

## *The Nightmare*

Kailen could feel the cool grass pressing against his cheek.  
With a groan, he rose off the ground.  
He was in a cold dark place full of shadows and whispering voices.  
Feeling an icy breeze on his skin, he tilted his head slightly, straining to hear.  
But the empty voices blew away in the wind, like the fading echoes of rustling leaves.  
Then silence came down, filling his heart with despair once again.  
He called out, his voice echoing in the darkness, "Rhiannon!"  
Another chilly breeze brought with it the scent of roses, along with a faint murmuring of her voice. He called out again, "Where are you, Rhiannon?"  
Far away, he heard her call, "Kailen!"  
He sensed the warm electricity that he had always felt in his heart while he was around her. Smiling, he began to grope about in the darkness, but a hidden root pulled at his legs, tripping him. He felt a sharp pain strike his palms when he broke his fall with his hands.  
As he rose again, he saw her standing there. Her green dress rustled against the cold breeze, her dark hair reaching up to touch her face. Bathed in cold moonlight, a smile touched the corner of her mouth as she came closer. Before he could speak, she pressed a finger to his mouth.  
She whispered, "Take this!"  
Kailen felt something cold placed in the palm of his hand. He looked down at it, curious. A strange looking cross with a loop on the top glared coldly back at him, catching the moonlight.  
He shook his head. "What...?"  
The icy breeze began to blow once more, throwing dark hair into his face.  
When he raised his eyes again, she was gone.  
Her fading whisper echoed in the darkness, "Help me, Kailen!"  
He took a step forward calling out, "Rhiannon!"  
But she had gone. All he could hear was the wind rustling in the dark forest.

After a time of searching among the tangled trees, he came to an empty clearing silvered by moonlight. Kailen reached up to grab a dark branch in front of his path, wondering. White light glinted off a sword lying upon a grey stone in the clearing. The sword looked like none that he had ever seen before. It shone with a pure flame, consuming all the darkness, and it also held a terrible power within.  
Then he noticed a tall dark man with a white turban standing on the other side of the stone with his back turned away. He stood near the edge of the light cast by the sword next to a Norman. Kailen narrowed his eyes at the warrior. He began to take a step forward, but something held him back.  
It was a whispering voice, rustling against the darkness.  
Suddenly Kailen felt his spine tingle. The cold hand of fear wrapped itself around his heart. Beyond the dark man loomed something else in the darkness.  
Beings of pure hatred, they were surrounded by shadows. The only remnant of their mortal forms had been twisted into something hideous by centuries of loneliness. Like a caged lion, Kailen could sense their hunger. He found himself unable to move, as an icy

terror gripped his limbs. The cold breeze rustled the crimson robe of the dark man. Kailen could hear the dark trees swaying in the wind but he could not take his eyes off the shadows. As they moved, it began to get colder.

Then one of the creatures called out in a raspy voice, “Maaaster, give her to us!”

Kailen blinked his eyes, listening intently.

The dark man crossed his arms, his voice resonating with power.

“Not yet. Her soul is mine for a short time longer.”

The creature hissed out an angry protest.

“But we hunger, Massster!”

The shadow crept closer, reaching out with a twitching claw, ghostly illuminated in the moonlight.

The dark man raised his hand.

“Stop! Your time will come soon enough. Until then I have plans for the girl.”

The Norman glanced quickly at the dark man, as if he didn’t want to take his eyes off the dark creatures. He whispered, “The ship is ready to leave, Ishaq. Let us go.”

The dark man ignored the Norman, not taking his eyes off the twisted spirits.

He said, “The girl Rhiannon will prove a perfect sacrifice.”

When the dark man mentioned his lover, a hot fire swept through Kailen’s blood, and he found that he could move once again. Gritting his teeth, he crept forward to where the sword lay upon the stone.

Another shadow lurked around the edge of the clearing. It came closer, bringing a shroud of inky blackness in its wake. With an echoing voice it demanded, “Where issss she?”

The dark man took a step back.

“I shall not answer. You will remain near the gateway until I am ready.”

The creature stopped at the edge of the light, hissing out a furious protest.

By that time, Kailen had made his way to the stone. With a trembling hand, he reached out to take the sword. Hot lightning ripped through his fingers and he dropped the sword with a cry.

The dark man spun around, his black eyes gleaming furiously. He had a black beard and a scar ran down his face, crossing one of his eyes, which was made of glass. Kailen clutched his burned hand, looking up into the man’s hateful eyes.

The dark man’s angry laughter echoed into the treetops. He pointed at Kailen and said, “You may take this one.”

Icy whispers called out in excitement. Kailen found himself fleeing in terror through the dark forest. Like an icy wind, the shadows pursued him. Another black root tripped him. He struggled to his feet but it was too late. One of them grabbed his shoulder....

“Kailen! Wake up!”

With a shudder, he opened his eyes. A chilly light fell through the windows of his home, splintering the shadows into dust trails riding along the cold sunshine. Sir Guy stood nearby, concern covering his face. His liege lord asked, “Bad dreams?”

Kailen inhaled the cool air, sighing loudly and shrugging his shoulders. He turned to look into the bedroom, which was wrapped in darkness. He could hear the priest whispering urgent prayers there. Without answering his liege lord, he went into the room, tears striking his heart like a knife in the darkness.

She lay there, flowers covering her dark hair. So still she looked, as if only asleep. The room was covered in frankincense and myrrh, which burned in a nearby crucible. The priest kneeled next to the bed, praying.

Kailen narrowed his eyes at the intruder.

“What are you doing here?” he whispered.

The priest ignored his query for a moment longer, continuing his chanting. Kailen nearly lost his patience, but he glanced at Rhiannon’s body lying on the bed, draped in the green dress he had given her on her last birthday and his anger subsided.

The priest stood, somberness covering his face.

“I am sorry for your loss. Rhiannon was a beautiful girl.” He shook his head. “To just drop down to the earth, dead... It was a terrible thing to witness.”

Kailen closed his eyes, hearing his lover’s plaintive whisper in the dream once again, “Help me, Kailen!”

He shook his head, opening his eyes.

“She isn’t dead.”

The priest opened his mouth in astonishment.

“But she does not breathe, and her heart is still. Why do you say such a thing?”

The priest looked over at the dead girl finally.

“Truly there is something strange in this, but her body lays here now before you.” He placed a sympathetic hand on Kailen’s shoulder. “I shall prepare her for the burial tomorrow.”

Kailen shook off the priest. His eyes burned hotly.

“Get out of my home.”

The priest nodded his head, as if he had expected to be thrown out of the squire’s house.