



# Monarchy of Blood



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# Prologue

There was a time in my life when I was homeless. When I was barely thirteen, in my naiveté, I made the stupid decision to run away. Between my mother's love of booze—which was stronger than her love for her son—and my father who barely knew I existed, except when he felt the need to make me his punching bag—I figured anywhere would be better than with them. I had retreated into my damaged and disillusioned world, believing that escape was the only answer.

For five years, I lived on the streets of Montreal in fear. I desperately wanted to go home, but had no home to go to. Even though I knew it would take them a while to discover that I had run away, their reaction to me wanting to come back would be much quicker. I know that my father would be furious, surely beating me within an inch of my life, while my mother would just drink herself into a coma to avoid having to deal with me.

Starving and emaciated, my body ached. I was tired and battled dizziness all the time. I could feel that my eyes and cheeks had hollowed, giving me a frightening gaunt look. At this pivotal low, I made the devastating decision to become a male prostitute. The first John to pick me up was a man in his late forties. I was so scared that, once alone with him, I had thrown up, despite my empty stomach. In his guilt, he handed me ten dollars and let me be. With cash in hand, I walked into the first convenience store I found and bought a bag of chips, two hotdogs and a Slurpee. With change in my pocket and food in my hands, this was the happiest I had been in ages. Never have ketchup chips and hotdogs tasted so scrumptious! My mouth watered profusely as I drenched the hotdogs in ketchup, mustard, onions and the thick gelatinous nacho cheese. Before I even left, I started chomping away on the first dog. Having wolfed it down so fast, I was quickly overcome with pain in my stomach from having too much food, too fast. But it was worth it.

Inevitably, I ran out of money. On the same street, Rue Wolfe, the same John had come by and picked me up again. This time I wasn't as lucky, and an exchange of services was the only way I'd be eating that night. Knowing that I was green was probably why I was so appealing to him, which made me cringe. I discovered later, over the next few years, that he was one of the easier Johns to deal with, since he usually only wanted a hand-job or to watch me masturbate. It didn't give me much money, but I was okay with that. As the years went on, the Johns became more demanding and most times I blocked out what I had to do to survive.

It was in the early morning hours, after the clubs had started to close, that I made my way to Rue Plessis. The area was known for bathhouses and nightclubs, which meant plenty of opportunity to make a few dollars. I was picked up by a man in his mid-twenties. He was horny, drunk and even though I sensed that his nature was malicious, I accepted his offer. I hadn't eaten in a week—I needed food. I also hoped I'd be able to make enough to rent a room, so that I could shower and get a good sleep. But all my simple plans changed in the blink of an eye. Before we even found a private spot the John started making advances. The moment I stopped him, he lost all composure.

I was already weak and much frailer than him, and he took that to his advantage. With a hard right hook, he had me staggering. Unable to right myself, I fell to the ground. Immediately he was on top of me. I tried to protect my face as he repeatedly swung his fists with such power. When he had enough of that, he stood and proceeded to kick me in the ribs. I lay there, curled in the fetal position, trying to protect myself, but with no advantage, his beating was turning me into ground meat. Pausing, he leaned down and whispered into my ear, "Whore!" My whole body shuddered in fear as I heard him unbuckle his belt and unzip his jeans.

After he raped me, he took my last bit of change and ran off, leaving me in the alley to die.

That was when she had come to me. Her green eyes were fierce and her skin like porcelain. She picked me up and wrapped me in her arms. Leaning in to kiss my forehead, her wavy red hair cascaded around me. Breathing in deeply, the mixed scent of flowers and vanilla calmed and aroused me. Her whole being exuded a calmness that washed over me. When her eyes locked with mine, I felt at peace. Closing my eyes, I absorbed the love I felt from her with my whole being.

It wasn't until pain encircled my neck, like a barbed collar, that I woke from my daze. At first I was confused, not understanding the

pain. I then realized that she had bitten my neck. Panicking, I pushed against this immovable living statue, but most of my protest I yelled within my head: *I don't want to die*. I felt my life fading away as I became weaker and weaker. That night she meant to end my suffering, but my silent fight for survival altered my fate.

