

Chapter 12

Kristie awoke early the next morning to find that the rain had stopped. Sunlight was evident beyond the bedroom curtains, but throughout the cabin there was only silence.

It was difficult to fathom everything that had happened yesterday. By some incredible sequence of improbable events, she was with Joel again. Not only that, but he had come up here hoping to find her. Then last night the whole story of the death of his fiancée came out, as well as the effect it had on him. She had been right! Yes, she had been right all along. Their attraction had been mutual in every sense, and everything he'd said to her in Grant Park had been the truth. And most incredible of all, after trying to walk out of her life, he was drawn back to her, no longer a prisoner of the past, no longer trying to be faithful to a dead fiancée and afraid to love again. It was almost too wonderful to believe.

She got out of bed, pulled on Joel's pants, and then went looking for the dryer. Back in the bedroom, she put on her own clothes. The pile of his clothes that she'd worn last night put a smile on her face. What a sight she must have presented! Of course, she still hadn't been able to do anything with her hair except brush it.

After folding his clothes and stacking them neatly on the dresser, she made the bed and then sat down to decide what to do next. Perhaps checking out the kitchen would be a good idea. Maybe she could make breakfast.

As she walked toward the kitchen, she took a closer look around the cabin. Quite obviously, there was little female influence on the interior decor. Everything had a masculine look, from the heavy wooded furniture to the knotty-pine paneling in the walls. There were no pretty knick-knacks, no fancy doilies, no vases of flowers. The pictures on the walls were landscapes, mostly winter landscapes featuring wolves and foxes. One picture featured a lighthouse with its beacon of light piercing a stormy sky above turbulent waters. Kristie smiled. She might like to add one or two floral arrangements, but on the whole, everything about this cabin stirred the call of the wild deep within her. Maybe she was a tomboy after all!

Looking through the cabinets and refrigerator convinced her that breakfast was a definite possibility. Apparently, Joel wasn't a coffee drinker because there was none to be found. That was all right; she didn't drink it either. Maybe the smell of bacon, eggs, and toast would wake him up. If not, she'd just go in there and do it herself!

The bacon was sizzling in the pan as she took the bread out of the refrigerator.

"Well!" a voice said. "Quite an improvement over last night."

She looked back to where Joel was standing in the doorway, leaning on the frame with one arm like John Wayne. His eyes scanned her appreciatively from head to foot. He was fully dressed, though not very well-groomed. But the dark, rough edges projected a very masculine image.

"Thanks," she said with a sheepish smile. "I was actually expecting some crack about my straight hair."

"Oh, not before breakfast. Say, you didn't have to do all this. There's a pretty good restaurant in Eagle Harbor. We could have gone there."

"Looking like I do? That would make my date with His Regalness the only time I ever looked worse when out with a guy. Have a seat. It's almost ready."

"Too bad I didn't wake up first," he said as he ate. "I was going to play 'Day Dream Believer' to wake you up."

"That's sweet, Joel, but you've got the wrong girl if you want to play that song."

"Why, because we're not married?"

Kristie felt her face flush with embarrassment, and sudden shivers raced through her system at the word "married." That had not been the reason she made the statement. The fact that the couple in the song were married had not even occurred to her, but the thought of being married to Joel revved up her emotions to scary levels. So if he had actually been picturing them married, she certainly didn't want her answer now to discourage such images. How could she have been so stupid to say that?

She reached out and touched his hand tenderly. "No, Joel, that thought never crossed my mind. I was trying to be funny. I meant I was never a homecoming queen." Her lips formed a small, knowing smile. "I wouldn't have gotten two votes!"

He took her hand in his and squeezed, nodding his head.

"Hey," she said, anxious to change the subject, "do you have a blow dryer?"

"Nope, never had much use for one."

"Well, then, how about taking me back to my car when we're done here? We can both drive back to the motel. I'd take you up on that shower here, but I wouldn't be able to do anything with my hair. Bring your bandages along, and I can put one on that cut before I get dressed. After that, I'm yours, and you can show me all around. Maybe go hiking again. My ankle's not giving me any trouble at all."

"Sounds like my kind of day."

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Joel led the way as they drove back to Calumet. He'd slept very little last night. Losing Kristie had been as painful as losing Karen, and now he had her back! The pain was gone, and he was alive again. The excitement was back, that excitement he'd felt when he met her and every time he was with her.

Hearing her quote those romantic, and yes, loving, song lines to him had melted his heart. In her sweet voice, they were like caresses, and he replayed that

scene in his mind over and over again. To think that a girl who now meant the world to him thought that same way about him was almost too astonishing to believe.

Last night had been romantic in other ways too. She had snuggled close to him with his arm around her as they sat by the fire looking out at Lake Superior. He had held her hand and kissed her.

Over the years he had occasionally wondered whether in some sense he might still be adolescent in his idea of what was romantic and exciting to do with a girl. He was now thirty years old, yet just to touch Kristie thrilled him as if he were a teenager. To hold her hand was a sweet and tender expression of affection between them, one that showed they were a couple. That in itself was a romantic thought. To hold her in his arms and kiss her brought the ultimate excitement, a sensation of warmth and closeness, a shared intimacy that expressed the depth of their feelings for each other. She was giving herself to him in a physically intimate way, yet one that was appropriate before marriage. The thought of kissing her never failed to make his heart race with anticipation.

