

OPEN DOOR

by

H. H. Self

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WHAT THEY ARE SAYING ABOUT *TITLE*

I enjoyed this book so much --this paranormal book deals with reincarnation, a subject that has always fascinated me. It grabs you from the first page and doesn't let go until the last page --and what an ending! HH Self has a beautiful writing style, the descriptive writing made the pages of this book come alive for me --this is one erotic paranormal read not to be missed .

~~Luisa at Three Degrees of Love~~

This was the first book by H.H. Self that I have read. It drew me in from the first page and took me on a journey through dreams and reincarnation. I look forward to reading more of this authors work
Sonja at Coffee Time Romance – 4 cups

Open Door is a love story with a twist. Built around an ancient legend, it has a touch of the paranormal set in a contemporary setting. Intense sex scenes, without being too much, are charged with emotion, making them all the more potent for it. **H.H. Self** has a style of writing that is romantic and erotically stimulating, so much so that I could almost feel Quinn's caresses. I was drawn into this story from the start and felt the emotions of the characters involved. I highly recommend this novella as I thoroughly enjoyed it and look forward to seeing more from this very talented writer.

Nikita reviewer for Enchanted in Romance

H.H. Self is a fascinating writer. He draws you into the land of dreams, and takes you where you have never been before. **H.H. Self** leads us into a dreamscape of supernatural

proportions, and uses his creative ability to show us that lost loves can be found, even if only in dreams. I enjoyed this story tremendously; it shows depth, and uncompromising excellence.

Dawn reviewer for Fallen Angel Reviews

Mr. Self is a new male author in the e-book industry, and he is one well worth watching. With this debut short story, he has proven to have what it takes to make his name well known among erotic romance lovers. Deliciously dark, this tale will grip readers, who will not be able to stop reading until the end. Mr. Self's prose is almost poetical, and emotions run hot between Quinn and Candy. His love scenes are passionate, emotional and very well written. The reader will definitely be squirming in her seat while reading. The characters are multidimensional, and the reader feels close to them. The plot is well thought out and reads very smoothly. This reviewer did wonder though, how a woman could stand on a bed in stiletto heels, however, it was a very enjoyable read. It is a refreshing change to read an erotic story from the viewpoint of a man. This reviewer will be watching Mr. Self's writing career with enthusiasm. Greater things to come are anticipated, as readers will surely agree after reading this exciting story.

Valerie reviewer for Love Romances

Mr. Self has written a great story of sex, lust, and love. There is a mystery to be solved so the souls of true love can be joined again. This is a fast paced story with wet and steamy love scenes and a dark evil that threatens the lovers. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and would recommend it everyone. It is a definite buy.

Oleta M Blaylock reviewer for Just Erotic Romance Reviews

Dedication

To Shana for the start, to Jewel for the push, to Midnight Passions, my Internet family, for being there, thank you all.

Chapter 1

A New Romance

He watched her from a distance. A thin gown covered her body as the mist at her feet did the ground, concealing the sharpest of details, delicately revealing the rest. Each step swirled the diaphanous night vapor around her ankles, rising, caressing her, and then flowing back over the pebbles of the narrow pathway. The sound of a heartbeat echoed in his ears. Was it hers, his, or a blending of both? He strained to see more, understand more, but the shadows and muted colors of night mocked his efforts as the moonlight ebbed and flowed with the passing clouds. His hand reached forward then halted, fingers curling back, a heavy breath pushing into the darkness. The gossamer figure slipped around the path's curve and stepped slowly toward the imposing cliff and the door set into the rock.

One arm outstretched, she pressed at the large stone door that loomed before her. For a moment, the small round carving on the door shimmered in a faint green glow, the design a memory just out of reach. The groan of burdened hinges, a grating as fingernails on a chalkboard, heralded the portal's opening. The sound moved over his flesh with the feel of a frigid wind. The breach was as black as pitch. Even the faint moonlight seemed to refuse to cross the threshold. Her long dark hair billowed back from an out rush of air and then quickly swung forward, as if the darkness inhaled. She turned to look at him over her shoulder, eyes of blue ice, lips the color of fanned embers; her paleness now amplified by the framing of the blackness before her. Her body twisted toward him, the curve of hip and breast made clear. A conscious act of seduction on her part reflected in the slight upturned corners of her mouth. The hand that pushed open the door now stretched out toward him and one finger with a blood red

finger nail curled slowly, calling him closer. He could not feel a step taken and yet the distance between them narrowed until he stared into the subtle shades of palest blue eyes, their hues flickering before him. As he inhaled, her scent filled his head, everything around him fading into the mist but her. Like a predator, her desire, her hunger, revealed to him by her musk, like prey, he did not understand why. Her outreached hand let a single finger touch his face. "Khaba..."

Quinn jolted up in his bed, a cold sweat covering his body. He felt on fire where the touch of her finger still lingered on his skin, yet deep within him ran a cold thread that heralded more than seen in the dream. He inhaled, pulling at her lingering scent. Why he held to it so desperately eluded him in the still fogged haze of trying to wake. With hurried desperation, he placed the scent firmly in his mind, as a feeling of déjà vu sent yet another cold chill through him.

The woman beside him shifted. He looked over at the small blonde; a sheet half covering his newly made friend from the Saint Patrick's party, *Cindy, no Candy*, his mind still split between dream and reality. The dream seemed a little more corporal each time he had it and this time, the scent made it too real. He let a single finger trace over his cheek as hers had in the dream, trying to recapture the jumble of feelings a moment more. The tingle of cold slithered up his spine. How could a woman, whose lips looked as though they could set a man ablaze with a passing touch, cause such a shiver? *It was just a dream. Dreams are not suppose to make sense.* He held on to more of the dream each time it came to him, even though he could not visualize her face as a whole. Eyes, lips, a piercing with a green stone in her left nostril, bits and pieces but never the whole. He tried his best to file each little clue to her, to the dream, away in his mind.

Candy shifted and sighed, seemingly lost in a dream of her own. Quinn's gaze focused on the soft features of her face. His dream pushed to one side by the memory of watching this beautiful woman flirt with him across a crowded room. The way she seemed to appear and vanish at will among the other partygoers, a butterfly in a field of flowers, her antics held him captive most the evening.

His mind filled with the music of their first dance. How when the third dance ended, he held up her hand and led them to the small terrace, taking two glasses of wine on the way. He handed her one, "Quinn White."

"Candy." Quinn raised an eyebrow and stood waiting. "Just Candy, for now." Sipping her drink, she walked over to the edge of the terrace and looked out on the scattered buildings of the campus. Quinn stepped behind her. The full moon lit the tree lined streets and walkways of a school that had been around for the past hundred years. "What do you teach, Quinn?"

"I am in the creative writing section of the English department. And you, Candy, what brings you here?"

She turned to face Quinn. "I came with a friend who promised I would meet some really cute single guys. You are single, right?" The chocolate brown of her eyes pulled him closer. The parting of full lips banished the remaining distance.

One of Quinn's hands held to the small of her back, the other, the nape of her neck. Their lips brushed together and she nipped at his lower lip. "Yes, thank God I am," Quinn replied. His tongue traced the curve of her upper lip and her mouth opened accepting him. Their tongues caressed and explored, hers stirring embers to flame. A flame not fed by air but the lack of it, not quenched by wetness but stoked by it. The fingers of one of her hands laced into his hair and the other embraced his hip. Her every move seemed the perfect reflection of his desire to be touched by her and touch her. Her body shifted and her hip pressed to his growing need. Her moan at its discovery fed into his mouth. The hand on his hip shifted to his ass and pulled his hardness tighter against her. His hand at her back lowered, gripping the swell of her bottom and her hips shifted, grinding and pressing at a growing need.

Her head fell back exposing her throat and Quinn's mouth covered the pounding pulse. Her words wrapped tightly in what seemed a breathless question. "Quinn, do you believe in lust at first sight?"

Quinn's tongue traced up her neck and around the curve of her ear, "I think I could be easily convinced." He kissed behind her

ear and the hand that held her neck moved to the front to caress her throat. His fingers moved down and slipped along the edge of the black lace blouse, a finger venturing under and finding the heated flesh of her breast.

Her fingers moved between them and grasped his erection. Her other hand reached up and undid the top button of her blouse. "Will that convince you?"

His mouth took hers once more and his hand moved under her blouse finding a diamond hard nipple. The sound of the terrace door opening pulled them apart.

A grin on Mark's face reached from ear to ear. "Quinn, I am catching a ride home with Sam. I will see you in the morning." He turned and started to leave adding, "Maybe."

"Who was that?" Candy asked.

"Mark, a friend, one with poor timing, but a friend. Now where were we?"

Candy placed her hand on his chest holding him back for a moment. "We were about to let you take me to your place and see if I could convince you further." She buttoned her blouse and started for the terrace door.

Quinn reached out and took hold of her arm. "Let's use the side path." He pulled her palm over the large bulge in his pants. "It might not go over so well me walking through the room with this, and with you close, I don't think it is going away."

Her finger tightened around him for a second. With a giggle, she let go and took a step back, "I think it's cute, but if you insist." She started down the side path. He became lost in watching her strides and the sway of her hip. She looked back at him. "This will work better if you come with me."

Quinn raised an eyebrow and quickly closed the distance between them with long strides. His arm went around her waist and he walked her to his car. Opening the door, he watched the gray skirt move up her thigh until the top of her stockings showed as she sat down. His gaze moved up her body to find her looking at him with a smile. Even with the short distance to his apartment, it

seemed to take forever to get there. The time stretched with Candy toying with her top button once more.

Once in the apartment, Quinn took charge of the top button, and then the next, and the next, his mouth discovering the flavor of Candy. He could wait no longer and he took her into his arms, carrying her to the bed. His steps hastened a little more with the fact her blouse fell open when he picked her up, exposing her breasts. He placed her in the middle of the bed and removed her blouse, kissing his way up the mounds and letting his tongue circle her tightening nipples.

She reached out and pulled his shirt over his head. Pressing her nipples into his chest, she undid his slacks and reached into his boxers. When her fingers touched his hardness, his breath left him and he could feel himself growing larger. She stroked him until his breath returned. With a smile that seemed shy, she stood up on the bed and undid her skirt. When it fell, she kicked it to one side. She stood there in a black thong, black stockings and stiletto heels. "More?"

"Yes, please."

"Show me yours, and I will show you mine." Her words punctuated with a mischievous grin.

Quinn jerked off the remainder of his clothes and sat on his knees before Candy, his erection reaching for her. He reached out and let his fingers capture the waistband of her thong. Lowering the small sliver of cloth, he exposed her shaven sex. Stepping out of her panties, she moved to the top of the big bed and sat down, spreading her stocking covered legs, the patten leather heels catching the light for a second. She looked like a men's magazine fantasy come to life. BBS as Mark called it, blonde, beautiful and spread. Candy gave a little wiggle of her shoulders and shifted her hips. Quinn reached out taking a hold of her ankles and pulling her back to the center of the bed. He took off the heels and tossed them to the floor. He held both her feet up, her legs running down his chest. He spread her feet apart just enough that he could nuzzle between them and feel the texture of the stockings on his cheeks. At the same time, he savored the feel of her bottom pressing down

on his cock. His hands caressed down one leg and pulled the stocking off, and then the other. His kisses started at her ankles but his need to taste the liquid center of Candy pulled him to the petals of her sex and the scent of her arousal.

Her legs draped his shoulders and his hands moved over her sides and up to her breasts. A probing tongue traced the outer edges of her sex until her hands reached down and grasped his hair pulling him to her. Every woman is unique in flavor and scent. Quinn filled his senses with Candy's. The silken feel of her inner folds accented his discovery of her. He could feel her upper torso arching and twisting, while her mound pressed into him. Grinding in small circles, her thighs began to press to the sides of his face. In his very breath he could feel her wetness. Her unstoppable need for release showed in the liquid that covered his lips and chin. Her legs wrapped around his head, her entire body trembling. Her clit captured between lips and pressed beyond all control by a fevered tongue. For a second, everything stopped. He could not hear her moans or breath, her body became hot stone, frozen. Small quivers returned and her legs released him but not her grip on his hair.

She pulled his head up so she could look at him. "I need to feel you inside me." She guided his head up her body, his tongue sampling her with each passing inch. The hardness between his legs aching to find the wet heat his tongue stirred. His body slipped over her like a warm summer breeze until he could capture her mouth.

His tongue explored once more, filling him with yet another of her sweet flavors. Her small hand reached down and took his girth. She rubbed its tip to the tight ring of muscle that announced her inner passage. "Don't make me beg, Quinn." His weight shifted, hips lowered and he could feel the tightness yielding to his hardness. Entry into such a woman is more than shaft and sheath. It is the engulfing of need and desire in a blanket of passion. Feeling the soft silken inner folds of her passage caressing his swollen sensitive crown, he felt her in a way only they could share.

Her legs wrapped around his waist and she drove herself hard into him. Every thrust, touch and moan building out of control until they shuddered, stilled and quivered.

Quinn rolled to his side pulling her into his arms and kissing her neck, his hands moving over her body moist from sweat. "You made a believer out of me."

"You think so, do you?" She slipped out of his arms and down his body. Light kisses trailing down until she reached a still half-erect shaft. Her tongue lapped at the underside causing his cock to tremble.

"Candy. it might take a moment or two for me to..."

"I doubt it," she said just before sucking the sensitive head into the heat of her mouth. His shaft did not hesitate to rise at her command. She pulled him to a point where her stopping caused a whimper from him. With a grin, she straddled him, took hold of his shaft and lowered herself so she could move the tip between swollen petals, raking it over her clit. Her back arched and breasts pushed out inviting his grasp. Her hips rocked from side to side but did not lower and when he raised his, hers countered doing the same.

"Please" he said.

She tipped her head forward letting golden curls cover her face, then tossed them back with a jerk. No siren conceived in mythology had more power over a man. "It's your turn to beg," her tongue moved over her lips and then she pulled her bottom lip between her teeth.

