ilya,” Shane repeats, his voice frantic and desperate and almost pleading. “We’ve loved each other for a decade and all we have to show for it is-“

“-*us*, Shane. We have *us* to show for it. Our life, our love, our home that we have built together.”

Notes

Title from *The Kids Aren't Alright* by Fall Out Boy.

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

As Ilya slowly begins to wake, he's overcome with a sense of peace that he's never really been accustomed to before. A feeling he has always reached for, grazed his fingertips against, but never quite been able to grab hold of.

There's a stillness in the house, and in the room, and in Ilya's bones.

Sunlight is just starting to filter through the blinds and bathe the bedroom in a warm glow. He has nowhere to rush off to since New York knocked Ottawa out of the playoffs two days ago, and - most importantly of all - Shane is still sleeping in his arms.

He's lay on his side facing Ilya, their faces so close together that his breath is hot against Ilya's lips. The tips of his fingers are hooked beneath Ilya's boxers, curling around his hip to keep him close even in sleep. His leg is tucked firmly between Ilya's, like an octopus who's latched onto Ilya and doesn't ever plan on letting go.

At this point, Ilya can't tell where he ends and Shane begins.

He wouldn't have it any other way.

Shane looks so soft, so calm, that it makes Ilya's heart ache just a little bit. The perpetual worry line between his eyebrows is smoothed out in sleep, and the tension he's been carrying since they were outed - since he was *born*, probably - has seeped out of him and melted into the mattress. It makes him look younger, more vulnerable, like the kid he was when Ilya first met him.

And that makes Ilya's heart ache a little bit too, for all the time that has passed and the things that have changed and for the terrified kids they used to be.

Ilya can't help himself. He moves his arm from where it's draped over Shane's waist, and reaches his hand up to brush a lock of Shane's hair off his forehead. Then, slowly and carefully, he trails his finger down his nose. He moves to his cheeks next, tracing his constellation of freckles even though he's already memorised the placement of all of them; they're what first made Ilya fall, after all. Big brown eyes, a smile Ilya wanted to kiss, and freckles that made him dizzy with desire.

And even though so much has changed between then and now, those three things have always remained.

Shane has always been the most beautiful thing Ilya has ever seen - it was true when they were eighteen, and it's still true now, over a decade later.

Shane begins to stir under Ilya's familiar touch, a small smile gracing his lips before he even fully awakens. He leans into Ilya's hand, makes a quiet, sleepy murmur, and then his eyes are blinking open and locking onto Ilya's.

He hums softly. "Mornin'."

"Good morning solnyshko," Ilya whispers in reply.

That gets a proper smile out of Shane, and he's quickly tilting his chin upwards in search of a kiss. Ilya isn't one to deny his fiancé anything so he touches their lips together, morning breath and all. Shane hums again as they pull apart, and Ilya's brushes their noses together one, two, three times.

"How did you sleep?" Ilya asks.

"Good. Great actually. Did you?"

Shane's fingers shift from where they were tucked inside Ilya's underwear, and he trails his fingers up along Ilya's ribs and around to the middle of his back. He presses his palm flat against Ilya's skin, his thumb rubbing back and forth as he watches Ilya and waits for his answer.

"Better than I have in months," Ilya tells him honestly.

It earns him a smile and another kiss from Shane. "Good. You deserve it."

He's not so sure about *deserve* but, thanks to Shane, he's started to understand that he doesn't have to grind for every single good thing in his life. Softness, happiness, love - they aren't things he needs to *earn*, they're things Shane offers to him freely. Willingly. Because he loves Ilya and Ilya loves him right back.

Because Shane chose him above everything. Even hockey.

"We can do nothing all day," Ilya points out, and it's sort of a revelation when they're so used to having no time to spare.

"We can finish watching *Lord of the Rings*," Shane suggests.

"Or we could finish putting up that bookcase in the office."

"You threw out the instructions," Shane grumbles, lightly scratching Ilya's back.

Ilya scoffs, waving his hand dismissively. "Don't need instructions," he argues, even though he definitely does.

Shane snorts out the sweetest little laugh, then closes the distance between them to kiss Ilya again. Ilya sighs, tightening his hold on Shane just a fraction as he revels in this...a lazy morning in bed with the love of his life. No obligations to tend to - except Anya, who will no doubt start whining soon enough - no games to play, no need to travel hundreds of miles away from each other.

No need to hide, either, now that the whole world knows about them.

