

The second book in Stephen G. Lonefeather's saga that began with SPIRIT DANCE. Gordon receives a vision that sends him in search of his biological family. After many twists and turns, what he finds is much more than he expected.

THE HEALERS: Those that were hidden

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The Healers

Those That Were Hidden



Stephen G. Lonefeather

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Note: The Native American words used in this story may be spelled phonetically to prevent mispronunciation.

- Chapter Three -

**Walk quietly
along the woodland trail,
lest you interrupt the melodies
and miss the harmony of it all.**

GORDON STOPPED FOR A moment to catch his breath.

He squinted through the bright mid-day sun toward the summit of Breakaway Mountain. *Only about another billion steps uphill. He laughed to himself, No problem for a twenty year old; even one who limps.* A strong breeze swept down from the mountaintop, engulfing him in its benevolence. He inhaled its coolness and pulled his leather headband loose, letting the caressing wind dry his damp forehead.

Turning to look back the way he had come, he raised a hand to shade his eyes and searched the valley below. He had spent many years among these hills, and he knew nearly every trail. He quickly found the miniature figures of the man and two horses. They had just emerged from the trees at the far end of Todd Lake. When he saw them pause and turn in his direction he was sure the man was searching the mountainside with his binoculars. He waved his arm in a long sweeping motion.

Even though he couldn't clearly see the man return the gesture, he knew he had. When the toy figures resumed their trek eastward, he thanked the Great Spirit for the man he had been privileged to call his dad for the last nine years.

Replacing his headband, he continued his upward climb until the prattle of a stream to his right caught his attention. Stepping through an opening in the Salal bushes beside him, he found a less obvious side trail leading toward the source of the noise. He slipped easily between the outstretched boughs of several stunted pines.

His moccasin-clad feet moved noiselessly along the dusty trail until a sharp hiss brought him to an immediate halt. His heart thumped loudly in his chest until he saw the porcupine standing indignantly in

the trail ahead of him; it quills at attention. Smiling at his irritated brother, he voiced a quiet apology. The little warrior lowered its quills as a sign of forgiveness, then resumed its slow waddling gait for a few more feet before deciding to give up the trail.

Arriving at the creek, he slid the deerskin bag from one shoulder and set it on the ground next to him, and then let the strap holding his bedroll slide off the other. For a few moments he watched the small, clear, stream race quickly by him, enjoying its freedom as it descended the steep slope toward its rendezvous with the alpine lake below. He knelt to taste its coolness.

As he raised his cupped hand to his lips, a softly repeated “*whee-oh, whee-oh*” sound made him glance to his left. He smiled and looked up at the familiar bird who sat close and unafraid on the limb of a tree overhanging the stream. Its head was cocked to one side as if waiting for an answer to its question.

“Hello, *Perisoreus Canadensis*,” he greeted the small gray and white bird. “I suppose you’re looking for a hand-out?”

In response to his question, the Canadian Gray Jay hopped a few inches away from him along the length of its perch, and then back again. This time it turned its head back and forth several times, first looking at him, then at the pouch on the ground.

“Sorry my friend, there’s nothing to eat in there. That holds my pipe, water bottles, some tobacco, and a few pieces of colored cloth.”

The bird ruffled its feathers, “*Cla-cla-cla*,” it scolded, accusing him of lying.

“I’m telling the truth, little one,” he said, as he slowly picked up one side of the small satchel and held it open for the bird to inspect. “I am only on a short retreat where I hope to learn the answers to several questions I hold in my heart. I will eat no food while I’m on this mountain overnight. I will only drink water.”

The small bird fluttered to the ground and hopped a few steps to peer suspiciously into the open satchel; careful not to go too close. Once satisfied, it looked at Gordon, bobbed its head as if it understood all he had said, and then flew away.

Gordon took the water flasks from his bag and dunked the first one into the icy stream. A few minutes later while replacing the cap of his second flask, he heard the soft, “*whee-oh*,” again. Looking up at the

same branch, he saw the Gray Jay looking down at him again. When the bird had his attention, it hopped to the end of the branch and dropped a pebble it held in its beak into the stream below. Gordon's eyes moved to where the pebble landed, and he immediately saw the wink of metal in the sunlight that filtered through the crystal water.

