

# NIGHTMARE ON PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE



## ANNETTE MORI

## **Glossary of Characters/Definitions**

**Dream Weaver:** A lab-engineered human who can bring dreams to life.

**Dream Catcher:** A lab-engineered human who can help the Dream Weavers control their dreams and make their apparitions more powerful.

**The Dream Center:** A government-run compound that experimented on young men and women with mental health issues to create Dream Weavers and Dream Catchers designed to fight for the military.

**Dream Warriors:** The ragtag group of women led by Darla who fought against the Dream Center and Maya and Leah's evil father,

**Dream Seeker's Commune:** A compound led by Darla and Syl, where the Dream Warriors live.

**Heaven:** Special Dream Weaver, who is romantically involved with Maya, a powerful Dream Catcher. She is bipolar, and once she learned how to control her dreams, she became one of the most powerful Weavers.

**Maya:** Powerful Dream Catcher who is Heaven's Yang.

**Forrest:** One of the young Dream Weavers who The Dream Warriors rescued when they attacked The Dream Center.

**Rain:** Forrest's Yin and lover, who the Dream Warriors also rescued.

**Syl:** A Scientist who used to work at the Dream Center and helped Heaven escape when she realized what they were doing to the young men and women at the Center. Her lover is Darla, the leader of the Dream Seeker's Commune.

**Darla:** Leader of the Dream Seeker's Commune and Syl's lover.

**Leah:** Maya's sister and another powerful Dream Catcher who had set her sights on Heaven before Maya established a connection with her. Her sole mission was to destroy the Dream Center and her father at any cost.

**Gretchen:** One of the Dream Warriors, paired with Beanie. A large woman who sometimes conjures large pastries or donuts to roll over her enemies.

**Beanie:** Gretchen's tall, thin lover.

**Keith:** Maya and Leah's Dream Weaver brother, who is more powerful than Leah or Maya. He is an enemy of the Dream Warriors and retains perfect control of his dream manifestations.

**Dr. Spartan:** The Lead Scientist at The Dream Center. A sadistic man who reveled in torture and experiments on the young men and women.

**Rosie:** Heaven's previous young lover who died by conjuring an apparition that lost control.

**Cleopatra:** One of Maya and Heaven's cats.

**Satan:** The other cat that was initially Heaven's cat and now belongs to both Maya and Heaven.

**Catrina:** A powerful Dream Weaver and one of the Dream Warriors with an attitude.

**Justin:** Keith's twin and Maya and Leah's other brother. He is more powerful than Keith.

## Chapter One

I felt the tickle of a tiny sandpaper tongue on my cheek as my eyes slowly opened. A fluffy orange kitten was giving me a bath. I giggled before taking in the scene before me.

I'd done it again, conjured hundreds of kittens. Maya simply smiled and shook her head.

Scolding me was not her style. That was reserved for Syl. She never appreciated the result of my good moods and hated when I went to my dark place, which thankfully wasn't often after my hard work at the Dream Seeker's Commune. I'd come a long way with the assistance of the love of my life, Maya.

"I think I'll get a few of the kids. They won't want to miss out on your treat for the day. At least this one is more PG than the twin strippers. Although, several of the older girls were quite enamored with that dream manifestation. They really wanted Syl to inject you with something that would make them last a smidgeon longer. I didn't know whether to be offended or flattered that they had a surprising resemblance to me," Maya said.

Forrest and Rain were the first to arrive, squealing with delight. “Oh my God, they are so adorable.” Rain scooped up a black and white kitten.

“You can have this dream every day,” Forrest exclaimed while grabbing two squirming tabby kittens.

Syl entered my bedroom and scowled. “Why can’t you do anything in moderation? There must be a hundred of these furry critters. If they pee and shit all over the cabin, you’re going to have to clean it up.”

“Aw Syl, we love when she conjures kittens. Can’t you try out the new serum so we can play with them a little longer? Thirty minutes isn’t nearly long enough,” Rain pleaded.

“I am holding you responsible, too, Maya. You were supposed to be working with her to rein in her gift. A hundred?” Syl glared at Maya.

Maya shrugged. “What’s the harm? The girls love it. At least she didn’t dream up a hundred She-Hulks or Godzilla’s. I don’t think they would have fit in the cabin,” she joked.

Syl crossed her arms over her chest. “Actually, I did not come here to scold you about the kittens. We have problems. I need both of you in the conference room.”

Maya quirked her eyebrow. “What now?”

“Your brother has surfaced.” Syl uncrossed her arms and bit the bottom of her lip in a gesture I’d often seen when she was over-stressed. I’d never heard Maya talk about her brother. I didn’t even know that Maya and Leah had another sibling. If her brother had the same talents as Leah and Maya, that could be a really good thing or something awful.

Considering Syl’s expression, I was sure this meant doom and gloom for us.

“Shit,” Maya muttered.

“You have a brother, too?” I asked.

“Not now, Heaven,” Maya snapped.

Maya had been nothing but patient and kind with me, and she’d certainly never used that tone before. She was the chipper, self-confident one. My good mood was heading into dangerous territory. I hoped tonight I wouldn’t conjure up anything that could do harm to the compound.

She must have realized that she’d been harsh because she immediately apologized.

“Oh, God, Heaven. I am so sorry. I honestly didn’t realize that my brother was still alive or in the US. This is bad, really bad.”

“Rain, Forrest, can you watch the kittens until they disappear? Don’t let them pee on the bed,” I instructed.

“Sure thing, Heaven,” they both responded.

