



The Undead In My Bed (Half Moon Hollow series)

By Katie MacAlister, Jessica Sims, Molly Harper

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Under the covers, these lovers come alive!

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When lonely were-jaguar Ruby consults a paranormal matchmaker, she hopes to finally move on from a heart-wrenching breakup with her one true love, a forbidden human. Nervously agreeing to a blindfolded first date with a vampire, she finds the spicy scent of him intoxicating, his voice low, sexy, and so very familiar. . . .

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- Sales Rank: #215772 in eBooks
- Published on: 2012-09-25
- Released on: 2012-09-25
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Growing up in a family where a weekly visit to the library was a given, **Katie MacAlister** spent much of her time with her nose buried in a book. When she was contracted to write a nonfiction book about software, her editor refused to allow her to include witty dialogue or love scenes, so Katie swiftly resolved to switch to fiction, in which she could indulge in world building, tormenting her characters, and falling madly in love with all her heroes. Her novels have been translated into numerous languages, been recorded as audiobooks, received several awards, and are regulars on the *New York Times*, *USA TODAY*, and *Publishers Weekly* bestseller lists. She also writes for the young adult audience as Katie Maxwell. Katie lives in the Pacific Northwest. You can visit her website at KatieMacAlister.com.

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Undead In My Bed

Chapter One

That woman is hopelessly inept at trespassing.”

The female form clinging to the top of the stone wall attached on either side of the massive wrought-iron walls weaved perilously.

“If she’s not careful,” I told the cat standing next to me, watching as the female peered down at the shrubs beneath her, “she’s going to fall right into that patch of . . . there, you see?”

The trespasser, I was mildly interested to note, wasn’t the angular blonde who’d attacked me the day before. This woman was smaller and rounder, pleasantly plump, with a mass of dark red curls pulled back from her face. A few strands had escaped in her efforts to scale the wall, and I wondered if she knew that a clump of leaves was listing to the side, tangled in the depths of her hair.

She must have realized that she had landed in a patch of poison oak, because after a few seconds of muttering to herself, she leaped up shrieking and drew a few quick symbols in the air.

“Did she just ward herself?” I asked the cat.

He sneered.

“That’s what I thought.” I frowned at the woman as she gathered up the things that had fallen out of her handbag. As she turned, I got a better look at her face. A jolt of electricity tingled up my spine when I realized that she was the nun I’d seen the night before. “What sort of a holy woman knows about wards?”

Johannes did not answer, not that he could—a small blessing for which I’d been thankful over the course of the last three centuries.

“It doesn’t matter,” I said with grim determination as I strode after the woman when she hurried past me on

the pitted gravel drive. “Whatever it is the little nun is doing here, it’s going to stop right now.”

She didn’t hear me until I was about to grab her, and then she barely had time to gasp as she whirled around. I slapped one hand over her mouth, the other on her neck.

Wide gray eyes considered me for three seconds before the lids fluttered closed as she toppled forward. I released my hold on her neck, catching her and swinging her up into my arms. “Now we’ll get some answers,” I told the unconscious woman as I carried her into the lodge.

She felt warm and soft in my arms, the faint scent of lilacs teasing my nose. I sternly told my libido to stop noticing just how nice a scent that was or that her face was lightly freckled, her skin as smooth as satin, all of which left me with the desire to stroke her soft curves. Her mouth looked as soft as the rest of her, a delicate rose in color, as if she’d been eating strawberries. A sudden rush of blood to my groin had me reminding myself that lusting after a nun was not appropriate, especially one who disregarded newly installed chains and locks and innumerable “No Trespassing” signs scattered around the estate. Still, it took some effort to force my gaze away from the temptation of her sweetly curved lips.

It took ten minutes to round up some twine from the remains of a broken packing box, but after a few minutes, I stepped back and admired my handiwork. The woman was slumped in a chair, her hands bound behind her, a gag around her neck waiting to be pulled forward and put into place in case she started screaming.

