

JILLIAN GRAVES



**BLOOD
MOON**

A
STRANGE MOON
NOVELLA

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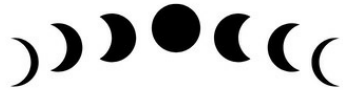
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To Angel, Spike, Eric, and Pam.

Bite me.

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CONTENT NOTES



Blood Moon contains depictions of mild violence, blood, and sex under the magical influence. The main characters engage in a consensual power exchange, the relationship is not meant to depict real-life best practices. For more detailed content description and kinks, please visit my website:

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CONTENTS

[Content Notes](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Hazel](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Hazel](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Hazel](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Hazel](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Vlad](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Vlad](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Hazel](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Vlad](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Hazel](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Vlad](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Hazel](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

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CHAPTER I

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HAZEL

“Oh my Goddess, Hazel! What’s wrong?”

The door of Drusila’s nineteen-twenties bungalow flies open. The coven’s high priestess, a stylish Mexican American woman in a flowing maxi dress and layered silver jewelry, grabs me by the hem of my tank top and yanks me inside.

“What the hell, Dru?” I shout as I stumble forward into the entryway. Immediately, I realize my mistake.

Dru is hosting her monthly mixer of the Strange, the name given to the supernatural creatures who live hidden in the shadows of Los Angeles, and every witch, vamp, shifter, orc, and variation of monster turns to stare at me. This October’s event is particularly packed because Titan, leader of the gargoyles, and his human mate, Jules, are in attendance for the first time ever. I would’ve thought their presence would hold the crowd’s focus. However, one errant shout and all eyes are on me.

“Nothing to see here, folks.” Forcing a smile, I attempt to wave off the crowd’s attention.

With my hot pink hair and many tattoos I can handle the occasional stare, but I’ve got twelve hours of bar gunk stuck to me, and my irritation is wafting off me like a bad high.

“I could sense your aura through the door. What’s wrong?” Dru repeats, ignoring the many eyes in their many rainbow shades now focused our way.

When I don’t answer fast enough, she takes me by the wrist and pulls me into her guest bedroom. Swooping in with a hug, she grabs me hard enough to knock the air out of my lungs.

“I’m okay.” At just over six feet, I’m saying it to the top of Dru’s curly dark brown hair. “Really, I am. I promise. Just some stuff with my bar. It’ll all work out.”

Maybe. Hopefully.

She backs out of the hug but holds my arms and gives me what we in the coven lovingly call the “crone’s eye.” Her big violet eyes narrow on me as if focusing the huge amount of magic held in her tiny body into one seriously intimidating glare. She has me stuck like a demon in a salt circle.

“Don’t bullshit me, Hazel.” Her head drops to the side, and with both

hands, she gestures to the air around me. “Your aura is all kinds of nasty. It’s got this funky pond-scum-green color to it.”

She frowns and starts picking through the air around me, grabbing at invisible bits of my aura, attempting to remove the offending parts.

“I know, I know.” Hot pink ponytail swinging, I shake my head because I don’t want to think about the storm of shit that slid through the bar’s mail slot this afternoon or the colossal eyesore that was parked right outside the bar’s window. I want to get super drunk, maybe make out with a hot shifter, and forget that I’m an adult with responsibilities for the evening, something I’ve been wanting to do for what seems like years but never find the time for.

Her “crone’s eye” intensifies. I roll my eyes at her and spill.

“That new club across the street from The Witchazel is trying to steal my patrons. This morning my front door was littered with free drink coupons from the—wait for it... *Black Door*.” I give another exaggerated eye roll. “And by this evening they’d parked a giant van advertising their upcoming Halloween party and completely blocking out any natural light.”

“Can they do that?”

“The place is owned by the FAL Group. I’m pretty sure they don’t care about what’s legal. They’ve been buying up Strange properties on the Westside and pricing out tenants to create high-end entertainment venues. I don’t think a little bit of littering bothers them all that much.” Visions of Los Angeles commercial real estate department bylaws and ordinances dance in my head like vengeful sprites. “And—*and*, to top it all off, a fucking bat flew into The Witchazel today—a *fucking bat*. I wasn’t there, but one of my bartenders said they ran all my human customers out.”

I let out a heavy sigh, hoping it will release some of the rising tension I’ve felt since finding out who the new owners of the warehouse-like building across the street are.

Nope.

“Can I start doing shots and looking for someone big and hairy to take my mind off of things now?”

She ignores me, turns on her heels, curls and layers of skirts flying, and heads for the grimoire on the dresser. Dru’s guest room holds many fond memories for me. It’s where I first stayed when I’d discovered I was a witch and moved to the city. Since then, she’s turned it into storage for her personal magical items and overflow from her metaphysical shop, Moonbound. Every surface, save the bed, is covered in filled glass jars, crystals, and candles,

with even more boxes of items haphazardly stacked in corners.

Dru flips the heavy leather-bound grimoire open and starts digging out supplies from the top drawers.

“Memory charm, reversal spell—we could definitely mess with the club directly, maybe cause several pipes to burst. We could go classic, turn that nasty club owner into a toad. The blood moon is on Halloween this year and the ritual is coming up soon, so whatever spell you cast would pack an extra punch.”

“Stop it.” I slam the grimoire closed. “I love you, but FAL Group is Strange-owned too, and I’m not about to get the coven into a magic-off with a bunch of shifters and vamps.”

“You know whose side everyone out there is on.” She gestures to the closed bedroom door and the roaring party on the other side. “Hell, I’d bet Titan would loan out some of his brothers to act as security. You know Knox would definitely help you.”

I’d dated Knox a while back. A short but fun fling where we quickly figured out we’d work much better as friends than we ever did in the bedroom.

“I know, but we’ve both seen what the gargoyle brotherhood is like at work. I think they might be overkill. However, if Black Door ever attempts an armed hostile takeover, I might give them a call.” I suppress a wild grin at the image of seven-foot-tall stone monsters standing outside my humble little community bar. “I’m fine, and I’ll figure it out.”

I’m pretty sure I’ll figure it out.

“What about the club’s manager? Maybe they outsourced their advertising and they don’t know what’s going on?”

Dru can’t help her high priestess nature as she continues to push me to find an immediate solution. But I’ve spent the last month at The Witchazel without a day off and my brain can’t handle worrying about it a second longer, so I cut her off quickly.

“I just don’t want to think about it tonight, that’s all.”

“Okay. Fine. I’ve got something for you anyways.” Dru smiles and turns back to the drawer, pulling out a small vial. She tosses it to me, and I scramble to catch it.

Holding it up to the lamp, I see that it is filled with a thick pale purple liquid, and when the light hits it just right, it shimmers.

“I don’t recognize it.” I frown. “What is it?”

“Just because you’re the best potions maker in the coven, doesn’t mean you’re the only one with skills.” She smirks. “It’s got peppermint for energy, a handful of anise seeds to help you forget your troubles for the night, and a pinch of damiana for releasing inhibitions and amplifying your life force energy. Oh, and I just added woodworm to intensify all your senses so my margaritas will taste extra delicious. I might’ve gone overboard with that one. I call it ‘Party in a Bottle’—*ehhh*, still working on the name.”

“Nice.” I grin at the bottle, thrilled to know I’ll get at least a couple of hours of freedom from my responsibilities.

“It’s an Absorbent, so—”

“I know. I gotta use it in the bath,” I say, interrupting her. While I do most of my potions mixing with a shaker and muddler, she prefers to go the self-care route, and a good bubble bath potion is classic Drusila.

“You can get away with applying it in the shower. Use it like shampoo to really get it in the skin. And...” She runs her violet eyes up from my comfy boots over my work jeans and tank top to my pink ponytail that I’m sure smells like stale beer. “I’ll lay out a dress you can borrow for the night.”

I raise an eyebrow at the offer. I’m a size sixteen to Dru’s size six-ish. Add in my extra twelve inches in height, and there is no way for me to leave the house wearing anything she owns without racking up indecency charges.

“The ex.” Dru’s lips press into a hard line before she exhales, eyes closed, and continues, “You guys are about the same size, and she left half her wardrobe in my closet, so I moved it into here. It would be a waste if you didn’t wear one of her dresses.”

“I see you found an excuse to finally make me dress up for one of your parties.” I laugh and roll back and forth on my boot heels, feeling them stick to the hardwood floor with their years’ worth of bar floor residue.

Okay, gross.

“You’re the one who wants to get hit on. I’m just helping you out.”

Not want. Need. Just a moment of carnal bliss and then I’ll be able to tackle my Black Door problem with ease.

“Fine,” I agree.

Dru is already in her closet rifling through dresses when I head for the large attached bathroom.

“Just make sure it’s long enough to *fully* cover my ass,” I yell out over the heavy spray of hot water as I turn on the shower, remembering that Dru’s ex was a fan of short and tight.

“I thought you wanted to have fun tonight.” Her cackle echoes from the bedroom, then I hear the shuffle of hangers start again. “*Ugh*, okay, fine.”

Phew, wardrobe malfunction averted.

“I found something I don’t think you’ll hate. It’s on the dresser,” she shouts. “I’m going to head back out there.”

“Thanks, Dru. Bring me back one of your margaritas and—”

“Someone big and hairy?” She laughs.

“I’ll take short and horny too,” I answer cheerfully, listening to her echoing laugh get cut off by her bedroom door being firmly closed behind her.

Disrobing quickly, I step under the spray of the hot water. I pop open Dru’s vial of purple liquid and squeeze out a large dollop into my left palm.

“Holy Goddess.”

There is an instant tingle of concentrated energy that pools in the center of my hand and radiates out to my fingers and halfway up to my elbow. It pulls me in and I’m drawn to the divine swirling in my hand like a newbie witch about to take her first delicious sip of magic.

I want to lap it up.

Instead I take a deep breath, close my eyes, and allow myself to be fully present with the sensation. My hand feels relaxed but also energized, joints at ease, like it’s itching to do something, like I could mix up a dozen new delicious drinks for The Witchazel using only that hand.

This is exactly what I needed.

I work the mixture into my wet hair. It foams up, and as the bubbles pop between my fingers, magic prickles at my scalp. It amplifies the natural abundance of life force all Strange have. I’m suddenly aware of each and every hair follicle and the blissful feel of the pads of my fingertips running over my skin. It’s the feeling of releasing my hair from a particularly sadistic hair tie after a full day in a ponytail times a million.

The sudsy water rinsed from my hair flows down my neck, then my shoulders, then my tattooed arms. Magic licks over the detailed art nouveau image on my bicep of the Goddess holding a full, juicy apple aloft. I swear I can taste the tangy sweetness of the pinky red apple on my tongue. My mouth waters.

It’s been too long since I’ve been able to truly enjoy my body. I’m often too tired at the end of the night to do more than pass out in my apartment or, more often than not, on the makeshift bed in my office above the bar.

As I massage the potion into my arms, breasts, and belly, everything is heightened and transformed into pleasure. The sharp spray of water becomes playful flicks teasing my nipples hard. I find myself arching into the warm water. And when I move to wash the potion over the back of me, I can't stop touching my ass. It's like I've never felt anything so lush and full and gratifying to rub and rub and rub. I hear music and assume it's coming from the party outside until I realize it's me who is humming "Fat Bottomed Girls."

"Damn, Dru's good," I admit.

I'm going to have to convince her to start selling this potion at Moonbound behind a red velvet curtain, because this is an age eighteen and up product.

My brain has a lovely floaty feeling, too light to carry the weight of my work hour burdens. I'm glad to let my mind untether itself; reality will come punching back soon enough.

I work my hands into my hair, over my neck, and down to cup my breasts. The weight of them feels amazing, and I squeeze them gently, swallowing a whimper. Moving back down over my rounded belly, I go slowly. My skin is so soft here. I try to think of something to compare the feeling to. Velvet? Silk? No, nothing is as good. Finally, my fingers move between my thighs, playing in the coiffed triangle of my pink-dyed curls before sliding over the wet seam of my pussy. I dip in between the folds to find my clit slick and swollen.

"Holy Goddess," I moan, my back hitting the tiled wall as I do everything in my power to stay standing.

"That good, really?" a deep, lightly accented voice interrupts.

I freeze.

CHAPTER 2

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HAZEL

“Dru, is that you?” I wrap my fingers over the edge of the shower’s frosted sliding glass doors and pull myself up on my tiptoes. Even though her “Party in a Bottle” potion doesn’t contain any hallucinogenic properties, I’m feeling too good to be certain any of this is real.

“Not Dru,” the deep voice answers. “Vlad.”

This time I can hear the distinctly Eastern European accent in his voice, though it’s far too faint, and I’m not good enough at parsing it to guess exactly where it is from.

With the old house’s small proportions and my tall ones, I manage to pop my head over the sliding glass door.

“Vlad,” I repeat, sucking in an unsteady breath. *Nope, that is definitely not the coven’s five-foot-tall high priestess.*

A tall, pale white man with shoulder length wavy black hair and lean muscles stands in front of me. He’s the spitting image of every fictional vampire crush I had as a tween. He’s dressed in all black too, jeans, fitted T-shirt, and open leather jacket.

What soft-core late-night paranormal TV-show dressed this guy?

“Are you real?” I narrow my eyes at him, trying to make sense of this literal wet-dream-come-to-life.

“I’m real,” the vampire answers with a laugh that shakes his chest, pulling the T-shirt thin across his frame, exposing the deep outline of his pecs. “I’m hiding out from a particularly relentless orc attempting to network. I assumed this bathroom was empty. You know, on account of the unlocked door.”

“The door *is* locked,” I snap, then look between the bathroom’s two doors, the one I entered through from Dru’s guest bedroom and the other that leads out into the hallway. “Well, *one* of the doors is locked.”

The vampire doesn’t leave. Just leans back against the bathroom counter, crosses his legs at the ankles, and takes a deep drink of a margarita before placing it on the counter.

Cocky vamp.

“Are you sure you’re real? Because I’ve never seen you at one of these

things before, and Dru's potion is really working for me. You might just be a figment of my divine imagination."

"This is my first Strange party since I got back to town a couple months ago. But I promise I am very real and very much enjoying whatever this is."

His amber eyes drop from my face for just a second to the shadow of my form behind the frosted glass, sending a bolt of heat along my wet skin. His well-formed lips pull to the side, exposing the tip of one vicious fang.

Lately my work has made me feel like merely a pair of hands to mix drinks and a set of tired feet to run across the bar, but with one look from this intruding vamp, every one of my cells is alive and dancing.

"Unless you want me to leave." He looks towards the door to the hall but doesn't make a move to go. "I wanted to avoid talking about work tonight, but I'm sure the orc has moved on to pitch his boutique grog brand to someone else."

Vlad may be unreasonably confident, but he also seems as work avoidant as I am, and it's exactly what I want.

"Doesn't bother me." I shrug.

I match his smirk with my own and lean into the door. The coolness of the frosted glass feels so good on my overheated skin, brushing against the taut peaks of my breasts. Vlad struggles to keep his eyes on mine.

I'm not sure if it's the potion or what, but I want him to look. I want him to stare, and I want him to see only the carefree sexual being I'm determined to be tonight.

"Hmmm..." Slowly sliding my gaze up from his leather boots, I study his long legs and narrow hips and then the sharp angles of his face and his perma-smirk. "You must be real, because if I'd imagined you, you'd be a shifter, not a vampire."

"You wound me, witch." Vlad claps a broad hand over his unbeating heart and jerks back with an exaggerated moan of pain.

"No offense. I had a hankering for something warm and fuzzy, not cold and hard." My eyes operate without my control to drop to his crotch. *Shit.* "Sorry. Just if I was going to have a vision of anyone—never mind. How'd you know I'm a witch?"

I try desperately to regain my composure.

"A guess based on that potion you were talking about. And the fact that Dru is letting you shower here, you must be a part of the coven. How'd you know I'm a vampire?" His smile is slight, showing off only the sharp points

of his fangs.

Not trusting myself with words, I point to the mirror behind him and his lack of reflection.

“Ahh. Now tell me, my little witch, what kind of potion would have you imagining Strange creatures walking in on you naked?”

“A very, *very* good one.” Rising up higher onto my tiptoes, I tuck my chin up onto the metal edge of the shower doors. I stifle a giggle as Vlad’s attention seems to drift lower. “And I’m not *your* little witch.”

He doesn’t respond. I don’t give him the opportunity. I press myself into the frosted glass until my lush form goes from shadowed to something far more detailed in the reflection of the mirror, my full breasts outlined clearly, framing my nipples against the glass. My soft belly gives way to the pink curls between my legs. The image I create is lewd, and Vlad’s amber gaze turns dark and hungry.

“I could make the potion better though.” My voice is suddenly husky.

“Could you?” Vlad’s accent is stronger, and his grip tightens on the bathroom counter as he watches me behind the glass.

“Oh yes. I would’ve added cinnamon so I’d be lucky too.”

“Not sure you need to add anything to get lucky.”

His words combine with the power of the potion to force me to squeeze my thighs together and swallow a moan.

