

Chapter 3

Joel Taylor was the last person Kristie expected to see at the station, and she was almost paralyzed with disbelief. And for some reason she could not quite pin down, her heart started beating a little faster.

After a moment or two of stunned immobility, she continued walking in his direction.

"Well, hello, Mr. Taylor. This is sure a surprise."

"Hi, Kristie. A pleasant surprise, I hope. And please...call me Joel."

"Yeah, quite a pleasant surprise...Joel. What brings you here?"

"Well, after our little talk, I decided that I'd been foolishly overlooking a really good advertising outlet. This is the station I always listen too. Why in the world haven't I been advertising my dating service on it? So here I am, and I just bought a month's advertising, twelve slots per day. And I insisted that four of them be during your show. I just now set the whole thing up with your business manager, Jim Patterson."

Her eyes brightened. "Well, gee, that's great. I'm flattered you think so many people listen to my show."

"That wasn't quite the reason. I guess it was because I knew the DJ." His smile was warm. "Hey, have you had lunch yet? I haven't, and I'm starving."

"Actually, I haven't either. I was going to get something awful from the vending machines here."

"Well, I know a place not far from here where they have Vienna hot dogs and the best homemade fries you've ever tasted. How about it? You want to go out to lunch?"

She laughed and wiggled her finger at him. "You know, I guess we like the same music and food. I'd love to."

The Vienna brand was known as "Chicago's Hot Dog" and was a true Chicago institution. The company headquarters was on North Damen, and the hot dogs have been sold in Chicago since the Great Depression. They were all beef with a unique, not-so-tough skin and were almost always served on a warm, poppyseed bun. There were Vienna hot dog "stands" all over the city and suburbs. Many of these "stands" were actually small, walk-in style eateries with a few small tables. The French fries served were often made from large, fresh potatoes cut on site.

Joel and Kristie found one of those small tables and sat down after picking up their order at the counter. She had eaten at this particular Vienna stand before, but it took on new significance for her today. She looked around. On the walls were pictures of Wriggley Field, Comiskey Park, Soldier Field, Buckingham Fountain, and even Al Capone, another Chicago institution. She savored the aroma of the hot dogs and French fries as they cooked. Yes, this was her kind of place.

How much more relaxed she was here as opposed to that fancy restaurant Reginald had taken her to. And she was here with Joel Taylor. She wasn't quite sure why, but that too was special.

"So, Kristie, tell me about your limp. What happened on that date you had?"

"Well, I'll get to the limp in a minute. Mr. Reginald Van Velkenburg III was certainly the exact opposite of those men I complained about in your office. He was the perfect gentleman, rich, and aristocratic. Why he ever picked me, I'll never know. But I really was looking forward to the date. I wanted to meet someone like him. I thought it would be such a welcome change. But absolutely everything went wrong! First, he hadn't made it clear that we were going to places where everyone would be very formally dressed. I was wearing a skirt, blouse, and a sweater. He was in a tailored, three-piece suit, and all the other women at the restaurant in beautiful evening dresses.

"And the humidity! It must have been the most humid evening we've had this year. My hair that I'd spent so much time on went flat in the twinkling of an eye." She waved one hand in the air as if performing a magic trick.

Joel was beginning to smile, but he held himself in and said nothing.

"Then the wind picked up. You can imagine what that meant--and I don't mean for my hair." She blushed a little as she recalled her embarrassment.

He was amazed she was sharing all this detail with him. "Your skirt?"

"Yeah, right at the door of the restaurant the wind caught it and flipped it up--right in front of everybody." Suddenly she giggled. "But I must say that His Regalness was probably more embarrassed than I was."

"'His Regalness'?"

"Yeah, that's how I came to think of Reginald. But the night was still young. While we were eating, I dropped spaghetti on my sweater, and then as we were leaving the restaurant, I managed to step on a nail. Naturally, Reginald thought it was his duty as a gentleman to carry me to the car, which he proceeded to do with complete disregard to the fact that I was wearing a skirt! I was never more mortified in my life. Anyway, instead of going to see a play, we went to a clinic so I could get a tetanus shot. You know where they like to give those!"

Joel was still smiling. "I don't want to laugh, Kristie. I know how embarrassing those things can be, and I can understand how you had gotten your hopes up so high. But..."

