

*Angel treading, feather light  
Came upon a campfire bright  
Crouched behind the dancing flame  
Sat one who forgot his name.*



Swirls of the fading fingers of the sun danced paisley pastel across the darkening sky as he lightly trod past wildflowers gently bending in the evening breeze. Blessing each petal and leaf as he passed, the angel sighed as he took in the grandeur of the plains, stretching out for dozens of miles around him on all sides. The Lord had blessed this place with space, and it felt as if every flower was bigger here, stretching up farther to every cloud above, blessed by brighter starlight here than anywhere else.

The rose hues faded to a purple, regal on the rolling rims of each cloud that drew evening over the land like a blanket. The fresh air was sweet with summer blossoms and clean, unadulterated nature. Here there were no roads, no paths, no sidewalks. In all the beauty of a city, here the angel found a very different beauty. Untamed nature grew where it pleased. Birds could perch on the head of a different flower every minute and never touch the same one twice. The very earth seemed to sigh with contentment out here, un-bruised by fences.

As he walked, praying and meditating on the goodness surrounding him, he caught the dim flicker of a light next to a tree in the distance. The purple of the fading sunset had now been replaced with the warm dusk that brings the stars to burning above, the night a black velvet curtain against which they shone like jewels. The angel, safe in the warm shelter of the Lord's loving hand, walked on steadily. He headed towards the light, figuring it to be a home of some sort.

Where there was light, there was a child of God, and he intended to bless it. When he came to be within a hundred yards of it, the wind shifted, and a light scent of burning wood came to the angel. It was a campfire.

With his effortless step, he listened for sounds of conversation, perhaps even music. But there was nothing to break the holy silence except for the popping of the dry twigs under the merciless appetite of the flames. Whispering a song of praise to himself, he continued

onward, thinking he would watch over the weary traveler a while as they slept. There was nothing as wondrous to him as one of the Lord's children sleeping, especially in such a wild and natural setting as this. Crickets started up around him, singing to the stars, and his spirit sang along as he walked.

Coming upon the flames close enough to feel the heat against him, the angel stopped. No-one was stretched out next to the warmth, asleep, however. A guitar, well-worn and widely traveled, lay just within the circle of light thrown off by the fire. A faded sack lay next to it. And, opposite from where he stood crouched a man.

Having seen all manner of men over countless number of eons, he was neither disturbed nor concerned with meeting the man's gaze. Such was the blessing he received at times. Often were the nights he would whim about meeting such a gaze and having such an opportunity to come into the lives of one of His own, and bless them, or guide them on their way. It was all the angel could ever wish for. And, this being one of those times, he stopped and held an open face and gentle eyes to the soul across from him, hoping to project an air of welcome.

He smiled at the man.

The eyes burned in reply, and he could not be sure if this was just a reflection of the fire before them, or an inner fire projected outward. Dark and hurt, this man was on the defensive. Hidden in a dark outfit, his face emerged as if from a dream, and the rest of him faded into the growing night around him. Neither spoke and the angel sent up a prayer of thanks and mercy before daring to speak out loud. The thrill of doing the Lord's will was mixed with an exhilaration he could not perfectly describe. Something about the soul of this man was different, and the power he projected was amazing, albeit a bit dangerous.

"Pardon me, but I saw your fire. May I rest here for a bit?" The angel asked, speaking low. The man's eyes flickered, taking him in, but his body did not move. The beard he wore was not full, but was dark, outlining his mouth and hiding a well-formed jawbone in the shadows of the evening. The angel took the silence as acceptance and sat on a log that was the opposite of the one the man was leaning against.

"I won't disturb your lovely evening. I just wanted to take a break. I've been walking for a very long time." The angel admitted, not wanting to elaborate on the countless centuries he had been walking. The man's eyes watched him through the flames, and the angel felt a bit

unsure for the first time in a long time. The Lord's children rarely made him feel uneasy, unless there was a demon tormenting them. But this man had nothing haunting him that came from Lucifer, so far as the angel could tell. Perhaps the man was merely aware that there could be no other person out this far and was already pondering to himself the possibility of a hallucination.