Quinn's hands moved to her hips coaxing her lower. "Please, I want, I need to feel the heat of you surround me. I have to feel the tightness within you." She lowered until the tip popped into her and then held still.

"More, Quinn?"

"Oh God yes," he could hear the desperation in his voice. He was sure it covered his face. However, all he cared about was finding himself held by her once more.

With a grin of satisfaction, she lowered painfully slow, consuming him. Once impaled on his hardness, her hips ground

and she leaned forward offering her breasts to his mouth. "See, I told you, with the right woman, you did not need any time." She rose until she held just his tip and plummeted back down. Within a minute, her body glistened with sweat once more and her hair swung out of control. Her body rising and falling in a rhythm his hips hurriedly matched. Quinn's hips thrust up into her trembling body, her face revealing what the clenching muscles of her passage confirmed. Her head arched back and her hot breath escaped in an out rush, all but seen. Quinn released a torrent into her passage that felt unending in the moment. She fell forward into his chest and lay there, the heat of her breath washing over his flesh. His fingers combed out the tossed blonde hair until their breathing became normal once more.

Slipping off his chest, she curled up beside him. "Any bets on a next time?" she asked. Quinn pulled the sheet up over them both with a smile as they drifted off to sleep between languid caresses.

* * * *

Candy rolled to her side eyes fluttering open. "Awake already? I would have thought after last night you would have wanted to sleep in." She said through a half yawn. She let her fingers caress over the ripples of his toned stomach, then slip under the sheet. She giggled and smiled. "It would seem you are up and ready to go this morning."

The erection began as an effect of the dream, a detail he felt best not shared right at the moment. He slowly pulled the sheet off her and let his hand caress the curve of her bare hip. '*One in bed is worth two in a dream*', he cringed a little at a thought so cliché. With a grin, he tossed the sheet to the end of the bed and gently rolled her onto her back. His hands caressed flesh as his tongue pulled soft moans to the surface. He explored her body looking for that scent that lingered in his mind from the dream. It should be Candy's. Yet it could only be found floating ghostlike in a shadowed memory. His tongue sketched a lazy wet line that rambled from a hard little pearllike nipple until it traced the soft curve of a pouty lipped mouth. He rose on strong capable arms to look down into soft brown eyes. Her head fell back as red lips parted so a pink tongue

showed, her chest rising as her lungs filled with air. One of Quinn's arms supported his weight while his free hand roamed down her side grasping her slender hip. He could feel the subtle movement stirring deep within her pelvis. A movement amplified with the arching of her back. He lowered himself to claim her moist mouth with his own. A shift of his hips and he swallowed her moan, her body engulfing his shaft.

Within the first throws of passion, Quinn found himself torn between holding onto a dream and embracing reality. Candy's body crashed into his with a growing force and made that choice for him. Within a breath, she owned his morning arousal. A sliver of her brown eyes showed through almost closed eyelids as a flush moved down her neck and flowed between the valley of her breasts. Her fingers dug into the muscle of his thigh forcing the union from delight to frenzy. Quinn met her need for release with his own. His hands cupping her face and the arch of his back increased. Her moans became screams, their almost sinful shrill pulling both Quinn and her over the edge. Two quivering bodies seemed to melt into one. Beads of sweat glistened between her breasts while Quinn lazily ran his fingers over her skin. Candy shivered.

"Cold?"

A soft purr preceded her answer, "Not in the least." Her finger tracing his jaw line, "A girl could get use to this."

"I know I could." He pulled her closer holding her tight until her body calmed. With a slow pace, he slipped from the bed, taking her hand in his. "What do you say to a shower and then I'll fix you breakfast?" Her eyes answered the question and her body followed. The warm water and the slick texture of her skin made it difficult not to let a shower become more. The willing tilt of her head made it near impossible. "If there was not a morning staff meeting—"

She placed a finger on his lips, "I need to get going soon, too."

Quinn got out of the shower first, telling Candy to take her time. He dried his dark hair with a towel looking into his own gray eyes in the mirror. *Damn, you're a lucky guy*, he thought, letting his

gaze move over to the svelte silhouette shifting behind the shower doors. He purposefully took his time shaving so he could watch her step from the shower. She shyly looked at him reaching out and taking the towel off his shoulder. Quinn yielded his place to her with a slight step back, one that forced her body to caress his when she stepped in front of the mirror. His hands grasped her slender waist and he kissed the back of her neck.

Her gaze caught his in the reflection, "breakfast?" Quinn raised one eyebrow, a mischievous grin curled his lip and he headed off to the kitchen.

Placing pancakes on the plates, he looked up to watch Candy walk into the kitchen, buttoning the black lace blouse he so slowly unbuttoned last night. She was gorgeous. He pulled a chair out for her with a boyish smile. When she moved past him sitting down, he drew in the clean fresh scent of her still damp skin. Maybe not the scent from his dream, but this...it was real and so very close.

He placed the plates on the table and sat beside her. The conversation neither clumsy nor forced but light, the kind two old lovers would have. Every now and then, a sly look or soft touch reminded him just how beautiful, how passionate this woman could be. A few mornings like this and that dream would simply fade.

After breakfast, they exchanged phone numbers, promising to call each other later that day. The drive down the oak lined street to the campus made a little more pleasant with the thought of a goodbye kiss that left no doubt in his mind about calling her. A kiss like that would leave an impression on a man's psyche all day long.

Chapter 2

The Legend

Quinn walked into the administration building and caught up with Mark as he came out of the restroom. With a punch to Quinn's shoulder, Mark asked, "Well, was she as good as she looked?"

Quinn just shook his head from side to side and grinned. "She is Candy and Candy is very nice, thank you for asking," Taking a quick look around to make sure he would not be overheard he added, "Asshole!"

At thirty pounds overweight, a good six inches shorter than Quinn's six foot one inch frame and his retreating hairline vaguely concealed by hair combed down over his forehead, Mark reminded him of a banty rooster. Quinn didn't choose his friends for their looks. He always enjoyed a person with a bit of a quirky personality and Mark fit the bill perfectly.

Mark laughed, "Well that tells me you didn't sleep alone."

"If you gave your sex life the attention you give mine, you might just have one." Quinn said, then chuckled.

"Hey, is that any way to treat the guy who is going to get you into the history department's newest exhibit early? Besides, once I lose these ten pounds" he pinched at the extra roll around his waist. "I will be in co-ed heaven."

Quinn opened the door to the conference room, "Ten pounds, sure."

Ever since Quinn took a teaching position at Durum College, he hated the monthly faculty conferences and like most of them

before, he sat and made notes on his current writing project. Mark sat next to him and as always, flipped through a history book.

Suddenly, Quinn's hand slammed down on the page of Mark's text, causing everyone in the room to turn and look his way. "Sorry, I just remembered I have to help a student" He grabbed Mark's book and Mark's arm. "And Mark has to help also." The room filled with a clamor of disbelief over Quinn half dragging his friend from the conference room.

"Are you trying to get us both fired?" Mark asked wide-eyed.

Quinn opened the book and frantically flipped through the pages.

"Damn, Quinn, what has gotten into you?"

Quinn found the page that started the disturbance. He pointed at the symbol on the page, the same one he remembered on the stone door. "What is...what does this mean?"

"It could mean you're going off your rocker," Mark said, not looking at the page.

Quinn held the book a little higher and pointed at the symbol, "This right here."

Mark took a half step back. "It has something to do with lost souls, some kind of underworld thing or something. Why?"

"No, Mark, I need to know *exactly* what it means."

"Well I might have a text in my office that would go into more detail about it. After the meeting, we can go see." Mark turned back toward the conference room. Quinn once more grabbed his arm and pulled him toward the exit and across the concrete courtyard toward the History department. Quinn nodded for Mark to quicken the pace, cutting across the grass covered knoll. He knew his friend's short legs were close to a run, but if there were answers to the questions left by the dream, he wanted them now. The students they rushed past looked up in surprise. Most likely because they were used to the slow, friendly pace the two usually maintained in crossing the campus. Quinn pressed his way through the crowded entryway to the large ivy-covered brick building. Once in Mark's office, Quinn placed the book on the desk, still open to the page with the symbol. Mark sat down at his desk, his

eyes locked on Quinn as Quinn told him of the dream, the door, the symbol and the ghostlike figure.

“Hell, even your dreams are hotter than my sex life.”

One of Quinn’s hands rubbed at his forehead and his gaze became a glare. “Please, Mark, just this once, try to be serious.”

Mark mumbled, “I was being serious,” as he got up and went to the large bookcase that covered the west wall of his office. After pulling and replacing several books accompanied by the drumming of Quinn’s fingers, he finally found the one he was looking for. Mark set it on his desk.

Quinn reached over and opened it. The pages of the book were a ghostly yellow and the writing looked more like scribbles.

“Unless you took Aramaic over the summer, perhaps I should do the looking.” Mark suggested.

Quinn slid the book over to Mark and took a step back. “Fine, just do it already.”

Mark carefully leafed through the pages until he found one with the symbol in its center. His finger moved over the pages from right to left at a slow pace while Quinn’s fingers drummed a double-time beat on the desk. Looking down at Quinn’s hand, “Do you want it fast, or do you want it right?” Mark asked.

“Sorry,” Quinn folded his arms and took another half step back from the desk, his fingers now tapping on his arm.

Mark returned to the text, his gaze once more moving at a slow pace. From time to time, he would place a finger on a single word causing Quinn to lean forward. When Quinn could take no more, he stepped around behind the desk and looked over Mark’s shoulder.

“It would seem I was right,” Mark said, looking back over at Quinn. “It is the symbol for the place lost souls go. Well, halves of souls, kind of. And not so much go, as they are placed there.”

“Kind of? Can you read that or not?” Quinn placed a hand on Mark’s shoulder and leaned in a little closer.

“The book is a very old copy of an even older scroll that tells a story even older. So yeah, kind of.” Mark looked back at the text

his eyes narrowing a little. "It keeps referring to the half soul left behind, whatever that means."

"So where is this place?" Quinn's grip on Mark's shoulder tightened.

Mark looked up from the book, his brow furrowed. "It's a legend, myth, you know, silly superstition. It only exists in the mind of some Egyptian priest trying to scare the hell out of the people."

"Egyptian? I thought you said it was Aramaic?" Quinn gestured disbelief with his arms. Shaking his head, he walked back around to the front of the desk.

"The book is in Aramaic and it tells of an Egyptian legend of a separate underworld for whoever these half soul people are."

"Some kind of monsters...the half soul creatures I mean." Quinn leaned over the desk, his hands gripped its edge, his knuckles turning white.

"Well I am a little fuzzy on that one because the legend also tells of a fair-haired demon that guards the entrance."

"No, that's all wrong. She has black hair."

"Who?"

Quinn pushed back from the desk and shook his head. "The woman, or whatever she is in the dream, the one at the door... she has black hair. Did you hear anything I said past thin dress?" How could Mark understand? Quinn felt sure Mark thought of it as no more than a simple dream. But there was nothing simple about the cold dread that filled him.

"You really don't think your dream and this legend are connected? It was just a dream, Quinn. You probably saw the symbol somewhere before. Gee, you can be a little weird at times." Mark closed the book and started to put it back on the shelf.

"Mark, just how well can you read that book?"

Mark shrugged his shoulders, "I can get the main parts." Putting the book back down on the desk, "Ok, I know someone I can fax copies of the pages to and she can give us an exact translation."

“Would you, Mark, please? I...I need to know what is happening, before...before I have another one of those dreams.” Quinn waited for Mark to nod his agreement before turning and leaving to go to his own office.

Quinn crossed the campus, at a much slower pace this time, lost in everything Mark had just told him. Even more lost in how it all tied back to the dream, but deep within him, he knew the connection existed. The thought that maybe the woman did exist frightened him, but in the fear, there lay a strand of excitement. It was a feeling that gave him anything but comfort.

Quinn managed to get through the day teaching classes and having conferences with the next Stephen Kings, but he spent most of it staring at a blinking cursor in the middle of page thirty-nine of his latest novel. The more he tried to push the dream to one side, the more it seemed to hang on. He found himself doodling the strange symbol on the pad beside his computer. When the phone rang, he jumped up, hitting the desk with his knee. A grimace on his face, clutching the injured knee with one hand, he fumbled trying to get the cell phone open.

Chapter 3

Dinner For Two

“Hello? Mark?”

“No...sorry...it’s Candy.”

“I’m sorry, Candy. I was expecting a call and...anyway please forgive me, my mind was lost. Is everything ok? Did you forget something at the apartment?” Quinn sat back down, rubbing his knee.

“As a matter of fact I did, you! But I needed your email address.” He gave it to her, quinn@hhsself.com. “Good, now go check it,” and she hung up.

It only took a few seconds to get to his personal email and when he did, the new message with the subject line “DO YOU LIKE CANDY?” grabbed his attention. A smile came to his face and an eyebrow rose when he saw the blinking attachment symbol. A single click and the email filled his screen with a picture of Candy in a dark blue dress, not a single word with it. Between the angle she held the camera and the low cut dress, her full cleavage took center stage. Her lips were parted with the very tip of her tongue pressed past perfect white teeth. Her gaze focused on the camera with eyes that seemed to know just what he was thinking at that moment.

A simmering heat moved through Quinn as he fumbled through his wallet to find her phone number. “New message received” popped up in the corner of the screen. It was from her but no attachment this time. It read, “I will be at Tony’s at seven. I

would hate to waste a new dress.” He found her number and called, only to listen to it ring.

The picture stayed up on his screen until Mark stopped by to tell him it could take a few days to get the translation. Quinn dismissed the news with a shrug and “That’s fine.”

Mark gave him a puzzled look, “I thought you were in this big hurry?”

“You will get it when you get it, Mark, right?” Quinn leaned back in his office chair.

Mark shook his head and shrugged his shoulders, “Whatever.” He turned and walked to the office door, looking back he added, “You sure?”

Quinn slid back up to his desk and toyed with the button that would return Candy’s picture to the screen, “Yes, like you said, it is just a dream. Nothing to really be worried about.”

“Okay,” Mark said, checking his watch and disappearing into the crowded hallway.

