



ANNA
SUGDEN

A PERFECT
CHANCE

Anna Sugden

A Perfect Chance



A New Jersey Ice Cats short story

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“I don’t need a hospital. You patched me up fine.”

Hank ‘Vexer’ Delvecchio eased his shirt over his head, trying not to catch the fabric on the bandage taped to the right side of his face, which covered a nasty slash on his cheek, courtesy of an errant high stick. One that wasn’t even freaking penalised.

“Fine? Those twenty-eight stitches are a work of art,” Marcus, the New Jersey Ice Cats’ team doctor snapped off his medical gloves. “You’ll have a nice, manly, but not-too-gruesome scar there to wow the women. Like you need any help there.”

Hank grinned, despite his aching face. “Not everyone’s a fan, believe me.”

One particular brown-eyed nurse sprang to mind. A trip to the ER might not be such a bad idea. “Are you sure I need to be checked out?”

“That cut is a little close to your eye, so I want to make sure that there’s nothing more than superficial damage. Plus, you’ll need to get signed off by the neurologist for the concussion protocol, after that late hit to the head you took in the third. You can kill two birds with one stone.”

Hank had a better use for that proverbial stone -- like taking out the prick rookie from Philly who’d

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targeted his head, having already cut him with the high stick. The kid's elbow had caught Hank badly and knocked him into the boards. Trying to protect his face from hitting the stantion and potentially splitting his stitches, Hank had fallen awkwardly and cracked the other side of his head on the lip of the board.

"Is the patient ready for transport, Doc?" Ethan Blackmore stuck his head around the treatment room door.

"Definitely." Marcus slapped an envelope against Hank's chest. "Give these to the person in charge, to add to your records."

"Like Vexer's file isn't already six inches thick," Ethan laughed. "I swear you've had more injuries over the past six months, than I've had in my whole career."

"Because it's my job to protect your candy ass."

"Next time, try not to do it with your face."

"Funny." Hank jabbed his friend's shoulder.

"Let's get this over with. Thanks, Doc."

The pair strode out of the treatment area, grabbed their gear from their stalls in the locker room and continued to the underground parking lot beneath the arena, where the players' cars were warmed up and ready for them. As usual, Hank and Ethan had shared a ride to the game today, because they lived in the same apartment block in Edgewater.

"Look on the bright side, Vexer," Ethan said as they tossed their bags into the back of his Range Rover and climbed in. "The ER won't be as crowded on a

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Tuesday night, so we might get back in time for dinner with the rest of the guys. After that tussle with Philly, giving up the equaliser in the last minute and then missing my shot in the freaking shoot-out, I could murder a beer and some enchiladas.”

“Yeah, me too.” Hank fastened his seat-belt. “I’m glad Ike stonewalled the Flyers and JB Larocque scored the winner, so we didn’t hand Philly both points.”

“Especially since all the other teams in our division won tonight too.” Ethan pulled out onto the street and headed for I-95, en route to Englewood Hospital. “I wonder if that cute nurse you’ve been trying to date will be on duty tonight.”

Hank was counting on it. “Knowing my luck, it’ll be Elise’s night off and I’ll have to deal with that hatchet-faced sister who always gives me a lecture about too much violence in sport.”

“Right, like it’s our personal responsibility.” Ethan shook his head. “If Nurse Elise is there, will you ask her out again? Or have you had enough crashing and burning?”

“She’d be disappointed if I didn’t. It’s kind of our thing. Besides, this ...” He jerked his thumb at his face. “... might make her feel sorry enough for me that she finally says yes.”

“I wouldn’t hold my breath, bro. She’s the only woman I’ve met who seems immune to your charms.”

Hank shrugged. “It’s not just me. She doesn’t date professional athletes. From what I’ve heard, her dad

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was a journeyman pro-baller, who changed teams every couple of years and took full advantage of the gridiron groupies in each town they lived in. When her mom found out, she ditched him in Arizona and brought the kids to Jersey.”

“Damn. Hard to fight the damage done by jerks like that. Especially working where she does, getting hit on by all the jocks coming through to be patched. Present company excepted.”

“Yeah.” Hank didn’t take offense; he was different from those other players. “I keep trying to show her I’m a decent guy, but for some reason she’s not buying it.”

