

DESTINY IN TIME - A NEW BEGINNING

by Judy A Keller

CHAPTER ONE

A lone figure could be seen walking silently along the twisted labyrinth of tunnels and caverns that now comprised her world. Her earliest years had been spent living with her family in a suburb of Kingston, Jamaica, a world far removed from the one she now inhabited. Although, in one respect, it was very similar; her family traditionally lived apart from their neighbors. To live alone, as she did now, was not all that bad. When the others came, she would continue to live apart from them. She would be able to enter their world whenever necessary. But, the others would not be able to enter hers.

She'd always known she would be coming here to what was left of the Ancient One's world. Every other generation, her family chose a new Guardian. Her grandmother before her ... and now it was her turn. It had been seven long years since she'd first entered this world. It had been during these years that she had gradually come to learn the secrets the Ancient Ones had entrusted to the Guardian of their Chamber of Knowledge.

Some called them Atlantins ... but, in truth, they were here long before the earliest human ancestor was even thought of. They chose to live with humans, in order to educate them. However, they soon learned that it was far better to let them learn from their own mistakes. By the time of the great cataclysm, they had moved all of their records to where they now resided. They passed this secret along to the Guardian. Each Guardian was responsible for choosing and educating its successor.

The average New Yorker would be amazed to learn the extent of this forgotten world, existing far below the city's streets. Since her arrival Below, she'd worked hard to learn the ways of the world where she spend her remaining years. As she came to the end of her training period, her grandmother had slowly fallen ill, and within a few days time, had slipped silently away.

I buried her, as she had directed, in the catacombs long reserved for this purpose. Now I, Narcissa, am its Guardian.

Few topsiders knew of these tunnels. A small number of homeless stragglers from time to time would take shelter in the upper regions ... none had ever ventured where I walked now. It was safe here, this was truly my world. Soon it would be different ... the Others would be coming and I will share my world with them. It was in the prophecies of the Ancient Ones that their imminent arrival was predicted. It was for this reason that I now journeyed to the location of the Ancient One repository of knowledge.

The secret chamber beckoned to me. It was now well-stocked with provisions and awaited my arrival; only when I was within, would it resonate with life. Only I could access this hidden chamber and utilize its knowledge. For this I had been born and now the time had come to awaken its powers; but the Ancient Ones' powers could not be used without exacting a payment in return. Already, a thin veil

of opaque coated the surface of my eyes. I could still see well enough to get around, but I knew that after this time it would be different. From this time onward, only within this chamber would I truly see.

Once inside, I would remain until the children were safe in the world Above and Below. Crossing the mosaic-tiled floor of the ancient temple's remains, I went directly to the wall of solid granite blocks. Once there, I reached upward and firmly pressed against the bronze-headed lion that now stood before me. Silently, a portion of the wall slid back to reveal a stairway that spiraled downward into the darkness. As I slowly descended, the door closed silently behind me. The only illumination within the stairwell now came from the small lantern I carried with me. Before me stood the gateway to the chamber.

Sensing my presence, it bathed the area with a warm glowing light as it sprang to life. At the bottom of the stairs, its crystalline wall stood before me. As I raised my hand to make contact with its surface, it began to dissolve into itself, as the chamber welcomed me within. As I entered through this portal, the chamber resealed itself, leaving no evidence it had ever existed. I was the master here and it sought only to serve.

The main control room in which I now stood was alive with its brightly-colored lights. Their brilliance was reflected in the gold and silver panels of the control console. The console covered one entire wall of the chamber. Here lay all the technology to access the chamber's hidden treasure of knowledge. In front of the console was a solitary crystalline chair. Directly to the left of this was a stand of many-hued crystalline rods, ready to serve. The chamber was continuously bathed in a soft golden light that came from everywhere and nowhere. It was just there when I wished it to be and not there when I no longer required its services.

The resonating vibrations of the controllers hummed a tune older than time. The very center of this wall was reserved for the viewscreen's large circular window. If one knew how to access the chambers' powers, it could open up anywhere on the continuum of time. That was what the crystal wands were for. With them, one could look back to the beginning of time, or far into the future. With them, one such as I could cause man and time to obey my commands. Walking towards the rear of the chamber, I deposited my bundle of provisions. I would store them away when I had completed my first task. It was time to begin my assignment.

Seating myself at the console, I opened the doors to the enclosure around the wands. Selecting the citrine-colored wand of clairvoyance, I turned back to the console and pressed down upon the first lever, directly to my right, until it was flush with the panel. In response, a thin hollow cylinder of clear crystal rose up before me. Into this I placed the wand and watched it slowly descend. As I watched, the viewscreen opened up and focused in upon my objective.

Coming into view was a desert landscape ... two riders dressed in dark blue Bedouin garb came into view, on a distant ridge of sand that surrounded the oasis directly below. The oasis had always welcomed the weary travelers that came its way. Here they sought relief from the relentless heat of the desert sun. To them, it was simply a place to rest and refresh themselves.

For the enlightened traveler, it held another long-forgotten purpose. As the riders crossed its borders, they quickly dismounted and led their mounts to the spring-fed canals. Here, they removed the horses' saddles and bridles, freeing them to feed and roam at will. The riding gear and desert garb worn by the riders were quickly hidden in the nearby ruins. Here, someone was to retrieve them later and return them to their owners.

Larger than most, this oasis had some unique features. The ancient ruin's series of pools and canals flowed from a deep subterranean source, enhancing its mysterious air. Just as surprising was the cascading waterfall's curtain of cool spring water. The ruins had never been dated and no one really cared to. It was here that the Ancient Ones had left behind one of their own. The preservation

chamber had kept him safe from, but not undiscovered by, mankind. The evil ones had found the hidden chamber behind the falls quite by accident. They had taken it over, and now it belonged to them. Here they dreamed their evil dreams; but, as forgotten and abandoned as the site appeared, it was not.

The ancient traveler had been left behind to await his time to return home. Until then, the Chamber of Life maintained his body in a state of perfect preservation. Throughout the centuries, he'd slept peacefully, safe from harm; even they couldn't harm him. They thought that they controlled his destiny as well as their own ... yet long before they were born into this world, the Ancient Ones had known of them and had planned for it. He would be kept safe, they could not injure him. However, they could use him in their evil experiments and for this I was well-prepared with the knowledge and means to destroy them.

The illuminati were a powerful group of men who sought to rule mankind. Throughout the centuries, they had amassed a wealth of knowledge and financial resources, that allowed them to undermine and use even the most trustworthy government official. They had their way of calling in favors and no one dared to stop them. Who would believe that an organization such as theirs was anything but a myth? What they hadn't imagined was one such as myself. I was one variable they could never have predicted.

Nor were they aware that the creature that slept so peacefully before them was fully aware of all that occurred in his presence. He knew their thought and dreams. Helpless to stop them, he relied on me to change the course of their evil schemes. For now he must abide.

The two figures approached the falls and ducked quickly behind its curtain of cascading water. Once there, they searched the stones for the inscription that marked the keystone to the hidden entrance. Covered with moss, it was hard to discern the letters stamped into the surface of the stone, but they were there. Veritas Te Liberabit was clearly visible to the trained eye of the enlightened. Pushing firmly against the keystone, they watched as the wall before them gave way and moved inward, exposing the entrance. Once inside, the opening resealed itself. Quickly, they descended to the lower chamber.

One of the two men was Dr. Richard Gabriel MD. He'd made this trip many times in the last four years. This time he was accompanied by his young nephew and protegee Damien. He'd hoped to impress upon the young man the importance of these experiments and the role he must play in their successful completion. Both men had traveled far to reach their destination. The Society had chosen him, Dr. Gabriel, to head up this project and he could not fail them again. The price for failure was death. If all went well, they wouldn't fail. This time they would succeed. His recent findings assured him of this.

They were to resurrect the ancient race of the sleeping giant - the Beast of the legendary Apocalypse. Then the world would be theirs for the taking. Damien shivered as he looked into his uncle's eyes and saw in them the demented look that was so often present whenever his thoughts focused on his precious project. Damien, however, did not share his zeal for scientific research and development.

Turning to his uncle, he whispered, "When do we get to see him?" No answer was immediately forthcoming, and Damien had to hurry to keep up with him. Before them was the entrance to the tomb-like chamber, straight out of the Valley of the Kings at Karnak.

As they approached the ramp leading up to its entrance, Dr. Gabriel turned to his nephew and replied. "Soon!"

The Nubian guards outside the entrance flung open the doors as they approached, and the attendant

within motioned for them to follow him. In the very center of the room, upon a raised platform, rested the object of their quest. There lay the ancient traveler's body. His large frame and leonine features giving him an exotically fierce appearance.

The attendant welcomed them and indicated that everything was ready and set up for them; they could begin at once. Transportation had been arranged and would be here soon. He indicated that we should begin at once. Gabriel knew he must work quickly.

He motioned for Damien to follow him. Damien was all too happy to oblige him. He certainly didn't want to be left behind in this godforsaken place in the middle of nowhere. If all went according to their plans, they would be out of here soon, and on their way back to the Institute and civilization.

Gabriel approached the silent creature on the platform before him. He was in awe of this magnificent being. Reverently, he began to remove the clothing necessary to expose his genitals. The next step was to attach the electrodes and the collection pump. Once the semen was obtained, they could leave him to his eternal sleep. They would be successful this time... he wouldn't be disturbed again.

In spite of all his fears that something would go wrong, Gabriel was successful. The collection went easier than he had envisioned. The vials of semen were quickly frozen and stored for transport. Little did he suspect that his newfound successors were not the result of his expertise.

It was my interventions that ensured his success. The child must be born to fulfill the prophecy; an extraordinary child. Such children hadn't been seen on earth for centuries; but now the time had come to welcome one to the world. These gentle spirits, with their special gifts, would only enhance our world. The ancient traveler also knew this had to happen before he would be able to return home. I was entrusted with ensuring his son's survival in the hostile world Above. One day, he would walk in the light of Above and become a valued member of that world. Different, yet, but loved for those differences and unique gifts. He would teach them to value all living things. The child's life wouldn't be an easy one, yet in time he would learn to take his place in this world.

Damien followed closely on the heels of his uncle as he followed the attendant into the elevator that would carry them upward to the surface. There, they would be picked up by the helicopter now waiting to transport them back to the private airstrip outside of Alexandria, where their corporate plane was awaiting their arrival.

Within minutes they were airborne, carrying with them the dreams of the Society. Damien sighed with relief. He really hated all of this and yet he dared not disobey ... to do so would mean instant death.

The silent tears of the Ancient One fell without notice. No one sensed my presence in their midst. In seeking to alter the outcome of history, they had set into motion the very events that would destroy them ... still unaware of the implications of their deeds. They would never succeed ... for I, Narcissa, am the true navigator.

In the end they would destroy themselves. What fools they were to imagine they could play God to mankind! I raised the cylinder, removed the wand from its center and returned it to the cabinet. I had time to rest now and get used to being here. Later on, I would need my strength, but for now I could rest and ponder my next move.

CHAPTER TWO

After a well-deserved rest, I once again took my place at the controls. Selecting the citrine-colored crystal wand again, plus the amethyst quartz wand, I inserted them into the console's receptacle. This time, clairvoyance alone wouldn't be enough to obtain the desired results. There was a need for healing and control of the physical body.

The viewscreen opened up on the Richard's Institute. The genetic research facility's laboratory showed a younger John Pater working on the ovum of the Stephens girl. I pushed the levers forward. The in-vitro fertilization being attempted would be successful. The other samples would not survive. Despite her age, the child was wise beyond her years. Since her mother's death less than a year ago, she had undergone a lot of changes in her life. This child was also a special child.

Victoria Stephens sighed and shook her wild mane of strawberry blonde curls. Sitting in the window seat, she wasn't really looking for anyone or anything. The large bay window in the dining room was a good place to sit. The drapes were always partially closed and you could hide yourself.

Before they'd moved to the Institute's compound in upstate New York, they'd lived in New Orleans. Victoria missed the sounds and sights of the old city. She had lots of friends there. Now, since her mother's death, everything had changed. Now there was only Papa and Mama Luci. Mama was their housekeeper and nanny.

