

*S L E E P t o*

**D R E A M**



P...e...p...p...e...r,  
*the mysterious voice  
rang through her  
head again.*

*But this time it was different.*

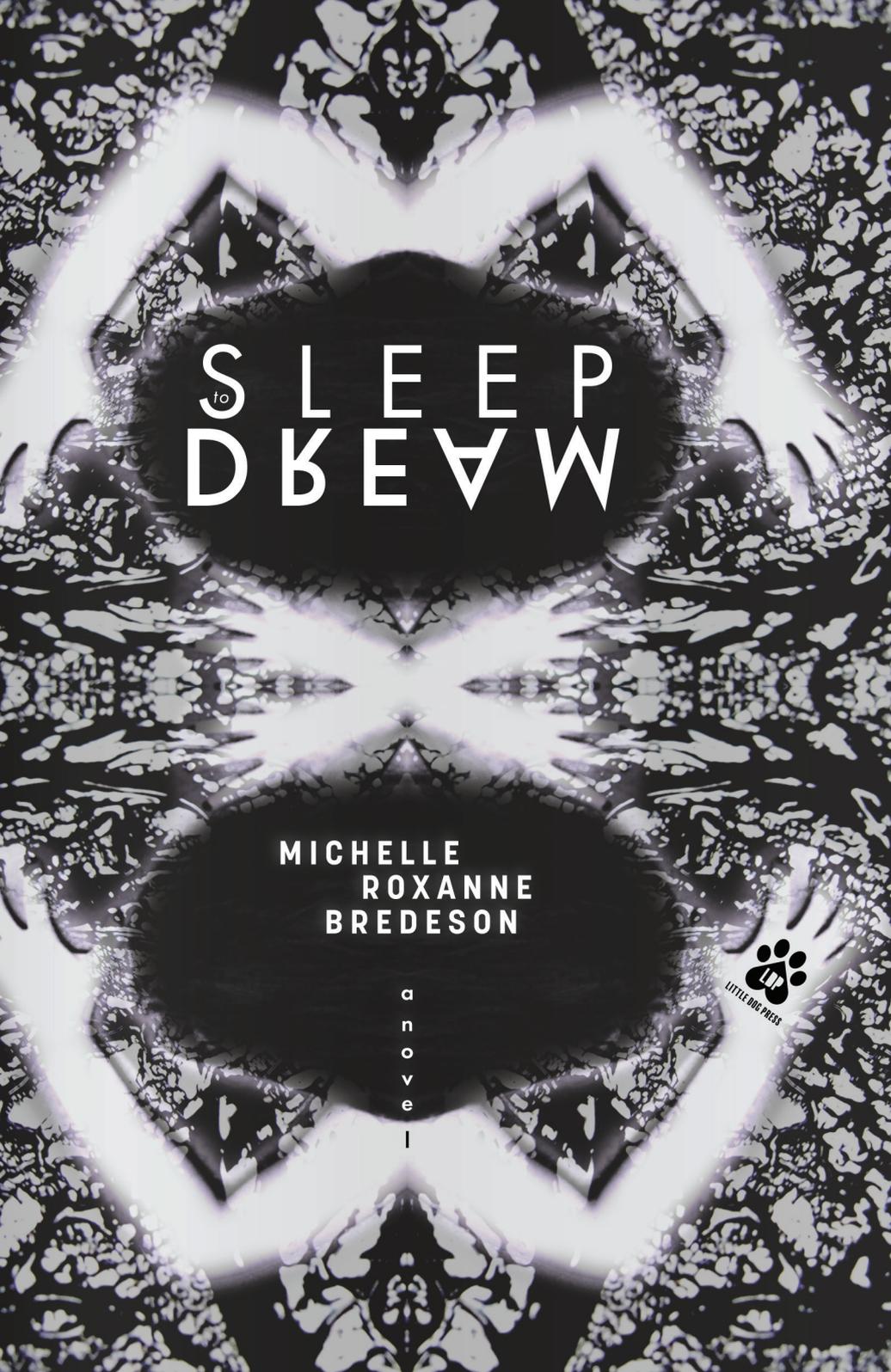
*This time when  
she heard the voice,  
a shimmery cloud of  
silver-white light  
appeared in her  
field of vision.*

P...e...p...p...e...r,  
you shouldn't be  
with the boy.

also by  
Michelle Roxanne Bredeson

*Legacy – Bloodline Book 1*

*Legends – Bloodline Book 2*



S<sup>to</sup>LEEP  
DREW

MICHELLE  
ROXANNE  
BREDESON

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF

**A N D R E W**  
**A N D R E W**  
**A N D R E W**







Pepper Montgomery woke with a start to the weight on her chest and the distinct feeling that someone was watching her. No, it wasn't just a feeling—there was certainly something there. Some evil thing bearing down on her torso, holding her arms and legs in place, willing her not to move. It was too dark to make out the shape, whatever it was, but she could feel it pushing down on her breasts, her ribs closing in around absent lungs. She expected to hear the crunch of bone, or perhaps her heart bursting under the pressure.

