

THE BLOOD RED ROSE

CHAPTER ONE

England: Early Spring, 1749AD.

THE TALL athletic built man longed for the next female to walk his way. He loved this particular time of night when the moon had risen to the highest point in the sky, and a gentle breeze started wafting in from the sea.

The man didn't blink, staring down the cobblestone sidewalk. His presence made whoever walked past the deep doorway he stood in, die of fright when they found him lurking in the shadows. He adjusted his tanned top hat and tails and tugged at his long sleeved frilly shirt to prepare himself for the arrival of the ladies. The man stepped further back into the doorway of the three-storey building which housed the city clock, watching the rats and mice scurrying about the rubbish in an attempt to discover food.

The man looked relaxed standing in the cold waiting to hear the scraping echo of lady's shoes. The giggling females always heightened the thrill.

William Haleton was told countless times by many a young lady when they danced he always acted like the perfect gentleman. His handsome features always attracted long luring looks. He lost count of how many times young single ladies commented on his strong shoulders, taut muscles, and dark hair. The only thing wrong, love had failed to mushroom in his life.

For several heartbeats Haleton studied the ground, he stood on. His facial expression looked drawn. He took to pondering what might be the reason for his loneliness. Finally, his thoughts fell on Alex Crompton. His cousin's murderous ways must cease, and he was the only one who could do it. Maybe after the death of the man, love will flow unhindered towards him. How he yearned for the warm embrace of a woman. He didn't want any girl; he wanted to be married to a beautiful woman. One he could love, cherish and adore. He wanted to smell the perfume on her neck, the sweet-smelling oils in her hair. He wanted to buy the love of his life, gifts of expensive perfume and long flowing dresses. Soon he'd start his medical studies. He wanted to be the finest surgeon in the country. He wanted to see a room full of patients. To top his dream goal, he prayed each night the young lady he'd marry embraced the medical side. Female surgeons were indeed a rarity. He needed to unearth the woman, even if fate took him to another country.

The familiar noise of flat heeled shoes scraping the cobblestone sidewalk quickly brought Haleton back from his daydream. He knew tonight would be the evening of Crompton's next victim.

To stop his cousin's murderous ways Haleton needed to be ready.

Crompton, wearing a black felt top hat and tails loosened his shirt collar. He hugged the wall of the only brick dwelling in the village. His cold murderous black eyes surveyed the area. Seeing no one he quickly marched across the dirt road, blending into the shadow of a large old oak tree.

Catching a whiff of enticing perfume from a young female, a satisfied expression wrinkled Crompton's brow. He acted hypnotized with the aroma of the sweet perfumed scent.

Haleton spied Alex Crompton, placed his tanned coloured felt hat on the ground and slipped across the road, hiding in the deep doorway of the general store.

Two young females walking home from a nearby party closed in. Every muscle in Haleton's body compressed to the point of cramping. He must win the fight. Crompton must be stopped no matter the cost. The lives of the young women approaching, not to mention his love life, depended on his victory.

The two females came soon enough. They were staggering from the effects of the wine they secretly drank. They were giggling at their noisy footsteps and slurred speech. One of the girls stopped walking. She swayed slightly leaning on the other's shoulder.

"Stand still for a moment I've broken the strap on both of my shoes. They keep slipping off my feet." The tall, slender young woman leaned forward to pick her shoes up off the sidewalk. Her long blonde hair fell in front of her face, sweeping the ground. For a short time, the girl swayed trying desperately not to fall over. "Hey sister, thanks for catching me, I nearly fell," she stammered, straightening. "Okay, let's go home."

Both young ladies were dressed to impress every man at the local dance. They wore the same style of eveningwear. Their long-sleeved white pleated dresses kissed the ground while they danced around

the floor. Tight corsets decreased the size of their already narrow waists and behind each ear the lingering smell of expensive perfume.

"We cannot walk about the streets with you wearing no shoes. What would a handsome bachelor say if he sees us?"

"Sister, I'm too drunk to bloody care."

"You should not use those sorts of words. What if someone hears?"

