

A close-up portrait of a young man with light brown hair and striking blue eyes. He is wearing a dark grey zip-up hoodie over a light blue shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a warm, orange-toned collage of autumn leaves. The text 'ANNA SUGDEN' is printed in white, serif, all-caps font in the lower right area of the image.

ANNA
SUGDEN

A PERFECT
REUNION

Anna Sugden

A Perfect Reunion



A New Jersey Ice Cats short story

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A Perfect Reunion

“I hope we have enough food.”

Troy Davidson slung his arm around his mom’s shoulders and steered her away from the heavily laden buffet table. “There’s enough for five teams, let alone a dozen Ice Cats.”

She shook her head, concerned. “I know how much you boys eat. Perhaps I should’ve got another ...”

“Ma, it’s fine,” Troy interrupted firmly. “This is great. The best Thanksgiving spread we’ve ever had. Trust me. We usually have bland hotel food.”

Aisla Davidson smiled. “But this is the first time your friends from your New Jersey team have been here, so I want to make a good impression.”

The Cats were in Chicago ahead of a game the following night against the Blackhawks. They were on the tail-end of a west coast swing, which had included four games in six days, so Coach Macarty had given the players a rest day. Troy’s parents had invited a bunch of his team-mates to their annual holiday party.

“No worries. They’ll love you and your food almost as much as I do.”

She rolled her eyes, but reached up and pulled his head down to kiss his forehead. “Make sure you eat plenty. Can’t have you being too skinny. You’ll get

Anna Sugden

knocked about the ice.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Awesome food, Mrs. D.” Jamie ‘Blade’ Wilkinson came to stand next to them, carrying a loaded plate.

“You don’t want to adopt another son, do you?”

“I’ll consider it,” she laughed. “Now, I should top up the potato salad.”

She grabbed the half-empty dish and headed to the kitchen. In the doorway, Troy’s dad grabbed her around the waist and kissed her, making her giggle and blush.

Troy grinned. His parents were lucky. They still adored each other after all these years.

A shame his own love story had fallen way short of theirs.

Being back in Chicago was making unwelcome memories resurface. Not surprising given this was where he’d screwed up, big time. Where he’d lost ... no, thrown away the girl he loved.

Not wanting to go there, Troy turned to Blade. “Hope all that food doesn’t slow you down tomorrow night.”

“I’ll be fine.” Blade waved his fork dismissively. “You’re the one who has to be solid. The Hawks’ top line is freaking sneaky and hellish fast. You’ll need to ride their asses tight.”

“I’m ready for them. They won’t burn me, like the last time we played here.”

“Pin them in their own zone for long stretches and I’ll be happy.”

A Perfect Reunion

“Count on it.”

Easy to say now. He'd had a rough ride the first couple of years after his high-profile move from Vancouver, the team that had drafted him, to New Jersey. Bad enough that he'd been brought in to replace a fan favourite -- Tru Jelinek -- but he'd also had to play alongside two of Tru's brothers -- Ike and Kenny - - and his best friend -- Jake 'Bad Boy' Badoletti. Worse, Troy had taken a long time to settle into the team and the new style of play.

The breakdown of his marriage had made things doubly difficult.

Recognising that his happy-ever-after wasn't going to last forever -- unlike his parents, grandparents and every other freaking Davidson in history -- had been hard to accept.

Part of the problem had been that no-one was to blame for the way his marriage had fallen apart. His wife, Sierra, hadn't had an affair with one of her co-stars. He hadn't done the dirty with a puck bunny. No storming rows, no broken china. They'd simply drifted apart. Despite their demanding careers, they'd tried to keep their marriage together. But, in the end, there hadn't been enough between them to hold onto.

This summer, they'd agreed amicably to divorce. It was like a huge weight had lifted from his shoulders. He'd found his feet and balance again. Which, in turn, had helped him play better. He felt like he'd finally turned the corner.

Anna Sugden

Yes, his life was headed in the right direction -- both professionally and personally. Today, of all days, he had a lot to be thankful for.

So why was he on edge?

As if answering his question, a burst of laughter came from the living room.

Troy looked up. His stomach dropped when he saw his team-mate, Chance Rivera, was flirting with a familiar, curvy brunette in a red sweater and black jeans.

Why hadn't his mom warned him that Charlie was in town?

She was still the prettiest girl he'd ever seen. While Sierra was classically beautiful, with perfect features the camera loved, Charlie's striking looks hit him square in the logo with the power of a slapshot. Her big, dark eyes, her high cheekbones and lusciously full lips took his breath away, just as they always had.

Troy wanted to go over and shove his friend aside. Only he didn't have the right. Hadn't for a long time.

Still, the sight of her lifted his heart. Troy drank in her presence, but it wasn't enough. He wanted to talk to her. Ached to touch her.

