

## Chapter 10

Roger and Kristie left Chicago on Edens Expressway early Saturday morning. The plan was to go through Milwaukee, Green Bay, and then into the U.P. through Iron Mountain. It was going to be a long drive, at least eight and a half hours. She hoped they might get to know one another better as they spent all those hours together in the car.

No sooner had she noticed a CD player in his car, than he turned it on and started a CD. It was Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata." The music sounded rich and full as it came from four speakers, two in the front and two in the back. His sound system was obviously expensive.

"You like Beethoven?"

"Yes, classical music is probably the music I enjoy most, especially on long trips. Say, Kathy, what did you mean in your profile by 'serious relationship'?" he asked, abruptly changing the subject.

Kristie had been trying to learn more about him, and this sudden, personal question took her off guard. Then she remembered that she had said something like that in her profile. Unfortunately, since it was out there for all to see, she couldn't very well object to a question about it, personal though it may be. She wished now she hadn't made that statement. Somehow she felt that this was way too soon to be talking to Roger about a long-term relationship that could lead to marriage--too soon for both of them. Nevertheless, she had to answer his question.

"Oh, the usual dream a girl has. You know, meet a guy you like, date, eventually fall in love and marry."

She noticed Roger smile, but he said nothing. The smile itself was enigmatic. As she'd often observed on the previous two dates, it certainly was difficult to tell what he was thinking. Sometimes she felt that the distance between them was still as great as when they first met. Were they growing closer? Kristie had pondered this question before, and the fact that the answer was not obvious was itself somewhat discouraging. But they were on a date that might become a milestone in their relationship. She encouraged herself with that thought and decided to see how Roger would respond to a question similar to the one he had just asked her.

"How about you, Roger? What were you looking to find when you put your profile out on MyForever.com?"

This time, the look on his face was quite clear: he was not pleased with the question and would rather not answer it. He said nothing at first, obviously trying to formulate a response.

"Like I told you the first time I called you, I'm looking for young women to date, and I never thought bars were a good place to meet them."

One thing Kristie had learned about Roger was that he had a good memory. But he communicated very little real information in this answer. She also noticed the plural. Was that a slip?

She tried to work the singular into the conversation. "That's probably the case for most of us who've signed onto an Internet dating service. I mean long-range goals. No, 'goals' is not the right word. You know...hopes, dreams. Maybe trying to find that special someone." She stopped just short of saying "marriage."

"Let's say I'm looking for compatibility. Say, I've got an idea how we can kill some time." Enthusiasm was back in his voice. "You obviously know something about classical music. How about playing a little game? I've put together a CD with excerpts from some of my favorite pieces. I'll play it, and we'll see how many you can identify."

Kristie laughed. She wasn't sure what struck her as funnier: the irony of this contest or the adroit way he changed the subject, once again away from himself.

"Sure, I'm game. Sounds like fun. When we're done, should we go to an oldies radio station and see how many rock-n-roll songs you can identify?"

It was Roger's turn to laugh. "In that contest, I will admit defeat up front! You still want to try the classical music?"

"Go ahead. Give it a whirl."

Roger put in a CD, and the first selection began. Kristie concentrated. It was a well known piece. What was it? Chopin!

"Chopin's Polonaise," she announced triumphantly.

"Congratulations!"

"It was also turned into a big hit song in 1945. Several artists recorded it, but the most popular version was by Perry Como, which made number 1 in *Billboard* magazine. The lyrics were very romantic."

He turned to look at her. "You impress me! I did know that words had been put to the music, but I didn't know any of those details, and I don't know the lyrics."

Why was she not surprised?

"How do you know all this?" he asked.

"Oh, I've done...quite a bit of reading in *Billboard* magazine."

"You must read old issues. Well, ready for the next one?"

The game took close to two hours because Roger wanted to play each selection in its entirety. Kristie got six out of twelve.

By the time they got to Green Bay, she was feeling pretty hungry. "I know where there's an Arby's close to an exit. You ready for some lunch?"

