



The Blood Master (The Rose Vampire Coven #3)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Even in the darkest places, light will find a way in...

Joel Penny is living in a nightmare. A one-night stand turned into a never-ending horror working at a strip club run by a disreputable bear clan. The only thing worse than the bears were the patrons at the club, the absolute worst of the Chicago paranormal scene. Joel wishes he could return to his normal life, but no one is looking for him. There is no one coming to save him.

Master Conall Rose is spoiling for a fight. The bear clan on the south side has gotten out of control, and it's making all the paranormal groups look bad. Conall goes to the strip club that night looking to settle some scores but ends up locking eyes with a tantalizing dancer on stage, a young man putting on a show but trembling with fear. Conall has found his fate-chosen beloved.

Can Conall save young Joel from the nightmare surrounding him and win his heart, which has been bruised by a life of disappointment?

Total Pages (Source): 7

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:39 am

"Get your ass back on the floor. I don't pay you to sit back here with your thumb up your ass." The man, Micky, wasn't really angry. He was just an asshole and liked belittling people beneath him. He wasn't in a much better position than Joel, but he had a little power and used it often.

"You don't pay me," Joel responded curtly. Micky grabbed a glass from the table and whipped it at him, and it bounced off Joel's shoulder and broke, cutting him deeply. Micky started to laugh when blood poured down his arm.

"Get out there the ghouls will love the blood." Joel ignored him, grabbed napkins, and held them to the wound. He walked away and headed for the bathroom, but the bouncer, who had a toothless, creepy smile, stopped him.

"He said out on the floor." He barked, his tone gruff and cold. The bouncer had a thing going with Micky and allowed him to boss around the dancers when the real boss wasn't present.

The little bit of control that it gave Micky didn't seem worth the self-degradation he had to go through. Having to suck the guy off after every shift seemed above and beyond what he got in return. But maybe Micky enjoyed that skin-crawling smile.

"I need to take care of this first." He pointed to the deep gash in his shoulder. The bouncer grabbed him roughly by the back of the neck and started hauling him out to the main room.

"Like Micky said, the ghouls will love it. He told you to take the stage, and you better be entertaining." Joel had been working the midnight shift for the past three months,

and it was exhausting. But there was no complaining and no asking for changes because everyone did as they were told.

If you wanted special treatment like Micky, then you had to offer up your ass or other parts to the powers that be, and Joel would never do that. The Club was shady and dirty and one of the worst places to work in the entire city, and his time there had marked the darkest days of his life so far.

It all started with a tiger shifter who promised him the world but only delivered pain and suffering. The decision to go home with that guy after an exciting night at the Blood Rose Bar marked the beginning of the end, and all he could see coming his way now was death.

“The strip joint on Ravine, the one owned by the bear clan, is stirring up trouble. I think it would be wise to put them out of business before they bring the cops down on the entire neighborhood.” Drakon commented during a meeting with Master Rose and his second, Victor Raum. Drakon, as lead enforcer, kept a close eye on their businesses and other enterprises, and he found that the bears were becoming a problem.

"I'll go and check out the business and speak to Cassius to see what he has to say about it," Conall stated. "I want to get a feel for what he is doing down there."

"My men have reported gruesome acts against humans and other more vulnerable shifters. Their lives and how they handle themselves is their own business, just as we don't want them poking around our lives, but I do believe they are crossing a line." Drakon clarified. "Their treatment of humans will eventually bring scrutiny down on all of us."

"We have no time or tolerance for scrutiny brought down on us through stupidity. If they are stepping outside the lines, then I will make it clear they need to restructure

their methods." Conall made his plans very clear, but both Victor and Drakon knew he had an alternative reason for his insistence on handling this particular issue himself.

Conall and Cassius had a long-standing feud that spanned nearly a decade. They both moved into the lower south side of the business district. The area was rough but not as seedy and revolting as it is now. Cassius seemed to make it his life's work to develop the area into the worst of what the city had to offer.

"I will go with you." Drakon offered, and Conall shook his head.

"Just give me a couple soldiers. I want it to appear casual." Conall countered offhandedly.

"Very well, but the bears have never been ones to regard talking as a means to problem-solving. Cassius and his men are vulgar and violent, period. You and I have dealt with these fuckers before." Victor wanted to go with Conall or at least have him take Drakon, but Conall waved them both off.

"We're going to have a nice chat about the future of business on the lower side. No need to go in with guns a blazing." He gave a smile that was more calculated than comforting.

"You're going to start a war, aren't you." Victor joined.

"Of course not; we will have a civilized discussion, that's all," Conall emphasized. Conall, with two of Drakon's men, Fane and Samuel, were soon off to have a discussion with the bear shifters. Drakon and Victor watched them leave.

"He's going to start a war, isn't he?" Drakon asked.

"Yep," Victor responded, and both laughed.

It took several days for his shoulder to heal, especially after the clients had finished pawing at him. The levels of depravity of some of the patrons of this joint really boggled the mind. Joel was twenty-two and not unaware of the ways of the world, but this place was beyond anything he ever wanted to see. He'd been on his own for a couple of years now with no family. He thought he had a few friends, but no one came looking for him.

It was his own fault he should have taken better care of himself. A few unfortunate decisions had put Joel in a position of vulnerability, which led to hooking up with Murphy. Murphy was a shifter and a psychopath, but he came off as a handsome businessman with kind eyes. Joel had gone home with him and had agreed to stay for a while, thinking this was the beginning of a true relationship, only to be sold off to a monster from one of the worse parts of town.

Joel wasn't sure if that was Murphy's intent from the jump or if he simply found it entertaining to see Joel panic and even cry when the deed was done. Cassius Brown owned his contract, and he wouldn't be released until it was paid, which would never happen. It was just a game to make people think they had a chance to get away, but no one got released. The only way to escape as far as Joel could see was to run far and fast and never stop running.

The Browns were bear shifters and they were ruthless. In their world, every problem was solved by killing someone, so Joel tried his best to do what he was told and not make a spectacle or draw attention to himself. People who drew attention to themselves often disappeared, and Joel didn't want to disappear. As unlikely as it may be, Joel held out hope that his chance to run far and fast would come.

"You two strip to your briefs, make sure they look good, and get out on the floor. We have a special guest coming, and he's probably bringing friends." Braum, one of the

bouncers and Casius' eldest, shouted at them, and Joel quickly stripped to his briefs. They were black and shiny, so Braum seemed satisfied. The other dancer, Mason, leaned over close and told Joel what was expected and for him to be very careful.

"The Vampire Master Conall Rose is on his way, and the bears are going to want an exceptional show, so do whatever you have to in order to entertain the guy."

"Have you met him? Is he as bloodthirsty as the other vamps we dealt with?"

"I've never met him, but I know who he is, and he's the leader of the fiercest and most feared coven in the city, and you don't get to where he is by being kind and gentle," Mason stated the facts, and Joel felt his heart sinking.

"Okay," Joel responded stiffly. He really wasn't in the mood to entertain an evil master vampire. He was barely healed from the last vampire who had used him as a worthless blood bag. The night he'd walked out on stage gushing blood had been a night of horror. A vampire in the crowd rushed the stage and began licking his arm and grabbing at his cock, and when the bouncer arrived to remove him, the guy gave the bouncer a hundred-dollar bill to let him continue. Everything was for sale at the Club, including Joel.

He was thankful just to have survived, and the thought of going through that again but with a vampire even more cruel and vicious was heartbreaking. He had no open wounds this time, so that was a positive, but that didn't mean he wouldn't ultimately be fed upon.

Vampires tended to be wealthy, and they simply bought whatever they wanted. Being a Master vampire, this man was probably in a position to get everything he wanted. The bears would not deny him as long as he was carrying enough cash. If he didn't perform and provide them with satisfaction and entertainment, the bears would make him pay for embarrassing them.

Mason had nothing to worry about. He was in a relationship with one of the bears, so regardless of how this went down, he'd be safe. If there was trouble, he would pay for it, and considering it was with a high-profile customer like a coven master, he would probably pay with his life. As much as he didn't want to attract the man's attention, he had to give the Master a good performance.

The Club was busy, but the moment the Master walked in, the energy shifted, and there was a wave of tension and fear that washed through the place. The bears were powerful and terrible people who did terrible things without pause, and yet they stepped back when this vampire and his guards entered the Club. Joel wasn't sure what to make of it as Cassius, the great leader of the bears, looked worried. This Master scares him, which makes the Master someone worse than Cassius.

Joel wanted to run away or disappear because anyone who put worry on Cassius' evil face was someone to avoid at all costs. He had no recourse. The bears owned him, and there was no getting out of this. Panic took him over, and he saw his hands shaking, so he swallowed his fear and focused on staying alive.

He and Mason walked out onto the floor, and the other dancers gave them room by moving back and allowing them to begin the sensuous choreography. They had worked together before, so they went with a set that they both knew would provide a hot and arousing spectacle for their guests.

Joel stole several glances at the Master as he made his way through the room and toward Cassius. Master Rose was a handsome fucker and walked like he owned everything and everyone. The power and confidence were thick, and the bears were feeling it, too. They stood around the room clearly agitated and waiting . . . for something.

Joel and Mason kept the act going, rubbing, stretching, and gyrating in sync. Joel's black briefs accentuated his package, and he used that to his benefit by rolling his

hips and jutting forward while running his fingertips sensuously down the center of his chest. He kept his eyes on the Master, desperate to be entertaining enough but not wanting to be singled out. It was a thin line; he was walking or dancing, but then the Master noticed him, and Joel felt his heart stop in his chest.

Master Rose stopped suddenly and looked around the room. His brow was dark and drawn tight, and his dark eyes ate up the room with a glance. His expression was cold and exacting. Joel was suddenly scared to death that the man was going to train that lethal gaze on him. He wouldn't survive an encounter with a man like Master Rose, but the bears didn't care because, in their minds, everyone was expendable, especially a slave like him.

He was dressed classy but casually in black leather and gave an ultra-sophisticated impression, whereas the bears were dressed in business suits, and still, they all looked cheap and classless. Cassius stood when Master Rose approached his table and motioned for him to take a seat, but Master Rose still had his dark eye surveying the room. His guards looked ready to strike, and everyone who didn't need to be in the area left. The mood was turning decidedly dangerous.

Then it happened, and his eyes captured Joel. Joel desperately tried to pull his eyes away, but the power of that stare held him frozen to the spot. He couldn't move, he couldn't breathe, and he felt like he was dying. He started to tremble full body tremors. This was bad, this was really bad. He was embarrassing the bears and showing fear to people who ate fear for lunch.

