

## Chapter 15

Kristie got back to the station the following Monday afternoon. As she was walking to her office, she passed Susan, a secretary and one of her closer friends, in the corridor.

"Hey Kristie, I heard you've got a new boyfriend."

Kristie stopped and looked at her in amazement. "Susan, where in the world did you hear that?"

"Oh, it's all over the station. I don't remember exactly who told me."

"All over the station?"

"Sure." Then Susan came a little closer and lowered her voice. "You probably should expect some ribbing."

Kristie continued to her office. How could anyone at the station possibly know about Joel? Was this Joel's doing? No, it couldn't have been him. Sure, he has a devious sense of humor, but this was not his style.

Tom. Yes, that's it! It must have been Tom. This would be his style. But how could he know? Then it dawned on her. The Sixties Club. She was sure Joel wasn't the type to be bragging about a new girlfriend. But he might have mentioned that they were dating to Dan, cofounder of the club and probably his best friend. There was no telling what the next couple of links in the chain might have been, but eventually it got to Tom. Yes, he would certainly not miss this opportunity to spread the news all around the station.

Then an awful thought occurred to her. Would he also have told everyone what Joel did for a living? Founder and CEO of an online dating service?

Susan's prediction turned out to be almost an understatement. About an hour later, Kristie ran into Jack Cassidy, another of the DJs at WKLS.

"Kristie, how's the new boyfriend? Any talk about the Chapel of Love yet?"

She scowled at him. "No, Jack. We're not heading off to the Chapel of Love yet."

"Oh, then it is serious. That's what I heard. Gee, Kristie, I've never known you to have a steady boyfriend before. You slip him Love Potion Number Nine or something?"

"Very funny, Jack. It happens I don't need love potions. On the other hand, I don't recall hearing too much about your dating life. Seems to me you're the one who needs Madame Rue." Then she giggled. "I'd really like to see you kiss that cop down at Thirty-fourth and Vine."

Jack started laughing too. "I can see love hasn't hurt your sense of humor yet."

After getting back into her office, she just sat there thinking for a few minutes. Nobody had kidded her yet about falling for the president of an online dating service. Tom must not know that Joel was the founder and president of MyForever.com. But that couldn't be--he'd have to know. Tom and Dan were pretty good friends, and who knows how many meetings of The Sixties Club he'd attended. No, Tom knew but he just hadn't told anyone about that. Maybe there was hope for him after all. Yes, Megan was having a very good influence on Tom. Kristie smiled as she thought about that. What kind of influence would she have on Joel? But as she thought about it, she couldn't think of a single thing she'd want to change.

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The next day, Joel was meeting Kristie at the station to take her to lunch.

"Where are we going?" she asked as he took her hand and led her from the building.

"No, no, this is going to be a surprise. You won't have long to wait though. It's not far."

With excitement building, Kristie watched the streets pass as Joel deftly maneuvered his 1964 Mustang through the Downtown traffic. When he got to the corner of Dearborn and Kinzie, she knew where he was going.

Joel seemed to have an uncanny ability to arrive at just the right time to pull up to a parking place as another car was leaving it. They got out of the car, and she looked first at the door of the restaurant and then back at Joel.

"Harry Caray's Italian Steakhouse," she said, giving him a quizzical look. "Did Aunt Grace tell you to take me here?"

"Well, he answered somewhat sheepishly, "Aunt Grace did make a few suggestions along those lines. This is one of the best lunch restaurants in Chicago."

"I've heard of it, but I never did understand its name. 'Caray' doesn't sound very Italian to me."

"My goodness, I'm surprised at you! A born-and-raised Chicago girl, and you don't know Harry Caray's real name? It was Harry Carabina, quite Italian indeed."

As they walked into the restaurant, the motif that met their eyes was unmistakable. There was a lot of exposed brick--not unlike Wrigley Field itself--tables were covered with cheerful red-checkered tablecloths, and the place was filled with baseball memorabilia recalling the beloved voice of the Chicago White Sox and then later the Cubs.

They sat down and ordered. Both took Minestrone soup. Joel ordered Fettuccine Alfredo, and Kristie selected Spaghetti with Marinara Sauce. As they waited for their food to arrive, a man eating to their left suddenly stood up and began singing and waving his glass of Budweiser like Harry Caray did his microphone. Soon the entire restaurant, including Joel and Kristie, joined in the famous Seventh-Inning Stretch ritual with a raucous rendition of 'Take Me Out to the Ballgame.'

Kristie had read about this: it was not an unusual event in the restaurant.

By the time they finished the song, Kristie was a little out of breath. "This is quite a place."

