

# **Enthralled**

## **Laura Baumbach**

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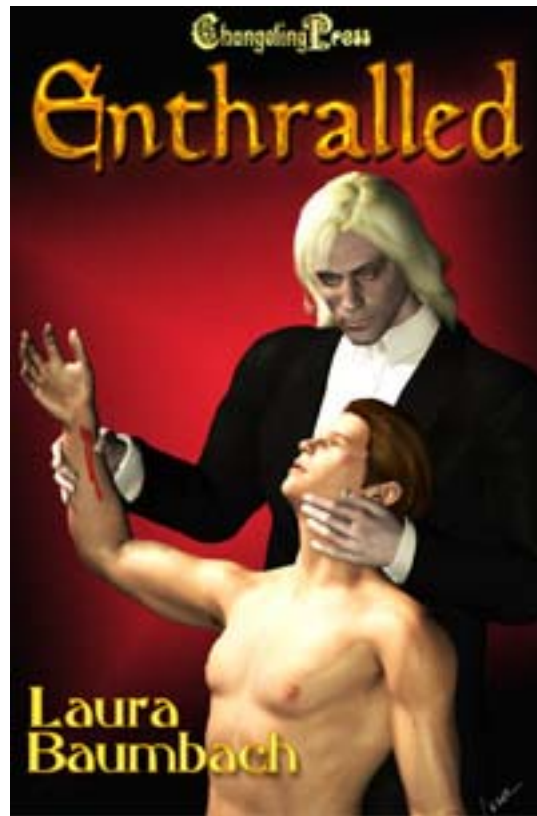
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## Prologue

*"That is a very long way down."*

Standing on the curved top of the thin railing of his apartment's balcony, the ground looked farther away than it had when Colin had been standing on the balcony itself. Ten floors *were* very high. High enough to make sure when he hit the street below, there wouldn't be any chance of a medical team having something to work with.

Colin shifted his weight slightly, his unbuttoned, white dress shirt billowing and flapping in the night breeze around his slender body. The cuff of one sleeve was edged in bright red, and a slow trickle of the same color dripped from one fingertip. His faded blue jeans hugged his hips and thighs, following the curve of his small, firm ass like a well-worn glove.

He looked down at the parked cars and faint white lines on the street below. They swirled dizzily as the half bottle of sleeping pills battled with the two inches of whiskey he had washed them down with ten minutes ago. He averted his gaze to take in the heavens above him, but the night was black and starless, as void and dark as his tired soul. At twenty-five, Colin Dobson felt the weight of an entire lifetime on his shoulders.

A slight wind blew through his dark hair, ruffling his curls and making his unfocused eyes water. The sound of paper rustling nearby eventually grabbed his attention and he glanced down to see the letter he had dropped earlier, the final straw in a long string of unpleasant happenings in his short, chaotic life. It was such a small thing, really, being left alone for his birthday once again, but it was just the final snapping thread to unravel his tenuous self-control.

The paper was trapped in the intricate ironwork of the patio set, captured between the biting wind and the table leg. As he watched, the breeze shifted and the

paper skittered away, like so much in his life had done lately, disappearing into the night.

Half lidded, his teal eyes followed the letter, then drifted closed. He opened them to find himself staring at his sock-covered feet. His black-clad toes were curled around the polished iron banister to keep what little balance he still possessed. He studied the weave of the knit fabric for a moment, fascinated by the tiny line of golden thread that ran across his toes. The thread moved with each flex and wiggle of his foot and Colin suddenly imagined it symbolized the delicate rope of sanity he was holding onto at the moment -- thin, wavering and surrounded by darkness.

A bright spot of color made his gaze dart to his left. He stood mesmerized by the tiny dot of red that splattered onto the railing, and then dripped off the edge to splash down into the street a hundred feet below. Colin cursed himself for his cowardice. He hadn't been able to cut through his wrist deep enough to end his problems in a neater fashion, but a lifetime fear of sharp objects took control and his attempt stopped almost as soon as it began. All he had to show for it was a superficial three inch cut that was more scratch than laceration and another blow to his dwindling ego. He sighed at the thought that he wasn't even man enough to take control of his life long enough to end it in a decent, respectable manner. Instead, he'd had to turn to drugs and alcohol, with an impending grand finale of blunt body trauma in the middle of a public thoroughfare ten stories away.

Another splotch of color joined the first, and Colin forced his gaze up as bright red layered over the now darker, lifeless rusty brown. A wave of dizziness floated around him, invading his thoughts and clouding his mind. Now that he was on top of the three-foot tall railing, he was suddenly confused about his plan of action.

Should he fling himself off the building, taking temporary flight like some comic book superman, pretending to be the hero for once in his life, if only for a brief second? Or should he just step off his balcony into the clear night air like he was walking off a city curb?

Did it really matter which one he picked? He knew no one would know what he was thinking. No one else could understand how he felt right now. Colin had a vast, aching emptiness that had shoved aside the constant pain in his chest until he was little more than an empty, useless shell. No one was left to care how he died or what his last thoughts would be. His life had been nothing more than a small hiccup in the timeline of the world anyway. A tiny blemish that would be forgotten before the spectators gawking over his broken and mangled body faded away.

Throwing his head back, Colin turned his handsome, still boyish face upward, tensed his legs for the jump, spread his arms wide, opened his glazed, watery eyes to meet his coming fate face-to-face like the man his father always wanted him to be, then slowly tipped over the edge into the welcoming night.

## Chapter One

“Deceitful mongrels! I’ll eat your hearts for this!”

Dodging to the left then making a sharp dive to his extreme right, Rowland Campbell managed to escape the crossbow’s mark for a second time. With teeth bared, extended fangs showing, his normally pale blue eyes were now a fluorescent yellow with just a tinge of red in them. The millennia-old vampire snarled under his breath, letting a bit of his rage at being caught off guard by this trio of hunters fuel his instinctive sense of survival.

Since his human days as a Roman general, when he used a name even he had forgotten, Rowland had a knack for winning and surviving under the worst of conditions. That was undoubtedly one of the reasons he had weathered the many changes the centuries had brought down on him since being turned. Even now, trapped between an un-scalable glass building wall and three rabid hunters out to claim his head for a trophy, he was still sure he could make it out in one piece. He might not be able to kill the hunters this night, but he would live to fight them another day. And their day would definitely come. Rowland Campbell took no prisoners and left no unfriendly witnesses to tell the tale of his existence. Ever. At times, even identifying what species his victims were was occasionally a problem for the people finding the remains.

A series of faint hisses warned him the next assault had been fired, and he rolled to one side to escape a volley of wooden arrows shot from high-tech, rapid firing crossbows. He had an inkling these dramatic and gadget-loaded hunters fancied themselves cutting a romantic figure as they brandished their modern day versions of an ancient weapon that was as steeped in myth and lore as the vampire legend itself.