"We could go to the grocery store," Shane says, so quietly Ilya has to strain to hear him.

Ilya's breath gets lodged in his throat as he chokes out a garbled, "Yeah?"

They haven't really ventured out in public together since Hayden's video outed them. It was just too much, right at the beginning, when the shock of it all was still brand new and every single glance from a stranger had them both bracing for impact. And then with the playoffs, and all the rumours that came with Shane tripping in overtime, it simply hadn't felt worth it.

The drama of it all would have been too big of a distraction while Ilya and the Cens were still in contention for the cup.

But now...now there's no need to stay hidden.

Now, if they wanted to, they could go absolutely anywhere. On vacation to a fancy hotel, or to the movie theatre, or shopping along Rideau Street. They could go to the goddamn grocery store and hold hands while they browsed, and Ilya could kiss his boyfriend in public. The ground wouldn't give way beneath them, the sun wouldn't burn out, the world wouldn't end.

It feels like a whole other universe has suddenly opened up to them - one they could have only ever dreamed of before now.

Shane nods his head.

"Yeah. We're out of rice, and that strawberry protein powder you like."

Ilya can't help the smile that stretches across his face, and it only gets bigger when Shane smiles back at him, all teeth and freckles and shining eyes.

"Okay, sweetheart. We'll go to grocery store."

"Just give me five more minutes," Shane says.

And then he shuffles forward, burying his face in Ilya's neck and peppering him with kisses that make Ilya laugh, and whine, and dig his fingers into Shane's hips.

It's definitely more than five minutes that they spend lying there, holding and kissing and just breathing each other in. A luxury they've been denied for far, *far* too long. It's only the buzz of Shane's phone on the nightstand that sees him drawing away from Ilya. He rolls onto his back and grunts as he reaches for his phone, and then Ilya watches the serene expression on his fiancé's face sharpen into something a little more apprehensive.

Ilya props himself up on his elbow, then reaches a hand out to rest it on Shane's bare stomach. He wants - no, *needs* - to be touching him.

"Moya lyubov, what is it?"

"Brophy just DM'd me."

Ilya frowns. His flicks back through his memories like a rolodex, trying to think of a single reason why Mike Brophy - the giant defenseman from New Jersey - would be contacting Shane. He's fairly certain the only time they've ever even interacted off the ice was at the all-star game back in, what - 2017?

“What does he want?” Ilya asks.

“I don’t know, I don’t want to open it.”

“Shane...”

“What if it’s bad?” He asks, his doe eyes all sad as he bites his bottom lip.

Ilya moves his hand up Shane’s chest to take hold of his chin, then uses his thumb to pull his lip out from between his teeth. He dips down to kiss it softly. Feels his heart swell as Shane melts beneath his touch.

“What if it’s good?” Ilya challenges.

Shane huffs, rolls his eyes at Ilya, but then picks up his phone to open the instagram DM.

He’s silent for a moment, and then his breath hitches, and suddenly his eyes are filling with tears. Ilya is instantly on alert, ready to defend or attack or burn the whole fucking world down if it would make Shane feel better - if it would chase away the wave of emotion that has clearly just slammed into him. He doesn’t care how big Brophy is, doesn’t care what it would cost him, Ilya will obliterate him.

But then Shane is looking at Ilya and the glint in his eyes...it’s not sad, exactly. It’s heavy, nostalgic maybe, but he isn’t devastated. He passes his phone to Ilya without saying a word, and Ilya takes it with steady hands and a racing heart.

The message just says *thought you might want this* and underneath it is...

Oh.

Oh my god.

It’s a picture. One of Ilya and Shane. And it’s such a rare thing - photographic evidence of the two of them together - that Ilya can hardly believe what he’s looking at. He recognises it instantly, though. He remembers the moment with such startling clarity that looking at the picture is like being transported back there all over again.

Tampa Bay. 2017. The All-Star Game.

He remembers the day by the pool, when he’d climbed out of it and shaken his head over Shane, flinging water droplets all over him. The picture is of the moment right afterwards, when Ilya had - in a moment of wild, reckless abandon - grabbed hold of Shane in something almost like a hug. His hands are resting on Shane’s shoulders, and Shane’s are on his waist from where he was getting ready to push Ilya away but hadn’t quite managed to yet.

In the picture Shane is looking up at Ilya with a mixture of shock and joy on his face, like he’s both terrified and exhilarated by Ilya’s audacious move. And Ilya, well. Ilya is looking at Shane with an overwhelming, glaringly obvious amount of affection.

