

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



Vacation

John and Kate drove along the trail, scanning the area for a good place to stop. There were only a few other campers this weekend, which was good; that gave them a better chance at getting a good campsite. John glanced in his rearview mirror to be sure that Roy and Joanne were still following behind them.

"Okay, this looks like a good place to stop," John said as he pulled the Rover into a campsite.

"Yeah, this looks good," Kate agreed, looking the area over.

John shut off the Rover. He and Kate stepped out and waited until Roy had parked his car along side of them.

"How does this look?" John asked as he approached Roy's car.

Roy stepped out of the car. "Yeah, this looks like a good choice."

"Great!" John grinned and slapped his hands together. "Okay, let's set up!"

John and Kate proceeded to unload their vehicle of their camping gear while Joanne and Roy unpacked their car.

John smiled at Kate as they were unloading. "Man, this is going to be great!"

Kate smiled back. She thought that John was so cute when he got excited about something.

As they were setting up John was secretly watching Kate. She caught him staring at her when she was carrying the sleeping bags towards the tent. "What?" she asked, smiling.

John smiled back as Kate approached him. "You're cute and I like watching you." He winked at her and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

"Flirt!" Kate laughed.

Joanne noticed how John and Kate were enjoying themselves. She whispered to Roy, "Look at them, Roy. Aren't they cute?"

Roy looked up and smiled. "Yeah."

"I wonder what it's going to be like camping with newlyweds?" Joanne asked.

"Well, they're not exactly newlyweds. They've been married for practically a year."

"One year's not that long—they're newlyweds," she insisted. "And they sure act like they're newlyweds. Just look at them, Roy."

"Yeah, they do act like it, I guess." With a twinkle in his eye he leaned over and kissed Joanne on the cheek. "Is it giving you ideas?" he asked, slyly.

"How could it not?" she laughed. "Four days without the kids? This is practically my second honeymoon. It had better give *you* ideas, Roy DeSoto!"

"Don't worry, it does," he grinned.

"Look at Roy and Joanne, John. This is really their first vacation without their kids, isn't it?"

John looked over at his partner and his wife. "Hey, get a room, will you?" he shouted towards them.

Kate lightly slapped John's arm. "John! You're going to embarrass them!"

Roy simply smiled and waved.

Once the campsite had been set up Joanne and Kate decided to take a short walk up the road while John and Roy cooked lunch.

"There's not too many people out camping this week-end," Kate commented. "It's usually busier than this."

"Oh, look at that!" Joanne exclaimed as they approached a large lake about a quarter of a mile from their campsite.

"Looks like a nice lake for swimming, doesn't it?" Kate asked as they stopped to admire the view. "What do you say we park ourselves here for awhile?"

Joanne and Kate sat down in the soft grass next to the lake. "So, tell me, Joanne, is this the first vacation you and Roy have had without the kids?"

"You could say that. Believe me, we're long overdue for this!"

Kate nodded her head, thought for a moment and spoke again. "Joanne, was it hard sharing Roy once you two had kids?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I love having John just to myself. I think I would miss that time alone together if John and I had kids." She looked at Joanne sheepishly. "Selfish of me, isn't it?"

"No, it's not selfish. And you're right. Once you have kids, you definitely don't get as much time alone together—the kids kind of take over your life. But they're great, though. It's wonderful to look at your daughter and see yourself in her, or to see your husband in your son."

Kate nodded and stared wistfully at the lake. "I wonder if John ever thinks the same way I do?" She turned and looked at Joanne. "Probably not, huh? Guys don't really think about things like that, do they?"

"Well, I can't speak for John. But in general, you might be right. So, enjoy it while you can, girl!"

Kate laughed. "Oh, believe me, I am. I am!"

"Well, we'd better get back for lunch. They're probably looking for us." Joanne and Kate headed back to camp where, to their surprise, John and Roy had lunch waiting.

The traffic in the park was quite light throughout the entire afternoon. "This is going to be a nice, quiet week-end," Joanne commented, looking at Roy.

Roy looked over at Joanne and smiled. "Yeah, *quiet*," he emphasized.

Later that night, Joanne, Roy, John and Kate relaxed around the campfire.

"Are you cold?" John asked Kate when he noticed her shivering.

"It's a little chilly, don't you think?"

John pulled Kate closer to his body and put his arms around her. "Is that better?" he asked as he kissed her temple.

Kate snuggled up to John and smiled. "Much. Body heat is still the best way to warm up." Kate looked at Roy. "So, tell me something, Roy."

Roy looked up from staring at the fire. "What's that?"

Before you and Joanne had kids, did you ever think about the fact that you and Joanne wouldn't have as much 'alone' time together?" Kate sneaked a look at Joanne.

Roy smiled. "Oh, I don't know. I guess it crossed my mind."

"Well, I thought about it *a lot*," Joanne piped in.

Roy grinned at his wife and put his arm around her.

