

BLOOD ON THE MOUNTAIN

David Burton



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Blood on the Mountain

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Blood Justice

Blood on the Water

Blood on the Bayou

Blood on the Mountain

*Dedicated to all those who go to the mountains
not to save the mortal world, but to appreciate
their beauty. And, of course, to Dee.*

Chapter 1

Around ten o'clock at night a few days after Justine returned, someone knocked on Harry Frazier's apartment door. Harry grinned. Justine must have forgotten her keys again. She'd only been gone two hours, shopping and just looking around. He knew she was trying to reconnect with her home after the last few months away. His grin faded. Why bother to reconnect when she'd be leaving again to go after Teresa?

He muted the TV and pushed up off his comfy couch. Aware of the pitfalls of mortal-vampire romance, he still loved her. He'd take any time with her he could.

Expecting her, he opened the door.

But it wasn't Justine with her cute pouty chagrined expression.

Two men stood there, caps pulled low over pale faces, one man slightly behind and to the side of the other.

Vampires. Harry sucked in a steady breath. Not all vamps were bad. They might be from Darwin. Maybe they knew Justine.

"You Harry Frazier?" the front one, who had wide-set eyes and wide shoulders, asked.

By the tone of the guy's voice and the tension in his shoulders Harry knew they weren't good vamps. "Who wants to know?"

The second man, burly with a wide frog mouth, handed Shoulders a photo.

"You're him," Shoulders said.

Harry slammed the door, then reached for a gun stashed under a small table next to it.

The door crashed open, splinters flying from the shattered jamb.

Harry grabbed his gun as Shoulders seized his arm and flung him onto the floor.

Shoulders dropped to his knees and opened his jaw inhumanly wide while twisting Harry's head to expose his neck. Intent on blood, the vamp forgot about the gun.

Harry couldn't get a shot at his head. But two bullets into his body got Shoulder's attention.

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At the door Frog had opened his mouth and extended his canines in anticipation of his share of Harry's blood. Before he stepped into the room, the staccato of rapid footsteps mounting the stairs outside distracted him.

Justine smashed into Frog. They tumbled onto the open landing, coming to a stop in front of Bailey's door. Frog was a tough one. He threw Justine off him. She smacked hard into the door. But Justine was tough, too. In full vampire and Kung Fu mode she kicked his leg. He returned with a punch to her ribs, the crack loud in the quiet night. She straightened up with a punch to his body, a punch to his jaw, and a sweep that knocked his legs out from under him.

He fell right on his ass.

With Frog stunned for a moment, Justine yanked a slim, modified machete from its sheath strapped to her thigh under her khaki trousers. It took her three strikes to cut through his thick neck. The head rolled between his legs and stopped a few inches away from Bailey's bare feet.

Still with full vamp face, Justine looked up at Bailey staring down at the head. Bailey's face couldn't decide what emotion to show. Justine didn't know either.

Two gunshots came from Harry's apartment. Justine ran to Harry so fast she appeared to vanish from Bailey's sight.

Shoulders gripped Harry's gun hand by the wrist. His other hand forced Harry's neck toward his wide open jaws.

Justine rammed her blade through the back of the vampire's neck, separating his spinal cord. She wrenched her blade right to sever half his neck. With one long stroke she cut through the other half, catching the head before it hit the floor.

"Hooo...ly shit," Bailey said from the door. Behind her, her partner Susan took in the scene with wide eyes and hands over her open mouth.

Justine froze with full vamp face, bloody blade in one hand, severed head in the other. The only movement was Shoulder's body slumping to the floor.

Still facing the women, Justine slowly set down the head, and brought her face back to normal. To Harry she said, "I guess it's time to have the talk."

Two hours later Bailey and Susan left. Bailey said, "Thanks for finally telling us, ah...everything. It definitely wasn't what I thought it would be. I'd give you guys a hug, but I'm still a little weirded out by it all."

Susan, who'd said little, seemed to accept the situation more easily than her partner. "Doesn't mean we won't let you borrow a cup of sugar if you need it."

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Snuggling on the couch a few minutes later, Harry said, "That went better than I thought it might."

"I just hope I never have to do it again." A few minutes later, Justine asked, "Do you think that was the last of the Sinakov followers who'll come after us?"

"No." Harry took a deep breath. "You're going after Teresa soon, aren't you?"

"I talked to Simone earlier. The Families have a good lead on where she is."

"When are you leaving?"

"Day after tomorrow."

"Where to?"

She sat up and faced him. She took his hand in hers and flashed him a sly smile. "You ever been to Columbia, Harry?"

Harry had never been to Columbia, but as he gazed at her crooked little smile and her dark vampire eyes that nevertheless had a slight twinkle in them, he knew he'd go wherever she asked.

He'd been in love with her since they first met, when he was investigating the auto accident that killed her husband and the woman he was running away with. He didn't see her again for some years, until the brutal murder of her daughter. Vampires were a myth to him until Justine persuaded the three-hundred and seventy-something year old vampire Simone Gireaux to make her a vampire, as well. It was the only way to get justice for her daughter.

Since then he'd had more than his share of dealings with vampires—good and bad.

Chapter 2

Ever alert, Justine Kroft and Simone Gireaux followed two other vampires, guides from the Guerro Vampire Family, through the streets of Cartagena, Columbia. They each had a 9mm pistol under their long coats and a machete held along their forearms.

“Stay alert,” one of the vamps warned. “Rubicon’s people could be anywhere.”

It was ten at night, in an area tourists were advised to avoid. Justine and Simone were not worried about pickpockets or purse snatchers or any other interference, even without their local guides. They’d dealt with much more dangerous creatures than some small-time criminals.

