

C
O
B
B
L
E
S
T
O
N
E

P
R
E
S
S

Michelle Hasker

THE VAMPIRE ORACLE

The Moon

In The Cards



The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

Cobblestone Press

www.cobblestone-press.com

Copyright ©2008 by Michelle Hasker

First published in 2008

NOTICE: This eBook is licensed to the original purchaser only. Duplication or distribution to any person via email, floppy disk, network, print out, or any other means is a violation of International copyright law and subjects the violator to severe fines and/or imprisonment. This notice overrides the Adobe Reader permissions which are erroneous. This eBook cannot be legally lent or given to others.

This eBook is displayed using 100% recycled electrons.



Distributed by Fictionwise.com

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

CONTENTS

[Dedication](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Author Bio](#)

* * * *

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

The Moon

Copyright© 2008 Michelle Hasker

ISBN: 978-1-60088-262-3

Cover Artist: Sable Grey

Editor: Leanne Salter

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced electronically or in print without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews.

Cobblestone Press, LLC

www.cobblestone-press.com

Dedication

Jessica—Thank you for making me enter the Vampire Oracle contest. Polly—Thank you for helping me break my writer's block.

Tina and Kim—Thank you for the kick in my arse.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter One

Maria Talbuth slammed the door shut. She leaned against it and drew in a deep steadying breath. Things were getting really weird, and right now she couldn't handle anything weirder. If Brett and his wandering hands didn't find someone else to harass, she might have to resort to one of her mother's magical potions.

A shiver danced up her spine at the thought. She'd given all that up in order to have a normal life. No way, no how, was she going back to that kind of lifestyle. Stability and money were more important than spells, magic, and speaking to the dead. Not that she could do any of that anyway. Her spells all flopped, and the dead never spoke back. Thank God for small miracles.

After saying a quick prayer for Brett to go away, Maria peeked through the peephole and watched him move out of the way. The door across the hall opened, and *he* stepped out.

Dylan McKnight. He worked for the detective agency run by his family. His specialty was night work. She'd like to find out if the rumors were true and his real specialty lay in the bedroom. Velma said he brought a woman home at least twice a week, and their cries of pleasure always woke her in the middle of the night.

Dylan's dark blue eyes focused on her door, staring as if he could see her, but that was impossible. No one could see

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

in through the peephole, only out. She'd once tried it out of curiosity.

Faster than she could blink, he pulled his door shut and crossed the hallway, raising his hand to knock on her door. She squeaked and backed away. Even though it was expected, the sound of his hand on the wood made her jump.

"Maria? It's Dylan from across the hall."

"Just a—" Her voice broke. Heat crept up her cheeks as she cleared her throat. She never failed to embarrass herself in front of her handsome neighbor. "Just a minute."

Nerves danced a fancy jig in her stomach while she debated if her clothes would add to her embarrassment. She studied her red tank top, cut off blue jean shorts and sandals. Matching red toenails peeked out at her. In the past it didn't matter how dressed up or down she was. Dylan never gave her a second glance. The painful reminder that she wasn't his type resurfaced. If only she could get him to give her a chance.

She forced a smile as she opened the door. Another harsh rejection from him wasn't on her list of things to accomplish today. She'd ignore her hormones and pray he said whatever he had to say and left quickly.

"Hi, Dylan. What a surprise. Do you need to borrow a cup of sugar or something?" She bounced from one foot to the other and tried to see if Brett still lurked out there. She didn't need to get ensnared in another conversation with that leech.

"Can't you stand still for one minute?"

She froze and looked up at Dylan. His facial expression left no doubt he'd rather be anywhere else than here. Disgust

couldn't be more evident in the curl of his lip or the way his nose flared as he held out a thin white envelope.

"What's this?" Careful not to brush her fingers against his, she accepted the card-sized envelope and looked down at it. It was addressed to her and postmarked El Dorado Springs, Colorado. *No name. How weird.*

"Looks like Billy mixed up our mail *again*. I swear that man should have retired ten years ago."

"He needs the money. You know how lonely he is since Rose died. He—"

"Save it for someone who cares. I just wanted to drop off your mail."

Before she could thank him, the shrill ring of her phone sent all her blood rushing from her head. Suddenly lightheaded, she grabbed onto the door as she swayed.

"Are you okay? You don't look very good."

She swallowed and tried to answer, but her phone rang again. *Right on time*. Dread rose in her, sending goose bumps over her arms and legs.

"Maria?" Dylan grabbed her shoulders and pushed into her apartment. She didn't even think to hesitate as he shut the door and half carried her across the room. He pressed her down into the sofa. "Are you okay?"

The phone rang again, and her answering machine clicked on. "Sorry, no one is home. Please leave a message after the tone." Her voice rang out clear and happy on the machine, but she knew what was to come next wouldn't be happy. Or clear. It never was.

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"Maria." The caller's voice was low and harsh as he crooned her name. She struggled to make out his words even though she knew she wouldn't like what he had to say. "I know you're there. You look lovely today. I can't wait until we can be together."

Maria whimpered and buried her face in a cushion as shudders racked her body.

"Did you wear the peach negligee yet? I bought it, thinking how it would look on your soft, creamy skin. Does it feel good when you wear it? Do you imagine it is my hands, sliding against your body, instead of silk?"

"What the hell? Maria?" When Dylan touched her, she couldn't prevent the whimper that tore past her lips. "Is that an ex-boyfriend?"

Maria shook her head and covered her ears. Experience told her his words would get more cruel and taunting as he went on.

"I hope you enjoy your gifts, Maria. I want you prepared for when I come for you. When I do, you will be reborn again. And you will be mine in all ways, Maria. All ways. Your screams will resound off the walls as I use first your body, then your soul for my pleasure and purification."

Maria pressed her hands even tighter over her ears.

"You will be mine, Maria. Body and soul. It's taken me a long time to find you. I'm coming for you, Maria. Soon."

She heard Dylan growl, then her machine beep as he picked up the receiver. "Whoever you are, Maria is under my protection. Don't think about setting one foot in this building

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

or even this block. If you come near her, I'll tear you apart limb by limb and throw your carcass in the Delaware."

Mad laughter echoed in her ears even though she couldn't hear if the caller responded. *Why can I hear him in my head? God, he's sick. Crazy. Why is this man after me?*

"You picked the wrong woman to stalk this time, buddy. I—"

Silence filled the room. When Dylan cursed, she realized her admirer must have hung up on him. Shivering again, she stumbled off the sofa and raced for her bathroom as her stomach churned. Blinded by tears of anger and fright, she sank to her knees next to the toilet and tried not to throw up.

Gentle hands caressed the nape of her neck as Dylan pulled her hair back and whispered soothingly. She collapsed against him, letting her tears have free rein. She was tired of pretending everything was okay. She needed a knight in shining armor.

"Maria?"

The realization of who comforted her sank in. Though she knew she should pull away, she didn't want to. While she might secretly be in lust with him, Dylan didn't even like her. Even if he offered her relief, it would be temporary.

He didn't feel the attraction she did. Her body hungered for him with an intensity that frustrated her most nights. Instead of finding relief with someone, she always came home alone. Night after night. No one could arouse her like he could with just one look. If he wanted to put his arms around her, she'd take what she could get before he remembered he didn't like her.

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"Maria. You have to talk to me, baby. Who was that? An ex-boyfriend? A disgruntled employee?"

"I don't know. I don't know who it is." She pulled free and rubbed her arms, trying to get warm but knowing she'd never be warm again. Instead of pulling away, she wanted to let Dylan hold her close and promise she'd be safe from now on. Damn, she needed to get a grip on reality. He didn't want her, and she didn't need him. Much.

"I saw your reaction to the phone call. There's more to this than you're admitting. Talk to me, baby. What's going on?"

"It isn't just the phone call. Whoever this guy is, he's been sending me presents in the mail. To get that card and then have the phone ring..."

"Was there a return address on the card?" Dylan released her and walked back to her living room.

She didn't want to follow, but she had to know what was in the envelope. "A partial one, but no name or street address, so it won't be very helpful. I don't even know anyone in El Dorado Springs, or Colorado for that matter. Is that the right zip code for El Dorado Springs? We can't be sure that it's his actual address."

"Or that it's from him. Where have the other things from him been postmarked?" Dylan examined the envelope, turned it over, and looked at the seams.

When he held it up to the light, she leaned close to see if they could see through it. There was something that looked like a huge playing card.

Before she could lean closer, he brought his arm back down and sniffed the envelope.

"I'm sure there's no chemical poisoning. It sounds like he wants to hurt me in person, not from mailing me something."

"We don't know that it's from your secret admirer." He frowned and shook the envelope for a moment, then opened it. He peered inside as he pried the flap open.

Maria leaned over, curiosity winning over her fear. But before she could see inside, he gasped and dropped the envelope.

"What is it?" She backed up against the wall, waiting for something to crawl out of it. "What's in it?"

"A card." He wiped his hand on his jeans, and her gaze focused on the spot where the material pulled taut. "Are you into tarot? Do you practice?"

