

# Cadence

A GIFT UNLEASHED.  
WILL IT BE ENOUGH?

— SPIRIT WALKER, BOOK THREE —

DIANNE J. WILSON

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## *Dedication*

To Dad, who made it easy for me to believe in a  
Heavenly Father who loves me  
and always has my back.



*Spirit Walker Series*

Affinity  
Resonance  
Cadence





# 1

Mist-fire burned across Kai's skin, so fierce it stole his breath away. Bree clung to him. Shivers wracked through her body.

*Get out!*

*Turn back!*

*You're going to die!*

A stubborn ball of resolve remained in the pit of his belly. He kept walking. One foot, then another. Bree's weight shifted, and she struggled against him.

"We're going to die! Let me go. Are you insane?"

"Just a bit more." Kai's arms throbbed from the mist and Bree's weight. She scrambled like a wildcat in his arms, but he held on. He held on for the time in the desert. He held on the way her father should have. Their feet hooked, and they came down hard. Kai kept his arms locked even as the blackness inched across his vision and claimed him.

~\*~

"Kai."

Was that Bree's voice in his head? "Hmm?"

"You can let go now."

Bree's face hung over his, so close he could taste her breath. He craned his neck and squinted. A worn throw lay at his feet. He was on the couch in Torn's office. The pain from the mist lingered on his skin and

he cringed as he held up his hand, expecting to see charred flesh. No sign of damage. His skin was normal. Everything came into sharp focus, and he heard the blast of the air freshener. Green vapour curled through the air.

“Affinity enhancer. Don’t breathe it in!” He shoved Bree aside and hunted for something to dislodge the canister. A chair. Kai swung it high and smashed it into the device mounted on the wall. It flew off and bounced on the floor. Lungs burning, he grabbed it and ran. Another two lined the walls down the passage. Kai stepped over sleeping bodies to hook them off too. He dashed to the kitchen, snatching breaths in short gasps. He threw open the chest freezer, tossed the canisters in, and shut it.

Bree peered around the door. “Is it safe to breathe yet?”

“Help me look for more. We need to get rid of them all.”

They searched the building and found a dozen more. Once they’d all been stowed in the freezer, Kai slid to the floor and felt his muscles turn to jelly. Bree sank to the floor opposite him, drawing her knees up under her chin. Her face was pale in the frame of her fiery hair, dark rings under her eyes. Kai drank in the sight of her. She was the loveliest thing he’d ever laid eyes on. And this time, she was right here with him.

“You’re here.”

“Apparently I am. Where are we?”

“We are back in the natural realm.” Kai struggled for words. “On earth.”

Bree eyed him sideways. “You think I’m an alien?”

“No! I just don’t know how to explain it.” He shrugged. “I’m sorry for squishing you. I couldn’t let

you go and risk leaving you behind again.”

“So, if we were going to burn to death, at least we’d die together. Is that it? Romeo and Juliet but without the family drama.”

Kai squirmed. He’d discovered glimpses of enough family drama to put Shakespeare’s stories to shame.

Bree shrugged. “It doesn’t matter. What now?”

“They should be waking up soon. And then...I’m not sure. Who would have sabotaged us like that? Why?”

“I haven’t been here, remember? We should make tea.” She pushed off the floor and turned a slow circle to get her bearings. Wiping dust off the urn, she filled it and switched it on. While the water heated up, she dug through the cupboards to find teabags and mugs. She favoured her whole hand, keeping the damaged one pulled into her sleeve.

Kai watched her move, and it soothed him.

She handed him a mug full of steaming sweet tea and then slid down next to him on the floor, balancing her own tea. “That was painful.”

Kai sipped and felt warmth return to his fingers. “The mist?”

Bree nodded. “How did you know it would bring us back?”

“I didn’t. It was a gut feeling. You make good tea.”

“I know. It’s been a while since I could.” Her cup clinked on the tiles as she put it down.

The sounds of moving people filtered through the doorway. “The rest of them are waking up.” *Where was Runt?* “Did you see a little dark-haired girl anywhere in the building? And two kittens?”

Bree shook her head. Without warning, she flew

off the floor. "Elden!"

