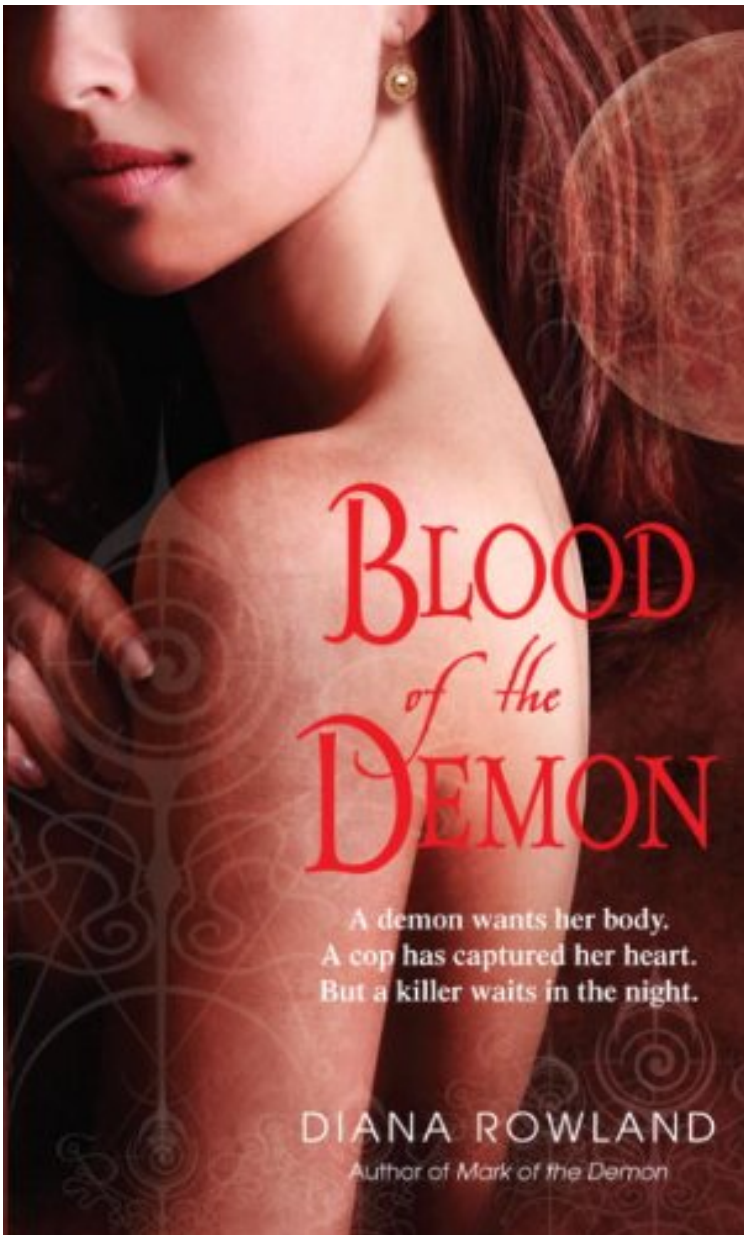


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Blood of the Demon



Par Diana Rowland
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL, MAN AND DEMON, SHES ABOUT TO FACE THE ONE THING SHE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO SURVIVE. Welcome to the world of Kara Gillian, a cop with a gift. Not only does she have the power of othersight to see what most people cant even imagine, but shes become the exclusive summoner of a demon lord. Or maybe its the other way around. The fact is, with two troublesome cases on her docket and a handsome FBI agent under her skin, Kara needs the help of sexy, insatiable Lord Rhyzkahl more than he needs her. Because these two victims, linked by suspicious

coincidence, haven't just been murdered. Something has eaten their souls. It's a case with roots in the arcane, but whose evil has flowered among the rich, powerful, and corrupt in Beaulac, Louisiana. And as the killings continue, Kara soon realizes how much there's still to learn about demons, men, and things that kill in the night and how little time she has to learn it. From the Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter One

