

Excerpts from:

Bloodfrost

By Deidre Dalton (aka Deborah O'Toole)



Book #1 in the Bloodline Trilogy

ISBN: 978-1-476467-47-4

Copyright © Deidre Dalton. All rights reserved.

Cover Design: Webs Divine.

Cover photo: (C) Tomas Bobrus.

ABOUT "BLOODFROST"

Bloodfrost by Deidre Dalton (aka Deborah O'Toole) is the first book in the *Bloodline Trilogy*. The novel was released in June 2012.

Noel Gatsby's dreams take her away from the misery of her pain-wracked, disease-riddled body. The dreams become real when she awakens one morning to find herself completely cured. However, she soon learns her miraculous recovery comes at a price...

Old before her time and afflicted with a myriad of medical problems, Noel Gatsby retreats into her "wishful-thinking" dreams every night. Desperate to escape the circumstances of her life, she imagines a world where all of her pain and suffering stops, to be replaced by the vigorous health of her youth. Yet each morning she awakens to the misery of her real existence, consumed by pain and depression.

Then one night her dreams come true. Noel is transported to another world, where healing hands work their magic on her tired body. She awakens without pain, filled with an exuberance and joy she never thought to experience again.

Her unique affinity with the handsome Pim Grady gives her hope for the future, although their blossoming love is tempered by knowledge of their shared and secretive dreams.

Noel soon learns her miraculous recovery comes at a price...

For more, go to:

<http://deidredalton.com/>

BLOODFROST:
Excerpt from Chapter One

NOEL GATSBY HAD THE same dream every night. Without fail, she saw herself floating above her body, strangely weightless, just before she drifted into a group of misty clouds. She never remembered the ensuing journey or the return, but she knew she came back replenished and without pain. The awakening was a hopeful endeavor, her body teeming with a new energy that seemed to fill every pore and blood vessel. It was only when she moved her muscles that she realized it was just a fanciful dream. Within a few seconds her reality came crashing back down to earth with resolute misery, once again riddled with pain and insidious disease.

Heaving a great sigh, she moved slowly to get out of bed. Nature was calling, yet another unsavory body function she could not ignore for long. Taking a deep breath, she forced herself into a sitting position. She felt the mechanical screw in her left hip grinding and popping, in turn pulling on the muscles in her lower back. She gritted her teeth together, causing another juncture of pain by virtue of her swollen gums and their caverns of decay.

“Please make it stop,” she whispered into the room.

Even in the worst depths of pain, she never considered saying “Please *God*, make it stop.” Her belief in the almighty was shaky at best, and for a myriad of reasons. If there was a God, she reasoned, why didn’t he give her a break? She long ago dismissed the pious adage that “God only gives you as much as you can handle.” As far as she was concerned she had endured more than her fair share of suffering, so God must be on hiatus or maybe not exist at all. It was the reason she stopped attending mass at St. Theresa’s Parish Church years ago. God didn’t seem to have the time to listen to prayers made by the poor and suffering, so why bother anymore?

Noel shifted her legs sideways, an ugly grimace creating deep lines across her features. She rested her feet on the floor, giving herself a momentary respite before inviting another wave of pain.

The room was cold, like a block of ice underneath her bare feet. Her legs and back ached with a familiar surge, travelling up her spine and into her shoulders. She moved her head back and forth, feeling the pinch of awry nerves. She grabbed her robe from the end of bed, shrugging into the shabby blue cotton. There was no point in starting the day with a self-pity party, she decided. “*Upward and onward*,” she intoned silently, refusing to give way to her plight. At least, *not today*. Tomorrow would likely be another story, despite her wishful-thinking dreams.

She shuffled to the bedroom window, which overlooked Wren Street. She pulled back the drab sheer curtains and peered outside. It was drizzling rain, the sky in her view as gray as her drapes and just as gloomy. She heard the bells from St. Theresa’s Church in the distance, signaling the start of early morning mass. She saw people on the street, going about their daily business without giving a second thought to the painful process of walking. She glanced across the street to a twin apartment building, six stories high like her own. The tract of row houses along Wren Street had been converted into flats years ago, each with a stoop and bowed first-floor window. She knew they were all nearly identical, dark gray stone with an unwashed feel and turned to seed, which prompted another sigh

from her throat.

"Noel," she heard her mother's voice calling from the next room. "Noel, are you awake?"

She brushed the hair from her face, annoyed by the stubborn gray tendrils that refused to obey. "Coming mother," she called in return.