They walked down a narrow dirt street past small pastel colored houses, most fronted with low concrete walls topped by security bars, the flicker of televisions their only illumination. Occasionally eyes peeked from behind curtains. The streets were deserted but for the four of them.

At an intersection with a slightly wider street, this one showing the remnants of an asphalt surface, their guides stopped. They inspected the cross street, then pointed to a larger two story, pastel blue house on the corner.

“Entramos allí.”

Justine studied the thicker, taller wall and bars that surrounded the house. “Looks like a safe house to me. I hope we can get out.”

Simone squeezed her arm in agreement.

A patio on the right side of the house had a tile roof that continued around the house. A wide gate to the left allowed access to a three-car garage with an apartment above it, separated from the house by a breezeway wide enough to drive through.

A male vampire opened the heavy front gate from the inside. The last one to enter, Justine hesitated. She felt something—other vampires. They were in the Guerro Family territory so of course she’d sense them in the area. Vampires can sense other vampires, but she sensed many at a distance who—possibly just her paranoia—seemed to be

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concentrating on her. Gripping the hilt of the machete pressed back against her forearm, she stepped warily through the gate. She started as the gate clanged shut with solid finality.

Another vamp opened the front door. Inside Justine took in the wonderful smells of spicy Columbian cooking and, to her, time-wise still a young Blood, the not so appealing aroma of old blood and old death. Maybe in a few decades or centuries she'd appreciate it.

Their guides led them upstairs and down a long hall. Justine figured they were about to enter a room above the patio.

"¿Hablas español?" the woman guide asked. "He English not so good."

"Sí. Los dos hablamos español," Simone said.

The woman shrugged and nodded to her partner who unlocked the door. "Please not to kill him."

"We'll try," Justine said and entered the room.

Jorge Cortez hunched over as he wrapped thin arms around his emaciated body. The skin on his long face hung slack as if he'd lost a lot of weight quickly. The last few weeks had been hard on him: kidnapped by the Guerro Family and held hostage for Justine and Simone. He stared at the two women with eyes sunken by worry and fear.

"Señor Cortez," Justine said. "We have only a few questions. Answer them and you will be free to go."

With a voice as defeated as he looked, Cortez said, "Go where? Everybody want to kill me. That is why you here?"

"Non, Señor, we wish you a long life," Simone reassured him.

"Huh." Looking at the floor in resignation, he said, *"¿Qué deseas?"*

"We want—"

A loud cry and several gunshots interrupted her. The clang of machetes, a few more shots, and cries cut short were followed by footsteps running up stairs and down the hall.

The male guard shouted into the room, "Rubicon's people found us. Guard him."

"They'll never stop them," Justine said. "The window."

Justine slammed and locked the door. Simone raised the window and kicked out the bars that blocked it on the outside. At full speed she slipped through the window onto the short patio roof. Justine dragged Cortez to the window and pushed him through while Simone pulled.

The attackers hammered on the door, shaking the house. A kick splintered the jamb.

Justine said, "Take him. I'll slow them down." She readied her machete and stood against the outside wall next to the window. Simone lifted Cortez and jumped off the roof.

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The first vamp, a male, stuck his bald head out the window. “¡Ahí!” he said, pointing at Simone and Cortez.

Justine cut his head off with one swipe of her razor-sharp blade. She grabbed his arm and yanked the rest of him through the window. The second vamp, a young guy with a white sidewall haircut, stuck his head out. He saw Justine, too late. His head rolled down the roof and landed with a thump on the grass. She grabbed his jacket, hauled his body halfway through the window, then took his long blade and jammed it through him into the wooden sill. She pulled the window closed on him then jumped off the roof and joined Simone.

In seconds they were over the high back wall and hustling Cortez down an alley. They turned right onto a wide deserted street lined mostly with small businesses, none of which were open.

“So where to?” Justine asked. “I don’t think the Guerros are going to be much help at the moment.”

“I do not know,” Simone said. “I do not know this city. We must find shelter. Perhaps a hotel?”

“Are you going to kill me?” Cortez asked.

Justine said, “I hope not.”

“I have small *hacienda* outside the city. You *Americanos* may call it a ranch.”

“Would not everybody know where you live?”

“It is my getaway place. Nobody knows it. Nobody lives there. It is under a different name.”

“How far?”

“Perhaps thirty kilometers.”

“We’ll need a car.” Justine scanned the street for vehicles. There were not many. With her enhanced night vision she spied a forty year old Chevrolet sedan that looked like it hadn’t been washed since it drove off the lot. “Next block. An old Chevy. If we can make it without getting killed.”

“They are searching. We must go now, *vite*,” Simone whispered. “We carry him.”

“No, I walk,” Cortez insisted.

“No, we carry you.”

Ignoring his protests, the two vamps grabbed his upper arms and ran to the car, reaching it in about five seconds. A quick search of the unlocked car produced no keys. No problem. Justine had had the foresight to learn some things from Harry, her mortal detective lover, when they had some time together. Without need of a flashlight and with her

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superior strength she had the old Chevy running in a minute.

Justine slipped behind the wheel and asked Cortez, "Where to, Señor? And while we're going there, tell us all about Switzerland."

Cortez guided them out of town and onto 90B, a good four lane highway which at that late hour was mostly populated by trucks, big and small. Small trees lined the highway that went through an otherwise arid landscape.

"Anybody following us?" Simon asked.

"Not that I can see. A couple pickups followed for a while then turned off."

Simone, sitting in the passenger seat, turned around and caught Cortez's gaze. With her no-nonsense glamour voice she asked, "Señor Cortez, anybody else know about this house?"

"*Mi amante.*"

"Your mistress? *Mon Dieu.*"

Justine said over her shoulder, "Does she love you?"

