



Vegas Magic: This Spells Trouble

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Vegas Magic: This Spells Trouble

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Dedication

Thanks to Loribelle Hunt and to Sara Dennis for being part of a witches threesome. That sounds kind of kinky, doesn't it? Well, anyway, *bless your hearts!* *Wink* And thanks also goes to my editor Rochelle Weber, and The Deanna for convincing me to write my first paranormal. And as always, thanks to my family and friends.

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Chapter One

Arianna Belford shoved a black curl behind her ear, and followed her friends through the door of the casino. This was such a bad idea. Why the heck had she agreed to come to the *Hell's Ball* tonight? This was *not* her scene.

"Here's the plan." Sam stopped just in the doorway. "We're all here to have a good time. We flirt, we drink, and we dance until our feet are numb."

"My feet are *already* numb," Arianna muttered and leaned back against the wall.

"Yeah, well you're the dumb witch that wore the cheap shoes with toothpick heels." Scarlet's southern accent was stronger than ever. "So don't be asking us for a pity party."

Sam, ever the peace maker, raised her hands. "Easy ladies, let's not—"

"Cheap? Do you know how many massages I had to give to buy these shoes?" Arianna lifted her chin. "They're Jimmy Choos. My Goddess, have you no respect for a good designer?"

"No, I have respect for a good margarita." Scarlet winked. "So I'm going to head to the bar and grab one."

Arianna wrinkled her nose at her friend's retreating back, and then finally smiled. After four years of friendship, Scarlet knew exactly what buttons to push to get a rise out of her.

Shelli Stevens

"Hey, I'm going to go check us in and get the keys to our room." Sam opened her purse and took out her wallet. "And don't look so nervous. This is supposed to be fun, remember? I'll be right back."

Arianna opened her mouth to respond, but Sam was already heading toward the lobby.

Okay. She turned and looked around the crowded casino. Of course she'd been the only one of the three of them who had chosen to wear a costume. Scarlet thought it was a waste of time to dress up, and as Sam always said, "I don't do costumes."

But I do. I decided to be the wild one this Halloween and get decked out. Unfortunately. Arianna scowled.

Ten minutes passed and neither Scarlet nor Sam had returned.

"What the heck? Is it *Ditch Ari* night or something?" She pushed away from the wall and set out to find them.

She wandered through the loud, colorfully decorated rooms and inhaled the sweet scent of fresh-baked goods. Pounding techno music could be heard coming from the dance floor.

The *Hell's Ball* party was in full swing. Booths of food were set up, and locals had stands where they sold various things from exotic jewelry, to blood-filled lollipops.

Her lips curled down in disgust and she suppressed a shudder as she passed the lollipops. Disgusting little treats for the vampires.

She squeezed her way through the masses of costumed party-goers toward the dance floor. Fortunately some others had dressed in costume, too. And some had come, well, as themselves.

A werewolf stumbled into her, the beer he gripped in his paw spilling all over her shoes.

Oh, Goddess, I'm going to lose it. These shoes were brand new!

He patted her on the back, making her stumble forward.

"Sorry about that, lassie. I'm a wee bit pissed."

Ugh. Not just a werewolf, but apparently a drunken Scottish one.

"No problem," she lied and scooted past him, scanning the crowd again for Sam and Scarlet.

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She weaved through the dance floor watching a vampire couple grinding in the middle of the floor. The female smiled as she rubbed her ass against the male who was gripping her hips from behind.

Arianna paused and swallowed hard, moisture stirring between her legs as she watched the sensual dance between the two vampires. The female raised her gaze and caught her watching and bared her fangs in response.

Turning her glance away, Arianna sighed. That looked so tempting right now. To have a man press up against her like that, grasping her from behind as if he couldn't wait to be inside her.

She shook her head and kept moving through the dance floor. *That isn't what you want. You want a man who will give you respect, kindness, and treat you like the smart witch that you are.*

How long had it been since she'd taken a lover anyway? At least half a year. Perhaps she would give Edward a call when he returned from his botany convention.

Glancing around one last time for Scarlet and Sam, she shrugged and heaved a sigh. Goddess only knew where her friends had taken off to.

I need a drink. Spotting the bar in the back she lifted her chin and made her way toward it.

"Happy Halloween, Madame Butterfly. How would you like someone to pluck your wings tonight?"

Arianna turned to look at the man who was half slumped over the bar, a beer bottle in his hand. Blood-shot eyes leered at her body.

"Tempting, but no." She glanced down the length of the bar. *Where the hell was the bartender?*

"Why not?"

Ugh. It was the costume she was wearing. She shouldn't have worn it. Usually she was environmentally conscious and chose conservative natural fabrics and material. Tonight she'd been rash in her decision to dress up. Although, designer shoes were always her downfall. And all her friends at *Save the Planet*—the non-profit organization she volunteered for—gave her shit for it.

"I'm a werewolf you know. Women want my body."

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She didn't even spare him a second glance—she'd seen enough. He certainly had the size of a werewolf, but his fur was obviously prosthetic, and the illusion of yellow eyes was created by contacts.

"You're a wannabe." Arianna shoved away from the bar, spotting the bartender at the other end. "Excuse me."

The bartender didn't turn around, just kept searching through the bottles of liquor on the back wall. He was tall, with black hair that almost reached his broad shoulders. Not bad looking from behind.

Her lips tightened in annoyance. "*Excuse* me."

The man hunched down, and reached under the counter for something. Her gaze dropped to his backside, so prominently on display now. Black jeans hugged a nice, hard-looking ass. Something warm stirred in her belly, and she shifted her stance.

Damn she hated being ignored. "Ex—"

"I hear you, Princess. Don't get your panties in a knot." The bartender straightened and turned around. His intense blue-eyed gaze moved over her body and lingered on her crotch. "That is if you're wearing panties. Nice outfit."

Jake watched the woman's eyes narrow as a flush moved up her neck and face.

He'd seen every costume imaginable tonight. But hers was the sexiest, hands down. He lowered his gaze. Her outfit consisted of some kind of sparkly-green latex bathing-suit thing, cut low on the tits and high on the hips. Her multi-colored butterfly wings were held on with two thin straps that fit her shoulders like a backpack would.

And those legs, long and smooth, ended in a pair of sexy, black, *fuck me* heels. Damn, she was hot. And not just because she had the body of playmate. The inky black curls that spilled around her shoulders looked soft and silky. Her green eyes flashed above cheekbones that had been highlighted with glitter.

"I'm glad you can hear," the woman said crisply. "But perhaps you could stop checking me out long enough to make me a drink."

Jake laughed. "Just taking a moment to enjoy the view, Princess."

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She exhaled loudly. "Goddess, you're crass. Didn't your mother teach you any manners? And don't call me Princess."

"Ah, put away the broomstick already. What can I get you?"

Her sensual mouth curved down into a scowl again. "Mint mojito."

"One mint mojito coming up." He reached for the rum.

"Were you being facetious with the broomstick comment? Or are you assuming that I'm a witch?"

He glanced up from mixing her drink. She was sitting on the barstool now, arms folded on the counter as she gave him a critical look.

"I assumed. Now tell me. Am I wrong?"

Her nose wrinkled. "No. You're correct actually. But I'm not the kind of witch you're thinking."

"And what am I thinking? That you fly around on brooms and boil lizards' eyes in a black pot?"

She rolled her eyes. "Come on now, bartender. Up until this point I hadn't pegged you for an idiot. Please don't prove me wrong now."

He popped a mint sprig into her drink, and then slid it across the counter toward her. "The name's Jake. And, trust me, I'm not an idiot."

She gave a quiet harrumph and picked up her drink.

His gaze narrowed on a group of vampires behind her. "So what kind of witch are you then, Princess?" he asked, without removing his gaze from the vamps.

"I don't practice magic—well, most of the time." She shrugged. "Don't get me wrong. I do harmless little spells using various herbs and natural products that are created in the environment, but that's about the extent of it."

"So you couldn't upright this bottle of tequila on me right now using magic?" He winked as he set down the bottle he'd been wiping.

"I could. But I won't." She took a sip of her drink and gave a moan of appreciation that had the blood stirring in his dick. "Okay, with a drink this good I think you've earned the right to know my name. Arianna."

"Your friends call you Ari?"

The group of vamps was talking in a huddle now. He recognized a few of them. *What were they doing here? This wasn't their usual hangout.*

Shelli Stevens

"My friends call me Ari, yes. But we're not friends. So—what on earth are you looking at?" She spun around on the barstool to see for herself. "Ah...you think they're going to cause trouble?"

"I have no clue," he lied. His gut instinct sensed the trouble a mile away. But then that was why he was here tonight, what he'd been hired to do. Find the trouble and stop it.

"You know specie-profiling is frowned upon. Just because they're vampires doesn't mean they're necessarily bad people."

Jake hid a smile. *She had no idea.* "Really?"

"Really. I've been discriminated against more times than I can remember because I'm a witch. Shoot!"

He glanced back to see her mopping up part of her drink that had somehow ended up on the front of her costume. She swiped the napkin into her cleavage and he caught the briefest glimpse of the tip of a pink areola. Her nipples had tightened against the green fabric, and he got a pretty good impression of how her tits would look. Small, round, perky, with large nipples that a guy could suck on all night long.

His dick hardened, and he licked his lips, wanting to drag her across the counter and pull down her costume.

"Will you stop it already?"

He raised his gaze and found her staring at him with wide eyes, her cheeks flushed.

"Stop what, Ari?"

"You know what. Licking your lips while you stare at my..." She broke off.

"What can I say? You've got nice tits, Princess."

"You are unbelievable."

Her eyes flashed with annoyance, but there was more there. He could see it. He'd been around women long enough to recognize the signs of sexual attraction. She was turned on, no doubt about it.

"I've got some free time. How'd you like to—"

"Absolutely not." She tossed back the rest of her drink and stood up. "You are so far from being my type it's not even funny."

"Maybe...but you still want me."

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She inhaled swiftly, and snapped her mouth shut.

“Careful out there, Princess. It’s All Hallows Eve, and anything can happen.”

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Chapter Two

Arianna kept walking, her fists clenched at her sides. Damn, he made her so angry. And offended. And, unfortunately—more turned on than she'd ever been in her life, too. Her pussy was wet and throbbing, her pulse racing. And it was all because of the crass, sexy-as-hell bartender.

He was everything she avoided in a man. Rude, overly sexual, and had absolutely no manners. Unlike Edward, her on and off lover, who was a peaceful, respectable Wicca—gentle, sweet, and treated the earth and everything on it with respect and nourishment.

Goddess, she was so close to putting an erectile dysfunction spell on Jake, the bartender. It was no less than he deserved. Imagine, treating her like that. It wasn't like she was some simpering co-ed from the local paranormal institute. No, she was a grown witch, and she deserved some respect, darn it. That man was an idiot.

She stumbled, the vision flashing through her mind and paralyzing her. She was lying back on a desk, with Jake kneeling between her spread legs. His massive hands gripped her thighs, while his tongue darted in and out of her pussy.

"No." She shook her head to shake the image. The visions were something she'd been blessed—or cursed—with since childhood. And most of the time they were an accurate foreshadowing of the future.

"Not this time. Absolutely not," she muttered, still shaken by the image. "I'm not that drunk. In fact, screw this. I'm done drinking."

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She glanced over her shoulder and swallowed hard. He was still watching her; those sexy lips of his curved upward in a half smile.

Spinning away from him again, she groaned. Where were Scarlet and Sam? She didn't want to be alone right now. She needed her posse of witches to back her up. Scarlet would've cut that guy in half, while Sam would have let the guy think he had a chance before letting him crash and burn.

And I looked like the idiot, blushing, virgin who couldn't even complete a sentence.

She shook her head again. Black curls bounced in front of her eyes, and she shoved them away with a ruthless hand.