At this point, she started laughing too. "Yeah, yeah, I know. Go ahead and laugh. It could have been a highly successful Abbott-and-Costello routine, if one of them had been a female." Then her laughter died out. "But you know what was really discouraging after it was all over? All those fiascos could have kept us laughing for the rest of our lives together--if we were to have a life together. But there was just no spark between us, and we had absolutely nothing in common."

"I'm so sorry," he said softly. "I know how you feel. But he was only the

first one. I still have real high hopes for you. Maybe we need to make a few additional changes in your personality profile. What do you think?"

"Yeah, I think I should add something about liking winter sports and the north woods of Wisconsin and Michigan's U.P. You know, he asked me what I liked to do for recreation and where I liked to go on my vacations. So I told him about the magnificent winters in the U.P. and how much I liked cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. You just wouldn't have believed his reaction! He practically started shivering right there in the restaurant! Said he hoped to move eventually to Dallas or Phoenix."

Joel just shook his head. "I think it's an excellent idea to put something in your profile about winter sports and the north woods. If I had known you liked all that, I would have suggested it when you were in my office." Joel sat back with a thoughtful expression on his face. "You know, so far we have rock-n-roll music and Vienna hot dogs in common. Now there's a third item. I love that area so much I have a second home up there."

Her eyes widened. "You do? Up there? You mean in the U.P.?"

"Yeah, in the Keweenaw Peninsula, right on the north shore of Lake Superior."

She closed her eyes for a moment in serene contemplation of the scene. When she opened them and looked at him, he was watching her intently, and those devastating blue eyes were working their magic on her again. Somehow an image of the two of them together in that cabin on the Lake Superior flashed through her mind. Good grief! She had to get control of herself. He had not invited her there!

"It must be just beautiful."

"It is; it really is. During the winter, the snow storms from the Lake are so fierce that the snow blows horizontally past the windows. It gives you a really cozy feeling inside, that's for sure. And while the Soo locks are still open, huge ore ships sail right past my window. At night their running lights make an eerie but spectacular sight."

Kristie was practically in a hypnotic trance as she listened to his descriptions. Suddenly a light clicked on. "Gordon Lightfoot--the most famous Lake Superior shipwreck of all: 'The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.'"

Joel smiled. "I knew you'd know that song, even though it's little later than the era you cover at WKLS."

"Wow. You're one lucky guy, Joel."

His smile faded. "Yeah, in some ways."

"Your wife must find it all incredibly romantic."

The statement was out before she caught herself. She cringed inwardly and held her breath, hoping he would not realize what a blatant attempt it had been to find out whether he was married.

"I'm not married." He paused briefly. "Never have been."

With a sense of relief, she breathed again, thankful he apparently had not taken her comment for the outrageously forward question it was. But there was something in his reaction. Was it a sensitive area with him? And it also struck Kristie strange that he would add the qualification about never having been married.

Joel regained his light tone but clearly wanted to change the subject. "So what else didn't you have in common with His Regalness?"

It took a second or two to get her mind off Lake Superior and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. "Well, music also came up for discussion. As usual, we were at opposite ends of the spectrum."

"You told him who you really are?"

"Oh, no. But still I just couldn't believe why he asked me out. You and I did keep that line in my profile about liking rock-n-roll music."

"What kind of music did he like?"

"Opera! Said it was the only music that can really get into your soul."

Joel laughed heartily. "Well, that shows how much he knows. We've got the answer to that. There's no music that gets into your soul like rock-n-roll! Remember the Lovin' Spoonful: *Do you believe in magic in a young girl's heart, how the music can free her whenever it starts?*"

"Yeah, Joel, as a girl, I've always believed in that magic. Just haven't had too many guys to experience it with."

"I just can't understand why, but we're working on that, aren't we? Say, here's another song. Remember the Turtles, 'The Story of Rock-n-Roll'? There was a line something like this: *It's the only kind of music that reaches right to your soul.*"

"That's right!" Kristie exclaimed excitedly. "I'd forgotten about that song." She thought for a moment. "By golly, I'm going to play it tonight--and dedicate it to His Regalness."

"But if he's listening, he'll know who you are then."

"Are you kidding? There's not a chance in the world that he'll be listening."

Joel looked at his watch. "Oh, man, look at the time. I've got to get back to the office." He bore down on her again with those eyes. "This has been great, Kristie. I've really enjoyed talking with you."

She smiled sweetly. "Thanks, I had a great time too. And Joel, don't forget to listen for the dedication tonight."

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As promised, during her show that night, Kristie dedicated that special song to Reginald Van Velkenburg III.

