

Chapter 1

"This next song by one of the most popular girl groups of the early Sixties is a favorite of mine. It was produced by the flamboyant Phil Spector using his 'wall of sound' technique. Here are The Crystals with 'Then He Kissed Me.'"

She clicked the mouse, and the music began.

Kristie Rydell had been one of the disc jockeys at WKLS Radio, a Chicago oldies station, for almost two years now. The music she played had been popular long before she was born. However, at twenty-eight, she probably knew more about the rock-n-roll of the Sixties than any of the other DJs at the station. There was a certain glamor, perhaps, in being a radio personality, but her enjoyment of this job went far deeper than that. She considered it a labor of love, for love was what she felt for this music. She believed it to be some of the greatest romantic poetry of all time. And she liked the beat.

Her three-hour program was almost over tonight. It wasn't the most enviable of the time slots. She had the least seniority at the station, and it was a wonder that she hadn't been assigned the midnight-to-five block. Nine to midnight wasn't nearly as bad. But Kristie had a positive philosophy about her time on the air: she simply imagined that most of Chicagoland was listening, and that animated her presentation.

The other DJs at the station just played the oldies without much comment, often four or five in a row without even identifying them. By contrast, Kristie imagined that everyone was as interested in learning more about the songs and artists as she was. So it had been her goal to develop a unique format for her show. First, she played only the music from the Sixties, no Fifties or Seventies mixed in. Second, she offered knowledgeable commentary that delved into the background, meaning, and social context of that music. Over her two years at WKLS, this format became well-defined, and she had even named her program: "Musical Images of the Sixties."

Kristie was also the only female DJ at the station and received quite a bit of ribbing from the other DJs. Their favorite quip, because of her extensive knowledge of the Sixties, was that she really was much older than she looked and had sung backup with Ronnie and the Ronettes. But she found all jibes to be innocent fun, and anyway she dished out quite a bit of it herself.

In short, she loved what she did.

However, her life outside the station was another matter altogether, especially her love life. It had been one long string of disappointments. She loved this music and the romantic scenarios it depicted in song after song. Why didn't it ever work out that way for her?

She asked herself this question once again as she listened to the song by the Crystals that she had just introduced.

*Well he walked up to me
And he asked me if I wanted to dance*

...
*When he danced he held me tight,
And when he walked me home that night,
All the stars were shining bright
And then he kissed me...*

Yeah, why couldn't she meet a guy like this? When guys drove her home after their first date, there was no romantic goodnight kiss at her door. They usually wanted to come in and join her in bed.

*Each time I saw him
I couldn't wait to see him again.
I wanted to let him know
That he was more than a friend.
I didn't know just what to do
So I whispered, "I love you."
He said that he loved me too,
And then he kissed me...*

There'd been several times Kristie really thought she'd fallen in love. But then for whatever reasons, the guys would just...well, lose interest in her.

*I knew that he was mine
So I gave him all the love that I had.
And one day he took me home
To meet his mom and his dad.
Then he asked me to be his bride
And always be right by his side.
I felt so happy I almost cried,
And then he kissed me...*

Well, maybe it was a sign of the times. Perhaps she was part of the last remnants of a culture that had all but died out. What she longed for was a romance like the one in this song: first, a goodnight kiss, next, as the relationship grew, saying, "I love you," then meeting his mom and dad, and finally a romantic proposal and marriage.

This line of thought, unfortunately, brought her mind back to her latest fiasco. She had joined an online dating service, this one called MyForever.com. Humph! She had four disasters in a row, each occurring on the first--and last--date. The first guy she met through the dating service let it slip that he was married. The second guy asked if she wanted to move in with him, and the third wanted to move in with her. The fourth guy had actually started out great. He was sort of cute and had been very polite and debonair during the date. Would he kiss her goodnight? She began to wonder whether her long-time dream was coming true. But when he brought her home, he had smoothly managed to invite himself in. Once inside, he was all over her and tried his best to get her into bed. After she finally got him to leave, she was almost in tears, the disappointment had been so great.

The tears had soon turned to anger. Maybe there was something about this particular dating service that attracted a certain type of guy. She was going to demand her money back and tell them a thing or two about their service.

The song ended, bringing her mind back to the present.

"Well, that's it for me tonight. Stay tuned for Todd Anderson right after the news. I'll be back again tomorrow night at nine o'clock with more 'Musical Images of the Sixties.' This is Kristie Rydell for Oldies Radio, WKLS 107.4, Chicago."

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The next day she was back at the station at ten o'clock in the morning, quite unusual for a DJ with a nine-to-midnight time slot.

"Hey, Kristie, what are you doing here at this hour?" asked Tom Hawkins. He was another DJ at the station, in fact the most senior DJ. "Has Peter Noon finally asked you for a date or something?"

