

## CHAPTER TWO

Like any other work day, Alex arrived home at somewhere around 3:30 PM after another day at the factory. He parked his car – a white Holden Commodore V6 – in the basement car park, and after his normal routine of sitting in the car and listening to the news update while he enjoyed a cigarette, he turned off the engine, got out of the car, locked it, and walked towards the elevator. Nothing unusual about that. However, today was different for some reason. As he walked towards the elevator, he had an uneasy feeling that he was being watched.

He stopped and turned around, and saw nothing out of the ordinary. Yet, he felt that there was something there. He had a strange feeling that he was being watched. He stood there and looked around slowly as he fidgeted with his keys. The jingling of the keys in his hand was the only sound in that place, and that should have been enough to satisfy his curiosity, but it wasn't. As he looked around, he happened to notice just how strangely dark one section of the car park was, and he leaned forward a little to peer into the darkness. Just then a cold chill swept over him, and he trembled. Immediately a part of him wanted to turn and run for the elevator, but the other part of him wanted to know what was at the other end of the car park. It had been a long day and he was tired. Rational thought was not part of his understanding right now, so allowing his curiosity to get the better of him; he started to walk slowly towards that darkness.

Again that deathly coldness emanated from the darkness and now filled the car park, and he felt afraid. Afraid of what was there, afraid of the unknown.

“Is someone there?” he called out, stopping for a moment to take a long look at that darkness. There was no reply, not of words anyway. Instead, he could hear a faint noise that he couldn't make out what it was exactly. At first it sounded like moans, but it wasn't.

He put his keys in his pocket and started to back away towards the elevator, taking each step slowly until his back was against the wall. Almost clumsily, he pressed the elevator button repeatedly until finally he heard the sound of the elevator bell, and he turned towards the door, anxiously wanting to get out of there.

“Alex” He heard his name echo in a cold whisper.

He turned quickly and stared around. Nothing. Nothing except that darkness. The darkness which now seemed to fill that car park. His eyes darted around from one end to the other, but no one was there. At least, no one physical was there. He heard the elevator doors open behind him and he backed into the elevator and quickly pressed the button to his floor. He watched as the elevator doors slowly closed in front of him, seemingly closing the door on this darkness and his fears.

The door closed and he sighed with a certain relief, thinking that in a matter of moments, he would be safe in his apartment with the girlfriend from hell and the son he loved dearly. Soon, he thought, he would sit down to luke-warm dinner of spaghetti and toast and discuss his day with his family. Soon he would watch Seinfeld on TV, and fall asleep watching re-runs of Star Trek.....

He was shaken out of his daydream of a perfect life when the elevator suddenly grinded to a stop. He looked at the digital panel above the door that was alternating from 3 then 4 then back to 3. This wasn't the first time this had happened to him in this elevator, and like he normally would do, he went to press the emergency button, but instead of the alarm sounding off, he was thrown to the floor by a powerful electrical charge. Stunned, he looked up at the panel, and then

at the doors. There was a brief moment of silence, before he heard a distinct grinding, as though someone was trying to tear open the elevator car like a tin. In an instant the lights flickered and shorted out, and the elevator stopped vibrating. He was alone in the darkness, trapped, afraid. He had no idea what to do or what to expect.

Silence. Nothing but his own erratic breathing was all he heard in the elevator. No sounds from the outside world, no voices, no noise. He wondered if he was even alive, as the silence was too damn peculiar. Slowly he got to his feet and looked at the buttons on the panel. He hesitated to press any of the buttons, just in case he got another electric shock, but summing up the courage he quickly pressed one of the buttons. Nothing. It didn't even make a noise when he pressed it.

"Shit". He thought out loud, "This aint good." He stepped back and looked up at the ceiling. He could faintly make out the outline of the emergency hatch, and for a moment he contemplated the idea of escaping through the ceiling, but his idea was shot to pieces as he knew that the emergency hatch didn't work. He slumped back against the wall and sighed heavily. "This sucks". He whispered, looking towards the place where he thought the doors were. He stepped over to the doors and fumbled around to find the edge.

There it was! He tried to pry it open, to no avail. That door was jammed shut.

"Hello!" He yelled as loud as he could.... Nothing. "Is anyone out there?" Again nothing. Not a damn sound. "Fuck this shit!"

Alex was too damn tired for this. He was too tired and too old to be afraid of the dark...At least, so he thought.

"Keep telling yourself that bucko!" A voice spoke to his mind, but was too faint to even hear. Or more to the point, he didn't even notice.

He sighed and fell back against the wall and stared around in the darkness.

"So this is what it must be like to be fucking blind." He mused to himself.

"Hardly." A voice said from almost next to him.

He jumped, startled and quickly backed into the corner and looked around quickly, "Who the fuck said that?"

"Never mind who I am." The voice said.

Alex was afraid again, but not like before. No, there was something about this voice that told him that this thing wasn't here to harm him... Or maybe...

"Wh-what do you..."

"You left me Alex." The voice spoke, "You left me trapped in that place!"

"What?"

"You fucking maniac! You left me trapped in hell!" The voice was closer now, and more frantic.

"I - I don't know what."

Suddenly, from the darkness he could faintly make out a face.. A face that was scorched and riddled with maggots.

"Take a good look at what you left behind!" The voice screamed with anger.

Alex screamed in fear.

"Wake up dickhead!" It screamed in his face.

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Alex woke with a startle and looked around. He was still sat in the elevator, and still in complete darkness. His face was covered in a cold sweat. He wiped his cold clammy face and slowly stood up.

“What the fuck was that?” He whispered to himself – and secretly hoping that he would not get a response. He stood there and tried to regain his thoughts and figure out if what he had just seen actually happened or if it was a daydream. He had no idea. He certainly didn’t recall dozing off, but he sure as hell was tired. He glanced around slowly and could make out the edges of the elevator car, as well as the elevator door.

He sighed and decided to try and pry open the door. Again, like before – was it a dream? – The door was jammed shut.

“Okay,” He thought to himself, “Get a grip here. Things like this happen all the time.”

“I doubt that.” A voice – that same voice – spoke from the darkness.

“What the –”

“Fuck!” It interrupted.

