

Forenote

The following is a collection of short stories about The Hunts, a modern phenomenon when a new wave of magic arrived due to genetic modification and caused moral panic, as those who were declared witches were out-casted once more. Some of these are letters, poems, secondhand accounts. The Hunts ceased more than a year ago, and those witches that were outed are now in the shadows. This is simply here to serve as historical reference, since The Hunts spawned a new wave of urban fantasy, with many authors using The Hunts as reference material.

Chapter 1

Double Double

This was found scribbled on some paper when a witch's home was raided. Judging by what was found, they were a witch of old. There was no sign of them once the authorities arrived.

Round about the cauldron we go.

In the poisoned kidneys throw.

Toad, that makes my eye glow

Days and nights have always stopped.

Venom makes my sleeping rot

Boil you first in the pot

Double, double toil and trouble.

The fire burns my inside bubbles

Fillet of a secret snake,

In the cauldron I will break
Eye of cat and toe of frog,
Wool of lamb and tongue of dog
Pitchfork spike and scorpion sting,
Lizard's leg and barn owl's wing,
For a charm of all the trouble
Like hell they will come and crush me to rubble
Double, double toil and trouble.
The fire will burn your inside bubbles
Wicked comes before the dawn
But by then I will be gone.

Chapter 2

The Alleyway

A short story inspired by a firsthand account of a witch encounter. Creative liberties were taken, and thus this story is not entirely accurate. The author was also...extremely against witches.

I saw the blood first. Oh, the blood. It poured out of the guzzling chest wound and dripped down towards me as I stood at the entrance of the alleyway. I must have just missed them, since the only way out was where I stood, unless they transfigured and scrambled up the walls like some unholy creature.

I carefully stepped into the alleyway, holding my breath to try and stop the fumes of the blood reaching my lungs. The blood smelled poisonous, tainted almost, probably by the hand that held the knife. The knife was left at the scene of the crime, dropping on the concrete, and covered in blood. I saw the intricate runes and carvings. Who knew what they could be for? Some demonic sacrifice, some damnation against god. This could all be part of some hellish ritual for all we know.

But that poor soul. When I saw their lifeless corpse in that alleyway, my heart sank. I wanted to get on my knees and pray they made it to heaven. But there was so much blood, oh the blood, and I refused to kneel in the same blood spilt by those hell spawn.

I called the hunters first, the authorities second. They questioned me relentlessly, about what I saw, and I questioned them back about the soul that was lost so I could go pray for them. I went home that night and washed every ounce of sin away with holy water. I still sleep with a crucifix by my bed. I am terrified that one day the witch will come back and stab me in my sleep. I do not want to be the one who completes their gruesome blood ritual. They need to be stopped, before it is too late.

Chapter 3

Texts Between Friends

SCENE – I . – 5:42 PM.

*A string of text messages between two friends,
Arabella, and Eliza. Eliza was later found out to be
a witch of new.*

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ARABELLA Hey, you see that weird graffiti in the square?

ELIZA yeh lol, pretty cool huh?

ARABELLA Cmon Liz, it's scary. Witches are back

ELIZA they never left Bella. You've seen all those modern witches
on tiktok

ARABELLA lmao, but they're not real witches. The real witches
died didn't they

ELIZA I dunno, there would have been survivors

ARABELLA sure whatever. Just hope they don't stop us going
to aaron's party tonight

ELIZA he's not into you bella

ARABELLA he will be lol

ELIZA surrrrrre lmao

ARABELLA lmao I have a chance since he broke up with becky

ELIZA they broke up?

ARABELLA yeh, like two days ago

ELIZA omfg

ARABELLA ikr!

ELIZA no bella listen. I knew they would break up.

ARABELLA we all did that relationship was toxic af

ELIZA no ur not listening. I had a dream where I saw them break
up

ARABELLA that's just coincidence

ELIZA it can't be. Not with the witch stuff happening

ARABELLA ur just paranoid. Probably the stress. Chill lx

ELIZA no pls listen I know it sounds crazy but some shit has
been happening

ARABELLA yea, no shit. Look at the news

ELIZA I mean to me

ARABELLA liz, stop self inserting urself into current affairs. U r
not a witch. Otherwise I would call the hunters on u.

ELIZA you'd do that?

ARABELLA yeh. They're evil right? Gotta stop them before we
all get sacrificed to satan

ELIZA none of that is true

ARABELLA sure, sure ms historian. It's totally true I've seen the
articles

ELIZA bloggers are not credible sources

ARABELLA whatever lmao. If u were a witch, id report u for ur
own good. You'd do the same 4 me

ELIZA yeah.... sure

ARABELLA I'll pick you up at 7 for the party. k?

ELIZA actually, I feel sick. I'm gonna skip it.

ARABELLA cmon liz!! U can't abandon me

ELIZA srsly bella?

ARABELLA I need a wingwoman

ELIZA I'm not up to it. You'll be fine

ARABELLA some friend u r. feel better k?

ELIZA will do. Have fun

8:07 *pm*

ARABELLA hey liz

ARABELLA liz

ARABELLA liz answer me

ARABELLA I came by to check on u after the party u bailed on,
ur mom said u haven't been seen all night

ARABELLA liz where tf are u

10:15 *pm*

ARABELLA liz wtf did u get into

ARABELLA the hunters just turned up

ARABELLA they said ur a fucking witch

ARABELLA fuck liz

ARABELLA liz u can't be 1 of them

ARABELLA this is insane

ARABELLA liz fucking answer me pls

00:02 *am*

ARABELLA they said ur gone

ARABELLA liz...