Pure misery. "No."

"So she would, will, tell. Probably won't even need a vamp to ask."

"Do the Guerros know about her?"

"*Si.*" More misery.

Justine said, "Okay, I think the Guerros have a traitor. Those attackers didn't just happen to be there. We have to assume that Rubicon's minions know about her and have already found out about your little love nest."

Simone, looking out the back window, said, "A vehicle, approaching fast."

All three tensed, watched the approaching headlights. The vehicle, an old pickup, came up on their bumper then swerved into the left lane and passed them. It continued at speed and was quickly lost to sight.

"*Mon Dieu*, I thought maybe we have to fight. But, Justine, did you sense a vamp?"

"Maybe. They went by pretty fast. How much farther, Señor Cortez?"

"Two or three kilometers."

"Where is Rubicon's laboratory and how do we get in?"

"You will kill me if I tell you?"

Simone turned and said, "Señor, we will kill you if you do not. Speak."

With no choice, he told them.

Afterwards, Justine said to Simone, "You're the language maven here. Did you understand what he said?"

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"Oui...and non."

"Great. Señor, can you explain—"

"Aquí," Cortez said. *"Por mi casa, a la izquierda aquí."*

Justine stomped the brakes and turned left onto a dirt road barely wide enough for two vehicles to pass. On the right side of the road, a few clumps of trees rose from the dry landscape. On the left, a steep bank about a meter high opened onto a sloping field.

"Dos kilometres mas," he said. *"¡Atención!"*

A pickup truck raced out of a dirt track on the left and slammed into the old Chevy broadside, driving it off the road into a tree. The right side door gave way, crushing Simone against Justine. It happened so fast neither of the vamps even had time to swear before they briefly lost consciousness.

Chapter 3

“**S**hit!”
“Merde!”

Justine hurt. Her left side hurt from the pickup and her right from smashing into Simone. A glance to her right revealed a rough tree trunk much closer than it should be.

“*Ca va*, Justine?”

“Yeah, I’m great. Just great.”

“That is good to hear,” a German tinged male voice said from outside. “She will be so pleased.”

Justine looked left. Through the window a pale square face grinned with cheerful vampire malevolence. He somehow looked familiar.

“If you are feeling so great, you may come out.” He reached in and grabbed her head. Still groggy, Justine didn’t put up much of a fight. A second man, with dark hair and dark eyes in a pale square face, aiming a shotgun at her may have been a factor.

Once free of the wrecked car, she hit the back of the first vamp’s knees and tried to twist away. All she got for her effort was a smack on the head with the shotgun barrel and her arms held behind her back with heavy made-for-vamps handcuffs.

While Familiar-German guy knelt on Justine’s back, Dark Hair reached in and grabbed Simone’s arm to pull her out. Once she was outside of the car, Simone drew a small knife strapped to her leg and jammed it into his arm.

“*Hündin!*” Dark Hair let go. Simone pushed hard against the smashed door, propelling her clear of the wreck and into Dark Hair. They tumbled onto the dry ground, Simone on top. She stabbed his body a couple of times. Those wounds would have incapacitated or killed a human. She tried for his neck, but that just pissed him off.

He blocked her strike, gripped her arm and twisted her off him. As he rolled over her she managed to jam her knee into his crotch. Human or Vampire, a knee to the balls has a similar effect. That small distraction was all she needed. With full force, she swung her small blade into

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his neck and sliced halfway through. Springing to her feet, she drew out a well-used, thin bladed machete and with a backhanded stroke jammed the blade through his skull.

Without a thought to the fully dead vampire—in her three hundred and seventy some years she'd taken her fair share of heads—Simone turned to Justine and Familiar German guy.

Still kneeling on Justine, he held the shotgun to her head. "She will not be happy if I have to shoot off her head."

Simone and Justine locked eyes.

"She?"

They knew it couldn't be anyone else. "The Girl," they said in unison.

"I believe you are acquainted with her, *ja*?"

"*Oui*." Simone flipped her machete, caught it by the blade.

"Do not do it," he warned. "Even without my head, I will shoot your friend."

Simone flung the machete sideways at the German—not at his head, but the arm holding the gun. The razor-sharp blade sliced through his wrist before his finger could pull the trigger. The gun and hand dropped away. She ran up and kicked him in the chest, sending him sprawling in the dust. Leaping to his side, she raised her blade to take off his head.

Behind Simone another vamp, a young Hispanic with neck tattoos, rushed out of the dark toward her. Justine, on her back, kicked him as he rushed by, making him sprawl into a tough desiccated bush.

"Simone!"

Simone spun, took a step and struck, removing the top half of the Hispanic vamp's skull. In one fluid motion born of centuries of fending for herself, she whirled back, looping her blade down on German's neck.

On her feet, Justine said, "Nice move."

"*Merci*. One or two hundred years from now you will do the same."

"Something to look forward to. Can we get me out of these things?"

Key in hand, Simone moved toward Justine. A shotgun blast grazed her leg, knocking her to one knee. Four vamps appeared, well armed and all with no-bullshit attitudes. "*Guten nacht*, Simone," a square-faced vamp with long black hair said pleasantly. "She will not be pleased. Hans was a favorite."

"You take orders from The Girl, now?" Justine asked, not trying to disguise the implied, "You pussy."

He shrugged, "What Rubicon wants, The Girl wants. You will come with us and tomorrow night she will speak with you. With some pain, I expect. Come."

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"Cortez?" Justine asked.

"Dead. Did he tell you his secret?"

"That he had a private *casa* around here? Yes."

In an instant Square-face pressed his blade to her neck. "That is not the secret I mean. As you well know."

