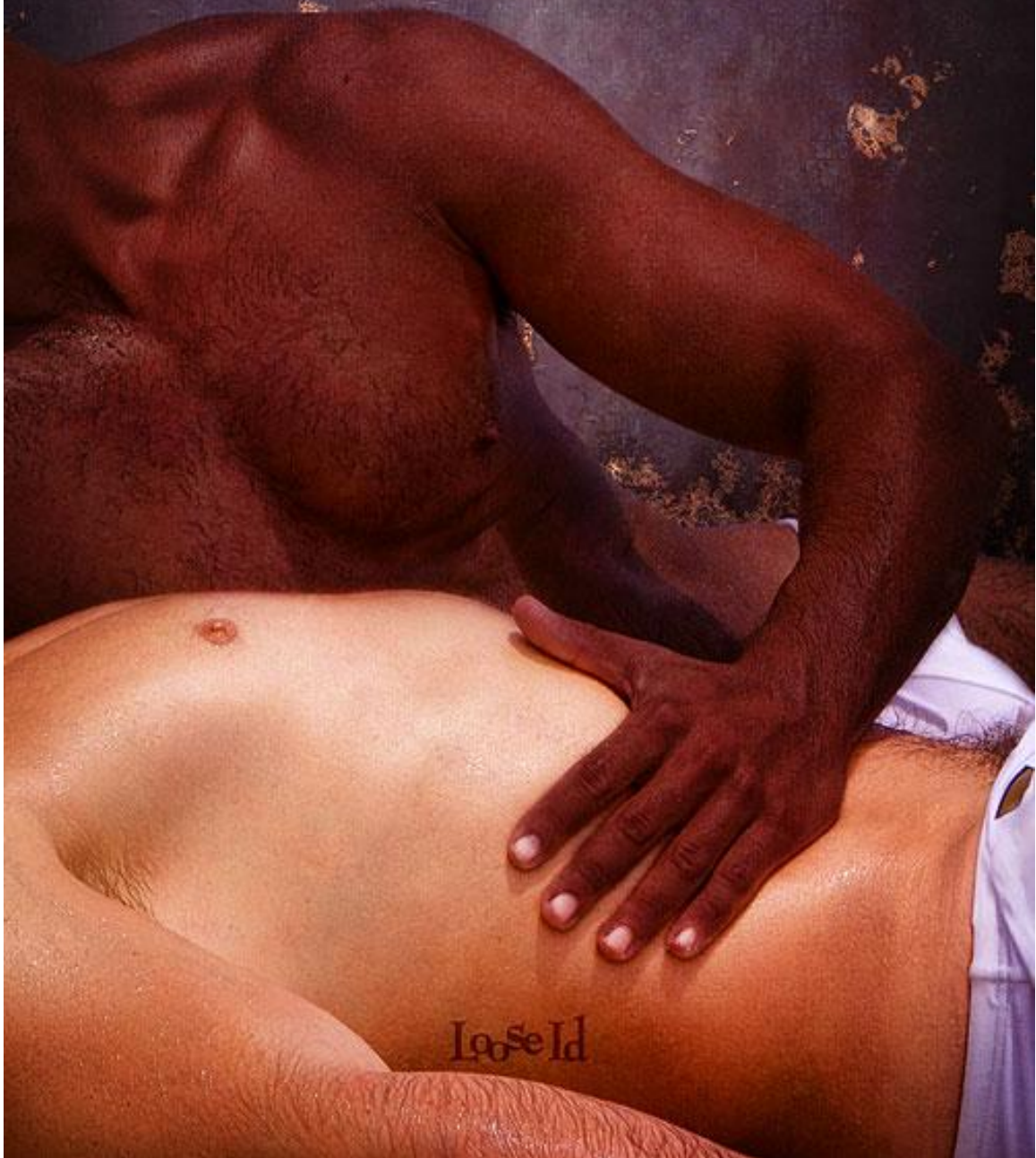


psychic rebels
cheryl dragon



Loose Id

PSYCHIC REBELS

Cheryl Dragon

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Psychic Rebels

Cheryl Dragon

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Chapter One

“Send the dogs in to flush the bastard out!” Dennis had zero patience when it came to waiting to rescue a child.

“What if the dogs go after the kid?” the police officer retorted. “We can’t shoot in blind; we can’t use tear gas. *You* said the kid is in bad shape.”

“The kid is locked in a closet, in a cage,” Dennis replied. “You think your dogs will go for that or a grown man terrified of dogs?”

In the rural backwoods of Illinois stood more police than Dennis had ever seen. He rarely worked police cases since he broke up with Colin again, but this time his psychic healing abilities were a necessity.

And Colin had insisted the police bring Dennis in. Dennis’s ex stood there tall, dark, and sexy. His skills ran more to those of a true psychic, with visions, compared to Dennis’s.

“Let the dogs in. You’re just making it worse.” Colin paced like a caged animal. In reality, his work was done. Colin had located the criminal with the victim still alive, and yet he took each case personally to the very end.

“If the dogs hurt the kid...” The chief came over, shaking her head.

“If he kills the kid before we get him out,” Colin replied.

Dennis tapped into the pedophile's mind and pulled all he needed. "He's terrified of dogs. His abuser used them to keep him trapped on the property. Colin is right. He'll run."

"Let 'em go!" the chief called. Police positioned themselves all around the house while the handlers released the dogs into the front.

Troops grouped toward the back door and pulled it open. Inside, a man shouted and pleaded. The police stood at the ready. Dennis stayed close, ready to enter to get the kid before the trauma took any further hold.

Colin rounded away from the back door and toward the garage. A smaller contingent of officers stayed there near the door and window, but it seemed an unlikely escape route.

Dennis knew Colin sensed something there. They made a good team, exes or not. They'd split up months ago, yet they fell into step as if it had only been days since they last saw each other.

A crash made all heads turn except Dennis's and Colin's. Colin grabbed at the window where the criminal had wedged himself, half out and half held back by a police dog.

The police officers trained guns on him. Colin, the muscle-bound adrenaline junkie, yanked the criminal free and pinned him to the ground. Dennis watched Colin hold that scum of a human to the dirt, leg bleeding, as the police put the dogs away.

Officers swept the house for bombs, booby traps, and anything else that might endanger anyone or prevent the child's safe rescue.

"Clear!" The chief nodded to Dennis. Now he went to work. Coaxing a tortured child was less glamorous but just as rewarding as slamming a criminal to the ground.

The police urged Colin to let him up. They wanted to cuff and read the criminal his rights. Colin held firm, silently threatening and taking a mental confession. Dennis watched and felt it all. Finally, Dennis called to his ex, "I can't get the kid until that creep is secure. Let go, Colin."

Colin glared down at the future inmate. "Tell the whole truth or I'll find you. I know." He stood and flipped the creep over like a rag doll.

The officers swarmed, searching him for weapons, slapping on handcuffs, reading rights, and shoving him to the back of a squad car, but not before they shackled his ankles as well.

Colin looked around. When Dennis locked eyes with him, Colin nodded. Dennis entered the house and prepared for his own challenge.

* * * * *

Today had felt familiar and frustrating all at once. As Dennis approached the old motel room, anxiety filled him. Colin waited on the other side. It'd been a long day. With his energy completely drained from healing the rescued boy, Dennis didn't need the hurdle of facing the one man who could turn him inside out.

His BlackBerry chimed, and Dennis shook off the fog. Colin's text messaged wanting to know where he was. His mind wandered easily when his energy dipped severely. He felt safe with Colin; his heart might get broken, but physically he was in no danger. Colin's interaction with the paranormal world made it hard for Dennis to let his guard down, but Colin would die before he let anything bad happen to him.

Opening the door with the key, he paused and inhaled not the musty smell of old motel dust but the delicious aroma of pepperoni pizza. His stomach knotted in hunger. Leave it to Colin to know exactly what he needed.

"They didn't give me a separate room." Dennis had had a futile argument with the police chief already, so he'd known that he and Colin would be sharing a room. The comment kept distance between them, exactly the way Dennis wanted it.

Colin Lockland grinned and tossed his T-shirt onto his overnight bag. Even if his ex weren't bare-chested, Dennis would have stopped at the sight of his muscled ex-lover. His black skin glistened as he rubbed his bald head, and his brown eyes always seemed to be searching for something. The ring through one of his nipples was new.

"Don't blame me. The chief didn't know we broke up, again. She didn't ask me either. I had no clue she was going to bring you in on this case. The hotel is all booked up with reporters now." He opened the pizza box and sat on the bed.

After closing the door and dropping his overnight bag in the corner, Dennis grabbed a slice and ate fast. They hadn't worked a case together in six months. Most of the time, the cops only needed Colin's superpsychic brain to locate a body, a missing person, or whatever. On a few occasions, Dennis got called in to help. His healing gifts and psychic skills focused on feelings more than facts. Tapping into people's emotions when all hope seemed lost was where he excelled, but it didn't rate high in police work.

"Don't be pissed. They're used to you on a case with me. The chief bugged me about you on my last two. I told her you needed to get paid or you weren't coming. On this one, they needed you enough to cough up the cash." Colin shrugged.

Nodding, Dennis took another slice. Money played no part, but it allowed him to distance himself. He couldn't turn down this case. The missing boy survived cruel treatment for over a week, kept in a cage in a closet and brutalized. Colin had the vision of where, but to get the kid to come out so they could treat him proved harder. Kids learned quickly, and this one had lost all trust in adults he didn't know. Today Dennis connected and helped the boy, but it had an emotional cost. "I'll sleep for a week." He grabbed one of the two bottles of Coke on the nightstand. Eyeing the one king-size bed in the room, Dennis knew they'd found trouble tonight.

Then Colin dipped into Dennis's thoughts. Dennis could always tell when he did by the soothing sensation that filled him. He felt too exhausted to be annoyed or even to mentally swat Colin away. They'd endured so much that it felt comfortable to have Colin there. Most of the time, they kept thoughts private, and Dennis could block him easily, but not tonight.

"You can drive back to Chicago tonight if you want. Only two hours." Colin patted the bed.

They both knew Dennis wasn't that crazy. "I'd pass out. It's three a.m. I hate when they do that standoff crap. The criminal knows he's going to jail or going to die. Pick one and get it over with." Dennis gave in and sat on the bed next to the pizza box.

Colin's devilish eyes called to him. "We needed you. That kid will recover faster and be less traumatized because of you."

"You found him." Dennis shrugged off the compliment. He hated police work. His psychic skills only brought him to the worst cases. Tonight they'd had the FBI, two different police department jurisdictions, and more backup than he'd ever seen in attendance. Plus reporters! Dennis didn't care for an audience. He and Colin agreed on that at least.

"The police like me better when you're around." Colin ran a hand over Dennis's tense shoulder. "You ground me and even me out. Helps me focus, and I'm not such a single-minded jerk to them."

Dennis couldn't hide a smile. "We work well together, but we've tried it before." The issues wouldn't disappear because of one fun night or one tense one, no matter how much he longed for Colin.

"I didn't say anything about getting back together." Colin's hand moved up to Dennis's hair. "You're filthy and exhausted. Let's hop in the shower and get you recharged."

Some men would've taken Colin's comment as a euphemism for sex, but he was being very literal. "I'm not taking your energy. You've been up and working as long as I have. I don't need it." Dennis barely had the energy to psychically nudge Colin back.

"Like hell. You poured all you've got into that kid and you look like shit." Colin pulled Dennis closer. "You couldn't fight off a puppy."

Colin got up and tugged on Dennis's hands until he stood. Dennis gave in physically, knowing Colin could handle his weight and then some. Colin grew up on Chicago's South Side in the area where kids went to jail, joined a gang, or left completely. They didn't turn out gay and psychic. When Dennis met Colin, Colin lived

on the down low, claiming to like women but sleeping with men. The denial confused Dennis, but Colin's need to fight paranormal creatures that preyed on the helpless intrigued him.

Colin's familiar touch electrified every bit of Dennis's skin. More than anything, Dennis wanted to kiss and hold Colin. What kept them apart wasn't love or fidelity or any of the usual issues. Dennis couldn't even focus on the complex history that brought them here. He couldn't focus on anything as Colin stripped him naked and led him to the bathroom.

"I'm okay." Dennis leaned on the cold tile wall as Colin turned the shower full blast and removed his own clothes. The sight of Colin naked, all hard muscles and dark intentions, made Dennis's cock awaken. He toyed with the nipple ring, and Colin pressed for more.

"Sure, you're great. I could have you any way I want ten times, muscle man, and you couldn't fight back if you wanted to." Colin closed in as his hands rubbed over Dennis's tense body.

Health, good energy, and balance – that's what Dennis loved about Colin. Dennis worked out and loved how fit and healthy Colin kept himself. Using his powers to help people beat disease and injury... Dennis got immense satisfaction from it. Colin's work tended toward the more dangerous end. Why couldn't they fit? Dennis shook his head. "Don't."

Colin kissed him, and Dennis thanked whatever powers ruled the universe that Colin didn't listen. The sexual energy Colin sparked in Dennis infused him, but it was only a start. Dennis couldn't deny the weakness.

Not breaking the kiss, Dennis followed Colin into the hot shower. The water helped his body, and Colin's strength and touch eased his mind. Colin pressed Dennis back to lean on the wall. "I missed you," Colin whispered.

"Me too, but we can't..." Dennis tried to open his eyes.

“Don’t. Don’t think or argue. You’ll kill yourself if you don’t relax and let someone help you for a change. We need to get cleaned up, and you need energy.” He pressed chest to chest, that little ring grinding between them, and all the way down. Rubbing cock to cock deepened the energy and connection, but the tease of their tangling legs fueled an intimate desire.

Dennis held on, his palms flat against Colin’s shoulder blades. The heat Colin’s body produced pulled Dennis in until he rested his forehead to his ex-lover’s.

Colin knew how to project his energy and let it flow so Dennis had to do nothing but receive. Energy, life force—whatever people called it—was real. Some people naturally projected positive energy, and that attracted people. Other individuals sucked energy, and people near them felt the fatigue. Most people handled their energy unconsciously, but when focused, energy could be very powerful.

Dennis had never felt more grateful for the man he loved. If Colin could stick to helping humans, Dennis would never let him go. Colin was the only one Dennis trusted to help him balance out his energy. He couldn’t help the vulnerability; he hated it.

“Drink it in,” Colin urged.

Colin’s use of the word “drink” set off red flags that rekindled Dennis’s tension. “I’m not a damn vampire.” He hated using Colin like this, even though it caused Colin no pain or harm.

“No, I didn’t mean it like that. At the worst, you’re a psychic vampire. You give and receive, just energy though. Stop fighting it. Vamps aren’t all bad.” Colin kissed his neck and teased Dennis with his teeth. “You like it when I bite you in some places.”

“No, you know how that bugs me.” If Dennis possessed his full strength, they’d be in a fight about Colin’s connections to the underworld, the whole dark scene that Dennis avoided. The saga, a pointless rerun, served no purpose at the moment. Vampires remained a part of Dennis’s history, a dark part he tried to repress and avoid.

Now Colin nuzzled Dennis’s neck instead. “Is there a clinical term for vampire-phobic? Believe me, humans can be much worse.”

Dennis ignored the question and pushed against Colin to suck the energy from him. They understood each other's limits, and Dennis could never hurt the man he still loved. He'd die first. Yet his history suggested otherwise. "I need you," he whispered.