The few glimpses of them he had seen in between shots revealed them to be heavily leather clad and sporting more hand weapons than could possibly be legal to carry out in the open, making them look like futuristic warriors in a cheap space odyssey. One even wore a long, velvet cloak that swished and swayed, giving away his location with each movement. Luckily for Rowland, they seemed to like to stay grouped together, so pinpointing them was only a matter of filtering out the night sounds and listening.

Even though they had several opportunities to rush him, the trio of men remained on the low roof to the right of the glass building Rowland crouched beside, pinning their vampire prey in the short alley between the two structures. All Rowland needed to do was make it to either the end of the alley or up to the rooftop unscathed, and he would be able to leave these foolhardy, but persistent, hunters behind. Then he in turn would track them down and they would become the unsuspecting prey.

Slipping soundlessly behind a large dumpster, Rowland turned to face the building, mentally calculating the jump he would need to make the leap to the seven-story rooftop. His keen eyesight picked out a rusted, unused flagpole brace still attached to the side of the building, and his decision on which escape route to take was made.

He let one corner of his thin lips quirk up in what he knew to be a mirthless, unattractive smirk and casually allowed the full force of the beast that dwelt within him to have free rein, feeling the massive, ancient energy and strength course through his already powerful frame.

Looking back down the building, he caught sight of himself in the blackened glass, a perfect reflecting surface in the dim light provided by the streetlights at each end of the alley. A tall, proud man stared back at him, with naturally platinum, brush-cropped hair, golden eyes flecked with splinters of red, with a handsome if square-jawed face set on a body that was broad, taut and muscular.

He had been turned at the time of his thirty-eighth year, his body honed and toned by years in the military and the battlefield. Even before he became a supernatural

creature with awe-inspiring powers, he had been an intimidating man and a fierce, unforgiving warrior. Any shred of mercy he had ever possessed was long gone, along with the centuries that had passed while he hunted his fellow man for food.

The crisp, clean lines of his black suit and black dress shirt showed the cut of his well-muscled body and accentuated the pale color of his nearly flawless skin. Only a small scar on the tip of his chin marred the smooth surface of his face, a lasting testimony to the temper and insanity of the last conquered woman he had taken during what was to be his final campaign.

Rowland casually straightened the lines of his jacket and moved out from behind the dumpster. Combining a distraction with his ultimate goal, he suddenly moved more rapidly than the men could possibly track with their human eyes. He jumped into the air and zigzagged up the side of the building using the force of his initial leap to propel himself up to the flagpole brace. Pushing off the short piece of jutting metal, he rocketed up the remainder of the slick glass wall. Arrows pinged and bounced all around him, ricocheting off the smooth surface and falling harmlessly to the alleyway below.

Just before he reached the rooftop, the smell of unwashed human male struck him, and he immediately knew why the three men below hadn't rushed him. They had wanted him to make a break for the rooftop where a fourth hunter waited patiently for him. Knowing they would expect him to panic and retreat at the last minute, Rowland continued up to land on the gritty asphalt roof, his shoes making a heavy, ominous thud as he paused a split second to target his lone opponent.

In a blink of an eye he was on the surprised man, dragging the hunter to his chest, pinning the cocked and ready crossbow between them. His fangs tore into the hunter's face and shoulders, blinding his prey with the man's own blood as his massive fingertips tightened on the thick leather collar the man wore protectively around his neck. Locking eyes with his victim's, he tightened his grip, watching the light fade from his prey's startled gaze.

When this moment occurred, he always felt the power of his victim's life energy drain away, usually mixed with massive elements of desire, hope, terror and pain. It



was like a drug he was addicted to. It reaffirmed his cursed existence, fortified his conviction that evil had found a home within his heart, replacing his soul and devouring his spirit. He was death and deserved nothing more than the centuries of pain and loneliness that was his entire existence. He was unredeemable by anyone's standards. A small smile creased his face, and he squeezed until he heard cartilage break.

He didn't need to feed, it was early and there was more suitable prey walking the street for later. Now, Rowland was content with making a statement, forewarning the other hunters what they could look forward to when he tracked them down one by one.

He released his hold on the dead man, pushing off the falling body to take flight for his final escape. When he was ten feet straight up into the air, the hunter's body hit the rooftop. The faint, but telling click of the crossbow striking the ground and firing met his ear a second too late. A sudden, sharp pain knocked him upright in the air and fire spread through his chest, racing down his limbs and torturing every cell in his body. His hands flew to his chest and wrapped around the protruding end of the wooden shaft lodged deep within his ribcage. Moving the shaft he felt the barrel rub against his heart and the fire consuming his body became a roaring inferno of agony.

Still suspended in air, Rowland hovered over the rooftop, momentarily stunned, until the sounds of the other three hunters hurriedly approaching snapped him back into action.

Blood poured from around the arrow and his strength flowed away with it. Pressing his hands to the wound, Rowland resumed his flight, keeping his path straightforward, conserving his energy. He needed shelter and to feed, preferably in the same place and he needed it soon. Within a few blocks he was in a high-priced apartment district in the heart of the semi-sleeping city.

Numerous lights dotted the surrounding apartment buildings, but few, if any, had open doors on such a brisk, chilly night. He heard the sound of a woman's laughter from an apartment balcony on the twelfth floor. She was talking on the phone to a

friend, murmuring snide remarks and cutting comments about co-workers and lamenting her evening alone at home. Rowland felt that familiar smirk of delighted evil twist his lips when he killed the hunter, and he strained to obtain enough lift to gain access to the welcoming sound of the harsh, feminine laughter.

Fifty feet before the woman's balcony, the arrow shifted and a spasm of pain shot through the vampire's chest. With a roar of agony, he tumbled out of the air, dropping two floors. With a final surge of flagging strength, Rowland propelled himself forward. With a sudden thud and deep, soul-shattering bellow of pain, he struck a soft object, plunging the arrow into his chest until it protruded out his back. The world twisted and went black.

## Chapter Two

At a loss for anything meaningful to say at the end of his life, Colin sighed and murmured, "Forgive me."

As his feet left the firm surface of the railing, Colin looked out into the night, determined to meet his fate with his eyes wide open. Instead of gracefully tipping over to see the gray asphalt rising up to meet him, Colin was greeted by Death himself. He only had a split second before Death embraced him with a roar of triumph.

Colliding chest to chest, Colin was thrown back over his patio railing. The sound of air rushing by him made his ears pound and his skin prickle. Sailing through the air into his open bedroom terrace doors, he landed heavily on his back beside his bed, his head making a dull thud as it bounced off the carpet. The room swam and his stomach churned at the sudden movement and abrupt stop. Swallowing down nausea, Colin blinked back the moisture from his bleary eyes and looked up.