“She spends a lot of time taking care of you when you’re in her ER. That has to count for something.”

“You’d think. But I’ve known her a couple of years and I’m no closer to getting that elusive date.”

“You need a game-changer. Something to make her look at you in a different light.” Ethan grinned. “Maybe your new war-wound will do the trick.”

“Given my luck with her so far, it’ll only toughen her stance.” Hank puffed out a frustrated breath. “You’re right. I need a new strategy. One that’ll sweep her off her feet.”

* * *

“Your favourite Ice Cat’s back. In cubicle three.”

Elise Arnett waved at fellow ER nurse, Nora, but didn’t bother correcting her about Hank ‘Vexer’ Delvecchio; Nora knew Elise wasn’t as immune to him

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as she liked to make out.

Trying to look unaffected, even though her heart skipped like it always did when Hank was around, Elise held up the phone. "I'm on hold with Orthopaedics."

Nora nodded and headed to the next patient, before Elise could ask her what he'd done this time. Before she could admit that she'd wondered whether Hank would be in tonight, since the Ice Cats were playing at home.

If she didn't know better, she'd think he was purposely getting injured, so he could resume his campaign to get her to go on a date with him. He'd certainly been banged up a lot lately. Even for a professional hockey player. Sure, once upon a time -- and not that long ago -- the game had been brutal. But these days, fighting was down and the focus wasn't on hitting, but on speed and agility. Players were also fitter and more finely honed.

Vexer was no exception on that score. She'd seen pretty much all of that hot body and the man was scorching! Fanning herself with the patient notes, she tried to switch her mind to less dangerous thoughts. As ever, when it came to Hank, that wasn't easy.

She didn't usually have trouble putting off men, especially those who made their living playing sports. They all came through here -- football, baseball, basketball -- and many asked her out. Not that she was big-headed; those guys pretty much hit on every nurse.

Whilst the whole rich, good-looking athlete thing

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might work for her colleagues, it left Elise cold. Too many of them reminded her of her father -- all flash and charm, but no substance. That might be an unfair generalisation, but it was too hard to figure out who she could trust. So she gave them all the same answer. Thanks, but no thanks.

The problem was she was beginning to think Hank might be different.

“Orthopaedics,” a voice on the phone broke into her thoughts. “Shirley speaking.”

Instantly all business, Elise started to discuss the patient they were planning to admit. Having organised a bed, she hung up and stood, stretching her aching back. Her stomach rumbled. She’d missed her break. As things were quiet, she could take a quick break and grab a sandwich. It was pure coincidence that to get to the cafeteria, she’d have to use the elevators that were next to the examination cubicles.

Nora came bustling out of number four and headed straight for her. “Your young man ...whoo-ee,” she whistled, wrinkling her nose. “Not a pretty sight.”

The injury must be nasty for her friend to look concerned. “What’s wrong?”

Nora explained about the slash on his cheekbone. “He was lucky. Half an inch the other way and he’d have major problems with his eye.”

Elise’s chest squeezed. An injury like that, while not life-threatening, could be career-threatening. How many times had her father told her that it would be a

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fate worse than death to have to stop playing? She'd often wondered whether his death, almost exactly one year from the day he'd blown out his knee, had been because without football, nothing else had mattered. Not even her.

Before she could second-guess herself, Elise headed towards Hank's cubicle. She couldn't explain why, but she felt the need to check on him. Thankfully, the neurology consultant, Dr. Whittaker, was still examining Hank, so Elise was able to observe for a few minutes without being spotted.

She bit back a gasp at the mess that had been made of Hank's face. Nora was right, it looked nasty. Multi-coloured bruises were already forming around the black stitches, which stretched in a neat line along his right cheekbone to his temple. The wound itself didn't affect her, but the thought of how close he'd come to damaging or even losing his eye made her a little light-headed. She leaned against the wall, trying to look casual, even as her stomach flipped.

Even battle-scarred, Hank was still gorgeous enough to take her breath away. His damp, dark hair was beginning to curl as it dried. The faded, black Ice Cats' t-shirt, with the famous snow leopard logo, fit him snugly, emphasising his broad chest and muscular arms. His jeans, also faded and snug, did the same for his legs. Maybe if Hank was built like one of those Zambonis, with a face and character to match, it would be easier to keep turning him down.