"I know." Colin put out more energy as the ego stroke fueled him. Their psychic connection snapped back to full strength the minute they were near each other. His cock rubbed Dennis's, and Dennis felt the warm glow as he grew harder. Taking a deep breath, Dennis felt his energy return. Sexual hunger consumed him. Dennis pushed Colin back and started to kneel.

"No, I've got to clean you up first." Colin reached for a bar of soap.

Dennis knelt, refusing to let Colin guide things further. The mythical theory of a man's power being in his cum tempted him. Or was it just the need for Colin's flavor after six months apart? It didn't matter. "I need this." Dennis licked over Colin's erection and down to his sac. He'd felt tortured every night they spent apart. They belonged together but couldn't get their worlds to mesh without explosions.

Rubbing up the shaft in firm, circular motions, Dennis felt Colin give in. Two years of off-again, on-again made them appreciate each other every time they were on. Dennis knew all Colin's buttons and quirks, yet the need for him never lessened. The bar of soap clattered to the floor as Colin thrust against Dennis's lips. Sucking the precum from the tip, Dennis held on to Colin tightly with strength restored and lust ignited by the man he'd been avoiding.

Colin braced his feet and reached to turn the water off. "Shit, you recover fast. Let's get to bed."

The suction increased as Dennis swallowed Colin's cock and grabbed his ass tight. Gasping, Colin struggled for control. Dennis was his soul mate both cosmically and chosen; they couldn't be separated. Breaking up always proved temporary, yet he missed Dennis every time. Colin changed Dennis's life and still Colin couldn't get to the bottom of Dennis's problem.

Going from the DL with other black men who kept girlfriends to being true to himself as a gay man wasn't easy for Colin. Dennis had helped him so much. Colin wanted to help Dennis get beyond his personal block with the paranormal world. The way Dennis rolled his tongue over Colin's shaft filled Colin with such a sparked need that it seemed Dennis hadn't sucked a drop of his energy.

Colin was happy to help refuel Dennis after all the healing energy he'd put out, but Dennis only wanted to get involved with human cases. No amount of persuasion Colin had tried ever convinced Dennis to give handling vampires or werewolves a try. One bad experience had set Dennis's mind, and so far nothing had budged him. It went deeper, Colin knew somehow; something more was wrong. All attempts to get Dennis to share the deeper fear never worked. He shut down, and not even Colin's psychic skills could penetrate Dennis's strong will.

He didn't want it to end, but Colin couldn't hold back after such an intense day. Colin thrust into Dennis's mouth. Looking down, Colin ran his fingers through Dennis's wet hair. The thick brown mess matched his green eyes with flecks of gold. The dark-toned muscles of his shoulders flexed in a dance just for Colin.

As Colin felt his release build, he knew he had to keep Dennis this time. Somehow Colin had to find a way to share his dream and get Dennis past his fear. They could heal his trauma if Dennis allowed him. Colin believed every problem could be overcome. His vision grew clearer and felt closer, but without Dennis it'd never work. One would never find a true balance without the other. Exploring the metaphysical and paranormal felt natural.

Colin's body jolted as Dennis swirled his tongue and tapped on the tip of his cock just right. The color of his aura, the energy burst, the shared lust flashed in Colin's mind as his release took over. No one else could do this to him. Colin didn't want anyone else. Six months without Dennis had been hell. His stubborn lover resisted their reunion, but fighting fate only wasted more energy. Their relationship was what Colin

came out for. Their connection to the paranormal world remained inescapable. He'd never give up.

Dennis didn't let up, kissing and nuzzling Colin's package like a desperate man. They were both starved for each other. Colin tugged Dennis to his feet and kissed him slowly. "Better?"

"Yes. Why can't I resist you?" Dennis asked.

"I'm good for you, whether you admit it or not." The chill of the shower hit Colin. "Let's get to bed."

They stepped out of the shower. The sexual need radiated from Dennis, and Colin believed this was it. This time they had to stick it out. Somehow they'd find a compromise, and Dennis wouldn't bolt again. Colin had to get to the bottom of the fear, and he felt up to the challenge this round.

"Pizza?" Dennis picked up the box and moved it from the bed to the desk.

"Not now. I'm after bigger things." Colin pushed Dennis onto the bed flat on his back. He climbed on top of Dennis and kissed him, working Dennis's thick cock with his palm. "Tomorrow when we drive home, you're coming back with me. We're spending the weekend together."

Dennis's hips snapped. "I can't."

"You will." Colin squeezed Dennis's balls tightly until he grunted. The pull of sex yanked on both of them.

"I have clients and stuff to do. Can't just run off for a weekend of sex or whatever underworld problems you'll suck me into."

Leaning back, Colin looked Dennis in the eye. "We'll see about that." Colin kissed and licked his way down Dennis's sculpted form. He teased his shaft gently until Dennis ground up. Colin worked the base with his hand and the tip with his tongue.

Colin had longed for every ridge, every dip in Dennis's body. He had the man memorized and still needed more. But he needed Dennis in his own bed every night. No more games and no more resistance.

"We're never breaking up again," Colin said against Dennis's cock.

"Not now. Shut up." Dennis thrust hard.

"You're mine. Always." Colin rubbed the sensitive tip and felt Dennis's orgasm lift them off the bed. Swallowing the cum, Colin kissed his way up more slowly than he'd taken the trip down.

Dennis held Colin close in a kiss, but Colin felt the uncertainty. "What did you mean, not breaking up? We never got back together."

"Don't argue. You'll waste all our energy debating." Colin grinned and rolled off the bed. "Pizza?"

"No. Colin. We're not together." Dennis sat up.

"We never actually showered. We should try again." Colin grabbed a towel and rubbed the moisture off his head.

"Stop it. We can't just fall back into old habits. It's too exhausting."

"So no more breakups, that's it. Come on, Dennis, we do this *every* time. We catch up on work, what's new with my brother, your sister, and so on. We get back together, and it's like we've never been apart. I move back in, and we're where we belong." Colin flung the towel at Dennis.

Towelings off, Dennis grumbled. "We're not going to change, either of us. Why create more pain?"

"Why not meet each other halfway and avoid *all* the big pain?" Colin dropped the box of half-eaten pizza on the bed. "Hear me out, okay?"

Dennis picked up a slice and chewed. It was as close to a yes as Colin expected to get. He refused to give up.

"I'm listening." Dennis grabbed his bottle of Coke and stretched out on the bed.

Wishing he'd gone to a liquor store, Colin took a drink of his own Coke and settled in on the bed. "Athena bought a new place." Dennis's biggest complaint was Athena's old shop in the worst area of Chicago. It attracted the demon types more than anything else. Dennis and Colin had met there.

"Where's Athena's Oracle now? Michigan Avenue?" Dennis chuckled.

"No, Orland Forest. Nice suburban location. Up-and-coming trendy area. It's near a newer strip mall with a tattoo parlor and a salon." Athena was Colin's close friend; the resurrected Greek goddess she claimed she had gone pagan in high school and made it her life. Her Greek Orthodox parents didn't know how to deal with it but she followed her own path. Her spiritual-metaphysical shop catered to all kinds.

"How can she afford that?"

Colin looked away. "I found the location. It's an old library. One floor, large, all brick, good energy, and a few friendly spirits in the place."

Leaning back on the headboard, Dennis stared. "You gave her money."

Keeping secrets in a relationship with a psychic was impossible. "I didn't *give* it to her."

"A loan?" Dennis asked.

"No, I'm a silent partner. I have a twenty-five percent cut. It was a good investment for the better location, expanded clientele, and more room."

"You put thousands into buying an old library, and you're still renting a crappy apartment? You're throwing money away."

Colin laughed. Same old arguments. "You're such a suburban brat. I don't need to buy a place. You've got plenty of room in your very practical house. That's the only place that feels like home. My apartment serves its purpose. This business matters, and I'm a part of something. I never thought I'd own a piece of anything. Ever."

"That happens to be in Orland Forest?" Dennis filled in.

Busted. "True, it happens to be in your town, but it's all one big Chicago suburb unless you're downtown in the Loop. I've worked on the North Side, the South Side, in the city, and it doesn't matter. This was a deal. The building is old but solid and laid out perfectly. You've got to see it."

"I've seen it. I know the old library." Dennis shrugged.

Colin grabbed Dennis's hand. "There's more. I've got an idea."

"Colin, no more about reforming vamps or taming werewolves. They're all dangerous. I love that you want to help people, but you're psychic, not a superhero."

"I know, but with Athena's place, we'll expand our connections. It can work. I swear I know what I'm doing. The neighborhood is much safer. I just need your help." This had gone better in his head. Dennis resisted harder than he'd expected.

"Stop with the Buffy and Angel fantasy. You're not going to bring down evil and reform everyone. The vampires and werewolves have double our strength. I learned my lesson with one encounter. You won't be happy until you get yourself killed. Just help the humans. Isn't that enough?" Dennis stormed off the bed and pulled on his clothes.

"Don't go! Dennis! Listen to me!" Colin followed as Dennis slammed the door. If only Dennis would give it a chance. Colin knew Dennis could get past his history and find the good as well as the bad if he tried.

Colin punched the door. "Every time!"

But he'd never give up. He couldn't until he helped Dennis get rid of the inner demons that he refused to talk about.

Chapter Two

Two days later, Dennis had returned to the normal zone of energy and routine. No police or paranormal creatures, and no pressure from Colin to revisit paranormal hell. Dennis had run and meditated his way to the inner balance he needed. Back in his reality, he felt in control. He was happy to help people. He couldn't chase demons the way Colin wanted.

The past refused to die. One wild spring break with his college boyfriend had gone terribly wrong. That's what Dennis got for trying a threesome. When the third guy turned out to be a vampire and vamped his boyfriend, Dennis had to defend himself by staking them both. Of course, when Colin learned all of this, he wanted Dennis to fight and join the superhero life.

Dennis could do as much good helping people with healing touch and physical therapy. Disease and injury damaged the body as harshly as anything out there. Why couldn't Colin back off and let Dennis do his own work? One run-in with the underworld as a young man had taught Dennis all he needed to know. Those creatures were faster, stronger, and ruthless. Losing someone he cared about once was all he could endure.

Still the truth gnawed at his insides. They were a team and, without a doubt, stronger together. Colin talked about compromise, but he'd made his own plans, teaming with Athena and investing in a place. They were better off without Dennis in the mix. His self-doubt could prove a weakness in the end, and he wouldn't let that harm anyone.

A new, upscale location? Yes, it would help, but Athena didn't have any discretion for the types of creatures she had for customers. Demons and humans... She helped them all. A dangerous combination that could explode at any time if handled wrong. He'd always wondered, if he'd handled the college spring break trip differently, would his then-boyfriend still be alive today? If it had been Colin, could Dennis have staked him? He knew he'd never be able to do that.

With the afternoon free, Dennis decided to stop by Athena's Oracle, just so next time he worked a case with Colin, he could honestly say he'd visited it. The curiosity ate at him to see what they'd done to the old library. He lived in the same town and would end up there sooner or later.

Of course, having a psychic ex-boyfriend made unexpected run-ins a lot easier. Dennis half expected to see Colin's car in the parking lot, but no luck there. Disappointment tugged at him, and he pushed it away. He'd made his choice.

Sliding out of his SUV, Dennis instantly felt the positive and peaceful energy of the old library. A place of knowledge and safety, he'd visited this brick building several times as a kid and loved it here. At thirty, he remembered the days before home computers were common and research meant going to the library.

Walking inside, the Indian incense smell hit him hard. Athena embraced all things metaphysical, and the previously modest main counter now displayed crystals, runes, tarot decks, jewelry, and more. Today she'd overdone it with the perfume-laced incense. Dennis did his best not to inhale deeply.

"I wondered when you'd show up." The husky female voice behind him belonged to Athena.

Dennis turned and smiled slightly. The petite woman with dark, wide eyes and curly black hair could easily don a Grecian-style gown and, with her porcelain skin, pass for the goddess she was named after. He'd never asked if she believed she was a daughter of Athena or Athena herself, and he found it best not to push that issue. It seemed odd that she remained single with her good looks. Dennis's mind went back to Colin and acknowledged that love was more than attraction and as much heaven as hell. "Hi, Athena. Nice place. Colin mentioned you'd moved."

"And I heard you trampled my friend's heart again. I told him to stay away from you." She folded her arms, and her long-sleeved tunic flowed with her. Athena liked to dress the part of mysterious metaphysical shop owner. Boldly colored tunics with dark-wash jeans and Egyptian sandals were her uniform. Dennis tried to get into it when he'd started dating Colin, but pagan didn't click for him. He stayed open and took in a variety of information. Khakis and polos were his comfort zone, and whatever label people put on him, Dennis didn't care. Actions said more than anything else. He did what he felt was right and didn't overanalyze the philosophy.

"Colin never listens to either of us." Dennis didn't blame Athena for her advice. Colin and Dennis were happier together, but the underworld invaded and ruined it every time. Knowing it was a crazy situation didn't make it any easier to walk away.

"You're the one resisting. When you and Colin are in tune with each other, it's very good." She rubbed her deeply hued lips together. "Want the free tour?"

He shrugged and followed her to what used to be the stacks.

"Here we have all the merchandise. Books, candles, clothing. Jewelry is in the back or in the front case."

The setup was clean, bright, and inviting. "The small meeting rooms are for what now?"

"Psychic readings, tarot, and so on." She led him down the hall. "Then the large rooms are for group meetings. Classes, support groups, and that sort of thing."

"Get many demons here?" he asked coolly.

"I've got loyal customers who followed me. Colin has his plans for more of an outreach, but we've only got so much money to go around now." She headed back to the other end where the periodicals used to be. Now there were two large rooms. One door read ADULTS ONLY. The other read STAFF ONLY.

"The staff room I get, but adults only?" Dennis knew the staff needed a lounge.

"Adult goodies. Toys, lotions, and outfits too. The old location didn't have the space. It's a good selling area. With some of the meeting rooms open to kids, we can't have *that* stuff out in the open."

"Meetings for kids?"

"I still teach pagan history and Wicca for beginners. Parents bring their kids to learn along with them. I thought you'd like my changes." She opened the door and entered the adult room.

Dennis followed. Naturally, he liked it. Athena was wild, but this smelled like Colin's idea. The adult room contrasted the rest of the Oracle, done in red and black. The room had good light and clear labeling. From feathers to rougher toys, she had it all stocked. With this merchandise, Colin might break even on his investment.

"Impressive assortment, Athena." Dennis couldn't deny the setup worked well. Athena had stepped up her quality and standards. She'd do better in the city, but the rent for a good location ran too high for their range. Customers would follow her here, and she'd appeal to new ones.

"Thanks. Couldn't have done it without Colin. We broke our modest goal for the first month. It's going well so far."

"You don't mind having Colin as a silent partner?" he asked.

She waved it off. "Please. I do the running of things. He does the psychic readings here instead of out of his dingy apartment. The money works itself out. A true goddess doesn't worry about those details. A woman in my coven is a CPA. She does the books for store credit. We're always looking for another good investor. The sooner we own it all, the better our bottom line becomes." Athena smiled at him.

"You'd do business with me?" Dennis didn't expect to get hit up.

"Why not? The universe wants you here. You don't want to escape, even if you claim to. Don't question the universe or the goddess." She headed back to the front counter and slid behind it.

