

A LOVE
BEYOND TIME

Dante Craddock

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Linda G Hatton
<http://www.lindaghatton.com>
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DEDICATION

For my father, the wood butcher.
May I be half as good a word butcher as he was
with wood.

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To the innumerable friends that helped make this
book a reality.
Thank you.

PROLOGUE

She floats above the seabed, the white sand glittering in the sun. The rays filtering through the crystal-clear water shine down upon her, her ankles locked around one of the many cross members of a metal grid secured to the seabed at the edge of the site. She steadies herself against the tug of the slight current, her thoughts focused on the half-buried black lump lying before her. What secret do you hold? What can you tell us of your past?

The dive light hanging from the side of her mask illuminates the jagged surface she is using the point of her trowel to shift the sand away from, uncovering it little by little. Out of the corner of her eye, she catches a glint off something just beneath the surface of the sand, as if the sun's rays are reflecting off some concealed object. Why have I not seen this before?

Dispelling the thought, she depresses the button on the side of her regulator. "Hey Davy, do you see that?"

"See what, Laurelie?"

She reaches out with her gloved hand, pointing at the flicker emanating from beneath the sand. Abruptly

the sparkling light vanishes. “Sorry girl, I don’t see anything.”

“I lost it too,” she says. “I don’t understand. It was there just a moment ago.”

“What did you see?”

“A light. I think something is buried there. I only saw it for a second so I can’t be sure.”

Davy stares at her from across the square, his light glaring in her eyes. “Maybe it’s time for you to take a break,” he suggests.

“I’m fine. We still have twenty minutes left on this dive. I want to get this,” she says, her free hand indicating the large concretion, “before we go up.”

“Ok. You’re the boss.”

He turns away from her, returning to his work, the glimmer catching her eye again. “Don’t move. I see it again. It’s reflecting off your dive light.”

“No wonder I couldn’t see it,” says Davy, now seeing the sparkle in the sand.

She kicks lightly off the grid, moving hand over hand along the spar, reaching a spot near the source, and hooking her feet into another section of the grid. She begins to shift the sand aside with her trowel and hand brush.

Another voice speaks through the earpiece in her mask. “What’ve you got, Laurelie?”

“Don’t know yet, Alvin, but I’ll find out here in a minute.”

“Go slow. We don’t want to disturb too much before we document it.”

“You know me, meticulous as always.” The brush shifts aside the final bits of sand, revealing a finely-worked chain. “This ain’t right,” she says, finally verbalizing the thought she had since first catching sight of it.

Davy says, "What's wrong?"

"It's some kind of finely-worked silver chain, but shows no sign of corrosion. I've never seen anything like it. It should show some kind of deterioration if it's part of this wreck."

Alvin says, "You think it might be some kind of contamination of the site?"

"It very well could be. The sand shifts a lot around here during the storm season. How else did this wreck remain hidden for so long?"

"Uncover the rest of it and document as usual. We'll determine its providence once we get it up here."

"Will do," she says. Little by little she uncovers the chain, making a startling discovery. "It's some kind of necklace. There's an oval medallion at its end. Cameron, I need your services over here."

A gruff voice grates in her ears, saying, "I'll be there in a moment, I just have to finish over here. Tina's got me photographing some more timbers they uncovered."

His ever-constant boredom and disgust rings through her ears, making her wonder yet again, why he ever chose to study archeology in the first place. "That's fine. I need to document this find anyway."

She pushes off of one of the cross members, settling herself a few feet above it, her legs still interlocked on the frame anchoring her in place, much like a sea horse with its tail wrapped around metal seaweed. She unhooks her dive board from the belt at her waist, pulls out her grease pen, jots down notations on the necklace, and assigns it the next catalog number 001256. She removes the tag from the ring hanging on the clipboard and places it next to the

necklace, making sure the string is not lying atop the necklace.

“Well, if you want this photographed then you’d better get out of the way.”

“Sorry, Cameron, I didn’t notice you.” She shifts her feet, rotating around, and coming face-to-face with the lens of a camera floating less than a foot away, causing her dive light to reflect back at her, blinding her momentarily.

