

1 The Beginning

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Bob rushed to the door and greeted his long-time friend, Janet Johnson. He hadn't seen her in over two years and he was excited that she had come to visit him.

"Gosh, I'm glad to see you," Bob said hugging Janet tightly. "Come on in." Bob took Janet's coat, hung it in the hall closet, and told her to have a seat on the sofa.

"Would you like a coke?" Bob asked. Janet said she would. While Bob went into the kitchen, Janet sat down on the sofa. She looked around the room to see what new things were there since her last visit. Everything looked about the same. However, she noticed a blue notebook lying on the coffee table that had the words "The Devil's Tail" on the cover. The name intrigued her and she picked up the notebook and started looking through it. When Bob got back with the drinks, she was fully engrossed in the notebook.

"Is this something new?" she asked. "I don't remember seeing it before."

"The notebook is new, but the articles in it are not," he said. "Last year, I started putting newspaper clippings and things I found about the trail into the notebook."

Janet continued glancing through the notebook. "These are all stories about people disappearing from the trail. That sounds scary. Where is this trail?" she asked, pointing at a headline that said that people disappeared and had never been seen again.

"It's less than five miles from here."

"I don't remember that you ever mentioned the trail to me before."

"It's always been there. I guess it just never came up when you were here before."

"Can you show me the trail?"

"Sure, but I really don't like it or even to be too close to it."

"Why?"

"Too many scary stories about it. You did read the stories and not just glance at the headlines, right?"

"I read most of them and I'm curious if any of the stories are true," she said with a slight questioning smile.

"I hate to say this, but I believe that they are all true," Bob said, trembling.

"All of them?" Janet asked and saw how nervous Bob looked.

"Well, at least most of them," Bob said. "I knew a few of the people that hiked the trail and I never saw them again. A couple of the stories about UFO's and aliens may not be true, but on the other hand, they may be and that trail scares the hell out of me."

They sat on the sofa and caught up with all that had happened since the last time that Janet had visited Bob. "It's only been two years, but it seems much longer than that," Janet said.

"Two years too long," Bob said smiling at Janet. Then, he asked, "Would you like another drink or anything to eat?"

"No thanks," Janet replied. "I ate before I got here."

After they'd talked for quite a while, Bob went to the closet and got Janet's coat and handed it to her. "Come on," he said. "Let's go for a ride. I'll show you what's left of the trail."

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Janet Johnson looked thoughtfully at her long-time childhood friend, Bob Wild, as they stood at the entrance to what used to be a trail. After she had read the stories in the notebook about the trail, she was really excited to know more about it. She was happy that Bob was going to show it to her. Now, more than anything she wanted to hike the trail. The trail disappeared into the forest in an array of blackberry vines and jungle-like foliage. The once popular trail was covered with vines, scotch broom, thistles, sword fern, and tons of sapling fir trees. Janet thought that it would take a machete to get through that jungle-like stuff. As they stood looking at the beginning of the

dilapidated trail, a large bolt of lightning struck the ground not far from them and illuminated the trees. Dark clouds boiled in a cauldron above them. Immediately after the lightning flashed, a loud clap of thunder rolled through the woods and rattled their bones. Bob nearly panicked when the trees in front of them lit up from the lightning and he thought he saw someone standing there looking at them. Janet noticed that her friend looked totally petrified and she assumed the lightning was what scared him.

"You're not scared of lightning, are you?" she asked with a laugh. She had known Bob for years and she'd never seen him look this frightened. He looked at her with an expression that said otherwise.

"No," he fibbed. "I'm not afraid of lightning, but when the lightning flash lit up the trees I thought I saw someone standing there."

Janet snickered at her friend, who stared at the trail and trembled. "I think you're imagining things," she said laughing. "I didn't see anything except trees."

Evilness seemed to emanate from the forest and shook Bob's bones as he looked at the covered trailhead and the forest behind it. He didn't know if Janet felt it or not, but he did and an involuntary tremble crawled through him. The loud thunder and lightning didn't seem to bother Janet as it did Bob. Dark ominous clouds hung over the lush brown-green forest as Bob and Janet stood in the pathway opening looking at what remained of the trail. The clouds opened up and a light rain fell steadily and an accompanying murky fog clung to the tree leaves as if punctuating Bob's thoughts about evilness. Bob jumped as another flash of jagged lightning knifed through the dark sky and was instantly followed by a loud echoing clap of thunder which rattled Bob's nerves even more. Janet looked at Bob and laughed as she relished the fear that he was showing. Nothing seemed to faze her, Bob thought as he admired her strong facial features. His friend had a toughness that he'd never had. He knew that her fearlessness had carried her through many dangerous hiking adventures and situations. Bob only wished that he had half the toughness that Janet carried with her.