"After acid rock hit the scene, there was a brief respite in which several big-name artists released a song that got back to the roots of rock-n-roll. Like 'Jumpin' Jack Flash' by the Rolling Stones and 'Lady Madonna' by the Beatles. One of the songs in this group had an additional distinction. Everyone knows the most common theme in rock-n-roll is romance. But there had been a handful of records over the years that were actually about rock-n-roll music itself. I want to play one for you tonight. It's by an American group called the Turtles, and the song is, 'The Story of Rock-n-Roll.'

"Now I've a got a special reason for playing this particular song. Someone just recently told me that classical opera was the only music that could really become part of your soul. Oh, yeah? Well, here's my answer. I want you to listen to this song and especially for these lines:

*Rock-n-roll music,
Sweet, groovy music.
Well, its the only kind of music, yeah,
That reaches right to your soul.*

"It's a great song, and it's got a great beat. I guarantee that as you listen, you'll *feel* the music reach right down in your soul. So this one's for you, Reginald. Here are the Turtles, and I am Kristie Rydell."

In his apartment, Joel Taylor sat back and smiled. As he listened to the Turtles, he thought about that magic in a young girl's heart.

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The next morning, Kristie added the north woods and winter sports to her profile at MyForever.com. However, the next contact she got wasn't from someone who had those particular interests in common with her. In fact, it was from a professor of physics. According to his personality profile, he taught and was heavily involved in research at UIC, the University of Illinois at Chicago, formerly known as the Chicago Circle Campus of U. of I.

Now this was another surprise. Why would a research physicist contact her? Well, anyone can be lonely and want to find a date. She had gone out with an aristocrat, so what was wrong with trying an intellectual?

They corresponded for a few days via MyForever.com email. His name was Keith Jackson; she again used Kathleen. Unlike Reginald, however, Keith had no problem calling her Kathy. Perhaps things were looking up. Two emails later, he mentioned that a physics colloquium was coming up to which he would very much like to invite her. They exchanged phone numbers, and he called to set up the date.

"What's the subject of the lecture?" Kristie asked.

"Oh, a simply fascinating subject. I think you'll really enjoy it. It's about time machines."

"Time machines?"

"Yes, a very hot item in current research. Of course, it's long been known that a wormhole in spacetime is a legitimate solution to Einstein's field equation. However, there have recently been some new calculations that indicate that vacuum fluctuations of the electromagnetic field can serve as a form of exotic material inside a wormhole to keep it open long enough to allow it to function as a time machine. Of course, Stephen Hawking still maintains his chronology protection conjecture that states that the laws of physics do not allow time machines. But now there's some indication that he might be wrong."

There was a prolonged silence on Kristie's end of the line. Finally, she said, "Well, I understood only one phrase from your description: time machine. There was a time machine in the Van Damme movie, *Time Cop*. I really liked the movie, but I think this colloquium would be wasted on me."

"You mean you don't want to go out with me?" The disappointment was obvious in his voice.

She knew what it was like to feel disappointment and suddenly felt sorry for him. And anyway, it was possible something could develop. She felt quite sure that the wives of physicists understood little if any physics and attended few if any colloquia.

"No, Keith, I'd love to go out with you. But can you think of any alternatives, something else, maybe, that we could do?"

"Well, there's always dinner at a nice restaurant, but I wanted to do something different, something special. That's how I thought of the colloquium."

"That would have been different all right, but..."

"Oh, I understand completely, Kathy. Yeah, it was a pretty boring idea. Don't know what I was thinking. I'll ask around here at UIC. See where some of my single colleagues go on dates. I'll get back to you."

A few days later, Keith called again.

"I found a place we might enjoy. It's near Lincoln Park and called the Velvet Cabaret."

"A cabaret...I've never been to a cabaret. What exactly is it?"

"Well, it's primarily a fancy restaurant. But on Fridays and Saturdays there's also music and a floor show. I checked the meaning of the word in the dictionary. The Velvet Cabaret is apparently using the word correctly. According to the dictionary, a cabaret is a restaurant providing food, drink, music, and often a floor show. The floor show part made me a little nervous, but the colleague who recommended this place said that it was very respectable. Definitely not a striptease. So what does that sound like? Better than a physics colloquium

on exotic material?"

Kristie laughed. "It seems to me that a floor show might also contain exotic material, but at least I'll understand it!" She paused but evidently he had not gotten her little pun. "Sure, let's give it a try."

