



In The Blood

By Sarah Jane Elliott

THE BLOOD OF KESH

CYCLE #1: ILL MET BY MOONLIGHT

Part 1: In The Blood

For Jenny

*My best friend, my soul sister,
and my hero.*

Moonlight bleached the holy mound to the colour of bone. Caroline shivered, rubbing her arms as though it would banish the shadows of the forest from her skin.

"So that's the rock, huh?" Shannon's voice shattered the mood, and Caro found herself once again able to breathe.

"Yeah. I told you it was less than impressive." Caro grabbed her friend's arm and tugged. "Come on, I'm cold and this thing creeps me out."

Shannon snorted, but followed Caro's tug. "I don't see what the big deal is. It's just a rock. Did Indians really use that thing for sacrifices?"

"Jesus, Shannon, how gullible are you?"

Shannon tossed her head in mock offense, setting her dark ringlets bouncing around her face. "Pardon us peasants for our ignorance, your highness."

Caro stuck her tongue out. "Fine then, I won't tell you."

"Oh, come on." Shannon chased after her as Caro stalked up the hill toward the house. "I'll give you chocolate."

"Playing on my weaknesses?"

"It works, doesn't it?"

"Hell, yeah." Caro accepted the chocolate bar Shannon held out to her. "The Iroquois used it in their rituals. They said it was a place of power, like a gateway to the spirit realm, or something." She dug into her backpack for her keys.

"So that's why your parents paid a billion dollars for the house?"

"For the property, and it wasn't a billion." Caro opened the door and stepped in to disable the alarm system. "Just a couple million. They like that historical crap."

"Huh." Shannon stepped in after her, her footsteps echoing in the vast entryway. "Too bad they're never home to appreciate it."

Caroline looked at her, suddenly very grateful for the company. She'd been finding nine bedrooms far too much for one person to occupy alone. "Tell me about it."

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Shannon, who was seated on Caro's bed with her math text lying forgotten on her lap, stared at Caro as she set down the phone. "Bad news?"

Caro scrubbed the traitorous tears from her eyes. "Not like I didn't expect it. They're never home for holidays. Why should Christmas be any different?"

"Sweetie." Shannon set her book aside and got up to wrap her arms around Caro's shoulders. "I'm sorry."

"People actually hate me for who my parents are, you know." Caro sniffed, leaning into Shannon's hug. "They look at my parents and all their money, and they get mad that I'm not floating around in a cloud of euphoria or something. They don't realize that those tribes in Africa know my parents better than I do." She pulled back until she could look into Shannon's concerned dark

eyes. "Am I a horrible person for kinda wishing that Dad had never figured out how to treat that disease?"

Shannon laughed. "Hell no. Congratulations, babe, you're human." She winked at Caro and grabbed her bag. "And so am I, though I won't be if I don't get to bed soon. I think we're about as ready for that test as we're going to get." She slung her backpack over her shoulders. "Are you going to walk me to the road, or what?"

Caro grinned. "Sure. Scaredy cat."

"Hey, I have a healthy sense of self preservation. Who the hell has a kilometer of driveway, anyway?"

"The real estate agent told my parents that the privacy factor raised the property value of the house."

Shannon rolled her eyes. "I respect what your parents do and all, but they're both a couple of flakes."

"I couldn't agree with you more."

It didn't take that long to reach the road, though it would have been shorter if Shannon agreed to take the shortcut back through the woods. "You know," Shannon said as Caro punched in the passcode for the gate, "this is why you need to learn to drive."

"Why should I when you're perfectly capable of driving us where we need to go?"

"Cute." Shannon tugged on a lock of Caro's hair. "Buy me a car for my next birthday, and I might actually be able to do that. Until then, my brother's got dibs."

Caro folded her arms. "Good night, Shannon."

"Night." Shannon hugged her quickly and ducked through the gate before it closed. "Don't go through the woods! You don't know what kind of perverts might be waiting for you!"

Caro shook her head, and waited until Shannon was out of sight before heading back up to the house. She wasn't stupid. Despite the fence, and the gates, and the cameras around the perimeter of their several acres of property, Caro hated the woods at night. It wasn't so much the fear of perverts as it was her overactive imagination that kept her out of them.

Which was why the very non-imaginary man that stepped out of them and onto the driveway took her completely by surprise.

"Oh, shit," said Caro. "There really are perverts in the woods."

