

**MADISON
FOXÉ**



**THE MANDORLA
MEDALLION**

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The Mandorla Medallion

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Prologue - Two Years Ago

The pale face of evil, with eyes--like the hair--silver and body bound in muscle, had a heart centered in ice. His name was unknown, but Shawn Holden was pretty sure the man had entered the small country of Tanzania, Africa to steal the mystical Idol of Minue. The foot-high solid gold molded figure of a gargoyle- like creature with brilliant eyes carved from diamonds was imbued with power that, only those with knowledge of the manipulation, could use to summon the daemonic incubus.

Shawn, a free-lance photographer, had received an anonymous tip that a diabolical collector, under the guise of some enigmatic organization, was after the occult artifact hidden in a small church outside the town of Mbeya. Shawn had been trailing the subject of the whispered report for months, having learned of three other similar thefts that he was beginning to believe were linked to the unnamed man, and his cloak--the Sutratma Society.

Little was known about the Sutratma Society, except that its membership was as obscure, as was its

purpose, the nebulous entity floating like a cloud from country to country, no base of operation, and no obvious means of support. What he had been able to learn was that it was dedicated to the acquisition of ancient artifacts, particularly those associated by myth or presumption, with the supernatural. The means of procurement as questionable as was the ultimate purpose of the 'why' behind the acquirement. But he had been able to make a reasonable guess that it had something to do with an insatiable thirst for power.

Posh Warren, writer, friend, and intimate, had met up with Shawn in New York, curious as to why he was arranging paperwork to permit him entry into one of the poorest countries in the world, Tanzania.

"There's something going on that you're not telling me about," she accused, touching his face thoughtfully. She had no idea when she had fallen-in-love with the blonde Norseman. But she was sure it was somewhere between their first kiss and the following carnal encounter.

Shawn wanted to keep his responses to her questions vague. "There is rumor of a minor up-rising outside the city of Mbeya, and if left unclipped, could spiral into a civil war. After what happened in Rwanda, I just thought I go in, take a few pictures, get a feel for the situation and get out. I should be back within the week."

He addressed one the manila envelopes he had in front of him to Evanston Burton, the other to Nemesis Danos. Both envelopes included the same

information. A list of occult artifacts that Shawn believed were now in the hands of the Sutratma Society and a letter articulating his concern regarding the private raid being made on these obscure pieces, the collection suspected to include the ancient Egyptian stone, the Eye of Ra; the Gnostic's, Staff of the King; and the Anasazi's, Ring of the Raven. The Idol of Minue, the next target.

"I'll go with you," Posh volunteered. "You could use an objective eye, and I take good notes."

"No," Shawn said flatly. "It could be dangerous. I'll go in alone."

In Posh's mind there was no discussion, and in days they were both on their way to the southeast corner of the Tanzania bush. How the collector had ever discovered that Shawn was on his trail was not known, but as soon as Shawn and Posh arrived in Mbeya, they were identified and singled out. Obviously expected.

The trained eye is always aware of nuance, abstractions, and things in, or, out of place, and so when the rifles were lifted, sights directed at Posh, the photographer dove into her, his body taking the deadly spray before collapsing over her. Drenched in Shawn's blood, her horrendous shrieks drew enough attention to buy her life. Posh survived the ordeal, but nothing for her was the same after that.

One Year Later - Pacific Coast Of Guatemala

The violence on the forest floor sent a surge of excitement through the tropical canopy driving the howlers and macaws into a frenzy of deafening roars and maniacal squawks. A tooled, black, leather boot drove down between the shoulder blades of the man who had just been thrown into the wet earth. The man's arms were jerked to the small of his back and lashed together with rope. The Cajun lifted his boot from the man's back, then thrust his knee down with such force that it flattened the man's face into the composting vegetation of slime and insects. Long, brown fingers reached out and entwined a hunk of hair, yanking the man's head from the moldy earth.

"I've been followin' your path of blood for a year now, you bastar'. Tell me who you work for," the Cajun demanded.

"He'll kill me if I do." Blood and dirt spewed from the mouth. Pink froth bubbled over the chin.

"You're dea' anyway. Gimme a name. Now," he snapped. He pulled the head back until he heard the

vertebrae scrape, the man's neck on the verge of cracking.

"The Sutratma Society."

"Gimme' a name," he commanded. When he didn't get the answer he wanted he pushed his head back into the loam, burying the man's nose and mouth below the soft earth. He waited, and then yanked the gasping man out into air. "Gimme' a name," he repeated.

"Conroy Mallory."

"Good. Now I wan' you to tell Conroy Mallory that I am in his face, at his heels, and aroun' any corner he turns. You tell him dat he now has competition, and his name is Nemesis Danos. Do *konmprann*?" Do you understand?

"Yes," the man choked.

Nemesis rose up off the man's back, pulled an automatic from the waistband of his pants and fired into the earth, next to the man's ear. "I shou' kill you," Nemesis snarled at the sniveling coward. "But den I'd be shootin' the messenger."

Chapter One - Six Months Later

Inside the jaws of the monolith that housed the publishing mega group, B.W. Enterprises, Posh Warren was guided to the tenth floor conference center and handed a cup of coffee. Left alone with her thoughts, she stared out the high-rise window feeling very distant from the woman who had stood in that exact same place two years prior, on that portentous day when she and Shawn Holden had left New York for Tanzania, Africa. It was the trip that had led to the horrific moment when all life as she had understood it suddenly changed. She squinted against the sun, or the memory, but no matter how many times she tried to close her eyes to the explosive flashes of that afternoon, the glare was unforgiving.

"It's been a while since we've seen you here," Darla said, breaking into the moment.

Posh turned, and greeted the older woman with a smile, happy for the distraction. The tragedy hadn't touched her delicate face, though it was indelibly etched in the spirit. Darla was obviously glad to see that Posh had finally come out of hiding to rejoin the

world.

"I thought you'd be long gone by now," Posh observed.

"Where would I go? I'm joined to BW's hip. He can't make a move without me." Darla grinned. "What made you decide to call Evanston?"

Evanston Burton was majority stockholder in the BW conglomerate, and the eccentric had taken Posh under his wing years ago, guiding her early career with the patience of a saint and the skill of a genius.

"I had heard about his new magazine and thought it might be a good place to surface. Get my feet wet, again, as it were."

"Enigma ? It's Evanston's pet project." Enigma was a new rag dedicated to '*the strange, the unusual, and the mysterious*'. "Six months ago, the man lifts his head from somewhere in South Africa, and tells BW that he wants him to start this new magazine, and sure enough, when God spoke, the earth flipped on it's axis to accommodate the command. The first issue will be on the stands next month." She grinned. "I'll bet he was glad to hear from you."

Posh nodded. "He seemed to be. He was receptive, though he knew I hadn't written a word in over two years." In all actuality, he had been nagging her for months to get back in the loop. She had finally agreed to give the matter some thought.

"He's always been attached to you," Darla said. "You're the 'daughter' he never had--so what's the subject of the article?"

"The recent discovery of twenty bog mummies

outside a little moorland village called Ravenshold in Northern England. I needed an introduction to the site director, Lawrence Paisley, who I remembered was a friend of Evanston's. So, Evanston made the call and arranged the appointment to visit the site before the Cultural Ministry sets up its own perimeters to control access." She had been looking for something that would fit into the Enigma genre but didn't offer much of a challenge. Just a warm-up. Get in and get out.

"I understand you're here to meet the photographer you've been teamed with. Do you know who it is?"

Posh looked at her notes. "A Nemesis Danos, like the Greek Goddess of retribution."

Darla chuckled. "More like a Greek God," she said.

"It's a 'him'?"

"Oh, yes, very much," Darla raised her brows. "And, I can tell you right now there isn't a woman in this building who wouldn't spread her legs for Nemesis Danos, if he'd just ask, myself included."

"Darla," Posh reproved, with a grin.

"You'll see. He's the proverbial tall, dark and gorgeous, with shoulder-length black hair that he wears in a band at the back of his neck, and a body to die for. And when he talks," she added with a sigh, "you melt. He lives someplace in Louisiana, and he's got that Cajun-French thing going on. Not too thick, but enough to make you puddle. I don't know how you're going to get any work done," she winked.

Posh rolled her eyes. "Trust me; a man is the

furthest thing from my mind right now. Especially one I'll be working with. Bad medicine to mix business with pleasure."

Darla shrugged. "Not if the pleasure is Nemesis Danos."

"My ears are burnin', *chere*." He stood in the doorway, his presence powerful enough to ignite the room. "Do ya have a kiss for me?"

Darla blushed as she raced over and offered her lips, meeting his with a peck. He toyed with Darla, offering a passing thrill to the woman before she scooted out the door. His attention was left to Posh.

His face was beautifully chiseled, but he had a rugged edge that kept him from being pretty. When he smiled, Posh felt that old familiar feeling between her legs. Darla hadn't been kidding. She felt the butterflies, then willed them dead. She was not going there.

Posh stood. "Mr. Danos, I presume," she smiled politely, extending her hand.

He took two long strides, extended a brown arm over the table, his eyes intent on her. "Posh Warren," he smiled. "I jus' finished readin' some of your work." He held her soft hand tightly. His eyes were dark, penetrating; they caught her from the waist, and moved up her body, lingering on the swell of her breasts before resting on her full mouth. He released his grip on her fingers.

Posh was afraid she blushed under the scrutiny. This photographer was going to be a handful, an element to the trip she had not planned for.

He put his hand on the back of a chair, lifted it over the carpet, and around the end of the table. There would be nothing between them but air space.

Nemesis leaned back in the chair, took a lounge position and opened his legs nonchalantly. Dressed in tight jeans, a sweater with sleeves pushed to the elbows, he was casual and she couldn't help but notice the natural rise from his groin. Amusement crossed his face, the expression vague, but the hint enough to send her to the notepad. She twisted the pen through her fingers. They had just met and already she was on a wire without a net.

"How flexible is your travel schedule?" she asked, letting her gaze drop over him evenly.

"I can travel when you want, *chere*. I'm all yours." He held his arms out expressively, pulling the dark sweater across the muscled chest.

Posh felt her heart skip a beat, and glanced back to her notes. "You say you read some of my work," she reminded him. It was a dare. So often, people tossed the off-hand comment like a bone, expecting that no one would chase it. "I haven't written anything in over two years."

* * * *

Nemesis examined the curve of her lovely jaw, hidden slightly by the long flask-tinged wave that brushed it softly. He knew she wanted to be hard, most ambitious women did. But the harsh lines would never reach her face, or touch those brilliant

blue eyes he had enjoyed earlier.

He accepted the challenge. He had read a couple of older articles she had written, wanting to get a feel for the writer. His work, his photos, would balance the author's intent. When she was hard, he would soften. When she was structured, he would offer ambivalence. "I particularly liked your article on the Dropa Stones," he smiled. "You were objective, but I detected a bit of desire, *chere*," he observed. "It was as if you wan' to find somethin' strange in the strange, where most tend to want to bleed the color, take the magic from an idea or object and reduce it to somethin' empty and malleable."

* * * *

She hadn't anticipated the answer. The article on the 10,000 year-old stone discs, carved with minute hieroglyphs, housed at the Prehistory Department at the Beijing Academy, had been printed in a rather obscure scientific journal. She was surprised that he had found it. His comments made her smile to herself. Sometimes it was nice to be seen.

"Now," he continued, "what about you? Do I need to give you a portfolio in order for you to find the comfort with my eye?"

Posh looked over at him. "It's not necessary; you were Evanston's choice, not mine. What I've seen of your work, though interesting, tends to be a little too whimsical for the seriousness of a subject. As an example, your shoot on the slow decimation of the

rain forest in Guatemala appeared to find more authority in the flora and fauna of what it is than the horrific injustice levied upon it. It may be a matter of perspective, but 'a picture is worth a thousand words', I expect my photographer to reflect my work, not influence."

* * * *

Nemesis offered a flat smile. He didn't mind critique. On the contrary, he reveled in it, but her disdain was unwarranted. It smelled like defense, and her beautiful face had pinched under the weight. He wanted to photograph her and see what the images revealed. So often one was able to capture on film what the human eye missed.

"It was about the loss of the beauty." He pulled his brows together. "Much of which is bein' sacrificed to sustain greed. Have you ever done any modelin'?"

Her head snapped up as if she had asked if she had ever been tried for murder. "When I was younger," she confessed. "But I've outgrown that phase."

Nemesis raised his brows and nodded. "Yes, I thin' maybe you have. So what's next?"

Chapter Two

Moss grew from the cracks and crevices of the old river-rock wall like a shredded green tapestry tossed over granite. The fog had blanketed the moors early, the inexperienced newcomer left to wander over the wet earth, through the mist, nearly lost. Thank God she hadn't wandered too far from the inn, or her first night in Ravenshold would have been a disaster. She followed the yellow light, which guided her past the estate entrance into the gardens and around the gazebo to the front door.

"You shouldn't be taking your time in the moors, miss," the old man counseled, as he held the door for her. "The weather this time of year is unpredictable."

