

No. 13

The Chronicles of  
Nightfire,  
Texas

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.



The Mines of  
Sangra Dios



# The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas

Books by Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

*Cry, Wolf*

*The Great Debate*

*Metrognomes: The Shaman's Apprentice*

The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas  
**The Mines of Sangra Dios**

Chapter X of *The Haunting of Alexas Mansion*

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**Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.**

CLARK  
INK<sub>LLC</sub>

**Dallas**

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# **The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas**

Volume 1, Number 13

“The Mines of Sangra Dios”

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# The Nightfire Timeline

1974

The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas #1-3

1975

The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas #4-13

1995

Six Nights to Damnation (featured in *The Great Debate*)

1997

Cry, Wolf

2000

Christian's Dilemma (featured in *The Great Debate*)

2001

Reverend Philips is Going to Hell (featured in *The Great Debate*)

2002

The Escapist



Sam turned in horror to find an unfamiliar, corpse-like face glaring at him from the darkness. The creature bared its fangs and pulled him inside violently, throwing him to the ground. It then started dragging him down, into the depths of the secret caverns. Sam struggled. "Wait! Stop!" He pulled against his captor's grip to no avail.

The creature finally stopped and pushed Sam against a wall, now somewhere beneath the land that surrounded Alexas Mansion. Sam heard noises coming from the wall and screamed out loud, as emaciated hands began clawing their way through.

His captor laughed with a voice that croaked as though unused for years. "No mortal has invaded our sanctuary for quite some time. It seems you have awakened the Sleeping Ones. Now they must feed." The vampire pulled Sam away and pinned him to the wall on his left, as they watched the Sleeping Ones emerge from the walls that had been their graves for years.

Sam's voice was barely a whisper, though he was trying to scream. "I'm a friend of Valentinus! I'm his friend!"

Three living nightmares, covered in dirt, skeletally thin, shambled towards Sam now, looking like something out of a zombie movie. The Sleeping Ones.

“Too bad, little slave. We don’t honor the human laws of ownership. Only our own. The Sleeping Ones have starved for decades. They *must* feed when awakened.”

“Then they’re going to have to feed on someone else!” Valen Alexas appeared in the corridor, having entered through the passageway in the mansion. His voice and face radiated anger. “You know the laws, Varney.”

The other vampire sneered, as the Sleeping Ones came closer. “I *do* know our laws, *Valentinus!* This slave does *not* bear your mark—just like the *last* time! He has wandered into our sanctuary. He has awakened some of the Sleeping Ones. He is ours, no matter that you hold a receipt from some trader.”

“You really should make *some* effort at keeping up with the world, Varney. The humans abolished the slave trade here more than a *century* ago. Sam is my equal.”

Varney sneered even more devilishly. “Not your equal, Valentinus. You insult us all with such words. You are a *god!* *This* will never be your equal or any of ours. *This* is our food.”

One of the Sleeping Ones coughed up a great cloud of dust, then spoke hoarsely. “This argument is pointless. The human is in clear violation. We will feed now.”

“What’s going on?” Another new voice, that of Bill Randal, entered the conversation.

Sam's eyes met Valentinus'. He found his own fear mirrored there, along with a deep sorrow. All he could manage to say with his now failing voice was, "You're a vampire."

Valen looked away from him, not making an answer. He spoke to Bill. "Sam Turner here seems to have gotten in the middle of something. But he's my friend. He is no threat to anyone."

Bill studied the twisted, hungry faces of the Sleeping Ones. He looked to Valentinus. "Does he bear your mark?"

Defeated, Valen answered, "No."

"How did he get here?"

"I don't know."

Varney provided the answer. "He opened the secret entrance in Alexas Mansion. I pulled him on in to protect our most precious secret."

"Valentinus," Bill went on, "this is more serious than the last time. This time none of us shares the blame. You have allowed a mortal, who does not have your mark, to find our resting place. The laws are clear. Aside from that, we know this is not the first time that one of your humans has entered our sanctuary uninvited. We must destroy him, and the Sleeping Ones must feed."

"Bill...please..." Valen was becoming desperate. "Once again, this *will* add suspicion to..."

"You returned to Nightfire for sanctuary," Varney said pointedly. "You can leave and hope the werewolves don't tear you limb from limb if all you're going to do is bring us trouble through your reckless relationships with mortals. That's why you're in this mess in the first place. If you hadn't helped them to kill Sebastian Barnes..."

