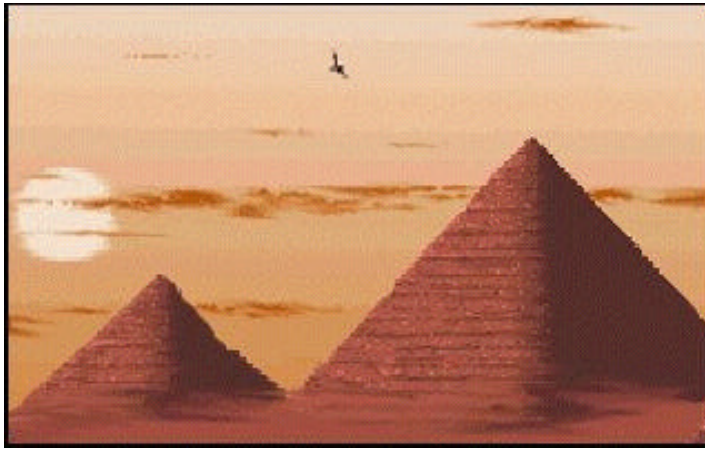


SANDSHADOW



By Suzanne Nikolaisen

3573 South Centennial Road
Magna, UT 84044
801.250.8090
Suzanne@softcom.net

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ONE

Michael glanced out at the seething shadows of night through his kitchen window, wondering if he had seen something shift out there, or if he was just imagining things. He could have sworn that something had passed his window, but if he had been pressed to say exactly what, he would have been unable to answer. An occasional bird might fly past, the window washer's would work their way down the building, but rarely did anything or anyone else disturb the sky at so close a proximity. The thirteenth floor loomed above the city. The white noise of the evening traffic murmured to him softly. Perhaps it had been a helicopter, but the truth was, he didn't know what it was. He stared out at the light bejeweled skyline and knew at his very core that this wasn't his imagination. Something was out there.

His nights had been filled with a darkness so vast during the past month that it reminded him of the nightmares he had forgotten about from his childhood. The dreams had been filled with such frightening images, that nightfall had been a time he had dreaded as a child. Now Michael was beginning to wish that he didn't live alone as an adult. The dream images were becoming more real to him, than the kitchen in which he was standing. He was getting jumpy.

The sunset was casting an ethereal glow over Cairo, pale yellows and oranges faded into the darkening lavender sky. Night was coming, and the last rays of sunlight seemed to be rushing to escape the darkness. Michael had just finished washing an apple and water was rushing into the sink. He turned the water off and searched the twilight horizon for an answer. Was there something really out there?

The twilight outside the kitchen window seemed to whisper to him and beckon. He could almost hear words, but they fell away like dying butterflies, into the shadows before he could catch them. There was nothing out there that was unusual. The skyline of Cairo sparkled as darkness engulfed the city. He shrugged, but decided to take one last glance toward the Nile, hoping to spot something, anything that might have given rise to the hackles of his fear. He knew with a surety that surprised him that there was something out there. Something that he should be very afraid of.

The pale apricot glow of the sunset flashed, blinding him, and he squinted against the sudden brightness. The light writhed, and grew until it filled his whole kitchen window. Pain seared his eyes, as though the light were actually imprinting its

shimmering twisting patterns of white, green and orange, into his eyes. Michael could no longer see through the window, he felt a tremor of terror, it didn't really look like there was anything outside anymore. He couldn't see past the strange patterns of light that filled the window.

Adrenaline laced his system, and he could feel a bead of sweat trickling down his temple. He searched the window for a sign, a clue as to what was happening, but he found nothing. The dreams... No. He couldn't allow himself to believe in them. The light was blinding him, and the flashes left bright blotches in his vision where he couldn't see.

Michael dropped the paring knife, and the apple that he had been gripping since the light had begun. The knife clattered loudly against the sink, in the preternatural stillness, and Michael stepped away from the window, as cautious as a man held at gunpoint. There was nothing he could compare this to, nothing that logically made sense. Sharp neon flashes burst away from the main glow, as though static was breaking loose from an enormous bar of lightening. There was no sound. Chills ran down his back.

He retreated another step toward the living room. He knew that the light was real, but he didn't know what was causing it. How could it be real? But then how could it not be? Was he going crazy? The silence in the kitchen had reached a brittle point as though the air would shatter around him if a noise were made. Michael could feel a presence, as though a gauzy veil of evil hung in the kitchen. The presence was familiar, but he couldn't concentrate on it, the light was too

distracting. The light was dancing and quivering weirdly, it seemed almost deadly.

Michael was vaguely reminded of a cobra rearing to strike, but he stood his ground shakily, watching.

The light writhed before him as though it were caught in a magical dance, unleashed by an unheard melody. He was squinting now, hardly able to look at the luminescence pouring in from his window. Another shiver of uneasiness trailed down his back. This wasn't right, what was going on?

The light was churning and pulsating as though it had a life of it's own. He tried to think of a plausible explanation, but as he thought through the limited possibilities, he immediately dismissed them. Nothing he knew of could be causing the light to glow, especially not at twilight, he shivered. This couldn't be happening!

Only a few seconds had passed, but it felt as though he had been trapped in a spook alley filled with flashing lights all night, he waited among mute kitchen cupboards, half expecting a ghost or even an ax wielding monster to appear from the shadows. Sweat was beaded on his forehead and the feeling that something bad was going to happen became a certainty. The light's unnatural convulsing seemed to be an omen. He took another step away from the light, holding his arms up in front of his eyes, to shield them against the twisting light. The kitchen was no longer defined, he could see only the fuzzy edges of the white Formica cupboards. There was a blurry green tint to the kitchen, as though a lens had been used to distort the light. Michael's eyes were tearing from the flashes.

A faint, evil chirrup began rising from the shadows behind him, and his fear

deepened. He turned to locate the sound, but his eyes refused to adjust to the dark shadows that were veiling the recesses of the kitchen. The thing started shrieking. Michael's heart was pounding hard and he was fighting the urge to run. The thing had begun hissing loudly like an evil minion voicing its unearthly rage.

Sweat trickled down his forehead. What was going on? Nuclear war? Was that the source of the weird light and the terrible screaming? He found the source of the shrieking, an instant later, on the gas stove, the teapot was issuing out a hot jet of steam. The water was boiling and ready. Relief poured over him, it was only the teapot, what had he expected? Nuclear war, he reminded himself, but what had caused the light?

A quick glance at the window was all he needed to confirm that the strange shimmering had stopped while he had been distracted with the teapot. The window showed the sparkling skyline of Cairo once more, the sky was filled with the greedy, purple tentacles of dusk that were devouring the pale sunset. The coming darkness held a menace, as thunderheads before a storm.

Michael stared out the window, he felt numb. What was happening to him? He looked out over Cairo, it looked the same as always. Tall, beige skyscrapers, stood intermixed with domed mosques and pinnacles creating a magical skyline. The Nile was flowing smoothly around Gezira Island to his west, and twilight glowed softly on the ancient river's moving waters.

There was no trace of the distorted light, no hint that it had even occurred. He felt as though there were a lump of lead growing in the bottom of his stomach, how was

he supposed to figure out what had happened? There were no clues, no residue of the light to even credit his crazy story with. The sand colored city seemed to mock him, as though it held the mysterious answer to the strange pulsing light in its dusty, people packed streets.

Trees randomly broke the continual flow of buildings every few blocks. The city of Cairo had always seemed to be a shock of concrete to Michael, while the Nile broke the monotony of the desert.

Something had filled the window, but the question was what? Michael rubbed at his sore eyes. What could have filled the window? Nothing could have created such a strange writhing light, nothing made sense, and his feeling of dread was deepening with the passage of time. His fear had not deserted him with the suddenness and ease that the light had. Something had caused the strange light - or someone. He knew that it was important that he figure out who, or what, had created the light, but he was afraid of the answer. What if there wasn't an outside factor, what if he was just going crazy? He was exhausted from the nights he spent awake after the dreams and his fear was draining all of the remaining energy from him.

The florescent light in the kitchen made the room look cold, and hollow. Michael felt alienated from his home, it no longer felt safe. A feeling of evil hung over his apartment, and he stood for a while in the kitchen trying to understand what had happened.

After turning on several lights in the living room Michael went back into his beige tiled kitchen and poured the hot water into a mug, and then dunked a bag of spearmint

tea into the water. He breathed in the spicy aroma that the steam ushered up, the mug warmed his cold hands. He was unsure of himself. More than that he didn't seem to know himself anymore. Someone creating the light? No, Michael couldn't accept that, but the thought frightened him and he couldn't shake the idea. He picked up his mug and left the kitchen, hoping that he could leave the strange ideas there as well. He had to get a grip on himself.

Michael took a sip of tea, but it didn't seem to help as it usually did, he probably wouldn't be able to calm down, there simply were no answers. Years ago his mother had introduced him to drinking tea to relax, it had been an everyday occurrence when he had been growing up. He had always been able to sit down, after school, with a cup of spearmint tea and hot toast. Not that the tea had done all the soothing, his mother had always made herself available to talk to him. She had always seemed to be in the kitchen when he had come home from school. They had lived in London, England, where his Father had worked as a professor at Bagorn University.

His mother had listened to him until he had finished everything that he ever wanted to say. She would sit near the kitchen hearth, her long dark hair pulled back into a braid. She had been endlessly patient with him, and she had always been there when he needed her, until now. She was gone now. He would never see her expressive brown eyes again as he talked to her, that was a thing of the past, he would never see her again. Two years ago she had died of pneumonia, in London.

His Mother hadn't belonged in England, and he resented his Father for not taking her home to Alexandria, but it was all in the past. Even his grandparents were

dead. He had no family in Egypt, he was alone.

The condominium smelled faintly musty, as though it were full of the same ancient air that had remained locked in the formidable pyramids for centuries. He closed his eyes trying to slow down, his imagination was forging ahead at light speed, creating monsters in the shadows.

Michael switched on the overhead light to his den and the cold, white light washed over everything allowing no ghouls a place of respite, but nothing could make him forget about the writhing light. He tried to push the memory of the searing light from his mind, but his hand was shaking as he set his mug down. He closed his eyes, it had only been a long day, that was all, nothing else.

He had lost his morning trial to a technicality he hadn't seen, and now the case had to be appealed. Will Palk one of the senior partners at his firm had come down on him. Which Michael understood, but didn't like. Will seemed to ignore the fact that they were all human and every once in a while made mistakes, although Michael had really never seen Will make one.

"They're our clients, can't you see things from their point of view? By losing the case at this point, it's going to cost them more money and time, next time they may not want to come back to us. And do you know why they won't want to come back to us? Because we weren't able to do things right the first time. Do I need to give somebody else the case, or do you feel confident enough to follow this to the end?"

"I can handle it, I've started the paperwork for the appeal already."

Sitting at the desk with the lamp glowing warmly, and the overhead light

showering the room with harsh white light, Michael felt discouraged. He tried to read over the research he had been doing for another pending case, the Brunswick trial that was scheduled on the judges docket in three weeks. His clients, Compu-Ware, were prosecuting nineteen year old, Shawn Brunswick an American who had infiltrated their computer system in downtown Cairo, selling trade secrets to Data International, their main competition. Now if Michael had his way, as prosecuting attorney, the arrogant kid would be put behind bars next month.

He glanced over his shoulder at the doorway to the living room, it was dark, and the shadows made him uneasy, but then again so did his memory of the pulsing light. Damn the light! Why couldn't he get it out of his mind? Then he remembered the presence he had felt in the kitchen - it had seemed so familiar to him. He had a sick feeling in his stomach, pure recognition ran through him. He knew this thing - he recognized it from his nightmares.

A terrible coldness filled him, he hated his fear, it made him feel weak. He tried to think of other things that could have caused the strange light, he sat slumped in his chair with the Brunswick folder still open on his lap. A flashlight might have reflected against the window, but not to the top of a thirteen story building. Had the light been supernatural? A ghost? No, he couldn't accept that.

What about the thing from his dreams? No, he had to keep some sort of sanity, he pushed the thoughts about his dreams away. Why couldn't he stop thinking about the dream? The fact that he'd even thought about ghosts and goblins depressed him.

Something was either wrong with him, or his fears were finally laying waste to his mind.

It was probably only a child out on the street playing with a piece of broken mirror. The mirror might have caught somebody's headlight, but that didn't explain the strange energy that seemed to have been part of the light. Cold fear burrowed deeper into the back of his neck.

Michael's dark wavy hair was ruffled from running his hand through it nervously, a habit he had picked up while studying for finals in law school. He shifted his eyes from the file that he had been staring at to the wall, he was surprised by a brown spider making its way up the wall near the doorway. He felt as though he were very similarly perched, with his sanity held in check, only by a strand as fine as the spider's web. Fear surrounded him as the enormous void of the room surrounded the spider. Michael's golden-brown eyes reflected the lamp light as he watched the spider move.

What the hell was he thinking? He had to get a grip on himself, with a swift movement he grabbed a tissue and snuffed the spider out, like a small flame on a tea candle. He did not like the implications of his comparison, life was so easily taken, even his could be.

He sat down at his desk again, he had to get back to the file, where had his concentration gone? He read the answers to the interrogatories again, and stopping at the bottom of the page he tried to think of some of the arguments that the defense attorney might try to use, but tonight his heart wasn't in his work, he just couldn't concentrate.

The calendar above his desk showed a picture of the Rocky Mountains, it had been a long time since he had seen them, for that matter it had been a long time since he had been hiking. The last time he had been hiking he had been in England, where he had taken Terri hiking through the green velvety hills. Today he had thought that he had seen Terri outside the Deli near the court house, a woman with honey colored hair, and pale milky skin, but when she turned he had seen that he was mistaken and he had looked away, embarrassed.

Why would he have thought Terry would be in Cairo anyway? She lived in the United States, Cairo wasn't exactly a Sunday drive. Earlier, in front of the Deli, he had hoped that she had come to Cairo, that she had been looking for him, that she had decided to move to Cairo to be with him. He had, just for a moment gotten his hopes up that she had come. He hadn't heard from her in the past few months, she had stopped writing, he knew that his own letters had been short. He had left England last spring, furious with her when she had refused to move to Cairo. Now he could understand all too well why she didn't write anymore, she had given up on him.

They had spent all of May together, in London, before he had decided to move to Cairo, Egypt to join a large specialty law firm. She hadn't cared about the firm, she had just wanted to be together. He saw now just how arrogant he had been, leaving only one option open to her, to either move to Cairo or to call it quits. His mistake outside the court house, showed him just how much she still meant to him.

Was he really changing or just sinking into depression? The thought of such a change frightened him. The changes that had been occurring, made no sense, and

even more important - he didn't like the changes he saw. His dreams were frightening him, as he hadn't been since he was a child - when the dreams had begun.

Michael was afraid of the shadows now, and of what they might hold, secreted away in their secretive darkness. He shivered, feeling a draft of air against his cheek, cool and fresh from the vents reminding him even more of the dreams that kept coming back. The dream was always the same, filled with darkness and a lonely desert wasteland. He would wake up from the dream feeling frightened and vulnerable and he would be awash in sweat. The basic dream didn't sound frightening, but it terrified him, leaving him afraid of everything and unable to sleep for fear of the dream. He worried that things might evolve in the very shadows of his bedroom during his sleep.

Michael shivered and picked up the warm mug of tea. The dreams had been occurring one to two times a week for the past month. An increase from the one to two times a year that the dream had occurred when he had been a child. The grandfather clock in his living room was ticking, the sound was hollow in the eager silence. He listened to the night, to his apartment, listening for a sound to betray his fear. He knew that he was alone, but there was something -- *something* in the dark shadows of the night that he was afraid of.

TWO

The pale desert was reflecting the sunset, the soft peach glow from the sky made the desert look as though it were made of flowing honey. Imhotep stepped back from the garden wall, his forehead was knotted in a frown, he'd been battling a headache all afternoon, he was worried about the dose, of toxic herbs in the potion he had been researching. He was afraid that he had gotten the mixture all wrong.

The night was warm and the Nile was flooding, ensuring fertile crops. Imhotep crossed the palace courtyard and walked slowly down the palace halls to his workroom. Shadows were engulfing many of the halls, but he could see the torchlight from his workroom reflecting off of the stone just outside of the doorway. He had spent many years in that room; detailing the plans for the Step Pyramid and learning and experimenting with the powers of healing.

Imhotep had discovered that he had no faith in the ancient Gods, but instead faith in what he had learned of science, mathematics and the laws of nature. Now he was finally going to test that faith and do something that would anger the Gods - if they

existed. If he succeeded in this, he would become immortal, and then he could only imagine what life would be like, the years that he could spend traveling to other lands, always learning new methods of healing, and the ways of other cultures.

He entered his workroom and dropped the doorway curtain to shield the room from curious bypassers. There wasn't much traffic down his hallway because of his reputation for magic, people tended to avoid him - especially after the sun had set. Rani, his apprentice was at the table crushing herbs, he was frowning as though he were trying to work a mathematical problem in his head. The young man looked up and his brow cleared, but he looked as though he had a lot of things that he wanted to say.

Imhotep wished that Rani could understand him better. He wasn't magical, he just understood science better than most of the people in his country, but Rani was young - and now he was frightened. Imhotep ripped off a chunk of bread from a loaf that had been set to one side of the table, he smiled offering some to Rani who quickly shook his head, he shrugged and sat down to eat.

"Are the mixtures ready, as I have asked?" Imhotep already knew the answer from the looks of the table, they were, but he couldn't stand the silence. They both knew what the potion was going to do to him. Imhotep didn't want to brood on it, he had wasted enough time on that already.

"Almost, I still have to add the water to the dried herbs, and then I'll bring out the paste that you prepared last month. You said that you would mix it in." Rani said it almost accusingly. Imhotep nodded, he hadn't expected Rani to add the toxic mixture to the herbs.

"Yes, I did say that."

All of the time Imhotep had spent studying and narrowing down the plants and mineral agents for the potion made him confident in the mixture, but there was a nagging doubt. What if it didn't work? Nobody had ever tried anything like it before - well at least nobody that he had heard of. Everything that he had studied indicated that the potion would work, but first, it would kill him.

He shivered, despite his confidence he was nervous, what if it didn't work? He finished the piece of bread and then joined Rani at the work table ensuring that his young apprentice was mixing the portions correctly. Rani was scared, his face was an ashy color, and his eyes were large, he was trying, not very successfully, to control his hands so that they didn't shake as he divided the powders. Imhotep wanted to tell Rani that it would be okay, but he didn't know if it really would be.

Imhotep's mouth was dry and his own fear was growing with the evening shadows. He had instructed Rani to hide after he died, to leave the country so that no one could find out about the experiment until he had made sure that it worked, even then he wasn't sure who he would tell. He had made arrangements with friends abroad and left packets of money for Rani to live on. He shivered as Rani added water to a small bowl and began adding the measured powders.

A bead of sweat trickled down Imhotep's face, he was getting more nervous, but he wasn't going to stop the experiment because of his own fear - if he had let his fear stop him in the past he wouldn't have begun to learn the process of healing. Rani picked up the stone jar of toxic paste, handed it to Imhotep and then stepped away from

the table.

Imhotep emptied the small amount of paste into the bowl with a swift movement of a wooden spatula. Then he stirred it into the liquid. The water foamed with thin green bubbles, he poured it into a cup. The mixture was a strange green color, he looked up from the mixture to see Rani staring at him, his eyes full of fear.

Fear had seeped into his own soul like a poison, Imhotep was cold and scared, but he wasn't going to stop. He had to follow this experiment through to the end. He had to know. He drank the potion then, almost greedily, not wanting to pause to think about what he was doing. When he finished drinking the mixture there was a bitter taste in his mouth. He crossed the room to his bed, there was nothing to do now, but wait. Wait to die.

Rani sat down on a chair beside the bed, obviously terrified, but unable to leave. Rani had been like a son to him, both of them had a unquenchable thirst for knowledge. Imhotep began sweating and he could feel his heart beating faster than usual. He was scared, the first wave of cramps hit his stomach, as though a tolling of death.

Imhotep had been able to stay calm until this point, but he was becoming more frightened as his death neared. His mind was full of doubt about his own knowledge, and about the experiment. The pain in his stomach was spreading and he began to think that death wasn't such a bad idea, at least he would escape the pain. His breathing was labored and he couldn't seem to get enough air. Rani was leaning over him, mumbling a prayer to one of the Gods, Imhotep didn't care who, maybe it would

stop the pain, he knew that he was dying now, and that nothing could stop it.

He tried not to think about dying, the next wave of cramps hit almost obligingly, distracting him from his fear. Darkness had started crowding in around the edges of his vision, the shadows moved and whispered. He had begun shivering uncontrollably and after fighting another wave of cramps he dropped into unconsciousness.

THREE

Shadows teemed in the dark hallway by the living room, as night cloaked the mountains nearby. Terri had the shivers even though the heater was on. She could see the trees moving, outside in a rough wind. The tree branches mingled with blurred shadows, beneath a crescent moon, making the dark October night cold and uninviting.

Terri turned away from the window and leaned back in the desk chair. Last spring had been just as cold and stormy as the past few days of autumn. She had come home from her visit to England in May and had enrolled at the University. She hadn't wanted to, but her Dad had really pushed, until she had decided to start school a quarter early. Spring had dragged by, Salt Lake had looked dirty, and the sky had been hazy with pollution. Depression had met her every day, and her own heightened awareness about how far she was from Michael. She had doubted her decision not to join him in Cairo.

Summer Quarter had started in what had seemed like a sudden rush, she hadn't felt ready. The University had assigned her an interpreter for her classes and she had

begun her third year at the university and the memory of spring - the days she and Michael had spent together, had become nothing more than a memory.

For convenience she stayed in her parent's home which was a two story Tudor, nestled into the steep avenues near the University. Terri glanced out of the living room window at the sparkling city. The city lights spread out before her like a great sequined blanket ending abruptly out by the Great Salt Lake and the desert, where the night was greedy and dark. The city seemed to be an oasis in the desert of the night. The lights twinkled and winked, in the bowl shaped valley, surrounded by mountains. Stars burned intently through gathering wisps of clouds.

The landscape behind the house was mottled and leaf littered, a small canyon opened off to the left side of the backyard. The darkness seemed to be holding something in its unknown shadows. Terri glanced away, but her eyes were drawn back to the dense foliage near the fence. Black scurrying shadows, of wind tossed tree limbs, hid desperate autumn leaves that clung to the lonely dying trees. She wished that she could hear the wind, and listen for someone moving out there, but she had become deaf seven years ago when she was fifteen.

Terri had gone deaf while her Father had been at an archeological dig in Egypt; he had lost precious weeks at the site because of her. She had known, that despite his concern, that he was aching to be at the dig, than with her. She hadn't been sure that he loved her or even cared about what was happening to her, but now she understood that he did, but he had been working on *his find*, his really big find. He had found an ancient temple built by Imhotep the same architect that had built the step pyramid. The

temple was dedicated to Ra, but it was out in the desert miles past the pyramids. Her father had finally gone back to Egypt, when they had accepted that her hearing loss was permanent, and that he couldn't do anything until he had time to stay home and learn sign language.

The autumn night held only a few leaves that littered the raw earth. Wind pulled through the tree limbs, stealing ever more leaves from the vulnerable trees. Trees surrounded her home, blue spruces, aspen, and river birch held the wind and storms at bay, but the raised flower beds lay naked in the October night, framing the back porch.

Terri sighed and looked down at her History book feeling discouraged, she had managed to get a C on her last quiz in History, but she didn't know if she could even pass the quiz tomorrow. She could study all night, but history just didn't click with her. Dates, facts, and names just didn't seem to stick to her brain, no matter how hard she studied.

* * * * *

Max watched the shadows in the garden. The shadows multiplied and darted around as though they were playing a secret game. He wondered about the shadows, and what they were doing. The wind was blowing and storm clouds shifted and blocked out more and more of the moonlight as they gathered.

The wind was busy shifting tree branches, Max closed his eyes, it was night, he would sleep for a little while - but, something clattered outside in the back yard. Max opened his eyes. What was that? An outside noise. Not a car. What was it? He sniffed the air and could smell the dying leaves outside.

He sat up and wagged his tail, had Terri noticed the outside noise? He glanced up at her. No, she was staring at the book. She didn't hear anything anymore, not even him. He whined softly.

Max stood up and shook out his fur. The smell of dying leaves seemed to hide another smell. What was the other smell? He had not smelled it before - it smelled dead. He did not like the smell. The warm air from the vent in the floor felt good. Max stood very quiet, listening to outside things.

The noise wasn't as important as the smell. The smell was something bad. He growled a warning. Terri hadn't noticed anything yet. He felt a little better. Maybe the dead smell would go away. He sat down at Terri's feet.

The smell was still in the air, he couldn't see it, but the smell was heavy. Why hadn't it left? Max could smell the stray tom cat, the dying leaves, and a fire from next door - but the dead smell didn't belong. He growled again. Dead things. Max sniffed the air and watched the night.

* * * * *

Terri shut her history book, she was having a hard time keeping the dates in the proper order, it was 1:30 in the morning and she needed some sleep. Max, her sheepdog was restless, maybe he needed to go out. He trotted to the window looking out at the backyard, he didn't seem upset, he was just checking things out. She wondered what he was looking for, something seemed to have gotten his attention, he'd been to the window twice now. Maybe it was just the Martin's cat, but she pushed herself away from the desk, where she had been studying and walked over to the

window where the blinds were half open. She let her eyes take in the backyard, the moonlight was weak, half covered by the storm clouds, and shadows hung thickly around the trees and bushes.

Loose leaves were swept up by the wind, creating small dark imprints against the night sky. Shadows seemed to cling desperately to the corners of the back yard as though they were hiding something. What was she thinking? What would the shadows really be hiding? A stray cat at most, but Terri stood by the window scanning the night. She studied the darker shadows nervously. With relief she found the culprit of Max's alarm, the lawn rake lay flat on the shallow wooden deck, blown there by the wind.

Terri knelt down and scratched Max's ears.

"It's okay Max." He tilted his head toward her, his eyes were dark and moist. The sound probably would have startled her if she had heard it. The sound of a falling handle against the wood rang through her mind as a memory from only a few years ago. The solid clunk of the wooden handle resounding against the hollow of the deck was familiar. She knew exactly what it would have sounded like.

She hated not being able to hear. She watched the wind toss the tree branches outside in a noiseless dance and knew the sound that the wind would make whistling against the eaves of the house, but she couldn't hear it, or Max's barking, or a bird singing, or a child laughing.

She turned off the computer and gathered her text books together and put them in her backpack. After losing her hearing she had learned how to use her other senses to her best advantage. Terri had learned to discern moods, and many hidden

messages due to simple body language. Sign language felt natural to her and now after four years and a lot of practice, mainly a lot of trial and error, she had learned to read lips. Reading lips was still a lot of guesswork, because so many words looked like other words, and if she was tired, she had a hard time focusing, but for the most part she got along okay.

Terri could communicate verbally, but she couldn't hear anything, she had to be facing the person to catch what they said. Her Father had told her that she had selective hearing and that had made her furious. She couldn't hear anything not even really loud things, and to have him say that had really made her angry.

Turning off the lamp in the living room she crossed the deserted house. The hallway to the stairs was dark, but Terri knew her way through the house, they had moved in when she was ten years old. She moved through the dark house with confidence, there was nothing in the house to run into, or that would hurt her, unless it was human.

The front door was locked, as she expected it to be, and she started up the stairs to her bedroom. The faint moonlight cast shadows through the front windows, strange patterns were made by the shifting tree branches. Quite abruptly she lost her confidence, and a strange feeling came over her when she reached the landing to the second flight of stairs, a feeling that there was someone up in the hallway above. She couldn't see anybody, but she could feel it, as though a sixth sense was warning her that someone was there. Goose bumps ran across her arms.

She could feel someone's presence. With one foot on the first step she tried to

rationalize that it was only the shadows - maybe the wind was seeping into the house, giving it a faint chill, but the upstairs hall gaped like a decaying doorway to an ancient mausoleum full of black and terrible secrets. Max still stood by her, but she could see, from his movements in the shallow moonlight, that he was growling.

Her heart was beating hard, she didn't want to die, if there was a robber in the house with her there was no telling what would happen. Terri's breath was coming quickly in ragged gasps and she couldn't control it, she started backing down the stairs. She knew that she couldn't turn her back on what was up there. No, not what, it wasn't a what, but a who, she couldn't let her imagination create demons. She had to be strong, there was no way she'd give anyone the upper hand, she wouldn't give them the slightest chance to hurt her.

Her hand glided across the cool wallpaper and made contact with the light switch, with a quick frightened movement she flipped on the light and stood frozen where she was, staring up at the top of the stairs. She was ready to jump the remaining flight of stairs to the main floor, but the hallway upstairs was empty. Nobody stood there with a heavy gun or a sharp knife, stalking her. The upper hall and staircase was totally empty. Max had lost interest and was nosing about the front door. A minute ago he had seemed very interested. What had happened? She snapped her fingers, to catch his attention. He just looked at her with his friendly inquisitive gaze. She looked up at the hall again. Yes the feeling was gone, and her eyes told her the truth there wasn't anyone in the house with her, yet, she had known that to begin with and that hadn't stopped her fear.

They went upstairs and Terri could see that the shallow hallway leading to her bedroom, was empty. She tried to pawn her fear off as just a figment of her imagination, but why had Max reacted? Grasping the icy door knob to her bedroom, she was filled with an irrational fear that clung to her like the clutching fingers of the dying. What if there was someone in her room? She swung the door open and flipped on the light.

Her room was empty. Tall shadows lurked in the stairwell where she had just turned off the light; they seemed to move. Catching her breath she made one last inspection of the dark hallway before shutting her bedroom door behind her. The house had to be empty, she chided herself. Her imagination was running away with her, it was late and she needed to get some sleep.

"Nothing's in the house with us is there boy?" Max trotted across the room and sat down by her feet and looked up at her. Terri smiled, he looked so earnest.

"There can't be anybody in here. Everything's locked up." She tried to push her fear away, but it's unconnected tendrils moved in from the clinging shadows. There probably never had been anything, or anyone in the hallway, maybe just a cat on the sloping roof outside the bathroom.

Despite all of her common sense her fear seemed to be a nuclear reactor inside her, continually being rekindled and rebuilt. The bedroom door seemed flimsy, there was something strange about it, it seemed as though it wasn't quite solid. Not that she could see through it, but it didn't seem to represent any kind of a barricade against her fear, it was as though the source of her fear had located her and was seeping through

the cracks around the door.

With one hand she rubbed her forehead as she moved away from the door, she was afraid of what lay behind it, and her head had started to hurt. Not a tension headache, or stress it was getting worse fast. She had heard of migraines, she had never had one but from what she had heard of them this was what they felt like. Pain had knotted in her forehead and was tightening into a throbbing knot, the pale lamp light was too bright, and she had to squint against it.

Fear still tingled at the back of her neck as the pain kept building in her forehead, distracting her. Her bedroom seemed cold, she could feel her heart beating harder as her fear chilled her. She couldn't think straight - her eyes refused to focus on anything. With shaking hands she tried to sit down on her bed, and almost fell. The headache was throbbing and growing.

Max was watching her curiously and she knelt down on the rug and put her arms around him, but the movement hurt and she got back up onto the bed. She laid down, what was wrong with her? Was she sick? She couldn't think about it right now, the headache hurt too much she couldn't concentrate on anything.

Terri was cold and the headache was crippling she wanted to pull the covers over her head, to keep the light out of her eyes. Shivering she reached for the quilt and wrapped it around her shoulders, she had to turn of the light, it hurt her eyes, but her fear still gripped her and she didn't want to be in the dark yet.

