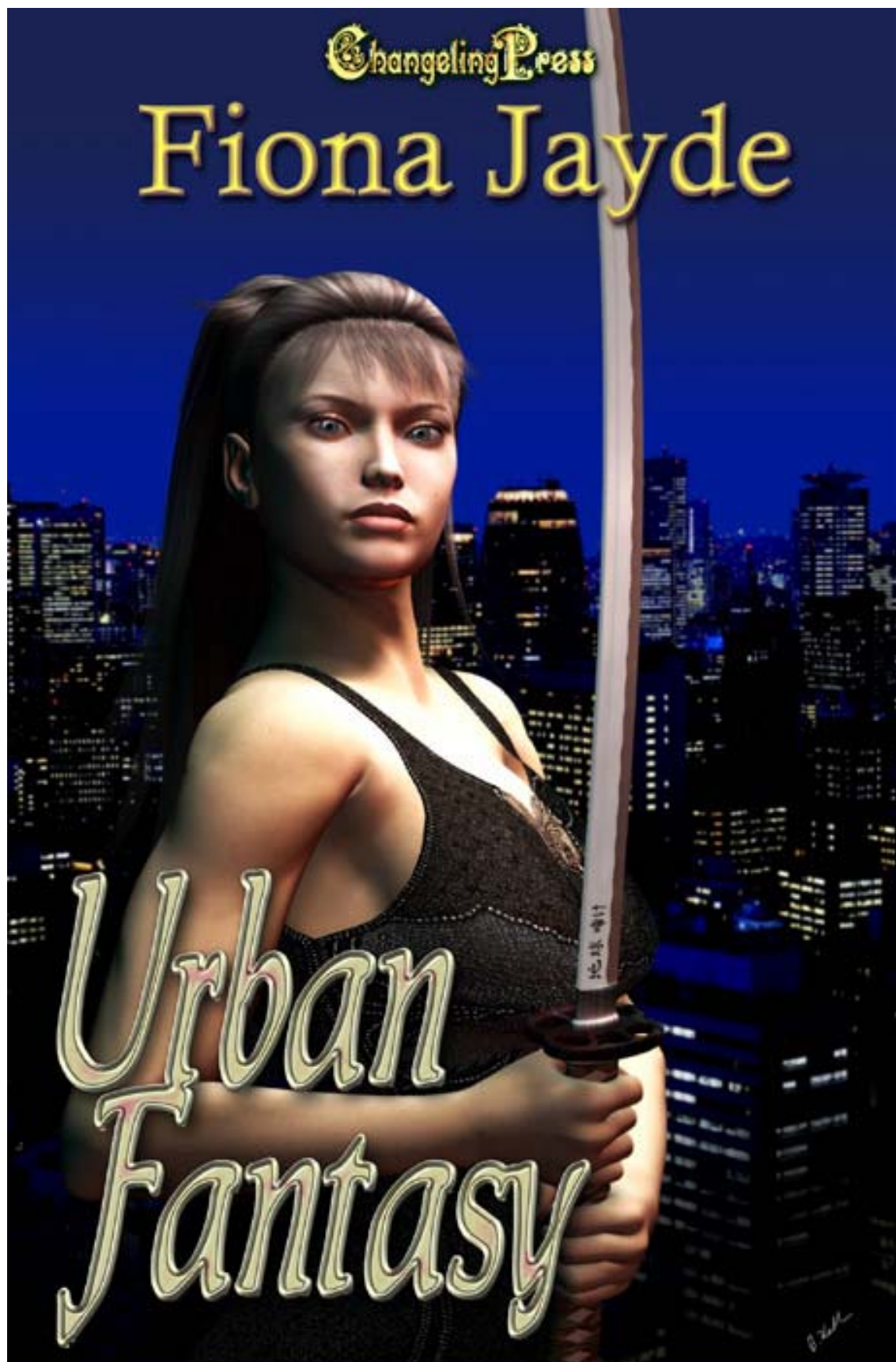


Changeling Press

Fiona Jayde

Urban  
Fantasy



# Urban Fantasy

## Fiona Jayde

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## Urban Fantasy

### Fiona Jayde

Over a century ago, Hanako -- a descendant of the Hunters -- fell in love with a vampyre. Over a century ago, Hanako -- too weak to kill the one she loved -- poisoned her lover's blood. Over a century ago, Hanako -- tricked into mixing vampyre and Hunter blood -- lost her burn, her strength, her courage. She lives today, fighting for a duty she had sworn to uphold, killing vampyres who prey on human blood, her sword and burning poison as her only allies.

Amidst a fragile peace among the vampyres and humans, Jakob Grey must apprehend a vampyre killer. The woman he must stop is dangerously beautiful -- and his lover from a life long past. The cherry blossom scent of her arousal teases his senses as their clash of swords turns into a battle of desire. But as forgotten love blooms once again, a hunt for ancient blood threatens to break the bond between the Hunter and vampyre.

## **Prologue**

**From the desk of Senator Wipstrom  
To Jakob Grey/Alliance of Human Protection Services**

As we rejoice with newfound peace between the races, we still face problems to be resolved. The Vampyre Council has finally agreed to the possibility of their kind preying on humans for blood. However, they do not possess a proper way to apprehend those who would break our joint laws. With the Alliance staffed with members of both races, they trust in it -- and you -- to oversee enforcement.

They are concerned with humans taking the law into their own hands. Vampyres have been found dead -- some of them the oldest members of the race. Bled dry or burned. The Council insists the deaths are caused by human hands.

Whoever's killing them, regardless of intent, must be stopped immediately, before concern bleeds to mistrust and our joint ways of peace fracture. Enforcement works both ways -- you have the clearance to apprehend vampyres who feed without consent, and humans who are killing them without proper judgment.

I trust you will proceed with caution.

Bill Wipstrom,  
Senator

## Chapter One

The walls throbbed in perfect timing with his eardrums, red laser lights keeping in rhythm. Around him, young, gleaming bodies writhed in what looked like agonizing ecstasy. Twenty-first century dancing.

He winced as smells of sweat and sex, laced liberally with drugs and booze, pummeled his senses. Amidst the writhing bodies high on the energy of youth, Jakob was bored.

After five lifetimes, all the clubs became the same. When the temptation struck him, he would pay handsomely for a whore's wrist and her mouth. Blood and a blowjob -- not too bad a deal -- if he were interested.

Lately, he just didn't want to bother. Instead, he took the frozen blood bags and kept himself immortal for a few years more. Amidst the young and sweaty bodies, amidst the pumping lights and throbbing noise that they called music, amidst the open sex and drugs, Jake thought he was simply a coward. Bored and alive -- the worst of curses -- forever young among the writhing bodies, waiting for his scotch and information as San Diego nightlife bloomed around him.

It was the gleam of metal that had caught his eye. A sword -- a decent imitation of a short katana -- and a girl that danced around it as if the weapon were a pole. Red laser lights caressed her skin and glinted off the metal. She undulated on a balcony above him, her young, firm skin gleaming with strength, her hair dark and thick whipping around her shoulders while she writhed around the sword she'd stuck into the floor, her hand pumping the hilt as if it were a cock wrapped up in leather. Obscene and beautiful.

He couldn't see her face. Jake didn't know why it suddenly was important, but he would not tear his gaze away until he saw her features. Something about her, the way she moved, the way that gleaming skin stretched over slim, strong muscles...

Interest stirred -- and it was a relief because a part of him had started to wonder if something, anything, anyone, would take his fancy. The women he had fucked were a blur of limbs, a way to choke away a memory. He wondered what had made him think of it.

The girl flung her hair off her face, and Jake could see her now -- lips of blood-red on a face pale white. She turned again, and under the black curtain of hair, a black dragon tattoo leered from her back down at the audience. At least in that she'd mixed her symbols up. The dragon was Chinese. And Geiko never showed their steel in public.

The leather band she wore across her breasts showed off a toned bare midriff. Opaque black pants clung to her legs -- in the red flashing lights the shape of them was strong and pleasing. Had it been dark, he'd only see a hauntingly white face and undulating belly.

A twenty-first century geisha looking as if she's about to fuck a sword.

Jake couldn't keep his gaze away from her. Perhaps it wasn't her -- she simply piqued his interest because of symbols -- Gion, Nippon. Hanako.

She, too, had long black hair. She too wore white makeup on her face and painted her lips blood-red. She too had gripped her sword as if she would a lover. Almost a century ago, she'd sliced his face and whispered of his death.

"Beautiful, ain't she?" A man sat heavily onto a bar stool to his right -- a two-fisted drinker, with a bottle in one hand and a shot glass in other. Both took their turns traveling toward the dark hole in his beard that was his mouth. "What would you do to fuck a real Japanese geisha?"

The word "geisha" swirled black lava in Jake's gut. "You've had the pleasure?"

The man shrugged and grinned, then dutifully tugged another swallow from the bottle. "Nothing but a flash of titty now and then. But if you want an introduction..."

Interest warred with boredom. "Later perhaps. Your information?"

"Sure. Right." Another swallow from the bottle again. A large fist left the shot glass on the metal bar to take a juicy wipe over his mouth. "You got cash?"

The words barely registered above the groans and music. Jake whipped a hundred from his belt, and held the bill up with two fingers. "My info first."

Once more the man shrugged, and winked with a red-rimmed eye. His irises reminded Jake of shriveled raisins. "Do you believe in vampires, my man?"

At that Jake smiled, not caring if he showed fangs. "And if I do?"

"It's a sick fantasy but someone's making cash on it. The geisha?" He jerked his chin up to her general direction. "Thinks she's a vamp killer."

Jake's interest was definitely piqued. "Really."

"Yep. Drops a couple of grand on weapons every month. Says it burns their asses."

"Burns?" His focus sharpened.

The man grinned through his beard, and made a circling motion with an index finger by his temple. Crazy.

The woman knelt now, with the sword gripped in her hands, pointing at someone down and left. When Jake followed it, he saw blond hair and fangs glint in the laser light. "She get her weapons from you?"

"Me?" Another swallow. "I don't deal that shit. But for another hundred I might be able to hook up something."

The music changed, the rhythmic pounding of drums nearly pulsing in his temples. Jake shoved the hundred toward the man, noting the calculating light in those small raisin-like eyes. When he glanced up again red lights bounced off an empty balcony. Blond hair with fangs was gone as well.

Pushing through writhing bodies, Jake followed the faint scent of blood.

\* \* \*



Her smile was encased in ice. The vampyre grabbed her hand as soon as she stepped on the silent roof. He dragged her farther into shadow, his grip cold and painful on her upper arm. Below them, nightlife pulsed.

"I'm not interested in fucking you," he hissed into her ear. "I want your blood. Right now."

Hanako took a silent breath. The ache inside her joints was ignored -- it sharpened focus, nothing more. "I want your blood." Her voice stayed quietly calm. She forced her pulse to do the same instead of beating wildly. "In ashes." Her blade was balanced strong and true inside her palm.

His fist hit hers, trying to knock the sword aside. "Bitch. I'll drain you."

She took a small step back and waited. She could've told him that if she had the money she would've happily given him her neck and watched him die. But Stink didn't take credit and she was low on cash. Tonight she'd kill in the old fashioned way -- or at least try. She might not have the strength, but skill at least stayed with her through the years.

He leapt at her, teeth bared in a snarl. A pivot, and she just barely had time to slice his arm. Blood -- thick and dark -- oozed on his skin.

"I'll drain you dry." His mouth was too close. "Every fucking drop." A glint of steel showed her a small knife he gripped inside his hand.

She kept her focus as he kicked a huge, booted foot right at her sword hand -- swift, vicious pushes backward. She mostly blocked, didn't waste precious strength on attacking him. Instead she let him push back and looked for openings. She had no interest in fighting him. Just one strong strike -- through ribs into the heart muscle -- would end it.

Something under her foot caused her to stumble, just a bit, enough to lower her sword and guard, and the vampyre crashed her against the wall, trapping her against the cold cage of his body.

Her sword was useless. He would take her blood and she had nothing in it to reward him with. As panic beat its wings into her eyes, Hana fought him, fists pummeling flesh, ignoring the saliva dripping fangs that were so close... too close...

A knee into his groin loosened him up enough to back away a bit. A second later his blood spilled on her sword. She skewered his heart and came out the victor. Now she could wait for sunlight so he could turn to dust.

