

## **Heart of a Traveler**

### **by Fay Faron**

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## CHAPTER 1

### Teetotaling Virgin

March - July 1965 Premiere of movie, "The Sound of Music;" First combat troops arrive in Vietnam; Martin Luther King Jr. leads 25,000 in march from Selma to Montgomery; Vietnam war protesters march on Washington; Sonny & Cher release "I Got You Babe"

NICK DROVE OUT past Thunderbird Road, which was pretty much the end of civilization as far as Phoenix was concerned back in 1965. He pulled over, yanked a bottle of tequila from beneath his seat and took a swig.

"Want some?" he asked, wiping his mouth.

"Thanks," I replied. "Not thirsty."

Well, this was going rather well, I thought. A year ago, Nick The Quarterback would never even have asked me out. I'm not quite sure what changed exactly, but I wasn't asking any questions. Still, make no mistake, for a nobody such as myself, this was a big deal.

You see, I was born a teetotaling virgin. Okay, let's face it, we all were. The difference is I was expected to stay that way until the day I married the organist player at church—whatever that happened to be at the moment—and toasted my nuptials with sparkling cider along with my parents and 350 of their closest right-wing, fundamentalist Christian friends. So the very fact that my father even let me go out with Nick The Quarterback was a miracle right up there with Jesus Walking on Water.

For my Bible-thumping patriarch, there was good and there was evil—and everything in between was evil. Still, Dad's world was fairly easy to navigate once you got the hang of it. Republicans were good. Democrats were bad. Baptists were good. Catholics were bad. Mormons were *really, really* bad. Sex outside of marriage was completely, exceedingly, *really, really* bad—aka non-negotiable—except if you happened to be the Virgin Mary, which Dad had no need to remind me, I wasn't.

Thus far, my parents had had it pretty easy as far as teenage angst goes. While my schoolmates were sassing back, shooting guns off in the desert, skipping classes and doing wheelies in the parking lot of the strip mall, I was an obedient child, tucked away in my room, the lilac walls covered in travel posters, watching *The Dick Van Dyke Show* on a 13" black & white TV I bought myself.

To ensure we were *in the world but not of the world*, my brother Daniel and I were driven to church activities—but if we wanted to attend school events, we had to walk. It wasn't that we were actually forbidden to attend dances, football games and after-school clubs, but neither were we encouraged. My brother and I lived in an insular world where everyone at our church could have lived to be 100 and not have had enough drama to pen a best-selling memoir between them.

Yet even in this world of innate goodness, we were expected to be the best of the best—a beacon of light so dazzling that strangers would stop us on the street and say they wanted what we had. This would be our cue to whip out our Bibles and save their sorry butts. I don't recall such an inquiry ever having been made, but I memorized John 14:6 just in case.

Only once did I attempt to become a leader. My sophomore year, a cute boy in my homeroom class took to climbing up and changing the clock forward five minutes whenever the teacher left the room. One day, he got caught. The teacher ushered us all outside while she wrote up Jerry's detention slip. I rallied a small group of quasi-enthusiastic supporters and convinced them that if we stuck together, they couldn't possibly punish us all. It was the right thing to do, I argued. After all, we were the ones egging Jerry on.

We marched back into home room and I began my impassioned plea, even as my beloved gave me the hairy eyeball. *Blah-de-blah-blah*, went my little speech, ending with, "Isn't that right, kids?" I turned to find myself utterly alone. A general without an army. A ship without a fleet. A singer without a band. A preacher without a congregation.

"Never mind," I said, backing out of the room. *Do with him what you will.*

But this date with Nick was sure to be a game-changer. A couple more of these and I would officially become *Nick's Girl*, a sure-fire stepping stone to Prom Princess. Of course, I would have to convert Nick from Catholicism to Christianity in order to marry him, but how hard could that be?

"SO, YA WANNA do it?" asked Nick, wiping the Tequila off his chin with the back of his hand.

"Huh?" I'd almost forgotten him, I was so busy figuring out how to get my dad to let me marry him.

"Well, do you?" he asked.

*And what is this "it" of which you speak?* —I did not say. I knew it couldn't possibly be *The It* because nobody in high school did *That It*. There must be some other *It* I didn't know about. Of course, I couldn't admit I'd never heard of *This Other It*, so instead I said, "I donno. Do you?"

Nick assured me he did.

"So, you safe?"

Yet another puzzling question. I thought on this first of many dates, we might talk about football or something else I wasn't remotely interested in. But, *nooooo*. Instead we were talking about something I had no idea what we were talking about. And I was fairly certain "safe" didn't refer to the rats that tended to nest in beehive hairdos because I was wearing my hair in a flip that night.

*Oh, duh! The Hook Guy!*

The true story went like this: There's this couple out parking when they hear on the radio there's a one-armed escapee from the loony bin headed for Lover's Lane. The girl freaks out and wants to go home. The boy wants to stay and have

an orgasm. The boy finally gets ticked off and peels out. When they arrive home, the boy goes around to let the girl out and finds a bloody hook hanging from the door handle.

*Eeeekkkkk!!!!*

I looked around to make sure we were safe. What a thoughtful fellow my impending boyfriend was.

