

Dreams

By J.S. Deaton

Jack toweled his face and sighed heavily. This was his third hard-core workout in two days, and it wasn't helping. At first, the dream had been soothing. A woman stood beside his bed and spoke to him, although there was no sound. He watched her lips, and no matter how hard he concentrated, he could not distinguish her words. After a week of this, he'd awaken from the dream sweaty and shaking. Following a groggy trip to his bathroom to slap water on his face, he'd return to bed and fall into a fitful sleep. Soon, he was dreaming about the woman again, and this time she came to his bedside for an altogether different reason.

Jack had modified his workout routine to accomplish one of two things – either purge her from his normally disciplined mind, or kill himself via heart attack or stroke. He was beginning to suspect that the latter might be the more likely outcome.

As the Resident Chaplain of Simpson College, Jack prided himself on his ability to maintain his thought life amid the daily temptations he faced. He was a single man on a campus filled with interesting and also single young women. Now, he knew that this pride had been his downfall. He was being humbled. Shown that he was not above the impure thoughts he was certain he'd harnessed. Yes, he was merely a man. He would cut some slack to the two young men he was currently counseling in this area.

Jack's doorbell rang, and he jerked his head toward the sound. An odd sense of dread filled him as he moved into the foyer. A shaky hand reached for the knob. He paused and blew out a long breath. The doorbell chimed again, causing him to jump.

He threw the door open, and it banged on the foyer wall. His irritation was self-directed, but a fleeting pang of guilt gripped him that his visitor didn't know that. Guilt, irritation, and self-loathing gave way to terror when he saw a familiar woman standing in his doorway. Her hair was short and black, and her eyes were the pale, translucent blue of a summer sky. His dream, his vision, stood before him with a knowing smile on her perfect lips.

"Greetings, Jack Kelly. I need a word with you."

Jack went weak in the knees. She knew his name. He continued to stare at her, his mouth hanging slightly open.

Years of seminary training and conferences in communication skills came to his rescue. He plastered a warm, ministerial smile on his face and raised his hand to shake hers – thought better of touching her – and continued lifting his hand to perform an awkward wave.

He started to invite her in, thought better of it again, and motioned toward his porch swing. "Shall we have a seat out here? It's such a nice evening."

She didn't seem offended by his obvious reluctance to invite her into his home. She drifted toward the swing. Drifted – that was the only word Jack deemed appropriate to describe her walk. She was the most graceful creature he'd ever encountered. And he'd known her less than ten seconds.

Well, that wasn't *exactly* true. She'd been in his bed every night for the past six nights. *You're going straight to Hell, Jack Kelly.*

It was only a little kissing, his carnal nature argued.

With a woman who wasn't your wife. And not even your girlfriend or fiancé, and whose name you didn't bother to catch. Straight. To. Hell.

Jack sighed heavily and sat as far from the woman as the narrow bench would allow. Still, their knees touched. The wood creaked loudly in the awkward silence.

"You don't seem surprised to see me," she said.

"Actually, I've been expecting you." *Now, you're a liar too. Straight to Hell, Jack Kelly.*

Jack brightened as a thought occurred to him. He'd read about these events. It was a visitation. She was an angel. His dreams had been a foreshadowing of her visit. The first dreams, anyway. Not the ones where....*straight to Hell.*

"I knew you were a man of great faith," she continued. "It's why they chose you."

"Chose me for what?" He heard his voice crack and shoot up an octave. A deep blush started at his collar bones and finally stopped at his hairline. A thin film of sweat lined the deep crease above his eyebrows.

The woman touched the back of his hand. Her skin was cool and soft.

Jack thought her touch should have stripped him of his last shred of decency and moral discipline; instead, her fingertips seemed to transfer an overwhelming calm that seeped up his arm and soaked into his very soul.

"Are you an angel?" he blurted.

She smiled. "I am Jenna. I've traveled a great distance to see you."

"I had a dream about you." Jack willed himself not to blush. It did no good. "For the past week."

"Yes. I brought you a gift."

She tightened her grip on his hand and turned it, palm up. From her other hand, she dropped a small, shiny object into his palm.

Jack stared at it. A medallion – silver and unremarkable. It resembled a lopsided heart – like a trendy piece of jewelry he saw many of the Simpson College co-eds wear.

“What is it?” He turned the trinket over in his palm.

“The medallion of Raphael.”

“Raphael, the archangel of healing?”

Jenna smiled. “Yes. If you will permit it, you are to be its first keeper.”

Jack leaned back on the swing. It swayed with the shift in weight. “What do you mean, its keeper?”

Her voice took on a narrative quality. “Those who follow in your lineage are the keepers of Raphael. They guard his medallion from the Enemy, who would use its power for other purposes. I came to you from a great distance, not of miles, but of time. A great deal of energy was expended to make this journey. At a great cost.”

Jack let the words sink in. The questions raised by her speech far outnumbered the answers.

