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Piscean Dreams
Bonnie Dee
Mystical Sign Series

Bonnie Dee

**MYSTICAL SIGNS: PISCES
PISCES DREAMS**

BY

BONNIE DEE

Venus Press LLC

PISCEAN DREAMS

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Bonnie Dee

Dedication:

To all who've read my work and sent emails.
Thanks for the kind comments.

PISCAN DREAMS

Chapter One

A man's warm, heavy hand slid up Aiyana's spine, gliding over the bumps of vertebrae slowly and coming to rest on the nape of her neck. The hand kneaded her muscles lightly, the blunt thumb digging in and releasing tension.

Aiyana stretched and smiled, luxuriating beneath his touch. She scooted backward until she felt the heat of his chest, his groin, his legs pressing against her. The length of his erection nestled in the groove of her buttocks. Aiyana rubbed up and down its length with her bottom.

"Missed you." She didn't need to say the words. The man could hear her thoughts and she could sense his. "You were late coming tonight."

"Missed you, too." He nuzzled her shoulder.

She tilted her head to the side so he could kiss his way up her neck. Aiyana's eyes closed and she arched against the hot body behind her. She thrust her breasts toward the hand roaming over her chest.

He squeezed one soft mound then the other, rolling her hardened nipples between his fingers. "I think about you all the time now," he whispered near her ear.

"Mm. It's getting harder to stay awake," she sighed sleepily as she wiggled to get closer to him.

His hips began to move. His heavy cock slid back and forth over her anus.

The puckered hole twitched at the stimulation and Aiyana's sex contracted with desire then opened wide. It felt like a hungry mouth desperate to be filled. Wetness dampened the lips of her aching slit. "I want you inside me now," she begged.

"So soon? I haven't even kissed you yet."

"Yes, now. Before I have to..."

"Wake up, Aiyana! I have called you three times already."

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The nasal voice was as harsh and unwelcome as the sunlight that suddenly shone in her face. Aiyana moaned and rolled to her side, away from the light and the voice that intruded on her beautiful sleep.

A hard hand fell on her shoulder—not the seductive hand of her dreams, but a cool, paper-dry, ancient hand. “Wake up, girl. There is work to be done.”

“Yes. I hear you,” Aiyana muttered. “I am getting up.”

“What is the matter with you? You have never slept so much before. I will put molasses on your cornmeal this morning, and you must add sorrel to your diet. Your blood is weak and needs strengthening.”

“Mm-hm.” Aiyana’s eyes opened. She stared at the rough bark wall before her face then rolled onto her back and looked up at Hausis.

The old woman gazed back, hands on hips, a sharp look in her snapping, black eyes. “You are dreaming.”

Aiyana blinked. The sleepy daze fell away as she sat up quickly. How much did Hausis know about Aiyana’s nightly visitor? Was Aiyana moaning in her sleep? She blushed, embarrassed that her teacher might know about the intense erotic dreams she had been experiencing for several weeks now.

“A cleansing steam with sage will drive the spirits out of your nightly slumber,” Hausis advised.

Aiyana nodded. “I will try that before sleeping tonight.” She pushed the heavy deerskin cover from her and climbed off her pallet. Her naked skin was wet with sweat, tendrils of her long, black hair sticking to her damp face. Impatiently, she pushed her hair back and reached for her dress. She slid the soft hide over her head and thrust her arms through the sleeves then stood up, ready to begin the day.

Hausis handed her a bowl of corn mush with a drizzle of blackstrap molasses on the surface. “Eat heartily. We will walk to the far west woods today to gather wormwood to heal the coughing disease Yarrow’s son suffers from. Also, partridgeberry and cohosh to make an infusion for the delivery of Majasi’s baby.”

Aiyana went outside to relieve herself before breaking her fast. The village was long since awake, people moving busily about their daily tasks. The women treated hides, tended fires, scolded children and broke soil in their gardens. The old women sat, sewing and singing, while the old men played gambling games, told tales of their youth and offered unwanted advice to anyone who passed within range. Children and barking dogs

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ran around getting underfoot. Most men were out fishing now that the ice had cleared the river, but some repaired their boats or helped Yannassi build the new lean-to by his wigwam.

Before going back inside, Aiyana waved a greeting to her friend Majasi, nearly nine months pregnant and waddling from the village well to her lodge with a full bucket of water. Aiyana wondered what it would be like to have her own home, to be a wife and mother and tend her own fire. She was glad she didn't have to find out yet. It was sometimes lonely being in training with Hausis, learning all that a healer needed to know, but at least it was interesting. Aiyana was proud that she was learning something useful to help her people.

She went inside, closing the birch bark door behind her and returning the wigwam to dimness. Picking up her bowl and spoon, Aiyana ate the porridge and reflected on her dream lover. She had never in her life had such vivid dreams as the ones that had been disturbing her sleep these past weeks. Often she woke bathed in sweat, her hand between her legs moving rapidly to bring her to climax. She would clamp her lips together to suppress her moans of relief as waves of exhilaration swept over her. Just thinking about the dreams and the strange man who knew exactly where and how to touch her body set Aiyana's pulse pounding once more.

At the beginning her dream lover had been a vague, shadowy figure but now he was becoming more and more real. The length of the dreams varied, sometimes only a few precious moments like last night, other times hours of pleasure that increased in intensity until Aiyana felt like one raw, exposed nerve, capable of endless orgasms.

Her spoon scraped the bottom of her bowl. Aiyana looked down, surprised to find it empty since she hadn't tasted a mouthful, her mind too full of sex to notice what she ate. With a sigh, she put her nighttime yearnings out of her mind, cleaned her bowl and put it away then took her gathering pouch from the peg on the wall.

"I am ready, Hausis," Aiyana told the old woman.

"About time." Hausis set aside the leggings she had been repairing and stood up. She grabbed her walking stick and her own sack then led the way outside, moving briskly for a woman of nearly sixty. Aiyana was hard pressed to keep up as they walked together out of the stockade surrounding the village and into the forest beyond.

"I want you inside me now," she begged.

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"So soon? I haven't even kissed you yet."

"Yes, now. Before I have to ..."

Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.

The intrusive siren of his alarm clock jerked Connor from sleep. "Fuck!" He reached out and smacked the alarm off then wiped one hand over his bleary eyes.

The dream again.

The woman again.

A morning hard-on that had his balls aching, and the sheet tenting above his groin. His chest was slick with sweat and his mouth was hot and tasted like her skin. Connor ran a hand through the damp spikes of hair stuck to his forehead, brushing it back from his face. What the hell did these hyper-real erotic dreams he'd been having mean? He would ask his therapist if he was still going to her.

This wasn't like the dreams he'd had after Helen died. Those were fragmented, chaotic, actual memories of the accident twisted together with other random images that probably had some deep significance but made no sense to Connor. The Helen dreams had been horrible nightmares and had slowly dissipated as time passed. The dreams he'd been having over the past few weeks were... God, they were so real, so strong, so terribly arousing.

Connor groaned and reached beneath the sheets to give himself some relief. His hand wrapped around his cock and his fist moved up and down, rubbing vigorously. It had been a hell of a long time since any hand but his own had stroked his dick. After Helen's death, his libido had been non-existent. He could barely move or breathe or walk through the motions of each day, let alone get an erection. But lately with these erotic dreams ... Maybe it was time to accept the blind date Wes was always trying to set up for him with his wife's old college girlfriend.

Connor's mind drifted back to the woman from the dreams. Last night they were interrupted before they barely began, but other nights their lovemaking had come to complete fruition. He concentrated on a memory of the shadow woman, who wasn't so shadowy anymore. When the dreams first came, they had been mostly erotic impulses and feelings with the suggestion of a womanly shape, but over time the dreams and the woman had grown more defined.

She had long black hair, brown skin that tasted salty and smelled natural, a round face with prominent cheekbones, and a pair of huge black eyes that gazed into Connor's

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while he pushed inside of her. Her body was solid and firm in the dreams now, her arms and legs strong as they wrapped around him. Her breasts were large and heavy, tipped with mahogany nipples that Connor loved to suck. Her mouth was warm and pliant beneath his when he kissed her, and it was pure heaven when that hot mouth enveloped his cock.

Erotic images tumbled through Connor's mind. In a few brief moments, with some vigorous rubbing of his cock, he came, warm bursts of come spilling over his fist. His eyes rolled back and he sighed with relief at the release. Damn, but he wished the dream woman was real!

After resting a minute, Connor threw off the covers and rose to start his day. A good, long piss followed by some weightlifting to keep his desk-bound, lawyer-body toned then a low-carb breakfast. As he ate, he studied the paperwork for the Alexander case. It was a simple settlement. None of the descendants was contesting the will. It was nice to see peoples' adult children act like adults after their death, rather than spoiled children. Too often Connor had witnessed family fights and backstabbing worthy of pop star princesses.

It was going to be an easy day in court. Maybe he'd take the afternoon off and go play a round of golf. It would do him good to get outdoors for a while, breathe fresh air instead of the recycled oxygen in the enclosed offices of the legal firm. Connor's window on the tenth floor of the building had a great view of the Hudson River, but wouldn't open to emit a breeze.

It never used to bother him. His mind was totally focused when he was working. He rarely looked out at the flat gray river rolling past or the wide expanse of sky and clouds above it. But lately Connor felt trapped in his office, like a bird that might smash through the safety-glass window and fly away across the river.

Definitely golf after court today—and Connor would give Wes a call about lining up a date with what's-her-name, Jan's college friend.

Before he left the house, Connor ran a hand over the pewter-framed photo of Helen, which still sat on the table in the front hall. It had become habitual, touching the frame before he walked out. Maybe it was time to put the picture away. It had been two full years since the accident on their road trip to Tennessee. Maybe it was a little morbid and shrine-like to have Helen's likeness still sitting on the table, the first thing one saw when entering the foyer.

Bonnie Dee

He'd think about putting it away.

Connor walked out into the brisk spring air, locking the door behind him.

Aiyana steeped the blue cohosh tea to give to her friend Majesi, who was only weeks away from her delivery. The cohosh would help speed the birth of the baby when contractions finally came.

Majesi accepted the warm cup of tea and sipped it, making a face. "Oh, this is bad."

"You will be glad later," Aiyana assured her. She sat down cross-legged on the floor and tapped a nervous finger against her knee.

"What is it? Something has been bothering you lately." Majesi held the cup between her hands, warming them.

Aiyana shook her head. "It is nothing, only a dream I have been having."

"Tell me," Majesi leaned forward, her big belly jutting out in front of her. "My grandmother reads dreams. I can tell you some of what she taught me."

"I... Never mind." Aiyana blushed. She couldn't tell her friend the content of her dreams. "Can I ask you something?"

"Of course."

"You are a married woman now. When you, uh, lay with Askuwhetu, do you...? What does it...? I mean, do you like it very much?"

Majesi smiled. "Oh! *Those* kind of dreams." She leaned back in her chair. "Sometimes it feels very, *very* good. Other times I do not feel like joining together so I push Asku away. I tell him I am having woman pains. He is so foolish he does not know that the pains only come with a woman's monthly cycle. Right now, we have not been together because of..." Majesi gestured to her distended belly. "But to answer your question, yes, sometimes I like it very much."

Aiyana nodded, toying with the fringe on her dress.

"Don't worry, sister, your time will come. There will be a special man for a healer like you." Majesi took another sip of her hot tea and pulled a face. "I hope this works as good as you say it will."

"Oh yes, it should make the delivery easier," Aiyana assured her.

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When Aiyana lay down on her pallet that night, she thought the long walk through the woods that day would make her sleep so soundly she wouldn't have the erotic dreams. A stab of disappointment pierced her at the chance she might not see her lover that night.

She needn't have worried. Aiyana no sooner lay down and closed her eyes than she fell asleep and in the land of her dreams the man came to her.

He was tall, much taller than the men of her tribe. He had light brown hair cut very short above his collar. He gazed at her with eyes like two pieces of blue sky. Usually he was naked, his skin very pale, smooth and as supple as finely cured leather beneath Aiyana's hands. But in this night's dream he wore clothes unlike any she had ever seen before. They were of woven cloth, so fine, light and perfect, the gods might have made them.

Aiyana stood before him. She ran her hands up the front of his blue coat then touched the collar of his white shirt. She tugged on the colored piece of fabric knotted around his neck.

He smiled at her and reached to loosen the knot and remove the cloth. "You're wearing clothes," he noted.

Aiyana looked down at herself and found she was in her best dress, the pale fawn one with deep fringe and intricate beading. Aiyana's mother had made it for her before she left home to take up residence with Hausis and begin training as a healer. "Yes." She stroked the man's blue coat again. "Your clothes are very strange."

"It's just a suit." He reached out and ran his hand down the length of Aiyana's hair, tugging at the braid that hung down the side of her face. "Your hair is so glossy." He brushed the backs of his fingers along her jaw then cupped her chin in his hand. "What is your name?"

"Aiyana." It hadn't occurred to her that they could share names. This man was just a spirit guest in her head. He wasn't real enough to have a name.

"I'm Connor." In this dream his lips moved as if he was really talking even though it his the thoughts and not his words that Aiyana understood.

"Connor," she repeated. "What does it mean?"

"I have no idea." He laughed. "What does yours mean?"

"Eternal blossom."

Bonnie Dee

“Beautiful.” He stroked his thumb across her lips. “A beautiful name for a beautiful woman.” He leaned forward and covered her mouth with his.

