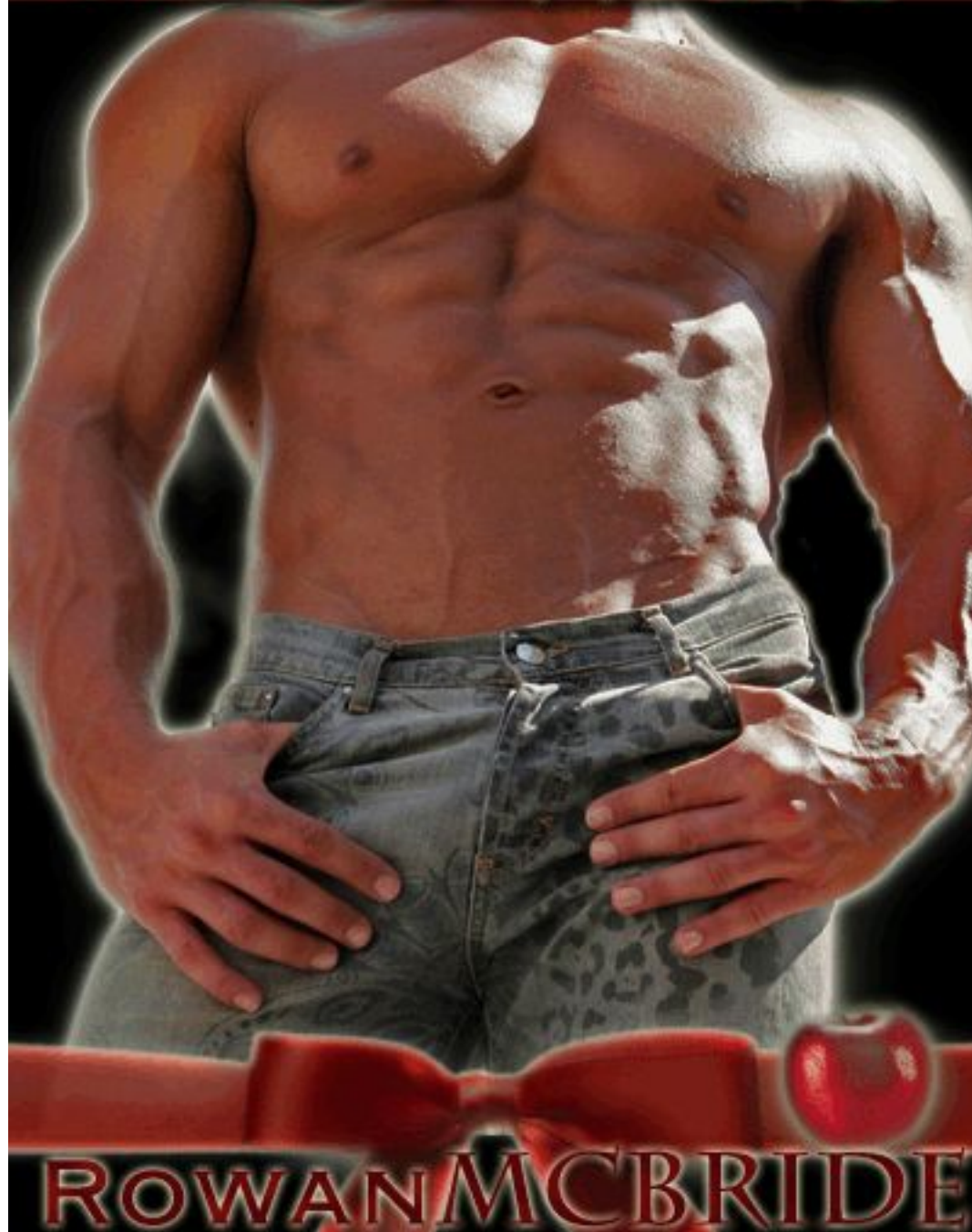
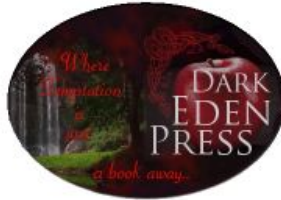


Dark Eden Press Presents
JUST WAIT



ROWANMCBRIDE

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Just Wait

Rowan McBride

For Liam, whose quest to transcend time is so cool.

“Are you sure about this, Mark?”

“C’mon, it’ll be fun.”

I glanced around the weight-room, practically overflowing with college jocks.

“Wh-What if we get caught?”

Mark grinned at me, his mischievous green eyes sparkling. “Don’t get caught.”

Hard to believe we were brothers. *Twins*, even. We were identical once, but now his hair was jet-black while mine remained brown, and he was a few inches taller. Mark loved to use his powers, and his had eclipsed mine by the time we were five. At eighteen, he had more magic than our parents. Maybe put together.