Reciting a prayer or two in his mind, the angel felt how good it was to sit within the warmth of the fire, and he took in the branches of the tree against the night sky. The orange and yellow tongues of flame hypnotized. It was quite relaxing if he ignored the man's large presence.

"Where were *you* going?" The man asked, after a long five minutes of silence. Hearing his voice for the first time amidst the quietness of the plains, the angel was taken aback a bit. Here was a tone he had not heard in decades, the voice of a soul who had the particular touch of the Lord on him. It was a deep voice, but gentle.

The angel smiled, feeling the man's defenses lower a bit. He found the inflection on the word 'you' to be strange.

"I'm just out for a walk." The angel offered. "Where are *you* going?" Something snapped in the fire, and a handful of sparks jumped towards the stars.

"Nowhere." The man admitted. He broke his gaze and looked at the ground, and his features took on a younger, less dangerous look. The eyelids were dark, half shadowed. Sleep had clearly been eluding him.

"You live out here, then? That must be wonderful." Taking a deep breath, the angel stretched his arms over his head. The stars twinkled down quietly, and he felt so connected, so right in everything just by looking up at them and taking in the beauty of home that he couldn't help but smile.

"I'm not living." The man said bitterly. This brought the angel back to focus.

"Of course you are." The angel gently corrected. This brought the hard stare back, though he moved not a muscle otherwise. "And what a blessing to be here, now, tonight. This is a beautiful spot." The man took a few deep breaths, and the angel sensed scarring on the man's heart, a pain so deep that it bordered on being eternally separated from the Lord. Unable to read the man's heart and see what had caused the pain, he decided to not

Speak again until the man explained more about what he was enduring here. If the Lord had brought them together, there was a reason.

“Nothing could be beautiful about it. And God’s never going to bless me ever again.” The shock of his words rested between them for a minute while the angel held his tongue. “Why don’t you rest as long as you like, *quietly*...and then go.” Reaching out to push a stick further into the fire, it was the first time the man moved. It was a stiff movement, as if he were in physical pain and the warmth of the flames weren’t reaching his body at all. The angel sent up a prayer to the Lord and asked for guidance.

“I’m sorry to hear that you feel so far away from the Lord right now. But I can’t rest quietly while seeing you in such pain.” The air stilled around the two and the open kindness and the pain hung in the air together, mingling. It was the first puff of gunpowder wafting over the clear morning of a fresh battlefield, stinging and final.

The man shook his head and looked down again, his face stoic. As he managed the simple movement, a lock of hair slipped down the side of his face, and the angel caught for the first time just how long the man’s hair was. To the angel, who had passed through time immeasurable, it gave the man an ancient look.

“What do you care?” The man whispered.

“Try me.” The angel said.

*Such a lost and lonely man  
Banished from his love, his land  
All locked out yet trapped within  
Haunted by his every sin*



The man shook his head at the angel's offer and tossed a few more sticks onto the fire. Taking his time to stretch out the silence between them, the angel could see the man struggling with himself. As he turned his head, the angel saw his jaw clenching, betrayed by the dim firelight. He knew the Lord had brought him to the plains tonight to see the fire and help this man back to the right path. His heart sang a song of praise at just being able to sit here and make the man feel less alone. He waited, giving the man space to speak further when he felt safe in doing so.

"Do you have any idea where you are right now?" The man began. His voice was a lonely baritone, dark as the sky. "Out here. Do you know where this is?" The man looked out into the black night with all honesty, his eyes desperately searching for something he had lost.

"No, I have no map with me." The angel said, being honest.

"You're in a trap. I'm here locked away from the only person I've ever loved...banished from the only home I've ever been given. I'm stuck out here, in the dark..." Emotion made his voice waver, power shaking his deep voice, and he stopped himself for a moment. He cleared his throat and held back another thought, shaking his head and swallowing hard before looking up at the angel again. "You know where you are? You're in hell."

The word slammed into the heart of the angel with full force and seeing the honest pain in the man's eyes made the angel lean away from the fire, away from the pain emanating from the man in all directions. He prayed to the Lord for a steady heart and a loving hand as he picked his words carefully. He couldn't imagine anyone sitting amidst such glory and grandeur unable to see the Lord's blessings all around.

