

Blood That Binds Ep 6 - Four Witches and a Vampire Walk Into a Bar

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A few days later, evening

A Dingy Bar

“So, can you control people’s minds?”

Sol is perched on the bar stool with one foot on the foot rest, the other on the seat and their knee tucked into their chest. A long green silly-straw curls its way up to their lips. The bottom lip is covered in bright blue lipstick, the other glitters gold.

Dolan raises a dram of whiskey to his lips and takes a slow sip before answering, then contemplates it with a scowl.

“This is terrible.” He sighs, “I can...persuade people to believe certain things, or to be more inclined to do my will.”

“Fascinating.”

Sol responds, wrapping their colored lips around the straw to take a drink.

Noam shrugs, scrolling through social media on his phone, “Typical vampire bullsh.”

“It’s highly unethical.”

Sia sets her beer down firmly on the table and purses her lips.

“That’s a little judgemental.”

Dolan counters, swirling his drink with dissatisfaction.

Sia leans forward, holding his eyes for a moment, then shifts in her seat. The red faux leather of the stool squeaks softly against her shiny black leggings.

“Well, what if you want to fuck someone, for example?”

“Here we go.”

Maeve runs a hand through her hair and leans as far back from the table as she can, sucking rum and coke through a stirring straw. She looks away from the table, suddenly fascinated by the neon lighting inlaid around the bar.

Dolan grins, "If I wanted to...have sex with someone?"

He pulls the drawstring of his black hoodie back and forth slowly.

"If you were using mind control to coerce them, that's not consensual. It's rape."

Sia sits back and takes a drink, crossing her arms.

"I said I could persuade people, not control their minds."

Dolan counters. He slumps in towards the center of the table.

"You're telling me you've never used a glamour in your makeup, or felt a little magic stir when the... juices... get flowing."

"Aaand I'm going to get some popcorn."

Maeve hops off her chair abruptly and leaves the table.

Sia shakes her head, "That's not the same thing."

She touches her hair, checking the twist in the red kerchief holding it in a high, elegant shape.

"Putting a little magic in my makeup or hair may help someone see me as more feminine or find me attractive, but that doesn't mean their free will is being tampered with."

Dolan examines his sharp nails, abandoning the drink entirely on the table.

"Well, what I do is similar, just with a little oomph. I may be able to make someone open a door for me, move out of my way, let me cut in line for coffee..."

Sol watches the verbal exchange like it is the world's most fascinating ping pong match. Their eyes are bright with curiosity, and startle slightly when Dolan looks directly at them.

"Or imply to someone that they should...lower their inhibitions," He says softly before returning his gaze smoothly to his opponent, "But I certainly can't make someone have sex with me against their will."

He raises the dram to his lips, then pauses, his brow furrowed.

"Nor would I."

Maeve, who has just approached the table again, turns on her heel, heading swiftly for the jukebox.

“So what you’re saying is,” Noam slips in, eyes still on his phone, “Your vampire juju really isn’t any more powerful than Umbrosia’s magic.”

He glances up and raises his eyebrows.

“Maeve’s conduit witchcraft must really kick your ass.”

Dolan chuckles, his grin slightly sour, “Well...” He raises his dram and cocks his head, “I wouldn’t say that.”

Umbrosia matches his cocked head, narrowing her eyes in challenge. Maeve has made it to the jukebox and a heavy bass beat rolls out over the bar. Happy hour ends and the bartender dims the lights, affecting a twilight state of mood lighting designed to keep the patrons unaware of time passing with each drink.

“Prove it.”

Sol breaks the heavy silence, twirling their nose ring. Dolan sputters a little on his drink, but they continue.

“Let’s do an experiment!”

The excitement in their voice is tangible, and they shift out of their barstool to stand next to the table instead. Their intention is to increase in height, but in reality they are slightly shorter standing than sitting on the stool. They push their drink to the side energetically and it spills on the table.

“First one to get someone to dance with and buy them a drink wins.”

Sia scoffs, “What are we, in middle school?”

