

# The Blood's Children

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A dragon, a cat,  
and a pissed off witch  
walk into a bar...

Book 3 of  
The Witch's Bar Chronicles



# Prologue

The scrawny man glared up at the heavy sky that spat rain in his gaunt face and thin, dirty hair. It fell into his eyes and dripped off the end of a nose that was flushed with burst capillaries from years of alcohol abuse. Why he ever let that vampire convince him to go wander around some godforsaken marsh in Ireland looking for a damned witch was a mystery.

He had no idea how the vampire even knew the witch would be out here tonight. One of those fairy elves showed up at the vamp's hotel room in New Orleans a few nights ago and thrust some kind of package at her before disappearing again, and she had him on a plane five hours later with nothing but the clothes on his back, a letter in his pocket, and a fake passport that somehow got him through customs at Heathrow.

All he knew was that the vamp had better hold true to her promise to turn him when he finished up here. It was about time he gained his rightful place in this merciless world— a narcissistic belief spawned from years of drug abuse and black out nights that ended in a jail cell or worse along with self-inflicted poverty and a string of dead-end jobs.

He pulled the threadbare army coat he had stolen from a homeless man tighter around his shoulders and hunched against the bitterly chill December wind. Wait, was that a howl? Supposedly the banshee who lived in these parts was dead, but you could never be too sure these days. Those damned fae were slippery devils and as likely to skin and eat

a person alive as do anything kind for a poor human like him.

No, it wasn't a howl. It was just the wind, but there, just on the edges of his senses, was something else. As he moved further into the marsh, it became clearer. He smelled smoke, like something cooking mingled with a wood fire. Had to be the witch— who else could get a fire to burn in this miserable rain?

He stumbled over the treacherous ground and peered through the gloom until he saw the shadow of a hut in the distance that seemed sturdy enough and sat low to the ground. As he drew closer, he saw that smoke curled from the chimney. The building was made of clay and topped with a neat thatched roof, and the windows glowed with a welcoming yellow light through thick glass. And for a brief moment, this nameless, forgettable man regretted all of the choices in his life that had led him here instead of the alternate reality of happily ever after with his own comfortable home, maybe a pretty wife, some kids. He shoved those thoughts out of his mind as he approached the door.

The letter in its cheap, drugstore envelope burned in his pocket, heat rising as he grew closer to the hut. Yeah, the witch was definitely inside. The vamp told him he would know he was on the right track when the letter warmed to the touch. He'd looked at her like she was crazy; after all, fae aside, magic couldn't really be real, right? But it turned out she wasn't lying. He crept to the hut and knocked sharply on the wooden door, only the howling wind breaking up the heavy silence that fell over him.

When the door opened, he recoiled backward, slipping in the mud and landing heavily on his ass. Like most humans, he had not bothered learning or understanding how much folklore was real when the fae and cryptids came out into the

open. He expected some ugly hag of a witch to open the door, not a fur covered, rat faced creature the size of a man wearing a red coat.

The fir darrig bared its yellow teeth as it scowled down at him.

“Strangers are not welcome here,” it hissed.

The man scrambled to his feet and sneered in a failed attempt at saving face while trying to shake the mud off of his ill-gotten coat. He looked over the creature’s shoulder into the neat, cozy room beyond that struck him as anachronistic considering the... thing that stood in his way at the door.

“I’m not here for you, freak. I’m here for the witch. I have something for her. Something she’s going to be very interested in. I suggest you get out of my way before I make you.”

The mud and snot running down his face did not sell his bravado.

The fir darrig smiled, a nasty, terrifying snarl of a smile, and called over his shoulder, “Greta, it’s for you. But I call dibs when you’re done with him, lass.”

The man stopped listening. He focused on the woman coming up behind the rat man. She looked so... ordinary. Were all witches like her? Had they really walked among normal people this whole time? This one wore a pair of jeans and a tank top with some fantasy movie quip on the front. A faded cardigan with frayed cuffs that had seen better days sloped off of her shoulders, adding to her unassuming appearance.