"Where does that supposedly scary trail go?" Janet asked, studying her friend. He had a cute ponytail and a slightly upturned nose with high cheekbones and rugged facial features that belied how childish appearing he really was. Bob stood over five foot, eleven inches and weighed just over a hundred and eighty pounds. He was solid muscle, but the fear in his eyes and his trembling hands gave him a look of weakness, not toughness. Janet's rough and tumble appearance was just the opposite of Bob's meek look. Maybe we complement each other she thought with a smile.

Before answering, Bob thought about the fertile forest and the trail. The forest, which was more like the Amazon jungle, got that way because of all the rain that Oregon provided. Bob thought about why he liked living in Oregon. Many people who lived in other states never got to experience the beauty that adorned the state. True, it rained a lot in Oregon, but that's what made the state so green. Bob knew that without the rain, there wouldn't be lush forests like this one near his house. Bob was happy that he had the forest within walking distance of his front door. It was just the abandoned trail that he lived near that bothered him. He glanced at Janet and noticed that she still maintained her calmness. She didn't seem to be affected by the scary trail, the overgrown remains of the trail, the close lightning strikes, or the loud rumbling thunder. Janet reached down and smoothed a wrinkle out of her shorts. Bob thought about Janet and how she usually wore Khaki hiking shorts, a wool T-shirt, and leather hiking boots. She was definitely not a fashion model for anything other than hiking and mountaineering outfits. He smiled while looking at her roughened knees and weathered face. Her tanned brown skin showed that she had spent many hours outdoors in the sun. She smiled at Bob as she waited for him to answer her question. Her rugged face and taut facial muscles gave her the appearance that she had no fear of anything. Bob liked Janet and sometimes wished that he had gotten the nerve to get closer to her. However, although he cared for her as a friend, he just could never get up the courage to be more romantically involved with her. Several times over the years Bob came close to kissing Janet, but he was too shy and always chickened out.

"That trail," Bob finally said, "goes deep into the woods and I believe it follows the up and down terrain up to Smokey Mountain. I'm not sure what's at the end of the trail, but there are so many terrifying rumors and stories about it that I don't want to know what's at the upper end. All I know is that there is a mountain up there and I assume it ends at it. From what I've heard, it's a pathway to hell," Bob added. "It's been said that the devil lives on the trail. As far as I know, aliens or something even more frightening may be on the trail. Believe it or not, the trail is called '*The Devils Tail*,'" Bob said, shaking apprehensively at the name. "I think that path is beyond scary. Scary would be a joy compared to what's supposedly on the trail," he added, trembling.

Janet noticed that Bob was getting goose bumps on his arms. She knew that fear could cause them and she almost snickered and asked him if he felt any fear.

"You have goose bumps on top of goose bumps on your arms," she said. "They're so big that I'd actually call them Elephant bumps." Janet laughed, but Bob didn't see the humor in it. Instead, he just looked at Janet.

"Maybe," she said laughing, "It's just large gnats on the trail that have scared people."

"From what I've heard, it's not gnats," Bob said and the goose bumps got larger.

Finally, between gnat swings, Bob managed to say as sweat poured down his face. "You've never heard what's so scary about that trail, other than what you read in the notebook? I know you didn't grow up around here or spend all of your early years around Dead Rock, but I thought that everyone knew. I'll tell you what I've heard about the trail. The scariest rumors are that anyone that's ever hiked the trail, never came back to say what's on the trail. The rumors are not just about one or two people disappearing, but many people."

"No one's ever come back that hiked the trail?" Janet asked with a non-believing expression. She looked at the signs nailed to the trees around the parking lot. "Is that why all the warning signs are posted here?"

"Yes, that's exactly the reason. After so many hikers disappeared, they put those signs up to warn people about the dangers."