The living room was perhaps the most depressing area of the apartment Noel shared with her elderly mother. The old walls were rippled with water damage, allowing the cold to permeate the floors. Noel drew the robe tight across her body, knowing the gesture was futile. Even scant furnishings appeared drab and desperate in the room, over-stuffed but still touched by the cold.

June Gatsby sat in her wheelchair in the center of the room. Her short hair was already combed, and the maroon-colored robe predictably matched a pair of slippers almost hidden by the hem. Her hands rested in her lap, clutching each other in an attempt to garner heat.

When she saw her daughter enter the room, she waved one hand in the air. "You *must* speak to the caretaker," she declared. "He simply has to fix the heater, Noel. *Today*. I'm freezing to death, more so than usual." She shook her head. "We're not animals living in the wild, for God's sake."

Noel regarded her mother with concealed pity. June had her own medical issues to be sure, but in the last few months she had also shown signs of memory loss. Noel wasn't certain if the forgetfulness was an early encroachment of Alzheimer's disease or dementia, or if June chose to live in denial as a way of dealing with their desperate situation.

"The heater was fixed last week," Noel reminded her mother gently.

"Then why is it so damnably cold in here?" June demanded irritably.

"I've told you before," Noel replied. "It's too expensive to run the heater night and day. We have to make do with spurts here and there."

June looked confused. "What do you mean, it's *too* expensive? What are you doing with my social security check every month, Noel?"

Noel walked into the small galley kitchen that abutted the living room. She plugged in the drip coffee pot, which gurgled on its last leg. She kept her voice even as she spoke. "I don't even *see* your social security checks. They are deposited directly into your bank account, which pays for your medications and helps contribute to the rent and food."

"It's bad enough we don't have a telephone," June snapped. "We have to live without heat as well? It's only November, Noel. We have months of winter yet to go."

"What do you want for breakfast, mother?" Noel asked, ignoring June's remarks in hopes she would forget them.

"*Spaghetios*," June responded without hesitation. "I want the kind with little hotdogs this time."

"Coming up," Noel said, accustomed to her mother's requests for anything related to spaghetti. It was June's favorite meal, and despite her daily doses never seemed to tire of it.

After she settled her mother with a bowl of *Spaghetios*, Noel returned to her bedroom to dress. It was a chore just to lift her legs into a pair of pants. She sat on the bed, wincing as she pulled faded black jeans over her hips. She donned a worn but clean blue sweater-shirt, decorated with a lopsided group of reindeer. Her clothes had seen better days. However, at the moment, fashion was on the bottom of her priority list.

She brushed her long hair quickly, gathering the thin ends in a pony tail. She went

back into the living room, her cane making a thumping noise on the floor. June was still enjoying her bowl of *Spaghettios*, so Noel continued to the kitchen. She poured herself a cup of coffee and sipped the hot brew tentatively. She would make-do without breakfast today, which seemed a moot point as she wasn't hungry.

"I have to go out this morning," Noel said over the rim of her coffee cup. "Will you be okay alone for a few hours?"

June snorted, taking another spoonful of *Spaghettios*. "Of course I will, Noel. I've been fending for myself longer than you have." She dabbed a torn strip of paper towel to her mouth. "Where are you going?"

"I have an appointment with the welfare office," Noel replied. "Remember? I applied for assistance after Carl died. I need some sort of health coverage in order to get my hip fixed, and to find out what else is wrong with me."

June stared at her daughter, a blank look in her eyes. "Carl died? Noel, why didn't you tell me?"

"I *did* tell you, mother. He had a stroke and..."

June shook her head vigorously. "You most certainly did *not* tell me. Don't you think I'd remember if my own son-in-law died?"

Noel tried to remain patient. "Okay, mother. Calm down. I'm telling you now. Carl died almost six months ago. He was having chemotherapy treatment for cancer and suddenly went into cardiac arrest. He died just minutes before I could make it to the hospital to see him."

June appeared stricken. "Oh my God. Carl was such a kind and decent man. Tell me, did you go to his funeral? If so, why wasn't I invited?"

"There was no funeral, mother. Carl was cremated. His brother George has the ashes."

"Why don't you have them? You were Carl's wife."

"We stopped living together years ago. Our marriage was basically in name only, even though we were good friends."

June nodded. "That's right, now I remember." She glanced at her daughter. "No great romance there, huh?"

"Never was, but I have no regrets. Carl was like a brother to me, my best friend in good times and bad."

