

You'll Live Another Life... Dream Another Dream

by Vickey Brickle--Macky

In the world of Above, Catherine was doing her own reviewing of the last days events. It was hard to get back into the swing of work after the peacefulness of Below. She half-way regretted her decision to return to this stress filled job possibly too soon after her father's death. She had only been two hours on the job and already her the top of her once neat desk was buried under a mound of manila folders and paperwork that she couldn't see over and the phone had been ringing so much that she wanted to scream and throw it out the nearest window.

Then there was Joe and her fellow co-workers trying to pry out of her where she had hidden herself either by subtle conversation or outright questions. From her they got either silence or mumbled explanations of going off to upstate New York to get away from it all. They watched her like a hawk worried that she might collapse or breakdown. Then there were all the sympathy calls and remarks. She appreciated them but she wanted to put her father's death behind her now and go on. She hoped that her friends would ease up soon and leave her alone to do her job. Wasn't that what she was there for, to work?

Catherine tried not to think of Vincent. Did he really understand or was he just going along with her decision to return? She sensed, no she knew that he really was sadden by her return to Above. One day she was ready to spend the rest of her life below with him and the next she was gone. Why could they never say the words they really wanted to say to each other. And neither of them could make the first move and more times then she wanted to recall they bungled their attempts to be together for always. She still wanted that, to be with him, but for reasons even she didn't understand she couldn't give up her life Above, even though it no longer held any attraction for her.

No, she told herself, I won't think about it. I've got to put the last couple of days out of my head or I'll never make it through the day. The phone rang saving her from any further thoughts on the matter for the moment.

"Cathy, it's Jenny. I just had to call to you," Jenny Erikson's excited voice bubbled across the phone line.

"Jenny, what in the world is up? You sound so strange!"

Catherine worriedly asked her friend, wondering what had gotten her so stirred up. Catherine could tell her friend wasn't frightened, but there was an odd quality to her voice that she couldn't interpret.

"I'm sorry, Cathy, but you've just got to see it to believe it. It's you, or at least it looks so much like you that you could have sat for it. But that's impossible, you weren't even born then!"

"Jenny!" Catherine protested, getting more and more confused by her friend's strange conversation, "What on earth are you talking about? Sat for what? A portrait, statue--what? Tell me!"

"It's the new exhibit at the Natural History Museum. You know I do volunteer work there once a month. . . " Jenny explained breathlessly.

"Go on. . . ." Catherine coached her. She leaned back in her chair, and absent-mindedly chewed on the end of her pen as she listened. She was glad of the break from her caseload files which were spread out before her covering the top of her desk. Joe glanced at her as he walked by, but he didn't stop his forward motion to his office.

Jenny's next words riveted her. "Cathy it's a temple mural from Egypt. . . Fifth Dynasty. . . it's a portrait of you and a man with a lion's face. The mural's inscription claims that he was a minor deity or god called

Kether and the woman was his high priestess. Their love defied the gods and evidently made the priesthood furious so that they sacrificed the woman to Osiris. Kether went berserk, killed all the priests with his bare hands and his teeth. Then he allowed himself to be killed so he could join his beloved. They were buried side by side. It's only recently that they found the burial site and the underground chamber they were hidden in. The wall painting comes from the chamber as does their two sarcophagus which are also on loan with some other artifacts they found there.

"Cathy are you still there?" Jenny asked, getting nothing but silence from the other end. Catherine was stunned. Her mind was reeling with the implications of the existence of this wall and its story. It was too fantastic to be believed if she allowed her mind to drift to the logical conclusion it presented. It implied that she and Vincent had been together before, with much the same appearances as they had now but within the framework of another time and place. If it were true then it could also explain why their bond was so

strong. She had to see that exhibit--see for herself what was inscribed there!

"Cathy, can you hear me? Are you still there?" Jenny asked persistently, starting to get worried at Catherine's ragged excited breathing.

Jenny's concerned tones finally brought Catherine to her senses. She shook her head to get the images out of her mind and she coughed nervously before she answered her friend.

"Yes, Jenny, I'm still here, guess my mind drifted off. I could almost see myself . . ." Cathy stopped mid sentence realizing what she had almost said. She had almost told Jenny about Vincent.

"See yourself--what?" Jenny inquired curious. "Cathy don't leave me hanging--tell me!" She implored.

