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# 1

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**IT WAS ST.** Patrick's Day, and the only green I was wearing was a button that read, "Pinch me and you're dead meat." I'd started work last night with a green blouse on, but I'd gotten blood all over it from a beheaded chicken. Larry Kirkland, zombie-raiser in training, had dropped the decapitated bird. It did the little headless chicken dance and sprayed both of us with blood. I finally caught the damn thing, but the blouse was ruined.

I had to run home and change. The only thing not ruined was the charcoal grey suit jacket that had been in the car. I put it back on over a black blouse, black skirt, dark hose, and black pumps. Bert, my boss, didn't like us wearing black to work, but if I had to be at the office at seven o'clock without any sleep at all, he would just have to live with it.

I huddled over my coffee mug, drinking it as black as I could swallow it. It wasn't helping much. I stared at a series of 8-by-10 glossy blowups spread across my desktop. The first picture was of a hill that had been scraped open, probably by a bulldozer. A skeletal hand reached out of the raw earth. The next photo showed that someone had tried to carefully scrape away the dirt, showing the splintered coffin and bones to one side of the coffin. A new body. The bulldozer had been brought in again. It had plowed up the red earth and found a boneyard. Bones studded the earth like scattered flowers.

One skull spread its unhinged jaws in a silent scream. A scraggle of pale hair still clung to the skull. The dark, stained cloth wrapped around the corpse was the remnants of a dress. I spotted at least three femurs next to the upper

half of a skull. Unless the corpse had had three legs, we were looking at a real mess.

The pictures were well done in a gruesome sort of way. The color made it easier to differentiate the corpses, but the high gloss was a little much. It looked like morgue photos done by a fashion photographer. There was probably an art gallery in New York that would hang the damn things and serve cheese and wine while people walked around saying, "Powerful, don't you think? Very powerful."

They were powerful, and sad.

There was nothing but the photos. No explanation. Bert had said to come to his office after I'd looked at them. He'd explain everything. Yeah, I believed that. The Easter Bunny is a friend of mine, too.

I gathered the pictures up, slipped them into the envelope, picked my coffee mug up in the other hand, and went for the door.

There was no one at the desk. Craig had gone home. Mary, our daytime secretary, didn't get in until eight. There was a two-hour space of time when the office was unmanned. That Bert had called me into the office when we were the only ones there bothered me a lot. Why the secrecy?

Bert's office door was open. He sat behind his desk, drinking coffee, shuffling some papers around. He glanced up, smiled, and motioned me closer. The smile bothered me. Bert was never pleasant unless he wanted something.

His thousand-dollar suit framed a white-on-white shirt and tie. His grey eyes sparkled with good cheer. His eyes are the color of dirty window glass, so sparkling is a real effort. His snow-blond hair had been freshly buzzed. The crewcut was so short I could see scalp.

"Have a seat, Anita."

I tossed the envelope on his desk and sat down. "What are you up to, Bert?"

His smile widened. He usually didn't waste the smile on anybody but clients. He certainly didn't waste it on me. "You looked at the pictures?"

"Yeah, what of it?"

“Could you raise them from the dead?”

I frowned at him and sipped my coffee. “How old are they?”

“You couldn’t tell from the pictures?”

“In person I could tell you, but not just from pictures. Answer the question.”

“Around two hundred years.”

I just stared at him. “Most animators couldn’t raise a zombie that old without a human sacrifice.”

“But you can,” he said.

“Yeah. I didn’t see any headstones in the pictures. Do we have any names?”

“Why?”

I shook my head. He’d been the boss for five years, started the company when it was just him and Manny, and he didn’t know shit about raising the dead. “How can you hang around a bunch of zombie-raisers for this many years and know so little about what we do?”

The smile slipped a little, the glow beginning to fade from his eyes. “Why do you need names?”

“You use names to call the zombie from the grave.”

“Without a name you can’t raise them?”

“Theoretically, no,” I said.