"I just came for the tour, not to invest. I'll keep it in mind, though." As Dennis turned toward the door, he felt the presence he'd been looking for when he arrived. Colin's energy called to him. There the man stood in dark jeans and a Chicago Bulls T-shirt.

"You're not on the schedule, Colin. Need something?" Athena asked with an amused lilt in her voice.

Colin just smiled slyly and stared at Dennis. "Like it?"

The heat in the room rose, at least between them. "A definite improvement. You drove all the way down here just for my opinion?" He stepped closer to Colin.

"It wasn't far. Thought maybe you'd want to talk." Colin moved in, and the spark jolted Dennis. "Grab some food and go back to your place?"

Dennis's resistance began to slip. "There's nothing to talk about. She gave me the tour, but what about when the dark witches come in? She'll sell them anything. Probably let vampires nest in the basement. Why can't you just stay away from this?"

"Ignoring it won't make it go away. You want to fight. Let's go to your place and not disturb the customers." Colin headed out the door and hopped in his old sedan.

Before Dennis unlocked his SUV, Colin drove off. Dennis knew Colin's heart was in the right place. They both wanted to help. But Colin didn't think of his own safety. Either way, Dennis knew Colin would be waiting with food by the time he got home. Dennis could count on him.

* * * * *

Colin sat on Dennis's porch with two bags of their favorite burgers and fries. He still had a key but didn't want to push the line by letting himself in. Dennis pulled in

the driveway and parked. As Dennis opened the front door, Colin was tempted to kiss him and explain every detail of the plan. Colin resisted both impulses and followed Dennis inside, setting the food on the round, glass kitchen table.

“So you’ve got Athena out to recruit me?” Dennis took a few fries as Colin sorted the burgers. No pickles for Dennis; he hated them.

“I just floated the idea. She went with it. The place wasn’t cheap but worth the money.” Colin went into the kitchen and grabbed two beers out of the fridge. He felt at home. The loft apartment where Colin’s mail arrived wasn’t home. That was just temporary. Where Dennis lived, *that* was home.

Dennis sat at the table. “It’s your vision, not mine. There are plenty of these stores around. They open and close all the time. You’ll never get rich at it.”

“I don’t need to be rich to be happy. Right now, I’ve got more than I did growing up. I need you, and I need to help people. For that, I need a base to work out of. This place is perfect.” Colin sat next to Dennis and set the beers down. “Didn’t you see all that space? We can have three big meetings going on at once plus readings and retail. Plenty of room to expand.”

“Like what? Vamp blood donations?” Dennis scoffed and bit into his burger.

Colin filed the idea away for later. They needed Dennis for just that type of off-the-wall thinking. He saw the problem and solutions but refused to believe the execution could be done. Colin understood why Dennis couldn’t trust paranormal creatures, but he never gave them a chance to change that one impression. Unprepared and unknowing, of course, Dennis found himself outmaneuvered. “It doesn’t have to be a problem. You can be as involved as you want. Or not.”

“Please!” Dennis took a drink of his beer. “It’s way more complicated than that. Whether I invest or not, just being with you would mean I’d get sucked into *every* case, *every* project, and *every* drama.”

“You’re not now? No one forced you to go to Athena’s today. The cops didn’t kidnap you at gunpoint and make you help find that kid.”

"The kid is different. I'll help humans any way I can. In those situations, there are normally tons of police around to help." Dennis stuffed more fries in his mouth. "Helping humans, I can handle that. It's the paranormal underworld I can't deal with, Colin. Most people don't know about it. There's no backup, no rules, and no control. If I'm dead or a vampire, I can't help anyone."

Colin laughed, wiping his hands and mouth on a napkin. They fit together so well, yet Dennis fought it. "You think you're pulled into my world anyway, and I'm pulled into yours. It's the same world. I help humans by managing the paranormal world and staying connected. If you let one bad experience define you, then they win. You're letting them win. I won't do that. You want to cut ties? Move far away and never see each other again?"

"Wouldn't work," Dennis grumbled.

"Exactly. Look, if you don't want to do anything with Athena's Oracle, that's fine. Don't invest. I don't care about the money. But when it comes to a case like a missing person who needs your help, you can't say no any more than I can. That can be incredibly dangerous. What's the real reason you won't get involved?" He ran his hand along Dennis's forearm. The familiar zap of their connection sent arousal coursing through them both.

"Seducing me won't convince me to go along with your paranormal aspirations. You can't win with sex." Dennis stole a fry off Colin's plate and kissed him hard.

"I know. Sex is how you pulled me out of the closet and changed my world. I was afraid, and the danger was real. The people I hung with before you and Athena would've put me out for being with you. Dennis, you changed my life. Now you won't let me help you work out your fears."

"Some fears can't be worked out," he replied. "Some things you have to live with. Sex won't fix it."

"Seducing you is a compulsion, not a plan. Doesn't hurt either. With enough sex you might forget about the bad stuff for a bit and enjoy the good."

“Can’t have one without the other.” Dennis kissed down Colin’s neck, and the food was forgotten.

Colin’s thoughts grew foggy as his cock hardened. Dennis seduced so much better but liked to play hard to get. “Exactly, so stop fighting it.” Colin kissed Dennis deeply and tangled their tongues.

Colin didn’t want to argue. He needed what he hadn’t gotten a few nights back in the motel. Colin knew Dennis needed the same thing, and it consumed them both.

Pulling Dennis out of his chair, Colin led them to the bedroom with their mouths still fused. Six months apart... They had so much time to make up for, it hurt, and his cock ached.

They undressed each other as they made their way to the king-size bed. Colin broke the kiss to admire Dennis’s hard form in the familiar room. He’d missed Dennis’s calming green bedroom and never wanted to leave. “I love you,” he said.

Dennis held Colin’s face with both hands. “I love you. That’s never been our problem. When you have to kill someone you care about because they’re evil and out to kill *you*, all because they trusted a vampire and were curious, then you’ll see. It’s easy when you’re not involved, but if someone you know is turned, and you have no choice...”

“I know it was hard, but it’s over now. You saved yourself. What else could you do? Hell, you were still a teenager and outnumbered. Stop living the guilt trip. You did nothing wrong. You’re the healer here. What does your history have to do with us now? We know how we feel, and we’ll make it work.” Colin pushed Dennis onto the bed and licked from his Adam’s apple to his erection until Dennis thrust upward.

Sucking and kissing his shaft, Colin teased his lover as he reached into the nightstand. The tube of lube rested exactly where he’d left it. Depositing a little on his palm, Colin worked it over Dennis’s hard cock and balls, making them slick.

Not wanting to go too fast, Colin stretched out next to Dennis and kissed him. Colin slowed his hand on Dennis’s cock. “I’m never leaving.”

“Good.” Dennis pulled him closer. “I’ll keep you out of trouble.”

The slow kiss rocked Colin hard. He couldn’t take another breakup. They weren’t in their twenties anymore. The urge to claim what belonged to him pounded through Colin’s body. He rolled Dennis over onto his hands and knees, ready for what they’d longed for.

Colin coated Dennis’s asshole with lube and rubbed his cock between Dennis’s ass cheeks. Admiring the tight muscles from hip to shoulders, Colin massaged his hands over Dennis’s gorgeous back. Maybe some sexual play would help Dennis realize their love was stronger than fear. “You want me?”

“Yes!” Dennis moaned. “Fuck me.”

“What if I were a vampire?” Colin reached around and teased Dennis’s erection. “Still want me then?”

“Stop it. You’re not.” Dennis rocked back for more.

“But *if*. Still want me? Trust me not to bite you?” Colin leaned in and nipped at Dennis’s strong neck.

“Yes. Hell, I’d want you dead or alive.”

Colin pressed into Dennis’s asshole and went slow. “I knew it. Good.” Once he thrust all the way in, he held still. Somehow Colin had to break through to Dennis that not dealing with the paranormal didn’t make it go away. Other humans were being victimized every day.

Rocking and squeezing, Dennis groaned. “Fuck me!”

“It’s a fair question. You didn’t want a punk on the DL who had anonymous sex with random guys. You wanted to be out and proud in the white burbs with your black boyfriend. What about if I were a werewolf?” Colin fucked him in slow, short strokes.

“Stop with the inquisition! You want to screw those creatures, do it!” Dennis pounded a fist to the bed.

"No, I want you. Would you let me fuck you if I were a wolf three nights a month?" Colin pumped faster, knowing Dennis would say yes eventually. He stroked and teased Dennis's cock until he bucked back for more.

"Damn it, Colin. Yes, I'd take you any way. I love you. Now quit playing!" Dennis thrust back hard, and Colin moaned.

"You'd like it better maybe. I'd have superhuman strength. Then I could fuck you harder and faster." Colin increased the pressure on Dennis's ass and cock.

"No, just you. Like this. More!" Dennis grunted and tensed.

Colin let Dennis's release wash over him. The dual orgasm of Dennis's cock and tight ass sent Colin closer. He enjoyed Dennis's pleasure enough to hold back his own.

"Want me more as a werewolf or a vampire? Which turns you on more?" Colin kissed Dennis's neck as he recovered.

"Neither. Stop playing." Dennis squeezed Colin's cock hard.

Control slipping, Colin moaned at Dennis's play. "I swear I'll keep you safe if you give working with me a try. That bad stuff won't follow us home."

Rocking them slowly, Dennis shook his head. "Don't promise what you can't control. Now come before I make you."

"You're demanding and impatient tonight." Colin grabbed Dennis's shoulders and fucked fully in and out, letting his body overtake his mind. He didn't need to talk to feel the pleasure radiating from Dennis. Finally Colin allowed himself to let go.

The release took over, and he held on to Dennis as the waves took him deeper and deeper into Dennis's mind and body. The intensity burned between them until Colin collapsed onto his lover's strong back.

Dennis turned enough to kiss Colin and pulled him down onto the bed. Colin went willingly on his back, curling up with Dennis as they shared the afterglow.

"Mine," Colin whispered.

"Possessive pain in the ass." Dennis chuckled and kissed Colin's head.

“Hell yeah, and you love it. So get over it. I’m staying.” Colin tried to ignore the tingle of trouble to come. It wasn’t about them directly. His psychic powers couldn’t tap into it specifically yet, so he let the worry go for now. If Colin let all the bad things in, he’d be insane. But something was coming. And soon.

Chapter Three

Dennis finished off the last of the garlic bread. He'd almost forgotten how relaxing a romantic dinner out with Colin could be. Pasta at their favorite little Italian place made it feel like old times.

The fast, techy ringtone of Colin's cell phone signaled a call. Colin grabbed it and answered. "Yeah, Athena."

Handing his credit card to the waitress, Dennis wondered if the Oracle's business had picked up even more.

"Damn, I forgot. I'll be there. Give me about fifteen minutes." Colin ended the call. "Sorry, I forgot one client moved his appointment. Can you drop me off, and I'll get a ride home? Should only be half an hour."

Dennis signed the receipt. "No problem. I'll go with and hang out." He wanted to show Colin that he wasn't against the business or Athena. The dangerous stuff could be avoided, if they wanted.

"Really?" Colin's eyebrow lifted as he slid from the dark green fabric booth.

"Yeah, it's only half an hour." Dennis followed his boyfriend out to the car.

Ten minutes later, they pulled in to the fairly full parking lot of Athena's Oracle.

They headed in, and instead of Athena at the glass counter, it was a pale, tall man full of muscle with dark brown hair and innocent blue eyes. Those eyes were a lie. Dennis knew a vampire when he met one. He could feel them.

"Athena had to teach her class, Colin. Your client is in room two," the vampire offered.

"Great. Thanks, Sean." Colin took a step toward the room but paused. "Sorry, Dennis. This is Sean. He works for Athena, mostly nights. Sean, this is Dennis."

Sean grinned. "Nice to meet you."

"Same here." Dennis nodded but couldn't quite relax.

"You can take off. I'll get a ride back." Colin hung up his jacket and headed off to work.

"No, I'll wait." Dennis refused to give in. The fact that vampires existed wasn't the problem; Dennis needed to prove he could coexist if he had to.

"You're the healer?" Sean asked.

Dennis glanced around at the merchandise. "That's what I do. Mostly physical therapy, but healing touch as well."

"You should take appointments here. A lot of people could use that help. One of the rooms could easily fit a bed and be outfitted for your needs. Want to look at one?" Sean sounded matter-of-fact.

"How old are you?" Dennis abruptly changed the subject.

"Twenty-seven years as a human. Seventy-five years as a vampire." Sean looked at the ground. "I won't harm you. Athena wouldn't hire someone she didn't trust."

"You try to hurt me or Colin, and I'll dust you without a speck of guilt or hesitation." Dennis didn't buy the no-harm promise, but Colin wouldn't leave him with a dangerous creature. "You don't drink blood?"

"Of course, I have to. But I don't kill people to get it."

"If that's true, you're very unusual." Dennis had never heard of a vampire who didn't want to kill and cause terror.

"I was quite evil before, I assure you. Last year things changed for me. Athena helped me, but it took a year to trust myself around humans."

Dennis sensed no ill intentions from the vampire. He wanted to know more, but all signals pointed to Sean not wanting to share more. "I staked two vampires in college. I'm not afraid of you."

"I know. Colin talks a lot about you. He says you're very skilled with paranormal creatures."

"Skilled enough to deal, but I generally prefer to avoid." Dennis shook off the tension and refocused. "Let's check out the room."

Sean led the way, and Dennis inspected the reading room with more attention than during Athena's tour. Painted a soothing sage green, it had a small counter in one corner and a simple wooden table with chairs in the center.

Instantly Dennis visualized a padded table, dimmed lighting, and his healing equipment out on the counter. "It could work."

"We've got more rooms than we can fill right now. I'm sure Athena and Colin would be willing to outfit one for you." Sean appeared enthused at the idea.

"Why do you care?" Dennis asked.

"Athena has done a lot for me when I was a great danger to myself and others. I want to help her and help the Oracle succeed. So far it's holding its own, but the more traffic the better."

A vampire with suicidal thoughts? That was a new spin for Dennis. "I want to think it over and talk to Colin before I do anything." He wanted to help, but being so close to Colin and his mission, plus the paranormal creatures... Dennis could be distracted. He didn't want to give any client subpar services.

"Of course, didn't mean to push. I don't have Athena's gift with people."

"Few do." Dennis nodded. Sean had no aggression in him, at least none Dennis could feel. "Where are you from?"

"Here." Sean shrugged. "Born in Chicago in 1907. My parents emigrated from Ireland in the late 1800s."

"And you never left in all those years?"

"Urban areas are the safest. I blend very well. I've menaced Al Capone, watched the city grow, and saw the river change directions. I have no wish to leave."

"You sound like Colin. He's never been on a plane and doesn't care." Dennis hoped he could drag Colin to the coast one of these years. A cruise or maybe Hawaii. A real vacation; possibly Disney World since Colin had never gone, even as a kid.

"Athena is really happy you two are back together again." Sean straightened the chairs. "Is there something you need while you wait?"

"No, I'm good. Colin should be done soon." Dennis exited the room. "Don't mind me. I'll look around."

"Of course." Sean went back to his station at the front of the store.

Dennis browsed the books and made a mental list of healing titles they needed to add. Sean was like no vampire he'd ever met, but Dennis wanted to know more to make sure Colin really was safe. He kept one eye on Sean and realized he should start carrying a wooden stake on him, just in case.