Johannes sniffed at her feet and turned away, apparently bored. I wasn’t fooled in the least. He always took profound interest in any female.

“Hrn?” The little nun snorted and blinked, squinting at me as I stood before her, my arms crossed. “Fleg?”

“Do you speak English?” I asked, switching to French. “French? German?”

“I’m English,” she answered, blinking rapidly as she obviously tried to bring me into focus. “Who are you? Did you . . . ough, my head . . . knock me out?”

“I applied pressure to your neck, causing you to black out,” I said sternly, trying hard not to notice how her breasts swelled when she struggled to bring her arms forward.

“You Vulcan neck-pinched me? Why am I tied up? And did you know you’re a Dark One?”

I frowned. “What does a nun know of either Vulcan neck pinches or Dark Ones?”

She stopped trying to free her hands. “I’m not a nun, I’m a Guardian. And a Beloved, so I know a Dark One when I see him. Or her. But mostly, you’re hims, not hers, aren’t you? Do you have any pain tablets? I had a repulsively annoying headache before you Vulcanized me, and now it’s just that much worse.”

“No,” I answered, increasing the intensity of my frown. The little nun didn’t seem to be the least bit intimidated to find herself bound and held prisoner.

“No you don’t know you’re a Dark One, no you’re not mostly males, or no you don’t have any pain meds?” Her eyes shimmered with gentle curiosity.

“Of course I know I’m a Dark One,” I snapped, annoyed and at the same time strangely pleased that she wasn’t afraid of me. “I’ve been one almost my entire life. You are not a Beloved, however.”

“I am,” she said, looking down at her feet. “Hullo. Is that your cat?”

“No. Don’t talk to him.” I scented the air. The lodge, like the Abbey itself, was a damp, mildewed, crumbling relic of grander times. The air was redolent with the smell of molds, wetness, and the leavings of various small animals that had claimed the lodge for their own. Tattered bits of wallpaper moved gently in a draft from a broken window, the walls streaked with equal amounts of grime and quiet despair.

And yet, despite the odors of the decaying building, the scent of sun-warmed lilacs lingered, stirring something deep in my belly.

“If you were a Beloved, I would know,” I told her.

“Is something wrong with his mouth?” she asked, making little chirruping noises at Johannes until—as I knew he would—the massive cat leaped onto her knees and purred at her, his eyes half-closed.

“Yes. You are not a Beloved.”

“I thought so, because most cats don’t have one lip pulled up so a fang shows all the time. Was he hurt or something?”

“No, it is simply how he is,” I answered, wanting to simultaneously shake her and kiss her.

Her gaze assessed me. “He’s not your cat, but you know he wasn’t hurt?”

“No, he is not my cat. He simply lives with me and accompanies me wherever I go. That is all. Why is a Guardian pretending to be a Beloved and a nun?”

“Why is a Dark One abducting innocent people?” she countered.

I leaned over her in an attempt to intimidate. “Why did you climb over the fence when the signs clearly state that your presence is not welcome?”

She blinked those lovely soft gray eyes at me. “You’re the one who put up the signs? Did you also chain the gate closed? We thought it might be the local authorities, although Teresa did show the police the documents the estate agent sent her, but you know how it is with Czech officials—they do love their paperwork—and Teresa figured she must have missed dotting an i or crossing a t.”

“I am Czech,” I said with much dignity.

“Really?” She tipped her head to consider me, not in the least bit intimidated by me, dammit. “You don’t sound Czech. You sound British, like me. Who are you, exactly?”

“My name is Gray. Grayson Soucek, if you were going to ask, and I suspect you were, since you seem to ask everything else that occurs to you.”

She giggled, and the sound went straight to my groin. I ignored the tightening sensation, grimly reminding

myself that not only was she trouble, but even assuming that she wasn't really a nun, she was a housebreaker or, at best, a squatter, neither of which I intended on tolerating.