As thrilled as he was to see Charlie, he wasn't dumb enough to believe the feeling was mutual. He'd be lucky if she didn't slap his face. Yet, he couldn't stop himself moving towards her. He knew how that moth felt about the freaking flame.

This was his opportunity to put things right. He

A Perfect Reunion

wanted that more than anything. Well, not quite. But a second chance was not going to happen. The best he could hope for was her forgiveness and the possibility of her friendship.

Steeling himself for disappointment, he walked into the dining room.

* * *

Charlotte Daniels knew the moment Troy stepped into the room.

Her nerves fizzed, like her personal radar. Even though she'd convinced herself that she was well over Troy, the way her pulse skittered proved it was a lie.

Why couldn't she be as affected by the gorgeous man standing beside her? Or by any of the guys she'd dated since her abruptly-ended engagement. There was always something missing. That special spark she'd only ever felt with one man.

Damn it.

Turning her smile up to mega-watt, she listened to Chance's story about his young twins. He should be the perfect fit for her. Single dad, financially sound and that sexy mix of green eyes and golden Latin skin. Yet all she felt was that he'd make a good friend.

Double damn it.

A flash of heat streaked through her. Troy was right behind her.

Charlotte deliberately moved closer to Chance. "I can't believe you haven't shown me any pictures."

Chance pulled out his wallet to display snaps of his

Anna Sugden

curly-haired toddlers.

“Cute rug-rats, Rivera.” Troy’s deep voice slipped over her skin like a caress, making her toes tingle.

“Hello Charlie.”

“It’s Charlotte,” she said flatly, without looking at him. “They’re precious, Chance. You’re a lucky man.”

“Yeah. They’re the best.” He sent a wary glance at Troy, then said quickly, “Blade needs me. Nice meeting you, Charlotte.”

Out of the corner of her eye, she caught Troy’s ‘hands off’ look.

How dare he? Troy had lost that right when he’d stood Charlotte up at their engagement party and eloped with Sierra.

That had been rock bottom. But, driven by the pain of her heartbreak, she’d focused on her career and was now a successful food blogger. Some day, she might be grateful to him.

Today wasn’t that day.

“I hope we meet again soon.” She snagged a pen from her purse and scrawled her number on Chance’s hand. “Give me a call.”

“For sure.” Chance looked from her to Troy and grinned. “Later, bro,” he said, before sauntering away.

Troy’s jaw twitched, sending a glimmer of satisfaction through Charlotte.

He cleared his throat. “I thought you’d be at your parents’ place in Florida.”

“Work commitments.” She crossed her arms. “Sorry

A Perfect Reunion

to disappoint you.”

“I’m not disappointed. It’s good to see you.”

His words did not thrill her. “Well, I’d better check if your mom needs help. Take care.”

He blocked her path. “Can we talk?”

“What’s there to say?”

“I was a jerk. I treated you badly and I’m really sorry.”

Her breath hitched. “True, true, and apology accepted. Goodbye.”

“Please, Charlie. Give me five minutes. For old times’ sake.”

That was a low blow. “You humiliated me.”

“I was stupid and thoughtless.” He glanced around. “Look, can we find somewhere quiet to talk?”

“You’re married.”

“We’re divorced.”

Damn Charlotte’s heart for leaping. “I hadn’t heard.”

“We’re keeping it quiet. Sierra’s next movie is about to be released and the studio doesn’t want any gossip until after the premier.”

“That’s tough.” She was proud of the perfect note of sympathy in her cool voice.

“Yeah.” He jammed his hands into his pants’ pockets. “I’d rather not do this in front of an audience. How about the sun-room?”

“Okay.” As soon as she agreed, Charlotte wished she hadn’t. They’d spent too many hours there when

Anna Sugden

they'd dated. "Five minutes."

She strode into the hallway and out the back door, into the glassed-in porch. Twinkling white lights looped across the panes, casting a soft glow around the cozy room. Perching on the arm of an Adirondack chair, she tilted her head. "The floor is yours."

Troy rubbed his hand over his face. "I should have broken our engagement face-to-face."

Remembered humiliation jabbed under her ribs. "You couldn't even make a phone call?"

"I meant to tell you before the party, but things snowballed and before I knew it, I was in a wedding chapel in Vegas."

"Leaving me to tell our guests that there was nothing to celebrate."

How many times had she imagined this conversation? She'd wanted him to grovel. Then she'd toss his words back at him, causing him as much pain as he'd given her.

Yet, now the moment was here, Charlotte felt weary. What was the point? Rehashing the past wouldn't change a thing. "I'm over it. I've moved on." Almost true. It certainly would be once this party was over.

"I never meant to hurt you."

Her short laugh was wry. "Like I said, it's done. You can go back to Jersey with a clear conscience." And maybe she'd finally be able to find that special someone.

