

The second in the Johnny and Kate series.....



Second Chances – Part II

"This is nice. You know, we should do this more often," Johnny suggested as he pressed his lips against Kate's cheek.

"Uh huh. It is nice, isn't it?" Kate answered, pulling John's arms tighter around her as she leaned back against his strong body.

It was Saturday evening and Kate and Johnny were relaxing at the beach. They both had been putting in long hours at work and hadn't spent much time together the last few weeks. Now, here they were, sitting on an old quilt on this quiet, sandy beach, making wedding plans.

Kate turned around to face John. "What kind of wedding do you want to have, John? Do you want a big one or a small one?"

"Whatever makes you happy." He smiled at her. It really didn't matter to John how big or small the wedding was. He was simply looking forward to the day when they would begin their lives together as husband and wife. He had never felt for anyone the way he did for Katie; nor did he think he ever would. He didn't think it was even possible to love someone this much. When he was with her he felt as if he were the happiest, and the luckiest, man alive. He wanted to be with her all of the time. When they couldn't be together he found himself constantly thinking about her. He longed to be near her, to hold her, to touch her. And he worried about her; he wanted to protect her from anything and everything.

"Would you mind if we had a small wedding, John?"

"Is that what you really want? I thought that little girls always dreamed about growing up and having big weddings!" he teased.

She smiled. "I guess I did—once. But I'd really like to just have immediate family and close friends with us that day."

He gently stroked her cheek with the back of his hand. "Kate, a small wedding would be just fine with me. All I know is that I love you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

She turned back around, leaning against him again. "Good, because I have a place in mind where we could have it. You know that old church south of town overlooking the ocean? We've driven by it a few times—"

Johnny grinned and finished her sentence. "—and you always said how beautiful and peaceful it was."

Kate smiled. "You remembered! I would *love* to have the wedding there. It's peaceful there and it would be so romantic. I don't want all of that 'pomp and circumstance.' Do you know what I mean? I just want it to be very simple—just you and me and the people closest to us."

"Katie, that sounds perfect to me. Did I tell you that I've already asked Roy to be my best man?"

Kate smiled. "That's great, because I'm going to ask Joanne to be my matron of honor! I can't wait! On Monday I'll try to get a hold of someone to see if we can have the wedding at that church. And if we can, I'll find out when we can have it." She twisted around to face John again. "And John?"

"Hmmm?"

"Don't cut your hair, okay?" She smiled as she ruffled her fingers through his hair. "I think you're sexy with longer hair! But not *too* long! It's just right the way it is."

John laughed and squeezed her. "The Cap's been at me to cut my hair. But tell you what. Just for you, Katie, I won't."

Kate turned back around and smiled to herself. She was so content and happy with her life, and she was looking forward to the rest of her life—with Johnny.

They sat quietly, watching and listening to the waves crashing methodically against the shore. It was a perfect evening; the sky was clear and there was a slight breeze in the air. Eventually, the sun started to dip below the horizon and a host of colors spread out gracefully over the sky, like a watercolor painting; vivid colors of red, orange, and yellow and all shades in between.

"That was beautiful" Kate sighed. "I've never seen a sunset over the ocean before. In Iowa, back on the farm, you can see the sunset every night. You can watch it set right over the corn and wheat fields." She frowned and shook her head. "But not in LA—there's just too many buildings in the way. I didn't realize how much I had missed it."

Johnny smiled thinking about how much he loved 'his little girl' from the country. Then he pointed to the sky. "Did you see that?"

"See what?"

"A shooting star. You know what that means, don't you?"

Kate twisted her body around to face Johnny. "No. What does it mean?"

"It means I get to kiss you. Kind of like mistletoe," he said with a sly smile.

"Johnny, you're such a flirt! But I like it!"

Johnny held Kate's face in his hands and kissed her gently, letting his lips linger on hers. "You know, it's been way too long since we've spent any time together like this," he whispered into her ear. He laid back on the quilt, pulling Kate with him. "I thank God every day for you, Katie. Did you know that?" he said as he stroked her soft, golden hair.

Kate rested her head on his chest and closed her eyes. "John, you're going to make me cry if you keep that up." She propped herself up on her elbow and stared into his chestnut-colored eyes. Brushing his hair away from his forehead she softly replied, "I'm thankful for you, too. You're the best thing that's ever happened to me. I love you so much, Johnny. I love you more than anything in this world." Tears welled up in her eyes and one slowly slid down her cheek.

John rolled Kate over on her back and he looked down into her deep, blue eyes. He tenderly kissed the teardrop from her cheek as tears came to his own eyes. "Katie, I can't wait to marry you and spend the rest of my life with you." He softly caressed her cheek. "It's going to be the happiest day of my life." He tenderly kissed her forehead and then her cheek. He gazed into her eyes as he lowered his lips lovingly onto hers, and he kissed her longingly.

"Hi Johnny!" Kate yelled as she crossed the street towards him.

Johnny looked up and smiled. Then, out of the corner of his eye he saw a car approaching. It was coming way too fast up the street and it was bearing down on Kate. "KATE! LOOK OUT!"

It was too late. The car hit Kate, tossing her up into the air like a rag doll and throwing her back onto the hard pavement.

"KATE!" Terrified, Johnny ran over to Kate's side. "Katie, can you hear me?"

Kate was in excruciating pain. "Johnny," Kate barely whispered, "It hurts. Bad."

He placed his hand gently on her forehead and stroked her hair. "I know, Katie, I know. Don't worry, I'll get some help." He looked around for anyone, but there was nobody in sight. He looked back down at Kate. Her head had fallen to the side and she had stopped breathing. "Katie? Wake up, Katie! Please don't do this, Katie! PLEASE! KATIE!"

"NO!" Johnny yelled as he abruptly sat up in bed gasping for breath.

"Johnny! Johnny, what's wrong?" Kate was awakened by Johnny's sudden outburst. She slid over next to him and placed her hand on his chest. *His heart is beating a mile a minute!* "Johnny, it's okay. You've had another bad dream," she reassured him. "Why are you crying?"

Johnny looked at Kate's beautiful face and big blue eyes and then closed his eyes in relief. He wiped his face with his hand, wrapped his arms around her and laid back down, clinging to her for dear life. "I love you, Katie. I love you," he said, his voice hoarse, as he kissed her forehead.

Kate frowned. "I love you too, Johnny." She couldn't imagine why he had been having nightmares and she didn't understand why he wouldn't tell her what they were about. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine."

Kate reached up her hand and lovingly stroke his hair. "Johnny, I'm worried about you. This is the third time this week this has happened. What's wrong?"

"Nothing, Katie. Don't worry." He brought her hand up to his lips and kissed it. *Thank God it only a dream!*

"I think you need a vacation, Johnny. You've been working too hard."

"Uh huh. Come on. Let's go back to sleep," he said as he held Kate even more securely. He didn't want to let her go. He needed to feel her in his arms, this woman that he loved so dearly—that he loved more than life itself. Kate laid her head on his chest and eventually fell back asleep. But Johnny couldn't fall back asleep. He couldn't get out of his mind all of the nightmares he had been having this past week. No matter how hard he tried to think of anything else, every nightmare he had this week played over and over and over in his head.

While Kate and Johnny had breakfast the next morning they talked about their upcoming nuptials.

"You know you can't see me in my wedding dress before the ceremony! It's bad luck!"

"Ah, come on, Katie. I want to see what you look like in it." He smiled as he teased her. "How about if you just show it to me after you get it?" he suggested as he set his cereal bowl in the sink.

"Forget it, John. Just get it out of your mind. It's not going to happen." Kate laughed as she placed the milk back in the refrigerator. She knew all too well that Johnny was teasing her.

