

The (un)usual crowd of Torments surged and ebbed around the bar, but Janice ignored them with the ease of years' practiced selfishness. Several empty glasses rested at her elbow, but that didn't mean much to a woman who often drank too much even while she was still breathing. Janice had downed several shots of her favorite vodka since her arrival half an hour ago and yet her foul mood lingered.

"And it's not like I didn't *try*," she grumbled at Jackson the bartender – who had long since realized that his presence in this encounter was incidental. "Delphi's spelunking in some god-forsaken pit under the town, Kevin's playing kissy-face with Connie and Julian is locked in his office until further notice.

"So I thought I'd drive around town for a bit, look for some fun, right? Ha!" Janice slammed down another shot of vodka as punctuation. "It's *Spend The Seed Money* night over at Cheek's, there's an entire frat house sprawled across the beach and I can't work in my studio because the water's off until the repairs are done on the bathroom."

"Why don't you go down to the park?" Jackson suggested, wearily hopeful.

Janice looked surprised. "It's spring. I can't go frightening the baby ducks." Her serious expression defied Jackson to make fun of her.

"Yeah, right. The ducks." Jackson poured another shot and wondered how long she intended to stay. He knew better than to suggest Janice go upstairs and amuse herself in the strip club – ever since Deputy Rundell had become a regular, *everyone* knew better than to mention the club to Janice.

Janice smiled wearily. "I ask ya, what's a clean-living vampire to do on a Saturday night?"

"How about she shuts her whiny ass up and let the *real* vamps have a good time?" This interruption came from behind Janice, towards the bar's main entrance. She glanced over her shoulder and saw three vampires – game-face and all – swaggering into the bar.

Janice turned back towards the bartender, a slight smile creeping onto her face. "That'll do." She conceded.

Jackson shook his head in warning. "Come on, Janice, they might be okay."

Janice stole another sidelong glance. The three newly-created vamps – they had to be, Janice realized, given that they were still clad in what was clearly their best suits and they hadn't quite brushed off *all* of the grave-dirt – pushed towards Janice, rudely shoving a couple of Jackson's co-workers out of their way as they did so.

"Or maybe not." he admitted.

With a great show of nonchalance, Janice put her wallet and car keys onto the bar. "Hold on to these for me will you, Jackson?"

Then, with an easy movement that Janice would *never* admit that she had practiced until her joints ached, she pulled a stake from inside her coat, turned and threw it into the chest of the closest vampire. Janice's nights of practice also enabled her to stifle a sigh of relief when the showy maneuver played out as she had hoped it would, and the vampire crumpled into dust.

"Damn it, Janice!" Jackson shouted. "You know the rules! Take it outside!"

Janice grinned. "No problem." Beneath the bravado, she thought: *new vampires, locals too. Who's been putting their fangs in without the gang noticing?* It was a question she determined to have answered shortly.

She closed the distance between the other two – somewhat stunned – vampires and grabbed them by the scruff of their necks. "Let's go outside, kids, and I'll show you how this whiny-assed vampire has a good time..."