June's face darkened. "My husband wasn't *my* best friend. Or was he?"

"Your husband was a bastard," Noel snapped, eyes flashing.

June's hand went to her throat, startled by her daughter's words. "Noel, *please*. You know I don't like that sort of language."

"Then let's not discuss your dead husband," Noel replied shortly.

"Whatever you say," June murmured vaguely.

Noel turned to face the kitchen sink, rinsing her coffee cup with quick, jerky motions. Mention of her father always made her irrational and beyond irritable. Burning hatred of Samuel Gatsby was a constant in her life, even though he had been dead for more than a decade.

Her lips curled in disgust every time she thought about him. He had been a miserable, sour bastard who hid his true self from outsiders, and was a voracious drunk to boot. He verbally abused her mother for years, driving June to an emotional instability that endured to the present day. It was only after his death that Noel realized her father

possessed multiple sociopathic traits, living under the radar for the most part because of his deceptive persona in front of others. It still angered her that he never answered for his despicable behavior while on earth.

BLOODFROST:

Excerpt from Chapter Six

MADGE TILLEY UNLOCKED THE front door of her small house on Dane Street in Boston. Located between the Arnold Arboretum and Jamaica Pond in Jamaica Plain, the two-story house was one of her prized possessions, obtained in her divorce settlement twenty years ago. It was older home, built in the 1930s, with a red-brick façade and attached garage. The roof gathered in points, the A-frames reflecting over the front door and attic window on top. A small room over the garage served as her home office, connected to the house by a door on the second-floor hallway. Mature trees towered over the short driveway and miniscule front yard, which was enclosed by a three-foot chain link fence and gate.

Dither greeted Madge inside the front door, rubbing against her legs and meowing loudly. The six-year-old tomcat was a mix of Siamese and Himalayan breeds. His tail was gray-colored, while the rest of his body was white with definite markings of gray in his face, ears and feet. His eyes were a light blue, their round irises turning dark only when he was angry. When Dither was happy and content, his eyes often crossed as he gazed at her lovingly.

Madge reached down to scratch Dither behind the ears, using her foot to close the front door behind her. She set her slim briefcase, purse and car keys on the entry table, and then kicked off her shoes. Dither followed her along the highly-polished hardwood floor toward the kitchen, where Madge flipped on the overhead light.

Her kitchen was a gourmet delight, although she rarely did any cooking. The marble countertops were swirled with brown and cream colors, reminding Madge of a hot fudge sundae. The dark-wood cabinets with slim brass handles were full of stylish china, glasses and cookware, also rarely used. The stainless steel refrigerator had two sides, one with an ice-maker in the door and a roomy freezer. She used the freezer side more often, stocking it with frozen dinners, desserts, pizzas and an ever-present bottle of *Sobieski* vodka.

“Let’s get you fed first,” Madge told Dither, who by now had jumped onto the counter near the sink. He stared at her intently, his body frozen like a statue as he waited for his dinner. Madge took an opened cat food can from the fridge, popping off the plastic lid. “It’s the same as breakfast,” she warned the purring feline with affection. “I’m not forking over an entire can of food for breakfast *and* dinner, so you’ll have to make do with halves and a bowl of crunchies to see you through.”

Dither meowed loudly, finally moving from his perch to the edge of the countertop. He paced back and forth, pausing occasionally to watch her as she spooned moist cat food into his neon-purple bowl. She set the bowl on the counter, patting him lightly on the rump as he dug in.

Her beloved cat taken care of for the moment, Madge grabbed a short glass from the cupboard next to the fridge. She poured herself a healthy measure of vodka, sipping the liquid gratefully as she made her way out of the kitchen.

The office loft over the garage was her true haven. Untouched by the cleaning service that came in once a week, the comfortable space always gave her tranquility after a long day. Along one wall, bookshelves overflowed with legal volumes and romance novels in no particular order. A tiny, 13-inch television set was crammed onto one of the shelves,

doing double duty as a bookend. A worn leather recliner in the corner had a footstool and overhanging lamp for reading. Her small desk faced the only window in the room, which overlooked the driveway. It was piled high with file folders and other papers, much like her desk at work, with a spot swept clean in the middle for her laptop computer. As with her professional office, she knew the relevance of every note or folder and could locate it on a moment's notice.

