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NIGHT SEASON deleted scene

# *Good Counsel*

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by [Eileen Wilks](#)

*This snippet takes place after NIGHT SEASON and just before the free short story, “Cyncerely Yours.” It’s more of a scene than a complete story, but I thought readers who’ve enjoyed the series might enjoy listening in on Cullen’s counselling session with Father Michaels.*



Abraham Michaels was trying yet again to access parish files that the new software seemed to have scrambled when a knock sounded on his door. He glanced at the clock. Three already? “Come in.”

Dora opened the door. “Mr. Seabourne to see you, Father.”

“Excellent.” He pushed his chair back and rose.

The man who entered was lean, scruffy, and extraordinary. He wore ryouagged jeans and Reeboks with the panache of a box office star relaxing between films—a notion supported by a face that could have earned him top billing in Hollywood or Madison Avenue. But it was his body women would watch. Cullen Seabourne possessed the physical poise of dancer, which wasn’t surprising. He was one—an exotic dancer. Or had been. Cynna said her fiancé hadn’t decided yet whether he would continue in that profession.

He was also a werewolf . . . no, Abe reminded himself. He should think of Seabourne as a lupus. That’s what they preferred to be called. “Thank you for coming to see me, Mr. Seabourne.” He extended a hand and they shook. “Please have a seat. Would you care for coffee or tea?”

“No, thanks.” He took the chair Abe indicated, one of the pair set at right angles near the window. Abe never conducted counselling from behind his desk. What would be the point of that?

Abe took his own seat. The other man lounged in his chair with deliberate ease—a pose, Abe

thought, but which of them was the pose directed at? Was lupus body language the same as human? “I’ll ask the standard questions first,” Abe began, “but there will be a few directed at your particular situation, which is not standard. I appreciate your willingness to participate. Are you willing to have your children raised in the Church?”

“Sure. Cynna would want that. It matters to her.”

“And you’ve no objections?”

“Your church is a valid approach to the Source.”

“What is your own faith background?”

“My mother was Wiccan. I don’t identify myself that way, but I like their symbolism. I like the idea of recognizing both the male and female aspects of the One. In the clans, we usually see Deity as feminine.”

Abe nodded. He had nothing against Wiccans, though he considered their faith overly simplistic. “The One being God?”

“Sure, though that’s a word I don’t use.”

“Why not?”

He was still for a moment, motionless in a way that gave Abe the idea he wanted to fidget. That the subject made him uncomfortable. “Expectations, I suppose. Baggage.”

An honest answer, however limited. Abe tried another angle. “I understand you urged Cynna to be married within her church. Can you tell me why?”

“What do you know about Cynna’s childhood? No, unfair question. Even if you know plenty, you probably can’t discuss it.” He frowned, shifted slightly in his chair. “Put it this way. We won’t have the support of my clan for this marriage. Friends, yeah, we’ve both got friends who will back us, but she needs her community behind her. As I understand it, Catholics see the Church as the union of many faith communities.”

“That’s one way of putting it.”

“Cynna needs that, needs both the belonging and the acceptance.”

“And you don’t?”

“I won’t get it, not from my people. But your congregations are like clans, aren’t they?”

Abe's eyebrows climbed. "You see a Catholic congregation as similar to one of your clans?"

"Sure. Not identical, obviously, but a church community satisfies some of the same needs. You've got one big thing binding you together—not the same thing that binds a clan, but an important commonality. You've got priests instead of a Rho, but the role of the priest as head of the community has some correspondence to the role of the Rho. Your hierarchy is more elaborate than ours, but . . ." A smile flickered at the edges of his mouth. "I understand the need for hierarchy."

"And you consider the support of the community important to a marriage?"

He shrugged gracefully. "That's obvious, isn't it?"

"Not to everyone." Abe studied then man across from him. He certainly understood what Cynna saw here. He was himself thoroughly hetero, but Cullen Seabourne's beauty was a fascination so strong, so inherently sensual, it made him uncomfortable.

Yet Cynna hadn't spoken of fascination or beauty in their counselling session yesterday. She'd mentioned Seabourne's looks with a chuckle, a roll of her eyes, but her eyes turned soft when she spoke of their friendship. "I wonder what marriage means to you . . . what you expect to receive from it. What you expect to put into it."

"I get Cynna," he said flatly. "I put into it myself."

"All of yourself?"

"Not perfectly, not all the time. It's a practice, isn't it?"

He was startled. "Do you mean that in the Buddhist sense?"

