

Tempting Fate - Paranormal

DEMON WIND

by

Kay Wilde

© copyright August 2004, Kay Wilde
Cover art by Eliza Black, © copyright August 2004
New Concepts Publishing
5202 Humphreys Rd.
Lake Park, GA 31636
www.newconceptspublishing.com

Jayden Parrish stood in front of the refrigerator with the door open smoothing the glass containing more ice than lemonade across her face and neck. The condensation from the glass dripped onto her chest and ran into the cleavage between her breasts. Growing up in the south, she should have been used to the sultry summer days but the extreme humidity sapped her energy, leaving her lethargic. The air felt so thick it was an effort to draw it into her lungs. If she didn't feel honor bound to remain near the elderly grandmother who had raised her, Jayden would have moved to a less humid climate years ago. Her grandmother was the only person in her life who had always been there for her, the only person who had never let her down and Jayden loved her dearly. As she saw it, putting up with a few days of discomfort in the summer was a small price to pay for all the sacrifices her grandmother had made for her.

Hot and cranky, so at odds with her normally easygoing personality, the intrusive ringing of the telephone irritated the hell out of her. Reluctant to leave the coolest spot in her small beach cottage, she closed the refrigerator door and went to the kitchen wall phone.

"Hello," she answered.

"I'm just checking to make sure you're home dear," her grandmother explained. "The

weather is ripe for a Demon Wind tonight and I wanted to warn you to stay inside after dark."

Jayden rolled her eyes heavenward and prayed for patience. Her grandmother was the sweetest, most loving person in the world, and generous to a fault. She was also obsessively superstitious, a personality quirk which appeared to be growing worse with age.

"I'm fine, Grams," Jayden responded. "It's hotter outside than inside and I have no desire to go anywhere."

"That makes me feel better. You just stay inside and you'll be okay."

"That's what I plan to do. I found the new mystery novel I've been looking for, so I'm going to turn in early and read in bed."

"You promise? You're not just humoring an eccentric old lady?"

"I promise, Grams." Jayden insisted. The relieved sigh on the other end of the line was unmistakable. While she might have been humoring her grandmother to ease her mind, Jayden also meant what she said. At the moment, she didn't have the energy to do more than curl up with her book in the one air-conditioned room in the cottage.

"Okay. I'll let you go, but give me a call in the morning."

"As soon as I get up. Why don't I pick you up around twelve-thirty and maybe we'll stop for a late lunch after your doctor's appointment?"

"I'd like that," her grandmother answered, then added, "I love you, Jay."

"I love you too, Grams."

Demon Wind. Jayden's grandmother hit her with that one about the time she reached puberty, claiming many a Southern Belle lost their virtue on a night of the Demon Wind. The Demon Wind warning was the least annoying superstition in her grandmother's repertory. She only heard that one a couple of times each summer. Even as a young teen, it hadn't taken Jayden long to figure out the old superstition was nothing more than a scare tactic designed to keep young girls from sneaking out at night.

With a rueful shake of her head and an indulgent chuckle, Jayden finished the lemonade in her glass and returned to the refrigerator for a refill before heading toward her bedroom.

The ancient window air conditioner groaned and sputtered as it struggled in vain to cool the small room. While the room wasn't cool, it was decidedly less humid than the rest of the cottage. Slipping out of her sandals, Jayden placed her glass on the bedside table next to the novel Jayden hoped she would find so engrossing that she'd forget about the oppressive heat.

Preparing to take a quick shower to cool off before curling up with her book, Jayden unbuttoned her blouse. The few times she wasn't displeased with her less than ample breasts was when it was extremely hot and her adequate but firm breasts made wearing a bra unnecessary ... at least while she was at home.

The air conditioner began to vibrate with a metal against metal clatter. It sputtered, coughed, then died. "Please, not today," Jayden groaned. Every time this happened, she promised herself that she'd replace the damn thing, but the weather always changed or something more pressing developed to eat up the extra money. Not bothering to re-button her blouse, Jayden merely tied the front together under her breasts, slipped her feet into her sandals, and headed toward the front door.

Stepping onto the front porch, she felt as if she walked into a blast furnace. Not a leaf, a blade of grass, or even the air stirred. Even on the calmest days she could always count on a gentle ocean breeze ... not today. It was as if some evil force had pressed a pause button, stopping all movement on earth.

"Get a grip," Jayden scolded herself. There were times when, even though she didn't take them seriously, her grandmother's dire warnings unnerved her. And then there was the sweltering heat. It did weird things to people.

The waves continued to wash against the shore. All was as it should be ... except the heat and the damn air conditioner.

Jayden spared barely a glance toward the sun setting on the horizon before making her way to the rear of the cottage where the casing of the air conditioner stuck out from her bedroom window. She picked up the hammer she'd left on top of the unit for just this purpose and proceeded to add another dent to the metal, dents caused from similar repair jobs in the past. The air conditioner began to hum.

"Come on old boy, you can do it," she encouraged. The hum grew louder, it started to vibrate, then quit.

So much for being nice. "Start, you son-of-a-bitch," she demanded, then gave it another hard wallop. The hum returned, the vibration, then with a cough and reluctant shudder, the motor took hold. "Thank you, God," Jayden said. Nevertheless, she waited a few minutes to make sure it didn't stop again before replacing the hammer on top of the air conditioner in case she needed it again.

Returning to the porch, she paused for a moment as she shook the sand from her sandals. The sun was nearly gone. All that remained was a glowing red tip on the horizon. The sunset was another reason for Jayden to resent the oppressive heat wave. What Jayden considered to be a perfect evening consisted of a light dinner, a leisurely walk along the beach, and sitting on the front porch with a glass of wine to watch the sunset. For the past week it had been too damn hot and appeared to be getting worse each day.

At least the air conditioner had been considerate enough to throw its temper tantrum before she had her shower. Turning on the water in the tub, she then removed her blouse and tossed it inside the clothes hamper followed by her shorts and panties. Running her hand through the flow to make sure the water

temperature was just slightly warm, she pulled the lever to switch from tub to shower. Jayden stepped into the tub, pulling the shower curtain closed after her. Closing her eyes, she turned her face upward into the spray and raked her fingers through her hair to comb it back from her face, savoring the soothing sensation as the tepid water flowed down her overheated flesh.

Eyes still closed, she blindly reached for the shampoo bottle within the recessed shelf on the tub enclosure and proceeded to wash her hair, which was no easy task. Long and thick with a natural tendency to curl, the humidity made her hair even curlier and nearly impossible to manage. Sheer frustration had once compelled Jayden to cut her hair short and she'd ended up looking like a cross between Shirley Temple and Annie, with an uncontrollable riot of reddish-blond curls. At least with her hair long, the weight pulled some of the curl out and she could either braid it or pull it back in a clip.

Rinsing her hair just enough to keep shampoo from dripping down into her eyes, Jayden squeezed soft soap onto a ball of soft nylon net. Working up a foamy lather, she washed her face, neck, and arms, then moved down her chest to her breasts. The slightly coarse nylon fabric caused her nipples to tighten and grow harder with each pass. A soft moan escaped her lips as she moved the lathered nylon down her stomach and between her legs. Jayden's hand froze.

"Stupid," she scolded herself. "The goal is to cool off, not make yourself hotter." Enough said. Jayden made quick work of washing her body then stood under the spray until the last bit of soap was rinsed from her hair and body. She remained in the shower until the water became unbearably cold and her already sensitized nipples puckered to an almost painful hardness.

Returning to her bedroom wearing nothing but a skimpy towel wrapped around herself sarong fashion and another around her head, Jayden sifted through her lingerie drawer for something cool to put on. Even though her beach cottage was on private property and in a relatively secluded area, she didn't feel comfortable running around nude. Unearthing the white, barely-there fabric of the baby doll PJ's she'd bought on impulse more than a year ago, she hesitated only an instant before asking herself, "What are you saving them for?" It wasn't as if she had someone she wanted to entice. Living in an area where the average age of the locals was seventy, and the male to female ratio was three women to every man, she didn't see her dismal love life changing in the foreseeable future.

