

# An Old-Fashioned Relationship

By

Megan McCoy

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# Table of Contents:

Chapter One .....	5
Chapter Two.....	12
Chapter Three.....	22
Chapter Four .....	32
Chapter Five.....	41
Chapter Six.....	50
Chapter Seven .....	54
Megan McCoy .....	65
EBook Offer.....	66
Blushing Books Newsletter.....	67
Blushing Books.....	68

# Chapter One

Jo looked up at the Sunday School room door, as yet another kid came in to the room. How many did she have this year? This was her fifth year teaching Sunday School, but her first year in middle school, with the tweens and early teens. That teacher had ‘retired’ and no one else wanted the junior high kids, not that anyone said that in so many words, of course. But several people eagerly wanted the preschoolers she had taught for five years now. So she graciously moved on up, for at least a trial period, but figured she could do this! Besides, it might be fun to teach kids who could actually read and maybe sit still for an hour and use scissors. Who knew? She guessed she’d find out.

Sunday School was her hobby, teaching and learning with the kids was much different from doing the taxes and bookkeeping she did during the week. Besides, her weekends seemed very long and lonely without the bright spot of laughing children on Sunday morning. Not that she would confess to that, of course. She didn’t want anyone to feel sorry for her. Her husband died about eight years ago, both her kids lived a couple states away, one ready to graduate college, and the other interning what seemed a hundred hours a week in medical school. Sure, she could move closer to one, or both, of them if she wanted to, but she wasn’t ready to leave her home, her friends, or her job that she actually enjoyed. Not just yet, anyway. One day, though, she knew she probably would, especially if they married and gave her the gift of grandchildren a few years down the road. Hopefully, it would be a few years. She didn’t think either of them was ready for that step. Not that it was her decision, of course.

So, no moving in her near future. Besides, she had a new big project at work, hopefully bringing in a lot of new business for her company, and she’d just committed to a year of teaching Sunday School again. Even though she took her commitments seriously, she gave a little shiver, as she looked around the room, at all the big kids. At least big compared to the three and four year olds down the hall. On the upside, no one was crying for their mom, and she was pretty sure no one would pee in their pants today. One of the pluses of teaching tweens and she hoped there would be many more.

“Is this sixth grade?” A very handsome man popped his head in the door.

Goodness! Jo smiled at him thinking he looked like one of the commercials on TV. Dark hair, with enough silver in it to make him distinguished, about her age, she figured, and well built—as if he had a gym membership and knew how to use it. Tall, well dressed, and dragging an obviously unhappy young boy by the arm.

“Sixth and seventh,” she said. “This is?” She looked at the scowling child. Yeah, she knew how to deal with that. Three or twelve, little boys were the same.

“My son, Noah. I’m Kent Harrison; we just moved to town and wanted to get established in a church home. It’s our first visit here,” he said, propelling Noah into the room.

Jo smiled, knowing there was nowhere in the world Noah would rather not be right now. Same as most of the other boys in the room. The girls were a little different; they enjoyed the looser rules and the socialization that Sunday School offered, as opposed to real school.

“Glad to meet you, Kent. I’m Jo Flannigan, and I run herd over this area. Noah, you can sit over there by Israel, and start to work on the word search before class. There are pencils on the table, help yourself. Kent, do you know where the adult Bible Study is? I know they would love to have you,” Jo suddenly wished she were in adult Bible Study instead of here with all these children. But oh well, her hormones could just go settle back down. Where there was a handsome man and a kid, there was also a wife, maybe a trophy wife, who might be lurking in the hall, or working or who knew where. None of her business, in any case.

“Down the hall, where the smell of coffee is coming from?” He smiled at her and suddenly her knees went weak. She obviously had not had enough of that coffee today. Or had just been without a male in her life too long. Probably both.

“Yup, that’s the place. I’ll dismiss the kids in about an hour. See you then!” Another perk of teaching older kids was that she could just tell them to leave, send them out in the hall, and be done, instead of waiting for a parent to show up and get them. She was looking forward to that.

“See you in an hour, then,” he said, and headed out down the hall. She sighed, and turned to face her scowling group of kids. “All right then, let’s get started with a prayer.”

\* \* \*

An hour later, Mary poked her head in the room, “You survive?” she asked, cheerfully, over the stream of kids heading out the door, her baldhead covered with a bright red bandana today. She’d lost all her hair from chemo treatments.

“I think so,” Jo laughed. “Let me check, yup, all limbs still attached. Actually, it was fun to work with kids who can read, and carry on a semi reasonable discussion. Are you going to late church?”

Mary taught the fourth and fifth grades across the hall from her, and as far as Jo could tell, did it wonderfully well, despite her illness. “No, I went to early service. Steve and I are going out to eat. I actually feel like eating so, yay! Thought I’d see if you wanted to join us.”

