

Excerpt from *Winning Ruby Heart*, by Jennifer Lohmann

Back at the hotel, Micah connected to the wireless and started digging. Most of the pictures he found were of Ruby as the world had known her—sharp points of her short platinum hair aimed directly at her painted red lips, looking more like a younger, edgier version of Marilyn Monroe than an athlete. But buried on her college’s website was a team photo from her freshman year. There, Ruby Heart looked like the girl next door. Her hair was still short, but it lacked the snap of her Olympic haircut and was the same mousy brown he’d seen today. The eyes clinched it. Without the heavy makeup, there was nothing to hide those doe eyes gracing the face of the girl who would become America’s Darling two years after this photo was taken. Even in the picture of her during his interview, after her cheating had been revealed to the world, her brown eyes had dominated her face, giving her an aura of innocence.

“You understand what I’m going through, right?” she had asked him after the camera stopped rolling on that memorable interview. “We both had our passions taken from us.” Her voice had sounded so young, adding to the blameless look she’d had on her face and almost making him agree with her. As if their careers had ended the same way. “It wasn’t fair.” He’d added *whiny* to the list of her defects. When he told her that her entire athletic career hadn’t been fair to her competitors, she’d jumped back as if he’d swung a fist at her.

Micah pulled himself away from the memory, found the list of participants in today’s run, and looked for the name. According to the website, no Ruby Heart had registered, but there was a Diana Heart. A Wikipedia page didn’t offer Ruby’s full name, only a short summary of the girl’s soaring rise to greatness and her crashing fall. Icarus, with his wax wings climbing higher and higher toward the sun until the lies he’d woven into the wings melted from the heat. Only Ruby had been the genuine flying article and she’d strapped wax wings onto her back anyway.

Her stupidity left a foul taste in his mouth the bitter coffee couldn’t overpower.

The current Wikipedia photo was Ruby at her apex, with the American flag raised high over her head in a stadium of adoring fans. No amount of makeup could hide the pure joy overtaking the exhaustion on her face. The other photo on the page was a still from his interview of her—Ruby's blond hair looking limp and fake, her eyes hurt and confused. Micah wondered how often the pictures were swapped out as the remaining few who cared—both fans and detractors—battled it out in cyberspace. Someone had cared enough about her to note that her suspension for doping was over.

While he didn't recall the specifics of her complicated settlement, after she'd provided enough information to close several clinics, her lifetime ban had been converted into a suspension from all non-Olympic sports. Micah had a vague memory of the prep material he'd gotten for that interview, which had included Ruby's full name and the fact that she went by her middle name.

Pitiful, really, to have disappeared from the American psyche so completely that all it took was a set of pigtails and different first name for people in your own sport not to recognize you.