Posh smiled, appreciating the caution. But when one needed air, they needed air.

She stepped into the lobby of the sixteenth-century estate turned twentieth-century hotel. Sprinkled with islands of brightly colored rugs that floated wing-back chairs, small tables and the occasional plant, the black marble floor shone like polished obsidian. The magnificent antique chandelier, cut from fine Italian

crystal, hung over the foyer like an inverted tree, tossing delicate shards of light over the room. Past the reception counter, at the far end of the lobby was an imposing walk-in fireplace stacked with burning logs that warmed the expanse with flame. The Inn was bulging, the discovery of the bog bodies drawing interest from the international scientific community. She and Nemesis' suites were on the second floor, and she saw him coming down the grand staircase, drawing attention from both men and women alike.

They had planned to meet for dinner, and she noticed he had changed into black silk slacks and a grey shirt that opened at the neck, exposing a satiny bronze chest. She had to admit he looked good, and decided to change into something a little less casual before she joined him.

She waved him to her. "I haven't seen you all day," she said.

"You miss me, *cherie*?" He grinned, flashing the brilliant smile that could have lit the room all by itself.

She ignored the question, refusing to submit to his southern manipulation. It may work on women like Darla, but it wouldn't reach her. "I'm going to go change. Do you just want to have dinner in the bar?"

He shrugged. "If that's wha' you wan', is no difference to me." He watched her face, his gaze intent. She bristled under his perusal and turned to the stairs. "I'll ge' a table," he said, shaking his head. She was making an effort to be cold, and he was getting a chill.

* * * *

Nemesis wandered into the lounge. For as many people that were checking into the hotel, it was relatively quiet. He took a table in the corner, back against the wall. Posh may be a very beautiful woman, but she was hard. He was beginning to find it difficult to be around her for any length of time. As soon as they had checked in, he had grabbed his camera and walked into the village. He wanted to get the lay of the land, and shoot some film. Picturesque, pastoral, and rich with color and angle, the valley hamlet was a welcome change to the stiff, cold, hackwork he had been doing the last few months. Plus, this was the break he and Evanston had been waiting for.

Ravenshold was laid out like a moorland cross, longer in stem and short in arm. Cobbled streets, red roofs, and boulder-chinked buildings endemic to the paludal countryside, contrived the small community. Cottages, a couple of storefronts, an old bridge, a deserted distillery and a moon-faced young woman all became fodder for Nemesis' muse. Particularly the young woman.

"You want to take my picture?" she smiled. American.

Nemesis aimed the camera and let the shutter snap. He had followed her through the village for a half hour, shooting her in various poses, at the edge of the bridge, in front of the general store, in a garden of heather, sitting, standing, laying, her breasts

pouting playfully, round hips twitching, doing whatever she could to hold his attention.

"Wha's your name, *petite*?" he asked, leaning on a cairn, the stone marker denoting the entrance to town. She was a little younger then he liked his women, guessing her to be in her early twenties.

"Cassie, short for Cassandra, Miller, and what's your accent?"

"Cajun, boo," he grinned. "How come you're here in dis town, so far from home?"

"I'm interning with Dr. Paisley at the University of Chicago. We're here because of the discovery like everyone else. Isn't that why you're here?"

"*Oui*." He found her sweetly attractive, with her pink cheeks, stained lips, and cap of wispy blonde hair. "How old are you, *chere*?"

"Twenty-two, how old are you?"

"Thirty-five."

"I heard men over thirty can't get it up anymore," she teased.

Nemesis chuckled. She was a precocious little peach. "Where you hear dat? From your Maw Maw?"

"My Maw Maw?"

"Your Grandma," he translated.

"No, from my boyfriend," she smiled, dipping her head just enough to play coy.

"Do you believe everythin' he tell you?"

She looked at him. "Maybe. Are you staying at the Inn?"

Nemesis nodded, and he invited her to have a drink with him after dinner. He found her amusing

and substantially friendlier than Posh Warren

Chapter Three

Posh had changed into a black sweater dress that molded her body like a glove, the gold hair flowing over her shoulders in thick waves that moved as she swayed through the room on tall heels. She was a vision, and turned heads as she passed. He stood as she neared the table, pulling her chair out, and inhaled a faint scent of perfume.

His eyes moved over her appreciatively, which whether she liked it or not, it was what she wanted and he knew it. "You look nice, *cherie*," he said huskily.

She felt the hair rise on the back of her neck. Those butterflies again. She offered him a half smile instead of a thank you, not wanting to encourage him.

He got the message and leaned back in his chair. He ordered another scotch for himself and a wine for her. "Why you go' such a hard-on, Posh? Did I do somethin' to make you mad?"

"I'm not mad," she protested. "It's just that I'm here to work and it seems that you are here to play." She had seen him earlier in the village entertaining a

young woman.

His eyes darkened. "There's nothin' wrong wit' taken' pleasures. You might wan' to try it."

"No, thank you. I've been there, done that, and I know how it turns out."

"And how is dat?"

"Badly."

They ordered dinner and she snipped, barbed, and jabbed at him through the entire meal until he had apparently been pushed too far. His muscles contracted and his senses flared. "You know, Posh," he started. "You have a thick wall aroun' you, the why of which is none of my business. But I wan' to assure you right now that I'm no' tryin' to climb it, so you can drop the defense. You have nothin' to fear from me." He stood, took the drink he had just ordered, from the waitress's tray, and looked down at Posh. "I'll see you in the morn."

Posh recoiled, the expression in his eyes threatening. "I assume you will be available by eight? The government is sending their own team to address the find, but we will have an opportunity to view the remains before the bureaucrats show up."

His eyes were set in onyx, and he nodded. They would meet in the lobby.

She watched him move to the bar, his long legs carrying him across the floor with a powerfully confident stride. She looked at her drink. He had been right about the wall. It had taken nearly two years for her to get it in place, and she had thought she'd be safe behind it. Nemesis Danos was the first man, since

Shawn Holden's death by insurgents in Tanzania, who had threatened to lure her out. And it scared her.

She glanced over to Nemesis' back, leaned casually over the bar, and watched the wide-lipped waitress accost him unmercifully with her ardor. He wasn't a bad man, it's just if she had ever felt attracted to anyone there would always be the sacrifice.

She finished her wine. There was a movement of muscle and a flex of virility that drew her eyes back to the photographer at the bar. The pretty young woman she had seen in the village with Nemesis earlier came from the lobby. Posh watched Nemesis' arm slink around the blonde's waist casually and pull her to him. The woman had obviously been expected. For a moment Posh felt hollow, and maybe a little lonely. The man was stirring up feelings she had managed to ignore for some time.

Posh saw no reason to stay and watch the couple at the bar flirt their way into the evening. She left the table. As she passed behind Nemesis, she heard the little blonde giggle, and saw him reach down and squeeze the cheek of her ass.

* * * *

Nemesis looked over his shoulder at Posh's stiff back moving into the lobby. He thought that she held her chin just a little too high. What a waste, he thought to himself, and smiled down into the shining, adoring face under his arm

* * * *

Posh unlocked the door to her suite and met the warm flame of the fireplace, already lit. The sheet was folded over the blanket, a rose on the pillow. Turndown service at its best. A charming long-stemmed cordial glass filled with red liquor was displayed on the table, with a card, the signature in black ink, 'courtesy'.

Posh reached for the delicate crystal and slipped a finger around the thin glass, and inhaled the scent. The liquid had the smell of chocolate and raspberry. It appealed to her. If she had smelled it before, it wasn't as rich as the moment, and she sipped her way through the narrow glass. It had been a long day, and she felt drained, like she had been warding demons.

Her eyes were heavy, her arms languid. The fact that one of her last thoughts before nodding off was of Nemesis Danos left her mind raw.

She lingered somewhere between sleep, and no-sleep, that hypnagogic state that held her over an abyss tethered to a string, dangling. It was a place that left the line between fantasy and reality too fine to see.

She had a sense of someone. "Posh," he said, "I wan' you to hear my voice."

Posh nodded. It sounded warm, sensuous, and deep.

"Can you hear my voice," he directed.

She nodded.

He rested his lips near hers, so close, and her reaction came slowly, magma rising from the core, picking up speed as it moved. "Kiss me," she murmured.

His lips draped over hers, sucking, before she felt the tongue dive into her mouth with a ferocity that moved her. It stroked, playing over her palette like fingers on the keys of a piano, he wrapped himself around her tongue and pulled, dragging her past his lips, tugging, kneading, the power of his effort sending its force between her legs and she moaned.

Posh had raised her back from the bed, shoulder and hip connected to the earth as she opened to the call. Whatever he needed from her soul she gave. "Who are you?" she cried.

His lips fell over her nipples like suction, pulling the nubs like mountains drawn from red earth. They were stiff, engorged, aching and his taut tongue tip whipped around the orbs like a fire, her breasts swelling with need.

She had to know who it was that was rousing her spirit. She reached down for his head and pulled him into view. Nemesis Danos.

Posh groaned and rolled over.

* * * *

Cassie looked up into Nemesis's eyes, her lust obvious, her mouth hot, and she leaned against the counter, inviting him to touch her any place he wanted. A four-piece combo hammered out

contemporary sounds, and Nemesis took the opportunity to work out some of his frustration with the Warren woman by guiding the pliant Cassie to the dance floor.

She was an eager partner, young hormones raging, wanting experiences she couldn't define. He pulled her up against him, as he guided her over the floor; the primed pussy adhered to his crotch. She pressed plump breasts into his chest, her wanton heat driving into him, and he saw no reason not to accommodate the hungry spark. He reached around, gripping her two pillowed cheeks, fueled by the groan she emitted with his touch. She was humping his leg like a sexually rabid animal and he offered it to her, his erection growing beneath the bouncing fluff, her anxious pant and needy clench, telling him all he needed to know. This sweet morsel was melting around him like liquid heat, and he burned.

She pulled his head to her. "Take me to your room," she moaned.

"Are you sure, *petite*?" he growled.

"Please."

It likely didn't come as a surprise to anyone that the couple had left the dance floor and headed for the stairs. He put the *Do Not Disturb* sign on the door and locked them in.

Nemesis flipped the switch on the gas fireplace, requiring no other light. He bent down and ran his tongue over the ready lips. She sank, and he wrapped an arm around her waist to hold her to him. He sensed her inexperience, and it excited him. Cassie

had passion she hadn't glimpsed, and, at the moment, Nemesis was willing to open the envelope.

"You make me so hot," she confessed. "I think I'm going to burn up."

A small warning light went off in his head. Nemesis pulled his face from hers. "Are you a virgin?" There were rules.

"No," she shook her head. "But I have only been with one guy."

Nemesis nodded. "The 'can' get it up over thirty' guy."

"Yes. I haven't even had an aphrodisiac pill, and I still want to have sex with you."

Nemesis looked at her quizzically. "How ya gonna do?" he asked, not comprehending what she was saying. What did she mean?

"My boyfriend always has me take this herbal stuff before we have sex."

Nemesis raised an eyebrow. "Does it work, *chere*?"

Cassie shrugged. "I don't know. He kisses me two times, squeezes my breasts, then puts oil on his cock and sticks it in." She shrugged again. "Maybe."

Nemesis furrowed his brow. "Wha' do you feel?"

"His cock in my pussy."

Nemesis shook his head. "No, *cherie*, I mean wha' do *you* feel?"

"I don't know."

"You don' know?"

"Well, I don't get hot like I am now. But I'm not sure."

She might as well have been a virgin, and he knew

immediately he was treading on thin ice. "Wha' do you wan' from me, Cassie?" He needed the perimeters defined.

"I want you to make love to me. I am so attracted to you. You are so hot."

He grinned. "Cassie. I'm not goin' to be roun' long."

She nodded. "No," she assured. "I love my boyfriend. We're going to get married. I just don't want him to be my only experience." She sidled up to him and rubbed his cock through the silk. "Does that bother you?"

"Wha'?"

"That I am in love with another man?"

Nemesis shook his head easily. "No, *beb*," he smiled into her trusting eyes. "I just don' wan' to confuse you."

"Will you or won't you be my second experience?" Her hand was insistent against his groin.

Nemesis looked at her. "I will," he said laying his lips over hers like a blanket. She was so sweet, needy and it sent a direct message to his cock, he swelled. Nemesis took it slow. Her avid want, combined with zero experience made the path they traveled as important as an odyssey. He took her swollen lips between his and began to massage them gently. He felt her breath lace his with gasps, and he slowed her response. Not too much, too soon.

Her arms slinked up around his neck like a rope, and his tongue shot into her ripe mouth. She pulled back. "Do you want to put it in now?"

"No, *petite*," he whispered. "Lovin' is like wind, it blows its own way. Relax," he said, as he moved her against him. "This is abou' the body. Abou' a quiet mind. No thinkin', *cherie*, no hurry, only lovin'."