A Perfect Reunion

“I’ve missed you.”

“Yeah, right.” Charlotte rolled her eyes to hide the tug of pleasure in her chest. “You were married to a beautiful, successful woman.” She hated that Sierra seemed to be a nice person and even admired her outspoken stance on important female issues.

“Do you want to know why our marriage failed?”

“Tell People magazine, not me.”

“It wasn’t enough,” he said quietly

“Oh please. Your smiling faces are always plastered over the media.” Great. The last thing she wanted was Troy thinking she’d sought news on him.

“Because we got on well together. And initially she was hot.”

Charlotte held up her hand. “I don’t need details. I’m not TMZ.”

“But hot fades pretty quickly.”

It hadn’t for them. From their first kiss to their last, if anything they’d only grown more intense and passionate.

She did not need to think about their kisses.

He continued, “All we had left was friendship.”

“That’s sad. But really not my business.”

He walked over the window and stared out into the darkness. “The real reason my marriage failed was because she wasn’t you.”

Charlotte couldn’t move. Couldn’t speak. She must have misheard.

“Even Sierra knew it.” He returned to her side.

Anna Sugden

She told her racing pulse to slow down. This didn't change anything.

Troy crouched beside her. "It's always been you."

The words wouldn't come. What could she say? She didn't want to look like a fish, mouth opening and closing, so she bit her lip.

"I was so caught up in the excitement of my first year in the show -- having money to burn, being treated like a rock star -- I lost sight of what mattered. Hell, I'd made it. And a popular actress wanted me." He laid his hand on hers tentatively. As if he were afraid she'd shake him off like a bug. "I rode the wave. Didn't think about what I was doing to anyone. Least of all, the girl I loved."

She didn't want to see his side. To understand. What he'd done was unforgivable. Yet his quiet words ripped out the festering shards of bitterness from her heart, relieving the pain.

Maybe the healing really could begin now.

Looking chagrined, he said, "By the time I realised that we'd mistaken lust and laughs for love, it was too late. Easier to let it ride, than correct it. I finally put that right." His thumb stroked the back of her hand. "Now I want to put things right with you."

Charlotte swallowed hard. "You've explained. You've apologized. Job done."

"If you can find it in your heart to forgive me, I'd really like to start over."

She meant to say no. "What does that mean

A Perfect Reunion

exactly?”

“Whatever you want it to. Friends. More. Up to you.”

More? Shocked, she pulled her hand from his and jumped up. She wrapped her arms around herself.

“That’s not going to happen.”

She couldn’t open herself up like that again. No matter how much her heart was screaming for her to say yes.

“Can we at least be friends?”

She would not be swayed by the hurt in his eyes.

“Honestly, I don’t know. I need to think about it.”

“Okay.” He grabbed the pen sticking out of her purse and deliberately wrote his number on her arm. “If you decide you want to try, here’s how to get hold of me.”

He kissed her cheek. The merest brush of his lips, yet it sent fire through her veins. Then he was gone.

Charlotte stayed where she was, stunned and unsure how to think or feel, for what seemed like hours. Outside, snow fell. The noise of the party echoed through the silent porch.

She shook her head. What was there to think about? Wasn’t this what she’d wanted -- for Troy to realize his mistake and come crawling back?

Perhaps she was a fool but, she’d never stopped loving him. Now it seemed he still loved her too. But could she trust him not to hurt her again?

Charlotte was surprised to realise that she did. He’d

Anna Sugden

changed. Grown up. And in some ways returned to being the shy, serious boy she'd fallen for. Was that enough to risk giving him a second chance? She hesitated only briefly.

If she clung to her pride, she'd throw away the possibility of a future together. Maybe it wouldn't work out the way she hoped, but surely it had to be worth one more shot?

Before she could talk herself out of it, Charlotte strode out of the sun-room in search of Troy. Only he wasn't in the dining room, by the buffet table, with his team-mates, watching football in the den, nor in the lounge.

Had he left? She sank onto the bottom step of the stairs, cursing herself for being too slow. Then she saw her arm and pulled out her phone.

"He went for a walk."

She looked up to see Chance, understanding in his eyes.

"Said he needed to clear his head." He held out a coat. "Idiot forgot his jacket. He'll freeze his ass off."

Her heart lifted. She smiled and grabbed her own coat from the closet. "We don't want him ill for tomorrow night."

"Right."

"Thanks." She hugged Chance, then dashed out the front door.

Charlotte didn't have to go far. She saw a familiar figure in the park opposite, standing in front of the

A Perfect Reunion

frozen pond. The one where he'd first asked her out, and later proposed. Her steps faltered. Where she'd run to on that fateful night, to escape the pitying looks.

That was then. This was another night. An opportunity to replace that memory with a happy one.