Mama Luci had always been with them. She was a distant relative of the Duvaliers, who were cousins on her mother's side of the family. Some would have found her strange, but Mama always liked her. She had something bad happen to her when she was younger. She had an accident and couldn't speak. Whatever it was, no one would talk about it. Since her mother's death this past year, Papa was sad and no longer spent as much time with her. She missed the old days when things were very different.

Now there was just Mama Luci and herself. Even school was different. Here there was no real school, just lessons at home that got mailed to an address somewhere in Michigan. It was very lonely here and Victoria was a very bored eleven-year-old. But it was Friday and that meant Papa would soon be home. IF she was lucky, Damien would come with him. He was the nephew of the Institute's director and Papa's lab assistant.

He was real cute and a lot of fun to be with. Damien was older, but not old like Papa. Mama says he's in his early twenties. That was the kindest thing she had to say about him. She really didn't like him at all. But Victoria did like him ... she liked him a lot. He treated her like a real person, not like a little kid. Mama was always watching them when they were together. Damien told her to keep some things he told her secret from Mama. Victoria was careful not to let Mama know about the medicine Damien had given her shortly after they came here. It was for a research project he was working on; after all, they were only vitamins. What could be wrong with that? Even Papa would say that was all right!

If she was lucky, maybe Damien would take her to a movie. As Victoria looked down the long winding driveway, Papa's car came into view. Damien was with him. The child eagerly climbed down from her hideaway and hurried to the front door, welcoming them home.

Mama Luci shook her head and went back into the kitchen. She understood the child was lonely but this young man was *trouble* to put it mildly. But the monsieur was too taken up with his work to see what was happening. It did little good to tell him anything. The child was too young to be going places alone with someone like him. But allow it he did and she could only warn the child and hope for the best. Usually the child was obedient and trustworthy. Lately, however, she was beginning to rebel a

bit when it came to her friend Damien. Something just wasn't right about his interest in the child. Protecting her charge from harm wasn't going to be easy.

Dinner was soon over and Papa suggested that Damien take me to a movie. It was just what I'd hoped he'd do. Mama was not happy but I was elated. Once in the car, we didn't go into town. Damien drove to the Institute and we went into the lab. Since the test to tell if the medicine was working would mean having a needle in my stomach. I was put to sleep for a few minutes. Then we'd go home stopping at the old diner for a late night snack. It was fun to be with him. He knew lots of jokes!

Damien said this was the last time we'd have to do this and I could stop taking the vitamins I had been taking. Now I had new ones to take. He also told me he would be going home to England for several weeks. I wouldn't be seeing him for quite a while. This medicine didn't require any further testing. I was glad of that!

Mama was waiting up for us on the porch swing. It was late when we got back. She was kinda angry that it was so late. It was almost midnight and I could tell she was worried. Damien seemed anxious to get going and quickly said goodbye to Papa. He had to return back to the Institute yet tonight. He was scheduled to leave for England in the morning, on the company plane. Papa's car would be left at the Institute and a car would be sent for Papa on Monday morning. Although Papa and I were sad to see him leave, it was obvious that Mama was elated to see him go.

The rest of the weekend was quiet as usual and once again Victoria was bored and restless as any eleven-year-old would be. Mama took mercy on her and they took a cab into town. The Mall was new and had lots of stores to wander through. It wasn't like home, but it was much better than nothing to do at all. But, Mama couldn't help noticing how tired her charge was.

As the weeks turned into months since Damien's departure, Mama continued to notice subtle changes in her charge. Victoria had always been a healthy child and something just wasn't right. If she didn't know better she might think the child was pregnant. But that couldn't be. She was too young and had not started her menses yet. Whatever it was, she needed to make an appointment with the local pediatrician, Dr. Diana Jardino. She had only seen the child for her initial physical, and a few times for minor complaints. However, she had come well recommended.

Victoria wondered why the doctor was so quiet - usually she joked with her and talked about things she was interested in. But today she would only shake her head and frown. Then she called Mama in and they talked while I got dressed. When they came out, they were very quiet. Mama Luci told me to stay in the exam room while she spoke with the doctor. The doctor understood sign language and there was definitely nothing wrong with Mama's hearing. But, they usually let me go with them. Something was definitely going on, but for now I would just have to wait.

Once out of the room, the two women spoke openly. Dr. Jardino sat down on the edge of her desk and handed Mama Luci a tissue. While Mama wiped at the corners of her eyes and blew her nose.

The doctor spoke. "I'm as puzzled as you are as to how this all happened but we both have our suspicions. However, how it occurred isn't the most important factor being considered. The child needs close medical attention. It might even be a good idea to place her in protective custody right now, before the Institute gets wind of our plans. The Institute has gone too far this time and it has to stop. The child is undeniably young, but not too young. But given the unusual circumstances of this pregnancy, it may be possible to save both mother and child. The physiological changes in her metabolism, blood pressure, and heart rate, along with the accelerated growth rate of the fetus

present a very unusual case."

Saying this the doctor turned around and picked up her phone and dialed a number. As she dialed, she indicated she knew an investigator who had previously dealt with the Institute in similar cases, that had come to nothing because the families involved had chosen not to talk and quickly disappeared from the face of the earth. This time, Dr. Jardino was not going to let them get away with their experiment. No more children were going to be abused.

Mama listened as the doctor made the arrangement with the authorities. It was decided that they would send the agents over to the doctor's office and confiscate the medical records along with the doctor's current evaluation. They would be taking both of them back to a safe house until the situation was stabilized. The monsieur would be notified after we were safely installed in the safe house. Mama shook her head, this was not the outcome she had envisioned.

Victoria fidgeted in her chair as someone knocked on her door. It was Mama and she was alone. She seemed very nervous and maybe just a little bit sad. Once inside, she closed the door again and sat down on the doctor's stool.

"Victoria, you're going to be just fine. You're going to have a baby! The doctors are going to take real good care of you. But for the time being, they want us to stay in a very special place. When they can reach your Papa, they'll tell him where we are staying and he can come too."

Victoria knew she was telling the truth. As she turned towards the door, she felt really funny ... that was the last thing she remembered.

Mama Luci called for the doctor to come in right away. Victoria had fainted at the news she had delivered as carefully as she knew how - but if she was asleep when the agents came, it would be a less frightening event. The doctor agreed and gave her an injection that would keep her asleep until the next morning. She too felt that the less involved the child was in the initial transfer, the better it would be for the child in the long run. One major shock in a day was enough for anyone!

Narcissa stretched and yawned. She had been at the console for quite some time now. The young man known as Damien would be his uncle's undoing. As his son would also be for the entire organization. As for John Pater, she had other plans. He would be useful without being aware he was doing the very thing that would ensure the child's survival.

But when his usefulness was passed he would need to be removed from the child's presence ... and that might challenge even one such as I. He was evil clear through - that one was an old adversary of the gods.

She had seen to the child's survival and the well-being of its mother. She was an innocent and would suffer much in order to bring her son into the world. It pained her to know she must separate the infant from his mother. But, it was for the best. Below, the child would grow and learn in a safe environment. In time, he would be returned to the world Above. The young mother would never forget her special son; sharing a bond with him that could never be broken. In time, she would let him go on alone. She would be with his father and when the time was right, they would return. In time, she would share his memory with another special child whose empathic bonding with the distant child would ensure their own special bond. This bond would ensure their joining as adults.

Narcissa smiled, now it would be up to the programming of the controllers, preset to do her bidding.

There were always those who sought to control the destiny of others. They always failed to understand that in the end they would be destroying themselves. But, for those who were aware, there were the special ones that were able to *shine* brighter than the rest - and they were noticed. Some more so than others. Their gifts were agents of change, to advance mankind's understanding and prepare him for the time of the *Return*. Others teach the value of the humane treatment of all living things and their right to co-exist with man. Some just make the world a better place by giving of themselves to others, by serving others, and some entertained and enlightened the world through the arts. The genetic inheritance of the Ancient Ones was still present.

This time the child would be truly unique. His differences so obvious that they alone would dictate a need for a protective environment during his early years. In the world Below, he would be protected and loved for what he was, not what he appeared to be. Until the world Above learned of this special being, they would be deprived of his gentle soul. For now, his life was just beginning. There were many trials yet to come. Those that would come to know him would love him unconditionally. Those that lost him would never stop looking for him. In time, the truth would be revealed and the world would reclaim its own. The tears of the innocent are always seen and never forgotten.

For now, it was no longer necessary for Narcissa to man the console. She could rest for now. Soon the others would be moving Below. Life Below would never be the same.

CHAPTER THREE

Dr. Bradley C. Stephens looked over at his sleeping daughter and marveled at the infant cradled in her arms. These past months had been a nightmare. Perhaps now, their lives could begin to settle down. Despite his questionable DNA, he was a beautiful child. If he resembled a *kitten*, and had soft pliable claws instead of nails ... so what! His survival was a miracle.

Whenever he looked at the child, he could see he had his mother's blue eyes and mass of reddish-blond curls. Except for a slower than normal heart rate and highly-oxygenated blood, his internal physiology was unremarkable. His growth rate in-utero had been accelerated; however his birth at six months gestation, by cesarean section, was routine. Perhaps he would have fared better if his mother had not been a child herself. Victoria Reed Stephens had just passed her twelfth birthday one week ago. Although she was physically immature, she had managed to produce a viable, living child. How she had accomplished all this, was an enigma in itself to the medical community who had cared for her.

The emotional trauma of learning you are pregnant at eleven years would have frightened anyone. Yet somehow she had come to terms with all the changes in her young life. Even through the long trial and frequent courtroom appearances, that were necessary to prosecute those involved in the Institute's programs that preyed on youngsters such as herself. Of the twenty-five youngsters involved in their project, only Victoria had maintained the implanted embryo and carried it to term. The data connected with the child's gestation and birth were kept from the press and only a limited number of physicians and legal staff had access to the data. It was further decided that any and all photographs of the two youngsters would be sealed along with the court files. The press was informed of the infant's differences and his abnormal DNA patterns, but to protect the two youngsters, no photos would be available.

Here in Breaker's Cove, the Stephens' had settled in. Not far from Cape Cod, Breaker's Cove wasn't even on the map. It consisted of a few houses, stores, diner and ice-cream parlor, general store and post office, and one elementary school and community center. Actually, it had one of almost

everything and that was about all you could say of it. It was a sleepy little village. The old boarding house easily converted into an antique emporium with living quarters upstairs. Here Dr. Stephens and his daughter planned to raise his grandson.

Christopher Reed Stephens was named after both sides of his mother's family. His differences were accepted by the locals, who had known the Reed family for many years. Although they no longer owned the mansion on the cliffs, the Stephens' were considered family to the residents. The estate left to Victoria upon the death of her mother was vast. Dr. Stephens' retirement to proprietor of the antique emporium was not a hardship.

Except for his differences, Christopher was a normal baby. In fact, he was an unusually happy child and if his smiles didn't get you, his blue eyes did! Clothes were another matter, at three months he wore doll-sized clothes. If you looked at him and didn't know his age, you would have thought he was a premie. To his family and friends, he was truly a miracle.

Dr. Stephens brushed back his hair from his forehead - he was late in opening today, the store could wait. Vicky wanted to take the baby to the park for awhile and visit with her friends. Somehow, he wasn't sure about letting her walk home alone, but it was what she wanted that mattered. She wanted to show off her son and just be a child. Already, it was late fall and the weather would soon be turning colder. It was probably just his imagination running wild. But, when Mama Luci left them shortly after Christopher's birth, she had warned him to keep a close eye on the infant. She'd warned him there were some out there who yet sought to obtain the infant. He couldn't forget her cryptic warnings. Perhaps he was just being too cautious. They would be just fine. What could happen in so short a time?

John Pater had left the Institute before the axe fell, taking with him the true history of the infant's paternity. He wanted the child. He'd planned for this and now the opportunity for success was presenting itself. He'd even gotten Jacob Wells to help him form his community Below. It was working out very well. With this child, he would be *King!* The little beast would ensure his success.

This was the first time since the child's birth that it was out alone with his mother. Unguarded, she would be no match for his men.

