

Blood That Binds Ep 3 - Liar, Liar, Vampire

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A week or so later

The apartment

Maeve pokes her head out into the kitchen on her way from the shower to her bedroom to get dressed, towel wrapped around her torso “Oh, hey, Dolan?” She taps her fingers nervously on the corner of the wall, “Um, I’m going to need you to, uh, not be here tonight.” She quickly ducks back down the hall.

“You what?” He is even quicker on her heels drying his hands on a dish towel as he follows her.

“Thanks so much!” Her tone is a forced sort of cheerful and she doesn’t look back at him.

“Hang on,” He reaches her door just as she shuts it in his face, “Look, I know you’re not exactly thrilled that I’m living here but I think I’ve been pretty good at giving you your space the past two weeks.” He pauses for a response but gets nothing, then raises his voice slightly to make sure she can hear him through the door, “Now you’re just kicking me out for the night?” He tosses the dish towel over one shoulder for effect, even though she can’t see him, “Well that’s just not very nice.”

“It’s just for a few hours tonight, don’t be such a baby.” She calls back through the door. He hears drawers opening and closing and smells a whiff of deodorant, “It’s my night to host the study group and I’m just not sure you should meet my... people... yet.”

“Study group? You have people?”

“Yes, college people. Friends. We’re all different majors but we’re taking this class on Modern Pagan Practices together and we need to work on our group project.”

“So they’re witches. They’re your coven.”

“No. I mean...yes. Maeve lets out an exasperated sigh and cracks the door to stick her head out, “Yes they’re also witches, but no we’re not in a coven.” She swiftly pulls her head back into her room and slams the door.

Dolan laughs, “What’s the group project, spellcasting? Potions?”

“It’s Penn State, not Hogwarts. We met at a guest lecture on the occult first semester.”

“So your best friends that are all witches - but you are *not* in a coven with - are coming over to study magic for your magic class at your totally mundane university and I can’t be here.”

Maeve pops her head out to bark, "Yes." Then retreats again.

"What? Haven't you told them about me?" He shoots back, feigning offense and leaning one shoulder against the doorframe petulantly.

She opens the door fully and they are abruptly face to face. He immediately sticks out his lower lip in a pout. She rolls her eyes and pushes past him, still pulling her polo down over her tank top, "Told my college friends that I have my weird vampire uncle as a roommate? No." She steps into the bathroom and brushes her wet hair out, then reaches for the mousse, "I will eventually tell them my junkie cousin just got out of rehab and I'm helping you get on your feet."

"I -- you -- ah --" He stutters, aghast, "Junkie?!" He finally blurts out. She just looks at him in the mirror, raising an eyebrow as she continues working mousse into her hair. "Ok, that is a little bit true, but come on! You're helping me on my feet? I'm paying your tuition! And half of the rent." He gesticulates at the apartment.

"Yes, and I'm supplying you with the blood and magic you need to live." She turns towards him and pats his cheek patronizingly. He frowns and wrinkles his brow at her and her smile fades, "Look, my friends are fantastic, open-minded people but I'm not sure they'd be cool with a five-century old vampire." She walks past him again, gathering her backpack, wallet and keys from the living room.

"Well that's racist." He sniffs, taking a few steps to lean against the kitchen counter. "And agist."

"Besides, it's a study group. You'd be bored out of your mind. Just try to stay away until ten and I promise I will have them out by then," She pleads as she hoists the heavy backpack onto her shoulders.

"Stay out? Well what am I going to do?" He shifts his shoulders uncomfortably. "Fasih's is only open until five! Even if I stay late to do inventory I'll have hours without anything to do."

"I don't know, go out, have a couple drinks, meet some people," She pushes a loose strand of damp hair back from her face, looking around for her phone.

"Meet people." He contemplates the idea for a moment like one would a highly questionable and unidentified casserole. "But what if," He raises the point and his finger at her triumphantly, "I end up *eating* people instead? This will mean I have my dinner late"

Having found her phone, she tosses her hair and firmly shoots him down, "In 400 years you have never bitten anyone outside of the family." She squints at him and motions to calm down, "I'm pretty sure you'll be fine having a late dinner." Checking the time on her phone, she turns to head out of the apartment.