Justine looked over at the wrecked car. Cortez slumped in the back, his bloody head at a very wrong angle. With a shrug she said, "No. Nothing. *Nada*. He was waiting until he was safe in his *casa*."

Square-face stepped back. "You should have told him he was not safe until he told you."

She pointed with her chin. "I don't think he would have been safe, either way."

He chuffed. "Perhaps. Come. Or do you want to walk back in the sun?"

If the four had been mortal, Justine and Simone would have had no trouble escaping. With those four vamps, they had no chance, so they went.

In two SUVs, one the requisite black, one dark green, they transported Justine and Simone, in separate vehicles, back into Cartagena. Once through a private gate into a compound attached to a large two story pink colonial mansion, more vamps escorted them into a four-vehicle garage and down stairs where they were shoved into a solid looking room with a thick wooden door.

Once the door thumped shut and the bolts shot, Justine said, "Once again, alone at last."

"So it seems. Perhaps a white knight will rescue us."

"He'd better. But I'd prefer to do it myself."

"I am waiting."

Chapter 4

Harry Frazier wasn't happy. He didn't like the hotel room because the AC didn't work most of the time. It wasn't that he didn't like the local food, it was more that it didn't like him. He was used to simple, plain, non-spicy fare. Most of all he didn't like being left behind, and he didn't like that the trackers that Justine and Simone wore had disappeared out of range.

He didn't like to worry, either. But he did. Those two women could take care of themselves, but they did have a penchant for getting into trouble. They were headed south into open land. Where the hell were they going?

The door opened behind him. It was supposed to be locked. Hand on the gun in his lap, he turned to look. He saw a woman, her long dark hair in a ponytail, with a full mouth and intense dark eyes, probably thirty-five years old when she died. "Jade, you could have knocked."

"Señor Harry," she replied with a fetching, if fake, smile. "It is more interesting to enter a man's room unannounced."

Harry shrugged agreement. "Is Jade your real name, or do you just use it to project badassery?"

"It is my real name, *gracias madre y padre*. I do not need a special name for my badassery."

Harry turned back to the computer. "I'm sure you don't. They've gone out of range. Where is that?"

Jade leaned over Harry, her cheek next to his. He knew she did it to unsettle him, but for reasons of self-preservation he made himself ignore it.

"Ah, *si*. Cortez has a secret *casa* in that area."

"Do you know exactly where it is?"

"No." She plopped onto a well-stuffed floral print armchair. She crossed her arms and allowed a who-gives-a-shit smile to curve her full lips.

"Who does?"

"Tito maybe." Tito, the head of the Family who actually made sure stuff got done.

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"How long to get there?"

"Driving, a half hour. If I turn into a bat, ten minutes."

"Funny. I don't like that she didn't call to tell me where they were going."

"I think they were in a hurry."

He swiveled in his chair and gave her his best non-glamour mortal stare. "You think?"

"They were attacked at our safe house. They had to run with Cortez. He is taking them to his *romántico escondite secreto*."

"Who attacked? Never mind, it had to be Rubicon's minions. Why are you here?" He waved his hands in the air. "Why aren't you out... doing... something?"

Jade sat forward in her seat. "Harry, my job is to protect you. You and Justine are *amantes*. Yes?" Harry jerked a nod. "If Rubicon's people had you, what would Justine do?"

To calm himself, he sucked in deep breaths. He knew what she'd do. She'd come after him, exposing herself to a trap—to The Girl.

"You think you can protect me against Rubicon's unlimited minions?"

Jade grinned. "I am a badass, remember?" She looked past him and pointed at the computer.

Harry saw two dots traveling up the same road they'd traveled down. "Looks like they're coming back. And they're in a hurry. Why don't they call?"

Two minutes later he called Justine. Voice mail. He tried Simone's number. Voice mail.

"Something's wrong." Three minutes later he asked Jade. "Where are they going? They just turned away from here."

In a second she was there, studying the map of Cartagena on the screen. "*Mierda*. I think your friends have been *secuestrado*. Kidnapped."

"Kidnapped? How the hell could they get kidnapped? You said that was open country. And how would Rubicon's minions know where they were going? Justine and Simone didn't know anything about Cortez's *casa*."

Thinking hard, Jade said, "*Yo no sais*."

"Who else knew about Cortez's *secret* hideaway?"

Together they said, "*La novia*." "The girlfriend."

"Follow them. Find the address where they stop." Jade snatched up her cell and had several conversations in rapid Spanish.

Harry, barely able to keep himself from running out the door after

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the moving dot, stared at it, willing it to turn toward the house they had rented on their own. Jade was the only Guerro vampire who knew its location.

"The girlfriend is dead," Jade said.

Harry blew out a deep breath. "Vampire?"

"Si. And several of the Family."

Eyes on the dot, Harry slumped back in his seat. "So when Rubicon's people missed Cortez at your safe house.... How did they find that house so quickly? Someone tipped them off as soon as they arrived. You have a traitor."

Standing beside him, Jade stared at the dot slowly moving through Cartagena's Old Town. "Ricardo," she said through clenched teeth. "He is not happy here. He wants to live the big life, move up to big cities: Paris, London, Hong Kong; Palaces, Society, Money. A promise from Rubicon and he would turn on his Family."

"If you can't trust your Vampire Family, who can you trust? They've stopped. Do you know where that is?"

"Si. Yo sais."

Harry jumped up. "Let's go get them. Can you get some backup?"

"I am your backup."

"What? What about others in your Family? We need help."

Harry felt a pressure on his chest that slammed him back against the wall. Jade held him there with his feet a foot off the floor. Eyes wide with surprise, he stared down at her, watched her two vampire teeth emerge from her snarl.

