

Chasing Her Dreams

by

Stacey Coverstone

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Dedication

To my mom, Beverly Marvin, who loves Maine and climbed the hill to the real Monhegan lighthouse with me.

Praise for Chasing Her Dreams

In *Chasing Her Dreams*, Ms. Coverstone has woven a delightful tale involving a bruised woman, a charming hero, and everlasting love. From the stormy waters of the Atlantic to a picturesque Maine island, join Devin as she tries to unravel her connections to a mysterious vision in her dreams and a local fisherman ferrying her across the bay. For fans of short, romantic stories, *Chasing Her Dreams* will keep you entertained from the first word to the last.

~Julie Lence, Author of *Luck of the Draw*

Waking to a distant roll of thunder after a midday nap, Devin first thought she was on the island. But then consciousness stirred. Pale light seeped through the thin curtains, and through the open window she heard the sound of tourists on the street below. Although it was June, her duvet cover was tucked up under her chin. She shivered and lay there for a moment with the back of her clammy hand pressed to her damp forehead. She had had another dream about the woman in white. Each time she experienced a dream, she woke with a slight headache, her body covered in chill bumps.

Her eyes remained closed as the memory of the vision soaked into the crevices of her mind. The dreams had been coming for several weeks now, in flashes and bits, like the pieces of a puzzle. The woman's face was always shrouded in a gray mist, but Devin sensed familiarity—a kinship with her.

The meaning of the dreams remained a mystery, but Devin believed they were leading up to some significant event—one in which she, her grandmother, and the island played major roles. The woman in white called to her; tugged at her like a magnet to return to Monhegan.

As her eyes opened, she splayed her fingers across her chest and felt her heart beating irregularly. A great sense of urgency washed over her. She sat up in bed and glanced at the calendar hanging above her desk. Today's date was circled in red; the first anniversary of her grandmother's passing. It was more than mere coincidence—the dreams and the need to get back to the island immediately.

Devin did not understand the force that fueled the dreams; she only understood the woman in white beckoned to her, and she felt compelled to heed the call.

The bedside clock glared two forty-five. "Shoot!" She leapt out of bed and slipped into her sandals as she ironed her top and shorts with her hands. The last ferry of the day would be leaving at three o'clock.

I must go now.

She rushed into the bathroom and tossed her hair into a ponytail and cleaned her teeth quickly. Grabbing her purse and keys, she locked the apartment door behind her and took the stairs two at a time.

At the narrow street, she waited for a car to pass and then sprinted to the dock. Although she lived right across from the harbor, it had been a full year since she had ridden the ferry. Anticipation gripped her chest.

A deep rumble shuddered across the steel gray sky. A scattering of dark, billowy clouds hovered ominously above. Raindrops splattered her arms. At one end of the street, a group of tourists ducked into a gift shop. Closer by, another bunch entered the Ebb Tide, the greasy spoon where Devin waited tables as a way to supplement her income as a romance novelist.

Her sandals clicked on the plank boardwalk as she jogged to the ticket booth. The island ferry was still tied to the dock. *Good! I'm not too late.*

"One ticket please." She inhaled deeply of the fresh, rain-scented air.

"Sorry, miss. The captain just cancelled the last run of the day." The man in the ticket booth pointed a finger upward. "Storm's comin'."

"What? You've got to be kidding. It's just a few clouds," she moaned. "I've got to get to Monhegan today."

The man shrugged. "As I said, the ferry's done. Try back tomorrow when the sun's shining again."

"I can't wait until tomorrow. I have to go today. Right now." Her heart thumped. "It's an emergency," she fibbed, giving it another shot with the man in the booth. "I have a sick relative who needs me."

"I have nothing to do with it, miss. The captain has cancelled the sail. I'm truly sorry." With that, he placed a *Closed* sign on the counter and shuttered the window.

Devin sighed. "Darn Maine weather anyway."

"I could take ya," came a deep voice from behind.

She whirled and found herself face to face with a handsome, suntanned man wearing a tee shirt, jeans, and tall rubber fishing boots. He was about six feet in height with a shock of black hair and eyes of the most unusual color. They were so dark they appeared purple. The man

looked unworldly, and something stirred within the depths of Devin's soul. She gazed at him, mesmerized.

Where have I seen this man before? He looks so familiar. Those eyes...It would be impossible to forget such fascinating eyes. Maybe we went to school together, or perhaps he's a customer at the Ebb Tide.