The demon was little more than a mist of fog and teeth, barely visible to normal sight. It coiled in slow undulations in the backseat of my Taurus as I drove through the night, the tires of the car humming on the asphalt in low rhythmic counterpoint to the movement of the demon. The nearly full moon draped my surroundings in silver and shadow, making even this deserted highway running through a rank swamp look beautiful. There were no other headlights along this stretch of road, but this was little surprise since there were no houses or businesses out here—nothing but swamp, marsh, and the occasional patch of dry ground that pretended to be woods. I could hear the demon murmuring softly to itself in hunger, and I stilled it with a nudge of pressure on the arcane bindings. It would feed soon enough, but I needed it to complete the agreed-upon task first. I'd dealt with this type of demon many times before and knew that the creatures were far less useful after a feed—preferring to coil in sated comfort rather than hunt. I continued to drive until I felt the change in the demon—a sudden tension as if it had perked up its nonexistent ears. I pulled over to the side of the highway, then walked around to the other side of the car and opened the back door. It felt a bit absurd to cart a demon around in the backseat of my car, but I couldn't exactly perform a summoning out in the middle of the swamp. I was limited to summoning demons in the prepared diagram in my basement. Murmuring again, the demon slid out in eager anticipation of a hunt. The demon was an ilius—a third-level demon, about as intelligent as a dog but a thousand times better at tracking. It was little more than a shifting fog, visible in my othersight as a coil of smoke with teeth that flashed and disappeared like a teeming mass of vaporous piranhas. Without othersight—a sense beyond the senses that revealed more than the mundane world most people were able to see—it was essentially invisible, except for the deep feeling of unease it left in those it touched. I opened the paper bag and pulled out the baseball cap, allowing the ilius to twine around it and fill itself with the scent, the feel of the one I sought. Seek, I said, and reinforced the spoken command with mental pressure. The demon shimmered in my othersight, then sped away across the grass and through the trees like an arcane zephyr. I let my breath out as soon as it was gone, then leaned back against the car to wait for the demon's return. That it would find the missing hunter I had no doubt. Whether that hunter was alive or dead would decide my next move. I only hoped the demon wouldn't take very long. Even at four in the morning, the south Louisiana heat in July was oppressive, and out here in the middle of the swamp, the humidity was easily near a hundred percent. Sweat beaded on my face and neck and I wiped it away with a sleeve, hoping I wasn't wiping away too much of the mosquito repellent that I'd doused myself in. Hundreds of the little bloodsuckers hummed around me, but so far the repellent was keeping them at bay. At least the ilius didn't have to worry about mosquitoes. There were twelve levels of demon that could be summoned by those with the ability to open a portal between this world and the demon realm. The higher the level of demon, the more powerful and the more difficult to summon. But I'd had no need for a high-level demon for this. This summoning had been more for practice, to get my feet wet again, than anything else—though finding the idiot who'd decided to go hunting in the swamp by himself was an added benefit. But this was the first demon I'd summoned in a couple of months, and I'd needed the reassurance that I still knew what I was doing.

White-blond hair like a river of silk cascaded over me as he bent to kiss me. Do you miss my touch yet, dear one? His ancient eyes were alight with crystalline amusement. I looked up at him, narrow-eyed. Yes and no. He laughed and took me by the hand to lead me to a white marble balcony that overlooked a shining blue sea. Is it such a difficult question? I watched the demons in flight above the water. I miss your presence, but you also kinda scare the crap out of me, y'know? He stood behind me, sliding his arms about me in loose embrace. I would never harm you, Kara. Summon me. You will be safe. I leaned my head back against him as his embrace turned into a slow caress. He nuzzled my neck, sending goose bumps racing over my skin.