"You want the 'others' in my Family to help. Many of them are dead, mortal. Many are injured. Many are on the run from Rubicon's little army. The army that is here because we... helped... you. You want to find your witch friend. But we are paying the price. The only reason I don't rip your throat out is because Simone did our Family a great service in the past. We owe her a debt. I owe her a debt. I will help you find your *Bruja*, but do not push it, *¿entiendes, sangre?*"

Harry did. "I'm sorry. This was supposed to be a quick, quiet in and out operation. I'm sorry the Guerro Family got caught up in this. Maybe it doesn't matter now, but we very much appreciate your help. I believe that rescuing Teresa is important to everybody, vampire and mortal."

He felt her eyes penetrate deep into his, searching for truth. Then Jade dropped him and went to stare at the two dots on the computer.

Unnerved, Harry dropped to a crouch against the wall. He was a vampire's lover, had fought with them and against them, had faced one

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of the most dangerous vampires around, yet this brief encounter with Jade had unsettled him more than any other, enhanced as it was by guilt. As a cop for 18 years he had rarely felt guilt for what happened to the peripheral persons—families, kids, employees—when he arrested someone. The guilt for ruined lives was on the criminal, not him.

But there were only sixteen members of the Guerro Vampire Family in Cartagena. How many were left? Twelve? Ten? And it was Justine's and Simone's and his fault. He chuffed and stood up. They were vampires, already dead, and he felt guilty. Showed how hanging around vamps could skew one's priorities.

"*Vamos, mortal...* Harry. We go and save your friends. Then you go and save the world, yes?"

"*Si.*"

Harry grabbed his .38, jammed it into his belt holster, checked that his machete was loose in its hidden scabbard along his right thigh and followed Jade out the door and down the stairs. They banged through the heavy metal gate and headed for Jade's car.

Jade stopped, head raised as if searching for a scent. As she reached for her blade two vamps rushed from the bushes, slamming her against the car.

Holding her by the neck against her car, a young pie-faced Black vamp said, "*Non, chienne Guerrero, we will take over the world.*"

"Maybe, but not you." With a free arm Jade reached into her pocket, pulled out a switchblade with a four inch blade, stabbed him in the belly and slit him open to his chest. Not a killing blow, but it got his attention.

He backed off, gaping at his guts spilling out. Jade stepped forward ready to swing her blade at his neck. But the other vamp, also young with a pockmarked face, punched her chest, knocking her down. He raised his machete to take her head.

Harry didn't hesitate. He shot the pockmarked vamp in the head. The vamp was down and out, but Harry wasn't taking any chances. He knew by experience that until the head was off and destroyed a vampire was still dangerous. He stepped up and with one practiced swipe decapitated the vamp.

The gutted vamp grabbed Harry's arm with the hand that wasn't holding in his intestines. He head-butted Harry and reached for his blade. That's as far as he got before Jade split his head, topknot to neck.

While Harry caught his breath, they both scanned for more attacks. Except for several dogs barking, all was quiet.

"*¿Estás bien?*" Jade asked.

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Harry shook himself. "A bit of a headache." He studied the black blood handprint on his sleeve. "A sore arm and a ruined shirt. But okay. Thanks."

"We are even, I think."

Harry nodded. "*Vamos.*"

Chapter 5

While they waited, Justine inspected the room. There was no way to get out without explosives, except the door. Sure, they could beat a hole with their fists through the concrete walls, in about a year or two. They were not in a comic book and their superpowers were limited.

"I don't think this room was made to be a cell," Justine said as she roamed the fifteen by ten foot chamber.

"A storeroom, *probablement*," Simone said as she circled the room in the opposite direction.

They came together by the wooden door, which had thick rusty iron straps and a five inch square peep hole covered by a steel plate on the outside. Justine touched the door. "Wood, old, two inches thick. What do you think?"

Standing off to the side, Simone said, "Maybe try the peephole first?"

"Sure, why not?" Justine flexed a fist.

Too late—Simone punched through the hole. The steel plate slammed back on its hinges. She stepped back, then graciously said, "You can look."

"Show off."

Justine put her eye to the peephole, then jumped back as the muzzle of a shotgun poked through.

A deep German accented voice said, "You are to be kept in one piece, but if you come through I will shoot you. *Sie verstehen?*" He didn't give them a chance to respond, just withdrew the gun and slammed shut the plate.

"Oookay," Justine said to the room. They looked at each other with raised eyebrows, then sat down against the concrete wall covered with crumbling stucco, out of sight of the peephole.

Simone broke a few minutes of silence. "Do you think Harry will remain *un policier* when you return home?"

"I think he wants a regular life."

"With you."

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"Fool that he is."

"Did you think your life would be like this when you asked me to change you?"

"I wasn't thinking of anything but finding Sinakov and killing him."

"Which you did."

"Sort of. I had to do it twice."

"And you, a regular life?"

Justine laid her head back against the wall. After a humorless chuckle, she said, "I don't know what a regular life is anymore. Maybe when Teresa is safe we can all go back to Oceanside and be one big happy family. That includes you."

"Maybe, but *chère*, even for vampires we have to live one day at a time."

"Yeah, guess so."

After a few minutes of reflection Justine said, "You know, he only said he'd shoot if we came through. Did he mean just the peephole?"

"*C'est vrai*, I think. He said nothing about through the door."

"No, he didn't."

Simone stayed relaxed. "Do you think Harry will come to rescue us? I do not know if I trust the new trackers in us to work."

"I'm sure they do and he will, but it might be easier for him if the door is open."

"*C'est vrai, ma amie. C'est vrai..*"



At three-thirty in the morning Jade drove slowly past the gates. "This is one of the oldest houses in Cartagena, maybe two hundred years old. You can rent it for ten thousand dollars a week."