He nipped at her lips, her round face lifting to him like a full lunar moment. Cassie let herself be directed. Her body tuned to his as he began to unbutton her blouse and push away her skirt. "I don't like this stuff aroun' you," he whispered. "You don't need this wit' me."

"You wan' me to touch you, put my lips on you, give you pleasure. I wan' dat too, *cherie*," he said, unsnapping her bra, freeing the pale globes.

* * * *

Cassie was well out of her element and she felt the energy of the earth pounding into her as the man caught her in an embrace.

His lips fell over hers like a cloud, light, dense and confusing. Her senses ignited like nothing she had ever known before, and she gasped. He sucked in her air, a man at a lifeline, and willed the nubile flesh over him. Her stiff, pink nipples pushed into his chest, and he lowered his head taking the nub between his lips, tugging on the peak gently. Cassie whimpered. Never had she felt such sensations. His hand burned against the firm flesh as he massaged her breast, her muscles trembling with his touch. His fingers moved down to her panties, moving the wet soft cotton aside, and painted her juice over the swollen lips of her vagina, pushing the engorged

button with the dexterity of the experienced.

"I wan' to taste you, *chere*," he said huskily.

He dropped to his knees, slipped her panties to the floor, slid his tongue into the sweet nectar, and she moaned. No one had ever done that to her before. She thought she was going to die from the heat of his breath on her pussy, the thrill of his tongue over her clit, flicking, stroking, sucking.

Nemesis knew she was close, and he wanted to be inside her tight channel when the dam broke. He climbed her body, kissing his way over the hills and valleys of her down.

"You have my cock hard, *petite*," he said, guiding a thigh into her crotch gently. "Make room," he whispered hotly in her ear. "Let me in."

She spread like worn spring, immediate and open. "Nemesis," she murmured. "My body aches."

Nemesis moved a finger and began to massage her pain. "Sit on it, *beb*," he willed, the endearment calling her over his digit, her spread yanking his mind in directions he planned to travel soon. Her pelvis rocked around his finger like a wobbly top, unsure, naive, and instinctually hopeful.

He felt his sex swell, then leak, but the face lingering over his erection was not the moon. It was Posh. Rebellion at the image was grit for fuel as his balls filled, and he looked at Cassie's wasp-stung lips, willing her to accept him. "You are ready," he said, barely able to see. "I wan' you now, *chere*. There is no option."

She had been ready for him for hours, and he took

her to the bed. He edged the head of his cock around the wet lips. He inserted slowly, his size stretching the walls wide.

"Oh, God," she moaned as he pushed, her tight pussy drowning him in the molten liquid.

Cassie bucked under the thrust, pulling his tongue into her mouth as he lay down over her and began the long, sensuous strokes, sliding in and out of her sex, letting the tension build in his loins.

She came quickly, her muscles contracting around his meat, forcing him to the euphoric center. His cock erupted as her legs tightened around him lusciously and he collapsed over her shoulder in a stupor.

"That was amazing, Nemesis," she murmured into his ear. "I guess a man can get it up over thirty."

He opened his eyes and smiled. "It shou' always be amazin', Cassie. Now you can go home and tell this boyfriend of yours dat the only aphrodisiac you need is sharin'."

Chapter Four

Posh woke early, drawn from the night by the startling vividness of the dream. The encounter with the phantom Nemesis had left her with a sense of intimacy that had seemed so real. It was disconcerting, this value her mind was placing on the man she hardly knew. With a whisper and the lightness of touch, she had felt things in her body that she had not allowed herself for a very long time.

He was waiting for her in the lobby and looked up as she came down the stairs, her jeans tight, dark and casual for their morning in the bog. As she neared, he thought her face looked softer.

"Bonjou'," he nodded politely. Nemesis didn't want to spend another day fending and fielding verbal attacks. He would keep his distance.

Posh noted the cool change, and felt a twinge of regret for her behavior. "Is the van here yet?" she asked looking to the drive from the window.

"There bringin' it roun' now," he said flatly.

"Look, Nemesis," Posh started to say quietly, but she was interrupted.

"Are you waiting for the van?" A round, white-haired, man rolled towards them.

Posh nodded. "You must be Lawrence Paisley," she said, introducing herself and Nemesis to the elderly man. "We appreciate you letting us accompany you out to the site."

"Evanston is an old colleague of mine." He qualified the invitation, following her through the door to the van. "They just completed the temporary unit where the bodies will be stored until they can be moved," he continued. "It controls the temperature, and atmosphere. With the unit in place, things will begin to move quickly," he informed.

"Who made the discovery?" Nemesis asked, climbing into the van behind Posh and the Doctor.

"Peat-cutters." Dr. Paisley said. He stroked his chin nervously and tapped the driver's shoulder, waving him on. He was in a hurry. "They're removing the bodies this morning, and I need to be there," he explained. But the man's concerns appeared a little more intense than the explanation supported.

* * * *

The moor plateau went on forever in any direction, the redundancy of color and texture uninspiring to some, but to Nemesis, it was a symphony of stony shapes, twists of herb, and an occasional flutter of grouse. He was looking forward to the shoot. Nemesis glanced over at Posh, her mouth soft, her face intent with thought. He wondered what moved

her, so much of her unreadable, the passion of the woman lost somewhere behind the dense curtain.

* * * *

They knew they were near the site, as there was a large section of the bog cordoned off with yellow tape, the perimeters manned with security. *No Trespassing* signs were being pounded into the sponge at short intervals. An armed guard stopped the van, checked authorizations and waved them through. The restrictions were excessive and Posh looked over at Nemesis. He shrugged. She had been on archeological sites before and nothing at this level of ironclad security had ever been required.

"The Ministry is exceedingly cautious," Posh observed, hoping to prompt the doctor for details.

"This site has been turned over to the Sutratma Society for management. The Ministry has backed away." The implications of the change had grave ramifications for the Doctor if it surfaced that he had brought a magazine writer and photographer on the site, but he had given his word to Evanston. He also knew he had time. The Society wouldn't be bringing their crew in until the next morning. After that, there would be no access to the discovery by anyone outside Conroy Mallory's will.

Posh made a mental note to check out this Sutratma Society. But now she wanted to talk about the bodies. The Bog Mummies.

Finding a bog body was not rare as one might think, the archeologist had explained, as more and

more sections of the dwindling moorlands were being plundered for the rich bog peat. It was the Sphagnum moss that was responsible for the amazing preserved state of the figures. Free of bacteria, the bog chemical atmosphere promoted an environment where the skin of the deposited converted to a leather-like casing, hair, wrinkles, even stomach contents preserved for future examination. The oldest bog body was the Koelbjerg Woman, Paisley told them, who was found on the Danish island of Fyn, the radiocarbon date placing her in the Mesolithic Period, making her well over 8,000 years old.

"It's probably too soon to tell, but is there any indication of the age of these bodies?" Posh asked.

Dr. Paisley stepped from the van, offering a hand of assistance. "Generally speaking," he said, "most of the recent discoveries have lingered around the two-thousand year point, most likely due to the fact that the bodies have not disappeared so far into the muck to be lost, perhaps forever. I will not venture a guess as to the age of our bodies. I would hate to see my words in quote later proved wrong," he smiled. "These are competitive times." Since he had learned of the Society's involvement, he didn't want to see his name in print at all.

"Of course," Posh smiled. The academic scientific community was a very cutthroat environment, the rivalry for recognition a game the ambitious intellectual needed to master in order to survive. Those that didn't disappeared into their own 'bog', never to be heard of again.

Nemesis and Posh followed Lawrence over the porous ground to where a handful of archeological students had begun to haul the contorted ghouls from the ooze. It was a tedious effort, care needed to save the souls from damage. Burned to the color of a coffee-bean by the tanning-agent inherent in the moss, the bodies were lifted one by one from their grave, and moved into the storage unit. It was an anxious, demanding effort, one that Nemesis caught on film, from every perspective he could take.

Posh wandered the site with her recorder, etching into micro-chips impressions, subtle nuances, or obvious snippets of information that she could garner through observation, or brief conversation. She spoke to the students, their supervisors, and the eccentric Dr. Paisley, who was affectionately referred to as the 'bog man'. Both Nemesis and Posh knew the Doctor was keeping a close rein on their movements, his nerves wound tight.

"What interests me most about this group is the number of bodies discovered at one site. Was this a sacrificial herbaceous alter, the local cemetery or were these people murdered?" Posh asked Paisley. "And, does the number of them suggest maybe an entire clan or village?"

Dr. Paisley shook his head. "Obviously, such details would depend on the age. But what we have seen here is a reasonable meld of men, women, and children. It's as if we are looking at some migrant group, possibly a nomadic tribe of people, caught in this strange place of circumstance."

"Any overt indications of how they might have died?"

"Several of the children had their throats slit. Two of the women, so far," he qualified, "had half their heads shaved, and their skulls bludgeoned in two places. One man was garroted, his neck broken and his throat slit."

"Sounds like many met a violent end. Ritual maybe?"

Paisley was non-committal. He had little more to say on the subject.

Posh and Nemesis followed the 'bog man' to the storage unit. They were gowned, gloved, and their mouths covered. It was a matter of protecting the bodies from any further contamination then they had already been exposed to.

Nemesis continued to snap the shutter, the leathered bodies, predominately in a fetal form, every scar, pimple or pore nearly as clear as it must have been in life. He edged closer to Posh "They have taken one body, in plastic, over to a tent on the other side of this modular. I don' know wha' its abou', but I have a friend hovering aroun' there, if you can occupy Paisley maybe I can see if there's anythin' for interest."

Posh nodded. "Go for it." She turned to Paisley and drew his attention to the back of the room while Nemesis headed to the door.

* * * *

Cassie took a drink of water from the bottle and lit up when she saw Nemesis. "Hi," she grinned, experiencing that new-found tingle in her pussy. "What's going on?"

Nemesis flashed a grin. "Wha' you doin'?"

"Baby-sitting."

"Wha' are you hidin' in there, Cassie?" He lifted his chin to the tent.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" she teased.

"*Oui, chere.* I woud'," he smiled, his eyes racing over her suggestively.

She moved up to his side, her body brushing his like a cat leaving scent. "This bog body wore a medallion, gold, with an odd symbol and strange writing"

Nemesis looked down at her warmly. "I sure woud' like to see."

Cassie looked a round and took his hand, opening the slit in the tent. "No pictures," she cautioned.

"No, *cherie*," he said, "But you had better wai' for me outside. If you can not be seen, it migh' draw interest." He glanced over the body, paying particular interest to the medallion.

"Okay," Cassie said, "but please hurry."

"I will, *petite*," he promised.

* * * *

Once she was gone, Nemesis pulled from his pocket a heavy bronze treated medallion, with a glint of gold, impressed with the symbol of the Mandorla and

Malachim letters etched around the edges. He opened the plastic tent that contained the body and carefully took the necklace from around the mummy's neck, making sure he did no damage to the body, and replaced it with the fake. As Cassie opened the tent, he slipped his hand into his pocket and grinned. He grabbed her hand, pulled her against him as he raised his arm from behind, snapping a couple of pictures while he bent down and kissed Cassie's bruised lips. "I like the taste of you on my tongue," he reminded her.

Cassie glowed and led him from the tent, clasping his hand ardently.

He gave her a quick hug. "Thanks, *petite*," he said, as he headed the direction of the modular. "Maybe I wil' see you later."

* * * *

The van took Nemesis and Posh back to the hotel, she was anxious to hear about the body in the tent, but not eager to talk in front of the driver. At the inn, Nemesis guided her into the garden beyond the gazebo. They were alone.

"Did you see anything?" she asked.

Nemesis nodded. "The body was singled out because of the gold medallion it was wearin'. I couldn' get a close look, but I go' some snaps. Course I had to sell my soul for the information," he grinned.

Posh looked at him, her expression hard, her tone acidic. "Or your body last night?" She didn't know

where that comment had come from, but she sounded like a jealous shrew and she bit her lip. This was about the little blonde at the bar. What had he reduced her to? Obviously nothing she was willing to take responsibility for.

His eyes went black with the tone. "You like to push me, *chere*," he said, his voice dark with warning. "You mus' wan' somethin' from me real bad, but are jus' too afraid to ask." He glanced over her body hotly, his insinuation clear.

"How dare you," she began, raising her arm for the indignant strike.

He caught it in mid-air and used it for leverage to maneuver her around and up against the boulder wall, his body pressed into hers like a rock. "Wha' you wan' from me, *chere*?" he asked, his face so close to hers she could share his breath.

Her chest rose under him. Her eyes widened. "Maybe you wan' to test the water," he said, looking over her face, his gaze sultry. "Maybe you wan' to know wha' my lips woud' feel like on yours.

"Yea," he smiled confidently, "you wan' a taste. Well, *petite*, I'm here to accommodate."