He noticed Cassius signaled one of the bouncers to get him off the floor. The other dancers and servers ran for their lives, knowing that things were going south rapidly. Joel tried to run, but the Master held him in thrall and steadily approached him with a look of dark determination. The minute the bouncer grabbed Joel and started roughing him up and dragging him away, the room suddenly exploded into chaos.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:39 am

Conall entered the rundown establishment with the expressed intent of starting something. The bears were getting bold, and it was time to put them back in their place, but Conall was more than ready to do just that. The bears only responded to violence, and Conall was eager to accommodate.

Cassius was across the room with several of his soldiers, and the rest of his clan was spread out around the open space of the Club. Several were beginning to slowly converge on them. The tension in the air was giving rise to their nervous unease, and Conall pushed his superiority and power, filling the room with his presence, which heightened the tension even further.

He moved toward Cassius with the intent of bringing him to heel first, but something wonderful and unexpected caught his attention. A feeling heavily laden with emotions brushed by him; they were emotions that called to him and demanded he respond.

Then, a bold scent of jasmine rushed toward him, intoxicating and sensual, filled his senses. He recognized what it was and searched the room for its source, but no one was connecting. Everyone was looking away, avoiding his gaze, and many were rushing from the room.

His mood, so highly charged and suddenly on edge, had people preparing for the worst, and Conall could not care less because his beloved was in the room. The bears were secondary to his need to find the source of the emotions and the jasmine that was setting him on fire, and then he saw him.

He was dancing provocatively, but it was obvious that his heart wasn't in it. He was

fearful, watchful, and on edge, and it bothered Conall in a way that was proprietary and protective. His dancing halted when their eyes met, and the man could not look away he captured he was owned. He was gorgeous and alluring, and he made Conall sweat because of the need to have him.

This man was moving into a deep place in his heart that had never been occupied before, and the feelings that gave rise were volatile. His baby should not be dancing for others he should not be at the beck and call of a bunch of fucking bears.

Cassius gestured for someone to deal with the trembling dancer, and that's when the house came down. Conall's instincts went off when the bouncer attacked his beloved, and the young man began to whimper. The sound cut through Conall like a red hot knife piercing his soul.

Conall moved on the bouncer, and his guards moved on the bears, and the room blew up. Samuel and Fane were in their element; they absolutely loved a good brawl. This was going to be a glorious afternoon. Conall smiled and broke the bouncer's arm.

He took care of the few who attempted to stop him or interfere with the dancer and then threw the beautiful dancer over his shoulder and headed for the door. He stepped over one of Casius' sons, who was lying broken and bleeding. "If you wanted him, we would have given him to you." He declared.

"He's not yours to give." Was all he said as Samuel and Fane finished the job and met him in the parking lot. No one followed them out, which was wise. Neither guard asked any questions simply opened the back door of the SUV and waited for the Master and his newly acquired dancer to slide in.

Once the door closed, Conall sat the young man down on the seat beside him and covered him with a thin blanket. He was terrified, and Conall couldn't blame him. He didn't know that he had been rescued from that pitiful den of iniquity and was about

to embark on a life of pleasure and promise.

"My name is Conall Rose." He began. "Do you know who and what I am?" He was asking a lot with that question. Considering the dancer was human, he may not be privy to the paranormal. But working at the strip club had put him in the path of many supernatural beings, so it could go either way. Most decent business owners kept the humans and paranormals separated for obvious reasons, but decent was not a word that was ever used when discussing Cassius Brown.

The dancer sat still and silent, with eyes wide as saucers, and his breath was shallow and rapid. He was still frightened, but after a few seconds, he gave the barest of nods. His eyes never left Conall, and although he loved having his beloved staring at him, it was the fear that he could do without.

"No one is going to hurt you. The bears are dangerous men, and you didn't belong in that place." Conall paused and carefully placed his hand over the young man's hand, which was lying stiffly against his leg. He felt the rigidity lessen as the warmth and meaning of his touch pervaded. The fear in his eyes was still front and center, but it was now joined by just a touch of wonder.

"Will you tell me your name?" Conall asked and then waited patiently. It took several minutes before words were spoken, and the sound was enchanting. The tone was soft and musical as it played across Conall's mind.

"My name is Joel Penny, sir." He was careful to only answer the question, and Joel was a beautiful name. He was so careful that it broke Conall's heart. His life was on the line every day that he worked for those fucking bears, and he learned to be oh-so careful in order to survive. His little man was going to take time, care, and understanding, and Conall was prepared to give him everything he needed.

"Please call me Conall." He gave him permission, but he doubted that Joel would

have the nerve to use it, not for a while anyway, and that was saddening. "How long have you been working for Cassius?"

"Seven weeks, three days, and five hours." He said this with a calm exactness, making it clear how he felt about the job.

"You will never have to go back there." Conall squeezed his hand and glanced away out the side window as thoughts of how his beloved was treated briefly flooded his heart. "I'm taking you home with me to my Coven." Joel's fear spiked, and the trembling began again.

Conall reached out and put his arm around the poor man and gently pulled him closer. It was a risk Joel might completely shut down if he pushed things too fast, but he needed to channel some peace and calm to the man. Joel didn't resist, although his stiffness was slow to recede. The scent of jasmine filled Conall's senses once again and he drank it in. This was his beloved, and they would find their way, he had no doubt.

"Do I belong to you now?" Joel asked his voice nearly a whisper.

"You have always belonged to me. It's destiny, my love." He continued to hold him throughout the remainder of the ride, hoping that the contact would help Joel understand their connection and give him a sense of their destiny. Fate was powerful, and she often helped those in need to see the future she was offering.

They pulled into the garage and were met by Victor and Drakon. Samuel opened his door, and Conell stepped out, extending his hand to his beloved Joel. Joel took the hand and was helped out of the vehicle to stand next to Conell, who adjusted the blanket to cover him more completely, a gesture that was lost on no one. They glanced at Joel and then at their Master and smiled.

"You started a war, didn't you?" Victor commented.

"Not a war, really, since that implies a struggle. It's more like a hostile takeover." He said and then added. "It's time the bears were removed from the area. They're dragging down the property values."

"Are we finishing the job?" Drakon asked.

"Yes, Cassius isn't the leader. He used to be; laziness and debauchery have taken his soul, and his sons are no better. It's time to clear the land, and it's time for the bears to go."

"We're on it," Drakon stated and immediately left the room as he was making calls. Victor came up to stand before him and glanced down at the little dancer beside him.

"This is my beloved Joel," Conall announced.

"I thought so." Victor smiled. "Congratulations, Conall. Go and be with your beloved. I'll handle it from here and keep you posted." Conall patted Victor on the upper arm, tossed Joel over his shoulder once again, and took off toward the elevators.

Joel was at a loss to understand anything that was happening to him. The incident at the Club was messing with his mind in a spectacular fashion, and everything since then has left him completely staggered. The Master and his men tore through the Club like a hot knife through butter. The bears didn't hold up under the attack, and even the great and powerful Cassius was seen running from the place in order to escape the man's wrath.

Joel was a bit stoked when the Master dealt a blow to the bouncer that was roughing him up. He couldn't lie and say he wasn't pleased when he heard that bone break. That man had hurt so many people that finally seeing him in pain was gratifying.

But then the Master turned on him, and Joel didn't know what to expect. His expression was deadly when he took out the bouncer, but when he looked at Joel, his features softened, or maybe he was just delusional. He tossed him over his shoulder and just headed for the door as his men continued to tear up the place. People just naturally moved out of his way like the parting of the sea. The Master was a man unlike any other.

The ride in the SUV was surreal, with the Master making polite conversation with him and telling him to call him Conall. That would never happen; the minute he broke a boundary would be the minute all niceties ended, and Joel would experience the truth of the Master's intention. That didn't mean he wasn't going to experience the worst that the man had to offer, but in Joel's experience, he found that the worst could always be made worse. Do as he is told and mind his manners, and there is possibly a ten percent chance that he could eventually get out of this alive.

He listened to their conversation in the garage but tried to remain invisible. The Master kept hold of his hand, and although he was scared, the touch was strangely comforting, as if he had someone there for him, someone to support him. It was crazy thinking, but he allowed himself a little crazy from time to time. Good feelings were few and far between, so he would take what he could get, even those that were simply a mirage.

Conall Rose, Master of the Rose Coven, wanted him for something, probably for the night, and then he'd pass him on to one of his friends or toss him out. Joel was praying that he would get tossed out, and then he'd run until his lungs burst, and he'd never go home with another guy for the rest of his life. If the powers that be got him out of this mess, he would straighten up and be the best he was capable of being.

He stood there at Conall's side, listening as they discussed taking out the bears. It never bothered them that he was there, but it bothered him. Joel didn't want to know any of their plans, so he tuned out and gave a blank stare in the hope of being

overlooked. Then the one he called Victor stepped up, and things were said that pulled him back to awareness.

The word beloved was bandied about, and Joel understood the meaning of that word, which was serious and important. He assumed it was used in a baser sense because there was no way he was the Master's beloved. That position belonged to someone better than him, someone much better. It was probably some sort of game they played with their hookups.

Once they were in the elevator, the Master placed him back on his feet and wrapped an arm around his shoulder. Joel kept his eyes on the floor and stayed as still as possible. The Master didn't speak, but he seemed to be communicating something through his touch. Joel was aware that vampires had the ability to influence others, but he'd never been on the receiving end.

This felt like an attempt to calm him, which didn't make sense. Why would he care? Joel was a dancer in that foul club, and he didn't deserve his concern. The elevator stopped, and they stepped out. The building was plain and resembled a warehouse from the outside, but the interior was something else. It was sophisticated, and the design and workmanship model were perfect. It was a home, and it was a workplace. It was the home of the Rose Coven.

The Master led him to a huge apartment that he found strangely relaxing. Joel should be scared stiff and looking for an exit at all times, but he kept finding himself marveling at the impressive beauty that was concealed by the shell of a fading warehouse. It was a masterful move to hide in plain sight like this.

He also noticed that the warehouse was positioned directly behind the bar he'd been at the night he left with Murphy, the Blood Rose. It was the night that changed his life and set him on a direct route to destruction. The pain welled up in him at the memory, and he had to force himself not to start crying.

Master Rose immediately stopped and looked down at him with a soft and reassuring look, and once again, Joel was confused by the apparent consideration. "Do I scare you?" He asked, his tone so gentle.

"Yes," Joel responded and said no more. The Master gave one brief nod and then guided him to a soft couch in the living area of the large apartment. He sat him down and made sure the blanket was tucked around him before going into the kitchen. When he returned, he was carrying two glasses of what Joel assumed was whiskey, and he handed one to Joel.