No poison this time. Just an honorable fight as the sensei would have wanted.

"Impressive, Buffy."

Air froze inside her throat, splitting into shards that burned her. That voice. She knew that voice. The streetlight swept over a face from a past long dead; lean, dark features, his mouth curled up with irony. Eyes cool and blue. A black scar over his cheek.

Jakob. Her lover. Vampyre.

A sword was in his hand, a short samurai blade gleaming with the light from streets below. Black leather draped over broad shoulders, more over his long, strong legs. He looked the same and different. More dangerous, more jaded.

Hana could feel his eyes caressing her. Even disciplined with pain and training, she could do nothing against the sudden onslaught of pure lust. She'd always wanted him. Even when she'd tried to kill him.

Because of him she was immortal; because of him she wasn't strong. *Blood whore*. That's all she was. She couldn't control the heavy pounding of her heart, nor could she stop the onslaught of emotions.

As rage and lust entwined, Hana pointed her sword level with his throat.

"I have no wish to fight you." His voice rasped his throat. It couldn't be. She couldn't be the woman he couldn't raise his sword to kill on the dark streets of Gion over a century ago.

Hanako was a lady, innocent and fierce, the exotic fruit of union between a British soldier and a geisha. This woman with her smoothly exposed skin was nothing like her. Nothing. He took a step to see her clearer.

Silent, she stared at him with Hanako's wide eyes that seemed to glow blue-silver in the night. An offspring maybe? A relative. He liked the relative idea better because the thought of lusting after a child of Hanako's descent was vile, even to his jaded sensibilities.

And yet the hate and lust that perfumed the air were unmistakable in their rich and slightly floral scent. Faint, blooming cherry blossoms mixed with something darker. Edgier. He took another step toward her.

Akamoto Hanako, the surname of her mother indicating an ancient line of vampyre Hunters. After all these years, after them both thinking the other dead, she faced him with her sword in hand, those perfect lips pressed closed. As if the years between then and now didn't exist.

Love had meant nothing when honor had demanded vengeance. Her sensei ambushed Jake after he found that his charge had lain with a vampyre. Jake had fought and killed Arishima-san, turning Hanako's want for him to rage. The love he'd felt for her had died the night they'd tried to kill each other. The night she'd poisoned him. The night he couldn't kill her.

Now he felt nothing. Nothing but a sharply heated lust, this need to bury himself inside her until she, too, was hoarse from screaming. Then he would feed.

Disgusted, Jake pushed the images away. He never took what wasn't offered -- plenty of women, both human and vampire, would welcome him into their pussies and their veins. He wouldn't touch the burn of Hunter's blood. "You would still like to turn me into blood ash."

Those perfect china-doll lips curled into a bitter smile. "*Hai.*" Yes, in Japanese, spoken in a cultured lady's voice. A vampyre lay still and silent at her feet. Once the sun cleared away the darkness, he would turn to dust.

The scent of her arousal infuriated just as it fed his desire. The years fell away. He was back in Japan facing his lover, rage laced with lust, love smothering the focus of his skill as she calmly took a stance to fight him.

He could not harm her. The scar that had been burned onto his face was testament to his own weakness. Now, as she stared at him with cool, distrusting eyes while her arousal scented the air, Jake wondered if he would have the strength to do what he could not a century ago.

He took in more of her scent, and ignored the growing bulge between his legs. His sword in his hand, Jake faced her, took his stance, and pointed the blade at the delicate hollow of her throat. Her face had smoothed of all emotion. She sunk low into a back stance, and brought her sword across her body so he would have to reach for her.

Clever. Her sword was longer, giving her an advantage. Making him reach for her, she set him up to lose his balance, leaving him open for a cut or throw. The Hanako he knew didn't bother much with strategy, counting instead on speed, strength and balance.

Now she waited.

He raised an eyebrow, motioned for her to start. She stood death-still. His sword was cold and heavy in his palms as he leapt forward, silent, swift. Steel sang as their blades slid on each other's edges.

He'd cut her. On the shoulder, just a small shallow nick. He was surprised that she allowed it. The scent of cherry blossoms mixed with blood, teasing his focus with sharp fingernails.

His next move forward was blocked by her sword cutting into his; he parried right before it sliced his ribs. The sting from it was like a lover's bite. Her eyes shone silver as she attacked again, slipping under his blade, and nearly gave him a matching scar under his eye. Her sword was lightning swift in those small hands.

They were both bleeding now, the scent of her arousal and her blood thickening his cock to an almost painful ache. Keeping steel fists over his raging blood, Jake watched for openings while they danced for death. There was no fear in her eyes, and

yet the small pulse in her neck beat wildly almost as if begging for his mouth. There were no sounds save for singing steel and measured breathing.

With control like icy water in his lungs, careful not to cut her skin, Jake slid the flat of his blade over her nipple. She froze for one small moment, looked down as if expecting blood. He watched the leather of her top strain over heaving breasts. Under it, he could see her nipples beading.

He wanted to just drop the sword and take her. He didn't see her move, missed the swift blur of blade, only feeling the cool tip of it as it brushed past his flesh. Another lunge -- she kissed his skin with steel once more. Again, no blood, just air on his flesh. Her eyes were brilliant and hot.

He let his body brush against her. His forearm touched her breasts. Her gasp was whisper-soft. His hand closed over her wrist, smooth skin under his callused fingers. He didn't pry the sword out of her hand. Instead he kept his eyes on hers as he lowered his head and took that soft sweet mouth.

He'd have her now. He'd make her weak, furiously weak from pleasure, pleasure only he could give. Her taste flooded his senses -- a wanton, reckless innocence. Her lips were soft and pliant under his. He tilted his head a bit, deepened the kiss, and reveled in the exotic and familiar...

That's when she nearly slit his throat.

Her small blade glinted in her hand, her eyes blazed blue. "Fight, bastard."

His control snapped before she finished speaking. He leapt on her, ignoring slices of her sword over his skin, avoiding stabs, ducking under her thrusts. His own blade was now orphaned on the floor. His own blood didn't bother him.

Her eyes were wide and wild on his, her scent strong with arousal and fear. He heard her pulse over her breaths. So close, he felt the heat of her. He hadn't realized how cold he'd been as her sweet heat teased him from inches away.

Bleeding, he closed the gap between their bodies. A press over her wrist had her blade clattering down on the cement. Time froze. Her eyes burned into his.

And then she moved -- hot, lustful fury devouring his mouth in a kiss both bitter and demanding. The scent of lust nearly drowned him. Fighting for more, Jake ravaged her lips until she clawed at him, and he moaned when he broke away to taste her jaw, her cheek. Her nipples stabbed into his chest with vicious heat. That pulse inside the hollow of her neck beat just for him.

Jake shoved his hands into the thick cloud of her hair. The growl that ripped his chest was foreign and unknown. He held her so her head tilted a bit, exposed that fragile column of her throat to tempt and tease him, her blood and scent exploding through his senses.

She sighed and, on a ragged breath, exposed more of her neck to give him better access.

He knew he'd burn and he didn't care. Mindless, he placed his lips over a pale gold patch of skin. Licked just a bit, to taste, to tease them both. She trembled as he grazed his teeth over her neck, shook as he sliced her skin with his incisors, tensed as he drew her blood into himself, bitter and sweet, burning with ice so hot it scalded him.

He pressed her hips against his aching cock, gripped her with shaking hands, drew more of her inside himself. Delicious Hanako, her hands clawing at his hair, her body trembling, clenching, rubbing against his. He needed more of her, to feel her body fully pressed against his. He lifted her closer, and she wrapped her thighs around his waist. Pressing his cock into the juncture of her thighs, he bit down on her neck again.

Her shuddered gasp pierced his mind. He thought he'd hurt her, taken too much, but as he lifted his lips from her bruised skin, he saw her flushed lips part, her head arch back. Her thighs clamped like steel vises around his hips while she orgasmed in a swift and gasping breath.

## Chapter Two

She burned in ice as dreams held her in sweaty claws...

The streets of Gion quieted as morning neared. She walked the streets amidst the silence, the red silk in the swirls of her long hair revealing her status -- apprentice geisha. The sword along her back was short and hidden under her kimono.

Banpaia walked these streets, looking for the blood of whores and drunks to fill their thirst. A young Geiko walking alone would be a tasty morsel.

Hanako counted on it.

She walked with her head down and her arms folded. A pretty young girl heading home. Inside her sleeves she gripped a blade with bloodless fingers. She would fight all of them, just as Sensei had taught her. Even if Jakob crossed these streets. Especially if it was Jakob.

Revenge was pure as fresh spilled blood. Her lover had killed her Sensei and honor dictated revenge. She'd finish this, even if she didn't have the strength to kill him with her sword.

Ochiai-san had given her a poison, although she hadn't put the green mixture in her mouth yet. It had smelled vile and she hoped that she would have the strength to kill him honorably. *Blood Whore*. Arishima-san's voice cut as clean and true as the blade he used to wield.

"I will avenge your death." She swore it on Sensei's deathbed and she swore it now. She should never have loved a vampyre. She should have killed him right at first glance, a swift strike of her sword straight through his heart.

The stolen hours they had spent together were nothing but a game for him. A naïve Hunter tender for a plucking. Sensei had been enraged. Now he was dead and it would be her honor to avenge him.

Senses alert, eyes scanning, she walked with slow, deceptive steps. A rustle to her side along the bushes had the skin on her neck prickling. Her fingers tightened on the blade, and she forced herself to keep her head bent meek and low.

She felt his eyes on her. He'd kill her, this she knew. There was no fear, no regret. Combat was water -- flowing clean and swift. Her breathing quickened -- this she could not stop. The sword against her back was calm and solid. The man in front was as cold as the gray river in midwinter.

"Hanako." The sound of her name was harsh and soft.

Her love -- ecstatic, painful joy -- surged up inside her at the sight of him. Silent and still, an exotic warrior with hair dark as sin and features so much like her own. She pushed these feelings inside her heart where snow numbed all but grief.

"Jakob." The night was silent as she drew out her sword. The edge of it glinted in soft moonlight.

"I do not wish to fight you."

"Revenge is mine." She stepped into position, pointing her sword right at his throat. The battle would be short and vicious. They would both lose. "You will fight me. Or I will slice your neck."

His sword was in his hand -- the katana of a samurai, the cold steel of the blade twice as long as her own. It didn't matter.

She attacked first, knowing that speed was her best ally. The song of blades was strong and swift as her lover parried the thrust, and directed it sideways to unbalance her. The small cuts on her arms were nothing. She stayed light on her feet, her movements sure and quick.

His sword met hers with each new parry, his eyes dark in the moonlight, dead. His mouth grim as she leapt high and pointed her blade down at his heart.



She couldn't do it. Instead she pushed away, felt her blade slice his skin. She thought she heard him hiss as she rolled away, using her own body to hide the motion of shoving the green pressed mixture into her mouth. She tasted salt, but that could've been tears. The Hunter's burn inside her seemed to calm a bit as the green mixture spread into her blood and shame filled up her soul.

She could not strike his heart. A coward's way then. Somewhere, she thought she heard Sensei laughing bitterly.

Another parry and the moonlight had caught his gaze, his eyes glinting with silver. She thought she'd seen a similar look once before, when they were lovers and not enemies. Ice speared her shoulder.

Blood spilled over her arm as dread oozed with it. *You must mix your blood with his.* It would be finished then. Perhaps in their next life they would find peace.

Focus was gone, its place taken up by despair. She fought without grace, striking at random, not caring if his blade came dangerously close to her own skin. She wondered if he'd take her neck, if he would drain her dry as death claimed her. Maybe he would simply walk away, disgusted by his victory.

Her blade found his skin. A breath, a sigh, and when his blood flooded his torso she threw herself at him and hugged him tight, pressing her arms into the cut along his ribs. An embrace of death. She threw her sword down where it lay over his. "It is done. My blood is poisoned. You will be dead by dawn."

He pressed his hand against the dark, thick liquid covering them both. His laugh was soft and lethal in the moonlight. "You have your vengeance after all."

She took a step away from him and waited for a blow to end it, for him to get his sword and finish her. When he stepped forward, fear finally reared through and stared at her from inside his silver eyes. She didn't know what kept her legs from simply running.