Just before she closes the door behind her he calls out, "You shouldn't go out with a wet head!" The door clicks shut and he mutters the rest to himself, "You could...catch a cold...or something." He ruffles his fingers through his own hair and puffs out a long sigh.

Dolan wanders around the apartment, gathering laundry and quarters from the bowl in the hall closet. Popping headphones in his ears, he tucks his phone into the back pocket of his skinny jeans and makes his way with the laundry basket out into the hall. He is grateful for the music, which makes it easier to ignore the many conversations, sex noises, blaring TVs and humming appliances forming the cacophany that is the apartment building. There is nothing he can do to block out the smells. The tempting orange scent of Maeve's magic overpowers most of them from within the apartment, but once he gets outside the door the magic that clings to everything she touches is left behind him.

Probably for the best. Smelling magic he can't access only makes the hunger rumble in his gut and buzz in his forehead. He saunters down the hall, but after only a few steps pauses mid-stride. His eyes glow and fangs begin to extend as the realization hits him that in all the discussion of avoiding the apartment, Maeve forgot to feed him. He sighs and continues down the hall. Lights flicker and the carpet is stained to a rusty mud color that does nothing to reveal it's original pattern.

The tile in the laundry room doesn't look much better as he approaches the doorway. When he tries to step over the threshold a pair of invisible hands shove his chest backwards so hard he stumbles.

"Oh, you have got to be kidding me." He tries to push his hand, then his shoulder through and meets the same impact. He steps back from the doorway, looking up at the ceiling and down each hall.

"Alright, building." He grumbles. "This is not funny. You can't say the hallway and lobby are common grounds but the laundry room is private." He sticks a foot out and meets the barrier again.

"Some of this laundry belongs to a resident, does that make a difference?" A murmur of consideration brushes through his consciousness, but the barrier still holds.

"Ok." Dolan pops out his headphones and tosses them over his shoulder. "I'm sorry I thought you were dirty. And noisy...and smelly." Gently, Dolan places his shoulder against the invisible barrier, but it still doesn't give. Leaning his full weight against it, he raises his eyes imploringly to the ceiling. "Please?"

A short pause, and Dolan leans his head against the barred doorway in defeat. Half a second later, he falls shoulder-first into the room, spilling half the laundry as the barrier lets him through.

Bending with a long sigh, he begins picking up the disheveled clothing, "Thanks." He mutters, dropping the basket onto one machine as he loads clothes into another.

When the laundry is finished, he drops it off in the apartment and heads out for work. The green door gives its now familiar jingle as he pushes it open, hand resting on the sign that says, "OPEN WEEKDAYS 11am - 7pm, WEEKENDS 10am - 5pm." The most notable change in the store is the distinct lack of an angry teenager spying on his every move. Zarilla had returned to classes for the year, leaving Dolan and Asim alone in the shop during the day, which Dolan much prefers.

Eight and a half hours and many customers later, Dolan fiddles around at the back of the store, debating whether it will eat up more time reorganizing the small bookshelf by genre or alphabetically by author's last name. He hears Asim sauntering towards him, but does not turn around. He forces his shoulders to remain relaxed, his gaze focused on the two books in his hands, until the moment Asim's hand rests on his shoulder.

Then he jumps as though startled and turns his head sharply towards the big man before letting out a shaky laugh.

"Sorry, you scared me." Dolan pushes the messy forelock of hair back from his face.

Asim smiles with shining, kind eyes, "My bad, I shouldn't have snuck up on you." He holds up a jingling ring of keys, "I just locked up. Going to head out soon."

"Oh, right." Dolan sets the books back on the shelf and lowers his eyes, "Guess I better head out too."

Asim ducks his head, trying to catch Dolan's expression, "Do you... have somewhere to go tonight?" He quickly amends his question with another, "With friends, I mean."

Dolan shuffles a slight step back closer to the larger man and shrugs, "I didn't have any plans. Actually, I don't know many people. Just my roommate and she... well, she has a study group at the apartment tonight..."

Dolan grinds his toe against a streak of rubber on the linoleum, letting the sentence fall into a heavy silence.