Another of the Sleeping Ones coughed up a cloud of dust, his arm creaking as he lifted his pocket watch and found it unreadable. He struggled to clear his mind, to remember words. “When...is it? What...date?”

The vampire Markus had entered the corridor and answered, “June 25, 1975.”

The Sleeping One groaned. “I have not fed in one hundred and twenty years! There is nothing to argue about here. The slave is destined to break our great fast.”

“There is nothing you can say here, Valentinus.” Bill shook his head. “*Learn* this time. Do not let these mortals so close that they discover our secrets.”

“I...” tears filled Valen’s helpless eyes. “Sam...”

Varney held Sam against the wall with one strong arm, and the Sleeping Ones approached.

A mist filled the corridor, and Varney’s arm was pried away from Sam by some invisible force. The Sleeping Ones were pushed back, coughing out protests. The mist began to take a solid form, standing between Sam and certain death.

Valen cried out with relief, “Tristan!”

The other vampire smiled. “Yes, Valentinus. Seems I picked a good time for a visit. We’d hate to have to bring you back from the edge again so soon.”

Sam recognized the name from the journal and from a very recent conversation between Valen and another man. “You’re dead!”

Tristan laughed, as he regarded the young man. “Oh, that. That was only temporary.” He let his gaze circle the room, locking eyes with everyone as he

spoke, assuring himself that he had their full attention. "I'm feeling *much* better now."

Bill whispered in awe, "He's become an Ancient!"

"Yes, it seems I've hit vampire puberty. And so you children will do as I say." He looked to the Sleeping Ones. "Go and feed in the town. That's what it's there for. We need some time to clear this up. This is not a random human. A plan must be formed one way or another before we take his life."

"But he's..." Varney was cut off by a hungry glance from Tristan.

"Do you wish a full demonstration of my new power, Varney?"

Terrified, Varney backed away. "No. I only wish to see our laws enforced."

"They will be," Tristan promised. "Return here after you've fed. We will not leave the Mines until this is settled, and we will not be settling anything on empty stomachs. But rest assured, when you return, we will decide *just* what to do about young Sam Turner."

Without a word, and with many backwards glances, the other vampires left, save for Valentinus, Bill, and Markus.

"Thank you, Tristan," Valen sighed.

"Don't thank me yet, Valentinus. We still haven't gotten this lad out of the fire."

Valen looked to his young friend, so many questions forming in his mind. "Sam..."

Sam met Valen's eyes, letting the full impact of his situation sink in—then he promptly fainted.

"Lucky bastard," Markus said to the unconscious youth.

Tristan shrugged. "Can you blame him?"

Bill grumbled. "I guess not. We are a bit spooky, I suppose"

"A *bit spooky*?" Tristan laughed hysterically at that. He looked to Valentinus, who was staring unblinking at Sam with terrified eyes. "Don't worry, Valentinus. I have a plan."

Valen sighed, remembering his relief at Tristan's appearance, and looked up at last with a sad smile. "You always do."

"So, why don't I ever see you much around town?" Ray and Jenny had finished eating, and their date had gone exceptionally well.

"Oh, I have responsibilities that keep me home most of the time." Jenny smiled sadly.

"What? Like fluffing the pillows? I have responsibilities too. I still get out."

"Yeah, but you've got a roommate to help out. I don't."

"Well, yeah, but even if I didn't have a roommate I could still find time to fluff the pillows *and* hang out with friends."

"I live with my uncle. He's...not well."

"Oh." Ray was bothered by her tone. He decided not to ask for details.

She laughed. "Don't make that face. You didn't know." She shrugged. "My brother agreed to watch him tonight so that I could go out."

Curiosity got the better of Ray, as it always seemed to do. "So, what are you gonna do with him...I mean...if you were to live with someone *else*. I mean, is it like cancer, or crazy?" Ray cringed in his head as the question came out so bluntly.

"It's more like...crazy, I guess. He um...he has...spells."

“Well that’s gonna suck if you ever get married. Can’t you keep him in the attic, or in like a home?” *What the hell is wrong with me?* “I’m sorry. I’m no good at chit-chat. I don’t mean to be such an ass.”

Jenny laughed. “It’s okay, Ray. I like a man who doesn’t waste time being careful. The truth is, we talked about putting him in a home about five years ago when it all hit the fan. What it comes down to is...” She struggled to find a way to explain without actually getting into it. This wasn’t something she wanted to put on the table on a first date. “They wouldn’t understand him. We have a pr...*nurse* who comes to sit with him during the day, while I’m at work. Then I take over when I get home.”

