

I climbed out of Quinn's limo and stared up at the building in front of me. It was big and ugly, the brickwork so covered in grime that it looked black. It was in terrible repair, with fissures in the walls, a roofline that sagged alarmingly, and rusting strips of tin that covered the windows and that creaked like old bones in the gentle wind.

*Not* what I'd been expecting.

I glanced at Quinn as he walked around the rear of the car. "You weren't kidding when you said we were eating somewhere different tonight. If I'd known *how* different, I would have ditched the heels."

His grin was decidedly cheeky as he leaned down and kissed my nose. "The heels make your legs look even lovelier, and the building really *isn't* as bad as it looks."

"It isn't?" I eyed the wreck dubiously. It looked ready to fall down, so the inside had to be a whole lot better than the outside. "What, exactly, is this place?"

"Over the years, it's been many things." He touched my bare back, his fingers light but heated against my skin as he guided me towards the door. "But most recently, it was used as a smelting plant."

"Hence the grime." I gathered up the hem of my summer dress so that it wouldn't touch the dirt. It was new and I very much wanted to avoid getting it stained. "This can't be a restaurant. The health department would have a fit if anyone tried to cook here."

"Then it's lucky no one is cooking, isn't it?" Amusement danced in his dark gaze as he opened the door and waved a hand towards the revealed darkness. "After you, lovely lady."

The air coming out of the building was thick with grease, oil, and metal and... something else, something I couldn't quite define. Something unpleasant.

Like death.

And old death, not new.

“There’s no one dead here,” he said, clearly reading my thoughts. His touch slid from my back, moving down my arms to clasp my fingers. “The deaths happened a long time ago, when it was used as a brothel.”

So why did it still smell like death rather than sex? “I would have thought it a little large for a brothel.”

“They rented out sections of it. I believe the foundry and warehouse men kept the girls quite busy.”

“I’ll bet.” I stepped through the doorway somewhat reluctantly. The click of my heels against the old concrete floor seemed to echo across the vast blackness and dust stirred--a fine cloud that caressed my skin like ghosts.

I shivered, wondering how many of those lived here. Wondering if I’d see them.

“So why are we here?” I blinked, switching to infrared vision as I looked around. There wasn’t much to see. Just the odd rat scrounging through the remains of rubbish. “I can’t believe you’d want to eat in a place like this.”

“I don’t. But there’s more to this place than grime and decay.”

“If you say so.”

He laughed softly, the sound a warm caress that flowed sweetly across my body and through my mind. “Trust me, Riley. That’s all I ask.”

“I do. I’ll reserve judgment on your taste, however.”

He laughed again and led the way through the darkness. My footsteps echoed, and dust continued to rain around us, filling the air with the scent of decay.

A low doorway loomed. We ducked through, then Quinn stopped so suddenly I had to do a quick sidestep to avoid him.

“What the--”

“Movement,” he said quietly, cutting me off. “Up ahead.”

I frowned at the edge in his voice and studied the darkness. The walls that divided us from the rooms beyond were obviously a mix of brick and metal, because I wasn't getting much in the way of body heat. But I could smell them.

And they smelled foul.

Vampires.

*I'm gathering this isn't part of your grand plan?*

*No.* His metal tones were annoyed. *It most certainly is not.*

*We could just retreat.*

*We could, but this building is mine, and they're trespassing.*

*You've bought this dump? Why the hell would you do that?*

*When we get where we have to go, you'll see.* He released my hand and flexed his fingers. *Wait here while I take care of the problem.*

I snorted softly and kicked off my stilettos, gathering them in either hand as I said, *We've been together long enough for you to know the answer to that suggestion.*

His smile flashed, bright in the darkness. *I was only thinking of your new dress.*

*Not believing it, vampire.* I motioned toward the double doorway ahead. *How do you want to play this?*

*There are humans as well as vamps in that room, so we'll need to proceed cautiously--*

His words were cut off as a scream rent the air. It was a high, piercing sound, filled with fear and pain. It was a woman's scream, not a man's.

*So much for caution*, I said, and ran forward.

We hit the doors as one, flinging them back against the walls. The sound echoed across the darkness, and from the next room came the sound of scrambled movement.

Apparently, the vampires had realized they were not alone.

*There's six vamps*, Quinn said. *And I can hear the heartbeat of two humans. Go right. Make sure they're safe..*

I didn't answer--simply swerved for the right doorway as he went left, my steps light and my bare feet making little noise on the grimy concrete. The door was hanging off its hinges and there was no sign life in the visible part of the room. But I could smell it. A vampire stood to the left of the door frame, waiting to pounce.

I flung my shoes through, then quickly followed, hitting the concrete and rolling upright in one smooth motion before spinning around. My foot took the vampire high and hard, throwing him back against the wall.

