

## **Blood That Binds Ep 1 - Old World Misogynistic Bullshit**

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*Scotland, 1629*

Pale hands clutch at the cloak, tugging the hood further over dark, curly hair. Paler still the mist clinging to its hem at her feet, so heavy the candles marking outer edges of the clearing splutter and threaten to go out. The coven works swiftly and deliberately, marking lines in the earth with salts, herbs, stones. As the final lines connect, creating an unbroken intricate knot, the fog clears in a near perfect circle. Her left hand touches the Brigid's cross around her neck with a swift and genuine prayer of gratitude.

A hand gently touches her arm. "We are ready for you, sister." The figure leans forward to kiss her cold cheek and place a small knife in her hand, then steps away, the woman taking her place in the circle.

He appears across from her with complete silence, stepping out of the mist like a shadow. The others follow him, dispersing around the ring so that each stands several feet behind one of her priestesses. The coven begins chanting softly, and he extends his hand to her. With a deep breath and a moment to clear her mind, she steps inside the circle, walking towards this dark creature, careful not to meet his eyes. He joins her in the center, hand still outstretched. Only then, as she places the knife in his hand, does she really look at him. His eyes glow like those of a nighttime animal in the candlelight. A fang already peaks out over one lip. His cheeks are gaunt, and his hand trembles slightly as he takes the blade. Besides the hunger in his eyes, there is something else. The same desperation she knows is in her heart. Holding his gaze she joins in the chant with her own spell. A witch approaches and carefully binds her left hand to his offered right. The energy is palpable, intense, burning through her veins. His nostrils flare and she knows he can smell it in her blood.

With her remaining free hand, she pushes back her hood and hair to reveal her neck to him. Instead of moving closer to her he drops to his knee, smiling a little at her surprise. He joins her in chanting the spell. Inside the binding he gently grips her hand and pulls her arm a bit closer. He lifts the knife and holds it just above her wrist. With a sharp breath she reminds herself that this dark immortal being, this blood-drinking sidhe, is completely at her mercy. He needs her as desperately as she needs him.

The pain at her wrist brings her back, and in a moment he is sucking at the wound, allowing just a little to drip onto the binding cloth. The chant fades with a final prayer for blessing on this dark and strange union. When he is done, she feels herself beginning to faint, but he is so quick. He catches her just as her knees begin to buckle. Unbinding their hands, he wraps the bandage around her wound before a single drop of blood can touch the ground. A few of her sisters come to steady her, each of them with small wounds at their necks still dripping blood. Others work to dismantle the ritual elements. The magic dispels and fog drifts back in, but she can still feel the heat in her blood.

She looks back at him and he nods, "Thank you," with a small grin. Then he turns away and, with his flock and a shock of ginger hair, disappears once more.

A flapping catches her attention and she turns towards the dim early morning light. Three crows alight on the stone to the east. *Three for a wedding.* Her wrist aches and she clutches it to her chest. To the northeast, four more swirl before landing, cocking their heads at her. *Four for a birth.* The hand slides swiftly to her stomach. She stumbles, knocking two stones against each other. The crows fly together towards the west. *Seven for a secret never to be told.* With one last, silent prayer she bends awkwardly to scoop up the knife. One of her sisters catches her hand and gathers it for her. She smiles and pulls the cloak hood back over her head. Hands locked together in silent, desperate hope, they turn and walk into the mist. Behind them, a single crow lands in the center of the now-broken circle.

### *Pittsburgh, Present Day*

The morning sun shines bright early, launching deep shadows across some buildings and leaping energetically over the red sandstone and brick of others. Pittsburgh gives off a clean, smoky city smell that rises up from the streets along with the wisps of fog from the rivers; years of burning steel furnace ash and rust ingrained deeply on the bones of the one-way streets, snaking around Carnegie's steel legacy of theatres and museums. That refreshing combination of smoke and mist and sunlight bleed through blue curtains and under the slightly open window, causing green eyes to blink open and narrow, peering through a mess of brunette bed head.

