

## **Blood That Binds Ep 5 - Hangovers are for Mortals**

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*The Apartment*

*The next morning*

Maeve wakes to an onslaught of sensations: dry mouth, smell of bacon cooking, the same sweaty clothes from the night before, light shining in the window and a pounding head. She rolls out of her bed, eyes barely open, just as Dolan sticks his head in her doorway and announces at what feels like a shout,

“Ah, good morning, blabbermouth.” His teeth are gritted into a smile, which he quickly drops, “Breakfast is ready.”

He pops back out, leaving the door wide open. Maeve drops her head into her hands, elbows resting on her knees, only to be hit with another wave of pain and nausea. Slowly, she stands up and slumps into her kitchen. At the island are seated three familiar - and similarly miserable - figures. Dolan is plating out heaps of bacon, eggs, sausage patties and biscuits with a disturbingly chipper attitude. Maeve knows him well enough to see the agitation sizzling just beneath the surface, but her head is too foggy to particularly care.

She slides awkwardly into the last seat and stares down at her plate as Dolan fills it with the heavy, greasy breakfast fare. She continues to stare at the plate as he hovers over her. Her friends slowly shovel eggs and bacon into alcohol-soaked stomachs.

“Well?” Dolan hisses at her. She looks up through glassy eyes to see a smile plastered on so hard his face might crack.

“Coffee.” She croaks out, trying to make the pouty face she used to use on him when she was a little girl. He does not find it cute.

“Oh you mortals and your bloody caffeine.” He mutters, tossing a kitchen rag over his shoulder and turning away to fetch coffee for all four of them.

It isn't until Maeve has the coffee in front of her and downs several soothing gulps that she registers what he has just said.

“Mortals?” She squints up at him.

He rolls his eyes at her, “Yes well, you are the one who ran your mouth last night.” He slouches against the counter, confronting the rest of the group, “Or at least that is what I assume happened, since you all burst in my room at about 2 a.m., demanding that I feed on Maeve to prove she's not insane.” He finally drops the smile, glaring at each of them in turn. “Do you know

how dangerous and irresponsible that is, for her? Do you even remember how hard it was to convince you all to shut up and go to sleep?"

The group drags bleary eyes up from their plates, glance around at each other, then lower them in shame one by one. Sol alone keeps their eyes up long enough to mutter a response, forkful of eggs halfway to their mouth.

"Oops?"

A real smile flickers behind Dolan's eyes, "Yes, oops indeed." He gives a little *hmpf* sound and pushes up off the counter, rocking on his heels and slipping a hand into his back pocket, "Well, I was a drunken idiot the first time we met, the second time you all were. I suppose on that count we're even." He begins to busy himself with the dishes, perhaps a little more quiet with the pans than he had been a moment ago, "Eat up you miserable witches," He looks over his shoulder at Maeve, "Especially you. I once again got no dinner and haven't had breakfast yet and as hungry as I am, I'm not interested until you've eaten." He sniffs, "And showered."

An hour later they have eaten, showered, changed and feel slightly more human. Maeve and Sia showered at the apartment, and Sia is currently in one of Maeve's sun dresses, which clings much tighter and shorter on her than it would on Maeve's less leggy frame. Noam and Sol live only a few blocks away, so they walked there to shower and have now returned. All four reconvene in the living room.

Maeve plays some anti-hangover neural waves low through her stereo speakers. The soothing hum is the only sound as she stands in the middle of the room next to Dolan. Noam and Sia are on the futon. He lounges while she is perched tensely on the edge of her seat. Sol leans uneasily against the window sill. Dolan claps his hands once and all four wince slightly, their heads not quite recovered.

"Oh, sorry." He apologizes with a grimace and slips his hands into his back pockets, "Well, I think we can all agree this is awkward and it's been some time since I had an audience, so let's just get this over with."

Maeve catches his elbow and turns him away from the group, whispering, "Are you sure this is a good idea?"

He glances back at them in an exaggerated fashion, leaning back but with his weight on the balls of his feet, then turns back to her, "Only if you're sure you don't want them thinking you are insane." She wrinkles her forehead and he lowers his tone, "Look I don't love that you told them but you aren't the first in the past several hundred years to bring a few trusted friends in on the family secret. Typically, the best route is to prove it to them as soon as possible, before they start calling the men with the pretty white coats." His eyes sparkle as he grins at her, "Besides, your friends are stronger than you know."

They turn back around to three incredulous faces.

Noam raises one eyebrow, dripping sarcasm, "Wow. Such whisper. Much secret. Many sneaky."

Dolan and Maeve give each other a brief, guilty side-eye glance. For a moment she is reminded of her mother catching them sneaking ice cream before dinner when she was a child, and almost smiles. It is only a brief thought, though, and then she is brought back to the present by Sia's intake of breath.

"Holy shit." Sol says quietly, leaning forward and taking their weight off the windowsill. Sia clenches her hands around the edge of the futon. Noam sits up straight, running a hand through his tight blond curls in disbelief.