Ray looked smug. “Wait a minute. Back up. You almost said something else. I know what that means. Anytime anyone *almost* says something around here, they seem to be covering up some weird secret. So let’s not be careful. What were you going to say instead of *nurse*?”

Jenny laughed out loud. “Ray, you’re so paranoid! I never would have guessed. You’ve obviously been through some trauma somewhere in your life.” She took a sip of her drink.

“Well...?”

Patently, she answered, “I was going to say ‘private caretaker.’ Nurse seemed more efficient.”

“Oh.” Ray was relieved and feeling a little bit silly. “Well, good. I’m just playin’ around anyway.” He smirked.

Jenny crossed her arms and leaned across the table. “So what got you so paranoid, Ray? Tell me some of these ‘weird secrets’ that people always have.”

Ray sat back and laughed defiantly. “Well if I told you, then they wouldn’t be secrets, would they? Besides, I’m much more interested in the two of us right now. To hell with crazy uncles and other people’s weird secrets.”

When Jenny’s time to stay out was up, Ray paid the bill and drove her home. As he pulled up to her place, she leaned over and kissed him on the lips. “I had a nice time.” She got out and closed the door.

Ray watched her leave; then he thought about Dori and laughed. “What the hell am I doing?”

“What the hell are you doing?” Bradley asked Ray incredulously.

“Huh?” Ray closed the door behind him and stared at Bradley as though the younger man were an alien.

“I’m pretty sure you don’t wear lipstick.”

Ray looked in the mirror by the stairway, wiped his lips, and laughed. “Oops.”

“I’m also pretty sure that’s not Dori’s lipstick either.”

“It’s not,” Ray answered. “So what?”

“So what? You’re cheating on Dori! That’s so what!”

Ray felt cold inside and was surprised by it. Hadn’t he made the same disappointed argument to Tom at lunch? “Look, Bradley,” he said gently, “It’s not wrong. It’s not cheating. I’m single. Dori and I aren’t a set thing. I’m just dating around is all. I’m still into Dori. But single means single. I haven’t picked one yet. What’s wrong with shopping around?”

“Do they know that you’re ‘shopping around?’”

Ray shrugged. “No.”

“Well *that’s* what makes it wrong.”

Bradley turned and walked up the stairs. Ray felt as if the wind had been knocked out of him. He looked in the mirror again, wiping the last traces of Jenny’s lipstick from his mouth. He sighed. “What the hell am I doing?” He shook his head. “Oh, well. *Que sera, sera.*” He snickered defiantly at his reflection.

The angry vampires returned to the Mines, no longer starved for anything but justice. “Well, *Prince* Tristan, we’ve returned. So let’s decide what to do with it.” He regarded Sam, who was still lying on the ground unconscious.

Valentinus simply massaged his temples, as he silently died with worry.

Tristan knelt down and roused Sam.

“What happened?” the young man asked groggily.

“The others have fed. It’s time to come to a decision.” Tristan smiled down at Sam, trying his best to be reassuring given the circumstances.

“Fed?” Sam’s eyes went wide, as he remembered and realized what the word implied. He fainted again.

Tristan laughed.

“I don’t see anything funny about this, Tristan.” Varney glared at the older vampire.

Tristan stood calmly. He seemed as out of place as he always had in the dusty Mines of Sangra Dios, especially in the company of the now former Sleeping Ones who were covered in utter filth. Tristan had always been considered a fop by the others. He came from a very privileged background and

always dressed the part. Though his face was young, his long dark hair in mortal life had gone stark white before he'd reached the age of twenty-four.

“You were born without laughter muscles, weren't you, Varney?”

“It's not funny! Our sanctuary has been invaded by a human *again*. It's Valentinus' fault *again*. He isn't getting away with it this time.”

“Listen to me. We have an obligation to each other that goes beyond our secret tunnels.” Tristan met the eyes of every vampire in the room. “The ‘sanctuary’ of the Mines is more than hidden doorways. We must care for each other as brothers and sisters. No one else in the world would give us the same respect as we can give each other.” He nodded towards his dearest friend. “Valentinus is traumatized by all of this. We need to be sensitive to that. He's had more trauma than any of us during the two lifetimes since we founded this town.”

“All because of his relations with the humans,” Varney spat. “It's his own damn fault!”