“Not again” He thought as he backed quickly against the wall and began to tremble.

Silence again, but he knew that this voice – or thing – was there.

“Wh-what do you want?” He asked almost cowardly

It’s response came with soft growls or grunts, at first before it began to say, “You are a real hero Alex!”

“What?” Alex whispered.

“A real fucking hero! And like a hero you had to save the day and then leave us all to fucking rot!”

“I don’t know what you’re –”

“Don’t give me that shit!” It interrupted him, “You know exactly what I am talking about!”

It’s voice seemed to be getting lower, or more to the point, he could tell that this thing – whatever it was – was now sitting on the ground...

He started toward where he thought the voice was and tried to understand, but he couldn’t. He had no memory of these allegations.

“Nothing to say, hero!”

Alex opened his mouth but words failed him. He was too afraid to speak.

“Take a look fucker!” It screamed, as it’s face appeared right in front of him.

Alex shit himself and began to weep.

“I haven’t done anything.” He wept as he turned away and wept in fear and coward on the floor.

“Hope you have a change of underwear. WAKE UP!”

\* \* \* \* \*

He opened his eyes and looked around. He was still standing against the wall, and again his face was covered in sweat. He wondered if for a moment if this had been another daydream or if it had happened. No, it didn’t. He certainly didn’t need a change of underwear, so he knew that it had been a dream.. Or nightmare.

“What the hell is going on?” He muttered and looked around. “This is getting out of control.”

He started to regain his composure and stared around in the darkness, to make sure – for his own sanity – that he was the only one there. He was.

Whew!

Or was he?

Was all this happening or had his mind finally snapped and gone to that place where dreams and imaginations end and insanity begins? He sure as fuck had no idea. But he wished he knew. He slapped himself on the face hard just to make sure he was awake.

“Ow!” He called out. Slapping himself must have worked as it sure as hell hurt so he must have been awake!

As he cradled his hurting head in the palms of his hands he suddenly started to hear sounds, and it wasn't coming from this elevator car, He looked up and listened intently.

“I know those voices.” He whispered, recognizing one of the voices as the college girl who lived across the hall.

“Tara!” He yelled out and started pounding on the elevator door with his fist. “Can you hear me!”

No response. He listened for a second as she talked in gibberish to someone on her cell phone. Why the hell can't she hear me? He was going insane. He had to be. Again he started pounding on the door and screamed out her name, and again he was met with no response. She was either too damn busy talking on that cell phone to notice or she was outright ignoring him.

“Can you bloody hear me!”

“No need to swear at me, you son-of-a-bitch!” She said, but not from outside, but from practically right next to him.

“Damn it!” He yelled, surprised. “What the hell are you doing in here!”

“Who do you think you are Alex!” She yelled, “I am trapped in here just as much as you are!”

He shook his head and stared at her with disbelief. She wasn't there. She couldn't be. It was impossible. But wait, that scent. It sure as hell smelt like her perfume. Dior Mystique. Yes, that scent was definitely too familiar to ignore. After all, that was her favorite perfume, and the very one that happened to drive him wild. Not just on anyone, but on her.

He closed his eyes and hoped that this was another dream.

Hang on, He thought, Here you are, trapped in an elevator with a sexy redhead and all you can think about was if this is a dream? Get your priorities straight here!

“Alex?” He heard her voice say.

How he longed for her. From the first moment he laid eyes on her some months ago when she moved into the apartment across the hall he wanted her. He desired her like most men did, but he could never have her, not for himself. She was like the forbidden fruit of the garden of earthly pleasures. Still, although she was younger than he was, maybe mid twenties, he wanted her for himself. He coveted her. He would admittedly confess that he needed her.

“Alex!” She said, this time shaking him.

Okay, this is good. He thought as he opened his eyes and looked into her blue eyes. This must be reality. “What happened?” he asked as he regained himself and tried to act like nothing had happened.

She sighed and stepped back into the glow of the red light that shone dimly in the ceiling above. “Obviously your memory is about as frail as your age.” She snapped, “If you don't recall, you got into the elevator just after I did, and then the elevator stopped. You passed out right about then and after a few minutes you started calling me a slut and a whore, which I don't appreciate in the slightest, thank you very much!”

“Oh... Sorry.” He said softly. He paused for a minute while regaining his thoughts. Strange, but he did not recall her being in here. But maybe he was just too tired to notice.

“How long have we been in here?” he asked.

“I don't know. Ten, maybe fifteen minutes.” She said, “Not sure exactly as me cell is not working for some strange reason.”

“That is odd. Maybe it’s because of the humidity in here.” He said, noticing how humid it had become.

“Yeah..It is humid.” She said, as she wiped her neck with the palm of her hand and began to undo the buttons on her blouse.

“Tara, what are you doing?” he asked.

“Oh come now Alex.” She said in a husky voice, “You knew as well as I do that you have wanted this for a long time... After all, I have seen you watching me.”

“What?”

“Don’t play innocent Mister.” She said playfully, as she stepped closer to him and continued to unbutton her white blouse, “When I’ve been in the courtyard pool I have seen you watching me. You have been undressing me with your eyes, haven’t you, you naughty boy.”

He swallowed nervously and could only stutter “Well, I...”

She stood up against him and whispered, “I have noticed how you have stood at the pool and tried not to notice me when I have been sunbathing... I have noticed that bulge in your pants.”

She made a grab for his manhood and he felt it swelling in her grip.

Fuck this is good. He thought. He was the first to admit that he had wanted this for a long time, and now that she was here, all he could do was close his eyes and take in how she felt pressed up against him.

“Tell me you want me.” She whispered then softly pressed her lips against his.

“I need you Tara.” He whispered. He kissed her mouth softly and held her tight in his hands. He didn’t want to let her go. Not now that he had her finally.

He ripped open the remaining button on her blouse to reveal her perky breasts, nestled beneath a red and white cotton bra. He kissed her neck and trailed his hands over her body, down over her breasts and over her stomach.

“Do something for me lover.” She whispered, as he squeezed his throbbing manhood

“Anything baby.” He muttered.

“Wake up.” She whispered.

He opened his eyes and looked at her. “What did you say?”

“Wake up.” She said.

