



Crimson Death (Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter)

By Laurell K. Hamilton

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In her twenty-fifth adventure, vampire hunter and necromancer Anita Blake learns that evil is in the eye of the beholder...

Anita has never seen Damian, her vampire servant, in such a state. The rising sun doesn't usher in the peaceful death that he desperately needs. Instead, he's being bombarded with violent nightmares and blood sweats.

And now, with Damian at his most vulnerable, Anita needs him the most. The vampire who created him, who subjected him to centuries of torture, might be losing control, allowing rogue vampires to run wild and break one of their kind's few strict taboos.

Some say love is a great motivator, but hatred gets the job done, too. And when Anita joins forces with her friend Edward to stop the carnage, Damian will be at their side, even if it means traveling back to the land where all his nightmares spring from...a place that couldn't be less welcoming to a vampire, an assassin, and a necromancer: Ireland.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Hamilton remains one of the most inventive and exciting writers in the paranormal field.”—#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Charlaine Harris

“If you’ve never read this series, I highly recommend/strongly suggest having the Anita Blake experience. Vampires, zombies, and shifters, oh my! And trust me, these are not your daughter’s vampires.”—Literati Book Reviews

“A sex-positive, kick-ass female protagonist.”—*Starburst*

“Number one *New York Times* bestseller Hamilton is still thrilling fans...with her amazing multifaceted characters and intricate multilayered world, a mix of erotic romance, crime-drama, and paranormal/fantasy fiction. Her descriptive prose is gritty and raw, with a mosaic of humor and horror to tell this complex, well-detailed story. But it’s her enigmatic stable of stars that continues to shine, managing their improbable interpersonal relationship dynamics.”—*Library Journal*

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About the Author

Laurell K. Hamilton is a full-time writer and the author of the Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter, and Merry Gentry series.

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1

I’d fallen asleep cuddled between two of the men I loved most, with one arm flung across their naked bodies so I could touch the third. All three of them were warm when I fell asleep, but when my phone woke me hours later, only two of the bodies in the bed were still warm. The only vampire in the bed had died when the sun came up a mile over our heads in our nice safe cave of a bedroom. It was great for vampires, but if you were afraid of the dark or didn’t like the idea of tons of stone pressing down on your head, well, you couldn’t sleep with us.

I scrambled over Nathaniel’s almost fever-hot body for my phone, which was plugged in on the bedside table, but when the screen came on it was his phone, not mine, because his lock screen was a picture of the three of us and mine was a close-up of our hands entwined with the new engagement rings. I finally got my phone and hit the button, but it had already gone to voice mail.

Micah asked in a voice thick with sleep, “Who was it?”

I squinted at the bright screen in the very dark room and said, “I don’t recognize the number, or hell,

the area code. I think it's international. Who the hell would be calling me from out of the country?"

Nathaniel snuggled against the front of my body, burying his face between my breasts, as he tucked himself lower under the covers. He mumbled something, but since he was both the heaviest sleeper and the most likely to talk in his sleep, I didn't pay much attention.

"What time is it?" Micah asked, his voice less sleep-filled and closer to awake.

"Five a.m.," I said. I clicked my phone to black and tried to put it back on the bedside table, but Nathaniel had pinned me and I couldn't quite reach.

"We've only been asleep for three hours," he said in a voice that was starting to sound aggrieved.

"I know," I said. I was still trying to push my phone back on the edge of the table with a now firmly asleep Nathaniel weighing me down.

Micah wrapped his arm around my waist and Nathaniel's back and pulled us both closer to him. "Sleep, must have more sleep," he said with his face buried between my shoulders. If I didn't slide down into the covers soon, they'd both be asleep and I'd be pinned with my arms and shoulders bared. The bedroom at night was about fifty degrees; I wanted my shoulders covered. I gave one last push to my phone, which fell to the floor, but it didn't light back up, which meant it was still plugged in, so I was good with it on the floor. Screw it, I was going back to sleep.

I had to force both men to give me enough room to slide down between them so we were all covered and warm again. I was just starting to drift back to sleep to the sounds of their even breathing when my phone rang again, but this time it played a different song, George Thorogood's "Bad to the Bone." It was the personalized ringtone for one of my best friends, Edward, assassin to the undead and fellow U.S. Marshal Ted Forrester. Interestingly, Edward and Ted were the same person; think Clark Kent and Superman.

I flung the covers off all of us and scrambled, falling to the floor and fumbling for the phone that was glowing in the pile of clothes beside the bed. I hit the button and said, "Here, I'm here!"

