

*Through an immensely painful breakup, Andrew Campbell realizes he'll have to drastically step up his game if he wants to reenter the dating world without having his heart broken again.*

## **Embracing the Tune of Love**

By Kristopher Paul

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# *Embracing the Tune of Love*



KRISTOPHER PAUL

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# **Chapter One**

## **Seeking the Comfort of Home**

It was one week into December when I decided to make the drive to the house I'd grown up in. I was fleeing New York City and heading for upstate New York. My mom had been living in that house by herself for over five years, ever since my dad passed away from a sudden heart attack.

My dad, now there was someone who had wisdom unsurpassed by fanciful dreamers like me. He'd warned me this could happen. He'd tried to prepare me to accept the possibility, but I didn't listen, and there I was, driving back home to move in with my mom, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Okay, over eight years ago, I fell in love with a ravishing dark-haired beauty named Briana. My name is Andrew by the way. Briana was a loan processor for a smaller bank in New York City. I accidentally bumped into her right after paying for a cup of coffee one morning in a coffee shop.

She'd been waiting right behind me, but I hadn't correctly guessed how close when I turned away from the front counter with a cup of hot coffee in my outstretched hand. Luckily, that first encounter was in November, so

she and I were dressed for colder weather, so neither of us got burned when I bumped right into her. She offered to let me share *her* cup of coffee with her, and that's how it all started. I couldn't believe chance had thrown such an incredible opportunity my way as I stood there and waited while Briana bought a cup of coffee. Most of the contents of my cup had spilled all over my black suit. That's how we first met and began to start seriously dating, but if things had stayed like that between us, I would never have decided to leave New York City.

Then, after over eight years of being in what I thought was a wonderful relationship as boyfriend and girlfriend, Briana decided to drop a bomb on me. She told me she needed to find a high-value man while she was still young. She explained that she felt my job in marketing wasn't paying a high enough salary. She made it very clear that she was dumping me and that she would be moving out of the apartment we'd been living in together.

Needless to say, I was totally devastated. Briana had been my whole world. I adored her. She was so beautiful to me that even when she had curlers in her hair in the evenings, I thought she couldn't have looked more beautiful. She was more precious to me than all the riches in the world, but according to her, I wasn't a high-value man, so none of that mattered.

My life changed after that. The loneliness of an empty apartment became unbearable. In the evenings while sitting alone in the apartment, it was almost as though I could hear faint echoes of Briana's sweet voice. On more than one occasion, I woke up in the middle of the night thinking she was asleep right next to me, but then I'd remember I was all alone. I'd considered getting a cat for company, but I knew that wouldn't help much. Everywhere I went to in the city reminded me of her in some way or another.

After several months of living like that, it finally occurred to me that I needed to get away from New York City. Living there was making me miserable with memories of the woman who'd meant the world to me. I mean, even just going out each morning to buy a cup of coffee to drink while walking to work made me sad. I'd always remember that first encounter. *Why can't it just happen all over again? Why can't I just walk in here to buy a cup of coffee and bump into Briana all over again?* I'd think to myself. I desperately wanted to be able to turn back the clock, but I knew that just wasn't possible. Our relationship was over. I'd scolded myself for underestimating the reality of hypergamy. It had never occurred to me that Briana might end the relationship so suddenly.

Which brings me back to my dad. My dad had owned and run a small lumber mill until he retired. When he retired, he sold the mill and made some very lucrative investments. Those investments had given my mom the means to retire from selling estate and to be financially comfortable. She retired shortly after he died.

Anyways, he'd warned me about Briana the first time she came to the house with me to meet my parents. He'd warned me to not get too attached to her and that the relationship could end at any time. He made the argument that a woman as beautiful as Briana had almost endless options in romantic partners. Naturally, I became incensed and assured him that we were in love. I'd even told Briana what he'd said during the drive back to our apartment in the city, and she'd assured me that she would never leave me.