Nemesis' mouth dropped over hers like a hood, hard, fast and she gasped as he pressed past her lips with his tongue and took what he wanted. She struggled at first, but the warmth of his breath, the skirt of his tongue, and the pressure of his hard muscle was too much for her hungry body. She began to respond, letting her tension pour over the ground beneath her as she surrendered herself to the

connection with a moan

The Cajun groaned into her mouth as he felt her body give in to him, her soft lips molding under his with an appetite to match his own. She wanted him, or wanted what he had to give, and he was willing. He pulled her tongue between his teeth, and sucked, the sensation sending a blast of fire to her pussy.

Nemesis plunged a thigh up between her legs, and she spread, without resistance. His cock bulged, and he laid it against her muscle for a slow stroke. If she wanted a piece of him, he would not fight the moment, and his demand enveloped her with its voracity. Stone was turning to ice, his heat melting the barrier like a Chinook over the arctic tundra.

"You wan me, *chere*," he whispered into her ear. "Why no' just give in to it?"

The window shut, slammed on his dick, human suddenly titanium.

"Get off of me," she hissed.

Nemesis raised his face from hers. "Your body speaks a language I understan', *chere*. Don' deny yourself." He offered her a cocky grin. "You're a woman in need of some pleasure, and I am here for you."

Posh pulled the venom from her veins like a spider. "You'd be the last man I would turn to."

Nemesis's gaze turned seductive, letting his eyes take her in, chin to forehead. "The pain you hide under, *cherie*, don' protect you enouh'. I can see you." He pulled away from her and smiled. "Don' wander too far today," he instructed as he turned.

He left her there plastered against the round stone watching his body leave, hers having suddenly gone cold.

Chapter Five

Posh walked to the village with the sun on her face, the breeze cool as it passed through her hair. The situation between her and Nemesis was spinning out of control, and Posh knew she had started it. From the first moment she had seen him, war had been declared, a lone warrior pushed into a battle for a cause that meant nothing to anyone but her. He was the chosen sacrifice. Punish him, deny herself, and somehow the guilt inside would vanish and she'd be free once more. Since the day Shawn Holden, lover and friend, had stepped in front of a spray of bullets to push her to safety, his blood hosed over her like red paint, she had withdrawn from everything. Her work, her friends, her life. For two years she had buried herself in grief, then guilt, and now she was forcing her anger out over a man whose only crime was that he attracted her. Posh knew her behavior was irrational, and she needed some distance from her thoughts right now. She picked up her pace. Posh had a destination--the Ravenshold rectory. It was time to dig up some history.

* * * *

Nemesis had watched her turn on the path towards the village from the window of his room, as he placed the call. His cock was still warm from the pressure of her pussy and he smiled. Women were rarely a challenge for him, and when one stubborn beauty crossed his path, there wasn't much he could do but enter the contest. As bitter as Posh was, he was attracted to her. Shawn Holden had always had good taste, but he and Nemesis had rarely seen eye to eye when it came to their choice of women. But Posh was different. He liked her style, and it was now clear that there was a seething volcano beneath that cap of snow, and it was beginning to stir. Nemesis turned from the window and looked over the necklace stretched out on the emerald green bed cover. It was magnificent.

Evanston had been waiting for Nemesis to make contact, his nerves on edge. "Did you get the Mandorla Medallion?"

"Oui, the exchange went off withou' a hitch."

"How does it look?"

Nemesis twisted the gold through his fingers. "As you woud' expect. Pristine, beautiful, and obscure."

"There is a man in Whitby, not far from you, who we can trust to authenticate the piece." There were two medallions in existence, and one was altered somehow to invalidate the artifact's power. "His name is Terrance Carter, but he won't be back in

England until tomorrow afternoon. You can stay where you are or move on to Whitby today, it's up to you."

Nemesis didn't like waiting. "Do we know how close Conroy Mallory is to Ravenshold? Paisley expects the Society to take possession of the site in the morn'"

"I regret to say I don't. But he may be expecting you if your message was delivered."

Nemesis considered the man's words. He wanted to get a look at Mallory. He wanted Mallory to get a look at him. But he had to consider Posh. By her own actions she had become an innocent cover. She had sniffed out the discovery of the bog mummies and Evanston had got her in, but Paisley had also confessed that his days there were numbered; the Sutratma Society was coming in to takeover the site. The information had pricked Evanston's ears. There must be something unusual in the find other than the bodies themselves. Yes, Paisley had confirmed. There was the gold necklace. The description of which Evanston recognized as the Mandorla Medallion.

"How's Posh doing, by the way?"

"I can see where there woud' of been no stoppin' her from comin' to Ravenshold. She is a stubborn woman. Bu' as you predicted. She labors heavy under the guilt."

"So do I," Evanston confessed. "I should never have let them go into Tanzania, but Shawn was determined, and unprepared. Mallory had used the political rebellion as a cloak, stirring the pot to keep

the focus off the theft. Shawn and Posh walked right into the middle of it."

"Shawn made his own choices," he said of his friend. "You cou' no' have made any difference."

It was a story he had heard before. Though Evanston had allowed Posh to believe it was at the hand of the insurgents that Shawn had died, taking bullets that had been meant for her, wrong place, wrong time, but Evanston and Nemesis knew it was Mallory, by proxy, who had pulled the trigger, the theft of the mysterious Minue Idol at the core of the rebel uprising. That had been the point where the two men had declared war on the nefarious Mallory.

"She don' like me too much," Nemesis shared, changing the subject. As hoped, he drew a chuckle from the old man.

"She didn't like Shawn at first either. Posh has got spirit. Which," he had to admit, "is why I thought she could handle the situation, should it get out of hand." Evanston knew that the best laid plans could shatter at any moment, but there was no one he trusted more than Nemesis Danos, to gather the pieces.

Nemesis got the address for the man in Whitby, who, Evanston had informed, was not a stranger to Mallory. Before he broke the call with Evanston, Nemesis let him know that he had decided that they would stay the night in Ravenshold.

There was a rap on the door.

It was Cassie.

* * * *

The rectory was set at the far end town, centered within a circular border of neatly sculpted rosemary.

"The rector, he is gone, can I help you, chile?"

Posh turned toward the voice and met the face. Creased with age, nearly opaque, soft skin was stretched over the small head beneath the long white hair. The eyes were warm, the frame slight, and Posh could feel the woman's kindness as the elder offered her hand.

"I was hoping to get some history on Ravenshold," she explained, introducing herself.

The woman nodded. "The people of the bog. They have drawn much attention. Are you a student?"

Posh shook her head. "A writer."

"Come," she said, taking Posh's arm. "We'll take tea. Maybe I can help."

* * * *

Nemesis took Cassie's hand and pulled her into the room, shut the door and lifted her chin up to him. He kissed her long and slow, pulling her lips between his, sucking the puffy mouth until he drew short gasps, her pussy pressing into his thigh provocatively.

"Are you wet for me already, cherie?" he whispered.

Cassie nodded, not wanting him to stop.

"Dr. Paisley said dat his position at the site was goin' to end today."

Cassie nodded. "Yes, this archeological society is going to come in and take over. I'll be leaving in the morning. That's what I wanted to tell you," she said, her voice sad. "I will miss you," she said, wrapping her arms around his neck.

"I will miss you too, *cherie*," he said, nuzzling her neck. "Do you know when this society is suppose' to show up?"

"Tonight, sometime after six."

Nemesis nodded, making a mental note. "Why don' you let me buy you lunch?"

* * * *

The woman had said her name was Mena, housekeeper for the rector, herbalist and town counselor. Posh had been guided to a small cottage behind the rectory where she lived, the thin china cups Mena had set in front of them now steaming with an herbal potion.

"Ravenshold grew up around the Stuart estate," the elder said, piling a plate with fresh-baked cookies. "That is the Inn where you are staying," she explained. "When Morgan Stuart died, the distillery went dry, the land, the township, were turned over to the crown and eventually for need of money, I suppose," she shrugged, "Ravenshold bowed to the will of tourism."

"So what prompted the Stuarts to build out here on the moors so far from everything?"

Mena smiled. "Mystery, or convenience,

depending on your view. The Stuarts were a rugged people. They had migrated out of Scotland in the early years, settled here in the moorland, began to produce strange liquors that the people and the crown had come to crave. Some said they were called here on the whisper of the druid tongue, others have said that the world of the bog was a good place to raise the ingredients for their brew."

Posh smiled, and took a cookie from the offered plate. "What do you think, Mena?"

A thin lip lifted with the thought. "I prefer mystery," she said factually. "We of the moors are all 'people of the bog'. I think of us as liminal beings, living between two places, the world of the fen neither solid nor liquid. Our lore speaks of the moorland as sacred space on a threshold of becoming. There is a legend," Mena smiled, sipping her tea, "that tells of a clan of nomads that pushed their feet over the sponge, and drew life from the peat like some inhale air. The leader of this clan carried the mark of the two worlds, of good and evil, of light and dark. He had come from a place in the south, spoke many languages, and gathered the clan together as he traveled the moors. One day the Romans came, pillaged the fen villages, tortured the men, raped the women, and then sent the children to their deaths. The man traveled to the villages to offer what comfort he could to the dying, counseling them through the transition to the Two Mountains of Mars. When he returned to his own people of the clan, he found them butchered, and he sent them into the bog, buried

them in the nurturing peat, then offered himself to the Mountain in personal sacrifice for their resurrection”

Posh knew that in all myth and legend there was threaded an essence of truth. “Do you think this group of twenty could be the clan of your legend?” What a great adjunct to the article this tale would be.

Mena looked at Posh, her eyes searching her face as if to read thoughts. “Does it matter? From birth comes death, from darkness there is light, from the ugly there is beauty, pain and then pleasure, to all things there is an opposite, a place where the one, becomes the other. The remnants of such inversions are hollow shells. Mere memories of what had been. Would it be important to you, chile, to discover that the bodies belonged to the clan of the legend?”

Posh lifted an eyebrow. It certainly would add a lovely splash of color over the storyboard. But that was not the answer she sensed the old woman was looking for. “I suppose, I would like these bodies to be whatever they are.” Whether bog mummies of legend or just plain viciously killed two-thousand-year-old preserved bodies, she still had an interesting story.

“Show me your hand, chile.”

Posh held it out to her. The woman took it between her bony fingers and examined the palm. “Your creases are deep, intense, and full of passion. Your life is rich, but I sense you have turned away from it. As if you are slowly being consumed by a pain you have accepted as yours, and you cling to it like one holds on to the blanket after the snow has passed.”

Posh withdrew her hand, feeling exposed. "I shouldn't take up any more of your time," she smiled weakly.

Mena nodded. "I hope the bog people are what you want them to be, chile."

Chapter Six

Outside Nemesis's room, Posh paused. She wanted to apologize, or at least find some line of communication with the man. The walk to the village and the afternoon with the old woman had centered a few things, and she had begun to feel unprofessional. Generally foolish. Posh rapped on the door lightly, and waited, maybe she should have just called. Like a coward.

* * * *

Nemesis had assumed it would be Cassie again, and hesitated a moment, then put the medallion away before answering. He was surprised to see Posh.

"Do you have a minute?" she asked, her discomfort obvious.

Nemesis kept his expression even and stepped aside to let her in.

* * * *

As the door shut, she turned to face him, once again

reminded of the power of the man, his chest now bared, brown and beautiful. Her eyes ran up from his hard waist, following the narrow path of black hair to his rippled chest where the dark fur spread sparsely over the rugged landscape. Her gaze moved to his mouth, lingered a moment, then met his eyes. She was sure she saw a glint of amusement flash across the dark glass, and she offered a half smile. "I just wanted to apologize for being so...difficult." The words didn't come easily, but they were sincere.

She shifted her weight nervously, feeling vulnerable, anxious, and she looked for a place to lean, backing up to the wall. Nemesis moved in close, and let one hand slide up the panel until it rested above her head, his chest very close to her face, as he towered over her. He enjoyed opportunity.

"Somethin' must have hurt you bad, Posh," he said, his free hand moving a wisp of hair from her cheek, "to make you be so afraid and angry."

Posh could feel his aura, the masculine essence close, his voice seductively sympathetic, and she couldn't bring her eyes to look at him. Nor, could she move.

"Well," she said, finding her voice, "that was some time ago. A man I was close to, and worked with, was killed while on assignment. It wouldn't have happened had he not wanted to protect me. Sometimes, when you become close, very bad things can happen. But that is not your issue. I realize that my behaviors were inexplicable." She stumbled around over her words, talking too much, wishing

she had just left after the apology.

He put his finger over her lips. "No need to say anythin' more, *chere*." Nemesis leaned down, cupping the edge of her chin in his hand and kissing the top of her head. It was the affectionate mark of a brother, except this was Nemesis, and there wasn't anything familial about him.

He must have sensed the control she had put on her breathing and lifted her head up to him slowly, her eyes wide as he smiled into them. "Have dinner wit' me. I spoke to Evanston today, and we'll be leavin' for Whitby in the morn'."

Posh stepped back away from the wall, and him. "Okay, we'll meet downstairs."

She couldn't have moved any faster from the room, once she had found her legs, if she had been in training for the Olympics. He was good at pushing buttons, and there was a part of her that liked the sensation.