"Take this it will help the tension." He told him. Then, he took a seat on the coffee table directly in front of him. They were so close their legs were touching. For some reason, the Master did not allow him to get too far away. The constant touching brought a pleasant familiarity, but Joel knew that it was far from real, so he kept a tight rein on his behavior.

He then placed his hand on Joel's knee and captured his gaze with his own dark, penetrating eyes. "Why were you working for Cassius." He asked and waited for an answer.

"I had no choice," Joel told him. He took a sip of the whiskey, loving the warmth and bite as it slid down his throat.

"Tell me about yourself, Joel." That was a broad question, and rather than going all the way back to the beginning, he started where his life had ended. The Master remained silent and gently squeezed Joel's knee, and his eyes continued to hold him frozen and powerless to look away.

"I worked at a coffee shop on Green Street, and I lived in a studio apartment in the Streeterville neighborhood. It's probably gone now since I wasn't able to pay my rent, and I'm sure the job is gone too." Joel got off topic for a second, feeling the loss

of his old life, but pulled himself back together.

"I was out with a couple friends, and we went to the Blood Rose, where I met this guy Murphy. I don't know his last name; I only know that he was fun, and I went home with him, thinking that it would be a fun night. I thought it was a one-night stand, but Murphy didn't let me leave in the morning." He stopped and took another sip of his whiskey.

"Take your time. There is no rush," Conall spoke, and as he did so, he took Joel's hand in his but never took his eyes from Joel's. "Are you warm enough?"

"Yes, sir."

"Call me Conall." Joel nodded. "For your own peace of mind, I can tell you that Murphy, the tiger shifter, is dead. He will never harm you again." Joel gave a sigh of relief at the news.

"He finally went against the wrong man?" Joel assumed.

"Yes, and that would be Victor Raum, my second. You met him downstairs in the garage."

"I must thank him, for it was truly a community service." Joel laughed softly. Conall cupped the side of Joel's face in the palm of his hand and tilted his face back up to his.

"I love the sound of your laugh, and I hope to hear it often." He then brought Joel's hand to his lips and kissed it, lingering for several seconds before looking up to capture Joel's gaze once again. "Tell me what happened, my love."

"Murphy wouldn't let me leave and used his tiger to scare me and to keep me in line.

After about a week, he grew tired of me, and rather than just let me go, he sold me to the strip club." Joel swallowed his emotions as they began to well up.

"I've never worked in a strip club or any bar or Club before. It wasn't my scene, but I liked to blow off steam like everyone. I never thought that I would fall victim to the kind of man that everyone and their brother warns you about."

"You weren't the first to fall for his charm, and you weren't the last. Don't blame yourself it wasn't your fault. You had a right to go out and expect to enjoy yourself." Conall kissed his hand once again, and Joel was loving it. "Bastards like Murphy prey on the decent by pretending to be such. He's off the streets now and no longer a danger to anyone."

"The bears were much worse, but if you were careful and didn't bring attention to yourself, it was possible to keep the beatings and degradation to a minimum." Joel finished his whiskey, and Conall took the glass and set it aside.

"I'm sorry I didn't find you sooner, but Fate works in her own time, and it was now that she brought us together." Conall moved to sit beside Joel on the couch and continued to hold his hand, which Joel continued to enjoy. "You are my beloved; do you know what that means?" Joel suddenly felt as if his mind was opening to the fantastic possibility of the claim being true.

"I know the basics." He responded.

"The rest will come to you as our time together continues. Fate makes it so that the uninformed, like humans, can grasp all the depth and complexity without having to take a leap of faith. She opens your mind and allows the truth of your new reality to take form. You're probably feeling it even now." Conall looked deeply into Joel's eyes, and the clarity expanded, and the knowledge of the supernatural was taking shape in his mind.

"Don't force it, my love. It will all become clear to you it is our destiny." Joel's heart melted at the words, and his emotions swelled with the longing and the need for this man. The fear he'd once felt was fading away, and in its place was a fierce, burning desire for this Master Vampire.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:39 am

Conall was a Master vampire, so he had pretty good control over his baser instincts and usually could resist reacting to his emotions. Unfortunately, that didn't apply where his beloved was concerned.

The need to provide, protect, and ravish, or rather claim, was absolutely overwhelming. Joel's scent was making his head spin and his blood burn, and the longer they were together, the harder it was for him to deny himself that which belonged to him.

"I'll order us some dinner. I'm sure you're probably hungry. While I do that, why don't you bathe and change your clothes? You'll feel so much better with the remains of that Club washed away." He stood up and reached his hand out to Joel, who took it without hesitation. "Come, and I'll show you the way." As they made their way to the primary bedroom, Conall noticed Joel sniffing him. He was trying to do it on the sly, but it was obvious to Conall, and he puffed up a bit at the thought that his beloved liked how he smelled. He brought him into the bedroom and then into the bathroom suite.

"Make yourself at home, love. Take your time and relax, and I'll let you know when dinner arrives." He took Joel into his arms, needing contact and the feel of his body pressed to his. "I'll leave you a change of clothes on the bed." He stared down into those expressive eyes and then allowed himself to let go a little. He bent and took Joel's soft lips in a kiss that was to be gentle and brief, but once it began, it was neither.

Conall devoured that sweet, sensual mouth, eating away until Joel opened to his exploration. It wasn't long before Joel joined, seeking his own pleasure and

satisfaction. The blanket dropped to the floor, and Conall couldn't resist wrapping his arms around Joel's warm, nearly naked body and pressing him close.

His body was made for him, and he ached to ravish every inch. He reached down and took that firm round ass in his hand and squeezed, kneading the flesh and bringing himself a modicum of satisfaction. He slid his hand beneath the thin, sparkly fabric of his tiny shorts and quickly found his tight little entrance.

Conall circled the tight muscle several times before plunging his middle finger deep inside his beloved. The heat and the pressure were mouthwatering. He ate away at Joel's eager lips while he plunged over and over and added his index finger, increasing the stretch and eliciting a sexy moan from his lover. "You are so hot, my love, so sweet and so perfect." He whispered against his plump lips.

Joel held him firmly with both hands pressing himself as close as physically possible while returning the kiss with equal passion and jutting his ass out to take advantage of Conall's deep exploration. His taste was erotic and enthusiastic, and Conall could not get enough. Finally, he moved to trail hot, moist kisses across his jaw and down his throat before delivering shallow, tentative bites to his shoulder.

Joel was panting, and his heart was racing. "You taste wonderful, my love, and your body is so soft and lovely, especially the way it melds with mine," Conall whispered as he kissed along Joel's collarbone. Joel let his head fall to the side, exposing more flesh for Conall to explore.

"You feel so right, but how can this be." Joel was coming around, but there was still uncertainty.

"Fate deems it so, my love. I am yours, and you are mine." He kissed him again and then slowly straightened and let his fingers slide free of his glorious channel, the velvety smoothness doing crazy things to his mind. He wanted him now, but he had

to let him get comfortable.

"Mine," Joel repeated as if studying the idea.

"Shower, change, and meet me in the dining room when you're finished." He stepped back and, after a long penetrative stare, left the room. The glamour was opening his mind, and Conall could see it in the glint of his eyes and in the acceptance of his embrace.

Joel was starting to understand, and this new world was making sense to him. It would take a while longer, but as soon as they bonded, the understanding would be complete and thorough. He couldn't wait to have Joel at his side and in his bed, his beloved for eternity.

With thoughts of bonding and the memory of Joel's hot, tight body in his arms and his taste on his lips, Conall found that his resolve to give the man time was getting thinner and weaker by the second. He would need to bond with Joel soon, or his vampire might simply take over. Conall smiled and considered for a moment the wild passion that they could generate. He couldn't wait to move this relationship along.

He took a seat in the living room, called in their dinner order, and then called Ethan in IT to look into Joel's life and situation. He wanted all the information he could get on his little lovely so as to be prepared for anything and everything that might occur.

He also arranged for Joel's things to be gathered from his apartment, which was probably lost to him after so many weeks, but his things would still be stored. He wanted to make himself comfortable, and having his things would be a good first step. He could hear Joel in the shower and could feel his insecurity and confusion at the events that had taken place. When they were together, he was calm and sure, but at each separation, Joel became hesitant. That would pass the longer they spent together.

He placed some sweats and a t-shirt on the foot of the bed, along with some slippers for Joel to put on when he finished with his shower. He stood and listened to the sounds of his beloved as he enjoyed the warmth and rejuvenation of the falling water.

He was a sweet young man with a lot on his shoulders, and Conall would help him shift that weight and see the future that lay ahead as the beloved of the Master. He would want for nothing, and he would be the center and the love of Conall's life.

Those who had hurt and demeaned him have been dealt with, and he would make sure that no one dared to touch or upset him ever again. Joel would come to understand the love of his Master and the lengths Conall was willing to go to make him happy.

Conall received a file from Ethan containing everything he'd found on Joel, and he included an update on the hostile takeover being spearheaded by Drakon and Victor. The Club where Joel had been dancing had been burned to the ground. The bears present have been eliminated, although Cassius is still on the run. Those like Joel, who were not a part of the business's workings, were released with compensation.

His men were presently moving through the area, taking the bear clan out one business at a time. They estimate that the neighborhood will be cleared by morning. He sent a short statement to Victor, basically commending them on their efficiency. He heard the shower turn off just as their dinner was delivered.

Joel reveled in that huge luxurious shower, washing away the stench and aura of that despicable place and the people he worked for. It was cleansing and reviving, and he was beginning to feel like himself again. He used the soap, shampoos, and specialty items there in the shower, loving the feel and the scents of the expensive products.

When he was starting to prune up, he decided that he should probably get out and towel off, but he loathed getting out of the sweet comfort of the Master's amazing

shower. He closed his eyes and could still taste his lips and feel the amazing sensations elicited by his talented fingers. His ass was tingling with the want of him.

He reached behind and used his own fingers to soothe the empty feeling, thrusting inside in fast, shallow strokes, wishing it were the Master who was touching him. With his other hand, he began rapid strokes of his now hard and weeping cock. He set a rhythm that soon brought him to the edge of release.

Joel closed his eyes, tilted his head back, and came spraying his seed against the wall of the shower. He kept up aggressively pumping his cock, needing this release so badly. Finally, he was completely spent, leaned his forehead against the cool tiles, and brought himself back under control. He turned off the water and stepped out of the shower feeling better but not satisfied.

He wrapped the towel around himself, and when he walked into the bedroom, Joel saw clothes set out for him on the bed. They looked soft and warm and comfortable he hadn't been allowed to wear anything plain and comfortable since being taken. He had to wear what he was told to wear. He'd dropped the tight shorts and horrible ankle boots in the trash in the bathroom. He never wanted to see that shit ever again.

