



Dark Visions: The Strange Power; The Possessed; The Passion

By L.J. Smith

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GIFTED AND CURSED

Kaitlyn Fairchild has always felt like an outsider in her small hometown. Her haunting eyes and prophetic drawings have earned her a reputation as a witch. But Kait's not a witch: She's a psychic. Tired of being shunned, Kait accepts an invitation to attend the Zetes Institute, where she can have a fresh start and study with other psychic teens.

Learning to hone her abilities with four other gifted students, Kait discovers the intensity of her power -- and the joy of having true friends. But those friendships quickly become complicated when Kait finds herself torn between two irresistible guys. Rob is kind and athletic, and heals people with his good energy. Gabriel is aggressive and mysterious, a telepath concealing his true nature as a psychic vampire, feeding off of others' life energy. Together, Rob and Gabriel's opposing forces threaten the group's stability.

Then one of the experiments traps the five teens in a psychic link. A link that threatens their sanity and their lives. And Kaitlyn must decide whom to trust...and whom to love.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

L.J. Smith is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Night World and Vampire Diaries series. She has written over twenty-five books and lives in California.

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Dark Visions

CHAPTER 1

You don't invite the local witch to parties. No matter how beautiful she is. That was the basic problem.

I don't care, Kaitlyn thought. I don't need anyone.

She was sitting in history class, listening to Marcy Huang and Pam Sasseen plan a party for that weekend. She couldn't help but hear them. Mr. Flynn's gentle, apologetic voice was no competition for their excited whispers. Kait was listening, pretending not to listen, and fiercely wishing she could get away. She couldn't, so she doodled on the blue-lined page of her history notebook.

She was full of contradictory feelings. She hated Pam and Marcy, and wanted them to die, or at least to have some gory accident that left them utterly broken and defeated and miserable. At the same time there was a terrible longing inside her. If they would only let her in—it wasn't as if she insisted on being the most popular, the most admired, girl at school. She'd settle for a place in the group that was securely her own. They could shake their heads and say, "Oh, that Kaitlyn—she's odd, but what would we do without her?" And that would be fine, as long as she was a part.

But it wouldn't happen, ever. Marcy would never think of inviting Kaitlyn to her party because she wouldn't think of doing something that had never been done before. No one ever invited the witch; no one thought that Kaitlyn, the lovely, spooky girl with the strange eyes, would want to go.

And I don't care, Kaitlyn thought, her reflections coming around full circle. This is my last year. One semester to go. After that, I'm out of high school and I hope I never see anyone from this place again.

But that was the other problem, of course. In a little town like Thoroughfare she was bound to see them, and their parents, every day for the next year. And the year after that, and the year after that. . . .

There was no escape. If she could have gone away to college, it might have been different. But she'd screwed up her art scholarship . . . and anyway, there was her father. He needed her—and there wasn't any money. Dad needed her. It was junior college or nothing.

The years stretched out in front of Kaitlyn, bleak as the Ohio winter outside the window, filled with endless cold classrooms. Endless sitting and listening to girls planning parties that she wasn't invited to. Endless exclusion. Endless aching and wishing that she were a witch so she could put the most hideous, painful, debilitating curse on all of them.

All the while she was thinking, she was doodling. Or rather her hand was doodling—her brain didn't seem to be involved at all. Now she looked down and for the first time saw what she'd drawn.

A spiderweb.

But what was strange was what was underneath the web, so close it was almost touching. A pair of eyes.

Wide, round, heavy-lashed eyes. Bambi eyes. The eyes of a child.

As Kaitlyn stared at it, she suddenly felt dizzy, as if she were falling. As if the picture were opening to let her in. It was a horrible sensation—and a familiar one. It happened every time she drew one of those pictures, the kind they called her a witch for.

The kind that came true.

She pulled herself back with a jerk. There was a sick, sinking feeling inside her.

Oh, please, no, she thought. Not today—and not here, not at school. It's just a doodle; it doesn't mean anything.

Please let it be just a doodle.

But she could feel her body bracing, ignoring her mind, going ice-cold in order to meet what was coming.

A child. She'd drawn a child's eyes, so some child was in danger.

But what child? Staring at the space under the eyes, Kait felt a tugging, almost a twitch, in her hand. Her fingers telling her the shape that needed to go there. Little half circle, with smaller curves at the edges. A snub nose. Large circle, filled in solid. A mouth, open in fear or surprise or pain. Big curve to indicate a round chin.

