

*Love You
Still*

Christopher G. Green

(Preview)

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The show started at seven thirty. The Koffee Klub was filling up with people and conversation as our band climbed into position. I hooked up my guitar and Chris, with light taps on the cymbals, counted off the first tune. We made havoc of each other's songs; wringing out misplaced notes, jumbling accents and skipping breaks and solos. The ladies sounded great vocally, but then, they always did.

From our perspective, we cremated one another's personal masterpieces, but like most weekend audiences, this one did not know and did not care. We could tell, that from their point of view, we were pulling off a good show. They cheered after every number, sending a shower of popcorn and peanut shells (*a Koffee Klub sign of approval*) from out of the darkness behind the glaring lights.

After an hour, each one had taken their turn as lead vocal or poet. We still had the top music video hits to work through (which we had adapted to our new style) and more original music to slaughter, but I was ready to execute my plan with Danita.

Knowing she was out there somewhere, imagining she was gaping at me in sweet surprise, I took a stool and my acoustic guitar and set up at center stage for the next song . . . my song. I adjusted the microphones and turned to my puzzled partners and whispered,

"Love You Still..."

Chris shrugged, gave me his signal of approval and counted down with his drumsticks. Everyone floated in softly with the drums as JP's bass laid a smooth, steady pulse. I fingered the melody and Ricky's keyboard cushioned us with even chords. I stared out into the darkness and could only see orange glowing lanterns at each table spraying radiant light on the blurred facial images surrounding them. I knew she was out there somewhere and I sang to her;

*"I watched you for three long years
Never told my feelings or fears
Then I met you face to face
No one like you in the human race"*

Then the ladies joined me on the chorus. They were smooth, yet strong;

*"If I could never touch you, If you, I could not feel
If I could never hold you, I would love you still"*

We dwindled to a soulful keyboard solo. I smiled, letting my gaze fall to the wires and lights on the stage floor, sure that she was getting my message; hoping she was, anyway.

*“Let’s meet in a certain place
So I can tell you how I feel
But if you don’t show
It won’t change my heart, oh no”*

Finally, we let go with full harmonies on a steady rhythm, but I kept my message crisp and clear;

*“If I could never touch you, If you, I could not feel
If I could never hold you, I would love you still.”*

I had to repeat it and I had to sing it from my heart. The music was flowing and the beat was tight. The feeling was like magic. Everything was going perfectly. The moment was right.

We eased out of the last notes and the crowd roared. I smiled, surprised by their response. I had not thought about their approval. I had only concentrated and worked for Danita’s.

We took a break and I ventured out into the audience, inching through a swarm of handshakes and compliments. I tried to be calm, but I was anxiously preoccupied with my search for Danita. With nothing but the stage lights and the flickering lantern flames to guide me, I tried to pick out the female faces in my attempt to simplify the hunt.

“Gerald!” It could only have been her. “Over here!” I tried to radar in on the direction of her call and located her in a booth to the left of the stage, exactly where I told her to meet me.

However, my high dissipated like morning mist at sunrise as she turned and began talking to two other girls who were with her. I sighed with the thought that this was supposed to be a date for the two of us. But, I smiled anyway, shifting to their direction.

The other two girls were quite pretty. One was Hispanic with olive toned skin and eyes whose color I could not tell right away. She reminded me of Myra, my high school girlfriend. The other had a dark, glowing complexion, but she was too flashy for my taste with her beauty buried under make-up and jewelry. I had seen them around campus a lot, but had never really tried to meet them. They each said

something to Danita and they all laughed, sending a flush of embarrassment into my eyes.

Danita shifted to make room for me as the other two followed my every move with wide-eyed curiosity. I was suddenly very uncomfortable, as well as disappointed.

The room was alive with clamor and laughter as waitresses darted about juggling entrees and drinks. Glasses sparkled as bubbling beverages gurgled out of sighing bottles, filling the festive air. It only made me much more aware that my plan was starting to crumble. I looked across the room, surprised at all of the friends who had shown up for our gig. I spotted Bill in the back in a huddle of our buddies. I barely heard Danita introduce me.

“Girls,” she almost sang, “this is Gerald Hanley.”

It brought my gaze back to the excited young ladies sitting across the table from me. I nodded with a forced smile.

“I’m Nicias Lopez,” sang the olive toned girl. “We’ve known Danita a long time, but we’ve never met you.”

Her full emphasis was on ‘you’. I squirmed, not used to being the target of a woman’s compliment.

“Joann Cole,” announced the other girl. “Everyone calls me Jo.”

I nodded politely, acknowledging their introductions.

“We were just interrogating Danita,” Nicias mused in a flirting voice, “because everywhere we go, she always seems to know the star attraction.”

“Oh really,” I said, flatly glancing over at Danita, but she just shrugged. Something went cold in my chest.

“If it’s not some athlete,” blurted Jo, “it’s like wow, we walk into this place and it’s the star of the show.”

“I’m no star,” I threw out, slipping into humility mode. “They asked me only because there wasn’t anybody else.”

“Come on Gerald,” moaned Danita, uncharacteristic of every impression I had of her. “You were great!” She nudged me...hard. Her eyes were aflame with the lantern’s glow, but the hard reflection made her somehow look menacing. I sent my stare to my hands and watched my fingers wipe away imaginary dust on the table.