The roller coaster ride of fear she had taken while she was coming upstairs scared her, somehow there had to be a legitimate source of her fear. She sensed that

her fear was seeded in a primal form, her instinct had raised the hackles of her fear, something had been in her house, she was scared.

The pain spread to the back of her head and she tried desperately to stay awake. Exhausted and frightened she sat up, shivering. Max hopped up onto the end of the bed and laid down. There couldn't be anything, or anyone in the house, at least not anymore. Max would be upset if there was. Not anymore? What was she thinking? There hadn't been anyone there to begin with.

Usually Max was aware of everything that was going on, he wasn't a nervous dog, but at the call of the doorbell he would bound to the front door barking, even when she got home he would go crazy with his immediate barking. No, if there was someone in the house Max would have announced it long ago. He had established his own ritual when he had discovered she couldn't hear his barking anymore, he now would nip at her feet or nudge her hand until he had her attention and then race to the door, or the phone, or whatever had him excited.

Pulling on a pair of thick white socks and her red plaid, flannel nightshirt, she got into bed. The sheets were unpleasantly cold and reminded her of the wind outside. She pulled the blankets closer around her and tried to stop shivering. The wind was rushing through the tree branches tossing them as storm clouds gathered near. Cold as a frozen grave, the disconsolate wind continued to disturb the intense night, moving loose papers, and leaves through the darkness. The majestic stars so far away seemed to bristle against the black velvet sky. All around shadows moved. Terri got up and went to her window to close the blinds.

Lights glittered from the valley floor as though a bottle of ethereal sequins had been dropped and never bothered with. The mountain peaks stood harshly black, rugged against the navy blue sky, disturbed only by an unearthly wash of moonbeams that glowed with a colorless light. It was late, Terri could see shadows darting to and fro across the sheer curtains, branches moving in the wind outside her window. She shut the blinds and went back to bed, pulled down the covers and then got in.

Terri couldn't get to sleep. Sometimes she wished that she didn't notice small things like moving shadows, it made her nervous, and being in the house alone didn't help either. Her parents were in Europe somewhere, most likely in Germany by now, they would be gone until early spring.

Terri lay awake, the pain from the headache was easing now, and she stared at the wallpaper, forgetting the dates and facts that she had just studied for her history class and instead she wondered about the presence that she had felt. Her brow was furrowed and her eyes were wide open as she stared at her wooden desk across the room.

The pain in her head had eased, but a painful headache still throbbed as she tried to think about what could have been in the house. Nothing made sense, and thinking about it only made her head hurt worse. She tried to think about something more pleasant and her first thought was of the bright tulip farms near her Grandmother's home in Holland, but those pleasant memories didn't last, she was thinking of the shadows in the hall outside her bedroom within five minutes. Her next thoughts were of Michael, and then her heart began to ache as painfully as her head.

She could still see his warm intelligent brown eyes, his dark hair, and his ready smile. Sometimes when she was discouraged, she wanted nothing more than to call him, but what would his response be? Now almost seven months later? He had said if she were willing to move to Cairo that he wanted to marry her, but that was an ultimatum, and she didn't go for those.

She frowned remembering how much of a handicap she had felt her lack of hearing would be in Cairo where she didn't even know the first language, and the sign language would be different as well. Now she wondered. What would have happened if she had gone? Should she call him? Her parents would never know, she'd pay the long distance bill long before they were home. She had gone out with a couple of guys from the University since she and Michael had broken up, but nothing serious had developed.

She longed to talk to Michael, but she fought the urge, he was half the world away and probably had a girlfriend, or maybe even a wife by now. She could wait a while, but she didn't deny herself the possibility to call him later.

Her lamp was still on and she knew that she'd have to turn it off. She didn't want to be in the dark, but she chided herself, nothing in the dark could hurt her, besides Max would notice if there was anything wrong. Her hand was shaking as she reached out and switched her lamp off. She pulled up the bed covers around her shoulders and she noticed that the small, light censored, night light, under her desk, was already glowing.

She had felt foolish needing the night light but, after the nightmare she had last

week she had somehow needed it to chase the shadows back, to let her sleep, she had almost forgotten the reason for it, until tonight. She fell asleep escaping the pain of her headache in the comfort of the warm covers.

Terri woke abruptly, twisted in the sheets, and blankets, panicking. Realization came quickly that she had only been dreaming. She tried to calm her breathing, her forehead held a fine sheen of perspiration that cooled quickly as she readjusted the sheets and blankets. The night was terribly silent now, she shivered, she had heard the wind in her dream again. The intense silence was a shock after the loud wind. There was only the silence. She didn't remember her dreams very often, and even less often did she dream in sound.

Terri was freezing, she flipped at the blankets trying to straighten them back out. With a wretched feeling of fear she pulled the covers up over her shoulders and let her eyes search the darkness around her. This was getting to be a habit, this quick search of the shadows. She hated it.

The night wasn't entirely dark, the moon was bright outside, the storm must have passed by; the shadows in her room held no secrets. Upset and alone she was uncomfortable in the semi-darkness and she switched on the lamp. What was it about the darkness? This was a new fear, one from childhood, resurfacing.

She felt especially alone with her parents out of town and being alone in the house. Autumn had always seemed to her to be a lonely time anyway, a time of change and passing. The house was empty, the basement was empty except for her father's den and books, the guest room with a few boxes of old clothes, and there was a

bar in the family room with the TV. The dark niche under the stairs held only a of couple spider webs, her skis, boxes and the safe, she rarely went down there. The main floor was where she spent most of her time, the living room and the kitchen took up most of the main floor.

Upstairs, the second floor held her room, her parents empty room, the second empty guest room, and the bathroom. The only occupied room in the big empty house was hers. Her only company was the shadows that crowded the empty rooms like unearthly visitors.

Max was asleep. Terri's alarm clock read 3:15 a.m., the hour that she had managed to sleep had been crowded with the strange dream. She had had the dream before it was the same one from last week, and it scared her, she couldn't remember details, only shadows, darkness and the wind. The dream had been loud. She had heard a forceful wind rushing around through the shadows that had filled her dream. Terri wanted to know what was happening to her, she rarely dreamed in sound. The shadows and wind from her dream frightened her.

The soft light, of her bedside lamp, glowed gently from the top of her dresser unmasking the shadows. Terri lay under her covers, confused and frightened.

FOUR

Michael took a deep breath, trying to clear his mind so he could focus on the Brunswick file, but he was interrupted by the doorbell. He looked up, startled out of his thoughts, who was at the door? He wasn't expecting anyone. Automatically he stood up to go to the door, but he paused when he reached the hallway. The darkness seemed to be holding its breath, and the shadows cloaked everything.

What was his problem? So what - a dark hallway, but he could feel his fear spreading down his back like ice water. Clenching his fists he tried not to be frightened, but he couldn't help it. He couldn't stop the primal fear that was washing over him - he knew that he couldn't go into the darkness.

The darkness seemed to be a black hole, absorbing the light from the den. Michael had to walk through the darkness to get to the door, he had to make it at least to the light switch in the hall, it was only a yard away. He was sweating, and clenching and unclenching his hands. What was he so afraid of? He left his office, plunging into the darkened hallway before he lost his nerve. The shadows quickly engulfed him as

he ran his hand along the hallway. Immediately he identified the light switch and flipped the switch; the hallway was flooded with light. He stood in the hallway supporting himself, his hands resting against the wall, he could feel hopelessness fighting to surface, what was wrong with him? The doorbell rang again, he had to get the door before they left. Michael went to the entrance hall and pressed the intercom.

"Hello?" He knew his voice was shaking, he was cold.

"Michael, it's Marsa." Her voice sounded cheerful, she always seemed to be happy. He grinned, relieved, at least it wasn't anyone from the office.

"Hi! Come on up." How did she ever manage to do anything for herself? She was always running something by for his dinner. His housekeeper was the closest thing to a friend he had; maybe she sensed that. He couldn't help smiling as the elevator hummed.

"Michael," Marsa, smiled warmly as she stepped out of the elevator, followed by her husband Ahamad. She was holding a brown paper bag that smelled of meat, and onions. The elevator doors closed quietly behind them. Un-veiled as usual, but otherwise modestly dressed in pale blue, cotton-crepe, Marsa looked at him with worried eyes. She and her husband were members of the Muslim religion, as were well over three fourths of Egypt's population. Her brown eyes were alive with concern for him.

"You look pale! How are you?"

"Okay." He could see that she didn't believe him. Her eyes showed her worry.

"It's just been a long day. You didn't have to bring me dinner." Michael smiled,

hoping to ease her worry. He was sure that she had seen the dark rings under his eyes. He knew that he didn't look well. For the last couple of weeks he hadn't been able to look himself in the eye, in the bathroom mirror. He had almost forgotten how lousy he looked.

"You haven't eaten have you?" She looked at her watch, and he knew it was well after eight now, he had missed tea, and he didn't have any plans for dinner yet.

Grinning he said, "No."

"Well, then?" She held out the food.

He gave in and accepted the paper bag with a smile.

"Thanks. You know, maybe you should try to make some money as a psychic - you always seem to know when I haven't had anything to eat." She nodded, smiling, and tucked her straight gray-black hair behind her ear.

"We would be millionaires by now." Ahamad said laughing. He shook Michael's hand and then headed back to the elevator.

"Can't you stay for a cup of coffee or would you like to sit down and visit for a few minutes?"

"No thanks Michael. We're going by Lisa's house. David our new grandchild is keeping her busy." Ahamad said with a smile.

"Ah, well I see your hurry then. Give Lisa my best, and thanks for dinner, it'll be great to have a hot meal!"

"I'll see you next Monday, and call us if you need anything." Marsa said, her eyes still showing her worry as the elevator doors closed. Then Michael was alone

again. His condominium didn't seem to be his haven anymore, as it had seemed when he had first moved in. He glanced into the living room, the well padded couch looked comfortable, but the open room, filled with shadows made him not want to eat in there. He had spent many nights on that couch while he was in college, reading through his homework and eating dinner, but now he had no desire to be in the open living room, there were to many shadows.

A rich, hearty aroma was emanating from the bag and he realized that he was hungrier than he had thought. He crossed the living room to the kitchen and opened the bag to find fool mudhammas, spiced lamb, and a cinnamon pastry. He set the plate of food on the bar counter and started to eat.

The meal was as good as the aroma had suggested, but halfway through dinner he paused, his fork halfway to his mouth, his eyes were drawn to the window. Curiosity, and fear held him as he gazed out at the night shrouded city.

The skyline of Cairo was magical. A hazy, dark blue night had descended, and the city was bejeweled by millions of lights. He stood up and opened the window, a cool dry breeze blew in. The night was hazy, but he could see stars dotting the sky in familiar constellations that his grandfather had taught him when he was a child. The Nile's dark waters caught the city's light and reflected it with an out of focus glow.

Nothing else seemed to matter, nothing, but the night outside the window. The shimmering city lights held him as though he were under a spell. The glowing lights vaguely reminded him of the light he had seen at his window earlier, he leaned back in his chair, and watched the city's glowing lights reflecting on the water.

A few minutes later Michael broke from the trance, his dinner was still on the plate, but now it was cold. He hadn't eaten everything, but he was no longer hungry, he wrapped up what was left and put it into the fridge. Whatever was happening to him, he didn't like. He didn't trust himself anymore to say that he was okay. Fear clenched tightly in his neck with a choking feeling. What if his problem was psychological?

With the Brunswick file in hand he went into the living room and lay down on the sofa. A faint glimmer of his old intrigue with an upcoming case emerged as he studied the unanswered interrogatories. He had research to do, and no time for the games his imagination was playing.

The computer hacker evidently had no conscious, the kid had broken into Compu-Ware's Intranet and then the Remote Access Server that the companies contract programmers used to transfer and store completed files. The kid had broken in just for the thrill of it - well that was all it had been at first. Brunswick had learned to like the taste of cyber freedom, no unknown passwords – at least with Compu-ware, he had started stealing computer files.

Brunswick had used a friend working for the phone company, in New York, to re-route his calls, so that it would look as though they were coming from somewhere else – namely a pay phone in another country. Then he had been able to call and hack Compu-Ware's system in downtown Cairo as frequently as he had wished, and as Michael had done his research he had discovered just how much time the kid had spent.

Brunswick had basically spent almost all night starting after dinnertime, until three or four in the morning trying to get a valid password to the RAS, this had gone on for a month before the kid had hit the jackpot - a valid password that matched an employees name. Brunswick had gone "trashing" outside the Cairo branch of CompuWare, searching through the dumpster behind the company's building, looking for employee names, and possibly, if they hadn't been shredded, an employee password to the network.

The kid's friend at the phone company had been nervous about the whole situation. Brunswick like many hackers, liked to boast, and he had gone into detail, to his friend explaining just what he was doing. His "friend" had gone to the police with the details. Brunswick's friend had been afraid that he would lose his job, and he had never thought that his friend was trying to break the law. Michael sighed, was the kid at the phone company naive or just stupid? Why else would the kid's friend want his calls rerouted?

Despite the constant reminder that people didn't care about each other most of the time, Michael loved his work as a prosecuting attorney. His motivation was simply a desire for justice, a passion that led him into his most eloquent of attacks, he became fierce, arguing points strongly. He knew the power of language, and he had practiced many times in front of the mirror. Michael knew that he came across aggressively, but earlier in the day he hadn't been able to convince the jury.

Michael spoke both the Egyptian language of Arabic, and English. Depending on where the cases venue was he would use the appropriate language. His form was

to methodically stuff the elements of the crime back down the defendants throat so he could choke on what he had done, while pointing out to the jury how the elements of the crime fit the elements of the law. Usually he was good at his job. Today he had been lousy.

Michael had hurried through the research for the case that had gone to trial that morning, and had not gone over the defense in detail. He was still angry with himself for what he saw as laziness, having missed a point in the case meant that the thief went to jail with a much smaller fine than he would have had to pay. The thief had ripped off an international long distance company for 15,000 dollars through calling on stolen account numbers, and giving the access codes out to his friends. The guy would have been in jail a lot longer or at least be paying for hie excess, but for Michael's own short sightedness.

William Palk, one of the law firm's senior partners had been lingering in the background, watching Michael's every case since he had joined the firm. Will had a uncanny way of finding out when Michael had lost a case, before Michael had even reached the office. Will had perfected his lectures. He would walk calmly into Michael's office and sit down in one of the chairs meant for clients, cross his legs and straighten out the wrinkles in his slacks - then he'd look up at Michael as though he couldn't believe how stupid he was - then the lecture would come.

Michael had lost one other case and he had endured Will's lecture, today though, Michael had already had enough. With his mounting fears underlying the case that he had just lost, he had barely been able to maintain his temper. Instead of

slugging Will in the stomach, Michael had clenched his teeth and stared him in the eye.

Will's lectures made Michael feel horrible - as though he didn't have a clue of why he had lost the case, and how he could have avoided losing it. As soon as Michael had left court, the "what ifs?" had started crowding his mind. What if he had said -this-, would it have made a difference? Today he knew that he had totally botched up, he had missed a major point.

Now one of his pending cases, Compu-Ware was counting on him to come through for them, to somehow have justice seen. He couldn't let his personal problems ruin the case he was presenting. He'd talk to Kyle, his law clerk on Monday, and have him follow up on the case. They'd meet to go over what Kyle had found the following Friday. Michael felt better having made the decision for back up help on the case.

He glanced away from the file, the bookshelves across the room were catching the lamp light in a soft glow, from the polish Marsa gave them twice a week. He spent many lonely evenings reading books, his bookshelves were filled mostly with pulp paper backs that he had picked up. Every shelf, except the bottom shelf, was packed at least two books deep, the bottom shelf held his antiques.

The antique books were as old as 1845, they had made it through more than one persons troubled life and that was a comfort to Michael. The old books were grounded to reality, and it made him feel better just looking at them, knowing that they were real, and that the stories and information inside them were old, and had helped more people than just him.

He knew the titles of most of his Father's books in London, his Father had a

similar passion for books, but Michael doubted that he would ever go home again. Not after the fight in the kitchen on Lawning Street. What a mess, he had said things to his Father that morning that he was sure he would never be forgiven for. He still felt angry. His Father hadn't been listening to a word he had said.

"What about my Mother!"

"She has been dead three months Michael, and your shouting most certainly will not bring her back."

"But, if you had taken her back to Egypt, she might still be alive."

"Might, and I didn't. I will not accept the blame that you are trying to lay on me Michael. I suggest you drop this immediately."

"Didn't you even care?"

His Father and he were eye level, man to man. He could tell that his Father would have slapped him had he not thought about the fight that would surely follow.

His Father had glared at him and walked out of the room. Michael knew that his Father had loved his Mother, but why had he been so stubborn about taking her home? Michael felt cold now. He didn't think that he would ever see his Father again, and he felt a painful sadness at the realization.

His condominium was on the thirteenth floor, the top floor of the Desert Blossom Condominiums in Cairo. He sat on the couch, very alone. Michael was grateful for the opportunity to practice law with the international law firm, who had a small branch in Cairo, but he was unsure of himself now. He didn't know where his confidence at presenting a case had gone. The clients came to him because he was a professional,

a specialist in the field of computers, but this morning he had lost the case. He didn't like to lose.

For the past two months he had been questioning himself, why had he come to Cairo? The city was big, the heat ever present, and the poor a common sight. There were no hills to go hiking through, no rugged cliffs to climb, no mountains. How had he thought he could survive in such a city?

He had climbed the great pyramid as a boy, and now he only yearned for real mountains to climb. He wanted to get away from the grayish brown city and the desert. Mountains covered with pine trees, and sheltered meadows filled with wild flowers seemed worlds away. How much longer could he stay in Cairo? He didn't know.

Michael set the Brunswick file down on the coffee table. The energy was drained from him. Exhausted, he went to his room and toppled onto the bed, maybe he needed a vacation. Maybe nothing, he knew he did need a vacation. Then inconveniently he remembered that he was still in his light weight slacks, Ralph Lauren oxford and tie. Damn it, if he cared about the canary yellow, silk tie. Let it get rumpled.

He didn't get up, he let his muscles relax and the day fall away, back to the office and court room, and for once he didn't think about his dark fears. Sleep welcomed him with gentle arms and left his worries to his conscious self.

From the edges of sleep he realized that he was not alone, somehow he sensed a presence. Michael sensed that something was coming, he recognized it and he didn't want it to arrive. He shifted in his sleep.

Why this dream? The dream that he had suffered through alone, as a child. No

one had ever have believed him about the dreams, he had quit telling people about it.

His Mom had laughed gently, assuring him that there was no such thing as the bogey man, but he knew differently.

The air around him grew uncomfortably cold and he was nowhere. Not in a forest glen, or in the desert, just nowhere. Darkness whispered all around him and terror started edging it's way up his spine with cold dead hands. The presence wasn't there yet. If he could just wake up!

His breathing grew choppy and he rolled onto his side, but still the grasping hands of sleep held him in their entombing embrace.

The thing was coming for him now. Coming for him out of the blackness of his dream, he could feel the cold air prickling as it parted. From where his dream came he didn't know, but it could have been from the depths of hell.

No! He had to wake up, he wouldn't wait, he'd wake up now!

Terror seeped into his mind, and Michael trembled in his sleep. Who was after him? Was it a man, or was it a demon ascending from the seeds of the night, stalking him through his dreams?

The partition between dream and reality shifted and he blinked awake, confused and disoriented. He sat up, his eyes still unfocused, his breathing rapid and uncontrolled. He was shaking. Looking around quickly, in the dusky light of the bedroom he discovered what he already knew, that he was alone. The bedside lamp was on, casting a warm glow over the wood floored bedroom.

His head was aching in a tight knot had formed in the center of his forehead.

Despite the nagging pain he realized that as always after the dream maybe he wasn't as alone as he supposed. He could never shake the feeling of being watched after the dream, it was like a lingering bogeyman in the shadows. Someone seemed to be watching his response to the dream, watching the aftermath of his terror. He could feel the unseen eyes staring at him from the hazy shadows of his bedroom.

What the hell was going on with him? Couldn't he have a night's peace, without irrational fear drowning him in insanity? First the terrible light, and then the dream, for God's sake he was a grown man couldn't he control his fear? As Michael left his bedroom the unseen eyes seemed to follow him to the kitchen, where he downed a mug of old coffee, black and bitter, just how he felt.

FIVE

He awoke in darkness, his body felt different, as though he was not used to having one. He didn't know who he was. At the moment he didn't really care who he was. The room was dark, and cool, and he lay awake in the darkness. For a moment he wondered why he didn't know who he was, but he wasn't able to muster enough enthusiasm to even think about what might have happened to him.

He didn't remember who he was, but he could tell that something was wrong, but it didn't really seem to matter. He was aware and alive and that was enough. A strange tingling was running through his body as though it were asleep. He clenched his right fist, the tingling was faintly annoying, but the tingling didn't stop, so he released the fist.

There was something nagging him from the mists of his memory, but he felt devoid of emotion, he wasn't worried. In fact he had never felt more incapable of worrying about anything, let alone caring about anything.

There was something about his perception, his eyesight seemed different. Were

his eyes damaged? He didn't feel any apprehension, just academic interest. The darkness he was in felt comfortable. Slowly an awareness began dawning on him, he *had* died. He didn't remember how he had died, and he felt no elation at having survived. He was alive and what had gone before no longer mattered. Sitting up he found that he became more aware of how cold his body felt.

A thick fog seemed to hover in his mind, covering the majority of his memory and all of his emotions. At the moment he didn't want to bother thinking about that or about what might be causing it.

The room in which he had been placed, by... who had placed him in the room? Wasn't there a young man, who had helped him? Yes, yes he was sure of it. What was his name? Well, it didn't really matter.

The floor was cold on his feet and he stood up testing the control he had over his body. Looking up, he saw a young man standing in the doorway. Was that the boy who had helped him? He wondered briefly and dismissed the thought, and began to move around the room, gaining confidence in his movement.

"Master?"

He stopped. The word seemed familiar, and the voice as well, the sound lingered in his mind. Master? The boy was talking to him then? Why was the boy standing there staring at him anyway?

"I am not your mas-ter." He choked on the last word, his mouth tasted bitter, he decided that he did not like to talk.

"You... uh, you..." He stared the at the boy who was frowning with worry, the boy

stopped talking. He wondered for a moment why the boy had called him "Master", but the mists that were seeping through his mind had covered his memories.

The boy had mistaken him for someone else. He stood up as straight as he could, he wanted to leave, and he wanted the boy out of his way. He started walking toward the boy, whose face paled as he approached, and then the boy retreated into the dark hallway. The boy was gone when he reached the hallway.

The shadows felt good to him, the darkness seemed very comfortable. He did not have to wonder, or worry, or think, he would just walk for a while, in the dark.

SIX

Tall shadows filled the corners of Terri's bedroom, making her feel as though she were an alien in her own room. The top of her dresser was covered with small figurines and souvenirs that her parents had brought her home after every trip. It had been a tradition that her parents had started when she was very young. Her dresser held a miniature of the Great Pyramid, a geode from Mexico, but also souvenirs from the trips that they had taken together, a porcelain killer whale from Sea World, a tiny bottle of salsa from New Mexico and a chunk of salt crystal from the Great Salt Lake.

Her room was as familiar as anything in the world, her old Raggedy Ann was nestled away on her closet shelf and her favorite novels were gathered on the small bookshelves beside her window, but the darkness made her room seem unfamiliar.

Terri's bed moved slightly and she looked down to see Max trying to find a more comfortable position. His normal doggy attitude of - I'm too tired to worry about it, made Terri smile. Max laid his head down on his paws and Terri reached out and scratched

his ears.

He was such a good dog. They had been friends for so many years. Max's eyes were closing as she scratched his ears, it was his very favorite thing in the world to have his ears scratched. As long as she had Max around everything would be okay. Feeling a little better she lay back down in bed. Within the next few minutes Max was breathing heavily, with a snore here and there.

Terri's fear began creeping back out from where it had retreated a moment ago, and she pulled the covers up around her shoulders. Half shut, ivory blinds that hung behind her sheer curtains sliced the full moon into even portions. The moon light was glowing through wispy clouds above the craggy mountain peaks. She was so tired, and the pain from the headache had totally drained her of all her energy. Her fear wasn't helping anything, but she couldn't just drop it into a hidden pocket of her brain and go to sleep. A chill seemed to spread through her room, but she wasn't sure if it was her imagination or if it was real.

After laying awake, for a few minutes, examining the flowered wall paper that covered her room, she decided to try and get some sleep. Taking a deep breath she turned off her lamp and snuggled beneath the covers. The bed moved slightly as Max moved again, and slowly the fear began to drip away as though she had been frozen in lake water and was slowly thawing out.

Having Max around was great, she couldn't have asked for a better friend. He had a lot of personality for a dog, and he always was there when she was happy and sad - and scared. The house didn't seem quite so empty and haunted with him around.

After lying awake in the dark room for what seemed an eternity, she relaxed under her warm covers and dropped off to sleep.

Terri slept until ten the next morning and she woke to diluted morning sunshine glowing in, through the blinds, at her window. The pale light illuminated her room gently and Terri went to the window, pulling the blinds up, looking out at the nearby mountain peaks. The morning looked clear, but when Terri looked westward she could see black storm clouds looming miles away over the Great Salt Lake. The clouds were casting long grey shadows over the islands in the lake, and over the open land that held weeds and railroad tracks beyond the city. Max had padded over to the door, he was ready to go out.

Maybe the storm that the weatherman had promised for last night would arrive today. With the sun up Terri felt better, her fears had receded into the shadows of the night. She might even enjoy it if the storm came; autumn often brought dramatic thunderstorms to Utah. Terri turned away from the dusty autumn colors that held the city and opened the bedroom door so that Max could run downstairs and escape out the dog door in the kitchen.

The morning had always been the best time of her day, she usually took a few minutes to savor the true beauty of each startlingly fresh morning. She never grew tired of the pale glow of morning, the pink sunrises, even the pale white glows that didn't have much color in the depths of winter.

After starting the coffee to brew she opened the sliding door and let Max out. The backyard was windblown and the air smelled of earth and leaves, she stretched

inhaling the cool morning air. The nearby mountain sides showed large red patches of autumn colors.

After a few minutes of fresh air she went back inside and changed into her stretch shorts and a T-shirt to do aerobics. Her worries and stresses fell to the side as she worked out. She could often lose track of time while she exercised. Terri felt recharged and ready for anything after exercising - strong enough to face up to any challenge.

Terri felt this special charge of energy especially after she had been hiking, she came back with a fresh perspective, as though the mountains were some kind of buff-puff on her soul.

Terri's Mother had discovered her interest in dance when she was very young, before she had become deaf. Years had been spent after school three days a week at dance studios learning and perfecting ballet techniques, while her Sunday mornings had been spent with her Father, hiking in the nearby canyons. It had been during her father's archeological dig deep in the Egyptian desert, she had lost her hearing.

She had felt so lonely after she had lost her hearing, and the silence had been terribly hard to cope with, but to add to her misery her Father had been upset - he had to come home in the middle of the dig. He had worked his whole life trying to locate the temple, the Temple built by Imhotep, one of the greatest ancient architects. She had interrupted the discovery of the temple, she felt as though she had somehow ruined the whole experience for him. Ever since she had gone deaf there had been a barrier between them. They didn't know how to communicate with each other anymore - they

just kept growing farther apart.

After the sudden loss of her hearing, unexplainable by the doctors, she had become depressed. Eventually her fascination with the world had pulled her back out of her depression. She was charmed by flowers, and she always paused when she could to check for the sunset, a baby's hand around her pinkie finger would always bring a smile to her face.

Her loss of hearing hadn't meant a loss of rhythm, but she had decided to quit ballet. Now Terri worked out to aerobic video tapes, which she alternated to keep her workouts interesting. It was no lifestyle change to spend her afternoons as a recluse in her own world of movement. The thought that there would be no more ballet class, occasionally struck a raw nerve, but she had found her way around it and now she was enrolled in a aerobic class at the University. Her first dance class since becoming deaf.

The class at the University had frightened her at first, but she watched the movement of those around her and managed to catch the rhythm of the beat from the other students. The music was loud and everybody's feet stomping caused the floor to vibrate with the beat, which she could easily follow.

When she had started at the University or Utah she had decided that she wanted to become a physical therapist, she still had a long way to go, but she loved to learn new things. School had always been a positive experience, and it wasn't any different now, but the classes demanded more studying time, in order to pull good grades.

* * * * *

Max was sitting by his water dish in the kitchen. The sun was bright. He was lonely. Terri wasn't home very much. Cream colored linoleum covered the kitchen floor, it was cold. The whole house was cold. Max laid his head down on his paws, he could see the dining room through the open door.

There was a smell. A sudden strange smell. Was there something in there? A mouse or a spider? No, so what was the smell then? Max sniffed at the air, but the smell had disappeared again. Was someone playing a game? Had Terri come downstairs? He jumped up, and sniffed the air, he took a step forward to see.

He stopped after two more steps. The dining room was dark, and shadows seemed to be making their homes there. He laid his ears back and growled. This was not normal.

Max studied the air in the doorway intently. It suddenly twisted with a arc of static, then it moved and quivered. Terri wasn't downstairs yet. He was sure it wasn't her. He didn't want to walk through the doorway anymore.

He could smell the dead smell again, but it wasn't very strong. The light in the doorway didn't shine very brightly, but it refused to be ignored. Like a neighborhood kid on a bike ready to run you over.

There was nothing there, but yet there was. He growled low and deep to show that he meant business. Max didn't like the light, he had the same feeling as he had had the night before in the hallway.

The light stopped. Max took a step forward and sniffed the air. All trace of the

dead smell had vanished. There was nothing in the air now. Max padded back over to his water dish and drank.

* * * * *

Terri burst into the kitchen with her brush in her hand trying to get the last of her long blonde curls brushed out. Max sat out of the way while she stuffed her brush into her gym bag and picked up her history book from the kitchen table. She let Max out and filled his food and water bowls and then locked the house behind her.

Her old Volkswagen Rabbit started up with a cloud of smoke unfurling behind it, giving the impression that it might need a day at the mechanics, but it was a reliable car and it hadn't quit on her yet. Terri backed out of the open air garage and headed down the autumn clad hill, toward the University.

The small parking lot behind the library was brimming with cars, but she found a spot to park near a large shady hedge. Jogging up the front lawn she entered the large stone building. The clouds continued their battle against the sun, and they were victorious allowing no more sunshine to light the early afternoon sky. The black storm clouds churned and moved bitterly across the ceiling of the sky, while wind tossed the few September leaves through the campus. Orange and red leaves clung to the bushes and fences in desperation against the coming of winter. The campus was crowded and probably would be until about nine or ten o'clock that night.

Terri waved at Wade, who was sitting at the front desk. As she set her bag

under the information counter she noticed that the library was fairly quiet, with only a few students crossing to various sections.

"How's it going?" he asked her.

"Okay, I suppose. How are you?"

"Great, can I tell you about how much fun I'm having at work today?" He was grinning.

"No, that's okay."

He laughed, "Okay, then let me give you some books that I've been saving for you to put away. Yeah, I know, don't you feel special, but I couldn't find where they belonged and you're so much better at finding where books go." He smiled with as much fake charm as he could.

She gave him a sarcastic grin, and went in search of the pile of books. The door to the office was open and she passed Wade when she entered the office to punch in.

"Looks like a storms coming in." Wade said trying to keep the conversation going. Terri shrugged, the thought of a coming storm really didn't bother her.

Gathering the pile of returned books, onto a cart, she started out into the vast labyrinth of the University Library.

Her afternoon passed quickly and she used her fifteen minute break to brush up on her reading assignment for History. The chapter focused on ancient Egypt and the time of the pharaohs, she was intrigued by the familiar topics, that her Father had studied for so long.

Terri was warm to the subject just from reading the small chapter heading.