His face is an open book, and every chapter is dedicated to Shane.

It's...beautiful. That's the only word Ilya can think of - in Russian and in English - to describe it. Absolutely fucking beautiful.

He briefly wonders if, back then, Brophy had seen what Ilya sees. If he had snapped the picture intending for it to be a joke - something he could post on social media to show Shane and Ilya getting along - but had refrained from doing so when he looked more closely at it. When he saw the way they looked at each other, the way they *touched* each other, and realised they were...*something*.

He wants to know why he never did anything with it, why he never showed anyone else. He also kind of wonders why Brophy kept the picture all this time, but he can't help but be thankful for it all the same.

"Wow," Ilya says, because he's kind of at a loss for words.

"Yeah."

Ilya looks Shane up and down, perusing him with an intense gaze. "You have gotten old," Ilya teases.

Shane guffaws, shoving at Ilya until he collapses back on the bed. He then props himself up on his elbow, hovering over Ilya with a devious gleam in his eyes.

"You're such an asshole," Shane says, but he's grinning so wide that the sentiment is kind of lost.

"What? Is true! You looked so young then. So handsome," Ilya says, continuing to taunt Shane just to see the way his cheeks flush and his eyes light up when they spar like this.

"Oh I'm not handsome enough for you, now?" Shane asks. "You weren't saying that last night when you-"

Ilya grabs Shane around the back of his head, pulling him down to silence him with a kiss. It's all tongue and teeth and heavy breathing until Shane giggles, and then so does Ilya, and they collapse in a heap as they laugh, and trade kisses, and touch and touch and touch each other.

"Can I see it again?" Ilya asks.

"Hm?"

"The picture. I want to see again."

It's one of the only pictures that exists of them. That's the first thing Ilya thought when he saw it.

They both sit up in bed, and then Shane offers Ilya the phone. Instead of taking it from him he just wraps his hand around Shane's, pulling it closer to his face to get another look. It makes Ilya's chest squeeze painfully to see something from so long ago - makes him remember how much time they missed, how much was lost, how much they had to hide.

They had so many years of love and joy, so many tender, vulnerable moments that they were never allowed to capture - never allowed to keep.

Ilya and Shane fell in love through fleeting moments and secret meetings and text messages they always had to delete. So pictures like this, moments frozen in time from when they were younger - before they learned how to be brave - are almost impossible to come by. It feels like discovering buried treasure.

They have those handful of pictures Ilya managed to track down from their first ever CCM shoot where everything changed. They also have the few he had snapped of them when they were presenting at the NHL awards in Vegas. They're objectively bad. The lights are blinding and completely wash them out, and Shane has a kind of deer-in-the-headlights expression in most of them, but Ilya could never bear to let them go.

He'd kept them hidden for years, not wanting to let go of the only proof that what they had was real. That *they* were real.

Other than that, there's nothing.

Even the countless number of bleary-eyed selfies they'd sent to each other whilst hundreds of miles apart - small, secret offerings that had helped them survive the distance - all had to be deleted. It would sting every single time, like death by a thousand tiny cuts that no one else could see.

It hurts a little, that one day in the future, when they're old and their children have children, they won't have reminders of what the start of their love story looked like.

But they do have *this*.

"I don't think I've ever seen a picture of us like this together," Shane says, and though his voice is quiet Ilya can hear the weight in it. The wistfulness.

This hasn't gone unnoticed by Shane either.

"We were never allowed to be like this where others could see us," Ilya points out.

Shane winces, his eyes squeezing shut tightly like he's trying to block the truth out. Like he doesn't want to remember what it cost them to keep their lives a secret. Ilya takes his hand and tangles their fingers together, pulling them up to press kisses to each one of Shane's knuckles. Shane lets out a sigh, tilting sideways until his head drops onto Ilya's shoulder.

"I'm sorry."

Ilya shakes his head, pressing kiss after kiss to Shane's hair. "No. No need to apologise, Shane. Not ever, please."

"We don't have any pictures together," Shane whispers. "Like, none, except for the photo shoot, and Vegas, and...this."

"Was too dangerous," Ilya reminds him. "Too big of a risk."

Shane sighs again, long and slow and deep. He shifts until he's sitting cross-legged, facing him, with both of his knees resting on top of Ilya's thigh. Ilya places his hand on Shane's leg, rubbing at the thick, strong muscles there, and Shane covers it with his own.