“And where would you be, Varney, if Valentinus hadn't been up top during the first lifetime of this town seeing to our business with the government, covering all of our tracks, steering the humans away from our secrets far more often than he's accidentally enabled any of them to find us. This is really the *first* time it's happened. What happened with Augustin was ultimately Bill's fault, if you'll remember. Valen hadn't done a thing to lead him to us.”

“I don't like the way your sort always uses their *names*. They're just cattle. They...”

“My point is,” Tristan interrupted, “we have an obligation to help Valen through this. God knows he's done enough to help the rest of us in the past.

This is his first offense. It's true, we may decide to destroy this unfortunate human, but Valentinus needs time to sort it all out. If we simply kill Sam now, Valen may go eternally mad. You know what it did to him the last time. We *owe* it to him. Give me a night to counsel our brother. We will keep the human under our power until tomorrow night, at which point Valentinus will be better able to handle the gravity of this situation."

Most of the vampires simply agreed. They had fed. Tristan had made a compelling argument for their responsibility to one another. What would it matter if they let it go one more night, knowing that the young man was under the watch of an Ancient? Varney Jones, on the other hand, was determined to have some extra security. "On one condition."

Tristan regarded Varney patiently. Valen regarded him with fear.

"We let *this* mortal go tonight, and only for tonight, on the condition that any mortal who wanders into the Mines before a decision has been made, and that means *anyone* be it the Mayor, another one of Alexas' boy-friends or favorite pets, or Andrew *fucking* Jackson, is sentenced to die on sight. We kill them immediately. If there is any chance that..." he nodded towards Sam, "...*it* has leaked information about our resting place, we need this security, or there might not *be* a tomorrow night for any of us."

Tristan regarded the angry vampire stonily. After a brief silence, he made his judgment. "Agreed."

Varney cackled victoriously, seeming almost to *hope* for another mortal's intrusion.

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There was a knock at the door, and Louise Turner put down her romance novel and went to answer it, worried sick. Sam had been out all night without a word, now there was a knock at the door, which meant it wasn't Sam, who would have just walked in. She feared it was someone come to tell her something had happened to her only son.

She opened the door and saw only a strange mist in the glow of the porch light where she'd expected to see someone standing. She looked down. "Sam!" Her son was on the porch, unconscious. "Sam!" She fell down and took hold of him.

He woke. "Huh? What?"

"Oh, Sam! You alright? Oh, my baby, what happened to you?"

"I'm fine, Momma. I just..." he considered what he thought he remembered happening. He couldn't tell her any of it. "I got sick. Someone must have brought me home."

"And just left you on the porch and run? This how those *white* friends of yours treat you, Samuel?"

"Ain't no regala friends brung him home." Sam's great-grandmother stood resignedly in the doorway, clutching her walker. She'd had time to accept it. She'd been waiting for the guillotine to drop ever since the night Valen Alexas had shown up at their door burned and pleading for Sam's help in the dead of night. "I knowed it. I tol' you. The boy has brought the Devil to this house. Now ain't no hope. No hope fo' any of us."

Sam and his mother both stared at the old woman fearfully. Louise feared that her beloved grandmother had become confused and addled. Sam only feared that she was right, and for all the attempts he made in that moment to dispel his fears with reason, he could not; and the thought burned into his mind. She was right.

Ray sat on a bench beside his locker after work the next day, waiting for the inevitable.

“You’re moving slow today.” Jenny giggled.

Smuggly, Ray answered, “No. I was just waiting for your appearance *before* I showered or changed clothes. I’m on to you.”

She offered a glowing smile. “I had a really nice time last night.”

“Yeah. Me too. We’ll have to do it again.”

“How ’bout tonight?”

Taken aback, Ray stammered, “Uh...” He had a date with Dori, but what good would it do him to tell Jenny? “I can’t tonight. I have to make up last night to Bradley, help out with the kids.”

“Got ya. I just thought since my brother was willing...He was glad I had a good time. He’s been bugging me to get out there and get to know some people. Speaking of which, are you going to the party at the Alexas Mansion tomorrow night?”

Ray cringed inwardly. “Uh...erg. I haven’t decided.” *No. Hell no. Fuck no. Why don’t I just say so?*

“Well, I’m going. Uncle Joe has an appointment with a specialist. My brother and I are both off the hook. I think the whole town’s going. Anyway, if you *do* go, maybe we can make a date of it.”

“Uh...sure.” He smiled up at her. “Sounds like a plan.” He added, “*If* I go.”