The eyes crinkle and a hand rubs at last night's mascara, smudging it further across her eyelids. She rolls across the bed and reaches to a handmade ceramic bowl on the rickety blue side table. Propping herself up with one hand, she searches for the correct item. A moment later she sits up, pushing unruly hair back from her face and squinting at the sigil engraved on a clay pendant. Satisfied she has the right one, she says a quick productivity incantation and fastens the cold chain around her neck. Only then does she place her feet on the cool hardwood floor and walk to the bathroom across a narrow hall, leaving her yellow bed sheets in a tangle behind her.

She returns a few minutes later, her mouth tasting of toothpaste and her hair tucked into a lopsided ponytail. From her dresser she pulls a pair of baggy, stained sweatpants, fresh underwear, her most comfortable bra, and an old t-shirt. Then a few steps down the hall to the left in her tiny kitchen, she pours a cup of hot coffee, turns on an-old fashioned stereo in the adjoining living/dining space and gently drops the needle on the record. Sitting on the stool next to her portable kitchen island, she checks the to-do list she made the night before. Her scrawling handwriting is much more erratic at the bottom of the list than at the top. For a moment she is so engulfed in the list that she almost drinks the room-temperature, watery dregs of last night's rocks glass instead of the coffee.

Two cups of coffee later she is deep in cleaning mode, singing along with the Sonny and Cher record gliding in circles on the turntable. The scents of lemon and honey drift from a potion bubbling softly on the stove. Just as she is about to start up the vacuum, she hears a knock at the door. Wrinkling her forehead, she turns down the stereo. Still humming, she peers through the peephole. Her humming stops abruptly.

“Oh, fuck.” She steps back from the door. Her chest tightens and burns.

The knocking comes again. “Hello? Listen, I know you’re in there. I can hear you just on the other side of the door.” The male voice has gravel in it. “And smell you.” The voice is slightly softer.

With a sharp sigh she unlocks and yanks the door open. The stale smell of public transportation drifts in, along with some sort of musky cologne. “What the hell do you want?”

“Is that any way to talk to your elder?” Medium height and pale, he leans against the door frame nonchalantly. From head to toe he is dressed in black: ripped skinny jeans, t-shirt, military style jacket complete with brass buttons down the front and on the epaulets, black grunge boots, and...

*Jesus Christ is he wearing mascara?*

....all beneath a shock of ginger hair.

“Welcome to the black parade.” She quips, the metal door handle still cool in her grip.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” He runs a hand through his hair self consciously and glances down at his outfit.

“Isn’t the emo-junky look a little cliché for you?” She settles a hand against the other side of the door jam, blocking the threshold. Tiny, rough splinters poke at her palm through varnish that hasn’t been retouched in ages.

“Don’t you criticize my wardrobe, I’ve been on a train for twelve hours, and you’re not exactly dressed for the ball, are you, Cinderella?” He scoffs at her baggy sweatpants and messy hair.

She stares at him, her mouth making a flat line across her face, her eyelids drooping, nonplussed.

He rolls his eyes. “Are you going to invite me in or shall I stand out here all day?” He gestures to the dim hallway. As he turns slightly, the light cuts across his sharp cheekbones and reveals shadows under his eyes. He can smell the potion ingredients on her fingers and the magic coursing strongly through her veins.

"Come in before you eat the neighbors." She pulls him in and past her by the front of his jacket, then closes and locks the door behind him. When she turns to face him he has his fingers tucked into his back jeans pockets, turning slowly on his heels to survey her apartment.

"How did you get in the building, anyway?" She asks.

"Ah, the rules with rentals are a bit..." He waggles his hand side to side, "blurry. More about who calls a place home than who actually owns it when it comes to dwelling spirits."

"I meant the buzzer."