"Okay, you win!" he said as he put his arms around her, pulling her to him and gently squeezing her. He stepped back and rested his hands on her shoulders. "I have to get going now, sweetie, or I'll be late. Why don't you stop by the station tonight for awhile? I have a feeling it'll be slow. At least, I hope it will be."

Kate rested her hand on his cheek. "You just look so tired. I wish you had gotten more sleep last night." His eyes were drooping due to his lack of sleep last night. "You're still not going to tell me what's bothering you?"

"It's nothing. Like you said, I've been working too many shifts. I'm okay. You just have fun shopping for dresses today with Joanne." He smiled weakly. "Pick out something sexy, okay?" He winked as he let go of her and began walking towards the door.

"Wait a minute," she said as she grabbed his hand and pulled him back to her. "You can't leave without a good-bye kiss, my little paramedic! I need a little mouth-to-mouth!" She put her arms around his neck, pulled him down to her and kissed him deeply. She moved her lips to his neck and started breathing heavily in his ear—Kate knew that would drive him crazy.

Johnny closed his eyes and slowly rubbed his hands over her body. "Katie," he groaned. He cupped her face in his hands and kissed her hungrily. "You're awful, you know that?" he murmured breathlessly into her ear.

"I know!" She grinned. "Just one more, okay?" She kissed him gently on the lips as she ran her fingers through his hair. She stared intently into his eyes and whispered, "I love you."

He leaned his forehead against hers and whispered back, "I love you more." He softly kissed her good-bye on the cheek. "I have to go now. Stop by later, okay?" Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, "Drive carefully today, okay?"

Kate nodded absent-mindedly while she finished putting away the breakfast dishes. "Sure, Johnny."

He didn't think that Kate was taking him seriously, so he pressed the issue. "Katie? Did you hear me? Be

careful today, okay?"

Kate turned towards him and smiled. It was so sweet that he worried about her so much. "Don't worry, John. I'm always careful when I drive. You know that."

"Hey, Johnny! What's up?" Roy slapped Johnny on the back as he walked into the locker room to get ready for that day's shift.

"Hi Roy." John simply said as he buttoned up his work shirt.

"Man, you look tired. Didn't you sleep last night?"

"I barely slept at all. Everytime I fall asleep I have that same damn dream!"

"Are you going to finally tell me what this dream is about? I mean, this has been going on all week."

John turned and faced Roy. "Roy, you're going to think I've gone berserk! But, did you ever have a premonition? You know, a dream that came true?"

"No, I guess I can't say that I have. Why? Is that what you think is happening to you?"

"Man, I hope not." Johnny frowned.

"Well, what's the dream about?"

Johnny took a deep breath and let it out. "It's pretty much the same dream every time and it's always about Kate. In every dream Kate gets hurt and she— . Well, let's just say that every dream is a little different, but the ending is always the same." He paused. "Roy, they always end up with Kate dying. And it seems so *real!*"

"Yeah, I can see where you couldn't fall asleep after something like that." He pondered over John's problem for a moment and asked, "What do you think is causing these dreams? Do you think it has anything to do with that fire last week, the one where that older woman died?"

"Man, I hope so, Roy. I hope so."

"It's got to be, partner. That fire was upsetting to all of us. Don't worry so much. Nothing's going to happen to Kate."

Johnny nodded. *I hope you're right.*

Roy and John walked into the kitchen finding the other guys on the shift sitting around the table, drinking their coffee and eating their usual breakfast—doughnuts. Each was engrossed in a different section of that morning's newspaper.

"Hey, guys," greeted Roy.

"Hi." John waved.

"Hi Roy. Hi John," they all replied.

Johnny walked over to the stove, poured Roy a cup of coffee and then one for himself. "Hey Roy, Kate and I have decided on where to have the wedding, so we should have a date pretty soon."

Chet lowered his paper and looked over it at John. "You're not scared about getting that old ball and chain?"

"Are you kidding me? Man, I can't wait!" Johnny smiled.

"Really? The nerves haven't gotten you yet, huh?" the Captain piped in.

"Me? Nah. I'm not nervous one bit," he bragged. Turning towards Roy he asked, "Roy, look how long you've been married. Did you get cold feet before your wedding?"

"Not exactly 'cold feet.' But I was a little nervous, I guess. It's a huge step, you know."

"Sure, I know that. But I'm not nervous! This seems like the most natural thing in the world to do. I don't know why people get so nervous. If you ask me, they probably shouldn't be getting married if they're that scared!"

"Yeah, well we'll ask you the morning of your wedding and see what you have to say! You can be sure that you'll be eating your words," Chet ribbed.

As Chet finished his sentence the claxon sounded for the squad. As Johnny and Roy ran out of the kitchen, John hollered over his shoulder, "No way, man. You just wait and see! You'll be eating your own words Chester B!"

When the men got back to the station after a difficult run, everyone was famished. It was almost two hours past supertime and it was Marco's turn to cook.

"Hey Marco, what's for supper?" asked Stoker.

"Steak!"

"Great! I'm starved."

Chet piped in. "Anything would beat the mush that Johnny cooked the other day. No offense, Marco," he reassured him.

"None taken." Marco grinned.

"Yeah, well all of you should just be thankful that you even had a meal," John snarled.

"I'm certainly not thankful for *that* meal!" Chet replied under his breath, but loud enough for Johnny to hear.

Johnny scowled at Chet and then turned to Stoker. "Hey Mike, Roy and I are going to work on the squad. Kate might stop by."

"Okay," replied Stoker, nodding.

Roy smiled. "Come on, partner. Let's go."

John and Roy went out into the garage to do some fine-tuning on the squad. They had been working on the squad for about 30 minutes when they heard Marco call them for supper.

After the meal the men sluggishly pushed their chairs back from the table. "You make the best steak around, Marco!" said the Captain, rubbing his stomach.

"Hey, thanks Cap! Now who's going to help me clean up?" he asked, looking around the table at everyone.

Just then there was a knock at the back door. "Saved by the bell!" Johnny said as he ran to the door to let Kate in. "Hi, cutie!"

Kate smiled as she walked into the station. "Hi, John. Hi guys!" She smiled and waved at the rest of the men.

A chorus of hellos greeted her.

"Am I interrupting dinner?"

With a big grin, John answered, "Not at all. In fact, you just saved me from kitchen duty!"

"Oh. Sorry, guys," she apologized.

"Hey, that's okay, Kate. He would have found another excuse anyway. He always does," retorted Chet.

Kate saw Johnny scowl at Chet. She chuckled to herself when she noticed that Chet just ignored him.

"Hi Roy," Kate said when she saw Roy. "You know, I've been with your wife all day! I think I ran her ragged!"

He smiled back. He liked Kate; she was a good friend to Joanne and was the best thing that had ever happened to Johnny. "Did you have any luck?"

"A little, I guess." She smiled.

"Come on, Katie." John took Kate's hand in his and led her out into the garage where they could talk in private. Once they were by themselves, he embraced her and gave her a soft, gentle kiss. "Hi," he said quietly. "I missed you today."

"I missed you too," she said as she stroked his face.

"So, did you and Joanne find a dress today?" He still had his arms wrapped around her.

"Maybe," she teased.

"You did, didn't you? I can tell! Is it sexy?"

She laughed at his remark. "John! It's a wedding dress for goodness sake!" Then she cocked her head a little and smiled coyly. "Well, maybe it's a little sexy!"

"Alright! Okay, what do we need to do next?"

"Well," she began counting on her hand, "the church is booked, I've got a dress, the invitations are out, the flowers and photographer are taken care of—." She paused. "Ah ha! Have you rented a tux yet?" Then she thought twice. "You know, the wedding is going to be pretty casual. My dress is pretty simple and I'd really like to have some pictures taken of us on the beach. Maybe you'll just want to wear a nice suit. Joanne knows what my dress looks like so she'll be able to help you and Roy pick something out."

