

## **Blood That Binds Ep 9 - I Want to Go Home**

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### *The Apartment*

*A few hours after the attack*

Maeve's hand goes to her neck the second Dolan walks into the apartment. Though his saliva closed the wound, the skin is raised and tender. She is sitting on the futon, wrapped in an oversized sweater and a blanket. Her other hand clutches the protection bottle so tightly her knuckles are white. In her lap lay lumps of citrine and copper. A bottle of water rests on the coffee table nearby.

Dolan surveys her calmly, closing the door behind him slowly and quietly. He sets his keys on the kitchen island and stares at them for a moment before running a hand through his hair.

"I see you're home at a reasonable time for dinner."

The breaking silence drops a stone in her stomach. Even with the bottle once again on her person, she can feel her connection to him and his hunger. The thought sickens her, and she swallows, reaching down her free hand to pick up the stones from her lap. Dolan steps towards the futon as though to take a seat.

Noam enters from the bathroom, an aspirin bottle looking miniscule in his large hands. Dolan's eyes barely shift to acknowledge the giant man's presence. Noam hesitates for a moment, then continues over to Maeve.

"Here you go, took me a minute to find them."

Maeve swiftly tucks her hair around her neck to conceal the bite. She takes the bottle and Noam carefully perches himself behind her, supporting her back and wrapping his arms around her as she takes the pills with a large gulp of water that makes her wince. In Maeve's continued silence and under Dolan's unwavering gaze, Noam speaks.

"She fainted in the library earlier. Umbrosia found her and I brought her home. She's still not feeling well. I don't know if she should be..."

Maeve retreats into her own thoughts, wishing they could drown out the conversation happening about her, around her. Wishing she could drown out the thoughts themselves.

*Stupid. Can't even keep to a decent schedule. So selfish. If I hadn't been so selfish and thoughtless this wouldn't have happened. Ruined a whole day of studying just because I can't stick to a fucking schedule. Now everyone will be behind on the assignment and it's my fault. And on top of that now Dolan's mad at me. Probably dreading a lifetime chained to such a*

*selfish, pathetic, depressed... If I just ended everything then none of them would be stuck with me. Except that's cheating, and then Dolan would end up feeding on other people who aren't conduits and...He took care of me my whole life, now it's my turn and I'm fucking it up, just like I fuck up everything. I'm such a useless, pathetic piece of--*

"Noam, I appreciate your concern, but you forget that Maeve is my niece and I am more than capable of caring for her when she is sick. I've been doing so her entire life. What she needs is rest and I think it is best if you leave."

"He's right."

Maeve speaks up, breaking away from her spiraling thoughts for a moment. Her tone and expression are flatter than the second-hand coffee table nearby. Her eyes fixate on a scratch at one of its corners, and she wonders vaguely if the table is crooked or the scratch is only creating that illusion.

"You should go."

Noam releases his hold on her shoulders slightly and leans around to try and catch her eyes.

"But, you asked me to stay with you?"

"And now I'm asking you to go."

With an effort that feels like sandpaper on her skin and makes her bones ache, she drags her eyes from the table to his face and shows a small smile.

"I'm fine, really. You should go study, I've kept you long enough. Dolan can take care of me."

Noam's eyes search her face for a moment, every line of his expression filled with adoration and concern. Slowly, he places a kiss on her cheek.

"Ok."

Without another word, he stands and exits the apartment. Dolan watches him go and stares at the closed door. Dripping water in the kitchen sink ticks by several heavy, empty seconds before he speaks.

"Do you remember when you were sick as a child and I used to tuck you in after watching a scary movie?"

Maeve's eyes settle on his long, thin fingers as he approaches and sits at her feet, gently tucking them further under the blanket. When she doesn't respond, his mouth turns downward into a pout.

"I don't like hurting people, Maeve. That's why I bound myself to your family in the first place. How many times have I told you that?"

Her eyes move to him briefly, then away, gazing off blankly.

He lets out a long sigh, "You get a small taste of what this hunger feels like. I know I shouldn't have behaved the way I did today, but--"

Maeve sets the protection bottle on the coffee table nearby and holds out her arm, pushing up the sleeve to expose her inner elbow.

"Just take it."

He stares at her in silence, pressing his fingertips to his pursed lips, as though that could hide the fangs already peeking out.

Maeve pushes her hair back from her forehead with a long breath.

"I know what it's like to get bitchy because I haven't eaten." Her shoulders raise in an almost imperceptible shrug, "Clearly it isn't a good idea to make a vampire hangry."