Surprised to be alive, I woke up the next day only to find myself in an unusual and peculiar circumstance: it was early evening and I was lying in a huge bed. The weight of the black and white modern floral designed duvet was thick and soft. If I had known where I was, and certain that I wasn't going to be murdered by some serial killer, I would have lavished in the luxury of it. But soon enough I wondered how I had gotten there and if I were even still in Quebec.

Pulling back the heavy blanket, the fresh scent of linen brushed past me, which in turn made me catch the soft woody floral aroma that perfumed the air. Soon enough, I realized I was naked—and clean. Feeling panicked and unsure of how to handle the fact that someone bathed me while I was unconscious, I immediately began looking around the room for my clothes. It was then that noticed the various perfume bottles, make up and elegant jewelry boxes that scattered dressers tops and side tables. A gentle repetitive ticking came from an ornately carved antique clock that sat atop an armoire giving the room a sense of tranquility. However, I didn't spot my clothes anywhere.

Unexpectedly, nausea washed over me. I felt dizzy and my vision blurred. I paused and waited for the sensation to dissipate. Shivering, goosebumps formed and I slid back under the warmth of the comforter. Every time I moved, my body ached. My face was hot from the swelling and I was sure the ribs on my left side were bruised, which caused my laboured breathing. Lying there, I tried to remember what had happened for me to get to that place, but to no avail, I was unsuccessful at shaking the cobwebs off my memories.

The door opened and a woman walked in. In a sudden flash, I remembered. I remembered her biting my neck. I sat upright in bed, but I really didn't know what to do. My pulse raced and I held my breath.

"Ah, mon chéri, you are awake." Though her voice was soft, she had an air of strength about her. Walking into the room, she appeared as though she glided, despite the fact I could hear her gentle footfall. In her hands she carried folded clothes that I didn't recognize. "I took the liberty of washing yours but they were so tattered, they practically disintegrated. I found some new clothes for you," she added and placed them at the end of the bed.

*Where am I? Who thought I'd be all right with someone bathing me while I was unconscious? What am I doing here? What do you want from me? ...Why did you save me?* My thoughts raced, but no words came forth.

"You are free to stay here if you wish. I offer you sanctuary. However, there are rules that you have to abide by."

"Who— who are you?" I managed to stammer. "Why are you doing this?"

"Why not? You are a fighter, Stone Rossi. Sometimes I am generous."

With wide eyes of shock and slight fear, I looked at this breathtakingly beautiful woman. *She knew my name! How the hell did she know my name?* A smile slowly spread across her face and at first I thought I was seeing things. I blinked to clear my vision, but my eyes weren't fooling me. She had fangs. As she took another couple of steps closer to me, I scurried back until my back pressed against the headboard.

"Oui, I guess this would be confusing, to say the least." She sat on the bed and rested her hand on my blanket covered calf. "I will be blunt with you Stone. I will care for your every need, but in return I expect you to live by my rules. I would say that's fair, *nést-ce pas?*"

My Adam's apple bobbed as I swallowed deeply. "What are the rules?"

She smiled widely and again her fangs gleamed even though the room was dimly lit. "Well, *mon ami*, simply put: don't tell anyone of our existence. I will probably put you to work around Chantonay, to do the things I cannot during the day." She paused for a moment as though pondering whether she should say what had come to her mind. Eventually she did voice her thought. "And just so you know, don't get in our way when we are... moody." She winked at me and smiled sweetly. Standing from where she sat at the foot of the bed, she walked closer to me then sat beside me. "I am not like you. I haven't been human for three-hundred and sixty-eight years." She reached for my arm and took hold of my wrist. The sheer coldness of her skin made me want to recoil the instant she touched me. I was speechless and dumbfounded. *I must be dreaming*, I kept telling myself.

"You're not dreaming, Stone. This is real. *I am real.*" With my arm still in her gentle grasp, she brought it up to her mouth. Slow and intentionally, she grazed her cool lips along the flesh of my inner wrist. "Do you remember anything from last night? I didn't mesmerize you nor did I play with your memories. I let you be because I want to care for you, and if I do, you need to know what I

am." I nodded, unable to form words. I did remember and I was horrified. Reading my mind, she smiled a tight-lipped smile and kissed my wrist gingerly before giving back my arm.

