

Blood That Binds Ep 12 - What Killed Linda, and other fairy tales

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*Immediately following the previous episode
Maeve's childhood home*

The air lightens a little but not much. Forks clank against plates, and the squishy sounds of spaghetti and chewing begin to grate against the silence.

"This sauce is delicious, Eliza. Thank you for teaching me how to make it."

Umbrosia revives the conversation, and everyone in the room lets out almost audible sighs of relief before jumping on the easiest topic at hand: college. Maeve and Kate discuss Maeve's poetry class and Bec's upcoming English paper. Eliza and Umbrosia talk about cooking and women in leadership, including Eliza's position at the local bank branch. That brings Eliza back around to college, and asking Maeve if she needs any help with rent or tuition. Maeve brushes off the question.

"Don't worry about it, mom. Dolan is paying tuition and splitting rent."

"Is that what you get in return for feeding the blood-sucker?"

Bec's voice is soft and her eyes do not lift from her plate.

"Rebecca!" Eliza's voice raises slightly, scolding.

"What, she can't ask about what killed our mother?" Hekate snaps to her sister's defense.

"I thought she died of a heart attack?" Umbrosia asks in alarm, sitting up and looking around the table quickly.

"Do you know what caused her heart attack? A lifetime of chronic anemia. Daily blood loss over thirty years put strain on her body, until one day her heart couldn't take anymore."

"We should call things as they are."

Hekate leans back in her chair, arms crossed.

"Dolan is a fucking murderer who killed our mother. Doesn't make a difference that he did it slowly."

Maeve's vision narrows. Her hands begin to shake, and she stands slowly, lifting her plate. She can hardly hear her mother's scolding through the blood pounding in her head.

“That doesn’t make him a murderer. I know you’re very upset and angry and you hate him but it’s not his fault your mother died.”

Hekate turns her head to address Maeve.

“I wasn’t even surprised you didn’t come to her funeral.”

Maeve’s senses feel hyper focused, separated from each other. Eliza presses her hands to her face, shutting out the argument. Maeve can barely breath, and she drags her focus from Hekate to Bec, whose face is covered in silent tears. The two lock eyes, and the noise in Maeve’s head gets louder.

“I...I couldn’t handle being there. You said you were fine with that. You said you were glad I kept him away.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not. And what do you mean you couldn’t handle it? Couldn’t handle what?! Supporting your family? Grieving with them before you start your new, perfect life with a murderer?!”

Maeve slams her plate back down onto the table, sending spaghetti splatters onto herself and the tablecloth. Maeve’s eyes pin Hekate to her chair, and the young woman shifts in her seat.

“I couldn’t handle looking into my own future and facing the way I will probably die. I understand why you hate him, I really, really do. If you never want to see him again, I’m glad for you to make that decision. But that’s not an option for me. You want to keep him away from here? To keep all of you safe? Good. That’s your job, that’s always been the job you chose, to help protect this family. But he’s also the closest thing any of us had to a dad, and I have to live with him for the rest of my life. You’re the one choosing to shut him out because you *get to*. Hating him isn’t that convenient for me.”

“You made choices too.” Bec catches Maeve’s attention again, “All those years of Mom being the only one he could feed off of. If only there had been someone else to help shoulder the burden. Who knows how much longer she would have lived.”

Everyone goes utterly still. Tears well up in Maeve’s eyes, and it’s as if she and Bec are the only two in the room. Bec doesn’t speak further. She doesn’t have to. The question rings in Maeve’s mind like a whisper, yet somehow louder than any sound in the room, than all the noise inside her head.

Time off her life so you could have a few years of freedom. Were they worth it?

Tears pour down Maeve’s cheeks and she sucks in a large breath to steady her voice.

"I can't just write him off. Even if I wanted to. You don't get to judge me for that." She begins to turn away from the table, then pauses. "And you shouldn't judge your mother for it either."

Maeve walks zombie-like to her room and shuts herself inside. A black ball of fur crawls sleepily out from under her bed and meows in protest. She lifts the cat to her chest and curls up on top of the comforter in the fetal position. Nuzzling her wet face into the cat's fur, she lets the pain and guilt and grief she'd been avoiding for months roll over her in waves. With a sick relief she sinks further into the familiar comfort of self-loathing, letting it drown her until she falls asleep.