A series of long wriggles for hair—and then the itch, the urge, the need in Kait's hand ebbed away.

She let out her breath.

That was all. The child in the picture must be a girl, with all that hair. Wavy hair. A pretty little girl with wavy hair and a spiderweb on top of her face.

Something was going to happen, involving a child and a spider. But where—and to what child? And when?

Today? Next week? Next year?

It wasn't enough.

It never was. That was the most terrible part of Kaitlyn's terrible gift. Her drawings were always accurate—they always, always came true. She always ended up seeing in real life what she'd drawn on paper.

But not in time.

Right now, what could she do? Run through town with a megaphone telling all kids to beware of spiders? Go down to the elementary school looking for girls with wavy hair?

Even if she tried to tell them, they'd run away from her. As if Kaitlyn brought on the things she drew. As if she made them happen instead of just predicting them.

The lines of the picture were getting crooked. Kaitlyn blinked to straighten them. The one thing she wouldn't do was cry—because Kaitlyn never cried.

Never. Not once, not since her mother had died when Kait was eight. Since then, Kait had learned how to make the tears go inside.

There was a disturbance at the front of the room. Mr. Flynn's voice, usually so soft and melodious that students could comfortably go to sleep to it, had stopped.

Chris Barnable, a boy who worked sixth period as a student aide, had brought a piece of pink paper. A call slip.

Kaitlyn watched Mr. Flynn take it, read it, then look mildly at the class, wrinkling his nose to push his glasses back up.

"Kaitlyn, the office wants you."

Kaitlyn was already reaching for her books. She kept her back very straight, her head very high, as she walked up the aisle to take the slip. **KAITLYN FAIRCHILD TO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE—AT ONCE!** it read. Somehow when the "at once" box was checked, the whole slip assumed an air of urgency and malice.

"In trouble again?" a voice from the first row asked snidely. Kaitlyn couldn't tell who it was, and she wouldn't turn around to look. She went out the door with Chris.

In trouble again, yes, she thought as she walked down the stairs to the main office. What did they have on her this time? Those excuses "signed by her father" last fall?

Kaitlyn missed a lot of school, because there were times when she just couldn't stand it. Whenever it got too bad, she went down Piqua Road to where the farms were, and drew. Nobody bothered her there.

"I'm sorry you're in trouble," Chris Barnable said as they reached the office. "I mean . . . I'm sorry if you're in trouble."

Kaitlyn glanced at him sharply. He was an okay-looking guy: shiny hair, soft eyes—a lot like Hello Sailor, the cocker spaniel she'd had years ago. Still, she wasn't fooled for a minute.

Boys—boys were no good. Kait knew exactly why they were nice to her. She'd inherited her mother's creamy Irish skin and autumn-fire hair. She'd inherited her mother's supple, willow-slim figure.

But her eyes were her own, and just now she used them without mercy. She turned an icy gaze on Chris, looking at him in a way she was usually careful to avoid. She looked him straight in the face.

He went white.

It was typical of the way people around here reacted when they had to meet Kaitlyn's eyes. No one else had eyes like Kaitlyn. They were smoky blue, and at the outside of each iris, as well as in the middle, were darker rings.

Her father said they were beautiful and that Kaitlyn had been marked by the fairies. But other people said other things. Ever since she could remember, Kaitlyn had heard the whispers—that she had strange eyes, evil eyes. Eyes that saw what wasn't meant to be seen.

Sometimes, like now, Kaitlyn used them as a weapon. She stared at Chris Barnable until the poor jerk actually stepped backward. Then she lowered her lashes demurely and walked into the office.

It gave her only a sick, momentary feeling of triumph. Scaring cocker spaniels was hardly an achievement. But Kaitlyn was too frightened and miserable herself to care. A secretary waved her toward the principal's office, and Kaitlyn steeled herself. She opened the door.

Ms. McCaslan, the principal, was there—but she wasn't alone. Sitting beside the desk was a tanned, trim young woman with short blond hair.

"Congratulations," the blond woman said, coming out of the chair with one quick, graceful movement.

Kaitlyn stood motionless, head high. She didn't know what to think. But all at once she had a rush of feeling, like a premonition.

This is it. What you've been waiting for.

She hadn't known she was waiting for anything.

Of course you have. And this is it.

The next few minutes are going to change your life.

"I'm Joyce," the blond woman said. "Joyce Piper. Don't you remember me?"

Users Review

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Kelli Ross:

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