

The Disappearing Stranger (Adventures of the Northwoods, Book 1)

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When her mother marries Mr. Nordstrom, Kate moves to a farm in northwest Wisconsin, solves a mystery, and learns to adjust to her new stepfamily

Lois Walfrid Johnson is the award-winning author of more than twenty books. She has received the Gold Medallion award, the C.S. Lewis children's book award, and the Silver Angel Award from Excellence in Media and the Wisconsin State Historical Society Award for Distinguished Service to History for the stories in the ADVENTURES OF THE NORTHWOODS series. She and her husband, Roy, have three grown children and live in Minnesota. size : 5.2 x 8From Chapter One - Kate's Secret Plan

On the way home from school Katherine O'Connell slowed her steps.

Around her, the noises of Minneapolis filled the street. A horse trotted past, clip-clopping on the cobblestones. Circling a mound of snow, Kate found a place to stop.

The black hair that escaped her braid curled around her face. In the afternoon sunlight her deep blue eyes sparkled. The air felt warm for a Minnesota winter, but twelve-year-old Kate barely noticed. She had an idea.

Rolling it around in her mind, she considered the idea from this way and that. More than once she had tumbled headlong into a plan, sometimes with surprising results. Yet this one might work.

At last Kate tossed her head. Flipping her long braid over her shoulder, she made up her mind.

Walking quickly, she plunged down the street. The church was only a block away. A year ago she wouldn't have thought of going there for help. But that was before Daddy died. Even now, Kate felt surprised by her idea. Yet it was a good one. She felt sure of that.

At the bottom of the church steps she paused, suddenly afraid. From here Kate could barely see the tall steeple reaching to the sky. Across the street a grocery wagon stopped, and a boy climbed down. Lifting a wooden box filled with food, he carried it into a house.

Seeing him there, Kate knew it was time to be home. Mama would wonder where she was.

Turning, Kate hurried up the wide stone steps. As she pulled open the heavy door, she tried to look like the young lady Mama wanted her to be. Somehow Kate always forgot.

Inside, where the sunlight did not reach, the entryway seemed dim and cold. Quickly Kate opened another door.

In the main part of the church, afternoon sunlight brightened the large windows. Pews stretched away to the front. Kate stood there a moment, thinking about Mama. Last night she had cried in the dark again.

When Kate asked, "Are you all right?" Mama sniffled her yes.

"Are you lonesome for Daddy?" Kate asked next.

Mama's answer sounded clearer, as though she'd pulled the quilt away from her head.

"Yes, Kate. Go back to sleep."

But Kate had one more question. "Mama, do you ever get lonesome for Sweden?"

At the age of seventeen Mama had come from Sweden by herself.

"Sometimes," she answered, her voice soft. "Sometimes."

Mama's words scared Kate. What if she decides to go back to Sweden? I'd have to leave all my friends-Sarah Livingston and Michael Reilly-

Often the children teased Michael, saying, "You're sweet on Kate!" Michael always turned red, but he never denied it.

In the darkness of night Kate lay there a long time before going back to sleep, wondering,

What can I do?

Now Kate started down the side aisle of the church. As she passed the organ, she stopped and looked back. "Do I dare?" she asked herself, then felt surprised she'd spoken aloud.

As she looked around, the church seemed empty.

Moving quickly, Kate turned back to the pipe organ. Again she glanced around. "No one will know," she muttered. Without a sound Kate slid onto the bench.

For a long time she'd wanted to sit there, feeling the ivory keys beneath her fingers. For what seemed forever she'd wanted to make the wonderful big sounds the organist played every Sunday. Whenever the sermon seemed long, Kate thought about the sound of the music.

She knew the organ wouldn't work without someone hand pumping the bellows that brought in air. Yet she touched the keys the way the organist did, pretending she knew how to play. I could be a great organist. I could travel around America putting on concerts. If only I could learn.

Then from somewhere in the dimly lit corners came a sound. In a second Kate was off the bench, starting down the aisle once more.

At the front of the church, she reached a hallway, then a large door. Kate straightened her shoulders, hoping she looked taller. Before she could change her mind, she raised her hand and knocked.

As the sound echoed in the stillness, Kate wished she hadn't come. In all her twelve years she'd never been so scared. Except when Daddy died, that is.

Maybe Pastor Munson won't be here. Kate felt torn between wanting to see him and fearing what he'd think. Just as she turned to run, the door opened.

"Kate!" exclaimed the pastor. "God dag!"

His words sounded like "Good dog," and Kate knew only a few words of Swedish. Because Daddy was Irish and Mama Swedish, Kate spoke English at home. Yet she knew Pastor Munson was saying, "Good day," and managed to squeak out her hello.

Whenever Pastor Munson stood in the front of the church, he looked tall and stern. Now as Kate sat down, he seemed still more frightening.

"What can I do for you?" he asked from his big chair behind the big desk.

Kate's hands tightened, and she found herself bunching her skirt inside nervous fingers. I wish I'd never come. Where do I begin?

In the silence someone knocked on the door. "Excuse me," said Pastor Munson. "I'll be right back."

As he went into the hallway, Kate looked around for a way of escape. Books lined two walls of the study. On the third wall hung a large calendar. JANUARY, 1906. Nearby, the sun streamed through a window.

Seeing the sunlight, Kate felt better. When Pastor Munson returned, she knew what to say.

This time he smiled as he asked, "Can I help you with something?"

Kate swallowed. "When you preached Sunday-" She stopped, afraid to go on. For a moment she waited, but he waited too.

"Yah?" It was the Swedish yes, and his voice sounded encouraging. She thought of Daddy and how he'd given her the locket on her last birthday before he died.

Other Books

LS 14: Menyamarkan Teman.

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