She keeps her eyes leveled at Dolan.

Without fully looking up, Noam mops up the spilled booze with a napkin he then crumples and drops in the center of the table.

“What’s the matter Sia? Saying you didn’t put any glamour on tonight?”

“Or are you just afraid of a little competition?”

Dolan examines his nails, then lowers them and meets her eyes, scratching circles on the table with his index finger. The two of them look away to listen to the music and glance around the bar, calculating. There are plenty of patrons, and while the music and mood lighting have shifted the energy, no one is remotely interested in the dance floor yet.

Maeve approaches the table again cautiously, trying to read lips from a distance, but no one is speaking.

Abruptly, Umbrosia stands, gaining significant height even in her converse.

"Fine. You're on. First one to get the same person to dance with *and* buy them a drink wins."

Dolan nods and picks up her empty beer bottle.

"I will refresh our drinks. The first song is lady's choice."

Maeve catches just the last few lines of conversation, joining Noam and Sol at the side of the table facing the dance floor and setting the popcorn basket on the table.

"What the hell did I miss now?"

She watches in confusion as Dolan heads for the bar and Sia approaches the jukebox.

"Hey, I just put money in that! Now she's gonna steal all my song spots."

Noam and Sol slowly turn towards the dance floor as the music changes abruptly to a much sexier, upbeat hip-hop track. Noam slips his phone into his cargo shorts pocket.

"You know this is totally just gonna turn into a dance off, right?"

His eyes follow Umbrosia, who is still by the jukebox, but beginning to swing her hips to the music.

Sol has their eyes on Dolan, who is at the bar getting drinks, tapping a foot in time and surveying the patrons for likely seductees,

"One hundred percent."

The two high five, eyes still glued to their targets like gamblers watching their steeds at a horse race.

Maeve rolls her eyes, walking away towards an empty seat at the bar with a huffed, "Oh dear goddess."

She only makes it halfway to the bar when Dolan intercepts her, a drink in each hand.

"Ahem," He says, "Haven't we forgotten something?"

"You've got to be kidding me." She looks around at the bar, "Didn't you have a late lunch? You can't be hungry yet."

"Well..." He rocks up on his toes and lowers his voice, "I *might* have used some magic earlier, and now your friends have challenged me to--"

Maeve cuts him off, "Yeah, I heard."

She shifts, popping out one hip and looking around the bar.

"Well, we can't do it here. There is an alley outside between this and the next bar. Meet me there in five."

She brushes past him, bumping his shoulder and spilling his drink.

Dolan plasters on a grin and, alcohol dripping from his fingers, brings Umbrosia her beer. Maeve finishes her rum and coke and sets her glass on the bar, zipping up her black leather jacket as she heads outside. The weather is starting to turn chilly and small glowing embers mark the clusters of smokers outside the bar entrance. Cars and bar signs provide enough light to see by, but with her eyes trained on the sidewalk and shoulders shrugged up in irritation she nearly walks into a darkly clothed figure with white-blond hair.

"Sorry." She mumbles, moving around the tall, lithe figure.

"No biggie." The woman turns to watch Maeve, sucking on a cigarette. The red glow reveals colorful tattoos winding along the woman's chest, hand and arm.

Maeve looks back over her shoulder as she passes, catching a glimpse of the tattoos and long legs stretching below a tight leather skirt. She smiles and blushes, then continues around the corner into the alley.

Several minutes later, Maeve is still alone in the alley with her arms crossed against the chill. She glances around the corner, envying the smokers their ritual of nicotine and fellowship. Before she can step out to bum a smoke off the pretty blonde badass, Dolan steps out of the bar.

"Fucking pain in the ass." She mumbles, slumping back against the wall.

He appears moments later, eyes already glowing and fangs peaking out.

“Protection charm?”

He asks without formality, although he can already smell the answer.

Maeve gestures to the bottle sitting on the ground a few feet away, then starts shrugging off one arm of her jacket. Dolan places a hand on her arm to stop her. Their eyes meet and she can instantly feel the hunger hit her, the magic in her pushing towards him.