“But you can do it,” he said. I didn’t like how sure he was.

“Yeah, I can do it. John can probably do it, too.”

He shook his head. “They don’t want John.”

I finished the last of my coffee. “Who’s they?”

“Beadle, Beadle, Stirling, and Lowenstein.”

“A law firm,” I said.

He nodded.

“No more games, Bert. Just tell me what the hell’s going on.”

“Beadle, Beadle, Stirling, and Lowenstein have some clients building a very plush resort in the mountains near Branson. A very exclusive resort. A place where the wealthy country stars that don’t own a house in the area can go to get away from the crowds. Millions of dollars are at stake.”

“What’s the old cemetery have to do with it?”

“The land they’re building on was in dispute between two

families. The courts decided the Kellys owned the land, and they were paid a great deal of money. The Bouvier family claimed it was their land and there was a family plot on it to prove it. No one could find the cemetery.”

Ah. “They found it,” I said.

“They found an old cemetery, but not necessarily the Bouvier family plot.”

“So they want to raise the dead and ask who they are?”

“Exactly.”

I shrugged. “I can raise a couple of the corpses in the coffins. Ask who they are. What happens if their last name is Bouvier?”

“They have to buy the land a second time. They think some of the corpses are Bouviers. That’s why they want all the bodies raised.”

I raised my eyebrows. “You’re joking.”

He shook his head, looking pleased. “Can you do it?”

“I don’t know. Give me the pictures again.” I set my coffee mug on his desk and took the pictures back. “Bert, they’ve screwed this six ways to Sunday. It’s a mass grave, thanks to the bulldozers. The bones are all mixed together. I’ve only read about one case of anyone raising a zombie from a mass grave. But they were calling a specific person. They had a name.” I shook my head. “Without a name it may not be possible.”

“Would you be willing to try?”

I spread the pictures over the desk, staring at them. The top half of a skull had turned upside down like a bowl. Two finger bones attached by something dry and desiccated that must once had been human tissue lay next to it. Bones, bones everywhere but not a name to speak.

Could I do it? I honestly didn’t know. Did I want to try? Yeah. I did.

“I’d be willing to try.”

“Wonderful.”

“Raising them a few every night is going to take weeks, even if I can do it. With John’s help it would be quicker.”

“It will cost them millions to delay that long,” Bert said.

“There’s no other way to do it.”

"You raised the Davidsons' entire family plot, including Great-Grandpa. You weren't even supposed to raise him. You can raise more than one at a time."

I shook my head. "That was an accident. I was showing off. They wanted to raise three family members. I thought I could save them money by doing it in one shot."

"You raised ten family members, Anita. They only asked for three."

"So?"

"So can you raise the entire cemetery in one night?"

"You're crazy," I said.

"Can you do it?"

I opened my mouth to say no, and closed it. I had raised an entire cemetery once. Not all of them had been two centuries old, but some of them had been older, nearly three hundred. And I raised them all. Of course, I had two human sacrifices to ride for power. It was a long story how I ended up with two people dying inside a circle of power. Self-defense, but the magic didn't care. Death is death.

Could I do it? "I really don't know, Bert."

"That's not a no," he said. He had an eager, anticipatory look on his face.

"They must have offered you a bundle of money," I said.

He smiled. "We're bidding on the project."

"We're what?"

"They sent this package to us, the Resurrection Company in California and the Essential Spark in New Orleans."

"They prefer *Élan Vital* to the English translation," I said. Frankly, it sounded more like a beauty salon than an animating firm, but nobody had asked me. "So what? The lowest bid gets it?"

"That was their plan," Bert said.

He looked entirely too satisfied with himself. "What?" I asked.

"Let me play it back to you," he said. "There are what, three animators in the entire country that could raise a zombie that old without a human sacrifice? You and John are two of them. I'm including Phillipa Freestone of Resurrection in this."

"Probably," I said.

He nodded. "Okay. Could Phillipa raise without a name?"

"I don't have any way of knowing that. John could. Maybe she could."