Aiyana closed her eyes and accepted the gift. His lips were warm and soft but pressed firmly against hers. His tongue licked her lips lightly, tickling them, then it slipped in between them to touch her tongue. Aiyana loved the way it felt, their two tongues tangling with one another like a pair of slick otters playing on the bank of the river. The idea made her giggle.

Connor pulled back. “What?”

She put a hand to her mouth. “Your tongue tickles my lip.”

When Connor smiled, the sadness in his blue eyes disappeared. His lips parted showing even white teeth and the corners of his eyes crinkled. “Let’s see what else I can tickle.” He leaned in and placed a kiss on Aiyana’s jaw then nibbled all the way down her throat.

She gasped and lifted her chin. His mouth tickled but she wanted more of it.

Lightly he sucked on the skin just over the hollow of her throat. Her pulse pounded and she wondered if Connor could feel it beating against his tongue.

One of his hands curled around the back of her neck, holding her steady, the other rested at the small of her back. Connor moved his hand around to her belly and up the front of her deerskin dress to cup her breast through the pliant hide. He pulled his mouth away from her throat and frowned at the colorful beadwork decorating the bodice. “Your dress is beautiful, but can you...take it off?”

Aiyana laughed. She wasn’t offended. It was exactly what she wanted to do. If this was a normal dream, she would have found herself instantly naked, the thought becoming fact, but in this dream she had to unfasten the ties on the back of the dress. She lifted her arms and pulled it over her head then stood nude before Connor. There was no shame or guilt about being naked in front of a man who was not her husband. There was no worry about her virginity being stolen before marriage. In the dream, Aiyana was simply happy and eager to share her body with her lover.

Connor gazed at her from her head down to her feet as if he had never seen anything so beautiful. He reached out and brushed his hand from her throat, over her breasts and down her belly.

“You too,” Aiyana said, tugging at his sleeve.

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Quickly he unfastened his shirt and shrugged off both shirt and jacket, casting them on the ground. He took off his pants, his odd, shiny black shoes, cloth foot coverings and the short pants that covered his private parts. When he straightened, Aiyana examined his nude body as he had hers.

This dream was the clearest yet. Connor was no longer a vague shadowy figure but as real as any person Aiyana had ever met. His shoulders were wide and his biceps lean and ropy. His chest was flat with solid pectoral muscles and sharp nipples centered in small rosy circles. His torso tapered down to lean hips and long legs. Aiyana's eyes were drawn to the trail of hair that led from Connor's navel to his groin. Her gaze came to rest on the solid cock that thrust out from his light brown thatch of pubic hair. It was flushed red and strained eagerly toward her.

Her desire to fondle it was too strong to resist and, since this was a dream, she didn't have to. Aiyana reached out, grabbed hold of Connor's rigid member and tugged on it.

A hiss of pleasure escaped his lips. "Harder," he urged.

Aiyana obeyed, gripping the warm, pulsing shaft and pulling. She glided her hand up and down several times then ran her thumb over the swollen head of his cock. White beads of moisture welled from the slit on the smooth knob. She glanced up at Connor. His eyes were riveted on her hand encircling his cock.

Impulsively Aiyana dropped to her knees before him and licked the beads of moisture from the soft, round head. Again she looked up to find Connor watching her. His pupils were so dilated with lust that his blue eyes appeared black. His lips were parted and his chest rose and fell quickly. "God, that feels so good."

Aiyana devoted herself to his pleasure for many long minutes, continuing to stroke him vigorously with her hand while she licked and sucked the head of his cock. With her left hand, she fondled his balls, toying with the swollen egg-shaped testicles then lightly massaging the skin between his balls and anus.

Connor groaned and began thrusting toward her mouth, his hips rocking and his legs trembling with tension. His hands held her head lightly, as he pumped faster and harder into her willing mouth. Then suddenly he pulled away. "Enough. I'm going to come if you don't stop."

Aiyana looked up with a mischievous smile. "Go ahead."

"Yeah?"

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She nodded and reached for him again. She gripped his cock and sucked the tip into her mouth once more, licking lightly over its surface then sucking so hard her cheeks hollowed from the effort. She moved her head up and down, working Connor to the edge of orgasm once more.

Connor gripped her head more tightly as he neared climax, his fingers twined in her long hair. He thrust his hips, fucking her mouth until he came with a loud cry and a strong release. He jerked against her several times then was still.

Aiyana felt his cock pulsing against her tongue. She swallowed his warm fluid as it hit the back of her throat then sat back on her heels, letting his softening prick slip from her mouth. She cradled it in her hand, feeling the solid strength dwindle and fade until it was limp.

Connor let go of Aiyana's head. His chest heaved up and down as he breathed heavily. His quivering legs would no longer support his weight and he dropped down to his knees facing her.

Aiyana embraced him in her arms, pleased with the results of her work. Knowing she could reduce a man to boneless delight with her mouth alone was a powerful aphrodisiac. She felt hotter and hungrier than ever as she clung to Connor's over-heated body. Her skin prickled all over, her nipples twitched as they pressed against his naked chest, and her pussy clenched with desire. Aiyana began to wish she hadn't allowed him to spend in her mouth, because now she wanted him hard again and inside her.

After a minute, Connor pulled away. His eyes were clear and blue again—such a strange color, like the waters of the river reflecting the sky on a bright summer day. He smiled at Aiyana and her heart leaped. “Your turn now. I’m going to do things to you...” Connor trailed off, leaving her to imagine what he might have in mind. “Lay down,” he ordered.

For the first time, Aiyana became aware of her surroundings. They were outdoors. She didn't know if they had been here all the time or if this was a new development in the course of dreaming. They were on the bank of the river, a grassy strip of land with a cluster of trees growing off to the left and the river tumbling by on the right. The sound of rushing water was so loud Aiyana thought she would have noticed it before.

As she lay back, she gazed up at a bright pale sky and yellow dandelion sun. A few white clouds puffed across the canopy and a light breeze stirred Aiyana's hair, but when it blew across her naked skin it wasn't cold. She was completely comfortable lying

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naked on the soft bed of grass, anticipating the things her lover would do to her. It was a perfect dream.

Connor lifted her arms and placed them above her head, running his hands up their length and folding her hands together. "Hold them there as if they were tied. Don't let go, no matter how much you want to."

She nodded. Licking her lips with excitement and obediently clasping her hands together tightly, Aiyana had to squeeze her thighs to still the eager pulsing of her pussy.

Connor looked around, spotted what he was searching for, and stood up.

Aiyana turned her head to watch him pluck a long blade of wild swamp grass with a wide, plumed head. Returning to her side, he knelt and brushed the feathery seed pod over her cheek.

Aiyana turned her head away from the tickling touch. She had a strong idea of where the downy grass was going next and she shivered in expectation.

Connor trailed the strand down her neck to her chest then swept it back and forth across her breasts, teasing her distended nipples with the fluffy seed head.

Aiyana twitched and moaned. Her breasts, already thrusting skyward, rose even higher as she arched her back. She didn't know if she was trying to squirm away from the tickling or receive more of it. It was annoying, frustrating and delightful torture.

Connor played with her breasts for a little while, teasing and tickling them until Aiyana was ready to scream. Then he moved on. He stroked the long blade of grass down the flat plane of her belly toward the dark thatch of hair at the apex of her thighs. After nudging her legs farther apart, he traced the outline of the triangle then ran the plummy grass up the insides of each thigh toward her sex. The tickling on her already sensitive private parts was unbearable.

Since he had pushed apart her legs, Aiyana could no longer squeeze her thighs together to give herself relief. Her legs and her pussy trembled and shook like aspen leaves, as Connor whipped the delicate frond across her genitals and up and down each leg. She felt she might explode from the tickling and the yearning it raised deep within her.

Above her head, Aiyana clenched her hands together so tightly her nails dug into her flesh. It was all she could do to keep from reaching down and snatching the torturous device from Connor's hand. She lifted her hips, twisting them right and left, trying to escape the touch of the blade of grass.

Bonnie Dee

But Connor was merciless. “Hold still. Completely still,” he demanded. His deep voice commanding her sent an excited chill through her.

Aiyana quieted down. She forced her body to lie absolutely immobile, although her skin twitched and trembled, while Connor stroked every sensitive part of her with the grass blade of torture. Sweat rose on her forehead at the effort of obeying his order and her breath gasped audibly in and out of her parted lips.

Finally Connor threw the long blade of grass aside. “Good girl. Now you get a treat.” He grinned teasingly before lowering his face to her crotch.

Aiyana’s eyes rolled back in her head and closed. She let out an extended sigh as he finally gave her the relief she craved.

Connor’s fingers parted her feminine folds and his tongue dipped inside to taste her. He lapped up the length of her slit and teased the swollen nub of her clitoris with teeth and tongue.

Aiyana’s hips arched as she rose to meet his mouth. Her arms were still stretched high above her head, but now her fingers dug into the grass and dirt. Her body was tensed as taut as a bowstring.

Connor held her legs spread apart with a hand braced on each shaking thigh, as he continued to feast on her bounty. The tip of his tongue lapped inexorably over her clit.

Inside, Aiyana felt a languorous coil of desire tightening and intensifying at the point of contact. The coil drew tighter and tighter as the licking went on and on then suddenly the coil sprang free, rocketing through her. It was as if a tiny bud had blossomed in seconds to a full-blown rose that filled her whole being. She let out a cry of delight and arched her body once more.

When the last throbbing star had burst inside her, Aiyana felt herself drifting back to earth like a falling leaf. She came to consciousness on the soft bed of grass with Connor still lying between her legs, watching her reaction with satisfaction. Aiyana smiled down at him. She released the fistfuls of grass she had pulled up and brought her aching arms down to her sides.

Reaching down, she caressed Connor’s face and touched his nut-brown hair, so different from the unvarying shades of black she was used to. He was exotically new and strange with his pale skin, sky eyes and light hair. Even the texture of his hair was different, fine instead of thick and coarse.

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Connor crawled up her body and lay suspended above her, weight resting on his arms, gazing down into her eyes.

“Is this real or a dream?” Aiyana whispered. “Where are we? How is this happening?” They had been together before, many times over the past weeks, but this was the most real dream yet. Every aspect seemed sharper than before, down to the smallest detail of a buzzing fly that lit on Aiyana’s arm then flew away and the smell of the river and the earth beneath them.

“I don’t know.” He leaned to kiss her lips. “But I don’t want it to end. I don’t want to wake up.”

“What is your waking world like?”

Connor rolled on his side next to her, resting his head on his hand. He smoothed his hand from her throat down to her breasts. He toyed with one of her nipples as he spoke. “Different than this. I live in a city in a small house and work in a tall building helping people with legal problems.”

Aiyana tried to relay the concept into terms she understood. “You have a very large tribe then?”

He smiled. “Something like that.”

“And your family?”

“My parents live in Manhattan, my brother in California and my sister in Connecticut.” Connor paused a moment. “My wife died.”

“I am sorry.”

“It’s been a couple of years now, but I still miss her.” He stopped gazing at Aiyana’s breasts and swept his eyes up to meet hers. “But not as much lately.”

She smiled, glad she had helped him put aside his mourning. The melancholy look was creeping into his eyes again and Aiyana wanted to distract him from his sorrow. An idea struck her. “We should swim.”

Connor turned his head to look at the river flowing past only yards away. “In there.”

“Yes. Where else?” Aiyana stood up and reached her hand down to pull him to his feet.

“It looks really cold.” He gazed at the water, his penis shriveling at the idea of entering it.

Bonnie Dee

“It is, but it will feel good and refreshing. Then afterwards...we can warm each other up again.” She lowered her eyelids seductively and gave him a lascivious smile.

Connor allowed her to take his hand and lead him to the water’s edge.

Aiyana splashed into the shallows, but Connor held back, testing it with a toe. “It’s *very* cold.”

She tugged on his arm. “Refreshing. Come on.”

At her insistence, he entered the water, teeth chattering and gooseflesh rising on his white skin. “Holy fuck!”

Aiyana dragged him in deeper, deep enough that she could feel the current swirling and pulling at her body, shallow enough that she could still keep her feet firmly on the ground.

“I don’t like this part of the dream,” he complained, bobbing in the water next to her and moving his arms. “Can we go back to the sex?”

Aiyana laughed. “You have no soul for adventure.” She splashed him with water. “Have fun. Play.”

“Oh yeah?” He growled and pushed a wall of water at her with his arm, dousing her head.

Aiyana shrieked and batted water back at him. She leaped on top of him and knocked him backward into the water. They both went under. Aiyana felt the cold water close over her head and Connor’s arms wrap around her.

He rose up into the air and sunlight, bearing her with him. They both sputtered and gasped for air.

Aiyana threw her arms around Connor’s neck and clung to his slippery, wet body. His hair stuck to his head, sleek as an otter’s. Water dripped off his nose and chin. Aiyana licked the falling droplets from his face, tasting the river.

Connor seized her mouth with his and kissed her deeply, possessively, hugging her tight as the current swirled around them. Then he overbalanced and they both fell back in the water once more, tumbling and floating in the choppy waves like a pair of fish. They swam together, splashing and playing until their teeth chattered and their lips were blue with cold, then they waded out of the river and lay down on the shore in the hot sun to dry out.

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Aiyana was perfectly content lying on her back and slowly warming beneath the open sky. One of Connor's arms was draped heavily over her body. She turned her head to look at him.

He was gazing intently at her, as if memorizing her face. "Tell me more about yourself. What is your life like?"