Quinn clicked the mouse and Candy’s picture filled the computer screen. Leaning back in his chair, he opened his cell phone and called Tony’s to make sure he got a good table. The maitre d’ told him the reservations were already made and that the lady who called was very precise about the table she wanted. Quinn told him, “What ever the lady wants will be fine, I am sure.”

Quinn folded up one of the pieces of paper with the drawn symbol on it and tucked it into his pocket. He would think of nightmares later.

He left his office with the determination of a man with somewhere to be, wasting no time getting home and getting ready for dinner. He could not help but wonder what the unseen part of the dress would look like. More to the point, he wondered just how hot Candy would look in it. He arrived at the restaurant fifteen minutes early not wanting her waiting on him and eager to see her.

Quinn checked his watch for the tenth time seven-twenty-one. He went back to fiddling with the candle on the table, feeling the stares from the tables all around him. A table set for two and

only one person there. By no means, would he have chosen the table in the back corner. He pushed back from the table when, from the corner of his eye, he saw her walking through the door. He rose to his feet. When his gaze met hers, she blushed and tilted her head down a little looking at him through strands of flaxen hair. Her stride reminded him of a large cat on the prowl. Each step purposefully placed, each step accenting the curve of her hips. The dresses hem was cut on a bias, its lowest point just below one knee, its highest approaching midthigh. When her stride reached a precise point, the darker top of her black thigh high stockings pulled his stare like a magnet to metal. She was beautiful.

The waiter pulled out her chair, but she grasped its back and pulled it around the table beside Quinn. Quinn held it steady as she scooted to the table, her slender legs disappearing under the tablecloth that stretched halfway to the floor. Soft brown eyes looked up at him through long dark lashes. "Sorry I'm late. I hope you're not too upset with me."

Quinn sat down and scooted back to the table. He took her small delicate hand in his, "No, not at all. The wait was well worth seeing you in that dress."

She smiled her naive young girl smile and leaned a little closer to him. Pulling her hand free of his, she slipped it under the table and on to his knee, "Good, I tried to be on time. I hurried so much, I forgot to put any panties on. I hope that won't be a problem."

Quinn choked on a drink of water half taken, yanking the napkin to his mouth. "Uh, NO! No problem at all."

She leaned closer and kissed his cheek, "Good." Her fingers trailed up his leg to midthigh. "I would not want you to feel uncomfortable. So what are you going to order us?"

Quinn cleared his throat and took a slow sip of water. He motioned at the wine steward, who brought over the red wine he picked when he first arrived. "Tony's has a great New York Steak; I just needed to know how you like yours cooked."

"Rare, very rare," she said, looking at Quinn. Quinn motioned for the waiter and placed the order.

"It was a nice surprise, your call and email." Quinn swore he could feel the room getting hotter as Candy's fingers shifted on his leg.

She took up her glass of wine, pausing a moment to inhale the bouquet, then she took a languid drink, her gaze never leaving him. "I hope I didn't sound too pushy, I just enjoyed last night," she giggled, "and this morning."

"So did I," He let his fingers caress the back of her hand that held her glass.

Halfway through the meal Candy asked, "So what made you so intense today on the phone?"

"Oh that," he reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out the scrap of paper with the sketch of the symbol. As he did, it fell to the floor.

She picked up the paper and unfolded it. For a second, the symbol looked illuminated to Quinn. She pitched it on the table, "What is this?"

"A symbol I saw in a dream last night."

"Does it mean something?" Her head tilted a little to one side.

"I'm not sure what just yet, but it may. Do you believe in ghosts, like a dream spirit?"

She grinned, "Not really. Isn't that stuff just silly superstition?"

"Probably." Quinn picked up the scrap of paper and pushed it back into his pocket.

She leaned over and let her tongue trace the edge of his ear, "What I believe in is how hot you make me." She nibbled at his ear lobe and let her hand move up his leg until she found the swelling taking place. "I believe that I love the way it feels when you make love to me." She let her fingers trace the outline of his erection through his tightening slacks. "I believe thinking of you makes me want to..." Her hand left his now throbbing member and in a second, she released a soft moan. Her eyes fluttered and she squirmed in her chair.

Quinn's eyes widened as he shifted in his seat.

Her smile no longer innocent, she reached up and took hold of his hand, pulling it under the table. Dragging it up her leg, where

in the span of a long breath, she pressed his fingers to her wet sex. Her hand left his diddling digits and rose to run over his lips, her lustful scent usurping his thoughts. His tongue swiped at the wetness she placed on his lips, sampling her bittersweet taste. "Please, Quinn, make me come right here. If you do..." she pressed her finger between his lips, the taste of a woman in heat filling every corner of his mouth, "you can have me anywhere, anyway you like, just a caress on my clit and..." His fingers found her hard nub. His heart pounded, as much from the thought of discovery that his finger danced in Candy's pussy, as it did from the fact he had her trembling with his slightest touch.

He sucked her finger deep into his mouth, his tongue caressing and seizing every drop of her flavor. Two of his fingers splayed her petals, while the third danced to the tempo of a pounding pulse over her proffering clit. She bit her bottom lip looking into his eyes, her breathing broken into gasps and her head nodding yes. Her body shivered and her thighs clamped tight together, trapping his hand. She held him there while quivers and moans slowly subsided.

She grabbed his wrist and pulled his hand free, guiding his soaked fingers to her mouth. Her lips parted and a drop of blood from her bitten lip glistened. She sucked his finger into her mouth and let her tongue caress it. Quinn's body tensed and his breathing paused, he felt as if he were standing in the middle of the restaurant nude and she held his cock not his finger in her mouth. With a slow, meticulous pace she cleaned his finger, all the time he shifted in his seat trying to accommodate his growing need. When she released his finger, he laid the money for the meal and tip on the table and took Candy's hand "Let's go."

Quinn kept Candy a half step in front of him all the way to the front door in an effort to conceal the erection that pressed his slacks out like a teenage boy watching cheerleaders. Once outside, he asked, "Where is your car parked?"

"I took a cab. I hoped that you would want to take me home, well to your place, that is." Quinn put his hand to her lower back and they headed for the parking garage. Her hand reached over and

caressed his erection. "You are not going to make me wait that long drive home, are you?"

Quinn cleared his throat, "It's not all that far. Just a few blocks."

Reaching the parking lot, Candy took a few quick strides and moved ahead of him. She turned, skipping backwards in schoolgirl fashion and raised her dress until her shaved sex caught the pink colored lights of the parking garage. "Is there something wrong with it, Quinn? Maybe I should get a second opinion."

Quinn caught up with her and pushed her between a SUV and minivan. "No there is nothing wrong with it, you. I just..."

She unzipped his pants, reached in, and grabbed his cock. "You can make love to me when we get home, Quinn. Right now, I want to taste your cock and then I want you to fuck me. I want you to fuck me so hard and dirty, I'll feel like you just paid for me." She bent down and with no forewarning, sucked his cock down her throat. She undid his belt and snap, pulling his pants to his knees. A half dozen strokes and she stood up, raising her dress as one of her fingers caressed her clit, "Well?"

Quinn raised one of her legs and with perfect placement, drove his entire shaft into her tight sheath. Her wet inner flesh felt scalding as it engulfed him. "Is this what you wanted?" His head spun but not from wine. Lust filled his mind, as it never did before. The thought they were in a public parking lot made him pound her all the harder, the minivan rocking in time with his taking of her, each strong thrust raising her to her toes.

"Yes..." a hot sweet breath carrying the word to Quinn

"Yes what?" He wanted to hear it from her lips, the words that would drive him deeper into the flooding moistness of her inner depths.

Her fingernails pressed into his ass jerking the two of them together, "Pound my pussy." Her grip on his ass tightened, "Fuck my cunt with that hard cock. Your little bitch loves it like this." He pulled down the top of her dress exposing her breasts. She grabbed his hair pulling his face to her. "Oh hell yes, suck my tits while you bang me...oh fuck yes..." Her head fell back with a thud on the

van's window and she released a scream that would have woke the dead, if not a security guard. Quinn held but one thought and he verged on expressing it. Her second scream released that thought and he poured his essence into her shivering body.

Reality tugged at them when they both heard a man's voice say, "I think it came from over here." Candy and Quinn scrambled getting their clothes back on and stepped from between the vehicles still straightening buttons when the two security guards came around the corner. "Are you ok, miss?" the bigger of the two asked.

Candy looked at him and batted her big brown eyes. "I'm fine, officer." She giggled and took Quinn's hand, "Just perfect."

Quinn did not waste any time getting the two of them to the car and home. Once there, her demeanor changed and she became a shy, sweet lover. They made slow, gentle love and then took a long shower together. Candy hurried to the bed after the shower, and pulled the sheet up in front of her.

"Can I stay the night?"

"I was hoping you would," Quinn said as he slipped under the sheet next to her.

"Good," she kissed his cheek. "Just one thing."

"What?" Quinn's eyes narrowed a little.

"You have to promise me that you will only dream of me and not some silly spirit." She lowered the sheet exposing the top of her breasts.

He kissed her, tasting the sweetness of her mouth and caressed her face. "Just you." He turned out the light and they cuddled close. His mind drifted into the twilight of consciousness thinking how lucky he was to find a woman that could fulfill his wildest, along with his most passionate, dreams.

His eyes fluttered open and to his horror, he knew exactly where he stood. His mouth went dry and tasted of ash. Dark half dead trees loomed over a path covered with a thick mist, an unyielding vapor that clung to his steps. Black towering stones marked the path's edge, looking like grotesque statues of exactly

what, he did not want to ask himself. "I am asleep in my bed. This is not real, this is not real."

Reality slapped him in the face, a hint of her scent, the scent, twisting into his brain. Every small hair on his body stood on end, and cold chills passed through him. He glanced around for his black-haired demon. He could not find her, though he felt something watching him from within the dark forest of stone and twisted trees. Something he hoped stayed only watching, he was not about to disturb it, not in there, no way. He held no doubt of whose heart he heard pounding this time. It echoed in his head as though held in an empty barrel. He felt each step he took, his bare feet touching cold worn stones hidden from view. Steps he first took with care, but the chill pushed him, it seemed to be growing stronger, closer. Steps became strides, strides yielding to a dart down a path that seemed to narrow. His lungs pulled hard trying to find air. Shadowed light, muted, came from a moon that hung veiled in a starless sky. Barely the light needed to find a hurried way down an indefinite path.

Each breath exhaled, carrying a plea to waken.

He rounded the corner and the path halted before the massive stone door. A trembling hand reached out feeling the cold, unyielding touch of stone. A pale green glow radiated from the small carved symbol in the door's center. For a moment, he could not make his arm move until fear of what prowled behind him compelled him to open the door. The scream of the hinges seemed to be calling out a warning, an alarm, one that quickened even an already pounding heart. Swirls of wind, as cold as death, pressed out from the door's edges. For a moment, the stalking presence behind him seemed less fearsome, overridden by what might loom behind the moving slab of stone. The door opened wider, and the dark-haired woman came into view. A reflection, not real, no something else... her hand reached out. A medallion clenched in slender fingers. Then pain. His gaze ripped to his shoulder as black claws pierced the flesh. With one jerk, he felt himself torn from the dream.

His eyes closed, a scream filled his ears, but it was not his, even though pain coursed through his body. This didn't feel like the dream, but it couldn't be real.

"Quinn!"

He could feel his shoulder pressed to the bed. "Quinn, wake up." His eyes opened and the glaze of uncertainty started to fade. "Are you ok? What happened?" Looking down at him, Candy pressed a sheet to his bleeding shoulder. Her stare locked on the blood soaking the sheet.

"It's the dream, the creature in the dream must have..." His words made no sense to him, how could they to her. "It's ok, Candy," he moved her hand from the sheet and replaced the pressure with his own. The fingertips of Candy's hand dripped with blood.

"Quinn, you have to put a stop to this...this nightmare. Before it kills you." She got up and went to the bathroom gathering some towels. With one of them, she cleaned the blood from her hand, the other she gave to Quinn. "Use this on your shoulder and I'll help you get your pants on. I think you are going to need some stitches."

An unnatural silence filled the bedroom. One punctuated by the fearful looks Candy gave him while helping him dress. She quickly put her own clothes on. Still in silence, she helped him to the car. Quinn searched for something to say that made sense.

Halfway to the hospital she looked over at him. "You okay?"

"I think so, thanks to you."

"You promised me you would only dream of me, Quinn." Her free hand rested on his knee. "You should have kept your promise."

Unsure of how to answer her, he said nothing. Forcing a smile, he turned and gazed out the passenger window at the passing streetlights. He found himself smelling the air for the seductive scent of his dark-haired demon.

Chapter 4

Exploration

The hospital seemed to be a firestorm of questions; where, when, how, why. Quinn stumbled for an answer that would not wind up with him on a forty-eight hour psychiatric hold. The doctor stitched the wound, while the nurse stood there, pen in hand tapping it on the clipboard she held.

“He tripped and fell on a garden tool I left out,” Candy said. The nurse looked up at the clock that showed three in the morning and raised an eyebrow. Candy moved closer to Quinn, “I thought I heard a noise outside in the backyard and my husband went to investigate for me, when he tripped and landed on the garden tool.” The nurse shook her head in disbelief, but finished her paperwork and left. Quinn smiled a thankful smile, his gaze meeting Candy’s.

“You are lucky,” said the doctor “just a little deeper, and the cuts would have been into an artery. You might not have had time to get to the hospital.”

Candy held Quinn’s uninjured arm and hand. “See, dear, you are going to have to learn to be much more careful when you venture out.” The doctor finished with his stitching and the nurse returned to bandage the shoulder, her touch anything but gentle.

Candy took Quinn back to his apartment and spent the night watching over him. Each time he woke up, she greeted him with a soft smile and hushed him back to sleep. Even with her soft words, he could only find a restless sleep, not only because of the pain, but also because he feared he might slip back into that world. The first rays of a new day pushed through the crack in the bedroom curtains

and Quinn felt the beautiful blonde curl up next to him in bed. Her touch seemed to pull him into a dream of her in a place of warm light and flower lined paths. He pushed the last thoughts of that other cold, dark place from his mind and let himself drift off to sleep.

