



Stone of Blood

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The shop wasn't interesting or creepy. It was just dirty. *What a crappy little shithole.* Carol didn't dare touch anything, it was so filthy. And the woman behind the counter didn't seem threatening or powerful. She was old, wrinkled and smelled awful.

"Are you looking for something?" The woman asked and Carol spared her a glance.

"No, I'm just browsing." Browsing for a stone, one she knew was in this shop.

Her gaze traveled over the items that cluttered the shelves. Chalice, necklaces, boxes of every size shape and type were everywhere. Carol's spine tingled. It was here. She could feel it. Her skin stretched over her blood vessels. She forced calm through her body. *Patience.*

But the skin beneath the skin was eager for revenge, for blood.

There it was, behind that Chinese box.

Her hand trembled as she reached for it and clasped it in her fingers. The shadow underneath her soul roared with triumph. *Yes!* Power surged through her and she almost had a sexual climax from the sensation. It would be finished tonight.

"Did you find what you were looking for?" The old woman's voice startled Carol and she whipped around with a snarl, her blood boiled with rage. But the woman didn't seem surprised or frightened. "Yes, I see you did." She turned away and stepped behind the counter.

Carol stalked her. This woman would do to initiate the rite. The stone would be washed in blood before the Halloween moon rose and old or not, the store keeper had enough blood for that.

When the owner glanced up, she smiled and that made Carol freeze. The woman's voice was suddenly harsh and cold. "Don't try it. I know what you are." She turned her back on Carol and retrieved a heavy book from a shelf behind the dirty counter. With gnarled fingers she flicked the pages until she reached the one she sought. "My blood will not give you what you seek." Her gaze pinned Carol who stood still. "You must wash the stone in the blood of the one you love. If you don't, you'll be ripped limb from limb." An evil gleam appeared in the woman's dark black eyes. "It's the price you must pay."

A growl emanated from Carol's throat. The shadow leapt and clawed at the bars that imprisoned it. Even with the stone burning in her hand, Carol could not be whole until it was washed in blood. "I love no one, old woman."

"Oh, but there is one. You know. Find him and you will have your wish."

"Why would you help me? I am one of the Old Ones. No one helps us."

The old woman's lips lifted. "Why question it? I had an answer that saved my life."

Wary, Carol backed away, the stone clutched in her hand and her muscles tense. "If I fail, I will come back and rip your throat from your body."

"No doubt you would if you could." The tone of the woman's words bothered Carol, but the shadow demanded urgency. "If you fail, you will be dead."

On the street, in the darkness, Carol could draw a breath. Glee filled her. The stone was hers and the shadow within rumbled in agreement. They would win. The long night of powerlessness would be over. The two as one would end. Tonight, only one would stand and one would be free. Power would belong to one and freedom to the other. All it would cost is the blood of one she loved.

But there was no one. Her parents were long dead. She had no siblings, no lovers. The shadow insisted on sexual partners, but they were only faces. So, who would wash the stone and free them?

She raced through the streets eager to set the stone in its rightful place. She was almost home, since the shadow gave her power to run at great speed. Suddenly, a solid object blocked her and she slammed into a hard wall of human flesh. The shadow growled and barked within her. *Kill it.* But she gritted her teeth and contained the rage.

"Are you alright?" The man asked as he helped her to her feet. When he did, something in his hand began to beep and whirl. "Whoa." The man's gaze was riveted to the device. "What's this?" He gazed at her. His eyes were a deep blue in the street light and his hair was light brown. He seemed friendly and warm as he kept a gentle grip on her arm. "You're setting off all the equipment."

"Get your hands off me," Carol snapped.

"Okay, sorry." He grinned. "I'm Derek Paulson. And you?"

"I'm in a hurry." She stepped around him.

"Okay 'in a hurry', why don't you tell me why you just set off my energy chronometer."

"Your what?"

"My energy chronometer. It reads paranormal energy. Ghosts, demons, stuff like that." He talked as he clicked buttons and the beeping continued.

"Get out of my way." Carol said when he blocked her again. She was only five three and this man towered over her. She glared at him.

"No, really, look at this." He was so excited, she glanced at the thing. It was all gobley gook to her.

"I have to go." The shadow pressed, but there was a small part of her that was drawn to the man. Perhaps because he seemed to know she was different but wasn't afraid of it, and in fact seemed excited by it.

"I'll just follow you." He grinned at her and then his attention was back on the device. The shadow screamed and pushed, urging her on. She turned her back and picked up speed to her home.

Her house was in a nice neighborhood with a little postage stamp yard and a thousand doors. Well, maybe not a thousand. One of those doors had changed her life forever.