"I am a healer...at least I am learning to be. Right now I am apprenticed to Hausis, the wise woman in our village. I help gather herbs, roots, seeds and bark and prepare them for use and learn their healing properties."

"Are you... Do you have anyone, um, special in your life?"

"No. I am not betrothed. I have too much to learn right now. Maybe some day there will be someone for me." She paused and smiled at Connor. "Right now, I have you."

He returned the smile. He lay on his stomach with his head resting on one arm, but at her words, he leaned in to kiss her again. "And I have you."

Aiyana closed her eyes as she yearned toward his mouth.

Connor's lips had no sooner touched hers when Aiyana felt their solidity fading, like a snowflake melting away to nothing.

Her eyes flew open. The bright day was gone, the sound and smell of the river was gone, and the man's arm sheltering her body was gone. She was back in bed staring up at the curved ceiling, interwoven saplings forming a lattice shingled with large squares of bark. Aiyana put a hand to her mouth, still feeling the weight and warmth of Connor's mouth against hers, but he had disappeared into the land of dreams once more.

Bonnie Dee

Chapter Two

Connor woke to the blating of his alarm clock again. He cursed and pounded a fist on it to end its squawking. He was exhausted. The night has been far too short and his body felt as if it had really done all the things in his dream. Connor could almost feel the impression of Aiyana's lips and body against his. He clearly recalled the sensation of the cold river, the soft grass, the hot sun, the warm flesh. Whatever was happening to him was more than a dream. Christ, the woman actually had a name now—Aiyana, and a life history. She was a novice healer in a tribe of, presumably, Native Americans.

Connor ran a hand over his eyes. Maybe he should call Dr. Loomis, the therapist he'd seen after Helen's death, and make an appointment. These dreams were getting too detailed and real to be normal.

He sat up, stretched and threw back the covers then stared at his body. It was dirty and shreds of grass clung to his legs and torso. It wasn't a thick coating of mud, just the slight dirtiness of someone who has swum in a river and lain in the grass afterward.

Connor reached down and brushed a few blades of grass from his thigh then scratched at a streak of mud. He lifted his hand to his nose to smell the loamy scent of river. His hand dropped back to his lap and he stared down at his body in silence for a full minute before he said quietly, "No way."

He shook his head to strengthen his doubtful delivery of the words. "No! Impossible."

Swinging his legs out of bed, he stalked to the bathroom and went straight into the shower, washing away the evidence that his mind couldn't comprehend. But as he leaned with his hands braced against the wall, hot water cascading over his bowed head and back, Connor relived the dream. He felt again Aiyana's thick hair sliding through his fingers, her smooth skin. The sound of her voice, the intensity of her eyes, her warm laughter and hot mouth haunted him.

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If only there was someone he could talk to, someone he could share his experience with who wouldn't automatically judge him mentally unbalanced. Connor lifted his head and let the water wash over his face then a thought struck him. He slapped off the tap, shook the water from his hair and wiped it from his face with one hand. There was someone.

Connor stepped out of the shower and towed himself dry, wrapped the towel around his waist and got his cell phone from the nightstand beside his bed. He pressed the number for his brother, Matt, then intercepted the call before it went through, remembering that California was three hours time difference. He'd have to call later on from work.

Connor moved through his daily routine on autopilot. It was amazing he arrived at work without getting in an accident. In his office, he stood holding a cup of coffee and staring out the window at the slate gray river reflecting a leaden March sky for a full thirty minutes. When he finally sipped from the mug, the coffee was barely lukewarm.

The river in his dream could have been anyplace. Hell, it was a dream river—it didn't have a *place* at all except in his imagination. But the rolling surface of the Hudson looked so like the water in his dream, he felt positive it was the same.

"Ridiculous. This is fucking ridiculous," he muttered as he crossed to his desk, set down the mug and powered up his computer. Online, he typed in the words, "Hudson River Valley Indian tribes" and pressed the search button. He read articles about the tribes that had inhabited New York State; Iriquois, Wappinger, Mohican, Lenape, Delaware, Pavonia, all loosely connected by their Algonquin heritage. He learned that these tribes believed in equality of the sexes and traced lineage through the mother. Their dome-shaped dwellings were clustered in stockades. Connor mostly knew about nomadic plains tribes like the Sioux from watching too many movies and was interested to learn details about the agrarian lifestyle of the Indians of his own area. They planted crops, fished, hunted, traded furs, made pottery and wove baskets.

He looked at artist renderings of busy villages and tried to picture Aiyana living her daily life. Suddenly the ludicrousness of the idea he was entertaining overcame him. Connor tapped the mouse, closing the web site. "Jesus, I'm going nuts." He stood up and paced back over to the window, staring out at the view once more.

The river flowed past and the dream seemed real once more.

Connor picked up his phone and called his brother in California. "Hey, Matt."

Bonnie Dee

“Connor! What’s the matter? Is something wrong with mom or dad?”

Connor was embarrassed that he phoned so seldom his brother suspected the worst on receiving his call. “No. They’re fine. Listen, I have a question ... It’s kind of weird. It’s right up Dex’s alley. Is he there?”

“Um, sort of. He’s out in his studio working. Is it important?”

Connor bit his lip. He thought about the dirt and grass on his legs. “Yeah. I think, pretty important.”

“I’ll get him. You can hold on a sec or I’ll have him call right back.”

“I’ll wait.”

“Can I ask, what’s the matter?” Matt said a trifle sharply. “I thought you didn’t believe in Dex’s psychic gifts.”

“I never said I didn’t believe,” Connor said. “I was waiting ‘til I had more proof. Well, now some strange shit’s been happening and ... I’m feeling very flexible about reality.”

Matt laughed. “Connor, you kill me. It takes a slap in the face to wake you up to the possibilities in the world.”

Connor smiled at the ironic choice of words. “How are you two getting along anyway?”

“Snug as two gay bugs in a rug,” Matt said. “Just a second.” There was a silent pause then Matt came back on the phone. “Okay, here’s Dex. You’re not going to swear him to secrecy are you, ‘cause I’ve got to hear more about this.”

“Matt...!”

Connor heard the muffled sound of his brother laughing then Dex’s deep bass voice. “Hello. What’s up?”

“God, I really hate talking about this over the phone.” It wasn’t true. In a way Connor found it easier to tell his story without having to look into Dex’s concerned brown eyes. “It started, I don’t know, about three weeks ago...” Connor quickly related the progression of the dreams from nebulous, erotic fantasies to concrete hallucinations culminating in mud and grass in his bed. “So, what do you think? Ever heard of anything like this? Do you think I’ve been out sleepwalking or something? Maybe molesting some poor woman in my sleep?” Connor laughed nervously.

There was a long pause. Unlike Connor’s quicksilver brother, Matt, Dex never spoke without thinking carefully first. “I wish we were closer. I’d like to do a reading and

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maybe watch over you when you're asleep. It's hard to say what's going on without seeing you in person."

On one hand Connor was relieved to be taken seriously, on the other embarrassed by voicing the secret nighttime life he had been living.

Dex continued, "But yes, I've heard of this kind of thing before. Assuming you're not having a mental schism from reality, I would say you're encountering a manifestation of another time, possibly another world. Metaphysically speaking, you're connecting with your soul mate in a paradigm created from your joint psyches."

Connor's embarrassment grew. He hated this psychobabble bullshit and now he was square in the middle of it, considering it as a possible truth. "Wow, that's..." He trailed off.

Dex laughed. "Sweetie, I know you don't generally believe in this stuff, but I think you'd better start. Here's what I can do for you. I have an acquaintance in New York, very respected in the paranormal field. I'm going to give you his number and pass yours on to him. Maybe he can help you figure out how to deal with this situation."

"Um, okay. Thanks."

"And meantime," laughter trembled in Dex's voice, "I'd just enjoy the hell out of your dreams as long as they last."

Connor thanked his brother's life partner again then hung up the phone. He leaned back in his chair and stared at the aquarium on his computer screen saver, remembering how Aiyana had felt slippery as a fish when he caught her in the water. After a few seconds he shook himself out of his trance and started to catch up on his wasted morning's work.

By mid-afternoon he had squared away the paperwork from the Litman case and prepared the brief for the MacDonald's divorce suit. Connor allowed his mind to drift away from the mind-numbing details of civil law and back to Aiyana. He opened a tablet of paper and did something he hadn't in a long time. He began to draw. Eyes half closed, he guided his hand over the paper, tracing the lines and curves of Aiyana's face and body, recording the way she had looked rising out of the water, hair slicked back, droplets rolling from her naked skin. When he was finished with the sketch, he was surprised to find it wasn't bad. He had captured the essence of Aiyana's natural grace and beauty. Connor traced his finger across the drawing and longed to touch her skin once more.

Was it possible? Could he bring on one of the dreams any time he slept now?

Bonnie Dee

He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. One minute ticked by. Two. Three. Relaxation wouldn't come. The idea of directed dreaming, the idea that he could bring Aiyana to him any time was too exciting to allow him to sleep. Finally, just when he thought he would never be able to lose consciousness, Connor drifted off to sleep.

He dreamed.

Aiyana cleaned Hausis' dwelling then sat with mortar and pestle, grinding dried roots to powder. It was a gray, rainy day, too cold and miserable to be outdoors, the perfect time to organize supplies and prepare tinctures and powders. But the quiet work allowed Aiyana too much time to think.

For a while, Hausis sat and quizzed her on the properties of wormwood, gentian, arnica, thistle and witch hazel. Aiyana recited all she knew about healing compresses for burns, chest colds, cuts and inflammation; teas to aid in reducing fever, rheumatism and stomach problems. When Hausis confirmed her satisfaction with a grunt and left the wigwam to go visit one of her friends, Aiyana was left alone with her mortar and pestle. The repetitive chore left her mind free to wander back to her vivid dreams.

Aiyana no longer had any doubt that the dreams were a gift from the spirit world. They were beyond normal in nature. She wondered what lesson or insight she was supposed to get from them. All she had learned so far was that she wanted Connor desperately. He stirred a fire in her loins so intense that her body began to ache at the mere thought of him now.

At first Aiyana had tried to suppress the dreams, sipping black cherry bark tea before bed in hopes that it would put her into a dreamless slumber, but now she wanted to find out what herb or root would bring on the dreams. More than that, she wanted to find a way to bring her dream lover into the physical world. There must be a way.

She dare not ask Hausis in case her mentor told her it was wrong to toy with the spirit world. There was only one person Aiyana knew with access to the other side. Only one who might possibly possess the knowledge she sought.

Beyond the stockade, out in the wilderness lived a man who had long ago been banished from the village for killing his brother. In the Kitchawanc tribe, there was no sentence worse than banishment and it was reserved for the most extreme crimes. The man named Mahasset was said to possess strong magic, even the capability of

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communing with the dead. Aiyana knew that people sometimes went to him for secret reasons, bringing goods he could use in payment for his help.

With Hausis busy for the next several hours, this afternoon was the perfect time to go find out if there was anything Mahasset knew that would help her. Aiyana wrapped herself in her deerskin cloak to repel the rain. She gathered a basket of honey, black walnuts, and various ground roots for the hermit then set out into the pouring rain to his home in the swamplands near the forest.

In his dream, Connor walked with Helen on the beach at Croton Point. The Croton River churned white foam at the point where it merged with the Hudson. Oyster shells and gravel crunched under their feet as they strolled along the shore. Helen looked exactly as she had on her last birthday—her twenty-sixth—two days before she died. The wind whipped her honey-blond hair across her face and she pushed it back with a laugh. Helen's pale green eyes, the first thing that had caught Connor's attention when he met her, locked on his. She stopped walking. "How are you, sweetheart?"

"Better," he said. "I still miss you."

"But not as much." She parroted his thought from the other dream then smiled. "That's good. This woman is good for you."

"I hardly know anything about her. Besides, she's only a dream."

"Like me?" Helen raised an eyebrow. "Listen, I know what you've put yourself through, blaming yourself for the accident." She shook her head. "Typical Connor, taking responsibility for something beyond your control."

"I can't help it. I shouldn't have been sleeping. If I'd been the one driving, it might not have happened."

Helen pushed up the sleeves of her sweater to the elbow, a familiar gesture that sent a sharp pain through Connor's heart. "Thanks for the vote of confidence in my driving skills. The road was slippery; it was an accident. End of story. If you hadn't been napping, you might have fallen asleep at the wheel and we still would have gotten in an accident. Enough, Connor! No more guilt. Let go and move on. This woman is the one for you."

"But how is it even possible? She's not real," he protested.

Bonnie Dee

“She’s as real as you or I. And she’s a healer. Let her heal you and help you live again. ‘Cause, sweetheart, right now you’re more dead than me.” Helen gave him her lopsided grin and, like the Cheshire cat, her smile remained after she had disappeared.

Connor’s eyes flew open. He jerked upright in his chair, his neck twinging with pain from resting at an odd angle. He wiped a hand across his mouth, catching a dribble of spit at the corner. “Okay. This is getting crazy. I should be seeing Dr. Loomis instead of a paranormal expert.”

But despite his misgivings, he picked up the phone and punched in the number Dex had given him.

“Hello?”

“May I speak to Harold Raimer, please?”

“Speaking.”

The answer took Connor aback. He had been expecting a receptionist. “Oh...I—uh—I’m a friend of Dexter Maddison. I don’t know if he’s called you yet about me. My name is Connor Baines.”