Speaking of which...

“How am I even supposed to *win* this game?” I crossed my arms over my chest.

“Your Drain is so much stronger than mine.”

His grin pulled wider. “I told you—we’ll limit the touch to one second per person.” He held up a finger. “That’s one Mississippi, Trav.”

That should level the field pretty well. Hard to get a lock on a person in less than five seconds. Mark was stronger, but I was quicker. “And the first one to pop a seam in his clothing wins?”

“Yep. Ready?”

I frowned. “We’ll give it all back once it’s done, right?”

He hesitated.

“*Right?*” It wasn’t an issue for me—I could only borrow. But Mark could *take*, and our family would skin him alive if he took too much and sparked a modern day witch hunt.

“Fine,” he muttered. “*Now* are you ready?”

I nodded and took a deep breath. “I’m rea—”

But he’d already strode into the room.

Darn it! I stumbled inside, fell against a football jock as he shook out his pumped muscles.

One Mississippi...

I straightened and murmured an apology, trying to gage the tightness under my skin. Walking forward, I let my shoulder brush against another jock, lingering the full

second. This time my whole body tingled, and I tried not to sigh out loud as a fraction of the boy's size seeped into my body. I always forgot how good this felt. It was always a pleasure to rediscover it.

Chancing a glance at my brother, I saw him clapping people on the shoulder, grinning broadly as he shook hands with everyone he passed. Each contact altered how the folds of his shirt draped over his chest and arms, how his jeans hugged his legs.

No one minded his presence. Mark was one of the most popular guys in school—handsome, smart, and talented in music, art and sports. Even *I* didn't know for sure how much of that was him and how much of it was magic.

Me, I was more or less stuck with what I'd been born with. I was cute and everything, but I was shy and preferred to watch Mark do his thing. So I traveled the room more slowly, trying to make my own touches as inconspicuous as possible: skimming the back of my hand against a baseball player, touching my fingers to the back of a guy totally engrossed with bicep curls. Every touch made my muscles swell, inched me closer to popping a seam in my shirt or slacks. A good strategy.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

A big hand grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and dragged me to my toes. Shocked, I looked up, right into Ryan Gibson's face.

Aw, crap. The biggest guy on campus had a hold of me! "H-Hey Ryan."

His grip tightened—if I hadn't Drained half a dozen guys already he would have crushed the cords in my neck. "Did you think we wouldn't notice, you sick perv?"

Noticed? One second per person... no one should have noticed! "I—"

"Tryin' to sneak touches of every guy in the room! We don't play like that here, fag."

Oh, that. Looked like Mark's strategy was better than mine, after all.

Ryan gave me a rough shake. "Got any last words?"

I stared at his body. Hard to believe he was a freshman, just like us. He was *huge*. Well over six feet, easily three hundred pounds. All of it was hard, cut muscle. Whatever I said next would definitely be my last words. My only defense was my magic, and I'd need to use a *lot* to take this one down. Couldn't do that out in the open. "I'm sorry," I said, knowing no way a simple apology would get me out of this.

Ryan cocked back his arm, making his biceps hit a frighteningly high peak.

“Travis!”

Mark hurtled over a weight bench and sprinted across the room. “Get the hell off my brother!” He grabbed Ryan by the wrist and yanked his arm away from me.

Ryan smirked down at him. “Well, well, and here comes the other Drayner brother.”

“I mean it, Ryan,” Mark said, his jaw tight. “Let him go.”

“I’m just gonna teach him a lesson, something you should have done a long time ago.” He gave me another shake—I felt like a rag doll in his hold. “It must kill you to be related to such a freak. I can fix that right here, right now.”

Mark’s emerald eyes flashed with rage. “Never call my brother a freak again, you hear me?”

Ryan just laughed at him. “Truth hurts, doesn’t it?”

As Mark stood there, I could feel him charging up, gathering his power. With the kind of magic he was amassing, I knew he intended to kill Ryan Gibson in front of everyone. “Mark! No!”

Mark’s gaze didn’t leave Ryan. Even though he was a full six inches shorter than the jock, his face showed no sign of fear. “Put...him...down.”

“Make me.”

The power inside of my brother’s body spiked high enough to make my teeth ache.

Cory Greene, another football player and a friend of Mark’s, clapped his hand on Ryan’s shoulder. “No harm done, man. Let it go.”

Other people started to join in, and Ryan snorted, dropping me. “This isn’t over, Mark.”

Mark looped his arm around my shoulders and drew me close. “Not by a long shot.”

Unimpressed, Ryan strode out of the weight-room.

Lowering his head, Mark swept his knuckles up my cheek. “You okay, little brother?”