"Arby's, huh? All right, Arby's it is." There was a definite lack of

enthusiasm in his voice. Perhaps Roger wasn't a connoisseur of fast foods, but they'd eaten, he did admit that Arby's had a good roast beef sandwich.

Interstate 43 ends not far north of Green Bay. Once on U.S. 141, it's a two-lane highway all the way to Michigan. Kristie had been this way many times before and enjoyed counting off the small Wisconsin towns, and knew them quite well.

"Now I've got a game for you. We'll be going through several towns before we get to Michigan. How many can you name?"

Roger took a deep breath. The idea of taking up this challenge didn't seem to hold much interest for him, but he was a good sport about it.

"Well, let's see. There's Lena, Coleman, Pound, Crivitz, Pembine, and Niagara. Then you cross into Iron Mountain, Michigan, back into Florence, Wisconsin, and finally into Crystal Falls, Michigan. At that point, you're in Michigan for the rest of the trip."

"Very good! I see you're familiar with this route."

"It's usually the way I go."

"You did miss a few towns, though." Kristie's eyes twinkled.

"Oh? Which ones?"

"Wausaukee, Amberg, and Beecher."

"You know, you're right. I remember them now. By the way, I think we'll get in too late to do any hiking this evening. We'll just find a nice restaurant and call it a day."

She got the impression that his phrase "nice restaurant" was meant to contrast with Arby's. He needn't have worried. There were no Arby's in the Keweenaw.

They were driving north on U.S. 41 when they reached Houghton, Michigan, the gateway to the Keweenaw Peninsula. It was already dark, but there was no hesitation when Roger pulled into a parking space in front of the Ambassador Restaurant. It looked to Kristie like it was probably one of the best in Houghton. From the ease with which he found it, she also got the impression that he'd been here before.

"You seem to know this restaurant. You've been here before?"

"A few times during my college years. But like I said, I'm not that familiar with the snowmobile trails in this part of the U.P. I did some research online and got a motel in Calumet, about ten miles further north. It's closer to the majority of the trails."

The mention of "motel" sent a shiver down her spine. She made no comment and hoped her facial expression didn't betray the nervous emotion she was now feeling. What was Roger anticipating? What did he want to happen?

Even more disturbing was the unexpected uncertainty she felt right now. How would she herself answer that last question? She had accepted his invitation for an overnight date. Did that tell her anything? Why had she done it? Somehow it all seemed clearer when she responded to his email.

What was she feeling now? She couldn't deny a kind of nervous excitement at the thought of making love and sleeping together. Roger was very different from those men she'd complained to Joel about. He had now asked her out three times. He seemed interested in her, maybe even attracted to her. He'd always been a perfect gentleman and treated her like a lady in every sense. If he was now ready to make love to her, is that what she wanted?

Clarity suddenly returned.

No! That was not what she wanted. She realized that she was being swept away by her own imagination and the romantic allure of making love. But no, this was not how she'd always dreamed it would be. She remembered "Then He Kissed Me" by the Crystals: the first kiss, falling in love, meeting his parents, and then marriage. She remembered the Beach Boys in "Wouldn't It Be Nice":

*Maybe if we think and wish and hope and pray it might come true.  
Baby then there wouldn't be a single thing we couldn't do.  
We could be married,  
And then we'd be happy.*

She had accepted this date with Roger because she wanted to give her relationship with him every chance to grow. If he wanted to move things along too quickly, she would say what she had planned to say. She would simply ask him to get two rooms. Men can get carried away by their imaginations too, maybe even more easily. She was sure that her request would bring him gently back down to earth. They could still have a wonderful time on this trip.

The Ambassador was indeed elegant. It had a bar, but Roger asked the hostess for a secluded table near a window that overlooked the water.

Kristie opened the conversation, in part to calm her nerves.

"That must be the Portage Canal."