It didn't stop him. He barely even grunted before he was coming at me again.

I swooped low to grab one of my heels, lunging under his blow and driving the wooden stiletto deep into his chest. It was only four inches, so it wasn't long enough to kill, but that wasn't my intent.

Not yet, anyway.

Flames erupted as the heel speared his flesh and he snarled--a sound that was part pain and part anger. I swept again with my foot, knocking him off his feet. As he crashed to the concrete, I punched sideways, my fist smashing into his face and knocking him out.

A woman screamed again. A different woman this time.

I twisted around to run to their aid, but another vampire was already diving at me. I dropped low, letting his momentum take him over me, then scrambled upright. The two women up ahead were both strapped by their hands to a metal loop. And one was being munched on by a vampire. Blood poured down her neck and soaked through her sweater.

The vamp had to be young. Older vamps were never *that* messy, let alone that wasteful.

Nor were they so oblivious to their safety and surrounds when feeding.

I leapt at him feet first, hitting him hard in the side and driving him away from the woman. I twisted as I landed, my hands briefly touching the concrete to balance myself, then I sprang upright and grabbed the metal ring holding the two women captive. With a grunt of effort, I wrenched it from the wall. Brick dust and god-knows what else went flying, and the women half-collapsed.

I didn't give them time to recover. I couldn't. The vamps were up and coming again. I grabbed the woman whose neck was still intact and shook her a little to get her attention. Her gaze, wide and frightened, locked with mine.

"You've got to get out of here," I said. "Help your friend. I'll stop the vamps from chasing you."

She licked her lips and nodded, her arm sliding around the waist of the other woman, supporting her as they wobbled toward the rear exit. I leapt up, grabbed a second metal ring, pulled it free of the brick, then slashed it around. The metal caught the vamp in the mouth, shattering his jaw, teeth and nose, and snapping his head backward. Blood, snot, and bits of bone scattered. I ducked as the other vamp leapt at me, but this time he

was ready for it, and his fingers lashed out. Nails as sharp as a cat's scraped my skin and cut through my new dress.

"Bastard," I said.

Then I kicked him, as hard as I could, practically smashing his nuts back through his ass. He dropped like a stone and didn't move.

More steps approached. I twisted around, half crouched in readiness, then relaxed when I saw it was Quinn. Other than a slight smudge of dirt down one sleeve, he looked surprisingly untouched. Hell, he hadn't even raised a sweat.

And damn, he looked *good*.

"I contacted Jack telepathically." It was only then that he glanced at the vamp still writhing on the ground. After a moment, he bent down and put him out of his misery.

Quickly and efficiently, like it was an everyday occurrence. But then, he *had* once been a cazador--a killer for the vampire council. "He's on his way. Which means we probably have ten minutes."

I raised my eyebrows, amusement dancing across my lips. "A lot can be achieved in ten minutes, but even I'm not turned on by the thought of eating--or doing anything else--in this hole."

"I didn't bring you here for food or for sex."

I raised my eyebrows. "You didn't? Why not?"

He laughed, reaching forward to grab my hand, dragging me against his warm, hard body. "Riley Jenson, you're incorrigible."

"Keeps you interested," I murmured, then his lips met mine and there was no talking for a very long time. Passion stirred, but it was a quiet hunger--one that would

wait for a better time and place.

After a while, he pulled away, and though my lips mourned the loss of his, all I said was, “We really should see if those women are all right.”

“My chauffer already has them in the limo and on the way to the hospital. This way,” he added, his fingers twining through mine as he led the way forward again.

I stepped over the dead vamp and followed him. We passed through another door and entered what looked like a turret. A stone stairway wound upwards and dust stirred with every step. But at least the air smelled fresher up here. Less dead.

We climbed for what seemed like forever, but eventually reached another doorway. Quinn tugged me through, then stopped, a smile on his face. After a moment, I saw why.

The turret had led us into a big round room with a panoramic view of Melbourne, stretching before us in an unending sea of beautiful, twinkling lights.

“What is this place?” I asked, with awe in my voice. I would never have guessed something this exquisite could exist within this wreck of a building.

“This,” he said softly, “is my new office.”

I swung around to face him. “Your new office? Does that mean--”

He caught my hand and dragged me towards him again. “Yep. I’m moving everything--lock, stock and all the company barrels--down to Melbourne. There seems to be a wayward werewolf in my life that I need to keep an eye on.”

I laughed and threw my arms around his neck. “You sure she’s not going to be more trouble than she’s worth?”

“I’m sure she probably will be,” he said with a grin. “But it seems I need her to spice up my staid and boring life.”

“Then lets start spicing,” I said, and kissed him.