"If I must die by dawn," he whispered as his blood mixed with hers, "I'll have a final taste of you."

She thought he'd drain her -- was prepared for it. Instead his lips touched hers, wet from his blood and salty with her tears. Then he was gone and moonlight was the only witness as she knelt on the street and let shame burn her.

She could not move when Ochiai stepped forward moments later, as if by magic knowing when they would be done. She tried to beg him to help, and yet her lips refused to speak. She watched through half closed lids as he picked up both their swords and sliced his wrists, mixing their blood with his.

Screaming through numbed lips, Hanako woke shivering with sweat.

She'd kept the lights turned on when she came in a few hours ago -- as if to chase away the demons. Now the harsh lights burned her eyes as she stumbled into the tiny bathroom, doing her best not to look at herself in the mirror hanging on the door. After more than a century, a face without lines and a smooth body that didn't droop with age did nothing to delight her. They were the tools to attract her enemy. And nothing more.

A splash of water on her face was close to heaven. The breeze of air through the open window was like a sweet caress. Hanako knelt by it, allowing herself the luxury to bury her face into her hands.

She'd failed again. Ever since that single act of cowardice, she hadn't had the true strength of a Hunter. Instead, she killed with poison -- having tried everything from garlic to whatever water was deemed holy.

And now, without poison in her veins she'd willingly allowed him at her neck -- worse, she found pleasure in it. She didn't kill him afterward -- after he'd put her down and stared at her for one long silent moment. The weird noise that had sounded somewhere in shadows was salvation. She'd disappeared before he could come back, with a single phrase that wouldn't stop screaming in her mind.

*Blood whore.*

Tears left her empty. Her movements were swift and graceful in the silence. Her sword gleamed coolly as she raised it high and pointed the tip into her chest.

\* \* \*

"I got a vid of them fighting on the roof."

The phone didn't distract Church from watching two newly-turned males work on a human woman. They fucked her with both cocks and fangs, their bodies pressed around her, their teeth sunk deep inside her neck. Any blood spilled was greedily lapped up as the woman moaned with fevered ecstasy and flung her long blonde hair from side to side. Watching her, Church was certain her delight was real. Humans had always found pleasure giving away their life-force. "The man?"

"Didn't give a name. Paid cash."

The woman was weakening, her movements starting to become sluggish. Church knew the two men wouldn't stop until they'd drained every last bit of blood. She had been worth the fortune he'd paid for her. The blood from both fed vampyres would keep him upright for another week. "Send the photos to Yuri." The Russian human proved his worth, although he did continue whining about turning.

"She killed a vampyre. I saw her."

The man -- Church knew he went by the name Stink -- had been invaluable in information and his weapons. Although perhaps overenthusiastic. "I told you, I am not interested in this human." Even if she was purchasing the same type of equipment as he did. In fact, this small coincidence was quite convenient. Church burned the vampyres after he was done with them, injecting them with a UV charged liquid. No risk of someone finding a drained vampyre, no possibility of questions.

At this time, Church didn't have time for questions.

Through all the dealings with him, Stink always wanted money -- and this Church understood. There was a time when money was the key to power. But now, as his limbs weakened with every hour, Church understood his clients. Living was... everything.

"Maybe you'd be interested in the arsenal my guy was carrying. Some high-tech shit. You got a player on your tail -- and he's asking questions you would prefer not answered."

"Oh?" This certainly was new. Perhaps the Alliance had gotten wind of his new project. "You can easily point him to the human." He probably already had, Church thought. Loyalty lay with bigger money.

"Sure thing. Five grand. Ten if it gets really interesting."

"Agreed." The blonde woman was mewling weakly in pleasure, her strength already sapped, her body lifted up by two pairs of hands. Church watched them drain her, waited for them to finish. There had been a time when he enjoyed watching a human writhe in pleasure as they died. Now it was simply a matter of survival.

The knife in his hand was poised, ready. They'd let him slit their veins and drink their blood. Such was their bargain -- their life-force for a woman. It wasn't safe to drain a human now that the governments -- both vampyre and human -- conceded their mutual distrust. But then, of course, he always built his power on exceptions. But he would first feed off their strength; their blood made strong would keep his death at bay. Just as it had for centuries.

\* \* \*

"If that's on my account, you're a century too late."

She didn't turn around although Jake knew he startled her. Thank gods and demons for the modern marvels of GPS and hackers. Cain had found her in seconds. It had been Jake's own cowardice for waiting, letting her blood settle inside him, letting his own emotions calm before he jumped down to her balcony from the old roof above. She lived in a tall and tiny shithole -- and why that angered him, he didn't know.

Seems like this night brought out emotions in him. Rage, lust, regret, desire. They flooded him and he didn't quite know how to deal with them swimming in his blood. It had been a long time since contrasting feelings swamped his heart. It had been a long time for feelings at all. He wondered if blank boredom was better. Certainly easier than feelings that stripped the nonchalance aside and left him naked and exposed to anything she chose to spear him with.

Seeing her with a blade poised at her breasts was both a relief and a sharp twist of pain inside his gut. Maybe she'd kill herself and save him the trouble, because he doubted he would find the strength to do it -- just as he hadn't over a century ago.

"Were you posing?" He allowed just a hint of sarcasm in his voice.

There was a reason he was here. Not her -- not the desire clawing through him at the sight of black silky hair spilling like rain over her back. Not the long white cotton T-shirt she had on -- concealing every inch of her, from throat to toe. Somehow he thought it more seductive than the revealing thing she had worn earlier.

There was no mask on her -- no white of makeup, no blood-red color on her lips. Sweet, innocent. Just like before.

His cock pressed hard against his zipper, obvious and painful. A perfect target for a trained seductress with a grudge. He wondered just how much geisha training she'd completed.

"I was meditating. Life and death meeting on one point. Sensei taught me." She threw that name out as if expecting him to fight her just for the word alone. He ignored it.

She was still human despite a life that had been due to end over a century ago. The poison she had thought to kill him with was but a binding agent, designed to stop their blood from burning out. Ochiai Arimoto -- now known as Armand Church -- had mixed the blood of Hunter and vampyre and in that he'd extended his lifespan. And hers apparently. The thought of it brought a strange feeling he recognized as joy.

"Vengeance is old. I have no wish to resume our fight." He simply wanted to resume what they hadn't finished earlier. Nothing to do with blades, and everything to do with plunging.

She watched him calmly, her sword still gripped inside her palm. "Then why did you break in here?"

Jake wondered what her life had been like for all those years. Hunting for vamps, killing them. Now, as the Vampyre Council severely punished those who forced

themselves on humans, there would be nothing left for her to hunt. He wondered what she'd do with herself then. He often wondered that of himself.

He stalked closer to her, allowing his gaze to roam freely over her body. "So you still kill, a Hunter to the last."

She didn't move a muscle as she faced him. He could scent both fear and desire from her and yet nothing showed up on that smooth china-doll face. "You wouldn't expect otherwise."

He let out a laugh as his cock strained his pants with the need to bury himself in her. "No. But you wouldn't expect to find me on your side. When did you come to the US?"

She exhaled air -- so softly he barely heard a sigh. "Jakob --"

"Just Jake." He shortened his name with every century, it seemed. Losing more of himself as the past became forgotten. Hearing her say his full name brought back memories and with them more emotions. He didn't need more emotions. He'd had plenty today. "Answer my question."

"Why?" Her calm and silky tone matched her face perfectly -- a blank canvas that could turn deadly in less than a second. "Do you now toy with prey before you kill them?" Her scent gave her away -- fear and lust, desire and nerves. All that mixed with the subtle scent of cherry blossoms. Terrifying and delightful.

He kept his own voice quiet. "I didn't kill you earlier. I could have."

She flushed but didn't look away. "I came after the war. First San Francisco. Here for the past fifteen or twenty years."

He nodded, fighting his way past the red haze of desire. "Do you know of the Alliance?"

Sword in hand, she simply raised an eyebrow. "No."

"You're killing junkies. Just like another street thug." He came out of the shadows fully now. The lights from the night city rimmed her strong and supple body. He knew the body hidden under the white cotton -- barely there curves sweeter than

those of any other woman he had fucked to purge himself of her. "The times have changed. There are laws -- and people sworn to uphold it."

"And you are one of them." She had no accent, just a smooth clear voice devoid of all feelings.

"Better than dancing with your sword at nightclubs."

She flinched at that and he was almost sorry he'd said it. Her voice still remained smooth. "I get my work done."

He was closer now, the heat from her almost reaching out to touch his skin. "Haven't you wondered why you are still living?"

"I was deceived by one I trusted." She said it with a resigned tone of one who had accepted it. "I saw him mix our blood with his. I gathered that he wanted immortality without becoming one of you."

"He goes by the name of Armand Church now." The bastard lived -- after the third time he was believed to have finally died. Thinking of him, Jake tasted the same old anger in his mouth. He thought he'd killed him twice -- once in Japan, after he'd figured out what had happened. The second time just months ago. The bastard fooled him then and now. "He can turn humans into vampyres -- made a nice profit from it."

She didn't seem surprised. "I wondered why the vampyre seemed so bold."

"Blood is the drug -- especially for those newly-turned who crave it. Addiction for some, medicine for others."

"And humans are this medicine."

"Relax." He smirked although he felt no humor. "A pack of frozen blood is cheaper and less trouble. Tastes just the same and doesn't scream." It was a frozen, dark red slush, which he drank daily because he was afraid of becoming old and feeble. It had been nothing like the hot burst of fire he took from her neck. His cock jerked hard.

"It wasn't frozen blood you took from me."

The thought of it nearly had him shuddering. He almost came while she writhed against him. He didn't burn -- not like before when the sharp edge of pleasure was

worth the honor and trust of her allowing him to drink from her. "And you enjoyed it. Don't deny."

Her scent had changed -- a hint of bitterness. "Get out. Now."

"I will." Jake kept his voice dangerously soft. "But tell me, what will happen when the hunt's no longer there? The laws are strict, and Church is on the run. There are many ways to purchase blood without harming humans. What will you do when humans don't need a Hunter to protect them? You gonna dance your life away? Forever?"

Her eyes flashed in the shadows. "I don't believe in your laws. As long as there are vampires, I will hunt those who prey on human blood."

"Our governments agreed -- the Vampire Council will deal with their own. I won't allow you to undermine a hard won peace. Give up the hunt."

She raised her sword -- a move practiced and calm. Her scent was wild. "Is that why you're here?"

"We both know why." Control finally broke.



## Chapter Three

The dreams and memories made her too weak to fight him. Still, Hana dropped into a stance, gripped her sword hard with both her palms, ready for anything he could unleash.

She wasn't ready for him to strip off his jacket. "What are you doing?"

His mouth was a grim, tight line as he extended his hand toward her. "We finish this, Hanako. Now."

No one had ever said her name like this. Eyes locked with his, her sword now dragging by her side, she took two small steps toward him. Then hesitated for a fraction of a second, her heart beating so loud she wondered if he heard it.

He muttered something, lifted her up against a wall of heat and muscle, his body huge and hard and scorching. Clutching the leather bound hilt of her sword, leaving it flat along his back, Hanako looped her arms behind his neck and flung control and caution to the wind. She dropped that first cautious kiss onto his mouth.

Desire clawed through her after years of sleep, vicious and painful in its sharpness. She couldn't get enough of him, and clamped both her arms and legs around his body to get closer.

Steel bands that were his arms crushed her against his body, his hands digging into her buttocks, her back, her neck. She felt his fingers -- were they shaking? -- comb through the thick weight of her hair. A flash of memory exploded in her head -- he had always loved her hair, and would spend long moments combing it after her bath.

His mouth found hers and spun her back into the present. His kiss was rough, demanding, brutal, as if he had been starved for her. His arms clamped tight around her, almost to the point of not allowing her to breathe.

The sword dropped with a clatter to the floor. Her body fused with his, Hana reveled in the heat and strength surrounding her. Too much... not nearly enough. A *vampyre*. She was too swept up in lust to care.

His heart beat wildly under her palms as she explored the rock-hard muscles of his chest. She felt herself sat down on something -- her own bed, those rough impatient hands tugging off the long T-shirt she had on.

Impatient for his skin, Hana went for his clothes. The cotton T-shirt over that massive chest was soft and black. She ripped it off in one smooth motion.