“You’re so weird.” She shook her head fondly. “I’ll leave you to get naked. See you tomorrow, at work anyway.” She winked and left the men’s locker room. Ray breathed a sigh of relief, glad he’d decided not to go to Valen’s froufrou housewarming party.

Matilda Preston was closing out her cash register at the downtown department store where she worked, when the sexiest voice she had ever heard asked her, “You come here often?”

She looked up to see Dirk Arnold staring at her from across the counter. “Oh, hi, Dirk. I...work here.”

He laughed. “I know. I was joking. If you didn’t work here and were going through the cash drawer like that, ’fraid I’d have to arrest you.” He patted the gun at his side for emphasis.

Mati was so astounded at his hotness that she forgot to laugh, though inside she was laughing hysterically. Overdoing it in fact. Maybe it was a good thing she just stared at him dumbly.

“You’re busy. I’ll let you...”

“No!” She laughed at how loud she’d just spoken. “I mean, no problem. What’s up? Need help finding anything?”

“Maybe. I mean...sort of. Ah, shit.” *Why the hell is this so hard?* “I’m here for a reason.”

She looked at him, waiting. “Most people that come here are.” She giggled nervously, wondering what was the matter. She’d never seen Dirk come across so stupidly before. He was usually very articulate; probably one of the smartest men on Nightfire’s police force.

“I mean...So, you heard about this thing at the old Alexas place tomorrow?” He leaned sideways on the counter, trying to be nonchalant.

“Yeah. Pretty much everybody has. I mean, it’s been all over the paper.”

“You goin’?”

She shrugged. “I haven’t made up my mind yet. I don’t know.” *Yes, I’m going. Who isn’t? So ask me out, dammit!*

“Ah, well...I’m not going if you’re not. You know...I was thinking maybe we could...go together?”

“Pick me up at eight.”

He laughed. “That was easy.”

“Easy?”

“Well, no...I mean...I thought you’d turn me down.”

She laughed. “And I thought you’d never ask.”

He straightened, feeling taller than he had when he’d first come up to the counter. “Well, I’m making my rounds, so...tomorrow. Eight o’clock.”

“Eight o’clock.” She wanted to explode as she watched him leave, turning to glance back at her twice with a goofy little grin. The hottest cop in Nightfire had just asked her out on a date. Dori was gonna be *so* jealous.

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Bradley and Helen were in his room on the bed. They'd been kissing and holding each other for the past half hour, having had the entire house to themselves while Ray wasn't back from work yet and Brendan and Kate were over at the Joneses'. She was catching her breath, giggling, straddling him as her hair hung down in his face.

He smiled up at her. "Come on, Helen. It's time. Have sex with me."

She laughed out loud and sat up, fixing her hair. "That sure was forward."

"Why beat around the bush? I want to. You want to. So let's do it."

He rolled her over onto her back, beneath him, and he kissed her tenderly, letting his hand slide up her thigh.

She moved like lightning, and was out from under him in a heartbeat, sitting beside him and rubbing his back.

Bradley was trying to figure out how she had moved so fast. "What the..."

She sighed. "Bradley, this isn't the way I want it to happen. I'm not there yet, okay?"

He turned over on his side, propping himself up on his elbow. "But, Helen, we've been going out for like a month."

"Two weeks. Six days. I know that seems like an eternity after the precedent set by your *previous* slut of a lover, but really, it's not. How long did you and the psychopath go out before...?"

"A month."

“Oh, well...see?” She decided the matter was settled. “So I think I’m gonna try to learn the guitar again.”

Bradley rolled over on his back, groaning and laughing simultaneously, resulting in a very odd sounding grumble. “You were a *terrible* guitar player.” He resigned himself to another sexless afternoon and sat up. “Wanna go eat?”

“Sure! I’m starving.”

After letting about thirty inappropriate responses filter through his tortured adolescent mind, Bradley bounced off of the bed and suggested, “Dan Parker’s then. Let’s go.”

Helen followed him down the stairs, glad to be on the way to a place where Bradley couldn’t possibly try to have his way with her. Then again, she decided, she couldn’t really put it past him.

Bradley and Helen arrived to find that Ray and Dori had already met up at Dan Parker’s. They joined them at a table near the bar and ordered *lots* of food.

Dori regarded Helen as she chowed down on her burger and fries like there was no tomorrow. “Helen, it seems to me you’re filling a void in your life with this particular meal. You guys still aren’t doing the nasty, are you?”

Helen put her burger down and glared at Dori, trying to find just the right flavor of spite to throw back at her, but was interrupted when Sam walked in.