"Well..." Asim says after a while, "I was just going to go out for a drink or two, maybe a bite to eat... if you wanted to come..."

Dolan raises wide, impish eyes to meet Asim's, shuffling closer again until their chests are nearly brushing. "Drinks with the boss. Is that allowed?"

A blush rises quickly up Asim's neck and face, "I... well... that is... I'm assuming you're old enough to drink but... I don't want to make you uncomfortable, I just thought..."

Dolan tosses his head, flipping his hair back, "I'm a lot older than I look." He spins on his heels away from Asim and, hands stuck in his jacket pockets, and strides away. "Well, let's go then."

Asim lets out a short laugh and ambles after the jaunty, energetic figure, shaking his head.

The Apartment

Later that evening

"Look, you can't disregard someone's personal experience just because it wasn't written down hundreds of years ago." Umbrosia pushes her long, natural mass of hair back from her head in frustration. She is curled into a tight seated position at the base of the futon, leaning back against a large, white shin which contrasts sharply against her bare, dark arm. "Everything was UPG at some point."

"That's true. Gardner has a huge, respected following and he put Wicca together a very short time ago, relatively speaking." A surprisingly tenor voice resonates from the large male person attached to the shin. Despite the liveliness of the debate, he leans relaxed against the back of the futon with his arms and legs splayed. His large frame takes up nearly the entire futon, "And other traditions are even younger, or just recently renewed or reconstructed from ancient traditions that were primarily oral to begin with."

"I'm not saying we disregard Unverified Personal Gnosis," The conversation shifts clockwise around the semi-circle to Maeve, who is laying on her stomach, propped on her elbows and gesturing with a pen. "I'm saying it is called unverified for a reason. If only one person, or even a handful of people, are recorded to have experienced something, that's not very reliable evidence that it actually exists."

"So we determine the validity of someone's practice and experience based on a popularity contest?" Sia pipes up again, looking around the group with disbelief. She begins shifting through the papers in front of her with intense energy.

Before Maeve can defend herself a fourth voice jumps in to bring the conversation back around to its original focus, "That's not what we're saying." This person sits across from Maeve, facing inward towards the apartment in a criss-cross fashion. "I agree that interviewing practitioners about their unique experiences is a bold way to go for the project, but if we don't include significant reference to long-established traditions the professor is going to see it as lazy instead of unique."

“So says the biology major.” The original speaker huffs, rolling her eyes, “Of course you would insist on silly things like evidence.”

Maeve interjects, “Hey, I agree and I’m an English major.”

At that moment the door slides open and an unsteady figure shuffles in. Within seconds Dolan surveys the unexpected scene. The coffee table has been pushed several feet from its normal resting place to make room for a large array of text books and papers. His keen eyesight notes the titles and contents of several of the books: pagan cultures, modern witchcraft, ancient polytheism. The hand-written notes are filled with sigils and symbols.

Umbrosia freezes and he can smell distinctly the agitation in her pheromones. The person directly across from him in the circle looks at him with a confused and guarded expression. The large man spread across the futon barely turns his head to glance over from under kinky blonde curls, but Dolan can hear his heart rate elevate. All this he assesses in the second or two before Maeve rolls halfway around to look over her shoulder at him.

“Shit!” She curses under her breath, “What time is it?” She snags her phone and scrambles to her feet, frantically checking the time, “Almost 11 o’clock? Have we really been here that long?” She looks from Dolan to her group of friends and back, at a loss for a moment of what to do.

“Maeve? Who the fuck is this?” Umbrosia asks, leaning back and draping her arm casually over the large man’s knee, subtly reaching towards the third person, almost protectively.

Maeve then notices how unsteady Dolan is on his feet, how hollow his eyes look. She quickly reaches past him to shut the door and wraps an arm around his waist, supporting his weight easily, “Uh, yeah,” She forces a smile, “So sorry I forgot to tell you guys. This is Dolan, he just moved in.”

“Boyfriend?” The man asks with mild interest, raising his eyebrows.

“What?” Maeve pulls her arm away, only to have Dolan nearly topple over, “Oh, fuck no.” She grabs his waist and chest again to steady him, “No, he’s my cousin.” The lie slips out easily, perfectly rehearsed. “We...grew up together. Sort of.”