Taking the manicure scissors from the catch-all pottery bowl, Jayden cut the plastic loop that attached the brief bikini panties to the top, and then cut off the price tags which also remained attached to the garment. Allowing her towel to drop to the floor, she stepped into the panties made of sheer, see-through fabric which left nothing to the imagination. The top consisted of thin spaghetti straps, a stretchy lace bodice which molded her breasts as if it had been painted on, and more see through, chiffon like fabric which fell from just beneath her breasts to her hips.

"Jeez. What a waste," Jayden said as she caught a glimpse of her reflection in the mirror of her antique vanity dresser. She was almost tempted to change into something else, to save the baby dolls for when, or if, someone special came into her life. "Oh, what the hell." The baby dolls were comfortable, they were

cool, and there wasn't enough fabric to restrict what little air was circulating in the room.

Taking a seat on the padded bench in front of the vanity, Jayden towel-dried her hair, picked up her brush made of wide-set plastic bristles and proceeded to brush the tangles from her hair. Knowing the lesser of her just washed hair evils, was to leave it loose to air dry, she returned the brush to the vanity and reached for the beauty secret her grandmother swore by ... vitamin E oil. At seventy-five, Theresa Parrish's complexion was ageless and relatively line free without the aid of cosmetic surgery. While many of her grandmother's friends caked on the make-up in a vain attempt to look younger, Theresa used her vitamin E oil as a moisturizer, and little else, which gave her face a healthy glow that defied time. Not one to argue with success, Jayden moistened her fingertips with the oil and smoothed it onto her face and neck.

"Who would have thought something so simple and inexpensive," Jayden said as she screwed the cap back on the bottle. She knew that while her face looked greasy now, in no time at all her skin would absorb the oil, leaving her with the glow often attributed to the Parrish women.

After a quick trip to the kitchen for a fresh glass of lemonade, Jayden was finally ready to settle down with her book.

* * * *

Jayden didn't know what woke her, whether it was a sound, or maybe the lack thereof. She felt disoriented, awake but not awake, here yet not here. Struggling to get her mental bearings, she succeeded only marginally. The novel she'd been looking forward to reading was by no means up to the author's usual standards and had failed to hold her attention. She'd fallen asleep somewhere in the middle of chapter four. The light was still on. The hands of the clock on the bedside table were straight up, midnight on the dot ... and the air conditioner was no longer working.

The air was so heavy Jayden felt as if she were attempting to breathe through a thick quilt that covered her from head to toe. The sensation of desperation was overwhelming. She needed air. She had to get outside.

Using both arms, she pushed herself to a sitting position and swung her legs over the side of the bed. Her legs were weak, slow to perform the commands from her brain. It took two attempts before Jayden was able to stand.

She covered the short distance between her bedroom to the front door in a dreamlike daze. Once she was outside, she had to hold onto the porch railing for support as she took slow, deep breaths in an attempt to

pull reviving oxygen into her lungs. Despite the lateness of the hour, it was still unbearably hot and the humidity extremely high without the slightest breeze stirring.

The filmy fabric of her baby doll pajamas was plastered to perspiration coating her body as she stepped from the porch onto the hot sand. The full moon lighting her way, Jayden walked to the water's edge until the waves washed over her bare feet and ankles, then she turned and began walking down the beach.

In some distant, semi-aware part of her mind, Jayden registered the fact that something was terribly wrong. She did not walk the beach in the middle of the night, certainly not alone, and most defiantly dressed or rather undressed as she was. Jayden stopped in her tracks, preparing to turn around and return to the cottage. And then she felt it ... the barest hint of a gentle cooling breeze. She took a step back and it was gone. She took one step forward and it was there again. One more step and Jayden was lost. The cool wind wrapped around her like a lover's caress cooling her overheated flesh while at the same time setting her blood on fire.

He walked from the moonlit surf like the god Poseidon. At first she thought he was nude, then she realized that he was wearing brief, flesh-colored, swim trunks.

Her body refused to obey her brain's command that she turn and run back to the cottage. Instead, she stood there waiting ... for him.

Just as she'd felt when she first woke up, Jayden was overcome with the sensation of being disconnected. She was there, yet not there.

Standing before her, bathed in the glow from the full moon, Jayden thought no mortal man could possibly be so irresistibly compelling, so beautiful, yet his features were strong, finely etched for the most erotic effect. Once again, she likened him to the god Poseidon. His deeply tanned body actually resembled the bronze sculpture she'd once seen of the mythical god. The well-defined muscles of his nearly nude, powerful physique could easily have been sculpted by the loving hands of a sexually frustrated female artist intent upon creating her fantasy lover.

He opened his arms for her. Jayden walked into them without hesitation. He held her close for a moment as if savoring his closeness to someone long lost and deeply cherished. Her cheek and ear resting against the hard contours of his chest, she could hear his erratic heartbeats echoing the tempo of her own.

With a reluctant sigh he relaxed his hold on her and took a marginal step back, a small distance which gave his intensely blue eyes free reign to explore all the delicate curves of Jayden's petite body. His hungry gaze felt like the blue flame from a torch, setting her flesh on fire. Barely recognizing her own voice, Jayden was shocked by the impassioned whimper that escaped her parted lips ... a sound which acted as a catalyst to banish all inhibition and uncertainty.

Sliding one hand to her hip and the other to the small of her back, he once again molded her to him,

making her befuddled thoughts forget where he ended and she began. Lowering his head, he touched his lips to hers, not tentative as she expected, but with the purposeful expertise of a man confident of the response he'd receive. Jayden didn't disappoint him.

Accepting that her body refused to respond to the dictates of her mind, Jayden gave up and relinquished what little control she had left. In truth, she'd been lost the moment he walked from the surf toward her. She could smell the intoxicating scent of the sea on his flesh, taste the salt on his lips, and feel the heat and hardness of his body. And dear God, was he ever hard. The rigid length of the erection branding itself into her abdomen was unmistakable.

The damnable cool wind continued to inflict a strange, almost electrical sensation against her flesh, like she was holding onto a shorted-out light switch and was unable to let go. Was it the wind or her reaction to the man whose lips continued to demand, then tease, whose teeth nipped her lower lip then soothed with the tip of his tongue? Did it matter? Her body felt as if she were coming apart. Her flesh tingled, every muscle in her body had grown taut, her blood flowed hot and furious through her veins, and every sensation flowed unerringly downward, pooling into a nearly unbearable ache between her legs.

This time when he gently nipped at her lower lip she was ready for him. When his tongue snaked out to soothe the spot, she closed her lips on his tongue and gently sucked.

He went rigid and groaned. Jayden didn't know whether he was surprised or pleased. She soon found out. He forced his tongue more deeply into her mouth to mate with hers and when he withdrew, like lovers holding hands, her tongue followed where his led. His lips clamped down and he began to suck gently, just as she'd done with his, creating a corresponding tugging sensation between her legs.

The hand on her hip moved up her side and around until his fingers closed around her breast. He gently massaged the firm mound before he latched onto her hard nipple. He rolled it between his fingers then tugged until pleasure became near unbearable. The hand at the small of her back slid to her waist, his strong forearm supporting her as he leaned forward, an act which made her lean back and forced her to wrap her arms around his neck for balance. Jayden was unable to resist a moan of protest as his lips left hers to kiss along her jaw line, down the side of her neck, and as he'd done with her lips, he kissed, nipped, then soothed with his tongue, continuing down her chest until....

When his hand moved to the other lace-covered breast to make room for his hot wet lips, Jayden's legs gave out. Instead of holding her up, he followed her down onto the wet sand. The lovers failed to notice the tide as it washed in, reaching almost to their knees. Not missing a beat, he showed no favoritism, devoting equal time to each breast, suckling one, massaging and toying with the nipple on the other. The cool wind blowing against the dampened fabric only served to heighten her arousal. Using his free hand, he smoothed one strap over her shoulder and down her arm, then the other, then he tugged the lace downward to expose her breasts. His cool hand closed on one breast and his hot mouth on the other in the same instant. He caught her nipple between his teeth and teased it with the tip of his tongue.

The gentle orgasm hit Jayden without warning. With a shocked gasp, her body tensed and trembled with a semi-release which was more of a tease, a mere appetizer that left her more in need than before.