"It's too weird Jenny. I could almost see myself there in Egypt . . . no, just forget it. Anyway I do want to see that exhibit. When can I come over and view it?" Catherine questioned, wanting very much to see this as soon as possible.

"Well, I'm beginning to think I shouldn't have said anything, the way you are reacting."

"Jenny, I'm fine. My mind just drifted there for a moment. I am serious. When can I see it?"

"The exhibit isn't open to the public for another two days, but since I work there I can sneak you in before that. Can you get away--say for lunch too, today?" Jenny inquired hopefully.

"Yeah. I could leave now and meet you on the steps of the museum, say in a half hour?" Catherine suggested.

"Done. I'll see you then. Bye now." Jenny agreed happily, and then hung up.

Catherine's mind was still racing. She wondered if Vincent could pick up her excited agitation. She hoped not. She would have to get word to him somehow to let him know that everything was okay and what was happening. Many days she fervently wished that she could just pick up a phone and call him. If she could she'd try to tap a message to him and hope that Pascal would pick it up. In the lower reaches of the building they had found a pipe that could send directly to the pipe chamber. Having a ways to communicate from her place of work had saved everyone's nerves and kept down a lot of unnecessary trips for both of them. So far

the new system was working, but she still wished for a phone.

She straightened up her desk, and was just about to slip out of the office when Joe spotted her leaving. She inwardly groaned.

He was smiling as he came up to her. "Early lunch, Radcliff?"

"Yes and no. Jenny Erikson called me. She has something she wants to show me--can't wait." Catherine hurriedly explained, hoping to throw Joe off so she could leave. her green eyes were determined.

"If it can't wait. I guess I'll let you go. Don't forget your two o'clock deposition, and I need the paperwork by closing time."

Joe added, his eyebrow crooked up slightly as he regarded the serious faced young woman. He was trying to figure out what she was up to and what it was that Jenny had to show her that couldn't wait, but he didn't have a clue. Nor would he likely get the information out of his mysterious co-worker.

"You'll have it before I leave, I promise," she said sincerely, making an attempt to step around him. "I was planning on going straight to the deposition right after Jenny and I were through."

"Must be something awful important to have you this worked up," he giped.

He was rewarded by a momentary flash from her eyes, but she recovered quickly and then smiled sweetly at him instead. "I'll let you know. As it is I'm running late." She said glancing at her watch and mentally calculated how long it was going to take her in mid-town traffic at the beginning of the lunch rush to meet her friend.

"I'll talk to you later." Catherine told him. She slid around him and hurriedly ran to catch the elevator down.

Once on board the car she punched the subbasement level and impatiently waited. Finally after what seemed like an endless number of stops she arrived at her destination. Checking to see that no one was around she headed for the message pipe. She picked up a loose brick from the floor and was about to pound out

her message on the pipe when she felt a presence behind her.

Quickly she turned around.

"Vincent!" She exclaimed, surprised and puzzled at his being there. "What on earth are you doing here?"

"I felt your distress earlier. I came to see what had troubled you so deeply. I knew you were coming here, so I waited for your arrival." He answered, his deep-set blue eyes searching hers with concern for her well being.

"Oh, Vincent, I didn't mean for you to get worried. It's really nothing. I'm fine. Jenny called me earlier to tell me about this Egyptian exhibit she wanted me to see." Catherine tried to explain.

"An exhibit?" Vincent questioned, his eyebrow arching, and his brow drawing up in puzzlement. "Why does this trouble you?"

"It's difficult to explain. Jenny wants me to see a wall mural that dates to the Fifth Dynasty. She claims that the woman in the mural is a dead ringer for me. The man, though she doesn't know it, looks like you. He was a god, and she was his high priestess. They fell in love and she ended up being killed because she dared to love him. He allowed himself to be killed so he could join her."

"A Romeo and Juliet of a different age and time. I can see now why you were so agitated. You are going then to see if there is resemblance?" Vincent inquired.

"Yes, I feel I must." Catherine acknowledged, moving in closer into the protecting circle of his arms. Then she rested her head on his shoulder and looked up at him, searching his face for clues as to what he was feeling with her news.

"What are you thinking, Vincent? Your mind seems very far away." She asked.

"I'm not sure. I felt a coldness, a chill when you told me about the exhibit. And strange scenes flashed before my eyes, then they were gone," he replied his eyes focused on some distant landscape, then he snapped back his attention and focus on the woman in his arms.

