

# The Succubus Gift

*An Urban Fantasy/Paranormal Romance*



## BR Kingsolver

Book 1 in the Telepathic Clans Saga

**The Succubus Gift**  
**An Urban Fantasy / Paranormal Romance**  
**By B.R. Kingsolver**

~~~

Published by B.R. Kingsolver at Smashwords

~~~

Copyright 2012 B.R. Kingsolver

[brkingsolver.com](http://brkingsolver.com)

~~~

**Cover art by Rebecca Sinz**

[www.elvenstarart.com](http://www.elvenstarart.com)

~~~

Look for the further adventures of Brenna O'Donnell in Book 2 of the Telepathic Clans

***Succubus Unleashed***  
***An Urban Fantasy / Paranormal Romance***

### **Smashword Edition, License Notes**

*This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to [Smashwords.com](http://Smashwords.com) and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.*

To Valentina, who encouraged me to write.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There's nothing like dumping a raw manuscript on someone to discover who your real friends are. Valentina, thank you for your encouragement, reading my first efforts, creating my website, and so much more.

Jane and Jackie, I can't believe you read it over and over through its many iterations. Thanks for putting up with me and giving me invaluable feedback and editing help. Rebecca Sinz created the incredible cover art. JQ Trotter, your in-depth critique forced me to rethink and then revise. All of my readers owe you a thanks. Hennessee Andrews helped with proofreading and the delicate scenes at a time I'm sure she was a bundle of nerves with her own first novel being published. HP Mallory, best-selling ePub author, sparked the idea that even I could publish a book.

It may not be a silk purse, but without these dear friends, it would definitely be a sow's ear.

## Table of Contents

### Pronunciation Guide to Names

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

The Telepathic Gifts

### Pronunciation Guide to Names

Some of the names in this book have been Anglicized, for others:

Aine: aw-nya – delight or pleasure

Aislinn: awsh-leen – dream or vision

Aoife: eef-ya – beautiful or radiant

Beltane: bel-tane – May Day, the beginning of the summer season, a springtime festival of optimism