Madge turned on the television and then sat behind her desk, vodka in hand. She glanced at the TV screen, barely taking note of the local evening news. She liked the background sound more than anything else, which made her feel she wasn't alone. Leaning over, she opened one of the desk drawers and removed her journal. It was a nicely-bound affair, covered in creased red leather with a golden tassel to mark her place. She bought the blank journals in bulk from a stationary store in West Roxbury, who kept them on hand for her.

She opened the journal as she took another sip of vodka, admiring the gold-lined pages on white velum. As much as she relied on computers for her work and business efficiency, she preferred keeping her private journals by hand. She didn't want them somehow flittered to the internet by a mistaken key stroke for the entire world to see. Madge fished a pen from the middle drawer of her desk, intending to carry on where she left off from the night before.

First, she drained the vodka from her glass and leaned back in her desk chair. Closing her eyes, she allowed herself to pass gas loudly. She smiled, leaning forward again. "*Yet another benefit to living alone,*" she thought happily. "*I can burp, fart or run around naked and not have to worry about the judgment of others.*"

Sighing, Madge slipped on her black-rimmed glasses and began to write in the journal:

Hired a new secretary today. Her name is Noel Gatsby. She has the same face as the woman in my dreams, the same voice, and the same mannerisms. It's like I saw her coming before she arrived. There was no question that I'd hire her. Lucky for me, she has the skills needed for the job.

Madge paused, thinking how insane her observations might seem to someone discovering her journals. They were filled with accounts of her dreams and ensuing observations, which she began documenting nearly one year ago. She flipped the journal back a few pages, re-reading her entry from two weeks previous:

Had the strangest dream last night. An attractive woman in her late thirties came to my office for a job interview, wearing a pair of pleated black slacks, white blouse and off-black blazer. I could tell the clothes were a bit worn, but they were clean and well taken care of. The woman was of medium build, with dark brown-gray hair pulled up into a French-braid bun. Her eyes were blue, and very alert. She came into my inner office for a chat, and I decided to hire her then and there.

Madge recalled that first dream about Noel vividly, although at the time she was rather puzzled by it. She hadn't advertised for a position in her office because her longtime secretary had been firmly entrenched for more than ten years, giving no signs she was about to abandon ship. When the middle-aged Carol Moore gave one-day notice two weeks

later, Madge had been floored. Carol was apologetic, citing her mother's sudden illness as the reason for her departure. As Carol's mother lived in faraway Phoenix, Madge couldn't very well hold a grudge against her otherwise faithful secretary.

Dither entered the room, ignoring Madge as he jumped to the leather recliner to wash his face after dinner. She watched her tomcat fondly, his right paw moving in rhythmic strokes over his face and mouth as he cleaned himself.

"Enjoy your dinner, did you?" she asked him aloud. "Was it up to snuff?"

Dither glanced at her briefly, with little interest, and then resumed his careful ritual of grooming.

Madge returned to her journal, flipping the pages back to her current entry.

It's not like me to hire someone off the cuff like I did with Noel today. I know my decision was somewhat based on my dream, but I also think she will be great asset to my office. Unlike typically flighty twenty-year-olds, Noel is stable and experienced. She's not likely to spend endless time mooning over boys and clothes. There is also something else about her that I can't quite put my finger on, something that draws me to her. I have a strong feeling we will become more than just boss and employee as time moves on; that we will become great friends someday.

Madge closed the journal, removing her glasses and standing from the desk. She yawned, glancing toward Dither again. He was curled up on the leather recliner, sound asleep. Smiling to herself, Madge left the room, empty glass in hand. She made her way to the kitchen, where she poured herself another healthy measure of vodka. She kept the ice-cold bottle of *Sobieski* away from her home office, knowing she would be tempted to imbibe more if the bottle was within easy reach.

After rooting around in the refrigerator, she assembled a small platter of sliced hard salami, stacked saltine crackers, a handful of *Kalamata* olives and a generous mound of crumbled feta cheese. It wasn't the healthiest of late-night dinners, but it would suffice for now. She made space on the platter for her glass, and then carried the lot back to her home office.

Dither lifted his head and sniffed the air when she returned, his nose twitching slightly. Madge laughed at him as she sat behind the desk. "Yes, dear Dither," she said. "I know you hate my aromatic food. Did you ever think that's why I eat such things? So you won't try to snatch morsels from my mouth?"

The tomcat yawned, revealing his long, pointy teeth. Within seconds, he lowered his head and went back to sleep.