He stared into her eyes with a lost look in his own eyes, and instead of the seductress he saw only seconds ago, all he saw now was a strange coldness.

“WAKE UP!”

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Alex opened his eyes with a startle and looked around. He was alone.

“DAMN IT!” He yelled as loud as he could, banging his fists on the wall. “What the hell is going on!”

He hated this. No, he REALLY hated this! He banged his head against the wall for good measure, just to make sure that this time he was awake.

“OW!” He screamed as he cradled his head in his hands.

Okay, this time he was sure that he was awake. A headache this bad had to be real!

He didn’t have time to think anything else as a few seconds later he heard a familiar sound, which was a welcomed relief.

DING! He heard the sound of the elevator.

“About time!” he muttered, “Had enough of this for one day!” He regained his composure and stood near the door and waited for it to open. “Going to get home, eat, get smashed on vodka and listen to Metallica.” He said to himself.

He was too focused on the impatience of the door opening to notice that the elevator was still almost in darkness, with the exception of the dim glow of the red light that flickered in the ceiling. Not that he really cared anyway. The only thing he was thinking about was getting inside the apartment.

Seconds passed, and still the elevator door had not opened.

“That’s strange.” He muttered. Looking at the panel then at the door. He glanced up and noticed that the light showed that he was on the ninth floor, which was the right floor. But the door had not opened.

Hmmm. He thought. He listened carefully, to see if he could hear anything. He wasn’t sure what, but he could hear something beyond that elevator door. He turned his head and listened more intently, pressing his ear against the door.

“What the hell is that?” He whispered, “Crackling?” He leaned back and stared strangely at the door, and listened as the sounds become louder and closer.

Noise.. The elevator jolted and the door began to move. Alex stood back and watched as the door slowly opened. He turned his gaze from the door to what lay beyond this elevator.. Darkness. Nothing but a vast darkness, but there was heat, intense heat.

“This can’t be happening!” He screamed.

He stood back against the wall and shielded his eyes with his hands. As the door opened more, that heat grew more intense, until finally the door was fully opened, exposing him to the fullness of this heat.

Instantly the elevator started to get intensely hot and the walls began to smoke and smelter. He tried to find a place to cover, but there was nowhere to run. He was trapped!

“HELP!” He screamed, as he looked out into that darkness. “HELP ME! SOMEONE HELP ME!”

The heat began to singe his clothes and within a mere few seconds the walls and ceiling began to melt and the floor became incredibly hot that the soles of his shoes began to melt. The stench of burning metal and rubber filled that elevator.

He was overcome by the heat and he fell on his knees and screamed in agony as the intense fire grew hotter. His nostrils began to fill with the awful stench of his skin burning.

In seconds his face ignited from the heat. Flames began blazing from his eyes, nostrils, ears, mouth — every opening in his body, flames were roaring out. His body sizzled and crackled from the fire.

He madly thrashed and convulsed from the horrible pain. He wanted this to stop! He begged for this to stop! But it wouldn’t!

“When will this pain stop?” He screamed, but it never would. He WAS in hell!

The darkness was terrifying, but from out of the darkness he felt something begin to stir. Something was there, something more terrifying than that damn inferno!

His screams of agony was the last thing that could be heard before his skeleton was all that remained for a mere second, before his skeleton was also engulfed in the fire.

As quickly as the heat and fire appeared, it vanished and only darkness remained.

Silence. There was silence now. No thoughts, no pain. No imaginations. Nothing but fucking silence! Was he dead? It seemed so.

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Alex opened his eyes and gasped heavily. He was laying on the floor, drenched in sweat and terrified. He scurried back into the corner and glanced around nervously.

“Alive!” He whispered. “I’m alive!” He sighed heavily, relieved, but terrified as hell. He was hesitant to do anything but sit there just in case that whatever he did ended up to be another nightmare. He drew his knees up near his chin and grasped his legs tight. He was afraid. Really afraid.

DING!

“Oh hell no!” He whimpered as he closed his eyes. He listened fearfully as the door slowly grinded open, then silence... again

“Alex?” He heard a female’s voice say. “Alex!” Her voice yelled with grave concern. He wanted to open his eyes and look, but he was too afraid to do anything.

“Alex! Are you okay!” Her voice yelled again. He remained there, trembling, weeping, eyes closed tight.

“Alex!!” The woman shook him hard and he opened his eyes to see Tara.

He gasped with relief.

“Are you okay?” She asked.

“I – I don’t know.” He muttered as she helped him up to his feet and began to lead him out of the elevator

“What happened to you? You look like hell.”

“If only you knew.” He said softly, trembling from his experience.

He was not sure if this was real or not, but if anything he was relieved that he wasn’t in that damn elevator. Tara lead him down the hall and paused near his apartment and fumbled for her keys.

“You better stay at my place and lay down for a while.” She said, “You can crash on my sofa.” He nodded and watched as she got out her keys and unlocked the door.

“You know,” she whispered, as she opened the door and helped him inside, “I’ve been meaning to talk to you.”

Alex went and slumped on her sofa and groaned as he sat down. Although his experience with the flames of darkness was nothing but a vision, his body was oddly in pain. He couldn’t figure out why, and he still had no idea if this was yet another vision. In any case, he really didn’t care.

He was safe here, on this white sofa, and that was good for now. The last thing on his mind was going home, or anything else. He was exhausted, mentally and physically.

He closed his eyes and slowly the pain in his body started to subside. He could feel the aching, the pinching, the strain, starting to fade. He could breathe again normally now. Yes, he was sure that this was reality... or he hoped as much anyway.

Tara locked the door and went and joined him on the sofa. "I have to tell you Alex." She continued, "I may not have known you and Karen for long, but I have seen enough to know you're not happy."

"Oh?" he asked, opening his eyes and glancing over at her.

"Damn Alex." She said, "You really look terrible."

"I've seen better days." He smiled.

Let me get you a drink and you can tell me what happened."

He nodded and watched her get up and walk into the kitchen. "So what the hell happened to you Alex? Did someone do you over?" She called out from the kitchen

"No. Noone did me over. Just..."

She came back into the lounge room with two glasses of rum and coke. She handed him his drink, and took a sip of hers, "So tell me what happened."