"I don't believe in tarot. Or magic." Even as she said the lie, she dragged her gaze away from his groin and looked down at the envelope.

Dylan's scent teased her senses. He smelled of cinnamon and spice, and something completely and utterly male. Desire settled thickly in her stomach. Instead of drooling over someone she couldn't have, she should concentrate on the card.

Why had Dylan dropped it as if it were on fire? Her gaze flickered back to his groin. She'd really like to know if the rumors were true. Just being near the man made her want to do irrational things. One minute ago she'd been on her bathroom floor, shaking in fear, and now she couldn't stop trying to see how big his dick was. *Get a friggin' grip, woman!*

She leaned over and picked up the envelope, holding it by the corner to study it. Why had Dylan freaked when he'd opened it and seen a tarot card inside?

Red and black caught her eye first. It was a card, but a little larger than the tarot deck she'd preferred when she used to give readings. It was either an oversized tarot card, or an oracle card. She pulled it out of the envelope and held it up.

"What the..." When she realized what she was holding, she froze.

It looks like a tarot card. Who would send something like this? I refuse to bow to Mom if she thinks this will make me come crawling back home.

The card was black and with a red moon in the center. An ornate decoration sat above the large V. It reminded her of a wrought iron fence or something from the Victorian era.

She flipped the card over and looked at the front. A full moon illuminated what was either fog or wispy clouds. The moon sat low in the night sky and hung over what appeared to be a grassy area with water flowing through the middle. A blood red border ran along the edges with a few ornate lines to match the ones on the back. *It's so beautiful. What can it mean?*

"The Moon." She turned it back and forth again, studying each side briefly.

Dylan cleared his throat. "I don't think this came from your stalker."

She looked up at him.

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"Not only did it give an address, even if it's a partial one, but what reason could he have to send this to you? It's not exactly stalker material."

"I don't know. You're right about one thing, though. This doesn't fit with what he's mailed me before."

Something in the tone of her voice must have put him on alert. "What do you mean? What things has this guy sent you?"

"Lingerie, pictures of me as I'm getting changed, or when I'm sleeping. He started with pictures of me in the park or at the grocery store or library. But the past week he's progressed to sending me pictures of me in here. In the kitchen or the living room. Even the bathroom. And phone calls. He calls when I get home, when I receive one of his packages, and in the middle of the night."

"Why didn't you come to me when these things started?"

"Go to you with my problem?" She stared at him in shock. A small laugh escaped. "Why would I come to you with my problem? You can't stand me."

"Because you know I'm trained to handle situations like this."

She shook her head. "Trained to handle this or not, it's not your problem. It's mine. Besides, you can't even stand to be in the same room with me. Why would I burden you with helping me?"

"You aren't a burden, and what you say isn't true. I can stand to be in the same room with you."

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

She ignored him and looked down at the card again. If it wasn't from her secret admirer, then who was it from? And what did the card mean?

"I think this might be an oracle card. It's not like any tarot card I've ever used before. While the tarot does have The Moon card, I'm not sure this is the same. For tarot, I'd suggest the water represents emotions. My emotions. It's running water, and not stagnant, in this card. Unless this is a path and I'm seeing it as water. But then the meaning is always going to be open to a different interpretation with every reading. It's so subjective."

"You lost me."

Ignoring him, she chewed on her lower lip and studied the card. "The Moon represents fear. This is referring to negative emotions. Even if the person isn't my secret admirer, someone else knows enough about what's going on in my life to send me this."

"Do you think it's someone working with your stalker?"

"No. I don't get any negative energy from the card."

"Negative energy?" He took a step back.

"You hold it and tell me what you think. Come on. What do you think of this?" She held out the card.

Dylan flinched and put his hands behind his back. "I don't know anything about the tarot. I won't be able to help you."

She narrowed her eyes and took a step forward. "Take the card and look at it. What do you think it means?"

"You know, I just don't know. All that stuff is so far out there. I don't put much stock in it." He sidestepped around

her and turned his back to her. "Right now, I'm more concerned about your stalker than some stupid card."

Interesting. She slid her fingertips around the edge of the card and jumped when electricity zapped her. She gasped and dropped the card. As she sucked her finger into her mouth Dylan spun back around.

"Are you all right?"

"Yeah. Static shock."

He shook his head but looked down at the card as if it were alive. He might not admit it, but the card bothered him as much as it intrigued her. She picked it up and walked over to her laptop, woke it from hibernation, and sat down, resting the card against the monitor.

"What are you doing?"

"The only thing I can do. Find out more about this card."

"What about your stalker?"

Maria sighed and looked up at him. "If you're sincere and want to help me, can you please check out my apartment and see if there is some way this guy is getting in here?"

"You're really going to sit there and play with that card while I walk around your apartment? How can you be so uncaring about your personal safety?"

"What more can I do? The police aren't concerned. The guy's done nothing more than watch me. Maybe he doesn't ever plan to do more than watch me. The torture might be what he likes. Besides, you are more than capable of checking out my apartment alone. I know I make you uncomfortable. If I followed you around, you'd feel nervous and rushed. If I

stay out here, distracting myself, you can take your time and do it right."

Dylan frowned and narrowed his eyes. "I always do my job properly no matter what. I wouldn't shirk my duties because of some mistaken belief of yours."

She chuckled. "Mistaken? Honey, if I came onto you right now, you'd run for the door." As she spoke, she walked toward him.

"Don't play games. Not games you won't win." He cleared his throat and backed away from her. He looked nervous and uncomfortable, just like she'd predicted.

"Fine. I know you don't like me, and that you'll be quick and thorough because you take your job seriously. I also know you won't hesitate to leave at the earliest possible moment. You're no threat to me, so don't pretend you are."

He growled and walked away. "Obviously, you're more naïve than I thought."

"Come on, big boy. Jump my bones and fuck my brains out. You know it's what I want anyway."

"I can't believe you kiss your mother with that mouth. You're lucky I know you're teasing. Do you intentionally live to provoke men? No wonder you have a goddamned stalker."

"See? I knew sarcastic sexual harassment would be right up your alley." She looked back down at the card and bit her lip to keep from apologizing. If she could continue this mean sarcastic behavior, she might make it through his inspection of her apartment without embarrassing herself, or throwing herself at him. Damn, he smelled good.

"Do you always lock your windows and doors when you aren't home and before you go to bed?" His breath tickled her ear.

Maria screamed and jumped. She held her hand against her chest, adrenaline racing through her. "Jackass."

He smirked and crossed his arms. "Do you?"

"Did you have to scare the life out of me?"

"Just answer me."

"Of course, I do." She hesitated at his look of disbelief.

"Well, unless I'm running downstairs to get the mail. I mean, we're on the fourth floor. Unless he can fly, I doubt the stalker is climbing in through my window."

"He *is* getting in here and taking pictures of you, though. Have you saved your correspondence from him? Have you notified the police?"

"Yeah, do you think I'm stupid? They want proof. More proof than I have." She sighed. "Want to see my proof?"

"Yeah, I do." Dylan walked over to the counter and pulled out one of the barstools. He looked at her laptop and the card. He didn't touch the card, but he didn't look as afraid of it as he had earlier. He glanced around the rest of her apartment.

Maria walked over to the closet next to the front door. She'd put everything in a box to show the police. The officer had seemed very helpful and concerned when he'd conducted the interview in her apartment, and he'd promised they'd look into matters and find out what was going on. Then when she didn't hear back, she called the station the next day and was told that unless she had evidence of an intruder or someone

that meant her harm, they couldn't help her, but they'd send a police cruiser past her building more often.

What more could she have done to prove it? She'd set out all the evidence, but apparently the officer had been humoring her. It didn't even matter at this point. Maybe Dylan would have some helpful advice, or could step in and get the police to listen to her.

She pulled the box out of the closet and carried it back to the counter that separated her living room and kitchen. The open floor plan of having a kitchen, dining room and living room all in one area was one of the reasons she'd chosen this apartment. And she was grateful for it now that she was stuck here with her deep, dark sexual fantasy and couldn't touch him.

"Here it is. I think it's self-explanatory. Letters, gifts, and pictures all from him." She set the box on the counter and stepped back.

Even though Dylan didn't have any sexual interest in her, the naked pictures of her in the box made her very nervous. What would he think when he saw them?

"Wait!" She stepped around the counter. "Let me remove some of—" Her words caught in her throat when she saw that he had one of the nude shots of her coming out of the shower. In the other hand was a shot of her as she was bent over, putting on her underwear.

"He's been in here with you and you've never seen him?" Dylan turned to look at her, his face full of anger instead of his usual nonchalance.

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"I didn't know." Maria shivered and rubbed her arms as she turned away. "I don't know how he's getting in here. Even with doors and windows locked, I find his little presents everywhere."

"Why are you still here?"

"Where else would I go? Besides, if he is a stalker, he'll just follow me."

