

## **Longer Than – A Christmas Love Story**

**By Dr. Katherine E.A. Korkidis**

It is 4:45 pm and Ms. Rose Delvechio rushes to catch the 4:48 pm express train from NYC's Grand Central Station to her small apartment in Stamford, CT. It is Friday and the station is crowded with commuters and people coming into the city to visit the famous tree at Rockefeller center. All the store windows are decorated for the season, bringing joy to children and adults alike. The city brings the spirit of the season to all its inhabitants. Smiles and kindness prevails. As Rose enters the train, she finds one available seat next to a man reading documents in hand. She politely asks if this seat is available. Without moving his eyes away from his documents he responds, "yes". Rose sits and takes out her reading for the journey home. The train pulls out of the station and heads north. In a moment of pause from reading, Rose looks over at her aloof companion and feels a sense of recognition. The man is older, but his features reminds her of her first love thirty years ago. Could it be him? "No" she tells herself as she looks away. Too much time has passed. Even if it is him what good would that do. I am now alone after an emotionally draining marriage, and he is probably married. When we parted that day, we were sure it was forever. He left for another state far away and I stayed behind. We were young when we first met. It was our first day in law school. I always wanted to be a lawyer to follow the legacy of my father. He was recognized as an excellent litigator. Well respected and well loved by all that had the privilege of meeting him. As his daughter I had much to live up to and was determined to succeed. I was focused on the content of the orientation meeting as a young man walked in late and sat next to me. During our first break he turned to me and asked what had he missed. I was curt and judgmental in my response. He accepted it in stride and that was the beginning. Time passed and we became friends, studying partners, and eventually so much more. David Solomon proposed one day before

Christmas. My answer was an excited 'Yes'. He did not have much money of his own and he placed a thrift store bought ring on my finger with the promise of one day buying me a diamond replacement. I was content for he was the man of my dreams, and I looked forward to our future together.

Two days had passed, and I went over to his dorm room to meet him. His roommate was there, Joseph Mayer. David and Joseph were the best of friends since high school. Both pursued the law, and we would often go out altogether. Joseph did not seem to be interested in dating yet never seemed like a third wheel. He seemed upset on that day, and we began to talk while I waited for David to return.

“Joseph are you all set with your internship as yet.”

“Yes, I am due to report to the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office on Monday.”

“You must be very excited to begin. I know David is so proud to be your colleague.”

“I wish he was not.”

“Joseph, I do not understand? You are the best of friends, and it would be wonderful to work together.

“We are no longer friends. I cannot be friends with someone like him.”

“Joseph, why?”

“I do not wish to tell you.”

“Joseph, we are dear friends. You can tell me anything.”

“Rose, David has betrayed you.”

“I do not understand. How has he betrayed me?”

“Last night he was with a girl from our graduating class. They have been together often.”

“That makes no sense. He proposed to me and wishes to marry me. Why would he spend time with someone else?”

“That is why we argued. I was furious with him. I could not understand why he would hurt you this way. You are my friend and I care about you. He always chased after many girls, but I was convinced that he would not cheat on you.”

“I cannot believe this. David does not appear to be that way. He has always been faithful to me, or at least I thought so.”

“Rose, he is not the man you should marry. You must forget him.”

I confronted David and he denied all that was said by Joseph. Yet the doubt was cast, and I walked away from my first love. With time I began dating Joseph and we married. David left New York City and relocated to Florida to practice law. We never saw, nor spoke to each other after that day.

Life with Joseph was not what I had hoped for. While we dated, he was always attentive and loving. The day we married, all changed. He became possessive and controlling and our relationship with time became toxic. I cannot say he physically abused me, but his emotional control was present. I was not permitted to be close to my family nor to have friends. I was closely watched and was not allowed ‘alone’ time. I had to be by his side every minute of every day. I was not his partner but his slave. As I excelled at work, the degree of contentious increased. He even accused me of undermining his performance at work. Eventually he was fired and blamed me. His anger towards me escalated and came between us. I felt trapped and miserable. My colleagues begged me to leave

him. I was determined to make this work. It was not out of love for that emotion no longer existed. I had made a vow and wanted to hold on to our marriage. Eventually he left me no choice. The day he broke a vase over my head causing a concussion I knew. As much as I did not wish to leave, I had to go. So that day I filed for divorce.