Brenna: bran-na – raven, often referring to hair

Caylin: kay-lin – slender, fair

Irina: ee-ree-na – Russian form of Irene

Mairead: mah-rayd – Gaelic form of Margaret

Morrighan: mor-ri-gan – Celtic goddess

Poitin: po-teen – Irish moonshine

Rhiannon: ree-an-on – Welsh for maiden

Samhain: so-ween – The harvest festival, now called Halloween

Seamus: shay-mus – the supplanter

Sean: shawn – Gaelic form of John

Sinead: shi-nayd – Irish version of Jeanne

Siobhan: shee-vawn – Variation of Jeanne

Slainte: slayn-cheh – ‘Health’ in Gaelic, a toast

Tuatha De Danann: tu-a-tha de dan-an – The people of the Goddess Danu - The original pre-Celtic inhabitants of Ireland

~~~

**A FULL LIST AND DESCRIPTION OF THE TELEPATHIC GIFTS APPEARS AT THE  
END OF THE BOOK**

# The Succubus Gift

## Chapter 1

*We have been burned at the stake, locked up in asylums, drugged into a stupor. We are secretive for our own protection. - Seamus O'Donnell*

She noticed the young man immediately when he walked past her, head down and in a hurry, but not only because he was so good looking. He had no thoughts, no mental activity, and that grabbed her attention in a way nothing else could have.

Following him, she stepped into a shop doorway when he stopped and looked around. She didn't need to keep him in sight. She could feel his emotions, so strange coming from someone with no thoughts she could read, different than all the other people on the streets. Checking her mental shields to make sure they were as tight as she could make them, she followed him around a corner. He didn't look back, seemingly not aware she was there.

Moving closer as he turned another corner into an alley, she stopped when he hesitated at the other end. He looked about before stepping out onto the street, but he never looked back. Realizing he couldn't feel her, she closed the distance between them.

Scanning the area with her mind, she discovered two other men, farther away, who also were mentally shielded. Their emotions were completely different than his, and she shivered at the malice radiating from them. Every time the first man changed direction, the others soon followed. Although they couldn't see each other, it was almost as though they could feel each other, just as she could feel them. Through the maze of streets in Baltimore's Inner Harbor area, they danced across the city in the summer twilight.

He walked into a bar just a block off the water. She knew it had entrances on two different streets, and rather than follow him, she walked to the corner, out into the street, and stood in front of one of the unusual old triangular houses in this part of town. From her vantage point she could see both entrances.

Coming out the other side, he walked in the opposite direction, away from the harbor. He was doubling back, hoping to lose his pursuers, but they weren't tracking him by sight or sound. She watched a man hesitate in front of the door the young man had used to enter the bar, stop, and then turn around.

He was walking faster now and she was forced to break into a run to keep up with him. He stopped in a small park, in a dark area near a building, turning and waiting for her.

"Why are you following me?" he asked as she approached him. He was tall with brown hair and blue eyes in his early twenties.

"Those men are following you. Do they want to hurt you?" she asked, looking up at him. "They don't feel the same as you do." His blue eyes widened. "They're coming. They can feel you."

"I can't feel you, and I doubt they can either," he answered with a puzzled tone in his voice. "You're an O'Neill." He took a step toward her. "Who the hell are you?"

She felt the other men at the edge of the park. "Why are you afraid? Are they going to hurt you?"

"I don't know. They might try," he answered, smiling nervously.



She covered him in her shield and saw his fists clench as the other men approached. The sense of menace radiating from them increased as they drew closer, moving stealthily. In the darkness, she couldn't see them clearly. Large men, even bigger than the young man she was following, they had a rough look. One passed within only a few feet. He turned and looked directly at them, but continued on. She could see he held a pistol close to his body.

"Holy Mary," the young man breathed when they were well gone.

She stepped close to him, out of the shadow, and looked up at his face. It was the first time he could see her clearly. His eyes widened in shocked surprise.

"Who are you?" she asked. "What are you? Do you know what I am?"

He stared at her pale face wreathed in black hair. His mouth opened, then closed. He swallowed and shook his head.

"Please," she said, her voice cracking, "can you help me? I've been alone for so long. Are there more people like us? Do you know where to find them?"

Taking a deep breath, he leaned forward and in a low voice said, "Come with me. I'll take you to someone who can answer your questions."

He started off, then turned back when she just stood watching him. "I know what you did to make those men miss us. Thank you. I promise no one will hurt you if you come with me."

They set off across the city together. After several blocks he turned up a street, similar to many in the area, where all the row houses looked exactly the same. They walked to a house halfway down the street and rang the doorbell. When the door opened, he entered, pulling her after him.

"Jared, what the hell?" the man inside stepped back frowning, his eyes scanning over her, lingering on her chest. "Who's this?"

"I've been playing hide-and-seek with two thugs half the afternoon," Jared answered. "Their shields and strength were pretty much a match for mine, and I just couldn't shake them. Then I ran across this lovely lady who graciously extended her shields to hide me from them. Where are Seamus and my mom?"

"Shielded you?" She felt him attempt to read her mind. Her blue eyes flashed and she pushed back, feeling his shields bend under the pressure she exerted. His eyes widened. "I see. Seamus is probably in his office."

Jared took her by the arm and led her down a corridor. They took a turn, then turned again into another corridor. Bewildered, she let him guide her. She had been in dozens of Baltimore row houses and they were small, open structures. She felt like she'd fallen down the rabbit hole.

They stopped in front of a door and Jared knocked, then entered when a deep voice said, "Come in."

Inside a spacious office, a very large man with shoulder-length gray hair and a bushy beard was seated behind a desk. A tall, thin woman with sandy colored hair in her late thirties or early forties stood just inside the other door to the room. She took a tentative

step forward, the blood draining from her face, and the man sat up in his chair, eyes riveted on the face of the young woman with Jared.

The young woman wore a white tank top and hip-hugger blue jeans that outlined her wasp-waisted hourglass figure. Thick, wavy black hair cascaded to her waist, contrasting with her pale complexion and sapphire blue eyes.

“I’d like you to meet ... I’m sorry, I didn’t get your name,” Jared said, turning to her with a slight smile.

“Brenna,” she said.

“Of course. This is Brenna. I had a couple of stalkers follow me tonight. She helped me get home. Brenna, this is my grandfather, Seamus, and my mother, Callie.”

“Thank you for seeing my grandson home, Miss, uh,” the man said slowly. He had a faint but distinct Irish accent.

“Morgan,” Brenna supplied.

“Miss Morgan. I didn’t know he was lost, but thank you for your help,” he said with a faint smile.

“She shielded me,” Jared said. “Covered me to invisibility without touching me.”

Seamus’ eyes narrowed at this assertion, studying her closely. “That’s very interesting.”

Biting her lower lip, the woman walked toward Brenna and indicated a chair with a trembling hand, “Please be seated. Can, can we get you anything to eat or drink?” Her cultured voice quavered.

“Oh, no,” Brenna replied, “I’m fine, thank you.” They were all telepaths, she could feel their shields. She sat stiffly on the edge of the chair, fidgeting and wringing her hands in her lap.

“Are there many of us?” she blurted. “I’ve felt more mind readers tonight than I ever have. What are we? Do you use the term telepath?” the questions tumbled out. Her eyes darted from one person to the other. “Jared said you could answer my questions.”

“Yes,” the older man said softly, “we use the term telepath. And there are quite a few of us.” He leaned forward, his blue eyes staring directly into hers, “I don’t think Morgan was the name you were born with. What was your original name, do you know?”

She looked at him questioningly then said, “My birth name is O’Donnell.”

He leaned back in his chair and folded his hands across his stomach. “Brenna Aoife O’Donnell?” he asked, saying her middle name with its correct Gaelic pronunciation, Eefya. Her eyes widened, mouth hanging open, and she nodded. “Your parents were Jack and Maureen O’Donnell and they were killed in a plane crash about fifteen years ago?”

“Yes, how do you know all that?”

“My name’s Seamus O’Donnell, child, and I’m your grandfather,” he said with a catch in his voice. He leaned forward, tears in his eyes. “Good Lord, we thought you were with them on that plane.”

She turned and looked at Jared and Callie. Jared was nodding, Callie lifted a trembling hand to her mouth. Tears ran down her cheeks. She started forward as though

to take Brenna in her arms, then caught herself and stood gazing down at the girl's upturned face.

"I'm your aunt," she said. "Your father was my older brother."

"You look exactly like your mother," Jared said, shaking his head. "Exactly. I couldn't believe it when I saw you. It was like Maureen coming back from the dead."

"I, I don't understand," Brenna stammered, "I've been in Baltimore the past six years and never run into any telepaths. I'd have felt you." She jumped up from her chair, walking away from them, then turning back, face flushed and hands fisted by her side. "Where have you been? Why did you abandon me? Why didn't you look for me?"

"Brenna, Mom and Grandfather don't live here in Baltimore, and I just moved here," Jared said. "This house isn't used very often, but we had business here this week."

Seamus sighed, his voice gentle, "Our need for secrecy sometimes works to our disadvantage. Your parents were in the middle of changing their identities when they died. We did look for you, but we didn't know where to look. It took us two days to confirm they were really on that plane. At first, we couldn't find the house they had just moved to. The whole mess was so chaotic, and we thought you were with them. No bodies were ever recovered from the crash."

"Changing their identities? Why?" her voice rising in pitch, her gaze darting from Seamus to Callie and then to the door.

Callie walked over to her. "How old do you think I am, or Jared?" she asked softly.

Brenna looked at Jared, who appeared barely older than she herself, and remembered him saying he knew her mother, dead fifteen years. And if Callie was his mother, she must have had him as a teenager.

"I don't understand. What are you trying to say?" Agitated, Brenna edged away from Callie, her whole body shaking.

Callie sighed. "I'm eighty-three. After a while, people start to notice that we don't age as normal people do. So your father and mother were in the process of changing identities, dying and being reborn as someone younger, and at first their deaths created a lot of confusion. Real deaths, fake deaths, moving from Maryland to Virginia, we didn't know what was going on, and when we were able to confirm their deaths, we thought you were dead too."

Seamus started to say something but his voice caught. He cleared his throat, and haltingly said, "I thought they were going to drop you off with me, before their trip, and when they didn't, I assumed they decided at the last moment to take you with them. Dear God, child, I thought I'd lost my whole family. I wanted all of you to be alive." His face quivered and tears spilled down his cheeks.

"I was supposed to stay with my grandfather," Brenna said softly, staring down at the floor. "One of my friends was having a birthday, and I didn't want to miss it. Mrs. Harris told my mom I could stay with them. It was kind of last minute. Then we saw the news about the crash."

She looked up, tears in her eyes. "I knew I had grandparents, but I didn't know their last names, or how to find them, just that they lived far away. Social Services couldn't find any record of me, no school records, no history. I could tell them I used to go to

school in West Virginia, but they couldn't find any records of me. I spent four years bouncing from foster home to foster home, and then the Morgans adopted me.

"You know, I'm having a lot of trouble with all this," Brenna said, her voice shaking. "I feel like I was just dumped and now all of a sudden I have strangers telling me a fantastic story and wanting me to just open my arms and welcome them into my life. I'm not even sure I want to believe you."

"They wouldn't have found any records," Callie said. "Where we live in West Virginia isn't on any maps and the school you attended is private. Father doesn't exist as far as the world knows, and O'Donnell is a rather common name. Brenna, you have to believe us, we thought you were dead."

Seamus said, "Well, we've found each other now, and I'll make damned certain we don't lose each other again. Are you living here in Baltimore? We can move you in here and then decide what to do next. Are you still in school? Working?"

Shaking her long black hair back from her face, she raised her chin, squared her shoulders, and said, "I just graduated and I'm working. I have a house about a mile from here. I have a life. I appreciate that you feel we need to get to know each other, but I've been without any family for a long time now. I'd like to be able to sort of ease back into things, if you don't mind."

"Brenna, our family has enemies," Jared said. "It isn't safe for you to be completely on your own. What if you ran into those men who were following me?"

"Oh?" Brenna shot back. "I seem to have done all right the past fifteen years, and I don't remember it being me who was having trouble dodging their attentions."

"I know this is a bit sudden," Seamus said, "but if you've just graduated, then perhaps you might be open to a job offer from our family business. We have very diverse interests, many locations. Will you listen to alternatives?"

"I doubt you have anything in my field," Brenna said.

"It's Dr. Brenna Morgan, isn't it?" Callie said, softly cutting into the exchange between Seamus and Brenna. "You've submitted a paper for publication called 'Neurologic Observations During Self-perceived Psychic Phenomena'."

Brenna gasped, turned to her and said, "How could you know about that paper? It hasn't been published yet. It was just accepted."

"Does the name Randolph Wilkins mean anything to you?" Callie answered.

"Dr. Randolph Wilkins, the neurophysiologist? Yes, I've used his work mapping brain functions extensively as a basis for my own work. Why?"

"My name is Dr. Callista O'Donnell Wilkins, and Randolph is my husband. He was sent your paper to review when you submitted it for publication. He told me he suspected, based on some of the methods you used and the conclusions you drew, that you might be a wilder, a telepath unconnected to a Clan. He was considering contacting you."

"Callista Wilkins? The geneticist? But, you'd have to be over seventy," Brenna's voice slowed, got softer. "And Randolph Wilkins, he must be, his seminal work was published, over fifty years ago ..." she stared wide-eyed at Callie. The woman had

already said she was eighty-three. She couldn't be. She couldn't be older than forty. Brenna was looking at her skin, not two feet away, and it was smooth and youthful.

"Oh, my God," she turned to Jared. "How old?"

"I'm thirty-five," he said.

"I was born in 1853," said Seamus.

"Brenna, we don't age the way most people do," Callie told her.

"How old, what's our life span?" Brenna asked, a note of panic in her voice.

"About two hundred years," Callie answered, "and we develop late. Not physically, but mentally our brains take longer to develop. You're still at least a decade away from maturing and developing your full powers."

Brenna took a deep breath. She stared off into space, silence fell over the room as the others watched her.

"And what are my full powers?" she asked.

Callie answered her. "We don't know. Our Gifts vary from person to person."

Brenna was silent awhile longer. She shoved her hair back from her face, her other hand clenching and unclenching, then looked at Seamus, her eyes flashing, "Why are you telling me all this? If you're so concerned about secrecy, then why tell me things that are obviously something you don't want people to know?"

He chuckled. "Who would believe you? None of this is news to other telepaths, except wilders like you. If you ran out of here and called a news conference, tried to tell CNN or the Washington Post, do you think they would take you seriously? You've known you can read minds all of your life. Who have you told?"

Seamus leaned forward, his face very serious. "We've been burned at the stake, locked up in asylums, drugged into a stupor. We're secretive for our own protection. We're a tiny minority, and those of us whose lines have survived these last few millennia have learned to be very circumspect and very protective. Humans – normal humans – have never been very comfortable with us, and it's to our advantage that we let them believe we're myths."

"That's why Randolph was concerned about your paper," Callie said. "He told me that some of the things you were investigating would only occur to someone who knew the phenomena were real. The areas of the brain you were monitoring would only be associated with psychic phenomena by someone who already knew those phenomena were possible.

"And that's why your safety is of concern. Other telepaths will see the same clues in your work. Once your paper's published, those who monitor the scientific literature in this area of study will come looking for you."

"If that's the case, why haven't you contacted me already? Why tell me this now, when I stumble into your midst?" Brenna asked.

"Do you recall a Dr. Angus contacting you for an appointment in a couple of weeks?" Callie asked.

"Yes," Brenna replied.

“Dr. Randolph *Angus* Wilkins is currently in the Far East, but will be coming back to DC in two weeks,” Callie said. “He planned to meet with you ahead of the publication of your paper to assess whether you’re a telepath, as he suspects. I don’t think that meeting is necessary now.”

Until then, everything had seemed unreal, but how could they know about that appointment? The implications of everything they’d said crashed down on her. She took a deep breath, her hands shaking. She felt faint. Wobbling, she made her way to the chair and sat down. The world started spinning and she felt Callie’s hand on the back of her neck, pushing her head between her legs.

After a while, she slowly sat up straight. A sense of numbness settled over her. Leaning back in her chair, she said, “This day definitely took a wild turn.” She looked around at them. “What the hell do I do now?”

