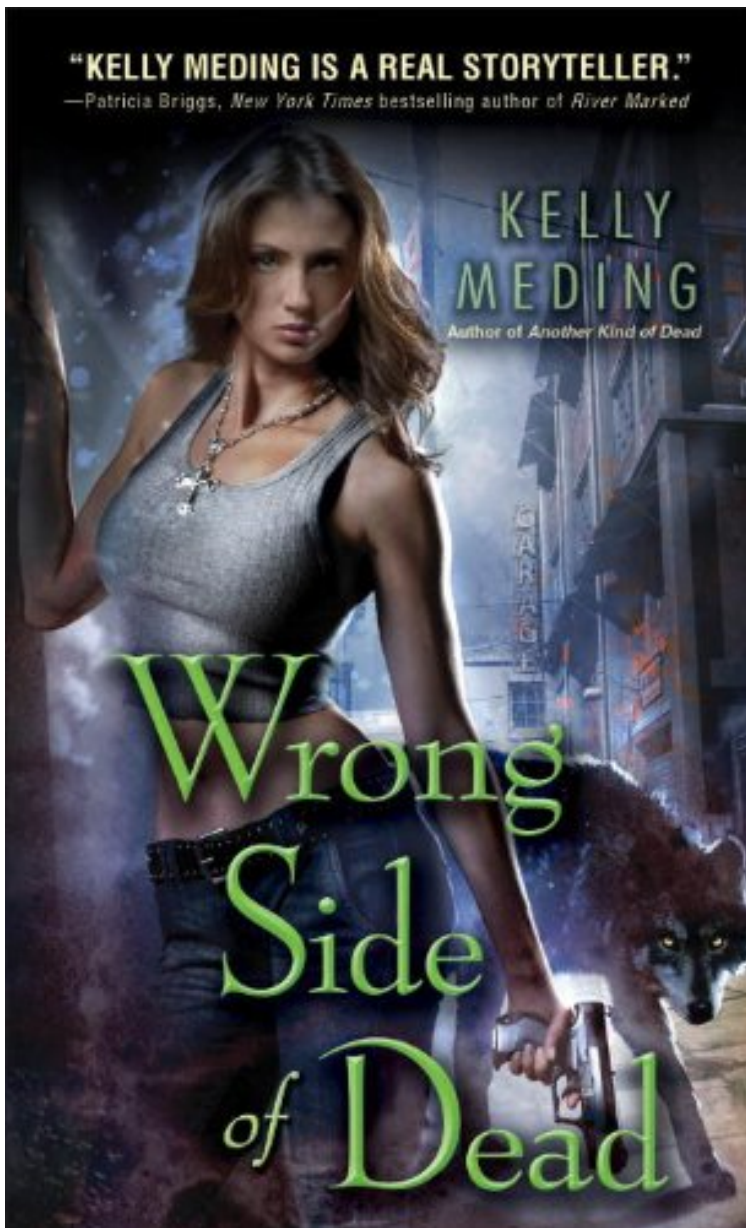


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Wrong Side of Dead



*Par Kelly Meding
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurMonster hunter Evangeline Stone woke up on the wrong side of dead this morningand now theres hell to pay. Barely recovered from her extended torture at the hands of mad scientist Walter Thackery, Evy can use a break. What she gets instead is a war, as the battered Triads that keep Dreg City safe find themselves under attack by half-Blood vampires who have somehow retained their reason, making them twice as lethal. Worse, the Halfies are joined by a breed of were-creature long believed extinctback and more dangerous than ever. Meanwhile, Evys attempts at reconciliation with the man she loves take a hit after