Very cocky vamp.

“Here.” I stick my right arm out over the door, offering Vlad my wrist. “Try it yourself.”

He pushes off from the counter, crosses the short distance, and circles my wrist with his long fingers, moving with an elegance only vampires manage to achieve.

We’re close enough now that if the barrier of the glass doors were to suddenly vanish, my naked body would be pressed against his. I feel my pulse race and realize he must too. I’ve never been with a vampire before, and I lose myself in wondering what it would be like to have his cold touch against the heat of me.

And what would it feel like to have him inside me...

“Careful.” Vlad grips my right hand tighter as my knees buckle. He firmly captures my left bicep over the door, holding me up and pulling me in close. “Don’t slip.”

“I’m fine, I’m fine,” I snap back, embarrassment coloring my cheeks the

exact shade of pink to match my hair.

“Okay,” he says softly, not easing up on his grip. “Have you ever been tasted by a vampire before?”

“No, but plenty from the coven have told me all about it. I know what to expect. Here.” I push my wrist towards him. “Drink.”

He stares at the pale triangle of ink-free skin, and I watch as his tongue flicks over one of his fangs. I can’t tell if it’s just the work of the potion or if it’s all Vlad, but my pulse doubles in speed. The closer his mouth gets to the delicate flesh, the louder it seems to get, until his lips brush over my skin, and the beat of it seems to echo off the bathroom walls.

The anticipation is killing me.

“Taste me, Vlad.” I push my wrist to him, even as he holds me firmly in place. “Goddess, please just taste me already.”

He looks up at me with that damn smile.

“Since you begged, my little witch.”

Before I can correct him—I was definitely, mostly, not begging, and I’m absolutely not his little witch—his fangs pierce my skin. There is a split second of pain, then...

“Oh fuck,” I moan, my knees buckling again. Vlad holding me up again.

He sucks me deeply, my blood and the energy of our magics flowing between us, each pop and sizzle of the potion’s power tethering us tighter together.

“Do you feel it? Do you feel the potion?” I ask, but he doesn’t have to answer.

Vlad’s amber eyes now glow a bright yellow-gold. His grip on my wrist tightens, and he lets out a low growl that hums over my skin.

I whimper as Vlad pulls his fangs from me.

He holds my wrist reverently, like my blood and body are precious. His long, pointed tongue darts out from between his fangs as he laps at the small puncture wounds, his saliva healing them quickly.

“Fuck, you’re delicious.” His new golden eyes shine as he falls just as deeply under the spell as I am. “Sweet, so sweet.”

Goddessdammit, I just want his immortal dick inside me.

He laughs, loud and uncontrolled. He’s still holding me tightly to the glass doors, though it hardly feels like there is anything between us.

“What’s so funny?”

“Your friends didn’t tell you everything about being with a vampire, did

they?” Vlad smothers his laughter.

I frown, racking my brain for what I may have forgotten, but I’m far too distracted by the way his thumb strokes over the spot where the puncture wounds used to be. Back and forth, he strokes, not too fast and just hard enough, in a rhythm I’d very much liked to be fucked with.

“Your blood is in my system now,” Vlad groans, “and while your blood is a part of me, so are your thoughts.”

Shit, I knew that.

“Shit,” I repeat unnecessarily.

He lets loose the laugh. Now unrestrained, it’s deep and soulful and makes it feel like the ground is shaking beneath me. The sound travels up my feet and calves, through my thighs and hips, and settles at the base of my belly. It vibrates to the core of my pussy, and I have to stifle a gasp.

“*Immortal dick...* never heard that before. I like it.” Vlad’s laugh transforms into a weighty growl. “Now, what do you want to do about it?”

I’m blushing so hard my face is on fire, but I’m so close to what I want tonight, of having every worry fucked out of me. I refuse to back down.

“Read my thoughts, Vlad.” I push myself into the glass, let him feel my heat. “I want your cock inside me.”

“Don’t forget it’s ‘immortal cock.’ That part is important,” he corrects.

“Vlad,” I groan, needing him for the love of all that is Strange and divine to hurry the fuck up.

“Impatient, impatient.” He tuts. “As you wish, my little witch.”

CHAPTER 3

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HAZEL

At a speed surpassed by only the fastest of shifters, Vlad has the door open and me out of the shower in seconds. His leather jacket is off, and my wet, naked body is pressed against his. I wrap my arms around his neck, my full lips seeking his firm mouth. He tastes like Dru's margarita and my blood.

He's right. I taste sweet.

Vlad grabs my thighs, pulling my legs up to lock around his waist. His strong fingers dig into my ass to lift me up his body so his mouth can gain better purchase. He's only a few inches taller than me and built lean. Normally I would've been more cautious about throwing my two-hundred-plus pounds onto an untested man, but lucky for me, he isn't a man.

If Vlad goes down, he'll go down with a smile on his face.

"Is there any other way?" He laughs, detaching his lips from mine long enough to respond to my thoughts.

I roll my eyes, then point towards the bedroom.

"Bed. Now."

I'll buy Dru new bedding if I have to. I need this, and she'll understand.

Vlad nips at my neck, managing to find the sensitive spot below my ear and applying just enough pressure to have me writhing in his arms. And as we land on the bed, my thighs spread to let him closer.

I roll my naked hips against his crotch in needy circles, grinding my pussy into him. My head drops back, and I'm thankful there is no need for protection between different creatures of the Strange. In fact, additional magic is required to conceive, not the other way around.

I want to feel all of him.

"Oh Goddess," I moan, moving myself faster against him. The potion makes me more reactive with every pass of my clit over the hard seam of his jeans.

Fuck, it feels so good.

My back arches, and my full breasts press into Vlad's chest. It's been too long since I've allowed myself to relax enough for pleasure and even longer since I've given into my fantasies. But now I get to. Thoughts of The Witchazel and the antics of the club across the street tease at the edges of my

mind, trying to pull me back to reality, but I push past it.

Tonight, I get to be a dirty little slut whose only thought is getting this vampire's cock inside me as fast as possible.

Long fingers slide into the wet tangle of my hair. His fist tightens slightly, pulling on the strands. My eyes fly open only to be greeted by the molten gold of Vlad's gaze.

"Is that what you want?" he asks almost gently. For the first time since he walked into the bathroom, his sharply angular face is deadly serious, and there isn't even a hint of smirk. "You want a near stranger to fuck away your worries? Make you feel like the slut your mind is begging you to be?"

Yes! Yes! Please, Goddess, yes!

I say nothing.

"I know what your brain wants." Vlad lets out a husky laugh before his hand slides between our bodies.

He parts my legs, and his featherlight touch glides over my cunt. I whimper, my hands digging into the sheets.

Oh fuck, oh fuck...

"And I know what your body wants. But I'm going to need you to say it out loud before we go any further. Do you want to be my good little whore tonight? Because I can do that for you."

I don't hesitate. This is all I wanted.

"Please, Vlad," I beg.

His expression goes feral. His fangs bared, he pushes off the bed.

"Keep those thighs open," he commands. "Show me how wet I've made that pretty pussy."

Knees up, I spread my legs as far apart as possible, loving and hating, and therefore loving even more, the feeling of being so exposed. Cool air hits every sensitive part, making me involuntary buck against the mattress.

"You are a needy thing." His voice is low, both of us aware there is a party still raging just beyond the bedroom door. "Your pussy is soaking and desperate, isn't it?"

Yes.

He tears off his shirt, kicks off his boots, and he moves so fast I don't see him remove his jeans or underwear. I only get a second to really look at Vlad naked. His long, narrow frame is made up of defined, sinewy muscles. His skin is so pale and cold-looking it's almost silver and in direct contrast to the inky blackness of his long hair. As he pushes a tousled lock out of his face,

he looks every part my vampire fantasy.

And then there is his cock: long and thick, perfect in a way I know I can manage but will definitely be feeling tomorrow. It juts upwards, ready. I feel my mouth water.

Thank the Goddess it's immortal because that thing deserves to stand the test of time.

"You're good for the ego." He laughs. He moves onto the bed and, careful not to touch me yet, crawls up my body.

Not that your ego needs it.

Vlad's potion-drunk gaze captures mine, and I stiffen at his smirk, the confidence I had in my retort suddenly gone as he drags the tips of his fangs up the column of my neck and his hand slides down my stomach.

"If that's what you think, little witch, maybe I should leave and let you take care of this"—he cups my pussy—"yourself."

No, no, no, no, no.

As he holds me firmly, I feel my wetness slide over his palm, but he doesn't give me the pressure I need.

"Please," I whimper, struggling to keep my body still, to not show him how truly desperate he has made me.

"Tell me what I want to hear." There is that damn smirk again.

I narrow my eyes at him, lips screwed up to the side.

"I need your..." I hesitate.

"What?" he teases, pressing into the crest of my cunt with the heel of his palm so I squirm beneath him. "Good little sluts use their words. Tell me what you need."

Finally, I say it.

"I... I need your *immortal* cock."

"Yes, you do." Vlad plunges two thick fingers deep inside me.

My pussy, aching to be used, is suddenly filled, and I scream out as he pumps inside me, thumb circling my clit.

"Quiet, or we'll have an audience," he chastises, looking as smug as ever.

My mind races, immediately imagining the scene as Vlad's fingers thrust in and out of me, images of a crowd of indistinct faces watching as I lose myself to this stranger, letting him play with my body like it's a toy built only for fucking.

"You have an exhibitionist streak, witch. Is that why you pressed your tits against the shower door for me to see?"

Yes... fuck... Fuck yes.

My brain answers before I can form the words. But it's all true. I like the taboo of it, the way the thrill of the risk blocks out all other worries.

"I see." He grins, adding a third finger and forcing me to grip the sheets as I take it. "Of course, when you're this wet, everyone can hear what a natural slut you are."

I frown, but then I hear it.

The sound of him plunging into me is obscene, my cunt sucking his fingers in and his palm slapping against my wet flesh. I should be embarrassed by how soaked I am, but all of it works with the potion to ratchet up my pleasure until I'm pushing myself back onto his fingers and I have to grab a pillow to scream into.

I get one good scream in before Vlad tears the pillow from my grasp, and my flushed face is fully exposed.

"That's right, work yourself on my fingers," he growls. His hard dick is pressed against my thigh, the wetness of his pre-cum cool on my skin. "Show me how you want me to fuck you, and maybe I'll reward you with my cock."

Rolling my hips, I plunge myself onto his fingers harder, faster, wanting so desperately to be filled.

"Good—good slut. You think you're ready for something bigger?"

If you don't fuck me, I will scream.

"If you scream, I will shove my cock in your mouth."

I debate screaming.

"Desperate, impatient little witch." Vlad laughs as he pulls his fingers from my cunt.

Before a whine can escape me, he has shoved a pillow under my hips.

"I don't want an audience tonight."

He slaps a hand over my mouth and drives his cock into me hard. My head falls back, and I let out a primal moan into his hand. I feel that blessed thickness stretching me just as I imagined it would, filling me so completely that any errant worry from earlier in the day is lost.

Pleasure builds quickly as each thrust is magnified by the magic flowing through our bodies. I whimper and dig my nails into his back, bucking beneath him. His hand is glued to my mouth, pressing me into the bed. His other holds my right thigh up towards my chest, spreading my legs wide for him and giving him the access he desires.

"Fuck, you feel so good. You aren't going to let me last long." Vlad lets

out a strangled groan as he pumps faster.

I open my mouth to tell him it won't be long for me either, but then he adjusts his position by millimeters and hits that hypersensitive cluster of nerve endings that has me screaming into his hand.

Vlad's breathing is ragged, his words rushed and punctuated at each thrust. "That's it, scream as much as you want."

And I do.

I scream and buck and twist beneath him. I'm not sure what is the potion and what is Vlad. It doesn't matter, because all of it feels so damn good.

"That's it, my little witch, that's it. This is all you wanted tonight, isn't it? Your poor little pussy just needed to be fucked. That's why you're clenching down on me so hard, you know my cock is meant to be inside you."

Goddess, yes.

"Yes!" I moan.

I'm so close, and it is all so intense, pleasure and sensation piling one on top of the other until it is all I see, all I can taste, all I can hear and touch and smell and sense with my third eye.

"Oh fuck, Vlad," I moan into his hand as my climax peaks.

It rocks me hard, hitting me with bolts of pleasure that feel like lightning, engulfing every part of my body in electricity. Vlad tenses above me as I shake below him. His muscles go rigid, his fangs bare, as the potion has me seeing literal stars around him. With a final strangled groan, he thrusts deep inside me and I feel myself being filled, his cum a prize for taking his dick so well.

"Holy fuck." I gasp for air once his hand drops from my mouth.

"Yes... that..." Vlad manages to get out the words between labored breaths.

I collapse back on the bed. I'm panting, a light sheen of sweat coating my body. The vamp has thoroughly fucked the worry out of me.

"Good potion," I say because I'm suddenly aware that I just did a deep dive into my private fantasies with a creature I barely know.

I'm too exhausted, my eyes struggling to stay open, to notice Vlad has left the bed until he returns with the black pair of underwear I discarded earlier.

"Great potion," he confirms as he stands at the end of the bed, my black panties held aloft. "These yours?"

"Yeah, why?"

He grabs me by the ankles and slides me down to the edge of the bed. He rests my feet on his shoulders, then slips the panties back on me.

“What are you...” I trail off as he pushes the fabric scrap down my legs. He swats at my ass, and I instinctually lift my hips. He slides my panties on the rest of the way.

Dropping to his knees, he grips my inner thighs and holds me wide.

“Vlad?” I ask softly, confusion contorting my face.

He leans down and kisses me through the gusset of my panties, fabric sliding over his cum and my wetness. His lips land on my clit, now oversensitive, and my hips jerk in response.

“Good little witch.” He smiles from between my thighs before rising to stand.

I don’t know what to do or say in response. It’s equally sweet and filthy, and I’m tempted to ask for round two, but he’s already half-dressed.

Dru will be waiting, I remind myself. *She probably already thinks I drowned in the shower.*

Vlad opens his mouth to say something, to respond to my thoughts, but this night has already been so perfect. I don’t want him to ruin it with him telling me something he thinks I want to hear.

“I’ll go out the bedroom door, you go out the bathroom. Okay?” I ask, moving off the bed. I grab my bra and head for the dress Dru had laid out for me on the dresser.

“You blowing me off?” he asks.

I look up to see Vlad, shirtless in his black jeans, leaning a shoulder against the bathroom door frame. Now he looks like the breakout star of that late-night soft-core paranormal TV show.

There would be fan art.

“Of course not. I’ll see you at another one of these things,” I say quickly. “Dru loves to gather the Strange. It’s her mission to keep the community tight.”

“You never told me your name.”

“It’s Hazel. I’m part of the LA coven of witches that Dru heads.”

“Ah,” he says slowly, pulling on his T-shirt and grabbing his jacket. “You’re that Hazel.”

I don’t know another witch in the city with my name, but owning a bar most of the Strange call their own, it wouldn’t surprise me if he’d heard of me before.

“Uh, yeah. I guess, I’m *that* Hazel,” I answer, hoping he doesn’t ask me about The Witchazel because I don’t want to ruin my post-orgasm high with thoughts of work.

“Cool, I wanted to meet you.”

“Well, we definitely met,” I admit with a chuckle.

“That we did.” Vlad laughs.

Our laughter quickly turns into silence. I lean against the dresser, my fingers drumming against the wooden surface. It’s been too long since I’ve had a one-night stand or, in this case, one-party stand, and I’m unsure of how to proceed.

“So I’m out the bathroom and you’re out the bedroom?” Vlad asks, reading my uncertainty.

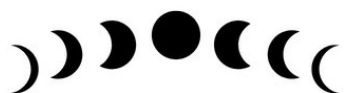
“Yep.” I nod.

“Okay then. See you soon, my little witch.”

“I’m not *your* little witch—”

But Vlad is out through the bathroom door before I can make sense of our final interaction.

I don’t let it bother me. I got exactly what I wanted out of the night. I pull on the black dress Dru had laid out for me, a sleeveless wrap number that lands about four inches higher above the knee than I’m comfortable with, then my boots. I wait a couple extra minutes to not look suspicious before heading for the bedroom door.



The moment I step back out into the party, Dru grabs me by the wrist and pulls me through the crowd.

“You took forever.” She gives me an exasperated sigh. “*Wait*. Your aura is all pink and shiny. It was good, right?”

“What’s good?” My entire body freezes, and she yanks my wrist to keep me moving after her.

“Party in a Bottle? The potion? What’s up with your hair right now?” She arches a dark brow at me, violet eyes bright with suspicion.

I raise a hand to my hair and feel a matted patch at the back.

“Never mind. I know you’ve got a lot on your mind right now with the bar. Which is why I think handling it straight on is the best course of action.” Dru waves over my shoulder at someone in the distance.

“Can we do this another time, Dru? I just—”

“He’s coming over.”

“Okay, but I’m not up for—”

“He’s the manager for the club across the street from you,” Dru interrupts.