Whatever the man had expected -- and judging by his black wardrobe, it wasn't anything wholesome -- Caro's response wasn't it. His startled laughter gave her the opportunity she needed. Bolting to the side, she leaped over the edge of the driveway and slid down the hill on her ass.

She could hear him coming down the hill behind her, so she struggled to her feet and ran into the trees. Her heart raced, sending a surge of adrenaline coursing through her, adding fuel to the desperation that drove her flight. "Damn you, Mom," she swore. "Why didn't you let me get that dog?"

The trees closed over her, blocking out what meager moonlight there was, so she never saw the root that tripped her. She did, however, feel the rocks that met her outstretched hands and split her palms open. Pain stabbed through her as she fought to regain her footing, and the footsteps of her pursuer had drawn closer. Tears stung her eyes and threatened to blind her as she pushed on through the trees.

She ducked under a branch, momentum carrying her forward before she realized she'd burst into the clearing housing the holy mound. She spared a quick glance over her shoulder, just in time to see her pursuer's hand reaching for her. Screaming, she flung herself forward and ran straight into the mound.

Her hands slapped against the rock, sending a fresh wash of pain down her arms. She stared dumbly at the handprints she left, the blood red against the bleached whiteness of the stone. The pervert was still behind her, but his footsteps sounded impossibly slow, like the beat of a huge drum heard from under the water. As she watched, pale fire welled from the bloody handprints on the rock and washed over her. The forest and everything in it vanished, until the world was nothing but a vast tunnel of that pale light, tinted faintly pink by the haze of her blood. And then she was falling toward the end of the tunnel, gaining speed by the moment, until the blinding light and the end of the tunnel rushed up to meet her and everything went black.

* * *

When Caro woke, there was a drunken marching band staggering around inside her skull and butchering the complete works of John Philip Sousa. Unable to do more than moan, she managed to push herself up from her facedown sprawl in the dirt just long enough to flop over on her back. She lay there, panting, as the pain from the reopened cuts on her hands pounded in time with the marching band.

She'd been staring up at the sky for some time before she realized what was bothering her.

"Ohhhh-kay..." she said slowly. She couldn't remember hitting her head, but then, she couldn't remember falling on her face either. "When did we get two moons?" The forest seemed disinclined to answer, so she gingerly pushed herself to a sitting position, despite vociferous protest from the drunken marching band. "And where the hell did that pervert go?" She looked around, and her brow furrowed. "For that matter, where the hell did the honking big rock go?"

Something large crashed in the undergrowth behind her. With a little shriek, she turned just in time to see something big, dark, and not human launch itself at her.

She had a vague impression of wings, claws, and more teeth than were anatomically plausible, as she ducked and rolled out of the creature's path. It turned, and gathered itself for another leap.

Caro heard a high whine as several somethings whizzed over her head, and the creature let out a howl of pain as a half dozen arrows blossomed in its thick purple hide. Caro stared, too numb to move. The thing looked like a

centipede gone horribly wrong. The body was composed of dozens of segments, covered with thick hide and dotted with clumps of bristly hair, but the legs were almost human. The head might have been, had the multitude of teeth not distorted the face beyond recognition.

And it was about fifteen feet long.

"Jesus, Shannon, what the hell was in that chocolate?"

The creature screamed again and lunged once more toward Caro, but another hail of arrows drove it back. With a rustle of undergrowth, her rescuers began to emerge from the darkened forest.

The beast gave a howl of rage and struck again, and its claws sank into Caro's arm.

Caro screamed as the creature, rocked by another hail of arrows, tightened its grip and sank its teeth into her shoulder. Fear coursed through her, setting every nerve in her body on fire. Without thinking, she reached down to the core of that burning pain and grabbed it.

Agony overwhelmed her, and she did the only thing she could. She threw the pain at the creature.

She hadn't expected anything to happen. In fact, she had fully expected to die. So when the creature burst into pale fire and fell away, shrieking, all she could do was sit there and stare at it. While she watched it writhe in agony, the men standing behind her came forward and began to hack it apart with swords and axes until it finally stopped moving. By the light of the burning centipede, she finally managed to get a good look at her rescuers.

They didn't do much to relieve her fears.

They wore short pants with sandals, and short robes that belted at the waist. Some of them had leather armour. All of them had blonde hair ranging from gold to sandy-brown, and blue eyes. All were armed. They looked like Renaissance Faire rejects that had just crawled out of bed and thrown on their bathrobes.