If that guy made one more move on her —

"You owe me a dance, Princess."

He swung her around before she even realized what was happening. How *had he crossed the room so fast?* She reached out to push him away, her hands gripping his massive biceps. *Damn he was built.*

"I don't owe you anything."

Despite her efforts to push him away, he had no trouble jerking her tight against his hard body. He moved their bodies in slow gyrating thrusts to the heavy techno music.

"You do owe me. You didn't pay for the mint mojito you just drank, and I'm collecting."

His scent tickled her nostrils, some expensive cologne that made her knees go weak. At least she hoped it was the cologne. Her knees never went weak for Goddess sake!

"I apologize for the misunderstanding." She gasped as his hands moved low on her back, just above her ass. "But if you'll let me grab my wallet I can pay you."

"I already paid for it. Besides, I prefer collecting payment this way."

His hands moved an inch lower and grabbed her cheeks that were barely covered by the costume. He pulled her snug against his hips, and there was no mistaking the large bulge in his jeans.

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Liquid flooded between her legs, and her nipples tightened almost painfully. She no longer tried to push him away, but gripped his forearms to keep her legs from giving out.

"Surely this is against the rules," she protested. "I mean you're working—"

"I was already off work when you came to the counter. You just looked so fucking sexy I would have done anything to...*serve* you."

Okay, so he said the word serve, but it was so obvious he meant something entirely less innocent.

"Oh..." She cleared her throat. "So you're not working right now?"

"So to speak." He squeezed the flesh of her ass and lowered his head toward her. His breath was warm on her cheeks and smelled like peppermints.

Arianna bit back a groan and licked her lips. Raising her gaze to his, she saw the raw desire there.

Stay rational. Think of Edward and his plants. "I know I have a few dollars in my wallet. How much was the drink?"

"I don't want—" his lips moved to just above hers. "—your money, Princess. Now pay up on my terms."

His mouth closed over hers, and she whimpered. Thoughts of Edward were replaced by the vision of Jake fucking her on black satin sheets.

His tongue probed the seam of her lips, and she opened her mouth to him. His tongue thrust inside, finding hers and curling around it. She groaned and slipped her tongue past his and into the cavern of his mouth. The taste of peppermints hit her and she pushed deeper.

Stinging pain speared through her tongue, and she pushed away from him, raising a hand to her lips.

No! The coppery taste of blood was immediate. She moved her tongue over the roof of her mouth and the tender flesh smarted.

"You just bit me," she accused, stepping back from him. "Why didn't you tell me you were a vampire?"

"I didn't bite you. You just got a small scratch." He smiled, exposing two long fangs where his canines had been a moment ago.

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"They come out when I'm hungry, or occasionally when I'm aroused. Does it matter who I am?"

Her stomach clenched, and she looked away. "Yes, it does."

"Hold up, Princess. A minute ago you were telling me I shouldn't specie profile, and now you're saying you're too good to be with a vamp guy?"

She snapped her head back to face him. "Listen up. We were never going to *be together*. And secondly, no. I don't date vampires."

"Why not?" His blue eyes glittered with anger now.

"Because. I'm a vegetarian." She folded her arms across her chest. "And you drink blood on a daily basis."

He didn't say anything for a moment, and then threw back his head and laughed.

Arianna's pulse sped up. Oh, Goddess, didn't he believe her? Sure the whole blood drinking thing was part of the reason, and she'd used it anytime a vampire had hit on her. But it wasn't the entire reason she didn't date vampires. The other reason was entirely too romantic and ridiculous. And she had no intention of sharing it with him.

"So let me get this straight. You won't even consider me because I'm a vamp?" He took a step closer to her again.

A warm tremor shot up her spine. *Please don't touch me again. If you touch me I'll give in and do entirely stupid things that I shouldn't be doing.*

"That, um, pretty much sums it up. Yes. Now if you'll excuse me." She tried to sidestep him, and he caught her arm again.

"Did you come here alone tonight?" His gaze jerked to the right to the group of vampires he'd been watching earlier.

What did that have to do with anything? She pushed a hand through her curls. "No, I came here with my two friends—whom I can't find. So, really now, if you'll excuse me."

"Hold on, Arianna."

She about screamed with frustration when he caught her arm again. But then she met his gaze and realized all the sexual intent was gone and concern was in its place. Not to mention that he'd even called her by her name instead of Princess.

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"Promise me you'll be careful tonight. Don't be alone or do anything foolish."

More foolish than making out with a vampire? What was he so worried about anyway?

"I promise," she agreed like an obedient child, so he'd get off her back.

He nodded and released her arm. Tingles still lingered where his fingers had touched.

Taking a deep breath, she walked away from him. What a bizarre night. And Sam and Scarlet still weren't anywhere to be seen. They had come to this party together, and yet here she was wandering around by herself. This was one of those few times she wished she owned a cell phone. But that would mean giving into the materialistic urge. And she'd just be like every other person with a cell phone—running around with a phone attached to their ear, acting like the world revolved around them.

Darn it. Maybe she should just head up to the room and do some reading. Hey, there was a thought. Maybe the girls had gone up to the room. She glanced back at Jake and saw him speaking into his cell phone now.

She shook her head and looked away. *Let him be. It's just not possible.* Leaving the casino floor, she went to registration to get her own key to the room.

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Chapter Three

Jake watched Arianna weave in and out of the dancers on the dance floor. Damn, why had he done it? He'd left the bar and run after her like a bitch in heat. But he knew why. So he could feel her tits pressed full against his chest, and be able to squeeze her soft, round ass.

And damn it, it had been worth it. But enough of that, time to get back to work.

He turned to check on Armon's group of vampires. *Shit*. They'd disappeared.

Not good, buddy, not good at all. He'd thought with his dick for about five minutes with his luscious witch, and his only reason to worry for the night had disappeared from radar.

Grabbing his cell phone, he dialed Grant Anderson.

"Yeah?"

"You finding anything yet?" he asked the head of security, still watching Arianna.

"Other than the most stubborn woman in Vegas? No."

Apparently he wasn't the only one frustrated by a woman tonight.

"Great. Well keep me posted. I've got my eyes on a group of vamps that seem a little suspicious."

"Can you handle it alone?"

"Shit, who do you think you're talking to? A fucking amateur?" He laughed. "I'm good. Thanks, Grant." Jake closed his phone.

Shelli Stevens

As a casino investigator he often worked undercover as a bartender to get the juice. He'd recognized Armon immediately. They went back, way back. The man was pure evil. Just like his lover had been. Fortunately, his lover had been destroyed.

But Armon...Armon was still the thorn in his side that needed to be removed. One of these days he'd try and do just that.

Why were they here tonight? They usually kept a low profile. The paranormal police usually kept a close eye on Armon's group. Something was up. But what?

Now with the group of questionable vamps out of sight, his concern for Ari shot up a notch. He scanned the room again. And she was missing, too. Well, hell.

He shoved his phone in the back pocket of his jeans and strode across the floor, not sure whom he was more eager to find — Ari or the vampires.

* * * * *

Arianna unlocked the door to her room and went inside. A quick glance around showed that she was alone. She sighed, trying not to let the disappointment kick in. They must be off doing their own thing.

She grabbed a cup from the counter and filled it up with tap water, taking it to the bed and sitting down. Reaching for the remote, she turned on the television and flipped through the channels.

The Discovery channel popped up, and she set down the remote and watched the show. When the credits rolled an hour later, she blinked and looked at the clock.

Jeez, what was she doing? Watching a documentary on gorillas while everyone else was downstairs partying at the Hell's Ball? Man, she was pathetic.

She went to the mirror and checked her hair, applying a little more lip gloss again. *Not that I care what I look like.* She tried to ignore the image of Jake that kept coming to mind. *No. Leave it alone.*

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Taking the elevator back downstairs, she walked back into the casino. It was still in full swing. She looked around for Sam and Scarlet again, but still had no luck.

Maybe she should just catch a cab home. It was a full moon tonight, a prerequisite for a few new herb spells that she wanted to try out.

But no, she couldn't do that. This was their girls' night out. Their night to party. If she took off, Sam and Scarlet would be pissed.

Her stomach roiled as the smell of cigarette smoke and sweat in the casino seemed to grow stronger.

She pressed fingers to her temples and looked around for an exit. Air. She needed fresh air.

Spying the familiar neon green of an Exit sign, she hurried toward it.

* * * * *

Armon Driscotti stood near the wall with his men, watching the woman with the green eyes and black curls dart across the dance floor toward the exit.

Yes. She would be the second sacrifice—one of the two women who were to be given to their dark Master this Halloween night. Then, the Master would rejoin them and walk upon the earth once more.

The requirements for the sacrifice were to find two women with green eyes. The first woman they had discovered at a roulette table in the gambling room. She'd been young and naïve, and had followed them willingly outside.

She had barely struggled—seemed to accept her fate once the group of vampires had finished taking their pleasure with her sexually. Her death afterwards had been brutal and no doubt painful.

And sadly anti-climactic. Armon's thin lips tilted downward. Perhaps it was selfish of him, but he was hoping this next woman would put up more of a fight.

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Humans were pathetic. They were a weak waste of space on this earth. Preying upon them had been one of the few pleasures he took since the death of Lucius.

The thought of his lover made him want to weep. The memory of Lucius' death was fresh in his mind, though it had happened nearly two-hundred-years ago in the nineteenth century. He'd been hunted down and brutally slain by a vampire hunter while he slept.

For centuries now Armon had sought a way to bring him back. And until he'd met a reincarnated gypsy a few months ago, he'd nearly given up hope.

The gypsy had informed him of the one possible way to bring Master Lucius back. It would include the sacrifices of two women, both to be killed on Halloween night.

Once the gypsy had divulged the information, he'd killed her—sank his teeth into her skull as if she were a ripe apple. The horror and fear in her gaze had only lasted a few seconds, before the vacant stare of death replaced it.

Soon you shall be back upon this earth, Lucius. And then we will be together once more.

Knowing his men were watching him, he nodded. They were anxious for the opportunity to fuck and kill the next woman.

They were blood-thirsty savages, vampires of a different breed. Lately many vampires had gone soft, using animals and blood banks to satisfy their hunger. Or perhaps taking from a human, but not drinking enough to kill or turn the human into a vampire.

Foolish. Once Armon sank his fangs into a human, his face was the last thing they ever saw.

"Let us complete the second sacrifice before the midnight hour."

* * * * *

Arianna shut the exit door behind her and sucked in a deep breath of fresh air. Leaning back against the building, she closed her eyes.

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Unbelievable. That's what it was. Absolutely unbelievable what that stupid bartender — vampire bartender, apparently — could reduce her to. A quivering, damn near swooning female.

Ugh!

Opening her eyes again, she glanced around to figure out where she was.

Nice, Ari. Could you have picked a darker alley? The alley was thin and long, resting between the casino and another building. This obviously wasn't the safe, scenic side of the casino. She should probably just go back inside, head up to the room. She closed her fingers around the door handle behind her and twisted. It didn't open.

Uh oh. Her teeth snagged at her bottom lip and she glanced down the length of the alley. Okay, she never considered herself a wuss, but this looked just the tiniest bit freaky.

Even though the night was hot, she shivered and wrapped her arms around her waist.

A vision flashed through her head, so quickly that she barely caught it. She was on her back on the concrete, struggling to free herself as a group of men held her down. The image disappeared, leaving a cool sheen of sweat over her body.

Goddess! She was in danger. The certainty of it hit her hard, and suddenly the light at the end of alley seemed miles away.

Clutching her purse in front of her like a shield, she took a deep breath and then broke into a run. The clicking of her heels resonated through the empty alley.

Cool air rushed up the skin on her back and from the corner of her eye she could see the shadows shifting above her. *No!*

The five vampires dropped down from the sky in front of her, one by one, placing themselves between her and the end of the alley.

