

CHAPTER 1

The Dream

An unrelenting chill had coiled around her body like an invisible serpent caressing its prey just before devouring it. Dressed only in a light summer dress and sandals, Genevieve tore at the clip holding her long, dark hair in a vain attempt to warm her bare shoulders and stop the uncontrollable chattering of her teeth.

Fog hung weighty in all directions, insufferably damp and opaque. As her anxious green eyes strained to see through it, nothing was perceivable, save for some faint rumblings heard in the far distance. With arms outstretched, Genevieve groped in the unyielding haze as she moved toward the sound. She was keenly aware of being alone, but it was the visceral feeling of *loneliness* that painfully rippled through her body. As her lip quivered, she moved forward.

Minutes passed, and the veil of fog began showing signs of retreat. Strangely, as it did, the dreary emotions *within* Genevieve, also began to recoil.

She had just begun to quicken her pace when she came to a sudden stop. With her ears perked, Genevieve's pulse started to gain speed. Somewhere, not too far away, there was warbling, otherworldly chant calling her name with a tonality foreign to anything she'd ever heard.

An odd energy was now pulling her closer as the anomalous tones slowly continued to reverberate, "G e n e v i e v e." With each step, the ensemble of ethereal voices was becoming clearer. Genevieve could feel an indescribable vibration emanating from the sounds, and the closer she got, the more intense her emotions became. As her mind tried interpreting the sensation, Genevieve only knew it resembled love, yet nothing she would be able to describe or had ever experienced before.

Then, the last trace of fog disappeared.

Blinking, in a state of confusion, Genevieve knew her eyes must be deceiving her, as a vast sea of people were spread out before her. Curiously, they were all lying on beds. Some were on hospital beds, others on regular beds, some, even on simple cots or mats. People of every age and walk of life were there. As Genevieve slowly moved her head from side to side, the multitude had her complete attention, yet Genevieve had no understanding as to why the vast bedridden choir had summoned her.

The sky slowly became dark and cloudy. Lightning flashed above, but the thunderous sound afterward never materialized. Rain came and went but fell silently with no sensation to Genevieve's skin. Nothing mattered but the state of reverie in which Genevieve had become a willing captive.

Not knowing if years or just moments had passed, Genevieve noticed that, in the far distance, those she barely could see had started to drift upward, still lying on their beds. As she

watched, one by one, they made their exit into the dark, ominous clouds above. When those closer to her started to lift off the ground, Genevieve could see they were smiling; their eyes fixated on her as they continued their ascent, singing her name until they disappeared.

Then, the last bed, and the one closest to Genevieve began to rise. On it, was a young woman in her late teens, approximately the same age as Genevieve. Frowning, Genevieve sensed a familiarity, yet knew she had never seen the girl before. When the teenager had risen to eye level, the young woman began to speak. “We know the great strength that dwells within you, Genevieve. Your spirit is extraordinarily fearless. Trust the path that will unfold before you. It will become more important than you can imagine.”

As the girl rose slightly above Genevieve, she reached out her hand. Genevieve ran quickly forward and grabbed hold of it. There were no words, but Genevieve clearly understood the young woman as if she was communicating telepathically. “You will begin to understand once your daughter is born.”

Frantically, Genevieve tried to hold on tight, but the young woman’s fingers slipped away. As the bedridden teenager watched Genevieve while rising higher and higher, Genevieve implored her, “Don’t go! I don’t understand what’s happening here. *PLEASE*, what are you trying to tell me?”

With her one arm still stretched upward, Genevieve could only watch as the mysterious teenager silently disappeared into the clouds above.

All of a sudden, a crack of thunder snapped behind her, making Genevieve jump. Moments later she felt the rain pelting, icy cold, against her face. Looking around, she realized that once again she was abandoned and alone.

With a moan, she dropped to her knees. Not caring how badly her hot tears stung against her frozen skin, Genevieve angrily screamed toward the dark grey sky, “You *have* the wrong person! I’m no one special—I’M NOT EVEN PREGNANT!”

With a sudden jerk, Genevieve opened her wet eyes and felt her body trembling. Brushing the tears away, she took a deep breath and blew it out in an attempt to calm down. *It was only a dream*, she thought. With a quivering chin, she closed her eyes again, trying to pull everything back into her consciousness and analyze it. *Why did a dream upset me so much?*

Squeezing her eyes tight, Genevieve shivered when loneliness began to insinuate itself. Shaking her head vigorously, she quickly buried the thought. She took another deep breath. After a few moments, Genevieve felt her body relax as she recalled the intoxicating feeling that came later in the dream.

Lying flat and very still, Genevieve tried to see if the euphoric phenomenon was something she could conjure up again, at will. *Nothing*. Whatever it was, it was gone now. *What in the world could people in beds possibly mean? What did the girl mean about a path to follow? 'You will begin to understand once your daughter is born.'* *What daughter? We just got married and haven't even discussed children yet. And, why did they make me feel so incredibly important? I'm certainly no superhero.*

Trying to figure out the abstract dream was beginning to give Genevieve a headache. Still, she couldn't help but whisper the young woman's final words, which weren't relayed as words at all, "...once your daughter is born." With a flashing grin, Genevieve thought, *at least that didn't seem so unbelievable...someday.*

Letting the dream fall away, Genevieve noticed the first signs of light peeking through the drapes. Rolling to her side, Teddy was still in a deep sleep. Genevieve relaxed and closed her eyes. *Mrs. Walker*, she thought with a sigh. The past year continued to feel surreal; the intense and unexpected romance, the fairytale wedding, as well as the honeymoon in Hawaii they had just returned home from.

Having had so much of her happiness and stability ripped away from her in the past, Genevieve had a hard time believing anything good would last. But she knew, deep down, this would last, it *had* to. For, at seventeen, she had never known love and wasn't looking for it, but he found her anyway—Theodore Ian Walker. *He* was the good that would last a lifetime.