More of the younger Dream Weavers and Catchers shuffled into the house as we left our cabin, squealing with delight. At least they would have a good day. After we had rescued them from the awful Dream Center, my mission was to ensure a smooth transition to the Dream Seeker’s Commune. I had a first-row seat on the atrocities they’d all had to endure. I shuddered to think about that torturous time in my life.

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Maya and I followed a scowling Syl into the large room where Darla, Syl’s partner, stood at the front of the large conference room table. Leah, Maya’s sister, was the only other person in the room, and I wondered why the other members of our ragtag team were not there. Gretchen and Beanie were always good for a laugh or two. I loved that odd couple. They were like the female version of Stan and Ollie, only neither were curmudgeonly old men.

Darla had loved the magic wall on CNN, so she had fashioned her own technology to update everyone at the Commune on the latest news on all Weavers and Catchers who had not joined our Commune but had remained in the wind since we’d taken on Maya’s father and shut down The Dream Center. Only Darla’s wall didn’t broadcast statistics but captured film of the various creations in hot spots worldwide.

It was all so confusing to me. The names were so similar, yet both had vastly different purposes. Darla had established the Commune to help Weavers and Catchers find their match, enabling them to control what the government had engineered to create perfect human weapons. The Center had convinced desperate parents to hand over their kids and insisted they would make them better. Kids with bipolar disorder were the most desirable because the true sociopaths and psychopaths were harder to control. Without emotion, they didn’t pair well with anyone else. Whereas the bipolar kids, like me, had quickly sought connection with others.

Darla cleared her throat. “I thought it would be best to show you rather than explain our situation. Pictures speak louder than words.” She pointed to the magic wall.

I watched in horror as an army of creatures destroyed everything in their path. I’d conjured up some truly frightening monsters before, but nothing on this scale. Every demon was at least one hundred feet tall, with teeth like a row of crooked Samurai swords. *Didn’t whoever conjured these beasts think to provide braces for them?*

Bullets ricocheted off their thick, scaly, green skin, and I was sure the military was using armor-piercing bullets. Not only did fire burst from those hideous mouths, but somehow, there was a chemical included in their spit and fire, causing loud and massive explosions wherever the foul substance landed. Naturally, I couldn’t smell the material, but I’d bet the entire farm it was noxious enough to lay an army flat.

A handsome man walked nonchalantly behind his monstrosities, appearing to have total control over them. I squinted my eyes and gasped as a familiar mouth and eyes appeared larger than life on the screen—except the man’s eyes did not have the same warmth as Maya and Leah’s. His mouth lifted in a sardonic grin that I was sure belonged to a living, breathing Satan on earth, or at least the picture I had in my head of Satan always seemed to be an attractive man with cold eyes.

Staring directly into the screen were the cold marbles of a true psychopath. I’d known a few at The Dream Center. I recognized the utter lack of emotion.

I opened my mouth to speak, but Maya beat me to the punch. “That’s our older brother, Keith. He was the first one that our father experimented on. Unlike other psychopaths who don’t connect to another person to help them control their creations, he doesn’t need one. He has perfect control, which makes him the most dangerous Dream Weaver alive,” Maya said.

“Why now? Where the fuck has he been for the past year?” Leah asked. “And why is he attacking that army? Where is that, anyway?”

“DC,” Darla answered.

I hadn’t paid attention to the surrounding building, or I would have recognized the landmarks. I’d focused entirely on the creatures and the handsome man. “I suppose the government wants our help now. Fuck that. They were the ones to start the dream program. Why should we help them?”

“Because this is a new administration with entirely different values. The current president is not the one who is responsible. Besides, if we don’t act, Keith will make it his mission to demolish this country, one city at a time,” Syl answered.

“Did you know about Keith?” I directed my question at Syl because she’d been a scientist at The Dream Center before breaking me out. Her conscience had finally kicked in after seeing what the Center was doing to kids like me.

Syl looked away. “I’ve met him,” she mumbled.

“How responsible are you for his strength now?” I spit out.

Maya touched my arm. “Heaven, don’t. Syl is not responsible for our psycho brother. She isn’t the one who brought him to The Center and encouraged his serial killer side to surface with a vengeance. That is all on our deceased father.” She glanced at her sister, Leah, who nodded in confirmation.

“How in the living fuck can we fight that?” I pointed at the screen where Keith’s monsters had done quick work of mowing down thousands of men.

“With a little luck and every single person in our charge helping, even the kids. I have faith in our Weavers and Catchers. We are a formidable group. Syl has been working on a new serum to enhance your dream capabilities,” Darla explained.

“You mean a serum that will make us go darker than normal. No fucking way. I’m not going down that path again. I can’t. I won’t.” Tears pricked at the corner of my eyes.

“Isn’t there another way?” Maya asked.

Darla and Syl shared a look. “I don’t think so. You are our most powerful Weaver/Catcher pair. We need you more than any other. If anyone can match Keith’s creations, it would be you two.” Darla looked almost green as she made that declaration.

Everyone at the Center knew I’d almost lost myself in that dark place. Maya had been the one to pull me from the darkness. “We wouldn’t ask this of you if it wasn’t vital. We have only thirty-six hours to prepare for his next attack. At least he needs to rest between major attacks. If he tries to conjure more monsters before the rejuvenation period, he’ll be vulnerable.”

Leah and Maya both attempted to jump in until Leah gestured for Maya to speak. “I wouldn’t be so sure about that thirty-six-hour period. Our brother is known for his arrogance. That’s his true weakness. Best guess is that he’ll make his next move in twelve hours, give or take an hour. The attack won’t be as grandiose as DC, so I’d plan on a less populated or prominent city, where their defenses are not as robust.”

