

Show Up

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Show Up

by [baletgir](#)

Summary

Five times the Centaurs show up for Pride Night on the road, imperfect and unscripted. Plus one time they do it at home, deliberately and out loud.

Takes place after The Long Game, once Shane has joined the Centaurs.

Featuring: rainbow tape, merch tables, fashion mistakes, friendship bracelets, and Pride as something you do, not something you announce.

Notes

Many thanks to [MikWrites_inSpace](#) for the idea that kicked this off!

Please enjoy this chaos of Ilya not realizing he is the bi fairy godmother of the NHL, but still doing the most.

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

1. Brooklyn Scouts v. Ottawa Centaurs

Ilya is halfway out the door when Harris calls his name.

“Hey, Ilya—quick thing.”

He stops, glancing down at his phone. Anya is stretched out on the couch at home, exactly where she was ten minutes ago. Unbothered.

A few steps ahead, Shane pauses, keys already in hand. “I’ll meet you in the car,” he says, easy and automatic.

He leans in, pressing a quick kiss to Ilya’s mouth, then keeps walking.

Ilya turns and rounds the corner into Harris’s office.

“So,” Harris says brightly, phone in hand. “Weird question.”

Ilya squints. “Weird like when you made us all pick favorite apple? Or weird like when Chiron dressed up for Easter?”

Harris grins, entirely unfazed. “Different category of weird.” He scrolls once. “We’re playing the Scouts next Saturday. Their social team reached out.”

Ilya nods. “Okay.”

“It’s their Pride Night,” Harris says. “They wanted to know what we’re doing for it.”

Ilya blinks. “We play hockey.”

Harris snorts. “That’s basically what I said.”

“So what is problem?”

“Well,” Harris says, shrugging easily, like this is more curious than urgent, “they were kind of... expecting something. Maybe a joint thing.”

Ilya tilts his head. “Is their Pride Night, yes?”

“Yes.”

“Then they do Pride Night.” He pauses, considering. “We play hockey.”

Harris nods, conceding the logic. “Totally fair. I just figured I’d ask. We *could* do something, maybe something small? If you want.”

Ilya laughs, short and genuinely confused. “Why?”

Harris opens his mouth, closes it again.

“So because we gayest hockey team,” Ilya says slowly, “we now responsible for all gay things?” He gestures vaguely. “We are guest. Not party planners.”

Harris winces, still smiling. “When you say it like that—”

Ilya checks the time and steps back toward the hallway. “We do what we always do.”

“And that is?” Harris asks.

“Score goals,” Ilya says, and heads for the parking lot.

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In the days before the game, Shane and Harris both mention it, casually and more than once, the way things get decided when no one wants to make a final decision. Ilya agrees. It doesn't feel like a statement to him, just a few small, visible choices that don't require coordination or explanation. They don't tell the Scouts in advance. They just do it.

Game day arrives without incident.

The Centaurs wear their Pride jerseys and rainbow tape for warmups, the colors bright under the lights as they stretch and skate slow laps. Back in the locker room, they swap into their regular, regulation jerseys.

Ilya stands in the middle of the visitor locker room, claps his hands once.

“Okay,” he says. “We will have a good game. Smart game. We are the best team, this is our year.” He pauses and looks around at everyone. “And Brooklyn are assholes, make them cry. They do not deserve to win.”

A few nods. A few grins.

Then, as an afterthought he adds, “Keep your gay tape on.”

“But my lucky tape,” someone calls out.

Ilya snorts. “No. We are too good for superstitions. We can play with any tape. Any gear. Any color.”

That settles it.

They win. They shower. They board the plane home.

On the plane, Shane is half-asleep against Ilya's shoulder when Troy appears in the aisle, phone already in hand.

“Hey,” Troy says softly. “Sorry, but Harris wants me to show you something and he's not going to let it go until I do.”

Ilya shifts slightly so Shane doesn't slide off him. “If this is video of dogs, tell him Shane—”

“It’s not,” Troy cuts in. “It’s the Scouts’ Pride merch.”

Shane sits up, stretching, then leans in close to Ilya’s ear. “We’re not getting a second dog.”

Ilya glances at him. “Hush. We are making fun of Scouts’ Pride clothes.”

Troy angles the phone so they can both see.

It’s a neat display of Brooklyn Scouts gear—hats, hoodies, jerseys. Entirely standard.

Troy zooms in on one item tucked in the corner.

A plain black t-shirt with a large Scouts logo. And, on the upper left chest, a small rainbow circle. About the size of a quarter.

“That’s it?” Shane asks, looking up at Troy.

“According to Harris,” Troy says, “that’s all he got confirmation on.”

Shane hums, unimpressed.

“Fucking idiots,” Ilya says mildly.

Troy nods once and heads back down the aisle, phone already out. Ilya catches the small smile Troy doesn’t bother hiding as he types.

Shane settles back against Ilya’s shoulder. “Should we have done more?”

“No,” Ilya says immediately. “Not our job.”

“Not officially,” Shane says. “But what about the kids at camp next summer?”

Ilya groans. “What happened to eat, breathe, snore hockey? Now you eat, breathe, snore gay?”

Shane laughs. “My captain told me to lighten up.”

“Now he listens,” Ilya scoffs. “You think being gayest hockey player will make you Centaurs captain?”

Shane laughs again, quieter this time, and tucks himself closer. Ilya lets him. They dissolve into soft chuckles, the kind that only they understand.

2. Toronto Guardians v. Ottawa Centaurs

The late afternoon quiet is settling in around them as they relax after a grueling morning practice. Shane is stretched out on the couch with his feet in Ilya’s lap. The TV is on, volume

low, something familiar and inoffensive playing more out of habit than interest.

Ilya scrolls on his phone with one hand, the other absentmindedly kneading Shane's calf the way he does without thinking.

Then he stops.

He groans, dropping his head back against the couch cushion.

Shane doesn't even look up. "What."

Ilya lifts the phone and lets it thump lightly against Shane's knee. A Pride Night graphic fills the screen—Toronto, rainbow accents, their game date circled like it's meant to be exciting.

"Another one." Ilya says. "Is fake."

Shane glances at it, then back to the screen. "It's not entirely fake."