I smiled when I finally made the turn onto my mom's driveway. The familiar old tire swing hanging from the maple tree in the front yard came into view. It felt good to be home. I'd quit my job, and sold all the furniture from the apartment. All I had to live on was the money from selling my furniture and the rent deposit I'd gotten back from my landlord. Everything I owned was tightly packed in the trunk of my car.

I got out of the car and started walking up the stone path that led to the front door. My mom had a beautiful



Christmas wreath hung on the front door. I reached for the knocker on the polished brass knocker and wrapped on it several times.

After waiting in the cold for several minutes, I could hear the scraping of metal as the locks were being unlocked from the inside.

“Oh, Andrew, I almost didn’t believe my eyes when I saw you standing there through the peephole! Andrew, it’s so good to see you, but where’s Briana?” my mom asked.

“Briana really wanted to come along, but she couldn’t get away from the bank. The holidays get crazy for her,” I said. I didn’t like lying to my mom, but it was one week into December, and everyone was trying to get into the Christmas spirit. I didn’t want to start unloading all my relationship problems on my mom the second I was in the door.

She offered to take my coat, and I took it off and handed it to her. Almost immediately, my nostrils were flooded with the delicious aroma of cinnamon and nutmeg wafting from the direction of the kitchen.

“Are you baking something?” I asked.

“I’ve been baking pumpkin pies for the homeless shelter. With your father gone, I do my best to keep

myself busy. It feels good to know that my pumpkin pies are so appreciated by hardworking people going through difficult times. I'll let you have your own pie if you promise to help me finish making pies for tomorrow," she offered.

"*That's a deal. No matter how many different pumpkin pies I've bought while grocery shopping around the holidays, I've never eaten another pumpkin pie as delicious as one of your pumpkin pies. You could have made a fortune if you'd gone into business with your family recipe,*" I told her.

"That's very possible, but your father saw to it that I wouldn't be hurting for an income in the event of his death. He was a shrewd investor, and his investments have allowed me to remain independent even though I've retired from selling real estate. My knees are too sore to do all the walking and driving around I did when I was a real estate agent," my mom said.

"I remember when you came to New York City just to see to it that Briana and I got the best apartment for what we could afford to pay. All the landlords became so uncomfortable when you kept asking them a lot of questions while we were apartment hunting. They all realized they were dealing with someone who knew their stuff when it came to property values. You stubbornly haggled and haggled with the landlord who owned the

apartment we finally settled on. You prevented us from paying an extra hundred and fifty dollars in rent each month," I reminded her.

"I was looking out for my son. I knew how much Briana meant to you. There were times you'd just blank out staring at her. It was almost as if you were under a spell. Come on, Andrew. It's time to make some pies for people who won't be as fortunate as us this Christmas," my mom instructed. I nodded and followed her into the kitchen.

For the next several hours, my two jobs were measuring out the ingredients and pouring the pie filling into the open face crusts before being baked. I really couldn't understand how she could take so much upon herself, but I also realized that it probably felt really good to her to feel needed, especially since she wasn't being consulted as one of the best real estate agents to buy or sell New York real estate through anymore. It was December, but we both worked up a good sweat in that kitchen. I had to stop what I was doing and mop my forehead every so often. I almost felt like I was at a gym working out.

Finally, after what seemed like far more than several hours, my mom stopped what she was doing and walked to the refrigerator. She pulled out a pumpkin pie wrapped in aluminum foil and headed for the dining

room. Quickly and eagerly, I grabbed a pie knife, fork and a plate from the kitchen before following her into the dining room.

She set the pie down on the dining room table and sat down in the chair across from where she'd set the pie down.

"It's just as you like your pie. It's been sitting in the refrigerator overnight with the pies I made yesterday. Even as a boy, you always hated your pie being warm. With pie, it didn't matter whether it was pecan, apple, cherry, pumpkin, or even one of my cobblers, your desserts always had to be chilled, or you wouldn't eat them. Your father could never understand it, because he always wanted his desserts to be heated up before he'd eat them. You wouldn't even eat brownies unless they were chilled. They had to be cold and taken out of the oven while they were still fudgy," my mom recalled.

"Of course. That's the best way to eat brownies," I said.