And there goes the orgasm afterglow.

“Titan spoke with him earlier. He’s been overseas for the better part of a century. He seems like a good guy. I bet if you just talked to him, you could —”

“Dru, seriously. I don’t want to think about it tonight.”

She turns me by the shoulders to face the incoming club manager. “Hazel, this is Vladimir. Vladimir—”

“Vlad,” he corrects.

“Oh sorry,” Dru apologizes. “*Vlad*, this is Hazel.”

Grin plastered on his face, my tween vampire fantasy holds out a hand to me.

This is the man trying to screw with my business... whose cum is dripping out onto my panties.

My empty stomach turns.

“Dru tells me we’ve got a little misunderstanding.” He chuckles, eyes still shining golden and bright, as he gestures with his outstretched hand.

I’m not prepared for this. I don’t have a plan. All I have is my earlier fear and irritation roaring back to life along with the tension I’d thought I’d released moments ago.

“Is poaching another business’s customers ‘a little misunderstanding’?” I respond abruptly.

I stare down at his hand.

Three of those long fingers had been inside of me only minutes before.

“Is advertising considered poaching?” His laughter fades, and his face twists in confusion as his hand drops to his side

“Of course you’d think harassing my customers is just advertising.” My head swivels and my mind races as I look for an escape.

“Harassing? A few billboards and flyers aren’t harassment.” Vlad frowns, brows tightly pulling together.

“Right, sure,” I huff.

I can’t deal with this right now. Tonight was meant to be a break from work, but now even the blissful memories of what we did in Dru’s guest room are tainted.

My phone rings and I scramble to grab it from my dress pocket, eager for the interruption.

It’s The Witchazel.

They’d only call if it was an emergency.

Thank the Goddess.

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CHAPTER 4

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HAZEL

“So you ran away last night?”

“I did not run away,” I insist, stopping mid-wipe down of The Witchazel’s curved mahogany bar to set Violet straight. “Is that what Dru told you?”

“No. She said you got a call from the bar and had to leave.” Violet is the newest member of our coven and my witch mentee for the day. The petite Black witch looks up from her matching lilac notebook and pen to give me a knowing smile. “I, however, saw you practically sprint out the front door when that hot vampire tried to shake your hand. He was a vampire, right?”

“First of all, I didn’t *sprint* away from anyone. Second, I did get a call from Farah last night needing me to take over because they had a childcare emergency. And third, even if I didn’t get a call, that creature has had people outside The Witchazel all week passing out flyers for his club to *my* customers. He doesn’t deserve my time,” I say firmly even as my attention wanders towards the broad windows at the front of the bar and out to the club across the street. From the line snaking around the building’s corner, it’s clear Black Door is packed tonight.

It’s a Wednesday night, never a busy one for The Witchazel, but it is slower than usual. Most of my booths are taken up with a group of divorced werewolves who meet up a few days before each full moon to offer each other support. The coven has placed a glamour spell on the bar so that any Strange will appear human to any non-Strange who enter. Not that an abundance of non-Strange seems to be an issue tonight.

Normally I don’t mind the break the occasional slow night gives me, but Black Door’s thumping music taunts me from across the street.

“So was he a vampire or what?” she asks.

When I turn to Violet, she is struggling to hold back a smile. At twenty-one she’s almost eight years younger than me and has become the little sister I never had, in all the best and most irritating ways.

I sigh. “Yes, he’s a vampire.”

“I knew it!” She flips open her notebook, adding to her many lines of writing. “I could just tell from how he moved, didn’t even need to see fangs.”

“Good. Now can we get off of me and back to figuring out your

medium?” I ask.

Witches, unlike any other supernatural creature, can come from anywhere and be born to anyone, no bite or sirehood required, and because of that our magic manifests within us differently. The magic comes from nature and the inherent life force in all beings, so we can all do the basic spells and work together under the cover of the full moon, but otherwise we each find the best outlet for the magic inside us.

For me, it’s potions, particularly the kind you imbibe, but Violet, newly come into her powers as a witch, is still figuring it out.

“Don’t see why we can’t do both.”

I roll my eyes and, grabbing bottles from the shelves behind me, begin lining them up on the bar.

“Do you want to learn some potion magic or what?” I ask.

“That’s why I’m here.” Violet nods, pen held at the ready.

I start making a cocktail that I want her to try next: tequila, rum, lime and lemon juice, and a dash of my special blend of herbs that gives the drinker a light floaty feeling and alters their perception of time. It makes a good night feel like it lasts twice as long. It comes with a fail-safe shot, in case the night goes south, that reverses the effects.

Luckily I can operate on autopilot, listing out the process as Violet takes notes, because I’m unable to get her earlier words out of my head.

Did I really run away?

Vlad had caught me off guard, sure. But it was more than that.

Vlad didn’t seem to know me. He certainly didn’t know my name before I told him, but could he really have had no idea who I was when he entered the bathroom?

Does it matter?

The Witchazel is everything to me.

It is a gathering space for so many of the Strange and the first place I could call my own after leaving my human family. With so few witches in this world our discretion is what keeps us safe, and it took years for my non-Strange parents to even believe my abilities. The Strange, and the coven in particular, had given me a home when I’d needed it the most. This bar is, in part, how I repay the favor.

I shake the tumbler filled with ice cubes, sift the liquid out into a highball glass, and slide it down to Violet.

“Here, try this. Tell me what you taste and if you know what it does.”

Violet takes a cautious sip of the drink.

“Oh Goddess, gross.” She shudders, black and lavender micro braids flying as she spits out a mouthful of my locally famous Tequila Moonrise into the sink. “That is disgusting.”

She’s about to dump the rest of the spelled cocktail down the drain when I grab the glass from her.

“Don’t be dramatic,” I say and sniff the glass.

I take a sip and immediately spit it out into the sink.

“What the hell?” I glare at the drink like it betrayed me. “Someone must’ve messed with my blend.”

“Mmmhmm.” Violet bites her lip to keep from laughing. “That vamp really threw you off your game, didn’t he?”

“He did not.” I whip back around to glare at Violet before looking at the ingredients I’d laid out and realizing I had indeed grabbed the wrong jar of herbal blend.

“Is it because you slept with him?” Violet is now biting her bottom lip so hard I’m surprised she hasn’t broken skin.

“Holy Goddess, if Vlad said something after I left...” I huff, slapping down a rag to wipe up my spilled drink.

“Ooo, Vlad, vampire classic! I like it.” She squeals. “But he didn’t say anything. Well, not that I know of. Just you guys were both so... *glowy* when I saw you at the party.”

A microscopic amount of my irritation dissipates, the bulk of it still firmly settled in my chest. Maybe he didn’t share the intimate details of our encounter, but his club still has their massive van parked outside my door.

“Glowy? Maybe you’re an aura reader, Violet, like Dru? And if *he*,” I continue, actively ignoring the heart eyes she is sending my way, “is a distraction, it’s only because he’s running my competition. Now can we please get back to potion crafting? Even if you’re an aura reader, I’d like to get your potion making to a level where I’m not worried about shit exploding. I don’t want another bat in the bar situation, losing half my customers and having them run across the street.”

“I made a candle explode once. Didn’t you blow up a car when you were first attempting transfiguration?” Violet frowns and furrows her brows.

“I set it on fire,” I concede. “That’s completely different—”

“Hang on,” Violet interrupts, “I think I’m getting that witchy intuition thing Dru’s always talking about.”

She flips her notebook close and looks at me, her lips pursed in concentration.

“Okay, let’s hear it.” I’m thrilled to move on from Vlad and focus on Violet’s craft.

“Just the vampire last night, who is actually your competition, and then a bat in your bar the same day. Weird coincidence or maybe...”

I stand there for a moment, hands slowly twisting the bar rag tighter and tighter.

“Or maybe I’m an idiot.”

“Do you think he would do that?” Violet’s notebook is back open and her pen moving fast.

“Do I think my competition would use his unique talents to spy on my bar and conveniently get my customers to run out and head over to his club? Yeah. Yeah, I think he would.”

The flyers, the van outside The Witchazel doors, maybe they were a mistake, but purposefully spying on my business and scaring away my customers? There were no excuses for that. Any lingering good feelings from last night are over... even if my body is still sore and my pussy remembers the contours of his cock.

Mind out of the bedroom and back on business, Hazel!

I toss the now thoroughly destroyed bar rag to the ground, gaze narrowed on my target across the street—the Black Door.

“What are you going to do?” Violet backs up, eyes wide at my determined expression.

“I won’t be gone long.”

“Sure, but what are you going to do?”

“Let Farah know I’m leaving.”

“Hazel, what are you going to do?” Violet shouts as she watches me walk out from behind the bar.

I grab one of many Moonbound totes from the back, a loose idea of a plan slowly forming into something much more concrete. I fill the bag with supplies from behind the bar and race upstairs to my makeshift office to grab a few nonedible items before heading for the front door.

“Dru is going to be so pissed if you kill him,” Violet calls out after me.

“I won’t kill him. Just give him a taste of his own magic,” I mutter and step out into the still warm air of a Los Angeles October night.

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CHAPTER 5

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VLAD

It's just after ten, Black Door has been open for an hour, and the DJ's music is so loud my office door is rattling on its hinges. It wouldn't bother me if I had a say in the DJ or the music, but since I didn't I work to block out the noise.

Last night's Strange mixer was a reminder of everything I'd planned for Black Door to be: a place for the Strange to come together, a space for shows and events that would grow with the community. The type of club I'd found in Los Angeles when I'd first turned in the 1920s. I'd been a dumbass kid at the time, newly arrived from Romania, blinded by the Hollywoodland lights and with no clue of what I was doing. It was in the Strange supper clubs where I'd learned what it meant to be a vampire.

But as I close out of my latest email from Charles, the head of the FAL Group, I feel the walls of the office closing in on me. He wants me to replace the expert bartender I'd wooed with promises of higher pay and growth opportunity with his inexperienced newly sired vampire.

"Fuck." I slam my laptop close, knowing that if I refuse to lose my satyr bartender, Nestor, Charles will threaten to replace me, something the FAL Group seems to do every time I fight for my vision.

I grab a blood bag from my mini fridge and lean back in my chair. I take a long drink of O negative. It hits the back of my throat and I choke on it, nearly spitting it out.

It's cold and bland. It's been so long out of the body all of the energy is drained from it, swill compared to what I lapped up last night, though store-bought blood never seemed to bother me before.

"Before the little witch," I muse.

Hazel had tasted like warm salt air and melting popsicles, a California summer I hadn't experienced in decades abroad and didn't know I missed until I sank my teeth in the soft flesh of her wrist. It was the potion the high priestess had given her, I'm positive. It's the only explanation for why I can't stop thinking about her when I need to be focused on my newly opened club.

How do I get a witch out of my head when I want more than anything to get back into hers?

Last night, every one of her filthy thoughts had become a dream I'd been

determined to realize. Whatever else was going on in her life had been pushed aside for her need to be fucked, to have her cunt used and pleased, to be filled until every errant thought was driven out by my cock. I could feel her anticipation. She'd been waiting to unleash her desires, and I was the lucky Strange it was unleashed upon.

I suck in a sharp breath, feeling my dick stir as I remember what she'd looked like under my touch.

Her pink hair fanned around her on the bed, kiss-bruised lips parted in a moan... my long, narrow fingers digging into her thick thighs, her tattooed flesh giving way to my strength as I spread her wide... exposing her—

Exposing my wet pussy to him... he looked at my body like I was built for sex and he was going to test drive it in every position possible...

I jerk to standing, my cock at half-mast as I note my thoughts are no longer my own.

Hazel's here. She's in my club and so close that with her blood still in my system, I can hear her thoughts.

"This'll be fun."

Shut up, Hazel! Stop thinking about the way you almost came when he called you a "good little whore." You're here to get a job done...

I'm stuck between a laugh and a groan. I'm so hard I have to adjust myself in my pants.

Just finish the damn spell before anyone notices. He thinks he can fucking come up in my bar... MY bar... and spy on me...

"Shit."

Hazel has figured out it was me flying into her bar yesterday, something I'd planned to tell her last night once I realized who she was, but missed my opportunity with her abrupt departure. I'd also intended to ask about the "harassment" she was talking of, but one quick email to the FAL Group this morning explained it all. They'd gone ahead with an aggressive promotional plan I'd never approved, one that unfortunately looked a lot like "harassment."

Fucking vampire dick... immortal dick... so thick, stretching me, filling me... Goddess, I'm still sore. Shut up, he's an asshole, just say the incantation...

Hazel's insult does nothing to slow my libido as my hand slides over the front of my pants, my cock now straining against my fly. I grip myself through the fabric and squeeze, knowing that she is in my club, moving

through my space, unable to think of anything but me inside of her.

I swallow hard. I need to deal with this now, before I'm cumming in my jeans.

I'm up out of my seat. I exit my office, my hard-on held back by the thick fabric of my pants and hidden by the darkness of the club.

Hazel's height gives her away instantly, with her pink hair swept up off her pretty long neck acting like a neon beacon.

She'll always be easy to find in a crowd.

I spot the curl of smoke rising up to the ceiling next. To the humans dancing tightly around her in the crowd it just looks like someone is vaping, but my bouncers, all Strange who can easily hide among humans, should've caught her right away.

That's what I get for letting the FAL Group be in charge of hiring security.

I call on the energy of my coven sisters, on my life force... Mirror to and through the divine... let me view all who want what's mine...

My knowledge of witchcraft is limited, but I'm certain the little witch is spelling the large mirror above my dance floor. I move through the crowd, too fast for the non-Strange to notice.

"Hazel."

Her shoulders jerk up to her ears, and as she slowly turns to face me, her cheeks turn a bright pink.

Fuck, he looks good. FUCK, he can read my thoughts...

"Vlad!" Her voice is overly bright, a forced smile on her face as she attempts to slyly shove something into her bag.

Shit, don't look at the mirror... Her eyes drop down and land on my crotch. Don't look at his dick...

"Immortal dick," I correct, my words swallowed by the din of the crowd.

She jerks her gaze wildly around the room before settling it somewhere just to the left of my eyeline.

Don't look up... mirror... spell... nope... think of something else...

"Come, Hazel." I clamp down on my grin to stop my rising laughter. "Let's go to my office. We can hear each other better there."

She's too focused on not thinking about the spell that she doesn't fight my suggestion.

I place a hand at her lower back, guiding her through the crowd and towards the back of the club. My palm finds the sliver of exposed tattooed

flesh between her top and jeans.

Until that moment I'm sure I have the upper hand, but a kind of alchemy occurs when our skin meets, and I have to flex my hand from the overwhelming sensation that my palm has caught fire.

"Here we are." I swallow hard as I open the office door, shaking out my hand.

Hazel moves past me, and I smell the sweet scent of the potion we shared the night before on her hair.

That must be it, the aftereffects of the potion.

Don't think about the spell... anything else... last night... SEX! Shit, no. Kissing in the shower... sex in Dru's bed... him on top... his face in my tits... He licks, he bites, he sucks... STOP...

"Let me spare you, little witch. Humans and creatures of the Strange alike have attempted to guard their minds from my kind. It is not possible." I lean back on the edge of my desk, folding my arms across my chest. "That being said, I have never experienced anything quite like this before."

Focus on anything else.

Her warm brown eyes scan the length of my body as she drops her tote bag on the floor.

His bulge. No, not that. The way he... ummm... fills out those pants. Dammit, Hazel, stay away from the vamp dick...

"Don't stay away on my account." I feel the urge to flex, anything to keep her attention on me. Anything to keep her focused on when we worked so well together. "I need to talk to you about last night. I didn't know what the promotional team was up to—"

Mirror... No! Vlad's chest... pale muscles... sweat, wet, wet thighs, my wet thighs... so damn wet...

A debauched word association game fills every corner of my mind. Hazel's thoughts are quickly becoming my own. It replaces the well-thought-out speech I'd worked out where I'd explain that I have no intentions on ruining her business, but I'm also determined to have my club succeed.

No, there is no space for that, only images of her dripping wet, swollen pussy, my fingers slick and disappearing inside of her—

"Hazel." I nearly shout out the name with the effort it takes to hold back a groan. I'm in pain. My cock, thick with need, threatens to bust the fly of my pants open. My fingers dig into the edge of my desk, the faint sound of wood splintering interrupting the silence. "You have to think of something else."

I try to clear my mind, but the witch has made it impossible.

“Why?” Hazel smiles, looking just as flushed and desperate as I feel but suddenly much more self-assured. The look is a warning. “I haven’t distracted the big bad vampire, have I?”

“With all those dirty images you’re putting in my head? Of course not.” I swallow hard. “It’s nothing compared to what we did last night.”

All I want to do is to close the space between us, see if last night was just about the potion or if it would always be magic between us.

“Hmm. I don’t know about that, Vlad.” She smirks, then, narrowing her eyes at me, unleashes a torrent of pornographic imagery that I will remember for thousands and thousands of years to come.

You take me right here in this office... My jeans are pushed down to my ankles...