"Anita, are you all right?" Edward's voice was too cheerful, which was all the clue I needed that he was with other police officers who would be overhearing everything.

"Yeah, I'm good. You sound awfully chipper for five a.m.," I said, trying not to sound like I was already getting cold outside the body heat of the bed. I started to fumble in the clothes pile for something that was mine but kept coming up with just the guys' clothes.

"It's eleven a.m. here," he said.

He wasn't home in New Mexico then, so I asked, "Where are you?"

"Dublin."

"Dublin what?"

"Ireland," he said.

I sat naked and shivering on the floor, scooping through the pile of clothes around me like a bird trying to make a nest, and tried to think. I failed, so I asked, “Why are you in Dublin, Ireland?”

“For the same reason I’m calling you, Anita.”

“Which is?” I tried not to get irritated at him, because it usually amused him, and Ted usually took longer to tell anything. Edward was far more abrupt. Yes, they were the same person, but Edward was more of a method actor, and trying to get him to break character wasn’t a good idea.

“Vampires.”

“There aren’t any vampires in Ireland. It’s the only country in the world that doesn’t have them.”

“That’s what we all thought until about six weeks ago.”

“What happened six weeks ago?” I asked, trying to burrow myself into the clothes on the floor for warmth.

Someone from the bed above me threw my robe on top of me. I told whichever of my partners had done it, “Thanks.”

“They had their first vampire victim,” Edward said.

I slipped into the robe, using my chin to hold the phone against my shoulder. The black silk robe was better than being naked, but silk isn’t really very warm. I kept meaning to buy something with a little more heat retention, but it was hard to find sexy and warm at the same time. “Vampire victim, so dead?”

“No, just a little drained.”

“Okay, if it was nonconsensual blood donation here in the States the vampire would be up on charges, but if it was consensual it’s not even a crime.”

“Vampire gaze wiped her memory of it,” he said.

“If the vampire and blood donor had agreed that the vamp could use their gaze so the donor could get the whole vampire experience, then it’s treated like you let someone drink too much at a party and then let them walk home drunk, again it’s not even a crime here, just bad judgment.”

“Vic can’t remember, so we’ll never know if consent was given or not.”

“If they took a swab of the bite for genetics and he, or she, is in the system, they can find the vampire in question.”

“Nobody believed it was a vampire bite, so they didn’t treat it like an attack. They thought she’d been slipped a date-rape drug.”

“The fang marks weren’t a clue?” I asked.

“You said it yourself, Anita: there are no vampires in Ireland. In thousands of years of history, there’s never been a vampire here. They noted the fang marks as possible needle marks for the drug they thought had been used on the vic; if they hadn’t been hunting for needle marks and other signs of drug use, they wouldn’t have even found them. They are some of the tiniest, neatest marks I’ve ever seen.”

I sat up a little straighter, both to tie my robe tighter and because that meant something. “You’ve seen almost as many vampire bites as I have.”

“Yep,” he said in his best Ted Forrester drawl. He was probably playing the full American cowboy, accent and all, for the Irish police. He could be the ultimate undercover person and blend in damn near anywhere, but when he was Ted, it was like he enjoyed just how thick he could play the part. I wondered if he’d packed Ted’s cowboy hat and brought it on the airplane. The thought of him wearing it in Ireland was either fun or cringeworthy. I wasn’t sure which yet.

“How tiny? Do you think it’s a child vampire?”

“I’ve seen female vamps that had a bite this small, but that one could be a child.”

“What do you mean, that one?”

“We have at least three different bite radiiuses.”

“So three different vamps,” I said.

“At the very least, maybe more.”

“What do you mean, maybe more?”

“I’ve got permission to share photos with you if you can get to a computer.”

“My phone is a computer. Can’t you just text me?”

“I could, but you’ll want a bigger screen to look at some of these.”

“Okay, I . . . I can get to a computer. I just need someone to help me log on, or something.”

“You have a secure email account, because I’ve sent you things to it before,” he said.

“I know, I know. I just don’t use the computers here much.”

“Where are you?”

“Circus of the Damned.”

“Tell Jean-Claude howdy for me?”

“Howdy? Even Ted doesn’t say *Howdy*.”

“I’m American, Anita. We’re all cowboys; didn’t you know that, darling?” he said in a drawl so thick it sounded like you should be able to do a Texas two-step on it.

“Yeah, like all the Irish are leprechauns and go around saying *Top of the morning to you.*”

“If I had my way, you’d be here seeing all the leprechauns.”

“What do you mean, if you had your way?”