Ilya drops the phone onto his chest. "Yes. It means nothing. What is that word." He frowns, searching. "When thing is only for show."

"Performative," Shane says.

"Yes," Ilya agrees immediately. "Performative bullshit."

There's a pause. The TV laughs. Anya pads through the room, considers them, then jumps up between their legs like she's claiming territory.

Shane absently scratches behind her ears. "But what if it wasn't."

Ilya looks down at him. "It is Toronto. It will always be—"

"Performative," Shane finishes, smiling a little. Then, softer, "But it doesn't have to be."

Ilya watches him for a moment, thoughtful. Anya sighs dramatically and settles harder into Shane's lap.

"We can't control what they do," Shane says. "But we can decide what *we* do. We can make it more."

Ilya hums, considering, thumb idly brushing over Shane's ankle.

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They're halfway through peeling off their gear when Ilya nudges Shane with his elbow.

"I want to talk to Harris before we leave," he says.

Shane glances over. "About what?"

Ilya winks, strips off the last of his clothes, and heads for the showers without answering. Shane watches him go, just a second too long, before catching himself and reaching for his own bag.

They detour toward Harris's office on their way out, hair still damp, the hallway gradually emptying as people filter away. Harris looks up the second they appear, smile already in place.

Troy is there too, sprawled in one of the chairs by the desk, hoodie half-zipped over practice gear, hair still wet. He's turned toward Harris, one foot hooked around the leg of the chair, listening to whatever Harris was saying before they walked in.

Harris cuts himself off mid-thought. "Oh—hey!"

Troy glances over, gives them both a nod.

Ilya doesn't bother easing into it. "What's the plan for the Toronto Pride game?"

Harris blinks once. Then grins.

"The plan?" he says, slipping into a truly atrocious Russian accent. "You play hockey."

Ilya points at him. "Funny." He leans back against the wall, arms crossing as he thinks it through. "Fabian will sing the *O Canada*, yes? And Price will do the puck drop?"

From the doorway, Shane laughs. "Oh, so now you're interested in event planning?"

"For the kids," Ilya says immediately. "They need—" He pauses, hands moving as he searches for the word. "Good people examples."

"Role models?" Harris offers, already leaning forward.

"Yes," Ilya says. "Especially in Toronto."

Harris's smile softens. "We don't really have any control over that," he says gently. "And honestly, from what you and Troy have told me, I'm not sure Fabian or Ryan would even want to."

"But it is for good cause," Ilya says, frowning slightly.

"Ilya," Shane says calmly, stepping closer now, "none of us get to make those calls. That's just not how it works."

Ilya turns to him, disappointed in a way he doesn't bother hiding. "You said we could do better. Make it less..." He trails off, frustrated. "What is the word. I never use this word."

"Performative," Shane supplies.

"Yes," Ilya says, relieved. "That."

Harris nods, but his energy doesn't dim, if anything, it sharpens. "Okay. But there *are* things we can do."

All three of them look at him.

Harris spreads his hands, bright and hopeful. "Do you want to plan something?" he asks. "Please. Let's plan something."

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The night before the Toronto game, they're gathered in Ilya and Shane's kitchen, food spread across the counter.

Shane had planned a balanced dinner, salmon and couscous bowls, but somewhere along the way Ilya had decided they needed something heartier. That was how the cheesy potatoes appeared, followed shortly by cookies, as if dessert had simply been the inevitable next step.

Harris kicks off his shoes and immediately starts talking about flight times. "You three have a six a.m. flight," he says cheerfully. "Which means we are *not* staying up like idiots."

Troy grunts in agreement and takes the chair closest to the window, phone face down on the table, posture already focusing for tomorrow's game.

Ilya, meanwhile, is on the floor, flat on his back, letting Chiron lick his face with reckless enthusiasm.

"Stop," Ilya protests, laughing. "Stop, I say—"

Chiron does not stop.

Shane hands out plates without comment. Troy and Harris have been over enough that they help themselves to drinks without asking.

They eat at the island, leaning instead of sitting. Ilya tries to stay on the floor with Chiron, asking Shane to feed him from the counter, but eventually gives up and joins the others. The conversation circles safely from practice schedules to team gossip and summer vacation plans. Harris tells a story that runs a little long; Troy adds one detail and then goes quiet again.

Anya wanders through, accepts a bite from Harris, ignores everyone else, and disappears. Chiron immediately follows.

"Wait! Chiron! Come back!" Ilya yells.

Shane rolls his eyes while Troy and Harris laugh softly.

Later, when Harris and Shane are deep into a discussion about summer camp marketing, Ilya finds Troy by the window, looking out at the street like he's counting down.

"You okay?" Ilya asks.

Troy nods immediately. “Yeah. It’s cool.” A beat. “I survived last year’s game. This year should be easier.”

Ilya accepts that.

“About tomorrow,” he says.

Troy turns back, attentive now, just a little guarded.

“We are bringing things to sell,” Ilya says. “Pride stuff. We will donate to Rainbow Railroad.” He pauses. “But we could split it. With your charity.”

Troy blinks. “Oh.” He looks faintly uncomfortable. “They’re not... my charities.”

“Okay,” Ilya says easily.

“I mean,” Troy adds, rubbing the back of his neck, “it would be a pretty big fuck you to Toronto.” He winces. “But I don’t want to take away from Pride.”

“Okay,” Ilya repeats, no argument in it.

Troy exhales, relieved. “Harris and I have actually been talking about something else.”

“Yes?”

“It’s called Denim Day?” Troy says, hesitantly. “It’s in April. Depending on how playoffs go, maybe we could do something then.”

Ilya considers this. “Denim.”

“Yeah. Jeans. Everyone wears jeans.”

Ilya frowns. “I do not skate in jeans.”

Troy snorts despite himself. “Never mind.” He shakes his head. “I’ll explain it later. Once Harris and I finish figuring it out.”

“Good,” Ilya says. “I like plans that are finished.”

Troy smiles at that, it’s small, quick, and gone almost immediately.

From the kitchen, Harris’s voice cuts through the quiet.

“Hey! Why are you feeding me burnt cookies?”

“They are not burnt,” Ilya calls back immediately, walking in their direction. “They are well done.”