She turned back and watched Dylan set the pictures aside. His frown deepened as he picked up the peach negligee. The same one her stalker had mentioned in his phone call. Dylan's lips thinned, and his eyes narrowed. He reached in the box again and pulled out some barely there bras and panties. The underwear and nightgowns were all either see through or lace. Her admirer didn't want her wearing much of anything, apparently.

"This is more serious than you led me to believe. And you showed all this to the police?"

"I said I did, didn't I? The police officer seemed very concerned at first. He even wanted to interview you and the other people in the building. Instead, he went back to the station and informed his superiors that I didn't have any proof of a stalker, just an ardent admirer. They were willing to send a cruiser past more frequently, but really, what would that accomplish?"

"Apparently the police are dumber than I estimated. And so are you. This man is sick, Maria. You're lucky he hasn't already captured and raped, beaten or killed you. That you're still standing here trying to hide the nude pictures of yourself

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

instead of listening to me proves you are as dense as the police."

"You're an ass." She stalked off to the bathroom and slammed the door. She wanted to brain him or fuck him. At this point, braining him looked better and better.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter Two

Dylan struggled to keep his eyes off the photos of Maria naked. As he flipped through the box, though, there were more and more. Whoever her stalker was, he'd found a way to get in her apartment without her noticing. She was lucky to be alive.

Anger coursed through him so quickly and violently he fought hard not to reveal his vampire nature in front of her when she returned from her self-induced solitary confinement in the bathroom. When he got his hands on the bastard that dared break into Maria's home, he'd kill him. Feast on his blood and kill him. Tear him limb from limb and let the neighborhood werewolf have what was left.

Maria might think he didn't like her, but she couldn't be further from the truth. She was good. A white soul. Pure, untainted. Unlike him. No matter how much he wanted to sink his fangs and cock in her, he wouldn't give in to the urge. She deserved better.

He looked down at the photos in his hand. Maria stepping out of the shower, soaking in the bathtub, standing in her underwear, applying makeup in her bathroom. There was a picture of her entering her apartment, then pictures of her in the park, and pictures of her sleeping at night. The next set of pictures contained more full frontal nudity.

"I'm sorry." She sighed and tugged at the pictures in his hands.

Dylan looked up and saw how red her face was. Her naïveté tugged at his heart. He released the photos and watched her tuck them in the bottom of the box. The image of her naked body had been burned into his memory now. There'd be many frustrated nights ahead for him.

"I should have removed those." Her face flushed even more as he continued to watch her. He made her nervous. Good. Hopefully it was enough to keep her from acting on her desire. Though he'd said he knew she was teasing, and she didn't deny it, he knew she wasn't. He knew the truth. She wanted him. He could smell her desire. If she knew he was a vampire, she'd change her mind quick enough.

"Don't be embarrassed. Be angry. This guy has been in your apartment with you! Do you know how lucky you are to be alive?"

"I know. I've gone to the police. What more can I do?"

"Let me protect you." The minute he said the words, he regretted it. Maria paled and began to tremble. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." She answered him too quickly and backed away.

"Will you let me help you?"

She nodded but wouldn't meet his gaze. "Please. I can't take much more. I don't mean to burden you—"

"Why in the world would you think you're a burden?"

"I know I get on your nerves. I know you go out of your way to avoid me. I have enough stress and strain, but I'm scared."

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

It was the look on her face that did it. Before he could think of the consequences, he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. The sweet scent of her essence mixed with her lavender lotion tickled his nose. Sounds of muffled crying melted the tough exterior he'd been trying to maintain. He made soothing sounds as he rubbed her back.

"You aren't a burden."

She melted into him, rubbing her face against his chest. He bit back a groan as his cock hardened. *Now's not the time.* His cock ignored him and continued to grow. He shifted, trying to ease the discomfort, but only a cold shower could help now. Or burying his dick in her softness.

"Dylan?" Her voice wavered, and his resolve weakened even more.

"Yes?"

"Will you be able to keep me safe?"

She sounded so fragile and upset that he growled and pulled her even closer. "I promise no one will harm you while I'm around."

Maria stared into his blue eyes. Eyes so dark and deep one could fall in and get lost. Lust coiled deep in her belly. Just being near the man made her feel like a feline in heat.

She swallowed past a suddenly dry throat, afraid to blink because she didn't want to break eye contact. The man was too handsome for his own good. He should have a warning tattooed on his body somewhere. *Ohh.* The thought sent a shiver of desire up her spine. *Does he have tattoos? I wonder what my chances of getting to see them are.*

"I swear I'll do everything in my power to keep you safe, starting by spending the night."

A thrill raced through her at his words. Even though he cleared his throat and flushed, she knew his attempt to backtrack would fail. Only a moron would have missed the lust in his eyes and the erection pressed against her stomach. There was no way she was going to wait another minute to find out what he tasted like.

Sliding her hand up his chest and behind his neck, she tugged him down and kissed him before he could protest. If he was going to reject her and push her away, she would take as good of a kiss as she could first.

Instead of protesting, his mouth met hers eagerly. His tongue traced along her lower lip. She parted her lips with a sigh and deepened the kiss. His hands tightened around her, and she pressed her body flush against his.

A low moan filled the air. She didn't know or care who made the sound, but it increased her desire. Moisture soaked her panties as she rubbed her lower body against him. Electricity danced along her nerves as she moved against his erection.

One hand fisted in his thick black hair, and the other reached around his waist, pinning him against her. She wanted to wrap her legs around him and ride him. She was so horny she could probably come without even feeling his dick inside her.

Please, please, she chanted over and over in her mind. *I want this man no matter what.*

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

Dylan broke the kiss to lick and nibble his way down her chin and neck.

"Yes," she hissed, grabbing onto his shoulders as he sucked on her neck. He alternated licking and sucking on her until she couldn't stand it anymore. She put her hands on both sides of his face and brought him back up for a kiss.

Fueled by their mutual desire, Maria backed him up against the wall. She tugged his shirt out of his khaki pants and skimmed her fingertips over his abs.

"*Maria*," he gasped when she dragged her nails along the top of his pants.

"Dylan," she whispered, gliding her hands up his stomach and chest.

"We shouldn't—"

She cut him off with her mouth. Kissing him was addictive. Something she could get used to. It was definitely better than letting him try to talk her out of this.

"Yes, we should." She smiled as she slid her hand in his pants. With a moan, she wrapped her hand around his hard, warm length.

"Yes." He groaned and pressed his forehead against her.

"I've wanted you ever since I moved into this building." She slid to her knees and unbuttoned his pants. Slowly, she pulled his zipper down. "You have no idea how long I've fantasized about you. About this."

He moaned when she tugged his pants open and reached inside his boxers, wrapping her hands around his erection and pulling him free of his confinement.

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"Why do you fight me? I can tell you desire me. Why pretend you can't stand me?"

"You're too good for me." He gasped when she tightened her hands on him.

"Too good for you? You've kept me horny and unsatisfied for months because you're not good enough for me? Who are you to make that decision? Isn't it one I should have the right to make?"

"Maria." He moaned and fisted his hands in her hair. "Once we start, I won't be able to stop."

"Who said I want to stop?" She knew he wouldn't protest anymore when he guided her head toward his cock.

She smiled as she squeezed him with both of her hands. He was long and thick, soft as velvet, and utterly intoxicating. Her mouth watered as she stared at him. Finally, she pressed her lips to the tip and kissed him.

"Mmm." He moaned and pressed his erection against her lips.

She licked him then sucked him into her mouth. First she teased him by sucking on just the tip of his penis. He moaned and moved his hips, pushing deeper in her mouth.

She worked him with her hands and mouth, testing to see what made him tense and what didn't. When she found the right speed, she slipped him as deep in her throat as she could and fondled his heavy sac.

His moans encouraged her. She continued to massage him, wringing animalistic sounds from deep as his balls tightened under her hand. She hummed, taking him as deep as she could.

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"Ah, Maria. I'm going to come." His fists tightened painfully in her hair as he thrust into her mouth and came with a roar.

She swallowed all he had to give and licked him clean, drinking every drop of his essence. Once she was done, she leaned back on her heels and grinned up at him. "Do you still think we shouldn't do this? That we shouldn't be together?"

His Adam's apple worked as he stared down at her. "I still think I'll only hurt you."

"That you care enough to protect me tells me you wouldn't hurt me intentionally."

"Not intentionally, but this won't last. We're like night and day."

"Then let's just have as much fun as we can." She smiled and prayed he didn't notice she'd already lost her heart to him.

He scooped her up in his arms and carried her into the bedroom. She squeezed his biceps and tried not to squeal at his deliciously firm muscles. Finally, her dream was about to come true.

When he gently set her down on the bed, she knew he planned to treat her as if she were fragile. Whatever reason made him think he was too good for her was also going to keep him from making love to her the way she wanted.

She refused to let that happen.

Rising up on her knees, she tugged on his shirt, lifting it over his head. She wanted to get a look at him. Smooth, slick flesh covered rock-hard muscle. Her mouth went dry as she slid her hands over his body.

"Are you sure you want this, Maria?"