In minutes the infant was snatched from his mother. The child was his now!

As the men drove away with the child, Victoria ran home in shock. Dr. Stephens could only hold her and weep. The authorities would have to be notified - somehow they'd get through this crisis too.

John Pater and the men with him abandoned the car, exchanging it for a new one. He'd planned this for so long he couldn't get over how easy it had been to obtain his prize. Once back in New York City, after eliminating his two witnesses, he went directly to his newly-rented apartment. Here he would care for the infant until he was of a more normal size - closer to that of a full term infant. He was fairly certain no one outside of the family, and maybe the villagers, knew very much about the child. That fact would be in his favor. Anna had always cut behind St. Vincent's Hospital and entered the tunnels from the deserted warehouse nearby. He'd have the child Below in time for the New Year!

He'd won! No one could stop Paracelsus, not even John Pater. His was an old spirit ... and he had found a home once again. John was a perfect host. So alike were they in spirit. They'd all have to acknowledge his superior intellect. Jacob Wells was a fool, with all his rules and councils. He'd be

well rid of him and the others would follow him.

CHAPTER FOUR

Father begged me not to go in after him, his fears for my safety overwhelming his desire to save his son. I didn't really have a choice - neither of us could ever be separated from the other ... not now. Even in this madness, as long as we were together, we could face the darkness. We would face it together, each knowing that without the other, we would have no life!

As I picked up the lantern and blanket-wrapped bundle of supplies that Father had assembled, I began to think what might be ahead for us, then I remembered the cryptic admonitions of Narcissa. Over time, I'd learned to trust in her ability to protect us from harm. Her words, spoken so often in the last few weeks, comforted me ... and calmed my fears.

"Like children, you will abide until the time for tears has passed away and death shall have no dominion over you, or the ones you love. It is then you'll find that which was lost ... the likeness of the mother is found in her son, and the likeness of the father is reflected in the daughter. The time of the darkness is upon you but the time of separation will end. Never doubt my words on this. Remember the things of which we have spoken. The evil ones seek your powers, but a power greater than they can envision surrounds you and your Catherine. Those it protects will endure."

As I walked forward, it was as though I was guided by an invisible presence. His screams were horrible ... his control gone. Would he even know me? Would he be capable of hurting me? My heart told me he could never hurt me. I was ashamed for my thoughts. His incessant growling echoed throughout the caverns. My heart pounded loudly in my ears, my mouth felt dry. Putting one foot in front of the other, I continued on into the unknown.

Even with the light of the lantern, I could barely see. The sound of his cries were faint and hardly audible. The small cavern I'd entered wasn't one I was familiar with. It was small, and I knew he had the advantage of his night vision. The light from my lantern cast eerie shadows onto the surrounding walls. As my eyes slowly became accustomed to the dim light, I began to take stock of my surroundings. I could sense him moving away from me into the shadows. His cries, when audible, were those of a frightened child.

As I continued on, the lantern's warm glow seemed somewhat brighter and the floor before me was littered with the torn remnants of his clothing. The soft earthen floor had preserved his footprints, leaving a trail which led into a natural corridor of stone. It opened up into an immense cavern, alight from some hidden source far above. Whatever its source, it allowed the warmth and light of the sun to shine through and rebound off its crystal-studded walls. The effect, coming from almost total darkness, was blinding.

I paused, taking time to look up in awe at the high vaulted cathedral-like ceiling. The cavern was immense. In its center, a crystal-clear lake, so blue that it reminded me of his eyes. Along its sandy shores, numerous rock formations could be seen, some forming shallow basins where warm thermal springs bubbled and steamed.

Scanning the area, I searched for him, without much success. He had to be near... but for now, he remained hidden from view. He'd always been really shy about revealing his body, and up until now, I had never pushed the issue of intimacy with him. While he was sick and stayed in my apartment, I had many opportunities to see him in various states of undress. However, he had almost no recollection of how long or how ill he had been, while staying with me. I'd fantasized for months now

of having a real physical relationship with him, despite his claims that it was not possible.

I blamed Father for all his insecurities. In the beginning, he was frightened by the incident with Lisa Campbell. Vincent, like any normal teenager in love for the first time, had fallen prey to her *spell* and his raging hormones had done the rest. When he realized she was frightened by what they were feeling, he tried to hold on to reassure her. He'd never meant for things to go so far. Lisa panicked at the intensity of her body's response to his advances. She, in turn, twisted away, forgetting that his fingertips were graced with sharp claw-like nails. Even filed down, they would leave their mark. He'd tried to calm her fears with reassuring words, when Father came onto the scene. Seeing Father caused Lisa to pull away without thinking of the consequences, and Father had gone ballistic as usual. No wonder he had a few hang-ups in this department!

For three years now, I'd worked hard to overcome his fears, but it hadn't been easy. Father was still a pain in the rear about his son's relationship with me! But, with the onset of this illness, I could see Father was letting go. I knew Peter had been talking with him, and just maybe he was listening for a change. It all seemed so long ago.

This cavern was much warmer than the other regions Below. Too warm for the heavy winter clothes I was now wearing. Wasting no more time, I set my bundle down and put out the lantern. Standing there, I surveyed the cavern. My clothes were already sticking to me as I struggled free of everything but my chemise. I wasn't going to be entertaining anyone down here! For once, we were quite alone. Picking up the supplies, I poked my clothes inside and again scanned the area before me, without success.

He had to be near. I silenced my rampaging thoughts and concentrated upon the bond. Slowly, I began to feel the pull, guiding me toward a large rock formation just ahead. I could hear my heart pounding, so loud it was hard to hear anything else. As I moved forward, I knew I had located him... even if he was not yet visible. Approaching the shore of the lake, I walked cautiously around the largest of the rock formations. He was lying face-down in the sand. Half-in and half-out of the water; and totally naked. As I moved in closer, I could see he was covered with numerous scratches and encrusted with sand and dried blood. His tangled mass of tawny-colored hair was matted with clumps of dried blood and sand.

Setting my things down, I slowly approached him. Kneeling down beside him, I checked to make sure he was breathing. None of the numerous wounds on his backside looked serious. Turning him over, I was relieved to discover that most of his wounds were superficial ones. I gently brushed the sand from his face. He was covered with it and layers of grime, so unlike the man he was... a man who was never seen in such a state, much less without any clothing.

I couldn't help taking advantage of the situation. My eyes traveled the length of his body; he was beautiful... only a little more *hairy* than the average man. His forearms and hands had caused me to once believe that his entire body would be covered with the same thick fur-like down. While he was ill, I had learned how wrong one could be when they assumed anything! His genitals were like those of any man I'd ever encountered - maybe a bit larger. He'd always acted so fearful whenever the subject of a sexual relationship was broached, I'd begun to fear the worst.

The silence around me was broken only by the sounds of the water lapping at the shore. Vincent remained unresponsive. Leaving him for the moment, I walked back to get my things. Setting them down a short distance from the shoreline, I spread out the blankets and other supplies Father had thought to send along. As usual, he'd thought a bit too much, but at least the medical supplies wouldn't be wasted, nor would the items for physical hygiene.

Obviously, Vincent wasn't in any immediate danger. First things first! I set about trying to treat the more serious wounds. I rummaged through the various sealed plastic bags and found the ones with

the medical supplies. Taking the bottle of hydrogen-peroxide and the bag of cotton balls. I also grabbed the small narrow plastic case that held the sticks of silver-nitrate. These would be to close the deeper cuts until Father could assess them for himself. The betadine scrub-sponge would help to reduce the risk of infection.

Placing these items onto a plastic tray, I moved back to where he was lying. Kneeling beside him, I began to wash around the more serious cuts; pouring the peroxide directly into the open areas. I then wet the sponge and began to wash around the wounds. Then I air-dried these areas as best I could. Holding the edges of the deeper cuts together with my fingertips, I placed the tip of the nitrate stick to the raw edges of the wound sealing it closed. These things really worked! I continued to treat the rest of his wounds as best I could under these circumstances. I felt that we had won this round.

Now came the real challenge - his bath. The naturally-formed thermal basin was the obvious solution. At least the water would be warmer than the lake water. I returned to the blanket and found the bathing items. Putting them onto the tray, I walked over to the basin which was only a few feet away. I dipped my hand into the water to test its temperature. It felt comfortably warm. Stepping over the rim, I waded into the center of the basin. The water was just above my waist. The edges of the basin's rim were worn smooth. The rear portion of the basin was formed by the large rock formation I had first noticed when I entered the cavern. Its presence provided the basin with a shelf of stone just slightly below the water level, wide enough to allow me to sit and still hold onto him ... that is if I held him either in front of me or if I laid him down across the shelf.

Getting him over to the basin and into the pool was not going to be easy. However, it had to be done. I managed to get behind him and raise him up into a sitting position. Kneeling behind him, I encircled his waist with my arms. Locking my forearms together with my hands, I pulled him tightly against me. With a great deal of effort, I managed to slowly drag him over to the side of the basin. Maintaining my hold, I struggled into a standing position and stepped over the rim into the water. Somehow, I managed to get the rest of him into the water. His body floated easily, as I moved backwards towards the rock shelf where I'd left the supplies. He was slippery as a newborn. Propping him against the back of the ledge, I removed my chemise. We were on equal footing in this environment; we were both naked as the day we were born. Once I was settled in a sitting position beside him, I positioned him between my thighs, wrapping my legs around him, and locking them in place by crossing my ankles.

Washing away the dirt and grime from his body gave me a chance to really get to know it. He was truly beautiful ... and totally unaware of it! As I worked to clean him up, my thoughts wandered. What would Father say now? I smiled and went back to work. In order to wash his hair and lower extremities, I needed to reposition him. Reluctantly, I released my hold upon his body and keeping him in place, I slid down, so that now I was standing before him. As I laid him back along the shelf lengthwise, I could now wash his hair and work on getting the sand out from around his genitals. The hair was the easy part, to say the very least. Then pushing one leg to the side, I reached across to his groin and gently began the process of washing the irritating grains of sand from the folds and creases of his quiescent organ. I'd often fantasized about what it would feel like to touch him, but in my wildest dreams, I had never envisioned the scenario that was unfolding before me.

As I continued my labors, I began to wonder if all his fears were unfounded. He certainly looked and felt like any other man I had ever had the opportunity to fondle; granted he was well endowed, even in his relaxed state. I *had* to do it ... I *couldn't* help it! Gently, I began to apply a steady pressure to the base of his penis. It eagerly responded to my ministrations and I couldn't resist the urge to kiss its widely-fluted head. Touching him this intimately caused me to tremble with excitement. I could feel him coming back to me through our bond. As I continued to caress him, I sensed he was aware of my touching him. In response to my actions, his hand reached out to stop me. Softly, he whispered my

name, as he struggled to sit up and orient himself to his surroundings.

"Catherine, how long have we been here?" He was becoming aware that neither of us was dressed and turning pinker by the moment – but still too weak to get up and run. I hugged him tightly, and wiped the tears from my eyes, giving a sigh of relief that he was once again rational and calm.

"Vincent, you were alone in the lower caverns ... totally out of control. We were afraid you were lost to us. I had to be with you ... bring you back. You're everything to me! Remember what Narcissa has been warning us about? Maybe it has started?"

"Catherine, I can't remember anything of what you say. Just before I woke up, I felt a sharp pain in my head. I couldn't recognize where I was, and then I found you through our bond."

I smiled, blushing slightly. "Aren't you at all curious about the fact that we are sans our clothing?" As I spoke, he smiled shyly and ducked his head. "Actually, you're the one to blame for your lack of clothing. But I confess my current state of undress comes from a need to be more comfortable while I did damage control. This was not an easy assignment!"

I couldn't help laughing at his dazed expression as he tried to take in all that I was telling him. I wondered if he remembered exactly what I did that woke him up?

Reaching out for my hand, he pulled me closer, and wrapping his arms around me, he hugged me tightly to him.