“He surprised me, too.” She told the other two and the coldness inside me warmed up to resentment. This whole thing was supposed to be between the two of us. Obviously she did not think so.

“I had no idea he was the entertainment,” she continued. Her companions squealed with girlish pleasure as though they were as much a part of the scheme as Danita. My resentment escalated to a cynical air. I did not care if she liked it or not.

“I meant to surprise, Danita,” I mumbled without looking up. “I solicited her to guarantee at least one person would be in the audience.”

“Oh Gerald,” Danita chided, “You knew I wasn’t going to be the only one here.”

“Well,” I returned with a sigh. “You certainly made sure that wouldn’t happen.” The other two gasped. Danita laughed lightly, her eyes roaming throughout the club. She was not even really listening to my verbal dart. I could not tell if she was ignoring me, pretending she could not read my anger, or was just so naïve that she did not understand.

“And since I’ve got an audience,” I sighed as my disappointment gave way to irritation. “I’d better get back up there with the band.”

Instantly her wandering attention snapped back to me. I just glared at her, tight lipped, straining to keep my expression even and pleasant. She looked back at me, disappointed, but it was my turn to show no emotion. I got up, nodding slightly to the other girls and backed away. I stormed angrily, returning to the stage.

“Who the h--l does she think she is,” my internal storm erupted. “I don’t believe she did this!” I sat down and picked at my guitar strings while the rest of the band migrated through the crowd to regroup on stage. “It must be a game to her,” I continued my private tirade. “I don’t have time for this!”

My band was ready to go again and we knocked off more tunes, but the night was changed for me. Time was dragging by and I only wanted the whole thing to be over. I wanted to kick myself.

“I waited three years for this,” I grumbled. “I even stopped playin’ around with other girls.” Suddenly all the time and effort was a waste. She was just like everybody else; no angel, no goddess.

The club dwindled to a few scattered couples. The usual pattern was to leave this setting and began hitting the off-campus clubs. As

eleven o' clock came and went, we wrapped up our show to their soft applause. Each table and booth was again engulfed in conversation among the occupants as the multi-mix automated music system was instantly cranked up to fill the dimly lit romantic air with an undercurrent of tunes from the early 90's.

I turned to begin breaking down our equipment. I was jumbled up inside with anger and guilt for being angry. I had to get out, so I gathered my gear, thanked my supporting cast, and marched toward the exit with my guitar in one hand and my feelings knotted in the clench of the other. I put my fist against the door to push my way out into the real world again.

"I thought we had a date."

It was Danita behind me. I stopped. I did not want to see her. I wanted to walk out anyway, but I knew I would only feel worse. I might even be sorry. I smirked at myself and turned to her. She stood looking up at me with apologetic eyes. Her hands were clasped together and she shrugged her shoulders as if to say, 'I'm sorry.'

I did not realize my expression was so harsh until the wrinkles in my forehead fell and a smile pushed out of the tight frown. Without thinking I opened my fist and reached out for her hand.

"Okay," I whispered.

All of my anger drained away as she took my hand and wrapped her arm around my waist. She held me close, laying her head on my chest with a gentle 'I'm sorry' hug. Her body was warm against mine and I wanted to drop my guitar to hold her even closer though she already was seemingly adhered to me. I sighed.

She slipped on a jacket with a matching white cap, and we left the club. We strolled across the campus without a word. Except for an occasional frosty whisper from the wind, the roar of cars in the distance, or the chatter of people who moved along past us, there was only the crunching of our footsteps on the light dusting of snow. She hesitated and shivered under my arm, but we did not waste the moment with idle talk about the cold weather. It was the perfect pause for our first kiss.

About the Author

Christopher G. Green is the founder of a family-owned publishing and production company called C and C Connections, LLC and senior pastor of a family-oriented church and ministry called Fruitful Life.

Chris brings a wealth of experience to the world of creative writing having served as the executive vice president of Metro Associates, Inc., a community outreach organization based in St. Louis, Missouri.

From 1989 until 2004, he helped coordinate annual community outreach events. He produced an award winning cable TV broadcast, established two music publishing companies, produced several music CD's, contributed articles to various publications, and authored a highly endorsed book titled. "WHAT NOW?"

As an itinerant speaker he participated in national and international conferences addressing issues of marriage, youth, youth leadership, and community and church partnerships. His travels have taken him from coast to coast within the United States, to Hawaii, the Bahamas, Trinidad, the United Kingdom, and to Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa.

Chris has completed two certificate programs from the University of Missouri-St. Louis' Continuing Education Program. He earned certificates in the Supervisory Training and 'Mini-MBA' Programs. He also completed a certificate program from the American Association of Christian Counselors.

For nearly 17 years Christopher, and his wife Carol, faithfully and loyally served in the Metropolitan Christian Worship Center of St. Louis, Missouri. They helped to establish this church and were officially licensed and ordained as ministers in May of 1992.

Chris and Carol have been married since January 3, 1981 and are the proud parents of three sons: Christopher, Jonathan, and David, as well as a host of young adults throughout the world who call them 'mom and dad'.

Love You Still

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