"Yes, and that's the lift bridge," he replied, as he pointed in a westerly direction. "This is a man-made canal, you know, and it turned the Keweenaw Peninsula essentially into an island. That's the city of Hancock on the other side."

The food was also excellent, and the conversation centered mostly around hiking. Roger told her one of his favorite jokes.

"These two men were back-packing deep in the woods. Suddenly in the distance a bear came rumbling out of the bush and headed straight for them. The one man immediately dropped down and put on his running shoes.

"'Why are you wasting time with that?' the other asked. 'You can't outrun that bear.'

"I don't have to outrun the bear. All I have to do is outrun you!"

Kristie stared at him for a few seconds, not getting the punchline. When it dawned on her, she scowled at him.

"That's terrible! And I might add that it doesn't make you look very chivalrous when you're about to go hiking with me."

"Ah, I tell it just for the clever humor, my dear. With you at my side, I would surely hand you the running shoes and stay and fight."

She returned his smile. "That's sweet!"

This was the first time he'd ever used a romantic form of address. Maybe things were looking up. But then too he might have been using it simply as a parody of Clark Gable's famous line.

As they crossed the Portage Bridge and continued on U.S. 41 toward Calumet, Kristie was getting nervous again. Maybe he had already reserved two rooms, and there'd be no problem at all.

At a traffic light he turned left and then left again into the parking lot of the AmericInn Motel.

"I'll go in and register," he said, hopping out of the car without waiting for a reply. When he returned, he drove down to the far end of the motel, got out, and opened the door for her. "I'll get our luggage."

The moment was coming. She could feel the nervous tension and increased heart beat and hoped her voice wouldn't tremble.

"Why don't you give me my key, and I'll turn the lights on."

"He only gave me one key."

So there was going to be a problem.

"You only got one room?"

His face registered no emotion. "Naturally."

She had assured herself that this would be simple.

"Roger, we can't share a room. Is that what you thought?"

That evidently stirred something in him. What was the look she saw in his face? Annoyance? Exasperation?

"As a matter of fact, I did."

"Please, get me my own room. We can still have a great time together this week without...without that." There was no anger in her voice; she didn't feel any.

She was pleading, but in some way she knew their relationship was over. She felt sadness and was afraid it would soon overwhelm her.

"No, it's time to come to an understanding between us. I liked you, Kathy, and you seemed to like me. I think when two people like each other, they show it. They share intimacy. It's part of the dating scene. I gave you all the right signals on our first two dates. You didn't respond to them. But I'm a patient man. I figured you needed more time, maybe to get to know me a little better. But when you accepted this date, it was plain to me that you were now ready to make love."

"Signals? What do you mean?"

"Although I find it difficult to believe, you apparently have done very little dating. Men and women often communicate in subtle, less direct ways, especially about their sexual desires. I made it very clear that I wanted to make love to you, and I had every reason to believe that when you accepted this date, you now were ready."

The wave of sadness had run its course. Now she did feel anger coming on.

"Well, Roger, you have misread quite a bit about me. I am not looking for casual sex. Yeah, I liked you, and that's why I went out with you. Talk about making things clear! I thought I made my hopes and dreams very clear both in my profile and in my answer to your question about it. I'm looking for someone to love and who will love me. I want to get married, and I'm willing to wait until then for sex."

"Kathy, I can see it's pointless to discuss this further. You just seem to have an outdated view of adult relationships."

"Why, because I'd like to be married before I have sex?"

"Not to put too fine a point on it, but yes, that's precisely why I say that. Marriage is an option chosen by fewer and fewer today. Don't you know that? And those who do get married are almost never virgins anymore. Many people, both men and women, who may eventually want to marry want to sample many partners before limiting themselves to one. Often couples who have talked about getting married think it best to start making love long before they marry to see if they are compatible in bed. Frankly, I'm amazed at your provincial attitude. It's almost as if you were living forty or fifty years ago. But I'm I'm not interested in making conquests, so I'm not angry. Most women today have a much different outlook. I'll move on."

