

I started down the same hall that six weeks earlier I had walked with Minna that first night. Steve's door was ajar. Minna sat on the floor cross-legged and puffy-eyed, her hair bundled inside a red kerchief. If she was surprised to see me, she didn't look it. I pushed aside the brown clogs she had kicked off and sat down. "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."

"It's a deal," –and I put out my hand. Still a little teary, she smiled and shook it, and we went out to her car. She had taken the bus home that morning to collect some spring clothes and borrowed the family station wagon for the return trip. Since it didn't have to be back until the next morning, we decided to go to Dunkin Donuts for coffee. Minna got in and 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, though at the same time unable to stifle a laugh. "I've told you that 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 last night...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. Reason and clear thinking rarely played their part in the thing, and only later would I admit (to myself, at least) the foolishness of it all.

Minna hung her head and suddenly announced, "Nicky, you're the kind of guy I could marry."

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

"I know we're too young," she responded, ignoring my clumsy effort to lighten the mood. "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 and pointed at the rose-colored light ebbing on the horizon. "You see that star...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.