None of them looked particularly happy to see her.

"My God, is there a pervert convention going on in my backyard, or what?"

The Renfaire rejects exchanged a few glances over her head, and one stepped toward her. She didn't realize what he was planning until he raised his staff, but by the time she figured it out and opened her mouth to protest, it was already on its way toward her head.

Blackness claimed her once again.

* * *

When Caro struggled back out of the darkness, the drunken marching band had been joined by a demented bagpiper.

"Fuuuuuck," she moaned, and attempted to roll over and bury her head in her hands. Unfortunately, someone had tied them behind her back, so all she managed to do was roll off the low cot she'd been lying on.

She smacked hard into a dirt floor, and it took several minutes for her head to stop spinning long enough to figure out that she was in serious trouble.

She managed to get onto her side without having her head explode, which, given the throbbing in her skull, she figured was a pretty good thing.

She was inside some kind of hut, which contained only the cot, a few baskets along one wall, and a small firepit in the middle of the room.

"Okay," she said quietly. "Either the perverts have really made themselves at home, or I am not in Kansas anymore, Toto."

The reed mat covering the door was lifted aside, and one of the Renfaire rejects entered the room. He stared down at her for a moment, and nudged her with his foot.

"Kadashte? Marahes dierad, eshdana vayan."

"Ah," she said solemnly. "Oz, then."

The pervert cast her an exasperated glance, and knelt next to her. He reached into his robe, pulled out what looked like a large ruby, and reached toward Caro. She jerked back, attempting to avoid him, and managed to smack the back of her head against the cot in the process. The pervert rolled his eyes as Caro lay in helpless agony, and touched her forehead with his big rock.

Pain stabbed straight through her head, causing another, involuntary, jerk. She would have cracked her skull against the cot again had the pervert not anticipated her and caught the back of her head in his hand. He held her immobile as the pain continued to tear through her brain, which felt as though he'd jammed it into a blender and hit puree.

When she passed out again, she found that was actually starting to get used to it.

* * *

She cracked her eyes open and winced at the sunlight that hit her in the face. "This is a habit I could do without."

"What is?" someone behind her asked.

"Unconsciousness." She craned her neck and found herself staring, upside down, at the pervert who had hurt her the night before. "When did you learn to speak English?"

"I didn't." He rose from his place by the fire and knelt by her side. She lay back down again, and for the first time noticed that she was lying on the thin mattress, which had been pulled from the cot and set down on the floor.

The pervert noticed her look and grinned. "It seemed safer than having you fall again."

"Ah." She flexed her hands. "Your consideration would be a lot more reassuring if I wasn't tied up." She frowned. "And what do you mean, 'you didn't'?"

"I mean, I didn't learn your language." He pulled out his rock again. "I gave you mine."

Caro's eyes widened. "Keep that thing away from me! I swear to God, if some big sparkly tunnel, or demented centipede, or shiny rock knocks me out one more time..."

He smiled. "Relax. This is a healing stone. It won't hurt you."

"Okay, I'm going to ignore the whole healing rock thing for the moment," Caro said, squeezing her eyes shut, "and remind you that it hurt a hell of a lot the last time."

"I know. It wasn't supposed to do that. You have... irregularities that we weren't aware of until it was too late. But this is different; it's healing, not implanting."

Cold smoothness pressed against her forehead. Caro's eyes snapped open, but it was too late, and she was bound too tightly to fight him anyway. She braced herself for the pain.

It didn't come. Instead, a wave of something cool poured over and through her, and the throbbing in her head began to recede. She blinked, and her eyes began to focus. She hadn't been aware her vision had been that bad until she could finally see again, and realized that the pervert standing over her was actually an older man who was either a later middle-age or a very spry senior. The cool tingling subsided, and the pervert put his rock away.

"I had a concussion, didn't I?"

"Most likely." He drew a knife from his belt. Caro flinched, but he merely reached behind her and cut the rope binding her wrists. "You should be all right now." He reached down and freed her ankles as well.

The mat across the door lifted, and a woman walked into the room. The white lacing her wheat-coloured hair and the wrinkles etching her face proclaimed her as old as the man sitting next to Caro.

"Ah, she's awake."