* * * * *

Walking into the house, Colin tossed his jacket on the couch and kissed Dennis hard. "You're awesome."

"What? I spent half an hour checking out the Oracle. Not a big deal."

Colin shook his head. "You spent half an hour with a vampire. That's progress."

"I'm not afraid of them. I can handle myself. The old issue is weird, but I can control it if I try. Doesn't mean I trust him, but I'm not going to kill your employees if they don't deserve it."

Colin wrapped his arms around Dennis's hard chest. "Tell me. We'll get to the root. What's the issue feel like? When does it trigger?" Fears and phobias were common. He wanted so much to help Dennis. They could work through it together.

"Not now, Colin. I'm trying. I am. Like you said...progress. My gifts aren't as well tuned to saving people and fighting demons as yours. But I'm curious about Sean for some reason." Dennis sat on the couch.

"He's gay, but I'm not sharing you. He'll be dust first." Colin grinned and sat down next to him.

Dennis shook his head. "Definitely not interested in him that way. He said Athena basically saved him."

"Vampires are people too. Athena has come across a few older ones who sort of get civilized and live by different and more sedate rules." His hand slipped under Dennis's shirt and tugged it off.

"I've never met any like that. Acting remorseful and skittish." Dennis shook his head.

Colin kissed Dennis's neck. "He's totally harmless now."

"Never totally, but I sensed he is in control." Dennis turned his head and kissed Colin back.

Colin felt the arousal building. "So we're safe at the Oracle. It's a good desensitizing thing for you." He tugged at Dennis's fly. It'd been a great night, and Colin wanted to make it perfect.

Dennis caught Colin's hand and pushed it away. He freed Colin's already erect cock. Colin took a quick breath as Dennis gripped the base tightly. When Dennis wanted his way, there was no arguing.

"You want me to take an interest in your work. Tell me about the vampire you work with. How do you know he's in control?" Dennis rubbed Colin's balls with the pad of his thumb.

"Right now, all I want is for you to suck my dick." Colin's blood pounded in his cock.

"Then tell me fast," Dennis whispered in his ear.

"I don't know all the details."

"He killed someone Athena knew?" Dennis pushed Colin back on the couch so he was lying along the length.

Colin groaned, trying to form words.

"But Athena tells you everything." Dennis licked the base of Colin's cock.

Lifting for more, Colin's body wanted more. He didn't care about work now. "Not everything. God, suck me off. You can talk to Athena tomorrow if you're so interested." Colin's hand grabbed Dennis by the hair and pulled him down.

Colin was grateful Dennis had taken an interest and treated Sean like a person, but Colin didn't know enough to help. Sean kept to himself, and Colin had enough people after his attentions and input.

"Later." Dennis finally sucked Colin's cock deep in his throat.

Exhaling, Colin thrust up to encourage Dennis. "Faster!" He needed more. Colin held Dennis's head and fucked up. Knowing he couldn't last long, Colin gripped the couch cushions and tried to make it last.

Then Dennis moved away from Colin's cock and worked his balls in a rough clockwise motion.

"Goddamn! Dennis." Colin was so close it hurt.

Dennis's hands slid beneath Colin, and a thumb teased his asshole, sending Colin over as Dennis sucked his sac.

Coming, Colin watched Dennis tug on his sac. The drops of cum dotted Colin's stomach. Slowly, Dennis licked up the evidence from Colin's hard abs. Dennis didn't stop until his mouth captured Colin's.

Holding Dennis tight, Colin kissed his lover. Things were, for once, going in the right direction. He still felt something out there, a case maybe. Trouble brewed, but it always did. Nothing was showing itself yet.

"My turn," Dennis said against Colin's lips.

Colin smiled. They both were in the mood to tease, and it could last all night.

Chapter Four

Dennis woke out of a dead sleep to find Colin tossing and turning next to him. Reaching out a hand, Dennis didn't even touch him before Colin bolted to a sitting position in bed.

"What's wrong?" Dennis put a hand on Colin's back.

"Vision. Damn. Sorry. I've got go." Colin threw the covers off and got out of bed. After pulling jeans and a shirt on quickly, he grabbed his cell phone.

Dennis climbed out of bed and started to get dressed.

"Don't worry about it, Dennis. You don't have to come along. I can handle it. I'll get Sean for backup."

"I'll go." Dennis had no idea what the vision was, but didn't want Colin to go alone or rely on a vampire.

"It's your least favorite thing. I'm not dragging you on a vampire chase." Colin dialed his phone. "Sean, I need some backup. I'm going to pick you up. Tell Athena I need you for a bit."

Dennis finished getting dressed. Even if he stayed behind, safe, he'd never get any sleep while Colin remained in danger. "I'd feel better there. I don't trust Sean."

"You don't need to." Colin shook his head and geared up with stakes and a stun gun. "I trust him."

Watching Colin leave, Dennis knew things would never be truly good between them if that distance lingered. Dennis didn't want to go into a vampire fight, but he did want to make sure Colin made it home.

Dennis waited until Colin had a head start and then geared up himself with stakes. Tuning into Colin's mind, Dennis knew exactly what Colin had planned. They tried to stay out of each other's minds, respect their space and privacy. In this situation, he needed to know.

Hopping in the SUV, he headed to the sorority house. A couple of vampires had trapped college girls. Dennis could see the vision as clearly as Colin could when he linked into Colin's mind. Luckily, Colin was too preoccupied with getting to the girls in time to notice Dennis's snooping.

Even with Colin picking up Sean, Dennis fell behind them since the Oracle was on the way to the college campus. As he pulled into the parking lot, he saw sorority girls scattering from the front door. Dennis parked and ran into the house, finding it empty. Dust lying on the ground suggested at least a couple of vampires lost the battle already. No human bodies meant they'd gotten there in time.

Relieved, Dennis tuned in to find Colin and felt a rush of terror.

The roof.

He ran for the stairs and made it to the third floor of the sorority house. Out the back window, he found a fire escape and climbed.

"Let him go." Sean's voice lacked any authority.

Dennis peered over the edge and took in the scene. Down at one end, a vampire had Colin on the edge. Sean stood his ground in the center of the roof.

"Why? I'm hungry, and you ruined it. You should've joined us." The vampire shook Colin.

“So drink already.” Colin reached inside his jacket.

The vampire shook him and shoved. He locked eyes with Dennis, smelling the new human. The vampire ran, sensing his outnumbered status would only increase. But he shoved Colin hard enough to send him over the edge. Colin grabbed the edge of the roof and held on.

Dennis jumped up onto the top of the building and immediately had a vampire running at him, between him and saving Colin.

Pulling the stake from his pocket, Dennis charged the vampire and pierced his heart with the wood; he exploded into dust. Gasping for air, Dennis kept on running toward Colin.

Sean already had Colin by the hand, pulling him up as if he weighed nothing. His shirt was torn, his skin scratched, but Colin was there. Unable to control himself, Dennis hugged Colin tightly enough to make him wince.

“You okay?” Colin asked.

“Are you?” Dennis laughed nervously. His eyes connected with Sean, and Dennis nodded a silent *thank-you*.

Sean nodded in return.

Maybe that vampire had told the truth? Maybe he wanted to help people and not harm others? He needed training either way.

Colin leaned back. “You got the vampire?”

Dennis shrugged. “Sure. I don’t mind that. How’d you get into a hostage situation?” He tried not to be annoyed with Colin for taking risks with his life so casually, but Dennis knew it was Colin’s way.

“There were four of them. I only saw two in my vision.” Colin rubbed his head. “Thanks for the backup.”

Sean moved forward. “Yes. Thank you for killing him. I would have, but I prefer to avoid direct violence.”

"That's your backup?" Dennis asked Colin. The relief was too big to verbalize. He held Colin and reminded himself that Colin lived right here in his arms.

"He does what needs to be done. Saved my neck." Colin stood straight and shifted his weight. "I'll live. Let's go home."

"I'll walk," Sean said. "Patrol just in case, circle around and head back to the Oracle. I need some fresh air." He jumped off the edge of the building and headed up the block.

Dennis couldn't tell if he'd offended him. Laughing, he realized it was the first time in his life he ever wondered if vampires could be offended.

"What's so funny?" Colin asked. "Why are you here?"

"I feel like I should thank Sean. Like we should've given him a ride back." Dennis took a deep breath. "You need a doctor?"

Colin shook his head. "Why did you follow me?"

"I didn't trust Sean. I wanted to know you were safe." Dennis moved in closer and held Colin.

As tense as Colin was with the residual adrenaline, he felt at ease with Dennis closer. "I can handle this job. Sean just saved my neck."

"I know. If I didn't see it, I wouldn't have believed it. So it's good I was here to see it." He kissed Colin's neck. "You killed three vamps before I even got here."

Colin nodded. "I couldn't let the last one get away to return. He wanted virgin blood."

"How many sorority-girl virgins are there nowadays?" Dennis laughed.

Colin grinned and started to chuckle. "I can't tell that, but Sean might be able to confirm or deny that aspect. I'm just glad you got the last one. Sean would've saved me before killing the vampire."

"I'm starting to like the creature." Dennis kissed Colin's forehead.

"I could've held on for a while longer. I'm no weakling." Colin didn't want Dennis to worry every time he went out on a case. Or to feel like he had to come along for backup. If Dennis didn't want to do it, he didn't have to. "Let's go home."

"You're sure you don't need a doctor?" Dennis took Colin's arm, and they headed to the ladder.

"I'm fine. Just want to go home now." Colin went down first and got into his car. "See you at home."

Dennis nodded and got into his car.

* * * * *

Colin peeled off the shirt and let it fall in the hamper. He had beat Dennis home and wanted to survey the damage before Dennis saw. He'd skidded on his chest a bit on the edge of the brick building to keep from going down.

In the bathroom, he looked in the mirror, and the blood kept seeping through what looked like road rash. Scrapes and scratches mostly. He took a washcloth and soaked it in water. Dabbing at the blood, he knew it wasn't serious, but it hurt like hell.

Dennis entered and zeroed in. Colin tried to put on a fresh shirt but knew the blood would ooze through. Dennis would see it.

"Let's see." Dennis turned all the lights on in the bathroom. He wiped at the wound to clean the dirt. "Damn."

"It's not that bad," Colin insisted.

"Yeah, sure." Dennis took the cloth. "Go lie down on the bed. I need to clean that up."

Arguing was useless. Colin suppressed a smile. Being taken care of by Dennis was something he loved. He never felt alone or afraid when Dennis stayed close by. Stripping first, he stretched out on the bed naked. "Ready when you are."

Dennis had his arms full between gauze pads and hydrogen peroxide. Sitting next Colin, Dennis set out the supplies and started by soaking a cloth with the peroxide. He

pressed it gently to Colin's wound. The stinging sensation made Colin inhale, but he watched Dennis, and the concern in his face made the pain disappear.

When he was satisfied the wound was clean, Dennis moved on to applying ointment and taping on a large gauze square. "Feel better?"

"You came after me," Colin said with a slight smile.

Dennis shrugged. "You needed backup. Look what happens when you don't take me along in the first place."

"Sean is okay. He's just unsure of himself. You're very sure, but I won't force you." Colin always had to give Dennis the choice. He refused to pressure Dennis to put his life in danger. Tonight, Dennis had volunteered, come on his own, and saved the day. "You did it."

"I should've gotten there sooner." Dennis shook his head and put the supplies back in the bathroom. "Do you need anything?"

"Stop it. Come back." Colin patted the bed.

Dennis sat back next to him. "If I'd gotten there sooner, you might not have gotten hurt."

Colin held Dennis by the back of his neck. "I take risks in this job. It's not your fault if something bad happens. You take it all so personally. You have to let that go and live. I love you. Thank you for helping." He pulled Dennis down and kissed him hard.

Colin let Dennis's love and concern fill him; the emotional spikes got repressed during the physical aspects of what he needed to do, but he never took them for granted.

Now, safe in Dennis's home, in his bed, Colin let his guard down and kissed him tenderly, shifting the feel from their usual rough-guy play. "I missed you so much," Colin whispered.

"You had Sean," Dennis teased.

Groaning, Colin sucked on Dennis's lower lip. "I meant before. Always. Hell, without you it's just crazy. The world is off balance, and I can't deal."

"I feel it too." Dennis held back, only letting his mouth touch Colin. "You need to rest now."

Dennis tried to lean back, but Colin held him. "I need you." Colin felt Dennis's reluctance, not wanting to add to the injury or strain of already overworked muscles, but Colin needed the connection now.

Standing, Dennis removed his clothes and eased next to Colin in bed. "I'm here, always, but I'm not going to let you injure yourself further to prove something."

Colin had a way of getting what he wanted. "But my male nurse fantasy is halfway there already. You don't want to ruin it for me, do you?"

"Now is not the time. In the morning, I'll give you a very kinky sponge bath." Dennis smiled.

Colin knew he had him.

Reaching out and squeezing Dennis's growing cock, Colin shifted restlessly as his own erection pulsed. "I can't wait that long. I'm hard now. A careful sixty-nine should be safe, if you can keep your muscles off my chest."

Dennis shook his head but moved to reverse his position so they were in a sixty-nine. "That'd be against doctor's orders. No straining of your muscles at all. But I can't resist a helpless and needy patient in your condition."

"No, let me." Colin tried to sit up and felt the sting of his injury.

"Stay back or else you won't get any." Dennis pushed him back to prove it. "I could put you in restraints for your own safety."

Colin saw the spark in Dennis's eyes; he'd do it. Hell, Dennis would probably enjoy it. "No, I'll behave. But don't tease me; I need it."

"I can see that." Dennis rested a foot on Colin's shoulder with enough gentle pressure to remind Colin to stay put. But Dennis leaned in, kissing Colin's sac and sucking it fully into his mouth.

As arousal pounded through him, Colin's body relaxed slightly. He was safe in Dennis's arms; he let the fear and danger of the earlier vision and pursuit go. It evaporated fast under Dennis's expert touch.

Dennis licked from tip to base and kissed randomly over the erection. Colin sighed, but when Dennis tongued over the tip, Colin lifted his hips.

Like the wrath of God, or a kinky male nurse, Dennis's hand clamped down on Colin's hip.

Colin could easily flip Dennis, injured or not, but he didn't want to move. He loved the sensation of Dennis in control and at play on Colin's body. Protective and possessive, Colin felt the need in Dennis.

Reaching out again, Colin stroked Dennis's cock gently. "You came on a paranormal case tonight."

Dennis kissed the head of Colin's cock, triggering a spasm, and Colin's hips lifted ever so slightly, pressing for entry. "I need you alive." Dennis tongued around the head until he finally swallowed Colin's erection to the base.

Exhaling slowly, Colin fought to keep still and let Dennis do the work. His hips were fine, but the scenario felt hotter letting Dennis run it. And so Colin inhaled; he felt the limitations of his injury remind him not to overdo it. He'd heal in a week or so, but with Dennis, it'd be faster.

Colin jerked on Dennis's cock, and then his hand got pushed away. Rocking slightly, Dennis began fucking Colin with his mouth. The pleasure spread, and Colin's body felt like new, groaning in orgasm. Dennis's hand pressed over the bandage he'd so lovingly put on Colin's wound.

Healing energy poured into the wound as Dennis sucked Colin's cock, pulling energy in a cycle few would believe or ever experience.

“Harder!” Colin begged.