Bradley got up, relieved by the interruption. “Sam! Over here.”

Sam was clearly dazed as he nodded at Bradley. He went over to the bar and didn't even register the fact that the man behind the counter was the very bigot who'd told him to take his business elsewhere the last time he'd been in. "Can I get a Dr. Pepper?"

James Parker regarded Sam condescendingly. "All out, boy."

Ray, who'd heard about the last time from Bradley, went immediately to the bar. "Hey, James. Dr. Pepper. It's for Dori."

James put a bottle down on the counter. Ray looked at it, then back up to James. "Thank you," he said just an instant before punching James in the face from across the counter with all of his might.

Sam snapped out of his stupor, as James stumbled back. "Oh, shit!"

The others at Ray's table were all on their feet, rushing over to the scene. Bradley grabbed hold of Ray just as he was preparing to jump over the counter and go in for the kill, pulling him back. "Ray, shit! What are you doing?"

James raged, holding a hand to the place where he'd been punched as if he could keep the pain from spreading. "Get the hell out of here, you nigger-loving commie shit, before I exercise my right to..."

"Your right to what, you fucking bigot!" Ray was still being held back by Bradley, and he wasn't making it easy for him. "Your *right* to not give my friend a drink when he asks for it? His money's just as good as mine!"

"No it ain't!"

The two men exploded in a loud argument full of expletives and accusations. Bradley struggled to hold Ray back from jumping the counter and murdering James. Sam was between the two men shouting at the top of his lungs just trying to make them drop it and keep Ray from getting into more

trouble than he was probably already in. Everyone else in the bar and grill was on their feet now, watching the exchange, hoping, as crowds often tended to do, that they were about to see a real fight break out.

Beau walked into the building, still on duty but thirsty and needing a break from the evening heat. He saw the shouting men, Sam standing between them. He saw the red mark on James' face where he'd obviously been hit. He marched over wordlessly to the group to diffuse the situation, ending Sam's shouts by grabbing the young man, pushing him over on the counter, and cuffing him.

"Get that nigger out of here, Beau! He's caused me too much god damned trouble."

"*What?!?*" Ray was on the verge of losing all self control. Bradley let him go, finally just hoping that he would.

Dirk walked in, wondering why Beau hadn't come back out yet, just in time to hear Ray shout, "He didn't do anything, you son of a bitch!"

Helen ran over to Dirk, followed by her boyfriend. "Dirk! Sam didn't do anything! He was just trying to calm Ray down when Beau came in and hand-cuffed him."

"James Parker's a racist sack of shit," Bradley added. "He never serves Sam drinks, and so Ray just went over and slugged him. The fight's between Ray and James."

"Please do something!" Helen pleaded. "Sam's not trouble. He's our friend."

Dirk regarded the younger sister of the girl he'd just asked out. No way was he going to let this particular damsel's request go unanswered. "I'll take

care of it,” he promised, and he made his way over to the bar. “Beau! What the hell’s going on here?”

The other officer explained. “I walked in, and there was pandemonium. I put a stop to it.”

“That why everyone’s still yelling? What did you see *Sam* do?”

Beau considered. “Well...he seemed to be in the middle of it all.”

“That nigger just comes in here to start trouble,” James added smugly. “I never want to see him come around again.”

Dirk was smoldering with anger, but he was a master of controlling his emotions. “I’ve seen him in here lots of times, James. Never seemed to be any trouble.” He moved Beau out of the way and didn’t even look at the other officer as he unlocked Sam’s cuffs and handed them back to him. “It’s not against the law to be black in the vicinity of a fight between two white guys.” He looked between Ray and James, deciding out of pure hatred for the ‘victim’ that he wouldn’t arrest Ray. “Go home and cool down, Ray.” He looked to Sam, who was rubbing his wrists. “Sorry about all the confusion, Sam.”

All the adrenaline of the past few minutes suddenly jolting him, Sam shouted out of every emotion, “*Fuck* this place!” He stormed out.

Ray pointed a finger in James’ direction. “And fuck *you!*” He walked out without another word. Dori, Helen, and Bradley followed.

Sam was nowhere to be found when the rest of the group got outside. Dori ran up to Ray and hung herself on his shoulder. “I am *so* hot for you right now. Where’s Sam?”

Sadly, Ray answered, “He ran off. I don’t think he even saw me come out.” He shook his head. “Mother fucking ass hole! I don’t care if that *is* his cousin, Todd needs to fire that guy. I’m not comin’ back until he does.”