"More or less. Not that I'm Buddhist—they wouldn't claim me, anyway—but their idea of a practice works for me."

"How would you define the, ah, the practice of marriage?"

"It's a commitment. You don't do it perfectly, but you don't have to. When you commit to something—sitting meditation or mindful dishwashing or monogamy, whatever—you practice it whether you're in then mood or not. It's through the dailiness of the commitment that you get what the practice offers. That's why community is important. Once you involve your community, make it witness to your commitment, they become part of it."

"The community serves as a reminder or reinforcement?"

“Sure. An ongoing witness to the commitment.”

Cullen Seabourne was far more sophisticated in his personal theology than Abe had expected. He steepled his fingers and asked God for some help. “And you believe you can offer Cynna sexual fidelity? That’s contrary to your personal beliefs, isn’t it?”

“It used to be. It isn’t anymore.”

Abe waited, knowing that most people were too uncomfortable with silence to let it linger, and would rush to fill it with explanations, denials, or defensiveness. But apparently Cullen Seabourne wasn’t most people. In the end it was Abe who broke the silence. “You don’t care to explain that change in your beliefs?”

“Some of it’s personal. Some of it isn’t, and involves matters I’m not free to discuss with you.”

A polite way of telling him, “none of your business.” Still . . . “You are asking yourself to change in a fundamental way. You’re an unusually attractive man. Sexual variety must have been a constant and important part of your life. Or do expect your love to eliminate temptation?”

Cullen’s smile this time was both private and amused. “I expect to be able to tell the difference between a hard-on and love.”

Crude, but well-put. Also the first time he’d spoken of love. “You will be faithful because Cynna needs you to be?”

He nodded. “She does.”

“It’s difficult to make a major change purely to benefit someone else. What will you get out of being faithful?”

“Other than Cynna’s well-being? I don’t know yet. That’s why it’s a practice. When you start a new practice, you don’t know what the results will be. The outcomes you see at the start are pretty limited compared to what’s really possible.” He thought about that and added, “I’ve already started on that part of the practice, by the way.”

Abe smiled slowly. “An unconventional approach, but one the Church can support. I see no obstacles to performing your marriage ceremony.”

It was only then, when the man truly relaxed, that Abe knew just how studied his earlier pose had been. “Good. Thank you. That’s . . . it means a lot to Cynna.”

And to you, Abe thought, but either wisdom or grace kept him from saying so. Not that there

was much difference between the two.

They spoke a little longer; Abe still had to deliver the usual cautions and suggestions and explain the Church's views on the sacrament of marriage. They ended up going over their allotted hour, but Abe had left room in his schedule for that possibility.

He stood and offered his hand again. This time Seabourne gave him a grin along with the handshake. "It's been a pleasure, Father."

Abe smiled. That was probably the least honest thing this particular supplicant had said to him, but he accepted it in the spirit it was intended. "Call me Abe. I've enjoyed meeting you, but I'm still curious. What's the real reason you insisted Cynna marry within her Church?"

For a moment Abe thought the lupus wouldn't answer. That gorgeous face grew still, a slight smile lingering as if he'd forgotten it was there. Then Seabourne gave a graceful shrug as if what he were about to say didn't matter—which told Abe it did, very much. "You offer the lifetime deal, don't you? If I were interested in anything less, I wouldn't bother making this legal."

"I see." Abe nodded and walked to the door. They said the conventional parting things; Abe thought they both meant them. As Seabourne left, Abe saw that his next couple was waiting in the small anteroom.

Caitlyn Murphy was young, bubbly, and madly in love with her fiancé. That didn't keep her from noticing Seabourne, of course. Her eyes widened, then lit. Her mouth widened in a grin.

Seabourne gave her a wink. It was mildly flirtatious, but suggested a certain shared, cocky humor: quite a face I've got here, isn't it? Glad you enjoyed it.

Caitlyn's fiancé noticed the small byplay, too. And didn't like it at all.

Abe repressed a sigh. Mike Donahue had some jealousy issues. "Come in," he told the couple. "I'm glad you could make it today."

Funny. Mike and Caitlyn had the best chance statistically of making a go of their marriage. They'd known each other for years, came from similar socio-economic backgrounds, and their families were very supportive. Both had been raised in the Church and were active parishioners . . . and they weren't starting their marriage with a new baby.

Cullen Seabourne and Cynna Weaver had none of those advantages. And yet, if he had to bet, he'd put his money on Cynna and her lupus.



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