

BLOOD CURE

[Book One of the “BLOOD CURE” Trilogy]

by

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Notice** Portions of this story may prove too graphic, sexually explicit, or violent for sensitive readers. This novel is intended for the mature adult.

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About the Author

Prologue

It started with a mysterious virus that attacked the respiratory system but developed into something far more complicated. Spreading rapidly across the country, this new strain of disease graduated from a simple respiratory illness that resembles the flu to something that mutates organs and body features. Some experience internal alterations that don't affect the exterior of their body, while others' physical appearances morph to a grotesque degree. There are a rare few who are not affected at all.

After a decade of the virus claiming its victims with no reprieve from science, it became clear to the masses that the disease was intentional for the purpose of creating a new ruling order. Unfortunately, by the time this fact came to light, the New Order had such a strong foothold of command that it was too late to do anything about it.

Members of the new ruling society have the benefit of a serum that makes their bodies immune to the virus. Sworn to keep this serum to themselves, this society of scientists and politically influential people have taken control of the country.

Obsessed with their power over the masses, they look upon anyone outside of their tight-knit group who manage to maintain their health and avoid contracting the sickness as a threat and hunt them down. Depending upon the degree

of threat they pose, these poor souls are either imprisoned, used for scientific purposes, or even put to death.

Even with this threat looming over them, a group of brave people formed an underground rebellion for the purpose of finding a way to stunt the virus' strength and, hopefully, reverse the effects of it on the afflicted.

A gentle breeze manipulated the tall grass in a way that it caressed and softly tickled my flesh as I slowly roused from my nap. Filling my lungs with the rich scent of nature helped clear the fog from my head. The sun's rays forced their way past the thick clouds and cocooned me in a silky warmth that buffered the reality of my life; if only for a short time. I slowly opened my eyes and shaded them with my hand as I observed the brilliant, giant orb's position in the sky. It was mid-afternoon; still too early to move about. Daytime travel was far too dangerous.

Reaching for my flask, I took a long drink of the river water I'd filled it with the night before. I'd added some herbs in hopes of warding off the effects of any bacteria that it might contain as well as mask its unpleasant taste. Once my thirst was quenched, I pulled one of the apples that I'd collected from the ground beneath a heavily laden apple tree that I'd come across along the way from my sac. It was severely mottled and bruised, but what it lacked in appearance, it made up for in flavor. After using my teeth to carefully bite away the spoiled, discolored sections and spitting them far from me, I eagerly made a meal of it. My stomach groaned and rumbled as it accepted my meager fare so I pulled a wedge of hard cheese from my sac and devoured that as well.

I had other options for sustenance, but I'd learned early in my journey that my body moved more energetically when slightly hungry. Since I slept better with a full belly, I saved the more filling food for when I stopped and made camp.

I'd met up with a small group of intelligent mutants while trekking through the night. For the most part, there was no love lost between the mutants and me. With my knife easily obtainable from its sheath on my thigh and my rifle held at the ready, I was cautious about allowing them to approach.

I'd become proficient with both a rifle and a knife since chaos struck my world and I'd made sure to keep them available to me at all times. This was especially true when traveling alone.

This particular group consisted of mutants who were only mildly afflicted. With their wits still about them, they surprised me with an attitude of warmth and appreciation for my mission.

I readily stated that I wasn't part of the New Order and, to my surprise, they gave me no argument. One of them informed me that, since they came upon me traveling alone and at night, they'd quickly deduced that I was of the underground movement.

Not only did they surprise me by sharing their fire and food, as well as replenishing my pack with food suitable for travel, but they gave me insight on what was happening in

the area. To my dismay, after asking about my location and learning that I was still about one hundred miles from my destination, they informed me that there was an ongoing sweep by the collectors for both the severely mutated and those who were unaffected. Only mutants like them were left untouched.

It would be far more dangerous for the days or even weeks that it would take for me to slither through the well monitored area. For the first time, I was grateful that I was alone. Although it was recommended to travel in small groups for safety reasons, being one person would make it easier for me to move about unnoticed.

Or, so I hoped.