"Okay. Sounds good. I guess most of it has been taken care of then, huh?" He paused a moment and asked, "Did I hear you say that the church is booked?"

"Yes you did!" Kate's face was beaming.

"Well, don't leave me in suspense here. What's the date?"

"In two months. The 17th!"

"Hmmm. Only another two months of bachelor-hood, huh?" he said teasingly, smiling.

"Yes, so you'd better enjoy it while you can!" Kate pretended to be annoyed.

"I can't wait to marry you, Katie," he reminded her as he pulled her body closer to him. "Too bad I can't smuggle you in here tonight, huh? We could pick up where we left off this morning," he said, nuzzling her neck.

"Johnny, you're incorrigible!"

"Yeah, but that's why you love me!" He flashed Kate that crooked grin of his that she loved.

"I do love you. But you know what? I've got to get going now."

"You just got here!" he said, disappointed.

"I know. I'm sorry. But I have a busy day at work tomorrow."

"Okay, Katie-bear. Come on, I'll walk you to your car." He had his arm around her shoulder as they walked through the kitchen towards the door.

"Bye, Roy! Bye, everyone!" Kate waved and smiled to the guys once more.

"Bye, Kate!" everyone seemed to say all at once.

When John and Kate had left, Chet shook his head and said, "You know, that Gage is one lucky guy. I mean, how did a guy like him end up with a girl like that? I'll never figure it out in this lifetime. She's nice, she's good-looking, she's smart, and she's great cook. It's just not fair."

"Yeah, he's pretty lucky, isn't he?" responded Marco.

John walked Kate to her car that was parked in front of the station and under a streetlight.

"Bye, Johnny." She gave John a short kiss on the cheek.

"Uh-uh. That's not good enough." He wrapped his arms around her and kissed her mouth tenderly. "Okay. Now you can go," he said with a smile after their lips parted.

John opened the car door for Kate. "Drive carefully!" he shouted as she started to drive away. He wasn't sure that she had heard him though. Slowly he turned around and walked back up to the station

"What's the long face for, John?" asked the Captain as John walked back in.

He looked up. "Huh? Oh, it's nothing. Hey everyone! We've got a wedding date—September 17th. Mark it on your calendars!"

"Hey, that's great, John!"

"Thanks Cap! Yep. Can't wait!" he said as he clasped his hands together, rubbing his palms against each other.

A few minutes later, John and Roy were back out in the garage finishing up their work on the squad. "Hey, Johnny, that's great that you've got a date picked out."

"Thanks, Roy. I guess you could say that I'm pretty happy about it!"

"So, what's up, partner? What happened out there when Kate left? You acted kind of strange when you came back in."

John frowned. "I just had a weird feeling. I can't explain it. Something just didn't seem right."

"You've got to quit worrying so much, junior. It's really eating at you."

"Yeah, you're right. I guess I am worrying too much." He said those words only to pacify Roy.

A short while later Chet opened the door from the kitchen and stuck his head out into the garage. "Hey guys! 'The Monster That Ate The World' is on tonight! Do you want to watch it with us?"

John and Roy rolled their eyes and groaned. Nevertheless, they went back into the kitchen area and everybody grabbed a chair and gathered around the television set. A few minutes into the movie the claxon sounded. "Station 51. Car accident with injuries at the intersection of Benjamin Drive and Elm Street. Benjamin Drive and Elm Street. Time out 20:15."

"Ah, man! Just as it was getting good!" complained Chet while running towards the engine.

The men grabbed their gear and climbed into the squad and the engine.

"10-4. Station 51. KMG365," responded Captain Stanley into the handset.

"Man, I hate nighttime car accidents. They're usually the worst," John said to Roy as he climbed into the squad.

"Yeah, I know."

Even though the engine and squad arrived at the scene of the accident in less than five minutes, two police cars had beat them to the scene. It turned out to be a head-on collision between two cars. The first car they saw was sitting in the middle of the intersection with its front end smashed in. The second car, a smaller one, was over to the side of the intersection, next to the curb.

As soon as the engine came to a halt the Captain jumped out. "Stoker! Kelly! Pull a line and flush that gasoline!"

Mike and Chet rushed around the engine, pulled a line and started spraying water on the gasoline that had spilled onto the pavement from the collision.

The Captain and Marco ran over to the larger car, the one still in the intersection. A teenage boy was inside and the car reeked of alcohol.

Johnny and Roy lunged out of the squad. Johnny opened the outside compartment of the squad and grabbed the drug box and trauma/splint box while Roy grabbed the biophone and oxygen. They rushed over to the car in the middle of the intersection.

After quickly assessed the injuries of the teenager, Roy decided to move on to the second car. Johnny stayed and tended to the boy. "Can you hear me?" Johnny asked the boy as he shone his light into each eye, checking his pupil responses.

"Yeah," the boy responded groggily.

"Do you hurt anywhere?" John asked as he felt up and down the boy's back to try to determine if there was a spinal injury.

"My head! Man, it hurts!" the boy groaned. The boy had a bad cut on his forehead.

"Okay, just relax," John said as he took the boy's pulse. "We're going to get you out of here in no time. What's your name?" Johnny asked as he applied a pressure bandage to the boy's forehead.

"Todd Roberts." The boy shook his head. "Man, my old man is going to kill me! He's going to kill me!"

"Hey, just relax," Johnny said as he tried to quiet the boy.

"Yeah, easy for you to say. You don't have to face my old man!"

Johnny shook his head. *When will people ever learn that drinking and driving don't mix!*

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Roy went to check out the occupant of the second car, the smaller one. Inside the car was just the driver—a female slumped over with her head resting facedown on the steering wheel.

Roy quickly tried to open the driver's door but it was jammed. He went around to the passenger door but that was also jammed.

"Hey Cap! Can you help me here? We need the pry bar. And I'm going to need the backboard, a cervical collar and head stabilizers. And if John's through, I need the drug box!"

"You got it!" The Captain ran over to Johnny and Marco. "Marco, pal! Would you get the backboard from the squad for me? And then I'll need you to come and give Roy and me a hand!"

"Right away, Cap!" Marco turned around and ran to the squad.

"John, Roy needs the drug and splint boxes."

Johnny slid the stethoscope off his neck and put it in the drug box. Then he took out of each box what he thought he would need for the boy. "Here you go, Cap. Oh, and Cap, I'm going to need the biophone. If you can get me the information on Roy's victim I can call it in for him."

"Sure, John." The Captain and Marco ran back over to the other car to help Roy.

Johnny had turned back around to tend to his patient when he heard someone come up behind him.

"How's the kid doing?" One of the policemen had walked over to John.

John looked up at the officer. "Well, he's got a nasty bump on his head, but he'll be okay. It smells like he's been drinking."

"Yeah, it looks like he ran that stop sign back there. He's got all kinds of booze in that car. The lady in the other car looks pretty bad, too. Looks like she saw him coming and tried to stop. There's skid marks from the beginning of the intersection all the way over to the curb. You know, this kid is going to have something to think about the rest of his life if anything happens to her."

Johnny shook his head in disgust. *Stupid kids!*

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The Captain ran up to Roy and handed him the boxes. "Roy, John needs the biophone. He said he'd call in the information on her to Rampart,"

"Okay. Let's work on getting this door open."

The Captain used the pry bar on the door while Roy yanked on the door's handle. After a few minutes of hard labor it finally gave way.