She smiles, but it doesn't reach her eyes... and she doesn't meet his.

Dolan gives a small, lopsided grin. He hears her heart racing, causing her blood to jump erratically in her veins. He opens his mouth and lowers his fangs to her skin. This time he is more than gentle, taking a beat for his saliva to take effect before carefully piercing her flesh. Maeve sucks in a breath at the pain, her heart catching and then thumping in relief that it is nothing like the searing jolt he had given her neck earlier. Her gaze turns to her goddess idol and she grips the stones in her hand more tightly.

When he is finished, he pats her shin in a fatherly manner.

"Rest up, eat something healthy."

The moment he is out of sight down the hall, she snatches up her protection bottle and holds it to her chest, eyes closed.

*I will do better. It will all be ok, I just have to do better.*

The thought solidifies in her mind like an anchor, and she rolls onto her side on the futon, wanting nothing more than to sleep.

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*The Following Weekend*

*The Lots at Sandcastle - Pittsburgh*

It is early October, and the air turns chilly with the leaves. The orange and brown provide a fitting backdrop to the vendors offering everything from \$100 hand-made besoms to ancestor divination sessions to dollar store quality witch hats. The sky is clear and crisp, a cold blue. Maeve stands near their tiny booth, tucked next to a questionable, culturally appropriative tent advertising "Chakra Healing Essential Oils" in rainbow letters. A small group workshop on pendulum divination takes place on the other side of their booth. She gazes at the people strolling by, glad she had opted for a warm sweater dress and thick leggings despite the blue sky and sun shining down.

As if to prove her point, a breeze comes along to knock over the laminated sign sitting on their table. She glances up to see Umbrosia is busy walking a few interested people through the paper version of their survey while another uses the tablet. The witch had pumped up her glamour spells that day and it was definitely helping to attract people to their booth. Maeve turns and crouches to retrieve the fallen sign from the ground.

"Hi there."

She pops up, face to face and less than a foot from platinum blonde hair, gorgeous sparkling eyes, and intricate tattoos she recognizes immediately.

"Fuck! Oh, hi, Rona. Yeah. Hello." Maeve almost drops the sign to the ground again before settling it on the folding table. She can feel her cheeks heating up to a bright red.

"You guys doing a survey or something?" Rona trails her long, thin fingertips over the tabletop before snatching up one of the business cards scattered amongst pens and clipboards.

"Um...yeah." Maeve busies her hands by tucking several of the cards back under little rocks and crystals to prevent them from blowing away. Her eyes, however, are distracted by the bit of stomach peeking out from under Rona's cropped sweater. "It's a study comparing major themes in modern polytheism to ancient beliefs from different cultures."

"Hmm...interesting."

Rona sets the card back on the table, hooking a thumb through the front belt loop of her jeans. Inky figures leap over her lower ribs and above her hip bone, hinting at further tattoos. Maeve

blushes deeper as she remembers running her stumbling, intoxicated fingers over that very same artwork.

“Yeah it’s...well, it’s for a class, so...” Maeve pulls her eyes back to Rona’s face. The taller woman gazes at her intensely. “But yeah, I’m interested. Interesting! Shit, I mean, I do find it interesting.”

“Can I take the survey?” Rona lowers her eyes to the tablet tucked under Maeve’s arm.

“What? Oh, yeah. Absolutely.” Maeve wakes up the device screen and navigates to the survey form. “Just, um, follow the prompts and answer the questions...it’s pretty straight forward, actually, but let me know if you have any questions.”

She hands over the tablet, which Rona immediately sets on the table and begins tapping and typing. The two stand in silence, Rona half bent-over to reach the touchscreen. Maeve folds her hands in front of her, trying desperately to become fascinated with her fingernails and divert her attention to anything other than the punk-rock bombshell standing in front of her. Her eyes land on Umbrosia, who gestures to Rona and then gives Maeve a huge double thumbs-up. Maeve rolls her eyes and Sia raises her eyebrows, placing a hand on her hip.

Maeve runs a hand through her hair and lets out a long exhale.

“So. I haven’t seen you since...well, a couple of weeks ago. I haven’t seen you around, that is. At the bar. Or anywhere. Except here. Now.”

Her sentence and confidence cascade quickly off a short cliff.

Rona glances up briefly from the survey, lips pursing, using one hand to tuck her long blonde hair behind her ear.

“You didn’t call the number.”

“The---? Oh, right.”

Maeve’s memory flickers back to ten black digits hand-written on the bikini line of a scrap of white lace panties. Panties she had carried around in her pocket for several days before tucking them into the back of her own underwear drawer.