"It is nothing. Do not worry about me. You go on with your friend and see the exhibit. Then you can tell me all about it when I see you tonight." Vincent added, his eyes sparkling, and his voice a low purr emphasizing as he his last words.

"I will, I promise." she replied trying not to get lost in those blue liquid pools, then she glanced down at her watch. "Oh my God, I'm late. I was supposed to be there right now," Catherine exclaimed, reluctantly disentangling herself.

Vincent grinned as she let go. She still had problems being on time for anything. That was just Catherine being Catherine, he had long ago decided.

"Goodbye, Vincent, see you tonight." She called as she raced for the service elevator, hurried rebuttoning her coat as she ran, her high heels clicking madly.

He sighed to himself as he watched her retreating figure vanish. Then he turned and made his way back out through the hidden entrances to his world. As he walked through the tunnels, he wished he could go with her. There was so much he couldn't share with her, and so much he wanted to share as he knew she wanted

to with him. The exhibit intrigued him. There was something about it that pulled him as it had her. It wasn't that the museum was inaccessible to him. He had spend many nights there wandering the deserted corridors studying and marveling over the ancient works shown there. He knew how to get into the wing that Catherine was visiting undetected. Since the wing was closed until the exhibit was opened, there would be few people. He could see the exhibit for himself without being seen. This would be as close as he dared to share an experience with her. He smiled to himself and then began to retrace his steps through the tunnel passages.

"Cathy, I was just about to give up on you. Where have you been?" Jenny asked in exasperation, as she met Catherine getting out of her cab.

"Mid-town traffic and last minute phone calls," Catherine half-lied, as she paid the driver and gave him a large tip for getting her there so quickly. He grinned, and didn't say a word, figuring his passenger had her reasons for her fib.

"Thanks lady," he yelled as he pulled away. "Have a good day."

"God, that's a rarity, a polite cabby in New York," Jenny exclaimed in surprise as she watched the cab disappear in traffic.

Catherine giggled as they turned and started walking up the steep steps. "So anyway, why did you drag me out to see this exhibit. You know I've got tons of work back at the office," she asked.

"It's like I told you on the phone. I couldn't get over the resemblance between you and that priestess. It gave me the creeps. I wanted you to see it before some of our friends did. Believe me you are going to be a hot topic of conversation for a while." Jenny said, trying to be nonchalant about it but not succeeding.

"Oh really, me a hot topic. When have I ever been a hot topic?" Cathy laughed.

"Well. . . , there was you and that painter at school, then there was the law student, then the . . .," Jenny went on, reminding her of all her old flames, "Then there was Elliot Burch."

"Elliot? He and I did make a bit of a stir on several levels. But that's over. He's off in the Caribbean somewhere, I heard. Jen, I just don't have the time to get involved with anyone, nor do I want to. Elliot was it--period. So no more match making, please."

Jenny sighed, "Too bad, I know this great book editor over where I work who would just love to go out with you. And he's single, and independently wealthy." She added as they went through the main doors.

"No, Jen, no!" Catherine replied in exasperation. "Which way to the exhibit?" she asked as Jen showed the guard her pass and they were let into the main lobby.

"This way," Jenny directed, taking Catherine by the arm and guiding her to one of the elevators. "It's on the lower level. Right now every one is on lunch break so we should have it pretty much to ourselves. They've got it pretty much put together. There's just a few odds and ends to be put in place then it be opened."

The elevator let them off on the basement level. They had just recently made this into an exhibit area because of space problems in the other wings. They were building two new wings but they wouldn't be completed for another year, Catherine recalled, so this was just a temporary space for this special show. The lighting was subdued for present, tomorrow this corridor would be more brightly lit for the people who would come. They stopped before a large pair of carved doors. A small sign advertising that the exhibit was temporary closed was posted on one of the doors. They stepped over the ropes in front of it and Jenny opened the door with her passkey.

The room was shrouded in total darkness, as dark as a tomb, Catherine thought to herself as she waited until Jenny found the light switch. Jenny did not turn on all the lights, instead she illuminated the exhibit as it would appear. Fake torches sprang to life here and there in the darkness and the only other lights were those of the subdued strategic lighting of the pieces in the display. From some hidden source came music that reminded Catherine of old Egyptian movies she had seen as a child.