"It's a tradition here. Can happen any time."

While they were eating, Kristie asked, "Hey, Joel, everyone at the station is kidding me about having a 'new boyfriend.' Did you have anything to do with that?"

Joel assumed a picture of innocence. "Kristie, I didn't tell a soul at the station."

"And what about your club, The Sixties Club?"

"Well, yeah, maybe, I guess, I might have mentioned something to Dan that I'm dating you." Joel's look of innocence slowly transformed into a look of guilt. "But you know, next to you, he's my best friend."

Kristie felt a warm feeling in her heart. When a relationship gets serious, a guy pretty much has to say "I love you," difficult as that might be for him! But how many would tell his girlfriend that she was his best friend? Nevertheless, she wasn't going to let him off the hook quite so easily.

"And Dan told Tom, and Tom told everyone at the station," she concluded.

"Well, it would have to come out sooner or later. When two people profess to love each other, it doesn't stay a secret very long."

Kristie smiled. "It was really sweet to call me your best friend. I guess you're forgiven. But would you believe Jack Cassidy actually accused me of slipping you Love Potion Number Nine?"

Joel burst out laughing. "That's good. That was really good!"

"You think so, huh? You do fit right in with those guys at the station." She wanted to sound stern, but she couldn't stop herself from laughing too.

"You know the kind of guys you work with, and, yeah, I guess I do have a similar sense of humor."

She reached across the table and took his hand. "And that's one of the things I like about you." She paused and then in a mischievous tone added, "But you know, I really wish I could come up with a few other things too. It'd help when everybody asks me what I see in you."

"Kristie, you're pretty good at that kind of humor yourself."

"Is that one of the things you like about me?"

"Yes, but unlike you, I can come up with one more."

"Oh, really? Just one? And what's that?"

"You're cute."

Her expectations had been pretty high, so she gave him a disgusted look.  
"Thanks. That really warms my heart, Joel."

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Joel dropped Kristie off at the station and was on his way out when Tom came up to him.

"Hey, Joel, got a minute?"

Joel turned around to see who had called him. "Hi, Tom. Sure, what's up?"

"Come on in my office. I've got something to tell you."

They walked into Tom's office, and he closed the door behind them.

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That night during her show, Kristie was thinking about what Aunt Grace had said--Joel had one more hurdle to overcome. Aunt Grace was probably right. If he did want to ask her to marry him, it would be difficult. It was as his fiancé that Karen had been killed.

It was time to introduce the next song.

"That was Little Eva with 'The Loco-Motion.' The next song has always been a favorite on this show. It really is quite remarkable. Coming out as it did in 1961, it was only six years into the rock-n-roll era. Yet it was about 'oldies but goodies.' Quite prophetic, really. Did Carl Burnett know that 'oldies' rock-n-roll would someday be a musical institution? By the way, Carl Burnett was Little Caesar. But there's another reason I like this song. It's very romantic...sweet, romantic, and nostalgic. Here it is, then, Little Caesar and the Romans with 'Those Oldies but Goodies.'"

*Those oldies but goodies remind me of you  
The songs of the past bring back memories of you  
I'll always remember the first night we met  
The songs they were playing, I never will forget.*

As she listened to the words, her thoughts went back to Joel. She remembered when they first met in his office at MyForever.com. There were no songs playing, but they had talked about rock-n-roll. In fact, they talked about "Forever Came Today" by the Supremes, the song that inspired the company's name.

But her thoughts soon returned to marriage proposals, a very delightful subject, to be sure, but...

"Then He Kissed Me," the song that portrayed her dream, ended with, *Then he asked me to be his bride/And always be right by his side.* Sitting back and closing her eyes, she wondered wistfully what it would really be like to hear that...for

Joel to ask her to marry him. In her heart, she believed he wanted to--or at least would want to. But...how difficult would be for him to take that step with such an awful tragedy in his past? How long would it take before he was ready to take what must seem to him a huge risk?

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A week later, Joel picked Kristie up on a date. He wouldn't tell her where they were going, but when he got on Lake Shore Drive, a thought flashed through her mind. No, that's impossible, she thought. But when he turned onto McFetridge, there was no longer any doubt where he was heading.

The Adler Planetarium.

Kristie's heart started beating faster. Had Tom told Joel about the suggestion she'd given him for a romantic proposal? No, very unlikely. Besides, she really couldn't hope that Joel would be acting this quickly. Aunt Grace had said it would probably take him awhile. This was probably just a regular date. After all, they'd never been to the Planetarium before. And anyway, even without a marriage proposal, being there with Joel would be pretty romantic compared to the date she had when Roger took her there.