The vampires were large, with glowing red eyes and fangs extended. Their red gazes watched her with a combination of lust and violence.

Her throat dried up, the *thump thump* of her heart grew louder and faster. She clutched her purse to her chest, her fingers trembling as she

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began to recite a spell of protection in her head.

Sweet Goddess. These were not nice vampires. They weren't harmless like the bartender had been. Her stomach twisted. *Jake*. She closed her eyes for a moment and attempted to send him a telepathic message. *Jake, please help me!*

* * * * *

Something felt off. Jake went to Grant's room since he wasn't answering his cell.

He hadn't been able to locate the vampires or Arianna anywhere. And his gut was telling him something bad was about to happen.

Reaching Grant's room, he pounded on the doorframe.

A few seconds passed before Grant swung open the door. He wore nothing but a towel, his skin was damp, and his hair mussed. But the smell of a female was also strong, and Jake spotted lingerie on the floor. His concerns were momentarily forgotten, and he shook his head in amusement.

"So you finally got her. Your elusive Miss Scarlet?" His lips curled into a smile. "Congratulations."

Grant gave a short smile. "Yeah, I got her. And it's about fucking time. Give me a second to put on some clothes."

Jake waited while Grant shut the door and then returned a few minutes later with clothes on.

"Okay, what's up?"

Jake's purpose for being here returned in full force. "I'm getting the feeling something's going down with that group of vampires I mentioned."

"I'll make sure I have my phone on me." Grant gave a quick nod. "Do you want me to call in a few extra guys?"

Jake shook his head. "I can handle it for now. Just keep your phone nearby—"

Jake, please help me!

His gut clenched. "*Fuck*. Arianna's in trouble."

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"You need me to help?"

"I got this one."

Please don't let it be too late. Jake turned and ran back down the hallway. The wall of sound hit him as he made his way back into the main area of casino. He weaved through crowds, trying to locate Arianna, when he slammed into someone.

"Vampire."

"Spellcaster," he replied, knowing without looking she was a witch. *Great, not another anti-vampire witch. Shit, I don't have time for this.*

The woman frowned. "*Jake?*"

It took a second for recognition to dawn, and he gave her a closer look. Not a vampire hater, but Sam. A dealer from another casino who would often hang out in his bar. "Sam."

Jake's gaze was snagged by a willowy, lavender woman running up behind Sam followed by some man he didn't recognize.

"*There you are. I looked everywhere for you,*" the fae bartender said. "Things are wrong, Jake. Really wrong."

He nodded. *Twyla could help.* "I know. Look, I'm looking for a woman. About this tall." He held his hand up at his side. "Black hair, curly. Her name's—"

"Arianna." Sam echoed him as he said the name. "What happened to her?"

Sam knew Arianna? Instead of dwelling on the fact, he muttered, "She was taken. Have you seen her?"

"Twyla." Sam looked over her shoulder.

The fae arched an eyebrow and jutted out her chin. "What am I, a bloodhound? I have rights and feelings, you know?"

Shit, enough already. He bit his tongue. If she could actually direct him to where Arianna was, there was a chance he could get to her in time.

"Please?" Sam spoke again.

Twyla heaved an over-dramatic sigh, but closed her eyes again. Time passed, and she pointed toward the side exit. Adrenaline spiked inside his veins.

Shelli Stevens

When her eyes opened, the pupils narrowed to pinpricks. "You're welcome."

"I owe you," Jake said and raced off.

* * * * *

"Tell me your name."

Arianna opened her eyes and swallowed hard, watching the approach of a thin vampire with white hair. He oozed control and confidence. He was the leader of this rogue group, she would bet her life on it.

Bet her life. She pushed back the hysterical laughter that threatened. *Stay calm, Ari.*

When was the last time she'd used her magic for something other than harmless little spells?

"My name is Arianna." She let her purse fall from her hand to the ground, hoping it looked like she'd dropped it in fear.

As inconspicuously as possible, she pressed her fingertips together and then closed her eyes. *Fire ball of heat and light; keep me safe this Halloween night.*

"Praying will not help you, Arianna," the man murmured.

Heat surged between her fingertips, and she opened her eyes. The leader's gaze was almost bored as he watched her, unlike his followers whose eyes were glowing as they literally salivated.

"I wonder if she tastes as good as she looks," the largest one of them spoke, licking his lips. "I'm going to eat you nice and slow, baby. And then? I'm going to *eat* you. You'll enjoy the first one, I promise."

Her stomach rolled with revulsion; bile clawed at her throat. She wouldn't go down without a fight.

"I don't think so."

Lifting her hand, she pitched the ball of fire into the group of men.

"She's a fucking witch," the leader roared. "Get her!"

Arianna spun and took off back down the alley. *Let the door be unlocked, please.* Unfortunately the fireball wasn't enough to burn them to

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ashes—but, it would slow them down a little.

She picked up the pace, pumping her arms to try and reach the door. But she could only go so fast in stilettos. Air rushed up her back again, and she cried out in terror.

The vampire landed on top of her, ripping the butterfly wings from her costume as he tackled her to the ground. Her knee caught on the pavement, but she barely felt the pain as the skin ripped open.

She struggled under the weight of the vampire, trying to free herself as he flipped her over onto her back. More of them caught up with them, pulling at her arms and legs and holding her down on the pavement.

It was her vision, exactly as she'd seen it when she'd first entered the alley. And although she hadn't seen the outcome, she could easily guess.

Would they kill her quickly? Or would they take their time with her? She jerked against their hands, trying to free herself again. But she could barely move with her body spread-eagle and held down by different vampires.

"You fucking, cunt." The largest vampire, the one who'd tackled her, reached out and grabbed her breast, squeezing it until she cried out in pain. "You like that bitch? Because this is just the beginning."

"Wait."

Arianna's stomach dropped as she watched the leader raise his hand and knelt down beside her.

"So you're a witch, little one?"

She ground her teeth together. *Why even bother answering?* Was he going to join in this rape and murder? Or just watch? He lacked the lust in his gaze that the other vampires had.

"I was not prepared for you to be a witch." He stroked his chin and ran an appraising glance over her. "I wonder how this will affect things? I presume it can only help."

Affect things? What was she to them? Arianna struggled again. "Please, you don't want to do this."

Shelli Stevens

“No. I don’t want to.” He smiled without humor. “But my friends do. Have at it, boys.”

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Chapter Four

Rough hands covered her body, ripping at her costume. Arianna screamed, trying to squirm away from them. But they honed in on her, blocking out the streetlight as the stench of them engulfed her. Hands moved up her legs, and she gasped in pain when fangs pricked the inside of her thigh.

Suddenly one flew backwards and away from her. Then another, and then another. Until she was lying on the ground with no one around her.

Shaking, she started to sit up and was grabbed roughly under her arms and jerked back against a hard body. One arm wrapped around her shoulders, the other grabbed her crotch.

She screamed, blinded by fear and panic, but whoever held her tightened his grip.

"Trust me, Ari," he growled softly into her ear.

His words penetrated, recognition sank in, and she went limp with relief. It was Jake. Thank Goddess, it was Jake.

"Who the fuck do you think you are?" he screamed to the vampires who surrounded them in a half-circle, their eyes watching Jake with rage.

"She is my property. *Mine.*"

His hand between her legs started moving back and forth. The terror that had filled her body dissipated some, and a warm heat spread to the area he was touching.

This was crazy. The whole situation seemed surreal, and she shook

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her head.

"Release the witch, Jacob." The leader stepped forward again. "She belongs to us now. You do not know this woman and would not want to evoke my wrath in your attempts to protect her."

They knew him? Was he in on this? Oh no. No! She started to struggle again.

"I don't give a *fuck* about your wrath. And, yes, I am protecting her from you." The arm around her shoulder slid down and jerked the top of her costume down, baring her breasts for all to see. His thumb skimmed over her nipple. "But not from me. The witch is mine."

Pleasure spread throughout her body, even as confusion and fear ran rampant in her head. Jake pinched her nipple between two fingers, and she whimpered in pleasure.

The vampires that surrounded them hissed with fury and lunged forward again.

Pain exploded in her neck as Jake's fangs sank deep. Her mouth opened on a silent cry of pain, and she could feel the warmth of her blood sliding from the puncture wounds down her throat and onto her breasts. Her knees buckled.

His arm slid under her breasts, supporting her weight as he sucked at her neck. The pain faded and pleasure shot from the spot he sucked on, straight to her now-throbbing pussy.

Dizziness assailed her, and her eyelids fluttered.

She was losing too much blood. Oh, Goddess, she was going to die! She made a weak effort to pull away, but he hissed and sucked harder on her neck.

Why? Why had he done it? Then the darkness closed in.

Jake waited until she collapsed, and then stopped drinking from her neck. Regret speared through him as he swept her up into his arms and clutched her pliant body against his chest.

"She's mine," he repeated, and gave the group of vamps an icy glare.

They could do nothing now. Vampires were territorial. They would respect him now that he'd laid claim. At least he hoped — this wasn't a

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normal batch of vamps. Unease rested bitterly in his stomach. He had to get her out of here. Now.

Still gripping Ari, he crouched low and then leapt into the air, flying over the vampires and heading toward the entrance to the casino. He had a room upstairs. She'd be safe there.

He slipped inside the casino, grateful the elevators were just inside the entrance. The last thing he needed was anyone asking questions about why he was carrying an unconscious woman.

When he reached his room he had to shuffle her a bit in his arms so he could unlock the door. Once inside he kicked it closed with his heel and walked to the bed, laying her down on top of the comforter.

She barely even stirred as he pulled down the blanket and set her on the black satin sheets.

"I'm so sorry, Princess." He pushed a few stray curls off of her forehead. "I wish I could have gotten to you sooner. I came as soon as you called me."

He ran his gaze over her body again. Her costume was ruined, the gauzy wings ripped and hanging from her shoulders. The green bathing-suit-thing had shred marks all over it from the many hands that had no doubt tried to rip it from her body.

His jaw clenched. *Fucking bastards!*

Jake slipped the wings off of her shoulder and then noticed that the puncture wounds in her neck still oozed blood.

Leaning down, he flicked his tongue over the wound, again and again, until the flesh crinkled up and the bleeding stopped. A few more licks and the marks were nearly gone.

Reaching for her costume, he slipped the silky fabric completely off of her body until she was lying naked on the bed save for her heels.

Damn she was beautiful. Her breasts were exactly as he'd imagined them—pale, small and round, with large dusky nipples crowning them.

Her stomach was slightly round, her hips flared in the most sexy, feminine way. And her cunt... He groaned, his dick hardening at the patch of black curls at the apex of her thighs, and the pink folds beneath them.

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He started to tear his gaze away when he noticed the marks on her inner thigh.

Shit. He leaned forward and ran a thumb over the bites.

This wasn't good. How did he miss the fact that she'd been bitten? And why had the vampires let him take her when they'd already marked her? Unease clawed at his gut.

There was only a small trickle of blood from the bite, but still, the wound needed to be healed. Kneeling next to the bed, he pulled her legs over the edge and spread her thighs.

The musky sweet smell of her pussy filled his nostrils, and he ground his teeth together. *Stay focused.* Leaning down to the cut, he began flicking the tiny wound with his tongue.

She stirred beneath him, moaning and opening her legs wider. Cream spilled from her pussy lips and trickled down toward his tongue. *Shit, how was he supposed to turn down this?*

Unable to resist tasting her most intimate juices, his tongue flicked up to catch the sweet nectar. She groaned again and when he looked up, her eyes were open.

Her green gaze looked almost drugged as her hands gripped the bedspread.

"Please," she begged lifting her hips and offering herself to him. "Help me. I can't..." She gasped and writhed on the bed. "Touch me. I need you to touch me!"

"Ari?"

"Now! Oh...what's *happening* to me?"