“Don’t you think it would look a bit odd to anyone walking by if I was sucking on your arm?” He asks, tousling the front of his red hair.

“Well,” Maeve sighs, tugging her jacket back up, “What do you suggest?”

She slumps against the brick wall.

Dolan runs one hand to the back of his neck and tucks the other into his hoodie pocket.

“Uhhh...” He rocks back onto his heels, “Your Aunt and I-”

Maeve’s jaw tenses, but he raises a hand and continues.

“I used to feed from her neck in these...situations. To look more like a...couple...”

Maeve looks at him blankly for a moment, then her face screws up in disgust.

“Oh, you’ve got to be fucking kidding me.”

Dolan lowers his eyes to his shoes, blowing air out through his lips. Maeve crosses her arms and glares through his head into the wall behind him. After a few moments she drops her arms in exasperation.

She pulls her hair to one side to expose her neck.

“Fine. Just...please don’t make this grosser than it has to be.”

He approaches awkwardly, shifting uncomfortably around her to find the position with as little of their bodies touching as possible. He places one hand on the wall and arches his back, stretching his neck and torso out so that in the end only his shoulders touch her. He lays his tongue on her neck just long enough to apply his numbing saliva along her artery. The hair on the back of her neck stands up and a creeping, sticky feeling crawls over her skin. He can smell the citrus of her magic turn a little sour as her discomfort spreads. He tilts his head back and

forth a few times, trying to find an angle where he can reach the vein without touching her with any other part of him, clearing his throat awkwardly. Each small movement brushes his breath and skin against her in some way. Goosebumps rise on her arms.

“Oh for the love of fuck just get this over with, please?”

I am going to shower like fifty times when I get home.

With a frustrated sigh he leans closer, sinks his teeth into her, then cups her head carefully. It hurts a hell of a lot more than the arm bite she is used to. His hand tightens around the base of her skull to stop her instinct to jerk away. After the initial pain, she holds perfectly still, suddenly acutely aware that he has teeth in a pretty significant blood pathway, and that if she were to rip away it could mean a very fast and very large loss of blood. She can feel the blood and magic pulsing out of her and into him in a big rush, feel his hunger fading. She breathes deeply, grounding her palms against the brick wall behind her and trying to draw more magic from outside herself. The technique seems to counteract the faintness and nausea she has come to expect since creating the protection charm.

After only a few moments, he slowly shifts his hand so it is around her throat and applies pressure near the bite, cutting off the blood flow. Only then does he pull away, licking the bite closed and watching it heal before he removes his hand and takes a large step back from her.

He clears his throat, both hands in his pockets, “Are you, um, all right?”

Maeve reaches up to touch her neck, then bends to retrieve her protection bottle. She clasps it tightly in her hand and nods. They both step out of the alley, walking side by side in stony, uncomfortable silence.

“So we probably should talk about--” Dolan says after a moment.

“If you ever mention this to anyone I will hex your dick off.”

Maeve quickens her pace, stomping through the smokers and into the bar ahead of him. They split off immediately inside, Maeve to an empty spot at the bar and Dolan towards the dance floor.

In the time it took Dolan to feed, Sia has already enticed a small but growing crowd to the dance floor. A ring of onlookers surrounds the dancers, most of them with eyes on her. Her body twists, thrusts and girates in perfect, graceful time with the music from the toes of her converse to the top of her twisted hair. Dolan stops in his tracks for a moment just a few feet from where Noam and Sol are still seated.

“She kicks ass, doesn’t she?” Noam calls to him. The giant man’s phone is in his hand, but his eyes are on the dance floor.

Dolan pulls his gaze away to see the smug grins on their faces.

“Nothing to sneeze at.”

He smiles and begins pulling off his hoodie.

“But I haven’t passed as human for the last 400 years by getting behind on the times.”