"Could either she or John raise from the mass bones, not the ones in the coffin?"

That stopped me. "I don't know."

"Would either of them stand a chance of raising the entire graveyard?" He was staring at me very steadily.

"You're enjoying this too much," I said.

"Just answer the question, Anita."

"I know John couldn't do it. I don't think Phillipa is as good as John, so no, they couldn't do it."

"I'm going to up the bid," Bert said.

I laughed. "Up the bid?"

"Nobody else can do it. Nobody but you. They tried treating this like any other construction problem. But there aren't going to be any other bids, now are there?"

"Probably not," I said.

"Then I'm going to take them to the cleaners," he said with a smile.

I shook my head. "You greedy son of a bitch."

"You get a share of the fee, you know."

"I know." We looked at each other. "What if I try and can't raise them all in one night?"

"You'll still be able to raise them all eventually, won't you?"

"Probably." I stood, picking up my coffee mug. "But I wouldn't spend the check until after I've done it. I'm going to go get some sleep."

"They want the bid this morning. If they accept our terms, they'll fly you up in a private helicopter."

"Helicopter—you know I hate to fly."

"For this much money you'll fly."

"Great."

"Be ready to go at a moment's notice."

"Don't push it, Bert." I hesitated at the door. "Let me take Larry with me."

"Why? If John can't do it, then Larry certainly can't."

I shrugged. "Maybe not, but there are ways to combine power during a raising. If I can't do it alone, maybe I can get a boost from our trainee."

He looked thoughtful. "Why not take John? Combined, you could do it."

"Only if he'd give his power willingly to me. You think he'd do that?"

Bert shook his head.

"You going to tell him that the client didn't want him? That you offered him to the client and they asked for me by name?"

"No," Bert said.

"That's why you're doing it like this; no witnesses."

"Time is of the essence, Anita."

"Sure, Bert, but you didn't want to face Mr. John Burke with yet another client that wants me over him."

Bert looked down at his blunt-fingered hands clasped on the desktop. He looked up, grey eyes serious. "John is almost as good as you are, Anita. I don't want to lose him."

"You think he'll walk if one more client asks for me?"

"His pride's hurt," Bert said.

"And there's so much of it to hurt," I said.

Bert smiled. "You needling him doesn't help."

I shrugged. It sounded petty to say he'd started it, but he had. We'd tried dating, and John couldn't handle me being a female version of him. No; he couldn't handle me being a better version of him.

"Try to behave yourself, Anita. Larry's not up to speed yet; we need John."

"I always behave myself, Bert."

He sighed. "If you didn't make me so much money, I wouldn't put up with your shit."

"Ditto," I said.

That about summed up our relationship. Commerce at its best. We didn't like each other, but we could do business together. Free enterprise at work.

**AT NOON BERT** called and said we had it. “Be at the office packed and ready to go at two o’clock. Mr. Lionel Bayard will fly up with you and Larry.”

“Who’s Lionel Bayard?”

“A junior partner in the firm of Beadle, Beadle, Stirling, and Lowenstein. He likes the sound of his own voice. Don’t give him a rough time about it.”

“Who, me?”

“Anita, don’t tease the help. He may be wearing a three-thousand-dollar suit, but he’s still the help.”

“I’ll save it up for one of the partners. Surely Beadle, Beadle, Stirling, or Lowenstein will appear in person sometime this weekend.”

“Don’t tease the bosses either,” he said.

“Anything you say.” My voice was utterly mild.

“You’ll do whatever you want no matter what I say, won’t you?”

“Gee, Bert, who says you can’t teach an old dog new tricks?”

“Just be here at two o’clock. I called Larry. He’ll be here.”

“I’ll be there, Bert. I’ve got one stop to make, so if I’m a few minutes late, don’t worry.”

“Don’t be late.”

“Be there as soon as I can.” I hung up before he could argue with me.