“Yes. I was planning to call you. Your story’s intriguing.” The man sounded excited. “Do you have time to stop by my office later today?”

“I’ll make time,” Connor said.

Aiyana was soaked to the skin despite her protective cloak by the time she had slogged through the deep meadow grass and dripping forest to the small hut in the clearing. Smoke rose from the hole at the top of the dome showing it was inhabited.

Suddenly nervous, now that the moment to confront the magic man was here, Aiyana walked to the door of the hut. Water dripped down the back of her neck as she stood outside his dwelling and called the hermit’s name aloud.

There was a long silence. The only sounds in the clearing were the singing crickets and tree frogs and the rainwater dripping from the branches of the trees.

“Mahasset,” she called again. “I beseech your wisdom.”

The small bark door was pushed open. A dim beam of light came from inside, framing a thin, old man. Long, white strands of hair straggled down from his mostly bald crown, framing his wrinkled face. “Daughter, what do you desire?”

“Please, I need your help.” Aiyana stepped forward but kept a respectful distance since the man had not invited her into his home. “I have been meeting someone, a spirit

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person, in the land of dreams. These are no ordinary dreams, and I wish to...I *need* to bring this person into the world of man. I want to see him under the true sunlight.”

The old man pursed his lips and shifted the blanket on his shoulders. “How do you know this spirit wishes to enter our world? Would you bring him here against his will?”

Aiyana shuffled her feet, uncomfortable with the question. She had been asking herself something similar. What would Connor do if she pulled him from his life and into hers? Was there even a place for him in her world? “I would ask him first, of course. But do you have the power to make this possible?”

Mahasset stared at the ground for a full minute before lifting his clouded, white eyes. “Come. Sit by the fire. I will think on this.”

Aiyana ducked her head to enter the low doorway. Inside the dim, smoky room was a fire, a sleeping mat, a stack of pelts and some woven baskets and pots along the wall. Traps and tools hung on the wall. Aiyana politely bowed to her elder then took a place by his fire. “I brought you something as tribute for your help,” she said, setting aside the basket.

The old man didn’t acknowledge the gift, merely lowered his old body slowly down on one side of the fire. He gazed morosely into the flames.

Aiyana sat cross-legged across from him, warming her hands and waiting for Mahasset’s response. She had almost nodded off, exhausted from her long walk and from lack of sleep the previous night, when the old man’s voice jerked her awake.

“What is he like, this man of dreams?”

“He is called Connor,” she stumbled over the strange name as she said it aloud for the first time. “His skin is pale like flat bread before it is cooked. His hair is the brown of horse chestnuts and his eyes are blue like the sky.”

Mahasset lit his pipe with a coal from the fire. “He sounds very strange and ugly. You would want such a foreign creature?”

“He is not strange at all and definitely not ugly. When we are together, our hearts are one. I understand what he says inside,” she tapped her chest, “without speech.”

Mahasset snorted. “Young lust. I remember that. It can lead to death sometimes.”

Aiyana remembered Mahasset’s brother and guessed at the story of a love triangle and betrayal behind the killing. “This is more than a desire of the body,” she said firmly.

Bonnie Dee

“Connor and I have a special bond, and if we could only meet in the real world, I know we would be together forever.”

The old man smiled as one would at a child’s fancy. “A pretty dream. Very well, I will help you bring your desire to pass. Time will tell if it is everything you had hoped for.” Without another word he rose and began moving around the hut collecting things.

Aiyana watched him, noting what he gathered in case she needed to replicate whatever magic he was about to perform.

But when Mahasset returned, he only brought a dried bunch of sage, rosemary and lavender and a piece of bone. He lowered himself to the ground with a grunt, his knees creaking and popping as he squatted by the fire. Muttering under his breath, he tossed the herbs in the fire and rubbed the piece of bone with one gnarled old hand. Then he began to sing, his quavering old voice rising and falling, his eyes closed as he raised a prayer to the spirit world and asked for Aiyana’s request.

The small hut filled with sweet scented smoke. It coiled through the air, stinging Aiyana’s eyes. She blinked, feeling suddenly incredibly sleepy. It was strange since she had used these herbs many times and never known them to have this soporific effect. The light grew dimmer, the smoke thicker and Aiyana saw shapes in the smoke. These beings were without definition or form, but she could sense their presence looming all around. They must be the spirits of the dead.

Mahasset rubbed the yellowed bone and chanted on. “*You honor us with your presence. Please Great Ones, I beg a favor. In the world of transparent light walks a man. Show this man to us here.*” He interrupted his prayer to say to Aiyana, “Now picture him. Fill your mind with his image and offer it up.”

Aiyana obeyed, closing her eyes and concentrating as hard as she ever had in her life. A picture of Connor bloomed in her mind. She focused more deeply, moving beyond the physical image to the essence of the man, his innate spirit.

Nothing happened.

Sweat rose on Aiyana’s brow. The room seemed unbearably close, the smoke choking, but she did not let go of the idea of Connor. She continued to picture him, as Mahasset’s song went on and on.

“Amazing!” Raimer exclaimed when Connor finished relating his story, leaving out the sex details but telling his hypothesis about Aiyana belonging to an indigenous

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Hudson River Valley tribe. “And then you dreamed about your wife giving her blessing. Do you realize the significance of the place where you talked with Helen?”

“Croton?” Connor shrugged.

“Croton Point has been an archeological gold mine for Native American artifacts. A heavily fortified village was excavated on the plateau above the river and a burial ground is located east of the village. I think Helen may have been verifying your guess that this dream woman is real—or was at one time.”

“Great. So, what does that mean to me?” Connor demanded. “I can only ever meet her in my mind?”

“Do you *want* to meet her in real life?” Raimer asked, pushing his glasses up his nose and curiously peering at Connor through them. “Or do you want to try to lay her spirit to rest?”

“This isn’t a haunting. Or, maybe it is, but not like that, with a ghost looking for closure.”

“No,” Raimer agreed. “It doesn’t seem to follow the classic template.” He sat back in his chair, fingers steepled under his chin, his heavy, dark brows drawn together. “You may be haunting Aiyana as much as she is you from what you’re telling me. This is most unusual.”

Connor stared at the heavysset man in the too-small polo shirt and double-knit slacks. Harold Raimer was an unlikely savior and so far didn’t seem to be offering Connor any useful advice.

Raimer gazed at Connor with inquisitive eyes. “Do you want the dreams to end?”

“I...” Connor suddenly realized that he didn’t. The idea of never seeing Aiyana again was inconceivable. “No,” he conceded. “But I can’t go on living in dreams. Something has to change.”

Raimer nodded. “Perhaps it can. I have an idea. As I said, I’ve never worked with anything quite like this before. I certainly wouldn’t promise I can bring your girl into the physical world, but I would like to try to reach Aiyana by putting you into a trance.”

“Hypnosis?”

“Yes.”

“Hm.” Connor wasn’t comfortable with the idea of putting himself in a stranger’s hands. Hypnosis always reminded him of a school assembly long ago when a kid named George Willis had done the chicken dance while under the hypnotist’s influence. Connor

Bonnie Dee

didn't like to lose control. But then, with these dreams, he was already out of control. He had asked Raimer for help and should probably give it a shot.

"I can videotape, so you'll have a record of exactly what transpires," Raimer offered.

"What do we think is going to happen?" Connor asked, tapping his fingers on the arms of his chair.

"I have absolutely no idea what to expect. I'll guide you through the process and then you tell me what you experience while you're under."

"If it's anything like the dreams I've been having," Connor said, "I'm not sure I want to share." He blushed, thinking about the erotic adventures he'd experienced.

"No judgment here," Raimer said.

It didn't make Connor feel much better. He sighed. "All right. When do you want to do this?"

"I'm free now."

"Now," Connor repeated.

"No time like the present." Raimer rose, dimmed the light and set up a camcorder. He had Connor relax on the couch in the room and sat by him with a pen light. "Concentrate on the light and listen to my voice." Raimer went through a series of commands, telling Connor to tense and relax body parts working from his feet up toward his head.

Connor felt jumpy and doubted he could be put under--although Raimer's voice urging him to relax was actually very soothing. Suddenly his body felt heavy, so heavy he couldn't lift his arm. Connor's last cognizant thought was, *Huh. So this is what it's like to be hypnotized.*

Aiyana realized she was in a trance as her consciousness rose from her body. She gazed around Mahasset's hut, seeing all directions at once. Then she rose higher, viewing the land outside of the dwelling, her village and the world beyond it, spread out in amazing shades of green and blue. It sparkled with diamond drops of light and was so beautiful it would be easy to get distracted.

Aiyana focused her mind to search for Connor. She had never had to find him before. They had simply been drawn together in their dreams with no effort. Now she called out for him and cast her all-seeing eye across time and space trying to locate him.

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She sensed him and followed the thread of his life force until it brought her to him.

Connor lay with his eyes closed on a sleeping pallet of some kind in a strange room. A man sat nearby speaking to him. Although the man spoke in a foreign language, Aiyana understood the words. He talked slowly and soothingly, and she realized he was putting Connor into a trance as Mahasset had done for her. Aiyana noticed a blue glow around Connor's body and a rose one around the other man. She watched the gently pulsating colors and waited for Connor to notice her hovering beside him.

It didn't take long. His spirit eyes opened and he registered her presence. "Aiyana!" He rose from the couch and came toward her, but his body remained behind. "You're here."

"And you are there." She pointed to his physical body.

Connor turned to look. "Jesus. I am. Does this mean I'm dead?"

The dark-haired man with the round, clear discs in front of his eyes leaned forward and touched Connor's arm. "Can you still hear me?"

"Yes. I'm outside of my body. I can see myself and you and the room. Aiyana is here with me." Connor embraced her and his blue aura mingled with her pale green one.

When their bodies melded in this space, it wasn't in a solid way like in the dreams, but the connection between them was deeper than ever. Aiyana reveled in Connor's essence twining around hers.

"Ask her what she wants."

Connor turned to Aiyana with questioning eyes.

"I want you," she told him. "I, too, have traveled into the spirit world with the help of magic to find you and bring you back with me in your flesh and blood form." She indicated the thread of her life force leading back to her body in Mahasset's hut.

They were immediately in the hut just by turning their attention toward it.

"My God, that's you," Connor said.

Aiyana's body had slumped to the floor by the magic man's fire. The old man still sat with his eyes closed, lips moving silently. Suddenly he spoke aloud. "Daughter, have you crossed to the spirit world?"

"Yes. I am here. Connor is with me."

The old man nodded. "Does he wish to stay in that place or come here?"

Bonnie Dee

Aiyana turned to the wide-eyed man beside her. “Mahasset can help us. He can bring your body into the world so we can be together.” Even as she said the words, she felt doubt radiating from Connor.

“How?”

“I am not sure. Mahasset is a powerful man. He knows lost, secret arts.”

“But...” Connor looked back at his own body, lying motionless in another place and time. “I was thinking more along the lines of bringing you to my world.”

“Oh.” Aiyana was taken aback. She had not considered that possibility. Her aim had been clear and simple, get the man of her dreams into her life. The idea of leaving her tribe, her apprenticeship as a healer, her family and relatives was unthinkable. “Forever?”

“I don’t even know if it can be done,” Connor said, “but I have a feeling if either one of us crosses into the other’s world it will probably be permanent.”

“I have duties,” Aiyana’s voice quavered as she thought about the step. Was it one she was willing to take? “I am being trained to take Hausis’ place as the healer in our tribe. She is very old and her health is failing. I can not simply leave my responsibilities.”

Connor frowned. “You could be a healer in my time. Herbal medicine is still used, and, Aiyana, life is so much easier. You will see and do things you couldn’t imagine.”

She didn’t know what to say. Part of her was intrigued by the idea of seeing a new world, but at the same time she feared it, wanting to retreat to her own.

“Connor, talk to me,” the man sitting by Connor’s unconscious body said. “What’s happening?”

“A discussion,” Connor answered shortly. He stroked his hand down the side of Aiyana’s face trailing streams of blue that mingled with her green. “I can’t live in your world. I could never fit in there. It’s too primitive and I know too much to be content with such a simple life.” He spoke gently. “Besides, could you imagine your family, your tribe’s reaction to someone as foreign-looking as me?”

Aiyana was angry because she knew he was right. As much as she loved and wanted him, there was really no place for him in her world. “You are not willing to leave your life, but you expect me to abandon mine?” she said. “It is impossible.”

For a moment, both were silent, at an impasse.

Connor reached a hand out as if to ward off her decision. “Please, won’t you at least think about it?”

Pain twisted Aiyana’s stomach. “Will you?” she challenged him.

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Frustration and sadness warred on Connor's face, but there was no solution to this problem. "I guess we can only continue to meet like before—in our dreams," he finally said.

It was clear that if neither was willing to leave a life behind, there was no other place for them to be together, and while the dreams were wonderful and fulfilling in their own way, they weren't real life, Aiyana reasoned. "I think...we have to end it. What we have is not a life together. I can not continue to live only when I sleep."

Connor didn't argue. He didn't protest or fight for her. Instead, he slowly nodded. The light of his aura darkened to the blue of a twilight sky, and his bright eyes dimmed with the veil of sadness once more. He released her, letting her spirit drift away from him.

Aiyana felt herself receding from Connor, following the slender thread of energy that connected her to the solid reality of her own body. She saw his blue shape slipping through the vastness of space and time to a glimmering point somewhere far in the future. She could no longer see the room, the strange man or Connor's physical body, and then she could no longer see or sense his essence either. He was gone.