"Not overdoing it are they?" Catherine asked as the music came on and she shook her head at the fake theatricals.

"Don't look at me it wasn't my idea. This is how they have the show set up. It's pretty corny to me too." Her friend giggled and apologized.

It was like stepping back in the past. The entrance way was from the original tomb. It had been brought back piece by piece and reassembled as had other pieces of the tomb, trying to reconstruct as much as was possible the original whose site was now being flooded because of a new dam in the area. The museum had felt very fortunate to get these pieces before they were lost for all time.

Catherine was dazzled by it all. It was like taking a time machine back into the past. But overriding her feeling of awe was the feeling of familiarity with many of the objects in the room. Maybe they look like similar things she had seen in the past in museums, she thought to herself as she tried to shake the strange feelings she getting.

Jenny just let her wander and look at the objects on display. She was quiet, oddly so, as she observed her friend and her reactions.

Catherine was getting more and more involved and it took a great deal of effort to not tell Jenny about each object she recognized. Her mind was being assaulted with images and names of people and places she had never seen or been, nor could have any knowledge of. There were very few things in the outer tomb room that she did not somehow know or recognize.

They stopped before a glass case and inside was a turquoise pleated dress banded with elaborate designs worked upon its hems and sleeves in gold. The model wore a turquoise, ruby, and gold necklace in a winged lion pattern with matching earrings and head dress. In its clasped arms it held two finely worked staffs that showed the rank and authority that the original wearer of the dress had had in serving her god.

Catherine knew that dress, she could feel it on her bare skin as she walked in it. Before she could stop herself she blurted out, "Jen, look at that dress isn't it beautiful? I wore that when I first saw Kether"

Jenny was more than a little alarmed at Catherine's outburst.

"Cathy, are you okay?" she asked solicitously, coming over to her and turning her around to face her.

"Sure Jen, I'm okay. What's wrong?" Cathy asked confused, not remembering what she had just said, her eyes held a very puzzled look as she looked back at her friend.

"Cathy, you're acting really strange. You just told me that that was the dress you wore when you first met Kether." Jenny said, slowly letting the words sink in. "Maybe this was a bad idea. Maybe I should take you home. It's too soon after your dad's death. You're not as recovered as you think you are."

Catherine continued to look at her friend in puzzlement. "Jen, whatever are you talking about? I'm fine-- really I am. I don't want to go home I want to see the rest of the exhibit. You must have heard me wrong. I've never seen that dress before in my life and I only heard the name Kether when you told me about him over the phone. Relax please, I am okay-- really!" Catherine protested trying to placate her friend.

Jenny was still dubious but outside of bodily dragging her friend away she could see no alternative other than to follow her through the rest of the exhibit. They entered the tomb itself passing a huge sunboat which the ancients routinely put into the tombs of notable personages. The realistic almost life-size rowers frozen in their places as they ferried the figures of Kether and his high priestess on their journey through the lands of the Egyptian neither world and cosmos added even more of an aura of unreality to the setting. Catherine bypassed the impressive display without so much as a backward glance, heading for the inner most room that contained the sarcophagi of the two ancient lovers as well as the tomb paintings.

Vincent heard the two women entering the outer chamber and made himself invisible by fading into the dark shadows of the room behind Kether's coffin. He was not sure what reaction he would get from either of the two ladies. And he was very worried about Catherine. Her thoughts and emotions were getting more and more confused the longer she stayed within these rooms. He was experiencing similar difficulties but he willed himself to ignore the random images that weaved through his mind. He was more concerned with his beloved's difficulties than with his own.

It was the painting that riveted Catherine's attention as soon as she entered the room. She stood still at the entrance for many long moments, then slowly she moved forward to see it better in the dim lights. Jenny followed a few paces behind, watching Catherine closely.

The painting told the story of Kether's coming. How he had come walking out of the vast desert alone, garbed in strange clothing. A living god, or so it appeared to the people who immediately fell down and worshipped him. Since he was not one of their known gods, a special temple was erected and dedicated to him, the Temple of the Lion God, guardian of the desert wanderers. Soon he had his own priesthood and rituals as well as followers in the years that followed. Only his priests and their helpers saw him and tried to communicate with him. He became almost a virtual prisoner within his own temple. And his life span was long, longer than those that served him and he saw many generations born and buried. After a time he became more and more reclusive, even his priests no longer saw him. Then he became a legend, and his cult began to fade into obscurity.

