

Final Stop -- a novella

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This is a novella for the non-fiction series I will be posting throughout 2013. I struggled with the decision on beginning or ending my publications with this novella, as the journey both starts and finishes with Matt. I hope this intrigues you to read the upcoming chapters in my first novel, "Around The Carousel".



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I can't believe what I was feeling yesterday. Even more unbelievable, Matt was feeling it too.

Shortly after my return from more than two years abroad I decided I really wanted to see Matt. He had said he wanted to see me when I got back so I messaged him after only a day's worth of thumb-hovering-over-send-or-delete-text moments. After a few Matt-like responses we had a reunion planned for that evening. Have to say I had every intention of sleeping with him. But during my 75-minute shower/shave/dress or cute top and shorts? process I made the crucial decision of not shaving. That timeless old trick would prevent me from jumping into bed with him if I got weak! I just kept weighing how I used to feel when I cheated to how I think I'd feel in my present relationship, and it didn't seem worth it. At least not tonight. Who knows for the rest of my stay here?

On the drive there I did the girly thing and reached in my blue handbag for some lip gloss. Wow, am I really being *that* girl?! Gross. Driving down Glenworth Avenue I was flooded with memories and nostalgia, especially when crossing the bridge by my old bff's street. I felt excited, nervous, and for once totally not in control of the upcoming situation. I parked in my usual spot on the corner across from Matt's house and only after when I was leaving did I realize how obvious that parking spot actually is. That stupid backyard door still sticks and gives a high pitched moan when I open and try to shove it closed, so for once I just left it but shook my head laughing at the memories it conjured up. I got to the third last step and fluffed my hair up a bit, straightened my necklace and paused when I could hear him outside on the phone.

Wow, it's Matt's voice! How WEIRD is this?!

It shouldn't be so weird. This was the guy who I had ten years of history with. While it's foundation was solidly built between the sheets we had a bond, a mutual understanding of each other and the world, that ran deep. Well this was it. Soak up the last of your memories Emma because you're about to see him for the first time, again. I turned the corner with a slow, confident walk and saw him standing with his back to the pool, still on the phone, with only a pair of cherry red and white board shorts on. And a goatee! He finally grew some facial hair.

Oh man, why did he have to look so good?? Staying chaste isn't going to be easy...

He finished his conversation the moment I stepped onto the pool deck. I went forward with a huge smile and he greeted me with one just like it. When I went to hug him though I squeezed tight and he kept himself loose.

That's cool, pretty sure he knows I'm still with Evan so he's just being a gentleman...

I forgot that about Matt. The gentleman part. I think it used to get lost under the pile of his ADHD and our teenage hormone-fuelled arguments.

It didn't take long to see what was unfolding before us. Plain and simple, there was still chemistry in the air. So much so it was almost tangible.

It wasn't flirtatious chemistry although there were plenty of light touches or "OMG I need to tell you about this" slaps on each other's knees. I have to set the mood first.

I got there just before dusk. We took seats facing each other on the deck beside the pool, just the right distance away from it and each other. I was wearing khaki coloured shorts and a black top with my favourite addition

Final Stop -- a novella

at the time, a layered necklace with red and teal beads spread throughout the gold strands. I slid off my black and gold trim ruffled flats and comfortably put my feet up on the end of his chair beside his right thigh, perfect chilling position. He spent a lot of time leaning forward with his hands poised between his legs like men do and I was taking the cool and laid back look, leaning back in my chair with my arms propped on the side like it was a throne. He immediately asked about my travels and I told him little tidbits in between him telling me how he is vice principal of a private school now because he loves the students but hates the work and wanted to do more than the average teacher. I consistently had the most enthusiastic, pretty smile on without feeling any effort from having it there. Our exchanges started off with high energy and just stayed there, never missing a beat, totally dissolving any awkwardness we may have been afraid of.

I can't believe how much eye contact there is. He seems so engaged in everything I'm saying and everything that's happening at this moment in time. Nothing else around us seems to be cracking this barrier or be distracting to the point where I have to rapidly shorten my thoughts otherwise I'll lose him. Maybe if he was always like this we would've worked out...

As the sun dipped and gave way to twilight, the backyard around us turned to an ocean blue but I could still see Matt and all his features perfectly; my black and gold shoes still visible in the moonlight and the trees around us still very green in contrast to the pool and deck. Matt went inside to get another beer and I looked just over the table, smiling to myself.

*I am having **such** a good time. I really can't believe it.*

Not sure what exactly was the best part or why this seemingly average evening of hanging in a friend's backyard was particularly noteworthy. It was just as if every possible dot that could be connected to make the best looking photo was there. And I was totally getting high off this buzzing energy.