Jake blinked, shock filtering through his lust. What was going on here? With the amount of blood he'd drunk, she should have been out cold for at least another couple of hours.

This was a reaction he'd never seen in one of his victims. The intense sexual reaction, the primitive need. It was what he'd always heard would happen when...

Could it even be possible?

"Jake!" Her body arched on the bed. "*Please.* I don't understand, but I...I really need you to touch me."

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When he found his mate.

"Arianna..." he whispered and reached out a hand to trail down the curve of her stomach. "Darling, just hold in there."

She groaned the moment his hand touched her skin; staring up at him with green eyes that shimmered behind tears of frustration.

"Yes. Yes, my love, touch me." She covered his hand with hers and whimpered again, almost sounding as if she were in pain.

Jake wrapped his hands around her calves and pulled her to the edge of the bed. Sliding his palms up the inside of her thighs, he parted her legs farther and then moved his shoulder between them.

Seeing her arousal shimmering between her legs and smelling her desire increased his arousal for her.

Lowering his head, he nuzzled the black curls at the top of her thighs, trailing his tongue through them and getting a hint of her taste again.

He groaned. It wasn't enough. He wanted all of her filling his mouth as he made love to her with his tongue.

Drawing his tongue farther south, he thrust it into the slit of her pussy. She bucked against him and gave a choked sob. Still holding her thighs, he drew his tongue down to the tiny rosebud of her ass and then back up to her swollen clit.

"Jake!" She panted and lifted her hips closer to his mouth. "I can't do this. It's too much. Please, just help me. Make this feeling go away!"

"I'm helping you, Arianna. Trust me," he murmured against her and then speared his tongue inside her pussy again, the tart taste of her filling his mouth.

He moved up to circle her clit again, encouraged by her guttural cries and her hands that gripped his hair.

He flicked the swollen nub, again and again. Faster and then in circles until her thighs started to tighten around his head. Knowing she was about to climax, he pushed two fingers deep inside her cunt.

Arianna screamed as she orgasmed, spilling her juices on his tongue and fingers. He stayed with her, licking her swollen flesh until she was pushing him away.

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He laid her legs back down on the bed and stood up. Had it helped her? Or only taken the edge of?

Her eyes were closed, but her hips were still jerking up and down on the bed.

"Jake." She opened her eyes. "Please don't leave me. I still...it's still—"

"Shh. I know, darling." It hadn't been enough.

He pulled off his shirt and then reached for the fly of his jeans. After kicking off his pants and underwear, he crawled onto the bed and covered her body with his.

Nudging her thighs apart, he settled between them, supporting his weight with his arms that were braced on either side of her body.

He lowered his head and captured her mouth, swollen from her having chewed on it—probably to ease the frustration.

Her tongue sought his immediately, and he let her take control of the kiss while he positioned his dick at the folds of her cunt.

He hesitated. Was she ready for him? Would he hurt her?

"Now!" she begged against his mouth, and grabbed the back of his head so she could deepen the kiss.

Jake flexed his hips and impaled his cock inside her hot, wet, flesh. The feel of being inside her, the sense of the rightness of it all took his breath away.

She stiffened for a moment and then gave a shaky gasp, her body relaxing more under his.

"Yes..." She sighed and closed her eyes. "This helps a lot."

"Does it, darling?" He pulled out a little and then thrust back inside of her heat.

"More than you know." She sighed again and lifted her hips to meet his thrusts. "Promise you won't leave me."

"I'll never leave you." He kissed her again, his tongue mimicking the thrusting motions of his dick.

He increased the pace of his thrusts, moving faster and harder inside her. Her head moved back and forth on the bed as she moaned, meeting each of his thrusts by lifting her hips.

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"Jake!" She started to writhe again, trying to pull away.

He caught her hands, threading their fingers together as he held her arms against the bed, imprisoning her with the hard thrusts of his dick.

He pushed deeper inside her, fucking her at a frantic pace, until she was screaming.

His sac tightened, and he thrust to the hilt, embedding himself at the entrance to her womb. He groaned and emptied himself into her. Her flesh clenched around his dick as she had her own orgasm, milking every last drop from him.

Her fingers that had been gripping his suddenly went slack. Still breathing heavily, he opened his eyes and looked down at her.

She was out cold now, her eyes closed as she lay limp on the bed.

Poor girl. He kissed her shoulder and then rolled off of her so he could lie down beside her. Drawing her into the curve of his arms, he tucked her against his body, enjoying the way her breasts pressed against his chest.

She had to be his mate. Either that or she'd just cast a spell on him. How else could she have gotten him to agree to something so absurd?

Never leave me. Her plea echoed in his mind, and he nuzzled the top of her head. Would she still feel that way when she woke up though?

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Chapter Five

Arianna stretched her body, and then tried to roll over. Something wouldn't let her. *What?* And why was she sore between her legs?

Her eyes snapped open, and she stared at the springy black curls of a man's chest hair. The memory of what had happened came rushing back, and her eyes widened.

Oh, Goddess. She'd slept with him. With Jake the vampire bartender.

A wave of tenderness for the man next to her hit hard, and she resisted the urge to touch him again. Why? What was up with this mushy emotion? She never got like this.

Maybe it was because he'd saved her life.... Or had he? The tenderness and odd connection with him slipped a bit.

What if he was one of them? She had no idea. Memories of what had happened in the alley were still somewhat hazy.

Fear pricked at her, and she tried again to pull away. His grip didn't tighten, but it didn't loosen either. She was trapped.

She glanced at the clock on the side table. It was only 10:30, not even midnight. Not much time had passed, but still, she had to get away. The chance that he might be one of the psychotic vampires was just too great a risk.

One more time she tried to pull free. No such luck. He murmured something and started to open his eyes.

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Arianna wiggled her fingers and cast a quick spell of deep sleep. His eyelids drifted shut again, and the arm around her loosened considerably.

Squirming away from him, she lurched off the bed and reached for her costume that was on the floor. Lifting it up, she realized it was shredded and completely useless.

Great. Now what? She looked around the room. Pretty darn nice for a hotel room. Then again, this was probably not your average room. This was probably his personal lair. *Lair. Nice choice of words.* But after all, what kind of hotel room had black satin sheets?

Her gaze drifted back to the bed. Images of them making love flitted through her head. She bit back a groan and looked down at Jake.

His dark eyelashes fanned out on his cheeks; his hair was tousled in the sexiest way. Guilt stabbed at her belly. He didn't look like he was evil to the core, not like the other vampires.

You can't take that chance, Ari. Get out!

Determined now, she grabbed his T-shirt off the floor and slipped it over her head. Seeing as she had no panties on, it was a good thing it almost reached her knees. She pulled on her heels and, before her conscience kicked in, she grabbed Jake's cell phone off the bedside table.

* * * * *

Lifting the cigar to his mouth, Armon took a long pull on it. When he exhaled, he blew perfect rings of the fragrant smoke into the air.

His men were scattered around the private room, watching him in silence, waiting for further instructions.

"Should we find another woman?" Sergio finally asked. "We have less than two hours until midnight. Perhaps we should—"

"No." Armon waved a hand to cut him off and raised the cigar to his mouth again.

"Sir, please help me understand why we let her go. She was ours. The moment I bit her, she was ours."

"Yes. She *is* ours." Armon's mouth curved into a humorless smile.

Shelli Stevens

"But knowing that our little witch has connections with Jacob Sealey changes the situation a bit."

Sergio frowned. "You know the man who took her?"

"Yes. I do." He blew another ring. "He sent the hunter two centuries ago to kill Lucius."

There was a moment of silence and then growls of fury from his men.

"We should kill him tonight along with the witch, Sir."

"I agree, which is why I allowed Jacob to take our witch for the time being." He crushed the cigar out on the table. "Despite that little show he put on in the alley, our vampire cares very much for the witch."

"Do you really think so, Sir?"

"I do." He nodded slowly. "And I want him to watch while you all take your turns fucking her. Then I want to see him beg for her life to be spared—right before you cut her throat and fill the chalice with her life-blood."

"My kind of plan." Sergio smiled and looked around the room. "And then we'll kill Jacob Sealey?"

"Yes. And then we'll kill Jacob." Excitement pulsed through his blood. "Finally, he will take responsibility for the death of our loving Master."

"So what should we do now?" another man asked.

"Find the girl. I sense she is once again alone." He stood up and smoothed a wrinkle on his shirt. "Get her, and Jacob will come."

His men rushed from the small room, and he sat alone with his thoughts.

One chalice of blood was already filled from the first sacrifice. After Arianna's blood filled the second, they would drink under the full moon at midnight and perform the required chant. Then, if all went as planned, Lucius would be returned.

Yes, it would be a lovely night indeed. The death of the man he loathed and the resurrection of the one he loved.

* * * * *

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Arianna hurried down the corridor toward the elevator, pausing briefly in front of a mirror in the hallway.

She glanced at her neck, reluctant to see the bite marks Jake must have left on her earlier. But looking in the mirror she saw nothing. Not even a pinprick-sized mark. Her skin looked pale, smooth, and completely untouched.

Had any of it actually happened? Confusion swept over her. She hesitated and then started walking toward the elevator again.

What a bizarre night! Oh, Goddess, Sam and Scarlet were going to love hearing about this one.

Love. Another memory rushed through her head, and she stumbled. No! She couldn't possibly have... Had she actually called him *my love*?

That was it. Something was definitely off. *I'll bet he spiked my mojito.* She loved him? She didn't even know him! That whole ultra emotional lovemaking had been like something in a cheesy romance novel.

That wasn't her at all. Sex was at best pleasant. It wasn't about toe-curling orgasms and fingernail wounds on the man's back. Was it?

This was all too ridiculous to even try to comprehend right now. The rational explanation was that she'd been drugged, hallucinated the attack in the alley, and then had been reduced to some kind of horny idiot.

Right. Totally rational explanation, Ari. She ignored the sarcastic voice in her head and opened Jake's phone. Dialing Scarlet's number with shaking fingers, she waited for her friend to pick up. After four rings it went to voice mail.

"You've reached Scarlet. You know what to do at the tone."

Beep.

"Scarlet, where on earth are you guys? I was looking everywhere." She groaned. "You will not *believe* the night I've had. Anyways, I'm probably just going to head up to the room soon. I'm on a—umm—friend's cell phone. So call me back at whatever number just showed up on your caller ID."

She closed the phone and stepped into the elevator, hitting the button that would take her down to the casino.

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The doors started to slide shut, and then slammed back open.

Arianna screamed and lurched backward as Jake advanced into the small elevator, his eyes glowing with rage.

“You thought you could put a fucking spell on me, Ari? On *me*?”
He grabbed her wrists. “And where in the hell do you think you’re going?”

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Chapter Six

"Jake, I—"

"I saved you, Ari. Why would you run from me?"

Even if her wide eyes hadn't given it away, Jake could smell the fear and panic inside her. She was terrified of him. Of *him*.

His gut twisted. No. Anything but that. He couldn't handle the thought of her being afraid of him.

The elevator doors slid closed again, and he released her to push the button for the floor that held his office on it.

"But, you bit me. Out in the alley." She shook her head, looking so confused. "And then—Goddess! I don't know what you did to me up in your room. But I've never behaved like that. Never acted so..." She choked on the rest of her words and looked away from him.

His anger faded and sympathy took its place. "Ari," he began, just as the elevator dinged and the doors slid open. "Come on, let's go to my office."

She hesitated, and looked as if she were going to stay in the elevator.

"I won't hurt you. I promise." He held out his hand. Finally she nodded and wrapped her small fingers around his.

He led her down the hall and then unlocked the door to his office, letting her walk in first before following after her.

"When you bit me...in the alley." She turned around to face him. "Am I... Is it possible you could have turned me?"

Shelli Stevens

"No." He shook his head. "I stopped before that point. Biting you was my way of laying claim on you. Only..." He hesitated. "Only I didn't realize they'd bitten you already."