Smooth skin poured over steel. She couldn't get enough of all that heat, kept running her hands and lips over every exposed inch. His palms stilled her when she went for his zipper.

"Slow down, sweet." Despite the words his hands were feverishly roaming her flesh, as if he didn't know what to touch first. She gasped when he found her breast, squeezed just a bit, lifted it as if testing its weight. He pushed her to lie down on her elbows, her breath hitching in her throat as she watched him lean in toward her, and brought his lips onto her skin.

He placed soft kisses on the skin between her breasts. Caressed his palm over her beaded nipples. Took one into his mouth, sucked gently as if worshipping it.

The ache between her thighs grew hotter as he took turns kissing and sucking at her nipples. Her body resting on her elbows, Hana couldn't touch him as she wanted to. Helpless, she let herself be opened to sensation, felt each new touch, each sweet caress.

She felt him part her thighs, heard him take a deep long breath. He kissed her nether lips, gently nuzzling the curls over her mons. His exhale was a soft caress. She bit her lip to keep from crying out and then his mouth was on her, caressing her in the most sensitive of places, giving her just the perfect touch, the perfect spot. Another touch and she would shatter -- he stopped, grinned wickedly at her, leaned to kiss her with her cream still on his lips.

The clenching in her belly grew to raging. With a soft groan she pushed herself upward, again got a hold of his belt, and struggled to open it. This time he let her -- just stood still while she struggled with his zipper.

A moment later he was free, his cock jutting up at her, thick and swollen, the purple tip already glistening. She wanted to take him in her mouth, suck him deep, to weaken him with pleasure as he'd weakened her.

His hands slid under her arms, lifted her after she took that first tasting lick. She tasted salt and man and Jakob.

"I can't wait, sweet," he growled into her ear, as he sat her back down on the futon. His hands were on her ankles, spreading her thighs again. She felt the cream of her own juices sliding down her skin. He must have seen it for his gaze went positively feral. "I can't wait."

He leaned over her, their eyes level, the tip of his cock touching her inner heat. Teeth clenched, his body trembling over hers, he pushed his cock up against her, smooth and diamond hard. She held her breath at that first entry, her body clenched against the pleasure-filled invasion. He was so hot he burned her as he pushed further inside, huge, thick, so good she bit her lips to keep from screaming.

On a long breath he pulled out, and she watched his cock slide out, coated with her cream. Another breath and he plunged fully inside her. Froze. Just stared at her as sparks of pleasure burned their way through her body. Speared by him, she couldn't move, she simply shivered as pleasure coiled in her.

"Are you all right?"

She wasn't, and if he stopped she'd have to kill him. Instead of answering, she clenched her inner muscles around his cock, crossed her ankles at his back, her wrists around his neck. Slammed into him. Their groans of pleasure mixed.

"Look at me."

She didn't realize her eyes were closed.

"Look at me, sweet."

She met his gaze and then he moved inside her. Slow, steady, as if holding back so not to hurt her. Skin dewed with sweat, the arms he locked around her were trembling. Deeper now, she opened more for him, each stroke inside her winding a fresh coil of pleasure through her.

She couldn't breathe, couldn't think past the feel of him, skin sliding against skin, their breaths mingling, their lips and sexes fusing. And then he stilled, and Hana moaned in protest.

He couldn't leave, couldn't stop now, not when the pleasure was so close to bursting. She wouldn't beg, but surely even he couldn't be this cruel. Biting her lip to keep the words from tumbling out, she stared at him, tensing around him -- arms, thighs, sex.

"Do you want me?"

She dragged in oxygen so she could breathe. Since no words came, she simply clutched him tighter.

Jakob was shaking now, fighting off something that she couldn't see, clearly at war with himself. She moved, maybe to comfort him, maybe in her own selfish pleasure, to feel him rasp inside her.

"Do you want me, sweet?" He spat the words through clenched teeth, tightened his arms over her to try to prevent her from moving on him further. In response, Hana clenched tighter around him, milked his cock, and challenged him to a duel of wills.

The tightening of her muscles heightened the raw, sharp pleasure. She pulsed around him, dared him to do anything to stop her. He couldn't pull out, she simply wouldn't let him. She worked his cock, tightening and relaxing around his shaft, staring at his face, his eyes, his mouth, loving him. God help her, loving him.

The thought was like a shard of ice inside her belly. Wanting to pull away, instead she held on tighter, taking him as deep as she could handle, feeling his cock push up against her cervix, just a bit of pain inside the pleasure. A jagged slice of a pain so sweet it pushed her over, hurtling screaming into climax, bone and mind shattering, mindless. She fought to keep her eyes on his, struggled to watch him as she felt him

tremble, clenched even tighter on his cock as his own climax overtook him, spilling hot bursts of liquid into her.

He was still on her when her eyes closed and sweet darkness beckoned.

“Hanako.”

She didn’t have the strength to fight him anymore. His body shifted just a bit -- air filled her lungs as he rolled off her. His palm was on her cheek and she turned her head away. *You’re nothing but a weak blood whore.*

Chills danced across her body. She was too tired to fight him and herself and the damned voice that wouldn’t stop screaming in her head. She just lay still and wished that he would leave.

Another movement, she felt the futon dip and then his heat was gone. He didn’t say a word and she was grateful. This wasn’t right, this burst of draining pleasure. This wasn’t right a century ago. Nothing had changed since then.

He left the same way as he’d entered -- silent and swift -- she didn’t hear him. The darkness, when it finally came, was cold.

## Chapter Four

The sun was scrambling its guts in a hot sky when Hana finished the double shift at CoffeeCake. She let herself feel the last warm rays before she dove into the shadows behind the Opal Club. Stink would be here by now and she needed a refill. After last night she was determined never to hunt without poison. Last night... she didn't know what in the world possessed her. But then again, she always was a sucker for mistakes.

Appropriate to his name, Stink set up shop behind the Dumpsters. The stench of alcohol and rotted food reminded her of the back alleys of Gion, where the main streets were pretty and waste was dumped out of view from privileged eyes.

"Geisha!" The man was small and wiry, with beady black eyes on a face brown from the sun. The voice inside him matched the package -- wiry and small, with an extra helping of a country twang. In his camo-colored pocket he carried a loaded XV789 that he kept pointed at both friend and foe when doing business.

"I need to refill, Stink."

"Sure thing." He gave her sunny smiles. "Three K."

"I got two on me. Perhaps you'll credit me the other one." Again he raised his prices. Between the dancing and coffee stains, that equaled most of her pay.

"On credit, Geisha?" The lines grew deeper on his forehead. "You know I don't do credit." He didn't move at all. She knew the XV was in the perfect place to spray her brains out of her skull. A part of her considered it a mercy.

Hana drew upon her mother's training and summoned up a smile designed to charm a snake. "What can I do to change your mind?"

His eyebrows wiggled suggestively but business came first. "What do you got?"

Wordless, she held up an extra fifty between two fingers.

"Weak, Geisha, weak. I tell you what though, you're my fave customer. You show me your tits and I'll consider it."

She smiled again as ice wrapped through her. "My... tits are worth much more than that."

"Take it or leave it."

The ice reached her face, and she felt her smile cracking at the edges. "I always thought you were an ass man."

He chewed on his gum loudly. The cherry smell was rolling in her gut. "I like variety. But hey, I ain't forcing anyone for nothing. Come back tomorrow with another grand and we can deal."

She thought for one long moment. "You like pain, Stink?"

He laughed as if the sound rippled from his gut. "You gonna hurt me with your sword?"

Her smile was calm as ice. "Perhaps some other time. I meant to watch. To watch pain."

This got his attention, although again he didn't move. His eyes -- still focused -- roamed across her body. "Maybe. You gonna fake it? Like an orgasm? I'd get a whore for that."

The word reverberated through her. *Blood whore*. "The liquid that you give me causes pain. I'll let you watch."

Thoughtful, he chewed his gum. "You shoot it up or what?"

"I... shoot it up." Actually she drank it and let the pain burn through her system -- as if somehow letting the poison compensate for the lost Hunter's burn.

More thoughtful chewing. "Gotta admit, Geisha, that's original. Don't know nobody who shoots up UV. You got a needle?"

She cringed, inside, where he wouldn't see. Human diseases didn't worry her. And yet the thought of what she was about to accomplish was somehow vile. "I'm sure you have a spare you'd let me borrow."

He smirked again, and nodded in agreement. "Let's see the cash. Plus fifty."

She handed it to him, even allowed his callused fingers to touch hers. He didn't seem bothered by the ice that burned her skin. His gaze crawled slimily over her body as he handed her a capsule and syringe already armed with a fresh needle. If she didn't need him for his weapons, she would have killed him just for this alone. *You are a coward. You cannot poison him and you're too weak for an honest kill.*

The voice that screamed inside her was ignored. Instead Hanako focused on the capsule, drew out the black contents into the syringe. She took a breath and kept her eyes on Stink. Without sound, she shot poison into her vein, gritted her teeth as ice cracked under pain, as fire scratched her blood and heart and lungs and skin, working its way into her throat. She would not scream. She wouldn't. She was afraid to breathe, afraid the sound would escape past burning traitorous lips. The only thing that kept her from it was Stink's face -- openly leering, watching for every drop of agony, like an attentive lover eager to see his partner's face.

It would be minutes before Hanako trusted herself to speak, to coolly thank him, to ignore him thanking her. She chose not to see his fist over his lap. Instead she pocketed the extra capsules and, newly poisoned, went to find more vampyres.

Another night was coming.

Jake watched through tinted windows as the sun set. He hadn't slept all day, had kept watch over her while she did the waitress thing for hours. He didn't know what in all hell possessed him to have sex with her last night. It had been... fucking beautiful. After five centuries, he'd learned to be honest with himself. Now he would spend another hundred years fucking every woman he could get his teeth into just to get that burning taste of Hunter out of his soul.

He didn't know what business she would have behind the Dumpsters at the Opal Club, but his gut told him something wasn't right. He saw her arch her neck and tense her muscles -- somehow he knew it was pain that the bearded one watched with his leering eyes.

Jake couldn't get out to stop her -- not just yet. Seconds were endless.



He managed to tear his gaze away to see the man behind her -- big and dirty, his lips peeled back in carnal pleasure. The man Jake met last night. His eyes were hidden behind mirrored lenses, the slacked jaw and parted black hole of mouth showing a sort of pleasure.

It was enough to simply kill the man right then and there. Instead, Jake forced himself to be as still as possible, just breathing out rage, waiting for those last slow rays of sun to finally drown.

Her life was not his business. He would stop her if she was responsible for vampyre deaths. Other than that, her life, death and jobs were her own concerns. Even if he fucked her like a virgin hours ago, losing himself inside her, not able to breathe, to think, to smell of anything but her. His Hunter and his death.

God help him if he didn't still love her.

The sun finally set, just as she walked away, not seeing him, her eyes trained straight ahead, her fists still clenched. The dragon on her skin -- peeking out from under the thin top she wore -- leered back at him.

Silent as death itself, Jake left the van. The twilight sky was still too bright for vampyre eyes so he stuck his shades on before checking for his guns. He preferred swords but life had progressed past tempered steel. On his right hip, the guns were made for humans. On his left, he carried Glocks with bullets charged in UV capsules, bringing a vampyre death more certain than the sun.

This man in front of him was human and paranoid with it. Jake let the guns bulge out just a bit under his jacket and approached him. "You didn't tell me you sold more than info."

The man took off his sunglasses to reveal small, raisin eyes. His smile was as wide as the Black Sea. "My man! How goes it? What's your name again?"

A couple of bills made themselves visible in Jake's palms. "Name doesn't get you cash." He fanned the money so the man could count.

"True that." Raisin-eyes didn't extend his hand. Instead he just leaned back onto his crate and showed what was left of his pearly whites. "What else you need? I got good shit in here."

"Drugs?"

"Fuck." The answer was immediate, accompanied by more great smiles. "That's just shit. I got good weapons." He ran his hand lovingly over the small suitcase he carried. Jake wondered why the cops hadn't been onto him. "You look like you may want an upgrade. Whaddya carrying? Glocks? You can trade up for an XV -- have you seen one of these babies?"

"The woman that was here." Jake rubbed the bills between his fingers.