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Hank must have sense her presence, because he turned his head slightly. His lips curved and he winked at her with his good eye.

Ignoring her skittering pulse, she said lightly, “I hope the other guy looks worse.”

“Not yet, but he will the next time we play his team.”

“You’re not going to challenge him to drop the gloves are you?”

“No, ma’am.” He grinned at her schoolmarmish tone. “But if one of our fourth-liners happens to lay him out, I won’t be shedding any tears.”

Elise rolled her eyes. She’d heard it all before. From him and every other athlete who’d come through the ER, regardless of whether they were beer league or champions with a massive, diamond-studded ring.

“Shame it’s the last time you’ll face off against the Flyers, this season.” Dr. Whittaker straightened and switched off his penlight. “Although I bet there isn’t an Ice Cats’ player who hasn’t registered the guy’s number.”

“Damn straight.” Hank bumped knuckles with the consultant.

Dr. Whittaker became serious. “Despite the goose egg and the headache you’ll have once the painkillers and the anaesthetic wear off, you’re in good shape. No concussion and no lasting damage. You’re good to go.” He went to the computer and typed, then printed a prescription, which he handed to Hank. “Elise, could

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you make sure his stitches are covered and that he gets the relevant after-care sheets?”

“Sure.” She walked over to the cabinet and gathered gauze, a wound pad and tape. “Although expecting him to read them, and then do what he’s supposed to may be wishful thinking, based on past experience.”

“I thought they were suggestions rather than instructions.” His innocent tone didn’t fool anyone. ‘It is advisable to ... blah blah blah’ doesn’t shout ‘must do’ to me.”

Dr. Whittaker laughed. “You may have a point. And, on that note, I’m out of here to deal with more sensible patients. I’ll leave you in Elise’s very capable hands. Try to stay out of trouble for the rest of the month. We need you fit for the playoffs.”

Once the consultant had gone, Elise moved to stand in front of Hank, so she could dress his wound. The familiar scent of soap, mingled with clean laundry and a unique spiciness that was all Hank, teased her nose as she applied antiseptic to the area around the cut and added a protective layer of gauze.

Concentrate on keeping your hands steady, she admonished herself silently.

Not easy, when they were so close she could practically feel his body heat. When her fingertips tingled every time she brushed bare skin.

She was both relieved and disappointed when she applied the last piece of tape. “All done,” she said

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briskly. “Try to keep this clean and dry.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Hank got up from the exam table and shrugged into his leather jacket.

Elise indicated that he should precede her out of the cubicle. “I’ll print off your instructions and then leave you with our discharge manager to sign the necessary paperwork.”

“That’s it?” he seemed surprised.

“What else did you expect?”

“That this ...” he pointed to his dressing. “... might get me enough of a sympathy vote to convince you to at least have a cup of coffee with me.”

Even though she’d been planning to take her break, she hedged, “I’m working.”

“Okay, how about I bring you a cup? It’s the least I can do to thank you for taking care of me.”

“You don’t have to do that. It’s my job.”

“And you do it so well. Trust me, I’m an expert. Come on,” he cajoled, his expression as winsome as a puppy’s. “What’s your poison?”

She knew she should resist, but found herself saying, “A skinny latte would be lovely, thank you.”

His face brightened. “Great. Back shortly.”

He disappeared in the direction of the coffee shop.

“About time you put that poor man out of his misery,” Nora said, as she wheeled a cart past, on her way to another cubicle.

“It’s just a hot drink.”

“Not too big a leap to a hot date.” Nora tossed

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over her shoulder. “Just sayin’.”

Elise ignored her friend and focused on the computer screen, clicking on the necessary documents to print.

She’d just handed them to the discharge manager, when Hank reappeared with her drink.

“Thought you could probably use an energy boost, so I got you this as well.” He handed her a bar of her favourite chocolate.

Oh, he was good. Why did she keep saying no to him, again?

“Trying to sweeten me up?” she teased.

“Is it working?”

“Maybe,” she admitted.

“In that case, how about having dinner with me on your next night off?”

What could it hurt to go out with him, just once?