The sweats were pure heaven, and the t-shirt fit nicely, hanging loose but not sloppy. Joel pulled on the slippers and then just sat on the edge of the large bed. The room was vast, with furnishings, linens, and rugs that implied wealth and culture.

He wondered what his lot would be here with the vampires and how long they would keep him before passing him on to someone else down the line. The word beloved was bandied about, and Conall had hinted at a relationship, but Joel was hard-pressed to believe any of it. History had shown him that lies and deception were rampant in the paranormal world.

His life had been a series of lies, manipulations, and letdowns since coming in contact

with Murphy, and he doubted any of it would change until he got away from the world of the supernatural. This wasn't his world, and he didn't belong here.

As these thoughts filled his mind, he also felt a sense of connection that was completely without foundation. Conall must have used some voodoo on him because it was crazy to think he was anything but the enemy. He was classier than most users and came off with a sincerity that most didn't bother with, but still, he was in control, and Joel had to do as he was told. It might be prettier, but it was still captivity.

Conall was waiting for him in the other room, and he promised him dinner. Joel stood and tentatively exited the room, looking around and seeing Conall off to his left in the living room. He was on the phone, so Joel stood still and waited. He'd learned that bothering them could result in a beat down, so as kind as Conall seemed, he wasn't going to push it.

He didn't look the type to raise his hand to someone like Joel, but he could easily have someone else do it for him. The paranormals he'd had contact with, from the highbrow to the scum, had all been harsh and mean. Although he was rough with the bears, Conall had not been unkind to him. A wash of calm and peace kept coming over him, and it didn't make sense unless he was finally losing his mind. A little insanity would be welcome at this point.

"Joel." Conall's voice was friendly, and he reached his hand out toward him. His expression indicated that he was in a good mood. Joel had been good at gauging moods and emotions at the Club, and it saved him many times from hostilities and collateral anger. He moved toward the Master and stopped when he was standing before him.

"Do you feel better?" He asked, placing his hand briefly on Joel's shoulder and then cupping his cheek, tilting his head up. The last kiss had been epic. Joel would not deny the intensity of that embrace, and he wondered if there was to be another. He

was so out of his depth, and he didn't know how to carry himself or how to react to keep himself safe as he stood there in the heart of the Rose Coven.

"Yes, I feel clean. Thank you for the clothes." Joel remained still, waiting for an order or a direction, not sure what was expected of him. Conall was patient and gentle with him.

"You're welcome, Joel. Come and sit dinner has been served." He took Joel by the hand, led him into the dining room, and helped him get seated at the round table. He continued to be kind and attentive throughout dinner. The meal was braised pork loin with rice, roasted green beans, and custard tart for dessert. This was paired with a white wine. Joel couldn't remember the last time he'd had a meal this good.

Conall watched him throughout with a look of concern, but Joel wasn't sure if he was reading it right. He responded when spoken to, sat up straight, and used all the table manners he could remember. Conall reached across and refilled his wine glass when the dessert was served.

"Why do you fear me, Joel? We've talked. I've explained your position here, so why does your anxiety continue to fill the air around us?" Conall spoke slowly, and there was a tenderness there. Joel set his fork aside and pushed his back slightly from the table.

"I feel many things, and I don't know what to trust. I've been used and lied to so much in the last couple of months that I don't know what is real, even inside my own head." Joel was probably saying too much, but Conall wasn't stopping him, so he continued. "I know who you are and what you're capable of. I've seen what you can do, so sitting here making nice and treating me like a valued guest is confusing the hell out of me."

"You are my beloved. You know what a beloved is and how important they are, so why do you question my attraction and devotion? You feel it, too. You just said as

much. Open your heart and your mind, my love, and let the awareness take you. Let Fate help you to see."

Joel heard the sincerity in his words and appreciated that he didn't come at him hard or demand that he believe and understand. The awareness that he had spoken of was there; it was on the edges of his mind, and it showed him life in this new world. He was getting it he just wasn't sure if he believed it. Conall stood and walked over to him. He crouched down beside him and took his hand.

"Your insecurities are clouding your mind. I understand what you are feeling, but it's necessary that you open your mind and don't resist what your gut and senses are telling you. Like I told you before, take that step of faith, and I won't let you fall, I promise." Joel stared at him, seeing the genuine nature of what he was saying reflected in his eyes. The man was saying and doing things that were completely needless if all he planned to do was take advantage of him and toss him out.

"Okay," Joel said that one word, and he meant it. He would let go and believe this man. His gut was telling him to lean into it, and his gut was usually spot on. His gut told him not to go home with Murphy, and he'd ignored it. If he thought about it, he really didn't fear Conall; he simply distrusted that anything good could come from being snatched by a strip club. Conall stood and brought Joel up with him.

"Let's go back to the living room and talk we have so much more to discuss." He led him into the living room, and they sat together on the couch. He was very close, and he did not let go of Joel's hand. He smelled amazing, like the smell of rain on a cool day, fresh and clean. It was a smell Joel loved, and he drank it in, feeling the effects calm and ease his worry.

"I've tried to make it clear that you are in no danger here. I would never harm you or allow anyone else to harm you. You are my beloved, and I will do everything in my power to love, protect, and provide for you. If you have questions about what you are

feeling or what I represent, please ask them. I will answer truthfully." He leaned toward Joel and caught his gaze.

Conall's stare was powerful, and Joel could feel the heat to his bones. He would try to accept, and he would open his mind to what Conall was offering. The need to please this man was something that suddenly washed over him. He tried to push it away but the desire to be thought highly of by Conall Rose was all-encompassing.

"When did you know that I was your beloved?" He decided he might as well ask his questions.

"You whimpered when that thug grabbed your arm. I heard you, and I responded to your pain and distress." Joel listened, and his emotions picked up on the moment and the reaction of the Master. It had startled him at first, believing he was the problem, but it was made clear quickly that it was the bouncer that was the problem. Conall's actions had brought him relief for a few seconds.

"I felt something off the minute I entered the Club. To be honest with you, I went to the Club to start something." Conall leaned back against the couch cushions and sighed. "I was tired of the bears pushing the boundaries and setting us all up for discovery. The existence of the paranormal cannot be found out by the human world; our survival depends upon our anonymity. Cassius and his horde of clowns were pushing the edges and letting the human world into our business. They had to be stopped." He glanced to the side, catching Joel's gaze, and held it.

"The paranormal world stays hidden because anonymity is beneficial to all of us, good, bad, and otherwise, but Cassius considered himself untouchable for some reason. His behavior was going to put us all in danger, with the death of humans and the involvement of the human police. He was sloppy and careless. I admit, I was there to start a war."

"A hostile takeover." Joel corrected, and Conall laughed.

"Yes, hostile takeover."

"I'm not the only dancer that was there against their will," Joel spoke up.

"They will be released." He started offhandedly. "I'm not running a welfare agency." He emphasized. "But Victor will see that they are taken care of, so don't worry about them. He will clear their minds of what they experienced and send them back to their old lives."

"Will you clear my mind?" Joel was not sure how he felt about that.

"No, you are my beloved, and your mind cannot be touched. Fate protects you from interference. It's her way of keeping you on a level playing field with your paranormal beloved. I can perform some glamours but nothing that would take away your free will or independent thought process." That was interesting.

"Will the bears come after me?" the thought of retribution suddenly entered his mind.

"Possibly, if any survive, but I will take care of you, Joel. Do not fear them." He was so to the point and honest that Joel found it impossible not to believe everything he was saying. "While they remain a threat, it's important that you stay inside the Coven house we can best protect you here."

"Am I your prisoner?"

"No, you're my beloved. You are my life."

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:39 am

Conall held his gaze, pushing the awareness forward, and his beloved blinked but did not look away. The awareness was touching him, and his mind was taking in the world of the supernatural. It was a process, but each step brought him closer to a full understanding of Conall's world.

"Will you bond with me, claim me as your beloved?" Joel asked, not fearfully but rather with passionate wonder in his eyes.

"I will claim you, and we will become one in our hearts and minds. Are you ready to become mine, Joel?" Conall was eager to bond, but he wanted to make sure Joel was completely on board and knew what he was asking for.

"They didn't use me like they did the others they said I was too delicate, and they wanted to get their money's worth out of my sorry ass before setting the wolves on me. I danced, and I served, but I was spared some of the harsher treatment." Joel wanted him to know that he hadn't been a part of the worst that the Club had to offer.

"Whatever happened was not your choice or your fault and takes nothing away from your beauty and your allure. You are mine, and that alone makes you absolutely perfect." Conall leaned toward him, and Joel joined him in a kiss that was both hot and urgent. Their need then took over, and both were pushing for control, taking it deep and impassioned.

Conall let Joel take over for a minute but found that he needed to lead, so he pushed his young man to his back on the couch and followed him down, never releasing his soft, sweet lips. Joel was pulling at Conall's shirt wildly, opening it up and plunging his hands inside to glide over Conall's bare chest and back. His touch was hypnotic,

and Conall could not hold back the moan that escaped his lips.

"Your touch ignites a fire inside me, my love, like only a true beloved can. Your hands are magic, stirring me with every touch." Conall picked him up and carried him to the bedroom. All the while, Joel continued peppering kisses to his throat and jaw. His beloved was eager and excited, and Conall had such wonderful plans for them this evening.

He sat Joel down on the bed and quickly pulled the t-shirt up and over his head. He then tossed it aside and pulled the slippers from his feet. "You're mine, Joel, all mine." He whispered into his ear, grabbed the waistband of his sweats, and started slowly pulling them down. Joel stretched out on his back and arched, allowing Conall to easily remove his sweats.

The moment that Joel's hard cock lay bare to him, Conall took it between his lips and tasted the firm, silk beauty so sweet and satisfying. He took him down his throat several times before popping off the end and then removing Joel's sweats and tossing them aside. His beloved was completely naked and calling for him, reaching for him, and begging to be touched. Life in this moment was perfect.

"Now you." Joel breathed the words in a wanton and needy tone that went straight to Conall's hard cock and stiffened it painfully. His desire for this man was nothing like he'd ever experienced before, and at his age, he'd experienced plenty. "I want to see your body, Conall."

Conall stripped in seconds at the urgent plea of his beloved. The sound of his name on Joel's lips was thrilling, and he wanted to hear it again and often. "Say my name, baby." He asked as he crawled up onto the bed and on top of his beloved, being careful not to crush him but determined to experience him head to toe.