Memories of the dig that her father had led only a few years earlier surfaced. Her Father had headed an archeological group made up of archaeologists from the University of Utah, and the University of Bagorn in England. The dig had uncovered Imhotep's Temple of the Sun. Terri was well versed in most ancient Egyptian history thanks to her Father.

The test might not be too bad because of this, but she studied what seemed to be key ideas and vocabulary that might pop up later in class. After getting back to work Terri noticed that the shadows seemed darker than usual in the rows between the shelves. Something in the reading had unnerved her, but she didn't know what it was.

Terri's shift was over at five, and she grabbed her jacket and bag leaving the library and heading across the cold campus toward the dance building for her aerobic class.

People were already there donned in spandex and T-shirts stretching out. A couple of her friends waved to her as she slipped past them into the dressing room to pull on her work out clothes.

Wearing pale pink spandex and a light blue tie-dye shirt, she left the dressing room and pulled her light blonde hair up into a ponytail and left it curling down her back. She was ready to work off some of her nervous energy. As she tied her Nikes, she could feel the beat of the music vibrating through the floor.

For the next hour she and her classmates learned a couple of new moves and worked out, hard. After class Terri washed her face and pulled on a pair of cut off sweats, over her tights, and a bulky navy blue sweatshirt. There was no time to go

home for dinner so she stopped at the Food Dungeon for a sandwich.

The sun had almost set, it was sinking into the Great Salt Lake, casting apricot flags into the veil of purple twilight. Shadows were growing in the dim sunset and the porch light from the Nelson Building was dim and didn't do much to light the front steps of the large foreboding stone building. Leaves littered the wide stone steps not caring where they settled. Terri ran up the steps, in a hurry to escape the coming darkness, and hoping to make it to class on time.

SEVEN

Michael was sitting at his desk, it was Friday night and the sun was setting. The coming darkness preyed upon the sunset and the night held a menace that Michael didn't understand. His fear was getting worse, and tonight he felt as though something was really going to happen, something real - as though the thing in his dream might find him. Michael shivered and wondered about his fear, and why he couldn't just forget about it. There obviously was nothing to his fear, despite how real it felt, nothing had ever happened. He needed to get to a doctor, - a psychologist. Nothing was going to happen, he just needed to get a grip on himself and a doctor could help him do that.

Outside, a silhouette of a small bird broke the purple sky as it fled to its nest. The computer was on and the monitor displayed a page of text, where Michael had been making notes on the Brunswick trial. The computer desk had been Michael's desk ever since high school, it was made of oak, and was scratched up a bit, but it was familiar and a good place to get his work done. Currently, his desk was cluttered with floppy disks, computer books, and photo copies. A bankers lamp sat on the corner of

the desk near his laser printer, it's green shade was slightly askew, to allow more light out.

A small figurine of a gnome, with all the trimmings of a mountain climber, ropes, sun glasses, rubber toed shoes, stood to the side of the monitor, his little sister Beth had given it to him for Christmas two years ago. He hadn't been climbing, or hiking for so long - since last spring, and he thought that he was going to go stir crazy in the depths of the dirty city - maybe he already was.

Pine bookshelves covered half of the wall at the side of his desk, where it overflowed into stacks of vagrant books that covered the floor nearby. Michael kept books, he had a hard time throwing any away, or even giving them to charities. He spent many Saturday nights reading late into the night, and then starting up again Sunday morning, he could usually finish a book that way before Sunday afternoon, but lately he couldn't concentrate enough to get past the first page of any of the new books that he had bought.

Michael watched the city lights sparkling in the hazy night. The sun had set over fifteen minutes ago and he had been drawn to the window, compelled to watch it go. The sunset had been intense. Many shades of orange had blazed against the horizon as the sun had deserted the sky and twilight arrived.

Crossing the hallway to the living room, he went to the bookshelves near the sliding glass doors that led out to the balcony. He studied the titles of the new paperbacks, but then he sat down on the floor and traced his finger along the spines of the few antique books that he owned.

Books written in the 1800's or even during the turn of the century were beautiful to look through with age yellowed pages, although they were sometimes hard to read and many of the ideas were long proven wrong. As late as the 1950's, the books were really amusing. Ideas on how to obtain a good sex life, and another he particularly liked, for no other reason than no adult in their right mind would give such a book to their son, just based on the title, "Nuclear Experiments For Boys" the title always left him grinning.

On the floor next to the bookcase was the new book that his brother, Ross had sent him. It had arrived on Wednesday. He'd either sell it for Ross or keep it and pay him for it. After his brother had told him the book was Shakespeare, he had decided it was a keeper, but maybe it was another one of his brother's jokes. Michael picked up the package enjoying the weight of the book, he hadn't had time to open it yet, so it was still a mystery to him.

Michael started opening the package, the tape came off without ripping the paper and the small faded, burgundy book slipped out of the paper, it was Shakespeare. He couldn't help but grin. He opened the old book and gently turned through a few pages.

Michael was drawn to old things, items from different eras. He especially loved things from the French Impressionistic era. A Monet, a Gogan, and a Vangogh hung on the walls of his living room. Garden and water scenes, by Monet. Irises and Starry Night by, Vangough - and many other pieces from that era hung on the walls throughout the condominium. He had always been drawn to older things, he had a

sense of being rooted to the world, a sense of comfort when he was near antique things.

His attraction to old books, and to nature in particular seemed to stem from a deeper source, but the thought disturbed him. He thought that somehow the things that made him happy came from a dark place, as though he were an echo of another person. He didn't like to think about that.

Across the room from where he was sitting the doorway to the kitchen gaped as though it were a passageway to another dimension. He could see the pale reflection from the nearby street lamp on the tile floor.

Tall stools waited at the counter to be used and the kitchen looked calm. Nothing was in there, other than the shadows. Still Michael watched the doorway, his breathing shallow, straining to hear any movement.

Nothing.

Of course there was nothing. Especially not the weird light, now that no sunlight could dance upon whatever chance broken mirror was below. He knew that his rational of the mirror was a hollow facade of whatever had really caused the light, but it was the best reason he had been able to think of. Now the kitchen seemed to be waiting, the darkness seemed anxious.

Darkness was smothering the kitchen as he entered it. Michael refused to turn on the light. His heart was pounding and he could feel a sheen of sweat on his forehead.

He stepped past the island that held the stove. Dark shadows clustered hungrily

in the far reaches of the kitchen. What was he doing? Sneaking around his condo in the dark?

Creamy peach tiles covered the floor, and deep white counter tops followed the walls back to the pantry that was enclosed in unstained oak wood. A big woven basket was filled with dried baby's breath and had been snuggled near the wide doorway, against the wall. The room was cloaked in a whispery veil of darkness, but Michael knew his way around.

How could he have allowed himself to be distracted enough to actually go into the kitchen just to check it to make sure that it was empty? Track lighting in the living room, hung above the bookshelves and ran across the length of the wall to the hallway. The light from the living room glowed in softly through the kitchen doorway. What was he doing scoping out the kitchen in the dark?

The unarmed alarm's small light was blinking from it's station above the doorway. A lot of good that would do to save him from his fears. He gave in and switched on the kitchen light. He was still holding the book. A folded paper had slid partially out of the back flap of the book. He retrieved it, to find that it was a note from his brother, Ross;

"Michael, I found this book at an estate sale - at that old home off of North-Lund Lane near the Catholic church. Remember the cemetery behind that church? Anyway that's where I got this book. I think this ones a "keeper", enjoy!"

How could he forget the cemetery? He smiled, he had teased his little brother almost constantly about being afraid of the cemetery, until one night Ross had finally agreed to go to the cemetery after dark. Michael could still see Ross's face, angry with the taunts that he had shot at him.

They had snuck out of the house well after midnight long after their parents had gone to bed to explore the graveyard at night, at the time when spirits would most likely be roaming. Ross had been frightened and Michael had been more scared than he wanted to admit, his earlier taunts at Ross had been forgotten. After exploring the small decaying, stone marked cemetery they had both fled in terror. Ross had enjoyed the fact that Michael had not taunted him again after that. Michael's smile grew - yes he remembered the cemetery and how the two of them had collapsed with laughter in Michael's room after arriving home.

He opened the book, the title page read, "The Works of William Shakespeare" Ross had really done it, he could hardly believe he had found the book, it had been a joke between them that he would ever find any Shakespeare for him. A loose paper fell out from between the pages.

"Surprised? I was." Michael laughed feeling better than he had in a long time. He'd have some good reading material tonight. This reading he found, was a treat. He enjoyed reading literature, but he had to be in the mood for it, or he would get bored. Many times the reading became too heavy or wordy. But, he liked reading Shakespeare, and this book, despite the worn leather edges, and the age stained parchment, was a treasure.

Gently he turned the first page yellowed, page and scanned the text, then he carefully flipped the pages ahead stopping only when he came to the play Macbeth. He felt a strange surge of anticipation. Hadn't Ray Bradbury quoted something from Macbeth in one of his books? He tried to remember the title of the book, but it evaded him.

He let his eyes scan the pages and stopped as he saw the words, the title of Ray Bradbury's book.

"Something Wicked This Way Comes" He whispered the words, breaking the stillness that seemed to hold the condominium in its grasp. He shivered, but not with the delicious chills of a haunted house, but with real fear. Something was coming. He tried to deny his fear again, but the feeling that something was coming was becoming a certainty.

He remembered reading the book "Something Wicked This Way Comes" well into the night after he had purchased it at the Copper Penny, used book shop when he was just starting college. He had read until he had finished the book and he could remember the delicious shiver the quote from Macbeth had caused.

Outside the night sheltered his home as though from the angel of death but Michael didn't notice the strange feeling, he was too wrapped up in the book and he continued to scan through the play, stopping, he went back and read the quote again.

The second witch spoke;

"By the pricking of my thumbs,

Something wicked this way comes." it continued

"Open locks

Whoever knocks."

His shoulders tensed and he reread the second sentence. "Open Locks Whoever Knocks." He shut the book and sat down on a bar chair thoughtfully looking at the aged cover of the book. The lingering delight, the chill that the words may have once brought him was gone. His mind was on his dreams.

Deep in thought studying the book a feeling crept in from his unconscious, making him aware only with the slow passage of time that a dark force was out there in the night. Maybe not close enough to do any real harm, but the feeling was surfacing that maybe after all the years, just maybe there was really something out there. Maybe a psychologist couldn't help him, maybe nobody could.

Was the light real then? Was there some explanation for the light? Was it tied somehow to thing in his dreams? The fear bringer. Could the thing actually find him? Did it have the power?

This unproductive thought process did not bring any relief, only bitterness as to the harsh reality that he had been unable to escape from the dreams even as an adult. During his college Psychology class he had feared that this dark force might be an inner part of him, a horrible area of his subconscious that had found a way to surface, but he had dismissed the thought.

Somewhere deep inside he knew it wasn't a psychological problem at all, there was some aspect of this that was physically real, and separate from him.

He became unaware of the room around him, his senses became heightened.

He was not alone, his bitterness grew blacker. The thing was trying to locate him, tracking him through the busy city streets of Cairo. What did it want? Why was it invading his life?

He felt a presence near him, would he actually see the thing this time, or would it be more of the same hide and seek routine that they had played for years. He felt a weight, as light as a sheet of paper, upon his shoulders and he shivered glancing around, nothing was there. Nothing ever was there, this thing couldn't be confronted only coped with and left alone he just had to accept it.

As a teenager he had boldly, and stupidly he thought now, called to the demon or whatever it was. He could remember lying under the covers in the dark seething with rage at this unknown tormentor after one of the dreams. Why had it chosen him? Why did the thing try to find him through the dreams?

He had clenched his hands tightly and with all the energy that he had been able to muster he had created an imaginary beam of light to search through the night. It was the only thing he could think of doing, in a supernatural situation.

He had imagined a flash light beam, pure and white and he had cast it out through the night as a hunter for the demon. He had no control, and he really didn't think that it was working, but he had felt that something so dark and menacing would have to either flee or confront such a light. He imagined the globe as he had seen it in his grandmother's library and swirled the light around it.

Then in a shocking amount of pain something dark and seething with an evil rage had clamped onto the beam and started coming for him using the beam to find

him. He had been frightened and had immediately switched on his bedside lamp and opened a book to force his mind to focus on pictures on anything to forget the beam.

He had felt that if the thing could see even a glimmer of the imaginary beam he would find him, he knew that the thing would kill him. A sickening headache had accompanied his harsh break of the contact and the headache had turned into a migraine, a steady pressure building behind his forehead.

The thing had attached and tried to track him. He had been in pain as though claws had been wrenched free from his back. Michael had realized that he had been stupid to try and contact the thing.

He didn't want the thing to find him. During the contact with the thing he had realized just how badly he wanted to stay away from it. The agony and the jumbled thoughts, the images and horrors that had been thrown against his mind while the thing tried to mesh with his soul, to locate him, had frightened him. After that night he had not tried to find his tormentor.

Michael had spent the rest of the night with his reading lamp on and then in the morning he had wandered through a neighboring book shop trying to find spiritual protection from what he now thought must be a demon.

Now he knew differently too. If this was a demon then it didn't abide by God's laws. Nothing stopped it, or prevented it from contacting him.

Nothing.

Yes, the eyes were on him. The psychic presence, if that was what it was, had found him again. It was locating him quickly now and much more often than in his

childhood when he had moved about seasonally with his parents, but now it seemed to really have locked onto him and was coming.

Sickened and frightened by the memories of the spirit invading his life he now stood resolute that he would face this thing that was crippling his life.

"I'm waiting." He whispered.

Then the usual doubts started in, tormenting him, as regular as his Rolex. Did he in all actuality just need a psychologist? He hated these thoughts, but how could he believe in things that weren't real? Invisible demons, and the horrible dreams that seemed only to be pathways for them?

Pushing his thoughts away he tried to study the cover of the book noting that the damage to the corners was minimal and the leather was only worn thin in one spot, on the back. He did this mechanically, he took no pleasure in knowing the age of the book, a tie to the past.

Michael felt as though he were adrift in the night, as though he were a boat on an ocean of darkness with no control over the currents that destiny had set for him. His body was cold and he was breathing quickly, why couldn't this thing just leave him alone?

Michael went to the kitchen and picked up the paring knife, not sure that anything could protect him, but he wasn't going to give up without a fight. The house was cold and he sat on the couch with his back pressed into the cushions so he could watch the door.

"I'm waiting." He whispered again.

EIGHT

He watches from the shadows. He watches people, and families. He sees how they act together, they eat every day. He tried to eat once, but he got violently sick, his body rejected everything he had eaten. He likes families, but somehow he is not like them. The farmers have something - something that he used to have.

The people laugh, and cry, and love. He watches from the shadows. He is empty. He has none of the happiness that they feel. He has anger, and hatred and envy. As he watches the people he gets angry because of their contentment, but his anger doesn't change him. The thing he has become watches, and is aware that sometime, long ago he felt the same things that the people do. He doesn't remember who he is, or anything about his past. He is nameless.

The shadows are comfortable, because the people don't see him. In the past he has been seen by some of the people, but they quickly look away and continue past him. Today, early in the morning one of the people, a young woman had stopped when

she saw him. She had stood and stared at him, until it became obvious that she had been looking for him. She had stayed until the sun had risen, and then she had left.

Someone knew him then - but, he didn't know anyone. He stayed in the shadows. He did not belong with these people, he did not share their emotions. That night he left the city to go into the desert, where only the wind would be near, and the sun would scorch the sand and his body. Where he could exist, without the emptiness he noticed when he watched the people.

NINE

The light was shining again. The same light that was in the kitchen. Max could see it near the gate. What did it want? He walked up to it cautiously, sniffing the air. The air tingled in a funny way.

He edged closer. The air smelled dead. It was the same thing. Suddenly it seemed to know that he was there. The air shimmered and the light passed through the fence.

He couldn't see it anymore.

He needed to see it. It would get Terri. He needed to get it! Had to! He ran as hard as he could and jumped - up, scrambling, scrambling, trying, then he was over the fence. The thing was disappearing. He had to get it.

Had to! The shining thing. He chased it, fast, no he had to go faster! Then it disappeared and he saw the car.

* * * * *

Terri ran down the deserted hallway on the second floor to the dusty classroom, where her history class was held. She glanced at her watch, there was another five minutes to class, but Mr. List was never late and he often locked the door after arriving, refusing to let in late students with the air about him that they would disturb the class. She thought it was a rather ignorant way of doing things, but he was the teacher, not her.

She looked for Arthur, her interpreter, and found him on the farthest row to the left. He waved, and moved his backpack off of the desk he had been saving for her. She pulled her history book out of her bag for a final glimpse at the assigned chapter before the quiz.

At one minute to eight Mr. List arrived looking as prim as an English butler. Neatly combed grayish-brown hair, brown tweed pants, with a white starched shirt and a navy blue bow tie. He set down his armload of books and folders, and he signaled the class to silence.

"Good evening, tonight I have what should be a treat for most of you. That is, if you did your reading." He paused to let the impact of what he said hit, and Terri stared at him. She couldn't believe him. He had the ability to confirm in every class what extreme pleasure he took from making his students were uncomfortable.

"I will lecture immediately after the quiz, and you should be aware that the information given in the lecture will be helpful for you to know, if you plan on passing the final." A portion of the class had begun to leave after the quizzes, this had to be

Mr. List's way of retaliating.

Mr. List had begun to pass out the "quiz" as he spoke and he finished in silence allowing the first few rows to get started on the test. Quiz? More like a pre-midterm exam. She flipped through it and despite her insight she was very glad she had studied.

A half an hour later Mr. List was insistent on the students surrendering the papers back to him for grading. Terri glanced at Arthur who gave her the thumbs up sign, and she couldn't help grimacing as she passed her quiz forward. Arthur had to be grateful that he wasn't getting graded for the class, he was there to make sure she didn't miss any of the information. Terri knew that she would have been lost without his help in this class, because Mr. List liked to lecture as he wrote outlines and notes on the blackboard. She would have missed at least half of what he was saying because his back would have been toward her, her lip reading useless.

The lecture went quickly and was detailed between structured notes on the board, where Terri often lost track of Mr. Lists words, catching the thread of the lecture again with Arthur's help.

Class ended slightly after nine o'clock and Mr. List's nervous looking assistant laid out a pile of last weeks quiz's to be looked at for scores. Terri made her way up through the jostling students and hurriedly flipped through the red marked papers to find hers. She made a few quick notes from the questions she had missed on her quiz, so she could study the evasive questions for the mid-term coming up in two weeks. She had gotten a B, it wasn't bad, but she knew for certain that new questions would

pop up on the larger exams. She handed her quiz back to the assistant at the door as she and Arthur left the classroom.

"So how'd you do?" he signed.

"B. I bet you're glad your not in this class for credit!"

"You aren't kidding, that man's a tyrant! Come on I'll walk you out."

Arthur had been interpreting for her since she had entered college, summer quarter. He had been new to college and he was making his way through the mandatory general classes, so they were often learning about similar things at the same time. Arthur's little brother was deaf and Arthur and his family had learned sign language as a result.

Arthur was parked nearby on the street and offered her a ride to her car, which she accepted. Terri hated to be alone at night especially, on the darkened tree filled campus. He dropped her off at the driveway to the employee parking lot at the library. She climbed out of his small blue sports car into the stormy night.

"Thanks, I'll see you later." She waved.

"Okay, talk to you later."

The wind held a desolate feel as though it was stripping the warmth out of everything. The library looked ominous clad in deep shadows and the heavy hedge by which she had parked now held secret shadows. She jogged across the empty lot trying to ignore the tall bushes to the side of her car.

What if somebody was waiting in them, just to get the small amount of cash in her purse. Across the parking lot Arthur was still there waiting for her to get in her car.

The key missed on the first try, but then it went into the lock. She quickly opened the car door and she got in, locking the door behind her. She glanced back in the rear view mirror and saw the fading tail lights of Arthur's car as he drove away.

She put her key in the ignition, and turned it to start. The engine vibrated as though it were trying to turn over and start, but nothing happened. She tried again, and then one more time. Nothing. She had probably flooded the engine on top of whatever else was wrong with her car. The parking lot seemed a lot darker, and she was alone.

What in the hell was she supposed to do? She was angry that her car had failed her. She was miles away from her TDD machine, but only a couple of blocks from the 7-11. Maybe the clerk would help her out. She felt a little better, and reached over to open her door when she saw headlights flash across the parking lot. Her heart sped up, and she locked her door. She'd wait until they had gone, but when the car turned she saw it was Arthur. Relief flooded her, and she felt foolish for her brief anger at the car. She grinned at herself, feeling a lot better now that help was there.

Arthur got out of his car, his smile was quirky.

"What's up Terri? Trying to do some late night studying in the middle of nowhere?"

"Yeah, yeah... - What are you doing here?"

"I saw that you didn't follow me out, so I waited, and waited some more, and then decided I'd better come back and see if you were okay."

"Which I'm not. My car's dead."

He stepped closer to her. "I'll take a look at it."

"What you're majoring as a mechanic now? Impressive." She stepped away from him and leaned in the car to pop the hood. She didn't like the way he had seemed to loom over her for that moment. She could have released the hood to the car. Just let her car start.

He pulled a pair of jumper cables out from his trunk and he pulled his car up to hers. Within a few minutes her car started.

"Hey, you ought to get this thing into a mechanics, Ter."

Ter? "Uh, yeah, I'll probably take it in Sunday afternoon."

"Well if you need a ride or anything just let me know."

Terri nodded, "Thanks Arthur, I really appreciate your help tonight."

"No problem."

Terri got in her car and locked the door. There was something about Arthur, almost condescending, but no, he just was trying to help her out, what was she ungrateful? She pulled out of the parking lot and Arthur followed her. Her car was cold and she hoped that the heater would kick in before she got home, but then she remembered that she was out of milk, and bread and had to stop at the store on her way home. The house was so empty. It was nice to have the freedom that she had right now, but then again, she missed her parents and wished they hadn't decided to take the better part of winter in Europe.

She pulled into the grocery store and Arthur blinked his lights as he passed her. At least she didn't have to worry about him following her around the grocery store, he must be confident that he car would start. What was her problem? He had just helped

her out of a mess that could have been a real headache. She didn't know what it was, but there was something different about him. She wasn't sure that she liked the change she saw.

The grocery store looked alien, and seemingly unfriendly. It was empty of all but a few lingering individuals. She made a point to hurry and she made her purchases and left the store. The parking lot was more empty than at any other time of the day, it seemed deserted, a seemingly unnatural state at a grocery store.

Wind pulled at her hair and chilled her face and hands as she left the shopping cart in a skeletal metal caddie near her car. She felt a cold drop of rain sting her cheek as she slammed the trunk shut and jumped into the car. The long awaited storm had almost arrived.

With the heater coming on in a warm rush she pulled away from the hostile parking lot and back onto friendlier neighborhood streets. A blue-gray cloud hung in the air behind her car a reminder that she had to get her car fixed this weekend. She hoped that her little car would last her through the winter. Insignificant pools of light opened on sidewalks, from pale street lights far above. The night seemed almost eager in its consumption of light.

Trees reached up from the sides of the roads with skeletal fingers dancing in the wind, buffeted by the approaching storm. Maybe it would start to rain soon, really rain, but not yet, only a few drops of rain hit her windshield catching light and evaporating in the steady wind. She found herself hoping that it really would snow this early, but she knew that it wouldn't, it rarely snowed until the middle of November and that was two

months away.

When she got home she placed her bags of groceries on the counter and opened the sliding glass door to let Max in. He didn't come. She stood there for a moment, worried. Where was he?

"Max -" She shouted for him, but still he didn't come. Had he gotten over the fence? No, it hadn't happened before. She left the door open wide enough for him to come in, just in case he was out there. Then she went to the TDD machine and was about to call out for him again, when she saw a message, it was from Mrs. Miller next door.

Maybe Max had come in through the dog door, and he was upstairs - no, he would have heard her and come to find her.

Terri's stomach tightened, where was Max? Poor guy, it was cold out there, why didn't he come home? The machine printed the only message, from Mrs. Miller.

"Terri dear, I don't know how to tell you this. I was out in the front yard this evening after dinner, Max got out I saw him running across your front yard. I tried to call to him, but he was in a mad dash, just running he didn't seem to hear me - oh dear. He ran into the street. He was hit Terri. I'm so sorry. The car killed him. I called the Humane Society to come get him. If there's anything I can do - please call me. It doesn't matter how late you get in."

Terri stepped back, shaking her head in denial. Not Max! He wasn't dead! It

was somebody else's dog, not Max. Her eyes filled with tears. Not her Max! He couldn't be dead. She looked at the open door her eyes still filled with tears. Slowly she went over to the door. The rain was falling more swiftly now. Max wouldn't have stayed out in the rain very long. The tears broke free and ran down her face.

The storm's first lightning glowed massively for only a few seconds, catching her eye as she stood at the door. She waited for the next flash and saw only sheet lightning glowing with pale flashes in the clouds out over the Great Salt Lake. Tears ran down her face. Max had spent so many hours by himself, he must've been so lonely - more tears came, and she slid the glass door shut.

She put away the frozen vegetables, ice cream sandwiches, milk, and the dog biscuits, leaving the rest of the groceries on the kitchen counter and went into the living room.

Two water color paintings of sandstone formations in Southern Utah hung on the white clean walls, and the furniture matched in shades of coral pinks and dusty blues. She collapsed on the couch hugging a pillow. The tears kept coming.

Outside the storm was whipping itself into a malevolent fury. Branches swayed and leaves filled the air like schools of dark fish. The yard held dark shadows. The rain started in great sheets of water, pouring from the sky and landing hard on the roof. Terri didn't move. The house seemed so empty to her now. Max would have followed her to the living room and sat near her on the couch, or on the carpet. He was her pet shadow, always there when she looked, but why had he died? How had he gotten out of the back yard? The whole night receded to this one incident - she had

lost Max.

Terri sat on the couch and cried. She got up a while later, tears still flowing freely down her face, she was drained she had lost her best friend. She switched the lights off behind her and went upstairs.

In bed she fell asleep on her pillow that was wet from her tears. The night had been long and terrible, and Max was gone and he was never coming back. Dreams threatened from the sides of sleep, but through the black hours of the night none of them interrupted her slumber.

TEN

Michael woke with a start, his left leg had fallen asleep and the knife was on the floor. He felt foolish for waiting for a boogey man to jump out of the shadows, besides that his left leg had fallen asleep, and was tingling. He couldn't stand just sitting around and waiting. The dream would hit again, he was sure of it, and he wanted to put it off for as long as possible.

In his bedroom he switched on the overhead light, chasing the shadows away. He changed into running clothes and he sat on the edge of his bed to put on his Nikes. He left his clothes draped over the standing butler and turned off the light behind him.

He yearned to be under the stars and away from the bustling city, but the best he could do tonight was to be under the stars. The elevator took him down to the lobby and he watched the sparkling skyline through the elevator window until other buildings blocked the city from his view. After stretching in the lobby he started out into the neighborhood, jogging at a slow but steady pace. The night surrounded him, following and closing behind him. The moon was gently hanging in the dark sky, beaming it's

gray watery colors to the earth, but not truly lighting the night. Michael's feet moved smoothly and he became accustomed to the jolts administered to his knees and his breathing adjusted as he began taking in deep breaths of the soft, and very dry, night air.

Shadows clung to deep nests of darkness seeming to hate the invading moonlight, Michael didn't look at the dark shadows. Although he felt no fear from a desperate robber, or the common thief, he had a feeling that the fiend was hunting him, that he was out there in the depths of the night. Michael had taken defense classes, in Karate, and he was confident that he could protect himself against a mugger, but he didn't know about the thing that was hunting him.

He didn't feel prepared to confront this thing. Would he just need to protect himself physically from it? What did it want from him? How could he protect himself when he didn't even know what he was up against?

A feeling of fear had edged its way forward into his mind and now it was blaring like a rude horn. He knew that if he lingered in the shadows tonight he would die, the thing must be close. Picking up his pace his breathing started coming quicker he thought of the flashbacks that he had in the hospital after the climbing accident.

He and Ross had been climbing the face of Half Dome in Yosemite National Park. The mountain looked as though some incomprehensible ax had sliced it down the center leaving the white-gray rock innards exposed in a vertical shock with only half of the mountain left. His accident hadn't occurred on the ascent up the sheer face, luckily. He and his brother had worked as a team bracing as back up for one another

during the climb, the ascent had gone smoothly, and Michael had been grateful for all of his weight training so that he had the strength enough to hold himself on the mountain.

It was after the break that they had taken at the top, and they had begun the descent when it happened. They were secured with ropes, but Michael had lost his footing despite the rubber gripping of his climbing shoes, the only thing that had saved him was the rope between he and his brother.

Michael could remember half lying, half ready to slide down the steep white rock, and the hot stinging pain on his forehead that seemed to penetrate even the fear of falling. He had known Ross was a strong back up, but the fear of falling almost paralyzed him until he managed to get his footing.

Ross had bandaged his forehead and insisted on extra precaution the rest of the descent. Michael had been deeply shaken. He had always thought that through his practice and precaution he could avoid a slip. Even though it hadn't been fatal it had been like a slap in the face to show him that he was human and that mistakes happen. He hadn't realized how arrogant he had been about it. Of course he wasn't immune to mistakes.

At the bottom Ross had driven him immediately to the rangers station where they had called the hospital. Michael had felt sweat trickle down his temple and moved to wipe it away and saw that it was blood and realized that the make shift bandage must have been soaked, the ranger asked him to lay down and wait for the emergency helicopter to take him to the hospital. That was when Michael had become more than

shaken, he was scared.

He had thought that he was fine, and obviously Ross's untrained medical eye hadn't known the difference between a split that would heal on its own and one that needed to be stitched up. He didn't blame Ross, as far as he knew he probably would have done the same thing, if the other climber was conscious and able to finish the descent.

He had passed out amidst the arrival of some out of focus individuals and had awakened again on a gurney passing through a white corridor in what must have been the hospital. He had felt claustrophobic with the oxygen mask over his face and had briefly coughed trying to clear the choking feeling in his lungs but when he had tried to push the mask away the dark haired nurse had insisted on him breathing through it.

The last thing he could remember was the throbbing in his temple as he tried to focus his eyes on the yellow overhead lights that had seemed far too bright for comfort and then he had swam out of consciousness and into a dreamlike-flashback state.

Color had swiftly swung into view and sand had risen up from the darkness. Soft and yellow, the sand seemed to go on forever. He knew the feel of the sand against his feet and he could feel the heat of the sun on his skin.

Doctors and nurses still clamored around him, but he couldn't see them, but the sand - the sand had filled up his horizons almost seeming like lost treasure gleaming in the clear day. The sand dunes fell away in smooth lines until they disappeared into the distance.

A feeling of contentment had rested in him when he had seen the sand. It was

clean sand it seemed like he was in the very heart of the desert, but that hadn't lasted.

The scene and mood changed as swiftly as it had arrived.

Now he was in the Temple of the Sun deep in the temple his Father had helped find. He was in the inner chamber of the huge stone-blocked temple, deep in the clutches of the shadows, and filled with fear.

He hadn't been alone, there had been a huge threat looming, but that had disappeared as the last of the serum, that the anesthesiologist had given to him, drowned him in the blackness of a dreamless sleep.

He wondered what he had seen then, had it been a near death experience or reincarnation? Memories from a different life? He doubted all of that, but he didn't know where the scenes had come from. Michael kept jogging, sticking to main roads that held occasional street lamps, not knowing if he should call himself a fool for even going out, but he couldn't always run away from his fears. He was tired of being afraid, tonight he just wanted a quiet run in the Egyptian twilight.

He tried not to think about his climbing accident, but its message was loud in his mind. What if he was being too sure of himself? What if he did need help? What if something as weird as the shimmering light hit away from home?