The date was made for the following Saturday night. Kristie did her hair up the same way as on her date with Reginald, but this time wore her straight-skirted suit with black hose. Whatever exotic exposés might take place, they would be confined to the cabaret stage.

When Keith arrived at her apartment, he was attired in an ordinary suit, and she noticed immediately that his shirt didn't have any cuff links. He was courteous and did open the car door for her, but didn't offer his arm in that formal manner of aristocrats.

With a marquee that was illuminated by at least a thousand light bulbs, the Velvet Cabaret presented a spectacular image from the outside. Once inside, she noticed that the area was swathed in lush velvet and suede. Chandeliers and etched-glass columns abounded and recessed floors glowed with colored light. Kristie was in awe of the luxurious decor.

The food was sumptuous. While they ate, she asked what she thought would be a few simple questions about Keith's research and teaching activities. What followed was a veritable monologue from him that ventured into many obscure and arcane areas of physics. During the discussion, it struck her that she was probably missing nothing that the colloquium might have offered. Well, perhaps the floor show would provide some interesting entertainment.

As the show started, they both gave the stage their undivided attention with a real sense of anticipation. What followed, however, was obviously not at all what Keith had expected.

As the curtain opened, a line of ten chorus girls were standing on the stage. The music started immediately, and they launched into what appeared to be a can-can-type dance. However, their costumes would have made the chorus girls of the 1800s blush. On top they wore what could only be described as pasties held in place by a string. Below was a very provocative combination of thong, garter belt and nylons. When the girls turned their backs to the audience, the thongs, of course, completely disappeared.

Kristie almost started giggling at the ridiculously crass display on the stage but then noticed the rapt attention most of the men in the room, and even many of the women, were giving to the performance. But when she turned to look at Keith, she was quite shocked at the appalled look on his flushed face. Evidently, he was not in the least amused.

He caught her glance and then did something else unexpected. He put his hand on hers. It was the first time he had touched her. "Kathy, please forgive me. I certainly had no idea the entertainment, if that word even applies, was anything like this. I'm so embarrassed for you. I think we should leave immediately." It was obvious that his own embarrassment was considerably greater than any she was experiencing.

Kristie smiled reassuringly. "Sure, if you want to. Naturally, this exhibition doesn't do much to excite me but look around at the men here."

"Yes, I have. It's pathetic. Let's go."

As they stood to leave, the first dance was finishing up, and another girl made her appearance on the stage. She was dressed only in balloons that covered her from breasts to hips. What this stunt would involve, they never learned. Neither did they find out what she was wearing, if anything, underneath the balloons. With a look of utter exasperation on his face, Keith ushered Kristie out the door.

The following Monday on her show, Kristie got an idea for another song dedication.

"Saturday I had occasion to see a floor show at one of Chicago's hottest cabarets. While that's not exactly my thing, I noticed that most of the guys were practically drooling at the mouth as they watched the girls on the stage. Well, it occurs to me that this calls for a dedication. The Troggs, one of the bad-boy groups of the British invasion, were known for rather suggestive lyrics. Their biggest hit was 'Wild Thing,' a song written by Chip Taylor, brother of actor John Voight. But in 1966 they also had another hit, not as big in the US as in the UK, but a hit nevertheless. And it makes me laugh every time I listen to these lyrics." Imitating the intonation of the lead singer, Reg Presley, Kristie repeated,

*"Your slacks are low and your hips are showin'...
Defense is down and you got me shakin'
You drive me so that my nerves are breakin'
If you knew me like I know you, girl
Your knees would bend and you hair would curl..."*

"I get such a kick out of this song, one of the towering tributes to girl-power from the rock era. So here it is, for all you guys from the cabaret, The Troggs with 'I Can't Control Myself.'"

As the song started, the engineer in the studio looked at Kristie and just shook his head as he smiled at her. She started laughing again as the lusty beat of the song pounded out its even lustier message.

She was pretty sure that Keith would not be listening, but she did think that he might perhaps ask her out again. Although he had certainly not swept her off her feet, he was nice, and she would have liked a second date. However, she never heard from him again. No doubt seeing her would bring back memories too embarrassing to bear.

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Kristie's next date found her in a restaurant in Downtown Chicago with a dignified man of forty and listening to an interminable description of his family history, which he was proud to trace all the way back to the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. His emails had actually been witty, she remembered, as she tried to maintain

eye contact and look fascinated.

Then about half way through the meal, something happened that immediately captured one-hundred percent of her attention.

Joel Taylor walked into the restaurant.

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