Back in her room, Posh put in the call to Evanston, she had her own things she wanted to discuss with the man. But, she hadn't heard anything from him by the time she met Nemesis in the bar.

The atmosphere was casual, dark, moody, old England combined with old 1950's renovation, the space molded sumptuously from red leather, stone, and wood. It was secluded and quiet, just as it had been the night before, until the band took up.

Posh apologized for being late, advising him that she had been waiting for a call back from Evanston.

* * * *

Nemesis smiled, nodded, and ordered her wine. Evanston would not be returning the call tonight. The game was going to get more complicated now, and Nemesis needed to handle it his way. He leaned over the table to her

"I tol' him, dat as it appears now, we have the exclusive. The site has been shut down to the press since this morn'." He leaned back in his chair. "I tol' him I wanted to go to Whitby tomorrow to develop the film, and see what we got. Agreed?"

Posh nodded. "Did you ask Evanston about the Sutratma Society?"

Nemesis took a drink of his scotch. "*Oui*. He told me that Sutratma means 'silver thread'. In a nutshell, it symbolizes a line that links somethin' by way of its center to a point of beginning, its origin." He considered his next words, deciding, in that moment, to offer information she may need to know at some point in time. "A man named Conroy Mallory, who is the Society, is dedicated to the acquisition of occult artifacts for reasons other den to expand his collection. And, for Mallory, the end always justifies the means. He is a dangerous man, Posh. So we need to be careful wit' the information we have acquired, and mus' no' say anythin' to anyone abou' the pictures I took."

Posh watched his face as he spoke. He was serious, but it seemed a little melodramatic to her. "How is this Conroy Mallory a danger to us?"

"The man can surmount government agencies to shut down an archeological site, ban the press and usurp academic interests. He has powerful friends in powerful positions. He takes wha' he wans', and if the acquisition of dat 'wan' is threatened in any way, he can do wha'ever he deems necessary to eliminate the threat."

"Is this about that necklace?" It was the kind of revelation that came with sudden sight. Illumination.

Nemesis handed her a menu. "*Oui*. Are you hungry, *chere*?" he asked, wanting the conversation to move to another subject.

No, this was not dead yet. "This Mallory thinks that the necklace is an occult artifact?"

"*Oui*," he answered perusing the menu. "Wha' you thin'? Fish?"

"Nemesis, what's going on?" Posh wasn't buying into the distraction

"Dinner, I hope, *cherie*," he said, with a sultry aside, his eyes attempting to take control.

She set the menu on the table and stood. "You know, perhaps if I present myself to this Conroy Mallory with what I already know, he'll see fit to fill in the blanks and allow me to continue with the story. I'll just go and leave a message for him at the front desk."

Nemesis reached up and grabbed hold of her wrist. "Sit down," he said quietly, his tone ominous. "Deese are no' the kind of games you wan' to play wit' me."

She stared down at him, trying to decide the best course of action. His expression spoke volumes, and

she dropped back into her chair, her jaw set. "You may let go of my wrist, I won't do anything."

He let her go. "I am a patient man, Posh, but if you push me too much farther, I will put you on the next plane back to the States."

"Are you threatening me?"

"No. It is a promise. I am tryin' to protect you."

Posh showed a blush of anger. "Who are you to protect me?"

Nemesis lifted his brows. "I am the man who let you come on this assignment."

"I work for Evanston Burton."

"Oui, but when the circumstances change, I take over."

"What circumstances?" she asked. Was that why Evanston hadn't returned her call?

"Shawn Holden was a friend of mine."

Posh gasped. She gripped the stem of her wine glass for support. "I don't understand."

"No, you don't. So you're goin' to have to trust me instead."

Posh shook her head. "No, Nemesis. I don't have to trust you. Frankly, I don't have to do anything with you. However, if you want my cooperation, I would entertain the truth."

Nemesis waved the waitress over and ordered them both another drink, since it looked like dinner was going to take awhile. He didn't blame her. If the places had been reversed he would have felt the same way. He had hoped she would roll over, but that had been a long shot.

The magazine *Enigma* was a tool, one to bring awareness to a skeptical public, the other, to cloak Evanston and Nemesis's work to counteract the scurrilous efforts of Conroy Mallory, and the Sutratma Society. Shawn's death had spurred the evolution of the Enigma effort, Posh now an innocent sucked into the project by fate, and osmosis.

"Mallory believes he has located the Mandorla Medallion--the necklace worn by one of the bog bodies." Nemesis saw no reason to confess on the exchange he had managed while they were at the site. "According to legend, the necklace is a conduit of energy for wha' is known as an inversion. The origin of the medallion is unknown, bu' the power inherent' in the obscure words etched in the metal is said to open a dimensional door of sorts," he shrugged, "a kind of alchemist's transition, to take one thin' and create its opposite, expose the duality."

"The Two Mountains of Mars," Posh considered. "That's what she meant."

Nemesis looked at her, his ears tuned. "The Mandorla has been associated as a symbol of the common, for example, number two, the astrological sign of the Gemini. More obscure is the blending of the Mounts of Mars and Janus, the meld of love and hate, light and darkness and so on. Who is the 'she' of your memory?"

Posh told him of her experience in the village with Mena earlier, recanted the legend of the clansman who guided his people over the bog and then lost them to Roman hands. "She had said that the man

wore the 'mark of two worlds', light-darkness, good-evil. I didn't understand it at the time. The medallion was the mark, the man dredged from the bog the legendary clan leader. We need to get to that medallion before this Mallory does. I mean, what if the power is real? Truth in fiction."

Nemesis shook his head. "A part of the myth surrounding the piece tells dat there are two, the real, and the unreal, the actual and the fake. The bog necklace could be the fake." Her eyes were lit and Nemesis thought he had never seen her look so radiant. He was drawn to her, and her enthusiasm. "We will go tomorrow to Whitby and develop the film," he insisted.

"What good would that do?" She wanted to put her hands on the real thing. She lowered her voice. "If such a power existed, that could invert what is into it's opposite, wouldn't such a power in the hands of a man you, yourself, describe as a 'dangerous' person, be a horrific gamble?"

Nemesis centered his eyes on her. "Yes, it woud', *chere*. But you have to leave this to me."

"Why Nemesis? I may be a woman, but I am not stupid, nor am I without my own set of 'brass'..."

"Because, I don' wan' a repeat of wha' happened in Tanzania." There he had used it, the last disgusting card he could play to manipulate her behavior. Damn her for making him do it.

Posh looked away from him. "A fucking good string to pull, Danos," she sneered.

He reached over to put his hand over hers. She

started to pull it away, but he held it. "There is a great deal at stake here, Posh. Leave this to me for awhile," he implored.

She looked over at him. For a moment she wanted to hand over body, mind and soul, but for now, she was able to relinquish the medallion quest. She thought of Shawn. Nemesis was the kind of man he would call friend. "Are you hungry?" she asked.

Dinner was comfortable, their conversation easy, the angst of the last couple of days a fading shadow. Posh was getting heady on the wine, the relaxed state softening her resolve, and capturing Nemesis's attention.

He liked her. She was intelligent, witty, and was quick with the repartee, without the added dagger. Several times she had tossed the blonde hair over her shoulder because it seemed to get in the way of something important she had to share or say. Nemesis found himself trying to catch every word, feel every demonstrative movement of her body, and not miss one blink of her lovely eyes, or rise of her beautiful breasts. He was mesmerized, and he enjoyed the web she spun around him unwittingly, the threads, constricting, thin, and pressing his body in all the right places.

* * * *

Her nostrils flared, the instinctual scent of attraction seductive. With a table between them, she felt like she could control the heat, though that was more a mental

delusion then a physical fact Nemesis was charming, his eyes never leaving her outside his view. He listened, commented, and always had an interesting observation, or a penetrating question. There were moments that she was sure they could be friends, but too often when their eyes locked, something tugged inside with a mind of its own--wanting more.

"At least tell me the purpose of the Sutratma Society. Why does this Mallory Conroy want these artifacts if it isn't 'just to expand his collection'?" she quoted, calling him to respond.

Nemesis glanced over the room, reminded once again that the man would be showing up at the hotel at any time. "Mallory is a man fueled by greed. But it is no' for the material. It is for control. Control of people, control of the natural energies, and subsequently, control of the world. The powers inherent in occult objects allow for the manipulation of the physical world, be it by a change in reality as we understand it, or by a change in the perception of it, both phenomenal results bein' the same."

"But where do these artifacts come from?"

"Dey come from differe' times, differe' cultures, differe' places. But each period is defined by suppression, or oppression, dependin' on the spiritual direction the human psyche is experiencing at the time, no matter if the bane be objective, or subjective. But each image, created in the name of the power it personifies, gathers the energy of nature within it."

Posh sipped her wine, her mind ricocheting different directions; she had a difficult time keeping

up. "Do you really believe these artifacts have magical qualities?" She didn't know if she did or not, but his opinion was important.

"No, *chere*, I don'. There is nothin' magical about deese images. It is natural. Dat is why someone like Mallory can access the power with no more den recognition of the truth in the image."

* * * *

The band had started, the music weaving through the room with the romantic sounds of the Celtic notes, and Nemesis took her hand and pulled her from her chair. "Come dance wit' me, *chere*."

He led her to the floor, as one song ended and another began, clasping her hand in his, while the other found the hollow valley in her lower back. She placed her free hand on his shoulder, and then edged it up around his neck, intimately. A young man on the up-step platform took the microphone, his soft tenor voice bleeding over the speakers, the story simple, quiet, and sweet. Nemesis held her, guiding her gently over him, enjoying the closeness of their bodies magnified by the truce that had been called between them.

He was warm, his arms strong, and the anxiousness of the past day demanded feelings from her body that she could no longer ignore. Maybe it was the man, her need, but since meeting him, each moment, inspired by dissension, camaraderie, or the wine, was like an answer to an invitation she didn't

know she had sent. With the meld of their beings, aggression gave way to his subtle touch, the whisper in her ear a call to receive versus defend. His hand moved over her back slowly, as if he was touching something for the first time, unfamiliar with its essence, the exploration tentative.

Posh pressed into him, feeling safe, and Nemesis let her guide the encounter. She was worth the time, worth over-riding his senses. Her soul felt fragile to him, and he had no need to coax her any direction. She put her lips to his ear as she let her chest adhere to his. Her breath was warm, her presence light. She lifted her face to his, their eyes meeting comfortably. "This means nothing," she whispered.

Nemesis smiled. "No, *chere*, its jus' a dance," he assured, dropping the words over her lips. He felt the pressure on the back of his neck pulling his mouth to hers, and he welcomed the kindle of the flame. The pressure was slow, the contact pure. She could hardly breathe. The more he urged, the more she opened, her lips parting, giving him access. She trembled under the need, the scent, the desire. His cock swelled slowly, an aching flex at a time, mind and body out of sync, the movement of her thigh to his, mistake and intention, accidents becoming absolutes as he hardened into her, her pussy moaning under the impact.

"Oh, Nemesis," she whispered into him. "I am so confused."

He tried to pull her closer, but there was no more space. His face nuzzled into her ear. "Don' be afraid

of me, Posh. I am no' your enemy."

"But..." she started to say, as he had found her lips again.

The voice surfaced from the dark somewhere, a sound capable of shattering the moment. "Nemesis, I thought we were going to spend the night together?" Cassie accused, loud enough to draw Posh's attention.

Posh pulled her lips from his, awareness a cold wind sweeping the moment. "It seems I've taken more of your time than you had available," she said flatly, embarrassed by the emotional spotlight tossed over them by the girl.

Nemesis knew he had no parachute. "Posh," he protested as she pushed from him. "This is no' wha' it seems."

Posh looked at him and shrugged. "So what if it isn't?" She left it to her eyes to convey anything she had to say. He got the message. "I'll see you tomorrow," she said. The truth always surfaced.

* * * *

Nemesis took Cassie's arm and guided her gently from the bar into the garden. "Wha' are you doin' Cassie?" They passed through the lobby.

"This was our last night."

Nemesis nodded. "But we had no' made a date, petite." He was angry, but he wanted to be gentle.

"But I thought we had something."

"We did, Cassie. We had sex. A very wonderful

exchange of body fluid and sensation, but we agreed that there was no expectations."

"But things change."

"For who, Cassie?" Over the top of the blonde head, Nemesis watched the Mercedes convoy litter the entrance, the five-car cavalcade heralding Conroy Mallory. The girl that gripped his neck now was not the priority. He took her hands, unraveled them and lifted them to his face. "Go to bed, Cassie," he instructed, kissing the inside of her wrists. "If I can be there, I will."

"Promise?"

"Absolutely." He wanted her out of there. He needed space to move.

A small man leapt from the first Benz and scurried into the inn. The second car pulled forward. The driver got out and opened the door for the passenger. Nemesis watched as the large man climbed from the sedan. Nemesis knew immediately who it was. Hello, Conroy Mallory.

