

Colin (Threefold #1)

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Chapter One

“Really? Her?” Colin cocked his head to the right and narrowed his eyes at the young woman across the street. Nope. Even from this angle, she looked a little too round for his tastes. Her dark, curly hair a little too messy. Her brown eyes a little too plain.

“I like her.” Brad shrugged. “She’s fun.”

“They all are.”

“She’s different. And she’s sexy.”

“Doesn’t sexy usually come with a waistline?”

“Smart is sexy.”

“You can’t fuck *smart*.”

Brad shook his head. “You’re an ass.”

“You just now realized that?”

“I keep hoping you’ll surprise me. I should know better.”

“You really should. But don’t worry. I’ll be nice.”

Brad chuckled. “Oh, I’m not worried. She can handle you.”

Before Colin could ask exactly what that meant, the light turned green, and the woman started walking toward them. Her gaze fell on Brad, and her full lips parted to reveal perfect white teeth. Colin thought he saw a flash of whatever had his best friend so hooked on her. Her smile seemed to spread from her mouth to her eyes, and for an instant, she was beautiful.

Still, she could use a makeover.

The woman reached them, and gave Brad a brief kiss. She turned to Colin, and he saw her eyes weren’t just brown after all, but filled with green specks.

“You must be Colin the Scoundrel.” She smiled again, and held out her hand.

Colin got the distinct impression she wasn't joking, despite the lightness of her tone. Unfazed, he returned her smile and took her palm in his. "Nice to meet you, Becca."

Her shake was surprisingly firm. She held both his gaze and his hand a heartbeat longer, then winked. "We'll see how you feel after lunch."

"Italian?" Brad asked.

"Don't care, as long as it's nearby. I'm hungry."

Instead of saying something snarky, Colin found himself following the couple and stealing a glance at Becca's ass, which swished with every step. Sizeable but round, it stretched her jeans nicely.

Nicely?

Brad was getting to him, and Colin needed to hook up with a tall, hot blonde, before he dropped his standards like his friend obviously had.

Becca blew her hair out of eyes, but a single curl kept falling forward. She huffed and tucked it behind one ear.

Across the table, Colin watched her trail her manicured fingers down one side of her neck, and wondered if the gesture was consciously sensual.

She rolled her shoulders, and tossed the menu on the table. "I'll have a Caprese salad," she said. "And any creamy pasta they got. I skipped breakfast."

"Yeah, I can tell you look malnourished." Brad grinned, his dark chocolate eyes twinkling with mischief.

Colin didn't know why he didn't find it funny; it was definitely something he might say, if he weren't on his best behavior.

Becca laughed. "I do, don't I?" She pulled Brad to her by the collar of his Polo shirt, and ran the tip of her tongue along his lower lip. "I might have to eat you too," she whispered, but Colin heard.

And he got hard.

And there was something seriously wrong with him.

He squirmed in his seat, and cleared his throat. “So, Becca, Brad tells me you’re a painter.”

She sat back. “I am.”

“What are your influences?” And could he have sounded more pretentious?

“Houses in need of color.” She delivered the words straight-faced, but Brad chortled.

“She’s not *that* kind of painter, you douche!”

Becca’s right hand disappeared under the table—probably on Brad’s thigh. “Don’t be mean. It’s an easy mistake to make. I totally look like the starving artist type.”

Colin let out a bark of laughter before he could stop himself. Becca scowled at him, and he felt like an ass. “I’m sorry. I didn’t—”

“Dude, I’m messing with you,” she said, her face breaking into that radiant smile. “I’m fully aware I look neither starved nor artistic, and I’m cool with it. Now breathe, and tell me how you and Brad met. I never asked, and you know how forthcoming this one generally is with information about himself.”

Colin still felt bad, but took the out she gave him. “I sold his mother a house six years ago. She was on a business trip when the papers were supposed to be signed, and Brad was her proxy. After the sale was finalized, we went for a beer.”

“Or ten.” Brad motioned for the waitress. “The lady will have an insalata Caprese and a spaghetti Carbonara, and I’ll have a spaghetti Bolognese.”

