

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white sleeveless dress, stands in a rocky stream. She is holding a large, vibrant red cloth that is draped over the rocks and partially submerged in the water. The stream is filled with large, smooth, light-colored rocks. In the background, there is a dense forest of green trees and a large, rugged mountain with a rocky peak. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall scene is a natural, outdoor setting.

# Red River Run

Book 2 of the *Red Butterfly* series

**AUBREY MOORE**

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Is this a dagger which I see before me,  
the handle toward my hand?  
Come, let me clutch thee.

– Shakespeare; *Macbeth Act 2 Scene 1*

# Part I

# Live

**A** bell from the church rang in the distance...Heaven's bells...ringing to alert my arrival.

*Bong.*

*Bong.*

*Bong.*

“Live.” A woman’s voice whispered through the darkness. “I have healed you once more. Take this gift and this life and continue to fight.”

I stood outside the gates, just as I did six years before—when I was just a girl. I was here, again, dead from Mayor Ward’s torture. Why wasn’t I allowed in? I shook the golden bars, frantic.

The woman appeared, but she did not reveal her face. The long white cloak covered most of her braided blond hair.

“I don’t want to live!” I yelled back to the faceless woman who spoke to me. “I don’t want to feel the pain anymore!”

“You must. Your journey is not over—it is just beginning.”

“Where’s Lizzy? She’s supposed to be here!” I cried in response, tears falling as I looked beyond the woman behind the gate. Lizzy was supposed to be waiting for me.

I was pulled away, my body floating through the air, down

through the clouds, stopping inches from the ground.

“Lizzy!” I screamed up to the skies. “Where are you?”

“Live,” the woman repeated, her voice echoing from above.

Church bells were just a faint ringing in the distance, my feet now planted in the field—the field in which the girls’ rotting bodies laid. The girls who had been murdered by Mayor Ward.

The red barn slowly started to fall apart, the nails giving way to the blowing winds. The boards flew all around me. Trees and bushes uprooted, all circling around, a twister taking everything away until there was nothing but the hay field I dreamed about for so long. My body whirled in circles. I was still in that same dream.

“Lizzy?” I begged to see her face one last time.

Time stopped, trees did not sway, birds were not chirping. My bare feet sank deeper into the ground with my heavy steps. I bent down, feeling the wetness. Blood soaked my fingertips. The girls who saved me appeared; their worn faces were now beautiful again.

“Thank you for setting us free.” They floated up to the clouds, a bright light shining down as they were taken home, free of the demons living on Earth. Why was Lizzy not being taken up to Heaven with them? Why was I not among them too?

I screamed to God, “Why? Just take me! What are you waiting for? Why won’t you take me?” I fell down to my knees, begging for salvation. Did I not believe in Him enough? Was I not worthy to be one of His children? His disciple?

The dead pulled me underground, the blood entering my lungs, drowning me. I felt the heat of the lava from Hell once more and closed my eyes.

Instead of the fire I expected to see when I opened my eyes, I

stood in a river, my white nightgown no longer torn, I had no bruises; my body didn't ache. Fog began to roll in, creating a mist about my face. The heat from Hell was gone.

Lizzy appeared on the shore, her hand gliding through the shallow water back and forth. She watched her reflection in the ripples. She didn't look up at me, but instead fled into the trees. I frantically trudged through the water—the bodies from the underworld trying to keep me from getting out.

“Lizzy! Wait!” My hand reached the mud along the shore, and I sunk deeper into the wetness. The mud on my nightgown turned to blood as I ran after her. The fog became heavy, reducing my sight to darkness until I couldn't see more than my hand in front of my face.

I circled around and around—like the twister in the field, my body being elevated off the ground, until I floated like the red butterfly.

*Live.*

I woke from my dream, my eyes adjusting to the morning sun coming from the window above me. The girls were still asleep in their cage, Mayor Ward was dead, and I was alive.

The memories of my childhood...of my parents, my life, Nadine—my sister...it all returned. I lay back in the straw below me...remembering...remembering the night I first died.

# Black Magic

*Twelve Years Old*

*December 18, 1999*

**L**ow chanting and whispers filled my ears, my dizzy head pounding. I had been knocked unconscious—I didn't know how long I had been under.

I needed to rub my eyes, but my wrists and feet were chained to something. Stake torches lit the night sky; the smoke in my lungs made me cough; the chanting was getting louder and louder. The rustling of wind through the thick forest created a howling sound.

*"Vivere Satan!"* the voices murmured in unison.

My chains were attached to rebar in the dirt. I tried to pry my wrists through, but there was no use—they were too tight. I closed my eyes. *Make the ground shake, like you did before, Maya,* I said to myself. *If I could get the ground to move, I could pry the rebar from the dirt and run away.*

I tried, but there was so much going on, I couldn't concentrate. Slowly I was able to turn my neck all around. I counted thirteen figures, all wearing brown cloaks, their faces covered, their foreheads to the ground as they worshipped the devil. My fears took over, making my teeth chatter.

Mama and Papa talked of this ritual often. They called it a séance. Nadine and I didn't know what it was; we just knew we'd have

to face a demon one day and we'd either live, or we'd die.

My fingernails dug through the frozen dirt. *If I could just dig my way out I could escape.* I pressed myself to try harder. Where was Nadine? Maybe she could use her fire to get us out of here.