I had to shower, change, and go to Seckman Junior High School. Richard Zeeman taught science there. We had a date set up for tomorrow. At one point Richard had asked me to marry him. That was sort of on hold, but I did owe him more than a message on his answering machine, saying sorry, honey, can’t make the date. I’m going to be out of town. A message would have been easier for me, but cowardly.

I packed one suitcase. It was enough for four days and



then some. If you pack extra underwear and clothes that mix and match, you can live for a week out of a small suitcase.

I did add a few extras. The Firestar 9mm and its inner pants holster. Enough extra ammo to sink a battleship and two knives plus wrist sheaths. I'd had four knives. All hand-crafted for little ol' *moi*. Two of them had been lost beyond recovery. I was having them replaced, but hand forging takes time, especially when you insist on the highest silver content possible in the steel. Two knives, two guns should be enough for one weekend business trip. I'd wear the Browning Hi-Power.

Packing wasn't a problem. What to wear today was the problem. They'd want me to raise them tonight if I could. Hell, the helicopter might fly directly to the construction site. Which meant I'd be walking over raw dirt, bones, shattered coffins. It didn't sound like high-heel territory. Yet, if a junior partner was wearing a three-thousand-dollar suit, the people who'd just hired me would expect me to look the part. I could either dress professionally or in feathers and blood. I'd actually had one client who was disappointed that I didn't show up nude smeared with blood. There could have been more than one reason for his disappointment. I don't think I've ever had a client that would have objected to some kind of ceremonial getup, but jeans and jogging shoes didn't seem to inspire confidence. Don't ask me why.

I could pack my coverall and put it over whatever I wore. Yeah, I liked that. Veronica Sims—Ronnie, my very best friend—had talked me into buying a fashionably short navy skirt. It was short enough that I was a little embarrassed, but the skirt fit inside the coverall. The skirt didn't wrinkle or bunch up after I'd worn the outfit to vampire stakings or murder scenes. Take the coverall off, and I was set to go to the office or out for the evening. I was so pleased, I went out and bought two more in different colors.

One was crimson, the other purple. I hadn't been able to find one in black yet. At least not one that wasn't so short that I refused to wear it. Admittedly, the short skirts made me look taller. They even made me look leggy. When you're

five-foot-three, that's saying something. But the purple didn't match much that I owned, so crimson it was.

I'd found a short-sleeved blouse that was the exact same shade of red. Red with violet undertones, a cold, hard color that looked great with my pale skin, black hair, and dark brown eyes. The shoulder holster and 9mm Browning Hi-Power looked very dramatic against it. A black belt cinched tight at the waist held down the loops on the holster. A black jacket with rolled-back sleeves went over everything to hide the gun. I twirled in front of the mirror in my bedroom. The skirt wasn't much longer than the jacket, but you couldn't see the gun. At least not easily. Unless you're willing to have things tailor-made, it's hard to hide a gun, especially in women's dress-up clothes.

I put on just enough makeup so the red didn't overwhelm me. I was also going to be saying good-bye to Richard for several days. A little makeup couldn't hurt. When I say makeup, I mean eye shadow, blush, lipstick, and that's it. Outside of a television interview that Bert talked me into, I don't wear base.

Except for the hose and black high heels, which I would've had to wear no matter what skirt I wore, the outfit was comfortable. As long as I remembered not to bend directly at the waist, I was safe.

The only jewelry I wore was the silver cross tucked into the blouse, and the watch on my wrist. My dress watch had broken and I just had never gotten around to getting it fixed. The present watch was a man's black diving watch that looked out of place on my small wrist. But hey, it glowed in the dark if you pressed a button. It showed me the date, what day it was, and could time a run. I hadn't found a woman's watch that could do all that.

I didn't have to cancel running with Ronnie tomorrow morning. She was out of town on a case. A private detective's work is never done.

I loaded the suitcase into my Jeep and was on the way to Richard's school by one o'clock. I was going to be late to the office. Oh, well. They'd wait for me or they wouldn't. It

wouldn't break my heart to miss the helicopter ride. I hated planes, but a helicopter . . . scared the shit out of me.

