

Tracy Island Wednesday May 9th midday

John whistled as he entered the kitchen. Emily Tracy smiled at her grandson. "You sound in a happy mood."

"I am, Grandma. Kat made me dinner last night and I offered to return the favour. But... I'm not the world's best chef."

"Lands sakes, well why did you offer then? And I thought you were the intelligent one," Emily said with a wink.

John shrugged and grinned.

"It seemed like a nice thing to do..."

"Well, why don't you take her on a picnic?" Emily suggested. "I can help you to pack a picnic basket."

"Sounds great!"

John helped his Grandma fill the basket with both vegetarian food for Kat and some of his favourite picnic foods.

"Thanks, Grandma," John said, giving Emily a peck on the cheek.

"Oh, you," she said, swatting him lightly on the back as he retreated.

John headed out through the lounge and down past the pool towards the beach. He had arranged to meet Kat on the beach. She was sitting on a large towel on the sand, head in a book. She looked up as his shadow fell across her. Shading her eyes, she said, "Oh hi, John."

"Hi, Kat. What are you reading?" John inquired, as he sat down beside her.

Kat showed John. "Brains has given me a manual on Thunderbird One. We are starting maintenance work on Thunderbird One now, and he has lent me this manual to look at to help me. I thought that it would be easier to read away from the others."

John smiled. "Well, I promised I was going to make you a meal, the truth is I would probably poison you. So, I've decided to take you on a picnic. Where would you like to go?"

Kat put the manual to one side. "Why not stay right here?"

"Sure," John nodded, "Let's have a swim first." They headed for the surf. John swam around strongly for a time, and then looked at Kat. "Come on in deeper."

Kat launched herself into the waves. The water was so warm. She swam lazily around for a while. John playfully tried to drag her under the waves. Kat began to splash John, and they splashed around in the water for quite a time, before Kat called for a truce.

Laughing they returned back to where they had left their towels. They sat down and John opened the basket. He brought out some slices of various cheeses, hard-boiled eggs, fresh fruit, a large bowl of mixed salad, and Waldorf and pasta salads. As they ate, John asked Kat what she had thought of the book he had lent her.

"It was so very interesting. I really enjoyed reading it. Have you written any more? I still blush at how naïve I must have seemed that night we looked at the stars. But there are one or two questions I would like to ask."

"Ask away," John replied, pouring two glasses of orange juice and handing one to her.

She hesitated. "Well... please don't laugh at me, but I can never quite understand black holes."

"Kat, I would never laugh at you. It's really great to be able to discuss my hobby with someone who is really interested. Now a black hole is where a star shrinks under an incredible gravitational pull, which crushes it into a sphere of increasing density and decreasing size. As the density builds up, the escape velocity at the surface of the star gets higher and higher until it eventually exceeds the speed of light. At this point, light rays, which up until then have been able to escape from the star, are bent back on themselves and are unable to leave. Eventually there will be a point at which the light can break free. This is the 'event horizon', enclosing a zone forever hidden from our view. This zone is known as a black hole."

Kat nodded thoughtfully. "Can you see a black hole?"

He shook his head, "No, but there are indications that a black hole is there."

She took a sip of her drink. John lay back on the sand, hands behind his head, watching her.

"I remember years ago when I was visiting my aunt and uncle in Scotland, the aurora borealis was very visible. It was quite breathtaking. Have you ever seen it?" Kat turned to look at him.

"Yes I have," John acknowledged. "They were very visible on an arctic rescue we had to undertake."

"All of this is absolutely fascinating. I could go on listening to you and discussing astronomy forever." Kat smiled enthusiastically.

"Well, then, we must spend another evening watching through the telescope," John replied. "Now, how about some of Grandma's apple pie?"

They continued eating, watching the waves and the sea birds wheeling above them and landing on the sand. Kat felt her eyes closing. John watched her with amusement. She opened her eyes as a shout hailed them.

"Hello you two! Is there any food left?"

Kat giggled.

"Sorry, Gords, no. We have just finished it all." John frowned at his brother and then rolled his eyes at Kat, who just laughed.

"We are going swimming. Want to join us, John?" Brandon asked.

"No, we've already had a dip," John said. "But enjoy!"

Kat lay back on her towel as the two aquanauts walked further down the beach. John watched her for a moment and then said, "There's a comet due to pass over the Southern Hemisphere in July. I know that Alex and probably Tyler will want to see it through the telescope, and I was wondering whether you would care to join me on the roof one night to watch it."

"That would be lovely, John. Yes, I would like to see that very much."

John started to repack the picnic basket. "Guess we had better be heading back. I did agree to play a game of foosball with Alex, and if I don't get there on time, he'll be mad and he'd be right to be."

The two headed back, the setting sun throwing long shadows and a cooling breeze gently wafted the trees. Kat thought what a wonderful place it was, and how lucky she was to be living and working here. She stole a sidelong look at John. He was so good looking. She silently prayed that the two of them would become very good friends. At the villa they parted company.

"Thanks for the picnic, John," Kat said

"Thank you for your company. I'm glad you enjoyed it."

John headed for the lounge and the games room, whilst Kat returned to her apartment.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 9/15/2005

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