

It almost killed Yvette to admit it, but the silver car was a godsend. Usually, she was confident when she was in a one-on-one fight, but Paul had so emphasized the need for this particular job to be done discreetly that she was hesitant to resort to the gun she carried to resolve the situation. And now it was almost too late because the opposition had decided against such caution and their encounter was turning ugly.

Clearly, Yvette's opponent wasn't sure if she was actually carrying the data disks she had broken into Bremman Investments to steal perhaps he had *some* caution about creating corpses in downtown Los Angeles. *Not without good reason, at least.* She suspected it was for that reason alone that she was not yet dead. Even near midnight, gunshots would attract attention in this moderately upscale part of the city.

However, the trained ape that had pursued Yvette since she left Bremman's headquarters seemed to be growing impatient and that didn't bode well for her situation. He had fifty pounds' mass on her, and obviously *hadn't* twisted his ankle whilst running through traffic a minute ago.

Yvette barely noticed the sedan when it first passed, but the barest hint of squealed tires and its immediate return – almost blocking the alley – demanded attention. Both Yvette and her would-be assailant couldn't help noticing at the sleek silver machine as it came to a halt. Their glances became stares when the far-side door opened and the driver stepped out. Vision hampered by poor light, Yvette couldn't see much of the driver - just a lean male figure in comfortable clothing and with a relaxed demeanor that Yvette couldn't believe was genuine.

"Problem?" he called out with casual ease, as if he had just come across a stranded motorist, not an incipient homicide.

Yvette glanced at the man closest to her and noticed the anger and indecision creeping across his face. *Frying pan, meet fire.*

"Not now," she replied, approaching the stranger's car as quickly as she could with her sore ankle. She hoped her relief wasn't writ large on her face, even with her back to her enemy.

The driver barely looked at her, keeping his eyes on Yvette's opponent. "Good." His tone was brisk and discouraged discussion. "Get in." he nodded towards the vehicle. Yvette was ahead of him, sliding quickly and gratefully into the passenger seat. She had to wonder how the driver still somehow managed to be in place and his door closed before hers.

Practice, I suppose. Without a word, he put the car into gear and sped away from their meeting place, almost - but not quite - spinning the wheels with the haste of their exit.

Not sure of what to say beyond the inane obvious, Yvette chose to look over the would be Samaritan, trying to discern undercurrents. He was almost disarmingly ordinary - although his green eyes added significance to an otherwise unmemorable oval face. His short dark hair had been slicked back without apparent concession to style – *function over form*, Yvette guessed. And he needed a shave. Almost without meaning to, Yvette noticed the pulse in his neck, the natural ease of his breathing. So, not a vampire, and that was a relief. *Being rescued by the kindred could become tedious.* Being rescued *at all* rankled, but she had to admit that she had needed it.

One fact that demanded attention was the driver's skill. His handling of the car was deceptively easy and he drove with a practiced economy of movement. He was also

used to evading unwanted company, Yvette noticed, as he continuously looked from mirrors to the road and took several abrupt turns designed to shake following vehicles. *Damn, I'm lucky.*

"You got a name?" he asked, a London accent adding a certain abruptness to his words. He kept his eyes on the road as he spoke.

"Does it matter?" Yvette didn't see the point in divulging information unnecessarily.

An almost-smile appeared on his face as his glance flickered towards her. "Fair enough," he conceded. "Where are we going?"

Yvette thought for a moment, and then gave in to an odd impulse: honesty. "Downtown Sheraton, off Laguna and –" Before she could finish speaking, the driver turned in the proper direction. "Never mind." She muttered, ignoring the driver's momentary chuckle.

The trip continued in silence, until they pulled into the Sheraton's underground garage five minutes' later. Once they had parked, Yvette listened to the barely audible tick-tick of cooling metal for a few seconds before coming to another decision.

Opening the door, she said, "See me inside." It was not a request. She sensed his hesitation, a heartbeat's duration, before he followed her out of the car and towards the stairwell that led from the garage to the hotel proper.

