

Excerpt

Borrowed Promises
Moonseed Trilogy, Book 2
By Judith Ingram

Ryan leaned his shoulder against the shaggy bark of a tall redwood and watched his wife. She stood in the exact center of the clearing, facing west. If her eyes were open, she would be looking out across Golden Springs Valley to the forested hills on the other side. But her eyes were closed, and her arms were stretched out on either side of her at shoulder level, palms up.

She had been standing that way for over five minutes.

An irate blue jay hopped along the branch above his head, scolding, as Ryan stifled a yawn. Whatever she was doing, he was getting tired of standing here. What could she be waiting for?

They had already walked the perimeter of the proposed building site and visited the caves that Vicki insisted were sacred. One cave had a stream running through it from an underground spring. The other was dry and deep, with a wide mouth where Ryan could well imagine an old shaman sitting cross-legged before a campfire, dreaming his dreams.

A sudden screech brought Ryan to attention. A large squirrel with a thick, bristling tail stood poised on its hind legs not two feet in front of his wife's motionless form. Vicki opened her eyes, and the two stared at each other for a long moment. Ryan held his breath. Without a sound, the creature lowered itself to all fours. With a long last look at her, it turned and scampered away into the forest underbrush.

Vicki turned to Ryan with shining eyes.

"Did you see it?" she called, starting toward him. "Dora would call it a spirit squirrel, a powerful sign."

"And what would you call it?"

Not answering, she took his hand and pulled him into the clearing with her. "Just stand here and look out, Ryan. Can you feel it? West, the source of healing and renewal." She took a deep breath. "You felt the sacredness of this place when you were here before. That's why the building plans didn't seem right to you." She glanced sideways at him. "The Indians believe that certain places are naturally spiritual. This ridge is one of them."

"And the bridge over Two Trees Creek is another?"

She looked surprised. "Yes. But how did you know that?"

"You told me, when we were up here before. Don't you remember?"

Again, she didn't answer. Instead, she stretched her arms over her head and yawned, like a lazy cat just waking from a nap. "Well," she said, scratching the back of her head. "I've seen enough. How about you?"

"I was ready to leave twenty minutes ago."

"But then we would have missed the spirit squirrel."

He couldn't tell if she was serious.

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They stopped for dinner in town before heading to Summerwood for the night. Ryan had told Alice to expect a late check-in. As he drove down the narrow main street of Rossport, his wife kept twisting her head to look in all directions, trying to take it all in at once. They ate a quiet dinner at Loggers End, and Ryan couldn't help remembering the last time they'd dined there. He'd been just about ready to give up on their marriage, to admit his second failure. As he looked at his wife now, smiling at him across the red-checked tablecloth, he had difficulty believing she was the same person, that they were indeed the same couple.

"This place used to be called The Green Bottle," she said. "It was a tavern."

"The old Indian woman tell you that, too?"

"No." She pushed her salad greens around with her fork. "I've learned something, Ryan." She looked up at him, her eyes dark and earnest. "This moment, right here, right now. This is the only reality there is, the only time that truly belongs to us. The past is beyond our reach, and we have no promises about the future." Seeing his bewilderment, she reached out and took his hand. "If I'm busy worrying about the future, then I'm losing the present. And the present is all I have. Do you see?"

He hesitated. "Are you talking about going away, Vicki? Like that day at the skating rink last week?"

She shook her head. "I'm talking about being with you every minute, as much as I can, for as long as I can."

His face cleared. "Well, I understand that. I feel exactly the same way." He squeezed her hand reassuringly. "But don't worry, sweetheart. We're going to be together a long, long time." He saw her smile turn wistful, and he squeezed her hand again. "Trust me," he said.