"Oh, right. One of your neighbors was nice enough to hold the door for me. Nice place. A bit quaint." He bumps into the stereo, causing the record to skip, "Not too...roomy."

She slips past him to the stove, flicks her fingers at the record sharply on her way and the skipping corrects itself, "Meaning you hypnotized her into it."

"Do I look like I have the energy for that?" He gestures to the circles under his eyes, "No, Miss Judgemental, some people are just nice."

She takes the lid off the pot and stirs the contents slowly clockwise with a wooden spoon. The smell in the room gets stronger, as if the yellow walls are weeping lemon juice, and the scent is the only thing that fills the silence for a moment. "So, Aunt Linda..."

He sighs and leans his elbows down on the island. "Three days ago in her sleep." There is a short, heavy pause. "Your cousins arranged the funeral. I'm sorry, I should have called and invited you but...our backup supply barely got me through last night and..." He traces patterns in stains and scratches on the countertop with a long index fingernail, "I didn't think you'd want to come."

"No, it's ok..." She glances back at him again with a wry smile, "Mom called, but I...I have classes and...a funeral is just a little much for me right now." She turns to the cabinet to her right and begins searching through herbs and ingredients. Most of them are in old spice containers relabeled with masking tape and permanent marker, although there are a few glass jelly and pickle jars mixed in. "I'm surprised you would miss it, though, even with a low blood supply."

"Your aunt and I said our goodbyes and...let's just say I wasn't particularly wanted either, for various reasons."

"So what are you here for, to bring me back to the yaya sisterhood of secluded witches?" Her jaw juts out slightly and there is a barely restrained iciness in her voice.

“What? No, no of course not. Your mother has her hands full with your cousins right now, anyway” He scrunches his face in an exaggerated fashion. “You know how she is with them. And she wants you to have your freedom.” He stops tracing and examines his perfect cuticles.

“Except when it comes to 400 year old blood curses.” She mumbles derisively and turns back to the pot, shaking out a bit of some shimmery pink something into it. The rising steam takes on a blue tinge.

“Blood pact,” he corrects and lets out a large puffing breath, “But, yeah, well, that is the thing. With Linda dead, you’re the last conduit. We were hoping your cousins would show signs; that they were late bloomers, but...well they’re not. It would take about a gallon from each of them to keep me from wasting away, so...” He draws out the ‘o’ and drums his fingers on the counter.

“Well fuck me in the ass, how lucky am I?” She snorts sarcastically, stirring the pot again, still not looking at him. The smell starts to turn sharper, the salt and honey growing to a sickly combination.

“Watch your language young lady!” He slaps his palm down on the island and points at her with the other hand.

She spins around to face him, nostrils flaring, spoon in hand dripping liquid that hisses onto the floor, “Fuck. off.”

“Very nice.” He sneers and places his other palm on the island. “You know what, you aren’t exactly my first choice either, but we don’t get a choice, do we?” With the last words he pushes back off the island forcefully enough to slide it a few inches across the floor. “In fact, I haven’t had much of a choice of diet in 400 years.”

“Don’t you patronize me, I know that!” She clatters the spoon down onto the stove top flips off the gas.

“Oh, I’m sorry, do I sound snippy? I guess I’m a bit peckish, I haven’t eaten in three days!”

“No, excuse me, you’re hungry, give me a minute and I’ll open a vein!” She flings her hands up in the air in frustration. “You know, I was going to spend the day cleaning my god damn apartment, but I guess that will have to wait until after I’m done being breakfast.”

He curls his hand into a fist and turns again on his heels away from her, raking his hands through his hair then down over his face. With his fingers in a steeple over his mouth he turns slowly back to her. “Okay. I apologise.”

She crosses her arms over her chest and tosses her head back slightly, eyebrows raised.

"I know you like living on your own. This whole 'lone witch' thing seems to be working out well for you. I know you don't want to be my..."

"Primary food source?" She spits.