Madge leaned back in her office chair, balancing the food platter on her lap. She popped olives into her mouth as she absently watched the local news on television. Her eyes occasionally wandered to the closed journal on her desk. She shook her head, sighing as she bit into a slice of hard salami.

Her drive to keep journals about her dreams was still a mystery to her. The obsession in documenting her vivid flashes – which often came to fruition afterward – began nearly a year ago as she was recovering from chemotherapy treatment for breast cancer. The diagnosis had initially sent her into an emotional tailspin, but with her usual common sense she realized it was her own fault. She had been a heavy smoker for years, so what else could she expect?

After several months of chemotherapy – during which she remained working, no matter how sick she felt – her doctor advised a complete mastectomy, also informing her that the cancer had spread to her lymph nodes and lungs. Devastated but refusing to show it, Madge numbly agreed to her doctor's recommendations. What else could she do? Curl into a ball and die? No, that was not for her. She would fight to the bitter end, if that's what it took.

The night before her mastectomy surgery, Madge lay prone in her hospital bed. She was alone, with intermittent visits by the attending nurse to check on her vitals. She stared at the stark white ceiling of her room for a long time, resisting the urge to fall asleep. She was terrified. At the age of forty-nine, she lived a life many women only dreamed of. She was a successful and well-respected attorney, making more money than she ever thought possible. She had a decent home and was generally happy with the flow of her life to date. Her brief marriage two decades ago was a mere blip on the radar, mattering little in the scheme of things. It had been a mistake from the get-go, but it was all water under the bridge now. Her true love was the law. She was consumed by her work, happy to be in the thick of a new case. Most men were unable to handle her professional devotion and strength of character, feeling slighted even in the newest stages of a romance. She gave up having relationships long ago, realizing she didn't need a man to be a complete person. She worked hard and played hard, and was truly happy with her life.

Cancer was not on her agenda, but here it was anyway, staring her in the face. She spent the night before her scheduled surgery alone with a thousand thoughts racing through her mind, not sure what the future might hold. It was nearly dawn when she finally dozed, only to awaken a half hour later. She felt strangely rested and alert. The pain, nausea and accompanying lethargy had left her body. She felt clean and whole, as if her entire being had been purified while she dozed. Was it the pain medication making her feel that way? Was she drug-induced delusional? Had she retreated into complete denial, or was it real?

Madge had perfect recall of the incident. She sat up in bed and rang the nurse, demanding to see her doctor. "Something happened in the night," she said excitedly, even though she knew it sounded like she was babbling. "Please, delay the surgery until I've had a chance to speak to Dr. Kopeck. I need to talk to him right away. Please, *hurry*."

Twenty minutes later, Dr. Kopeck appeared in the doorway of her hospital room. He was tall and balding, with thick glasses perched on his bulbous nose. Madge trusted him implicitly, but she needed to tell him how she felt. She was certain something about her condition had changed during the night, and she wanted him to perform the necessary tests before undertaking any surgery.

Dr. Kopeck had listened to her speak, nodding his head now and then as she described how she felt. She saw the look of understanding mixed with sympathy in his eyes, and it annoyed her. "Look," she said evenly. "I'm the patient, and you're the doctor. *I get that*. But I'm telling you, something changed during the night. What harm can it do to run some tests, or delay the surgery a few days? If it's the cost you're worried about, don't concern yourself. Whatever the insurance company doesn't cover, I will pay in full. And you know I'm good for it."

"I just hate to see you get your hopes up," he told her soberly. "Dealing with cancer is as much an emotional struggle as it is physical."

"Please, Dr. Kopeck. Trust me on this, will you? If the tests come back positive, just like they did before, I'll shut my mouth and go through with the surgery." She pleaded with him using her emotionally charged eyes, and he finally capitulated.

Two days later, Madge's tests came back free and clear. Dr. Kopeck was dumbfounded. He came to her hospital room, chart in hand. "The tumors are gone," he told her, his eyes wide with amazement. "I've never seen anything like it. The mass is gone from your breast, and the shadows in your lungs are no longer there. I don't understand it. It's just not medically possible..." He shook his head. "But I can't deny what I see. Just to make sure, I'd like to re-run the tests one more time. Do you mind?"

"Of course I don't mind," she replied happily. "And don't feel bad, Dr. Kopeck. Perhaps the initial tests were wrong – you know, maybe someone made a mistake in the lab and mixed up my results with someone else's. Who knows? After you gave me the initial diagnosis, perhaps my mind took over and convinced my body it was sick. We're all human, aren't we? Entitled to mistakes now and then? Especially when they turn out for the better?"