I didn't mind that he always called me his 'little' brother. I was a couple minutes younger and only came up to his nose, anyway. "Yeah, I think so."

"Looks like you won the game," he whispered, tugging at the shirt above my shoulder.

I glanced at the material and blushed red. "Ryan ripped that seam open, not me."

He chuckled. "Rules are rules. You win."

That teasing smile made me forget he'd been about to kill someone seconds earlier. I leaned against him, felt his hard body pressing into mine. He'd Drained more than I had, no doubt about it. His pecs and arms were at least a half inch thicker.

A couple of guys began to cough into their hands, signaling they were uncomfortable. If it were any other two men hugging, trouble probably would have started, but even as a freshman, Mark was so well liked throughout the campus that most people thought he could do no wrong.

Still, I didn't want to embarrass him with my affection, so I pulled away.

We walked out of the weight-room together, and Mark was already talking about the next game as he ruffled my hair. I shook my head. Mark took our Drayner Legacy to whole new levels.

And I loved him for it.

I snuggled deeper into the covers and buried my face in my pillow. Listening to Mark sing in the shower, I smiled and closed my eyes. He'd been a little pensive after the incident at the gym today, but now he seemed his usual cheery self.

Being a Drayner wasn't easy, and that went double for my brother. Centuries of breeding with humans had diluted our powers, but Mark's blood was strangely pure. Growing up, our parents were always saying how he was the strongest in our line since anyone could remember. They were also continually reminding him to keep a low profile, not to use too much magic. Especially now that we were away at college.

That had to suck. Never being allowed to let yourself go. Truthfully, I was insanely curious about what he could *really* do. Probably wouldn't get to see it, though.

The water turned off, and the silence began to lull me to sleep. My eyes snapped open when the mattress dipped.

“Hey,” I mumbled, turning over, “what are you doing?”

Mark gathered me into his arms. “Getting into bed.”

“You’ve got your own bed.”

He chuckled, pulling me closer.

I pushed against his chest, but I was sleepy and he was stronger. “You’re all damp.”

“But I’m clean,” he countered, nuzzling my hair.

“Mark... we shouldn’t do this.”

“Why not?”

“Because we’re brothers, and you’re naked.”

“That never bothered you before.”

The older I got, the more I understood other people didn’t act this way. “It’s not right.”

His hand slid down my back. “We’re Drayners. How much of what we do is ‘right,’ anyway?”

Good point. It was a token protest—I couldn’t imagine stopping this forever. Other people weren’t *us*, after all. Giving in, I relaxed in his hold. I noticed with a start that he hadn’t lost any of the size he’d gained this afternoon. “You kept what you Drained!”

He flexed the muscles in his arms and then his chest. “Sure did.”

Shocked, I looked into his eyes. “But you said—”

“I know, but it’s just a little. No one will realize they’re missing it.” He grinned. “And don’t think I haven’t noticed how you’ve been looking at me. You like the extra size, too.”

I couldn’t deny it, but... “If our family finds out—”

“I’m the strongest Drayner alive, Trav.” Mark pulled me higher, licked the curve of my shoulder. “I’m the *head* of the family, and they know it, even if they don’t say it aloud.”

I shivered, and then moaned when his teeth scraped against my skin.

His palm curved over the back of my neck, and the pain I'd been feeling there all day vanished. As I stared up at Mark, I saw bruises in the shape of fingers appear on his own neck. "Mark!"

"Don't worry about it."

Appalled, I gingerly touched the blue-black skin. "You Drained my injury!" I focused my power, tried to take it back.

"Won't work, little brother. Only the more powerful Drayner can take from another." He lowered his head, pressed his soft lips to my forehead. "You're nowhere near strong enough to take from me."

I gripped his shoulders as his lips trailed to my temple. "But..."

"I'm sorry for letting that gorilla get his hands on you today, Travis." His mouth found my ear. "I'm gonna give you a present to make up for it."

Hard to think clearly when he was kissing me, rubbing his nude body against mine. "You don't..." My hands slid from his shoulders to his back; my fingers dug into the hard muscle there. "You don't have to..."

"It'll be great, I promise."

Mark was always stealing little changes to his body, but somehow I knew it better than I knew my own. I grabbed his hand, dragged it downward to let him know I wanted him to strip off my briefs. "What kind of present?"

He pressed me onto my back and worked his way downward, dropped a kiss on my stomach. "Should be all wrapped up for you by the end of the week."

"You don't have to wrap—"

His mouth closed around my dick and I arched my back, forgetting everything except Mark. Strong hands curved under my ass, and his tongue swirled around my flesh as he took me all the way into his throat. Ecstasy flared from that point of contact, spreading outward until my fingers and toes throbbed with it.

So good. At home, we'd had to sneak around, keep quiet. Things were better here. *He* was better. It was as if Mark felt free, and he was determined to set me free as well.