“Is the serum ready yet?” Leah asked.

“Sort of. I haven’t tested it out on our more powerful Weavers. I was reluctant to do that until we had reason to go down that road,” Syl answered.

“I’ll be your lab rat,” Leah offered. “Give me the shot. I’d relish the chance to take down Keith.”

I kept looking between Leah and Syl, and then something sickening occurred to me.

“How long have you been working on the serum, Syl?”

Syl cringed, hesitating before responding. “Um, well, a few weeks after we battled with Leah and Maya’s father and The Dream Center.”

She hadn’t answered my implied question. “Why?” I became agitated, which in my mind meant I might not even need her damn serum because the dark place loomed large in front of me.

“Leah and Maya worried that with Keith in the wind, we weren’t in the clear.” Darla ran her hand down Syl’s shoulder in a gesture of support. “I’m the one who asked her to work on the serum, so don’t blame Syl.”

“You realize you’re not much better than Dr. Spartan with his torture techniques designed to send us misfits down that horrific path just to get us to conjure the biggest, baddest monsters we could think up. And trust me, that’s exactly what we did, to the detriment of a few innocent scientists working at the lab and my beloved Rosie. Those bastards and their methods are responsible for her death. Now you want to do the same thing, only in the form of an injection.” I slumped in my chair after finishing my rant.

Deflated and out of steam.

“There weren’t any innocent scientists at The Dream Center, Heaven, not even me. If I’d died at the hands of one of your apparitions, it would have been poetic justice. Rosie’s death was a tragedy that she chose. She was the one who conjured the creature that ended her life, not you.”



Technically, that was true. My first lover, Rosie, was also a combination Weaver/Catcher, a mighty one who lost the will to live knowing they would never leave us be. I knew in my heart she never would have conjured the monster who took her life if they hadn't tortured her and made it happen.

"Oh, stop your bellyaching. I already said I'd take the shot. I'm strong enough to go against Keith with a little added oomph. We won't need Heaven's weak tit. She and Maya can stay safe and sound in the Commune while the rest of us fight this battle." Leah stood and turned to Syl. "Come on, Doc, I'm ready for the big, bad needle."

Maya grabbed my hand and squeezed, then turned to Darla. "Can you give us a few minutes, please? I want to talk to Heaven alone."

Darla nodded, and Syl, looking unsure of herself, followed Leah and Darla, who had already made their way to the door.

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"Don't look at me like that. I can't do it, Maya. Not even for you. I'm afraid I won't be able to control them if she boosts my dark side. I've barely learned to control the ones I consciously bring forth now. I know I've come a long way with your love and support, but I'm not as good as you think. I genuinely believe our victory over your father and Dr. Spartan was a freak event."

"It wasn't," Maya assured. "But I agree with you about not needing the shot. I believe that together we can defeat my brother. The strength of our pairing is like nothing I've ever seen before. Even though we prevailed the last time, you were still holding back. I could tell. If you promise not to restrain your gift, I'll help them understand you don't need Syl's new serum."

"What about the others? You know, it scares the shit out of me that Syl is willing to give the serum to Leah. She isn't that far from completely psycho right now. Her blind rage at your father was almost our undoing. She's willing to take risks that are to the detriment of all of us. I can't believe Syl wants to supercharge her. Doesn't she remember what happened the last time we let Leah run the show?"

"I don't believe Syl and Darla ever let Leah run the show. They simply did not intervene until it was necessary to rescue her." Maya leaned forward

and caressed my cheek, soothing my ruffled feathers. I was thankful for Maya in my life. Without her, I would have needed medication for my Bipolar Disorder and subsequent scary fucking creatures that appeared after a particularly nasty nightmare.

“I suppose that’s true. Please don’t let Syl inject me.”

“I won’t. I promise.” Maya began rubbing my back, continuing to calm me.

“Do you think we can defeat your brother?”

A fleeting look of indecision crossed Maya’s face before she answered, “I hope so, or the world is doomed.”

“Answer me honestly. Would we have a better chance if I accepted Syl’s serum boost?”

Maya would not look me in the eye. “You don’t want me to answer that question.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Probably. Although, I haven’t seen the results of any tests Syl has done.” Maya shifted uncomfortably in her chair.

I squinted my eyes at Maya. “You knew about this? Who has she injected?”

“She volunteered.”

“Forrest?”

Maya nodded. “You know, some of the other kids still pick on her. She wants to develop her skills and thought Syl’s serum would help.”

“How the fuck don’t I know about any of this? Forrest is a sweet kid. She shouldn’t want to conjure anything more than kittens. God, I hate what The Dream Center did to us, not just the experiments and torture but putting thoughts into that sweet kid’s head that she isn’t good enough unless she can conjure up a grotesque, scaly apparition with sharp teeth. What did she dream up?”

Maya smiled, and it looked incongruent considering our discussion. “A bald, middle-aged man, complete with a potbelly, MAGA hat, and camouflage clothing except for his Stop the Steal T-shirt.” She shuddered. “What I saw could not be unseen.”

“You’re joking, right?”

“Actually, I’m not. Although it was pretty funny, except for the AK-47 he had flung over his shoulder and was prepared to use. Gretchen disarmed

him, though. After he called her a commie dyke bitch, she was having none of that.”

“Why did you keep this all from me? You, Darla, and Syl are always keeping the important stuff from me. I hate that. I thought you weren’t going to do that anymore.”