Roy grabbed his flashlight and reached inside. He placed his fingers on the victim's neck to check for a pulse. Roy yelled back over his shoulder to the Captain, "Cap? She's alive, but we've got to get her out of here!" Roy then continued checking over his victim. He counted her pulse and then he carefully felt up and down her neck and back for any spinal and neck injuries. There didn't seem to be any injury to her spine. Roy turned around and asked the Captain, "Can you hand me the cervical collar?" He then slowly eased the victim's body back into an upright position so that he could place the collar around her neck and check her pupil responses. But Roy wasn't prepared this evening for what he would discover. *Oh my God!*

Roy looked back over his shoulder at the Captain. "Cap?"

"Yeah, Roy?"

In a somber voice he told him, "Cap, it's Kate."

Marco and Hank looked at Roy in disbelief. The Captain ran his hand over his face. "Oh, man," was all he could say.

"Do we have two ambulances on the way?"

"Yeah. Yeah, we do. How is she?"

Roy shook his head. "Not good, Cap. She's pinned up against the steering wheel." Roy turned back to Kate. She was barely conscious and she was bleeding badly from a large cut on her forehead. "Kate? It's Roy. Don't try to move your head. I'm going to place a collar around your neck to protect it. Just relax, everything's going to be okay. We're going to take real good care of you."

Roy grabbed his light to check her pupils. "Okay, Kate. I need to check your eyes. Just relax, okay? We'll get you out soon. I promise."

Kate was in excruciating pain and it was extremely difficult for her to breathe.

"Kate, is it hard to breathe?"

"Yes," Kate barely whispered.

"Do you hurt anywhere else?"

Kate closed her eyes and again whispered, "My head, my chest." She had to stop to catch her breath.

"Anywhere else?"

With a raspy voice, she continued, "My stomach and my left shoulder."

Roy's heart sank.

"Can you feel your legs, Kate?" Roy asked anxiously. Roy waited nervously for Kate's response while she concentrated on his question.

"Yeah."

Thank God. "Do your legs hurt?"

"No."

"Okay, Kate. Just relax. Don't worry. You're going to be okay." Roy took Kate's BP, then listened to her heart and lungs. He backed out of the car, carefully recited Kate's vitals to Marco and then told him, "When John's through with the biophone I'm going to need you to bring it right back. Right away! And we're going to need the jaws. But I don't want Johnny to know that it's Kate until he's done with his patient. Do you understand?" Roy's voice was clearly agitated.

"Yeah, sure Roy. I won't say anything to John." Marco then rushed the biophone over to John.

Roy had a lump in his throat that he tried to swallow. "Kate, I'll be right back. I'll just be gone for half a minute and then I'll be right back."

Roy got back out of the car and spoke urgently to the Captain under his breath. "Cap, she's badly injured. We need to get her out of here now!"

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"Here you go, John," said Marco as he handed him the biophone. John wrote down the vitals of Roy's victim as Marco relayed them to him. Then he added, "John, Roy needs this back as soon as you're through. I've got to go back and help them get that woman out of her car."

"Okay, Marco!"

John picked up the biophone. "Rampart, this is Squad 51. How do you read?"

"Go ahead 51. This is Rampart," replied Dr. Brackett.

"Rampart, we have two victims as a result of a car crash. Victim one is a male, approximately 16 years of age. He's got a contusion and laceration on his upper left forehead. Pupils are equal and reactive. Vitals are: pulse 90, respiration 18, BP 110 over 85. I have applied a pressure bandage to his forehead. Victim two is a female, approximately 30 years of age. Pulse is 116, respiration 28, BP 90 over 75. She has a contusion and a laceration on her forehead. A pressure bandage has been applied and bleeding has stopped. A cervical collar has been placed on her. She is complaining of pain in her chest, abdomen and left shoulder. She is having trouble breathing and no air can be heard in the left lung. Victim two is still in the vehicle and can't be treated yet."

"10-4, 51. On victim one start an IV with D5W and transport."

"10-4, Rampart."

"51, is there an ambulance at your sight?"

"Negative, Rampart." Johnny looked up as he heard the wail of an ambulance siren. "Ah, correction Rampart. An ambulance has just arrived."

Johnny had selected just the right supplies from the boxes before handing them over to the Captain. He quickly administered the IV and then helped the ambulance attendees get the boy onto the gurney and into the ambulance. John stayed behind at the accident scene to help Roy. He grabbed the biophone and rushed over to the other car. "Roy! How's it going over here?"

Marco was using the jaws while the Captain held his turncoat between the Kate's face and the steering wheel, just in case the steering wheel popped up or the windshield shattered.

Roy jumped when he heard Johnny's voice. Johnny went over and stood next to Roy, watching Marco and the Captain working. "Man, she's really wedged in there!"

Dreading what he had to do, Roy turned to John. "Johnny, I have to tell you something." Roy didn't quite know how to break the news. He put his hands on his hips, lowered his head, took a deep breath and lifted his head back up to look at his best friend. "John, I've been helping Kate. It's Kate that's in that car."

Johnny felt like the wind had been knocked out of him. He looked at Roy with disbelief and then he looked at the car. He hadn't even recognized it with the darkness and the damage to the car. *No, it can't be!* John's eyes were wild with fear as he remembered the condition and the vitals that he had reported to Rampart. He ran over to the car. "Cap! Is that Kate in there?" *God, please let it not be her!*

The Captain looked over his shoulder at John. Soberly, he answered, "Yeah, John. It is."

"Okay!" Marco announced. "We should be able to get her out now."

Roy ran over to the car with the backboard. He and the Captain worked as fast as they could to free Kate from her crumpled car. "Okay. Okay, I think we've got it. Okay, bring the backboard up. Easy now. Slide her out gently. Easy! Easy now. Okay. Okay, we've got her!"

When John saw Kate on that backboard it was as if someone had just stabbed him in the gut and twisted the knife. *Oh God! KATE! Oh God! This cannot be happening!* They gently set her down on the grass, keeping her on the backboard. Roy placed the stabilizers on each side of Kate's head to keep it from moving from side to side. Johnny instantly knelt beside Kate on the grass and placed his hand on her forehead. He immediately felt how cold and damp her skin was and saw that she was gasping for air. There was also a lot of blood on her head and face. "Katie? Katie, honey, it's John. Can you hear me?" John looked up and yelled to anyone who was listening, "She needs a thermal blanket and oxygen! NOW!"

Kate moaned when she heard John's voice. "Johnny?"

Johnny turned back to Kate and swallowed hard. "Yeah, Katie. It's John. Don't worry honey, I'm right here. Everything's going to be fine."

"I...I can't breathe. I hurt everywhere. It hurts so much." Her voice was barely audible. "I feel like I'm going to pass out."

John frantically looked around and yelled out, "WHERE'S THE OXYGEN!" He turned his full attention back to Kate again. "Katie, here, take my hand." He picked up her right hand and placed it in his. "Squeeze my hand when it's painful. Okay Katie? Squeeze it as hard as you can! You're going to be fine, honey. I'm not going to let anything happen to you." *DAMN THAT STUPID KID!*

Roy quickly pulled the oxygen tank over to him. John took the mask and with his free hand he placed the mask on Kate's face. "Katie, this is just some oxygen to help you breath easier. Just relax and breathe." John looked up at Marco. "Marco, would you do this for me?" he asked, referring to the oxygen mask.

Marco knelt down and took over the mask for John. John moved back around to Kate's side, her hand still in his grasp.

While Roy rechecked her vitals they heard a siren which indicated the arrival of another ambulance. Roy was examining the rest of Kate that he couldn't check while she had been trapped in the car. When Roy felt Kate's abdomen she grimaced and let out a gasp. Immediately, Roy pulled his hands back. Kate was also clearly in agony when Roy checked her ribs. Johnny anxiously looked up at Roy and saw the concern on his face.

