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Full Blooded

Written by Amanda Carlson

Published by Orbit

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By Amanda Carlson

Full Blooded

FULL BLOODED

Jessica McClain: Book One



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ORBIT

First published in Great Britain in 2012 by Orbit

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A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-356-50126-0

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

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Orbit
An imprint of
Little, Brown Book Group
100 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DY

An Hachette UK Company
www.hachette.co.uk

www.orbitbooks.net

For Bill, Paige, Nat & Jane

1



I drew in a ragged breath and tried hard to surface from one hell of a nightmare. "*Jesus*," I moaned. Sweat slid down my face. My head was fuzzy. Was I dreaming? If I was, this dream hurt like a bitch.

Wait, dreams aren't supposed to hurt.

Without warning my body seized again. Pain scorched through my veins like a bad sunburn, igniting every cell in its path. I clenched my teeth, trying hard to block the rush.

Then, as quickly as it struck, the pain disappeared.

The sudden loss of sensation jolted my brain awake and my eyes snapped open in the dark. This wasn't a damn dream. I took a quick internal inventory of all my body parts. Everything tingled, but thankfully my limbs could move freely again. The weak green halo of my digital clock read 2:07 a.m. I'd only been asleep for a few hours. I rolled onto my side and swiped my sticky hair off my face. When my fingers came in

contact with my skin, I gasped and snapped them away like a child who'd just touched a hot stove.

Holy shit, I'm on fire.

That couldn't be right.

Don't panic, Jess. Think logically.

I pressed the back of my hand against my forehead to get a better read on how badly I was burning up. Hot coals would've felt cooler than my skin.

I must be really sick.

Sickness was a rare event in my life, but it did happen. I wasn't prone to illness, but I wasn't immune to it either. My twin brother never got sick, but if the virus was strong enough I was susceptible.

I sat up, allowing my mind to linger for a brief moment on a very different explanation of my symptoms. *That scenario would be impossible. Get a grip. You're a twenty-six-year-old female. It's never going to happen. It's probably just the flu. There's no need to—*

Without so much as a breath of warning, another spasm of pain hit clear and bright. My body jerked backward as the force of it plowed through me, sending my head slamming into the bedframe, snapping the wooden slats like matchsticks. My back bowed and my arms lashed out, knocking my bedside table and everything on it to the ground. The explosion of my lamp as it struck the floor was lost beneath my bona fide girl scream. "*Shiiiit!*"

Another tremor hit, erupting its vile ash into my psyche like a volcano. But this time instead of being lost in the pale haze of sleep, I was wide awake. I *had* to fight this.

I wasn't sick.

I was *changing*.

Jesus Christ! You've spent your whole life thinking about this very moment and you try to convince yourself you have the flu? What's the matter with you? If you want to live, you have to get to the dose before it's too late!

The pain buried me, my arms and legs locked beside me. I was unable to move as the continuous force of spasms hit me one after another. The memory of my father's voice rang clearly in my mind. I'd been foolish and too stubborn for my own good and now I was paying the price. "*Jessica, don't argue with me. This is a necessary precaution. You must keep this by you at all times.*" The new leather case, containing a primed syringe of an exclusively engineered cocktail of drugs, would be entrusted to me for safekeeping. The contents of which were supposed to render me unconscious if need be. "*You may never need it, but as you well know, this is one of the stipulations of your living alone.*"

I'm so sorry, Dad.

This wasn't supposed to happen. My genetic markers weren't coded for this. This was an impossibility. In a world of impossibilities.

I'd been so stupid.

My body continued to twist in on itself, my muscles moving and shifting in tandem. I was locked in a dance I had no chance of freeing myself from. The pain rushed up, finally reaching a crushing crescendo. As it hit its last note, my mind shattered apart under its impact.

Everything went blissfully black.

Too soon, pinpoints of light danced behind my eyelids. I eased them open. The pain was gone. Only a low throbbing current remained. It took me a moment to realize I was on all fours on the floor beside my bed, my knees and palms bloodied from the shards of my broken lamp. My small bedside table

was scattered in pieces around me. It looked like a small hurricane had ripped apart my bedroom. I had no time to waste.

The dose is your only chance now. Go!

The bathroom door was five feet from me. I propelled myself forward, tugging myself on shaky arms, dragging my body behind me. *Come on, we can do this. It's right there.* I'd only made it a few thin paces when the pain struck again, hard and fast. I collapsed on my side, the muscles under my skin roiling in earnest. *Jesuschrist!* The pain was straight out of a fairy tale, wicked and unrelenting.

I moaned, convulsing as the agony washed over me, crying out in my head, searching for the only possible thing that could help me now. My brother was my only chance. *Tyler, it's happening! Ty, Ty… please! Tyler, can you hear me? Tyyy…*

Another cloud of darkness tugged at the edges of my consciousness and I welcomed it. Anything to make all this horror disappear. Right before it claimed me, at that thin line between real and unreal, something very faint brushed against my senses. A tingle of recognition prickled me. But that wasn't right. That wasn't my brother's voice.

Dad?