“That’s no surprise, nobody notices me unless they need me. What do you want photographed? Not another lump of concretion. Don’t we have enough of those already?”

“No, but that’s not why I called you over here and you should know by now that the more evidence we find the better our results are.”

“I know I know. You don’t have to be so touchy about it.” She knows there’s a grimace on his face even though it’s hidden behind the respirator unit of his mask. “So, what do you want me to take pics of?”

“That would be this,” she says, shifting sideways on the bar, revealing the necklace lying half-buried in the sand.

“Ok. This is new,” says Cameron. Laurelie is amazed to hear true surprise and intrigue finally break through his usual bored malaise.

“That’s what I thought. Let me get out of your way so you can get to work.” She kicks off the grid, somersaulting through the water, and landing lightly on the far side of the grid, giving him the best light available.

Cameron swims down to the grid and hooks himself into it, letting the camera float a foot above the frame while he places a scale card next to the necklace, and then grabs a hold of the handles

sticking out of the sides of the camera to position it. After snapping a shot, he says, "I've never seen anything like this before. The camera is picking up some kind of halo around it."

Davy says, "Could it be a reflection off the surface—or from your flash?"

"I don't think so. I adjusted the flash to keep that to a minimum. The halo's present in all of the pics I've taken of it."

Laurelie says, "Maybe you should take one without the flash just in case."

His head snaps up from the camera. "Hey, I'm the photographer here!"

She jumps from his sudden outburst, nearly losing her grip on the bar.

"And besides I already did; same result."

"Ok, ok, calm down, Cameron, we'll just have to settle for what you've got. Davy, get me a box and we'll retrieve this thing."

"Right away, boss."

"And stop calling me boss." She watches him as he slides his feet into the swim fins quickly donning them like they are a second skin, showing her once again how adept a diver he is. Too bad I'll never have his diving skills.

He says, "No can do. You're the boss this dive." He swims away with a trail of bubbles in his wake, leaving her shaking her head.

She returns her attention to the necklace, finding Cameron—who has left his camera floating above him and his mask mere inches above it—staring at the necklace. She says, "Thanks, Cameron, I can get the rest from here."

"I didn't touch it. I was just looking," he protests, his voice exuding innocence.

“I know Cameron,” she says, attempting to remain calm—a task she finds harder and harder with each passing day she works with him. “I’ve got work to finish.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know when I’m not wanted.” He grabs his camera and swims off, nearly hitting her with his fins. She ducks, causing her feet to slip off the bar and her left hand to flail out. She grabs a hold of another cross member, barely stopping her right arm from slamming into the jagged surface of the concretion.

She pauses, catching her breath. Damn him! He’s so going to hear about this when I get to the surface. Floating over to the necklace, she picks up the tag next to it, slips a string beneath the chain, and securely ties the string onto the chain. With caution, she gingerly places her hands into the sand beneath the necklace and eases it out of the sand. With the necklace now cradled in her hand, she sees that there’s a clasp and hinge. “It’s not a medallion! It’s a locket! This thing’s extraordinary! There’s a finely carved image on the front and I can see stamps on the back.”

“That’s interesting and all, Laurelie, but you need to get it packed away for transport. We’ll examine it later.”

“I know, Alvin. I’m just waiting on Davy to get back.”

“I’m right here. You were too busy looking at that thing to notice. Here’s that box you wanted,” he says with a chuckle, holding out a small plastic container with a protective padding inside.

“Sorry Davy, this thing is just so unusual. I am enthralled with it.” With Davy still holding the container, she places the locket onto the protective

padding, and gently closes the lid. Taking out her pen, she writes the catalog number and grid square onto the label affixed to the top of the container. “I’m done. You can take it to the lift.”

“Will do, boss,” he says with a chuckle. “I know, I know. Stop calling you boss.” Turning away, he swims off toward the waiting lift.