Elden, her brother, stood propped up by the doorway. He winced as Bree smacked into him, throwing her arms around him fiercely. He hugged her with his eyes shut, his breathing shuddery. After a long moment, he pushed her to arm's length before folding her into another hug.

"I didn't think I'd..."

Bree smacked his arm. "I know. I didn't think I'd see you again either. Why did you have to go and get involved with those people? Sometimes I swear you have no brain."

Elden held up his hands, blinking.

Evazee pushed past their reunion into the kitchen, her gaze slid over the boiling urn, the teacups, and finally rested on Kai. She sat down on the floor next to him, and the warmth of her seeped into his skin. He hadn't realized how cold he was.

"Well, that was quite something." Evazee kept her gaze on the ground, and her pale hair hung between them like a curtain.

A dry chuckle shook him. "Indeed. I want to hear your stories sometime. A lot happened after we were split up."

Evazee blinked and switched her intent focus to her fingernails. "Yeah, we can swap stories sometime." She glanced towards Elden and Bree, who were still hurling insults at each other. "You brought her back."

Kai nodded. Weariness crashed in on him, and the desire to be horizontal seemed overwhelming. Too many unanswered questions. He needed to think, and for that he needed time and space. None of which he'd get around here.

Evazee spoke softly, "You should come to the hall.

Everybody is waking up. They're going to need somebody to talk them through."

"You can do that. You're good at that."

"Oh, please. I'm not the only one who can talk, you know." She pushed off the floor, picked up a cloth, and started wiping counter tops furiously, as if they'd gotten dirty just to annoy her.

*What was wrong with the girl?* "You know I'm right. You are way better at that whole thing." He stretched his arms up, working the kinks out his back. Carrying Bree was one thing, but hanging on to her as she'd turned wildcat? That was enough to tie knots all down his spine.

Evazee frowned at his arm. "Boy? Is that a muscle I see?" She dropped the cloth, pushed up his T-shirt sleeve, and held up his arm. "Flex it." Her eyebrows shot up in disbelief. "It is! Look at that bump! Whoa!"

"Evazee, stop it." Kai grimaced as Bree and Elden came closer, looming over him to get a better look.

Bree reached out and squeezed. "Yep, that's a muscle." She took on a conspiratorial tone, whispering into Evazee's ear, "He carried me all the way through the mist."

Evazee's eyes sparkled. "For real?"

Bree grinned and nodded, her red curls creeping across her face each time her chin dipped.

"And who fought me every step of the way?" Kai yanked his arm away and pulled down his sleeve, cutting off any further opportunities for comment. They might as well be investigating a zit on his nose. "We should go. Apparently, everybody is waking up."

He stalked out of the kitchen, and Evazee followed him into the dark passages. The bodies that he'd hurdled over to get to the dispensers were beginning to

show signs of life. Some had made it to half-sitting, others had made it all the way onto two feet, but most of them needed a wall to stay upright.

He couldn't help noticing that Evazee slipped past them all with her arms crossed over her chest. The Evazee he remembered, would be right in there, glowing and letting her hope rub off on everyone. Now she held back, pale and distant. As far as they walked, a sea of green surrounded them. It twisted his belly. So much was broken and bent out of shape in all of these kids.

By the time they'd picked their way through to the main meeting hall, acid-bile gathered at the back of Kai's throat. He swallowed the urge to throw up. Then he found a dark corner and sank to the floor with his knees drawn up. He shut his eyes and focussed on swallowing. His mind wandered, throwing up images of Grave Keepers, Shasta, and the vision he'd seen at the pools. It had just been a vision, but it was stuck in his mind on repeat. TrisTessa with an injured arm—he recognized her. But the baby who'd healed her and the man who'd taken the baby and left? There was nothing familiar about either of them. Even knowing that his name was Roland didn't help.

Peeping through his half-shut eyelids, he surveyed the room. Across the sea of green, a guy sat staring at him. Kai looked away, but soon found his gaze drawn back. From this distance, there was nothing remarkable about the shadowy figure across the room, but the fact that he was staring at Kai so blatantly made Kai's skin crawl. The green in the room assaulted his senses, and he flinched.

Bree found him and sank to the floor close enough that he could feel warmth from her leg on his. He

tipped his head towards his silent fan. "Do you know that guy?"