"Hi, Gray, I'm Noelle. I've always been naturally curious, and I found out a long time ago that if you don't ask questions, you won't learn the answers. I like your name, and it does sound Czech, but what are you doing here? And why have you abducted me? Why do you have a cat who isn't your cat? And why don't you think I'm a Beloved?"

You don't smell like one.

"That could be because the man I was supposed to end up with chose someone else over me," she said in a voice that had curiously lost its luster.

Startled, I took a step back. "What did you say?"

"You don't know him, do you? His name is Sebastian, and his replacement Beloved—who, I admit, is a very dear friend, and really, I couldn't be happier for them, especially now that they're expecting their first child, but still, you can understand how having your Dark One want someone else could wound your ego—his replacement Beloved's name is Belle. Ysabelle, really. We used to share a flat. Could you untie me? Your kitty wants me to pet him."

I took a deep breath, mentally shaking my head at both my surprise and the fact that I found this woman, this housebreaker and possible nun, more attractive with each word out of her delectable mouth. "No, I do not know a Dark One named Sebastian, not that I asked you about him in the first place. I will untie you, but if you make any attempt to escape, you will find yourself in a much worse position than you are currently in."

"You did ask me, you know," Noelle said as I moved behind her to slice the twine binding her wrists. "You said I don't smell like one, and I explained why I don't smell at all."

Again, I was aware of a sense of something profoundly unexpected happening. I didn't say anything about you smelling.

"Yes, you did. I heard you. Hullo, puss. Aren't you a big boy, then? What's your name?"

Johannes, I answered as I moved around to the front again, wondering to myself if I had suddenly gone insane.

"I'm afraid I can't answer that, not having known you for more than ten minutes, but I can say that it's not exactly normal popping out at people and Vulcan neck-pinching them. But outright insane? Hard to say. You are such a loving kitty, aren't you, although you have a very unusual name." Her head bent over Johannes as she murmured soft little words of affection to the cat. He'd eat up every word, I knew, and make everyone's life a hell until he finally grew tired of her.

"This cannot be," I said, shaking my head. "No. It is an aberration. You cannot hear me."

"I can, you know," she said, still nuzzling Johannes.

It doesn't make any sense.

“What doesn’t—oooh!” Her eyes widened as she realized that I had not spoken aloud. “You didn’t . . . your mouth didn’t . . . holy cats!”

Johannes is anything but a holy cat, I assure you.

Her eyes widened even further. “You did it again! Do you know what this means?”

I watched her warily as she took a step toward me. “Yes. It means that somehow I’ve . . . er . . .”

“Marked me!” she yelled, and with a whoop of joy, she leaped over Johannes and flung herself into my arms.

My mind may have known that the last thing in the world I should be doing was holding her, but my body certainly celebrated the fact that she was right where it wanted her to be—pressed tight against me, her soft, lush body stirring up all sorts of fires within me. Worse, her tantalizing scent woke the hunger I had just a few hours before sated, the gnawing, biting urge demanding that I dip my head and breathe deeply of her lilac-scented self.

It was madness to allow her to press kisses along my neck, but I couldn’t seem to put her from me as I knew I should.

“You’re my Dark One! I can’t believe it! I never thought I’d find another one after Sebastian, especially since Allie and Belle kept trying to find him for me, but I never clicked with anyone else, and now, here you are, all mysterious and darkly handsome, and I love the cleft in your chin, and you have the most gorgeous green eyes, just like your cat’s, and I’m your Beloved! You can brain-talk to me! I’m so happy!”

“No,” I said at last, gathering every ounce of strength I had in order to put her at arm’s length. It felt so wrong to do so, and yet I knew it was for the best. I had to stop this before it went any further, before she could be hurt.

“No what?” she said, her smile lighting up all the dark places of my heart. The hunger grew, roaring inside me now.

“No, you are not my Beloved.”

The joy so evident in her face faded. “But . . . I am. I know I am.”

