

Under A Blood Moon

The Alex Hayden Chronicles Book One

By

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Chapter One

Lots of people say that when you die, or are about to, your whole life flashes before your eyes. A lot of people also believe that it helps prepare the way into Heaven or indeed Hell, depending if you believe in those places. When it came to my turn, I didn't see a thing so I don't know if that meant I wasn't eligible to go to either or just that they didn't actually exist.

I sat on the edge of the pier, looking down into the murky water below. It was about half an hour before sunrise, and I was lost in my thoughts. I had grown weary of life, living the existence of a vagrant, moving from town to town, city to city; never settling, never being allowed to settle.

I brushed the blonde hair out of my pale blue eyes as they scanned the starry constellations, finding the all too familiar groupings in the night sky, those that I had spent so much of my life gazing at. I sensed the presence behind me before the man spoke.

"What are you doing out at this time of the night, kid?" a deep voice asked.

"Just wondering how deep the water is," I replied, hating the croak in my voice that belied my age. It was still the voice of a fourteen year old boy, the same as my body.

"Well, I don't think you want to find out," the man said and I turned my head to look at my alleged saviour. Of course, he was a policeman. Dressed in a white shirt with a black tie and black body vest, he looked to be around his mid-thirties, his dark hair combed neatly and he had a disarming smile. Yet my enhanced senses could feel a hidden, dark emotion within him, one of loss and longing. I certainly didn't want to get involved with anyone else's problems as I had enough of my own.

"Don't worry about me," I told him. "I'm not your problem."

"Well I'm making you my problem," he replied, moving slowly towards me, as if to reassure me that he meant me no harm. What he didn't realise is that he held as much threat towards me as a rabbit would towards him. Well, as he's a cop, I'll give him a little benefit of the doubt, maybe a rabbit with sharp teeth.

Not wanting to continue the conversation, and with my plans for silently ending my existence now ruined, I flashed him a smile before throwing myself off the wooden pier. I heard him rush to the metal rail where I had been perched a second before and curses littered the air as he searched the water for me. From my position on the underside of the pier, I watched as his body dived into the water in an effort to save me from drowning.

Why can't some people just leave you be? Knowing that the water would be freezing at this time of year, I couldn't stand by and let him freeze while fruitlessly searching for me so I climbed around and onto the ladder and called out to him.

"How did you get over there?" he gasped, as waves threatened to wash over his head.

"I got caught up on that bit of wood," I lied. "Come on, give me your hand and let me help you up."

"Right son," he chuckled. "I weigh two hundred and thirty pounds. I don't think you'll be strong enough."

"Well, at least you can use my hand as a stabiliser," I grinned as he swam over to the bottom of the ladder. It was about a foot above the water, with the low tide, and I curled my legs around the bottom two steps and reached forwards to take his outstretched hand.

"Okay, son, I'm gonna pull my other hand to the bottom rung and heave myself up," the cop told me. "Just make sure you don't fall in."

"I won't," I reassured him, and felt him shivering in the coldness of the sea and the effort to try to pull his now water soaked clothed body up and out. Despite knowing that he probably would be okay if I left him to it, it was getting close to sunrise and I needed to find shelter, something that hadn't been in my train of thought when I awoke this evening. Giving him a gentle pull, I helped ease his body onto the ladder, far enough that he could take over on his own. I scampered up the ladder, pausing at the top to cast a look back down at my 'would be' life saver. "It really was a waste of time you doing that, but thanks for the thought anyway."

With that, I turned to run, leaving the policeman to climb back to the top of the pier, all the time telling me to hold on, to wait for him. With my supernatural speed however, I could be long gone, I needed to

be, before the sun's rays could cause my body damage. I looked at his coat and spotted his police ID badge. JC498. It wouldn't take me long to find out who he was, and, as the sky started to brighten to welcome the dawn, I cursed knowing that I wouldn't reach a safe haven on foot. I could see people starting to mill around at the end of the pier, on the seafront road, as the local businesses were preparing themselves for another day of hopeful trading despite the season nearly finishing.

