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Endlessly

Written by

Kiersten White

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ENDLESSLY

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PARANORMALCY

SUPERNATURALLY

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For Elena and Jonah
My life, my joy, my two little wonders



PINK GOES WITH EVERYTHING

Here's the thing about dragons: I know absolutely nothing whatsoever about them.

Which made my task to scare raccoons out of the alley behind the diner much more complicated. Instead of the mini masked bandits, I was greeted by a pale, serpentine body with feathers raised like spikes along its spine and shoulders. Its face was almost wolfish, a long snout cut by two thick tusks jutting out and curling up over the lips. Oh, and claws. Sharp claws. "You are not a raccoon," I whispered.

"Nae, child, I am no wee beast." The air tasted like

charcoal as its voice slid out, high and smooth and ageless, momentarily shocking me even more than the fact that there was a dragon hanging around behind the trash cans. *It talked*. Well, of course it talked, Evie. Because really, what kind of self-respecting, trash can–scrabbling mythical dragon wouldn't talk? I was equal parts terrified and annoyed. But at least the dragon didn't smell as bad as unicorns.

Then again, unicorns were herbivores.

It breathed in deeply, a golden glow growing in its chest. For once I didn't think that light was related to its soul. Not soul; definitely fire. I didn't have time to dash back through the door and close it before being roasted—nor did I like the door's odds against a dragon. I could make a break for it down the alley, but I had no idea how fast this creature was. I decided on honesty. "Are you going to eat me?" I asked.

"Is that your desire?"

"Not really, no. The Winter Formal is coming up, and it's not going to plan itself, so this is kind of a bad time for me. Can we reschedule?" I took a step back. People used to fight dragons, right? I could do this. All I needed was a full suit of armor. And a sword. Or a mace. Or *some* Mace.

The door opened behind me, flooding the alley with light from the kitchen, and I yelped in relief.

"There you are," Nona said. She nodded to the dragon.

"You two know each other?" Why did this surprise me? Of course the resident tree spirit would know the talking

dragon hanging out in the alley, just like she knew every other weird paranormal recently lurking about town. And I had no doubt that this meeting, too, would go entirely unexplained.

I so needed to get a new job.

"Evelyn, I have served your friends milk shakes. Please enjoy your evening." Smiling placidly at me, Nona walked out past the dragon toward the end of the alley where the forest pushed up against the town. The dragon fixed one gleaming, dark pink eye on me, then winked.

Forget a new job. I needed to get a new town.

A breeze blew past me in a massive gust, flinging my hair into my mouth. The dragon took a few graceful hops, then slid like a snake through the air after Nona.

"Fabulous," I muttered, going into the kitchen and shutting—then locking—the door. "Glad Nona has another new friend." Taking a deep breath to clear my sinuses of the lingering smell of smoke, I squared my shoulders and walked into the main part of the diner. I just faced off against a dragon and came away char free. I was ready to fight.

"Now," I said, sitting down at the corner booth and glaring at the five other teenagers there, "who says pink isn't a good color scheme for this dance?"

I threw my binder of materials down on our apartment's tired floral couch. "Seriously, pink *is* a neutral color! And

what's elegant about navy blue? No one ever says, 'Hey, you know what's elegant? The Navy!'"

Arianna rolled her dead eyes. "There is nothing neutral about pink. They need a color that looks good as a background to any shade of dress."

"What color clashes with pink?"

"Orange?"

"Well, if anyone shows up in an orange dress, she deserves to clash. Yuck."

"Chill out. You can do a lot with navy."

I sank down into the couch next to her. "I guess. I could do navy with silver accents. Stars?"

"Yawn."

"Snowflakes?"

"Gee, now you're getting creative for a *winter* formal."

I ignored her tone, as usual. I was just glad she was here. She'd been gone a lot lately. "Hmm . . . maybe something softer. Like a water and mist theme?" I asked.

"I . . . actually kind of like that."

"Wanna help me with the sketches?"

She leaned forward and turned on *Easton Heights*. "Decorating a stupid dance is all yours. You're the one who decided to be more involved in your 'normal' life. I'd prefer to be sleeping eternally six feet under."

"This is probably a bad time to mention I also might have signed up to help with costumes for the spring play. And since I know nothing about sewing, I kind of maybe

signed you up as a volunteer aide."

She sighed, running one glamoured corpse hand through her spiky red and black hair. "I am going to kill you in your sleep."

"As long as it doesn't hurt."

We hummed along to the opening theme, which ended when the door banged open and my boyfriend walked through, shrugging out of his coat and beaming as he dropped a duffel bag. "Free! What did I miss?" Lend asked, his cheeks rosy from the cold and his smile lighting up his water eyes beneath his dark glamour ones.

"I lost the vote on color schemes for the dance, the last episode of *Easton Heights* before they go into reruns is back on in three minutes, and Arianna is going to murder me in my sleep."

"As long as it doesn't hurt."

"That's what I said!"