The second set of tests came back clean as well, so Madge was in the clear. She had dodged the proverbial life-ending bullet and had been given a second chance. After awhile, she convinced herself the scare had indeed been a lab mistake, and nothing more.

The dreams began shortly after her stay in the hospital. At first they were harmless. She dreamt of her secretary Carol bringing cookies to the office, and the next day – sure enough – Carol brought cookies to the office. In another dream, Madge saw Dither catching a mouse in the backyard and then trotting through the house with the dead rodent hanging from his mouth, proud of his kill and wanting to show her. The next morning Dither did *exactly that*, much to her disgust.

Then the dreams began to take a more serious turn. Madge dreamed of winning a specific case, and weeks later she did. She saw future clients in her dreams as well, and lo and behold, they walked through her office door within days. She had a rather disturbing dream about a client, a single mother, being beaten by her estranged husband the day before their scheduled appearance in divorce court. Rather than explain her dream to the client – and therefore rendering her position as an attorney less than credible – Madge invited the woman and her children to her home on Dane Street for dinner the night before the court date, plying the young lady with vodka until she was tipsy and forced to sleep over. Madge was convinced she saved the day, especially when the divorce was granted without incident.

She started to keep journals in order to detail her dreams, often wondering what strange cosmic occurrence had led to her sudden glimpses into the future. Had she been blessed with second sight after being spared the ravages of cancer? Or had she possessed the gift all along, only lying dormant until now? Whatever caused her visions, she was determined to put them to good use and – above all – pay close attention to their portents.

Madge knew there was a purpose to Noel's appearance in her dreams, now materializing in real time. With her typical practicality, Madge realized that fate had a way of playing itself out one way or another.

BLOODFROST:
Excerpt from Chapter Eleven

THE MORNING OF FRIDAY, August 13th, dawned hot and humid. Noel awoke early, a dull pain in her lower back making sleep impossible. The heat was already oppressive, forcing her to fling the blanket from her body. She sat upright in the bed, and then gasped. The sheet underneath her was soaking wet.

"Pim," she shook her sleeping husband urgently. "I think my water broke."

He raised his head, looking at her in alarm. "It's time?"

"The bed is soaking wet and my back hurts, so yes I think it's time." Noel didn't intend to sound peevish, but the pain in her lower body was accelerating rapidly.

"Steady, Noel. I'm here to help."

Pim assisted her out of the damp nightgown and into a pair of gray sweat pants with a white tee-shirt. "You stay here while I call for a taxicab," he instructed.

"Call Dr. Mintz and Madge, too."

"I know the drill."

Dr. Mintz met them at Faulkner Hospital on Centre Street, with Madge following shortly thereafter. Noel was placed in a small room on the third floor, where she was dressed in a hospital gown and given a cup of ice cubes. Pim sat next to the bed, holding his wife's hand.

Noel sighed with relief as another wave of pain subsided. Rivulets of perspiration covered her face in a damp sheen. "At least it's cool in here," she said. "I can't believe how hot it is outside, and so early in the morning. We'd all melt away if the hospital didn't have central air conditioning."

At that moment, Pim and Noel felt a low rumble shake the walls of her room. It was as if the entire hospital building trembled briefly, and then shuddered to a halt. The lights went out and the cooling flow of air from the vent over the bed stopped abruptly.

"Oh please *no*," Noel groaned. "Take *anything* away but the central air."

Pim stood from his chair. "Let me go find out what's going on."

Before he could leave, Dr. Mintz entered the room trailed by a nurse. "Not to worry, folks. Boston just had a brown-out. Our power is only off momentarily. The generators should kick-in any second." He pointed to a corner in Noel's room, telling the nurse: "Put the fan over there."

Noel watched as the nurse positioned a tall, oscillating fan in the corner. "When the generators come on we still have to conserve power," Dr. Mintz explained. "That means doing without air conditioning."

Before she could respond, another contraction took over Noel's body in a rush. She gripped the sides of the bed, clenching her teeth in pain. At that instant, the lights went back on and the fan started rotating in the corner.

Dr. Mintz came to the bed, taking Noel's wrist to read her pulse. "How far apart are the contractions?" he asked her.

She looked at Pim. "Three or four minutes, maybe?"

Pim nodded. "About three minutes, doctor. Are we getting close?"

"Most definitely," he replied. "I'll be back shortly, and then we can get started."