“You’ve been happy. All those suspicions about everyone and everything disappeared, leaving you oblivious to Syl and Darla’s continued work. I knew about it because I knew Keith was still out there. I didn’t want you to return to the way you used to be. I knew I could take on the worry without having to burst your happy bubble.”

“Never do that again.” I pinned her with my most serious expression. “We are a team, and if you’re worried, I need to know. I’ll get one of my She-Hulks to kick your ass if you do.”

Maya laughed. “Okay. I’m sorry. I kept this from you because I love you and wanted to protect you.”

“I don’t need you to protect me. I only need you to love me and periodically boost my ability to conjure badass protectors and fighters for this war we’re apparently about to embark on. Give me a few hours to think about Syl’s serum. With you by my side and perhaps a few more lessons on how to control whatever I think up after the injection, I’m willing to give it a try. He can’t win, and I’ll never forgive myself if we could have stopped him, but my cowardice got in the way.”

“Let’s go back to the cabin and give Cleo and Satan some attention. They’re probably pissed about all those kittens you conjured. You know how Cleo likes to be the only cat who gets attention.”

Cleopatra and Satan were our cats. Syl had thought to bring my cat, Satan, to the Commune, and Maya found Cleopatra, a large, fluffy gray and white prima donna who acted like she was the only cat worthy of attention. Cleopatra was also the cat she used to help me refine our skills of mutual control. Cleopatra loved it when we created a laser pointer for her. It was more complex than a person could imagine, jointly creating a small beam of light and moving it with precision to keep Cleopatra entertained.

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Amid our laser tag game with Cleo, otherworldly noises reached the cabin. That could only mean one thing—Leah had unleashed one of her dream manifestations. And by the sound of it, this one was a whopper. Maya and I ran outside while I mumbled prayers that Leah had also thought to control or contain her apparition before the thing could demolish every cabin in the Commune.

The thing was impressive as they whipped their massive black and orange head. Spittle flew in every direction, and when it landed, vegetation disappeared as if the spit was made of acid. I guessed the creature was at least 150 feet tall. I noted it was a good thing she'd only conjured one of these things, and if she were to dream up a hundred or more like her brother, we wouldn't need to join the battle. I suspected this was the extent of her abilities.

Impressive as this monster was, we'd need a lot more to stand a chance. It kept pushing against an invisible barrier and roaring in pain every time one of its massive claws reached the edge. I almost laughed, thinking about those mimes who pretended to be inside a box.

"What are you laughing about?" Maya asked.

*Oops. I guess I did laugh. Out loud.* "Don't you think Leah's creature looks like one of those mimes trying to feel the edges of an invisible wall?" The minute the words came out of my mouth, the orange and black menace pushed again, and I heard a popping sound.

"Shit. I really wished you wouldn't have said that out loud."

As the creature advanced closer to us, Maya yelled. "Quick, everyone needs to concentrate on turning this bad boy into a stuffed animal or plastic toy. Leah, your containment field is not working. We need a different tactic."

For a second, I thought Leah would simply stand there with her mouth agape, but finally, she shook her head and seemed to register Maya's order. I used every ounce of energy I possessed to put all of my force into imagining Big Orange as a child's toy, not dissimilar to those popular dinosaurs that boys and girls seemed to like.

Slowly Leah's dream manifestation shrank, and if the damn thing wasn't so ugly, it would have been almost cuddly—except we'd only reduced the hideous thing to adult size.

So, I guess we'd have a six-foot stuffed animal to contend with. I doubted any child would want to cuddle with it, though.

A ring of Weavers and Catchers stood around the massive toy, and I could almost feel the collective sigh of relief brush across my face.

Darla was the first to comment. "Well, I suppose your serum worked. Any chance you can tweak it to give them a modicum of control over their creatures?"

Leah strolled over to Darla like she didn't have a care in the world. Her calm demeanor scared me more than the creature. "I had control over him. The containment field was only meant to keep him in a small area so he wouldn't do a lot of damage, but his prime directive was to find my brother. You can't blame him for trying to break the force field to get to Keith. I won't need to contain him on the battlefield."

"I assume you only conjured one as a test?" Syl asked.

Leah frowned, and her famed haughtiness almost evaporated. "No. We don't need any more than one of him. He'll do the trick."

"Doubtful," Darla responded. "Yes, he was larger than Keith's creations, but Keith can conjure hundreds at once. We'll need a lot more firepower than one of your manifestations."

I shared a look with Maya before she whispered, "Are you sure?"

I nodded, and we made our way over to Darla, Syl, and Leah, who had gathered in a small group while the rest of the Weavers and Catchers kept their distance.

"I'll do it. Give me the damn shot. I'd prefer it in my arm versus my ass, though. My butt hurt for a week the last time you gave me a shot of my medication," I said.

"Well, if you hadn't stopped taking your meds before meeting Maya, I wouldn't have needed to jab you so hard." Syl placed her hands on her hips and scowled.

Darla clapped her hands together. "Right, well, let's get on with it, then. We need every available Weaver and Weaver/Catcher to get that shot. Intel has a pretty good idea of where he'll strike next, and we won't have a better chance because the location is close to the Commune."

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When I saw the needle, I rethought how it would feel jabbed into my puny arm muscle.

I opted for an area with a lot more padding. With my ass in the air ready for Syl's long needle to penetrate one of my cheeks, I asked, "Why in the world would Keith make his next target close to the Commune? There aren't any large cities around for miles." I felt the needle plunge into my extra-padded flesh. "Ouch. Do you have to be so exuberant when you give me a shot?"