"You're worth it, though, Ilya. I should have been, I don't know, braver? Ready sooner? I should--"

"-stop, Shane, stop," Ilya interrupts, his heart close to breaking. "I was scared too. I was hiding too."

"We don't have any pictures together, Ilya," Shane repeats, his voice frantic and desperate and almost pleading. "We've loved each other for a decade and all we have to show for it is--"

"-us, Shane. We have *us* to show for it. Our life, our love, our home that we have built together."

Ilya points between the two of them and then gestures around the room wildly. At their half-open closet door where their clothes are all mixed together, and the plastic rings on the chest of drawers, and the real ones on the chains around their necks. At Ilya's heap of clothes that he'd left on the floor when they fell into bed together last night, and the pile of Shane's folded neatly on the chair in the corner of the room. At the teeth marks on Ilya's pec, and the hickeys on Shane's chest.

Their dog is sleeping downstairs. Shane's family - and Ilya's by extension - are fifteen minutes away, with both Shane and Ilya's draft pictures on the wall in the hallway. Ilya now has Hayden Pike's number saved in his phone.

"We have so much love, Shane. *So much*," Ilya says. "It's everywhere, all around us. And yes, it is sad we don't have pictures from before. From when we were young and still finding ourselves..."

Shane glances down and away, but Ilya won't let him. He won't let him hide anymore, especially not from Ilya. He takes Shane's chin between his finger and thumb, tilting his face up so he can look into his fiancé's beautiful eyes.

"But we have time, moya lyubov," Ilya promises him. "We have the rest of our lives to take pictures, to put them all over our home. To show the whole world what we have always known: that we belong together."

Shane whines, and then he's surging forward and capturing Ilya's mouth in a kiss. He kicks off the cover that's tangled around his legs so he can climb into Ilya's lap, straddling him with his knees on either side of Ilya's hips. Ilya winds one arm around Shane's waist to hold him close, and with the other he reaches up to tug on the chain around Shane's neck - the one that's holding his engagement ring.

Suddenly, desperately, Ilya wants it on Shane's finger. He wants to wear his own on his finger, too. There's no reason to keep them tucked under their t-shirts or jerseys anymore, no reason to keep it a secret when they're going to spend the rest of their lives loving each other loudly. Openly. Proudly.

Ilya pulls back, much to Shane's dismay, who tries to kiss him again and again, like he's starving for it. Like Ilya didn't fuck him through the mattress last night, so slow and deep and torturous that he made Shane come three times before they were done.

"Baby," Ilya says. "Want you to wear this now, please."

He holds the ring between his fingers, tugs on it so Shane can feel the pull around his neck. He sees the exact moment Shane realises what he means - the way his pupils dilate until his eyes look black, the way his breath stutters, and the way his cheeks flush that devastating shade of pink that Ilya wants to trace with his tongue.

Shane nods so quickly he looks like one of those bobble heads, and then he's leaning away from Ilya so he can reach around to the back of his neck to unfasten the chain.

"You too," Shane insists. "You have to wear it too."

So there, with Shane sitting on Ilya's lap as the early morning sun pours through the blinds in their bedroom, they slide their rings onto their fingers.

Ilya puts Shane's on him slowly, at first watching the way *Shane* watches it slot into place, but then having to look down himself to see the way his ring fits so perfectly on Shane's finger. Shane is the opposite. He fumbles, almost dropping the ring into the tangle of bedsheets as he rushes to get it on Ilya's hand. He slips it into position and for a moment he just stares, holding Ilya's hand like he can't quite believe what he's seeing. Like he's forgotten how to let go.

And Ilya gets it, he really does.

This is a moment that often felt like it would never arrive. A moment that felt so impossible, between hockey, and expectations, and the weight of the world placed on both of their shoulders. It's exhilarating, unbelievable, *breathtaking*, that they get to sit here wearing each other's rings.

"I love you," Shane whispers, with tears of joy in his eyes. "My fiancé."

Ilya grins, brushes away the tear that rolls down Shane's cheek, and says, "I love you too, sweetheart."

He leans forward, kissing Shane's forehead, then the smattering of freckles on both of his cheeks, the tip of his nose, and finally his lips. Shane hums into the kiss like he can't get enough, still a rush of excitement and joy and *love*, even after so long.

Ilya finally pulls away, leaning back against the headboard, and Shane's body is so soft and pliant as he follows him, draping himself over Ilya. Shane rests his head on his shoulder as his left hand finds constellations in the moles scattered over Ilya's chest. He's touching him so gently that it sends a shiver down Ilya's spine.

