

HOLLY RHIANNON



A TIME WHEN  
DEMONS

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For Mom and Dad.

You raised me with all the creative support in the world,  
but never so much to make me delusional.

Thank you.

# **PART ONE: DREAMS**

## Chapter 1

The mossy ground had been a source of comfort through the warm summer months, but now as August drew to a close and the sour sweet winds of Fall began to blow, the mouse was looking for shelter elsewhere.

Entering a human home is normally dangerous – but entering a witch home is something else altogether. Yet, on this cool evening, the small creature twitched its ears and its nose, fur bristling as another breeze slithered past, glancing off the damp stones of the house - and felt the chance was worth it. He could see it clearly – the crack in the stone foundation; small, but not too small for him. Even looking at it brought new-found warmth and confidence to his tiny body.

Yes, this would do nicely.

The stone was hard, slick with dying greenery and sticky spider webs; but he was agile enough to squeeze through, holding his breath inch by inch until he had come out on the other side. Wood greeted his paws. Looking out, he could see it led to miles of carpet that promised even more warmth. Only as he motioned to begin his hunt for a good nesting spot did the smell hit him – like a hurricane.

A cat.

Before he knew it, the ground around him was shaking and he was going up, up, upside-down, flailing about as his tail threatened to come off from the pinching teeth that gripped it. Jostled back and forth as the cat hurried upstairs, heart beating faster and faster with every second that went past, the mouse closed his eyes and waited for the end. At least he would perish in the warmth of this fortress.

Yet somehow, his tiny heart held out.

Snapped up in the mouth of this virile feline, he was whisked far away across the expansive carpet, up the stairs... and the cat drew up in a fast halt. He had run into his human. Craning his neck, the

mouse attempted to see if this was to be his saviour or the bringer of an even swifter death.

“What have you got there? Bodkin! Bodkin... give it!”

Glaring with one green eye and one blue eye protruding from his naked face, Bodkin was unwilling to release his prey. But once his eyes met those of the human, it was impossible to resist the buzzing that was growing in his skull. Opening his mouth, he allowed the tiny mouse to tumble to the ground where it sat unmoving, frozen in fear.

Bodkin arranged himself properly, sitting up straight and watching his mistress intently, waiting and hoping for the return of his prize.

“Ugh that’s nasty! Let the cat have it! You can get disease from those things, you know.”

With a laugh, Bodkin’s mistress held his prize in the air, staring at it; and closing her eyes a moment, two furry ears much like the mouse’s protruded from the top of her head.

“A good look, no?”

The girl and her friend burst out laughing.

“No, really, it’s nasty. Just give that thing to Bod and clean your hands before you come near me again. Some of us can’t just magick away a disease.”

“Alright, alright, killjoy.”

With a wet spak, the tiny body hit the ground. Sensing this was his one chance at life, the mouse bolted for it, and after a reproachful glare, Bodkin gave chase.

Pushing her hair back, the ears disappeared. Aeres Cadogan sized herself up in the mirror beside her friend, jostling into the other girl as they smoked and vied for dressing table space.

“I swear sometimes that cat of yours understands everything we say

and do.”

“He probably does, he’s a familiar after all.”

Aeres shrugged and removed one of the bobby pins she held in her mouth along with the tube of tobacco. Brushing her mass of reddish-brown hair over to the right, she pinned the other side behind her ear. Then, stamping out the cigarette in a metal jewelry tray, she leapt back to admire her progress from a distance.

Thin and pale, Aeres had negligible curves which made her appear younger than her 19 years, but she made up for it when she went out by wearing the shortest dress of anyone she knew. That, paired with fishnets and combat boots and a plethora of jangling bracelets and necklaces, formed her signature style – one her parents never had any appreciation for.

Her best friend, Kami, was a bit more polished; tawny skin glowing with a bronze sheen on her high cheekbones which she always highlighted when they went out.

A film maker by passion and sex worker by trade, Kami frequented internet venues for her profession, preferring to create artistic, solo films which she posted on her own domain and retained complete control over. Through her evolution online, makeup and fashion had been two major points of interest that she had used very much to her advantage, creating little ‘how-to’ videos and live ‘get ready with me’ content on safe-for-work platforms when she needed a couple of extra bucks.

Tonight, she wore tight faux leather pants and a white boned blouse, incredibly low-cut with padding in the shoulders, giving her a slick appearance reminiscent of the ‘80s.

“Not sure whether I should buy you a drink or steer clear.”

“I’ve always appreciated a combination of the two,” Kami joked, applying blood red lipstick in the mirror then turning to face her friend.

“Ready? Charlotte should be heading out soon, she just texted me.”



“Yeah, I’ve just got to...” Aeres had grabbed a clutch which featured a brass knuckle grip and was rummaging around in it now “...grab this!” she finished with a smile.