"Geisha? She comes and sees me every few days. Pays under market but for a pretty face..." He shrugged and grinned some more.

Jake kept his blood cool. "She buys weapons from you."

Raisin-eyes stretched, his lips stretched wider. "That's the fun part, my man. Your girl's convinced she's a fighter. A..." He searched for the right word. "Vampire Hunter. Looked at me with those tilted eyes and told me this straight out. Says that my shit gives her this strength." Another shrug. Black painted nails scraped a bit along his suitcase. His other hand was still inside his pocket. Idly, Jake wondered what secret military marvel the man had pointed at him.

"What did she buy?"

"Your money's done."

Keeping his movements slow, Jake extended his hand with that hundred. Then snatched it away before the man could touch.

The grin was gone. "You don't like to piss me off, my man." The gun -- still in his pocket, was blatantly pointed at Jake's stomach. At least it wasn't his cock.

"No, I suppose not." Another second and the XV was in his hand, sleekly black and top secret. It wasn't supposed to hit the market for another year, maybe five. "Don't bother," Jake said as Raisin-eyes rummaged for something else. "Won't do much good if they're already dead."

"What are you?" There was no fear.

"Vampyre. Five hundred years old." He made sure his incisors showed.

"I should have guessed."

"You fuck with her, your ass is mine." Despite the smell, Jake leaned forward, keeping his lips peeled so his fangs would make the right impression. "Don't talk to her. Don't even look at her. If she approaches you again, you're dead."

"But..." The man grabbed onto the leather Jake wore. "But if she needs my shit..."

"Your deal. But I'll find you by your stench." He turned his back to Raisin-eyes and walked back to the van.

The dark had set, the city brightening with fluorescent lights. The clubs pumped blues and rap and people filled the sidewalks, out for alcohol and sex. Some of them would get much more than what they had bargained for. Jake watched a girl with mile-high, thin heels, her red curls in a fashionable disarray over her feather boa, walk the street, and wondered how in the five centuries that had passed, humans had forgotten how easily they could become prey.

## Chapter Five

The pain that burned inside her fueled her strength. She would be prey tonight. She would allow a vampyre to hunt her, take her, drink from her.

Hanako wore the leathers of a party girl -- vamps always liked revealing outfits. She kept her hair up -- baring her fragile neck in a snug halter-top. Her leather pants contained a knife and a few extra capsules of the poison. All in black -- the only color was the dark red of her lips.

Without a sword she felt exposed, but since she wasn't dancing at the Opal, she didn't need the extra trouble of cops and good Samaritans. Poison would be her weapon now. A part of her had hoped Jakob would fight her again and drink. A part of her was praying that he wouldn't.

Jakob. Jake now, with his modern clothes, speech and manners. She felt his eyes on her even as logic told her he was nowhere in sight. He was alive, and to her shame, Hana was glad for it.

*A Hunter who loves a vampyre. Blood whore!*

Sensei's voice was like the slice of a cold dagger through her heart.

She had no love for Jakob. Maybe a girlish infatuation, lust. A fascination with what had been forbidden. Stupid to feel love for a man who'd tried to kill her years ago.

He proved to her that she was weak, that she had no skill as a Hunter. No honor for her teachers or her mother's ancestors. For years Hana poisoned her own blood, seeking out those who'd take the bait, to keep up the tradition even if her own skills had failed.

The city was alive around her; the people swarming on the streets, strange music they called Hip Hop, crude and energetic. In front of her, a redheaded woman in tight

pants balanced on tall, thin heels. Her feather neck wrap trailed seductively behind her as she clanked her way across the sidewalk.

When a tall, blond man sniffed the woman's hair, she jerked her shoulders for a bit, a human ritual of playing hard to get. Hana watched the exchange, idly wondering if the man was vamp or human.

When the man tried another sniff, Hana decided vamp. Without geisha makeup or a sword to get a vampyre's attention, she did the next best thing. She bit her bottom lip until it bled and smudged it on her mouth with her fingertips.

"Excuse me." That same fingertip was used to touch a massive shoulder. She felt a bit of fear as he turned and leered at her. Attractive in a brutish sort of way. He would be dead by morning. "Do you have a light?"

Blood was the most exotic perfume. Red curls forgotten, the vamp held out a heavy hand to her. "How 'bout we smoke somewhere private?"

Hana slapped on a smile. "I thought you'd never ask."

The alley was just a couple steps away when he made a clumsy grab for her. She fought him longer than she would have usually. Maybe the pain spiked up adrenaline, maybe she thought to test her skills again. She'd killed the vampyre last night with only her strength -- although having a sword did help. Maybe the image of having that leering mouth on her skin made her fight harder.

She drove her fist into the cold steel of his solar plexus, and for one short moment wished for something sharp to drive into his heart. He gripped her hair, painfully snapping her head back. His breath was hot and ugly on her skin.

*You've won. Let him take your blood.*

She couldn't allow it. A scream pierced her lips; she drove her foot into his shin, her elbow in his gut. It didn't loosen the death grip over her hair, but his grunt of pain gave her some satisfaction.

*You waste your strength.*

Hana exhaled a coolly burning breath, and allowed his hand to tilt her head sideways. She closed her eyes and waited for that painful slide of teeth into her skin.

It never happened.

There was no growl, no scream, no sound at all. The vampyre that clutched at her had simply disappeared into blood ash. Beyond him, Jakob pointed both his guns at her.

*Say something. Anything.*

Her throat went dry. Wrapped in dark leather that seemed to suck in any light source, he stood in front of her, silent as death and so damned handsome her body quickened despite the pain of poison swimming there. Adrenaline that shot sparks through her body was stronger than both pain and common sense. "You followed me." Despite the guns she took a small step toward him.

"I saved your ass."

"Yes." Another step. "I'm sorry for it."

"Are you?" He didn't back away. His eyes were bright and cool.

"I am. I make my own kill."

The corners of his mouth lifted. Hana moved in on him, past guns, past her own voices in her head screaming at her to stop.

His body heat was nearly palpable, bursting through leather and metal. Her arms went up, into his heat, around the hard mass of him. Memories flashed -- excitement, danger, lust, his body on her, under her, above her. His arms closed over her, the guns still in his hands. She stared at him for one long poignant second -- and fit her mouth to his.

Sweet heat.

It wasn't brutal like before. No strength to fight for dominance of wills. Just a soft meeting of a lover's lips. His scent was both familiar and exotic -- man, leather, night. His lips against her were firm and soft, returning the kiss without making a demand for more.

His arms pressed her against the steel cage of his chest. "Hanako..."

The rest was lost as the wail of sirens split the night, and lights, ice-blue and murder-red, washed over them.

Cops. Great. Just what he needed.

Jake shoved his guns inside the utility belt under his coat and scrambled his mind into some sort of order. The flashing lights of blue and red seared his eyes just as her lips scorched his.

He didn't want to deal with the questions. Decision made, he grabbed her hand just as the cars screeched to a stop. The sirens deafened him, and in the flash of red he saw a few cops jump out of the car. Their guns were laughable and small compared to his. Funny how governments never had money to arm the public face of their defenses.

"Put your hands above your head!"

Behind him was a fence. Beside him, Hanako had an odd smile on a calmly serene face. For one small crazy second, Jake wondered if she would do the suicide-by-cop thing.

Not while he was around. In the act of getting his hands up he managed to take hold of a few smoke capsules in his belt. A small flick of his wrist and smoke poured out through shattered glass. It crawled into his throat as he gripped Hanako and leaped over the fence, tearing leather and skin on the sharp wire, running into darkness as cops and chaos followed.

She struggled as he ran, cursing at him while sirens wailed and lights seared his eyes. The cops didn't shoot -- or if they did, the bullets didn't come close.

A roar of motorcycle cut into his focus. He heard the engines at his left -- two Harleys with their headlights blinking on and off racing toward him just as the wails of sirens echoed closer.

Almost there. Jake saw one of the riders raise a hand and extend it out. He breathed in burning oxygen and leapt again with Hanako screaming in his ear, a clawing death grip on his free arm. He landed with his balls pressed dangerously against a leather seat, her screams lost in the sirens.

Wind whistled in his ears as the bike sped forward, leaving the sirens and the lights behind as they flew through streets and alleys, the second bike mirroring their

movements. A few more minutes and they were past the railroad tracks and surrounded by darkness. The rider cut the engine and silence was like a swift and sudden hammer to the head.

He felt Hanako slide away from him, watched her make her way onto the ground, simply sit down on the grass. Sheer pride kept him from doing something similar. He was too old for stunts like these. Centuries old. And yet his blood pumped like a teenager's.

"You better get a grip or you'll tempt me to feed." Deadshot, a vampyre and sympath, surviving not on blood but on the energy from one's emotions, was their savior. If Jake didn't mistake the scent, the vampyre's wife was on the other bike.

"Thanks." Jake slid off the bike, and got a good grip on his old lover's arm. She looked ready to bolt. The usual golden hue of that smooth skin was pale now. Jake couldn't decide if it was due to the night or blood loss. Probably both.

"Go on." He nodded his head in thanks. "Leave me a bike. I'll catch you later."

The vampyre snorted softly, and gestured for Taina to join him. A soft and vicious battle of words entailed on who was supposed to drive. The vampyre drove away, and if Jake wasn't mistaken, his wife was firmly seated on his lap.

Their lust fueled his own. Then he saw blood trickling on Hana's neck and rage exploded. "You let him drink from you. On purpose."

She struggled to her feet. He iced his heart and wouldn't extend a hand to help her, just watched her move -- graceful, always so goddamned graceful. Her hair must have come undone during their flight -- she avoided his eyes and coiled her hair up into a knot, allowing a few locks to escape. They framed her face and neck -- an exotically beautiful neck with twin black holes and oozing blood.

"You let him drink from you." He emphasized it because it burned his gut. As if somehow she had betrayed him.

"Yes." She didn't bother to deny it. Instead she watched him with her eyes so wide they looked unnatural. "I did." His hands were on her before he even realized it.



"Don't touch me!" Her eyes were dark on a pale face, huge and terrified. "You'll burn. Just don't!"

"What?"

"Don't touch me!" She struggled in his arms, emotion ravaging her face. He thought it blank before? Now she was terrified. "You will burn!"

"You're insane!" He held her arms to calm her. Whatever this thing was, it got her terrified.

She stilled, her body stiff as ice while he held her. She didn't fight, even her face went blank. The fear in her eyes was gone, replaced with huge dark knowledge that was somehow terrifying. "I am a blood whore." She spoke quietly, her breath mixing with his. "I have no strength to kill them. I poison my blood." Her eyes flashed deadly calm when they met his. "I poison my blood -- something that kills your kind. So get away before I bleed on you." She laughed -- a bitter broken sound. "You'll burn on the inside. This time I wasn't deceived."

Jake pushed away from her as if she had indeed burned him. The pain-filled arching of her back, the dirty man who had sold weapons, all that made sense now. This was how she killed them. A blood drop at a time.

"So you're the law and executioner." He watched as color slowly came into her face. She had control back, and her scent -- filled with adrenaline and fear and, damn it, cherry blossoms -- was slowly killing him.

"They come to me expecting blood -- turning to force if I refuse. And yes, I kill them."

He'd have to deal with that. By law he was required to turn her in to the Council. But she was human, immortal or not. He'd fight for her, a vampyre protecting a sworn enemy. The thought was as laughable as it was true.

Sirens split the night air, far in the distance but still obscene. "Let's go." Jake jumped onto the bike, extended his hand toward her.

"I'll be fine. You go." She turned away from him and started walking.

He didn't know where the need came from to just haul her on the bike and speed away. Sirens were getting closer. "Prison won't get you many vampyres to kill."

She snarled at him. "I'll burn all of you to hell and back."

He shrugged out of his leather jacket, tossed it to her. "Use this." She didn't look at him, but didn't give back his jacket. Avoided his outstretched hand. Stubborn woman. "Let's go!"

"I'm not stopping you."

With a curse Jake gunned the engine, forced himself to speed away from her, not looking back... He did of course -- just as she brought the jacket to her face.

Sirens were getting closer. Calling himself the vilest of names, Jake turned around, and cranked the engine so he would fly by her.

The hand that wrapped around her waist was effortless and sure. Her body pressed against his chest. He sat her on the seat in front of him and sped away into the night.