There’s a pause. Then Shane, fond and entirely unsurprised, adds, “Baking is his new hobby.”

“That explains *a lot*,” Harris says, laughing.

Ilya picks the most aggressively burnt cookie off the tray, and takes a deliberate bite.

He hums. Loudly.

Then another bite. Another pleased noise, eyes closing like he's tasting something profound.

Shane groans. "Please stop doing that."

"Oh no," Harris says immediately. "Please continue."

Ilya takes a third bite, fully moaning at this point, clearly committed to the bit.

Behind Harris, Troy steps in close, arms sliding around his waist. He leans in, murmurs something low into Harris's ear.

Harris laughs, tilting back into him.

Ilya swallows the last bite of the cookie, grins unapologetically, and reaches for another.

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Toronto doesn't make a production of it.

The night unfolds the way it always does—the anthem, the lights, the familiar swell of noise as the teams take the ice. Fabian doesn't sing. Ryan Price doesn't drop the puck. Nothing in the pregame marks it as different, and that absence settles uneasily in Ilya's chest.

The Centaurs do what they can anyway.

They wear Pride jerseys for warmups, bright under the lights as they skate their laps. Every stick is still wrapped in rainbow tape once the game begins, left on deliberately. Out in the concourse, a table sells Pride swag, some of it more bold than other items. Harris had worked hard over the last week to pull it together on short notice. Much of it is generic, not Centaurs-branded, but the collection is thoughtful and varied all the same. There's a raffle too, five dollars a ticket, and the prize is a bundle of items signed by the entire team.

A sign taped to the table makes it clear: **All proceeds go to Rainbow Railroad.**

During warmups, Ilya spots Fabian and Ryan a few rows up from the glass. They aren't wearing Toronto colors, and they aren't in Ottawa either. Deliberately neutral. Ilya lifts a hand and calls Shane over to do the same. They wave back.

When the camera sweeps the crowd later, it finds them. Once. Then again. Long enough to catch them cheering for Ottawa, long enough to make it clear the shot isn't accidental. Like whoever's running the cameras isn't looking away this time.

The game itself is tight and fast. Shane scores twice. Luka adds one. Bood picks up two assists. Ilya plays his minutes and feels the night move around him, sharp and loud and familiar.

They win, 4–3.

Ilya is glad for the points. Glad for the result. But more than that, he's aware that it still doesn't feel like enough, and he can't quite say why.

He thought inviting Ryan Price would matter. He thought donating the proceeds would feel like an impact. Instead, it all seems to slide off Toronto the way everything else does.

He's one of the first ones out of his gear, sweat barely cooled, adrenaline still humming under his skin. He showers quickly, pulls on his suit, and heads back out, intent on finding the merch table before everything gets packed away. He wants a number. Something concrete. Something that proves tonight mattered, at least a little.

Tunnel-side, the arena hasn't emptied yet. Fans linger, pressed up against the barriers, waiting on the off chance someone will stop.

That's when he sees the kid.

Eleven, maybe twelve. Small enough that the Toronto Barrett jersey hanging off his shoulders looks like a hand-me-down. He's clutching a rainbow Toronto ball cap with both hands, knuckles tight, standing on his toes as players file past.

He asks one.

Then another.

Each time, they decline with an awkward shake of the head, eyes sliding away, or a muttered *sorry, kid* delivered like an inconvenience. One player doesn't even slow down.

Ilya notices and starts toward him, then slows as he gets closer. The thought flickers. Would the kid even want someone from the winning team? From the other side? He hesitates just long enough to second-guess himself.

"Hey," he says. "Nice hat."

The kid startles, then looks up. The hope that flashes across his face is so quick it almost hurts to see.

"Will you sign it?" he asks.

Ilya doesn't hesitate. "Of course." He gently takes the hat and the marker. Then, after a beat, adds, "Can my friend Troy sign it too?"

The kid freezes, eyes wide, and for a moment Ilya thinks he's misjudged completely. Then the kid's mouth opens, closes, and Ilya understands.

He laughs softly and looks up, spotting Troy a few steps away, still half in his jacket, talking quietly with a staffer.

"Troy!" Ilya calls.

Troy looks over, startled, then walks closer. As he does, Ilya leans back toward the kid.

“You still want mine,” he asks lightly, “or just his?”

The kid hesitates, then nods his head quickly. “Both,” he says, barely above a whisper.

“Good answer,” Ilya says.

He signs first, big and looping, his name taking up far more space than necessary. He hands the hat to Troy, who pauses for just a second before accepting it. Troy smiles, small and genuine, and signs beside Ilya’s name, neat and careful.

When the hat is handed back, the kid stares at it like it’s something sacred.

When Ilya straightens, he notices movement at the edge of his vision, a couple of fans edging closer, a jersey held out tentatively and a marker already uncapped.

He grins.

“Hey!” he shouts back toward the locker room. “Gay boys! We popular today!”

Shane appears first, laughing as he jogs over, sliding in easily at Ilya’s side. Luca Haas lingers for a moment, then steps forward and quietly asks a fan, “Would you like mine too?”

Wyatt shows up to, talking to fans, collecting markers, passing them along like this is a role he’s been preparing for. A girl approaches him, holding out a rainbow shirt.

“Oh,” Wyatt says, glancing at it. “I don’t think I’m who you want. I’m just an ally.”

She smiles, unfazed. “Sidekicks are just as important, aren’t they?”

Wyatt blinks. Then smiles. “Yeah.”

He signs without another word.

After that, it’s like a switch flips. More players drift over. Someone cracks a joke. Someone else kneels to be eye-level with a kid. Pride hats, jerseys, scraps of paper—anything that will take ink gets passed forward.

By the time security steps in, gentle but firm, the line has stretched halfway down the tunnel.

The opposing team is already gone.

Ilya stands there a moment longer, watching the last kid walk away clutching something newly precious, and feels the weight in his chest finally shift.

This, he thinks, might be what *enough* looks like.

3. New York Admirals v. Ottawa Centaurs

They're in the car, traffic slow but moving, the city thinning out as they head home. Ilya drives with one hand on the wheel, the other resting on Shane's thigh like it's always been there. Shane scrolls through his phone.