He grimaces, but continues, "And I know your feelings on this whole... partnership..."

"You mean how we got totally screwed with holding up our end of a 400 year old deal whose benefits no longer apply to us?" She leans against the sink.

"Right. But I assure you that isn't entirely true." He sees she still has her eyes on him, at least willing to hear him out. "You know the negatives of not keeping to the pact."

"Yeah, breaking blood magic bad." She says in a cave-man voice and rolls her eyes.

"That's not all, though. I can protect you."

She laughs, short and sharp.

"And..." he presses on, sticking his hands in his back jeans pockets and gazing around at the shabby flat, "I can pay your tuition. Up front."

"So, I open a vein for your three squares a day, and you pay for my college?" She shakes her head, "Or I keep my O-negative and all hell breaks loose."

"Yep." He continues to survey the room, rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet.

She frowns and uncrosses her arms, "You are going to pay half of the rent, too." He glances at the tiny futon in the living area. She gestures down the hall. \*sigh\* "You can take the spare bedroom. I was going to get a roommate anyway."

"Fine." He shrugs, "Thanks."

"Alright." She turns, washes her hands, and pulls a knife from the silverware drawer. "Do you prefer to slice or bite these days?"

He flips his head around to meet her eyes. She raises an eyebrow and the knife the tiniest bit. He takes half a step towards her then pauses. He can hear her heart pounding in her chest. "When was the last time you ate?"

"Huh?" She releases a breath and wipes a loose strand of hair back from her forehead, "Um, last night. Unless you count coffee this morning."

"That's what I thought. Your blood sugar is low and you smell like caffeine and alcohol. You would pass out on the spot." He wrinkles his upper lip in disgust, "And probably won't taste very good, either." He walks around the island and opens the refrigerator, finding the contents very sparse with more spell and potion ingredients than actual food. He snorts, unsurprised, and digs around until he finds some eggs and mushrooms that look like they probably aren't toxic.

"What are you doing?" She asks, still brandishing the knife with uncertainty.

He emerges from the fridge with the eggs in one hand, mushrooms in the other. "Making you breakfast. Now, where do you keep your pans?"

Less than half an hour later she is perched on the kitchen stool, shoveling down one of the best omelettes she has ever tasted, and he is washing dishes at the sink. Their conversation has digressed into the less serious topic of her childhood.

"Do you remember," he chuckles, "when you used to stick tic-tacs up under your front lip pretending they were fangs?"

"I was seven years old!" She protests through a mouthful of egg.

"You went around BITING people for weeks! I don't know HOW many times your mother got called into your school for that." He imitates a high pitched, snooty principal, "Maybe if you stopped letting her watch so much night time television."

She rolls her eyes, "Yes, well some kids walk in on their parents having sex, I walked in on my aunt feeding a vampire...and having sex." Her smile fades a little at that very early memory and tension spreads through the room again, even invading the Patsy Cline album now spinning on the turntable.

He coughs, "Uh, finished with your omelette?" He turns towards her and reaches for the plate.

"Oh, sure, yeah. Thanks, it was delicious." She hands him the plate without meeting his eyes. "So, uh, do we do this now, or do we have to wait?"

He washes the dish and sets it to dry on the counter. "Well, you...I mean, whenever you are ready. That is ... we could probably wait a bit more for it to digest but... you smell fine...so..." He turns slowly to face her, and the scent of her magic hits him more strongly now.

"Right." She snaps out of whatever memory she was in. "Should I sit here or...?"

"Probably the futon would be better. You know, in case you do pass out or something."

She frowns and stands, moving to the far corner of the couch. "Well, try not to get blood on anything." She curls her feet up underneath her, tugging on her ponytail to tighten it.

He perches next to her on the edge of the seat with his knee brushing hers. He tugs at a loose thread on his jeans with long, pointed fingernails. She watches him, feeling his eyes on her, then finally looks into his face.