"Have you been in it?"

"Once, years ago. A party. It is very lavish, though I did not see much, the first floor and one of the bedrooms." She flashed a grin. "Mostly the bedroom."

"I don't think that will help much. There's probably a dungeon. You know any back doors?" He checked his laptop. As far as he could tell Justine and Simone were within three hundred feet of them.

She parked the car half a block down. "I wasn't staring at the ceiling all the time in that bedroom." She gave him an eyebrows up leer and punched him lightly on the arm. "*¡Vamonos!*"

At that time of the morning only the occasional rumble of a truck on the main street broke the silence.

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Jade led Harry down the cross street, then left to a three story business building in back of the mansion. A heavy gate blocked the main entrance, but Jade stopped at a small gate that led to the side of the neighboring single-story building.

A chain and standard padlock secured the gate. Jade gripped the chain to break it.

Harry said, "I've got it. No need to break anything. Or make any noise." He pulled out a small leather pouch and in thirty seconds the lock popped open. Harry stepped back and swept a hand to the open gate. "After you."

"*Sabelotodo*," she said with a shake of her head. She placed a finger to his lips. "*Silencio*."

They moved down a narrow passage between the small building and an eight foot brick wall. At the back of the building an open space contained three company pickups, two battered dumpsters, and a storage container in the corner next to the wall. Jade pointed to the top of it.

Harry looked up the eight feet to the top, then at Jade. Hands out, he shrugged the question.

In answer, Jade stood next to the container and locked fingers. Harry took a deep breath and stepped onto her hands. Effortlessly, she boosted him up so he could almost step right onto the container's top. One leap and Jade landed beside him.

From the corner they looked into the mansion's back yard, seeing manicured grass, a profusion of flowers, and a fountain by a swimming pool surrounded by a stone patio.

Even with Harry's mortal vision he could see that the sliding doors into the house were open. He scanned for security cameras, finding none.

He whispered, "No cameras. Can you sense any vamps?"

"Three, I think. Maybe one at the front."

"Won't they sense you?"

"Yes, if they are paying attention. They are not expecting us, but we are expecting them."

"Door's open."

They dropped into the yard. Using the flowers and plants as cover, they crept along the wall to the corner of the patio. Weapons ready, they waited several minutes.

Seeing no movement, Jade whispered in his ear, "Four. I think three in the kitchen. Other, not sure."

"Let's go. If The Girl gets here before we get them out..."

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On full alert they moved to the sliding doors where they waited against the wall. They heard heavy footsteps approach down a long stone-floored hall. The footsteps stopped in the kitchen. A German accented voice said, "She has landed. She will be here in one half hour. Be ready. Check down."

Two voices, male and female, said, "*Si, señor Jost.*"

The footsteps receded. Jade darted a look, then indicated that Harry should go in first, then duck to the right next to the glass door.

Harry wasn't wild about that idea. With vamps inside shouldn't a vamp with a chance to survive go first? When he hesitated, she emphatically pointed to the right, grabbed his arm and guided him through.

Realizing she had a reason for him to duck right, he did just that. He felt the tug of a blade ripping his jacket. He spun to confront his attacker, but Jade had already struck off the vamp's hand and jammed her blade up under his chin far enough to pierce the top of his long-haired head. The poor guy never had a chance to utter a warning.

Jade dragged him outside and laid him on the stone patio, then entered the house. They were in a formal dining room with a table set for twelve. Many old paintings hung on the vertically striped multi-colored walls. Gold statues on carved marble pedestals guarded each corner. A wide hallway led to the front door. A swinging door on the left led to the kitchen. Jade headed that way.

With one finger she gently opened the door enough to peek through. Harry felt Jade tense. Anger flowed off her like a hot wave. He knew she was going to barge in, so he gripped her arm in warning.

Her glare warned him most emphatically not to fuck with her. Harry had been around enough vampires, including his lover Justine, not to be intimidated by a vampire's fierce glower, at least up to a point. He stared right back at her while moving his hand palm down.

Her anger turned to surprise that a mortal would not back down. Harry swiveled his head while keeping eye contact and used his finger to indicate the whole house. Jade didn't like it, but she got the drift. Though she didn't need to breathe, she sucked in a deep breath, squared her shoulders and slowly pushed the kitchen door open.

The vamp sitting at the kitchen table with his back to the door paid attention only to his cell phone. He wasn't the only one in the kitchen, as Jade realized as soon as she stepped into the room. From behind the kitchen door a large tattooed hand grabbed her and threw her to the floor. He stomped the hand that held her machete and kicked the blade away.

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“*¿Quien diablos eres tú?*” he asked in German accented Spanish, full of disdain. He chuffed and offered his own answer. “Some local slut vamp looking to steal something.”

The young vampire jumped to his feet. He held a machete and his cell phone. “Jade?”

“Roberto,” she replied with a sneer. She may have been down, but she still had a few moves. Spinning around, she slammed the back of the German’s legs with her knees. His legs buckled. She jumped up and struck his head with her elbow.

Turning away from the big vamp, she confronted Roberto, a Hispanic vamp of about 20 with long dark hair pulled into a tight ponytail. “*Tú eres el traidor.*”

Harry didn’t need a translator to know what Jade said, and that she was pissed.

Jade stood two feet away from Roberto and let loose a torrent of Spanish. “You told them where the safe house was. You betrayed your family. Coco and Sarah are full dead. Tomas, your cousin is full dead. Others, too, Jorge and Ozzie. You killed them.” She pushed his chest, forcing him against the wall. She poked his chest continuously as she spat, “Why Roberto? Why? The Guerro Family took you in when you were a Young Blood feeding on drunks and druggies and being hunted. We saved your ass and gave you a home. Gave you a Life. And now you betray us. *¿Por qué traidor ingrato? ¿Por qué?*”

“You gave me Life? One of you *took* my life. I was going to college and one of you killed me and left me.”