"No, but Freddie Garrity did, and he's a real dream! I didn't hesitate for a second. He's flying over from England tonight. Too bad no girl ever says yes when you ask her out."

"Oh, yeah? A famous jock like me? I got girls banging down my door."

"We're not talking about paternity suits, Tom." And with that, she turned down another corridor and was out of sight.

She stopped at the office of Sam Watkins, head of the news department. Kristie liked Sam. He was middle-aged and happily married with two wonderful children. Perhaps that culture had not died out completely after all.

"Sam, have you got a minute?"

"For you, Kristie, I always have a minute. Come on in and have a seat."

As she walked into his office, she pulled the door shut. "I've got a favor to ask."

"Sure. What is it?"

"Well..." She felt a little sheepish. "I joined one of those online dating services, and I'd like to get the address of their business offices. I looked all over their Web site but couldn't find it. You're our top investigative newsman here. Do you think you'd be able to track down that address for me? I'd really appreciate it."

"Some of these dating services don't have what you'd call formal business offices."

"Oh, I think this one does. I got the impression they're pretty big. Here, I wrote down their name and URL." She handed Sam a piece of paper.

"If they have a public office, I can find it." His eyes softened as he looked at her. "It hasn't worked out for you?"

"Actually...no. That service seems to attract a really bad element. I want to go there and tell them that face-to-face. And get my money back."

He laid his hand on her arm. "I'm really sorry for you, and I'll get you that address."

"Thanks, Sam." She got up and started to leave. Turning back toward him, she said, "Oh, Sam...please don't tell the guys around here I joined a dating service. They'd...well, they'd..."

His smile was kind. "I understand. They'd really have a field day. Not a word, Kristie. I'll let you know when I have the address."

Two days later, Sam sent her an email asking her to stop by his office.

"I've got that address for you. They're right here in Chicago. And you were right about their size. It's one of the biggest and most successful Internet dating services out there. Here's the address." He handed her a sheet of paper. "The owner and president is a guy named Joel Taylor. As you know, their dba is MyForever.com, but their official legal name is Taylor Enterprises."

"Thanks. I owe you a big favor."

"You don't owe me anything, Kristie--except finding a nice guy."

* * * * *

At that moment, Joel Taylor was sitting at his desk in the offices of Taylor Enterprises looking at a neat, hand-written letter he'd only today received from a client.

I just wanted to let you know that Stan and I are now married. We met eight months ago through your dating service and soon fell in love. We're both very thankful we joined. The wealth of helpful information at your site and the guidelines your service provided for putting together a profile were a tremendous help to both of us. I knew as soon as I read Stan's profile that we were made for each other. What a thrill it was to meet him on that first date! Everything was perfect! We dated for several months, and I knew we were falling in love. When Stan asked me to marry him, I just cried, I was so happy. I'll always remember MyForever.com because you truly did bring "forever" into my life.

Sincerely,

Jill--Mrs. Stan Carter

Joel leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head. He lived for letters like these and was smiling. In some curious way, he was able to vicariously experience the thrill of romance, love, and marriage through such testimonials. He often looked up the profiles to see their pictures. Then in his mind's eye, he pictured the glorious wedding.

Before he realized what was happening, his mind went back in time. Yeah, he

thought ruefully, this was the one downside of reading these letters. Sometimes they stirred certain memories that he would prefer remain dormant. What were those lines by Simon and Garfunkel?

*Don't talk of love--
Well I've have heard the words before.
It's sleeping in my memory.
I won't disturb the slumber
Of feelings that have died.
If I never loved,
I never would have cried.*

*I am a rock,
I am an island.
And a rock feels no pain,
And an island never cries.*

He turned his chair and looked out the window at the Chicago skyline, trying not to further disturb the slumber of those feelings that had died.

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The offices of Taylor Enterprises were on Dearborn Street, and Kristie went there the very next day. The office suite was a picture of opulence. The receptionist's area had a new, modern look, but the rich woodwork and doors spoke of traditional elegance. Apparently, no expense had been spared in equipping these offices. The receptionist herself was young, pretty, and professionally dressed.

"My name is Kathleen Rydell. I'd like to see Mr. Joel Taylor, please," she said to the receptionist.

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No, but my business won't take long."

"And what is the nature of your business?"

"I prefer discussing the details with Mr. Taylor. However, it's related to the quality of this dating service."

"Are you a member?"

"Yes."

"Then you would need to see the customer service department. Of course, we prefer that you deal with them via email, but if you wish to see them in person, they're just down this hallway..."

"No, I do not want to talk with customer service. This is a serious matter, and it requires the personal attention of Mr. Taylor."

"Well, Mr. Taylor normally doesn't deal with our clients directly. He makes decisions on higher levels. That's why we provide a customer service

department..."

