# Strange Dreams

*My love, it is time for you to come back to me…*

My mind was swarmed by thoughts. In this deep, restless sleep, I couldn't wake up. It was dark and cramped.

I could feel tingling in my limbs and tried to move, but something stopped me.

*You have left me long enough and caused quite a mess.*

At nst, I registered these thoughts as a dream. But they weren't mine!

*Come to bitl!*

I couldn't see where I was in this nightmare. It was dark, cold, and left me with a sense of dread that permeated my bones.

Struggling more, I began to feel with my ngers and traced the cold steel that was closed around me.

I couldn't move because I was caged!

"Who's there?" I called out, my shaky voice betraying me.

"Have you forgotten me already?"

The gure of a man appeared in front of me. He stood tall and con dently and walked with such aloofness.

Before his appearance was even remotely visible to me, I could sense that heavy sinking feeling growing inside.

"Lazarus…", I grunted.

"That's right, my darling," Lazarus sneered at me as he paced in circles. Slowly, probably to undermine my con dence.

It was working.

"As long as we are fated to each other, I will not rest until you are mine. I will shred that mangy mutt's heart into a million pieces if it means having you," he smiled widely.

"NO!" I shouted in protest. "You'll never have me. I don't want you, and I never wanted you!"

Lazarus' smile dropped into a snarl as he walked over to my cage, leaning his face against it. He inhaled deeply, taking in my scent.

"Playing hard to get is no longer cute, my love. Why chase after some stupid wolf who hasn't marked you? He never wanted you to begin with. What makes you think he really wants you now?"

Lazarus bared an evil smile.

A lump in my throat made it hard to breathe. I swallowed it down and tried to keep calm while the world pressed in around me.

His words stung like daggers, compelling me to feel completely worthless.

"You don't have to feel like this," he cooed in my ear, as he continued to circle the cage. "Let me in, and I will show you what love really is."

The Demon Lord's voice traveled through my entire body, poisoning my cells with his deluded idea of what love meant.

He reached his hand through the cage, extending it to reach for my head. I tried to move aside but found only cold metal.

His ngers brushed against my neck and moved to my collarbone. Unable to move, I instead spat in his face.

"Don't you dare touch me!" I screamed.

Determination was beginning to spark in my blood, and I could feel clarity slowly washing over me.

Lazarus was appalled by my reaction. Even I had surprised myself.

"You will be MINE!" he hissed.

A glow began to ll our dark space, and as it intensi ed, I could feel the cold being replaced by heat. Lazarus smiled, showing his razor-sharp fangs dripping with drool.

"You should never disobey the Demon Lord," a deep, grating voice called out from behind me.

Suddenly, my body was consumed by a scorching re that brought out the worst of my screams.

Azazel's arming body appeared next to his brother.

He moved closer to the cage and looked at me with gleaming eyes that penetrated my entire body.

"Disobeying my brother is disobeying me, and you do not want to do that, naïve girl," Azazel spoke.

He reached through the cage and latched onto my wrist. His heat was unbearable, and I could feel my skin boiling and small my singed hair.

I screamed. It was all I could do.

The pain was immense, and it felt as though it would never stop.

Finally, he released his grip and rejoined his brother's side.

"Now, you understand how serious I am about you," Lazarus said.

I grabbed the cage and shook it with all my might. "This naïve girl is going to kill both of you."

Then, I pointed to Azazel and watched his smile fatter. "I'll make sure to bury you in a watery grave."

The two brothers exploded into laughter, lling the room with their terrible voices, echoing on into eternity.

"Until we meet again," Lazarus purred, before stepping back into the shadows.

Azazel disappeared as well, but his arnies remained. They were stronger now and burned with an intense heat.

I couldn't breathe. Every inhale became more painful; every exhale, more su ocating.

I squirmed and tried to keep away from the metal of the cages as they burned with the same heat as Azazel.

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I awoke in a panicky sweat.

No cage.

No Demon Lord.

No scathing burns on my body.

Instead, I was on the couch in the living room where I'd fallen asleep, completely entangled in my blanket.

I exhaled, and as the air left my lungs, so did the terrible dread that had wrapped itself around me.

How did they manage to penetrate my mind so easily?

I slowly got up from the couch, using the back of my hand to wipe all the sweat o my forehead.

A mirror let me inspect my body and reassure myself it had all been a dream. But that was unlike any dream I could ever hope to have.

I let out a long, stale breath and wallowed in my misery. It was just a dream, I told myself again, and again.

But then, why did the Demon Lord's words shake me so?

"Are you okay, dear?" Tessa's voice asked from the shadows.

I screamed from shock, and Tessa responded with a jump. She laughed at our little moment, something I hadn't heard from her before.

The sound of her laughter lled me with the hope I desperately needed.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you heard me," she said, moving further into the room.

"I didn't mean to be jumpy, but I had a strange dream," I said with a shudder.

Tessa's smile dropped into a frown. "What happened?"

I recounted to Tessa every menacing detail of my horrible dream. Even though it seemed stupid to believe it was real, I couldn't shake the pain I had felt.

"They can't hurt you now," Tessa said.

"Then, why do I feel like this?" I asked, cradling my arms.

"Because they've trapped your mind, dear. Only for a brief moment, luckily. But when you pay mind to their attacks, you are giving away your power to them," Tessa said.