He tosses the hoodie to Sol, who catches it with a wide-eyed laugh. Without the grungy statement piece, his clothes look a bit more adult; an acid-washed gray tee with black, slim-fitting jeans and blood red sneakers. He moves to the edge of the dance floor near the jukebox and after a moment looking through the list, puts in a dollar and selects a song on the touch screen, moving his selection to the next in the queue.

He then settles in, studying Umbrosia and the crowd around her. So far most of the dancers are women, but the onlookers are a mix. They are enthralled by her. Those who glance in her direction can’t seem to look away. He inhales deeply through his nose, searching through the smell of cheap alcohol, body spray and sweat for her magic. Something vaguely familiar tickles through his nose to his memory, but it isn’t what he’s looking for, and it fades away on the second inhale. After a moment, he catches the smell of Umbrosia’s glamour magic: cinnamon and sea salt.

He cracks his neck.

The song ends and Umbrosia takes a breather, hugging a few of the other dancers she recognizes. Several people trickle from the dance floor to refresh their drinks as the next song begins with a slow, heavy intro. Dolan weaves his way through the exiting people until he is face to face with Umbrosia.

“Glad you finally decided to show up,” Sia sways her hips slowly to the music, “And didn’t make a terrible song choice.”

Dolan simply grins at her, and they lock eyes in the moment before the beat drops.

As it does, she steps seamlessly back into freestyle hip-hop, grinding and spinning a full 360 degrees. But when she turns back around, Dolan is no longer there. Instead, he is in the corner looking into the eyes of a very tall, large and handsome young man. Sia nearly misses a beat when, a few moments later, Dolan leads the man onto the dance floor and the two begin dancing very close together.

Sia's nostrils flare, *Well his dance moves might not be smooth, but his game sure is.*

She puts a bit more movement into her hips, and begins making eye contact with a few onlookers. By the next song, she has a man behind her and a woman in front of her in a smooth tangle of skin and rhythm.

Maeve observes the spectacle from the bar with a smirk.

Both of them are definitely going to turn more than a few heads tonight.

She looks to the bartender to order another drink, only to see him setting a rocks glass full of rum and coke in front of her. She can tell by the pale color it is strongly mixed. In almost the same moment, long, tattooed fingers appear on the bar next to the drink. Several elaborate silver rings ornament them and the nails are unpainted, but long and pointed. A few messily folded bills are pinched deftly between the pointer and middle fingers.

"Mind if I get this one?"

Maeve follows the twisting array of tattoos up the woman's forearm, picking up bright little demons and fairy faces, script and birds amidst a tangle of thorny vines. They bring her to a face she can see much more clearly in the bar than she could by the glow of a cigarette. Thick eyebrows stand out on porcelain skin above deep-set eyes heavily defined with black, smokey makeup.

Maeve's own eyes sparkle as she nods slowly, "Sure, never turn down a free drink."

The woman hands the bills to the bartender with a smile and gets most of it back in change, along with whiskey and soda. Maeve watches the swish of long, ice-blond hair as the woman turns her head, but quickly returns her attention to her drink as blue eyes fall back on her. After a short sip, Maeve raises her eyes again to meet the woman's.

"Usually when people buy me a drink they also introduce themselves." She challenges, then softens with a smile, "I'm Maeve."

The woman offers her hand, "Rona."

Maeve takes it briefly, "That's a beautiful name." She smiles, trying not to blush.

Please do not misunderstand my compliment, She thinks desperately, trying to press her intention out as warm pink energy through her fingers, *I am being so queer with you right now.*

With her third eye, she sees the energy snap and crackle with nervous static where their hands meet.

Rona chuckles and takes her hand back, pulling out a stool to take a seat, "Thank you. To be fair, I didn't pick it out on my own."

"Bet you picked those clothes, though." Maeve counters, turning her body towards Rona and taking another sip of her drink.

Rona swirls the ice in her untouched drink, "And?"

Maeve nearly spills her drink as she pulls it away from her mouth and gestures emphatically to Rona's entire outfit, "You look like a fucking badass."

Ah, yes, She thinks, Nothing says "I'm super gay for you" like telling a girl you like her clothes. How basic straight white girl can I sound right now?