“Go to the computer so you can see the pictures, Anita,” and the out-West accent lost some of its thickness, fading into what was Edward’s normal “middle of nowhere,” maybe Midwestern accent. I’d known him for over six years before I’d learned that Theodore (Ted) Forrester was his actual birth name and the one that both the military and the Marshals Service knew him by. He’d just been Edward to me.

“Okay, but what did you mean, if you had your way?” I got to my feet and my lower body was instantly colder in just the silk robe without the nest of other clothes around me. I looked down at the bed, because both Micah and Nathaniel were better with the computers down the hallway than I was; hell, Nathaniel was still occasionally sneaking new ringtones for people into my phone. Some of them had been embarrassing when they sounded at work with the other marshals, but “Bad to the Bone” for Edward had worked so well, I kept it.

“When you’re at the computer, call me back,” he said, and hung up. That was more like Edward.

Once the phone screen stopped glowing, the room was pitch-black, cave dark, so that you could touch your own eyeball because you couldn’t see your finger coming to flinch away. We usually left the bathroom door open, so the night light inside could give some illumination, but whoever had gone in last had forgotten. The only thing that let me walk to the bathroom door without bumping anything was familiarity with the layout. I opened the door and it was so damn bright that for a second I thought the overhead lights had been left on; but as I blinked and adjusted to the glow, I realized it was just the night light. It looked ungodly bright because my eyes had adjusted to the thick darkness of the other room, but as my eyes readjusted to the light it was just the night light like normal.

I’d have liked to let the men in my life sleep, but I needed help with the computers. I was really going to have to take notes the next time someone showed me how to do all this because I never seemed to remember it the way that they did. I stared down at the bed. Nathaniel had curled down into the covers so that only the top of his head and the thick braid of his nearly ankle-length hair showed. The light was just bright enough to gleam red in the brown of his auburn hair. He was curled up on his side so that his broad shoulders rose like a hunky mountain above the rest of the bed. It was impossible to tell with him curled up like that, but he was five-nine. Micah lay just out of arm’s reach from him; they were leaving my space in the middle of them empty, waiting for me to crawl back in and sleep, which I so wanted to do, but duty called. Micah’s curls had spilled across his face so the most skin I saw was the darker skin of his slender shoulders and one arm that showed muscles, but he would never bulk up the way Nathaniel did. Genetics had made our very dominant and commanding Nimir-Raj, leopard king, my size, five-three. You couldn’t see it under the covers, but he was built like a swimmer with that upside-down triangle of shoulders to slender waist and hips. Nathaniel was built not only more muscular but more lush, the man’s version of curves. Jean-Claude lay on his back. He could sleep on his side but he preferred to sleep on his back, and since he died at dawn so he couldn’t keep cuddling as we moved during our sleep, it wasn’t as big a deal that he didn’t spoon as well as the

three of us, who were all side sleepers.

Jean-Claude was the tallest of us at six feet even. Lying on his back, he looked every inch of it. His long black curls fell almost to his waist now, as did mine. We both had truly black hair, me because my mother's family had been Mexican, and his because it just was; his skin was paler than mine, but not by much thanks to my German father. I was pretty sure that if Jean-Claude hadn't been a vampire I'd have been paler than he was, but no one is paler than a vampire. Even literally dead to the world he was still one of the most beautiful men I'd ever seen, and that was with Nathaniel and Micah to compare to, though admittedly both their faces were currently covered, but I knew what everyone looked like. I was told that I was beautiful and some days I believed it, but looking down at the three of them I was still amazed that everyone and everything in the bed was mine, and I was theirs. I caught a gleam in Micah's hair and realized it was his eyes open and watching me through the tangle of his rich brown curls.

I whispered, "Were you just pretending to sleep?"

He started to sit up and nodded.

I tsk-tsked at him. "It's police business."

"Then get a policeman to help you with the computer," he said, but he was already climbing out of the covers, carefully trying not to uncover the other two men.

"Get my gun," I whispered.

He reached into the specially made holster attached to the headboard and my Springfield EMP, and crawled to the foot of the bed to hand it to me so that he didn't cross Nathaniel's body with it. He was nowhere near the trigger, and he was being careful, but he knew the rules for gun safety. Treat every gun as if it's loaded and lethal, and never, ever cross someone's body with it unless you mean to shoot them. I took the gun and put it in the pocket, wondering if it would hold the weapon. The gun fit, but my robe was seriously hanging crooked from the weight. I tied the sash at my waist even tighter and tried to see if my hand would fit into the pocket well enough for me to draw the gun if I had to; it wasn't perfect, but it worked.

Users Review

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