I often thought about what he told me about David and wondered if it was true. Over the years I saw that manipulative side of Joseph. He told me that he wanted me as his wife since the first day we met in law school. Could he have lied about David? I took his story at face value. I dare not go there.

The train is nearing my station, and I must depart. I am torn by the past and cannot face David if indeed this man is my first love. So I packed my documents and left the train. I walked slowly to my car and returned home.

I could not sleep that night as I remembered a gentle man that I once loved that I hurt so badly by not trusting him. The next few weeks as the world prepared for Christmas, I had lost the spirit I once had in my heart. It has been so long since I felt the joy of this holiday. My anticipation brought such excitement. Both David and I loved the city during this season. I stopped celebrating any holidays, even birthdays, while married to Joseph. He took away my love of life. It was now time to bring it back.

Every year David and I would visit the tree at 30 Rockefeller Plaza. For more than eight decades, the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree has stood as a holiday beacon for all New Yorkers. While the lights, decorations, and stars have changed through the years, visiting the Tree remained a quintessential New York experience for David and me on Christmas Eve. There are more than 50,000 multi-colored LED lights on approximately 5 miles (8 km) of wire. Designed by architect

Daniel Libeskind in 2018, the three dimensional Swarovski star at the top of the tree weighs approximately 900 pounds and features 70 spikes covered in 3 million crystals. This year's iconic tree is an 80-foot-tall Norway spruce that measures 43 feet wide and weighs 12 tons. It's somewhere between 80 and 85 years old and hails from Vestal, New York, near Binghamton. It is a sight worth seeing.

I decided that this year I will visit the tree and ice skate, albeit alone, on the ice skating rink in Rockefeller Center. David and I loved ice skating. I have not done so in 30 years. This should be interesting.

It is Christmas Eve, and I am alone in my apartment. The cold has settled for the season. I dressed warmly and headed for the train to the city of New York. My mission is to visit the tree at Rockefeller Center and attempt to skate. Ice skating on The Rink under the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree is one of New York's wonderful winter experiences. For me it was where David proposed on Christmas Eve so long ago. As we were skating, he suddenly stopped, dropped to one knee, and asked me to marry him. As I said "yes", he stood up and hugged me tightly. We kissed and continued skating holding each other.

I arrived at the tree and photographed its beauty. I proceeded to the ice skating rink. I was hesitant at first because it has been many years, yet I was determined to try. I walked out on the ice gingerly and with much concern about falling. Luckily, I had a thick coat on in case I did. I ventured towards the center of the rink. All was well until a group of young people decided to skate close to me. I lost my tenuous balance and fell.

"Are you okay?" I heard a voice ask me.

"Yes, I think so. I do not feel I am hurt, just my pride."

“Let me help you up.”

“Thank you, I would be most grateful.”

As I stood up, I turned to look at my benefactor. To my surprise it was the man on the train. What is he doing here? I decided to inquire.

“Hello, my name is Rose. Thank you for helping me. I believe we met before.”

He looked puzzled.

“You do look very familiar, but I cannot place you. You say we met before. Where and when?”

“I sat next to you on the train away from the city a few weeks back.”

“Of yes, I believe I remember. I was reviewing some legal documents, and I am sure I was anti-social.”

“No I understood. Are you a lawyer?”

“Yes, I am. I am in New York City to meet a client.”

“Oh, you are not from the city?”

“Originally yes but for the last 30 years I have been living in Florida. How about you? Are you a native or visiting the city?”

“I am originally from Connecticut, but I have spent many years in New York City. I currently live in Connecticut.”

“I love Connecticut particularly in the winter. Many years ago I spent time there with a special friend. By the way my name is David.”

“If I am not being intrusive, can I ask you a question?”

“Certainly, we are old friends by now.”

“My name is Rose Delvechio. Is your name David Solomon?”

“Rose, is that really you? Yes, I am David Solomen. How could this be? It has been so long.”

“David it is so good to see you again. I have thought of you recently, especially since the recent train ride.”

“Why did you not say anything to me on the train?”

“It has been 30 years, and I was not sure it was you. Plus you were busy reading. I did not wish to disturb you.”

“Serendipity brought us back together twice. We must heed the call.”

“Do you remember the Blue Bottle Café?”

“Yes, of course I do. We often stopped by for their excellent espressos when we finished skating.”