You’re hard, pre-cum shining on the thick head of your cock, and you grind up against me. You want to be inside me so fucking bad. Goddess, I want you inside me so bad...

I’m a good little slut for you, so fucking wet, so ready. You bite into me, drinking me, devouring me...

My panties are shoved down my thighs, and your fingers—

“And my fingers stroke your pussy until you’re begging me to give you my dick.” I’m up, growling the words as I close the gap between us.

Hazel exhales hard as I stand in front of her, her breasts pressing into my chest as she shudders, her nipples hard beneath the thin fabric of her top.

“I can play that game too, my little witch.”

Sliding my finger under a strap of her tank top, I tease it off her shoulder. Dipping my head down, I nip at the exposed flesh.

My fangs trace along the top of her intricate Goddess tattoo, her pulse racing against my lips. It beats so loudly it drowns out the club’s music forcing its way through the door.

Drink me, fuck me. No, fuck, I need to get it together. The Witchazel... focus on The Witchazel...

“You showed me what a little slut you are last night. Do you need me to remind you now by taking you here, while hundreds of people just outside—”

“I wouldn’t say hundreds,” she interrupts quickly, but I ignore her jab.

Whatever well-intentioned plan I had to set Hazel straight on the state of our businesses is gone. It’s smothered by the thought of getting to sink my fangs and cock into her.

We can be professionals later. Right now, I need to be inside her.

“It’s loud out there. Not sure I would even have to cover your mouth when I make you scream. Tell me, my little witch, do you want to test out my theory?”

Mentally I’m preparing to throw a cold bucket of holy water on myself if she decides against seeing our urges through. It’s the only way I can get control over my baser urges. I step back to give her space, once again leaning on the splintered edge of my desk.

“I’m not *your* anything,” she answers quickly, her pouty lips pursed in the most delectable way.

Not yet.

“Good sluts only get cock when they ask for it. Use your words, Hazel.”

She looks up at me, her big brown eyes melting with need, her full breasts rising and falling as she meets my gaze, her pulse drumming so loud it drowns out all of her thoughts but one.

Fuck me, Vlad.

Right here, right now.

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CHAPTER 6

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VLAD

Hazel gasps as I grab the waistband of her jeans and yank her towards me. Her wide hips nestle between my spread thighs, and I squeeze my legs down on her to hold her in place. She is tight against my erection. I grab her wrists and pull her hands behind my back.

My lips and fangs claim her mouth, my tongue dipping into her, lapping up her whimpers. She pushes herself forward, thrusting her hips into my hard length, until she is flush against me.

I release her mouth with a groan before sinking my fangs into the curve of her neck. Her hiss of pain quickly transforms into moans. And there it is again, that sweet taste filling my mouth like liquid sunshine. No potion necessary.

“Fuck, how do you taste this good?”

Her mind is a babble of sensations and sex positions with no word fully enunciated. It mingles with my own animal hunger, one failed by words and best expressed with action.

I push off from the desk, using my unnatural speed to move behind her.

“Jeans around your ankles, right.” It’s not a question but a statement. Her every filthy thought is burned into my memory.

She lets out a gasp of surprise as I undo her pants, pushing them down her thighs until they drop to her ankles. Gripping her at the waist, I pull her back hard against my chest.

“Oh fuck,” she moans, her head dropping back on my shoulder. “What about my underwear?”

My laugh shakes my chest and, in turn, shakes my little witch. She is so desperate right now, all flushed and overheated.

“Such a needy little slut.” I tsk. “I want to enjoy unwrapping you.”

My fingers slide under the lacy sides of her panties, her skin burning under my chilled touch. Hooking my thumbs into the sides of the fabric, I jerk her hips back to nestle my hardness against her voluptuous ass.

“Bend over,” I whisper in her ear. “Hands on the desk. I have something to show you.”

Yes, Vlad.

My sexy witch is so much more compliant in her thoughts. She drops forward, her hands firmly planted on the desk, her tank top sliding up to reveal the bottom half of a large back tattoo.

Quickly, I move to the security monitor in the corner of the room. I turn the screen to face Hazel.

“What is this?” she asks breathlessly, hands firmly planted where I commanded, her hips twisting in anticipation.

“Patience.” I grab the remote and flip the channel until the monitor shows live footage from the camera pointed right outside my office.

Hazel’s thoughts are racing as she attempts to decipher exactly what is going on.

“Look at all those humans out there, just on the other side of this door. They have no idea what an eager little whore I have in here and what I’m about to do to her.”

A torrent of voyeuristic images floods Hazel’s brain. The thrill of that many people mere feet away potentially catching her moans and whimpers zings through her mind and directly into mine.

Leaving the remote easily accessible to Hazel, I drop to my knees behind her. Her generous ass pulls the lacy panties tight over her cunt, a growing wet spot slicking her thighs.

“Fuck, you’re beautiful,” I groan as I slowly, methodically, like it is a gift to the witches’ Goddess, unwrap Hazel.

I pull the black lace down, parting her thick thighs with my hands as the fabric sticks to the pooled wetness.

“You just walk around like this Hazel, dripping wet, turned on all the time, don’t you?”

“I...I...” Hazel hesitates to say what is so clear in her mind.

“I know, little witch, you can’t help it,” I soothe. “I can smell it on you. Your arousal. Every Strange in this club should’ve scented the sex on you the moment you walked in here tonight.”

How someone hasn’t claimed her yet and made it their job to fulfill every one of her dirty thoughts, I don’t know.

Holding her panties firmly, I dig my thumbs into the lace and rip the fabric from her body. I shove the damp, now tattered pieces into my back pocket.

“Now, tell me what you see on the screen,” I command.

“Oh fuck.” She gasps as my breath hits her pussy. Dropping to her elbows

on the desk, she arches her back and presses back into me. “I... I see a group of men and women, all human and...”

Gripping her ass, I angle her pussy towards me, opening her up to me.

“And,” she groans, “they’re coupled up, dancing, so close...”

I run my tongue along the wet seam of her, tasting her, savoring her. Where her blood had tasted like summer, her cunt tastes like twilight, earthy and spiced. I unzip my pants with one hand, releasing my heavy cock. Sliding two fingers over her folds, I gather her wetness before using it to coat my length.

“Oh fuck,” she whimpers, shivering and pressing into me further.

Fuck me...

“What would those humans think, getting to see how needy you are? Do you want an audience to see you take this immortal cock?” I jerk myself off in slow, slick strokes.

“Yes.”

Fuck me, please.

I drag my tongue deeper, probing, sucking, and licking until she is squirming against me. Forcing her ass up, I drive my tongue in and out, working my witch until she is crying out, until she is fucking herself on my mouth, using the desk as leverage, and my only goal is to keep up with her.

“Take off your pants,” she demands.

Please! Please! Please!

I make her wait, letting her lose herself on my mouth as she bucks against me, until she is forced to beg me out loud. With a groan, she finally complies.

“Please, Vlad. I need you inside me now.”

The moment my mouth leaves her, her fingers replace me, working her clit in fast circles. She can’t even last a second without feeding her arousal. Her body is so built for pleasure, it is a crime not to give in to her insatiable needs.

I remove my pants and boxer briefs in seconds.

My hands are at her hips, my dick aching to feel her around me, when she reaches between us. Hazel wraps her hand around my cock, and she pushes herself back onto me.

“*Fuck, Hazel!*” I groan so loudly that, as she clenches tightly around my thick cock, I check the security monitor to see if I’ve been heard. “Your cunt feels so fucking perfect.”

Our fucking is fast and hard. She pushes back on me, and I thrust into her

with equal need, her ass bouncing and jiggling, hitting against my hips with a staccato slap that will be the soundtrack to every future jerk-off session. I grip her cheeks, spreading her, letting her experience that exposed feeling I know she likes so much.

Oh Goddess, yes!

“You’re just my little slut, aren’t you?” I run my thumb over the tight ring of her asshole. “Nothing more than your pretty holes... all open to me, all free to use whenever I want.”

At the word “holes,” any coherent thought Hazel has ceases.

“You like that, don’t you?”

She answers with an animalistic whimper, whining as her back arches.

“Words,” I chastise.

“Use me.” She gasps. “That’s what I want. Use me, Vlad.”

Her eyes are glued to the screen as she watches the humans right outside. Every now and then, one turns to look towards the office door in confusion. But if my little slut wants to be heard, I will make sure she is heard.

“I’m going to finish inside you, and you are going to have to walk through that crowd with my cum dripping out of your pussy. Even if they don’t hear your screams, they’ll know what you’ve done and who your cunt belongs to.”

Oh fuck, yes...

“Do it,” she begs at a near scream.

One hand digs into the soft flesh of her hips while the other fists her pink hair. She has to arch her back to give me the hold I need. I remain still and, using my Strange speed, force her back on my cock, her hair acting as a leash, as I pull her down on me over and over again. She’s no longer watching the screen, too busy pinching her hard nipples, as I angle myself to hit her G-spot again and again.

“Scream for me. Let them know how well I treat this pussy.”

With each stroke, Hazel moans and arches, her hips twisting and her fingers moving over her breasts until, finally, I feel her cunt squeeze down on me. Her body shakes, and she screams. It’s the most beautiful sound I’ve ever heard.

As my pleasure climbs, I release her hip and move my hand to her cunt to hold her in place. I stiffen and unload into her, filling her. My hips jerk and her pussy grips me tighter as we both make sure she gets every last drop of me.

“That’s it, little witch. Milk my cock. You earned every last drop.”

With a final shaking thrust, I gently lower Hazel to the desk. My firm body bends over her soft one, my chest to her back. I’m still inside her as I release her hair. I feel her wince beneath me.

“Are you okay?” I ask, quickly working my fingers over her scalp, massaging out any lingering pain.

“Mmmhmm.” She exhales as I move my hand over the crown of her head. “I’m more than okay.”

Dropping from her elbows onto her forearms, her ass is forced up even higher. My cock throbs inside her, and I wonder if Hazel will have me breaking a record for speediest recovery time. I have a million ways I’d like to take her in this office, and I’m almost ready to start ticking off the next position on the list.

“You know, you could just give up Black Door altogether, and this would be a whole lot easier,” she says dreamily, her eyes half closed as she pushes back into me.

“I don’t know, but I kind of like the part where you get so mad at me it makes you horny.” I laugh as I lightly slap her ass.

Hazel’s back arches as she whimpers.

“I haven’t forgotten why I’m mad at you. You need to explain why you ___”

Three firm but speedy knocks interrupt her.

“Fuck,” I hiss between clenched teeth, cock still firmly planted inside her.

“Are you kidding me?” Hazel sighs, slumping over the desk.

“Hey, boss,” Ty, my barback, calls nervously from outside the door. “The vodka delivery is here, and there’s a problem with the number of cases they brought. Also, Charles has called a few times wanting to talk to you, and he, um, sounds impatient.”

I have a meeting on the books for tomorrow with Charles, but of course he chooses mid-fuck for a surprise call.

Ty knocks again. “Do you want me to bring the distributor back?”

“No!” Hazel and I yell out in unison.

I pull out of her, my cock aching at the loss.

“Get him a drink, Ty, and let him know I’ll be out in a second,” I call back.

I hear the shrill ring of the Black Door’s phone on the other side of the door. I’d programmed the one in my office to go straight to voicemail so I

wouldn't be blindsided by FAL Groups' many requests.

"Charles is calling again," Ty adds unnecessarily.

"I have to deal with this, but we need to talk." I turn back to Hazel.

"Yeah, we do, but I don't want to be rushed."

I redress and watch as Hazel does the same. She hops, pulling her tight jeans on and zipping them up. Last night's ending seems to be repeating itself, and I am determined to not let that happen.

"Before you run away again, there was something I wanted to say."

"I never ran away," Hazel says quickly, arching a brow.

"Okay. Last night, I wanted to tell you I don't have any designs on The Witchazel. There is no attempt on my part to harm your business in any way."

There better not be.

I can hear her uncertainty, with me and with her feelings. I continue, "I know your location has been Strange-owned for years and is important to our community—something I hope to achieve with Black Door."

"You've had people canvassing outside my bar, a van blocking my parking—"

"That wasn't my doing, but my investor's, the FAL Group. I didn't know until this morning. They're very involved in the business, more than I expected," I admit. "When I talk to Charles in a second, I'll inform him that anything that interferes with your business must stop immediately."

"Okay." Her voice goes quiet and cautious. "Thank you."

"But we have other promotions in the works. Billboards in the area. I'll have the van parked on our side of the street. The market is changing, and the Strange will have more options of places to go," I clarify, "so your business will have to adapt."

"Huh?" Hazel's lips press into a firm line, and I watch her body tense.

"I want to make Black Door a success," I explain. "I want it to grow to something bigger than it is now. That is my goal. Just as I'm sure it's your goal with The Witchazel. I'm informing you of my plans because you may lose customers, but I want you know I'm not trying to steal them—"

"Just that they may wander over here and never come back to my bar?"

Hazel's thoughts turn black, and she turns to look at me, her eyes narrowed.

"Well, yes. We are both business owners, and this is not an easy dream to pursue. I think we can admit our goal is success. There is nothing wrong with

that.”

“No, there is nothing wrong with that. You’re just kinda being a dick about it.” She grabs her tote bag and roughly pulls it on to her shoulder, spell casting supplies clinking together as she does so. “You make it sound like The Witchazel wasn’t already a success until you started messing with it. Like I’m the one new to this business and not you.”

“That is not what I said.”

“You flew around my bar, scaring my customers away and spying on The Witchazel. Or are you going to pretend the bat in the bar yesterday wasn’t you?”

“And you spelled my mirror to spy on me,” I grind out through my fangs, my hands clenching into fists to stop me from grabbing her by the shoulders. “Look, we’re keeping tabs on each other. Nothing we couldn’t learn by simply walking into each other’s place.”

She glares at me, ready to bolt.

“Shit, I’m fucking this up,” I mutter, dragging both hands over my face.

“Yup.” **Dick.**

Hazel pushes past me and out the door past a bewildered Ty.

“Fuck,” I heave a heavy sigh.

The barback looks at me expectantly, phone ringing in their hand. I debate chucking it at the wall and racing after the witch.

“He’s just going to keep calling,” Ty says.

I run the back of my hand over my mouth and chin, wiping Hazel’s heady wetness off of me, before answering. “Fine, give me the phone.”

CHAPTER 7

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HAZEL

It takes three days for blood to leave a vampire's system. Three days during which I take the back entrance into The Witchazel. I ask my bartenders to be the ones to clean the front windows and put out the sandwich board with drink specials. And because Dru isn't able to confirm the exact radius of Vlad's mind reading abilities, I avoid even looking across the street before I feel confident my thoughts are my own.

The Witchazel is my baby, but it is also a child of the Strange. The space was originally owned by a satyr who'd been using it for orgies since it was first built in the forties. My coven sisters were the ones to loan me the money as well as the potions and spells to barter in aid of the sale when the satyr had moved on to open a sex club in a larger location. When Vlad insulted the bar, he wasn't just insulting me; he was insulting the very group of Strange he claimed to want to be a part of.

"So it's not aura reading," Violet announces, swinging her bag onto the bar as she takes the last stool. She'd been over at Dru's store, Moonbound, working through her ability to guess I'd slept with Vlad at the party.

I feel my traitorous cheeks heat at the memory. The vamp was an ass, but that mind meld action had given him a direct line to my every fantasy and, holy Goddess, did he deliver.

Still, I'd managed to walk out of that club, no sprinting necessary, head held high and refusing to look back at him even as I'd felt him pooling inside me.

"You slept with him again," Violet shouts victoriously.

"How the hell do you know that?"

"I'm working on it." She shrugs.

Well, I won't be doing that again.

I've been so overwhelmed with The Witchazel that in that moment Vlad had been the escape I'd needed. But the moment has passed.

"I'm already set for the spell I'll be working." Violet checks off her to-do list in her notebook. "But Dru wants to make sure you're prepared for the blood moon ritual too."

"The bar will be busy with Halloween and all, but Farah has me covered. I'll be gathering the supplies for the protection spell tonight."

“Huh,” Violet says absently, eyes on her notebook.

“What?”

“Surprised you’re just doing a protection spell. I found all these really intense spells in Dru’s grimoire.”

I’d thought about it. There were spell options if I wanted to go scorched earth, ones that would ensure FAL Group not only stopped messing with my bar, but that the group and its owners ceased all operations permanently. However, Vlad has kept to his word since my time in his office, and I’ve now had several days free from Black Door’s guerilla promotion tactics.

Maybe we could coexist.

Shaking my head and focusing myself on what’s really important, The Witchazel, I get back to work. I pull out two glasses and start mixing relaxation cocktails for the fae and her human companion farther down the bar. This time I double check to make sure I’m using the correct spell blend before adding it to the shaker.

It’s Friday night, and The Witchazel is busy. Pleased but unable to help myself, I chance a glance across the street to compare our lines. My view is blocked by two men in all black.

No, not two men, I realize. Two Strange.