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"Yes." She looked up into his eyes. "I want it. I want you. I have for months. You won't deny me now, will you?"

"No. I want you, too." From the fire in his eyes, she knew he spoke the truth.

"How long does it take for you to...?" Maria looked down at the opening in his pants and forgot to finish speaking. She'd wanted to ask how long it would take him to get hard again, but his dick was already at full mast. Long, thick, and delicious. "Damn."

He chuckled and quickly removed the rest of his clothing. She reached for her shirt, but he beat her to it and gently tugged it over her head. Before she could reach for him, his hands closed on her breasts.

"I suspected you didn't wear bras."

And sometimes not wearing them really paid off. "I didn't think you even noticed." She gasped when he pinched her nipples.

"Of course, I noticed. Any red-blooded man would have to be blind, stupid, or both not to notice you and your breasts. And your ass." He slid his hands down her sides and guided her back on the bed. His nimble fingers quickly undid her shorts and pulled them and her sandals off.

She smiled. He'd noticed her. Not just noticed her, but *noticed* her. Then his hands slid up her calves, and she forgot everything but to breathe. When his eyes met hers and held, her breath caught in her throat and heat raced through her.

"If you're going to change your mind, you'd better do it now."

"I'm not." She swallowed past a dry throat and tried to interpret the look in his eyes.

"Good." He lowered his mouth and captured hers with an expertise that made her head spin.

His hands played with her breasts and nipples while his lips, teeth and tongue wreaked havoc on her mouth, chin and neck. When his lips brushed over her carotid, she shivered and gasped. Moisture dampened her thighs from his attention. She prayed he'd never stop.

"Your neck is so sensitive," he whispered then brushed his lips back and forth over her carotid again.

"Yeah." The word came out on a breathy sigh. She closed her eyes and grabbed onto his shoulders when he gently bit, then sucked on the spot. "You love to play with them, too, apparently. Necks."

"I love how responsive you are, and I have to admit I've been known to give a love bite or two."

"Bite me, baby." She opened her eyes and grinned up at him.

Dylan's gaze seared through her. She gasped at the intensity of his expression. Whatever it was, she couldn't identify it, but it sent shivers racing through her.

"Something wrong?"

"Nope." She slipped her hands tight around his neck and pulled him back for a kiss.

He broke the kiss and climbed on the bed. His eagerness to be with her reassured her and gave her extra confidence. Not that she was ashamed of her body, but she didn't often orgasm when with a man. She really hoped that all changed

with Dylan. She mentally chastised herself. It wasn't like she'd been with many men. Two sexual partners hardly constituted having sexual expertise.

When he slid between her thighs, thoughts of her previous lovers fled. He licked a path up her thigh before burying his tongue in her pussy. She closed her eyes and tilted her head back as sensations raced through her at his touch. His lips pressed against her wet folds, kissing her intimately. His tongue traced a line along her swollen lips before flicking her clit.

Desire and lust coiled deep inside. Tingles raced up and down her thighs as his mouth and tongue worked magic on her. He lapped at her, feasting on her pussy as if he truly enjoyed it. Judging by the sounds he made, there was no question of his enjoyment.

Maria closed her eyes and surrendered to the passion he roused in her. She surrendered to his wicked mouth and hands as he slipped a finger into her core and swiped it against her inner walls. The coo of pleasure that escaped her not only didn't sound anything like her, but it caught her off guard. He chuckled and added another finger to the first before repeating the action.

No other man had taken the time to love her like this. No one had ever made her feel as desirable and beautiful as Dylan did right now.

"Mmm, that feels so good." She rocked against his hand. The signs of her impending orgasm shocked and thrilled her, but they shouldn't have. He was rumored to be a god in bed. The screams were heard around the building, or so said

Velma. Maria lived across the hall and had yet to hear them, but her imagination hadn't done him justice.

Dylan crooked his fingers, and she arched off the bed as her orgasm crashed through her hard and fast. As she screamed her pleasure, she felt and heard Dylan sucking and licking up her juices, and it pushed her headlong into her second orgasm of the night.

Shaking and struggling to breathe, she stared down at him. He grinned up at her and slowly crawled his way up the bed. He hesitated long enough to sheath his cock with a condom he'd pulled out of his pants pocket, and then he pressed himself against her core.

He looked like a predator, like he wanted to devour her in one bite, and she loved it. She reached for him and helped guide him inside of her. As he slid in, he closed his eyes, a look of pure pleasure filling his features. She tightened around him, aroused even more by his obvious enjoyment of making love to her.

When he sank in all the way, he rested inside her, his balls pressing tightly against her. He opened his eyes and stared at her. She fell into the dark pools of bliss, tightening around him.

"Sweet," he whispered. He licked his lips and drew in a deep breath. "Your scent is intoxicating, love. So sweet and rich. I could feast on you all night. And fuck. I could fuck you all night long."

She sucked in a deep breath and tried not to show how his choice of words affected her. He was a guy. It was always fucking to them. She couldn't expect him to fall in love with

her as she'd done with him. He'd spent all this time avoiding her because she was too *good* for him, and she'd been secretly falling in love with him. She'd take what she could get. A man like him had too many options to settle for just one woman.

He pulled back slightly then thrust into her. He glided in and out with ease, stroking her higher and higher. She grabbed onto his shoulders and closed her eyes as sensations raced through her so fast she couldn't decipher them, and didn't care.

As he made gentle love to her, her heart and throat tightened. And when he strengthened his thrusts, ramming into her faster and harder, she tightened her muscles and held onto him as he pushed her headlong into another orgasm.

Still, he continued to move in her, burying deeper and deeper with each thrust until she felt full. With each movement, he brushed against her sweet spot, making her entire body tingle.

"Dylan," she said on a moan, another orgasm building. "Oh. My. God." She let out a keening cry when he sucked on her neck. A sharp pain immediately followed.

She cried out, nails digging into his shoulders as her eyes flew open. As quickly as the pain flared, it melted under the hot warmth of his mouth. The sounds of Dylan sucking on her neck added to the unbelievably erotic sensation, and she tumbled into an orgasm so strong she started to pass out.

A low curse kept her from succumbing to the darkness. She opened her eyes and stared at him through a haze. A

flash of red on his lips made her realize he'd drawn blood. The sounds he'd made must have been as he drank her blood, sucking on it and drinking her life force. Like a vampire.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean for you to find out this way."

She knew it was horror he saw in her face, but she didn't care about his feelings right now. "You bit me. Like an animal."

His face hardened as he studied her. "I told you that you were too good for me, that nothing good would come of this. I told you I would only bring you pain and hurt you. I was the fool for thinking I actually had a chance."

Dylan's lips thinned and his eyes narrowed. "I am a vampire. I didn't want you to find out this way. If I had better control of myself, this would never have happened."

"Vampires aren't real. There is no magic; there are no vampires." She rubbed her hands over her face. As usual, when she denied her heritage, the pain in her heart and head taunted her with the truth. She might claim it didn't exist, but she knew better. It was for her own sanity that she denied it.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter Three

"I'm disappointed in you." Maria gasped at the unexpected voice and turned toward the window she knew had been closed earlier.

She saw the form of a man standing in the dark, and she scrunched up on the bed until her back pressed against the wall.

How was this possible? Dylan had checked every inch of the apartment before he'd stormed out to get some of his equipment. He'd said he'd protect her, and he would. Regardless of the fiasco of the bite and the sex, he would keep her safe from her stalker, and she believed him.

"You would cheat on me with *him*?" Brett, her annoying, sneaky, lecherous neighbor, stepped out of the shadows and advanced toward the bed.

"What? How did you get in here?" How the fuck had he gotten past Dylan?

"How could you lower yourself to sleep with that vampire?" He reached for her. "You cheated on me!"

She gave up wondering how he got in and looked around for a weapon as she stalled. "Cheated on you? You're psycho if you really believe that. There is nothing between you and me, Brett. Nothing more than a vivid fantasy world you've created."

"You're wrong!" His face twisted in anger. "You and I are meant to be together. I failed you in the last lifetime, but my patience and prayers for forgiveness have been rewarded."

The gods have practically delivered you right into my lap, and it's for a reason. You're mine, Maria."

Her chest tightened, and she struggled to breathe through her fear. She focused on her anger, the only thing keeping her from losing control. "Listen, you sick twit, I'm not now and never was yours. I am—"

"Your mother sent me here."

"*What?*" Maria sat up and clutched the sheet to her chest. Her mother? What was he talking about? And how the hell did Brett get into her place? It should have been impossible. She ached to attack him with all she had, but her nudity kept her glued to the bed under the sheets. The thought of him leering at her as she fought him was enough to turn her stomach. Dylan would be back soon. He'd take care of him.

"Now I've got your attention, I see." Brett sat at the foot of her bed.

"Dylan will be back here any minute."

"No, he won't. You were just a feed and fuck."

She raised her hand and caressed the bite on her neck. "You of all people have no right to talk to me this way."

