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# Blood Canticle

Anne Rice

## Chapter 3

She drew the blood from me as if she'd broken the circuit that kept me alive, as if she meant to kill me. A witch had me by the blood. I gasped and reached with my left hand for the post of the bed and missed it, falling gently back with her on the nest of flowers. Her hair was catching in the roses. So was mine.

In a blatant rush, I felt myself emptying my life into her dank country castle, Paris, the boulevard theater, stolen, stone tower, made by Magnus, fire, alone, orphan weeping, treasure; did she laugh? I saw her teeth in my heart, my very heart. I pulled back, dizzy, and clung to the post, each one is unique, staring down at her.

Witchlet!

With glazed eyes she looked up at me. The blood was on her lips, just a touch, and all her pain was gone, and the moment had come, the moment of peace from pain, peace from struggle, peace from fear.

She simply couldn't believe it.

In the twilight between human and vampire, she breathed deeply and slowly, hungry hybrid, doomed hybrid, her skin plumping exquisitely and the sweetness unfolding in her face as the cheeks formed and her lips filled out, and the flesh around her eyes grew firm, and then the breasts were rising beneath her cotton gown, and a roundness came to her arms, such a delectable roundness, I am such a fiend, and she sighed again, sighed as if ecstatic, looking at me, yeah, right, I'm gorgeous, I know, and now she could endure the Dark Trick. Quinn was stunned. So in love. Get away. I pushed him back. This is mine.

I snatched her up from the flowers. Vessel of my blood. Petals falling. Whispered poetry was tumbling from her lips, "Or like a creature native and indued unto that element." I hugged her to me. I wanted my blood from her. I wanted her.

"Little Witch," I hissed into her ear. "You think you know all I can do!" I crushed her to me. I heard her sweet soft laugh. "Come on, show me!" she said. I'm not dying. Quinn was afraid. He put his arms around her and touched my arms. He was trying to hold us both. It was so warm. I loved him. So what? I had her.

I grazed her neck with my teeth. "I'm coming to get you, Little Girl!" I whispered. "You're playing in the big time, Little Girl!" Her heart was racing. Still on the brink. I sank my teeth and felt her body stiffen. Lovely paralysis. Slowly I drew on the blood, her salt mixed with my own. I knew her: child beauty, nymphet, schoolgirl scamp, the one on whom nothing was lost, pronouncements of genius, nursing drunken parents, freckles and smile, her life a romp, and always dreaming, restless at the

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computer keys, designŽe to the Mayfair billions, burying father and mother, no more worry there, lover of more men than she could count, pregnancy – now I saw it! – horror birth, monster child, Look at it: woman baby! Morrigan. "Walking Baby," said Dolly Jean. Who are these people! What is this you are showing to me! "You think you're the only monsters I know?"

Morrigan gone forever, monster child, What is this mutant that grows to be a full woman at its birth, wants your milk? Taltos! Gone, taken, ruined her health forever, made her start dying, have to find Morrigan, emerald around Mona's neck, look at that emerald! Mona fastened to Quinn, so in love with Quinn, tell Quinn, no, poetry of Ophelia sustaining her soul, heart beat, catching breath, dying for too long, Don't you realize what this is! I do, I do! Don't stop! Don't let me go! Who is that trying to take you from me? I knew that ghost! Uncle Julien!

He came at me. Angry phantom! In the midst of my vision! Was he in the room? This tall, white-haired man assaulting me, trying to wrench her from me! Who the Hell are you? I sent him flying back, receding so fast he became a tiny speck. Damn you, let her go!

We lay on the bower of flowers, she and I in each other's arms, no time, look at him, he's coming again, Uncle Julien! I was blind. I drew back, tore my wrist again, pushed my wrist to her mouth, clumsy, spilling blood, couldn't see, felt her clamp hard, body lurch, Uncle Julien, you're out! She drank and drank. Uncle Julien's face furious. Faint. Vanish. "He's gone," I whispered. "Uncle Julien gone!" Did Quinn hear? "Make him go, Quinn."

