

The Scarecrow & Ms. Moon

A novella

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A blood red moon one sliver shy of full cast long shadows from the broken, barren corn stalks, darkening the dirt path I paced. But, in spite of the deep shadows, tripping didn't even enter my mind. I, Jessie Moon, had been pacing the same path long enough to have ground any fallen stalk, leaf or cob into mulch.

I paused in mid-turn at the end of the corn rows and peered up at the rising moon. Time was running out. Briefly, I wondered what more trouble could I be in if I wasn't pre-pared when the others arrived.

Not eager to find out, I sighed and strode back to where the scarecrow hung from his perch. Drawing a shoulder-squaring breath, I faced the pole on which I'd hung him more than four months ago.

"This is your fault," I muttered at the weathered biker boots he wore. I slid my gaze up faded, frayed jeans, stopping on a split just above his right knee. I stared at the straw poking through the only rip that had been there when I'd hung him out. But four plus months of sun, rain, and wind had wreaked havoc on denim that had already been well worn.

Well-worn in more than one sense of the word. I could almost remember how the long legs had filled out those jeans—could almost still feel... In an attempt to divert my carnal thoughts, I lifted my attention to the hay raggedly fanned from the plaid, flannel shirtsleeves. But that only re-minded me of long, thick fingers toying with my spiky, dark hair and a deep, back-of-the-throat voice teasing, "Paint it purple and pierce every inch of your body, but those doe brown eyes of yours, cupcake, will still give you away."

My heart stuttered at the memory. Suddenly I wanted nothing more than to press my cheek against the scarecrow's black t-shirt and feel the warmth of flesh beneath. But a light autumn breeze fluttered the draped flannel shirt across the dozens of straw tufts sprouting from tiny holes in the rotting cot-ton. There would be no warmth beneath that t-shirt. There hadn't been since—

That night just over four months ago.

Don't linger.

But I was lost in my battle of memories. Most good. One very bad.

I closed my eyes. Which did I want to remember? The bad one justified all that had gone wrong these past months. The fight prompted by his lie. And I'd known he was lying when he hadn't been able to face me. Where was he going that night that he'd had to lie to me? Such falseness was as good as being disloyal. And I hadn't wanted him to be disloyal to me. Not him.

I opened my eyes and looked up into his angry, blue pair. Okay, moonlight washed out all color so they were gray at the moment. But, in sunlight, they were blue. In any light they were angry, and that wasn't

just *my* take on them. Mrs. Kozakowski, my nosy neighbor, had commented the same when she'd folded her arms imperiously over the fence separating our yards and watched me hang him up. I really needed to put up a taller fence.

Planting my hands on my hips, I glared into the angry eyes of my scarecrow and howled, "Every tormented minute I've suffered these past four plus months is your fault! Got it? *All your fault!*"

With adrenalin-charged strength, I wrenched the scare-crow off his perch. I swear I heard an '*ouch*' inside my head. I hoped I had. It would serve him right.

Taking him by the feet, I dragged him out of the garden and across the yard, surprised that a man of straw could be so heavy. I tugged him up the stairs of my side porch, his head bouncing over each step. I wished I could take the time to enjoy the trio of *ouches* I heard inside my head, whether real or imagined. But I had a job to do.

I towed the scarecrow through my kitchen into the dining area, leaving a trail of straw. I tugged and pulled and pushed him up onto the table situated between the couch and kitchen counter. Even with the drop leaves raised, his legs hung over the end. It would have to do.

A glance at the clock told me I'd wasted far too much time in the garden pondering things long done. I swept up the path of straw we'd left, cleansed the table area, then changed out of my ordinary clothes. Hurrying now, I gathered the necessary accoutrements for the evening.

Setting out the last candle, I gave my handiwork on the table an appraising once-over.

The candle between his thighs didn't look quite right. But, with his knees bent over the edge of the table and his feet dangling, this was the closest to encircling him with candles as I could get. Still, that candle between his thighs seemed a bit erotic. I reached for it. But the doorbell rang.

I jumped, my heartbeat kicking into hyper-drive. Too late.

The coven had arrived.