A terrifying face, twisted in a harsh grimace of defiance and anger, hovered above him. The eyes were golden yellow, flecked with blood red. The bristled white hair cropped close to the creature's head was splattered with dots of reddish brown. Its mouth was open, lips pulled back to reveal sharp white fangs that glistened in the faint light from the table lamp beside Colin's bed. The teeth were stained the same blood red as the creature's eyes.

Colin knew his fate had finally found him, but his moment of final peace was snatched away as Death groaned, closed his eyes and slumped unconscious over Colin's small, thin body. Somewhere in the back of his drugged and drunken mind drifted the message that his attacker, this creature, was a vampire, and in his current mental state Colin accepted this as fact without needing to explore it further.

The vampire's barrel chest pressed him to the plush floor, a frame defined by unyielding, rock-hard muscles. Colin groggily tried to regain the breath forced out from his own chest. A thick thigh rested between his faded blue jean clad legs, his sock-covered toes barely reaching to below the bend in the creature's knees. Something poked at his right armpit, causing his white linen shirt to cling to his chest and side, a wet, coolness seeping through to his own chilled flesh.

"What the hell?" Wiggling his hand out from under his own body where it had been trapped in the fall, Colin's fingertips found the end of a smooth, thin stick wedged firmly against his arm. Following the slick shaft, his hand slid up to the creature's chest where it was lodged. Colin shifted his shoulder to free his skewed shirt from under the shaft's end, his actions nudging the vampire's arm and tugging on the arrow.

The vampire's golden and red eyelids flew open. Colin instantly froze in place, his hand pressed against the platinum haired man's bleeding body. The vampire's eyes actually glowed in the dim light as they raked over his face, seemingly memorizing every pore of his pale skin.

"Move again and I'll kill you." The thin, sneering lips had barely moved, but the cultured voice was deep and commanding, the tone harsh and unmistakably deadly, even to Colin's temporarily impaired hearing.

Despite the genuine intent behind the threat, the vampire's words brought a small smile to Colin's own full, dry mouth. He drowsily batted his eyelashes at his attacker and slowly moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue before trying to speak. Even then his words were slurred and hesitant, the drugs and alcohol firmly in control of his abilities.

"Promise?" Colin fluttered his eyelids in an attempt to keep his gaze focused on the intense stare burning into his. "Like this?"

Colin lifted his only free shoulder a fraction of an inch. A massive square hand slammed it back down onto the floor so hard Colin gasped and blinked through the drug-muted stab of pain. His hand was pried from around the slick, blood-coated shaft

and both his wrists were pinned to the floor above his head, held easily in one of the vampire's hands in a move so fast, Colin didn't see it happen.

That deep, cultured, faintly British voice purred in his ear again, making his numb nerve endings tingle all the way down to his crushed groin.

"A pretty little one with a death wish. How fortunate. We can both have what we crave." The vampire nuzzled his chin over Colin's face, rasping the edge of his prominent jaw along Colin's light five o'clock shadow. "But first, the arrow must be pulled out. You'll have to help me with that." A wet, rough tongue licked the soft flesh under Colin's jaw, the slight scrape and burn of teeth marking the skin over his pulse. "Then I'll grant you what you desire, my pretty little one."

Colin found himself mesmerized by the sound of the vampire's sultry voice, and his cock stirred wantonly in its confined prison. Colin panted a little for air, the weight of the man and the stench of blood mixing with the alcohol in his stomach until it churned and burned at the back of his throat.

Suddenly the vampire heaved himself up to land on his side with a thud and a muffled groan of pain.

Colin breathed a sigh of relief and pulled in the first deep breath he'd been able to draw since falling. He could see both of the large man's hands wrapped tightly around the feathered end still sticking out of the front of his body. A three-pronged metal arrowhead glistened on Colin's side, along with several inches of the wooden shaft.

The creature's deep, commanding voice carried biting in the still bedroom air, demanding and sure, even now. "Break off the tip."

"Okay. I help you live then you help me die. Seems fair to me." Colin tried to roll over and push himself up off the floor, but his body wouldn't cooperate even if his mouth couldn't seem to stop working, silly childhood questions finally finding a voice. "Are vampires actually alive?"

The room swayed and tilted with the slightest move of his head. "And if they are, why do you need blood to live if you're already dead?"

A harsh growl was the only answer his questions received. It didn't matter, they were rhetorical anyway. Something to distract him from the nausea rolling in his stomach.

Colin fingered the sharp tip and finally slurred, "Can't. Can't get up. Downers finally hitting. Another twenty minutes," he yawned and patted the vampire's back soothingly, "and I won't need you after all."

A guttural, primal roar shook the room and the arrow shaft under his fingers suddenly disappeared. Colin blinked and twisted to get a better look at the creature beside him, but the vampire was no longer lying there. In his place were the blood-coated, mangled remains of what was once a wooden arrow.

The air in the room seemed to rush by him in a swirling blaze of darkness and muted lights. Colin felt his body lifted and turned, whirled and dangled, before his cotton-filled head stopped spinning and his body flopped boneless and naked down onto his sheets. Pinned down, wrists held at his lean shoulders, Colin's eyes watered as strong, unforgiving fingers laced through his dark curls and tightly gripped his hair.

The weight of the vampire settled abruptly on his chest once more, the blood-soaked shirt cold against his exposed flesh. Colin's legs were flung wide and one clothed, thickly-muscled thigh buried itself between them. Colin could feel the vampire's fully erect cock pressing demandingly against the length of his own fluttering shaft. He couldn't think of a reason to resist the sensation so he didn't, arching his hips up and savored the rush of pleasure that sizzled through his body. This was more intimate physical contact than his body had experienced in his entire lifetime and now he actually had something that he would miss about life when he died. How ironic. He could feel hot tears slip down his face as the drugged stupor ate away the last of his self-control.

Opening his heavy eyelids, Colin met the same terrifying creature that had swept him off the railing, but this time the vampire had added hunger to the look of anger and murderous intent. Completely unfazed, Colin merely nodded, struggling to keep his eyes open. "If I were sober, I bet you'd be really scary looking."

One of the vampire's thumbs uncurled from his hair and began to stroke across Colin's full lower lip, caressing the moist inner lining then using the wetness to paint over the sensitive outer flesh. The expression of impending death barely affected Colin, but the delicate touch sent a shiver straight through him.

"Do it. Do it now." Colin fought to keep his body still, surprised at the arousal the deadly creature's touch coaxed from his body. He was amazed at how excited he was at being pinned down by this beast. His body grew warm and he panted with each new shallow breath he managed to pull in despite the heavy weight on his chest. He found it faintly amusing that what amounted to his "first time" with another man would be when he was on the brink of having his death wish granted.

He locked his bleary gaze on the golden-eyed monster's fanged mouth then slowly turned his head to one side and arched his neck, silently offering everything he had. The pressure on his scratched wrist increased and Colin felt the warm blood ooze from the still raw wound. He watched the vampire raise the injured wrist to his lips and delicately lap at the trickle of fresh blood. Colin relaxed back against the mattress and studied the expression of bliss and hunger that replaced the creature's grimace of pain and rage, oddly fascinated by the erotic look in the vampire's eyes.