Easing his body over hers, he rose to his knees and leaned forward to slide his hands up her legs until his fingers gripped the barely there fabric of her bikini panties at her hips. He paused. His eyes met hers, giving Jayden a chance to protest.

Jayden's mind warned, "This is insanity. You have to stop it now." Her eyes held his and her lips remained closed as her hips rose to assist him.

He slowly pulled her panties over her hips, down her legs and off before he rose to his feet. Hooking his thumbs into the waist band of his swim trunks, he pushed them down, stepped free and kicked them aside. Standing over her like the powerful, mythical god she'd likened him to, his erection imposing to the point of being frightening, he once again gave her the opportunity to say no.

Instead, her arms reached out for him.

Dropping to his knees, he ran his hands up the inside of her calves to her knees, pushing them further apart to open her more fully to him. His hands continued their upward slide over her trembling thighs until his thumbs came to rest upon her wet, passion swollen folds. Using his thumbs to open her, he eased one finger, then two inside her. Without being conscious of doing so, Jayden's hips rose to meet him, forcing his probing fingers deeper inside.

Dear Lord, were those desperate moans actually coming from her? She couldn't breathe.

Her heart was beating so fast she feared it would explode within her chest.

Apparently satisfied that she was sufficiently prepared to receive him, his body covered hers. Supporting his weight on his forearms, the tip of his erection barely touching her, he looked down into her eyes.

Actions speaking louder than words, Jayden ran her hands up his chest and under his arms to grip his muscular shoulders from behind, then wrapped her legs around his hips.

Up to this point, he'd been gentle, seeming to know exactly what she needed to raise her desire to a level of desperation. With her final act of surrender, the rigid control he'd had on his own needs seemed to snap. With one powerful lunge, he buried himself inside her.

Jayden didn't want slow and easy, she needed more. He didn't disappoint her. With the tide flowing in to wash over them, their lovemaking became something primal. His thrusts came hard, deep, and fast. Even though her petite body had difficulty adjusting to his size, she met him thrust for thrust, urging him on for more.

His tightly clenched jaw and the quivering muscles in his biceps and shoulders betraying the fact that he was struggling to hold back, to wait for her, he gave her what she needed to push her over the top. With one fierce thrust that went so deep it touched Jayden's soul, her impending orgasm rolled over her in explosive waves as her body strained and shook refusing to let go ... not until he joined her. And then he was there. She was unaware that her fingernails sunk into the flesh of his back as she held him tight and they rode out the mind shattering tidal wave of sensation together.

* * * *

Wanting to savor the afterglow of the most incredibly erotic dream she'd ever experienced, Jayden struggled to ignore the persistent ringing, breathing a sigh of relief when it stopped. Only to start again almost immediately. Without opening her eyes, her left hand reached out and fumbled on the top of her bedside table for the telephone. Carrying the receiver to her ear, she mumbled, "Hello."

"Jay? Is everything all right?"

"Everything is fine, Grams. Why wouldn't it be?" she answered, still not fully awake.

"Well, dear, you are always so punctual with your morning calls that I use you as my alarm clock. I overslept. I was getting worried and was about to walk down to check on you but decided to call first."

"What time is it?"

"It's going on eleven o'clock. What's going on, Jayden? You sound strange."

Eleven o'clock? Good Lord. Always and early riser, she couldn't remember ever sleeping this late, not even when she was ill. And, her grandmother never called her Jayden unless she was upset or worried. Jayden's sleep-sluggish thoughts squirreled around in her brain for a reasonable explanation. She could hardly tell her elderly grandmother that she'd been dreaming about making wild, passionate love with a total stranger on the beach last night and didn't want to wake up. So she spouted the first thing that popped into her mind.

"I'm sorry, Grams. I started reading last night...."

"And you read all night long until you finished the book," Theresa Parrish supplied.

"Yeah, I did," Jayden lied, feeling guilty because she felt compelled to do so.

"You rarely take a day just for yourself, honey, and you don't have any classes scheduled for today. Why don't you just take it easy today. You can nap, putter around the cottage, or just be lazy," Theresa suggested. "I can have Helen drive me to the doctor, or better yet, reschedule."

"Absolutely not," Jayden insisted, now fully awake. "It won't take me long to get ready. I'll pick you up, take you to the doctor, and we'll have lunch just like we planned."

"My appointment isn't that important, dear. It can wait. Take the day for yourself."

"No, Grams, it can't wait. You're going if I have to pick you up and carry you."

Recognizing her granddaughter's tone of voice as the one she used when she had no intention of backing down, Theresa accepted that she wasn't going to get out of the dreaded appointment. "Okay, if you insist," she gave in with a martyred sigh.

"I'll swing by and pick you up around twelve-thirty."

"I'll be ready."

"Okay, time to get your butt in gear," she told herself after she replaced the receiver on its cradle. With a yawn and a languid stretch, Jayden prepared to face the day. "What the hell?" she muttered, feeling a gritty substance beneath her arm. When the realization dawned that there was sand in her bed, she bolted upright.

There was sand in her bed! Feeling an itching sensation on her head, she reached up hesitantly, afraid of what she'd find. "This isn't possible," she groaned. There was sand in her hair. Her hands began to tremble. Her heart began to race, and she was sure she was going to be sick.

"No, dammit. This isn't real," Jayden insisted. She'd fallen asleep in her bed and she woke up in that same bed. "It was just a dream." An incredibly erotic dream, but it was still just a dream. Even as her psyche rebelled against the evidence to the contrary, some elemental part of Jayden knew that what happened to her last night had been no dream.

Mythology was riddled with stories about gods who took human form and seduced mortal women. Had Gram's dire warnings about the Demon Wind been based on fact? Had she actually had sex with the god Poseidon?

"No, no, no. This is total insanity," Jayden told herself firmly. She still had on the baby doll pajamas she'd put on before going to bed. At least.... It took a minute before she found the courage to check. And when she did, she bolted from the bed, ran to the bathroom and dropped to her knees in front of the commode. The bikini panties that went with her baby dolls were gone. Several minutes later, her hands

still trembled as she splashed cold water on her face.

"Oh my God, Grams." What ever happened, she'd figure it out later, when she had time to think. For now, she had to pull herself together for her grandmother's sake. She'd nearly lost her less than a year ago to a heart attack and Jayden couldn't risk upsetting her because of some insane aberration.

* * * *

"Fasten your seat belt, Grams," Jayden instructed as soon as her grandmother closed the car door, then cringed at the tone of her own voice. One of the things Jayden consciously tried not to do, was talk to her grandmother as if she were a child, like she heard so many people do with their elderly relatives. It was hurtful, demeaning, and damaging to their pride.

Theresa gave a none-too-gentle jerk on the shoulder strap, grumbling under her breath as she fumbled in her attempt to connect the male and female sections. "I hate these damn things. Should be our choice whether or not to wear them. Just one more right the government has taken away from us. Makes me feel like a damn child being strapped into a stroller."

"Boy, aren't we a pair today," Jayden said then forced a self-deprecating laugh which held no humor past her lips. Reaching over, she gave her grandmother's slightly arthritic hand a gentle squeeze. "I'm sorry I sounded so cranky, Grams," she apologized, and once again was forced to make up a plausible excuse. "Every time I read all night, I swear I won't do it again. I always feel like crap the next day. I didn't mean to take it out on you."

"And I don't want to go to the doctor and I'm taking it out on you. Guess that makes us even, huh?"

"Sounds to me like we're two ladies who need a fun day on the town. Why don't we make a day of it? We haven't done that in a while," Jayden suggested, reluctant to return to the cottage where she's be forced to think, forced to remember. If anyone could make her forget for a while, it was her grandmother who, despite her age, had a sharp mind and possessed a quick wit. She could also be hilariously funny and was an outrageous flirt.

"Want to make a wager on who gets the most phone numbers?" Theresa asked.

"Usual forfeit? Loser treats the winner to dinner and a movie?"

"Considering that we're starting out with a lousy day, why not up the stakes?"

"To?" Jayden asked.

"Winner gets a "You owe me one" to be collected whenever they want a favor."