"Is that the way you feel?" Roy asked Kate.

Kate looked up at John and then back at Roy. "Yeah, it is. I guess I'm greedy. I want my husband all to myself." She was embarrassed to admit it, but after all, these were their closest friends.

Roy saw that John had a puzzled look on his face and noticed that he didn't say anything.

The couples talked awhile longer before deciding to retire to their tents and get some sleep.

Once John and Kate were inside their tent, John reached for his sleeping bag, pulled it over to Kate's and zipped them together. He crawled inside and reached for Kate who crawled in, snuggled up to him and rested her head on his chest. John was still thinking about what Kate had said outside about having children.

"Kate?"

"Hmm?"

"Are you having second thoughts about having kids?"

"I just like having you to myself, John. I know it's selfish, but I love being alone with you," she said as she snuggled in closer.

Johnny was even more puzzled. "So you don't want kids anymore?"

Kate looked up into John's confused face. "Don't worry, John. I still want to have your babies," she reassured him. "Once we have kids I just want you and me to have more time alone together than Roy and Joanne have had. Don't you ever think about that?"

"I guess I hadn't."

Kate propped herself up on her elbow to look at her husband. "John, once you and I have kids, our whole lives are going to change. Everything will revolve around them. We're going to hardly have any time for each other."

"Is this worrying you?"

Kate nodded. "Just look at Roy and Joanne. This is the first real vacation they've had together—just the two of them—since they've had kids."

John rolled Kate over on her back and looked deeply into her eyes. "Katie, don't let this worry you. We are going to *make* time to be together. I'm not about to let anything get in the way of my time with you. No matter what."

"Is that a promise?"

He gently brushed the hair from her face and answered softly, "Yes it is. I promise."

Kate brought her hand up to John's face and gently caressed it. "Thank you. I needed to hear that," she whispered.

John tenderly kissed his wife. "You remember my vow to you on the day we married, don't you? 'You're my whole life and you always will be.' Well, I meant what I said." Then he pressed his body onto hers as his lips found the nape of her neck.

Kate closed her eyes, absorbing this closeness with John completely. "And do you remember what I said to

you?"

"Which part?" John murmured, still kissing her, enjoying the taste of her skin.

"I said 'You are the most—.'" She stopped and moaned in pleasure as she felt his lips move down to her throat. Breathing hard, she finished her sentence. "I said that you were the most precious gift God has given me."

"And I promised to be your helper, healer, lover and friend. And you know what?" John whispered hoarsely, his breath hot on her skin.

"Hmm?" Kate purred as she ran her fingers through his hair.

John kissed the hollow at the base of her neck. "Right now I want to be your lover."

The next morning John and Kate rose early and walked up the road to the lake. Roy and Joanne weren't awake yet and they didn't want to disturb them. Besides, they wanted to do something that they wouldn't dare do with Roy and Joanne around.

"I've never done anything like this before, John!" Kate laughed.

"Neither have I, but it's time we try it, don't you think?" he grinned devilishly. "You only go around once!"

As they got to the lake Kate and John shed their clothes and stepped into the lake.

"IT'S SO COLD!" Kate shrieked.

Laughing, John told her, "You just have to jump in!" He walked out into the lake further, dunked his entire body under the water and jumped back up. "Like that!"

Kate looked at him doubtfully.

"Come on, Katie. Just do it," he said, reaching his hand out to her.

Kate rolled her eyes and told him, "I cannot *believe* you talked me into this!" She grabbed his hand and walked towards him, then she slid her body below the surface of the water and came up again panting. "This is so cold!"

John laughed and went underwater again. But he didn't come back up. Kate scanned the water around her, looking for him.

Suddenly he popped up behind her and grabbed her waist. "Gotcha!"

She turned around to face him. "John Gage! I am going to get you!" she said as brushed her hand against the top of the water, splashing him.

Instead of splashing back, John put his arm around her waist, pulled her body into his and pressed his lips against hers.

Smiling, Kate suggested, "Now I know why you wanted to go skinny-dipping. Didn't you get enough of this last night?"

"Never." With his eyes half-cast he leaned in towards her, and tenderly kissed her. "I want you all the time, Katie. You're all I think about," he told her as he squeezed her body against his. "Don't ever think that will change, because it won't." He was looking intently into her eyes. Then his eyes lowered onto her scars from her car accident. He traced them gently with his finger and tears stung his eyes as he remembered how close he came to losing her. "I love you, Katie."

Tears sprung to Kate's eyes. He had caught her off-guard with one of the most beautiful moments she'd ever experienced.

"Aww, Katie, don't cry," John said softly. He pulled her into him and held her tenderly. After a few moments, he said, "Come on, we'd better get back. Joanne and Roy will be up soon."

"Sure, make me cry and then forget about it," she chuckled, wiping her eyes.

"Katie, you're shivering. Come on, let's get dressed and get back to camp and warm you up."