Charlotte walked up to Troy and laid his jacket over his shoulders. "You'll catch your death of cold."

"I'm tough. But thanks anyway." In the lamplight, she could see the questions in his expression. "Guess this means you don't want me to die of cold."

She shrugged. "It would be a hassle and upset your folks. We'd have to get an ambulance. The Cats would have to call up someone to take your place."

His mouth quirked into a half-smile. "I wouldn't want to inconvenience everyone."

Their gazes met and held. Her breath hitched at the hope and love she saw there. But she also saw nervousness; he was unsure. He wasn't taking anything for granted.

His uncertainty gave her courage. "I'm prepared to give us another shot. I want to be more than friends, but to take things slowly. Make sure it's what we want, before we make any commitments."

He dropped his head back. His puffed-out breath misted in the cold air. The tension drained visibly from his body. Then he straightened. "Okay. But so you know -- while I'll wait as long as it takes for you to be comfortable, I love you and know I want it all. Marriage, kids, the whole nine yards."

Anna Sugden

Happiness bubbled up inside her. “I love you and I want all that too.”

Troy wrapped her in his arms. “Are you sure?”

She lifted her face, smiling. “Of course. I know you won’t let me down.”

Serious for a moment, he said, “I can’t promise never, but I’ll do my best. For sure, I won’t hurt you again.”

“I know you won’t.” And she did.

He kissed her lightly. “This morning, I wished you’d be here. I hoped you’d forgive me, but I never imagined we’d end up back together.”

“This is truly a day of thanksgiving.” Charlotte wound her arms around his neck. Just before she touched her lips to his, she said, “It’s been a perfect reunion.”

A Perfect Reunion

Welcome to the world of the New Jersey Ice Cats!

Books in the series:

[A Perfect Distraction](#)

[A Perfect Trade](#)

[A Perfect Catch](#)

[A Perfect Compromise](#)

Coming Soon: A Perfect Plan

Short Stories:

[A Perfect Party](#)

A Perfect Lucky Charm

A Perfect Disguise

A Perfect Reunion

A Perfect Storm

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Anna Sugden

A Perfect Distraction **A face-off—head vs. heart**

For Jake Badoletti, this year is all about his career. He has a rare second chance to make the most of being a pro hockey player, so no parties, no scandals. Too bad he's met a woman who could sideline those plans. Maggie Goodman is not his usual type—right down to being a single mom. Still, the sizzling connection with this gorgeous brunette can't be ignored.

With a little juggling and a lot of focus, Jake manages to have the game *and* Maggie. Then his performance on the ice suffers and a scandal erupts. Now he can't afford the distraction of Maggie...even if she is perfect for him.

A Perfect Trade **A win-win negotiation?**

Truman "Tru" Jelinek's life is pretty much off the rails. With his professional hockey career on thin ice, and his personal life falling apart, he's ready to implement some serious changes. Helping Jenny Martin—the only girl he's ever loved—make her dreams a reality is a good place to start.

There's just one problem: Jenny doesn't want his help. She barely wants to speak to him. But Tru is prepared to negotiate a deal that even Jenny can't refuse. As trading favors turns into sharing passion, he has to face the truth that when it comes to Jenny, the game is far from over.

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A Perfect Catch **He's the perfect catch...for now!**

When it comes to romance, Tracy Hayden is *not* looking for a rematch. She's had epic passion—and problems!—with professional hockey player Ike Jelinek. Brilliant on skates and magic in bed, his too-traditional-for-her views were like a bucket of ice water on their affair.

Then an injury takes Ike out of the game, and everything changes. Suddenly he needs her services-providing business—even though he once claimed it was their biggest problem. Tracy's determined to be professional, despite the sizzling attraction between them that won't go away. Maybe they need a second fling to fix that!

A Perfect Compromise **Theirs is a game of give-and-take...**

Schoolteacher Issy Brandine has a plan to build a stable, secure future for herself. No settling for second-best. Anything more than a sultry Caribbean fling with hotshot hockey star Jean Baptiste Larocque isn't part of the plan. A New Jersey Ice Cat with the ultimate hockey trophy in his sights won't fit into her low-key lifestyle. Except a surprise pregnancy changes everything.

Issy knows her child deserves more than a part-time dad. With JB's eyes on the championship that will redeem his career, compromise is out of the question. But love—and the baby between them—might prove that nothing is impossible.



A PERFECT REUNION

A day of thanksgiving?

When Ice Cats' defenseman, Troy Davidson, sees his ex-fiancé at his parents' Thanksgiving party, he's determined to make things right. He screwed up five years ago, when he ditched their engagement party to elope with a movie star. Now divorced, he realises he's only ever loved one woman. Charlotte Daniels claims she's forgiven Troy. But can she trust him enough to take another chance on him and love?

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