When Shane's phone buzzes, Ilya can see out of the corner of his eye as he taps the notification, then makes a face.

"What," Ilya says, already suspicious.

Shane tilts the screen so Ilya can see it at the stoplight. "Scott."

Ilya frowns. "Why does Scott Hunter have your number?"

Shane reads aloud, amused. "*Hey, heads up. Management wants to schedule our Pride Night to be against the Centaurs. Just wanted to check if that's cool.*"

Ilya exhales sharply. "Why does he not text me."

Shane shrugs. "I don't know."

"I am captain," Ilya says. "He is captain. This is captain-captain conversation."

"You are also," Shane adds mildly, "a menace."

Ilya scowls. "I know Scott better than you. I have hung out with him more. Why is he texting you."

Shane grins. "Maybe we've been sexting."

Ilya keeps his eyes on the road and slides his hand up Shane's thigh, fingers deliberate, claiming. "Mine," he says, low and rough.

He doesn't stop there. His hand presses in, cupping Shane through his pants, feeling him warm and pliant under his palm.

Shane laughs, breath hitching. "Relax. It was for the camps over the summer. We had to coordinate schedules."

"And?" Ilya asks, thumb brushing slowly, intentionally.

"And," Shane continues, voice going a little less steady, "he probably figured you'd be difficult, and I would give him a straight answer."

Ilya snorts. "You cannot give *straight* answers."

Shane raises an eyebrow. "Wow."

Ilya's hand starts moving properly now, slow strokes that make Shane suck in a sharp breath. His laughter dies off completely, replaced by a soft, helpless sound.

“So...” Shane manages, shifting in his seat, phone forgotten in his hand. “Should I—should I tell him yes?”

Ilya considers it, eyes fixed on the road, traffic inching forward. His hand tightens, strokes firmer, more certain.

“Of course yes,” he says finally. “We must out-queer New York.”

Shane groans, head tipping back against the headrest. His phone slips from his fingers into his lap, screen dark, irrelevant. When Ilya sneaks a glance over, Shane’s eyes are closed, mouth parted, entirely focused on the feel of Ilya’s hand.

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Ilya corners Harris after practice, towel looped around his neck, hair still damp. “What was feedback from last time,” he asks. “Toronto. Pride game.”

Harris thinks about it. Shrugs. “Honestly? Fine. Normal engagement. Nothing wild.”

“Good,” Ilya says, already turning away.

“Except,” Harris adds, brightly.

Ilya stops.

Harris grins and tilts his phone so Ilya can see. “The fashion discourse.”

He scrolls.

*Love the message, but those suits are a crime.
If you’re going to lean into being the Queer team, you need better fashion.
Who let these men dress themselves.*

Ilya stares at the screen. “These people are mean.”

“They’re not wrong,” Shane says from behind him.

Ilya turns. “What?”

Shane lifts his phone. “Rose texted me too.”

Ilya scoffs. “I dress very well.”

Shane looks at him, not teasing, not indulgent. Just honest. “You dress like you,” he says. “That’s not always what people mean when they say ‘fashion.’”

Ilya frowns. “So now there is correct way to be queer.”

“No,” Shane says immediately. “I think that’s the problem.”

Harris nods, softer now. “It’s not really about the clothes. People just want to know that what they’re seeing is... real.”

Ilya exhales. He rubs a hand over his face, towel slipping down his neck. “It *is* real.”

“I know,” Shane says. “You know. But the internet doesn’t.”

Ilya looks back at the comments. Reads them again. This time slower.

“They want us to perform,” he says finally. “But also be ourselves. Is stupid.”

Harris smiles, a little rueful. “Welcome to Pride.”

Ilya shakes his head.

Shane grins. “We’re playing the Admirals.”

Ilya exhales, already decided. “Fine. But we do it to be ourselves. If we are ugly, then that is fine.”

Harris nods. “Deal.”

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It still doesn’t become a plan.

They get ready together, sprawled across the bedroom with clothes draped over every available surface. Shane tries on two jackets. Ilya vetoes one immediately. Shane vetoes a scarf Ilya refuses to admit he was serious about.

“You look like art dealer,” Shane says.

“I am rich art owner,” Ilya argues.

Shane laughs and changes shirts.

In the end, Shane settles on something familiar. Clean. Comfortable. Himself. Ilya goes louder than he probably should, pieces chosen because he likes them, not because they match.

Neither of them is trying to make a statement, which very well might be the statement.

They see the rest of the team in the tunnel.

Some look polished. Some look odd. Some look like they ignored the conversation entirely. No theme. No cohesion. Just people.

Ilya clocks it all and feels something loosen in his chest.

This is not a costume.

It is a collection.

Bood walks past, infuriating as always.

“How you do this,” Ilya demands.

Bood shrugs. “I just wear what I like.”

“You are straight,” Ilya says.

Bood grins. “And still myself.”

Ilya watches him go.

Maybe that is the point.

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New York, at least, understands theater.

Out in the concourse, the Centaurs’ Pride table is impossible to miss. The merch is better than last time, more of it custom, braided with team colors and the ridiculous centaur logo that has somehow grown to represent safety and community. Donation QR codes are plastered everywhere. Volunteers wave people over. Harris bounces between stations like this is the exact scenario he was born for. The raffle is back too, with bigger prizes and a longer line.

The Admirals’ Pride display sits just across from it, almost as prominent. Their merch is loud and proud in its own way, but where the Centaurs went dramatic and a little silly, the Admirals opted for something cleaner. More restrained.

“Boring,” Ilya says.

Harris, who decided to make the trip this time with two Pride games back to back on the road, lifts an eyebrow. They’re standing in front of the Admirals’ display now. The merch is laid out beneath a large promotional photo of the team: Scott Hunter front and centre in a Pride jersey, the rest of the roster behind him in traditional, regulation jerseys.

“Everyone has different styles,” Harris says mildly, his eyes flicking down Ilya’s outfit and back up again. “And maybe this is more approachable for some people.”

“People should be more exciting,” Ilya says, shaking his head. “Harris, you are only non-boring gay man in NHL. Hollander is boring. Barrett is boring. Hunter is most boring.”