Dennis ran his teeth along Colin’s tender flesh and pinched his sac, spurring more need and triggering a release.

Colin shouted Dennis’s name, thrusting up, shifting, and sitting up without pain. Dennis hadn’t moved; he stayed there, sucking and swallowing his reward.

Breathing hard, Colin peeled off the bandage. No scrapes or scratches remained, no blood oozed at all. No pain or stinging. “You didn’t have to do that. It was minor.”

“Hell.” Dennis kissed up Colin’s body, nuzzling over where the wound had been. “It’s nothing. With you, I get the energy back as fast as I put it out. I heal a lot of people but only get to enjoy that with you.”

Colin laughed. “So all the bandages and ointments?”

Dennis shrugged. “It’s got to be clean to heal right. I’m not magic; removing dirt and killing germs is not in the gift bag. I should’ve waited until tomorrow, but once you got me started, I couldn’t resist.”

Colin ran a hand over Dennis’s shoulder. “You’re okay then?”

With a grin, Dennis glanced down at his still-hard cock. “Just fine. Hopefully jerking off on the naughty patient is part of your fantasy.” Dennis knelt up as if he’d do just that.

“Not a chance.” Colin rolled Dennis over onto his back and pinned him. Sucking Dennis’s shaft fully, Colin felt the energy pulsing on Dennis. They were so connected, it scared him at times. But he loved it. Now without pain or limits, he could pleasure his boyfriend. Fuck him all night long if they wanted and refill Dennis’s body with plenty of excess energy.

Dennis fucked up into Colin’s mouth fast. “You should still rest,” he moaned as Colin squeezed his balls.

No rest, no wasted time, he'd never felt like this for anyone. Colin knew he'd never love anyone else. Biting at the head of Dennis's cock, Colin sucked deep as Dennis came in waves and shudders.

Dennis flopped back on the bed with a content smile. Colin curled in next to him, entwining their bodies snugly. "Better?" he asked.

"Now we can rest." Dennis kissed him gently.

Colin laughed. "No, this patient is now all worked up. You're mine all night." He rubbed his growing erection on Dennis's hip and felt Dennis press back as a smile spread on his face. They were as in tune as ever.

Chapter Five

Two weeks of peaceful and visionless nights later, Dennis believed his life might be on track. Dozing in the wake of good sex, Dennis felt the hot form of Colin where he always dreamed he'd be: lying in bed next to him. As he woke, Dennis ran a hand over Colin's flat stomach. It seemed real. When Colin's thick cock pulsed in Dennis's hand, he knew it was.

Not sure how long they'd last this round, Dennis slid onto Colin face-to-face and let their bodies line up. They handled things so differently. Their skin color was nothing compared to their approaches, and yet they stayed so in tune with each other in quiet moments like this. As he kissed Colin slowly, letting the heat and comfort seep into them, Dennis pressed his growing shaft between Colin's balls. The friction as he gently rubbed their bodies together made Dennis want to keep Colin forever. Nothing should drag them apart.

Colin groaned, returning the kiss with his eyes still shut. His hands held Dennis suddenly, one braced on the back of his neck and the other squeezed his ass in a pinch.

Breaking the kiss, Colin reached for the lube resting on the nightstand. "Another night ambush," Colin said.

Dennis nipped at Colin's chin and thrust harder as Colin added the slick lube to the mix. "You love it." He reached down and jerked Colin's cock as he thrust between his balls.

"I've missed this. I've missed you so much." Colin's voice caught as his hips lifted.

Holding Colin tighter, Dennis buried his face in his lover's neck. Together was hard; apart was dysfunctional. Grinding harder, Dennis lost himself in the feel of Colin's hard body and loving energy. Colin tried to move his hips, but Dennis kept him pinned.

Colin's hand tightened on Dennis. He was close to release.

"Damn it, Dennis!" Colin came in shudders that rocked the bed.

One release sparked another as Dennis gave in and thrust hard on Colin's sac. Their cum mixed between their bodies as they caught their breath.

At this rate, Dennis knew they'd be fucking all night. He rolled off Colin quickly and checked the clock. Already 9:00 p.m.? He wanted to stop time and make tonight go on forever.

"Don't even try to kick me out. We're just getting started." Colin folded his arms behind his head.

Dennis smiled back. "You're not going anywhere, but I could use a shower. Athena's incense gets into clothes and skin."

"She likes the strong stuff. I'll keep you company." Colin followed him into the bathroom.

At home with Colin felt natural. Dennis lathered with soap before handing it to Colin.

"Athena does have it a bit girly in there. Maybe it needs a little more balance?" Colin wondered out loud. "Get some of those great Chinese dragons. Herbs, teas, and the dragon icons. That'd add some masculine energy."

"Tone down the incense a bit. That stuff from India is too strong." Dennis ran a soapy washcloth over Colin's strong back.

"Consider it done. I didn't even notice it with you in the room," Colin said.

Dennis leaned back and looked. Colin's face seemed blank except for an eye twitch. Dennis knew that twitch!

For most people, it'd signal stress. For Colin, it meant a strong psychic vision. Colin closed his eyes and braced his hands on Dennis's shoulders.

"What is it?" Dennis asked.

Blinking, Colin shook off the haze. "Where's your sister?"

"Mary? Off for a long weekend with her latest boyfriend. Why?" The last question was a reflex. He knew why. "What's wrong?"

"The boyfriend is bad news. We need to get to her now!" Colin looked down.

Dennis could feel how bad it was as the tension vibrated off Colin. He couldn't let himself panic. "What is it?"

Colin shook his head. "Not sure yet, but it's dangerous."

The mission set in. Dennis blocked the old memories and fears in his past. He'd lost someone before; he couldn't lose his sister. On autopilot to get out of the house, Dennis made sure they were rinsed and turned off the shower. Heading out, he grabbed a towel. His sister had lousy taste in men, but Colin had never gotten a vision of problems before. It had to be bad. Luckily with Colin, he usually got the information in time.

Grabbing his cell, Dennis dialed as he dried himself off. His sister's cell phone went straight to voice mail. He dialed the only other option, his mom. Two minutes with his mother and he had the hotel name and something about a concert. Ending the call, Dennis pulled clothes on and looked for Colin. "She's about an hour away at some concert."

Already dressed, Colin shoved his feet into his shoes without bothering to put on socks. "I'll drive."

"We'll take my SUV." Dennis handed over the keys. He'd get them killed racing to reach Mary.

When Colin stopped on the way to the door, he grabbed the stun gun from the drawer. Dennis's heart nearly stopped. "How bad is it? Is this guy on drugs?"

Colin shrugged. "It's not clear. We've got to get there. I want this just in case."

After piling into the car, Colin drove with an urgency that scared Dennis. "If he's hurt her, I'll kill him."

Without taking his eyes off the road, Colin grabbed Dennis's hand. Dennis squeezed it. If it weren't for Colin, he'd never have known. Not in time, anyway. Fate wanted them together and his sister alive. If she lived, Dennis made a silent vow that he'd never fight fate again.

"Okay?" Colin asked.

"Is Mary?" Dennis replied.

"We'll get there. We will." Colin increased his speed and changed lanes to pass slower-moving cars.

Staring out at the night didn't help. Dennis looked to Colin. The resolve in his face touched and terrified Dennis. Bad. How badly he couldn't tell. Not that Colin would give him details if he asked. They couldn't do anything until they arrived. It had to be a paranormal creature involved, or else Colin would've called the police immediately. That unspoken truth between them scared Dennis all the more.

Colin sped down the back roads, well lit thanks to the full moon. Dennis marveled at Colin's ability to navigate based on his visions alone. He couldn't have drawn a map, but he could follow that intuition to the very spot.

The two-lane road had tons of potholes, but it was faster than the clogged main highway. Dennis waited for the bright lights of the concert stadium, but nothing. His stomach fell as Colin turned off the main road and pulled into the hotel parking lot.

“No concert? Is it over?” Dennis expected a public scene or something in the parking lot. People nearby could come to Mary’s aid. This dingy motel frazzled Dennis’s nerves further.

“They never made it to the concert.” Colin parked and shut off the truck. Before he exited, he grabbed the stun gun.

Dennis followed Colin as Colin followed his gut to the right room. They stopped outside door number ten, and Colin tried the knob. In this area, Dennis would want a weapon without knowing about the danger beforehand. Why was his sister here?

Muffled screams and growls came from inside. “What the hell?” Dennis pushed Colin away from the door and kicked it open with a rage he’d felt only once before.

“Get back!” Colin yelled and charged into the room, stun gun first.

* * * * *

His vision had turned out dead-on. Colin hoped he’d overreacted because of Dennis, but a full-size werewolf beat on the door to the motel bathroom. The dingy room stank of fear and werewolf. The phone lay on the floor, ripped from the wall, no doubt Mary’s first attempt to get help. The drab fifties wallpaper gave an eerie hue behind the seven-foot-tall monster. The door to the bathroom clattered, and Colin feared it’d splinter shortly.

He surveyed the room again for any tactical advantage. The creature could flee via the window, but if they hadn’t scared him off yet, they’d have to subdue him. Not even the lamp looked sturdy enough to knock the werewolf out. Colin prayed Dennis had kept the stun gun charged properly. Traditional guns did more harm to humans than to paranormal beings. Out of the corner of his eye, Colin saw Dennis advance. “Wait,” Colin whispered.

Dennis followed Colin in. "A werewolf? No!"

The noise turned the mangy creature's attention—from mating or attacking or whatever he'd planned to do with Mary—to the intruders. Colin felt alive. He wanted to fight this type of danger. The fact that it was Dennis's sister only added pressure and a variable. The werewolf loomed over them, tall and bulky. The long hair hung in patches, indicating plenty of fights. The cold brown eyes revealed not a hint of humanity, and then suddenly he snarled a low growl of warning. All the chance they'd get to run.

Flipping the stun gun to the highest setting, Colin held it out. He'd prove to Dennis that these creatures could be handled safely. "I told you the boyfriend was bad news."

The werewolf charged, and Colin struck, holding the stun gun hard to the creature's skin. Snarling, it sank to its knees and fell to the floor. Colin held the gun for a few more seconds to be sure the werewolf was out.

Dennis stepped over the slumped body to reach the bathroom. "Mary, it's me. Open up."

The half-broken door swung open, and Mary threw herself at her brother. Sobbing, she hugged him tightly. Colin smiled. This work was what he and Dennis could do together, not just for family but for all.

"You okay, Mary?" Colin asked.

"What is that thing? All of a sudden he just changed." She rubbed her eyes. "I'm not crazy. I didn't do any drugs, I swear."

"It's real, Mary. It's a werewolf." Colin used the phone cord to tie the creature's limbs in case it woke up.

"It can't be real." Mary limped toward him.

"It's real. What kind of crowd are you in with?" Dennis looked her over. "You're hurt."

"Worse." Colin stared at her leg. "She's been bitten."

"No." Dennis looked closely. "You said we'd get here in time."

"She's alive, isn't she? It'll be okay." Colin grabbed the gun and headed for the door. "Let's get out of here."

"What about Jerry?" Mary pointed to the hairy beast.

"He'll wake up and break free. Those won't hold him for long." Dennis ushered his sister out the door and closed it behind them.

Colin started the SUV as Dennis put Mary in the backseat. Normally he'd bring the werewolf back, but they didn't have the right restraints or a tranquilizer gun for safety. Also he lacked any suitable accommodations to hold it. He wasn't prepared for this level of work with creatures yet. When it came to Mary, however, he had no choice.

"He bit my leg when I kicked him away. Do I need shots or something?" Mary had a swollen lip and scratches on her arms.

"No shots will fix it," Colin replied.

"Fix what?" Mary asked.

"Shut up and drive," Dennis snapped. He turned to check on Mary. "It'll be okay. Just rest."

Colin shot a glare at Dennis as he pulled onto the road. "It's the first night. Two more to go this cycle."

"Jerry does that three nights a month?" Mary looked stunned and scared. "It's got to be a bad dream. Maybe he spiked my drink."

Mary seemed too emotionally fragile to handle the truth about herself when she'd just had her first confrontation with the dark underworld. Squeezing the steering wheel, Colin concentrated on the road and a plan of action they'd need, for the next two nights at least. With Dennis in this state of emergency, Colin had to be the practical one.

"Your boyfriend will be fine, Mary. Don't worry. But we need to get you medical attention." Colin grabbed his cell and speed dialed Athena.

"I'll heal her. Go to my house," Dennis said.

Colin nodded as Athena answered. "You saved the day," she said.

"Not exactly. I need a favor." Colin knew Athena would help. If only he'd outfitted the shop like he wanted. At least then he could handle both werewolves now.

"Of course, darling."

"You know my phase two part of the plan for the basement?" He hoped he wouldn't have to say too much.

"The cages? Yes. Why?"

"I need at least one up and secure by tomorrow night."

Athena paused. "I don't think so. It's a weekend, and they aren't cheap, love. What's the crisis? Your emotions are all over the place, and I can't read you now."

"Werewolf." Colin didn't want to alarm Mary or tip off Dennis just yet on his plan, but the logistics needed to begin now.

"That girl?"

"Yes."

"You're sure?" she asked.

"Ninety-nine percent sure. If it costs more, I'll cover it. Get it done. Pull some demon or goddess favors if you have to. I don't care." His voice caught. This was for Dennis's little sister, a sweet girl with a soft spot for troubled men. But troubled and dangerous were hard to differentiate without a little psychic help.

"What are you spending money on now?" Dennis asked.

"Trust me, I'm not your main concern right now." Colin kept one eye on Mary in the rearview mirror and one on the road as he drove home.

Forty-five minutes later, Dennis carried Mary into the house. Colin heated up soup and made a few sandwiches as Dennis worked on healing his sister. Finally Dennis emerged.

"She's asleep?" Colin asked.

Dennis nodded wearily and sat at the table with slumped shoulders. "She'll turn tomorrow night. It was a deep bite. We'll explain the details to her in the morning."

Putting a bowl of soup and a sandwich in front of Dennis, Colin leaned against his back, pouring energy into him.

"Don't."

Colin could feel Dennis fighting it. "She'll be fine. It's your turn." Colin kissed the back of Dennis's neck.

Dennis's fist hit the table. "She's a damn werewolf now. I don't need your energy. We were too late. Now she's one of *your* evil creatures."

"Mine?" Colin stung at the harsh words.

"I should've killed him." Dennis shook his head.

"It wouldn't have changed what happened to Mary. Besides, dead werewolves revert back to human form, and you'd be wanted for murder. It's not all just poof and dust like a vampire. I won't let that happen to you. We'll keep him away from her now."

"How? How can I control a werewolf? Him or her? When she turns, she'll kill me as easily as any stranger."

"Athena is working on it."

"Great, drag more people into this. What? Has she got the coven chanting to cure Mary?"

"That's not cool." Colin felt Dennis's rage, and it showed no sign of subsiding. He didn't mean the backhanded insults. If only he'd take control instead of letting it scare him. Dennis had nearly gotten turned into a vampire back in college, but now it was too late for Dennis's sister. Lashing out wouldn't help. In his exhausted, emotionally drained state, Dennis could do nothing constructive. She was a werewolf. "Athena's getting a cage installed in the basement of the store. One of my plans. We just have to

move it up.” Colin couldn’t fix it; all he could do was help. After what Dennis went through, this would only confuse him more.