It was a sucker bet, Jayden being the sucker. Considering where they lived, and the average age of the locals, her grandmother always won. "Sure, why not," she agreed. "One of these days I might just surprise both of us and win." She'd had sex with a god. Anything was possible.

As she pulled from the drive onto the road, Jayden asked, "Why are you so reluctant to see the doctor, Grams? Is something wrong? Something you're not telling me?"

"I just don't understand how Paul could up and abandon his patients. He has to know how much we rely on him, how much we trust him. It isn't right," Theresa complained.

"It isn't like you to be unfair. You know Dr. Grant wanted to retire years ago, but he stayed on until he found just the right person to take over his practice. Someone who he felt would be right for his practice and for his patients," Jayden reminded her.

The older her grandmother got, the more she resisted change. And since her heart attack, she'd been forced to make so many. Jayden could understand that under those circumstances, the prospect of changing from a doctor you know and trust to an unknown had to be unsettling.

"That doesn't mean I have to like it. Maureen Nelson phoned yesterday. Said she'd met the new doctor. She went on and on about how good looking he is."

"And that's a bad thing?" Jayden asked.

"It's embarrassing. I'm old, Jay, I'm not dead. How would you feel if you were stuck in this wrinkled, sagging body, sitting on an examining table wearing nothing but a skimpy, hospital gown with no back, and some gorgeous young stud is about to examine you?"

"Oh Grams," Jayden said, realizing that her grandmother was in fact more embarrassed than afraid. "You are, and will always be, the most beautiful woman I know. Think about all your friends who are your age. You look a good ten to fifteen years younger than they do."

"I do, don't I?"

"Yeah, you do. But, I'll tell you what, if you see this new doctor and you still feel uncomfortable, you don't have see him again. We'll ask Dr. Grant to recommend someone else. Maybe even a female doctor. Agreed?"

"Agreed," Theresa said with a relieved sigh. As she settled back in her seat, she appeared to relax for the first time since Jayden picked her up. "You're a good granddaughter, Jay."

* * * *

Unlike many doctor's offices, Dr. Paul Grant's office was on the first floor of a beautifully restored Victorian. His longtime nurse, Gayle Perkins, lived on the second level which had been converted to an apartment. The waiting room was a comfortable, authentically furnished parlor.

While waiting for her grandmother, Jayden leafed through every magazine in the rack, unable to focus on anything. She now found herself pacing. Now was not a time for staying in one place for too long. She wanted to take another shower. Jayden needed to wash her hair, which she hadn't had time to do this morning, settling instead for a vigorous brushing to get out the sand. But she didn't want to go home either. As long as she was doing ordinary things, she could almost convince herself that last night had in fact been nothing more than a dream. She....

"Jayden, your grandmother asked me to send you back," the doctor's nurse informed her from the parlor doorway.

"Is she okay?"

"If the laughter I heard coming from the examining room is an indication, I'd say she was just fine," Gayle responded with a grin. "She just wants you to meet her new doctor."

* * * *

"Is that you, Jay?" Theresa asked from within the curtained dressing area.

"Yeah, Grams. How did it go?"

"I worried myself silly over nothing. What a bedside manner. The young man had me laughing so hard I forgot what I was nervous about. He...."

The door opened and her grandmother's new doctor walked in. He froze mid-stride, a startled expression on his undeniably handsome features. Jayden's mouth opened but no sound came out.

At least now she knew that she's made love with a very mortal, human male, and not some supernatural entity. That should have made her feel better. It didn't. And for that matter, who was she kidding? Made love? She didn't even know the man for heaven's sake. What they'd had was sex, pure and simple. Hot, uninhibited, incredible sex.

Fitting right in with the relaxed, casual atmosphere established by Dr. Grant, he wore jeans and a pale blue T-shirt. Only the stethoscope draped around his neck identified him as the doctor. With his longish, sun streaked brown hair curling slightly at his neckline and his to-die-for body, Jayden thought he looked more like a male model, or a Greek god, than a doctor. The visual image of him as she'd first seen him last night flashed through Jayden's mind forcing her to grip the back of a chair for support.

Tyce Cantrell spent the morning functioning on automation, trying unsuccessfully to put the bizarre incident on the beach last night and his inexcusable behavior, out of his mind. Not wanting to find himself trapped in uncomfortable situations, he had perfected the art of deflecting the matchmaking attempts of his patients. Theresa Parrish had skillfully out-maneuvered him into meeting her granddaughter before he knew what hit him, a granddaughter who was a teacher of computer science at the local high school. He'd considered having Gayle go in claiming an emergency to get him out of it, but he'd been so charmed by the old gal he couldn't bring himself to disappoint her. So, he'd walked into examining room two expecting to meet the stereotypical computer nerd. The last thing he expected was the find the very woman he'd made love to the night before, looking even more gorgeous than her remembered. That she was just as shocked to see him was unmistakable. He hadn't missed her gripping the chair for support, nor the blood appearing to drain from her face.

Theresa chose just that instant to step from the dressing cubicle. "There you are, Tyce. Isn't she as beautiful as I said she was?"

What could he say? He answered the doting grandmother with complete honesty. "That she is, Mrs. Parrish." His eyes met Jayden's. She appeared almost shell shocked. Every instinct he possessed urged Tyce to go to her, to reassure her in some way. But until he had a chance to talk to her privately, he didn't want to arouse Theresa's curiosity. His examination revealed a blood pressure that was higher than he liked and he didn't want to risk upsetting his patient.

The soothing, velvety quality of his voice made Jayden's knees go weak, ideal for a doctor ... or lover. She suddenly realized that throughout their strange encounter on the beach last night, not a single word had been spoken.

"Jay, this is Tyce Cantrell, my new doctor. And Tyce, I'd like you to meet my granddaughter, Jayden." Theresa made the introductions and Jayden immediately recognized the undercurrent of excitement in her voice ... and the matchmaking gleam in her eyes.

"It's a bit late for matchmaking, Grams," she thought to herself. As common courtesy demanded, in response to her grandmother's introduction she said instead, "Doctor Cantrell."

Taking his cue from her, "Miss Parrish," Tyce responded with an acknowledging inclination of his head in Jayden's direction.

"Such polite formality," Theresa scoffed. "We're neighbors for heaven's sake." Then to Jayden, she explained, "Tyce is leasing the Clarkson beach house. We should have him to the house for dinner one night next week to welcome him to the neighborhood."

"This is a nightmare," Jayden nearly groaned aloud. That's it. It was a nightmare. She was still home in her own bed sound asleep. She'd wake up and discover that it had all been a dream after all.

"What do you think, Jay? Jay?" her grandmother repeated. "Good Lord, Jayden, you've gone as white as the tissue paper on the examining table."

"I'm fine, Grams," Jayden insisted.

"You are not fine. I knew you weren't feeling well when you slept so late." Turning toward the doctor, Theresa explained, "My granddaughter has lived with me since she was six years old, and in all those years I have never known her to sleep as late as she slept today. I know my granddaughter, and I'm telling you, something is wrong. Since we're already here, I'd appreciate it if you'd check her over."

"He'll do no such thing." Jayden's rejection was too quick and far too adamant, resulting in a surprised gasp from her grandmother and a raised eyebrow from the good doctor.

Jayden struggled for some semblance of control. The last thing she'd wanted to do was upset her grandmother, and had succeeded in doing just that. Once again in the space of a few short hours, she was forced to lie to explain away her uncharacteristic behavior. "I have a simple, ordinary headache, Grams. You know I have no appetite when it gets too hot. I had next to nothing to eat yesterday, then I slept so late that I didn't have time before I picked you up. I'll feel much better after we have lunch."

Considering that the good doctor was responsible for her current dilemma, Jayden prayed he would back her up and help her get out of here with what remained of her dignity intact. "We've already taken up enough of Dr. Cantrell's time. I'm sure he has other patients waiting."

Tyce couldn't deny that the mere suggestion that he examine Jayden sent his thoughts into areas which had nothing to do with the Hippocratic Oath. "Actually, I do have...."

There were a couple of quick raps on the door before it opened slightly and Gayle stuck her head inside. "Claude Peters is in examining room three when you're ready, Doctor."