Aiyana slammed back into her body, the sensation of weight and mass constraining after the freedom of astral travel. Her eyes opened and she sat up with a gasp, sucking a deep breath of sage and lavender smoke into her lungs.

Mahasset sat cross-legged by the fire, regarding her through rheumy eyes. "Well, daughter, did you find wisdom? Love is pain and parting. It is good that you learned the lesson so young. Now perhaps you can get on with your life without unreasonable expectations."

Aiyana stared at the hard, old man. Her whole body ached from the sadness in her soul. She rose to leave and her limbs felt thick and heavy, her physical body clumsy and unwieldy. She bowed to Mahasset. "Thank you, grandfather, for helping me."

He lifted his pipe and re-lit it, puffing hard to set the embers burning again and stared into the fire once more, clearly dismissing her.

Aiyana walked out into the fresh air, laden with moisture in the wake of the spring rain. As she walked toward the village, her thoughts swirled around Connor and the choice they had made. She felt almost certain that her sleep tonight would be deep and dreamless. There had been a sense of finality when each of them had agreed to end the dreams. Visions of a dry, lonely future sprawled before her and Aiyana began to regret her decision, but her heart told her it was too late to take it back.

Bonnie Dee

She would live the life she had chosen.

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Chapter Three

When Harold Raimer snapped his fingers, Connor's eyes opened. He was fully conscious yet had forgotten nothing of the experience of being suspended beyond the physical realm. He recalled Aiyana, glowing green as a spring leaf, light and airy in his arms but more *there* than ever. The sensation of their separate essences flowing together when they touched was etched in his mind so strongly, he felt he would never forget it.

"Thought I lost you there for a minute." Raimer removed his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose before putting them back on. "You didn't respond to my questions anymore and wouldn't come out of the trance at first when I tried to end it. What happened?"

Connor felt like a mannequin, stiff and lifeless. How could he be expected to form words? He exhaled deeply. "I saw her. She had some medicine man helping her and wanted me to ... manifest, or whatever, in her time and live there. I wanted her to come here." He paused and breathed in. "As you can see, she's not here and I am."

"The dreams...?"

"Are over. We can't live only when we sleep. That's crazy."

Raimer sat back in his chair. The stained polo shirt rode up on his hefty stomach. "*A bird may love a fish, but where will they make a home?*" he quoted.

Connor blinked at him.

"One of my mother's Yiddish-isms. My sister dated a black guy and my parents were less than thrilled. But, you know what? He's my brother-in-law now."

"That's very helpful," Connor drawled. "How am I supposed to apply that to this situation?"

Raimer shrugged. "I don't know. The point is, they say love finds a way." He paused. "Sorry I couldn't do more to help you."

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Connor sat up slowly, his body feeling heavy and awkward after the weightlessness of space. “You did a lot. Just having someone to talk to about this was a big help. Thanks.”

“Thank *you*. It was a fascinating case.”

Connor pulled out his checkbook, but Raimer waived his fee. “Let me know if anything else happens. Would you be willing to sign a release so I could include this case in an article I’m writing for the *Journal of Parapsychology*?”

“Sure. Why not?”

What did it matter? At least someone would profit from the experience. Connor had gained nothing but a bittersweet memory to carry with him through the lonely years ahead. He now had two lost loves haunting his psyche.

Connor drove back to his office because he couldn’t bear the thought of going home, sitting and staring at TV, probably getting drunk, brooding about Aiyana and facing a restless sleep with pointless dreams. There was always plenty to be done at the office. Work was what had saved him after Helen, giving some purpose and shape to his existence. He would devote himself to work again and in time he would forget about Aiyana’s face, her luminous eyes, her full, soft lips, her earthy scent, her pliant body and her warm, loving soul.

If he worked hard enough, he could erase all his memories and maybe even convince himself the dreams had never happened.

“Don’t push yet, Majesi. It’s not time,” Aiyana ordered.

“I need to!” Majesi said through gritted teeth.

“Soon. Just think about your breathing right now. In. Out.” Aiyana smoothed ointment along the opening of Majesi’s vagina to help it stretch to accommodate the baby’s head without tearing. The dark shadow of the baby’s crown appeared and Aiyana’s already racing pulse sped up. This was her first delivery on her own. Hausis was not even in attendance this time. As the actual delivery approached, Aiyana feared a complication.

“All right. Now you may push.”

After several minutes of straining and grunting, Majesi gave an unearthly scream and expelled her baby into the world with a gush of fluids.

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Aiyana caught the slippery, red creature, unwound the umbilical cord from the baby's arm and neck and tied it off. She cut the cord and presented the little boy to Majesi then Aiyana massaged her friend's groin to help stimulate expulsion of the placenta.

"Ai, he is perfect. So perfect," Majesi cooed, while her mother, Helaku leaned over Majesi and examined her first grandson.

Aiyana watched the pair of them exulting over the child and her heart swelled with satisfaction and joy. She had made the right decision staying where she was needed. It didn't matter that late at night she lay wide-awake on her sleeping cot and ached for her lover's touch. A moment like this made the sacrifice worthwhile.

After removing the afterbirth and cleansing Majesi and the baby, Aiyana finally had a moment to appreciate the newborn. She crouched beside the young mother and examined the squalling creature's minute fingers and toes with as much pride as if she had made them herself.

Majesi could not stop smiling. "Aiyana, thank you. You know how much I feared the pain, but with your help, it really was not that bad."

Aiyana smiled, remembering her friend yelling and panting through the contractions for most of the afternoon. How quickly a new mother forgot the pain in the joy of holding her infant.

"We must find a husband for you, Aiyana," Majesi said. "I want you to be as happy as I am. Askuwhetu has a cousin across the river. We will introduce you to him. He is a fine man."

"Mm." Aiyana was saved from having to answer by the entrance of the proud father, Askuwhetu. She left the happy family to their celebration and walked back to Hausis' wigwam.

Hausis was suffering from rheumatism and could barely hobble around the room. When Aiyana entered the dwelling, the old woman lay stretched out with her feet near the fire.

After making her mentor a cup of bloodroot tea, Aiyana massaged her swollen joints, knees, ankles, elbows and shoulders with pennyroyal. Although Aiyana's touch was gentle, Hausis hissed at the pressure. "Careful, daughter."

Aiyana manipulated the woman's gnarled hands, concentrating on the healing energies flowing from her hand into Hausis'. She thought about the birth and thanked the gods for letting everything go smoothly. She thought about Majesi's infant, wondering if

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she would ever have one of her own. Aiyana tried to picture what Connor's child might look like. What would a combination of their spirits produce? Would the baby have Connor's blue eyes and fair skin or would Aiyana's darkness dominate its features? She reined in her mind, scolding herself for allowing it to dwell on something that could never be and on dreams that only caused her pain.

"What is it, girl?" Hausis pulled her hand away, grabbed Aiyana's chin and tilted her head up to glare into her face. "Something has been troubling you for weeks now. What are you unhappy about? I do not wish to see your weepy face any longer. It ruins my digestion."

"Nothing. It is nothing, grandmother."

"Is it our work? It does not agree with you."

"No." Aiyana took Hausis' hand in hers and patted it. "I love being a healer. Today it was wonderful to be able to help Majesi deliver her child."

"A man," Hausis said with authority. "It is always a man who causes a face like this."

Aiyana could not hold her teacher's gaze. Her eyes slid away.

"Ha. I knew it. Who is it? That fine looking buck, Nahamesh?"

Aiyana shook her head. "No. It is ... no one from our village." She should have said it was no one at all, but she found it impossible to lie to Hausis.

"Who then? Come on, child. I can see that you are desperate to talk."

It was true. The secret had been burning in Aiyana for weeks. She opened her mouth and suddenly found the whole tale of her dream lover spilling out like a gushing flood of water from a spring. When she was finished explaining, she finally turned her gaze up to meet Hausis', afraid of the disapproval she might see in the old woman's eyes.

But the sharp, black eyes nestled in folds of wrinkles gave nothing away. "So, you went to Mahasset rather than come to me? Hmph."

Aiyana almost smiled at her reaction. "I am sorry. I did not think you would want to help and I did not think you would be able to."

Hausis made a scoffing noise. "Do you think that old man knows more than me? Whatever he can do, I can do better. Now the question is, do you still want your strange white man? Have you made the right choice to stay here or do you wish to be with him?"

"I do not know how to answer that." Aiyana felt tears spring unbidden to her eyes. "I loved every moment I spent with him, but I have my duty to the people."

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“Child, do you think you are the only person in this village I could train to take my place?” Hausis tone was as dry as dust in August. “Such vanity! There are several young girls who show promise and could be trained to heal. Do not let love slip away because you think you are irreplaceable. Such wondrous things do not happen often. The gods offer you a great gift and you turn it down? What foolishness!”

Aiyana toyed with the fringe on her dress, laying it straight. “The truth is, grandmother, there is another reason I chose to stay. I was terrified at leaving here and going to a strange world, even with Connor. It would be like dying and passing over to the other side, never to see my family again.”

“The shadow of death looms closer to me every day,” Hausis said. “But when my time comes, I will walk through the door with my head up, eager to see what is on the other side.”

Aiyana sat quietly considering Hausis’ words. It was true, the challenge and adventure of a new world, an entirely new way of life, would be exciting. And Connor would be there for her. What was there to hold her back?

Impatient with Aiyana’s silence, Hausis burst out, “Heavens, girl. Do you want the man or not?”

The barked question startled an immediate answer from Aiyana, “I do.” The truth in the statement only registered after the words were out of her mouth. *I really do.* “But, Hausis, he no longer appears in my dreams. I don’t know if it is even possible for me to reach him again.”

“We will find out. Build up the fire and gather the herbs Mahasset used. If that old weasel can use transporting magic, I can certainly do it too.”

Aiyana did as she was bid, telling Hausis as best she could remember the words of Mahasset’s prayer. Soon a haze of scented smoke filled the room and Aiyana felt herself drifting up and out of her body as she had done before. It seemed easier this time.

She turned her attention outward, casting about for the spark of life that was Connor, and soon she located his essence and aimed toward it.

When Aiyana saw Connor after so many weeks of his absence, her heart swelled with joy and she knew for certain that she would go with him if he asked her again. Giving up her old life seemed a small sacrifice. She gazed at his beloved, familiar form, but he was oblivious to her presence. She hovered close to him, but could not gain his attention even when she spoke to him.

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Connor was in his waking world and all Aiyana could do was watch as he moved about his dwelling. The rooms in his house were huge and brightly lit, the floors covered with soft matting of some kind, the walls reflecting pale colors. All of the furniture was so strange that Aiyana couldn't even guess what some of it was used for. She almost forgot her purpose in contacting Connor in her fascination at his exotic surroundings.

In his sleeping chamber, Connor stripped off his clothes. He walked to another smaller room where he turned a knob and water sprang from the wall.

Aiyana watched his naked body as he stepped under the spray, steaming water coursing down his glistening skin. Her sex twitched in response to the sight, and she wished she could be under the waterfall with him, gliding her hands over his hard muscles and wet flesh. Then Aiyana realized she could do that. Connor might not be able to see or hear her, but maybe he could sense her presence.

She moved close to him under the coursing water that passed right through her. She rubbed her green, glowing astral hands over his pulsing blue light, blending them together for a brief moment.

Connor paused in soaping his body and froze, like a dog which has caught wind of a deer. He looked around then shook his head and resumed cleaning his torso.

Disappointed, Aiyana backed off and continued to observe Connor from a distance as he washed, dried and dressed himself in strange garments. She felt useless as a ghost and frustrated by her inability to reach him. Perhaps it was too late. Maybe their moment of possibility had passed and she should let the dream go.

Aiyana had decided to try one last time to make her presence known, when a buzzing sound filled the room in the physical world.

Connor looked at a wide bracelet on his wrist. He said, "Shit, I'm late," then went to open the door of the dwelling to a beautiful woman.

Her skin was paler than Connor's, her eyes bluer and hair as yellow as corn silk curled around her face. Her body was tall, willowy and graceful as she strode into the room. "Connor, I'm so glad we could finally get together. Your apartment is beautiful."

"Thanks. I'm not home much so I don't have time to mess it up."

"Yeah, Wes and Jan told me that you're a bit of a workaholic."

"An understatement," Connor said.

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The woman smiled and her teeth were white as snow against her scarlet painted lips. “Well, we’ll have to see if we can’t do something to change that. All work and no play...” She laughed.

Aiyana hated the woman. Her laughter made Aiyana feel like growling. The woman’s aura pulsed a soft, buttercup yellow around her physical body. Aiyana could see there was nothing negative to dislike about her but still wanted to claw her eyes out.

Connor smiled. “Can I offer you a drink?” He reached for the woman’s jacket as she slipped it off her shoulders.

“Sure, vodka tonic.”

Aiyana watched Connor and the strange woman interact, talking and laughing together. He appeared at ease and content, clearly not aching with the loss of Aiyana as she was for him. Their shared dreams had been only a temporary distraction for him and now he had moved on with his real life. Whatever deep connection Aiyana had believed she and Connor shared had only been on her part.

Aiyana feasted her eyes on Connor, drinking in his face and form, his laughter and his resonant voice one last time, wishing she could feel his hands on her once more as well. Then she let go. Her spirit rose up from the room and followed the connecting line that led her back to her body in Hausis’ wigwam. Aiyana opened her eyes and looked around at the familiar space. She was back where she belonged.