~~~

## [Chapter 2](#)

*According to a recent survey, men say the first thing they notice about women is their eyes, and women say the first thing they notice about men is their lies. - Anonymous*

It was late when Callie showed Brenna to a bedroom on the third floor.

“What is this place?” Brenna asked. “I feel as though I’ve walked into an Escher painting.”

Callie laughed. “All the houses on this block are connected. It’s actually all one house. Your father bought the whole block when the Inner Harbor was developed and designed a house for the Clan. It’s huge, and only a few of the outside doors are real.

“Try to get some sleep. Maybe a hot bath will help. In the morning, take the stairs to the first floor, then turn left and follow your nose to the kitchen and dining room for breakfast. Oh, and if you decide to leave ...”

Brenna interrupted her, “I know, the doors are all locked,” she said resignedly.

Callie smiled. “Yes, but not from the inside. I was just going to say we would appreciate it if you’d tell someone you’re leaving so they can lock up behind you. I would also appreciate it if you’d leave me an address and phone number.

“You’re not a prisoner, Brenna. We’re concerned about your safety, but if you’re bound and determined to get yourself kidnapped or killed, that’s your choice. We’ll be very sorry, and we’ll hunt down anyone who hurts you, but you’re an adult. We might think you’re a damned fool, but we won’t stop you from doing what you think you need to do.”

She turned to the door then stopped. “Do you have any pictures of your parents?” she asked.

Brenna shook her head.

“I have some in West Virginia, I’ll get them for you. Good night, Brenna.” She shut the door behind her.

Brenna looked around the room. Nice, old, solid wood furniture and a queen-size bed. She peeked into the bathroom, amazed at the huge, deep soaker tub with Jacuzzi jets.

The medicine cabinet was stocked with sanitary supplies, toothpaste, toothbrushes in sealed plastic, soap, shampoo and cream rinse – and not cheap brands. *What the hell*, she decided, and started water running in the tub.

Curious, she checked the drawers in the dresser and was surprised to find them stocked with women's underwear and hose still sealed in plastic. And in her size? The shock was the drawer with a half-dozen bras, brand new, in her size. Who the hell buys sexy, lacy bras in her size? Better question, who even makes a front-closure demi bra in her size? There weren't any tags.