No, he was not adolescent. It was their loss when couples today bypassed these simple yet profound pleasures of courtship in a fast-track pursuit of easy sex.

Joel was also enjoying a great feeling of relief as he drove toward Calumet. He had another lifelong personality trait, one much more difficult to live with than his view of what makes a date romantic and exciting. He'd always had a fear of doing something that would cause irreversible change or damage to a good relationship--whether with a pet dog, with a coworker, with a friend, or with a girlfriend. When he'd come up to the U.P. looking for Kristie, he didn't know what to expect if did meet her again. He had something wonderful with her before that day in Grant Park. Did his decision that day forever ruin their relationship? Kristie's reaction last night put that fear to rest once and for all.

What did the future hold for them now? Aunt Grace said he had fallen in love with her, and Aunt Grace had an uncanny insight when it came to affairs of the heart. Was Kristie in love with him? Neither one of them had said so yet, but boy, that was only one small step from what they'd already said to each other. A little more time, yes, just a little more time, and Aunt Grace's prayers might finally be answered.

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As Kristie followed Joel, she was deep in thought. Last night had made her so happy, so excited, like their first date all over again. When she woke up this morning reliving it all, replaying everything he'd said to her, she thought about Peter Noone: *But I do know that I love you/And I know that if you love me too/What a wonderful world it would be.* Maybe that wonderful world would soon be hers.

However, slowly, almost imperceptibly, darker thoughts began to intrude. Roger came to mind as well as the reason he left her. She thought about those other two times she'd been in love with a wonderful guy she thought also loved her. Those guys had just lost interest in her and found someone new. Why? She'd been terribly hurt both times but never knew why they left her. Could it have been for the same reason Roger gave her?

She'd always had this dream about meeting that one, special guy, their first kiss, going on romantic dates with him, falling in love, and then he'd ask her to marry him. That was why "Then He Kissed Me" meant so much to her. It was her dream set to beautiful rock-n-roll music. Was it finally happening? She'd meant every word she'd ever said to Joel: it was like heaven being with him, he's everything she ever wanted, and she'll never find anyone like him.

But "Then He Kissed Me" was 1963. Does it happen like that anymore? Can it happen today? Or are guys different today? Is the world different? Could that be why she'd always had this problem of guys just losing interest and drifting away to someone else?

She always had faith that there were still guys out there from her generation who shared her dream. But maybe that faith had been misguided. Doubts and fears suddenly assailed her. She felt herself losing that faith.

But what about Joel? He shared that dream. Or did he? Was she just seeing what she so desperately wanted to see? More doubts and fears filled her mind.

What if he didn't share that dream? Would he too eventually lose interest and leave her for someone else? She couldn't bear the thought of losing him again. She wouldn't lose him again!

But what did that mean? Give up her dream? Throw away the moral standard on which it was based? How could Joel fulfill her dream if she gave up her dream to keep him?

Great! Just great! Joel had finally resolved his deep, emotional conflict, and now she had just conjured up one of colossal proportions for herself! Confusion, utter confusion! What should she do? She didn't know the answer.

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Joel was turning into the motel. She must put these thoughts out of her head. She wanted so much to enjoy this day with him. They both got out of their cars.

"Okay, why don't you go in and make yourself beautiful, and I'll go do some shopping at Pamida."

"Sure, sounds good. Give me about an hour."

"Will do."

While she showered, her emotions again tugged at her in two different directions. She had her dream, but she also had that gnawing question: was it impossible? Would it cause her eventually to lose Joel?

The same disturbing doubts assailed her thoughts while she dried her hair. She must get a grip on herself. They were together again, and today was supposed to be filled with carefree fun. There had been nothing last night that portended a future problem. Nothing even hinted that she should abandon her dream, except her own doubts and fears.

Laying the blow dryer down, she examined the results. At least her hair had some body to it now.

She looked through her suitcase to decide what to wear. A WKLS sweatshirt would do nicely. She also had a number of choices for slacks. Some vague impulse led her to bypass all the looser options, and she selected a pair of form-hugging leggings. Hiking shoes completed her preparation for a day of romantic fun with Joel.

Not long after she finished dressing, he knocked on the motel door. She answered almost immediately.

His lips curled into a smile as he looked her over. She liked that smile.

"There's the old Kristie. Did I ever mention that I thought you were kind of cute?"

"Cute, you mean, for a girl who's hippy?"

"Who told you that?" He took her hand. "Come on, let's go. The Keweenaw awaits us."

They left Kristie's rented car at the motel and got into Joel's 1964 Mustang. He headed north again on U.S. 41. On a curve several miles past the village of Mohawk, she noticed what looked like a gigantic thermometer.

"I saw that when I drove up here yesterday but didn't stop to get a closer look. What is it?"

