

One Shot

By

Nikki Ryan

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Chapter One

Cool air swept in behind Laci as she walked through the front door of the studio. Two large coffees from the café that she and Emma frequented occupied her hands.

"Man, it's freezing out there," Laci said, placing one coffee in front of her best friend and business partner. It was the middle of September and unseasonably chilly for that time of the year.

"Thanks," Emma said. After taking a sip of the delicious hot brew, she asked, "How did it go?"

Laci circled around the counter, shrugged off her coat and sat down at her work station.

"Not good. All he did was cry and tell me that I was making the biggest mistake of my life. He actually thinks that we are soul mates, can you believe that? There's something seriously wrong with that guy."

Strands of Laci's hair had escaped its rubber confinement when she walked back from the café and now fell lazily around her face. Laci pulled the elastic band out of her hair.

"Soul mates, huh? And here I thought his soul mate was Lieutenant Uhura."

"You're terrible."

Laci had met Doug at the same café where she bought the coffees every morning. He had been hired there a little over a year ago and had immediately fixated on Laci. He seemed like a nice enough guy to Laci at first until calla lilies from the flower shop next door started arriving. The cards were addressed the same, 'My dearest love, your beauty captivates me'. They were never signed. With the help of the shop owner, Laci discovered that Doug had been the sender. She politely asked him to stop but they continued to arrive week after week. She wasn't quite sure how he could afford the exquisite bouquets on a barista's salary but they certainly made a beautiful centerpiece on the table Laci and Emma used whenever they consulted with clients.

His infatuation with her was now at the point of ridiculousness. Laci needed to find another coffeehouse for her kick start in the morning. Doug had taken it to the extreme by ignoring the customers who were in line in front of her, just to take her order. She kept telling

him she'd wait her turn until the others realized they weren't getting their items until she allowed him to make her coffee. Now he had her and Emma's coffee ready when she or Emma walked in.

She had finally relented and told him that she'd go out to dinner to with him if he'd quit with the flowers and the excessive attention. Big mistake! The dinner date had been long and tortuous. Nothing against Star Trek, but the guy worshipped the movies and talked incessantly about the conference coming up. Until then, she had only heard about 'trekkies' as they called themselves. Now she had one staring her right in her face.

Things picked up after their dinner together even though he had promised that he would stop. And as much as she hated confrontation, it was time that she told him that his feelings weren't reciprocated. True, sitting in his apartment for the past hour watching him break down and beg her not to leave him had been a living hell, but it had to be done. How do you break up with someone you were never with in the first place?

And as far as soul mates go, she had already found hers years ago while in college. Or at least she thought she had. He had chosen his career over her and had broken her heart. That ship sailed a long time ago.

"Unbelievable," Emma said.

Laci thought about the time he had come into the studio carrying flowers last spring, telling her that he was taking her out to dinner again. She had refused of course. Not only could she not endure another dinner with the guy, but she and Emma were photographers and were on a deadline with the area school districts.

They'd been working twelve hour days as it was, organizing and touching up children's photos. And now, she was on the National Hockey League's bankroll to take individual shots of the players on all of the teams which required a lot of travel. She had had zero time to go to the bathroom let alone have a boyfriend or whatever it was that he wanted to be.

He accepted the refusal but clearly hadn't been happy about it, throwing the flowers on the counter before storming out of her shop.

"I'm just glad it's over. I also spoke to his manager this morning while I waited for our coffees to be made. He said that he'd been getting a lot of complaints from both employees and customers. He *did not* seem happy about it at all." Laci watched as Emma finished touching up a family portrait she had taken yesterday. "Cute family."

"No doubt. I had a hard time controlling myself around the father. He looked and smelled delicious."

Laci shook her head at her friend. Emma was a sex fiend.

She reached down and pulled the laptop from her bag and scrolled through the forty two new emails in her inbox. She clicked on the one sent from the team manager of the Boston Bruins.

She read the email and looked over at Emma.

"What's our schedule look like today?"

Emma shrugged her shoulders. "We have a full day of sittings starting at ten, why?"

"The Bruins manager sent me an email asking if I could come in today to take pictures."

Emma left the project she had been working on and pulled up the day's schedule on her computer. "I think I can handle today without you. You go on and play nice with all of those sexy men." She winked at Laci.

"You're a walking sex hormone, Emma," she said with a roll of her eyes.

"Don't be a hater."

Laci typed a quick response back to the team manager, answered the other pertinent emails and closed her laptop. She gathered her camera bag and other necessary items she'd need throughout the day while she was at the rink.

