

Fireworks for Wizards
A Hall of Blood and Mercy Short Story
By K. M. Shea

I slipped out of a side door of Drake Hall, waving to one of the vampires on guard duty as I made my way through the mansion's impressive landscaping, intent on joining the rest of the House Medeis wizards on the back lawn.

"Hazel."

I spun on my heels, a smile bubbling up in me. "Killian! You're back!" I started to run towards him, but he reached me first with his vampire speed, sliding his arms around my waist before bending down so he could give me a heart-pounding kiss.

"Mm—careful! I have a rocket popsicle." I leaned back, holding my icy treat far away from the vampire—I wasn't going to risk dirtying his suit, even if he didn't care.

"A *what?*" Killian looked quizzically at the red, white, and blue popsicle.

"A rocket popsicle," I said. "We wizards brought a couple boxes over for the Fourth of July celebration. Happy Fourth of July, by the way," I said.

"Yes, yes, happy Treason Day, colonial peasant," Killian said, letting his British accent thicken before kissing me again. "It seems your celebration has begun?"

"Yep! Are you going to join in the fun? Since it's dusk we're starting with a couple of fireworks."

"I shall make an appearance—for your sake," Killian said.

"Great! A few off-duty vampires are already down there." I leaned around Killian, spying his first and second knights ambling towards us. "Hey Celestina, Josh! Welcome home."

Celestina smiled. "Happy Fourth of July, Hazel!"

"You seem to be in a festive spirit!" I grinned at the tall, model-esque vampire.

Celestina tucked the elegant braid her dark hair was gathered into over her shoulder. "Of course, I enjoy American Independence Day. The way you celebrate by blowing things up is so amusing I cannot help but show my support. See?" She flashed her nails, which were dark blue with white stars, except for her thumbnails and pinky fingers that had red and white stripes. "I took full advantage of my morning off to get a manicure."

"Celestina lives for the day you begin to have progeny," Josh added. "In the hopes that it will see a multiplication of her time off."

Celestina grinned at me and wriggled her eyebrows.

All I could do was laugh awkwardly, so I shoved my rapidly melting popsicle into my mouth, flooding my tongue with the sweetly-sour taste of fake cherry flavoring. "How was work? Did you finish with the vampire issues?"

Killian quirked one of his eyebrows. "I'm afraid I shall never *finish* addressing the vampire issues. There are too many decrepit, stodgey, selfish vampire elders for that. But we have addressed the most pressing issues we set out today to accomplish. There were a few bright spots. I got to thrash a vampire elder. You should have come with; you would have had fun."

I made a noise of disbelief as I looked from Killian to Celestina and Josh, still gnawing on my popsicle.

"The vampire elder's soul was black and in need of purging," Josh said.

"He was taking advantage of the younger members of his Family," Celestina explained.

“Ah, yeah, I’m really sorry I missed that,” I said with zero conviction. “But we’ve been busy getting our party set up. Thanks again for letting us throw it here, Killian.”

“Of course. Whatever you want, my darling One.” He bent over, most likely planning to kiss me again.

At that moment a high-pitched whine filled the air, and I saw a spark of fire that exploded into a glittering shower of purple lights with an explosion of sound that was so loud it made my belly slosh.

“Ooh, the fireworks are starting!” I said.

Killian temporarily abandoned the idea of kissing me and instead straightened up and looked in the direction of the fireworks. “I foolishly never thought to ask before this moment, but why did you need to throw your party *here*?”

“Noise codes,” I said. “The city won’t let us set off fireworks in our neighborhood. And even if they did, House Medeis wouldn’t like it.”

“Goodness,” Killian murmured, staring at the sky. “We can never upset the House.”

Someone must have set off another firework, because another flash of light shot into the sky, flaring briefly before exploding into green lights that formed a perfect circle shape.

I bit off the last of the cherry section of my popsicle, moving onto the white middle. “Unlike you, I don’t like getting locked in basements.”

“Your loss,” Killian said. “Shall we proceed to the celebration of this country’s independence?”

“Sure!” I peered back at Celestina and Josh as Killian took my free hand, threading our fingers together. “Josh, Celestina, are you two coming with?”

Josh tilted his head. “Will there be more blowing up of things?”

“Oh yeah,” I said. “We’re just getting started.”

“Then I shall come admire the beautiful poetry of lights and destruction that is fireworks.” Josh tugged on the cuffs of his suitcoat, then started to march through the gardens, heading towards the faint sound of music and laughter that marked the party’s location.

“I’ll come too,” Celestina said. “You wizards are always a good riot at a party.” She trailed behind Josh, passing by Killian and me as we hadn’t started moving. “I wouldn’t mind trying one of those rocket popsicles, either.”

“There’s also red, white, and blue jello,” I said. “Great Aunt MARRAINE made it, so the white layer of whipped topping is double the usual thickness. We also made strawberry pie and blueberry pie, and I think the BBQ and hot dogs must be almost done.” I sniffed the air, catching the tangy scent of Franco’s homemade sauce.

“It sounds like a true picnic,” Celestina said. “We shall be sure to enjoy it!” She winked and waved back at me before she and Josh disappeared behind a large row of bushes.

Killian and I followed at a slower pace, our fingers linked as I started on the blue layer of my nearly gone popsicle.

“You wizards certainly do enjoy your celebrations.” Killian tilted his head as the distant laughter and hum of music grew louder.

I peered up at my husband, trying to interpret the slant of his eyebrows. “Does that bother you?”

“No.” Killian smiled down at me, his eyes a deep, red color. “If it makes you happy, it is enough to amuse me.” He glanced up at the sky again. “And—as we’ve discussed—it seems members of my Family are amused by the House Medeis wizards’ enthusiasm.”

“They’ve mixed extraordinarily well,” I agreed. “And I think both your Family and my wizards are better for it.”

Killian opened his mouth to reply, but another explosion in the sky drowned him out. This time it wasn’t a firework, but a massive fireball that burned white hot. It was immediately followed by a massive bolt of lightning that made the ground shake.

Killian stared at the now empty sky. “Another part of your celebration?”

I sheepishly laughed. “Yeah, a few wizards talked about trying to put on our own display of power—since we wouldn’t be limited by city noise violations, and we’ve been practicing so much.”

“Exactly how much property damage do I need to prepare for?” Killian asked.

“Only a little,” I said. “I mean, we *are* wizards. If there’s a fire, we’ll just put it out.”

“Is the party located at all near the pool?” Killian asked.

“Yes?”

“As long as it’s near a body of water, I suppose it will be safe enough. Though perhaps I should text the kitchens to make sure the tea cupboards are locked up tight in case any of you ungrateful colonialists feel nostalgic for your country’s tea-dumping days,” Killian said.

I rolled my eyes. “You can’t fool me, Killian. You might be British, but you’ve made America your home.”

Killian shrugged. “Initially I decided to settle here temporarily—which, I do acknowledge that my *temporary* is quite long for a human. But now, you are correct.”

I bit off the last of my popsicle, feeling smug. “I knew we’d win you over.”

“Oh, no,” Killian said. “The only reason it’s my home, is because it is *your* home, my One.”

I paused and peered up at the powerful vampire.

A faint smile played on his lips as he peered down at me.

I smiled and shook my head. “Okay, you win this round. I love you, Killian Drake.”

Killian chuckled—a velvety sound that I loved hearing. “And I love you, Hazel Medeis. Even if you do come from a House of alarmingly enthusiastic pyromaniacs.”

The End