## Chapter Six

The giant vibrator between her thighs did nothing to allow her to find peace. A turmoil of emotions roared through her while the motorcycle rumbled under her and teased her sex with sparks of pleasure. The blood loss might have weakened her, but the adrenaline and lust and nerves sped up her healing process. Now she was itchy, and the buzz between her legs only intensified the need. The solid body of the vampyre behind her didn't help.

They stopped in front of some motel, next to a motorcycle similar to theirs. With Jakob's hand heavy on her, Hanako let him lead, confused, in lust, and damn it, hungry for both food and sex.

Once inside, she saw a man in leather kissing a woman half his size. There were two things Hana immediately knew: the woman was Hunter, and the man whose lap she had been sitting on was a vampyre. Somehow the fact didn't seem to bother either of the two.

*Blood whore.* She pushed the thought away.

"Meet Hanako, a Hunter." Jakob's voice caused the two to jump apart, but there was no guilt that Hana saw on their faces. "Rayan Slade -- Deadshot -- one of Alliance's finest." The man nodded. "His wife, Taina. Also a Hunter."

The Hunter was the vampyre's wife? She frowned at them but didn't have time to analyze or question. Jakob's hand over her arm urged her out of the room and into another straight across the hall.

"You said they're married?"

"Yes." His voice was clipped. "You want something to eat?"

She wanted sex. Plain simple sex to burn out this ache inside her so she could simply think. Before Hana could answer he was on her, pushing her back against the wall. *Now. Do it now.*

"You smell like cherry blossom. You did last night as well." His face was close to hers; she couldn't quite tell if he was aroused or angry. Probably both. "That motorcycle didn't get you off and now you're wanting me to do it. Except if I touch you wrong, I burn."

She didn't know what to answer. The disgust on his face mirrored what she felt inside her soul. *Blood whore.*

"How long before the poison dissipates?"

She didn't answer.

"How long?"

"Probably dawn." Actually, with the blood loss and her internal healing it likely would be within the hour.

"I smell your need," he whispered roughly. "I can just touch you --"

She shook her head. "No."

"Fine." His heat was gone. "Your deal."

He made his way to a laptop on the small desk and typed on it with ease that was astounding. He had the skills to live within this world, while she stayed the same for years. Dancing and poison. That was all she knew.

Doing her best to ignore him and the damned lust that had her belly clenching, she looked around the room. Two beds, the floral matching bedspreads deafeningly cheerful. A table, closet. Bathroom with its door open. The damned bathroom was larger than her whole apartment.

"What do you want?" His voice broke through her thoughts.

"Excuse me?"

"Food. You got requests? Pizza, burgers? Sushi?" She made a face at that, stuck out her tongue as if she were a kid. His laugh startled them both. "Not a sushi fan?"

"Unless you get it from Japantown, no."

"Pizza?"

She shrugged.

\* \* \*

She ate with the single-minded focus of a starving teenager. It'd been a long time since Jake had seen a woman eat with no regard to the carbs or fat or any other shit that modern science labeled bad for women.

"Why do you dance?" He didn't realize the question had been asked out loud.

Hanako wiped her mouth with a paper napkin the color of faded skies. "Money." Simple and quick.

"That works for you?"

She shrugged. The cherry blossom scent was buried under cheese and freshly flash-fried pepperoni. "Pays better than waitressing."

"Is money that important?"

She raised her gaze to him. "Poison is expensive."

It was as if she challenged him. He needed to address that, make the report to the Vampyre Council. Figure a way to let her work for the Alliance. "Why do you do this?"

A bitter smile. "You. Due to cowardice I chose another way. I lost the strength."

"Ochiai."

"Yes. Since then I have no strength. But I fulfill my vow -- I protect humans."

"So do I. You could come work for the Alliance." The words tumbled out before he had a chance to stuff them back into his throat.

A small laugh. "And do what there?"

"You're a Hunter. You can train others."

She sighed, pushed away the pizza. "I have no skill of teaching. I kill vampyres. That is the only thing I know."

"You didn't kill me."

Another bitter smile. "Yes. I didn't. You know why."

She got up, walked to a filmy window. Innocently beautiful, gorgeously lethal. Sad.

He didn't know what to say to that. "I loved you just as much. I nearly killed the old man for what he'd done to you."

She shrugged, her movements jerky. The cherry blossom scent was darker now, as if somehow laced with something heavy. Pain.

Of course, the pain. A Hunter's pain -- the energy that gave her strength and healing beyond an ordinary human, only relieved by having someone skim the excess -- either through the psyche or through blood. Rayan, being a sympath vampyre, fed on it from his wife.

For Hanako, Jake could only offer her himself. "Your Hunter's pain. How bad is it?"

Her voice was soft. "Not bad. He didn't take too much blood; it's coming back sooner than normal."

It took a moment for Jakob to realize she was talking about the vampyre that bled her. This was how she handled the pain, then. Pumped herself full of poison and let somebody drain her. Two birds with one bite. "When the poison is gone," he said quietly, "if you would like me to take your vein I would be honored to relieve you. If you intend to use the sink, tell me so I can leave and lock the door."

No answer save for measured quiet breathing. But then again, Jake didn't really expect one. Her scent would live in him until he turned to dust -- a woman's skin, a woman's lust wrapped up in cherry blossoms.

He shrugged it off and went to his computer. Cain had more data and before Jake offered the Alliance once again he needed to make sure the Council wouldn't freak out having another Hunter in their midst. He buried himself in scrolling text, inhaling her arousal and her pain while she simply sat on one of the flowery bedcovers and watched him.

## Chapter Seven

Jake didn't know he slept until a soft sigh woke him. The room was dark and silent. The only sound was a measured breathing from the bed just a few feet to his right.

The breathing that was just too even. "Are you all right?" He knew she wasn't sleeping.

Silence.

"Hanako."

"Yes. I'm fine." A calm, clipped tone that meant she wasn't.

"Go use the sink." She probably had pain. That's all. A Hunter's pain. The thought of her blood swirling away into oblivion left a bitter flavor in his mouth.

"I'm fine." Her voice went whisper-soft.

"Look, I can --"

"You can do nothing." She was up, the sheet high up against her chest, her eyes virtually flashing with need. He smelled arousal and disgust. "I'm nothing but a blood whore."

"What?"

"That's what Arimoto sensei called me." It was said in a raw final voice. "When he found out. About us. He was right."

He heard tears but didn't see them on her face.

"You are a fool."

At that she laughed. "I am, yes. A Hunter who loved a vampyre."

"I loved you just as much." The words were like large rocks falling from his heart. "There was nothing shameful in letting me have your blood. It sustained me, and took away your pain. It was beautiful." Maybe she did it as some sort of punishment,

Jake thought. Or maybe even simpler -- she twisted it until it became ugly and empty. Just let a vamp onto her neck to feed and die. Fulfill her duty and rub out the past. Just as he did with countless women of both species -- an empty fuck, faceless and quick and ugly. "I was weak for you."

"Your words mean nothing now."

The sadness in her was like a slow kiss of regret. "I'll show you if you have forgotten."

"No."

"I'll ease you." He kept his voice soft, in fear of scaring her. "I can remind you what it was like before you twisted it all into something to punish yourself with."

She rose, golden skin and glowing eyes. The sheet was a white ghost wrapped around her, exposing the strong and fragile curve of neck and shoulder. Had he said he was weak for her? Helpless would be a better word.

"I have no pain. Not much of it. It dulled when I took poison. But the need..." She gave a small and bitter laugh. "After all these years I still want you. Take me, my blood. Blood whore." She shook her head. "Sensei was right."

Jake barely had the strength to keep himself rooted to the chair. His cock immediately swelled, painful from the half aroused state it had been at for the past few hours. "You're a fool. Come here."

"The poison..."

He pulled out a small blade -- the edge glinted a sharp and evil blue in the light of his monitor. Keeping his eyes on hers, Jake took the blade, made a small slice across his palm. Squeezed his blood onto the table. Silent, praying she wouldn't see his hands were shaking, he extended the blade to her. "Try it." She scored her own palm, let blood drops flow like tears. He watched as their blood mixed on the shiny wooden surface of the table. Nothing. No burn, no smoke. "Will you let me?"

She nodded.

Clutching control in trembling fingers, Jake put his arms around her waist, drew her near. He was afraid to get up, afraid that any sudden move would wake one of



them. Her wrist was small and delicate in his. He brought it to his mouth, and inhaled her sweet dark scent.

“No.”

He almost heard her freeze. “Just like before. Everything, Hanako.”

Silence was the answer. Silence and the rustling of cotton as she dropped the sheet and stood in front of him, nude, gold and waiting. He couldn’t speak. His throat went dry as dust. Afraid to touch, afraid that if he didn’t she would walk away and never again let him have another chance to touch her.

She stood silent and strong, a goddess to be worshipped. He started at her feet, kneeling in front of her, placing soft kisses from her high arched feet to her knees, shaking with need, afraid he’d scare her with it.

Her breathing changed, her scent became a mass of contradictions. Nerves, lust, desire, fear, love. The cherry blossoms swelled. He pressed his face into the junction of her thighs, breathed deeply. Wanted to tell her how good she smelled, but couldn’t bear to shatter the silence that cocooned them.

Instead he pressed his mouth to the sweet lips below her mons, felt a small shiver running through her. He caressed the perfect swell of her curved buttocks. Her breathing quickened. The fine trembling under his hands increased. Her scent was blooming for him, spicy and rich, exotic flavors mixing with familiar.

His lips found her belly, nuzzled. Upward, to kiss each pink-tipped breast, already hard and ripe, begging for his mouth. He didn’t touch them though, couldn’t guarantee he wouldn’t send control to hell and simply feast.

Instead he moved up more, pressed kisses on her collarbone, feeling her muscles start to tense, her trembling increasing. He could’ve done it then and there, and gotten her fear over with. Taken her flesh strong and true, bit down for that first sweet gush of life-force.

With her heart thundering under his palm, he couldn’t do it. Instead he caught her chin and tilted her head up, met her sweet tasting mouth with his own.

Slow, soft. He held himself in check while her pulse thundered in his ears, her scent flooding his senses. His erection bursting through his jeans, he fought out of his T-shirt, crushed her to him to feel all that smooth skin burning against his.

Her heat was like salvation. Her back was a smooth, long, erotic curve.

He turned her, guided her hands to brace them on the desk. Silence was like a kiss of moonlight. Her head bowed and she brushed her hair off her neck. Offered herself to him, blood and body.

Shaking with need, he traced sweet kisses on her spine, down toward her buttocks, pausing to give each swell a teasing nip. Then up, inch by delicious inch, his hands caressing smooth planes of her belly, thighs, hot little tips of firm, delicate breasts.

Gently, she undulated under his hands and lips with soft moans and deep breathing. Her hair was hanging over her shoulder, her neck a tempting curve. Her buttocks pressed against his hips in a silent invitation.

He pushed his pants down and aligned himself against the core of all that heat. Took a deep breath. And plunged.

Their groans mixed like transparent smoke. Hana wanted to tell him how good it felt, to cry out with each delicious thrust. She only sighed, unwilling to disturb the silence that had wrapped around them.

She heard her own wetness as he slid in and out of her, deep, slow and tender, his hands cupping her breasts, teasing the burning points. His mouth traced kisses on her back, lips brushing softly at her skin, and as the pleasure grew, she wanted more of it -- edgier, sharper.

Still silent, feeling his heartbeat pulse inside her, she gripped the desk and slammed herself against his hips, meeting his thrusts, making his plunge a rougher one. He grazed his teeth along her spine and the excitement that sparked through her coiled her inner walls around him, squeezing as he growled softly in her ear. She craned her

neck -- a silent invitation. He plunged deep into her, kisses becoming light, sharp bites along her back, pleasure edging with pain, both sweet and sharp.

*Do it.* She wanted his teeth on her.

More bites over her spine, his fangs grazing her skin, his cock slamming deep inside her.

*Do it.*

She squeezed around him as hard as she was able, pushed back against him with more strength. Another growl, his palms tightening on her breasts as the tension in her belly grew unbearable. *Do it, damn you.*

He did. Pain, sweet and sharp, pierced her skin. His lips were on her neck, sucking and pulling, and she shuddered as his strokes drilled into her, as pleasure coiled through her body. His palms tightened around her waist, drawing her onto him, hammering into her with hard, rough thrusts, draining her, blood and soul.