Something told Pepper the fear wasn't new, that she'd been here before—but that fleeting thought was soon replaced by absolute and total horror.

She was going to die.

Whatever this thing was that was holding her down meant to take her life, and there was nothing she could do to stop it. These were her final moments, trapped under the weight of this god-awful whatever-the-hell-it-was. This was the end of everything, and she didn't even get a chance to say goodbye.

"Pepper, wake up," a voice broke through her thoughts. "You have to get out of bed or you're going to be late for school."

It was only then that Pepper was freed from darkness and fear and whatever had been holding her down. It took several moments for the terror to fade and the pink walls of her bedroom to come into view. She hated pink, but



hadn't had time to fix it since she and her mother had moved into the house two weeks ago.

"Your alarm's been going off for at least five minutes," her mother, Lois, pointed out, reaching down to the bedside table to silence the noise. "Get dressed, and I'll make you breakfast."

Pepper rolled over to face the wall, resting her hands under her cheek. She closed her eyes as the images of the dreamlike state came flooding back. It wasn't the first time she'd had an experience like that, but it didn't make it any easier to deal with.

Though her condition had never been professionally diagnosed, Pepper knew what was going on. She'd made the mistake of admitting what she was experiencing only once—and her overly religious mother had quickly summed it up as demonic oppression. Pepper didn't believe in all that stuff, and had taken it upon herself to do some research. It hadn't taken much time to determine that the phenomenon was called sleep paralysis, and it was a fairly common condition.

Knowing what was happening, however, didn't make the episodes any less terrifying.

"Pepper, get out of bed," Lois ordered.

"I'm not going."

"Why must we have this fight every single morning? You *have* to go to school."

Pepper whipped her head around, coal black hair spilling over narrow shoulders. "I tried it out for a week, and I hate it, so I'm not going back."

"You're seventeen years old, I'm your mother, and you don't get a say in the matter."

Pepper knew exactly how she wanted to respond—that not one single person at her new school in the suburbs had so much as bothered to say hello in the week she'd been there. That she'd never loathed a place more in her entire life. And that when she turned eighteen at Thanksgiving, she planned to leave anyway.

"Fine," Pepper mumbled instead, swinging long legs over the side of the bed. "Can I have some privacy, please?"

Lois gave a slight nod, her arms crossed over her chest as she turned for the hallway.

Pepper hurried to the door and slammed it behind her. Things had been tense with her and her mother—and that was *before* Lois had insisted on moving Pepper from the only home she'd

ever known in microscopic Willow, Minnesota to a suburb of the Twin Cities.

Pepper stood looking over her closet for several moments, not satisfied with any of the garments hanging inside. She settled on a black t-shirt and jeans, fully expecting the annoyed, “Black again?” sigh from her mother. Well, black was all she felt like wearing these days.

“Black again, huh?” Lois asked when Pepper joined her in the small kitchen. “What would you like for breakfast?”

“Nothing,” Pepper replied, slinging her backpack over her shoulder as she headed for the door. “Later.”

“Don’t you want a ride? What about money for lunch?”

Pepper didn’t bother with a reply as she hurried out the door. It was a good twenty-minute walk to school, but she didn’t mind. It would give her time to clear her head before she spent another day at a school she hated with people she couldn’t care less about.

While she knew it wasn’t fair, she blamed her mother for the divorce. She also blamed her mother for taking her away from her father. He’d said he didn’t care if Pepper lived with him, yet Lois had insisted they move four hours away.

“You’re in my American History class,” a voice spoke from behind her.

Pepper ignored it, quickening her pace down the sidewalk. She didn’t plan on being here long, so she didn’t want to make friends. Friends would do nothing more than give her a reason to stay.

“Your name’s Pepper, right?”

This time she could tell it was a boy speaking. God, she hated talking to boys—mostly because she *couldn’t* talk to them. Literally, she did nothing but stumble over her words.

“Hey, I’m Liam,” the boy said, falling in line next to her on the sidewalk. “Liam Harper.”

She dug her fingernails into her bare arms while pretending to ignore him. Boys didn’t usually talk to her, so she didn’t know why this one was. She figured she was acting like a total dork anyway, which meant he was bound to see right through her and leave without a dismissal.

“You must be new,” he continued. “I mean, I hadn’t seen you before last week.”

Pepper looked down at the sidewalk, to his black Converse sneakers moving along the cement. Her gaze slowly trailed up to his Ramones t-shirt and the black backpack slung over his shoulder. But she was terrified of meeting his gaze, so she stared back down at the sidewalk.

She assumed the boy, Liam, would get the hint and leave her alone, but he didn't seem to mind her silence as they walked along together.

"It's kind of nice being around a girl who doesn't like to talk so much," he admitted sometime later. "It's a welcome change of pace."

Pepper wasn't sure how to respond to that, so she didn't. Which may have been a mistake, since he seemed to appreciate her silence.