It was the first time he had ever been the cause of someone, anyone, looking like that. A burst of pride and desire blossomed in his hollow chest. The desire flared out from his ribcage and traveled to his groin where his cock jerked and strained against the weight of the thigh holding it immobile. Colin was about to throw caution and reason to the wind and hump the vampire's leg when the creature's eyes glowed a deep gold, the red flecks expanding.

"I can taste your youth and your untried passions. A virgin in so many ways."

The vampire purred softly, his deep voice like melted chocolate, smooth, rich and addicting. Even the undertone of raw need and hunger excited Colin. His wrist was lapped and suckled, talented lips encouraging the tiny flow of blood, widening the shallow wound by forcing the edges apart.

Colin hissed at the slight burn his numb senses could still detect, but his toes curled and his hips jerked at the same time as a low groan escaped his lips. A soft chuckle teased near his ear and cool lips nipped at the tip of his chin before returning to his bleeding wrist. A blunt hand found a nipple and a single fingernail raked over its swollen, erect nub. Colin gasped and squirmed, never taking his eyes off his smiling companion.

"You're so needy, so ready for my every touch." The vampire flicked his nail over Colin's now aching nipple again. "I think I've changed my mind."

Colin blanched and whimpered, confused and exhausted.

"Oh, don't worry, my pretty little one, I plan on feeding from you. I just don't plan on killing you. At least, not right away. I think after I feed and heal a bit, I'll spend the next few days teaching you what it's like to have a vampire for a lover." He sucked hard on Colin's wrist, working the wound open even wider. "And as I hate to deny myself anything worth having, if you are an exceptionally good learner, I might even make you my thrall."

"Thrall? What...?" Speech slow and his words indistinct, Colin barely managed to hang on to consciousness.

"A vampire's human companion. Their lover, slave, and source of occasional nourishment."

Colin felt the vampire stroke one finger slowly up his chest from his ribcage to his carotid artery, letting a finger rest against the pounding, slightly irregular beat Colin could feel hammering in his neck.

"The relationship can last for centuries," he whispered near Colin's ear, low and seductive with just a touch of deadly intent, "or hours, depending on the vampire's mood."

"So do it." Colin licked his lips and gave the vampire a sleepy-eyed, sultry look. "Make me your thrall. Bite me."

"Remember you begged for this later, pretty." His lips brushed the shell of Colin's ear.



"Yeah, sure, later."

Immediately, the highly erotic, sucking sensation was back at Colin's wrist, but only for a moment before a spike of true agony flashed up his arm. The vampire's fangs were embedded deep into his flesh and blood poured down his arm before the creature clamped his lips over the gaping hole and began to feed. Once the searing pain from being bitten lessened, a strange euphoria mingled with the nauseating effect of the downers and whiskey. Colin knew the last threads of his life were slipping away. A satisfied smile tugged at his mouth and a small breathless chuckle escaped from between his dry, numb lips.

Abruptly the sucking stopped. The vampire froze in place, then licked at the wound. Surprise evident in his voice, he hissed, "Tell me what you are."

Colin huffed out an amused, unintelligible murmur and fought to keep his eyes open, just to see the creature's expression. Blood ran down his wrist and the vampire lapped and sucked at the open wound again, a frown marring his handsome, harsh face.

As the blood flowed unchecked, the vampire held Colin's wrist closed and yanked Colin up to within a few inches of his snarling face. "Why doesn't this stop?" He jerked Colin until the young man's eyes fluttered open wider and demanded, "Tell. Me. *Why*."

A mildly triumphant note mixed in with Colin's stuttered reply. "Sorry to disappoint you, big guy," Colin's fingers curved and he laid them on the vampire's cheek. "But it's not going to stop, not now, not until I'm dead."

Colin smiled and his eyes slid shut, but a sharp shake and low growl in his ear snapped him back to awareness.

"I said, tell me *why*!"

Body melting into a boneless heap, Colin still managed to look the enraged vampire in the eye. He noticed for the first time the man's eyes were now a pale shade of icy blue, cool and startling. As the last thing he would ever see, Colin decided they were a very nice sight to leave this world with.

Ground out between gritted teeth and fangs, came the low, urgent demand of “Why?”

“Uh? Oh... hemophiliac... born to bleed.” Colin snickered, then hiccupped. “Guess I get my death wish after all. Thanks for helping.”

Colin’s teeth rattled and his head spun as he was thrown back down on the bed. He trailed his blood-covered hand across the vampire’s cheek and murmured just before passing out, “Nice eyes. Even when they do that... glowy... thing.”

The touch to Rowland’s cheek was like an electric caress that set his body and mind on fire. His face actually burned where the thin streak of blood trailed across his flesh.

Stunned into inactivity, Rowland stared at the limp, pale man under him. He jerked upright and straddled the slim, naked body, letting out an enraged bellow that echoed eerily in the large bedroom. Doves resting on the balcony railing outside the still open door cooed and scattered into a flurry of wings and lost feathers at the sound.

Clamping the hemorrhaging wrist to his lips, he drank down as much of the sweet nectar as he safely could, then forced mouthful after mouthful of his own saliva into the blood vessels and flesh surrounding the wound. Over an hour later the clotting factors from his own body began to seal the wound and the bleeding tapered off to a mere dribble. With the first sigh of relief he could remember exhaling in centuries, he lay down beside his young conquest. Nothing would keep this sweetness from being his for the taking and the keeping, least of all a petty bleeding disorder.

The moment Rowland had sunk his fangs into the young man’s flesh he knew this one was different. Under the bitter taint of tranquilizers and alcohol, and the familiar smell of blood and rising bile, there was a sweet, bright current of purity, like sunlight. Granted, it had a cord of dark despair twisted around it, but the thread was thin and could be easily broken. Rowland had no desire to release the man from it, it served his purposes as well, but it was interesting to know how dark a place the young man was in at this moment.

Expecting to experience the inevitable surge of power and delicious energy he received with the first deep taste of warm, pulsing blood, Rowland had gulped down a mouthful and then another. Letting the third linger in his mouth, he was forced to freeze his actions. When his eyes darted to his victim's, he was unexpectedly horrified and perplexed. As the light began to dim in the human's eyes, there was no rush of energy, no kick of adrenaline, no thrill of draining away part of the young man's life force. Instead, Rowland felt a surge of panic flush through his body at the thought of losing this man. This one was indeed different.

Rowland had long ago lost a sexual preference. This one, this pretty little one, was a perfect choice for a thrall. Too perfect to waste and too important to rush. This one needed to be seduced and possibly even cherished.