A vamp and a mountain lion shifter in human form. I’ve seen them both at Dru’s mixers. I shake the drinks, waiting for the two Strange to enter.

As they turn their backs to me, their shirts are emblazoned in white script with the words “Black Door.”

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me.”

They’re two of the FAL Group’s lackeys, and I spot the neon papers in their hands. And if the open door of the branded black van behind them means anything, they aren’t planning to stop anytime soon.

So much for Vlad’s promise.

“What?” Violet leans forward on her stool, an array of bar paraphernalia in front of her, seeming to be midway in making her own spelled drink.

I ignore her as I watch the shifter stop potential customers outside my door. I pass off my cocktails to the fae and her human, barely hearing their words of appreciation.

“Goddess, give me strength.” I reluctantly make my way to the landline.

Grabbing one of Black Door’s many crumpled flyers I tossed in the trash, I find the phone number and dial. I don’t make it halfway through the second ring before the shifter’s growl rattles the windows of The Witchazel.

“Oh shit!”

I turn at Violet’s exclamation, just in time to see her eyes get wide and her pen pause mid-stroke. I follow her gaze outside.

The shifter and vamp are currently harassing one of my regulars, a young orc named Gregor. Club flyers litter the sidewalk, crumpled and stomped on, and the long-haired shifter has his chest puffed out and nearly pressed against the orc. Whatever they are saying to each other I can’t hear them, but their faces both turn deep shades of red, and I don’t need to guess what direction their conversation is heading in.

I slam the phone down. I don’t have time to wait for Vlad to handle this.

“I’ll be back in a second,” I call out to Violet.

I rip off my black apron, grab a small satchel of stunning powder I’ve mixed up, and round the bar. While The Witchazel is warded against violence, along with the glamour spell, it ends at the front door.

“Woah, woah woah, guys.” I exit The Witchazel with hands held high, my stunning spell tucked into my front pocket for easy access. I keep my tone light and cheery in order to de-escalate. A witch has powers, but it takes a good few seconds longer to cast a spell than it does for a shifter to transform and attack. “Let’s take it down a notch. I don’t want to be making any healing potions tonight. Let’s cool off.”

Normally this would be the part where I offer everyone a drink if they just settle down, but there is no way I’m letting the Black Door’s creatures into my bar.

“These guys work for you?” Gregor asks, his breathing ragged as he tries to calm himself down, but he doesn’t move an inch. His broad chest brushes against the shifter’s with each inhale, only irritating the shifter further.

“No, but it’s okay,” I say calmly, before turning to the vampire. “You’ve both passed out a lot of flyers. I’m sure Vlad will be more than happy with what you accomplished tonight.”

I want to tell the vamp to fuck off and fly into the sun, but I feel my customers’ eyes on my back, so instead I maintain my composure.

“Vlad? Who the hell is Vlad? We were told to pass out everything in the van or we wouldn’t get paid. We aren’t leaving, *witch*,” the vamp sneers, nearly spitting out the word.

“Don’t speak to her like that,” Gregor shouts, then, with a sharp jerk of his shoulders, chest bumps the shifter back into the vamp, and all hell breaks loose.

The shifter is growling, now partially shifted into his mountain lion form, still mostly human with his claws out and fangs bared, the imprint of a tail pressing against the back of his pants. Gregor, who wears an oversized hoodie with the hood up, now pulls the hood off to reveal his green-tinted skin and his upward jutting tusks. His large mitt-like hands ball into fists.

“Gregor, don’t,” I shout, reaching for my stunning powder in my front pocket, but it’s too late. The shifter has taken a swipe at the orc, and Gregor comes back with the full force of his fist, hitting him squarely in the chest.

The shifter knocks back into his vampire pal again, but this time the force is enough to send him flying backwards and directly into me.

My head hits the corner of The Witchazel’s window before I smack the concrete with the vamp on top of me. The air is completely knocked out of me, my hand stuck between us in my pocket, futilely attempting to reach the stunning powder. I try sucking in a sharp breath, but the weight of him makes each inhale more difficult than the last, until I’m gasping for any little bit of air I can get.

I attempt to shove the vamp off of me, digging my nails into him and twisting beneath him, but it is useless. He doesn’t budge. My panic rises as the last tiny bit of oxygen is forced from my lungs.

Fuck.

Then suddenly I can breathe, not just a little bit, but a lot. I’m gulping down as much oxygen as possible. It has never tasted so sweet or hurt so much. I pull the satchel from my pocket, and needing only to see the shifter out of the corner of my eye, I throw it.

That’s when I spot him.

Vlad.

His pale complexion nearly glows in the moonlight as he holds the shifter and vamp by the collars, their feet barely touching the concrete.

Vlad had pulled the vampire off of me.

He spots the flying satchel a split second after he sees me. I expect him to pull his creatures out of the way, sidestepping my spell completely. Instead, he yanks them further into the line of fire, only releasing them and stepping back right before impact.

Gray glittering powder flies everywhere, dosing the two Strange so they are hit with the full force of the spell. Normally I would only use a pinch to calm someone down, but with this amount their bodies instantly go limp. They drop to the concrete together, falling into a pile, eyes closed and

breathing calm. They look like they could be sleeping.

Vlad is just out of reach of the powder and staring me down. No, not staring. Inspecting.

I'm glad he can't hear my thoughts. I'm pissed and confused. He's screwing with The Witchazel again, yet he let me take out his men with my spell. I don't understand.

"Are you okay, Hazel?" Gregor reaches out a large, warm hand and helps me up.

"I'm fine." The orc looks no worse for wear. If anything, his rosy cheeks and bright eyes confirm it was likely an exhilarating experience for him. Still, I ask, "Are you okay?"

Gregor confirms that only his fist might be a little bruised.

"Head inside. Whatever you want is on the house."

He enters The Witchazel to cheers, thankfully pulling my patrons' attention away from me and the aftermath of the fight outside.

"You're bleeding." Vlad's deep voice is almost painfully gentle.

"I'm not." I refuse to turn around to face him. He caused this, and I'm not making this easier for him. I pat over my torso and arms, finding only aches and pains that will no doubt turn into big splotchy bruises tomorrow unless I mix something up soon. "Don't you have your minions to take care of?"

"They weren't my doing, but my security will handle it."

I see him gesture across the street, and two large Strange are already racing to grab the passed out vamp and shifter.

"I smell your blood, my little witch," Vlad whispers.

"I'm not your little—" I start, then am cut off by the touch of his long fingers in my hair. At some point in the scuffle, my hair tie had fallen out. He slowly works his fingers through the matted pink until he finds what he's looking for.

I suck in a sharp hiss and jerk forward, turning to face him.

"Hazel, you hit the back of your head."

My eyes go wide as I see the bright red spot of blood on his fingers.

If my blood had still been in Vlad's system when I fell, he would've heard my torrent of curse words, and I'd have been happy for him to hear it, but now my body just hurts. I'm tired and worried that tonight's events are just the beginning.

Will fights on The Witchazel doorstep be a nightly occurrence?

Vlad doesn't get to hear my worries.

“Don’t you dare taste my blood.” I feel my jaw clench and my pulse race.

“I won’t. I would never without your permission,” he says calmly, but I see the hurt in his amber eyes as he wipes his hands on his black jeans. “Let me heal you.”

“You’ve done enough.” I yank open the front door of The Witchazel. The cheerful jack-o’-lanterns and faux spiderwebs put in place for tomorrow night do nothing to lift my mood.

“You’re hurt, Hazel. You’re bleeding,” he repeats, his voice getting stronger, more insistent. “You can heal yourself if you want, but I’ll leave when I know my healing abilities aren’t needed.”

A few of The Witchazel patrons closest to the entrance turn to look at us.

“You can yell at me the entire time,” Vlad offers, one fang poking out as he gives me a half smile. It’s so close to his smirk but missing the usual glint in his amber eyes.

“I don’t need your permission.” Sighing, I finally add, “Healing myself will only take a minute.”

“Then you will only have to deal with me for a minute.”

I glare.

Normally, my height and general demeanor are enough to make someone back down, but not Vlad. His razor-sharp features are soft with concern, and I don’t understand.

“Fine.”

I enter my bar without waiting for a response. I head straight for the back corner and the door that leads to my upstairs office. Vlad is close at my back.

CHAPTER 8

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VLAD

If it had been any other night, a pang of jealousy would've shot through me the moment I entered The Witchazel. I would've again marveled at the intimate two-story building I'd only had a chance to glimpse in bat form. It held about ten times as much charm in its brick facade than Black Door held in its entire square footage. And I would've had to admit that Hazel executed something so much closer to my original vision than I, with my multi-millionaire investors, had.

However, as I arrive at the landing of what appears to be an empty storage space on the second floor, all I can think about is Hazel's blood.

I still feel the heat of it, wet and sticky, on my fingers as I follow behind her.

"Let me heal you."

She ignores me.

Her blood had been so sweet to suck from her neck and so right when she'd been writhing beneath me, but now it's matted in her hair, staining it a dark red. All I want is to chase down the vamp and shifter who did this and make Hazel's temporary spell permanent.

Scenting the witch's rapidly drying blood, I realize it doesn't matter. It would've taken all of her coven's power to keep me from following after her.

"Don't touch that," Hazel says.

I stop my hand inches from a crystal ball placed on a rickety wooden table at the top of the stairs. I arch a dark brow in her direction. She never turned around to look at me but simply sensed what I was doing.

Her magic is intact.

"Is this what you watch me with?" I move my hand over the ball, careful to keep my fingers a whisper above the glass.

Hazel stops behind a half-opened stack of boxes and whips around to stare at me or, more specifically, at my hand.

"It is, isn't it?" Hazel is too much fun not to tease. "See anything interesting?"

"I don't watch *you*. I monitor the club, just as you had monitored mine." She glowers at me, her face heating.

A special thrill courses through me whenever I manage to turn her

freckled cheeks the perfect shade of pink to match her hair. It's like a reward for getting under her skin the exact right amount or fucking her so good her mind goes blank. It was clear from the first night we were together that her duties to The Witchazel consume her every thought. I admire her devotion, but the little witch cannot survive on stress alone, not when she is brimming with unfulfilled desires. It's there, always, bubbling right below the surface, and fuck, was she beautiful when it boiled over.

"Was tonight payback for spelling the mirror?" Hazel asks, abruptly. "One silly little spell and you send your goons to terrorize me."

My unbeating heart clenches in my chest. I cross the room with such speed that Hazel gasps as I stop in front of her.

"With what we've done together, how could you think that?" I grind out the words between my fangs as I search her brown eyes. Her curiosity is sincere, which only hurts more. "No, of course not. I wouldn't send out someone to harass you, and definitely not to hurt you. We could be enemies and I wouldn't."

"Aren't we enemies? Or rivals, at the very least?" Her voice returns with its usual snap.

"No," I answer firmly. "I was serious when I told you I want to build something that will last here. I spent the last eighty years traveling the globe, trying to discover what I wanted out of life, and this is it."

She eyes me warily before silently turning away, the dark red spot of blood now back in my eyeline.

"What are you doing?" I ask softly, trying to hide the plea in my voice. *I need to heal her.*

"I'm making myself a drink." She moves over to a stack of boxes, pulling out bottles and then placing them on a folding table.

"You need to heal yourself now," I repeat. I can't take my eyes off the dried blood. "Or I will heal it for you."

"You'll make me?"

"You like the things I make you do, Hazel."

She looks up at me from her half-bent position over the boxes, brows furrowed as she nibbles at her bottom lip, her breath coming quicker and the pink of her cheeks that had started to dissipate now back in full Technicolor force.

Now more than ever, I wish I could hear her thoughts.

"This is how I heal myself, Vlad. My medium is potions." She swallows

hard before pulling out several more fresh bottles of liquor and placing them on the table. “It’s just a flesh wound. Why do you care so much?”

Because after almost a century of partying and living a responsibility-free life, I’m finally getting my shit together and I still fuck up.

Because I can’t seem to stop fucking up with you.

Because I only want to see your blood flowing free when it’s under my fangs and lapped up by my tongue.

Hazel is staring at me.

“I can’t decide if I want to be able to read your thoughts or not.” She slowly looks me over, concern marking her pretty face. “Compared to your mega club, I don’t want to know what you think of The Witchazel.”

“It’s perfect,” I say instantly, confused by the uncertainty that seems to suddenly overtake her. “Every Strange I’ve encountered that comes here has raved about it, but you must know that.”

“It’s not like there are a lot of us or many venues that are spelled to protect us. Where else are they going to go?”

The Black Door, I realize. My club wasn’t specifically designed for the Strange, though that was my vision. Charles and the FAL Group insisted on appealing to as large a customer base as possible, but I now see why she views us as rivals.

She crosses the short distance between us with two bottles, one light, the other dark, neither of whose contents I’m able to identify.

“Might as well make yourself useful since you insisted on following me up here. Open these.”

I grab the bottles. I pop the tops off almost instantly. Following her back to the table, I set them down among several plastic cups and jars of ingredients she has set out.

“The bar is beautiful, Hazel. Inviting and warm. Hell, your customers love it enough that when I flew in the other day, at least two of them—who I can only assume are your regulars because they seemed to know you keep a baseball bat behind the bar—chased me out almost immediately.”

Hazel holds back a laugh, her shoulders jumping with the effort to restrain herself.

“All Strange feel welcomed here. It’s the kind of environment I’ve dreamed of creating,” I admit softly. “Even this second floor has so much potential. Especially if you ever want to expand.”

The space is equal in size to the floor below it, with surprisingly high

ceilings and solid bones to allow for several expansion options. I feel my own excitement rise as I think of the many possibilities.

“You could even turn it into a special events venue with a small stage in the back there. Might fit a kitchen too.”

“And in five to ten years when I’m able to pay back the coven, build up enough capital to hire help, and magically have free time, I’ll do exactly that.” Hazel lets out an exhausted sigh, and I follow her gaze to the makeshift bed in the corner. “I don’t know why I’m telling you this.”

“Maybe because you hit your head, little witch,” I challenge, “and won’t let me heal you.”

“Fine, fine, don’t get your fangs in a twist. I’m making the potion now.” She waves me off before grabbing a variety of small vials and jars from around the room. “You want one? I’ll make yours without the healing properties.”

Her voice is almost back to normal, husky and teasing. Then I remember the last time her tone changed so quickly. But her blood is no longer in my system, so she can’t force a torrent of porn into my head, so I don’t dwell on it.

“What are you making?” I ask after the silence has dragged on too long.

“Trust me, you’ll like it.”

Hazel’s tattooed hands move fast over the ingredients, grabbing different bottles and jars, mixing them together in a shaker. Before I can make sense of what she’s doing, she places a red Solo cup filled with a sparkling midnight-blue liquid garnished with a purple five-petalled flower in front of me.

“What is it?” I pick up the cup and sniff at it. I am hit with the sting of the alcohol first and then a lingering sweetness I can’t place.

“You’ll like it,” she repeats. “I promise.”

There is that mischievous twinkle in her eye again I don’t wholly trust. I’m sure I’m walking into a trap, but I like seeing her smile, so I don’t stop.

“Just drink it.” Hazel rolls her eyes at me and downs about half her cup in one go.

As I bring the drink to my lips, I can feel her watching.

Hazel is nervous.

I sip the drink slowly. Grapefruit and hints of lime burst on my tongue followed by the smooth burn of an herbal alcohol that could be mistaken for gin but is definitely witchcraft. It’s fresh and tangy and so delicious it might be all I ever want to drink.

“You give my bartender a run for his money,” I admit and take another sip.

She narrows her eyes at me.

“Fine.” I smile, leaning over the makeshift bar. “Your skills blow Nestor’s out of the water. I would gladly give up drinking blood to only drink this. I would die for it. Walk into sunlight for it—”

“Okay, okay, I believe you. You like it.” Hazel’s laugh is so big and unselfconscious it shakes her entire body and blocks out all the sound from the bar below.

My eyes stray to her full breasts, and the pang of lust I’d been able to keep at bay since the fight outside the bar is back with a roaring vengeance. Jeans and a tank top, Hazel’s work uniform, shouldn’t look so sexy, but on her it’s sinful. With her lush hips and belly, her thick thighs and long legs, her clothes just beg to be peeled off.

She catches my wandering eye and holds it. I feel the challenge in her look. And I wonder if the same memory of our time in my office plays in her head at the same frequent intervals it does in mine.

I’m forced to clear my throat before I can speak.

“Let me see the cut.”

Hazel downs the rest of her drink. “Give it thirty seconds and it’ll be healed.”

“I believe you, little witch,” I say softly, moving around the table, “but please, let me see it.”

Reluctantly she turns her back to me and drops her head forward, her pink waves parting over her shoulders and exposing the long column of her neck.

Carefully I slide my fingers up her delicate skin, feeling her heartbeat speed up under my touch. I sift through her locks, gently parting them as I search out the wound. She lets out a hiss as I work the matted blood out of her hair.

“Almost done,” I reassure her.

She’s only a few inches shorter than me, so as I find the spot where I know the cut to be, it’s easy to get a clear view of it.