Before she could answer, the tinny notes of ‘Cowboy Casanova’ rang out. The song, which always reminded her of her father -- that’s what her mother had called him, after she’d discovered his infidelities -- was like the proverbial bucket of cold water. Dousing the spell Hank seemed to have put her under, the words echoing in her head reminded her that even once could be a mistake with a pro-hockey player.

Hank grimaced and pulled his phone out of his jacket. “I’m going to kill those jackasses,” he muttered, swiping the screen. “They changed my ringtone.”

“I have to go,” she said quickly, backing away.

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“Thanks for the coffee and chocolate.”

“But, what about ...?” he broke off, at her expression. He held his hands up, saying, “You know what? Never mind.”

He turned and walked out of the ER, leaving Elise with a terrible, sinking feeling that she’d just let something important slip through her fingers.

* * *

“You really think this will work?” Hank stared at the costume hanging from his closet door. “Can’t I just show up and do the usual hospital visit stuff -- sign autographs, take selfies, give away Ice Cats gear?”

“Marketing wants one of us to be the Easter Bunny and you need a new strategy to help Nurse Gorgeous see another side to you.” Ethan leaned against the doorjamb to Hank’s room. “Trust me, this will make her take notice.”

“Like you guys switching out the ringtone on my phone.”

“That wasn’t me.” His friend winced. “Kenny thought it would make her laugh. Break the ice.”

“Broke something, definitely. I was this close.” He held up his thumb and forefinger with a tiny gap between them. “I know she was about to say yes.”

“If she got to that point once, she’ll get there again. And this costume will help.”

“I guess.” Hank wished he shared Ethan’s confidence. Ever since his friend had got together with Zoe, their neighbour who he’d been after for a long

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time, Ethan was convinced there was a happy ending out there for everyone. “This just seems a little ... radical.” Not to mention that he’d be making a complete fool of himself.

“Sometimes it takes an unexpected move to shake the status quo. To change the momentum. Do you want to go out with her or not?”

“Yeah.” Elise’s abrupt change of heart had floored him. Hank had almost given up, there and then. He wasn’t a quitter, but she might be a lost cause. The problem was, his brain had other ideas; he hadn’t been able to get her out of his head. He had to give it one last shot. “For sure,” he added, with more conviction.

“Has anything else you’ve tried worked?”

“No, but ...” Hank ran his hand over the red jacket and black vest which reflected the team colours.

“But nothing,” Ethan interrupted. “You’ll be handing out chocolate and candy. The kids and staff on the children’s ward will think you’re great. As will Nurse Gorgeous. This is the perfect chance, so take it.”

Hank gave the fluffy, white costume one more dubious look. “I guess on the upside, I’ll be covered from head to toe, so if it doesn’t work, she won’t know the idiot inside is me.”

“If I were you, I’d be worried about how quickly I could get out of the bunny gear when she says yes. I doubt it’ll whip off easily, like stripper pants.” Ethan hummed a few bars of ‘The Stripper’.

The idea of Hank trying to perform a sexy

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striptease, while dressed as the Easter Bunny, cracked the two friends up.

Hank shook his head. “I know women say they like a guy who makes them laugh, but that might be a step too far.”

“Desperate times need desperate measures, bro.”

Heaven help him, but Ethan was right.

* * *

“I know it doesn’t seem like it, Todd, but breaking your leg today is good timing,” Elise said brightly to the young boy she was escorting up to the children’s ward.

“How?” Todd looked at her, misery and pain etched on his eleven-year-old face. “I’m done playing hockey for the season and I’m gonna miss the state championship playoffs.”

Having looked after sports-mad boys of all ages, she knew that probably hurt worse than the compound fracture. “I’m sorry about that, but I hear we have some special visitors stopping by today. Some guys you might be interested to meet.” She tapped his Ice Cats’ Youth Hockey jersey, which he’d refused to take off.

“Who?” he asked grumpily.

“A bunch of the Ice Cats’ players.”

Todd’s eyes widened. “For real?”

Elise nodded. “I bet you’ll get some autographs and other cool stuff.”

For the first time since he’d arrived in the ER, with his broken leg strapped to a board, some of Todd’s colour returned. “Awesome. Who’s here?”

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She had a suspicion, given how keen Nora had been for Elise to take Todd up to the ward. "You'll have to wait and see for yourself."

"Are we nearly there, yet?"