Wyatt is viciously assaulted an attack traced to Thackery, who has not given up his quest to exterminate all vampires . . . even if he has to destroy Dreg City to do it. With Wyatts time running out, another threat emerges from the shadows and a staggering betrayal shatters the fragile alliance between the Triads, vampires, and shapeshifters, turning Evys world upside down forever. From the Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter One Friday, July 25 11:10 p.m. The rave was already in full swing by the time Phineas and I showed up dressed to blend, even though we werent there for a party. Illegal raves full of drunk college students and twentysomethings were the ideal hunting ground for half-Blood vampires, which made the transformed warehouse the perfect place for our little stakeout. But while any Halfie would do, I was hoping to see one particular target show up. The music vibrated in my chest, loud enough for me to know my ears would be ringing by the time I left. We paused just inside, and Phineas el Chimal, my squad leader and partner for the night, closed his eyes to orient his more sensitive were-hearing to the din. Ravers jostled past us, ignorant of the partygoers around them, caught up in their own narrow little worlds. They had no clue why we were there, or that death was mingling among the kegs, glow sticks, and gyrating bodies. No clue and no fucking manners. I was ready to turn around and slap the next person who elbowed me. Phin saved them by opening his clear blue eyes and smiling. Ready to have some fun? he asked. Definitely. I draped myself onto his arm so wed look like the happy couple we were pretending to be, and his fingers laced through mine. We both knew wed have to do some acting, and I trusted him to watch my back. Hed been doing it without fail since the day we met nearly three months ago. I stumbled a little in my knee-high boots, not used to the three-inch heels. My default shoes of choice were sneakers or combat boots better for running and kicking. But the black leather boots I had on now matched my black leather miniskirt, and their knee-high length carefully hid a pair of serrated blades. The boots were the only place where my skimpy outfit could easily camouflage weapons, so I suffered the indignity of stumbling around in them. Anyway, it was also a good excuse to lean on Phin and put on a lovey-dovey show. At least Phin had the benefit of jeans and a black wife-beater, which showed off his toned physique and earned him appreciative smiles from a few female gawkers. I shot them possessive glares as we wove our way into the dancing, gyrating crowd. The air was thick with the distinctive odors of smoke, beer, and sweat. Phin tilted his head, pretended to nuzzle my neck, and whispered, Team one, six oclock. I spotted them easily, dancing amid a tight cluster near the DJs stage. Gina Kismet and Marcus Dane were team one to our team two, and even from a distance they made quite the convincing (if mismatched) couple. Ginas five-foot-two, pale-skinned, red-haired goth girl to his six-foot-one, black-haired, copper-eyed pirate. Okay, so I never actually called him a pirate to his face, but the long hair in a ponytail, the ruddy complexion, and the tendency toward scruffy facial hair gave that impression. Even if I hadnt known that the man was actually Feliaa were-jaguar, to be precise I would have suspected he wasnt quite what he appeared. They were burning it up on the dance floor, completely into each other at least to the untrained eye. And besides our two pairs, we had two single plants mingling around the rave, on the lookout for shimmering eyes and silver-streaked hair, or even a set of fangs that hadnt been filed down. Half-Blood vampires have certain telltale signs that can be covered up with contacts and hair dye, but members of the newest crop of Halfies were bolder and smarter, and they werent as afraid of us as they used to be, back when an organization called the Triads existed and just our name sent them fleeing in fear. God, I miss those days. It didnt really help that one of our own was now one of these bolder Halfies and seemed to be using our hard-learned tactics against us. Phin swept me through the crowd, and we ended up near the makeshift bar, where two guys with silver rings in their noses were filling cups from dozens of different kegs. Phin collected a beer for each of us to complete the fitting-in image. Beer wasnt my favorite, but Id guzzled worse in the line of duty. At least a hundred people were in the main part of the warehouse, and I imagined dozens more wandered around, getting into any unlocked rooms they could find. Initial surveillance told us that the place had a section of offices on the north side of the warehouse, as well as roof access from the main floor. Although I had officially returned to the field last week, after spending almost three weeks training and recovering from being nearly tortured to death (again) last month, this was my first big mission since . . . well, since my time with the Triads. And a lot was riding on finding the guy we were looking for. Time to play, I said. Phin grinned. The strobe lights lit his angular face in a way that accentuated the fact that he was a were-osprey a predator in every sense of the word, but also a very loyal ally. Our relationship had its share of ups (me saving his life twice in the first two weeks we knew each other) and downs (him stabbing me in the stomach the first day we knew each other), but I wouldnt want anyone else by my side for tonights operation. Except maybe the one man who no longer wanted to be there. We moved with the crowd, creating an easy dance of grinding and groping, while carefully observing the other dancers

and sipping slowly at our beers. Gina and Marcus had disappeared. I spotted one of our single plants, a full-Blood vampire named Quince, dancing it up with a pair of girls in slinky dresses. Hed dyed his white hair dark blond and wore blue contact lenses to cover his glimmering purple eyes. That color was a very distinctive vampire attribute. The other was his long, lean frame, which he carried like a male model. Quince had joined our organization two weeks ago and proved, right from the start, to be eager and very trainable.