"Don't be such a baby," Syl answered. "Next."

I flipped over, horrified to see a line of Weaver and Weaver/Catchers waiting. They'd all had a bird's-eye view of my naked bottom.

"Nice ass." Gretchen giggled.

"She does, doesn't she," Maya added. I could see her cheeky smile as she offered her hand, and I jumped from the examining table.

"You haven't answered my question." I was on a mission now. I needed to understand how Keith's demented brain worked.

Darla hovered in the corner of the room and answered for Syl. "He's discovered our location and wants to take us out before we become a problem for him and his army. He's smart enough to know that we are the only thing standing between him and his goals."

"How the fuck does he know where the Commune is?" I asked.

Leah pushed off the doorjamb and strolled into Syl's lab. "Before he went rogue, we were working together. I wasn't very complimentary of Darla and the Weavers and Catchers she had gathered. I didn't even know she had combination Weaver/Catchers or their strength. I'm embarrassed to admit I didn't have a high opinion of Darla, especially after Syl joined Darla. I've always admired Syl's skills, the others on her team, not so much."

Catrina, one of the more powerful Weavers, glared at Leah. "Who are the rejects now? Seems like we're the ones who came to the rescue to save your sorry ass." Her heavily muscled arms, both with tattoo sleeves, crossed over her chest as she leaned against the far wall. I shuddered when I thought about the creatures she might conjure, especially when she let anger get the best of her, along with a jolt of Syl's new drug.

Catrina was spot on. We had been the ones to rescue Leah, and it had almost been too late. She'd turned into a crazed woman bent on revenge,

believing I was supposed to be the other half of her matched pair, but I wasn't. Maya was my Yang, not Leah. I was the only one strong enough to dig inside Leah's head after Dr. Spartan had nearly turned her, and my mining excursion almost cost me my sanity until Maya led me out of that dark place.

"Water under the bridge. We can all beat up on Leah for her past mistakes or use our collective energy against those that truly deserve our ire. Don't forget that Leah is now one of us." Maya had her arm around my shoulder as she looked directly at Catrina, who still had a scowl on her face. Maya was the most forgiving soul on the planet, and she was all mine. I beamed at her with pride.

All remnants of the potential spat between Leah and Catrina subsided when the rumble of several large motors interrupted the quiet of the forest. I could almost feel the vibrations.

Running outside, my mouth hung in surprise as I spied an enormous convoy of army Humvees, tanks, and other military vehicles.

"Holy shit," I exclaimed. "They're with us, right? Because if they're not, we're in deep shit."

"Yes," Darla affirmed. "The president sent the cream of the crop to help us fight Keith. Intel revealed Keith booked a private jet from DC to Spokane. He's expected to arrive in Spokane in two hours. As he heads to this location, I suspect he will secure an armored car designed to travel over any territory. The timing should work well." Turning to Syl, she added, "Right?"

"The drug increases in power. Peak efficiency is somewhere between five to six hours," Syl confirmed.

"Give me another shot, then." Leah pushed up the sleeve of her shirt.

"No. I can't do that. I don't have data on the effects of more than one dose in a relatively short time. You should still have some residual boost after eight hours. The serum dissipates after twelve to fifteen hours. You'll have plenty of juice to add to the collective strength."

I didn't like the look in Leah's eyes. If I knew anything, it was that calculating look.

She would grab more of the juice because she needed to be the leader and take out her brother, just like when she went after her father. Careful

planning be damned. Leah was going to get all of us killed one of these days.

“Someone needs to watch Leah,” I whispered into Maya’s ear. Maya nodded. She could feel her twin and was the best person to sense impending action.

“I want everyone to rest. Perhaps do a few light meditative exercises to prepare for the confrontation,” Darla directed. “Maya, can you lead the group in the common room?”

“Sure. Leah, why don’t you help me?” Maya smiled at her sister. “You’re better at leading those exercises.”

*Ooh, good call.* Maya knew enough to stroke Leah’s ego. Hopefully, that would keep her from acting rashly. Before I followed Maya and the rest of the Weavers and Catchers out of the lab, I thought I saw Leah snatch an item from the tray next to the examining table. I should have alerted Maya right away, but I didn’t. Surely Leah would not be so bold as to steal the serum in broad daylight with everyone watching. Except no one was paying attention. They’d already followed Maya out of the lab.

While our ragtag group of Dream Warriors made our way to the common room, Darla and Syl approached a giant of a man decked out in full war gear. I only heard him say, *Ma’am* and nod once at Darla. Syl stood next to her lover but let Darla do the talking. As I walked along, I tried to listen to the conversation with my head turned in their direction. I kept squinting at the men; not a single woman in the bunch that I could tell. I didn’t trust the government. Not one bit. Especially after spending my youth at Spartan and Turnbull’s House of Horrors—sponsored by that same government. They were ultimately responsible for my enhanced skills. The conversation with General Carlson still elicited a creepy crawling feeling. They’d all discussed me as if I were nothing more than a military toy—only worthwhile as long as I did their bidding. If I couldn’t perform to their liking, I was expendable.

“Heaven? What are you doing?” Maya asked as she grabbed my hand and gave it a tiny squeeze. She could always tell when the wheels spun in my head.

“Trying to hear what they’re saying. I don’t trust the government. Do you know if there is a General Carlson still in charge? If so, I’m not joining with those cretins. Did you notice, not one woman in the bunch?”



“How can you tell? Do you have x-ray vision now?” Maya chuckled.