ARABELLA I hope u and all the other witches burn

Chapter 4

A Chance Encounter

This is an extract from the first of the new wave of urban fantasy, a book series called “The Reckoning” inspired by The Hunts. Although entirely fiction, the author has hinted at the possibility of using real witch’s stories as inspiration.

Cole walked the nighttime streets. The sky was cruel and cloudy, the moon never showing a sign of appearing, and the cold winter air rushed against his coat. He constantly checked behind him, and to any outsider it would be suspicious. Why was a young man in a dark coat constantly checking his surroundings at such a time at night? Well, that was Cole’s secret, of course. Nobody could know he was a witch. Descended from the time where magic was alive and thriving in the air before the bitter taste of metal and smog took over. Of course, magic still existed, but it only lasted through those who carried the genes.

Until now.

Nobody really knew what happened. Science went wrong, genetics got pushed a little too far, and suddenly every-

one had woken up with magic coursing through their veins.

All the witches of old were freaking out. The amount of terrified text messages Cole had woken up to was nightmare inducing. Everyone was getting ready to move out the cities, hide in the forests, wait for this all to blow over. He had already made the arrangements if needed.

He continued down the street, where there were no cars passing him by. Nobody paid him any mind. As he continued however, he noticed someone up ahead. They were pacing back and forth, and Cole could hear them talking to themselves.

“Oh god...what did I do...oh god...”

That’s when Cole stopped, and realised what was happening. His eyes slowly moved up to the streetlight, which was barely functioning, and had been bent in half.

His heart sank. Magic.

He pulled out his phone, sending a single word to a single person. It would be important later.

Then, he approached the person.

“Hey...you okay?”

The person turned, and they took a step closed, entered the skewered light. It was a young man, around the same age Cole was. He had brown hair, which was curly and frazzled, and rounded glasses. One of the lenses was cracked. His pale face was covered in freckles.

In normal circumstances, Cole would have said he was cute.

These were not normal circumstances.

“Shit.” The man looked at the streetlight. “I can explain.”

“No need.” Cole held up a hand. “The sight is explanation enough.”

The young man looked like he was about to have a nervous breakdown. “Please...I...I just touched it and then it...don’t call the hunters.”

Cole bit his lip. Ever since the wave of magic, the hunters had spawned. Said to be descended from the Templars of old. Through a hateful campaign spurred by them, and later the government themselves, they had been tasked with finding the witches of old and new, and eliminating them by any means necessary.

“I’m not going to.” Cole stepped forward, and very cautiously, put a hand on the man’s shoulder. “What’s your name?”

“Danny.”

“I’m Cole. Listen Danny, you’re not in trouble, and I’m not going to call the hunters.”

Danny released the breath he had been holding for a thousand years. “Oh, thank god, thank you. Thank you so much.” Then he paused. “But why?”

Better late than never.

“You’re a witch Danny. And I’m one too.”

Danny stumbled backwards and out of Cole’s grip. “That isn’t...no, that’s not right! Witches are meant to have horns! And do weird rituals.”

Please god what has this child been reading.

“They’re not normal!” Danny yelled. “You’re normal.”

“We have tattoos Danny. Not the same thing.” Cole smiled a little. “You have one too. On your wrist. Probably appeared around a week ago?”

Danny looked down at his left wrist. Cole held up his right wrist.

“I know what I’m talking about Danny.”

Danny’s breath was shaky as he spoke again. “What...what are you going to do? Are you going to kill me?”

“Listen...”

“Fuck you’re going to kill me.” Danny put his hands to his head. “Fuck please I’ll turn myself in let the hunters kill me. Don’t do this man.”

Cole stepped forward and reached for Danny’s hands, pulling them down. “Danny listen to me. I’m going to help you.”

Danny had gone red in his cheeks. Neither of them had been expecting things to go like this.

“In about 5 minutes, somebody is going to come pick us up. We can sneak into your house and grab anything important you might need. Then, we’re going to get you somewhere safe. Okay?”

It took a moment, but Danny nodded. “Okay...”

Cole let go of his hands. “Okay. Everything’s going to be fine.”

“I’m sorry I thought you were going to kill me.” Danny admitted, sheepishly looking away. His cheeks had faded into a soft pink colour.

Cole patted his shoulder. “Eh, I’ve had worse.”

Chapter 5

An Open Letter

This was found on Parliament's doorstep. There was no return address.

To whom it may concern,

By the time you read this, we will be gone. Disappeared into the night like the shadows and smoke, and deep down at the bottom of the river where we will not float. You will never find us now. For since you declared that we were a threat, a danger to natural order, we must now hide again.

We will come back one day. When you have forgotten. When this crisis is no longer a trend and is not the smoldering topic of conversation. We will be back, to claim vengeance for our brothers, sisters, siblings and all who you cut down out of putrid fear.

We will not hurt you like you hurt us, but you will know the pain that we felt. Your hearts will ache as much as ours did.

But we are gone. Gone like the dawn, like the stars

fading from view. We are safe and we are happy. And when magic dies, and you die with it, we shall live.

Yours,

The witches of old, the witches of new, and the witches that are soon to come.