“Well, daughter, did you find him?” Hausis peered at her.

Aiyana nodded. “But I could not reach him. He could not see me.” She paused then choked out the rest of the story. “And he has found someone else. It is too late.”

“Ah.” The old woman sank back in her seat. For a moment there was no sound in the room but the crackle of the fire. A shower of sparks popped as a knot in the log burst into flame. “Sometimes,” Hausis said, “things are not as they seem. I do not believe the gods would bring you and this stranger together if there was not a purpose to it.”

Aiyana shrugged and rose to her feet. “It seems to me that many things happen in this world for no purpose. Thank you for your help, Hausis. I must go now and fetch more water from the well.” Aiyana quickly left the smoky chamber, unable to bear Hausis’ unaccustomed sympathy and well-meaning words.

She strode through the village to accomplish the simple task of drawing water, her heart heavy with the knowledge that her dream was truly over this time.

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Connor made it through the evening all right, and thought he'd managed to give Cyndi a pleasant enough time—dinner, movie, drinks and conversation. She was a nice woman, easy to talk to, beautiful to look at, but Connor had neatly sidestepped her obvious interest and had not invited her into his apartment at the end of the night.

He'd done what Wes begged him to do, gone out on a date, so he could check that off the list. Wes could harass him all he wanted, but Connor wasn't going out with Cyndi again. Lovely a person as she was, he simply wasn't interested.

It was after two when he got home, but Connor wasn't sleepy. He never slept much anymore. Changing from his 'date' clothes into a paint-stained T-shirt and sweats, he cranked up The Clash and removed the dustcover from his easel.

The painting looked angry—no surprise. Color roiled and spilled across the canvas in frenetic waves. The surface churned with desire and despair in shades of black, gray, blue, and purple, punctuated by angry red swirls.

Connor stared at the work, trying to decide if it was finished or not. He didn't care if it was any good; that wasn't why he did it. He was driven to draw and paint again when he found that even working fifty plus hours a week wasn't keeping him sufficiently distracted.

Aiyana never left his mind. The constant ache for her was different from the heartache he'd suffered after Helen's death, because with Aiyana Connor had been given a choice and had chosen to let her go. It was as if he'd been presented with a unique gift and, after tearing off the wrappings, had thrown it away. Why hadn't he taken a chance with her, even if it meant giving up all the trappings of the twenty-first century world? Was his life so wonderful? Was there really anything that he would miss?

Well, all right...beer. He would miss beer, but he was sure the Native Americans had some form of fermented beverage.

God, he was doing it again, fantasizing his life in a primitive, tribal village as Aiyana's husband. He squeezed a dollop of white from a tube of acrylic paint and swirled it into the black on his pallet. Loading his brush with gray, he attacked the canvas with fury once more.

He would paint until a few hours before dawn, fall exhausted into bed and capture a few hours of sleep then rise in the morning to go back to the office even though it was a Saturday. That was his life now—work, more work, a little painting and a couple of dreamless hours of sleep.

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Aiyana was wakened from sleep by a voice shouting outside the wigwam door. "Hausis, healer woman, are you home?"

She glanced over at Hausis' sleeping form, a lump under the covers. The old woman had suffered a rough night with the aches in her body. She did not need to be roused before dawn for an emergency.

Aiyana opened the door. She did not recognize the early morning visitor. It was not a person from the village.

"I come from Wichachnee across the river," the wild-eyed man said. "My child is sick. The healer in our village has tried everything and my little girl is not getting better. My wife is crazy with fear. We lost two children over the past two years and she can not bear to have another one die."

"What are her symptoms?" Aiyana asked, beckoning him into the hut.

He described a high fever that would not break, chest congestion and difficulty breathing. When Aiyana asked what methods their village herbalist was using to heal her, she agreed with the course of action the man described. It sounded like the healer had done everything possible and Aiyana was afraid there was simply no hope for the girl. Nevertheless, she agreed to gather some supplies and accompany the man across the river in his dugout.

Hausis awoke during their conversation and rose creakily from her sleeping pallet to offer suggestions and advice, but seemed glad that Aiyana would be going in her place. "Trust me," she assured the man named Shawsee. "This girl is fully as capable as I am of helping you. If there is anything that can be done for your child, she will do it."

Aiyana packed a bag of supplies and was ready in a few short minutes. She wrapped her cloak around her and followed Shawsee out into the blustery April wind then down to the beach. Aiyana climbed into the canoe, shivering at the chill as she wet her feet, and sat down in the back.

Shawsee pushed his canoe off the bed of crushed oyster shells and gravel into the tossing waves. As he climbed in and began to paddle away from shore, the small boat lurched and rolled on the wind-whipped waves.

Aiyana gripped either side of the dugout tightly. She seldom had reason to go out on the water and certainly not on a day when the river was so rough. But despite the waves, the small boat cut through the water under the propulsion of a worried father's

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straining arms. They crossed the wide expanse of the river then Shawsee steered the canoe into an inlet off the river. He paddled up a stream and docked the boat at the landing near the Teconsha village.

They climbed out of the boat and followed a path up to the stockade surrounding the town. The moment they entered the gate, it was clear that they were too late. Women's keening wails and death chants filled the air.

"No!" Shawsee cried out. He left Aiyana's side, running across the compound toward his home. She trailed after him, feeling useless and wishing she had at least had the opportunity to try to help the girl, although she guessed there was nothing she could have done to save her.

Aiyana spent the day with Kranziuk, Hausis' counterpart in this village. Kranziuk was a vigorous, middle-aged woman, who clearly resented the fact that the dead girl's family had brought in another healer. "I told them I was doing everything possible, but no one can ever accept the fact that sometimes it is simply time for a person to cross to the spirit world."

Aiyana murmured agreement. She listened to all the remedies that Kranziuk had tried and agreed there was nothing she would have done differently. The knowledge seemed to comfort Kranziuk, who, underneath her gruff exterior, was obviously upset by her inability to save the child.

Throughout the day Aiyana moved about the village feeling like an outsider as she tried to soothe the peoples' grief. Shawsee's child had been well loved, one of those children who charms everyone. Most of the families in the settlement were related in some way, so every other person Aiyana talked was the dead girl's aunt or uncle.

A number of people were Aiyana's relatives as well. The two villages were close enough that intermarriages were common. After visiting several distant cousins and sharing a meal with them, Aiyana was ready to travel back home. She could not ask the mourning Shawsee to take her, but got her cousin, Menowee to agree to ferry her across the river.

The sky was gray with billowing clouds moving steadily across it. The earlier stiff breeze had increased to a strong wind which set fleets of whitecaps ruffling over the surface of the river. It blew Aiyana's hair across her face.

With a shiver, she pushed it back behind her ear and pulled her cloak tighter around her. She climbed into the dugout.

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“Are you sure you must go today?” Menowee asked.

“Yes. There is a new baby in our village, and a mother recovering from childbirth. I want to be home in case I am needed,” Aiyana explained.

“All right.” The young man nodded and pushed off from the shore. “It is good. I will visit my sister’s family and stay the night.” He paddled a few strokes on either side of the boat, steering it through the choppy water toward the far shore.

The crossing was at one of the shallow, narrow parts of the river, sheltered from the strong pull of the current in the main stream. Still, Aiyana was frightened as the dugout tossed on the swells, rising and falling and drifting sideways at the same time that Menowee propelled it forward. Rain began to fall from the dead, gray sky and the wind blew even harder.

Aiyana’s teeth chattered from the cold. Her feet were in icy water at the bottom of the boat and her wet hands gripped the slippery sides. It became an effort to keep her seat and not be tossed out as the boat fell from the crest to the trough of a wave.

“Hold on,” Menowee called. His hands clenched the paddle and he dug in hard on the left side of the boat just as the current swirled them to the right. The canoe rolled sideways. Aiyana was almost dunked in the water. Then the boat righted and moved forward once more.

Menowee laughed at the close call.

Aiyana gritted her teeth and cursed herself for bringing them out in such dangerous weather. Her insistence on going home had put both their lives at risk.

No sooner had she thought this when another huge wave hit the boat. With a lurch the dugout rolled sideways again, but this time there was no recovery. The canoe flipped over in the water. Aiyana had time to draw one deep breath before her head was plunged into the cold, murky water of the river.

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Chapter Four

Connor looked down at the brief outlining the division of property in the MacDonald divorce case. Usually in divorce suits he was able to come up with an out of court settlement, but Sinclair and Mariana MacDonald were hard cases. They were suing and counter-suing one another, using every weapon in their arsenals to assassinate each other's characters. It was clearly a battle that had been going on throughout their marriage. Both alpha personalities, each wanted to be the winner at all costs. The case was making Connor's firm and the opposing legal counsel a lot of money.

Connor sat behind the table listening to the opposition drone on and his mind wandered. His leg jiggled nervously. A general feeling of anxiety had been percolating in his stomach all afternoon—anxiety which had nothing to do with speaking in court. The hair on the back of his neck prickled and he felt like jumping up from his seat and running from the room, to do what, he didn't know. *Now*, his inner voice clamored. *Hurry.*

Aiyana's face floated in Connor's mind. Her eyes were wide and her mouth open, soundlessly crying for help. He shifted in his seat drawing a curious glance from his client, billionaire businessman, Sinclair MacDonald.

Meanwhile, the opposing counsel argued that Mariana MacDonald was entitled to at least one hundred fifty thousand dollars compensation for emotional and mental abuse.

Connor knew that neither of the MacDonalds deserved anything except a hard slap in the face and maybe a stint working community service in a homeless shelter. The spoiled, selfish behavior of the two left him feeling sick ... or maybe it was his lurching stomach. Connor felt nauseous, as if he was tossing on erratic waves in a stormy sea. Again the image of Aiyana calling for help, wet hair plastered to her head, shone in his mind like a beacon. He had to go to her. He had to help her right now!

Connor held up a hand to attract the judge's attention. "Excuse me, your honor. I need to call a recess."

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“What cause, counselor?”

“I feel ill. Something I ate at lunch.”

“Do you think you’ll be ready to resume yet this afternoon?”

“I doubt it, sir.” Connor hoped his face was pale. He knew it was sweating.

The judge sighed. Connor thought the judge wished to be through with the MacDonald case as much as Connor did. “Very well. We will resume tomorrow.” He called the two lawyers forward and they quickly reviewed their schedules and came up with mutual date. Then Connor put his hand to his mouth as if he could barely hold back vomit—which wasn’t far from the truth—and practically bolted from the courtroom.

He went straight to the men’s restroom and closed himself in one of the stalls. Sitting down on the toilet seat, he rested elbows on knees, his head in his hands, closed his eyes and fought to bring the picture of Aiyana into better focus. It was the first time in weeks he had *tried* to contact her. Most of the time he had been struggling to push her out of his brain.

He could catch glimpses of her frightened face and feel sharp stabs of fear radiating from her, but he could not seem to focus and get a clear picture of where she was at or what she needed. Connor knew he must be able to sleep if he wanted to slip into a dream and encounter her there. And he knew he had to do it fast. Whatever was happening to her was happening now—which made no sense at all since she lived in another time and everything about her was in the past. Dwelling on the incongruities of time was pointless. Connor needed to go to Harold Raimer and try to achieve unconsciousness as soon as possible.

He squeezed his eyes closed even tighter and tried to telegraph a message to Aiyana. *I’m coming somehow. I’ll be there soon to help you.* He slammed open the stall then the men’s room door and ran flat out down the halls of the courthouse, drawing curious stares.

As Connor dashed to his car and peeled out of the parking lot, he dialed Raimer’s number. He got voice mail and left an urgent message. “Hey, it’s me, Connor Baines. I have a problem and need your help. I’m on my way to your office. Hope you’re there. Please call me back if you get the message.”

Connor drove like a madman, cutting through traffic and speeding down side roads across town, but luckily managing to avoid getting a ticket. He hadn’t received a call back by the time he reached Raimer’s. He parked haphazardly at the curb, ran up to

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the door of Raimer's home/office and began simultaneously pounding on the door and ringing the bell.

A few moments later, Raimer appeared. "Baines? What is it? I'm with a client."

"Emergency," Connor said breathlessly. "I need you to put me under right now."

"I can't. I'm working with someone, contacting her mother on the other side."

"Now!" Connor said. "Her dead mother can wait. I have to help Aiyana immediately. It may already be too late."

Raimer, clearly intrigued by Connor's panic, glanced over his shoulder. "All right. Wait in the foyer. Give me a few minutes to finish with my client."

Less than fifteen minutes later, Connor was lying on Raimer's couch, desperately trying to relax and breathe deeply. But going into a trance when his heart was racing was almost impossible.

"You have got to relax," Raimer complained. "Or you're going nowhere. Close your eyes and tell me exactly what you saw."

"Her face. She's in trouble. She's wet so I think she might be drowning or something."

"Okay. Breathe in and out very slowly. Open your eyes and concentrate on my light. Focus all your attention at that point and release everything else from your mind." Raimer spoke soothingly. He went through the litany of tensing and relaxing body parts.

Connor followed his commands and slowly began to unwind. His consciousness began to drift away. He experienced the rising and floating sensation he had the last time Raimer hypnotized him, but this time Aiyana wasn't there waiting for him. Connor had to search for her. He cast his mind outward into the void of space until he felt her presence calling to him. He concentrated, following the call, and immediately was with her.