As the star show began, the lights went out, and the projector created a panorama of the heaven on the domed ceiling. Joel leaned over so that his shoulder was touching hers. Then he threaded his arm through hers and took her hand. Yes, this was how Kristie had imagined it could be here. Indeed, it was one of the most romantic places in Chicago for a date, and the ambiance was not lost on Joel.

After the show, they made their way to the various exhibits. When Kristie saw the scales, she said, "Oh, let's go over there. Go ahead and get on that moon scale and see what you'd weigh on the moon."

Joel looked at her suspiciously. "So you can take its reading, multiply by six, and figure out what I weight here on earth?"

She gave him a surprised stare. "You know more about astronomy than I thought."

He wagged his finger at her. "And you've been here before. Was it with Roger?"

"Yes, it was Roger. I was here once before coming with Roger, but not on a date. If there ever was a man who had no sense of the romantic, it was Roger. The power of this place completely eluded him."

"So much the better for me! He might have stolen your heart."

Kristie looked up at him. She wanted to say something sweet...something romantic. "I don't think so, Joel." In a whisper, she added, "Somebody else had already stolen it."

He put his arm around her and drew her close to him as they walked to the next exhibit.

The temperature had been dropping throughout the afternoon and evening, and when they made their way outside, it was pretty cold. Joel led her to one of the benches anyway.

"This is my favorite view of the skyline. Isn't it magnificent?" he said.

"It's mine too. And somehow it's much better here than from Navy Pier."

"That's because we're much more out in the open here." He smiled mischievously. "You know, Kristie, I've read that back in the Sixties, Chicago winters didn't stop the kids from making out."

She gave him one of her coy smiles. "Are you inviting me to a taillight park, Mr. Taylor?"

"Not exactly. Just thought I'd comment on how it was. You couldn't leave the car running the entire time, but every so often you'd start the engine to get a little shot of heat. But the really fun part was how you had to do things with heavy jackets or coats on. The girl would open her coat, and the guy would put his arms around her inside the coat. The warmth always seemed to make it feel all the more romantic."

"Inside her coat, huh?"

"Yeah, but, you know, for hugging and kissing. Most guys understood that it wasn't an invitation to try...other things inside her coat."

"Humph! Well, from past experience, I know I'd be perfectly safe with you."

"But learning the techniques of making out in the Sixties was not really the reason I brought you over here. I was just rambling, I guess, because I'm a little nervous."

"Nervous?" Kristie's mind began racing again. Could this possibly be a prelude to...No, she must not think that. It's probably nothing. Don't disappoint yourself. It's probably just a prelude to a kiss. Still...he'd never been nervous before doing that before.

"A little." He seemed to take a deep breath. "Chicago has a beautiful skyline, especially from here, but it only adds to an even more spectacular display of nature." He pointed upward. "It's a clear night. You see the stars above? *A thousand stars in the sky/They say to me that there'll never be/No other love...like you...for me.* That's how I feel, Kristie. *Tell me you love me, tell me you're mine once more.* And tell me you'll marry me. I love you, and I want you for my own."

As he was saying all this, his hands as if by magic had produced a small box and flipped its lid. Inside was the most beautiful engagement ring she had ever seen.

Her heart was pounding inside of her as she looked from the ring into his eyes. Her own eyes were now filled with tears.

"Joel, I...I can hardly believe this. Yes, I love you. For now and forever. For so many years I've dreamed about a moment like this. I just can't believe it's happening."

"Well, it's the last part of your dream. *Then he asked me to be his bride/And always be right by his side.* That's what I'm asking you."

"And yes, I'll be your bride. Yes, I'll marry you! It's what I want more than anything else in the world."

She started to cry, and Joel gave her his handkerchief. She dried her eyes and between snuffles asked, "Joel, do you remember that first day we met in your office? When I was about to leave, you said something to me. You said, 'I truly hope that as a result of our dating service, you'll soon be able to say with the Supremes, "My forever came today."' Well, my forever did come--that day, *When you walked into my life/And made my lonely life a paradise.*"

"And for me, I recaptured forever. I thought I'd lost it when I lost Karen. But I have it back now...with you."

He took her in his arms. The warmth and the love she felt as he held her took on new meaning. It would last forever.

After a minute or two, Kristie pulled away and looked at him.

"Hey, Tom told you about this, didn't he? Told you I thought this would be the ultimate in a romantic proposal."

Joel looked sheepish again. "I'd like to say I came up with this all on my own, but, yes, Tom told me about your advice to him--what you thought would be a romantic proposal. But think of it this way: some girls get to pick out their own engagement ring. Tom told me that you'd want me to do that. But you got to pick out your very own proposal scenario!"

