

HOLLYWOOD **WARLOCK**

A Novel by Julie Kushner

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Hollywood Warlock: a novel / by Julie Kushner

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN # 978-0-557-26028-7

For my Mom, the heroine of my story. And for my Dad, its hero.

Chapter 1

At First Bite

The mood on the set of *At First Bite*, the much anticipated prequel to the critically acclaimed *The Vampire Chronicles*, was undoubtedly one of anticipation. After all, filming was to start in just a few short minutes on what cast and crew knew would be a surefire blockbuster. Heck, with the world economy in the crapper, and people's lives going down the toilet right along with it, who wasn't in need of a little supernatural escapist fantasy? And what better way to escape than into the arms of a dangerous undead blood sucker? The marketing department often joked that the tagline for the film should be "Recessions Bite, and So Does He."

Frenetic energy reverberated around the set, as everyone prepared for the film's pivotal first scene, in which Vampire Lestrange encounters the naïve yet strong-willed heroine, Rebecca. The prop department was busy strategically splattering "blood" (an odorous mixture of tomato paste, chocolate syrup, and lord knows what else) on the walls and floor, while white lab-coat wearing makeup specialists fussed over a highly realistic dismembered plastic corpse. As a cumulative result of these activities, the sound stage bore greater resemblance to an Emergency Room surgery gone horribly awry than the filming locale for a high-budget action/horror flick set during the Victorian era.

The rendezvous between the film's two leads was to occur just moments after Lestrange, unbeknownst to Rebecca, had turned her sister Mary into a vampire. The only

problem was that film's star, Justin Warlock, was still in his trailer, and no one seemed capable or willing to get him onto the set.

"He's doing what? You're kidding right? Oh, I don't get paid enough for this shit."

Kate McElwain paced back and forth in front of the craft services cart, barely able to contain her rage, as her agent tried in vain to prevent her from bodily removing her costar from his trailer. Given her mood, he quickly decided honesty of the non-sugar coated variety would be the best approach.

"Sweetie, you know Justin Warlock has always had a reputation for being a bit . . . How do I say it kindly? Promiscuous. But the boy brings box office, so we just have to bite our tongues."

"You bite your tongue. I'm going to bite his balls off with those fake vampire fangs!"

Although touted by *Entertainment Weekly* as one of the "Top Ten New Faces to Watch in Hollywood This Year," Kate McElwain, at 22, was already somewhat of an industry veteran. Daughter of long-time soap opera starlet, Marlene McElwain, Kate practically grew up on film and television sets. In fact, her career began when she was just eight months old, and was chosen, along with another baby who looked remarkably similar to her, to play the newborn daughter of her mother's character on *Days of Our Lives*.

As Kate got older, she had little trouble landing modeling gigs and commercials, due to her uncanny resemblance to her mother. "It's almost as if we created a time machine, went back about 25 years, retrieved Marlene from the past and brought her back

here to repeat her career,” Marlene’s manager proclaimed about Kate. With her petite frame, strawberry blond hair, pouty pink lips, and deep piercing blue eyes, Kate was the picture of naivety and innocence.

As such, even though Kate was hardly a teenager, she was often cast to play “damsel in distress” types much younger than herself. In fact, her role in *At First Bite* was no different. Given Kate’s penchant for innocent roles, those who met her in her personal life were often surprised and amused to learn that she had the mouth of a truck driver and a temper to match.

“I mean, seriously, we haven’t even started filming yet, and *already* he’s missing call times because he’s diddling extras in his trailer?” Kate griped. “Why doesn’t anyone just go get him, for Christ sake?”

“From what I’ve heard, *no one* interrupts Justin Warlock while he is ‘otherwise engaged,’ the agent replied coyly.

