

Rayne Storm

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“Rayne, duck!” Liam shouted. I heard the familiar *swoosh*, then suppressed a cough as a layer of fine ash rained down on me.

“Dammit, why does that shit always get in my hair? My grandmother isn’t this gray,” I moaned.

“Quit bitching. You’re still alive, and you can wash your hair later.” He gave me an impish grin. “It could be worse. It could stink.”

“Ha! You’ve obviously never bathed in it. It reeks like your dirty socks. Now shut up and let me kill some bloodsuckers.”

I stood and spotted two undead coming at Liam from behind. “Back-to-back, Liam.”

We turned in unison like a well-oiled machine. But then my feet slipped on the loose hay littering the building’s floor, and I almost went down. I fought for my balance.

“Oh-oh, no.” I sneezed. Not your ordinary *achoo*, but the *knock you out of your boots* kind. Hey, I can’t help that I’m highly allergic to grasses. I stifled the next sneeze as three vamps rushed me. Daunted by their superior numbers and preternatural strength, the precariousness of the situation seemed all too real. At 26, I had no desire to die young. But if I didn’t come up with a plan—like *now*—they’d tear me to pieces. In the lead, one big, ugly vamp charged me. I waited until *Big and Ugly* stood right where I needed him. The Katana is a sword fit for a king—or queen, in my case. It had the perfect length blade, was strong and lightweight and was well-balanced. I loved my Katana. But right then, I would have traded her for the longest broadsword ever made. With the weight of every ounce of my body behind my Katana, I swung as if my life depended on it.

It did.

But *Big and Ugly* caught the blade. Son-of-a-bitch. The razor sharpness of the blade had no effect on him. I could have done more damage if I’d given him a paper cut.

Time for Plan B.

Now, if I only had one.

He outmatched me. His preternatural strength, 6’ 7” height and massive muscles all screamed, *Game Over*. With one shot to live, my limited options flew through my mind at breakneck speed. Then suddenly I knew.

Eureka!

I placed my left leg behind me, then sprung up and kicked the mother square in the nuts. He squealed and doubled over, clutching his balls and crying with a gusto. The din echoed throughout the structure. Who knew vamps had the same weakness as any other man? After I caught my sword, I

wanted to kiss it. Its cold, smooth steel was a comfort in my hands. With *Big and Ugly's* neck exposed, I severed his head from his body with one clean stroke.

Swoosh.

His oversized body disintegrated, creating a lot of dust. I held my breath so I wouldn't inhale any of it.

I didn't have time to bask in the glow of satisfaction, because Uno and Dos reached me in a flash. Did I mention vamps move at warp speed? Uno's hands tore at me. His far-reaching, razor-sharp nails could rip me apart in an instant. But my suit saved me. The black, Kevlar-reinforced leather one-piece outfit would have been stifling if not for the top-secret design. Breathable and supple, the form-fitting, bad-ass uniform could have passed as biker's gear.

In one swift move, I took my KA-BAR from my weapons belt and used the knife's armor's piercing blade to slice off Uno's ears. I cringed when he shrieked, slicing through the dusty air. But the racking noise didn't cause me to falter. Uno stepped backward, his eyes ablaze. The distinct metallic scent of blood reeked from him. Drunken rage consumed me. He had given me an opportunity, and I took it. His severed head soothed my ire. As with the others, his body disintegrated. I kicked the heap of sallow, fine ash—all that remained of the filth.

I realized I hadn't heard from Liam. "Talk to me. I need your location."

"Ten feet to your right." His voice rang clear, but he sounded short of breath.

"You okay?" What a stupid question. How could he be, with the vast sea of preternatural creatures out for our blood?

"No fang marks on me, if that's what you mean."

Death loomed large. But damned if I'd let the bloodsuckers turn me. Fuck! What are you going to do? Curl up and die?

Then I spotted an opportunity, the one chance to complete the mission and live to tell made up grandiose stories. My adrenaline-high mind laid out the plan of action.

"Liam, can you hold them off for thirty seconds?" I knew I was asking the impossible of him. But they didn't choose you for the unit and expect less. He turned his strong, angular face until our eyes met.

"Hurry," Liam gasped.

Hurry, I did. I spun toward the aged, weathered double barn doors. A rotted 2-inch by 4-inch pine board slid into the wood brackets that kept the doors closed. I held my breath, then raised my sword over my head, aimed, and with one swing, cut the 2 x 4 in half. The force of the blow sent pulses of sharp pain up my arms. The blow almost knocked me down.

Pure instinct drove my next moves. The years I'd trained in numerous forms of martial arts had turned my body into a weapon. I planted my front foot, then pushed off the hard-packed dirt floor with my rear foot. I rotated my front foot and leg, so my heel pointed toward the target, adding additional rotational momentum and energy. I completed the roundhouse kick and shattered the door. Another skilled kick destroyed the other. Piercing wails filled the air as the noon sunlight punched through the dreary interior of the barn. Their bodies burst into blue flames, the color of fire's hottest temperature. I

smelled their terror and agony and wondered what they faced that fueled their terror. For an instant, I saw their eyes —dark crimson colored.

Did hell await them?

I could only hope. Screams of agony filled the air for an instant. Then, *poof*, gone. I'd seen it happen many times, but I didn't think I'd ever get used to the sight.