Bree followed his gaze and shrugged. "There're lots of guys. Which one?"

Kai checked to see if she was messing with him, but her face was straight. He pointed to the man, but he wasn't there. "Oh, he's gone. He was right there, boring holes through me with his eyes."

Bree waggled fingers over her temples. "Probably just leftover from whatever was being pumped into these rooms."

"You're probably right."

"Elden wants to talk to you. He sent me to fetch you. He's waiting in the kitchen."

"Great. What now?" Kai's head ached. The pain started in his shoulders and spread over his scalp like a swimming cap a few sizes too small.

"He wouldn't say. Secret boy stuff I guess."

If Bree knew more, she wasn't saying. Dealing with Elden was the last thing he wanted to do right now. "Sure. Go tell him I'll be there soon."

Kai waited until Bree was out of sight, used the wall to push himself up, slipped from the room, and out onto the street.

~\*~

Feeling useless, Evazee moved between those who were waking up. She should have words dancing in her, golden words, full of Jesus-life and power to work inside any who chose to listen. Her hand slipped to her throat to cover where her imprint used to be, and her belly twisted as if someone had scooped out her insides with a spoon. She glanced behind her.

Bree handed out steaming cups from a tea trolley.

*What now, Jesus? What do we do with these kids?*

Ruaan and Zap ran into the room and headed straight for her. "We need Kai. Where is he?"

"What's going on? He's around here." She searched the room where she'd seen him last, but he was nowhere. "What's the matter?"

Zap stepped in close enough that his words stayed between them. "It's his friend, the small one. Something's not right."

"Runt?" Evazee's hands grew cold. "Take me to her. Now."

She picked her way between the sprawled bodies to follow Ruaan and Zap from the room. Outside the passage was gloomy, shut off from any windows that would bring in natural light. A few of the overhead lights had blown, and Evazee's heart pinched at the thought of being back in thick darkness. "How far is she?" Evazee had left Peta sleeping under a soft blanket in the room, but she didn't relish the thought of leaving her in case the girl woke up and panicked.

"Basement. I think she's found something."

Evazee followed them to the lift and watched lights running in a straight line as the box took them into the belly of the building. The doors drew back with a hiss, and the air around them twisted with a strong sense of wrongness. It gathered in a ball of tension in the pit of her belly. Breathing was suddenly hard.

"She's behind there." Zap bounced on his toes, reluctant to lead the way.

Ruaan glared at him. "Well? Lead on, McZap. We'll be right behind you."

~\*~

A sign hung on the doors to the SandSky Studio declaring it open in spite of the closed doors. Kai let himself in and instantly considered turning around and leaving. The vision he'd seen of the baby healing TrisTessa and being taken away by a man named Roland sat in the centre of his brain, overshadowing all other thoughts. All his other worries led back to this one. He had to know if the Pools of Resonance had been lying. Or worse, telling the truth.

Pockets of people ambled through the gallery, gathered in quiet clumps around the rooms. TrisTessa would be easy to spot with her shock of black hair that refused to be tamed. Kai ran a hand over his own rebellious spikes wondering if he should shave it all off. Before he had a chance to seriously consider that option, he saw her.

TrisTessa was dressed in worn jeans and an oversized white shirt with the sleeves rolled up past her elbows, her hair piled on top of her head in a semblance of a bun. She carried two containers of water with a paint mixing tray balanced precariously on top. Paintbrushes poked out from her armpit and her face pinched in intense concentration highlighting the fine lines around her eyes and mouth. Something about her defied time. *Mom. Mother. Mother dearest.* He settled on her name.

"TrisTessa!"

She turned, and her face glowed as she saw him.

Kai rubbed his neck. This was awkward. How would he even start this conversation? "Here, let me help you." He coaxed the paintbrushes out from under her arm and took the paint trays. Her cheeks flushed and she shot small, sideways glances at him as they walked down the airy corridor.

The building had been designed to use every scrap of natural light. Skylights let in just enough to make entire wall panels glow as if lit from inside.

Kai drank it all in, feeding off the simple beauty of reflected light.

