

Third Round Draft Pick

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Third Round Draft Pick

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Summary

"Mister Rozanov," the Centaurs' GM says, standing and holding out his hand for Ilya to shake. "Welcome to Ottawa."

(Or: When the Centaurs play their first game on Boston ice, half the fans in the crowd are wearing number 81.)

Notes

Inspired by that one video of Brad Marchand playing in Boston after getting traded to the Panthers. IYKYK.

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

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The trade goes through.

The Centaurs' general manager looks a little dazed, across the table. The Raiders' team is silent. They'd stopped talking the second he picked up the pen. They had been doing a *lot* of talking. Promises. Considerations. Special— accommodations. Anything. Name his price.

But it's done now.

The only thing Ilya Rozanov really wants is something Boston would never be able to offer. That doesn't mean his hands aren't shaking.

In return for a third round draft pick next year, and the potential of a first round draft pick, the year after— if the Centaurs' make the playoffs— Ilya Rozanov now plays for Ottawa. Two year limited contract. To see how things go.

The lawyers take the papers away, filing them into identical folders, into identical bags. Two perfect duplicates. Ilya's future, in their hands.

The conference room is silent, for a long minute, as the lawyers nod their heads goodbye and step out of the wide glass doors.

Coach LeClaire moves first, stepping out of the stunned Raiders' corner to pull Ilya into a gruff hug that's all arms and shoulders.

"I hope you know what you're doing, kid," he says, quiet enough that Ilya is the only one who can hear him. From another man it would have sounded like a threat, but Coach LeClaire has picked him up off the ice too many times in the last seven years to be anything except what he already was— worried. About Ilya.

Because that's the heart of it, really. Ilya has no idea what he's doing. This horrible, risky, all-in plan he can't talk about with anyone.

He should make some quip here— something fast-tongued and light, to wipe that look off of Coach LeClaire's face. But when he goes to open his mouth, his voice fails him. Dies, somewhere in the back of his throat. Coach LeClaire thumps him once on the back, hard enough to knock some wind back into him, and then walks away. Back towards the only team Ilya has ever really known. One that isn't his. Not anymore.

"Mister Rozanov," the Centaurs' GM says, standing and holding out his hand for Ilya to shake. "Welcome to Ottawa."

Ilya shakes his hand, and says nothing.

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They lose their first game of the season on Buffalo ice in the middle of nowhere.

The team jerks back from him as he tells them he loves them, almost on automatic, bumping gloves as they shuffle off the ice and into the tunnels.

And why wouldn't they?

Ilya Rozanov is a stranger with a bad reputation. He left the team he lead to glory, and won't tell anyone why. It will be hard for them to believe he loves anything at all.

He feels himself go silent as the goalies take up the rear of the line, just holds his glove up for them to hit, if they want to.

Only one of them does.

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They play Boston on their second away game of the season. Like some kind of bad joke.

The media is feral, cameras pointed at him the second he steps past the gate at Logan, all shouting questions he won't answer. Can't answer. His team surrounds him as they get onto the bus, not saying anything. They let him have a back corner seat, where he curls against the window and watches the city roll by.

It hasn't changed much.

It's only been a few months. Not even three.

They go straight to the arena, bus pulling around the back to the industrial player entrance, next to the loading dock. Their gear is already here, shipped up the day before. Which means Ilya doesn't have anything to do with his hands as he follows the rest of his team inside, down new hallways. Turning left where his body wants to turn right.

The inside of the locker room looks like the inside of every other away locker room on the planet. Which means it's dully coloured, full of scraped wood and painted white cinderblocks. But the whiteboard is the same and Ilya moves the same way he always does to come stand up next to Coach Wiebe to discuss opening plays.

Ilya knows a lot about Boston's defences. Their weaknesses. When he was traded this information was traded with him.

He spills the most critical of Boston's secrets onto the sticky padded floor. Some of his teammates smile. Hungry things. Ilya only tastes the plastic of his mouthguard as he bites down on it, sliding the visor down over his helmet.

Just another game of hockey. He has played so many on this ice.

They end the first period tied 1-1.

When the buzzer goes, Ilya moves to head back into the locker room, debrief his team on what to expect in the next period, but shouting in the crowd stops him. He pauses, for a second, to try and make out what they're saying, stomach churning. He had expected their anger at the beginning. When there was none, he thought he was safe.

The fans point up towards the jumbotron, and Ilya follows their fingers.

He's not as good at reading English letters as he is at hearing them, so it takes him a second to understand what it is he's looking at. But there, on the electric-bright screen, fifty feet in the air, in all-capital letters, reads: *WELCOME BACK ROZY*.

It flashes in colour a few times, and then drops into a montage of all of Ilya's highlights on the Raiders. Hat tricks. Fights. Win after win after win.

He hears his own voice, amplified though the arena soundsystem, telling his mother the cup win was for her. In her name. In her honour. The rest of his team, in the background, hollering. Laughing. He can feel the phantom weight of the crush of them against his shoulderpads. He turns away from the screen and almost starts skating— for two easy steps — towards the home bench.