Sia stands at the sink in Maeve's family kitchen, bent over a little to reach the low counter height. She sinks her hands into the soapy water, scrubbing at and rinsing the spaghetti-stained plates and cutlery.

"Thank you so much for helping with the dishes, dear."

Eliza moves to the stove to put a pot of tea heating. The gas stove clicks several times before it lights. Sia finishes up the last plate, draining the water and wiping her hands on a nearby dish towel.

"Thank you for serving such a delicious meal."

Eliza sighs, "Yes, well...I wish it had been more peaceful. I really appreciate you supporting Maeve through this. It's not a... not a small thing to be dragged into, our secret."

"I actually wanted to talk to you about that." Umbrosia turns to face the older woman, "I want to...help Maeve. I was wondering if you could tell me a little more about the...blood curse."

Eliza levels her gaze at Umbrosia for several steady, searching seconds. Then she flicks off the gas stove.

"Be a dear and grab something out of that cabinet by the sink, will you? I'll get the glasses."

A few minutes later, the two are seated in the living area, each with a glass of red wine. Eliza sits in the recliner, while Umbrosia stretches her long legs out on the couch.

"Ok, you're in on the big secret, you might as well have the rest of the information. What do you want to know?"

"The blood curse--"

"It's not a curse. Not technically, not magically speaking."

"That's what Maeve always calls it."

“Yes, well...I have no doubt it feels like a curse to her. But it wasn't supposed to be. It was a binding spell.”

“Binding Dolan to the conduits in your bloodline?”

“No, binding him to our entire bloodline. Dolan hasn't always just fed on conduits. In fact, there's nothing in the spell that prevents him from feeding on me...or Kate or Bec. A few generations back, when our family was larger, he used to feed just a little bit from everyone. I imagine he took more from the conduits than the others but...no. The spell doesn't just bind him to the conduits like Maeve.”

“But it takes more blood from non-conduits? Because their magic isn't as strong?”

“Because magic doesn't flow through them as strongly, yes.”

Sia chews her lip for a moment.

“Do you know why Maeve is a conduit and her cousin's aren't? Sol has a theory about genetics, a prominent trait skipping generations, but...”

“I...don't know why some are conduits and others aren't. A conduit witch gene seems as likely as any other explanation.”

Sia begins to speak, but Eliza gently cuts her off.

“Why don't you ask me what I know you want to ask me?”

Sia takes a long sip of red wine, then sits for a moment looking into Eliza's patient, expectant eyes.

“Is there a way to remove the binding spell?”

“Let me ask you a question, first.” Eliza looks down into her glass. When she looks up, her eyes are suddenly full of tears, “How is he treating her?”

Umbrosia's heart sinks a little in her chest. Unsure what Maeve would want her to share, she just shakes her head, pushing her hair back from her forehead.

“It's...not good, ma'am.”

“I see.” Eliza lets out a shaky breath. “Well...she should know, the money he claims he's going to give her...Hekate kicked him out of this house with whatever cash he had and the clothes on his back the night her mother died, so unless he's stealing it from somewhere...just let her know not to rely on it, ok?”

“Please, ma'am. If you know how to release the spell...”

“I tried. I’ve tried more than once.”

Eliza takes a long drink of her wine before clutching it in front of her, gazing into its depths.

“Has Maeve told you about her grandfather? She didn’t know him very well. You know Dolan as a vampire, but to my father, Bernard...to him, Dolan was an angel ”

*****FLASHBACK*****

Michigan

The 1980s

Bernard was overjoyed when Linda was born a conduit. The family could carry on their “divine directive” to protect humanity - not from the angel Dolan, but from his unfortunate curse.

Linda was 14 years old the first time Eliza noticed Dolan looking at her sister differently. He had always given the younger sister more attention and affection, but on one of Bernard’s rare visits home, there was a shift in his manner towards the 14 year old child.

Linda was the well-behaved child of the family. She was wistful and bookish with wide eyes that swallowed the whole world up in them with adoration. That day Eliza came bouncing down the stairs first, running directly to her father, already whining about a movie their mother wouldn’t let her go see with her friends. Linda came second, bare feet patting down the stairs carefully so as not to smudge the polish still drying on her toes. Just as she reached the bottom, one of the cotton balls fell to the floor.

“Oh, shoot! Hi Daddy!”