Rona finishes the survey and straightens up, raising one eyebrow and locking eyes with Maeve.

“So are you going to ask me out or not?”

“Well. I didn’t call the number.”

Maeve crosses her arms over her chest and juts out one hip along with her chin.

\*\*\*snort\*\*\* “Defensive. Cute. I know you didn’t call the number. That’s not what I asked.”

Rona smiles, her own neck and cheeks turning a little red.

Maeve’s jaw relaxes a little, but doesn’t speak. Her eyes widen slightly, leaving the ball in Rona’s court.

Rona’s eyes drop, then roam around the crowd.

“Hey, it’s not the first time the number on the panties thing has struck out. It’s a pretty bold move, I know. It *usually* works. But not always. If you do want that drink...”

She trails her gaze over Maeve’s neck, cheek and lips, then leans over the table separating them, placing her fingertips on its surface.

\*\*\*lean in sexy whisper\*\*\* “Call the number.”

“I am. I mean. I do. I just...”

She takes a deep breath and lets it out, remembering with embarrassment her period-stained sheets the morning Rona left without saying goodbye.

“How did I know it was even a real number?”

Her chin and arms drop, eyes landing once again on Rona’s hands.

One of those hands rises up to cup her cheek tenderly for a moment, bringing her green eyes back to meet blue ones. Maeve feels the spark, the connection, the way their energies reach towards each other at the point of contact. Something about Rona’s energy feels strangely familiar to her, a barrier that sets off a small alarm in the back of her mind. Before she can decide whether to pull away, Rona’s hand pats her cheek unexpectedly and steps away from her.

“Call the number. Be ballsy. It’s sexier on you.”

With that final comment and a toss of platinum hair, she is gone in the crowd.

“Maeve?”

Umbrosia steps up to her friend's side, following Maeve's gaze to the place in the crowd where Rona has disappeared.

"Do we know her?"

Maeve's smile flows slowly from the crease of her lips to all corners of her face like daylight creeping over a hillside.

"That's the, um, the one who left me her number."

She can feel the warm magic in the sunlight flowing down over and through her skin, and the life-energy of the grass reaching up in return, just as eager to soak it in as the people milling about.

"The Panty Dropper? Da-yum. Nice."

Her gaze flicks down to Maeve's glowing face.

"Yeah, she's..."

Maeve lets out the next word on a long exhale, "...awesome."

"Oh, have you been seeing her? Is she the one that gave you the hickey?"

Sia pinches Maeve's arm teasingly.

Maeve's smile drops instantly and she covers the red spot on her throat with her hand.

"Um, no. It's not a hickey."

She slides her hand to the bottle around her neck, pushing against the energy of her shields. She finds reassurance in the feeling of the energy flow stifled by the edges of the charm's barriers. They surround her like a second skin just outside of her own, dulling the flow of energy both in and out.

"Hey, it's a little high-school for me, but I'm not judging."

Sia's own smile drops when Maeve doesn't respond, just gazes into the distance.

"Maeve? Are you ok?"

Maeve tries for a cheerful expression, tries to pull the warm energy of the sun back into her smile. But just as the bottle charm protects her, it limits the flow of her magic...and the weight in

her chest, the prickling energy reaches into her throat and head, making it hard to breathe. Every ounce of her body fights to hold that sensation in, to push down the memory, the fear. She prays she manages to keep it out of her eyes and voice when she looks up and responds.

“Yeah, sorry, just distracted. What time is it?”

Maeve turns and grabs her phone and purse from underneath one of the tables.

“Almost five, why?”

“Do you think we have enough people? I’ve got to get home for dinner.”

Maeve brushes the fingernails of her left hand over her right inner elbow.

“Yeah, no problem. I can stay for a bit if you’ve got to go but, you know Dolan could always come meet us.”

The space between Umbrosia’s eyes crinkles as she watches Maeve’s suddenly frantic energy

“No, it’s really better if I go meet him. Thanks for staying, I’ll, um...I’ll text you later.”

Maeve speeds out of the booth with a quick wave, eyes on the ground.

Sitting on the bus minutes later, Maeve’s eyes are glued to her fingernails. Her cuticles are torn, nails bitten back and uneven. She picks at a jagged edge on her thumbnail. Linda would have chastised her for letting them reach such a state. Her mother had never bugged her about things like nail polish and makeup. Eliza never had an interest in teaching her about "girly" things.

Her mother.