"Burr, that's cold," he said, as he lifted the quartz stone from the stream and held it up toward the sunlight. *I wonder if those specks are real gold.* After rubbing his thumb over its smooth surface, he looked at it again. Still not satisfied, he wiped it dry on his shirt and looked at the two specks within the quartz. *I think they might be; I'm sure dad would know.*

He thought of his father riding toward their home on the Tenfeather River. The man who had taught him most of what he knew about the creatures and things of the forests around where they lived, just as his own father had taught him when he was young. Both of them were good, caring, stewards of Mother Earth.

He fingered the bird-bone whistle on the necklace he wore, recalling the story his grandpa had told yesterday and the comment he'd made about real love being colorblind. It bothered him that so many people made such a big deal about the ethnicity of a person.

"Look at all the different pebbles that make the path for you to follow," he said to the stream. "They all have different colors, are different shapes and sizes, and they share every inch of the streambed. They all get along fine; and water really doesn't have any color at all. Sort of like the Spirit that surrounds all life." He thanked the Great Spirit for sending him that thought.

Looking at the piece of quartz in his hand again, he noticed there were actually three specks. One speck was round, the other in the shape of a figure eight, the bottom speck much bigger than the little fleck attached to its top; the whole stone was about the size of a quarter and shaped like a heart; polished smooth by eons of movement of the streambed. *I'd better get moving, myself,* he thought. He stood and stuffed the flat stone into the pouch around his neck that held his smaller rose quartz Wotai, and then found his way back to the main trail.

ANDY TOWED GORDON'S horse across the Tenfeather to where Lynn stood waiting. She pulled the gate open for him to ride through, and then took Wonder's reins from him as he slid from Con's back. He lost his balance and sat down hard on the ground. "Damn!" he said.

Lynn grabbed Con's halter. "Andy?"

"I'm fine," he said, getting to his feet, somewhat disgusted with his clumsiness. He rubbed his rear with both hands and swiped the dirt away. He laughed when he saw Lynn's worried look. "I just stepped wrong," he insisted.

Lynn saw the sweat on his forehead and grimaced inside; she knew he was hurting. "So how do you think Gordon's doing?" she quickly asked.

He gave her a quick peck on the cheek, recovered his horse's reins from her, and took her hand. Lynn could tell he was trying hard to cover up his pain by the way he shifted his hips as they towed the horses toward the stable, but she knew better than to make a big deal of it.

"I'm sure he's doing fine, honey," he finally replied. I caught a glimpse of him through my binoculars when I came around the end of the lake; he was up there quite a ways already. Despite his limp, he can sure cover some ground."

"I know this quest is very important to him, Andy, even if it is just overnight. I hope he finds the answers he's looking for. I know we'll lose him as soon as he returns."

"As much as it hurts, we've got to let him go sometime, Lynn. He's twenty years old. Heck, I was on my own at seventeen."

"He has been on his own, Hon; living in the apartment above your parent's garage for two summers now."

Andy shook his head and laughed as they walked along. "Oh sure he has," he said sarcastically. "Working at their feed store, and eating at their table, or ours. Heck, you stop by every few days to check on him to make sure his laundry is done, or he's over here doing it because he doesn't want his grandmother handling his things. Now he's moved back here. He's only cut one apron string, Darling."

"I know that, Andy, but it seems like we just got him. It's hard to believe it's been nine years."

"I know, Angel. He's been a treasure to have for all nine years too. He fit in from day one as if he were our own biological offspring. We

never had to go through any of the adjustment trauma's the orphanage told us to expect. I think we've raised him right too, so now we have to let him decide his own direction. No matter where that takes him he knows he'll always be welcome here."

The sudden empty nest feeling made her voice catch, "I'm sure he knows that ... I just hope he's getting it all figured out right now. I'd hate to see him leave here without being sure."

"Well, Lynn, I don't think anyone's ever a hundred percent sure about anything when they head down the road on their own for the first time. At least we know he has some money in the bank to help him jump the rough spots. Other than buying his truck, he's saved most of his share of the reward for finding the bank robbery loot. With that, his scholarship money, and what he's made working for my dad, he has a good chunk for a young man his age. It should be enough to get him started. If he needs a hand later, I'm sure we can do something."

Lynn turned and walked backward, facing the mountain peaks behind them. *I wonder what he's thinking about up there?*" She turned back.

Andy answered her thought, "We know he wanted to go into the military last year, but his ankle kept him out, so he isn't considering that anymore. Today on the way up to Todd Lake he said he's pretty sure he'll go to medical school at the University, so he's probably thinking about that, and what it will be like living in a big city like Eugene."