"Oh, I have a right. Your mother told me all about how you will come into your new powers this year. I've been more than patient waiting for you to come to your senses."

Fear clenched in her gut. She looked around the room for a weapon.

"See. Right now you are thinking like a regular human. Find something to hurt me with. Whereas, if you accepted who and what you are, and what you're capable of, you could easily render me unconscious."

"You're lying." She reached for the lamp on her nightstand.

"You won't use your powers against me. Not the powers you so adamantly claim not to have. The powers you pray will go away. I'll gladly relieve you of your unwanted burden. After I make you mine in every way imaginable, that is." Fangs gleamed as they shot down past his lower lip.

"You're a vampire, too?" Her arm fell weakly at her side. Her mind grew foggy, and she tried to figure out what was happening to her.

"Lie down." Even though she didn't want to obey him, her body acted as if it had a mind of its own. "Now we're going to pose you just right, so that we can leave a little present for Dylan. Something to let him know that once again he failed to protect someone he loved."

Loved. Maria tried to shake her head or move her body, but it was as if she were a puppet. Her arms and legs moved when Brett waved his hand. He removed her sheet and put her in a provocative pose like in a girlie magazine. The man was insane. And he had full control over her body. Cries choked in her throat as tears slipped down her cheeks. Something he couldn't control.

Brett was taunting Dylan. *See this woman? She's mine now. I can do whatever I want to her and there's nothing you can do to stop me.*

After he took several Polaroid pictures, he tossed them onto the bed and made her stand up. "Now we're going to my place so I can perform the necessary ritual."

Maria tried to speak. She wanted to argue, to kick and scream, to fight him and his power. What was happening?

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

First Dylan bit her, and then Brett revealed he was a vampire as well. Was she a goddamned vampire magnet?

"It's your power. You're like a beacon of white light, love. Your energy, power and goodness call to us like a lighthouse to a ship during a storm. You are an untapped source of energy the likes of which I've never before seen."

Maria shook her head, but her head didn't move. The bastard had complete control over her. Almost complete control. He didn't have her mind.

Yet.

She shivered, unsure if that had been her internal voice or his voice inside her head.

"Come, my love. We must leave so we can start the ritual."

"I'm not your love. I'm not your anything. I'm not going anywhere with you."

He laughed. It was an evil, soul-shuddering sound that sent shivers up her spine. There was no way she could prevent him from doing whatever he wanted to her. No way at all.

"You can't do anything about it, love, and you know it." He waved his hands. Her body rose at his command. He draped a robe around her and tied it tight. "I don't want anyone else to see this luscious body of yours."

She didn't know what disgusted her more. That he wanted her even though he knew she'd just had sex with Dylan, or that he was trying to act loving. Either way, she'd come face to face with the fact that vampires were real, and they

weren't anything like what she'd heard her friends rave about from their romance novels.

"What *do* you want, Brett?" Saying his name left a bad taste in her mouth, but it was nothing compared to feel of his arm around her shoulders or the press of his body against hers as he led her out of her bedroom.

"I'm going to have to silence you now, my love. But once we are safely within the place I had built for you, I can reveal all of my plans. Things would be much easier if you just accepted this and stopped fighting me, fighting fate."

"Easier on who? Certainly not me!" She wanted to say more, but suddenly her mouth wouldn't open.

"Yes, my love. Easier on you. You have no idea what I am capable of. Or even what you are capable of."

She wondered if Dylan could read her thoughts like Brett did.

"Don't even try to shout for him. Dylan is so self-centered he wouldn't hear you even if you could scream."

Tears formed as the realization that she was doomed sank in. How could she escape from a man who could manipulate her body and voice with thoughts? Putting every ounce of strength into it, she shouted Dylan's name in her mind. Brett's head swung towards her, but not as fast as his fist. Pain flared through her jaw, and she crumpled to the floor as her world went dark.

* * * *

Dylan grabbed his head as he heard Maria's shout, and felt a fist connect with his jaw. "What the hell?" He looked up

from the floor and rubbed his chin. Damn it. Someone had a mean right hook. They also had Maria.

"Shit! Fuck!" He jumped up and raced for the door. "Why the hell didn't I make her come with me to get my equipment? Why did I leave her alone when I knew that prick bastard was getting into her apartment? I am such a fucking ass!"

Granted, he'd needed his weapons, but he'd done something green. He'd made the stupid assumption that she'd be safe for the five minutes it would take for him to get in his apartment, grab some weapons, and return. "Fucking ass!"

He entered her apartment with ease. The bastard had left it open for him. He raced through the hall into her bedroom and drew to a halt when he eyed the snapshots on the bed.

The nauseating stench of cologne assaulted his senses as he bent over and scooped up the snapshots. He'd recognize that strong odor anywhere. Brett Masterson. The jerk who lived next door to Maria. The one who was always hitting on her and trying to corner her in the hallway.

He flipped through the photos. The fear in Maria's eyes was palpable as he scanned picture after picture. The bastard had posed her for the pictures, making sure to rub it in his face.

Why would Brett do this? He'd been annoying in his persistence to get in Maria's pants, but to also stalk her on the side? Had he been trying to drive her into his own arms? Why leave the photos here for him to find?

Dylan checked around the room and saw that there had been no sign of a struggle. Maria definitely would have fought

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

like a wild cat. What did Brett do to gain her cooperation? What had put that look of fear in her eyes?

He followed the annoying stench out to the hallway. After he closed and locked Maria's door, he walked over to Brett's apartment. Of course, the bastard wouldn't be there. Not after leaving hints even a moron could decipher. Why did he want to be found? Was Brett using Maria to get to him?

* * * *

"Lover boy should be here soon. I left hints even a moron could follow."

"Why do you want him to follow you down here? Aren't you afraid he'll kill you?" Maria struggled against the restraints that held her to a table. That he had stripped off her robe before strapping her to the table didn't help the panic tightening her chest and throat. Her heart raced, and she struggled to breathe.

"Save your strength, love. You won't get free. All you're doing is spilling precious blood as you cut your wrists and ankles."

"What does it matter? You're just going to kill me, anyway." A sob caught in her throat.

"Is that what you think?" Brett smiled down at her as he shook his head. "No, love. I have something even better. You will die, but it's your rebirth that I'm interested in. Did you know that once I drain you and give you life with my blood I will then be your sire? And if I choose to, I can keep you under my control, under my power, as long as I want. It's an

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

easy choice, love. Come to me willingly, and I'll reward you. Fight me, and this will be hard and painful."

He reached down and stroked her head. She shivered in disgust and tried to pull away from him. At least he didn't plan to rape her before he killed her, but then what was with all the goblets and knives and things?

"No, love, I don't plan to rape you. I have plenty of willing women at my beck and call. What I want from you is more than a gorgeous body. That's not to say I don't desire you, but I don't want to taint this ritual with such a base emotion like lust."

"And it's okay to taint it with your greed for power?"

Brett's brown eyes darkened like pools of mud, swirling and drawing her in. Arousal snaked through her body, even though it was something she didn't want.

"I can do anything I want with you. I'm not just a vampire, love. I'm much more."

"Don't call me *love*. You're nothing more than a disgusting animal chaining women up for your sick pleasures."

When his palm connected with her face, she accepted it gratefully. It chased away the desire he'd mentally pushed into her body. At least it was the only thing that made any sense anymore.

"You could tempt the patience of a saint, couldn't you? I had no idea you were this mouthy. Your mother spouted of your virtues from the rooftops."

"What does my mother have to do with this? You didn't hurt her did you? If you did, I'll kick your ass, you son of a bitch!"

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"Tsk, tsk." Brett shook his head. "Your mother is fine. Better than you at the moment." His smile sent a rush of anger through her.

"When I get free—"

"When you get free you'll be so far under my spell you won't even remember this. The only thing you'll know is that you exist for me and my pleasure. That you live to serve me. And all that beautiful power you possess will be mine."

"My power. I have no power!" She struggled even harder against the binds. If he thought she was magical like her mother, he had another trick coming.

"You are full to bursting with untapped power. You just don't know how to use it. You haven't accepted it. If you'd have acknowledged it and trained under your mother you would be capable of so much. Instead, I will relieve you of it."

"I have no power."

"Love, your mother confided it all to me."

Horror and realization settled on her at once. "Oh my ... You! You are the man she wanted me to come home and meet. You're the one she said was perfect for me. The man she'd found who would awaken my powers and heal me." How could her mother have been so wrong about him?

"Your mother wasn't wrong. I may have had to come to you, but before the night is over you will be in full control of your powers, and you will be mine."

"You're wrong."

"I'm right. We just need Dylan here before I can start."

"Why?"

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

He gave her head one final caress and then pulled away. "You'll find out soon enough. I have some preparations to make before Dylan finds our hiding spot."

Brett turned and walked away, leaving her alone in the cold, dark room. She shivered on the tabletop and tried to make out the other objects in the room.