She somersaults through the water back over to her original position to continue removing the sand from around the concretion. A few minutes go by and then she hears Davy in her earpiece calling for the lift to be raised to the surface.

The lift—its contents safely secured under mesh netting—crests the surface as it’s hoisted out of the water. The crane swings it over the deck of the barge and handlers in protective gear gingerly guide it down onto the deck.

CHAPTER ONE

The wooden deck lurches beneath his feet, the planks creaking and popping, the boards of the deck twisting with each sway and buck of the ship as it rides the crests and troughs of each successive wave. The ferocity of the hammer blows to the hull around him increases with each ensuing wave. Leaned up against a weathered beam, he struggles to stay standing in the cramped cubbyhole, the coarse wood digging into his hands, a square iron lantern, his only source of light. With the hatches to the decks above secured against the growing storm, the crisscrossing bars holding the heavy opaque glass in place, its iron ring hanging from a hook embedded into one of the ship's heavy timbers, feebly shines in the darkness. The lantern swings to and fro with each successive wave, casting its light out into the gloom of the darkened hold, revealing his surroundings, to be glimpsed ever so briefly. Swinging forward it shines down the narrow crate-lined aisle leading to the ladder for the deck above, its rungs hidden in the pitch black beyond the light's reach. The variously sized and shaped wooden crates are stacked to the deckhead and flow off into the impenetrable gloom.

The lusterless rays bends back to the right exposing the ship's hull, it glimpsed ever so briefly through the gaps in the high-piled canvas bags, each one stuffed to the bursting point under their rope netting. The wooden planks seem to shudder with the colliding of each wave. The frail luminescence arcs forward to the left, unmasking from the shadows looming stacks of barrels, the heavy ropes wrapped around them securing them to the deck, the load shifting within their embrace with each heave and roll of the deck. The emaciated glow hooks back around into the little nook illuminating him ever so briefly before continuing its never-ending journey.

The light exposes his harrowed state to his own grim set eyes, clothes tattered and torn, his once white shirt now dingy and gray. His wrists and ankles ache, the irons clapped around them weighing heavily on him, the chains rolling and clanking along the deck with the hammering blow of each wave. The stagnant air hangs around him like a tomb, fouled by the mixtures of smells surrounding him. Salt water and brine seep through every crack in the ship's wood. Layered amongst that is the scent of rotting wood and the mustiness of decaying mold. All of those odors combine with the stench of a lidded bucket, his only means of relieving himself, its contents barely held at bay, having not been emptied for two days. The reek forcing him to look away as the foul material sloshing around the edges of the lid.

These are his quarters—if you could even call them that—where they had brought him after dragging him aboard the ship. He seems to be more of an afterthought, as if he were just another piece of cargo to be ignored until it was time to be unloaded. This is his prison without iron bars, instead he's

forced by chains to grasp a rough wooden timber of the ship's frame, but the true torture lies in knowing there's no escape. Stuck in the middle of the ocean, no knowledge of where they're taking him or what will happen to him once they get there makes the thought of escaping pointless.

For a time they had brought him food—scraps really—but they stopped some time ago. He's almost thankful for that now, the ship's bucking and swaying having taken away his appetite, the thought of food making his empty stomach lurch.

The beam shudders in his grasp, as if it's being beaten into the very bones of the ship by a hammer. The shudders ride up his body, hammering his knees with sharp pains of fatigue, his legs sore from hours of standing since the deck, awash beneath his bare feet, prevents him from sitting. The water, alternately trickling and showering down from above, pools around his toes, his bare toes growing cold with its creeping rise. He hears it in the brief moments of silence—drip, drip, dripping—in between the hammering fall of the waves and the groaning of the timbers around him. Leaning against the beam, he tries to rest his tired and sore legs, but another wave crashes down, throwing him onto the water-soaked deck. His body barely misses the wall of crates on the other side of the beam as cool, clammy water washes over, drenching him. He gets up, shivering a bit as the air cools for the first time in days. He uses the massive pillar to pull himself back upright, taking it firmly in his grasp, steadying himself, ready for the next blow.