"Hello?" he said, waving a hand in front of her face.

Devin roused herself from her reverie. "Beg your pardon?"

"I overheard ya tell the man at the window that ya need to get to the island. My boat's available for chartering, but I'd think a young lady would know better than to head out on the water when a storm is approaching. I'll take ya if it's that important, but it's going to cost a pretty penny."

Devin's eyes narrowed and the hairs on the back of her neck bristled. The nerve. Who was he to comment on her personal business—and then take advantage of her situation? "Excuse me, mister...?"

"The name's Kipp Sullivan. Say...do I know ya? I never forget a pretty face. Have we met before?"

"I don't think so."

The man thrust his hand out to shake. "Are ya sure? Ya look very familiar."

"I'm sure." She was fibbing again. The truth was, she *did* have a strange feeling about him, which had her quivering on the inside. Despite that, and his rugged good looks, Devin refrained from accepting his hand just then. He smelled of fish. "Are you in the habit of eavesdropping on people's conversations, Mr. Sullivan?"

The man grinned and shook his head. "Try to help a lady out and this is what I get." He turned and began to walk away.

"Wait!" she exclaimed, as the sky quaked with another clap of thunder.

The fisherman took a bold step. His lean frame towered over her, and his unusual purple eyes flashed. "Well, do ya want me to take ya to the island, or don't ya? My price is forty dollars. Come on now and make up your mind."

"Forty dollars!" Devin cried. "That's nearly twenty more than the ferry charges."

"I'm doing ya a favor, in case you've forgotten."

"You call that a favor?"

"It's up to you. Take it or leave it. I don't have all day to argue with a hard-headed woman—no matter how pretty she is." Kipp lifted his face up to the sky and winced. "If we're going, we've got to get on the water now. This storm won't wait for procrastinators."

Devin's mouth drew into a tight line. "I get the distinct feeling I'm being bushwhacked, but I guess I have no option." She nodded acceptance of his offer.

"Okay, then. Let's go." Kipp turned and stomped down the boardwalk. She followed, trotting like a pony in order to keep up with his long-legged stride.

They stopped at the end of the pier. The smell of seaweed and fish invaded her nostrils. A small commercial fishing boat bobbed like a buoy in the choppy water. Devin's mouth gaped. Her cool eyes scanned the ancient, rusted-out rattletrap of a boat. *I don't think that tin can will even make it out to sea.*

She noted the name, *Serafina*, painted on the hull. She was aware that translated, the name meant angel. New Englander fishermen always christened their sailing vessels after the women in their lives. She stared at Kipp Sullivan's broad back and silently wondered about his muse. A picture formed in Devin's mind. Serafina was probably as beautiful and sweet as her name implied—a lithe, fairy goddess with long legs, blonde hair and blue eyes that twinkled. She sighed. *What difference does it make what the woman looks like?*

She studied the boat with a solemn countenance.

"I know she doesn't look like much, but I guarantee, she's as sturdy as an oak. Don't worry, miss."

"Who is Serafina?" she blurted.

"Pardon me?"

"Serafina. Who is she?"

The fisherman's eyes plunged into hers and fastened. Devin sucked in a breath and waited for his response.

He shook his head. "Don't know. You'll have to ask the retired seaman I bought her from."

She released the breath she held and smiled.

"Is that a satisfactory answer?" he asked curiously.

"Yes. Quite."

“Good. We’ll have time to chat later, but right now we have to shove off.”

A cloud above them cracked open and spilled out a light mist. Kipp hopped onto the rocking boat and stretched out his hand to help her in.

A spark caught the moment their fingers touched. As Devin grasped his hand and stepped into the boat, a jolt of electricity shot through her arms and raced through her veins straight to her heart. Her entire body trembled with the awareness that comes when one soul meets its mate. Had he felt it, too? The perplexed look on his face confirmed that he had.

“Did ya feel that?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“What just happened? It felt like a surge of power. It coursed through my body.”

She whispered, “Maybe it was static electricity, caused by the storm.”

“Maybe. I’ve never felt anything like it before.”

“Me either.”

The two of them stood fixed upon each other, until the sway of the boat brought them back to their senses. “I feel light headed,” she managed to say. “I haven’t sailed in a while. Must be anxiety kicking in.”