When the alarm clock sounded, Quinn reached out, still half lost in a dream of Candy, but quickly remembered the injury to his shoulder when a shooting pain grated down his arm. His arm froze and his fingers trembled. Candy reached over him and tapped the button on the clock. She stretched out like a cat, and Quinn almost expected to hear a purr. The sheet draped over one of her thighs and ran between breasts with nipples darkening. "Stay with me, Quinn. I'll call in sick for you and we can spend the day..." She blushed and pulled the sheet over her breasts. "Playing."

Quinn eased a shirt on. "I would love to, but there is something I must check on." He let a finger move over her exposed waist. His lingering look ambling up to the soft brown gaze that pushed through dark lashes. His hand reached for her cheek but stopped short when a stabbing pain moved through him. "Besides, with this shoulder, I would not be much fun." Her bottom lip pushed out and a frown covered her face. "You can stay here if you wish, Candy, and I will be back as soon as I can."

She shrugged, "Promise?"

He leaned down and kissed her sweet lips. Reaching the bedroom door, he looked back at her, "I promise." She seemed more beautiful each time he looked at her.

* * * *

Quinn burst into Mark's office. Opening his shirt, he raised the bandage on his shoulder to reveal four stitched wounds, red and angry, the longest being four inches or more.

"My God, Quinn, what happened?" Mark stood up, leaning over his desk.

"The dream, that creature in it!"

"Quinn, dreams don't..."

"Don't what?" He pulled the bandage back a little more, "Do this?"

"Yes, I mean no, I..."

"Did you get the translation?"

"No, I told you yesterday it could take a few days. You said it would be ok." Mark lowered himself back into his seat, supporting his unsteady weight with two hands on his desk. His gaze locked on Quinn's wound.

Quinn put the bandage back in place with a cringe. "Things have changed since yesterday, Mark. If Candy hadn't been there, who knows what would have happened. Hell, the thing may have killed me." He buttoned his shirt and sat down. "I have to find out just what it is that creature is after."

"This Candy, she was there? Maybe she..."

"Don't even think that, Mark. She was trying to stop the bleeding when I woke up. Besides, the doctor at the hospital said it looked like claws caused the wound."

"So how did you explain it to the doctor, and not wind up in the loony bin?"

"You are so funny, Mark." Quinn said, shaking his head from side to side.

"Well?" Mark's eyes widened.

"Candy came up with a story, about me tripping and landing on a garden tool."

"Guess that would be better than telling him it was the bogeywoman."

Quinn stood up, kicking the chair back "Fine!"

"Calm down, I'm just kidding. I will see what I can do about the translation. While I am getting the information, what are you going to do?"

"Large amounts of No-Doze pills?" he pulled the chair back and sat down. A long sigh trickled out as he raised one hand to his temple.

"Maybe, Quinn, that's just what you shouldn't do." Quinn's eyes narrowed as his brow furrowed at Mark's hesitant suggestion. "Just listen for a second." Mark continued. "You get the feeling this thing is after something, right?"

"I do."

“Well maybe if you gave it what it wanted, it would leave you alone.”

Quinn leaned forward in the chair, “And how do I find out what it wants?”

Mark scooted back a little from his desk and scrunched down a little in his chair. “Ask it.”

“And you say I’m the crazy one,” The frown on Quinn’s face grew more intense.

“Just listen, if we did this where we could control things. Keep an eye on you. Maybe you could find the answer and this would be over.”

“And maybe it will be my throat and not my shoulder the next time.”

“From the looks of those wounds, if it wanted you dead, you would be.”

Quinn squirmed in the chair at that thought.

Mark leaned forward, “Think about it. We get Sam over in sleep studies to set things up. We can monitor you so nothing can go wrong. Things start getting weird and they pop you back.”

“Do you think he would go for it?”

“A dream that can manifest physical wounds? Oh yeah, he will definitely go for it.”

“Let me think about it.” Quinn got up and started back to his own office. Mark did have a point, nothing would be accomplished running from this. Besides, where could he hide? He would do it but first, he needed to make a phone call.

Sitting in his office, he brought up a picture of Candy. Why couldn’t she be the one that filled his dreams? She definitely met all the requirements of his dream girl. Beautiful, intelligent and a lover he would almost swear could read minds.

He reached for the phone. When Candy answered, he assured her he was okay and told her of his plan to revisit the dream.

“NO! I mean you can’t do that. It will only make things worse,” Candy snapped.

“I have to try something, Candy.”

“Come by and get me, I’ll keep an eye on you. I’ll see that your only thought is of us.”

“As nice as that sounds, I don’t want to endanger you. I’ll call you when it’s over.”

“Quinn, don’t do this.”

“I just wanted you to know what was going on, Candy. I’ll call when it’s over.”

“If you can.” She hung up the phone.

As Quinn started to Mark’s office, Candy’s last words weighed heavily on his mind. Something in her tone carried a cold shiver. Even as he and Mark walked down the oak lined path to the sleep studies lab, the words “if you can” kept echoing in his head.

* * * *

“No way!” Sam said, leering at the wound. “Wow, that is so cool. Well, not that you got hurt, but the connection with the dream.” He leaned back in his chair, surrounded by a room full of closed circuit monitors and computer readouts. “Tell you what, you go have a normal day, come back here after supper and we’ll hook you up.”

“I told you he would do it,” Mark called back as he headed down the path to the history department, leaving Quinn at the entrance to the English department. Without turning back toward Quinn, he waved, “I’ll check on the translation and let you know.”

Quinn checked his voice messages and emails throughout the day. Every so often, he would find a copy of an email Mark sent to his friend Val, about the translation. Quinn could see the growing frustration in Mark’s messages as each went unanswered. Mark’s concern for him proved both comforting and worrisome. Quinn began wondering once more about the sanity of chasing after a monster. His fingers moved over the covered wound and for a moment, he could see the black claws. He jerked himself from the thought. Unless the translation came soon, the only place to find answers would be in the darkness of that other world.

Quinn spent most of his day lost in images and symbols, trying to find one thing that made sense. Dreams didn’t unravel lives, at least they weren’t suppose to. At the end of the day, Quinn stood

at Mark's office door. "How about we get a bite before you go home and I go off to find... whatever the hell it is I'm looking for."

Mark got up and put on his jacket. "Dinner sounds like a good start, but no way am I going to let you go monster hunting without me." Mark picked up a folder from his desk.

"Is that?"

"No, Quinn. I tried to get through today but no luck. This is the exhibit folder, I just need to go over some of the paper work, while you buy me supper."

"Now how did I know I would be buying?"

The small restaurant across from the college, a place normally crowded, seemed unusually quiet. They had no problem finding a large empty table, one where Mark could spread out his paperwork.

Mark kept showing Quinn all the planning going into the exhibit. He felt sure he could keep Quinn's mind off what would soon be happening. But before long, he caught himself showing Quinn the same brochure for the third time.

"Mark, it is going to be ok. I need answers and we'll get them tonight," Quinn said.

Finally, Mark gave up and asked Quinn, "When did you have the first dream about her, it?"

Quinn rested his elbow on the table and his head in his hand, one finger moving over his cheek. "It would have been the second of this month. Right after you had me over for that barbecue. I chocked the first dream up to your cooking."

"Real funny, Quinn."

"At first, they were vague dreams, like most are." Quinn said.

Mark shuffled some of the papers from the exhibit. He noticed that the shipping papers showed the day the exhibit arrived in the states, March second. Mark thought it strange how sometimes things happen on the same day. "And when did they get so vivid?"

"Two days back now, Mark. I came in and talked to you about it the next day."

"Wasn't that the same night you met Candy?" Something else about that date stuck in his mind. He flipped over the next shipping

invoice and he saw it. The exhibit arrived at the college that same day. "Quinn, you won't believe..." A passing waitress tripped and a carafe of water spilled all over the paperwork.

She quickly started wiping up the water and Mark started grabbing the papers from the table.

"Sorry," she said.

"It's ok. These are only working copies," Mark said, looking up into the face of an angel. The young girl must be new because Mark would never miss a blonde this cute. "No problem at all," he managed to get out. She pulled her shirttail up and wiped his hands dry with the cloth still warm from her skin, a taut, flat belly exposed only inches from Mark's fingers. He felt a bead of sweat roll down the side of his face and realized the pounding noise he heard was his pulse.

Her smile at Mark grew as she knelt down and started gathering up the ice cubes that had landed on the floor. "Good," she said, reaching for a cube close to Mark's chair. Mark's eyes stayed glued to the cleavage the loose necked blouse exposed as she leaned closer to his lap.

"Excuse me, Mark, but we need to get going before your tongue lands on the floor." Quinn laid the money for the dinner and tip on the table.

Mark reluctantly followed Quinn, stopping at the door and taking a long look back at the girl still kneeling, cleaning up the water and ice.

At the sleep lab, Sam took Quinn into a cramped room filled with a bed and test equipment, numerous colored leads coming from the button covered boxes. Quinn got undressed down to his boxers and sat on the edge of the bed. Sam started placing electrodes on Quinn's head and then pointed to a camera, "Don't worry, we can see everything that goes on in here and we'll keep a video record of it tonight, just incase something good...interesting might happen. Mark and I will be in the control room." With that, he dimmed the lights and left the room, closing the door. Quinn shifted, trying to find a comfortable position, wondering how anyone could sleep with all this stuff stuck to them. Odd, but he

did start to feel a little comfort at knowing they tied him to his friend in the next room.

The night progressed with a tedious pace, Quinn drifted off, waking up with a jolt every now and then. Mark and Sam sat in the observation room with Mark telling him about the new hot waitress across the street. Well into the night and after more than once nodding off, Mark told Sam he needed a cup of coffee.

"I'll be right back," Mark said and left Sam to all the wavy lined readouts and the flicker of a small closed circuit TV.

Entering the small café, the smell of fresh brewed coffee struck Mark, he looked for the cute waitress with no luck. He ordered a cup of coffee to go. Looking over his shoulder, still hoping to catch a glimpse of her, he stepped out of the café and ran into the object of his search.

"Oh excuse me, professor." Soft round eyes looked up to meet Mark's surprised expression. "I guess I am in too big of a hurry to get home," her small fingers pushing the flaxen hair from her face.

"No, it's my fault, I wasn't looking where I was going." He stepped back just a little, taking in the petite young woman's figure. "Do you know me? I mean, I am sure if you were in one of my classes, I would remember you."

She diverted her eyes and smiled shyly. "No, I'm not in any of your classes yet, professor. But I hope to be soon."

"Mark, please call me Mark." He reached out and touched her arm.

"Mark...what could have you out this time of night?"

Mark looked at his watch. "It is late, isn't it? I have a friend over in sleep studies I'm helping to keep an eye on. I guess I should..." he pointed at the campus.

"Oh, of course, Mark." She let one finger trail down his arm, a touch that brought a smile to his face and a feeling of heat between his thighs "But if you ever have some free time, I would enjoy getting to know you a little better."

Mark swallowed hard, "Well it's not that late, maybe we could..." his mouth went dry and his mind couldn't leave the white blouse with its top three buttons undone.

"You could walk me across campus, if you don't mind." She took hold of his arm, "I would feel better having you to protect me. If you have the time, that is."

"I'm going that way, so no problem at all." Walking across the street, her hip swayed into his thigh, her slender legs matching Mark's stride. Stepping up from the street to the walkway, her short black skirt rose up her silken thigh. Mark took a quick half step, trying to catch himself from missing the entire curb.

"You know, you have quite a reputation as a lover with all the girls on campus, don't you, professor, I mean Mark?"

"I do? Well, yes, I could see how that could...happen, sure." He stood a little taller and pulled in his stomach a little more.

The young woman led Mark right past sleep studies, past the history department and to the far side of the campus. Taking his hand, she pulled him off the pathway and into the shadows. "I bet it's really big."

"What?"

She stood on her toes, her dark painted lips almost touching his. "Your cock, I bet it's huge." She placed her hand between his legs and found the erection he ineptly tried to hide ever since they left the café. "Oh yes, it is." Lowering herself to her knees, she let her body move over his and looked up at him. "Would you please, professor?" Her long eyelashes batted.

"What?"

"Would you take it out so I can see it? Maybe if I am a really good girl, you would let me suck your cock." Her finger moved over her lips and then she sucked it into her mouth, her cheeks hollowing.

Mark fumbled with the snap and zipper on his pants for what seemed like forever to him, her soft, brown eyes watching his every move. Her hand moved up and down his thighs as her tongue moved over her lips. Things like this hardly ever happened to him, okay, never happened to him, so he was not going to miss his one

big chance, not with a coed this hot. He jerked his pants open and down, his erection tenting his briefs.

Her small finger moved over the tight fabric. "More, please."

Mark jerked down the briefs and stood there, his hands on his hips, his dark veined dick reaching out for the fulfillment of his fantasies.

She unbuttoned her blouse, pausing between each button to pull the fabric apart a little more. The swell of her breasts tantalizingly exposed mere inches from the heat that radiated from his swollen flesh. When the pale pink of her nipples peeked from under the cotton blouse, Mark let the fingers of one hand caress his length. "Oh yes, professor, make it so big and hard, you'll have to force it into me." Her tongue slipped between pouty-lips wetting the tip of her finger. The moist finger glided over her stiffening nipple, its light pink hue growing darker. The finger moved from one nipple to the other until both no longer yielded easily to her touch, but reached out for Mark. Her hand moved to Mark's ass pulling him closer to her mouth. Her chest filled and her tongue flicked out, lightly touching the tip of his dick.

"Oh God..." Mark shuddered, losing all control and covering her chest with his release. His body still shaking, "I'm sorry, that never happened like that before. I au..."

The young woman ran her fingers along the shrinking length of his shaft. "Don't worry, professor, things happen, we have all night. I tell you what; you get things up again while I run up to my dorm room and get a condom. When I get back, you can show me how big you will feel deep in my little shaved pussy." She stood up while buttoning her blouse and headed back to the walkway.

