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DEMONIC
OBSESSIONS

DREAMING OF YOU

CRYMSYN HART

Dreaming of You
by Crymsyn R. Hart

Amira Press

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Demonic Obsessions: Dreaming of You

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Cover art by Anastasia Rabiya © October 2008

Amira Press

Baltimore, MD 21216

www.amirapress.com

ISBN: 978-1-935348-04-7

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Reality is only a dream perceived by the beholder.

Dreams are only illusions.

Therefore, reality can be changed.

Chapter One

"If you drink too much, you can kill me too!"

Tucker's gaze flicked from my wrist to my eyes. He knelt before me supping on my blood because he hadn't brought himself to kill yet. The pull on my veins weighed on my heart, causing it to hiccup. He was infatuated with the blood, but Tucker hadn't learned to live with the guilt and burden of ending a life. It was our nature. Staring into the souls of men and seeing their dastardly deeds, we preyed on the guilty and the corrupt. Tucker had to assimilate our ways or die. The others didn't know I supported his habit, our addiction. It would have to stop or they would kill him.

Tucker's azure eyes closed in ecstasy. I knew what he felt. What he heard. Our pulses thumped in time with one another. The air tingled on his skin, caressing it like a wayward lover. The night had a life of its own. It hummed, revealing its haunting melody only to those who had the sense to discern the tune. Tucker's body was taut like a guitar string ready to snap at the. The tug on my body had to stop. I wrenched my wrist away from him. Once his mouth was free of my flesh, my heart returned to its slow, almost nonexistent rhythm. The wound healed itself over. The ache of hunger burned in my veins since Tucker had drained me of the blood I'd already taken. I could wait to feed. The luster of the night had dulled now, but I was satisfied Tucker was alive. He'd originally been a kill, a feed to calm the flaming hunger. I had stared into his soul and saw the guilt buried there. That had

been enough to know he was mine. However, it hadn't gone the way I planned. I bit him. Then he bit my shoulder thinking I enjoyed roughness. I hadn't noticed, because I was lost to the joining of our hearts, until I felt him pulling. By the time I pushed him away, it was too late and he was my responsibility.

The others, my family, my traveling companions, were forced to accept him. They gave Tucker a week. It'd been five days. He had two more nights to make a kill. If he did, he would be one of the brood. If he didn't, they'd stake him out in the sun until his skin split and the blood in his body boiled away. I shook my head. I would not allow that to happen to Tucker.

He'd become a beautiful specimen. The moon highlighted his hair, turning it into burnished gold. His skin was blemish free. He'd been remade to perfection by the hand of God. His eyes were like opals, changing colors in the light. They were distinctive even among my kind. They captured his prey and had me enthralled now. I don't think he knew it yet, but even though I had bitten him, I was falling for him hard.

"Let's enjoy the night, Tabby."

My nickname. Not because of my name, but because my hair was streaked orange and white like a tabby cat. I sighed and watched Tucker. He stood before me, awaiting my decision. Something shifted in his face. Those azure eyes tinged yellow. His smile widened showing me a maw of sharpened teeth. We couldn't shape-shift. It was an old wives' tale, yet Tucker's body began to contort. The snapping and

popping of bones alerted me to his changing. What was happening to him was not possible.

"Anything is possible," Tucker said before he completely shifted.

Not sure what to make of this, I backed away a few steps. Had the feeding caused a mutation? Was there something in our blood? There couldn't be. Fear gripped my heart and made it thump like a battering ram. The blood ran loud in my ears. Tucker, now resembling a large wolf, advanced on me. He was the size of a small pony but had the build of a bull. I didn't understand. What had he become? In my world, there were no such things as werewolves. A wide smile, revealing rows of deadly teeth, played on his lips. I swallowed hard. I was too far away from the brood to call for help. Vampires were the top of the food chain. As far as we knew, they were myths like in Little Red Riding Hood. Now it appeared I was going to be his next meal. If he killed me, the others would still exile him. It would be a catch twenty-two, but then again, he wouldn't be a vampire anymore, either. I didn't know what he was.

"Tucker. Don't do this. If I caused this in you, I'm sorry. So sorry. I never meant for you to be a night creature. I didn't know it until it was too late. I fought for you with the others. I've fed you, please."

The wolf growled low in his throat. I was backed up against the wall of the alley. There was nowhere left for me to go. The hunger pounding in my veins made it impossible for me to call upon the shadows to cloak myself in them for protection. Tucker wasn't old enough to know this skill and I

hadn't taught him yet. Vampires had nothing to fear, yet I was facing off with something beyond a fairy tale. I was standing against the man who I thought I knew and could love.

"Tabby."

Tucker's voice whispered in my head while he slowly padded forward. It was calm, held no hint that he was going to kill me even though his wide toothed grin said otherwise.

"What?" I heard my name being yelled at me this time and it was from someone else. My body shivered with terror. I was a vampire. I wasn't supposed to be afraid.

"Tabby!"

Someone shouted my name right next to my ear. I stared at Tucker and realized it wasn't his voice. Suddenly something cold was thrown on me, and I...

I opened my eyes. I was soaking wet and freezing. Above me holding a pitcher of water was Kasandra, my roommate.

"What the hell was that for?" I yelled. I wiped some of the droplets out of my eyes.

"Sorry, Tabby, but you were screaming in your sleep. You know, having one of your nightmares again." The look on her face was one of annoyance. I looked at her clothes and realized she was already dressed for work.

"Shit. What time is it?" I threw the wet sheets from my body.

Kasandra checked her watch. "It's almost nine. You'll be late if you don't get your ass out of bed. I thought you were done with your nightmares. Have you talked to your professor about them again?"

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I shook my head and pulled a brush through my orange and white hair. It didn't do any good. My hair had a personality of its own. So many people thought I dyed it that way to make it streaked, but somehow, my hair was naturally this color. I had been made fun of a lot growing up, but once I hit high school, I had become one of the most popular girls in the school. Not that it mattered. I was more into studying than caring that I had a pretty face, a body a model would die for, and all the right curves in all the right places. I was smart, so people looked up to me. I dated one guy through my junior and senior year and made it perfectly clear I wasn't about to jump into the backseat of his car because he was the captain of the basketball team. I had been named prom queen and graduated near the top of my class. I studied hard, loved mythology, went to school to study ancient cultures, and was now doing my master's thesis on dreaming, how certain dreams were interpreted by different cultures, and which symbols were the same and which were different. I had been lucky enough to get a great teacher who turned my interest in my paper a little deeper.

"Tabby, did you hear anything I said?"

"Nope. I was thinking about my dream. And no, I haven't talked to Professor Amonde about my nightmares. I really didn't think he wanted to hear it."

Kasandra chewed on her lip and checked her watch again. My roommate was a worrywart and didn't like the fact that I wasn't talking to someone about my dreams. She assumed that my nightmares were some repressed shit about my father molesting me when I was a child and that I was finally

remembering the incidents in my dreams. My roommate was so Freudian. My father had not molested me, but he had walked out on my mother and me when I was only two. I didn't have any memory of him.

"So are you going to class or not? You're going to be late!"

I rolled my eyes. "I heard you the first time, K. If you don't hurry up you'll be late for work." I felt a smile tugging on my lips. She cursed under her breath and walked out of the room. Kasandra hated to be late. She was the kind of person who demanded everyone be on time. If there was a party, she invited everyone two hours early to be sure they would get there on time. Me, on the other hand, I prided myself at always being fifteen minutes fashionably late.

I groaned and threw the wet blanket from the bed. Already I was shivering from the pitcher of water she had thrown on me. Today, I had one class and then I had to study in the library. The first draft of my paper was due in a month, and I still had only written about half of it. Then again, my thesis depended on my research. Professor Amonde had taken an interest in my approach to dreaming. He had steered me away from writing about how different cultures saw dreams to what entities might be walking through those dreams. These vampires, werewolves, daemons and anything else that went bump in the night were actually the archetypes that people had created.

I glanced at the clock. I was going to be late. It didn't matter how fast I took a shower, threw on sweats, and pulled my hair back into a ponytail. I didn't have to work tonight. I was going to pull an all-nighter studying for my test and then

going over some more research. I had gotten into the subject. Professor Amonde had been the first one to get me thinking along a different path. From there, I had taken it deeper, delving more into the unconscious. Was there any credence behind the idea that the unconscious actually held the pathway to a different realm where dreams and reality blended? It was a little bizarre, but I kept it to a minimum in the paper so he wouldn't think I was a crackpot.

Finally, I forced myself out of bed. I padded into the bathroom and stared in the mirror. My hair was still a wild, untamed beast, even if I brushed it a million times. The white and orange strands stuck out at odd angles and tickled the inside of my ear. Dull brown eyes with dark circles under them stared back at me. I might have gotten a whole night's sleep, but my body didn't feel like it. I felt drained. Maybe it was a throwback from my dream. I ran the tap and splashed some cold water over my face to get in gear.

When I opened my eyes again, I glimpsed my right wrist. The same one that Tucker had drunk from in my dream. Horror ran cold through my veins. On my wrist was a perfect impression of teeth. A crescent-shaped wound of human teeth. The same one from my dream. As a vampire in my dream, I didn't have any fangs. I had just had regular teeth. I ran my finger over the imprint. It was tender to the touch, but the indentation could have been an old scar. I began shaking.

This is ridiculous. This is all something that I brought back from my unconscious. It's not real. Okay, this is way too weird. It was a dream. It was only a dream. The light

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flickered above the bathroom sink. I felt a cold breeze on the back of my neck. My eyes darted over to the shade covering the small window. It wasn't moving. The light stuttered again. Something was in the bathroom with me. There was something watching me. *God. I'm losing my mind.*

"Tabitha."

I jumped and spun around. There was no one behind me. I listened hard. There were no footsteps, and the warped floorboards of the apartment were eerily silent of their normal creaking. There wasn't even a whisper of a breeze. Something was going on here. There could have been another person standing next to me, his or her body heat rubbing against mine.

"Who's there?"

I heard laughter purring next to my ear. A puff of breath. I spun around again. The light flickered and finally went dark this time. The bathroom door slammed shut of its own accord and shook on its hinges. I was plunged into complete blackness. Suddenly, hands wrapped around my waist. I couldn't move. I gripped the countertop hard and when I tried to pull away, my body was frozen. The hands were also attached to arms. I could feel the bend of elbows on the sides of my stomach and the hardness of a torso pushing against my back. One of the hands left my waist and moved the hair from the side of my neck. Terror held me in its grasp. There was someone in the house. The person was going to rape me or kill me.

"W-what do yo-ou want?" I blurted out.

"Shh, Tabby. I won't hurt you." The voice in my ear was the same one from my dream. It was smooth, and sweet, like melted caramel. His fingers twirled around my hair. I felt the tip of his nose ride the side of my neck as he inhaled. "You smell so much better than you do you in your dreams."

"T-Tucker?"

He chuckled low in his throat. He ran his fingers through my hair. I was beginning to relax in this stranger's arms. Playing with my hair was one of my downfalls. His other hand rested lightly on my stomach. The warmth from his palm seared through the thin fabric of my T-shirt and warmed my belly.

"Yes, Tabby. It's me."

"But how is it possible? You've been in my dreams. Dreams and reality can't cross." I wanted to see his face. I needed to know if he was there or if this was all something from my unconscious mind that I had somehow carried over into my waking life. Or maybe I was still. If that were the case, I hated dreams like this. I never wanted to be stuck in a dream thinking I was awake, and the next minute, poof, I was awake.

"Dreams are only gossamer and can be spun however I wish them to be. Just like reality." The hand teasing my hair slipped down over my face ever so gently. The lines of his palm pressed against my flesh almost stamping themselves on my cheek. His hands were big, with long fingers. The nails weren't sharp as they trailed down over my skin. At that moment, I smelled him. The scent of earth and musk clung to him. It made me lightheaded. I felt a pressure between my

eyes, like a headache beginning, then a fog descended over me and I fell back against Tucker's body.

"What are you doing to me?" He still hadn't answered my earlier question but at the moment I really didn't care. I was content to just be in his arms.

"Only introducing myself properly. I've watched you dream these past couple of months. Participated in them even, but now I wanted to see you for myself. Your fear of me is unwarranted. I would never do anything you didn't want me to. But there are so many things that I want to do to you. Will you let me?"

I swallowed. The fog was still in my thoughts, weaving around my brain, trying to get into the smallest crevices and learn everything about me. I released my hold on the bathroom counter and let him support my weight. What did he want to do to me? Would I let him? My head fell back against his shoulder. No matter how much I tried squinting in the darkness, trying to see even an outline of him, there was nothing except the onyx of shadows. I couldn't even see myself in the mirror. As my head rested on his chest, I heard the double beat of his heart. Two beats to my one. He drew in long breaths. My weight didn't seem to matter to him.

The hand on my cheek swept lower as if memorizing the curve of my neck. His fingers tickled the hollow at the base of my throat tracing my collarbone. They were so soft and light butterfly caresses against my flesh. Whoever Tucker was, whatever ever he was, he was stroking my desire. It had been a long time since I had been with a guy. I had been so wrapped up in studying, working, and just living that it

seemed my body had forgotten what it was like to have a good lay. And what he was doing to me was eating away at my self-control.

"Will you, Tabby?"

I heard the wanting in his voice, felt it against my back. His dick was hard, and but he wanted to claim me. I drew in a ragged breath trying to think through the haze. To make sense of all of this. "I—"

"Tab, you in there?" Kasandra's voice ripped through the fog in my mind and brought me back to reality. I opened my mouth to say something to her, but the door burst open. Suddenly, the room returned to its normal appearance. The light above the sink was back on. I lost my balance, whacked my head on the side of the counter, and landed on my butt on the cold tile floor.

Kasandra scrambled down next to me, trying to help me up. I looked up at her and my hand went to my head. The pain was so severe I wasn't sure if I had a concussion or not, but I knew I was going to have one hell of an egg. Glancing around, Tucker was nowhere in sight. *Weird.*

"Oh God, Tabby, are you all right?" She offered me her hand. I took it and got up slowly. "How many fingers am I holding up?" Kasandra asked once I was on my feet.

I was dizzy, and my feet a little spongy, but I was doing okay. She was waving her hand in front of my face. I knocked it away. "I'm fine, Kasandra. I have to get ready for class. What did you want anyway?" I pushed past her and started walking down the hall toward my room, trailing one hand

along the wall to steady myself. Her high heels clacked on the wood floor as she followed me.

"Class? You're in no shape to go to class. You have to go to the hospital."