Bob repeated what he'd previously said, "As far as I know, no one that's ever hiked the trail has come back." He tried not to look too terrified. However, his five-foot, eleven-inch frame was shaking like a bowl of jelly and the goose bumps were shaking along with him. He took out his handkerchief from his back pocket and again wiped the sweat from his forehead. It was a nervous gesture and completely involuntary. "I'm not sure if it's that hot or I'm just too nervous thinking about the trail," Bob said.

"It's not that hot," Janet said with a slight laugh. She looked at her friend and for the first time, she saw that he had a full head of hair that looked kind of cute pulled back in a ponytail. She looked at him more closely than she ever had and noticed that Bob was no longer the young boy that she went to grade school with. He had matured and she admired his clean-shaven mustache which adorned his face. His mustache was neatly trimmed and it gave him an even more mature appearance. My she thought, he's grown up to be a very handsome man. There were no gray hairs showing in any of the hair on his head. Other than a large black mole on the side of his face that he'd always had, he didn't have any unusual characteristics. Janet knew that Bob didn't have many friends around the area and as far as she knew she was one of his closest friends. She lived several miles from him in the town of Deadwood and although they were fairly close friends, she had done other things during the last couple of years. Janet took a swat at an oversized mosquito that had landed on her arm and she knocked it a few feet away. After disposing of the giant bug, she smiled

at Bob and said, "I took care of that little devil." Then, she turned serious and asked, "So do you have any idea what lies at the end of the trail?"

"I don't even know what lies along the trail, let alone at the end of the trail," Bob said nervously.

"Let's hike the trail," Janet said suddenly with a wry smile. "It should be fun. Then, we can find out if any of the rumors are true. I really feel that they are just that, rumors. I can't imagine that people wouldn't come back. The rumors probably started because someone got lost and couldn't find their way back. That's usually how rumors like that get started and then people add to them by making things up."

"No way," Bob said shaking his head.

"What can be so scary about a trail?" Janet asked. "I've hiked a lot of trails. I've been hiking trails for as long as I can remember. Some have been almost impossible to hike with near vertical hiking terrain. I've even done rock climbing."

"This trail is different."

"What do you mean by different?"

Before Bob could answer, another bolt of vicious lightning sliced through the darkening sky and hit a tree close to them. Bob jumped as lightning struck the ground not far from them and a loud clap of thunder shook the area. "That lightning struck very close!" Bob exclaimed nervously. "In fact, too close for comfort," he added. "Didn't that one scare you just a little?" Bob asked, looking at Janet. She smiled, shook her head no and asked him again about what he meant by the trail is different.

"What I mean is that of all the trails that you've ever hiked, you came back," Bob said. "I think we'd better get away from here and get back to my house. That lightning struck too close for me and from the looks of that sky, I have a feeling that it's going to start pouring soon. Come on," he added, "let's get back to the car."

"Okay," Janet said and turned to go. Just as they started to go back to the car, the rain started falling and Janet's hair quickly became a wet tangled mess. Water ran off of her head and onto her shoulders. They raced to the car and jumped in. As Bob started the engine, Janet again asked with an almost comical expression, "Are you saying that if I hiked up that trail, no one would ever see me again?"

"That's what I'm saying, at least from what I've heard," Bob said, staring back at the trail that disappeared into the woods. The thought of people hiking it and never coming back terrified him.

He was shaking so hard that Janet almost laughed. He tried to quit shaking, but fear clung to him. He looked at Janet and could see that she was a very strong person and probably not afraid of anything. She had a sense of humor and maybe, he thought, that's what carried her through her rigorous adventures. Bob looked at Janet and noticed the strong piercing look in her eyes and he shuddered thinking about what she could do to someone that crossed her. She could overwhelm people just with her look.

Bob started to pull out of the parking lot, but he stopped when he glanced back towards the trail and saw a stifling greenish-yellow fog that seemed to be rolling towards them from the woods. Bob and Janet both jumped as another jagged bolt of lightning lit up the sky and then shattered a nearby tree, less than a couple of hundred feet away. The lightning was followed by rumbling thunder. They jumped in the car and quickly closed the doors. Bob looked back towards the trail and to his surprise, the fog had disappeared. It was a strange evil looking fog and it scared him. He'd never seen colored fog like it before. He started to say something to Janet about the fog, but he was afraid that she'd just accuse him of imagining it as well.