Her eyebrows drew together. "They bit me? I don't remember it. Actually, I think I blocked out quite a bit of the incident in the alley."

He nodded. *Good. At least she was spared from remembering the terrible encounter.* "I'm not surprised."

She shuddered and sat down on the edge of his desk. "So if they bit me, what does this all mean?"

Jake's gaze moved to her thighs, which were exposed under the shirt she was wearing. His shirt, actually.

His dick stirred under his jeans. *Not now, buddy. Try and think with your head for a few.* Ari shifted on the desk, and the shirt rose higher. *No, not that head. The other one. She asked you a question. Now answer it.*

"It means they should have had first claim on you." He jerked his gaze from her thighs to her face. "But they let me take you with me. Which I'm not sure I understand."

"Well I don't understand *any* of it. I thought vampires had moved past the killing of humans. The Society for the Paranormal signed an agreement years ago." She shook her head. "What happened? They wanted to kill me, Jake. They flat out told me so."

"I know they did."

His shirt slipped off her shoulder, exposing the curve of her collarbone. "If you hadn't—"

"But I did." He stepped forward, unable to resist anymore, and nudged her legs apart so he could stand between her thighs. "I heard you call me."

"You did? I sent you a telepathic message, but lots of people can't hear them." The wariness in her eyes faded some, followed by a heat that showed she was affected by his close proximity. "You really had me scared. I thought you were one of them."

"No, Arianna. Never." He nuzzled the side of her neck. "In fact I have a bit of a dark history with Armon."

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"Yeah?" Her hands moved up to his shoulders. "Is that the creepy one with the white hair?"

"That'd be him."

He brushed his mouth across hers, and she sighed, then pulled away again, lifting her gaze to his.

"I need to know. Do you think I'm still in danger?"

He waited a moment, deciding whether to be honest with her or not. He didn't want to scare her more than she already was, but she deserved the truth.

"Honestly, I do, Ari. I think you're still at risk of whatever they had planned for you." He tucked a curl behind her ear. "But I promise I will do everything in my power to protect you until I find out what's going on."

"Thank you," she whispered. "I can do a little bit of that protection thing myself, but when it comes to flying through the air and drawing blood—literally—I'm not so good."

Jake laughed. "I'll pick up the slack where you leave off then."

"Okay." She licked her lips. "Are we going to have sex again now?"

His dick hardened further at her words. She sounded so innocent, like sex was a novelty for her. Moving his thumbs over the inside of her wrists, he asked, "Do you want to?"

"Definitely." She wiggled against him, and he could feel the heat and moisture between her legs against his stomach.

"You look damn sexy in my shirt, Princess."

"I look damn sexy out of it, too." She winked and then lifted the shirt over her head, so she was sitting naked on his desk.

He groaned. "Yes. Yes you do."

Arianna's pulse raced as she sat on the desk, watching Jake's gaze travel over her body. The way he looked at her was completely empowering. As if she was the sexiest woman on earth, and he couldn't wait to be inside her.

Moisture gathered between her legs, as her stomach did that little fluttery thing again. She was aware of her sexuality as a woman—with her

Shelli Stevens

body and the power it had — in a way she'd never experienced before. The new-found confidence made her want to be bold.

Cupping her breasts, she lifted them and stroked her thumbs over the hard nipples.

"Will you touch me, Jake? Touch me the way I'm touching myself."

She heard his swift intake of breath and reached down to palm the thick erection straining through his jeans.

"Or better yet, let me touch you." Reaching for his jeans, she popped the button and then pulled the zipper down. "You see, I didn't really have the opportunity to explore you as much as..." She felt heat flood her cheeks. "As you did me earlier tonight."

She slid off the desk and grabbed the edge of his jeans, tugging them down to his knees. Then she jerked his briefs down, sighing as his large cock was freed and stood at attention.

When he was naked from the waist down, she gave him a small push, forcing him back into the chair behind the desk.

"There you go," she murmured and sank to her knees in front of him. "Forgive me if I'm a little eager to get my hands—and mouth—on you."

"Ari..." He groaned, watching her with hooded eyes.

She wrapped her hand around his dick and smoothed it up and down its length. "You're bigger than I thought you were when you were inside me, Jake."

"Am I?"

"Yes." She ran her thumb over the slit at the head of his dick and smiled when his hips jerked. "Tell me. Do you like to feel a woman's lips wrapped around your cock?"

"Yes," he hissed.

"Good." She lowered her head and let her tongue dart out to flick the tiny hole. "Because I really want to try doing this."

His eyebrows shot up while he fisted a hand in her hair. "You've never sucked a dick before?"

"No, I haven't." She shook her head. "I never wanted to before I met you. So...let me know if I'm doing it wrong, okay?"

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"I don't know if that's possible."

She smiled and then opened her mouth, drawing his smooth flesh between her lips. He tasted a bit salty and his cock was thick against her tongue. She let her tongue move over the round head.

Jake pushed at the back of her neck, silently urging her to take him deeper. She stiffened, panicking. But then he gentled his hold on her and trailed his fingers lightly over the nape of her neck. She relaxed once more and opened her mouth wider so she could slide his dick farther inside. His guttural groan made her want to take him even deeper, and she brought him as far back as he could go. Until he was brushing the back of her throat.

"Arianna," he ground out and tugged gently on her hair, lifting her head back slightly and then pushing her back down.

After the not-so-subtle lesson on how to suck his dick, Arianna found her own rhythm. She gripped his thighs and moved her mouth up and down on him faster. Bringing him deeper and then licking his head on the upstroke.

"Princess, I'm about to come down your throat if you don't stop."

He tried to lift her head away from him, but she refused to let him. Having gone this far she wanted to taste him. All of him.

She remembered a trick Scarlet had told her about, and reached down to fondle Jake's balls.

He groaned, and she felt his dick stiffen inside her mouth. Then he was spurting warm and salty on her tongue and down her throat. She swallowed every last drop of him—surprised that she loved the taste of it, the feel of it.

"Ari, Princess, you're a quick learner. That was amazing." His hands closed over her shoulders and massaged. "Come here, sweetheart."

She gave the tip of his cock one last lick and then rose to her feet.

She gasped as he grabbed her around the waist and then lifted her onto the desk.

"My turn."

Shelli Stevens

Chapter Seven

Jake swiped his arm across the desk, sending papers and pens flying. Then laid her down in the clearing he'd created.

He moved his big hands down her body, pausing to cup her breasts. *Did he think they were too small?* She'd always wished they were bigger.

"You have perfect breasts, Arianna," he murmured, as if he could read her mind. Then again, maybe he could. He'd heard her calling to him in the alley.

Arianna bit her lip as he pinched her nipples gently, and then tugged on them. Darts of pleasure moved from her breasts down to her pussy.

"Do you like it when I do that?" He lowered his head and blew a stream of warm air on the tips. "How about when I suck them?"

His mouth closed over a nipple, and he sucked it deep into his mouth, drawing on it with hard, rhythmic pulls.

Arianna squirmed beneath him and groaned. Her mind swam, as she buried her fingers deep into his hair to hold him against her. Oh, Goddess, why did he affect her this way? Make her lose control so easily?

He switched his mouth to the other nipple, and tormented it with his teeth and tongue. Never neglecting the free one, he kept pinching and rolling it between his fingers.

"Jake, *please*." She didn't even know what she was begging for, but she wanted it.

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Releasing her breasts, he moved down her body and sank to his knees, trailing kisses in a steady path toward her throbbing pussy.

Her ass lifted off the desk as she tried to arch herself toward his tongue, which was delving through the curls between her thighs.

His hands gripped her thighs as he spread them wider. "Earlier when I tasted you, you were like warm honey. I need to have that again, sweetheart."

His tongue slipped wet and rough into the folds of her pussy. The intensity of the feeling had her trying to close her thighs.

"I don't know if I can..."

"You can." Jake pushed her legs open again and forced his tongue deeper inside of her.

"*Jake,*" she cried out again, and he fucked her with his mouth.

Cupping her breasts, she stroked the tips while he continued to run his tongue over her slit and then push deep inside, repeating the process.

He turned his attention to her clitoris, licking her while he pushed two fingers inside of her.

She gasped and clenched her inner muscles around his fingers. The swirls of pleasure spread throughout her body, and all thoughts centered on the building tension.

"That's it, sweetheart," he murmured against her. "Let it go."

He drew her clit inside his mouth and sucked on it, while increasing the pace of his fingers.

The pleasure peaked, and she cried out as explosions of color flashed behind her eyelids. Her body trembled as she came back down. Jake's hand slid up her stomach as he stood up.

"Jake." She smiled at him. "Thank you. That was..."

"Just the beginning." He pulled her forward so she was still on the desk, but her ass was over the edge. He grabbed her legs and urged them around his waist.

His fingers bit into her ass cheeks, and even as the orgasm still sent tremors through her body, he eased his cock inside her pussy.

Her head fell back against the desk. *Oh, Goddess he filled her nicely.* He was so thick, stretching her inner muscles which were still aching from

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the earlier fuck.

"You feel so good." He groaned, pulling out and then thrusting back deep inside. "Like your body was made for mine."

"Yes." His words resonated with her—made perfect sense, oddly enough.

He thrust harder. "Like your pussy was made for me."

"Yes."

"Say it's mine, Ari." His fingers tightened on her ass, and he pushed deeper, till he was wedged against her cervix. "Say it, Ari."

"It's yours," she cried. Her every thought, every fiber of her being centered on him. "I'm yours, Jake."

"Yes," he hissed and then was pounding into her, harder and faster.

Her body moved with each thrust he made inside her, and she reached her hands above her to grip the top of the desk.

"Come with me, Arianna." He moved his hips so his pelvis rocked against her clitoris.

Everything exploded into color again. The climax ripped through her body twice as hard as the previous ones. Jake cried out the same time she did, and she could feel him spurting hot and full inside her.

Tears filled her eyes as her body shook through the orgasm.

"This is crazy," her voice trembled. "Sex has never been like this for me."

"Sex?" He pulled out of her and then scooped her off the desk and into his arms. "This goes way beyond sex, Ari. Can't you tell?"

She snuggled against him, hearing the pounding of his heart as he sat them down on the couch in the corner of the office.

"I...yes. I don't understand it. It confuses the heck out of me, but—"

"This is going to sound strange to you." He pushed back a few curls from her eyes. "But I think you should know."

"Know what?" She licked his nipple, and it tightened under her tongue. "That we're good in bed together? That you affect me like no man ever has? That this could be the beginning of a really good fling?"

"Well, it's—"

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"I've been going full speed since I took the job at the day spa." She licked the other nipple, curious to see if it would have the same reaction. It did. "Did I mention I'm a holistic masseuse? Anyways, I needed this. Some good lovemaking—since we decided not to call it sex—and a bit of romance."

"There's more to it than that, Ari. And if you'd stop talking for a second I could tell you," he chided gently. He put a finger under her chin and tilted her head so she was looking at him. "Promise me you won't freak out."

It couldn't be that bad, could it? "Okay...I promise."

His gaze was serious and intent as it held hers. "You're not just another fuck, Ari. You're my mate."

Jake watched closely for her reaction, but her eyebrows just drew together and she gave him a quizzical look.

"Mate? Umm...isn't that a term reserved for species of the Animal Kingdom?"

"Not necessarily. Vampires, werewolves, and some other paranormals have mates."

"Oh. And so you think I'm your...mate?" Her voice had taken on that gentle tone, as if she was talking to a child.

"I don't think, Arianna. I know."

"You *know*. Right." She nodded.

"Ari?"

"Well, I think that's my cue to go." She lurched off his lap.

His gut clenched. "Wait, you promised you wouldn't freak out."