The Captain ran up to John with the thermal blanket he had retrieved from the squad. He quickly unfolded the blanket and carefully placed it over Kate. Chet and Stoker had followed behind him with worried looks on their faces. They had just found out from the Cap that it was Kate in the other car and that she was badly

injured.

"This will help keep you warm, Katie," John told her as he gently tucked the blanket around her body.

John was worried about the large contusion on Kate's forehead. "You've got to try to stay awake, Katie. Do you understand? Can you try to do that for me, Katie?"

Kate closed her eyes and nodded her head weakly. A tear slid out of the corner of her eye and rolled down her face. John's heart nearly broke in two; he couldn't bear to see her in so much pain. She motioned to John to remove the mask from her face.

"Marco, take the mask away just for a second, will you?"

When Marco took the mask off Kate's face, Johnny moved his face closer to Kate's. She looked into John's eyes, her own eyes brimming with tears. "I love you, Johnny. If anything happens to me..."

Tears came to John's eyes. "Shhh, Katie. Please don't talk like that. You're going to be fine. You're going to be okay, Katie. Trust me. You've got Roy here helping you. He's the best there is." He managed to force a weak smile for Kate and then motioned to Marco to put the oxygen mask back on her face.

Suddenly Kate gasped. She pulled her right hand out of John's and brought it up to her rib cage.

John grasped Kate's hand again. "Okay, Katie. Squeeze my hand!" Johnny instructed her. "That's good, Katie. Just keep squeezing it. I know it hurts, honey, I know." Johnny had to turn his head away as tears were burning his eyes. He thought that if Kate saw him crying she wouldn't believe him that she would be all right.

"Rampart, this is Squad 51," Roy said anxiously into the biophone.

"Go ahead, 51," said Dr. Brackett.

"Rampart, we now have our other victim free. Vitals are: Pulse is 130, respiration 32, BP has dropped to 80 over 40. The skin is cold and clammy. She has a large contusion and laceration on her forehead. She is complaining of sharp pains in her chest and upper abdomen. She has some fractured ribs and there is also a fracture of the left clavicle. There are no breath sounds in the left lung. We have a thermal blanket on her and we are administering O2."

"ROY!" John yelled.

Roy quickly turned around.

"Kate's going into respiratory arrest! Oh God! SHE STOPPED BREATHING!" *NO! Please don't do this to me, Katie!*

Roy looked at Kate and saw how blue she was turning. "Rampart, she's in respiratory arrest!"

"10-4, 51. Insert an esophageal airway and bag her. Administer an IV with 1000cc ringers lactate."

"10-4," Roy responded as he dropped the phone. He looked at John who's face was as white as a sheet. "John, do you think you can you give her the IV while I insert the airway?" Roy needed John's help right now if he was going to save Kate's life, and he would never consider asking John to intubate his fiancée.

John nodded.

Roy grabbed what he needed and Marco stepped back with the oxygen mask as Roy moved up by Kate's head. Roy quickly looked at Johnny. Johnny was holding Kate's limp arm. He was ready to insert the needle but his hands were shaking badly.

"JOHNNY! Are you okay? Are you going to be able to do that?"

John wiped the sweat from his brow with his arm. He was so frustrated with himself. *Get a grip, man! She needs you now. Just calm down.* He took a deep breath and answered, "Yeah. I can do this." He got the needle in on the first try and attached the IV bag. John couldn't, however, bring himself to watch Kate being intubated.

"Okay. I've got it in. John, I need you to bag her."

The Captain stepped forward. "John, why don't you give me the IV bag? I'll hold that while you help with the oxygen."

Roy got back on the biophone. "Rampart, the patient has an airway and the IV has been started."

"10-4, 51. Immobilize her shoulder, keep monitoring the vitals and keep her warm. There may be some internal bleeding. Do you have an ambulance there?"

"That's affirmative, Rampart."

"Transport immediately! What's your ETA?"

"About six minutes. Uh, Rampart?"

"Go ahead, 51."

Roy looked over at John. "Uh, I just thought you should know—it's Johnny's fiancée we're bringing in."

After a pause, Dr. Brackett answered, "10-4, 51."

After everything that had just happened, John was finding it impossible now to keep control of his emotions. His heart ached to watch Kate go through such torture. He had seen injuries like this before and knew they could be fatal. His face became distorted as he desperately struggled to prevent himself from breaking down. But it was no use, the tears began to slide down his face—he couldn't hold them back any longer. He dropped his head, brought his hand to his face and sobbed.

Roy hung up the biophone, stood up and looked at the ambulance attendees. "Okay, let's get her in the ambulance." Roy placed a hand on John's shoulder and squeezed it. "Come on, Johnny. We'll both go with her." Roy took over the bagging for John and placed the IV bag under Kate's right shoulder. It was killing Roy to see his best friend go through such agony and to see Kate this way. He was just thankful that he was able to hold it together to help them. Now it would be in Rampart's hands...and God's.

John stood up, nodded his head and wiped his face with his hands as he watched the ambulance attendees carefully pick up the backboard that was holding Kate. They gently placed it on the gurney and set her into the back of the ambulance. John and Roy climbed in with her and the rest of the guys watched somberly as

the ambulance sped away. The siren cut through the air like a knife.

At Rampart, Johnny and Roy jumped out of the back of the ambulance and ran alongside Kate's gurney as Dixie rushed them into Exam Room 2. Dr. Brackett and Dr. Early were both waiting there, as was a portable x-ray machine.

Johnny stepped back helplessly as everyone worked over Kate. Everything was a blur to him—there were people quickly moving everywhere around the room with orders being given right and left. He felt as if his whole world was spinning and crashing down all around him.

Dixie approached Johnny and Roy. She didn't think that John should be in the room due to the extent of Kate's injuries. "John, why don't you two wait in the lounge? I'll keep you posted."

"No, Dix. I've got to stay here and make sure she's okay. What if she wakes up and I'm not here?" Tears started to sting his eyes again. Kate had been unconscious since going into respiratory arrest.

Dixie looked at Roy hoping he could convince Johnny to leave the examination room.

Roy spoke up. "She's right, John. When Kate wakes up Dixie will come and get you, won't you, Dix?"

"You bet, John. Don't worry. We'll take excellent care of her. Right now it would be best if you waited in the lounge." Dixie's heart broke just looking at Johnny; his face was ashen and distraught, and his eyes were red from crying. She knew how much Kate meant to him and she felt horribly for him. Before Johnny met Kate, he was always checking out the nurses in the hospital. But after he and Kate started dating, Johnny had eyes for no one else; he hadn't turned his head to look at another girl since.

"Okay, Dix," Johnny barely whispered, wiping his eyes. He turned and walked out of the room in defeat.

"Come on, partner. Let me get you a cup of coffee," Roy said.

"No thanks, Roy. I don't want anything. I'm going to stay out here in the hallway. You know, just in case they need me for anything." His voice cracked with emotion. He couldn't chase away all of the horrific thoughts that were going through his mind.

Quietly, John said, "You know, none of this would have happened if I hadn't asked her to stop by the station tonight." He turned around and faced Roy. "Or if that kid hadn't been drinking!" he said bitterly. He swallowed the lump that was in his throat, leaned his body against the wall and dropped head. "She was suffering so much, Roy. I just can't get it all out of my head."

Saddened, Roy stared down at the floor. "Yeah, I know." After about a minute of silence, Roy asked, "John, don't you think someone should call her folks?"

Johnny shook his head. "I wouldn't know how. They're out of the country."

"Oh." And Roy knew that Kate didn't have any brothers or sisters.

While Roy and Johnny waited in the hallway they saw nurses and x-ray technicians stream in and out of the exam room. After what seemed like an eternity, but what was really only about 15 minutes since they had arrived, the door to Exam Room 2 opened and Kate was quickly wheeled out into the hallway towards the

elevator.