Dennis frowned. “A cage?”

“It will contain Mary tomorrow night. She’ll be safe and won’t be able to hurt you or others.”

“That’s crazy! This is my sister. You’re building a werewolf prison?”

“More of a shelter. A place to help her adjust. The first few months, we’ll help her stay safe until she finds a stable pack that doesn’t attack humans. What else can we do?”

Dennis shook his head. “It should’ve been me.” The reality weighed too heavily. Colin could feel his denial and rage.

“Don’t go there. It’s no one’s fault. I’m sorry it happened, Dennis. I’m really sorry I didn’t get the vision sooner. I wish I could undo it, but I’m doing the best I can to help. This is why we need to be out there, helping people. There are other people like your sister and her boyfriend who need it.”

“You’re crazy! You can’t possibly handle all that. You could end up—”

“No, I’m not crazy. I can use my powers to help instead of waiting until people come to me with problems. I’ll go to them. Mary would be dead if we didn’t go tonight. Is that better? She fell in with a random werewolf, so let her die?” Colin walked toward the back door. “It’s okay to save your sister, but no one else is worth it?”

“I didn’t say that. I don’t know what’s better. I don’t know anything anymore. I thought if I stayed away, I’d be free of this.” Dennis glared at the table.

“Ignoring it won’t make it go away. Bring Mary to the Oracle before sunset tomorrow. There’s nothing else we can do for her now.” Colin left the house feeling torn. He wanted to stay and help Dennis come to terms. At the moment, Colin represented the werewolf, vampire, and demon world Dennis resented even more deeply now that his sister had fallen victim. The rift between them had grown wider.

No matter what happened between Dennis and Colin, Dennis would bring Mary in for help tomorrow night. Colin would be waiting for them. For now, he had to go to the Oracle and get to work on the basement.

Chapter Six

After a weird night of reliving his college vampire encounter and waking to debate the situation and how to tell his sister, Dennis found himself curled up on the couch. Apparently he'd slept, but he felt like hell. Maybe if he'd been turned into a vampire years ago, he'd have more endurance? Vampires seemed to have limitless power. Undead had to feel better than the walking dead.

The smell of pancakes wafted from the kitchen. For a split second, he hoped Colin had returned, but as his mind cleared, Dennis knew Colin wasn't in the house.

Mary poked her head into the living room with a smile. "Breakfast?"

"You're feeling better?" He headed in and poured himself a cup of coffee.

"Much better, thanks to you." She deposited three fluffy pancakes on a plate. The table was set for three. "Where's Colin? Did he have an early appointment?"

"No, he left last night." He focused on the food.

"Oh no! Dennis, why do you keep doing this? I'd kill to find a single, straight guy that's as good for me as Colin is for you." Mary filled her plate high and poured on syrup.

Her choice of words sent a chill up Dennis's spine. She could kill and would have no clue. "I didn't kick him out. I was upset about you last night and acted like a jerk."

"It was just a matter of time before he'd stop putting up with you. You get back together and then break up. You don't know what you've got." She wagged her fork at him.

Dennis folded his hands, unable to eat. They had to talk. "I know what I have. Relationships aren't easy. Are you even going to mention last night?"

Mary set her fork down and took a drink of coffee. "I don't know what to say. It feels like a bad dream. Bad night. Bad boyfriend. I want to forget it."

He understood the denial. It's exactly how he'd reacted to the vampire revelation. Big-brother mode kicked in. That same protective instinct that made him act like a jerk to the man he loved. He'd deal with Colin later. Mary's life hung in the balance, and she was family. If she didn't take this seriously, she'd end up dead or the cause of someone else's death. "It was no dream. Jerry is a werewolf. Three nights a month he turns and clearly isn't in control of himself."

"Three nights?" she repeated.

"The nights before, after, and during the full moon," he explained.

"I deal with PMS for at least three days a month, so this werewolf thing should be nothing." She laughed, but her gaze darted randomly over the table as though in a daze.

He chuckled softly. "Glad you're keeping a sense of humor about it. Most werewolves run in packs and hunt smaller animals. Some lone ones don't know what they are and end up killing people."

She shook her head. "How could they? Jerry couldn't."

"They don't know that they've done it. Jerry may not even remember last night. In werewolf form, humans are easy prey for werewolves."

"I should call him. We can help." She stood and looked around.

"Your purse and cell are in the living room, but just sit down for now." Jerry wasn't his first priority.

"Did you or Colin kill him?" Her voice came out a scared whisper as she sank back in the chair. "I don't remember. Did it get that bad?"

"No, he was alive when we left him. This is about you right now, Mary. Jerry bit you."

"But I'm fine now. You healed me." She put two barely cooked sausages on her plate.

Dennis hadn't even smelled them cooking. His stomach turned at the reddish grease on the plate. "I can't heal that. Your wound is gone, but the result of a werewolf bite is that now *you* are a werewolf." He took a slow breath. The changes had begun in his sister. She'd always preferred her meat well-done before.

Mary stared at the pink meat. "You mean I'll turn into one of those wild, hairy beasts every month?" Her face went pale, and her eyes glistened as her lower lip quivered.

His hand covered her shaking wrist and brought it to rest on the table. "Tonight, yes, you'll turn. But don't worry; we'll make sure you're safe."

"We? Who is 'we'?" Her eyes filled with tears, but her face hardened. "You and Colin? You ran him off!"

"That's not really the point, Mary." She could be angry at him, but it wouldn't change the facts. "Denial won't help now. You need to calm down and deal with it."

Tears streamed down her face. "It's real?" she gasped.

He held her hand. She was in shock. Mary's entire body trembled. Time was the only antidote for her pain, but until then, he'd help her deal.

"It'll be fine. Colin said to bring you by Athena's Oracle tonight before sunset. They'll have a setup for you by then. Colin's pissed at me. He got stressed just like I did over you being in danger. He cares about you. Don't worry; he'll get over it. He had the vision that saved you."

"And you blew him off and were mean. I need all the help I can get!"

Mary's denial deepened. He could tell she'd focused on his problem with Colin to avoid her own issue. "I healed you and was exhausted. He'll understand. If it were his family, I'd understand." They put up with a lot from each other, but the idea that he might've gone too far this time haunted him. Colin would understand. He *had* to.

She nodded unconvincingly, like a trauma victim. How could he remain objective about his sister? Dennis didn't really know what to think. His mind spun in so many directions he couldn't reach out to Colin the way he wanted. The way he always could.

"You keep pushing him away. One of these times, he won't come back." Mary's hands shook as she wiped away the tears.

"He will." Dennis dismissed the idea. He counted on Colin as a constant in his life. "Or I'll go after him. Don't worry about us."

"Is he here now? Did he even call to check on me?" She stirred her coffee slowly. "He knows more about this werewolf thing, doesn't he?"

Reality had sunk in, and Dennis sighed with relief. Mary needed to focus on her new state and not worry about his relationship. "Colin and Athena both know a lot. We'll go by early, and you can ask all the questions you want today or tomorrow. Whatever is wrong between Colin and me, he won't hold it against you. I really try to stay away from that world he seems to love. That's why..." Dennis shook his head.

"That's why you two broke up?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I don't know why he has this compulsion to live in that world and help them. Vampires, witches, werewolves. They're very dangerous."

"Yes. I guess *we* are." Mary chewed her lip uneasily. "You knew about it and never told me this stuff even existed."

He nearly slapped himself. "I didn't mean it like that. You're an innocent victim of all this. You don't belong in this world."

"And I'm the *only* innocent victim?" She rolled her eyes at him. "Colin tries to help, and you don't like that? Dennis, you always liked that cowboy crap."

"I never dated a cowboy. This is Chicago." He frowned.

"No, I mean that whole *good guys wear white, bad guys wear black*. You stay on the good side, and you're the hero. Life isn't black-and-white. Colin gets that."

"Being around that stuff, even for the right reasons, is dangerous. Only a few werewolf packs around here are really stable and safe. You deserve better."

"We're talking about you and Colin. Whatever I need to do to be safe and not be dangerous to others, I'll do it. I'll learn and decide what's best for me. It's still too new. If I think about it, I'm going to get hysterical. Three nights a month isn't so bad. At least I can still get a tan. Vampires can't tan." She smiled weakly. "See? Jokes I can handle right now. You'll make sure I'm safe. Who is protecting Colin?"

Dennis tensed. "He can handle himself."

"True. You can take care of yourself too, but you're better with Colin around. I don't want to think about last night without him. If he's out there helping and saving people every night, and you're not backing him up..."

He didn't want to think about it either. Alone, Dennis would've done something very stupid by overreacting. "You think I should join the dark side?" He couldn't tell her about his wild college time and the trauma that followed. Mary didn't need the ugly details of his near-vampire experience.

"No, but if you're going to use *Star Wars* metaphors on me, would you rather be Han Solo who joins up to help fight or someone who just sits on the sidelines and lets the dark side take over?"

Laughter erupted from Dennis as his memory flooded. "Colin has a theory about Han Solo and Luke Skywalker."

Mary giggled. "He has that fantasy theory about everyone. So you go get your Luke and act out some fantasy of his."

The fear not the fantasy took over. "Colin needs to calm down first. He's busy with preparations at the Oracle, and we've got to go to your place. Too much to do. I'll worry about my sex life later."

"Why?" she asked.

"We're going to your place to get some things for tonight. Fresh clothes. I want to check that Jerry didn't go there and rip your place to shreds looking for you. Luckily, he didn't track you here."

"You think he'll come after me?"

"Don't know, but don't worry about it. You'll be safe tonight. We'll make sure you're secure. When he's a werewolf, he may not realize what he's doing. If you want to call him and feel him out today, that's up to you. Colin didn't seem to think much of him. It's possible he only recently turned."

"He was a wild guy. I'm done with wild men." She looked at the clock. "Let's go to my place. Then I want to help Colin and meet this Athena."

Dennis understood and admired his sister's resolve to take matters into her own hands. She lingered in a state of shock and denial, which was probably best. Right now, Dennis thought denial felt really comfortable. He'd screwed up all these years, playing cowboy and yet not getting in too deep. He couldn't change the world, but he could protect humans and especially Colin from the darker side.

* * * * *

Colin placed a large jug of water in the back of the cage as Athena began to hang curtains around it. "Curtains? Really?" Athena had taken the cage request to heart, but she had gone above and beyond for a rush job.

"Okay, I've had it with you!" she snapped. "You need to go meditate or something, because I'm going to kick your cute black ass in about two seconds."

Taking a deep breath, Colin couldn't relax. He'd moped in a foul mood all night and worked nonstop to have this ready. Mary's safety was all that mattered. "They're coming."

"I can feel them." Athena glanced out the small basement window that let in the sun. "It's only five o'clock. They're early."

"I'm done with Dennis," Colin said.

"Good." Athena hung the last bit of blue curtain and added a big pillow to the floor of the cage.

"I mean it." Colin had experienced this side of Dennis before, but last night clinched it for him. "He'll never change. Never understand. He refuses to let the past go. He won't tell me what the *real* problem is. I believed he would for too long."

Athena turned and came toward him, belly chains jingling. "I know. I believed it too. You're hurt." She hugged him.

"I'm done." He let the anger flow and pushed the hurt away. "I'm right. I'm clear on my job, and I won't let Dennis pull me away from the Oracle."

Athena pulled back and shrugged.

"You think I'll go back. Never." How could he have wasted so much time on a man who refused to try and see the other side of things? Stupid!

"I think *never* is a bad word. Dennis will *never* change. You'll *never* go back. I don't deal in absolutes. People are irrational, erratic, and ironic. In time, you'll both find your way, with or without each other. I feel you're very close to something. It's a good change, if you're open to it."

Colin suppressed his shock. Athena always had an opinion. "I'm always open. You don't care if Dennis and I aren't together?"

"I care that you're happy. I trust the universe. What's best will happen unless you're both so stubborn that you won't allow it. So relax and accept the inevitable." She lit a stick of incense, releasing a subtle floral fragrance.

The front door chimed, and Colin tensed. "I don't want to see him."

Athena blinked her long black lashes. "Please, what a lie. If you need to punish him, punish him. Get angry and let him know. Let it out! We have implements in the adult's-only room that will do it safely. Just remember tonight is about Mary."

Nodding, Colin inwardly scolded himself. He'd known Mary for years, and she needed his help now. "It's not about Dennis and me this time." As much as Colin understood Dennis's bad behavior the night before, Colin had been shoved away one too many times. If ever there was good cause for Dennis to realize how much help Colin needed to bridge the worlds and keep humans and nonhumans safe, this case showed it. But he'd put the blinders on yet again.

"That's right. It's about *Mary*." Athena opened the door at the bottom of the basement stairs to let their guests in. Normally left open, tonight the basement door had multiple locks.

"Hi. You're Athena?" Mary asked.

"Yes, dear. Don't worry; you're in good hands." Athena took the overnight backpack from Mary and set it in the corner.

"Thanks. Hi, Colin." Mary walked over and hugged him tight. "Thanks for last night. I didn't get a chance to tell you then. I was a mess. Still am, but I have my manners back."

"Don't worry about it. Dennis fixed you up. I didn't do anything." Colin refused to look at Dennis, but something felt off. No doubt Dennis battled with the reality that his sister had turned werewolf.

All his instincts told Colin to go and comfort Dennis, but his anger held him back. Dennis deserved no better for dismissing Colin and the underworld population. One bad encounter and he labeled them all evil forever. Colin hated that Mary had to pay the price, but she'd chosen her company. Bad things happened to good people daily.

"So where are you going to lock me up?" Mary's forced smile hit Colin in the heart.

Colin pointed to the cage wrapped in blue silken curtains. "Athena made it nice and cozy."

Mary headed over, and Athena showed her the pillows and supplies.

As Dennis approached, Colin pulsed to fully tense with every muscle flexed. He didn't know what to expect.

"I'm sorry about last night." Dennis's hand slid up Colin's arm. "I couldn't handle it all. Not my sister."

Colin pulled away in a calm, controlled manner. Violence against those who committed violence was one thing. Colin had never hit a friend or lover, but this so tempted him.

"You're pissed; I get that. I deserve it. Can't we talk?"

Shaking his head, Colin stared at Mary in the cage. "I'm here for your sister. We're done." He'd never said those words to Dennis before. History showed that Dennis couldn't handle it and broke things off. Colin finally had to agree. Now the tables had turned.

Dennis looked around. "What?"

The shock Colin felt running through Dennis gave him some odd satisfaction. He'd always chased after Dennis, getting things back together. No more chasing. "You win. You don't want to be with me. It's over. This is my life now. Helping everyone. You can't handle it, and I can't chase you anymore."

"This is crazy." Dennis leaned in. "You said it's fate. We both know this is it."

"Fate can change with the will of people and their choices." Colin stepped back, feeling calmer still as he got the pressure off his chest. For so long the power had seesawed. Now Colin had control in his own life again. He wouldn't let Dennis yank him around by his heart ever again. It was broken.

"No, that's not what I want," Dennis said.

"It's not up to you anymore." Colin walked toward Mary. "There are tranquilizer guns here in case anyone tries to get to you or you try to hurt yourself. Athena has backup to guard the outside when it gets dark. You won't be able to escape."

"We talked to Jerry. He didn't know what he is. He's going to stay locked in his brother's wine cellar. I should be fine," Mary said.