"Not freak out?" She spun around to face him, her eyes wide with panic. "Not freak out? You drop the bomb that I'm your mate, when we've only known each other for a few hours. Tell me, Jake, how am I *not* supposed to freak out?"

"It doesn't matter how long we've known each other. When a mate comes along it's instantaneous. You don't need months of courtship. Is it so hard to believe?" he argued. "You said so yourself that it's never been like this. Were you lying?"

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"No! I wasn't lying." She shook her head, trembling. "And that terrifies me."

"Why?" He stood up and grabbed her arm. "Why does it terrify you, Arianna?"

"Because I can't love a vampire!" She jerked away from him so hard she stumbled backward. "I won't do it."

Pain hit him hard, and it confirmed his belief that she was his mate. Only a mate had the power to hurt him this severely on the emotional level.

"Why?" he ground out, trying to not show how her words had cut him to the core.

"I just can't." Her eyes filled with tears, which confused him more. What was going on in her head? Why was she so against this?

"Is it the drinking blood thing? You brought that up earlier—"

"No, that's not it." He watched her throat move as she swallowed hard. "I could learn to deal with that."

Relief washed through him. That would have been a hard thing to work around. But whatever was wrong, surely it was something they could deal with.

"Then what is it, Ari?"

She pointed to the corner of her eye. "It's this."

What? He shook his head. "I don't get it. It's your eye?"

"No. It's the wrinkle on the corner of my eye."

This was about wrinkles? One tiny wrinkle I hadn't even noticed?

"You're an immortal, Jake." She met his gaze. "Sure, it'll be great for awhile, but then time will catch up with us. And first we'll get the 'Ashton and Demi' comparisons, then the 'Harold and Maude' jokes will start rolling in. And before we know it you'll still be running marathons, while I'm running to the bathroom every two minutes with my walker."

Relief washed over him. "I don't care about that. About *any* of that."

"But *I* do." The smile she gave him was obviously forced; her eyes were shiny with tears that she hadn't let fall, yet. "I do, Jake."

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He pulled her into his arms again, and she didn't resist. "Why? Why would it matter? If we're destined to be together? If I love you?"

"Because it's not enough! I want to fall in love with someone who will grow old with me."

Her words twisted the emotional dagger in his gut. It must have shown in his face this time, because her expression softened.

"Oh, Jake. Don't you see?" The sadness in her eyes must have been a mirror to his. "I want the old man who'll sit beside me on the porch swing drinking lemonade. Smiling even though he's being forced to listen to me bitch about the expansion of urban America."

He could picture it so easily. The image she'd just painted for him. *I want to be that man*. The words locked in his throat, and this time when she tried to pull free he didn't stop her. What could he say? It wasn't as if he could just change the fact that he was immortal. Hell, he would have done that centuries ago if it were possible. He was tired of having no one, of losing everyone he'd ever loved. A day hadn't gone by where he hadn't cursed his immortality.

"I need to get back to my friends," she mumbled, swiping at her eyes.

"Arianna—"

"Please, don't. Just let me be." She opened the door and slipped out.

She was gone. Had just walked away from him, from them. *Shit*.

His fear of losing her was immediately replaced by another fear. The realization that she'd just walked out of his office alone—unprotected.

"Arianna!" He ran across the room and flung open the door, just in time to see her being dragged into the elevator.

"No!" He flew toward the elevator. Armon's cold smile was the last thing he saw before the doors slammed shut.

He tried to use his powers to force them open, but there were more of them inside blocking his attempts.

"Fuck."

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He stood back and watched the floors light up above the elevator to see where they were taking her. It kept moving up, floor after floor, finally coming to a stop on the roof.

His gut was tight as he went back into his office. Moving to the emergency weapons cabinet, he pulled out his key and unlocked it.

He wasn't an idiot. They might have had a purpose for Ari earlier, but as soon as Armon had realized who Arianna was to Jake, he'd seen a way to take them both down.

Jake grabbed the small duffle bag and then shut the cabinet.

Armon wanted revenge. No doubt about it.

And now, so do I. Tonight the bastard would be joining his dead lover. Because the moment he took Arianna it became personal.

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Chapter Eight

Arianna lurched away from the men who held her, gagging as she fell to the wet ground. She was too horrified to even consider why the roof was wet, since it rarely rained here. She just averted her eyes as best she could from what she'd just seen.

Still, her gaze kept sneaking back to the mutilated body of a young woman spread-eagled on the ground. Goddess, were they going to do the same thing to her? There was a chalice of blood next to the body. Her stomach turned again, and she pressed the palm of her hand to her mouth.

"Why?" she asked. "What purpose could you possibly have to do this to a human being?"

"You just said the reason, Arianna. Because you're a human." The white haired man—Armon, Jake had called him—gave a brief smile. "And of course you're a minor part in a sacrifice to revive our Master."

"Funny, I always thought revivals were more spiritual." *How the hell am I going to get out of this?*

"Can we start, Sir?" One of the vampires asked Armon.

"Tie her up like the other one was and make sure her hands and feet are tightly restrained. I don't want any surprise magic like the last time."

Magic! Before she could even come up with a spell, the vampires had rushed forward and grabbed her, forcing her to the ground and tying down her body.

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She'd been so distracted by the dead girl a minute ago that she hadn't even thought to try to use her magic to get out of this. *Foolish idiot!* If she got out of this alive she was definitely going to study up on her magic and spells.

One of the vampires reached for Jake's shirt and began to rip it from her body.

"Wait." Armon lifted his hand. "We will not begin the fun until *he* arrives to save her."

He? Icy sweat broke out over her body. *Oh no. No, please.* Were they setting a trap for Jake? He'd said they—he and Armon—had a history.

"He won't be coming for me." She had to stop them. "I'm nothing to him."

Armon gave a soft laugh. "Are you that naïve, little witch? You are *everything* to him. You are his mate."

Her jaw fell open. Did the whole world think they were mates? Did a memo go out that she didn't get? Because while apparently it was common knowledge to everyone else, she was still in the denial stage.

One of the vampires moved a hand over her thigh, lifting Jake's shirt over her hips so her lower body was naked to their gaze.

"I said do not begin until Jacob arrives," Armon snapped and sent the vampire who'd touched her flying across the roof.

The vampire who'd been thrown staggered to his feet and flew back toward the group with raging eyes.

"You dare? I've been nothing but loyal to you. I should cut off your—" His words ended in a gurgle when Armon thrust a wooden stake through the vampire's chest.

Arianna watched in horror as the vampire's flesh turned black, crinkled up, and then fell to the ground in a pile of ashes.

Screw this! She struggled against the ropes again, terror increasing her strength.

"Hold her down." Armon waved a hand calmly toward her. "The witch can probably wish herself out of those ropes."

Hell, if that were possible, I would have done it by now!

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The rest of the vampires didn't move right away, but stared at Armon with mistrust.

"Do it! Or I'll kill you fools like I killed him."

With obvious wariness, the remaining three vampires surrounded her, one holding both of her arms, while the others each grabbed a leg.

This is it. I am truly going to die. The vision moved through her head. Armon with the knife at her throat, blood trickling down her neck.

"I'll give you thirty seconds to release her."

She went limp with relief at the sound of Jake's voice. Oh, Goddess, he was here. Maybe he could find a way to save her after all. She strained to lift her head off the ground to see him.

He was hunched on the ledge of the building, seeming calm as could be as he stared down the vampires. Her gaze drifted to the object he held in his hand.

Her eyes widened in disbelief. *What? Are you kidding me? A squirt gun?* He was going to protect her with a freaking squirt gun?

She dropped her head back to the ground. He was as good as dead—they both were. There was no way he could take on four vampires by himself with a *squirt gun*.

She pulled her head up again. Unless.... What was in the gun?

Armon laughed. "You don't know how long I've been waiting for this, Jacob."

"You're wrong. Because I've been waiting, too." He leaped down from the ledge and slowly advanced. "Your thirty seconds are up."

Armon smiled. "I don't recall agreeing to your bargain."

Jake shrugged and pumped the loader on the squirt gun. "Not my problem."

The vampire trio shrieked with fear, dropping her and running to huddle together in the corner.

Jake pulled the trigger, spraying the group of vampires with whatever was in the gun.

The screams continued, but then began to turn to laughter as they looked at one another.

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Armon, who stood away from the group, joined in the laughter. "I'm going to enjoy this, Jacob. Watching you beg for her life." He shook his head. "Surely you could have come up with something better than unblessed holy water."

Jake reached into his pocket and pulled out a matchbook, striking a match.

"That wasn't holy water. It was lighter fluid." He tossed the lit match at the group of men.

The vampires exploded into a massive ball of fire, their screams of agony ringing through the night. Arianna slammed her eyes closed against the glare and heat of the flames. Finally all went quiet, and when she opened her eyes the vampires had been reduced to a pile of ash.

Oh, Goddess, he'd done it! He was *brilliant*.

Armon dropped to his knees beside her and pressed a knife against her throat.

"Stop where you are," Armon ordered calmly. "Or I'll slit her throat."

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Chapter Nine

Jake froze, stopping his advance. His gaze honed in on the drop of blood that appeared beneath the tip of the knife at Ari's throat. *If Armon hurt her...*

"How does it feel, Jacob? Knowing you're going to watch your mate die?"

Jake's blood pounded. Every muscle in his body was coiled, ready to spring into action.

"What's this about, Armon?"

"Justice," Armon hissed. "Undoing what was wrongly done."

He narrowed his eyes. "What could you possibly accomplish from butchering two women? You won't leave here alive, Armon. Mark my words."

He smiled. "Poor Jacob. Was she good in bed?" Armon grabbed her hair in his fist and jerked her head back farther. "Shall I fuck her while you watch?"

Ari's eyes widened before she closed them, and her lips started moving quickly as if she were saying something.

"Usually I don't enjoy women." Armon nuzzled her hair and then lowered his mouth toward Ari's. "But I could try again if I knew it would enrage you to watch."

Jake took a step forward.

Wait, trust me, Jake! He heard her voice in his head and hesitated.

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Armon must have seen his hesitation as a sign of submissiveness, because he laughed and then closed his mouth over Ari's.

He raised up a moment later, a twisted smile on his face.

"Not even to annoy you would I fuck your bitch," he said. "No, I think I'll just kill her while—"

His eyes widened, and he dropped the knife, clawing at his throat and gasping.

It was the only opening Jake needed. He grabbed a wooden stake from the duffle bag and threw himself at Armon.

Raising the stake above his head, he brought it down in a swift motion, driving it through the vampire's body until he heard the crunch of it piercing Armon's heart.

Black blood gurgled out of Armon's mouth as he made a weak effort to pull the stake from his body. Then his body began to shake and his skin turned black before he crumpled into himself and formed another pile of ash.

"Jake!" Ari whimpered and jerked against her restraints.

Jake hurried over to Arianna, cutting through the ropes with his fangs. When she was free he lifted her into his arms.

"Ari, sweetheart. I'm so sorry." He leaned down to kiss her, and she pushed him away.

"No!" She squirmed out of his arms. "I still have the toxic kiss curse on. I need to reverse it before you touch me."

He stepped back, giving her a moment to undo whatever curse she'd put on herself. Her eyes closed, and she chanted something. Then they snapped back open and she hurled herself into his arms, closing her mouth over his.

His tongue plowed between her lips, needing to taste her sweetness to verify she was alive. She groaned and stroked her tongue against his, sparring with him and deepening the kiss.

She jerked away just as suddenly and smacked his chest. "You jerk! You could have been killed. You shouldn't have come after me."

"Not come after you? I had to come after you, Ari." He shook his head. "Don't you get it yet? You're mine. Your my—"

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"*Please!* Don't say it." She lowered her gaze, but not before he'd seen the sheen of tears. Stepping away from him, she folded trembling arms across her chest. "Please, Jake...I told you how I feel. Right now I don't have the emotional stamina to discuss this again."