He slapped her hand away. “Yeah, you took me in and gave me a new Life as an errand boy and a janitor in one of your clubs. I told you I wanted to study electrical engineering, and you laughed. These guys promised to take me out of this shit hole to where I can study and get an education. I’ve had two lives and the Guerro Family has ruined both of them.”

He swung at her. She easily dodged and slammed him back against the wall, this time holding a knife at his throat.

“You stupid kid,” Jade said.

“I hate all of you. I hope they wipe you out. And I made sure they took Jorge’s head. He was the one who killed me.”

“You ungrateful little shit. Don’t you realize you had years to prove yourself, then years, decades, to study whatever you wanted. That’s finished now.”

The German vamp had stayed back and watched the two, ignoring

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the mortal in the doorway. He must have read Jade's body language or felt some vampire vibe that spurred him to action. Blade raised, to Harry's perception, the German appeared instantaneously next to Jade.

Jade snarled, "Jorge was my friend."

"Jade, behind you."

Too far gone in her rage, she sliced halfway through Roberto's neck.

Harry had no choice. He shot the German vamp in the head—a kill shot, even for a vampire.

Jade turned to see him fall, threw a glance at Harry, then pushed her blade through to Roberto's spine. "*Traidor!*" With both hands on the knife she cut through the bone. She jerked the knife out and stepped back. Roberto's body slid down the wall. As he hit the floor, his head toppled off to land between his legs.

Jade, still quivering with rage, stared at the head, then nudged it with her foot. "*Estúpido.*" Lips still twisted, she glanced at Harry, who kept his expression neutral. "*Gracias.*"

Harry nodded, then, "Look out!"

Jost, the head vamp, charged through the other kitchen door from the hallway and ran full speed into Jade. Both of them tumbled through the dining room door, knocking Harry on his ass. They slid across the floor until they slammed into the sliding door. In an instant they sprang up fighting.

Harry struggled to his feet and tried to follow the fight. He held his weapon with two hands, searching for an open shot at Jost. The kicks and punches were a blur. They destroyed several chairs as paintings and a mirror crashed to the floor.

Jost got in a strong kick to Jade's chest. She flew over the big table, landing with a crash of cutlery and fine china as she slid off.

Harry thought he had a clear shot. Jost saw him raise the gun. He flung a heavy china plate like a Frisbee before Harry could fire. The plate hit Harry's shoulder with incredible force. It shattered, slicing into his arm and sending tiny shrapnel across his face. The blow numbed his arm and the gun fell to the floor. Harry followed it to his knees.

Back on her feet, Jade flung two plates distracting Jost long enough for her to run around the table, smash into him and slam him against the wall. But he was tough. He spun her around and held her against the wall while he punched her body.

Harry had a clear shot except at his head. Fighting the pain, he picked up his gun with his left hand. Unsteady, his vision blurry, he aimed at Jost's legs and fired.

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Even for a vamp, getting shot with a .38 is a painful experience, and a distraction. Jade knelt Jost in the crotch and punched his head with her fist. Harry slid her machete across the floor. She snatched it up and without hesitation or ceremony cut off Jost's head. The only way Harry could tell she was hurting was that it took two swings to do it.

Jade slid down the wall to sit on the floor next to Harry. "I might have to start carrying a gun."

Eyes closed, holding his bleeding arm, Harry said, "They do come in handy sometimes. Even against you guys."

"That hurt?"

"Yep."

Jade knelt beside him. She gently turned his head to face her. He turned away just enough to signal his reluctance.

"Come on, mortal. After tonight, you don't trust me yet? I'm not going to make you do a funny dance or make chicken noises. You need to be in good shape when we find your girlfriend or she will be pissed at me. Look at me."

The vampire's ability to look deep into mortals', and sometimes other vamps', eyes and "Glamour" them could be a curse or a blessing, depending on how it was used. Something like hypnotism, it could make a subject do anything, whether or not they would ever consider doing it on their own. Relieving pain was one of the blessings.

Harry looked. Immediately Jade's dark eyes captured his full attention. All else faded except for a voice in his head saying, "You do not hurt. You feel no pain. Your arm does not hurt. Your face does not hurt. You have no pain." The pain slipped away as if he had taken a hit of the good stuff.

The world faded back in.

"Come on, partner. Let us go rescue your damsel in distress."



"If we hit that door right next to the hinges it should split like my high school prom date when that slut May Snikerson promised to put out."

Simone lowered her head and gave her a top-of-the-eye look of incredulity.

Justine shrugged. "I was a good girl back then."

Simone grabbed the front of Justine's T-shirt. "Not like the bad girl you are now." She gave her partner a quick but thorough kiss.

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“Bad is better. Shall we kick that freakin’ door?”

They readied to kick, Justine high, Simone low.

The sound of a gunshot filtered into the room. They froze, listening with all their vampire power. Somebody yelling. Bumps, bangs—furniture breaking. A cry of pain. Harry? More noise, another gunshot.

“The door, now.”

They hit the door just where they planned. The door was tougher than they thought. It cracked, but held.

“Merde!”

“Well, shit. One more time.”

They moved back to get a good run at it. Before they could take a step, the muzzle of a shotgun stuck through the peephole. Justine and Simone jumped to the side as the barrel swung right, fired, swung left, fired.

“Stay away from door,” a German accented voice ordered.