"I'm not sure." He said, and groaned as he leaned forward and took a drink. "All I know is that I parked the car, got in the elevator, then all this weird crap started to happen."

"Oh? Like what?" She asked.

He glanced over at her then looked at no particular point in between his feet. "I wish I could tell you, but I don't understand it myself. Besides, you wouldn't believe it."

"Go ahead, Alex. You can tell me." She reassured him, placing her hand on his.

He smiled at her and shook his head. "I don't know how to tell you. You may think I'm insane."

He let out a mock laugh and continued, "Hell, I experienced something really messed up and I think I'm insane, so why wouldn't you think the same?"

"No. I wouldn't think that." Her hand held his firmer, and he found comfort in that. He felt he could trust her.

He sighed heavily and told her everything that had happened in the elevator. He told her about the visions, the darkness, the terror he witnessed. When he had finished recounting most things, with the exception of the vision of her, he looked at her and her expression told what he had suspected.

"What you think I'm insane, don't you." He said as he stood up, "Sorry, I shouldn't have said anything... I better go."

"No." she said, reaching for his hand. "Stay. Please."

He glanced at her hand and looked in her eyes. Her words were soft, soothing, comforting, and the look in her eyes. That look, was familiar to him. A look he had not seen since...

She motioned for him to sit next to her by patting the sofa, smiling at him. He was oddly comfy here. Too comfy, but what could he do? If this was another illusion there was nothing he could do. He knew that, but at least if this was another vision, it was more tolerable than the previous ones in that damn elevator.

He sat next to her and looked at her face, taking in every part of her. He noticed the light blemishes on her face and the dimples in her cheeks. She had a smile that was warm. He suspected something.

And how could he not? The last half hour or so he had been in a nonstop series of visions which reminded him oddly of being in *The Twilight Zone*, and he wondered just when the bomb here would drop on this scene. After all, in the months she had lived across the hall, she had hardly said two words to him, and now all of a sudden she was Miss Compassionate of the Year. He hardly thought so. He didn't know what force was at work in all this, but whatever it was, he would play it's game for now.

"What do you think?" He asked.

"I don't know Alex." She said, and paused. She wanted to say something. He could see it. She probably was thinking that he was insane. If she thought that, she sure as heck wasn't saying it.

She looked at him and motioned to say something, then hesitated.

"What is it?" He asked, assuming she was uncomfortable with his presence. He looked away and nodded, understanding, "I'll go." He said.

"No. Don't." She almost insisted. "I wanted to tell you..." She paused long enough to smile at him which was reassuring.

"Don't keep me in suspense." He joked, trying hard to make light of a situation he felt that was otherwise going to explode on his face.

"As I started to say before, Alex, I haven't known you and Karen long at all, and I have seen that you are not happy in the situation you are in."

"That I can agree with." He agreed, nodding, but thought Okay where is this going?

"There is something I have wanted to tell you for some time now, in regards to Karen."

Okay here we go He thought

"I'm not sure if you know but, when you are at work she has, well, a visitor."

Alex frowned and looked at her and asked with one brow raised, "Visitor?"

She motioned and said, "Ya know... A visitor."

He looked away, "Oh." He was stunned, no shocked. Shocked was hardly the word to use, more like angered. He felt angry and betrayed, but then again he did suspect something had been going on. Especially since of late she hadn't wanted to have sex, claiming that she was too tired and wasn't interested at all in him sexually.

"I know." She said, placing her hand on his knee.

He glanced at her then looked away. He didn't know if this was a dream, but he was certain of one thing, what he was told had been in the back of his mind for some time. He took another drink, and this time finished the almost full glass with one long swig.

For the first time in ages, alcohol actually was starting to do what the legends talked about...

Relaxed him, and he started to feel more relaxed and open.

"Let me get you another drink." She said, taking his glass and walking into the kitchen.

Alex reclined on the sofa and closed his eyes. Before too long, everything started to become blurry and the room started to spin.

"What the hell ..." Was all he could whisper then he passed out. Only darkness, that strange darkness, engulfed his mind.

## CHAPTER THREE

Alex awoke sometime the next morning, naked and in Tara's bed. He squinted and looked around the room slowly. Tara was nowhere to be seen, at least, not anywhere he could see from the bed. From his viewpoint, he could see down the hall and a part of the lounge room, but that was it. He couldn't hear her either, so he assumed to himself that she had gone out. He looked at the clock-radio and noticed that it was a little after eleven am. For a second he panicked as he thought he had missed work, but then remembered that it was his rostered-day-off. He breathed a sigh of relief that he didn't have to go to work and he reclined back in bed, thinking - or wondering - just how he ended up in Tara's bed. He knew that Tara would not have been able to carry him to bed, so that left him wondering just what happened the night before. All he remembered was sitting on the sofa, and after that, nothing. The next memory he had was waking up in her bed.

There was something else, Karen.

"Damn." He muttered. "If she finds out she'll kill me!"

He was strangely groggy from the night before, but he managed to drag himself up out of bed and the first thing he did after putting on his underwear was look for his cell phone. He quickly found it. Tara had placed it on the kitchen bench, along with a note. He glanced at his phone and saw that he had 35 text messages.

Damn, He thought, knowing that those messages could have only been from Karen. He dreaded flipping open his phone and reading those messages. He knew that those messages only spelled doom and trouble! He opted to read the note from Tara first before hearing the never-ending texts of threats from Kaz.

Lover, Thank you for a wonderful night. I had the best time. Feel free to help yourself to whatever you want in the fridge. See you later today.Luv,  
Tara  
xoxoxoxo"

"Nice" He thought, and held the note up to his nose. "Dior Mystique" He commented, noticing that she had sprayed a little perfume on the note, that particular perfume "Okay." He sighed heavily, knowing that he now had to face the 35 messages that he knew Karen sent. He dreaded this, but he flipped open his cell phone and started to read the messages one by one. The first dozen or so were easily deletable, with random repeatable questions like "Where are you?" and "I am worried. Call me." But the last half dozen or so he found disturbing, and normal for her, or as he would say, "Kaz being Kaz."

Apart from her normal threats of "when you get home" crap, he found her messages boring, although one message did claim "I know where you are! You are with that bitch T!! Not to worry 'loverboy', I will show you and that skank!!!!!"