"I'm a vampire, Stone," she paused to make sure I heard her. "Do you understand what I am saying?"

"There is no bloody way..." I stopped speaking. I knew it was possible, but was I ready to accept it? I reached up and touched my neck where I remembered her biting me. I felt the wound and winced. I looked at this stunning woman in awe. "I believe you. But... are you—what are you going to do to me? Am I going to be like you now?" I asked naively. She laughed at me, not in a mean way, but with gaiety.

"No, you will not be like me. I want you to be you. I want you to live and grow to be an old man," she responded sincerely. Leaning towards me, she kissed me on the forehead and then rose to her feet. "I will check in on you in a bit. Meanwhile, I'll get someone to make you something to eat. You must be starving." And she began walking towards the door.

"Wait! What's your name?"

She stopped mid pace and turned gracefully to face me. "Mylana," she responded simply and continued to exit the room.

So at the age of eighteen in the early spring of 1994 I was taken in, cared for and loved by a vampire. I learned quickly when to make my presence known and when to keep myself at a distance. It wasn't only Mylana who lived in La Maison Chantonnay. There were also those she called her clan: Deirdra, who was her "child," Brenna who was Deirdra's "child" and Elijah. There were many others who would come and go, but for the most part, it was mostly those three.

That was seventeen years ago. My whole world changed—for the better, even though I lived in a mansion full of blood-sucking vampires. Mylana was true to her word, even more so. It was one thing for her to take me in and give me a home, but she even let me follow my dream to attend the University of Montreal. She never wanted me to shy away from anything that would better my life. Mylana made sure I experienced life to the fullest, that I remembered to enjoy it, because it could be taken away like the snap of the fingers.

No words are as true as those. Even though I lived with vampires, I was never frightened of them enough to leave. They all had their moments, but for the most part, they had good control over their bloodlust. However, there was one instance, in the summer of '95, when I was forced to leave for my own safety. Vampires had been burning spontaneously around the world and those at La

Maison Chantonnay were not exempt from the chaos. I didn't want to leave the only home I had come to know. But at Mylana's insistence, I stayed at the Hôtel Frontenac, per her arrangement. My time away from them was bittersweet. I enjoyed the freedom, but I worried for them. After nearly three weeks of no contact from them, Brenna was the one to come for me and tell me that all was well. That was the first time I heard about the Blood god and the havoc he wreaked. Though they trusted me, I was on the need-to-know basis list. I didn't need to know everything, which was fine with me. However, in the winter of 1999, I learned more than I ever wanted to know. With the return of the Blood god, who I knew as Adam, my world changed once again—forever. My mortality was taken from me against my will.

Amongst the disorder and turmoil with the vampires, I was used as one of Adam's pawns. Following Adam's orders, Brenna and Kristine kidnapped me—it was Brenna who had turned me. I had considered her one of my dearest friends, but I guess ultimately that friendship and love *is* what saved me. I say that because if she did not do what she had, I would be in the ground, rotting. But on the other hand, if she hadn't kidnapped me, imprisoned me, drank my blood for weeks on end and beat me to within an inch of my life, I may still have been human. I try not to dwell on it. As time passes, the pure hatred I had for Brenna on that night has waned. I do admit that what I feel for her is a bit messed up. A lot of the time I'm confused and torn between devotion and irritation. I guess this is what Deirdra had meant when she talked about her relationship with Mylana. Now that I am no longer an outsider, many of their idiosyncrasies make sense to me.

When I was first brought across, the chaos that surrounded my embrace kept me in check. Or I should say, kept my thirst in check. I was distracted by my physical change, at first, and then by meeting Brian. He was another saviour in my life. He took me in when I needed it most and helped me to deal with my transformation. I am grateful and will always be grateful for his companionship—then and now. Having to deal with the death *and* resurrection of Deirdra, I didn't know how I was going manage. When I think back, I'm surprised I didn't lose all composure and drain any and all mortals that crossed my path. But I thank Brian for his guidance.

However, once things became more routine and normal—*if* anything in our world can be called "normal"—that was when the true reality of what I had become hit me hard. I discovered that any control I had been able to maintain was a joke and I was about to learn a new lesson. A lesson about obsession.