Dolan was there before she could reach; on one knee, holding up the bit of fluff as though it were a delicate flower. Linda startled as his bright eyes gazed into hers.

“Why, Linda...how much more grown up you look. And we’ve only been away a few weeks!”

He tucked the cotton ball back between her toes, his hand lingering on the top of her foot for a moment. Linda’s wistful eyes went wide and her childish cheeks turned pink.

From that day he began to spend more and more time with Linda, asking about her studies, recommending books, telling her how very mature she was for her age. A week before her 18th birthday, when Dolan told Bernard his intention to marry Linda, their father was not only unsurprised. He was elated. An angel was going to marry his daughter.

Present day

Maeve’s childhood home

Umbrosia sits in silence for a few moments before slowly running her hand over her face.

“Holy shit.”

“I tried to convince her not to marry him. Actually, they were never legally married. The paperwork would have brought up to many questions. But... he was her dark and dangerous knight in shining armor. He was the adventure she thought she needed. If I’m being honest...our father had her...brainwashed. If Dolan was an angel, and Linda was a conduit, marrying him made her a saint. I just stayed near enough to her to make sure he treated her well.”

“So, Kate and Bec...”

Eliza shakes her head.

“The Fuiil Shea can’t conceive children with humans. I don’t know who their father is. She and Dolan would go to bars and...find men...until she was pregnant. He was choosing them for her, I think, sniffing out the more magical ones in hope to birth more conduits. They didn’t succeed and after Bec was born Linda refused to have any more. Maeve was...seven, I think? And clearly a strong conduit, so he didn’t push too hard for more children from Linda.”

Umbrosia closes her eyes and slowly shakes her head.

“Does Maeve know about this?”

Eliza lets out a long breath, leaning forward to set her drink on the coffee table. She sits silently for a long time, her elbows resting on her knees, gaze on the floor. When she does look up at Umbrosia, her eyes are hollow. Umbrosia gasps.

“What would you tell your child, if they were chained to a monster for the rest of their life?”

“The truth.”

“Really? Don’t you dare sit there and judge me. How much of the horrible truth would you reveal to a child? Would you fill their head with nightmares and dread when there is no hope of escape? Or would you try to make the best of it? Make their relationship better, make her see him as a father and hope that if she submits to him it will be enough to keep him kind.”

Umbrosia stares into the empty, helpless eyes begging her to understand, to forgive. She finishes her drink in one gulp and stands, wordlessly walking out of the room and up the small staircase. She approaches Bec and Hekate’s room and knocks on the door.

The next morning

Maeve wakes up before her alarm, eyes still puffy from a night of crying. The guilt sits dull and heavy in her gut, just underneath the crawling flutters of anxiety. She stands bleary and indecisive for several minutes, staring at her suitcase. She hadn't changed out of her clothes before crying herself to sleep, and feels sticky anxious static on her skin as she tries to decide whether she should put on pajamas so the rest of the household would think she slept in them, or just put on fresh clothes for the day.

Just as she gets a fresh pair of jeans and a sweater pulled on, she notices the sound of movement and Umbrosia's voice in the room next to her - Kate and Bec's room. Curious, confused, and hoping to rip off the bandaid of seeing her cousins with Umbrosia available as a buffer, she rounds the door jamb and gently pushes it ajar with her fingertips.

The room is in shambles. A ring of notebooks, scrap paper, empty energy drink bottles and full coffee mugs spreads out in chaos from the bunk beds. Umbrosia is folded in a cramped position against the closet door next to the beds. Hekate swivels in the one desk chair tucked in the opposite corner of the small room. Bec dangles her torso from the lower of the two bunk beds, stretching for a spellbook just out of reach. All of them are in pajamas, but none of them look like they've slept.

When Maeve pokes her head into the room, Umbrosia freezes, eyes flicking uncomfortably from one family member to another. Maeve's eyes range around the mess before landing on Kate.

The goth's face is somber. She tosses her head at the doorway.

"Come in. Shut the door."

Maeve steps in and gingerly closes the door behind her, tucking her hands into her sweater sleeves at her sides, body tense.

With a sigh, Kate lurches up from her seat and stands in front of Maeve, then grasps the taller cousin in a stiff and unpracticed - but firm - hug. Knitting her eyebrows together, Maeve gently pats Kate's back, making confused eye contact with Umbrosia. The trans woman's face is sympathetic but reveals nothing.