She slowed as she reached her steps and was surprised to find the man Derek still behind her. The shadow stirred. *Take him. Rip his flesh.* The hunger was there, just beneath the surface. The coppery taste of blood and flesh would be such a relief, such a treat. She smiled at the man, but he was intent on his readings.

When his gaze met hers, the hunger diminished and something else, something different swamped her. What was this? She frowned. He was a piece of meat, nothing more. He was food for her, an appetizer for the awaiting power she would have. Beneath her chest, the blood pumped and ached for fulfillment. He studied her, watched her, as his equipment beeped and buzzed.

"Why don't you come in?" The shadow would not be denied and she would have her blood. The stone in her hand pulsed and burned.

There was knowledge in his expression, like he knew what she was thinking. He followed her up the steps to her front door and into her living room. It had been so long since she'd brought a human there it hadn't registered how dingy and tattered everything

seemed. His eyes scanned everything and he lifted his chromo whatever up to the walls. The readings went crazy. He swerved the thing back to her and the readings diminished.

"This is fascinating," said her dinner. "The house is the focal point of the disturbance in you. How long have you lived here?"

A thousand years. "About two years." Where did that answer come from? Why was she talking to this meal?

He stared at her. "What is your name?"

I have none. "Carol. Carol Fillmore." The shadow stirred with rage. There was no name attached to them. None. Eating was all that was important here.

The man moved closer and the shadow shrank, but the shell, the woman Carol, leaned forward. The readings dipped. "Well, Carol. If these readings are correct, you are being haunted."

She laughed then. The shadow within was amused. Haunted. That was not what was happening here. The flesh rippled as the shadow strained to get out. The ritual. Do the ritual and the two that are one shall be two again. It was promised, foretold. They must do this.

Derek's equipment screamed and whined. Carol launched her body at the man and gripped him with inhuman strength. Her nails bit into his flesh and her mouth descending to feed.

And kissed him instead. Sweet Holy Hell. Her lips plundered his. He was passive for two seconds before she was flipped on her back and he was in control. The shadow receded, disappeared in the wave of passion that swamped her. Her blood churned with a need she'd never known. Always at the mercy of the shadow's needs, her own were nebulous, ethereal. Until now.

This man. She wanted, needed, this man. Something explosive happened and Derek and Carol were caught in a whirlwind of discarded clothes and seeking hands. They rolled on the floor and then he was on his back and she sprawled over him. Instead of tasting his blood, she tasted his flesh, her mouth on his cock and her tongue stroking the head. His hands twined in her hair as he thrust upwards, hitting the back of her throat with his cock.

His hands dragged her away and his mouth claimed hers in a desperate clash of lips and tongues. His fingers left a trail of fire over her skin, her breasts, down to her clit where his firm touch sent her reeling over the edge and into a spiraling climax. Her body trembled and quaked as he slammed his cock inside her waiting channel. She arched her back and straddled him, driving him deeper.

Simultaneously, he yelled and she screamed as they crashed together in a violent release. Tears coursed down her face and the shadow stirred but did not move. Somewhere in the background, Derek's devices were screeching, but he lay with his arms wrapped around her and remained still.

"That was..."

"Amazing?" She supplied.

The house shook, the devices screamed louder and the shadow beneath roared to life. She cried out in pain as the shadow plunged forward, ripping and tearing at her as it did. She rolled to the corner of the room and whimpered. "No, please. Stop it."

"Carol? What's wrong? You're possessed aren't you?"

The shadow surged and snarled at him. "Possessed. How little you understand. We are one. We must be two."

Somehow, Derek didn't seem shocked or surprised. "And you need a blood ritual for that?"

"Yes. Of one I love. But there is no one. No one." Carol's emptiness was echoed by the shadow within.

"Tell me." He was beside her, talking to her, naked and gentle. The storm of desire between them had passed, yet she wanted him still. Not the aching hunger the shadow used, but the need of one human being to another.

"The Blood Stone." Just saying the words made the room seem darker and heavier. "It...divides. It gives and takes." She couldn't explain. "It must be done tonight. On Halloween."

"It will separate the demon from your body."

"Yes."

"But it needs blood. The blood of one you love." The man stroked her hair as he took in what she said. The shadow shrank from the touch, but Carol leaned into it. There were two, not one. Two. She purred and Derek stared into her face. "Try me."

She blinked. "What?"

"Try me. I know you can't possibly love me, but maybe what we have is good enough."

"Why?" The word came out in a whisper. "You don't know me. Why would you sacrifice yourself for me?"

His gaze met hers. "You know. Or you'll figure it out."

"You were looking for me."

He didn't speak for a moment. Then, "Yes, I was." His eyes were sad, distant.

"I don't understand." The shadow also seemed sad, as if the shadow and this man knew something she did not.