“I’m sorry to hear you are separated from your love...but you are not...in hell.” The angel said carefully, speaking firmly. “I don’t know what has happened, but I know the Lord has not banished you.” At this, the man lashed out in frustration.

“You’re right; you *don’t* know what happened.” He snapped. “And don’t think you can wander over from nowhere and start preaching to me.” He tossed another stick into the fire. As his sleeve exposed his forearm, a simple black banded bracelet was exposed, but only for a moment.

“I don’t want to assume, so why don’t you tell me what happened?” The angel said, very softly. Reaching out for an errant stick that was half hidden next to the end of the log near where he sat, the angel picked it up and tossed it onto the fire in a helpful gesture. Still in his crouched position, the man put his elbow on his knee and raked his fingers through his dark hair, hanging his head, deep in thought. The angel prayed silently and waited.

“I deserve to be here.” In one fluid movement, the man stood, and his full height evidenced the power he emanated. His clothes, his hair, even his eyes shone black. Shadows from the fire danced across his face, making his features gruesome and haunted. Stepping over the log, he walked toward the tree, blending into the night until he was only the outline of the fantastic creature he was.

The Lord then impressed upon the angel that a tempting experience had been offered, and that the man had taken it despite the pain he knew it would cause his love. When confronted, the man had resisted reason and clung to the Devil’s lie that he could make the temptation work without consequence. He had placed a vow before the Lord to honor the soul of his love, and then he had broken it for a thrill he still regretted. The man had been through a hard fight with his love, and had lost, being cast out of the place they had created together.

When the Lord created souls to walk together, and a deep separation occurred, nothing but deep forgiveness ever allowed happiness to return to them both. They were lost without each other, in every way. And, unlike so many others, they were certainly not made to exist without the other.

The angel shot to his feet, as if released from a bow. Knowing the details the Lord had imparted on him, he had to work it out with this man. He had to set his heart on the path that would lead him home. Their two souls had very special work to do that could not be done

while they were separated. And, most importantly, neither could be replaced by another. He stayed by the fire as he spoke.

“She must be a beautiful person with a delicate spirit.” The angel said this matter-of-factly. The man spun around as if he had been shot, his eyes shooting daggers. “I imagine your powerful heart protected her many times.” Remorse crossed the man’s face, and he bit his lip in frustration. His eyes squinted and darkened at this stranger’s curious words.

“I couldn’t protect her...from me.” He said, his head cocking to the side.

“So you left because you loved her more than you loved yourself. You sacrificed everything to give her what she wanted back: happiness.” The two stood and looked at each other for a few seconds, and the angel’s words made the man feel as if they had both been through the same thing.

“Now, out here in the dark, all you’re left with is your tarnished chivalry and the ace.” The angel said, holding up his hands as if they were a pair of scales.

“Don’t you mean I’m holding the joker?” The man asked, with a twitch of a painful grin.

*Angel brought a simple key  
That could set his whole life free  
First forgive her this mistake  
Then one's own forgiveness take*



“You always have an ace.” The angel said. “Even when you feel your hands are empty.” He sat back down on the log and held his hands out to the fire. The man took a few steps forward.

“I’ve never felt more empty.” The man admitted, running a hand over his beard. “There’s just no way out of this.”

“There is always a way. Perhaps it’s not the answer you want, maybe that’s why you never thought of it as a possibility.” Clasp ing his hands in his lap, the angel sat and waited while the man mulled over what he had said. A sad shadow came over him again.

“We were a team. I put me before the team.” He lamented. He stared into the flames a while, almost hypnotized. It was clear that memories of her were flooding through him, an old summer storm had broken the dam in his mind, and things were rushing all about, spilling over the riverbanks of his soul. He seemed to be a man who kept a very tight grip on things and who always fought for control of a situation. He held his body tense, bracing himself against the inner flood of thoughts that he could no longer contain.

His heart was clearly haunted.