"I'm sure you're right. It's probably for the best, especially because of the way Abby is behaving. Did he say any more about that?"

"Not much."

"What did he say?"

"It bothers him, because he doesn't want her to feel bad and think he doesn't care about her. He's sure it's just a schoolgirl crush."

"It may be more than a crush, Andy. She knows what she wants, even at her age. Ellen came over while you were gone; she said she talked to her. Abby agreed to keep her hormones under control."

"Well, we sure don't need them making that mistake."

"I feel for her. She's such a wonderful kid, way ahead of her peers. Ellen says she insists her feelings are genuine, straight from the heart."

“To be honest, Lynn, I wouldn’t mind having her for a daughter-in-law.”

Lynn smiled agreeably. “But not yet.”

“No, definitely not yet.”

“I’m glad we agree on that, Lefty. Did Gordon say anything more about his recurrent dreams?”

“We didn’t talk about them. What do you think they signify?”

“That something is missing in his life, of course. Every time he has the one dream, he sees himself with one of his legs detached.”

“What about his newest dream?”

“I’m certainly not very comfortable about that one. A man running away with a child is a very distressing thing to wonder about. I was in his room this morning tidying up after you two left. I got one of my feelings when I straightened his pillow. I know it’s not much, but I think if I hold onto it tonight I may get something from any of his energy still surrounding it. I don’t know what else to try.”

“You haven’t had a quickening in awhile.”

“No, but these dreams of his have set my spirit on edge. I feel like something is coming.”

“Maybe the Great Spirit will reveal its meaning to Gordon while he’s on the Mountain. Oh, speaking of being uncomfortable, I met another motorcycle on the trail when I came through the BLM land. It spooked Wonder pretty good, and it bothered Con too. I sure didn’t need to witness a horse having a heart attack; they’re both pretty old.”

Lynn stroked Wonder’s nose. “You’re not ready for the handicapped ranch yet,” she told it.”

“It won’t be long,” Andy said, “We only have these two and your mare left since we quit the guiding business; they’ve all got their scars. I sure don’t push Con anymore. I let him go at whatever speed he chooses.”

“Kinda like I let you do,” she teased.

“Now let’s not go there,” he laughed. “I don’t hear you complaining.”

“I’ll never complain about how you make love, darling.” She squeezed his hand.

“Are you looking for trouble,” he said, squeezing her hand in return.

“Maybe I am,” she laughed. “Oh, speaking of trouble, while you were gone we had a little more trouble with the kids from the apartment complex up the road. They were sling-shooting rocks again from across the river. They didn’t hit my horse this time, but I wish they’d never built that walking bridge over the river down there.”

“They’d just come down our side then. Did you call Chief Allen about it?”

“No, I didn’t want to bother him again.”

When they reached the stable, they pulled the gear from the horses and turned them loose. Con went straight to the water trough to drink. Wonder stole a bite from the hay bin where Lynn’s horse was eating, and then walked over and gave Con a push with his nose, trying to hog the trough. The older horse wouldn’t budge.

“That horse had better be careful who he tries to push around,” said Lynn, “Con is liable to light into him.”

“He’s a pretty tolerant old buck, but he’ll only put up with so much,” agreed Andy.

They sat on a bale and watched the two horses. When Wonder didn’t get Con to move over, he walked behind him and stood pressing his nose into the older horse’s rump, trying to get him to quit drinking and turn around.

“I think trouble’s coming,” remarked Andy.

Right then, Con lifted his tail to the side and let go a loud horse fart. Wonder was so startled he started bucking and ran across the pasture, kicking his hind legs in the air. Con continued to drink water as if nothing had happened.

They laughed so hard that Lynn slid off the bale onto the ground. Andy lay down on the bale, holding his gut. Finally, after they recovered a bit, Lynn stood. Her husband however, had trouble sitting back up. Lynn grabbed his arm and helped him.

“Damn, I got a stitch there, thanks,” he said, grimacing. Shaking it off, he grabbed her around the waist. They staggered and leaned on each other, laughing all the way back to the house.

THE SKY ABOVE HIM WAS a brilliant swirl of orange and white. *I never get tired of that painting*, Gordon thought, watching the sunset from where he lay atop his open bedroll.