“Okay, fine, I suppose there could be women driving the Humvees or tanks, but I’d bet not. Isn’t it ironic they have to rely on a bunch of women to save their asses? How come they didn’t track down the remaining Weavers that scattered in the wind after we took down your father? All of them were men. I’d think they would fit better into their macho army.”

Maya shrugged. “Probably because those men did not have Catchers to help them control or amplify their dream manifestations. Remember how easily they fell apart against our collective strength?”

“Yeah.” I grinned, but then I remembered the collective monster we conjured and how it ripped into Turnbull and Spartan in the most gruesome display of power I’d ever witnessed. It was so horrible. I had looked away before I lost all the contents in my stomach.

There were brains and guts everywhere. Slung around like mud.

Maya tugged my hand and pulled me along. “Come on. We can do your favorite exercise.”

“No, no, not the candle trick. If I remember correctly, isn’t that the one that eventually tried your patience?” I laughed as I thought back to that first time Maya worked on my control. As usual, my brain was all over the place. Instead of simply concentrating on lighting the menorah, I had asked about the number of candles in a menorah and what other holidays were in December. That led to further questions about candles. Poor Maya had her hands full with me. At least I could perform this simple meditative exercise with ease now, but I knew when I got into the meditation room, I would mess with her again, just for fun.

## Chapter Two

The rest of the warriors were already on the mats, sitting in the lotus position. A few of them had a single candle at the top of the cushion. Other Weavers preferred bushes with only one bloom. Taking my position across from Maya, she waited patiently for me to settle. She had already put a single candle in front of me.

I closed my eyes, and honestly, I tried not to let my mind wander, but all I could think about was why the Weavers chose a rose bush. Why not a hydrangea or rhododendron?

What color would they make them? Could you make a rose bush multi-colored? I'd probably make them red? The color of love because I was still madly in love with Maya and would give her one of the new blooms. Then I thought, why did we have to do the candle trick? Suddenly, I wanted to create flowers.

Maya's hearty belly laugh interrupted my musings. "You just can't help yourself, can you? Roses are easy. Yes, they can easily make them more than one color. Aw, you are so sweet. But if you're going to give me flowers, I prefer lilies because they smell so heavenly, just like you."

Of course, Maya had heard every random thought that passed through my brain. That was the beauty of linking with your Yang. "You're learning not to let my wandering mind frustrate you."

"Yup. It's all part of your charm. Besides, I know that eventually, you'll settle, which is the whole point of the exercise. If you really want to conjure flowers, we can do that."

Maya reached across and stroked my hand.

I clapped my hands in excitement. "Yes. Let's do flowers instead." I closed my eyes and began to concentrate.

The meditation was short-lived when the increasing thunder of hundreds of boots entered our sanctuary. Several gasps littered the air as the other Weavers opened their eyes and saw lilies in every corner of the common room. Not one inch of the floor was visible.

Military boots crunched my flowers, not giving them a second thought.

*How had Keith gotten here so quickly? That had to be the reason for the intrusion.*

“I don’t know, Heaven, but I’m sure we’re going to find out.”

The mantra of *whatever you can think up is possible* entered my mind. I wondered if that extended to artillery. If so, we were royally screwed unless we reframed our strategy.

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I stood and yelled over the din of voices, all trying to speak at once. “Hey, listen up. We’re going about this all wrong. Forget monsters and protectors. We need warriors to fight this battle. Think science fiction. Don’t limit yourself to snarly, scaly Godzillas or creatures from the Black Lagoon. Remember the motto. Whatever we can think up is possible. Dig deep into the creative realm and consider force fields that are impossible to penetrate or molecule disruptors that change or move a mass, sending it to the ether or another planet far away.”

Maya grabbed me and pulled me into her arms. “You are a bloody genius, Heaven. She’s right,” Maya exclaimed. “Guaranteed that Keith is not limiting himself, and he’ll bring weapons to the fight that are unimaginable to anyone but a true psychopath.”

Darla, Leah, and Syl approached, all with grim expressions. Leah kicked at the lilies until she pulled Maya off to the side and whispered in her ear. “Keith isn’t alone. Somehow, he’s convinced Justin to join his cause. That means he knows how much power we have as a collective, and he’s worried.”

Maya crinkled her nose. “But Justin isn’t like that. He’s a pacifist.”

“Was a pacifist. Dad got to him. Brainwashed him into thinking he was fighting for the right causes. Keith must have found him in the aftermath and continued the indoctrination.”

I was close enough to hear every word and asked, “Who is Justin?”

“Keith’s twin,” Leah answered. Simultaneously, Maya said, “Our other brother.”

“Holy shit. Two sets of twins? And I suppose you’re going to tell me that Justin, like you, Maya, is more powerful than Keith.”

Maya nodded. “We used to be close. I’m the only one who knew the extent of his skills. I’m not sure how Dad or Keith learned about his strengths.”

“Maybe they didn’t,” I offered. “We’ll talk about how you kept another secret from me later. Another brother? Really, Maya?”

Maya had the good sense to look sheepish. “Sorry. I didn’t realize Justin was part of all of this or a threat to anyone. But it’s doubtful Keith didn’t know. He’s a calculating psychopath. Nothing he does is without reason. Besides, they are twins. He would have figured it out eventually because once Dad got to Justin, he would not have had any cause to keep it a secret like I did with Leah.”

“Well, let’s go meet these brothers of yours,” I said with more confidence than I actually possessed. And then I felt it.