As they strolled back into camp Joanne and Roy were just coming out of their tent.

"Where have you two been? Have you been swimming already?" Joanne asked.

"That too," John joked.

Kate, embarrassed, nudged him in the ribs with her elbow.

John grabbed his side, laughing. "Ouch! Those elbows should be registered as lethal weapons!"

Roy and Joanne exchanged glances, both grinning. It was going to be an interesting camping trip, that was for sure.

"Ha, ha. Very funny," Kate said, dryly, as she walked towards their tent. "I'm going to change clothes. I'll be back out in a minute to help you with breakfast, Joanne."

"Take your time, Kate. I can handle it if Roy and John help," she hinted, looking at the men.

John could hear Kate coughing while she was in the tent. He hoped that their dip in the lake this morning wasn't a mistake.

A little while later, Kate emerged from the tent wearing worn-in blue jeans, hiking boots and one of John's white T-shirts. She had towel-dried her hair and it was a little tousled looking.

John smiled at how sexy his wife looked. He handed her a cup of coffee and winked at her. "Feel better?"

Kate looked at John slyly and grinned. "I feel fine, thanks."

After breakfast Joanne and Kate packed lunches for that day; they were all going to go hiking.

The guys took the lead with Joanne and Kate following behind. After a few hours Joanne piped up and teased them by asking, "Hey guys, you're not going to get us lost, are you?"

Roy and John stopped and looked behind them at their wives. Then Roy looked at John and then at his surroundings. "You know, John, I don't remember which turn we used back there. Do you remember which fork in the road we took?"

"I wasn't paying attention. I thought *you* would remember," John replied. "I think we took a left."

"No, we took a right back there," Kate corrected him.

"No, I think John's right. It was a left," said Roy.

Kate looked at Joanne who was smiling. "Just ignore them, Kate. They think they're being funny."

John and Roy looked at each other, grinning. Then they turned around and started back up the trail again.

Joanne laughed and said to Kate quietly, "You've got to learn to not be such a pushover around these guys."

"I know. I've always been gullible," Kate admitted, shaking her head and smiling. Kate started coughing again and had to stop.

John and Roy looked back. Kate was bent over with one hand resting on her knee and the other up to her mouth to stifle her coughing. John had a concerned look on his face. "Are you okay, Kate?"

Kate brought her hand up to her chest and took a deep breath. "Yeah, I'm fine."

"Are you sure?" John asked, his brow furrowed.

Kate stood up and nodded her head. "Yeah. Let's keep going."

John took one more look at her before turning back around to be sure she was being straight with him.

After about another hour the group stopped for lunch. John took his sandwich out of his backpack and looked at it.

"What's the matter? Don't you like your sandwich? What did you get?"

"Peanut butter," he answered.

"Oops. You got mine," said Kate. "Here. I've got your ham." She extended her hand to John and they swapped sandwiches. Then she turned to Joanne and rolled her eyes without the guys seeing.

Joanne giggled.

"Ah! Much better!" he grinned as he took a big bite.

As they ate their lunch they absorbed their surroundings.

"Look! Look at that huge oak!" Kate exclaimed. She jumped up and jogged over to it. As she stood at the base of the tree she looked straight up into its branches, closely examining it. She turned to the group and gestured to John. "John! John, give me a boost, will you?"

John's eyes got big. "What? Do you think you're going to climb that?"

"Yes, I am," Kate replied, her hands on her hips. "I grew up climbing trees and I haven't climbed one in years. Come on, John. Please?"

"No way, Kate. You're not climbing that thing. You'll fall and hurt yourself."

Kate turned back around and looked up at the tree. She wanted to climb it so badly; it brought back to many memories for her.

The rest of the group sat and watched Kate. John felt badly. He knew that Kate missed Iowa and hadn't been back home for a long time. He let out a big sigh and said, "Okay, you win." He got up and walked over to Kate.

Kate beamed at John. "Thank you! This is going to be so much fun!"

John clasped his hands together for Kate to step into. She put her foot into his hands and he lifted her to the bottom branch. Once she was standing on the bottom branch she looked upwards to the next branch. John felt completely uncomfortable with this situation and kept a close eye on her. Roy and Joanne were now standing next to John watching Kate, as well. John looked at them and shook his head.

Kate grabbed a larger branch above her and placed her left foot on a smaller branch to hoist herself up. She continued that way for a few more branches until she was at least 20 feet up.

"Kate, come down now. Please?" John begged.

Kate looked down at John and then looked up at the next branch. "One more," she told him.

"Katie, please?"

She lifted her foot up to the next branch and it slipped.

Joanne gasped.

"KATE!" John shouted.

Kate looked back down and smiled reassuringly. "I'm okay. Just relax. I've done this a million times."

She tried it again and this time she made it. She looked back down at the group, "See?" Satisfied now with her accomplishment she started climbing back down.

Once she got to the bottom branch she carefully swung herself over the side and dropped to the ground. John caught her.