"I'm not going to the emergency room. I'm fine!" I grumbled, entering my room. I tossed aside a pair of unwashed jeans looking for a clean pair. I went halfway through the pile and realized all of them were dirty. I brought one to my nose and sniffed. It didn't smell bad. These would be okay. I started to slip them on and almost fell. Okay, so my balance was a little off. I flopped down on the bed and when I did, my head spun. Okay, so going to class was out, but I was not going to the doctors.

"You're not fine. You nearly fainted. What were you doing in the bathroom anyway? I thought I heard voices. You hiding someone in here?"

I looked over at Kasandra. She had heard voices? If she did, it meant I was not crazy and there really was someone in the house with me. A chill passed through me as if a ghost had dissected me. I looked down at my wrist. The bite mark was still there. I ran my fingers over it again. This time it wasn't sensitive as it had been before. The impression of teeth was still clear though. "No. Not hiding anyone. I don't know what you heard."

All of this was too much. Tucker had somehow come out of my dream and appeared to me. He had said that he had been watching and participating in my dreams for a couple of months, and now he wanted to meet me. Did that mean he was some kind of a dream entity? Was he a regular guy who

had the ability to dreamwalk, to visit people's dreams and influence them? I'd read about shamans and medicine men had the ability to do it if they meditated hard enough. I'd also read there were daemons who could do the same thing. Entities that tricked humans into believing they were friendly and killed them in their dreams so they died for real. There were other theories about beings who walked through dreams and fed off the fear that arose from the mortal. I shook my head at all the data I had gathered from doing my paper.

"Tabby?" Kasandra said, bringing me out of my thoughts.

"What?" I snapped.

"I said are you sure it's okay for me to leave you by yourself. You're not going to pass out or fall into a coma are you?" Kasandra's dark gaze searched my face. Her blonde hair was pulled back into a bun. A conservative hairstyle to match a conservative job. But under the conservative façade, she had arms covered with tattoos, she smoked like a bonfire, and there were eight holes in her ears for earrings. My roommate had been a raging rebellious teenager, but hid it well now that she had grown up. She could still have quite a party even though she wanted everyone there two hours early.

I waved her off. "I'll be fine. I'll skip class and go to the library later. If I feel nauseous, dizzy, or anything else out of the ordinary, I'll go to the hospital and promise not to die on you."

She gave me one of her crooked smiles and threw up her hands. "Fine. It's your life. Have a good day. I'll see you later."

Kasandra walked out of my room. I heard her fumbling with something in the living room and figured it was whatever she had forgotten, her reason for returning to the apartment. I sighed and ran my hand through my hair. I caught the lump beginning to form and wished I hadn't touched it. I threw my jeans off, grabbed a dry comforter, and crawled back under the covers. There was no way I was going back to sleep in case Tucker decided to come calling again. Even though the Sandman tugged on my eyelids, I found myself lost in TV Land, sucked into the cheesy talk shows and reruns of whatever the networks used to fill the time slots until people settled into primetime viewing. I leaned my head back against the wall and let my thoughts get blown away by the monkey playing a miniature tuba followed by a dancing koala bear that had the nation stunned. It didn't matter what it was. It could have been anything to make me stay awake.

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Chapter Two

After lying in a television induced coma for hours on end, my head still hurt a little, but when I stood, I wasn't woozy. My legs weren't shaky, and I really had to go to the library and do some studying. My mind reeled from the morning. Tucker's appearance in the bathroom was all my imagination. Had to be. There was no way a creature could just step out of my dreams to try to entice me. Then again, how could I carry bite marks out of dreams? I pulled off my shirt and absently traced the spot where his hand had rested on my belly. Tucker had a soft touch but it had burned all at the same time. I trembled thinking about him and how he had made me feel. I was about to give into him when Kasandra had walked in.

I'm losing my mind. I threw my shirt into a pile and pulled on my jeans. Glancing around, I tugged on another shirt, then slipped on my coat, and grabbed my schoolbag. I tried not to think about Tucker. However, on my walk over to the library, my thoughts played over the fact his breath had touched my ear. He had caressed the curve of my throat with his lips almost like he were going to sink his fangs into me. Just thinking about him made me hot. *I have to snap out of this. I didn't even see what he looked like. He could be covered in scales or fur. Maybe it was all a ruse to catch me off guard and to try to kill me in my dreams.*

Finally, I got to the library. People struggled to be as quiet as church bats within the hushed halls. I didn't even bother

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going to find a spot on the first or second floors. All the comfy chairs were already taken. I fought through the crowded bookcases of the third floor, grabbed my books, and then decided to haunt the fourth floor where hardly anyone went. It was where the stacks were. It was also where the no-borrow books were because they were so fragile, to leave the hallowed halls of the library would have been a sin. There was only one staff person assigned to the floor. Sometimes, they slept the day away. It was one of the jobs occupied by a college freshman looking for work to help pay their tuition. I walked by the desk. The guy behind it barely looked up from his girly magazine. I nodded over at him and headed to the far back corner and found my favorite spot.

It was by a window with an old, rickety table and chair that looked horribly uncomfortable, but when I sat in it, I was in heaven. I dropped my bag to the floor and settled down for hours of wonderful reading. I didn't mind studying. There were times it got so monotonous I wasn't sure why I ever decided to go for my Master's degree. There were so many hours I'd sat writing things in this very spot. I wasn't surprised the seat had an impression of my butt worn into the chair. Oh well, impression or not, I got out my pen and started taking notes.

For hours, my pen scratched over the paper, filling the pages of my notebook. The muscles in my fingers were starting cramp. Slowly, I unwound my fingers from the barrel of the pen and stared outside. Night had snuck up on me without me realizing it. I got up and stretched, my stomach rumbling. A reason some of the kids stayed away from the

fourth floor was some thought it was haunted. I didn't believe in ghosts. Whatever being that had come to visit me this morning was no ghost. His hands hadn't passed through me and he felt so good. Nothing I read today gave me any clue as to what the hell was going on. I shook my head and began reading again.

After a while the words blurred together. I stopped reading and tried to tell myself I was not going to fall asleep. That was all I needed. When I looked outside, I saw a blur in the reflection of the window. *I'm seeing things. I've read so much today.* My head was throbbing a little. I needed some more pain killers. Then I was going to drink a pot of coffee and not fall asleep. I got up and put my books in my bag. Leaving the ones I didn't want on the table, I slung my backpack over my shoulder. The lights in the library began to shut off. I checked my watch and saw it was closing time. The click of the lights made me jump. I ducked down a side hallway and took the steps to the side entrance. I'd done this plenty of times before. All I needed was to scan my student ID card and the door would pop open. I dug into my wallet and scanned the warped card. As usual, the door opened. I sighed, relieved that I could now get something to eat.

I licked my lips at the thought of food. At this point, I was beyond instant mashed potatoes. My hunger was a beast. I wanted rare steak to rip into. I readjusted my backpack, and I stepped outside. Instantly, I was assailed with the scent of pine. I stepped on a branch that cracked in the empty night air. Shock stole my breath. There were no pine trees anywhere on campus. And there should have been the sound

of cars and people walking by because the side entrance came out next to one of the busiest parking lots on campus. But there was silence. Cold gripped my heart. I tried readjusting my bag, but it wasn't there. I spun around, and the building had vanished. I was surrounded by towering trees. A loud howl split the silence and echoed all around me. It shivered my spine. I realized then I had fallen asleep. My body was in the library, but my mind was in another world. Some believed it was actually the soul that traveled here, into this dream realm. I wasn't sure what was true.

The howl sounded again. I didn't know where it was, only that it called me towards it. The clouds parted overhead. There was a full moon above me. *Great. Just great.* I had to keep my wits about me. Whatever was going to happen I could handle. I could control my dreams. I'd done enough reading about dreams and nightmares. I should be able to control them by now. The howl was coming closer. It was a wolf and I was Little Red Riding Hood. I squeezed my eyes shut, trying to calm my racing heart. I thought about nothing but rolling hills. There was shifting under me. The earth rolled beneath my feet. When I opened my eyes, I saw the rolling hills, but it was still night. The moon was still full. The orb spotlighted me. From behind me came a low growl. I turned slowly. I saw was the largest wolf in creation. I started quivering. The beast stood before me, leering at me. I recognized its eyes. Underneath the fur was Tucker. I sank to my knees in the sweet-smelling grass. Defeat entered my heart. I was doomed. Whether he was a daemon or a spirit, he wasn't going to let me go. Tears came to my eyes.

"Whatever you want, just get it over with," I whispered to the wolf.

A furry head butted my forehead. I looked up and saw a pink tongue lolling to the side between its sharp teeth. It yipped at me and planted a wet tongue on my cheek. It made me smile a little and made some of my fear dissipate.

"Tucker."

"Yes, Tabby."

"Why are you hunting me?"

"I'm not hunting you, Tabitha. Let yourself go. I won't hurt you. Your changing the scenery is wonderful. You're getting the hang of this world, but it's still my world and my rules."

"What are the rules? Why are you a wolf? Why did you come into my bathroom this morning? What do you want with me?" Tears of frustration slid down my face. I was at my wits end. Should I be terrified of him? He hadn't shown any hostility. Yet, he hadn't told me what he wanted. He rubbed his forehead against my cheek. His fur was warm and made me tremble. Part of me was terrified of him, and the other wanted him to hold me like he had this morning.

"Tabby, shh. Some things I can't tell you. This world calls for us being wolves. You chose vampires last night. I choose wolves tonight. Come, run with me. I'd never hurt you. Haven't you figured that out by now? You crossed the threshold into my universe a couple of months ago. Most humans don't stay so long. Run with me please, before you wake up."

"How?" I asked him. Not about the running but how did I get into his universe. How did I find the key to changing it?

"Let yourself go. Relax. Feel the moon above you."

Tucker backed away from me. Once he did, the moon had me in its sights. The cold power of the orb filtered down my body. I was shaking and suddenly very hot. I stripped off my clothes, not caring the Tucker saw me naked. It didn't seem to matter at that point in time. It was all natural. This was supposed to be happening. Once I got my pants off, a pain seared my belly. My skin was bubbling and boiling. Everything was growing and breaking. I heard the rearranging of my bones. Then fur grew where skin was. Then I was free. There was nothing holding me back. I could run. Great joy filled my heart with the excitement of being able to run free. The sky was clear and the air smelled clean. I heard the crickets and the wind rustling through the grass. I could hear Tucker's heartbeat thundering like mine. He smelled like earth and wolf.

"Was that so bad?"

I barked and jumped on him. I pushed him on the ground and wrapped my jaws around his throat. I bit down playfully and shook my head. Tucker growled, but I sensed it was playful. I leaped off him and then bounded off through the grass, which was taller than me. I spread myself low to the ground and tried to stay as quiet as I could. My behaviors and instincts were natural. It didn't matter that I had been human. Part of me knew I was still mortal, another knew I was dreaming, but I wasn't afraid of Tucker anymore. I was here and I had the night to enjoy. The moon was full and it ruled this form. I was a werewolf. Tucker had said he had chosen this shape, but what would our next encounter bring

us? Suddenly, the weight of another was on my back. My heart raced. Then, I was head over heels and tumbling. The scenery had changed and we were back in the woods.

So much for rolling hills. I didn't wait for Tucker to take me by surprise again. I got up, shook myself off, and sniffed the air. Pine and wet grass clung to my nose now. I caught the scent of a rabbit. My stomach rumbled. I hadn't eaten for hours and it was reaching into my dreams. I licked my lips. I dashed toward the rabbit. But as I began to focus on the scent of rabbit, I caught a whiff of something else. I didn't know what it was. It made me stop. I looked around me and saw a blur in the woods. I stepped towards it. I sniffed again. It smelled like Tucker, but it was different. I tried to go after it, curiosity getting the better of me. A jolt of pain went up my leg. When I turned and growled, Tucker's eyes glowed yellow. Something was wrong.

"Come on. We have to go."

"Why? I'm hungry? The rabbit smelled good." I snapped at the air next to his throat. I wanted to eat and then I wanted to play.

"Tabby, we have to go! They can't find you here."

I was confused. Who were they? *"What's the matter?"* There were howls off in the distance. There was a pack on the way. Tucker bit my leg again to get my attention. I turned around, thrown off by the new weight of my tail. *"Who's they?"*

He shook his head. *"It doesn't matter. Please. Come with me."*

I heard the urgency in his voice and knew he meant it. Something was coming. I barked once and then leapt before him. He snapped at my haunches, and the wind whipped by me as he ran out in front. *"Show-off."*

"Follow me. I know a place they can't follow."

We ran, my feet barely touching the ground for what seemed like hours. I wasn't even getting tired, but I was still hungry. Tucker kept us at a hurried pace, as if the devil were on our heels. I stopped to catch my breath and felt the others behind us. It was a sense, a change in the air, making it cooler. When I looked behind me everything was darker. It didn't seem like I was dreaming anymore, but was truly in some different world. Finally, Tucker nudged me again and whined. He was getting anxious. I ran along side of him for a while until he stopped suddenly. It was still night, but the moon had sunk lower in the sky. I was tired from the run.

"What is it?"

Tucker turned and stared at me. *"Do you trust me? Completely? If you don't, I don't know if you can follow."*

I thought about it. My trust in him was a little shaky. How could I trust whatever he was when he kept popping into my dreams and into my bathroom? I felt a quiver of fear in my heart. He had done nothing to hurt me. Even in the other dreams I'd had before, there were scenarios that I had or we had been put in dangerous situations, but he never hurt me. Not even in my dream the night before, when he was feeding off me. It had always been my choice. Now he was trying to protect me again. I had to believe he wasn't going to harm me.

"Yes."

He nodded and stepped forward. The air rippled around him. The scenery before us was nothing more than just forest. I breathed in and waited. I heard howls behind me. They were getting closer. I had to trust him. I had to believe. I held my breath and kept repeating that I trusted him over and over again in my mind. Slowly, I moved forward. Instead of the resistance I expected, there was none. I walked through the clearing just as he did. It felt like I was walking through dense fog. The atmosphere stuck to me. When I crossed the threshold, everything shifted around me. I wasn't a wolf anymore, and I was completely naked. When I looked around, so was Tucker. I blushed when I realized I was staring. Tucker looked the same as he had in my dream last night except his eyes.

They were golden.

He smiled. I smiled back. He was all chiseled muscles. Not a lick of hair touched his body except the blond mop he had on the top of his head. I bit my lip, was glad to see him naked, but when I stepped forward, he snapped his fingers, and I was clothed again. We were back in the woods, in a valley with a small pond with a creek pouring into it. The birds twittered and it was still night. The moon gave us enough light I could see fairly well.

"Better?"

I nodded, a little saddened that he had clothed both of us. I wanted to run my hands over his abs and feel his skin. I needed to know if he was real or if all of this was in my

imagination. I also needed to know what he was and what was going on.

"Tucker, what is all of this? Why were we being chased? Who were they?"