All his relief and elation at having her alive shriveled into something dark and painful.

"Okay. If that's what you want." His voice cracked, and he forced himself to nod. "I know this is the last thing you want to do, but we need to fill out a report."

"Of course." There were tears in her eyes as she took the hand he held out to her. "Let's get it over with."

* * * * *

"Just sign right there and you're free to go." Jake slid the paper across his desk toward her.

Arianna swallowed hard, trying to not think about what they'd been doing on the desk an hour or so earlier. Her throat was dry from trying to hold back tears.

She didn't understand it. Any of it. Why she cared so much for Jake when she barely knew him. Why she was about ready to throw away her fears of living with him, loving him, knowing she'd die eventually and he would go on without her.

The thought had her so choked up she could barely scrawl her name on the line he pointed to.

She flung down the pen, grabbed her purse, and headed for the door.

"Arianna, *wait.*" His voice was hoarse.

She stopped, but didn't turn around. She closed her eyes against the tears that snuck down her cheeks.

"What if there was a way for me to give up my immortality?"

She turned around to look at him. *Give up his immortality? Was that even possible?* A memory tickled her brain. Something her grandma had said back when Arianna had been a little girl. She frowned. *Stop it, Ari.*

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Even if it were possible do you realize what you'd be asking?

"I would never let you do that."

His nostrils flared and his eyes widened. "Let me?" He strode across the room and grabbed her arms, jerking her toward him. "Is it possible? Is there a way?"

"Jake..."

"Is there a way, Ari? Answer me." The hope in his eyes gave her hope.

She stared at him for a moment, and then nodded. "There might be."

He closed his eyes, and she could see the tension in his shoulders visibly ease. "*How* is it possible?"

She licked her lips. Her arms were tingling from where he was touching her. "It's in my book of magic that's been handed down through my family."

He let her go and walked to his desk. "Let me grab my keys. We're going to your house to get the book."

"No." She walked toward him. "I don't need to go home; I just need your computer."

"What?"

She sat down at the separate desk with the computer on it. "I added a copy of the book of magic to my Web site a few years ago."

"You keep your spells online?"

"Yeah, doesn't everyone?" She opened an Internet browser and typed in her Web site, then accessed the book of magic. "I can't guarantee it exists, but—oh. It does."

"It's real?" Jake knelt beside her and read over her shoulders.

"Yes, I remember now. My grandfather was a vampire. But he died when I was eighteen. And the only way that would've been possible was if he were mortal." She nodded. "I remember Grams telling me something about this back when I was a kid."

"The instructions don't seem too hard."

Doubt plagued her. Did he realize what he was doing? What he'd be giving up?

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"I don't want you to do this for me—"

"I'd be doing it for both of us." He brushed his mouth across hers. "For two centuries I've been cursed with immortality. The possibility of removing that curse—"

"You'd still be a vampire, Jake. I can't remove that part. You'd just be able to die some day."

"That's fine. And I don't want to stop being a vampire. I'm still partial to blood."

She wrinkled her nose, even though the warm pleasure inside her was spreading to every nerve in her body. "Are you sure? Are you really sure?"

"I'm sure, Ari." He touched his nose to hers. "I want to be that old man sitting on the porch beside you. Drinking beer—sorry, I don't do lemonade—while I listen to you bitch about the expansion of urban America."

"Oh, Jake..." She gave a watery smile. "That's the most romantic thing anyone's ever said to me."

He laughed and pulled the T-shirt over her head, then cupped her naked breasts in his hands. "Let's get started."

"Yes." She trembled as his thumbs stroked her nipples.

He lowered his head to her breast, pricking his fangs through the skin, and she winced. Jake pulled away, and they both looked down at the pearl of blood that appeared at each puncture.

"Once I begin to drink, you will repeat the chant until the change has taken effect." He tucked a curl behind her ear. "Are *you* sure about this, Ari?"

She smiled and pulled his head down to her breast. No doubts, no fears, just an absolute certainty.

"You're my mate."

"Sweetheart." His voice was rough with emotion as he licked her tight nipple. "I've been waiting all night for you to agree with me. Stubborn little witch."

"Oh, quiet and just suck me already." She giggled and then closed her eyes, groaning as he began to drink from her breast. "With this life-

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blood from my breast, I give you the chance for eternal rest. With this life-
blood from my breast...."

The End

Vegas Magic: This Spells Trouble

Biography

Shelli Stevens is a musician, a second degree purple belt in Tae Kwon Do, and most importantly a mom. She has been a Supervisor for an International Phone Company, a Network Analyst, even a Medical Assistant, but her passion has always been for writing. Shelli currently lives in the Pacific Northwest with her daughter, where she is Vice President of her local RWA Chapter.

Visit Shelli at www.shellistevens.com.

Shelli Stevens

Also Available at Cobblestone Press, LLC

The Pirate's Booty by Shelli Stevens

Chapter One

God what a night. Renee Hawkins squinted into the darkness and tried to ignore the heavy gusts of wind that rocked her compact car.

The weather was an eerie backdrop for what she was about to do—crash a party thrown by a pirate and steal a priceless brooch right out from under his nose.

Okay, he wasn't a pirate. He was a reclusive software designer. But he was the descendent of a pirate, and no less intimidating. Not that she'd know first hand, she'd never even met him.

All she knew of Devon Murray was what she'd learned from the papers and magazine articles. And they barely scratched the surface of the infamous, mysterious man who evoked so much gossip. He didn't allow himself to be photographed so she had no idea what he looked like. Devon was a man who obviously valued his privacy.

That is what made tonight the perfect opportunity. The person who tipped her off to the party told her to dress sexy. She felt like a vamp in her sleazy outfit and dark makeup. But that wasn't a bad thing. It was exactly what she needed to be to blend in with the other guests. *This was going to be a breeze.* If she told herself that often enough, hopefully she'd start believing it.

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Her hands tightened to a death grip on the steering wheel as sweat trickled between her breasts.

She turned onto the road that led to Devon Murray's property, anxiety clawing at her stomach as the canopy of trees snuffed out the moonlight. The road was private and went on for a few miles, before it emerged out of the trees and into a clearing.

The Murray estate was massive. Located on acres of land, the house itself large and Tudor in style, and probably over a hundred years old.

Renee wasn't surprised to see a valet as she pulled up to the house. She turned into the circular drive, stopped, and climbed out of her car.

She handed her key to the valet and watched as he got in to her car and drove off. She took a deep breath before turning to look at the house.

Getting onto the estate hadn't been a problem. Getting through the door would be. Then again she'd come prepared for this next part.

Renee followed another couple as they strode briskly up to the huge oak front door. She fidgeted with the black rose in her hand—the unconventional invitation. Her stomach flipped as she spotted a large blond man in a tuxedo standing guard at the door. Was he a butler? Or a bouncer?

The woman in the couple in front of her was a tall redhead in a slinky dress and the man looked distinguished in his well-tailored suit.

The man handed their black rose to the bouncer who gave it a thorough inspection.

Renee bit her lip in nervous anticipation. With a bit of luck her knockoff version would pass his close scrutiny, but she was starting to wonder.

The bouncer placed the couple's rose invitation with others in a large crystal vase on a table just inside the foyer. "Please step inside the foyer so you may be prepared," the bouncer told the couple.

"Mmm, I've heard about this." The woman cooed as she stepped forward.

After the couple stepped inside, the bouncer followed, leaving the door slightly ajar. Curious as to just what the 'preparation' entailed, Renee edged forward to peak through the crack into the foyer.

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The woman stood against the wall, her back to the bouncer standing in an intimate proximity behind her. Her date was in a similar position, but instead of a male bouncer, a woman in black leather had come up behind him.

The bouncer slid his hands around the front of the woman, and into the V of her dress.

Renee's mouth parted in a silent gasp as the bouncer pulled the woman's breasts free from her sexy red dress. He covered her small pale breasts with his massive hands and began rubbing his palms across her nipples.

Renee tried to stifle her shocked groan as all questions about what 'preparation' meant were answered. Her nipples hardened in response to the stimulating sight, and a sudden, persistent, throbbing started between her legs.

She watched as the bouncer lowered one hand to the woman's thigh, and then up and under her dress. A moment later the woman surrendered a long, throaty moan.

Renee pulled away from the door and closed her eyes, trying to shut out the stimulating image. But the damage was done. Her panties were already moist.

What kind of party was this?

A moment later the door opened and the bouncer appeared. The smile on his face was one of anticipation as he approached her.

* * * * *

Inside the house another man scanned the surveillance monitors showing different areas of the house and property. Satisfied that everything seemed under control, he was about to turn away when he noticed the woman standing in the doorway on the front porch.

"Well, hello, sweetheart," he murmured. "You don't belong here, do you?"

The woman had made a fine effort to fit in, with her modern corset, short, tight skirt, and high stilettos. But her demeanor screamed uptight.

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She stood motionless watching Kurt, the *Pleasure Greeter* currently on duty.

She was incredibly sexy, with a voluptuous body that reminded him of a 1950's playmate. Her shiny, black hair fell in a straight curtain down her back. And her milky white tits seemed ready to pop out of her revealing corset. He wondered what color her nipples were and how they would feel in his mouth.

His cock stiffened. *And just from looking her*, he mused. Now that was something that hadn't happened in a while.

While gazing at the alluring woman in the entryway—her arms now folded across those glorious tits—he decided to go and relieve Kurt of his duties for a while.

* * * * *

"Your rose, ma'am?"

Fingers trembling, Renee thrust the rose at the bouncer almost hoping he would realize it was a fake. She must be crazy to think that the brooch was reason enough to go through that door.

"This isn't authentic."

Renee's heart raced. She had to get into the house, failure wasn't an option. Getting that brooch was her only hope.

"Of course it is." She lifted her chin and glared at the bouncer. "I insist you let me pass. Mr. Murray is expecting me."

The man's expression didn't change, nor did he move aside. "I'm going to have to ask you to leave, ma'am, or I'll have you arrested for trespassing."

"Is there a problem, Kurt?"

Both Renee and the bouncer looked up as another man appeared in the doorway. Like Kurt, this man also wore a tux. But somehow this man—with his dark hair and eyes—seemed more imposing. He wasn't as tall as the first bouncer, but much broader in the shoulders with a more solid build.

Shelli Stevens

"Nothing I can't handle." Kurt glanced at the other man. "This woman is trying to gain entrance with a copied rose."

"It isn't copied!" Renee protested, the lie sounding feeble on her lips. "As I said before, Mr. Murray is expecting me and he'll be furious if you don't let me pass."

"I believe you are due for a break, Kurt." The man turned to face the bouncer with a brief smile. "I will relieve you."

The other man looked taken aback. "But—"

"Thank you, Kurt."

Their gazes locked and something passed silently between the two men.

"Sure thing." Kurt gave a slow nod, handed him Renee's rose, and then retreated inside the house.

Renee turned to face the replacement bouncer and swallowed hard. The man stared down at her in the way a cat might watch a cornered mouse. The look in his eyes blatantly sexual as they moved over her body. Finally his mouth curved into a smile, but he didn't look amused. He glanced down at the rose in his hand and spun it in a slow circle.

"It might be a little bent." *Please don't let him notice it's a fake!* "It was in my car."

"The rose is fine." He took a step toward her. "Kurt misjudged."

The sudden proximity of his body to hers made her knees threaten to give out.

"Please, come inside for your preparation."

His hand settled low on her back as he guided her under the archway and through the massive door. She trembled at the slight contact. He wasn't a conventionally handsome man. A scar marred his left cheek and his nose looked like it had probably been broken at some time during his life. Still, her body reacted to him as if he were some kind of sex God.

The foyer of the house was dark, with only a few candles burning in the entryway.

Renee looked down the hall, noting they were completely alone in the cold silence.

