

Chapter 9

When Kristie got back to her apartment that night, there was an email from Roger.

She didn't open it immediately. Her mind was still reeling from what she'd found out about Joel. But she had to get Joel out of her mind--and her heart. He was just not in her future, and Roger was interested in her.

Well, maybe. She thought back on their date and how many romantic cues he'd missed. But maybe he was reserved, wanting to go slowly. At least he'd given her that "flirty handshake" and kissed her goodnight.

Then she thought of this two-week gap without hearing from him. Could Roger be contacting her only if he couldn't get anyone else? Boy, now there's a thought to thrill the heart! But maybe he was extremely busy with his work. After all, he was an independent insurance salesman and probably had to call on potential clients in the evenings.

Well, she'd see what he had to say. She decided that if he did want another date, so did she.

Hello Kathy,

Once again time has just flown. Has it been two weeks already? I can hardly believe it.

Something tells me I might have been a rather dull disappointment to you on our first date. Sometimes I seem to forget what girls find romantic. If you'd like to go out with me again, I have an idea. How about the John Hancock Building? We could take a look at their newly remodeled observatory and then have dinner in the Signature Room on the 95th floor.

If this sounds like something you'd enjoy, let me know, and I'll give you a call.

Roger

So he was asking for a second date. She read the message again, feeling mixed emotions. He admitted he might have been a little dull in the area of romance but now wanted to take her to a romantic dinner overlooking Chicago atop one of the world's tallest buildings. That should make her happy.

But he offered no explanation for it taking two weeks to get back to her except that "time had flown." Had he exhausted every other possibility and finally got down to her?

And why hadn't he called her? Why an email? So impersonal, and hardly what you'd call romantic! Well, she thought, guys sometimes have trouble expressing their feelings in words. Email enables you to give careful thought on how to say things.

Kristie sat back in the chair and wondered just how much she was attracted to Roger. For the most part, she'd enjoyed their first date, but the usual metaphors,

chemistry and electricity, had just not been there for her. Nevertheless, he'd been nice, and she'd rather go out than stay home. Who knows? If it doesn't work out with Roger, she might even meet someone with more potential through him.

She decided to write back and accept his invitation but not mention the two weeks of silence. She'd try to make her reply sound positive.

Hi Roger,

Wow, Big John and the Signature Room! You must have started remembering what girls find romantic.

Sounds great. I'd love to go.

Kathy

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Roger had called the next day after Kristie sent her reply. They set the date for the following Sunday evening.

She'd been to the Hancock Building before but had never eaten in the Signature Room. This would require her dressiest outfit. She spent several hours getting ready and felt the same kind of excitement as she had when preparing for her date with His Regalness. Her hair came out just right, and this time the humidity was quite low. She wore her straight-skirted, teal suit with nylons and a fancy white blouse.

When she finished dressing, Kristie went to her full-length mirror to assess the result. Her eyes went to her hips. Joel. The thought brought a smile to her face. They sure had fun together! But now look what she's doing! All because of Joel, she'll forever worry about looking hippy!

As she sat down to wait for Roger, she knew that she shouldn't be thinking about Joel. It was Roger now, or at least until she got a new contact through MyForever.com.

Roger arrived on time, and they headed for Downtown Chicago. Once again she noted that he was a very handsome man. Did he have brown eyes? She'd always liked that song, and the thought amused her. Was she prepared, like Venus, to lose both arms in a wrestling match to get a brown-eyed handsome man? With apologies to Chuck Berry and Buddy Holly, she'd always thought it had been a bittersweet victory for poor Venus. After winning her man, how could she put her arms around him?

The John Hancock Building, located on Michigan Avenue, was a towering 100-story skyscraper in the heart of Chicago's Magnificent Mile. Kristie had read that on a clear day you could see up to 80 miles and four states. The observatory was on the 94th floor and contained numerous exhibits about the city of Chicago. Maps explained the view in each direction and a special meshed-in area allowed the visitors to feel the winds 1,030 ft above ground level.

Again, Roger showed remarkable knowledge of Chicago. He pulled into the parking area off Delaware in the John Hancock Center itself. As they entered the

building he took Kristie's hand.

Well, she thought, things might be improving.

The high-speed elevators that take you to the observation deck make your ears pop due the rapid change in air pressure. But once you step into the observatory, all suffering is quickly forgotten.

The view from that height is absolutely breath-taking. Kristie had been here before, and again she realized the experience was completely beyond the ability of words to capture. It makes some people feel light-headed, and you want to grab hold of something tangible, solid. The effect on her was just an overpowering sense of awe.

Big John offered Chicago's highest open air viewing deck. They were still holding hands as they walked toward the railing. The wind was fierce, and Kristie's hair soon looked like she hadn't done a thing with it since stepping out of the shower.

"Hey, Roger. Let's take the audio Sky Tour. You're a suburbanite. You should learn more about Chicago."

"You're right, I should. Let's do it."

They walked around to each of the 16 stops and played every one of the narrations. Kristie was surprised. She learned some things about Chicago that even she hadn't known. It took them about 45 minutes to complete the tour.