"Okay, now I'm worried." He whispered, knowing that Karen was hardly someone who was rational when she got pissed off, but then again, he dismissed that notion as he figured that Karen was just mouthing off. Still, he had to go home sometime, and he knew that he had to face the music. Which was a pity that he had to go home, as he seemed to have a good time last night. Well, going by the note Tara left him he must have had a good time. It was a damn shame he just couldn't remember any of it.

He glanced towards to kitchen window. It was sunny outside. Too sunny. He walked over to the window and pulled back the curtain and looked outside. It sure was a sunny day. The sun was high in the sky and very bright. So bright he had to squint and turn his head sideways. Down on

the street he could see people running, not just some, but dozens of people. In fact, everyone he saw on the street was running.

“Odd.” He whispered, as he leaned in to the window to get a better look.

“Noises? What the ...?”

He slid open the window to listen to what all the commotion was about.

It took him a second to figure out what the noise was about, and it wasn't the regular noises of everyday life, like traffic and people chattering. It was screams. People were screaming in terror. The sound of a warning siren was blaring on the distance and car alarms were sounding off everywhere.

“What the hell is going on here?” He stepped back and glanced around the room.

Something wasn't right here. Why were people running scared?

He frowned and scratched his head, then looked back out the window.

Suddenly the noises, the screams, the alarm bells, stopped. Just as strange as it was, there was now no one on the street. No noise, not a damn sound, and no movement. Not even rustling in the trees. It was as though the area had suddenly become deserted.

What the ....?

He shrugged his shoulders, and tried to think nothing of it. But he couldn't help himself. There was definitely something amiss here, and he looked out the window again. Still no one. Not even a damn dog taking a piss on a tree! He leaned a little further out the window and glanced down the street to see if he could see anyone, someone, even a bird. But no.

## RUMBLING

He quickly glanced around the kitchen. That noise came from behind him. He peered around slowly, as though he suspected something in the room. Nothing. He saw nothing out of the ordinary.

Earthquake? What the heck?

He stepped into the lounge room slowly, cautiously. He remembered the events of yesterday, and he was expecting something similar to happen now, but he had no idea what. As scared as he was, he didn't want to appear scared. In fact, he smiled nervously and stood near the sofa.

Rumbling again, only this time it was right underneath him! He made a run for the door, but it was jammed shut!

“HELL!” He yelled, and ran towards the bedroom. Before he could get down the hall, the bedroom door slammed violently shut, leaving him nowhere to run. He glanced around quickly, and made a dash to the kitchen.

## Trapped!

He looked around frantically, while that rumbling surrounded him. He had nowhere to run. All he could do was watch terrified as the walls around him became to crumble and fall apart, and the ceiling started to splinter and flakes of creamy-white paint snowed on the floor. Glasses and cups began to shatter around him and the windows etch and then shatter simultaneously. He panicked, not knowing what to do.

Before he had a chance to think anything else, the floor in the kitchen started to creak and tear apart, revealing a torrent of fire far below. He jumped back and glanced around what was left of the kitchen. He momentarily glanced down into that fire, that damn fire, and he sure as hell didn't want to get burned alive! He didn't want to die! He didn't know what to do!

He glanced at the window frame, and he could see darkness, that fucking darkness, spreading across the sky! Not again! He glanced at that fire below, and then at the apartment which was falling apart right before his eyes. Doing the only thing he could, he ran and jumped out the window, just as the apartment erupted into flames and exploded.

He fell fast towards the ground, death was imminent.

WAKE UP!

\* \* \* \* \*

Alex awoke with a startle and gasped. He had to glance around the room and it took some seconds for him to realize that he was in Tara's bed, just as it had been in that dream. He flung back the sheet and stood up. Tara was not in the bed, but he could hear noises coming from the kitchen.

He was afraid of what was out there. He found his pants and put them on almost hurriedly, and crept out of the bedroom. There was the sound of tinkering in the kitchen, followed by the sound of something smashing and mumbling. He froze, startled, and swallowed dryly. He tried to remain as still as he could but his legs were trembling. He couldn't control his nervousness at all. I need to get out of here. Was the only thing he could think. He had no idea what to expect. Was this yet another nightmare or vision? What was the point of all these damn things? He didn't want to know. All that he knew right now was he wanted relief, he wanted to get out of there..as fast as he could.

He took a step forward, and the floor creaked beneath him. He glanced down and gulped. He was so damn afraid that something was about to happen. He closed his eyes and began to whimper, not knowing what to do or to expect.

"Alex?" He heard Tara's voice say. He opened his eyes and looked at her. "You okay?"

He looked down at the floor for a second then back at her,

"Yeah, I – I had a bad dream, that's all." He said, with noticeable nervousness in his tone.

She walked over to him and ran her fingers through his hair.

"It'll be okay now." She said, "Go rest for a bit while I finish making breakfast."

She kissed him on the cheek and turned and walked back into the kitchen. He did not even notice that she was wearing only a pink singlet top and blue lace knickers, not that it really mattered what she was wearing, or that he cared. He could just breathe a sigh of relief.

He took a look towards the kitchen then went back to bed and lay there, recounting the things he had seen in that dream. As much as he tried, he couldn't make sense of anything, and he still didn't know if he was awake or dreaming. He allowed himself to think about slapping himself in the face again, but remembering the vision from yesterday, he wasn't going to do that again. He still had a headache from banging his head against the elevator door. Strange that he had a headache, since it was only a vision...

In any case, this had to be reality. The smell of her cooking breakfast was just too mouth watering to be fictitious. He got himself comfortable in the bed and waited for her to join him.

"I hope you're hungry!" She said, as she came in carrying a breakfast tray, and now wearing a black silk kimono.

"I sure am." He said with a smile, "What are we having?"

“Oh, just something I chopped up.” She replied, and placed the breakfast tray next to him. He looked at her, smiled and then looked at the food on the tray.

“What the hell!” He screamed as he sat upright in bed. What he expected was bacon and eggs, instead what he saw was his penis on the plate! He looked, and noticed that a big pool of blood quickly forming where his groin was. He quickly threw back the sheets to see that his manhood had been cut off!

