

Beyond the Threshold of Death

(Synopsis & excerpt)

In a weakened state, fearful for herself and for all vampires, Deirdra is eerily aware that an unknown being has been released. Wishing for simpler times, Deirdra is drawn back into her memories of when she was so young and naive. Remembering clearly her youth in Ireland, 1795, Deirdra recalls how the gift of immortality had been bestowed upon her...

Ailing from an unknown illness, her health deteriorating rapidly, her father fearing for his daughter's health, unknowingly hires a vampire named Mylana to care for her. Instantly, a friendship blossoms between the two women. Seeing the pain Deirdra is in, Mylana offers her immortality, of which she accepts...

Now almost two centuries later, Deirdra finds herself in the middle of an unearthly upheaval. Events waged over a millennia beforehand have reawakened the fury of an ancient Blood God, whose objectives involve the complete obliteration of the vampire race.



Prologue

I pace back and forth in that wee dingy hotel room in downtown Victoria. Listening to the traffic that never seemed to cease on Gorge Road, I hoped that the monotony of it would dull my senses and calm my nerves. It had been almost three weeks of constant moving, trying to break away from the nightmares, the visions. However, not knowing where they were originating from made it impossible to escape them. They always found me and the intensity of it was becoming almost unbearable. Not only was it mentally draining, but now it was becoming physically painful. I'd been at this hotel for only a few days and I could already feel the heaviness of the nightmarish trance wanting to overcome me once again. It was unpleasant to say the least, the blacking out, the intense pain of feeling the unknown vampires die from what I could only derive as spontaneous combustion.

Out of the corner of my eye, the reflection in the mirror that hung above the standard dresser caught my eye. Stopping abruptly, I turned and found myself looking at someone who I thought I knew, but the image before me was of an ill and weak looking vampire. My eyes that usually shone a clear cobalt blue now appeared greyer and dark purple-blue circles hung heavily making the white of my flesh appear even more ghastly than usual. Without thought I reached up and touched my porcelain like face. In that moment I couldn't help but think back to when pink coloured my cheeks all the time, not only when I fed. But that was so long ago. With a long breathy sigh, I rubbed my eyes then let my hands smooth back my long curly blond hair. As I turned away from my reflection, my mind regrettably returned to my current dilemma.

My fear held me, as though through magic, binding me to that hotel room. My thirst was so strong, yet I could not get myself to relieve my hunger. I couldn't help but suffer that nagging feeling that whoever, or whatever, was doing those horrific things to the vampires were somehow near or had awoken. But rest assured he was royally pissed off. Yet with all that was unclear and unknown to me, I did know one thing for sure, this thing was real, and what I witnessed in my nightmarish trances was also real. How, why or who and even more importantly where, is what I really wanted the answers to. I knew that night I would not go out and hunt, I would not allow myself to feed and release this pain – physical and emotional. I would suffer because my fear was too great. Making my way over to the chair by the window, I sat and stared numbly at the idiot box. Not really registering what was flashing on the T.V. screen, I did however unconsciously absorb the music that was playing. Letting my eyes focus on the screen, I fully and completely let the music fill me. As I watched I came to realize why the music was familiar to me and took my soul away to another place. To when I was still human, with supple flesh and warm flowing blood, when I could walk in the sunshine and loved to dance in the rain. The band's name that flashed across the bottom of the screen, *The Corrs*, was from Ireland – my motherland. As they played their mix of Celtic folk rock, I couldn't help but let my mind wander to those years when I was so young and naive. I couldn't help but smile and let those memories sweep me away from that 20th century hotel room back to my childhood home in the countryside of Ireland, 1795. But quickly my smile soured, as with those joyous memories came the recollection of when I was embraced and accepted the gift of immortality and became a vampire.

Chapter 1

A crisp clean breeze brushed against my face as I walked toward the well. I knew that morning fall would be greeting us early that year and the coming weather would be hard on my father. After my mother died from pneumonia last year, my father became weak from grief and his own health began to deteriorate. My brother Patrick, taking the time from his own land and family helped us to harvest the crop of potatoes that father had been prolonging. The hard labour of farming never bothered father physically until this point in his life. Whereas, now the cold damp aggravated his back and knees. As well as recently he developed a raspy cough that worried me. I did what I could to help at harvest time, but it was mostly my duties to care for the home, make meals and tend to the animals. Despite being poor farmers, we did however have fertile soil and with bountiful crops we were even able to house and care for a few animals.