"Do you know that you practically gave me a heart attack?"

Kate patted John's cheek. "You're so sweet. But I used to climb trees every day growing up." She noticed that her friends looked concerned. "I'm sorry, guys," she apologized. "But I just couldn't resist. I promise—no more tree climbing."

"Well, should we get going again?" Roy asked. He was relieved that Kate's tree climbing episode was over.

They hiked for another hour before turning back around for camp. Tonight was John and Kate's night to cook supper. "Go on, you two," said Kate. "We'll take care of this. Why don't you two go down by the lake and just relax?" Kate suggested.

Taking Kate's advice, Roy and Joanne walked to the lake for some time alone together. Once there they sat on the soft grass next to each other and Roy put his arms around his wife's shoulders. "Are you having fun?" he asked as he kissed her cheek.

Joanne sighed. "This has been so relaxing. I'm having a lot of fun." She turned to Roy. "Do you miss the kids yet?" Joanne asked, snuggling into him.

"Kids? What kids?" Roy kidded. "It's so peaceful here. You know, this is the *perfect* vacation. This is better than going to any amusement park or tourist spot. This is *restful*."

"It is, isn't it?"

"Remember the last time we went on a vacation and couldn't decide where to go?"

"Yeah, and we went to that farm. That, definitely, was *not* restful," she laughed.

Roy gently caressed his wife's face with his hand and looked at her with his big blue eyes. "You're still beautiful to me, you know that?"

Joanne blushed. "Roy—"

Roy leaned in and kissed her before she could even finish.

John saw Roy and Joanne approaching the camp. Roy had his arm around Joanne's shoulder; her arm was around Roy's waist. John smiled and hollered, "Hey kids, what took you so long?"

Kate smiled at them. "Did you have fun?"

"You might say that," Roy answered, smiling.

After supper, the group sat around the campfire again and talked.

"So, Joanne and Roy. I don't think I know how you two met. Tell me the story."

"Well, Kate. You see, it's like this. The first time we met we hated each other and we really didn't start dating until many, many years later."

Kate got a puzzled look on her face. "Really?"

Joanne laughed. "There you go again, Kate. Roy, explain to her what you mean."

"Well, you see, we met in the third grade," Roy told her.

Kate laughed. "That would explain it. So when did you finally ask her out?"

Roy looked at Joanne and grinned. "Well, not until we were juniors in high school. You see, Joanne was one of the prettiest and one of the smartest girls in school. I remember that she had this soft, pink sweater that she would wear with this short skirt. All the guys wanted to ask her out but everyone was chicken. So when prom time came, I got up the nerve and I asked her. And she said 'Yes.' We basically dated from that point on."

"Aww, that's a sweet story. He swept you off your feet, didn't he, Joanne?"

"Yeah, you could say that." She looked at Roy and smiled. Then Joanne looked back at Kate and John. "And I'll never forget the first time you two met."

"Thanks to you," John added as he lifted his arm and rested it over Kate's shoulder. He smiled as he remembered how Joanne had set him and Kate up, unbeknownst to everyone—even Roy.

"Well, *someone* had to do it. I knew you two were right for each other." Joanne laughed. "And John, you should've seen your face when you first saw Kate!"

Kate smiled and looked at Joanne. "What? I've never heard this story! Tell me!"

"Well, John was already at our house. He thought he was there just to have supper with us. He didn't know I had invited you—and neither did Roy," she glanced at Roy. "Anyway, when the doorbell rang and Roy let you in, you should've seen John. He just stood there with his mouth open. He was literally speechless. And that is *not* like John, as we all know. I guess you had made quite an impression on him, Kate." Joanne then looked at John and smiled. "You were so cute, John." She continued, "He was totally mesmerized by you, Kate."

"Really, John?"

John smiled and cleared his throat. "Well, I guess I was a little nervous."

"John, I've never seen you so nervous around a girl before in the entire time I've known you," added Roy.

"Thanks, Roy. Thanks a lot."

"And let's not forget Kate!" Joanne added.

"What do you mean?" Kate asked.

"I suppose you don't recall hanging on John's every word that evening. You really made Johnny's ego swell that night!" Joanne laughed.

Kate blushed. "I guess I developed a huge crush on him the moment I saw him." Then she turned to John and squeezed his face with one of her hands, like you would to a small child. "I mean, just take a look at this face! Who could NOT love this face?"

"Okay, okay. I think we're done with this conversation!" John laughed.

"Yeah, you're right. And I am getting tired. I hate to be a party pooper but I'm going to hit the hay. I'll see everyone in the morning." She squeezed John's shoulder as she walked by him towards their tent.

Kate's gesture did not go unnoticed by John. He guessed that Kate wanted him to go with her.

After putting the campfire out, John joined Kate in their tent. She was already in the sleeping bag. John undressed, got in beside her and reached for her. He liked what he found and what he felt. Kate was wearing a new black, satin nightgown with spaghetti straps.