"She also wants to know what the hell is going on." Caro sat up, drawing her knees to her chest. "Who are you people? Why did you hit me on the head? What was that centipede thing? And please tell me those two moons were a side effect of that concussion."

The woman smiled. "I am Nesha. This is Dano. We are the *areshti* of this village. Geshtan hit you to make sure you didn't go anywhere before we were sure of our suspicions about you. That creature was a demon, of the lesser blood, but dangerous nonetheless. And there are and have always been two moons."

Caro stared from one pair of blue eyes to the other, and hugged her knees closer to her chest. "This isn't my world, is it?"

Nesha sat next to her. "I can't say for certain, but judging by your clothing, your looks, and your speech, I would say not."

Nesha's face blurred as tears began to run down Caro's cheeks. She pressed her head against her knees. "I want to go home. I don't even know how I got here. I don't know how to get back."

She heard Dano sigh. "We can't tell you the latter, I'm afraid. But we may have an answer to the former."

Caro raised her head and sniffed. "What?"

Nesha tapped Caro's shoulder, where the demon had bitten her the night before. "It's in the blood."

* * *

Caro stood in the centre of a ring of solemn villagers, and hugged her arms tightly to her chest. "I changed my mind. I don't want to do this."

Beside her, Nesha chuckled softly, the harsh planes of her face softened by the firelight. "Too late now."

The two *areshti* -- the word didn't translate through whatever filter the rock had put into Caro's head, but she gathered they were some kind of cross between priests, druids, and witch doctors -- flanked her on either side and kept her from running. She'd discovered the hard way that they were much stronger than their ages implied. Before them, the ring parted. Geshtan, the one who had knocked her out the night before, dragged a small squealing creature into the ring. The watching villagers drew their weapons, but remained motionless. Geshtan bound the creature to the stake awaiting it, and fell back to take his place in the ring.

"What are you going to do to that poor shriveled monkey?" Caro asked.

"That 'shrivelled monkey' is a demon," said Dano. "A very weak one, to be sure, but it will tell us what we need to know."

"Which is?"

"Whether or not you are the *deasha*."

Caro tried to take a step back. "Look, I already told you, I'm not your avatar, or messenger, or whatever. God, can't you people pick names that actually translate? Anyway, I have never spoken to any gods, or spirits, or anything like that, so you don't need to do this--"

But Dano was ignoring her. He grabbed her wrist, drew his knife, and slashed a deep cut across her forearm. She shrieked and struggled against his hold, but Nesha was already on her other side, holding a stone bowl under the wound. When the bottom was covered with Caro's blood, Nesha stepped away and Dano let go. Unprepared for her sudden release, Caro ended up on her ass, watching as Nesha approached the cowering little demon, which looked too much like the beef-jerky version of a monkey for Caro's comfort, and held the bowl up to it.

The little demon froze, sniffed at the bowl, and instantly its demeanor changed. Instead of a frightened, whimpering thing, it became enraged. It lunged at the bowl, threatening to rip the stake clear out of the ground. Nesha tilted the bowl, and a thin black tongue lapped at the blood in the bottom.

The villagers had been silent from the beginning, but when the demon froze and went rigid, the silence that settled over the village became an almost tangible thing. Caro's breath began to come shorter. Nesha stepped back, and all eyes rested on the quivering demon.

It shattered the silence with a scream of rage, and the cords binding it to the stake snapped. It fell forward, heaving, and as Caro watched, it began to grow. Its claws lengthened, driving deep into the earth. A row of spines erupted from its back. It raised its head, and was no longer the cowering, piteous thing that Geshtan had dragged into the clearing.

Its burning red eyes fell upon Caro. With a triumphant howl, it leaped.

The demon was dead before it reached her, falling to the ground with a dozen arrows piercing its side. Those who weren't armed with bows leaped forward, finishing the job by hacking the creature to pieces and then setting those pieces afire.

Caro watched the proceedings from her awkward sprawl on the ground, all but forgotten by the rest of the villagers, and too horrified to move. Only when Dano reached down and took her wounded arm in his hands did she remember to breathe.

"Well, I suppose that answers our question," said Nesha as Dano began to bind Caro's wound.

"What the *fuck* was that?" Caro shrieked.

"You are the *deasha*." Nesha reached down and helped Caro to her feet. "Come with me."

She led Caro past the villagers, who bowed their heads as they passed. Too lost to even fight, Caro followed meekly where the old woman led. They travelled through the woods for some time, until they emerged at the top of a high cliff. Caro gasped.