Aiyana clung to the side of a log floating in a river. Waves tossed her back and forth. Rain lashed down upon her and her wet arms slipped on the surface she was trying to grip. A paddle drifted past and he realized that the log was actually a primitive, dugout canoe floating upside down on the water.

Connor took in every detail of the scene; Aiyana's pale face, blue lips and chattering teeth, her black hair, slicked to her head, her fingernails digging into the wood of the canoe as she struggled to keep her grip. But although he was present, he could not interact with Aiyana. He couldn't make her see him or even sense his presence, although

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he shouted that he was there and would help her. How could he help her when he couldn't even touch her?

Furious and frustrated, Connor gathered all the force of his will and concentrated on summoning his physical body into the scene. He pictured every cell and atom of his form mustering at his command and coalescing around his spirit. Pulling the heavy weight of flesh around him like a cloak, Connor was suddenly, unbelievably in the water.

And it was fucking freezing!

He kicked his legs and moved his arms to keep afloat as a wave crested and broke over his head. Connor went under then rose, sputtering and splashing.

Aiyana's head whipped around to face him. "Connor?" With her concentration broken, her hands slipped. She lost her grip on the boat and fell into the water a few yards away from him.

Connor swam toward her, cleaving through the water with hard pulls of his arms and strong kicks of his legs. His body felt like it was made of lead—or ice. He wondered how long it took for hypothermia to set in. Glancing at the shore far off to the right, he knew it was too far away to swim for.

He paddled up beside Aiyana, who was bobbing up and down in the water, gaping at him.

"We have to get the boat turned over and get back inside it," Connor said. The land is too far away. "Help me."

She replied in her own language, spitting the words out between chattering teeth.

If the freezing river hadn't convinced Connor he was physically in the world with Aiyana, their lack of instant communication proved it. In the dreams he had always understood her. Now he had no idea what she was saying.

He nodded his head toward the canoe, which was floating farther away by the second, and swam back toward it.

Aiyana splashed along behind him.

When they reached the canoe, Connor ducked under the water and brought his back up under the boat. He heaved upward with all his strength. Aiyana popped up beside him, adding her weight to the lifting. Suddenly the boat flipped and landed with a splash, floating right side up beside them.

"Get in." Connor held the dugout steady while Aiyana clambered in. It rolled precariously but stayed upright. But when Connor tried to climb in, it quickly became

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obvious he couldn't pull his weight over the side without tipping the boat. He would have to float alongside it all the way to shore. He held onto the stern of the boat and kicked his legs out behind him, propelling the boat forward.

Aiyana leaned over the side and paddled with her arms as best she could. The actual paddle had long since disappeared. Slowly, awkwardly, inefficiently, they made their way to shore.

Connor thought he was going to let go and drown his legs felt so numb after a very short while. It gave him a greater appreciation for Leo DeCaprio floating around at the end of *Titanic*. But Leo was in the middle of the ocean and for Connor land was in sight. He would not let go and give into the lethargy that was overtaking his icy body. His legs churned ceaselessly as the trees slowly grew closer. Suddenly, he felt solid ground beneath him, under the water. His feet dug into the mud and he pushed the boat along faster and harder toward shore.

A few moments later, Connor splashed through the shallows to the blessed land. He collapsed on his knees on the bank shaking water from his body like a dog.

Aiyana climbed out of the boat and dropped down beside him, gasping and shaking. She looked over at Connor, her deep brown eyes as piercing as he had remembered them. She said something in her harsh language that sounded like it contained way too many consonants. There was a questioning lilt on the end of the sentence.

Connor crawled a few feet farther out of the lapping edge of the river. "Don't know how I got here," he said through chattering teeth. "I knew you were in trouble."

Aiyana pointed out across the water. She said something with the word *Menowee* repeated several times. The distraught look on her face clued Connor in to the fact that someone else had been in the canoe with her.

"I'm sorry." Connor gathered her shivering body into his arms and held her. He was astonished and grateful at her solid body filling his arms. "We've got to get warm. We can't sit here or we'll freeze to death."

"Hai," she agreed, unwinding her arms from around his neck.

Connor staggered to his feet and helped Aiyana to stand. They leaned against each other drunkenly embracing and fighting gravity for several seconds. He bent down and kissed her icy lips, warming them with his breath. "We made it. We're alive," he whispered, pressing another kiss to her cheek.

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Aiyana leaned into him, twining her arms around his back and laying her cheek against his chest.

She was just the right height for Connor to rest his chin on top of her head. He hugged her tight once more then put his arm around her shoulders as they walked up the gravel beach.

Aiyana pointed up-river from where they stood and said something. Connor assumed she was indicating the way back to her village. They began to walk that direction.

“Hello,” a voice called down from the bluff above them. “Are you all right?”

Connor shielded his eyes against the sun and stared up at the woman silhouetted against the sun.

“I had my husband, Robert call 911,” she said. “Help is on the way. God, you almost drowned out there!”

“We’re ... We’re okay,” Connor stammered, thunderstruck by the revelation that they were apparently in the twenty-first century. He cast a sideways glance at Aiyana.

Her dark eyes were huge. She murmured something under her breath.

Connor squeezed her shoulders tighter. “It’ll be okay.” He kissed the side of her soaking wet hair.

The white-haired woman on the bluff descended the stairs from her property to the river. She brought blankets, which she offered to Aiyana and Connor. “What in the world were you doing out there?” She cast a curious eye at the dugout at the edge of the water.

“Re-enactment at Croton Point,” Connor blurted, trying to explain the antique canoe and Aiyana’s garment. “But we got too far away from land and the boat capsized.” He gratefully pulled the warm blanket around his shoulders.

“Oh.” The woman frowned, but didn’t ask any more questions. “Well, I’m glad you’re both all right.” She held out her hand. “My name is Mary Weidel.”

“Connor Baines, and this is Aiyana...Krouse,” Connor extemporized. “Thanks for the blankets, but you can cancel that emergency call. We’re all right, really. If you’ll just let us borrow a phone, we’ll have a friend pick us up.”

“I think you should at least have the paramedics check you out,” Mrs. Weidel said. “Come on up to the house before you freeze to death.” She herded them before her up the steps on the side of the hill.

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Connor cast another look at Aiyana's shocked face. He tried to imagine how frightening it must be for her to find herself among strangers who didn't speak her language, removed from everything she knew. Deep down he was grateful he wasn't the one having to make the adjustment.

Aiyana had never felt so disoriented in her life. She didn't know how much was because of her near brush with death and the fact she was half-frozen, shaking so hard she could hardly walk. Her weak legs would have given way if Connor's arm wasn't supporting her. But the fact that everyone around her, including Connor, was speaking a foreign language definitely added to her feeling of displacement.

The husband of the woman who had given them blankets was waiting at the top of the hill. He had a lame leg and he talked without pause as he led them into his home.

The house was like nothing Aiyana had ever seen. Her eyes darted from one item to the next, unable to settle on any one of the hundreds of strange objects. Her feet sank down in a thick, colorful rug. The room was lit with lanterns and with light pouring through windows covered with some clear material that kept the cold wind at bay. Glancing out the largest window, Aiyana saw the sky, the earth and the flowing river at the bottom of the bluff. She shuddered, looking at the rolling waves.

There was a tug on her arm and Aiyana turned to find the blanket woman chattering at her.

Connor's hand slipped away from Aiyana's shoulders and down to the small of her back, nudging her to follow the woman.

The woman continued to babble incomprehensibly as she led Aiyana and Connor to another small room in the huge house. She handed them big, green pieces of fabric to dry off with, then disappeared for several moments.

Connor said something to Aiyana in a soothing tone. He stroked her face, and gazed at her with his bright blue eyes. He cupped her chin and gave her a soft kiss on the lips.

Warmth blossomed in her core and radiated outward. She stopped shivering for the first time since she had crawled out of the river.

A moment later, the woman returned with dry clothing for them to put on.

Connor thanked her. Aiyana understood that much. Then he closed the door to the small room and began to strip off his wet clothes.

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Aiyana did the same, but she felt suddenly, unaccountably shy. In her dreams they had done everything a man and woman could do together. Nudity had never bothered her. But now that they were in the physical world, she blushed as she pulled her dress over her head and dropped the sodden garment on the floor.

Connor's eyes swept over her body, the gooseflesh and the hard, beaded nipples that jutted out from her full breasts. His tongue ran over his lips then he turned his eyes away and quickly towed dry and dressed in the old man's clothes.

Aiyana understood. This was not the time or place for them to explore one another's bodies. But during the brief time he was naked, she took a good, long look of her own at Connor's strong shoulders and back, his flat abdomen, narrow hips and erect penis. The knowledge suddenly struck her that after weeks of silently pining for Connor, he was here and he was hers. As soon as they were truly alone together in his home, they could do whatever they wanted with each other's naked bodies.

The warm feeling swelled inside her. A smile blossomed on her face.

Connor glanced up just then. His eyes locked with hers and the same, dazed, delighted smile turned up the corners of his mouth and made his eyes sparkle like sunlight on water. He started to step toward her, but Aiyana held up a warning finger. "Not now," she said. "If we start kissing, I don't think I can stop."

He might not have understood her words, but Connor got the 'no.' He nodded and stooped to slip on the shoes the woman had given him. "Soon," he said.

Aiyana thought the word must mean 'home.' She dressed in the soft leggings and shirt the woman had supplied, marveling at the fine texture of the fabric. The way it brushed against her chilled, sensitive skin made her nipples and her pussy ache. She shivered, but not from cold this time.

When both of them were dressed, they returned to the main room where the mistress of the house was waiting with a hot beverage for them to drink. They sat on cushioned, comfortable seats in the warm room.

Connor accepted a small square object from the man and talked into it for a little bit.

Aiyana had no idea what was going on as the three pale people spoke to one another. They appeared to argue at one point, but she couldn't figure out why.

After some time had passed, there was a ringing sound and the old man got up to answer the door.

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The man with round eye coverings whom Aiyana had seen during her first out of body experience came into the room. He stared at Aiyana like she was a ghost.

Connor stood up and said some words to the man then thanked the old couple who had helped them. He shook each of their hands.

Aiyana listened carefully and mimicked the words Connor spoke. “Tank you,” she said, taking the man’s hand then the woman’s.

The old woman patted her hand as she replied.

Aiyana smiled and nodded. She breathed a sigh of relief when they were back outside and she could stop pretending to know what was being said. But her relief was short-lived.

Connor’s friend led them to a cart of some kind.

Connor opened the door for Aiyana to get inside. She understood that this vehicle was going to take them someplace, but didn’t understand how it was going to do that with no animal to pull it. Connor slid in beside her and took her hand in his, jabbering at her as he fastened a strip of fabric around her waist. Aiyana could tell he was trying to calm her down, but she wasn’t even nervous—not until the man got into the cart and it suddenly made a loud, roaring noise.

Aiyana jumped. Her body tensed as the vehicle began to move. Her hand clutched Connor’s, her eyes seeking his for reassurance.

He smiled then leaned over and kissed her cheek.

Clearly this thing was supposed to make the loud noise in order to move. Neither of the two men seemed worried. Aiyana tried to close her ears to the deafening sound and force her racing heart to slow down. After she got over her nausea at seeing the scenery fly past the windows, Aiyana was finally able to enjoy the sense of speed. The machine hurtled along a black path much faster than a deer could run. It was exhilarating.

Connor tugged at Aiyana’s hand, drawing her attention from the window. “Car,” he said, patting the seat beside him and indicating the space around them.

Aiyana repeated the word. “Cah.”

The man in the front turned slightly and spoke to Connor. Aiyana could see the man’s face reflected in a small square in the center of the window. She watched his clear reflection with fascination.

“Harold Raimer,” Connor said, gesturing toward the man.

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Aiyana made eye contact with Harold Raimer in the reflective surface as she repeated his name. She nodded at him and he grinned back at her.

In a very short time, Raimer stopped the car in front of a building. After Connor opened the door for her and helped her out of the car, Aiyana gazed in wonder at the row of tall buildings up and down the street. While the two men talked, she looked at the passing cars in many shapes and colors and at the people on the paths beside the street in their strange costumes. Their skin was also many colors.

Aiyana was observing a mother bending over and giving something to her little girl, when Connor gently tugged on her arm again. He guided Aiyana toward another car, one she assumed belonged to him. This time she rode in the front while Connor operated the amazing vehicle. The view of the world, rushing straight toward her through the window made it even more exhilarating than the last ride. It took her breath away.

Aiyana's head was throbbing from the excess stimulation by the time they reached Connor's home. She felt ready to weep from the stressful events of the past few hours; her cousin's drowning, her near death, the abrupt appearance of Connor and the sudden shift to a completely foreign world.

Once more Connor helped Aiyana out of the car. With his arm around her shoulders, he again supported her and led her up the stairs to his home.

She was too full of new sights and sensations to focus on her surroundings. She let herself be led like a child to a small room. Connor stripped the clothes from her and from himself then guided Aiyana under a stream of water that poured from the wall. It felt good, stinging and hot against her skin, warming her chilled insides.

Aiyana was at first too overwhelmed to feel a sexual response to Connor's naked body. He stood behind her and lathered her hair. His hands plunged through her hair and massaged her scalp, washing away the river smell and replacing it with the scent of flowers.

Aiyana's eyes drifted closed and she luxuriated in the firm touch of Connor's hands.

He carefully rinsed the suds from her hair then began to wash her body with a softy, scratchy, fluffy thing. This soap had a different scent, like lavender.