I twisted my hands into the sheets as he sucked on my shaft. Low, needy sounds tore out of me when he pulled back and tenderly kissed my cock head.

“Mark...”

“You taste like apples, did you know?” He dipped lower, nuzzling the underside of my shaft, letting his tongue dart out to tease my balls. “Red, ripe apples.”

My body writhed, begging for more.

“So tempting.” Mark dragged his tongue up my dick. “I’m always craving you.”

I groaned, and he swallowed me in one full stroke. Sucking. Tasting. Driving me crazy. My balls drew tight, and my hips bucked hard into his face. I cried his name when the explosion came, as I shot my load into his mouth.

Even without magic, Mark could drain everything out of me. This time was no different as he drank every drop of what I had to offer. I surrendered myself to him willingly, *eagerly*.

Why he wanted me I never understood. But for this pleasure, for everything else he gave me...

God, I’d walk through fire.

I was scanning my calculus notes when I saw Mark get up from his seat. “Where are you going?” I whispered. “Test starts in five minutes.”

He winked and walked to the end of the row, to where Ryan Gibson sat. It always surprised me that Ryan was a brain as well as a jock, but he was at the top of the class. Especially in math.

Mark leaned on Ryan’s shoulder, and I honestly thought my brother had lost his mind.

“What the hell do you want?” snapped Ryan.

Grinning, Mark looked at the other boy’s notes. “Little nervous about this test. Was hoping you could break down improper integrals for me?”

He snorted. “Yeah, right.”

“Aw, Ryan. Don’t be like that. I’m sorry about yesterday, okay? And we all know you’re going to break the curve anyway. I need all the help I can get.”

I tilted my head to the side. Mark never worried about grades. What was he doing?

Ryan's chest puffed with pride even as he rolled his eyes. "If you don't know it by now, it's not like you'll understand it in the next five minutes."

Mark leaned a little harder on his shoulders. "Just the basic definition, then?"

Sighing, Ryan pulled out a sheet of paper. "It's simple, moron. An improper integral occurs when..." His pencil hovered over the paper.

"Yeah?" asked Mark, his face attentive. "I'm listening."

"It occurs when..." Ryan's brow furrowed. "When..."

Mark smiled sympathetically. "Maybe if we start a little earlier? What's an integral?"

The other boy's frown deepened.

Mark raised an eyebrow. "What's two plus two, Ryan?"

"It's..." His hand began to shake. "Wait a sec, I know this."

My lips parted. Mark couldn't be doing what I thought he was doing, could he? Drainers only had the ability to Drain *physical* characteristics. At least, that's what we'd always been taught...

Straightening, Mark patted Ryan's shoulder. "You know what? I'm just stressing you out, asking all this stuff right before the test. I'm going to stop bothering you and pray I can muddle through, okay?"

Ryan glanced up, nodded, and glanced back at his blank sheet.

Mark took his seat next to me, put his notes away.

"Mark?" I whispered.

He glanced over at me. "Yeah?"

"Did you just... Did you just Drain Ryan's knowledge of math?"

A slow, wicked grin curved his mouth. "Just wait, Trav. I'm only getting started."

The professor walked in and immediately started passing out the tests. I looked at Mark, flying through the equations with no problem. Then I glanced at Ryan, staring hard at the same equations, his own pencil not moving at all.

Just getting started? I was almost scared to see what would happen next.

Almost.

After classes, I sat on the bleachers, staring down at the football field as I waited for my brother.

He hadn't been kidding when he'd said he was only getting started. We also had U.S. History with Ryan, and after another brief conversation, he'd lost that knowledge as well. The prof called on him, he stood up, and... nothing. It had the other people in class snickering behind his back.

I could only watch in amazement. Mark even Drained his *class schedule* right out of his mind. Ryan had needed to go to the Administration office to get a hard copy printed up. It was just a rumor, but I heard Ryan went to the infirmary afterward to get himself checked out.

How far did Mark plan to go with this? And why did he want me to meet him out here?

As if my thoughts had summoned him, Mark took a seat beside me. "Hey, Trav. They start running drills yet?"

I jumped, relaxed when he handed me an apple. "Not yet."

He grinned and pointed at Ryan. "Watch him."

"Why?"

"Just watch."

Taking a bite out of my apple, I watched the field as the guys began to run their drills. My gaze locked to Ryan just as he threw a long pass to another player. It was perfect: a beautiful spiral and everything.

Except it landed ten yards short of the target.

"What happened? He never tanks a pass."

Mark stretched his legs out, crossed them at the ankles. "Drained a little bit of his strength just before history let out."

I glanced at my brother, studied his body. "You don't look bigger."

His mouth crooked. “That’s because I just Drained his strength. Didn’t take any of his size.”