Maeve watches each of them for a moment, knowing what they see. Then she turns her head to look at him. Dolan is showing off, playing up his nonhuman features for the audience. She fights the urge to roll her eyes. His fangs are fully extended; thin white spikes curving gently down in place of normal canines on either side of razor-points. His eyes shine intensely bright, seafoam green irises almost glowing. She can see now that his cheeks are gaunt from missing meals again. His eyes turn to meet hers.

Locking that eye contact with her, he reaches out to gently take her arm. Slowly he lowers himself to his knees and pulls the crook of her elbow towards his mouth, still never breaking eye contact. He turns her arm slightly to ensure her friends can see, and licks the place where he will bite. Maeve feels a burst of connection, but duller than she is used to during a feeding. Her magic writhes in her veins, as though pushing against a barrier. She's never had him feed from her like this, so cautious and almost reverently.

"Maeve," He says in a soft voice, "The charm?"

With sudden realization, she reaches for the small bottle hanging from her neck. With one hand, she slips it over her head and drops it gently on the coffee table beside them. She brushes her thick, curly hair from her eyes and he regains eye contact with her almost immediately. The strange connection resumes much stronger than before and his weakening hunger hits her already unsteady stomach like a brick.

Slowly, to ensure they all see every detail, Dolan opens his mouth and sinks his fangs into her vein, then closes his mouth around her flesh and drinks deeply. Maeve can feel the magic flowing through her, from her core through her veins and into him all at once, like a dam bursting. She also feels the hunger - his hunger - slowly fading. The sensations are exhilarating. She begins to feel faint. Before she can open her mouth and tell him to stop, her knees buckle and she falls towards the floor.

“Shit.” He gasps.

In less than an instant he is on his feet with his arms around her, cradling her like a child. He raises her arm to his mouth for one last moment to lick it closed, then scoops his arm under her knees and lifts her from the floor.

The sudden, unexpected interruption has left her blood smeared across his mouth. Her magic smells faint, the delicate, spicy fragrance turned flat and slightly sour. He looks at her friends. Noam is on his feet, arms slack at his side but fists clenched. Sia stands with her hands over her mouth, tears welling in her eyes. “You!” Dolan barks at her, “Get a bucket, she may vomit. You, there’s some juice in the refrigerator.” He motions to Noam with his head.

The two move into action immediately, relieved to realize their friend is not dead. Sol steps forward cautiously, raising their hand to Maeve’s pale cheek, hovering their palm centimeters from her skin.

“You took too much.” Sol accuses, looking up into Dolan’s face. They are taken aback for a moment. Dolan’s eyes still shine, perhaps brighter this close, and his fangs are just beginning to recede into his scarlet stained gums. Sol’s disdained expression quells slightly and they turn their flushed cheeks back towards Maeve.

Dolan speaks to them, tone gentle, “The bottle. It’s her protection charm. It caused this mess, but it will help her regain strength.”

Sol retrieves the bottle as Dolan moves towards the futon and slowly lowers Maeve to rest on it. He lifts Maeve’s head so Sol can place the charm back around her neck. Just then, thankfully, Sia returns with the bucket and Noam with a tall glass of juice. Maeve’s eyes flicker open, confused and surrounded by familiar faces. She sits up slightly and takes the offered juice from Noam. Maeve takes a deep drink, swallows, and immediately throws it back up into the bucket. Spitting half-digested breakfast bits, she raises her face to look at Dolan.

“You fucking asshole.”

He lets out a short laugh, “Serves you right for locking me out with that protection charm, spilling the beans, starving me again and coming home like a drunken fool.”

She takes a tentative sip of the juice, glaring daggers at him.

He sighs, “We have a metaphysical connection, Maeve. Your protection charm doesn’t just stop me from feeding on you. It mutes that connection and stops the magic from flowing through you. If you only take it off for feedings, it’s like opening up a high-pressure line all at once.”

“I’m keeping the fucking charm.” She chokes out, brushing her hair back from her face.

He shrugs, "It's your vomit. I suppose you will just have to learn to deal with it." He looks to Sia, "She'll be fine," He pats Maeve's leg sharply twice then bounces up to standing on the balls of his feet, "She tastes terrible, by the way, if anyone's asking," He twirls laissez-faire on his heels to face the window, licking the sticky blood from his lips. The sweet-spice scent of her magic is strong enough now to follow him across the room.

"No one did." Sia hisses sharply, slowly rubbing Maeve's arm and refusing to even look at Dolan.

Dolan listens for a moment. Every beating heart in the room is agitated, and he feels a tingling on the back of his neck. He reaches up to rub it with one long-fingered hand, and slowly turns his head to glance around the room. Maeve looks pale, but slightly better, her focus entirely on not vomiting again, it seems. Three sets of eyes bore into him, the directed energy growing stronger by the second. Sia is still seated on the floor, cross-legged, stroking Maeve's hair. Noam's hulking shape is in the kitchen, leaning forward on the island facing Dolan, dark eyes glaring down his long nose through curly bangs. Sol stands alone in the middle of the floor, feet shoulder width, hands clenched at their sides.