Justine and Simone looked at each other, silently communicating the way they had come to do. Justine held up one finger, two, three. They charged the door. Justine grabbed the shotgun barrel and yanked it in as far as it would go. Simone peered back through the peephole. She signaled *now*. Justine thrust the gun back out of the hole. By the surprised groan it hit somebody hard. The gun clattered to the floor outside.

Immediately they kicked the door. Still hanging tough, it bent enough to swing wide open, banging against the wall and revealing one vamp on the dirt floor with a dent in his forehead.

Justine charged through the doorway. Simone grabbed her and dragged her back just as a machete blade swung down where her head would have been.

Letting go of Justine, Simone rushed through and attacked the lean vamp who held the machete. With her experience, few could best her. However, lean of body and face, this man also had a lot of experience.

Despite the dent in his head, the vamp on the floor also had experience and no desire to fully die. When the lean vamp managed to back Simone close to him, Denthead rolled toward her and hooked her leg with his foot. This disrupted her focus and knocked her off balance. Lean vamp landed a kick that sent her down. A quick slice and she would be done.

Denthead rolled the other way and grabbed the shotgun, swinging it up as Justine was about to pounce.

Within two seconds, two things happened. Jade smashed into Lean

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vamp and skewered his head before they tumbled to the dirt. A second later the blast of two shots filled the narrow passage. Harry's first shot hit one of the hands holding the shotgun. His second shot made a small hole on one side of Denthead's skull and a larger one opposite.

Jade nodded her approval. With one swipe of her blade she separated Lean vamp's lean head from his lean body.

In the sudden silence Justine said, "Harry."

"Justine."

In a blink she was with him. She touched his injured cheek. "You're hurt."

"Yeah, but still alive."

"Pain?"

He shrugged. "Jade glamour'd it away, but it's wearing off."

Gently she held his face then kissed him, soft and easy, the kiss of a lover thankful their beloved is alive. She looked deep into his eyes and glamour'd the pain away.

Jade said, "No time for that. The Girl is in country and coming here right now. We need to leave here, *jahora mismo!*"

A minute later they were packed into Jade's car. She drove quickly through the city's wakening streets. Holding hands, Harry and Justine sat in the back shoulder to shoulder, knees pressing against the front seats. Nobody spoke until Jade stopped the car by a waiting business jet.

At the gangway Simone spoke to the pilot who immediately disappeared into the cockpit.

Jade, ignoring Justine's slightly jealous glare, hugged Harry. She hung on a bit longer than seemly, in Justine's view. Smiling, Jade shook hands with Justine.

"Harry's a good man. Take good care of him."

"I will. Be careful, The Girl is a ghost. A vengeful ghost. You cannot detect her. She'll be pissed to have missed us."

"We will be careful, those of us still alive."

Simone stood next to Justine. "*Merci* for your aid. We hoped for a quiet in and out visit. We apologize for the loss of your people. Contact Claire at the Vampire Family Council."



The Girl walked through the house followed by male and female vamps who came with her, plus an angry and scared local vamp who had driven them from the airport.

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The Girl wore sneakers, blue jeans, and a black cotton blouse under a light jacket. A five foot tall waif with short black hair, she could be a teenager from anywhere. She wasn't. Over a hundred years old and bred to be a servant, she was one of the most dangerous vamps anywhere. She was skilled and ruthless, but her danger came from the power of serving Rubicon, who took her on after Justine killed her previous master, Sinakov, for the second time.

Rubicon was an incredibly wealthy thousand-year old vampire with the desire to take over the world. Now that he had captured the powerful witch Teresa, Justine's best friend, he could use her magic to breed a race of Sunwalkers—vampires who could walk in sunlight without burning.

The Girl had only one other desire besides serving Rubicon. She wanted to kill Justine.

With her foot she rolled one of the bodies over. Jost, one of her favorites. The Girl had no sympathy for him. If he let himself be fully killed, then he was no use to her.

She caught a whiff of a scent. Nose in the air she inhaled deeply, sorting out the various scents. A female vampire scent was strong on him. But it was another that made her walk around the room sniffing, sorting the various odors. She knew that smell too well. A male mortal—Harry, Justine's lover.

The thought of both of them enraged her, making her lose the tight control she held on herself. She kicked a chair, then another one. She pounded the heavy mahogany dining table with her fists until it cracked apart.

The female vamp moved close to her with the hope of calming her down. The male gently gripped her shoulder and shook his head. He knew better.



Justine had killed her previous master—twice. She had decapitated him and left him to burn, revenge for raping and killing her daughter. The Girl had dragged her master's body and head to safety where she reattached his head, a practice rarely done and never completely successful. If they did come back to life, their minds were never the same—sometimes blank, sometimes with large memory gaps, always with an unpredictable personality change.

The Girl had taken care of him and shepherded him across country for help. Harry followed them and almost killed her. In the end Justine

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finished The Girl's previous master and Rubicon took The Girl into his service. She would do anything for the ancient vampire.



Rage spent, besides an almost disinterested kick, she barely noticed the two bodies in the basement. She stood by the broken door and inhaled the scents of the cell. For certain—Justine and Simone. She contained another burst of rage, adding it to her simmering hatred. Life was long for vampires. Justine and Harry would be found, and though she preferred a quick kill, she hoped to have the time to make them suffer before their final demise.

"Do we know where they are?"

The driver, who had been on his cell phone, said, "They had a plane waiting, *Señorita*. It take off maybe ten minutes now."

"Where are they going?"

"Not sure. *Estados Unidos?*"

"Can we catch them and shoot them down?"

"*Señorita?*"

The Girl turned and glanced at the bodies. She appeared to take a deep breath. "Never mind. I know where they will appear." To her two followers she said, "Clean up this place." To her driver she asked, "Where's my room?"