Mallory was older than Nemesis had expected, but well-built for a man he guessed to be somewhere in his fifties. Mallory ran his fingers through his thick silver hair and stretched, as if having been contained in the small space for too long a time. He looked around, inhaling the air, his eyes catching Nemesis as he scanned the landscape. The lock between the two men was brief, but Nemesis felt something ominous in the exchange. Mallory turned away to talk to another man who had just joined him, before they both disappeared into the inn.

Nemesis suppressed the dangerous urge to take the man out now, the hatred for the enemy yet having reached the point of neutrality, the point where emotion goes flat. He wanted the man dead. But it was too soon.

* * * *

Posh had gone to bed, wanting to escape the feelings that Nemesis continued to stir from their long slumber. She had been in an emotional hibernation for nearly two years, and the waking was disturbing. She had rested comfortably in a persona that had encased her safely, pain a great paste when chinking armor, but Nemesis seemed to leak in between the anxious pores. It came in a voice, a touch, seizing something inside her that offered life to the dying; spiritual preservation taking an offered line. No matter how far she turned from the hand, she couldn't turn far enough. He was there, an emotional buoy she closed her eyes to, yet reached for. There was no desire to explore these new feelings that were better left to fester in a place she chose to ignore, and couldn't handle, it had been too long.

She tossed and turned for an hour, wondering what might have happened if the young woman hadn't shown up and broke the spell. She was also curious as to the strange turn this rather rudimentary assignment had taken. Where had it all started? With a simple phone call to Evanston asking for his help in getting access to the discovery site. From there, the

situation seemed to have taken on a life of its own.

* * * *

Nemesis followed Mallory and his crew into the lobby, hovering as close as he could without drawing attention to himself. He was curious as to the conversation the boss was having with his fledglings. It sounded like a debate, and he opened the brochure on Whitby, as he listened from over his shoulder.

"I want someone out at the site tonight." Mallory was insistent.

"We won't be able to determine much in the dark," one voice counseled.

"There is only one thing I want, you do what you have to with the site after the acquisition is made."

Nemesis decided not to see Cassie; he no longer had any interest. He passed Posh's room and hoped there would not be any lingering discomfort from what had happened tonight. In fact, her expression had been dismissive, but it seemed it have been given without prejudice. He wanted to call her, maybe apologize or somethin'. Nemesis shook his head. He had never apologized for anything in his life

* * * *

Something from beyond the mind pulled Nemesis from his sleep, and he was drawn to the window. As he looked out over the dark entry drive, he heard a scuffle in the hall and cracked the door open. There

was a frantic discussion between inn employees regarding the discovery of two bodies. One belonging to Dr. Lawrence Paisley. Nemesis was on the phone to Posh.

"Get up, get dressed, don't even take the time to brush your teeth, we're out of here," he commanded. He didn't want to be encased in the inn by crime tape, which as it sounded, would begin to cocoon around them within the hour.

Nemesis had them checked out by the time Posh descended the stair and they moved quickly to the car. It wasn't until they passed the cairn of Ravenshold entrance that the first constable rounded the corner from the main road.

Nemesis exhaled. "We got out just in time."

"Do I get to know what this is about, or is it another mystery I have to leave to you?"

"Paisley and his assistant Cassie were found tortured and murdered," his voice was grave. He thought of the lovely young woman. A delightful life snuffed too soon.

"Oh, God," she pained. "Cassie was your friend from earlier this evening?"

"Yes," he said.

She looked at him. "I'm so sorry, Nemesis." She then paused, an ugly thought beginning to surface. "Why did we race out of there so quickly?" Her tone had a suspicious edge to it.

Nemesis caught the veiled inference and looked over at her. He shook his head. "I had nothin' to do with it. I just didn't want us to get stuck under an

inquiry with Conroy Mallory able to move around like a ghost."

She believed him. The question had surfaced like a bubble, there a moment, gone the next. "What happened? It all seems so oddly coincidental."

"Mallory Conroy happened." He had a pretty good idea what had transpired. Mallory's people had discovered the medallion switch, previous confirmed gold, now brass, and wanted to know who had done what, and with whom. Nemesis was sure under the slice of the skinning scalpel, one or both had given up names. Mallory would recognize his; Posh would be new prey for the hunt. These were details he opted not to give. "We'll be better off in Whitby where we can finish out our business." He hoped.

To Posh, they were less on the run in concern for their lives, as they were just moving on before being strangled under bureaucratic rope. She was looking forward to Whitby, a small fishing village a couple of hours from Ravenshold. They pulled into the water-edged hamlet at dawn.

Chapter Seven

The River Esk split Whitby in two places, before emptying into the North Sea. The village grew out of the sheer cliffs that skirted the harbor, red roofs, white walls, and history permeated the port, rich in color, and sustenance for a writer's imagination.

"Did you know that this is where Bram Stoker found inspiration to frame his Dracula character?" Posh asked, staring out at the harbor. "I'd love to climb the ninety-nine steps to the old Catholic abbey before we leave. Black dogs, round crypts, bats, sea storms, combined with my computer," she smiled. "Could be fun."

Nemesis smiled to himself. He'd love to climb those steps with her, he just wasn't sure they would have that much time. Nemesis pulled up next to an inn that overlooked the street that edged the harbor. He noticed a light.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll see if we can get a room."

"Oh, please," she smiled. She could use a splash. The evacuation had been so fast and furious that it

had left her feeling undone.

When he returned he carried one key. Her expression was an open question.

"I got a two-bedroom suite on the second floor overlookin' the harbor. It was the only room wit' a private bath. You'll have to share it wit' me, but this is infinitely better den having to run down the hall behind the guy next door."

Posh agreed.

Once settled in, the morning still early, Posh showered and buffed. She emerged from the bath in a satiny robe that covered her nakedness like a second skin, and Nemesis was drawn to the image as she rubbed the towel through her hair, facing him comfortably with her routine. Her nipples were hard. They poked into the white fabric, buds pronounced as she raised her arms overhead and shook the towel.

"It's all yours," she smiled brilliantly. "I even left you some warm water."

He let his eyes roam her body. Posh stirred his senses. "Thanks," he managed, as she turned to her room, the gentle folds gripping the twin moons of her ass like a mist. She shut the door, and he shook his head. He couldn't remember the last time he shared space with a woman he hadn't tossed to the bed. He thought of Shawn. "I understan', Buddy," he mumbled under his breath.

* * * *

By ten, Nemesis was ready to hover around Carter's

door. The longer they lingered with Mallory knowing the possibility of them making contact with the man, as they searched for authenticity, the more vulnerable they became.

"We need to go, Posh," he said.

She smiled, preparing to negotiate. "Why don't you go get the film developed and I'll meet you somewhere, for lunch, maybe?"

He hated to disappoint, but that was not a possibility. He did not want her out there alone. "No, *chere*," he said, his tone leaving no room for discussion. "I want you wit' me."

Her lovely brow furrowed, the shade drawn against things she did not understand. "I do not want to appear petulant," she informed, "but maybe you could show me some respect by explaining why."

Nemesis nodded. "I have the medallion from the body. The man we are going to see now is our current contact dat may be able to authenticate the necklace."

Her eyes flew open. "Show it to me."

He paused for a moment and then pulled the item from his pocket, wrapped in a piece of fabric he had carved from the inn. He dangled it in front of her like a lure, her hand reached out to examine it front and back. She looked up at him.

"I expected more."

Nemesis looked at her, a faint smile drawn over his lips. "Why?"

"I don't know. I think maybe if you're looking at some magical work of wonder that shatters the laws of reality as you know them, you want the conduit to

be as amazing."

"But wha' better place to hide the power den under the guise of the simple. No one ever looks there." He smiled. "The wolf in lamb's clothin'. The skin of a parable that speaks of mystery in the most plain of face."

"A disguise?"

Nemesis pulled the gold from her palm. "Only to the ignoran'"

* * * *

As Terrance Carter opened his doors to the metallurgy shop, Nemesis and Posh were waiting. They stepped inside. Carter had been expecting them. He directed them to his back room. He had no more then taken out the jeweler's lupe when two Mercedes pulled up out front, the clang of the entry bell lifting all three heads. There was no time to waste on identifying who was coming through the door.

Carter looked at Nemesis, pointed his head to the back door and handed the Cajun the medallion. "The alley," he suggested. Nemesis reached back, caught Posh's hand, pulled her around in front of him and pushed her to the door. His hand was between her shoulders urging her forward, as movement stretched the air behind them.

"Move," he said, giving her a gentle shove. She was in the alley, not knowing what direction to go, when Nemesis took her hand and dragged her with him into the dark corners of the narrow outlet. They

took to the street behind Carter's shop, traveling a couple of blocks before they slipped between two buildings where they followed the concrete hall to the frontage street. Nemesis looked to the left over the cobblestone. Two blocks down, in front of Carter's store, the Mercedes' sat, with drivers waiting.

He pulled back, and considered their options. The hotel was five blocks over, but to manage that direction they'd have to cross in full view of Mallory's men. He had no reason to think that Carter would make any effort to protect them if his own life were threatened. The metallurgist would give up name and description without thinking twice. It was time to retreat. He decided that they would take the long way around.

"We're going for a walk," he told her, putting his arm around her shoulder as he directed her to the left on the back street, away from Carter's. "Are you okay, *chere*?" He pulled her close to him protectively.

She reached up and slipped her fingers around his hand. She needed his strength, but wanted to reassure him that she'd stand up to the situation. "I'm scared," she said, "but I'll be alright."

He squeezed her hand, as he watched the Mercedes pull around the corner, nosing their direction. Nemesis twisted Posh into a sidewalk cafe patio. The restaurant was closed, and there was no outlet. He pushed her up against the brick, and looked into her eyes.

* * * *

"We need to be occupied, *chere*," he whispered before he dove over her lips fiercely. The action took her by surprise but the insistence of his mouth, the pressure of his tongue between her lips, and the taste of him suddenly made the world beyond his shoulders disappear from her mind.

She opened her mouth to him, and began to stroke his tongue with hers. She leaned her body into his hard chest, drawing him in close around her like a shell. Something she didn't recognize was surfacing, and she didn't care what it was, she just liked the way that it felt. His arms around her, his scent in the air, the depth of her need emanating from her like a wave, triggered something in herself she had never experienced. Caged too long, once the senses were free, there was nothing to stand in their way. Her breasts heaved against him, her nipples projecting into his chest like stone as she brushed into him, massaging the nubs with his sweater.

His mouth was ravenous, sucking her tongue, her lips, wildly, like a starved animal, his senses raw from the intensity of her demand. Was unable to comprehend it. And, he let himself go. She had been building to this point, the force behind the crack in the wall was commanding, and neither heaven nor earth would change the path. The blood raced through her, pumping furiously to her pussy, like lava on an accelerated course to eruption. His bulge swelled over her thigh and her sex spasmed, sending juice into her panties, the damp lace rubbing into her

plump clit.

She moaned as his hands slipped down her back and gripped the cheeks of her ass, pulling her pussy up onto his cock brutally. She thrust herself into him, seized by the passion behind his violent appetite. He pounded her sex with insatiable fury, her urgency of need, and his own unquenchable desire for her throwing fuel over the fire that raged between them. He groaned, knowing he had to stop, knowing that danger lurked just outside his view, but he couldn't let her go. She consumed him with her heat, her power, and he never wanted to surface.

Nemesis slowly lifted his lips from hers, his chest heaving, his eyes flooded with lust. She had nearly sent him over the edge with her hunger, and the look on her face mirrored his own, their appetites had merely been whetted.

He looked to the street as the tail-end of the Mercedes pulled from view. Nemesis turned his face back to Posh, her breath still heavy, her heart beating into him like a hammer.

"I'm sorry, *chere*," he gasped, "for jumping on you like dat." he said huskily, his breath still deep, letting his eyes encompass her with his ache.

Posh looked at him, unable to hide her intoxication with him, her smile sensual. "I'm not."

He took his hands, ran them up her back, their gaze locked. He put one hand in her hair and pulled her to him, gently this time, his bruised lips light against hers. "We've go' to go," he whispered over her mouth. She nodded, and relaxed away from him,

straightening her clothes.

Back on the street, he continued to hold her against his side. If anything was to happen quickly, he wanted to make sure she was maneuverable. The Mercedes continued to comb the streets, but they managed to avoid detection and made it back to the hotel. He urged her to the room.

"Get your thin's together," he told Posh firmly. "We're goin' to Edinburgh."

He then was on the phone to Evanston to inform him of the new plan. "I have a contact there dat may be able to provide us wit' what we need to confirm the medallion. And, wit' Mallory on the prowl I wan' to get Posh out of here."

He reached down into the bottom of his bag. His fingers gripped the butt of the gun.

"Now dat he knows she's involved, he'll assume her to be the weakest target, and go for her first," he said into the phone quietly. "Like before." Tanzania. But then she had only been a face. Now Mallory, also had a name, an association with a threat called Nemesis, and a memory of their mutual African history of two years ago.

Evanston agreed. It would be best that she stay with Nemesis until they could both leave the country together.