The lights from downtown Cairo looked somewhat dusty against the horizon, and he found himself watching, not the glittering city, but the small shadow filled gardens and the dark alleys. He didn't know what he was looking for.

Michael was confident that he could take down any robber, or pick pocket. It wasn't any robber that he was thinking of. Then what was he thinking about? A

boogey man? He tried to chide himself out of his fear, but somehow that name rang true and horrible.

How could such a childish fiend be real? He didn't believe in boogeymen hiding in the shadows of Cairo, he would have even laughed had he not been so sobered by how he felt, and the real dread that had seeped into his soul. Something very real had been hunting him through his dreams since childhood, and now it seemed to be catching up to him.

How could something he had refused along with the fairy tales of childhood hold any bearing on him?

The boundaries of organized religion didn't apply to him any more than the stories of childhood. Long ago he had decided to reject both his Mother's Muslim religion and his Father's Christian religion deciding that belief in God, and staying close to God's creations, close to nature, would keep him in line.

He had learned to protect himself, long ago, in college and he felt that the self defense courses were very in tune with his whole purpose of being close to nature, alive and close to nature. Dust to dust. He didn't want to be that close.

That was really long ago, he realized, during his Freshman year at college, over seven years ago. He was twenty-six years old now, would he ever settle down? There were no women in Cairo that he was interested in, his thoughts drifted back to Terri. They had met first in Egypt at the dig at the Temple of The Sun, where their Father's had been working, and later in England they had almost married, but he had left, thinking her life would be better without him.

Michael stopped and stretched his foot that had started cramping, he leaned against a dark building. He started walking to keep his pulse rate up. After the climbing accident on Half-Dome in Yosemite he had calmed down and lost a big part of the arrogance that had held him in his youth, he knew straight out that fear often came with a very good reason. But, immediately his obstinacy exerted itself, arguing that fear did not include devils, demons, or boogey men.

He was fighting a battle between common sense and his emotions. It was like knowing that there was no monster under the bed that would grab his foot if it hung over the side, but instinct kept his feet under the covers anyway. A side of him seemed to accept the mere idea of the supernatural as common place and he hated that. He tried to go about life as though he didn't believe in the supernatural, but he could never stop himself from pulling his foot back in under the covers after being daring enough to leave it hanging over the bed for a few minutes.

He believed in the supernatural, and he lived by his belief.

He felt defeated with the realization. Almost doomed.

The night was quiet and he was afraid. What in God's name was going on with him? The night seemed condensed and unmoving, but Michael jogged past. In a blanket of his horrible awareness he entered his condo. Something was holding its breath in the night, in a pocket of blackness, unmoving.

He was glad to be inside. The elevator lurched upward or was that his head? A headache had caught up to him in the lobby, not just any headache this one was already starting to throb, and his temples felt like they were splitting open. Of all nights

he didn't need it tonight, come off it Friday night, why not on a night before one of those trials like the one earlier? Not that he would have abandoned his client. He wouldn't have done that. Not in his line of work, what was he thinking?

These irrational emotions were tainting even his responsibility for his work. It was now only a seldom hour or two at a time that he could delve into his research and hold off the horrors of his life. He wanted his passion for life back. Where had it gone?

His headache tightened.

The couch beckoned to him, but he went into the kitchen and downed a glass of cold water with four aspirins, hoping it might relieve the pressure in his temples. He didn't want to keep his eyes open. Sitting back on the couch he tried to get his breathing back to normal. He closed his eyes against the faint light from the lamp.

It felt as though his temples and eyelids were swollen already, God it hurt. He pressed gently against his eyelids as if the reverse pressure would relieve his pain. No relief, he sat forward leaning his head between his legs hoping that maybe that would help. It didn't, and a sharp jab of pain shot through his temples. He laid back against the couch, covering his eyes with his hands hardly able to believe the pain that had reared up so quickly.

He didn't move, he was glad he could sleep this one off no work in the morning. Sleep? Would this pain let him sleep? He didn't know.

Should he call the Doctor? He had no idea if this was an emergency and he hated to disturb people on their time off, he didn't care what they had chosen for their profession. He decided to wait and see. If the pain got worse he would call the doctor,

or pass out, whichever came first.

He turned off all the lights and sat in the dark where no light could get to his eyes. His head was throbbing and he pressed at his temples trying to massage the pain away. Every action was futile. Then a slight change in the atmosphere brought him up out of the well of his pain. Was there someone in the room? He squinted at the darkness. Was it just a figment of his imagination? He couldn't figure it out, he sat still, trying to ignore the horrible grinding in his head, and watched for some movement.

He didn't want to turn on the light due to the pain, but he decided that he'd better anyway. At least he'd be sure that he was safe and no cut throat was in the condo with him, it was probably just his imagination, but he wanted to make sure.

Reaching for the lamp he felt his breath cut off. He choked. Something was really wrong with him, he should have called the doctor before it was too late.

The air seemed thick as though it were filled with the ancient dust that filled the pyramids. Suddenly the air was stale and even rank. Then the vast expanse of the nothingness from his dream opened up and filled his mind.

No! This wasn't happening. His head felt like it would explode. He tried reaching for the lamp again, but he felt as though his arms were cemented to the couch. He couldn't control his movements any longer, he lay on the couch paralyzed as the black open nothing of the dream rushed toward him.

Then amidst all the cacophony he heard a angry voice breaking the blackness of the nothing wide open. It was a man's voice and he seemed to be struggling to speak, struggling to form the words that he would use to communicate.

Was there somebody in the room or was he dreaming? Michael couldn't tell the difference. Despite his confusion his mind was racing, focusing on the voice, it didn't seem to be coming from anywhere in the room. The voice was ripping into his pain paralyzed mind.

"Want it. Want it. Want it." The voice chanted. Want what? But, Michael was afraid he knew, he was afraid of the thing. He was afraid of what it would take from him. The words seemed to split Michael's head open, he grunted against the pain and passed out.

ELEVEN

He has been alone for such a long time, he wanders the sands of the deep desert. He has crossed the ocean hidden in ships to Australia where he has explored the land, and again he has crossed to America.

He knows very few things. He knows to stay out of sight. Why he should do this he has forgotten, but because it is important he is rarely seen except by those who watch him, and they rarely find him.

It has become a purpose, a reason he exists, to elude those who seek him, but it is good to be wanted. He is old now, and has been for hundreds of years.

He is looking for what is missing. The missing part of him that makes him different from the people he sees. He sees a spark of it when he searches with the energy of his mind, but he cannot find it. The missing part of him makes him angry, he knows that it is important and he must have it back. He is different because it is gone.

The sun is coming up and he moves through the weak shadows, he is back in familiar land again, he will keep searching until he finds what was his.

TWELVE

The next morning Terri woke to the sun shining in through the blinds in her bedroom, she sat up and reached down to scratch Max's ears when she remembered what had happened. Her eyes ached from crying last night.

Tears welled in her eyes and she got up and went to the bathroom to shower. The hot water felt good against her eyes. She had the whole day in front of her, and she didn't want to stay in the house, where she would expect to see Max. She'd go up Big Cottonwood Canyon and go hiking. She loved to hike and be outdoors. She'd go up Mineral Fork B, to the mine. The solitude of the hike would do her good. She dried off and went to her room to get dressed.

The mountains still held morning shadows in the rough crags and cut peaks, the flanks held red, and orange colors of autumn. Autumn started earlier in the mountains than in the valley.

This would probably be one of her last hikes of the season, deer hunting season would start soon, and that clamped an end to safe hiking. She pulled on her favorite

old T-shirt, and a pair of stretch pants. She took her flannel shirt, and grabbed her backpack, but she couldn't find her sunglasses. Out of desperation she went downstairs to look on top of the washer. They were there, but also the room to her father's study down the hall was just barely ajar.

Her heart immediately jumped and started beating faster, she couldn't help thinking that someone had been in the house. Would she have left the door open? There had to be a reason the door was open, any other reason than a burglar. She crept forward on the carpeted floor and looked through the slit that the open door left. The study was empty, had she left the door open the last time she had been down? Everything looked okay. She stood holding her breath, then she pushed the door open.

Nothing, but more of the sepulchral peace. Stepping into the room she glanced about quickly and saw that the room was empty. The map on the wall with all its colored pins was in place, all of her Father's books were on the shelves above his desk. The desk was not normal.

Far from being close to normal.

A perfect golden ankh had been placed on the stack of papers her father had left, its weight apparent even at a glance, fine lines engraved the soft golden surface in exacting hieroglyphics. She reached out and touched the ankh gently and then yanked her hand back as though it might get burned, then very cautiously she picked it up feeling the heaviness of the gold and held it in the pale light of the sun, that was coming through the basement window.

The ankh gleamed full of beauty and mystery. Where had it come from? Her

parents had been gone for three weeks and she had been down twice since then to look at her father's books. She would have noticed the ankh wouldn't she have? Her father would never have left something so obviously priceless, casually hanging about his desk as though it were a paperweight.

The ankh had been on top of papers that were on the side of the desk. Had she only just noticed it in the morning sun? Had her father intended to take it to the University, or place it in the safe before he left?

What was she supposed to do with it?

Forgetting about her sunglasses, she decided to put the ankh in the safe under the stairs. After she had locked it safely in the vault she could try and figure out why it was in her house.

It should have been in a museum. A feeling of fear lingered on her back; it eased only slightly as she turned the dial to the vault locking the ankh in the darkness and security of the safe.

She wanted to learn a little bit more about the Ankh before she left the house. She went to the computer, the PC clicked on and moved swiftly passed its memory check. She accessed the CD ROM encyclopedia through Windows. She couldn't remember the exact spelling of the symbol but she found it in the glossary of her history book. The computer responded quickly with the right spelling. "Ankh: Egyptian sign of life. In conjunction with the ancient myth of an ongoing life after death."

She tapped at the desk. Okay, so what was a sign of life doing on her father's desk? When she knew that it hadn't been there when he had left for Europe. She was

startled out of her thoughts by a light blinking. A quick glance at the TDD machine confirmed that the light was blinking, somebody was calling her.

THIRTEEN

There was no sound when Michael woke, the silence filling the room was complete. Michael sat up to get up from the living room floor where he had collapsed. A fraction of the headache from the night before remained and his joints seemed unwilling to support him, he winced and stood up and went into the kitchen.

The heavy pink color of dawn washed the sky and he watched the sunrise for a moment as he got a glass of water and downed four aspirin this time he hoped that they would do the trick and get rid of his headache. God, that was some dream last night, but it held an edge of reality about it. Had he hallucinated?

He couldn't tell, and he hated it. Dreams and reality weren't supposed to mix like this. In the bathroom he started the water for his shower and then he got in and let the hot water run over his head and down his back, relaxing his muscles all over. Then his thoughts turned once more to Terri.

He felt upset and nervous. Why had he thought of her again? he remembered thinking briefly of her the night before, but why was he thinking about her now? He had

a terrible feeling that something horrible was going to happen to her? He could see her fair skin against the light brown autumn foliage of her blonde hair curling over her shoulders.

She had been so energetic and full of life that he had been drawn to her like a man dying of thirst. He had felt a little shy with her. Her thick blonde eyelashes, almost transparent had hardly shielded her glowing blue eyes, and he had found that he was quick to break eye contact. She had the effect on him as a fresh mountain waterfall.

He finished washing his hair, and was rinsing it clean of soap when he felt a sudden urgency and worry pile onto his mind, Terri was in trouble. That was what was bugging him. The thing last night hadn't been a dream, he shuddered hating the thought. Had it been a warning then? Was Terri tied into this somehow?

Nothing made sense.

The need to make sure Terri was okay rushed through his mind. He rushed the rest of his shower, and he cursed his lingering headache as he pulled on his Levi's and ran to his desk. Michael booted up his computer, then he picked up the phone and dialed for an international operator.

"Yes, I need a number in Salt Lake City, Utah. U.S.A." he said remembering that his father had stayed with their family while lecturing at the University of Utah.

"What name sir."

"Oh, sorry. Robert," he paused. God what was his last name he slammed the desk with his hand.

"uhh... Wokensen."

"Is that sen sir?"

"Yeah." He was shaking. He knew that he was right about this, he had to get her out of Utah. What if she was in danger? What if she was having the dreams? He had a feeling that somehow he could shield her, protect her, that somehow if they were together here in Egypt they stood a chance against the coming tide of darkness.

Michael was afraid for her, he couldn't let this thing get to her. He knew his way around Cairo, he knew the places where they could hide, and he was familiar with the people, he was more than confident that he could protect her, he just had to somehow make her believe him and get her out of Salt Lake. But, what if he was wrong, what if this was a mental illness? He shivered, for now he would just have to believe in his own sanity.

"Here you go, and have a nice day." the operator said interrupting his thoughts. She hung up and the precious number came on, a woman's prerecorded voice read it off. He typed it into the computer phone base, and then wrote it down on a pad of paper too. He wasn't about to loose his link to her. The number seemed like a life preserver looking up at him from the paper.

He remembered the pain that he had felt when he had decided to go to Cairo, he had left abruptly. He had been visiting his parents after he had received his doctorate of law, Terri had been there and he had immediately taken a course in sign language so that she didn't have to do all the work while they were talking.

Their relationship had started to bloom almost at once. They would read

together in the library or take walks, and he had shown her small shops, and the huge tourist traps. Late in May after an afternoon of horseback riding in the woods, he had made his decision to leave for Cairo.

He had decided for that he would not be the best man to take care of her - that somewhere out there she could find a better man. The problem, as he had seen it was that he had begun to think of his life with Terri in it, but now he could think of no better way to live life. He had hurt himself, and besides that he hated himself for hurting Terri.

It had been almost a year since he had seen her. He missed her, and he knew that he wasn't going to run this time, he wanted to be near her forever. The feeling that she was in trouble was still hanging onto him as he dialed her number.

The connection was full of static and he could hear the ring start after a few seconds. After four rings he heard a beeping sound. A modem? What was the deal was she expecting a computer call? No. Something nagged at the back of his mind.

A TDD machine, the machine that accepted her calls from the relay service. He hung up the phone, had the operator given him the wrong number? Maybe her Father had the modem hooked up to the phone.

Feeling panic eating away at him he called the operator and received the number to the relay service that served Salt Lake City, Utah. He dialed the number.

"Operator 055, May I help you?" It was the relay operator.

"Yes, I'm trying to reach Terri Wokensen." He gave the operator her number and then he waited, listening to the clicking of her typing.

"May I ask who's calling?"

"Oh, sorry. Michael Collins."

More keystrokes.

Then the operator spoke in a bland voice, "Terri is on the phone" they waited as Terri typed her greeting. The operator read her message.

"Michael, it's been a long time, how are you?"

He felt so awkward speaking through this operator, he couldn't really talk to her about his worries for her, and his regrets.

"Good, how are you?" before the operator could ask him to wait he continued, "I'm coming to Salt Lake on business next week, can I see you?" This really wasn't working for him.

"Is that a go ahead sir?" A 'go ahead'?

"Yes, sorry."

A small delay, "That would be great. I can take some time off."

He smiled, he could think of no better way to spend his time anywhere.

"Umm, tell her I don't have the flight number yet, but I'll call back within the hour with it."

The operator read off the message that Terri typed in.

"Okay, I may be out, if I am leave a message, and I'll be at the airport to pick you up. I've missed you." He was taken back, it seemed like she was a lot more at home working with a relay service than he was.

"Uh... me too. I'll call back later, and Terri be careful. Thanks operator." He hung up. The concept of going to get her from Utah had become real during the

conversation. He couldn't tell her about the dreams through the relay operator, he could just imagine the response from the operator, oh there were probably rules against snide remarks, but he had to see Terri. She was more than competent at reading lips and he could pour his whole soul out to her if she wanted to listen, and if not he would somehow just stumble ahead and tell her what was going on.

He pulled out his personal phone book from the desk drawer and called his travel agent in New York.

"Hello, Brad please."

"He's not in today sir, would you like to leave a message?" a young woman's voice asked.

"Like hell he's not in. You call him and tell him that Michael Collins called and it's urgent! I need a flight out of here by tomorrow morning to the United States. If he wants to keep me as a client he had better damn well call me within the next fifteen minutes. I know it's not your fault." he stopped, but only briefly, "but, please just have him call me immediately."

He hung up after another quick apology and giving his phone number. He hated being rude to people, but there was no time for delay, he ran his hand through the drying waves of his dark hair and stood up. He went to his room and pulled down his suitcase and started to pack. The phone rang.

"Hello?" he demanded.

"Hi Mike, Brad here."

"Good, thank you for being so prompt. I have urgent business in Salt Lake City,

Utah. I need to be there as soon as you can get me there."

"Let me call you back Michael I'm fifteen minutes away from the office, I'll see what the schedule is and what I can work out. I'll call you from the office within the hour to get the details."

"Right, bye." The professional lawyer facade slid away and the fear for Terri came back. He hoped that she would be safe for the weekend, he was really pushing things right to the limit. A two day notice, on the weekend to get halfway around the world. Brad would do it though, he always came through and Michael paid him well for it.

He paused before he started loading up his suitcase. What was the weather there like. He tried to remember what his father had said about it. The city was in a valley, a bowl surrounded by rugged mountains. September, that would be headed into their winter, autumn perhaps like in London? But, without the blasted fog, that was for sure, he knew that the city was located in the southwestern deserts of the United States.

He started tossing in Levi's, a couple of sweaters, T-shirts, running shorts, shoes, then he gathered up his personal items. Great business attire for his supposed business meetings but he couldn't just talk to her through the operator. He felt guilty for saying that he would be in Utah for business but what else could he have said? Maybe something more about being careful. He cursed himself for not warning her, for not telling her what to watch for, but then he didn't really know what to watch for himself. If he just wasn't so self conscious about the operator listening, then maybe he would

have.

Okay, now he needed to hear from Brad it didn't matter how bad New York traffic was he'd be at the office by now. Give him another half an hour. Relax.

He went to the kitchen and started the coffee and put some eggs on to scramble he had just added ham when Brad called. Michael picked up his cordless phone.

"Yep."

"Hey Mike, I've got it all arranged. You leave Monday at 12:30, from Cairo International and you'll head into New York. You got a pencil?"

"Hang on a second." Michael turned the eggs down and then went out of the kitchen and to his den, he sat down at his desk.

"Okay I leave at 12:30 p.m. Monday afternoon, what's the flight number?"

"1046 on Egypt International. Then you'll get to New York at 2 a.m. you'll have an hour layover."

"Yeah, okay. What time's the next flight?"

"3:10 a.m. flight number 1067 heads out to Denver, Colorado and arrives at 6:00 a.m. their time to stop for fuel, you'll get into Salt Lake City at 8:45 in the morning on Tuesday."

Michael whistled as he looked at the jumps he'd have to make between airports.

"Okay, thanks Brad, you know I appreciate you."

"Sure thing Mike. Pick up your tickets from Oleta at our booth she'll be working Monday."

"Okay, thanks. Bye."

He ate his eggs and took his mug of coffee to the phone with him. He dialed the relay service and Terri was out, but she had left him a message.

"Michael please stay at our house, don't worry about hotels and all that. Bring your hiking shoes, we haven't had snow yet so we'll see the mountains on foot. See you soon."

He smiled, they had done a lot of walking in London.

No. She hadn't said come to Salt Lake we'll get back together, just I'm your friend and I'll spend some time with you. He was jumping the gun and he knew it.

After leaving his flight number with the operator he hung up. The sky outside was a pale blue and several wisps of clouds traced through the desert atmosphere. It looked hot out, but it always did. He turned toward his book shelves and searched the titles of books. No title seemed to intrigue him neither did the current case he was working on. He simply wanted to be somewhere else, and he wouldn't even be leaving for another day.

Michael sat back against the forest green cushions that rested on the tweed overstuffed arm chair and he studied the white marble candle holder that sat on the wood coffee table. He remembered the hassle that his younger brother Ross, who had finally settled into a career as an antique dealer, had gone through to find it. Michael's family had been such a part of his life before his permanent residency in Egypt, now they seemed worlds away.

His balcony held a small shallow box full of cactus and a lawn chair, but it was just too hot to want to go outside. He felt like an alien. What now? He couldn't stay

here, he was feeling nervous as if he didn't belong. Maybe he should go work out. He was always able to get focused when he exercised, but then he remembered the horrible onslaught of the headache the night before after exercising and he knew that he should call the doctor.

That was the last thing he remembered. Deciding to call the doctor. Then the shadows skittered in and entrapped him in a tomb of darkness.

Nothing moved in the condominium, not him, not a spider, not anything. Until Monday morning.

Amidst the pre-dawn darkness Michael awoke, laying on the carpet. What time was it? Three Fifty. It couldn't be. What on Sunday morning? He flipped on the lamp after he got up slowly from the floor. His joints felt as though they had rusted over and they hurt as he moved. He grunted with pain as he straightened out his arms and stretched his aching back. His mouth had a funny taste in it. It wasn't just morning breath.

He was cold. Freezing, and hungry. Checking his Rolex it read Monday, three fifty-one. His creaky knees gave and he planted himself on the couch. He had lost over a day to empty unconsciousness. Where had it gone? He tried to remember and felt only fear as he realized that there was nothing to remember. He had been intending to call the doctor but that was where his memory ended. He was in the same clothes - jeans and a old creamy yellow, button down collar shirt. He felt dirty, and frozen, he didn't think that he would ever thaw out.

He was getting worse.

"What the hell is going on?" He exclaimed, really angry, to the empty morning.

What was happening? More seemed to happen every day. Had he passed out? He remembered passing out after the hallucination Friday night, if that was what it had been, if he had passed out again Saturday morning then he had laid on the floor for almost a day unconscious. What had happened?

He remembered the voice from the hallucination.

The dream of nowhere. He shuddered hating the thought of it. But memories of the dream flooded his mind anyway. Black midnight everywhere no wind, no air, just nothing.

His anger of being out of control was only chilling him further, it was a dark, cold side of himself that he didn't want to see. He had to get warmed up, he was frozen to the bone. With fresh hot coffee in his mug he ate some leftover pasta to fill his aching stomach and then drew steaming hot water to take a bath.

Once he was in the tub the hot water swirled and gurgled against his cold back, from the water jets of his sunken tub. He shivered and tried to submerge, but he'd worked his shoulders to much with weights, and they were too wide for him to comfortably lay down into the tub. The mirrors had steamed up instantly, but Michael found that even the warm comforting water did not ease his mind.

The misted mirrors were normal, but he didn't feel comfortable. He had the uncanny feeling that he was in a box and that something could see in through the mirrors, and that he couldn't see out. He finished his bath, rinsing the soap out of his hair and got out of the tub, nervously shrugging into his terry-cloth robe that clung to

his wet back. Leaving the bathroom behind in the foggy darkness he went to his room and dressed for the approaching trip. It was now almost six thirty.

Michael was still angry. He looked around his apartment. Nothing was out of place. It looked a little dusty but then Marsa hadn't been in for over a week, Lisa had been sick and she had been helping with the baby.

Fed up with his lack of control and the whole situation he grabbed his suitcase and wallet, and wearing his leather flight jacket he left the building braced for the early morning chill.

Seven-thirty, and he was in his office trying to clean up his cases so one of the partners in the law office, could watch over them while he was gone. He could only pray that it wouldn't be Will.

He was still cold. Not just his body was cold, but he felt this cold in the depth of his soul. He found that he was shivering, he couldn't pass out now, he had to catch that plane out of Cairo. He couldn't slip on the easy part of the climb as he had at Half-Dome, he was in control for the moment.

Everything had to appear casual, nothing out of the ordinary with good old Michael. The dread he felt deepened and he finally decided not to sit around and wait that he'd go have a early lunch and then wait for his plane at the airport.

Everything was going smoothly at this point, even Chalise his secretary hadn't been too over stressed when he had told her to reschedule his next two weeks of trials. She had looked shocked but she had kept quiet, knowing better than to argue with him. Clients came from around the world to their firm and his reputation had grown

rapidly since he had joined them a year ago. He had been tremendously successful and had been invited to become a senior partner at the end of the business year. That was if Will was still agreeable to it.

He spent hours pouring over case law, and the rules that governments abided by. Research was what he loved about his work, the reading, and new cases that opened to him from the books, all the intricate procedures, and different facts intrigued him. But, lately he hadn't been able to motivate himself, and he was disgusted in himself for sliding by on the last case.

At the airport Michael left his black Landrover in the long term parking and crossed the parking lot. The new terminal where his flight would leave from was clean and refreshingly busy after his weekend alone. Everything in his analytical mind argued about his sanity, but deep inside a note had rung true to him about Terri. Something about this was more than just a hunch.

He had been so distracted and motivated by this hunch that he would go half way around the world, on a feeling.

The fear was still in him that no one would believe him about his dreams. His mother hadn't when he had been a child and he had told her about one of the dreams.

"You forget it Michael. It was only a dream. Nothing can hurt you from dreams." She had been wrong, but he had been taught his lesson. His dreams would be called a farce, he would keep them to himself and do what he could to deal with them, but this feeling went beyond all his own inner fears. Terri was involved, in some way she had been drawn into this, and he had to make sure that this thing didn't get to her.

After boarding the plane he tried to read, but his mind kept wandering. His ears popped as he yawned, and he looked out the window to see the city disappearing behind him. Slowly and unconsciously his gaze moved to the dusty blue sky, as the plane moved further away from Cairo.

FOURTEEN

He quit trying to die many years ago. He watched as the people of every country, grew old and died, or died in other ways. His body wouldn't die. He is tired of his meaningless wandering.

There is a spark, a recognition he feels only once in a while when he tries looking for the thing that will make him like all the rest of the people - he is slow to understand, but he thinks that it is his spirit. Why he needs a spirit, he doesn't remember.

He reaches out with the psychic power of his mind, sifting through sleeping minds, searching, and looking for his lost soul. Sometimes he feels as though he is on the verge of remembering how he lost his spirit, but then the shadows gather and hide the things that he was thinking about.

The best time to search for his spirit is at night, and then only when he's lucky can he find it. He can follow the direction of his spirit with his psychic power, but he can only use his power for a short time, before he becomes too exhausted to continue.

His only choice is to keep following the invisible trail to the only soul that he recognizes. His pilgrimage is humble. The night is dark in the desert, there is no moon. He walks carefully, his shoes are worn, he can't remember where he got them. Sand seeps into his shoes through the holes in the bottom of them.

He knows that his body has been damaged by something, but he doesn't know how badly or what from. He wants to think, but he gets confused, and then he gets angry. The spirit he finds in the dark sparks clearer thoughts for short seconds, and he knows that he must have it. Must. He will be like the people of the world, he will live, and love and die - he tries to walk faster, it is important to him that he reach the city. He has to get there soon. The spirit will make him whole again.

The city has many dark shadows, the people will not see him, he has learned to avoid crowds, and to stick to the side streets and alleys. Will the watchers be in the city?

The desert is big and he has a long way to go, but he feels himself being drawn to the city and to his spirit, as though his body is a boat being drawn toward a lighthouse, from the depths of the dune tossed desert.

FIFTEEN

After talking to Michael on Saturday morning, Terri had spent the day in the mountains. She hiked to Desolation Lake, and sat at the lake for over an hour watching the wind ruffle the water, and the clouds gather in bruised turmoil overhead. Terri was feeling as moody as the day. When she had first talked to Michael she had been soaring, floating in euphoria, but the more she had thought about it, she had started wondering why he wanted to see her. Were they just going to pass in the night, or was there something more? The more she thought about it, the more confused she became.

The mountains surrounded her and made her feel safe, but there was a feeling about the forest, as though a spirit were lingering amongst the shadows and trees. Tall aspens with white bark stood at the sides of the trail, and across the meadow pine trees grew in thick clusters blocking the mountain itself from view, as though the mountain had been carpeted in trees for protection.

That night she was lonely. She missed Max. The house seemed like an empty

carcass, the spirit having fled and only the shell of the body was left. There was no feeling of home, or comfort, the house was empty. Terri had been thinking about getting an apartment, that moving out was long overdue. Maybe she should before her parents came home and could argue with her. They had been arguing a lot before they left. She watched the tree branches outside her window, move in the wind.

All day Sunday Terri stayed home, she studied her history and continued her work on her term paper. After spending all morning on her homework she cleaned the house. She was vacuuming the hall when she saw the light flash. She hadn't seen what had caused it, but she was sure that the light had flashed. Had it just been a brown out, or a power flicker?

Turning off the vacuum she searched the hallway for what had caused the flash of light. There was nothing that could have, other than a power surge. There were no windows in the hall, only the overhead light, and that was on, she shivered wondering what had caused the flash. Terri went around the house and checked to make sure that the doors were locked. The rest of the evening she felt nervous, and finally she had to tell herself to quit looking over her shoulder.

Monday Terri didn't work, but she went to the library that morning anyway and arranged to get the week off. She only worked part time during school so it wasn't much of a problem getting her shifts covered. On her way home her car stalled at a red light and finally started again on the third try. She was ready to call the mechanic, but she couldn't put her car in the shop now, when she had to pick up Michael in the morning.

Maybe there was water in the gas or something that didn't need work, but she knew that she should get it checked. She took her Volkswagen Rabbit to Ray's Oil Lube, and waited while he gave her car a tune up.

"This needs more than a tune up." He was an older man with graying hair, he looked honest. She hoped that he was.

"What's wrong with it?"

"There's a problem with the engine, we could try to fix it, but it would cost you a lot for our time, and we probably would just replace the engine in the end."

"Replace it?"

He nodded.

"How long do you think it will run before the engine quits? Can I bring it back next week?"

"It should be okay that long, but it does need to be taken care of soon."

She paid for the tune up and groaned inwardly, how could she think about moving out, when she had to buy a new engine? She decided that she would just have to make it work. She had made up her mind to move out, she would just have to go full time at the library.

Back at home, she sat in the kitchen with her TV dinner and her memories of the spring she had spent with Michael in London. Her memory was still vivid. Both of their parents had loved the idea that they were interested in each other, except his mother still had thoughts, all be it remote ones, of arranging his marriage. Not that they had talked of marriage it had just seemed inevitable. She had been so in love with him

when he had left.

Despite the aching that tore at her heart she knew that it would be good to be near him again. The remains of her TV dinner had long gone cold and she threw the container away and changed into some shorts and went for a run. Usually Max would trail after her scoping out what lay hidden in the bushes or occasionally he would race ahead of her and sit down waiting for her to catch up.

She was two blocks away from home when the first tears broke free from her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. She missed Max terribly, he had always been there until now. They had spent so many years together that the house seemed deserted now, it didn't really feel like her home anymore.

The road that she was following was old, and cracks ran through it like decrepit veins. A couple of pot holes were hollow and deep, the road was faded and gray.

Gradually her thoughts gave way to Michael. She was still hurt by what he had done - leaving her without an explanation, suddenly wild about going to Cairo. How could he have done that to her? She felt more tears fall and she wiped at them angrily hating how weak they made her feel.

What had happened was done and over with, she had to let the past stay where it was. Maybe when he got there he would explain why he'd left, but she wouldn't bring it up. Terri wasn't going to let this visit turn into a wallowing of old feelings, she didn't want to be hurt again. She could almost imagine the patient words he would use to explain, she would see the tender sympathy in his eyes. No, she had to quit envisioning what might happen.

She still cared about Michael and she wondered if there was a spark left between them. Underneath the hurt, a feeling was bubbling up like an effervescent well, she was excited that he was coming to visit. Terri was excited that he was going to be near, even for just a short while. She felt foolish, but she gave in and let herself be happy that he was coming.

Terri passed the tree filled City Creek Canyon on her way home hardly able to see the drying up creek that followed its shallow, rocky bed down the canyon. The trees were starting to lose their brilliant red-orange leaves and the flocks of leaves that still clung to the branches hung with a desperation. A few mottled brown and yellow leaves already lay on the canyon floor. Weeds crowded the dirt by the sides of the road, and Brown Eyed Susan's, small sunflowers, grew randomly adding a yellow brightness to the gloomy day.