She grinned at his impatience, as the orderly manoeuvred the bed out of the elevator. "Almost. At the end of this hallway."

Even from outside the huge, double doors, they could hear music playing and children cheering.

"Sounds like a party." Elise held her pass up to the security panel, to gain access to the ward. "The players must be here already."

"Do you think Vexer will be there? He's my favourite player."

"Possibly." Her heart clenched at the thought.

"I really hope so."

Me too. She hadn't seen Hank since that night. Several Cats had been to the ER over the last couple of weeks, but he'd remained surprisingly injury-free. Which had given her plenty of opportunity to replay their last encounter repeatedly in her head. It was just as embarrassing each time. Talk about over-reacting.

But it had helped her to come to a decision. It was really unfair to keep tarring him with the same brush as her father -- Hank hadn't done anything to deserve that -- and the next time he asked her out, she'd say yes.

Only there hadn't been a next time.

If Hank was here now, maybe this would be the chance she'd been waiting for.

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The party seemed to be at the far end of the ward, which was where Elise was directed to take Todd. The noise level grew as the orderly wheeled the bed closer - everyone was clearly having a good time.

As they arrived at the entrance to the six-bed bay, she discovered why. A six foot tall Easter bunny, decked out in Ice Cats' red and black, was dancing between the beds, passing out chocolate eggs from a white, wicker basket to the young patients. Whoever was inside the costume played the part well -- side-shuffling to one child, then moon-walking to the next. Elsewhere, various players in their jerseys, hung out with different children and flirted with the nurses.

Elise recognised a few familiar faces. Just her luck that Hank wasn't one of them.

There was a slight halt in the partying, as the orderly pushed the bed into the waiting space and fixed the brakes. Elise busied herself, making sure Todd's records were in place for the hand-over, while trying to hide her disappointment.

As soon as Todd was settled, the Easter Bunny shimmied over to his bed and high-fived him, welcoming him to the party. Todd's face lit up as some of the other players made their way over too. His eyes widened as they spoke to him and handed him some Ice Cats' gear.

"Ethan Blackmore, Kenny Jelinek, Jordan 'Match' Matcheson and Taylor 'Mad Dog' Madden. Wow." Reverence coloured his voice. "You guys totally rock."

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“Todd broke his leg playing hockey,” Elise added. “So, he’s one of you.”

It was touching to see the players spend time with Todd, taking selfies and signing autographs, but also asking him about his hockey.

“I want to play like Vexer when I’m grown up.” He grimaced and looked down at his bandaged and splinted leg. “If I can skate again.”

“Sure you can, bud,” the Easter Bunny said gruffly. “Right, Nurse Elise?”

“Of course. As long as you do what the doctors tell you and let it heal properly, you should be good to go in a few months.”

“Months?!”

The Easter Bunny laid a hand on Todd’s shoulder. “I was out for months too, when I broke my leg. But I’m back now, better than ever. With a cool scar.”

“Can I see?”

Elise rolled her eyes. Typical boys.

Bunny pulled off his furry foot and hitched up the costume to show a muscular leg with a neat, white scar running from knee to ankle.

Her pulse tripped. She’d seen that scar before.

Was it really Hank under all that white fur?

Before she could get her mind around that, the Ice Cats’ marketing gal, Ginny, bustled into the ward, followed by a photographer. “Time’s up, I’m afraid.”

A loud aww went up, from the children and the nurses, even though several patients were clearly tiring.

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“I know.” Ginny held up her hands, smiling. “But these guys have some more places to visit today. Before they go, let’s get some nice group shots.”

“Gather round,” the photographer instructed. “I want every-bunny to give egg-stra big smiles.”

A loud groan went up, but that didn’t stop more Easter jokes and puns being tossed in.

“I want twenty-four carrot photos,” Ginny said, holding up one of the Easter Bunny’s felt carrots.

“I’m so egg-sited,” Todd called out, all trace of his earlier misery gone.

Ethan Blackmore waved the staff over to join the melee. “No-bunny left behind. Especially not our egg-sellent nurses.”

Elise held back, as she wasn’t part of the ward.