“ENJOY!” She yelled, wielding a carving knife in her hand.

He screamed, terrified. This bitch was going to kill him! The last thing saw was Tara attacking him with the knife, screaming in a mad frenzy as she violently slashed his arms and then stabbed him in the face.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Wake up sleepy-head.” He heard the faint voice of a woman say. He opened his eyes, and sat upright in bed with a fright. He glanced to his left and saw Tara laying next to him, with her arm draped around his stomach. He threw her arm off and jumped out of bed, and immediately felt to see if his cock and balls were still attached.

They were!

“What’s wrong sweetie?” She asked

“I – How did I – “

“Oh..” She said sleepily, “You don’t remember last night?”

“Last night?” He panicked, “I don’t even know if this is real!”

“Oh poor baby, you had a bad dream again.” She said, “Come back to bed and tell me all about it.”

“No, I – I can’t. I have to go.”

“Go?” ... “Go where?”

“Home!” he said in an almost panic as he fumbled to get his clothes on. “Karen is going to kill me!”

Tara sat up and looked at him, puzzled, “What are you talking about? Who’s Karen?”

He stopped long enough to look at her, and he realized that this was another dream. He sighed heavily, and wondered what was going to happen this time.

Tara got out of bed and walked over to him and ran her fingers through his hair with one hand and the other draped over his shoulder. He looked at her and he was afraid. His fear was noticeable.

“Baby.” She said, then kissed his lips, “Come to bed.”

He shook his head. He didn’t want to. He wanted, needed, to make sense of this. He needed to know if this was real or if he had finally gone insane.

“I have to go,” He said, removing her hands from him, and walked out of the bedroom, throwing on his shirt as he grabbed his keys and cell phone then walked out of her apartment.

Tara stood and watched him leave, then shrugged her shoulders and went back to bed. She was too tired to go after him.

Alex stood in the hall for a moment and glanced at his cell phone. No messages.

“Odd.” He whispered. “Kaz should have sent a message, many messages.” He flipped open his phone and scrolled through the messages that were on his phone. Strangely enough, there wasn’t any from Karen, not even old messages from her. He checked his contact list, and her name

wasn't there. He glanced back at Tara's apartment and muttered, "Bitch", thinking she had deleted Karen's messages and details from his phone.

He sighed and went to his apartment and tried to turn the door handle.

Locked.

He tried his keys in the lock. They didn't work.

"Changed the bloody locks again." He muttered then knocked hard on the door. No answer.

"Karen! Open the door! I know you're in there!"

DING!

The distinct sound of the elevator chimed from down the hall. He glanced down the hall and listened as the door grinded open, and the light from the elevator car shone dimly in the dark part of the hall. He watched, and saw no one exit. One second, five seconds, ten seconds passed. Still no one exited the elevator.

He frowned and turned and faced the hall. He watched that elevator, or more to the point, he watched the open doorway, and as though in a trance, he stared.

"What the -?" He finally muttered, and started to step towards the elevator. He stopped momentarily to glance towards Tara's door, then walked silently down the hall. With each step he took he became more afraid, and his hands began to twitch and his breathing became shallow. He hated this. He really fucking hated this!

When will these bloody games end? He questioned himself.

His answer came swiftly it seemed as he heard something creaking down the far end of the hall.

"What is that?" He questioned out loud.

Before he had a chance to second guess, he heard something like metal break, and a faint whistling. Almost immediately he felt something strike his chest and he was sent flying backwards, pinning him up on the far wall. He glanced down, and a metal rod had pierced his chest, puncturing his heart. Blood spurted out of the wound and seconds later he slumped, dead.

\* \* \* \* \*

He awoke with a gasp and in a cold sweat. He sat upright quickly and felt his chest, then his groin. He wasn't bleeding and his balls were still intact. There was a certain sigh of relief, and he glanced around the room. Yep, he was again in Tara's bedroom, and she was sound asleep next to him. He sighed heavily and went to get up, sitting on the side of the bed and rested his head in the palms of his hands. His head still ached from yesterday, although now he wasn't sure why exactly.

He glanced at the clock-radio next to the bed and it continued to flash 00:00AM.

"Great." He whispered as he stood up and walked down the hall into the bathroom. He washed his face with cold water then he stood and stared at himself in the mirror, and tried to figure out just how he ended up in Tara's bed. By now he had given up trying to figure out anything, as no matter what he did, things weren't as they seemed, and he really started to believe that he had finally gone insane.

He washed his face again, then looked back in the mirror. He gasped in fright, and turned to see Tara standing there in the doorway, leaning against the wall.

"Morning sleepyhead." She said, "You okay?"

He hesitated for a second, then answered, "Yeah. Fine. Just bad dreams."

"Again?" She said, as she moved passed him, kissed him on the cheek, then began to brush her teeth. "Ya know you may wanna talk to someone about that."

“About what?”

She rinsed her mouth then answered, “The dreams. Obviously there is something locked away in your subconscious that is trying to tell you something.” She paused to wipe her face, then continued, “There are some good hypnotherapists around who deal with that sorta thing.”

“Yeah, I will keep that in mind.” He said, then asked, puzzled, “By the way, how did I end up here last night?”

“You don’t remember loverboy?”

He shook his head “No.”

“Lets just say that we had the best night, last night sweetie.” Was her response as she put her arms around his shoulders and kissed him passionately.

That scent again! That scent that drove him wild was dominant again, and he could feel his manhood swelling by the feel of her body next to his.

“Not now baby.” She said, gently squeezing his cock, “Later, okay.”

He nodded and smiled. His eyes followed her as she walked out and went into the kitchen.

“Hey you hungry?” She called out.

He turned and looked at himself in the mirror again, and wondered if this was again a dream. He wasn’t sure. Like the other nightmares, it sure seemed real.

“Eggs and toast?” She asked, popping her head in the doorway.

“Sure, that’d be nice. Thanks.” He said, looking at her through the mirror.

She smiled at him and went back into the kitchen. He stood there and stared at himself in the mirror, noticing how old now looked. Strange, he hadn’t noticed how the years had aged him, and although he was now in mid thirties, he seemed to look older, like in his forties. Maybe he was tired. But the bags under his eyes sure told a story. So did that small scar on his chin. He didn’t remember having a scar there before, not before today anyway...