"No, you wouldn't." He rose and took her hand. "What exactly does the ritual say?"

"The Blood Stone must be bathed in blood. The old woman said it must be bathed in the blood of one I loved."

"Bathed in blood doesn't mean I have to die for it."

She wasn't sure and the shadow didn't care. It hungered. It ached.

But Derek was confident. "Come with me. We need to do this right. There's a place we need use for this."

She dressed, as he did, and they strode out of the house and down the street. He took her to that place. It was the place the shadow knew, filled with power and color. Carol loved the feel of the breeze there. The shadow loved the surge of power and electricity. The darkness around them was thick and unnatural. Fog moved in and covered the grass beneath their feet.

A tree stood in the center of this place, and Derek led her there. She noticed he carried a pack with him for all his gadgets. In a side pocket, he removed a dagger. It was a wicked blade. The shadow gleamed with pleasure at the sight and Carol shrank from the violence it represented.

He also removed a small cup with strange markings. "Hold this," and he handed the cup to her. She held it as he sliced his arm open. The copper smell hit her nostrils and the shadow clawed at the chains that bound it. *Eat him! Rip out his heart.* She ignored

the voice and it subsided. Derek drained the blood into the cup and she noted his face was white. "Drop in the stone." Derek told her.

The shadow howled in triumph. Finally, it would be free!

Carol dropped the Blood Stone into the cup of Derek's blood. The shadow was impatient for her to finish. *Drink it. Drink it!*

Tears dripped from her face as she lifted the cup. These tears steamed as they hit the liquid and sparked as they touched the Blood Stone. She gulped it all down, stone and all, and it slid down her throat.

Fire erupted from her belly and she screamed in agony. Every muscle in her body contracted and convulsed. Electricity buzzed through her brain and she twitched. The burning was too much. Even the shadow twisted and writhed under the lash of the magic.

Blood streamed from her eyes and nose as the shadow was ripped from her inch by terrible inch. A dark form materialized beside her and she dropped to her knees.

The shadow, once so intimately tied to her that she didn't know where it ended and she began, roared with joy.

"Noooo!" Carol screamed. Her frantic gaze turned on Derek. "It kills. That's all it knows. I contained it, controlled it. Now--"

"Yes, now." It said, shimmering in the moonlight. "For two years you contained me in that hollow vessel you call a body. Now, I will feed on anything I want instead of the paltry few you allowed me."

She covered her face with her hands and sobbed. All that time and agony for nothing. Nothing.

But suddenly, there were people around them. Carol lifted her head as she and Derek and the shadow were surrounded by at least a dozen people. They chanted and murmured. Power sprang around her. The shadow screeched in rage.

"You cannot stop me. I will eat your flesh. I will devour you!" It flung itself at the group, but something repelled it. When it couldn't break free of the circle, it tried to invade her again, but the Blood Stone pushed him back. He cursed her and Derek.

The words were louder now, but still incomprehensible to Carol. She watched them and noted the color around them, the power. Derek glowed with energy. The shadow began to waver. The tree above them trembled and shook.

It finally dawned on the shadow what they intended. They could not kill it. Its power could only be contained, as Carol had captured it within her when she'd accidentally released it with her house renovations. The shadow was sucked into the trunk of that tree and its agonizing scream echoed in the air.

"Carol?" Derek was beside her.

"I don't understand any of this." She clutched his hands. "I was renovating that house and tore out the chimney. Then, this thing threatened to kill everyone around me if I didn't let it in." She shuddered. "It was so evil."

"It was a demon, Carol. Not as strong as some, but stronger than most."

She frowned. "How did you know? To find me, I mean."

He cupped her face. "We've known each other forever, Carol. My soul and yours has found each other many times. I knew when it happened but it took me two years to find you."

"That's why you had all that equipment."

“Yes. I knew I’d need it. You see, I was pretty sure I’d know you when I met you, but with the demon inside you, I had to be sure.”

“Who are they?” She gazed at the group around them who now chatted and talked like normal people.

“A coven. I needed them to perform the ritual to contain the demon in the tree.” He smiled at them. “Thank you.”

“Our pleasure.” One woman grinned at them and then they all drifted off.

“Derek.” Carol squeezed his hand, but couldn’t meet his gaze.

“Yes, love.”

“I’ve...done things.” She choked on the words. “I’ve killed people.”

He wrapped her in his arms. “You didn’t. That was the demon. Now that it’s gone, you can live again. With me.”

“What about the Blood Stone?” She frowned.

“It’s now a part of us, Carol. The next time the demon is released, our blood will send it back. We have begun a new part of the tapestry.”

“And what about us?”

He grinned. “We are going to live happily ever after. Didn’t you know that?”

The End.