Kate releases Maeve as abruptly as she grasped her, stepping back to look Maeve straight in the face.

"I'm sorry I was a bitch last night. Dolan isn't your fault. Mom...mom isn't your fault either."

Maeve nods, tears welling up in her eyes again as a little of the guilt releases from her stomach.

"Bex!" Kate calls over her shoulder.

"What?" Bec mumbles, her nose in a spellbook.

"Tell Maeve you were a bitch."

A faint mumble comes from behind a curtain of strawberry blonde hair.

“Hex-Bex!”

Kate swivels her head around, and her tone takes on a distinct “older sister” vibe.

“I don’t swear!” Bec pops her face out of her hair and makes brief eye contact with Maeve, “But...yeah. I shouldn’t have said that...stuff.”

At this point, Umbrosia pats the floor next to her.

“You might want to sit. I talked to your mom last night and found out some...things.”

Several minutes later

Maeve sits frozen, every muscle and her body heavy and limp at the same time. Umbrosia takes her hand, but she doesn’t respond. Hekate paces heavily across the bedroom floor. Bec has a blanket pulled up over her legs, which are tucked up to her chest.

Umbrosia starts to speak.

“Maeve--”

“Fuck that cold-blooded bastard. Fuck him.”

Maeve’s tone is quiet as her face slowly turns from shock to rage. Her free hand grasps the charm necklace around her neck and flings it across the room before she can think. Bec jumps and Kate freezes as the charm slams into the wall, not breaking. Then Maeve bursts into uncontrollable tears, pressing her hands to her mouth to stifle the sound. Bec and Kate are at her side immediately, and the four women hold each other for several minutes, releasing their shared grief.

Without the charm, Maeve can feel the strong energies and emotions flowing through and between herself and the other three women. With her metaphysical senses, she can see Umbrosia’s power reaching out to the others in empathy like warm, golden honey. Bec’s magic is cool and crisp, like a protective but thin shield of ice over a coursing stream. Kate’s energy flows from her in spiky jumps and leaps, a righteous anger on a foundation of stone.

Those energies wrap around each other, holding and balancing and supporting each other, as real as the eight hands grasping each other as they share and validate one another’s pain and anger and grief.

She feels their magic, welling up stronger and stronger like a wave about to crash. Then, as it reaches its peak she feels the energy flow out and through her, washing her cleaner than she has felt in months.

As they calm, wiping their eyes and almost laughing a little at the pure relief of crying, the flow subsides. The pool of anger and grief remains, but no longer overwhelms them. When she can speak, Maeve chokes out a small but important question.

“So what do we do with that information?”

The question is vast and full of desperation. Umbrosia looks at the other two women, the same question on their faces.

“We beat that damn curse.”

She tightens her grip on Maeve’s hand.

“I don’t care if we have to go around it, over it, under it or through it. We get rid of that curse. We get that bastard out of all of your lives. Forever.”

Just as the possibility and hope of that promise attempts to settle in Maeve’s center, her phone buzzes in her back pocket. She pulls it out and hastily wipes her eyes with the ends of her shirt sleeves.

“It’s him.”

She jumps up and leaves the room before any of them can stop her. In the kitchen downstairs she shoves on her boots and marches out of the door without bothering to grab a coat. Then she sees the car in the driveway, and in it, Dolan. His eyes pierce hers through the windshield. Her resolve begins to falter with every step. Doubt creeps into her mind. Every possible argument he would make if confronted floats through her consciousness.

But Maeve, I’m 500 years old. Fourteen is a perfectly reasonable age to begin courting.

Step.

Did Linda ever seem unhappy to you?

Step.

So much of my life is controlled, Maeve. Would you deny me love, too?

Step.

Of course I never had sex with her before she turned 18! How can you suggest something like that?

Step.

Your cousins are grieving, they would say and believe anything right now.

Step.

They're just jealous. Your mother was always jealous of Linda's abilities.

Step.

I loved your Aunt Linda until the day she died. Why do you always have to make everything I do seem so ugly? I'm not your enemy, Maeve.

Step.

And Maeve finds herself standing in front of the passenger door. Clenching her teeth to hold her hand steady, she grasps the handle, pulls the door open, and swings herself inside.