"You said that the people searching came back, right," Janet continued and interrupted his thoughts. "So, if those that were doing the searching came back, I could do it too," she said, confidently.

"I never said that those that were doing the searching came back," Bob said looking nervously out the window. "I said that those that were doing the searching never found them. Those that were doing the searching also disappeared and never came back."

"Just those that were searching went out and never came back?" Janet asked skeptically. She looked at her long-time friend and noticed that he was shaking. "You really are scared aren't you?" she asked with an amused expression.

Bob drove out of the parking lot as fast as he could. Janet smiled at Bob as the tires spun on the wet pavement. "Don't kill us," she said laughing. They were almost to Bob's house when another bright bolt of lightning lit up the sky and loud thunder bounced the car and echoed through the mountain valleys.

The lightning shook Bob and he took a couple of moments to compose himself again. He pulled up in front of his house and they both sat there watching for more lightning and listening to distant thunder reverberating in the mountains.

"Come on," Bob said, looking through the rain at Janet. "Let's go in the house before we get completely soaked. I get the shivers just thinking about that trail and yes I do believe the stories. I don't think they're just made-up. There were too many documented newspaper articles."

As they started up the path to his house, Bob said glancing at Janet, "I hope that you're not thinking seriously about going on that trail."

"I wouldn't think of hiking that trail by myself," Janet said smiling and watched the goose bumps rising higher on his arms. She could see that Bob really was afraid of the trail. "I can take care of anything I would meet on that trail," she said fearlessly. "I have a black belt in Karate and besides that, I have two pistols and plenty of ammunition to take care of anything dangerous that I run into."

"Anything?" Bob asked questioningly.

"Yep, I'm ready and I just need you to come with me," Janet said with a devious smile. "As I said, I prefer hiking with someone."

"I don't know if I ever want to hike that trail," Bob said. "I'm not sure I could ever be talked into doing it, even with you. If anyone could hike the trail and come back, I feel that you could do it, but I'd have to give it a lot of thought."

"Don't think too long," Janet said as they went in the house. "I want to hike that trail and find out what's on it and I don't want to have to do it by myself unless I have to. I'm sure that we can prove the rumors untrue." After they were in the living room, Janet got closer to Bob and asked pleadingly, "Will you please go with me?"

"I told you that no one has ever come back that went on that trail and you expect me to go with you. You don't believe the rumors and now you want to go find out what evil thing is lurking on the trail?"

"I'm not afraid," Janet said confidently. "After all, I've fought off some ferocious animals on some of my hikes. One time, I managed to scare a black bear away that attacked me. The bear took off with its tail between its legs. Besides scaring the bear away, I managed to fight off a large evil brute of a man that tried to attack me. The guy ran off into the woods screaming after I kicked him in his groin and broke his arm." Janet smiled at Bob with an 'I'm-ready-for-anything fierce look'. Besides proving herself to be very tough, she had the fierce looks of a fighter. Her body showed that she was no slouch when it came to her strength. Her arms and leg muscles showed evidence of having done physical labor. Janet had a scar on the left side of her face that she'd gotten from being in a fight with a boy when she was ten years old. It was a jagged scar and made her face somewhat

distorted. The scar made her look a little evil, but he knew she wasn't evil. He somewhat liked her face with the scar. It gave her a special feature and made her look rough. Looking at her ruggedness, Bob could see why a bear might fear her.

"Okay," Bob said, "I believe you, but I think we might run into something way more frightening than what you've ever encountered."

"I doubt it," she said. "I can't imagine anything worse than what I've seen. Bob, I really want to go," she again pleaded and added, "Believe me, I can handle anything."

"I don't know if you could handle *anything*," he said, again looking questionably at her. "What may lie on the trail isn't just anything. Give me a few days to think about it."

Bob looked at Janet and saw a different person than the innocent looking girl that he knew in grade school. Janet was born and raised just outside Portland, Oregon in the small rural town of Deadwood. She was born Janet Tonya Johnson and Bob first met her when they both went to the same grade school in Deadwood. At the end of his seventh grade, Janet's folks moved to the outskirts of Portland. They'd kept in touch over the years by visiting each other several times since she moved away. He had always liked her as a friend and thought she looked kind of cute, even with the scar on her face. In grade school, students used to tease her by calling her scar-face, which infuriated her. Now, she looked different, older and more mature, as she stood before him. However, as cute as Bob thought she was, she looked resolutely fierce and he almost thought that he could see smoke coming from her nostrils. He'd known her for a long time and he knew that she wasn't as tough as she looked, but sometimes she almost scared him. Damn, he thought, maybe she could handle whatever she'd meet on the trail.