"Whew!" Roger said when they finished. "That tour and all this wind has made me hungry. Good timing too," he said, looking at his watch. "Our reservations are for seven o'clock. You ready?"

"Yeah, I've been looking forward to dinner all evening."

They took an elevator one floor up. Roger had reserved a table right next to one of the windows facing west, providing an almost limitless vista of lights. He held Kristie's chair as she sat down. Sitting at a table by a window at that height gave her the impression that both they and the table were floating in the air.

The decor was luxurious. The plushly-upholstered, straight-backed chairs matched the tablecloths. Each table had an elegant setting and a thin, glass vase with cut flowers.

As Kristie looked over the menu, she sincerely hoped that quite a few of those evenings during Roger's two weeks of silence were spent writing new policies. He'd need that additional income after tonight.

She selected the least expensive appetizer, Wild Mushroom Strudel, a steal at \$11.00. While selecting the main course, she tried not to look at the prices and picked Seared Duck Breast. The side she ordered was white cheddar potatoes, which represented an extra \$7.00. Not her kind of restaurant at all, and for just an instant, an image of lunch at a Vienna hot dog stand with Joel flashed before her mind. But she quickly refocused on the opulent scene around her. She wanted to let

Roger know how appreciative she was that he'd taken her to such a beautiful and cultured restaurant.

"Roger, this is just fantastic. Almost too rich for my blood. I'm just not used to it."

"Well, I wanted to take you somewhere more elegant than Gino's. A little luxury every now and then is nice, don't you think?"

"Sure!" Then she lowered her voice and said with all sincerity, "This is a really nice evening, Roger."

"Ah, the half has not been told!"

"What do you mean?"

"The best is yet to come."

"Oh, really? I thought this was all we had planned."

"That's what I wanted you to think."

"Well, tell me: what's happening next?" Kristie definitely felt excitement over this new mystery.

"No, no. It's going to be a surprise. You just finish eating."

The remainder of their meal was accompanied with mostly small talk--various activities and events they'd attended in Chicago and various places in an around the city they'd visited. Neither one asked any probing questions about background or goals. Roger still didn't know where she worked, but didn't bring up the subject at all.

When they finished their meal and returned to ground level, Roger said they'd be leaving the car where it was. They exited on Chestnut and walked to Michigan Avenue. On the southwest corner Kristie noticed a carriage stand.

"Well, Kathy, have you guessed yet?"

She looked at Roger, then back at the horse-drawn carriage, and finally it dawned on her.

"We're going for a carriage ride?"

"That's right."

With excitement bubbling over, she said, "I've always wanted to go on one of these rides. What a romantic idea!"

He took her hand and helped her up. When he got in beside her, he put his arm around her and pulled her a little closer to him. Kristie didn't resist. The breeze off the Lake had gotten chilly, and she snuggled close to keep warm.

The Downtown tour included Michigan Avenue's Magnificent Mile, Lincoln Park, Grant Park, State Street, and the riverfront.

It was a perfect date: three elegant, romantic settings with a handsome escort who was conducting himself as a gentleman. He had even made a few romantic overtures, such as holding her hand and putting his arm around her to keep her warm. There was only one thing missing: any spark within her for Roger Penfield.

Odd, she had actually been excited about this date while getting ready earlier in the day. What had stirred her emotions was not the man sitting next to her but the sight of Buckingham Fountain in Grant Park. She'd felt that familiar ache inside of her, and she knew who still held her heart.

It was difficult to tell what Roger was feeling. Tonight he was doing everything right, but yet there was something missing, even in his touch.

When they got back to Kristie's apartment, Roger put his hand on her shoulder and gently turned her to face him. No flirty handshake this time. He drew her to him, she wrapped her arms around him, and they kissed.

Again, he kissed her hard, and she could detect his breathing grow heavier. Then he put both hands on her shoulders and stepped back to look at her. For a moment, she thought he was going to try something else, but he didn't. Like their last kiss, he said nothing, waiting.

After a few seconds, he released her and resumed his normal, rather emotionless demeanor. No words had been spoken.

Kristie smiled. "Thanks, Roger. I had a wonderful time."

"So did I. But I'm already toying with an idea that may even top this evening. It's very tentative. Don't want to mention anything just yet. Is it okay if I call you?"

"Sure, I'd love to go out again."

"Until then, Kathy. Goodnight." Then he turned and walked away.

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Over the next two days, Kristie thought a lot about her date with Roger, but the same problem kept surfacing. No spark. She just didn't feel any growing attraction to him. Of course, there was always something nice about a goodnight kiss, and she really had wanted that kiss to move her. But it hadn't.

However, with the passing of a few days, she found a way to explain it. After the carriage took them through Grant Park, she'd been thinking of Joel. That simply had to stop if she were ever to go on with her life. She needed to concentrate on Roger.

Roger. What about Roger? What did he feel? He didn't give much evidence of sparks either. But then she remembered reading that some relationships take time to develop.

That night after her show, she got another email from him. She frowned. He'd said he was going to call her.