There had once been a time where she had spent an entire winter at an ice rink while she watched the love of her life score countless goals and bring their Division 1 team to the championships three years in a row for the University of Vermont. A time where she not only learned the rules of the game but had fallen in love with the sport as well. She had always worn figure skates growing up until Matt had bought her a pair of hockey skates for Christmas one year. It hadn't taken her very long to adjust to the new skates before she was playing pond hockey with Matt, his team mates and a few of their girlfriends. Of course, they had gone easy on the girls otherwise it would have been a massacre. She really missed those guys and the cold Sunday afternoons they had spent out on the frozen lake.

She couldn't tear herself away from the television when the Bruins played last year. A couple times a year she would watch Matt playing for the opposing team and the pain of him leaving her without an explanation would rise to the surface.

She'd be lying if she said she didn't google him every so often. He had been drafted to the NHL during their senior year of college. She had gone with him on that day. She had been so excited for him and for their future together until he had dropped the mother of all bombs on her one Saturday afternoon in April. He had broken up with her, saying that she would be a distraction to him and that he needed to be completely focused on the game.

Laci could still remember how hollow her stomach had felt in that moment as her life unraveled before her. What had confused her the most was that he had held her for hours as they both cried. Laci had begged him then to reconsider. His only response to her pleas was that 'he needed to walk into this new chapter by himself so that he could focus on hockey'. Laci had finally cried herself to sleep in his arms while he too succumbed to the fatigue that surrounded the two of them. Later that evening when they woke, he walked out of her life.

Laci had spent days in bed following the breakup, crying during her awake hours and refusing any nourishment that Emma put in front of her. The emotional pain was so severe and had consumed Laci to the point of vomiting. The pain hurt so much. It felt like one of her own limbs was gone. Like the amazing best friend that Emma was, she held vigil over Laci as she grieved her loss. She'd slept alongside her at night, holding her until she'd finally surrendered to sleep.

When Emma realized that time wasn't helping Laci to heal and the vomiting turned into dry heaving, she knew it had been time to call in the big guns.

Without a moment's hesitation, Laci's mother, Joan, had packed a bag and drove the two hours to northern Vermont to take care of her baby while Peter and the twins remained home to fend for themselves. She stayed with Laci and Emma for three and a half weeks. She kept herself busy with the cooking, cleaning and the girls' laundry while she mother-henned Laci and Emma to death. Slowly but surely, Laci pulled out of her depression and joined the land of the living, allowing Joan to return home. After that, she had promised herself to never give her heart to anyone ever again.

"Earth to Laci," Emma chided. "Where did you go just now?"

Laci breathed in deeply and looked over at Emma. Without another word Emma knew.

"You know you are going to have to deal with him at some point."

"I know."

"I googled him the other day. He and that slutty tramp broke up. What's her name? Francesca?" Emma said.

"I didn't know you kept tabs on him."

"Just his love life. Every time I search for him, I hope that the headline reads: Superstar skater, Matt Lindberg, has announced that he can no longer date as his dick has rotted and fallen off."

Laci choked on her coffee. She knew Emma had also loved Matt. But it was all 'sisters before mistas' with Emma, and so far, Matt still held the number one position on her shit list. Laci couldn't even fathom the thought of Emma not being in her life.

The bell jingled over the door frame. Emma walked over to the couple and their newborn baby and exchanged pleasantries.

"I should be going. I'll try and get back in time to help you close up. Are you still going with me to check out the apartment tonight at six?"

Emma nodded and waved her off as she sat down with the man and woman to show them the different backgrounds they could choose from.

Laci stepped out onto the cobblestoned street. She loved this area of Boston and had been ecstatic when this property had become available two years ago.

She thought about walking the six blocks to the arena in order to reach her quota for exercise that day when the wind picked up again and howled around her. Not to mention the fact that her arm would likely fall off after the first two blocks from the weight of her camera bag. So instead, she walked behind the building and unlocked her car door, placing her belongings on the passenger seat. Besides, if Laci was really being honest with herself, exercise wasn't really high on her to-do list. In fact, it never made it to the top ten. Thank goodness for good genes.

Traffic was heavy as usual. Lady Gaga screamed through her speakers. Laci belted out the lyrics while cars honked and people swerved in and out of lanes around her. The song had ended and Laci laughed. She was a better photographer than she was a singer. She'd stick with her day job. Pulling into the private parking lot, she stopped at the guard station. The uniformed man cross-checked her ID with the page attached to his clipboard. Satisfied, he waved her through.

The lot was almost full. *The players must be here already.* Circling around until she found a spot in the back, she parked and turned her car off. It had been four years since she had

stepped foot in a hockey rink. Laci gathered her things and headed towards the back entrance. It had always been a happy place for her. What was it going to feel like now?