"Hey, what's your name?" Mark asked.

She smiled. "You can call me Candelis, professor," and she pushed her way through the bushes.

Mark sat there for some time until he realized she wasn't coming back. He looked at his watch. "Oh shit!" he said, seeing the time and started back for the sleep studies department.

* * * *

Quinn's eyes opened to the dark world of the dream, but this time, the path unfolded into an open space surrounded by the twisted trees and towering stones, the shifting mist hovering at its edges. In its center, stood a lone figure and even before she turned to face him, he knew it would be the dark-haired demon. He looked back over his shoulder for a path of escape and questioned once more the sanity of even trying this. The throbbing pain in his shoulder reminded him of the consequences of their last meeting. Her hand motioned, calling him closer. Each step he took filled him with hesitation. As he got near, her brow furrowed, her eyes narrowed. Each step forward was now forced, as he could not understand the reason for the change in her expression.

Her gaze locked on his wound as her finger touched her own lips. He would have sworn a tear ran down the demon's cheek. She began to speak, but "Khaba" was the only word he recognized and that, only from hearing her speak it before. The rest of what she said seemed faint echoes of something vaguely recognized by him. She took a deep breath and this time when she spoke, he understood her.

"I feared this would happen," her voice not that of a demon, but soft and with a tone somehow familiar to him.

If she could bring him to such a place, surely it would not be hard to make her voice seem pleasant. Her blue eyes lingered on the wound before they rose to meet his, a look that felt like a familiar caress. "What do you want from me?" His mind filled with bewilderment. How could the cause of his pain stir such feelings with only a look? It should only be caution and fear she aroused, not...

She smiled, "It has been so long. It will take you time to remember."

"Remember what?"

"Me." She reached out, he backed up a little, but the tilt of her head and the expression in her eyes prevented him from going far. She pulled off the bandage and placed her hand on the wound. First, the pain slipped from him and like magic, the wound faded. "You have forgotten much, Khaba."

“Forgotten what? Who are you and why should I remember you? And just what the hell is Khaba?”

“Your name when last we spoke and mine was Nofertiri.” The name conjured an image of a beautiful garden surrounded by high stonewalls. “See, you are already remembering.” Her hand touched his cheek. “You hold the other half of the key. But there is little time and much you must know.” Her eyes grew round and her gaze looked behind him. “The guardian has found you once more!” She took the medallion from around her neck and placed it around his.

“The what...” Her hands slammed into his chest and he felt himself flying through the air. When he felt himself hitting what he thought to be the ground, his eyes opened and there at the door to the sleep room stood a dark winged creature with eyes of flickering yellow flame. Its arms were spread with its fingers, tipped with black claws, gripping the doorjamb. Claws he recalled all too well. The leathered wings rose with a rustling sound, filling the doorway with their blackness. Talons long and keen tipped the wings, their edged glistening even in the low light of the room. A tongue, forked and long, tasted the air and the creature took a step into the room.

Quinn leaped up from the bed and a gold medallion swung out from his chest. The flames in the demon’s eyes flickered with sparks of red as its gaze lowered and locked on the medallion. For an instant, Quinn glanced down at the half circle of brilliant gold. It seemed almost glowing, mesmerizing, but fear jolted his gaze back to the dark creature as the sound of his pounding heart echoed in his head.

Chapter 5

Choices

A low guttural hiss filled the small room, cutting through Quinn like a rusty knife, slow and painful. The creature's gaze remained seized on the medallion, and its advance paused. Quinn gasped, his body shivering as he saw that Sam lay at the creature's clawed feet. He scrambled back against the wall, unsteady; trying to focus on what now shifted its weight from leg to leg. Quinn grabbed the small table lamp by the bed and held it in front of him with two hands, his knuckles white. His gaze followed the shift of the creature, his mind racing, dream, reality, the answer came on the smell of ash, *this* was all too real. There would be no awaking from this nightmare. The wings of the creature folded and it backed from the room. Somehow, Quinn knew his gesture with the lamp had nothing to do with its leaving.

Quinn hurried to Sam and felt for a pulse. A shadow passed over him. He sprung to his feet, the lamp swinging out in a wide arc. Mark ducked with no room to spare falling back against the wall. He looked at Sam and then up at Quinn standing there with the makeshift club in hand. "Quinn?"

"Did you see it, Mark?" Quinn snapped. His lungs burned from trying to pull in air that did not have the tinge of ash.

"It's ok, Quinn, you must have been dreaming, I'm sure you didn't mean to..."

"No, Mark, it wasn't me!"

"You're telling me the dream did this?"

"No!" He looked at the lamp, still raised above his head, then at Mark's stare locked on it. He tossed the lamp to one side. "Not a dream, it was here."

"It?"

"You wouldn't ask if you saw it, Mark. A monster, some kind of demon..."

"The dark-haired one from the dream?" His eyes narrowing, he pulled himself back to his feet.

"No." Quinn looked down at Sam. "I think he's ok, just knocked out. Help me get him to the bed." Placing Sam on the bed, Quinn tried his best to describe the horror he woke to find at the door. He told Mark what happened in the dream. Feeling its weight, Quinn remembered what hung from his neck.

Mark touched Quinn's shoulder with a shaking hand. "The wound, it's gone."

Quinn looked to his shoulder, then held out the medallion. "And this has appeared."

"It's the symbol from your dream," Mark said, "well, half of it." Mark reached out and lightly touched the gold half circle.

Sam moaned and his eyes opened, his hand reaching to the bump on the back of his head. "What the hell?"

"Just what I was going to ask," asked Quinn. "You saw it, right?"

Sam looked up at Quinn, eyes squinting, "I was watching you on the monitor when I thought I heard Mark coming back. The next thing I know... well, is this."

Quinn looked at Mark and Mark at Quinn and simultaneously, they said "The video." Both headed for the monitoring room, then turned back to help Sam up. In the control room, Sam cued the tape and hit play. All three let out a heavy breath as the video showed the door to the sleep room open and Sam tossed to the floor by what looked to be a shifting shadow. In brief moments, it almost took on the shape of what Quinn described standing in the doorway. Other times, it almost looked human, but never solid, never clear.

“There!” Quinn pointed at the screen “Back it up a little, Sam.” When Sam hit play once more, Quinn pointed at the image of his chest, one second bare, the next, the medallion hung in its center. The frozen frame of video flickered on the screen and the three men sat in silence. For several seconds, it seemed that they didn’t even take a breath. Quinn broke the silence with a long exhale. He stood up, and without a word, he went back to the small sleep room and started getting dressed.

“What are you doing, Quinn?” Mark asked, leaning into the room as if afraid to enter it.

“Going home.”

“But what about...”

“What about what, Mark? The dream? The thing I saw in this room or this?” He pulled the medallion from around his neck, showing it to Mark before he put it in his pants pocket. “I’m not safe anywhere.”

“Come home with me, Quinn. At least there will be two of us if this thing comes back.”

“Mark, if you saw it, you would understand, I think there could be ten of us and we would still lose. You head home. I need some time to try and think this out.” Quinn finished buttoning his shirt and pushed past Mark. He paused at the control room for a moment to check on Sam, and then headed for his car.

Mark continued trying to talk him out of going home alone even as Quinn got into his car and drove off.

Quinn pulled up in front of his place just as the sun reached long fingers of orange over the horizon. Something in the vanishing darkness gave him a little peace. When he saw Candy sitting on the steps leaning against the railing asleep, he felt even better. He bent down, picking her up and she stirred. “Quinn, I was getting worried about you and I...”

“You were right, Candy. The only thing I accomplished was to make things worse.”

She rested her head on his shoulder, snuggling into his arms. “Tell me about it later. Now take me to bed and hold me. Just hold me and everything will be all right.” Her eyes were fluttering when

he laid her on the bed. “Undress me, Quinn, and pull me so close that not even a dream can get between us.”

She rolled to her back and spread out her arms, giving a little wiggle that seemed as much to keep her awake, as to entice him. An enticement he didn’t need, for right then, the only thing that made any sense was Candy.

Undressing her, he let his fingers caress soft skin, pausing every now and then to kiss her. Languid twists and sleepy moans were her only response. When the beauty lay nude in his bed, half curled up, inviting him near, he removed his own clothing and lay beside her, pulling her into his embrace where she fit perfectly.

“Sleep, Candy,” he nuzzled his cheek to her soft hair.

Close to midday, Quinn felt soft lips touch his and he woke, reaching out to Candy. She pulled back with a playful smile. “Hey, I’m easy, but not that easy. You had me worried, sitting on your step all night. Go off to sleep in some room, hooked to wires instead of with me and you expect me to just fall on my back for you?” Candy hopped up from the bed and walked to the bathroom door.

Quinn’s attention fastened on the swells of her apple ass and its shifting sway until it stopped and he looked a little higher to see her looking back over her shoulder at him. “I...”

“Ok, ten minutes in the shower, but you have to cook breakfast.” She tossed a big grin his way as the fingers of one hand combed through her short blonde hair. She winked and stepped into the bathroom.

Quinn bounded from the bed, catching up to her head start in three long strides and opening the shower door with a bow. His fingers caressed up the back of her thigh as she stepped into the shower and she gave a little extra wiggle to her bottom. Quinn followed right behind her, the hot water no more than hit him, when the phone started ringing.

Candy frowned.

Quinn removed the frown with a kiss to the side of her neck before closing the shower door. The hot water seemed to be washing away the last traces of the past few days and what it didn’t,

Candy's caress quickly banished from thought. What was that silly saying about something being too good to be true? The disproof of that stood before him, water flowing over her erect nipples as if cold. Eyes almost liquid and even more enticing than the warm water held him and assured him of her need.

She squeezed the soap onto her breasts and pressed them to his chest rubbing in a slow figure eight. "I'll get the front." She turned and placed her hands on the wall, legs spread just right, "You get the back," she said, looking over her shoulder.

Quinn squeezed the liquid soap over her back and let it flow over her bottom. His hands started at the base of her neck letting his pelvis caress at her swells. By the time his hands reached the small of her back, his erection slipped over her responding vulva. "Please, Quinn," she moaned.

Quinn's hands grasped her hips and she reached back with slender fingers, encircling the pulsing cock that hovered at her entrance. She raked the swollen head over petals as wet from desire as they were from the splashing water. She held him still and pressed back onto him. He felt a fiery grip seizing him, one that continued to consume until the crease of Quinn's pelvis and thighs cradled the cheeks of her bottom. Her low guttural moan bounced off the tile of the shower and an out rush of air from Quinn entwined with it. She braced herself against the wall. "Please, Quinn," she begged in a demanding tone.

One of Quinn's arms wrapped around her waist, the other hand moved over breasts crowned with diamond hard nipples. Between water, soap and desire, their bodies slipped and moved with the ease of ice on ice. Soapy bubbles covered Candy's body, her breasts swaying in tempo with the forceful thrusts that sent bubbles popping into the air. Quinn's soap covered hands took the full weight of her breasts, thumb and finger pressing her hard nipples. All friction lost except for the grip of her clenched pussy to his pulsating cock, a grip so tight, he felt trapped, a willing prisoner of heaven. Moans rose to ecstatic screams, drowning out the sound of the water hitting the shower floor. Candy's body froze as Quinn crashed into her and for a few blissful seconds, the only

movement came from the quivering of Candy's tight passage and the gushing release of Quinn's seed.

As Candy straightened up, Quinn pulled her into his arms and under the shower. Hot water barely cooling the fire the two stoked. Quinn rinsed the last of the soap from her hair. With a whimper, Candy's head fell back onto his shoulder. "If only."

Quinn kissed her shoulder, his lips moving close to her ear, he whispered, "If only what?"

Candy looked up at him with large brown eyes, a surprised expression filling them, as if he overheard her thoughts and not her words. Her fingers traced his lips and her eyes seemed to start to answer before the words left her mouth. "Just daydreaming, Quinn, no more than that." She pulled the shower door open and stepped out. "You need to get dried off, your ten minutes was up fifteen minutes ago. I want pancakes with strawberries and tons of syrup, toot sweet." Taking a towel from the rack, she started drying her hair.

The cascading rivulets of water that traced the curves and valleys of her body held Quinn's gaze until she slipped from the bathroom. Quinn turned the water off and snatched up a towel. Drying himself, he stepped into the bedroom. Candy stood by his closet pulling his football jersey over her head. The hem of the jersey slinked over bare flesh. She looked up at him through long lashes. "Is it ok if I wear it?"

Quinn watched her as the jersey settled at midthigh. "Yep, sure is, but it will be your job to get the syrup off the bottom shelf of the frig."

Candy shook her head, stepping down the hall toward the kitchen, "You wish."

Quinn slipped on his jeans and by the time he got to the kitchen, Candy sat at the table, legs crossed so the jersey hid not an inch of her thigh. "Are you trying to make it hard for me to concentrate on cooking for you?" She answered with a smile and a raised eyebrow. Quinn did his best to hurry through fixing the pancakes, but his gaze kept wandering over to her. "You could help," he said.

She slowly uncrossed her legs and recrossed them with a pause in the middle that allowed him to see her pink sex. A pause accented by a grin. "How was that?" He took a step toward her. "Don't you dare burn my brunch!"

Shaking his head, he turned back to the stove. As he reached for the spatula, the phone began to ring. Picking up the phone, he could see Candy's lower lip sticking out.

"The day is ours. Don't worry." He pressed the talk button on the cordless and stepped back to the stove. "Hello."

"Quinn?"

"Well gee, Mark," He winked at Candy, "Who else did you expect to get at this number?"

"When are you going to be in to work?"

"I'm not, well, at least not today. I taking a sick day. Sick of all the BS going on."

"Whatever, but we need to talk. I watched the tape again and when I turned up the volume, you mentioned two names in your sleep. One of them—"

"Like I said, Mark, not today!" and he pushed the off button.

Chapter 6

Intrusion

Quinn set the phone down and took a step toward Candy. She pointed to the stove with a scolding finger. He turned back to his cooking, picked away the brown edges of the eggs and set aside the first dark pancakes for himself. If he kept them turned down, Candy would never know his cooking ability lacked a little. When his culinary efforts ended, he placed the two plates on the table and sat down close to Candy. “I hope it’s alright.”