The crowd is roaring. Raising signs and jerseys with his number, still in black and gold.

His team— his new team— have no idea what to do with the mess of him.

They pat careful gloves on his shoulders as he collapses over the boards, dropping his head between his arms, staring at the rubber floor. What he's doing cannot properly be considered *breathing*. The overwhelming noise of it doesn't stop. He's wearing too much equipment to even really rub at his eyes.

The intermission is only twenty minutes long. It feels like an eternity. Every time he tries to raise his head he sees them, all of them, everywhere. It's probably only a few seconds before someone new hits him in the hip with the soft edge of a stick.

When he turns, Marlow is behind him, flanked by Carmichael and St-Simon. Behind them, others. Blurred. They're smiling at him. Bumping his shoulders.

"Come on, Rozy," Marlow says, laughing. "Give the fans what they want."

What they want is apparently Ilya, with his old team. Out in front of them, skating a full loop of the rink, with both his hands in the air. Like this is something to celebrate. His being here.

He knows the press is getting this on camera. Video clips will circulate for weeks. Ilya Rozanov— hot-headed brawler— emotional on Raiders' ice. The fans blame the team. The management. The strange, intricate, games of contract negotiations.

They have no idea Ilya Rozanov begged for this. Pulled every string he could to give them up.

Here they are— welcoming him home to a place that will never be home again.

They finish their slow, easy, lap around the ice at the away bench. The rest of the Raiders drift away, and it's just him and Marlow, and the few Centaurs still on the bench, pretending not to listen, and failing. Coach LeClaire calls something across the ice and Marlow calls something back. Enough time fraternizing with the enemy. It's more than any other coach would have granted them.

"You are still going to lose," Ilya tells him, tapping their helmets together.

Marlow just laughs at him. Says, "Yeah, cap. Without you we probably will."

And it's only because he's watching his tongue, under the weight of the cameras, that Ilya doesn't offer out his glove for Marlow to hit, the same as he's done a thousand times before, just like this, standing at the bench. Doesn't say *I love you*.

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They do. Ottawa takes it. 3-1 for the away team. The crowd chants his name as he steps off the ice and into tunnels— sweat already cold on his skin. Shoulders, shaking.

His new team celebrates in the locker room, and they smile at him when he comes in the door. Clap him on the back. They're not bad guys. Good teammates. Friendly. They don't flinch, anymore, when he tells them *good game, well played*, at the end of each game. Maybe next year he will love them.

But they are, for now, ultimately, strangers.

He absentmindedly pulls his mother's crucifix into his mouth as he unties the laces on his skates— trying to do anything except think about how much he had loved it here. How far away he is from the things he had loved before he loved Boston.

The rest of the team filters out of the locker room and for only a few minutes, Ilya Rozanov is alone.

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jane

*good game tonight
they really love you in boston*

lily

yes

jane

*not as much as I love you in montreal
but maybe close second*

Ilya turns his phone screen off without replying and lets it drop, face-first, down onto his chest. This hotel room could be any hotel room. Beige. Quiet. But if he were to open the windows— if these windows even open— there would be the familiar snarl of Boston traffic. He's not in his penthouse. It's not his penthouse anymore. But it's close. An almost-thing.

His house on the river in Ottawa is not anything like this.

The phone buzzes again, a rumble against his ribs.

jane

*three days off this week before we fly to jersey
i'll probably get home before you do
your flight's at 11 right?
practice is over at 10:30 and i'll probably hit the road right after*

lily

*drive safe
weather report says snow*

jane

*i'd be more worried about your flight getting in than the drive
you made fun of my car but who's laughing now?*

jane

do you want to stay another night in boston?

*im sure marlow would love to see you
off the ice*

He considers it, for a long minute. Thinks about going to the windows and finding out for real if they open or not. Thinks about calling Svetlana and curling up on her couch in a house he knows well, where all the streets are familiar. Going to the bar all the Raiders go to to celebrate, where there will be none of them, tonight, after a loss.

He turns the lights off instead. Into the blue glare of his phone, he types a simple truth.

***lily**
i want to see you*

***jane**
okay
tomorrow then :)
love you*

***lily**
love you more.*

That's all there is to it, really. Tomorrow morning he will get up, eat breakfast with his teammates. Try to learn something new about each of them. Details on their families— how they take their coffee. Which ones don't believe in caffeine at all. Which ones think coffee constitutes a whole meal. Every team has both.

They will debrief the game. Coach will want to discuss the weakness on their offence going into the third period.

And then they will all fly to Ottawa, in the snow. To play on home ice. To rest, and practice, in this new city he has sworn himself to.

Where Ilya Rozanov is trying to build, for the third time in his life, somewhere he feels welcome.

End Notes

will i ever stop writing ficlets about ilya and his desperate quest for home? no. i dont think i will.

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