"Conall." He said, Conall trembling at the sensuous sound. "You have a beautiful

body, Conall," Joel added, and the compliment was made doubly touching by the fact it was his beloved praising him. The man did not know the power that he held over Conall.

Another deep and penetrating kiss was followed by Conall spreading Joel's legs and hiking them up onto his arms, lifting the lovely young man's delightfully hard cock up to Conall's eager lips.

He continued to play with him for a while, taking him down his throat several times and then licking the length and sucking hard on the head to send him into a stir of sensations. Joel writhed beneath him, whipping his head side to side as he sought completion for his now aching cock. The sounds he made were delicious, moaning and whining, so lovely and needy.

Conall took him to the base and held him as he bit softly into the velvety smooth flesh and took a taste, letting the blood flow over his tongue and feeling its energizing assets. He sucked hard on Joel's throbbing cock pulling everything he could from Joel, pushing him to a powerful climax.

Conall clamped down just as Joel lost it and came hard, filling Conall's mouth and throat with his exquisite essence. Joel stiffened and held his breath throughout as Conall swallowed him down, taking all he had to give.

The feel and taste of Joel's blood and his release and the pure energy contained in both was intense and moving. Joel was hot, provocative, and erotic, and yet he possessed the body of an angel so pure it was divine.

Everything he did and said and just the beat of his heart turned Conall on and made him want to ravish and own this man now and for all time. The heat and desire that was consuming the room was also consuming him, and the need to be inside his beloved was overwhelming.

He trailed kisses, wet and ravenous, along his hip and groin, exploring and sensitizing the tender flesh. All the while, he was stretching and preparing Joel to take his hard length deep inside his tight, heated channel. He'd never cared for a lover the way he cared for Joel. His every desire felt like a command Conall would do whatever he had to in order to please and satisfy his gorgeous man.

They would bond, and the last of the scales would fall from Joel's eyes, and his future and his life with Conall would become clear at last. He thrust his fingers deep, stretching and spreading the lubricant and readying his beloved. The heady sensation of having his lover's body embracing him sent visions of wild and salacious lovemaking through Conall's mind.

Joel kept the rhythm of thrusts moving with him and riding his long, thick fingers as they invaded over and over again. Joel continued to moan and press into his intimate touch, his excitement growing along with Conall's.

Joel let out a slow, guttural groan, and his channel walls pulsed and tightened around Conall's fingers. Conall felt his own body vibrating with the need for this man, and he'd denied himself long enough. He was prepped and ready, and his climax was on the breathless edge, but it wasn't time yet. Conall gripped Joel's cock by the base and squeezed, forcing back the inevitable and ripping another desperate moan from his amazing lover.

"Not yet, my love." He whispered deep in his throat and abruptly flipped Joel onto his stomach. It caught him by surprise, but he smiled seductively and went with it, knowing the outcome was going to be enjoyable. His trust was appreciated.

Conall spread Joel's legs apart and lifted him slightly, baring his stretched and welcoming hole. Conall had never seen anything more lovely, and his aching cock throbbed with the want of it. He massaged the firm round cheeks of Joel's beautiful ass and spread him further.

He then bent and ran his tongue along the tight, muscled opening, taking in the musky flavor and sensing the growing excitement in his beloved. He did it again, circling the sensitive area before burying his tongue in the eager opening.

Joel shivered and squealed tightly through compressed lips and then began to pant in a delicious way. Conall played with his ass until Joel was about out of his mind. He then plunged his cock deep inside, stretching and filling his beloved full. Joel jerked and shouted and then settled into a fiery litany of chants.

"More Conall, more." He pushed his ass back against Conall, increasing the power of each thrust. "Harder Conall, harder." Conall held him and hammered his hips against Joel, burying his cock to the base with each drive plunging deeper and reveling in the tight embrace of his beloved.

Joel was feeling every nerve ending in his body vibrate with the excitement of their lovemaking. His moves were quick and sharp and a little wild, leaving Joel begging for more. He wasn't gentle or tender, and yet everything held a sense of loving control that left Joel with a feeling of importance and regard. It was weird but true. Never had he experienced such mind-blowing titillation and also felt seen and heard. He asked for more, and Conall delivered every single time.

How they ended up in bed having rough, amazing sex was a mystery, but somehow, they communicated the need, and each was eager to deliver. Joel had not felt anything like it, and he never wanted it to end. He looked back over his shoulder at the most handsome man in the world. He was disheveled and fierce, but he still looked amazing. If he could keep this man, he would offer himself up in a heartbeat.

Conall held him and thrust deeply, penetrating all his reserve, taking him fully and leaving nothing untouched or undiscovered. He was laid totally bare to this man, and he didn't care for somewhere deep in his soul; he trusted Conall Rose. He shouted Conall's name when he felt the hot release filling his channel and felt teeth breaking

through the tender flesh of his shoulder.

Joel came furiously, spreading his seed on the blanket beneath them as the need to come tore through him over and over. The feelings rushing through him were wild and raging.

Conall was feeding from, and Joel had experienced a feeding only once on the night he'd been injured and bleeding and forced out on stage and had found it distasteful. But this was different. This was intimate and loving and filled Joel with a tingling sensation, and it touched him like everything Conall did; it touched his soul.

Conall finished and pulled his teeth from Joel's soft flesh. He then licked the area, soothing the sting and making the excitement so much more potent with each stroke. He moved Joel to the side, avoiding the wet spot beneath him, and laid him out on the bed. Joel felt Conall slide out of him and instantly missed the heat and fullness.

Joel was spent, totally spent, and could barely keep his eyes open. He watched as Conall removed the wet blanket from beneath them and then stretched out beside Joel and gathered him into his arms.

They lay there together naked and wrapped in each other's arms, and Joel had never felt so loved and so complete, and it made no sense at all. He didn't care if it was a delusion. He was going to enjoy every second of it, and so leaned into Conall, laying his head on his shoulder and kissing him lightly on the underside of his jaw. "I could easily fall in love with you, Conall." He said without bothering to think of the ramifications. It was true and how he felt, and so he said it, and he'd deal with any fallout later. For now, he was going to love this little piece of life.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:39 am

Conall pulled him tighter into his arms, and Joel felt his lips kissing his shoulder before moving to look down into his upturned face. "Your love is all I ask of you, and I hope that one day you will find me worthy." He kissed his forehead and buried his face against Joel's shoulder. "The bond will bring us closer, and in time, you will see how deep my regard for you is. Love swept me away the moment you said my name."

Joel, too, felt himself swept away by the tender words. "I see your world and the vast influence that it wields. This city is so much more diverse than I ever thought. The vampire covens alone cover over a quarter of the city and make up for thousands of the population." Joel saw things as if the veil or whatever it was that shielded this reality had lifted just as Conall had said it would.

"Our world has been here a very long time, vampire, shifter, mage, and magics all working and living beside you," Conall commented.

"And looking very human." Joel chimed in.

"It's how we survive, I suppose, but that image is for those not aware. Now that you see us, you will see us as we are." Joel wasn't sure what he meant, but he noticed the light behind Conall's eyes and the hard angles of his face, which weren't there before.

"It is my vampire coming to the surface. It happens when I'm angry or very much aroused." He smiled. "I am not angry if you're wondering." He smiled, and Joel laughed. He took Joel's lips in a bruising kiss that left them both breathless. "You feel the excitement in my soul, baby."

“Will I know other vampires when I see them?”

“You will recognize them as you will other paranormal beings. You’ll see the alabaster skin and the pointed ears of the Fae, the telltale animal signs of the shifters, and you will see the aura of the magics.” Joel was a little taken aback by the discovery that awareness brought with it the ability to see what was hidden.

The understanding that was flooding his mind was heavy and thick but also brought everything into perspective. Life was clear, and things that had confused him and made him question were now making sense. The paranormal world was huge and operated parallel to the human world. He looked up at Conall and ran his fingertips down the side of his face, feeling the reality of the man and his potency.

“This is real.” He stated.

"It is all real, my love." He said and then rolled Joel onto his side and held him from behind for a few seconds before pushing his left leg up to give him access to Joel's swollen, needy hole. Joel saw the light flare in Conall's eyes, red and powerful; he could feel the strength behind them. Joel pushed his face into the pillows and jutted his ass back toward Conall.

Conall held Joel's leg high and, in one thrust, plunged inside, stretching him tight and filling him full. Joel moaned, loving the feel of Conall's large hot cock stretching him going so deep. The sensation rocked through his body as Conall pulled out and plunged back in again, only faster and harder, slapping their flesh and filling the room with their raucous desires.

The deep guttural sounds coming from Conall as he hammered into Joel set his blood on fire. The heat and the need were building to a level that had Joel gripping the sheets in his fists and panting for air. "Faster, Conall." He said, and Conall picked up speed, setting a rhythm of thrusts that had Joel reaching his climax in record time.

Joel reached down and began stroking his cock needing the release. He kept rhythm with Conall's thrusts, and the sensations were making his head spin with a pleasure unmatched. This was heaven, and he never wanted to end.

Conall was slamming inside rapidly and vigorously and brought them both to a peak of satisfaction and pleasure. He loved the feel of his beloved's tender hole squeezing him and holding him tight. The flesh was sensitized and aching for attention, and Conall would never deny himself or his beloved. He gripped Joel's leg and hiked it a little higher, spreading him open a little further, and then he hammered his hips, plunging inside and bouncing Joel off his cock. It was amazing and most pleasurable.

It hit him fast, and he came in a sudden burst, stream after stream of his hot seed flowed into his beloved's channel, marking him further and soothing his doubts and anxieties. Joel was pleasuring himself, which was a lovely thing to watch, and he came as soon as Conall bit down on the claiming scar he'd given him and drank, sealing their bond and cementing their connection. Every time they came together, Joel's understanding grew, and hopefully, acceptance would come with it as well.

He lowered Joel's leg and wrapped his arms around him, pulling him tight against his body. He was still inside his beloved, not ready to pull out and separate them just yet. He wanted to revel in the moment, holding his lover as they both relaxed and caught their breath.

"Making love with you is glorious. I've never felt so much so hard and so completely." Joel confessed his feelings, and Conall kissed the claiming scar on his shoulder. Joel shivered and giggled at the touch.

"Your claiming scar will always react to my touch," Conall explained.

"It feels thrilling, and I can't believe it, but I think I'm getting hard again." Conall laughed.

"You will get hard whenever I touch that scar." Conall reached down and encircled Joel's hard cock and started stroking him, and then bit into the scar. Joel jerked and panted and then came in a sharp eruption of seed that covered Conall's hand. Joel was breathless once again.