He fakes a yawn for emphasis.

“Well,” Harris says, smiling, “hopefully all those boring men on the same ice tonight make for a good game.”

Ilya mutters something in Russian, but he doesn’t quite manage to hide his grin.

This, at least, looks like effort.

By the time the teams take the ice for warmups, the arena is already loud, rainbow lights washing over the boards in slow pulses. Pride jerseys on both sides are not subtle, bold striping and intentional design, the kind of thing that looks like someone actually cared. The Admirals match them, bright tape on sticks, patches on helmets. It feels coordinated without being obnoxious.

Ilya skates to the red line and stops near the jersey labeled **HUNTER**.

“We have gay hockey meeting after,” he says. “Kingfisher. Yes?”

Scott Hunter doesn’t even look up. “Gay only?”

“Yes.”

Scott considers this, still stretching. “So you’re not invited? Perfect.”

“I am organizer,” Ilya says, affronted. “Of course I am invited.” He pauses, still glaring, then calls louder over his shoulder, “Hollander! Tell Hunter I am gay enough for gay bar.”

Scott finally looks up, shakes his head, and skates away without another word.

The game starts fast and stays that way. New York plays clean but aggressive, feeding off the energy in the building. Ottawa answers in kind. Hits are finished. Passes are sharp. The ice feels smaller than usual, louder.

Ilya catches Shane’s eye at the bench after his first goal and grins. Shane grins back, like this is exactly where he wants to be.

The jumbotron keeps finding them. Queer-presenting couples in the crowd. Pride flags draped over shoulders. Kids in oversized jerseys waving signs. No hesitation this time, no quick cuts away. Whatever rebel had been working the cameras in Toronto clearly has friends in New York.

By the third period, the score is tight and the arena electric. Boord scores off a rebound and celebrates like he knows exactly how good he looked walking in tonight. Hayes makes two back to back saves. The kind of saves Ilya knows will be clipped before they even hit the locker room. Haas skates like nothing has changed, focused and steady, which somehow feels very on-brand.

The Admirals win, 3–2.

And still, when Ilya leaves the ice, there’s no hollow echo in his chest. He feels charged instead. Like something landed the way it was supposed to.

Later, fans are still buzzing. Pride merch everywhere. Laughter spilling throughout the arena. Ilya catches sight of the donation total scrolling across someone’s phone and lets himself smile.

New York didn't just schedule Pride Night against them.

They showed up for it.

4. The Boston Bears v. Ottawa Centaurs

Boston feels close after New York. A short flight, barely enough time to settle, and then they're pulling up to the hotel while the sky is still doing that late-afternoon thing that makes everything feel briefly forgiving.

Ilya feels it in his body before anything else. The pressure easing. His shoulders dropping as soon as the door closes behind them.

The room is quiet, the kind of hotel quiet that absorbs sound instead of echoing it. Shane drops his bag by the door. Ilya doesn't even make it that far.

He's on Shane before either of them speaks, crowding him back toward the bed, mouth finding Shane's like this is a continuation of something they started hours ago and never quite finished. Shane makes a small sound and goes with it immediately, hands fisting in Ilya's shirt and pulling him closer.

They kiss slow, then not slow at all. Familiar heat. Familiar weight. Ilya presses him down onto the mattress and follows, hands sure, mapping what he already knows by heart. Shane arches into it, breath going uneven, fingers digging into Ilya's shoulders.

Ilya shifts, lets his hands travel, lets his mouth drift lower, unhurried and deliberate. When his knees hit the floor, Shane's head tips back. The room narrows to breath and sound and the soft creak of the bed beneath them. Shane's hands find Ilya's hair, grip tight and grounding.

"Ilya," Shane says, nearly breathless, already too far gone. "Do we even have time for this?"

Ilya hums, stubborn and unconcerned, hands stilling only long enough to look up. "Svetlana can wait," he says.

Shane laughs quietly, fond and resigned, and Ilya focuses again, pace steady, intent clear. Shane's sounds break apart, grow less controlled. Eventually, out of breath and thoroughly undone, Shane pulls him back up by the collar.

They kiss again. Slower this time. Softer. Like a truce.

Ilya lingers just long enough to make it unfair, then forces himself to stop.

Shane makes a frustrated sound and reaches for Ilya's belt, clearly realizing how uneven the situation has become.

"Is fine," Ilya says, straightening, smoothing his shirt with unnecessary care. "There is no time."

Shane groans.

Ilya leans down to kiss him again. When Shane tries to deepen it, Ilya steps back. “Later.”

Shane exhales, then stands, presses one last kiss to Ilya’s mouth.

Ilya grins, unrepentant, and checks the time on his phone. “You still do not want to come to dinner.”

Shane sits back down on the edge of the bed, watching him. “You and Svetlana should catch up alone.”

“She may try to take me home if you are not there,” Ilya says solemnly, adjusting his collar in the mirror.

Shane laughs. “Last time you two got together, you came back sad because she refused to flirt with you.”

Ilya considers this, then nods. “Fine. We shall talk all about you.” He pauses. “In Russian.”

Shane smiles. “Yes. That’s the point.”

Ilya crosses the room and kisses him one last time. It’s brief, unhurried only in intention, cut short by time and plans.

“I won’t be late,” he says, which Shane knows means not too late.

“Have fun,” Shane says. “Remember to ask her about next summer.”

Ilya scoffs, already reaching for the door. “Then she will spend the whole night convincing me to make camp entire month.”

“Goodbye,” Shane says. “Ya lyublyu tebya.”

Ilya pauses with his hand on the handle. “Ya lyublyu tebya.”

- - -

Boston greets them with indifferent kindness.

Harris had already handled it. Somewhere between JFK and Logan, he’d realized they were going to run out. New York fans bought more merch than anyone predicted, not just Centaurs fans but locals too, and by the end of the night the table had been picked nearly clean. So Harris made a call, paid the overnight fee, and had new boxes shipped ahead.

By the time Ilya gets to the rink, everything is waiting for them. Fresh stock. Same setup. No panic.

Boston tries. They really do.