Kristie laughed and threw her arms around him.

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Tom and Megan pulled into the parking lot and got out. The church was as magnificent as it was huge. When they walked in, lots of people were already there, and the two sides seemed to be pretty evenly filled. An usher approached and addressed Tom.

"Are you friends of the groom or the bride?"

Tom chuckled. "Well, I work with the bride, and the groom is one of my best friends. You pick."

The usher smiled as he offered his right arm to Megan. Tom followed slightly behind as the usher seated them on the left side of the church as friends of the bride. All very formal.

The decorations and floral arrangements were awesome. Obviously, no expense had been spared. The center aisle had the usual canvas, and satin pew ribbons added a touch of elegance to the massive wooden pews. The grand pipe organ was one of the most majestic Tom had ever seen, and the organist was playing softly as the guests were being seated.

"This is going to be one spectacular wedding," Megan whispered. "Now take a look around, Tom. I want to get some ideas here."

Taking a look down at the engagement ring on her finger, he felt very happy.

As the organ played, Tom sat there thinking about weddings. Legally, of course, only one line from the entire ceremony was really necessary to become married: "By the power vested in me by the state of whatever, I now pronounce you man and wife." But, he thought, what a great loss it would be to reduce it all to that. A wedding ceremony is a truly beautiful and romantic occasion. There is probably no event in one's life more lovely.

It was time to begin.

The head usher escorted Aunt Grace to the first pew on the right side, Uncle Tony following close behind. The usher soon returned and seated Mrs. Rydell, Kristie's mother, in the first pew on the left side. The minister, Joel, and Dan, his best man, took their places at the front of the church. At this point, the organist switched to a processional. In pairs, the ushers and bridesmaids marched slowly up the aisle. The ushers were from The Sixties Club, and the bridesmaids were all from WKLS. When they reached the front, they separated and arranged themselves in lines on either side of the nave, the ushers on the right and the bridesmaids on the left. Kristie had no fewer than eight bridesmaids. That wasn't hard for Tom to understand. Everybody at the station liked Kristie. While bridesmaids perform no essential duties during the wedding ceremony, he appreciated the charm and beauty they added to the splendor of the service. Susan, the Maid of Honor, followed in the procession by herself.

A brief pause in the music followed. Then, somewhat louder, the organist began the traditional "Bridal Chorus" from Wagner's *Lohengrin*. As if on command, the entire assembly rose and turned toward the back of the church. Kristie, escorted by Charles Rydell, her father, began her slow, rhythmic march to the front of the church and her waiting groom.

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Kristie thought her emotions would overwhelm her. She was almost shaking with nervousness but yet more excited than she had ever been in her life. Today was the day of her wedding! She could hardly believe it. Today--within a few minutes--she was going to become Joel's wife.

She stood in the narthex of the church watching the procession of ushers and bridesmaids. It was almost time for her. She wondered if her legs would hold without buckling under as she walked. To steady herself, she grasped her father's arm. He in turn put his hand on hers, and she felt a little reassured.

There was a temporary pause in the music. Then she heard the Bridal Chorus,

and she moved to the beginning of the long, center aisle and saw Joel standing at the front of the church. He was waiting for her.

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As Joel looked toward to the back of the church, he saw Kristie standing there ready to march down the aisle. He couldn't remember ever seeing a more wonderful vision. *And always be right by his side.* She was all his.

Kristie looked absolutely beautiful in her wedding dress. It was bright, satiny white, the emblem of purity. Exquisite lace covered the modest neckline and bodice. The dress fit tightly in the waist and then flowed into a wide, elegant skirt that just touched the floor as she walked. But what really made this dress special in his opinion were the sleeves, short puffy sleeves that were only slightly padded and came to her elbows. Normally, gloves were worn with short-sleeved wedding dresses. However, Kristie had decided to break with that tradition, and her slender, bare arms made her seem especially delicate and exquisite. The train was relatively small for the size of the wedding, and she wore a modest headpiece with a traditional veil, symbolizing youth. She also wore a very thin necklace with a tiny cross that rested a few inches below the neckline. To complete the image, she carried a small, white New Testament instead of a bouquet, a tribute to both Aunt Grace and to her own faith.

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Tom and Megan turned with everyone else to watch Kristie move slowly up the aisle in step with the music. Megan was pretty, very pretty, Tom thought, but today was Kristie's day, and she was a beautiful bride.

The ceremony was very formal, dignified, and traditional.

"Who gives this woman to this man?" the minister asked.

Kristie's father responded, "I do," and then took his seat next to his wife.