“Then you must resurrect the team.” The angel suggested. “She wouldn’t let you have what you thought you wanted. Your pride was hurt. You retreated so that she could get her way and so that you could still get your way as well. But it hasn’t worked out, has it?” The last large log broke in the middle of the fire, and as it shifted, it sent a shower of sparks up into the sky. The man brought another log over from a pile he had gathered, and restocked the fire. White hot coals created a pile on which the new log rested. As the flames returned, brighter, the man’s features shown more. His dark beard half hid hollow cheeks above the strong jawbone. His dark hair was curly, his eyes held an intensity heightened by the dancing

of the flames before him. His shoulders, strong and wide, had a slump to them as if they carried the weight of the whole world.

When he finished tending the fire, he sat on the large log opposite the angel, resting his elbows on his knees.

“Nothing’s worth anything without her.” He whispered. Tears started to fall, and he put his head in his hands. The angel felt the love of the Lord on the man, even though the man could not sense it for himself.

“Then you must forgive her.” The angel said lovingly. His heart sang a song of praise to the Lord for being able to help the man make his way towards a different point of view. Pulling his hands away from his wet face, the man looked up at the angel incredulously.

“Me? Forgive *her*?” He asked. “She hasn’t done anything wrong!” The man remained hunched over, his tear stained hands held out away from his face as if in supplication.

“Didn’t she hurt you? Hurt your pride by judging you? She caused you shame by cursing what you knew you should not have done. Didn’t she cause you pain when she didn’t go along with your plan to have the temptation without the consequence? Aren’t you still holding all that pain?” With the angel’s words, the man’s hand came up to his chest subconsciously, almost as if he were feeling physical pain.

“Just a stubborn fool is all I am.” The man said bitterly. Standing up, the angel walked around the fire and approached the man, feeling the love of the Lord coming down on them as the wind from an owl’s soft wing. It was everywhere, strong, effortless, and sweet. Almost speaking the man’s name, the angel suddenly realized the man hadn’t told him his name, and he bit his tongue, hiding a smile at his eagerness to help.

“Stupid old fool.” The man muttered again.

The angel crouched next to the man and spoke low.

“You must forgive yourself for all of this. Forgive yourself for denying her, for pushing her away, for listening to that dark side. You made a mistake.” The angel smiled as he crouched there, feeling that everything was going to be all right. But the man couldn’t look him in the eye again. He simply shook his head and took a ragged breath. The curly hair hid most of his face, as if it were a curtain between them in a confessional.

“She’ll never trust me again.” He sniffed and cleared his throat. “It’s over.”

“Forgive yourself,” the angel reminded him. “You’re simply a good man that made a bad choice.” The flames crackled behind them.

“A good man?” He scoffed at the words. “I’m broken and worthless. Nothing good can ever come out of forgiveness, for her or me. She’d be better off having never known me.” And the wave of sorrow brought tender tears to the angel’s eyes. The Lord’s own dear child was so lost that he had hidden his heart from the sweet light of forgiveness.

“Don’t you know?” Whispered the angel. “Don’t you know your worth? Have you ever taken into consideration all that has gone into you being here right now?”

*You have never been alone  
Everywhere you go is home  
You can leave your prison den  
Won't you let love try again?*



“People like to think that the world was created in six twenty-four hour days, and then God sat back in his chair and watched how it all unfolded.” The angel began.

“Yeah, what do we know.” The man muttered.

“Exactly. Because the Lord is outside the realm of time, His existence is timeless. He has more time than you can ever imagine. And He is constantly creating. Not a beat of His heart goes by without Him creating something in thought, word, or deed.” The angel’s voice took on a reverent, hushed tone. He adjusted his legs so he was no longer crouching, but sitting on the ground beside the man.

“I never thought of it that way.” The man said, still holding his face in his hands. “He didn’t just create the world then. He creates it now. Everything. Every blade of grass, every dewdrop on that grass in the morning, every beetle on it in the afternoon, every stripe on every beetle, everywhere. Every day. The Almighty Lord has put His hand to every scale on every butterfly wing everywhere in the world since the first butterfly in the Garden. All that is around you is not chance, not chemical reactions, not mistake. It is only by the will of the Lord above.” Full of amazement in thinking of all his Creator’s blessings, the angel plunged forward in his thoughts.