My eyes rounded. “You can do that? You can get that specific about what you take?”

“Apparently.” He reached out and gripped the metal railing in front of us. It crumpled under his hand.

Despite myself, I gasped. “Ryan’s that strong?”

The hand that had crushed the railing drifted to my leg, gliding over my thigh in a feather light caress. “No. Drained a tiny bit of strength from everyone in school.”

“*What?*” I straightened. “How did you manage to touch *everyone* on campus?”

“I don’t need a physical touch anymore.” His fingers danced upward to tease my crotch. “I just need to want it.”

My body shuddered with pleasure, and not a little fear. “Y-You don’t need a touch to Drain? That’s impossible.”

“Not for me.” He leaned close, brushed his lips over my cheek. “Mmm, you taste sweet.”

The apple dropped from my hand as I snapped my head back. “Are you okay?”

He nipped at my ear. “I’m great. Fucking fantastic.”

Fear turned to concern. “You sound drunk.”

“I am, a little.” His hand slid to my hip, drew me closer. “You know how it is when you use a lot of magic.” He chuckled. “And I’ve used a *lot* of magic today.”

Not caring if anyone saw us, I twisted my hands into his shirt. “Mark, you can’t do this. The rules—”

“Fuck the rules.” He took a moment to suck on my lower lip. “They don’t apply to me.”

I tried to push myself away, but I don’t think he even felt the struggle. His rock hard muscles didn’t even twitch.

How much strength had he absorbed?

“Mark—”

“Shh. I can handle it. Really.” His gentle hands dropped lower, to knead my ass. “You trust me, don’t you?”

Groaning, I turned on the bench, straddling it as I bit kisses along his shoulder. “Always.”

His arms wrapped around me in a brief hug that squeezed the breath from my chest. “Shit, I want you. Here or in our dorm-room? Your choice.”

My breath hitched, and my shyness took over. “O-Our room.”

“Whatever you say.” Mark slipped his hands over my ribs and stood. Grinning broadly, he held me in the air a while before setting me on my feet.

My entire body drew taut with desire. I could hardly stand it.

Mark touched his nose to mine. “Knew all this strength would turn you on. Hopefully I won’t be too much for you to handle.”

I trembled in his embrace.

“Gibson! Get your ass into the showers!”

We both glanced at the field in time to see Ryan take off his helmet and trudge toward the locker rooms.

Mark chuckled. “Looks like he’s having a bad day.” He turned his head, his face softening as he stared down at me. “The rest of the week’s just going to get worse, though.”

Again, a touch of fear whispered through me. But something far more powerful instantly overwhelmed that weak emotion.

Awe.

I sucked in deep drags of air, my sweat-drenched body quaking with exhaustion.

Mark licked a droplet of sweat from the bridge of my nose. “You’re not tired already, are you?”

“Th-Three times,” I gasped. “That’s my limit.”

He made a soft sound of disappointment as he rubbed his cheek against mine. “It can’t be—not when I’m so hot for you.”

I whimpered, unable to even lift my arms. “You must have Drained *stamina* along with strength today.”

Teasing chuckles filled the air as his hard cock pressed into my thigh. “Seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“I can’t keep up with you, Mark.” I managed to flop my head to the side, giving him better access to my neck. “A-And I’m a little sore.”

A smile played on his lips as he crooned. “You should have said that *first*.” He closed his eyes, blew out a slow breath.

I glanced up at him in surprise. “You’re giving back the stamina?”

He burst into laughter as his eyes fluttered open. “No way, it feels too good. You’ll just have to step up your game.”

Easy to see that Mark was still drunk off his power, but it was sexy as sin to have it all focused on me. I didn’t want to let him down. “Maybe...” I bit my lower lip. “Maybe I can Drain someone.”

His mouth crooked as he swept his thumb over my lip. “How long can you hold on to something you’ve Drained? Half an hour?”

A hot blush stained my skin. “Closer to forty-five minutes,” I said defensively.

“Hmm.” He rolled to the side, gathering me into his arms as he spooned himself against my body. “Not long enough. I’d need you the whole night, into the morning... maybe through the afternoon.”

I shivered. “You can go that long?”

Mark smoothed back my damp hair. “Probably. Can’t tell for sure right now.”

My stomach clenched. “Because I’m weak.” I pushed myself deeper into his embrace. “You’ll have to sleep with someone else.”

“Stupid.” His arms tightened around me. “I don’t want anybody else.”

The declaration made my brow furrow. “Why—”

“Shut up,” he murmured into my ear, his voice gentle. “Get some rest. We have a big week ahead of us.”

At his command, my eyes drifted closed. “With Ryan?”

He nuzzled my hair, smiled against my temple. “Among other things.”

