



Dream Seed

by Nina Kiriki Hoffman



Photo by [Kelvin Kay](#), 2003

My Aunt Eileen was the only one in the family who understood me, and that was weird, because I'd never met her.

Aunt Eileen sent me the best presents.

When I was ten, and my older brother Scott told me there were no such things as fairies, Aunt Eileen sent me a scarf with fairies on it, and they moved. They were dancing, and every time I looked at the scarf they were in a different position.

When I was thirteen and Scott found my diary and read parts of it out loud to my friends who were at the house for a sleepover, resulting in my social downfall (why did I have to describe my friends' worst habits and flaws, even if only for myself?), Aunt Eileen sent me a journal with a lock that really worked.

When I was fourteen, Scott showed my boyfriend Brent, the love of my life, embarrassing pictures of me with chicken pox. Brent faded out of my life after that. Aunt Eileen sent me a friendship ring with celtic knots that flowed into each other without end. I had lost the love of my life, but I had her friendship, and that counted for something.

I wrote Aunt Eileen letters thanking her for the presents. I sent her little things in return, a fat golden acorn with a perfect cap, a red-striped agate I found on the beach, a bluejay feather. I didn't know how she always found me the perfect present when I hadn't told her why I needed it.

This year I was fifteen. I wondered what Aunt Eileen had sent me for Christmas. Scott hadn't done anything terrible to me lately, maybe because I didn't have friends over anymore. I only had two real friends, and we met at one of their houses. I hadn't let Scott know who they were. He was in high school now and could no longer watch me in the cafeteria to see who I was with.

I was still afraid to date boys, though. I would have to tell my mother who I was seeing, and Scott would find out from her, and I just knew he would screw the whole thing up somehow. I was still sure Brent was my one true love, though I'd been noticing another guy, Doug, at school lately, and I knew he noticed me back. Well, a lot of guys noticed me, but I just smiled.

Christmas morning Scott, Mom, and I sat on the floor near our little white-lighted live tree. Dad had left a year ago. Mom said he would call us in the afternoon, but I wasn't even sure if I wanted to talk to him. I was still mad at him for leaving. Plus, he moved halfway across the country so even if I wanted to see him I couldn't.

We each passed out the presents we could reach until there weren't any more under the tree, and then we opened things. Scott tore through the paper quickly to see what was inside. Mom watched him and waited for "thank you"s he was too preoccupied to make, even though she got him a new Wii (I guess she and Dad went in on it together).

Mom had fewer presents — one each from me and Scott, one from Aunt Eileen, a couple of presents she'd brought home from work — her coworkers at the library had given them to her. She had a little stack of Secret Santa gifts from work, too. She opened a present and then waited a while, watching me and Scott.

I tried to slow myself down, open one thing at a time and really look at it. Mom had gotten me new pens, one of them a really nice fountain pen, with special ink. Dad had sent me a new laptop. I really, really wanted it, and I also wanted to hate it because it came from Dad, but ultimately, I had to hug it. Mom had given me stickers to personalize it with, owls and frogs and bats and black kittens, and word processing software. So they must have talked about this, too.

When Scott saw my laptop, he tried to grab it. I hugged it tighter. I wanted to plug it in right away, but not in the living room where Scott could do something to it.

"Scott. Leave your sister alone."

Scott ignored Mom, the way he usually did when she told him to do something he didn't want to. Finally I had to take my laptop up to my room and hide it in a drawer.

My present from Aunt Eileen was small, and I saved it for last. When I opened the black ring box inside the blue paper, I found a small silver seed lying on gold satin. There was a folded note with it. I sat with the box in my hand and stared at it.

"What is it, Damara?" asked my mother.

"A seed," I said.

"Whoever gave it to you must not know about your black thumb," said Scott. "Maybe you're supposed to eat it." He reached for the seed, and I snapped the box shut and put it in my pocket. He tried to pickpocket it later in the afternoon while we were having the turkey. I excused myself and hid the box in my room, where Scott was not allowed to go, though he went anyway. I wished he'd find something else to do besides snooping on me all the time. I made friends and Scott didn't, and he couldn't figure that out. Maybe he thought I had the secret in my room.

In the afternoon, we visited our cousins and aunts and uncles. Cousin Peter locked Scott in the closet for most of the visit and nobody noticed; we were all playing a noisy game most of the afternoon.

We came home tired. I was ready for bed. I went to my room, locked the door, got out the seed, and unfolded the note.

"Dream Seed," it said.

"Plant this in dirt, water with tears or milk, wait a night, and see what grows."

I snuck downstairs and got a teacup full of dirt from the garden, and one of milk from the fridge. Back in my room, I planted the silver seed in the dirt and watered it with milk. I sat cradling the seed cup and thought about Scott, the way he sabotaged me and made me scared. I managed one tear that dropped into the milk-wet dirt.

I set the cup on the dresser and went to sleep.

When I awoke the next morning, a boy sat on my desk chair, watching me. He was dressed in green leafy things that covered everything about him but his face and hands. His hair was wild and dark. His face was peaceful. He smiled when he realized I was looking at him.

He didn't scare me, and I didn't know why. I sat up. "Who are you?"

"Ranir," he said.

I saw that a vine grew from the teacup on the dresser down to the toe of Ranir's left foot.

"Are you my dream?" I asked.

"Am I? Maybe you're mine." He smiled again. "Who are you?"

"I'm Damara."

He came to my bed. The vine attached to his toe broke off. He sat on my bed, leaned toward me. I was afraid. He smelled like sagebrush and clean dirt, and his eyes were gold-flecked brown.

"What—" What had Aunt Eileen sent me? I hadn't been dreaming about anything like him. "What do you want?"

"I want to know you," said Ranir.

"Why?" I huddled in my blanket.

"It's time someone knew you. You've been alone long enough."

I didn't want anybody to know me, what I was really like underneath. Whenever anyone got close, all Scott had to do to drive them away was show them something more about me, my hidden thoughts, my ugly past, all the things I had never showed my two new best friends.

"You won't like me," I said.

"I'm your dream," he said, and leaned closer. His breath smelled of honey. I closed my eyes and sensed his warmth. His lips touched mine, so warm and soft, and they tasted of ripe fruit. "Just tell me everything," he whispered.

I didn't even speak. Somehow all I had been, all I was, all I hoped to be was between us, and he breathed me in. He leaned closer and hugged me. At first I held back, but then I leaned against him. He was warm and smelled like jasmine and honeysuckle. He knew me, he understood me, and he loved me.

Then he vanished, leaving nothing but a few silvery petals and a dusting of gold on the bed.

I lifted one of the petals and it disintegrated between my fingertips. But that moment when he had loved me, that sat inside me, solid and forever. No matter what else happened, I knew I could hold onto that.