I swooned, giving her my life, see it, see it all, see the devastated core, move beyond regret, go on, her body growing stronger, the iron of her limbs, her fingers digging into my arm as she drank from my wrist, go on, take it, sink those teeth into my soul, do it, now I'm the paralyzed one, can't escape, brutal little girl, go on, where was I, let her drink on and on, I can't, I snuggled my face against her neck, opened my mouth, no power to – .

Our souls closing to each other, the inevitable blindness between Maker and Fledgling meaning she was made. Couldn't read each other's thoughts anymore. Drink me dry, beautiful, you're on your own.

My eyes were shut. I dreamt. Uncle Julien wept. Ah, so sad, was it? In the realm of shadows, he stood with his face in his hands and he wept. What is this? An emblem of conscience? Don't make me laugh.

And so the literal dissolves. She drinks and she drinks. And alone I dream, a suicide in a bathtub with streaming wrists, I dream: I saw a perfect vampire, a soul unlike any other, tutored in courage, never looking back, lifted from misery, and seeking to marvel at all things without malice or lamenting. I saw a graduate of the school of suffering. I saw her.

The ghost came back.

Tall, angry, Uncle Julien, will you be my Hound of Heaven? Arms folded. What do you want here? Do you realize what you are up against? My perfect vampire does not see you. Go away, dream. Go away, ghost. I have no time for you. Sorry, Uncle Julien, she's made. You lose.

She let me go. She must have. I drifted.

When I opened my eyes, Mona stood beside Quinn and they were both looking down on me.

I lay amongst the flowers, and there were no thorns on the roses. Time had stopped. And the distant commotions of the house didn't matter.

She was fulfilled. She was the vampire in my dream. She was the perfect one. Ophelia's old poetry dropped away. She was the Perfect Pearl, caught speechless in the miracle and staring down at me, wondering only what had become of me, as another fledgling of mine had done long ago – when I'd worked the Dark Trick just as fiercely and just as thoroughly and just as dangerously to myself. But understand that for Lestat there are only temporary dangers. No big deal, boys and girls. Look at her.

So this was the splendid creature with whom Quinn had fallen so fatally in love. Princess Mona of the Mayfairs. To the very roots of her long red hair the Blood had penetrated, and it was full and shining, and her face was oval with plumped and smiling cheeks and lips, and her eyes clear of all fever, those fathomless green eyes. Oh, she was dazed by the Blood vision, of course, and above all by the vampiric power that pervaded the cells of her entire frame.

But she stood resolute and quick, staring at me, as robust no doubt as she'd ever been, the hospital gown now skimpy and straining to contain her. All that juicy and enticing flesh restored.

I brushed off the petals that clung to me. I got up on my feet. I was dizzy still, but healing fast. My mind was clouded and it was almost a nice feeling, a delicious blurring of the light and warmth in the room, and I had a swift, profound sense of love for Mona and Quinn and a profound sense that we'd be together for a long time, just the three of us. Three of us.

Quinn appeared shining and steadfast in this feverish vision of mine. That had been his charm for me from the beginning of knowing him, a secular crown prince of sorts, full of openness and self-confidence. Love would always save Quinn. Losing Aunt Queen, he had been sustained on the love he'd felt for her. The only one he had hated, he had killed.

"May I give her my blood?" he asked. He reached out for me, squeezed my shoulder and bent forward hesitantly and then kissed me.

How he could take his eyes off her I didn't know.

I smiled. I was gaining my bearings. Uncle Julien was nowhere about that I could see. "Nowhere," echoed Quinn.

"What are you saying?" asked the shining newborn.

"Uncle Julien, I saw him," but I shouldn't have said it.

Sudden shadow in her face. "Uncle Julien?"

"But he was bound to — ." Quinn said. "At Aunt Queen's funeral I saw him, and it was as if he was warning me. It was his duty, but what does it matter now?"

"Don't give her your blood," I said to Quinn. "Keep your minds open to each other. Of course you'll depend on words, no matter how much you read of each other's thoughts, but don't exchange blood. Too much, and you'll lose the mutual telepathy."