Mark had never used his powers to this extent before. We’d never had the freedom of being away from home. I couldn’t even imagine what would come next, what he would eventually change himself into. I just hoped...

I just hoped he wouldn't leave me behind.

"I like that guy's hair. It's so blond, and those shimmering strands of gold drive me wild." Mark propped his chin on the heel of his hand. "It's natural—I can tell from here."

I followed his line of sight. Across the cafeteria, Steve Richardson's hair began to grow darker, shade by shade. My gaze shot to Mark, and I saw that *his* hair already possessed strands of gold. "Wait, don't!"

His eyes stayed trained on Steve as his own hair continued to lighten. "Why not?"

"I-I like your hair black."

"Really?" He turned his head and glanced down at me, his hair darkening to its original color.

I cast a sidelong glance at Steve, confirmed he was a blond once again before looking at my brother. "Yeah."

"Alright, I'll keep it black for now." He picked up his juice, took a long drink. "If you ever get tired of it, let me know. I'll Drain a cool color."

I shook my head in amazement. "I can't believe you Drained that guy just by looking at him."

"That's nothing. Check this out." His traps rose higher—rising out of the collar of his shirt. As his neck thickened, the necklace he was wearing today tightened until the pendant rested at the hollow of his throat. His pecs pushed forward, and the material of his clothing dipped into the crevice between them. "How do I look?"

My cock stiffened in my pants, and I untucked my shirt in an effort to hide the bulge. "Did you Drain a little from everyone again?"

"Nope." He lifted his arm and flexed it. The softball sized biceps pushed his sleeve up to his shoulder. "This is all Ryan Gibson. He's on the other side of campus right now, probably wondering why he's got so much room in his pants all of a sudden."

Without thinking, I glanced down at Mark's crotch. His dick strained the confines of his pants, and he wasn't even hard! "I'm going to be sore again tonight, aren't I?" I said mournfully.

Mark chuckled.

I looked up at him. He was taller too, by at least an inch. That he had the kind of precision allowing him to Drain someone he couldn't even see... It defied even the legends I'd heard of the first Drayners. "How far can you reach with your power?"

He shrugged, his newly rounded shoulders popping a seam. "Hard to say. Right now it's around a square mile, but I get stronger every time I use my magic." He placed his palm on the table, pressed an imprint of his hand into the metal.

"Mark, you keep pulling stuff like that, you're going to get caught."

"So what?" He smiled and picked up an apple. "What can anyone do to me, really?"

I didn't have an answer. After all, even those with Drayner blood in their veins were no match for Mark. And the gap was getting wider by the second.

Mark stood, handed me the apple. "Meet me in the art room when you're done with classes."

Taking the fruit he offered, I tilted my head back to meet his gaze. "There's no art club today. The room will be locked up."

"Don't worry about that. Just be there, okay?"

His emerald eyes seemed brighter than usual, and all I could do was nod.

Mark ruffled my hair as he left the cafeteria.

I slid my palm into the impression he'd made on the table, noting how much bigger his hand was than mine. "What's happening to you?" I whispered. It was the only question I could voice aloud. The other one—the *real* one—was too painful to utter.

What will happen to us?

The door to the art room was ajar by the time I got to it. On closer inspection, I saw that the lock had been shattered. Mark, definitely. Who knew how strong he might be now?

I walked in, tried to close the door behind me. But it just fell open again. He'd done some major damage.

"Finally. I thought you'd never get here."

"Yeah, sorry. I got held up." Turning, I tried to focus on the shadowy figures on the other end of the dim room.

Mark chuckled. "This isn't cloak-and-dagger. Go ahead and turn on the light."

I flipped the switch, my eyes straining a moment as they struggled to adjust. When they did, they opened wide.

Mark held another guy at his side by the shoulder. "R-Ryan?"

Ryan struggled, kicking at my brother as he tried to yank himself free. Mark didn't even notice as he smiled at me.

"Like him?" Mark trailed the fingers of his free hand over the ribbon tied around Ryan's neck. "All nice and wrapped up for you."

Stunned, I could only watch the two of them. Although Mark was obviously the stronger one, he was still a few inches shorter than the football jock, and Ryan still had a lot more muscle.

"Travis?"

"Ryan is... my present?"

"Yep." Mark tapped the other boy's cheek with his fingers. The contact looked light, but a bruise immediately began to form. "A couple days early, but I just couldn't wait."

Ryan's mouth opened and closed wildly, his face a mask of rage.

Confusion made me frown. "What's he doing?"

Mark cast a disinterested glance at the jock. "Oh, he was making a lot of noise, so I drained his voice."

My frown deepened as my gaze drifted back to my brother. "You don't sound any different."

His nose wrinkled in distaste. “No way was I going to absorb *his* annoying voice, so I just stored it in an object.”