"Well," Dolan gives half a grin, then heel-toes his way slowly around the coffee table and towards the door, "I can see I'm not needed at the moment."

As he steps towards Sol, they shift slightly to block his path. Dolan moves with supernatural speed, so that he is suddenly standing with his face an inch from theirs. Sol doesn't flinch, just lets out a heavy breath through their nose, the air jiggling the gold nose ring hanging from their left nostril.

The corners of Dolan's eyes crinkle in a smile and he gazes directly into Sol's caramel ones, "I'm sure you all have a lot to talk about." He steps around them to the door, opens it, and strides through. Just before it shuts, he peeks his face through the crack and calls out to Maeve, "I'll be back for dinner."

"Sociopath." Sol mutters under their breath, folding into a full lotus position on the floor.

"Factual." Noam makes his way to the far end of the futon, where he gently lifts Maeve's legs, sits down, and sets them in his lap.

Maeve carefully shifts in her seat, "He's not insane, he's just...not human."

"Agreed. He's not human, he's an asshole." Noam removes one of Maeve's socks and begins rubbing her feet.

"Well, also the fangs." Sol interjects.

"Also the fangs." Noam shudders, "Whatever a vampire is, that dude is *it*."

Maeve looks around at each of them, "So you don't think I'm insane."

There is a heavy pause, then Sia speaks, "There is no denying what we all just saw." She takes a deep breath as though to calm her nerves, "What's insane is that you put up with him literally using you as a food source and treating you like that."

"It's not usually that...dramatic," Maeve shakes her head, "And I told you, I don't really have much choice. The blood magic was done hundreds of years ago." She takes another drink of the orange juice with a shrug

"But spells can be undone, theoretically," Noam moves his attention to her other foot, "Has anyone in your family ever tried?"

"No one ever talked about it when I was growing up if they did." Maeve runs a hand through her hair, shaking it back from her face. "My mom might know if someone has tried to break it."

"So call and ask her." Sol fiddles with the top button and collar of their flannel t-shirt.

"Oh, yeah, right." Maeve rolls her eyes.

Sia stands abruptly, taking the vomit-filled trash can with her and moving towards the large kitchen can to dispose of the messy bag. "So you're just going to put up with abuse because you don't want to call your momma?" She clicks her tongue against her teeth.

"I'm just saying that's not a great phone call," Maeve turns her head and shoulders to follow Sia's movement, "Hey, mom, sorry Aunt Linda died. How was the funeral? Sorry I couldn't make it, even though I haven't been home in years. By the way, any clue how to break the 400 year old blood curse that ties our family to a vampire, because feeding my uncle three times a day is a huge pain in the ass."

Sol, Noam and Sia stop for a moment to consider her outburst.

"So, this curse is the real reason you never go back to Michigan for holidays?" Sia asks gently.

Maeve nods, "Not since I turned 18. It was the only way to live my life without being tied down to Dolan." She pushes her hair back from her face, "I guess I thought I would have a few more years to run away from the curse before...before it caught up to me...and then I didn't even go home for the funeral."

"So you see why I can't just call up and chat?"

"Yeah," Noam nods, "Maybe that's more of a face-to-face conversation."

"You could head home for Indigenous People's Day." Sol suggests, "I know it's a little way off but," they form their fingers into air quotations, "'Thanksgiving' break," ~~they scoff~~, "might be a good time to reconnect with your family and ask a few questions."

Sia returns to the group, standing with her arms crossed, "One of us could go with you, see what we can dig up together."

Sol shifts, uncrossing their legs, "I can't go, my dads want me home for their big fall church thing."

"When are you going to tell them about your practice?" Maeve asks, setting her empty glass on the floor.

Sol forces a laugh, "One family crisis at a time. They are still reconciling with the church that the new priest is a gay dude with a kid who can't pick a gender. The church leaders are pretty open minded but announcing the preacher's kid is a witch might be a bit much for them."

Maeve nods, "Fair enough." She turns to Noam, "Want to come to the great land of Yoopers with me?"

Noam holds up his palms like scales and puts on a nasal lilt, "Freeze my ass off for a week while your mom asks me a million times if we're dating," He raises the other hand a bit higher, "Hide from my rabbi, play video games, and eat my mom's delicious apple pie." He rolls his head around and drops his voice an octave, "No, I do not want to go to Michigan with you."

Sia drops her arms to her sides, "I'll go with her," Her tone is resigned but firm, "My old foster parents are great but they've got enough kids in the house without me packing my ass back home anyway."

"Great." Maeve runs a hand through her hair, "In the meantime," She points a finger at each of them in turn, "The more freaked out you seem the more of a drama queen he will be, and the more of a pain in the ass he will be for me to deal with. I want all of you to treat him like a normal human being."

"But he's not a normal human being." Noam raises his eyebrows at her.

"No," Maeve grins, "He's an asshole."