Hello Kathy,

Sorry for another email. I tried your apartment a couple of times, but there was no answer.

Perhaps you've been wondering what my idea is. I'm hoping you have.

So far, we've never gotten around to talking about one item in your profile. You mentioned an interest in Michigan's U.P. I'm going to take some time off soon. Been working too hard and thought I'd go up there myself. Would you be interested in driving up with me for a few days? We could hike the snowmobile trails before the snow starts to fly and check out some of the restaurants.

I thought I'd try a new location this time. Haven't done much in the Keweenaw Peninsula, so I was thinking of going there.

Give me a good time to call, and we can talk about it.

Roger.

Well, he probably can be forgiven for using email. She'd never told him that she worked from about four or five in the afternoon until midnight Monday through Friday.

The invitation really piqued her interest because it involved hiking in the North Woods. But then something curious struck her. Just as with Roger's last email inviting her to the John Hancock Building, she felt mixed emotions as she read it.

This time it was a doubt that suddenly forced itself upon her thoughts. He was inviting her on a date involving several nights. What did he have in mind? Twice now he had waited after their goodnight kiss as if expecting something. Was it for her to invite him in? However, it was still a fact that he'd been a perfect gentleman in every sense on both dates. Would he take her acceptance of this invitation as a willingness to sleep together on the trip? Well, if he did, she would simply and politely ask him to secure two motel rooms, not one. No problem. She was sure he would act the gentleman.

She tried to communicate a sense of excitement in her email.

Hi Roger,

Yeah, a trip to the Keweenaw sounds great! I know the Marquette area pretty well, but the Keweenaw will be something new. Sounds exciting.

I have some time coming at work and can take off a few days. I work evenings, so give me a call in the afternoon, and we can iron out the details.

Kathy

After sending the email, another thought struck her: *the Keweenaw Peninsula*. That's where Joel had his cabin. She had tried to put Joel out of her mind, but was that the real reason she was going?

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Kristie was able to arrange a week off, and they had decided to leave on Saturday morning. The trip from Chicago to Houghton would take about eight or eight and a half hours.

It was now Friday night and near the end of her last show before her one-week vacation. Time to introduce the last song.

"Well, everybody, I'm going on vacation for the next week. Going hiking in Michigan's great Upper Peninsula. Tom Hawkins will be sitting in for me. But since it's still early September, I can still play this as my goodbye song for all of you: 'See You in September.' This is Kristie Rydell for Chicago Oldies, 107.4."

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Joel had been dozing on and off during the previous song, but when Kristie came back on the air, he was wide awake again.

A vacation? Had he heard her correctly? She was going to be on vacation for the next week in the U.P.?

The wheels started turning.

After his talk with Aunt Grace and Uncle Tony, he had done some serious, even agonizing, soul-searching and had finally come to several conclusions.

He believed Aunt Grace was right that Karen would have wanted him to love again. He also came to accept the idea that his emotional connection to Karen during these years since her death had probably been going on long enough. But he was not prepared to admit that he'd been wrong to maintain those feelings--his sense of faithfulness and loyalty to her--up to this point in time. He was simply now willing to let go, although the decision to do so was still very difficult. But Kristie had awakened feelings and desires he had not felt since he'd lost Karen. She made him feel truly alive again. He never thought he would love again, but now, well, now maybe so.

He felt excitement stir within him at the thought. A new romance always carried with it a sense of excitement, of wonder, of anticipation, but the overwhelming emotion filling him right now was the joy that he could once again love and be loved. The feeling was like entering into a new life.

These conclusions were positive, renewing the soul. His final conclusion was just the opposite. He was firm in his decision not to call her up and ask her out again. What could he say? "Oh, Kristie, I've changed my mind about breaking up. Now I want to date you again." No, no, he would never treat her like that. It would unmistakably give the impression that he held her in low esteem, that he considered her just a play thing he could discard and pick up again at will. She'd already had enough disappointment from too many guys who gave no thought to her feelings. So he

saw no direct means of getting Kristie back. Something outside of his direct action would have to be the catalyst to bring them back together.

Now this vacation opened up just such a possibility. Where was she going in the U.P.? She knew he had a cabin in the Keweenaw. Would she go there, possibly thinking that they might accidentally meet again?

Then another thought occurred to him, not at all pleasant. He was pretty sure she was dating someone new. Perhaps she had no desire to see him again. Maybe he had hurt her too deeply. Now there was a discouraging thought! But if it were true, there was no point in thinking about Kristie at all. He had lost her, as surely as he had lost Karen. But such fear was too painful even to contemplate, so he decided not to make that assumption. Instead, he thought back on the time they had spent together and how it had made them both feel. Something special had developed between them, a connection, a very strong romantic attraction. He had not felt anything like it since Karen. Kristie too had felt it--he was sure of it. Despite what he had done, she was still very much in his heart. He had to believe the same was true for her, or there was no hope.

So he'd go up to his cabin. That they would meet was a long shot, a very long shot...but then Aunt Grace was praying.

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