“Let me move these lobster traps out of the way.” Kipp released her hands and shoved the traps with his foot. He offered her the seat in the wheelhouse, and then reached into a storage box and pulled out two rain jackets with hoods. “Here ya go. The rain might still splash us in here, so this will keep ya dry.” He handed her a jacket and suggested she put the hood over her head. He slipped the other jacket over his own shoulders. “All set?” he asked when she was situated.

She nodded in response. “Thank you, Mr. Sullivan.”

He began to guide the boat carefully into the open sea. “Please, miss. Call me Kipp. I won’t consider myself a mister for a good many more years.”

“All right,” she replied with a smile. “As long as you stop calling me miss. My name is Devin Fuller.”

“Okay. That’s a deal.”

Conversation halted as the fisherman concentrated on maneuvering away from the harbor. The small boat

chugged out its rhythm like staccato notes as it bounced on the choppy water.

Sinking into the oversized rain jacket like a turtle delving into its shell, Devin pondered the feeling of déjà vu she experienced when they touched. He said he felt the power, too. Any fool knew it wasn't static electricity, as she had suggested. She could tell he didn't buy her flimsy explanation, but he'd not had an answer himself as to what had occurred between them.

The outside temperature was dropping quickly, but Devin's body radiated a burning heat—a heat that increased as she focused her attention on the man's strong, lean frame.

The weather turned wild once they got onto open water. When Devin spoke, the blustery wind lifted her voice and carried it into the air like a feather.

The *Serafina* rose and fell with the foamy waves. Icy water spewed and splashed up over the sides and into the boat. Devin drew her knees up to her chest and hooked her arms around them. Her teeth were chattering.

Kipp glanced her way. He held the wheel securely with one hand and reached into the storage bin next to him with the other. He yanked out a pair of green rubber boots and offered them to her.

"Put these on over your sandals or your feet will freeze."

She stuttered, "Th...th...thanks."

"You're not dressed for this kind of weather," he yelled above the wind.

She hauled the boots over her calves and closed the buttons at the top. Even though the boots were way too large, she was grateful for the leg protection. Her nearly bare feet were drenched and as cold and hard as a frozen mackerel. "I left my apartment in a hurry."

Huddled in the swivel chair, Devin stared out at the dark blue sea and glimpsed a pair of porpoises springing up from the depths. Kipp pointed, spying them at the same time. He turned back to his wheel and she continued to watch the horizon.

Despite the mind-numbing cold, her memory was able to drift to the last time she was on the island. Inwardly, she questioned how her grandmother's passing

was connected to the journey she found herself on today. She recalled the past year and the difficult times, which had led to the start of the dreams.

After her grandmother's death, her parents split up, and then the man she'd been dating a few months accepted a job offer in Europe. She began suffering writer's block and found it hard to complete any story. The straw that broke the camel's back, however, was when her cat ran off. Not coincidentally, she reasoned, the dreams began soon after.

Emotionally, she had managed all that was thrown her way, but the dreams did become a welcome distraction.

Devin had never believed in ESP or ghosts before, even though she'd been raised on her grandma's stories about the spirits who roamed the outer island. As the dreams intensified, so did the certainty she was receiving a message from beyond. From whom, she wasn't sure. What the message was, she had no idea. She hoped to discover answers to both those questions once she reached Monhegan.

Fortunately, her grandmother's strong, comforting presence blanketed every vision. This reassured her it was safe to follow her heart back to the island, despite questioning the true nature and motives of the woman in white. Devin could not fathom who the feminine spirit was. She only knew the woman was bound to both she and her grandmother as sure as a package was tied with string.

"How ya feeling?" Kipp hollered through the wind and drizzle. "Are ya motion sick?"

She shook her head and hollered back, "No. I'm fine. I've been taking the ferry ever since I was a little girl, and never once been seasick."

Kipp smiled. "Only the tourists sailing over on day trips tend to get sick."

"Do you charter a lot of day trips?"

"Some. They help pay the bills." A rogue wave slammed into the boat just then. Kipp twisted the wheel and easily regained control while keeping a steady eye on his passenger.

Devin peered out at the tossing sea again and

recalled the island in her mind's eye. It lay ten miles offshore from the coast of Boothbay Harbor. A picturesque summer haven for artists and vacationers alike—a place that time forgot—the island beckoned nature lovers, photographers, writers, poets, painters, and every other kind of traveler in search of a truly unspoiled hideaway.

