

SOMEDAY

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by
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Chapter One

Wilmouth, Maine, 1992

"Someday, Kristy," Sonny Flagler said, "if you stay as sweet and innocent as you are now, you'll make some lucky guy a great wife."

I stared after him in silent misery as he walked away. I was crushed by his lack of insight into my true potential. What an exit line! I couldn't believe he'd said that, not after all the adventures we'd shared.

And those kisses.

It had taken me ages to get him to notice that I was more than "one of the guys" but I'd succeeded. I'd gotten his attention, then won his friendship, and I thought I'd been slowly winning his heart, but now I had to wonder if I was really any closer to that than I'd been at the beginning of the semester. My senior year in high school was almost over. By now Sonny Flagler was supposed to be as crazy about me as I've always been about him.

Sweet and innocent?

Gruesome! Insulting, too. Who wants to be labeled sweet and innocent? It's right up there with brain, which I'm already struck with, and nerd, which, thank goodness, I'm not.

Then a worse thought struck me. What if "some lucky guy" hadn't ever had a chance of being six-foot-tall, sandy-haired, hazel-eyed Sonny Flagler? All those vague doubts, all those tingles of dissatisfaction I'd been trying to ignore for weeks came back to torment me. I couldn't put off thinking about them any longer.

By the time I got home that afternoon I was pretty depressed. I was also confused. What had I done wrong? I'd expected a completely different outcome from the day's daring gambit. Somehow I'd misread things completely.

I plopped down in the desk chair that sits in front of my computer, resigned to starting the report that was due in English the next week. Then it came to me. I suddenly realized that there at my fingertips was the perfect tool to help me sort things out. All I had to do was write down everything that led up to Sonny's stupid remark and I'd be able to figure out why he made it . . . and what I'll have to do to change his mind.

"Select File Name," the word processing program demanded as I logged on.

I typed: SOMEDAY

Next I recorded Sonny's heartbreaking words. They glowed at me on the monitor, taunting me.

There were a lot of things, I realized, that could have made Sonny say what he did. There was my age, for one. I was born exactly one day before the cutoff date for starting school. Then, a few years later, some bright guidance counselor decided I should skip the third grade because I was gifted. That's how I ended up so much younger than everyone else in my class. Somehow, though, I didn't think that being barely sixteen was reason enough for Sonny to call me sweet and innocent.

I raised my fingers over the keyboard, hesitating only a moment before I decided on a starting point. Sonny wasn't even there, but the event that would bring us together was Miss Beatrice Calioni's decision to cast me as one of the lead dancers in the annual ballet recital. That's when it all began . . .

The girls in the long, narrow dressing room—an even dozen of them in the advanced class, all in their teens but representing every possible shape and size—stopped talking as soon as I lifted the red velvet curtain hanging over the door from the studio. I knew why. They'd overheard every word Miss Calioni'd said to me in her "office" next door.

"Sorry, Kristy," Beva said.

Her brown eyes were mournful as a beagle's, assuring me that she really did understand how upset I was. When I tried to smile at her, I caught sight of my pitiful effort in a mirror and realized that it looked more like a grimace of pain than a grin.

Beva Gauch is my oldest and dearest friend. We started taking ballet lessons at the same time, right after Miss Calioni first moved to Lumberton, the next town over from Wilmouth, which is where Beva and I live. That was ten years ago and every year since Miss C. has choreographed a fairy tale for her students—all female and from every town in our far-flung rural county—to present during the winter doldrums. One other thing has been constant, too. Every year the tallest girl in the advanced class is cast in the part of the prince. The hero. The *male* lead.

This year I was it.

Miss Calioni thought it was an honor. "Kristy, darling, you'll be perfect," she told me.

Miss C. meant I'd look the part. If it wasn't for masses of straight, light brown hair hanging clear down to the middle of my back, people might find it hard to tell I'm a girl. With the exception of a nose that's a little too long, I was really cute until I hit thirteen. Then I got taller, nearly five foot ten, but stayed flat chested. Beva grumbles about being short and chubby, but nobody will ever mistake her for a boy.

"Cheer up, Kristy," she whispered as everyone else began to troop into the studio to start warm-ups. "At least none of the kids at school will know about it. They wouldn't be caught dead at a ballet recital."

Brave words from someone who was going to look great. Beva always ends up in gauzy tutus with flowers in her short, auburn curls. I'd get a tunic and tights and a hat with a droopy feather.

Don't get me wrong. Most of the time I like taking ballet lessons. Dancing is one of the things I do well enough to make my mother say she's proud of me. No easy task, let me tell you. Still, being cast as a boy was a bummer. I'd wanted to play a beautiful princess, with a shot at finding true love with a prince.

"It should have been Lisa," I grumbled.

Lisa Mikels, who stands half an inch taller than I do and weighs in at least forty pounds heavier, quit dance lessons at the beginning of the school year and tried out for cheerleading instead. She made the team, leaving me not only the tallest student Miss Calioni had but also, aside from Beva and three little girls under the age of ten who are in the intermediate and beginners classes, the only one still coming over from Wilmouth for lessons.