"Yes, I'm afraid I do," and saying this, he lowered his head and really kissed me on the lips for a change. "Catherine, you weren't alone in your desire to touch and be touched. I have always wanted you, and until now I have always doubted my right to burden your life with one so different, but my need to join with you has grown stronger of late. I can no longer delay the inevitable. I *need* your touch; it's brought me back to you time and time again. The bond pulls me towards you, feeding upon the energy our combined selves create. Once we are joined in the physical, the bond will be unbreakable - one cannot survive the loss of the other."

He shuddered as he remembered his recent dream and the cryptic message it contained. The warnings of Narcissa were also on his mind - time was running out, and soon they would be caught up in something neither of them could control. The dream was always the same.

It was so cold, the darkness overwhelming and with it came the cries of those who loved her. How can I tell her not to be afraid? Narcissa says to trust in her words ... she says we will survive, and yet, I would give anything not to be separated from you. We will be lost to each other, so alone ... yet still one ... separate, but never apart. Looking down into the dark abyss, I feel the bond resonate with her presence. Holding onto each other, we become one ... experiencing the terrors of the long night to come.

We both shuddered as we returned to reality. We would make the best of the time we had left. Lowering my head to kiss her, I held her tight. This time there would be no pulling back for either of us; we were meant to be together ... this joining of our bodies would bring us even closer, strengthening our bond.

CHAPTER FIVE

Vincent stood and lifted me up into his arms. Wading to the edge of the basin, he stepped over the rim and onto the sand. Carrying me across to where the supplies waited, he returned me to my feet. Locating the towels, we soon put them to good use - taking turns, we dried ourselves.

The supplies were soon pushed aside, as we rearranged the blankets to form a makeshift pallet. As he lay back onto the thickly-padded quilting, he softly whispered my name, reaching upwards, grasping my hands, and gently pulling me down with him. Dropping to my knees beside him, I slowly took my time, and lowered myself until I was able to lie along the length of him. He was beautiful, sexy, and shy ... a *killer* combination in my book! He was everything I had ever wished him to be.

My fingertips seemed to have a mind of their own as I began to explore his body. He was silk and steel ... a combination I could become addicted to. As I came closer to the main object of my desire, his now erect organ, he shivered in anticipation, making no attempt to stop me. Raining soft moist kisses all around the base, my breath warm and moist upon the shaft. I licked my way towards its widely-fluted head, encircling its edges ... tracing its shape with the tip of my tongue. As my lips touched him, he moaned softly, caressing my hair. He began to thrust upward as his excitement built and at this point, I gently pulled back, placing the palm of my hand against its opening to forestall his climax. I wanted this to last!

He seemed to understand my intentions and without my prompting, he pushed me backwards onto the bedding and began to caress me, raining soft kisses along the side of my neck ... slowly working his way downward. As I watched, I felt an aching soreness in my throat. I held back my tears of joy.

Carefully, he parted my thighs. He began to caress the length of the exposed portal. I began to throb as he gently sucked and licked, knowing he could feel the tension building within me as his mouth and fingers worked their magic. Just when I felt I was ready to explode with pleasure, he rose up and kissed me passionately. Pulling me to my feet, he quickly drew us back towards the thermal basin we had so recently vacated.

Reaching the rim of the basin, he took me in his arms, and I delighted in the feel of his skin next to mine. Wanting him, I followed him into the steaming pool and waded over to the shelf which still held the bathing supplies. We immersed ourselves once, and then, picking up the bar of soap, he began to rub it over my back and across my bottom, avoiding, for the moment, the area between my thighs. He could sense I loved the feel of his hands as they continued to caress me. I closed my eyes and gave myself over to his wonderfully smooth touch, feeling every tingling sensation as he lightly stroked my body.

Turning me around to face him, he placed me on the ledge. I sat facing him, and he once again took up the bar of soap, smoothing its lather onto my legs and feet. My tension built as the tips of his nails tickled the bottoms of my feet. Then he leaned forward, kissing me gently, and slowly explored my lips and tongue. Our bond was in full force, I knew what he was feeling ... that he experienced my responses as intensely as his own. His rigid, engorged organ seemed to move of its own volition ... striving to reach me.

Then he started under my arms, caressing downward to my breasts, feeling my nipples harden under his palms. Shivers, like flashes of lightning raced through my body as he touched my sensitive flesh ... the electricity produced fed the molten heat erupting inside me. How I wanted him? When he moved down to my lower abdomen and thighs, I couldn't suppress a moan of anticipation. With hands still slick with soap, he caressed my folds, and unerringly found the small bud of my clitoris to rub lightly, increasing the pleasure for me. Then he picked up the sponge, and filling it with water, he

squeezed it out over my body, repeating the gesture until I was rinsed clean.

Sitting down next to me, he held me close, pressing warm skin against warm skin. Laying me backwards on the shelf, lengthwise, he looked down upon me with smoldering desire. Glowing and wet, I waited for him.

Spreading my thighs apart, he ran his tongue the full length of my folds. He seemed to enjoy his actions as much as I did, or perhaps it was my reactions he enjoyed through the bond. I began to moan and cry out to him. Realizing how ready I was, he felt my excitement building, and as it reached its peak, spasms of delight washed over us. Somehow, he had come along with me as I rode my sensations earthward. Yet he held his own release back.

Reaching for him, as he mounted me, I guided him inside. Pressing up towards him as he plunged downward, he easily penetrated me; he sighed with deep satisfaction and release. Tightening my muscles around him as he started to pull back, caressing his still firm member completely, a soft moan escaped his lips. I rose up to meet him and he increased his momentum, plunging deeper into my body as he finally filled me with his seed. Feeling his climax through the bond was a new sensation ... a feeling of complete joy flowed between us... finally we were one in body, as well as spirit.

I loved the feel of his weight upon me as we lay resting and sated. When he finally rolled over, he looked down at me. I had to kiss his unique lips, that had brought me so much pleasure only moments before. Our tongues explored, softly, gently, without prodding, and incredibly, I began to feel the tension building up again. He sensed my response and moved against me, slowly and languorously.

This time there was less urgency, he kissed me on the lips and then each eyelid, then the lobes of my ears, and the tender ticklish places along my neck. Raising his hand, he traced the path of the one remaining scar, a thin line just in front of my left ear. Moving downward, he caressed my nipple with the cleft in his upper lip. In no hurry, he suckled and nibbled one breast while fondling and gently squeezing the other. In response, I pressed my hips upward, wanting more and more.

As my enjoyment grew, so did his. Once again his body was responding to my call and his flesh swelled and throbbed against my groin. Playfully, I moved so that I could take it into my mouth and help the process along. Lying back to enjoy my caresses, he was allowing me to pleasure him in return. It was his nature to give more than he took, but I needed him to let me love him and he silently agreed. I took in as much of him as I could, sucking hard, then releasing him to slide almost completely free of me, stopping as I encountered its sensitive ridge rapidly moving the tip of my tongue across the underside. Enjoying his reactions, I circled its smooth head, moving my tongue faster and faster. He moaned softly as the waves of pleasure washed over him. Then I rose up and straddled him, but he reached up to pull my hips toward him so that he could taste the warm petals of my flower. At once the tensions between us built to an almost unbearable level as we tasted each other. He pulled himself back and turned me around so that I was now on my knees, and guided himself inside, filling me completely. I met each new stroke, rocking, moving, plunging in and out, feeling each push, every pull, each stroke caressing my womb. Once again we felt the thunder of our passion and delighted in each other.

Exhausted, we collapsed, totally spent from our marathon session of lovemaking. Finally, we stood ... shakily ... and left the pool to return to our warm nest on the sand. There we gently dried each other. Finishing quickly, as the sunlight was fading in the late afternoon hours, we lay down to rest in each other's arms, sleep fast overcoming us as we snuggled together beneath the blanket. Tomorrow would be here soon enough, and with it a return to our separate worlds and those who loved us.

Narcissa's cryptic warnings and reassurances would remain with us. I somehow knew that once we

left this chamber, he would once again lose himself. Narcissa had somehow given us this time together ... for what reason I could only speculate. I wondered if I were indeed pregnant as Narcissa's words indicated.

We woke rested, washed up and dressed ourselves in the clothes Father had included with the supplies. We still hadn't eaten anything, but neither were we hungry. Silently, we packed up and began the journey back to those who waited outside the small, dark cavern we had entered so long ago. As we entered the passageway, I could see him weaken and falter in his gait. Upon reaching the smaller cavern, he collapsed onto the floor, suddenly unconscious, but I was prepared for this.

I dropped the supplies onto the floor of the cavern and knelt down beside him and held him close to me. Feeling no pulse, I panicked momentarily. **"No!"** I cried. **"Not without me!"** and I kissed him. His eyelids fluttered open and he drew in a deep breath. "Catherine," he sighed, and I knew that the crisis had passed.

I called out for Father and noticed that the passageway through which we had just come was no longer there. Truly Narcissa had provided a special place for us to heal. As the others entered to help us return Vincent to his chamber, I could sense his confusion. Somehow, the bond was weakening for him and becoming stronger in me. Whatever was to come had begun.

CHAPTER SIX

Father entered the small cavern, and with no small amount of effort from both of us, we were able to raise Vincent to his feet, and he was able to take a few halting steps. Slowly, we guided him out of the cavern to where the others anxiously awaited our return. Once outside, we eased him down onto the stretcher, covering him to keep him warm. On the way back to the home chambers, he seemed restless and disoriented, but unlike before, I was able to sense his inner turmoil, his fears and mine were one and the same.

We took him directly to his own chamber. Father felt it would be more familiar to him, and in the past he had always preferred his own chamber to a cot in the hospital's infirmary. Mary had already opened up his bed so that we could transfer him directly onto it. Father left us to contact Peter and get his medical bag. While he was gone, Mary and I undressed him and readied him for bed. I couldn't keep my tears back and it was all too obvious to Mary.

"Catherine, I've got a cot in the nursery. Why don't I bring it in here and we'll make it up for you? You're as worn out as he is; you won't do him any good if you break down too!"

I turned and smiled at her. "I don't know if we need to ... he's so restless ... if I'm not close enough to reach out and physically make contact with him in some way, he becomes agitated and thrashes about. Sleeping apart would be counterproductive. I know how Father feels about me, but if he wants his son to recover, he'll need to see things my way or not at all. He's long overdue for an attitude adjustment ... especially where I'm concerned!"

Blushing slightly, Mary shook her head in the negative. Smiling, she whispered. "Catherine, he means well, in spite of his gruff manner. Vincent's his *baby* and the one child he never thought would grow up to depend on someone other than himself. He'll adjust. You'll see him come around; give him time. In the meantime, we're all here for both of you. I'll sit with him while you take some time for yourself. I want you to go into that bathroom and draw yourself a tub of water and have a good soak. When you're dressed for bed, we'll have a bit of supper here in the chamber, just the two of us."

I wanted to protest, but if I was going to last the night out, maybe it would help to relax me. Vincent's

bathroom was luxurious by most standards in the tunnel world. I found a bottle of baby oil on the shelf over the commode. My skin was always dry; it would feel good. I quickly shed my clothes and climbed into the tub and settled down for a good *soak* as Mary so aptly put it. Shortly, I began to drift off, waking suddenly when I heard Father's return to check on Vincent. From what he was saying, Vincent was fine ... all things considered. Peter had finally sent word that his latest blood work showed traces of an hallucinogenic, similar to the one he'd been exposed to the last time. It would most likely respond to the drug *Narcan* which Father had just obtained from Peter. The repeat blood work showed the first test results had been contaminated. The second panel of test results showed that Vincent's blood type was unique, but definitely human. The new drug could be repeated until the drug was out of his system. There should be no lasting effects from the drug once it is out of his body.

I could hear Mary speaking in hushed tones. "Jacob, you really should rest; Catherine will be staying with him here in his chamber; she won't be needing the guest room. I wrote a note to her office and sent Kipper to deliver it before her boss leaves for the day. It explains that she will not be in due to an illness in her family. She will notify them, as soon as she is able, as to when she will return to work. I've also coaxed her into taking a long hot bath and changing for bed, even if it is still early. We'll be eating supper in here. Why don't you join us? I know you want to talk with her."