Maybe he was hallucinating...

As though he had an Obsessive Compulsive tendencies, he washed his face once again then went back into the bedroom and put his pants on before he went and joined Tara in the kitchen.

“Smells good.” He said as he walked in.

“Hope you like it sweetie. I’m not much of a cook, but I do try.” She said, as she served his breakfast.

“It looks great.” He replied, and kissed her, then sat down at the kitchen table. “So tell me,” He began to say, “How exactly did I end up here last night? As the last thing I remember was being on your sofa.”

“You must have hit your head hard last night when you fell out of bed.” She said, smiling.

He smiled, but was not amused, more puzzled if anything.

She served up a small portion of omelet for herself then sat at the table and looked at him. He saw something in her eyes, something familiar. It was a look he had seen before from someone. But he couldn’t remember who. She gently reached over and squeezed his hand and her eyes spoke a lot of unspoken words, or seemed to.

God she’s beautiful. He thought to himself. That was all he could think right then. There was definitely something so familiar about this though. It was as though....

“Last night you passed out on my sofa.” She began to say, “I had gone to get you a drink and when I got back you were asleep. So I didn’t want to wake you and left you sleep a while.”

He frowned, still confused, “That doesn’t explain how I ended up in your bed, and naked.”

She smiled and said, “You weren’t asleep long, maybe two hours. When you woke up you checked your cell and said that you didn’t want to go home. Karen had sent you a few nasty text messages last night, and going by what she said, I think it is obvious that she doesn’t care about you.”

“I figured that.” He said, as he started to eat, “So then what?”

“We sat on in the lounge talking for a while then one thing led to another and, well, I don’t have to say how wonderful you were last night.” She again squeezed his hand. Well that sure explained enough. He was satisfied with that, and quite frankly, he rather enjoyed being here than being back at home in the Den of Doom.

He smiled at her, and continued eating, while she sat and watched him eat. Although he was flattered that she chose to sit and watch him eat, at the same time he did find it uncomfortable, but he didn’t say anything. He chose to enjoy her company rather than say what he thought.

As much as he enjoyed being there and enjoyed her attention, he knew that he had to get back to reality and face the music at home. He really did not want to read the message on his phone, but he knew he had to. That would tell him what type of mood Karen was in, and going by those messages he would know whether to go home or not.

He picked up his phone went and stood in the kitchen and looked at the display on his cell. He had 35 unread messages.

“Damn.” He muttered.

“What is it?” Tara asked, coming over to him.

“35 messages.” He said then thought, Just like in the dream.

Tara looked at him but didn’t say a word. Her eyes spoke what she thought, and even though she may have been right, he had to read them. With a heavy sigh he flipped open the phone and opened his inbox. Just as he assumed, all messages were from Kaz, and just as it was in his nightmare, most messages were easily deletable and non relevant, with the exception of the last few.

Among the many messages of “Where are you?“, “What time will you be home?“, “Where are you, you prick!“, and not to forget her ever favorite, “When you get home we need to talk!“

Before he had a chance to read the last three messages that could have only been more abusive than the last one of “Had enuf of UR games Alex! I kno who U R wif! U can bet she won’t get away with dis! U n her can both rot n die!“, a loud knock came on the front door, and they both knew who it was.

“Karen.” They said at the same time.

Tara looked into his eyes, “You stay here. I’ll talk to her.” She said, already walking towards the door, finishing with, “Don’t say a word.”

He didn’t say anything, rather he put his phone to silent mode and stood in the kitchen and listened to the commotion.

He heard Tara open the door, and then mumbling. He couldn’t hear exactly what was being said, but by the tone in Karen’s voice, he could tell that she was really pissed off! And why shouldn’t she be! After all, he was in another woman’s’ apartment, and had obviously fucked her six ways from Sunday!

He couldn’t quite make out what Tara and Karen were talking about, but it was obvious that Karen had settled down a little, and after some moments, he heard the door close and then silence. He had no clue what happened, and after Tara didn’t come back into the kitchen after a few moments, he walked softly into the lounge and looked towards the front door.

She wasn’t there!

“Tara?” He said softly, “Tara?”

Where was she? He hoped that Kaz hadn’t done something damn stupid, like dragged her into the hall to beat the crap out of her. And for a moment he imagined that she had, but he quickly

dismissed that thought, thinking that Karen didn't have it in her to do something like that... But then again.. She was a woman scorned and she was liable to do anything!

He glanced around the room, then walked silently to the front door and peered through the peephole. No, couldn't see her out in the hall, and he couldn't hear anything out there.

Not again. He thought, thinking that he was in another nightmare.

"Babe." He heard Tara from behind him suddenly.

He turned quickly and was startled to see her standing near the sofa. There was sadness in her eyes. He could see that she was upset. Where she had vanished to a few moments ago he really didn't care. Right now, she needed him.

"Are you okay?" He asked, going up to her and holding her close to him.

She nodded and wept. "I'll be okay." She said through tears, "That woman is a dead-set bitch."

He knew that, and he wasn't going to defend the woman he had lived with for the last ten years. He had spent the last decade in the sixth circle of hell, and that was enough for him.

He wanted to leave Karen. That was obvious and plain as the nose on his face, and now, he felt in a way, he could. This woman, Tara, was strangely familiar to him, and not because of the fantastical sex that he couldn't remember, but there was definitely something about her that he knew....

He held her close then kissed her softly on her lips. Her lips were warm, soft, almost sensual to the touch, and a part of him couldn't help but want to have sex with her right now, but now wasn't the time.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked her.

She nodded and replied softly, "Yes. Wake up."

He looked at her, confused as hell, "What did you say?"

She looked into his eyes, "Wake up baby."

He looked at her with a strange look in his eyes, and didn't say anything. He was confused.

"WAKE UP!"

\* \* \* \* \*

He woke up suddenly, still confused by the dream he just had. It took him a few seconds for his eyes to focus properly and then he realized that this was reality! He was in his own bed, and Karen was sound asleep next to him.

"Great." He muttered, regretting that the dream he had just had was nothing more than what it was... A dream. He sat up in bed and glanced over at the clock.

7:12AM it read.