I screamed as I watched Nadine's body levitate from the middle of the circle of bodies, the chains around her wrists keeping her body from floating away. The chanting grew louder. The fire reached up like hands toward her. If she were any lower, her nightgown would catch on fire. Where had her curly locks gone? Someone buzzed her hair short, like mine. The fire grew stronger as she moaned.

"Nadine!" I tried to get her to wake, but her mind was in the underworld, with the demon...and I was next.

She moaned louder, her body jolting in the air. Blood dripped from her nose. Something was torturing her. I yelled her name again, and again, until her body thumped down—the fire going out as she hit the ground.

I watched as Mama and Papa took her from the chains.

"I told you she would be the one," Papa said with his thick Spanish accent—what did he mean she was the one? They moved her body outside the circle.

"Hurry up, we might be lucky." Mama waved her hand. The cloak covering her head fell back, revealing her short wavy brown hair blowing in the wind.

A man approached me and disconnected my chains from the rebar in the ground. He carried me to the circle with a pentagram created with blood from the pig they murdered in front of us.

Five people stood forming the points of the star, while the

others surrounded them in a circle. There were others behind them—maybe thirty or more—too many to escape from.

The man who carried me lay me down in the middle of the circle and attached my chains to a pole. He held a matchbook up so I could see. Black with red lettering. *I'll remember his face*, I told myself. He lit the match. The small flame made his eyes yellow.

“This is my lucky matchbook.” The man snickered. “See the *I* in magic? It’s a flame,” he whispered. *Black Magic, Las Vegas, Nevada*, it read. “The flame is what is going to take your life tonight if you choose the wrong side. Keep that in mind, little girl.” He ran his right index finger up my nightgown and smiled. “I already told your parents I think you’ll choose wrong. It’s too bad—such a waste of beauty.” He kissed my cheek with his wet lips, turning my insides to stone. “I have big plans for you one day, if you decide to live.”

“Hurry up, John—quit playing with her. We don’t have much time before the portal closes!” a woman yelled to the man. She was young—possibly in her twenties, the shadow on her face was ghostly.

*John*. I repeated his name to myself. I now had three names of the people who were trying to hurt me: Carl, John, and Randy. I needed the other eight. I wanted to know who these monsters were so when Nadine and I escaped I could tell police their names and what they looked like.

John pulled a needle from his side pocket and injected a yellow liquid into my arm. “This will help you see a little more clearly while you’re in the presence of our *God*. If you survive—it’ll give you quite the headache in the morning.”

He flicked his match against the paper as it lit, and dropped it. The fire roared all around me, the kerosene feeding the flames. The

heat hit me first, my screams tantalizing the audience more. They wanted to see me burn. I wouldn't get the chance to escape. I was going to die.

"No! Mama! Papa!" I reached my hand out to them, praying they'd save me, but they just smiled.

"Choose!" Papa yelled over the others' chanting.

Nadine was still unconscious. No one was going to save me. I closed my eyes, waiting for the fire to take my life. I could feel my insides turn to fire from the drug John injected me with.

A voice spoke; I could feel its hot breath—hotter than the flames surrounding me, like the dragon from Nadine's fairytale stories.

I opened my eyes to see a demon, his long, beast-like nails clicking together. From how Papa described it, I was in Hell. Other demons and dead bodies surrounded us, watching, waiting for me to be in reach so they could destroy my soul. I stood on a rock, lava flowing on either side of my feet. I was stuck—there was no exit out of Hell. The demon's saliva dripped down their pointy teeth, waiting to get a taste of the human child.

"I can give you everything you've ever wanted." The demon's horns tilted from one side to the other, studying me. He knew all of my secrets, desires, nightmares. "Do you want revenge for what your parents have done to you for all these years?"

"No!" I yelled out. I couldn't give into what he wanted. I'd have to die. They told me if I chose to live, I'd be rewarded with toys. I didn't want toys. I wanted to eat more than just bread...go to school...be free of my parents hatred and the chains.

"Don't you want to avenge your sister, Nadine?" His voice deepened with rage. "They let that man do what he wanted to her.

Carl's his name, am I right? Carl will die—I will make sure he does. All you have to do is join me.”

“I won't give in!” I stood my ground.

The demons were angry as they hissed at my response.

“Throw her in the fire!” one of the devil's minions spat.

“Is that what you want? To die?” the demon questioned with a twisted smile.

“Yes!” I yelled over the sound from the fallen rocks.

“You *will* die. You *will* be nothing. Your sister will continue to be tortured for eternity. Or, you can join me, and live. I can give you the tools and the skills to kill all those who have hurt you and your sister. You've repeated their names in your head. You want them dead—don't you?”

“No! I don't want anyone to die!” My tiny voice was barely audible over the lava and demons yelling.

“Choose,” the demon growled. “Choose now!”

“I will never follow you!”

“Then your choice has been decided! Die!” The demon waved his hand and the level of the lava began to rise, swallowing up the area of the rock where my feet were standing. A wave of molten torture took over me and the lava devoured my body. I felt my heart pulsate, my veins pumping with blood, running like a river through me until my heart stopped.

I felt the warmth of Heaven—a soothing warmth, one that left me with the peace of my decision. The clouds migrated slowly through the air; church bells chimed from behind the Gates of Heaven, just as I had imagined it to be in my dreams. Just as Nadine told me it would be like.

A woman's voice echoed from beyond the golden gates.  
"You've chosen to die over giving into the evil. Now, Maya, you must live."