Then one day a new priestess began to serve her god. She was young, and beautiful. Her parents had dedicated her their god. She was left as a living sacrifice to him on his altar one night. She had prepared herself for death, knowing full well that the high priests would come in masks and cut her still living heart from her body and offer it to the god.

When the moon had risen to its zenith, the god himself appeared to her. He started to take her life as he had done to so many victims in the past and stopped his clawed hand from ripping her open when he looked into the deep green liquid pools of her frightened eyes. He knew then he could never harm her and that she was the woman he had searched for so long.

To her surprise, he loosed her bonds and released her, bowing down before her. Needless to say, the priestess was left in a state of shock because the god she worshipped was a living, breathing being, and was now offering himself to her.

She made him arise and when he did and they looked into each other's eyes and knew they were forever bound together.

Then their troubles began. The following morning instead of finding a corpse on the altar, they found the god and his very living priestess in his rooms. When they tried to reclaim the priestess and complete the necessary rituals, the god intervened and slaughtered several of his supposed followers before they could harm her. The god then proclaimed her his wife and his highest emissary then he decreed that he would no longer remain hidden from his worshippers and would walk freely outside his temple walls.

His priests were not pleased with these new turns of events and secretly vowed to restore things to what they had been.

From the scenes on the wall painting it was clear that it took several years for the priests to enact their revenge. The paintings showed that Kether and his priestess were well loved by his followers because of their devotion and love to one another as well as for their wisdom on matters of the heart and family. Their following grew and drew attention from other lands as well as many flocked to see the living god. In time they had children. And their power and influence began to rival that of the royal house.

When the new pharaoh came to power the priests began to put their plans in motion. The high priestess was killed as she conducted an outside service for Kether's followers. The god went on a rampage killing the priests until he was stopped and killed. Of their three children only one escaped to other lands. The god and his priestess were then buried side by side. The priests returned to the original rituals and beliefs of this cult but they soon lost all the followers that had been gained and the worship of the god Kether died out.

The pictures on the wall were very clear, very vivid and in a style unlike most paintings of that era. The most realistic though were the life-size portraits of Kether and his priestess on the opposite side of the room between the two sarcophagi.

Catherine finished reading the story panels and turned around to read the other walls. As she saw the portraits she let out a startled gasp and felt her knees get weak. Jenny had been right, it was her and the god was a dead ringer for Vincent. Even the look he was giving his priestess was the same as she had seen Vincent give her. The clothing was different but it was as if she and Vincent had posed for this painting. The elaborate sarcophagi on either side of it echoed the portraits too.

Was it possible they had met and loved in different times and places as themselves, and then had their life together taken away by the hands of others. Was fate always bringing them together but never letting them fully experience what they could have? Were they doomed forever to have just pieces not the whole?

She walked closer to the painting and as she did she felt herself growing faint, and she collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"Catherine!" Jenny yelled in alarm, rushing to her side. Jenny tried shaking her with no success, "Catherine, wake up-- please don't pass out on me! Damn, it's all my fault, I shouldn't have brought you here! It was too soon for you." Jenny berated herself thinking it was her Catherine's father's death and being in a tomb that had triggered her collapse, not really knowing it was the portraits and what they represented that had done it.

Jenny tried for several minutes to revive her friend without success - Catherine was out cold. Jenny felt absolutely helpless as she stared down at her friend passed out on the cold tiled floor. She decided to go for help, and got up from where she sat and headed for the door to find help. She hated leaving Catherine alone but there was nothing else that she could do.

Vincent watching from the shadows had had to hold himself in check to keep from rushing to Catherine's side when she fainted. He felt as helpless as Jenny did. When Jenny decided to go for help he felt great relief. He listened as her footsteps vanished in the distance and then came out of his hiding place to go to Catherine's side.

"Catherine, can you hear me? Wake up." Vincent asked, trying to keep the deep worry and fear out of his voice as he picked up his beloved and cradled her in his arms, hoping that his physical presence would awaken her. There was no response.

He searched their bond trying to find her, trying to sense what she was feeling and experiencing. He dove deeper and deeper into their link, deeper than he had ever attempted on a conscious level until he did make contact with her and when he did he was shocked. She was herself and yet she wasn't. She was reliving her past life in that ancient world. She had become the priestess - and yet she was still Catherine of this present age.