He stepped across the clearing, put a finger to my lips and shushed me. His intense eyes studied me. I think he was waiting to see if I was going to run away screaming. His other hand touched my head gently, the place where I hit it on the bathroom counter. It was still tender. Wincing at the pain, a warmth began to filter through me. Soon the tenderness was gone and my head felt fine. I took his finger from my lips and moved closer to him. Tucker smelled like a spice rack. Staring deep into his eyes, I leaned up and kissed him. He wound his hand through my hair and cupped my nape. He pulled me closer. His lips were soft as he kissed me. I could feel the restraint in him. He was holding something back. Maybe it was himself. Maybe it was something else. Pressing myself closer, I let him know I wanted him. I ran my hand the length of his dick. I gave him a devilish smile. I wanted him to know he could fuck me, and I wouldn't say no. I'd always been attracted to him, even in all the dreams that I'd ever had of him.

At first, they had been a typical wet-dream scenario, he and I in bed together. Others he had claimed me from the evil monsters, but in the past couple of weeks, my dreams had turned. Now my dreams were more involved. I seemed to be in a different world. A good example was my vampire dream the last night. He was my minion, and I had turned him. Even then, I was still attracted to him. I didn't know if I had

feelings for him. In my dreams I always had. This morning, even though it had been a surprise, my body responded to him. Tucker was warmer than I was, but it didn't matter when his lips scorched mine. I wanted to taste all of him. I opened my mouth wider, ran the tip of my tongue along the top of his teeth, and waited to see if he would respond. And he did. He deepened our kiss and tried to consume me. We went back and forth between our tongues meeting and him biting my bottom lip, until finally I had to break away because I was out of breath.

"What did I do?" he whispered.

"Nothing." I shook my head. "I just needed to catch my breath." I took a moment to look around. There was no grass on the ground, just soft moss. Suddenly, I wished I was barefoot so I could walk around in the spongy foam. Then, I looked down, and I was barefoot. I giggled. When I looked back at Tucker, he was gazing at me so intensely that I felt like I was under a microscope. "What?"

He smiled and ran his finger along my cheek. "Just you. Do you know how long I've waited to touch you? To kiss you? I want other things from you, but I can't ask them."

"Why?"

"It's the rules."

"You said that before. What does that mean?"

"It means I want to make love to you, but I can't until you let me. It means I want to claim you for my own, but I can't. It means you're the first human to stumble into my universe and actually be able to stay. It means so much more I can't

even tell you the half of it." He cupped my cheek and held me there, with his palm and with his eyes.

I thought about what he had said. Things from the past filtered into my mind. We had made love before, at least in my dreams. Why did I have to let him? What did me being here mean to him? Who were the others that had chased us? What was he really? So many questions and not enough answers rolled through my mind. "But in some of my other dreams, you and I have been together? Why do you say you haven't made love to me? How can you be in my dreams and then come to me when I was fully awake, like this morning?"

"If you desire me enough, Tabby, I can break out of the dream world and be with you. I can be mortal in a fashion. Last night was the first time I've felt that much desire from you. I'd fed on your blood and it infused me with your cravings for me. I saw inside your mind, and I was able to break the threshold of this world and yours. The other dreams of you and I in bed together were only dreams to you. I was only an echo of myself, but the more time you spend here, the more of me is here with you. Last night was the first time I've been completely yours. Like tonight as well. Parts of me aren't off haunting other dreams and bringing chaos. I'm here with you. And the others have noticed."

"The others?"

He nodded. "The ones who chased us tonight. They are my brethren. They don't like that you've found the key into our universe and are learning how to change it. There are some humans who can dreamwalk. You've read about them. At first we all thought you were one of them, but the more you've

been in your dreams, the more you have learned to be able to control and change you dreams. Not many mortals can do that. You're a threat to the others. And with me spending so much time with you, the others want..."

I was trembling at what he was saying. My research was true. There were beings who influenced our unconscious minds. It wasn't just our minds that went somewhere else. It was our souls as well. My thesis was going to take on a whole new meaning now. Some of the stuff I had read had been pretty far-fetched. Now that I had a basis for the truth, I wondered what I was going to be writing about. "What do the others want?"

A look of dread crossed his face. "They want to hunt you. They're calling for your blood. For your very soul."

My heart sank. There went my hopes for publishing a book on dreamwalking. The others wanted me dead all because I was monopolizing him. What was I going to do? How could I defend myself against beings who could change the very world around them? They were going to be there every time I fell asleep. I couldn't avoid them. I had to sleep. "What am I going to do?"

"I won't let them hurt you. I won't lose you, Tabby."

Tucker meant what he said. There was determination in his eyes. He wasn't about to let anything get at me. I leaned in to kiss him again, but as I did, I fell.

* * * *

Everything hurt when I opened my eyes. My back and my arms ached from leaning on the desk after falling asleep in

the library. I looked around, and it was still dark out. But dawn approached, the colors of it kissing the horizon. A pang of sorrow wrapped around my heart like barbed wire and pierced it. I wanted Tucker. I craved his touch.

"Then go home and lay down again. Lock your door and I'll be there in some form or another."

The decision was mine. I packed up my books quickly and went out the side entrance like I first had done in my dream. I hightailed it home, slipped inside quietly, and then went into my bedroom. I locked the door and waited.

"Okay. What now?" I asked to the thin air.

I sensed Tucker's laugh, felt his hot breath warming my ear. "How much do you want me, Tabby? Do you just want to have some fun? How hot do your desires run?"

He wrapped around my waist like he had this morning. My bedroom was somewhat lighted from the coming dawn, and when I looked down, I didn't see his hand, but I felt it. I closed my eyes to make the illusion more of a reality. Did I want him here in the flesh? How much did I crave him? My heart did flips. I desired him. I balled my fists. I knew what I wanted. I wanted to feel him with my hands. I wanted to taste him with my tongue. I wanted to know he was flesh and not woven just from the fabric of dreams. I needed him. I let the yearning capture me and wrap around me like his arm was. "I want you here. I want you flesh.

I—"

Before anything else could slip from my lips, I was twisted around in his arms. He captured my lips, and I allowed myself to become his prisoner.

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Chapter Three

He frantically tried to get underneath my shirt, but I grabbed his hands and held them. Tucker let me up for air then. The look on his face was panicked, as if he wondered if he had done something wrong. He opened his mouth, but I put a hand up and stopped him.

"I just needed to breathe. That's all." I felt his lips form a smile under my fingertips. I let go of his hands and pulled my shirt over my head. I flung it onto my bed, not caring that it only added to the mess in my room. My fingers went to the zipper on his jeans, but he grabbed my hand and guided it down to the bulge in his pants. I ran my hand over the length of it.

"I want you, Tabby. Ever since I realized what you mean to me."

Wondering what he meant, I looked at him. "I thought I was only a human that crossed over into your world. I thought that—"

"It doesn't matter what you thought. What matters is here and now and how much I want you."

His lips came down on mine before I could truly ask him what was on my mind. I yearned to know exactly what kind of a creature he was, but when his mouth captured mine, the heat erupted between us, and I forgot all about asking him. His palms rubbed my nipples, hardening them in an instant. Pressing against him, I felt the hardness of his cock. I unzipped his pants with no one to stop me. They, like him,

felt real enough to me and not something spun from dreams. His mouth left mine and worked down my jawline, and, settling on the spot where he, as a vampire, had bitten me in my dream, he bit the exterior of my neck. He licked the flesh, and he bit a little harder.

"If you wish me to be a vampire, Tabby, I can be that too," he whispered in my mind. My fingers had found his cock and were learning the length and width of it. "I can be anything you want me to be, even on this plane. It doesn't matter if I have fangs or claws, hair or scales. I am what you wish me to be."

What did I want him to be? I had found a form of him in my dreams that I desired more than anything else. I had had him in my dreams as a vampire, a werewolf, a wizard, a daemon, and a hundred other things there were no names for. No. "I just want you as you are."

I groaned when he left my neck and let his fingers tickle the hollow between my breasts and smooth over the expanse of my stomach. His other hand caught itself up in my hair pulling my head back and kissing the small indentation at the base of my neck. At that moment, a jolt of power sparked between us. It rode my spine. A cry of ecstasy escaped my lips. My back arched, and I had to press my legs together to keep from coming. His hands seemed to be electric against my skin. I felt little pins and needles wherever he touched me. It wasn't painful, was more like prickling, as his energy and mine merged.

"Stop." Another jolt seized me. Tears came to my eyes, the shock bringing me to the verge of orgasm. I was there,

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careening on the edge of a pit that was black and bottomless. If I fell in, I wasn't sure I could find my way out of it. If the pleasure of his touch drove me into that pit, then I wasn't sure if my body or my mind could handle the eternal orgasm. That was the darkness awaiting me, never-ending pleasure, and he was going to take me there.

"I can't stop it, Tabitha. Once it starts, it doesn't stop. I can't make it stop." I realized he was feeling it too, was seeing the same vision. He had no idea how to stop the energy moving between us, but we couldn't stop this either. The lovemaking we had started had to come to culmination.

"Fuck me, then. Do it. Hard."

"I'll hurt you."

Tucker let go of my hair and stared deep into my eyes. He was sincere. He really thought he would hurt me. I didn't care. I wanted him. I had summoned him here to be with me. I had to take responsibility for whatever was developing between us. I backed away from him for a quick moment and slipped off my remaining clothes. He did the same by letting his jeans fall to the floor. His dick saluted me. I went to my knees and took it in my mouth. He tried to stop me, but once I began licking, he was lost to the sensation. One hand held his balls to keep him steady while I gripped his ass with the other. As I did, the same energy that he had stirred up was now coming from my hands. My lips worked their way up his cock as my tongue went down. His muscles tightened.

"Tabby, I'm supposed to—"

My dream lover gasped when I nipped the sensitive head of his dick and worked my tongue in swirls around the smooth

skin. He gripped my shoulders hard and began to rock his hips into me.

Do you want me to stop? I thought to him. I closed my eyes. I didn't see myself standing on the edge of the pit any longer. I was a few steps back and he was doing the balancing act now. What would happen if we both came together? Would we both fall into the vision that was holding us captive? He was the one who could bend reality. What would happen?

"Yes. Stop. I have to feel your pussy."

I took almost all of him in my mouth and came up slowly, letting my tongue and teeth trail over his silky smooth flesh. By the time I swirled my tongue over the head, I tasted the saltiness of precome. I got up off my knees and headed over to the bed. I didn't make it far. Tucker grabbed me from behind and held me around the waist. His strength was suddenly overwhelming, and he was not going to let me go.

"You still want it hard?" With his free hand, he pushed me down on the bed so my ass faced him. His fingers left trails on the inside of my thighs as he spread my legs farther. My pussy was wet, and I wanted to be taken. I blinked and the abyss had grown bigger behind my eyes. Whatever we were doing was not going to stop. Like Tucker said, once it had begun, we had to see it through until the very end.

"Yes."

He bit my shoulder. I cried out. I felt fangs where there shouldn't have been any. "Good girl. Remember you asked for this. You begged me for this."

Before I could answer, he plunged his dick deep inside of me. Before he had been so warm. Now, he was so cold. I drew in a breath through my teeth, trying not to quiver. When he thrust against me, I noticed there was a difference in his bulk. His chest seemed broader, and he was heavier when he pumped into me. His nails scraped across my belly, and when I looked down, they were thin black talons. His flesh was no longer pink hue of a healthy human. It was the color of dried blood. I held in a scream as he did what I asked. Tucker dived into my pussy all the way.

I closed my eyes. Fear moving through me, made me wonder what I had invited into my life. What was Tucker really? What kind of a monster was making love to me? As we continued our love making, his actions brought me to the high I had known before. Moans built inside of me, as the pulses of energy from his hands reached a deeper well. Against my closed eyes, I saw the cliff I stood on. The dark abyss beckoned to me, but I tried to hold onto what I was feeling. I couldn't stop Tucker in the middle of all of this. His nails dug into my stomach. Their pinpricks cut into my skin. Blood trailed down my stomach.

"You're everything I've ever wanted, Tabby." Tucker's voice was gravelly, deeper than before. "Do you like me fucking you?"

The sound of skin slapping against skin filled my ears. I gasped. "Yes. Yes." It was true. I did like him fucking me. I wanted him so badly. The dreams had been vivid when we had been together, but this was unbelievable. It was better than anything, being able to touch him and smell him. He had

a deep musk that entranced my senses. Part of his smell was what aroused me so much.

"Good." A sharp pain bit into my shoulder. He bit me. At that moment, the abyss rose up and engulfed me. Ecstasy flooded my body, convulsing it and I lost consciousness.

When I opened my eyes again, I was lying in bed under the covers. I looked over at Tucker, sitting on the bed looking nothing less than human. Had I imagined it all? When I went to get up, I felt weak like I was half there. My shoulder was killing me. My dream lover had a look of concern on his face. "What's the matter?" I asked.

He reached out and entwined his fingers through mine. "I couldn't hold on. My nature overcame me and I hurt you. I never wanted to hurt you. I should never have crossed over into your reality. I should go—"

I took his other hand and held it so he wouldn't go anywhere, even though it was hard to do since I didn't seem to have the strength to even sit up. "I'll be fine. I don't want you to go."

Tucker smiled and ran the back of his hand down my cheek. A shiver ran rampant over my skin. Even that small gesture pulled the warmth from my body. "If I don't go, the others will wonder where I am. If I don't go, I might end up killing you. It's my nature."

"What are you exactly, Tucker?"

"You don't want to know," he whispered. There was so much pain in his voice. He sounded like he didn't enjoy being what he was. Or that he really didn't want me to know what he was.

"But I do." I really did. It was obvious that he was some kind of entity that influenced dreams. I wondered what kind. In all cultures, there are creatures said to be able to invade dreams. I had read about them in many of books Professor Amode had given me. Tucker was the evidence that there was another reality when it came to dreaming. What other reality had I crossed into that had gotten his attention? Maybe he was one of the entities that if he truly killed me in my dreams, then I would die for real.

But the sex hadn't been in a different reality. It had been in this one. I was wide awake. I had felt and had heard the change in him. He had bitten me and the power Tucker had was so intense it made me black out. "I want to know exactly what you are. I've read about entities who move through people's dreams and influence them. Are you one of those? When we were having sex I felt you change. One minute you were warm and the next you were so cold inside of me. Now I feel like I could sleep for days, like I have no energy. I'm not afraid of you, Tucker. I'm intrigued."

He squeezed my hand so hard that it hurt. "If I show you what I am, if you truly see me, then there is no going back. I-I can't risk that right now. Feeling me is one thing. Seeing me is another. I went too far, even before. I can't risk your exposure. The others can follow me here, and I don't know what they would do to you."