The light of the two moons clearly illuminated the vast ruined city on the horizon. She stared at the fallen white stone, and felt a strange sadness touch her heart. The city would have been magnificent when it was whole.

"It was my mother's home, once. The home of all our people."

Caro couldn't tear her eyes away. The hair on her arms prickled, and she rubbed at it absently. "What happened?"

"It was destroyed. By a demon."

Caro started, and turned to stare at the *areshta*. "One of those little things did that?"

Nesha laughed softly. "No. There are many types of demons, Caro. Those you have seen are the weaker ones. They are to the greater demons what the beasts are to us." She sobered and stared at the ruins. "That was done by a demon who calls himself Jarakeshtan."

Caro shivered. "Why?"

"Because he hates humans. He feels demons should be the rulers of this land, not us. And he feels that he should rule the demons. So he has systematically destroyed our cities and forced the survivors to make what livings we can in these hills. He would wipe us out completely if he could, but the *areshti* still have a few tricks up our sleeves." She paused. "And he hates us for that, too."

"Look," said Caro. "I'm sorry for that. Really. But I don't see how this gets me home."

Nesha turned to her, the look in her eyes so fierce that Caro took a step back. "You are one of those who have been touched. Your blood has power, child. The power to turn a lesser demon into a monster. The power to destroy a demon of middling strength." She cupped Caro's cheek in her hand, turning Caro's face toward her, forcing her to focus on the *areshta*'s words. "The power to open doors between worlds."

A chill touched Caro's spine. "The mound," she breathed. "There was this rock in the woods near my house, it was supposed to be sacred or something. I touched it..." She looked down at the healing cuts on her palms. "There was blood on my hands..."

"And it opened a gateway between our worlds," Nesha finished. "There used to be many such gates in these places, though we lacked the keys to open them."

"Great," Caro said. "Just point me at the nearest one and I'll be out of your hair."

Nesha shook her head. "Would that it were that simple. Jarakeshtan destroyed every one he could find."

Caro stared at her. "Why?"

"Because they, too, could convey power if tapped properly. If there's anything he hates more than us, it is the threat of another more powerful than he."

Caro pulled away. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"You have been sent to us for a reason, child. Your blood has the power to face him. You are the weapon we have been waiting for."

"No," Caro held up her hands. "Ohhhhh, no. He did *that* to an entire city, and you want to fight him using *me*? What am I supposed to do, sarcasm him to death? No. No way. Find someone else to run your kamikaze missions." Caro turned and ran for the trees.

"What do you think he will do when word reaches him that a *deasha* has come to this world?"

Caro froze. Slowly, she turned. "No."

"He destroyed every city, every gateway, that stood in his path because he feared what they *might* be able to do. What would he do to one whom he *knew* could destroy him?"

"But I can't do that," Caro whispered. "I don't know how I'm doing any of this."

"Do you think he will believe you?"

Caro shook her head. "It doesn't matter, because he's not going to find out--" The look on Nesha's face choked off the words in her throat. "You wouldn't."

"We are a desperate people," she said. "How far would you go to ensure the survival of your kin?"

"But he'll kill me if you tell him!" Caro grabbed a tree for support. "What good am I to you if I'm dead?"

"What good are you if you will not help us?" Nesha countered, and took a step toward her.

Caro ran, pushing her way blindly through the trees, desperate to get away. All she had to do was find another white stone, like the holy mound. Then she could bleed on it, open another sparkly tunnel, and get away from these Renfaire rejects with delusions of revolution. She wasn't a warrior. She didn't know how to fight demons. Hell, she could barely handle Mrs. Bellavance, her

deranged Chemistry teacher. This Jarakeshtan would wipe the floor with her. She had to get away, before these villagers had the chance to march her to her death.

She pushed past another tree, looked up, and drew herself up so fast that she lost her footing and ended up on her ass again.

For a moment, she thought that one of the villagers had caught up with her and was ready to hit her on the head again. But the man leaning against the tree in front of her had black hair, not blond, and it reached nearly to his waist. His clothes were much finer than the villagers' as well -- the richly embroidered robe he wore reminded her a little of the kimonos she'd seen in the Far Eastern gallery at the museum, and a little of the Elvish stuff in the Lord of the Rings movie. His hand rested on the hilt of the long, narrow sword at his side.

