

from "Sojourner" by Angela Bibum

PROLOGUE

As she dreamed, she saw a handsome man walking through a tropical rain forest. The man wore military fatigues and his boyish face glistened with sweat. Carrying an AK-47, he walked parallel to a stream. She noticed the stream was red with blood. There was a primordial greenness and moistness about the forest; she could feel the thick, warm air. A monkey, sitting on a tree branch, yawned lazily as it watched the man walk by. Suddenly, the man started to run. He seemed to be pursuing someone. The forest gave way to a clearing and the man stopped running and looked around. He was surrounded by green hills. Then, Sojourner saw that the hills were covered with the corpses of men, women, children, even babies. Some were clothed, some were partially clothed. It was a sea of human corpses. The people were so newly killed that she hoped, and half-expected, the bodies to move at any moment. However, to her despair, they did not. They just bled and began to rot. She wanted to call to the man in her dream as she saw him looking down at his military boots, boots that were spattered with blood. He looked up to the sky. Then, he grasped the rosary around his neck and prayed. She heard him whispering the prayer of St. Michael the Archangel.

CHAPTER ONE

Washington, D.C., September 1990

Sojourner Brown felt giddy as a tall, dark brown-complexioned attorney approached her in the law library of Livingston & Richards, where she was a part-time assistant. Livingston & Richards was located in Washington, D.C., in an office building on Pennsylvania Avenue, across the street from the old post office pavilion. The location was walking distance from the White House, the Capitol and the Supreme Court. Being in such close proximity to these institutions made Sojourner feel that she was in the center of the world's most important location.

The attorney approaching Sojourner was a lean man with an angular, boyish face and an aquiline nose. He seemed to grow with each step toward her. She estimated that he was about 6'4". She stood behind the counter of the library. The attorney's name was Joseph Kalisa and he was a new associate at Livingston & Richards. Joseph's name had been included in the latest issue of the monthly employee newsletter, along with a note about the universities from which he had graduated and his native country in Africa: Rwanda.

"Good morning, miss," Joseph Kalisa said. His voice was low and soothing and Sojourner detected a rich foreign accent.

"Hi, Mr. Kalisa. How are you?" she said.

"Fine, thank you. I would like to check out these books, please," Joseph said, glancing at the books he held in his arms. He wore a chocolate brown three-piece suit which seemed to be fresh from the racks of a couture designer's studio and a cream-colored dress shirt with a matching silk tie. The cream and brown colors accented his smooth complexion, creating a vanilla-and-chocolate effect that made Sojourner's mouth water. However, on the outside, Sojourner remained cool and professional. She opened the circulation binder and proceeded to show Joseph how to check out the books. He signed his name for each as she watched him. His long, elegant fingers curled delicately around his expensive-looking gold pen, showing clean, well-groomed fingernails. Ostensibly, Sojourner watched him so she could help him in case he had questions.

Standing near Joseph, she absorbed his scent: A light, clean, woody fragrance. His hair was closely cropped and neat, with a healthy sheen. He carried himself with the dignity of royalty and his disposition was serious and reserved. Although he made eye contact with Sojourner, his facial expression was almost blank. His dark eyes gazed not *at* her, but *through* her. *I'm transparent to him*, she thought, and was intrigued.

Quickly glancing at her clothes, Sojourner thought about what she had worn that day: A pale yellow oxford shirt, beige gabardine pants, and brown penny loafers. The faux pearl necklace that she wore matched her earrings. She was glad she had taken some extra time that morning to style her hair in a chignon.