But he felt the power roll from her like a tide. Power that made him inexplicably afraid of the ground on which he stood. Power that made him suddenly regret leaving New Orleans. Power that made him wish he’d said no and walked away when that crazy vamp took him to the cheap hotel

room and held out the little baggie of white powder he crammed up his nose to briefly try to feel invincible.

“Thanks, Matthias. What do you want?” Greta asked, tilting her head to one side to pierce the man with a hazel-eyed gaze under the silver fringe of her shaggy, short, bob haircut.

“What’s going on then?” said another voice behind her.

This one looked human— but no, he was one of those fairy bastards again. He was almost as tall as the witch, but he had the pointed ears and weird cat eyes and planed cheekbones to prove his damned fae lineage. His hair was all golden curls around his shoulders, and the nameless man could see tools at the fae’s belt under his bright red vest.

“I was told to give this to you,” the man snapped, thrusting the letter at no one in particular. It was so hot now that it nearly seared his skin when he took it out of his pocket, but the witch didn’t seem to notice as she opened the envelope and pulled out a sheet of paper. Silence fell as she read the one carefully written line and the signature scrawled beneath.

“I see,” she said, her voice as cold as the endlessly howling wind. She folded the letter and tugged her cardigan back on her shoulders.

Then she looked at him, and some animal instinct deep inside of him knew that he was dead. The brown in her hazel eyes faded away until her eyes were an ugly green, no, now they turned black, the black seeping in from the edges and crowding out the white and now the iris, and oh god, those eyes, he had to get away, why couldn’t he run?

Because the Earth had him. He was a prisoner where he stood, and now he will never get away. His screams filled the marsh and were carried through the uncaring air as the witch slowly buried him alive, screaming as he sank into the Earth inch by inch, screaming until his mouth and lungs and

stomach filled with the Earth and there was nothing left but the remnants of his screams echoing across the empty marshes.

“Well,” Tam said. The leprechaun blinked at the mound of dirt where a man once stood and adjusted his red vest over his tinker’s tools. “Killing the messenger seems a bit excessive.”

“Aw, I wanted him! I never get the good ones,” Matthias complained. His shoulders slumped in dejection and his whiskers drooped as the fir darrig turned away from the door.

“There, there,” Tam said, patting Matthias on the back. “You can dig him up when she’s done with him.”

“I can, can’t I?” Matthias brightened at the thought.

Tam shuddered and looked at Greta. Greta hadn’t moved, the letter clutched in her white-knuckled fist.

“Greta? Lass?” Tam asked. He exchanged a worried glance with Matthias before they both began to back away.

“I need Jessie,” she said in a cold, dreamy, detached voice that was not her own. It was strange to their ears as if she had never spoken before.

“Okay then, let’s go to her. Can you use your portal? Do you want me to take you?”

Greta was a statue of ivory, sinew, and bone. Tam and Matthias exchanged another glance.

They hadn’t known Jessie and Greta long. It had only been a few months since the witches showed up at the marsh looking for a trail that would lead them to Charlie, their friend and the ghost who haunted Jessie’s bar.

When the new cabal rose up and targeted Jessie and Greta, Astrid, the cabal’s young, misguided lieutenant and daughter of one of the oldest witches in the world, had captured Charlie in a spirit trap. A spirit trap was a terrible

prison designed to destroy a ghost's soul piece by piece until nothing was left to be saved or reincarnated. Charlie would have been lost forever if Madame Blanche, the European cryptid emissary for the Fae, Cryptid, Witch, and Human Alliance and France's most well-known White Lady, hadn't fed him her essence while they were captives together.

Matthias' closest friend, the banshee Brigitte, was a casualty of that fight when the cabal tricked her into becoming a necromancer, an act so repulsive to Nature that it would be centuries before she was free from the karmic punishment. Brigitte had gladly accepted death as an alternative, and Jessie and Greta had vowed to save as many fae and cryptids as they could from the banshee's fate.

"Okay, you hang tight, I'll fetch Jessica," Tam backed away and fumbled for his key to the portal leprechauns used to reach their storehouses and workshops and travel around the world.