"That was so good," Joel said and watched as Conall lifted his hand that was covered in Joel's seed and licked it clean. "I'm getting hard again," Joel whispered. Conall slowly slid out of Joel's body, reached over, and grabbed some tissues from the bedside table. He cleaned Joel up and tossed the tissues to the side of the bed.

"You need to rest, my love. You have a lot to learn, and it will be coming at you fast now that our bond is complete and our connection solidly in place." He snuggled Joel's back to his chest and held him tightly. This was how he'd dreamed it would be with his beloved, and he looked forward to many happy and fulfilling nights in the future.

Conall was awakened by his phone just before dawn. He took the call but remained in bed with his arms around his beautiful beloved. "What is it?" He barked in a tight whisper, not happy at being disturbed.

"I wouldn't think of disturbing you, sir, but it's Cassius. He's escaped again." Ethan, who was following and advising the teams in the field that were tasked with eliminating the bears, hit him with the bad news. "But from what I can ascertain, he is alone. The businesses have been taken or burned, and the bears have either died or left town. All that remains is Cassius."

"Perhaps he has left town with the others," Conall suggested.

"He's still in town. He's been seen. Reports are coming in, but for such an out-of-shape toad, he's moving pretty fast." Ethan didn't like falling short of someone like Cassius.

"We'll find him, so don't worry. I'll be there shortly. Call up all the information you have."

"Yes, sir," Ethan responded. Conall closed the call and looked down at the gorgeous man in his arms.

"Fuck that bastard, Cassius, always getting in my way." He carefully got out of bed and washed up and dressed while keeping a close eye on his little lover. Joel hadn't woken, but he didn't want to leave him without an explanation, so he sat on the edge of the bed and ran his fingers through Joel's hair until he began to stir. He was so precious that it made Conall's heart hurt to have to leave him, even for only a while.

"You're up and dressed." He said as he attempted to sit up.

"Don't get up, sweetheart. It's still early, but I have to attend to something, and I didn't want to leave without letting you know that I will be back as soon as possible." Conall bent and kissed him softly. "You are such a gorgeous young man." He said, dropping another kiss on his plump lips.

"You are amazingly handsome so early in the morning." Joel countered and reached out, taking Conall's hand in his.

"You stay in bed and relax. When I get back, we can pick up where we left off last night." That brought a shy smile to Joel's lips.

"I'll be waiting," Joel said, and after another harder, more determined kiss, Conall got up and left the room. It was difficult to leave, but he planned to take care of business as quickly as possible and return to his beloved.

He'd have breakfast delivered, and they could have a lovely morning of sex and breakfast and then more sex. He smiled at the erotic thoughts and shook himself, and

brought his focus back to the business at hand, and that was killing that fucking cretin Cassius Brown.

Joel lay back in the large luxurious bed and closed his eyes. His mind shot back to the previous evening, and all he could think about was Conall and how he'd made him feel. The awareness he spoke of was real, and it brought equal measures of wonder and panic.

The paranormal world was all around him, and as a matter of fact, he was right there in the center of a vampire coven, the Rose Coven, to be specific. He understood who they were and what they were about now.

He grew up in this town, and he'd felt some suspicions about something powerful existing on the edges of normal life. But he never thought it would be so pervasive and so more than just vampires and shifters. It was a lot to take in, just as Conall had predicted, and it would be a while before he treated it as anything other than fantastical, but he would get there.

He checked the clock on the bedside table and saw that it was nearly six in the morning, and he was fully awake. It had been a couple of months since he had the luxury of sleeping in such comfort, but he could not get back to sleep. He sat up and then tossed off the blankets and threw his legs over the side of the bed. He wished he still had his phone, but Murphy had disposed of that early on. He wanted to call someone, maybe Ray at the coffee shop or Milly, his neighbor.

Thinking about his old life brought a wave of melancholy, but he pushed it away. There wasn't anything back there for him. He thought he had a life and friends, and yet no one looked for him. No one cared that he was gone, that he was missing. His family was spread out across the country, and no one kept in touch, so they wouldn't know, and they wouldn't care that he had been taken. He didn't need a phone because he had no one to call.

Joel got up and went to the bathroom, where he showered and dressed in the clothing from last night. The t-shirt and sweats were soft and warm, and he needed some soft and warm right now. He sat in the overstuffed chair by the wall and thought and wondered when Conall would return.

He was his beloved, and that fact was crystal clear now that the bond had snapped into place. It held a deep promise of love and devotion that would span a lifetime. It was the perfect relationship that would grow in love and longing with each passing day. He belonged to the feared and dreaded Conall Rose, Master of the Rose Coven.

That thought, as it hit him, weighed heavy, and he wondered if he was indeed reading this correctly. He'd been manipulated and abused for so long that he often doubted his own sense of reality, let alone an alternate one.

His mind was beginning to spin, and his thoughts were becoming frantic. He needed to calm down, or everyone would be able to feel his panic. The vampires could sense intense feelings like fear and panic, and he didn't want to raise the alarm that he was upset.

"I need some air." There were no windows in the bedroom or bathroom, so he went out into the living room. There was one on the far wall, but it was covered in thick, heavy curtains. He pushed back the curtains and saw that it did not open. The sense of being trapped was crawling all over him. "I have to have air."

Joel put on the slippers that Conall had given him last night and headed for the door. He remembered the route they took to get to Conall's quarters so he could backtrack and find his way out. He wouldn't go far he just needed to breathe some fresh air and feel the sky above him and the earth below. He wouldn't go far, he told himself.

No one bothered him or tried to stop him. That's when it struck him that he was not a prisoner, and he had the power to come and go as he pleased. He had the urge to go

back to Conall's quarters and wait. But the desire to feel some fresh air on his face won out and he continued on his way.

Once in the garage, he followed the roadway out the back entrance and into the alley that ran between the warehouse and the bar across from it. He noticed then that it was the Blood Rose, the place where his nightmare began. He stood still for a moment, taking it in, and he realized this was the alley he stood in as he waited for Murphy to bring his car around. The stupidity of that moment was hitting him hard as he considered the stupidity of his present moment.

He turned and looked back at the entrance to the garage and then down the alley a short distance to the main street. It felt good to be out in the air, but there was something telling him to go back. There was an attachment pulling at him, insistent that he return.

It was the pull that Conall had spoken of, the connection they held, that gave him awareness and insight and brought their hearts and minds together. He needed Conall in a way that he'd never needed anyone. Conall calmed and reassured him and gave him a sense of support that freed him from the panic and anxieties with which he'd been plagued for so long.

He looked behind him again and then again down the alleyway to the main street. "I'll just go to the main street and feel the openness and breathe the air, and then I will return." He told himself and began walking. The further he got from the warehouse entrance, the more he felt off and in danger. Was it real, or was it a side effect of the bond? He pushed himself to make it to the main street, stopped, and looked around.

It was too early for there to be many people on the street, but there was life and movement, and it seemed normal. It was the normal that he craved. To finally see the light of day and the city at dawn. He'd been kept in a room with the other dancers over the club and was not allowed to leave.

This felt good but also dangerous, and he wasn't sure where the danger signs were coming from. He stood for a few minutes, just taking in the openness and freedom, and then turned to head back to the alleyway. The desire to get back to the warehouse and to the safety of Conall's quarters and Conall's arms quickly overcame his need for fresh air.

Just as he was about to turn down the alley, someone rushed up behind him with an arm around his waist and a hand over his mouth. He was picked up and tossed into the back seat of a long black car. It took less than a few seconds for him to be forced back into his living nightmare.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:39 am

Conall reviewed the video surveillance of Cassius several times, watching him flee from the clan safehouse when Drakon went through it with his men, leveling it. He was picked up by a black car that is owned by the jackal gang that resides within the city. The jackals are loyal to no one, including their own brothers, so they weren't doing this out of the goodness of their hearts.

"Cassius has hired them as protection and maybe more." Ethan offered, and Conall nodded his agreement.

"I believe it is time we put the run on the jackals as well as the bears. This city needs to be cleaned and controlled before it falls below our ability to bring it back." Conall had nothing against criminal activity, and his business ventures relied heavily upon illegal activities. What he could not abide were the assholes who caused pain, humiliation, and loss for no reason apart from their need to hurt someone. It could be overlooked for a while, but soon, it became a lifestyle for them and could no longer be disregarded.

The bears and the jackals had both reached their limit and if Conall happened to benefit from their demise, then all the better. He put in a call to Victor, giving them full authority to finish the bears and bring down the jackals as well.

"It's about time," Victor commented. "I've wanted that group of shit-eaters out of our city for years."

"They're helping Cassius, so they deserve the same," Conall stated.

"Cassius must be truly desperate to call in the jackals. They don't work for free."

Victor chuckled at the thought of what they might do to Cassius if he couldn't pay. "His clan is gone, and he's on his own, so there is no one to save him from his hired muscle if things continue to go badly for him."

"I'm sure he made them promises, and we'll make sure he doesn't keep them." Conall closed the call and instructed Ethan to keep him posted on the cleanup and the pursuit of Cassius. He then headed out, eager to get back to his waiting beloved.

It had been a couple hours since he'd left his sweet love, but he half hoped the man was still in bed. If he were, Conall planned on joining him. He entered the elevator, and it was then that he felt the panic hit him. It was not his emotion or reaction it was coming from outside.

He stopped the elevator and headed to the garage. His instincts were telling him the panic belonged to Joel, for he'd never felt something like this so clearly before. It was the bond that was warning him, and his vampire senses were telling him to go to the garage. The moment he stepped out into the garage, he could smell his lover's jasmine saturating the area. Joel had been there not long ago. He stopped one of his soldiers, who was on guard.

"Amon, have you seen the human Joel Penny? Was he here in the garage?" He asked.

"Your beloved?" Amon clarified. Obviously, the news had traveled.

"Yes, my beloved."

"He was here a few minutes ago. He stepped outside." Amon indicated where he'd exited. It was the door that opened to the alley behind the Blood Rose. Conall rushed to the exit, flung the door open, and stepped out into the alleyway. His beloved was not there, but he could still smell his jasmine, so he followed.

At the point the alley met the main street, he felt the sinking feeling of shock and fear, a combination that went straight to his heart. He looked up the street and down and surveyed the immediate area. Joel was not there, and his scent was dissipating. Wherever he'd gone, he hadn't gone on foot. His trail was broken at the edge of the sidewalk and the street. His beloved had been taken.

He notified Ethan and asked for a surveillance video of the area, which Ethan sent immediately. In the video, he clearly saw Joel standing with his face in the wind, enjoying the air and looking beautiful. Then, the black car belonging to the jackals pulled up beside him, and he was taken. They had to have been watching the Coven House for them to be on hand for such a timely kidnapping. It was time for the jackals to die.