"Do you walk to school every day?" Liam asked. "I usually drive, but my sister asked to borrow my car this morning. She's brilliant, and I love her, but she talks non-stop, and it really drives me crazy sometimes. Anyway, I could give you a ride to school tomorrow if you'd like. It wouldn't be a big deal at all."

Pepper knew this was her chance to get rid of him, but it meant she'd have to speak. And she was about to—to tell him no, thank you, she preferred walking—but she made the mistake of looking at his face first.

Pepper recognized him right away. He was tall and terribly thin with shaggy dirty blond hair tucked behind his ears. His eyes were a misty shade of gray, a hue she'd never seen before, and were offset by the purple-blue half-moons underneath them. He looked as if he hadn't slept in days, but it was only a minor distraction from how utterly attractive she found him.

"Is that a yes?" he asked, flashing a crooked smile. "To the ride?"

"I, um," she managed, her eyes darting back down to the sidewalk. "I don't..."

"That's the strangest yes I've ever heard, but I'll take it."

"I didn't say yes." Pepper was startled by her response, but mostly because she'd had one at all. A full sentence spoken without stuttering was an accomplishment.

"But you didn't say no either," he pointed out. "How about I walk you home so I'll know where to pick you up tomorrow?"

"That's not necessary."

"I'm sure it's not, but I'd still like to."

"But..." She looked him in the eye again for some reason, and lost her thought. There had to be a right way to say no to him, a convincing no, but she couldn't manage it now.

"Have lunch with me today," he suggested. "Please. That'll give you a chance to get to know me, and then I can convince you that I'm not a bad guy."

"I'm sure you're not a bad guy," she got out. "I just can't."

"So you'd prefer to keep reading your book by yourself then?"

Pepper flinched. She didn't think anyone had noticed her sitting by herself in the corner of the cafeteria, poring over a tattered copy of *It*. In fact, she'd *hoped* no one had noticed—it would make leaving in two months so much easier.

"At least let me introduce you to my sister before you say no," he continued. "She'll vouch that I'm not a bad guy."

"Again, I didn't say you were a bad guy, I just..."

"You don't like blonds? Or maybe you don't like boys. I've usually got a pretty good radar for that kind of thing, but I have been known to be wrong."

"It's not like that, I'm just... bad at it."

"At what?" he laughed.

"Talking to boys," she blurted out, the school finally coming into view. Pepper quickened her pace, realizing this was her opportunity to get rid of him.

But Liam's legs were longer than hers, his stride faster, and he had no problem keeping up. "Look, I feel like I'm making a bad impression here. All I want is to have lunch with you. Can we at least start with that?"

Pepper stopped in her tracks to face him. "There's, um, there's something you should know about me."

He smiled, cocking his head to the side. "What's that?"

"I'm going to be moving back home to live with my dad soon. Hopefully, within the next couple months. As soon as I can get out of here, I'm leaving. I figure there's no point in making friends if I'll be gone soon anyway."

"A couple months is a long time to go without friends. What could it hurt to make just one while you're here?"

"I, um..." She couldn't come up with a good argument for him, so she just stood there, fidgeting as they stared at one another.

"I'll walk you to class," he offered, nodding toward the school.

“Who do you have for homeroom?”

Pepper realized she wasn't going to win, and maybe that was for the best. Liam was right—making a friend probably wouldn't hurt. “It's, uh, AP Chemistry, with Mrs. Cooper.”

His smile grew. “I know just where that is. My sister's in your class.”

“She is? Who's your sister?”

“Carrie Harper. The tiny blonde girl who's constantly raising her hand.”

“I *do* know who that is,” Pepper admitted. “She seems really smart.”

“She is,” Liam confirmed. “She's only fifteen, and she's already set to graduate this year. I'm supposed to graduate, too, but it'll be on time for me. Not everyone can be a genius, I guess. Do you have any brothers or sisters?”

“No, it's just me.”

“So you don't have any siblings, and you're not inclined to make friends. Do you just enjoy being alone?”

“Yes,” Pepper confessed as they reached the large double doors leading into the high school. She didn't know what to think when Liam opened the door for her, and she awkwardly swept her mop of dark hair over her shoulder as they made their way inside.

“I can appreciate that,” he said, leading the way down the hall. “I've had Carrie following me around since we were little kids, so I've never really been alone.”

“That doesn't sound so bad. I think it would be nice to always have someone to hang out with.”

“That's contradictory, coming from someone who seems so determined *not* to make friends.”

“Having a brother or sister isn't the same thing as having a friend. At least, I assume it wouldn't be.”

“I'll give you that,” he agreed. “There are times when I really want to kill my sister, or at least get rid of her for a few days, but I'm kind of stuck with her.”

“You make it sound like it's a bad thing,” someone spoke from behind them.

Pepper turned with Liam to face the petite blonde girl peering at them through glasses with purple plastic frames. She smiled as she took a step toward Pepper. “Hey, you're in my homeroom.