"Oh, thank God," she said, struggling to her feet. "You have to help me. These demented villagers are after me, and they think--" The man turned toward her, and the words died in her throat.

"I don't believe it." He took a step toward her, directly into the moonlight. His long, pointed ears and amber eyes were clearly illuminated. "They really did find a *deasha*, didn't they?" He reached out and took her arm. The claws he had in lieu of fingernails pricked lightly against her skin as he pulled the dressing from her wound. "Unbelievable. Have you any idea how much power runs beneath this frail skin?"

Caro couldn't breathe. The sense of wrongness emanating from him filled her head and choked her. She couldn't understand how she had ever mistaken him for human, even without being able to see his face or hands.

He pulled her closer, wrapping one arm around her waist as he lifted her wounded arm. "Did they want you to fight Jarakeshan, little girl? Foolish, that. You'd be killed before you set foot near him." He grinned, baring a mouth full of teeth that would have been normal had his canines not been elongated. Not like a vampire. More like a wolf.

"That's what I tried to tell them," she managed to gasp.

"How very wise of you," he said. "I respect a human who knows its limitations." He raised her arm to his mouth, and drew his tongue across it. A shudder rippled through him. "On the other hand, with your blood running through me, I could give him a fight he would not soon forget."

"No." She strained against him.

"Yes," he said.

Belatedly, she realized that this lunatic was actually going to kill her. She fought against his hold with everything she had, but it was like kicking stone. He didn't even appear to notice her struggles. In desperation, she tried to remember what she had done to the centipede. She reached down, pulled her fear and pain from within, and threw it at him.

His hold slackened for the briefest of instants before he shrugged it off and laughed.

"Poor little girl. Is that the best you can do?"

"*Ayasherin!*"

He rolled his eyes and turned, his face set in an expression of mild annoyance. "What?"

Nesha stepped from the trees. "Let her go."

Caro's captor let out a short bark of laughter. "And how do you propose to make me?"

"Look above you, *Ayasherin*. The moons are full. Do you really want to challenge me now?"

He stared at Nesha for a moment, and sighed. "I have no doubt I could defeat you, old woman, but the process would be an inconvenience." He released his hold on Caro. She immediately darted toward the dubious protection of the *areshta*, who at least didn't plan on killing her right away.

Ayasherin smiled and gave Caro a little bow. "Enjoy this reprieve. I can find you whenever I wish. Remember that." And between one breath and the next, he was gone.

Caro sagged against a tree, gasping for breath. "Who the hell was that?"

"*Ayasherin*," said Nesha, and shook her head. "You do manage to attract trouble, don't you?"

"Who?" Caro asked, bewildered.

"Son of the wind demon *Danaraeshka*," said Nesha. "The wind demons might actually have the strength to rival *Jarakeshtan*, if they retained corporeal form long enough to care."

Caro rubbed at her wounded arm. "He seemed to care."

"Only because he is trapped in that form you saw." She snickered. "His blood is tainted by that of a human parent, and for that he hates us even more than Jarakeshtan does." She reached out and grabbed Caro by the shoulder. "He is only half-demon, child, and you saw the power he had over you. You felt the evil within him, didn't you?"

Caro nodded mutely.

"He is nothing compared to Jarakeshtan." Her fingers dug into Caro's shoulder. "Do you understand now why we need you? Do you understand why you must help us defeat this threat?"

Tears slid down Caro's cheeks. "Yes," she whispered.

Nesha's face softened, and her grip on Caro eased. "Oh, child. I am sorry. I did not mean to frighten you." She took Caro by the arm and tugged her back through the trees. "I promise you, whatever happens, we will not send you into danger alone. Or unarmed." She patted Caro lightly. "We have one last weapon strong enough to fight Jarakeshtan. We lacked only the means to wield it. Until you came to us."

"Not by choice," Caro said.

"No. By fate." Nesha sighed. "Come. Enough of this talk for tonight. Come back to the village and rest. Our power is strong enough when both moons are full to keep away that which would harm you. You can sleep tonight, and tomorrow we will arm you against the demon."

Caro followed obediently, but she was not defeated. If she had enough power to fight a demon stronger than Ayasherin, she had enough to get away

from the villagers. She would play the meek little *deasha* until they taught her how to use it, and then, the first chance she got, she would open a gateway back home.

Her ticket home was already in the blood. She just had to learn how to use it.