"Take a look around; I can't see anyone. Can you?" The young lady palmed an open hand around the deserted area. "Tomorrow I'm going down to the local peddler's shop to give him an extra round of strong verbal diarrhea. The small rat featured, irritating little man, kept my shoes for a whole week. Now they're broken."

"You should blame the well-rounded man at the dance. He stepped on your feet too many times to count."

"No, it's the peddler's fault for not making the shoe straps strong enough in the first place."

"Shhh, not so loud, this is the area where the last murder took place."

"Sister, lightning doesn't strike in the same place twice," hinted the taller of the two. She staggered over a cobblestone. Her sister caught her again, propping her up.

"I have a strange feeling someone is watching us."

"Who'd bother with two drunks? Especially me, I've no shoes on my feet." The girl giggled. Again, she leaned against her sister. "It sure is a nice night for a walk. Shame you're not a man."

Crompton slowly pulled his long-bladed knife from inside a pocket of his knee high left boot. He lifted it to eye level and slowly twisted it back and forth in his hand. The blade glistened in the light of the full moon. He stared at the blade, admiring its razor-sharp edge. How he missed how the custom-made wooden handle felt when he held it in his hand. The explanation he gave to the craftsman for wanting the knife perfectly balanced was for killing and dissecting rabbits.

The wind started to strengthen, blowing the dark clouds off to the South. Crompton slipped the knife behind his back. He glued his gaze on the two young ladies staggering past. He scraped his tongue slowly across the surface of his lips. As the girls walked away, Crompton made final preparations to pounce.

Haleton knew Crompton didn't care about his female victims or whether they were a mother. In life, the only way he could satisfy the constant hunger burning deep inside him was to kill a woman. The moment he found the perfect victim their time walking on the Earth quickly came to an end.

Haleton studied the killer's face. Crompton looked disappointed. 'Could he be growing soft?' Haleton frowned at his thoughts. 'Not possible.'

Crompton marched up behind the girls, striking up a casual conversation. If the two young women knew of his intentions, they'd have bellowed a blood-curdling scream.

Haleton estimated one girl to be around sixteen, the other nineteen.

"You're too drunk for my liking. Have a nice life," Crompton taunted.

The moment the nineteen-year-old blew him a kiss her younger sister grabbed her by the arm and marched her down the road.

The killer turned his collar up to keep warm from the cold. He changed direction, deciding to walk slowly towards the ocean. The moment he drew level to a doorway he stopped to stare at the tall figure watching him.

"Show yourself or suffer the consequences."

"You don't know the meaning of the word."

"I don't have to."

Haleton emerged, glaring at Crompton. "Haven't you scared every female in the fishing village enough?"

"William Haleton, I should have known you'd be lurking about."

"Answer my question."

"I want to be certain I haven't left any females off my list. Be told, my gang and I are going to continue. The twelve of us are unstoppable."

"Are you sure?"

Crompton laughed dryly. "Positive. When I feel the urge, another female will end up face down in the sea."

"I'm here to stop you," growled Haleton.

"Don't tell me you decided against joining my gang? It will be the biggest mistake you have ever made."

"You're wrong. Waiting too long in standing up to you has been my biggest mistake."

"Don't give me your high-priced talk again," spat Crompton.

“You need it.”

“You’ve always been weak Haleton. Mark my words, you always will be. All women were born to be treated, in anyway, men like me, want.”

“You’re crazy. A young lady should be showered in love and romanced, in a gentlemanly way.”

“You talk nonsense. Ever since we were old enough to walk, we’ve never seen eye to eye on anything. For that, I hate you,” jeered Crompton. “I’ll give you one last chance to join my gang.”

“What if I refuse?”

“Your sour lonely life will draw to an end. If you think your way is the best, how come you’re not married? Where’s the good-looking woman who has skin like honey hanging from your arm?”

Haleton remained silent.

“It’s just like I thought. This is your last chance. Join us or die.”

Giggling from a potential new victim interrupted the standoff.

“Haleton, come, witness what you’ve been missing.” Crompton slipped behind a small upturned fishing boat to wait for the new arrivals.

Haleton slipped back into the shadow of the doorway. Every cell in his body cried out for the love of a young woman. He sniffed the air, catching a whiff of an expensive French perfume wafting towards him on the wind. He’d entered many a perfume shop over the years to smell the delight from the endless array of small bottles only to be tossed out by the female owner.

