

## Lucid

by Ana Sun

When she showed up in his dreams a third night in a row, Linus began to wonder if she was a demon invading his slumber, or an angel trying to impart a celestial message.

It was still dark and much too early. Linus huddled under the duvet, feeling strangely empty. His mind was hazy, his body ached with an unnamed longing. Come to think of it, there was a third possibility: she could be simply another lost soul and they'd somehow found a kindred spirit in each other. This would be the stuff of cheesy romantic movies, he mused.

What they did in the dreams wasn't spectacular, which was why he'd barely paid attention at first. Each time, he had found himself on a bench in a park he'd almost recognise, she would appear beside him, and they would just talk.

Blinking himself awake, Linus tried to remember her face, but her features were an indistinct blur. All he could recall with any clarity was that she had slender hands, a plain silver ring shining against the dark gold of her skin. Then there was a faint floral scent that seemed to enclose him at the moment of waking. Lavender? Rose? Linus was never good with that sort of thing.

He sat up and willed himself to remember. What was she wearing? What did they talk about? If only he could find a thread of recollection he could pull at, then maybe he could get somewhere. His mind drew a blank. Nothing.

There was a trick he'd read about—how if you could focus on an object, imbue it with intention before falling asleep, you could use it to control your dreams. Or did he learn it from a movie?

Linus shrugged. What did he have to lose? He leaned across and rummaged in his bedside table for a small black velvet box. Inside was his father's signet ring. This would do.



He got on with the day. The tedious business of morning ablutions, a hurried breakfast, the monotony of the day's work, the mundanity of reality. When evening came around, Linus didn't feel like supper, so he ate a slice of bread with marmalade and washed it down with a cup of tea. After some thought, he swilled a shot of whisky.

Bedtime couldn't come fast enough. He held his father's ring in one hand and willed it to remind him to be aware when he dreamed. He then slipped the ring onto his little finger and succumbed to sleep.

He was in the park again. His feet seemed to know where to go, so he followed a path until he reached an empty bench. He sat down on one side to leave room for her. Children who had just finished school were running haphazardly, playing an indecipherable game that must only exist in their heads.

Something wasn't quite right with his hand. He looked down, saw the ring—and remembered. An inner eye opened. It was a sunny day, and nature's lush green rushed to greet his senses. Linus enjoyed the warmth on his bare arms. With a start, he realised that he was in a summer shirt and light trousers. Unbelievably, the ring had worked.

“How are you today?” said a familiar voice, mellow like the afternoon.

Linus turned to greet her and smiled. Today she wore a yellow sundress, her shoulders glistening in the golden light of the hour. She looked down at her hand, her silver ring glimmered in the sun. Was she using the same method of recall?

“I can't believe I don't know your name yet—” Linus started to say.

“Kanisha.”

“Linus.”

It was as if they were meeting for the first time. Suddenly, he felt a surge of urgency. There was no telling how long they would have.



“Kanisha, you’re...aware you’re in a dream, aren’t you?”

She smiled. “Not initially, but after I saw you twice, I thought I’d better do something about it.”

“This has happened to you before?”

“Only once, a long time ago.”

They looked over at a child who was searching for her friends. The game seemed to have morphed into hide-and-seek.

“Do you know why we meet?” Linus asked the burning question on his mind.

Kanisha shook her head. “The universe works in mysterious ways. Maybe we have something to learn from each other.”

Linus’s brow furrowed. “I remember nothing of our last three meetings.”

She paused. “I don’t think it’s about what you consciously remember.”

“What do you mean?” He looked into her eyes then. Deep, dark, lustrous.

“My guess is...it’s about the feeling we have afterwards. Things that change deep inside us, shifts that are made forever—ones our conscious minds can only grapple with.”

Kanisha pushed back a strand of hair from her face and looked at Linus earnestly. “Listen, I don’t think we have much time left, so I want you to have this.”

She removed her ring. With both hands she grasped his and placed the ring into his palm, closing his fingers around it.

“Keep it for me until we meet again.”

Linus blinked. The world went dark. Lavender, or rose.

It took a moment for him to realise that he was, at least physically, back in his own room. Morning stole in through the gap between the curtains. A sliver of dawn slicing through the residue of night.



Linus didn't move. The emptiness in the aftermath was suffocating. He resisted the urge to cry. There was something in his hand. He knew what it was without having to see it.

He sat up and switched on the bedside lamp. Hands shaking, he slipped Kanisha's ring onto his middle finger. Too small, so he tried it on his ring finger. It fitted perfectly. Taking it off again, he marveled at it under the lamplight. Neither angel, nor demon. Perhaps just a memory now. It was then that he noticed there was an engraving on the inside: an address.