Jacob leaned heavily onto his cane. Everything bothered him these days. "Mary, I don't know if tonight's a good time to *talk* about anything. Perhaps, for a change, I should do a little listening, especially to Catherine. Yes, I think dinner tonight would be a good place to start making amends."

Reluctantly, I left the tub and dried off in the chill air. The nightclothes Mary had left for me felt good, especially the fleece-lined slippers. Usually, I went around in my socks. Brushing my hair vigorously, I returned to the chamber, where Mary was ready to serve the dinner as soon as I was ready. Father actually smiled, as he indicated I should join them.

Surprisingly, Vincent slept through dinner and Father seemed reluctant to ask me anything about the past few days. It would seem that Mary did know him better than I thought she did. As soon as we were finished eating, Father made his apologies and actually hugged me as he kissed me good-night. I was shocked, to say the very least, but relieved all the same. This really wasn't a good time to discuss anything - especially the more intimate happenings. Our relationship as a couple seemed to have been accepted by everyone for some time now. Hopefully, Father was now on our side too.

Kipper and Samantha quickly cleared the remains of dinner away, and Mary left shortly after they did. Father insisted I get into bed and wouldn't leave until he'd tucked both of us in. He even put out the lights and pulled the door to the entrance closed. The warm glow of the stained-glass window beside our bed made me feel safe, and having the door closed was also a plus. I'd only recently learned this chamber had one. It was hidden in a recessed slot in the entryway. Vincent almost never used it; I'd only learned about it by accident. Tonight, I was thankful for the privacy and sense of security its solid form guaranteed.

Vincent shifted closer to me, drawing me into his arms. Lying so close to him, it was hard to relax. However, my body won out over my anxieties and I soon found myself drifting off.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I awoke to find it was morning, and Vincent was already up and taking his shower. Lazily, I rolled over and sat up on the side of the bed. Reluctantly, I got up and padded into the bathroom. This was going to be a new experience for both of us. Mother Nature didn't seem to be willing to wait much longer, and he was nowhere near ready to get out of the shower. Giving up, I used the facilities, hoping he wouldn't notice. If he did, he most likely wouldn't let on anyway, so why was I making such a fuss?

I washed up at the sink to save time, and returned to his closet for my clothes. Once dressed, I heard a knock at the door, and upon opening it, I found William with a tray of breakfast for each of us. Usually, I would have been famished when I woke up, but for some reason, nothing looked good. However, Vincent did need to eat, even if I couldn't. I also knew William wouldn't take no for an answer!

Vincent was already dressed when he left the bathroom. He seemed much better this morning - more like his old self. He didn't seem at all surprised to see me. He was still a bit shy, but he seemed happy, and from what I could sense through our bond, he remembered everything. Father would be relieved about the return of his memory. It was obvious that the medicine Peter sent down last night had worked.

Vincent smiled and sat down at the table across from me. "Catherine, I hope we can get through this without any more problems. My sense of you isn't the same. The bond feels different ... not really gone, but not as clear. Yet your sense of me seems to be stronger than before. When I was much younger, I often felt this way, but only when I was ill. Every time I caught a cold, I'd get an ear infection. If I'm right, we will have a small problem Whenever this happens, I lose my ability to locate through the bond. If you are away from me, I will not be able to come to your aid without specific instructions from you as to your location. Just be careful for a while. I don't want to lose you."

As we talked about all the past events of the last few days, we both knew this was the calm before the storm.

Father stood outside the chamber listening. He hesitated to bother them, but Peter would be coming down this evening and they needed to know he wanted to speak with them about something - about what, Father had no idea, but they needed to know about it. He knocked softly against the outer wall, entering as he did so. Smiling, he motioned for them to stay seated.

"I trust you two slept well? Peter asked to see both of you. I believe he needs another blood draw to bring Vincent's labwork up to date, to make sure the drug is completely dissipated. He plans to be down around dinner time. I thought it best to tell you early in the day so you could make plans accordingly. Oh, I almost forgot ... Kipper has a message for Catherine from her office."

After saying that, he delivered the envelope into my hand. With his mission accomplished, he departed. He was unusually subdued for Father. We were both amused at his obvious attempt to not bother us.

I had wondered how Joe was taking all this. Hopefully, he'd understand. I certainly had plenty of vacation time that I'd never used since I'd started working for the DA's office. At last count I had five weeks coming from last year. I also had enough *comp* time to take at least a year off with pay. If they fired me now, I wouldn't fight it; Vincent's health came first.

Over the next six weeks, Vincent and I spent almost all of our time together. We really had a nice time; everyone went out of their way to give us time to heal. By the end of the sixth week, Vincent seemed well enough for me to return to work. I was not used to all this leisure time.

Joe was ecstatic to have me back and working. Father had arranged to have a direct entrance into the City Courts Building reopened. It seems, in the not too distant past, someone who lived Below had put it in, and when he passed away, it was sealed. Now it was needed again. The entrance was located in the rear of the Chief Engineer's Office in the basement. His father had constructed the original entrance while he served as the building's engineer. Therefore, the current engineer was well aware of its existence and was a Helper himself.

What did surprise our Chief Engineer was that I was the one who needed to use it. I was the last person Carl Vinson would have picked to be Vincent's girl. His opinion of me rose considerably.

Now, the only remaining problem was my living arrangements. I needed to move Below. This meant I would have to make the move soon. Father had been reluctant to let me tell my friends where I was going, but neither Nancy nor Jenny would leave a stone unturned until they found me. Once convinced, he agreed to let me tell them about the tunnels and Vincent. It was hard for me to believe all the changes in our lives. At least Nancy would be less surprised than Jenny.

Nancy took my news fairly well, all things considered. Unlike Jenny, Nancy did know a little about Vincent because I had previously confided in her. Actually, she was elated!

CHAPTER EIGHT

I dialed Jenny's number at her office. Hopefully, she'd be in town today and not on a book tour. When she answered on the second ring, I was taken by surprise.

"Jenny! You are in! This is Cathy, remember?" I could hear Jenny's laughter on the other end of the line. "Cathy, where have you been hiding? I've called and called. I even called Joe Maxwell; I didn't have the heart to tell him you didn't have any relatives still kicking! We have to talk, kiddo."

I could sense Jen's anxiety. She had always been very protective of me. "Jen, I know everyone's concerned about my welfare and I don't like to worry anyone. However, this has been the best I could do up to now. That's why I'm calling. We do need to talk. Can you get away for a few hours, days, weeks?" I laughed, as I could imagine what she must be thinking.

"Cathy, I can get away right now. My eleven o'clock appointment just canceled. Is that soon enough? Anyway, I'm on vacation as of five o'clock today. I'd already decided I would take the time off so I wouldn't lose paid vacation time. I have ten days free with nothing planned. What did you have in mind?"

Catherine laughed. "Okay, I'll be here. Plan to pick me up at the office. You can pick up some Chinese take-out on the way."

I had closed out all the files Joe had given me this morning. They were already sitting in his *In-Box*. Hopefully, I would be able to get out of here before he returned with something more for me to work on. I grabbed for my briefcase, jacket and purse, so intent on clearing out of the area sight unseen, that I didn't see Joe walking towards my desk. As I turned to leave, the expression on my face must have told him how surprised I was to see him.

"Radcliffe!" Joe exclaimed. "Where are you headed for... what about those files?" Folding his arms, he tapped his foot, waiting for my answer.

I smiled and indicated they were on his desk - waiting for him. He seemed almost disappointed. I was usually a fast worker, but not this fast! I really *booked* on this assignment. I had too many loose ends to tie up at home and no time to do it in.

"Joe, you know I'd never leave you holding the bag - especially while I'm off for a few days. You gave me a whole week plus four weekend days to move, remember?"

Joe laughed and gave me a hug. "Radcliffe, I know you want to get going, but I had to give you just a little grief; you'd think I was getting soft!"

Just then Jenny arrived and we said our goodbyes as we hurried out the door. "Well, Cath, I guess the next stop would be your place. On the way over, I stopped for Chinese and took a cab to my place, packed my bag, and here I am ready for some adventure!"

I couldn't help wondering if Jen was as ready as she thought she was. Once in the main corridor, we turned and headed for the small service elevator off our back hall. I could see Jen was a bit confused, but she wasn't saying anything. With my key, I accessed the elevator and we were soon exiting in the sub-basement opposite Carl's office.

I motioned for Jenny to follow me into Carl's office, and on into the storage room beyond. I wondered what she would think as I closed the door behind us and pressed against the cement block wall that swung back to reveal the tunnel beyond.

"Jen, go on through. I'll be right behind you. I have to lock the door from this side. You'll be fine." Jenny seemed apprehensive about going on alone but she did as I instructed. Following close behind her, I pulled the door shut and pushed the bolt home.

Turning towards Jenny, "Okay, now we head for home. It will take us at least forty-five minutes to get home from here. We can talk on the way." I could tell she was more than just a little bit curious about where we would be ending our journey, but she was being really nonchalant.

As we walked, Jenny finally got up enough nerve to ask her questions. "Cath, are these the tunnels you hear about being under the city? I wasn't aware people used them. I thought they were abandoned years ago. How on earth did you come to be so at home here? Want to tell me anything? You must have quite a story to tell, so start talking!"

I began to relate all that had occurred to bring Vincent and me together. Every now and then, Jen would let loose with an, *I knew it*, and then I'd go on with the story. As we began to reach the lower levels, the pipes sang out with their interrupted melodies. I could tell she was curious. "It's people talking to each other ... much like our telephones Above," I related, and laughed as she just shook her head in amazement.

"Can you understand what they're saying?" Jen seemed to be enjoying my current level of discomfort. "Only enough to get me into trouble," I replied. "It's quite an involved system of codes, I'm not sure I'll ever learn even the simplest one."

By now, we were approaching the home chambers. Passing by the kitchen area, off the back hallway to our chamber, the enticing aromas of William's cooking did a lot for one's appetite, but we had our lunch with us. As we approached the entryway to our chamber, Father came out and greeted us as he was leaving. He was very charming and appeared to approve of Jenny. He even asked her if she played chess!

It was no surprise when seconds later he asked if they could have a game before she went back Above. Jen had been warned about Father's luck with his chess partners. Jen assured him she would give it a try. While we talked in the hall, I could sense Vincent's anxiety at coming face-to-face with the infamous Jenny. I sent my reassurances through the bond.

Entering our chamber, Vincent was sitting at the worktable with his back to us. "Vincent, this is Jenny Aronson... Jenny, this is Vincent Wells, the man I've been telling you about." I knew I could trust Jenny not to react in a way that would upset him.

I watched in silence as he stood up and hesitantly turned towards us. As he greeted Jenny, I could see how hard this was for him, but it soon was all too obvious, even to him, that Jenny was quite taken with him and when she turned to me and called him *gorgeous*, I think even he believed her! Jenny approved - and it showed! I was more than a little relieved it was working out so well. Soon, there would be no secrets between us.

Vincent sat back down at the table and indicated we should join him. I motioned for Jenny to sit down and headed for Father's microwave to warm up our lunch. Returning minutes later, I came up behind Vincent's chair and set the food down on the table along with some plates and eating utensils. Then without warning him, I leaned over and really kissed him soundly on the lips. He was still shy about being so open about our affection for each other. However, he was learning - in spite of himself!

We sat and talked about a lot of things ... mostly he pumped a more than willing Jenny for stories about me. When we finished our lunch and the dishes were cleared away, Jenny went to her suitcase and brought out a stack of journals and sat them on the table.

"These are yours, you should read them. I know Cathy has mentioned I'm a bit psychic. I get these premonitions and dreams. For a while now, I thought I was getting a bit stranger than usual, but now, after three rather confusing years, I can relax and get on with my life."

Saying this, she thumped the journals and sat down to watch our reactions.

I'd told Vincent about Jenny's dreams, but I wasn't sure if he really took me seriously. Somehow, I had a feeling he would soon be a believer in her talents. The person she most needed to meet Below was Narcissa. Maybe we could arrange it before she returned Above.

As I picked up one of the journals, I teased her. "I didn't realize you kept such close tabs on me."

Jenny leaned forward to brush the hair out of my eyes. "Cath, are you feeling all right? Something inside me says you have something to tell me ... right?"