Even though my father was a stubborn man, he was not a stupid man – he knew he was ill. So with this keen insight into his own health, he had begun to pester me much more frequently on marriage. It was my time to find someone, bare children and build my own family. At the age of twenty-three and still unwed, I was considered an old maid. It's not that I was haggish; I was and still am quite attractive. Not that I am conceited, but it was my temper and a certain stubbornness that I inherited, that turned men away from me. Back then it was unacceptable for women to speak their mind.

Now, on that day, as I reached into the well grabbing for the bucket, I saw my father come from around the barn. It was a small barn made of wood with stone walls that went from the ground and up about three feet. Even with the distance between us, I could tell my father was out of breath as he held onto the barn wall for support. When he saw me he took a deep breath and came over to the well. My father was a man of average height. His receding, wavy hair had silver highlights that shone in the sunlight. As he walked over, he brushed off dirt and pieces of hay from his leather breeches and white cotton shirt. He then straightened the grey wool vest he always wore for extra warmth. He frequently said it kept the cold from, "nippin' at me old bones".

"How are ya feeling this mornin' Da?" I took the bucket of water and set it down beside my feet. He looked pale and very tired, dark circles seemed to cling under his eyes, his skin appearing jaundice. He looked worse every time I saw him.

"Oh, I be fine for an old cocker," he chuckled to himself. "Ah, lass before I forget, I have found a new suitor for you. His name is Brian, an owner of a general store in town." He paused and smirked, "try not to be as impolite to him as you were to the last gentleman."

"He was not –" I began, my temper getting the better of me, "– a gentleman. He was a boorish and revolting old man. Why can't you just let me be and find my own love, to marry and have children with?" I reached down, picked up the bucket and began to walk away in a huff before my father could answer me. I really didn't want an answer to my question; for I feared he would say he was dying. I didn't want to lose him. I loved him too much to let him go. He was the only one who understood me, who let me be who I really was.

Alas, I let him talk me into seeing this man he thought so highly of. I had said to him before I left to meet this Brian, "why don't you marry him then Da, since *you* like him so much?" But he never took offence to what I ranted to him. He knew it was just my frustration at having to be what others expected of me: married; barefoot and pregnant, as I have heard some say.

But Brian surprised me; he was everything I wanted in a man if I were to marry. He was so kind-hearted and affectionate to me and never once was vulgar, like many of the men I had met and known. From our first meeting we possessed each other's hearts. Brian not only was a well-mannered, well-dressed business man, he was also a musician who loved to play the fiddle and he had such a tremendous sense of humour. Every time I saw him, my heart fluttered and a flush of excitement would blush my cheeks. I hadn't been this enamoured ever, and I would have done anything for him. Just as I knew he would have done anything for me in return. After just a month Brian wanted to get married, but I felt like I didn't deserve to be with him and I had told him a few times that we should wait just a while longer. Not because I didn't love him, for I loved him more than life – I would die if something ever happened to him. But for some reason I just felt I wasn't worthy of him and his love.

His last proposal was a couple of weeks before Brian left for England to purchase merchandise for his general store. I could tell it was coming by how his body tensed and I could feel his nervousness.

"Deirdra, come for a walk with me to the barn." Brian suggested while walking over to me as I stoked the stove. He already had my shawl draped over his arm and a slightly sly grin on his face.

"What are you up to now?" I queried while finishing with the stove then turned to face him.

"What? I just thought you'd enjoy the crescent moon and the clear night sky speckled with its stars. Am I wrong?" Again, he gave me that sexy sly smile. With a small sigh and a small chuckle, I made my way over to him and grabbed the shawl.

"Hmmm, okay." I said, giving in to him, and together we walked out of my house into the crisp night air. We had just finished dinner, so father had already taken to his spot by the hearth and began whittling his little wooden toys. He did his best to leave Brian and myself alone; I knew he desperately

wanted us to marry. I also knew that father was very pleased with himself. He was the matchmaker and was finally successful. But I could not deny him his accolades; I was happy and in love and it was all because of my father.

As we strolled in the direction of the barn, it wasn't very far before Brian stopped and turned to face me. He was going to propose again, I knew it. It wasn't that I said no the other two times, I just tried to delay it. I tried to explain to him why, but he didn't like what I had said.