Events of the night replayed in her mind. Finally getting Dylan into her bed, which resulted with him biting her. How could he be a vampire? They were real no matter how much she wanted to deny it. And they wanted her powers. Powers she'd repressed when she'd left home. Deny it as she might, it seemed that tonight was a result of her stubbornness. Things couldn't possibly get worse, could they? Even as she thought the words, she realized what she'd done and wished she could take them back. Things *always* got worse when someone said something like that.

Closing her eyes, she tried to make some sense of it all. Because of her stubborn nature, she had no idea what to do or how to use these powers everyone said she had. Powers she knew damned well she had, no matter how much she'd prayed for the goddess to take them away. Apparently it didn't matter how hard she wished for something.

Her mother's words came back to haunt her. *You can't run from fate. Hiding won't do you any good, either, Maria.* Obviously, her mother was a lot wiser than she'd given her credit for.

"Mom, wherever you are right now, I'm sorry for not believing and not listening." She opened her eyes and glanced

around the room. "Not that it does me a whole lot of good now."

Where was Dylan, and would he save her? Why should she expect him to? She'd freaked out when he'd bit her. He'd had no right to bite her, so he owed her now, didn't he?

Closing her eyes again, she tried to remember her mother's instructions on communicating without speech. Even if she could remember how, it didn't mean Dylan would hear her. She'd never practiced to see how far she could reach with her mind. It had been necessary to keep her skills a secret when she was a child, and as she'd gotten older there'd been no one to communicate with.

She tried to picture Dylan in her head and whispered the word *basement* several times until she began to feel dizzy. Realizing she'd managed to suppress her powers enough that they might be lost to her forever, she prayed to the goddess. She prayed for forgiveness and for something to happen to stop Brett before he could make good on his promise. If it were actually possible for him to take her powers and use them himself, then she didn't know what else the man—monster—was capable of.

When Brett entered the room again, a sense of hopelessness tightened around her.

"You disappoint me, love. I thought you'd surely use your powers to save yourself."

Maria shook her head and glared at him. "I told you, I have no powers."

"But you do. That's what makes this so sad. You are full of all this power. Power you've never even used." He shook his

head. "You know, Dylan wants your power, too. He's using you just like I am."

Instant heat flooded her body. "You are a fool if you think to use Dylan to hurt me. I already know he's a lothario. I know all about how he sleeps with a different woman every night of the week. Now that I know he's a vampire, I can understand his need for it."

Brett snickered. "He doesn't need to bed them to drink their blood, sweet, naïve Maria. One of his sheep is always waiting for him. You know, the women he fucks and feeds from? A vampire as old as Dylan gets an added thrill from the blood of a woman in the throes of an orgasm. He fucks them to sweeten their blood. He gets a rush from the endorphins released into their bloodstream during their orgasm. When they are at their peak, he bites them and drinks all that thick, rich blood."

"You'd know. You're just like him."

"Ahh, but we're different, Maria. I'm upfront about what I want. I don't use and seduce women, and I don't change to a new one every day or so. Dylan uses them and then tosses them aside."

Maria prayed for patience until she realized that his cruel remarks about Dylan really didn't upset her. Since he was busy badmouthing Dylan instead of coming up with things that might hurt, she decided not to bother enlightening him.

"You're quiet, Maria."

"What do you want me to say? That I was in love with Dylan and your words have cut me deep? Sorry to burst your

bubble, but all I wanted was a quick fuck, which he was more than ready to supply."

"No—"

"Yeah. I'm way more shallow than you could have imagined." *So much for keeping my mouth shut.*

"So you're saying you used Dylan?" Brett's eyes took on an unearthly glow.

Maria bit back her doubt and guilt at the lie. "Yes. I used him. Everything was good until he bit me."

Color infused Brett's face. "So you willingly became Dylan's whore?"

"Whore? We only did it once. Whore seems like such a harsh word."

The slap came out of nowhere and made her head slam against the tabletop with jarring force. She worked her jaw and blinked until her vision cleared.

"No sense in trying to make you my mate then. When you were of pure heart, that was different. A woman who can fuck someone just to get off isn't the kind of woman that deserves to be my mate. I don't understand why your aura didn't reflect this ... I guess we'll just get on with the ritual then. I've already summoned the elements and several deities."

Brett shook his head as he walked over to what she realized was an elaborate altar. He threw his hands up in the air, and a multitude of candles lit around the room. He picked up a large, ornate knife and bowed his head. As he whispered words of prayer, Maria whispered her own. She just hoped she died before Brett could actually get her powers.

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"You better be worth all this trouble. Manipulating the minds of those policemen was a risk I better not have taken unnecessarily."

"What do you mean?"

"Did you really think the police wouldn't investigate me after all the stories you told them? I had to fix their memories so they didn't find me a threat."

As he walked back to the table, she digested the information. The police hadn't abandoned her, they'd been brainwashed.

She felt the table shift and then move. It rotated and lifted up so her feet were straight up in the air. All the blood rushed to her head.

Brett walked over. With a wave of his hands, he released her arms from the bindings. He used his magic to force her arms to hang so they were toward the floor. Once again, he waved his hands, and bindings clamped shut on her wrists.

"I'm sorry this will be a slow death, my dear. The alternative would have been eternal life with me."

"Never!" she spat.

"That's what I thought you'd say." He held up the knife again. "I'm going to bleed you so that I can drain your power along with your life essence. Then I will drink your blood and absorb your power."

"I have no power!" Her protest fell on deaf ears. "If I had powers, I'd have saved myself, you dumb ass."

Brett ignored her and knelt in front of her. Maria fought the dizziness and roar of blood in her ears and concentrated

on him. He pressed the cold tip of the knife against her forearm.

"What are you doing?" She fought desperately against the restraints.

"I'm going to bleed you, Maria. I just explained this to you." He sliced her arm. Warm hot blood seeped down her wrist and hand. "Since you're upside down, you'll bleed faster, but by slicing your veins, you should live long enough for me to complete the ritual. Don't want you dying too soon on me."

Before she could form a response, he sliced her other arm, too. Pain was nothing compared to the realization he wanted her to have a slow death.

"I have a few things to do now." He stepped back.

Maria blinked and tried to focus on him. "Like what?"

"Absorbing your power."

Maria growled and yanked on the restraints.

"No, love. Don't fight it. You'll just bleed out faster, and I don't want that. Unless you have changed your mind and decided to join me and live forever by my side."

"Never!"

He laughed and walked away, his laughter growing faint.

Maria cursed and lay as still as she could. Gravity worked against her, though. She was dizzy and nauseous, and really didn't want to be hanging upside down anymore.

Images of her family ran through her mind, and the urge to live filled her. She wanted to live. She didn't want to die. She also didn't want Brett to take her powers.

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

As she grew weaker and weaker, she vowed that she'd embrace her powers if she survived. If Dylan found her and saved her, she'd listen to her mother and finish her training. She'd even become a priestess.

Time passed, it could have been mere minutes or hours. She didn't know and didn't care. All that mattered was that her life had ended because she didn't have the power to save herself. Power she'd have had if she'd listened to her mother. Power she'd tried to deny and suppress. The very power she was incapable of using now when she needed it.

* * * *

Dylan growled as he looked around Brett's apartment. He'd completely trashed the place but found no sign that the asshole had been stalking Maria. He'd also found no clue as to where the bastard would take her. Why had he left the photographs and his scent behind? He'd been so sure Brett wanted him to follow. Perhaps he'd been wrong. It wouldn't be the first time.

While he'd searched, he had Caroline at the office do a search on Brett. The bastard had been going under an assumed name all this time, and no one had known it. Least of all him, the great detective.

Brett was really James Buchanan, and he owned the building. He'd bought the place shortly after Maria moved in. Caroline had sent him the schematics for the building, and he'd done some comparisons with what he knew about the place.

There was nowhere in the apartment that wasn't marked on the architect plans, no secret rooms. There were a couple empty apartments, but other than that, nowhere seemed big enough for him to hide a full grown woman for any length of time.

It was highly unlikely that Brett—James—would take Maria to one of the empty apartments. Not with what he probably had in mind. And now that Dylan had a real name to put with Brett's face, he was even more worried. James was a vampire gone bad.

Dylan had heard rumors of him over the years. James was older than him, but no one knew by how much. How the hell could he have lived across the hall from him and not realized he was a vampire? Dylan had heard of vamps with powers that others did not possess, but he'd put it down to myths and legends. Boy, was he wrong. He'd fucked up every which way.

He continued to pour over the schematics. There was nowhere else James could have taken her. But where in all the gods' names was she? Before he could think up more curse words, he realized that over half of the basement was unused. Parts were marked for storage, but Dylan knew damn well the apartment storage closets didn't take up that much space.

"Where else better for a vampire to go than the basement?"

He ran back to his apartment to grab the one thing he knew might help him defeat James. Without stopping for the key, he broke the glass on the display case of his most prized

possession. This knife had been in his ownership for as long as he'd been a vamp. It had been the blade that had nearly killed him. The reason his sire had been forced to turn him or let him die. He'd kept it as a reminder of who he was, and what he was capable of. It had saved him more than once in the past.

