

Toms Story
February 2003

It wasn't so much that he was alone. Kitt was used to being alone by now. Six months after the divorce was finalized and more than two years now since the initial separation, Kitt had been alone a lot. The initial boredom and loneliness has turned in to therapeutic quiet time. Kitt still missed his family. He saw them twice a week for the first few months, then once a week then two or three times a month. The distance between them grew greater as the visits decreased.

The kids were older now and didn't need him as much as they did when they were younger. They had adjusted well. At least that is what he told himself.

Anyway, that was the past. And here, on this mountain path, as Kitt hiked and pondered, his loneliness overcame him again.

It was the first good day for hiking in months. The rains had been heavy and frequent since Christmas. The trails often to muddy to make for an enjoyable hike. This was Kitt's favorite hiking trail. It was an eight and a half-mile round trip with a moderate difficulty rating. He often did this hike early in the morning and was back before lunch. But sometime he packed his lunch and ate at the base of the falls. That was Kitt's plan today.

He made his tuna sandwich this morning and threw in some pretzels, sweet gherkins and a cherry coke. Three Little Debbie cakes made up dessert. Water, of course, was in the old backpack too. The water was heavy to carry but Kitt always brought three or four bottles. The stream was full this season but Kitt never trusted the water. These woods were full of wild life and the stream was full of fish. And hikers, especially the tourists, were not always respectful of local nature and threw trash in the stream. So Kitt never drank the stream water.

This was Kitt's favorite trail for two reasons. Because of the trail's proximity to the stream, flora and fauna were plentiful. No matter how many times Kitt did this hike, and it was many times by now, he always found something that he hadn't seen before. He loved to point these things out to the kids when they would take this hike with him. He was a born nature lover who loved to teach others and share his appreciation of nature with his children. His notebook, which he always carried with him when he hiked, was full of dates and times and events that he determined pertinent or

worthy of jotting down for posterity. Several notebooks had been filled over the years.

The other reason that Kitt loved this hike was because of the memories that it held for him. Kitt and Emily, now his ex-wife, had taken this hike many times. He had proposed to her at the base of the falls. That was 23 years ago now. The kids had taken this hike several times when they were older and pictures of them at the trailhead, at the falls and at the scenic overlooks were omnipresent in Kitt and Emily's home.

Then there was the overnight trip with his old college friends from San Diego in 89. The creek was dry that year but that also meant that the trail was less traveled and the campground at the top virtually empty. Only the die-hard hikers bothered with this trail when the falls were not at full glory.

That weekend had been the best. The beer flowed almost as fast as the stories of old times and past glories. Kitt hadn't seen Ron and Sandy in over ten years before that weekend and had seen each only once since then. Sandy, with her long straight light brown hair and her emerald green eyes, was Kitt's first love. But, unfortunately, he was not hers. Sandy and Ron married after graduation and had moved to Boston where Ron went to work for his Dad in the company that he would eventually take over and run. This next visit with Ron would be less than pleasant and Sandy's eyes not so radiant, but filled with tears as they watched Ron lay there, quietly and serenely, in his best suit.

He had died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack at the frustratingly young age of 47. Too many smokes and too much whiskey had been the official cause of it according to his doctor. Or maybe it was the stress of running a business in economically depressed times or maybe he just had a weak heart. But whatever the reason, the result was the same and all of them that day felt the loss. But today that memory filled Kitt with a quiet sense of pride at the memory of his old friend and he chose to celebrate their friendship instead of mourning the loss of it.

Kitt soon reached the halfway point of the trail and sat to rest for a while. Several hikers passed by, all saying "Hello" or "Good morning", as was the custom when hiking. Everyone, it seems, is at peace with himself or herself when in the woods hiking a trail. People's best qualities seemed to rise to the surface then.

Kitt's thought now turned back to his family and how much he missed them. He missed the little things the most. The dinner time conversations, the helping with homework projects. He even missed the fighting and bickering that went on between them which would surface now and then throughout the day as if it were a continuous flowing stream that raged just below the surface forcing its way up at every possible opportunity. Never once did an opportunity for insult or put down get passed up in favor of a kind word or two.

Kitt smiled and almost laughed at the thought of it. He knew that they loved and cared for each other. He knew also that they, too, would come to accept that someday. It was inevitable. Even now they would exhibit this caring and loving side to each other if the situation called for it, but it was only displayed when necessary and was quickly extinguished when the need for it had passed.

Pride was how Kitt felt when he thought about them. They were good kids but more importantly they were good people. He was envious; maybe even resentful that Emily was with them everyday when he couldn't be. But that was how it had to be. Or so he told himself. "One of us had to be the one to leave" he would say. "I did the bigger thing by volunteering to be the one to leave" he also told himself, as if it could have been done any other way. Yes, he was resentful of Emily, but he did have to give her credit. Together they had raised three amazing children and were now reaping what they had sewed. They, he and Emily, had done a good job.

Kitt stayed at his resting spot for a few more minutes before moving on. The day was going to be a good one. Springtime here was Kitt's favorite time of the year. The summers were too hot for him. Fall and winter were just there. There was nothing noteworthy about those seasons. There were really no well-defined seasons here and, despite having never really lived anywhere that did have seasons, Kitt still felt as though he longed for that. But spring here was nice. The stream was full and he loved the sound of it as it rushed down the mountain and into the reservoir below. "Another disappointing end to something so glorious," he said to himself. Then again, but this time muttering it out loud.

Kitt's favorite part of the trail came at about the three-quarter point. There was a bend in the trail, followed by a slight decline (which he usually appreciated by this time) and the second of four amazing scenic overlooks that this hike offered. On a clear day like today as you could see the ocean. If you were lucky, you might even be able to catch the sun glint off

the water. Kitt was hoping that he would be so blessed today. But the favorite part of this point in the trail was that you could, if you listened hard, hear the faint thundering of the waterfall at the end of the trail. On a quiet day, after a good rainy season, you could hear it without having to listen quite so hard. Kitt was hoping, no, he was expecting this today too.