"Is there some reason other than being scared that you can't hike the trail?" Janet asked.

"I guess not," he answered meekly. "I'm not working right now. I was laid off from my store job a month ago and I haven't been able to find another job yet."

"Well then," she said, "you don't have any excuses."

"Would you like a cup of coffee to warm up?" Bob asked hoping that she'd forget about the trail.

"I would like a hot cup," she said. "That sounds good."

"Do you want cream and/or sugar?"

"No, I prefer it black. Sugar and cream are for sissies," she said with a wry smile. Bob made them some coffee and brought Janet her strong black coffee. They talked while they sipped the hot liquid. Finally, Janet asked, "Well, do you have any excuses for not going on the hike?"

"No, other than fearing for my life," he said sheepishly.

"I'll tell you what," she said with a forceful smile, "I'll give you until next Saturday, seven days to make up your mind and if the answer isn't yes, then I'll have to twist your arm until you cry and give in. I don't take the word 'no' very easily and I promise to do all I can to persuade you." Janet again said that she wanted to hike the trail more than anything and that she'd wait for his answer. They finished their coffee and then Janet told Bob goodbye and headed for her car. Bob fondly watched her go and thought about how persuasive she could be.

2

Early Saturday morning, as promised, Janet knocked on Bob's door. He apprehensively opened the door and said, "come on in, I've been waiting for you."

"Well," she asked with piercing eyes that tortured Bob's soul, "What's your answer?" She asked and waited for his reply.

Bob hesitated before saying anything. After a couple of minutes, he managed to timidly blurt out, "I'm still not sure."

"What do you mean by that?" Janet asked. "Jeez, you've had a week to make up your mind. I'll tell you what," she said, in a demanding voice, "I'll give you to the count of three to decide that you're going to do it." She smiled at Bob, but the smile tore through him like a dagger. It was the look that said do it or else. He knew that if he told her he wouldn't go, then she would never give up her quest. So, after more thought, he looked at her with an expression that said, "I give up."

"I think you're the only one that could ever convince me to go on that trail. However, I'll only go with you under one condition," he said resignedly.

"One condition?" she asked. "What's the one condition?"

Bob looked at her seriously and said, "That we are given our last rites. I want us to be prepared."

"Come on, you're kidding, right?" she asked. However, Bob didn't look like he was kidding about it. He looked as serious as a person begging for mercy from someone trying to kill him.

"No, I'm dead serious," he said. "I have a deep discomfoting feeling that if we go on that trail that we won't be coming back. I feel very strongly that we'll end up just like all the others."

"Whatever you want to do, it's okay with me, but don't count on me doing it with you," she said. "I assure you that I fully intend to come back and I don't need any first or last rites." She

looked at Bob like he was a little child. "Go ahead and get your last rites, if it'll make you feel better, but don't look for me to accompany you. I don't need any divine intervention to help me," she added with emphasis.

"Thanks," he said looking at the ground and kicking a rock. "It might be a waste of time, but I'll feel a lot better. Just thinking about hiking that trail scares the Holy Grail out of me. I'd feel better if we both were given our last rites, but if you don't want to do it then that's okay. I know that not everyone believes in it."

"I don't know about you and your last rites," she said smiling. "but I assume that from what you're saying, you will go with me."

"Yes, but against my better judgment and only after I've been given my last rites. At least after I've been given them, I'll be ready to face anything that would kill me on the trail."

"I think you're being silly," Janet said.

"Maybe, but I want to be prepared."

"Prepared? Prepared for what?"

"My death," Bob said cringing at the thought of death and the trail. As the thought of death floated through his mind, he resignedly looked at Janet.

"Oh, I think that you're just being a big baby," she said. I didn't expect you to be this silly. You're like a little kid that's afraid of his shadow. Then, she added, smiling, "It's a good thing I like babies. Well, let me know when you've done it. I hope that it doesn't take too long. I want to get going on the trail and I want to do it soon."