As per her usual habits, Yvette took the stairs past the lobby up to the third floor – taking a moment to heal her throbbing ankle - and then took the elevator to the 22nd floor of the thirty-storey hotel. The driver followed without comment, and Yvette started to wonder if he had *any*natural curiosity – although she knew that he must.

Reaching the door for room 2246, Yvette silently gestured that her companion should remain in the hallway while she went in. The automatic pistol that she pulled out from her jacket provoked only a slight expression of surprise and a half step's retreat as she quietly entered her room. The driver was used to trouble, it seemed.

The hotel room was small with its lone bed and cramped bathroom, and it took Yvette only a few seconds to determine that no one waited within. Tucking the gun back into its holster, she waved the driver inside. She watched him as he closed the door and looked over the rest of the room.

"High profile." He commented.

"I had my reasons. This side of the building is the tallest thing by ten stories for two miles."

The driver nodded, but said nothing further.

Yvette finally let curiosity overwhelm her. "Why did you stop?"

A half-smile was her answer. "Does it matter?"

Yvette winced. "Fair enough."

They regarded each other carefully, each weighing options and risks known only to themselves. There were at least half a dozen possibilities to be considered – most of them Yvette discarded within a few seconds. She thought about the time she had to kill before catching her flight back to Germany.

Meanwhile, Yvette's companion leaned against a wall, letting her take the lead – although the slight tilt to his head reminded her that he was at least somewhat intrigued. *Does anything really matter, this far away from home?* She wondered. To her surprise, she realized that not *much* mattered with six thousand miles between her and her

Regnant. Survival did, but that had already been taken care of. If this man was a wolf in knight's armor, he already had several chances to move against her. In Yvette's experienced opinion, survival for the evening had been assured.

She removed her jacket – brown leather with 'designer' wear – and dropped it onto a nearby table. Her shoulder holster and the knife on her belt immediately followed the jacket. The other weapons... *they can wait*. Still, the driver watched silently, even as Yvette watched him in turn, looking for some sort of reaction beyond polite attention.

Again, her curiosity overcame good manners. "Do run into this sort of thing all of the time, or something?" she demanded. "And if you say *does it matter*, I swear you'll regret it."

He smiled, a disarming expression, and held up a hand, as if to keep her at bay. "Not every day." He admitted. "But often enough."

"I get the sense that we both work for some very interesting people."

"I think you're right." He glanced at the gun, still within her reach.

Another moment's silence passed.

"You might as well stay." She decided.

The driver frowned. "I might as well go. You don't owe me anything."

Yvette suppressed a moment's irritation his response, and looked him in the eye. "I know I don't, and I'm glad that you know that too. But you're here. And I'm here." And it was a long way back to Berlin and Paul's rationed affection.

"Impulsive." Whether that was intended as an observation or criticism was unclear.

"You really are a man of few words, aren't you?" Yvette said, half-sighing, half smiling.

"I don't need that many of them."

"Go, if you want to," she suggested, and then felt the need for further explanation. "My life is...generally solitary, and I wouldn't mind taking advantage of an opportunity. I guessed that you might be in the same situation."

"Is that a roundabout way of saying *let's fuck*?" he said with a hint of a smile.

"Well...yes."

"You Yanks," He laughed quietly. "Always using five words where one will do."

"So give me a word."

He shrugged. "No."

"Is that *no* you're not giving me a word, or *no*, I'm not in luck tonight?"

"You're out of luck."

Yvette tried to hide a scowl. "How about a phone number, then?"

"Alright." Yvette didn't bother to hide her surprise as her companion pulled a business card from his pocket and offered it to her. "Satellite phone," he added. "Global coverage."

"I don't get it!" Yvette's patience finally collapsed even as she automatically accepted the card. "You're giving me your number, but you're leaving, anyway?"

"Sure," he nodded, and glanced at his watch. "It's just bad timing," he grinned unexpectedly. "I've got to get to work."

Too stunned to stop him, Yvette watched him leave.

A moment later, she glanced dully at the card in her hand, and then glared at the door. In plain typeface, the card featured a phone number and the title *Driver*. Yvette

flipped the card over, stared at the blank reverse." There's no name!" she shouted, exasperated almost beyond belief.

If he laughed, she didn't hear it.