The minister gave a short homily on the sanctity of marriage. Traditional vows were exchanged. He then had the couple kneel and offered a beautiful prayer for their blessing. They rose and he said his one legally necessary line. Then to Joel, he added, "You may now kiss the bride."

Joel gently lifted her veil. They embraced and kissed. When they drew apart and turned to face the congregation, the minister announced, "I am very pleased to present to you Mr. and Mrs. Joel Taylor."

At that instant, the organist began the resounding, triumphal "Wedding March" from Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He must have pulled out all the stops of that magnificent pipe organ. You could literally feel the music, and it sent chills down the spine.

On the first note, the recessional began. The organist played it much more sprightly than he had played the "Bridal Chorus." First, Kristie and Joel marched to the back of the church. Then the lines of ushers and bridesmaids moved toward the center aisle, paired up, and followed after the bride and groom. Tom considered

the precision of the choreography a thing of beauty.

He turned to Megan and saw tears in her eyes.

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The reception was to be held in the Grand Ballroom at the east end of Navy Pier immediately after the church ceremony.

After all the greetings and best wishes were exchanged outside the church, Dan got in his car as Joel and Kristie climbed into the back seat. Once Dan pulled away from the curb, Kristie and Joel embraced and kissed.

"I'm so happy, and I love you so much," she said, tears again in her eyes.

"Careful. We mustn't embarrass Dan here." That got a little bit of a laugh out her her.

"I'll try to behave myself."

They were the first to arrive at the ballroom, with the bridal entourage following close behind. Walking in, Kristie again marveled. The 18,000-square-foot ballroom featured not only a five-foot-high elevated stage at one end, but also 3,000 tivoli lights for dramatic ambiance. The 80-foot-high domed ceiling had massive beams arching over the space, adding a bit of architectural interest to the historic facility. Floor-to-ceiling glass panels in the ballroom offered a 180-degree view of Lake Michigan, including the Chicago Harbor Lighthouse. Outside the ballroom, one had a spectacular view of the John Hancock Center.

As the guests started to arrive, Joel asked the bridal party to form the formal receiving line. It took considerable time to welcome all the guests. Once they were finally seated, Dan filled Kristie's glass and then Joel's with sparkling clear champagne and proposed a toast to the newlyweds.

"Here's to a wonderfully warm and happy marriage for two of the greatest people I'm proud to call my friends."

A sumptuous, catered meal followed and culminated with the cutting of the massive wedding cake. Not long after that, the band members took their places on the stage. They began with that beautifully romantic Elvis Presley song, "Can't Help Falling in Love." It was a tender, instrumental rendition, slow and melodic.

Following tradition, Joel got up as the music started, took Kristie's hand, and led her to the center of the dance floor. All eyes were fixed on them as they lovingly embraced and began to dance. After a few minutes, Mr. Rydell started dancing with his daughter, and other couples began making their way to the floor.

The music throughout the evening consisted exclusively of the very best of the slow, romantic rock-n-roll of the Sixties. Kristie had picked each song.

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Late that night, they walked up to the door of Joel's apartment.

"We've waited for this night, Kristie. It's been our dream, the way we always wanted it to be. That song by the Beach Boys helped us keep our eyes focused on that dream, but now we can reword the lyrics: we are married, and there isn't a single thing we can't do."

"Not a single thing, Joel..."

He didn't answer. He just smiled and unlocked the door. Then to her utter astonishment, he swept her up into his arms, pushed the door open with his foot, and carried her across the threshold.

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"I've got a very special announcement to make tonight. My show is now going to be called the Kristie Taylor Show. That's right. I'm now married to the most wonderful guy in the world. Rock-n-roll oldies played a very important part in our romance, and that calls for a dedication. I'm going to break precedence and go back to the early rock from the Fifties to get just the right song. Donny Osmond redid this hit in 1973, but I'm going to play the original version by Johnny Mathis from 1957. It reached number nine nationally and stayed on the charts for a phenomenal fourteen months. When you listen to the words, you'll see why. So here it is--'The Twelfth of Never.' This one's for you, Joel--from my heart."

*You ask how much I need you, must I explain?  
I need you, oh my darling, like roses need rain.  
You ask how long I'll love you; I'll tell you true:  
Until the twelfth of never, I'll still be loving you.*

*Hold me close, never let me go.  
Hold me close, melt my heart like April snow.*

*I'll love you till the bluebells forget to bloom;  
I'll love you till the clover has lost its perfume.  
I'll love you till the poets run out of rhyme,  
Until the twelfth of never  
And that's a long,  
Long  
Time.*

The Beginning...

of a New Life...

Together

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