

May 26th Kat's home

Kat awoke to a knock at the bedroom door and Estelle and Jake toddled in, accompanied by their mother, who was carrying a tray on which was Kat's breakfast. They sat on the bed and talked while she ate. At three years old, the twins were becoming independent. They were both bouncing on the bed, each trying to get their aunt's attention. Estelle, the elder by an hour, seemed more grown up than her brother.

"So," Suzi asked, "how's life in Kansas?"

Through a mouthful of toast and marmalade, Kat mumbled, "Oh, you know, not too bad; plenty of work, and plenty of recreation. Just a mechanic's job, but much, much better even than with Lady Penelope."

Pushing the tray to one side, Kat scrambled out of bed, heading to the bathroom. Suzi carried the tray back downstairs, followed by the twins.

As Kat took a leisurely shower, she groaned at the continual questions. It is so difficult. How can I continue to keep up this charade? she wondered.

After breakfast Kat watched as her father worked on his car.

"Need any help?" she asked. Immediately her father nodded, handing the spanners to her. For the next two hours father and daughter did what they used to do: work on a car. There was much laughter as her father asked if she remembered such and such. She replied that yes, she did; or no, she wasn't sure.

"Dad?" Kat looked serious. "Just how well is Mum? When I rang she said she was feeling really well. But I'm not convinced. She certainly doesn't seem fit to me. There are dark shadows under her eyes. She is more tired now and much thinner."

Kat's dad looked at his daughter. "For a while your mother was very seriously ill. Because she had concealed it for so long, by the time she collapsed it was almost too late."

Kat's face turned white. "I never realised she was so ill."

"She didn't want you to."

"Dad! She should have told me. I had a right to know."

"Sweetheart, she was wrong not to tell you, but she thought she was doing the right thing. She knew how much you wanted that job. And now that she has had surgery, she will lead a relatively normal life. The doctor has told her to take things easy. And believe me, I intend to see that she does just that."

After lunch Kat drove to the local farm where she used to ride. Mr Bannister had intimated to Kat's mother that, whenever Kat came home, she was more than welcome to ride his horses.

"Kat, my dear, nice to see you again. Would you like to ride Jet or Sunny?"

"Sunny, please," Kat answered.

Once tacked up, Kat rode out of the stable and across the farmland towards the bridleways.

Trotting across the familiar landscape, Kat was in her element. She felt totally at one with nature. There was no other being, human or animal, in sight. Urging the little mare into a canter, they sped across the fields and along the bridleways. The wind caught Kat's breath, and she laughed out loud, totally enjoying herself. Finally she brought Sunny back to a trot and then a walk.

"Good girl," she said, patting the mare's neck.

Whilst she was walking back towards the farm, Kat began to think about John and the picnic he had taken her on. She thought also of the talk they had had whilst he was making them both some hot chocolate after watching the stars on the roof. She has been expressing to him the joys of riding.

Suddenly, she stopped. Sunny began to try to crop some grass. Kat realised that she was beginning to have feelings for him. ~But does he feel the same way? She fervently hoped that he did. But if he didn't... no, she didn't want to even think about that. Kat continued her ride, heading back to the farm.

Sitting on an upturned bucket in a corner of the stable, cleaning the saddle and bridle, she wished that she could confide in someone about her feelings. ~Lady Penelope, perhaps. I have always been able to talk to her. I may be able to discuss this with her whilst I'm here in England. Then there's always Elise and Nikki. Maybe I can talk things over with them as well.

Just after she arrived back from her ride, Melanie approached her. "Kat, we are bringing the wedding forward from the end of this year to Saturday, 17th November. Please, will you be my bridesmaid?"

Kat nodded. "Of course I will, Melly, just as long as I don't have to wear pink or frills."

Melanie shook her head. "As it will be a winter wedding, I shall be dressed in white velvet, with my bridesmaids - that's you and Estelle - in aquamarine coloured velvet."

Andrew came over and put his arm around his sister. "When will it be your turn, Kat?"

Kat blushed. "Not yet for a while, Andy."

Later that afternoon Kat and her mother headed for the hairdressers'. Kat had wanted to have her hair cut and, at her request, her mother had made an appointment at Kat's favourite hair salon.

"It won't be Janine," her mother explained. "She is on holiday, so I have arranged for Madeline to

cut your hair this time."

Kat was relieved. Janine was a very nice young woman, but, oh boy, she could talk for England, and Kat just didn't want to have to put up with the third degree.

"So, Kat, how do you want your hair cut?" Madeline asked. Kat explained the kind of style she wanted.

One hour later Kat emerged from the salon with a totally new look. Gone was the length. Instead she had an inverted bob, shorter at the back with the sides chin level. The ends had been cut in such a way giving the effect of a tousled look. A side parting fell into a long wispy fringe.

Suzi and Melanie then joined mother and daughter for a shopping spree. Kat bought herself some more underwear, night attire - mainly large t-shirts - some cropped tops, strappy t-shirts, shorts and one very long, pretty, gypsy-style cheesecloth skirt in bright orange and coffee colours.

That night, as it was Kat's last night, all of the family went out to a well-known restaurant for a really expensive meal.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 10/26/2005

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