“I am sure it will be, Quinn.” She reached out and let her hand move over his thigh, quickly pulling it back. “What’s in your pocket?”

Quinn reached into his pocket and pulled out the medallion. “I wanted to talk to you about this.” He set the medallion on the table.

Candy got up from the table and went to the refrigerator. Opening the door, she asked, “Where did you say the syrup was, Quinn?”

“Bottom shelf,” He watched her bend at the waist to retrieve the bottle. The jersey rose until a hint of her bottom peaked out. She glanced at him just before straightening back up, sending a shiver of pleasure coursing through him.

Stepping over to the microwave, she placed the bottle inside it. “So what did you want to tell me, Quinn?” She set the timer and pressed start.

“I know you don’t believe in ghost and dream spirits and you’ll think I’m crazy when I tell you where this came from, but I need you to understand what has happened.”

"I believe in you, Quinn, that's enough for me. But do we have to have that old thing on the table while we eat?" She pointed at the Medallion.

Quinn placed the gold half circle back in his pocket, "Sorry."

Candy retrieved the bottle and returned to the table. She covered her pancakes and his with the liquid sweetness. "So what help can I be?" She rested an elbow on the table and her head in her hand, her other hand wielding a fork that cut the pancake into ever smaller bites.

Quinn began telling Candy of the dream, the woman. How at first, he thought her to be a demon. However, with his last visit, dream, he now wondered if she could somehow be connected to his past. He told her he was sure evil existed in that place, but now, he believed the dark-haired woman to be as much a victim as himself. With a shaky voice, he described the creature that stood in the doorway of the sleep room. How he believed the black claws it bore to be the instrument of his injury. That maybe, this horrid creature that tried to kill him was causing all the problems.

"Horrid!" Candy's eyes narrowed and the cold from them sent a shiver moving through Quinn. Her chest rose with a deep breath, the calm returning to her expression as she exhaled. "I mean if it is as powerful as you say, surely it could have killed you if it wanted to." She took a slow drink of coffee and pushed her half eaten plate away from her. "Things are not always what they seem, Quinn."

"Maybe, but if you'd seen this...this thing, it gives me a chill just thinking about it."

Candy stood and headed toward the hall leading to the bedroom. "It's probably just part of the dream. Sam probably just slipped and fell and woke you up."

"No, we have pictures of it. There was a camera in the sleep room."

Candy stopped in the doorway, her head rocking from shoulder to shoulder, her back arching as she stretched. Still looking down the hall, her voice raspy, "What could you see on the film, Quinn?"

Quinn started clearing the table, but her tone halted his hand reaching for the last plate. "It was a video, Candy." He picked up the last plate, his eyes locked on the doorway and Candy's back. Her arms reached up and took hold of the doorjamb, fingers locking as if she was holding back a pressing weight. "It looked more like a shifting shadow than anything else, but it was there."

The tension left her shoulders and hands as she turned to face him. "Then there was nothing there you could...recognize?"

Quinn shrugged "No." He placed the dishes in the sink, watching Candy from the corner of his eye. "Don't let it scare you, Candy, this thing only seems to come around when I'm dreaming. I'm awake now, so no monster. Just you and me and a day we can—"

The doorbell pulsed and repeated at a panicked rate. "I'll get that," Quinn said, taking long strides toward the front door. He kissed Candy on the cheek as he passed her. Her skin felt cool to the touch. "Are you ok?"

"I'm fine," a smile that left him wondering added to her answer, but the quickened rate of the doorbell kept him moving.

Quinn opened the door and Mark pushed his way into the room. "Look, I know you said you were taking the day off, but you have to hear this. The name you gave was..."

Mark froze and his eyes looked right past Quinn. Quinn took a step back to see Candy at the hall door, and then looked back to see Mark's gaze move up her body.

"If you look up another eight inches, Mark, this is Candy." Mark blushed and raised his gaze to her eyes.

"So you're Mark, Quinn's friend?" She halfheartedly pulled down at the hem of the jersey, pulling Mark's attention to her thighs.

Mark shook his head no, "Umm, yes, and you're the mysterious Candy."

"Well I am not sure about mysterious, but yes, I am Candy. I'll go get dressed and you two can talk."

"No!" Mark uttered, "I mean, I think you'll find this interesting, too." His eyes stayed locked on her.

“And just what would she find interesting, Mark?” Quinn asked.

“Amazing...” Mark’s gaze reluctantly moved from Candy to meet Quinn’s frown. “Ah, amazing how the mummy the college just received has one of the names you said in your sleep, Quinn, Nofertiri.” Mark held up a key with a smile, “and maybe if we were to look through the exhibit, we might just find an answer or two.”

“I’ll come with you guys, if that’s okay?”

Mark’s yes slammed into Quinn’s no. “I don’t want you getting involved any deeper, Candy. Not until we’re sure what we’re dealing with anyway.”

She stepped to Quinn and placed a hand on his shoulder. “I am involved, Quinn, like it or not. Where you go, I will follow.” Her brown eyes halted his breath for a moment. “Besides, I can be dressed and ready to go by the time you finish dressing.”

She turned and headed to the bedroom with Quinn following. Once there, she pulled the jersey over her head. “Is your friend always that horny?” she asked.

“I don’t know what you mean.”

Candy turned and spread her feet at shoulder distance, her hands on her hips, an alabaster image of near perfection. “Well, it is easy to tell this is how he pictured me the moment he saw me.”

“That’s just Mark; he is a flirt, harmless, all talk and stolen looks.”

“Well that hard-on he’s sporting didn’t look like all talk.” She moved to Quinn and pressed her hard nipples into his chest. “Does it make you hot to know other men fantasize about me nude like this?” Her fingernails grazed down his back.

“Candy...we need to get going.”

His halfhearted attempt to pull away from her stopped when Candy reached down and grasped his cock through his jeans. “You didn’t answer me. Does it make you hot that Mark would love for me to suck his cock, just like I’m going to suck yours?” she squeezed a little harder, “But then, I guess your cock answered for you.”

She lowered to her knees and unzipped his pants. She tugged his jeans down to his knees and let her tongue circle the small opening on his cock's tip. Lips parted and her eyes danced with a wicked glee that locked on his. Her tongue flicked from side to side, lavishing the underside of his cock. She pulled each inch of him into her mouth until her nose rested in his trimmed curls and her tongue flicked out, teasing his balls now cradled in her hand.

Her cheeks hollowed and she inched her way off his shaft. Rocking back to her heels, she said, "Think what your friend would be doing if he could see me like this, worshipping your big beautiful cock," her fingers caressed the hard length. Her tongue moved over her upper lip and she cupped her breasts. "Do you think when he gets home tonight he'll jack off dreaming of these?"

"Maybe. I mean..."

She reached out and took hold of his hand, guiding it to his erection. "Show me how he would do it." Quinn took a hesitant stroke. Candy spread her knees and lowered her hand to the moistness between her thighs. She splayed her already parting petals with her fingers. "Or do you think he'll imagine how it must feel to have his cock inside my wet, hot, hungry pussy? Then you know how it feels, don't you, Quinn? You know how hungry my cunt is for your cock."

Quinn's hand moved faster over the length of his shaft. Candy pressed a finger into her tight passage, and then a second. Her other hand squeezed her breast. "Do you think it would make him want to come all over my tits if he saw me finger fucking myself?"

"Yes."

Quinn's breaths came hard and fast, his stroke unhesitant over his expanding length. His fingers wrapped tightly around the throbbing mass' veined girth. The cock head darkened in color and a glistening drop of precum flipped free, landing on her unattended nipple. Her tongue snaked out gathering the prelude and putting a glisten on the hard flesh.

Candy leaned further arching her back and spreading her legs apart. The sound of sodden wetness stirred, accompanied her two fingers moving with the rhythm of a jackhammer. "Show me,

Quinn; show me what it's like to be the object of a fantasy. An object of lust." Her gaze locked on his swollen cock, her mouth opened taking a deep breath. Her thighs began to quiver. "That's it, baby, watch me cum!" She bit her lower lip and slammed her fingers home to the last knuckle.

"Oh fuck yes," Quinn could feel the building pressure erupt within him. Every nerve in his body surged and then followed the out rushing torrent. The first string of pearls he lay on her inner thigh. A half step forward and the rest showered down on rising breasts and a flat, hard stomach. His last drop dangled precariously from his cock. She rose, replacing his stilled hand with her slender fingers and a soft stroke. Her tongue reached out catching his final drop on its downward tumble. Her mouth opened wider and she took captive the overly sensitive head of his shaft. Her tongue raked him to the point of pain. His hands took hold of her hair, pulling her head back from himself, releasing his cock with a popping sound as he left her mouth. "Candy."

"Yes," she said, and then trailed her tongue over grinning lips.

"You are amazing."

"So you both say." She wiped herself clean with the still damp towel from the earlier shower. She reached for her thong, but Quinn knelt down and took it. He kissed the calf of each leg, raising it and helping her into the small black strip of cloth, her hand on his shoulder steadying herself. A soft kiss placed on hot smooth skin just before he pulled the thin veil over her sex. His hands moved back down her thighs, then retrieved her skirt. An almost shy grin moved over her lips. With the same care he gave the thong; Quinn pulled the skirt into place. Holding her calf, he raised each foot in turn and slipped the kitten-heeled shoes in place. Lowering the last foot back to the floor, he let his fingers caress up her thigh to the hem of the skirt and just a little higher.

Blouse in hand, he rose and stepped behind her. With the touch of a butterfly, he kissed each shoulder while holding her blouse open and her arms slipped into the sleeves. Covering her breasts, he reached around her buttoning the blouse, the final

touch, a kiss on her neck. Her head rocked back onto his shoulder and her hand caressed a returning erection. “We could—”

“Damn it, Quinn, what the hell is taking so long?” Mark shouted from the entry room. Candy and Quinn finished dressing and headed down the hallway. Quinn watched Candy walk past Mark on the way out to the car; she let her fingers move under his nose. They were the fingers that only minutes before were buried deep within her body and he knew well the scent that filled Mark’s lungs.

“That answer your question, Mark?” she asked with a giggle and a sway of hip. Mark grinned at Quinn.

Quinn could feel a flushed heat move over his face watching Mark follow behind Candy. He didn’t have to see it to know Candy’s ass held Mark’s eyes locked to her shifting swells.

Chapter 7

Betrayal

Quinn looked into the rearview mirror and watched Mark's gaze slowly move over Candy. "Just what do you hope to find, Mark?"

Mark's eyes jerked up, finding Quinn's eyes in the mirror. "Find?" His eyes shifted, looking back to Candy for a second and then back up to Quinn's reflection.

"At the college, Mark." Quinn said raising one eyebrow.

"The mummy...sure...well, there are some papyrus scrolls that may give us a clue to Nofertiri. Maybe even a link to Khaba. It's worth a look, right?"

"Sure, Mark." Quinn did not like the little voice that played in the back of his mind. He kept telling himself it was just all the stress. After all, Mark's a flirt, but he's always been his friend. He wouldn't...he pushed the rest of the thought from his mind

On the walk from the car to the History Department, Quinn placed an arm around Candy and let Mark lead the way. The rain from that morning left small puddles here and there. The air carried that clean new smell only rain can bring, the kind of smell that gives one hope. Mark led them to the back entrance and down a long hall, lit with bare hanging bulbs, to the storage room of the basement.

"We're getting close to having everything unpacked and next week, we'll move everything to the exhibit hall." Mark undid the last lock and pushed the metal door open. A flip of a switch and florescent lights flickered, struggling to come on. One light at the far end of the large room refused to end its flicker. "Over here,"

Mark motioned Quinn and Candy to follow. The air in the room seemed heavy with the smell of ages past. The electrical humming of the flickering light seemed totally out of place here. However, the flicker of light, like that of a torch, seemed right.

In the left corner of the room lay the huge sarcophagus. A large wooden framework and hoist above it. "Come Monday, we'll have someone here from the Cairo museum to help us open up the sarcophagus. But here, this is what I wanted you to see." He looked at the pictographs carved into the stone. "See, Quinn, in this panel is the name Nofertiri." Mark's fingers moved from panel to panel as he took notes on a small pad. Then he stopped and just looked at his notes.

"Well is the other name there?" Quinn asked.

"No," Mark stood up. "It's kind of like a riddle." He looked at the notes for a moment and then started reading. "Within rests Nofertiri, the vessel of my soul, the keeper of the answer."

"And!"

"That's it." Mark looked up at Quinn. "Over there are the notes the museum sent along with the exhibit. If you'll go through those, Quinn, I will see what I can make out on the scrolls. They're in the back room. I'll let you know what I find."

Quinn walked over to a large table and started looking through the papers on it. "I think we're wasting our time." Candy whispered in his ear, her hand resting on his shoulder.

"I think you may just be right. Besides, as well as Mark does translations, who knows if the name is even close? But I guess it won't hurt to take a quick look since we are here."

Candy pulled her hand back. "I guess." She walked by the sarcophagus, her finger tracing along its edge and a smile on her face. "I'm going to look around. I'll holler if I find something." She stepped out of Quinn's view.

"Okay, be careful." Quinn shuffled the papers and photos before him half-heartedly, until an artist's rendition of a walled garden grabbed his attention. He found himself making mental corrections to the drawing, moving a gate more to the center and the fountain's pool was much larger. Beside the pool, stood the

stone bench where...his mind froze and a chill rushed over his body. Now he turned each scrap of paper over twice, slowly reading each word. Each photo now treated the same. Quinn opened an old leather bound diary, its edges worn and its face scuffed. The pages within yellowed and the ink faded. They were the hand notes of the archeologist that found the tomb. At the beginning, the notes talked about excavation details, but then Quinn found a passage that differed.