The weight around his neck shifts. Glancing down, he sees the locket has slipped from its hiding place beneath his shirt, dangling in midair. The locket—the

last gift he received from his love—shines in the light of the lantern, the grooves carved into its face glinting in the pale illumination. He frees his hand and clasps the locket tightly, his movements awkward and belabored by the iron chains dangling from his wrists. He utters a silent prayer to his love, swearing with his heart and soul. *No matter how long it takes, I will find a way back to you, my love.*

His mind takes him back to the last time that he saw her, all those days ago, seeming like a lifetime, but having been no more than a week, his time cramped in the cubbyhole making the passing of days and nights hard to follow. Only when the hatch was open above did he see the difference.

She had stood on the docks, struggling against the grip of the soldiers, her hands reaching out to hold him as he was dragged away to this pit of suffering. She called out to him, proclaiming her love, but they were never allowed to do the one thing that they most desired—hold each other one last time. The anguish upon her oval face vividly etched into his mind, the gentle curves hardening with each plea, the terror and heartfelt beseeching contained within those amber eyes, the last thing he ever saw of her. Just thinking of it makes him weep, the tears rolling down his face, dripping onto the front of the locket in his grasp. If only the soldiers had listened, he'd have had that one last moment with her, but they didn't listen at all; her father had made certain of that. Her father had to have been the one that ordered the arrest and imprisonment aboard this ship. He was the only one who had that kind of authority. Even as his heart aches at the loss of her, a slowly kindling anger seethes just beneath the surface of his skin, threatening to burst forth onto

the world, but with her father so far out of reach, it is forced to just smolder.

A loud clang suddenly erupts far off in the shadows and gloom of his surroundings. He quickly hides the locket away, beneath his shirt, making sure his captors won't find it. They would surely take it away from him and he could never let that happen. It's the only thing he has left of his love; he must always keep it close to his heart or he will surely have lost everything that he had before this dreadful nightmare began. He was surprised by its presence when he awoke in the cell. They had merely deposited his unconscious body and left, his surprise further compounded when they didn't search him before chaining him in the bowels of the ship.

He peers out into the gloom, attempting to see if anyone is there, but sees only the impenetrable darkness beyond the pale lantern's continuously wild glow. The latest wave must have knocked something loose somewhere off in the shadows.

He examines his surroundings once again—the only thing he has to occupy his mind—revealing that the water on the deck has risen to just below his ankles. At this slow but steady pace, the crew of the ship shouldn't have to worry about the rising water, or at least he hopes not. The crashing of the waves around him has redoubled, the storm raging outside worsening. There's nothing he can do but wait for it to die away and the journey to continue taking him farther away from his love.

Suddenly a sound—so loud it's heart-stopping, grating and tearing, a cacophony so terrible that he believes the world must be ending—echoes through the ship. The reverberation slowly fades, but is rapidly replaced by a roaring the likes of which he has

never heard before in his life. A wall of water hurtles out of the darkness, rushing toward him and throwing him against the beam, nearly dashing his head upon it. The waves are now crashing all around him, amongst the crates, barrels, and canvas bags, straining the ropes and nets to the breaking point. A stack snaps free of its ropes and tumbles down, barely missing him. *The ship must have hit something*, he observes as the water rapidly rises around him. It's as if he's an outsider looking in and not the one these terrifying things are happening to. He tries to climb up higher onto the top of the fallen crates. The shackles attached to his arms and ankles, pinned beneath the pile of crates, yank him to a stop. He reaches down into the water, tugging on the chains in an attempt to free them, but they refuse to budge. The waves crash into his chest, hammering him to and fro, as if he himself was a ship straining on its anchor in a foul storm.

He yells out, his voice drowning in the commotion surrounding him—a cacophony of raging waves, the creaking and popping of the hull as it gives way to the force of the ocean—nearly getting a lung full of water for his efforts.