“It took man hundreds of thousands of years to discover strange and amazing fish living over a mile underwater, at the very bottom of the ocean. Fish with giant teeth, glowing lights, wondrous forms. Why are they living all the way down there if no-one could ever travel down that far to see them? Simply for the Glory of the Lord. For no other reason. No scientific experiment could put them there, or make them glow. Only the light of God himself can shine down there.”

“Look at your own hand. Feel it move. See the muscles and tendons work beneath the skin. A marvel of engineering that no scientist can perfectly duplicate, even with all the technology and knowledge the Lord has given to them. Look closer. Every line and swirl on each fingertip was put there, carved out of clay by the Lord. He put such detail into you before you came down from heaven that He knows every hair, every line, every cell, every thought. Because He made it. And He put that kind of love into every person who has ever lived and who ever will live. No chemical or scientific process can create a hand, or a man, or a thought. Only the Almighty God above.” The angel smiled and paused, simply praising feeling himself breathe. He turned to see the man studying his own fingertips.

“No-one who could put that much love into creating you could ever not love you. And no-one who created her could ever put pure hate into her heart. No-one who could create two people such as you and her would have ever brought you together as a mistake. Stubborn or not, fool or not, the Lord knows exactly what He is doing.” The Lord stilled the angel’s tongue before he could continue, and a silence descended as deep as the night.

The fire snapped and popped, the crickets chirped, and a warm breeze touched their backs. The vastness of life was enough to make one feel so very small. But a calm had come over the man as he had listened to the angel’s words. The tension had left his shoulders, and the weariness inside was dissipating.

“I came out here to get away.” The man said quietly. “There’s just some things you can’t get away from. I was so worked up that I thought I was in solitary, like in jail.” He paused to scoff at his own thought. “You’re right, though. I’ve never known her to have hate in her heart over anyone. It’s just that...oh, God...what if she can’t forgive me? Or doesn’t want to?” With a deep sigh, the man rose again and began pacing around the fire. His stride was long, and the angel watched the heel of his boots begin to form a ring in the dust as he talked it all out.

“That’s why I’m all the way out here, lost. It hurts. It just hurts to sit, to think, to wonder.” His hand went to his chest again. “I thought that if I left, I could be moving and could walk it out. But it’s everywhere. I’m sick of all of it.” He stopped in mid- stride, facing away from the angel, the fire again between them. He spun around suddenly, and as the angel took him in from where he still sat on the ground, the man looked like he could be an avenging angel of his own. His firm stance, strong build, fiery eyes, disheveled but flowing hair and

beard were all striking. It was a beautiful form, and the yearning flicker of hope in his face made him captivating. The spark was back, and it was plain to the angel that this was the man she had come to know and love. He was strong, confident, intelligent, and inspiring.

He was a true masterpiece of the Lord. And he was so very afraid.

“Can you tell me that this will work? You talk like you’ve been through it too.

What happened in the end for you? Did she come back? Did she forgive you?” He reached out to the angel. “If you really feel it will work, I want to try. But if all she’s going to do is...if I leave without her, again...” The man stopped himself, his jaw clenching again. The angel got to his feet. This was the pain he had been created to soothe. These were the nights he looked for to bring compassion and love to the Lord’s children. It still wasn’t easy when such emotions were so very real, however. The angel found his tongue.

“Don’t think that.” He whispered. The man shook his head.

“I’ll do it. There’s nothing to live for if not for her. I’d be better off dead.” He said with finality.

“Don’t!” The angel pleaded, walking around the fire. “Please!” Reaching out, he placed his hand on the man’s shoulder, knowing the physical connection was very important when one such as him was so lost in his pain. Tears threatened behind his dark eyes, and his pain was palpable.