I believe this to be the tomb of a princess I have heard so many stories about. They call her Nofertiri. The legend says she was the youngest of the pharaoh's daughters and by far, the most beautiful. It would seem her father promised her as a wife to the priest of a sect I am not familiar with, but it would also seem she had other ideas. According to the legend, she told her father she could not marry the priest because she and one of his mightiest warriors were destined to spend eternity together. Her father told her he would release her from the promise to the priest but before the pharaoh had done so, the priest found the Princess and the warrior in a walled garden making love. The priest placed a curse on the princess, pulling her soul from her and killing her. Though the warrior slew the priest, he could but find half the answer to free Nofertiri's soul from the priest's grip. People here say the warrior still walks the earth waiting for the time he can reclaim the soul taken from the princess. The people call the warrior...

Quinn's fingers trembled as he turned to the next page.
Khaba.

Quinn looked around the room. He needed to tell Mark what he found. Quinn walked down the passage to the small backroom. Getting closer, he could hear muffled voices. Quinn stepped around the corner just in time to see Candy slap Mark's face. She ran to Quinn. "He tried to get me to suck his cock, Quinn."

Mark's surprised gaze locked on Quinn, his eyes wide and rubbing his cheek. "Quinn, I never."

“Damn you, Mark, can’t you keep it in your pants for five seconds? You’re fucking sick.” Quinn threw the diary on the floor in front of Mark.

“Quinn, it’s not like that. I am—”

“You’re what, my friend. Some friend! I turn my back and you try and fuck the one good thing I have going right now in all this bull shit.” Quinn put his arm around Candy and started out of the room.

When they reached the door, Candy glanced back, a wicked smile crossing her lips. *Why did Candy lie?* Mark wondered, watching her and Quinn leave. He’d been telling her about the scrolls, when she took his hand and placed it on her breast. She was a beautiful woman, but he could not betray Quinn’s trust. Quinn was his friend. The slap came with perfect timing for Quinn to see it.

Had she waited for that exact moment? Why make up lies like that? Mark picked up the notebook and opened it, then closed it and set it on the worktable by the scrolls. He would deal with the mummy after he figured out what just happened.

Mark made his way to his office and called Quinn’s cell phone and then Quinn’s apartment, leaving messages at both, telling him they needed to talk. Mark ran through the details of the past few days in his mind and then those of the past hour. There must be something missing, or something hidden. Candy could be the jealous type, not wanting Quinn to be around his friends. However, now was the time Quinn really needed his friends.

Mark felt sure the answer lay in Quinn’s dream, he just needed to put the pieces together in the right order. He pulled the book out that started all this and called Val to ask about the translation. He breathed a sigh of relief when she answered the phone. She assured him he would have it before the day’s end. Mark tried his best to stumble through the text once more, but finally realized he would have to wait. He called Quinn’s cell once more.

* * * *

"It's Mark, maybe I should..." Candy reached out, taking the phone from Quinn and folded it shut.

"You do believe me, don't you, Quinn?" Soft brown eyes looked up through long lashes.

"Of course I do, Candy. You're right, he and I don't have anything to talk about." The thought of his friend betraying him gripped his stomach like a clawed fist. How could he have been that wrong about Mark? Quinn turned the phone off. "I tell you what, why don't you and I grab some sandwiches and we can spend the day out at the lake."

Candy nuzzled into Quinn's shoulder, her hand resting on his thigh. "That sounds perfect, Quinn, away from everyone."

A couple of quick stops on their way out of town and Quinn picked up what he thought they would need. An hour's drive and they were stepping from his car and walking back to a nook at the south end of the lake. Tall old cottonwoods hung out over the shoreline. The thick brush that filled that part of the forest gave the feeling the cove existed separate from the world, a hidden place just for them. Quinn spread the blanket on the ground and laid out the food. His gaze lingered on Candy. Warm sunlight, filtered through the quivering leaves of the trees, dancing in her golden hair. He could picture her with wings, the soft white wings of an angel or maybe the pastel wings of a forest nymph, both suited her.

Candy reached over and pulled the bottle of wine from the sack. "What do you say we start with this?"

Quinn reached to the bottom of the sack and pulled out the corkscrew. "Sounds right to me." He opened the bottle and looked into the empty sack. "I forgot the glasses." Candy grinned taking the bottle, tipping it up and taking a long drink.

She curled up against Quinn's chest and handed him the bottle. "Quinn, I'm sorry about Mark. I shouldn't have teased him before we left the apartment."

Quinn took a drink and handed the bottle back to Candy. "Don't blame yourself. What happened was his doing, not yours." Quinn let his fingers move through her hair. "I'm just glad you're okay and that you're with me."

“Oh, Quinn,” She stretched up and kissed him. Her lips felt like a whisper moving over his, a whisper that told a secret most alluring, and then she settled back into his arms. “If I have anything to say about it, you will be mine forever.” Quinn wrapped his arms a little tighter around her. He felt a serenity settling in, one not felt since the dreams began. Something about this cove always helped him find that. This time of the year with the wildflowers in bloom, made it seem all the more a place of refuge. Having Candy in his arms seemed natural and right. “Do you bring all your girlfriends here?”

“Is that what you are, my girlfriend?”

She reached up and caressed his face, “I’m not sure just yet what we are. The better question is what will we become? However, you haven’t answered my question. Do you?”

“No, this has always been my place. Something about it seemed . . . familiar from the moment I found it. Now I guess it’s our place.”

“Good” she said, standing up. “That’s the correct answer,” a giggle was in her voice. She reached down to Quinn and weaved her fingers into his hair. “Do you think if we ever got past all the dream stuff that you and I could be more than just lovers?”

A softness filled Candy’s eyes he never saw before. They seemed held in a mist. A look that made him feel the answer she looked for was more than a simple yes or no. “Candy, I—”

She put her finger to his lips. “It’s not a question that can be answered, can it? Not now anyway, there are the dreams.” The mist in her eyes cleared and they brightened, “I want to go swimming.”

She moved slowly to the water losing an article of clothing with each step, then wading out hip deep. She looked back toward Quinn and for a moment, Quinn found himself in another time and place. Quinn no longer saw the flaxen beauty that stood in the cove but the dark-haired woman of his dreams, Nofertiri and she stood in the pool in the garden. Quinn tried to clear his thoughts, but the memory held a moment more. He could see the tattoo on Nofertiri’s back and remembering every line as one he traced.

Ripples moved over the water with a slow grace, reaching out to him, turning past and present into a single moment and then it vanished. Candy turned and faced Quinn. "Are you okay?"

He smiled, trying to give himself a moment to understand. "Sure, with scenery like this, I'm doing great."

"Then come join me."

"I'm not that big on swimming, Candy."

Candy took a couple of steps backwards, the water rising to her flat stomach; she splashed the cool water up on her chest. "Who said I was still talking about swimming?" She rolled over and swam to a small outcropping of rock that pressed into the cove. There she turned her back to the warm rocks and curled a finger calling Quinn closer.

Quinn's trail of clothing mimicked Candy's. When the water reached his waist, he flipped forward and disappeared below the surface of the lake. He rose up out of the water, a hand caressing up Candy's dangling legs until his chest pressed to hers and his arms encircled her. His hands crept up her back, over shoulder blades and came to rest with fingers entwined in her damp hair. A smile crossed his lips as his gaze locked on her liquid eyes, the world outside his embrace turning to mist.

"I thought you couldn't swim?" she asked as her hand wiped the water from his face.

"I never said that." His body bobbed slightly against hers. Hands moving down the sides of her body, he grasped her hips. He arched back a little pulling her into the space between his legs. "I just said I'm not big on swimming."

Candy lowered one hand and took hold of the erection that rubbed against her thigh. "Well, there are other things it appears you are very big on." Her eyes fluttered and her lips parted in an invitation Quinn accepted.

His mouth, with a slow steady hunger, claimed hers. His arms pushed the two free of the rock and they floated languidly, lost in the exploration of each other's mouth, bodies of passion suspended in shimmering clear water. Heat building within them, tongue encircling tongue, their bodies sank until touching bottom. Above

them, the surface shimmered, ripples racing with the warm summer breeze. With the flavors of their mouths perfectly blended and their breath totally shared, they pressed back to the surface. A gulp of air greedily consumed by both, they captured each other's ravenous mouth once more. Their bodies wrapped together, they drifted down in a tightening spiral. They floated, suspended between earth and air where nothing but the touch of one to the other could reach them. His tongue explored every texture her mouth concealed, every nuance her tongue revealed. His hands lowered from the small of her back to cup the swells of her buttocks. Candy's fingers clenched to his back, pulling herself so tight to him, he could feel his trapped erection pressed between their bodies. His need to feel the liquid embrace of her tight passage grew faster than his need for air. When they pierced the water's surface, Candy did small backstrokes, her look pulling him after her.

"Quinn, make love to me, like I am the one."

"What makes you think you aren't?" His eyes questioning more than his words did.

"Please, Quinn, no whys or promises. Make love to me as if this were the last time we could." She paused and waited for him, when he reached her, her arms encircled his neck. "No dreams, Quinn, just you and me...for this moment," she whispered in his ear.

Quinn moved them both toward the shore and when Quinn's feet touched the sandy bottom, he took Candy in his arms carrying her to the blanket. Small kisses tasted her sun warmed skin and fingers pulled drying puddles of water around on her silken flesh. Not one second of exploration or pampering rushed, but each savored. The fire of desire slowly fed until its glow radiated from her in a crimson flush. When her body shivered with each caress and moans announced each shiver's pleasure, Quinn slid up over her like a warm blanket in winter. His weight on elbows and knees, he rocked gently letting the head of his shaft caress her nether lips, while his tongue did the same to those of her mouth. Her hot breath rushed over his face and her grip on his hips urged him

closer. He rose slightly so he could see the soft features of her face. When Quinn slipped into her, their gazes locked together as tightly as their entwined fingers. Kisses dancing on Candy's face and neck were Quinn's reply to her growing moans.

The beginning penetrations into her fiery core were slow and savored, yet each heralded the growing urgency for the next. Quinn watched every quiver that passed through Candy and encouraged every wonton expression on her face. He did truly make love to her in a way a woman would cherish for the remainder of eternity.

Time seemed to pause. There were no demons or mystic dreams, only Candy. Not even the transgressions of Mark could push past the bliss he found in feeling her held close.

The long shadows of late day finally brought Quinn back to reality.

Coming into the apartment, it all started once more. The flashing number fifteen on the answering machine grabbed his attention and the caller ID told him they were all from Mark.

Chapter 8

Answers

Mark paced the floor of his office, the first page of the long awaited translation in his hand. He glanced over, as the second page fell from the fax machine that inched out the remainder of what he hoped would be answers.

The symbol represents a dimension that hovers out of time. A dark, cold world filled with souls that gave up on love, on even the hope of finding it. It also holds prisoner those stolen from their soul mate. The master of this damned kingdom feeds upon the hopelessness of those abandoning love and on the longing of those who once knew their other half.

Mark took another page from the fax machine, trying to calm himself by repeatedly saying that legends are only that.

By unlocking the open door, those truly loved can escape. A feat far from simple for it takes both halves of the key and love to unlock the door. The darkest of those who have given up on love, making sure the halves can never come together.

Mark looked back over his shoulder reassuring himself his office door remained closed, a chill passing over him. The beast portrayed sounded just like what Quinn described seeing that night in the sleep studies lab. Reading the next part, Mark's heart ran cold.

The demon can take on human form, but always that of a beautiful blonde woman.

The next line made Mark try to find air in a room that now seemed void of it. The legend gave the name of the beast as *Candelis*.

Mark reached into his pocket grabbing his car keys and remembered he'd left his car parked in front of Quinn's. Running from the building, he dialed the cab company on his cell. "An hour? You have to be kidding." He grabbed the first unchained bicycle he saw and started for Quinn's apartment. The bike wobbling from side to side as he dialed Quinn's number once more.

Quinn walked over to the phone and saw Mark's number flashing on the caller ID screen. He listened to the fifth ring, then reached down and unplugged the phone. "It's been a long day, Candy, what do you say we turn in early?" Candy smiled and took his hand. She walked beside him down the hall to the bedroom. "Maybe tomorrow we can work everything out and you and I can put this other stuff behind us."

Candy leaned her head against his chest, "Maybe, Quinn, I hope."

Quinn watched Candy undress, then slip into his bed. His world seemed to be coming apart, only Candy and the dream remained constant and somehow, he knew only she could save him. She pulled the sheet over her breasts with what appeared to Quinn to be a forced smile. Then she rolled to her side facing the far wall. Quinn got undressed tossing his clothes in the corner of the room and then slipping under the sheet. "Are you okay?" he whispered.

She reached a hand back without turning from the wall and rested it on his hip. "I'm alright, Quinn. You need to get some sleep."

"You sound...different. You are sure nothing is wrong?"

Candy pulled her hand back, "I need to get back to my job soon. I'll miss the time we've shared."

"But we can still find time to be together, right?"

"Sure, Quinn, sure."

Quinn kissed the back of her neck and pulled her into his arms, the light in his eyes dimmed by her tone. The bedroom took

on that same chill he felt in the basement earlier. He concentrated on the warm feeling of Candy's body and not the cold shivers that passed through his heart. He fought the drowsiness that crept through his mind. He wanted to talk with Nofertiri to know the secret only she could reveal, to understand why him, why now? Still, he feared the answers he might get. He watched the shifting moonlight creep across the bedroom wall.

The moon slipped from behind the cloud and there, where he last saw her, stood Nofertiri.

"Khaba! Did you bring the second half?"

Quinn walked to her, "Second half?"

Nofertiri's eyes locked to his chest. "The medallion, where is it?"

Quinn reached for his absent pocket. "It's in the pant's pocket I took off when I got into bed."

She started to push him, but this time, Quinn took hold of her wrists. "No, I need some answers. Please?"

Nofertiri touched his face. "Without the medallion, I cannot sense the guardian. It could be right beside you and I would not know it. You need to go back, my love."

Quinn took her by the hand. "Then come with me and you can explain everything there."

She pulled back, keeping herself within the circle of the clearing. "I cannot, Khaba. My soul is trapped here."

"Then how do I keep bouncing back and forth?"