"That doesn't answer my question. Are you a daemon, a spirit, what?"

"I'm a daemon. A creature that walks in dreams, feeding on human emotions. Sometimes, we get entranced with one

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human and, using its dreams, feed on it, and the human dies. Mostly, we move from dream to dream, human to human, feeding off the desires, fears. Sometimes, we find a powerful spirit and watch that human. That was how I found you. I was walking through your dreams and saw your strength. At first, I wanted nothing more than to possess you and eat you up until you were nothing more than a husk. But then, I began to watch you, and I was spellbound. There was something about you. So I pulled you into a dream one night and it all started from there. Ever since, I have been enthralled, and here I am. Totally captivated by you until I couldn't help myself and I was so caught up in your dreams that I became whatever you wanted. Normally, it goes the other way around. I control the dreams and not the human, but you are something special." He freed his hand from mine, ran it through my hair and then his fingers over my face.

When he touched my face, the same ecstasy I experienced from our love making flooded my body. I shook uncontrollably. When his palm passed over my lips, I exhaled. Something warm was being drawn out of me. I looked down and saw a wisp of smoke leave my lips and be absorbed into his hand. His eyes fluttered in the same orgasmic rapture that had just ensnared me. Then his fingers left my face and I was left even colder, but wanting more. Whatever Tucker had taken from me, whatever power he had over me, I craved for him to do it again. "Wh-what did you do to me?"

"It's what I do. In the end, when I'm done with a human. I steal their souls. To see me in my true guise would mean our relationship has come to an end and your soul would be mine.

I can't have that. You stood at the edge of the abyss today while I made love to you. It almost had you. I almost had you, but I don't want to consume you. However, the contradiction is that I want to consume you, also. I've never had this paradox before. To the others, I will seem weak. If the others catch on, they will want you too. They will wonder why I have not killed you after all this time. Why I can say I've fallen in love with you."

Tucker did not meet my eyes when he said this. Rather he stared at the floor. I wanted to reach out to comfort him, but I wasn't able to. My body wasn't responding to any of the commands I was giving it. I found it hard to even concentrate on breathing. "You love me?"

"Yes. Love is a sin among my kind. We're not supposed to be able to possess that emotion. Only creatures of Above have that right. Daemons can mimic human emotion, but love is prohibited. I have crossed the forbidden threshold and now I must cross back or your soul is in jeopardy." Tucker got up and kissed me on the forehead. "I'll watch over you." He backed away. When he did, he became transparent and finally faded away. With Tucker gone, I felt loneliness in my soul. Before I could act on it, the darkness descended again, and I was taken down with it.

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Chapter Four

"Tabitha. Tabby, come on girl, wake up."

Kasandra's voice echoed in the back of my mind. It called to me like a beacon. I wanted to ignore it, but somehow, I knew if that I did, I was never going to escape the darkness sleep had me in. I was in a cocoon. When I opened my eyes, it was to the very worried expression of my roommate. Trying to lift my head, I was slammed with a headache so strong I dropped back down on the pillow. "What do you want?"

"I wanted to be sure you're still alive. You've been asleep for three days. Why didn't you go to the hospital like I told you to?"

How could I explain it wasn't the bump on my head that had made me sleep for so long? It had been what Tucker had done to me. "I didn't know it would be so bad. Shit. My paper was due yesterday."

Kasandra sat on the edge of the bed. "Don't worry about it. I called your work and your professors. I told them you had a bad flu and then hit your head on the sink so you weren't in any shape to come in. You have until Monday to recover. Are you sure you don't need to go to the doctor?"

"It's fine, really."

Kasandra patted my leg and left. I pulled the cover back over my head, but my body wasn't tired. I couldn't sleep anymore, but I couldn't move, either. I reached slowly to my end table and got the remote. I stared at the television for a half an hour while flipping through the channels. After finding

nothing on, I turned it off. What I really wanted to do was figure out what Tucker had told me. I wanted to look in my books and see if I could find anything about daemons. I had read a little about them. Professor Amonde was going to be the best source of information.

The clock read one in the afternoon. His office hours were going to be over in an hour. I had to force myself out of bed. Taking a deep breath, I forced myself to move. After a minute, my body responded, but everything hurt and felt heavy. I was slow dressing and threw my hair into a ponytail. I caught a look at my skin in the mirror. If no one believed I was sick, then they were dense. My skin was ashen and stretched over my bones. I had even lost weight. But I really wasn't hungry. Finally, I left the apartment and made my way to Professor Amonde's office.

He was locking the office door. A few seconds more and he would have been gone.

"Wait, Professor," I called. It was barely a whisper, but he turned and saw me. Shock appeared on his face. I clutched the wall to keep myself steady. I tried to catch my breath. I took another step, but wobbled. The Professor reached out and caught me when I got closer. Whatever Tucker had done to me had certainly done a number on me.

"Tabitha, your roommate said you were sick, but you didn't have to come all the way down here to prove it. I'll give you an extension. Are you sure you're okay?"

"It's not about the paper. Well, it might be. I need some advice. It's important."

"Look, why don't you come to lunch with me. You look like you haven't eaten in days. We'll talk about whatever you need to. Okay?"

I nodded. I couldn't say no. I had to ask him about Tucker. Was I going crazy?

Twenty minutes later we were at the diner across the street. Everything on the menu looked good. "Order what you want."

The waitress stared at me. "Uh..." Needing a sugar rush, I craved something sweet. At least craving something was better than not wanting anything. "Hot chocolate and two pieces of apple pie." Professor stared at me. I shrugged.

"Burger and fries for me." Once the waitress left, he leaned on the table. "So what's so important?"

The waitress came back with our drinks and parked the hot chocolate in front of me.

I dipped my finger in the whipped cream topping of the sweet drink and licked it off. He was going to think I was crazy. I knew it. Taking a deep breath I started. "You know all about dreams. That's stupid. I mean you teach dreams."

"It's not stupid. What's your question? Whatever you ask, I'm not going to judge you."

The waitress returned with our food. I waited until she left, then began my confession.

"Professor, I've been having these dreams with the same man in them. Only in every dream, he's a different creature. Vampire, werewolf, warlock, whatever. At first, the dreams were just dreams. But the past couple of months, I've been able to change the substance of my dreams. The books you

gave me talk about creatures that can haunt dreams. I-I think such a creature is haunting mine."

Professor Amonde took a bite of his burger, and I looked at the apple oozing out of the pie. A scoop of vanilla ice cream came on both. I took a large bite and stared at the speckled tabletop.

"Tabby, you are one my brightest students. These creatures are archetypes used in every culture for people to identify the meaning of what your subconscious mind is trying to tell you."

I groaned. I knew he was going to say this. "Yeah, I know that. But, hypothetically, what if these creatures, these daemons, were real? What then? What do you do?"

He played with a french fry and then met my gaze. "Tabitha, why ask all these questions? Your paper was focused on archetypes and dream symbols entrenched in different cultures. Why the sudden interest in dream daemons?"

"Whether you believe me or not, I have a daemon in my dream."

"Does this scare you?"

I shrugged. I had come to know Tucker in my dream. I had made love to him. I was enthralled by him. I hadn't been afraid of him. I missed him. He had said he would never come back because he didn't want to hurt me or have the others catch on to me. "He doesn't scare me, but the others do. The daemon, he doesn't mean me any harm, but it—"

"It's his nature to consume souls. Hypothetically, what's happening between you and this entity?"

"He's crossed over from my dream and into this reality."

Color drained from my teacher's face. "That can only happen if you invited him into this realm."

"I know."

"Tabby, if you really want me to believe—"

I pulled my shirt down over my shoulder showing him the bite. I had seen it in the mirror, and it was definitely not made from a human mouth. It was jagged and torn on the edges. "How do you explain this?"

My teacher stared at the wound and then shook his head. "It looks like you were bitten by some kind of animal. Tabby, are you sure you don't need to see a doctor?"

I slammed my fist down on the tabletop causing the hot chocolate mug to jump. I straightened my shirt. I didn't need to be hearing this from him. *I need to make sense of all of this.* "I'm sorry. I'm just a little frazzled over everything right now. I don't need to go to a doctor. I shouldn't have bothered you. Forget I ever came. Thanks for the pie. I'll pay you back at the next class. The paper is almost done, and I'll have it to you next week." I made to get out of the booth, but he grabbed my hand and held it.

"Please don't go. I believe you. It's hard to fathom. I've read about them. I can control my dreams in a sense, but it seems that you have a daemon that has focused on you. You said you have been able to control some of the aspects of your dreams. Have you ever tried going to those places when you were awake? Meditation? There are different parts of consciousness. You said you are afraid of the other daemons,

but not the one that is attached to you. Why not? Why is he so different?"

Blood rushed to my face. How could I tell him? "Like I said, I invited him to cross over here. He was the one who bit me. We—I've been intimate with him. He's flesh and blood. He said he won't come to me anymore because he doesn't want to attract the others."

The professor's face paled even more. "If you've invited him in, then there's no turning back. He will never leave you alone. He will either kill you or turn you into one of them. You have to bar him from your home and from your life. I can show you a technique that can make you able to control your dreams and can block out the daemons. You need to be able to make this creature go away before it hurts you further."

"But I don't want to give it up. I want to be able to understand. I need to know what's going to happen to Tucker."

"Tabitha, you can't be in love with a daemon. They can't experience love. These daemons make themselves known in dreams and attach themselves to their human prey, feeding off them until the person either dies or the daemon gets bored and moves on. Each soul they consume makes them stronger."

"Where do they come from?"

"Some say they are fallen angels caught between Heaven and Hell. Other legends say they were the offspring of angel and man, but made a deal with the devil to give them immortality. Whenever they died, their souls couldn't rest. They were sent into limbo. The only way they could survive

was to feed off the souls of others, but they could never love. It was a gift denied them because they had gone against the decree of the Above. Some of them had mortal lovers, but they found they were never able to actually love them. However, to make love to one of the beings was said to rival anything in this world. But that was how they stole a soul on this plane and in the other. They make love to you and pull the soul from your body."

I nodded. Whatever Tucker had pulled out of me was part of my soul. It was true. Making love to him was beyond any experience I had ever had with another man. Was that why I craved him, because I yearned to be consumed by him? Was Tucker an offspring of an angel and a human woman? Wouldn't that make him an angel as well? If he was part human, then he should have the capacity for human love. *No, he said that he didn't. That it was only permitted to the ones Above. It must have been like Professor Amonde said. The daemons had made a pact with the devil, and God had stripped that emotion from them.* "Professor, I don't have to fear Tucker."

He shrugged. "Maybe you do, and maybe you don't. I think he's trying to act in your best interest when he said that he's going to stay away from you. It might be best for me to teach you how to close off your mind from dreams. Will you let me help you with that? I want to be sure you are protected from these entities."

I nodded. It was the only way, but I didn't want to close myself off from Tucker. I didn't want to open myself to the other daemons. I remembered them from my dream of being

a wolf. They had been on my heels. They had wanted to kill me then. "Okay. When can we start?"

"Finish your pie and hot chocolate. Then we can go back to my office."

A tear slipped from my eye when I realized I would be closing the door between me and Tucker. In the end it would be for the best. After I finished eating, I went with the Professor and we ended up at his apartment. I was too tired to care. My mind was still exhausted even though my body was ready to do a marathon run. I wasn't exactly sure what would happen if I did. I didn't blink when the professor sat me down on the couch and brought me back a glass of water.

"I'm sorry I had to bring you here. I didn't think we would have much privacy at the office. If anyone saw the light on they would think I was in and would be banging down the door."

"That's fine. So what do I do?"

He lit a candle and placed it in front of me. "Stare at the flame. Let the light carry you away. Let your eyes close and find yourself floating in darkness."

I stared at the flame. My eyes grew heavy. I couldn't fight it. My body grew light, but I still heard his voice in the background.

"See the darkness around you. Feel that there is nothing. There is nothing, until you will it into being. Create a space where you are comfortable."

I thought about green fields. Then, they appeared. I reached out and touched the grass. It felt real. I heard the professor in the back of my mind still.

"This is your space between dreams and reality. Whatever you wish here, you can make it happen. What do you see?"

"I'm in a green field with nothing else around me. I want there to be trees." Once I said that, it felt like a bubble had popped and suddenly there were trees. I smiled.

"What do you see now?"

There was pressure on my mind. My world changed. It went from night to day. The trees burst into flame. Fire surrounded me. I screamed at the heat. It blistered my palms. Suddenly someone grabbed them. When I looked up, Professor Amonde was standing before me.

"Nothing can harm you here. This is your reality. Remember that. Will it away."

I stared at him and the surrounding flames. They were encroaching around me. Fear kept me rooted to my spot. I couldn't do anything. The flames were going to burn me. They were already searing my clothes.

"The fire. I ca-can't."

"Yes, you can. If you want the daemons to leave you alone, then you have to control your dreams. This is your reality. Nothing can break into your mind here. Learn to control this realm and then you can move on to your dreams. This is your mind first. No one else's. Remember that. Once you step into their reality, then they might be able to switch things around. But not if you have the power to control their reality. Most humans can control a small part of their dreams. But if you can control all aspects of your dream then you will be messing with their realm. You can keep them out of your dreams totally. Now make the flames go away!"

I squeezed my eyes shut. Telling myself that there were no flames, I pushed with my mind. *There are no flames, and there is no heat. They are only an illusion.* I kept telling myself that over and over again. After a few seconds the heat receded. I opened my eyes and the fire had vanished. I willed the landscape around me to be rid of the trees. Suddenly, a great whoosh of air encompassed me, and then there were no more trees. A yelp of glee passed my lips when I realized that I had done it, but as soon as I had done it, I felt a stunning wave of dizziness and fell to the ground. When I opened my eyes, I was lying back on Professor Amonde's couch. I tried to get up, but was winded. Whatever energy I had gotten from the pie was totally gone. I could barely keep my head up.

"What happened?"

"I think you've had enough for one try. You look worse than when you came to my office. Look, why don't you spend the night here. I'll take you back to your apartment in the morning."

"Night? But we just got here."

"No, Tabby. It's eight o'clock. We've been at my apartment for five hours. Reality is different in the astral realm. Even more so in the dream realm. If you can master controlling your space in the astral realm, in your mind, then if you need to you can actually traverse the dream realm while you are awake. All it takes is concentration and lot of practice. It took me years to master even one change."

"How come you were able to come into my mind?"

"I didn't. What was there was a projection of your mind. I was sitting right here. Now lay back and get some sleep."

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I nodded absently as he took off my shoes and then placed a blanket over me. Before I knew it, I was asleep.