Lend scooped me into his arms, turning around and sitting back down on the couch with me in his lap. This Christmas break of his couldn't have come soon enough. After the crazy events of last month—including but not limited to finding out that my father was a faerie, being abandoned in the Faerie Paths by a vengeful Jack, and finally finding my way back to Lend—we needed some time together to relax. I'd figured out that *this* was the only answer I needed about my life. No more worrying about how much time I'd have, no more fretting over what I was

or wasn't. What I *was* was here, now. And happy.

"Anything else?" he asked, playing with my hair.

"Oh, yeah, there's a dragon in the alley behind the diner, hanging out with Nona."

Lend frowned at me, his warm fingers lingering on the back of my neck. "And this gets a mention *after* the color scheme for a dance and a new episode of a teen soap?"

"Priorities, Lend. Priorities."

My IPCA communicator beeped from the coffee table during a commercial, earning me an icy glare from Arianna. "If it goes off during dialogue, I will smash it to pieces."

"Sorry! I told Raquel to call on my actual cell. The one that is cute and pink and has a cool ringtone instead of an annoying beep. Not like I can do anything for IPCA now anyway."

"That whole lack-of-faerie-transportation thing does kind of make it pointless." Lend tried not to sound too happy about it, but I knew he was secretly thrilled.

I wasn't sure how to feel. It had been nice to be involved with Raquel again, and I didn't mind helping out in the ways that *I* wanted to with IPCA. But I wouldn't travel anywhere with a faerie. A very small part of me was curious to see if I could use the Faerie Paths on my own now. But that part was very, *very* small, and all the other parts of me thought that part was crazy and wanted to beat it up. I was never going back into that inky, empty darkness.

My communicator beeped again, and Arianna gave it such a death look that I snatched it from the table and ran back to my room before she could put it into early retirement.

"Raquel, honestly! Just call on my cell!" I answered.

"Evelyn," a strong voice that was definitely not Raquel said.

"I— Who is this?"

"Anne-Laurie LeFevre, Supervisor. Raquel's no longer over you; you will report to me."

"I'll *what*?"

"From now on I will be your supervising authority with IPCA. We need to discuss your schedule and reform the current arrangement. There are several infractions that need to be addressed as well."

"Whoa—first things first, I'm not *with* IPCA. So you are not my Supervisor or my authority or whatever. Second of all, I work with Raquel. Only Raquel. Does she know about this? I want to talk to her."

"Raquel isn't available; she's been reassigned."

"Well, so have I. To my life. So thanks but no thanks, and don't call back." I disconnected and glared at my communicator. Which beeped—again. I ignored the incoming line and dialed Raquel, but the call didn't go through; maybe she was busy with her reassignment, whatever that meant. I'd have to get ahold of her to find out what the crap

was up with IPCA. When I went back to work for them, we all agreed it was on a contract basis and I could leave whenever I wanted. Apparently someone hadn't gotten the memo. Raquel would take care of it, though.

"Evie! Commercial is over!" Arianna yelled. Frowning, I shoved my communicator into my trusty sock drawer.

Lend stood up, shouldering his duffel bag, as I walked back into the living room. "Where do you think you're going?" I snatched his coat away and held it. He just got here. There was no way I was letting him go anywhere else.

"I happen to have very important things to do."

"What on earth is more important than watching *Easton Heights*?"

"Christmas shopping for you?"

I dropped the coat into his arms and opened the door. "Take your time."

"Glad to know I'll be missed."

"Have fun!" I leaned up and kissed him hard, then shoved him out and sat back on the couch with a sloppy smile on my face. "Best boyfriend ever."

"Shut. Up. Now." Arianna didn't move, eyes fixed on the television. A firm knock sounded on the door. "And tell Lend he can just walk in already!"

"Did you forget something?" I said as I opened the door, surprised to see a short black woman in a suit. And not Lend pretending to be one, either. Definitely just a woman, no glamour. "Umm, hi?" That was when I noticed the man

standing to the side behind her. The man who, beneath the glamour, was a faerie.

"Evelyn," the woman said, in a voice I instantly recognized from our phone conversation. Oh, bleep no. Not here, not now, not with my best vampire friend sitting right there on the couch. This was the last place I wanted anyone from IPCA other than Raquel.

I straightened my shoulders and fixed Anne-Whatever Whatever with an icy glare. "I'm sorry, did I say it was okay for you to come here? Because last time I checked, I don't work for you anymore. In fact, wait."

I stalked back to my room and grabbed my communicator. "Here," I said, shoving it into her hands. "I won't be needing this. When I said I will only talk to Raquel, I meant, *I will only talk to Raquel.* Feel free to pass that along. And if you ever use a faerie to come to my home again, I will tase you both."

I slammed the door in her face, then put both hands over my mouth in panic. IPCA. Here. Pretty much the epicenter of free paranormals in the United States. Regardless of the reforms they'd undergone, I did not want them paying any attention whatsoever to my town. Or to my swarming-with-paranormals diner. How did they know where I was? Raquel wouldn't have told them. Would she? No. *Never.* I needed to call David right now. I needed to talk to Raquel to figure out what the bleep was going on. And I needed to make sure that Arianna *never* got fitted with an ankle tag.

"What did she want?" Arianna's tough voice betrayed a hint of fear.

"I don't know," I whispered, my heart still racing as I stared at the closed door and willed it to stay that way.