He'd picked his camping spot on a sparsely covered edge of a volcanic depression. From experience he knew the dwarfed alpine shrubbery around him would not offer much protection if the night winds kicked up, but he also knew from experience that it wouldn't be a good idea to be in the bottom of the amphitheater if it started raining. He'd learned that one the hard way. He could have stayed within the protection of the trees below, but he wanted to be out in the open where he could watch the sunset over Broken Top Mountain beside him. On a clear night the show was spectacular.

The smaller mountain he was camped on had once been connected to Broken Top, eons ago. As the glaciers of the Wisconsin Ice Era receded, they released the pressure bound within the earth beneath them. Between that and the wrenching movement of the receding ice, it caused this gigantic hunk to tear away. Hence, its name, Breakaway Mountain. The whole area was a jumble of moving earth and ice then, more than ten thousand years ago.

He stood, stretched, breathed in the crisp air, and then walked a few yards to look down into the ravine called Crater Ditch, which separated the two massifs. The thought crossed his mind that it must have been like a giant youngster cutting the apron strings from its giant mother when this smaller peak made its escape. The analogy made him sigh, and think about his reason for being up on this high prominence. He was about to embark on a journey that all young people must eventually take. The thought of it was a bit frightening, but exciting too.

Walking back to where his gear lay, he picked up his satchel and pulled out the squares of colored cloth. He chose the yellow one first and tucked the others inside his shirt. Checking his bearings, he walked a few steps to his right and laid it on the ground. Finding a suitable stone, he placed it in the center of the cloth to keep it from blowing away.

Yellow was the color he chose to represent the eastern direction of his medicine wheel, It would be the first to be addressed when praying. East was the direction associated with illumination, new beginnings, like the sunrise heralding a new day.

He pulled the red cloth from among the others, and turned clockwise. Taking several steps to the south, he placed the red cloth beneath another stone. The South was associated with sacredness, trust, and nature. Its color was red; it was where the heart lived. It represented the natural world to which he was bound. It was here his worldly passions were represented.

He then walked to the west and placed the black cloth beneath a stone. This was the color representing introspection and understanding. It was here that man faced his past and prayed to the thunder beings for courage to stand for what he believed in, and to make positive changes out of past mistakes in his life.

He placed the final stone on the white cloth a few steps to the north, the direction associated with wisdom, and healing. It was where the riddles of life and death were finally solved. It was to the North a man must turn when faced with adversity, reflecting on what life had taught him, so that he might receive healing and be able to help others by using his experiences.

Filling his shirttail several times with stones, he laid them three in a line between each cloth to create a crude circle. Seven more stones surrounding the Creator stone finished the small center circle where he would build his fire. After gathering firewood, he stood quietly, observing his personal altar.

Satisfied he was safe within his sanctum, he returned to his bedroll and moved it slightly off to the side of the center wheel, laying it so he would be facing east when he awoke. When he straightened up, he felt the first serious pangs of an empty stomach.

"Hello stomach," he said, "Your growling has reminded me I still have another day to go without my mother's, or my grandmother's cooking." He took a deep breath and chuckled when he realized he was talking to himself ... he suddenly felt very alone.

He noticed how still everything became as the shroud of darkness descended on it; he laughed nervously. A moment later, his laughter returned to him in the form of a mocking whisper that echoed out of nowhere. It made him blush at his uneasiness. Turning to the west, he watched the last rays of sunlight stream over and through the crags of Broken Top, before rapidly dissolving beyond the horizon. He raised his arms and turned his face upward in respect. *Creator, I am truly just*

a speck in the middle of your universe. It is a wonder you even acknowledge me ... I pray I do not waste your hopes for me. Within minutes, darkness descended on him with authority, for it was the time of the new moon.

Lying down upon his blanket, he watched the stars appear and marveled at how their brightness was in such glorious contrast to the darkness surrounding them. As he scanned the multitude in the spirit path of the Milky Way, hunger pangs hit him again, harder this time. He sat up and took another long drink from his flask to quell their urgency; realizing that every small twinge was a reminder that he was here to sacrifice his comfort for good reason.

He had fasted for 24 hours before leaving the house with his dad early this morning, rode his horse eleven miles, and then spent the rest of the afternoon climbing up the side of a mountain, all without a morsel of food for energy. He noticed how his body lightly trembled now that he was sitting quietly. His heart told him, *You have done well, now you need to build your fire and pray, it will bring you peace,*

Rising to his knees, he massaged his stomach for a minute and then stood. Despite his hunger pangs, he felt spiritually strong. He raised his outstretched arms again and whispered a prayer of thanks to the Great Spirit for the imposing darkness around him. He asked that its quietude would stir the spirits to bring forth the answers he needed.