“It’s fully healed.” I run my finger over the spot where the cut had just been, dark red flakes coming off with my touch.

“Told you!” Hazel pulls herself from my grasp and spins tightly around to face me.

A smug smile is on her face, but I don’t think she realized how close I

was. Now that we're facing each other, her breasts pressed into my chest, the cockiness drops from her face.

"I just wanted to see for myself." I stroke her cheek with my thumb, feeling her hold her breath. "I needed to know I hadn't hurt you."

Her lips are parted just slightly.

"You didn't hurt me," she reluctantly admits. "Gregor was the one who hit the shifter. It was an accident."

"An accident that wouldn't have happened if I'd made sure Charles and the rest of the investors had actually listened when I told them to back off with the street promotions."

"True," she confirms

"This isn't how I want to run my business," I say firmly. Then more softly, I add, "I will fix this, Hazel. And if something like this happens again, you call me directly"

"Okay," she agrees.

"Put in your number." Pulling my phone from my back pocket, I hand it to her. "I'm serious, I'll take care of it."

I send her a quick "hi" text to make sure she has my number and return the phone back to my pocket. This time when I run my thumb over her cheek she releases a breath, and her eyelids drop to half lidded.

"Vlad?" she asks cautiously, looking up at me under her lashes.

"Yes."

I slide my fingers along her jaw, my eyes trained on her lips.

"Why'd you throw Charles' lackeys into my spell? It was just a stunning spell. They'll wake up tomorrow, no worse for wear, but you didn't know that."

"No, but I didn't need to. I know how you think."

"My blood should be out of your system by now." Hazel frowns.

"It is," I assure her. "We've gone back and forth a few times now. You're proportional in your responses. I spy, you spy. Whatever the spell was, I wasn't worried. They deserved it."

She smiles, and I feel her move by millimeters closer to me, her cheek now pressing back into my hand. I want the little witch just as much now when she is soft and yielding as I do when she is feral with need.

I want her even when the wanting isn't about sex. I want to lean down and kiss her, just to feel her lips against mine. That would be enough.

The sharp shrill of the Wicked Witch theme from *The Wizard of Oz* plays

from my back pocket, and Hazel jerks backwards, taking several small steps away from the offending sound.

Her warmth is no longer against me, and I almost shiver with the cold.

“That’s gotta be someone bad. Even witches don’t want that song as their ringtone.” Hazel chuckles, though it doesn’t move her body like the laughter had earlier.

Reluctantly I pull my cell phone out from my back pocket again and check who is calling.

“Interrupted by Black Door again.” I let out a heavy sigh when the ringing stops only to have a slew of text messages pinging me. “And Charles wants me to test out his freshly sired vamp as the new bartender tonight.”

“The things we do for our dreams.” Hazel gives me a commiserating smile.

“Yes, the things we do,” I repeat with a sigh. “I have to go.”

She gives me a flat-lipped smile and nods.

“By the way,” Hazel calls after me, “you’re the one running away from me this time.”

“I’ll be back.”

“I know.”

CHAPTER 9

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HAZEL

It's about an hour after closing as I'm packing for the coven's blood moon ritual when my phone finally buzzes. I know exactly who's texting me.

Vlad made it longer than I expected.

Vlad: Bet you think you're funny.

Hazel: Always.

I chuckle to myself as I find the horseshoes I've been looking for behind a crate of pre-spelled vodka on the second floor. Vlad's right. I need to do something with this space before it becomes a permanent dumping ground. While visions of what it could be are quickly overtaken by thoughts of extra late nights at the bar, I drop the horseshoes into my leopard print duffle bag alongside my other supplies. Their iron makes them perfect for protection spells, and I'll be hanging them over The Witchazel's doorways when I'm done.

Vlad: Charles's new bartender came in tonight. We did a trial run.

Hazel: The new bartender you didn't want?

V: Everything he made tasted like garlic. I wonder why that was?

I let out a snort of laughter. My drink was harmless. It didn't have the same properties as actual garlic, which might hurt a vampire; it only gave the illusion of the taste. Still, imagining Vlad's beautifully firm lips curling back with equal surprise and disgust has me struggling for breath.

H: Just a little reminder to talk to your bosses. What? Not a fan?

I add a witch emoji followed by an angel and hit send.

Vlad texts back a gif of a cartoon vampire, open-mouthed, running in fear.

H: Wish I could've been there.

V: You could be here now.

Something eager and sparkling races over my body, making my skin prickle and my breathing slow. The sensation isn't an entirely comfortable one, and it takes me several long seconds to realize why. Vlad wanting to see me is no surprise; what is, is that I want to see him too, badly. Not to tease or get him back, though he is quite adorable when his dark brows furrow in irritation, but because I like him. Like, actually *like* him, and for more than

the teenage vampire fantasies he fulfills. I don't know how long it's been since I've really allowed myself to see the possibility of more with someone. Since before I opened The Witchazel. Of that I'm certain.

I take longer than usual to respond, debating what exactly to say, when three dots pop up from Vlad and then finally—

V: If it wasn't clear, I'm asking you to come over.

V: Because I want to see you.

A perfect image of Vlad's smirk pops into my head, his vicious fangs looking far too tempting.

H: Okay

My body is already tightening in anticipation, and the single word response is the best I can manage.

V: Are you still at The Witchazel? The light is on.

I jerk back from the upstairs window. The thought of Vlad watching me makes me feel all squirmy inside. Bright and shiny too. I take a cautious step back into the light, my shadow no doubt visible against the sheer curtains to someone standing across the street.

Pulling on my leather jacket, I grab my bag and my large ring of keys and turn off the upstairs light. I set the alarm at the bottom of the stairs and jog to the front door. As I'm locking up, a pleasant chill runs down my spine.

He's behind me.

"I'm impatient." Vlad's voice is low, and his light accent vibrates in my ear down through the core of me.

"I thought I was the impatient one."

"Only because you can't read my thoughts."

Vlad runs his hands down my arms, and I step backwards against his chest. Without blood running through his veins, he should feel cold, maybe even downright freezing on a late October night, but he doesn't. His body shields mine from the wind as he walks me back across the street to the Black Door.

He lets me into the club, and for the first time, I get to see the space without anyone in it. It's gray, black, and shiny all over. The ceiling mirror casts its silver gaze back down on the dance floor. The Black Door is everything The Witchazel isn't, spacious, sleek, and cold, the reflected light of the spinning mirror ball highlighting the cavernous space. I see nothing of Vlad's warmth or humor here.

"You know, Hazel, I think you spelled my drink just to make sure I called

you back.”

“No way.” I jerk my head back in surprise, but the truth of it hits me just as fast. “What if I did?”

The corners of his mouth turn up in the barest hint of a smile. His face is otherwise unreadable in the heavily shadowed club, and I feel the nervous weight of what I’ve just admitted.

“It’s not fair that you’ve been in my head.” I drop my bag at the bar and follow Vlad to the center of the dance floor. Worrying my bottom lip with my teeth, my fingernails dig into my palms. “You’ve read every one of my private thoughts about you, but I’ll never be able to do the same.”

The sparkling diamonds of the mirror ball’s light crest over his sharp cheekbones, mesmerizing me, distracting me, so my shoulders jump to my ears when he finally speaks.

“Do you truly want to know?” His grin is wolfish and hungry.

I’m desperate to know.

“Yes.” I shove my hands into the pockets of my jeans just to give myself something to do.

He closes his eyes, and as he takes a deep and unnecessary breath, I hold mine. I’d grown accustomed to his amber eyes and the playful way they light up, but as his thick lashes flick upwards, all humor is gone. They’re several shades darker and dangerously fixed on me.

“Wh—what are you doing?” I shuffle a small step backwards. The intensity of his gaze seems to bypass all sense of decency and crosses right into the obscene.

“You want to know my thoughts. What I hide from you isn’t just in my head, but in what I see when I look at you,” he answers, his accent stronger and his words rough. “It’s not appropriate for public spaces.”

“We aren’t in public anymore.” I sound far more confident than I feel.

Yet Vlad makes me feel safe enough to push my boundaries in the ways I’ve always wanted but haven’t been brave enough to do on my own.

“No, we’re not, and so I can look at you exactly how I want to, and I can tell you that every moment in your presence, I’m imagining you as I saw you that first night, wet and naked.”

He takes a step forward, and before I can take a step back, he grabs my wrist to hold me in place. I stay where I’m directed because it’s exactly where I want to be.

“And I can tell you that all I think about while I’m here at work is how

you are right across the street. Your perfect body is so close. Your hips, so generously full, just waiting for me to hold on, to pull you in close. I can feel the soft touch of your skin, always. It's burned into my palms." He clenches and releases his hands several times. "My beautiful little witch."

"I'm not *your* little witch." It's a reflex and a test.

"If I were to taste your blood right now, *my little witch*, would your mind make you a liar?"

There is no roar of Dru's party or thump of the Black Door's DJ to act as a distraction. It's just Vlad in front of me, my competition, the man who makes my body quiver with just one look.

"Yes," I whisper, daring myself to maintain eye contact.

He smirks.

And then he kisses me, soft and unhurried. His hands cup my face as the sharp points of his fangs tease over my plump bottom lip. It's the almost kiss we missed out on hours before at The Witchazel. It would've been perfect then, but now I want more.

My hands slide up the rugged plane of his stomach, squeezing him as I move over his chest, then wrapping around his neck. I press the full weight of myself into him, and every one of my curves and rolls meld to his body.

He meets my eagerness with his own, plunging his tongue into me as I gasp. Under the heady heat of his amber eyes, my body melts. My belly flutters, my heart races, and every bone in my body loses its strength.

With vampiric speed, he has me up and in his arms, my legs wrapped around his waist so fast that I yelp my surprise. Clinging to him, I bury my face into his neck. He smells like a crisp fall night: chilled air and a hint of smoke.

Vlad slowly sinks to the dance floor, lowering me down onto my back. He must notice the way I look over to the floor, lips curled, temporarily pulled out of the moment.

"It is thoroughly cleaned every night after closing," he assures me. "Tonight especially."

He knew we were going to do this. He was planning for it.

"I want to savor you, little witch," he whispers, "take you slowly, put all of my filthy thoughts about you into action."

I gulp hard as nervousness prickles at my stomach. This is a new way for us to fuck.

Vlad undresses me as slowly as I can stand. He pushes his dark mop of

hair out of his face to remove my shoes, then my jeans, then panties. I'm vibrating with urgency and have to close my eyes and clench my fists to keep from pouncing on him.

He moves up my body, removing my tank top, then my bra. The still air rushes over my skin, giving me goosebumps and tightening my nipples to hard points. I gasp. I bite my bottom lip so hard I might bleed. Vlad runs his thumb over my lip, tugging it out from under my teeth.

"Don't do my job for me," he growls.

"Then work faster," I challenge, opening my eyes to mock glare at him.

"As you wish." He breaks what has to be a record for speediest undressing, letting buttons fly and seams rip.

"Uh... o... oh." I struggle to find my breath.

I'd seen Vlad naked before, but not with the time to appreciate him fully. With his pale, almost frosty skin highlighting his taut lean muscles, his body looks built by work and not just for show, even if the show is damn good.

"Look up," he says casually, his eyes darting to the ceiling above.

"*Fuck me.*" I exhale, looking over his shoulder to the mirrored ceiling above us.

Vlad has no reflection. It is only my voluptuous naked body, flushed with desire, that is in view.

Not until his fingers reach my pussy, parting me and dipping in between my folds to spread me wide, do I reconcile what I am feeling physically with what I'm seeing reflected above me. His fingers push inside me, and I watch my hips jerk against nothing, yet I feel it all.

"Now you see what I get to see."

My cunt is stretched wide as I watch my most delicate parts manipulated by invisible fingers. The slick sheen of my wetness glints between my thighs, and I watch it spread.

I turn to Vlad. He is looking at me with those intense eyes that I know pick up more than any human, or even witch eyes, can.

"You were built for pleasure, Hazel," he murmurs, seemingly as much to himself as for my ears. "You're my beautiful little slut. Just look at yourself, so desperate, so honest in what you crave."

I see it. In my faded pink hair that splays out like a halo around the crown of my head. In the rosy flush that marks my skin. In the way my tattoos accentuate every curve and roll, every soft, lush part of me. My ample thighs are spread wide and trembling in anticipation. My back arched and my hips

rolled forward; I'm practically begging to be entered.

"You deserve someone who will take care of this needy pussy." Vlad's voice is harsh and labored, his fingers teasing my cunt. His touch is too light, too polite. "Someone who knows when you are just your aching holes, when all you need is to be filled."

"Vlad." I whimper because I need him to stop being such a tease. I need him inside me. "Please."

No mind reading needed, he is on top of me. I spread my thighs for him, and over his shoulder, I see myself splayed open, feeling shameless and sexy.

He pushes his hard cock into me so slowly I growl at him, and then he goes slower.

"Tell me to be patient one more time." I mean to playfully threaten, but it comes out pleading.

"Never. Good little sluts deserve to be fucked," he answers, sliding a hand under my hips.

He drives himself firmly inside me, and my hips thrust up to meet his. I feel every thick inch of him fill and stretch me so fully, and seeing it plainly in the mirror I scream out in relief. I squeeze my thighs around him, wanting to hold him in me as long as I can, crying out as he pulls out.

"We are the only audience tonight. Scream as loud as you want."

And I do. I scream as I watch my first orgasm hit me in the mirror above. I see my plump curves shake and tense, the pink stain on my cheeks blooming to cover my breasts. I watch my body contort as waves of pleasure crest and fall.

And I see that Vlad is right.

I am so Goddessdamn beautiful.

"I told you," Vlad groans, and he then answers my unspoken question. "I don't have to read your thoughts, I see it on your face."

He thrusts again and again, never letting up, then rolls us over so I am on top of him, riding him.

"It's too much," I moan as I take him deeper and at a new angle, my hands on his chest, my thighs spread over his hips, my ass bouncing up and down on top of him. I look down to see his eyes flick between me, my face, my breasts, the juncture of our bodies, then up to the mirror and what I can only imagine is the wonton view of me wildly, passionately fucking air.

"Vlad," I moan as he grabs my hips. "Holy Goddess... Vlad"

He pulls me down onto his shaft, holding me there as I move my hips in

small, tight circles. I lean forward, fingers digging into his chest, and grind my clit against him. My pleasure deepens and builds with each aching gyration.

“Hazel... *fucking hell*... little witch,” he growls as I tighten around his cock, holding him firmly, deliciously inside me.

In a flurry of sensations rising ever closer to their apex, everything except our bodies is gone. The mirror, The Witchazel, the Black Door, anything further in the future than this moment or outside our flesh.

Vlad lets out a guttural noise, animalistic and fierce, and pulls me to his chest. My hand snakes around to his shoulders to hold on as tight as I can. He has me securely around the waist and drives himself upwards, thrusting into me.

I am overwhelmed by him, consumed by his attention and focus, when I’m finally granted release. I bite down on his shoulder and dig my fingers even deeper into him as I ride out the waves of pleasure. Vlad’s release hits seconds or minutes later—who knows. Time isn’t linear to begin with, but when he comes, I feel every muscle beneath me pull taut and then snap in release.

He is fierce and beautiful like this, fangs out, dark eyes burning bright, and body tensed beneath me.

“Bite me, Vlad, taste all of me,” I beg.

He pulls me down on him and sinks his teeth into my neck. I moan as I ride him hard. Our magic and life forces combine and double our pleasure until we are coming together.

Squeezing my cunt around him, I milk every last drop from his cock, just as he drinks my blood down deeply, and we create a circle of fucking and sucking and milking. He takes me in just as I take him in, both of us committed to be a part of each other for more than just this moment.

Vlad collapses back, and I relax boneless on top of him, still held tight in his grasp. I search for a god or goddess to praise for the pleasure I’d just experienced, but my brain isn’t working right now.

All I can manage to whisper out, the only god I can think to say is, “Vlad.”

CHAPTER 10

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VLAD

“Everything okay, Vlad?” Nestor asks, yelling over the din of the packed club.

It’s Halloween night, and I’d undone many of the FAL Group’s changes in favor of one night with the club exactly as I’d intended. Instead of a DJ, there is a live Strange band, whose true forms hide easily among the costumes. I’d also swapped out some of the sterile decor for more holiday appropriate ones.

The Black Door is as busy as it’s ever been.

“Huh?” I react slowly to Nestor’s question, reluctant to pull my attention away from the crowd. “I’m fine.”

“You sure? ’Cause every time someone walks onto the dance floor, you look like you want to murder them.” Nestor’s shirtless, his furry haunches and small horns on full display, this being the one night of the year glamour spells and concealing clothing aren’t required. The satyr’s heavy brows pull together incredulously when he adds, “You’re growling.”

Fuck. I am growling.

But the costumed club goers are trampling on hallowed ground, a sacred place where, less than twelve hours ago, I’d taken my pleasure in Hazel’s body and she in mine. If I had it my way, I would’ve kept Black Door closed and taken my witch captive for the day. She needed the break, and I needed her, Halloween sales be damned.