On the eastern edge were cliffs that offered awe-inspiring views of the crashing surf below. A hike to the top took one to the lighthouse and the keeper's house, as well as the neatly manicured cemetery. In the cemetery rested many strong New Englanders who had considered the island their home. The number of those year-round locals seldom exceeded sixty-five because of its isolation, particularly during the harsh, cold winters, but a handful of old timers had been there fifty years or more. One such old timer had been Devin's grandmother, who called the island home for fifty-seven years. She had arrived there as a young bride, tending the light with her husband for thirty-five of those years.

Spending every summer with her grandparents, and then with her grandma after her grandpa died, highlighted Devin's growing-up years. She knew the island like the back of her hand; hiked miles of trails through towering evergreens, climbed the steep and rocky ledges of the ocean cliffs, and enjoyed picnics along the shore. She also spent many hours sitting and watching her grandma paint.

Amelia Fuller had been a talented painter. Most mornings would find her setting up her easel along the shoreline, painting beautiful landscapes of the flora and fauna. She painted the crashing waves and rocky cliffs, and even the fishing boats and lobster fishermen who sailed in from the mainland. She'd been an inspiration for the granddaughter who had her own creative ambitions of becoming a writer.

A dull pain pulsed in her heart as Devin remembered the night her grandmother succumbed to pneumonia. She had loyally remained at the bedside for two days and nights. The end was near, and her grandmother had fallen unconscious, her pulse barely throbbing. The country doctor had even declared her gone, when suddenly her eyes flew open and she grasped her

granddaughter's hand. Clear as a bell, Amelia whispered, "Chase your dreams, girl of mine. They will lead you to love."

Strange; she had completely forgotten those final prophetic words until now. *Chase your dreams. They will lead you to love.* What had her grandma meant? Was she foreseeing the future on her deathbed? Devin glanced at the handsome fisherman. Did Kipp Sullivan have anything to do with her dreams, or with the love her grandma spoke of?

"Who's sick?" Kipp asked, raising his voice above the storm. The rolling waves pitched the *Serafina* back and forth. He held tight to the steering wheel and Devin gripped her chair with white knuckles.

"Sick? I don't know what you mean."

"Back at the harbor ya told the man in the ticket booth ya had to get to the island today because of a medical emergency."

The recollection of her fib surfaced just then. "Ah, yes. My sick relative." She hated to admit she had lied, but she didn't see any way around it. "I made that up," she confessed. "I was desperate to get on the ferry and thought he could speak to the captain who might take pity on me. Obviously it didn't work."

"I guess you're not a good enough liar." Kipp chuckled.

"Guess not."

"So, why are ya paying me forty dollars to sail in this God-awful weather? What's so important it couldn't wait until tomorrow?"

Before she could answer, another wave rose out of the ocean like a phoenix. Kipp cranked the wheel but was unable to avoid smashing into it. The impact was similar to hitting a brick wall. Devin slipped off the seat. Landing on her knees, she seized the chair and held on for dear life. In their hurry to board, she had forgotten to ask for a life jacket.

She watched him keep one firm grip on the wheel, as he stretched out his hand. He motioned to her. His eyes asked her to trust him. She scrambled to her feet and flung herself into his protective arms. She buried her face in his shoulder and clung tightly as another column of

water crashed into the boat, spraying them both with frigid sea and salt.

"Wow! That was awesome!" Kipp opened his mouth to display a row of perfect teeth and laughed.

Although Devin was scared senseless, she knew she was in safe hands. A tiny moan escaped her throat when he squeezed her waist.

"Are ya okay?"

She nodded, unable to find her voice for a moment.

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Hang in there. It's not far now."

Kipp removed his arm then and completely focused on steering the fishing boat through the storm. She stood next to him for the remainder of the trip. They didn't speak anymore, but he smiled down at her every once in a while.

What was the connection to this man? Why did it seem to be destiny that they meet today, of all days? How could she explain the heat that rushed through her body when he looked at her? Things like this only happened in the romance stories she wrote. Didn't they?

When the *Serafina* finally docked on the island's shore one and a half hours after leaving Boothbay, Devin was anxious to get her land legs back. She slipped off the big rubber boots and disembarked. The sky was thick with clouds, but the rain had not arrived yet. She plodded up a dirt road and waited under the shelter of a tin-roofed shack as Kipp tied the boat to the dock. When he joined her a few moments later, she handed him his forty dollars. "Thank you for bringing me over today. What time should we meet back down here?"