"Don't you leave me alone with her," Matthias hissed as he hugged his tail to his chest, holding onto it like it was a long, hairless lifeline. His eyes darted between Greta and Tam. He had very little experience with witches, particularly when their eyes went strange and they buried messengers on his doorstep.

"You'll be fine! We'll be right back."

"Bring Mikael too," Greta said in that flat voice that didn't seem to be hers at all.

"Aye, I'll bring them. Just wait right here," Tam opened a door in the air and stumbled through, leaving Matthias to nervously eye their friend and pray that Tam made it back in time before Greta started to look at him the way she had looked at the nameless man.

# Chapter 1

“I’m telling you, it should go here!” Jessie argued as she tried to use her shoulder to nudge an errant silver curl out of her bright blue eyes. While the brightly colored knit cap her dear friend Isabel made for her kept most of her hair out of her face, this one lock just would not stay put.

Isabel, air witch extraordinaire and Jessie’s oldest friend, had decided to take advantage of her position as head of the Witch Council to knit hats and scarves for her friends during the more tedious meetings. It was a source of endless satisfaction to pull out her craft bag and latest project in the middle of a session; nothing quite deflated some of the pompous asses the Council dealt with like the click of her needles, much to Jessie and Greta’s gleeful delight.

Jessie struggled under the weight of a beautifully carved foosball table, her small frame barely big enough to handle her end, and swore profusely when the corner of the table caught her favorite Toadies shirt and almost tore the fabric. She wanted the table in the middle of the room where players would have plenty of elbow room and everyone could appreciate Jared’s craftsmanship. Her apprentice had really outdone himself this time.

Jared had a knack for succeeding at anything he tried and making it look easy. He was a handsome, tall, brilliant Black air witch with a promising future as a game developer, and the foosball table was his latest achievement. It wasn’t just any table though— it was imbued with magic to bring it to life. He had built the entire base out of oak with cherry wood inlays and, with Greta’s earth magic help, made the field out of living turf. The teams weren’t just stick figures on rods either. Christopher, a fire witch who excelled at clockwork

creations, helped craft the rods that kept the figures suspended while enabling them to move independently. Jared had also enlisted Tam's aid to carve the figurines out of stone in perfect detail and then used air magic to breathe life into each one.

The little figures mostly went where the players told them to go, but then that's where things could get nasty. After he and Greta tested the table to make sure it worked, Jared had to rebuild two of the figurines when one used its skull to shatter an opponent's head, making the ultimate sacrifice for its team. Tam prudently showed up on Jared's doorstep with a large box of spare pieces and set of fae carving tools after that. The table was Jessie's Yule gift. John— and many of the bar's patrons— couldn't wait to play it.

“No, if you want the optimal light and room to play, it needs to go here, by this window and further away from the bar. Jared, you made this thing. Tell her I'm right.”

John, Jessie's werewolf boyfriend and the local sheriff, tried to be reasonable, but at this point, he just wanted to put the damn thing down. He also wanted to try it out very badly. His wolf rose at the thought of all of that competition just waiting for him, and his normally green-blue hazel eyes that were set under a shock of unruly blonde curls glinted with a touch of gold.

“Oh, no. I'm not getting in the middle of this,” Jared backed away shaking his head and ducked behind the bar where he used the taps and Caroline, one of Jessie's other apprentices and Christopher's twin sister, to shield himself from the impending fight.

John almost dropped the entire table on his foot when Tam popped out of thin air, startling them so much that Jessie lost her grip on her end.

“Jessie, I need you. Greta needs you. You have to come quick, something is wrong. Where’s Mikael? She needs him too.”

The words tumbled out of the leprechaun’s mouth as he grabbed Jessie by the arm and pulled her toward his portal. The bar patrons openly stared, the few humans who braved the unknown or sought thrills in a witch’s place of business exchanging uneasy glances. Shania, the widowed wolfpack member Jessie had hired to wait tables part time, paused with the glass she was handing to an impatient werepanther in midair.

“Wait, what’s going on?” John demanded, putting down his end of the table and moving quickly around it to Jessie’s side.