Roger paused. He reached out and put his hand on her shoulder, smiling.

"Come on, Kathy, I'll take you back to Chicago."

"Chicago! Tonight?"

"Sure, why not. I've often made trips of over twenty hours. Another eight or nine hours is no problem for me. You can sleep during the trip. I assume sleeping in the car would not violate your social mores?"

He'd said he wasn't angry, but she certainly detected a hint of sarcasm.

"No, I'm not going back to Chicago. Not yet. I came up here for a vacation. To go hiking. So that's what I'm going to do. And one other thing, Roger. You wanted to know where I work. Well, now I'm going to tell you. I'm a DJ at WKLS, Chicago Oldies, and I play Sixties rock-n-roll for a living. My real name is Kristie Rydell. You should listen to my show some time--nine to midnight, Monday through Friday, 107.4. You might learn something about love."

He raised his eyebrows. "Well, that explains a lot. But I'm still afraid there's no future for you and me. I live in the Twenty-first Century. You are caught in some kind of a time warp. So go ahead, dream about holding hands and a goodnight kiss. I'll find someone else who has a more modern outlook on relationships between adult men and women." He handed her the electronic key. "The room is yours. Goodbye...Kristie." With that he turned, got into his car, and drove away, leaving her suitcase sitting in the parking lot.

Kristie was still fuming when she walked into the motel room. She threw her suitcase on the bed and sat down next to it. The nerve of that man! She knew plenty of people who still valued marriage. There was Sam Watkins, the newsman at WKLS who had helped her track down the offices of MyForever.com. He loved his wife, and they had a wonderful marriage. And weren't Tom and Megan going to get married? Well, maybe they already... She tried to come up with another example. Was she the only one left from her generation to still have those old dreams?

In an effort to comfort herself, she thought of her music, that wonderfully romantic music that was such a part of her life and that ignited all her dreams.

The anger was dissipating, slowly replaced with the inevitable, though quite familiar, sadness and loneliness. Kristie laid her head on the pillow and fell asleep with tears in her eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

She woke up the next morning still fully clothed. Maybe some thoughts had occurred to her during that hazy twilight period between sleep and full wakefulness. In any event, many things about Roger she hadn't understood were now easily explained. He never had been interested in her or in developing a romantic relationship, a relationship that might lead to love and marriage. She remembered the forceful, hungry way he kissed and how he had waited at the door of her apartment for her to invite him in. Yes, it all made sense now.

However, there were some immediate and practical problems that required serious thinking. She'd have to rent a car for a week. That should be easy enough: take a cab to Houghton County Airport and rent one there. She could also get some maps of the ski trails and snowmobile trails. That should be easy too. She'd seen a sign for the Keweenaw Visitors Bureau at the corner where Roger had turned off U.S. 41 to get to the motel.

The motel itself was located next to a small shopping center that included an IGA, Pamida, Subway, Burger King, and an independent shop that sold pasties, the well-known and quite unique U.P. staple. She made it a point to have several during the week.

Having planned a rough strategy, she took a shower, put on clean clothes, and walked the short distance to the Burger King for breakfast.

By early afternoon, Kristie had her car and maps. Sitting on the bed in the motel room, she studied the trails. Eagle Harbor on State Highway M-26 caught her attention. There was a trail from Lake Superior's Great Sand Bay to the little village of Eagle Harbor. She could park the car at Sand Bay and then hike to Eagle Harbor. Perhaps she could get a ride back to her car, or maybe she would just walk back along the highway, a much shorter distance.

As she drove up to Sand Bay, Kristie decided to put Roger out of her mind as well as her depressing dating history. Or at least try. She wanted to enjoy the beautiful north woods.

There was a small paved parking area off the side of the highway on the lake side at Sand Bay. She pulled in facing Lake Superior. The highway at this point followed a majestic plateau and afforded a spectacular view of the sandy beach and Lake Superior far below. She saw that one could walk down to the beach, and no doubt many did this during the warmer months. However, the trail she wanted to hike was on the other side of the road. Grabbing her small backpack and locking the car, she started out on the trail.

