

1. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE?"

Megan watched from behind the audience as her sister Jenny Spaulding, her matron of honor, and Jack Setsuda walked up the aisle together, Jenny's hand resting on Jack's arm. When they reached Chris, the couple parted and stood on either side of him. Chris smiled at Jenny, then grinned at Jack, his best friend and his best man. The saxophone quartet segued from "Body and Soul" to "What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life?" and the tenor sax began a slow, smoky solo as someone opened the doors to the main salon and Megan stepped out onto the sun deck of the *MV Rainbow's End*, a private yacht that a friend had loaned Chris for the wedding.

Last Sunday, she had stood in front of the band, singing this very special song to close her month at Wan Chai Bop on The Peak in Hong Kong. Chris had been in the audience, and she had sung it to him, and only him. After the closing set, Chung Jum Sang, the owner of the club, threw a private party celebrating the upcoming marriage. Today, Jummy was sitting on Megan's side of the aisle, and today, the band was playing without her, and Megan Deschamps was walking up the aisle on her father's arm to marry Christopher Girolami, a Microsoft millionaire (God, she thought, there really is such a thing!). He had followed her around the world for the last year and a half, nearly stalking her, she had felt at times, but courting her with flowers and gifts, and most of all with his presence, eager and funny and smart, and his devotion and commitment to her.

No way is this like before, she thought. Nothing like when she and Cal Fletcher, her drummer at the time, took time off waiting to do a gig in Vegas and went to the Rope'em Wedding Chapel, where each of them were given cowboy hats and boots for their ceremony. Megan had the traditional "Little Cowgirl" set of red, short-brimmed hat and red boots with white swirls on the sides. She and Cal had howled through the ceremony, drinking the cheap champagne that was included. She spent the next two days in a motel room, wearing nothing

much more than the boots and hat, and drinking so much she could barely remember what had happened. She could remember laughing a lot, and she remembered that Cal was very good in bed, and that was about it.

As it turned out, Megan and Cal had their music and their sex in common, and that *was* really about it. And a few months later, Cal let himself slide deeper into his addiction, until he was spending his entire share of their income on junk, and then getting cash advances on Megan's credit cards. Megan talked him into quitting once, but the vomiting and the sweating and the anger only lasted until she had to meet with a producer about an upcoming recording session, and Cal, desperate for a fix, called his dealer and went right back on the needle.

Megan knew that Cal would drag her down if she didn't leave him, either by bankrupting them or, worse, by convincing her at a weak moment to join him and "listen to the music" he was hearing. After two years of fighting the weight of Cal's need, she left him and moved back to Seattle, her hometown. It had taken her six months to get back to a state of mind where she could start singing again.

No, this was definitely something new, she thought, and she looked out past their guests at the sparkling water of Victoria Harbour and beyond at the towering skyscrapers of Central nestled at the foot of Victoria Peak.

"Who gives their blessing to this marriage?"

"Both of their families do."

It was her father's voice, and he put his palm on the small of Megan's back and gently pushed her forward to stand next to Chris. Her sister Jenny nudged her, and Megan flashed a smile at her and then turned toward Chris. He wasn't tall or husky. In fact, he was just five eight, which was a perfect height for Megan, who was only an inch taller than five feet and very petite. But Chris was handsome in a boyish way. His curly blonde hair made him look much younger

than his more than 40 years. And he was a handsome dresser, too. When she had told him that she wanted to wear a cream halter top sundress for the wedding, he had gone out and bought a beige silk suit that was a perfect complement to her outfit. Megan looked into his smiling eyes.

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Wow! thought Chris. This is really happening. I'm marrying the most beautiful and talented woman in the world, just like I planned.

On July 7th the year before, a vendor had given Chris tickets to a box at the Hollywood Bowl, which was doing a tribute to Duke Ellington. Several of his colleagues at the office were jazz fans, and Chris was an ardent fan himself, so the group of eight showed up early and took advantage of being in an upfront box with dinner and drinks provided by the Bowl's caterer. The concert had several well-known jazz players and singers backed by an LA big band. Chris had a couple of CDs by Megan Deschamps, and he liked her singing style—she reminded him a little of a young Sarah Vaughan, but when he saw her walk out on the stage in a full length silver gown to begin the first few wistful bars of "In A Sentimental Mood," he was, as they say, hooked. He couldn't take his eyes off her. Jack leaned over and asked him something, and Chris told him to shut up. As Megan finished the number, Chris jumped to his feet, cheering and clapping. A few other patrons stood, too, but standing ovations were generally reserved for the end of a concert at the Bowl.

He sat down and looked around at his friends, his eyes bright, and said, "I'm going to marry that girl!"

As soon as the concert ended, he pushed his chair back, got up and hugged Jack.

"Hey, I'm sorry, man. But I wanted to hear what she was singing. There was something major going on inside my head. And my heart. I'm not kidding you. I'm going to marry Megan

Deschamps.” Standing, he said to the group, “Hey, I’ll see you all in the morning,” and he headed out into the crowd leaving the Bowl.