I hadn't been afraid of flying until I was on a plane that plunged several thousand feet in seconds. The stewardess ended up plastered against the ceiling, covered in coffee. People screamed and prayed. The elderly woman beside me recited the Lord's Prayer in German. She'd been so scared, tears had come down her face. I offered her my hand, and she gripped it. I knew I was going to die and there was nothing I could do to prevent it. But we would die holding on to human hands. Die covered in human tears, and human prayers. Then the plane straightened out and suddenly we were safe. I haven't trusted air transportation since.

Normally in St. Louis there is no real spring. There's winter, two days of mild weather, and summer heat. This year spring had come early and stayed. The air was soft against your skin. The wind smelled of green growing things, and winter seemed to have been a bad dream. Redbuds bent from the trees on either side of the road. Tiny purple blossoms like a delicate lavender mist here and there through the naked trees. There were no leaves yet, but there was a hint of green. Like someone had taken a giant paintbrush and tinted everything. Look directly at them and the trees were bare and black, but look sideways, not at a particular tree but at all the trees, and there was a touch of green.

270 South is about as pleasant as a highway can be; it gets you where you're going fairly fast, and it's over quickly. I exited at Tesson Ferry Road. The road is thick with strip malls, a hospital, and fast-food restaurants, and when you leave the commerce behind you hit new housing developments so thick they nearly touch. There are still stands of woods and open spaces, but they won't last.

The turn to Old 21 is at the crest of a hill just past the Meramec River. It is mostly houses with a few gas stations, the area water district office, and a large gas field to the right. Where the hills march out and out.

At the first stoplight I turned left past a little shopping area. The road is a curving narrow thing that snakes between houses and woods. There were glimpses of daffodils in the

yards. The road dips down into a valley, and at the bottom of a steep hill is a stop sign. The road climbs quickly to the crest of a hill, to a T, turn left and you're almost there.

The one-story school sits on the floor of a wide, flat valley surrounded by hills. Having been raised in Indiana farm country, I'd have called them mountains once. The elementary school sits separate, but close enough to share a playground. If you got recess in junior high. When I was too little to go to junior high, it seemed you did get recess. By the time I got there, you didn't. The way of the world.

I parked as close to the building as I could. This was my second visit to Richard's school, and my first during the actual school day. We'd come once to get some papers he'd forgotten. No students then. I entered the main entrance and ran into a crowd. It must have been between classes when they moved the warm bodies from one room to another.

I was instantly aware that I was about the same height as or shorter than everyone I saw. There was something claustrophobic about being jostled by the book-carrying, backpack-wearing crowd. There had to be a circle of Hell where you were eternally fourteen, eternally in junior high. One of the lower circles.

I flowed with the crowd towards Richard's room. I admit I took comfort in the fact that I was better dressed than most of the girls. Petty as hell, but I had been chunky in junior high. There isn't a lot of difference between chunky and fat when it comes to teasing. I'd had my growth spurt and never been fat again. That's right; I'd been even tinier once. Shortest kid in school for years and years.

I stood to one side of the doorway, letting the students come and go. Richard was showing something in a textbook to a young girl. She was blonde, wearing a flannel shirt over a black dress that was three sizes too big for her. She was wearing what looked like black combat boots with heavy white socks rolled over the tops of them. The outfit was very now. The look of adoration on her face was not. She was shiny and eager just because Mr. Zeeman was giving her some one-on-one help.

I had to admit that Richard was worth a crush or two. His

thick brown hair was tied back in a ponytail that gave the illusion that his hair was very short and close to his head. He has high, full cheekbones and a strong jaw, with a dimple that softens his face and makes him look almost too perfect. His eyes are a solid chocolate brown with those thick lashes that so many men have and women want. The bright yellow shirt made his permanently tanned skin seem even darker. His tie was a dark, rich green that matched the dress slacks he wore. His jacket was draped across the back of his desk chair. The muscles in his upper arms worked against the cloth of his shirt as he held the book.