Winter was coming and for the trees it meant death for a season. Terri couldn't help feeling that the trees knew winter was coming. That somehow they could feel the change, but they could not stop it. Death was drawing nigh. She thought about how terrible it would be to die, to know it was coming.

She reached the house twenty minutes later and after a quick shower she decided to bake some cookies for Mrs Miller, she had called again and had been so upset over Max's accident. With her history book on the table where she could try to memorize facts out of the summary pages, she mixed the cookies.

Terri padded around the kitchen in her socks, a T-shirt and a pair of sweats. There would be no school until Thursday night. This would be a great week, and

Michael was coming, she felt a surge of happiness. She rolled the ginger snaps and when they were done baking, she spent the afternoon reading a horror novel, by Dean Koontz, while she sat at the kitchen table.

She could see that the sun had set and the last rays were disappearing in a silent retreat. Night loomed up from the east and covered the sky with its dark sparkling cloak. Terri reached up and shut the blinds closing herself into her home. It was just after eight when she pulled on her tennis shoes and stretched out. She would miss her aerobics class this week, legal excuse, but she had to make up for it on her own time, or she'd be really sore after the next class.

After the forty-five minute work out, she was cooling down when she had the feeling that someone was watching her. Terri went to the window and lifted one of the wooden blinds and looked out at the yard. There were no shapes other than the shadows of the trees. When she looked back into the living room she could see that the video tape had ended and the eerie static had come on the TV. Had there really been anything out there? After becoming deaf she had learned to trust her other senses, but she wasn't sure about this. She turned off the TV.

With a somewhat shaky hand she pulled the blind back ever so slightly and scanned the dark empty yard again. There were so many shadows that somebody could hide in, but it didn't feel like there was anyone out there, it felt almost as if the presence was in the room with her.

Crossing the room she flipped on the overhead light not liking the weird ghostly presence, and especially not liking the weak light that the lamp gave off. She fingered

her delicate golden cross necklace. Would this symbol even do anything if it were needed, really needed? It sure hadn't protected her from the nightmares, but that wasn't a demon. Maybe it was all just her imagination. The lamp blinked off then on again, she almost jumped, but she realized that it was just somebody at the door. The lamp was hooked up to the doorbell, since she couldn't hear the bell.

She looked through the peep hole and saw Arthur. She opened the door. His red curly hair was wind tossed and he smiled at her.

"Hi, I was in the neighborhood so I dropped by. Your neighbor over there gave me two zucchinis as I was getting out of my car, nice people." He signed as he spoke out of habit.

She smiled, relief was washing over her, had it only been Arthur and Mr. Larsen? The fear faded immediately back into the shadows.

"You want to go get a shake or something?"

"Sure, let me get my coat, hang on." she signed and then ran down the hall to her room. She smiled as she picked up her coat, she was doing a great job at undoing all of the benefits from her workout. Arthur was waiting in the entry hall for her when she got back and he drove to the Village Inn where they talked about school and ate french fries and shakes.

Terri knew that he was a good friend, he was always there for her, but tonight she was edgy and nervous, preoccupied by thoughts of ghosts and the otherworldly things from her dreams. Tonight it was hard for her to focus, she was missing some of the words that Arthur was saying, she had to ask him to repeat himself several times.

When she was tired or distracted she had a hard time reading lips.

"Tired?"

"Yeah." Her inability to concentrate was making her aware of just how nervous she was. Her thoughts moved on from the occult to Michael and his trip around the world, he was on his way by now. She was watching a waitress serve a table across the room and Arthur waved his hand in front of her face. She blinked her eyes into focus and flushed.

"You're sure spaced out tonight." He said, but he was smiling.

"I've got a friend coming in tomorrow morning from Egypt."

"That's great! Wow, Egypt, that's really cool! Will you need my help?"

"No thanks. I'm okay around the hearing. Anyway, he knows some sign language and I'll have a note pad ready just in case. But thanks, it was nice of you to offer."

Arthur's smile had dimmed when he had found out the visitor was to be a man and had almost snuffed out entirely when his help wasn't needed.

She found herself wishing that Arthur would relax and back off, and not be so possessive of her. He wasn't even her boyfriend, just a friend, and her interpreter. Arthur always gave off the impression that he was waiting for her to make a move, some signal so he could officially ask her out, or hold her hand anything to show that they were a couple, but she still held back. Terri didn't want to go out with him, it didn't feel right. She really didn't think of him as anything but a friend.

"Hey, cheer up." she signed.

His smile brightened, but quickly left his face and they got up to leave.

"Let's get out of here." He said, already looking depressed. He said good bye to her at her front door, hanging around on the porch as though he didn't want to leave. He grabbed her hand impulsively and squeezed it quickly, then he walked away. She didn't like the way Arthur was acting.

Inside, the grandfather's clock showed that it was already one-thirty. After locking up, she went to bed. Terri woke with a start at 7:30 and realized with a jolt of panic that she was running late. After a quick shower, she dried her hair and pulled on her Levi's and a pink rayon blouse. Grabbing her London Fog jacket she shrugged it on as she grabbed her purse and locked the door.

At the airport she stared at the rows of glowing information monitors. Trying to match Michael's flight number with a gate, but the rows were confusing. She let her eyes scan the rows. Nothing. It had to be there somewhere. She studied the luminous screens again. There it was gate K-4. Clutching her purse to her, she ran down the moving walkways toward the gate. The plane should have just arrived. She had wanted to be there when he got off of the plane.

She saw passengers unloading and she stopped outside the carpeted lobby searching for him among the people that were leaving the plane. Then she saw him walk out and scan the crowd with his powerful gaze. He reeked of success, despite the faded Levi's, and the old button up oxford shirt that he was wearing. He had really changed since she had last seen him, he had obviously been working out intensely, his shoulders looked powerful and although the shirt was loose she could see the definition

of his muscles. His face was more serious than she remembered, holding newly etched lines that she wondered about.

He had spotted her. She waved and he made his way past a large group of tourists to where she was standing.

"Hi." he said looming a few inches over her.

She gave him a shy smile, feeling awkward near him, she could hardly believe he was there, but he didn't seem to care about the social awkwardness of what they had been through, he pulled her to him in a hug. She felt him exhale as though a vast weight had been eased off his shoulders. She hugged him back, it felt good to be in his arms again.

"It's good to see you again." He said with an earnest look in his eyes. She nodded and could feel her face burning, she found herself not really knowing what she was feeling.

"I've missed you Michael." She said and his expression changed. His eyes met hers as though he was trying to confirm what she had said, but she found that she couldn't manage to meet his strong gaze for long. They walked down the corridor and waited at the baggage claim for his suitcase. The depth in his eyes startled her, she was relieved at the momentary excuse to watch for his luggage.

She eyed his worn out jeans with a grin. "When do you have your business to attend to?" He looked startled and then embarrassed, and didn't meet her eyes.

"Uh. Not for a while."

A while? Didn't his office even have the meeting scheduled? Then a tiny

thought wormed its way through the others. What if he had come here for her. No meetings, no other things, but for her. The little thought became a big one and she was floored by the concept and immediately tried to shove the idea out of her mind.

SIXTEEN

Michael's leather suitcase was spit out of the machine at the baggage recovery area, and it spun as it slid down the slick metal slide to where it could be retrieved. Michael stepped forward and picked his suitcase up, then without thinking about it, he took Terri's hand. They walked through the airport crowd to the parking lot.

He didn't want to let go of her hand, it was as though she was an anchor to the world of reality. Her hand felt good. His feelings were in a turmoil. He had missed her so much, and now that they were together, he never wanted them to be apart again, but he wasn't sure if he could undo the damage he had done by going to Cairo when he had. He knew now that he would fight to get her back if he had to. He needed her. She had the effect on him as a cool mountain stream, washing away the residue that his fear left in him after his long months of solitude and nightmares. He was still frightened by the thing that was coming, but he was more confident now that they were together.

"So where are you parked?" He asked releasing her hand. Terri seemed

embarrassed and he realized that he might have been too forward by holding her hand so soon, but she smiled and led the way to the car.

On the ride home he watched her more than the scenery. Her blonde hair was a shade lighter than it had been when he had seen her last, probably from the summer sun. Occasionally she would glance over and catch him looking at her, and they'd both grin. Terri seemed more thoughtful than she had been. He wondered what she was thinking about, he wondered if she would be able to forgive him for his stupidity.

At the house he expected to at least meet her Mom, or even her dog. Hadn't her dog's name been Max or Mac?

"Where's your Mom? Your Dad's at work right?"

"No."

"Where are they then?"

"My parents are out of town in Europe, but like I said you're welcome to stay here in the guest room. Do you want to call your office?"

"No, that can wait. Why didn't you tell me they were out of town? I can't impose on you like this."

"You and your sense of what's proper. It's fine I wouldn't have invited you to stay if it wasn't."

He was embarrassed. He wasn't sure if he should stay, it wouldn't look good, but he wanted to be with her. He decided to stay, at least he would be there for her if anything happened. He'd be there to protect her.

"You win. I'll stay, but why don't we go up to the mountains today? Maybe we

could go hiking? I don't think I could stand staying indoors."

"I'd love to." She said, smiling. God, he'd forgotten how much he loved her smile, and how much she loved the outdoors. He really felt that they were good together. He'd never had a better friend. They loved many of the same things, but the desire to be out doors was one of the most simple, and most pleasurable. Having been cooped up in the airplane for so long, made Michael especially nervous. He wanted to be outside, as soon as possible, soaking up as much fresh air as possible.

"Where's the guest room and I'll go unpack my hiking boots?"

"Are you sure that you don't want to rest after your flight?"

"This will be like resting. You don't know how long it's been since I've been in the mountains or out in the hills hiking."

"Since England?"

"Yeah." He looked out of the window unable to meet her eyes. He felt terrible, as though he were opening a wound that had finally healed, but she kept talking, not willing to dwell on it yet.

"How about getting some breakfast on the way?"

He nodded and then followed her upstairs to the guest room across the hall from her parents room. The room was small, but it was comfortable and had a homey feel about it, with hand made quilts and heavy wooden dressers. She brushed his arm with her hand as she left to go down the hall to her room.

Terri was downstairs before Michael got there, she was standing on the back porch in the cool morning air, the sunlight glowing softly on her skin, she had a faint

smile on her lips. He stood there for a moment watching her, he was afraid that they wouldn't make it through this, that they would be defeated. He wanted her back, he needed to be with her, but his dreams were still vivid and frightening, he was afraid for Terri.

She turned and saw him there and came back inside.

"You look worried. Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'll be fine." He said. She looked like she didn't believe him, but she didn't say anything. Michael felt reassured, she was in tune with him as though they had never been apart. He was sure that she knew that there was something wrong, but she wouldn't press. That wasn't her way, she would wait until he was ready to talk.

They left the house and took off in her little car, across the rim of the Salt Lake valley, to Big Cottonwood Canyon. Her car sounded terrible, he wondered if she knew it needed work, but then he saw a receipt for a lube garage hanging out of her sun visor and he felt better, he was sure she was aware of it. She rarely missed things.

While they were stopped at a red light she looked over at him. "I don't want to intrude on you."

Looking back at the road again she shook her head as if she couldn't believe him.

"Come off it Michael, I'm glad you came to visit. Now quit worrying about it and enjoy your stay!" He smiled again, he was glad he had come.

They stopped at McDonald's and ordered breakfast and ate as they drove. After a sip of scalding hot chocolate she glanced over at him. "Want me to hold it for you?"

He asked.

"Please." She said, handing him the styrofoam cup. The touch of her hand sent a jolt like an electric shock through him. He was falling more in love with her now that they were together again. He hadn't remembered how attracted he had been to her, but now he saw that she hadn't changed he had just refused to think about her. Her body was in good shape and she gave off an aura that she could handle anything that came her way. Her face, although not particularly striking, had a soft beauty that he found more attractive than the supposed beauty of the glamorous super models. They had been right for each other. They were right for each other.

Michael watched the mountains as they drove up the winding canyon road. The rugged peaks soared amongst the striking blue sky. He loved the mountains and the atmosphere of the forests. Utah was entirely different from his home in Cairo, but in a way it felt more like home.

Terri pulled off of the road onto a wide dirt shoulder and parked the car a few yards from the wooden sign that marked the trail head.

"Have you been to Utah before?"

"No, but my father came here to lecture and told me about it. The land is just as beautiful as he had said it was."

The mountains rose up on either side of the winding road like a medieval fortress. Aspen and fir trees clung to the mountains, and shades of red, orange and yellow tinted the trees. Rocks jutted up diagonal and straight, from the Wasatch Fault.

They got out of the car and Michael insisted on carrying the backpack that Terri

had loaded with apples, granola bars, and a canteen. The sun was out and there was only the clean air of the mountains. The Aspen Fork trail stood open to them full of fall colored trees and small bushes with a few straggling wild flowers that were still in bloom. The trail was a old dirt road leading deep into the mountains, but Terri had said that they were only going to follow it for a couple of miles.

One nearby ridge looked as though part of the peak were glowing. The autumn leaves of a forest of aspens were a golden color, and the shoulder of the mountain glowed in the sun light. Fir trees heavily lined other ridges and the mountains showed faces of pine, aspen, and hard granite rock.

The natural flowers and vegetation were so different from Egypt, and even England that he soaked in the new atmosphere with each new turn in the trail. Terri was hiking a pace ahead of him, he watched her keeping their pace steady, but comfortable, she must have been keeping the altitude change in mind. Her shoulders were relaxed and she looked comfortable as she walked. This was the Terri he had missed so much, she had seemed so comfortable in life, whatever it threw at her.

Eventually the road turned into two tire tracks and civilization was pushed away, as nature held its door open. A chipmunk crossed their path, and Michael stopped for a moment to see if he could find where it had run to, but it was gone. Occasional bees flew near, and creamy yellow butterflies were often in the warm autumn air.

The trail climbed up the side of the mountain and trees crowded the trail closely creating shadows. Michael looked around at the trees, feeling uneasy. He felt as though they were being watched. He found that Terri had glanced around and was

standing a few paces away watching him.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing, really. I just wanted to stop for a minute, there's something in the air... I can't describe it, it's a little unnerving, I just haven't been in a forest for a while." She nodded but, she looked like she didn't believe him, had she felt the presence?

The trail leveled out again and opened into a valley, the air seemed to shimmer in the early afternoon sunlight. A few butterflies and a occasional bird could be seen. Michael and Terri made their way to a boulder that had been deposited by one of the ancient glaciers of the ice age. Flowers and low growing shrubs surrounded the huge rock.

Michael climbed up the steep face of the rock hardly able to believe that he had stayed away from climbing for so long.

"Hey Tarzan!" He looked down to see Terri holding her hand out for help up, he grinned and helped her up. The top of the rock though only about twenty feet from the valley floor gave them a unblocked view of the valley. A small stream cut through the shrubs and wild grasses and its water shone and glistened under the sunlight. The valley was clear and they could see through the gap between the neighboring mountains for a phenomenal distance, no city smog.

Michael pulled out the canteen and a couple of apples from the pack he had been wearing and after a long drink from the canteen he laid back against the boulder soaking in the sunlight. He was so tired, it had been a long time since he had been comfortable, or even glad to be anywhere. He wanted to protect this moment.

After relaxing amidst the splendor of the mountain peaks for a half an hour, they climbed back down the boulder and started back down the trail to the car.

Terri drove slowly down the canyon, watching the turns in the road and Michael noticed that nodding yellow flowers with brown bellies still clustered amidst rocks even though it was the middle of fall. The road cut into the mountain in many places, and raw dirt from the exposed mountains rose only a couple of feet from the road.

At the next light, he touched her arm to get her attention.

"Can I take you out to dinner tonight?"

She blushed under the light sunburn that she had gotten, tiny new freckles seemed to have appeared on her nose "sun kisses" he had heard them called, in spite of the sun block she had put on before the hike.

"That would be great!"

They drove home with the windows open, he felt good surrounded by the majestic mountains and the cool fresh air. As they left the mouth of the canyon Michael caught his first glimpse of the Great Salt Lake since he had landed. The sun was glinting against the water on the far end of the large valley, from where they were. The islands rose from the lake as small mountains, or foothills to the surrounding giants.

"It is very beautiful here." he stated as she glanced at him.

They didn't talk for the rest of the way home. She followed the freeway along the mountain bench and then up the hill past the state capital to her home. They entered the house and Terri went to the back door, was she going to let the dog in? She stopped and turned around she looked upset.

"What's wrong?"

"It's Max." Her lower lip trembled, "He died a couple of days ago. It was a car accident. I just forget once and a while."

He went over to her and gave her a hug. Slowly they stepped away from each other, and Terri went to the fridge and poured them each a glass of Coke.

"You can shower first if you want I've gotta go over my History. I should be done when you get out."

"You went back to school? That's great!" He hadn't known she was going college, he was impressed. He knew that she was independent, but he was glad that she wasn't just going to get married, somehow he had wanted to see her do more. Then he remembered the reason he had come, the dreams and fear that were haunting him. His enthusiasm dropped, he excused himself and went to shower.

They arrived outside the Mountain Siesta, Mexican restaurant as the sun was sinking into the Great Salt Lake creating a magnificent glow in the sky, of salmon orange. They were shown to a booth by one of the windows that looked out over the city's glowing skyline.

Their waitress, wearing a name tag of Maria, approached wearing a black skirt and a white peasant blouse with short sleeves, her black hair was gathered into a thick braid down her back.

"Hi, are you folks ready?" She smiled at them both.

"Give us just a few more minutes." Michael replied and he opened his menu and studied it. How was he going to tell Terri about his dreams? Would she think he was

crazy? There was no good way to tell her and he didn't want to ruin dinner, so he decided to wait. He glanced up and saw that Terri was watching him, and he smiled, trying to cover up the glimmer of worry that she might have seen. He asked her what she wanted to order.

After they had finished dinner of enchiladas, gourmet nachos, and soft tacos, Maria brought them desert of cinnamon fried ice cream, that they had decided to share. They had almost made it through desert when Michael finally brought up why he had left so abruptly for Cairo. It was really bothering him that they weren't together, that his actions still held them apart, he wanted at least to tell her what had happened. He could see Terri brace herself as though he was going to hurt her again, and Michael reached out and held her hand.

"I'm sorry Terri, I never meant to hurt you. I thought that when I left for Egypt that it would be the best thing for you, that there was a better man out there for you. That you would be happier without me. I know it sounds ridiculous, but I'd convinced myself that we had to go our separate ways, the job offer in Cairo gave me the excuse to leave. I was wrong Terri. I should never have left. I was wrong and I'm sorry."

She had frozen; it seemed like he hadn't made himself clear.

"I was wrong to leave, Terri. I still care about you. – I love you."

He could see that it would take a while for her to digest what he had said, her eyes held new hurt tears and she moved her hand out from under his, and put her napkin to the side of the plate. Pain seemed to rupture inside him, what if she didn't want him back?

Maria came back to leave the bill, and as a good waitress, she had known her timing was off and she had left quickly. The booth in which they had sat held Mexican charm, a huge sombrero hung above the table, on the wall, with colored, tissue paper flowers tucked to one side of it. Michael reached out for her hand, but she hadn't made up her mind yet and she pulled her hand away, that sent another tide of pain through him.

They abandoned the charm and wove past the other tables to the front counter where Michael paid the middle aged hostess that could have passed for his Mom except for the fact that her hair was cut short above her shoulders and she was a little heavier than his Mom. She was wearing a flowered skirt and a blue sweater.

"Oh, beef enchiladas," she said as she glanced at their ticket. "those are my favorites. Did you enjoy dinner?" She asked with a smile as she rung their dinner up.

"Yes, thanks." Michael smiled, she had comforting eyes, they looked kind, like his Mother's. After paying for dinner they left the restaurant.

Terri seemed preoccupied as they got into the car, but after she had started the car she reached over and held his hand for a moment. He felt a surge of hope, but she still wasn't meeting his eyes. Then she put the car in gear and they crossed the small dark parking lot to the street.

She drove deep in thought through the dark city streets and when they reached her house she pulled up in the leaf cluttered driveway and parked under the open garage.

Michael went to the living room and Terri sat down on the couch, she seemed to

be willing to get this over with. He was afraid it might not work for them. Things were still unsaid and he felt his stomach knot up in apprehension. He sat down in the arm chair near the couch.

Michael took a deep breath and then started, signing as much as he could as he talked.

"I was wrong to leave Terri and I'm sorry." After a moment and nothing from her he went on. "I guess I can be blunt with you, you're used to the real me, or you used to be." a frown clouded his forehead, then he decided to let it out. "Of all the people in the world you matter terribly to me, it was stupidity and naive gallantry that led me to believe that you would be better off without me. There is no business here in Salt Lake, I came here because of you. There's more to it, but..." He didn't want to go on not yet.

Looking down at his hands, that he had begun to knead in a nervous gesture, he looked up and saw Terri watching him. Her eyes seemed full of pain, and he stood up to go sit by her, but the light hooked to the doorbell blinked, somebody was there. Michael glanced at Terri and she seemed annoyed that somebody was interrupting them, he hoped that her annoyance was a good sign. He turned to go answer it but, Terri waved him down and went to the front hall.

Michael could see Terri checking out the peep hole in the front door, she must have recognized the person because she opened the door.

"Hi Arthur, what's up?"

A young man, about twenty-two years old, stood in the doorway. Arthur? Was it

her boyfriend?

"I just thought I'd drop by to say hello and meet your friend. Maybe help out with the conversation a little." Michael met Arthur's eyes, and saw a look of jealousy enter his Arthur's face. Was he Terri's boyfriend?

"No Arthur. I told you that I don't need your help. He's remembered more sign language than I thought. We're managing just fine. Thank you though. That was thoughtful of you."

Michael stopped and wondered, maybe not a boyfriend. An interpreter? Arthur's gaze moved from Terri to him. Michael stood up and walked to the door, he didn't like the kids tone of voice.

Michael was tall and well built, but he didn't use his bulk to intimidate people. There was no sign that Arthur even noticed that Michael was a good eight inches taller. Instead Arthur's eyes darkened and looked over at Terri with an accusing glare. He changed from voice to sign language as though he thought that Michael wouldn't be able to catch what he was saying.

"Who the hell is this guy Terri? I thought that we had something. We were almost going out."

Michael could feel shock go through him, but he saw that Terri had stiffened. She refused to be led, and she spoke as she signed. "No we weren't. What do you mean almost going out? We are friends and I have never led you to believe anything other than that. What's gotten into you? Have I made any commitments, held your hand, or done anything that would have remotely led you on?"

"No but, I just thought..."

Michael could see that Terri was furious.

"You thought wrong. You had better leave." Michael had never seen Terri so upset, she seemed to be getting more angry by the minute. Arthur turned on him, his face was flushed red with anger. Michael stood his ground.

"And you, - you think you're some macho jerk coming here to get a little action." Michael could see that Terri had missed most of the sentence, thank God, he couldn't believe this kid, Michael could feel his own anger rising. What rock had this guy slithered out from under?

"Aren't you staying at a motel? You think you can just have her?" Michael could see Terri blushing and her eyes were flashing with anger, and she opened the door wider.

"Would you leave? Terri has asked you to go."

Arthur was getting really angry as his delusions were breaking apart. "No I told Terri that I'd stop by to help interpret for her."

Michael's face was a steel shell he was barely able to maintain his own frustration, "It seems that she has already told you that we can manage, please leave."

Arthur's face was red and he glared accusingly at Terri.

"Knock it off Arthur you know there's never been anything between us, now leave." Terri said.

Arthur obstinately stood his ground and started to talk and a new viciousness filled his eyes.

"What are you some kind of loose woman..." he never got a chance to finish his sentence as Michael's fist rammed squarely against his jaw knocking him back against the wall. This jerk had no right talking to Terri like that, Michael was furious. He wanted to know more about their relationship, but he wanted to get this creep out of his sight first.

"We told you to get out, now get out!"

Michael picked Arthur up by the collar of his t-shirt and the waist of his jeans and threw him out, dumping him on the porch outside. Michael slammed the door and locked it. He could feel his anger still close to the surface, but he could see that Terri was stunned by the incident.

"Who was that?" he demanded still frowning.

"Arthur." she signed.

"I didn't miss much of the conversation between you two, who is he?"

"He's my interpreter for school. He's been wanting to ask me out, we go out for shakes or dinner before class once in a while, but he's not my boyfriend. He was only a friend and my interpreter. Nothing's ever happened." Michael knew that she had no reason to lie to him, and he himself had no reason to be so angry, when he had been the one to break up with her. He wasn't mad at her so much as with the creep who had ruined their evening. Her eyes looked sad.

"How could he say such a thing? Terri asked. "I was only his friend, I made it clear that I wasn't interested." She stopped and she seemed to make a realization.

"He hates me."

Her voice held a conviction that cut through Michael's anger, she was hurt.

Michael put his arm around her shoulder and they walked back into the living room.

"He probably thought that things were going somewhere with him, and was jealous that a man would be in the house with you. Especially when he knew you were alone."

"Yeah." Was all she said, she looked disgusted. The lamp flashed on and off, the doorbell was ringing.

"Not again." Terri groaned. They could ignore him easy enough. Michael crossed the room to the lamp and unplugged it. He grinned at Terri mischievously, and she smiled back. He tried to hold his own anger back, for Terri's sake. This Arthur had been her friend, before he had turned into Mr. Hyde.

Michael could hear the kid knocking, but he was sure the kid would give up eventually. Neither of them spoke, and after a few minutes passed the phone rang. Terri sat down at her TDD machine to answer.

The machine typed out. "Terri, I am so sorry, please let me talk to you."

She gasped. Michael could feel his anger building up, wouldn't he give up? She glanced up at Michael and he decided to try and get rid of Arthur for the evening. He motioned for her to move and he sat down.

"Terri is not interested in speaking with you. Leave her alone."

"Yeah, well I'll sue you for assault."

Michael's anger became apparent as his typing quickened.

"Be careful what you wish for. We - both Terri and I can sue you for

harassment.

Now I suggest you hang up before we decide to take legal action." The line was dead and they hung up the phone.

"We could sue him?" She seemed stunned.

"Technically yes, but I was just trying to scare him off. I won't sue, and really, what kind of legal action can you start at," he looked at the grandfather clock. "Oh, eleven o'clock at night? The courts are closed, you can't file anything. Besides I wouldn't waste the courts time on something small like this."

"I wouldn't want to sue him, I just don't want to see him again and he's my interpreter for my history class. I had no idea that he was such a disillusioned jerk." Michael could tell that she was upset. She was pacing.

"Thanks for coming to my defense Michael. Look I can't just sit here, I'm going to go for a walk do you want to come?"

He was surprised, but it was a good idea. He nodded. After retrieving their jackets they met at the front door and Terri locked it behind them. The sky overhead held big fluffs of dark clouds, but the moon was glowing in its corner of the sky, giving a small amount of light to the enormous dark night.

SEVENTEEN

The morning was warm and bright and Marsa had started work at Michael's condominium at nine as usual, but something didn't feel right. The sky was a hazy brown, and the skyscrapers rose up amidst the pollution. Clouds hung on the horizon, as faint wisps, traces of water in the desert city.

Michael's place was easy to keep clean because he had her come in twice a week, and he usually picked up after himself. The few antiques that he had begun to collect were a pleasure to take care of. An oak coffee table, carved and polished, stood amongst the couch and arm chair, and the bookshelves stood against the wall near the window where they were glowing in the late morning light. She loved the warm color of the wood.

Something seemed to be bothering Michael lately. He had been upset the other night when she had dropped off dinner for him. His face had been tight, and he had been playing with a pen, turning it end over end over end. She wondered what was bothering him. He looked almost as though he was ill, but she wasn't sure. She knew

he didn't have many friends, and he never talked about his family, she wondered if anyone else knew how he was, or if he was sick.

Having finished dusting everywhere she went into the kitchen to make a sandwich for his lunch. He usually would come home after she had left, but she had gotten in the habit of making him something to eat. He had been losing weight lately and she was worried.

Was his work pressuring him? Maybe she was just reading too much into the way that he was acting, but even Ahamad had noticed that something was wrong. Frowning, as she wrapped his sandwich, she decided that the next time she saw him she would ask him what was wrong. Maybe there was something she could do to help him. Marsa felt a little better, and she wiped off the counters already thinking about her upcoming trip to England.

Ahamad and she had been saving for three years, and finally last week they had purchased their plane tickets. In a month they would be in London, seeing all the places she had read about, and longed to see. She looked out the window at the brown hazy sky, and longed to be there, where the skies were often gray with storm clouds and the city streets wet, instead of the pollution smeared sky, and the dusty streets of Cairo.

She rinsed out the dish rag and hung it over the faucet to dry, she was done for the day, no other homes to clean on Monday's. As she began her last check of the rooms to make sure that they looked perfect, she wondered what she should fix for dinner, she'd have to stop at the market on the way home.

Michael's bedroom blinds were closed. She was surprised, and then upset.

Something nagged at her from the back of her mind. Hadn't she opened up his bedroom windows when she had cleaned the room? Usually she opened everything up and aired the whole condominium out when she arrived. Had Michael come home, and she hadn't heard him? What if he was sick, and he needed help?

She flipped on the bedroom light and entered the room, she noticed immediately that Michael wasn't there. The bed was unwrinkled. What was going on? Why were the blinds closed? What if a burglar had gotten in? The thought scared her, and she started backing out of the bedroom.

The overhead light cast a eerie illumination, not revealing all of the shadows. A surreal quality hung in the air, becoming more tangible as the seconds passed.

She heard the door shut behind her, and the light went out. A feeling of terror clenched at her with ragged claws and she turned for the door, but someone was standing between her and her only escape.

It was a man, but as she looked closer she saw that he was not a man. Maybe once long ago, but not now. Fear was choking her, like a noose tightening around her throat. She had expected a burglar, but instead, a thing of filth, surely having crawled out of a sepulcher stood barring her way. Marsa wanted to scream, but she couldn't.

The thing that had once been a man was hunched over, his hair hung about his shoulders in tangles. Dirty and unrecognizable things were caught in the snarls of his dark hair. His body and the tattered rags that covered him were caked with dirt. The dirt looked as though it might be a second skin that he could molt.

He sniffed the air, as though he were an animal, and then he looked at her. His shoulders hunched forward as though he might attack. Marsa was having a hard time breathing, the air wouldn't go into her lungs. She moved back against the bedroom wall, there was nowhere else to retreat to.

Tattered, filthy rags hung from his emaciated body. She knew that the thing was not human. Her instinct told her that he was not a bum. Not a city vagrant. Not human.

Her fear was rising to terror, and she wanted to run. To run anywhere. She had to get away, but the only other way out was the window.

The thing's face was scarred, and its eyes were wild and dark. The whites of his eyes were yellow and blood shot, to the extent that the veins had burst and bruised his eyes in various spots. The hollows of his eyes looked as though they held dark secrets. Blood had pooled under his eyes in dark smudges. There was nothing recognizable about his eyes, there was no spark of human intelligence in them. The foreign, animal like behavior terrified her.

She didn't know what he was, but stories of mummies rising from the dead, that she had heard as a child, were swiftly surfacing. The stench that surrounded him was more than she could bear, she could feel her stomach churning.

Seconds later she vomited by the wall, and he moved a step closer, curious. Her breath was coming fast and she felt as though she were a cornered animal facing a ruthless hunter.

He watched her. His eyes were inhuman.

He moved toward her then. She tried to run, but she tripped over some books and fell. The smell of the thing was like the smell of rotting meat, she dry heaved.

She couldn't take her eyes off of him now. She could no longer deny that he looked like a rotting corpse. What did he want with her? With her hands held in front of her face she pressed her back into the wall, willing it to move, praying to Allah for it to move.