With a broad smile across my face, I sat down and removed the aluminum foil covering the pie. I cut myself a generous slice and set it down on my plate. It was while I was chewing my first bite of pie, when I suddenly noticed my mom was staring at me with an intense look of concern on her face.

"So, when are you going to tell me what's really going on with you?" she asked. I didn't say anything at first.

"What do you mean?" I asked, pretending nothing was wrong.

"Oh, Andrew, when are you going to learn that a mother *always* knows when her son is unhappy? Please tell me what's troubling you. You wouldn't have come here so unexpectedly unless something was wrong," she said. I put down my fork and sighed.

For just a moment, I avoided her piercing gaze, but then I decided to answer the question.

"Okay, okay, I can see there's no point trying to hide it any longer. I was going to tell you everything, but I was just waiting for the right time. Mom, Briana wasn't happy with our relationship, so she broke up with me. I mean, to her credit, she didn't argue with me about who should get to live in the apartment. She just moved out. Some movers came to pick up her things the next day, and that was that. She was gone," I explained.

"Oh, Andrew, I'm so sorry that happened to you, but it sounds to me like she may have already found someone else. Otherwise, it would have been extremely difficult for her to move out so quickly," my mom pointed out.

"I've thought about that many times. Upsetting her was the last thing I wanted to do, so I didn't ask questions. I didn't lose my temper. Secretly, I was hoping she'd change her mind. I *did* suspect that she'd started dating someone else, even though she never mentioned anyone. She just told me that she needed to find a high-value man while she was still young and that my salary wasn't high enough," I said sadly. I was struggling to suppress the wave of emotion that was stirring within me.

"Oh, Andrew, things have changed so much with younger couples. You know, I didn't marry your father, because I felt he was the most successful man I could possibly find. I married him because he was kind and considerate. He never mistreated me. Also, I felt certain he'd never grow tired of me, and a woman worries about that as she gets older. He was just a factory worker then, but he was feisty. I knew he was determined to find a way to become more successful than he was at the time, and he did, but that eventually came with patience. Women like Briana don't understand the concept of acquiring and holding a man who loves them. They go about pursuing men like day traders. If they don't like something about a man, they simply trade him away," my mom said with disgust.

"I really like your analogy, mom. It's very insightful. The way younger women frequently do that reminds me of baseball," I confessed.

"How so?" she asked.

"Well, as a professional baseball player, you can get traded for a whole multitude of different reasons. With Briana, I feel like I got traded for not hitting enough homeruns with my job in marketing," I said.

"I see what you mean. Well, if you don't mind my asking, how come you're not working at your job in New York City today? You haven't quit, have you?" she asked, looking worried. Once again, I sighed.

"I've decided to get away from the city. Mom, Briana meant the world to me. She was my heart. I couldn't bear it anymore. Without her, living in New York City was just a graveyard of memories of a dead relationship. That's why I'm here. This is the first Christmas that I won't be spending with Briana. Yes, I quit my job. I've sold all my furniture from the apartment, and I've moved out. Everything I have is in the trunk of my car. I just wanted to spend the holidays with you. I hope that's okay," I said.

"Oh, Andrew, I'd love to have you here for the holidays, but what are you planning to do for work?" she asked.

"I don't know. I guess I can go to a temporary staffing agency and show them my credentials in marketing and hope for the best. At the very least, I'm sure there will be some slots available for holiday jobs with Christmas approaching. I'll figure something out. I just know I want to spend this Christmas with you," I said.

"You're in luck then. I know someone who works as a job recruiter for a local temporary staffing agency. John comes into the shelter all the time to help people get back to work, so they can afford to have their own place to live. I'm sure he could find you something that was up your alley. You probably won't be making nearly as much as you were in New York City, but it would be a steady income until you figure out what the next step is for you," my mom pointed out.

"John sounds like a terrific person. Okay, I'll meet with John. After all, I do plan on paying my way around here. For starters, I'll give you some of the money I got from selling the furniture in the apartment and getting my rent deposit back. Do you mind if I go upstairs to see my old bedroom? I need to clear my head," I said.