Holding up a small Ziplock bag with one solitary pill in it, she froze when a knock sounded on the door. Kami smashed her cigarette into the jewelry dish and tossed the dish’s contents out the open window, ushering the remaining smell in the room out along with it, while Aeres stuffed the Ziplock back into her clutch.

“Come in if you must!”

The heavy oak door swung open without the expected creak a door of its age would have, and in the doorway stood Aeres’ mother.

“What do you want, Ava?”

Tall and willowy, with ash-blond hair, Ava Cadogan bent to her daughter’s will about half the time. The other half of the time was spent in passive aggressive mental and magickal battles that left one or both drained. It had been easier to control the young witch before she was out of school, but with the summer sun had come a blaze of power unique to the newly-adult.

“Dear, your father and I need to discuss the matter of succession. Dinner is ready...”

“Kami and I are getting food when we’re out and I told you already I don’t care about that antiquated bullshit law.”

Pursing her lips, Ava’s eyes slid over to Kami, taking in the resolute stance of her daughter’s friend and deciding tonight would not be the night for further altercation.

“Very well, we’ll discuss it in the morning then.”

Turning on her heel, Ava walked rigidly from the room, and shut the door behind her.

Both young women let themselves fall onto Aeres’ bed, its burgundy brocade duvet enveloping them briefly before flattening

out in a puff of air as if it were sighing right along with them.

“They’re still not getting off your back about that, huh?”

“Not even a little. Gets worse every day. I guess this was all supposed to be sorted a few years back, but I’ve managed to put it off.”

“Honestly, I thought they’d given up.”

“They did for a while. I mean, as much as could be expected. But they’ve got – renewed fervor!” Aeres held up a militant fist and then let her arm fall back to her side. “They learned some old school friend of Dad’s has a son who’s late to the game too, and he’s got some dusty old bloodline or some shit like that. I think he was promised to someone else, and it fell through. Generally, the older bloodlines are signed and sealed at, like, age 13.”

“Is he hot?”

“You think I asked?” Aeres scoffed.

“Might not be so bad if he is!”

Laboriously sitting up and positioning herself on the edge of the bed, Aeres looked back at her friend who still lay on its downy surface.

“I guess Charlotte’s going to be wondering where we are.”

“Is Molly coming along then?” Kami asked as she sat up as well.

“Oh, Molly is coming. If there has ever been a night for Molly, it’s tonight.”

Taking the baggie from earlier out of her clutch, Aeres popped its contents into her mouth.

“I’ll bring you along with me when we get to Charlotte. Should be enough time” she said with an impish smile, which Kami returned.



Styx was not in the best part of town, but it was not in the worst either. Like Kami and Aeres, it floated in a purgatorial grey area that attracted all manner of lovely, dark, messy little creatures.

A thin rain was beginning to fall, giving the pavement and stone buildings a surreal glimmer in the neon light and mist that was now hovering a foot off the ground.

Charlotte stood under the blue signage of Styx, far enough away from the bouncer and main entrance that she was not a bother, but close enough to hear the industrial thumping of Skinny Puppy as it beat at the doors of the club like a demon trying to escape its prison.

Upon noticing Kami, Charlotte dropped her cigarette – the black clove variety – and stamped it out on the ground with a shiny pointed toe. Her imposing appearance melted away; icy expression breaking into a grin, and she ran over to greet her girlfriend with a lengthy kiss.

Upon pulling away, she bestowed a smile upon Aeres too, along with a little hug.

“What took you so long?! I came here from work and thought I would be late for sure! Some jackass paid past my stream time and I just couldn’t turn it down.”

She made a gagging gesture and Kami moved to put an arm around her, placing multiple kisses on her cheeks to comfort her from the harrowing experience.

“The Mother Unit decided to lecture me about my future marriage plans.”

“Ah your ‘great matter’! Have they found a suitor yet, Mademoiselle Cadogan?”

“Ugh please. I’d rather not. What was your jackass like?”

“Jackass-like. Wanted me to call him Daddy. Not sure why these men don’t understand that I set my own rules. After three requests

I shut it down. Got \$100 out of it though, so.”

She shrugged and Kami hugged her close with one arm before letting go.

“That’s my girl! Wish you’d switch off the livestreaming though. I swear it attracts the worst of the worst.”

“It’s my brand at this point, you know that.”

“Yes, well, Aeres has brought a present for us both that will make everything better!”

“Ohh?” Charlotte perked up.

“Come here,” Aeres smiled, holding out her hands, and Charlotte obliged by stepping closer.

With her hands on either side of Charlotte’s head, she massaged her fingers through her scalp and then let go, standing back. Staggering a moment, Charlotte’s mouth opened in shock.

“Girl WHAT! Shit. That’s GOOD!”

“Shush!” Kami covered her mouth, laughing “Do you WANT the lug over there to hear you and not let us in? You know he already is certain we’re underage.”

Charlotte lowered her exclamations to a giggle as Aeres repeated the motion with Kami. Soon the trio were entering the bar.

