

Chapter 1: Dream Story from the novel *The 7 Women of Tourmaline Island*

A piddling, little ol' thunderstorm would never give the women of Tourmaline Island cause for concern or reason to rise from sleep. They have slept through far worse, for sure. Even as the millennium draws to a prophetic end, they rest assured that fifty years of separatist living have well prepared them for all that is to come. That is, until a dream came to call on each of them, in turn, bringing urgent news of a visitor soon to arrive.

Normally, each woman, according to her own particular logic, could find good reason for no reason a'tall to study on a dream before the light of day. Old age, they say, makes you stingy with sleep and even more inclined to wait on the sun to figure things out. However, something about this dream stuck way down deep in the seat of their souls, like an unannounced neighbor who finds cause to stay for dinner. Yielding to oblige, they each reluctantly rose to the auspicious occasion of the potent premonition. From one cabin to the next, candlelight descended on darkness until illumination came full circle around the Island's middle grounds. A clear enough sign for anyone who understands anything about the mysteries of life to know a pot of tea was in order at the fireside of Mama Delight, the tribe's matriarch.

"Watchu doin' up so late?" May Su asked as she plopped through the door with a clap of thunder at her heels, dripping rain from her well-worn calico cape. For all of May Su's 76 years, she had managed to retain the zeal of that feisty young gal who used to buck authority, wear pants, and do as she damn well pleased at a time when such behavior from a lady was scorned as simply disgraceful.

"Same thing as you, I s'pose," Dee answered with subtle, mutual realization. She knew her oldest friend on Earth understood the nighttime and all its nuances too intimately to be fooled. But the thing that struck May Su as odd wasn't so much Dee's wide open front door at that odd hour of night, nor the slow churning whistle of her teapot set to boil, nor the way she pensively occupied her throne at the head of her round oak kitchen table, but that her 80-year-old, earth-toiled hands were uncharacteristically idle and folded, as if she were poised for a sermon or prayer. . .

Suddenly, everything that was prone to speak of wisdom and truth around Mama Delight's two-room cabin fell silent. From the creaking screened door across to the hand-carved cherry bed frame holding cotton-stuffed mattresses; to the fox, rabbit, and weasel skins shading the top half of the window above the bed; to the hurricane lamp on the round teak nightstand beside the bed; to the adjoining cedar chest of drawers packed with clothes in homemade potpourri; to the crackling cherry wood in the fireplace along the far left wall; to the deer and buffalo bones spread across its mantel; to the frayed, worn boxes strategically piled by size next to the fireplace and stuffed with buttons, scissors, threads, and scraps of fabric; to the wicker rocking chair between the boxes below the rear window and stacks of books by Wheatley, Dunbar, Hurston, Hughes, Du Bois, and other noted writers; to the potbellied stove next to the brief hallway leading to the bathroom; to the nail-hung pots and pans on the wall next to the stove; to the freshly picked bundles of herbs and pungent roots occupying her ceiling-high shelves; to the mason jars containing seashells, pot liquor, pickled peppers, gems, and semi-precious stones of every hue on her oak countertops; to the aromatic potted peppermint, sage, sweetgrass, basil, and parsley plants in the windowsill above the kitchen sink; to the river's reeds and rushes leaning with a stiff sotol broom in the front right corner; to the scores of wire-hung tintype and sepia-toned photographs of family members long gone on the facing wall; to the ribboned and bowed hats and shawls draped around the large oval looking glass on the back of the open door; to the vased magnolias, roses, and lilacs placed in every available spot throughout the room; to the round kitchen table flickering with candles in the middle of it all—everything at once had gone stubbornly mute.