TrisTessa cleared her throat. "Would you like to paint a bit? I've just had a client cancel. I've got it all set up. Unless you're busy, of course."

Kai shook his head. "I'm OK, thanks. It's not really my thing. I just want to ask you a few questions."

"Come on, it's this way." She led him to a small round room, a terrarium of glass in the middle of a jungle of plants. There was a single easel set up in the centre. A rocky water feature trickled outside an open window, filling the air with the music of running water.

"What are you going to paint?" Kai welcomed the distraction, the chance to put off asking her about what he'd seen.

She grinned at him and mischief danced in her eyes. "Oh, I'm not painting. I already know how." She opened a box of paints, set the water down on a small table, and waved him to his place in front of the blank canvas. "This is for you."

This was worse than asking her his question. "I'm not here for that. I just need to ask you something."

"We can talk while you paint. It will be easier."

"What would I paint? This is not my thing."

"It doesn't have to be. Wait, let me start you off." TrisTessa squeezed out coloured blobs onto the paint tray next to him.

For a moment Kai thought she would put brush to canvas, but instead she motioned towards him.

"Don't think. Just put colours on the canvas."

Abstract is what we are aiming for.”

Kai didn't have energy to argue. He dipped the brush into the purple blob, smooshed it into the blue and painted a wavy line diagonally across the top corner. Without rinsing his brush, he dipped it into the yellow and swirled the yellow paint into the green. Another wavy line appeared below the first one, swirls of all four colours blending.

TrisTessa grinned at him, nodding her head. "Perfect. Keep going."

Kai decided to play her bluff. If she'd been hoping to avoid his questions by making him paint, he was about to prove her wrong.

His brush swooped up and down as he considered his words. What he would give to have Evazee's talent of saying the right thing. That would be great right now. "I had a vision. We can call it a dream if it's easier for you."

TrisTessa focussed on his painting, tilting her head this way and that, rubbing her chin thoughtfully. "A vision is a vision. Go on."

"You were in it." His hand shook and the line went skew. "There was also a baby." Kai felt her gaze on his face, but he stared fiercely ahead as if the canvas was the only thing in the world. He dabbed a thick blob of orange over the ruined line. "You had hurt yourself, but the baby grabbed your sore arm and his touch healed you." He cleared his throat against the tension threatening to choke him. "A man came in—"

"Roland."

"Yes, Roland. He took the baby away." Kai had switched from lines to circles. He painted another one, trying to figure out what he was actually asking TrisTessa. *Mom.*

"And you want to know if you were that baby, if Roland is your dad, and if that is what happened?"

His hand dropped to his side, brush splodging paint onto his jeans. For the first time since tackling the subject, he met her gaze.

"What you described is exactly what happened." She reached for him, as if to take his hand but folded her arms instead. "Don't hate him, Kai. He thought he was doing the right thing."

"It makes no sense."

"Very little in life does." She squinted at his canvas, a random mess of colours that could have been the work of a three-year-old. Grabbing his hand, brush and all, she dipped the tip into the black and guided his hand through a series of swift strokes. Kai couldn't quite make out what it was until the last few strokes landed.

Under the direction of her skill, his random mess became an eagle, soaring high against a backdrop of planet earth.

TrisTessa grinned at him, delight crinkling the skin at the corners of her eyes. "Good job."

The gallery doorbell rang. TrisTessa crossed to a small monitor mounted next to the door and pressed a button. The display lit up and showed three men and a woman at the front door of the gallery.

Kai was studying his, or rather *her* handiwork, but he heard her suck in air and a sliver of disquiet shot through him. She spun towards him.

"You have to go now." She hustled him towards the door and away from the main entrance. "Use the back exit. Go quickly."

"What's going on?"

"Nothing!" She forced a smile and her voice

softened. "Nothing, I just have an appointment that slipped my mind. I'm sorry, Kai. Please excuse me. Follow this passage, go left at the end, and you'll see the door. Go now." She was as jumpy as a lizard on a hot desert floor, torn between watching him leave and observing whoever had come into the gallery. With a quick wave, she turned her back on him and left.

Kai had half a mind to follow her and see what had rattled her so badly, but he was tired and hungry, and their conversation had left him more unsettled than before. Let her have her secrets.