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Chapter Five

The next time I opened my eyes, it was morning and I felt a hundred times better than I had before. I was slightly woozy, but I didn't feel like I had been hit with a horrible flu. And I really wanted to go home and take a shower. I had some renewed confidence that I could control my dreams now, or at least had a start, and it was all because of Professor Amonde. However, when I looked around, I realized I was in my living room crashing on the couch. I scratched my head and wondered what the hell was going on. *How in the world did I get home? There's no way Professor Amonde could've dumped me off without me knowing it. Maybe I dreamed about getting home and now I am?*

"Kasandra, you home?" I yelled.

"In the bathroom. You've been out a while, girl. You feeling okay since you bumped your head? I went into your bedroom yesterday and you mumbled something about your Professor. You remember me telling you I called your work and your classes?" Kasandra walked out with a towel around her and damp hair.

"Yeah, I remember. Hey, did you call Professor Amonde for me?"

"Professor Amonde? Who's that, Tab?"

I looked at her sideways. Who was he? "He's the professor that's been helping me on my thesis about dreams. Kas, how did I get home last night?"

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"Tabby, you feeling okay? You've been in bed ever since you hit your head yesterday. And the only thesis you've been working on is how cultures deal with death. Crazy ass like you would only be interested such morbid stuff. Anyway your professor said you would be fine until next week since you have a concussion. That bump must have seriously messed you up. 'Where was I last night?' You've got to be kidding!" My roommate wandered off back into her room shaking her head, and then I went into mine, wondering what the hell was going on.

I know what I was experiencing was real. I hurried back into my room and got down on my knees and looked underneath my bed. There was one book lying under there when there should have been at least a dozen. I pulled it out. It was on dreams. All of my other research was gone. I had a complete paper on my computer and a whole stack of books about death. The only thing to tell me I wasn't crazy was the one book in my hand. The one book that had been forgotten. I scanned the index and looked at the section on dreaming. I had a theory, but I wanted to prove it. Reality was sometimes considered only a dream. It could be changed in the perceptions of others. Sometimes reality was considered God's dream and all reality could be changed if there was enough thought and will behind it.

"Tucker." It had to be him. He wanted to be sure that none of his kind found me, and by me messing with my own dreams, he had to change reality. I threw the book across the room so hard it knocked off the picture of me and my parents on their last visit out here. It was a picture of us standing in

front of the college's main sign. Both of them were so proud of me I was going for my master's degree, but I had no idea what I wanted to do when I got done. I had thought about studying sleep patterns or dream psychology when I had talked to Professor Amonde, but now that my paper was on a completely different subject, who knew. I was not crazy. I know that. I had not imagined what went on with me and Tucker. I had the bite to prove it.

I jumped into the bathroom and pulled my shirt down, but instead of a chunk of flesh missing from my shoulder, there was only smooth skin. Tears came to my eyes. I was not going to forget what happened to me. I wouldn't let myself.

Back in my room, I grabbed a journal and wrote all of my experiences down I could remember even down to what Professor Amonde had said and Tucker. I would not lose it. After I finished, my hand was so cramped that I had to wrap it in ice to make it feel better.

Tucker had turned my world completely upside down by cutting out a large part of it. I wasn't going to let him get to me. I sat on my bed and relaxed. I practiced what I had been taught on controlling my own reality inside my mind. I did this over and over again until I had a good sense of my limits on the astral plane.

I put in hours and hours until finally I knew I had a good handle on it. All the while, my dreams were normal. I had a few during which I knew I was dreaming, but I had no control. Each time I woke up, I was more determined to find Tucker again in my dreams. I went out and purchased more dream books. They all said that it was possible to control my

dreams; calling it lucid dreaming. I had to have a strong will and enough concentration to be able to step into the dream world and then have the grasp of reality to know I was dreaming, and then bend the dream world to my will. Kasandra thought I had gone loony all of a sudden, talking about my dreams the way I did. I knew I could do it. I admit I was a little obsessed, but I had my reasons. I desired to see Tucker again. I wanted to hold him again. This time, I wasn't going to let him get away from me that easily. He was going to change my reality back so I could get credit for all the work on a paper I had done on dreams. And, hopefully, every night I wouldn't wake up being so lonely.

Tucker was a daemon. It scared me to think like that since I didn't believe in Hell. But I also knew there was good in him. There had to be if he had gone to all the trouble he did to hide me from his brother daemons. If some of the books I had read were correct, then he was half angel. He said he loved me when he wasn't permitted the emotion. That had to count for something. I didn't want to change him, but I had feelings for him, too. It wasn't just an obsession or a spell he had over me because he had fed off of my soul. I had grown to love him in the dreams we shared. It was now or never.

I sat with my back against the wall and closed my eyes. Instantly, I was transported into the astral realm. Well my own little piece of if that I controlled. It was dark with just grass and a full moon over head. I imagined a door before me. This was my way into the world of dreams where I could walk among others, but I only wanted to find Tucker. Taking a deep breath, I knew that whatever would happen was my

choice. Reaching out my hand, I pushed it open. On the other side was a vast array of stars. Without hesitation, I stepped through it. Immediately, I fell in the soundless void. Wind whipped at my flesh. There were things in the darkness with me. I couldn't see them, but I could feel them. The beings were big with sharp talons. I could sense their claws and teeth snapping at me. Fear surged my heart forward. I had to remember I had the power to control this reality. I wanted to be away from the dark things. Safe. Instantly the world shifted. I landed hard on my ass in the middle of a cloud with a little girl drinking tea. Instead of tea, the liquid was blue.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Tabby. Who are you?"

The girl giggled. "I'm Alice, of course. Are you here to keep the monsters from getting me?"

The sky darkened, turning crimson. I glanced back at the little girl, and I saw little things swimming in her teacup. When she smiled again, the same things were poking out from between the spot were here front teeth used to be.

"Holy shit!"

"It's bad manners to swear. My mommy says all people who say naughty words will go to H-E-double hockey sticks. Are you here to protect me?"

Her head began to melt into a mass of twisted flesh. Her fingers looked like they had been chewed off. Her blue dress was smeared with mud, as if she had come out of the grave. "No, Alice I'm sorry. I'm looking for a monster on my own."

She laughed a sinister tone. "Oh really, and which one is that?" Her voice had suddenly become gravelly.

I wasn't talking to a little girl any more. "Who are you?"

"That's for me to know and you to find out!"

The creature reached for me, but I squeezed my eyes shut and willed myself somewhere else. I felt myself traveling, fast. When I landed, it was with a thud and a sharp pain. I opened my eyes. I was outside a very large oak door which was attached to a castle. A very creepy castle with gargoyles guarding the doors. The knockers were the size of my head. Moss and ivy crawled up the side of the crumbling bricks. I made it to my feet only to realize that my ankle was twisted badly.

"Fuck." An eerie feeling crept over me as I stood slowly using the door to hold my weight. I calmed my mind and tried willing myself somewhere else, but no matter how hard I tried I wasn't going anywhere. There was a flutter above me and then a screech. When I looked up, I saw a funnel cloud of bats descending on me. This wasn't going good. Maybe this was my dream, but it felt real. I banged on the door.

"Let me in!" I called. The rabid bats were on me, but before they sank their teeth into me, the door opened and I fell in. Before me was the typical butler wearing a tuxedo.

"Miss, the Master has been expecting you. Won't you come and join us in the study."

I hobbled in slowly while taking in the suits of armors, dark portraits of long dead relatives, and fraying tapestries. When I got into the study there was a large fireplace. A man stood before it with his hands clasped behind his back. I noticed a large ruby set in dark yellow gold ring. It winked at me while the firelight bounced off it. When the door closed behind me,

the man turned. Instantly, I was captured by his appearance. He had a high forehead. His long dark hair was swept up in a ponytail and fastened with a red silk ribbon. There was an olive hue to his skin. His eyes were completely black. A short, clipped beard adorned his jawline. A sexual charge sparked around him. I had never encountered anything like him. He dressed all in black and had a ruby pin holding his collar together. I found myself shaking as I stared. I knew once his dark gaze swept over me that this was not part of dreamwalking. He wasn't just a regular person caught up in the same vision. This being was the real deal.

"Who are you?"

He smiled and extended his hand to me. I wasn't about to take it. I saw sharp black nails at the end of his fingers.

"Come here, Tabitha. I won't hurt you. I just want to talk. If I wanted to kill you, I would have had my Nightmares do so when you first entered my realm." He beckoned me forward. I didn't have a choice. I was stuck here.

Slowly, I hobbled forward, wincing every time my foot hit the floor. He noticed that I was limping, but did not offer to help me sit down. Honestly, I wasn't about to ask for any help considering I didn't know exactly what kind of a creature he was. I figured he was one of the daemons. Finally, I enjoyed the warmth of the fire. The flames were eerie, dancing about forming faces as they parted and rose while eating at the wood. One of those faces leered at me, jumped out of the hearth, and sent a flame shooting up to the mantle. With a squeak, I jumped back onto the sofa.

My host's laughter filled the room. "My servants do not appreciate that you have stepped into our realm and that they are not allowed to play with you. It's rare we have a human who is so aware of our world. Of course, many mortals are able to control some small aspect of their dreams, but you have learned to manipulate all of yours. You've even dared cross the threshold into our reality. Now tell me why that is."

I swallowed when he sat beside me. Fear pounded through me. Should I tell him about Tucker? I didn't want to get him in trouble, but I was here looking for him. "How do I know you really are the lord of this realm? You could be just another daemon trying to trick me."

My host reached out and grabbed my chin. The points of his nails pierced my flesh. I bit my lip against the pain and tried to escape him. I was held by his strength and the power in his eyes. The black orbs sparked the same color as the fire, burning into my mind. The abyss I had seen when I was with Tucker reappeared, but there was no pleasure in the energy I received from the daemon's touch. Only searing pain. I was on fire. I screamed as it consumed my flesh. I couldn't move. The abyss was coming to claim me and I was burning. Then, when I didn't know if I could take the pain anymore, the heat evaporated. Cold washed over me and found myself trembling with terror. I drew in a breath, realizing I was free from his power.

"Do you believe me now?" he asked with a sneer on his lips.

Tears streamed down my face. He didn't let me go. "Yes."

"Good. Now tell me why you entered my realm. I suggest you answer truthfully and don't piss me off again. What you felt was nothing compared to the full extent of my abilities. Understand?"

I nodded. "I-I'm looking for one of your daemons. He haunted my dreams and then nothing. He left, and I was hoping to see him again."

My host let me go and reclined on the other side of the sofa. Amusement animated his features. "You certainly amaze me, Tabitha. Why would a bright and talented human like yourself come looking for one of my subjects? It's obvious you know much about my kind if you came here and mastered your dreams. You must also know that any daemon attached to a mortal feeds off their souls. Is that what you want from this one daemon ... to consume your soul? How about I make you a better offer? You forget about the one whom you seek. I'll decree that none of my subjects ever interferes with you again. I'll give you leave to walk in this realm whenever you wish. Maybe we can even talk once again."

I was stunned by his offer. He was allowing me to come back here whenever I wanted, unhampered by any other daemons. But what good would that do me? I hadn't learned to control my dreams just to walk about in other people's nightmares. I wanted to see Tucker. These past weeks, I had missed him. I wanted him in my life even if it was for a brief moment. "I appreciate the offer, but I can't accept it. I know that your kind feed on souls, but I can't give up on finding who I came here to see."

My host tented his fingers. "Who is it that you seek?"

"He told me his name was Tucker. If he has another name, I don't know it."

"My subjects know to never give a mortal their true name. That would allow the mortal to have power over them. This daemon didn't give you his real name. Did you see his true appearance?"

Sorrow filled me when I realized that I was further from ever seeing Tucker again. That wasn't even his real name. I sighed. "No. He said if I ever saw his true form, then I would be his body and soul. When we were together, in my dreams, he never showed me what he looked like. He only assumed the form of whatever creature was in my dreams. Vampire, werewolf, angel, whatever I wanted."

"He was correct. If a human sees us, then we own them. Their soul is ours to feed from. Why did he let you go?"

"What will you do to him if I tell you? Will you punish him? You have to swear to me you won't harm him."

He gazed at me with his ebony eyes. His mind seared through mine and I couldn't hide anything from him. By the time he was done, he knew everything that had happened between Tucker and I. I wasn't ashamed of what had happened. I just wanted him back in my life.

"You love him."

"Yes." I turned my attention back to the fireplace. The flames still danced, but there were no more faces. My eyes stung from brimming tears. I wiped them away before my dark host could see them. "I know your kind isn't supposed to love. The ability was taken away from you by God when you

bargained for immortality with the Devil. But he loves me, or at least he feels some semblance of the emotion. He said the others would kill him if they found out. Your kind doesn't like weak links and all." I wiped more tears away and then glanced back at him. He was unmoved.

"Love is forbidden to us. That is true, but sometimes, it can break through the cracks. Love is a powerful gift given to humans by the Above. If one of my daemons truly loves you, then the others might see this as a weakness. It is said that if a daemon can ever truly love and the human loves it in return, then the daemon will transcend and become an angel. Of course, this is all myth, but still. There is one thing you don't know about us. We may have gone to the Devil for our immortality, but we are a step above his demons. We don't answer to the Devil and the Above shuns us. We are our own species if you will. From your mind, I see that you summoned my daemon into your reality. You had sex with him, and he nearly stole your soul then. It would have been a great temptation for him to steal it all, but he stopped and left you alone, even changing your reality so you would try and forget him, making you think it was all a dream. Very tricky. Were you worth all the trouble my daemon went through to hide you from me? Let's find out."

He reached over across the couch, but I dropped to the floor before he could touch me. Hitting the floor hard, I twisted my ankle even more. I yelped and tried to get up. I hobbled along with my foot dragging behind me. I made it to the wall lined with bookshelves, but when I tried the handle on the door, it wouldn't open. I closed my eyes and willed

myself back to my body, but nothing happened again. He was walking closer. The Daemon Lord shifted and changed. His dark suit became dark red flesh stretched over a massive chest and muscles which were rock hard. His face elongated and large bull-like horns grew from the sides of his head meeting at one dangerous point before his forehead. His hair was still black and pulled back. His eyes were black, but his teeth were pointed. A snakelike tongue licked thin lips as a black, skirtlike garment covered his lower extremities. His feet were cloven and as black as his hair. His hooves echoed on the stone floor as he walked over to me. I let myself slide down the door as hope abandoned me.

This was his true form. I knew it in my bones. Now I was his. He would take my soul, and I was helpless against him. He knelt down before me.

"Please. No."

He took my face between his hands and cradled it gently. His hands were scalding. "Yes. I won't hurt you. I just want a taste." The lord pressed his lips to mine and then drew back slightly. Something released from my chest and worked up my throat. I choked and coughed. When I did a wisp of energy left my mouth and work into his while he sucked out my very essence. He was true to his word and backed away, leaving me coughing and feeling weak. The pain doubled in my ankle. My host had his hands clenched at his side in tight fists. His nails must have cut into his flesh because droplets of blood plopped onto the floor. His eyes were closed, his head tilted back, as he relished whatever he had drawn out of me.