"I bloody hate this," I cursed to myself and with a word, I felt my body shrink, grimaced at the pain as my bones popped and realigned themselves with the new shape that I was taking on. While most humans think of bats as vermin, they are one of nature's truly wonderful creations. With sonic radar that is unsurpassed even by human computers, the navigation, once in flight, was magnificent. Launching myself from the pier deck, I took to wing and sped towards the abandoned warehouse that I had been sleeping in for the last two weeks.

Entering through the broken window just as the cursed golden orb of the sun broke over the horizon of the sea, I landed heavily, instantly transforming back into my human form. Yawning heavily as the day sleep started to take over my consciousness, I stumbled towards an inner office, one which had no outside windows or doors. Pulling a heavy table across the doorway to block anyone from entering the room, I curled up on the homemade bed that I had put together of stolen blankets and pillows.

As I drifted off into slumber, the memory of the touch of the cop's mind crossed mine. There had been a desire to see me safe, something that went beyond his call of duty as a policeman. A strong sense of loss within him was the cause, and I smiled to myself that I had found an intriguing puzzle, one that might spark my interest for a time and keep me from taking the sunwalk.

Chapter Two

I awoke instantly, as all of my kind do, once the sun's rays were shimmering over the horizon of the evening sky, giving way to the moon's light. Wiping my eyes to waken fully, I studied the office that I was in. It was bare of any necessities and with the building lacking any power, I needed to head out to see what I could find out about the policeman from last night. My internal body clock told me that I had a couple of hours before the nearby library shut so I made my way out of the warehouse and walked the short distance to the municipal building.

As I passed an alleyway, I heard a scuffle and a shout so I glanced down into the darkness. My eyes picked up three forms. One was a guy of around twenty, pinned to the wall by a fat guy in his thirties. The third was a slimmer man, again looking to be in his thirties. Something was obviously about to go down, and I paused for a moment to see exactly what.

"You know the score by now, Jackson," the slim guy told the younger. "You take the drugs, you pay up or else you get a visit from me."

"But look, Billy," the young guy begged. "I got robbed on my way here. I can get you the cash tomorrow."

"Not good enough," the guy called Billy cut him off.

I spat on the ground as I saw a flash of silver, a knife. If it had been an ordinary mugging or assault, I would have gotten involved, but as the soon to be victim was a pusher himself, he deserved everything he was going to get. My eyes met with Billy's for a moment as he scanned both entrances of the alley, and for a moment, he hesitated. I shrugged my shoulders, turned away and continued on my path to the library, counting slowly in my head. I had reached eight when I heard the scream, quickly muffled before my enhanced hearing picked up the thud of a body hitting the concrete. I could smell the blood trickling towards a nearby drain. No more Jackson I guess.

I picked up the pace of my walk, not wanting the two guys to come looking for me. Not that they could do anything to me, I just wasn't in the mood for a fight, even one as one sided as that would be. I entered the brightly lit library, smiling nicely at the elderly librarian behind the desk just inside the entry as I waited my turn in the queue.

"And how can I help you, young man?" Ethel asked. Well, I assume that was her name as it was written on her badge.

"I would like to use one of the computers for a while please," I replied politely. Showing good manners towards a lady was one thing that had been drilled into me from an early age, from a time when ladies were respected and prized, unlike today.

"Do you have your library card, so I can log you in?" she asked. Damn, I didn't know I needed one.

"Oh no, I've left it at home," I moaned, patting my pockets in a show of mock horror. "I really need to get this research done tonight as well."