John ran up to Dr. Brackett "Doc! What's happening? How is she?"

"John, we're bringing her up to surgery. The x-rays show no skull fracture. But she has a fractured shoulder, a punctured left lung and several fractured and cracked ribs. But right now our main problem is her collapsed lung and the fact that she's bleeding internally. We've got to find out where she's bleeding so that we can stop it. Why don't you go and wait in the lounge. This is going to take awhile." Dr. Brackett turned and started walking briskly towards the elevator.

"DOC!"

Dr. Brackett turned around.

"Is she going to be okay?"

Dr. Brackett lowered his head and looked back up again at John. "We'll do our best, John." He turned back around and quickly entered the elevator.

Johnny stood in shock as he watched the elevator doors shut with his Katie inside.

"Come on, junior," Roy said as he placed a hand on Johnny's shoulder.

As they entered the lounge, Johnny picked up an empty coffee cup and hurled it against the wall with all his might, smashing it into tiny pieces. "DAMMIT! WHY DID THIS HAVE TO HAPPEN? WHY KATE?"

"I don't know, John. I don't know," Roy answered quietly. After a few minutes of silence, Roy asked, "Johnny, do you need anything? Is there anything I can get you?"

"The only thing I want right now is to know that Kate's going to be okay." Johnny walked over to a chair, dropped his head in his hands and started to pray — something that he hadn't done in a long time. *Dear Lord, I haven't talked with you for a long time, but I need something from you now. I need you to watch over Kate and protect her. Please don't let anything happen to her. She didn't deserve this. She's my whole life. I don't know what I would do if I lost her—*

It had been hours since Kate had been brought up to surgery. John had sat quietly the whole time, immersed in his own thoughts. He kept thinking about their upcoming wedding. He wanted to be married to Kate so badly. He wanted to see this beautiful woman walk down the aisle towards him on their wedding day. He wanted to spend the rest of his life with her and have a family with her. But was it going to happen? Would Kate even live? Or would he be left alone, knowing that he could have had a life with the most wonderful woman in the world, the one he'd been waiting for his whole life, and that it was cut short by some careless kid?

He vividly recalled the night they spent on the beach planning their wedding. They had been so happy. He remembered the feel of Kate in his arms, the sweet scent of her hair, the softness of her skin, the smell of the ocean, the sound of the waves. As his mind was reliving all of these pleasant memories with Kate, they were all of a sudden pushed aside by the searing memory of Kate in agonizing pain, of her mangled car, and of when she had stopped breathing. John jumped up from his seat. "DAMMIT! Why don't they let me know anything? What's taking so long?"

"I don't know. I'll check to see if anyone knows anything."

Roy came back into the lounge a short while later. "Sorry, John. I tried. Nobody seems to have any updates on Kate's condition."

John clenched his jaw, walked across the room and aimlessly stared out the window.

About another hour later Dr. Brackett finally entered the lounge. "John? Kate's out of surgery."

"How is she, Doc?"

"Well, she's lost a lot of blood. We're lucky we got her up to surgery in time."

"Is she going to be okay?"

"Well, she's going to need another surgery for her shoulder. And there's always the chance that pneumonia might set in. But if everything goes like we hope it will, she'll be fine. It's going to be a long recovery, though."

"When can I see her?"

"She's in Recovery now, but you can see her. We'll transfer her to Intensive Care later. John, there's something else. We're going to keep Kate in a drug-induced coma until after her second surgery. She'll heal better and that way she won't feel any pain."

John ran his hand over his face, took a deep breath and let it out. He closed his eyes, lowered his head and nodded. He raised his head and asked quietly, "Can I see her?"

Dr. Brackett and Roy could clearly see the agony in John's face. "Sure, John. Follow me." Dr. Brackett led Johnny to Recovery. "I'll leave you alone with her, John."

John pulled up a chair next to Kate's bed and slowly sat down. He looked at her broken body and could not believe that this horrible accident had happened to her—to the person that he loved so dearly, more than anything in this world. He gently took her right hand and brought it to his lips. "Katie," he whispered as the tears streamed down his face. As he held her hand, he painfully forced himself to look at Kate; at what that damned kid had done to her. The left side of her forehead had stitches where she had been badly cut, and it was black and blue and swollen. Her left arm was immobilized in a cast. She was hooked up to IV's, was receiving a blood transfusion, was on oxygen and had a tube in her chest due to her collapsed lung. This was all too much for Johnny. It ripped at his heart to see Kate this way.

He started speaking to her softly. "Katie, honey, it's John. I don't know if you can hear me, but I just want to tell you that I love you." He reached up and gently stroked her hair. "You've got to get better for our wedding, honey. I need you, Katie. I need you so much. Please get better. I don't know what I would do without you. I've been waiting for someone like you my whole life." He sat with her, quietly weeping for almost 30 minutes when Dr. Brackett came back into the room.

"John, why don't you go home and get some rest? We'll call you if there's any change."

Reluctantly, John got up from his seat and walked back down to the lounge where Roy still was waiting.

Roy looked up as John entered the room. John's face was pale and haggard looking. "How is she?" Roy asked.

John sat down, leaned his head back against the wall, took a deep breath and shut his eyes. "Not good, Roy. Not good."

John had been asleep several hours when he started to stir. When he opened his eyes he saw Joanne and Roy. "What are you two doing here?" Johnny asked as he straightened up in the chair he had been sleeping in.

Roy answered, "We knew that Kate would be waking up sometime today, and we knew you'd be here waiting. So we decided to come over this morning and keep you company."

"Hi, John. How are you doing?"

"Hi, Joanne. Well, let's just say that these have been the worst three days of my life."

"I'm sorry."

"What time is it?"

"It's about eight o'clock."

Johnny's body got tense immediately. "Have you heard anything about Kate?"

"She's still sleeping," Roy told him. "The nurses are going to let you know when she wakes up."

"I brought you some food, John. You must be starving!" Joanne held out the food to him. "Now here, take this and eat it, okay?"

John actually was hungry and he gratefully accepted the food. "Thanks, Joanne."

John felt a little better after he had eaten. He looked at Roy and Joanne. "Thank you for being here. I really appreciate it."

Joanne added. "John, there's no need to thank us. We're family, remember?"

John nodded his head and actually managed a smile. "Listen, I'm going to go splash some water on my face, okay? I'll be right back." John cringed as he got up from the chair he had been sleeping in for so many hours. Joanne and Roy watched him as he slowly walked down the hall.

"He doesn't look too good, Roy."

"Well, you should have seen him before. This is a big improvement." Roy shook his head. "Poor guy. He was so scared. And he was right to be scared like that. Kate was in bad shape. We could have lost her right there. Right in front of him. I don't know what he would've done if that had happened."

"But it didn't, Roy. Someone's watching out for Kate and John."

Just then Joanne saw Dr. Brackett come out of ICU. She gently nudged Roy and pointed. "Roy, there's Dr. Brackett."

Roy stood up. "Dr. Brackett?"

"Hi, Roy. Joanne. Is Johnny around?"

"Yeah, he just went to clean up," Roy answered.

"How's he holding up?"

"He's still taking it pretty rough."

Johnny was coming back down the hallway when he saw Dr. Brackett talking with Roy and Joanne. He rushed over to them.

"Doc! How's Kate? Is she awake yet?"

"Hi, John. Well, I just checked on her and everything's looking good. She's still sleeping but I expect the sedation to wear off soon. She's going to be groggy for awhile, though."

John's face was tense. "Doc? Is she going to be in pain when she wakes up?"

"I don't know, John, but we'll monitor her carefully. But she should be in considerably less pain. She might have some discomfort, though."

John dropped his head and nodded.