He lay on his back and pulled Kate on top of him. "Mmm, this is nice," he commented as he ran his hands over her body and over the soft nightgown.

"I thought you might like it," she said as she tucked her hair behind her ear and kissed him. "John?" Kate whispered softly.

"Hmm?"

"Are Roy and Joanne in their tent?"

"Yeah, why?" he asked as he tenderly kissed the nape of her neck.

"Because I have an idea and I think you'll like it."

"What's that?" John asked as his lips moved over her skin to her shoulder.

"We haven't broken in the Rover yet."

John stopped kissing her and looked at her. By the look on her face he knew exactly what she meant. Smiling, he told her, "Katie, I swear that you are the devil in disguise. What if Joanne and Roy hear us?"

"And what if they don't? Come on, where's your sense of adventure?" she asked, kissing his neck, pressing her body onto his even more. "It'll be fun, *I promise*," she whispered into his ear.

John closed his eyes and started breathing heavily. John wasn't going to need any persuasion that night. "Let's go," he whispered back.

Kate and John sneaked out of their tent and carefully tiptoed over to the Rover. They quietly opened the door to the vehicle, climbed in, and just as quietly, closed the door.

"It's like we're in high school and we're sneaking around behind our parents, isn't it?" Kate giggled.

"Yeah, but I didn't have this much fun in high school," John said as he started to rub his hands over Kate's body, kissing her. Then he stopped and looked at Kate. "Did you have this much fun in high school?" he asked with a crooked grin.

"Me?" Kate laughed. "Yeah, right. Miss 'Goody Two Shoes?' Hardly. But I'm having fun *now*," she said as she moved in even closer towards John.

Back in Roy and Joanne's tent Joanne asked, "Did you hear something?"

"Yeah, it sounded like a car door. I'll go check." Roy walked out of the tent with his flashlight. He saw movement in Johnny's vehicle, but couldn't see anything because the windows were fogged over. He stepped closer and could see that it was John and Kate inside. Roy smiled and walked back into his and

Joanne's tent.

"Well, what was it?"

He grinned at Joanne. "It's John and Kate. They're making out in the Rover."

"Did they see you?"

"Doubt it, they looked too busy."

Joanne chuckled. "Well, they've got the right idea, don't you think?"

Roy shut off the flashlight, opened his sleeping bag for Joanne and grinned. "Yes, I think they do. Why don't you come over here, Mrs. DeSoto, and we'll see what we can find to do."

The next morning John and Kate rose early and had breakfast ready for Roy and Joanne.

"Morning! How'd you sleep?" John asked his friends.

"I slept like a log! It's amazing what fresh air will do for a person," Joanne answered.

"And other stuff, too," Roy said, looking at Joanne out of the corner of his eye, smiling.

Kate caught what Roy said and smiled. She looked at John and could tell that he hadn't heard Roy's comment.

"John, did you say that you and Roy were going to do some fishing today?" Kate asked.

John looked at Roy. "How about it, Roy? Should we work on catching dinner for tonight?"

"Yeah," Roy nodded. "Yeah, that would be fun. I don't think I've fished since you and I went together that last time a few years back."

"Well, where does that leave us, Joanne?" Kate asked. "Any ideas on what you'd like to do?"

"How about we go into town and check out the shops?" she suggested.

"Sounds good to me. John, do you mind if we take the Rover?"

John shrugged. "Go ahead."

While Joanne and Kate cleaned up after breakfast, Roy and John went to their vehicles to fetch their fishing gear. Roy had his small boat on a trailer behind his car. They would drive the car to the lake and back the trailer up to the edge of the lake.

Kate was watching the guys get their gear together as she made Roy and John's lunch for that day. "Hey John?" she yelled over to him.

John looked up at her. "What?"

Just then Kate felt a spasm in her chest and started to cough. She bent over and brought her hand up to her chest. After a few moments, when the coughing had stopped, she stood up again. She found John standing beside her.

"Are you okay?" he asked with a concerned look on his face.

Kate took a deep breath and let it out. "Yeah, I'll be fine. I must've caught something from our swim yesterday."

"Well, maybe you'd better just stick around the camp today and rest," he suggested.

"No, I'm fine. Besides, I don't want to let Joanne down. But John, I was just going to ask you if you two had life jackets."

"Life jackets? Oh, yeah. Roy's got those."

"Well, wear them, okay? Don't just toss them in the boat with you."

John smiled at Kate's concern. "Yes Ma'am!"

"Okay, well Joanne and I are going to leave soon. Have fun today!" She gave John a peck on the lips and she started towards the Rover. Turning around she added, "Oh, and John?"

"Yeah?"

"Catch some whoppers!"

"We'll try!"

"One more thing? *You* clean them, okay? I've never cleaned a fish and I'm not about to start. *Yuck!*" She made a face of disgust.