There are Pride jerseys and rainbow accents, carefully arranged, clearly approved by committee. The signage is earnest. The language is almost correct. Everything looks like it was designed by someone's well-meaning aunt who found out, at sixty-three, that her favorite niece is gay, and would now like to be supportive in a way that does not make anyone uncomfortable.

Harris scans the display, lips pressed together like he's trying not to laugh.

"This is adorable," he says. "I love it."

Ilya squints at the display. "Why."

"Because it's so sincere it hurts."

"It hurts *me*," Ilya says with a look.

The concourse fills early, and then he sees it.

Rozanov gear. Everywhere.

Warmups come and go. The rink fills with more of his fans in black and yellow Rozanov jerseys.

Old ones. Faded ones. Boston-era. The kind of jersey that remembers him exactly as he was. His name stitched across backs that have been worn thin with time.

His returns to Boston have never been like this before.

Then the game starts, and there's no more room to think about any of it.

Boston plays like Boston. Loud, physical, unapologetic. Ottawa answers in kind. The game is fast, messy, and exhausting in a way Ilya almost misses.

When it's over, he showers quickly, changes back into his suit, hair still damp at the collar. By the time he heads back out into the tunnel, the adrenaline has cooled just enough to leave him restless.

That's when it starts.

Fans are still lingering, pressed against the barriers. And this time, they're waiting for him.

Mostly Boston fans. All ages. More adults than kids. Men who remember him as a kid. Women who remember him as trouble. People who watched him leave and never quite forgave him for it.

An older guy pushes forward, gruff, accent thick, holding out the corner of his jersey and a marker.

"Fuck you for going to that crap team," he says as a way of greeting.

Ilya doesn't miss a beat. "Team is not so crap anymore," he says, signing. "Beat your Bears tonight."

The man watches him for a second, then snorts. "Yeah," he says. "But you're still the same pain in the ass. Was worried you'd gone soft."

Ilya finishes the signature anyway, adding **Ottawa** underneath, larger than necessary, just to be sure the message lands. The guy huffs, then laughs despite himself.

That's Boston.

More people edge forward. Photos. Signatures. Someone else tells him they named their dog after him. Someone tells him they hated him for leaving and still bought the jersey anyway.

The guy hesitates, then adds, almost defensively, "Only bought it 'cause it was on sale after you left."

Ilya laughs as he signs it and adds **Miss me?** beneath his name. "Worth more now," he says.

The man snorts despite himself. "You were an asshole. A couple of wicked goals though."

"Yes," Ilya agrees, signing. "And now I will win cups for someone else. Still asshole."

He'd forgotten how fun Boston fans are.

Ilya laughs, sharp and genuine.

They're just as rude as he is.

A few of the Bears drift over eventually. Handshakes. Claps on the shoulder. Polite smiles. No invitations to catch up. No talk of drinks later. Just acknowledgment.

Ilya watches them go, then turns back to the crowd, marker warm in his hand.

Boston shows up. They just love him the way you love something that changed without your permission.

5. Tampa Bay Thunder v. Ottawa Centaurs

By this point, it's a system.

There's a running list taped behind Harris's office door, laminated now because Dykstra spilled coffee on it once, with every team's Pride Night circled in highlighter. Dates, cities, color coded by opponent. Checkmarks beside the ones already done. A column off to the side for bets.

"Chicago's going to ask us," Bood says one morning, glancing at it. "Over or under two weeks."

“I take under,” Hayes says immediately.

Ilya doesn't comment. He's still looking at the list.

There's a blank.

Not a TBD. Not under discussion. Just nothing.

Tampa Bay Thunder.

He taps the paper once, as if it might explain itself.

“Harris.”

Harris looks up from his laptop. “Yeah?”

“They do not have Pride Night.”

Harris swivels his chair, scans the list, frowns. “Huh. You're right.”

Ilya tilts his head. “We are playing them?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

Harris scrolls. “In three weeks.”

Ilya considers this, quiet. Then, “Can you ask them if they want us for Pride Night.”

Harris blinks. “You want me to—”

“Request,” Ilya says, waving a hand. “Very politely. Tell them we are popular.”

Harris exhales, already resigned, but he sends the email.

Three days later, he knocks on the locker room door before morning skate.

“They said no,” he says.

Ilya pauses lacing his skates and looks up. “No... not that game?”

Harris shakes his head. “No Pride Night. At all.”

Something settles in Ilya's chest. Not surprise. Just confirmation.

He nods once. “Okay.”

That night, he checks the calendar again. Checks the travel schedule.

Then he starts texting.

- - -

Outside the arena, the Centaurs' merch table looks different than it usually does. Stripped down. Focused. There isn't a single red-only shirt in sight. Just Pride gear. Hats. Shirts. Flags. Everything clearly marked: **Proceeds donated.**

People slow as they pass. Some smile. Some stop. Some take photos. Others scowl and keep walking.

Not everyone cheers.

Ilya notices all of it and files it away, then lets it go.

Warmups pass without spectacle. Nothing loud. Nothing that could be announced away. A rainbow pin on a lapel. Pride-colored laces threaded through someone's skates. Shane's socks carry a thin stripe you'd miss unless you were looking directly at his ankles.

By puck drop, every Centaur has rainbow tape on their stick.

No announcement. No explanation.

The Thunder do not.

Once the puck drops, he plays the way he always does. Aggressively. Joyfully. With intent. He scores once, sets up two more, chirps a defenseman badly enough that the guy loses the puck outright and slams his stick against the boards in frustration.

In the second period, during a stoppage, Ilya catches sight of a Thunder player standing a few feet away. Young. Third line. Helmet sitting just slightly wrong, like he adjusted it without looking.

There's a small Pride sticker on the back.

It's scuffed. Not new. Like it's been there awhile.

The restarts before Ilya can even consider saying something.

After the game, the Thunder are gone fast. No lingering. No waving to fans. No slow lap around the ice. They disappear down the tunnel like the night is something to escape.

Ilya is untying his skates at the bench when someone clears their throat.

"Uh. Rozanov?"

He looks up.

It's the kid from the Thunder, the one with the pride sticker on his helmet. He looks twenty-two, maybe. His hands are shoved deep in his pockets like he doesn't quite know what to do with them.

“Yes?”