"Why don't you grab a cup of coffee? And just so you know, the nurses are going to call me when Kate comes out of her sedation. So I'll see you then, John." Dr. Brackett gave a reassuring smile, put his hand on John's shoulder and squeezed it before he left.

"Here you go, John." Joanne had already brought coffee over for him.

After three days of waiting, all he heard now is that he would have to wait some more.

Almost two hours later a nurse walked over to John. "Mr. Gage? Your fiancée is starting to wake up."

John jumped up from his seat and followed the nurse into ICU to Kate's bed. There were just a few patients in ICU. Kate's bed was at the far end of the room. Johnny ran his hand through his hair nervously; he took a deep breath and approached her. He wiped the tears from his eyes and watched her as she slowly came out of the anesthesia. He leaned over her bed slightly so that she could see him more easily. "Hi Katie." He forced a small smile and kissed her hand after she had opened her eyes.

Kate looked at Johnny and tried to speak but was unable to.

"Katie, it's okay. You don't have to talk. Just rest."

Kate looked into Johnny's brown eyes that she adored—that now looked so sad. *Where am I?*

Just then Dr. Brackett approached Kate's bed and smiled softly. "Hi, Kate. It's Dr. Brackett. How are you

feeling?"

From the look on her face John and Dr. Brackett could tell that she didn't know where she was or why she was there.

"Kate, do you know where you are?"

Kate shook her head.

"You're at Rampart, Kate. You were in a car accident, but you're going to be fine. Are you in any pain?"

Kate shook her head again. The last thing she remembered was shopping with Joanne. And she remembered visiting John at the station that night. Then she started remembering what had happened after that. As the events of that evening became clearer in her memory the tears welled up in her eyes and she started to panic and breathe heavily, which caused extreme pain in her chest. Her eyes squeezed shut and her brow furrowed as she grabbed at the sheet, clenching her hand around it. *Oh God! That hurts!*

"Doc! She's in pain! Can you do something?"

"Kate, slow down your breathing. Try to relax. You have some fractured ribs and when you breathe deeply it's going to hurt."

Kate continued to panic as she remembered driving into an intersection and a car coming straight for her. Her eyes pleaded to John. "Johnny, it hurts. It hurts everywhere," she managed to whisper.

"Doc!" Johnny looked at Dr. Brackett. "Please do something!"

"Nurse!" Dr. Brackett motioned to the closest nurse. He quickly approached Kate's bed and said soothingly. "Okay, Kate, we're going to give you something to take the pain away."

John swallowed hard. He looked up at the nurse who was adjusting an IV to administer Kate a dose of pain medication. It was just like in his nightmares. He softly stroked her golden hair and said, "You've been through a lot, Katie. You're going to be sore for awhile but they're giving you something for the pain. You're going to be okay, Katie. I promise."

Kate started to get woozy and after a few minutes, she had fallen asleep. Johnny breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"Well, she'll sleep for awhile. We'll see how she does after she wakes up again. Next time we'll try a more mild pain reliever and see how she does with that."

John stayed by her bed and kept a watchful eye over her while she slept. He was there when she woke up again. "Hi, Katie. Are you feeling better?"

Kate nodded her head and whispered, "John, what happened? Did I hit someone?"

"No, Katie, you didn't. It wasn't your fault at all."

Kate closed her eyes in relief. She looked back at Johnny. A single tear rolled down Kate's face. "Johnny, it was so horrible!"

"I know, sweetie. I know," he said, tenderly wiping the tear away.

"What happened to me?"

Johnny wasn't exactly sure what she was asking. "You were in a car accident, Katie."

Kate shook her head weakly. "No, I mean, what's wrong with me?"

Johnny's stomach dropped. He looked her in the eyes and softly replied, "Well, you've got some broken and cracked ribs. One of your lungs collapsed, honey. Your left shoulder is broken and you got a nasty bump on your head. You've had a couple of surgeries but the doctors say you're going to be just fine. But you need to rest."

"Surgeries? What day is it?"

"It's Thursday, sweetie. We've all been keeping watch over you the last few days."

"Thursday?" she whispered. She could hardly believe it. "John, when I saw that car coming, I tried so hard to miss it! I tried, but I couldn't! I couldn't stop it!" The tears were flowing freely down her face.

Johnny was choking back the tears. He took her hand and gently squeezed it. "Katie, what happened was not your fault, okay? I want you to understand that there was nothing you could have done. Katie, the other driver was drunk."

"Is the other driver okay?"

"He's fine, Katie. Don't worry about him," John reassured her. "Katie? Honey? Is there anything I can do for you? Do you need anything?"

Kate looked back at Johnny. "Just stay with me. I'm scared."

"I'll stay here for as long as you need me. You just close your eyes and rest. Don't worry, I'll be here when you wake up." He was devastated that this horrible accident had happened to the love of his life. But at the same time he was relieved that she was now safe and that she was going to be all right. He was never going to let anything happen to her, ever again—not if he could help it.

The alarm clock jolted Johnny out of his sleep. He had set it for about eleven o'clock that morning. He had been up late the previous night—there were a lot of things on his mind. Johnny stretched out his arm and hit the snooze button and then turned over to reach for Kate—but she wasn't there. Then he remembered.

John lay in bed for awhile with thoughts of Kate going through his mind. He missed her so much.

Slowly, he got up from bed and took a shower. When he was through getting ready the phone rang. "Hello?"

"Hey, John. It's Roy."

"Hey, Roy."

"How are you doing, junior?"

"I'm doing okay. I'm just getting ready."

"Did you eat yet?"

"No. I'm not sure I can."

"John, you've got to eat."

Then all of a sudden John heard Joanne's voice on the other end of the phone. "John, did I hear that you haven't eaten?"

"That's right, Joanne."

"John Gage, you have got to eat something. Promise me you will eat something, okay?"

"Okay. Okay. You win."

"Now, I'll see you later, okay? Roy will be over soon, though, to help you out."

"Okay. See you later."

John did eat some lunch like he promised Joanne. However, he didn't eat much because he had other things on his mind.

After eating John went to his closet and took out his black suit. He carefully dressed, and afterwards, took the lint brush over his suit. Then the doorbell ring. It was Roy. He was dressed in a black suit, as well.

"Hey partner. Are you still doing okay?"

"I'm fine, Roy. Do I look okay?"

"You look fine, junior. Come on. Let's go. I'll drive you. Where are the keys to your Rover?"

John looked around. "Ummm—oh, here they are. I guess my mind's been on other things lately."

"Yeah, that's understandable. Come on. We'd better get going."

About an hour later they arrived at their destination. Nobody else had arrived there yet, so John and Roy entered the church and waited patiently.

"John, what's wrong?" Roy asked when he saw tears in John's eyes.

"Roy, I just can't believe this is happening. I just can't believe it."

"Yeah, well you'd better believe it, because it's going to happen today."

"Did you know I haven't seen Kate since Sunday? Man, I miss her, Roy."

"Why haven't you seen her?"

John smiled. "Kate wanted it that way. She thought it would be romantic, I guess, when we finally see each other at the wedding."

"Yeah, that sounds like something Joanne would do." Roy chuckled.

Just then Joanne entered the church. "Hi, Johnny. How are you doing?" Then she saw his face. "What's wrong?"

"I was just telling Roy that I can't believe this is actually happening. Kate and I are finally getting married. On the night of Kate's accident I really didn't think this would happen."

"Oh, John. Kate feels the same way. She's been crying off and on practically the whole day!"

"Where is she, Joanne?"

"John, you can't see her before the wedding. It's bad luck and you two have had enough of that already! You'll see her soon enough." She smiled and looked down at her watch. "In about 45 minutes, in fact! I've got to run. I've got to help Kate with the final touches."

John lifted his hand and felt his tie. "Man, this just isn't working! I can't get this tie to sit straight! Can you help me with this?"

