

Crimson Bullet  
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‘Damn Rubies,’ someone yelled, as bullets ricocheted around the alley, while I ducked behind a dumpster,

‘Ay kid, get over here.’

One of the men not shooting at me was waving for me to come, so I ran to him. Gotta be better than the other guys

‘In the car. Quick.’

I jumped in the back seat, as the guy got in beside me.

‘Get us out of here,’ he yelled. As the car rocketed down the street, the sounds of gunfire faded away. ‘What’s your name, kid?’

I looked over at him. The guy seemed normal, bit of stubble and a black buzz cut. ‘Tony,’ I stammered, still shocked that I hadn’t been shot.

‘I’m Angelo. You’ll need this,’ he said, pulling out a black revolver and dropping it in my hands

‘What am I supposed to do with this?’

Deadpan, he said, ‘Make pasta.’

All I could do was stutter, ‘What?’

‘You shoot people who shoot at you.’

Perspiration coated my brow. ‘Kill someone? But that’s bad, I can’t do that.’

‘Don’t worry, we’ll look after you.’

‘We?’

‘The Rubies.’

‘Who are the Rubies?’

‘The Rubies protect the people in our turf, and they pay us for it. So, when a gang, like the Black Butchers, who are the people who attacked you, come to our turf and cause trouble, we have to stop them. You were in the wrong place at the wrong time, so if you go off after this, they’ll come after you at home with your family and kill you because they’ll think you’re with us, *capito?*’

I took a deep breath. ‘What do I do now?’

‘Join us. We look after our own. We’ll keep you safe.’ The look in his eye—hell, everything about him—was trustworthy, and he saved my life, but why was he here? He seemed so nice. ‘What did you do before you joined the mob?’

He stared out the window, and when I stopped expecting an answer, he gave one. ‘Nobody just joins the mob. They’re desperate, or stupid, and stupid don’t last long. I used to be a trapper, making an honest living, came into town to sell some furs and got caught in a gunfight like you. Now, I’m here. You remind me of my little brother. He’d be about your age now. Fourteen, right? Always getting into trouble he didn’t start. What he’d think if he saw me now.’

He kept looking out the window. Sad? Lonely? I couldn’t tell, but I’d decided. ‘Okay. I’ll do it. Don’t have much of a choice.’

Angelo slapped me on the knee, making me jolt. He had a big smile plastered on his face. ‘Good man. We’ll head over to the boss and get you sorted out. Marco, take us to the boss.’ The man in the driver’s seat gave a nod, taking a turn

‘The boss can explain the rest. He’s better at it—Marco, look out!’

A car crashed into us, sending the car careening off the road and into a wall.

‘Shit,’ Angelo yelled, pushing me towards the door. ‘Get out of the car now.’ He dragged me behind a dumpster as the car exploded. ‘Marco!’

Angelo dived out from behind the dumpster, but the sound of bullets stopped him.

‘Marco? Is he—?’

‘If he didn’t get out, his goose is cooked. Keep your head down and get your gun out. I’ll handle this.’

I huddled behind the dumpster, covering my ears, until the gunfire stopped. Angelo ran out, and I poked my head out to see him and another man on the ground. Angelo was pinned, holding back the other’s knife.

‘Tony, get help, quick.’

His arm was shaking from trying to hold the knife back. I knew he wouldn’t last long. What should I do?

*Breathe, Tony, breathe.*

The gun! I can use that. I stood, legs shaking.

*This is a bad idea. I can’t kill someone, but if I don’t Angelo will die. You’ve got to do this. Aim for the shoulder. Do it for Angelo.*

I squeezed the trigger. The bullet buried into the guy’s shoulder, and he screamed. Angelo took the knife and stabbed the man through the throat, silencing him forever.

For a moment, we didn’t move. Blood pooled from the dead man’s body, and before I could react, Angelo’s jumped up and hugged me, as I bawled my eyes out against his chest.

‘Hey, little man, it’s okay. You’re fine. You’ll be fine.’

He comforted me until I had no tears left, but every time I closed my eyes, all I could see was that man's body. I won't forget that face. Not even in my dreams will I escape it.