He desperately pulls on the chains, stubbornly refusing to move, as the water creeps up his chest. He looks around for anything to help him and spots a lever dangling precariously from the edge of a crate, mere feet away. Its presence calls out his salvation. A wave must've knocked it from its hiding place. His freedom may be only an arm's reach away. Stretching his body out with all his might and groping his fingers in the air, he moves his hand ever closer, only to be pulled away by the chain gripping his wrist at mere inches from his salvation. He reaches down into

the water, grasping the chains in both hands, posing himself on the fallen crates and the beam to leverage all his remaining strength into a single mighty pull. He frees the chains, the iron links grudgingly grind across the deck, only to be lodged again. No matter how forcefully he pulls, the chains stubbornly refuse to budge any farther. Hoping beyond hope that he has freed just enough of the chains, he reaches once more for the lever, stretching out with his full body and managing to touch the lever with the very tips of his fingers. The roaring deluge of yet another wave snatches it away from his grasp, his heart sinking, and his hopes dashed.

The bowels of the ship unleash a tremendous groan, followed by a muffled popping sound, the roaring ocean nearly drowning it out as the timbers beneath his feet transmit it to him despite the muffling. The deck suddenly lurches beneath his feet, no longer rising and falling with the motions of the sea. Dread fills him.

He throws himself back into the task of freeing the chains. He tries again in the vain hope of freeing himself from his prison that may soon become his watery tomb. The deck shudders, his floor abruptly becoming a wall as the ship begins to roll over, only to be slapped back upright by the following wave. The waves hammer the battered ship yet again. An ear-splitting crack—shaking the very marrow in his bones—hurtles through the hull. A mountainous wave rides its heels, darkness overtaking his world as the lantern's light is extinguished. Finding what little strength he has left, he struggles to the surface, only his head cresting the water's surface. The chains are still stuck, threatening to pull him back under with the rest of the ship. He gasps for breath, his hand

grasping the locket and holding it with all his might as he struggles to keep his head above water. He tries to speak, but his voice is carried away by the crashing of the seas as the chains drag him under.



Ashley bolts up from the bed, cold sweat drenching her body as she gasps for breath, her heart threatening to leap from her chest as reality sets in and she realizes that she isn't drowning. She flops back down on the bed, muttering, "Dammit! I hate that dream. Why do I keep having it night after night?"

Ashley Brannock is in the prime of her life, or she would be if she could get a single night of sleep without that dream. She used to relish her trips to the gym, but now she barely has the energy to make it through the day. Her once taunt and toned body grows flabbier with every passing day, her normal vitality drained by the absence of fulfilling sleep. The dream—more accurately described as a nightmare—invades her sleep every night, as it has for nearly six months. The number of times she's had to relive the dream is beyond her own recollection and it's always the same. The nightmare's meaning is beyond her grasp—surely existing for why else would it keep repeating night after night—it threatening to take her sanity, as she wakes once again with unanswerable questions.

The formerly soft inviting bed is now rock hard beneath her, ramming into her rigid back. She orders her muscles to relax, slowly feeling the bed soften beneath her, her ramrod-tight body reluctantly releasing its iron grip. Blinking the shock from her bleary eyes, she slowly sits up in bed and looks

around the darkened room, the only light coming from her nightstand, a dull green glow illuminating from her alarm clock's digital display. The simple act of seeing the familiar shadows of her bookcase, its shelves stuffed to the brim with all manner of books, knickknack-laden shelves, her wardrobe and walls covered in picture frames the contents of which are hidden in the gloom, succeeds in bringing the concreteness of reality to her rapidly beating heart. She tries to slow her breathing, furthering the process of calming her nerves; glad she can turn her attention away from the thoughts rambling around inside her head.