He weaved his way through the jostling crowd down to the parking lots and got into his Lotus. He turned the key and pushed the button to lower the top, sitting and thinking about what was happening to him as he waited for the cars in front of him to fill and pull out of the lot. He turned on the radio to listen to Kjazz. Coltrane was wailing on “My Favorite Things.” When he pulled into the parking lot next to Amoeba Music on Sunset, Coltrane was just finishing up, and Chris sat and listened politely to the luscious ending, not wanting to break the thread of broadcast music to cut off what had been brilliantly conceived, so many years ago.

He found eight of Megan’s CDs at Amoeba that he didn’t already have, paid for them, got back into his car and drove down Cahuenga and then west on the 10. The street lights sliding by flashed on the Lotus’s bright yellow hood, but he didn’t notice. When he reached the 1920s Venice office building that he had had transformed into his home, it was midnight. He passed the bank of computers on the first floor and turned on a Mac, went to the stereo at the end of the room and loaded five of Megan’s CDs into the changer, starting from the oldest to newest. As he pulled a bottle of Anchor Steam out of the refrigerator in the kitchenette that served those working at the computers, Megan’s voice, sounding a little younger but as lovely as tonight, began “Autumn in New York.” By the end of the third CD, Chris had read just about everything he could find concerning Megan online. The short bio at Wikipedia told him that she had been born and grew up in Seattle, but now lived in New York. He charged \$1.95 to his Visa card to find her current address and phone number in New York City, as well as the data on her parents, Dory and Madeleine Deschamps, in Seattle. Another jazz musician’s site told him that she had been married to Calvin Fletcher for two and a half years, but had gotten a divorce in 2004, and was now single. She had won a number of awards in the U.S., Europe and Asia for her recordings, and her CD “After You’ve Gone” had been nominated for a Grammy in 2005. The

calendar on her website showed that she was going home to Seattle for a couple of weeks and would be singing with a local piano trio at Jazz Alley during the coming week.

He logged on to the Alaska Airlines website and used some of his Frequent Flyer miles to buy a one-way ticket to arrive in Seattle the day before her gig started. He added a hotel and car to the reservation, then stopped. The next CD had a lot of Brazilian songs on it, and he listened as Megan sang “Corcovado,” just for him. He went back to the refrigerator and got another Anchor Steam, then sat down quietly, closed his eyes and listened to Megan’s voice, letting her sound wash over him. When he woke up, it was nine o’clock in the morning, and the sun was streaming through the clerestory windows.

As he quickly showered and changed, Chris listened again to Megan singing to him from the CD changer. He locked his door behind him and headed up the street, keying a number on his cell phone. After three calls, he found that Megan was still checked in at the Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood, Room 1412. He stopped to get an Americano at a coffee house, then walked north a block to Beach Florists. He bought a dozen long-stemmed yellow roses, signed the enclosed card “From an admirer” and tipped the delivery boy enough to get them delivered to the hotel by 10:30. Back home, he logged onto his email and sent a message to Megan’s website.

Hi. I’m the admirer who sent you the yellow roses. I was at the Bowl last night, right up front. You were so impressive that I felt I had to somehow show my gratitude for your talent. I love jazz and have some of your CDs, and I noticed on your booking schedule that you’ll be at Jazz Alley next week. I happen to be going up to Seattle on business, and I’ll come by the club to hear some more. I hope that’s okay.

Chris Girolami

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Chris reached out to backhand Jack's drive on one of the racquetball courts in their club and slammed into the back wall. The racquet spun out of his hand and clattered to the floor as the ball rebounded.

"Match!" Jack shouted.

Chris leaned over and picked up his racquet, slapping it with his palm. "Have you been practicing behind my back?"

"No extra practice, but I've been losing to you long enough to improve a little," Jack smiled. "Let's see, at \$1,000 a point, you owe me \$18,000, or you can buy me a beer instead."

"I'll do the beer, if it's all the same to you."

"Sounds good."

They showered off and went into the brewpub down the street.

"Here's to improving," Chris lifted his bottle, "and I have to tell you I'm about to feast on improving."

"What?" Jack asked.

"I won't be playing racquetball or hanging around the office much for a while. I'll be listening to songs sung by an angel and basking in her glow," he said.

"Who?"

"Remember Megan Deschamps, the singer who knocked me out at the Bowl?"

"Oh, yeah. That petite little brunette."

“Right. Well, before she left LA, I sent her a big bouquet of roses and an email asking her if it would be okay if I came up to Seattle, where she’s singing next week.”

“And...?”

“And I just got an email from her, saying she’d be happy to chat with me at Jazz Alley, the club where she’s appearing.”

“Okay, that’s good for one evening. What’s the big announcement about?”

“I told you at the Bowl that I was going to marry her. And that’s what I plan on doing.”