Rona leans forward slightly, her crossed legs tangling against Maeve's. Gently, she wipes a drop of rum from Maeve's chin.

"Thanks."

Her eyes flick down to Maeve's leather jacket, ripped jeans and black heels.

"I like your shoes."

She leans back, legs still brushing Maeve's.

Maeve smiles and her eyes drop down to her drink, then flick away as she feels a familiar blue energy heading her way. She looks up and past Rona to see Noam heading towards the bar, an empty drink in his hands. He sees her and waves, but stops when Rona turns around to look. Taking in their body language in an instant, he smiles and waggles his eyebrows suggestively at them.

Maeve tries to shoo him away silently with Rona looking away from her, then sets her elbow on the bar with a thud to hide the gesture as the woman turns back.

Rona takes a long drink of her whiskey and soda, then grimaces.

"This whiskey is shit."

It seems for a moment she will ignore the interaction with Noam, but then, "Well, at least your friends know you're into women. It can be difficult with people totally in the closet, having to sneak around all the time."

Maeve gently rests her head in her hand, a mixture of relief and defeat.

“Good to know my flirting is more obvious than I thought. Most of the time girls just think I’m SUPER NICE.”

Maeve’s voice jumps up to a very peppy octave and two fingers separate from her drink to form air quotes, nearly causing it to spill again.

Rona smoothly sets one hand on Maeve’s thigh, brushing her thumb along skin showing through a rip in the jeans.

“I didn’t buy a sexy woman a drink just because I was starving for conversation.”

She pulls back a little, her long fingers resting lightly on Maeve’s knee.

“Although I could use some of that, too.”

Maeve blushes, her eyes on the hand brushing her knee. After a few moments, she looks up at Rona again.

“My friends also know I’m into dudes.” She bites her lip, “That can be a real turn-off for some girls.”

Rona tosses her head back for a short, full-bodied laugh, ending it with an empathetic smile as she raises her glass to clink with Maeve’s.

“Well that’s just fucking stupid.”

Across the room, Sol sits alone at the group’s original table. Noam is still at the bar, apparently deep in conversation with a friend from Temple. Sol sucks at the melting contents of a nearly empty glass, their blue and gold lip colors now smudging together and fading at the inner edges. The dance floor is full, and their view of Dolan and Sia is blocked, so there isn’t much to do but look around at the bar patrons as they contemplate ordering another drink. Just before they reach for their phone, eyes glazed over, a tall glass of neon sugary liquor with a fresh crazy straw is plopped enthusiastically in front of them.

Startled, Sol looks to their left to see Dolan sitting there, grinning.

“Saw you needed another drink.”

Dolan raises his own drink to his mouth, still making a face at the cheap whiskey.

Sol gives half a smile.

“Thanks.”

They push their empty glass aside in favor of the new one.

“Not interested in dancing?” Dolan asks casually.

Sol shrugs and shifts in their seat. “I don’t really like...touching people. It feels overwhelming to me.”

Dolan nods, “I noticed you avoid skin-to-skin contact. Sorry, I shouldn’t have pried.”

He furrows his brow and sets his drink down.

“No, it’s fine.” Sol waves their hand, “It’s something I usually try to tell people fairly early anyway, if I’m going to be around them regularly.”

Soll mimes pulling away from a handshake.

“Hi, I’m Sol, I’m nonbinary and please don’t touch me.” They laugh a little and roll their eyes, “It’s great for impressing people in job interviews”

Dolan smiles crookedly.

“You certainly impressed me right away.”

He traces a long fingernail in the condensation on his glass.

“You’re quite brave and...energetic.”

Sol’s ears turn slightly red.

“You barely know me.”

“Sure, but I haven’t been...what’s the word...chastised? By such a small human before. At least, not in a long time. Certainly not one that just saw me sink my fangs into their friend.”

Sol sits up straight and puffs their chest out.

“Who the hell are you calling small? I bet you weigh all of 150 lbs soaking wet.”