“I’m a junkie!” Dolan offers brightly, a goofy smile on his face, leaning heavier on Maeve. A sale had kept him busy at lunch, and by that time Maeve was in class. He wasn’t unused to going thirsty, but forgot how hard alcohol could hit him without magic in his system.

Maeve laughs awkwardly as the other woman rises to help the clearly drunk cousin stay upright, “He’s fresh out of rehab and really not supposed to be drinking,” she offers the last half of the sentence through a tightly clenched smile.

“Hey, you told me to go out!” Dolan defends himself, “And not to come back until after 10. Well it’s after 10 and you’re all still here and it’s not my fault.” His speech is slurred and takes on a very chastising tone, like when she misbehaved as a toddler, “So you might as well introduce me to your friends.”

Maeve rolls her eyes and gestures to the woman who is now standing on his other side, bracing his right arm behind the elbow. “This is Umbrosia, Labor and Human Resources.” He has to look up at an awkward angle to see her face.

“Hullo Mmbrosia ‘svery nice to meet you and did you know that you’re vurry tall?” He manages to jumble out one run-on sentence, and can feel the alcohol hitting him harder with every second. It is dulling his senses, but with his ongoing thirst and her standing so close he smells magic rippling off the African American woman’s every pore. A few synapses not yet drowning in alcohol tell him that is unusual.

Maeve continues, in a hurry to get this over with, “There on the couch, that’s Noam, computer science.”

“Sup.” Noam glances up but has already lost interest, redirecting his attention to the textbook spread across one of his meaty thighs.

“And over there is Sol, Biology.” Maeve shifts Dolan’s weight, eyeing the hallway, bedrooms and safety from anything else he might blurt out.

“Nice to meet you,” Sol nods from an upright semi-fetal position, both hands resting on one bent knee against their chest, the other leg curled underneath them. They have short brown hair with electric blue highlights, large brown eyes peering out from soft copper skin, several face piercings and a decidedly androgynous look.

“Likewise.” Dolan gives a sloppy salute and follows Maeve’s tugging towards his room. As they make their way down the hall he continues to mutter to himself, “Vurry nice friends, your friends. Friendly witches are my favorite.”

Maeve looks at him sharply and sees that his eyes are now flashing, his fangs sliding down, ready for feeding. “Shit.” Luckily, they are in his room. She practically throws his thin frame through the doorway and turns sharply to stop Umbrosia from following her in, “Thanks, Sia. I’ve got him from here.”

“Are you sure?” Umbrosia looks over Maeve’s head, brow furrowed, “He doesn’t look good at all. What if he used something other than alcohol?”

"No, really, he's just drunk." Maeve closes the door all but enough to fit herself in the opening, blocking her friend's view somewhat, "Trust me, I've seen him like this before. I'm just going to get him to bed and I will be right out, if you guys can stick around for a bit longer?"

"Fuck yeah, girl, just yell if you need any help back here." Sia nods and gently places a reassuring hand on Maeve's arm. She turns back down the hallway, "No damn way I'm gonna leave you alone with some drunk ass junkie, I don't care whose cousin he is," she mutters under her breath, loud enough for Maeve to hear.

Maeve quickly closes the door and spins around to face Dolan. He is slumped sideways across the bed, head propped miserably in his hand. He looks slowly up at her with glassy eyes, fangs peeking out of his partially open mouth. She crosses her arms and shakes her head at him.

"You are such a fucking cliché, you know that?"

"Oh, blah blah blah." He slurs out, flapping his free hand at her, "I'm not the one who ran away from her coven at 18," He switches into a mocking, high-pitched valley girl voice, "I don't want to be in a coven. I'm going to be solitary!" He giggles drunkenly, "And then, you come to the city and guess what?" He slaps his hand down on the bed. "You're in a coven!"

"Oh shut the hell up." She kneels near his head, "Here, you need to drink something other than alcohol." She can feel his hunger roiling in her gut.

She offers her arm, laying it across the bed in front of him, vein pulsing in her agitated state. She sees his eyes flash and faster than her brain can register his mouth is on her skin, biting in sharply without pausing to apply his pain-killing saliva. She gasps in pain but doesn't tear away. He stops immediately and looks at her, mouth already stained with her blood.