Posh carried her bags into the main salon. She watched Nemesis put the medallion on and slip it inside his sweater, then noticed the gun in the waist of his pants. The danger was real. The situation was grave, and it began to feel like Tanzania all over

again. Nemesis saw the expression in her eyes.

"Chere?"

"I was just remembering," she said turning away.

"Ah, Posh," he said, moving in behind her, taking her shoulders. He brought her around to face him and pulled her into his chest. "Everythin' is goin' to be alright, I promise."

She wrapped her arms around his waist. "I don't think I could go through that again."

"You won' have to. Now, we' better move"

She let go. She was becoming emotionally involved with this man and that just wasn't going to work.

* * * *

The car ride to Edinburgh seemed to take longer than it did, very little being said between them, both caught in their own thoughts. Their actual destination was a small town an hour outside the city, a place called Downey

It was a village, similar to Ravenshold, though it had a strange feel to it. She mentioned the odd sense to Nemesis, and he nodded. So many of the buildings remained unidentified; however they were obviously not homes. Few people were on the street, much of Downey's world hidden behind fence and wall, far from view.

"The people of this town are esoterics. Masters of metaphysical understandings and occult lore. Downey has a reputation for such thin's, the inhabitants caught up in some 60's shift, and now, for

privacy, and protection," he added, "dey keep themselves fairly contained."

"This contact of yours lives here in this town?"

"Oui, he is a strange old man, but very wise, and very knowledgeable abou' the thin's of the supernatural. Here," he said as they pulled in front of a moss painted brick building with a thatched roof. "He operates this book store."

A small plaque dangled from a post that projected over the door. It was written in English--The Open Mind.

"Your friend is not Scottish?"

"No, he came from the States years ago to join this group. He's been here for as long as I've known him."

Nemesis opened the car door for her as he looked around the town. He knew they hadn't been followed out of Whitby, but he remained on alert. She noticed that he had left his gun in the car.

The Open Mind was a dusty, dingy, dark hovel, with books stacked, leaned, and shelved over walls and free standing cases that were lined two rows deep in the middle of the confined space. A small bell had tinkled overhead as they had entered the dank room, but they had yet to see anyone.

"Molly don' rush anywhere, for any reason," Nemesis informed her quietly.

"Well, what do you know," the old man said, wiping his glasses on his shirt, as if he was sure he had been deceived by the dust. "Nemesis Danos. Come give an old man a hug," he instructed.

It was a side of Nemesis she hadn't seen, and

found it strangely alluring to see him so sensitive to the elder.

"And who is this lovely creature?" he asked, the glint in his eye a little unnerving.

Nemesis grinned. "Down, boy," he told Molly before he introduced Posh to the salacious old man. "He really is quite harmless," he assured her.

"No doubt," she smiled.

Molly grinned. "It really is true, girl. I make noise, but that's all." He slipped the spectacles over his nose and looked up at Nemesis. "What brings you to Downey, boy?"

"I wan' you to take a look at somethin'."

Molly nodded and motioned for them to follow him into the back room. "Let's have a go"

Nemesis pulled the medallion out from beneath his sweater and laid it on the black velvet pad Molly held out to him.

Molly rubbed his forehead, and then looked up at Nemesis. "Is this what I think it is?"

"That's what we're here to fin' out."

Molly opened the drawer of his desk and retrieved a jeweler's lupe, grazing the medallion with the magnifier, shaking his head as he perused the gold etchings. "Malachim writing." He took the piece over to a scale and weighed it. "The weight is right." He twisted the medal around. "It is the Mandorla symbol. If it walks like a duck..." He shook his head, the quip expressive. "There is just one more thing I need to check."

Molly pushed a ladder over to one of the bookcases

and handed a large, beaten leather tome down to Nemesis. The pages were onionskin, frail and brittle, yellowed with age. Molly turned the pages carefully, and Posh watched the images shift from page to page, some colored, some black and white, many ink scripted, many just floating on an empty canvas.

"What are these pictures of?" she asked.

"Objects of the occult," Nemesis told her. "There," he said, pointing to the illustration Molly had just revealed. "It is the Mandorla Medallion."

Molly nodded. "This image describes the medal with the power." He turned the page. "This image is the artifice."

"But why two? Why one fake and one real?" she asked.

"The Mandorla is a symbol of duality," Molly explained, "which speaks to the unconscious psyche and enables it to project images outside the mind that our ego consciousness can grasp, or understand. Our conscious psyche can only relate to what is, by virtue of it's opposite. We know hot, because we know cold. We know hate, because we know love, and so on. Though the Mandorla symbol can stand alone as an expression of this duality, when it is harnessed by the mind as a conduit of power, it must be perceived by both, the conscious and unconscious selves for the psychical effect to be recognized and experienced."

"Well, does one have to possess both Medallions in order to facilitate the experience?" Posh wanted to know.

"No," Molly said. "Possession is not the necessity,

it is cognizance, awareness. As long as the two exist, the two are perceived, consciously, and unconsciously. There is universal balance."

"So which one do we have?" Nemesis asked.

"We'll know in a minute." Molly made his comparisons. "Nemesis, take a look at this," pointing out the order of the Malachim letters. Molly explained for Posh's benefit. "The Malachim alphabet, also known as the Angelic Script, was developed during the Middle Ages by philosophers who wanted to hide their doctrines from the uninitiated, the ones who might twist their tenets or misuse the power of the understanding to foul ends. It was like a code. As you can see here, Nemesis, after we convert the Malachim to old Hebrew we get Caph, Jod, and Theth on your piece, but on the inversion, we get Mem, Nun, and Tau. Yours is the real deal," he grinned.

Nemesis nodded.

"The next question is how to activate the power," Molly smiled. "You will have to come back tomorrow for that information. I have much more research to do before I can reveal that nugget."

Nemesis understood. He put the necklace back around his neck. "We'll take rooms somewhere and be back in the mornin' And," he added. "We have somethin' dark nippin' at our heels wanting this piece," he said. "Maybe you should lock yourself in and keep your eye out. I don't think we were followed, but I'd hate to have anythin' happen to you."

Molly grinned. "I will do as you suggest, but you

should know, I'm well protected."

"Just the same..." Nemesis stressed.

Molly nodded.

Chapter Eight

Downey was small enough to boast only one inn, and one room with a private bath. Nemesis gave Posh her options. Two rooms, bath down the hall, or one room, fireplace, bar, large bed, and private bath.

"We're adults," she clarified. "One room will suit."

They wandered the street of the hamlet like tourists. Nemesis wanted her to take some distance from the intensity of the issues they still faced, and his methods seemed to be working.

He held her hand, peered in windows, laughed, and generally let the world turn, while he kept one eye on what might be revealed during the rotation.

They had dinner in the inn, the only restaurant in town, and then went up the narrow stairs to the cozy space already warmed by the wood burning fire. They had enjoyed a couple of drinks during dinner, but Nemesis wanted another and pulled a bottle of scotch from his bag.

"Do you want one?" he asked, as she climbed up on the padded stool at the small bar.

"Sure." She wanted two. Anything to quiet the

concerns that were beginning to surface. Up to this moment, they had engaged in nothing more than prodding, foreplay, but she had not been required to cross the line. Nemesis was enticing her to the edge of the cliff, and part of her wanted to jump. She just didn't want to have to think about it.

He poured her a heavy shot, which she chugged and choked until it was gone, holding her glass out for another. Nemesis was half-way through his first, and he watched her warily. What was she doin'?

"It didn' look like you enjoyed dat one much, *chere*," he said. "Are you sure you wan' more?"

She nodded.

"Okay," he said skeptically, as he poured.

She took her glass to the bathroom along with her overnight bag. "I think I'll get ready for bed," she slurred casually.

He was watching the odd behavior. "You do dat, *petite*."

* * * *

When she emerged, she was encased in a small front tie camisole and panties. He thought she looked delightful, and uncomfortable. The message convoluted. She carried her glass and propped herself up on the bed, well stacked with pillows. Posh stared into the fire, exposed and silent.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"Yes," she smiled pretentiously. "Just fine, and you?"

He furrowed his brow. "I thin' it has been a long day, no?"

"I think, yes."

He was naked except for a pair of satin briefs, and she couldn't take her eyes off of him. He squatted by the fire, thigh muscle defined under the smooth skin. He tossed in a couple of pieces of wood, and then smiled. The woman from this morning had suddenly gone shy. It intrigued him. He knew what lay beneath the surface, and the thought nudged his cock

He paused in front of the four-poster, his erection evident in the expressive fabric. Posh couldn't take her eyes from his crotch, and he shook his head. She had something going on that made him curious.

He climbed up on the bed next to her, surprised that she had suddenly turned her back to him. Nemesis reached over with a finger and traced her arm, the dip of her side, the swell of her hip, to the top her thigh. She shuddered, and he felt the quake.

"You tremble when I touch you, Posh. Are you afraid of me?" His voice was gentle, but concerned.

"Yes," she admitted. There wasn't anything she feared more at this moment

"Bu' why? You thin' I'm goin' to hur' you?"

"No."

"Den why?"

"Because, I haven't been with a man for over two years." There, she'd said it. Out in the open, all over the bed. If only she had consumed more scotch, he may never have needed to know.

Nemesis' eyes widened. "Why?" She had thrown

him a curve.

"When Shawn was killed, I didn't want to do anything for awhile, and then, if the urge surfaced, I felt like I was betraying his sacrifice. Doing something ugly. I lived, he died, how it would be okay for me to take pleasure from life? After awhile, it had just been so long, I didn't think I'd know how to do it anyway. I still don't." A tear welled in one eye. There was some scotch involved, but it was a confession she was finally hearing herself.

Nemesis felt the wave of pain, as if he had entered her being and took the next hit. "Shawn woud' no' have asked dat of you." He knew that to be fact.

Posh agreed. "No, he wouldn't," she said, "but it was all I could ask of myself." There she was, nailed on the cross...bleeding.

"Look at me, Posh," he commanded, his large hand on her shoulder urging her to him.

She turned slowly, her body propped high enough on the pillows where they were now eye to eye.

"I won' touch you if you don' wan' me to," he said quietly. "But, I felt the woman this morn', and though Shawn is dead, she still lives. Wha' you thin' your mind forgets, your body remembers." His eyes were connected to hers, the dark wonder of him shining past the lids and penetrating her soul. Her expression was vulnerable and desperate.

"I need you, Nemesis," she confessed. "And, that need is my fear."

He reached over and touched her cheek, moving his face close in to hers. "I need you, too," he

whispered. His breath played over her lips with a dare and a promise. "Maybe it is okay to jus' kiss you," he said, edging closer.

He took her lips between his gently and tugged on the soft pout artfully. She felt the pull from down deep, his breath warm and seductive, her heart picked up its pace, her lips moving against his lightly. She lifted her face to him, wanting to get closer, feel the pressure. He felt her urge and he leaned over her, his chest rested to hers, his tongue tripping her mouth, willing it open but not pushing for access.

"Your lips are sweet," he whispered, his cock already swollen, the skin stretched over the hardness like gauze. He wanted her so bad he could taste it on his tongue, smell it on his lips, feel it in the deepest reach of his soul and yet, he was afraid' to climb the wall. One false move and she woud' pull the cloak in aroun' her, protection reinforced, consumed by the opposite, lost to him forever.

He listened as her breath deepened, and she reached her arm up around his neck, releasing his hair so it fell over their faces, and drew his mouth into hers. She moaned under the weight of the contact, turning her body to him suggestively, her breasts grazing his arm as he let his hand drop to her waist. He caressed her lightly, the touch titillating, goosebumps rising over her flesh ignited by the sensation. His fingers moved slowly up her abdomen, following the path exposed between the lacy camisole edges, tantalizingly close to the underside of her breasts.

"I want to touch you, Posh," he whispered. "I want to feel your breast in my palm. I want to suck your nipple into my mouth."

"Please," she moaned, lifting her chest to him, wanting his hands on her, needing the pinch of his fingers.

He slowly pulled the single lace draw, exposing the succulent mounds. He lifted his face from hers, and rose up on one arm to enjoy the view as his finger circled the nipple like a moon in orbit, constricting the waters under the touch. His cock swelled into her thigh, as he molded the globe in his hand like clay.

She pushed into his touch, needing his guidance and ardor to see her through the shadow. She whimpered, as his mouth draped over the stiff orb, sucking, pulling, begging her to release herself to him. At that moment, the fluid soaked her panties in a flash. It had been so long, and her breath was rapid, her heart beat to a rhythm of its own. She wanted this man more than she could remember wanting anything.

He continued to reel himself in as nature tugged the line. Too much, too soon, and he would lose the connection, her trust, the intimacy. She wanted to be played, needed to be played. He ran his fingers over her belly lightly, continuing to suckle her sweetness. At the top of her panties, he paused, tracing the inside of the band tentatively. He found her mouth, using his tongue to seduce her into allowing him access as his fingers caressed their way to her pussy.

"Spread your legs, Posh," he whispered. "I want

to touch you. I want to taste your sweetness.”

