

I started down the same hall that six weeks earlier I had walked with Minna that first night. The door was ajar and I pushed it open. Minna sat cross-legged on the floor, puffy-eyed, her hair bundled inside a red kerchief. She did not look surprised to see me. I sat down and pushed aside the brown clogs she had kicked off. "I feel like such a jerk," she whispered, continuing to stare straight ahead. "I'm so embarrassed." The small scar on her chin was trembling.

"You're not a jerk," I said, draping my arm around her shoulders. "C'mon, stop with the melodrama."

"Was it because I danced with Steve? It didn't mean anything, Nicky! You said it was OK. I don't get it. I thought we were getting along so well. You told me you loved me. What did I do? What *happened*?"

"You didn't do anything. It's not because of Steve. I do love you. I just got angry...I don't know why."

"I'm sorry, Nicky...I just love you so much...too much probably."

She looked at me and I crumbled. "Your lips taste salty."

"Nicky, let's not ever fight again."

Five minutes later, we're walking hand in hand to her father's station wagon parked outside Harold Hall. Minna had taken the bus home that morning to collect some spring clothes and borrowed his car for the return trip. Since the car didn't have to be back until the next morning, we decided to go to Dunkin Donuts for coffee. After getting in the car, she sat with her hands on the steering wheel, not saying a word.

"Are we going?"

"In a minute," she answered. "I just want to sit a bit...if that's OK."

"Something wrong?"

She shook her head, then started weeping.

"*What?* What is it?"

"It's stupid."

"What is?"

"Nicky, I'm scared!"

"*Scared?* Scared of what?"

"Of the way I feel. What if we break up? Sometimes I think I really do love you too much...I can't help it...it scares me!"

"Why? I love you, too," I assured her, barely able to keep from laughing. "I've told you a million times."

"See, I shouldn't have said anything. You think it's funny."

"No, I don't."

"Yes, you *do*! You're laughing!"

"No, I'm not...it's just silly. You know I love you."

"I know you do, but look at today...what if I do something to make you mad, and you stop loving me."

The girl had a point. Although I later regretted my moody behavior, I was often powerless to stop it. My impulsive outbursts persisted beyond the boundaries of my will.

"Nicky, you're the kind of guy I could marry."

"*Marry?* I'm too young!" I laughed. "I'm only eighteen!"

My clumsy effort to lighten the mood and spare her feelings fell flat. She answered somberly. "I know we're too young. I'm not saying I want to get married now."

"Well then stop worrying about it. It's stupid to worry about what *might* happen."

Minna looked in the rear view mirror and began dabbing her eyes with a tissue. "You're right. I don't know what gets into me sometimes. Just forget what I said...OK?" She settled back in the seat. "You see that star?" She pointed at the rose-colored light ebbing on the horizon. "There, above that tree. That's Venus."

I extended my focus to a bright spot in the twilight. "How do you know it's Venus?"

"Dennis and I used to look at it through his telescope. They say that if two lovers see Venus rising in the evening sky, they're meant to be together."

"You and Dennis aren't together."

"It'll be different for us," she whispered.