The leggy blonde jotted that down and turned to Colin. “And you, sir?”

“He’ll have a mixed salad, but what he really wants is your number,” Brad answered. “The poor guy is recently single, and has been mooning over you since we sat down.”

Colin hadn’t even noticed her before, but now he did, he wouldn’t mind getting her number...or anything else of hers that was on offer. Her high heels brought her to just shy of six feet, and she was slim, with narrow hips and small, perky breasts. He could tell she wasn’t wearing a bra.

“I don’t know...I’m not allowed to go out with customers.” She studied Colin’s face, and he tried to keep his expression as innocent as possible.

Suddenly, Becca smacked her forehead. “Oh my God, Jules! I can’t believe I didn’t recognize you. Remember me? Becca? From that thing last year?”

The waitress seemed confused. “I—”

“Come on, that *thing*. With the food? You were with what’s-her-face, and we said we’d meet up, but you never called. Bet you’ve lost my number, huh?” Before the woman could reply, Becca brought out a cell-phone. “You give me yours this time.”

Reluctantly, the waitress did just that.

“Shit. I can’t remember how to write your last name. Spell it for me?”

“You can’t remember how to spell Bell?”

“Heh. Brain-glitch.” Becca wagged her eyebrows. “Thanks Jules. I’ll make sure to call you. Nice running into you.”

“Um...you too. I’ll be right back with your order.”

“You don’t know her, do you?” Brad said, as soon as the waitress was out of sight.

“Never seen her before in my life.”

He gave her a smacking kiss on the lips. “You make me so hot when you’re naughty.”

“Down boy.” She was smiling as she handed Colin the cell she held. “Here. All ready for you.”

It was his own phone.

“How did you...?”

“Her nametag read Julia. It wasn’t a huge leap from there. The trick is to talk fast—not give them much time to think and notice the holes in your story.”

“There was nothing *but* holes in your story, but I meant my phone. How did you get it from my back pocket?”

“I have very nimble fingers.” She wagged them, and Colin shook his head.

She *was* fun.

“Are you really recently single?” Becca asked.

“Can’t you see he’s heartbroken?”

Colin mock-glared at Brad. “Wasn’t in a relationship to begin with.”

“At least that’s his story. Helga saw things differently, hence the parting of ways when she caught him with someone else.”

“*Helga?*”

“Flight attendant,” Brad supplied, ever so helpful.

“Of course.”

“Of course?” Colin asked.

“It fits the picture Brad has painted of your character. You know—serial model-type dater with commitment issues.”

The way her eyes glinted with mirth, Colin couldn’t take offence. Not that he would otherwise. The description fit. “That’s me in a nutshell.”

She seemed to really study him for a moment. “Maybe.”

There was something undoubtedly magnetic about her gaze, and Colin decided he liked her. In the completely platonic way one could like his best friend’s chubby girlfriend.

“I’m just wondering whom you’d cheat on Helga the Flight Attendant with,” she said. “Swimsuit model?”

Colin hung his head.

“Victoria’s Angel?” Becca asked.

He hid his face in his hands.

“Barista,” Brad said. “But she wants to be an actor.”

Becca tapped her chin with her index finger. “Huh. I don’t know if I’d ever sleep with an actor. I’d be wondering if he was really into it or playing a part. Weren’t you?”

“Hadn’t thought about it till just now,” Colin said.

“Well, now you can, and it’s all ’cause of me. Glad to have been of service.”

Brad messed Becca’s curly mop of hair even more, and she grinned. Dimples appeared on her cheeks.

For the first time, Colin wondered if maybe smart *was* sexy.

If maybe Becca was sexy.

It wasn’t the last time he wondered that.

The thought crossed his mind again when Becca's pasta arrived, and she closed the perfect 'O' her lips formed over her first bite. Her eyelids drifted shut, and she let out an appreciative moan that sent a vibration all the way down Colin's spine. He could easily imagine hearing that sound in bed, muffled by soft, smooth thighs pressing against his ears. He wasn't thinking of *Becca* rolling in his silken sheets and making those sounds, of course. Just some random fuck.

Of course.

He really was a piece of shit.