He then received a call from an unknown number, and he answered knowing full well who was calling and their intent. "Hello, Conall." Cassius drawled. "It would seem I have something that belongs to you." Cassius laughed, but Conall did not comment. "I heard that young Joel here is your beloved, and I believe it now that I've seen the bonding scar on his shoulder." Conall could feel his blood begin to boil at the thought of Cassius laying hands upon Joel, but he remained calm and waited for the ask, for there was definitely going to be an ask. Cassius wanted something.

"You've taken everything from me, Conall, and I've taken the most important thing from you." He paused and then went for the conditions. "I may be persuaded to return your little pet if you sign over the Blood Rose to me completely and legally, along with five hundred thousand dollars for my pain and suffering." He laughed and then put Joel on the phone to seal the deal.

"I'm sorry, Conall, I'm such an idiot; I'm so sorry." Joel was crying, and it was all Conall could do to not lose control and tear the very heart out of this city.

"It's okay, love. Stay calm and wait for me." He soothed, and Joel responded.

"I will, forever, if need be." The phone was snatched back, and Cassius concluded the call.

"Meet me at the remains of my club where you met your beloved. I believe we should end things exactly where they started. Come alone, or I'll kill him on the spot." He closed the call.

"Cassius and the jackals have abducted Joel and are holding him in or around Spring Street at the location of their former club." He spoke to Victor, who was livid at the audacity and correctly mirrored Conall's feelings on the matter. He didn't ask how he was taken but went straight to how to extract Joel without him getting hurt.

"He instructed me to come alone, so you and Drakon and your men need to fall back," Conall told him, and Victor quickly spoke up.

"If you go alone, they will kill you. I know you are capable of taking many, if not most, of them out, but in the end, with the number of jackals that I predict will be present, you cannot win Conall." Victor implored.

"I will not risk Joel's life, so this may be a gamble I have to take," Conall answered.

"We can remain hidden, Conall; those dolts will never know we're there. If you die, so does Joel." Conall realized that his emotions were clouding his thinking, and his need to kill everyone who even looked at his beloved was stirring a rage in his thoughts and mind.

"Meet me there." He said and closed the call. Victor was right, he had to handle this like he would any dealing with the jackals if his beloved was to survive. Blind rage would not help him reach his desired goal. He would appease that rage later when Joel was safe.

He gathered the items requested, finding the amount of five hundred thousand dollars to be rather cheap considering the prize he held. Conall would gladly pay ten times that amount to get Joel back. Cassius was always a small thinker with limited vision and ability.

Cassius backhanded him as soon as he hung up the call with Conall. "Your lover boy isn't going to save you, so don't get your hopes up, boy." He sneered at Joel and walked over to lean against the car. Joel looked around and saw nothing but ashes and rubble. The club that he'd spent nearly two months in slaving away for the likes of these monsters was now nothing but dust and garbage. It had always been dust and garbage in Joel's mind, so there wasn't much of a difference.

"Stay where you are," Cassius yelled at Joel when he started to move to the edges of the destruction nearer to the roadway. "I want him to see you clearly when he arrives." He laughed. "It will enrage him, and that's just what I'm hoping for." Cassius was a big talker, but Joel doubted he was much of a match for Conall, even an enraged Conall.

"He will kill you all," Joel said slowly and clearly and kept his eyes on the ground.

"He is Master Conall Rose; the Blood Rose is what they call him, and he will be showing you your entrails today." Joel wasn't sure where he was getting this defiant strength, but he liked it, and it seemed to set them back just a little.

"Shut up," Cassius screamed, and Joel looked up and pierced him with a knowing stare that caused him to step back. A large black SUV pulled up next to the debris and stopped. Joel watched as the love of his life stepped out of the vehicle, looking handsome and just as deadly as hell. He took in the area in one glance, just as he had at the club. He could sum up anyone in a glance.

He had a large envelope and some papers in his hand as he walked toward them. His

eyes captured Joel, and he could feel warmth and safety in that stare. Joel began to move to his right, just a half step at a time, slowly unnoticed by those who were training their attention on the Master.

"Good to see you, Conall." Cassius greeted him but stayed back with the jackals flanking him. His fear was heavy in the air. Conall took the thick envelope and threw it at him. It skidded to a stop a few inches from his feet. Cassius glanced around and then bent to retrieve the package.

Joel could see that it contained bills, probably the money that Cassius had demanded. The papers he was still holding were most likely related to the bar, the Blood Rose. As tense and uncomfortable as the scene was, Joel found that he was not afraid. As soon as Conall arrived, all fear and apprehension drained away. He had no doubt how this would end, and he looked forward to being in Conall's arms once again.

"Is that the ownership of the Blood Rose in your hand there, friend?" Cassius asked but still did not move toward Conall. He nodded at the guy to his left, and he walked toward Conall, and reached out his hand for the paperwork.

Conall did not immediately hand it over. He looked over at Joel, who was now a good distance from where he'd been originally standing, having moved away from the impending melee without notice. The expression he wore told Joel to stay put, stay alert, and follow his lead.

"Your beloved is there and somewhat unharmed." Cassius forced a laugh, but it came out with a nervous crackle.

Conall took two steps to the side, effectively putting himself between Cassius and Joel. The jackals wouldn't kill Joel unless they had to, but Cassius would do it for kicks and spite. Their bond gave Joel some perks, such as being faster and stronger and healing faster, but he was not immortal. Cassius knew how to kill him. He'd done

it before to others that displeased him or got in his way. Cassius was carrying a firearm, and it would only take one shot properly placed to kill his sweet love.

"Hand over the Blood Rose, or both you and your beloved will die." Cassius declared, pulling the large handgun from under his coat. Bullets had little effect on vampires, but he wasn't intending the gun for him.

Conall held the papers up. "Let Joel walk away, and once he's out of sight, I will hand over the documents."

"Why don't we just kill you both right now and take the documents from your corpse." Cassius stated and took another step closer to Conall.

"Show me what you got, Cassius. Come and take them from me." Conall baited.

"Take them from him do it now." He yelled at the jackal standing a few feet from Conall. The jackal attacked, and Conall caught him with one hand to his throat and forced him to the ground.

The jackal clawed at Conall's hold on him, but it was useless. He had an iron grip on the beast's throat, and he was crushing it. He stuck the papers back into his jacket and pulled out a dagger, plunging it into the jackal's eye and twisting it. He then pulled it out and wiped it off on his knee before assessing the surroundings once again.

The jackals cared nothing about their brother, so his death was considered his own fault. They were a cold breed that never formed bonds with anyone or anything. They would fight for Cassius if the money was right and for no other reason than that.

"Kill them, kill them both, and the Blood Rose is yours," Cassius called out and ran for the car as the jackals immediately advanced on Conall. It was then that Victor Drakon, and the others descended upon them. Conall saw Samuel swoop in and grab

Joel, spiriting him away to the SUV for safety.

Once Joel was secure and protected, Conall headed for Cassius. His men were taking care of the jackals, but they were leaving Cassius for him. The coward tried to run, but Conall's men had him hemmed in, unable to flee the yard.

For once, Cassius would have to face a reckoning for all his bad decisions. No running this time, no putting it on his clan or his brothers, for they were all gone. And now the jackals, his hired muscle, were dying and fleeing, and he was alone.

He frantically looked around, summoning help, but the scene had devolved into every man for himself with no order or form. Conall's men systematically pushed them back and cut them down. Those who ran would be found no one was going to survive such an egregious break in custom and practice as abducting and abusing a beloved.

"Let's discuss this, Conall." He started, but Conall wasn't there to discuss. "It was simply business we wouldn't have actually killed him. We would have returned him in time, even without you meeting our demands. It was just business." Cassius implored but soon understood his pleas were useless, and he shifted. He was an out-of-shape, awkward man, but he was a massive and savage bear.

Conall held his dagger in one hand and a short sword in the other. Bullets were useless on a beast of this size. The bear tried to circle him, but Conall kept advancing, forcing him to ultimately take a stand. This day was a long time coming, and Conall was ready to put an end to Cassius and his depravity.

Conall focused on Cassius, fully confident that his men would take care of the rest. But his heart still remained connected to his little lover in the SUV. Joel would forever be in his heart, with his health and happiness being Conall's primary concerns. He would not be safe until Cassius was dead.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:39 am

Joel sat in the SUV and watched his lover face a bear the size of a truck. It should have put him into a panic, but he was somewhat calm. Worry existed on the edges of his mind but was not overwhelming him. He waited, knowing that Conall would come for him when it was safe.

Several men stood outside the vehicle, keeping watch and clearly protecting him. He would not move until Conall told him it was okay he was done trying to find his way in this new world on his own. The stupidity of going out on his own wore on him. If he'd been thinking clearly, he would have opened a damn window instead of going to the alley for air.

He would have to find his footing in this new world and do it fast. It bothered him that he'd put Conall and his men in such a position for something as ridiculous as needing some air. There were so many ways he could have handled this, but he took the most dangerous route. He was descending into some serious self-loathing when his thoughts suddenly softened, and the embarrassment he had been feeling started to fade.

He felt Conall's regard, and his tender thoughts warmed him and gave him comfort. Cassius had made such vial threats to him, and the jackals had treated him roughly, but they were waiting to see if Conall brought what they wanted before killing him. They made it very clear to him that death was his only escape, and he would be dead before the day was over.

Through it all, he never lost faith in the fact that Conall would come for him. It was just a matter of time. He wasn't sure how he knew, but he knew Conall would save him. The bond he'd spoken of gave him insight and understanding into many things,

including the emotional bond that existed between them.

They were meant to be he knew that now without question. No more bullshit doubts and insecurities he planned to make his feelings for Conall very clear once he finished with this business.

Joel looked over his shoulder at the battle ensuing there in the lot that had once been a despicable strip club. Conall had destroyed the club, and he would destroy their enemies. This was his life, and he was ready to live it. Joel leaned back, closed his eyes, and sent every ounce of love and devotion he felt toward his amazing lover.

Conall continued to close in on Cassius. His bear was formidable but, like Cassius, lacked focus and control. A feeling of complete, all-encompassing love came over him, and he recognized Joel. His beloved was sending his deepest feelings, showing him his heart openly and freely, and it was wonderful. Conall was energized and motivated to end this circus and get back to his beloved.

"You can't run, Cassius. There is nowhere for you to go. You've betrayed everyone you ever knew, and now even your hired friends are abandoning you." He knew that would infuriate the beast, and it did just that. Cassius started to charge, and Conall was ready. The bear came at him but fumbled when he tried to strike out with his long, razor-sharp claws.

