

*Winter in Berlin, how unlovely.* Yvette hunched over a public phone and was grateful for her knitted hat, heavy coat and thick gloves – for more than the obvious reasons.

Resisting the urge to look over her shoulder, she fed a handful of small change into the battered phone standing on the edge of a not-quite-fashionable shopping plaza near the center of the city. Yvette knew the place to be infrequently patronized during daytime. At shortly after 2AM, it was totally deserted and that suited her. Witnesses were the last thing Yvette wanted as she dialed a number and tried to piece the past few hours together.

Yvette and her domitor, Paul Viersan, had ended the previous evening in a hotel, as they had since their arrival in Berlin three months ago. Until a permanent haven had been completed to Paul's satisfaction, he preferred to keep on the move, rather than imposing on his Sire's hospitality. So the sun had come up with Yvette and Paul following their usual routine – Paul settling into a closet rendered light-tight with a variety of materials, and Yvette hanging a 'do not disturb' sign on the door before settling down in bed, herself.

She had awoken long after sunset – a suspiciously long rest even given the short winter days – to find Paul gone and a cryptic note written in his hand, left beside the bed. *This is and isn't a test – sorry.* The television was on, broadcasting a breaking news story featuring a police sketch of a woman with a strong likeness to Yvette and an allegation that she was responsible for a murderous robbery in the Deutsch Bank three hours ago.

Things had gone downhill from there. Paul had taken his car from the hotel garage and left Yvette trying to find a way out of town that would get past a police dragnet and the well-surveyed transit hubs. She wanted breathing room enough to determine her next steps, and that meant getting away from the scene of the supposed crime - *somehow.*

Yvette knew that the Deutsch Bank was owned by Paul's Sire, therefore he must be involved, as well as Paul - apparently. *Not a test, indeed.* Well then, she had some ideas, but she needed a safe place to think things through. And that was what had brought her to a trash-strewn shopping plaza in the middle of the night.

Yvette listened to the phone ring and was on the verge of giving up when:

"Driver." There voice was wide-awake, but Yvette didn't have time to wonder at it.

She hesitated for a moment before speaking. "You probably don't remember me, but we met in Los Angeles about a month ago-"

"I remember. I dropped you at the Sheraton." No surprise, no inquiry – just a statement of fact.

"Yeah, that's me." Yvette tried to keep her tone calm and steady. She took a deep breath. "I don't suppose there's *any* chance you're in Europe?"

"You're luck's in. I am."

Yvette appreciated the lack of prying questions. "How long would it take you to get to Berlin? I need a ride...somewhere."

"Are you in the suburbs or downtown?"

"Downtown."

"Two hours. Ninety minutes if I hurry."

Yvette sighed in relief. *He could be here before the town wakes up, and I can hide in the meantime. Assuming he'll come.* "I don't have much money..." She admitted.

"We'll talk about that later. Where are you?"

Yvette knew better than to protest. She gave him directions to an alley behind a vacant department store, with a warning that if he saw police, he was to keep going.

"Business as usual, then." It wasn't a question. Yvette wondered when her life had become quite so transparent. *Then again, he saw a lot in Los Angeles and that was no-one's fault but your own.*

"I should go. I'll see you soon."

"You've got a thing for silver." Yvette commented as she half-sat, half-fell into the passenger seat of the car which pulled up at her location ninety minutes later. The car had changed since their first meeting – from a sedan to a trendy convertible – but some things remained the same, including the driver. Yvette wondered if his only mirror was the rear-view, given his casual-at-best sartorial style, and then realized that appearances probably didn't matter to a man who drives for a living. As long as his hair stayed out of his face – gel and a comb had seen to that – and he was comfortable enough (khakis and a loose-cut button-down shirt) then all else was unnecessary.

"The color makes it go faster." The driver said with a half-smile as he executed a neat three point turn in the alley and headed towards the nearest highway.

"That must be pretty fast." Yvette didn't she much point in hiding her relief - she was glad to be away from the rat-infested storefront. She didn't like rats.

A half-smile appeared briefly on his face. "I was in Prague when you called."

Yvette was surprised. "That *is* fast."

He nodded. "Where am I going?"

Yvette sighed. "How far will-" she thought about the stock of cash in her purse.

"A thousand Euros get me?" It was most of her cash, and all she could spare.