"No, I don't mind at all. You'll find everything just as you left it. I've kept the room clean, but I haven't changed anything or thrown anything away," my mom explained. I backed my chair up and stood up. I started heading for the staircase that led to the upstairs.



The feeling of nostalgia became overwhelming as I entered my old bedroom. Immediately, I could see that my mom had left the room completely intact. The room looked exactly the way it had when I moved out to go to college to pursue a degree in marketing. I slowly scanned the room. My eyes suddenly fell on my old baseball trophies.

I stood in the center of the room and reflected on how baseball was a game that made complete sense to me. Even as a boy, I'd understood the rules of the game. As an adult, I realized that I had to accept the fact that I didn't understand much about women. It hadn't occurred to me that Briana had been keeping score on my accomplishments during the entire course of our relationship.

It dawned on me that the art of finding love was almost like a game. My relationship with Briana was never a game to me, but it *was* like a game in the sense that I hadn't taken into account that there were men who were far better at attracting someone like her than me, so in that sense, finding love *was* a game. There was knowledge and skill required to know how to strategically win the game and not lose and be lonely and heartbroken.

"I picked up one of my old bats from its wall mount hanging above my long dresser. *I just need to learn how to*

*play the game*, I thought to myself, as I gripped the bat. Don't misunderstand, my intentions were noble. I didn't want to master the art of stringing women along with lies and deception, but I knew I needed to make myself the kind of man that women like Briana wouldn't be so quick to trade up for another man.

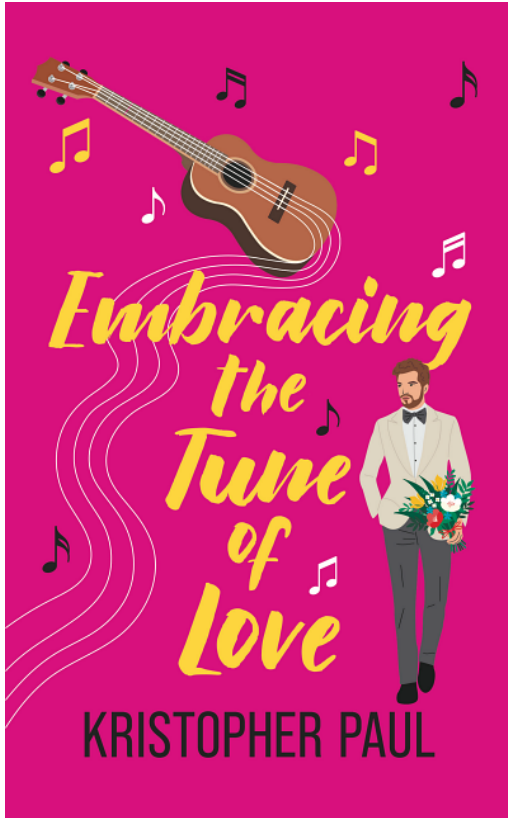
"For starters, I had to establish what was a high-value man. I thought and thought about it and decided that a high-value man was a man who was at the top of his profession, whatever that profession may be. Doctors, lawyers, actors, bankers, stock brokers, professional athletes, and singers were all typically perceived as high-value men by society, especially females. I didn't want to get in over my head in college debt to go back to school, but I knew I had to do something to become a better man.

Being skilled at dancing, hairdressing, and the culinary arts were all different aspects that most women would certainly appreciate in men, but what seemed to be most paramount was a woman feeling financially secure with her choice in a man.

Granted, I definitely resented the fact that women like Briana seemed to have a major advantage in the game of finding love. Women like her typically had an enormous saturation of options in potential mates from all different walks of life. They could simply decide they wanted a man who made more money, and chances were, they

could have that, but there was no point in whining about the game not being fair. The simple fact was that the game wasn't fair. I just needed to focus on learning to become better at playing the game.

I finally decided I wasn't going to be able to accomplish much right then, but I was really looking forward to my meeting with John. Perhaps he could help me get into a job with a lot of potential for advancement for someone with the ambition to strive ahead and master new job skills.



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