The hilt of the knife was carved ivory, and the blade was pure silver. While not many things could kill a vampire, this deadly knife could. Silver and vampires did not mix. At least not with the vampire coming out alive. Every time he handled the knife, he ran the risk of accidentally killing himself, but he knew that tonight this was a necessary risk. Dylan slid it into its leather sheath, careful to avoid the metal despite his hurry. Killing himself now wouldn't do Maria any good.

He raced out of his apartment and flew down the stairs, bypassing two of his neighbors on the way. With all these people around tonight, how had James managed to get Maria through the building without being seen?

When he reached the basement, the scent of Maria's blood reached his sensitive nose, and he bit back a howl of rage. He raced to the back, searching for the door he knew had to be there.

He found it and approached with caution. It swung open at his touch, so he knew the bastard expected him. He didn't know what to expect when he entered the dark, dungeon-like room.

Disgust at how long it had taken him to find this hiding spot vanished the instant he saw Maria chained to the table,

her blood dripping into a pair of gold goblets. The bastard was sacrificing her!

A quick glance around the room showed that James wasn't around, but Dylan wasn't sure he could trust his vampire senses. Somehow, James had been clouding his abilities all this time, and he'd never noticed. He had to be more than just a vampire.

As Dylan approached Maria, James stepped out of the shadows. "I was wondering how long it would take for you to get here. You disappoint me. She's almost dead."

"If you hadn't been playing head games with me, I'd have been here a lot faster." He fisted his hands and studied James, trying to see if he had any hidden weapons.

"And ruin all my fun?" James walked closer but stayed out of reach. "I was enjoying playing with your girlfriend. It's a shame for her that you took so long to get here. She might have enjoyed watching you fight valiantly to save her."

A million questions raced through his mind, but there was no time for them. He needed to kill James, save Maria, and figure it out later.

"Don't count me out yet." Maria's voice, weak as it was, gave him hope.

Dylan felt the knife press against the small of his back where it rested in its sheath. He slowly inched toward James. Silver could kill a vampire. He'd used this knife successfully in the past, and he hoped his success continued tonight.

"Okay, let's get this over with," James said as he moved into a fighting stance. Dylan suspected James hadn't actually

studied any martial arts, because the pose was one he didn't recognize.

Moving into his habitual stance, Dylan watched as James advanced. He smiled and studied the man's movements. Though his actions were steady, his inexperience showed. James had probably spent most of his life having others do his dirty work. He must not have even expected him to find them here in the basement.

"You must tell me where you learned the talent to cloud my mind. How did you keep me from sensing who and what you are?"

"Talking won't distract me, Dylan. But it is an annoyance. I just want to kill you and be done with it. I have a ceremony to finish."

Dylan didn't bother responding. He wanted this over with as quickly as James did.

When the vampire began to circle him, Dylan readied for a fight. He needed the right moment to use the knife; otherwise it could backfire on him.

James circled him, his hands clenching and unclenching at his sides. Dylan turned with him, not allowing the bastard to come at him from behind. He wasn't sure what James planned and was taken off guard when the vampire pushed both his hands in front of him. A huge fireball shot forward. He dove to the ground, the sizzling heat searing over his head.

Rolling to the side, he looked up and saw James building another ball of flames. Dylan jumped to his feet and tried to rush the man, but James released the ball, and a hot streak

of energy slammed into his chest. With a roar of outrage and pain, Dylan flew backward. His head hit the wall with force, and he lost focus long enough for the bastard to fire off another. Luckily, Dylan managed to avoid this one.

A vampire he'd stand a good chance against, but James was some kind of cross between vampire and mage. Dylan grabbed his knife and tried to ignore the burning pain from the silver. He rushed across the room, not taking the chance of throwing the weapon.

James laughed and threw his hands up, preparing to launch more magic at him, but then he must have seen the glint of the silver because his face paled and his mouth opened in shock. James let out a roar and turned as if he tried to get away, but Dylan was close enough that he could grab him.

He slammed James back into the wall as he thrust the knife into the vampire's chest. He shoved the blade deep, twisting it up under the sternum. James gasped for air, his mouth moving as his hands clutched at his chest. Dylan held him there, knife pinned in place, and ignored the painful burning in his own hands.

The stench of the vampire's blood made him want to retch. The combination of power and evil tainted the man.

"You're still too late to save her," James gasped just before he collapsed.

Dylan released him and rushed over to Maria. James was dead, and for now, not a threat. After she was healed, he could make sure there was no chance of a resurrection for James.

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

With James dead and his power gone as well, it was easy to free Maria. Once he unchained her, he cradled her in his arms. Her heartbeat was faint and sluggish.

"Come on, baby. Don't give up."

Maria's lips curved in a faint smile. "It's too late for me, Dylan. The only way to save me now is to make me like you."

Horror curled in the pit of his stomach. Gods, no. He couldn't make her like him. He couldn't taint her or her white power. There was no way he could condemn her to eternal life as a vampire.

"Please, Dylan." Her eyes closed, and her head fell back. "Don't let me die."

"I don't want you to die, damn it." He cursed even as he ripped his wrist open with his fangs. "I don't want to see you live the rest of your life as a vampire either."

She didn't respond. Her heart stopped. A faint beat sounded, then stuttered and stopped again.

Dylan pressed his wrist to her mouth and forced his blood into her. He tilted her head back so his life giving essence could flow down her throat. She didn't want to die, so he wouldn't to let her.

"Drink, damn it!"

"What the hell is going on here?"

Dylan ignored the angry, female voice and focused on forcing his blood down Maria's throat. Finally, after a few tries, she began to drink enough that he looked up to see who held the gun pressed against his back.

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

The woman looked exactly as he imagined Maria would in a few years. Not only was she beautiful, but she was furious as hell.

"I'm guessing you are Maria's mother."

"And I'm guessing you are the man who killed my daughter."

"She's not dead. Yet. And you can thank James for her dire predicament." He tried to remain calm. All that mattered was that Maria had now latched her lips onto his wrist and was suckling like a newborn babe.

"What happened to my little girl?"

Dylan growled. "I don't really know. I just know that James, the dead vampire over there, was stalking your daughter. He had more than her death in mind."

The woman glanced over at the James and frowned. "He was the man I wanted Maria to meet. I had high hopes for them. But why do you keep calling him James?"

Maria's mother kept her gun trained on him, but he could tell her entire focus was on her daughter. She must have realized he was giving her life. Otherwise, he was sure she'd have pulled the trigger by now.

"Who are you?"

"Dylan McKnight. I'm a private investigator and your daughter's neighbor. How did you find us, and how did you get here?"

The woman lowered the gun and crouched next to them. She rubbed her forehead, and frowned. "I don't remember much. I just remember the very helpful man who offered to help bring my daughter back home."

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

Dylan bit back what he wanted to say. James had probably used magic on the family to keep them from knowing what he was doing. He'd used them to find out more about Maria, and then he'd tracked her down.

"Can you dispose of the body while I finish giving Maria the blood she needs to become vampire? With her last breath, she asked that I not let her die. I'm sure you have powers like her and know that I'm telling the truth."

"Yes. I guess as soon as you killed ... James ... and broke his spell, I recovered my senses enough to feel she was in danger. I used most of my magic getting here, but I have enough left to dispose of the vampire."

"When you're finished, can you please bring my knife up to her apartment? I want her comfortable when she wakes from the transformation."

"You have a lot of explaining to do, young man."

Dylan winced. He was not only a lot older than her, but he wasn't the one who had done anything wrong. Other than sleeping with her daughter and taking her blood without permission.

"Here." She took off her dark blue cape and draped it around her daughter.

"Thanks. What should I call you?"

"Mom?" She gave him a look he didn't even want to try to interpret.

"Do you know how to undo the spell James had started on her blood?"

"I'll take care of it, but I'll need a place to crash until I recover enough strength to transport myself back home."

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"I'm sure Maria will want you to stay with her."

"Get her out of here." Maria's mother turned her back and began to chant.

Dylan didn't need to be told twice.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter Four

Maria awoke slowly. She felt weird. All her senses were more alert, and she could hear the heartbeats of the people in the room with her.

Memory flooded back. Brett trying to kill her, the fight between him and Dylan, and then Dylan giving her his blood to transform her into a vampire. Relief that she wasn't dead coursed through her body. Thank the goddess he'd listened to her. There were a lot of things she needed to do now that she was still alive. First was to learn how to use and control her powers. She didn't even know what powers she had.

At least she knew she could add vampirism to the list. The scent of Dylan's blood called to her, and she licked her lips. As soon as she realized the other person in the room was her mother, Maria's eyes flew open, and she glanced around.

"So you're saying that Brett used magic that made me think one thing while he did another? That he also messed with your mind? What was he? Some kind of supervampire?"

"I think someone taught him some powerful magic. Or perhaps he'd had that before he became vampire. Either way, it doesn't matter since he's dead now. There are loose ends to tie up, but none of them concern me right now."