"Oh dear," her lip quivered under the assault of my distraught expression. I allowed a partial flow of hypnosis to emanate from my blue eyes, strengthening her desire to help a young boy in distress and she quickly gave me a temporary password. After a smiled thank you, I found myself logging in to a computer in a secluded corner of the room, away from all onlookers. After all, hacking into the police database isn't something you really want to do with an audience is it? I quickly pulled up the Blackpool police database. Casting a quick glance around to make sure no-one was watching, my fingers blurred as they typed the hacker code that I had gained from a friendship that I had forged six years previous while I was living in Oxford. Matt was a computer genius and had grand visions of setting up his own company, programming games and software before the reality set in and he was working in an internet café to make ends meet. We had started talking about various things and once he got past the whole 'Shit! You really aren't human!' thing, we became firm friends. After giving him the start-up money, I am now a silent partner in a multi-million pound software company.

I clicked my way through the various screens until I got to the employee database and typed in the badge number of the cop from last night. Something about him intrigued me and when I accessed his file, my heart sank a little.

“Harry Shepherd, age thirty eight, hmm he’s older than I thought, recently back on active service after an eighteen month leave of absence due to the disappearance of his fifteen year old son, Connor, who’s body is yet to be discovered,” I read quietly. No wonder I felt the sense of loss within him. Reading on, I found his wife blamed the lack of success in the investigation on him as a police detective and had divorced him on top of everything else. No wonder he had time off! But it didn’t explain why he was now back in uniform, walking the beat. Noting that he would be starting his shift soon, I logged off and smiled sweetly at Ethel once more as I headed out of the building.

Walking around to a back alleyway, I made sure no one was watching and I jumped into the air. I normally always have a chuckle at this point, as I remember once reading a quote from Douglas Adams that the art of flying is throwing yourself at the floor and missing. If only he knew how close he was to the truth! I soared into the air, whispering a word which would cause my body to refract light around me, not making me invisible as such, just extremely difficult to see. I covered the distance between the library and the police station in a matter of minutes, landing on the roof of the building opposite the front entrance.

I waited patiently for Harry to appear, and was rewarded after fifteen minutes as the uniformed policeman exited the station. He said a brief farewell to the two constables that were with him and he headed in the direction of the Pleasure Beach. I followed him, jumping from rooftop to rooftop easily, although I did nearly scare the life out of a couple of jet black cats that I hadn’t seen. Cursed things they are anyway. If they aren’t killing small animals just for the fun of it, they are normally on some errand for their mistresses. I don’t have a lot of time for witches, even in this day and age. I have too many painful memories from my past dealings with the old hag who still lives in a cottage in the Yorkshire Dales.

I easily blended in with the crowds at the amusement arcades, keeping a watching eye on Harry, noting that while he observed everyone around him, his eyes sought out the younger kids who looked like they may be lost or in danger. However, time after time, parents were close on hand to reassure the policeman that they were fine.

I was about ready to call quits on him when my ears picked up a distressed cry from behind a shop. Harry heard it a few moments later and walking around the back of the building, he was greeted by three guys who looked to be a lot worse for wear and the figure of a girl, obviously on a hen party by the way she was dressed. I let my mind touch theirs, and while I wasn’t blessed at being able to read minds, I was empathic and could sense that the girl’s night was about to get a whole lot worse.

“Now then, what’s going on here guys?” Harry asked, his low voice full of confident power.

“Nothing for you to worry about,” the nearest lad slurred. “We’re just helping our friend home.”

“Is that right?” Harry queried. “Well, I don’t think that you should really be undressing her before she gets home.”

“Look copper, just turn round and piss off before we cut you, and her,” a second youth spat. He pulled a knife from his pocket and waved it in the policeman’s direction.

“I suggest you put that down before you hurt yourself with it,” came Harry’s authoritative voice.