She wanted to cry out, but her voice was caught in her throat. The thing was crouched on the carpet only a couple of feet away. Then he came at her again, he was stronger than he looked, and she was unable to get out of his way. He hit her across her jaw, knocking her to the floor. She was no longer facing him and she closed her eyes and prayed that he would go away.

He hissed in anger, and fastened his hands onto her head, she panicked trying to fight him off, but already her head hurt so badly that she couldn't focus her strength.

She whimpered.

Her temples felt as though they were being torn apart. No, this wasn't happening! No! No! No! No! No! She could no longer see. Pain encompassed her awareness. Within seconds she blacked out.

EIGHTEEN

The wind rustled through the night, moving dead leaves that hung to autumn branches. Shadows enshrouded the houses, making the neighborhood seem like it held dwellings for the dead.

Terri and Michael held hands as they walked down the dark road, their feet occasionally crunching on the dry leaves. The night was cold, but they didn't go back to the house. Instead they walked down to the elementary school and walked through the deserted playground. Passing the cold steel jungle gym, and the monkey bars they stopped at the swings and sat down.

They sat there, on the swings, for a while letting the wind blow against them, as though it would cleanse them of all of their problems, if only they sat there long enough.

The night had been so full of emotion for Terri that she was ready to cry. She was so tired. Maybe it would be good to go home and get to bed, let the tears out. Michael looked exhausted, she realized that he probably had one Hell of a jet lag. Maybe they could talk things out in the morning. She did still love Michael, she had figured that

much out during the day, but she hadn't figured out what she wanted to do about it yet.

Terri liked to have things out in the open, everything clear and straight forward, but he seemed to still have things he needed to tell her, and well it wasn't like she didn't have her own problems.

"Hey, why don't we go home?" She asked him. Michael stood up and held out his hand to her. She took his hand and together they crossed the soccer field, following the way they had come. His hand felt strong and she was comforted by his strength. Michael seemed to be strong willed, and sure of himself, he seemed as though he were a pillar of strength in the turbulent night. The wind was quickly becoming more vicious, and from the look of the churning clouds that were now blocking out the stars, rain wasn't far away.

At home Terri said goodnight to Michael. They stood for a moment at the front hall, she had stopped on the first step and he walked over to her, gently cupping her cheek in his hand, he kissed her briefly on the lips. Her skin tingled at his touch, but he backed away, as if he was not willing to endanger the fragile relationship they had.

"I'll see you in the morning then." He was already turning to go to the living room. She wanted to call him back, to ask him to hold her for a moment. Hugs recharged her, as though she were a battery that needed more energy, but instead of calling him back she climbed the stairs to her room.

In her bedroom she was unable to stop thinking about the night. She had no idea that Michael's feelings for her were still so deep, and Arthur's horrible intrusion,

she wanted to push everything from her mind, but her thoughts still spun around in her head as she crawled under the covers and laid down to try and sleep.

She felt safe and despite the wearying thoughts, she felt sleepy. Michael was near and nothing would hurt her. For the first time in the last month she felt that the night light was an unnecessary item.

The night was dark, she couldn't see the moon. She curled up under the covers, her face toward the window, she closed her eyes. She was ready to let the day go when a strange tingling feeling started. The feeling was barely detectable, but it seemed to be only in her forehead. She sat up abruptly and looked around the room. The tingling stopped. What in the Hell was going on?

Shadows clung desperately in the corners of her room, she shivered and backed up against the head board, covering herself with the blankets. She could barely feel the presence she had felt the night before, but it was there. Was she going crazy? No, she couldn't think like that. What was happening? - and why was she frightened, Michael was downstairs there was nothing that could harm her. She glanced around the room nervously. Something was outside her window.

Terri looked out at the night through the half shut blinds and saw two faintly luminous eyes with vertical slits. A cat. It was only a cat. Then the weird green glowing eyes blinked out and were gone, and with it the feeling of being observed.

What was it, some sort of ghost? She knew that it had only been a cat out there, but the fear had rooted in her as unwanted as a milk weed. After sitting in bed for a couple of minutes she turned on her bed table lamp and got up. She knew that it had

only been a cat, but what about the tingling feeling? Why were these strange episodes happening to her? The feeling of being watched, the presence? She went to find Michael.

He was half asleep in front of the TV in the living room still dressed as he had been, he came fully awake when he saw her standing there shivering in her flannel night shirt.

"Terri what's wrong?"

"I, I'm having trouble sleeping." She signed. She didn't know how to tell him about the strange presence. He'd probably think that she was some kind of nut case, and ask if she had been to see a shrink. He looked worried.

"Are you sure that's it?" The question seemed to echo in her mind. Was she sure? No, and a terrible awareness that it wasn't a dream or hallucination was surfacing like monster from the bottom of the sea, and she didn't want to drown in the awareness. Blackness was groping for her at the edges of her mind. She fought back against the tingling in her forehead that was starting again, she didn't want to black out. She felt Michael's hands against her shoulders as he helped her to sit down on the couch. The darkness faded away and Michael was still holding her by her shoulders.

"What happened?" he asked, but his eyes seemed to hold a prior knowledge. She felt uneasy how did he know what was bothering her?

"I've been having these bad dreams, and..." she dropped her hands, what would he think? Would he have her admitted somewhere like a psychiatric hospital? "Well, your going to think I'm crazy." Michael shook his head his eyes registering a disbelief

verging on denial, although she hadn't said anything yet. What was he thinking?

"Go on."

"Well tonight, I was trying to fall asleep, when I, I felt this tingling in my forehead. There was a cat outside of my window, and it startled me, but it felt as though... are you sure you want to hear this?"

Michael nodded.

"Okay. Well, it felt as though there was somebody watching me. I haven't seen anything before tonight, and tonight it was just the cat. Usually, it's just a feeling."

Michael's face was draining color fast, he was looking very pale, but he listening with an intensity about him that made her want to go on.

"I've had this weird dream that seems involved somehow, it's all just really weird. I had this nightmare a few nights ago, I don't really remember what it was about, but there was this really loud wind."

"How do you know there was wind?"

"That's the weirdest part."

"What?"

"I heard it. This dream was in sound."

Michael leaned back against the couch looking as though he was defeated.

"Terri..." he started but he didn't say anything else, he closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the couch. What was wrong with him, why was being so affected by what she was telling him?

"What?"

Fine beads of sweat lined his forehead, he was really getting worked up about her dream. He leaned forward on the chair again agitated by unshared thoughts.

"Now you'll be the one to think I'm crazy. I have had those dreams since I was a child, except for one big point seems to be missing in your dream. I always know that something's looking for me, it's only a feeling but it's so strong that I can't shake it. It seems to find me while I was sleep, and it hates me. I always feel like I'm being watched after the dream, and I have a tremendous headache that doesn't let go for hours."

He went on and told her about actually losing consciousness before the flight. Despite the desperate need to base reality on things that she had seen and experienced with her own eyes, she believed him. In a way she had gone through the very same things. This nightmare was somehow real, but why the similarity in the dreams?

"What's going on Michael?"

"I don't know, but I had hoped to protect you from it."

Terri felt as though she were balanced on the tenuous edge of sanity, that her reality was being eased out from under her, the hallucinations were real. She had hoped that they were, but now she wondered how she could have hoped for such a thing. Something real was going on and it was affecting both of them.

"What's causing these things Michael?" Maybe he knew what was going on, he had immediately made the connection when she had told him about her dream.

"I don't know. How many times has this happened?" His business facade had

fallen away entirely and he looked vulnerable. Terri was scared. She looked out at the night through the half open blinds and shuddered, Michael saw that she was uncomfortable and went over and shut the blinds, blocking out the inhospitable view of the black night.

"One other time, a week ago."

His face had ghastly edges and he looked exhausted, this must have been the thing that was etching the fine wrinkles into his face. The dreams. They sat together on the couch not talking, Terri didn't know what to say.

The next morning Terri woke up noticing the glow of dawn coming in through her window, she didn't remember going back to her room, Michael had probably carried her up. It was early still probably no later than seven thirty, but the time wasn't holding her attention it was the glow coming in through her window. She was almost convinced that she had missed the first snow of the season.

She could almost feel the snowflakes catching on her eye lashes, melting quickly against her cheeks. She pushed back the covers and went to the window pulling back the sheer curtains and opening the blinds.

No snow, only grey bottomed clouds filled the sky, glowing in the early morning sunrise, turning pink as the sun rose. Terri felt disappointed, even though she knew that it couldn't have snowed this early in the season. Frost clung stiffly to the grass, and tree branches, and coated houses and cars in a thin pale wash.

She left her room and after washing up she went down stairs still in her pajamas and found that Michael was already up and sitting at the counter with a book and a mug

of coffee.

"Morning!" He smiled, his eyes were warm and comforting.

"Morning, how did you sleep?"

"Fine. Can I cook you breakfast?" Michael asked, Terri sensed that he was glossing over how well he had slept. He had probably only slept a few short hours.

She shook her head "You're my guest I can do it." but he didn't budge on the so called offer, so she sat down. He was wearing a loose white t-shirt with pale blue Levis's and a red sweatshirt was laying over the back of the chair. He started searching around the kitchen for the things he needed and she pointed out where to find everything. After a lot of laughter and miscalculated guesses he mixed up half a dozen eggs and some flour.

"What are you making?" She couldn't believe the amount of eggs he had used.

"A German pancake."

"Are you sure it's not some Egyptian specialty, some plot to use up all of the eggs?" She asked laughing.

He gave her a glance saying he'd humor her. After setting the timer, they went into the living room to wait for his masterpiece to bake. Before she sat down she realized that Michael might be able to help her with the ankh that she had found. She could show it to him.

"I'll be back in a minute."

Having retrieved the ankh from the safe she handed it to Michael to examine.

"Why do you have it Terri? Is it for school?" He looked uncomfortable.

"No."

He didn't say anything for a few minutes. He looked at the ankh, weighing it in his hand, and looking at the engraving.

"It's a sign of life, renewal and ever lasting, eternal life." He looked at it curiously, "Is it your father's?"

"It must be, it was in his den." He looked at her to hear the rest of it, but the timer went off in the other room and Terri took the ankh back to the safe.

"Wow! I'm impressed. " she exclaimed upon entering the room. The pancake had cooked and had become a ruffly edged thing that curled up from the sides of the pan. He smiled as he sat down.

"Why did you want to know about the ankh?" Michael asked, throwing her off.

"I found it in my father's den, I could have sworn it wasn't there, but it was on his desk when I went down there last Saturday."

"What do you have planned for today?" he asked dropping the subject.

"Nothing really."

"Could we go out and see the lake?"

"Sure. It's over rated but we can go, just don't plan on swimming. Its water is loaded with brine shrimp and tiny flies hoard the shore."

Two hours later they were hiking up a observation point that overlooked the salt flats. Barren, dead land stretched all around and the wind was blowing coldly, Terri felt it numbing her bare hands and cheeks. Michael put his arms around her as they surveyed the salty white land around them, mountains rose up on the far end of the

valley, the mountains looked foreign when compared with the white ground. The only vegetation was the occasional grey-green sage brush that grew in sparse groups out of the salty ground. The whole scene looked like it was one from a different planet.

* * * * *

The white salty ground brought Michael memories of the climbing accident in Yosemite National Park, in California. Memories of the desert flashbacks ran through his mind and he felt fear raking at his soul. Had he and Terri been reincarnated? Or was there some evil loose in the world that no government, let alone individual family units, had noticed? Were they the only ones that knew about this thing, this plague?

He didn't know the answer, and he didn't see any way to find out. How had Terri been coping with the dreams? It seemed that she had kept them to herself, it seemed that maybe the fear of being scoffed at held a reign on her as well. The wind sounded lonely as it rushed passed the cement bridge structure that they were standing on.

Michael had been impressed by the inland lake that had survived millions of years. Despite the decay at the edges of the water, Terri said that people did go swimming in the lake. Terri had pointed out the benches, the common level on the mountains where the water level had visibly reached thousands of years ago. The ancient glacier carved mountains were now well cloaked by heavy storm clouds. He could imagine the clouds reaching the ancient lake's surface like a thick fog unable to escape over the mountain tops.

He liked this land, it was dry very much like Egypt, but he loved the mountains that surrounded him. Every way that he turned he could see some part of the two mountain ranges that surrounded the valley. He loved the enclosed, safe feeling the mountains gave, a feeling of protection and security.

The wind was blowing and the pungent smell of the lake was coming with it. It wasn't the clean smell of fresh water lakes, or even the tangy smell of the ocean. This great salt water puddle held a scent of its own, although bearable, it was unpleasant.

"The smell of the lake carries. When it's really windy you can smell the lake over in the city, sometimes even up to the homes on the mountains."

Michael wanted to go out to Antelope Island, but Terri had said that the road had been closed during massive flooding a few years back, and she wasn't sure if it was open again. She had explained that the area had received a monumental amount of snow for the season and as it melted streams flooded, she said one year there was even a river down Main Street channeling water away from houses and buildings. There was a cycle to this flooding. Seven years of drought and then the water again, she said they were only a couple of years away from the floods.

Michael's thoughts drifted back to their problem, he didn't know how to broach the subject of taking her back to Egypt, but he knew that he had to. Another of his hunches was nibbling at him to get her out of Salt Lake and to Cairo. He knew for a fact that he could take care of her better there. He felt more comfortable there. He knew his way around the city, where to find weapons if needed, what religious people to talk to, it just made sense to him, although the rest of the mess didn't.

* * * * *

The ride back to town from the lake was comfortable and Terri's rabbit made the trip without breaking down, although Michael had expressed worries, that there was a continual clank in the engine that he wanted to look at.

Michael wanted to see some local stores and Terri felt her spirits rising so she took him to a mall close to her house. They shopped the afternoon away. Passing cookie shops, clothing stores, and stopping for a half an hour in the book store where Michael purchased fifty dollars of books, ranging from science fiction, to a couple of specific religious books that he thought would help them figure out their problems. After stopping for hot chocolate and fries at a food stand they wove through the crowds and into a tobacco shop that sold trinkets, kaleidoscopes, and miniatures. They looked through the kaleidoscopes respectful of their price, and then they walked through the small store looking at the wall to wall display cases that held gnomes, dragons, sculpted candles, potpourri, and crystal sculptures.

The crystal sculptures seemed to intrigue Michael, he said that he hadn't seen anything like them before. Shards of clear crystal had been gathered in light catching formations, their only purpose seemed to be to catch the light and have the light glance of one of their many facets. Michael was looking at one sculpture, a triangular three sided piece, that reminded Terri of a pyramid. When she looked at it closely she could hardly have called it simply three sided, it had hundreds of shards set just to catch the

right light. The small sculpture seemed to glow from within. Michael decided to buy it, and was so entranced by it that he was ready to go home.

When they got home Michael built a fire and Terri went to the TDD machine and called out to order a pizza. She found Michael settled on the rug in front of the fire, his new piece of art set on the mantle where it would catch the light from the fire. He was reading a book and she sat down nearby and picked up the book she had bought, while she waited for the pizza boy to arrive.

She had been unable to stay away from the horror section at the bookstore, despite the horror in her own life. She had purchased a thriller and now was ready to let the words of the author carry her away, even if it was for only a moment from her own, very real fear.

Michael went to the door and paid for the pizza and brought it, and the six pack of Coke back into the living room and they ate the combination pizza picnic style.

Terri was worried about Michael he kept looking at the glowing pyramid. The fire was intensifying the sculptures beauty. The firelight danced and moved making the thing seem alive, or possessed. At that moment the night seemed horribly dark to Terri, she wondered if they would ever find out what was happening to them, and if they would be able to beat it.

She got up and went into the kitchen, she turned on the light and wrapped the leftover pizza in foil and then put it in the fridge.

Michael was now absorbed in his reading and his eyes didn't stray to the object. She wanted to put the sculpture away, to hide it in a box, but he would think she was

crazy, she knew it wasn't reasonable to want to hide the beautiful object, but it was reminding her of the pyramids, the ancient tombs of Egypt.

She could remember seeing the pyramids briefly, they had only gone on a quick tour and her Mother had been particularly squeamish. Her Mother was always uncomfortable with anything to do with the dead. That had been only six months after she had lost her hearing. She had still been very bitter. The doctors hadn't been able to tell her what had caused her to go deaf. They were supposed to know what caused it, but they hadn't been able to find a reason. They had told her that sometimes it just happened. People went deaf. The doctors had helped her adjust to her new life style, but sometimes she still wondered why it had happened.

Michael looked up from his book and glanced at her, much to her relief instead of looking at the sculpture. His eyes were animated and sparkling he must have hit upon something interesting in his reading.

"What is it?" She asked, leaning back against the couch.

"This book is on possession of the human body, and it's really interesting, there are points that make sense with what we're going through but, I don't really think anything is trying to possess us. It's something way out. Something really weird."

Was she missing something? Wasn't possession weird enough for him? Oh well, Michael had loved to do research when they were dating last year, it still seemed to fascinate him. He'd simply plow through all sorts of books gathering facts and assembling them into a order of what made the most sense to him. He'd find something related to what they were going through. He was good. He knew his work, and Terri

was confident that even though this was not related to the practice of law, that he'd find what was happening by the same means of research. He'd come through for her.

She looked at him from the corner of her eye and a nagging doubt entered her mind. What if he had made up that bit about the dream? No, he had seemed sincere and his face held the torture that the dreams brought.

Terri put her book down on the rope carpet that was laid out in front of the fireplace and watched the fire as it danced and leapt, causing the sculpture to glow strangely. She got up and moved the small thing over to the computer desk, out of sight. Michael had glanced up but he didn't say anything. Something about the importance that the Egyptians put on death, was bugging her. Hadn't death been considered a metamorphosis?

She sat back down and let the fire warm her body, but a chill lingered like cold fingers on the back of her neck.

* * * * *

Michael decided to play ignorant for the time being, he knew that something was bothering Terri, she wasn't as immune from the body language game as she thought herself to be. He had seen that she wasn't really reading, and that the sculpture was bothering her. To be honest, it was bothering him too, that's why he was so fascinated by it. The small triangular structure seemed to literally pull at his memory and it was bugging him. He wasn't being morbid he just felt that somehow the pyramids might be

involved, something nagged at the back of his mind but he couldn't seem to focus on it.

He remembered the one time he had been through the pyramids it was a far cry from his fascination with the sparkling replica. The black encompassing darkness of the cavernous tomb had been too much like the dreams. He had suffered the whole way through the pyramids. Suffering from the inky blackness that was only lit by the guides electric lantern. He had hated the seething blackness and had risen from the tomb shaky and pale in the fading afternoon light.

Michael didn't want to go back into the pyramids, that wasn't what he was thinking about. There was something about the crystal pyramid, something that he couldn't explain, but somehow it was important. He had to read more to see if he could find some tie to the pyramids.

Terri had just sat back down, and he shifted his gaze from the warm glowing flames that leapt about in the fireplace, back to his book. Something had to give, he wouldn't give this thing another precious year of his life, there had to be a link in this torment, somewhere. Even if there was only a vague glimmer of what was going on he would grab on to it and expose the whole thing, and get the fear out of his life.

He took a sip of his Coke, and then went back to his reading. He was reading a book on the religious after life and ghosts. He didn't really believe in ghosts, he had never seen one and there was no real reason to believe in a spirit life except that it was too devastating to think that upon death there was nothing else.

Was there some way for a spirit to invade him while he was asleep, to somehow possess him and guide his dreams? The thought was horrible. Were people weak

when they were asleep, or had this spirit just found his and Terri's weak spots, and why both of them? What about psychic's or witches? What could they possibly want with them?

Religions. He needed the computer for this one, any number of religious beliefs might be manifesting through their dreams, or what might be able to be called visions, or visits from spirits. What was he thinking? He wasn't a spiritual elitist, but if there was some truth to a religion, that linked it to the dream, it would be worth it just to research and see what religious beliefs might coincide with what was happening to them.

"Can I use the computer?" Terri nodded and he crossed the room to the PC and switched it, the modem, and the printer on. He called up the computer directory and searched for a program that would allow him to dial out to a computer conference. The screen glowed with white characters against a black screen and his eyes followed the program titles as he searched. He found a program, that he could use.

There was already a list of Bulletin Board Services, he didn't want any of those, maybe the University computer but he didn't want to hack onto anywhere to get the information he wanted. Despite knowing how the criminals hacked into computers, he wouldn't resort to using any of their illegal tricks to gain access, besides he didn't have that kind of time to waste.

He saw an account for an on-line information service, a passcode was already attached for the number so he dialed it. After logging onto INFO-Line, Michael relaxed he wouldn't have to apply for a password, he could just use Terri's account. He

accessed the menu to the on-line encyclopedia and proceeded to capture the information to the computer so he could read it later. Most information services charged per hour. He captured information on Buddhism, Islam, Jewish, Christian, Pagan, the Occult, every related religion he could think of, then he accessed information on psychic energy, and on ghosts and spirits, demons and poltergeists.

Before logging off INFO-Line he captured information on the pyramids. From the history of the pyramids to the reasons why they were built. Then he hung up and printed the information, so he'd have a hard copy to read and make notes on.

Michael deserted the computer, for the welcome company of the fire, and settled down read. He could hear the rain tapping against the windows like impatient fingers.

NINETEEN

Terri watched Michael while he read the computer printouts, he was all business now. His glasses added a weight of knowledge to his handsome face. She was sure of her feelings, she had known what she felt about him from the moment he had walked off the plane, she had just been denying it. She still loved him.

The bankers lamp on the desk was on, giving off enough light to read from. Shadows seemed to cling to everything as though someone had dropped a jar of them and they had squirmed out into the house. Everything seemed so strange, the dreams and the horrible presence. Terri was afraid that they wouldn't ever be able to figure out what was watching them, let alone figure out what it wanted or if they could overcome it. Michael glanced up, his eyes reflected a deep point in his soul where he was worried too. Then his expression changed as though he had made a decision and he set the papers aside, and sat up, sitting cross-legged on the floor. Pain was evident in his eyes and he seemed to be struggling to word something. Terri wanted to tell him that it was okay, that he could talk to her, but she waited, sensing that he needed to

rely on his own strength.

"Terri, I tend to be a loner. That's not really by choice." He stopped and pressed his fingers lightly to his temples, as though trying to rub away a headache. Terri frowned, hadn't he said that he had a headache the last time he passed out? What would she do if he passed out?

"I spend my time alone now more out of habit, than out of any real desire to be by myself." He was struggling and frustrated. "I'm a God-damned attorney, and I'm tripping over my tongue as though I didn't know English." Leaning forward, Terri watched him as he tried to put his thoughts into words. His lack of being able to name his fear echoed her own feelings. How could they explain any of the things that were happening to them?

"I'm sorry, Terri, I'm just trying to get my thoughts together, and they don't make sense. Remember the reoccurring dream, that I told you about? I remember having the dream when I was a boy, when we were staying with my Grandmother in London. My mother didn't believe me when I told her about my dream, I was just a child having nightmares. But they didn't go away like she said they would." Terri could sense that he resented the frail lies his Mother had told him to quiet him. She would have resented the Hell out of her parents if they had refused to listen to her, or if they had lied to her.

"I realized that she didn't believe me about the reoccurring dream, after I tried bringing it up another time."

"What did she do?"

"She scolded me, and told me that dreams were nothing to fear. After that I decided to keep it to myself. If my own Mother didn't believe me then who else would?"

He had known as a child that the dreams were real. He had known that the dreams were real, and he had been alone in his knowledge. She shivered. Why hadn't his Mother believed him? Terri sat back, leaning against the couch, she was weary for Michael and all of the years he had spent with his fear. She could hardly imagine the torture he would have gone through. Terri wanted him to tell her everything. She wanted him to tell her about the dreams, to tell her about his fears, to open the nightmares so that they could be defeated, but somehow she knew it wouldn't be that easy.

Michael seemed to sense her mood and he continued.

"I remember only shallow fragments of the dream from my childhood. I was in a dark place. A place where there was nothing, no air, no light, nothing." He was staring at his hands and they were trembling. "Then after a few moments I would feel a presence nearing. There wasn't anything gentle about the thing that was coming. I could feel hate searing through the emptiness as it neared me out of the blackness of the dream, but always, always I would wake up before it arrived."

"What do you mean, where did it arrive?"

"In my room. My supposed safe haven from the world, but not from this spirit. That must be what it was, or is, from what I've been reading anyway. I don't know why this thing hates me, but somehow my dream always preempted its arrival in my room. Why was it watching me? Why the Hell was it watching me?" He looked away, Terri

could see the pain in his face.

Terri was frightened, it was like telling ghost stories around a campfire, only to turn out the light and find a ghost lingering in the air behind you. The strange presence that she had felt, was it the same thing that had been tormenting Michael?

The fire popped and sent out a spark that glimmered as it floated up into the hungry shadows of the chimney. Michael watched the fire.

"Could you see it?" She asked.

"No, but I could feel it. God, I could feel it. I would always wake up cold, and after I realized that I had been dreaming I became aware of the presence in my room. The shadows could have held anything, but I never saw it. I could feel its attention focus on me. Then my fear always took over, and I would turn on my flashlight."

"It never stayed for very long once I was awake, I don't know why, but it didn't. The dream didn't come very often when I was a child, and it came even less when I was in college, but now its been happening almost every week. It came last Friday night. The next morning you came into my mind. It was from out of the blue, don't think I'm some psycho, but I couldn't get you out of my mind. I felt that you needed to be protected, that somehow this thing would be coming for you as well. I was afraid for you. I had to come."

"I hated making up the story about business, but I couldn't tell you what was going on through the operator. I had to tell you, and only you. I came because I had to protect you." He paused searching her eyes, she could feel how much this mattered to him. The reality was beginning to set in like cold hard concrete, her earlier skepticism

had disappeared. This demon or whatever monster it was, was real, and it was hunting them.

Terri didn't know how she felt. Her mind set to work. He didn't even know what to protect her from, but neither did she. How could they survive when they didn't know what was coming after them? Demons and hobgoblins, none of this made any sense.

Michael looked haggard and exhausted. They let a few minutes pass then Michael spoke.

"Just so you know if I blank out again, it was preceded by a headache. Right now my headache is just small and not a problem but I don't know anymore."

"Should you see a doctor?"

"Probably, do you think we could get into see one tomorrow?"

"We'll go to one of the medical care offices that see walk in patients. They should be able to see you first thing in the morning. What do you think this thing is Michael? Why do you think its coming for me, when we don't even know what it is?" She was scared, and what Michael was telling her was making her feel worse.

"I had premonition, I know that sounds weird, but that's what it was. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, I knew that I had to be with you. I had to be here to tell you what was going on, so that I could at least warn you about it." He paused and then met her eyes.

"I want us to go back to Egypt."

"What?" Egypt? He wanted her to go to Egypt?

Michael was staring at the fire again. "I just think that I could handle things

better from my home, where I was in charge, a car at my disposal I'd know where to research our problem, and I don't want to leave without you."

"God Michael, you really know how to drop a bomb on a person. What the hell is going on?"

"I don't know, but we have to fight through this together, or I have the feeling that we won't win. Maybe we won't anyway."

She felt a shiver run up her arms, fear had finally rooted in her soul. She hadn't just imagined the presence. Michael had dealt with his fear all of his life, alone. She wanted to be with him, she couldn't make him deal with his fear alone again.

"I'll go with you." She said. Terri could see his relief. He smiled and reached over putting one of his hands over hers. His eyes seemed to reflect a glimmer of light, maybe even hope from beneath his ancient pain. Michael stood up.

"I've got to call my travel agent and get flight's booked out of here, I'm going to try for tomorrow. Do you still have a up to date visa and passport?"

"Tomorrow? Yes, I went with my Mom to Amsterdam last summer." He really wanted to get out of here. Tomorrow? Why so soon?

"My travel agent should be able to get us a flight. Can I use the phone?"

"Sure." She was still in a daze as he left for the kitchen. Terri felt as though she was in the center of a maelstrom. Everything seemed so much bigger than her, and so horribly out of control.

TWENTY

Pain grates through his head in waves. Slow and rhythmic, the pain moves through his head in tides as though an entire ocean were trapped in his skull. He wants the pain to go away, but it doesn't. He needs for the pain to go away. He had been wrong. He had tried to *take* from the wrong person. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.

There was pain. There wasn't supposed to be pain. No.

Had he been wrong for all of these years? Wrong? Could he not take it back? Could he not have what was his? No. He could. He let out a whimper of pain and loneliness.

He has to find *the one*.

The one lived in the place, the place where the pain started. The pain has become a companion, it follows him.

The one has left again. He feels frustration, and his pain intensifies. The

thought of waiting for him is too much to bear. He wonders if *the one* will come back or if he will have to go find him.

The pain keeps distracting him. He wants to die. He wishes for death. He is no longer sure that he can become whole. Dark, and shadowy places comfort him. The pain eases a little in the dark. Maybe he will try again.

Maybe.

TWENTY-ONE

Michael's nerves were shot. He felt as though he couldn't get Terri back to Egypt fast enough. Shadows seemed to cling to the house as cobwebs in an ancient cellar. He didn't feel good about being in Utah any more. Not even for the night, he would have booked a flight out in the next hour if he could have, but Brad, his travel agent, had only been able to get them a flight to New York because of a last minute cancellation.

They wouldn't be leaving until the morning. He wanted to leave now, but what could he say? He couldn't say that he was actually in tune with the thing from their dreams, but he sensed that it was coming. His fear, and instinct long repressed, was telling him to get the Hell out of there.

"Brad will call us in a half an hour with a flight time for tomorrow." Michael said, feeling a little bit better now that he was on the path to being in control again. He lay down in front of the fire and put his head on his arms. The darkness that filled the house and the night beyond filled him with anxiety. He wanted to get up and turn on

the lamps, and the hall light, to be secure, and know that the shadows held nothing more than dust, and furniture. Instead Michael lay on the rug, fighting his need for light, full of doubts about the future and his sanity.

The storm was starting to hit hard. Thunder echoed hollowly out of the sky, reverberating against the nearby mountains as lightening flashed, illuminating strange disfigured trees. The phone rang and he jumped up to get it. He needed to have their departure time confirmed, he needed to know when the Hell they were going to be getting away from Salt Lake. Michael didn't understand it, but Salt Lake, and even Terri's house didn't feel safe anymore. He needed to be back in Cairo.

After hanging up with Brad, he went back into the living room, where Terri was still sitting on the floor, she looked almost stunned, she was watching the fire.

"Hey, you okay?"

"Yeah. I'll get over it." She said. She looked exhausted.

"Okay. Well, it's all set up. Flight 3092 leaves at 6:37 tomorrow morning, they had two cancellations, we were lucky."

* * * * *

When she had finished packing, Terri hauled her suitcase and gym bag downstairs, and set them with Michael's bags by the front door. It was past one in the morning, but Terri wasn't tired. She sat down to write a note to her friend Kristeen about where she was going and asked her to give the Library her notice. She had no

idea when or if she was coming back. At that point she wondered what the Hell she was doing? Why was she giving up her life, on a feeling that some monster was going to jump out of the closet? She folded the note and almost ripped it in half, but her anger dissolved. The *feeling* was more than a hunch. The presence, whatever the Hell it was, was real, and it would be coming.

Michael had fallen asleep on the couch instead of messing up the guest room. Terri decided to get showered and make her bed, then catch a catnap in the recliner before they left to go to the airport.

The bathroom was cold, and Terri realized that she wasn't ready for the winter months, she was glad that she was going to Egypt. Goose pimples stood out on her arms and she looked out the window before turning on the water. Trees swayed in the silent wind, rain streaked the bathroom window, and the bathroom light was reflected in the streamlets, and rain drops. Terri shut the blinds, and turned on the water to shower.

