

TWELVE

Mary sat in the passenger seat of Erik's car as the windshield wipers slapped back and forth, trying to figure out the best way to "break up" with him. She had let the whole thing go too far. Erik had turned into a slave to her family's computers, and her heart . . . her heart seemed to have forgotten this was all pretend. It was time to stop the farce and go back to living in the real world, even if it hurt. "Erik, I think we should stop seeing each other."

She waited for Erik to say something, but he remained silent all the way up to her door, ducking in the rain.

"So, what do think about what I said about 'breaking up'?" She sort of chuckled to make light of it and made quotation marks with her fingers.

Erik opened his mouth as though he were going to say something, then closed it and worked his jaw back and forth. She waited for him to say something, anything. Instead, he cupped her face in his hands and kissed her. He stared at her a moment, then walked back out into the rain to his car and drove away.

What was that about?

He's the one.

He is?

But he was gone. She picked up her phone and dialed his cell phone. It went straight to voicemail. At the beep she spoke. "Erik, if you get this message before you get too far away, I was wondering if you'd come back, so we can talk?"

As she pressed the OFF button, she heard a car door shut outside and went to the window. Erik was hurrying up her walk through the downpour.

She opened the door before he reached it so he could get out of the rain. "I was just leaving you a message."

He took off his coat and hung it on the back of a chair. "My phone was off."

She went to her couch. "Do you want to sit down and talk?"

He sat next to her. "Words are not my forte."

"Well, I suggested we call things off, and you didn't say anything. Then you kissed me and left. You can start with either one, because I'm just a bit confused."

He took her hand. "I know we started out pretending, but after about five minutes, it was real for me. I don't want to break up. I didn't know what to say, so I kissed you."

It was real. It was all real after all. She smiled. "We would have to reinstate the no computer rule with my family. I'm going to be stingy about my time with you."

He pulled her close and kissed her again.

Six Months Later

Phoebe entered the bride's room and handed Mary a note from Erik.

My Dearest Mary,

On our first "date" you asked me what my given first name was. I told you I would tell you someday. Someday has come. It's Grant.

I couldn't believe it when you introduced yourself as Mary Grant. It was exactly what I hoped you'd do—marry Grant. I

heard this voice I could have sworn was audible that said, "She's the one." And I knew you were the one for me.

So, today, your thirtieth birthday, you are fulfilling your name. I will be forever grateful for that. I can't wait to see you coming down the aisle toward me.

Happy Birthday, my love.

Grant Eriksen