I watched as the third youth pushed the woman to the floor, their interest in her put on hold while they dealt with the intrusion of the policeman. Harry made the cardinal sin of not keeping his back to the wall as he edged himself forward to try to get between the three and the girl, who was curled up in a ball, sobbing into her knees. As the first lad lunged at Harry, his baton came down, smacking the wrist of the teenage guy, causing him to pull up and yelp in pain. Harry spun as he heard the third rush his back but as he did, he left his side open to the knife wielder. I sensed his grin as he thrust forward to stab at Harry’s chest, but the knife never made it near him as I jumped down from my perch, landing feet first on the attacker’s back, pushing him hard into the wall.

“What the frack?” he yelled as his head bounced off the brickwork, spinning his body around. His eyes settled on me and he snarled. “You’re so dead for that kid!”

“Keep back,” Harry warned me, as he sensed my help before realising that I was, to all intense purposes, just a kid trying to help. However, I cursed myself as his distraction allowed the third thug to lash out

with a broken pipe that he had picked up, catching Harry across the back of the head, stunning him to the ground.

“Well kid,” the second grinned at me as they circled around me. “Looks like you picked the wrong fight to join in.”

“Yeah, maybe in your comic books the hero wins but, this time, you lose,” the first chirped, pulling his own knife from a pocket. I nearly laughed out loud at the look of it, as it must have been picked up cheap from some second hand store.

“I’ve seen bigger knives with the boy scouts than what you’re playing with here,” I chuckled. “Do yourselves a favour and piss off home before I really get mad.” I did, at least, try to warn them and offer them a way out. I always liked to do that as it eased my conscience if it didn’t work.

“You know what, kid, you’ve got a big mouth for someone so little,” the third sneered. “Let’s just finish him so we can get back to the bird.”

I guess that they expected me to cower in fear as the blonde haired youth advanced, knife held in front of him. I rolled my eyes, and allowed myself to feel the surge of adrenaline through my veins. My blue eyes darkened to deep red as my body took the order from my mind to change into a hunting state. Strength coursed through my muscles and as the lad finally stabbed towards me, I spun my body, catching his arm and pulling it hard, feeling the pop as I wrenched it from the shoulder socket. The youth cried out in agony before I silenced him with a flat handed jab to his throat, crushing his windpipe. I held his body for a few moments, before releasing the now limp form to the floor.

“What did you do to Jake?” the first gasped.

“Jake?” I asked, grinning evilly at them. “Oh, he’s dead. Who’s second?”

They both charged me at once and I jumped above their onrushing bodies, landing behind the remaining knife wielder. I grabbed his hair, grimacing as I felt the grease cling to my fingers and yanked him backwards, raising my knee into the small of his back as I did. Looping my left arm around his body, I stretched him further backwards and was rewarded with suitably painful sounding cracks as his spine protested at the angle I was forcing upon his body. The lad, screaming for release, squirmed in my strong grip and I released his hair, taking a moment to wipe my hand on his shirt before lifting his body into the air and throwing it against the wall. He hit the bricks with a bone-crunching thud and slid, unconscious, to the garbage strewn floor.

I felt pain in the back of my head as the pipe hit me hard as the last remaining youth attacked me from behind. While it stung, he had nowhere near sufficient strength to actually do me any harm, even brandishing his metal weapon. I turned, rubbing the back of my head with one hand.

“You really, really shouldn’t have done that,” I growled at him, feeling the power surging through my body, as it demanded the change so that I could finish this puny being for good.

“What the frigging hell are you, you freak?” he yelled at me, swinging wildly as I slowly advanced on him.

“Your worst nightmare,” I snarled and gave in to the change. My vision fully switched over to that of the hunter, as darkness became enhanced and the heat from his body showed in my infrared range. My ears now picked up his heart beating so fast in fear that I’m not sure even a hummingbird could keep up. I crouched for a second before leaping the short distance between us, spinning my body in mid-air to avoid the pipe, landing on his back. I reached out and pulled his head to one side, angling it, exposing his neck. As much as I hated this part of my being, I did need human blood to survive, to feed, and normally waited until I found a lowlife such as this to quench my thirst. My incisors lengthened and with the experience that my youthful appearance belied, I bit into his carotid artery, just under his jawbone. I fought to hold him still as he realised that he was no longer dealing with just a kid, but a lethal creature intent on draining his life, but as his blood pulsed into me, my strength grew while his weakened.