Eager to lighten the mood, Dori asked, “So are you going to Valen’s tomorrow night?”

“No!”

“But you have to!” Bradley and Helen urged him in unison.

“Everyone else is,” Helen assured him.

“Even Brendan and Kate,” Bradley put in.

“See, Ray?” Dori cooed. “You’d be the only man in town *not* at Valen’s party. And that’s probably not far from the truth.”

Suddenly Ray got a sinking feeling at the thought of being alone. He hadn’t seen any of his stalkers since he’d made his deal with them, but that didn’t mean they weren’t still there, watching and waiting for an opportune moment to strike. He sighed loudly. “I’ll be there.”

“Good!” Dori bounced giddily. “Now I don’t have to show up without a date.”

Ray remembered Jenny, realizing at that moment just how deep into a lose-lose situation he really was. “...Right.”

Much later that night, Sam was at Alexas Mansion, sitting on the couch across from Valen and Raksha, terrified beyond his worst nightmares. He would never have returned of his own free will, not after the night before.

He’d been hypnotized. After running off his rage and winding up at Hilltop in the dark of night, a mist had enveloped him, and Tristan had ap-

peared, mesmerizing Sam with his voice and spiriting him off to the Alexas Mansion. By the time Sam had come out of his stupor, he was already sitting where he was now.

Valen looked miserable. He and Tristan had talked until the sunrise was peeking over the hills and they'd had to race back into their sanctuary. Back into the Mines that were the cause of the current problem. Tristan had calmed Valen down, made him understand. There was only one thing that he could do. He loved humans, but he wasn't one of them. He had been given no alternative to accepting that fact last night. The vampires had their laws, and he was a vampire. He had to put the safety of the Mines above all else. He wished that he could make Sam understand. He wished that he could travel through time, like in an H. G. Wells novel, and erase the mistakes that had led him to this moment.

"So, you really are a vampire."

"Yes."

"Are they gonna kill me?"

"I won't let them touch you."

"I read your journal. From 1917. I just had to know if it was true."

"So you went to the clock."

Sam nodded. "I'm real sorry, Valen."

The vampire shook his head. "It's not your fault, Sam. It's mine. I should never have revealed so much even in my private writings. That was a terrible year in my life. I wasn't thinking as I should have been."

"So how old *are* you?"

"I'll be five hundred and one this October."

Sam nodded, eyes glazed, just trying to absorb the information. He looked up. “So what happened to Tristan? I thought he died. Is he a ghost?”

Valen struggled to smile. “No. He’s an Ancient. When a vampire has been a vampire for about five hundred years, give or take, they experience a metamorphosis. They die. Then they rise up again with near unlimited power. It will happen to me one day as well, in twenty years or so. The way it works when you first become a vampire is that you are bound by the confines of your mortal body. You are fatally allergic to sunlight, and you must feed on the blood of humans. So many of us used to get killed in the early years, because it was difficult to get away with our business, especially when we sleep as if dead throughout the day. When mortals find our resting places, they do not hesitate to use the daylight hours to destroy us. That’s why there aren’t many Ancients.

“After the metamorphosis, however, vampires can change form with only a thought.”

“Like turning into bats?”

“If one so desires. Bats, wolves, mist, shrubs. No one can hide from or escape an Ancient. And they are notoriously difficult to track down and kill during the daylight hours, since they can hide themselves wherever they like.”

Sam looked to the wolf at Valen’s side. “So, Raksha has your ‘mark,’ like Tonkowa did? What’s that mean exactly?”

“We give our guardians, human or animal, our mark. It’s a bond we form that allows the creature in question to link with us psychically. I can call to Raksha from great distances, and she can send me images as well. For creatures such as wolves, the mark inevitably raises their intelligence. I’ve

never put my mark on a human. I always felt it was too much like slavery, but worse, because there is no escape. Slaves at least were able to live their own lives. They weren't *really* my property. They didn't know what I was or what horrors I endured."

"What about Daisy Jacobs?"

Valen was startled out of his train of thought. "Why are you still so interested in that particular slave?"

"I can't..."

"Sam, she's your ancestress... isn't she?"

Sam fought back tears unsuccessfully as he spoke. "Don't hurt my family. Kill me but not my family. All they have are stories. No proof."