Madge came into the room after Dr. Mintz and the nurse left. She went directly to the bed, peering down at Noel with concern. "How are you feeling, sweetie?" she asked.

"It hurts," Noel admitted frankly. "But I'm more annoyed by the god damned heat than anything else. That stupid fan in the corner is only blowing hot air around the room."

"Wouldn't you know it - Boston has a brown-out the same day you give birth," Madge said sympathetically. "From what I heard on the news, our power grid couldn't handle everyone blasting their air conditioners all at the same time. By the end of the day, we're sure to have some cases of heat-inspired road rage, don't you think?"

Noel's pain subsided once again. "What about the office? Did you get someone to answer the phones?"

"I called in a temp before I came to the hospital," Madge told her. "Not to worry, Noel. I don't have any cases scheduled for court today, so I'll be nearby for the duration."

"Thank you, Madge. I'm so glad you're here."

"Judge Minot and his wife are outside in the waiting room, too. I phoned and told them you were in labor, and they insisted on coming over."

"That's very kind," Pim said. "I should go and thank him." He leaned over and gave Noel a quick kiss on the cheek. "I'll be right back."

Madge dragged a chair to the other side of Noel's bed, sitting down and crossing her legs. "Miriam wants to throw a baptism party for the baby when the time comes. She knows you two want to have the child christened at St. Theresa's, and she'd like to have a modest shin-dig at her house afterward."

"She doesn't have to go to any trouble..." Noel began to protest.

"In case you haven't noticed, the judge and his wife have taken a real shine to you. They aren't pushy sorts, but I know they would be more than happy to celebrate the birth of your child. Don't forget, they *are* childless. I'd go with the flow if I were you."

"What are you saying?"

"Let them be generous if they want to be, Noel. It makes them happy. Besides, it can only be good for the baby, right?"

Pim returned to the room with Judge Minot and his wife in tow. The judge's words were almost immediate, meant for Noel's mind alone. "*Not in...too much...pain...are you?*"

"*No more than expected,*" she thought, looking into the old man's eyes. "*But I'm fine. Please don't worry.*"

"*Hard...not...to,*" he smiled.

Miriam stood at the foot of the bed. "My God, it's awfully hot in here. Can't we do something about that?"

"Not until the brown-out is over," Madge informed her.

"Where's your mother, Noel?" Judge Minot asked. "I didn't see her in the waiting room."

"We decided it would be best if she stayed at the apartment," Pim answered for his wife. "June has such trouble getting around, and she didn't want to be in the way. Mr. Carter agreed to bring her over in a taxi once the baby is born."

"We can pick her up when the time comes," the judge offered.

"That's very kind, but..."

"It's no trouble at all," Miriam assured Pim. "We'd be happy to bring June over, and Mr. Carter too, if he wants to come along."

Another wave of pain cycled through Noel's lower body. She squeezed Pim's hand, who murmured soothingly in her ear. "Not much longer, love. Just think, in a few hours time you'll be holding our little Kate in your arms." He ran an ice cube across her clammy forehead, trailing it down to her cheeks and jaw.

"That feels good," she said gratefully. "More, please."

Dr. Mintz reentered the room, his tone brusque. "Okay, folks. Visiting time is over. Everyone but Mr. Grady needs to leave."

The next few hours were slow and agonizing for Noel. The pain ripping through her body increased with frequency and duration, the heat making her feel as if she was a turkey baking in an oven. At one point, she became confused and frightened. In her mind, she saw flames licking up the walls of her hospital room, reaching the ceiling in slow-motion curls.

"Do you see the fire?" she mumbled, directing her question to no one in particular.

"There's no fire, Noel," Pim tried to console her. "Your skin is hot, love, and the room is hot, but there is no fire."

"But I see the flames," she insisted stubbornly.

"Doctor?" Pim asked, concern in his voice.

"She's just having a mild hallucination," Noel heard Dr. Mintz say. "We put a bit of Demerol and Meptazinol in her IV, just enough to take the edge off her pain. That, combined with the heat, has made her slightly delirious. It's nothing to worry about, Mr. Grady."

Noel felt herself go in and out of conscious thought. Whenever she opened her eyes, she saw flames snaking up the wall, so she quickly closed them again. She held onto Pim's hand tightly, afraid to let go.

"I'm right here," he whispered in her ear. "I'm not leaving you."

Her head lolled back and forth on the pillow, which was now stained and soaked with her own sweat. The heat was simply unbearable, made worse by the relentless flames in the room. Why didn't they catch everything else on fire? What kind of flame simply curled up a wall but did little else? Or was the fire another omen?