I shook my head in the negative. I really didn't know what she was getting at. I could tell she believed me when I gave her a blank stare in return. Yet, she was still amazed I didn't know what she was getting at. And then, it hit me. I was pregnant. Was that it? What she said next shouldn't have shook me, but for some reason, it did. Maybe it wasn't what she said that surprised me so. More likely it was the fact that she really did know everything, long before I could even imagine it into existence.

"Cath, you know you're pregnant! You have to know it. What I'm seeing besides this fact, is the presence of two babies, one each. I mean one is a girl and the other is a boy, but they are different and so are you. You're becoming like them and their father. I mean your metabolism is more like Vincent's and your blood chemistry is changing. Already your blood pressure is well below your normal rate ... have you told Father or Peter?"

I admitted I hadn't really talked to either of them ... not even with Vincent. We both knew I was pregnant, but I really hadn't wanted to share our news so early in the pregnancy. But I understood what she was trying to say. And, I could see Vincent was in agreement. It was amazing how relaxed he was around her. Even he would have to admit that here we were, together, and our world was still intact ... for the time being, anyway.

Vincent shifted nervously in his chair. "Jenny is right, you do need to see Peter ... and do something about your workload being reduced to a more manageable level. And, get away from investigation ... maybe just do research for a while. I too have felt these changes in you. I've kept

quiet so far, but now I feel I must agree with Jenny and insist upon it. Maybe these changes are not good for you. It worries me."

By now it was almost time for Vincent's literature class. It began at two o'clock. Since it was usually held in our chamber, Jen and I excused ourselves, taking her things along to the guest room nearby. After settling in, I took her into the common room below Father's study. Here we ran into Lena and little Cathy, as they returned from a walk Above. Classes were changing and children were all over the place. Father was in his element. He could be seen lecturing one youngster, who had transgressed in some way and for the moment couldn't stop crying. I *felt* for the little guy. Whatever he was saying to the child was having the desired effect. Then to my surprise, he looked up and winked at us, as he sent the boy to William for a job assignment.

Father pushed his glasses back onto his nose and rose up, indicating with hand signals that we should join him for a cup of tea.

As we sat down at the table, Father spoke to Jenny. "Well, how do you like us?"

Jenny smiled. "Well, it's not what one would expect to find underground in New York City, but I'm glad to know I didn't just imagine it. At least now I know it's for real and not just a fantastic dream. Cathy never has led an uncomplicated life; it's good to know she has a family to keep her in line."

Father cleared his table off to make room for the tea tray. "By the way, maybe we could play that chess game tomorrow afternoon?"

We both tried not to laugh as she answered him. "I'm sure I'll be able to do that. I'm not a very good player, but I'll give it a try."

While we sat sipping the hot tea, Samantha arrived, curious about the visitor. I introduced her to Jenny. I'd already told the story of how Vincent had found her when she was barely a year old; she'd lived Below ever since. We visited for a few more minutes, and then we explored a bit. All things considered, we had a really nice afternoon. While we walked, I told Jen I was having my apartment sold and my belongings moved Below. The movers were Helpers and had a freight elevator that connected directly with the tunnels. Hopefully, we'd get it done tomorrow, or Sunday at the very latest. Somehow, my news didn't surprise Jenny. The day had flown past before we knew it. Supper also came and went ... and we still had a lot to talk about, but it would have to wait for another day.

The movers worked at breakneck speed to get us settled, but Vincent wouldn't let me near our chamber all day Saturday. No one would! By five o'clock in the evening, word came that the job was completed, and he had to let me in to assess the *damage*. The results surprised me. The chamber was totally different now. The large stained-glass window had been moved to the rear of another chamber directly behind where it had once rested. Now it was all the way to the rear of the new chamber. My bed was now positioned directly below it, and the floor was now covered with a thick, well-padded, cut-pile, wall-to-wall carpeting. My Oriental rugs were also overlaying the carpeting, just like at the apartment. Even the outer chamber was carpeted; it really did look and feel like home. They'd even hooked up my VCR to the television, as well as my tape and CD player; even my videotapes and shelving were all in place. Not that we could get any reception down here, but Mouse had managed to hook them up to a small generator. He'd also assured Vincent that he could tap into the cable line. Vincent said he'd tried to discourage him, but he wasn't at all sure he had succeeded.

The loveseats fit against the back corner, where his armoire and bed had once stood. The armoires, his and mine, now stood on either side of the new room, opposite each other. Next to mine stood my

dresser and mirror, the brass bench was at the foot of our bed. Even my bedside tables and lamps were in their usual place.

Since this chamber was quite spacious, the armoire and dresser took up only half of the wall. The remainder was taken up by a large closet hewn out of the rock wall, which now held most of our clothes. A large chest of drawers had taken up residence next to his armoire, and in the corner nearest the old chamber, stood my curio cabinet. If anything was missing, it probably wasn't needed. My desk had found a home in the outer chamber. As I slowly surveyed my surroundings, Vincent watched anxiously from the sidelines, as if he expected me to disapprove of the finished results.

"Catherine, you can change anything you don't feel comfortable with."

Having said this he wandered over to the sofa and sat down. Reaching out for my hand, he pulled me over to him and encouraged me to sit on his lap. He gently pushed the hair away from my face. I wanted to ask him about the extra room we were now blessed with, but I wasn't sure how to approach it.

Sensing my confusion, he answered me. "It was to have been Devin's room, but he left; it was never used. I didn't feel right using it. No one did - that is until now. I hope it is a nice surprise. It does allow us to keep and use more of your furniture. Mack Davison donated the carpeting; he says you need it because you never wear your shoes at home."

And with that he sat me down beside him and went over and closed the entryway door. Returning, he once again placed me on his lap. As Vincent quietly held me, I looked the outer chamber over and could see he had managed to place a lot of his things on my shelves, and in the end, we both got to keep the best of both our worlds. Leaning back into his arms, I could only nod my approval. My thoughts were elsewhere and so were his. He began to push up my sweater and reached inside my bra. While one hand fondled my breast, he unzipped my pants. I couldn't help thinking I'd created a monster with too many hands.

With reluctance, he stopped playing with my breast and concentrated working his hand down inside my pants. Urging me to open my legs a bit more, as he slipped my jeans and underpants down ever so slightly to make room for his hand. He stroked me with his fingers massaging the small bud hidden within my folds. As I climaxed, arching upward in his arms, he kissed me passionately and inserted two fingers into my vagina and used his thumb to continue massaging my clitoris. I couldn't stop responding to his ministrations and was soon lost in a crescendo of climaxes which, for the moment, left us both drained - but oh so satisfied.

When we could talk again, he replaced my clothing and held me tightly against him. I could feel his arousal beneath me and found myself pulling back, as I slipped to my knees in front of him. Quickly, I released him and gently held him in my hand as I leaned forward and began to caress him with my tongue. Seeing the pearl-like drop of semen poised at the entrance to the shaft, I gently licked it away as I followed the length of the slit with the top of my tongue. As I covered its head with my mouth, he began to thrust within. A gentle combination of stroking and sucking soon brought about the desired climax his body sought.

Caressing my hair, he lifted my chin up, as he brushed my hair away from my face. As we embraced he kissed me passionately. Then we put ourselves back to order and none too soon. We could hear a commotion out in the hall coming our way. Whoever, or whatever, was causing a fair amount of excitement in the local population. The knock at our door came as no surprise, but what came next was.

I don't know who was the most surprised, most likely we all were. It would seem Devin was back, and he had brought Joe Maxwell with him. I should have guessed that they'd known each other a long

time ago. Joe hadn't ever been very upset over Devin's lack of credentials, but at the same time, I just hadn't caught on.

It wasn't a coincidence that they chose now to appear in our midst. It would seem all was not right in the DA's office. Moreno was up to his ear lobes in something he couldn't get out of.

Devin was a champion of sorts when it came to disguises, but not in the way I had first envisioned - or he had led us to believe. He was not the vagabond con-artist we'd all believed him to be, and Joe had always known about Vincent. He even suspected he was my mysterious lover, but he hadn't wanted to ask.

As to Joe's being Below, I was in for another shock! It was soon revealed that his parents had been Helpers. Joe had run with Devin and company Below. It now came to light that Mitch's gang Above had been responsible for Detective Maxwell's death. After this happened, Joe's mother had retired her position as a Helper. And as a result, Joe stopped coming down to be with the boys. Then shortly thereafter, Devin ran away, but not to sea as he'd always pretended. He'd only run as far as the Maxwell's home, where he lived until he went away to college. Yes, he did have a law degree and a Masters in Deviant Criminal Behavior as well! His only failure over the years, was that he'd never really practiced his profession in the courts.

What he'd done instead was to join a special investigative task force known only as *Unit 2-10*. Its members were all independent investigators with very special talents. They worked alone, undercover, in situations that required a delicate hand to successfully bring in these cases.

That was how Devin had become involved in the Moreno case. As luck would have it, Greg Hughes had recently taken over Detective Lieutenant Hermann's files on me, all the slashings associated with cases I had been assigned to, as well as the information collected by that damned reporter, Spirko. Wouldn't you know Hermann would be the one to get his research notes.

Once again fate had somehow stepped in and Lt. Hermann's files were turned over to Greg to be dispersed or closed out. Lt. Hermann had suddenly passed away last week. When Greg went through the files, he called Joe into his office and gave everything to him, because I was his employee. Of course, Joe made quick work of them. No one would ever know they had existed. It would seem the Lieutenant had been working on his own. No official investigation had ever taken place. We were relieved to learn this, and so was Father. I think he guessed someone was keeping track - and it had worried him more than he'd let on.

What we heard next did nothing to reassure us of peace and tranquility at the home front. Joe was to meet with another undercover agent, who had been in place for years, as was his father before him. They were gathering information on a group known as the *Illuminati*. It was time for Patrick Hanlon to hand over the information that would possibly close the group down on a world-wide basis.

Vincent's recent dream had foreseen this meeting and he tried to warn Joe about the dangers he might face ... possibly a bombing. It would seem that whatever Hanlon was coming out with, was something only he could bring out. It was causing the group to be stressed out, because they only knew someone from their inner circle was involved. They wouldn't know the identity of that individual until he made his move. Only then would they have an idea of how damaging the information might be.

Devin explained that this was the one and only chance they would have to bring these monsters down; whatever needed to be done, would be done, to bring this information out as planned. They would take every precaution to protect those involved. If anything did happen to Joe, one of us would have to get that information and see that it fell into the right hands.

As we talked, Jen listened quietly to all that was being said. Joe could see she was visibly shaken by

what she was hearing. Devin made a special effort to reassure her it would all be okay; we just had to be careful. I could tell Jen wanted to believe him, but her intuition was telling her otherwise. What really surprised me was that Jen was more taken with Joe than I'd ever noticed before with the other men in her life. All things being equal in terms of matchmaking, I decided to help things along if the opportunity presented itself.

For now, we all tried to change the subject. We all left our chamber and went out to see the rest of our family. After dinner we attended a short recital by the children in honor of our guests.

Seeing our chance to get away for a few minutes, we headed for the Chamber of the Falls. It was my favorite place to rest and to think. The sound of the falls also provided you with more privacy than other places Below. As we found a comfortable out-of-the-way to cuddle up together and watch the falling water cascading into the lake below, we began to discuss the need to see Peter. Vincent reminded me that tomorrow night Peter was scheduled to be in the clinic. I agreed to see him, but only if Vincent would stay with me. In the meantime, we could hang onto each other and dream of better times.

CHAPTER NINE

Sundays Below were usually quiet and uneventful, but today was certainly an exception. Jenny and I had left early in the morning to call Nancy from Joe's apartment. Then after much talking, Nancy agreed to arrange a visit between Vincent and her family. Then we took a cab to the Park and walked to the tunnel entrance. Then we had lunch and watched some tapes Peter had brought down, of Vincent and myself as children. He'd also transferred all of Dad's home movies and he'd included these as well.

By the time dinner came and went, I was more than a bit tired. At least the nausea was more tolerable these days. When the others retired to the common room to visit, we excused ourselves and headed for the clinic. Only two patients were ahead of us and they were gone by eight o'clock.