* * * *

Sitting back in the Adirondack style lounge on her front porch to watch the sunset was a normal, routine experience and right now Jayden desperately needed, normal and ordinary. The only good point in an absolutely hellish day was that the heat wave had finally broken, resulting in a beautiful evening with a breathtaking sunset and a refreshing ocean breeze. She never ceased to be amazed that every sunset was different. This evening, the color palette was predominately purple and yellow, the vibrant and muted shades of each merging and blending to create different colors. Colors which reminded her of a bruise in the process of healing. A real indication of her current state of mind. At the moment, that's exactly how she felt, bruised and confused.

Thankfully, her grandmother had begged off on their day out claiming to be too tired. Jayden knew better. Knowing Jayden would have continued with their day as planned no matter how lousy she felt, the crafty old gal used reverse psychology to get her granddaughter to go home and get some rest. She'd spent most of the day trying to figure out what had truly happened last night and was no closer to an answer than when she woke up this morning to find sand in her bed. Her thoughts and her emotions were in chaos. Nothing made sense. The only theory that made sense and stubbornly refused to be dismissed was the Demon Wind. But that was just a silly old superstition. Or was it?

"We need to talk."

Startled by the sound of Tyce's voice, Jayden jumped, nearly knocking over her glass of wine and spilling the contents into her lap. She'd been so lost in her thoughts, she hadn't been aware anyone was there until he spoke. "And it just keeps getting worse and worse. Lord, will this day never end?" she thought to herself.

Wearing jeans which could have been deliberately shrunk to mold his legs and an unbuttoned Chambray shirt with the sleeves cut out, he looked sinfully sexy. No mortal man had the right to look that good, and most definitely no doctor. For the first time she fully understood her grandmother's apprehension and embarrassment at the prospect of being examined by a handsome doctor. Jayden found the very thought of having her annual pap smear done by someone who looked like Dr. Tyce Cantrell appalling.

"Are you okay?" Tyce asked when she failed to respond. He was standing at the bottom of the steps, his hand on the railing. She had such a ready-to-bolt air about her, that he was reluctant to get any closer. Once again the term shell-shocked came to mind, a definite indication that she appeared to be as shaken as he was by their encounter on the beach last night.

"Yes, of course I'm okay," Jayden answered, then deciding to be honest recanted. "Actually, if you want the truth, no, Dr. Cantrell, I am not okay. Last night I went to bed and fell asleep reading, had what I thought was an incredibly erotic dream, and woke up with sand in my bed. Followed by a day from hell where I've jumped back and forth from wanting to scream or laugh hysterically, all the while attempting to put on the good granddaughter face and pretending that everything is just hunky-dory." She'd just opened her mouth and everything that had been building up all day came rolling out. Jeez, talk about venting. It was his fault after all ... well, at least partially.

Throughout her impassioned outburst, Tyce had been unable to take his eyes off her animated features. She was so incredibly adorable. He half expected her to come out of her chair and physically rip into him for the part he'd played in the encounter that he was at a loss to explain or defend. There was also no denying that she had summed up exactly what he'd been feeling all day as well. "Feel better?" he asked.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I do." And she did. Until she'd let off a little emotional steam, Jayden had felt as if she were about to explode with the pent-up emotion that, for her grandmother's sake, she'd been unable to express. She'd never felt so confused or alone in her life. "Dr. Cantrell, I..."

"Your grandmother was right about one thing, under the circumstances, I think polite formality is a bit redundant. My name is Tyce."

"Just say it and get it over with," her conscience demanded. Sitting up in her chair, she met his gaze before speaking. "Look, Dr. ... Tyce," she amended. "I don't even want imagine what you must think of me. I can't explain what happened last night, but I assure you, I do not make love to total strangers on the beach in the middle of the night."

It wasn't so much what she said as the way she said it that got to Tyce. There was no apology, no self reproach in her voice, just a statement of the events as she saw it. Shaken as she clearly was, by what happened between them, Jayden still had spunk. He liked that. "I've been too caught up in being my own judge, jury, and executioner, to make snap judgments about you," Tyce assured her. "I don't make love to total strangers either. From the time I went to bed last night to study patient files, I'd have to say my night and today pretty much parallels yours."

"You woke up with sand in your bed too?"

"Among other things." He reached into his pocket and pulled something out. "I believe these belong to you," he said, holding out the missing bottoms of her baby dolls.

Jayden sprang to her feet and snatched the next-to-nothing garment from his hand. "You're right, we do need to talk." The old cliché about misery loving company couldn't apply more. If she were totally honest, she was frightened and didn't want to deal with it alone. As an apparent victim of the same ... dream, phenomenon, joint psychosis, or what ever it was, Tyce was the only person she could talk to about the incident. "Can I get you something to drink, glass of wine, cold beer, lemonade?"

"A beer sounds good. Don't bother with a glass."

When Jayden returned with his beer, Tyce was sitting in the chair next to the one she'd vacated, his bare feet propped on the porch railing. Handing him the unopened can, she returned to her seat. She heard the metallic snap as he opened the beer. Okay, now what? They needed to talk, but where to start?

After taking a healthy drink from the can, Tyce asked, "Okay, so what the hell is going on? What happened last night?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. How did you feel?"

He had the audacity to chuckle.

"That's not what I meant," Jayden insisted, irrationally pleased by his response. "During our ... well, you know ... I can't say that I thought I was dreaming at the time, it was more like only part of me was there and the other part was a helpless bystander."

"Exactly," Tyce agreed. "I was aware of everything that happened. I certainly felt everything. It was like my body and my mind were somehow disconnected."

"Same here." Jayden took a sip of wine, not wanting to think about how comfortable she felt sitting here with Tyce, who despite last night was still a virtual stranger. If only they had met under less bizarre circumstances.

"So now we know that we were both under the influence of the same thing. Now all we have to do is figure out exactly what that was," Tyce said.

"I have one possibility, but it's really farfetched," Jayden said hesitantly.

"At this point, short of alien abduction, I'd believe about anything. I don't like unanswered questions."

"Before I say anything, I have a question," Jayden began. "Last night, before you saw me, before we.... What exactly do you remember?"

Tyce was quiet for a moment, trying to reconstruct last night in his mind. "I remember feeling so hot I found it hard to breathe, which didn't make sense because my house has central air and it was comfortably cool inside. I just knew that I had to get outside to get some air. It was hotter outside than inside but instead of going back to bed, I found myself walking down the beach."

"Ditto, only my clunker of a window air conditioner bit the dust prior to my waking up. At any point, did you feel a cool wind?"

The incredible intensity of their lovemaking was so predominant in his mind that other details had faded, like the details of a dream that diminish as time passes. "It was so hot and muggy that not even the air moved. I remember thinking that the tide still rolled in so there should be a breeze from the ocean. Only there wasn't."

"That shoots down my only theory," Jayden said, not sure whether she was disappointed or not. The Demon Wind was a bizarre prospect but at least it was better than no prospect at all.

"Wait a minute," Tyce said as the incident became clearer in his mind. "There was a wind. I walked into it and I remember thinking how incredibly cool it felt. It also had a strange effect on me. It was almost...."

"Erotic?" Jayden supplied.

"Oh yeah," Tyce agreed, feeling the hair on his arms raise and a responding twitch in his groin as he remembered the sensation. "That was just before everything went haywire."

Figuring it best to start at the beginning, Jayden explained. "You met my grandmother. She is the most wonderful person I've ever known. She's also obsessively superstitious."

"Paul Grant filled me in on her superstition quirk before I took over. She was one of his favorite patients," Tyce said, then confessed with a chuckle, "She's such a charmer that she had me twisted around her little finger within the first five minutes."

"She has that effect on people." Loyalty wouldn't permit Jayden to add that her grandmother was quite aware of that fact and she didn't hesitate to use it to her advantage. "What would you say if I told you that yesterday evening, my grandmother phoned me and warned me to stay inside after dark, because it was a good night for ... a Demon Wind. I know it's just a silly superstition. It sounds crazy. But I've spent the entire day trying to figure out what happened last night and that is the only explanation I can come up with."

"Can you be a little more specific about this Demon Wind?"