Reluctantly she crawls out of bed, touching her feet to the solid, unmoving floor—another sign that she's no longer on the deck of a pitching ship at sea. Testing her footing, she takes a few short steps, relishing in the feel of the soft low-shag carpet brushing her soles. Feeling confident that she won't fall flat on her face, she plods her way toward her door. She steps onto the walkway above the living room, the full moon's light blinding as it shines through the floor-to-ceiling windows covering the far wall. Turning away from the bright moonlight, she forces her feet to tread the rest of the way to the bathroom. After flipping the lights on, she squints at the painful flood of yellow light burning her tired eyes. After adjusting to the foreign light, Ashley turns on the faucet and splashes cool water over her face. With eyes closed, she feels around for the towel and dabs away the running rivulets of water. Glancing into the mirror, she's met with a face she knows is her own, but resembles that of a stranger, her shoulder-length auburn hair matted to her head, her once-vibrant violet eyes now sunken, dulled to an almost

gray with puffy bags hanging below them. Her skin hangs loosely in places, the color resembling a dulled sallowish white, lacking the vitality that's usually present. *Will I ever look healthy again? Will my face ever hold the vitality I remember? Will I ever get a good night's sleep?*

"Ashley, you look like hell," she mutters. Hanging the towel back up, she turns around and heads back the way she came. She shuffles past her bed and into the small room that was once a walk-in closet but is now her very small, cramped studio. Turning on the lights, she takes a moment to look around the small room that she's turned into her workspace. She used to spend her days in here, but now she spends most her nights as well. While most people are sleeping, she's tortured with the dream that wires her mind, racing around and around as if it's in the race of its life. This is where she comes when sleep evades her, where she attempts to find answers to her questions.

The studio is a fairly cramped space, especially with all of the equipment for her job at Maccabe Design—the interior design company she works for. She'd been lucky to get the job right out of college, three years ago. If she is able to persevere through her current project, she'll earn a nice promotion, but that's a big if. The dream is slowly dragging her under, sucking the very life from the marrow of her bones.

She glances around the room, allowing this one bastion of peace in her otherwise chaotic life flow over her and through her. Her drafting table, its massive size devouring whole sections of the room, sits against the back wall, the various cubbyholes beneath it filled with instruments for drawing. In the corner, just inside of the door, is a small desk with a

docking station for her work laptop. Beside it sits a graphics pen tablet and resting on a shelf above is a thirty-inch wide screen LCD monitor. Her laptop is leaning against the wall next to her bedroom door, packed away in its bag in preparation for the coming day. In front of the drafting table sits her office chair, the minimal space forcing her to have only one chair, the low-backed chair sitting in front of the drafting table, an expense necessitated by the need of a chair for both the computer desk and the drafting table, forcing her to shell out the extra money for the extended height adjustment model. At the time she thought it was an extravagant expense, but now on these long nights it's proven to be a good investment. In the other corner stands her wellspring of knowledge—her little black bookcase, its shelves filled with her interior design books and magazines. Perched atop it is a stacker filled with paper of various sizes. Next to it stands a row of sketch pads, its pages she's filled with many drawings over the years. Among them is the one she uses to document her dream, pages filled with images that defy understanding.

A searing pain erupts in her upper right arm, the muscles spasming uncontrollably, white-hot pokers shooting up her arm with each contraction, the pain yet another symptom of her slowly deteriorating body. Bolting out of bed every night, coupled with the lack of exercise causes these pains to become far more frequent. She stretches out her upper body, working the kink out of her arm, along with any other ailments that might crop up while she is drawing.

She grabs the sketch pad from the stacker and sits down in the chair, flipping through the many sketches she has completed on previous sleepless nights. One

of them catches her eye. It's of a woman walking off into the rain-filled night, her cloak not limited to protecting her from the rain, it enshrouding her in mystery. She has no knowledge of who this woman is, what her name is, or what her life beyond their brief encounters is like.

The man is another enigma all together. What she does know is that by the woman simply being this man's lover—at least she thinks he's a man since she's never seen his face—it causes him to be in some kind of serious trouble. In the dream, Ashley seems to be inside of him, yet she knows even less about him. *Inside of him is not quite right though because that would mean there's a separation between us, which there isn't. I don't remember myself at all in the dreams. I am him. There is no me, but why is that? Dammit! I don't know.* Answering her own question with a shocking expletive, these internal arguments are growing far more frequent, frightening her, and causing her to question her sanity.