Leaving the unconscious man outstretched on the sheets of the large bed, Rowland stripped off his own soiled clothing and began planning his young, inexperienced thrall's seduction.

## Chapter Three

The shadow-shrouded room slowly came into focus. After a few lethargic blinks and a slow turn of his head, Colin recognized it as his own bedroom. The furniture wavered slightly at first then settled into firm surfaces and familiar lines. The lamp on his bedside table was lit, casting a golden wash of warm color that didn't extend past the foot of his bed. A thick comforter lay draped over him, his body beneath naked and sore.

Colin raised his right hand to rub the sleep from his eyes, wincing at the burning pain that tingled at his wrist. Holding his arm in mid-air, he stared at the neat, professional-looking dressing wrapped snugly over the painful area, confused about how the injury had occurred. In fact, he couldn't remember how he came to be in bed, naked and exhausted beyond any memory in time. A slight movement at the end of the bed brought a tall, regal figure into the hazy light and Colin's last quarter hour of consciousness came rushing back to him.

His lungs seemed to lose the ability to move and his breath stilled, trapped in place, until the need for air became too urgent for his body to deny. Dropping his bandaged arm to the bed, Colin pulled in a shaky, shallow gasp, forcing his eyes to track the large, broad-chested figure as it sauntered around the bed and moved to stand beside him.

"Good evening, Colin. The night is just beginning. I'm pleased you'll be able to join me."

Drained, barely able to move, Colin still responded to the rich, deep voice. The seed of fear that had taken root in his chest at the sight of the vampire died away. Even his earlier despair and intense loneliness seemed a pointless waste of precious energy.

After clearing his parched throat to ease the passage of his words, they still tumbled out in a hushed whisper. "How do you know my name?"

Clad in a dark red, silk robe Colin didn't recognize, the vampire sat down next to him and leaned forward into Colin's personal space, arms outstretched and braced on either side of Colin. "By looking through your private correspondence. I know your name, age, profession, and checking account balance." He tugged the comforter down several inches to reveal Colin's chest and flat stomach, a leering gaze wandering over the exposed, quivering, pale flesh. He ran one long, blunt finger down the comforter to Colin's groin. "I know your waist size, inseam, approximate weight, and how long your cock is when it's partially erect." The vampire winked at him. "I am Rowland Campbell."

Despite the faint blush he could feel heat his cheeks, Colin ignored the taunting and the introduction. "How long have I been out?"

"Two days. Long enough for me to heal, rest and feed -- benefit of the acid-tongued woman who used to live on the twelfth floor." Rowland fingered the open edges of the red robe he was wearing. "At least her lovers had good taste in bed jackets. She, on the other hand, tasted appalling. Too much recreational cocaine and no fat in her diet, I suspect."

Faintly horrified, Colin pressed his lips shut and tried not to think about the woman. Gently tracing the edges of the gauze wrapped around his injured wrist Colin asked, "How...?" Squeezing shut his eyes to stop the sudden burn of tears only made them burst free and stream down his cheeks. Unwilling to look his savior/tormentor in the face, he clenched his eyelids tighter. "*Why* am I still alive?"

Lifted from the bed to a near sitting position by a bruising grip on his upper arms, Colin's head bobbed on his shoulders, his entire body shaken in a harsh grip. Snapping his eyelids open he stared at the now familiar face of the vampire's full wrath and fury.

Rowland seethed, words spitting out at a furious rate, his tone threatening and decisive. "Because I desired it!" He raised one arm to deliver a backhanded blow, but

stilled at the last moment. He gripped Colin's jaw in his massive palm and forced the young man's face up to meet his icy blue stare.

"You agreed to be my thrall, and my thrall you *shall* be." His voice, first low and sultry, shifted to a seductive purr of promise and pleasure. He lessened his biting grip and ran his hands up Colin's arms, gently laying him back down on the mattress. "Now I need only to teach you *how* to be my pleasure."

Trying not to shudder under the vampire's arousing touch and hungry stare, Colin pressed himself deeper against the bed.

Rowland stood and slowly slipped the robe off his body, revealing the muscular, hardened body of a sword-wielding warrior of forgotten days long past. Colin noticed an array of battle scars crisscrossing his broad, heavily-muscled torso, making him look even deadlier than before. The vampire's skin was a pale shade of alabaster, defined as well as any of Michelangelo's proud statues. His thick, full erection jutted out from a thicket of pale golden hair, the uncircumcised hood engulfing its blunt tip like a shield of armor.

A flash of fear and desire flooded through Colin's weakened body and his cock stirred beneath the silky covers. Despite his confusion and anxiety, he longed to feel the touch of a lover. If he was going to die at the hands of this creature, falling into the arms of a temporary lover sounded far better than falling off a ten-story balcony.

Longing to reach out and touch the vision of mythic manhood before him, but too depleted and depressed to move anything other than his eyelids, Colin returned the vampire's seductive glance and wet his lips. He knew he should be screaming, running for the nearest church, but all he could do was stare back at the man's hypnotic blue eyes and murmur, "Okay. Teach me."

He watched Rowland's eyebrow quirk up and a small smile tugged at one corner of his mouth. "Aren't we the brave little one?" the vampire hissed.

Rowland approached the bed, slid under the single comforter, and rolled on top of Colin's unresisting body. Instantly reacting to the cool, smooth slide of flesh on flesh, Colin whimpered as the creature's firm cock stroked over his own heated groin. A

tremor of excitement and fear shot through him. He continued to tremble, mouth open and panting, eyes glued to the amused stare hovering above him.

"The trembling form of a virgin in my bed, how lovely. I'd almost forgotten what it felt like." Rowland supported his weight on his forearms and forced his legs between Colin's lax thighs. "Why have you never had a lover, Colin? A young man as attractive as you should have dozens of suitors."

Unable to force words out of his tightening throat, Colin shook his head. It wasn't enough for his captor. The vampire gripped his dark curls and tilted Colin's head back in a gentle, but immobilizing hold. "I asked you a question, pretty." The grip eased and Rowland's tone softened, as did his glare. "Tell me."

Swallowing hard past a dry lump in his throat, Colin stuttered, "Home schooling, private tutors, online college courses, private trust fund, over protective, never-there parents, all meant to keep me from getting hurt." He sighed, worrying at his lip. "Never had the opportunity to meet anyone. My entire life's been about living safely and avoiding injury." A wry smile twisted his lips and a tiny twinkle managed to light his tired eyes. "I think meeting you has kind of blown the last twenty-five years of caution all to hell though."

He felt a huff of laughter shake the vampire's chest and his smile quivered on his own lips. A flat broad thumb gently rubbed over his mouth.

Rowland's deep voice was a gentle mix of sarcasm and wonder. "Saving yourself for me, no doubt."