I pulled my ngers through the locks of my hair, trying hard to think about what she meant. I hadn't meant to give them any of my mind.

They had taken it!

She registered the confusion on my face and sighed.

"I forgot that with all you've been through, you're still only eighteen years old," Tessa said, walking out of the room.

"Sch!" I protested.

I followed Tessa into the kitchen as she put on the kettle for more tea.

"What does my age have to do with anything!? I'd say I've learned a lot in the past week," I reminded her.

I had been through so much and lived for another day. That was something so many others could not say.

Remembering the fallen made me pause, but I couldn't mourn for them now. Not when there was still so much to do.

"Don't dictate what I know and what I don't know," I added.

She took a seat and smiled at me. "You remind me so much of my own daughter."

"You've said that before," I replied.

"And I mean it. You're both so…quick to respond and defend yourself. Even if you don't know why you're defending in the rst place. It is quite endearing in a way," she said with a smile, as she poured water into our tea.

"That's what they want you to think. And most of the time, it works wonders on whoever they choose…" Tessa said, before stopping and staring at me.

I could almost feel her words before I heard them. It wasn't a surprise when I saw her nodding along as if she was reading my thoughts.

"Exactly," she remarked, though I had said nothing.

"You are more powerful than you could ever believe. That includes having control over your own mind. How did this dream end?" she asked with genuine curiosity.

"I spat in their faces," I said, unable to hold back my smile.

Tessa laughed again, lling the entire room with her warm energy.

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I walked up the staircase, looking for Keith. If I could not him and tell him about my dream, maybe it could restart everything.

We didn't always have to be so pissed at one another, although I didn't feel that way last night.

He could give a better explanation to what the living hell he abandoned me for.

Part of me didn't want to hear his explanation. But I wanted to see him, *needed* to see him.

And that was all that mattered at the moment, right?

I found myself standing at his door, unable to open it. Memories of Tessa's laughter lled my head and gave me comfort.

I exhaled and slowly opened the door to our bedroom…and found it completely empty.

Did he even come back? Would he even want to?

With slumped shoulders, I walked to Tessa's room, where Tannon was recovering.

Tannon was resting peacefully—as it seemed—on his back in the empty room. I watched his breath push his shallow chest up and back down.

My eyes started getting weary. I wanted to go back to the room and sleep, but I didn't want to be alone.

Part of me knew, if I went back again, it would only be heartache.

The rst time we met, I hated him. He'd ripped me away from my family, my pack, and forced me into his world.

Then, I'd fallen in love with his world.

And now, what?

I found myself down an unfamiliar corridor. My mind was so preoccupied my feet took me wherever they wished.

But I had been down this corridor before and knew the door at the far end of the hall led to none other than Daisy's room.

The door was slightly open, but the room was dimly lit. A few candles sticked light, but all else was bathed in shadow.

A rustling sound pulled me forward. I tried to listen but couldn't place the noises.

I had already seen the worst from this room when I found Keith and Daisy together. What else could be so terrible?

I pushed the door open and took a step forward. A hand covered my mouth as I almost shrieked.

Keith was in the room! He was alone and in his wolf form, hostile, and rolling around on the oor!

"Keith!" I shouted.

His wolf form turned quickly and spotted me. He rolled to his feet and let out a ferocious growl.

"Keith! What's wrong? What are you doing here?" I asked.

He rose higher onto his back legs. I had seen him like this before, but it was still a shock.

*"It's me! Annabelle!"* I claimed, my voice a bit less con dent.

He stood his ground and all of the hairs on his body rose, like a territorial beast warning an encroaching threat.

I held up my hands in surrender and bowed my head into submission, to show I wasn't a threat.

I checked my peripherals for Daisy, but the rest of the room was empty.

Both fear and anger possessed his wolf form. I could see it in his eyes and hear it in his growls.

"What happened to you?" I asked, slowly lowering my hands. "I'm going to get Tessa…"

As I took a step back toward the door, he barked at me, loud enough to scare me o my feet.

"Tessa!?" I yelled, as I ung myself through the door and ran down the hallway.

Within seconds, Keith had torn through the too-small door frame and was careening down the hall, charging right at me!

I turned the corner of another corridor and pushed forward. I could hear his footsteps pounding on the stone oor behind.

In a ash of light, Tessa appeared in front of me.

The ash confused Keith, slowing his movements.

With a quick chant and wave of the hand, Tessa sent Keith's body ying sideways into the wall.

"What happened?" she asked fearfully.

"I don't know!" I answered, shaking uncontrollably. "I found him in Daisy's room acting like this!"

Tessa challenged Keith and swung her arms around in a strange choreographed manner, evoking white light from her palms and directing it at Keith.

Black vapor left his body as her white light surrounded it. He tried to ght back and emitted a bloodcurdling growl, but his legs faltered.

Seconds later, he shifted back into his human form and collapsed onto the ground.

"Keith, explain yourself," Tessa demanded, her voice grim and serious.

Keith looked disoriented. He was still conscious but couldn't focus on any one thing.

Against Tessa's better judgment, I ran to him and took his head in my hands.

"Moon Goddess, please help us," I prayed aloud. "Are you all right? Can you hear me?!"

Keith's eyes focused enough to look into my own.

"Get the hell o me!" he yelled, but he was unable to move from my grip.

"Keith, I'm here now. Talk to me," I said with hope.

He looked at me once again and snarled. "Who are you?"