“Oh, thanks for the offer, but maybe another time. I’m going to go to late church then go home and catch up on some chores before work tomorrow. But you and Steven enjoy yourselves. I’ll join you soon, though.”

“Sounds like a nice day, enjoy. See you next week, then!” Mary waved, heading down the hall.

\* \* \*

Two hours later, Jo waved to Mary across the crowded restaurant as she and Kent walked in together. How had that happened? She hadn’t been on a date in years. Why was she on one now, with no notice and no time to worry? She wasn’t certain. But, she was certain Mary would be calling her for details, so she’d better figure it out.

Kent had slid into the pew beside her at the late service, and the next thing she knew, her stomach was growling and he was insisting they have a bite to eat after church. His son was going to his new friend’s house, and he would be all alone in a new town. It was the neighborly, friendly thing to do, she’d told herself as she accepted what probably really wasn’t a date, but more of gesture of kindness. That’s all.

Suddenly, she felt better and less dazed and decided to just enjoy herself. Why not? She’d have a good time with anyone else she’d have brunch with after church. Just because he was tall, dark and very handsome, didn’t mean she couldn’t enjoy the best Belgium waffles in town.

“Where did you move from?” She asked him as the cute little waitress put the plates in front of them. She realized she hadn’t eaten since yesterday noon, just totally forgot about it last night. That was a perk of living alone. She didn’t have to cook unless she wanted to. It was also a downside, because she really loved to cook, especially for a crowd. Holidays were coming! The kids would be coming home for her food.

“We moved from Denver, my company transferred me out here,” he said, cutting his waffle. He’d taken her suggestion for the best thing on the menu. She liked that.

“Big change from all those mountains to the flatlands of Illinois,” Jo said. “Do you like it so far?”

“It’s different. We lived in Ohio for a while, so it’s really not that dissimilar. Oh, man, that is good!”

“Told you,” she smiled at him. “I know my waffles.” She really wanted to talk about his wife, or lack thereof, but was trying to figure out a polite, subtle way to do it—without being too obvious. “Where else have you lived?”

“All over. I guess since I got this job fifteen years ago, the longest we were anywhere was Nashville. Sarah, my wife, liked her oncologist there, so I turned down a few promotions so she could be stable as long as she could. Then after she passed, Noah and I moved on.” He said it casually, as if it were a practiced speech.

It probably was. She had one too, about how her husband died. *I went to work in the morning. He was on his computer and told me good-bye. I kissed the top of his head and left for work, thinking he’d be leaving in a while for his job. When I came home that night, he was still there, slumped over, and was gone when the EMTs got there.*

“I’m sorry,” she said. “How old was Noah?”

“He was three the day after we buried his mom. I didn’t want to do it on his birthday. It just seemed wrong.” Kent continued to eat as he related the story she was sure he’d told many times. People seemed to want to know how your spouse died, she knew. Her theory was that it was to reassure themselves it wouldn’t, *couldn’t*, happen to them.

“I don’t know if it’s harder or easier when the kids are smaller. Mine were early teens when their dad passed. Luckily, they are both great. My daughter is in med school, and my son is getting ready to graduate with a degree in business accounting.”

“None of its easy. I was an older dad, too. My wife was quite a bit younger than I was. Never thought I’d outlive her,” he shook his head and took a sip of coffee.

“Life is odd,” she agreed, and took another bite of waffle, strawberries, and whipped cream. She’d have to do some major time on the treadmill later, but it was very worth it.

“Noah is, what, twelve now? You ever thought about getting married again?” she asked so casually, she was certain he didn’t think a thing of it. Just conversation! Nothing more.

Kent grinned at her, “My wife and I had a special kind of marriage, and not many women want to...” he paused. Obviously, this didn’t come as easily or wasn’t as practiced as his ‘how

she died' speech. "Want to be in an old fashioned kind of relationship and I know I wouldn't be happy in any other kind."

Jo choked on her waffle. Did he mean what she thought he meant? Old fashioned? As in... no... couldn't be. He probably meant she stayed at home and took care of the house and family. Washed his clothes and cooked his dinner. Not old fashioned like her Henry had been. Surely not. That would be just, strange. Sure there were people out there in the land of the internet that she knew—or at least they claimed—to live an 'old fashioned relationship,' but she never knew anyone in real life who did, except for Henry, well and her, of course. Yes, cooking, cleaning and kid caring, that was all he meant. Naturally. He didn't mean he had been the head of the house, and paddled his wife's butt regularly, like Henry had done to her.

Jo felt quite certain of that.

Quite.

\* \* \*

Three dates later, she wasn't quite so certain.

In fact, she was very uncertain.

It was his first night over at her house for dinner. He'd taken her out a couple times, and since he wouldn't let her pay, or even leave the tip! Every other date she'd been on had let her tip at least! She wanted to reciprocate by cooking him one of his favorite meals. He told her that he loved meatloaf, mashed potatoes, gravy and homemade bread. She could do that with one hand tied behind her back. No worries at all.