Her mother, whose sister had recently died. Who was probably filled with grief and worry for her daughter, now a blood-bag to the family legacy. Who would want to make hell itself pay if she knew how Dolan had attacked her. Who would probably get them all killed in the process, because some magic just can’t be broken. Her mother, who would be filled with guilt over her daughter’s pain.

Her mother, who she has been avoiding.

Maeve’s rough fingers wake up her cell phone screen, open the contacts, and raise the phone to her ear.

“Mom? It’s Maeve. Umbrosia and I would like to come visit.”



Maeve's gaze trails out the window to the city streets sliding by, bringing her closer to her apartment.

"I want to come home, Mom."

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*The Apartment*

Maeve slides the key into her apartment door, the metal cold and smooth between her fingers. She pauses, a beat she wishes would last an eternity. No use in waiting. Her heart is pounding in her chest, and he probably already knows she's at the door. She lets out a long, shaky breath and turns the lock. The door is open halfway when she stops with a jolt of surprise, nearly dropping the large iced coffee in her right hand.

"Umbrosia? How did you get here before me?"

Her best friend stands behind the kitchen island, leaning up against the fridge. Dolan is seated nearby, long fingers propping up his cheek and elbow resting on the table. He barely turns his head when Maeve walks in.

"I didn't stop for coffee."

Sia smiles, pushing herself fully upright off the refrigerator.

Maeve steps into the apartment, retrieving her keys and letting the door swing shut behind her, clicking the deadbolt over to the locked position. The room seems to crackle like static against her skin, and her heart pounds. She drags her eyes from Dolan to Sia, forcing her smile to reach her eyes.

"Did I forget something at the pop-up? You could have texted me."

"My phone's dead. I...forgot to charge it this morning."

Sia's eyes flick to Dolan, and her smile flutters for a second.

"Anyway, I forgot to ask if you could come help me with some, um homework. But, I left my books at my place."

Sia steps away from the fridge, around the island and towards Maeve.

"So we'll have to go there to figure out this problem I'm having...with calculus."

Sia locks eye contact with her friend, eyes bright and intense with a slight wrinkle between her eyebrows.

“Well, I suck at math, but, um...”

Maeve’s eyes slide past Sia again to Dolan, who is seemingly engrossed in his phone.

“Dinner first, young lady.”

He glances up, his eyes flashing, with a smile that reveals his fangs extending.

“Sia, why don’t you join us?”

Sia slaps on a smile as she spins to face Dolan.

“I’d like that--”

“Oh, I don’t know if that’s a good idea. I’ll come to your place later.”

“Nonsense.”

Dolan straightens up, knocking his knuckles on the countertop.

”I’ll even take a night off from cooking and order a pizza to save time. That way you girls can get back to studying sooner.”

He makes a few clicks on his phone and brings it to his ear.

Maeve tries to release the tension in her shoulders, shifting her head back and forth. She lifts the iced coffee straw to her lips to avoid making any expression. Sia turns back to her and places a hand on Maeve’s arm. Sia’s smile stays wide, but her eyes are filled with daggers and she shifts her feet, subconsciously placing her body directly between Maeve and Dolan.

“Do you hear that? The vampire is ordering us pizza.”

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*Eighteen years prior*

*Upper Peninsula, MI*

*Maeve’s childhood home*

Dolan swings his torso into the hall from the kitchen, hanging onto either side of the doorframe by his fingertips.

“Alright everyone, pizza’s here,” he calls towards the living room.

Maeve’s little bare feet pat down the stairs and to the TV. She pops a DVD into the player, then throws herself across the couch to quickly snatch the remote and begin switching the input. Previews spring onto the screen. In a nearby recliner, Linda leans her head back and shifts in her seat, one hand gently pressed on a rounding stomach.

“Dolly, would you be a dear and bring mine here please?”

She is speaking to Dolan, but her voice doesn’t rise much above normal volume.

“This recliner is hell to get out of with a watermelon in your lap.”

In the kitchen, Dolan swiftly plates out pizza slices.

“What about you, Maeve? Going to come get some pizza?” He calls back.

“Maeve feels like a lazy watelmermon too, Unc’ Dolan.”

Maeve tosses an arm over her face dramatically.

Dolan chuckles and his fangs catch the light from the TV screen as he joins them, carrying a plate of pizza in either hand. He passes one to Maeve and the other to Linda. The little girl bounces forward to peer at her aunt’s plate.

“Hey! How come she gets more than me?”

Dolan takes a seat next to Maeve, wrapping his arm around her shoulder and tapping the furrowed space between her eyebrows with his index finger.