But your idea of safe might not be the same as mine, I said, groaning as his teeth gently nipped at my earlobe. I will allow none to harm you, Kara, the demonic lord murmured. Summon me. You need what I can give you. I shuddered as if to throw off a chill, still unsettled by the remnants of last night's dream. That's all it had been—a dream. Nothing more. Gooseflesh rose on my arms despite the warmth of the night. I wished I could really be that certain. There was another type of demon above those twelve levels: the demonic lords. It was considered pretty much impossible to summon a demonic lord. Or rather, with enough power and preparation it was technically possible to summon one, but surviving the experience was another matter entirely. Yet I'd accidentally summoned Rhyzkahl, one of the highest of the demonic lords, and I'd even

survived the experience. In a manner of speaking, Rhyzkahl had created a link to me after Id unintentionally summoned him, and for a time he had come to me in dream-sendings, so vivid and real that it was impossible to tell whether I was awake or asleep. Plus, elements of these sendings could intrude into the waking world, as evidenced by one instance where he healed an injury Id received when I was awake. But those had stopped after hed saved my life. Id had dreams of him since, but they never felt as visceral as the sendings. I knew I should be pleased and relieved that the link had apparently been severed. But I wasnt sure how I felt about that. Or him. It didnt help that many of the dreams were filled with scorching erotic content with me as an eager participant. I woke from them shuddering with a combination of pleasure and need feelings that quickly shifted to confusion and uncertainty. Was he sending these dreams in order to remind me of what wed shared and what he could offer? Or were the dreams merely messages from my screwed-up psyche, reminding me that I had no boyfriend, no sex life, and no prospects? Either way, I could do without the reminders. I felt the demons return before I saw it. I pushed off the car and straightened as it swirled around me, illusory teeth grazing me. I suppressed a shiver. Show, I commanded as I closed my eyes. Images flickered behind my eyelids, hazy and difficult to follow, but along with the images came scent and sound and a sense of distance, as if Id walked the demons path. I could have done without the scent. The hunter was quite dead, face bloated and swollen, and the rank stench of decomposition surrounded him. I had no idea how hed died whether from drowning or injury but the important thing was that I knew the body was in this area. I opened my eyes, then held the door open for the ilius. It swirled around me again and I could feel its rising hunger. It had completed its task and wanted to be fed. I tightened my mental grip on the arcane bindings, even as sweat prickled under my arms. Not here. Soon. The demon flashed red in my othersight, then slid into the backseat again. I got into the drivers seat as quickly as I could. Id never heard of an ilius feeding on a human, but there was a lot I didnt know about demons. I didnt care to find out what would happen if it got hungry enough. Fortunately, the place I was headed was only a short distance down the highway. Once again I pulled the car over and released the demon. Follow, I commanded, then set off at a light jog down a well-worn path, grateful for the moon that lit my way. I could feel the demon following me and had to shake the unnerving sensation that it was chasing me. A few hundred yards later I stopped at the edge of a bayou. I turned back to the ilius and held the image of a nutria in my mind a large ratlike creature with nasty yellow teeth. Nutria were an invasive species that had quickly overrun south Louisiana and did terrible damage to marshlands so much so that nutria-eradication programs had been created. I had my own nutria-eradication program right here. Feed, I said, continuing to hold the image in my mind and sending the mental emphasis that it was to feed only on the nutria. It zoomed past me so quickly that I nearly lost my balance, and before I could even blink I heard an animal shriek; it was quickly silenced. I looked away from the sight of the demon winding itself around one of the creatures. Id seen an ilius feed before. There was no blood or rending of flesh, or anything graphic and grotesque. To anyone without arcane ability, it merely looked as if the nutria seized up and convulsed, dying for no apparent reason. But othersight would show that the ilius was gently and painlessly slaying the creature with a near-surgical jab of arcane power, then drawing out and consuming its life force or essence. The demon dropped the empty husk of the nutria and dove on another. I kept my eyes fixed on the moon above the trees, ignoring the imagined mental screams of the ratlike creatures. After about half a dozen nutria, the demon slowly coiled its way back across the water to sleepily wind around me like a cat preparing to settle in for a nap. A demonic, life-eating, piranha-toothed, misty cat. Presentation de l'diteur

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