Nothing but empty air filled my mind. I chastised myself. *You're just hoping for a miracle now.* Females weren't meant to change. I'd heard that line my entire life. How could they change when they weren't supposed to *exist*? I was a mistake, I'd always been a mistake, and there was nothing my father could do to help me now.

Pain rushed up, exploding my mind. Its fury breaking me apart once again.

Jessica, Jessica, can you hear me? We're on our way. Stay with us. Just a few more minutes! Jessica… Hang in there, honey. Jess!

I can't, Dad. I just can't.



Blood.

Fear shot through me like a cold spear. I lifted my nose and scented the air. Coolness ran along my back, forcing my hair to rise, prickling my skin. I shivered. My labored breaths echoed too loudly in my sensitive ears. I peered into the darkness, inhaling deeply again.

Blood.

A rumble of sounds bubbled up from beneath me and I inched back into the corner and whined. The thrumming from my chest surrounded me, enveloping me in my own fear.

Out.

I leapt forward. My claws slid out in front of me, sending me tumbling as I scrabbled for purchase on the smooth surface. I picked myself up, plunging down a dark tunnel into a bigger space. All around me things shattered and exploded, scaring me. I vaulted onto something big, my claws slicing through it easily. I sailed off, landing inches from the sliver of light.

Out.

My ears pricked. I lowered my nose to the ground, inhaling as the sounds hit me. Images shifted in my brain. *Humans, fear, noise… harm.* A low mewing sound came from the back of my throat. A loud noise rattled above my head. I jumped back, swiveling away, searching.

Then I saw it.

Out.

I leapt toward the moonlight, striking the barrier hard. It gave way instantly, shattering. I extended myself, power coursed through my body. The ground rushed up quickly, my front paws crashing onto something solid, my jaws snapping together

fiercely with the force of the impact. The thing beneath me collapsed with a loud, grating noise. Without hesitation I hit the ground.

Run.

I surged across hard surfaces, finding a narrow stretch of woods. I followed it until the few trees yielded to more land. I ran and ran. I ran until the smells no longer confused me, until the noises stopped their assault on my sensitive ears.

Hide.

I veered toward a deep thicket of trees. Once inside their safe enclave, I dove into the undergrowth. The scent pleased me as I wiggled beneath the low branches, concealing myself completely. Once I was settled, I stilled, perking my ears. I opened my mouth, drawing the damp air over my tongue, sampling it, my nostrils flared. The scents of the area came quickly, my brain categorizing them efficiently. The strong acidic stench of fresh leavings hung in the air.

Prey.

I cocked my head and listened. The faint sounds of rustling and grunting were almost undetectable. My ears twitched with interest. My stomach gave a long, low growl.

Eat.

I sampled the air again, testing it for the confusing smells, the smells I didn't like. I laid my head down and whimpered, the hunger gnawing at my insides, cramping me.

Eat, eat, eat.

I couldn't ignore it, the hunger consumed me, making me hurt. I crept slowly from my shelter beneath the trees to the clearing where the tall grass began. I lifted my head above the gently waving stalks and inhaled. They were near. I trotted through the darkness, soundless and strong. I slid into their enclosure, under the rough wooden obstacle with ease. I edged

farther into the darkness of the big den, my paws brushing against the old, stale grass, disturbing nothing more.

Prey.

The wind shifted across my back. They scented me for the first time. Bleating their outrage, they stamped their hooves, angry at the intrusion. I slipped under another weak barrier, my body lithe and agile as I edged along the splintered wood. I spotted my prey.

Eat.

I lunged, my jaws shifting, my canines finding its neck, sinking in deeply. Sweet blood flowed into my mouth. My hunger blazed like an insatiable fire, and my eyes rolled back in my head in ecstasy. The animal tipped over, dying instantly as it landed in the dirty hay. I set upon it, tearing fiercely at its flesh, grabbing long hunks of meat and swallowing them whole.

"Goddamn wolves!"

My head jerked up at the noise, my eyes flickering with recognition.

Human.

"I'll teach you to come in here and mess around in my barn, you mangy piece of shit!"

Sound exploded and pain registered as I flew backward, crashing into the side of the enclosure. I tried to get up, but my claws slipped and skidded in the slippery mess. *Blood.* I readjusted, gaining traction, and launched myself in the air. The pungent smell of fear hit me, making my insides quiver with need.

Kill.

A deep growl erupted from inside my throat, my fangs lashing. My paws hit their target, bringing us both down with a crash.

Mine.

I tore into flesh, blood pooled on my tongue.

"Please . . . don't . . ."

No!

I stopped.

No!

I backed away.

"Bob, you all right out there?"

Danger.

Out.

I loped forward, limping along in the shadows. I spotted a small opening, jumped, and landed with a painful hiss. My back leg buckled beneath me, but I had to keep moving.

Run.

I ran, scooting under the barrier. A scream of alarm rent the air behind me. I ran and ran until I saw only darkness.

Rest.

I crawled beneath a thick canopy of leaves, my body curling in on itself. I licked my wound. There was too much damage. I closed my eyes. Instantly images flashed through my mind one by one.