Haleton took a moment to replay the last encounter in his mind.

The woman looked feisty when he stood in the doorway. Her yells almost woke the dead.

“This is no place for a man. Get out,” she demanded.

Haleton’s thoughts were interrupted by a rat running across his feet. Its mistake was to stop and eat a morsel of food. Haleton squatted, killing the vermin. He kicked it into the rubbish and refocused on the two young ladies walking his way.

Haleton readied himself. He carefully considered which girl will be Crompton’s next victim. One at a time is his first rule. His second rule he never broke meant she mustn’t be drunk. The killer never broke either rule. Which one will die first, the brunette who happened to be in the lead or the shorter blonde one? Haleton knew the pattern. Blonde first, a brunette second and the cycle starts again. Haleton frowned. Could Crompton let them live? He had done it in the past. Haleton shook his head. There’d been too many missed chances since the last killing four weeks ago. He viewed the corpse of the pretty brunette. His spirit grieved for the dead girl. He felt great pity for her family’s loss. He did get the chance to talk to the deceased girl when she was alive on several occasions. She didn’t act her age. Crompton destroyed the contents of several rooms of the house she lived in when he discovered the girl was only fourteen. For the first time, he broke the third rule he lived by. The victim must be older than sixteen. Crompton was unstable and growing worse as the days wore down.

Haleton surmised his cousin would have a sensational appetite for blood, stopping at nothing to quench it. He cast his thoughts back to the scene of Crompton’s first murder. They were two young ladies. For an unknown reason, he allowed the tall woman escape, if only for a time. He must have thought it more sporting to think she outwitted the murderer.

Haleton didn’t like hearing his name mentioned in the countless whispers anymore. He wanted to make certain Crompton never accomplished another murder. Haleton pushed all thoughts of his cousin to one side. He started to think of the woman he dreamt about night after night. In his dream she was intelligent, the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen. How he hungered to meet her. Other than the woman in his dreams the only real woman he loved happened to be married. He could never be a marriage breaker. He conceded in the fact they’d only ever be friends. He planned to leave England and try his luck somewhere else. England was a great place, but the ladies seemed to stay away. Maybe they thought Haleton or Alex Crompton might be the killer.

Haleton came back to reality by the sweet smell of the perfume both ladies were wearing as they strolled past the doorway. Their giggling muffled any noise he made. Their approaching presence momentarily distracted Haleton causing him to lose sight of Crompton.

The rat’s death surfaced in Haleton’s mind. He wondered if the young ladies might scream if they saw the carcass. Crompton loved the way women screamed. He’d brag down at the local pub how each one screams differently. The noise was sweet music to his ears.

“Curse you rat,” Haleton whispered a decibel too loud.

He’d tipped off the girls.

They started to run.

Crompton darted from behind the upturned boat.

The taller girl squealed when one of her shoes fell off. She kicked the other away, running ahead of the shorter in bare feet.

“Shantal, I beg you to wait; do not leave me. I’ll need your help if the man catches me.”

The young woman stumbled, falling face first onto the gravel. She rolled over onto her back, looking into the cold eyes of her attacker.

Crompton hovered over her. His evil smirk widened. He bent sideways so he could slowly slide his knife from a hidden sheath sewn into one of his long boots. Staring at the steel blade, his eyes glistened. He seemed to relish in the fact the woman will soon be dead. He switched his focus from the sharp blade to the woman cowering on the ground.

“Do you like the blade?”

“No,” she stammered. “I beg you; please leave me be.”

“You can beg all you want it will do you no good.”

Crompton stared into the woman’s eyes studying his reflection in her pupils.

“Please, I have a son. He has not been long in this world.”

Haleton started to move closer. He must be extra quiet if he wanted to get close enough to save the woman’s life.

Crompton lowered himself over the woman. He looked more than ready to accept his trophy. His lips parted, curling upwards. “You are my next victim,” he hissed.

The girl’s eyes widened to the size of golf balls. She tried to cower away on all fours, but Crompton held her a prisoner using a white-knuckled grip to her pink blouse. The girl watched the knife slowly rise into the air.