"Don't worry." His eyes glimmer and his fangs peek out over his lower lip. "I'm not a messy eater."

She tries a chuckle, but it fades in her throat. Slowly she holds out her right arm, palm up, "Are you sure this is sanitary?"

"Don't worry, sweetheart. I've had all my shots." Carefully he takes her arm and lifts it to his mouth. He gently licks a spot on the underside of her forearm, just inside her elbow.

"Gross." She whispers.

Some of the tightness in his jaw eases and he smiles, "Natural antiseptic and anesthetic. You will thank me later. Now, please," He glances up to meet her eyes.

Suddenly she can feel his hunger, physically in her stomach. Though she had just eaten the best breakfast she'd had in months she felt like she hadn't eaten in three days. The hunger is so strong she almost doesn't hear him finish his sentence.

"Try to hold still."

He opens his mouth fully to reveal a double set of fangs creating a jagged silhouette for his upper teeth. The inner set nestles on either side of his two front teeth, wide and thin, coming to a jagged razors edge. The outer pair, his canines, remind her of snake fangs, but less curved. Like the incisors on a kitten. This set protrudes a couple centimeters past his other teeth.

He presses them quickly and firmly to her flesh, and she gasps; more from the sight than the pain. It doesn't feel much worse than nicking her ankle with a razor in the shower. The fangs pierce a vein and he lets off the pressure of his bite slightly. His lips press against her skin, concealing the bite, but she can feel her blood pumping into his mouth. His eyes flash wide for a moment as the taste of blood hits his system for the first time in days, then his eyelids sink softly closed.

She says nothing, tries to think nothing, just sits with all her attention on holding still. The hunger fades as she feels the magic syphoning through her veins and into him.



He stops and pulls away after only moments, licking the two curving punctures to close them before any blood can spill out, fast enough she feels but doesn't see it. She does see him lick her blood off his receding canine fangs before they slide back into their normal position. They still protrude more than the average human's, but less noticeably so. She flicks her eyes to her arm. Bringing it close to her face she sees the wounds already shrinking and fading.

"Neat," she touches the damp skin, "Glad I won't walk around looking like a heroin addict."

"How do you feel?" He leans back into the futon cushion, examining his nails in a slightly overdrawn fashion.

"A little strange, kind of grossed out. How did I taste?"

"Like you need more fresh food in your diet and fewer processed carbs. I was hungry, though, so..." He shrugs then catches her expression. She has one eyebrow raised and a slight tremble at the corner of her mouth. "You were joking."

"A little. That actually wasn't as bad as I thought."

He listens in on her heartbeat. It is steady, normal. He gives a small smile back, "Well, yah know, 400 years of practice."

She gently punches him in the arm and they fade into silence for a few moments. "You know, I actually kind of missed you, you old shit."

"Language." He says softly and pinches her cheek, seeing again the little kid that covered her face in white paint and mocked old vampire movies with him.

She smiles back, a little awkwardly. "So, what now? I see you didn't bring much with you," she eyes his faded jacket and black boots with a deadpan expression, "So you can start moving in right away." She answers her own question as she stands swiftly, motioning down the hall with one hand, the other on her hip. "Want to see the room?"

"Uh, yeah." He stands slowly.

She realizes her blood must still be flooding into his system. His eyes flash brightly and the dark circles under them are gone, his cheeks no longer look quite so hollow. His skin is still pale, but more of the color you would expect for a goth, ginger, twenty-something little shit.

"You look a little less like a starving drug addict now, at least." She smiles and waves for him to follow her down the narrow hallway. "So, that's the bathroom. I will clean off a shelf for you if you want. It's small but the water pressure is ok, just don't try to shower while someone is doing the dishes." She flicks the light on and steps out of the way for him to peer in.