Kate had never actually met Justin in person; although, she’d be lying if she said she wasn’t familiar with his career and reputation. First discovered by his agent at a shopping mall at the age of 16, 25-year old Justin Warlock made a career out of playing the leading man in romantic comedies and Nicholas Sparks-esque dramas. In addition to being a consistent fixture on People Magazine’s Sexiest Male List, Warlock was also a notorious playboy. In fact, since starring in his first feature film at 18-years old, Justin has been romantically linked with every single one of his costars. However, none of these romantic relationships had been rumored to last long after the movie premiere.

“Screw that!” Kate exclaimed, “Justin Warlock’s no supernatural being. He’s just a dick who can’t keep it in his pants long enough to get to work on time. I don’t see what

everyone's so fucking afraid of!" And with that, she stalked off, leaving her agent to shake his head at his client's tempestuousness.

Typically, by the time filming commenced, lead actors had already met one another at least a half a dozen times to conduct script read-throughs and navigate press junkets. However, *At First Bite*'s Director expressly prohibited his on-screen duo from meeting prior to filming the first scene. Rather, he desired their initial reactions to one another to be "fresh and unfettered." According to the Director, an actor's and actress's meeting on the first day of filming should be like a virgin bride's first encounter with her husband on her wedding night, charged with anxiety and anticipation. Kate thought that idea was a bunch of crap. She was no virgin, and she was quite certain Justin wasn't one either. But far be it for her to mess with the Director's "vision."

Right now, vision or no vision, Kate was ready to have a little chat with El Director about her MIA costar. When Kate approached "the man in charge," he was hard at work on the Friday edition of the *New York Times* Crossword puzzle. His tongue cradled his upper lip in concentration, as he struggled over one of the tougher clues. The 40ish gentleman whose salt and pepper hair, olive complexion and finely muscled physique gave him a George Clooney-type appeal, did not seem at all perturbed that his film was not running on schedule. In fact, he seemed the picture of relaxation.

"Umm . . . Leo?"

The Director looked up from his puzzle and offered Kate a winning smile. "Miss McElwain. You look troubled. Please, have a seat," he said, patting a chair next to his own. "How can I ease your spirits?"

Kate sat gingerly in the chair next to her Director. Although it was going to take all of the inner strength she could muster, the young actress desperately wanted to appear diplomatic, knowing it was far too early in the game to piss off her boss by appearing too pushy.

“Well,” she started, “I am very eager to begin shooting our first scene.”

The Director laughed, a hearty Santa Claus “Ho, Ho, Ho,” which seemed incongruous with his lean-muscled frame. “Ahhh, me too, me too,” chortled the Director, “It’s high time we popped that cherry.”

Ughh, more creepy virgin bride references. Please, just kill me now. Kate thought, but forced herself to remain courteous. “Right . . . so the thing is, I was kind of wondering if you knew whether our ‘star’ would be making an appearance on set any time soon?”

“You think I should go get him, right?” The Director responded, looking at Kate slyly. “Yeah, I guess I should get him,” he rose from his seat and offered Kate his hand to help her out of the chair, “Come with me?”

Kate had no desire to go anywhere near that trailer, but again she recognized she had to be polite. “Sure,” she said and followed the Director toward the trailers. At least something was finally getting done.

As they approached Justin’s trailer, Kate and the Director could hear the distinct sounds of sex coming from inside the doorway. Kate was disgusted, but the Director simply appeared amused. He glanced back at Kate. “On second thought, why don’t you wait outside,” he said, before quickly climbing the steps and rapping on the door. There

was a brief pause, a few nervous shrieks and a hustle of activity, before the door opened a crack and the Director escaped inside, abruptly shutting the door behind him.

Kate was seething, as she waited outside the trailer alone, her foot tapping incessantly up and down, her arms wrapped tightly across her chest. After a few moments, the door to the trailer opened. Four women, all rather cheap-looking in Kate's estimation, climbed out into the daylight, in various states of undress, each with the same lovesick grins on their faces, and dopey looks in their eyes. If Kate hadn't been too nervous about shooting to eat breakfast that morning, she probably would have puked right then and there.