Finally collapsing to his knees, I knew that I had to stop before I drained too much blood from him. My kind had discovered long ago that human investigators get jumpy when they discover a dead body with no blood around, so if we are not in a position to properly dispose of the corpse, we limit ourselves to three pints, allowing the rest to spill out onto the floor. I pulled off the youth, who immediately tried to staunch the spurt of blood from his neck, and walked around him to face him. The look of abject

terror in his eyes was enough to satisfy me that, should reincarnation exist, he would come back with no thoughts of following the same path. My right hand shot out, palm up, and crushed his nose, shooting the bone backwards into his brain, ending his miserable life. I picked up the pipe that he had been using as a weapon and quickly bludgeoned his neck to disguise my bite mark.

Feeling revitalised after my feed, I looked around to see the young woman still curled into a ball, rocking herself against a garbage dumpster. I walked over to her and touched her shoulder. Her head shot up, staring me straight in the eyes. She was an attractive young lady, brunette, a little too much make up on maybe, but it was easy to see why the youths had singled her out.

“Come on, it’s okay, they’re gone now,” I said gently to her.

“But... they wanted... they were gonna...” she sobbed before I touched a finger to her lips.

“A policeman came down and now they’re gone and won’t be back to hurt you,” I reassured her, telling the half-truth. “If you walk just over there, there’s a taxi rank and you can get one back to your hotel.” I pointed in the opposite direction to where the dead and unconscious bodies lay. I helped her to her feet and she wobbled unsteadily to the safety of the main street once more.

I turned back to where Harry was still lying. I quickly checked his vitals and he seemed to be okay, but with such a blow to the head, he needed to get out of the cold and into a warm bed. I easily lifted him over my shoulder and with a leap, I was airborne once more.

Within minutes I landed in a quiet alley way next to the Victoria Hospital, the largest one serving Blackpool. I eased Harry’s body down to the ground and putting on my ‘frightened child’ face, I ran inside the main entrance. Pushing past a drunken crowd of young men, I made it to the A&E desk.

“Please miss, can you help?” I said, making my voice a little higher than it normally is. “There’s a policeman in the alley who’s been hit round the head and is unconscious.”

This always got the attention of passing nurses and paramedics as anyone within the emergency services always put their colleagues ahead of anyone else. Two yellow and green uniformed men followed me to where I had placed Harry, and before they could ask me anything else, I made my escape into the darkness. I perched on a rooftop once more, watching them work on Harry, examining his injury before getting him inside on a stretcher.

I knew that I shouldn’t have gotten involved in protecting him, not with the potential of exposing myself, but something about the policeman had intrigued me and I wanted to find out more about him, and his missing son. As I sat there pondering, I remembered the youths in the alley, realising that I had left one alive. Cursing to myself about this slip, I flew back to where I had left them, only to discover Blackpool’s finest already there. I saw a coroner already checking out the dead body of the pipe welder, making strange noises as he examined the crushed neck, while the job that I had left alive was being loaded into an ambulance, a uniformed policeman getting in with him, and his partner telling him that he would follow in their car.

Grinding my teeth in frustration, I thought for a moment about attacking the ambulance, but my conscience wouldn’t allow me to harm innocents. In disgust, I jumped from the building and headed back to the Pleasure Beach. I fished some money from my pocket and walked into an arcade, where I grabbed a gun on one of the shoot ‘em up machines and killed zombies by the score. I did receive a few strange looks from some of the adults about being a kid out alone so late, but most didn’t care. Eventually, the arcade started to empty and knowing that I needed to leave before it became too obvious that I was alone, I headed out to my now familiar seat on the edge of the pier.