

Chapter 6

Roger Penfield.

Kristie looked at the name on the screen but experienced little emotion.

The previous week was a confusing blur. It had been hard to concentrate. How she'd gotten through her show each night was a mystery even to her. Confusing--that was the key word. She felt hurt and disappointed, but confusion was really the dominant feeling.

What Joel had done was not quite the same as her other painful breakups. If she could believe what he'd said, he had not simply lost interest in her. There was something deeper going on, apparently much deeper. He said he wanted to go out with her again but wouldn't do it. He was holding back. Why? Had he been hurt in the past, hurt so deeply that he wouldn't let himself get involved again?

She did believe Joel. The obvious affinity between them made any other conclusion impossible. So what had happened in Joel's past? Maybe she should try to find out. Maybe she could help him.

But she realized how hopeless that was. How could she find out? Certainly not by asking him. And even if she discovered what it was, what could she do? Call him up and quote the Beatles--"we can work it out"? He hadn't asked for her help.

Whatever was going on with Joel, though, did not make things any easier for her. She was afraid she had already fallen in love, and already it was over!

Now she'd gotten a new contact from MyForever.com. Well, she thought ruefully, that's just what Joel had wanted. Still and all, she had to forget about him and look elsewhere. Maybe this was the contact that would change the rest of her life. Her forever.

Yeah, right! Let's not go concocting scenarios out of thin air. This contact may or may not even result in one date. Roger Penfield could never be like Joel.

No, that was exactly the wrong way to think. Joel had stepped out of her life. She had to accept that, however difficult that would be.

Kristie clicked the button to open the email.

Hello Kathleen,

I was so pleased to find your profile. We seem to enjoy many of the same things, including a love of the North Woods of Wisconsin and the U.P. I often go up in the Fall just to hike the snowmobile trails.

I'm an independent insurance agent with an office in Elmhurst. Your profile mentioned classic rock-n-roll. Do you mean the disco from the Seventies and Eighties? I was pretty young then, but I've since been introduced to that type of dance music and really like it.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Roger

Well, he certainly struck out with disco music, but he did like hiking in the North Woods. Interesting. Her spirits began to rise, if only a smidgen. At least he deserved a response.

She clicked the link to his picture. Dark, wavy hair. Not bad looking.

Hi Roger,

Your interest in the North Woods was encouraging. Are you originally from that area, or are you from the Chicago area? Go to school in Elmhurst? I've driven through Elmhurst a number of times but don't know anyone there--yet.

No, disco music was not quite what I had in mind. I like the really old stuff from the fifties and sixties. But I'm not lying about my age! That's just the era I've fallen in love with. Such beautiful, romantic lyrics! And I like the beat.

Kathy

Kristie read over her response. It actually sounded upbeat. Is that the way she felt? She generally considered herself to have a bubbly personality with a good sense of humor. She again read over what she'd written. It really wasn't what she could call "bubbly," but it did indicate that this contact with Roger had made her feel a little better.

She clicked "Send."

Three days went by with no response. The small rise in her mood at the initial email exchange with Roger had all but vanished. Several of the songs she played on her show reflected her depressed state.

"Here's a song by the Everly Brothers. Apparently, judging by its popularity, a lot of us have asked this question at some point or another. It broke into the Top 40 in June of 1960 and stayed there for nine weeks, peaking at number eight. I also find it pretty interesting that the theme is universal enough that in 1975 Linda Ronstadt released the girl's version. How many of you girls out there have experienced this?"

*When I find a new man
That I want for mine,
He always breaks my heart in two.
It happens every time.*

"Well, the Everly Brothers don't quite put it that way, but here's what they say in their version of 'When Will I Be Loved?'"

But that night when Kristie returned to her apartment, there was an email from Roger.

Kathy,

So sorry I didn't get back to you sooner. Business has been pretty good lately, and I've had very little time. I guess in one sense that's a good sign!

Okay, no disco! I've heard a little of the older rock-n-roll that you're talking about, just not enough to really get into it. However, I remember one time when I was surfing radio stations for something to listen to in the car, I got some station that played rock-n-roll music from that era. I think it was somewhere around 107 FM. I've never really listened much to that station, but on that occasion I remember hearing some song about a bass singer. Struck me as an odd sort of song.

I thought maybe we could explore a few more facts about each other. Yes, I was born and raised in Elmhurst. How about you? Where do you call home?

And where do you work?

Roger

Kristie was pleased that Roger had finally gotten back to her, and the humorous dilemma in which she now found herself made her laugh. What could she say? "Oh, I work for that station you never listen to!"