He looked at her like she had two heads. "Ya don't think we're going back tonight, do ya?"

"Well, yes. I didn't expect to be staying. I didn't bring a bag or a change of clothes."

"I'm afraid you'll have to do with what ya have on then," Kipp stated, amused. "That storm's movin' fast. It'll hit within the hour. Have ya got a place to stay? A relative or friend to bunk with?"

She peered into the sky. The sun was trying to peek out from behind a gray cloud. "Maybe it's going to pass

over us," she said, hopefully.

He shook his head. "Nope. It's on its way. We're not going back onto the boat."

He stared at her with steely determination. She realized there would be no more discussion about it.

"In that case, I'll get a room at the Island Inn. Is that where you'll be staying?"

"Yeah. If there's availability."

"I'll come over and register later. If you'll excuse me, I really need to get on my way now. I want to visit the cemetery before the rain starts." She started climbing the steep dirt hill that led to the cemetery and long-abandoned lighthouse. Itching to go, but sensing he was watching her, she turned and indeed saw Kipp standing at the bottom of the hill. He was smiling broadly. "What's so funny?" she asked.

"You. Don't tell me you're going to walk all the way to the top in those water-logged sandals?"

Devin peered down at her feet. It was true; she had not dressed appropriately for a trip to the island, but she wasn't about to let him get her goat. "I'm starting a new fashion trend," she replied, as she waved goodbye.

Kipp laughed then, a deep, masculine laugh.

She had no idea how long he continued to watch her. She began the tread up the hill and willed herself not to look back for fear he was just another dream that might disappear.

When she made it to the top, she had to catch her breath. She stood at the edge overlooking the village below and exhaled slowly. Small cottages with backyard gardens full of flowers and vegetables dotted the hilly landscape. In the harbor, she spotted the clunky *Serafina*, as well as another, sleeker fishing boat that pulled in after them. Devin could even see a painter down on the rocky shore, standing at his easel with brush and paint board in hand, seemingly oblivious to the storm brewing.

Finally, she focused her gaze on a cottage with a country-style thatched roof and a flagpole out front. She noted the old tire swing was still hanging in the big tree out back and the picket fence still needed painting. Many fond memories of fun-filled days and star-studded nights were linked to that little home. An ache pierced her

breast.

She wandered over to the cemetery. Although the sky was darkening and getting gloomier by the moment, the melodic symphony of birds chirped all around her. They were welcoming her home again.

A flash of light streaked across the sky and a cool breeze began to blow, rustling the tops of the trees. Kipp was correct. The storm was moving in, and it was coming fast. Devin quickly walked under the elegant iron archway and marched straight to her grandmother's grave. Someone had recently placed a pot of red geraniums there. She knelt and slid her finger across the glistening hard surface of the marble headstone. Tears sprang to her eyes as she lowered her head and whispered a fervent prayer.

"Grandma, why am I here? Please help me unlock the secret of my dreams. Who is the woman in white, and what does she want with me? You advised me to chase my dreams and I'd find love. Where is the love you foresaw?"

She lay on her side and rested her head upon the mound of grass. She let flow the tears that had been swelling inside for a year. Like the rain that began to softly fall, the tears washed over her in waves, refreshing her spirit and nourishing her soul.

Fat droplets splattered rhythmically onto the headstones throughout the cemetery, sounding like musical notes. Next to her, a young bird flapped its wings as it splashed in a small puddle formed by the footprint of her sandal.

Devin lifted her head as a sudden cold gale carried an eerie whistle upon the wind. As though she were a puppet on a string, her neck rotated toward the abandoned lighthouse. The light was on in the tower.

How can that be happening? The light hasn't worked in years!

Stumbling to her feet, she dashed between the maze of headstones and out the cemetery gate. Just like unpredictable island storms, the wind began to howl and the rain started to pour down in sheets. Devin jerked off her sandals and ran barefoot to the base of the lighthouse. Out of breath and shaking from sudden exposure, she stared up at the small oval window fifty feet above. White

lightning exploded across the eerie-looking sky, and in one sharp instant, she saw her. The woman stood at the window, her shadowy face staring down.