"Not much I'm afraid. Grams says that the Demon Wind appears on a hot, sultry night during a full moon. She claims that many a Southern belle has lost her virtue and many children were conceived on a night of the Demon Wind."

She'd actually started to look relaxed for the first time since Tyce saw her in his office today, that is, until she uttered the last sentence. The shell-shocked expression was back. It also answered the question he'd been trying to get up the nerve to ask.

"Oh, dear Lord. I just realized that you didn't ... we didn't...."

Okay, more uncharacteristic behavior on his part. The possibility that Jayden could have conceived his child last night should upset him. With any other woman he'd dated it would have. Strangely with Jayden, the prospect didn't upset him in the least, quite the opposite in fact. She was basically a stranger to him, yet she wasn't at all.

Tyce reached over, took Jayden's hand in his and gave it a gentle squeeze. "I'm a doctor, Jay, and I do not have indiscriminate, unprotected sex. What happened last night was somehow out of our control. If there are consequences, we'll deal, together. Okay?"

So shaken by the possibility she hadn't even considered, Jayden could only nod her head in response. Doing a rapid calculation in her head, she was marginally relieved that the possibility was a small one. That was one answer at least that she'd have in a matter of days.

"Back to this Demon Wind superstition," Tyce quickly inserted to change the subject. "What you've told me is all you know?"

"Fraid so," she answered once the paralysis left her vocal chords. "Not wanting to encourage her, I never asked my grandmother for details."

"You're right about it being a farfetched theory, but it's better than anything I've been able to come up with." Tyce brought the beer can to his lips, watching Jayden over the rim. She was sitting there staring into her nearly full glass of wine like it was a crystal ball which might reveal the answers if she looked deep enough. "So, we do some research," he suggested. "Most legends and superstitions have an origination point, based on some story or incident. What about your grandmother? Could she give you more information?"

"I can't bring her into this," Jayden insisted. "She's too shrewd by far and she knows me too well. She'd know something is wrong and worry herself sick. Nothing is worth that."

"You love her a lot, don't you?" Tyce said more as a statement than a question. Watching the interaction between the two women in his office, the bond between them had been unmistakable.

"Yeah, I do."

"So, where do we go from here?"

What Jayden wanted to say was, "Where we go from here is that you put your arms around me and hold me," which would make her appear weak. She wasn't a weak person and she didn't like feeling that she was. "To tell you the truth, I'm at the point where I can barely string two coherent thoughts together, much less come up with a rational plan to research this thing."

As reluctant as Tyce was to leave her, he didn't miss the weariness in the voice. "I know the feeling," he said, then downed the rest of his beer. "Why don't we sleep on it and we'll talk tomorrow?" Tyce put his empty beer can on the table between their chairs and rose to his feet. Jayden followed suit.

Tyce reached into his shirt pocket, pulled out his business card and handed it to Jayden. "The front has the office number and the service number. I wrote my home and cell phone number on the back. If you need me or just feel the need to talk, call me, anytime, night or day."

"Thank you," she said with a shuddering sigh that went right to Tyce's heart.

Without giving his actions conscious thought, he pulled Jayden into his arms, realizing for the first time that she was trembling. "It will be okay. We'll figure it out."

"I'm trying to handle this thing. But I'm struggling here," Jayden confessed, admitting the weakness she hadn't wanted him to see. Like everything else she couldn't explain, Jayden somehow knew it wasn't necessary to hide the real Jayden from Tyce Cantrell. From the time her father sent her to live with her grandmother after her mother's death, fearing another rejection, she'd learned to hide her true feelings from others. Even though her grandmother had never been anything less than loving and accepting, the fear of abandonment instilled in one so young had grown roots that went too deep to destroy entirely. In every relationship Jayden ever had, those old insecurities were always there, just beneath the surface, causing her to walk away before it got too serious, before she cared too much.

Yet standing here in the light of the full moon, within the shelter of Tyce's arms, for the first time in her life, Jayden wasn't afraid; for the first time, she knew she was where she belonged.

"What happened between the time we were together on the beach and when we woke up in our beds? There is a large amount of time not accounted for," she said, her cheek resting against his chest, fighting the urge to turn her head slightly so he would feel the warmth of her lips against his flesh as she spoke.

"From the accounts I read about alien abductions, the so called victims mention unaccounted for time."

Unwilling to leave the comforting shelter of his arms, Jayden leaned back slightly and looked up at him. "If that was a joke, it wasn't funny."

"I know. Less than admirable habit of mine. I make bad jokes when I'm out of my depths," Tyce admitted. "When things get to you, just remember that I'm going through the same thing. You are not in this alone."

"I know. I'm glad you came over, Tyce."

"Me too. Are you going to be able to sleep?"

"Yeah, I think so."

It hadn't been necessary for Jayden to turn her lips to Tyce's chest for him to be affected by holding her. Considering it prudent to make his exit before he embarrassed himself and shocked her by the soon to be unmistakable evidence of the impact she had on his libido, he released her and stepped back. "I'll talk to you tomorrow," he told her before he turned and walked down the porch steps.

Jayden remained on the porch, watching Tyce walk down the beach in the direction of his house. Despite the circumstances of their meeting, was there a chance something good could develop as a result?

* * * *

Jayden stared at her computer monitor shaking her head in frustration. The headache she claimed to have yesterday was now a reality. She gently rubbed at her temples with the tips of her fingers. She'd slept like a baby and was up at the crack of dawn. She had a light breakfast of grapefruit, toast, and a cup of tea, then her daily morning stroll on the beach. Returning to the cottage, she hit the computer to research the Demon Wind. More than 280,000 hits and four hours later, she was still no closer to the answer. She found a movie titled Demon Wind, books, stories, legends, song lyrics, wind demons, incantations, paranormal investigators who describe cold spots where there is spirit activity as the Demon Wind, and so on, and so on, and so on, but nothing seemed to fit.

At least she felt more in control today, more like her old self, and she wasn't a quitter. The answer was out there somewhere and she'd damn well find it. "If at first you don't succeed," she said returning to the computer. Typing in "superstition," she hit the search key. Gee, only 196,000 hits this time.

Feeling a slight movement of her hair against the side of her face, Jayden sat back in her chair and took a deep breath. She loved a day when she could leave her windows open and let the ocean breeze circulate throughout the cottage. The curtains began to twitch and dance with more abandon. The papers on her desk began to flutter and move, forcing her to put her dictionary on top to keep them secure. If a storm was brewing, it had moved in fast. Less than an hour ago, there wasn't a cloud in the sky. The forecast had predicted calm seas and clear skies for the next several days.

The breeze quickly became a wind. There was no mistaking the sensation as it appeared to wrap her in a cocoon of sensation. "What the...?" The fight or flight impulse urged her get up and run from the cottage. Whether from fear, fascination, or something else, Jayden couldn't move.

The mouse moved, clicking on the search engine. Computer keys were compressed by unseen hands. Jayden sucked in a breath and forgot how to exhale. The letters typed on to the search line spelled out newspaper, then the name of the town in which she lived. The mouse moved again. The search key depressed. The screen flashed, up came the website for the local newspaper. The curser moved to Archives and clicked. At the date prompt, October 25, 2001, was entered. Classifieds was entered in the section prompt. The curser moved to search, then clicked.

Feeling lightheaded, Jayden realized she was still holding her breath, which she expelled in a whoosh as the requested page came up. The scroll key at the bottom of the page moved to the right, the key to the right moved downward, then stopped. The classified ad in the center of the screen seemed to jump out at Jayden.

AUTHOR RESEARCHING BOOK

Local author, researching new book on
the origins of legends and superstitions
wishes to include the local Demon Wind
legend. Any information you can supply
regarding the phenomenon would be
appreciated. All names will be treated
with absolute confidentiality. You can
send information anonymously to the
newspaper _ Robert Morrison, or by
phone. The number is listed.

All movement in the room stilled for barely an instant. Jayden could almost swear she felt hands on her shoulders. Then as quickly as the wind blew in, it was gone.