Yet another thing I didn’t know Drayners could do. “Where did you store it?”

He tapped the pendant at the hollow of his throat. “Figured out how today.”

This was wrong on so many levels, but I couldn’t help my next words. “So cool.”

“Thought you might get a kick out of that. Now, come and get your present.”

The rage in Ryan’s face hadn’t abated at all, and I hesitated.

Mark grinned. “Right, forgot the best part.”

The air went electric with magic and, as I watched, both guys began to change.

In Ryan, rage gave way to horror as the ribbon around his neck loosened. His arms thinned and pulled deeper into his t-shirt, while his legs grew shorter—causing the denim around his ankles to pool on the floor, engulf his feet.

Meanwhile, Mark’s head was inching upward, past Ryan’s. His thighs swelled, the hard muscles ripping through the sides of his slacks. His shoulders pulled wider and wider, until his delts ripped his sleeves from the rest of his shirt. He tipped his head back, his face a picture of bliss as the neck of his shirt tore open, revealing thick, tanned pecs.

My breathing shallowed at the sight of him, as the difference in their sizes became more and more pronounced.

Mark’s hand slipped from Ryan’s shoulder, and Ryan tried to make a run for it. By now, though, he was swimming in his clothes, and he tripped over his pant legs, sprawling hard onto the floor. Once down, it was easy to see his thin limbs outlined by the abundance of cloth draped over his body.

Lowering his head, Mark chuckled. The sound was rich, low, seductive. “I think your present’s ready for you now, Trav.” He crossed the room, crouched and grabbed Ryan by the scruff of the neck. Straightening, he lifted the former jock into the air and set him on his feet.

My eyes rounded. I was looking down—*down*—at Ryan Gibson! I was five-nine, which meant he had to be around *five foot six* now.

Mark grabbed Ryan’s shirt, dragging it off his body and revealing spindly arms, a flat and narrow chest. Ryan tried to fight him, but was far too weak.

“I know this must be humiliating for you,” rumbled Mark as he divested the little guy of his jeans as well, “but it’s not like you can move in these things, and my brother will need them more than you in a few seconds.”

My gaze shot to Mark, now a six foot eight mountain of muscle. “M-Me?”

He tossed the clothing onto a desk and closed the distance between us. Another charge went through the air, and I saw Ryan standing oddly still, his eyes vacant.

“Wh-What did you do to him?”

“Took his will,” Mark answered casually. He brushed his fingers over his pendant, now hanging just below his Adam’s apple. “Put it here. I need to talk to you, and I don’t want him trying to sneak away.”

I stared up at my brother, at the muscles rippling under his skin with every breath, with the slightest movement. Mark could do *anything*, I realized, tremors going through my body. He was—

“You figure it out, yet?” He bent over, spoke husky words into my ear. “What I am?”

My eyes filled with tears. “A god,” I whispered. “You’re a god.”

“That’s right.” He kissed the wetness from my cheek. “Why are you crying?”

“B-Because of what you’re about to do.”

“I *have* to do it, Travis. These humans, the other Drayners, they’re pathetic. Insignificant, weak. It’s my destiny to rule over them.”

Pathetic. Insignificant. I dropped my forehead against his shoulder, and it hurt because it felt like stone. “You’re going to leave me,” I said around a sob, as grief wrenched me apart.

A big hand engulfed my shoulder while the other cupped my chin, tilted my head back. “Who said anything about leaving you?”

“*You* did! *I’m* pathetic. *I’m* insignificant. Even compared to the other Drayners. Even compared to the *humans!*”

He chuckled, pressed a kiss to my temple. “You always were too hard on yourself. I need you by my side, Trav.”

“N-Need me?” I sniffled. “Why in the world would *you* need *me*?”

“Because we’ve always been together. Because you’ve always been loyal.” His lips brushed over mine. “Because I love you.”

My breath hitched. “But I don’t understand why—”

“You want me to kill Ryan?”

I jumped. “No!”

“See? I couldn’t care less what happens to those around me. I could Drain them all empty if I wanted.” He caressed my cheek. “You’ve always had a sense of mercy.” His amused eyes crinkled at the corners. “More or less. You’ll keep me from destroying the world, and you’ll keep me sane.” He trailed the pad of his forefinger down the bridge of my nose. “And you make me happy. Isn’t it good for a god to be happy?”

I stared into his fathomless emerald eyes. “I can do all that?”

“With everyone else, it’s like they’re insects buzzing in my ear. But I *always* value what you say, even if I don’t always take your advice.”

Of its own accord, my body fell against him. “You really want to be together? Until we die?”

He shook his head against me. “I can Drain *life*, too. Even if I just take one minute from every person on earth, that’s over twelve thousand years. So when I say together, I mean *forever*.”