Then the Director re-emerged, but this time with the man of the hour himself, Justin Warlock. The two seemed to be having an uproariously good time, just yucking it up, which only served to make Kate madder. Simultaneously, they both noticed her glaring at them and, like insolent school boys, guiltily wiped the shit-eating grins from their mugs. "I'll meet you both back on set," called the Director. He winked at Kate before briskly walking away, leaving the pair all by themselves. *So much for the "wedding night."*

Justin Warlock approached Kate, not with the confident swagger of a guy who just got laid by four women, but rather with the childlike exuberance of an eight-year old chasing after an ice cream truck. With his tussled sun-kissed sandy brown hair, uncommonly long eyelashes, and obnoxiously adorable nose, the actor appeared to be nothing like the nymphomaniacal Adonis Kate had read about in the tabloids. And yet, to the actress's deep discomfort, Justin's youthful pretty-boy body definitively smelled of sex. Annoyed, Kate stared at the floor, desperately trying to avoid her costar's good

mood, which was being broadcast like radio waves from his dimpled smile and impossibly straight Crest advertisement white teeth.

“Wow . . . Kate McElwain! I’ve been dying to meet you, since, like, forever,” announced Justin in the slightly-raspy voice Kate had heard so many times in movies. He bowed slightly and held his hand out for Kate to shake. Kate stared at the abhorrent hand as if it was infested with the intermingled juices of cheaply-perfumed floosies (which it probably was), and took a step back. She would not be won over so easily.

The ingénue looked up at her nemesis, hands clenched, ready for battle. Her vitriolic words spilled out of her like bullets shot from a tommy gun. “OK. Let’s get something straight, right off the bat. I get that you’re Mister Sexiest Man Alive, and that you have scripts being thrown at you every day from here to Scandinavia, but some of us actually need this job. So, in the future, if you need to get your cock sucked by one of the members of your bimbo harem, I’d really appreciate it if you did it on your own time.”

Wow, it felt really good to get that off her chest. Kate took a deep breath. Then, she looked up at Justin to gauge his reaction to her outburst. For a moment, he didn’t appear to react at all. Then, shock registered on his face. Clearly, he had never been spoken to like that by anyone before, particularly not a woman. Kate even worried for a second or two that he might hit her. Instead, he did something even more unexpected.

Gently, Justin clasped Kate’s hand, looking deep into her blue eyes with his rounded blinking emerald green ones, which seemed as though they should belong to a boy much younger than the actor himself. “Kate, you are absolutely 100% right . . . about everything. What I did was completely selfish, unreasonably inconsiderate, and

just plain stupid. You deserve better, and I promise to be better from now on. I am really . . . truly sorry.”

Unprepared for this type of response, Kate was utterly at a loss for words, and could do nothing but stare back into Justin’s eyes. Even as Justin delivered his “heartfelt” apology, Kate knew that she was being played. This guy was totally bullshitting her. He didn’t mean a word of it. And yet, while her mind was saying “Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit,” on autopilot, her body was responding in another way entirely.

The warmth from Justin’s hand sent tingles up her spine and throughout her body. Immediately, her mouth became dry and her knees nearly buckled. Try as she might, she could not pull herself away from Justin’s entrancing stare and her eyes watered at the unblinking effort. Suddenly, she had this intense impulse to rip off his shirt and run her hands over his muscled abdominals. She imagined herself kissing his thin lips as he nibbled on her neck.

Kate longed to touch the firm bulge in Justin’s designer khakis. Just moments ago, she hated this man, who seemed to stand in the way of her career and was against everything she stood for. Now, she couldn’t bear to let go of his hand, which, to her embarrassment, she was gripping tightly with her recently manicured nails.

And yet, as excited as she was by these feelings, they also frightened her to her very core. After all, Kate wasn’t the type of girl to go gaga over a man as seemingly shallow as Justin Warlock. In fact, Kate wasn’t the type of girl to go gaga over any man at all. You see, Kate McElwain was a lesbian.