

SIX | JOHANNESBURG

Henry

As soon as we landed in Johannesburg, Sunower impatiently waited for her bag at baggage claim. We'd had to place her supply of blood under the plane. Obviously, it couldn't be scanned and carried onboard with us, and the long trip had taken a lot out of us. Aires wasn't physically exhausted, but just like everyone else on board, she was suffering from jet lag, her body ached from the elevated cabin pressure, and she needed time to get back to normal. Thankfully, our bags were amongst the rst to come out, so as soon as I saw them, I snatched them up and hailed a cab.

"Can you make it to the hotel, or do we need to stop somewhere?" I asked once we were settled in the backseat, and I noticed Aires slip on her sunglasses. She rarely wore them, so I knew that it meant that her eyes were probably already turning red or getting ready to.

"I can make it to the hotel Mi Amor. It's not that bad, but after I have a drink, I'd really like a big hunk of cow meat."

I turned her face to mine and slightly lowered the lenses, looking deep into her eyes. I was relieved to see that she was right, and the circles were very faint to the point of being unnoticeable. After a soft kiss on the tip of her nose, I returned her glasses to their original position.

"The hotel has room service, so I'm sure they'll have something on the menu that you'll like. What's the plan?" I asked.

Before giving me an answer, Aires leaned forward and began to communicate with the driver in a language I'd never heard her speak before. The conversation went on for a few minutes, and once it was done, she sat back and furiously jotted down notes in her phone.

"What language was that?"

"Zulu. They speak about six different languages here, but most South Africans speak Zulu, so I gured it was worth a try."

"How many languages do you speak?"

"Fluently? Three. Conversationally, it's closer to ten."

"Ten?! How did I never know this?" I asked, shocked.

"Aye, Henry! Did you think that while I was working all over the world, I just happened to nd someone in every country who spoke Spanish or English? No, if I want to get information from the natives, I have to speak their language. Literally and guratively." She then slipped the driver a crisp U.S. \$100 bill, making him smile brightly in the rearview mirror.

"So what does \$100 buy us?"

"Cab fair and addresses for four late-night establishments that cater to a more questionable clientele. That's where we will start our investigation tonight," Aires explained.

"You don't want to get started now?"

"No. We need time to try to adjust to the new time zone, rest, and refuel. Also, the people we're looking for don't usually come out when the sun is still up." Sunower blew me a kiss then began researching up the locations the cabbie had given her.

By the time we made it to the hotel, Aires had eciently planned out the night and was confident that we'd nd at least one person who remembered Wesley and could give us information. The check-in process was quick and easy, so it didn't take us long to get to our room, order a meal, and prepare for the night's festivities.

"So, I've always wondered: how is it that you get people to talk to you and tell you things?" I asked.

"What do you mean? I ask them nicely."

"I don't doubt that at all. But from what I've learned, vampires are pretty close-knit, and they don't like outsiders. So I don't understand how you can get them to tell you where people are or where they've been when they know you're just going to kill them," I explained.

"It's true, vampires don't like outsiders, but I'm not an outsider; I'm one of them as far as they know. Short of tasting my blood, there is no way a vamp could detect my werebear DNA, so when they look at me, they see one of them. And if that doesn't work, I'll have to get a bit more aggressive. Or seductive. It all depends on who I'm dealing with."

"You won't be seducing anyone for information on this trip, Sunower. I don't want to kill anyone, but I will if I have to."

"Of course, my love. I'm not in the seductive mood for this hunt anyway. Anyone who doesn't want to tell me what I want to know will meet my st. Or the heel of my boot. Wesley isn't going to get away from me."

I could sense her getting upset, so I decided to drop the subject for the time being; she needed to be calm and relaxed if she would be successful tonight. I'd never been on a vampire hunt, but I'd been on plenty of scouting missions, and that was all this was. Going into battle, you needed to be focused, or you made mistakes, mistakes that could end your life.

That wasn't going to happen. Isabella and Isaiah needed both Aires and me to come home. And I refused to go to the afterlife before I made this woman my wife. So I'd talk about everything except vampire hunting, whatever I needed to do to make sure Aires would be alright.

"How about we call home and see what the kids are up to? Maybe we can get them on a FaceTime call," I suggested, making my warrior queen immediately perk up. If there was one thing Aires took more seriously than her vampire hunting, it was being a mother to our children, and she was excellent at it.

"S! I miss my babies so much; I even miss Isaiah pulling my hair," she said with a smile.

"I can pull your hair for you, beautiful. All you had to do was ask," I replied.

"Such a dirty boy behind closed doors. If only the rest of the pack knew who you really were, your Prince Charming title would be gone, Mi Amor."