"And by the same token, I would imagine that your clients normally do not go to the trouble of tracking down your business offices. This address is nowhere on the MyForever.com Web site. I work at WKLS, and our news department was able to obtain your address for me. I would also imagine that your clients normally do not go to the trouble of actually stopping by in person to see Mr. Taylor. So I believe that if you explain all this to Mr. Taylor, he might be willing to take a few minutes to talk with me."

The receptionist stared at Kristie, probably contemplating the possible ramifications of refusing this request by someone who worked for a Chicago radio station and had an inside track to its news department. Perhaps this was even part of some undercover investigation of their dating service. These were the thoughts Kristie had hoped would occur to her.

"Just a minute please. I'll check with Mr. Taylor's secretary." She did not use the intercom but got up and disappeared through a door to her left. After two or three minutes, she returned with another woman in tow, presumably the secretary. "Mr. Taylor will see you," the secretary said. "Please follow me."

They walked through several doors before she was ushered into the office of Joel Taylor. It was a large office, handsomely decorated with a distinctly masculine motif. He sat behind a large wooden desk with a credenza behind him. Two large, leather chairs were positioned in front of the desk, and a matching sofa had been placed along one of the walls. The opposite wall had a large bookcase with glass doors.

"Mr. Taylor, Kathleen Rydell," the secretary announced. Then she turned and left, closing the office door behind her.

Joel stood up as Kristie walked toward the desk. He was of average height and would not be considered handsome in the classical sense. However, he was impeccably dressed and projected an unexpected combination of executive persona and rugged masculinity. His eyes, a stunning shade of blue, seemed to bore into hers, and his smile had a captivating effect. Suddenly, she felt decidedly uneasy.

He extended his hand toward one of the chairs. "Please be seated. Marleen tells me that you have a concern about the quality of our dating service."

She had a speech all prepared, but her thoughts were no longer well-ordered. Somehow the idea of how attractive he was kept asserting itself, even though she had no business whatsoever entertaining such a thought. Yet those eyes--they held her transfixed. No doubt he could easily seduce most women with a mere glance. Good grief! What was she thinking! Anyway, even if that were the case, it was definitely not true of her. She certainly had no interest in the man who ran this dating service.

With some effort, she finally broke eye contact with him and sat down, desperately trying to organize her thoughts. What was it that she had planned to say first?

There was a picture hanging on the wall directly behind him, and she decided

to focus her eyes on it rather than him. He might not even notice what she was doing. This way she hoped to gain better control over her unruly thoughts. However, that strategy didn't work. The picture was a spectacular winter landscape of the north woods featuring a pack of wolves in the foreground. Kristie loved the north woods of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, and she always found wolves to be almost regal in their majesty. This would never do. She'd have to bring her eyes back on him and attempt to keep her wild imagination from asserting itself.

"Yes. Since joining, I've had a date with four different men that I met through your service. Exactly one date each. All four dates were disasters." Those memories brought back some of her frustration, and that made it easier for her to concentrate on the business at hand.

"Disasters in what way?"

"Well, they weren't bad-hair days, if that's what you're thinking," she replied testily. "No, the problem is with the quality of men your dating service attracts. One of them turned out to be married. Two others asked me to live with them--on the first date, mind you--and the fourth practically attacked me when he brought me home."

"Did you invite him in?"

"No! Well, he sort of bamboozled me into letting him in. It was a very well-practiced technique, I can assure you."

Joel sat there for a moment, apparently thinking about what she had said. "As far as the first man being married is concerned, we have no way of checking the truth of the claims made by our clients."

"I understand that," she replied with some impatience. "My point is that your service seems to attract the wrong type of man in the first place--men who would do that and...other things."

"Were the photographs they posted correct?"

She hesitated. "Yes," she answered reluctantly.

"Well, why don't we have a look at the personality profile you posted about yourself. Your name is Kathleen Rydell?" He was looking at her with an odd expression on his face.

"Yes. Do you need my user ID and password?"

"No. Even if we have more than one Kathleen Rydell in the system, I can tell from your picture." After a few seconds, her page came up on his screen. "Here it is." He read it aloud.

Kathleen Rydell, never married, 28 years old. Looking for intelligent man for romantic dating with a view to possible serious relationship. I enjoy classic rock-n-roll music, dancing, movies, hiking, and cross-country skiing. Limitations: nonsmokers only.

"Let me say first of all that we try to run a very high-quality dating site. I have many testimonials in my files of happy marriages that resulted from the use of this service. I take great pride in that, and, having a bit of a romantic bent myself, find it highly gratifying. Moreover, I believe the vast majority of both men and women who use our service are honest and sincerely seeking to meet someone they can enjoy dating and perhaps even fall in love with. Of course, I don't kid myself that everyone who uses this service fits that description. I'm sure we have a few men who are simply out to, shall we say, take advantage of the women they meet through our service. I will permanently delete the memberships of the men who dated you, and they will never again be allowed to use this service."