Yes, this would require some thought. She'd wait until tomorrow night after her program to respond.

For that show, she decided to play "Mr. Bass Man" and then follow it with one of the cleverest songs ever written during the rock era. A sort of musical debate. Not that Roger would be listening, of course. Kristie was smiling when it came time to play the two songs. She wasn't quite sure, but maybe she was feeling happier again.

"Tonight I want to play a rock-n-roll debate that took place in 1963. Johnny Cymbal released a single called 'Mr. Bass Man' in the Spring of that year, and it quickly broke into the Top 20, peaking at number sixteen. Cymbal wrote the song himself and in it described the bass man with his 'bop-ba-de-bop' in the background as the real star of a rock-n-roll group. For the base part in the song, he used the actual bass singer from the Coasters.

"Now you might be wondering what else Johnny Cymbal did. Was he a 'one-hit-wonder'? Not really. The next two songs he released were flops. But then he changed his name to Derek and had a big hit in 1968 called 'Cinnamon.' So here is Johnny Cymbal with 'Mr. Bass Man.' You'll need to listen to the words carefully to get the full impact of the next song I'm going to play."

(Bop-bop-bop singing by bass voice)

*Mr. Bass Man, you've got that certain somethin'
Mr. Bass Man, you set that music thumpin'
To you it's easy when you go 1-2-3, d-d-b-bop-a-bop
...
It don't mean a thing when the lead is singin'
Or when he goes "Hi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yah"*

...

The song faded and ended.

"Pretty funny, huh? But not nearly as funny as the hilarious retort by Lou Christie. Lou was one of the first solo performers of the rock era to compose all his own material, but it was his unique singing style that made him famous. He sang the verses in his normal register but then with amazing ease shifted into a striking falsetto on the choruses. By the way, folks, for those of you who remember his biggest hit, that was a pun! The first one to call in with the name of that song will win a CD of Lou Christie's greatest hits.

"Anyway, Lou Christie wrote this song in answer to 'Mr. Bass Man.' I think it was one of the cleverest rock-n-roll songs ever written. It was never released as a single but still deserved a lot more attention than it got at the time. I really like the long drum beat that's repeated several times. So here it is, listen and laugh: 'Mr. Tenor Man.'"

*They talk about the bass man, he had success
Oh what they say about him, I couldn't care less
But I'm a tenor man & a-don't you forget
That I have got the sound that the kids love best*

...

*They all come around & we hit the town
They never start screamin' till they hear this sound
Now I don't care about a "boom boom boom"
They never start to swoon till they hear me croon*

...

"By the way," Kristie added when the song had finished, "I agree with Lou Christie. I don't care about the 'boom, boom, boom,' either and as one of his female fans, I don't start to swoon until I hear him croon. And you girls out there, if you could see a picture of Lou from the Sixties, there'd be a lot of swooning going on right now!

"I've gotten some email in the past asking whether I was named after Lou Christie. I've wondered about that myself. Well, my parents would never admit it. When I asked them, they only smiled and said, 'Oh, we just liked the sound of it.' But if they did name me after him, they didn't do him any favor. 'Lou Christie' was not his real name. It was Luigi Alfredo Giovanni Sacco. He had wanted his career to be based on a single name, just Lugee. But after cutting his first single, 'The Gypsy Cried,' on the C&C label, the company, without his consent or permission, credited the song to 'Lou Christie.' He hated the name for twenty years.

"And while I'm at it, I might as well set the record straight on one other matter. My family is not related to Bobby Rydell.

"Time now for a commercial break. You're listening to Kristie Rydell on Oldies Radio, WKLS 107.4, Chicago."

* * * * *

Joel was laughing as he sat in his apartment listening to Kristie's program

and "Mr. Tenor Man." She seemed more like her old self, he thought. Had she met someone new? Well, that was what he wanted for her, wasn't it?

Despite what had taken place between them at Buckingham Fountain, he hadn't missed her program even one night. In some way, it represented a link between them, a link he just didn't want to break, no matter what he'd felt that Sunday at Karen's grave and no matter what he'd said to Kristie in Grant Park.

It had been many years since he'd heard "Mr. Tenor Man." He was quite familiar with it, even though it hadn't been released as a single. Once again it occurred to him how much he and Kristie had in common. Even such a little thing as these two songs. Just like her, he had always found Lou Christie's rebuttal to "Mr. Bass Man" hilarious and agreed with every line in the song.