There were clothes in the closet. Jeans in her size, skirts in her size, several blouses in her size. None of them had brand tags. *This is creepy ...*

She stripped, lowered herself into the tub and let it finish filling. She lay there for a long time, trying not to think but just letting the evening soak into her mind. She wasn't sure what to think. An old anger at her abandonment sat in the back of her mind along with the total helplessness she'd felt when she heard her parents were dead.

And now her father's family shows up, wanting to tell her what to do. She had plenty of practice with new families. All she had to do was be passive, let them think she was buying in to all this, and tomorrow when she could escape she'd be able to decide how she wanted to deal with them.

As long as she had expensive shampoo available, she washed her hair and discovered the towels were large enough to wrap her hair in just one, rather than the two she had to use at home.

Her curiosity drew her back to the dresser. She opened a package of silk panties and picking a bra, put them on. They fit perfectly. Pulling a skirt and blouse from the closet, she dressed and stared at herself in the mirror. Her own clothes didn't fit this good. Of course, with her body, it was never a surprise when clothes didn't fit, only when they did. They were expensive and well made, formfitting around both the breasts and waist. The impossibility of that was something she refused to think about. Who stocked such clothes in a spare bedroom?

Her audacity hit her, and blushing furiously she quickly stripped and put the clothes away. Of course, there was no way to hide that the panty package had been opened.

She put her own shirt and panties on and crawled into bed. Silk sheets? No, they must be some kind of synthetic. Hell, she wouldn't know the difference. She'd never touched a silk sheet in her life.

The next morning, the light through the window woke her. She got up and began the task of brushing out her hair. Thick and wavy, it often had a mind of its own. There was a light tapping on the door, and she said, "Come in."

Callie entered with a tray holding two cups of coffee and two glasses of orange juice. "Do you mind some company?" she asked.

Brenna smiled. "Anyone who shows up with coffee in the morning is obviously an angel, and who wouldn't want the company of an angel?"

Callie chuckled, setting the tray down on a small table. She watched as Brenna finished brushing out her hair, and twisted it into a braid as thick as her wrist.

“Your mother never wore her hair that long, or at least not when I knew her. It’s incredible, like a waterfall of night.”

“It’s a pain, but it’s also my pride, my vanity,” Brenna said. “A lot of fat chicks grow their hair long, it’s kind of a compensating mechanism.”

Callie, in the middle of taking a drink of coffee, choked, spewing coffee all over the tray and table. She finally got her coughing under control as Brenna returned from the bathroom with a hand towel and wash cloth to clean up.

“What the hell did you call yourself?” Callie said, her face was flushed and her eyes angry.

“Hey, if the shoe fits.” Brenna said. “Size 14 isn’t exactly trim and svelte.”

“You don’t wear a 14,” Callie said.

“14, 16, it depends on the brand. Whatever. Anything that’s big enough is shapeless as a sack.”

Callie glanced at the closet. “Did you look at any of the clothes hanging up?” she asked.

“Yeah, some very pretty things,” Brenna answered, her face growing warm.

Callie cocked her head to the side. “Did you try anything on?”

Brenna could feel her face flame. *Shit. She’ll know I’m lying.* She shrugged her shoulders, afraid to look Callie in the face. “I tried on a skirt and blouse,” she said, wishing the floor would open and swallow her. She took a deep breath. “I was curious. I’m sorry. Really, I’m not usually so rude.”

“Did they fit?” Callie asked.

“The black A-line and the white blouse, yeah.”

Callie stood and went to the closet, opened it, and took out the two garments. She looked them over while Brenna wondered if anyone had ever died of humiliation. Callie turned to her.

“There’s underwear in the dresser. Get out a pair of panties and a bra, then put these on again. I want to see.”

“Why?” Brenna asked.

Suddenly Callie seemed to notice Brenna’s body language, her red face.

“Oh, honey, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to make you feel guilty,” she said. “This is the room your mother used when she stayed here, and some of her clothes are still here.” She held out the blouse and skirt. “Would you humor me? Please?”

Unsteadily, Brenna pulled the underwear she’d worn earlier from the dresser and put on the panties and bra. She wasn’t shy about getting nude in front of a stranger. Looking at Callie, she said, “I’ve never worn anything like this. I didn’t know they made bras like this in my size.”

She took the blouse and put it on, again amazed at the fit, then stepped into the skirt and zipped it up.

“Nothing that fits me in the bust and hips ever fits me in the waist. Nothing,” she said.



Callie studied her. "Turn around. Amazing. What is your waist measurement?"

"Twenty-four," Brenna answered.

"How the hell can you be fat with a twenty-four-inch waist?" Callie demanded.

"I have a fat ass and big breasts," Brenna replied. "I have to shop in the fat girls' section."

"Those are your mother's clothes, custom made for a special body. The bras are custom made."

Brenna walked to the floor-length mirror on the closet door and looked at herself. Turning back to Callie, she said in a tight voice, "I always thought I was pretty, but I was taught that to say that about yourself, or to act like you're pretty, was vain and that's a sin. And my mother, my foster mother, always told me I was fat."

Callie strode toward her, and before Brenna could react, swept her up in a hug. "I say you're beautiful, and you are to always, always believe me. No arguments. Got it?"

In spite of herself, Brenna smiled. "Got it."

"Okay," Callie said, "Let's go get some breakfast. No, don't change, wear those. They're yours."

The dining room took up what had originally been the entire first floor of one of the row houses. When they entered, there were at least twenty people sitting at the table or filling plates at the sideboard. Several people looked up at them, and then conversations stopped. Everyone turned to look.

"Hot damn," one young man exclaimed. "Callie, may I have one too, please?"

Brenna's face flamed, and Callie shot him a look of distaste.

"Collin, did you forget the one manner you've managed to acquire? I'll have to tell Father you should go back to eating in the stable."

"Callie," he replied with a smile, "I apologize." He didn't look at all apologetic.

He stood, turned to Brenna, bowed, and said, "I'm sorry I forgot my manners. I hope you understand, Miss ..."

"Morgan," Brenna supplied.

"Miss Morgan. I hope you understand that when the most beautiful woman I have ever seen interrupts my breakfast, I just don't know how to cope."

Brenna felt her face catch fire. She wanted to drop through the floor.

"I don't think words alone can express my chagrin," Collin continued. "Please allow me to express my apology by taking you to dinner on Saturday evening at the South Harbor restaurant."

*My God, he's gorgeous,* Brenna thought. Her mind was blank, and she just wanted to eat him whole. He was over six feet with broad shoulders, slim hips, unruly brown hair and blue eyes.

She couldn't believe the calm coolness in her voice as she replied, "I think that nothing less would suffice, Mr. ...."

"Doyle, Collin Doyle."

“What time should I meet you here?” she asked.

“I can pick you up.”

“What time should I meet you here?” she repeated.

He got the hint, “Seven thirty? I’ll make reservations for eight.”