With her companions chatting away about work, Aeres took her usual place as leader of the group, scoping out the crowd and strutting towards the bar. Once there, she made eye contact with the tender immediately, and the woman swanned over to greet them all. She knew her regulars and what they were bound to order.

“Gin and tonic?” she asked, already starting to make them as Aeres nodded and leaned on the bar, looking out at the dance floor. Kami and Charlotte were running their fingers up and down each

other's arms and laughing, eliciting an unnoticed eye roll from Aeres.

The young witch had a different agenda than a giddy drug experience and fancied herself quite the master when it came to controlling a trip.

When the drinks were ready, she abandoned her friends for the pulsating floor. As the breeze, noticeable in such a strange and meaningful way when she was rolling, surrounded her in an aura, she felt removed from everyone else around her. Of course - she was removed. Different. Powerful. That power coursed through her all the time, but there were few moments when she could really use it in this world she existed in.

Sipping her drink and dancing, one song switched to another, to another, and soon the expected attention was coming on. A hand was on her arm, and her eyes previously closed, lost in the music, opened; wide and blue, staring at the creature who dared pull her from the trance.

Placing her drink on the DJ's stage, her free hand went in her purse, clutching her phone, while the other reached out, a single finger tracing its way down the man's neck, sparking white as it went. He drew away in shock, hand to neck, as Aeres grinned wickedly and moved to another part of the dance floor, reconnecting with her friends who had their own clutch of admirers.

"...No, not into the D but if you want to watch my show, you're more than welcome to."

Charlotte was handing out a business card – ever the entrepreneur.

"What did you do to that guy? He's glaring at you." Kami nodded over her shoulder, causing Aeres to look back and see the man who'd just tried to dance up on her.

"Shocked him a little. Have phone will travel." She held up the offending item and grinned wickedly.

“Sweet!” Kami laughed, then took hold of Charlotte’s arm, addressing the two men who were speaking with her. “Time’s up, lads.”

They left their companions in confusion and headed to the bar for another drink. The tender from earlier motioned to serve them again, her hand hesitating over a lime as she paused to first talk to them.

“Just once, you might give them the time of day...”

“And why would I do that?” Aeres spat.

“Because it’s a bar. That’s kind of part of it.”

“Look, if someone who’s not a total perv ever comes in, I’ll give it a thought.”

“Watch yourself, alright?”

The woman finished pouring their drinks and stalked off.

“And I guess we’ll just have to find a new bar,” Aeres grumbled.

With a groan, Charlotte and Kami sipped their drinks, leaning against the bar.

“They have the best music here, though. Right rubbish that even the women here are put off by us having a dance and enjoying our own company.”

“Internalized misogyny, am I right?”

“It’s one hell of a drug!” Charlotte responded, eyeing a man who was sidling up to them.

“Loves – how about I buy you each a shot?”

“Yes, would you be a darling?” Kami responded before Aeres could say otherwise, giving her sweetest smile and placing a hand on his.

Two rounds of tequila later, the man would not leave, and a knot was growing in Aeres' stomach. With half a mind to break her friends from their drug-induced reverie, she downed another shot then excused herself to the facilities.

She slammed the stall door as the world spun around her, the scents of old wallpaper, cracked tile, toilets that had never been given a proper clean crept up, smothering the bright clarity she had felt through the rest of the night. Putting hands on the back wall of the stall, she concentrated on her blood stream and everything that occupied it. Expelling the liquor and drugs from her system completely, she sobered up in an instant.

A bar bathroom at two in the morning is never something you want to take in with sobriety. Wrinkling her nose, Aeres cleaned her hands, wiped them on the rolling towel dispenser (likely more germ-filled than if she had ignored washing altogether) and shoved her way out of the stifling room.

Casting her gaze around the bar, she saw her group was still sitting at the bar with the unwanted man. Aeres smirked as she rejoined them, having had an idea to make the situation entertaining again. Taking her seat, she ordered a round of flaming shots and egged them on, flicking her zippo under the counter, unnoticed.

Strangely enough when their overly-confident drink pusher took his, the flame shot up, singeing his eyebrows.

Convulsing in laughter as the stranger flew into a panic, the three decided it was time to make their exit and stumbled out onto the street. A blast of fresh rainy air hit them along with the twinkling lights of the cabs queuing up to get patrons safely home.

“Sober shawarma?”

Sighing and fidgeting like a petulant child, Kami agreed “Oh alright, we have school starting up tomorrow, don't we.”

“Don't remind me!” Charlotte wailed.

Grabbing her friends' hands, Aeres led them around a corner,

cleared their systems as she had done her own, and they walked off towards their favourite 24/7 Lebanese diner, heels clicking into the night.

As their voices faded away on the wind, a man who had had an unnatural shock to his neck earlier in the evening stood on the street corner, eyes trained on the strangest women he had ever witnessed. Did his senses deceive him? They looked so normal now under the streetlights. Shaking his head and getting into a cab, he vowed he would see them again.



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