"It's not silly," he protested. I just want to be ready in case we never come back." Bob appreciated the fact that Janet was confident in her abilities. However, he wasn't as confident in his abilities.

"Okay, whatever," Janet replied with a look of disdain. "Give me a call after you've done it. I'll be waiting."

The road to Bob's house wound through the woods and went by the evil trail that they were going to hike. Janet glanced towards the trail as she drove by. *The Devils Tail*, she scoffed as she looked at it. She laughed as she said out loud, "I'll grab you by the tail and grind you up into a thousand pieces. You will be devil's mincemeat when I get through with you."

Janet thought about her friend as she drove the rest of the winding road to Bob's house. He was born Robert J. Wild in Mojave, California. His folks moved to Grange, Oregon when he was two years old. It was a small town about thirty miles east of Portland. Bob's dad couldn't find a job in Grange and when Bob was six years old, they moved from that town to the town of Dead Rock, Oregon. It was not too far from Grange and was just a few miles southeast of Portland and close to the town of Deadwood. They lived next door to each other and their parents worked at the same local lumber mill.

Bob's parents called him Bobby and some close friends still called him that. However, he preferred Bob to Bobby. He told Janet that the name Bobby sounded too childish and he didn't like it. Janet liked the name Bobby, but whenever she called him that, he would get mad at her. So, to make him happy she called him Bob and only teasingly called him Bobby when she wanted to get under his skin in a fun way.

Janet anxiously walked up to Bob's door and knocked. She was eager to get their hike started and hoped that he was ready to go. Bob came to the door and greeted her.

"Good morning," Janet said smiling. "Are you ready?"

Bob didn't look well and Janet asked if he was okay. "No," he answered, "I was sick all night and I don't really feel like going on a hike today."

"I think maybe you're too scared to go," she said looking at him with a crooked smile.

"Think whatever you want," he said, "but I really don't feel like going today. Can we plan on going next Saturday?" he pleadingly asked.

Janet was disappointed beyond words, but she reluctantly agreed to wait another week. "Okay," she said and turned to go. "But, you'd better be ready when I get here next Saturday. We're going to go whether you're ready or not."

Bob had to admit that although he liked Janet, she was extremely strong-willed. "I'll be ready," he assured her and had no doubt that he had better be.

Bob watched Janet walk out to her car and closed his door after she got in and drove away. He wished that he felt better because he didn't want to see her go. He thought about Janet and why she seemed so tough. She was a lot like her mom. Janet's mom had worked on the green chain at the mill pulling lumber off of it for sorting. Some of the lumber was heavy and it was a hard job, but she liked it. Bob figured that Janet got her toughness from her mom. Both his dad and her dad worked inside the mill. Bob's dad ran the lumber edger and her dad worked as a foreman. Bob's mom was a housewife. She preferred that job to working for someone else.

Bob still felt a little sick and he went to the kitchen and got a big dish of vanilla ice cream. Ice cream, especially vanilla, always seemed to make him feel better when he was sick. For him, it worked better than any medicine. He might even have to eat more ice cream to make sure he was ready for next Saturday's hike, maybe a lot more. The thought of eating more ice cream to make him feel better brought a smile as he headed back to the comfort of his bed. He pulled the blankets up around him and laid there thinking about Janet until he fell asleep. It wasn't long before he drifted off into dreamland.

"Where does this trail go?" Janet asked, holding Bob's hand and skipping along the trail.

"I don't know, but I do know that I love you," Bob said. He smiled at Janet and pulled her to him and kissed her. Janet laughed and pointed out the shadows on the side of the trail. There were shadowy figures that danced in a greenish-yellow fog that flowed out of the woods and enveloped them. They struggled to breathe in the stifling fog. I think I see several people on the side of the trail with spears," Janet said, trembling. "Are they going to kill us?"

"I don't know who they are, but they scare the hell out of me," Bob said. "I hope that they're not going to kill us." Then, he smiled and said, "Don't worry, I'll protect you." He hugged Janet tightly and kissed her again, hard and long. He was starting to get aroused when suddenly a loud clap of thunder shook the whole house. Bob sat straight up in bed as the thunder echoed throughout the house. It finally subsided and Bob thought, as he pulled the blanket up around him, "I'll never get back to sleep. However, it wasn't long until he was once again sound asleep. The only thing missing was Janet and the dream."