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*Pain. So much pain.* I doubled over, holding my head. “He’s inside my head,” I screamed. It felt like grubby fingers were digging inside my brain, pushing aside the gray matter, looking for a treasure hidden inside. Before the fingers found their way inside, I was sure someone had taken a chainsaw to my skull and pulled back the skin and bone until they had exposed the soft, squiggly material inside. “He knows what we’re planning.”

“You, you and you, raise that collective shield and protect Heaven. Don’t let anyone or anything inside that beautiful brain of hers. Do it. Right now. We need them out. We’re toast if we don’t have Heaven with us when we confront Justin and Keith. Come on, Warriors. I know you can do this,” Maya ordered.

Even though I was in more pain than I’d ever experienced in my entire life, including my time in the horror chamber at The Dream Center, I heard Maya’s commanding voice.

She would never let them take over. She would die before she would let that happen. I felt a pop, and then my head was clear again. I glanced over at Gretchen, Beanie, and Catrina, who all nodded in my direction.

“Thank you.” My voice came out in barely a croak, but I was getting stronger by the minute. “I’m ready now.”

Maya touched my arm and asked, “You sure?”

“Yup. Let’s go send those fuckers into space.”

“Okay, everyone but Leah, Heaven and I will shield the inside of the compound long enough for us to conjure a teleporter.”

Forrest and Rain approached Maya. Rain whispered, “We got teased for being Trekkies. Can we help you instead? We can conjure special weapons against his monsters. Like shrink rays,” she excitedly exclaimed. “They’ll be expecting something different.”

Maya nodded. “Okay, you two are with us. Keith is predictable. He’ll believe that manifesting bigger creatures impervious to bullets is the right tactic. He doesn’t have finesse and prefers brute strength in his attack. Justin is our bigger concern. He’s more cunning. He used to be such a sweet boy, but they teased him all his life for being soft. Those were my father’s and brother’s words. They never missed an opportunity to ride him on his passive nature.”

As we prepared to leave the common room, I asked, “How do you think they got to him?”

“No clue.”

## Chapter Three

The four of us marched into the blazing sun to the pandemonium of blood and guts strewn across our beautiful sanctuary of trees and flowers. I looked away when I glanced at a young soldier who'd been disemboweled as his eyes stared into the sunny sky. The stench was overwhelming as the toxic fumes from whatever erupted out of the 200-foot army of alien-looking beings marched closer to our small group. When their spittle hit the ground, a kind of sizzle occurred. Then the patch of earth became a gaping hole of steaming sewer swamp. That's the only term that seemed to fit.

Rain and Forrest were doing their job as the army advanced to less than 100 yards from where we stood. It appeared as though their focus was now solely on the four of us, with an occasionally massive arm swiping the pesky soldiers away. There were so many that several escaped Rain and Forrest's line of defense that had reduced at least forty of them to the size of tiny tree frogs. I had inadvertently squashed a few with my heavy boots.

I felt bad. They were almost cute after Rain and Forrest did their thing.

Feeling another tickle in my head, I groaned. He was trying again, but fortunately, whatever Gretchen, Beanie, or Catrina were doing worked. Apparently, the rest of our Dream Warriors were also successful. They had conjured an impressive force field. I laughed when a nasty fucker ran smack dab into the middle of the protection shield, and it packed a punch. The monster comically touched his massive head, shaking it from side to side and hissing in obvious pain, before Rain and Forrest did their thing.

Unfortunately, Keith's apparitions were coming too fast for Rain and Forrest to handle.

I was afraid the force field would not hold for much longer. I looked to Maya for direction.

“Heaven, we need to get to Justin. He’ll turn his attention to the others if he can’t get to you. If he breaks their chain of concentration, we’re screwed. Leah, I know you gave yourself an extra shot. You need to join the other Dream Warriors and use that boost to keep us safe.”

For once, I was glad for Leah’s arrogance. Maybe the double shot of serum would actually help this time.

“Okay. What do we need to do?”

“You need to help me get inside his head. We are going to turn the tables on him. If I can get inside his head, then maybe I can reach whatever piece of humanity he has left after whatever my father and Keith did to him.”

“I don’t know how to do that. We haven’t practiced that before. If I couldn’t even do the candle trick at first, how the fuck am I going to manage this?” I was in full panic mode now.

“Breathe, Heaven, breathe. Deep breaths. All you have to do is concentrate on how much you love me. I’ll do all the heavy lifting. Remember when I brought you out of the dark place and talked you through locking that fucker up?”

I nodded.

“That was all love. Take my hand and pour all the love you can into giving me strength.”

“Okay.”

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I shut my eyes and squeezed Maya’s hand. She was my Yang. I could do this. I’d never felt anything as strong as my love for Maya. There was no way I would let her enter Justin’s brain without walking by her side.

The pandemonium before us disappeared, making way for a dark, swirling fog. The heaviness nearly choked the air from my lungs, but we continued to advance hand in hand.

I repressed the need to cough out the foul air. Maya pursed her lips and blew into the cloud, forcing the molecules to part and form a kind of tunnel free from the stifling, putrid atmosphere. Finally, we reached a sterile white room where a small boy cowered in the corner, whimpering pitifully.

Both of us squatted in front of the boy. Maya let go of my hand, and I felt our combined strength waver. She reached out to the boy and gathered

him in her arms. Not knowing how to re-engage our connection and give her whatever loving energy she needed, I simply touched her back and re-established our contact.

“Justin, you know this isn’t you. You’re stronger than Keith. You’ve always been the strong one.”

“No, no, you left me with them. I didn’t have a choice.”