She murmured his name as his fingers reached into her slit, and painted the wetness over her clit, as he drove his tongue into her mouth. He lifted his mouth to her breasts, kissing a trail to her belly, taking the scent of her skin as guidance as he traced his way to the ripe pussy he knew waited for him. His mouth felt like a hot-cool path, the seared laze of one giving way to the cool breeze of breath over the other. His back was to her, his hands pressing gently into her thighs as lowered his mouth to the laced mound, sent a hot breeze through the fabric, letting the promise tease her sex and he felt her muscles relax.

He put his thumbs inside the top of her panties and began to work them over her hips. She lifted, and he pulled them from her, shifting position so that he had direct access to the bloom. She gasped as his tongue slid up the inside of her thigh, sensitive flesh sending chills as he growled hungrily, spreading the lips of her vagina, easing his mouth over the folds. Her moans stirred his desire relentlessly, his cock straining under the too tight briefs. His tongue shot up into her slit, lapping the inside of her. She rose up on her heels as his finger stroked her clit, his mouth flooding with the nectar. In moments, her body erupted in orgasm, two years of pent-up force stunning her mind with the delirium.

His hair clung to the moisture on his face and neck; his lust wild eyes were glazed with primal hunger as he set his muscle free and pushed himself on top of her.

"That was the first one, petite," he said huskily. He sucked on the skin of her neck gently, working his way to her mouth, his fingers plucking over her breasts as he pinched her nipples, and played over her flesh.

He wrapped his arms around her body and rolled her over the top of him, his cock pressed into her belly, her chest flat to him, her tongue in his ear. "God, I want you," she whispered desperately.

He lifted her up, moved her onto the head of his cock, and let her ease over the thick shaft, slowly, his size now demanding its place in the hot, tight, unwonted corridor. As she slid, her muscles clenched the bone, working their way down a moment at a time, driving him mad with the seduction. His body took over with a short thrust, making full penetration and she gasped with the force. He grasped the cheeks of her ass, molding her around him as they rocked over the bed fervently, her clit pounding against his belly as her second orgasm began to rise. He grabbed her tightly, stopping her in mid air.

"Stop," he whispered. "Don't move," he groaned, trying to buy more time.

But she couldn't wait. She broke from his grip and rode her way into the blissful cloud. Her ecstasy sent him over the edge, he exploded, the detonation blasting through his body in resurging waves. His arms fell to his side, his muscles heaving, her warmth enveloping him covetously.

He slowly raised one arm and entwined his fingers in her hair, holding her to him. He felt her breathing

slow. He wrapped the other arm around her possessively.

"Nemesis," she whispered.

"What, Posh?"

"I can't move."

"I don't want you to move, *chere*. Ever."

* * * *

They woke the next morning in the same position, his cock inside her swollen, ready. She felt his erection, moaned, and began the slow caress into the moment. By the time they finally left the bed, Nemesis had to meet Molly, and Posh convinced him to let her stay behind. He would have denied her nothing, and he gave her a long, sensuous kiss before heading out the door.

* * * *

Molly had been waiting an hour when Nemesis walked through the front door of the Open Mind.

"Busy morning?" Molly smiled.

Nemesis didn't address the question. "What do you have for me?"

Molly launched into the explanation, telling him that activation of the medallion was really much simpler than Molly had originally anticipated. "It's merely a matter of putting the Hebrew renditions of the Malachim script into a proper sequence to create a vibratory connection with earth energy. That is why

the medallion was connected to the moors, the natural energy that emanates from the peat creates, versus consumes, and offers a purity of force for the convergence."

"But the use of the medallion is not exclusive to the moors," Nemesis qualified.

"No. Now here is the sequence that inspires the energy--Zain, Theth, Cheth, Beth, Gimel, Samech--repeat twice, but, beware, the effect is immediate, the inversion complete in seconds."

Nemesis offered Molly money for his time, but the old man refused. "I was just happy to help.

* * * *

Nemesis' heart raced as he approached the door at the end of the hall. Muscles constricted in his chest, his blood pounded in his veins, the wood had been broken, as if someone had put their foot through it.

"Posh," he called, pushing the panel open slowly, afraid of what he might find on the other side.

She was gone and the place had been ransacked. A red light was blinking on the phone. A knot grew in his stomach, twisting his insides into stone, as he dialed in for his message.

"Danos, this is Conroy Mallory, and it seems we're in one of those interesting positions of each having something the other wants. I'll wait for you at a home I just rented on the outskirts of Downey, the directions to follow. I hope you get this message soon, because this little flower is begging to be picked."

Nemesis' hand gripped the receiver, the sound of the man's voice pumping through his muscles at a fevered pace. "I'm comin' for you, you bastar'," Nemesis snarled into the empty phone.

He had his gun in the waist of his leathers, the knife in his boot, when he left the inn and headed beyond Downey. It took a half hour with his foot to the pedal before he rounded a bend, the two-story manor in the distance. He had no intention of driving up to the front door. He would go in on the sly and pick Mallory's ghouls off one at a time until he had pared the odds down to the one-on-one he thirsted for

The thought of Posh at Mallory's mercy blinded him with rage, the energy fueling his adrenaline as he dumped the car along side the road, and took off across a wooded field parallel to the house.

He slipped in from behind, scaling an old stone wall, hoisting himself up over the scum of moss and wet. Below, like a shallow moat around the castle, a creek gurgled over pebble. He waded the water, and then climbed the embankment of dead limbs, deep compost, slow and quiet where he crested at the base of a small outbuilding, perhaps a gardener's shed.

One man leaned against it, his foot resting on the stone, his German G36C assault rifle draped in his arms. He wasn't expecting company. Nemesis tossed a rock, raising the man out of his stupor, luring him into the brush. Within seconds, Nemesis had the Danish knife blade in the man's throat, where he carved a canyon out of the flesh. He dropped the

body, rolled it down into the creek and picked up the weapon.

"That was for Cassie," Nemesis deemed.

Skirting the perimeter of the landscape, still able to use the woods for cover, another one of the goons set his rifle against a tree and lit a match, cupping the glow as he put it to his cigarette. This time, Nemesis wrapped an arm around the man's neck, then drove the blade into the kidney and twisted. He dragged the body off into the bush and tossed the weapon even further.

"That was for Paisley."

Nearing the front of the house, Nemesis took cover behind a shrub wall. Keeping his profile low, he zeroed in on his next target. He slammed the rifle butt into the side of the man's head, knocking him behind a garage, where Nemesis could finish him off beyond the view of the house.

With the outside secure, he circled to the rear of the mansion, climbing to a window. There were three men seated at the table in the kitchen. Nemesis did a calculation from memory; once those three were down, there would be two left, and one of them was Mallory. He stooped, took the three steps to the kitchen door, stood, slammed his foot in it, turned, and started firing. He sliced the three men in half with the spread of bullets before taking cover to see what his effort would root out.

"That was for Shawn."

In the window to the yard, he saw the reflection of the small man from the inn, sneaking down the hall.

He moved towards Nemesis, a pistol aimed, ready to fire. Nemesis slipped through another door and came around in behind the man. He pulled the automatic from his waist, shot twice, both bullets lodged in the man's head. He turned quickly, not wanting to leave his back exposed, it was time to locate Mallory.

He heard movement behind a door that led to the basement. Where else would a rat hide when threatened? He wondered if that's where Posh was as well.

Mallory would be waiting, the element of surprise given up some time ago. He traced the wall to the basement door, and stayed to the side as he slowly twisted the knob. It was locked. With the speed of light, he stepped into the hall, shoved his foot into the door and then draped himself back against the wall protectively.

He waited, heard nothing, and started down the stairs the rifle in one hand, the pistol in the other. Both, ready to fire.

Mallory waited at the bottom, in the shadows, out of the line of sight. When he saw Nemesis' boots, he started firing. Nemesis dove down the remaining steps and rolled behind a free standing stone fireplace. He could hear heavy feet moving away from him, down the hall into the darkness. Other than a small bulb that burned over the stairwell, the damp stone dungeon was dark.

With the grace of a cat intent on prey, Nemesis moved slowly into the hall, letting his eyes adjust. It was a realm of shadow and deeper shadow, Mallory

having the advantage of familiarity.

Guns poised, he prowled along the hall, kicking his way through doors, each action guarded, fast, and relentless. A faint light glowed at the end of the hall, like a disembodied flame flickering in space. He edged closer, his ears tuned, his eyes sharp, his senses on alert. From his position, he saw the outline of a body he knew well, manacled to the wall, naked and whimpering quietly. He swallowed hard. The best he could do for her now was to take care of Mallory.

Nemesis moved into the doorway, scanned the room, while a presence moved in behind him like a wraith. The chill skated up his spine eerily. He turned, but not soon enough. The butt of a rifle clipped the side of his head, the loud crack exploding in front of his eyes, knocking him to the floor, temporarily dazed. Instinctively he rolled to the side, as the big man lunged for him.

Nemesis tossed the pistol and rifle away from him, not wanting bullets flying around the room with Posh so vulnerable. He pulled the knife from his boot.

"Okay, you mother-fucker," Nemesis spat, "come an' get me."

Mallory saw the glint of the steel, laughed, and tossed his rifle. There were few better than he with the sling of a blade. He pulled a razor sharp dagger from a sheath at his waist. This is what he liked best.

"I want you to know that after I did your woman, I gave her to my boys. She screamed like a stuck hog."

Nemesis' muscles tightened, pulled taut like a band ready to snap. "You're dead, Mallory."

"That's what Shawn Holden thought."

"I'm not Shawn." Nemesis feinted to one side, spun, and plunged the knife into the man's leg, gave a twist and withdrew.

Mallory stumbled, ducked, came in under Nemesis' arm and sliced a gash into the Cajun's bicep. Nemesis wanted an organ, something to compromise the man fast, but Mallory had experience.

They both made their hits, while Mallory took one in the abdomen; Nemesis took one in the thigh, opening an artery. He was bleeding fast, the blood pouring from his body in spurts, and he was weakening. He made one last stab at Mallory and punctured a lung. Mallory dropped, and Nemesis began to chant.

"Zain, Theth, Cheth, Beth, Gimel, Samech.," the words given twice.

Posh raised her head, the thunder in the room sucking the air like a vacuum, she couldn't catch her breath. A blaze of light surged through the brick, and in that instant, she watched Nemesis move through a bright window, back and forth, yet never moving. It was as if she had seen spirit.

Nemesis looked down he was no longer bleeding. The inversion had taken the carved body and made it whole.

Mallory had seen it too. But he had no such advantage. "This isn't over, Nemesis," Mallory snarled as he kissed the ring on his hand, slammed his fist in the air over his head, and then disappeared.

Posh could not believe her eyes.

Nemesis was at her side, releasing her from the wall, and she slumped into his arms. "You came for me," she said as she shook from shock and cold.

He ripped the sweater over his head and draped it over her. "Of course I did, *petite*. Did you thin' I wouldn'?"

Nemesis swept her up into his arms and nestled his face in her hair.

"I didn't know," she confessed, clinging to his warmth.

"Don' you ever thin' that. No matter where you are, or where you go, *chere*, I will always fin' you."

She snuggled into him, remembering. "It was amazing, the Mandorla Medallion worked, but what happened to Mallory? He just disappeared."

"Oui. He wore the Ring of the Raven; a Native American occult artifact dat leads the bearer back to the nest, or in this case, wherever dat monster calls home."

He carried her out to one of Mallory's cars. "Let's get out of here."

* * * *

At the inn, Nemesis braced a chair against the door and helped her into the shower. She wanted to wash the experience from her body.

"Did they hur' you, *chere*?"

"No, not like that," she told him, as he climbed into the shower behind her.

He didn't want to leave her alone, let her go from

his view, and he pulled her wet back to his chest and began to soap her body gently. She slinked one arm up around his neck, and rested her head against his shoulder, her breath quickening under the slippery massage. He lingered over her breasts, running the soap over her nipples until she thought she would scream. His breath was hot in her ear.

"I was afraid I had los' you, Posh. I can no' do dat."

"Please don't ever lose me," she whispered.

He turned her round, pressed her breasts to his body, his mouth wandering over her neck before he rested on her lips.

"I mus' go to Johannesburg tomorrow, and you must' fly back to the States," he said, as if she didn't know the itinerary.

Posh nodded. "Is this it for us?"

He took his hand, wrapped it in the wet hair and pulled her gently into his view. His eyes were sultry, his expression serious. "Do you wan' it to be?"

She gazed into his eyes, searching his soul, his cock hard against her thigh. What did he want? What did she want? Could she let him go? He had set her free.

"I've been dead for two years. You gave me back my life."

"You need some time to sort past the change," he said, recognizing the truth of her revelation. "I will always be here for you, *chere*."

She nodded, reached up, wrapped her arms around his neck and gently lowered his mouth to hers. "I know you will," she murmured.

About the Author

Madison Foxe is a Jungian-oriented psychotherapist taking a break to explore various writing genres.