Growing serious at the thought, Colin froze for a moment. He found himself searching the vampire's face, looking for some sign of need or desire in the man, some clue that he, Colin Dobson, was actually wanted by another. A spark of something Colin couldn't define suddenly crossed the vampire's face, and his own body responded to it. His skin flushed, his cock filled, his breathing increased, and a queasy, fluttering feeling in his stomach threatened to send him into a bout of dry heaves.

He turned his head into the grip Rowland had on his hair and rubbed his head over the vampire's curled fingertips. "Maybe I was." He let his lips part invitingly, darting the tip of his tongue out to wet his lower lip. "Let's... find out."

The soft, glistening pink of Colin's tongue drew Rowland's eyes to the young man's full, parted lips. Desire surged through his body and he dipped his head down to greedily accept the tentative invitation. His hands clenched in the silky curls on Colin's head and he drew his young lover tightly to him. The heady scent of Colin's arousal made Rowland hungry for the taste of the young man's flesh.

Starting with the offered kiss, the vampire devoured and explored, caressing and stroking his tongue over Colin's soft palate and hesitant tongue. Refusing to allow Colin to back away from his advances, he pressed his weight onto the slender form beneath him and rubbed his thigh enticingly over Colin's erect cock, delighting in the wetness that leaked from the tip and smeared over his skin.

One flick of his long arm and the comforter floated to the floor, exposing both of their naked bodies to the pale light and warmth of the room. Pulling back from the embrace, Rowland slowly released his hold on the soft curls and studied the expression on Colin's face. The young man's eyes were closed, his lids nearly translucent in the golden stream of light from the lamp, and his full, bow-shaped lips were swollen, dusky pink and slick from the kiss.

Colin's eyelids fluttered and Rowland leaned in to brush a delicate, chaste kiss on each one. He mouthed a trail of light caresses down his lover's face, outlining the cut of Colin's high cheek bones. He nuzzled the jaw line next, adding a sliver of tongue to his eager lips, tasting and teasing the sensitive underside of Colin's chin and throat, slowly easing his way past the thundering pulse calling to him, to nip lightly at the curve where slender neck met shoulder.

Colin moaned and panted in Rowland's ear, the sweet sound of blossoming need and hunger fueling the ancient man's own long neglected desires. He pressed his nose against Colin's warm, fragrant flesh and inhaled deeply. At the same time, he licked at the fine sheen of sweat forming on the young man's skin.



This little one smelled like the spring rain, and tasted of ginger, sharp and slightly biting on the vampire's sensitive tongue.

The memory of Colin's blood, light and sweet like wisps of whiskey-flavored smoke, constantly invaded his thoughts, inflaming all his senses. A surging wave of primal need washed over the vampire. Rowland allowed it to take partial control of his actions. He licked, mouthed, tasted, suckled and explored every inch of smooth, pale flesh he could find on Colin's face, neck and chest. Working his way down Colin's flat, quivering belly, he teased at the young man's sensitive groin crease, laving his tongue over and over the thin strip of flesh to savor the pulsing beat laying shallow and vulnerable under his lips.

Small, fidgety hands alternately grabbed, then pushed at his shoulders. The hands trembled, their heated surface like a branding iron against his own cool flesh, igniting a fire of ravenous desire in the pit of his stomach unlike anything he had delighted in since before his change.

Reining in the fierce urge to ravage and abuse in his usual, self-serving matter, he gently nuzzled the sparse patch of dark hair between Colin's legs, breathing in the rich, musky, masculine scent of the young man's arousal. He slid his hands up Colin's slender torso, lightly massaging and stroking the tense abdominal muscles under his palms, delighting in the tremors that rippled against his skin. Deliciously panted moans, intermixed with breathless gasps from above him rewarded his tender touch.

Careful not to scratch the delicate flesh between himself and the sweet nectar flowing through Colin's femoral vessels, Rowland grazed the surface of one of his fangs along the thin crease that divided thigh from pelvis. Hands continuing to stroke and pleasure his now writhing lover, Rowland nudged Colin's spread legs further apart and trailed his teeth into the triangular nest of crisp curls at the base of Colin's cock. The stiff shaft bobbed and quivered, straining upward, its hot, flushed head jutting against the side of the vampire's face, marking him with its heat. Turning his head, Rowland ran his lips up the shaft, stroking it with his tongue, as he lavished it with wet kisses and slow, teasing sucks.

The hands weakly clinging to his shoulders spasmed and jerked up into his hair, scratching at his scalp. Unhurriedly, he captured their wrists and pinned them to the bed, never missing a stroke of his tongue on the silky-smooth length of wanton, jutting flesh.

He swirled his tongue around the underside of the head, then brushed the flat of the slick muscle over the tip, bathing it with a slick sheen of moisture. Spurring Rowland on were Colin's garbled, weakly shouted cries of need as the young man begged to be taken over the edge into climax.

His own cock full and heavy, Rowland released Colin's wrists to palm his cock. One hand came to rest on Colin's stomach, massaging and smoothing his nervous, anxious first-time lover, his mouth still methodically stimulating and teasing the straining shaft at his lips. Without breaking his rhythm, the vampire tucked his long body into a crouch between Colin's wide-spread thighs, raising Colin's lower half into the air slightly, so that he could tuck his bent knees under the man's firm, rounded ass.

Working his rough palm over the smooth, taut skin of Colin's abdomen, Rowland brought his other hand to his mouth to nick the end of a finger with his fang. Thick blood pooled in his cupped hand. Before he lowered it, he added a generous mouthful of saliva to the mix. Bring his hand to his cock, he coated the flesh with his body fluids, hissing at the delicious sliding sensation of the slick, viscous gel the mixture had become. He licked the last smear from his fingers and surged up and over Colin's body to rest his forehead on his lover's sweat-covered brow.

Voice deep and sultry, his stare hypnotic and seductive, Rowland placed a soft, gentle kiss on each of Colin's clenched eyes and commanded, "Let me in, Colin. Relax, listen to my voice and let me in."

The blunt tip of his shaft nestled against the untried entrance to Colin's body, pressing the tight rosebud of nerve endings and muscles until they spasmed and trembled.

Colin gasped and balled his hands into white-knuckled fists on the bed, but didn't open his eyes. A spastic nod signaled his intent to comply, but his body remained tightly coiled.

Sliding his arms under Colin's bent knees, Rowland patiently raised Colin's hips higher, aligning his shaft for easier, more comfortable access. The tight muscles fluttered and grasped at the tip of his cock and he inhaled, deep and long to maintain his iron control. Whatever it was about this young man that drew the vampire in him -- his taste, his scent, or maybe his purity of soul -- it also attracted the man in him. He almost felt bewitched.

Rowland lowered his voice to a bare whisper, letting his lips brush over Colin's open, panting mouth. "Open your eyes and look at me, pretty. Look at me and see your master, your pleasure, your need and desire. See your own heated passion and hunger in my eyes. Look at me and see your future."