"You'll do a much better job than Lisa would have," Beva said loyally as she fiddled with her ballet slippers.

"Maybe I should quit, too, before anyone finds out about this."

"There's nothing wrong with being in a recital."

"So how come everyone else who used to take lessons has dropped out?"

Beva shrugged. "Just because ballet is not a popular activity in Wilmouth—"

"It ranks somewhere below classes in interpretive basket weaving," I told her.

I was already an oddity in our school. For years teachers had been pointing me out as a good example. "Why can't you be more like Kristy?" they'd say. "She studied for the test." You can imagine how popular *that* made me!

I couldn't help getting all those A's. No one asked me out on dates, so I had a lot of time to study. The more I studied, the better my grades got and the less likely it became that any boy, at least any boy from Wilmouth Junior-Senior High School, would ever ask me out. Talk about a vicious circle!

"You can't quit," Beva said as she stood up and headed for the studio.

"Give me one good reason why not."

"Then I wouldn't have anyone to drive me over here once a week and I'd have to quit, and then I'd turn into a blimp from not getting any exercise." She posed dramatically, the back of one hand against her forehead and the other lifted gracefully at her side. "And *then* Jon Mannering wouldn't be interested in me anymore."

Can't argue with logic like that.

Between school, homework, going to games where I helped cook hot dogs for the food concession, and commuting the twenty miles to Lumberton for ballet classes, I was pretty busy after that. Playing the prince turned out to be more enjoyable than I'd expected. As a boy, I didn't have to wear toe shoes, which I was never too crazy about anyway, and I got to do a lot of big leaps and turns. I also learned how to do pantomime.

My favorite scene took place in a forest of *papier-mâché* trees. This sorceress gives the prince a cloak of invisibility. Maddy, the girl playing the sorceress, wants to be a professional ballerina someday, and she actually practices at home between classes. We're all supposed to, but I don't think any of the rest of us do. Anyway, we had a lot of fun with that scene, and before I knew it, we were only a few days away from the recital.

That's when fate stepped in. My whole life changed because of what happened that afternoon.

Miss Calioni set up a rehearsal on the stage at Liberty Hall, where we were going to perform. Liberty Hall takes a little explaining. It was built of local granite back at the turn of the century by our native-son-who-made-good, a guy named Willy Rokebutt. He had "rokes" in his head if you ask me. This has got to be the craziest building anyone ever built. It has towers and battlements and sits in the shadow of a cliff and has what looks like a moat in front of it. Actually the moat is Wilmouth Stream, but the effect is the same—you have to cross a bridge to get to the Hall.

Inside are the Wilmouth town office, the public library, and a theater. Not movie. It has a stage, with all the usual stage things, like spotlights and footlights and a grid for flying scenery. It's used for school plays and town meetings and rented out for special events—like Miss Beatrice Calioni's ballet recitals.

Our rehearsal was going well. When we'd gotten through a particularly tricky bit, Miss Calioni stopped us. There were tears in her eyes.

"Wonderful, Maddy. And Kristy! Darling, I am so pleased. You've made startling progress. You flow from one movement to the next, and that white skin of yours makes you literally out of this world. An Elgin marble come to life!"

For about a second I was thrilled. That was before I realized there were more people backstage than there should have been. Miss C. couldn't hear the giggles, but I could. They scurried out the backstage door before I could get a look at them.

"Who was it?" I asked Beva.

"Linda Auchinclaus."

I groaned. "Just what I need! Who was with her?"

"Who else? Gerald Wertman." They were inseparable, a match made in heaven, the most popular couple in our school, though I hadn't been able to figure out why.

"Anyone else?"

Beva looked so sorry for me I almost didn't want to know.

"Who?" I repeated, bracing myself for the worst.

"Sonny Flagler."

Beva was the only person on earth who knew I'd had a crush on Sonny since we were in fourth grade. That's the year we were assigned to do a social studies project together and decided we both wanted to be archaeologists when we grew up. I still do.

Or maybe a writer.

"I'm doomed!" I groaned, sank to the floor with my legs crossed under me, and buried my head in my arms. If there was one guy in the whole wide world I didn't want to see me with my hair all pinned up out of sight and my chest squashed even flatter than it really is, so I'd look like a medieval prince, it was Sonny Flagler.

"Maybe he didn't recognize you."

"Maybe I could drown myself."

If he hadn't seen who I was, Linda would tell him. And if he hadn't recognized me it could only be because he was preoccupied with her, which didn't do a lot for my ego. I threw off my boy's cap and started ripping bobby pins out of my hair.

Linda and I have similar builds, and she wears her long brown hair in a style a lot like mine, but since her hair isn't as baby fine as mine, it stays where it's supposed to. She also has light blue eyes the same color as mine. The biggest physical difference between us is the nose. Hers is the one I'd like, short and well shaped. Except for that we could probably pass for sisters.