“Isn’t this a little premature? You haven’t even talked to her yet,” said Jack, shaking his head.

“No, Jack, I’m serious. I know that I’m going to be following her around the country, wherever her bookings take her. I want to be with this woman, and I’m sure we can build a relationship.”

“You were never ambiguous before, and you’re sure not now,” said Jack. There was a ripe pause, then he asked, “But what about Siegfried Idyll?”

“I’ve thought about that, too,” answered Chris. “I know that the project is at a critical stage right now, and I don’t intend to ignore it. I just won’t be in a hands-on position for much of the time. But we both know how much we can do online. And I’ll be in touch with you and the staff whenever I need to be.”

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Six months later, Chris opened the door to Antica Venezia, a lovely Italian restaurant in the West Village. Megan was sitting at a corner table, waiting for him. She was drinking a glass of red wine, and, as he approached her, he motioned to the waiter and said, “What she’s having.”

She smiled when she saw him, and he bent down and lightly kissed her soft mouth. She tasted of Barolo.

“You’re early,” said Chris.

“We finished the rehearsal earlier than I expected,” she answered, “so I just came down here to relax.”

Megan had been extra tense these last few days, thought Chris. “Are you okay? Is everything all right?”

She looked at him and started to say something, but paused as the waiter brought Chris’s wine.

“No, Chris. I guess you could say everything’s NOT all right.” She took a sip of her wine. Her hand was shaking. “Goddamit!” She started to cry and blotted her eyes with her napkin. “Chris, we have to split up.”

“Wh...?”

“I just can’t handle this. You’re wonderful and thoughtful and generous and smart. But you’re all over me! Every time I turn around, you’re there, doing something nice for me, or giving me something beautiful, or just listening to me sing, or rehearse, or probably looking at me when I’m asleep and snoring.

“But of course I’m with you,” answered Chris. “I love you, and I want to be with you. I thought you wanted to be with me, too.”

“Oh, I do! I do! Shit! I don’t know what I want! All I know is, I need to be alone for a while. Please, just give me some time by myself.” She swallowed the rest of her wine, wiped her mouth and eyes with the napkin and stood up. I’ve already paid for both glasses of wine. You

see, I'm getting to know you quite well," she said. "I have to go now. Don't follow me," and she walked out of the restaurant.

Chris checked out of his hotel and caught the next flight back to LA. The next morning, he was at the office of his newest startup at seven o'clock, reading emails and memos and catching up on the progress that had been made on the company's newest product, code name Siegfried Idyll, a new format that would revolutionize file sharing on the Internet. He worked tirelessly, but quietly, talking only about the project, and, when Jack asked about Megan, simply saying, "She's on vacation, Jack."

Twenty-seven days later, Chris opened an email from Megan. The subject simply said "Us."

Dear Chris,

First of all, I want to thank you for abiding by my wishes and leaving me alone to think things through. I've been thinking about you and me. A lot. There've been times when it felt like you were stalking me. Maybe you were. I know that you've told me how you fell in love with me that night at the Bowl. Well, I didn't fall in love with you so instantly. But now I realize that I do love you. I'll be in Monterey for the jazz festival on the 8th. I'd love to see you there. I miss you.

Megan

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John Anderson, the ship's captain smiled and said, "I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may celebrate your new marriage with a kiss."

Following the ceremony the staff had moved the chairs out of the way to create a good-sized dance floor on the sun deck for the reception. Chris started to lead Megan onto the dance

floor as Buddy Johnson, Megan's pianist, began the intro to "Our Love Is Here To Stay" for the couple's first dance. Suddenly the roar of a low-flying helicopter drowned out the band, and the group looked up. No damned helicopter is going to ruin our wedding dance, thought Chris. A cry came from the group, and someone screamed, "Megan!!!" Instinctively, Chris jerked her to him and pulled her into his arms. A split-second later, a body slammed onto the deck where Megan had been standing.

Actually, it wasn't a body, quite yet. It was a middle-aged Chinese dressed in an expensive dark suit and tie who obviously had fallen from the passing helicopter. He had landed on his back and shoulder, and a pool of blood grew under the right side of his head. His eye caught Chris as he moved to the man and knelt beside him. The man reached up and grabbed Chris's arm and his lips moved, but Chris couldn't understand what he said. It was in Chinese, "Tu something something." Chris felt Megan's hand on his back. "Ting bu dong," she said, "I didn't understand you," but the man's hand dropped to the deck, and he lay still. Chris felt for the artery in his neck. Nothing. He was dead. There were tears in his open eyes, whether from pain or sorrow, Chris didn't know, but he reached out and gently closed the man's eyes.

"Chris, I'm having the captain call the police," Jack said, as he left for the bridge.

Chris looked up, then followed the sound of the departing chopper. By now, it had passed the Star Ferry Terminal and was merely a shadow over Kowloon, and he couldn't make out any detail. He and Megan stepped away from the dead body, and the grief-stricken party surrounded them.