

London, England
Fall 1870

Chapter 1

Grace opened her eyes with a strangled gasp, staring blankly into the murky darkness surrounding her. Fear gripped her entire body and she lay motionless for some minutes before realization dawned. Sweaty and shaking, she sat up in bed, wiping the tears that had spilled down her cheeks as her wild heart rate slowly returned to a more normal pace. With a trembling hand she lit the lamp on her bedside table, allowing the warm glow to comfort her, and sighed heavily.

The dreams. Another of those haunting dreams had awakened her.

Now that her bedroom was lit, she instinctively glanced at the small ormolu clock resting on the fireplace mantel, not that she needed to look. She knew exactly what time it was. As expected, the elegant hands indicated a quarter past five o'clock in the morning. She always awakened from these strange dreams close to dawn.

Knowing she would not fall back to sleep now, she rose from her four-poster bed and padded across the room to the large window. Lately she had been compelled to look out her window after one of those dreams, but she did not know why. Except she felt the answers to her questions lay somewhere beyond these walls. She pulled back the pretty rose toile curtains that reached to the polished, wood floor.

The backyard of her London townhouse was shrouded in dark shadows, but she knew the grass was immaculately trimmed and the rose bushes and flower garden carefully tended. Her eyes scanned the lawn and moved upward above the trees. The last of the night stars were fading as soft fingers of light caressed the early morning sky. The

Immortal Dreams by Kaitlin O'Riley from *Yours for Eternity*

world always seemed desolate and lonely to her at this hour, when the city was not yet awake and all was hushed and still. A sense of expectancy clung to her as she searched through the dimness, looking for a sign of movement. A sign of anything. She held her breath in anticipation. The eerie pre-dawn light still held shadows but she could distinguish nothing out of the ordinary.

“Where is he?” she whispered impatiently to herself.

The question startled her, not only because she had said it aloud but also because of what it meant. She shook herself at her odd query for she did not know who she was looking for, but she could not get over the feeling that she was waiting for *someone*. A man. A certain man. The same man who haunted her strange recurring dreams. *Who was he?* She was quite positive she did not know anyone remotely like him. In her dreams she loved him. Even when she was married she had not loved Henry with the same passion she loved the stranger in her dreams. This love was magical, intense, and wildly passionate.

Afterwards the dreams always left her in a melancholy mood, and this one in particular had been more vivid and detailed than usual, and filled her with a sense of anguish and sorrow.

She had had the dreams for as long as she could remember all her life, although they had occurred with more frequency in the last year. While they always left her with an overwhelming sense of loss and sadness, she could not deny the indescribable joy and deep love she experienced within the dreams. Nor the aching loneliness she felt when she awoke and faced her real life.

Grace shivered and dropped the rose toile curtain back into place. Moving back to her bed, she gathered her soft robe around her and donned her slippers. It was too early to ring for a servant, but she desperately wanted the warmth of the fireplace, for the first days of autumn chilled the air.

Grace walked to her elegant writing desk, unlocked a small drawer, and retrieved a familiar book, indulging in the memory of her dream for just a few more moments. She curled up on the overstuffed rose chintz armchair with her journal. Flipping through the pages she noted that her last entry was dated less than a week earlier. The dreams were becoming more frequent, more intense. It was after Henry died when she first began recording in a journal the recollections of the strange dreams that had haunted her life. Never had she spoken to a soul about these dreams, not even her husband.

For these dreams were special and quite unlike ordinary dreams. She had often tried to find words to describe them and could only come up with "life like." These dreams were not flights of fancy, nor the vague processing of the daily events. These dreams did not fade as the day wore on. They did not become wisps of memory or flashing impressions of feelings as her other, more ordinary dreams did.

These dreams of him were lasting and vivid, as real as if the events happened while she was awake and living them in reality. In truth it was as if she were visiting another person's life during another era, yet somehow they were about her.

She had begun transcribing her dreams to keep track of them and over the years she had discovered that she lived another life when she slept. She could not shake the suspicion that it had been *her* life, if such a thing were possible. For the details were too intimate, too private, and too intense to belong to anyone but her.

Last night's dream in particular.

She had been naked with *him* in this dream last night again. Her cheeks growing warm, Grace closed her eyes, remembering the deliciously sensuous and passionate nature of the dream.

In the dreams she called him Phillip. He was tall with black, wavy hair, very fair skin, and deep dark brown eyes. His face was beautifully sculpted, his handsomeness almost startling in its perfection. He possessed a seductive voice, smooth and cultured. And he loved her. Or at least he loved the woman she was in the dream. He called her by a strange name. *Gráinne*. His love for her was evident in every word he whispered to her, in the way he caressed her cheek, in the way he gazed adoringly at her. In the way he kissed her lips. Oh, the way he kissed her! The emotion and intensity between them was over-powering, all consuming.

Never in her own life had Grace experienced anything like it.

Henry had kissed her, of course. Yet Henry's kisses never left her feeling the way she felt after Phillip kissed her.

A sharp rap on the bedroom door startled her, causing her to drop her journal on the floor. Before Grace could rise from her chair, the door opened and Mary Sutton stormed in.

"What in God's name are you doing up at this hour?" her sharp voice snapped.

"I... I couldn't sleep," Grace began to explain to her mother-in-law, her heart beat increasing. With a furtive glance at her dream journal lying on the floor, she frantically wished she had had a chance to tuck her journal behind her before Mary entered.

With eyes like a hawk, Mary spied the journal and snatched it up. "What is this?"

Grace's cheeks flushed red and a sense of panic welled within her. She was always very careful to keep the journal well hidden. She would surely die of mortification if Mary read her journal now, knowing she would never be able to explain to Mary's satisfaction any of what was written within its pages. A tall, wide-girthed woman with steel gray hair and permanent frown lines around her thin lips, Mary Sutton carried herself as a queen and expected others to treat her as such.

"It's nothing important. Just some thoughts." Grace held out her hand. "Sometimes it helps me to sleep if I write down the thoughts in my head first."

"Your thoughts!" Mary ignored Grace's obvious request for the return of the book. With a disapproving frown, she thumbed through the handwritten pages. "Of course you can't sleep. How could anybody sleep when they are up composing such drivel instead of in bed where they are supposed to be? Dream journal indeed!" She scoffed and flung the book back at Grace, who fumbled to catch it.