



Cryptshiver

Excerpt

The dank scents of magic, beast, and blood clogged the air. Mean Priest just so happened to be the only city bar catering to the supernatural. However, large crowds never collected in the local pub. Avi Grissom gazed over the dark interior. The faux wood paneling showcased black-and-white pictures from the seventies tacked up to give some bullshit historical value to the place. The stench of cheap hookers and smoke made it hard to breathe. Grissom hated the place. The run-down club, smack dab in the middle of downtown Dallas, helped fuel the supernatural ruffians who thought getting drunk and hunting would be okay on the city streets. Meeting here pissed him off, but it was neutral turf and he had to think it a well-played card on Ender's end to pick a place where Grissom couldn't beat his ass.

Jenner, the scarred vampire bartender, wiped down a bar section populated by a couple of magic slingers. Magic slingers. Fucking great. He curled his upper lip back in a silent snarl.

Jenner glared at Grissom. "Keep the Peace Law, Regulator."

With a slight nod of respect, Grissom studied the three wizards laughing over beers. They always smelled of burnt herbs and sex. They ceased their merriment and gave him silent glares until they looked away first and started back up with their fun. They looked to be celebrating, but he couldn't think why — they'd had a rough row to hoe as of late.

The black-cloaked cultists had been getting bolder since their maniac leader, Eli, had been gunned down two years ago. They probably figured it was time to come out of hiding. As long as they played by the rules and no one got hurt, they could drink Coronas all they wanted. Besides, he wasn't after them; it was Ender he'd come to see.

Since the bar seemed occupied, Ender would undoubtedly choose something a bit more private. Grissom scanned the wall lined with leather horseshoe booths and lost his breath when he saw a male too stunning to be real watching him. The thought of seeing Jakob Ender after two years caused Grissom to

be on the verge of both a panic attack and a fucking hard-on. A ping of aching went through him, a minuscule throb in his chest compared to the hurricane in his heart two years ago. Ender occupied a corner booth, facing the entire tavern. Their eyes locked across the distance... so much unsaid, so many hurtful things Grissom wanted to say. Still he was speechless; he just absorbed the sight of his partner — and at one time, best friend — before trying to move. They had a lot of history together, and not all of it good, especially when Ender disappeared off the fucking Earth. Ender had hurt him, cut him down to the bone like a butcher knife, and for a long time Grissom didn't think he'd really recover.

As they stared at one another across the bar, a moment passed between them. The old memories and laughter echoed in Grissom's mind. He even remembered them brainstorming together over supernatural homicides. It all hit him like an electric jolt. Much like the intense shock therapy he'd endured when he'd had trouble accepting what he was. Grissom's breathing was labored and his palms became moist. Could he do this?

He wanted to hug his old friend, welcome him back, ask why he fucking left, and then punch him in the mouth for doing so. The way he suffered facing Jakob proved he hadn't fully healed. Grissom needed to have his wits about him or risk Ender knowing things he'd kept hidden throughout the years. Mainly, those feelings he'd tried not to acknowledge. The deep care he felt for Ender would come out if he didn't choose his words carefully. He'd look like a pathetic piece of shit. So he reminded himself of the worry, the near insanity he'd undergone when he'd searched for Ender. His thoughts soured and turned to a bitter, dark cloud that swallowed up those happy memories. Past the bullshit of their different species, he respected the hell out of Ender, and now it seemed like it had been one-sided all along.

Still, there was something different about Ender, though he hadn't changed in appearance. True to his trademark, Ender wore a charcoal suit and a crimson necktie that brought out the sharp blue-silver of his vampiric gaze. He looked like an unearthly being sitting with a simple glass of bloodwine. Closing his eyes, Grissom let the erotic thoughts of Ender filter through his wolf's brain: Jakob's perfectly cropped hair, the way he smelled — crisp, like expensive cologne that outdated the shit made nowadays. It all made Grissom's inner wolf pant and his heart weigh heavy.

Ender seemed harmless sitting there, blending in with the tavern's otherworldly patrons, sipping his drink carelessly. But Grissom read Ender's body language to see he was on alert. Grissom was sure Ender had been keeping tabs on all three magic zealots at the bar. The slight turn of his body in their direction meant he was lined up perfectly if he needed to pull his weapon. The tilt of his head meant he was listening to every word that came out of their mouths. If he deemed them a threat, things would get ugly,

Peace Law be damned. Ender was deadly and could kill someone without pause and before the person ever saw it coming. The coldheartedness made a lot of supes walk the straight and narrow. Grissom admired that particular trait about him. After Ender left, things in the city went to shit, and Grissom couldn't keep the villains in check all by himself. Other Regulators were pushovers and let the populace talk or bargain their way out of trouble. Slowly Dallas's evildoers started gaining the upper hand, and slowly he'd stopped trying to do it all by himself.

Now Ender was back as if nothing happened, without a care in the world, and he didn't even have the decency to talk to his old partner before they stomped back out on the streets. That shit wasn't cool; it fucked with his mind. Chief Marx was forgiving enough to welcome Ender back on the force... Grissom, not so much. His partner's abrupt disappearance had given him a clear perspective on how important he was in Ender's life. Fuck him. Grissom didn't want Jakob Ender as a partner again. He'd tried to tell Marx, but she wasn't hearing it. The fantastic duo of Ender and Grissom kept her city clean and made her look good to the Uppers. She gave him no choice; partner up or go home indefinitely with no benefits or pay. He couldn't do that, not with unchecked creatures still prowling the night.

He took a few deep breaths and the tension eased in his shoulders. He was calm enough to meet Ender without the side effect of going protective shifter on him. The beast in Grissom wanted to mark Ender as property, pin the vamp down and mark up his skin with his teeth while fucking him from behind. He sensed the stirrings of arousal and mumbled a curse. How could he handle this? Being teamed up with Ender again was going to drive him insane. Deep down inside he was happy about it but terrified of what this would mean for them now.

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