Peter motioned for us to come into his office area behind the partition. He shifted uneasily in his seat. "What can I do for you two youngsters; you don't look sick to me!"

We laughed, and explained what we thought might be happening. As we talked, Peter's face broke into a warm smile, shaking his head in amazement.

"Well, the first thing I'm going to do is ask Vincent to close the door to the clinic and put out the *Do Not Disturb* sign. I've been waiting for a good time to talk to Vincent - actually to both of you. If what you suspect is true, I have some information that might just answer a lot of questions. Questions that have needed answers for some time now.

"However, all this can wait; lets take time out and examine Cathy, and then we can finish our conversation." Saying this, he indicated I should get into a hospital gown and hop up on the exam table in the adjoining area that served as an examination room. Actually, the exam didn't take all that long, except for the bloodwork. Vincent never left my side for a second, which seemed to amuse Peter to no end!

As a treat, Peter insisted we both listen to the babies' heartbeats. Yes, Jen was right; we were indeed having twins. Twins ran in my family on both sides. Therefore, Peter wasn't all that surprised. But although the changes in my physiology did slightly concern him, his findings seemed to be pleasing him in some way. His calm reaction to our news left Vincent and me wondering just what Peter was up to - and what was it that he needed to discuss with us.

I figured Peter wouldn't keep us guessing much longer. Therefore, I hurriedly dressed and slipped back in the office area and sat down on the bench opposite Peter's chair. By this time, Vincent was more than a little anxious to hear whatever it was that Peter had to relate.

Peter smiled reassuringly and began. "If you two are sure about the when of all this, I'd say your gestation is occurring at an accelerated rate. If you are approximately seven weeks along by your calculations, my exam shows you are much closer to nine weeks. But to reassure you, whatever month it is for your babies, you are all doing just fine."

Vincent's relieved sigh was definitely audible to all concerned. Peter once again settled back in his chair and began to relate a most interesting story.

"Remember the story Father tells every December about how you came to live Below? I've wanted to relate a different version of the miraculous tale, but I've never wanted to go against Jacob's wishes without a very good reason. Now that you are an adult with a life of your own, the real story needs to be told. Jacob has always hesitated to follow-up on what we did know about your background. In a nutshell, he fears losing you. Perhaps he feels your family didn't value you enough in the first place. No matter, it's time to let you hear the details and make your own decisions. I'm not getting any younger and I don't want to let this go any longer. I'd always hoped Jacob would come to his senses, but I realized long ago that he has no intention of ever doing so.

"I've never believed that John Pater had nothing to do with your arrival Below. Oh, Anna found you where she said she did, but knowing John, he'd just put you there seconds before she walked by. When Anna found you, you were hardly wrapped in rags. If expensive clothes, gold cross and a monogrammed baby ring constituted *rags* then I could go along for the ride. However, there are more inconsistencies. You were never sick. In fact, you were remarkably healthy for an abandoned newborn. Another point of fact is the issue of your body temperature. You should have been half frozen in that weather, yet you were warm as toast and suffered no exposure from the elements.

"Actually, there were a lot of things that never added up. When you arrived Below with Anna, Jacob wasn't available; but, as luck would have it, I had just arrived Below. Therefore, I was the first to examine you. I felt from the onset that John was up to his ears in this - most likely from the beginning. I firmly believe he not only was responsible for your coming Below, but for your disappearance in the first place. When I examined you, I found that although you were small, weighing just under six pounds, you seemed much older. Your umbilical cord presented another inconsistency. It appeared to be surgically attached to an already healed navel. In addition, the blood within the cord was not the same as yours. I tested it myself after removing it. Also, you were in the process of recovering from an ear infection and the antibiotic Ampicillin was present in your blood chemistry.

"I still have the clothes you were found in; an undershirt, a hand knitted romper. Pinned to your undershirt we discovered a small gold cross, and on your finger, we found a gold ring with the initials *CRS*. It was 18 carat gold. Not the apparel of a rejected infant. I feel someone is looking for you, and these items could be the key to your real identity.

"When you were a toddler, you *talked* to your *mother*. Jacob thought that it was a fantasy made up to fill that special void in your life. But I never knew for sure if he was right. Now, knowing about your *bond* with Cathy, I truly believe you did *talk* to her. She may even have felt you were safer where you were, and chose to leave you with us. Jacob always discouraged you, and in the end, forbade you to *talk* with her, or about her.

"Speaking of your ability to bond with those you love, I find there's a curious set of occurrences in your younger lives that paralleled each other. I never made the connection until recently. I guess it came to my attention when I reviewed your old medical records. The data spoke for itself. It seems that whenever one of you is hurt or sick, the other one would come in with the same complaint on the

same day - until today that is, I don't foresee Vincent becoming pregnant any time soon.

"As for the significance of these physiological changes in Cathy, it opens up a new area to investigate, especially when it comes to Vincent's past. It would seem that whatever caused these changes didn't originate in Cathy. Therefore, Vincent's sperm is the most likely culprit. Possibly, the agent of change is similar to a type of retrovirus. It seems to be linked with the immune system and is sexually-transmitted during intercourse, most likely carried in the seminal fluid.

"What that means, if I'm on the right track, is that Vincent's mother would also have experienced similar changes. If they are permanent changes, as I believe them to be, then maybe there is some documentation to back up my theory, especially when you know where to look for it.

"Now, there is something I need to tell Cathy. You, too, have a few old skeletons gathering dust in your family's closet. Do you remember your Aunt Vicky from Cape Cod? She was a distant cousin of your mother and her closest friend. She was also your godmother."

Catherine shook her head and answered hesitantly. "I remember her only from pictures in our album. I somehow kept feeling that there is more I should be remembering - but, I'm sorry to say, I don't."

Peter smiled warmly, and continued. "There's a reason for that, honey. Shortly after your mother's death, she disappeared. I knew her father, a Dr. Bradley C. Stephens, formerly of New Orleans. He was a geneticist of some renown. At one time, he was the best in his field. Then his wife was killed in a freak accident, and he and his daughter moved to upstate New York to work at the infamous Richards Institute. It burned to the ground, taking its director with it. But that was years ago. While Dr. Stephens was employed there, his eleven-year-old daughter was used in some bizarre experiment that allowed her to become pregnant through in-vitro fertilization and implantation. The Institute was into things way in advance of most researchers of their day. There were other young girls involved in the study, but only little Victoria's implant was successful. Knowing some of the history of that case makes me fairly sure Vincent just might be Victoria's missing son. It's a connection I should have made long ago, and yet I never really thought about all this until recently."

Vincent leaned forward on the bench, and put his head in his hands. Then he raised his head and asked. "What happened after all that was discovered?"

Peter sighed and went on. "It would seem that a nephew of the Institute's director blew the whistle on the Uncle. I also know that John Pater worked for Dr. Richards during that same time. He must have known about the project.

"It also came out in the trials that the sperm's donor was an alien, said to be from another world. They somehow discovered him in a dormant state. As a result of all this, hearings were held in Albany and the Grand Jury shut down the Institute. But before it was official, it burned to the ground, taking its director with it. Dr. Stephens and his daughter were not dependent upon his employment for financial support. Therefore, he chose to retire in order to care for his daughter. Victoria's mother was the sole heir to the *Reed Estate*, most of which would now belong to her son, who has been listed as missing for as long as Vincent has been with us.

"It would seem that, if I remember the story correctly, Victoria's child was born prematurely on August 6th, 1959. Records regarding his birth and the mother's medical history during this time, was ordered sealed by the courts, to protect the minor children involved. She was twelve-years-old when she gave birth.

"Cathy, when you were little, there were two porcelain dolls representing *Beauty and the Beast* - the Beast looked a lot like your Vincent. Vicky told you her version of the old fairy tale, promising that one day her Christopher would come and rescue you, and then you would live happily ever after, just like in the real fairy tales. You carried that doll with you everywhere you went. While Vicky and your

mother encouraged you in the fantasy, Charles on the other hand, didn't like any part of it. But at the time, he never really voiced his objections.

"When you were about five years of age, you came to our house to attend my charity ball for the children's hospital. That year, and for many years to come, you were always *Beauty* and you carried your *Beast* with you. You'd only answer to the name of *Beauty*. You played the game very well.

"That year, Mitch and some of the older boys were bent on teasing anyone they could victimize. Seeing your doll, they grabbed for it and you became hysterical. Devin came to your rescue, as he had for little Vincent only moments before.

"Vincent was hiding out in my library, preferring to stay out of their way. Devin carried you and the doll into the library, and I came in to see if we could make it all better. When you saw Vincent, you two were fast friends. However, you insisted on calling him *Christopher*. I don't think either of you knew your real names. He called you *Beauty* and you called him your *Beast* or *Christopher*. Over the years you continued to see each other, and I did know about this - but Jacob wasn't aware Vincent knew any children outside of our extended family. Cathy would meet you in the park, or at my yearly party. I kept silent about you two because I just didn't see any harm in it.

"When your mother's illness became terminal, Charles refused to tell you anything about it, and as a result, you became confused and angry; several times you disappeared for days. I don't think Charles was aware of how unhappy you were. I had a pretty good idea of where you were staying, but I kept still. I was far too busy with your parents' immediate needs.

"When it was over, Charles decided Vicky was a bad influence on you and decided to end the *fantasy bit*, as he so aptly put it. He returned everything Vicky had ever given you and demanded she distance herself from you. Then he did something I could never condone. He took you to Dr. Grafton. You recently saw his son. After meeting with you and looking at your old file, he called me to see how you were doing. It seems the files showed there was more to your problems than at first glance. He wanted to know if he should be honest with you, or wait until you were ready to learn what Charles had done."

Catherine shifted her position on the bench beside Vincent and shook her head. "I'm almost afraid to hear what's coming next."

"It's not as bad as all that. Charles had the doctor hypnotize you and erase your memories of the boy, Christopher, and the stories Vicky and your mother had told you. Meeting Vincent as you did, most likely triggered your suppressed memories, especially on the anniversary of your mother's death. It was no coincidence that you went Below when Charles died. It was exactly what you had done when your mother died. Not long after your mother's death, Vicky disappeared and your father seemed more settled. He was satisfied you wouldn't have any reason to remember her, or her son.

"There is one more interesting story to share with you. Shortly before Devin ran away, he came to me and related the following story. Vincent and Devin were out on the town one winter day and found themselves at Rockefeller Center, where Vincent spotted Cathy and her Aunt Vicky. Devin recognized Cathy, but he didn't know the woman with you. It was your Aunt Vicky. She'd been staying with you shortly before your mother's death. Devin was reluctant to go up to the table, but Vincent would have it no other way. The boys came over to say hello. You were having hot chocolate, and Vicky asked the boys to sit down. Much against Devin's better judgment, the boys did join you. While you and Vincent talked, Devin said he couldn't help noticing something familiar about the woman. She could see little Vincent was trying to hide his face behind his scarf.

"As the boys got up to leave, she motioned to Vincent and asked if she could hold him on her lap for a moment, and let her see what he really looked like. Vincent almost never let this happen Above, yet

he went along with her request and seemed almost happy about it. When she unwrapped him, Devin saw the winter sun catch their faces as she looked him over. It struck Devin what it was that bothered him - they looked alike. Their hair was the same color and their eyes were that same deep azure blue. Vincent could have been hers. As they were leaving, she told the children that she would be going away to be with the father of her son. In time, they would return, but not for many years. As the boys were getting ready to leave, she motioned for Vincent to come closer; she then whispered something to him that made him look very pale and sad. Devin never learned what she said. Then Devin left the tunnels - and life went on."

Vincent shook his head. "I wish I could say I recall any of this, but I don't. My illness, after Devin left, took its toll on my memories of the days just before he disappeared and while I was sick."

Peter reached over and gave Vincent's hand a reassuring pat. "It would seem life's changes separated you for a time, but in the end, it seems you two found each other all over again. And now, the story comes full circle. If I'd paid attention to all these facts earlier on, I could have told this story a lot sooner. Since both of you have a connection to Victoria Stephens, perhaps you both shared a bond with her. As a result, perhaps that fateful walk in the park wasn't just a coincidence."