When he opened his eyes again, he gazed at me and ran the back of his hand down my cheek.

"You're going to kill me now, aren't you? I've seen you. You said it yourself. Now I'm yours."

His form shifted back to what I had seen him as before. "Yes. You are mine now, Tabby. But I'm not going to kill you. At least not yet. I want to savor you. I'll keep you alive as my paramour. If you prove to be a good lay, then I might just let you keep your soul."

"I'll never sleep with you. I'm no one's plaything. Take my soul now if you want it that badly. I'll take my punishment in whatever form you want to give it."

"Would you have me kill your daemon before your eyes? I can summon him with a snap of my fingers. We can watch as Lucifer's demons come to collect him. Hellfire will burn away his flesh and eat his bones. It's great fun. I've watched it before, and the Devil loves new beings to fuck. Would you damn him to an eternity of suffering because you won't give up your body to me?"

"I wish I had never come here." I tried to hide my face in my hands. I loved Tucker, but I didn't want to see him burn. This thing, his king, would do exactly what he said if I didn't submit to him.

"You might wish that you hadn't come here, but you are here. All because you fell in love with a daemon. Would you do anything to be sure that your beloved Tucker remains in my services and alive?"

My head thumped against the hard door. There was no way I was getting out of this. "Yes."

"Then look at me." I looked back at him and his cruel smile was replaced by a gentle one. He reached out, took my palm, and kissed the inside of it lightly. A shiver of pleasure moved through me even though I didn't want it to. "I won't hurt you, Tabby." He leaned forward and planted a light kiss on my cheek. The imprint of his lips sent a fire down deep inside my soul. "I won't force you. I can woo you."

I shook my head and laughed. "What does it matter? You're going to claim me anyway."

The daemon lord leaned in closer and whispered in my ear. "It matters." He scooped me up and crossed his study. The world shimmered and then we were in his bedroom. A sumptuous king-size bed was the centerpiece of the room. He laid me on it. He lifted my hair from my neck and kissed it lightly. I shivered at his gentleness. A sharp nail traced the line of my spine. My back arched from the pleasure shooting through me.

"I can't do this!"

"Shh ... I know it's a stretch, but you swore."

"I know, but not like this." I stopped as an idea hit me. There must be a way to trap him. There had to be some way to catch him at his own game and keep him in my reality. *I have to get back there and figure out what is going on and how I can get him to stay there. I'll honor my bargain, but not now.* "Come to me in my own reality." I turned around the best I could and faced him. I pulled his face close to mine and traced my tongue over his lips. He tasted like salt and smoke. "Here you have all the power. Shadows and dreams. You have all the advantages. Let me have some of my own." I

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pulled his lip between my teeth and nibbled on it. His nails pressed into my skin but didn't break the flesh.

"You mean that?"

"You can read my mind." I searched his eyes and ran my hand over the bulge in his pants. "You know I'm telling you the truth."

He came all the way in and kissed me long and hard. "You're telling the truth. As you wish. Lie back. When you close your eyes, you'll be back in your room. Take a few days. Relax and recover. When you wish me to come, light a single candle." He backed away from me and moved off the bed. As he did, he faded into the shadows like he had never been there.

I laid back and closed my eyes. I felt a sharp tug and when I opened my eyes I was back in my room. A sigh of relief moved through me, but deep down the dread of what was to come thumped against my heart.

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Chapter Six

Five days passed, and after scouring books, I had came up with something that would trap him. I found the symbol in an old occult book which had fallen into my hands, literally, as I looking for another book. The one I had open on the bed fell into my arms. It opened right to the page that displayed a binding pentagram called the Devil's Trap. The book was all about summoning angels and demons. I figured since the daemons were a little bit of both the trap should work. Not to be too careful, I rearranged my room, drew it under my bed, on the ceiling, and covered it up on both of my walls with furniture. All together it made a cube so there wasn't anywhere the daemon lord could go. It was probably overkill, but I wanted to be sure. As the days passed, I thought more about the encounter and what he had said to me. There was a reprieve. If Tucker truly loved me and I him, Tucker could transcend and become an angel. I didn't really know how that would work, but I hoped it was an option for him. I didn't know if I would ever see him again, but I desired to.

Finally, I made sure that I was ready. I didn't know what I was going to do with the daemon lord once I had trapped him in my room. I hadn't thought that far yet. There were things in the old book that made me wonder. Rights of Exorcism that even though I wasn't a firm believer in God, made me rethink my position. Hell, if there were daemons, then there had to be something else roaming around. Kasandra had gone away for the weekend. I was dressed in a new black silk nightie I

had gotten, with a robe to go over it. It was all flowing and silky and almost made me feel like a princess, until I remembered what I had really bought it for.

The candle was dark red like the daemon lord's skin had been, and it smelled of spiced cinnamon. My room was completely dark, and to make matters more fun, we were having the storm of the century outside. Lightning sparked the sky. The trees battered against our windows. "Great. Just what I need. A dark and stormy night and I chose this one to invite the devil into my house. Tucker, if you're watching over me, please know that I'm doing this because I don't want you to get hurt. I know you left and changed reality because you wanted to protect me, but I can't stand to be without you." I wiped freshly formed tears from my eyes.

I gazed around the room, searching the shadows to see if Tucker was there. But I didn't see any of them change. I had to remember I was doing this for him because I loved him. I couldn't see him get hurt. Taking a deep breath, I struck a match, letting the sulfur burn my nose, before I lit the candlewick. Once I blew out the match, I felt the change in my environment. Time slowed. The shadows pressed together, gathering in one corner of my room. A head formed first, then a body.

The daemon lord seemed to be made of the darkness. For a second, I saw the daemon behind the human facade. Then he stood before me in the guise of a man. This time he was dressed in nothing more than red silk pajama pants and a robe like mine. It could have been the male companion to my clothes. His dark hair was loose around his shoulders. The

crimson of the robe brought out his dark eyes and the olive tone of his skin. His chest was well formed, and his pants low enough I saw the line of muscles that led down to his lower anatomy. I swallowed as I watched him step into the room. He was barefoot with toenails as black and sharp as his fingernails.

I prayed he wouldn't notice the Devil's Traps. I prayed he wouldn't read my mind and discover my treachery. If he did, I would be dead in an instant. At this moment, he might be a handsome morsel, but he was in fact my enemy until I could figure out how to get to Tucker.

"You kept your word." His gaze scanned my room. The power he gave off beat against my skin like a heat wave. He wasn't playing.

"I said I would. I'm here. Yours for the taking. Why don't you come onto the bed and we can get started?"

The daemon lord laughed. "So willing to jump in bed with a daemon. I wish every mortal was as eager to dance with the devil. How about we take it slow? Besides I have some news for you."

"What kind of news?"

"I spoke to your beloved Tucker."

"You didn't hurt him?"

He waved his hand and something materialized on the table. It was a black velvet jewelry box. "I didn't hurt him. I am a daemon of my word. He was easy to find. He was the only one of my minions moping. I don't see that much in my kind. He begged me not to kill you. I asked him why he loved

you so much. What was so different about this human woman than the others he had fed from? You know what he said?"

He had seen and talked to Tucker. My heart nearly dropped. "No."

"He said that you saw beyond the physical with him. He wasn't just a dream lover. You made him into a real man. It wasn't because you could dreamwalk, but because when you looked at him, no matter what form he took, you saw through the illusion and knew it was him."

Wetness dotted my lashes. I turned my head and wiped the tears away. I tried to laugh, but hiccupped instead. I felt his hand on my knee, and I looked back to him. "I'll do whatever you want, please don't—"

He placed a finger against my lips. "I won't. Kiss me, Tabby." He pulled me closer. His lips were soft. The kiss was brief, but the heat that fired down my spine was enough to make me break out in a sweat. The daemon lord ran the back of his hand over the curve of my neck and under the silk of my bathrobe. I sat perfectly still as he slid the material off my shoulders and let it pool around me. His dark gaze searched mine as if he was waiting for me to break my word and run away from him. But I didn't, I would finish this and then he would be trapped. So far, he hadn't noticed the Devil's Traps. Once he was distracted, I would slip out of my bed, pretending to have to go to the bathroom or something.

Tentatively, I reached out and placed my hand on the side of his cheek. I shook. My heart double thumped in my chest, and it was hard to breathe. Closing my eyes, I tried to calm myself. His hand rested over mine above my heart.

"Calm yourself. I won't do anything against your will. Don't you know that by now?"

I opened eyes. The way he cocked his head and stared at me made me think. Something about what he said made me sit back and study him. He had said that Tucker had told him I had the ability to see through illusions. Was this all an elaborate illusion? Tucker had once told me in the bathroom that dreams were only gossamer. "Can I ask you something?"

"Anything you wish?"

I leaned in, kissing him lightly before whispering in his ear. "Tell me your name."

He breathed in a sharp breath through his teeth and pulled away from me. "I can't do that, Tabby. Then you would have power over me."

I placed my hand flat against his chest. It felt like he had a fever. Underneath my palm, his heart beat a slow rhythm, slower than mine. "You already have control over me since I saw your true form. Why not tell me your name and then I can have control over you?" I slid my finger under the waistband of his pajama pants and circled the elastic. His erection was already peeking through the slit in his pants. I gave him a sly smile, lowered myself to his cock, wrapped my lips around the head, and took it into my mouth a few inches.

A garbled moan escaped his lips. I licked his soft skin and enjoyed the salty tang to his flesh. I went down on him farther, drawing more of his length between my lips, devouring him slowly as I ran my tongue up and down his shaft.

"Using your wiles won't get my name out of me, Tabitha." His hips bucked as I let my teeth scrape along his flesh. "I've had encounters with angels and demons who—" A groan of pent-up agony rumbled from his chest. I moved in centimeters, took as much of him as I could, and then painstakingly slow came back up until I had almost let his cock escape the prison of my lips. Then, I repeated everything I had just done. His rhythm increased, again keeping time to my swirling tongue. His sharp nails cut into my shoulders. I could sense he was ready to come, but right at the last moment, I pulled away.

The lord's eyes were closed, and his breathing was labored. When he opened his eyes they were golden. He smiled and I saw some of his teeth had become pointed. "Maybe you have a little bit of the Devil in you yet." He ran his thumb over my mouth.

Playing the part I knew I had to play, I nipped at it. "Will you tell me your name?" This time, I pulled up my nightgown and, straddling him, let him feel the warmth of my pussy since I wasn't wearing anything underneath. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I ground against him.

His hands slid under my nightgown and lifted it over my head. It landed in corner. Rain still poured outside. The thunder rocked the apartment as his nails scraped the round mounds of my ass. "You may entice me all you wish, Tabitha. But you will not tempt my name from me. Now lie back so I can claim you as I am meant to." Still holding me, he leaned over and brought me down on the bed, but I rolled out from under him and off the bed. He gave me a devilish smile.

"What are you doing? If your intention is to drive me mad, then you are doing it perfectly well."

I smiled innocently and took a few steps backward. As I did, I glanced at the chalk lines on the wood floor. He hadn't noticed the Devil's Trap yet. I was just about out of them as I moved towards the bathroom. "You may be a daemon, but I'm still human. Nature calls."

He laughed and waved his hand at me, dismissing me. "Hurry back then."

"Oh, I will." I sauntered off giving him a good look at my rear, and had to nearly stop myself from running the last few steps to get into the bathroom. When I closed the door, I let my head fall back against the wall. *What am I doing? This is so not me.* I stared at myself in the mirror after splashing water on my face. With the dark storm outside, it reminded me of the first time Tucker had touched me. I had been so shocked to think that the man I had been dreaming about, the man that I was in love with in my dreams had stepped out of them into reality. Now look where I was. Another clap of thunder rattled the house. The daemon lord in my bedroom might have been trapped by the Devil's Trap, but I was just as trapped as him. I had seen his true form and like Tucker had said, I was now his. *What's going to happen to me? Tucker where are you? Please, if you can hear me, I need you.*

I listened to the shadows, praying to hear him. Lightning illuminated the sky and thunder jangled my heart, but there was only emptiness in the bathroom.

"*Tabitha.*" The Daemon Lord's voice whispered in my mind, enticing me back to bed.

I flushed the toilet for good measure. I still had to carry out my end of the bargain. It was that or Tucker might be killed. Staring at my reflection again in the mirror, I wondered how I, an ordinary woman, had gotten so tied up with daemons. Lightning flared outside. The lights died out. *Great. Just fucking great!* I stared into the mirror, and when there was another flash, I saw a glimpse of a twisted creature behind me. It took me a moment to register what it was. The lightning flickered again, and I saw long teeth and frayed wings. There wasn't just one of them. There were several. Fear froze me to my spot. I felt their presence creep along my backbone like impending doom. I backed away from them slowly and opened the door back into the bedroom. When I looked back, the daemon lord was on the bed reclining, waiting for me to come back to him. When his gaze met mine, he bolted up from the bed.

"What is it?"

I pointed at the bedroom door. The creatures' faces, pressing against the wood, stretched it as if they were trying to claw through it. It wasn't the wood, but the darkness covering the door. They were moving through the shadows. The candle only threw off so much light. Shadows and night surrounded me everywhere and the power was out.

"What are they?" I asked. I glanced over at the daemon lord and saw he tried to step out of the Devil's Trap, but he was blocked. He placed his hand on the barrier but couldn't breach it. At least I knew the trap had worked. Of course,

now was not a good time to test it since there were other monsters in the room.

"What did you do, Tabby?" he growled. He glared at me and then around the room. He must have felt the other traps on the walls and ceilings, knowing he was boxed in.

Growls and hisses came from behind me as well. I spun around as more perverted creatures revealed themselves from the shadows. Their mouths were twisted masses of sharp fangs. Their fingers were long black talons. This lot had no eyes, only teeth. Some of them had four arms. Others had tentacles, but no matter what they were, they all had claws and fangs. Everything to shred flesh with. As they came closer, they made a slurping sound and I saw a shiny trail left on the wood like that of a slug.

"What are they?" I screamed.

"They're Nightmares. Let me out of this trap! I'm the only one who can make them go away. They sensed I was in danger."

I hesitated, staring at the things coming toward me. The whole room was shadows except for the candle. I couldn't let the daemon lord out. There was no way. If he was trapped then Tucker was safe. I shook my head. "I can't let you out. If I do, then you'll kill me eventually or take my soul. You're a daemon. You'll go back on your word and kill Tucker or send him to Hell. I can't have you do that." He might have been sincere and straightforward with me, but at the core, he was a daemon. So was Tucker, but I trusted him more. I loved him. I didn't know anything about the daemon lord. Even with his handsome human appearance I didn't trust him.

