

Someday

By Karen Kingsbury

Chapter One

John Baxter made his decision as his family was leaving the hospital.

Elaine had shared with him and his family a moment of deep tragedy and deep love, a time that had bonded them beyond any other shared experience. He held her hand as they walked silently to the car. In a few hours, everyone would meet back at the Baxter house for dinner. They needed to be together, needed to share about how the brief life of little Sarah, his granddaughter, had touched them, changed them.

But in the meantime he couldn't shake the feeling inside, the certainty that he wanted Elaine in his life not only in moments like this but always.

Elaine's car was parked near his, but before she went to it she stopped. "You're quiet."

He smiled and a calm worked through his soul. He was worn-out and weary, but he was no longer discouraged, not after what he'd witnessed this afternoon up in his daughter's hospital room. "Just thinking."

Elaine would be joining them for dinner after she spent a few hours at home. They all needed some downtime. But the look in her eyes told him that she would stand in the parking lot all day if he needed her. "Wanna talk about it?" She angled her head, her eyes soft.

John could feel the warmth in his heart shining through his eyes. "God's bringing some of the details into focus. About how much I need you."

She looked surprised and touched and maybe a little shy. "That's a good thing."

"We'll talk more about it later." He hugged her, and they said their good-byes.

When John was alone in his car, the decision in his heart took root, writing itself across his soul and changing his picture of the future. The drive home seemed longer than usual and marked by a new sort of thrill and loneliness. He entered the old house, but

instead of tossing his keys on the counter, he stopped and leaned against the doorframe. Every inch of the place still held Elizabeth's memories, the way it always would. He walked up to their room and hesitated at the photo of her on his dresser. "You were there with us today, dear. I felt you."

He gripped the dresser, and his thoughts drifted back to earlier today. Before he left the hospital, Ashley had shown him Cole's picture. The artwork by his eight-year-old grandson brought him the same much-needed comfort as it brought Ashley and her husband, Landon. Nothing could be more fitting than the image of Elizabeth holding little Sarah in heaven, taking care of her until they could all be together again.

He moved to the card table he'd set up at the end of his bed. Elizabeth's handwritten letters were spread across it, more organized than before, and on one end was a stack already copied. The project had outgrown this space, so later tonight he'd move it to the dining room. When he was finished copying he would have six sets of her letters—one for each of their children. Each yellowed letter carefully opened and reread had filled his heart with Elizabeth's presence and made him miss her more than ever. But now the emotional, painstaking process was nearly behind him, and he was almost ready to put the letters into scrapbooks and pass them out. He had a feeling there was something in Elizabeth's words that would make a dramatic difference in each of their adult children.

Even with baby Sarah's funeral planned for later in the week, he would focus his energy on the letters. It was time, and it was the right thing to do. When he was finished, he would finally have closure, finally have walked through everything left of the woman he still so dearly loved. He would need that closure because of the decision he'd made an hour ago. The decision that one day very soon he would take the step he had been certain he would never take.

He would ask Elaine Denning to be his wife.

Dayne Matthews gripped the wooden railing of his back porch and stared out at the distant water. Even with the sorrow from earlier today, the sun sprayed a blanket of light across the surface of Lake Monroe. From inside the lake house he could hear the soft voice of his wife, Katy, talking to her agent again, trying to keep the conversation short.

This wasn't a day for business deals.

He squinted against the shine of sparkling lake water and lifted his eyes to the deep blue sky. No matter how many Hollywood roles he'd played, regardless of all the emotion he'd conveyed and seen acted out across the big screen over the years, he'd never seen anything like the strength and faith of his sister Ashley.

The events from a few hours ago came to life again—the call from his father, John Baxter, asking them to come quickly, and the way he felt walking into Ashley's hospital room. His family—Brooke, Kari, Erin, Luke, and their spouses and children, the people he'd missed out on all his life until recently—filled every possible space, circling Ashley's bed.

Of course, Ashley and Landon had known for months that their unborn baby girl wouldn't survive more than a few days. Anencephaly was merciless that way. The miracle everyone prayed for wasn't an unexplained healing but rather what happened today in the few short hours of Sarah's life.

The screen door sounded behind him, and he looked over his shoulder. Even on a day marked with so much sadness, his heart still found room for the familiar awe. Katy Hart had actually married him, agreed to put aside her private life in Bloomington, Indiana, and join him on his public journey of fame.

Now if only they could survive the ride.

He turned and held out his arms. "C'mere."

Her steps were slow, measured, her expression lost and distant, as if the brief life and tender death of their niece Sarah had drained her. When she reached him, she eased her hands around his waist and laid her head on his shoulder. For a long time the only sound was the cry of a lone hawk in a distant tree.