*Come for me, sweet.*

She thought she heard his voice inside her head while he pushed deeper into her. The pleasure coiled to near bursting. She fought for it, clenching around the fullness pounding into her, feeling his lips sucking at her neck. Then silence burst in hot, sharp shards of pleasure as she climaxed around him, trembled and screamed and cried, and felt him shudder when his own orgasm hit.

## Chapter Eight

"You were correct. Five centuries of blood would be much more useful." Church hated being outside. Too much potential for bullets and his body wasn't as resilient as it had been before. Flanked by his guards, his latest yellow-haired female favorites keeping him upright, he watched the man he knew as Stink.

Those black lips smiled. "I figured you'd be interested. Ten grand and he's yours."

Ten grand was nothing. But principle -- now this was everything. If Stink was right, there would be no more need for this. A five-hundred-year-old vampyre whose blood grew stronger with time. It would be enough to keep Church's own body strong for a long time. "Am I to assume you know of his location?"

A bottle of a vile smelling liquid made its way to Stink's mouth. "Yep."

Church never understood the human obsession with strong spirits. Blood -- this was a drink worthy of a thinking man. The juice of life. The juice of strength. Thinking of it was like a jolt of electricity through his old tired body. In a few hours he would be able to enjoy his strength again. For now, he would watch.

"Perhaps you would consider somewhat of a partial payment." One of the women left his side and took off the tight material that covered her human enhanced breasts.

Stink's eyes went narrow. "Nice," he said. "Maybe a twenty."

Church nodded a command. The woman made her way toward Stink, ignored the stench that permeated from him, ignored that rotten weathered skin. What she was after was beyond all that. She rubbed herself against the man, her blonde hair gleaming on the dirty camo he wore.

"My man, this just ain't worth..."

Church nodded to the other blonde. She left his side and it took all his strength to keep his body upright. He wouldn't let his guards see his weakness -- the women were much easier to control. Instead, he watched as both of them slithered over Stink, and the man looked like he was close to ecstasy, his dirty hands on smooth, young female flesh, roaming on breasts, on hips, on buttocks -- every male fantasy come true.

One of the blondes nipped on his neck and moaned. Stink shuddered. "If they both blow me this is worth it. How much?"

Church smiled. "All, if you'll allow it. They are both yours if you will tell me the location."

"Sweet." Stink gasped for air and grabbed onto a hip, squeezed hard. As if on cue, one of the hands with red-tipped nails found a way down to his crotch. His eyes rolled back in ecstasy. "Got a GPS tracking the man. Here." Amidst wandering female hands, he searched through his pockets, fished out a device, and threw it at Church. One of the guards caught it as it sailed high over their heads.

Both of the women moaned now, sniffed at Stink's neck. Waiting -- Church knew -- for his permission. "Enjoy yourself."

"Let's go party." Stink puckered up his lips for kisses, but the blondes latched onto his neck. "Ladies..."

Church heard that first bite, heard blood rush up into a greedy throat. Another bite and Stink was trapped in pain and pleasure, shuddering, dirty hands groping at the smooth female flesh that flanked him. They weren't gentle, and Church didn't have time for them to be. He left them to finish up, knowing they would drain all the blood out of the man. He made his way back to the dark limo, and nearly fell into the seat as his strength finally failed. With shaking hands he shoved the GPS to Yuri, who hadn't left the car -- squeamish about death.

"Find him." So close. Church would cheat death once more -- just one more hour.

"What about them?" Yuri cast a longing gaze out the window. His sessions with the blondes hadn't been many, but they were long and sweet. And if Church hadn't supervised, Yuri would have been bled dry. With his skills, it wasn't to be tolerated.

"They rarely get a chance to finish. We will allow them their fun."

\* \* \*

The slide down from paradise was slow and steady. Jake still had both his arms around Hana's slim waist, his lips nuzzling the dragon on her back, when something jarred the monitor awake. The ghastly light that filled the room was blue and bright, since the thick drapes had kept the rising dawn away. The monitor displayed a new incoming message, the indicator blinking, focusing Jake's attention on the text.

*The ash spread isn't consistent with our weapons. The particles are blown around a central point, while ours are forced to one direction from the weapon. These vampyres were burned from the inside as if they'd managed to ingest the UV bullets.*

Maybe not bullets. But the "ingest" contained the clue.

Skin cooling, Jakob pushed himself away from the sweet warmth of Hana's skin. She turned, her lips parted and soft, her eyes downcast, as if unsure what to do next. Jake simply watched her.

"I need to get home." Her voice was husky.

"I'm afraid that isn't possible." His own tone was kept cool. Her eyebrows narrowed, her mouth no longer soft. "I'm told there is new evidence of vampyres being burned from within. As if by ingestion of UV. And I'm afraid yours is the first name that comes to mind." His brain was struggling to switch from lover to enforcer. Her body was now carrying his scent mixed with her own arousal.

"I only kill the ones who hunt me."

"These ones were found in their homes, their ashes carrying your signature."

With a brisk movement she snatched up the sheet that had been lying on the floor, and wrapped it around her body in jerky nervous movements. "You don't believe me. I'm not surprised."

It was as if she had accepted it. He wanted to forget it all and rip the sheet off her to ring in round two. Fuck vampyres and poison and this peace. He wanted her again. It scared the hell out of him.

"You may want to get clothes on," he said coolly. Duty came before lust. He repeated it as if a litany. "We're leaving shortly."

"I'm not going anywhere."

"You have no choice." He wasn't sure what he was doing. He'd take her to LA, but then what? Keep her locked up at the compound and fuck her until she had no strength to stand, much less go out killing vampyres?

The sheet wrapped over her, she grabbed her clothes and headed for the bathroom. He heard water running, couldn't stop himself from picturing her naked, her hair like wet silk, water drops beading on that gold smooth skin. His cock thickened once more, and he focused on the laptop to distract himself.

He stared at the screen and did not see it. It had taken more than a hundred years and countless women to fuck her out of his head. Looked like he was stepping back to square one. Idiot.

He tensed as the water was shut off. He didn't want to fight with her, not now, not when the only thing he could think of was spreading her legs and pushing his cock inside her until they were both breathless.

When the door opened he saw his T-shirt backlit in the bathroom light. He hadn't noticed when she grabbed it, but the idea that she wore something of his was ridiculously pleasing. Still...

"I'm assuming you won't allow me to return to my apartment before you take me to LA."

"Yeah." Looking at her in skintight leather pants and his own black T-shirt hanging off her turned his throat to dust. Her hair -- damp, black silk -- was coiled off her shoulders, and on that fragile column of her neck he saw the healing bite marks. His bite marks, as if he had branded her as his. *Well shit.*

"You will not believe me?" Her voice was smooth as silk.

"I will not."

"Then I'm sorry."

In a swift movement she crossed the distance between them, and he lifted his elbows in defense, but no blow came. Instead sunlight -- burning and pure -- flooded the room as she pushed aside the curtains. It seared his eyes, his skin, everything. Instinct just took over. He thought he heard a soft "Sorry" before he stumbled blindly to the bathroom, sick from the light, his skin so hot he wondered if it had started flaking.

Cursing himself, Jake finally opened his eyes to find his wild gaze in the small mirror. His skin was red, but not peeling off. There was no sound in the room save for early morning traffic. She must have jumped out the window and fled. And damned if part of him wasn't relieved because at least now he could think of something else besides her. Like getting out of this bathroom. He heard footsteps and winced, thinking of Rayan finding him like this. Then all hell broke loose.



## Chapter Nine

Hana came in to sunlit chaos.

Pieces of furniture were strewn about; sheets were cut up to rags, red ash floating like fairy dust. Amidst them, on the floor, lay the vampyre she'd met last night. Jakob had called him Deadshot.

His Hunter wife was pouring her own blood into his mouth. "We've got no time for you." Her voice was weak but vicious as she looked up. Her brown eyes were tired, her face scratched.

Jakob was nowhere in sight. "What... what happened here?" God, did she do this? She had come back here hating herself once more for taking the coward's way out, for not talking with him as she should have, and just letting an impulse drive her.

"Cops will be here in a minute." Taina helped her husband up, took most of his weight upon her shoulder, staggered with it. "Get out unless you want to answer questions."

They made a move to leave -- or rather, Taina dragged her husband out. Hana just stood there, shell shocked and silent. Only when they passed by her did she speak. "What happened?"

Taina threw a glance over her shoulder. "Twenty to three aren't great odds."

"Jakob is... dead?" With horror she looked at the red blood ash on the floor. Pain twisted something in her heart, a cold knife-edged pain she didn't know existed. Worse, much worse than anything she'd felt before.

"They took him."

They were in the hallway now, and briefly Hana wondered why this vampyre could stand the light. She ran until she blocked their way. "How do you know?"

"They could've stayed until they killed us all," the vampyre muttered, leaning heavily on his wife. "I'm fine. I'll walk."

"Yeah. Sure." Taina kept her hands on his large frame. "Cain's tracking them -- luckily Jake's got the chip on him. They're moving -- looks like they're headed to LA. We're following."

"I'm fine." The vampyre tried to walk, but nearly staggered to the ground.

"I'm with you." The words flew out before Hanako even thought them.

"I don't have time to babysit." Lightly, Taina smacked her husband on the head and took his weight again.

"I'm a Hunter, same as you." Hana grabbed Deadshot's other arm and walked with them toward the exit, ignoring looks of horror and blatant curiosity. Guilt settled like a rock inside her belly. She'd burned him, weakened him. Now it was up to her to get him out. If he lived. "I'll get him back." Or she would die for him.

The sun was brilliant and merciless as all three shuffled out of the building. Sirens approached but Hana didn't care. She'd done this to him. She hadn't fought -- she'd simply used another form of poison.

*You really are a coward.* The voice inside her head was somehow gentle now. She should have stayed there -- made him believe. Even if he'd taken her to LA at least... at least he'd be around.

She climbed into a van with tinted windows and just prayed.

\* \* \*

He'd die after five centuries of living. He wasn't afraid, he didn't curse hell or whatever god had become popular during this century. He simply lay on top of cold, damp carpet and waited for the burn to do its job. His strength was sapped from him -- he didn't need restraints after the first slow minutes of the leech machines draining his blood. The vampyres that had held him down left him alone in this dark basement with the steady pull and hum of the machines and his own soaring misery.

Ironic that it was his blood Church wanted. As Jake listened to the steady hum of tubes that sucked the life out of him -- steady and slow enough so he wouldn't die too

soon -- he wondered if he'd burst to ashes before or after Cain and company would get here. Taina probably was cussing up a storm right now. Deadshot would be stern and quiet, holding all thoughts inside. And Hanako... probably would be happy to get rid of him.

At least he knew she wouldn't have to be turned in to the Vampyre Council. Once the Alliance swept this place they'd find all the evidence of what Church had whispered to him earlier. The hunt for older vampyres. The draining of them -- all for nothing -- the burning of them to suppress any and all evidence. Which led to him and his own blood, centuries strong. Except Church didn't know about the capsules of poison Jake had managed to grab before they took his weakened and burned ass out of there.

As it slowly churned his blood inside his veins, he hoped he wouldn't die before Church took that first sip. He hoped to see that bastard burn. For Hanako. Himself. For everything. Ochiai started this. It would be Ochiai who finished it.

The burn inside him seared his insides, and Jake focused all his strength on fighting it. Gritting his teeth, he thought of all the things he'd left undone; the emails still to respond to, cadets to finish training. Hanako -- beautiful and delicate and strong. Funny how only now he realized this boredom was simply his own doing. Fate was a real bitch, and she had quite the sense of timing. He chuckled painfully. And saw a movement out of the corner of his eyes.

Church -- Ochiai -- old and frail, skin gathered in loose wrinkles, his mouth slack as he approached, those dull blue eyes hungrily focused on the container with extracted blood. He was flanked by two blonde women, vampyres more than likely.

*Drink it already so I can fucking die.*

"I really prefer to drink from females." Ochiai's voice was old and frail as one of the blondes detached herself to light something that seared Jake's pupils. He heard the sound of liquid hitting glass. "But then, they say variety is the spice of life."