Phin immediately asked to have him assigned to his squad. Before separating for the nights mission, our working sextet had come up with a handful of signals, since using earbuds would be useless with the noise levels. Quince caught me looking at him and tugged hard on his left earlobe shorthand for I might have something. I scratched my forehead along the hairline, motioning that I understood. Come on, I said to Phineas. We leaned on each other, pretending to be more tipsy than we were, as we threaded our way to the opposite wall, which was painted with Day-Glo stripes and splatters. Quince extricated himself from his dance partners and met us there, slapping Phin on the shoulder as if greeting an old buddy. Rumors are circulating about a private party at midnight, Quince said, his tone serious even as his expression remained playful. It promises a narcotic experience that is both mind-altering and life-changing. It definitely sounded like what happens when humans are infected with the vampire parasite, which turns them into half-Bloods. Vampires are a species unto themselves; they arent made and they were never human. Their saliva, however, is highly infectious to humans, and a single bite alters a human beings brain functions and physical nature.

Many infected humans go insane from the change, but some adapt and are able to function with relative ease relative given that theyre still driven by bloodlust and are at risk of infecting more humans. Which is why all Halfies are on our kill first, dont ask questions list. But the functional Halfies were our target tonight.

During the last two weeks, wed stumbled across several places where a dozen or more Halfie corpses had been dumped after being beheaded. Word on the street said several functioning Halfies were looking to create an army of similarly functioning Halfies to take us on. And since two in three went bat shit crazy from the infection, they seemed to be building their ranks by trial and error. Which meant the bodies of the once innocent were piling up, and their makers had to be stopped. Of all the minor disasters plaguing the city, this was our most pressing. And the most personal, given the former Hunter who was helping to organize it. Wheres the party? I asked. Meeting on the roof, he replied. For a brief inspection, I assume, before reporting the location to the chosen candidates. Awesome. What time is it? Phin checked his cell phone.

Eleven-twenty. Good, we had a little time. Quince, I want you and the other plants to stay down here just in case things get rowdy. Phin and I will let team one know, then head up to the roof. Quince nodded, laughed like Id just told the funniest joke ever, then melted back into the crowd. He was a damned good actor, for a vampire. Phin crowded in and pressed his forehead to mine, like a lover going in for a kiss. His familiar scent, wild and clean like a raging mountain river, settled around me. Think hell show for the roof meet? he asked, mouth mere inches from mine. Hope so, I replied, but Im not counting on it. I was keenly aware of Phins warmth and of every place our skin touched. I missed this kind of contact with a man one man in particular, who made me crazy in the best and worst ways. But I couldnt waste time missing Wyatt, or mourning our broken relationship. I had a damned job to do. Ill go tell Marcus, Phin said. Meet me by the roof access. Okay. I lingered against the wall for the length of a song. That should be enough time for Phin to track down Marcus and Kismet and let them in on the new plan. The music changed. I eyed a path toward the far end of the warehouse where the stairwell (according to the blueprints) was located, aware of the pulsing throng between me and it. Which was why I didnt notice my shadow until hed sidled up next to me, leaning casually against the wall like he belonged there. I shifted sideways, prepared to tell him to get lost, and froze. Shit. Hey, Evy. Hed taken care to dye his hair back to its natural shade of brown, and donned a pair

of lavender-tinted sunglasses to obscure the new shimmer to his eyes, but the face was the same. Felix Diggory, former Hunter and two-week-old half-Blood, grinned at me, his unfiled fangs gleaming brightly under the constantly shifting lights. I wasnt sure how Id react when I saw him again. I expected anger, grief, maybe even a little bit of shame, since I was there the night Felix got infected. Instead, all I felt was relief. Relief that he was here and I had the chance to correct my mistake. The mistake that allowed him to run free

in the first place. *Revue de presse* Kelly Meding is a real storyteller. Patricia Briggs, *New York Times* bestselling author of *River Marked*