Vegas Magic: This Spells Trouble

"Please stand against the wall, facing away from me." His voice resonated in the foyer, deep and abrasive, sending chills of forewarning down her spine.

You can do this. You have to do this. Renee finally convinced her feet to move forward and take the few steps to the stone wall.

She sensed his hard body before he touched her. His breath fell warm and intimate on the back of her neck. Then his hands settled firmly on her waist. Her eyes fluttered shut.

"What is your name?"

"Renee." She should have lied, but her mind was all fuzzy and she could only think about the hands sliding inward over her stomach.

"Renee," he said, so close to her neck she felt his lips brush against her sensitized skin. She shivered. "Have you attended one of Devon Murray's parties before?"

Even through the fabric of the corset, Renee responded to the fingers inching their way up towards her breasts.

She bit her lip before saying, "I've been to a few. You must have been off those nights."

His laugh, low and seductive, echoed throughout the foyer. *What had she said that was so amusing?*

Suddenly he pushed her tight against the wall and she turned her face to the side to avoid the hard rough surface.

"So you know what to expect then." His hand had reached her breast and closed over it through the corset.

"Uh..." *What was the question again?* "Yes."

"Wonderful."

He delved one hand into the bodice of her corset and cupped her breast, his thumb stroking firmly over her nipple.

Oh, God! Her knees buckled, but his body pressing against hers kept her from falling. A second later he pulled her breast up and over the edge of the fabric. Cool air rushed over her exposed skin and her nipples grew tighter.

"You have amazing tits, Renee." His breath tickled her ear as he pulled her other breast free from its restraints.

Shelli Stevens

He plucked both of her nipples in quick, rhythmic strokes, shocking her with almost frightening pleasure and making her panties useless against the flood of moisture pooling between her legs.

"Do you like this?" he asked calmly.

Renee exhaled a long, shuddering breath, intensely aware of his cock pressing hard against her lower back. He tugged on her hair, pulling her head back forcing her breast more firmly into his hand. Now she was even more vulnerable to him.

"Tell me you like it, Renee."

"I...I like it," she whispered.

"Good, girl. Your preparation is almost complete," he said. "Now for verification."

She whimpered as one of his hands abandoned her breast and slid back down her stomach. A moment passed as he worked his fingers beneath the waistband of her skirt.

"Spread your legs."

Renee blinked, hesitating.

"Spread your legs," he repeated, pulling her hair harder and tilting her head back further.

Renee didn't hesitate this time and moved her right foot a few inches away from her left. The man's fingers immediately slid into her panties.

"Christ, you're wet," he muttered against her neck, not sounding as neutral as before.

Renee found it hard to breathe as he tugged on her curls and then moved downward to play within her folds. When he thrust a long, thick finger inside her pussy she couldn't stop a ragged gasp from escaping.

"Hot and creamy." His lips covered the pounding pulse in her neck, and his mouth closed over the skin, sucking hard enough to leave a mark.

She groaned as he slid his finger out of her and up and over her clitoris, making her body hum. "You're ready."

He released her so suddenly that she fell fully against the wall.

"I will arrange an escort to see you inside."

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Renee jerked away from the wall, pushing her breasts back into the corset and smoothing her skirt.

"What's your name?" She had to be crazy. Lusting after a bouncer who was only doing his job. A very bizarre and erotic job, but a job none the less.

"It doesn't matter," he said, his gaze hooded. He turned to another man who'd entered the foyer. "Victor, please escort Renee into the party. She is prepared."

As another bulky blond man grasped her arm and steered her from the entrance, she glanced one last time at the man who had brought her so close to the edge so fast. She couldn't read anything in his expression as he continued to watch her.

Renee turned away, thinking nothing inside the party could possibly be more shocking than what she'd just experienced.

When she'd left the foyer, Devon Murray brought his finger— still wet with Renee's slick juices—to his mouth and sucked away the essence of her. The musky sweetness made him close his eyes to recall the brief encounter with the mysterious woman.

Devon's resolve hardened. It was a damn shame that she'd lied to him. He didn't appreciate being fucked with. But she would regret it. He suspected that Renee was a reporter. No reporter had ever gained access to his parties, though many had tried.

This woman was no different. Her rose was a poor counterfeit. If Devon hadn't interfered, Kurt would have sent her packing.

Though she'd intrigued him, he shouldn't have allowed her inside. That was his cock making the decision.

By now she would be in the other room. No doubt in full panic mode. She'd certainly been on the brink when he'd had her pinned against the wall, but it was obvious that this was a first for her.

Kurt returned to the foyer, interrupting his thoughts. "Is everything in order, sir?"

"Cut the sir shit. You've known me long enough." He turned his analytical gaze on Kurt. "Do you recall the vehicle she arrived in?"

"Of course."

Shelli Stevens

"Have the plates run and find out who she is," he ordered. "First name might be Renee. I want her surname, age, and address. I'll take it from there."

Kurt nodded without changing his expression.

That's what Devon appreciated in an employee, someone who didn't ask questions.

"In the meantime I'm going to keep an eye on our uninvited guest," he murmured. "Bring me the details as soon as you have them."

* * * * *

As they passed through the door into the party, Renee noticed a naked woman reclining on a chaise lounge just to one side of the door. On the other side a naked man was in a similar position. *Eye candy?* she wondered, but didn't think much of it. Especially, after what had just happened to her in the foyer. Her pulse was still racing a mile a minute.

The only light inside the room shone from hundreds of candles that burned throughout. The air smelled spicy and exotic from incense, adding to the ambience around her.

They moved further inside and Renee stumbled, her eyes going wide. *Damn, maybe it could be more shocking inside.* There were maybe only fifty people here, dressed in kinky outfits and some wearing nothing at all, but all were involved in various sex acts.

Renee's gaze drifted to her right and she nearly cried out at the erotic scene taking place by her side. On the couch were two women with a man. The man was lying down and one of the women was straddling his head. His hands grasped her hips as his tongue drove again and again between her legs. The other woman lay, half reclining, on him while she sucked on his large erect cock.

She'd never seen anything more erotic. Her body, still aroused from her experience in the foyer, tingled and ached with excitement.

"How may I assist you, ma'am?"

Renee startled by the sound of Victor's voice, had forgotten about the escort by her side.

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"Assist me?" She looked away from the threesome on the couch, uncertain of what Victor had just offered.

He nodded, not elaborating.

"I..." She licked her suddenly dry lips. "I think I'd just like to look around for now."

She turned her attention back to the shadowy figures in the room. The further they went into the room, the more sexy activity she noticed between the guests.

Before long she noticed a woman who sat giggling on a man's lap. They seemed to be in conversation. They were probably the only two people in the room that didn't seem to be having sex.

As she approached them, the man suddenly lifted the woman's gauzy skirt and massaged her ass. *Oh, God.* The man's cock was deep inside the woman. They were having sex just like everyone else!

Renee whimpered and jerked her gaze away. She still heard the wet sucking sounds, the moans, the slaps, the erotic screams.... And the smell. It was the smell of incense combined with the musky smell of sex that created the most sensual pheromone. One that sent her hormones into overdrive. This was unlike anything she'd ever seen before. People couldn't just go around having sex in a crowded room, could they?

Umm, apparently. And if you don't start making an effort to fit in someone might catch on that this isn't exactly your cup of tea.

She still needed to explore the house and figure out where the brooch might be. But how? She couldn't just sneak away this soon. And she still had no idea who Devon Murray was, so she could hardly keep an eye out for him. The last thing she needed was to run into him at the wrong time.

Time to get a grip. Renee spotted an empty chair and hurried to claim it. As she sat, Victor kneeled beside her.

"How may I pleasure you, ma'am?"

"Umm...I'd like a beer, Victor." She nodded quickly and gave him a confident smile.

"A beer?" He seemed skeptical, but again rose to his feet. "If that is what you so wish, ma'am."

Shelli Stevens

"Yes, that's exactly what I wish. Thanks."

After Victor disappeared, she again looked around the room. A man and woman, a few feet away from her, were cuddling and kissing on a pile of throw pillows.

Finally, a normal couple. And they so obviously weren't having sex.

"Are you enjoying yourself?" the man asked the woman, as he played with her nipples.

"Yes."

He pinched her nipple, and Renee winced. *Ouch, that had to hurt!* But the woman made no move to protest or cry out.

"Yes, Master."

"Good." He released her nipple and then bent to run his tongue over the reddened flesh, parting his lips and drawing it inside his mouth.

Renee couldn't turn away as the man sucked on the woman's breast. The sight was so stimulating, that she touched her own nipple through her corset.

The man pulled his mouth away from the woman's nipple with a loud sucking sound.

"On your hands and knees, slave."

The woman didn't hesitate. She rolled over and raised herself onto her hands and knees in front of him. The man knelt behind her and slapped her hard across her ass. Still the woman didn't even flinch.

He grunted his approval and slipped three of his fingers in the opening of her pussy, then thrust them inside. Renee watched in reluctant fascination and growing arousal as the man continued to penetrate her in this way. When he finally withdrew his fingers in a steady, slow stroke, they glistened with the woman's wetness.

This is just crazy. Renee was unable to look away, almost jealous of that woman. Right now, she needed to be touched so bad that it hurt.

"Your beer, ma'am."

Renee jumped, and turned to see Victor holding a bottle of beer out to her. She snatched it and glanced to see what was happening now.

"Her mouth is very appealing to me," another man said as he approached the pair and stood naked in front of the woman.

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"I rather think so, too," replied the first man. "Would you like her mouth on your cock?"

Renee choked on the sip of beer she'd just taken. *What?*

"You don't think she would mind?"

"She will do whatever I tell her." The man gave the woman's ass another sharp slap. "Slave, suck this man's cock."

The other man bent to his knees in front of her—his cock bobbed next to her mouth. He prodded her lips with his thick, long penis until her mouth opened and he could slide his full length inside.

Renee groaned. It had been so long since she'd given head, and watching a blow job in progress made her want to do it. *Now.*

The first man stroked his own cock and then grasped the woman's hips, thrusting himself into her pussy from behind.

"Oh, God..." Renee whispered, unable to keep silent anymore. She squirmed in the chair, too aroused to stay still.

"Perhaps I can assist you now, ma'am."

Renee turned to protest, but Victor, who was now kneeling in front of her, had slid his hand up her thigh and under her skirt. He began to rub her pussy through her panties. The sensation felt wonderful and was just what she needed. *I should stop him.* Instead, she let her knees fall open a bit. Victor rewarded her by slipping two fingers beneath her panties, and sliding them up and down her slit.

This is insane! His fingers probed, before dipping just inside her pussy.

"Tell me what you'd like," he told her. "And I will do anything you desire."

His fingers stroked over her clit, and she gasped. She was going to lose it! Any minute now she'd pull off her panties and shove his face between her legs. *He's good looking, and obviously knows how to pleasure a woman....*

No! She couldn't afford this kind of distraction. She pushed his hand away and leapt off the chair.

"I'd like to wait a little. Thank you, Victor."

Shelli Stevens

Before he could comment, she rose and walked quickly away from him. She raised the bottle of beer to her lips and took a long swig. What a bizarre night. She was going to need another beer or two to get through this evening.

Renee reached the edge of the room and glanced around to see if anyone was watching her. Then, she slipped through a door and found herself in another hallway. No more erotic sounds or scenes, only an empty hallway and silence.

She rubbed a hand across her forehead and sighed. Her gaze drifted around as she tried to figure which direction to go. All the doors were shut. Hell, she might as well just start with the one closest to her.

After twisting the doorknob and glancing around one last time, Renee slipped inside a darkened room. Thank God no one had seen her. Still, the tension in her body didn't ease until she had the door shut behind her.

A lamp in the corner shed a bit of light in the otherwise dim room. She fumbled along the wall for a light switch. Locating one, she flipped it on.

"Hello, Renee. Are you lost?"