

Arcane Du Beltah
Island Nights

A Novel

Book One

Amanah Saais

Copyright © 2026 by Amanah Saais

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted, or used in any form or by any means, including electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations used in reviews, articles, or other uses permitted by copyright law.

This is a work of fiction. The names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events, and incidents portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead,

actual events, businesses, organizations, or locations is entirely coincidental.

The moral right of Amanah Saais to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted.

First published in 2026.

Book One of the Arcane Du Beltah series.

Dedication

To every woman who has looked at her life
and wondered whether she arrived too late.

Your dreams have not forgotten you.

Your adventure may be closer than you think.

And to the friends who become sisters, the
families who keep believing in us, and the
unexpected people who awaken parts of our
hearts we thought had gone silent—this story
is for you.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1.....	7
Thirty and Still Dreaming.....	7
Chapter 2.....	25
The Birthday Wish	25
Chapter 3.....	43
Journey To the Secret Island	43
Chapter 4.....	63
First Day in Paradise	63
Chapter 5.....	84
Two Worlds About to Collide	84
Chapter 6.....	103
The Ice-Cream Encounter.....	103
Chapter 7.....	123
The Call Before Dawn	123
Chapter 8.....	142
Secrets, Suspensions, And Betrayal	142
Chapter 9.....	161
Business, Family, And A First Date	161
Chapter 10.....	180
An Evening of Temptation.....	180
Chapter 11.....	202
Beneath The Northern Lights	202

Epilogue.....	223
End Of Book One	228
Acknowledgments.....	228
A Preview of Book Two	230

Chapter 1

Thirty and Still Dreaming

If anyone had told Raven that at thirty years old, she'd still be living with her parents—no husband, no fiancé, not even a child to call her own—she'd have laughed in their faces. Yet here she was, staring at the peeling paint on her office walls, wondering how her life had spiraled so far from the dreams she'd once held so tightly.

When she was younger, she'd imagined her thirties would be a time of stability and joy. She'd pictured herself in a cozy home, a loving husband by her side, and two kids—a boy and a girl—running around the yard. She'd be working her dream job, jetting off to exotic destinations every year, and living a life full of purpose. But as the saying goes, man makes plans, and God laughs.

Raven was turning thirty in a matter of days, and the only thing she felt was a gnawing sense of failure.

The phone on her desk buzzed, snapping her out of her thoughts. She reached for it automatically, her fingers brushing against the sticky notes and pen she kept within arm's reach. "Mr. Philips' office, how may I help you?" Her voice was steady, practiced, though her mind was miles away.

The caller rattled off a message, and Raven scribbled it down, her handwriting neat and precise. "I'll make sure he gets it. Thank you for calling." She hung up and leaned back in her chair, staring at the note. The routine was so familiar it felt like second nature, but today, it left a bitter taste in her mouth.

Is this it? she wondered, her gaze drifting to the window where dark clouds loomed. Is this all my life will ever be?

The office was quiet, the hum of keyboards and occasional murmurs of conversation doing little to distract her. She glanced around, catching the eye of a colleague who quickly looked away. Raven sighed. She wasn't oblivious to the whispers—how the women thought her aloof and the men found her unremarkable. She didn't blame them. It was easier to keep to herself than to try and fail at fitting in.

When the clock finally struck five, Raven packed up her things and made her way out of the building, offering polite nods to the few colleagues she passed. The air outside was heavy with the promise of rain, a rarity for March in Abuja. She glanced down at her flats; grateful she'd chosen practicality over style that morning.

The Bolt car she'd booked earlier was waiting by the curb, its engine idling. She hurried

over, dodging puddles as the first drops of rain began to fall. The driver, a familiar face after six months of rides, greeted her with a warm smile. “Good evening, madam. How was work?”

“Same as always,” she replied, buckling her seatbelt. “How’s the family?”

They exchanged pleasantries as the car merged onto the highway, the rain now falling in earnest. Raven stared out the window, her thoughts drifting until a ping from her phone pulled her back. She pulled it out and saw a message from Lilian.

Happy birthday, bish! I hope you’re ready to party till sunup because I am. By the time I get to your house, please be ready, or I’ll shove you into one of my dresses. And you know how long they can be. Wink, wink. See ya in a minute!

Raven read the message twice, a small smile tugging at her lips. Lilian was the only person who could make her laugh even on her worst days. But a party? That was pushing it. Raven hadn't been to a party in years, and she wasn't about to start now.

She was about to reply when her thumb accidentally swiped to a news article. She scrolled absently, skimming past the usual politics and scandals, until a headline caught her eye: Win a Free Trip to Beltah—A Technological Island Resort Where Dreams Come True.

