

Chapter Four

It had been five years, well six actually, since Alex first started investigating the dream state in earnest. He had always experienced vivid dreams, some whimsical and nonsensical, some related to what was directly going on in his life and also many bad dreams, but had taken them for granted. He wasn't sure if they were triggered by the memories of a sad period in his younger life when his parents had been killed, from what he'd been told as they apparently walked home from a local pub after celebrating the New Year.

A drunk driver had mounted the kerb and ploughed into his mother. His father at that point unharmed had run to her rescue and the driver, scared and evidently cowardly, had reversed in his attempt to get away and had run over Alex's father too in his haste. It was basically a hit 'n' run and the culprit wasn't caught until some days later when, frightened and guilt-ridden, he turned himself in.

His parents had both been left fatally injured and Alex was sat down by his grandmother, aged 11, and told his parents had gone to heaven. It tore his world apart and left him a very bereft and lonely little boy. His grandmother willingly took over his care and did the best she could with regard to his basic needs and encouraged him in his education and his ambitions, despite her age.

Many a night after the death of her daughter and son-in-law, she climbed into bed beside Alex, sponging down his brow with a damp face flannel and cooing him back to restful sleep as he experienced nightmare after nightmare, night after night, for months, as he bravely battled through his grief.

He had always shown signs of developing into quite a boffin, building a science lab in the garden shed mixing things and blowing up things, then at college first sociology, then psychology grabbed his interest. He then took and passed advanced maths and all the sciences, wishing to specialise in biochemistry, so after leaving college he went straight to university to study a subject he knew best, as well as quantum physics to assuage his curiosity in the field and taking additional courses in calculus, computer languages, physical chemistry, organic chemistry, analytical chemistry, genetics, physiology and molecular biology.

With a combination of all of these and a chance meeting with The Scientist who lectured there periodically, and for whom he became a part-time research assistant, a firm friendship developed, and along with Kay-Johanna, who would become his wife, the future looked, if not rosy, then adventurous at the very least. One thing was for sure, and that was that nothing in Alex's life could ever be described as ordinary. His ambitious was to put his education to good use, become a more senior researcher and the *Nobel Peace Prize* didn't seem so much of a pipedream as a possible reality, if he played his cards right!

He met Kay-Johanna at university. The saying is that opposites attract. He felt himself quite the geek although modestly confident, and she, although not classically beautiful, was attractive, bubbly and outgoing, with a serious side, and with a mind-set similar to his own in terms of ambition. They became good friends, studying together mostly at first, before mutual attraction become obvious, and before the second term were very definitely an item. She became his *Kay-jo*, which he cut down to 'Kayj' pronounced 'cage' and that became his nickname for her.

It was as simple as that. Geek or not, Alex was a personable young man, well liked, easy-going with a laidback attitude, and attractive, but he kept himself to himself. He didn't date much, not because he wasn't propositioned, especially by other pretty students whose ploy was to seduce when they feigned

interest in the subjects he was studying, often asking to spend *studying* time with him, with ulterior motives written all over their faces.

The ones with the most sense cast their line at those male students they thought most likely to fulfill their full potential, that is, the ones most likely to get the best qualifications, get the best career and command the best and highest salaries. Potential doctors and lawyers were two-a-penny compared with anyone with an '*ology*' seen as, by far, the safer bet, and Alex could see right through them and wasn't so insecure as to accept every fluttered eyelash at face value.

Kay-Johanna, like Alex, questioned everything, and very similarly wasn't in the least bit impressed by the students who had chosen the easiest option and the road *most* traveled when considering a mate. She wanted and needed someone on her intellectual level, and seemed drawn to Alex, maybe by destiny, although neither of them questioned that aspect of things when they fell into each other's lives as though it were previously ordained.

She was fully supportive when Alex first posed his idea about researching the dream state and experimenting so far as to record dreams and somehow manipulate them. At first his ideas were only thoughts thrown into the air with no real direction, but for the sake of it and with the additional wealth of The Scientist's extensive knowledge, with whom they had started to liaise on a regular basis, they all ploughed into something tempting, possibly unethical, intriguing, exciting, and for which they had no idea where it would lead.

For Kay-Johanna The Scientist had a soft spot. She was like the daughter he never had. He marveled at the inquisitiveness of younger people when, if you read the papers, one would think the youth of today were all feral and feckless. So these two willing students with great ideas of their own came into The Scientist's (George's) life like a breath of fresh air. "*Call me Kayj like Alex does*" Kay-Johanna encouraged upon first making his acquaintance, and he'd regarded her with fondness ever since.

Having never married, George moved from his birth town in Scotland and concentrated on his career for the best part of 40 years, his lectures, his students and writing his books, and he practically adopted the young couple. They all met regularly in bars, in coffee shops, for evening meals, or on university premises, in the labs, to brainstorm and compare notes regarding their ongoing research. He'd be coming up for retirement in the next few years and wanted one last feather in his cap. Besides which, George was thankful for acquaintances other than his stuffy old university colleagues and peers.

It was unfortunate and completely and shockingly tragic when Kay-Johanna and Alex, married just a year and only recently having informed their close friends and family and, in fact, anyone who would listen, that *they* were pregnant with their first child imminent in six months time, were torn apart by events completely out of their control.

Alex had already lost his grandmother the year before that. Thankfully she'd known Kay-Johanna but she hadn't lived to attend the wedding, passing away a couple of months before because of complications after an operation on a tumour. Alex was heart-broken but decided after a short period of mourning to move forward, *looking* forward to his future life with a brand new wife and a planned family. He felt like an orphan twice times over, and with no siblings he was the last in line now.

The number of nightmares increased around that time, with the odd night terror, but he had no idea what the future held. He had no idea that they would increase in intensity and scare him rigid. He also had no idea that the nightmares would spur him on into more intensive investigations and a *need to know*, not just what caused them or the reason for them, but with regards to the dream state, delving

into the psychology of dreams and wondering how far one could access the dream state and control it, and where he could possibly go from there.