Even though I was grateful to be able to move swiftly, I was also extremely lonely. Up until ten days prior, I'd had both Chase and Rita as companions. Chase was the love of my life and Rita was his younger sister. Both were my closest friends.

Rita and I were born just days apart. Combine that with the fact that our houses were next door to each other and our parents were best of friends, it was inevitable that we form a bond of friendship.

It took longer for my relationship with Chase to cultivate. Knowing each other since birth made it so that we viewed ourselves as siblings instead of the love match that our parents openly campaigned for. It wasn't until the

country was placed into a crippling state of emergency and we became orphans that everything changed.

That was five years ago.

I was sixteen.

My father was a scientist turned practicing naturopath who was generous with his time and information when it came to his daughter. My fascination with natural healing made him proud and eager to have me follow in his footsteps. As a result, he spent hours upon hours tutoring me on herbs, vitamins, and vibrational frequencies for healing and the science that was behind them.

By the time the New Order whisked him away and imprisoned him, I was fully schooled and capable of taking over his practice, should it have been allowed to remain in existence.

Knowing the danger I was in if anyone realized the skill I'd acquired, I hid the fact that I'd learned a thing and secretly focused on developing a remedy for the vicious scourge that overtook mankind.

Although my mother and I were basically healthy, with my father's practice forcibly closed and all of his supplies and equipment seized, the virus eventually managed to infiltrate our household. I was able to recover with no visible afflictions, but my mother wasn't so lucky. She succumbed to it to the extent that her facial muscles stiffened and twisted so that she looked more a fright than a beautiful woman, her hands gnarled like an old crone from a fairy tale,

and her vocal cords behaved as if she'd had a stroke. It got so bad that she eventually became mute.

With the help of Rita's family, I did my best to care for her for the better part of a year before a team of collectors swept her away. I'm not certain, but the rumor was that, because my mother had been married to my father, she was taken to be used as a lab specimen. To this day I have no idea just what they had against my father, but to punish his wife in such a way because of their hatred for him was beyond wrong. I couldn't help wondering if they did the same to the wives of all of the other natural healers in the country.

It was by sheer luck that they weren't aware of my existence. I was away from the house, secretly collecting herbs, when they raided my house, or I have no doubt I'd be suffering alongside my mother.

Rita and Chase's parents also fell victim to the pandemic. Patrons of my father's business, they were fairly healthy. Even so, the virus eventually overtook their respiratory systems. My private research and studies hadn't led me to the remedy in time to prevent their lungs from filling with fluid.

With the distribution of allopathic medications monitored by the New Order and given out in a manner that resembled a lottery to the sick, and practitioners with the knowledge of herbal remedies outlawed, it was impossible to

obtain the correct remedies for them. As a result, they died a slow and tortuous death that resembled pneumonia.

Clinging to each other for support and courage, I moved in with Rita, and Chase. In the years that followed, we did our best to survive and maintain our home until the actions of the New Order impacted our community's food supplies and fresh water to the extent that they became scarce. With living conditions as they were, it made it impossible to stay put.

There was also the fact that we were of the few left who hadn't succumbed to mutation. Since healthy people were scooped up upon discovery, we utilized makeup in a way that suggested we'd been affected, just a bit, by the virus whenever we left the house, but the risk of being found to be healthy was far too great to ignore.

More than once, I lamented over the fact that my knowledge of how the virus worked and affected people came too late to save our parents. Had they remained healthy for a few years more, I would have developed a compound to be ingested that caused an immunity to the virus and/or its effects. In milder cases of mutation, it actually reversed the symptoms.

After a good deal of deliberation, we set out from our homes in Oklahoma to my uncle's farm in New York. With telephone lines and internet reserved for those in the New Order only, I was in the dark to his fate and unable to let

him know of our intentions. I just had to hope that he was fine and we'd be welcomed.

The journey was a task of no easy measure.

First of all, we were forced to travel on foot. The need to duck and hide, as well as travel at night, made the going slow.

Although the danger of being captured by the collectors was lessened, the threat of an attack by rogue mutants increased. Rumor had it that, because of the restricted food supplies provided by the New Order and their inability to function at a normal capacity so that they could grow and raise their own, a small number of mutants who were allowed to roam free had taken to cannibalism. I sincerely hoped that was just a rumor.