Dolan holds up his palms defensively.

“My apologies, I take it back, you’re not small.”

Sol settles back a bit and Dolan raises his glass to his mouth.

Slightly muffled through his glass, he adds, “You’re short.”

Sol sticks their tongue out at him. The two settle into a few moments of silence, looking towards the dance floor and listening to the music. Sol takes a few more sips of their drink.

“Aren’t you supposed to be kicking Sia’s ass on the dance floor?”

“Well,” Dolan sighs, “Dancing is only half the bet. I also have to get one of my dance partners to buy me a drink.”

“So?”

Sol raises an eyebrow and shifts their body to face Dolan, switching which knee is tucked up to their chest.

“If you can make someone open a door for you, I would think you can make them buy you a drink.”

Dolan chuckles around a sip of his whiskey.

“Maybe I want to lose so that Umbrosia will underestimate me. Or...”

He gestures with his glass, raising the pointer finger on the hand holding it.

“Maybe the only halfway interesting person in the room doesn’t want to dance.”

Sol cranes their neck towards the patrons at the bar.

“Who?”

Dolan smiles and mutters under his breath, “The clueless owl.”

“What? Sorry, couldn’t hear you.”

Sol’s attention is still on the other patrons, trying to guess which one might have caught Dolan’s attention.

“Doesn’t matter.”

Dolan waves the question away, diverting Sol’s curiosity with another one.

“Do you actually dislike dancing, or is it just the aversion to touch that keeps you away?”

Sol’s head snaps back, directly meeting Dolan’s eyes.

“Oh, I love dancing.”

Their gaze wanders back towards the dance floor.

“But I mostly dance by myself, alone in my room.”

They turn back to meet Dolan’s eyes again. The vampire frowns, eyes softening. Sol’s face splits into a grin.

“Ew! Hey, don’t feel bad for me. That’s gross.”

Dolan grins back and narrows his eyes at Sol.

“I have an idea.”

He hops down off of his bar stool.

“What if I could promise no one would touch you out there? Not even by accident”

Sol narrows their eyes back at him.

“How could you possibly guarantee that?”

Before Sol can finish the sentence Dolan disappears. Startled, Sol swings their body around to face the other way, only to lurch back and nearly fall off their chair when they find themselves face-to-face with Dolan, who moves faster than the eye can see.

Dolan leans in slowly, still smiling, “Vampire speed.”

Sol looks skeptically at him for a moment, sucking on their crazy straw until the contents begin to make a slurping sound and Dolan’s eyes shift back and forth, trying to judge their reaction. When the drink is empty, Sol plunks it down and climbs off of the bar stool with a slight stumble.

“Ok, I’ll bite. Let’s see if your personal-space-protecting skills are up to... speed.”

Sol giggles at their own pun as the two of them stroll over to the dance floor.

Several minutes later, having finished his conversation, Noam heads towards the group's table only to find it filled with strangers.

"What the hell?"

He scans the room and quickly locates each of his friends on the dance floor.

Umbrosia dances solo in the center of a large group of onlookers, most of whom are too mesmerized by her to do much dancing. She doesn't even notice them. Sol's diminutive stature is more difficult to spot, but after a few moments he sees them dancing within a small, empty circle. Noam blinks and gives his drink a wary glare as he sees what appears to be Dolan moving at inhuman speeds to defensively dance between Sol and other people, keeping everyone at least a foot away from the enthusiastic Latinx shorty.

"Typical vampire bullsh."

Noam concludes, searching for his final companion.

Maeve dances proudly like it's amateur night at the strip club, using a tall blonde in stilettos as her pole. As Noam watches, the blonde whispers something into Maeve's ear and kisses her neck. Maeve turns bright red and laughs, then pushes the blonde woman up against the jukebox and kisses her passionately, bodies pressing together.

Noam smiles, settling himself into one of the few booths lined up against the wall.

"Everybody's gettin' laid."

With a sigh of contentment he pulls his phone out of his pocket and melts into the worn black pleather cushions.