Her breath hitched. The accompanying images were breathtaking—crystal-clear waters, lush greenery, and futuristic architecture that looked like something out of a sci-fi movie. Beltah was described as a hidden paradise, invisible to the human eye, a place where anything was possible.

For the first time in what felt like forever, Raven felt a spark of hope. She wanted more for her life, and this—this felt like a sign.

By the time the car pulled up in front of her estate, the rain was coming down in sheets. Raven thanked the driver and dashed through the downpour, her clothes clinging to her skin by the time she reached the front door. Her mother looked up from the sofa, where she was watching a Nollywood drama, and raised an eyebrow.

“Didn’t I tell you to leave an umbrella in your office for days like this?” Mrs. Mathews’ voice was sharp, but Raven knew it was laced with concern. “Next thing I know, you’ll be sneezing all over the house and giving everyone your cold.”

“I’m sorry, Ma,” Raven said, shivering. “It won’t happen again.”

“Hmm, that’s what you always say.” Her mother stood, shaking her head. “Stay there. Let me get you a towel.”

Raven waited, dripping onto the tiled floor, as her mother returned with a towel and a white robe. It was a familiar routine—her mother’s scolding followed by her fussing—and Raven couldn’t help but smile. Despite everything, her mother’s tough love was one of the few constants in her life.

Once she’d changed into the robe and wrapped the towel around her hair, Raven made her way to her room. A hot shower later, she felt almost human again. She dressed in gray sweats and a black long-sleeved shirt, then stood in front of the mirror to braid her hair.

She studied her reflection, taking in the features that had always drawn mixed reactions. At five-foot-six, she was shorter

than most of her colleagues, and her slender frame often made her feel out of place. But she loved her curly black hair, a gift from her father's side, and her hips, which she'd inherited from her mother. Her caramel skin, blemish-free thanks to years of her mother's insistence on skincare, was another point of pride—even if some people insisted she must be bleaching.

Shaking off her thoughts, she finished her braids and headed to the kitchen for something warm.

True to her word, Lilian arrived five minutes later, bursting through the front door without knocking. She never did, not even when they were kids. Dressed in black shorts, a blue hoodie, and sneakers, she looked every bit the carefree spirit Raven had come to rely on.

Mr. and Mrs. Mathews had always treated Lilian like their own, ever since she'd followed

Raven home from primary school. Their friendship had only grown stronger over the years, surviving the same schools, different states for national service, and everything in between. Lilian was a model and fashion designer, a whirlwind of ambition and creativity. At six feet tall, with milk-chocolate skin, dark eyes, and an ever-changing hairstyle, she turned heads wherever she went. Her five tattoos, six ear piercings, and one eyebrow ring only added to her rebellious charm.

Lilian was the kind of person who swore like a sailor and put people in their place without a second thought. She was Raven's protector, the one who'd once punched a boy in the face for pulling Raven's hair. Their parents often joked that they were destined to be friends—born on the same day, same month, same year. Their bond was unshakable.

The Mathews' home was a second home to Lilian. A white-painted bungalow with creeping plants along the sides, it sat on a hill with a stunning view of Abuja. The house wasn't grand, but it was warm and welcoming, filled with the scent of Mrs. Mathews' cooking.

Lilian kicked off her shoes by the door and followed the delicious aroma to the kitchen. "Hello, Momma Raven!" she squealed, wrapping Mrs. Mathews in a tight hug. The older woman laughed, hugging her back just as fiercely.

"How's your mom doing these days?" Mrs. Mathews asked as they pulled apart, her hands resting on Lilian's shoulders.

"Momma's good," Lilian replied, grinning at Raven. "The doctor discharged her yesterday with a clean bill of health."

“Oh, that’s good to hear.” Mrs. Mathews exhaled in relief. “I’ll give her a call later or tomorrow.”

“She’ll be expecting it.” Lilian’s grin widened as she turned to Raven. “So, Madee, what’s cooking?”

“Ah, I knew it.” Mrs. Mathews smirked. “That’s why you’ve been twitching your brows like a cat in heat.”

“Mom!” Raven groaned, her cheeks flushing. “How do you even know what a cat in heat looks like?”

“Child, I’ve been alive longer than you. Anything I say goes.”

“That’s right, Madee,” Lilian chimed in, clearly enjoying Raven’s discomfort.

“And you,” Raven said, narrowing her eyes at Lilian. “I thought you were coming here so we could, air quotes, go to a party.” She wouldn’t

be caught making air quotes in front of her mom. Her hand may just accidentally reach for a spoon, miss and wind up in her face.

“Child,” Lilian drawled, mimicking Mrs. Mathews’ tone. “I’ve been partying since before partying existed. I choose what type of party we’re going to, and as you can see, due to the individual I have to work with, a slumber party is that party tonight.”