Dylan looked over and saw her watching them. A look of happiness appeared on his face before he quickly masked it. He walked to the bed and sat beside her. "Good, you're awake. How do you feel now?"

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"Like death warmed over?" It came out like a croak, but at least she still had her voice.

"Don't worry, you'll heal quickly. I fed while your mother watched you, and I can give you more blood. I bet you're starving."

"How will I feed? From your wrist?"

Dylan shook his head. "I want you to feed from my neck. You'll get richer blood more quickly that way."

Maria looked shyly at her mother. Why she was shy was beyond her, but she hadn't had time to get used to having these vampiric abilities, and already Dylan wanted her to feed. What if the taste and scent of blood made her sick?

"Do we need to have sex while I feed?"

Dylan shook his head a little too quickly, and her gaze flew to her mother again.

"Replenish more of the blood you lost, and then we can catch up on everything."

"Like how you got here and what you're doing here?"

Her mother nodded and turned to look out the window. "And how I let you down and led the devil to your doorstep."

Maria reached for her, but her mother walked out of the room before she could say anything. When she could no longer prolong it, Maria turned to Dylan and looked up at him. "What do I do?"

He tapped a finger against his carotid. "You bite me here and drink my blood. Just think about food, and I'm sure your fangs will elongate. It takes some time to learn to control your vampire instincts, but I'm sure you'll pick it up quickly enough."

"No sex?"

Dylan shook his head.

"Okay." She sighed and watched as he lay down on the bed next to her and stretched out.

He was right. Soon enough, her fangs dipped down past her lip. The sound of his blood pumping through his body fueled her hunger. She licked her lips then lowered her mouth to his neck.

She opened her mouth wide and sank her fangs into him. Dylan cried out, but the sound wasn't one of pain. She wondered if he felt the same sexual rush she'd felt when he'd fed from her.

His blood was thick, rich, and tasted metallic and sweet at the same time. It wasn't a great taste, but neither was it horrible either.

Maria drank from him and wondered if he was as aroused as her.

"We need to talk." He sighed and closed his eyes.

When she thought she'd taken enough blood, she licked at the wound and kissed it before releasing him.

"What do you want to talk about?"

She looked into his dark eyes and melted against him. She kissed him long and deep, until he broke the kiss and pulled away.

"No." He sighed again and pushed up to a sitting position.

"What?" Maria copied his movements. "What's wrong?"

"I don't want you to think you owe me something. I don't want you to feel as if we belong together because I turned you."

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"I felt this way before you turned me."

"No." He shook his head.

"I've wanted you since I first saw you. Even knowing about all those other women didn't stop my desire. Now that I know why you had sex with them—"

"Wait. What do you mean why I had sex with them?"

"The endorphins and the super charged blood."

"Where did you get that idea from?"

"Brett told me all about it. I just had a taste of your blood. Let's have sex so I can drink your blood while you orgasm. Maybe it will give me enough strength to go out there and face my mother."

"That's not a wise idea. James almost killed you."

"James?"

"See. We need to talk."

"Not yet." She pressed him down on the bed and straddled him. She brushed her hair back and rubbed her naked body over his clothed one.

"*Maria.*"

Ignoring him, she reached for his pants and unzipped them. She pulled out his semi-hard penis and eagerly stroked it. She wasn't surprised when he grabbed onto her waist and rolled her on her back. This time she planned to make love to him until he couldn't leave her bed. Tomorrow they could talk.

* * * *

Maria traced her fingers around the border on the Moon card. A week had passed, and with Dylan's help, it had been

easy to learn the tricks of being a vampire. She wondered if he returned her feelings.

Warm kisses were pressed on the back of her neck. She smiled and leaned into the caress. "Mmm."

"What are you doing?" Dylan's breath tickled her neck as he leaned over her and looked down at the card. "You're still playing with that thing?"

"That thing is what brought us together."

Dylan shook his head.

"No. I'm right and you know it. If the mail hadn't been mixed up, you'd have never known about my stalker and ended up fucking me senseless and leaving me alone to be kidnapped."

Dylan winced. "You really know where to hit a guy."

"You saved me!"

"After it was too late."

She sighed and tucked the card in her journal, then slipped it into her nightstand drawer before turning to face Dylan. "You can beat yourself up over it forever, but things worked out for the best."

Dylan shook his head. "You say that, but you lost your life."

"And you gave me a new one."

"You should have had a choice in the matter." He sighed and pulled away. "It's too late, but I can still keep from doing too much damage."

"What do you mean?" She sensed his withdrawal even before he pulled his hands free.

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

"I might be your creator, but I won't hold any power over you. You're free to come and go as you please. Free to live your life however you want. I will not use my claim to you."

"What?" She grabbed onto his chin and forced him to meet her gaze. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"I release you from any binds you think I might have over you."

"You're *releasing* me?" She waited until he nodded. "Just like that?" He nodded again. "You're a fucking bastard!"

Using all the anger coursing through her, she slapped the idiot across the face.

"I deserved that." Dylan moved his jaw. At least her superhuman strength came in handy for something.

More anger at his acceptance flooded her. "I can't believe you."

"I'm sorry." He looked down at her hand as she clenched it at her side. "Although there will always be a connection between us, you are free to do as you wish."

"With whomever I wish, right?" She studied him closely and hoped she didn't misinterpret the flush of anger he quickly hid.

His lips thinned as he nodded again. He turned his back to her and went to get out of the bed.

"Don't I get a say in any of this?"

He froze and turned back to look at her. "I thought you said it already." He rubbed his jaw.

"No. I gave you what you deserved." She put her hand on his shoulder and tried to urge him to turn around and face

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

her. When he refused to budge, she growled and climbed off the bed, skirted around it, and straddled his lap.

He sat stiffly at first, and then his hands settled on her waist. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to show you what I want." She slid her hands up his neck and fisted them in his hair. She moved his head so she could look into his sexy eyes. "I want you, Dylan. Maybe the vampire bit bothered me before, but I'm over that now."

"Only because the choice was taken from you."

"You aren't the one who drained my blood. You are the one who gave me blood and life. Do you know how many bargains I made with the goddess? How many things I promised to do if she let me live?"

He didn't answer.

"I wanted to live, even at the cost of becoming vampire. I hold no anger against you. My only anger is that you think you can toss me aside like your other women." She slid closer so that her lace-covered pussy pressed against his erection. "There will be no other women from now on."

His eyes clouded in confusion then cleared as the corners of his mouth twitched. "What are you saying?"

"I'm trying to get it through your darn stupid stubborn alpha head that you're mine and no one else's. I'm yours and no one else's. The Moon card brought us together, and our love will keep us together."

"How can you be sure it's love?"

"Dylan, why are you doing this? Why are you driving me insane? I love you. I know you love me. I don't understand

why you think dumping me is the right thing to do. You want to break my heart?" When he went to speak, she shook her head. "No. I don't want to hear any more stupid words from you. If you don't love me, will your erection away."

She reached between them and wrapped her fingers around his hard length. "I mean, attraction is one thing, but if just any woman will do, then why are you still sitting here."

"You're sitting on me."

Maria smacked her forehead against his then winced as pain radiated from the point of contact. "Ow. Shit. You do have bricks for a brain."

Dylan laughed. In one smooth motion, he switched their positions and pressed her into the bed. "If you want to be mine, it will be on my terms."

She held her breath and looked into his dark blue eyes.

"I want you when I want you, where I want you, when I want you, no questions asked."

A shiver raced up her spine as his eyes darkened. Moisture dripped from her pussy, soaking her skimpy lace thong. If those were his terms, she'd take them.

"Reach your arms over your head."

Maria reached back until her hands hit the headboard.

"You will hold on to that headboard or I'll stop." Before she could open her mouth, he added, "No talking. Not with your mouth or your attempts at mental telepathy."

Hot damn.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Author Bio

Michelle Hasker has been writing with the pursuit of publication for three years. Her first manuscript submitted to an epubliher was accepted in 2006, and she's been writing for epublihers ever since.

She is a member of Romance Writers of America and the Fantasy, Futuristic and Paranormal chapter of RWA, as well as Authors of Erotic Romance and The Daughters of Circe.

Michelle loves vampires and things that go bump in the night, so it's no wonder her creations are truly paranormal. While most people only dream of finding love, Michelle's characters find it, but in the most unexpected places.

Her stories are dreams and fantasies that she provides in the hopes of giving her readers a good, satisfying read.

Michelle's website is www.michellehasker.com. She also loves to hear from readers. You can contact her from her website or her blog: michellehasker.blogspot.com

* * * *

VISIT COBBLESTONE PRESS, LLC

WWW.COBBLESTONE-PRESS.COM

ROMANTIC FANTASIES FOR EVERY READER!

MAINSTREAM, SENSUAL, AND EROTIC ROMANCE

The Vampire Oracle: The Moon
by Michelle Hasker

LIT, PDF, HTML, AND MOBI FORMATS AVAILABLE

If you are connected to the Internet, take a moment to rate this eBook by going back to your bookshelf at www.fictionwise.com.