She decides to set aside the questions, returning her focus on the woman. Flipping through the remaining pages, she realizes she's never done a clear drawing of this woman. She pulls out a sharp pencil from one of the cubbyholes and begins sketching her, starting with the woman's face.

As she draws, her mind wanders, her hands performing the task all on their own. At first she had been vaguely aware of when this happened, but now it happens so often that it's become routine. Parts of her mind shut down for the briefest of moments, catching rest in the only way they can. A memory of a conversation with her therapist flits to the surface. She had said, "It might help you if you put the images you see in your mind down on paper."

Fat chance it'll help. It certainly hasn't helped so far. I've sketched out countless images from this dream, but I'm no closer to figuring out what it means than I was before I started. A lot of good that eighty dollars an hour has done me, not only does the dream keep me from sleeping at night, but I spend the rest of the night doing this.

Her hand slides over the page, adding small lines to the growing image. Each line is laid down as a separate piece, adding layer upon layer until they combine into what her mind's eye sees.

It's not like I would've gotten back to sleep anyway. Nearly drowning, even if it's only inside my head, leaves me so wired. I'd probably be lying in bed right now, running the dream over and over in my head trying to make sense of it. All I've ever wanted was a good night's sleep and that woman's suggestion isn't doing me any good. I think she's more interested in lining her pockets than actually solving my problem.

She pauses in her sketching, her mind abruptly snapping back into focus. She looks down at the woman on the page, really seeing it for the first time. The woman has an almost angelic beauty about her with a gentle curving of her oval face, a long slender nose set between gray beckoning eyes, and thin ever-so-precious lips. She has perfect shoulder-length hair with just the right curl to it. *No wonder this guy is in love with her, if I was a guy I'd probably be in love with her too.*

The woman has an ample bosom, made ever more pronounced by the constriction of her dress shoving her chest up. Her mind conjures up colors, but the monotone pencil drawing is unable to create them. The dress itself is an old style, like the ones she's

seen in movies set in the colonial era. She visualizes its low-cut square chest and shoulder-line rimmed in ruffled crème-colored lace. The elbow-length sleeves end in ruffled layers of linen and crème-colored lace. The dress is a pale blue with a crème-colored floral pattern that traces its way down its length, narrowing down to an extremely small waist then billowing out to twice the woman's width.

She adds the final touches to the drawing before flipping back to the first page where she'd sketched the locket. In the dream the man has the locket around his neck. It's a picture she usually takes another look at before finishing with her drawings. When she first began sketching what she saw in her dreams, she believed the locket was important, and thus, it was the first thing she'd drawn. The locket is oval-shaped and she believes it's made of silver by the way it glistens in the light. A family crest is carved into its front, the crest surrounded by a flowing collection of branches and leaves, an ornate oval-shaped shield at its center, a lion and a bear supporting it. Above the shield is an ornate-looking knight's helm, a wreath with a small crown on top of it, and a falcon spreading its wings standing in its center. The shield itself is divided into two halves by a band shaped like castle ramparts. Within the top half of the shield is a stone, double-arched bridge, the bottom half containing a standing falcon with its wings spread. The center band has a pair of axes, centered around what appears to be a flower, but is partially obscured by an even smaller shield, half of a gryphon on the left side, and half of an eagle on the other.

The family crest is another endless mystery, all of her searches having turned up with nothing. She knows that she must have seen it somewhere. How

else could it be in her dream? The crest must belong to the woman's family, because she gave it to him. *He clutches it with his dying breath. Is their love so great that even in death all he thought of was her? To have such a love would be amazing. He's a lucky man, or at least he was until it was all taken away from him. It's so sad. Agh.* "I must be going crazy. I'm empathizing with strange men in my dreams!"

A mezzo-soprano emanates from behind her, "We always knew you were crazy, but we love ya', anyway."

Ashley turns around, shocked by the sudden interruption, saying, "Veronica, you really do know how to scare a girl."

