



EIGHT

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FINDING EACH OTHER

Fran's Story

BOTH MY PARENTS wanted me to go to college because they knew I had a one-track mind: ever since Neal had gotten sick as a young boy, I'd been determined to become a nurse. Mom and Dad never tried to persuade me otherwise. We came from a long line of farmers, but nursing was a profession that also ran in the family: my great-grandmother had worked as a practical nurse in the 1800s.

Because I was only seventeen when I graduated from high school, I decided to stay home for a year before applying to a nursing program. I continued to help my mom around the house and with the gardening, and that year we also raised chickens. Mother ordered some baby chicks through a catalog company and two weeks later we picked them up from the post office, where they arrived packed in a big square box divided into four sections.

Finally, a year after my high school graduation, it was time for me to go to college. That spring I applied to the nursing school at Swedish Hospital in Minneapolis, where Neal had been treated a decade earlier. Back then, as a little girl terrified of losing her older brother, I had watched as the nurses in their white uniforms cared for

*Opposite: Harry & Fran,
Spring Formal, 1950*

Neal and then, miraculously, made him better. I knew this was where I belonged. After an interview with the admissions office, I checked the mail each day for notification of my acceptance. Finally, a letter arrived.

I was rejected.

After so many years of envisioning myself as a nursing student at Swedish Hospital, this was a huge disappointment. In high school I had taken all the science and mathematics courses to prepare myself for nursing school, but now I wouldn't get the chance to study there after all.

Harry's Story

Choosing a girlfriend is a hit or miss thing. For me, it was mostly a miss—I got turned down by lots of girls!

Most women are like a candy bar: half sweet and half nuts. That was the case with Jean McDxxxx. I met her one day when a college friend invited me to take a study break. We walked down to the drug-store for a soda, and Jean was working behind the counter. She was seven years younger than me and a member of my church. We started dating but it didn't last long. I pity the man who married her. She was fickle-minded as can be.

Once when I was on an outing in the country with my nature class, I stopped to help a couple classmates whose car had broken down on the way back to St. Paul. The girls had pulled to the side of the road and were standing outside their car, crying.

"Muggs," someone said, "you need to go help those girls out."

I walked over and popped open the hood.

"The fan belt left go," I told Cindy and her friend Betty. I was

pretty shy with girls, but I knew my way around cars. "We need to catch a ride into town to buy a new one."

After I got the car fixed, the girls asked how much they owed me.

"Not one red cent." I wasn't going to take any money off them.

"Well, then," Cindy said, "suppose we stop at a tavern and have a beer?"

What the hell is going on here?

I wondered to myself. I had no

problem with girls drinking beer, but two eighteen-year olds asking me to go for a drink? I knew it was the only thing they could think to do for me after I fixed the car, since I wouldn't take any money for it, but it struck me wrong. In addition to that, I didn't care for beer. I turned down their offer, and we all walked away feeling embarrassed.

I had a whole different experience with the next girl I met.



Harry, circa 1953

Fran's Story

After that first blow of disappointment, I decided to change tack. The Swedish Hospital wasn't the only nursing program around. If I couldn't go there, I would find a different school to attend. I applied to the University of Minnesota and was accepted for the fall semester.

If moving from a one-room schoolhouse to the Belle Plaine High School was a big step, starting college was an enormous leap. I went from a small-town high school class of thirty-five to a campus of twenty-five thousand students in the big city of Minneapolis. As my