John grinned, turned around and walked over towards Roy who was waiting for him.

"Is she okay?" Roy asked. He had heard Kate coughing. "It sounded like she has a bad cough."

"She says she's okay," was all John could offer. "She's stubborn, Roy. She'd never tell me if she was sick."

John and Roy drove the boat to the far end of the lake where they heard the fishing was best. They talked mostly about sports but also about the other guys at the station.

"Hey, did you hear Chet has a new girlfriend?" Roy asked John.

John looked up and grinned devilishly. "Oh yeah? Have you met her?"

Roy shook his head. "Nope. I don't think they've been dating that long."

"Well, I'll have to ask him about this when we get back."

Roy could tell John was scheming inside his head and rolled his eyes. John and Chet never let up on each other.

"Did you hear that Mike and his wife are having a baby?"

John smiled. "Hey! That's great!" Then he thought for a moment. "Just where do you get this information, Roy? I mean, we're always around each other. How is it that you hear this stuff and I don't?"

Roy shrugged his shoulders and said with a slight smile, "I don't know. Maybe you're just not listening."

"Ha!"

Roy and John sat for quite awhile while casting their fishing rods into the water. Roy thought that John was unusually quiet, even for fishing.

"So, what's up?" Roy finally asked.

John continued to stare at the water. "What do you mean?"

"Why are you so quiet?"

"I was just thinking about Mike and his wife."

Roy understood now. "And you're thinking about Kate's miscarriage, right?"

"Yeah. You know, you get news like that—that you're going to have a baby—and you think that you're the luckiest and the happiest guy in the world. And then something happens and all that goes away—*instantly!* You know what I mean?" Then realizing what he had asked, he added, "I'm sorry, Roy. I know that you know all about it."

Roy nodded. "Yeah, I know what you mean."

"You know, I really don't think about it all that much anymore. It's just that when you hear news about other people having kids, then it comes back to you."

Roy simply nodded. "You're right."

John considered Roy his best friend, even though he was a man of few words. Just having him there was a comfort to John. Roy's personality complemented John's: Roy's calmness and his way of reasoning compared to John's excitability and compulsiveness.

Joanne and Kate had fun that day checking out the stores in town. They didn't even notice that there was a pair of men watching them as they walked into a restaurant for lunch.

"Man, look over there," one of the men said to the other.

Looking up, he replied, "What? At those women?"

"Yeah. What do you think of the blonde?"

"She's a looker. But just forget about it, Tim. I don't want any trouble, got it?"

His friend didn't respond, but he did continue to keep an eye on Joanne and Kate.

After lunch Kate and Joanne checked out one last antique store before heading back to camp.

"I loved that last store," sighed Joanne. "I'd give my eye teeth to have that oak cupboard!"

Kate smiled at her friend. "Well, why don't you tell Roy about it?"

"Roy's not the problem. It's the kids. I don't want to get anything really nice until they're older. Do you know what I mean?"

Kate smiled weakly and nodded, keeping her eyes on the road.

Joanne noticed that Kate hadn't said anything. "Kate, if you don't want to talk about this just let me know. But are you and John still trying to have kids?"

Kate took her eyes off the road for a second to look at Joanne. "Yeah, we're still trying."

"Well, don't worry. It'll happen eventually. The doctor said everything was okay, right?"

"Yeah, she said everything's fine. But it's just so frustrating. I know it's only been a couple of months, but still—. Well, you know how it is."

"Yeah, I remember going through that. But don't worry Kate, everything will all turn out fine in the end," she reassured her friend.

"Thanks Joanne. I needed to hear that." Kate smiled at Joanne.

Kate turned into the park and observed that there were a few new campers that weren't there when they originally arrived a few days ago. In fact, the campsite just down the road from theirs was now occupied.

When Kate and Joanne pulled into the campsite, they noticed that John and Roy weren't back yet. So they decided to walk to the lake. When they reached the edge of the lake they saw Roy's boat not very far away. At that same time, Roy saw Kate and Joanne.

"Hey, John," Roy gestured towards the shore. "They're back. Should we show them dinner?"

John smiled crookedly. "Yeah, let's show them."

Roy guided the boat towards shore.

"Any luck today guys?" asked Joanne.

"You could say that," John said as he held up a pail of walleyes to show Kate.

Kate wrinkled her nose and turned away. "I'd rather not see them, thank you very much. You can show them to me after they're all cleaned and filleted."

John grinned and then helped Roy get the boat back up on the trailer.

That night, after supper, Kate went to bed early, as she was tired and still had a cough. The rest of the gang stayed up and talked around the campfire.

Joanne told Roy about the oak cupboard she had found in town. She also mentioned that when she and Kate were coming back from town they noticed a few more campers in the park. In fact, there were a couple of guys at the campsite right down the road from theirs.

When it came time for bed John stepped into their tent and found Katie sleeping soundly. He noticed that her face was red and that she was sweating.