It wasn’t that he had any illusions that his lady love was a wilting flower in need of his protection. After all, as one of the oldest and strongest witches in the world, she had withstood her fair share of attacks, both magical and physical, over the years. But the cabal had targeted her twice in the last three months. He wasn’t quite ready to let her out of his sight, despite the fact she was more than capable of taking care of herself, thank you very much.

“We were having dinner, and then this man came out of nowhere and handed her a letter. I don’t know what it said. Her eyes went this strange green and then all black, and then she buried him alive and told me to get you and Mikael,” the words fell over themselves as Tam tried to get them to understand this was important and Jessie needed to come with him now.

“Damn,” Jared said with a low whistle.

Jessie yelped and hopped on one leg, grabbing John’s arm for balance as she pulled up the cuff of her faded, well-worn

jeans. The tiny flower tattoo on her ankle, the symbol of her bond with Greta, glowed an ugly, burning red.

“Shit, something’s really wrong. I have to get to her now! Jared and John, you guys figure out the table. Caroline, call Mikael. Tell him to get here as soon as he can. Better yet, find out where he is so Tam can go for him. Where’s LaSalle?”

“I’m right here,” LaSalle spoke up.

The Nain Rouge had popped in seconds before with the trusty, never empty goblet he had “borrowed” from the local fae court grasped in his fist. The court was ruled by Mara Mac Gabhann, Duchess of Green Orchards and Oberon’s great-niece. The Tuatha de Danann duchess was also one of Jessie’s dearest friends.

LaSalle resembled a disgruntled garden gnome with a matted beard, red eyes, and a cawing laugh. Like all Nain Rouge, he treated others the way he was treated, proving to be a loyal friend and ally to those who earned his trust. While the Nain Rouge usually never involved themselves in others’ conflicts, LaSalle’s chieftain sent him to unofficially assist Jessie and her friends after the cabal attempted to infiltrate his clan.

He was ready to take his post that he usually shared with Rupert, the erstwhile Matagot who preferred to take the shape of a giant black cat, by the door. They frequently joined Tug, who was Jessie’s deeply loyal ogre doorman.

Until the cabal managed to exile the ogres to another world centuries before, they had served as Oberon’s elite Honor Guard and were some of the most skilled fighters and craftsmen among the fae. After discovering that his uncle Theodore was one of the witches behind the ogrekin’s disappearance, Jared took personal responsibility for their plight. He, along with Jessie, LaSalle, Rupert, the wolfpack, and the Witch Council, was instrumental in rescuing the ogrekin and reinstating them to their rightful place in

Oberon's court. Tug still worked for Jessie as the bar's security and doorman. Yes, it made sense that he would be at the bar as a fae liaison in case anything happened, but they all knew he really loved it there.

Rupert was absent that evening— again. During the fight to rescue the ogrekin, he had scouted the battlefield in his crow form while Jessie and her allies fought Theodore and his reinforcements. But the cabal had been waiting for Rupert with the only known substance that could get through a Matagot's almost impenetrable coat and brought him down with a poisoned arrow.

Before they first came to power a few centuries before, the cabal had once hunted the Matagot race to the verge of extinction for their pelts. The compound on the arrow that wounded Rupert in battle was a remnant of those dark times. Madame Blanche was able to get word to the remaining Matagot who went into hiding, but Rupert never quite recovered from the knowledge that his death had been imminent and his kin were, once again, in danger. He had taken to roaming the spirit world in solitary moodiness, something which worried both Jessie and Madame Blanche, his dearest friend and companion. She admitted to Jessie that she was worried he might veer toward the darker side of his chaotic neutral nature (as Jessie put it).

“Go warn Mara that something bad just happened and then find a way to warn Madame Blanche,” Jessie ordered LaSalle. “Tell them I'll fill them in as soon as I know more but to be on the alert.”

“You got it,” LaSalle popped through a dark portal and was out of sight in an instant.

“Tam, where is Greta?” Jessie turned back to the leprechaun.

“Matthias' hut,” he told her. “I'll be right behind you with Mikael.”

“Thank you. Caroline, you’re in charge until I get back.” She paused long enough to stand on tiptoe so she could give John a kiss before she ran down the oak paneled hall to her office, gray curls streaming behind her. The others stared at her retreating back.