Devin's fist flew to her mouth. Thunder boomed and another jagged flash lit the sky, illuminating the window again. Remarkably, the woman was still there. Her long hair lay in curls on her shoulders and the wide lace collar of her white dress accentuated the slender arch of her neck.

The ghostly figure of a man magically appeared at the woman's side and placed an unearthly arm around her waist. He had dark hair and wore an odd-looking shirt with a ruffle down the front, but his face, too, was cast in long shadows. He tenderly took the woman's pale face in his hands and brushed his lips against hers.

Another clap of thunder shook the earth. Devin jumped and blinked, and the two smoky shapes dissipated into thin air.

"No! Come back!" she shouted.

She pounded her fist upon the small lighthouse door. It was padlocked. "Open up!" she called desperately to the wind. She pounded again, and the lock magically broke apart and the chain thudded to the ground. With mouth gaping, Devin flung the door open and planted one foot on the bottom step of the old wooden stairs. She peered up just in time to see the apparitions gliding down the staircase, hand in hand. Unable to move, and with nowhere to turn, she gasped as the ghosts soared into her body. They knocked her backward onto the ground and continued to pass through her soul. Her chest burned with the impact.

With the air literally knocked out of her, she struggled to breathe. When she was finally able to rise to her feet, she tripped outside and found the couple drifting over the grass waiting. The woman summoned her with long, ethereal fingers. Seemingly in a trance, Devin took one step and then another, following the vaporous couple as they floated through the air and hovered over the edge of the cliff. The woman reached out.

It only took an instant. Still holding hands, the couple took one giant step into the air and jumped. Devin struggled for breath. Not believing what she had just

witnessed, she scurried to the edge and peered over. She saw nothing but the sheer cliff walls, sharp rocks, and crashing waves below.

“Devin!”

She turned and saw Kipp running toward her. He opened his arms and she walked into them and rested her head on his broad chest. Her clothes were soaked through, and she was emotionally drained. “Did you see them?” she asked wearily. “Did you see the man and woman on the cliff?”

He shook his head. “Let’s get out of this storm.” Kipp shrugged off his rain jacket and wrapped it snugly around her shoulders. He led her down the rocky hill to the village.

They trekked to the Island Inn as the center of the storm churned around them. When they staggered into the hotel lobby, drenched and chilled to the bone, the lobby lights flickered several times. The hotel manager handed them matches and candles in the likelihood the power would go out.

“I’ll show ya to your room,” Kipp said, pulling a door key from his pocket.

“You reserved a room for me?”

“Yeah. I was afraid they might fill up quickly due to the storm.”

“I told you earlier I’d register myself.” She was slightly offended that he thought she was incapable of taking care of herself.

“I just wanted to help. You’ve seemed a bit scattered today.”

He walked her down the hall, drew a hot bath and lit several candles, and then retreated to his own room. Sometime later, they sat together on the plump sofa of her room, bathed in the soft glow of candlelight. They were both dressed in fluffy bathrobes, a hotel amenity. The room was decorated in Victorian style, with dark, plush fabrics on the furniture, a four-poster canopy bed, and an oriental carpet covering the gleaming wood floor. They sipped cider and munched on cold sandwiches.

“Thank you for reserving a room for me. It was very thoughtful.”

“You’re welcome. I didn’t want ya to be left out in the

cold, literally.”

Kipp covered Devin’s hand. It would only be a matter of time before she shared what had happened up at the lighthouse. She hesitantly began to tell him about the dreams. When she saw he wasn’t freaking out or looking at her like she was a lunatic, she went on and described her experience with the ghosts. She detailed their hazy features the best she could, and told him how she was drawn to the woman. Kipp didn’t flinch when she explained how they had moved through her body, flung themselves off the cliff, and disappeared into thin air.

“Do you think I’m a nut?” she asked.

He rubbed his chin. “No.” His tone was low and calm when he said, “I want to ask one question. How were those two dressed?”

“They appeared to be from the Victorian age. The woman wore a white dress with a lace collar and the man wore a long-sleeved shirt with a fancy ruffle down the front.”

“Just as I suspected.” Kipp’s brow furrowed. “You’re not going to believe this,” he whispered.

“What?”

“I need to show ya something. Come with me.” He picked up a candle and led her down the hall through the hotel lobby. Other guests openly gawked at the two of them, still dressed in their robes and slippers, but Devin didn’t care.