Yep. He was home. Karen was softly snoring, and that damn clock ticked so bloody loud that it didn't need an alarm!

He sighed, disgruntled with how this was, and he wondered why he couldn't have stayed in the dream. At least in the last dream he was with someone who he desired, unlike the one he was with now.

He glanced over at her and could only wonder, Who is this woman in my bed? He regretted this life, and wondered why he even stayed.

He got up out of bed quietly, so not to wake her, and crept into the bathroom to wash his face. Yes, he more or less trudged into that bathroom. He was tired, and it was obvious why. The sequence of dreams had him at a loss as to what was going on and why. He washed his face and

looked at himself in the mirror. Just as he vaguely recalled from every other time he looked in the mirror, nothing had changed, except now he was older. He looked older. He could see a few grays in his hair, which he always had a habit of plucking out. And he now had a defining small scar on his chin. He still had no idea how it got there. His obsessive behaviors caused him to wash his face once again with that herbal soap and he rinsed his face with cold water, not once but three times before he looked at himself again.

“Man.” He muttered. “You look terrible.”

“You look fine.” He heard Karen say from behind him.

He turned and looked at her. She looked the same as she always did in the mornings. Tacky cream color cotton nightie and hair looking like a birds nest. Finally this was reality!

“Morning babe.” He said, smiling, and kissed her on the cheek.

“Mornin’ sweetie.” She replied, as she kissed him back. He glanced her over, then walked out of the bathroom and went into the kitchen and poured himself a large cup of coffee, then went and sat out on the balcony and prepared to watch the day go by.

He sighed heavily, and realized that everything he had witnessed had been nothing more than a dream, and that made him depressed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

It was yet another Rostered Day Off for him, so he could afford to relax today. He had no intention of doing anything, except maybe perving on Tara, if she happened to be in the courtyard below. How he hoped she would be there!

He leaned forward in his chair and spied down into the courtyard below, hoping that he would catch a glimpse of Tara, sunbathing by the pool. No such luck. The only person down there was the guy who cleaned the pool, and that was it. Nothing sexy about that guy at all.

He sat back in his chair and looked off to the distance. As he sat there reflecting over the series of dreams which made no sense, he began to wonder if this was all that there was to his life. He wanted more than what he had. He wanted to be happy, but he was far from that. He had a comfortable home, but that was not enough.

He knew that there had to be more than this.

There was a time when he had a certain happiness, but those days when he was a child, when he would spend his holidays at his parent's cabin was a distant memory, and could never be regained.

He longed for those days again. He closed his eyes and could remember the cabin vividly.

His parents owned a log cabin at a small retreat in the forest, near the Glasshouse Mountains. He could remember that nearly every Summer they would make the long trip up to the cabin to spend a few weeks in "tranquility". The cabin was isolated enough from prying eyes, which made a good excuse for other vacationers to go skinny-dipping in the nearby river.

Alex could remember the feelings of that place. How the air smelt so crisp and fresh, the sounds of the tropical birds, the noise of other children as they played. All too vivid those memories were, which made him smile.

He chuckled to himself as he could now smell that same crisp pine in the air.

"Ahh. How I have missed that." He whispered. He opened his eyes and what he saw was not his balcony, but he was there, at the retreat, standing in the midst of the forest. He shook his head and looked around quickly, wondering how and why he was there.

Everything he remembered was there. That smell of morning dew was very strong, and the scent of pine was in the air, just as he had remembered. He could hear tropical birds singing their morning song from around him, as well as the sound of the nearby river, and the morning fog was beginning to settle.

"This is too weird." He said as stared around slowly. He was shocked to be in the place from his childhood, but he wasn't afraid. More curious than anything else.

In the distance he could smell something cooking and he knew exactly what that smell was. It was the smell of pancakes. Not just any pancakes, but the pancakes his mother made.

"Mama." he said softly, as he started to walk hurriedly in the direction of his parent's cabin.

He had no idea what to expect when he would see his mother, and he really didn't care. He just wanted to see his mom. As he hurried towards the cabin, he was filled with a mix of emotions. It had been many years since she died, and although there was a part of him that was angry at her for leaving him, he was also anticipating and almost yearning to be held by her again. In his arms he felt safe.

"Alex." He heard a voice suddenly say from behind him. He stopped and turned around quickly but saw no-one. He glanced slowly around, expecting to see something out of the ordinary but didn't. He shrugged his shoulders and turned back towards the cabin.

"Don't do it kid." He heard that same voice warn sternly. He stopped and glanced around again. Nothing.

"Must be my imagination." He whispered, "And if it's my imagination I can do whatever I want."

"I know what you're intending to do kid." It said, this time it's voice was closer than before.

He froze and stared. Something was there alright. But what?

"Don't be alarmed," It said from behind him.

Alex turned to see a person standing in front of him, dressed in a black cloak, his face hidden under the hood.

He was taken aback, but he was not afraid. He just stepped back and sized up this person. "Who are you supposed to be?" He asked, "Some kind of Druid or Sith?"

The apparition ignored his comment. "I know what you're intending to do kid." He said once again, "Do you think that by revealing yourself to her that will change anything."

"Maybe." Alex said without thinking. "What would you know anyway?"

"You cannot change what is to come Alex." He said, "She has a destiny to fulfill, just as you do. Telling her events that are yet to unfold will not save her."

"She's my mother!" He retorted, as he started to walk off.

The apparition grabbed him firmly by the arm and pushed him to the ground. "Don't be an idiot Alex." It said harshly, "Think about your actions carefully. If you follow this course of action to the end it will not end well for you and those you love will have died for nothing."

Alex said nothing. He lay there on the ground and stared at the apparition for a moment. "You would do the same thing if you were me." He said as he quickly scrambled to his feet and ran off.

The apparition didn't follow. Instead he pulled the hood back to reveal his face. Alex ran and glanced back to see if he was being followed and for a split second he caught a glimpse of the apparition, and in that moment he could have sworn that the apparition was himself.

He stopped and looked back, but the apparition was gone. He stood there and tried to second guess what he saw, but it made no sense. That apparition certainly looked like him, but it couldn't have.

It made no sense. He looked back in the direction he was going, then glanced back once more before he ran off towards the cabin.

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