“I’ll go blind. I’ll never sing anything again. Never talk to anyone.” The man’s breath came in small gasps, so worked up was he over the anxiety of losing her again. Then, as the angel’s full presence came over the man’s physical being, the worried furrow across his brow smoothed, and he relaxed his jaw. “I’ll never drink again. I’ll give up smoking, too. I’ll go to church with her again. I’ll never do anything that could ever hurt her.” The angel was convinced that the man’s soul was strong, because usually, one touch and a person dropped into an almost heavenly repose. This time, his touch merely calmed the man, so strong was his spirit. He imparted the following onto the man’s heart.

“Inflicting pain on the body the Lord made for you doesn’t merit anything.

Hiding your heavenly talents like singing is only dishonorable to Him. He put that gift in your heart to help heal others, to bring joy to them. Giving up vices for other people never works. Smoking and drinking are harmful, and it is wonderful that you cleanse yourself of those things...but give them up for you, not her. Attending services together is a beautifully special

way to share your time together, and I'm sure it will be time well spent. But as for things that hurt her, being so far away from her now is the only thing you're doing to hurt her. Disappearing and giving up on what you two have is what really hurts her. No amount of pills or powders could hurt her more than your heart leaving hers."

The angel patted the man's shoulder. He wanted to impress that improvement in the outer vestiges of a human life were important, but that it was the inner changes to a spiritual life that could bring love and joy back again. Men often wanted to barter with the Lord over material things so they could keep sin in their hearts. Only when they let go of the old pain, the old thoughts, and the old ways could a new and better way come in and replace it. Only when a man's hands were open and ready could the Lord fill them with new blessings.

They stared at each other. Flames were just a scant flicker now, and the darkness threaded its way between them.

Then, the man nodded.

*Angel left before the dawn  
Left the key and carried on  
Left him to decide his fate  
Prayed he would not be too late*



The man's eyelids gave a brief flutter, and the angel kept his hand where it was. "I feel so...calm." The man said. He took a deep breath and felt a relaxation that had been lost to him for years. The angel smiled, and the man returned the smile. It spread across his face and made him more striking than ever. The calm reached to his eyes, and they searched the angel's face.

"No wonder you knew...just what to say." The man whispered. Momentarily losing his balance, he reached out his arm and took the shoulder of the angel to steady himself. The connection grew stronger and their eyes met again.

"She...does love...me." The man said, almost reading it from the air itself. "Forgiveness is a powerful thing." The angel reminded him. The man nodded, slowly.

"...think I need to sit down..." The man muttered, his knees buckling. The angel caught him just before he hit the ground, easing him into a sitting position before the coals of the fire. A man had never connected with the angel in that way before, and the angel was shaken and in awe of the Lord's power.

"Oh." The man breathed, putting a hand to his head. "I feel..." The angel, knowing his touch would bring blissful sleep, kept his hand on him, guiding the soul to rest. The man sat there and blinked, trying to shake off his sudden overwhelming realization. It was more than he could possibly know, but his drive to control a situation kept him conscious long after the angel thought he should have collapsed into a very deep slumber.

"Forgiveness will save you." The angel whispered.

"You...weren't takin' a walk...were you?" The man asked, looking up at him with an unfocused gaze, his words slurring as if he were inebriated. The last flame went out and they

were lost in the darkness except for his hand on the man's shoulder. The man's wet eyes were still visible as the red-hot coals trembled in the warm breeze. His breath quickened.

"Jesus...forgive me...oh, forgive me." The man cried, reaching out to clutch onto the angel before he vanished like smoke. The angel's face broke out into a smile that could've shown for miles in a blinding snowstorm, warm with the love from the Creator. Their hands clasped in the dark. The man began to cry, so the angel shushed him tenderly and placed his hand on the top of the man's head. He fainted finally, and the angel took him up in his arms and gently laid him down on the ground near the fire.

Looking through the sack nearby, the angel took out a blanket and covered the man with it. Rolling the sack up, he placed that beneath the man's head.

When his physical comforts had been attended to, he sat and watched the man sleep for a long while, his heart overflowing with the Lord's mercy on His child. The man slept more peacefully than he had since the day he'd left her side. His face was as blissful and as tender as a newborn babe. The pain that had surrounded him like a shroud was gone, and the beauty of the night completed the picture of a perfect evening.