We proceed to go to the café we often would frequent which is located around the corner from the ice skating rink, on the Rink Level, at the bottom of the steps leading down from 1 Rockefeller Plaza (entrance just off 48th Street). The Blue Bottle's coffee bar was a wonderful respite for us from the clamor and bustle of midtown Manhattan. We had much to choose from. The café served blends and seasonal single-origin espressos on two La Marzocco Strada MP espresso machines with the choice of many treats such as their pastries—all made in a kitchen in Brooklyn.

We ordered our espressos and sat to talk as we always did in the past.

David, do you have some time so we can get reacquainted?”

“Yes, of course. Always for you.”

“David tell me about your life after you left NYC.”

“There is not much to tell. I found a wonderful firm in Tampa, Florida. They have been kind to me over the years. I am until recently one of the senior partners of the firm. We are doing very well. Initially I wanted to join the DA’s office but decided to pursue environmental law instead. There is a great need for lawyers to protect the environment from abuse.”

“I too began in the DA’s office for a few years but switched to environmental law. Pursuing homicides was never a comfort zone for me. I work for the NY office of the EPA. I am currently a senior attorney.”

“Somehow, I felt we would have taken a similar path. Did you ever marry?”

“Yes, but I am in the process of seeking a divorce. I have three grown children, two boys and one girl. I wanted to wait until they left home to seek their futures before seeking mine. How about you, are you married.”

“No, I never married. I had a few relationships, but never made that final commitment.”

“Marriage can be good or bad. My marriage was good in the early stages but quickly turned bad.”

“I am so sorry to hear that that happened to you. Was it someone we knew once?”

“Yes, it was your roommate, Joseph. He was there to comfort me after our separation. He was kind and caring and I thought I loved him.”

“I do understand. Joseph did have a mean streak even then. He did tell me that he was attracted to you back then. I am glad he was there for you when you needed someone.”

“David I still do not understand why you had to seek the arms of someone else.”

“Rose, what are you talking about? You chose to leave me, and I never understood why until Joseph told me that you loved him and wish to marry him. I did the right thing and bowed out. I could not stand being around if you were going to marry Joseph, so I left.”

“David, I was in love with you, never with Joseph until many months after you left.”

“I do not understand.”

“Joseph told me that you confided in him that you were having many affairs while we were engaged. That is why I broke off our engagement.”

“Rose, I have only loved you then and now. I never betrayed my commitment to you. Never once. I was totally, body and soul, in love with you. That has not changed. That is why I never married!!”

“David, are you telling me that Joseph lied to me?”

“I suspect he did. I trusted him then as I assume you did. We were the best of friends. There was no reason to doubt him for either of us.”

“I am so sorry that I did not confront you directly and asked for an explanation.”

“I too am so sorry that I believed Joseph and did not confirm his lie with you. All those years wasted and lost. We would have been so happy together. Rose, I loved you deeply and I still do. You would have been my whole world.”

“David, I believe I would have been very happy with you. Can we start over?”

“Yes, but with one caveat. Let no one put us asunder. Agreed?”

“Agreed. I would like to spend time together, but you are so far away.”

“Rose, I have accepted a position here in the Northeast in lower CT, Stamford to be exact. It was time to return home. That is why I was on that train. I was visiting my father who was ill. I realized I was needed to be close to my family once again.”

“David I now live in Stamford. I have an apartment there. That is why I was on that train. I am so sorry to hear about your dad. I loved him and your mom very much.”

“They loved you too. They were devastated when we separated and never understood why. I could not tell them the truth as I knew it then. My mom passed a few years ago and I did not wish to leave my dad alone.”

“My parents felt the same way. They are both gone now. They loved you very much and could not understand why we parted. They never liked Joseph. They were convinced he was manipulative, mean, and a liar. They were so right. I too never told them why we separated. “

“Rose, let us put all the past where it belongs, behind us, and as you put it let us ‘start anew’. Rose, may I call you once I relocate? My move to Stamford will be complete over the next two weeks.”

“Of course, David. I am looking forward to getting to know you once again.”

“I too as well.”

“Let us part as old friends that have rediscovered each other once again. May I kiss you on the cheek goodbye for now.”

“Yes, but let us not say goodbye, but merely ‘until we meet again soon’.

“Until we meet again soon.”

David and Rose found each other again, married, and spent their golden years together. They both lived many happy years into their high 90s. They were always seen holding each other's hand.

They say that when Rose died at the age of 98, David passed a moment later. Their love was such that they could not spend a single moment without each other.

It was indeed a marriage made in Heaven.