John felt her forehead with his hand. She had a temperature. Of that he was certain. He undressed and got into bed quietly, so as not to wake Kate.

The next morning when John woke up he noticed Kate was still sleeping. He felt her forehead again. She was still warm. He dressed, trying to make as little noise as possible, and went outside to find Roy and Joanne making breakfast. "Kate's sick. She had a temperature last night and she still has it. She's still sleeping," he told his friends.

"Oh! What's wrong?" asked Joanne.

"Well, I guess we never should have gone down to the lake the other morning. I've got a first aid kit. I'm going to get some aspirin for her."

"Do you have any cough syrup in your kit, John?" Joanne asked.

"No, I don't have anything like that."

"Hang on, I might have some. You know, when you have kids, you learn to stock certain things in a first aid kit."

Joanne and John walked over to their vehicles. Joanne found the cough syrup and handed it to John. "Her you go. It's a children's formula but it should help somewhat, I should think."

"Thanks Joanne. I'll give this to her when she wakes up."

After they ate breakfast John went back into his tent to check on Kate. She stirred as he entered the tent.

"Katie?" John whispered, not knowing if she was awake or not.

"I feel awful," she groaned. And then she started to cough again.

"I know. You've got a fever. I've got my first aid kit here, Katie. Let me take your temperature, okay?" He grabbed the thermometer and carefully placed it under her tongue. Her temperature turned out to be 100.5 degrees. "I've got some aspirin for you to try to bring down your fever and Joanne gave me some cough medicine. And I want you to stay here and rest today."

Kate nodded. She was too weak to argue. "But I don't want to spoil your fun, John. Promise me that the rest of you will do something today."

"No, I'm staying here with you, Katie."

"John, all I'm going to do is sleep anyway. So what's the point of you staying here with me? I'm a big girl. I know how to take my medicine," she smiled weakly, coughing again. "Please do something with Roy and Joanne. I'd feel better if you did. Honestly."

John clenched his jaw, took a deep breath and let it out. "Okay. I think Roy and Joanne were talking about hiking again, but I won't be gone the whole day. I'll come back early. How's that?"

Kate nodded. "Good. Thanks. Now where's that aspirin and cough medicine so I can go back to sleep?"

After Kate took her medicine and lay back down to sleep, John stepped out of the tent, updated Joanne and Roy on Kate's condition and told them what she had said.

"John, I can stay here with her," offered Joanne.

"Joanne, if she knew that you stayed here because of her, she would have my head. Believe me! We'll go on our hike and I'll just come back early, that's all."

"Well, we can *all* come back early. You don't have to come by yourself," said Roy.

So the three of them started their hike in the park that day.

Later, when Kate woke up, she was feeling much better. She felt like she was practically back to normal. She checked her watch and found it to be past lunchtime. She washed up and changed her clothes.

She got some food and a soda out of the coolers and sat down in a lawn chair outside for a bite to eat. After a few minutes she heard footsteps coming up the gravel road. Thinking it was John she yelled, "John, is that you?"

There was no response. *It must not be John*. She finished her snack and stood up to stretch her legs. She looked towards the road and was startled by what she saw — there was a man standing on the trail watching her.

"Can I help you?" Kate asked him.

"Do you know how far it is to the lake?" he asked her. The man was surprised to see the pretty blonde again.

Relieved, Kate replied, "Yeah, it's just about a quarter of a mile up the road. Keep going in the direction you're walking."

"Thanks," the man answered. He continued walking and then stopped again. "You look like you're by yourself. Are you going to be okay? Do you want any company?"

"No thanks, I'm fine," she replied, tersely. She just wanted this man to leave. There was something about

him that made her uncomfortable. She watched him as started walking up the road again.

Then he stopped suddenly and turned to face Kate again. "Say, Miss?"

"Yes?" she asked with some exasperation in her voice.

"You wouldn't happen to have some aspirin, would you? I've got a bear of a headache. I hate to ask, but I just don't have any with me."

"No, I don't, sorry," was all she said. She had lied but she didn't like the looks of this guy.

"Okay, well thanks." The man smiled and finally continued on his way.

After the man was out of sight Kate grabbed a magazine and sat down again. The sun felt so good on her skin that she laid her head back and closed her eyes. She had started to doze off when she felt someone touch her arm. Startled she opened her eyes thinking she would find John there. Her eyes had to adjust to the bright sunlight, but when they were able to focus the person she saw was not John. Instead she saw that same stranger again.

"What do you think you're doing?" Kate asked, alarmed. She tried to jump up from her chair but the man had a tight grip on her arm and was holding her down.

"You sure are pretty," the man said to her.

"What are you doing? Let go of me!" She tried to free herself from his grip but he tightened it even more. She grimaced in pain as he wrenched her arm.

"Not yet, blondie. Don't you want to have some fun?" he sneered.