Listening to her talk about the two songs had almost made him feel, at least for those few moments, as if everything was still like "old times" between Kristie and him. But after the song ended and he heard Kristie identify herself and the station, his laughter gradually died, and the tears welled up in his eyes again. This happened to him all too often when he heard her on the air or thought about her and remembered the times they had been together.

In some strange way, the thought of having lost her was almost as painful as when he'd lost Karen. But there was something confusing about it all, because the situation was quite different. Kristie was very much alive. In what sense had he lost her? He was the one who told her he couldn't continue seeing her. He had been the one to break it off, not her. But he had to.

Didn't he?

All these questions still plaguing his mind, most of them only vaguely articulated, just made him feel worse.

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When Kristie got back to her apartment that night, she was feeling happier than she'd been since that last awful day with Joel. She had a much more positive outlook regarding her new contact, Roger Penfield. If Joel didn't want to see her again, fine; move on to Roger. Sitting down at her computer, she logged onto MyForever.com and wrote a reply.

Hi Roger,

I was born and raised in Mont Clare on Chicago's northwest side. I've lived in Chicago all my life, but like I said in my profile, I enjoy getting away to northern Wisconsin and the U.P.

As far as my job is concerned, I think I'll pass for now. I doubt that it would impress you. :)

Incidentally, the song that you remembered hearing is called "Mr. Bass Man." It wasn't one of the romantic songs from the early rock era. It was written for humor.

Kathy

She read over the email before sending it. Yes, the smiley made it friendly. Kristie doubted that Roger was anxiously awaiting more information about "Mr. Bass Man," but her comment on the song would be the second time she'd mentioned the romantic nature of rock-n-roll music. She smiled. It definitely couldn't hurt to draw attention to her interest in romantic things. Would it lead to a romantic date? She clicked "Send."

* * * * *

This time it was four days before Kristie got another email from Roger. It struck her as odd that he never seemed to reply right away. But this time, it was definitely worth the wait.

Hello Kathy,

Having been raised in one of the outlying suburbs, I'm not as familiar with Chicago as I should be. Not sure exactly where Mont Clare is. Perhaps you'd like to exchange phone numbers, and you could tell me about it.

Roger

Kristie quickly forgot about the four-day delay and smiled brightly. Yes, it was definitely time to see what he sounded like on the phone. You could tell a lot more about a guy that way, a lot more than just from email.

Roger called at her apartment the following afternoon.

"Kathy? This is Roger Penfield."

"Hi, Roger. Gee, it's good to hear what you really sound like."

"Same goes for me. Say, how about some get-acquainted small talk? Tell me about Mont Clare. Where is it?"

"Well, you know North Avenue; it goes right through Elmhurst. Take it back into Chicago. When you get to Harlem, take a left and head north. When you get to Grand Avenue, that's the shopping district of Mont Clare. I was raised on Sayre Avenue about six blocks from there."

"I guess I can't quite picture having been there. How'd you get introduced to Wisconsin and Michigan?"

"My father liked to go up there and fish. I never really enjoyed fishing myself, so I got to like hiking. Then when I was in college, me and some of my friends got in with a bunch of guys who loved snowmobiling. We'd all go up to Rhinelander or Marquette as a group and rent snowmobiles. That's what got me interested in winter sports. How about you?"

"Well, it goes back to my college days too. Some of my fraternity brothers were from upper Wisconsin. We went up there quite often back in those days, looking for girls, of course. I guess I just liked that area of the country and kept going

up there."

"Looking for girls?" Kristie asked playfully.

Roger laughed. "Yeah, I guess you could say I'm still looking, but I never really did like that bar scene. That's why I joined MyForever.com."

"I know what you mean. I decided a long time ago that bars are not where I want to meet guys."

"So maybe we both joined for similar reasons. Kathy, do you think you might be ready to meet and go out on a date with me?"

Kristie hesitated, but only for moment. "Yeah, I think I'd like that. What did you have in mind?"

"Well, I may not know my way around Chicago very well, but I've been to all the museums. My favorite is the Adler Planetarium. I also know about your famous pizza place on Rush Street. How about a pizza at Gino's and then a star show at the planetarium?"

"Sounds like a really fun night, Roger. I'd love to go."

"This Friday?"

"Oh, Friday nights aren't good for me. How about Saturday?"

"Saturday it is."

They talked a little longer, and Kristie gave Roger her address. They needed to get to Gino's by six o'clock in order to get to the planetarium in time for the star show at eight.