He screamed and beat against the walls of the trap. As he did, a branch came through the window and sent glass flying everywhere. I covered my face with my hands, but there was no where to run as the Nightmares drew ever closer. The daemon lord's appearance wavered back to his daemonic appearance. He used his power and flung my bed across the room into the Nightmares coming from my bathroom. With a flick of his hand, he sent my bureau into the others coming at me from the other side. I backed up against the wall, which had the other Devil's Trap. The wind picked up and chilled me to the bone. The candle flame flickered. My eyes darted back to him as fear sped up my heart. My broken furniture hadn't stopped the Nightmares from hunting me.

"You would rather die than let me make love to you?"

I nodded. I didn't want anyone else to touch me except Tucker. I had teased the daemon lord, but I had had to play the part long enough for him to think that I desired him. Long enough for me to know if the Devil's Traps had worked. I didn't want to die, but maybe, just maybe I still had enough in me that I could send my mind somewhere else. Maybe live in a dream. Anything to get away from him.

"Yes."

The daemon lord peered at me from inside the trap. The claws of the Nightmares were about to slice my flesh. Their breath smelled like the sewer, full of rank and decay. One of them bit into my leg. Another, coming out of the wall, grabbed me with four arms from. The slime I had seen on the floor now covered my back. Burning pain shot through my

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body as the creatures were about to pounce. The candle flame still flickered.

"You love him that much?"

My gaze flicked to the sputtering flame. The answer surged forward from my heart. "Yes."

The wind blew out the candle, and I was claimed by the darkness.

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Chapter Seven

My eyes snapped open. I bolted up in bed and screamed. I flailed around, trying to fling the Nightmares off me. After a moment, I realized there was nothing there. There was nothing on my back. There were no cuts on my arms. The sun shone outside. The curtains fluttered in the early morning breeze, sending the perfume of apple blossoms into my room. All my furniture was back in the same place before I had moved it. There were no Devil's Traps on the walls. The door burst open. My roommate stuck her head in.

"You okay, Tabby? I heard you screaming. Did you have one of your nightmares again? Have you talked to Professor Amonde about them? You promised you would after the last one." The look on her face was one of annoyance. I looked at her clothes and realized she was already dressed for work.

I stared at her, not sure of what to say. How did she know about the Professor? Tucker had changed my reality and wiped out Professor Amonde. I glanced over at my desk and saw my stack of dream books ready to topple off the edge. The copy of my paper I had been working on was scattered over the keyboard with red pen marks all over it. All of this was way too creepy and a sense of *déjà-vu* came over me.

"You okay in there?" She was snapping her fingers in front of my face.

I shook my head. Was I okay? "Um ... yeah. No, I haven't talked to him yet. What time is it?"

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Kasandra checked her watch. "It's almost nine. And you'll be late if you don't get your ass out of bed. I thought you were done with your nightmares. This is like the third one this week. You want to talk about it?"

"Do you know anyone named Tucker? I mean, am I dating anyone by that name? Do you work with him? Has anything weird been happening to you lately?"

My roommate felt my forehead. "You sure you're okay, sweetie? The only Tucker I know is the one you mutter about when you're dreaming. I came in here last night to check on you, and you were mumbling about nightmares trying to eat you alive. That must have been one hell of a dark dream."

You have no idea! "Yeah. It was very vivid. I was being ripped apart. There was this daemon who—" I glanced at my roommate and knew that she wasn't going to listen to me tell her about my dream. She was late for work and hated to be late. "It doesn't matter. I'll talk to the professor this afternoon. Have a good day at work."

Kasandra chewed on her lip and checked her watch again. "So are you going to class or not? You're going to be late!"

I rolled my eyes. "I heard you the first time, K. If you don't hurry up, you'll be late for work." I felt a smile tugging on my lips. She cursed under her breath and walked out of the room.

I heard the door to our apartment close. I shook my head. I got up and went into the bathroom and stared at myself in the mirror. I didn't look any different. My eyes were still dull brown, and my hair was still striped like a tabby cat. I half expected the creatures I had seen in my dream to come out

of the shadows in the bathroom, but there was nothing. It had all been a dream. A very bad dream. I glanced down at my wrist where Tucker had bitten me from my vampire dream, and nothing was there. The skin was perfect. *Had it been real?* If the daemon lord was real, Tucker, and the Nightmares, then reality had been shifted again. Had the daemon lord used his power to shift my reality and move me back in time? Had Tucker somehow done it, maybe feeling that since the daemon lord was trapped he didn't have to fear him? I ran my hands through my hair and pulled it up in a ponytail. I had to get going. I didn't want to miss class. All of it had been a dream. A very fucked-up, drawn-out, scary dream. I kept telling myself there were no such things as daemons. Nightmares didn't have claws or fangs. There was no way that I could dreamwalk. It was all created by a very inspired imagination, too many dream books, and one too many pieces of chocolate.

* * * *

Having jogged across campus, I made it to class just as Professor Amonde was beginning his lecture. All eyes turned to me and stared at the intrusion. I gave them a smile and slid into my seat. My teacher wrote on the board, and I took notes, but I really wasn't interested in what he was talking about. I had to talk to him after class. Minutes ticked by until finally the class was over. I ran down the steps of the lecture hall and tapped the retreating professor on the arm. When he turned around, I saw twisted black horns, pointed teeth, red

skin, and black eyes. The appearance of the daemon lord. I yelped and jumped back.

"Tabby, are you okay? You look like you've seen a ghost."

He led me to one of the seats, where I caught my breath. My dream was really hanging onto me this time. "I'm fine. Thanks. But I really need to talk to you."

He sat down next to me. "Well, I have a few minutes before my next class. What's on your mind? Is it about your paper?"

I laughed. "No, not really. This is going to sound insane. If it doesn't, then I must be crazy. I've been having these dreams ever since I started doing research on my paper. At first, they were just dreams, and then the one man I was dreaming about came out of my dream. I fell in love with him. He changed my reality. But he forgot one book on dreaming. So I bought more books and learned to control my dreams. I met the daemon lord. I saw his true form. I trapped him in a Devil's Trap. Then his Nightmares attacked me and I died. But then I woke up and my reality was back to what it was today."

"Tabby, I don't think you're crazy. Look. I'll give you an extension until the end of the month. Give me what you have by next Friday and I'll go over it for you to see if you actually need the extension. I know how hard you worked."

"Thanks, Professor, but what if it wasn't really a dream? What if it was all real?"

"Tabitha, the one thing you have to remember, is that dreams are illusions. Just like reality, they can be bent and changed. This chair is real because you and I say it is real."

But how does the Above see it? To Him it might be a cat. Reality is only a perception as to what you and I think it is."

An illusion. That was what the daemon lord said. That was what Tucker had said. I stared at Professor Amonde. "Why do you call it an illusion?"

He waved his hand. "I don't know. I could have said it was a mirage. It's the same idea. Dreams are only messages from our subconscious on how we deal with our everyday lives. Maybe you are battling some unknown stress, and this is the daemon you have bound yourself to. Dream interpretation is a touchy subject. Now leave your paper in my box and I'll look it over. Okay?"

I nodded and watched as my teacher left the room. Today was Friday. I had tomorrow off from work, but the whole idea of my nightmare haunted me. So did the loneliness I felt about not seeing Tucker. I sighed and walked back to my apartment. I didn't have any other classes today. Kasandra would head over to her boyfriend's. I sat on my bed staring at the paper and the leaning stack of books. I had to be logical about what I was seeing. All of this could just be another dream all together. Maybe it was. Maybe the daemon lord was trying to trap me like I had trapped him. Was I a rat in a maze now?

"If you want me to question my sanity and get back at me for trapping you, well haha, very funny. Now let me out of this nightmare?"

There was no answer. Okay, so I was crazy.

* * * *

Dreaming of You
by Crymsyn R. Hart

Days passed, faded into weeks. I finished my paper and got an A. I had one more semester to go, and I would hopefully have a degree. Night after night I expected to dream about the daemon lord or even Tucker. But nothing. My dreams were normal nighttime dreams where nothing tried to eat me. But as the nights passed, I was lonely in bed and there was an ache in my heart. I missed Tucker, even if he was a part of my subconscious, someone I had made up because I wanted a boyfriend or some shit like that. However, as the semester ended and I didn't need the books anymore, I decided to take one more chance and see if I could dreamwalk. I had to tempt Fate to find out if it was all in my imagination. Kasandra had been working long hours, so I knew she wasn't going to interrupt me. All the doors were locked. I sat on the bed, let myself relax, and saw myself back in the green field on the astral plane. The grass was still real as it had been the first time I had done this. I willed the door to the dream world to appear. After a few moments, a door did appear, but it was different than the first one. However, it was one I had seen before. It was an oak door held together by large iron hinges and had knockers the size of my head on it. It seemed I was not going to be able to enter the dream world without going unnoticed.

Well, I'm the one who wanted to prove if I was crazy or not. I pushed on the door. It squeaked, but opened easily. My soul ran cold. I knew what I was about to step into, but I had to do it since I wanted to be sure that I was sane. Gathering my courage, I stepped through the doorway. Once on the other side, I walked into the same study where I had met the

daemon lord. The fire blazed in the hearth, but he was nowhere to be seen. *At least this time my ankle isn't messed up, and I can run away if I need to. Like running will get me very far.*

The door slammed shut behind me. I jumped, searching the shadows for any sign of the daemon lord. I waited for him to come, but he didn't. Someone was in the room with me. I could feel eyes watching the back of my neck, which raised the little hairs at my nape. I tried to keep it together as I strolled around the room gazing at the large bookshelves and tapestries on the wall. Every time I had thought I had a good look at what was on the tapestry, it would suddenly blur and then change. Scenes went by so fast from a clear waterfall to the pits of Hell. In each one were people interacting acting with something, but the scenes changed so quick I could never get the whole image.

"I know you're hiding in the shadows, watching me. I can feel it. If you want to torment me it's only going to piss me off. Come on out!" I finally said to the presence hovering over me.

A liquid laugh wrapped around me and echoed through the room. "As you wish, but are you prepared for what you will find?"

"I've dealt with everything you've done to me. I was the one to trap you, remember? I think I can handle whatever other surprises you have for me."

"*As you wish ...* " The daemon lord whispered.

"Tabby?"

I spun around. Before me stood Tucker. My heart leapt at seeing him. I ran into his arms and made sure that he was real and that he was okay. He wrapped me in his arms, holding me to him until I looked up and realized that I was crying. He gave me his off-kilter smile and brushed the tears away. I inhaled and smelled the faint scent of lemons and cinnamon around him. I leaned forward to kiss him, but he put a hand to my lips.

"Not yet."

My brow furrowed. "Why? Did he bring you here to torture me? I won't let you go. Not this time. I can't bear it. I searched for you after you changed things. I—"

He ran his hand down the back of my cheek. "I know, Tabby. But now you have to listen to your heart okay? Remember what the daemon lord told you. What are dreams?"

"They're an illusion just like reality, why?"

"Watch."

He took a couple of steps back from me. As he did, shadows swooped down over him as if they were alive. When they left him, the man before me was no longer there. Before me stood the daemon lord in his black suit and ruby ring. After a moment, his form melted and shifted again until he was the daemon I had originally seen. I backed up a little bit more. I was beginning to realize what was going on. He had one more form change, and that was into Professor Amonde. My back hit a lamp, which fell to the floor. The crash didn't register as the Tucker I knew and loved was before me. With my mind reeling, I kept backing up. He had said that dreams

were an illusion. He was the daemon, the daemon lord, and my professor? How could that be? The smile on his face was a sad one. Through his look, he pleaded with me to understand.

"Was this all a game?" I whispered.

He stepped forward, but I shook my head and put my hand out to stop him. I couldn't think about him touching me right now.

"It was never a game, Tabby. I told you the truth in every guise that I came to you in. I'm really a teacher you trust. I have a human persona in the mortal world. It helps me pick out souls I wish to feed from."

"Great, so I was doomed before I fell in love with you."

"No, Tabby. I make it a rule never to get involved with the mortals I feed from. It's bad for business. What I told you was the truth. You didn't catch my interest until you took up your study on dreams. I saw the way your mind worked at night while you slept and found your night visions intriguing, so I kept reappearing to you as someone you could recognize. And after a while, you began to change things in your dreams, and I saw you could dreamwalk. That dream when I fed from you as a vampire, I drank in your desire for me."

"You said that the others were after you when we were wolves. Who were they? Were they made up, too? Did you change my reality because you wanted me to pass some test?"

Tucker knelt before me and took my hand. I tried not to pull it from his grasp. How could I trust him? I couldn't. He was a daemon.

"They were after me. My minions, the other daemons, would love to have my place. We are not civilized. We have to earn everything we have. My kind is prone to violence. I fought my way to power, and at any sign of weakness, the others will snatch it away. That was why I told you I had to leave. But you couldn't leave it be. You went to Amonde, just had to know how to dreamwalk and control your dreams. Do you know what Amonde means?"

"No. Should I?"

Tucker tried to touch my face, but I shied away. He got up and paced. As he did, his form kept changing. It was dizzying to watch. "Pick one would you? I'll get sick if you keep switching."

"Sorry," he muttered. He settled on the dark appearance of the daemon lord. Sulfur and cinnamon scented the air as he stirred it. The flames danced again with wild faces. Somewhere in the distance, a violin began to play. The melody was sad, reflecting his mood, but soon it flowed into an angry, compelling tune that had me hypnotized. He pounded his fist against the mantle and dislodged a chunk of stone that hit the floor and shattered into pieces. I cringed at the sound. I had never seen him so violent.

"Any guess?"

"No."

"Amonde is an anagram for *daemon* or *a demon*. I thought it was clever."

"Yeah, nice use of language. So did you really love me?"

He turned to face me. "Don't you know that I do? If I didn't, would I have gone to all the trouble to save your life? I

could have let my Nightmares gobble your flesh and feed on your soul. But I didn't."

"Then why did you save me? To toy with me? To put my world right back where it was when you left it and watch me make myself go crazy thinking you were only a dream when I loved you. I thought the daemon lord had you trapped or was going to kill you. I didn't know it was you. I never would have trapped you. I—"

My last string of sanity and reality snapped. I let myself slide down the wall and crumple into a ball. Everything had been true. All of it. I wasn't crazy. Every different reality happened. *The man I loved was also my teacher and the daemon. I hit the jackpot. Great.* "Why did I fall in love with you? Why didn't I just let you kill me? Why did I pick that stupid paper?" I was crying and talking out loud, but who cared. I was dreaming, right? Who was going to wake me up from my nightmare?