Matt came back minutes later and connected another dot:

"I am having a *really* good time right now. I don't even want to go to the cottage anymore! I think I'll just stay here tonight and meet everyone tomorrow."

I smiled and told him almost with relief in my voice that I was having a great time too and I was so glad that we decided to hang out. I told him I was worried he wouldn't want to see me now that I'm "spoken for" but he laughed off such a notion and said he actually expected me to bring Evan. On that note, he brought out his pipe and we packed it with some of my stuff and that's when he told me his old nickname for me:

"You were my Drug Dealer Booty Call. I always used to tell my friends how perfect our situation was. Like, I had this girl, who brought me drugs, who also wanted to sleep with me, and didn't even want to cuddle after!"

He told me that during our long friends with benefits stage he would go on dates and wouldn't worry if things went sour because, "I always had a backup. And my backup came with wonderful marijuana!" A lot of women might take this as an insult. If I was that kind of woman, this story would have been over ten years ago. I told him I felt the exact same way, that sometimes I really wouldn't even try to make things work or after a bad date I would instantly cheer up because I knew I could call him up and come over.

Still being lit by natural light (aka light pollution) well after 10pm Matt looked just as good as when I first arrived. I thought the initial attraction would settle down a bit but like being in some enchanted forest even the dust specs floating around us had an energized glow. Maybe nature was feeding off our chemistry, too.

It's funny; when reminiscing about why we took so long at first to become a couple, and never again after, Matt said quite triumphantly,

Final Stop -- a novella

"It's because *you* liked Patrick."

"What?! Come on, I so did not tell you that." *Did I? Or was I just that painfully obvious?*

"You were so into him, and any time I'd see him I'd just think, 'What's this guy have that I don't?'"

I smiled with flattery at the confession, but also with sympathy at his painful memory.

"Hey, he was my best friend in high school. I might have had a silly crush on him back then but I knew nothing was ever going to happen. *You* were the one who still felt guilty after "stealing" me away from your best friend and refused to be anything more than friends with benefits with me."

Matt's turn to smile with embarrassment. "He was my best friend! And you were the devil that came between us! I couldn't make that official by being your boyfriend."

I laughed. "Whatever. It worked out for the best." But as soon as the words left my mouth I felt bad. Of course Evan was the man I intended to be with for years and years, but I could never diminish Matt's role throughout my teenage and young adult life. "I mean, we never would have had any real fun if we were a true, monogamous couple all those years," I added in a rush.

We went inside to make something to eat and the buzzing energy followed along. Matt enthusiastically hopped about the kitchen, throwing all sorts of things into a pan and talking amicably as he did so. I smiled genuinely throughout this venture. When it came time to move to the living room and throw on a movie I noticed that he sat a respectable distance away from me on the couch, but close enough that I could still rest my leg on his knee when the old cushions sagged towards each other. Being this physically close ignited a once-familiar rush inside me that I used to feel on a regular basis before Evan and I got serious. Part of me wanted Matt to close the rest of the space between us. To kiss me with those big, full lips like he used to and to pick me up and hold me tight against his tall, lean body-- a stark contrast to Evan's short build. After all, this was the guy who was my step-in boyfriend throughout the years; the guy who never questioned my appearance in his bedroom in the middle of the night when I should have been in the bedroom of whomever I was dating at the time.

You've been so good, Emma. You've been so good to Evan for two years. Never even a fleeting thought to jump into someone else's bed. Is what you're feeling now the sparks of a missed connection, or just lust from the memories?

My mind fast-forwarded a year. Two years. Five years. And there we were, Matt and I, together in another familiar routine, except this one didn't come with smiles and burning passion. Quite the opposite actually. The inevitable truth finally made it's way to my brain's centre stage. What we had was great and surely would have continued had I not moved overseas and met Evan. But committing solely to each other was never something that Matt and I could master over the years and we long ago accepted that we were not meant to be matched forever. I sighed internally and straightened my posture for the remainder of the movie.

"So... did you want to watch another one? Or maybe have a drink with me?" Matt asked tentatively as the credits rolled.

Yes! Let's put on another movie, have a drink, and not let this magic end...

"Nah, we better quit while we're ahead," I grinned at him after shaking my head. "I'm gonna be home for a few months. We can't use up all our fun in one night!"

Final Stop -- a novella

I savoured our last few moments of togetherness as Matt walked me to my car. When I went to hug him goodbye, he lingered just two seconds more than he normally would have and I gratefully accepted the gesture. As I drove away I instantly started replaying the night but not to analyze where things could have happened differently. While old habits would have been so easy to fall back into I was proud of our mature, unspoken decision to celebrate the past and respect the present. Looks like we still have a use for each other after all.ã

Final Stop -- a novella

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