"Sure. Just try to relax."

The minister soon arrived and spoke to John and Roy. Then John saw Kate's parents walk into the church. Johnny walked over to them. This was only the second time that John and they had met.

"Hi Bob. Hi Diane." John shook Bob's hand.

"Hi John! You look so handsome!" Diane reached out and gave John a big hug. "We're so glad to have you as part of the family!"

John smiled as he hugged her back. "Thank you, Diane. That really means a lot to me. Have you seen Kate yet?"

"Yes, we just saw her. She looks so beautiful, John. And we've figured out a way to hide her sling on her arm. She's going to carry a bouquet of long-stemmed roses in that arm. She was so self-conscious about having her sling show on her wedding day."

"I know that she was worried about that," John said somberly.

"John, how can we ever thank you for taking such good care of my little girl after the accident? We felt so horrible not being there when it happened, but we're grateful that you were there. She thinks the world of you."

"You don't have to thank me, Bob. I love your daughter very much. There were so many times when I wish it had been me in that accident instead of her." Just then John saw his father enter the church. He looked back at Bob and Diane, "Ah, will you excuse me? I think I see my dad." He gave Bob another handshake and kissed Diane on the cheek before leaving them.

John walked over to where his dad was standing. "Hi, Dad."

"Hi, John. How are you, son?" his dad said as they shook hands.

"I'm fine. I'm very happy."

"I'm glad, son. I'm happy for you, too. Kate's really something. I really like her, John."

John smiled. "I'm glad. She really likes you too. She couldn't stop talking about you the night after you two met!"

His dad chuckled.

"Dad?"

"Yes?"

"What do you think Mom would've thought? Would she have liked Kate?" John asked quietly.

"Son, your mother would have loved her. Kate is the kind of person that she had always hoped you would marry. And I believe she's with us right now rejoicing for you."

"Thanks, Dad. I needed to hear that. I miss her so much." John had tears in his eyes. "I know you miss her, too."

"I do. But I still feel her with me sometimes. You know son, the body may die, but I believe that the spirit never dies."

John nodded his head.

As the rest of the family members and close friends starting arriving, Johnny and Roy greeted them. All of the guys from the station had come, as well as Dr. Brackett, Dr. Early and Dixie. Finally, when five o'clock rolled around John and Roy went up and stood at the front of the church. The music was very simple and soothing, a talented friend of theirs played acoustic guitar and sang. There were candles lit in candelabras at the front of the church and all along the aisle. The entire room was aglow in candlelight.

First Joanne appeared at the back of the church. She slowly walked down the aisle; Roy met her halfway and escorted her the rest of the way up to the front. "You look beautiful," he whispered to her as he squeezed her hand.

Joanne smiled up at him, remembering her own wedding day and their recent renewal of vows.

Johnny was getting a little nervous; he was shifting his weight back and forth between his legs. Then he saw Kate standing at the back of the church with her father and all of his nervousness dissipated. The sight of her literally took his breath away; she was stunning. She smiled at John and then started her walk down the aisle, keeping her eyes on John the whole time. John, in turn, could not keep his eyes off of her—his heart was full of love for her.

When Kate and her father reached the front of the church, Kate turned to her father and gave him a kiss on the cheek, and then she turned towards John. What they did next touched everyone in the congregation. They took a single rose and placed it in a vase at the front of the church in memory of John's mother who

was no longer with them. Kate and John said a short prayer to themselves while they did this. Kate looked over at John to see if he was okay and noticed that he had tears in his eyes. John saw Kate looking at him with concern on her face. He smiled reassuringly at her and whispered, "I'm okay." He took Kate's right arm and placed it in his while they walked up the few steps to where the minister was standing.

The ceremony was short but very sentimental and personal. They kept some of the traditional, religious parts of the ceremony, but Johnny and Kate had also written their own vows to express how they felt about each other.

The minister began, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to witness and to celebrate the coming together of two separate lives. We are here today to join Kathryn and John in holy matrimony. Kathryn and John want to share, with their family and friends, their decision to accept one another totally. We have come here to be with them and to rejoice with them in the making of this important decision. This is a commitment, which is not to be taken lightly, but rather undertaken with the greatest respect."

"Kathryn and John have written some vows that they would now like to say to each other." Johnny and Kate turned to face each other as he held her right hand with both of his hands.

John looked directly at Kate and squeezed her hand. "Kate, before I knew you, I wasn't living. I was waiting. The night we met the last thing I had on my mind was falling in love, but I thank God that he brought you into my life. I respect you, I cherish you and I adore you. You're my whole life and you always will be. I thank God every day that you are in my life." John's voice choked. He paused for a few seconds and then continued. "I promise to stand by your side as we build a life together. I promise to be your helper, healer, lover and friend. I promise before God, our family and our friends to forever be faithful and true, till death do us part."

Kate also had tears in her eyes as spoke. "John, you came along at a time when I didn't think there was any more hope for happiness in my life. I am so grateful to you and *for* you. You are the most precious gift God has given me. I believe that to have someone come into your life that you love as much as I love you is special and is something to be treasured. I'm so happy that we found each other. You are the most caring and gentlest man I've ever known. Our love has brought me here today to become part of you. I promise to always be your confidante, always ready to support you and to share your hopes and dreams."

John squeezed Kate's hand and they turned back towards the minister. The minister continued, "A ring is a very precious thing—a token of your faith and your love. It is a never-ending circle that indicates the continuing love of God—a love that never fails. Wear these rings as a continual reminder of your faith, as a constant reminder of the confession of faith you have made to each other and God. As you look at the ring that you wear, let it remind you of this day and of the pledge that you have just made to one another.

"Kathryn and John do you accept each other—will you love, cherish, shelter and care for each other in sickness and in health? Will you respect and honor each other always?"

"We will," they replied in unison.

"May I have the Bride's ring please." Roy handed John Kate's ring.

"John, take this ring, place it on Kathryn's finger." John carefully placed the ring on Kate's left hand, which was still in the sling. He then repeated after the minister: "With this ring, I thee wed. It is a token of my love for you and a token of my faith." He reached up to his face to wipe a tear away.

"May I have the Groom's ring please." Joanne handed John's ring to Kate.

Kathryn, take this ring, place it on John's finger, and say to him: "With this ring, I thee wed. It is a token of my love for you and a token of my faith." John helped Katie place the ring on his finger, since she could only work with her right hand.

"May these two, now wedded, remember the vows they have made. May they comfort and help each other in all the experiences of their lives, living joyfully under the same roof. May we who are gathered here today, and those who could not be with us, always remember Kathryn and John, and hope that the inspiration of this hour will not be forgotten, but will be the cornerstone of a loving, lasting and wonderful relationship. And now, by the power vested in me as Minister and as authorized by the state of California, I bless this union and now pronounce you partners in Life."

John turned to Kate and brought her hand up to his lips. Then he cupped her face in his hands and sweetly kissed her.

"I love you, Johnny," Kate whispered with tears glistening in her eyes.

"I love you."

They turned to face the congregation and walked back down the aisle—this time together, as husband and wife. Everybody was smiling as they came back down that aisle—including John and Kate. She had her arm in John's and he had his hand resting on hers. Once outside the church Johnny took Kate gently in his arms. The sun was beginning to set, producing a warm glow over the sky. "Katie, have I told you lately that I love you?"

"You just did—inside that church." Kate reached up and ran her hand through John's hair. "I love you so much, Johnny. I always will love you—for as long as I live."

Johnny looked directly in her eyes. "Katie, two months ago I didn't know if this day would happen. But it did and I thank God every day for that. I love you more than anything in this whole world." He drew her close to him and kissed her gently.

Kate and John were now beginning their lives together as partners in life and in love.