"I'm so sorry." He says, his eyes widening a bit. She can see how thirsty he is, his hands nearly shaking with hunger.

She slowly swallows and nods for him to continue, "Go on, before I bleed all over the bed." The blood is already running down her arm.

Gently, he leans down and licks the dripping blood from her arm up to the bite. He wraps his mouth around the wound again. She watches his face in fascination as the magic in her veins rejuvenates him, bringing color back to his cheeks and brightening his eyes. He drinks a little longer than usual, and she starts to wonder if she should stop him before she gets dizzy. He stops on his own, though, once again licking the wound and watching intently to make sure it heals.

When it is healed, they sit in total silence. She gingerly pulls her arm from his grasp and places her hand on the bed, palm-down. She starts to push herself up to standing, but he places a hand on her shoulder to stop her. It takes her a moment to bring her eyes up to meet his.

"I'm not human, Maeve." His look is more open and intense than she has seen since she was a little girl, "You're aunt chose to forget that but... I think it's best if you don't."

She stands slowly and doesn't speak until she is at the door with her back to him, "Just...get some sleep." Without waiting for his response, she leaves the room, shutting the door behind her.

Stepping into the hallway, she can hear her friends whispering. She makes a quick stop in the bathroom to collect her senses and wash her arm. There really isn't any blood left smeared on it, but she doesn't want to take any chances. She stands for a moment just gazing at her own reflection in the mirror, his words echoing in her head. She had started to forget he isn't human, and never would be. But she knew better. Her mother had made sure she knew something was different about Uncle Dolan, even before she was old enough to understand his relationship to the family. From the day Maeve was born, her mother walked the tightrope between honesty and protection.

Maeve thinks back to the day that wire snapped.

Somewhere in Michigan's Upper Peninsula
2002

Maeve is so excited to show her Uncle Dolan and Aunt Linda the St. Brigid's cross she has made. It had taken her little fingers and pint-sized patience nearly an hour total over several days but - with her mother's help - she had finally finished a crooked little pinwheel-shaped cross. She pats down the hall towards their room in her bare feet, cross held carefully in her left hand. When she gets to the door, it is slightly ajar, and she energetically swings it open.

"Uncle Dolan--" she begins, but the rest dies on her lips. Her eyes widen and she freezes.

Dolan kneels behind Linda on the bed, his face nestled in her neck. Dolan looks up the same instant the door swings open. Maeve's eyes lock on them and the world freezes. Linda's arms wrap behind her head and fingers tangle in his red hair. She wears a white tank top, ripped open to expose one breast. Smears and trails of blood stand out on her shirt and skin like a garish fingerpainting. His mouth is covered in blood, fangs exposed, his eyes bright and shining, normally pale cheeks flush. He quickly covers his grotesque appearance, but in that split second it takes to wrench himself from a frenzy of blood and pheromones Maeve turns and runs from the room. Her precious cross floats abandoned to the floor.

Dolan swiftly seals the wound on Linda's neck, and she opens her eyes in confusion, "Darling?"

Maeve's mother steps out of another room just a little way down the hall and Maeve collides with her flowing skirts.

"Hey, slow down there missy." Eliza begins, then stops short. She senses fear before she sees the tears on her daughter's face. She drops down to Maeve's level immediately, "What's wrong?"

Maeve begins to wail but cannot get a deep enough breath to speak between sobs. Large, fearful tears pour down her cheeks. Movement down the hall catches Eliza's eyes and she looks past Maeve while taking the child in her arms. Dolan and Linda stand apologetically in the doorway, Linda behind him with her hand on his shoulder. Eliza stands, holding the crying Maeve tight to her chest. Dolan takes half a step forward but Eliza raises a hand in warning, her eyes filled with all the stony energy of an angry mother bear.

Nearly an hour and a very long conversation later, Maeve is settled on the couch with a juice, her teddy and cartoons playing in the VCR. She only somewhat understands what her mother tried to explain, and it will take time and many more conversations for her to accept Dolan's peculiar relationship with her aunt. But for now, she is calm and mostly content with her mother's promise that everyone is safe.