"They know me; you just get to know a deeper part of me. Just like I know the deepest parts of you. My favorite is that spot all the way at the top left, right about here. Your eyes always roll back when I hit this spot," I said, pressing my thumb right above her pubic bone. She knew just the spot I was referring to because she moaned as soon as my ngers made contact with her esh.

"First we call our babies, then I need you to remind me of this spot you're referring to. I seem to have forgotten all about it."

"Have you now? Don't worry; I'll make sure you never forget it again."

Aires

"What do you know about an older guy who would have been in the area about twenty-one years ago? Named Wesley?" I asked the guy beside me at the bar. The literal Bloody Mary he was drinking let me know that he was the right type of person for me to be talking to, and the abundance of scars across his sheet-white face said that he was also not one to sit back and watch while s***t went down.

"Spray tan or one of those con bed things? You're not orange or streaky, so I'm going to put my money on the con. I should probably invest in one of those." The guy was speaking at me rather than to me, and I had a feeling that he was probably too drunk to remember where he lived, let alone a person he may or may not have crossed paths with two decades ago.

"Do you want me to give it a try, Sunower?" Henry asked from my other side. "He seems to want to chat with you, but maybe if I can piss him off, it will sober the guy up. Clearly, he appreciates a good brawl."

"You think I can't piss him off and dodge a few drunken punches? Come now, Mi Amor; you know me better than that," I replied.

"I know you can take everyone in here, even me. And I also know that if Bloody Mary swings at you or shows any aggression to you in any way, his time amongst the undead is going to come to a sudden end tonight. It's better if he comes after me."

"Henry, this is what I do, and I'm good at it. You're not here as my bodyguard or my overprotective ancé; I need you here as my partner. Someone to watch my back. Okay?"

"You can't expect me to--"

"I can. The same way you have to suck it up during training at home, you have to suck it up now. I might hit a few people, I might just get hit myself, and I'll denitely get hit on. It's the nature of the business. My business and I need you to let me do it," I explained.

"Fine. But if I'm your partner, just know that I'm going to be just as involved as you. I might not be able to blend in as well as you, but I'm not sitting on the sidelines while you get your hands dirty. I'm here to help."

"I know you are, and I love you for it. Why don't you go talk to the lady at the end of the bar? She's some kind of hybrid, and since she's not all vamp, she might be more open to talking to you," I suggested.

Henry glanced over in the direction I'd motioned and set his eyes on his target. He then leaned over to kiss my temple, then stood to his feet. Before he could take a step away, I grabbed the front of his shirt and pulled him down towards me. "Just in case she tries anything, I want her to know that you belong to me," I said before I gently pricked the skin of his neck with my teeth.

I'd bitten Henry many times before; drinking his blood during s*x was like a drug to me; every drop of him made me light-headed, euphoric, and would almost immediately make me reach my climax. But having a quaking orgasm in the middle of a job was a little unprofessional, so I made sure to avoid biting too deep. I just needed to break the skin to show that he'd been claimed.

"I think you just marked me; I'd expected it to be a little more romantic than that," Henry smiled down at me.

"We can have a replay later on with all the romance you're charming heart desires. But for now, I didn't want her getting the wrong idea; she's not on my list to kill tonight. Now get your sexy ass down there and see what you can nd out."

Henry walked away abs I turned my attention back to my bar mate, who was chugging his drink like he was at a frat party. When he was done and had ordered two more, I gured I needed to make my move before he was passed out.

"How long have you lived in Johannesburg?"

"Two hundred and ve years. I hate this f****g place," he replied.

"Then why are you still here?"

"Because it's home. Some people come and go; others stay for a lifetime. I was turned here over two hundred years ago, and I've never stepped foot anywhere else since. Home means family."

This was perfect. In the span of less than a minute, I'd found out that not only had Bloody Mary been here when Wesley was, but that he was nostalgic and liked to talk. I wonder what else I could get out of him.

"You can probably guess from my accent that I'm not from around here; I'm originally from Spain. I was born twenty-seven years ago; then my father disappeared before I turned one. I heard that he might have come here."

I wanted to see if a softer approach would work here. Usually, I had to save my sts for those who didn't want to talk, so I didn't think that they would be needed in this case.

"That's no kind of man I want to know. I've fathered over thirty children in my time, and I've been there for every single one of them," he spat.

"Maybe you met him?" I said, sliding the picture of Wesley across the bar.

"Maybe. But I'm an old vamp, and my brain doesn't recall as well as it used to. What did you say his name was?"

"Wesley Grant."

"Grant? British?"

"That's what my mother said; I wouldn't know, being that I was abandoned so young," I said, emphasizing the abandonment more than I needed to.

He looked at the picture for about a minute, then shook his head. "I don't know, sweetheart; I wish I did. Have you checked in the U.K.? If that's where he's from, I will bet anything that he went back. Home always pulls us back, no matter how far we stray."