Nestor eyes me suspiciously.

“Something—I don’t know what—is going on with you. And it can’t be that the boss is stopping by, or you wouldn’t now be smiling as you stare at the dance floor.” The satyr shakes his finger at me before moving back down the bar to a waiting customer, a human dressed rather unconvincingly as a fairy.

I’d left a message for Charles letting him know I wouldn’t be losing Nestor to take on his sired bartender. I also made it clear we needed to talk about how the investment group was promoting Black Door. What happened to Hazel could never happen again.

I arrived this evening to a message from his assistant informing me that I would be meeting with Charles at the club tonight. It wasn’t a request.

At least I have plans with Hazel after the club closes to look forward to.

I chuckle as I realize that after eighty years of parties and crisscrossing the globe, it feels novel that all I want to do is spend the last hours of All Hallow's Eve with my little witch in my arms.

A smile spreads on my face as I imagine Hazel dressed up, as she told me she would be for the night, in a classic witch costume. I look up at the mirrored ceiling as if her spell might work in reverse and I might see her in action. Pointed hat, corseted top pressing her breasts right up to chin—I bet she has on the works. She doesn't do things half-assed. My cock stiffens as I imagine pushing up layers of her skirts to take her under the full red moon.

But Hazel's distracting image is ripped my mind. The air within the club shifts, stilling and cooling even as the bodies on the dance floor heat up.

Charles is here.

"Busy night."

I turn to find him at my back.

"It is." I give him a firm nod.

He's only a couple inches shorter than me, but he was turned a least a decade before I was and dresses like it. His oversized gray suit overwhelms his frame, giving him cartoonishly squat proportions. He's backed by three large, muscular Strange, two orcs and a coyote shifter, in black T-shirts several sizes too small. The orcs' greenish skin and jutting tusks hide in plain sight as particularly good Halloween costumes. The shifter has to remain in human form.

"Vladimir," he tsks, looking around the club. "You've made changes. Not ones we agreed upon."

"It's our best turnout yet, Charles." I keep my voice even. "As you can see, my ideas are good ones. They've always been."

"I know this isn't what you wanted when you came to me for help. But if you run this club the way we want, you will get your little supper club next time." Charles snaps his fingers at Nestor. "Blood and vodka, AB positive, on the rocks."

"What do you mean next time?" I frown and then turn to Nestor. "I got it."

I move behind the bar to make the drink. Purse strings or not, I don't appreciate anyone treating my staff in such a dismissive way.

"Black Door is doing well enough that we are considering expanding in the area. A different venue, one you would have more freedom with."

“That isn’t why I called you.” I slide Charles his drink, a sick uncertainty rising in my stomach. My gaze slips upwards to the mirror, and I wonder what Hazel would think if she was watching this. More than likely, she’s too overwhelmed with her own crowd to look. *Good*. “You’ve been sending your creatures to harass customers at The Witchazel. Two of them injured the owner. We’re lucky she hasn’t decided to seek compensation.”

“She wouldn’t be the first to try and won’t be the last to fail.” He laughs, nudging the orc to his left, who seems to reluctantly smile along.

His gaze returns to me, still light with laughter, but I refuse to play into his ego.

“I know why you called me, Vladimir,” he hisses, exposing his sharp fangs, “which is precisely why I’m speaking with you about your future with the FAL Group. Here is what I’m going to need you to do.”

His light eyes are only a few shades darker than his pale white skin. As he stares at me, I know whatever he says next will only make my growing anger worse.

“Return the Black Door to our specifications. No band, get the DJ back...”

Nope.

“You install my bartender...”

I grip a dirty bar rag, squeezing tightly.

“Train him to take your place...”

Fuck no.

“And I’ll get you your supper club right across the street.”

That can’t be right. I lean over the bar, needing to make sure I’ve heard him correctly.

“What the hell are you talking about, Charles?” I close in on him, forcing the vampire to look me in the eye as he answers.

Sitting on the leather bar stool, he has to angle his face upwards to meet my gaze. The orcs and coyote shifter move, sensing the rise in tension Charles hasn’t yet recognized.

“It’ll take a couple months,” he continues, “which is why you’ll remain in your position here for the time being.”

“What location across the street?” A growl builds in my chest.

“But don’t worry. We’ll have her out of there in no time. Just a matter of upping our promotion to hurry it along.”

“What is the location?” I repeat. I’m barely holding myself back from

baring my fangs.

I know where this is going, but I need to hear him say it. Because I've just spent the last week convincing Hazel that Black Door had no designs on her business, that despite our actions, we weren't a threat, but now I'm almost certain Charles is about to make a liar out of me.

"What's that place called?" He turns to his creatures.

"The Witchazel?" The coyote shifter answers.

"Yeah, The Witchazel. Not a particularly clever name."

Charles laughs with his goons, turning on the stool, but I grab him by the lapels before he can spin away from me, yanking him over the bar.

"Fuck you," I growl, taking pleasure in hearing his laughter turn into surprised silence. "What the hell did Hazel ever do to you?"

His creatures are already on me. The orcs are back behind the bar. They have my arms in a vise, trying to pull me off of him, but I have his jacket firmly in my grasp. With each yank on my arms, I jerk their boss around with me.

"Hazel? First name basis, I see." Charles seems oddly calm, as if this isn't the first time an employee has threatened his well-being. "I have nothing against the witch. It's just business, something the FAL Group is very good at and is the very reason you sought out our funding. It's also something you would do well to remember because whatever this Hazel means to you, she is preventing you from getting exactly what you want."

Human crowd be damned, my vision narrows only to my target, and, hands on Charles, I pull myself forward. I don't make it far. The orcs jerk me back hard as the coyote shifter rips my hands off of Charles's jacket. With the release I'm easily shoved back against my liquor shelves. Bottles rattle, and one drops to the ground with a thunderous crash.

There is no hiding this from the crowd around us, and while the band plays on, humans cosplaying as the Strange they don't know exist stop to watch us.

I pull and twist, attempting to free myself from the creatures' arms, straining with every bit of my Strange strength. Against a human this would be an easy win, but against two orcs I'm fucked, and Charles knows it.

Charles slowly rights his suit, smoothing out the creases and adjusting his tie.

Waving off the attention of the crowd, he gets off the stool and slowly walks around the bar to face me.

“I like your passion, Vlad. It’s what I need in my business. If you want to stay employed and you want a chance at your little dream, then you’ll do what we ask,” he whispers harshly. “Your witch would want you to have your dream, wouldn’t she?”

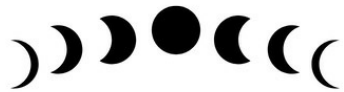
I don’t get a chance to respond. His creatures hold me in place as he exits the club.

All I can do is look at the mirrored ceiling and hope Hazel isn’t watching.

The coyote shifter leaves next. And then only after they’ve been gone long enough to assure that Charles is tucked away in a car or flying high as a bat, do the orcs let me go.

By then the humans are back to dancing and drinking, none the wiser to what they’ve just witnessed. There is no point in going after Charles now. I know my decision. His last-minute ultimatum changed nothing.

What I don’t know is what Hazel saw or what she must be thinking, and that I can’t accept.



The second story window of The Witchazel is uncharacteristically open, and when I fly in, transforming from my bat to vampire form, I see why.

“Well, that was informative.” Hazel is waiting for me. She’s seated on the end of her makeshift bed, crystal ball in her lap.

A desperate pang of desire hits me as I see her in her full Halloween getup. I was right. Her cleavage overflows her corset, and the layers of her skirts are hiked up on one side, exposing two handfuls of tattooed thigh. I want to drop to my knees and bite my way up to her center.

“Came upstairs to restock the spelled vodka, ended up getting a show,” she continues. Her pretty face is unreadable. I can’t tell if she’s angry, or sad, or resigned.

I want to read Hazel’s thoughts. Her blood is in me, but I’d be wrong to do it now. After what she watched, whatever she’s feeling, she’s entitled to keep to herself. It takes a lot of concentration not to let her in, but I manage to block out her thoughts.

“I’m not taking his offer,” I say firmly.

“I know.”

“The fucking asshole thought he could buy me off with his empty promises—”

“I know,” she repeats calmly, her tone light as if she’s just stating a fact. She turns the crystal ball in her lap, her eyes dropping to watch whatever scene is playing out across the street. “You know I’ve been watching, and Nestor’s got skill.”

“You know? You believe me?” The vice grip on my chest loosens by a fraction.

“Yeah, I mean you just tried to take out an older, more powerful vampire in front of a room full of humans.” She looks up at me, pushing back the wide brim of her pointed black hat. Her eyes shine with mirth, and her lips tremble as they press together, holding back a laugh. “It would’ve been kind of hot if I couldn’t also see that that shifter was just dying for an excuse to go full coyote on you.”

“Hazel.” I breathe her name with a smile, every syllable releasing me from the worry that gripped me.

“One wrong move,” she continues, “and you could’ve been coyote chow.”

The humor on her face is gone as her eyes drop back down to the ball in her lap.

She was worried about me.

I cross the room to her and take the crystal ball from her hands. I place it on the blanket next to a large leather-bound book that is at her side. Dropping to my knees in front of her, I hold her tattooed hands in mine, feeling her pulse race.

“I’m okay. I promise, little witch.” I capture her chin with my thumb and forefinger and tilt her head up to meet my eyes.

“You know this would be a whole lot easier if I could be pissed at you.” She sniffs, a smile tugging at her lips. “I got my grimoire out and everything. I had like five different hexes ready to go.”

“Well, I’m about to be unemployed, so I’ll have a lot more time to piss you off.” I brush my fingers along her jawline.

“I do have a really sweet transfiguration potion.” She laughs, but it dies quickly. “He was offering you everything you wanted, Vlad. Everything you dreamed of.”

“The Black Door wasn’t my dream.”

“No, but the supper club was. Just as The Witchazel is for me, and—”

“The supper club isn’t my dream either,” I say with a certainty I’m just discovering. “I spent almost a century just trying things out, people and places. Different professions too. When I finally decided I wanted to come back here, I thought it was because it was where I was turned. The Strange in the clubs in this city made me comfortable in who I was as a vampire. So I thought if I wanted to create a home, to set down roots, I should create my own club.”

“But um... now you don’t?” She looks confused, her black-laquered lips creating a boldly graphic frown.

“No.”

Oh fuck. I feel where my thoughts and words are headed. It scares the shit out of me, but I won’t stop them either.

“Because I don’t need to create something that already exists. I just need to support you.”

I move to release Hazel from my hold, to step back and give her some space, but her hands tighten on mine and I’m stuck, happily, on my knees in front of her.

“I don’t have a potion prepared for this,” she says softly, a hint of panic in her voice, “so this will just have to do.”

She releases my hands and grabs my face, pulling herself onto my lips. It is gentle at first, her mouth moving cautiously over mine, like she’s unsure how we work now that she knows we are no longer rivals.

But we were never rivals in my mind. And so I grab her around her corseted waist and pull her down to the floor on top of me. My fingers weave into her pink hair, her black hat flying off as I pull her in tighter. I want more than just a kiss from her; I want a future with her.

My hands move to the laces at the back of her corset. The silken ribbon slips through my fingers, and it takes several tries before I can tug the knot at the back open. Hazel lets out a satisfied groan as the corset begins to loosen, her breasts spilling out.

“HAZEL!” Violet’s voice calls out from somewhere far too close. “I’ve been standing at the bottom of the stairs for the last fifteen minutes trying not to interrupt, but can you please wait to fuck until after the blood moon ritual? We’re already running late.”

“Shit.” Hazel tries to roll off of me before yelling back, “No problem, just

getting the last of my supplies together.”

The coven’s youngest witch arrives at the second-floor landing dressed up as Velma from *Scooby Doo*. She has a hand over her eyes as if expecting to walk in on us half naked. She wasn’t far off.

“Do I need to leave without you?” Violet gestures wildly in our direction, eyes still covered.

I help Hazel up to standing. She hastily tries to cover her nipples with the corset while I knot the laces in the back. Once finished, I tug down my shirt and she smooths out her skirts.

“I’ll be ready in a second.” She moves quickly, grabbing a leopard print duffle bag.

She zips it close, then stops suddenly and looks at me.

“I’m doing a protection spell tonight, but do you believe Charles will go after The Witchazel even after you turn him down?”

“Especially when I turn him down. Charles’s greed is only surpassed by his ego,” I admit. “I will fix this, Hazel. But whatever protection spell you have, it would be best to double it.”

A mischievous grin spreads across her face as she flips through the leather-bound grimoire on her bed. Finding what she is looking for, she looks back to me.

“What are your feelings about getting even?” she asks, unzipping her bag and adding the book to the rest of her supplies.

“For you? Getting even is the bare minimum.”

“Perfect.” She grabs an empty jar and shoves it in her duffle bag. “We have a blood moon ritual to go to.”

CHAPTER II

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HAZEL

My mind is buzzing as we arrive at Moonbound. Conflicting feelings—fear and joy, anxiety and comfort—tumble through me at a velocity too fast for me to decipher.

Vlad is not my rival, he is my ally, just as I'm his. I breathe deep and exhale fully.

Charles is coming for The Witchazel. My stomach drops.

I watch my vampire from the corner of my eye as I explain to Dru what I want to do. I'll be crafting hex water in the circle tonight. It's relatively simple to make, but it can have intense results. If the FAL Group doesn't make a move on my business, Black Door will remain unharmed, but if they do, then that negative energy will be brought back on them ninefold. There is no way to know the exact results. The only thing I can be sure of is they won't be able to take my bar from me.

I expect to see some sign of my spiraling thoughts on Vlad's sharply handsome face, but there is only support in his amber eyes. He had stayed out of my thoughts at The Witchazel, but now I want him to listen.

Are you sure you're okay with this? I can do it on my own.

He runs his hand up and down my back, stroking along my spine. I want to close my eyes and melt into his hard chest, but there is no time to rest. Vlad never returned to the club, and at this point, Charles has his answer. There is no telling what they might attempt next or when.

"We're in this together, little witch," he whispers in my ear and kisses me on the forehead.

Thank you.

"So hex water," Dru confirms as she leads us to the back of her shop. "You know once it's complete, there's no going back."

"It's a proportional response." He turns to me with a nod. "It's what they deserve."

"We understand," I tell Dru.

"Okay." She nods. "I'll need you to wait outside, Vlad. No one but a coven member can enter once we begin, but you can watch from the doorway if you want."

"Here." Violet pulls a book from one of the store's shelves, *Strange*

Dreams: An Encyclopedia of Shared Thought Magic, and hands it to him. “In case you get bored. I found the section on vampiric dream manifestation to be particularly interesting.”

“Uh, thanks, Violet.” Vlad chuckles lightly as she breaks the tension in the room and heads into the back.

We’re alone, and I turn to face him, sliding my hands up his chest.

“Dream manifestation? You can enter my dreams too?” I ask once we’re alone. I know what he can do to me in the waking world, but I can only imagine what more would be possible in dreams.

“There you go with your filthy thoughts. Let’s get through tonight and I’ll show you.”

“Fine.” I pout, leaning in to give him a quick peck on the lips.

Before I can pull away, he yanks me back. His mouth crashes down, his tongue darting into me. My eyes close and my fingers dig into his shoulders as I gasp. When he finally lets me go, I’m panting.

“One day I’ll find a spell that lets me read your mind.” I laugh.

“All you have to do is ask and my thoughts are yours.” He smiles. “Now let’s save *The Witchazel*.”

I smile and head into the large back room of the store.

The space is cleared, the bookshelves and storage boxes pushed to the walls. It’s dark except for the lit candles that dot the room. Thick tendrils of incense smoke curl around me, and I breathe it in fully. It’s thick and heady, and it feels like comfort.

Eight witches—Violet, Daphne, Natalie, Maisie, Zelda, Serena, Corinne and I—form a circle around Dru as she calls in the elements to protect our spellwork.

“I call upon the Goddess, the one within us and without, to guide us in our magical workings.” Dru anoints a small carved figure representing the universal goddess with oil and places it on the central altar. “I call upon the magic of the full moon. Life force of the lunar cycle, let us honor your power on your night.”

The process of opening the circle is slow and purposeful. It is the necessary prep work we do to turn the back room into a protected magical space. I revel in the process, appreciating the feel of our collective energies joining and rising to connect with the divine.

The ritual is sacred, giving space for each coven member to be open about their needs and to call on their sister witches for magical aid. Tonight,

more than ever, I will need their help. The Witchazel is my dream, but it would never exist without their support, and the hex will be stronger not just because of their collective power, but because of their connection to its purpose.

Violet uses the energy of the circle to call for the wisdom to discover her path within magic. Dru, a spell to attract passionate love. With each magical working, the energy in the room builds, and spells weave in and out of each other, locking into one another, becoming more powerful than any one witch could create on their own.

Then it is my turn. I enter the circle.