She reached out her arms to me. I embraced her, squeezed her tight, marveling at the power she'd already achieved. I felt humbled by the Blood rather than proud of any excess to which I'd taken the whole process. I gave a little accepting laugh as I kissed her, which she returned in her enchantment. If any one trait in her made me a slave it was her green eyes. I hadn't realized how clouded they'd been by her illness. And now as I held her back, I saw a sprinkling of freckles across her face, and a flash of her beautiful white teeth as she smiled. She was a small thing for all her magical health and restoration. She brought out the tenderness in me, which few people do.

But it was time to move out of the rhapsody. Much as I hated it. The practical matters came to intrude.

"Okay, my love," I said. "You're going to know one last bout of pain. Quinn will see you through it. Take her into the shower, Quinn. But first, arrange some clothes for her. On second thought, you leave that to me. I'll tell Jasmine she needs a pair of jeans and a shirt."

Mona laughed almost hysterically.

"We're always subject to this mixture of the magic and the mundane," I replied. "Get used to it."

Quinn was all seriousness and apprehension. He went over to his desk, punched in the intercom number for the kitchen and gave the order for the clothes to Big Ramona, telling her to leave them right outside the door. Okay, good. All the roles of Blackwood Farm are played smoothly.

Then, Mona, stunned and dreaming, asked if she might have a white dress, or if there might be a white dress downstairs in Aunt Queen's room.

"A white dress," said Mona, as if she were caught in some poetic net as strong as her mental pictures of drowning Ophelia. "And is there lace, Quinn, lace that nobody would mind if I wore?"

Quinn turned to the phone again, gave the orders, yes, Aunt Queen's silks, make it all up. "Everything white," he said to Big Ramona. His voice was gentle and patient. "You know, Jasmine won't wear the white dresses. Yes, for Mona. If we don't use them, they will all end up packed away. In the attic. Aunt Queen loved Mona. Stop crying. I know. I know. But Mona can't go around in this disgusting hospital gown. And someday, fifty years from now, Tommy and Jerome will be unpacking all those clothes and figuring what to do with it all and just bring something up here now."

As he turned back to us his eye fastened on Mona and he stopped in his tracks as if he couldn't believe what he saw, and a dreadful expression came over him, as though he only just realized what had happened, what we'd done. He murmured something about white lace. I didn't want to read his mind. Then he came forward and took Mona in his arms.

"This mortal death, Ophelia, it won't be much," he said. "I'll get into the stream with you. I'll hold you. We'll say the poetry together. And after that, there's no pain. There's thirst. But never any pain." He couldn't hold her close enough. "And will I always see as I see now?" she asked. The words about the death meant nothing to her.

"Yes," he said.

"I'm not afraid," she said. She meant it.

But she still had no real grasp of what had been done. And I knew in my heart, the heart I closed off from Quinn and the heart she couldn't read, that she really hadn't consented to this. She hadn't been able.

What did this mean to me? Why am I making such a big deal of it?

Because I'd murdered her soul, that's why.

I'd bound her to the Earth the way we were bound, and now I had to see to it that she became that vampire which I'd seen in my moment of intense dream. And when she finally woke to what she'd become she might go out of her mind. What had I said of Merrick? The ones who reached for it went mad sooner than those who were stolen, as I had been. But there wasn't time for this sort of thinking.

"They're here," she said. "They're downstairs. Can you hear them?" She was alarmed. And as is always the case with the new ones, every emotion in her was exaggerated.

"Don't fear, pretty girl," I said. "I'm on to them."

We were talking about the rumblings from the front parlor below. Mayfairs on the property. Jasmine fretful, walking to and fro. Little Jerome trying to slide down the coiling banister. Quinn could hear all this too.

It was Rowan Mayfair and Fr. Kevin Mayfair, the priest for the love of Heaven, come with an ambulance and a nurse to find her and take her back to the hospital, or at least to discover whether she was alive or dead.

That was it. I got it. That's why they'd taken their time. They thought that she was already dead.

And they were right. She was.