The guy hesitates, then pulls one hand free and holds it out, awkward but earnest. “I just wanted to—” He swallows. “To say thanks.”

Ilya takes his hand without thinking. His grip is firm, steady.

“For... everything,” the guy adds quietly.

Ilya nods once. “You’re welcome.”

The guy lets go, gives a quick, grateful smile, and disappears back into the flow of bodies moving through the tunnel.

Ilya watches him until he’s gone.

Later, on the bus back to the hotel, Bood nudges him with his knee.

“So much for no Pride Night,” he says, laughing.

Wyatt leans over the seat in front of them. “Yeah. Good work, Rozanov.”

Ilya exhales, rubbing at his face. “No,” he says. “Not enough.”

Bood opens his mouth, then closes it again. The bus hums around them, steady and indifferent.

No one argues.

Back at the hotel, Shane is already showered when Ilya finally sits down on the edge of the bed, elbows on his knees.

“There was a kid,” Ilya says.

Shane looks up, immediately attentive. “From the Thunder?”

Ilya nods. “Third line. Pride sticker on his helmet. Old one.” He stares at the carpet like it might answer him. “He thanked me.”

Shane waits.

“That’s it,” Ilya adds. “Just... thanks.”

He swallows. “Maybe I should do more. Give him my number. Tell him to call.”

Shane shifts closer, resting his hand on Ilya’s shoulder, his forearm pressed against Ilya’s back. “Ilya.”

“What if he needs help,” Ilya says. “What if I missed it. And what about the others?”

“They’re not lost puppies,” Shane says gently.

Ilya looks at him, offended. “Yes they are.”

Shane huffs a laugh. “No. They’re grown men.”

“Young,” Ilya counters. “Scared. On bad team.”

Shane presses his forehead to Ilya’s shoulder. “You’re not the only person they have.”

Ilya slumps forward anyway. “I want to help all the gay puppies.”

“I know,” Shane says. “And you are.”

Ilya exhales, long and tired.

Shane pulls him close, and the worry loosens, just a little.

+1. Ottawa Centaurs v. Montreal Voyageurs

The afternoon of Pride Night in Ottawa is bright in a way that feels deliberate, the sun low enough to soften the edges of the street without giving up its warmth.

Ilya backs the car out of the driveway slowly, the neighborhood caught in that quiet stretch between workdays and evening plans. He’s halfway to the end of the block when he eases off the brake.

The neighborhood kids are outside again.

They’ve made a new sign today, held up with both sets of hands and far too much tape.

HAPPY PRIDE NIGHT ILYA + SHANE

There are rainbows everywhere. Two hockey sticks crossed in the middle. Two hearts drawn underneath, one marked **24**, the other **81**.

Ilya smiles, soft and familiar, and pulls the car to the curb like he always does.

“My favorite part of game day,” he says to Shane with a smile, already unbuckling.

They both get out.

“Good luck!” one of the kids shouts, bouncing on their toes.

“We will win,” Ilya says confidently.

From the porch, Kate waves. “You didn’t have to stop!”

“I stop for my good luck charms,” Ilya calls back. “You got the tickets from our agent?”

“Yes,” she says, smiling. “Thank you so much. They’re so excited to sit so close they barely slept.”

When Ilya turns back, Shane is already crouched in front of the kids, pulling two knit toques from his jacket pocket. Centaurs logos stitched on the front, Pride colors woven through. He hands them over carefully, like this part matters most of all.

Ilya squints. “Why are both 24?”

“You had years of giving them your number,” Shane says easily. “I’m catching up.”

Willa pulls the hat down immediately, grinning. Andrew holds it to his chest like it might disappear.

Ilya clicks his tongue. “Traitor children.”

He leans in anyway, taps each of them lightly on the head. “You cheer loud,” he says. “Especially when Shane scores.”

“And when you score?” one of them asks.

Ilya considers this. “Also then. But might lose your voice when I score many goals.”

They say their goodbyes, waves exchanged, the sign wobbling as the kids lift it one more time.

Back in the car, Shane glances over, smiling to himself.

“You ready?” he asks.

“Yes,” Ilya says, starting the engine. “Now we do it right.”

The rink rises into view a few minutes later, banners already visible, color spilling out into the parking lot.

Their Pride Night. At home.

Ilya grips the wheel a little tighter, feeling something settle into place.

- - -

Montreal treats it like a normal game.

Normal, at least, by the standards that existed before the Centaurs decided that being the away team didn’t mean being invisible. They don’t make announcements. They don’t build displays. They don’t try to match the bar Ottawa has set. They show up, as scheduled, prepared to play hockey.

Warmups begin, and the difference is immediate.

The Centaurs take the ice first, a bright, unapologetic sweep of color. Pride jerseys layered in every shade imaginable. Rainbow tape. Laughing voices echoing in the rink as they skate loose circles, sticks tapping, bodies relaxed. It feels like home. Like intention.

The Voyageurs step out more slowly.

A few at a time. Then a few more. Then the rest, trickling onto the ice until nearly the whole roster is there. Regulation jerseys. Standard tape. No color. No adjustment. Not even a token attempt.

Ilya clocks it, catalogues it, lets it go.

Everyone is on the ice except JJ and Hayden.

JJ appears first. Rainbow tape wrapped neatly around his stick. Nothing else changed. No show, just presence. He nods once at Shane as he passes, small and deliberate, then joins the drill.

Then Hayden steps onto the ice.

The jersey is impossible to miss.

Bedazzled. Pride-colored. Custom. Loud in a way that borders on theatrical. Shane Hollander's name and number blaze across the back of a Montreal jersey that has clearly been reimagined with malicious joy.

Ilya doubles over laughing, nearly losing an edge. Shane's cheeks go pink instantly, which only makes it better.

"Hollander," Ilya calls, breathless, "this is *your* friend."

Shane buries his face briefly in his glove.

Ilya pushes off and skates toward the blue line, still grinning. "You think this help you skate faster?" he asks Hayden, gesturing broadly at the jersey.

Hayden shrugs, unfazed. "Maybe it'll distract you. You'll make heart eyes at me instead of shooting the puck."

Ilya snorts. "Your face is too ugly to distract." He pauses, then smiles. "You should wear Rozanov jersey. More powerful."