"It is only your mind traveling, your soul is still on the outside of these walls."

"I have seen you open the gate. We will just use it."

"The passageway only leads back to here, an open door that leads nowhere without the key, the complete medallion. Please, Khaba, try to remember. Within you rests all the answers, you just have to find them. They have always been there."

"I have tried to remember and I do get bits and pieces, but that's all. Tell me, are you the princess I read about when I was..."

"Near my mummy? Yes. When my ancient body came near you, I could once more feel your heartbeat. When I could feel the

warmth of your soul, then I could touch your mind. I hoped you would remember more, but it has been so many lifetimes since we touched.” She placed his hand over her heart, his other to the pulsing vein in his throat. The rhythm of her heart beat in perfect time with his. “I have missed you so, Khaba.” She caressed his face and leaned a little closer to him.

Quinn’s hand moved from between her breasts and cradled her cheek in his palm. He started to kiss her, when she jerked back. “We cannot kiss, Khaba. If we do, you will remember everything and your soul...”

“Yes, what about my soul?”

“It would be brought here. I cannot let you become a prisoner as well.” She turned from him, looking into the darkness. A darkness Quinn now realized could seize them both for eternity.

His hands caressed her shoulders, “Ok, I’ll go back, get the key and get you out. Simple.” Quinn turned her around until she faced him and smiled. “I guess Candy is right, she and I were meant to be just friends. I wonder how she could have known?”

“Candelis! Where is she?” panic filled Nofertiri’s voice.

Mark kicked the door of the bedroom open. On the bed before him, he saw the dark winged creature he told himself could not exist, hovering over Quinn. Flickering yellow eyes looked up from Quinn to find him. His body shivered and his legs felt as if they were made of stone, too heavy to move. The razor edge of a black claw drew a small red line on Quinn’s chest, its tip tapping in time to the heart that lay just below the skin and muscle. “No!” screamed Mark. “Damn it, Quinn, wake-up!”

The beast shifted into Candy. Her supple legs spreading as she straddled Quinn. One finger traced the red line on Quinn’s chest and she brought the drops of blood to her lips. “He can’t, Mark. I now hold him there until...”

“Until you kill him.” Mark took a shaky step further into the room.

“If he would have listened and dreamed of only me, we could have avoided what comes next, to both of you.”

Her last words made his knees grow even weaker and his next step became a stumble. “Quinn could not love you. You’re a monster!”

Candy shifted once more and this time, the young waitress from the restaurant sat on the bed. She slipped to the bed’s edge and spread her knees. “I am whatever you want me to be, Mark, whatever I need to be.” Her hands moved over full breasts and she smiled softly getting out of bed. “If Quinn were as easy to distract as you...” She shifted back to Candy. “Then this would not have been necessary.” Her arms reached out and the beautiful woman became the beast once more. With a motion of her hand, the bedroom door slammed shut. “You dreamed of being locked in a bedroom with me, Mark. Is it everything you hoped for?” Her clawed hand swung out and slammed into Mark’s chest sending him across the room, landing on a pile of clothes in the corner. Candelis turned and moved to the bedside; once more, a claw hovered above Quinn’s bare chest.

Mark shook his head in an effort to clear it. He steadied himself with his shaking hand, trying to get up. Slipping back down, his hand landed on the pocket of Quinn’s jeans. Oh God, he hoped what he felt was the medallion. His fingers fumbled trying to get into the pocket, his gaze moving from the crumpled jeans to the claw lowering ever closer to Quinn. With a jerk, he pulled the medallion free of the pocket and juggled it a moment—a moment that seemed to last forever.

Candelis turned and yellow eyes burned into Mark. Wings spread and talons glistened. A low rumble became a hiss that filled the room. Gaining a grip on the medallion, Mark threw it with all the might he still possessed, hoping what he read in the translation would be true.

Chapter 9

Awakening

In that instant before impact, Quinn's eyes opened. The medallion, glowing green, passed through Candelis. For a moment, yellow eyes flickered brown and the demonic features softened. Then a scream neither Mark nor Quinn would ever be able to forget, ripped at their ears. The creature reached for Quinn but before touching him, like smoke caught by a passing gust of wind...she vanished!

Quinn jumped to his feet, "What just happened?"

"Candy. She is the monster. She was going to kill you!"

"I know, Mark, Nofertiri told me, but why did she vanish?"

Mark smiled, pulling several folded sheets of paper from his back pocket. "I got the fax. It told me the creature could not endure the touch of the medallion."

Quinn walked to the far wall of the bedroom and leaning down, he picked up the medallion. "I think I know where the other half of this key is. We need to go back to the college, Mark." Quinn crossed the room and placed his hand on Mark's shoulder. "Mark, I'm sorry about..."

"Yeah, I know, Quinn," Mark injected. He pulled his car keys from his pocket. "This time, we take my car. Can you go to jail for stealing a bicycle?"

Quinn slipped on his pants. "Let me get this straight. You face down a monster and you're worried about a bicycle?"

"Well, can you?"

Quinn grabbed his shirt and they started for the car. "I think you get a bye if you steal it to save a friend. Thank you, Mark."

Mark shrugged, grabbing the bicycle leaning by the front door, then loaded it into the trunk of the car. He looked at Quinn. "What? I'm just returning it." On the ride back to the college, Quinn told Mark about the passage in the diary and what Nofertiri told him. How all the pieces seemed to be coming together now, the who and whys were starting to become clear.

He left out the cacophony of feelings stirred by all the happenings of the past few nights. Deep within him, he knew Nofertiri to be his destiny, yet Candy's passion seemed real. Not even a monster could have faked the fire of her kiss. He didn't tell Mark how the cut on his chest nor even the wound he suffered to his shoulder didn't come close to the pain Candy truly inflicted on him.

Entering the storage room, Quinn started hooking up the ropes to the sarcophagus lid.

"Quinn, we can't open that without someone from the museum."

Quinn hurriedly continued hooking up the pulley ropes. "I think the reason Khaba, or I, couldn't ever find both halves of the key lays in the fact Nofertiri possessed half."

Mark placed his hand on the lid. "You did hear me, right? We can't open this or we both could lose our jobs."

Quinn hooked up the last rope and pulled down on the hoisting rope. "Only I, Khabam didn't know that, so he would have kept the half he held close to her." After the slack left the pulley, Quinn pulled with all his strength and the heavy lid shifted slightly. "You going to stand there, or are you going to help me?"

"Help you get me fired, you mean?" Mark said, taking hold of the rope and pulling. "Oh what the hell, I need a vacation."

The lid rose by inches. When the heavy stone cover hung on creaking ropes high above its base, Quinn locked off the line and went to the sarcophagus. Heart pounding, he looked upon the wrapped body within. His fingers traced the lines of the burial mask and remembered its curves. The memory of saying goodbye so many lifetimes back slammed into him. He steadied himself, gripping the cold stone's edge.

“Quinn! You ok?”

“Yes,” he bent over and reached under the body, now knowing where to search. He pulled out the second half of the medallion. “I am now.” Quinn put the two medallions around his neck and lay on the floor beside the sarcophagus.

“You going to do it right here?”

“Right here, right now. Being this close to her, it should be simple. I hope.”

“But...” Mark mumbled

Quinn grasped the medallions, closed his eyes and whispered “Nofertiri.” When his eyes opened, she stood before him and without a word, he kissed her. The key might free them both; it might not, but one way or another, even if it meant he would remain trapped within this darkness, he would be with her. The memories of past lives flooded into him. When he looked into the pale blue of her eyes, he knew it had always been her he waited for, always her that filled his dreams. “Let’s get out of here,” he said, taking her hand in his.

The dark, looming pathway now almost seemed familiar, but no more hospitable. The shifting mist parted before them showing the stones of the path, damp and shimmering in the muted moonlight. With their passing, the mist rushed back covering the path, rising and swirling as a wave pushing them ever forward. The feeling of cold on his back assured Quinn of the reality of where he found himself, of the permanence of making one mistake and its consequences for both Nofertiri and himself. Rounding the curve in the path, the stone door came into sight. Quinn removed the medallions from around his neck and joined them into one. He placed the gold disk key into the glowing symbol on the door. The heavy door seemed freed of gravity and opened with his touch, the hinges yielding but a muffled moan. Before them lay a long, shadow filled grotto. The sound of dripping water echoed toward the distant light of an opening. A cold wind reached out to them, carrying the smell of decay. Quinn took the medallions from the lock, wrapping the neck cord through his fingers. Nofertiri’s steps were hesitant, though Quinn tried to hurry her through the maze

of stone. "My friend killed the guardian with the medallion. It's okay, we're safe."

Nofertiri stopped and looked at Quinn, "My love, the medallion only—"

"Banishes my pet!" a voice from the darkness said. From the same darkness rose a huge figure. Four arms stretched from a body covered in scales ending in the tail of a serpent. Its eyes were the color of fresh spilled blood, its body, the gray of death. "Did you think it would be so easy, Khaba?"

When Quinn heard his old name, he recognized the voice. "I killed you once, priest." Quinn hurled the medallions at the dark figure.

The priest simply caught the medallions, laughed and threw them at Nofertiri's feet. "Keep them as a souvenir, princess, while I take care of this pest once and for all."

Quinn reached down, picking up a stone and measuring its weight. With calculated steps, Quinn and the priest maneuvered for the first blow. Quinn slammed the stone into the scaled chest. His blow answered with a fist slicing the air and crashing into his chest. A blow that sent him across the passage slamming hard against the stone wall. "If Candelis had done her job as I told her to, none of this would have been necessary, but she kept hesitating. I will not." In two strides, he stood above Quinn, picking him up and slamming him to the far wall.

The impact accented by the sound of air rushing from Quinn's body. The taste of blood filled Quinn's mouth and each breath brought wrenching pain. Nofertiri ran to Quinn and pulled him to his feet, only to have herself and Quinn hurled through the air like superfluous rag dolls. The two struggled toward the light at the end of the tunnel. Each foot gained costing them in the growing rage of the priest and the escalating fury of his blows.

Quinn's blows bounced from the scaly body, only antagonizing the priest, accelerating the punishment he delighted in delivering.

Quinn looked up and found that despite their battling, half the cave remained before them. Maybe he could get a few good blows

in. Maybe he could distract the priest and Nofertiri could make a run for it. Maybe...

At the lit opening, a figure appeared. Leathered wings unfolded and Quinn knew it was Candelis.

The fragile light of escape eclipsed. Long black claws raked over the stone wall, the shrill sound of their scraping cut through the thick air. Each methodical, deliberate step closer made it clear there would be no escape, the blows of a forgone battle for survival were now all that remained. The yellow of her eyes pierced the darkness and locked on Quinn.

A low chuckle came from the priest when Candelis stood over Quinn's battered body. Her leather wings quivered then folded, her head tipped from shoulder to shoulder. She knelt down and placed a clawed finger under his chin raising his head so she looked into his eyes. "RUN!"

Her wings flew open and in a single blow, claws and talons sank into the scaled body of the priest. The two became a mass of blood and pain.

Quinn gathered Nofertiri into his arms and did what Candelis told him, he ran for the light. When he reached it, he looked back and for a second, the gray of his eyes met the soft brown of Candy's. A step taken and Quinn's eyes opened back in the storage room.

He jumped to his feet looking for Nofertiri but saw only Mark. From the sarcophagus, a velvet mist began to rise. Taking form for a moment, Nofertiri smiled at Quinn and he could hear the name Khaba whispered. The mist vanished.

"What happened?" Quinn looked longingly at the wrapped body and then at Mark.

"Before you went after her, I tried to tell you, Quinn. The best you could do would be to free her soul to find the place it should be. This body died two thousand years ago. I'm sorry, Quinn."

* * * *

It took Quinn three weeks to heal from the beating he endured, at least the worst of the physical wounds. The others, he

hoped to reconcile in time. Each day the memories given by the kiss played in his mind. He remembered so many lifetimes once shared, from the high planes of Mongolia, to the pool in Heliopolis. He knew she was free now and that someday, perhaps in another life, they would find each other again, but he wished that time could have been now.

Mark checked in on him every day and this being Quinn's first day back at work, they were to meet for lunch. The campus overflowed with new students as the new semester got underway. A soft breeze moved over the grass covered knolls and sifted its way through the trees. Quinn's mind now focused on trying to get back to a normal life when something in the air caught his attention. That scent, it was... he turned and there, walking toward the gym, strolled a dark-haired woman. He could only see her from the back, but the form, the stride were hers. The crowd shifted and for a second, he thought what he saw to be no more than the apparition of his need. Yet the scent lingered. His own stride quickened and even the lingering pain from his battle wouldn't slow him. Weaving through the crowd, he saw her once more, though her back still faced him, he held no doubt and his stride became a hitched run. His hand reached out between two students to take her shoulder. Stopping her, turning her to face him, he spoke.

"Nofertiri!"

The surprised woman looked up at Quinn, "Excuse me, you must have me confused with someone else. My name is Tiri. I just transferred here." Quinn looked into eyes of blue ice and from her neck hung a gold medallion.

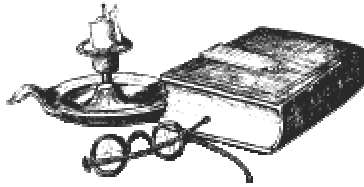
He smiled "Excuse me, I'm Quinn, a professor here. I was wondering, do you believe in dreams?"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

HH Self, known to his friends as Vince, has been a contributor to numerous internet-writing projects. The anthology Erotic Fantasy: Tales of the Paranormal featured his recent story, The Hunted. Quoted there saying, "Writing for me is the exploration of passion in its many facets both light and dark. Now that's a job anyone would enjoy." With a propensity for the forbidden, and an inclination for the sensual, erotic paranormal is the genre the bulk of his work resides in, but he is by no means limited to only the paranormal, as the free short story FORBIDDEN DREAMS: LEMON TEA on his web site, www.hhself.com, proves. You can contact me at me@hhself.com. I love to hear from my readers.

When not writing, he spends his days, and more often nights, working as a fire fighter and medic.

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