

# PROLOGUE

The moon hung low over Blackthorn Manor, veiled in a haze of crimson fog. Within its walls, the screams had already begun.

Lord Alaric Blackthorn stood alone in the grand hall, his fine clothes drenched in blood. Around him sprawled the bodies of his guests—faces contorted in frozen terror. His wife, Celeste, knelt before him, her white gown torn and stained scarlet.

“You brought this upon us,” she hissed. “You and your obsession with the old rites!”

## THE FIRST NIGHT