

Excerpt

Last night she dreamed she was back on the lake. With him.

The water churned around them, frothy waves lapping at their rental motorboat. Above, storm clouds chased each other across the sky and covered up the last bit of sunlit blue. The wind picked up, whipping heavy raindrops against their faces. Thunder rolled in the distance.

The shoreline had vanished behind a rising mist, except for an island mound covered with evergreens looming in front of them.

“We better get to dry land quick,” he said as he aimed the boat straight ahead.

They hurriedly put in on a strip of gravelly beach. He hopped out and dragged the boat from the roiling water. She rushed to help him secure it to a scrawny aspen tree underneath a tall, sturdy white pine. Then, shrieking and laughing like children, they scrambled and ducked under a rocky overhang out of the pelting rain.

Soaked and shivering, she nestled in his arms, still laughing. They huddled on the ground on a mat of wet pine needles, leaning against the rock and each other.

He suddenly squeezed her shoulder and placed a finger on her cold lips. “Listen.”

A tremulous sound glided across the water, its plaintive echo bouncing off the waves before dying down in the far reaches of the lake. “A loon,” he whispered in her ear.

Listening for more cries, she asked, “Is it true that loons mate for life?”

“It’s true if you believe it is.” He turned to her, his eyes twinkling with tenderness. “I do.”

Then, as she watched in stunned silence, her heart pounding so hard she could barely breathe, he knelt before her and took her trembling hands in his. Rain trickled down his face. A strange fire lit his eyes. His lips started to move when a sudden flash of lightning tore through the clouds and streaked across the black sky—

—and Kathy jolts awake.

A skinny ray of sunlight has snuck around the edge of the bedroom window curtain and landed on her pillow, waking her up.

Her pulse still racing and her body tingling with the warm glow of her disrupted dream, she rolls over and squeezes her eyes shut again, hoping desperately to resume the moment. But it’s no use. The spell has been shattered and the moment is already flying away.

She can’t remember the last time she dreamed of Joel, at least that she was able to recall afterward. That part of her life has seemed so far removed and shrouded in haze, mostly due to the decision she made long ago to stop dwelling in the past. Yet, to her astonishment—and yes, unabashed delight—the dream has unearthed such vivid details of that special summer day, as though the mist of half a century had suddenly lifted.

Kathy lets out a sigh. Grasping her pillow with both hands and burrowing her face in its soft folds, she feels a wave of pent-up memories washing over her.