Raven stared at her, open-mouthed, until her mom used the end of a spoon to gently close it. “There you go, dear,” Mrs. Mathews said with a mischievous smile.

By the time Raven recovered, Lilian and her mom were already back to cooking, their laughter filling the kitchen. Raven shook her head. Sometimes, she wondered if her mom had secretly given birth to Lilian instead of her. Their synergy was almost brutal.

Thirty minutes later, dinner was served. The three of them sat around the dining table, their plates piled high with jollof rice, fried plantains, and chicken stew. After saying grace, they dug in, the conversation flowing as easily as the food.

It was Mrs. Mathews who broached the topic Raven had been dreading. “So, Lili, any news about the engagement yet?”

Raven stiffened, her spoon hovering mid-air. She knew her mom was only asking out of curiosity, but she also knew where this conversation was headed.

“She’s cooking up her liver to tell Mom,” Lilian said, her tone light. “But I think she’s worried it might affect me, especially with how cranky Momma’s been these past few months.”

Lilian’s sister, Macy, was three years younger and shockingly close to getting married.

Raven couldn't help but feel a pang of envy, though she quickly pushed it aside.

"I don't think she should be worried about that," Mrs. Mathews said, her voice gentle.

"You can take care of yourself, and I think your mom has stopped expecting that from you."

"I don't think there's any way she'd ever stop expecting that from her," Raven muttered under her breath. Mrs. Daniel was a Yoruba woman through and through, and she loved nothing more than a good celebration—especially a wedding.

"And that's why you're my sister," Lilian said, grinning. She didn't care much for the idea of marriage. Her parents had a great relationship, but she'd seen too many couples end up in a divorce court. She preferred her job and her freedom.

“However,” Mrs. Mathews began, and Raven braced herself. “I would like to know what your relationship plan is.”

Raven groaned. “Mom, I don’t know what you mean by a relationship plan. I didn’t stay single all these years because I wanted to; it just happened. There’s no plan...”

“I’m asking you now so I know what to tell your dad when he returns. Unlike me, he takes this entire situation very seriously.”

Raven huffed, stabbing a piece of plantain with her fork. “I’ll tell him myself when he gets back.”

“Wow, I don’t envy you at all,” Lilian said, her tone sincere. Dr. Mathews was a force to be reckoned with. “But that’s by the way. Madee,” she added, tilting her head, “where’s my present? Or did you think me too old for presents?”

Mrs. Mathews burst out laughing, the sound rich and warm. “No, my dear. You can never be too old for my presents.”

“Yay!” Lilian pumped her fists in the air, while Raven rolled her eyes and focused on her meal.

“It’s in your sister’s room.”

“Thank you, Madee. You’re the best.” Lilian planted a firm kiss on Mrs. Mathews’ cheek, and just like that, the serious conversation was forgotten, replaced by laughter and lighthearted banter.

Twenty minutes later, Raven and Lilian made their way to Raven’s room after cleaning up. On the bed were two beautifully wrapped gifts, complete with ribbons and bows. Mrs. Mathews had gone all out, as usual.

“She really does spoil us, doesn’t she?” Lilian said softly, picking up her gift. It was

rectangular and surprisingly heavy. She shook it gently, trying to guess what was inside.

“Yes, she does,” Raven replied, picking up her own gift. Following tradition, they opened them together.

Lilian squealed as she pulled out a sleek Nikon camera, the latest model she’d been eyeing for months. “Madee, you’re a genius!” she exclaimed, holding it up like a trophy.

Raven’s gift was a box of smaller items: a diary (a yearly tradition), a pair of heels, and the one item both gifts had in common—an infinity bracelet. She slipped it onto her wrist just as Lilian did, admiring the delicate gold chain. Inside, the inscription read: Together for Infinity.

“It’s beautiful,” Raven whispered, her throat tightening.

“I don’t think you’ve seen everything yet,” Lilian said, her voice soft. She held up a car key, her eyes wide with excitement.

Raven’s breath caught. She took the key with trembling hands, her vision blurring with tears. It was the key to a Pontiac. “Mom...” she whispered, her voice breaking.

Without another word, they rushed to the living room, where Mrs. Mathews was sitting. Raven and Lilian enveloped her in a tearful hug, their gratitude overflowing.

“Thank you, Mom,” Raven said, her voice muffled against her mother’s shoulder.

“You’re welcome, my dear,” Mrs. Mathews replied, her own eyes glistening. “Now, go enjoy your party.”

Back in Raven’s room, Lilian cleared away the wrapping paper and disappeared outside, returning with a decadent chocolate cake, two