But Kenny Jelinek shook his head. “Hop to it, Nurse Elise.” He tucked her in beside the Easter Bunny, then winked. “Is that a big carrot in your pocket, Mr Bunny, or are you pleased to see your favourite, del-egg-table ER nurse? Ow!” He ducked, as Ginny smacked his head.

Her pulse skittering, Elise laughed self-consciously, her cheeks pink.

“Be careful,” The Easter Bunny growled. “Or you’ll get lettuce, instead of chocolate on Sunday.”

Kenny looked horrified. “Big words from a guy in a giant, fluffy rabbit costume,” he tossed back boldly. “At least, take off your head and show your ugly face.”

Her body’s reaction told Elise who was inside.

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The kids cheered as Hank revealed himself, and chanted “Vexer, Vexer.”

“Man, that thing is heavy.” Hank grinned, as he tucked the head under his arm and shook out his dark hair. “And this costume is hot as he ...heck.”

Elise’s heart warmed. This unexpected side of him touched her. His kindness with the kids, especially with Todd, wasn’t an act. It reinforced her feeling that he was different and worth taking a chance on. She would definitely say yes to him.

But, once the photos were taken and the group broke up, Hank made no effort to snag her for a date, or even a coffee. As he disappeared to the bathroom to get changed out of his costume, she wondered if he’d given up. Had she rejected him once too often?

Disappointment tugged at her. She said goodbye to Todd and promised to visit him before his surgery, then headed to the elevator. The players stood in a small group, outside the ward doors, waiting for Hank.

She willed him to return before the elevator arrived, so they could all ride down together. When he did, and the players crowded in to join her in the car, her heart pounded heavily with anticipation.

Even though he stood right next to her, Hank didn’t speak to her. Nor did he say anything when they arrived at the ground floor and got out. His team-mates all said goodbye, but he simply nodded.

Elise smiled brightly, as if she wasn’t disappointed, and while the players made for the exit,

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she headed towards the double doors for the ER.

With her pass in hand, ready to swipe for entry, she couldn't resist one last glance over her shoulder.

Hank stood by the glass doors, watching her. Their gazes caught and held.

In that moment, she knew he'd put the ball in her court. She had to take her chance, or lose it. And him.

Elise didn't hesitate. She turned and walked purposefully towards him.

His eyes widened at her approach. Her confidence grew, as she saw the guarded hope in his expression.

She stopped in front of him. "I owe you a coffee."

"Okay," he replied warily.

"I'm sorry about last time. Can I make it up to you?"

"Okay," he said again, not giving an inch.

Elise took a deep breath. "How about I buy you dinner, the next time we both have a free evening?"

"Okay." He smiled and shook his head at the third repetition. "Tuesday works for me."

"Me too."

"I'll call you and we can make arrangements."

"Great." She rattled off her number, which he entered into his phone. "I'll see you then."

As she walked away, he called her. She stopped and turned.

"What changed your mind?" he asked.

Elise tilted her head, thinking. "I guess, the costume enabled me to look beyond the looks and

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charm to the man inside. And I liked what I saw.”

“It took an Easter Bunny suit to win you over enough to go on a date with me?” He shook his head.

“Think of it as giving you egg-stra credibility.” She grinned. “It showed me you were some-bunny worth taking a chance on.”

“Funny,” Hank groaned, laughing. “Be warned, I plan to take full advantage of this perfect chance.”

“Be warned, I plan to let you.” Her smile broadened. “I can’t wait.”

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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.

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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.

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!

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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 Strategy Is there really life after hockey?

If there's one thing Scotty Matthews knows, it's hockey. Unfortunately, the former New Jersey Ice Cats captain isn't proving successful at life after hockey. His wife's left him and he's lost his post-ice job as a media commentator. All he's got now is a big empty show house.

If there's one thing Sapphire Houlihan knows, it's that she never wants to be tied down to anyone or anything ever again. Unfortunately for her, a wonderful one-weekend distraction with Scotty turns into something much more complicated... Because he's a guy who wants way more than one weekend.



A PERFECT CHANCE

Making an Egg-stra Effort!

Ice Cats' defenceman, Hank 'Vexer' Delvecchio, knows he needs a game-changer to get lovely nurse, Elise Arnett, to look past her dislike of professional athletes and take a chance on him. Will dressing up as the Easter Bunny, to entertain the kids on the children's ward, be the play that finally helps him score?

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