“You heard her,” Caroline flipped her long, curly blonde ponytail over her shoulder and narrowed her big blue eyes at her crew as she dialed Mikael’s number while Tam waited, impatiently shifting from foot to foot and fidgeting with his tinker’s tools.

Caroline’s honey-gold tan and all-American cheerleader good looks masked a no-nonsense attitude and driving ambition, and she and Jared worked hard to prove that Jessie’s trust in them was not misplaced after Jessie had agreed to make them her apprentices.

Jared heaved a sigh of resignation and bent to pick up Jessie’s end of the table as John resumed his post at the other side. Caroline handed the phone to Tam who spoke a few words to Mikael on the other end and then blinked out of sight.

“This is a masterpiece,” John admired the craftsmanship as they struggled to lift the ornate and very heavy table. “Next time do you think you could make it lighter?”

Jared grunted in response.

“Was that a yes?” John grinned, and Jared scowled at him before they managed to get the table in position by the window.

Cassie Rodriguez, Caroline’s human girlfriend and Jessie’s IT guru, watched as she sipped a neon pink classic Caroline concoction. She was as tiny as she was fierce, her long black hair framing a pretty face with large, dark eyes. Charlie, the resident ghost, hovered next to her along with his succubus girlfriend Mary Jo Sutton. Mary Jo still felt

guilty at the part she played in Charlie's death, no matter how many times he reminded her that he hadn't told her about his heart condition when she invited him into the bar's bathroom for a more... personal conversation.

Cassie hadn't always gotten along with the couple. However, Charlie's near destruction combined with Cassie's unprecedented courage and leadership when she recruited Mary Jo's help to save both Jessie and Charlie had caused the trio to form an unlikely, easy friendship.

"You know what I don't understand?" Cassie asked them, stirring her drink and fishing the cherry out with her fingers.

"What's that?" Charlie asked.

"Why no one thought to ask Tug for help," she popped the cherry in her mouth and turned back to the bar. She blew a grinning Caroline a kiss while Jared and John stared at each other in chagrin before looking at the ogre, who just shrugged.

# Chapter 2

Jessie burst through the door to her office, colliding with a chestnut-curved vampire and sending them both crashing to the ground.

“Nicky, what are you doing here?” she demanded, exasperated as she struggled to untangle herself from him and get to her feet.

“I came to visit you! Did you have to hit me so hard? That actually hurt!” he complained in a grievous tone as he stood up and dusted off his black velvet, skin-tight pants and the emerald green silk shirt he wore more often than not. The shirt had been a favorite of Warsaw’s, he admitted to her one night. He wasn’t ready to bury the memory of his dead lover.

The third oldest vampire in the world, Nichodemus hailed from ancient nobility where he had made a name for himself as a flippant, rakish playboy. But despite his flamboyant, mercurial reputation, he was capable of very deep love, and he fell for Warsaw hard. When the cabal made the sweet, serious gargoyles their first casualty in the new war, Jessie and her friends swore revenge on everyone responsible for shattering Nicky’s heart into a thousand pieces.

As a result, the cabal’s attack on her bar ended in a massacre. None of Jessie’s allies had any interest in showing mercy to the group that had so deeply wounded two of their own, for Charlie also suffered when Astrid took him prisoner in the spirit trap.

“Greta’s in trouble, I need to go to her now,” Jessie snapped, choosing not to question why Nicky decided to crawl through her office window instead of using the front door like a normal person. When he didn’t get out of her way

fast enough, she snarled in frustration and scrambled over the beat-up, ancient desk.

“Wait, do you want me to go with you?” He reached for her arm.

She paused, considering. Greta had asked for Mikael, but as his younger brother, Nicky was the next best thing.

“Yes, Tam is trying to find Mikael. She said she needs him too, but I don’t know why. I just know we need to get to her now!”

“Okay, let’s go,” Nicky jumped over the desk too, ignoring the fact that it wasn’t necessary since, unlike in Jessie’s case, there hadn’t been a slightly narcissistic and sometimes oblivious vampire blocking his path. Jessie pushed the knot hole in the oak panel behind her desk and opened the portal that led to the Library she shared with Greta.