Kipp showed her into the hotel parlor. Through flickering candlelight, Devin glimpsed the room’s deep red embossed wallpaper, comfortable leather chairs and stone fireplace tucked in the corner. Books covered one entire wall, and hanging on the remaining three walls were oil paintings in ornate frames.

He ushered her to the back of the room, stopped, and placed a hand on her shoulder. His expression was serious.

“What is it? Why are you looking at me that way?”

“I want ya to be prepared for what you’re about to see.”

“What are you talking about? What am I going to see?”

Kipp ran a trembling hand across his mouth. “While

I was waiting for ya to come down from the hill, something drew me into this room. It was like a thread pulling me straight to this portrait.”

“What portrait?” she asked.

“The one behind me.”

“And?” Devin shifted from one foot to another.

“And...when ya see this painting...well, it may come as a shock. I can’t quite believe it either, if ya want to know the truth of the matter. I just don’t know how to explain it.”

“Kipp, you’re talking gibberish.”

Just then, the lamps sitting around the room flickered, engulfing the library in light. Devin shoved him out of the way and stood still, gazing at the large oil portrait in front of her. It took all of her willpower to stifle a scream. Her gaze drifted to Kipp, then back to the painting. She slid her finger across the date on the etched metal plate screwed to the frame. It read *circa 1889*.

“I don’t understand,” she whispered. “I think she’s the woman in white—the one I’ve been dreaming about. I could never see her face, never in the dreams and not even this afternoon, but I know it’s her. She’s the one who watched me from the lighthouse today. And he’s the same man. He’s wearing the shirt with the ruffle. But...” She glanced at Kipp, pleading with him to assure her she wasn’t crazy.

He answered her softly. “It’s you. And it’s me. This couple is the spitting image of the two of us. It’s downright spooky. I couldn’t believe my eyes when I came in here this afternoon. I had to find ya. That’s why I went to the lighthouse.”

“It’s remarkable,” she stated. “They look so much like us. He even has your dark purple eyes.”

“And she has your hair coloring and your beautiful smile.”

“I wonder what their names are. Do you think we can find out?”

“I asked the lady at the front desk about this exhibit. She told me the Monhegan Historical Society collected the paintings. Apparently all the pieces, including this one, were donated through the years by local people and stored in the basement of the society office until they finally

decided to display them here at the inn.”

“My grandmother was a member of the historical society for most of her life,” Devin remembered. “It’s odd she never spoke of this couple. She used to tell me all kinds of tales. Someone must know the legend surrounding these two. If they committed suicide together, their story would have been passed down through the years.”

“I was just getting to that,” Kipp said eagerly. “Listen to this. The lady at the desk called the president of the historical society, a Mrs. Grey, and let me talk to her. Mrs. Grey told me the couple’s names were Kenneth Summers and Darla Freemont. He was a fisherman’s son and she was the daughter of the lighthouse keeper. Darla’s mother was a popular, local painter.”

Devin’s eyes popped. “Surely you noticed the coincidence? KS. Kenneth Summers and Kipp Sullivan. DF. Darla Freemont and Devin Fuller.”

“Yeah. They have the same initials as us.”

“You said Kenneth was the son of a fisherman. You’re a fisherman. That’s not a stretch, given this is Maine, but I can’t believe Darla’s father was the lighthouse keeper and her mother was a painter. My grandpa was the lighthouse keeper and my grandma was a painter.”

“This is too weird to simply be coincidence,” Kipp agreed.

Devin continued to stare at the painting. “They look happy. I wonder why they committed suicide together. Did the president of the historical society offer any information on that?”

“Legend is the families wouldn’t allow them to marry. No one knows exactly why.”

“Maybe they were fated to marry others,” she said. “Kenneth and Darla must have been so desperately in love, they chose to die together and spend eternity reenacting their suicide rather than be separated in life, married to people they didn’t love.”

Kipp chuckled softly. “That sounds like the plot of a romance story.”

Devin beamed. *How could he know?* “It could be,” she replied. “I *do* know a thing or two about romance.”

“That’s interesting. We have something in common.”

Devin's face lit up. "We do? Do you write romance novels?" she teased. "Because that's what I do for a living."

"No kidding? I don't write, but I've read a few romances in my time."

"Do tell."