“Because your Auntie has a very special job. She’s got to care for three people now. Herself...”

“And you and watelmermon baby?”

“That’s right, Maeve.” Linda pipes up, smiling before taking a large bite of cheesy pizza.

Maeve chomps down on some of her own pizza thoughtfully. After a moment she swallows and narrows her eyes.

“Will the watelmermon eat pizza when it comes out?”

Dolan nods, his expression deeply serious, “Eventually.”

Maeve snaps her face around to look at him.

“But still not you, right? You still just eat magic?”

Linda’s smile wavers slightly, and she drops the pizza back down to her plate. Maeve’s eyes don’t catch it, though, as they focus only on Dolan. He brushes hair back from Maeve’s forehead and nods again. Maeve turns her attention to her pizza and begins mumbling to herself in a whisper.

“Someday I’ll make magic for Unc’ Dolan to eat. Then Aunt Linda won’t steal all my pizza for the watelmermon.”

Dolan gives Maeve’s shoulder a light squeeze, his eyes settling softly on her for a few moments, then turning them back to Linda, who smiles and takes another large bite. Finally, he looks towards the TV with no expression on his face.

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*Umbrosia’s Apartment*  
*Present Day*

Street lights shine in through Umbrosia’s single window, leaving a patch of light on the floor despite the lack of moon outside. She slumps into the studio space with Noam, Sol and their questions in tow. She tosses her keys and phone onto the bed that takes up most of the open space.

“What do you mean she’s still over there with him?”

Sol’s voice spits fire as they stomp in with combat boots they immediately kneel to remove. Noam finds a seat nearby on the floor, leaning back against the wall. Umbrosia kicks off her shoes and flops to a seat on the edge of her bed.

“I stayed as long as I could, but after he fed on her she said she was exhausted and she wanted to go to bed.”

“Yeah, exhausted because she’s basically anemic.”

Sol begins pacing their green woolen socks back and forth across the carpet.

“Or because she’s in college, like us, and she’s sleeping like zero hours,” Umbrosia reasons with them. “We have no way of knowing how much he’s actually taking from her in a day.”

“No, but we know that the human body isn’t designed to give blood three times a day, every day. Even if she increases her calorie intake, her bone marrow just won’t be able to keep up with--”

“It doesn’t matter.”

Noam sits up slightly, lifting his head up from where it rests against the wall. Sol pauses their pacing and crosses their arms over their chest.

“We can debate biology all day, bottom line is we know Maeve would stop being her uncle’s blood bag in a...in a heartbeat...if she thought she could.”

“Blood bag in a heartbeat? Really?”

Sia arches a finely groomed eyebrow at him, glossy lips bowing into a smile. Noam rolls his eyes.

“Shut up. The point is, we are her friends, and we’re not witches for nothing. Conduits or not there has to be something we can do about this.”

He twists a beaded bracelet on his wrist back and forth.

Sol rubs their thumb along their lower lip, then tugs on it suddenly, eyes resting on Noam’s hands.

“Any ideas?”

Noam lets out a long breath, shaking his head, “I’ve been praying for wisdom and guidance but...I’m not exactly an expert on faeries or vampires or...look, I’m a barely practicing Jewish witch. I’ve never tackled anything like this before.”

Umbrosia shifts, tugging at her bra underwire with both hands.

“I don’t know what went down at the library last week, but...”

“Do you think he did something to her? He wasn’t even there.”

Sol folds their arms around their knees. Noam’s eyes move between Sol and Sia.

“That we know of. The way she reacted when he showed up at her apartment...something was off. Something’s been off with her since.”

Umbrosia shifts again, shaking her head, "Damn just thinking about him sinking his teeth into her makes me sweat. Do you guys mind if I-?"

Noam and Sol both shake their heads.

"Do what you gotta do."

Umbrosia reaches down the front of her shirt and pulls out two silicone breast forms, which she flings behind her into a laundry basket.

"Whoo. Thank Mary."

She then unclasps the deflated bra at the front and, with some maneuvering, removes each arm from the bra straps beneath her shirt and pulls it out from the bottom, laying it on the bed next to her.

"Well if she won't talk to us there isn't much we can do." Sia tugs at her shirt until it lays more naturally on her chest, "Maevie said she called her mother and confirmed a trip home for Thanksgiving. I'll get as much information as I can and try to talk to her alone about at least trying to break the spell."

"That's almost a month away!" Sol protests and returns to their pacing.

"In the meantime..." Noam interrupts, "We stick as close to her as possible, keep an eye on her and do as much research as we can."