Conall sliced him with the dagger and sent him reeling backward, but soon gathered his rage and made another charge. This time, he leaped at Conall, clearing the ground and coming down on top of him. But Cassius hadn't taken into consideration the short sword in Conall's left hand. Or if he did, he didn't recognize its lethality or Conall's skill with a blade.

He roared out in anger and pain and attempted to swipe his claws across Conall's face, but Conall stuck the dagger in the bear's wrist and rolled the beast off him. He stood over the dying bear with his sword stuck in his heart and held it firm, twisting it

and staring into its eyes. "You don't belong here, Cassius. You and your kind will find no place in my territory. I will root out all who bring scrutiny down upon us. I rule this territory, and you dared to touch my beloved and threaten me."

Cassius shifted back to his human form as he bled out. He gripped the blade of the sword and stared into Conall's eyes. "This isn't over, Conall." He ground the words out between teeth that were clenched.

"Maybe not, but it is over for you." Conall twisted the sword and then buried the dagger in his throat. Cassius was dead, and with him, the blight that had taken over the area.

Conall turned and headed for the SUV. His men could handle what remained, and Victor would oversee the cleanup. Right now, all he wanted, all he needed was to have his beloved Joel in his arms.

His body was shaking, and craving to hold him close. Every part of him was fixated on getting to the SUV as quickly as possible. The demand that he felt in his soul to protect and defend was still raging through him even after the threats were dealt with. He would not calm or relax until he had Joel in his sight and in his arms.

Conall nodded his head at Samuel, who then got in behind the wheel while Conall slipped into the back seat. The jasmine that enveloped him was fucking beautiful the heavenly scent filled his heart and mind and eased a portion of his worry. He knew his beloved was safe, but still until they were together, he would not be satisfied.

"Conall, I'm so sorry." Joel began his apologies, but they were not needed. He knew his lover, and he knew that there was no intent to run away or cause the trouble that ensued. He should have been able to step outside the warehouse without the danger of being kidnapped.

"No need to be sorry. I should have been clearer about the danger. You are the most

important person in the world to me, and I have a lot of enemies. This makes you a prime target for anyone hoping to influence or destroy me." Joel crawled onto Conall's lap and laid his head on his shoulder.

Conall wrapped him in his arms and just held him for several minutes. Feeling the beat of his heart and the soft breath against his throat calmed all the fears and dampened the rage boiling in his blood.

Joel laid his hand on Conall's chest, and the warmth of that touch went right to Conall's heart. He loved this young man with all that he had and all that he was, and nothing would ever part them.

"You were going to give five hundred thousand dollars and the deed to the Blood Rose to Cassius so he would release me." Joel sounded amazed by the act, but it was small, considering what he would have given. Joel was worth everything in this world.

"I would have given anything to have you safe and in my arms." Joel tilted his face up toward him, and Conall placed a hard kiss on those soft, trembling lips. The taste of his beloved was all that he needed to feel right and fulfilled. He could never lose this man.

"I made a deal with Cassius, and if he'd held to the deal, he would have walked away with the money and the bar. I wanted to kill them all, but a deal in good faith must be held. It is one of the very few laws that we follow." Conall let out a long sigh and laid his cheek on the top of Joel's head, loving the tight embrace and the feel of Joel's pert little ass sitting atop his now very hard cock.

"If he'd handed you over, I would have had to meet my part of the agreement, but instead, he decided he would try to kill you and me both, which immediately nullified the deal." Conall smiled because he figured it would work out that way.

"Cassius couldn't resist going for the chance of killing me and taking the lead in this territory. It was a chance that did not pay off for him. But thankfully, he and his group of swine are finished and no longer a threat to the decent people of this city." He actually had very little thought as to the decent people of the city his only concern was to make everyone who dared touch his beloved pay with their lives.

He didn't share that with Joel because his little love was a gentle soul. Even with everything he'd endured, he still had love, hope, and joy in his heart. His Joel didn't need to worry about the evil among them, for Conall would deal with them every time with an iron hand.

"I love you, Conall. I know that I acted poorly on more than one occasion, but I always believed that you had my best interests at heart. After the bond snapped into place, your regard for me became clear. This isn't a one-off or a keep me till you get bored type of relationship. This is a real bond of hearts and minds. I feel it, and I want it. I want it all, Conall." He stared into the depths of his beloveds, beautiful, soulful eyes and saw the sincerity of every word he spoke, and his heart melted for the love of this man.

Conall leaned forward and spoke to Samuel. "Takes us home, Samuel, but take the long way." Samuel nodded, started the SUV, and pulled out onto the road. Conall reached up and closed the panel, separating the front seat from the back and giving them complete privacy.

"I want you, Joel." He said, and the meaning was clear. Joel took a sharp breath and then looked up at Conall.

"I want you too, so bad." Joel scooted back just a bit and started opening Conall's pants, slowly lowering the zipper and spreading the fabric to expose his hard, aching cock. Joel took it in one hand and pumped it with a firm grip. Conall took the back of Joel's sweatpants and pulled them down, baring his luscious ass to Conall's eager, exploring hands.

Being with his beloved was a beautiful and satisfying event, and nothing in his life would ever compare. Thinking about your beloved and actually having your beloved in your arms were two very different feelings.

It was such a stark awakening to the power of Fate and the significance of this one person in the whole of your life. It wasn't just a companion and sex partner for your long life. It was a pairing of souls knowing this person completely without question or reserve. It was perfect.

Conall thrust gently, enjoying the attention of his beloved and the feel of his soft hands on his heated cock. "You are my life, Joel, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do to keep you happy and safe." He nuzzled his face into the crook of Joel's neck and breathed in the gorgeous scent of jasmine.

He pressed his thumb into Joel's greedy opening and felt the shudder that passed through him, and it was delicious. The heat and the arousal churned around them as their want grew with each stroke and each kiss. There would never be another for him, and he needed no one but this sweet, gentle little man. His love and devotion would nourish him for a lifetime.

Joel raised up, and Conall pulled his fingers free from the tight entrance. Joel positioned Conall's throbbing cock to his opening and slowly lowered himself down, taking it inside a torturous slow inch at a time. Conall held his breath as the intimacy and love of this moment took his breath away.

He held back and let Joel take the lead watching as his hard cock disappeared inside that lovely body over and over and relishing the sensations that rushed through his body. His beloved was more than he could have ever asked for, and he would cherish him forever.

"I love how you fill me so full; the feel of you inside me makes my body tremble." Joel had closed his eyes and was reveling in his own feelings. It was beautiful to

watch, and Conall absorbed every move and every glance.

"You make me so happy, Joel." He said, and Joel opened his eyes and smiled. Then, a rapid bounce began that set Conall's nerve ends on fire. The push to climax raged in his blood, and Joel did not let up. He pounded away, bringing him all the excitement and sensitivity to feel his mind blowing with the need to come.

It was an explosion of sharp sensations and feelings that tensed and froze as the need to release overcame his attempt to hold on a little longer. Joel slammed down and gripped him tight, and Conall came with a raw gasp and a sudden jerk. He filled his beloved, spasming with each release and thrusting upward, seeking further satisfaction.

Joel held tight and stared into Conall's eyes. The satisfaction in that stare was exquisite, and it touched Conall's heart in a way it had never been touched before. Joel opened so many doors for Conall emotionally, and he relished every new experience. He pulled Joel toward him, sunk his teeth into the lovely bonding scar on his shoulder, and took a small sip. The taste of his beloved was without compare.

They stayed that way until the SUV stopped, with Conall holding him close with his now softening cock still inside Joel's lovely body. "I don't want to move Conall. This feels so good, and I feel so safe with you."

"I will love and protect you always, my love." Conall pledged.

"I want to stay here with you," Joel stated, but it came out as if it were a question.

"Your place is here with me it has always been." Conall made it clear. "I had my men find your belongings, and they are in our quarters. The landlord had stored them when you failed to return."

"Thank you for doing that for me."

"I will always take care of you," Conall added in case there were still any questions lingering. "Feel free to sort your things and put them where you wish. My home is your home." He then figured it was as good a time as any to approach the discussion of Joel's previous jobs.

"I would prefer that you not work outside the home. The manpower it would take to protect you would be awkward for my men and uncomfortable for you. Victor and Drakon both have human beloveds, and they work within the coven itself. Jaden, Victor's beloved is a freelancer, and Dean, Drakon's beloved works for the coven." Conall paused for comment.

"I don't know what use I could be in the coven. My work history is primarily in the service industry. But I do understand the situation, and I will find something that doesn't require me to spend long hours in public." Conall appreciated his understanding but wanted him to enjoy whatever it was he decided to do.

"What would you do if you could have any job you wanted?" He decided to start there to get an idea.

"This probably sounds stupid to someone like you, but I wanted to become an event planner. I was working for a caterer and loved watching the planners put everything together. But I would need training and certification in this area." Joel told him honestly.

"Nothing that interests you is ever stupid, my love. Your desires are important to me. Know that you can share anything with me." Conall held him snugly to his chest and rotated his hips, stirring his cock, which was still buried inside his beloved. Joel moaned and giggled, and Conall laughed softly. "I love you so much.

"Event planner would be doable," Conall stated. "The training and certification can be easily obtained, and I believe a good share of the work is done remotely. For those times when you meet with clients or suppliers or whoever you could have an assistant

with, No one needs to know that he is your bodyguard." He felt Joel's rising excitement, and it pleased him.

"I'll think about it but thank you for listening and hearing me." Joel moved up and kissed him gently with a teasing allure that was all Joel's.

"I will always listen to you, my love, and with that said, why don't you take some time to relax and find out what really interests you? I just ask that you run it by me before getting started." Joel laughed and laid back on Conall's chest.

"Don't worry, I will never do anything as stupid as what I did today. I will stay aware of my surroundings, and I will pay attention to my safety, I promise."

"I know you will." Conall wanted to give his lover the moon, but his position and lifestyle came with some limitations. He would help Joel with whatever he needed and in any way that he could. "Come now and let us go home. It is time we get you settled and get reacquainted."

"Reacquainted?" Joel grinned up at him.

"Of course." Conall helped him get his clothing in place and slipped off his lap while Conall adjusted his own clothing. "It has been hours since I last enjoyed you in our bed."

"I'll need to shower first before getting into that fabulous bed," Joel told him as the door opened, and they both stepped out. Conall picked him up into his arms and carried him to the elevator, needing to keep him very close until the fear of losing him wore off. Those beasts had scared the life out of him, and it was going to take a day or two before he allowed Joel out of his sight.

"A shower sounds wonderful, I'll join you."

“I’d love that.” Joel relaxed in his arms. “It feels good to be home.”

“It feels good to be with you, my love.”