"LEAVE ME ALONE! I MEAN IT!" Kate struggled to free herself from this hideous man, but he was too strong. Kate was scared out of her mind. *This can't be happening!*

Then Kate heard someone come up from behind them, yelling. "TIM! LET HER GO!"

The man holding Kate looked up at his friend and hissed, "Get out of here, Pete! This is none of your damned business!"

Then Kate saw Johnny, Joanne and Roy came running towards her. They were on their way back to camp when they heard Kate screaming.

"KATE!" John yelled. He saw two men at their campsite, and Kate was struggling with one of them.

"Let her go Tim! LET HER GO!" yelled Pete.

When Tim saw John he let go of Kate and took off down the road in a dead run.

John charged towards the other man when he heard Kate yell, "John! Stop! He didn't do anything!"

Pete held up his hands in defense. "You don't get it, man. I tried to tell him to leave her alone!"

John stood between Kate and this man—keeping this stranger from his wife. John's face was red with anger

and the veins in his forehead were bulging. "NO, *YOU* DON'T GET IT! LEAVE NOW BEFORE I BEAT THE CRAP OUT OF YOU!"

With his hands still in the air he started backing up and replied, "Hey man, no problem. I'm outta here!" Then he turned around and took off down the road, just as fast as his buddy had.

John turned to Kate, placed his hands on her arms and lowered his head to look at her face. "Katie, are you okay?" John could feel Kate's body trembling.

Kate nodded her head. "Yes."

Joanne and Roy approached John and Kate. "Kate, are you alright?" Joanne asked softly.

Kate smiled weakly at her friends. "Yes, I'm fine. That other guy—he came and tried to stop it. Nothing happened. Really, I'm fine. Please don't make a big deal out of this. I don't want this to spoil our vacation, okay?"

John could still feel her trembling. He wrapped his arms around Kate, pulled her against his body and held her tightly. "Don't worry about that, Katie." He gently rocked her and whispered, "I've got you now, honey. You're okay."

Roy and Joanne watched as John comforted his wife.

"I'm going to drive the car over to the park ranger and get these guys kicked out of the park," Roy said quietly.

'Thank you,' John mouthed to his partner over his wife's head.

"Good idea, Roy," said Joanne as she squeezed his arm.

"Come on, Katie. Let's get you inside the tent and rest for a little while, okay?"

Kate nodded her head as John led her into their tent. They laid down and John pulled Kate over to him. He held her securely as she rested her head on his chest. He could feel her body starting to relax as he gently stroked her hair. Horrible thoughts went through John's mind as to what might have happened had they not decided to come back to camp early.

"Are you doing okay?" he whispered to Kate, kissing the top of her head.

"I am now." She moved in closer to John. She needed to be as close to him as she could possibly get.

When John and Kate emerged from their tent later that afternoon they found that Roy and Joanne had already cleaned the fish and that they were cooking them.

Joanne and Roy walked over to Kate right away. "How are you doing, Kate?" Joanne asked, giving her a hug.

"I'm fine, really. Please don't worry."

"We're glad you're okay," Roy said as he, too, gave Kate a hug.

"Thanks guys. Thanks for worrying. You're such good friends. But I'm really okay. Now, let me help you with dinner, Joanne. I'd like something to do."

Roy walked over to John. "How's she *really* doing, John?"

"She was pretty shaken up at first, but I really think she'll be fine. I'm probably doing worse than she is. Man, I really wanted to kill that guy, Roy!"

"I know. But she's okay and that's what counts."

John nodded. "Roy, did you get those guys kicked out of the camp?"

"I talked to the park ranger and he said he'd take care of it. In fact, he followed me to their campsite when I came back here. I'd bet that they're long gone by now."

"Good," John said, clenching his jaw.

"Come on guys! Supper's on!" Kate announced.

"I wish tomorrow wasn't our last day," Kate said as she crawled into their sleeping bag that night.

"Really? Even after what happened today?" John asked as he climbed in beside her.

"Really."

John propped himself up on his elbow and stared down at his wife, softly caressing her face.

Kate stared back up into his face and got lost in his deep, brown eyes. She brought her hand up to his hair and ran her fingers through it.

"I love you, Katie."

"I love you more."

John laid down, snuggled up to Kate and draped his arm across her body and they closed their eyes for the night.

Kate couldn't sleep though. She laid there for awhile thinking and listening to the crickets chirping outside. She wasn't thinking about what had happened that day — instead, she was thinking about John. How he was such a good person. How he was such a loving husband and so protective of her. How much he cared for her and loved her. And how much *she* loved *him*.

"John?" she whispered quietly?

"Hmm?"

"Are you awake?"

"Yeah," he answered as he squeezed her.

"I can't sleep."

"Me neither."

Kate laid on her side and looked at John. "Wanna do something?" she asked, coyly, as she brushed her lips across his.

John laid on his side to face her, looked into those big blue eyes of hers and said, "Do you even have to ask?" Then he pulled Kate's body close to him and kissed her passionately.