The hope began to bleed from my body. “But I can’t...”

The air crackled with magic again, and pure, hot pleasure arced through every nerve ending, every cell I had. I felt my arms and legs stretching, thickening. My chest pushed out as my traps pushed upward. A groan ripped through my throat as I gripped Mark as tight as I could.

Mark was changing too. I felt him sliding, moving lower. His muscles, though rock hard, decreased in size. The sound of cloth ripping filled the air, and an unfamiliar breeze skimmed along my biceps, my chest and back, the sides of my legs.

All too soon, it was over, and he straightened to look up at me.

Up.

I couldn’t comprehend it, even as I ran my hands over my swollen pecs. I’d grown... but how much? I couldn’t tell from looking down at Mark, so I glanced at Ryan, standing still as a statue in the center of the room.

Whoa. How could anyone be so tiny? I was almost a foot taller than him! So that would make me... six-four, six-five. I slid my fingers under my shirt, and that bit of pressure proved too much for the material. The whole shirt fell apart, fluttering to the floor. It gave me a prime view of the flesh jutting out from my chest. “Did I... Did I invoke my power?”

“No,” said Mark, grinning up at me. “I invoked *my* power.”

Drainers could only *Drain*... right? Bewildered, I let my arms fall to my sides. It surprised me to find they no longer hung straight down, but were pushed slightly outward by the sheer size of my muscles. “How long will it last?”

“Ah, that’s the beauty of it.” His teasing gaze slid over my body. “Since Ryan’s body was filtered through *my* magic, it’s permanent. Until I decide to take it back. And I promise I won’t do that unless you say the word.”

“Permanent?” I flexed my chest, my arms, and my quads. “All this is mine?”

His mouth crooked. “What kind of god would I be if I couldn’t give *as well as* take?” He tapped his pendant. “Your pet should be easier to train now, even with his will and his,” he sighed, “voice intact.”

Ryan’s head jerked up, his eyes rounding. His entire body shook so hard I thought his thin little neck would snap off his body.

I couldn’t help smiling. “He’s so scared.”

“Yeah,” said Mark, leaning back against a desk and crossing his arms over his chest, “most pets are when they meet their new owners.”

Ryan whimpered pitifully.

Just like a puppy. I supposed the training should start right away, for his own good. “Sit, Ryan.”

He backed away from me. His stick-thin legs looked barely strong enough to support his weight.

I lifted my arm and clenched my fist. The cords in my forearms popped out into sharp relief, and it looked thicker than his thigh. “Ryan...” I warned, my voice little more than a rumble of thunder.

His gaze locked onto my fist, traveled up my arm and swept over my chest. Releasing another high-pitched whimper, he slowly sat on the floor.

“Okay,” I grinned broadly over at Mark. “I can get used to this.”

“Knew that already.” He straightened and strode toward me. “It’s a whole new world, little brother, and we’re at the top.”

I raised an eyebrow. “‘Little’ brother?”

He dipped his head low, dragged his teeth across one of my nipples. I quaked with pleasure and hoped he’d thought to give me more stamina, too.

“Just wait, Trav. I’m only getting started.”

**Excerpt from
Fallen Angel: On Death's Wings by Auburnimp
Releasing August 31, 2007**

Light flooded the room from the doorway and a tall figure was outlined against it for a moment before the door was shut again and the figure was moving forward towards the bed.

"Samael? Is that you?"

A sharp humorless laugh. "Who else were you expecting, boy?"

He sat up quickly and backed up until his spine hit the headboard. "What do you want?"

"The same as you. Comfort and forgetfulness."

"I see." So this was when he started paying for Samael's hospitality with his body. His street persona made him say. "So you just wanted a freebie after all."

His head was rocked to one side as Samael backhanded him. "Don't be crude, Daniel. Not if you know what is good for you."

He raised a hand to his stinging cheek and felt blood from a newly split lip. He closed his eyes, wanting to cry but he'd long since forgotten how.

"You're just like Angelo!" he cried out but his voice sounded small and got lost in the wail of the wind outside the shuttered window.

Another short laugh came from Samael together with the sound of clothing falling to the floor.

The bed dipped under Samael's weight and he scrambled to get out on the other side. A strong hand clutched his wrist and pulled him back. Samael's free arm caught him round the waist and pulled him close.

He was becoming really frightened by now; the visions of how Angelo had died were playing through his head like a stuck record. "Let go of me!"

But instead of letting go, Samael pulled him even closer and grabbed his hair to pull his head back. Then he was being kissed, Samael's tongue demanding entry. His breath came in short gasps and he parted his lips in surprise. Nobody had ever kissed him. Not until this moment.

He groaned again and clutched at Samael as if he were a life raft in a storm-tossed sea.