“Seven thirty it is, then,” she said, turning to the sideboard to fill her plate, then turned back. “Just in case I’m not the only date you’ve made for Saturday night, perhaps you should consult your schedule to make sure you’re not double or triple booked. I’ll check back with you before I leave this morning, okay?”

His face turned red and several people laughed.

“I should warn you about Collin,” Callie murmured.

“A bad boy?” Brenna asked.

“Not a bad boy, incredibly dedicated, organized and responsible, actually. He just has a thing for the ladies. Lots of ladies,” Callie responded.

“Oh, I can see that,” Brenna said with a soft smile, “but I haven’t had a date in over a year. If he wants to take me out, I’m going to take advantage of it.” Callie’s eyebrows shot up, but Brenna wasn’t sure why.

She joined Callie at the table and found herself sitting across from Collin.

“So, Miss Morgan, are you visiting?” he asked.

“No, I live here in Baltimore,” she answered.

He looked puzzled. “I’m surprised we’ve never met before.”

“I guess we travel in different circles,” she said, getting increasingly irritated as his gaze seemed never to rise to her face. She wondered if he knew the color of her eyes.

“What do you do here?”

“I’ve been going to college.”

“Oh, what do you study, Miss Morgan?”

“Currently I’m studying the effects of visual stimuli on the limbic system of young males,” she replied dryly. “And it’s Dr. Morgan.”

Callie choked and spewed coffee across the table. Coughing, she managed to gasp, “I’m going to stop drinking when you’re around.”

Collin, helping to blot up coffee with his napkin, said, “I have the feeling I’m missing the joke.”

Callie and Brenna laughed. “The limbic system is implicated in sexual arousal,” Callie said, shooting him a wicked grin.

He blushed, eyes running over Brenna who was leaning over the table using her napkin to blot up Callie’s coffee. His eyes seemed locked on her breasts.

“Mr. Doyle?” Brenna said.

“Yes?”

She pointed to her face. “I’m up here.”

His face flared bright red. The people around them, especially the women, laughed.

“I hope we don’t spend dinner with you talking to my chest,” she smiled sweetly. “You have no idea how much that would piss me off.”

After breakfast, Callie handed her a roller suitcase. “Your mother’s clothes are in there, along with what you wore yesterday. Take them, they’re yours.” She smiled. “There’s a car outside to take you home, and they’ll take you from there to work if you need them to. May I have your address and phone number?”

Brenna wrote down the information on the proffered tablet, and exchanged it for a sheet of paper dense with addresses and phone numbers.

“We’re here for you, Brenna, in any way that you might need us. Your mother was my closest friend. I hope we can be friends, also.”