The class was mostly seated, the hallway nearly silent. He closed the book and handed it to the girl. She smiled and scrambled for the door, late to her next class. Her eyes flicked over me as she passed, wondering what I was doing there.

She wasn't the only one. Several of the seated students were glancing my way. I stepped into the room.

Richard smiled. It warmed me down to my toes. The smile saved him from being too handsome. It wasn't that it wasn't a great smile. He could have done toothpaste commercials. But the smile was a little boy's smile, open and welcoming. There was no guile to Richard, no deep, dark plan. He was the world's biggest Boy Scout. The smile showed that.

I wanted to go to him, have him wrap his arms around me. I had a horrible urge to grab his tie and lead him out of the room. I wanted to touch his chest underneath the yellow shirt. The urge was so strong, I put my hands in the pockets of my jacket. Mustn't shock the students. Richard affects me like that sometimes. Okay, most of the time when he's not furry, or licking blood off his fingers. He's a werewolf. Did I mention that? No one at the school knows. If they did, he'd be out of a job. People don't like lycanthropes teaching their precious kiddies. It's illegal to discriminate against someone for a disease, but everyone does it. Why should the educational system be different?

He touched my cheek, just his fingertips. I turned my face into his hand, brushing lips against his fingers. So much for

being cool in front of the kiddies. There were a few oohs and nervous laughs.

"I'll be right back, guys." More oohs, louder laughter, one "Way to go, Mr. Zeeman." Richard motioned me out the door and I went, hands still in my pockets. Normally, I'd have said I wasn't going to embarrass myself in front of a bunch of eighth-graders, but lately I wasn't entirely trustworthy.

Richard led me a little ways from his classroom into the deserted hallway. He leaned up against the wall of lockers and looked down at me. The little-boy smile was gone. The look in his dark eyes made me shiver. I ran my hand down his tie, smoothing it against his chest.

"Am I allowed to kiss you, or would that scandalize the kiddies?" I didn't look up at him as I asked. I didn't want him to see the raw need in my eyes. It was embarrassing enough that I knew he sensed it. You can't hide lust from a werewolf. They can smell it.

"I'll risk it." His voice was soft, low, with a warm edge that made my stomach clench.

I felt him bend over me. I raised my face to his. His lips were so soft. I leaned against his body, palms flat against his chest. I could feel his nipples harden under my skin. My hands slid to his waist, smoothing along the cloth of his shirt. I wanted to pull his shirt out of his pants and run my hands over bare skin. I stepped back from him feeling just a little breathless.

It was my idea that we wouldn't have sex before marriage. My idea. But damn, it was hard. The more we dated, the harder it got.

"Jesus, Richard." I shook my head. "It gets harder, doesn't it?"

Richard's smile didn't look innocent or Boy Scoutish in the least. "Yes, it does."

Heat rushed up my face. "I didn't mean that."

"I know what you meant." His voice was gentle, taking the sting out of the teasing.

My face was still hot with embarrassment, but my voice

was steady. Point for me. "I've got to go out of town on business."

"Zombie, vampire, or police?"

"Zombie."

"Good."

I looked up at him. "Why good?"

"I worry more when you go away on police business, or vampire stakings. You know that."

I nodded. "Yeah, I know that." We stood there in the hallway, staring at each other. If things had been different, we'd be engaged, maybe planning a wedding. All this sexual tension would have been coming to some kind of conclusion. As it was . . .

"I'm going to be late as it is. I've got to go."

"Are you going to tell Jean-Claude bye in person?" His face was neutral when he asked, but his eyes weren't.

"It's daylight. He's in his coffin."

"Ah," Richard said.

"I didn't have a date planned with him this weekend, so I don't owe him an explanation. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

"Close enough," he said. He took a step away from the lockers, bringing our bodies very close together. He bent to kiss me good-bye. Giggles erupted down the hall.