After gathering an armload of stray branches, he kindled a small fire in the center circle, carefully leaning the small twigs against the Creator stone. When the flames grew large enough to illuminate the area in front of him, he took his totems from his satchel and medicine pouch, and laid them in a line between himself and the fire. For some moments, he studied his pouch of kinikinik tobacco, his rose quartz Wotai, the bird-whistle necklace his grandfather had given him, and his new heart-shaped Wotai that had winked at him from the streambed.

Carefully, he took his pipe pieces from their leather pouch. He reverently acknowledged the stem as the male component representing the animal world, the bowl as the female compliment that encompassed the plant world. After saying a short prayer, he fitted them together, engendering the sacred Chanupa. Lifting his twin feather necklace from around his neck, he wrapped its leather thong around the juncture of the

pipe's stem and bowl; he then became very still. Eyes closed, breathing cautiously, he asked the Spirits of the wheel to teach him.

After a few minutes of meditation he stood and slipped his feet out of his moccasins to let the Earth's energies enter him through the soles of his bare feet. Sprinkling a small amount of tobacco on the ground around him in respect to Mother Earth, he packed his pipe bowl with a small twist of tobacco, tamping it down with his thumb. He caressed the twin feather hanging beneath it and thought of Abby as he pointed the pipe stem toward the sky. "I ask that my best friend also receive peace for her troubled heart." He pointed the pipe's stem toward the yellow cloth and asked the spirit of the East to tell him if a journey to college was right for him.

Turning his body to the South, he pointed the pipe's stem to that direction and asked for strength to understand his emotions, and to fearlessly follow the leading of his heart.

Facing the West, he asked that he never become so weak-willed that he compromise his integrity, that he be strong in his walk and have the courage to make the changes necessary to fulfill his purpose.

To the North he asked that he be allowed to walk a path of service to others, and that he walk it with honesty and assuredness so that he would not be ashamed when he sang his death prayer.

Completing his invocations, he sat on his blanket and plucked a small burning twig from the fire. Lighting his pipe, he puffed on it several times to ignite the tobacco, then paid homage to each of the six directions by respectfully exhaling large puffs of smoke to the sky, to the earth, and to each of the four major compass points; each time watching his prayers be carried away by the smoke. When he finished, he tamped the dead ashes into his palm and sprinkled them around the outside of his blanket.

Disconnecting the Chanupa, he put his twin feather necklace back around his neck, placed the sacred pipe pieces back into its pouch, and tucked it into his satchel. Pulling his blanket over himself, he took one last look at the celestial brilliance above him, closed his eyes, and let the image of Abby wander through his mind.

ED LEFT THE ROOM AFTER saying goodnight to his daughter. He closed her door quietly and walked down the hallway to the living room. Ellen, sitting on the couch reading a realty magazine, looked up when he entered the room. "Is she asleep?" she asked.

"Almost," he answered, as he eased himself into his reclining chair. Leaning over the arm to pet their Cocker Spaniel lying in her basket with her four sleeping pups, he said, "Hey there, Shy, how you doin'?" The dog looked up at him with its typical sad expression, her stubby tail beat time against the inside wall of the wicker basket. "I guess that means you're happy," he told her. Her wiggling tail increased its speed, but her expression remained the same. He looked over to his wife,

"Hey, El, you ever notice how a Cocker Spaniel doesn't smile?"

"They smile with their tail," Ellen replied, not looking up from her magazine.

"She must be happy then, happier than some people around here. Abby seems a little off her feed. What's up, her moon time?"

Ellen let her arms fall to her lap, the magazine made a plopping noise against her thighs. She sighed, "No, she's going through a heartache."

"Anything to do with your conversation last night?"

"Every bit of it. She's having trouble being fourteen."

"Can I help?"

"No, Ed, it's something she has to deal with on her own, but I think you should know she has a crush on Gordon."

"I've seen that coming. They haven't gotten frisky, have they?"

"No they haven't. I asked her that and nearly got my head bitten off. She just doesn't want him to go away to college. She's afraid he'll fall in love with someone else and never see her as anything more than a kid."

"Gee, that sounds pretty serious for a fourteen year old."

Ellen nodded. "Especially one with the body of a nineteen year old and the mind of a twenty-five year old. She's really grown up fast.