It was one of these attacks that separated me from Rita and Chase. After weeks of grueling travel, we'd made it to the mountains of Pennsylvania and a rather formidable looking river that needed to be crossed. Although I was nervous about traversing the rapidly flowing water, it in no way compared to the fear that Rita experienced.

For good reason.

The river looked deep and my friend had never mastered swimming. She'd been given plenty of opportunities to learn, but just didn't find it something that she enjoyed. Instead, she'd languidly bask in the sun on the shore of our local swimming hole while Chase and I playfully swam about.

With the water weaving and attempting to capture our lower legs with so much power that it was difficult to maintain our footing, the threat of being dragged was great; as was Rita's regret for not learning to swim.

Understanding his sister's vulnerability, Chase stayed close to her while crossing. With the brilliant moonlight to aid my vision, I moved cautiously behind them.

My friends were halfway to the opposite shore when they spotted a small horde of mutants coming in our direction. They exhibited a clear intent of attack. Their shouts made us remember the rumors of cannibalism. Their frightening behavior confirmed that the rumors were real.

Fortunately, the impairments to their bodies from the mutations made it impossible for this small gang to tackle the power of the flowing water.

As we moved further away from the shore, the current got even stronger. With my heart threatening to escape my body by way of my ears, I lamented over the fact that it was too strong to risk continuing.

With fear choking me to the point that I found it difficult to swallow, I watched in wonder as the horde made note of our difficulty in continuing and converse about whether to wait for us to turn back or give up. This group may have had their bodies affected by the virus, but their brains were definitely intact. Had they been more zombie like, I think I would have better understood their cannibalism and not found it quite as vile.

The battle with the current was practically overwhelming. With my strength waning, I longed to turn back and find a different place to cross. Sadly, the mutants' stubbornly holding vigil on the riverbank behind us, made it impossible. Chase suggested that we move downriver until the current lightened up and we could find an easier place to finish crossing.

Although movement was eventually manageable, we were taken by surprise when the river's bottom disappeared. I thrashed and gasped for air and control as the thunderous current carried me downstream. By the time the powerful water mercifully eased and I managed to pull my exhausted body ashore, my friends were nowhere to be seen.

I lay on the riverbank while I regulated my breathing and waited for my strength to return. After what seemed like hours, I sought the safety of shelter for the night while I tried to figure out what to do.

I spent the following day searching for my friends to no avail. My hope was that they'd made it further upstream than I had.

With no other option but to keep going, I moved on alone.

Now, after a few lonely weeks of traveling with no sign of them, I gave up and focused on reaching the safety of my destination. They knew the address of my uncle's farm. I could only hope that they, like me, were making their way to it.

Time painfully dragged while I waited for the sun to retire over the distant mountainous ridge. Dusk was still a risky time to travel, but my patience was worn thin. I longed to complete my journey and soak my weary bones in a soothing, hot bath. With any luck, my uncle's wine cellar would be left intact and there'd be a glass of wine to accompany it. So, I took a chance that I was in a remote enough location to risk it.

I'd developed a painful blister on the back of my heel while being forced to walk with wet footwear while I looked for an opportunity to make a safe camp and allow things to dry off after my traumatic river experience. I'd managed to collect adequate plant life to create a healing salve, so I took a moment to apply it before putting on my socks and hiking boots.

I kept to the river bank for the first day or so after being separated from Chase and Rita. Thinking my pack was lost to mother nature, I was both shocked and relieved when I spotted it clinging to the branch of a dead tree that had fallen into the water. Most of the food was either canned or secured in plastic so I really only had to deal with drying out my spare clothes.

Although it was mid-summer, the nights in the northern part of the country were damper and chillier than home. Without the sweatshirt and army blanket that were

bundled in my pack, I'd have suffered a great deal more than I did and possibly lost my health.

As I donned a fresh tee shirt, I gave thanks for Lady Luck smiling down on me for that brief time.

Shoving my soiled tee shirt into the outer pocket of my pack that I specifically reserved for rank clothing in need of a wash, I heaved a sigh. If she would only smile on me again and reunite me with my friends.