Feeling domestic in her small but well laid out kitchen, Jo had the bread rising, the ground beef and sausage mixed, and was chopping onions and peppers to put in the mix when he called. Already, even after just three dates, seeing his number pop up on the screen made her smile.

She remembered the handful of dates she'd have over the past few years and couldn't remember the last time she'd smiled this much, with, or about, a man. This man made her happy. Strange but true. She hadn't been this happy since Henry died. They hadn't made love yet, but she was hoping it would be soon, despite her nerves. She wasn't young and perky anymore after all. She knew he realized that, but still. Maybe he didn't. His wife had been younger apparently, and gravity hadn't hit her. Had he had older lovers since? Maybe he had one much older and she would seem just fine in places she didn't feel just fine any more. Wistful thinking, she knew.



Did he need little blue pills? Would he take them if he did? She might not be young and perky but she was too young to not desire. Desire she did, so much. Maybe tonight, they could scratch her itch.

Or at least they could go a little further than the necking and teen age making out they'd done in his car. She ached for him to pull her breasts out of her brand new lacey pink bra, to undo the front clasp and let them spill into his hands. For his mouth to lick and twirl her nipples, for his hands to stroke, and his tongue to send her into spasms of need. Maybe she could keep them from drooping by sheer will power? Probably not. Would he care?

Was she too old? Was he? She hoped not, because that simply wasn't near all she wanted. She couldn't wait for a bout of good heart-pounding sex as much as she was terrified of it. Yes. She knew that made no sense, but since no one knew but her, it didn't matter. She supposed she'd have to tell him of her nerves at some point if it went much further, but not yet. It was only date three, four if you counted the waffles.

Oh sure, she knew the kids thought of date three as 'the closer date'. But, she wasn't a kid. She was a grown up woman that had been hit with the gravity stick, and she was nervous. He'd have to get her past that. If he wanted it too. Her mind needed to stop racing. Ha! Like that could happen.

But for now, he just wanted a meal with her, food, nourishment. Good, old-fashioned comfort food, and her good old-fashioned, hopefully interesting, company. He seemed to find her interesting anyway.

Jo put the potatoes on to cook and, after dousing it in a luscious tomato and brown sugar sauce, popped the meatloaf in the oven. There were green beans she'd canned last summer to put on the stove and the bread was cooling on the rack. She'd made a lovely lemon meringue pie for dessert, but she really hoped she'd be dessert. Look at her! She'd created company supper.

Now, to make herself company ready. As she changed into a favorite deep purple silk blouse, and her favorite black maxi skirt, she pondered, trying to decide if she did or didn't want sex tonight. Well, she knew she wanted it, and very badly, but the issue seemed to be if it was too early in the relationship. Well, hopefully it would be a mutual decision at some point. She just wouldn't worry her pretty little head about it, much, anymore. A decision. She loved it when a plan came together.

She thought back to the last dinner they'd had together, while she applied her make up. She'd told him about a small Mexican place that had recently opened to rave reviews. He'd stopped by and picked her up, which she adored. Meeting him at the restaurant had seemed prudent the first couple of times, but now, she knew enough about him to give him access to her address. Jo knew it seemed silly, she knew he probably would have googled her like she had him, and found it out, but to her that was a huge step! Just to simply offer it freely. She'd been proud of herself. When he opened the car door for her, and shut it behind her, she knew it was the right decision. She rarely got pampered, and decided she liked it.

They'd had a lovely time, as always. They had so much in common--travel experiences, they both loved the same beaches in Michigan and Florida, they both wanted to ride a mule to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. They read many of the same authors. They both loved Mexican food, but neither had been to Mexico, and they both thought one margarita was plenty, and yet required, for the hot spicy food they were enjoying.

They did have one small place where they disagreed. Well, it hadn't even been a disagreement. Just a chat, she'd thought. He was telling her about his golf handicap and the difficulty he was having finding a new personal trainer in town. Jo's mind kept flashing back to that conversation. "What do you do for regular exercise?" he'd asked her.

She'd wrinkled her nose, and took a sip of her salty tart drink and confessed, "Not much. I take a walk once in a while, but that's about all. I just don't make the time for it I should."

"And what does your doctor say about that," he'd said in a rather stern tone that startled her, because it was so different from his usual kindness.

"I'm pretty healthy, I don't see her often...." Her voice trailed as his dark eyebrows thundered together. Oh, that didn't look good. What?

He took a breath, as if to calm himself, and then looked her in the eye and said, very calmly, "If any woman of mine didn't schedule exercise and regular doctor checkups into her routine, I'd blister her butt till she couldn't sit down for a week."

Then he'd taken a drink of his margarita and ordered dessert for them both while she sat in stunned silence.