"Don't worry about it."

"What?"

Her companion glanced at her, his expression quizzical. "You're already covered. Your boss was more than generous."

*That* threw Yvette for a loop. "Excuse me? When did you talk to P- my boss?"

"About three weeks ago. He tracked me down, sent me a bundle with a note indicating his gratitude for the LA incident. He gave me about three times the going rate for saving damsels in distress, so your credit's good."

"Tracked you down? Oh... he must have found your card." Yvette was too tired to be annoyed at Paul's interference. As the driver had mentioned during their first meeting, she didn't owe him anything, but clearly Paul thought so.

"That would make sense, yeah." He nodded. "But that doesn't answer my question."

"What?"

"Where are we going?"

"What's my limit?"

"Moscow, Madrid, Istanbul, Reykjavik." He paused. "Reykjavik would be pushing it."

"Wow," Yvette said, stifling a yawn. "When the boss pays, he *really* pays."

The driver sidestepped the matter. “So where’s it to be?”

“Good question.” Yvette thought for a moment. Fatigue was starting to overwhelm adrenaline and she was having difficulty concentrating. “Frankfurt, I guess. Or maybe Bonn.” Based upon a few things mentioned in passing by Paul and his sire, Yvette made a decision. “Frankfurt. I don’t think it’ll be worth the effort of going too far from Berlin. I’ll just have to come back, eventually.” *Because I won’t be able to let this situation lie for long.*

“Had a falling out with someone?”

“Of a kind.” She sighed. “A kind I doubt you’d believe.”

The driver made a non-committal *hmm*. Yvette got the hint. “You’re not interested, right?”

A half-shrug, this time. “Not exactly. I operate on a need-to-know basis...” he glanced at her. “But anything you say stays strictly between us – not even your boss will hear it.”

Yvette sensed the granting of an exception in his tone, and smiled as much as her fatigue would allow. “The boss can be very inquisitive when he puts his mind to it.” Yvette considered matters for another moment, and then decided that she didn’t have much to lose.

“I’ve been set up to take the fall for something. I *think* my bosses are trying some sort of trial-by-fire thing. That or this is their way of telling me I’m out of a job.”

“Interesting workplace.”

“You could say that. Great pay, but the retirement plan is lousy,” she thought of Paul’s attempt to confer the Embrace upon her.

Her companion chuckled quietly. “Sounds like my job.” He looked over at her. “Frankfurt’s a couple of hours away. Why don’t you get some sleep?”

“Don’t like talking while you’re working, I take it?”

Her answer was a wry grin – concession of a point made.

“Fine, fine.” Yvette didn’t need much persuading. It had been a long night. She tilted the seat back and got as comfortable as she could. “Wake me up when we’re about a half hour outside the town. I’ll be wanting to make a stop on the way...” *Hair dye, scissors, sports bandages...* she fell asleep compiling a shopping list.

Three days later, the silver convertible pulled up beside the Untermain Bridge in central Frankfurt. “Right on time.” Yvette noted, throwing a half eaten almond pastry into the trash as she approached the car. Her mood was good and she was looking forward to leaving town.

“Wait.” To her surprise, the driver got out of the car – leaving the engine running – and leaned on the door, clearly not intending to go anywhere just yet.

Yvette paused and regarded the driver across the roof. “What?”

“Your boss. His name’s Viersan, right?”

Yvette frowned. “Yes, it is. I thought you knew that.”

The driver shook his head. “No, not really. He sent cash. Anyway, he called me last night and-“ he paused, considering his words. “He said that I should take you to Paris.”

“Oh?” Yvette waited for more information.

“Yeah. Said you should take a few days off.”

“And he suggested Paris?”

“He hinted strongly at it, yeah. His money’s good so…” he shrugged.

“That man.” Yvette sighed, wondering if Paul honestly meant that she needed a break, or was warning her to stay out of his – or his Sire’s – way until things had cooled down. “How much did he give you, anyway?”

His expression darkened slightly. “Enough to get to Paris.”

Yvette heard the warning in his voice. “All right. So what’s the problem?”

“The problem is…” He paused. “If you don’t want to go to Paris, don’t get in the car.”

“I see.” At least, she *thought* she did.