I gingerly got to my feet and positioned my pack on my back. My thighs were tight from all of the walking, but they also felt stronger than ever. After making sure that my knife was secured against my thigh, I cradled my rifle in the crook of my arm and cautiously looked as far as I could in both directions before starting my night's journey.

I traversed lonely fields with overgrown foliage that wrestled with my calves for dominance for as long as I could before cautiously following the local roads. When I realized that I'd managed to make my way to Pennsylvania Route 6, a surge of energy returned. Minus a few side roads, it was the last imposing stretch toward my uncle's farm. It was located in New York, not far from the state border. With any luck and a good walking pace, I'd be there within a day or so.

I occupied my travel time by contemplating the situation of my world. I had yet to understand the motive behind the actions of the New Order. Killing off normal people and keeping the population made up of the mildly mutated people simply made no sense. The fact that the

virus was contained to the United States was also a conundrum that I spent a good deal of time brooding over.

These were things that I'd expended minimal brain power on while I searched for a way to deal with the virus, but, now that I'd accomplished that, they weighed heavy on my mind. I was hoping that my uncle might have a greater insight on the situation.

The faint sound of a motor coming in my direction brought me back to my reality. With lightning speed, I agilely darted into the ragged looking shrubs that lined the unkempt roadside while I waited for the vehicle to pass. I'd trained my ears to hear the least bit of noise early on in my journey. Because of this, the roar of the motor was still a good distance away.

I squatted on my heels behind the low rising shrubs. There was a tree line a few hundred yards behind me that would better prevent me from being discovered. I debated whether I'd have time to sprint to it before the vehicle reached a point of the driver being able to see me. To my knowledge, the only people who were allowed motorized transportation were members of the New Order. The rest of the population either traveled on foot or, for those lucky few who'd managed to retain their wealth amongst the chaos, on bicycles.

It was early night, but the moon was already full, bold, and bright in the sky. Was it worth risking being caught? I took so long debating whether staying where I was created a

greater risk of being discovered than sprinting to the trees would, that I ran out of time. Heaving a sigh of disgust mixed with apprehension, I did my best to shrink my body behind the barrier I'd selected.

The sound of a loud pop gave me a start. I quickly slapped my hand over my mouth to muffle any involuntary sounds that might emerge. Flattening my body against the hard ground as best as I could, I peeked through the foliage. When I realized that mere yards of gravel and overgrown roadside grass separated me from a pickup truck with a flat tire, I sucked in air and gave thanks to the fact that the night would make it more difficult to spot me with my dark hair and black tee shirt and equally black denim jeans.

My body trembled with trepidation as I watched the long legs of a tall, dark haired man slide out from behind the driver's wheel. Planting his feet firmly on the ground, he locked the fingers of his hands against the back of his head as he studied the damage to his tire.

Even in my fear driven state, I couldn't help admiring his strong stature. His rich, dark hair glistened in the brilliant moonlight. The faint shadow of growth on his face accentuated its aristocratic contours. His broad shoulders were held in a way that spoke of confidence and power. His skin took on an unusual hue in the moonlight as he moved. One moment he looked quite pale and the next he was quite fleshy.

I was so mesmerized by the fluidity of his movements as his lean muscles worked to change the tire that I almost forgot that I was supposed to be hiding. It wasn't until his cell phone rang that I was reminded of the precarious state that I was in.

This man may have been delicious to look at, but it was clear that he was also a member of the New Order. I listened to his rich voice rumble his part of his conversation over the phone while he explained his reason for being delayed.

Keeping his communication brief and to the point, it ended quickly. He slipped his cell phone back into his pocket before tossing the old tire into the back of the truck with such ease that, had I not known better, I would have thought it weighed nothing at all. The sleeves of his tan, form fitting tee shirt hugged his lean, muscled biceps and his thighs strained against his faded blue jeans as he slid back into the truck and closed the door.

I heaved a sigh that was a mixture of relief and lust as I watched the truck disappear down the road. Once I was certain it was safe to continue, I stood up, dusted off the ground's debris from my clothes, and continued on my way.