I shook my head, not wishing to cause this pain but knowing it was better to sever her hopes now, while they were still newly born and not yet grown to a point where it would devastate her. “We may have a sympathetic link somehow, but I cannot have a Beloved. I am vitiated.”

“You’re what?” The hurt in her eyes quickly faded to curiosity.

I was half tempted to explain the circumstances, but sanity prevailed. “All it means is that I can’t have a Beloved. Now that we’ve dealt with that situation—”

“Have we? I don’t think you saying you can’t have a Beloved when you clearly can and do is dealing with it.”

I ignored the interruption. “Now that we’ve dealt with that, let us move on to the part where you explain to

me just what you and your cohorts in crime are doing to the Abbey, after which I will ring up the local officials and have them remove you from the premises.”

She looked down at her hands for a few seconds. My gut tightened when I saw a glitter of tears in her eyes, but when she lifted her head again, her gaze was forthright and unwavering. “You want to have me arrested because I’m your Beloved?”

“You are not my Beloved. I thought I’d made myself clear—”

“Is it because you don’t like me?” Self-consciously, she brushed a hand down the lightweight summer dress. “I’m sorry I can’t change the way I look, but if I went on a diet, I could probably lose a few pounds.”

“That would be a crime,” I said without thinking, then mentally damned myself for saying it, then damned my damning, because women, it had been my experience, always believed the worst about their appearance, and I couldn’t stand the thought of Noelle believing she was anything but a lovely, sensual goddess put on earth to tempt mankind. “On the contrary, I think your appearance is exquisite. It has, however, nothing to do with—”

“Do you hate Guardians? I can’t leave the Guardians’ Guild, because . . . well, I don’t want to. I like being a Guardian, and I like helping people. But if there was some aspect of Guardians that you objected to, perhaps I could buffer that so it wouldn’t annoy you.”

“I don’t care what the hell you do in your spare time, other than trespassing, that is.”

“So there’s nothing about me personally that you object to?” she asked with obvious relief. “I’m so glad. I have to say, if I was rejected by a Dark One a second time, I’d probably become a hermit and just give up on men. It’s because you’re . . . what did you call it . . . vitiated? That means marked, doesn’t it? But that’s silly. I’m a Guardian. If you’re marked by a demon lord, then I’m just the person to help you. So, really, we’re meant to be together.”

She was back to looking happy again, dammit.

“There’s quite a bit more to being vitiated than simply being marked. No.” I held up my hand to stop her before she could start planning out our lives together. There was no future for us, period. “You are not my Beloved.”

I think I am.

“I do not need a Guardian.”

If a demon lord is after you, then you probably do.

“The only thing I want from you is the names of your cohorts and then for you to remove yourself from the grounds.”

I really want to kiss you. Her eyes widened in horror as she covered her mouth with her fingertips. Tell me you didn’t hear that.

Unbidden, my gaze went to her mouth as she dropped her hand. The hunger roared through me, shaking me

with its strength, actually causing me to step forward until I realized what I was doing and stopped myself. I fought the hunger, fought the need to taste those lips, fought the urge to strip off that gauzy dress and lick every inch of the woman I'd just caught stealing into my grounds.

"I'm sorry if that offended you," she was saying, her voice dimly audible over the growl of the beast inside me demanding that I take life from her. "I'm not normally the type of woman who falls instantly in love with the first devastatingly handsome vampire she finds, but I've heard from other Beloveds that they felt something right away, so I assume that's why I really want to kiss you. And touch your chest. And possibly your legs."

All too easily, the mental image came to mind of her kneeling on a bed next to me, her hand stroking its way up my legs, her lush, ripe body within my reach, waiting for me to taste it, to sate myself on her, to bury myself in her heat while feeding from her . . .

It was too much for me. Without another word, I turned on my heel and marched out of the room, my erection painful but not enough to distract me from the need to take her blood, to consume her, body and soul.

To make her mine.

Users Review

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