The Library served many purposes– storage, a workspace, comfort, a home for Jessie’s and Greta’s cats, and also the ability to operate as a portal to anywhere in the world. Nicky barely had time to glance at the cheerfully roaring fire flanked by comfortable, mismatched, and patched armchairs and six feline heads that poked up over the back of the old sofa before Jessie pushed a panel open on the other wall that looked into Matthias’ hut.

Greta was immobile, still framed in the open doorway that looked out on the dark, rain-lashed moors beyond. Matthias hovered nearby, wringing his ratlike hands.

“Oh, thank the Goddess, you’ve come!” His shoulders sagged in relief.

“Greta, honey, what’s going on?” Jessie moved to her friend’s side.

The only time she had ever seen Greta like this was after the original cabal attacked Greta’s home centuries ago, slaughtering her mother and sister in the process. It had

taken five witches to bring Greta down after she succumbed to her rage and decimated a forest and small village.

Her older brother had survived the cabal's attack, fleeing with their infant niece in his arms and using his witching powers and his connection to air to hide the child until Greta and Jessie could get her to safety. He then proceeded to make Greta's attempts at revenge look like a tea party. Jessie was pretty sure there were still old members of the cabal who wet themselves at the mention of Stefan's name. He wasn't called the bogeyman of the witching world for nothing.

Greta did not speak. She simply handed the crumpled letter to Jessie, and Jessie smoothed it out. The black ink of the sharply sloping letters stood out against the stark white of the paper.

"Come to me or the child dies."

A name was scrawled underneath in pencil, written in an adolescent's hand. Stephanie. The daughter of the niece Greta and Stefan fought so hard to save.

"Oh, Greta," Jessie breathed, feeling her heart tighten in her chest as it filled with dread.

"Let me see," Nicky demanded, reaching for the letter. Jessie handed it to him. He read and started to swear, his amber gold eyes turning red and his mouth suddenly filling with teeth.

Matthias backed away from the turning vampire, still clutching his tail. Jessie turned to him and calmly, so calmly, said, "Matthias, I appreciate your hospitality. You are a most gracious host. If I could impose on you for one last thing, I need you to get the Puck for me."

"On my way," he bobbed his head. Either he shrank or the wall grew, but he was through a hole Jessie had never seen before as fast as lightning.

She stood still for a moment, trying to decide what to do next. Jessie and Greta had enemies. They had lived for over a thousand years, taken part in wars and skirmishes, and time and time again fought against conspiracies, ambushes, and betrayals. She knew exactly where this threat came from. But were the perpetrators acting alone, or had they joined the new cabal?

Tam skidded to a halt as he burst through his portal, Mikael right behind him. Nicky's older brother wore dark blue tailored jeans and a deep wine colored silk button up shirt that complemented his long, raven black hair and gray eyes. His outfit probably cost more than a year's worth of profit from Jessie's bar. Even for vampires, Mikael and Nicky's fashion sense and style were legendary.

Mikael looked at the letter in Jessie's hand like it was a snake.

"I heard Nicodemus' rage echo in my head from a thousand miles and another dimension away. Is it true?" he demanded.

Jessie nodded.

"They took her niece. They said they'll kill her if Greta doesn't come."

"They won't," Mikael's voice was flat. "They're desperate. We should have wiped them out when we had the chance before they went to ground."

"Not to intrude, but would someone like to enlighten me as to what's going on?" a new voice spoke up from behind them.

Jessie turned to see the pleasant-faced Robin the Puck with an ever-present mischievous twinkle in his holly-leaf green eyes that, along with his silver and brown-gray hair, like snow-dusted branches, changed color with the seasons. Robin, Oberon's emissary and trusted advisor, had become a

close friend after Jessie and Greta saved him from a spell that bound his will and almost ended the peace talks between the factions of the world.

“Yes, and I need you to listen carefully and then go back to Oberon with everything I’m about to tell you. Tell him to warn the rest of the Courts and get word to the Alliance,” Jessie said, the serious look on her face driving the smile from his lips.