Tucker came over and scooped me up. Automatically, I buried my head against his chest and wrapped my arms around his neck. He might have been the cause of my frustration, but I also needed someone to hold me and comfort me. I needed something to remind myself this was real. It wasn't just a dream. It was reality. Tucker said dreams were made of gossamer and could be woven into whatever he wanted. Just like reality. I didn't know what I wanted right now. Even in the realities Tucker had been removed from me, my heart had ached for him when he wasn't there. I was in love. No matter how much I tried to deny it, because he had deceived me, I still loved him. He

had said he had told me the truth in every guise he had been in. Did that mean even about becoming an angel now that he loved me in return? He carried me back to his bedroom and sat down beside me on the bed. He gave me a silk handkerchief to wipe my eyes with.

"I was going to tell you the truth after I had made love to you, before I realized you had trapped me. I had a gift for you, but the Nightmares came. I saw how much you loved me. You gave your life for me. I couldn't bear to see you unhappy. I couldn't watch you live wondering if you had experiences that were imaginary or if you were crazy."

I gazed at him through my tears. "Why, because you love me so much? Your kind can't love. You told me that or was that a lie amongst the truths you told me?"

"I do love you, Tabby. And that's my downfall. I'm holding down my palace by a shred. I have daemons at one door and angels at the other. Both brigades are weakening my Nightmares. Soon one will come for me. I hoped to see you before they took me."

Angels? "You said that angels—" Then it all clicked into place. He admitted that he loved me. And then he must have found the loophole.

A smile spread over his dark features. "Yes, Tabby. Because I allowed myself to love you. I've been given a reprieve. The angels wait for me to go to them. But I wanted to see you before I left." He leaned in and kissed my cheek. His lips, feeling like a brush of silk, burned against my cheek. "Will you let me make love to you one more time?" His other hand rested over my heart. A zap ran through me that made

me gasp. It was the same power he had used before. "Let me feel you moving against me, Tabby. You feel like silk and smell like sweet apples. Will you let me?"

"Only on one condition." I leaned in and whispered in his hear. "Tell me your real name?"

"You drive a hard bargain. But you'll get your wish this time. My true name is Ramiel. Now you know my name, you have power over me and can call me any time you wish."

Claiming his lips, I let myself meld against him. His thigh rubbed along mine, pushing my legs open. Once his hands touched my shoulders, the energy sparked between us, and I shook from the intensity. This time, in my mind's eye, I didn't see a dark pit, but an intense bright light that emanated serenity. When his hands slid under my shirt, the light was so intense with power that my whole body was suffused with the light. I could see it filling me as long as he touched me. I felt its warmth move along my limbs and shine through the top of my head and the end of my toes. It was so intense I could barely focus on Tucker.

"What is it?" he asked, after pulling away from my lips. Concern painted his features.

"When you touch me, there's a light. Before, when we made love, there was a dark pit. Now it's so bright."

"Does it hurt? Am I hurting you?"

"No. It's just intense. Close your eyes. Do you see it?"

He went rigid for a moment and then shuddered. A satisfied moan rumbled in his chest. He opened his eyes and smiled. As he did, he waved his hand, and we were both naked on the bed. I only wish it could have been that easy

when I needed to get changed. He laid me back against the pillow and, nestling his head between my legs, settled on my slit. Tucker's tongue found the sensitive bud and began to tease me with long, slow strokes. I jumped at first, a little hesitant to let him continue. It had been so long since anyone had paid attention to me like him. Our last encounter hadn't been like this. Now Tucker seemed focused on pleasing me.

As he worshipped my nether region, I let myself sink into the pleasure of the act. My eyes fluttered shut. Despite my eyes being closed, I could still see the light. The brightness overwhelmed me, and the closer Tucker brought me to ecstasy, the closer I got to the source of the light. Within my mind, the light wasn't blinding to look into, but soft. With each lick from Tucker's tongue, the light responded, sending me a jolt of bliss, doubling the pleasure from my lover. My hands balled into fists as my hips took on a life of their own. I heard cries, and it wasn't until Tucker lifted his head from my clit that I realized they were coming from me. I had been so overwhelmed with the energy coursing through me.

His hands slid over my nipples, which were hard pebbles under his palm. He rolled one between his fingers and claimed the other with his mouth. As he caressed the one with his tongue, I moaned, wrapped one leg around him, and drew him closer. I slid between us. I grasped his cock and ran my hand the length of his shaft. Tucker was hard and ready to claim me. I reached up and brought his mouth back to my lips. Our tongues touched and entwined while he slid his fingers inside my wet pussy. I groaned and let him lick his way down my neck and between my breasts. The light was

still there, but it wasn't consuming me as it had before. It was only keeping me titillated and aroused while Tucker thrust his fingers in and out of me. My hips moved with him. His tongue circled around my belly button, but his gaze was locked to mine as if he dared me to let myself completely go. I tried to breathe evenly, but the sheer delight of his manipulations was sending me over the edge. I couldn't hold on. I dug my nails into his back.

"Come for, Tabby. Let me hear you scream my name."

His tongue traveled lower, claiming my clit again. He timed his strokes with the quick thrusts of his fingers. Determined not to give in, I squeezed my eyes shut. Sweat had broken out all over my body, but he seemed unaffected.

"Say my name, beloved," he whispered in my mind.

His dark eyes didn't leave my face. He laid his hand flat against my stomach over my belly button. When he did that, white energy coiled around my spine like a vine entwining itself through my body. An orgasm moved through me so hard that I wasn't sure I was going to remain conscious. It swept me away.

"Tucker. Mm ... please, Tucker," I screamed.

He didn't stop, but kept on attacking me with his fingers, tongue, and the energy pulses. My bones felt liquid. I could barely move as he assaulted me with pleasure. The world had ceased to exist. It was all I could do to focus and remind myself to breathe as I quivered from the onslaught. Finally, he sensed I couldn't take anymore and replaced his fingers with his dick. I was so wet that he slid into me easily.

"Ahh, Tabby."

I wrapped my legs around him, holding him tight to me. My arms grasped his as his nails raked my skin leaving faint pink lines. His cock felt good inside of me. He lifted me up in his powerful arms and kissed me. Then we began to make love. He thrust his hips against mine slow at first to let me feel his entire length as he lifted me and brought me down slowly. I tried to move against him to keep a rhythm between us, but he claimed my lips.

"Let me love you, Tabby. Your body feels so good against mine. We fit together. I love you."

He broke the kiss then. He was gasping. The rhythm increased between us. I clenched my legs tighter around him. My arms were around his neck. I kissed the side of his throat. Tucker was straining. His nails pierced the flesh of my back. But I didn't feel the pain. The light that we both saw in our minds now surrounded the both of us. We didn't need to close our eyes to see it. It wrapped around us. I felt the arms of the light touching my flesh, suffusing all of me as I was sure it was doing with him as well.

I bit into his shoulder to keep from screaming. It felt like I was being torn in two, but it wasn't painful. All my atoms seemed to be separating and then fusing back together. Tucker was almost there. I opened my eyes and saw the light adhering to his shoulder blades. It began to brighten. Inside the brilliance, I saw the outline of wings. At the moment, the illumination became too bright, and I felt Tucker holding me tighter to him.

"I love you, Tabby." He kissed the spot under my ear and then gave me one final thrust before the light washed over

both of us and infused us with its final push of sheer pleasure. Tucker collapsed on the bed next to me with a contented smile on his face.

It took me a few seconds to come down from the high. Tucker pulled my hand up to his lips and kissed my fingers. He drew them into his mouth suckling them I closed my eyes as a shudder of pleasure had me in its grasp for a second.

"You need to stop that."

"Why?" His grin was devilish.

"Because I can't go another round like that. What was that? That light?"

He stopped sucking on my fingers and twined his through mine. The heat of his flesh made me break out in another sweat. "It means I've crossed to the other side. All because of you. Because you loved me enough to open my heart."

I stared at him in awe. "You're an angel now?"

"Almost. I think. There's only one more thing to do."

"What's that?"

"I have to let go over everything."

He stared at me long and hard, and I realized what he meant. He had to give me up. To be an angel, he had to give up our love and ascend to a higher plane. I understood that, but it didn't mean I liked it. The feeling of peace and serenity the light had infused me with hadn't left, and I realized that this was what Tucker had to do. "I understand."

"Forgive me, Tabby. I don't desire to leave you like this again, but—"

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I placed my hand over his lips and kissed our entwined fingers. "I understand. I really do. It's okay. I mean that. You have to do what you need to."

He moved my hand away and pulled me close to him. He kissed me and then hugged me. "Thank you, Tabitha. For everything you've done for me."

"What happens when I wake up?"

He cupped my cheek. I closed my eyes and enjoyed the caress for the moment it lasted. "When you wake up, you'll have an A on your paper and a piece of my heart. Now lie back and shut your eyes. You'll be in my heart forever, Tabby. Love never dies, especially when it's in the heart of an angel."

I closed my eyes and nestled against him. As I did, fatigue washed over me. My last thought was of Tucker, but I didn't have to worry about him. That was the sense that I got. He was going to be fine. Just as I was.

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Epilogue

Just as Tucker had promised, I woke up the next morning in my bed. My body felt great. The sense of serenity I had with him in the dream realm had carried over into my waking world. Kasandra was still at her boyfriend's, and I didn't feel lonely. Later that day, I checked my e-mail, and there was a bulletin from the college saying that Professor Amonde had taken a leave of absence and that anyone in his class would have final grades posted. There was also an e-mail from the professor with nothing more than my paper attached to it. When I opened it, there was a large red A at the top of the paper. Tears came to my eyes. I hoped Tucker was happy. I was sure that he was considering it was what he wanted. I saved the paper and shut off my computer. Like him, it was time for me to move on.

Weeks came and went. My dreams were normal. No daemon looking to feed off my soul haunted them. I also didn't try to dreamwalk again, at least not with knowingly. I wasn't sure what was on the other side of the dream door this time if I crossed over it. Who knew what the next daemon lord would do to me. So I kept my mind focused on the present. I got a new job and finished up my master's thesis. However, Professor Amonde never did return. Kasandra moved into her own place with her boyfriend, leaving me the brunt of the rent, but that was okay because I was making more money and it wasn't too stressful. I was in training to study people's dreams. Life was good. It seemed like an angel

was watching over me. I didn't have any trouble, but I was still lonely. At first, I wrote it off and didn't think about it, but as time went forward, I knew what I wanted. I knew what my heart needed.

I didn't search my dreams looking for him. My body knew what it wanted. Tucker said that I would have a piece of his heart. So after watching television about the incoming storm, I stared at the empty room and the cinnamon candle that I had bought. Tucker might have changed my reality from being the daemon lord, but I went out and found the black nightie I had had before and the same kind of candle. I only hoped that he would be allowed to come.

The rain had begun battering the windows. The lightning ran across the sky and chased the thunder. I shut off all the lights and stared at the candle. Tucker had told me his true name. Supposedly I had power over him. *Let's see if you're an angel and if you can come down to the mortal realm.* I struck a match and lit the candle. The wick sputtered to life. Shadows danced on the wall. My mind flashed back to the night when the Nightmares had me. Goosebumps dotted my arms as I brushed away the memory.

I took a breath. "Tucker."

The shadows remained flat on the wall. I scanned along the corners of the room and still there was nothing. I figured then that I had to use his true name. I shook as my mind traced back in time to the last time we had been together. My body came alive from just the remembrance of his touch. I bit back a moan and turned my desire into a caress as I whispered his name.

"Ramiel." He had to have heard me.

I watched the shadows, and after a moment, I saw a faint glow, and then he was there. He was dressed as before in a black suit. His hair was loose around his shoulders. His beard was nearly trimmed to his face, but instead of the ruby, there was a diamond holding his collar together. His eyes were the most different about him. They weren't black anymore. They looked like human eyes except they were gold with silver irises.

"Summoning me with that much passion could drive an angel to debauchery." He opened his arms to me. I ran into them. It was where I belonged. He hugged me and kissed the top of my head. This time he smelled like lilies and jasmine.

"God, I missed you."

"I missed you, too." He untangled himself from me and looked around the room. "No Devil's Traps this time?"

I chuckled. "I wasn't going to make the same mistake twice. Besides, I wasn't sure if you would come or if you were allowed to."

He moved aside a piece of my hair. "It seems I wasn't able to give up everything. There was one thing I couldn't give up." His fingers brushed my cheek. His nails were clear and not claws anymore. He kissed me and his lips were as sweet as honey. My tongue ran along them to savor the taste.

"What happened?"

His hand ran over my satin nightgown. "They assigned me as a guardian for this certain human whose hair looks like a tabby cat's. Told me to watch over and protect her until she kicked me to the curb."

I bit my lip as I blushed. "Oh." I absently began unbuttoning his shirt and worked lower until I cupped his erection. "Does an angel still get to do this?"

"Oh yeah! As much as you want. But there's something I forgot to give you." He waved his hand over his other and a black box appeared. It was the same one from his last visit. He waited while I opened it. Inside was a gold band with a heart-shaped ruby on it. He plucked the ring out and slid it onto my ring finger on my right hand.

"I can't promise you marriage, Tabitha, so I won't bind you me in the human way. But I can give you a piece of my heart. You showed me love and I'm yours until the end of time."

My finger slid over the stone. It was warm. I kissed him while winding my hands in his hair. "I can live with that, but on one condition."

He growled, and his eyes turned black for a moment. There was still a little bit of the daemon in him. "Why do you always ask the impossible, woman?"

I tickled his chest and looked up at him innocently. "Because I can."

"Yeah, you can. Now what do you want?"

I licked one of his nipples. "I want you to claim me like you were supposed to. Over and over again."

His smile stretched from ear to ear. "Oh, I think I can oblige that." Leaning in to kiss me, he slid his hands over my breasts.

"Oh, and I want to see your wings."

Before he could protest, I claimed his lips one more time, knowing the whole time I would get what I wanted. I would

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always get what I wanted. Like he had told me before, reality was only an illusion. And in my reality, in my dream, I would always get what I wanted.

The End

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About the Author

Crymsyn Hart's worlds are filled with luscious vampires, gorgeous gods, quirky witches, and brooding shifters.

Crymsyn is a crafty witch and psychic who, for many years, worked in Boston while attending Emerson College. She graduated with a degree in Creative Writing. When she gets bored, she sneaks away to local cemeteries and coffee shops to find peace and quiet. Graveyards might be a great place for the dead, but she still has to listen to their chattering. It can get annoying when all you want to do is write, but she can tell you quite a ghost story. Crymsyn shares her life with a small zoo including two playful puppies and her hubby Mark.

If you come after dark, you're more than likely to find her snuggled up with a gory horror movie, or a bloody vampire movie.

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