"Sam, I'm not going to hurt your family. No one in the Mines needs to know about them. Daisy saw me that night. I would have liked to speak to her about it, but things changed so fast. The Yankees came in the very next day. All of my slaves were run off in the attack. Most of the men joined the army. I never saw Daisy Jacobs again. I always wondered what happened to her; the slave who knew. It's almost like being given another chance tonight. It's so astounding that *you* are her descendant, because I wanted to explain it all to her. I would have told her exactly what I'm telling you. I would have trusted her with my secret."

"You wouldn't have killed her?"

"No."

"You wouldn't have given her your mark?"

"No. She would have had nothing to fear from me. As long as she never went into the Mines. I wouldn't have told her about the Mines of Sangra Dios. The Mines of the 'Blood Gods.'"

Valen lost himself in thought for a moment, then went on. “And the man she saw me kill... we have laws. We don’t kill townspeople, unless we have to. We kill vagabonds, travelers with no connections in the town, harmful elements such as the serial killer last year. I killed *him* myself, by the way.”

Sam was repulsed. “You really...you chopped him to pieces.”

“It had to be done. A message had to be sent. I came back to Nightfire, because I was in trouble with the werewolves. A particular pack has sentenced me to die. More than a century ago, I was involved in the death of their leader. He was a monster by every conceivable definition of the word. I did it for Nightfire. At any rate, they just found out last October that I’d been involved. A friend helped to get me and Raksha back into Nightfire, where we’d be safe.”

“Safe?”

“Werewolves can’t enter Nightfire. They can’t cross the borders.”

“Why not?”

“Long story. And it’s another matter entirely. Just know that I am safe here from werewolves. The serial killer was an acolyte of theirs; a human servant sent to frame me and turn the town against me, which is why he made vampirism his gimmick. He wanted the town to figure me out.”

A thought occurred to Valen, as he remembered Daisy Jacobs. Sam had her eyes. Eyes that reflected a deep thirst for knowledge, a cunning mind that deserved every enlightenment he had to offer. He could see it now so clearly, and he wondered how he’d ever missed it before. “Sam, I need you to know, I only ever owned slaves because that’s the way it was in the world. Rich men had slaves. It wasn’t really questioned until recent centuries. I admit that I *personally* never really questioned it. But I never treated a slave as subhu-

man. It was just their lot. I was used to it. I educated them, which was absolutely not done in those days. It was said that slaves who could read would learn what they were missing. They would rebel. I'll be honest; I had a few who would have rebelled. I set them free. It's my nature, Sam. I care about people. I want to see all of their needs met. If a slave asked me for freedom, I saw no reason not to grant it. To me, slavery was their job. It was no different to me than the man who ran a shop, or the man who tempered steel. If any of those had decided to change vocations, why should I question it? So it was with slavery.

"I know that atrocities were committed by some slave owners. I know now that slavery on the *whole* was an atrocity. I'm glad it's over and 'gone with the wind' so to speak. It's just as easy for me to *pay* people to work for me anyway. As I said, I was simply used to the way things were. Many of my slaves actually returned after the war and did work for me. I paid them very well. Daisy Jacobs, of course, was not among them. She was terrified of me. As I'm sure you are, now that you know."

"I'm terrified of the ones in the Mines. I trust you, Valen."

Valen stood up, and Raksha whined. He walked over and sat beside Sam on the couch. "I can't blame you for fearing them. After all, they've called for your death, just as the werewolves have called for mine. The thing about me is, I always look out for my own. I'm also a vampire. This whole situation..." He looked down, forlorn. "I'm so sorry..."

"Sorry for what? It's not your fault." Sam tried to assure him.

Valen looked up suddenly, and Sam noticed his fangs for the first time, wondering how he'd ever missed them before. "I'm sorry you trusted me, Sam."

Valen grabbed Sam so quickly that the youth could not cry out or even react, as the vampire sank his fangs deep into his throat and fed.

*I'm so sorry.*

*Next: Immortal Heart*





# The Mines of Sangra Dios

It's been a rough summer for young Sam Turner. For weeks, it seems, he's been burdened with one tribulation after another: his family labeling him an "Uncle Tom," the loss of his girlfriend, the strained relationship between his two best friends, the reality of racism...and yet none of these trials compare to the living nightmare he's stumbled into this time. Deep beneath the land that supports Nightfire, Texas, rests the deadliest secret of the unequivocally haunted Alexas Mansion. This secret is more terrible than any of the many malevolent ghosts that walk the mansion's halls at night, more terrible than anything Sam has ever known, for no mortal soul has ever survived long enough to tell the tale, once having entered the Mines of Sangra Dios.

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