He watched as a spectator as she met Kether and then relived their brief life together until they were parted in death. It was then that he stepped into her mind to draw her back to the present and himself.

She was lost in a limbo she couldn't escape from after she had re-experienced her death. She wandered helpless searching for an exit. When she couldn't find it she burst into tears because of the overwhelming loneliness and frustration she felt.

"Catherine, I am here," Vincent called as he approached her, homing in her by the waves of despair she was sending out.

He was appearing to her consciousness as himself but the woman who was Catherine and yet the priestess too saw him as the god, Kether. "Kether, you're here?" She asked looking up and recognizing his presence. Joy and hope sprang up within her as she wanted to believe it was him while not truly believing that such a miracle could be.

She ran to him, wrapping her slender arms around his broad frame and feeling his arms go around her in response. He needed to correct her assumption that he was Kether and to bring her consciousness back to being Catherine, but he was reluctant to disturb the moment and the sensation of his beloved being in his arms.

They were alone in this void that she had created. More alone than they had ever been. They were also more vulnerable and open to each other than they had ever been because so many barriers had been stripped away from both of them so that their consciousness's could exist on this plane.

She sensed the difference in him before he could speak and tell her that he was not who she thought he was. "You're not Kether!" she exclaimed drawing back a little in his arms, "but you are - I don't understand. If you are not who are you?" she asked, puzzled and confused.

"I am Vincent, and you are Catherine, my Catherine, but you think yourself another person in another time. A time that is long gone as are the persons we were then. I am here to bring you back to your own world." he said, looking down at her, his eyes serious and grave.

The woman grew frightened and tried to get away but he would not let her. He held her firmly in his arms, compelling her to look at him, to remember who she was. She read the love he held for her in his eyes and in his soul and her fear fell away. She was not sure whether he was Kether or the Vincent, he had called himself, she did not care as she got lost in the liquid pools of his eyes. All she knew was that he was the man she loved regardless of the name he called himself by.

She turned her face up to meet his downward moving one. She made the first move taking him by surprise as she kissed him fully on his unique lips. Her arms reached up too pulling him down to her. He began to resist and pull away but then he got lost in their kiss. This was much more than the kiss Catherine had given him when she had returned to her world. It was a kiss that held all the love and passion she felt. He could not help but respond to her and he deepened the kiss she had begun putting all that he truly felt into it. She swooned in his arms.

He almost dropped her in surprise at her reaction. Instead he swooped her slight form into his arms and held her close until she opened her eyes. She looked up dazzled and confused for a moment, and then smiled happily up at him.

"Vincent, you're here?" his Catherine asked, recognizing him.

"I am, and you are yourself again." He smiled with relief, seeing no traces of the priestess in her face or consciousness.

"What happened? Where are we?" Catherine asked looking around and seeing nothingness on all sides of them.

"At present we are in your consciousness or on another plane or dimension outside of what we know as reality." Vincent tried to explain.

"Huh?" she asked confused, "How did we get here? All I remember is coming into the museum with Jenny, entering the exhibit room, and then seeing the things in the room and the portrait. But it was like I was looking at them with two sets of eyes. But it was the portrait most of all. Suddenly, I was no longer me, I was someone else, living their life and their death, and then you kissed me and I became me again," she tried to explain.

"I know," he said.

"But how are you here and how do we get out of this place?" she asked, remembering Jenny and the museum.

"I was in the exhibit room. I have my own hidden ways to visit the museum and I was watching you when your past self took over. You fainted and when your friend could not revive you she left and went for help. When she did I came out of hiding to help you. Somehow, through our bond I was able to join you so that I could bring you back to yourself."

"You succeeded, in the classic way." she smiled mysteriously.

"Oh? How?" he asked confused now.

"You woke the sleeping beauty with a kiss." she laughed, then got serious, "if we are here, or at least our minds are, where are our bodies and what is happening to them? How long have we been here?" she asked suddenly afraid for him.

"This place is without time. Moments or hours could have gone by in reality, but I suspect only moments. I would have sensed the presence of anyone approaching our bodies. However, we must return as soon as possible," Vincent suggested.

Catherine sighed, rather enjoying being held this closely in his arms. "Yes, we must, but how?" she answered, letting reason rule over the stray feelings and impulses she was having.

"We just will ourselves to wake up," he suggested, hoping that was the answer.