“A long time ago, just before the war between the Witch Council and the old cabal, witches had to use other skills to try to make ends meet because we were still unknown to humans. Every witch has a skill that can double as a conduit for our magic and provide a means to support ourselves in the human world. For instance, Greta and I busked to make our living. I danced with fire, and Greta accompanied me on the flute. We were able to move around Europe while performing our duties for the Witch Council and stay off the local constabulary and churches’ radars. We performed at street fairs and carnivals, and she also played at local inns for our room and board. Fire is energy and passion, and earth is healing and comfort, and we fed those things into our art.

“But then something happened when we were in Paris. We had to stay in a tavern close to a slum where sickness broke out. There were fights; people were scared and angry. When Greta played, she channeled healing and calm so that fights ended as soon as they began, and the sickness fled. The humans never put two and two together– but the vampires did.”

Jessie paused in her tale. Nicky hovered somewhere between humanity and monster. Greta still didn’t move. Mikael, his beautiful face a mask of rage and hate, took up the thread.

“At the time, witches and vampires were just becoming aware of each other’s existence. You have to understand,

those of us in the know did not share the information lightly. By this point, Nicodemus and I had made Jessica's and Greta's acquaintance through our work for our respective councils, and we became close friends. However, our affiliation was a heavily guarded secret.

"Unfortunately, as I'm sure you are well aware, all magic leaves a trace, and any creature who performs magic can sense the magic use of another. A vampire's magic is not much, but we still have glamour, compulsion, and transformation."

"To say Greta went overboard at the tavern is an understatement," Jessie glanced at her friend. "She's an earth witch, and an earth witch is a natural healer. She couldn't help herself. It started off as light, gentle magic, but as she sank deeper into the music, the magic became stronger and brighter. At first, we thought we were safe, that no one had realized what she had done. But then *they* showed up."

"A theory had begun to circulate among one of the more unhinged vampiric sects that the ultimate being could be created by turning a witch into a vampire and that whatever vampire could sire and control such a being would have all of the power in the world," Mikael continued. "It has never succeeded. Conflicting magics cannot exist in the same creature without ripping the creature apart from the inside. The Vampiric Council placed a sentence of death on any who tried after a coven of witches was found slaughtered."

"We didn't recognize any of them," Jessie's voice was soft, her blue eyes sadly looking at a scene far away in the past. "It was as if the magic had exploded, destroying them from the inside out."

Robin shuddered. Jessie brought her gaze back to the present and shot a brief glance at the Puck before she continued.

“Anyway,” she was spurred by a sense of urgency to finish their tale so she could fix Greta, make Greta move again, make Greta’s eyes go back to their normal brown-green. “A new vampire in the throes of turning was in the tavern, and Greta inadvertently healed her through the transition. It’s rare that a witch can do that, but it’s possible if the vampire is still human enough.

“This vampiric cult’s leader, a pathetic idiot named Robert, got it in his head that Greta was the answer to his prayers; the witch he was looking for. He decided that she had to be strong enough to be turned, and then he would rule the world, even though she didn’t do anything differently than any other witch. He tried to convince her to join his followers. When that didn’t work, the cult kidnapped her, which is when I got him involved,” Jessie nodded toward Mikael.

“By the time we got there, Jessica was ready to burn Paris to the ground,” Mikael’s voice held a low, growling note that made shivers go down Robin’s spine. “She told us that maybe a dozen vampires came for Greta. We hunted them to the filthy hole in the sewers they called a coven. They were disgusting. I’m fairly certain that none of them had bathed since they had been turned. You see, Robert believes that he and his followers are the ultimate, supreme beings, and they are above the vampire’s instinctive love for material possessions. At any rate, we got Greta back, but we lost Robert. He escaped.”

Robin looked confused.

“I was under the impression that the need to surround oneself with material wealth was innate to the vampiric nature.”

“It is,” Mikael told him. “Our ultimate sire, the vampire who fathered our race, was spawned from the first of the

great Celtic dragons. Our need to hoard material possessions and wealth is literally in our blood.”