"Good." Colin nodded. If Mary needed to be tranquilized, she'd never remember it, so there was no point in alarming her. Jerry wasn't the only werewolf that needed to be contained.

"Colin." Dennis walked up behind him.

"I'm going. Athena can fill you in on whatever you need." Colin directed his words to Mary.

"You two need to talk. The pain and tension is making me ill." Athena waved at them. "I'll call your cells if I need you."

"I'm staying with my sister tonight." Dennis looked to Colin and back to Mary as though torn.

"No, I'm staying with her." Athena stomped her sandaled foot. "I've got soothing music and chanting to do. Once you're gone, I'll put a protective spell around the place, and we'll be fine. There's too much testosterone around, and it'll antagonize a female werewolf. I have Sean coming in to protect the exterior. He's a vampire, so he won't really bother you, but he's strong enough to handle whatever shows up. Better than Colin or Dennis."

Mary's face scrunched. "Dennis is my brother."

"As a werewolf, especially at first, you won't remember much and won't recognize anyone. It's best to keep calm and neutral surroundings. The fewer people the better, and no men right now. Especially stressed and lovesick men." She winked at Mary.

"Yeah, go talk you two. I don't want the big blowout to be because of me. This is hard enough without that guilt." Mary folded her arms.

"It's not," the men answered in unison.

"Then take it outside and resolve it one way or the other before I cast a spell on you." Athena tapped her long fingernail on the table next to the tranquilizer gun.

"Fine." Dennis headed upstairs.

Colin waited, catching Athena's eye. He could hear the word *closure* rolling through her mind. If nothing else, he deserved to have that. He made his way up the stairs. Dennis waited with fear in his eyes.

"Let's go to your place." Colin sighed.

Dennis started to smile.

"There may be yelling." Colin slammed the front door behind him and went for his car.

Chapter Seven

Never in their years of on-again, off-again had Dennis seen Colin so angry. Mary's assessment proved correct. Dennis had pushed Colin too far and ruined everything.

Entering the house, Dennis watched the driveway, half expecting Colin not to show. When the old sedan turned in, Dennis exhaled. It wasn't a forever cutoff. If Colin wanted to talk, Dennis had a chance to change things and make it right.

Colin walked in slowly and stood still in the foyer. No pacing or knuckle cracking. He seemed to have made peace with the breakup being final.

Pain and terror tore through Dennis. He had to undo what he'd done. "Thank you for taking care of Mary."

"Don't worry about that. It's what I do now." Colin wasn't making this easy.

"I'm sorry. I was a jerk last night. I was in over my head, and I turned on the one person I really needed." Dennis took a step forward.

Colin took a step back. "You don't like my world. You've made it perfectly clear. I'm sure you wish it wasn't your sister. I do too. But none of that changes anything."

"It wasn't that." Dennis didn't know how to explain his realization.

"Please, I've listened to it for years. Demons and evil creatures. One bad experience in college and you're an expert on all of them. Think of all the people you

could help if you'd get involved instead of avoiding it completely. You never would face your fear and go deeper to the real problem. It serves you right now you've got one in the family." Colin turned toward the door.

"It's not that. Listen to me."

"I thought a gay guy would be more tolerant. Try to help *all* people. Maybe you can't get over that guy you had to stake? First love still stuck in your heart? Wish I were him? Is that why you'd never tell me the real issue? That's what's keeping us apart." Colin reached for the door.

"No!" Dennis slid between Colin and the front door. "You're the only man I want. That was college. It'd never have lasted. I cared about him, and the guilt has never let up. But I'd choose you any day. Over anyone. You know that deep down. Talking to Mary today, I realized what the real issue was. It finally became clear."

"You're afraid the evil things will *get* you? Maybe that I'll turn evil and turn on you?"

Dennis shoved Colin back a foot. "I don't give a damn about myself. It's *you!*"

"Me?" Colin's verbal offensive halted.

"Yes. Every time you did something in that underworld, I couldn't sleep. I worried about you. With the human stuff, there are police, lots of protection, and backup. In that other world, there's nothing. I barely survived a vampire attack. If you go looking to change things daily...odds are you—"

"So I get vamped, and you won't want me?" Colin stepped closer. "We both know that's not true."

"No." Dennis grabbed the man he loved by the shirt and pulled him into a hard kiss. "I love you. I want you any way, but I need you here. If you died—"

"I can take care of myself," Colin argued. "I won't die!"

Dennis wrapped his arms around Colin as the memories flooded his mind. All the times Colin had put his life in danger. "I can't face the idea of you dying, so I tried to

keep you away from it. Now my sister. I can't fight every creature out there. I can't keep you safe."

"We can't save the world." Slowly Colin's arms came up around Dennis and held him tighter and tighter. "I'm not going to die. Not for a long time. When we're old and on Viagra."

"You don't know that. Every time you work one of those cases, it's a risk. I used all the other excuses because I couldn't face what it'd do to me to lose *you*. I realize now it was dumb and passive aggressive. It wasn't intentional. You're so much more than that guy in college. You came out and changed your life for me. I wasn't trying to hold out; I just couldn't face losing you. I've never loved anyone like this. I won't let anything happen to you." Dennis felt the weight of denial lift until only truth existed between them.

He'd put the truth of his feelings out there, and whatever Colin did, it'd be based on reality. His mind had excused his behavior based on history. But love and the fear of loss kept him in that limbo too long.

Colin's lips brushed his cheek, and Dennis went from hopeful to pure joy. "I love you," Dennis whispered.

"Me too. God, you're such a pain in the ass." Colin pulled him toward the bedroom. "So no more breakups?"

"No, never." Dennis tugged at Colin's shirt.

"And my work with Athena on this underworld stuff?" Colin yanked Dennis's shirt off and worked on his jeans.

"Do as much as you want. I'll back you up." Dennis stood naked in the bedroom, aroused and, for the first time, content with every bit of his life.

Colin pushed Dennis onto the bed and stripped off the rest of his clothing. "You don't have to be a part of it. Just not having you fight me is enough." He leaned over Dennis and kissed him slowly.

Dennis eagerly pulled him closer. Colin's hard body made him feel safe and free. "I want to. It's safer if I know where you are and can protect you."

Smiling, Colin kissed his shoulder. "You're so old-fashioned."

Dennis chuckled as Colin kissed down his chest. "You'll deal with it? We're partners in everything. You might not like working together, but you're stuck now." He thought back to the case that'd reunited them, and he knew their new business venture would work.

"There are worse things than having you back me up in *every* way." Colin sucked the tip of Dennis's cock into his mouth.

Thrusting slowly, Dennis moaned as the rush of lust and love took over. "So you'll get rid of your apartment and move in?" His hands rubbed over Colin's head, urging him on.

Colin paused, and Dennis looked down. Was that too far too fast?

"I love you." Colin kissed his hips tenderly. "Yeah, I'll move in."

Sighing, Dennis lifted his hips. "Don't stop, or you won't get a turn."

Colin licked his balls over and over and up Dennis's shaft to tease the head slowly. "I'm going to fuck you senseless."

"Not tonight. I'm sucking you dry first." Dennis caught Colin's eye, and all doubt evaporated from them both.

"We'll see." Colin rolled his tongue around the tip of Dennis's erection.

His hips snapped and Dennis reached to pull Colin down farther. "Suck it. Swallow it now."

Slowly, Colin gave in, sucking his way down to the base and letting his tongue tease what he could reach. His hand toyed with Dennis's sac, and Dennis reacted by fucking up and digging his fingers in Colin's hair.

It was just too much. Dennis pushed Colin down until he swallowed it all. "I can't last," Dennis grunted as his hips jerked.

Colin held tight and teased the shaft as Dennis jerked one final time and came in hard pulses. Easing back, the release flowed through Dennis as he gave into his life and love. Colin played, sucking and nipping at Dennis's spent member. But when Dennis heard Colin digging for the lube in the drawer, playtime was over.

Pulling Colin next to him on the bed, Dennis put the lube away and pinned Colin down with one hand on his chest. "My turn."

"Don't tease. You need to be fucked." Colin moaned.

Dennis couldn't deny his need for Colin, but first he needed to blow this man. Starting at Colin's muscled upper thigh, Dennis kissed up to Colin's sac. As Colin relaxed, Dennis licked the tender underside of his balls and sucked them into his mouth, rolling them with his tongue.

"Quit playing." Colin lifted.

Biting down gently, Dennis got the response he craved. Colin arched for more. When Dennis released his balls, he kissed up Colin's body. "If I were a vampire, you'd be bleeding by now."

"Are you going to blow me or not?" Colin challenged.

Dennis kissed Colin's mouth and wrapped a hand around Colin's cock as they kissed deeper and deeper. He jerked Colin's shaft despite the muffled protests. Dennis knew Colin preferred to fuck him. Secondly, a blowjob would work. A handjob was last on his list. But Dennis needed to feel and claim his man tonight from head to toe.

When Colin started to thrust in time with Dennis's manual attention, Dennis switched back to sucking Colin's hard cock.

"God, you're such a bastard!" Colin shouted.

Dennis sucked Colin's cock deep into his throat and rolled his balls roughly in one hand. In no time, Colin was on the edge again. Dennis slid back to work the tip of the shaft. Colin came in shudders, and Dennis lapped up every drop.

"Better?" Dennis asked.

"You're going to get it," Colin said breathlessly.

"Promises, promises." Dennis kissed his exhausted cock.

"I'm going to fuck you all night and not let you come once."

Dennis smiled. "I don't think that's possible. You're good, but not that good."

"I can be bad."

"Your cock is too big. No matter what you do, I'll get off two times." Dennis pulled the lube out of the drawer and dropped the tube on Colin's chest. "Take your best shot."

* * * * *

"Food first," Colin decided. Climbing out of bed, he found his pants and slid them on. "Chinese?"

"Get almond cookies." Dennis pulled his pants on and followed Colin into the kitchen.

Colin didn't need any help. They'd ordered from the same little hole-in-the-wall forever. He'd missed it during the times when they were broken up. Now, he'd be here without fail. Colin's mom always said it was the little things, and he appreciated every one of them.

"You just want me for my delivery area." Dennis snuggled up behind Colin and kissed his neck.

"They won't deliver to the city," Colin replied. Once the order was in and the quick delivery arrived, Colin and Dennis curled up on the couch with plenty of food.

"You always overorder." Dennis poured soy sauce on the rice.

"That's why you love me. Leftovers for days and days." Colin checked the clock on the wall and then pulled out his cell phone from his pants pocket.

"We keep eating like this, and we're going to have to join a gym." Dennis didn't slow his consumption a bit.

"No, we're in a serious relationship now. Doesn't matter. Besides, we keep chasing werewolves, and we'll stay in great shape." Colin hit the speed dial and hoped Athena would pick up.

"Are you sure we should interrupt her?" Dennis asked.

"Just checking. Athena will be expecting one of us to call."

Athena finally picked up. "You two came up for air?" she teased.

"And Chinese food. Want me to order you some?" he offered.

"No, thank you. I ate. Glad you two are doing okay."

"Mary? How's she doing?" Colin flipped the speakerphone feature on.

"Relax, I've got it all under control. Mary is just fine. Tired herself out trying to get free but finally fell asleep."

"She didn't hurt herself, did she?" Dennis put the food aside.

"Goddess no. Calm down, Dennis. She's aggressive, but not the worst werewolf I've seen by any means. We're doing good." Athena yawned.

"You're going to stay all night?" Colin asked.

"Sure. Either of you would set her off. Sean is here if I need a break. Tomorrow it'll be better."

"No outside problems?"

"Nothing has tried to get in. At first, she howled a bit, and I was concerned she'd attract something, but nothing replied. The burbs are quiet, Colin. You were right on that point." She laughed softly.

"Well, I can't thank you enough," Dennis said. "You're a lifesaver."

"I'm a goddess. Besides, what are business partners for? My job is to help. Now go back to bed or your Chinese food...or both. Mary is doing as well as we could hope." Athena ended the call.

Colin snapped the phone shut and grabbed a carton of fried rice. "See, we're good."

Ignoring his food, Dennis leaned over and kissed Colin firmly on his stubbly cheek. "Thanks to you."

Swallowing a mouthful of rice, Colin inched closer and kissed Dennis softly. "She's like my sister. I won't ever let anything bad happen to her if I can help it."

"We. We won't. I'm done sitting on the sidelines and hiding from our reality." Dennis kissed Colin deeper but kept the slow pace until Colin pulled him tight.

Colin groaned. This man knew how to push his buttons, and Colin wouldn't trade Dennis for any other, alive or undead. Their bodies pressed together flush, Colin could feel Dennis's cock growing. "I think we should go back to bed."

Dennis nodded. "You promised me an all-nighter, and I intend to get it."

"But I won't let you come," Colin reminded. "Maybe I'll start with an egg roll."

Dennis lifted an eyebrow. "We're not wasting good food when we've got toys. If you *need* the help. And that's not fair. You've got to be the one screwing my brains out, or it won't work. I can resist toy play, but not your cock. When we're done, you can explain this." Dennis played with Colin's nipple ring.

Colin led the way to the bedroom, removing his pants and tugging Dennis's off as he climbed into bed. Grabbing the lube, Colin coated his cock and then drizzled more over Dennis's hard ass, letting it drip and glisten before rubbing it in the entrance.

In return, Dennis pressed back, and his defined muscles, from thigh to back, tightened. "If you're going to take all night to start, I'll find a toy."

Grinning at Dennis's impatience, Colin pressed his hard black cock and felt the familiar give of Dennis's tight ass. No teasing this time, Colin drove in fully and held. Dennis's back muscles rippled as he adjusted.

Colin kissed along Dennis's broad shoulders and then slid back. He held off, not thrusting until his cock pulsed insistently. Dennis finally ground but uttered no words. Not ready to give in, Colin groped for Dennis's cock, playing with the tip until Dennis thrust into his palm.

“Bastard!” Dennis grumbled.

Rubbing his cock between Dennis’s firm ass cheeks, Colin wanted to pound his lover until they both came in a frenzy. But he’d promised to tease and torment tonight. Slowly he sank his member into Dennis, who pushed back in return, holding his cock tight.

Dennis tried to fuck back, but Colin held his hips still. The sense of oneness flooded him with peace, but the throb of Dennis’s desire urged him on. Two quick, hard thrusts and Dennis twisted and pressed for more.

“At least jerk me off!” Dennis demanded.

Colin nearly told Dennis to do it himself, but Dennis might have, and Colin wanted to see how long they could hold out. Reaching around, Colin pulled on Dennis’s balls, tugging them away from his body and squeezing them.

Enough pleasure to keep Dennis happy, and enough pressure to keep him from coming. “You love it. I don’t want you to get bored with me now that there won’t be any more breakups and make-up sex.” He began to thrust gently.

Dennis moaned. “Never. You’re never boring in or out of bed. Fuck me, or I’ll use an egg roll on you when you’re sleeping.”

The image made Colin laugh and fuck Dennis harder, still holding his sac tight. Suddenly Colin felt Dennis’s ass clenching around his erection.

“Hell yes, I win that one.” Dennis bucked back.

Colin leaned in until his lips touched Dennis’s ear. “I’m going to wear you out tonight.” He released Dennis’s balls and stroked his cock until Dennis grunted and groaned in a second climax.

Self-control in check, Colin thrust hard and steady until he felt Dennis’s insides contract around him. Three times he’d made his lover come before Colin gave into the lust and came deep in Dennis.