Brenna reached out and pulled the older woman into a hug. “Thank you.”

~~~

On Saturday, Brenna showed up at the Clan compound at six-thirty wearing a blue blouse of her mother’s that matched her eyes. She was shown to Callie’s bedroom suite.

“Hi, a little early for your date, aren’t you?” Callie greeted her.

“Yes, a bit, but I wanted a chance to talk with you or Seamus. They said he isn’t home.”

“Father is in West Virginia. He really doesn’t like cities. So, how can I help you?”

“I just sort of wanted to talk, to ask some questions. About what I am. What it means.”

Callie’s heart melted. The girl looked so lost and miserable. “Would you like some tea?”

Brenna nodded. “Yes, that would be nice.”

Callie led her downstairs to a pleasant sitting room and offered her a chair, then sat across from her.

“I guess we unloaded a lot of information on you the other night,” she started.

“Yes,” Brenna responded, “and I’m not even sure what a lot of it means. You use words that I understand, but I’m not sure we’re using them the same way. I don’t have the context.”

Brenna looked puzzled and said, “You just ordered tea for us, didn’t you?” Callie nodded. “How did you do that? I know there were conversations going on all around me at breakfast the other morning, people talking about me, but I might as well be, as you say, head blind. I wasn’t a part of things, didn’t know how to be. I could see the smiles, the hidden laughter at Collin and me, but ...,” she trailed off.

Callie gave her an understanding smile. “I’m sure we’re not going to be able to get to all your questions this evening, or even this month. What are you doing tomorrow? Can you come for dinner about one? Then we can spend the afternoon together.”

“Sure. Thank you,” Brenna said, her face relaxing.

“First question. What’s bothering you the most?”

“What is a gift? You seemed to group gifts and talents and powers and, well, it’s all a jumble. I don’t understand any of it,” Brenna said.

“A Gift, the way we use it, capital G. There are twenty-five identified Gifts. Basically they are a combination of Talents, capital T, that can be thought of as both distinct and interacting abilities.

“For instance, the O’Neill Gift, which you obviously have, is named due to its manifestation and heritage from the O’Neill clan in Northern Ireland. Your mother had it, and her mother’s maiden name was O’Neill. It’s a complex and rare Talent that provides the telepath who has it with stronger, deeper shields than most telepaths normally have.”

“Yeah, my mother taught me to shield when I was very young, and I’ve played with it, and discovered some things she didn’t teach me.”

“Now,” Callie said, “as to your concerns about the conversations you missed the other morning. When telepaths are by themselves, they usually drop their first shield and allow their surface thoughts to be read. That also allows mental conversation. You can also communicate privately with another person using what we call a spear thought, aimed directly at that person. But that’s impossible when an O’Neill is locked down as tightly as you are. Nothing out, nothing in. If you keep your shields this tight all the time, you might as well be head blind. That’s why you don’t hear any of the mental chatter that’s going on in this house.”

“But,” Brenna fidgeted, obviously uncomfortable, “doesn’t that get awfully noisy?”

“Try dropping your first level shield,” Callie advised, “and see what happens. It only covers surface thoughts, and you can filter what goes to that level. You’ll still have your privacy.”

Brenna did as she said, and immediately her head was filled with dozens of people’s thoughts. “Oh, Jesus,” she moaned. It was enough to drive a person crazy.

Callie’s eyes widened, alarmed at her reaction. “May I see?”

At Brenna’s nod, Callie entered her mind, and was almost overwhelmed by the chaos she found there.

“Oh Jesus, is right. Don’t you know how to filter that?”

“Filter?”

“By the Goddess,” Callie breathed, “no wonder you’re locked down so tight. Come into my mind, let me show you.”

Cautiously, Brenna entered Callie’s mind and found that while she could still feel all the people in the house, as well as those on the street outside, everything was muted, like listening to a stream from a distance. Callie homed in on one person, then another, and Brenna could hear their thoughts, but then Callie backed away from them and their minds became muted.

“Oh, I see.” Brenna said excitedly. “Wow, that’s really neat.”

She tentatively started setting filters the way Callie had shown her, and the chaos retreated to a dull roar, and then to a quiet murmur.

“Oh, God, that’s great.” she said.

*And now I can speak with you mind-to-mind.*

Brenna jumped in her seat.

*No, I'm not in your mind, just speaking to you. I don't have to go into your mind to talk to you as long as you're not blocking me. Try it.*

*Like this?* Brenna asked.

*Yes, just exactly like that. Now, come back in, and I'll show you how to send a spear thought. Okay? Collin, when you're ready, Brenna is with me in the small sitting room near the kitchen.*

*Thanks, Callie. I'll be there in about 10 minutes.* Collin replied.

"Brenna, I wish you could see your face," Callie laughed. "As for what all your Gifts are, you won't finish mentally developing until you're in your mid-thirties. Until then, we won't really know everything you can do and how much power you have."

There was a knock on the door, and Collin entered.

"My, you look pretty. Ready to go to dinner?" he greeted her.

*So do you*, she was careful to shield the thought. He had obviously made an attempt to control his unruly, collar-length brown hair but had lost the battle.

"Have a good time," Callie said with a smile, picking up the tea tray and leaving the room.

Collin escorted her out the back to a small, blue sports car and held the door for her.

"Pretty nice," she told him when he settled into the driver's seat. "I guess they pay cook's helpers pretty good here."

She was surprised at his laugh. "You don't know how close you just came to hitting the truth," he said. Chuckling, he drove out of the compound toward the harbor.

"So what do you do?" she asked.

"The O'Donnell Group is a multi-billion dollar privately held company with its fingers in a lot of pies. I'm the Director of Security." He smiled at her. "But my mother is the head cook at Seamus' manor house in the country."

Brenna's face grew warm. "I really didn't mean anything by that," she said. "There's nothing wrong with being a cook."

"No, there's not, and no offense taken. She's damn good at it, and makes as much as some fancy Washington chefs. But my first job was helping in the kitchen," he smiled.

"I worked as a short-order cook for a while when I was an undergrad," Brenna said, "but when I turned twenty-one waitressing paid a lot better."

"Good tips?" he said as he pulled up to a red light.

She smiled at him. "Can you keep a secret?" He nodded. "I used to buy blouses that were a size too small to wear to work."

He roared with laughter. "And you gave me such a hard time for looking at your chest," he said chuckling.

"You didn't look like the type who would leave a good tip," she said in a mock-haughty manner, raising her chin and flipping her hair.

He laughed again. "I guess I have a lot of work to do to correct a first impression."

“Mr. Doyle, I’m a very open-minded woman, and I’m willing to give you a chance to do just that,” she said with a smile.

The restaurant overlooked the water on the south side of the Inner Harbor. The dining room curved to match the shoreline, and their table gave them an incredible view of the harbor and downtown. She could see their view of the approaching sunset would be spectacular.

Collin ordered an appetizer for them to share and a bottle of wine. Brenna stared at the prices on the menu. She quickly scanned for the cheapest items, but they were still beyond what she was used to paying.

“Brenna,” Collin said in a kindly tone, “order what you like. Just don’t look at the prices, okay?”

She looked up sharply.

“I remember how broke I was as a student,” he said, “and even if you shield your thoughts, you don’t do a good job of keeping them off your face.”

“Oh. It is a bit out of my normal price range,” she said. “But I’ll be making a lot more in the fall when I start teaching.” A dish of sea scallops with imperial crab caught her eye and just reading the description made her mouth water. “Ah, hell, if this is going to be an apology, I guess I should let you apologize good, huh?”

He laughed. “It will be a much more pleasant evening if you enjoy yourself, don’t you think?”

The food was excellent, the wine was far better than anything she’d ever had, and he ordered a second bottle. She told him about growing up in and out of foster homes, and he told her about his early life on the O’Donnell family estate hidden in the mountains of West Virginia.

When they left the restaurant, they walked along the harbor and when he offered his arm she took it. *Who would have thought this would be the most romantic night of my life*, she thought. As an experiment, she lowered her first shield after carefully constructing the filters as Callie had showed her, and tried to let him sense how she felt.

His face jerked toward her and he smiled. *So you’re enjoying yourself?*

*Yes, very much. Thank you for a very lovely evening. Apology accepted.* She stood on her tiptoes and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek.

He drove her home and double-parked in front of her house. Jumping out, he held the car door for her, and escorted her the few steps to her door. She unlocked it, then turned to him. He put his arms around her waist and bent to kiss her, but she leaned into him, her forehead resting on his chest.

“I had a wonderful time tonight, Collin. Thank you for inviting me.”

He stroked the side of her face, putting his hand under her chin to lift her face, but she shook him off.

“I like you, Collin, but I’m not a play thing. I don’t just fall into bed with men. I don’t have very much experience with them, and most of it was very disappointing.”

“I would like to see you again,” he said, stroking her hair.

“I’d like that,” she replied. “But, Collin, I don’t need fancy dinners, as nice as tonight has been. If you want to impress me, be yourself, be honest with me, show me respect.” She smiled up at him. “I may not be easy, but I am cheap.”

She stepped back, turned to go inside.

“When I said you’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen, I was being honest,” he said.

“I think you’re very pretty, too, but you have to want more than you can see, Collin. Good night.”

She went into her bedroom, carefully hung her mother’s clothes in the closet, then brushed her teeth and hair and went to bed with her vibrator. It was an extremely unsatisfying ending to the evening.

~~~

### Chapter 3

*I have an idea that the phrase "weaker sex" was coined by some woman to disarm some man she was preparing to overwhelm. - Ogden Nash*

Callie walked into the dining room for breakfast and found Collin sitting there staring off into space.

“Have a good time last night?” she asked.

He looked at her, taking a moment to bring her into focus.

“Yeah, had a great time.” he smiled. “She’s a hell of a woman.”

“You were in rather early last night, for you.”

“Christ, Callie, she’s so messed up over sex and yet she’s really not a prude. Put me off over and over but told me she was attracted to me. I’m as messed up this morning as she is.”

“Go on.”

“Her stepmother was a witch, evidently, a Bible-thumping Catholic. She graduated with her PhD two years faster than anyone has ever done out of that program. I kidded her about being a Type-A personality, and, serious as a judge, she said, ‘I’ve never been satisfied with A’s.’ She did that and worked full time all through college.”

“She didn’t tell me that.”

“Yeah. Lab assistant, GTA, worked in the financial aid office, cocktail waitress, spent a year cleaning toilets at the student center. Said the best part about turning twenty-one was she could get a job that didn’t involve cleaning toilets. Jesus, what a woman.”

Callie studied him for a moment, “If I didn’t know you better, I’d think you were falling.”

He put his face down on the table. “Madly, head-over-heels infatuated down to my toenails.” He raised his head, looking at her with unfocused eyes. “Callie, it’s not just the way she looks, it’s not just lust, she’s the most fantastic person I’ve ever met. God help me. I would drink her bath water. I would crawl over broken glass for her smile.” He

pursed his mouth, “Don’t just sit there and laugh. Shoot me, put me out of her misery. Damn.”

He sighed. “She’s a Kashani, isn’t she?”

Callie just looked at him.