Her mother leaves the room to speak with the rest of the family. Maeve only makes out a single sentence before a door closes and voices become muffled. It is her mother's voice, more angry than she has ever heard.

"What the hell were you two doing?!"

The Apartment
Present day

"What the hell am I doing?" Maeve says to the mirror with a shake of her head, then splashes water on her face and steps out of the bathroom. She flicks the light off behind her and takes a final deep breath before walking into the living room to face her friends.

They all freeze when she walks into the room, and she immediately turns away from them, searching in the fridge for something to help bring her blood count back up. They wait in silence while she pours herself a glass of juice, pulls a bag of chips from the cupboard and walks back across to where they are sitting. Flopping down on the futon, she leans comfortably against Noam's massive chest. She closes her eyes for a moment and he wraps his arm around her stomach comfortingly. After a few seconds, she opens her eyes to see Sia and Sol have gathered closer so they can both see her face. She blows a loose strand of hair away from her mouth with a sigh.

“Ok, shoot.” She takes a large gulp of the juice to hide her eyes.

“Are you ok?” Sol asks, resting a hand near her foot. The space between their eyebrows furrows, creating two tiny wrinkles parallel to the bridge of their nose.

“Yes,” She smiles a little, “Exasperated, but fine otherwise.” She reaches into the bag and pulls out the largest chip she can find, shoving it in her mouth whole.

Sour cream and onion. Delicious, delicious junk food, she thinks.

Dolan has been pushing her away from unhealthy snacks since he arrived. While she appreciates the healthy meals, sometimes you just can’t beat a goddess damned potato chip.

“Why didn’t you tell us about this guy moving in?” Sia is frustrated but concerned, “How long has he even been here?”

Maeve thinks back a moment, “A couple of weeks? I was planning on telling you but didn’t because...he and I have a complicated relationship.”

“Complicated like forbidden incestual cousin love?” Noam’s voice reverberates through her back and he crinkles his free hand into the bag, pulling out a handful and crunching down on them.

Maeve chuckles and gently slaps his arm. “No, you sicko. More like my weird drunk uncle that...well, let’s say the rest of the family is done taking care of him, so he’s my responsibility now.”

“Maeve, that is some codependent bullshit.” Sia interjects, jamming her pointer finger down onto the futon cushion.

“Wait, ‘uncle?’” Sol pulls their hand back into their lap, shifting slightly. “I thought you said he was your cousin?”

Shit. Maeve thinks as she quickly covers her slip-up, “Yeah he is my cousin, but he’s older than me so he always acts more like an uncle.”

“He can’t be that much older,” Sol brushes back and ruffles their bangs, “He looks our age, and I’m not under the impression that people with addictions age well.”

“Trust me, he’s a lot older than he looks.” Maeve reassures them, fighting the urge to roll her eyes and hiding them again behind the juice.

Understatement of the past five centuries.

“Even more reason he shouldn’t be your responsibility,” Sia raises her voice at first, then lowers it, glancing back towards the bedrooms, “I don’t mean to make any snap judgements but if he’s not really sober...maybe he came out of rehab too soon?”

Maeve covers her face with a hand and shakes her head. The lie is going to be harder to keep up than she thought. “I just...I know it might not make sense but I am kind of stuck with him.”

Noam rubs her arm with one meaty hand comfortingly, “Well, guess that means we are stuck with him too.”

Maeve peaks out from between her fingers. She plunges her hand back into the chip bag and this time grabs a whole handful.

Sol is nodding. “Yeah, whatever you need. We are here to support you.” There is a pause as both they and Noam look at Sia pointedly.

Sia is chewing her lip thoughtfully, deep into a frown. She catches Sol’s gaze and sighs with frustration, “Yes, of course.” She leans forward and narrows her eyes at Maeve, “But don’t think I will hesitate to kick his codependent emo ass the second he hurts you.”

Noam chuckles and Sol rolls their eyes at Sia’s mama bear attitude. Maeve chuckles nervously, forcing a smile.

Already too late.

She unconsciously rubs the crook of her elbow with the back of her hand and eats another chip, hoping the chewing will mask her expression.