After hanging up, Kristie sat back, feeling excited for the first time since...well, since Joel. She snapped her fingers. No more pining for you, Joel Taylor.

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On her show that Friday, Kristie was feeling more and more excited about her upcoming date on Saturday with Roger. Not only was she anxious to meet him and go out with him, but as a Chicago girl, she was looking forward to showing a guy from the suburbs around the big city.

Such thoughts influenced the music she played that night.

"Tonight I want to emphasize our own Chicago groups. The first one I'll introduce is a soft-rock group called the New Colony Six. They had only two hits that made it into the Top 40 nationally, but here in Chicago, several other releases became quite popular, such as 'Cadillac' and 'I'm Just Waiting Anticipating for Her to Show Up.' But the one I'm going to play first is called, 'I Confess.' Okay, how many of you romantic females out there would love to hear the guy of your dreams say this to you? *I confess to have a willingness and wanting*

for you/To have you here by me, near by me, all my life through. Pretty sweet, huh? Here they are, then, the New Colony Six. Listen and dream." As the song started, Kristie sat back with her eyes closed.

"I'll play one more song by the New Colony Six," Kristie continued after the song ended. "It's another really nice romantic song called 'I Will Always Think About You.' This one did make it nationally and peaked at number 22 in 1968."

*I will always think about you.
Even if I live without you.
Please don't let that ever happen.
I have too much love within me...*

*I can't find the words to tell you.
Just how much I really love you.
If you feel that same way I do.
You will know the love I have here.*

*The days we spent together were fine.
The nights, the lights, were yours and mine.
It's true.
I'll always love you,
Always love you.*

*So let us plan our futures together.
Love is here,
It's getting stronger...*

"If some guy said that to me, I think I'd grab him up pretty quick! How about you?"

"The next group in our Chicago showcase is the Shadows of Knight. They were what was known as a 'garage band,' playing for various high school dances. The story got around, though, that once they scored with their one and only really big hit, the price they charged for gigs around town skyrocketed. See what you think. Here they are with 'Gloria.'

For the next hour or so, Kristie returned to other Sixties music. But then she highlighted one more Chicago group.

"Here's the last Chicago group in our spot light tonight. They're called the Cryan' Shames. This group never had a Top 40 hit nationally, but here in Chicago we sure liked them. The local rock stations in the Sixties, like WLS and WCFL, played a number of their releases, and they became quite popular. 'Sugar and Spice' and 'Mr. Unreliable' were two examples. 'Sugar and Spice' reached number four on WLS and number seven on WCFL. Probably their most beautiful love song was 'It Could Be We're in Love.' In August of 1967, it reached number one on both stations. I promise to play it for you in the near future. But the song I'm going to play tonight is a remake. The Drifters had a string of hits in the early Sixties, one of their biggest being 'Up On the Roof' in 1962. As a loyal Chicago girl, I think the version by the Cryan' Shames is much better, truly beautiful. Their vocalization was exceptional for a rock-n-roll group, especially on the last few notes, and the song even featured a mandolin. Despite having to battle both psychedelic and

bubblegum music popular at the time, it reached the Top 10 on both WLS and WCFL. So here it is, a real lost gem from Chicago's unofficial rock-n-roll hall of fame, 'Up On the Roof' by the Cryan' Shames.

*When this old world starts gettin' me down
And people are just too much for me to face
I climb right up to the top of the stairs
And all my cares just drift right into space.*

*At night the stars
Put on a show for free,
And darling, you can
Share it all with me.*

Up on the roof

* * * * *

At midnight Joel turned off the radio. He still faithfully listened to Kristie every night, but it was getting harder and harder. The heartache seemed to get worse every time he did. She sounded so happy again, back to her old self.

He finally decided he needed the benefit of wisdom beyond his own. He'd see if he could go over to his aunt and uncle's for dinner tomorrow night. He wanted to talk, to tell them about Kristie.

Aunt Grace and Uncle Tony were feisty Italians and pretty much all the family Joel had left. His mother and Aunt Grace were sisters, and he'd been very close to Grace and Tony all his life. Their only son had taken a job with an Italian company, married an Italian girl, and lived in Italy.

Saturday night found the three of them sitting around the dinner table. As they finished a delicious home-made spaghetti dinner, and Joel had just finished telling them all about Kristie.

Aunt Grace was not happy.

"So do you let us know about this new girl in your life?" she asked in that special tone of motherly disapproval. "Let us know that maybe my prayers for you have been answered? No. What do you do? You tell us about her after you break up!"

"Aunt Grace, I only went out with her once."