“You know, don’t you? Her mother was. She has all the physical attributes. And last night she was flirting with me, you know, trying to talk me into agreeing to be one of her research subjects, and she gave me a pheromone blast. Jesus, I almost took her right then on the table. I called her on it, said it wasn’t cool, and she didn’t have a clue what I was talking about. She doesn’t know, does she? Doesn’t know what she is?”

She didn’t answer.

He put his head down on the table again. “I am so fucked.”

~~~

Brenna came to the house around noon. Jared let her in and was surprised when she gave him a hug. “It’s good to see you,” she said with a smile. “How’s my favorite cousin?”

“I’m your favorite?”

“You’re the only one I’ve met, so you’ve got exclusive rights,” she told him gaily, wandering off down the hall to find Callie.

*Callie? I’m here.* She sent.

*Brenna, come up to the third floor, remember the room you stayed in?*

*I’ll be right up.*

The door was open, and Callie was sitting at the table next to the window. “I like the view from this room,” she said.

Brenna sat and Callie poured her some tea, then handed her a sheet of paper with printing on both sides. The Telepathic Gifts were listed along with their descriptions.

“We have identified twenty-five Gifts. Some people only have one, Telepathy, while some have as many as fifteen. A person’s Gifts and the mix of them determines how much power someone has and the interactions between them can affect the way they manifest.”

Brenna read the list while Callie gazed out the window. When she got to the end of the second page, she let out a short, startled laugh.

“A Succubus Gift? You’ve got to be kidding me.” She read the short description, and said, “Is this what Collin thought I was doing the other night? Dousing him with pheromones?” She chuckled. “The boy just needs to get his libido under control.”

She looked at Callie, “This isn’t real, is it? I mean, a succubus? A demon woman stealing men’s souls?”

Callie sighed. “It’s very real, although rare. We have two women with that Gift in the Clan. Brenna, your mother had that Gift. There’s a possibility you might have it also. As it says there, it’s an X-linked recessive, and you have at least half of what’s required from Maureen. But as far as being a demon, or stealing men’s souls, that of course isn’t true. The church hunted succubi, those with the Kashani Gift, with even more diligence



than the rest of the telepaths, and it's responsible for their demonizing. Although a Kashani does drain a man's energy during sex, she doesn't harm his soul, and none of us are in league with the devil."

Brenna stared at her. "So I might be some kind of genetic femme fatale? God, if you had any idea what kind of sex life I have, you'd know the answer to that one."

Callie regarded her, "The only way for us to truly know what Gifts you do have is to run your genome. Will you give me a sample?"

"Sure, a cheek swab?" Callie nodded. "I think that's rather painless," Brenna grinned.

"Now, back to the list. With you having the O'Neill Gift, and the fact you would have inherited the eight Gifts associated with the Kashani gene complex, the odds are very great that you have at least ten."

"Why do you say that?"

"OK," Callie said, holding up her hand and counting fingers, "Telepathy is one. Each of your mother's X chromosomes carried the Gifts marked on that sheet as part of the Kashani gene complex, so that's seven more, and Super Shielding, the O'Neill Gift, makes nine. Plus the O'Byrne Gift is part of the O'Neill Gift but we count it separately, so that's ten.

"Some of them are obvious to a knowledgeable observer. Girl, you ooze Charisma out of your pores, and have you figured out how you could feel Jared, or his hunters, even though they were shielded? Or how you knew that Jared was one of the good guys and the others wanted to hurt him? Empathy, my dear. It takes either the O'Neill or O'Byrne Gifts to block a strong empath.

"I watch you interact with people. You pick up their feelings and react to them without even thinking. Brenna, don't take this wrong, because I'm not trying to be condescending or judgmental, but you have a need to have people like you. I think you'd concede that's a fairly normal part of growing up in foster homes."

Brenna nodded. "No offense taken. I won't let people walk on me, but life is a lot easier if people like you, and it really doesn't take much effort to be nice to people, to treat them the way they want to be treated. Does it?"

Callie smiled. "I think that's an admirable attitude. Catching more flies with honey, and all that. Anyway, you do a very good job of it, and you tend to hit the nail on the head with everyone I've seen you interact with." A sly smile stole across her face. "You know you have Collin completely tied up in knots, don't you?"

Brenna's face twisted into a wry expression. "Serves the son of a bitch right. He's got me confused, too. He's so damned good looking, and just when I think he's an arrogant jerk, he turns around and does something so sweet and thoughtful, and gives me a smile that says, 'you didn't really think I was like that, did you?'"

"Do I need to tell you the boy has both Charisma and Empathy that are off the charts? I warned you to be careful."

"You say I've got him all twisted up? And he still doesn't know if I'm a virgin or not? I'd say I'm being somewhat careful."

Callie laughed. "Got me there. You're not, are you?"

It was Brenna's turn to laugh. "Why the worried look? Is there some dread disease virgins get that I'm not aware of?" She took a deep breath. "No, I'm not a virgin, but sometimes I feel like I might as well be. I don't have a very good track record with men, and not because I choose jerks like some women do. It just never seems to work out. They're all hot and bothered and chasing my tail all over town, but when it comes down to trying to make a relationship work, they seem to lose interest very quickly." She looked out the window. "Maybe they were jerks, but they just didn't feel like it."

Shifting in her seat, Brenna said, "You said my mother was a succubus, had the Kashani Gift. Did she, well, did she sleep around a lot?"

"For some people, sex is addictive. For all of the succubi I've known, it is." Callie leaned forward, her voice gentle. "Their enjoyment of sex is greater than normal, but their relationships suffer for the same reason. A man can only have sex with a succubus once a week, sometimes only a couple of times a month. It just takes too long for a man's energy reserves to build back up. Yes, Maureen took other lovers, and I know Jack encouraged her to. A man who can't live with that probably shouldn't be with a succubus."

"I'm sorry I asked," Brenna said, covering her mouth with her hand, her face very pale. She looked away and was quiet for a couple of minutes. When she looked back at Callie, it was with a change of subject.

"You keep talking about the clan. Are all telepaths Irish? Surely not."

"Oh no, when we use the term Clan, we're not talking about the same thing you are. It's our name for ourselves. There's a reason the word is the same in all European languages. Ireland was isolated for a long time and that's where we lasted longest as the rulers. We didn't do very well elsewhere against the Romans, but they never reached Ireland. It took the English to defeat us there. But there are Clans all over the world, though the African and Asian Clans are somewhat different than the Europeans.

"When we use the term it's in the same way you'd use the term Irish or Jewish, it's an identification of a people. When you come out to West Virginia I can recommend some books in our library."

Callie's head turned to the door. "There's our call for dinner, we can continue this afterward, okay?"

Brenna smiled. "Yes, I heard it, too."

They went down to the dining room and Callie introduced her to those she hadn't met before. Collin looked like a kid with a new puppy when she walked in, and she felt a jolt when she saw him, her heart beating faster. *Damn, he's so good looking*, she thought.

"Brenna, this is Rebecca Healy. She's a wilder who came to us about a year ago."

Rebecca was a pretty, slender woman with a thick mop of shoulder length brown hair, and a graceful, casual way of moving that reminded Brenna of a large cat. Brenna had to look up to meet her unusual amber eyes. Rebecca smiled and extended her hand.

"Pleased to meet you. It will be nice to have another wilder around," Rebecca said with a smile. "I won't have to feel like the only dumbshit when people talk about things I don't understand. We'll have to go out together some evening."

They had a pleasant dinner. Sitting next to Rebecca, and with her first level shield lowered, she felt included. People talked to her, asked her questions, and made her feel at home.

“So did they find you here in Baltimore?” she asked Rebecca.

“San Francisco. I was just walking down the street and a woman named Lydia McCarthy walked up to me and said hello mentally. I didn’t know whether to laugh, cry, or go blind. I spent about a month with the Clan there, then they shipped me here, West Virginia actually, but now that my shields are getting better they let me out in public.” She laughed. “And you’re the long-lost granddaughter, right?”

“Yes, and still getting used to being around people that do amazing things with their minds. I was only eight when my parents died, and I haven’t been around any telepaths since then.”

Rebecca gave her an appraising look. “Do you mind my asking how old you are?”

“No, I’m twenty-two.”

“I’m twenty-four,” Rebecca said. She leaned closer and said under her breath, “Isn’t it weird how all these people look young but they’re old enough to have seen Elvis play in person?”

Brenna giggled.

“I’m serious,” Rebecca continued, “I’d love to go out some night, hit a few clubs with someone my own age. You’ve been going to school here, right? So you know where to go.”

“I’m not much of a party girl,” Brenna said, “so I don’t know that much about the night life.”

“Nonsense,” Rebecca scoffed, “where’s the best Thursday night beer specials?”

“Lou’s, down in Fells Point.”

“And where’s the best trivia night?”

“The Red Dog in Canton.”

Rebecca laughed. “I think we’d have fun, Miss Not-a-party-girl.”

“We just might at that,” Brenna chuckled.

“Yeah, let me know when you feel like going out and doing some damage,” Rebecca said.

Dinner finished with coffee drinks and tiramisu, which had Rebecca sighing like a schoolgirl with a crush. “God, I love this stuff. It’s the perfect dessert.”

After dinner, Brenna and Callie retreated to the third floor bedroom. On the way, they stopped by Callie’s office to take two cheek swabs from Brenna and put them in glass tubes.

When they sat down with their coffee, Callie said, “Where were we?”

“You had just said you were pretty sure I have at least ten Gifts.”

“Oh, yes. Why don’t you look down that list and see if anything else strikes you as familiar.”

She watched Brenna read through the list again. “There’s something, isn’t there? I can see it in your face.”

Brenna took a deep breath. “Yes, there’s something, it’s part of that Kashani complex you were talking about. Callie, something happened to me my freshman year that I’ve never told anyone about. I’m not sure I know how to tell you.”

Callie sat silently, waiting.

“I was going home from the library one night, and this guy grabbed me and pulled me into some bushes and tried to rape me,” Brenna began, her head bowed and staring at her lap. “I tried to fight him, but he was just too big and strong. He hit me, and he had a knife and he told me he would kill me if I didn’t cooperate. He pulled my pants off, and, and put himself inside me. I was a virgin then, and I was terrified.”

Her face colored. “I was afraid I’d get pregnant, get AIDS, that he’d kill me when he was finished. And I did something, I don’t even know what, but he rolled off me and just lay there, shaking and drooling. He pissed and shit all over himself. I pulled my pants on,” her voice grew even softer, “and ran back to the dorm. Somewhere on the way I threw up on my shoes, and I took them off and threw them in a dumpster. I just left him there. I know he was, well, I tried to read his mind, and there wasn’t any mind, not anymore.”

Callie leaned over and looked at the page. “You’re thinking the Rivera Gift, Neural Disruption, sounds like what happened,” she suggested.

Brenna nodded.

“Do you feel guilty about it? About what you did to him?”

“No, not really,” Brenna responded. She looked up at Callie, her eyes fierce, “The bastard was trying to hurt me, and I fought back, why would I feel guilty about that?” She glanced down at her hands, “But it scared me, still scares me, because I didn’t know what I did, and I’m afraid I might do it to someone else unintentionally.”

Callie reached out and laid a hand on hers. “We can teach you how to control your Gifts, how to use them, so that you won’t have to worry about unintended harm to someone. Did you do anything else in response to that? You said you never told anyone, so I assume you didn’t see a counselor.”

“The only thing I did was sign up for karate classes the next day.”

“I think that was a good idea. How long did you study karate?”

“Oh, I still do. I have a black belt,” Brenna said.

Brenna stared at the table, “Callie, what happens to someone who gets burned out like that?”

“Eventually their body dies. Depending on how long they’re kept on life support, eventually without a mind inhabiting the body they die.”

Brenna nodded, slumping a bit, “So I killed him. I’ve always wondered.” She was silent for a while, then straightened her shoulders. “What Gifts did my parents have?”

Callie leaned over and marked the sheet with Ms and Js. “Both of your parents were very strong, with fifteen Gifts each. That’s very unusual. Seamus also has fifteen, as does

the young lady you just met, Rebecca. I don't have any record of someone having more than that. Only about one percent of telepaths have more than five Gifts."