Standing in the doorway is Veronica, one of her best friends and her roommate. She is dressed in a navy blue skirt, jacket, and matching vest. The skin-tight skirt clings to every curve. Her neck is adorned with a purple and yellow scarf that's tucked under the collar of her white blouse, its top three buttons left open to show a touch of cleavage. The look says, 'super sexy, yet professional with a flair of Veronica.' Her raven hair flows over her shoulders to frame her deeply-tanned face perfectly. Added to her perfection are a button nose, vivacious prominent honey-brown eyes, and luscious full lips. Couple all of this with her talent for producing makeup that's subtle yet gives her a sexy pout look, most women didn't stand a chance in hell of measuring up to her. She is an "EVA," something that had started back in college when their dorm monitor started calling them the "EVAs," a combination of their unique friendship and the first letter of their names.

"You do know that's part of my job description right? But enough of that . . . shouldn't you be in bed,

girl? I believe we were told,” Veronica says, referring to her and Elena, “earlier that you had a big presentation in the morning.”

“I know, I know, but my therapist wants me to draw what’s in my dreams while the images are fresh in my mind.”

Ashley watches as Veronica’s hands instinctively move to her hips, trying to look indignant, but all it does is open up the top of her blouse more, revealing just a little more cleavage. “You’re still going to that old bitty? I thought you said she wasn’t helping you at all?”

“*Yeah*, I know what I said, but what else can I do?”

“You’re right about that. This business of you drawing out your dreams, it’s just plain nuts, especially since you wanted her to help you sleep. She must be loonier than you are.”

“Oh thanks, it’s not like I don’t get enough insults from myself. Now you have to start doing it too?”

“Isn’t that what sisters are for?” Their bond as the EVAs making them feel more like sisters than friends, each of them being the sister they never had.

Veronica gives one of her steely-eyed glares that practically screams, “I’m the boss and you’d better do what I say if you know what’s good for you. I’d better be going I don’t wanna be late for work. As for you, get yourself to bed,” she says to Ashley.

Here she goes again playing mother hen. She may be the oldest one of us, but she’s far from the most mature. “Yes, mother,” Ashley says, sticking her tongue out.

Veronica just laughs, points at her and says, “You. Bed. Now.”

“Okay, okay, I’m going.”

“Good. I’ll see ya tonight.”

“Later, Veronica.” She slides the sketchbook back into the stacker and slowly shuffles back into the bedroom, the dream still rolling through her mind. She gets into bed, knowing she won’t get a wink of sleep, but knowing she still has to try.

TO BE CONTINUED IN

A MEMORY OF LOVE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dante Craddock is a pen name. I have chosen to use a pen name because I plan on eventually writing in multiple genres. Why Dante Craddock you may ask? That name appealed to me. In the name lies a secret. It is for you, the reader, to discover this secret. If you can discover this secret, a prize will be waiting for you. E-mail me with your answer. Under the name Dante Craddock, I write Paranormal Romance (PNR). These stories will center around the magic that is love. A magic that flows between two people in love. For when two people fall in love, they create a magic that is all their own. Magic that has the power to do incredible, unexplainable things. In

the Power of Love Quartet I explore this magic. The first of the Quartet is **A Love Beyond Time**.

I have been writing for over a decade now, but have not finished any of the ideas that I have until recently. Why PNR you may ask? I kind of just fell into that genre. I started working on A Love Beyond Time as a simple love story, but it eventually evolved into its present form as the first book in the Power of Love Quartet. Along the way it became a PNR. Looking back at it I have realized that it was always heading in that direction.

I am an organic writer. I get ideas from the world around me. From everything I read, see, or hear. The ideas seem to pop out of nowhere at times. Others are triggered by some event. An example of this happening would be the idea for my first novel, A Love Beyond Time. Some years ago I saw the music video for the song Whiskey Lullaby by Brad Paisley and Alison Krauss. A question popped into my head. What if they were given a second chance? From that question came the origins of what became A Love Beyond Time.

I am currently working on A Memory of Love, the sequel to A Love Beyond Time.

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