Man, boy . . . woman.

I focused on her.

I *needed* her.

Jessica.

I called her back to me.

She came willingly.



Jessica! Jessica! Honey, can you hear me? Answer me!

Jess, it's Ty. You have to listen to Dad and wake the hell *up!*

My brain felt foggy, like a thick layer of moss coated it from the inside.

Jessica, you answer me right now! Jessica. Jessica!

"Dad?"

I squinted into the sunlight filtering through a canopy of branches a few feet above my head. I was human again. I had no idea how that had happened, but I was relieved. I tried to move, but pain snapped me back to reality the instant my leg twitched.

With the pain came everything else.

The change, the escape, the poor farmer. I shuddered as the memories hit me like a flickering film reel, a snippet of my life one sordid frame at a time. I'd been there, I'd seen it, but I hadn't been in control for any of it—except at the very end. I hoped like hell the farmer was still alive. Saying *no* had taken so much effort, I couldn't remember anything at all after that. I had no idea where I was.

From everything I knew about wolves, not being in control was an extremely bad sign. If I couldn't subdue my wolf—couldn't master my Dominion over the new beast inside me—I wouldn't be allowed to live.

Holy shit, I'm a wolf.

I lifted my head and glanced down the length of my very exposed, very naked body. I focused on my injury and watched as my skin slowly knit back together. *Incredible.* I'd seen it happen before on others, but until now I'd never been in the super healing category myself. Young male wolves gained their abilities after their first shift. My body must still be adjusting, because my hip was still one big mash of ugly muscle. Dried blood stained my entire right side, and the heart of the gunshot wound resembled a plate of raw hamburger.

Thankfully there was no bone showing. If there'd been

bone, there would've been bile. Now that I was awake and moving, the pain had increased.

I closed my eyes and laid my head back on the ground. My encounter last night better not have been a normal night out for a new werewolf. If it was, I was so screwed.

Jessica!

My head shot up so fast it slammed into a pointy twig. *Ow.* "Dad?" So it hadn't been my imagination after all. I knew the Alpha could communicate with his wolves internally, but hearing his voice was new to me. I concentrated on listening. Nothing. I projected a tentative thought outward like I used to do with my brother.

Dad?

Oh my God, Jessica! Are you all right? Answer me!

Yes! I can hear you! I'm fine, er . . . at least I think I am. I'm in pain, and I can't really move very well, but I'm alive. My hip looks like it went through a meat grinder, but it's mending itself slowly.

Stay where you are. We'll be right there. I lost your scent for a time, but we're back on your trail now.

Okay. I'm under some thick brush, but I have no idea where. I can't get out because of my leg.

Snort. *You're not healed yet?*

Tyler?

Who else would it be?

Hearing my brother's voice in my head released a flood of emotion. I hadn't realized how much I'd missed it until right this second. *It's safe to say I wasn't expecting you back in my brain. We haven't been able to do this since we were kids, but it's good to hear you now.*

Tyler's thoughts shifted then, becoming heavier, like a low, thick whisper tugging along the folds of my mind. *Jess, I heard you calling me last night. You know, when it first happened. It*

sounded awful, like you were dying or something. I'm so sorry I didn't make it there in time. I tried. I was too late.

It's okay, Tyler. We haven't been able to communicate like this in so long, I really wasn't expecting it to work. It was a last-ditch effort on my part to take my mind off the brutal, scary, painful transition process. Don't worry about it. There wasn't anything you could've done anyway. It happened mind-bogglingly fast. Almost too fast to process. My heart caught for a second remembering it.

I heard, or maybe felt, a stumble and a grunted oath. *You'll get used to it*, Tyler said. *The change gets easier after you do it a few more times. Hold on, I think we're almost to you. We lost your scent back at the barn. Jesus, you ripped that place apart. There was blood everywhere.*

An ugly replay started in my mind before I could shut it down. *I hope the farmer survived.* I shifted my body slightly and winced as a bolt of pain shot up my spine. My injuries would've killed a regular human. I was clearly going to survive, but it still hurt like hell.

My dad's anxiety settled in sharp tones in my mind. *We're close, Jessica. By the time we picked up your scent on the other side of the barn, we had to wait for the human police and ambulance to leave. It shouldn't be long now. Stay right where you are and don't move. Your scent grows stronger every moment.*

Yeah, you smell like a girl. It's weird.

Maybe that's because I am one. Or have you forgotten because you haven't seen me in so long?

Nope, I haven't forgotten, but you don't smell like a regular wolf, Tyler said. *Wolves smell, I don't know, kind of rustic and earthy. You smell too female, almost like perfume. It sort of makes me gag.* I could feel him give a small cough in the center of my mind, which was totally bizarre.

Then I should be easy for you to find.

Snort.

We'll be right there, my dad assured me. *Don't worry. We've got a car not too far from here waiting to take you back to the Compound.*

All this effort to communicate was taking its toll, and my head began to ache in earnest. The pain in my hip flared and a whooshing noise started in my ears. *I'm feeling a little woozy all of a sudden…*

Hang on—