When the angel's praise and prayer was complete in the Lord's wishes, he stood up and walked on towards sunrise.

*A*wakened to a whole new way  
His heart no longer held at bay  
Homeward bound the man did trod  
Led by the precious light of God



As morning broke gently over the horizon, he lay there by the log, lost in the deepest slumber his soul had ever known. His entire body was relaxed and at rest, though he lay on the hard ground with no bedding except the blanket draped on top of him.

Birds broke into song around him as they began searching for food among the tasseled grasses. The sky changed from a dusky deep purple to a gradual pale pink. There was not a cloud in the sky.

In his dreamscape, he ambled through an endless field of wildflowers with her, their hands clasped...

*It all felt so right that they seemed to float through the field together. Pain and anger that had lain between them was gone, melted. All was as it had been, as it should be. He couldn't stop squeezing her hand, feeling her fingers warm against his. They spoke no words, walking as their hearts spoke volumes. As they walked through the wildflowers, a clearing came to them, and he could see a campfire, an old guitar, a man...sleeping...*

Raising his head with a start, he awoke to find he had been dreaming about finding himself. He sat up, the blanket falling away from him. The fire was safely out, everything was where he had left it, but something, somehow, seemed different.

Changed.

Then, out of the fog of sleep, the man's face came back to him. The man that had walked up to the campfire out of the darkness last night. He tried to remember all that had been said between them, but the sleep had softened all the edges of his mind. The man had seemed to have been able to see right into his heart. Now, the matter that had driven him out in the

middle of the field didn't seem so final. He looked around in the dirt, but could find no trace, no footprint.

Laying back down, he covered his face and tried to remember what all had happened. Had it just been another dream? No, he felt certain the man had sat with him at the campfire and that they'd spoken in length about why he was here, about the fight, the divorce. He remembered admitting to the stranger that he was contemplating suicide over losing her.

*'Forgiveness is a powerful thing.'* Came the words from out of nowhere. He looked around again, as if he had heard the man speaking to him from the log on which he'd sat the night before. But there was nothing but a small bird perched there, looking and chirping at him as if to say he should get up and enjoy this beautiful morning.

And a beautiful morning it was! Through all his inner turmoil that had made every day appear bleak and gray, somehow, today looked as if it held all the possibility of a fresh start. The idea of starting anything over with anyone else made his gut churn, then the thought came to him that he had once started something new with someone else, which was why he was now all alone. But the self-admonishment didn't have the same effect as before.

The stranger had said to forgive himself, and her. To stop holding against her what his foolish pride had not let go of. Propped up on an elbow, he earnestly prayed the sincerest apology to her heart that he felt he would never be able to say. He began telling himself the opposite of what he'd been beating himself up for.

The prayer went on a long while, bringing tears to his eyes as the perfect silence of the morning field punctuated his thoughts with a soft breeze and the smell of the wildflowers.

After a long while, he finished and composed himself. Lying back, he thought he heard someone shouting his name. His eyes focused on the cold ashes in the fire as he listened for the voice. Maybe he was simply daydreaming. But, after a moment, he heard it again. A strained female tone, breathless, searching...

Sitting up to look over the log, he turned to see his soon to be ex-wife racing across the field towards him. She was in sweats and her old tank top. Her hair streaked back from her face as she ran towards him with all her might. His heart started hammering and he struggled to stand up.

Never hesitating, she ran full bore into him, and, had he not held out his arms to catch her, she would've bowled them both over. She buried her face into his chest, smelling of that

soap he had bought her for last Valentine's day, the one she only used for special occasions. Her arms were like a vice squeezing him, and other than her heavy breathing, they were silent in the unexpected embrace. The longer she stood there, holding him, the more he felt his reserves slipping. They hadn't held each other in over six months.

When she looked up, he could see her eyes were red and puffy. She searched his face as if to check that it was really him, and that he was all in one piece. He dared not move a muscle, fully expecting her to slap him hard across the face, or stomp on his foot, or maybe both. He hadn't seen such an openness in her eyes since the night before everything came to a head about what he'd done. He thought he must be dreaming.