A strangled sound whimpered from Colin's throat and his need-glazed eyes opened to stare Rowland in the face. Locking his commanding gaze to Colin's frightened, but lust-filled one, Rowland used his formidable powers to nudge at the walls of resistance still remaining in Colin's mind. Within seconds, he felt the final barriers to him crumble and Colin relaxed in his embrace, the taut tremors fading.

Their gazes locked, Rowland pressed forcefully against Colin's now slick opening, burrowing past the slight resistance and sheathing his shaft deep into the constricted heat of his lover's lithe body. He instantly sealed his mouth to Colin's lips, swallowing down the guttural cry of wanton passion that erupted from his young lover. It took him a moment to realize it had been his name, screamed in ecstasy and primal need.

"Rowland!"

Colin bucked and twisted, his mouth taken in a ravenous kiss, his words swallowed and the air devoured from his very lungs. Sensations bombarded every system in his body. Bright lights exploded behind his eyes, his lids falling shut as his body literally gave itself over to his domineering new lover. The smell of the vampire's

cool flesh had a rich, earthy scent to it that faintly reminded Colin of strong European coffee, heady and rich. The taste of his mouth was coppery and slick, his commanding possessive kiss smooth, seductive and addicting. The constant soothing caresses that Rowland lavished over his body, brought goose flesh to the surface and caused his skin to flush and quiver.

Colin's muscles melted at the vampire's command and his body clung and formed to his lover's demands. Even his newly breached entrance welcomed the intrusion, opening to receive the vampire's iron-hard shaft, then gripping and clinging to it with every slow, slick stroke.

Exhausted and weak beyond anything he had ever experienced before, Colin still couldn't keep his hands from rising off the bed. He gripped Rowland's shoulder, instinctively arched his back, forcing the cock buried in his tight channel to plunge deeper. Every stroke of Rowland's wide cock set his nerves on fire, the burn a heated pleasure.

The unfamiliar pressure in his ass was strange and thrilling, giving Colin a feeling of completeness he had never felt before. His own cock jerked and tingled, pinned between their rubbing abdomens. A flame burst to life deep in his pelvis and his scrotum pulled up, tight and heavy, against the thin strip of sensitive flesh that led to his stretched, stuffed opening.

Suddenly the angle of Rowland's thrusts changed, the tip of his long cock striking one vulnerable spot inside of Colin again and again, the stroking caress merciless in its pleasurable attack. The demanding tongue in his mouth ravaged every millimeter of his soft, willing flesh, conquering his body and mind with its sensuous explorations and relentless caresses. His breath was stolen and replaced with the vampire's own, its warm, moist offering thick with oxygen and seductive whiffs of the vampire's own scent.

Colin felt possessed, owned and claimed, and he reveled in it. He belonged. He had found someone who wanted him and desired him. This lover was unafraid of bruising him, breaking him, or letting him experience life, desire, or passion.

A bolt of energy shot through Colin's sweat-slick body, a sizzling nearly blinding heat that invaded every cell. His massive climax broke free, erupting from every pore, every breath, every nerve, taking Colin to a plateau of mind-dizzying ecstasy he had never experienced. His cock pulsed and sprayed a small offering of creamy white that coated his shaft. It added a slick warmth to the slip-slide of Rowland's belly over its overly sensitive surface, extending his climax and heightening his response.

The room dissolved in fireworks. His sight disappeared, his hearing muted, words strangled in the back of his throat and caught on his busy tongue, but his flesh burned and his nerves sizzled, the input to his system overwhelming. A series of rapid, harsh jabs hammered over his prostate, the blunt head of Rowland's cock burying itself deeper and deeper in his ass. His mouth was suddenly released, the lips that had captured his own now free to roar a primal, unintelligible growl into the bedroom air.

Colin bucked and gasped, his lungs finally under his own control, as a fierce blast of heat sprayed his insides, the liquid slick and hot. He could feel it clinging to him, coating his channel. The heat grew and spread throughout his body, absorbed and welcomed by his flesh. The fire it caused grew more intense, an inferno of passionate release, consuming him piece by piece until even his mind was ablaze in an unfamiliar mix of satiated desire and fulfillment.

Just as he blacked out, Colin knew he had found something to live for in the arms of death.

## Chapter Four

For the first time in Rowland's memory, his climax rushed over him before he was prepared. The tight, hot flesh wrapped around his shaft milked his cock, spasming and clenching his length in a continuous bombardment of sensation. Colin's unbridled moans and cries of need sent shocks of electric-like energy through Rowland's thrusting body, heating his desire and fanning the already raging inferno of passion burning in him to new levels of want.

His mind fed on every gasped sigh and strangled whimper his virginal lover uttered and his flesh ached for the feel of the young man under him. Rowland couldn't stop his own hands from exploring every inch of the delicate skin under his touch. Every stroke of his cock was matched by a caress of his fingertips until the sensations became too much for him to bear. His seed erupted in a fierce, convulsive stream, a tangible testament to the convoluted feelings churning and infusing his mind and body.

He would never let this one go, not for all time. But this lover was more fragile than all the others, and he knew he would need to take precious care of him -- body, mind and soul -- or Colin would break and crumble to dust under the vampire's usual demanding control. For this one, Rowland would have to make concessions, starting now.

Instead of pushing off his lover and moving away, Rowland gently pulled out and lowered Colin's lax legs to the bed. Still crouched between his lover's legs, he slowly licked and lapped at the spent fluids on Colin's belly, enticing his thrall back to consciousness and arousal.

Colin stirred at the same time his cock did, his dazed eyes opening to meet Rowland's intent stare as the vampire continued to clean off the limp, but rallying shaft. Colin gasped and shifted his hips, arching up into the moist heat as Rowland

swallowed his lover's cock to the root, coaxing it to full engorgement with each bob of his head and swirl of his tongue. Sliding his fingers under Colin's tight sac, he massaged the root of the man's cock buried under the sensitive strip of perineum. He plunged two fingers into the fluttering, slick opening he had just pulled out of, dragging a choked scream from Colin at the same moment he sucked the sudden orgasm from his shaft.

Releasing Colin's cock, he kissed his way up the panting, heaving body to lay beside his lover, rough hands soothing away the chill and muscle tremors that vibrated through Colin's slender frame. Lying on his back, Rowland pulled Colin to him, draping the human over his side and embracing him with one arm. Reaching down with his free arm, he plucked the discarded comforter off the floor to cover them.

Neither spoke for several minutes then Colin tilted his head up to stare Rowland in the face and asked, "How did you stop the bleeding? Before, when you bit me, when I thought I was finally going to die?"

Rowland studied his lover's face and decided it was a question he would answer. His thrall would need to understand in order to accept his new life.

"Like this." The vampire pulled Colin's hand off his chest and sliced the tip of one finger with a suddenly evident fang. It welled with blood, what would be a tiny trickle in most people was an unchecked stream of red in Colin. He immediately popped the finger into his mouth and sucked, then bit at the tender flesh.