"That is not how I see it! You listen to her for over a year on this radio station. She comes into your office of this dating service you run and steals your heart away. Then you take her out for hot dogs! Every girl's dream date! But she loves it and so do you. For days afterward you can think of nothing else but her. So you take her out again. You tell us how much fun it was, how happy you were. You don't fool yourself or me. You fall for her in a big way.

"I...I know all that, Aunt Grace."

"So what do you do about it? Instead of telling us all about this wonderful

girl you meet, you tell her you don't want to go out with her anymore!"

"And I told you why I did that. I thought it was the right thing to do, thought it was what I had to do. But now I don't know. I feel pain, hurt, sadness...just like when I lost Karen. I don't now what I should do anymore." There was anguish in his tone. "That's why I'm here tonight."

His aunt's eyes softened, and she put her hand on his.

"I know what you went through when you lost Karen, how terrible it was. And I know, Joel, yes I do, I know we almost lost you too. I knew what you were thinking. But I prayed for you, and the good Lord in heaven answered my prayers.

"But now that you've met this new girl, I want you to think about something. I say it because I love you. You are like my own son to me. It was so sudden with Karen. You never had a chance to talk. But think now, think what Karen would have said if the two of you had known she would soon die. You think she would have said, 'Yes, Joel, spend the rest of your life in sorrow and grief'? No! I know what she would have said. I know because I know how much she loved you. She would have said what I would say to my Tony. 'You go out and find a girl to love and who will love you. Do not throw away your life, Joel.' That is what she would have said, because that is what I would have said."

"I never thought of it that way, Aunt Grace. Yes, I think Karen would have said that. But that's only half of it. When I lost Karen, I determined never to let myself get into a position where I could feel such pain, such loss again. I just can't go through it again."

"And you think your future is better that way? What about this pain you are feeling now, this ache in your heart? You want to have it for the rest of your life?"

"And even if you forget about this Kristie and the pain goes away, what will replace it? I will tell you: loneliness. What do you see years down the road? You will have no one, Joel! Your saintly mother is gone. Your father is gone. You are an only child. Yes, we love you as our own, but you think me and Tony, you think we will live forever? You run this dating service because your heart aches for love. Yes, I know that is true. I have always known. You watch everyone else fall in love. You think maybe that will fill the emptiness in your heart, but it does not. So what do you have? Who will love you for the rest of your life?"

Now Aunt Grace took his hand in both of hers and looked him straight in the eyes with her kind and compassionate face.

"Joel, the good Lord never promised a life with no risk. Do not be afraid to love again. It is God's will. Karen would have wanted it, and she would have believed you were brave enough to do it. Do it for Karen. Do it for Tony and me. But most of all, do it for yourself. Do not let Kristie go. You're perfect for each other, and you know it. You know it in your heart. I can see it in your eyes when you talk about her. And you both seem to have this same twisted sense of humor. Of course, she's not Italian, but that's okay. You're only half Italian anyway. So I say it: You were made for each other!"

Joel smiled at her quip about not being Italian. His aunt released his hand, and they both sat back in their chairs. No one spoke. He sensed the truth of what she was saying. He thought of Karen. He thought of his mother. Then he felt his eyes tear again, but he was not going to break down in front of his aunt and uncle.

"Even if you're right, Aunt Grace, I think she's found someone else."

"How do you know this? Do you check up on her with all your computers?"

"Of course not! But I can tell it in her voice on the radio. I can tell it by the songs she plays. She's happy again."

"So maybe she has met someone new on this dating service of yours. She has a broken heart. You think I don't know? You think I don't know how much it hurt her, what you said to her? I am not that old! I know what it does to a girl. Now somebody new comes along in her life. Maybe she feels a little excitement. But is she going to fall for him like she fell for you? I tell you this: You wait long enough, and maybe that will happen."

"But what can I do now? She's not a toy that I can just throw away and then pick up again. She's got feelings too."

Aunt Grace smiled brightly at him. "See how you care for her, care for her deeply? I think you have fallen in love."

"Yeah, that helps me a lot."

"But you are right," Aunt Grace continued, ignoring his sarcastic comment. "You have made a mess of things because you don't come to us right away when you meet this Kristie."

"What do you think about all this, Uncle Tony?" Joel asked.

"She's right. You really screwed up." Uncle Tony had always been a man of few words. But then very few were needed when Aunt Grace was around.

"And I don't have an answer for you," added Aunt Grace. "But now I do have something new to pray for. The Lord can work in mysterious ways his wonders to perform."

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