Vincent stood up and paced a bit and then sat down again. "So, where do we go with all this. I take it Father is best kept in the dark about most of this."

Peter also stood up and helped Catherine to her feet. "Well, I hope we can get some answers from the court records. Both Devin and Joe have agreed to help open up the closed files in question. So, when I can get away to research this, we'll have some answers we can deal with. In the meantime, here are a few prescriptions for Catherine." Peter walked with them to the doorway and opened it. "I'll talk to Jacob about Catherine."

Catherine sighed and yawned as they walked back to their chamber. It had been an eventful night, to say the very least.

We were exhausted from hearing all that stuff Peter was laying on us. If Peter could get the answers to agree with the known facts, maybe Vincent could find his family. If Peter was right about his identity, it seemed he was to inherit an estate said to be in the hundreds of millions. it was a lot to digest all at once.

EPILOGUE

That weekend turned out to be the last time we were all together. Just as Vincent had said, Joe was hurt in an explosion, and I did come into the possession of the infamous *Black Book*, with all the coded information. I certainly was forewarned about letting on that I had it. Instead, I immediately placed it in a manila envelope from my briefcase before leaving the hospital. I mailed it at an express mail office near the hospital that same evening.

I knew Peter was still in Albany, but the note inside explained what it was and to whom he would have to deliver it. I never learned if he discovered it, or anything else.

Despite my best efforts to stay out of John Moreno's way, I was abducted. A man named Gabriel was behind it. While I was held captive in his penthouse apartment, I was able to use a pipe under the bathroom sink to tap out a distress signal. However, Vincent was not successful. He had failed to rescue me in his dream, and he was unsuccessful in this attempt, too.

They made sure I wouldn't be able to do this again. Now, I was being kept at a new location. I wasn't sure, but I felt it was an estate on Long Island. I had no real idea of where I was being held.

I was getting bigger by the minute, and with my slower metabolic rate and the fact I was not allowed to exercise, I was retaining a lot of water. For that reason, Gabriel decided to allow me to be seen by a specialist in high-risk pregnancies. Somehow, the doctor I saw on a daily basis wasn't all that familiar with obstetrics. He also wasn't being entirely honest with his employer. Was he with Devin's group? He had not told Gabriel about the twins. He'd shown ultrasounds that showed one male fetus. I didn't feel it was safe to speak to him about it, as it seemed Gabriel heard everything. If he didn't, one of his underlings did.

I knew Devin had said there were men inside his organization, but I really never saw anyone but the oriental nurse, or Dr. Archetor. Once in a while, Gabriel would appear and disappear like a snake in the grass. Only in my room was I not bothered by those damned cameras. Yesterday, was the first time I'd met the new doctor; he'd put me on bed rest. He was due any time now to examine me. His voice sounded so familiar, but I couldn't identify it.

When he entered my room that next morning, he was alone. I could hear a lot of shouting going on outside on the grounds below. Then as I watched, he immediately did something to the door's electronic locking device. Then it came to me - It was Devin! His accent was gone now, and he was speaking in his normal voice. He smiled and came over to the bed, and put his jacket around my shoulders. Pulling up a chair, he indicated I should get off the bed and sit down.

He explained the grounds were inundated with FBI men and SWAT teams from several local police departments. While we waited, Devin brought me up to date on what was happening. He told me that the ledger, once decoded, essentially was a listing of every financial holding for the group. It also included its members' private accounts and property holdings. Each of the account access codes were listed - even those hidden in banks that didn't give out this information. In seconds, one could wipe out their worldwide financial base for their covert operations. It was happening now, and it was going to be a lot more effective than confronting them in the usual manner - with a gun. The Hanlons had even included duplicates of all the safety deposit keys, and where the boxes were located. They also left a list of warehouses and the keys to access them.

We would later learn that Patrick Hanlon Sr's real name was Damien Richards. He was the one who turned his uncle into the police back in 1959, and testified against the Institute. Because of his ability to infiltrate the group, he was given a new identity and facial surgery to change his appearance. With his new identity, he re-entered the organization and soon worked his way into a position of trust as their financial advisor. He was the only one they trusted with the entire network of accounts. Unfortunately for them, they had given him access to the means to destroy them. The man Gabriel who had been holding me all this time - thanks to Moreno's paranoia, turned out to be the son of Dr. Richards. The family had been severely damaged by the unsuccessful attempt to produce the gene pool for a super race. In Vincent's child, he saw a chance to move ahead in the organization's hierarchy.

Once the ledger was given to Vincent, he worked with Pascal to break down its codes and transcribe them into a more usable format. With Peter back in town, Vincent learned that he was the missing heir to the Reed fortune. Peter and Vincent traveled to Cape Cod to meet with his grandfather.

As a result, it was front page news for weeks when Vincent claimed his inheritance. Locally, he was being hailed as a hero, for bringing in the decoded ledger. He also was responsible for nailing Moreno!

When he brought the ledger into the DA's office, he delivered it to Joe, along with the translation, and then headed straight for John's office, grabbed him by the throat, slamming him up against the back wall of his office, and held him there until he confessed. Vincent had then politely asked him to explain what he had done with me. Needless to say, Moreno took little time in complying with his

wishes. Vincent must have been John's worst nightmare. It was a good thing Greg Hughes was waiting just outside the door to arrest him. The whole office witnessed the affair and cheered when Moreno was read his rights.

Devin explained that Father had taken Peter's interference fairly well. Vincent was beside himself, because no one dared to go in any sooner than today. The doctor had been in on it from the beginning. It seems he'd lost his wife to one of Gabriel's men, and he was only too happy to help bring him down.

It was several hours later before Joe and Vincent were able to reach this portion of the house. But no one was any happier than I was to be leaving this terrible place. The twins were being fairly quiet for a change - which made me think they were more than ready to leave me for the outside world; after all, I didn't have much more room to spare! And, they were not small fetuses. I could sense the doctor's surprise every time he examined me. At least now they could be born at home.

Here again, there were surprises in store for me. As part of Vincent's inheritance, we now owned a lot of real estate. One area was an entire block of brownstones. He was restoring them to their former elegance and had completely closed out the alley which had run down the center of the block. He was making a private park for the residents, complete with all the luxuries of life - a tennis court, covered swimming pool, and children's play area. His relatives had lived in one of the brownstones - and it was this one we were to call home. Its turn-of-the-century antiques gave the residence an ambience all its own. Inside, he had only remodeled the kitchen and the children's wing on the second level. He was also having the adjoining unit connected to ours. It was being converted into a special school for children at risk. The Reed Foundation was managing the details for him. Some of the residences were privately-owned and their owners were being given the choice of life leases with a generous buy-out offer. The rest of the residences were being offered to the Helpers and those who needed shelter. Services could be exchanged for a place to live. Peter had moved to another unit and opened a free clinic on its lower level.

Vincent's grandfather, Dr. Stephens, had somehow arranged with NYCU to allow Vincent to test out of his courses for his undergraduate degree. Now he was almost finished with his Masters in Education. He was also a guest lecturer in several literature classes and he taught his own history class on Shakespearean England.

When things calmed down outside, we left for the car waiting outside. Here we met up with Vincent who was half out of his mind with worry about how everything was going inside. After seeing I was alive and well, he relaxed. After a warm embrace and kiss, he helped me into the waiting limousine. Then after saying our goodbyes to Devin and Joe, we finally left for home. As we rode back into the city, he caught me smiling to myself.

"Catherine, what were you just thinking about?" I confessed that I was remembering that dream I'd had when I was hospitalized, after Mitch shot me. The one about walking down Fifth Avenue in the sunlight, together, and buying ice cream from a vendor. And, no one noticed anything strange about us. Then it was a fantasy. Now, after everything I'd just learned, maybe we would have the chance to make it a reality.

As we pulled into the parking area inside the grounds, Vincent seemed nervous. "Catherine, I hope you'll like what I've done. Jenny and Nancy have been a big help to all of us. I've taken steps to adopt Eric and Samantha. I know we'd talked about it several times, and it seemed the right thing to do now that we can live Above. Joe has pulled quite a few strings to help me do this.

"By the way, I don't know if Devin told you, but Joe and Jenny are engaged; and that Joe's arranged for Judge Leyton to marry us, as soon as you're up to it. Hopefully, before the twins make their appearance. And from the looks of you, that had better not be put off for very long."

I laughed at the last part, as we entered the kitchen. "Is tomorrow soon enough for the wedding? I don't really want to wait any longer."

We'd entered the unit from the rear entrance of the newly-installed deck. I found myself in a pleasant, old-fashioned kitchen with all new appliances and cupboards. Waiting inside were Father and Mary, anxiously waiting to see how I was before Vincent spirited me upstairs to the master bedroom. They followed fast behind him. Once Father was certain I was okay in the physical sense, he seemed relieved.

What I most wanted, outside of dinner, was a hot bath, but Father and Mary wouldn't hear of it - not this close to delivery. Father's exam showed I was beginning to dilate. So I settled in for a hot shower with Vincent's help - not a bad consolation prize. As nice as it was, I wanted more. Vincent didn't quite know what to do with me and all my amorous advances. But, it had been so long ...!

After I was settled in our new bed, Mary let the kids in to welcome me home. Eric and Samantha talked excitedly about their new lives. We really had a lot to catch up on, but we had time.

They all had been right, of course. No sooner had we retired for the night, but my water broke. My labor started right on cue and wouldn't give me a break - the twins wanted out. Really, only the last couple of hours were really bad. Vincent was beside himself during that time, but he now knows what it feels like to give birth. Not too many men can say that. In fact, he's the only one!

Once the babies were here, they made up for any and all discomforts they may have caused. Our son, Jacob, was born first. He seems to favor me, but he has his father's eyes. Jennifer Elizabeth, our daughter, is more a combination of both of us. She doesn't have his cleft upper lip, but instead, she has a narrow crease that flairs slightly at the bow of her upper lip and continues up onto the septum. There is also a light coating of colorless hair on the bridge of her little nose that angles upward to join with her eyebrows. Her eyes are already greenish in color, and will probably match mine in time. Her hair is a mass of strawberry-blonde curls, which will resemble her father's in no time. Jacob, unfortunately, has my hair.

Of course we all think they are just perfect. Vincent adores them and the kids are making plans for them already. To say Father is delighted with his grandchildren is an understatement. Dr. Stephens plans to be here tomorrow to meet his great-grandchildren - all four of them. Needless to say, we're putting the wedding off for a couple of weeks.

Vincent is going around with the biggest grin I've ever seen. Everyone Below is equally excited. Whatever else would come in our lives, I feel we can make it. We're a family, and we would have a happy life, after all. Maybe not a perfect life - but who needs perfect when your husband looks like Vincent, and you have more money than you could spend in several lifetimes?

I have to confess that Vincent is now convinced when I say he is attractive to the ladies. It would seem that several of his female students have crushes on him. He finds it quite amusing, but he realizes they are sincere in their adoration. I'm not so sure I like having all that competition, and he teases me about it. For now, he seems happiest when he is holding the twins.

Right now, he has our very sleepy daughter in his arms while I finish nursing her brother, who already exhibits a hidden talent - he purrs! - at least when he is nursing or just very contented. So far Jennifer has not been inclined to let us in on her secrets.

For Vincent, learning about his past has answered a lot of questions. Reading his mother's journals has also let him get to know her. She appears in some of my family movies, which Dad had

transferred onto videotape just shortly before he passed away. Dr. Stephens had also transferred his films of Victoria and little Christopher onto videotape. These have all helped him learn about his origins. We may never have all the answers, but we can live with what we have.

His relationship with Father is more relaxed, mostly because Father isn't as threatened as he was before. In fact, he has become good friends with Dr. Stephens.

When it warms up in the late spring, we plan to open our old summer residence at the Cape. Dr. Stephens lives on the Old Coast Road. I understand the little village has quite a celebration planned for us, when we can get up for a prolonged visit. I hope we'll be up to it.

Whatever was to come would certainly be different than any of us would ever have imagined. Maybe the kids are right - we should go to Disneyland!

END