Through tearing eyes, Jake watched as the woman filled a heavy crystal glass with his own blood. She sniffed at it and made a move to bring the glass up to her lips. Jake held his breath -- she'd know something was wrong.

"No!" Like a jealous lover, Ochiai shoved the blonde away. "You can have the humans that come after him. This one is mine."

He took a heavy swallow from the glass, and arched his neck back as poisoned blood entered his system. The burn inside Jake's body started boiling. He could let go now. Pain was like scalding oil in his gut, scorching him from the inside. He watched Church for a reaction. A few seconds more. He wanted to see that bastard's face. He hoped the burn would work. He prayed it would.

Just a few seconds more.

"Actually." The voice was cool and female. "He's mine."

Hanako -- dressed in ninja black -- appeared as if out of thin air.

Ochiai. Her sensei friend, her enemy. He who consoled her when her sensei died, who told her that she wouldn't have the strength to kill her lover. Who gave her poison to ensure his death. Who gave her poison to ensure his own damned immortality.

She let the anger bubble to the surface, ignored the hissing in her ear as Cain barked something into her earpiece. They were fighting their way through the vampyres a level above. He barked for her to wait, but Hanako ignored him. This all would end before they got here.

She couldn't watch Jakob, not like this, not lying helpless on the empty floor. She had no poison, she would heal him like Taina did. Her human blood would save a vampire -- as soon as she killed Ochiai.

"Hanako." The bastard took a drink of something from a heavy glass.

"Get out." Jakob's voice was weak, delirious.

She ignored him and faced Ochiai. "Our reunion is overdue."

He sipped again and smiled. "Perhaps. Although I have no need for gratitude." He'd been sipping blood, twirling it in his glass just like a connoisseur of wine. Hana

realized -- after a quick glance at the tubes and the machine attached to them -- that he was sipping Jakob's blood. Rage doubled. And she had no sword as the vampyre bitches neared her.

"Pretty," the left one said, and curled her blood-red mouth in a smile. "Her neck looks tender."

"Get out, Hanako!"

She didn't glance his way, didn't back up when one of the blondes came closer and took a sniff. "She doesn't smell like Hunter."

"Get out, damn you!"

She spared Jake a glance; nearly broke seeing him struggling to get up. "Not before I kill this bastard." She threw a feral glance at Ochiai who solemnly continued to sip blood, watching them all with a detached stare as if his life was in that cup.

"He is already dead." Jakob was on his knees, holding onto the machine to stand upright.

The words made Ochiai smile. "A ruse? How clever." Another long deep swallow.

One of the blondes chose just that moment for the first strike. A backhand, right across Hana's cheek. Hanako tasted blood and went a little mad. She didn't have a sword because Cain had told her it would set off every alarm in here. Instead she had her rage and let it fuel her strength.

The vampyres were strong, their nails long and vicious. But then the old man screamed -- a thin, high scream of someone dying.

An eerie silence followed. She watched the blondes rush over to Ochiai's fallen body, and wondered why one of them bit into her own wrist and tried to feed the blood into the old man's gaping mouth.

Somewhere in shadows, Jakob stood, leaning on the machine that sucked his blood away. Hana rushed to him and yelled at Cain to hurry while she ripped the tubes out of his veins.

"He's dying. As am I." Jake's voice was weak against her ear. He was so heavy Hana wasn't sure she could hold him up. The vampyre blondes were ignoring them, openly weeping over a man who seemed to wither with each passing second.

"What did you do to him?"

"Poisoned his blood. Closed the circle." She heard Jake draw a jagged breath. "You hear me, bastard? We'll both turn to ash." He laughed now as they watched the vampyres try to revive the human with their blood. He sagged just a bit against her, more, more...

"I can't be strong much longer, Hanako." She had no choice but to let him sit back down onto the hard cement. In the harsh light his skin looked pasty. She touched his face, and his pale skin nearly scorched her. "Live, Hanako. Live well. I've... always... loved..." She heard him grit his teeth. His skin started to turn from pale to gray. Smoke. She started smelling smoke.

From him.

He'd taken her poison!

She heard voices now, a shuffling of feet as people rushed in toward them. She didn't care. Through tears she would watch him die. A wail of misery broke through the haze. She watched the blondes lifting away from an unmoving shriveled corpse. Their blood was on his mouth. Ochiai was dead.

And the idea hit.

She didn't have the fangs of a vampyre to bite into her wrist. She did her best, painfully tearing through skin, letting the blood flow, squeezing her hand over his lips. She didn't know if it would work. She simply cried. And prayed to every god her mother had taught her.

## Chapter Ten

Hell was a dark room and the Devil himself looked just a tad familiar. When Jake's eyes cleared, he realized that it was Cain hovering above him, his eyes and mouth somber, quietly talking to someone in the shadows.

"What happened?" His own voice was loud in his head, but it came out a whisper that raked his throat with shards of glass.

"Your Hunter saved you. Poured her blood into your throat before you turned yourself into a martyr. Idiot." The last word sounded gruff. A woman came to put her hand on Cain's upper arm; tall and fair, her hair a dark fall over her shoulder. Cain's vampyre. That silent offer of support was more than Jake could handle.

He thought of Hanako and closed his eyes. And smelled her scent.

Gritting his jaw through pain, he struggled to get up, ignoring hands that were determined not to let him. "I'm fine," he managed through clenched teeth.

Another glance around told him he was in his own bedroom. His art and swords were on the walls, katana and pen drawings. Symbols of a life long past.

"Yeah, you're fine." The human smirked, his scent a mixture of both relief and recent panic. "Don't take any more poison. You'll be fine." He left the room, gripping his vampyre's hand.

"Hanako."

"I'm here." Her voice sounded tired.

"My life is in your debt."

"Yes, I suppose that's true." He watched as she came forward, gold-skinned, delicate and unbelievably strong. Somehow he felt his heart overfill with things he hadn't felt for a long time. He didn't know how to handle them. He didn't know what one would say in such a situation.

She spoke for him. "You knew they'd come for you and still you took my poison."

He shrugged although the motion caused him pain. "Revenge. Why did you come for me?"

She shrugged. "I felt... I owed it to you."

A part of him had hoped she would say something else. A part of him was terrified she would.

"Without Ochiai your peace can flourish. What will you do now?" Her face was pensive, as if she wondered the same thing about herself.

He didn't know. He would keep living, training cadets, investigating crimes, both vampyre and human. A dull, gray life without too many feelings.

He hated it.

"Join me. Us. The Alliance. Cadets could use a real Hunter training them. You'd be invaluable."

Something flickered in those exotic eyes. Instead of answering she looked up somewhere behind his shoulder. "You've always had a talent with the brush."

She must have looked at one of the drawings he'd done over a century ago -- one night when he was drunk and after three different women he still couldn't get her out of his mind. He'd drawn both of them -- warriors fighting, a combat of the sensual, as if the art of war was turning into love. "It's you. It's us." The feeling inside him was now bittersweet. The urge to take her in his arms was growing stronger. He was afraid that if he tried, she'd bolt away from him.

"Hanako..."

"You need rest." Her voice was curiously hitched.

"Hanako, look at me." She did, her eyes suspiciously bright. "You're crying. Why?"

She gave a tiny laugh. "No reason."

Her scent was mixed-- regret, hope, sadness. He was a fool, Jake realized. Five hundred years, and he still knew nothing. "I love you."



Silence.

"Didn't you hear me? I love you. Always have. Even when you thought to poison me."

She put her face into her hands. "How could you? Knowing that I'd kill you?"

"You thought you were weak. That's why that bastard talked you into it." She nodded silently and in the dim light he saw a tear on her cheek. He reached for her and it was like a gift from heaven when she allowed his hand to grasp her own, to draw her closer. "I want you with me. Always."

He watched another tear slide down her cheek, and felt the tiny tremble in the hand he held. The growing fear gnawing at his belly was nothing like the fear of death. Would she not feel the same? It'd been so long, and memories of youth were always sweeter than real life.

"I do not have the words," she whispered and just shook her head. "I do not have the words to give you."

"*Aishiteru*," he said, formally in Japanese, the way a male would say once in his lifetime when proposing to his female. "Say it back to me."

"I..." She leaned to him. Her lips on his were sweet as rain. "You need my blood. Take from me."

"I'm fine." He didn't have the strength to push away. She didn't love him -- wasn't fate a bitch? This urge to laugh and howl was new and not too pleasant.

Before he turned away her arms were on him, her scent fresh and true. Sweet cherry blossoms. "I have no words," she said. "But I can give you this. I want to give you strength -- of me."

She pressed his face into her skin, right in the curve where neck met shoulder. He felt her pulse against his lips, steady and tempting. She couldn't say the words, but maybe this meant the same thing.

He didn't ask, didn't want to break the sudden silence where their breathing and their heartbeats were the only sounds. Instead, he licked her skin and felt her shudder. Her arms tightened around him, and she shifted so she knelt on the bed beside him.

His hands cupping her head, he licked her skin again and gently bit. Her moan was thunder in his ears, and the fine trembling that raked her body shook him apart. Her blood both burned and saved him. Careful, keeping control in check, Jake sucked and nibbled on her neck, and as her shudders grew, he slid his hand down to the center of her heat, found her core and pressed his palm hard against it. Even the dark material she wore didn't stop the scorching of his fingers. She burned him, inside, outside, and filled him with more emotion than he could handle.

He forced himself to tear his lips away. He didn't want to take too much of what was offered as a gift. Instead he pressed his lips against hers, ground his palm into her sex, and felt her hips push and rub against it. Impatient for all of her, he tugged on the material of her pants and felt her breath tickle his ear.

"You're too weak. We can't."

"You'll be on top." He had to have her. Now.

She helped him strip the clothes off her and knelt beside him, golden skin concealing ancient strength, delicately, beautifully his. The clothes he'd been wearing were tugged until they parted, giving her access to his skin. She put her lips on him, covered his chest in kisses, lower, lower, until his cock started to throb, anticipation beating in his blood like drums. He helped her push down his pants and free his cock, and then that scorching mouth was on him, loving him, working him until he thought the sheer pleasure would burn through him.

And then she covered him, lay on him, skin to golden skin, and took him inside her heat. Pleasure became lava, thick and shimmering and burning, and as she moved on him, he wondered if indeed he'd died and ended up in heaven by mistake.

She rode him soft and slow and a cherry blossom scent tickled his nostrils as she kissed him. His hands held on to those slim hips in fear that somehow she would disappear, and heated pleasure rolled through him as he watched her -- couldn't keep his eyes off her. Her neck was arched, the bite marks from his teeth like an erotic branding on her skin. *Mine. You're mine.*

He wondered if she heard, the thoughts were so loud in his head while she moved over him. Clenching herself around his cock, her breathing quickening, her soft, smooth skin rubbing against him, her breasts pink-tipped and, when he put his hands on them, firm and soft. She arched her neck, moaning softly, and the burn around his cock increased while she climaxed over him, pulsing and squeezing and trembling -- the cherry blossom scent much stronger now. His hands were on her hips again. He moved her now while she pressed her lips against his neck and shuddered.

"I... love you," he heard her whisper shyly, and the burning pleasure overtook him. He pumped his hips into her heated sex and emptied himself into her, his seed, his soul, his everything. Her lips were still against his neck when sanity returned. With cherry blossoms in the air, he felt her lick his skin. "I wonder if it would hurt if I bit you. Here." She licked his neck again, and Jakob hugged her tight, pressing her against his body until she squealed a bit.

"The pain is worth the pleasure, sweet." And then he tilted his neck to give her better access.

## **Fiona Jayde**

Fiona Jayde is an author, a pilot, a ninth degree black belt in three styles of martial arts, a computer hacker, a mountain climber, a jazz singer, a weight lifter, a superspy with a talent for languages, and an evil genius. All in her own head, of course.

In real life, she really is an author, insists she is a good driver even though various loved ones refuse to let her drive, possesses a brown belt in Tae Kwon Do and blue belt in Aikido, is a web developer, scared to death of heights, loves jazz piano, can bench-press about twenty pounds -- with effort, speaks English and Russian fluently, and when not plotting murder and mayhem enjoys steamy romance novels, sexy spy thrillers, murky mysteries and violent movies where things frequently blow up.

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