"I had a dream...about you." She said finally. Her voice broke, partly from exhaustion and partly from the emotion of seeing him again. "Daddy came and told me you were dead. He was so...mad at me." Her voice quivered and tears started falling. Her father had passed on when she was eleven, and she dreamed of him often. He knew the dream of her father had spurned her on the way none of his entreaties could. "You were here...out by the tree." She squeaked out the last word as she looked over to the tree that stood like a sentinel in the middle of the field. Trying to hold back her sobs, she buried her head in his chest again, clinging to him as if he would disappear at any second. He began to hush her, stroking her hair delicately, still half afraid to touch her.

"I'm okay." He managed; his throat tight. "Just came here to pray." His hands were shaking from the incredible-ness of the entire moment, so he rested his hands at her back and held her quietly. Thinking of his phantom father-in-law knowing what he had been contemplating scared him. Then he thought back to the prayer he'd just uttered minutes before she ran up and marveled at the power of God.

"What did you pray for?" She quietly asked when she'd gotten herself together. Looking down at her tear streaked face, her wild hair, he simply looked deep into her eyes, thinking about what he had prayed for minutes ago. He swallowed hard, seeing this could be his last chance to do things right.

"That...I could hug you one more time...tell you I'm sorry and...that I love you so very much. Tell you how beautiful you are right now..." He sighed, blinking back tears. "I prayed..." He whispered. "For the chance to show you my love again." Letting go of her, they stood inches apart.

Her eyes were locked on him in disbelief. Never had she heard him talk like this, so openly, with such emotion. Every fight about the other woman had been vehement and defensive, full of cheap begging and empty promises. She told herself he just didn't care about her anymore. He had been so closed off that she'd never been able to get him to open up. But Daddy had never been wrong. Now, after the sleepless night with the horrible dream, she looked things in a different perspective.

He kneeled before her.

"I betrayed you." He said. "I got drunk that night, thought I could have an exciting secret and hide it. I didn't think I was attractive like that anymore. It's hell getting old and I didn't want to talk about it and...seem weak. But not letting you in just left me shut out. Pretending to be perfect kept you from helping me be real. There's nothing here for the real me if I can't be with you." Never before had he felt an apology so strongly or sincerely.

"Daddy's never wrong." She said softly, reaching out to touch his hair, stopping her hand an inch from his head. He didn't dare look up at her. She realized just what her father had been trying to tell her. The thought of suicide fairly broke her heart.

Shaking her head at the thought of ever living in a world where her high school sweetheart was dead, she felt her entire body tremble. Falling to her knees, she forcibly grabbed his face and made him look at her. Letting go of the anger and hurt that had been inside her for so long, she was finally able to see into the eyes of her best friend, her lover, her husband.

And a very old feeling came back to her, deep inside.

The brown eyes that she had sometimes gazed into until she had fallen asleep next to him looked at her with a desperate hope. His were the soft brown eyes that had playfully flirted with her at their first dance together. They were the loving brown eyes that had gazed into her soul as she had spoken vows to him on their wedding day. And now she could see his hurting, his remorse.

His love.

And her heart opened back up.



“I forgive you.” She said. The anxiously fearful shiver of vulnerability played down her arms. His hand came up to touch her hand as it held the side of his face. Her gaze was instantly drawn to his finger where the wedding ring still shone in the morning sun.

“Baby...” He whispered, stunned. He felt his heart stop.

“I don’t want to be without you.” She confessed. “I want to grow old with you.” Taking a ragged breath, he placed his hands over hers, relishing in the feeling of her skin on his, of feeling her loving touch.

“You’ll never be without me.” He wondered if he was dreaming. Her sheer proximity was going to his head. The look of her was making his heart come undone. She had just said she couldn’t stand being without him anymore!

A simple nod of her head brought them into an embrace that made the angel sigh as he stood next to them and sang a praise to the highest reaches of his heavenly home. Although they could not see him, he had faithfully returned to see things through. Lifting up his hands in grateful prayer for God's power of forgiveness, the angel asked that their marriage come to be restored, then walked on.

He did not need to look back to see the man find a feather by his guitar.

He did not need to wonder if the man understood.