Finally Katy drew a shaky breath and stepped back so she could see his eyes. "We can do it . . . right, Dayne?"

He let himself get lost in her touch, in the sweet caress of her voice. "Do what?"

She sighed. Her expression held fear and determination in equal amounts. "Use the next four weeks to remember what matters. Before the world tries to tear us apart again."

Four weeks. That's all the time they had to savor a semblance of normalcy in Bloomington, to enjoy their lake house and remember the reasons they'd fallen in love. Just four weeks. Frustration built in a hurry and took the edge off his good feelings. He

set his jaw, and for a moment he looked past her to the hills beyond their home. What had he been thinking, encouraging her to star in a movie opposite him? As if that weren't enough fodder for the tabloids, in less than a month they faced the debut episode of the reality show based on their shared movie experience. Both the show and their upcoming movie had been moved from a January release to the upcoming fall debut. His agent had explained the schedule change best. "Right now, no one's hotter than you two. The studios realize that." Everyone with a dime to make was counting on the conflicts between Dayne and Katy, racy headlines that during the filming had brought them to the breaking point.

But that was before they returned home to Bloomington. Here, finding love was as natural as breathing. Amid the sprawling country fields and rolling hills and endless sky, love had returned like a summer breeze, washing over them and assuring them that everything would be okay. And how could it not, in the company of the Baxters, surrounded by more love than Dayne had known in all his life?

"You're not answering me." Katy's expression softened, and sadness added to the mix.

He brushed his cheek against hers. "I wish it were four *years*."

"Or more." Katy rested her head on his shoulder again. "There's no way back, is there?"

She was talking about their upcoming movies, the fact that in a couple of months she would fly to London and he to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. For ten weeks they would be separated, fulfilling their obligations while the rags took shots at them. A heaviness settled over his heart.

"Ah, Katy." He held her close. The faint smell of her perfume, her skin, filled his senses and heightened the subtle urgency in their hushed tones. "Someday, maybe. When all this is behind us." He didn't say it, and she didn't either, but what if they never made it to that far-off day? What if his world grabbed hold of him, and her world grabbed hold of her? And what if they found themselves pulled so hard toward distant shores that they lost sight of the promises they made on a beach in the Mexican Riviera what felt like a lifetime ago?

They talked about someday often, especially since they'd been home from Los Angeles. Someday, when they'd say good-bye to Hollywood and acting and every aspect of the celebrity life. When they'd settle down in Bloomington and maybe bring to life again the Christian Kids Theater group Katy missed so much. A time when they'd have walks on the shore of Lake Monroe, Sunday supper with the Baxters, and babies of their own. The picture grew and swelled and filled Dayne's heart and soul because nothing could be better.

But they had a war to win between now and someday, the war they'd welcomed by agreeing to do the reality show. *For Real* was supposed to be a white flag, a way of giving in to the paparazzi without being swallowed them whole. But the camera crews didn't land on the set of their recently wrapped movie looking for happily-ever-after scenes. They stirred conflict from the beginning, creating headlines that screamed of doubt and unfaithfulness.

And the show hadn't even aired yet.

Dayne kissed her forehead. "What did your agent say?"

"He wanted to make sure I had a passport." She sounded tired. "I told him I did, of course. Because of our wedding."

For a heartbeat the world fell away, and Dayne could see all the way to the center of her soul, the way he had once seen her before the tension of the past few months. "It was beautiful, wasn't it?"

She smiled. "Sometimes in my dreams I see it again, playing out so real I can smell the ocean air."

He nuzzled his face against hers. "Too bad you couldn't get your movie switched to Cabo."

The sun was setting, casting shadows across the deck and underlining the difficulty of what lay ahead. "It'd be hard to shoot Big Ben from Cabo."

"True." He placed his hands on either side of her face and touched his lips to hers. Their kiss was slow, with a hesitancy born of the tension that had marked the recent weeks. But it kindled a passion that knew no bounds, and after a while, their breathing changed and a knowing filled her eyes.

“I love you, Dayne.” Her whispered words betrayed the intensity of her feelings, the way her body responded to his.

Even in the worst of times, their marriage had been marked by a physical love that seemed almost divine—a gift from the God they both believed in, the God who Dayne prayed would keep them together in the coming months when it might look easier to walk away.

“I love you too.” He held her closer. “Don’t ever stop saying it, okay? And I won’t either.”

Katy hesitated. “I won’t. . . . I won’t ever stop.” She kissed him again and spoke close to his ear. “Let’s go inside.”

He swallowed and eased his fingers between hers. As they went in, as they walked past the kitchen and down the hallway toward their bedroom, Dayne still wasn’t sure about the someday they dreamed of. But for now they had something else, something that here and now maybe mattered more.

They had four weeks.