“You’re my –” Jack struggled for the proper word “—relative?”

“Yes.”

He shuddered. *Straight to Hell, Jack Kelly. Of all the women you could have inappropriate thoughts about, you choose someone related to you?*

Jack cleared his throat. This blush was never going away. “And you came through time to give me this?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

Jenna cocked her head to one side and frowned. “I thought I made that clear.”

“Nothing is clear to me right now.”

“I came through time, with the medallion, to deliver it to the keeper.”

“That’s too simple. What aren’t you telling me?” Jack watched Jenna’s eyes fill with tears. Now they were making progress.

“The Earth is in chaos in my time, nearing the Great Battle, before the time of Paradise. The Elders were instructed to choose a member from each of the twelve people groups, who guard an artifact, to return in time, to a member of their line, to leave the artifact for safekeeping. The Enemy seeks to gather the twelve artifacts and use them in the Great Battle to sway the outcome – which is not possible – but would cause untold misery and suffering for billions. This is an act of mercy and compassion. The Elders sent visions – the dreams you mentioned – to prepare the way for our arrival and reception.”

Jack rubbed the medallion with his thumb. “Are all the artifacts in this time?”

“No,” Jenna said. “They are scattered throughout Earth history.”

“And how did you know I would honor this responsibility, or even believe it for that matter?”

“Because you are a man of faith. Your legacy survived the generations. Keltin – Kelly – is one of the remaining twelve peoples on Earth three hundred years from now.”

Jack hung his head, not really prepared to hear the answer, but needing to ask the question. “And who are you to me? Exactly?”

"I am your descendent. But in this time, that remains to be seen."

Jack's head shot up so fast, his neck muscles screamed in protest. "What does that mean?"

"As I said, it took a great deal of energy to send the messengers throughout time with the artifacts. Those who were chosen said good-bye to family and friends. We cannot go back. We were called. And there is no greater service."

"You gave up everything?"

Jenna nodded. "I had faith that you would receive and care for me."

"Your faith puts mine to shame."

Jenna squeezed his hand. "You are not required to guard the medallion; it must be a choice of your heart and will. But before you say yes, if you do, you must know what is required."

"But you talk like you know I *already* said yes."

"You did. But you must still choose it now."

Jack frowned at her and rubbed the back of his neck with his free hand. His only hope at this point was that she wouldn't say he needed to guard her too; that was asking too much of a mortal man.

"Should the Enemy discover what the Elders did, he will alert his followers and attempt to retrieve the artifacts," Jenna said.

"He can do that?"

"Yes. It would be a simple matter, really. He has followers throughout time."

"When you say 'followers' you mean —"

"Demons."

“And I would know them, how?”

“With my help.”

Jack chuckled darkly. “I was afraid you’d say that.”

Jenna cocked an eyebrow. “Does something about me displease you so much?”

Jack shook his head. “No, not at all. Quite the opposite, actually.”

Jenna gave him a knowing smile, which Jack was already beginning to find irritating. She seemed able to read his thoughts.

Jack rose from the swing and held out his hand to Jenna. She took it, and he pulled her to her feet. Again, her touch seemed to calm more than fluster him. Perhaps there was hope that he could learn to control his thought life in her presence. *Yeah, right, Jack. I’m certain that’s what King David said when he met Bathsheba.*

“You can’t stay with me,” Jack heard himself say.

Jenna nodded. “But I will need your help to assimilate to this time period.”

“I can arrange campus housing for you.”

“Will your decision require time?” she said.

Jack shook his head. “No.” He tried to convince himself the decision was noble, rather than rooted in his desire to keep this beautiful creature in his life a little longer.

Jenna smiled. “We will need to begin our study of the Enemy’s followers, to prepare for their possible pursuit.”

“Did the Elders really believe it was safer to send the artifacts back in time? Rather than keep them in the future?” Jack said.

“The Enemy will have a much harder time searching for them over thousands of years of human history, if he even discovers where they’re hidden. Only the Elders and

the messengers who were sent knew the mission. The Enemy is not omniscient. It was very wise of the Elders.”

Not really, Jack thought. They sent you to me, and that wasn't too brilliant.

Jack left Jenna standing on the porch while he went to retrieve his cell phone and make her housing arrangements. His lack of manners nagged at him a little, but his sense of propriety won out.

When he returned to the porch, he found Jenna standing by the railing, gazing at the twinkling lights of Jack's peaceful neighborhood.

When he came up behind her, Jenna turned suddenly and bumped against his chest. She brushed her lips across his and stood on her tiptoes to whisper in his ear.

He barely heard her words over the pounding of his very healthy heart.

“Did you ever stop to think, dear Jack, that those dreams you had about me were prophetic, rather than carnal? Perhaps we're related in the future because we'll be related in the past.”

Jenna turned and skipped lightly down the steps.

Jack waited to follow until he regained control of his leg muscles.