"We can blame her looks on your genes."

"Why thank you, Cowboy."

"Gordon isn't leading her on, is he?"

"To the contrary, she's the one who is in love, not him. He talked to Lynn and Andy about it before he went up the mountain; Lynn and I

talked this afternoon. He's actually pretty baffled by her sudden change in attitude."

"That's good to hear. It's probably a good idea he's heading off to college on the other side of the mountains. She'll soon realize it's just a phase all fourteen year old girls go through."

"I can't see that happening at all, Ed. They've grown up together, know each other's innermost secrets, and have always been the best of friends. Who else has that advantage at their age?"

"Hmm, I didn't think about that. But Abby has good sense, I'm sure she'll get through it. She may be a bit headstrong, we can blame that on your genes too, but she's also very intelligent, we'll blame that on mine."

"I don't know about that, cowboy. There aren't any rocket scientists falling out of your family tree," she laughed quietly.

"You might be surprised, honey," he said with mock seriousness. He stood and walked to the sofa. Bending down, he kissed her and said, "I'm going to bed, sweetie, I have some quantum physics formulas in my head I need to go over before I apply for work at the Kennedy Space Center tomorrow."

She rolled her eyes at him. "I'll be there in a bit, professor Balingier. I'm just going to look at a few more properties."

"We're not moving," he said over his shoulder as he headed for their bedroom.

LYNN REACHED OVER and shook her husband. "Please wake up, Andy."

"Huh... what... What time is it? What is it, angel?"

"We need to talk."

He rolled onto his back. "Oww," he said, as he pulled himself upright.

"You okay?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine, just exhausted, and I ache in every joint of my body."

"That doesn't sound good. You should go see the doctor tomorrow."

“I’ll be fine, I’m just getting old; starting to wear out. Hauling stacks of soft drinks in and out of stores all day is taking more out of me these days. Besides, you know how I feel about going to the doctor.”

“I know, you won’t go to one unless you’re bleeding to death.”

“That’s right. Why did you wake me?”

“I had a dream similar to Gordon’s dream. It showed me an old man running away from a child. I think the child was Gordon.”

Andy rubbed his eyes. He noticed she was holding Gordon’s pillow. “That’s a bit different than Gordon’s dream, isn’t it? I thought his dream had an old man running away *with* a child?”

“Well this man was carrying a child too, but he was running away from the other one.”

“What do you think it means?”

“I’m not sure, but I think it happened in Ellis. And I think the child was Gordon.”

“Which child?” he asked.

“The one being left behind.”

Andy licked his dry lips. “Do you think he was abandoned by someone? It couldn’t have been his parents; they died in the car accident. Do you suppose he was returned to the orphanage by a previous family? Maybe they lied to us when they said he had never been in foster care?”

Lynn massaged her forehead between her thumb and fingertips. “No, I don’t think so. I’m sure Gordon would have told us. When are you going to get him tomorrow?”

“I was planning to go up early, since I don’t know exactly what time he’s going to meet me at the lake. Ed is going to tag along and sit around camp with me until he arrives.”

“You’d better go back to sleep then, I’m sorry I woke you.”

“You know better than to apologize for that. You can wake me any time you need to, Angel.” He nestled his head into the pillow and closed his eyes.

“I know that,” she said demurely, “but you need your sleep.”

“Well so do you. Now don’t lie awake all night thinking about your dream. I’ll ask Gordon about it when I see him.”

“Andy?”

“What, Angel?”

Lynn heard the pain behind her husband's question. "What is it, darling," he asked again.

"I've had another dream, several times. In it I see you stumbling through the woods alone, you are very distraught. Are you sure you're okay?"

"Oh hell, I'm just fine, Angel," he said, scrunching his pillow into a more comfortable position. He reached out and caressed her arm. "I'm sure it's nothing to worry about; probably has something to do with my being a little concerned about growing old, that's all. You know, stuff like not being able to tromp through the woods as easy as when I was younger. I'm sure that's it, now please go to sleep and don't stay awake all night worrying about it."

"I'll try not to. Goodnight, honey."

"Goodnight, Angel."

Lynn gazed across her pillow at her husband. She was sure the tightness of his facial muscles reflected something stressful going on behind his closed eyes, something he would not share with her. She loved him terribly, and knew he would never bother her with his personal complaints. The thought of losing him someday popped into her head. She quickly shook it away.

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