"I broke a leg one winter and was laid up for a couple of months. My mother brought over a box of books to keep me from going stir crazy. She didn't realize she had mixed up her romances with the sports books. I read them and got hooked. Do ya promise to keep my secret?" His eyes gleamed devilishly.

"I promise." She turned back to the portrait. "I wonder if my grandma ever saw this painting. Who is the artist?"

"The signature is small, but it looks like the initials AS..."

Interrupting him, Devin said, "I have a very strange feeling, Kipp. Goosebumps are running down my arms." To prove her point, she pushed up the sleeve of her robe to show him the prickles. She pressed her face close and squinted into the bottom right-hand corner. In tiny block print were the letters ASF.

She gasped. "ASF! Those are the same initials as my grandma. Her name was Amelia Suzanne Fuller. What do you think it means?"

Kipp ran a hand through his thick, dark mane. "I know it doesn't mean your grandmother painted this portrait because ya told me she died last year. The date on this metal plate is 1889. Your grandma wasn't one hundred twenty years old, was she?"

"No. Of course not." She leveled a gaze at him. "I hope you don't think I'm a complete nut, but I believe my grandmother led us here. These are her initials on this painting. I believe more than fate brought us together today."

"What are ya getting at?" Kipp asked.

"Do you believe our loved ones can speak to us from beyond the grave? Do you believe in past lives?"

He nodded slowly. "Yeah, I do. The moment I saw ya back at Boothbay Harbor, I knew I'd met ya before. It seemed I'd known ya all my life. And then, when we

touched..."

She grabbed his hand and spoke with enthusiasm. "Yes! It was electric. It seemed I knew you, too. I remember my grandma telling me stories about spirits caught between this world and the next, and about the ones who live their lives over and over again. I always thought they were just made-up tales to entertain me as a little girl."

"And now, ya believe them to be more?"

"Yes. Obviously my grandma didn't paint this portrait, but maybe one of her past lives did—a woman with the same initials. Grandma always told me spirits watch over us after they've thrown off their physical garments and left the earthly world. I think that's what she's been doing. Grandma has been watching over me, and she used the woman in white to guide me to you."

Devin moved toward the lobby quickly, pulling him along with her. "I need to speak to the president of the historical society. It's very important."

They stepped up to the front desk and Kipp asked the clerk to once again ring Mrs. Grey. When she answered, Kipp reminded her of their earlier call and asked if she would mind speaking to Amelia Fuller's granddaughter.

"I'm happy to talk with Amelia's kin," she said. "I remember Devin."

Kipp placed his ear up close and listened at Devin's side as she explained to Mrs. Grey the reason she was calling.

Mrs. Grey said, "The artist's name was Annabelle Serafina Freemont, but she went by her middle name of Sera. She was Darla Freemont's mother."

Serafina!

Astonished by yet another coincidence, Devin and Kipp gazed at each other. After Devin thanked Mrs. Grey for the information, the two sank into a loveseat and pondered their extraordinary situation.

He asked, "Why has this happened now? Your grandmother passed away a year ago."

"One year today." Devin lowered her eyes and spoke with ragged honesty. "My grandma and I were very close. Her last words were spoken to me. She told me to chase my dreams and I'd find love. It's been a trying time for

me, this past year. My personal dreams almost came to a standstill, and I'd nearly given up on love in any shape or form. Maybe this is grandma's way of getting me back on track—of reminding me that love is always there, waiting for us, no matter how long it takes to reach us." A single tear welled in the corner of Devin's eye.

Kipp took her hand and stroked it with his finger. "I've been waiting for love, too. I'm willing to do my part so grandma's dreams for both of us come true." He drew her hand to his mouth and kissed the inside of her wrist, where her pulse beat.

"How do you suggest we start?" she asked softly.

"I think we should begin by first promising each other we will never, *ever* go near the cliffs together."

Devin laughed as Kipp wiped the tear from her cheek. He lifted her hair from the collar of her robe and caressed the back of her neck with his fingers.

She closed her eyes and sighed pleasantly. "I think that's a wonderful way to begin, but as a romance writer, I can't help but wonder how the story will turn out in the end." She gazed at him tentatively.

He looked deep into her eyes.

Devin's knees went weak as he raised her face to meet his. As their lips touched for the first time, a new dream glimmered through her mind—one that pictured the two of them standing on the shore looking out to the sea, exchanging rings, and promising to love each other all through time.

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