While online, her computer tended to be slow at responding to commands, yet at the prompts from the unseen user, it had functioned at hyper speed. The entire incident played itself out in a matter of minutes and during those few minutes, Jayden felt as if time stood still. Released from her temporary paralysis, frightened as she was, she still had the presence of mind to grab not only her cell phone, but also the

business card lying on the table beside it, before she ran for the front door, not stopping until she was a good twenty yards from the cottage. Bending forward at the waist, her free hand holding onto her knee for support, Jayden attempted to catch her breath and slow her heart rate to a less alarming level. Anyone who said they would have stayed in the cottage for a possible encore performance was either a liar or out of their mind.

Feeling slightly more in control, she sank down onto the sand and checked the card Tyce had given her for a number to call. This being Saturday, Jayden knew the office would be closed, so she decided to try his home number first. Her hands were shaking so badly she had to start over several times before the call went through. Receiving no answer, she tried his cell number.

"Dr. Cantrell," he answered on the third ring.

"It's Jay. Where are you?"

"I ran to the hospital to check on my patients and I'm on my way home. In fact I'm just about to turn down the side road." he answered. "What's up?"

"I can't believe I'm saying this," Jayden said as much for her benefit as for Tyce's. "I just had another encounter with the Demon Wind."

"Where are you?"

"On the beach in front of my cottage."

Jayden heard an unmistakable intake of breath, then there was a pause as if he were choosing his words carefully. "Are you alone?"

Realizing what he must be thinking, she was quick to correct his very reasonable assumption. "It wasn't like the other night. This time it was inside the cottage. I was wide awake, acutely aware of everything that was going on, and I was alone."

"I'll be right there," was all he said before he disconnected.

As soon as he disconnected, Tyce tossed his cell phone into the passenger seat. Thanking God that he'd turned down an invitation from a colleague at the hospital to visit the new health club, Tyce floored the accelerator. There was no mistaking the quiver in Jayden's voice when she spoke. She was genuinely frightened. Even as close to home as he was, he couldn't get to her fast enough to suit him.

He no doubt laid rubber on the pavement when he hit the brake to slow him enough to allow him to turn into Jayden's drive. Coming to a screeching, dust-raising halt behind her cottage, Tyce literally jammed the gear into park and switched off the ignition at the same time. Jumping from the vehicle, he hit the

sand running.

Tyce found Jayden sitting on the beach in almost the exact spot where they had made love that first night. Was it just the night before last? He felt as if he'd known her so much longer than that. Her knees were drawn up to her chest, her arms were wrapped around them and she was shivering as if she were freezing. Dropping to his knees beside her, Tyce pulled her into his arms. He didn't speak, didn't ask any questions, just held her quietly until the shivering subsided and she was ready to talk.

"You must think I'm a terrible wimp," Jayden muttered against his chest.

"What I think, is that something happened that frightened you badly."

"That's an understatement," she said with a self-deprecating laugh. As comforting as it felt to be in Tyce's arms, Jayden pulled back and struggled to regain her composure. Now was not a time to give in to feminine hysterics. She needed to get a grip.

"Can you tell me what happened?" Tyce asked when the color began to return to her previously ashen features.

After taking several deep, calming breaths and releasing them slowly, Jayden relayed the details of the incident exactly as they happened. "What's really strange is that I didn't feel like they were there to harm me or even frighten me. It was the incident itself that scared me witless. When it was over, the only thing I could think of was to get out of there as fast as I could."

As crazy as Jayden's story sounded, it didn't even occur to Tyce to question the validity of her words. "Good Lord, under those circumstances, anyone would have done exactly the same thing," Tyce insisted. While Tyce would by no means consider himself to be a coward, he couldn't imagine himself sticking around to see what would happen next. Something Jayden said suddenly registered. "Wait a minute. Did you say ... they?"

"After what I've already said, what's one more buckle on the straight jacket," Jayden responded, making a lame attempt at a joke, when neither of them were in a laughing mood. "When it felt like there were hands on my shoulders, one felt fairly large and firm, the other smaller, almost gentle. I had the distinct impression of male and female. As if rather than frighten me, they were attempting to reassure me. Does that make any sense at all?"

"Sweetheart, nothing that has happened the past few days makes sense. But it's time that we get to the bottom of it before anything else happens."

* * * *

Seated in Emma Morrison's cozy kitchen, Jayden and Tyce tried to be patient while the lady poured tea from her china tea pot into matching cups and heaped homemade cookies onto corresponding cake plates.

"Thank you for agreeing to see us on such short notice, Emma," Jayden, said as she accepted her tea and cookies.

"No need for thanks, dear. I don't get out as much as I used to, so I love having guests," Emma Morrison insisted. "How is your grandmother feeling these days, Jayden?"

"She's doing really well. Stubborn as always and resisting the restrictions her doctor put on her after the heart attack."

Emma chuckled and looked at Tyce. "You're going to have your hands full with that one, young man. Don't think I've ever known a stronger willed woman than Theresa Parrish."

"I figured that out on her first visit," Tyce answered, as he tried to figure out how to get his finger through the handle of the delicate, china cup.

"Speaking of my grandmother, Emma, I'd appreciate it if you didn't mention anything to her about...."

"Don't you worry yourself about it, dear," Emma answered before Jayden could voice her request. "No need for anyone else to know you were here, or the reason for your visit. No point in getting her upset over something she doesn't understand."

"I wish we did," Jayden couldn't resist.

"That's why you came to me, isn't it? Your encounter with the so called ... Demon Wind."

Jayden's eyes immediately met Tyce's.

"I thought so," Emma said, noting their reaction to her question. "It's unsettling, in the beginning, until you know exactly what happened. Even then, it might take a little time for you to figure out how you personally feel about the experience."

"Exactly what do we need to come to terms with, Emma?" Jayden asked.

"My Robert and I, God rest his soul, preferred to call it, temporarily sharing your body with spirits.

Possession sounds so evil, when we didn't see it that way at all. The Demon Wind label was never applied to the experience by those touched by it. It was labeled the Demon Wind by family members and I suspect a good number of jilted suitors."

Her words left Jayden and Tyce speechless. Fully understanding their shock, Emma turned in her chair, leaned down to open the door to the hutch, and retrieved a crystal decanter of brandy. Pulling the stopper from the bottle, she pushed it in Tyce's direction. "You might want to strengthen your tea a bit."

"Are you telling us that we were possessed by spirits?" Jayden asked once her power of speech returned. Tyce poured a small amount of Brandy in Jayden's cup, then hearing the tone of her voice added more.

"Drink up, it's a long story," Emma suggested.

"We have all night," Tyce said, then settled back in his chair. He was a doctor, a man of science, so to speak. He relied on documented facts with substantiated data. As such, he was still in a state of disbelief from everything that had happened in the past few days. If Emma Morrison could help them make sense of it all, no matter how farfetched her story might be, he was prepared to listen with an open mind.

Emma tipped the iced-tea-colored liquor from the decanter into her own cup. "As near as Robert could pinpoint, it all started back in the early 1800's, with a young woman by the name of Rachel Connor, and her Spanish lover Nicolo. We were never able to discover Nicolo's last name. Rachel was the only daughter of a local merchant who had arranged a marriage for her with the son of a wealthy ship builder. While taking her usual morning walk on the beach, Rachel met Nicolo, an Italian sailor, who, according to the rigid class distinctions of the time, was far beneath her social standing in the community. Soon Rachel and Nicolo were walking together every day and as you might expect, they fell in love. Knowing her father would never stand for their romance, the young lovers took to meeting secretly and as her arranged marriage approached, Nicolo and Rachel began making plans to run away together. When offered the opportunity to make some quick money by helping to crew a ship making a delivery up the coast, Nicolo accepted. The ship was to return within a week. Unfortunately, it returned without Nicolo. The captain claimed he had been swept overboard during a freak storm, but Rachel suspected that her father had discovered their relationship and had paid the captain to murder her lover."

"The night the ship docked, servants spoke of a violent quarrel between father and daughter, after which Rachel ran from the house. Her shawl was found on the beach where Rachel and Nicolo first met. She was never seen again. It's believed that Rachel loved Nicolo so deeply that she couldn't bear living without him, nor the thought of being forced to marry the man chosen for her by her father, so she walked into the ocean to join the man she loved."