“You always have a choice. You can fight their influence. I have faith in you.”

“I can’t. They locked me up for months. Gave me drugs. Made me watch horrible things.”

While remaining connected to Maya, I moved closer to Justin and touched his shoulder. “They did that to me, too, but I survived. They can’t fundamentally change who you are deep inside. Don’t let them win. I love your sister. She’s my Yang, and I can feel her love for you. You know your brother is a psychopath. Keith doesn’t care about you. He’s using you. Fight him.”

The little boy swiped at his face to remove the tears. “Can I stay with you? I don’t want to remain in this room.”

“Of course you can. You’re my brother, and I love you.”

“Keith is our brother, too. Do you love him?”

Suddenly, I felt the cold, black fog against my back, threatening to penetrate the room.

Maya’s response was critical.

“I don’t hate him like Leah hated Father. My feelings are more empathetic. He needed our father’s help for his mental illness. It’s not his fault. So I guess in that respect, I love the little boy who never had a fighting chance.”

“Will you kill him?”

Maya shook her head. “No, but I think some of our Dream Warriors may send him to a place that keeps him away from anyone he may try to hurt in the future. Come with us. We’ll lead you out of here.” Maya offered her hand, and Justin took it.

I grabbed Maya’s other hand as we walked toward the pulsating black fog. It almost appeared alive, and I bet the damn thing was pissed. I tried Maya’s trick of blowing hot air into the middle of the swirling cloud. With both of our breaths, the tunnel was large enough for all three of us to enter.



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I blinked and looked around as hundreds of the alien-looking creatures ran around the grounds, squeaking like tiny mice. Keith or Justin lay on the forest floor. I wasn't sure which twin he was. He appeared to be unconscious, and then, right before our eyes, he disappeared.

"No, no, no. Was that Justin? Did we do something to him?" I asked. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw an identical man run toward Maya. My first instinct was to protect Maya from her brother until Maya opened her arms, and the man fell into them.

"Justin. Thank God you're alive."

"Oh, Maya, I've missed you. Will you ever forgive me?"

"Nothing to forgive. Although, if you ever go excavating into my girlfriend's head again, I'll kick your ass."

Justin held up his hand. "Never. I promise." He put his hand to his head. "I've got a massive headache right now. Any chance that famed scientist, Syl, has something for the pain?"

"Probably, come with me. We'll get you fixed right up. Any other residual effects?"

"No, I'm just a bit knackered. Where is Keith? He was right beside me a moment ago, and then he went down like a ton of bricks and disappeared."

Darla strolled over to us like she didn't have a care in the world. "Your brother is in a safe place. We have a containment room for him. Syl is administering drugs as we speak to counteract whatever abilities he has left."

"Syl has a drug to take away our ability to make our dreams come to life? What the fuck, Darla? Why hasn't she offered that to any of us? I want to be normal again."

Maya rubbed my back. "I know you believe that your gift is an albatross, but it's not. Think of all the joy you will take away from the girls if they don't have kittens to play with anymore. It's your decision, but I like who you are. I don't want to lose my powerful Yin."

"Honestly?"

"Yes. I love you even when you dream up strippers that look a lot like me."

*Crunch.* I lifted my boot and looked at the bottom. It was a gooey mess. I'd stepped on another tiny monster. Wiping my boot on the grass, I exclaimed, "Yuk, these things are worse than dog shit. How long until they dissipate?"

Usually, our dream manifestations only lasted thirty minutes. Occasionally, they would stick around for close to an hour, but that was the exception to the rule.

"Probably another ten to fifteen minutes. Just watch where you step." Darla scanned the compound. "It looks like we'll be cleaning this mess up for days."

"Better get a bushel of poop scoopers," I quipped. "I call replanting the grass. Let the youngins clean up this gooey shit."

"I agree. We'll need this lawn looking perfect for the wedding," Maya said.

I scrunched my nose. "What wedding?"

"Ours, silly. Don't you want an outdoor ceremony?"

"You want to get married?"

"Of course. And now that I have my brother back, he can be the best man. You know you have to ask Syl to be your best woman."

"But you haven't asked me to marry you."

"I haven't? I thought I just did. What do you say? Want to ride with me for all eternity? Let's get motorcycles. I've always wanted one."

"Yes, to marriage. No, to motorcycles. Those things are death on two wheels. I love you, but after agreeing to jump out of a plane, I thought we were done with all those thrill-seeking activities."

"Nope, never. I love you too. You're going to make a gorgeous bride."

"Quit buttering me up for whatever crazy thing you have planned for us."

"Oh, I thought we could hang glide into the compound in our wedding suits or dresses. Your choice. Wouldn't that be an amazing entrance?"

"I groaned. We'll talk about this later. And don't forget, we still have to discuss why you failed to mention your brother Justin."

"You didn't tell her about me?" Justin looked hurt.

"Later, I'm in enough trouble with her. Isn't having the honor of being my best man good enough?"

“I guess,” Justin admitted and clapped his hands together. “Can I plan the bachelorette party?”

“Absolutely. Remember when we climbed on the roof...”

I shut out the rest of the words. At that moment, I knew Justin was every bit as much a thrill seeker as his sister. I was in real trouble now. The two of them would undoubtedly double-team me in the future.

### **Note From the Author**

The characters in this short story are from my Urban Fantasy, titled *[The Dream Catcher](#)*, available on Amazon through Kindle Unlimited. If you enjoyed the story and/or the writing style, I hope you will check out my other books from Amazon. Here is a link to my Amazon page:

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