It was important to have a positive attitude, she thought. She was out here to enjoy herself. Sometimes one had to decide to have a good time--put forth a real effort. Rerunning scenes from yesterday evening in her mind had to stop; that was the first step. She took several deep breaths, conscious of the cool, clean air.

She tried to name some of the trees. There were balsams, cedars, and a few white birches, although most of the birches were nearer the road. She also watched for animals, but saw only a few squirrels. She hoped to catch a glimpse of a fox, but that was not likely. There was one animal she hoped she wouldn't see. She loved all animals but would rather not meet any black bears on the trail.

Kristie had been hiking for about an hour when the sky grew dark and the winds picked up. As best she could tell, they were coming from the lake--a strong north wind. About ten minutes later, it started to rain. At first, that didn't bother her. In fact, she pictured the famous scene with Gene Kelly and even considered singing one of her favorite rock songs. But while trying to think of a song, the rain and wind picked up significantly. The heavily wooded forest reduced the effect of the wind, but she could only imagine what it must be like on the shore with the storm coming across Lake Superior with all its ferocity. Still, even on the trail, she found it increasingly difficult to see.

Storms like this always bring down branches. She knew this and was watching her step while walking more slowly.

Then it happened. Kristie slipped on a wet branch that had been partially covered by the blowing pine needles and fell toward the side of the trail. The ground sloped downward off the trail, and she slid down the incline, scraping her hands and legs as she went.

After coming to a stop, she tried to assess the damage. Her hands had only a

few minor scratches, but she found a deeper cut on her left leg. Her pants were torn, and there was some blood mixed with the rain. It was quite painful to the touch.

Trying to stand, she realized there was another problem. She must have twisted her ankle a little. She could stand, but her ankle was very sore, too sore to simply walk back up to the trail. The ground was very slippery anyway. She would have to sacrifice a little dignity, and crawl back up on all fours.

A few minutes later, she was sitting on a log just on the edge of the trail. The rain continued pouring down, and by this time she was completely soaked. Both her ankle and the cut on her leg hurt.

Kristie loved the north woods and would have been able to accept this little disappointment in stride had it not been for what happened last night. Now it seemed like a final, devastating blow, sweeping aside all her efforts to be happy and enjoy her vacation. Depression engulfed her as thoroughly as the rain and wind. Nothing seemed to ever work out right for her. All the hurt, disappointment, and sadness welled up within her. She wanted to cry, just cry. It was her one, overpowering desire, the only possible response to how she felt. The tears came, and she put her face in her hands and sobbed and sobbed.

\* \* \* \* \*

How long she continued this way, Kristie wasn't sure. Something had distracted her. The wind, rain, and her own sobs made quite a racket around her, but she thought she heard her name. No, that was impossible. Then she heard it again. This time there was no mistaking it. Someone was shouting her name. She looked up and for one, fleeting second questioned her sanity.

But Joel Taylor was no hallucination.

At the sight of him, for reasons only vaguely understood at that moment, she felt a sudden rush of emotion, new emotions. Feelings of profound relief and joy. Joel! All was suddenly right with the world!

"Kristie, honey, are you all right?"

She stood up and flung her arms around him. He hugged her tight, stroking her very wet hair as she pressed her head against his chest.

Joel took her by the shoulders and stepped back to look at her. "What are you doing here alone? Are you hurt?"

"I was hiking and this storm came up. Then I slipped and slid off the trail. Cut my leg, and my ankle hurts too."

"Are you up here by yourself?"

"Humph! I didn't come up here by myself. I came on a date, but he left me and went back to Chicago. I decided not to let it ruin my vacation."

"Well, let's get back to my place and out of this storm. The weather forecast

said it's going to be a mean one."

Then the unexpectedness of his appearance struck her. "What were you doing here?"

"Looking for you."

(4332)