The bathroom mirrors steamed up eerily, reminding Terri of how foggy her own reality was. She was scared. This was real, this was her life, and something was messing with it. She kept her eyes open as often as possible during her shower, to watch her naked back against unseen spirits, she knew it was childish but she couldn't help it.

After she had finished rinsing the soap off, she turned off the water and grabbed a towel. She dried off quickly and shrugged into her robe. She tried forcing memories of Egypt into her mind so that she could push the fear out. Wrapping the towel around

her hair she let herself out of the bathroom and started across the dark hallway to her room. She stopped in fear halfway to her room.

Adrenalin sent a cold jolt through her and she took a step back toward the dark bathroom. There was someone in the hall with her. She knew it beyond a shadow of any doubt. She could feel the presence, the eyes were on her.

Dread filled her. She wasn't alone, and it wasn't Michael. She tore herself free from the paralysis that was holding her and with clenched teeth she looked behind her. The shadows were thick, as though the hallway had been filled with ancient dust. The thing that was hunting them was standing less than two yards away from her.

The faint light from the front hall seeped through his form. He had to be some sort of spirit. Had to be. His eyes held no emotion, his skin was rotting away in places, leprosy? No. This thing had crawled from the grave. She was as sure of it as anything in her life. It had to be a ghost.

The thing watched her.

Her heart was beating faster, and faster, she wanted to scream for Michael. She wanted Michael to come running up the stairs to protect her, but she couldn't utter a sound. Her tongue was dry, and her voice was frozen in her throat.

The man was dead. She finally uprooted her foot and took another step back. He was years dead, maybe centuries. He was rotting, she could see the decay in his skin. He was staring at her with yellow diseased eyes. His skin held open wounds, as though they had been unable to heal, and in places the skin was dark with gangrene. Terri couldn't move, her feet had grown roots and she had petrified in the hallway like

ancient wood.

It stepped toward her. One step.

It was only a ghost. Only a ghost.

It was coming out of the shadows.

She didn't want to see it. She had seen too much already. What did it want?

She wanted to turn, and run back into the bathroom, slamming the door between them, but she couldn't move, and if she could have moved she doubted that the door would stop it. It would come for her right through the wood panelling on the door.

He took another step.

At last she was able to rip a scream from her throat and she was able to move. Even as she fell back against the wall, the thing was disappearing, shimmering as though it had been a mirage in the desert of shadows.

No, it wasn't real, but even as she tried to deny it, she knew that she was wrong. The thing was real. It had found them, and the terror of the realization struck. She couldn't stop shivering. Had it just been her imagination? She knew it hadn't. The fevered dark eyes were real, she hadn't thought it up, the thing was coming for her. She closed her eyes and hugged her knees to her chest. She didn't want to see it, but the decay was imprinted in her mind.

* * * * *

Michael was off the couch as he heard the scream. It sounded strange in the

silence of the house. He was running, the stairs were in sight, what was happening to Terri? God, please let her be okay. He ran up the stairs into the hall. Nothing could happen to her. Nothing! It wasn't fair, why was she being drawn into this? He knew that nothing controlled the thing, but his heart broke when he ran into the hallway, switching on the light as he passed it, and saw Terri on the floor. She was hugging herself and rocking, she was squeezing her eyes shut.

What had happened?

His heart was pumping as though it was trying to rip free from his chest. Gently he lifted her up from the floor and took her into her room. She didn't resist him, but she didn't open her eyes. Michael felt a hot tear escape, a single release of the pain he felt for her. Why Terri? Why couldn't it just leave her alone? She was shivering under her terry cloth robe and he put a quilt over her. Was she in shock? What did you do for shock? He cursed himself for not knowing what he could do. Why wouldn't she open her eyes?

He found himself trying to speak to her, and angrily stopped mid-sentence realizing the futility, she was deaf. He shook her shoulder gently, trying to get her to open her eyes. Hardly able to control his anger at the futility of the cat and mouse game that they were forced to play with this thing, Michael pulled her to him and held her fiercely, as though nothing could happen to her if he held her. He had thought that nothing could happen to her if he was there to protect her. He was angry that he hadn't been with her. He should have insisted on staying together.

After moments of holding her he found that she was stroking his back very

lightly, he pulled away and saw that her eyes were open, she was staring at the wall behind him. Her eyes were unfocused. He pulled away gently and her eyes focused on him. What had she seen? Had she finally seen the thing of his dreams?

Her eyes held tales of horror, and things that shouldn't be. He didn't try to get the story out of her. He would wait until she could cope with it and tell him, he knew people that were impatient and couldn't wait for news, but he couldn't put her through that, he would wait for her to somehow become more comfortable with her fear. If she didn't tell him what she had seen, then he would just have to die curious.

"How you doing?" He said taking her hand.

She didn't respond for a few minutes, he could see that she was thinking. He was sure that he'd have a Hell of a lot to think about himself if he was in her shoes. Michael had come to the conclusion that she had seen the thing.

"Jesus." she whispered. Was it a utterance of a prayer or was she admitting her despair?

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really, but - I have to."

"Not for me. Only if you want to."

"I know." She smiled, but the smile was gone before he could feel any relief.

"It was the thing, the thing from the dreams."

"Is it still here?" Michael asked.

"No. It was a ghost, I think."

She told him about the ghost and he shuddered at the picture her words painted.

She kept looking around the room as though she expected it to appear. She got off of the bed and got dressed. He helped her make her bed and then waited while she pulled a sweat shirt over her t-shirt. He stayed in the bathroom, sitting on the counter while she dried her hair. He had gone through this torment, he had gone through it alone, and he wasn't about to make her do the same.

The grandfather clock in the hallway read three o'clock.

"We've still got time for about a two hour cat nap if you think you can fall asleep, or maybe we should leave? What do you want to do?"

"I want to get out of here." Her voice was unsteady.

"Okay, let's go wait at the airport." She stopped at the front door, he watched her as she looked at the house, there were tears in her eyes.

"Why is he doing this to us?"

"I don't know." Michael said, he leaned over and quickly kissed her. The kiss was soft and sweet, and he knew that he wanted more, but he would wait until the time was right, when Terri was ready. He wanted her to stay with him forever. To have babies, to grow old together, but that wouldn't happen if they couldn't free themselves of this thing. She locked the house.

The morning was dark and rain swept, and the shadows under the carport were thick. They threw their bags into the Rabbit, and got in. Terri pulled out of the driveway and headed toward the airport. The car sounded terrible, but maybe it would be okay. There was a heavy clanking sound in the engine.

They had just left what Terri called the Avenue's, when the car died. Terri pulled the car over to the curb. Michael looked around at the night, not liking the inky darkness that covered the city.

"What are we going to do?" Terri looked upset. He was upset too, what was going on? Was the whole world pitted against them getting back to Egypt? He shrugged, trying to appear more calm, than he felt.

"All we can do is call a cab, and have your car towed to your house. That's it. There's no time to get it fixed."

Michael felt a cold sweat break across the back of his neck. They didn't have time for delays like this. What if this thing was real? Not just a ghost, but it was real? Real, and it was coming for them?

They arrived at the airport at five fifteen and they checked their baggage in and walked to the gate to wait for their flight. As soon as they got on the plane Michael could see that Terri relaxed.

In the midst of all of the people on the plane, Michael felt safe, as though nothing would happen when other people were around. He couldn't stop thinking about the apparition. Dead men just didn't roam city streets haunting people. What was the connection? Why was it haunting them? Was there something more he wasn't thinking of? Michael fell asleep still wondering about it.

Michael woke disoriented, he could see the sun working its way up over the rim of the horizon. Glorious comforting beams of sunlight shot up into the purple morning light. He felt comforted by the sunrise. The renewal of day. The fact that there would

always be a sunrise no matter how dark the night was, made him feel a little bit better.

They arrived in New York and he woke Terri. There were dark rings of exhaustion under her eyes. They left the plane and entered J.F.K. International Airport. Michael led her through the crowds to the Travel International booth where he greeted Brad with a firm handshake.

"How you doing Brad?"

"Just great Mike, here are your tickets. One way on both?" he confirmed.

"Yes." He handed Brad his credit card.

Terri had wandered over to the gift shop and was looking through some books that were on display. She was looking through the horror novels, what else.

"Don't we have enough of that in our own lives right now?" Michael asked with a grin.

"Yeah, but it takes my mind off of it."

"I know. Still reading Koontz?"

"Always will." He grinned as he remembered how vehement she had been about her favorite authors, which had turned out to be many of his own favorites.

"Come on, we've got a flight leaving in ten minutes with or without us, its across the terminal."

Terri bought the book and then zipped up her bag, they started at a jog across the terminal. The airport teemed with people, and Michael felt a wave of relief when they arrived at their gate. They boarded the plane and got seated.

"Are you sick of flying yet?" Terri signed grinning.

"Not when I'm with you."

Terri looked surprised, but the smile didn't leave her face.

"I thought you came to protect me. Or are you just stuck in that Knight in shining armor rut?"

Knight in shining armor? He grinned. "My feelings are a little deeper than that. Although the macho aspect of becoming a knight sounds interesting."

She laughed. "Yeah right."

He was glad to see her smiling. Michael was glad she was going back to Cairo with him. The flight wasn't nearly so long as it had been on his way to the U.S., they talked and caught up with each others lives. They shared dreams and hopes, he felt invigorated. He was alive again. After sinking into the depression and loneliness, love was like a super nova flaring and overcoming his somber mood. He had changed in the past days, after opening up to her about the true reason he had gone to Salt Lake. He had become happier, despite the challenges that still lay ahead of them. Terri eventually fell asleep at his side, in the dim security of twilight.

* * * * *

Michael woke Terri hours later at sunrise. The sea was lit in a glow of red and dark oranges that caused the few puffs of clouds to reflect the color of the dawn. The ocean was swollen and moved continually for as far as the eye could see as a dark mass of motion. Then the first actual flirting beams of golden sunshine broke over the

watery horizon, the sea glowed bright and the mornings pink sky retreated slowly as the sun rose.

Terri remembered an old saying from childhood that disturbed her now. "Red sky at night sailors delight, red sky in morning sailors warning." There wasn't any truth to the rhyme as far as she knew, but somehow she knew that they hadn't passed the worst of anything yet, and that if they were to see this through she'd have to be a lot braver than she felt.

She read her book for the rest of the morning, never quite able to forget why they were going to Cairo, and Michael fell asleep for a while, but woke up in time for lunch.

"Were about an hour out of Cairo." Michael said before he started eating.

Terri felt apprehensive, they were almost to Cairo. Their confrontation with the thing would probably be in the city, as far as she knew. Her mood dimmed considerably, and she stared out the window at the pale sky. Michael seemed restless after he finished eating. He flipped through the pages of her book as though he could pick up the story line anywhere, if he could only find the right page. The plane was shooting forward, to a destiny unknown. Would they make it through this? Terri knew that she had to accept whatever was going to happen. They would fight this thing to the end. That was the only option Terri could accept, she had to be free of the plaguing fear.

TWENTY-TWO

Terri was surprised by the new, modern looking Egyptian Air terminal that loomed up next to the now archaic building that she had gone through a few years earlier. She had gone to Egypt to see the Temple that her Father, and Michael's Father had discovered at their archeological dig. Michael helped her get through customs quickly and they left the crowded terminal and went out to the parking plaza.

Terri followed him, absorbing the warm dry air. She wondered if they really had any chance of success. Did coming to Cairo tip the ball in their favor? She almost bumped into Michael when he stopped at his car, he was driving a Landrover. She was surprised he had driven a beat up old Mercedes in London.

"Nice car." She said, and Michael laughed he must have seen the look of surprise. Terri was glad to see him break out of his melancholy mood even if it was just for a few minutes.

"It's a lot better than getting a spring in your back every time you've got to go somewhere.

"I forgot that you were an attorney. You seem like such a nice guy at times."

She said with a grin.

"It's all a front." Michael said with a smile. He looked tired. He had done a lot of travelling in the past week.

"You look hammered."

"You're not exactly looking like a tree sprite yourself." He laughed

They both needed some sleep.

As they drove through Cairo Terri felt excitement seeping into her as though a faucet of adrenaline had been turned on. Mosques were scattered among modern high rises that dwarfed the city. The mosques high domed roofs stood out in her mind as symbols of the middle-east. She felt very naïve about the country, even though her father had taught her a lot about the history and people.

The sunshine appeared bright and harsh against the pale wash of light blue Egyptian sky. Michael had caught some of her enthusiasm. "Okay, okay I can see you over there bursting with energy. I'll take you to lunch then show you around a little, then we'll go home. I've got two jet lags and I for one need some sleep."

They ate lunch at a small cafe' and Terri was thankful that she had worn long pants. Not for the heat, that was for sure, but she had entirely forgotten about the religion, and the modest dress code that most of the population followed.

"Are you Muslim?" She asked Michael. She didn't think he was, but she wasn't sure. He looked up from the menu, his face serious.

"No. My mother tried to force her religion on me as did my father. I don't belong

with the Muslims or the Christians. But, I do believe in one God. Thus nobody can call me a heathen. I have the best of both worlds." He smiled, but Terri could sense that he was laughing off something that had hurt him a lot. He was reading the menu again.

After they finished eating lunch they drove through downtown Cairo, and then Michael drove to the condominiums where he lived. Terri had caught several glimpses of the Nile as they drove. Sunshine glinting on the water. Michael pulled into the underground parking level at a tall, pale brick building, he parked in a reserved stall.

Terri let herself out of the Landrover, nervously looking at the dark, shadow filled parking lot. Michael was holding her suitcase and she picked up her gym bag. Together they went to the elevator, that was mirrored and elegant and she felt out of place in her old Levis, t-shirt and Keds. Michael caught her eyes once and smiled at her through the mirror.

"Wow." She said as she entered the living room from the elevator and looked around at the luxurious overstuffed furniture, and the large bookshelf that covered almost the whole wall by the balcony.

"I've got to check that out." she signed pointing to his bookshelves. He nodded and showed her through the white and peach colored kitchen on the far side of the living room and then back through the living room and down the hall passing the bathroom, the weight-training room, and his bedroom. All of it was tastefully done and Terri wouldn't have changed anything about it.

She felt at home immediately and was delighted by the mural in the weight room, and its story. Michael had let his sister, an art student, paint a mural on the wall. The

mural had turned out better than he had expected, his sister had been in tune with his love for nature and she had created a mountain meadow on the wall.

Michael went to kitchen to get some things out of the freezer for dinner, and Terri decided to take a bath.

* * * * *

Michael stopped at the answering machine in the kitchen, and rewound it. He played back the messages. There were only two, the first was from his research assistant who said that Mr. Aimes from Compu-Ware wanted to talk to him, and the second was from Ahamad, Marsa's husband. Had something happened to Marsa? Michael felt his stomach tighten with apprehension.

"Michael, I don't know how this happened - I called your office and they said you were out of town. Marsa is in the hospital, she has gone into a coma. She was attacked. It happened while she was at your place. I didn't find out until that night, when I came home and she wasn't there. I went looking for her, and she was on the floor in your bedroom. Call me. I know you were out of town, but I have to know what happened."

Michael dropped his pencil. Marsa was in a coma? What had happened? He picked up his car keys and then put them down again he couldn't go anywhere until Terri was out of the shower and could go with him, he wasn't about to leave her, by herself. He looked up Marsa's number and called Ahamad.

"Ahamad? It's Michael, what happened?"

"It's terrible Michael. You should see her." Ahamad's voice was full of pain.

"Marsa had finished cleaning your place, as far as I could tell, and she was in your bedroom on the floor when I found her. Her head," Ahamad struggled, and Michael felt a chill run along his back, what about her head?

"Her head was bruised, and she looked as though she had been beaten. Her breathing was so shallow Michael, so shallow that at first I didn't know if she was alive."

"I don't know what to say Ahamad. It's terrible. I'm so sorry." Michael's mind was racing, had a burglar broken in, or had the thing finally found him, and hurt Marsa.

His stomach didn't relax, instead it tightened up a notch. What had Marsa seen?

"How is she?" Michael asked.

"They say her condition is stable, but I want to find the person that did this to her."

"Did you call the police?"

"Yes, but they haven't found anything yet."

"What hospital is she in?"

"St. Dominick, down town."

"I'll go down tonight and see her, if I think of anything or if I discover anything I'll call you."

Michael hung up the phone and shock continued to flow through him. How could Marsa have been attacked? Why had the thing attacked her? Michael shuddered, he was sure it was the thing from his dreams. The shadow that he often felt near.

Had the thing found him? That was the only thing that made sense. If Marsa had run into it... How would he ever be able to forgive himself?

Terri was shocked to hear about Marsa and insisted that they leave immediately to go see her. Michael wondered if Terri realized what sitting ducks they were if they stayed at his condo. He had been so sure that everything would be all right once they arrived in Cairo. Now everything was just getting worse. What was he supposed to do? Stay at the condo and wait for the thing to come, or run? He was confused, but he was also very upset about Marsa being in a coma, and that preyed on his conscious. She should never have been dragged into this.

TWENTY-THREE

In the hospital Terri stood back near the door of Marsa's room. Marsa was a thin woman with graying dark hair, that escaped above the bandage that covered her eyes. Bruises, purple and a ugly green mustard color clung to her face and one was visible on her lower right arm. Michael was standing at the foot of the bed, his pain at his friends condition was evident.

The room was stuffy and Terri wondered if that was good for sick people, but she watched as Michael walked to the side of the bed. He looked as though he were approaching someone sacred. Terri could see the respect he had for Marsa from the way he was acting.

Michael sat down on a chair by the bed, his face showing the anguish that he felt. He didn't look away from Marsa's bruised face. Gently he put his hand over hers.

"Marsa." He whispered, and his voice broke. Terri felt tears in her eyes. Nothing changed. Marsa didn't answer Michael. There was no sign of life other than the rise and fall of her labored breathing.

* * * * *

Michael bent his head in grief for the only person who had made the effort to be his friend during the past year. It was because of him that Marsa was suffering. He could feel tears in his eyes as he looked at his friend.

Her skin was bruised and swollen and her eyes were covered with bandages. The nurse had told him that Marsa had been unconscious since Monday. Was that bad? Would she come out of the coma, or would she die?

He struggled with his feelings, of guilt and responsibility as though she were already dead. Her breathing changed, although nothing significant, it had changed. Was she awake?

"Marsa?" He whispered softly. There was no response, no twitch of a finger, no movement of her head, nothing. He had to talk to her, would she be able to hear him? He heard Terri open the door and go out into the hallway. Michael was grateful to her for giving him the room he needed to talk to Marsa. Terri always seemed to understand.

"Marsa? I talked to Ahamad, I just got back today. I was out of town when this happened." He wanted to make the bruises disappear, it hurt him to see her this way. "I'm so sorry that this happened to you. You've been such a good friend to me. I don't know if you can hear me, but I think I know what caused this. Or who." He let go of her hand. "I don't know his name, or what he wants, but I know who he is."

"It's not going to beat us. Can you hear me Marsa? You'll get better. You have to get better. We can't let this thing destroy us." A tear escaped his left eye and he brushed it away.

"Please Marsa, try to get better. Try with all of your might. Ahamad needs you." Michael stood up, he couldn't look at her bruised face any longer.

He went to the window and watched the traffic crawl by below. How could he leave her? She was vulnerable, what if the thing came back for her? With a sick feeling in his stomach he turned to face her. He knew that he would have to leave. He couldn't stay with her, the nurses would kick him out. There was nothing he could do, other than find the thing and get it out of his life before it hurt somebody else.

Night had fallen and the headboard lamp gave off a weak light that made Marsa look as though she were dead. The shadows had hungrily devoured the room as night had fallen and it seemed that they would consume her frail body.

TWENTY-FOUR

Marsa was awake, she knew that she had been moved from Michael's house. There was a different feel about this place. She couldn't open her eyes to verify where she was, but she decided that was okay. From the smells and sounds she could hear when she rose out of her unconscious soup, she was in the hospital. The smell of disinfectant, urine, and sickness mixed in the air, as a foul potpourri. She might not have noticed the smell so much if she could just see.

There were only short bouts of consciousness before she fell away into the darkness of sleep. When she was conscious she *remembered*. When she was awake her mind was full of memories of the thing that had attacked her. Sleep was like a shield against her memories.

She was cold, even though she could feel the weight of a blanket over her body. The coldness came from inside. There weren't supposed to be corpses that could rise from the grave. Sure in ghost stories, or movies, but not in real life. Not in real life!

Could such a thing be real? Marsa wondered about her sanity, and if she had

dreamed the thing up, but she knew that it was real. Deep inside she knew, despite all of the rational excuses that she was thinking up, that the thing was real. Was that what Michael was afraid of? His eyes had been so haunted, he had to know about it. He had to. Maybe he didn't know that the thing was waiting for him. Waiting for him in his own house. She felt anger rising at the thing. A home was a sacred place. A place to be with your family and to feel safe.

The air was still and dead, no breeze stroked her face. She tried to open her eyes, but she couldn't, and she realized there was something covering them. A bandage? Her arms were too heavy to lift, she struggled to raise her right hand to touch the bandage, but it wouldn't move.

If the corpse-thing was going after Michael, she had to warn him. She had to tell him to stay away from his condominium. She had to tell him that he should run, he had to get away from Cairo. There was a strange knowledge that seemed to seep into her awareness as though a mist coming through a forest. She knew that the thing was going to try to kill Michael, she didn't understand why, but she knew it would keep looking for him. It wouldn't stop.

She wasn't sure if Ahamad would believe her. It was a wild story, and the doctors would probably say she was making it up to cover up the real incident, but somehow the memory of Michael's haunted eyes only confirmed her thoughts. He knew about the thing that had attacked her.

She tried to move her mouth, to form a word, but her tongue felt dry, and her mouth didn't respond. She tried again, this time working on her mouth, trying to shape

a word with her lips. Nothing happened.

There was no one in the room with her, she could sense that much. There was no one she could have pleaded with to call Michael, even if she could have spoken, or moved her hands to scribble a message. When would Ahamad come? Was it the middle of the night, or was it day? Had Michael already been assaulted by the thing? Marsa's head hurt. She tried to relax, but the pain didn't stop.

What day was it?

Was she paralyzed?

Who would warn Michael?

The pain was too much, and she could feel her grasp on consciousness slipping. She fought against sleep, fought with all of her heart, but she continued slipping into the darkness.

PART II

There is only one doorway
into Forever...
and Death keeps the only key.

- Joan Walsh Anglund

TWENTY-FIVE

The headlights didn't dispel the shadows and darkness that cloaked everything like decay in a garden of corpses. The clouds moved and seethed overhead like traitorous ghosts making their silent ways to unknown destinies. Michael kept watching for the moon which was covered by clouds most of the time. The moon was only a quarter full, but its soft glow made him feel better.

They had decided to go to the Temple of the Sun after lunch. The temple their Father's had discovered years ago. Michael had known from his immediate reaction to Terri's suggestion that she had hit on something. They needed to go to the temple. They were about an hour away from the temple and a sense of doom raked at him. Why was he dragging Terri with him into this danger? He knew that nowhere was really safe, even if he had left her at home, the thing might have found her there, alone. They couldn't split up.

Michael was scared. They were going to try and come face to face with the thing, what if it wanted possession of his body? He could remember Terri telling him about the ghostly corpse the other night. The grisly image was stuck in his mind, he

hoped that the thing was real and physical, and wouldn't try to take over his body. He had seen Terri wearing a cross, and he almost wanted a cross of his own to wear, as though they were going after some overgrown vampire that would respond to the Christian symbol in terror.

He tried to chide himself back into a lighter nature, but it only put him deeper into his thoughts and depression. He wanted to get out of this alive, get rid of the damned creature so he could start his life with Terri. In the passenger seat Terri was asleep, and her face was pale under the moonbeams. Michael had a sick feeling in his heart that she wouldn't make it through the night. He tried to put the thought out of his head. Terri would be fine. He couldn't think that way. The thought of Terri in mortal danger made him almost turn the car around. He slowed for a moment, but he fought against his will. Terri knew that they had to confront this thing.

"Damn." he whispered. He felt as though he were in a trap and that any direction he went would bring terrible repercussions. He didn't want to lose Terri, he hadn't even been able to tell her how much she meant to him yet. He'd have to guard her with his own life. The night seethed with darkness and the shadows looked deep and alien. Whatever secrets the night held, Michael wished it would keep. The road out to the temple was slightly out of repair and Terri woke up as he tried to miss a pot hole.

"Hi." She smiled, her eyes looked sleepy.

"Did you sleep okay?"

"Yeah. I've got to keep my energy up to make sure I don't miss any excitement."

He smiled. Michael found that his respect for Terri was deepening. She was not letting her fear drag her down, they were heading straight into a dark pit, the nesting place of their fear, not knowing if they would survive, but she still was able to have a sense of humor.

The temple began to come into view on the right side of the horizon. A seething black hole in the night, darker than the sky. The ancient stone building almost radiated of corruption and danger but they continued down the road toward it. Terri reached out, took his hand and held it. Her hands were sweaty too. Michael pulled into a parking spot and turned off the engine. They looked into each others eyes making sure they were up to this horrible meeting. Terri still held his hand.

"We should leave the Landrover unlocked. In case we have to get out of here fast." She nodded seemingly unable to move to get out. Michael knew how she felt. There was a old truck on the other side of the parking lot, probably broken down and abandoned. He opened the door for Terri and helped her down and then he opened the back pack and took out the flashlight and handed it to her. Then he took out the gun.

"Okay." He said with a deep breath. He put the backpack over his shoulder and then he took Terri's hand and they started walking toward the temple.

* * * * *

Chills traced along Terri's arms. What were they doing out here? Looking for trouble? Why had she ever suggested coming in the first place? A feeling of doom

held her heart and she dreaded the confrontation. The temple filled the night in front of them. Her father's gift from the sand. His greatest archeological finding. She wished now that he had never found it. Maybe she and Michael still would have found each other. Maybe not. Whatever the case she was glad that they were together.

They hiked up the huge granite steps to the temple's courtyard and passed under the tall stone pillars that loomed in the night air daring them to pass. The moon was out high above them and the courtyard was bathed in its weak light. The light from the moon was no longer comforting it seemed cold and secretive.

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They walked slowly across the vast open courtyard taking their time, carefully looking around as they walked. Michael could feel loose sand grating against the stone under his tennis shoes, and Terri kept checking the corners of the courtyard with the weak flashlight beam. The entrance to the temple gaped terribly welcoming them into its dank innards. They stopped at the entrance. Terri was shaking.

"I don't want to go in there. You can almost feel it watching us, waiting."

"I don't want to go in either, but I want us to have our lives back." He paused, "I love you Terri, I want us to be together for the rest of our lives, but we've got to make it through this." He kissed her tenderly and then pulled away. Michael took the flashlight and moved the beam around the entrance. In the vaulted doorway he spotted a bat clinging to the stone. Where there was one bat there was always more.

"See that up there?" He asked.

"That bat?"

"Yeah. There may be more, so try not to be frightened if we disturb them."

She swallowed and breathed in the night air and nodded. They stepped past the vaulted doorway into the chamber where they had had their first kiss, so many years ago. The room was just like Michael remembered it. The vast room seemed larger and far loftier than the pillars outside could support. As they went farther into the room the air became dank and stale almost damp in comparison with the dry air outside. They were halfway across the room when a accented voice called to them breaking the black air apart.

"Do not be alarmed. I am not who you seek."

Michael gripped Terri's hand tighter, and she looked at him in fear.

"Who the hell are you?" Michael yelled, almost relieved to let the anger seep into his bones instead of the fear that had chilled him all night.

"I will come out." A flashlight switched on from the inner sanctum, and Terri gripped his hand tighter. Something was bugging Michael about that voice, it was familiar. Everyday familiar, but he couldn't place it. The flashlight was courteously downcast and the unknown voice was almost close enough to have a face. The night didn't seem so hostile now that they weren't alone against it. Terri was trembling, but she seemed to know that the person with the flashlight wasn't who they were looking for.

"Who?" Michael started and then he saw who had left the inner chamber.

"Will. What in the Hell are you doing here?" He felt annoyed. What was one of the senior partners from the law firm doing here, and what did he know about who they were looking for? The guy was a jerk. At work Will didn't seem to like him, and Michael really didn't care for him either.

"I knew that something was wrong when you said you weren't sight seeing, the average holiday for Terri. I hardly dared to think that you might be the one."

"The one? What are you talking about? You're talking in riddles." Michael's anger was in his voice, he felt foolish being out in the middle of the night chasing unknown demons and then being met by a colleague.

"Just out for a midnight stroll Will? I often hang out in deserted temples in the dark by myself too. Did you follow us? How did you know we'd be here?"

"Michael! Calm down, I knew that if you were the one, you would come here."

"The one! Who in the Hell is this *one* your looking for? God, Will I can't believe you. Come on Terri." He gripped her hand and he started out of the chamber.

"Wait Michael I can help."

"Help what? Do you even know why we're here? Just stay out of it Will. You don't want to know why we're here. Believe me just stay out of it, you'll fare much better." His voice was bitter and they left the temple leaving his colleague in the courtyard following them out.

As they drove out of the parking lot Michael spoke, "Terri, he can't help us. He's just not capable of more than his work. He's more analytical than the most picky of lawyers. He would reject what's happening to us in a second." Terri had sat back in

her seat and she was leaning against the door.

"Come on I'm not mad at you. I just think it's really nervy of Will to follow us here."

"If he's as picky and anal as you say, then why would he waste his time trying to meet us. What if he could help us?"

"What's he going to do sue it? He can't help us, nobody can. We'll just have to think of some other way to rid ourselves of this creature."

Terri looked out the window, he could tell that he had hurt her. He regretted his anger, and he gently touched her shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Terri. I shouldn't have gotten so upset."

She tried to smile and failed, he could see it wasn't really heartfelt. Michael reached over and took her hand, but she didn't respond and he wished that he hadn't been so sarcastic.

"We should be home soon. After we get a good night's sleep we'll be able to think more clearly." She nodded, and he fell into silence and didn't know what to do. Michael hoped that she would forgive him. Now that he thought about it he couldn't figure out what had driven him to become so angry, he could rationalize his annoyance, but not his anger. What if Will could help? Why else had he been at the temple in the middle of the night? The doubts tugged at him, until he almost believed that Will could help in some strange way.

TWENTY-SIX

The sun was rising as they pulled into the parking lot to Michael's condominium. The sky with a wash of soft pink melding into the fading lavender sky. Terri had fallen asleep during the last hour of their drive back to Cairo. Michael woke her gently, and they wearily walked across the dark parking lot to the elevator. He tried to ignore the deep shadows, but Michael found that even though he was exhausted he kept looking for things in the shadows of the parking lot.

The doors to the elevator slid open and they got in. Michael couldn't remember being this tired since he had gotten out of law school when he had pulled all nighters studying for finals. After sleeping the morning away Michael woke up on the couch unsure if his alarm clock was going off, or if the buzzing noise was the smoke detector. He was still tired, and he sat up feeling groggy. The noise wasn't his alarm clock, it was the door. Michael stood up and crossed the room slowly, hoping that the caller would give up by the time he got to the intercom.

He pressed the talk button on the intercom to the lobby.

"Yeah, who is it?" He asked.

"Flowers." A mans voice said, in quick Arabic.

"Okay come up." Who was sending flowers? Michael went to the bedroom to get his wallet, he was wearing a pair of cotton shorts, and a t-shirt. The doors opened on Will Palk. Michael frowned, what the hell was Will doing with a flower arrangement? Will smiled, and looked pleased with himself, he handed a large vase, full of bright lilies, to Michael. Michael couldn't think of anything to say, he just stared at Will, unable to believe that he wouldn't give up. What did Will want from him?

"Take them to Terri, tell her that I'm here."

"We don't need to drag Terri into this."