Chapter Eight

Dennis woke early. With Colin distracting him last night, he could enjoy things, but thoughts of Mary crept into his dreams. After watching Colin sleep for a few minutes, Dennis slid out of bed and took a quick shower.

Dressing in jeans and a T-shirt, Dennis then rubbed gel in his hair before writing Colin a quick note that promised bagels and expensive coffee when he returned. Sliding into his old gym shoes, Dennis hopped in his SUV.

Nothing felt wrong. Dennis double-checked his gut and instantly felt reassured. He just needed to see his little sister and confirm she'd returned to human form.

Parking in front of the Oracle, Dennis saw Mary's car and Athena's Jeep, painted a lavender cream, still there. Chuckling, Dennis knew he belonged in this world of werewolves, goddesses, and demons. He was the freak in a world of extraordinarily gifted types, just a human with a sixth sense and gift for healing. In a way, Dennis and Colin were outpowered by the paranormal creatures they intended to take on or help, but that wouldn't stop them.

Dennis tried the door but found it locked. He knocked gently and heard the click of heeled sandals that signaled Athena. The door opened to a fresh-looking, perfectly

made-up Greek goddess. All night babysitting a werewolf wearing the same clothes he'd seen her in last night, and she looked clean and bright.

A goddess temporarily trapped in human form, maybe. Dennis had dealt with odder things. But how could anyone prove or disprove her state? It puzzled him. For now, Dennis had a more pressing concern. "How's Mary?" He stepped inside.

"Fine as she can be. She's changing." Athena closed the door and gave him a hug. "You look a lot better than last night."

"Thanks." He half hugged her in return. They usually gave each other more space. "Thanks for staying with her. If it had been the right choice, I'd gladly have done it."

Athena backed away and held up a hand. "Not at all. It's the whole point...to help people. We all do what we can with what we have. Colin wanted to stay too, but it's not the best for her yet. Besides, you and Colin needed to work things out. Such deep emotion can get tangled up occasionally."

The door to the ladies' room opened, and Mary emerged. Her eyes had dark circles under them, and she looked more pale than normal, but she smiled at Dennis. "I wondered when you'd show up." She hugged him hard.

"How are you doing?" he asked.

She shrugged and tucked her hair behind her ears. "As well as can be expected, I guess. Tired. I feel all sweaty and achy."

"You'll adjust better as you change more. Your body will get used to it." Athena waved it off.

"I hope so." Mary nodded. "It still feels like a bad dream."

"I wish I could take it away. Put it out of your mind for now. I'm getting bagels and coffee. You two are welcome to come back to the house for breakfast. I know Colin would love to see you." Dennis owed them much more, but at the moment, he had no better ideas.

“Not for me, thanks. I’m going to meditate, freshen up, and get on with my day.” Athena flipped the lights on in the store so there was more than sunshine to illuminate her products.

“Me either. I need a shower and my bed. I’m glad you and Colin are okay again. That’s a huge relief. I owe you two my life. It’ll take time to adjust to this reality. Knowing you and Colin are together is reassuring. Some things are right in the world.” Mary turned and hugged Athena. “Don’t worry; I’ll be back tonight before sundown. Thanks again.”

“No problem. And here.” Athena grabbed a box of tea off a shelf. “It’ll help you sleep and soothe those aches. Great for cramps too!”

“Great.” Mary slid the box into her purse and gave Dennis a quick wave as she left.

Athena smiled at him. “She’s a strong woman. Still a bit in denial, but getting there. It’s hard to face, but Mary will make it.”

“You’re not going to go home and sleep? Colin and I could watch the store,” Dennis offered.

“Don’t worry about it. My cousin needs a part-time job anyway. He’ll be here by eight this morning. Not that this goddess needs sleep, but a shower and fresh clothes would be good. I’m sorry I’m so ruffled.”

“You look brand-new.”

She winked. “That’s the idea. What’s up? Why are you hanging around here when you have a sexy man to get bagels for?”

“Were you serious about my buying in on the store?” he asked.

“You want to invest?” She sat on the stool behind the counter. “You’re sure?”

“I’m positive. I want in for twenty-five percent. That’ll mean Colin and I own half.”

“You want an equal interest?” Her eyebrow raised.

“Colin and I get rooms here to see clients when we need them. We give input, get special favors, but you run the first floor however you see fit. I want control of the basement.”

“For Colin’s plan? The werewolves?”

“Right. And for a little side business we want to start. Think your cousin and maybe some friends might want to earn a little extra money this weekend? Maybe Sean can help supervise with the heavy lifting overnight.”

“College students? Of course they need money. What do you want?”

“It’s not the rush the cage was for Mary, but if you can get the kids to paint the basement and brighten it up, that’d be great. Get us a couple desks and chairs and stuff. That’d be a huge start.” He pulled a couple of hundred dollars out of his wallet. “That’ll get them started. Nothing fancy. You can draw up the papers for the investment whenever, let me know how much my share is, and we’ll be in business.”

“You don’t go slowly, do you?” Athena shook her head.

“Not when I know what I want. I also want a sign for the basement. One of your fancy airbrushed pieces if you have time. It should say this.” Dennis scribbled the words flashing in his mind on a scrap of paper and handed it to her.

Athena chuckled as she read it. “Cute. Very Colin!”

“That’s the idea. But I want it to be a surprise. If the college kids can paint this weekend and get the desks in at least, it’d be enough. Monday, I want to surprise him with it. Can you adjust his meetings so he’s free in the morning but doesn’t know it?” Dennis knew it was hard to shock a psychic, but with Athena’s help, they could pull it off.

“That’s so sweet! Don’t worry about a thing. I’ll have your sign, and it’ll all be done. My cousin has brothers. I’ll have a Greek army here, and it’ll be done. And I’ll put a blinder spell on Colin so he’ll have no clue.” She clapped her hands together. “It’s so much more fun now. I knew you were one of us.”

"Took me a while to figure it out." He shrugged.

"You're only human. Now get out of here and don't forget the bagels. Colin won't suspect a thing beyond you wanting breakfast with him and to visit Mary. Tell him I said hi!"

"Thanks, Athena." He headed for the door.

"Oh, Dennis," she called.

He paused. "Yeah?"

"As a one-fourth owner, you're entitled to anything you need from inventory. Just mark it in the book so I know. Thought I'd mention it in case you need something from the adult room." She grinned knowingly.

"Not now, thanks. We're good." Dennis headed out with everything in place.

* * * * *

Ready to face work without stress or anxiety for a change, Colin had to leave the haven of his home with Dennis after an indulgent weekend of sex and food. With no more doubts about work or relationships, he could throw himself into the readings and do what he loved.

Athena hummed and dusted the counters as he entered the shop. "Morning. Everything go okay?" he asked.

"Sure. Mary did very well. She's getting adjusted. Your aura is glowing."

"Like Dennis didn't tell you everything." He knew Dennis had stopped before, making sure his sister was okay.

"I know. I just like it when I'm right about things." Athena dusted over the shelves. "Where is Dennis? He didn't keep you pinned in bed today?"

"He's got clients too." Colin headed for the reading rooms.

"Oh sorry, your first client called and canceled. Bad cold. I rescheduled for next week."

“Oh, okay, thanks.” He dropped his bag and flipped through the appointment book.

“The basement is a bit messy. Sean can always tackle it on the night shift since no customers go there. I left it for last, but if you want to deal with it, that’d be a help.” Athena smiled.

“Sure. I’m on it.” Colin walked down the basement stairs and felt a familiar tingle as he arrived at the bottom door. Now a sign hung on it.

PSYCHIC REBELS. DON’T CALL US; WE’LL SAVE YOU.

One of Athena’s airbrushed signs obviously, but the style didn’t match her.

Before he could call up to see if she’d picked today to play a prank, the door opened. Dennis stood there. He pulled Colin inside.

The basement looked brand-new. The floor and walls had a coat of fresh paint. Two desks with chairs sat under a street map of Chicago and the surrounding burbs that hung on the wall. “What did you do?”

“You wanted it to be your job. Now it’s official.” Dennis grinned.

“Official?” Colin tried to process what his eyes took in.

“I gave Athena the other twenty-five percent. We now own half the store. Part of the deal is we run Psychic Rebels out of the basement. You can have the werewolf cages and whatever else we need in that half. We’ll put offices over here. I had Athena order computers, but they won’t be here until Wednesday.” Dennis frowned as though disappointed it didn’t look perfect before Colin saw it.

Colin walked around, overwhelmed. “You did all this for me?” He knew how much money Dennis dished out, yet the support was what hit him. Dennis had financial and common sense Colin admired, but how he threw himself into things really touched him. When he gave, he gave fully from his whole heart and with all his effort.

“Actually Athena did the work yesterday. When I stopped by to check on Mary, I asked her to get the ball rolling. We need some better lighting down here and business

cards. One of us should probably get a PI license or something. But we already know a lot of cops from the human cases. It's a start." Dennis sat on the edge of the desk with a look of anticipation. "Hope it's okay."

"Okay? This is perfect. We can shelter the new, lone, or dangerous werewolves. Capture and rehab them here. As we get visions, we can go after them. Not waiting until people ask for a reading or help. We find them, like Mary, before it's too late. And we can take normal clients on as well. Weird stuff. Vampire issues and everything. It's perfect." Colin grabbed Dennis's face and kissed him while pushing him onto his back on the desk. "I love it. You're amazing."

Smiling, Dennis kissed him hard in return. "You used to like me on all fours. Now you seem to keep me on my back."

The rush of the weekend together and all they'd shared pounded in Colin's mind. The desire for Dennis never let up. It never would. "Don't we have clients?"

"Now you're all work, huh?" Dennis reached for Colin's cock and teased him through his jeans until Colin felt himself getting hard. "As it happens, I blocked off the morning for both of us."

"I love you." Colin stood and flipped Dennis over. "Wait, we need —"

"Top drawer on the right. I grabbed some from the adult room. Owner perks." Dennis freed his pants and let them slide down.

"You thought of everything." Colin opened the drawer and retrieved the lube. He applied it hastily to Dennis's asshole and quickly unbuttoned his own fly. His need for Dennis was obvious. His erection throbbed as he rubbed it between Dennis's cheeks and drizzled more lube into the mix.

"We haven't got all day." Dennis taunted him with a squeeze.

Colin thrust harder and pressed the tip to Dennis's tight pucker. "You're just an employee here. I'll direct the schedule." Colin teased himself, thrusting with just the tip until Dennis grunted and Colin felt his own restraint giving way.

Pushing in fully, Colin gasped. He looked down at their joined bodies and held Dennis tight at the shoulders. "You had it too easy this weekend." He pulled back and thrust hard. Colin stayed deep and fully felt the tightening around his cock.

"Harder," Dennis urged.

Colin rewarded Dennis with more pressure and got a tight squeeze in return. Thrusting, Colin reached around for Dennis's cock, working him from both sides. Colin sensed Dennis's control give as he clutched the desk and held on.

Lost in the moment, Colin stroked until he felt Dennis come on his palm. Then Colin focused solely on the internal. Fucking fast and pressing just right for Dennis, Colin had his lover muffling shouts as his tight ass contracted.

The orgasm sent Colin over the brink. He fell onto Dennis's back as he came. The only thing he could do was hold on. The intense pulsing of their bodies soothed Colin. He wanted to take Dennis home and spend all day in bed.

"You can take me to lunch, but we've both got appointments this afternoon."

"You're such a workaholic," Colin said.

"At least we're in it together."

"And your therapy clients?" Colin kissed along Dennis's neck.

"I can go to their homes, or they can come here. I'm flexible. There is time for both careers. Plenty of room for both worlds in our life." Dennis pulled Colin into a kiss, and Colin knew their lives had truly taken the right turn together.

* * * * *

Three Months Later

Dennis updated the file on the new werewolf case as Sean carried the sedated man who would turn werewolf into a cage.

"He won't upset Mary, will he?" Dennis asked.

"He shouldn't. She's well adjusted to it now." Sean looked over the cage setup.

"You'll be here?" Dennis couldn't shake the concern despite the exhaustion. His body screamed for his bed and a pizza with Colin next to him.

"Yes, all night." Sean closed a black curtain around the cage.

"Relax, Dennis." Colin dropped their equipment in the corner by the desks. "Athena never would've left for a month in Greece if she wasn't sure Sean could handle it."

Dennis almost offered to stay. Sean wasn't the issue. "It's not Sean; I trust him. Mary's never been here with another werewolf. Big-brother concern never goes away."

"I understand. If there is an issue, I'll call." Sean showed no offense or concern about the coming full moon.

"We could really use vampire strength out there, especially on cases like these. Sure you don't want to join in on a case one time? We'll match Athena's hourly rate." Colin sat in his desk chair with a groan.

"I prefer to help this way. In the midst of the action, with violence necessary at times, is what I avoid. I can defend and tame, but the chase is too great a temptation."

Dennis understood the slow pace Sean took. While Dennis and Colin had yet to discover the full details of Sean's transformation, Dennis knew that sometimes time was part of the process to recover or deal with reality. Time was relative; each person took as long as they needed. "If you ever are interested and ready, the offer is open," Dennis said.

"Thank you." Sean inhaled deeply and turned to the stairs before he opened the cage at the other end of the row and got it ready for Mary.

"Hi, Mary!" Dennis called up the stairs. Sean's super vampire senses knew she had arrived, and Dennis took the clue.

Her heels hit the old wooden stairs. "Hi, guys. Athena safely in Greece?"

"Yeah, family vacation." Colin rubbed his neck. "No offense, but can we get out of here, Dennis? I need some painkillers and a beer."

"Don't stick around for me. We're having lunch on Sunday. New recruit?" She nodded to the closed cage.

"He's out cold." Sean took her bag. "Shouldn't bother you tonight. Lots of tranquilizers worked."

"That guy was a runner. He refused to listen." Dennis grabbed his cell phone and ordered a pizza for pickup on the way home. "We could've been in Greece, gone off to explore the islands. But Colin didn't want to."

"Not this again." He pointed a stern finger at Dennis. "I don't have a passport. I've never flown. Let's not start the travel thing with long flights to foreign countries where neither of us speak the language."

"He has a point." Mary shrugged.

Dennis smiled. They were making progress. "Okay, well, we're going to Florida in the spring no matter what. Flying!"

"Fine. Right now, I just want my bed." Colin stood slowly. "Have a good night, Mary."

Dennis gave her a hug. "Stay safe."

"You too." Mary laughed. "You're like an old married couple."

"Sure. We track new werewolves and lock them up before they turn. We're so normal." Colin called from halfway up the stairs.

Dennis chuckled at his boyfriend and then patted Sean's shoulder. "Anything happens to Mary, you're dust Sean."

Dennis followed Colin with a smile despite his aching muscles. They had exactly what they both wanted, a normal life and an interesting job.

 THE END 

Cheryl Dragon

A lover of unusual things, Cheryl Dragon enjoys writing unique stories with sinfully hot erotic romance. Never at a loss for ideas, there are plenty of contemporary and paranormal stories waiting to be written. Her two favorite settings are Las Vegas and New Orleans...where anything can happen!

Cheryl lives in the Chicagoland area with her deaf albino cat. By day she analyzes numbers as an Assistant Controller for a division of a large international conglomerate, which leaves the creative juices free for her erotic romance novels. For more info, visit www.cheryldragon.com