The anger that had slammed into me when I saw the crystal ball image of Charles had lowered to a simmer once Vlad arrived at my side. I don't know how he does it, but I like it. Still, it's there, beneath the surface, ready to boil over.

The Witchazel is nothing to Charles or the FAL Group. To them, I am nothing compared to the money they could make.

We'll see if they feel the same way after tonight.

I look back to the doorway where Vlad is standing several steps back. Draped in shadow, his face is hidden in the darkness. I can't see his reaction to my thoughts, but I don't need to. I know he's with me.

I step up to the altar.

"Divine Goddess, daughter of war and passion, of revolt and retribution." I pull a large mason jar filled with vinegar and place it on the altar. "We've been wronged, our creations have been attacked..."

Magic, invisible to the eye, thick and foamy, fills in every crack and crevice of the room. It whips around the circle, building, frothing, pressing against the walls. I can feel the combined energy of the coven surrounding me, in me, moving my hands over the jar and strengthening my words. Now is the moment.

I dump out my bag of supplies and reach for the nails first.

"I bring you iron to guide and attract all ill-will... I add pepper for heat and pressure..."

I continue to throw the ingredients in, feeling the power of the circle and every witch in it move through me. I send it, mixed with my rage, frustration, and hope, into the jar.

"And I ask the Goddess to guide me in this hex's righteous delivery..."

I seal the jar tight.

“So shall it be,” my witch sisters chant in unison as the liquid swirls, slowly dissolving the materials until it returns to a clear and stable state.

“So shall it be,” I repeat, exhaling sharply to release the excess energy in my body.

The work is done, but I can’t rest yet. I have one last thing to do before the spell is complete. I have to direct the hex water at its intended target, the Black Door. I leave the jar on the altar and return to my position in the circle. I feel Vlad’s eyes on my back, his Strange energy just as strong as my sister’s.

We chant as Dru lowers the circle, completing and ending the working portion of the blood moon ritual.

The witches then move quickly to lay out a long table at the back of the room with food and wine. They pile their plates high with an eclectic mix of pastries, fruit and vegetables, scoops of hearty casseroles, and more. Many nibble off their plate as they work their way down the table, needing to replenish the massive amount of energy lost in working so much magic. I pull out a sealed pitcher of my Tequila Moonrise and place it next to the wine, a small offering of thanks for all they have done and an apology for not being able to stay.

Dru gives me an approving nod, Violet at her side, watching as I grab my jar of hex water from the altar and head for the front of the store.

“Are you ready?” Vlad is at my side, grabbing the jar from my grasp.

“I am if you are,” I confirm.

“Let’s go then, little witch.”

We walk the nearly silent city streets back to Black Door. Moonbound is only a few blocks away, and parking is nearly impossible. Even with all the bars and clubs closed, it wouldn’t have been worth it to drive. I want the cold walk anyways.

The chill in the air helps me think, and I hope it does the same for Vlad.

If he changes his mind, decides he does in fact want to take Charles’s offer, he only has minutes left to decide. Once the hex is complete, there is no going back.

Vlad stops suddenly on the sidewalk. The Witchazel and Black Door are visible and only seconds away.

Humans dressed as horror film monsters, sexy animals, and, of course, vampires and witches run by us. They’re drunk and laughing, too distracted to notice how cheap their plastic fangs look in comparison to Vlad’s real

ones.

We wait in some silent agreement for the humans to leave before either one of us finally speaks.

“I’m not going to change my mind, Hazel.” His amber eyes narrow, his mouth tightening with the heaviness of his words. “We’re in this together because I decided I wanted to. You did not force me. This is my choice.”

“I just need you to be sure.” I start to walk again, slow and meandering, having to expend my nervous energy some way.

Vlad follows after me at a leisurely pace.

“I’m sure, *my* little witch.”

I turn to face him, walking backwards. I smile. No correction is needed.

“We’re here.”

I shuffle to a stop, turning to follow Vlad’s focus on the building in front of us.

Black Door. It’s empty now. All the club goers and staff have been gone for at least an hour. The club doesn’t look like much without the line of eager humans in front of it, just a big gray box with a black door and a black and white lit sign above it.

“Do I just throw it?”

“I’ll do it.”

“I told you, Hazel, I’m sure.” He gives me a determined look.

My shoulders and chest jump with laughter. “I know, Vlad. I believe you. But I was the one who created the hex, so I need to be the one to see it through.”

“Okay.” He hands it to me.

The jar is barely in my hands before I throw it at the club’s door. It shatters instantly, and the sharp sound of glass breaking echoes down the street. The liquid is clear and likely to dry up by tomorrow. The glass will be explained as drunk partiers tossing their empties.

“Is that it?” Vlad asks.

“Yup.” I turn to him, face flushed and exhilarated.

“Then we need to go.” His hand moves to my lower back, guiding me forward.

We race across the street, and I quickly open up The Witchazel. We had plans to look at the blood moon tonight from the roof, and without discussion, we head upstairs. I grab a blanket from my makeshift bed, and then we move out the back fire escape and up to the roof.

I lay out the blanket, and Vlad, having thought to grab a bottle of spelled wine from one of the open boxes, sits down next me and uncorks it.

“Shouldn’t something happen?” His focus is trained across the street.

“Not yet. Hopefully not ever,” I answer, “if Charles does nothing. If they stop messing with my bar and just run the Black Door in peace, they’ll be fine. If they don’t, then the hex will return whatever they put out.”

“I hope they don’t go after it.” Vlad takes a swig of the wine before passing it to me. With a resigned sigh, he adds, “Unfortunately, they’re too greedy not to.”

We sit there for a long moment, the dark city streets laid out in front of us, dotted with the orange glow of Halloween decorations and punctuated with the shrill, joyous screams of humans playing pretend. We pass the wine between us. I stare up at the red moon as it shines with its full brilliant magic.

“And he had the nerve to say The Witchazel wasn’t a clever name!” I burst out of nowhere. “I’m a witch, and my name is Hazel. It’s adorable.”

“Yes, it is.” Vlad lets out a sharp snort of laughter, then, spotting my irritated expression, adds, “You okay, little witch?”

“Yes.” I let out a calming breath before launching back into it. “And I’m sorry, what the hell kinda name is Black Door? You have a black door... oh so Goddessdamn clever!”

Capturing my jaw in his hands, he brings his mouth down on mine. It’s a quick kiss, gentle in its confidence, knowing it will be the first of many more.

“I didn’t pick the name.” Vlad pulls back, hands raised in surrender. “Other than Nestor and the staff I hired, there wasn’t much I liked about the place.”

“The band you had playing tonight was pretty great.”

“Oh yeah? Well, I’ll call them up, get them to play The Witchazel. Of course, we’ll need to build that stage on the second floor first.”

I bite back a grin.

“What about a ceiling mirror?” I ask. “You think we can build one of those?”

“Oh no, I’ll do better.”

A sex swing?

He shakes his head.

“You’ll just have to wait and see.”

My vampire pulls me in close to his chest, and my head drops to his shoulder as I try to guess what plans he’s crafting for our future. The sky has

slowly transformed from an endless black to a navy blue. Soon the sun will peak out over the horizon. We'll need to leave, Vlad to his slumber and me at his side. When I wake to work The Witchazel, perhaps he'll join me. Either way we'll figure it out. Right now we're content to stare up together at the waning blood moon and just dream.

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EPILOGUE

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SIX MONTHS LATER

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HAZEL

“Hazel, hurry up,” Violet calls to me from the back of The Witchazel. Her beaming face and halo of tight curls peek out from behind the false bookcase that now works like a secret passageway to the second floor. “Vlad’s asking for you.”

“Shit. Okay, give me a sec.” I whirl around the bar, finishing up a Dark N’Horny, the newest creation by my newest bartender, Nestor.

We’d snapped Nestor up after a series of electrical problems and a small fire that miraculously stayed completely within the edges of the Black Door’s property shuttered the club’s doors.

A LAFD fire chief gave a statement to the local newspaper about it saying, “I’ve never seen a fire burn the way this one did. No matter how much water we dropped, the flames didn’t seem to stop. Luckily no one was harmed. It was contained to the building and didn’t spread to the rest of the neighborhood. It was strange, very strange.”

Vlad and I had a good laugh about the quote. Our day continued to be made better when he heard from some vamp pals that Black Door wasn’t going to reopen. The damage was too great, and the FAL Group was getting cold feet about the location. Charles took the insurance money and set his sights on other parts of the city, far away from any properties owned by coven members.

“You good, Nestor?” I ask, removing my black apron to reveal the fitted sheath dress Dru had picked out for me. It’s tight enough that when Vlad had seen me get dressed early that evening in our apartment, he’d pulled me back into the bedroom.

We were a good twenty minutes late to open The Witchazel today.

“Don’t worry about me, I’ve got it covered down here,” Nestor answers, his hands working swiftly to make drinks while he maintains eye contact with me. He and Farah had picked up the slack over the last few months so Vlad and I could focus on turning The Witchazel’s second story into a speakeasy-style supper club. “You and the big man enjoy your night.”

“Oh, we will,” I assure him. I slip out from behind the bar, pull the hidden door handle between the stacks of books, and climb the stairs, for the first

time ever heading towards more noise instead of less.

As I hit the second floor, my neck prickles with a cool chill in the warmth of the crowded space. Then a hand, *his* hand, grips the back of my neck.

I shiver.

“Little witch,” Vlad whispers in my ear, his free hand running up my arm and then circling around my waist from behind, pulling me back hard against his chest.

He walks me backwards, away from the standing room only crowd, and into a dark corner of the supper club. We’re between a couple of plush hunter green booths that face out towards the small stage where everyone’s attention is focused.

Vlad grips my hips, then spins me to face him. I hold his jaw in my hands, enjoying just having a moment to appreciate the sharp angles of his handsome face under my palms. Other than a quickie here or there, we’ve been too busy with the grand opening in the last month to really be with each other in the way we want.

“My little witch,” he growls.

“Yes, Vlad,” I purr and press light kisses along his jawline.

“I have a surprise for you.”

His voice has that mischievous lilt to it that has me eyeing him with suspicion.

“Trust me,” he adds.

Always.

Before I can respond out loud, Vlad pulls me further into the shadows at the back of the room. There is a small set of steps, only three or four, that lead up to a black door that almost disappears against the black walls.

“My surprise is the supply closet?” I frown, looking back wistfully at the crowd and the supper club’s impending inaugural performance.

“Impatient, impatient,” he tsks, and one fang pokes out with a smirk.

Not giving me a chance to respond, he leads me up the stairs and through the door.

“Not a supply closet,” I say in awe as I enter the room.

The first thing I notice is the massive window that looks out over the club, and then I immediately realize that it must be a two-way mirror since that is all that is visible from the outside. The room is draped in heavy velvet curtains that dampen the outside noise. A built-in wooden shelving unit runs along the wall under the mirror, stocked with what looks like drink supplies

and—

Is that handcuffs? And a blindfold?

“There’s more. Keep looking.” Vlad laughs. We’ve been too busy for him to drink from me in a couple days, and so I know he hasn’t read my thoughts, only that he knows me well.

I turn to take in the whole room.

“A bed?” I gesture to the large, comfy-looking bed pushed up against the back wall. My hands linger on the short hem of my dress, playing over my thighs. Suddenly I feel my body flush, and I can’t stay still.

“For our late nights at work,” Vlad explains.

“Is that what it’s for?” I raise a brow at his pleased smile.

“Come here, Hazel.” He grabs my hand and, pulling me to him, turns me to face the two-way mirror out into the club.

The view is above the heads of the crowd, the location of the hidden room some distance from the majority of the patrons, giving us a perfect vantage point of the stage.

The opening strains to a big band number start, and I watch as the red velvet curtains on the small stage part. A spotlight illuminates five large wild cats lounging on oversized satin cushions. Their furs are different shades of golden tan with big dark-brown spots. They’re human in size, and on closer inspection, the way they are posed is human-like too, legs crossed and propped up on their elbows, their paws tapping in time to the music. The shifter burlesque troupe had been a big get, their performance consisting of slowly transforming into their almost nude human form one body part at a time.

“Look at what we’ve created.” He pulls me back against his chest, his chin resting on my shoulder as he pulls my hands from the hem of my skirt.

He replaces my fingers with his own. Grabbing the silken dress, he slowly pulls my skirt up my hips. He slides his hands along my thighs, over my hips, then moves to the center of me.

I want to respond, but all I manage is a moan as his fingers brush over my exposed pussy.

“Always the good little slut,” Vlad groans in my ear, his thumb slipping along the slick seam of me, “wet and ready.”

I let out a strangled moan as he pushes a finger into me, his arm pressing into my stomach and side to hold me upright. His free hand moves over my breasts, squeezing me gently. Whimpering as he pinches my nipple through

the fabric, I arch my back, pushing my ass into the hard length of his cock.

He growls with the effort to maintain control, so I push back into him harder. Positioning his thickness between my ass cheeks, I roll my ass over his dick. He responds by stretching me further, adding one and then two more fingers, as he plunges in and out.

We play a game of chicken, seeing who will break and come first. He already has me so far along, my pleasure compounded with the view of an audience and performance beyond. I feel so exposed yet protected. I moan and scream, knowing they can't hear me, while fantasizing about what they might see if they could.

What Vlad sees now.

“Such a good little whore you are, Hazel,” he groans. “You’ve been wanting this all day, haven’t you? Your holes have just been aching to be used.”

“Use me,” I beg. “My body is yours.”

The words do dangerous things to me, amplifying my sensations and focusing me down to only my wet and desperate parts. He’s so close to winning, to forcing me to come, but I won’t let him without a fight.

I drop my head back onto his shoulders, rolling my face away from his, exposing the long, bare length of my neck to his mouth.

I hear him suck in a sharp, wanting breath. He’s scenting my blood mixed with my sweat and arousal.

“Bite me, Vlad.” I set my trap.

Vlad sinks his teeth into my tender flesh, my body now trained to react to that particular hint of pain as a shot of pleasure. I whimper, and my knees buckle. He holds me up and sucks. I feel the energy in my blood flow into his body.

When he pulls his fangs from me, I pounce, unleashing a torrent of graphic imagery.

... your cock is in my mouth, your hands in my hair, holding me in place... it’s so thick I’m gagging on it...

“What the hell are you doing to me?” he groans, body stiffening as he tries to process every filthy thought I’m putting in his brain.

... I’m your slut for tonight... for always... and I want you to make me feel it...

Vlad’s hands leave my cunt, and I spin around to face him. He’s in my thoughts, and when I drop to my knees, he’s already placed a pillow beneath

me.

I unzip his fly and grip his painfully hard cock. My mouth is on him in seconds, my lips stretching over his thick head and swallowing him down as much of him as I can take. I build up the spit in the back of my throat until it is easier to take him inside me fully.

“Touch yourself,” he orders with strained effort. His hands thread through my hair, not holding me still but guiding me in his desire.

I work my cunt and his cock with matching strokes, our shared blood and energy working together so our pleasure is mirrored. With his moan, I moan; with his spasm, I spasm.

The images in my head bleed into reality until they are one and the same. And as we come, we come together.

My body shakes and twists on the pillow, and Vlad pulls back enough that as his body stiffens at his thrust, only the head of his cock is in mouth.

“Don’t swallow,” he demands through gritted fangs. “I want to see you hold me in your mouth.”

I do as I’m told, my mouth filling with the salty taste of him until he finally pulls out, exhausted and panting.

He crouches in front of me, his hands cupping my face, fingers stroking over my cheeks. Finding a droplet of his cum on my chin, he wipes it with his finger and then licks it off.

“Show me,” he whispers.

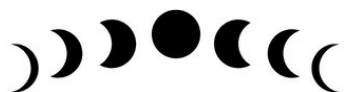
And kneeling, spread legged, my dress bunched around my waist, an entire room full of people only feet away, I part my lips for him.

There is awe shining in his amber eyes as his thumb brushes along my bottom lip.

“I love you, my little witch.”

My mouth open, his cum held on my tongue like it’s some precious potion, I refuse to lose a drop, and so I can’t speak, only think.

I love you, too.



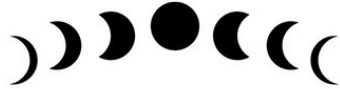
Thank you for reading Blood Moon. I hope you love Hazel and Vlad as much

as I do!

If you read and enjoyed Blood Moon, consider leaving a review. If Blood Moon was your first Jillian Graves' book check out my debut novel, [Titan: A Gargoyle Daddy Dom Romance](#). And don't forget to pre-order [Rook: A Primal Gargoyle Romance](#) to dive deeper into the Strange Universe.

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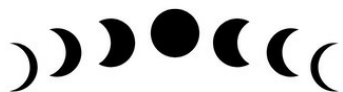
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Jillian Graves is an author of paranormal and monster romances. Jillian lives in Southern California with her partner, Bill, and their two cats, Salem and Luna. When not writing she can be found trolling the Halloween section of Target for home decor or starting a new craft project she will promptly grow bored of and forget about half way through.

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