"But we did all the right things," she cried out, her eyes still closed. "We went to church, we prayed...we've made plans to be the best parents on earth...we'll be loving parents, you'll see...what else can we possibly do to stave off such horrible evil?"

"Noel," Pim's frantic thoughts broke through her jumbled mind. *"Everything is going to be okay. Please, believe me. Think about our beautiful daughter...think about good things...don't conjure up hellacious images in your head. You can do it, love. Think about our darling Kate; think about taking her home to the little room you created for her. She's ready to meet us, Noel. She's ready to come into the world and meet her parents."*

"I believe you," she whispered out loud, opening her eyes to stare at her husband. "She won't be sour and tainted, will she?"

Pim shook his head. "No, she won't be sour and tainted. She'll be perfect, Noel. Our little Kate will be perfect."

Trust in his words filled Noel with relief. She closed her eyes again, squeezing his hand as another wave of pain bore down on her. It was the last thing she remembered for quite awhile.

"BLOODFROST" INFORMATION

Bloodfrost by Deidre Dalton (aka *Deborah O'Toole*) is available from Amazon, Barnes & Noble and Kobo Books.

Amazon (Kindle edition):

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B008AC17FW>

Barnes & Noble (Nook edition):

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/bloodfrost-deidre-dalton/1111496075>

Kobo Books (multiple formats):

http://www.kobobooks.com/ebook/Bloodfrost/book-M7ZHiGY_7EarjZspWaKLMg/page1.html



BOOK DETAILS:

Series: Bloodline Trilogy, Book One.

ISBN: 978-1-476467-47-4.

Kindle ASIN: B008AC17FW.

Nook BNID: 2940014793742.

Released: June 12, 2012.

Cover photo: (C) Tomas Bobrus.

Cover Art: Webs Divine.

EXTRAS:

***Bloodfrost* @ Facebook:**

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bloodfrost/368081853252947>

Bloodline Trilogy web site:

<http://websdivine.tripod.com/bloodline/index.htm>

ABOUT THE BLOODLINE TRILOGY:

The *Bloodline Trilogy* follows the uniquely magical yet ominous journey of one family through time.

The trilogy begins with *Bloodfrost*, where Noel Gatsby's dreams take her away from the misery of her pain-wracked, disease-riddled body. The dreams become real when she awakens one morning to find herself completely cured. However, she soon learns her miraculous recovery comes at a price...

Noel's daughter Kate learns she has unusual powers in *Bloodlust*, where she is able to bend people to her will. At first she uses her gifts wisely, but then goes astray after falling in love with the diabolical Kirk Lester, whom she follows down an ugly path of debauchery and evil...

Blood & Soul is the third and final part of the *Bloodline Trilogy*. Jenny Jardine is adopted into a loving home as an infant, never knowing the true circumstances of her birth. As a teenager, she discovers she has unique powers of healing. She soon realizes her abilities are an instrument of evil, begotten by two bloodthirsty monsters...

All three titles in the *Bloodline Trilogy* are scheduled for release in 2012-17.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Deidre Dalton is author of the "Collective Obsessions Saga," which chronicles the extraordinary loves and intricate obsessions between two families sweeping a span of more than one hundred years, all set against the backdrop of a Gothic seaside mansion in Maine. Titles in the eight-part family saga include *The Advent*, *Quixotic Crossings*, *The Twain Shall Meet*, *Enthrallment*, *The Keeper's Journal*, *Hearts Desires*, *The Twilight* and *Megan's Legacy*.

She is also author of the "Bloodline Trilogy," which follows the mysterious and magical journey of one family through time. Books in the trilogy include *Bloodfrost*, *Bloodlust* and *Blood & Soul*.

Deidre is author and editor of the *Larkin Community Cookbook*, which is a compilation of recipes mentioned or prepared by characters in the *Collective Obsessions Saga*, and the electronic versions of *About Larkin* (companion guide to the *Collective Obsessions Saga*), and *The Private Journal of Colm Sullivan*.

Writing under the pseudonym Deborah O'Toole, Deidre is also author of the fiction titles *Celtic Remnants* and *Mind Sweeper*, the *Short Tales Collection* (juvenile fiction), and a book of poetry known as *Torn Bits & Pieces*. For more, visit <http://www.deborahotoole.com>.

For more, visit Deidre's web site at: <http://deidredalton.com/>.