Cousins, anyway.

I didn't understand then why Linda hated me, but I knew she did. She hadn't had a nice thing to say to or about me since she moved to Wilmouth from Lumberton the year before. She usually made sure that if she was talking about me I could overhear every word, too, like the time I yelled: "Hot stuff! Comin' through!" in the cafeteria line.

I meant I was carrying an overflowing bowl of soup, but thanks to Linda I learned that "hot stuff" has another, entirely different, meaning.

"If she's such hot stuff," Linda said in one of those whispers that can be heard for miles, "she must be spreading it around out of town. She sure doesn't put out for any of the local boys."

Hard to believe now, but when she said that I got red and embarrassed at the very idea that people might think I was fast. Talk about irony! If I'd had that kind of reputation, whether I deserved it or not, Sonny would never have hit me with the "sweet and innocent" line.

"Linda won't stop talking about what she saw until everyone in school knows I was cast as a boy," I predicted gloomily.

"Ignore it," Beva said. "Ignore her. You're good. Your dancing is going to make this recital the best ever."

"I don't want to be in it. I'd rather die. Maybe I can come down with some rare tropical disease."

"Kristy! You have to dance the prince. We'll have to cancel the whole show if you don't."

"Somebody can fill in. Miss C. can do it herself, like she did the year one of Cinderella's wicked stepsisters broke her leg skiing and couldn't dance."

Beva just looked at me. She was right. Miss C. could dance it, but she'd never in a million years look like a handsome young prince.

The next day at school was even worse than I'd expected. Not only had Linda spread the word around that I was in a dance recital (she made the words sound obscene, curling her lips and wrinkling that cute little nose every time she said them), but she started calling me Pinocchio. It took a while to figure that one out. At first I thought it was because of my nose. I was sure Linda knew I was sensitive about its size. I figured the whole world knew that. Then Beva told me.

"It's because someday you may turn into a real boy."

I had to go lock myself in a stall in the bathroom so nobody would see that I was crying. When I came out, Linda was standing in front of the row of sinks, fussing with her eye shadow.

That's another difference between Linda and me. She wears too much makeup. Of course, I may be biased. I tried using blusher once. I looked like a clown, and my face promptly broke out in a rash. Since then I've only bothered with makeup when I'm on stage. Fortunately there are special brands for people who are allergic.

As I watched Linda and her crony, Monica Wertman, who was patting already perfect dark brown curls into place, I thought of at least one reason to be glad I wore no cosmetics. They'd really have had a good laugh if there'd been black mascara streaks all down my cheeks.

Linda caught sight of me in the mirror. "Hey, Prince Charming," she cooed, mouthing the words at her own reflection. "Kissed any sleeping princesses lately?"

I wanted to crawl back into the stall and never come out but I knew that would only make things worse. I wondered dismally where all my friends were when I needed them. It wasn't as if I didn't have any, but it suddenly seemed to me that I didn't have quite as many as I'd had before Linda moved to Wilmouth.

"Ooooh, look!" Monica Wertman, who is Gerald's twin sister, turned and pointed one elegantly manicured finger at me. The magenta nail glinted in the harsh fluorescent light. "The Elgin marble isn't white anymore. Her face is all red!"

"His face," Linda corrected, still concentrating on her own image and observing everything behind in the glass.

"But—"

"Kristy should use the boy's john!"

"But . . . but . . . but—"

Linda turned at last, cutting short my miserable, stuttering effort to defend myself. "You sound like a motorboat!" she said.

Her eyes locked on mine, challenging and defiant, while I groped for some intelligent, preferably witty comeback.

I was saved by the bell. It was time for classes to start after lunch and not even Linda dared be late for Mrs. Bratusky's history class. She and Monica rushed out, leaving me to follow along. I was angry with them, but I was more upset with myself.

What's wrong with me, anyway? I wondered. Why did I let Linda badger me? Why didn't I just tell her how ignorant she is? Why didn't I say something? Anything would have been better than letting them know how tongue-tied and embarrassed I was.

Next time, I promised myself. Now that it was too late, I'd thought of the perfect rejoinder.

"Next time," I vowed again, under my breath. I stuck my chin out and began to run for class . . . and slammed right into Sonny Flagler.

"Slow down, Pinoch," he said, and grinned at me.

That did it. This time I was ready, and I didn't care who heard me. "I'm playing the role of a prince," I shouted, "and it's the best part in the entire show. I'm glad there aren't any boys in this school with guts enough to learn a hard sport like ballet. Otherwise I wouldn't have had a chance to learn I could dance and act and move an audience to tears!"

Well, I figured that little speech ended any chance I'd ever have with Sonny Flagler. If I'd ever had a chance at all.

I walked off at a dignified pace, my head held high. I'd just made another promise to myself. I was going to dance the prince's part so well that there wouldn't be a dry eye in the house.

No one would dare laugh at me then!