Ilya looks down at him through hooded eyes, sees the way Shane curls so perfectly against his chest like they're two halves of a whole. Every line and curve and divot of their bodies fit

together like they were designed to hold each other, and it will never stop feeling like a miracle that he gets to have this.

He gets to keep this beautiful boy for the rest of his life.

“Hey,” Ilya says softly. “We should capture this moment, yes?”

“What?” Shane asks, his warm breath fanning across Ilya’s skin.

Ilya finds Shane’s phone and it unlocks it, opening up the camera and switching it to selfie mode. He holds it up to show Shane what he wants to do, and when Shane realises his breath hitches and he presses so close to Ilya that it’s like he’s trying to climb into his skin. Trying to merge them into one being.

“Is okay?”

“Yes,” Shane all but whines. “Please, Ilya.”

So Ilya holds the phone just so, capturing the way Shane’s eyes are glossy and bright, the way Ilya is looking down at him, the way Shane’s head is resting on Ilya’s shoulder and his hand - the left one, with his ring on show - is tangled in the chain Ilya wears around his neck. It’s clear they’re in bed, that they’re both shirtless, but it’s not revealing. And it doesn’t matter now, anyway. The whole world has seen them making out against the side of Pike’s house, after all.

Ilya snaps one, two, three pictures, all in quick succession. He barely even has time to lower his arm before Shane is snatching the phone from him, scrambling off Ilya’s lap to sit beside him and analyse the photos.

“They’re perfect,” Shane says, in absolute awe. “Look.”

He holds the phone close to Ilya’s face so he can see, and, well. He’s not wrong. The photographs are intimate, and tender, and Shane looks so fucking pretty that Ilya kind of wants to die. They both look blissed out, like they’re the happiest people on earth. And, if Ilya is being honest, he thinks it *would* be damn hard to come by anyone who’s happier than he is right now.

“Perfect,” Ilya agrees.

Shane hesitates for a moment, sucking his bottom lip into his mouth like he’s about to bite on it, but then stops himself.

“I’m going to post one.”

“You - what?”

Shane looks over his shoulder at Ilya. “Is, I mean, is that okay? I just...I want everyone to know - everyone to see what we have. How special it is.”

It takes everything in Ilya not to cry, or to pin Shane to the bed and take him apart with his mouth, or to scream *I love Shane Hollander* from the top of his fucking lungs. Instead, Ilya shifts closer to Shane, pressing a kiss to the top of his bare shoulder.

“Of course, baby,” he assures him. And then, because he’s feeling too soft and sentimental, he says, “I just didn’t realise you knew how to use Instagram.”

The pet name dulls the impact of the insult for a moment, but when it sinks in Shane scoffs, lightly elbowing Ilya in response. Ilya laughs and Shane rolls his eyes, but the look of fondness in them is impossible to hide.

“Asshole,” he says, but it sounds an awful lot like the way he says *I love you*.

They sit in silence for a few minutes, Ilya watching over Shane’s shoulder as he meticulously crafts the perfect Instagram post.

After typing and deleting half a dozen captions, Shane finally settles on the simplest one of all: *Home*.

He presses the blue *share* button and, in less than a second, it’s out there for the world to see. Nestled among Shane’s other posts - all reposts, or hockey related, or the single landscape shot from the cottage - is a picture of them curled up in bed together, Shane’s engagement ring on full display.

“Maybe next time I’ll post the one from the All-Star game,” Shane suggests. “I should thank Brophy for it.”

Next time, next time, next time, rings through Ilya’s head like an echo.

There will be more photographs of them together from now on. There will be snapshots from the cottage this summer, and from the start of the season - both of them finally together on the Centaurs - and from holidays with Yuna and David. There will be a million more little moments that they get to capture, that they get to freeze in time and keep forever. And maybe they’ll share them, or maybe they’ll keep them just for themselves, but they will exist. There will be proof of their love beyond what is etched onto their hearts.

They don’t have to love each other in secret ever again.

“That sounds good, sweetheart,” Ilya tells him.

“So...grocery store?” Shane says, all casual like something monumental hasn’t just occurred. Like the ground beneath their feet hasn’t shifted.

Ilya snorts, tackling Shane back down onto the bed so he can lie on top of him. He burrows his face into the crook of Shane’s neck and breathes deeply.

“Five more minutes,” he insists.

And it’s okay, because they have time.

End Notes

love u<3

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