“I’ll just tell him that you weren’t here. But if you get in…”

“I’m going to Paris.”

He nodded.

Yvette stepped back from the car and thought for a few moments. Her anger at Paul over the past few days still seethed within but… he wanted her in Paris. Just knowing that made her decision easy.

She reached for the car door. “It looks like I’m going to Paris.”

“All right.” The driver followed her lead and re-took his seat in the car.

“New look.” He remarked as he pulled away from the curb.

Yvette was surprised by what seemed to be – for him – a forward comment. Still, he had good reason. Her long brown hair was now burgundy and ended just below her jaw line. Careful application of cosmetics had changed her skin tone, and a brief – painful – visit to a hair salon changed the shape of her eyebrows, as well as tidying up the hatchet job she had done on her hair shortly after she arrived in Frankfurt. Meanwhile, her chestnut-brown eyes had been rendered hazel with contacts and her body had been strategically restrained and padded to change its silhouette.

In fact, changing her shape had been the most uncomfortable aspect of the past three days, so Yvette immediately wriggled in her seat to unhitch some elastic bandage around her chest and not caring much about personal dignity. Fortunately, the driver kept his eyes on the road and if he was amused, he hid it well. “It’s all redundant, now, thank God.”

“Oh?”

Yvette nodded. “The bosses have been brought to heel. It’s amazing what kidnapping a man’s family will do for one’s annual review.”

The driver nodded at that, with the expression of one who has just had some questions answered.

The past few days had been a gamble, but they had paid off. Yvette pieced together a few overheard remarks; a past conversation had with one of the ghouls beholden to her domitor’s sire, created a well-informed hunch, and had combined it all with some frantic legwork in Frankfurt. The practical outcome had been the identity and location of the mortal descendants of Paul’s superior – still looked after by him from afar. Yvette understood the utility of such sentimental weakness and wasted no time putting the pressure on. A few photographs emailed with a bluntly worded demand produced almost immediate results. Yvette was no longer of any interest to the authorities.

After a few minutes, Yvette realized that she didn’t like the silence. Reaching for another subject, she asked: “Do you know Paris, at all?”

“A bit. I can find my way around.” Yvette had the impression that he could say *that* of almost any city on the globe.

“Would my outstanding credit extend to you taking me around the city for a day? I’ve never been to Paris.” Yvette wondered why the idea of visiting the city made her feel slightly uneasy. She shrugged it off as a case of nerves at the idea of going to a new place, solo. The best way to fight that, then, was not to be alone. “It could be fun.” God knew that Yvette had had little enough of *that* in her life of late.

He didn’t reply at first. Yvette regarded him in the early-morning light and wondered what he was thinking. *Something* was on his mind, if that half-frown was any indication.

When he spoke, his voice was firm and a little too loud. “I’m not a tour guide. Or a gigolo.”

Yvette blinked. “Why...? Oh. LA.” She winced a little at the memory of a clumsy pass, deftly refused.

The driver kept his gaze on the road and nodded.

“And you think that maybe *I* think that my boss’s money entitles me to...?” Yvette shook her head. “Hell. I might have presumed a bit much in the past, but I’m *not* presuming that now.” The fact that she wouldn’t entirely mind was another matter entirely and, she suspected, increasingly irrelevant.

“Like I said, your boss gave me a large payoff, then he drops broad hints that I’m to take you to Paris – and I have no idea how much you told him about Los Angeles...” He shrugged one shoulder.

“I tend not to talk about the times I make a fool of myself.” Yvette said with what she hoped was the right mix of humor and honesty.

To Yvette’s relief, he relaxed a little at that.

“So he doesn’t know?”

“Not from me, he doesn’t. What’s wrong with being a tour guide?” Yvette wanted to get away from the subject of Los Angeles as quickly as possible.

“The tips are lousy.” He deadpanned.

Yvette laughed. “Alright, I can believe that. And, besides, you’re a driver, right?”

“That’s right.”

Yvette thought, just a little wistfully, about missed chances – and the attendant odds of looking a fool – and realized that she needed a driver more than she needed a way to get back at Paul for anything that had happened. She didn’t doubt that by the time she saw Paul again, he would be completely forgiven, and perhaps they could go on as they had before.

Yvette tilted her chair back, closed her eyes and smiled at the thought. *Yes, that would be good...*