"That's Keweenaw County's snow thermometer," he explained. "It's calibrated in feet, showing how deep the yearly snowfall really would be if it came all at once." He pulled off on the shoulder of the highway. "Take a close look. The 82-year average seasonal snowfall is 187.4 inches. Now look up at the top. The record was 390.4 inches, set in the winter of 1978-79. The gauge used to measure snowfall in Keweenaw County is at the Delaware Mine."

"The Delaware Mine?"

"An old copper mine. For over a hundred years, this was a booming copper-mining region. That's why it's also called the Copper Country. Most of the mines are closed up and abandoned now. A few, like the Delaware, are privately owned and run as tourist attractions."

"Yeah, now that you mention it, I have read a little about copper mining in the Keweenaw and iron mining around Iron Mountain. But mostly I know the Marquette area. That's where I usually go when I come up here. This is my first time on the Keweenaw Peninsula."

Joel drove on. They came to a tiny little town called Phoenix where State Highway M-26 turns left and separates from U.S. 41. He pointed to the left. There used to be a whole town up there built around the Cliff Mine. Now you couldn't even call it a ghost town. There's virtually nothing left."

They drove past Joel's cabin and on through Eagle Harbor. "I'll show you the Brockway Mountain Drive. It was a WPA project built during the Thirties. It's about nine miles long and reaches the highest point above sea level between the Rockies and the Alleghanies."

When they reached the top of the drive, there was an overlook where cars could pull off the road and enjoy the view. Joel and Kristie got out and walked to a small stone railing.

"That's Lake Superior behind us." Pointing in the other direction, he continued, "Down there's the little town of Copper Harbor, and that's Lake Fanny Hooe," he added, pointing to the right of Copper Harbor. For some minutes they silently studied the spectacular view that surrounded them.

Then Joel pointed back toward the road. "When we continue down Brockway Drive, we meet M-26 again just as it enters Copper Harbor. A few blocks more and it meets U.S. 41. M-26 ends, but 41 continues a few more miles north and then ends almost at the tip of the peninsula. U.S. 41 is one of the longest U.S. highways in the country. It starts in southern Florida, goes up through Atlanta and Chicago, and ends here. Downtown, you know, it's Lake Shore Drive."

"Can we walk over to the end of the cliff?" Kristie asked.

"Sure, but it's pretty steep and pretty high. Maybe I better hold on to you."

He put his arm around her waist and Kristie put hers around him. Together, they walked to the edge. The view did make her knees feel just a bit weak. He moved his arm up around her shoulder. The view was beautiful, but she was more interested in Joel. She turned to look at him, her hair blowing in a rather strong wind.

He squeezed her shoulder then took her hand and led her back to the car. This was just like their date at Johnny's Barbecue--the fun, the romance, Joel holding her hand in his. On that night she'd quoted the lines from "Angel Baby" to him. She was feeling that magic again now. *It's just like heaven being here with you/You're like an angel, too good to be true.*

They continued on the Brockway Mountain Drive and descended into Copper Harbor. "It's hard to believe," Joel said, "with ghost towns all over the place, but the population in the Keweenaw used to be quite large. It peaked somewhere between 1900 and 1920. But all the mines are closed now. I think the reason had something to do with union troubles and falling copper prices. But the interesting thing is that this area still has the largest copper deposit in the world, and the mother lode was never found."

"Can we go see one of those ghost towns?"

"Yeah, we'll take U.S. 41 back. Not far from here we'll pass several ghost towns. There's Mandan and then a little further south Delaware and Central. But we'll stop at Mandan. It's a good example."

They left Copper Harbor and drove south on U.S. 41. After ten or twelve miles, Joel turned left onto a dirt road with deep ruts that led into a heavily

forested area. He drove a distance of about one or two city blocks when they first saw a few old buildings. He stopped the car. "Well, this is Mandan. We're right in the center of town."

Kristie looked around and saw hardly anything. "The center of town?"

"Yeah, the center of town. Would you believe that at the turn of the century, the population of Mandan was about 2000?"

Indeed, it was hard to believe. She saw two or three buildings that looked like they were ready to fall down and about six or eight stone foundations. One or two houses looked like they might have families living in them. That was all that was left.

"Somebody still lives here?"

"Only during the summer."

"Let's get out and walk around," she said.

Holding hands again, they walked up the main street of Mandan. "Can you picture it?" she asked Joel. "Dozens of people walking this street. Going about their business, shopping, greeting friends. Look at this foundation here. Maybe this was some family's house. A man and woman made love here, maybe raised children here. And now there's no trace: just this empty shell--a silent sentinel of days gone by."

Joel looked at her in surprise. "You've got a nostalgic streak in you. So do I. I get similar thoughts in a ghost town, an old railroad station or roadbed, things like that. But you're not only nostalgic, you're poetic. That was...that captured my feelings a lot better than I could have done."

She looked up at him and cocked her head slightly, almost doing a curtsy. "Thank you, sir," she replied. Then arm-in-arm, they continued walking around Mandan.

Joel drove back through Eagle Harbor and pulled into the driveway of his cabin.

"Ready for some hiking? In a better mood today for learning your way around these trails?"

Kristie reached over and squeezed his hand. "A much better mood."

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