Hayden laughs, shaking his head. "I don't want to get any penalties tonight."

Ilya glances around. "Where are the girls?"

Hayden points into the stands.

Ilya follows the line of his glove.

Ruby and Jade sit together near the glass. Both of them are wearing traditional Centaurs jerseys. The ones Ilya bought as a joke for Christmas, never expecting them to actually wear them. Ruby is in **24**. Jade in **81**. They also have on Montreal pride hats pulled low, their grins unmistakable even from here when they see Ilya's wide wave.

Something tightens in Ilya's chest, sharp and unexpected.

He looks back at Hayden.

"Thank you," he says, simply.

Hayden nods and bumps his glove against Ilya's in return.

Warmups bleed seamlessly into the rest of the night, and Ottawa does not miss a beat.

The anthem is sung by a local queer musician, the crowd already on its feet before the first note finishes. The puck drop follows, ceremonial and unapologetic, another familiar face from Ottawa's queer community taking center ice to roaring applause.

By the time the puck drops for real, the arena is already loud with it. Not just noise, but intention. The sense that this night belongs to the city as much as it belongs to the team.

Harris somehow ends up on the Zamboni during first intermission, phone in hand, narrating a social video with one arm braced against the rail, grinning like he's won something. The clip will be everywhere by morning.

There are Pride jerseys in the crowd as far as Ilya can see. Flags draped over shoulders. Handmade signs. Merch giveaways between whistles, tossed into the stands until people are laughing and scrambling for them. Every stoppage feels like another small celebration layered on top of the last.

It isn't subtle. It isn't restrained.

Ilya skates hard, heart steady, smile threatening at the corners of his mouth.

This is what it looks like, he thinks.

Home.

- - -

After the game, they stay.

Not five minutes. Not ten.

Over an hour.

The arena never really clears, it just reshapes itself, bodies rotating in and out as security gives up on the idea of moving anyone along and settles instead for keeping the flow from

tipping into disaster. The Centaurs spread out instinctively, backs to the wall, markers already uncapped, hands already reaching.

It isn't just Ilya and Shane this time.

Everyone is busy.

Luca signs patiently, head bent close to hear over the noise. He draws small designs, usually his version of the centaur logo. Wyatt ends up with a small crowd of teenagers and is immediately roped into a discussion about which superheroes he would draft for a hockey team. Bood is laughing loud, leaning in for photos like he was built for this exact moment.

Ilya signs a jersey. Then another. Then a Pride flag. Then a shoe.

"Shoe?" he asks, baffled.

"Yes," the kid says, serious. "It's lucky."

Ilya shrugs and signs it anyway.

Someone hands him a hockey puck that has been bedazzled within an inch of its life. Someone else offers a phone case. A foam finger. The inside of a jean jacket. He signs the brim of a cowboy hat and does not ask why.

For the first time, though, people start handing over things for him to keep.

A young woman presses something small and beaded into Ilya's palm. "For you," she says, already backing away like she's afraid she's broken a rule.

Ilya looks down.

Friendship bracelets.

Two of them.

One spelling out **Twenty-Four**.

The other **Eighty-One**.

He brightens immediately.

"Oh," he says, delighted. "Yes."

He doesn't move. Just stands there holding them, staring, like he's deciding what to do.

Then, he yells, "Hey. Hollander."

Shane looks over from where he's signing a hat, and holding a stuffed bear that must have been gifted to him. "What?"

"Gift for you," Ilya says, wiggling his fingers obnoxiously. "Very special gift."

Shane sighs, but he's smiling as he steps closer. "What is it?"

Ilya lifts the bracelets proudly. "Look."

Shane blinks. "Oh."

"Yes," Ilya agrees. "This one is mine." He taps the **Twenty-Four**. "This one is yours." He holds up the **Eighty-One**.

"You don't have to—"

Ilya grabs Shane's wrist before he can finish and slips the bracelet on, movements careful but decisive.

"You are wrong," Ilya says cheerfully. "I absolutely have to."

Shane looks down at it for a long second, then swallows. "Okay," he says quietly.

Ilya beams, leaning forward and pressing a loud kiss to Shane's cheek.

They return to signing.

More jerseys, lots of custom t-shirts. The shirts have slogans ranging from "*I Came for the Game, Stayed for the Gays*" to "*Straight(s) to the Penalty Box*" and "*This Is My Emotional Support Hockey Team*".

At some point Shane taps Ilya's arm, eyes wide, barely containing himself.

"Hey," he says. "Turn around."

When they do, he sees them properly. Two men standing a few feet away, close together, shoulders brushing. Both are wearing custom Ottawa jerseys.

One says **HOLLANDER** with **81**.

The other **ROZANOV** with **24**.

They're swapped.

Ilya makes a sound that is deeply undignified.

"No," he says, already moving toward them. "No. Is perfect."

They laugh, a little shy now, a little proud.

"We have to get photo," Ilya says. "No—two photos."

He grabs Shane by the sleeve and pulls him closer without asking. "Come."

He hands his phone to Luka, then turns and snags another phone from a nearby fan, passing it to Dykstra. "One for me," he says firmly. "One for you."

He positions everyone, then stops.

“No,” he says. “Turn around.”

The men do. Ilya and Shane step in on either side of them, close enough that their shoulders brush the fans’ backs.

“Okay,” Ilya says. “Go.”

The photos are snapped.

Then Ilya shifts again. “Now front.”

They all turn. Ilya tugs Shane to his side. Shane’s arm slips easily around Ilya’s waist, familiar and unthinking. Ilya leans into him, grinning like he’s just won something.

“Another,” Ilya says. “For safety.”

The phones flash twice.

When it’s done, the men thank them, voices a little unsteady.

Ilya shakes his head. “No,” he says. “Thank *you*.”

By the time they finally drift back toward the locker room, markers dried out, wrists sore, arms full, the arena feels different.

Quieter. Warmer. Like it’s been emptied gently instead of abandoned.

Ilya looks at Shane, bracelets and bear and all of it, and feels the last lingering doubt loosen its grip.

This one, he thinks. This one was enough.

End Notes

Kudos and comments and bookmarks mean the absolute world to me! ❤️🏳️‍🌈

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