~~~

After Brenna left, Callie went looking for Collin. "Do you have a courier going to the estate tomorrow?" she asked.

"Yes, every day," he said.

She handed him an envelope that said "Kelsey" on it.

On Thursday, Callie's cell phone rang, and pulling it out of her pocket she saw the number was her lab in West Virginia.

"Callie," she answered.

"Hi, it's Kelsey. I have the results from that swab you sent me. I just sent them to your computer. Callie, I ran it three times because I thought I must be doing something wrong, but I can't find a mistake."

"Hang on," Callie said as she pulled up the email and opened the attachment. She read through it twice. "Kelsey, you're as good as I am at this stuff. I don't think there's a mistake."

"Who is she?" Kelsey asked.

"Jack and Maureen's daughter," Callie answered.

"You found her?"

"Yes, or rather she found us." Callie took a deep breath. "Kelsey, I want you to find Seamus and tell him about this, but don't tell anyone else."

"Got it," Kelsey said.

Callie hung up the phone and stared at the screen.

~~~

There was a knock on Seamus' door. "Come in," he said.

Kelsey walked in. "Callie wanted me to let you know that I finished running the genetic analysis on your granddaughter."

"Oh? So what Gifts does the young lady have?"

"All of them."

~~~

**To continue reading this book, please purchase it.**

For Kindle edition go to:

[Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

For Apple, Nook, Sony or other eReaders (Epub, PDF, HTML, Text, RTF, LRF) go to:

[Smashwords.com](https://www.smashwords.com)