Aiyana arched her back as he rubbed it over her skin. Her body began to react to the stroking cloth, the heat and the slippery hands touching her all over. An answering heat built inside her.

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Connor turned her to face him and pulled her close to his warm, wet body, nuzzling her shoulder as the steaming water coursed over them. He murmured something that ended with 'Aiyana'.

She smiled to hear her name on his tongue, recognizing love talk when she heard it no matter how foreign the language. "I love you too, and I am happy to be here," she replied, pulling away and tilting her face up to receive his kiss.

Connor's mouth covered hers and his tongue pushed between her parted lips, curling sinuously around her tongue.

Aiyana threaded her fingers through his wet hair, cradling the back of his neck as she kissed him fiercely. This at least was familiar. No words were needed for them to communicate with their bodies. Her breasts were pressed against his hard chest, rich tan against flushed pink. Her nipples ached at the delicious friction of their bodies sliding back and forth against each other. She reached a hand down between them and gripped his growing erection. It felt solid and hot in her hand. She moved her hand up and down the shaft and was gratified to hear Connor's sharp intake of breath.

Aiyana smiled and leaned in to lap droplets of water that had collected along his collarbone. Her head dipped lower and her mouth latched onto one of his nipples, biting and sucking the flat circle. She kissed her way across his chest and did the same to the other nipple, never stopping her steady stroking of his cock.

Connor's hands wound through her long hair, holding her head. His hips rocked slightly as he pushed into her hand. Then he tugged on her head, pulling her up. He looked down into her eyes and said something.

Aiyana nodded as if she understood.

Connor turned the water off and gave her a last hug before stepping out of the shower. He offered her a cloth and she dried off, rubbing the material briskly over her body and wet hair.

For a brief moment they stood in the small room gazing at each other, glowing with warmth from the hot water and from desire for one another. Then suddenly, Connor reached out and scooped Aiyana up in his arms as if she weighed nothing. He carried her from the steamy room, across a hall and into a large sleeping chamber. There he deposited her gently on the bed and crawled up beside her.

Aiyana had never lain on a pallet so comfortable. She rolled back and forth a little on the soft surface.

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Connor smiled as he watched her then he pulled the covers down so they could climb inside and Aiyana marveled again at the smooth, white material beneath the blanket. Her aching body wanted to melt into the soft bed and never move again. She stretched and smiled.

Cuddling her close, Connor whispered things she didn't understand, but it didn't matter. She would learn his language soon enough and for now just the sound of his warm, deep voice was enough.

Then he stopped speaking and started kissing her all over and that was even better.

Aiyana's earlier exhaustion fled replaced by arousal. Her body lifted and swelled like a flower ready to bloom under Connor's moving hands and mouth. His hands were hot, gliding over her shoulders, her breasts, her stomach, waist hips, thighs. His pale hands, skimmed like white birds over her bronze skin and Aiyana loved the contrast between them.

Connor bestowed soft, wet kisses along the same path his hands had taken. He spent some time nuzzling her breasts, sucking the nipples in then letting them go with a wet pop. He stroked and squeezed the soft mounds before moving down her taut stomach toward her sex. Settling between her legs, he worked magic with his lips, teeth, tongue and hands.

He stroked and petted her sex, inserting several fingers inside her wetness and moving them in and out, while his tongue lapped her clit.

Aiyana sighed her contentment. Her body arched into Connor's hands and mouth. Desire unfurled inside her, magnified by her brush with death that day. The residual adrenaline rush from her near drowning and the fact that Connor had appeared from nowhere to save her were somehow entwined in her mounting orgasm. Gratitude, relief, love, simple carnal need and affirmation of life made a potent mix.

As Connor licked her inexorably, Aiyana felt herself rising higher and higher. It was much like her out of body experiences. She felt light as swan's down, floating on the air. Then came the intense explosion radiating out from her core and consuming her being like a fire in the forest. With a harsh cry, Aiyana bucked up, froze with her back arched in the air, then released. She fell back to the bed and to earth gasping and weeping.

Connor crawled up beside her and held her close while she shook and sobbed. The intensity of the day had finally caught up with her.

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He brushed her hair back from her forehead and kissed it, murmuring foreign things that sounded sweet and soothing. His language was much softer than hers, rounded and lazy rather than clipped and sharp.

Aiyana nestled in his arms and felt safe and secure despite the new, strange circumstances of her life. She became aware of Connor's erection pressing into her thigh and realized he was still waiting for a release of his own. Reaching down she caressed his rigid cock, shifted her body sideways to face him, and guided Connor to her wet, waiting slit.

He penetrated the slippery lips of her pussy and glided up her channel with ease. Connor let out a low groan as he entered her. His eyes closed and his lips parted in delight as her heat and moisture surrounded him.

Her willing body stretched to accommodate his girth. Aiyana felt full of him; the yawning ache between her legs was satisfied. She smiled at the great need for her exhibited in his soft groan. It was thrilling to be able to give so much pleasure. She squeezed her inner muscles around his cock, hugging it, and was rewarded with another quiet moan.

Connor began to move inside her, pulling out then pushing slowly back inside her depths.

Aiyana wrapped her arms around his back, her fingers gripping his shoulders. She lifted her hips to give a better angle for penetration, drawing her knees up toward her torso. As Connor withdrew and plunged into her again and again, she felt the head of his cock hitting a place deep within. It was almost painful, but utterly satisfying at the same time. She felt the remnants of her fragmented desire gather and build again at that spot.

Connor thrust faster and harder. His back grew slippery with sweat.

Aiyana's hands slid over the slick smoothness of his muscles all the way down to his buttocks. She gripped them, digging in her nails and pulling him ever deeper into her body.

Now Connor let out a hard grunt with each push. His brown hair fell across his forehead, flopping with the steady beat. His eyes were still closed, brows drawn together in a frown.

Aiyana whispered, "Look at me," and as if he understood the words, Connor's blue eyes opened and stared down at her. Usually the clear color of the daylight sky, his

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eyes were now midnight blue—dark with desire. His gaze locked with hers and neither blinked nor looked away as their desire rapidly mounted.

From the speed and intensity of Connor's thrusts, Aiyana knew he was close. She tilted her pelvis just a bit more, lifted her hips an inch higher to encourage his climax.

His cock hit the sweet spot inside her with such intensity that her desire broke like water through a dam. Once more Aiyana called out her jubilation as she came. Her body clenched his cock tightly and her arms and legs wrapped around him like she would never let go. Aiyana's eyes shut as waves of ecstasy flowed through her.

Almost immediately, she felt Connor come. With a long, protracted groan he thrust into her and his swollen cock pulsed, releasing wave after wave of seed. "Aiyana." Her name came from his lips on a gasp of air.

She smiled at the pleasure of hearing him say her name. It was like a caress on her skin. It made her feel safe and loved. She smoothed her hands up and down his spine while he shuddered against her, face buried in her shoulder.

For long moments they lay entwined on that big, soft bed, amidst the rumpled sheets, then Connor pulled out and rolled over to lie beside her. He gazed into her eyes once more and said something as he stroked the damp strands of hair from her face.

Aiyana smiled agreement at whatever he had said and vowed that the first thing she would do in this new life was learn to speak the language. It was frustrating not to understand anything, and the language of love only went so far.

Connor pulled her to him and they curled together, her back to his front. His arm was heavy across her body and he radiated such heat that Ariana was almost too warm for the first time that day.

Her long day finally caught up with her and she fell asleep almost immediately lulled by Connor's steady breathing.

When Aiyana woke, the room was nearly dark. A bright light from a manmade source shone in through the window, but the sky was dark. She was terribly thirsty and needed to pee.

Connor breathed slow and steady at her back. She rolled over and gazed at his beautiful face in the dark. Brushing the hair from his forehead, Aiyana kissed it then slipped out from under his arm and out of the tall bed. She padded across the soft covering on the floor to the small room where they had cleaned up. Connor had showed

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her how to use the toilet and she did so, watching with fascination when the water swirled her pee away.

Aiyana pushed the tap on the sink the way Connor had taught her and water gushed from the faucet. She plunged her hands under it, letting the water flow and watching it disappear down the hole in the sink. After a minute, she cupped some of the water in her hands and drank. She turned the water off then wandered through the dark house examining all the strange objects that Connor possessed. It was impossible to guess the uses for many of them. She was eager to have Connor show her what other marvels man had created—for Aiyana had realized that she was not really in another world but in another time far in the future.

There was yet another room off of the sitting area. Aiyana couldn't fathom how one person could have so much space for only himself. In this room was a tall tripod and on the three legs rested a rectangle covered by a cloth. Aiyana pulled the cloth away and her breath caught as she saw what lay underneath. It was a picture. The woman in the picture looked like the reflection Aiyana saw whenever she looked in still water. This person was a representation of her. Looking at the brushes and tubes of paint on the table next to the picture, Aiyana understood that Connor had made it.

Cautiously she stepped forward and touched the rough surface, tracing the lines of her own nude body, the angles and planes of her face. She had never seen anything so marvelous in her life.

Connor's voice from behind her made Aiyana jump and turn.

He entered the room and walked over to her, wrapping an arm around her waist and kissing her shoulder. He talked to her as he reached out to trace a finger along the line of her breast in the painting then stroke her actual breast, tweaking her nipple.

"This is wonderful," Aiyana told him. "You should make more pictures."

Connor said something else then he turned her to face him. "I," he indicated himself. "Love," he patted his chest in the rhythm a heart makes when it pounds with desire. "You," he gestured at Aiyana.

She understood his meaning clearly. It was not so very hard to communicate after all. She smiled and carefully repeated his words, "I. Love. You."

Eight months later...

"Connor, come eat now," Aiyana's impatient voice called for the third time.

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“Coming,” he answered, but didn’t put his brush down. Leaning toward the canvas he daubed black beside a dash of scarlet then stood back to assess the effect. He was mildly annoyed by Aiyana’s interruption. She knew that when he was really into painting, he didn’t like to be bothered with meal times.

He swished the brush in water and switched to a wider one for stippling the tree trunk in the painting. Dipping the brush, Connor began to dash flecks of greenish-white along a branch. He lost track of time, entranced in watching lichen form on the tree.

“Connor!” Aiyana’s sharp voice right in the doorway made him jerk.

“What?”

“Eat. Now,” she said menacingly. Her arms were folded above her swollen belly and she glared at him with snapping black eyes. Her hair was pulled to one side and braided. The braid lay over her left shoulder and breast and ended in a colorful hair tie.

“All right.” Connor sighed and plunged the brush into the water. He wiped his hands on his paint-smeared jeans then walked toward her. “Coming. Right. Now,” he mimicked. Lifting her up off the floor, he spun her around.

Aiyana’s scowl turned to a grudging smile. “Enough.”

He set her down and bent to kiss her neck. With an arm around her waist, he followed her to the kitchen. Connor breathed deeply the scent of the herbs that hung drying from the beams overhead. He glanced at the rows of bottles and jars containing homeopathic ointments and infusions, which lined the shelves on one side of the room. It was quite a home-based business Aiyana had going. She supplied her cures to the Natural Health Shoppe in town and now that the little store was about to open branches in two other locations, her sales would increase.

“Smells good,” Connor said, sitting down at his place at the table.

Aiyana spooned a thick, meaty stew into each of their bowls then sat down across from him. “You work hard today.” She paused between words. It was still a struggle for her to express exactly what she wanted to say and her phrases were stilted. Usually Connor got the gist of it.

“Yeah. This one’s really coming together for me right now. I think I’ll be finished soon.” *And thank God, I’ve got a buyer.* Connor hadn’t set foot back in court or in his law firm since the day he walked out of the MacDonald’s case. He’d been disbarred and couldn’t care less, although it was a little frightening to go from a stable income to haphazard sales of his paintings. He and Aiyana had moved out of the noisy city

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apartment to this old farmhouse upstate. She couldn't take the noise and bustle of the city and Connor no longer wanted it either. This place was a perfect spot for creativity to unfurl.

"You will paint room for the baby then."

"Yes. A meadow with flowers and a sunny sky like we talked about," he said.

"And deer."

"Deer too." Connor smiled and spooned up some of the hot, spicy stew. It was delicious as were all of Aiyana's meals.

"Maybe," she said thoughtfully, "Water instead. With fish."

"I can do that. An ocean, whatever you want, just let me know...and don't change your mind after I get started."

"No. I would not," she smiled back at him. "You paint fish and the river. It bring us together."

Connor shuddered. "No rivers. Ever. I had something more tropical in mind. Like in *Finding Nemo*."

It was one of Aiyana's favorite movies and she nodded in satisfaction. "Good."

"Good," he agreed.

The new husband and wife exchanged a warm look over their meal.

As he ate, Connor looked around at their home. This life, this marriage was worlds away from what he and Helen had shared. It was completely different but equally satisfying. Helen had been right, Aiyana was good for him. Her warm, earthy soul was the perfect complement to Connor's introverted fluid nature.

It had been a hard transition for Aiyana from her primitive world to this fast-moving one, but she had patiently learned the language and customs and the modern way of thinking about things. The past few months had been life changing for Connor too, but the fact that he and Aiyana sometimes loved and sometimes squabbled only brought home the fact that they now had a real life together.

Their dreams were over. Their reality had begun.

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About the Author

I have a number of books to be published in 2006 at Venus Press. My complete library of works is available at my web site: <http://bonniedee.com>

I've gotten some very good reviews on the books I've had published so far and hope to garner more in the future—as well as a host of new readers!