"Kind of like Dorothy telling herself there's no place like home and clicking her ruby slippers to get back from Oz?" she laughed, running her hand gently across his cheek.

"Something like that," he agreed, chucking a little too at her analogy, but he was saddened too. He wished he could prolong their time together as well. They had never been as open to each other as they were at this suspended moment.

He dared to chance it, to do what his heart wanted before they returned to their world where pressures and fears kept them apart, he lowered his head and kissed the woman in his arms. His action took her by surprise but she recovered quickly and responded back without any restraint.

The kiss went on taking in all the feeling and love they dared not say out loud to one another, but could only feel and keep hidden for fear of hurt the other. That was foolish, they both knew, but still they did. But they vowed to do it no more after experiencing this openness here.

When they finally broke apart they were back in the real world in their bodies. Vincent still held Catherine in his arms, as he sat upon the tiled floor of the museum. Her eyelids fluttered open and she saw his face only inches from her own. They both looked a little embarrassed to find themselves so. There was a lingering tingle on both their lips that suggested it wasn't a dream, they had kissed.

"Catherine, are you alright?" Vincent asked solicitously, drawing back a little.

"I'm fine. And you?" she asked, "It wasn't a dream, it did happen, all of it? From remembering our past lives together, to my awakening on that other plane, to our kiss - it was all real wasn't it?" she asked seriously.

"It was. This room unlocked your hidden memories of the far past as it did mine, but your conscious mind fought it and that is why you had to go back and relive them. You accept your memories and now, and your feelings. You had to find yourself and you did."

"I think I understand, and what about you? Do you accept yourself. I saw the real you and it did not frighten me. I only wish we could always be as open with one another as we were there." Catherine replied wistfully, seeing her own sadness and regret mirrored in Vincent's eyes.

She sat up, and he let her loose from his embrace. He helped her up and they stood together in the quiet room, trying not to let their old fears and shyness with each override their newly-won openness. But they could each feel the other drift back into the old patterns.

"Thank you for bringing me back," Catherine said finally, breaking the growing silence between them, "if you had not been here . . . I don't know what would have happened."

"Even if I had been Below, I would have come to you to bring you back. Nothing is more important to me than you, you are my life, then, now, and always," Vincent replied very seriously, then he straightened up suddenly alert his head turned towards the doorway.

"Someone is coming down the outside corridor, I must go." He said releasing her and moving away back into the shadows where the hidden entrance to the room was.

"I know." she agreed, "Will I see you tonight? There is still a lot that we need to talk about," she added, hearing footsteps now herself.

"Yes, tonight. Come Below and I will meet you at the threshold. Goodbye," Vincent quickly said, pausing for a moment for one last look at her, and then he vanished into the darkness.

She heard a low sound of stone grating on stone and then silence and she knew he now safely away to the tunnels.

Catherine turned as Jenny entered on her heels were two security guards, and two paramedic with a stretcher between them. Jenny was rather surprised, but pleased to see her friend up around and obviously all right.

"Catherine, you're okay?" Jenny asked coming over to her.

"I'm fine. I woke up shortly after you left. I don't know what got into me and why I fainted, but I'm fine now." Catherine explained cheerfully.

Jenny was dubious, as were the relieved guards and medics.

"Maybe we should check you over, miss?" One of the medics asked, readying his equipment.

"No thanks, I'm fine. All I want to do is go back to work before Joe has a fit." Catherine said seriously, refusing any help.

"Oh, no you don't. You're going straight home and rest. And you are going to stay there if I have to sit on you. I already called Joe and he told me if they didn't take you to the hospital that I was to make you go home. And you are to take the rest of the week off. Is that clear?" Jenny relayed still worried.

"Yes, Mother," Catherine replied with a smile, "And I will go home and I will rest, I promise. I really needed to get my caseload caught up"

"It can wait. Right now you need to take care of you, okay?" Jenny insisted, as they walked back to the main corridor. The guards and medics trailing behind them.

"Okay," Catherine agreed with smile, and as she walked back to elevator she was glad she had such good friends who did care about her.

She just wished she could get her two separate worlds to mesh together and quit living a double life. Maybe with all this time off she could sit and think how to accomplish this. And she also thought on the lessons learned today. She and Vincent were definitely going to have some very long talks on a number of subjects. She was going to start making changes, so that they could have a life together and she wouldn't have to dream another dream, and live another life - except the one she wanted with him.