

Another Dream

- by Angie

A dream ... but of a shadow, summoned with all his substance

- George Chapman

I left the night forest and entered the cavern, feeling as if I was entering another dimension. I couldn't believe I was doing this, but it was summer and the night was warm.

I spread out the straw mat and quilt I had brought with me, then sat down on it and looked at the pool. The full moon was just peeking over an opening that looked too perfect to be natural. I looked around. The cavern was dim but the pool reflected starlight. The cavern was stepped at intervals and tapered to the roof, almost spherical, except the side where I had entered, an opening like that in a snail shell. I realized that it must have housed a whirlpool once, eons ago, when the sea level had been much, much higher than it was now.

Tonight, it was my heart that was racing, as I contemplated what I hoped to see here. I was crazy to even think it.

The cavern was warm and I could feel the summer breeze wafting against the back of my neck. That was re-assuring. It meant that I wasn't having a dream. I wasn't sure I believed what the elder had told me about this place. There is no danger during a full moon, she had said, smiling reassuringly. Enjoy.

I shifted to make a small well for my bottom in the soft sand under my mat, crossed my legs, and tried to form a picture in my mind, while watching the pool. Even so, perhaps because I my eyes had turned inward, long moments passed before I realized something had changed.

In the light of the moon, a mist seemed had formed in the centre of the pool. As I watched, bemused, it began to take shape, and drift closer to me. Before long, details became clear.

I rubbed my eyes and clenched my hands, wanting to be sure I had not fallen asleep. The cavern itself was silent and the pool still, but I could hear the faint rustle of the huge firs outside in the forest, like an echo of that long-ago sea. I felt very awake.

The shape, now above the shoreline, rotated a few degrees. Briefly, I caught a glimpse of a face, and I grabbed onto the quilt as if it were an anchor. The clothing gained more definition as I watched, and filled out with shades of grey, topped by a dark shadow. Something much lighter caught a little moonlight as the figure turned a little more. Then the figure stepped down onto the sand and paused, as if uncertain.

I had not really expected this to work, but I stood up instinctively, and waited, I was not sure for what.

I couldn't see his face now. He was limned in moonlight but in silhouette. The hood was obviously over his head. He turned a little more to face me and approached with the silent, easy grace I had always admired. Half of his face was now moonlit, and there was no doubt about his identity, including the little leather pouch hanging from his neck. I was too stunned to move.

When he was standing close to me on the blanket, he opened his arms in invitation. I moved into them slowly, as if in a dream, and felt them circle me, hold me close, as I had always imagined he would.

He felt very solid and warm and his hands on my back were firm. I felt him move his head and look up and I moved apart a little to look at him. His face in the moonlight seemed ethereally beautiful.

After what seemed like an eon, he gave a large sigh. It told me everything. I recognized the tone, from hearing it so many times, and my heart skipped a beat.

I could see his face clearly now. A few strands of his long hair escaped from the hood and I wished I could see it all. As if he caught that thought, he tilted his head, moved his hands from my back and carefully slipped off the hood. Now his hair gleamed silver and gold and his unusual face was still as he looked down at me.

The silence hung in the cavern like something physical now. I didn't want to break it. I had no idea what to say, or even if I should.

As if he had sensed that indecision, I saw his mouth twitch upwards. I could see his eyes now, that stunning blue, magical in the moonlight, and they seemed amused.

I didn't know what to do next. I had not thought this far – had not really believed it could happen.

He closed the distance between us, looked in my eyes and then bent to pick me up behind my knees. He sank down gently down onto the mat, as if I weighed no more than a child. Was there a whiff of candle smoke as he leaned towards me?

He stretched out his legs on either side of me and reached for my hands to gather them in his large ones. They were warm and I could see the hair on the backs of them, the long pearly nails. I relaxed a little then, closed my eyes briefly, enjoying the sensation of his clasp, still unable to quite believe it.

He tugged my hands a little towards him and, obediently, I turned and cuddled against his shoulder. He moved his arms to surround me. I could feel his breath against my hair and the beat of his heart through the white sweater he wore, the one I loved best. Turning my head just a little, I could see some moonlit chest hair through the shirt ties and sighed happily. If this was a dream, it was the best one I had ever had, and I didn't want it to end.

He hugged me closer, drawing me against him and pulling up his legs to bracket me. I was wearing light pants, so I could feel the soft bulge between his legs and that made my heart race. Perhaps he felt that too, because he kissed the top of my head. I closed my eyes to enjoy the warmth that ran along my skin and seeped into my bones.

When I opened them again to look up at him, he was looking down at me intently. He gave another sigh, this one so deep and full of meaning, that my mouth dropped open. He was happy, I realized, although I could not guess why.