We turned to see most of his class huddled in the doorway gazing at us. Great.

Richard smiled. He raised his voice enough so they'd hear him. "Back inside, you monsters."

There were catcalls, and one small brunette girl gave me a very dirty look. I think there must have been a lot of girls that had a crush on Mr. Zeeman.

"The natives are restless. I've got to get back."

I nodded. "I'm hoping to be back by Monday."

"We'll go hiking next weekend, then."

"I put Jean-Claude off this weekend. I can't not see him two weeks in a row."

Richard's face clouded up with the beginnings of anger. "Hike during the day, see the vampire at night. Only fair."

"I don't like this any better than you do," I said.

"I wish I believed that."

"Richard."

He gave a long sigh. The anger sort of leaked out of him. I never understood how he did that. He could be furious one minute and calm the next. Both emotions seemed genuine. Once I was angry, I was angry. Maybe it's a character flaw?

"I'm sorry, Anita. It's not like you're dating him behind my back."

"I would never do anything behind your back; you know that."

He nodded. "I know that." He glanced back at his classroom. "I've got to go before they set the room on fire." He walked down the hallway without looking back.

I almost called after him, but I let him go. The mood was sort of spoiled. Nothing like knowing your girlfriend is dating someone else to take the wind out of your sails. I wouldn't have put up with it if it was the other way around. A double standard that, but one we could all three live with. If living was the term for Jean-Claude.

Oh, hell, my personal life was too confusing for words. I walked off down the hall, having to pass by his open classroom door. My high heels made loud, rickety echoes. I didn't try to catch a last glimpse of him. It would make me feel worse about leaving.

It hadn't been my idea to date the Master of the City. Jean-Claude had given me two choices; either he could kill Richard, or I could date both of them. It had seemed a good idea at the time. Five weeks later I wasn't so sure.

It had been my morals that had kept Richard and me from consummating our relationship. Consummating, nice euphemism. But Jean-Claude had made it clear that if I did something with Richard, I had to do it with him too. Jean-Claude was trying to woo me. If Richard could touch me but he couldn't, it wasn't fair. He had a point, I guess. But the thought of having to have sex with the vampire was more likely to keep me chaste than any high ideals.

I couldn't date both of them indefinitely. The sexual tension alone was killing me. I could move. Richard might even let me do that. He wouldn't like it, but if I wanted free



of him, he'd let me go. Jean-Claude, on the other hand . . . He'd never let me go. The question was, did I want him to let me go? Answer: hell, yes. The real trick was how to break free without anybody dying.

Yeah, that was the \$64,000 question. Trouble was, I didn't have an answer. We were going to need one sooner or later. And later was getting closer all the time.

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I **HUDDLED AGAINST** the side of the helicopter, one hand in a death grip on the strap that was bolted to the wall. I wanted to use both hands to hold on, as if by holding very tightly to the stupid strap it would save me when the helicopter plummeted to earth. I used one hand because two hands looked cowardly. I was wearing a headset, sort of like ear protection for the shooting range, but with a microphone so you could talk above the teeth-rattling noise. I hadn't realized that most of a helicopter was clear, like being suspended in a great buzzing, vibrating bubble. I kept my eyes closed as much as possible.

"Are you all right, Ms. Blake?" Lionel Bayard asked.

The voice startled me. "Yeah, I'm fine."

"You don't look well."

"I don't like to fly," I said.

He gave a weak smile. I don't think I was inspiring confidence in Lionel Bayard, lawyer and flunkie of Beadle, Beadle, Stirling, and Lowenstein. Lionel Bayard was a small, neat man with a tiny blond mustache that looked like it was as much facial hair as he would ever get. His triangular jaw was as smooth as my own. Maybe the mustache was glued on. His brown suit with a thin yellow tweed fit his body like a well-tailored glove. His thin tie was brown-and-yellow striped with a gold tie tack. The tie tack was monogrammed. His slender leather briefcase was monogrammed