Jayden wasn't aware that she was crying until Tyce put a handkerchief into her hand. "That's an incredibly sad and tragic story, Emma," she said after she wiped her eyes. "But how does it relate to the Demon Wind legend?"

"I'm getting to that," Emma told them, then proceeded to pour fresh tea into their cups. "What is commonly called the Demon Wind by the local legend, is in fact, Rachel and Nicolo. The conclusion Robert and I reached was based upon excerpts from diaries, journals, and interviews with couples who claim to have encountered the Demon Wind."

"And that conclusion was?" Tyce prompted.

"That where ever Rachel and Nicolo are, they seem to be able to recognize soulmates, and have taken it upon themselves to bring those people together. To give others the happiness that was taken from them. After years of research, Robert was unable to find a single incident where the couple brought together by Rachel and Nicolo were not married as a result, nor of a single divorce from the union. In every case, the couple reported only one possession type encounter. It was as if once they brought a couple together, the rest was up to them. I know that I loved my Robert as much the day the Good Lord took him home, as I did the day I married him, more than sixty years ago. We figured compared to all the happy years we had together, sharing that first night we were together with the spirits of Rachel and Nicolo was a small price to pay. And if sharing our bodies that night allowed them to also experience what we felt, I couldn't be happier."

Jayden looked at Tyce, who responded with a "beats-the-hell-out-of-me" shake of his head.

"Assuming everything you said is true, Emma, how can you be so sure that it is Rachel and Nicolo?" Jayden asked.

Emma's response was an almost girlish chuckle. "We asked ourselves that same question. Robert and I were sitting in the living room discussing it, when we heard his typewriter in the den. Robert used an old electric typewriter when he wrote, said he was too old to learn computers. Anyway, when we went in the den to investigate, typed at the bottom of the page Robert had left in the typewriter was: RACHEL LOVES NICOLO. They do have a unique way of making their point."

Having first hand experience with a similar occurrence, Jayden couldn't dispute Emma's words. "What about the book? Did your husband ever finish it?"

In response to Jayden's question, Emma rose to her feet and walked to the counter where she picked up a box, and returned to the table. "He finished it, but we decided it shouldn't be published. We didn't want people swarming the beach trying to prove or disprove Robert's findings, or worse yet, lonely people hoping Rachel and Nicolo would help them find their soulmate. We decided it was best to leave the Demon Wind legend as is, and leave Rachel and Nicolo with what ever peace they've been able to find."

Emma placed the box on the table in front of Jayden. "I'm giving the book to you for safe keeping. It might help you explain, when someone comes to you for answers, as you have to me."

* * * *

The ride home was a silent one, yet it wasn't an uncomfortable silence. They both had so much to absorb, so much to think about. Tyce put in a Norah Jones CD, and when he took Jayden's hand and held it while driving with the other hand on the wheel, it felt so natural, so right. Jayden put her head back against the headrest, closed her eyes and listened to the music, relaxing for the first time since she awoke to find sand in her bed.

"You awake?" Tyce asked as he brought the vehicle to a stop.

"Yeah, just thinking. Where are we?"

"My place. After what happened earlier, I was afraid you'd have trouble sleeping in the cottage tonight," Tyce responded, then suggested. "I have a guest room, several in fact. You can take your pick." Jayden hesitated so long that Tyce was beginning to think he'd over stepped his bounds.

"What if I don't want to sleep in a guest room?" was what she was thinking. What she said was, "I'd appreciate that. So much has happened today that I didn't even consider how I'd feel in the cottage tonight."

"I don't know about you, but except for Emma's cookies, I haven't eaten anything since this morning. Are you hungry?" he asked.

Until Tyce mentioned food, Jayden hadn't given it much thought. She was surprised to realize that she was indeed hungry. "Starving."

As a frequent visitor to the beach house before Kathy and Ben Clarkson were forced to relocate in Seattle, Jayden was familiar with the layout of the kitchen. Working together as if it were a regular evening routine, Jayden chopped red peppers, sausage links, and grated cheese for omelets, while Tyce got out the dishes, broke eggs into a bowl and used a whisk to beat them. They talked about everything, except Emma's story and the Demon Wind.

"You and your grandmother are so close, I'm surprised you didn't move in with her after her heart attack," Tyce said. His statement wasn't meant as a criticism and Jayden didn't take it as such.

Putting the knife aside, Jayden reached for the cheese grater as she answered. "I wanted to, believe me, but Grams is a proud lady. She's terrified of losing her independence, so I didn't press the issue. She has Helen, her live-in housekeeper, whom I trust totally. They're more like best friends than employer and employee. If I use the path from the cottage to the main house, I can get to her almost as fast as I can

drive the distance; faster if I run."

"Wise decision," Tyce agreed. "Once their independence is gone, they seem to give up. I've seen it happen too often."

"What about you?" Jayden asked. "Why would a handsome young doctor take over a medical practice and settle in an area where the majority of his patients are senior citizens?"

"Something else we have in common. My parent's were killed in an automobile accident when I was nine. I was raised by my grandparents, who were wonderful." Tyce turned the knob to the burner under the omelet pan and poured in a generous amount of olive oil. "I lost my grandmother to cancer my senior year in high school. My grandfather, my second year of medical school. Specializing in Geriatrics just felt right."

It was a beautiful night so they decided to eat outside on the deck. Over a glass of after-dinner wine, Tyce was the one to bring up the subject upper most on both their minds. "So, what do you think about Emma's Demon Wind theory?" he asked.

"I don't know, Tyce. Logic tells me it's nothing more than a tragic, if compelling, fairytale. Yet another part of me wants to believe it," she admitted.

"Same here," Tyce said. "You realize that we may never know what really happened?"

"I know. But strangely enough, how we met doesn't seem to matter so much anymore."

"All that matters is that we did meet," Tyce added, expressing for the first time what he'd felt from the moment he walked in the examining room and saw her standing there.

Their eyes met over the candle flickering on the table between them. Volumes of thoughts and feelings passed between them without a single word spoken. Then they were on their feet, finally in each other arms, their lips seeking and at last finding each other's.

It was a kiss unlike any Jayden had ever experienced. His lips were warm and tender, giving as well as taking, evoking something inside her that went beyond mere physical desire, it soothed her soul, making her feel whole for the first time in her life.

Breaking the kiss, Tyce rested his forehead against Jayden's with a sigh of relief. "You can't imagine how badly I've wanted to do that."

"Hopefully as much as I've wanted you to kiss me."

"Things between us started a bit backward, didn't they? I was holding back because I was afraid you'd think all I wanted was a repeat performance, instead of wanting you."

"And you don't?" she asked.

"Don't what?"

"You don't want a repeat performance?"

"Hell, yes, I want a repeat performance, and an encore."

"A few curtain calls might be nice too," Jayden suggested.

Needing no further encouragement, Tyce picked Jayden up and carried her into his bedroom. Still holding her, one arm around her back, the other supporting her legs, Tyce lowered his lips to hers in a series of butterfly light caresses. That first night on the beach, they'd had wild, intense, incredible sex. It also had a surreal, dreamlike quality. Tonight he wanted slow and easy. Tonight, having sex wasn't good enough. Tonight, Tyce wanted, needed, to make love to the woman in his arms. And tonight, it would be just the two of them ... without an audience.

* * * *

Exactly two months later, after their engagement party, their way illuminated by light of a full moon, Jayden and Tyce walked the path from her grandmother's house to the beach.

"Happy?" Tyce asked Jayden, as they passed her cottage and walked toward his house.

"I've never been happier in my life," she responded without hesitation. Had it not been for the couple walking along the beach in their direction, Tyce and Jayden might have stopped for a while at what they affectionately called their spot, the place where they made love that first night. The other couple smiled and nodded as they passed, Jayden and Tyce responded in kind, so wrapped up in each other they weren't inclined to stop and chat.

They'd gone barely ten feet when they stopped in their tracks. "Did you feel that?" Tyce and Jayden spoke in unison. The wind was just a bare caress of coolness, subtle and brief, but unmistakable. Turning around, they looked back toward the young couple they'd passed.

They were gone.

"Tyce, look at the sand," Jayden said in dismay. "The only footprints in the sand belong to us."