"On the contrary, you already have. Go wake her with my apologies and get her out here. We all need to discuss this." before Michael could interrupt Will continued.

"I *do* know what's going on Michael, the horror I can't imagine, but I do understand."

Michael was confused. Did Will really know what was going on, or was he on some entirely different wave length? He went down the hall to the bedroom and woke up Terri. There were dark rings of exhaustion under her eyes, but she got up and followed him out to the living room.

"Good Morning Terri." Will said with a smile.

"Morning." She said managing a sleepy smile.

"Did you manage to get some sleep?" Michael asked Will, glaring at him. Will looked embarrassed, which seemed uncharacteristic for him.

"I stayed at my sons house, that's who's truck was in the parking lot last night."

"Quite the undercover investigator." Michael said.

"Michael, relax. He's trying to help us." Terri said.

Michael was annoyed at Will, but he decided that Terri was right, he could at least be civil to him.

"Okay Will, you seem to think you can help us. How can you?"

"You cannot offend me, or drive me away Michael, I'll keep coming back, this is too important. I can't leave you to deal with this on your own."

"Okay, okay, Will. I'll hear you out, but lets go to the kitchen, at least we can talk about this over some coffee."

Michael still felt uneasy about Will, but he was tired of looking for an answer that seemed too bizarre to be figured out. The sunlight came in through the kitchen window, making the kitchen look cozy and inviting. Michael put a pot of coffee on, and then joined Terri and Will at the table.

TWENTY-SEVEN

The kitchen wasn't as warm as it looked, and Terri found that she was shivering. Michael poured them all mugs of coffee, and then with rolls, and jam they ate a mid afternoon breakfast while Will politely sat back and didn't speak. If she had known he was just going to sit there instead of talking she would have just stuck to her coffee.

Michael apologized to Will while they were eating and that made her feel better. Even if they hadn't gotten along in the past she was glad that Michael was going to give him a chance. Michael looked hopeful even though she could still see the worry in his eyes. They were sitting at the kitchen table, sipping their coffee, when Will began his story.

"Michael, we've been acquainted since you entered law school, and even though we haven't become friends, I have always been honest with you. It is important that you keep this in mind, as I tell you this.

Hundreds of years ago, before 600 BC there was a great scholar, his name was Imhotep."

"The architect of the Step Pyramid in Giza?" Michael asked.

"Yes, and the magnificent temple that Terri's Father discovered. This Imhotep was very educated and had excelled in math and science. He was also known as a magician and a healer. Imhotep was a teacher and he taught many things to the court during the reign of Zoser, he kept detailed records on nature and science as he perceived it around him. He often tested his scientific theories with mathematical equations. His skills in math surpassed the most advanced mathematicians.

Imhotep was a well known healer. Not a doctor by today's standards, but he was able to apply reasonable methods of either doses of herbs, or setting broken bones to produce a cure. He was a loved man and revered by the kingdom. After his death he was deified, and is now counted among gods."

Terri shivered, she didn't want to hear any more. Somehow this genius was tied up in what was happening to them.

"We have a limited collection of his papyrus in a vault at my family's house. Would you come to see it?"

Michael looked at her to see what she thought. "Sure" she said, wondering how the papyrus was going to be able to help them. Maybe Will read hieroglyphics as well.

"Can you tell me why we're related with this?"

"Yes, but I want you to read one of the papyrus rolls first. Please Michael just come and read it, then you'll understand."

"I guess I'll just have to wait then. We'll shower and be ready in a minute. Please feel free to relax."

After showering and dressing Terri went out to the living room to wait with Will

for Michael. Will continued to read a magazine article, and Terri sat in one of the arm chairs with a book that she didn't read. Michael came out with his hair still wet.

"Let's go." Michael said. Terri could see that he wasn't about to waste this opportunity to learn about the thing that was hunting them. She hoped that they were talking about the same thing that Will was talking about.

They arrived at the Palk household thirty minutes later. The house had been built on the side of a hill overlooking Cairo. White stucco clung to the pillars of the outer gates and the house itself was built of a beige-white brick and was three stories tall. Terri could hardly believe the gardens and flowers, she glanced over her shoulder and could believe that they had arrived at an oasis. A couple of ancient palm trees grew in the back of the house, and flowering bushes, with creamy flowers thrived. Several rose bushes were planted by the front porch. They followed Will into the house through a heavy oak door.

"Rita!" Will called.

"Yes?"

"We have guests. We'll be back in just over an hour."

"Okay."

Will held out his hand in invitation to a stairwell that she hadn't noticed before. Back in an hour. Back from where? A trip to Hell? Where were they going that was downstairs? Were they going to tunnel to China? Terri couldn't control her imagination as they descended into the dark uninviting basement. What was down there that would make the difference?

The floor was done in a warm brown tile and the room appeared to be a exercise room, and just through double glass doors the room was filled by a lap size swimming pool glowing with pool lights. They followed Will down the hallway through a large living room filled with books, and old paintings covering the walls. The last room held a keypunch security pad on the wall by a closed door. Terri couldn't figure it out. A security pad for one room? What about the whole house? Will punched in his code and the solid wood door released. The room beyond the door, made Terri gasp.

A small fountain was gushing at the center of the room and a potted palm grew out of richly worked brass pot. The walls had been painted a soft white, and they held oil paintings of the Egyptian desert, the Nile, and the Step Pyramid. On the wall farthest from where they were standing, was a antique desk and a small book shelf. To the right of the desk was the door to a vault. It looked like the door to a bank vault. Why all the security? What did any of this wealth and security have to do with their problems? Where was the scroll? The skin on the back of her neck was cold, she was scared to see what was in the vault.

TWENTY-EIGHT

Michael was unsure of how he felt, as he watched Will dialing the vault code. The room they were in was well lit, and comfortable enough, but Michael wanted to know what was behind the door, before it was open. Was the vault holding something terrible inside it? Something that might struggle forth out of the deepest shadows, and cast its foul gaze on him. He clenched his hands. Was the thing from his dreams inside the vault?

He could have popped himself one, for his imagination. What would Will be doing locking up a monster in his basement? Michael's imagination had only been growing over the last year, and now it seemed that he was not only seeing monsters in the shadows, but in the most damned unlikely places as well. The vault probably held the family jewels, but what could be so priceless that Will had gone through so much trouble to protect it?

Will pressed the finger tips of his right hand against a milky glass plate that was

flush with the wall next to the vault door. A light from behind the glass flashed, and the vault door released. Did Will have his fingerprints encoded in some file stored in the security system? It seemed that was the case. The vault door released, and began to open. Michael tried to see into the other room as the door was opening, but Will was standing in the way. The vault was already lit with what seemed a harsh light, after the warm light in the fountain room. Michael stood on the threshold and looked around the room, which was much larger than a safe, or even a bank vault. The room appeared to be a huge storage vault, built right into the hill.

The vault was not made from a natural cave, it appeared to have been blasted out of the mountain. Track lights had been secured on the ceiling, directly on the naked rock. The floor was covered in a thick brown carpet, and rows of bookcases ran the length of the large room full and overflowing with books. Another desk, which actually looked more like a worktable and was stained with ink, stood against a bare wall where several of the track lights pointed at it.

Will led them past all of this to the far end of the room where the wall held storage slots. The slots looked as though they had been made hundreds of years ago, but the wooden beams looked solid. The storage compartments were filled with boxes, loose papers and envelopes, and a smattering of scrolls. Strange shaped items disappeared into the shadows, and Michael wondered if something lurked in one of the compartments, waiting for them to turn their backs so it could attack.

Will left them standing by the desk, and walked to a wooden ladder that was resting on rollers. The ladder was the only access to the cubby holes that Michael

could see. Terri moved closer to him and he took her hand, he could smell the fresh scent of the shampoo she had used before they had left his condominium. He wished that they could leave Egypt. Walk out of Will's house, take a flight to Colorado, or even California and escape all of this, but he knew that they wouldn't be safe for long. The thing would find them.

Will's voice interrupted his thoughts. "This is the legacy that my family has given me."

Michael watched Will retrieve the brittle scrolls. What did the scrolls say? Terri shivered and leaned against him, and Michael looked for a thermostat, it was cold in the vault. He decided that it was probably some sort of climate control used to preserve the items, and documents in the compartments. Climate control or not, Michael was cold, as though his soul had been dipped in water and thrown in the freezer.

Will climbed down from the compartments and walked to the work table where he carefully unrolled a scroll that covered the top of the worktable. Michael held Terri's hand as he leaned closer to study what was written on the ancient paper, he couldn't decipher any of the text.

"Let me translate," Will said. "This is a section of Imhotep's writing," Michael felt chills run across the back of his neck. Why did Will have something this ancient? Shouldn't the scroll be in a museum somewhere? The paper had to be papyrus, it was thick and had brown with age. Will started to read, lines of concentration formed a frown on his face.

"What I have done is blasphemous to the Gods of my time. If Zoser were to find my work he would destroy me along with it. If I am right, and I am only following the laws that the Gods have created, then I shall live again. Live after having died, the true meaning of the ankh, a reality. I can then bring forth my discovery as a gift. The greatest of my healing powers. To come forth from the death." Michael stepped back from the table, he felt as though he had been punched in the stomach. What was Will reading?

"I am ill, but I have found herbs that will work when altered, to bring me back to life. I hope to live to the winter equinox. I have told no one of my sickness. What state of health shall I be in when I rise? Will man accept me? There is nothing but good to be gained from this. I feel as though the Gods approve."

The Gods approve? What kinds of drugs was he taking? You didn't have to be a funeral director to know coming back from the dead was wrong. It just didn't happen. It wasn't supposed to happen.

"Didn't he think about overpopulation? The dead and the living? How could there be room for both?" Terri asked.

"He understood. From studying much more of his work it seems that he believed this would only add about fifteen to twenty years to life. He was wrong." Michael looked away from Will and stared at the paper. The room was so cold.

"What happened?" Michael asked.

Will reached out and took a gold ring off of the work table. The ring was a polished gold, with an ankh engraved into the surface.

"Take this and put it on Michael." Michael did as Will asked and waited for him to explain.

"He died of his terminal illness a couple of weeks before the winter equinox. He used his herbs, but his plan didn't work. After he rose from death he didn't die again." Michael felt sick. Will was serious. There was nothing crazy about Will, only the message he was giving.

"He had no soul to guide him in his new life. The time between when he died and when he came back to life was too great. His spirit had departed his body upon death. When he became conscious again two weeks later there was no trace of the spirit. The spirit had gone on to be reborn again, *reincarnated*. Imhotep was left as a hollow husk. He wasn't given a few years of life by his experiment, he was made immortal."

A hollow husk? Immortal? Michael felt as though the room was reeling.

"Imhotep doesn't seem to have any emotion other than anger. When his spirit left, it seems it took his genius with it. His emotions and actions seem to come directly from outside stimulation. He watches, and he lashes out."

"Over the thousands of years he seems to have figured out what happened. At first we could only tell that he was looking for something, but now we have decided that he must be looking for his soul.

Why he is able to feel and express anger I don't know, but he is frozen as he was in the second week of death. He was damaged in death, his brilliant mind included."

What Will was saying was making more sense than it should. This was wrong!

How could it have happened? This corpse was searching for its soul. Michael remembered the dreams he had had as a boy. The presence watching him... trying to find him.

Michael exhaled. "How do you know all of this?"

"Imhotep had a servant that he trusted. A servant that he thought did not understand his project. This apprentice, or servant whatever you want to think of him as, was treated much like a son. He learned about magic, and healing, and most of all he knew that when Imhotep did die, he would be coming back.

After Imhotep died, the servant continued with his masters projects and waited for his return. After a month he was too afraid to keep waiting and took a priest with him to check the tomb in which Imhotep had been laid. They found it empty. The servant was afraid, and with the help of the priest he got an audience with the pharaoh, who was a very superstitious man. The pharaoh believed the story, and had only a few questions. At the advice of the servant he kept the story to himself and agreed to council with the servant again.

The servants name was Rani and he was becoming more frightened, seeing things in shadows and the darkness when the sun set. He met with the pharaoh again.

After talking with the pharaoh it was decided that to keep Imhotep docile they should create a monument to him. The pharaoh pondered, and with the help of the priest they devised a plan to call Imhotep back. Albeit that it probably wasn't a good plan for bringing the master back but they knew that this would endure to call to him, if

indeed he would live forever, like the servant thought.

The student of Imhotep was bound in a pledge of silence to the pharaoh and to the priest, death would be the price if the secret leaked. They started to build the first of three great pyramids, building along the same lines that Imhotep had built the step pyramids but Rani smoothed the lines. This monumental process was masked as tombs for the mighty pharaohs. Rani thought that if he could create at least one huge pyramid, his master might recognize the shape and come forth.

Rani took his teenage son as an apprentice and they began the construction with multitudes of slaves, and the support of the pharaoh. Rani had felt that the pyramid on a greater scale than the one completed by Imhotep at Giza completed in steps, would be a tribute to him, and that he would be drawn by the wonder that they would achieve. He prayed for his master and to his Gods, and as you know in the end they achieved their goal. Only the sons of Rani, in great humility have known. After Zoser died Rani's son dared not tell the new pharaoh about Imhotep, so the secret lived on in our family. Rani's children have kept many things, and have always watched for Imhotep."

Michael was speechless and he felt as though he had disassociated with reality. Time didn't seem to matter so desperately, they were all part of a infinite cycle.

"How do you know this is true and not some folk tale? All that effort..."

"Was put forth because the pharaohs wanted their own monuments, and that's what they were led to believe by their architects. I have this history because Rani is the Father of my family. Imhotep has not come back to our knowledge until this

decade. We believed that he had found his spirit, but he does not have it, yet."

"God, Will what are you saying? This dead thing wants my soul?" He shuddered.

"Oh yes he wants your soul. He covets it. Your spirit fled his body centuries ago and was reborn many times, and you hold the spirit now.

Overall we have known of many of the lost discoveries of the ancient world but we have let them be in the graves of sand. The temple to the sun that Imhotep constructed had drawn him after it had been rediscovered. My children and I watch and they were watching the temple the day you and Terri were there.

Imhotep disappears quickly and easily, but occasionally once maybe twice a year we see him. He is seeking his spirit and I believe he has found it Michael."

Michael leaned against a wooden beam. "He has. He tormented me since I was a child filling my head with nightmares and then I would feel his presence, as though he were looking for me with some sort of psychic energy. I don't know how but I would feel him there with me. Now, he's been after Terri. How can we get our lives back?"

Will's eyes were a blaze. "I believe somehow that the idea or memory of love may have been awakened, by your emotions toward each other. That could be why he is watching Terri."

"All we can do is to wait for him, he will come to us because he seeks you. He must use some sort of telepathic, or psychic powers to locate you. Maybe he developed certain parts of his brain mere mortals don't have access too. Who knows? It could be anything. Michael, when we have him the ring imprinted with the ankh will

protect you. It was his in life and he will recognize it. I promise you he will.

I don't know what will happen when he finds you and faces you, but we can protect you and Terri. We will have to plan very carefully. For as I know, Imhotep, when he discovers a purpose can cover ground quickly. He was in the temple the night after your father unearthed it Terri."

Terri felt weak she didn't want to see this thing. How could they protect Michael?

"He wants his spirit and you." Will looked at Terri, and Michael felt anger building inside him. Will must have realized that they were full up with the information he had given them, and he left the other documents that he had gotten out laying on the table and showed them out to the hallway.

"Go upstairs now, Rita will have dinner started. Try to relax and I will call my two sons, my oldest daughter is in Europe and I can't reach her, but we will find a way to defeat him."

Michael felt relief. 'We will find a way...' So, even though Will's family had followed Imhotep for centuries, Will was going to help them. Will led the way back into the fountain room. Terri was shaking, and Michael could see the fear in her eyes, he wrapped his arms around her, and held her tightly.

Upstairs Michael and Terri talked with Rita whose quick smile and friendly nature, helped them forget a little of what they had just heard. Her black hair hung down her back in loose curls and she had bright smiling eyes. Terri helped in the kitchen and when Michael tried to help Rita insisted that he go wait on the deck. He

watched the sunset in the dusty night, and wondered how he could defeat this thing that Imhotep had become. This unnatural part of his life, that was never meant to be? He felt turmoil inside threatening him. The dead living. He couldn't believe it, how would it have survived, unnoticed, but by this one group of observers?

The hiding and constant emptiness it must have felt. He couldn't imagine what it must have been like for Imhotep after his death, and Michael found that he didn't want to. The sun continued to fall behind the horizon and Michael wanted to stop it. Would this be the last time he saw it? He wanted to stop the night from crawling in, giving Imhotep the chance to move more freely in the protective darkness of the night.

He didn't want to be alone anymore as the dusk became more apparent, and he went into the house. He sat on the couch and watched Terri and Rita working together, his thoughts fell back onto his dreams. The presence must have been the residue of Imhotep's psychic touch. Why had it taken Imhotep so long to find him? Then he realized that his family would move from Egypt to England every season for his father's lecturing schedule. He thanked God that they had moved so often.

Will stood in the doorway of the kitchen watching Rita and Terri with worried eyes. Rita looked up once at Will and smiled, warmly, intimately, she knew what was happening. Will must have told her long ago, what might happen.

They ate dinner in the quiet dining room, with a fresh night breeze blowing gently through the screen of the open back door. Terri helped Rita clean dinner when they were finished eating. Michael had caught her attention, but she had waved him away, she was probably glad to keep her hands busy. Michael wouldn't mind scrubbing

the whole house for Rita, for the cleaning would keep his mind off of the thing that was coming for him.

After they had finished in the kitchen Rita and Terri joined Michael in the garden. Will had disappeared in the basement after dinner, now when he appeared he looked worried.

"It is time Rita." Rita's eyes held questions only for a second.

"He's coming?"

"Yes, go to the airport. Joshua will be home soon to fly you to Alexandria, I've reserved rooms for you there. You will be safe. Terri, it is time to come inside."

Rita gave Terri a look of sincere empathy and then she excused herself and ran into the house to gather things and to escape the nightmare. Michael watched her go, feeling depression settle upon him. The night was dark, and Michael could see no moon. The thing would be coming.

TWENTY-NINE

Will was sitting by the door to the fountain room-study and Terri sat on the floor, cross legged, watching the water as Michael paced. Michael had a gun secured to him in a shoulder holster, but that didn't make her feel any safer. Guns and weapons, seemed like a bad joke. How would it be possible to kill something that was already dead? Will had made it a point that they were all armed. Terri had a handgun and one of Will's son's Issac was outside the door with a shotgun.

Terri was afraid for Michael. What would happen to him if they couldn't stop the thing that Imhotep had become?

"What if he doesn't come tonight?"

"He will." Will answered.

"What if he doesn't die from bullet wounds?"

Michael looked at her, and gave her smile that she was sure was meant to be reassuring, but it wasn't. Terri didn't feel reassured, the dead thing with the power to go where it wanted unhindered by the boundaries of mortals. The thing could just waltz in

and kill Michael. She didn't want to think about it but, she couldn't stop. What if she lost Michael? She tried not to think about it, but she knew that she would fight the thing with every ounce of strength that she could muster, bar its way. There had to be a way to stop it. Tears fell from her eyes and she didn't wipe them away, instead she watched the fountain as her fears ate away at her.

* * * * *

Michael continued pacing and started rubbing his forehead. It was starting. The link was being made. He felt a surge of panic in his stomach, but there was nothing he could do. This time they were going to see it through. Terri was watching the fountain and her blue eyes were worried, and intense. Michael wished that he could take away her fear, but he wasn't doing a great job at keeping in his own fear at bay.

"Its starting." Michael said and Will looked up.

"Thanks for helping us." Michael said, feeling embarrassed by how he had treated Will."

Will nodded and looked at the door. Michael knew that the thing was following the psychic string to him. Now there was no choice involved, he had to confront the thing. What if he didn't win? Visions of the thing that Terri had described plagued him and the headache became worse with a painful stab - he could feel the link tightening. *It* was coming

THIRTY

The night whispered to itself as breezes blew. His feet hurt, but the pain registers as only a interference, angered he doesn't stop walking. He moves with the shadows. Searching again. Searching... the feeling was there, his soul had settled into place for the night. This time it was closer than ever before. He remembered the other, and the pain. His soul was near, and the night was dark.

The moon was only a sliver of light in the black sky and the alleys were unlit. His feet hurt, and he was angry. Pain, pain, pain - distracting him from his soul. He *needed* his soul. He *wanted* it. He *would* get it back.

Between the black shadows that lingered in his mind like layers of cobwebs, he remembered the girl. Echoed memories of emotions lost, angered him. His anger made the link with his soul clear. He would feel. He would have what was his. He moved through the shadows by habit.

The shadows welcomed him and seemed to show him the way through the streets, and the buildings. He could feel he was close. He had never been this close before.

His clouded, and damaged mind had only one area of focus now. Memories were as close as he had to feelings for centuries, now he was within the reach of the real things. He would take his soul.

THIRTY-ONE

Will offered Michael his chair, and Michael sat down gratefully, leaning his head against his hands. Will switched off the lights to relieve Michael's eyes from the searing pain the lamplight brought. Michael was holding his hands over his eyes to protect them from the dim light that glowed out of the fountain. Terri hurt for him. She sat by his feet and put her hand on his leg. She wished that he didn't have to go through any of this. They had given him a pain reliever, but it hadn't done anything to phase his pain. They had stopped talking, and were waiting. As a last resort Will had brought out a small spray can of mace for Terri to use to defend herself if the bullets didn't stop the corpse, it seemed that Will was becoming more unnerved as time passed.

Michael was in no condition to defend himself now, he was frozen in the chair collapsed against its leather back, his eyes tearing with the pain. She could see the tears wetting his cheeks. Terri was getting more and more worried. This was really going to happen, not like before. Imhotep was coming for him physically, not in his dreams.

She held her gun loosely in her hand, and the can of mace was on the floor within reach. Fear raced in her veins and the adrenaline rush never seemed to go away, she was wide awake and afraid for Michael. If in the worst case the thing got Isaac, and Will then she was Michael's last defense, the thought chilled her.

Will stood up and crossed the room, to check Michael.

"I think he's passed out." Terri watched as he checked Michael's pulse.

"He's just unconscious. Probably for the best for now, the pain can't reach him."

"The dream."

"What?"

"He can dream. It always happens when the thing is searching for him." She didn't want to call the thing Imhotep, it had become something else.

THIRTY-TWO

A light was burning, where he had to go. The brightness burned like acid against his ancient eyes. Anger built inside him and he directed it at the light. The bulb made a popping sound and broke apart, small glass missiles hissed against the fixture, and fell to the porch.

The door was unlocked, but the house was deserted. He was confused. Lights twinkled from the house, stinging his eyes, and there were no more shadows to follow. The ancient thing he had become moved forward, limping on blistered feet. The house was deserted. He used his mind to probe the house. His soul was in the basement. Something else became apparent to him, they were waiting for him.

Those who had waited for him through the years, were there with his soul, and the girl. The stairway held shadows. He needed his soul. He had to go get it.

"Want it." He tried to whisper, then he followed the stairs down into the basement.

THIRTY-THREE

Terri could feel a change in the atmosphere, something indiscernible, but a change. Imhotep was in the house. Will met her eyes, he could feel it too. She hoped to God that Isaac knew. Will's son was in his early thirties, and he had shown her his pictures of his family, her heart broke at the thought of him in danger.

Will turned on the lights and moved to the side of the door, holding his gun in front of him. Terri stood up, and tried to position herself in the best place to act as a barricade to Michael. She had shoved the small bottle of mace into her pocket, and was holding the gun with both hands, ready to aim. Terri had never used a gun before, but Will had taught her how to use the gun and she hoped that she could aim it correctly and not miss when the time came. Whatever happened she would stay in front of Michael. Will nodded to her in encouragement. She let her eyes acknowledge it, and her stomach knotted even tighter as they waited.

Will's face changed, disbelief, and then she saw the steel barricade of protection. What had happened? Had something happened to Issac? She could see Will's jaw was clenched tight, he was tense, and his face was pale under his naturally

dark complexion. She was furious at their helplessness.

"He's trying the keypad." Will said.

The analytical mind of the thing had processed the mathematical possibilities and cracked the code. Michael groaned softly behind her as he came to, pushing himself up in the chair. She could see that he was still in pain. He knew that Imhotep was there. He was watching the door.

The door to the study swung open and all the horrific movies she had ever seen had not prepared her for the thing in front of her. Imhotep's skin was burned from the sun, and his body was decayed as she had seen it in the hallway. His eyes were fevered and yellow with dried puss that caked the corners of them. His hair was tangled and clumped with unknown things, and his face held deep gashes that looked recent, she realized, Issac had put up a fight. He was clothed in dirty tattered clothing, but he was wearing no shoes. His feet bled openly on the clean light tile. The angel of death had come for them.

The thing started toward Michael. It didn't stop when Will called, so he shot it twice, and the thing made a horrible sound of rage, behind him Will fell to the ground unconscious.

The thing was limping.

"Please" she started unable to keep her teeth from chattering.

"Stop!" He looked at her and the fever in its eyes receded, but then as if remembering why he was there he walked past the fountain. She glanced behind her Michael looked like he was going into shock, he was staring at the thing coming toward

him. After that glance she saw that he wouldn't be able to get his gun. The rest of his life was up to what she did.

Steadying herself she fired a bullet at the things chest. It started wheezing but did not look at her again. It limped closer, she could see rage in its eyes, she could smell the stench of its diseased and rotting flesh. Michael would be dead in a few seconds if she didn't stop the thing. She felt sick, as she fired the remainder of the bullets into the dead thing. Then against all protests of her logic she moved within reach of the thing and sprayed the mace into its oozing face.

It grabbed toward her arm for support, but it missed and fell forward on top of her. Terri screamed, and saw Issac seconds later as he reached down, pulling the thing off of her.

She looked over at Michael, he seemed to be paralyzed by the pain. Isaac took the his father's gun from where it had fallen. She looked away and covered her ears as she heard him fire. The horrifying reality of it all was hitting her and she couldn't look at the thing anymore. She passed out.

When she came to Michael was holding her. His headache had broken, the tie had been broken at last. Tears welled up in her eyes and she hugged him fiercely.

"There's no pulse." Issac said. The nightmare had died the death of a mortal.

THIRTY-FOUR

Terri was watching the night from the dining room window. The city lights seemed surreal and almost as though they were from a distant fairyland. Across the kitchen Isaac was talking to his Mother, his face was pale, and his left cheek was bruised and swollen. Isaac had called for an ambulance as soon as they had confirmed Imhotep was dead. His Father was unconscious.

Michael was awake, but his eyes were strange, they confirmed the horror of the night, his eyes were clear and golden brown. She watched as Isaac and Michael carried Will upstairs in a sling made from a sheet, they had decided that they had to chance moving him, the paramedics would have raised too many questions about the blood and bullet holes in the basement walls. Terri found some wash cloths and wet them down to blot Will's face, and Michael followed Isaac into the basement. She didn't want to think about what they had to do down there. She pulled a light blanket out of a closet and gently laid it over Will to keep him warm.

They weren't very far from the city, the paramedics would arrive at any moment.

What was taking them so long? Will's face was gray, and his breathing looked shallow and quick. She was so tired that she could have crawled into bed and slept the next week away, but instead she watched the night sky, for any sign of the ambulance lights. She was praying, when she saw the first ghostly flicker of the ambulance lights, whispering a prayer for Will to make it.

The front door was open and she backed out of the paramedics way as they checked Will and got him onto the stretcher. Issac had come running upstairs when had heard them arrive, there was no sign of Michael. Where was he? Her stomach tightened, as she thought of him in the fountain room with the dead thing. What if it wasn't dead?

Issac locked the door.

"Michael and I are going outside." He paused, as though mulling over what he was trying to say, and after a moment he seemed to decide that she was tough enough.

"You can join us, but we are going to burn Imhotep's body. It won't be pleasant." Her stomach was queasy, but she knew that she had to watch. She had to *know* that the thing wouldn't be coming back.

"I have to see it."

Issac nodded as if he understood, then he went down stairs. Together Michael and Issac carried the body, wrapped in a tan sheet, outside. Terri followed them out and shut the sliding glass door behind her. She sat on the porch and watched the night sky, the stars were bright and beautiful a wilderness all of their own. The scent of the fire being lit caused a chill to run down her back.

When the fire had burned down to ashes Terri went into the house, and went straight into the bathroom where she gagged against the taste of ashes in her mouth. She rinsed her mouth and washed her face, but that didn't seem to help, she still felt sick. Her stomach was upset, and she felt sick from exhaustion, she wanted to get out of here, but Michael was going to wait for the ashes to cool, so they could scatter them. She fell asleep on the living room couch a few minutes later.

She woke to Michael's touch.

"Hey, you okay?" His face was grimy, but he was smiling, and the smile was more radiant than the clearest summer day. He was finally smiling.

"Yeah. Are you?"

"I'm fine. What do you say we get out of this place?"

She sat up. "I'd say yesterday wasn't soon enough."

At his condominium after they had showered, they fell asleep, in each other's arms, exhausted.

* * * * *

The sunshine was streaming in through the bedroom window, and the light was strong and bright. Michael lay in bed for a while, watching Terri's face as she slept. He was relieved that the nightmare was finally over. There was nothing to fear in the shadows any more, and more important he hadn't been going crazy. The relief brought tears to his eyes.

Before they had gone to bed, Michael had baked a frozen pizza. Despite the terrible night he had been hungry and over Coke, and thin freezer pizza he had realized how terribly he missed America. He was ready to leave Egypt, and not for the east coast this time. He wanted to be with Terri, wherever that might be.

Michael sat up in bed and looked at the sky through the blinds, the sky was a dusty brown and there were no clouds. The daylight was delicious after the long night and Michael closed his eyes, soaking in the sunlight that fell through the slots in the blinds. He was still sitting in bed when he remembered Marsa was in the hospital. Pain echoed through him. The last time he had seen her, she had been laying in the hospital bed, unconscious.

He got up and went out to the living room and looked up the number to the hospital. Once he was on the phone he almost hung up, he was afraid of what he would hear. The conversation with the nurse was brief. Marsa had died the night before, due to hemorrhaging in her brain. Tears flooded his eyes. It wasn't fair! Marsa was too good a woman to have died. He wanted to deny it, and block it from his mind, but he couldn't. He could only think of her family.

As the day passed, they had decided to leave Egypt, and they spent the afternoon packing. Michael had suggested that they take a vacation. They were going to Colorado. As the sun was setting Michael talked to Issac, and discovered that Will had stabilized. With relief, Michael went out onto the balcony and joined Terri. She was watching the sunset. They sat in twilight solitude for a few minutes, holding hands, and watching the stars appear.

"So," Terri began casually, and that single word caught Michael's attention like nothing she could have said. She had a faint smile on her face.

"So?" He asked, wondering about the smile on her face.

"Where do we go from here?"

"Go from here?" He asked, feeling his nerves tighten. Where would they go from here? Michael wanted to ask her to marry him so badly, but he didn't know if he would sound like a total flake. What would she say?

"Yeah. What do we do for an encore?" She asked with a grin.

"Well..." He stopped, frightened by what she might say. He felt more shaken by the possibility that she might choose to spend her life without him than by anything they had lived through. She smiled, and the gentle encouragement he saw in her eyes, helped him continue.

"I want you to marry me Terri. *That's* what I want to do for an encore." Her eyes grew bright with happiness and he felt his love blossom. They sat quietly for a few minutes watching the stars.

"You know, Colorado might be ok."

"Colorado's not paradise you know. Lot's of rocks, snow..."

"Mountains..."

"Mountains everywhere..."

"Not like we could be happy there..." She was smiling. Michael leaned over and kissed her gently and then with more passion. The night wasn't as dark as it had been. The moon was out, and wisps of clouds embraced the stars.