"Deirdra..." Brian began. Taking a deep swallow he then quickly cleared his throat and continued. "I know it has been a quick courtship, but I have never met anyone like you. You are so beautiful, intuitive and imaginative. You are loving, protective and sympathetic. You share your love of music with me and together we can laugh at each other and the world. We are meant for each other, Deirdra. Will you marry me?" Brian reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a ring and presented it before me. It was a simple yet elegant square cut emerald stone with a brilliantly shining gold band. I gasped slightly, he never had the ring before and his words – his words took my breath away. I stood there, stock still and my mouth slightly agape.

"Deirdra?" He said softly, trying to rouse me to speak. I closed my mouth and swallowed deeply. I looked at him, then at the ring then back at Brian. Taking a step forward, I placed my hands over his and looked into his crystal blue eyes.

"Brian, I love you more than you will ever know, but..." I began, and as he heard me pause he pulled back his hand and quickly put the ring back into his pocket. Now with his hands free he quickly grabbed onto my shoulders gently, yet firmly.

"Why do you always do this?" He asked, the desperation in his voice was evident. "What else can I do for you? I not only love you with all my soul, I can provide for us. Our family will never have to want."

"Brian, it's not that, not that at all. I just feel that I don't deserve you. I am not that young, what if I cannot bare your children? What if my mouth gets the better of me and gets me in trouble – or worse, gets *you* in trouble. I don't want my opinions or views to negatively effect your business. I am a liability. I don't deserve such a man as you." Sighing in defeat I lowered my head unable to look at his handsome face. I felt ashamed at my irrational thoughts, but they ruled my brain and my insecurities flowed out of my mouth.

"My love," Brian began as he reached for my chin and lifted my head to force my eyes to meet his. "I know you love me and I love you. That is why, for right now, I will let this go. Rest assured I will never stop asking you to marry me until you say yes. I know you want to, I can feel it. But you have to overcome whatever it is that holds you back from having happiness. I am patient I can wait." Leaning in, he kissed me gingerly on the forehead and embraced me.

"Thank you." I said trying to choke back my tears and wrapped my arms around Brian, holding onto him firmly never wanting to let go. I loved him so much my heart ached. But with all his love surrounding me, I couldn't help but be bombarded by my own self-hatred. I hated myself for not yelling at the top of my lungs, YES... YES... YES! I will marry you. I pulled from of his embrace and looked up at him. As he smiled down at me, I melted.

"Brian," I began, I felt that frog of fear forming in my throat. I wanted to say, *I will finally answer you tonight and I will be your wife*. But quickly my courage fell away and I was left standing there, unable to speak a word of what I truly wanted.

Instead I weakly uttered, "never-mind..."

"Let's head back in, it's getting rather chilly out; you must be freezing." With that Brian wrapped an arm around me. I nodded, staying silent while I let him guide me back into the warm house.

There were many times when I found myself in intimate moments with Brian and did things that a respectable woman was not to do before she marries. I had given my virginity to Brian, a sin in 1795, but I never regretted it. I had everything I ever wanted. My father was still alive and once I got over my irrational fears, a lover I was going to marry. But all that changed when I fell ill.

It had been after a good week of working in the cold, damp and rainy weather helping my brother Patrick harvest the last of the potatoes that I became sick. The cold rain soaked my clothes, the wind so frigid it made my bones shiver. It was extremely rare to have weather like that since Ireland never became that cold in the fall or winter. Never-the-less, ever since then my health deteriorated rapidly. My father quickly grew worried when I became so weak that I could not even rise from my bed.

He finally decided for me, not listening to my protests any longer, to take me to the town doctor. The ride would take about two hours to Dublin. I remember my brother Patrick and his wife Miriam commenting to father how at least the weather warmed up for the trip, but to me the breeze felt so cold and seemed to penetrate my body chilling me to the core.

At times I shook violently from the frigid air, even though I was sweating profusely from a raging fever. I saw white spots which eventually led to everything going black. I would scream out to my father to help me, but a few seconds would pass and my sight would gradually return. The only relief I had from my illness was when I slept which was often, but brief. At one point when I woke, I was unable to neither move nor open my eyes, my body still paralyzed from sleep. That very sensation made me believe I was dead. It didn't really frighten me, but gave me peace of mind. It was almost like I was between life and death but the soft alluring whisper of death was drawing me closer to him.....