Colin winced and tried to jerk his hand away, but Rowland held on securely and when he removed it from his lips seconds later, the wound had sealed. It had taken him far less effort than last time.

"When I feed, I sometimes inject my saliva into my victim's bloodstream. It contains various elements that either clot or thin blood according to my needs. The first time, I simply had to overwhelm your system until the disorder that taints your blood was temporarily subdued." He licked at the finger once more, and then pulled it down to hold Colin's hand firmly against his chest.

"Subdued?" Colin yawned then fidgeted at his side, trying unsuccessfully to twist around so he could lift his upper body. "You mean I'm cured? You cured me?"

He yawned again, exhaustion showing in his every uncoordinated movement, but the bright gleam of amazement on Colin's attractive, young face touched a part of Rowland he thought had writhed and died. He had given hope to another person.

"Yes and no." He gently coaxed Colin back down to lay at his side. Wrapping the covers more completely around his lover's shoulders, Rowland added the weight of his embrace to keep the young man down. He watched Colin's eyelids flutter while he talked, long dark lashes fanning out across his unmarked cheeks. "As long as I feed from you daily, the effects will stay in your body and your disorder will be kept at bay. If I stop, you will once again be plagued by its symptoms."

A sleepy murmur mumbled against his chest, soft, innocent lips brushing tantalizingly over his ribcage. "You're saying, as long as I'm with you, your thrall, then I can live a normal life?"

One hand threaded through Colin's dark curls and Rowland rubbed soothing circles with his fingertips over the scalp beneath them. "As normal as the life of a vampire's thrall ever is, yes." He blinked in amazement when Colin snuggled closer, releasing a deep sigh of satisfaction to blow its warmth over his cool skin.

"You've saved my life, given me a reason to keep it. I think I can live with this." Colin burrowed closer and squeezed Rowland's hand. "And you." His breathing became slow and shallow as his boneless, sleeping body melted into the vampire's side.

Staring off into the dark of the bedroom, Rowland gently explored the exposed skin of his lover, examining the changes of the last few days. Speaking only to himself and the beam of pale moonlight streaming through the balcony doors, he mused, "This is the first time since becoming a vampire that I have saved a human life rather than destroyed it." He kissed the top of Colin's head then blustered with a bit of his natural harshness, "I'll have to make sure this doesn't become a trend." He ran his hands lovingly over Colin's back and whispered, "But then, there will never be another like you."



\* \* \*

When Rowland returned from a trip to the kitchen to find food and drink for Colin, he found his young thrall missing from their bed. He grabbed the comforter and followed the distinctive scent of his new lover out the open doors to the balcony. There, at the railing where he had first seen him, Colin stood, silhouetted against the night sky, his small, slender form wrapped in the pale blue sheet from the bed.

Rowland approached silently, knowing Colin could now sense his presence. Draping the thicker comforter over his shivering lover, he wrapped his arms around Colin and hugged him to his chest, hands possessively holding the young man's crossed arms.

Colin immediately leaned back into his embrace and Rowland felt a stirring in his chest that gave him pause.

This man brought to life feelings he had never thought it possible to experience. Colin was the missing element of his long, harsh existence, he knew that now. He realized that from this point on, without his thrall, without this responsive, passionate, fragile human in his life, he would experience loneliness for the first time in over two thousand years. This was not something Rowland was willing to let happen.

Tilting his head down, he rested his cheek on the side of Colin's head, inhaling the man's scent in the soft curls over his ear.

Colin nuzzled his head against the pressure and murmured, "Do you think we were meant to find each other like this?" He turned his head and looked up at Rowland.

Rowland saw the confusion and need in the pleading, teal eyes and he couldn't fight the desire to soothe his trembling lover's worries. "Our own needs collided here just two nights ago. We have since turned both of our impending deaths on this balcony into one, new life." He kissed Colin's temple and pulled him tighter to his chest. "I think that miraculous, don't you?"

Colin sighed audibly and looked back at the dark void of night beyond the balcony. One hand freed itself from the comforter and gripped the back of one of

Rowland's hands. "You have to admit the chances of me jumping off my balcony at the same moment in time as you fell from the sky is pretty outrageous."

Overcome with the need to confide his own thoughts to this new part of his soul, Rowland leaned closer and whispered in Colin's ear. "As I descended through the air that night, wounded and near death, I thought for a brief second that you were an angel cast out of heaven and sent into my arms."

"An angel?" Colin's voice sounded hushed and disbelieving.

Mouthing the rim of the tiny ear under his lips, Rowland blew a stream of warm breath over the wet flesh, delighting in the small squirming action it produced as his lover's firm, rounded ass wiggled against his groin. "Yes, an angel. Your white shirt billowed around you like a pair of wings and your cherub curls framed your sweet face like a halo of darkness. It deceived me, taking me back to the legends and myths of my childhood from so long ago." He exhaled long and hard before quietly adding, "For a moment, I believed."

"Believed what?" Colin had stilled his movements.

Rowland could tell the young man was intently focused on his answer, truly interested in Rowland's feelings and needs.

"That there would be forgiveness. Understand, my love, this is a life that was forced upon me, not one I asked for. But it is also one I have embraced in all its forms and deeds. I have survived at the expense of countless human lives. One day, either forgiveness or restitution will be due." He tightened his grip, savoring the feel of Colin's warmth and sharp gingery scent. "I believed I didn't care, until now that is. Now, I prefer to think forgiveness will be granted when my final time comes." He rained a trail of chaste kisses down Colin's neck, licking lightly over the warm pulse point before sucking a tiny earlobe into his mouth and nibbling it. He released the plump treasure to whisper seductively, "If not, then why have I been granted a living angel for a lover?"

"Lover? Or just a thrall, a temporary plaything?" Hurt and fear rolled over the words and touched Rowland's mind.

“It is true, you are now a vampire’s thrall, Colin, *my* thrall. But, I am enraptured and possessed, trapped by your beauty, your delicate spirit and soul, your passion and desire. Although I am your master and your lover, you have become my soul. It is I who am *enthralled*.”

Colin turned in his arms and burrowed against his body, returning the tight embrace. A faint, muffled “love you” brushed by his sensitive hearing and something cold and hard in his chest burst, the sensation both painful and pleasurable.

In that one moment, Rowland Campbell, millennia-old vampire and harbinger of death, realized he had already been granted forgiveness. He had his arms, and his dry, still heart, wrapped around it.

After all, hadn’t he heard the words “I forgive thee” when this angel appeared in his arms?

**The End**

## **Laura Baumbach**

Laura Baumbach is the author of fan fiction, screenplays and numerous short stories, novellas, and novels. Her favorite genre to work in is manlove or m/m erotic romances for women. Manlove is not traditional gay fiction, but erotic romances written specifically for the romantic-minded reader, male or female.

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