"So, how did you two get together?" He needed to be reminded that they very much *were* together.

Brad said, "We—"

"Long story." Becca stuffed her mouth with more spaghetti and looked away. There was definitely a story there.

"I have nowhere to be for a couple hours." Colin sat back and steepled his fingers.

"Okay," Becca said. "We met online."

"Like in a chat-room?"

Brad let his head fall back. "Sort of."

"It was a sex ad, two months ago. You know, in Personals? I'd posted about needing to get laid, and Brad promised me a good nine inches of wood. The liar!"

Brad's head snapped back up, and Colin choked on his water.

"Seriously?" he asked.

"No, man." Brad raked his fingers through his midnight-black hair. "I was looking for someone to paint the second bedroom. And you're a sick fuck."

"Sticks and stones."

Becca laughed. She was quick to laugh. Colin liked that too. He also liked the way her breasts bounced when she laughed. And Brad was right; he was a sick fuck.

"Can't believe you fell for that," Becca said.

"You totally look the type of gal to get her jollies from strangers," Brad said.

“Eh, not lately.” She said it with a smile, but Colin got the impression she wasn’t all that happy about it.

“But you’d do it?” he asked. “Sleep with a stranger?”

“Brad and I hadn’t exactly exchanged social security numbers when we first...”

“Neither did we sleep, though.”

Becca pinched his cheek. “You stud, you! No, this good Catholic boy lost at least half his Heaven-cred that night.”

Brad preened, and Colin shook his head. This was the first time he saw Brad being so casual about his sex life. The guy was usually a prude. Whatever else Becca might be, she was freeing his best friend, and Colin would like her for that alone.

Only, for a heartbeat, he thought he might like her for more than that.

That night, he fucked Jules the waitress in a hotel room. She was limber, and way more active in bed than really beautiful women usually were.

She rolled off him, with a satisfied sigh. “Well, that was refreshing.”

“Indeed.” Colin traced the outline of her ribcage, getting ready for the I-don’t-usually-do-these-things speech. He knew the song and dance. None of them *usually* jumped in bed with a stranger, but they made an exception just for him. Some blamed it on his dark blue eyes, some on the body he spent hours maintaining. He knew the truth. He was a hunter, and could find the chink in anyone’s armor. Once he chipped away enough of an opening for himself, nobody turned him down.

“This hotel is so lovely. I’ve never been here before.” She smiled.

The answer to her unspoken question was that yes, he visited the place a lot. It was clean, luxurious, close to home, and most of all had a discreet staff that didn’t bat an eyelid, no matter who joined Colin in his usual room. He didn’t tell Jules that. “It has great room service. Hungry?” He wasn’t an animal. Just because he didn’t care for a relationship, didn’t mean he treated women badly.

“I could eat.” Her smile faltered when he jumped out of bed and passed her the menu from the nightstand.

He pulled off his condom, tied a knot in it, and tossed it in the garbage can by the dresser. “Order anything you want. It’s on me.”

She gave him what was obviously a well-rehearsed pout. “You don’t want anything?”

“I have an early morning tomorrow.” He kneeled on the mattress and leaned in so he could give her a deep, lingering kiss. “Need to go. You take your time. The room is paid for two more hours. I’ll arrange for a taxi to take you home.” He picked up his clothes from the floor and considered taking a shower. Maybe she’d join him. Fucking her against the cold marble shower would be enjoyable.

“So this is it? I won’t see you again?”

He pulled on his slacks and hurried to button his shirt. He’d shower at home. Before jumping into bed with someone, Colin made sure to explain he wasn’t looking for emotional entanglements. It was supposed to save both him and his occasional lover some time and drama, but there were always the ones who thought they could change him. Jules was apparently of that mind, so the sooner he was out of there, the better.

Tucking his shirt in his pants, he gave her a smile over his shoulder. “Never say never.” It was better than trying to explain she was being unfair to him and to herself by expecting more than a one-time fling.

“I don’t usually sleep with men I just met, you know,” she called out when he opened the door to leave. He didn’t break his stride.

He deleted her number from his contacts before he even reached the elevator.