He leans in with his toes just outside the threshold. The shower curtain is sky blue, and the walls are a happy shade of grey with deep blue floor tiles. The room smells faintly of mint and sunflowers. He nods a couple of times, then leans back out. As he does, he catches a whiff of her magic - a musky citrus smell, like oranges and cloves - but she is already moving down the hall, waving a hand at another doorway on the right.

"That's my room." She keeps moving and he does too, only glancing at what he can see through the partially ajar door. "And this..." She reaches the end of the hall and swings the last door open with a slight flourish, "Is your room."

He takes one step in and stops in his tracks. He crosses his arms over his chest, "It's pink." His nostrils flare and his lips pucker. The tinny, chemical scent of new paint strikes his nose.

"I just finished decorating," she mumbles through her teeth as though she knows exactly where this is going.

"I don't like pink," He looks at her in firm annoyance. His eyebrows lower like the times he caught her cutting the hair on her dolls as a kid.

"I liked the shade," she strokes one finger down the rose-blush colored wall, not making eye-contact.

"Sure. Sure," he says, "Don't get me wrong, I went through a big pink phase in the 1770s." He spreads his fingers in a wide flare outward from his chest, "Couldn't get enough of it, really. Well, neither could beloved Louis. But no." He cracks his knuckles and shakes his head. "Not this century, I don't think."

She suddenly turns to face him head on, raises an eyebrow at him, taps her foot and jabs a finger at his chest, "Well I didn't expect you to be moving in with me so soon!" The end of her sentence falls and she stands frozen, realizing the weight of what she's just said. "You can certainly repaint it yourself if you don't like it." She amends.

His gaze is on the room, not her. He catches her hand in his right one, spreads the fingers of his left hand wide and places each finger firmly against the wall. The blush-rose walls slowly darken to a deep red, the color of clotted blood. A smell of woodsmoke, roses and faint citrus fills the room. She feels the bite on her arm sting for a moment, then has the sensation of energy being pulled through her veins towards her fingers where he grasps them, and her heart skips a beat.

"What the actual fuck?!" She rips her hand away. The feelings and smell fade, but the walls stay a deep, bloody red.

He whips his head around to face her, "Sorry, sorry!" He holds his hands up defensively, "But doesn't it look better now?"

"Go to hell!" She cradles the bite on her arm and storms out of the room. She turns sharply into her own bedroom and slams the door.

In his room, he rocks back on his heels, hands in his back pocket, and stares at the ceiling, "Now, why did you think that was a good idea?" When the room neglects to answer he spins around and slumps down onto the bed, "Ass."

A while later, he knocks softly on her door, "Maeve?" The door swings softly open, and he stands at the threshold. She looks up from a mess of books and handwritten journals spread around her bed. Her expression is guarded, waiting. "I am an ass," he says, and she crosses her arms, lips pursed, "I must remember that you and I don't have the ... relationship your aunt and I had. I have absolutely no right to use your magic without asking, without your permission. I forget that you aren't..."

"Brainwashed? Submissive? Your goddess damned servant or worshipper or what-the-hell-ever?"

He says nothing, and his gaze drops to the floor

"You are god damn right you need to ask permission! It is my magic, and my fucking body. Without them, you would starve to damn death, so don't try to pull the moody 'I'm such a cool, dangerous predator' bullshit with me." She lets out a huge sigh, "The amount of fucking rape culture in the supernatural world blows my god damn mind." She scoots to the side of the bed and sits with her feet off the edge, "If you want to use magic, you're going to have to use whatever extra is floating around in your veins."

A long pause follows. "I only did it because...I swear to you I will never draw your magic from you without your permission again. If I do you can kick me out and let me starve."

She leans back with one arm behind her on the bed, musses her hair with the other hand and tosses it over her shoulder. "What about the horrible, terrible consequences?" She blows a stray strand of hair out of her face, "The blood magic?"

"Fuck the consequences."

She grins a little, "Alright," They are both quiet for a short eternity. "Just because you are an old motherfucker doesn't mean I will let that old-world misogynistic crap slide, get it?"