I felt at peace, protected, loved – and no words had yet passed between us. Maybe none were necessary. He held onto me tightly still, as if he feared a separation as much as I did.

I could feel his breathing under my ear and turned a little to look at his chest again. As if on its own volition – or perhaps his - I watched my hand slip under the bottom of his sweater and then move lightly upwards. His chest was firm and covered with soft, fine hair. I felt him breathe deeply and his heartbeat quicken a little. Then I felt a slight vibration under my hand. I looked up, unbelieving. He looked down and I saw that I was not mistaken. He was smiling and his face was relaxed.

Then he bent down and planted a kiss on my lips, holding his unique mouth there just a little longer than I expected. I couldn't breathe for the joy of it, the feel of warmth and love that accompanied it. When he released me, I rested my head against his shoulder and a sigh escaped me.

Could one have too much bliss, I wondered?

I felt I should speak, but my thoughts were confused and I still didn't know what to say. But again, he anticipated me.

"Thank-you", he said softly, in that deep, slightly raspy voice.

I looked up at him, puzzled. Why was he thanking *me*?

“This is a dream pool,” he continued, looking at me before gazing out across it.

“It catches strong dreams – fantasies. I have felt them, so many of them, but no one came here to give me form, to make me real.”

His head tilted, and he looked up at the moon, now bright and full in its circular hole, bathing the cavern in silver light. A breeze was playing across the surface of the pool, weaving the moonlight into bright strands inlaid with pearls.

We sat in silence and I watched his face, moonlit and beautiful. I closed my eyes for a moment and when I opened them, I realized that the cavern light was dimming. The moon would move past the opening and the pool would go dark. The magic, I was told, would then end. The moon would not appear again in that hole for a long time.

He was looking across the pool. His mouth was open slightly, as if he was having trouble breathing, and I could see his canines glinting a little. The expression on his face showed a deep longing. When I shifted, embarrassed, he closed his mouth and looked down at me again.

I knew, suddenly and very clearly, what he wanted – and that he would never ask me for it. I hoped I could.

I turned towards the pool a little, and removed my hand from its warm place. I clasped my hands together to concentrate. He held me firmly in the crook of his arm, giving me support.

I formed another image in my mind, a smaller one. This time I was hardly surprised when I saw a mist form in the middle of the pool and gradually form into a shape, which moved quickly towards the shoreline. Time was running out, and I waited impatiently, willing the figure to hurry, and saw it gain definition and a hint of colour as it neared the shore.

She stepped down onto the sand and walked towards us, a soft shadow with just a touch of adamant around the edges. There was a metallic glint around her neck and I could just see the crystal at the end of the chain. I let my breath out, unaware that I had been holding it.

I moved to stand up and he lifted me to my feet in a single graceful motion as he arose too. I could feel the tension in the clasp of his hand on my right arm, which he hadn't released. I knew he was afraid - that what he wanted so badly might not be.

But she came up to us and looked up at him. She was wearing the long, white, lacy nightgown I had always admired. Even in the growing dimness, I could see that she was as solid as he and caught a little of her smile, as if it was reflected off him. Her hair seemed like polished pewter in the fading moonlight.

I felt him relax his grip and I moved away, wanting to give them privacy, but wanting even more to witness their reunion.

“Vincent,” she whispered, and gathered up his hands in hers and looking up at him.

“Catherine,” he replied, his voice catching as he moved closer. Without another word, he enveloped her in a hug, surrounding her with his arms, his cloak making them one shadow in the dimming cavern. As they stood thus, one in spirit, their love seemed to envelop me as well. The dying moonlight made it more poignant, because I couldn't see them clearly anymore.

I backed up further and was about to leave, when their shadow moved and turned. I saw both their faces, as if lit from within. They were smiling.

“Thank-you,” they said together, and I nodded. I realized I still had not spoken a word and found my voice.

“You're welcome,” I whispered. “And thank *you*.”

I felt, rather than saw, Vincent nod. I knew that I would hold his warmth and love in my heart, and that the memory of the feel of him, the sound of his voice, his kiss – would never fade. I knew also that he wanted this - a last gift between us.

As I gazed at them, I could see they were fading. I watched them turn and walk onto the pool, hand in hand. I knew they would never again be separated, or need to wait for a dreamer. Dreams would continue to be collected here, though, perhaps to enrich them both now.

Their love, which had warmed so many, seemed to fill me as the last wisp of their misty forms disappeared and the cavern went dark, lit only by the stars. This place, I thought, would never forget them either.

I picked up my blanket and mat and rolled them into a bundle. I left the cavern of the dream pool, at peace with myself, happier than I had ever been.

I smiled to myself, and seemed to feel his hands again, warming mine. Outside, the wind sighed their names in the tall firs and a rustle of aspen leaves whispered farewell.

END