And Greta still did not move.

“We took out the rest of the cult members though. Lots of burning,” Jessie said in a matter-of-fact voice. “Robert had plastered the walls with his ‘teachings’ as he laughably called them. It was the same writing that’s on this letter now. I will remember it as long as I live. That was when Greta and I started to learn how to fight in battle and not just in self-defense. But now he’s back, and he took her niece, and he is threatening to kill Stephanie if Greta doesn’t do what he says.”

“And so he will die,” Greta finally spoke, her voice soft and dreamy. Her eyes were like onyx.

“So you need to warn Oberon now,” Jessie continued, her urgency creeping into her voice. “You need to tell him what happened and what we just told you. If they still believe that such an act is possible with a witch, it’s not a stretch that they’ll start to wonder what a vampire fae can do. And we need to launch a rescue mission as soon as possible because please, please believe me when I say that Greta will take the earth itself apart stone by stone to find Stephanie, and she is powerful enough to do it. She will leave nothing behind.”

“How did Robert find her niece?” Nicky asked, his face returning to normal.

“We probably have our lovely new friends to thank for that,” Jessie said, her voice a shade away from a snarl. “My guess is whoever’s behind the new cabal knows the story and pulled some strings to find Robert and his followers. After all, the Witch and Vampiric Councils had to work together to get this threat under control, and it’s still talked about as a warning to anyone who wants to indulge in a little cross-

species experimentation. It's not hard to find the records in the Council archives."

"Sadly, that would not surprise me," Robin shook his head. "Well, on that note, I had best be off now. I hope to see you again when the timing is more conducive to a lovely afternoon at your pub as opposed to convincing Greta that single-handedly annihilating a coven of vampires may not be the best idea."

Jessie's element may be fire, but her smile was ice cold.

"It's cute that you think we plan to stop her."

Robin stopped in his tracks, looking uncertainly from face to face.

"I'm going to bring popcorn and sell tickets to all of the witches and vampires these assholes have targeted throughout the centuries so they can watch," Nicky piped up, almost cheerful with the anticipation of wholesale slaughter, even if it was of his own kind. Mikael shot his younger brother an exasperated glance.

"I must inform the Vampiric Council. Jessica, I suggest you reach out to Isabel and do the same. I will not be long, and then we will hunt together."

Jessie bared her teeth in a terrible, feral grin.

"As it should be," she said and wrapped her arms around Greta, who stood as still as stone, looking out across the dark, wind-swept marsh with an unseeing gaze.

"Greta, honey, you need to move. You're bigger than me. I can't drag you through the portal. We have to go so we can kill him. Well, so you can kill him. I get to watch though."

"Okay," Greta said in that same dreamy voice. She let Jessie lead her through the portal into the welcoming cheer of their Library. Nicky and Mikael followed close behind.

Matthias, Tam, and Robin looked at each other after the witches and vampires were gone.

“I miss peace and quiet,” Matthias said with a wistful sigh. Tam snorted.

“Do you, now? Well, Sir Puck, you’d best be off to the High Courts. I wouldn’t want those two witches on my heels for not doing what they asked on a day like this.”

“No, you’re right,” Robin hastily agreed, opening his portal to Oberon’s court before he paused.

“How did Greta get the letter?” he asked with a slight frown.

Tam pointed at the mound of dirt outside Matthias’ front door.

“A messenger brought it. And then Greta took care of him too,” he told Robin, which spurred the Puck to haul ass through the portal so fast that he almost tripped coming out the other side. Tam chuckled and then sobered.

“Well, I suppose it’s about time we get involved in this mess. What Jessie said about vampire fae... maybe we should check on some of our old friends. Make sure no one’s trying to do any more damage,” he said.

“I couldn’t agree more.” Matthias squared his shoulders and led Tam out the door, taking care to lock it behind him.

“What are you going to do about that?” Tam nodded to the mound.

“Let it marinate for a bit and then stew it up for dinner, of course,” Matthias answered with a shrug. He ignored Tam’s shudder of revulsion as he led the way through the marsh to the woods and the Faery Hill.