Kristie had not expected anything like this, and it really surprised her. Why would he do that without further investigation? Surely this could not be standard procedure in a case like this. Why was he doing it?

"But there's a problem with your profile as well. To be brutally honest, it would tend to attract the wrong element that we might have lurking in our data banks."

Her eyes flashed. "That's insulting! I was certainly not trying to attract such men."

"You misunderstand. Please bear with me. I didn't mean that you intentionally worded it that way, but what you did say would nevertheless attract the attention of the type of man that neither of us would want you to meet."

"And just how did I do that?"

"In general, it's best to avoid saying too much. People have a tendency to read things that are not accurate into lengthy profiles. Yours wasn't that lengthy, but you did say that you've never been married. That's better left unsaid. When a certain type of man reads that and knows that you're twenty-eight years old, he'll conclude one of two things: either you make a practice of sleeping around or you've lived with men before without benefit of marriage. So naturally, he'll expect you to act accordingly if he takes you out."

"Well, neither of those conclusions is correct." Her anger was quickly being replaced with...well, for some strange reason she was feeling hurt. If she wasn't careful, tears might even come.

Joel was watching her intently with those devastatingly attractive blue eyes, appearing to sense what she was feeling.

"I know." His voice was gentle, even tender. "Let's do this. You and I will work on a new profile together. Then I'll refund your money and extend your subscription for three months. How does that sound...Kristie?"

At first, her mind was dwelling on his offer, but all of sudden it hit her--he'd used her name! She looked up with a startled expression on her face.

"Yes, I knew who you were as soon as you spoke. You said you worked for WKLS, but I'd recognize your voice anywhere. I'm a big fan of yours and listen almost every night. You've got the sweetest voice I've ever heard, and now that I

see how pretty you are, my visions while listening to you have all been confirmed."

Now she knew exactly how she felt: that strange mixture of excitement coupled with feeling embarrassed and self-conscious. She looked downward as she spoke. "I guess I should thank you for saying such a nice thing. I just feel...a little confused."

"That's all right. I was shamefully forward and should apologize."

Kristie looked up quickly. "Oh, no, I didn't take it that way. That was really very...kind of you." She'd almost said *sweet*. "But you must think I'm as bad as those men I complained about--lying about my name. It was not quite a lie, though," she added sheepishly. "Kathleen is my middle name. I thought that, well...maybe it would be wiser not to mention..."

"You were quite right, and there is nothing wrong with what you did."

"You really listen to my show?"

He smiled. "I certainly do." Why did that smile and those eyes have to be so...sexy? Things would be a lot less complicated for her if they weren't.

"You like the rock-n-roll from the Sixties?"

"I'm hopelessly hooked on it, as you obviously are. I'm sure you've connected the name of my dating service with the hit song by the Supremes?"

She smiled impishly. "Well, I wondered about that. But didn't you get it a little wrong? The title isn't 'My Forever'; it's 'Forever Came Today.'"

"Actually, I did know that. However, for legal reasons, we couldn't use the title of the song for our name. But the actual line in the song is 'My forever came today.' So I took the phrase, 'My Forever,' and we were able to use that part, at least for our commercial Web site. Our incorporation documents, however, use the name 'Taylor Enterprises.'"

Well, he really did know the details of the song. "Very ingenious and very romantic," she said in a tone that clearly implied she meant it. "That has always been one of my favorite songs, and the name of your dating service was one of the reasons I registered with you."

"It's always been a favorite of mine as well, one of the few songs the Supremes did that spoke of a successful romance. Okay, what do you say we get to work on that profile?"

Twenty minutes later, she was preparing to leave.

"I'm really glad I got to meet you, Kristie. Thanks for coming by and sharing your concern. 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.'" He held out his hand.

There was that smile again! His hand was warm and gentle as it wrapped around hers. She sighed inwardly. Someday...maybe she would be able to say that.

She turned and started to leave but then swung around suddenly to face him again. "Hey, what did you mean when you said, 'Now that I see you...'? My picture's on the station Web site." Again, she was smiling impishly.

Joel returned her smile. "Ah, the media misquoting me again! What I actually said was 'Now that I see how pretty you are.' Anyway, to answer your question...this is a bit embarrassing, but to be completely honest, I was afraid to look at your picture. You see, I had a pretty spectacular image of you and didn't want to take the chance of...well...

"Being disillusioned?"

Joel laughed. "Yeah, something like that."

She nodded her head. "Well, thanks again for taking the time to see me."

"It was my pleasure. Good bye, at least until our standing date at nine o'clock tonight."

Strange, it was somehow exciting to hear him put listening to her show in terms of a date. She felt her face flush and turned quickly to leave.

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