Aside from a few more perplexing questions, Nick wasn't much of a talker. I was a little disappointed about the meal and the movie, but I figured this might even be better. We'd have a little chat, maybe a little above-the-neck necking if we ran out of things to chat about—

"Anytime you wanna stop, we'll stop."

"Yeah—really?"

"C'mon, work with me here! I'm meeting the guys back behind Pedro's for a fight at ten."

"Anytime I wanna stop, we'll stop?" I muttered to myself, buying time. "That's the deal?"

"That's the deal, Pussycat."

Well, who could say no to that? I'd just wait around and see what the *It* turned out to be. Then I could "yea," or "nah"—depending. Meanwhile, anytime I wanted to stop, we'd stop.

That settled, Nick took off his tie.

*Okay, that made some sense because it was kind of hot out here in the desert, even at night.*

Then he took off his shirt.

*All right, it might be hot. But seriously, not that hot.*

Off came his shoes. His socks.

Meanwhile, what was I taking off? Nothing. Nada. Zip. Not so much as an earring. And my clip-ons were killing me.

Then I heard it.

*Zzzzzzip!!!!!!!*

*"Stoooop!!!!!!"*

UNFORTUNATELY, NICK TURNED out to be very anti-groovy about the whole stopping thing. He peeled out faster than lovers with The Hook Guy scraping at their window.

The next day, I passed the quarterback in the breezeway. He pointed at me and started faux-yanking on his ding-dong while his pals dissolved in laughter. And then I distinctly heard him say, "Aw, she weren't nuthin' but a virgin 'til I gotta hold'a her!"

*And he said it like it was a bad thing.*

Anyway that's how I found out that Nick the Quarterback was going around saying we'd *Done It*.

You know, *It*.

Gone all the way.

Played bury the sausage.

Planted the flag.

Danced the horizontal mambo-jambo.

And we so had not! Not at all! Heck, we hadn't even gone one-tenth of the way to *The Only Way* I even knew about.

And after that, the harassment really began. Whether real or imagined, I envisioned myself the butt of every joke whispered in the halls of Sunnyslope High, especially whenever Nick was anywhere in the vicinity. Okay, sure I was a self-absorbed, melodramatic teenage drama queen, but then how do you explain this?

First, there was the note shoved into my locker. It was on lined paper, torn from a spiral notebook, written in pencil and addressed to "Faye," which, by the way, is not my name.

"BABY DOLL," it read—which, again, is also is not my name.

*"I will meet you tonight after the basketball game in the middle of the football field. It will be dark enough... You bring the blankets and I will bring myself, see you to nigh, (sic) baby.*

*Lucky"*

Of course, I didn't go. And not just because I wasn't allowed out at night. First off, I didn't even know a "Lucky," let alone was there anyone in the yearbook by that name. But I wouldn't have gone anyway since I had no intention of throwing away my unclaimed treasure on some dip-puck who didn't know how to spell, "tonight," let alone, "Fay."

Was it Nick or his friends? I'll never know. Along with whoever managed to tee-pee my house, twice, in the dead of night. Then there was the duck relocated from Encanto Park and deposited in my back yard. And the pineapple and anchovy pizza that arrived C.O.D. at midnight—which, okay, turned out to be surprisingly delicious, so I'm letting that one go.

It took six weeks to formulate my revenge.

Back then, Fry's Food Store employed cute high school boys to follow the ladies out to their cars and unload their groceries. Nick was one of those guys. One afternoon, I became one of those ladies. When we reached my parents' Rambler station wagon, I inquired politely, "Might I speak with you a moment?"

"Yeah, what'da'ya want?"

"I'm pregnant."

*Ka-boom!* The quarterback looked like he'd been hit by a linebacker.

"You can't be," he stammered. "I never touched you!"

"Well, I know that, and you know that, but there's all those people you went out and told—"

I waited while he clutched his heart.

Getting a girl pregnant back in 1965 meant one thing and one thing only. Nick, you're getting married! And though, quite obviously, the "baby" could not possibly have been his, with DNA testing not yet invented, what's a guy with a promising future as a bag boy to do?

The 1965 Recant Tour of Sunnyslope High School was what he was supposed to do.

Which was exactly what Nick did.

WITH MY DREAMS of becoming Mrs. Nick forever quashed, I went back into my lilac room to what I did best—clipping pictures out of *Seventeen* magazine and pasting them in a big spiral notebook.

Beautiful girls in berets posing prettily in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

Long-limbed creatures in jaunty Carnaby St. caps jumping off red double-decker buses in London.

Short-skirted young lovelies on the backs of Vespas, circling the Coliseum in Rome.

Someday, I would be that girl, I vowed. Not now, of course, because I was gangly and freckled, and my curly hair never went straight, no matter how long I ironed it.

But someday I would blossom into a relative beauty—due mostly to the tips from *Seventeen* magazine. And I would go abroad and speak in my adorable Phoenician accent—which wasn't an accent at all right now because everyone sounded like me. And I would finally be cute and have a lot of boyfriends.

And I did so want to be cute. And I so wasn't.