

Not for Ourselves

Not For Ourselves
A Karmic Romance

Theresa Chaze

Chapter One

Alyssa struck the match. Instantly, the end burst into flame. She held it to the wick of the white candle until it ignited. Pinching off the flame, she placed the match on the table. Taking a deep breath, she flipped her long chestnut color braid back over her shoulder; it bounced and swung around her waist. Focusing on her intent, she started the ritual. "Goddesses--Maiden, Mother, Crone I call to thee and ask that you appear to me."

Picking up the candle, she held it above the surface of the water. Its glow illuminated just beyond the rim of the black bowl and reflected off the clear surface. "On this darkest of night, grant me the portal to make things right. Let me see clearly the moments of the past, so that I may understand what is happening at last."

Tapping the edge with the candlestick, the glass on glass echoed throughout the dark room. The vibration rippled through the water. "As I created a wave in the glass, so I ask you to help me with my task."

She set the candlestick next to the bowl and placed her hands on either side palms down. "Let me see where his hatred of me had begun so that his vengeance can be undone. Why he stalks me I know not why, yet I know the answer lies in times gone by. Take me back to the time and place, so that I may end the conflict with haste and grace."

Picking up the four raven feathers, she held them above the candle. "Goddesses of the raven and night, who left these feathers as a symbol of your might. I call you now to come me, to create a justice that even the blind may see. I call you forth to this land to guide the karmic hand. For those who have done harm to me, let their reckoning begin now--so mote it be."

Placing the feathers equal distance around the bowl, Alyssa paused for a moment to let their energy settle around her. Tilting her neck side to side she felt her vertebrae click into place and her muscles relax. She took a deep breath and allowed her Priestess training to move her into a meditative state. The outer world fell away as she sank deeper within herself and started climbing the stairs to her own soul. Into the darkness, the staircase spiraled upward, until she reached the iridescent platform where her Akashic record was held.

Suspended in the darkness of endless time, Alyssa looked for a guide to help her. But she was alone. In the past, there had always been someone to help her face the challenge. Uncertain, she stepped up to the pedestal. If she was to atone for a past error, she would be given direction. However, if she was merely a player as another strutted and fretted through a karmic lesson, then she could do little more

Not for Ourselves

than watch.

The book lay open before her. On it, fate continued to write. “Book of all my lives, show me karmic tie that echoes into this life.” The pages flipped, stopping twice before it came to rest on the life named Shannon Marie Cullen.

The image of an auburn-haired young woman lifted up off the page and hovered above. Her heart-shaped face still had the softness of youth. Yet the hazel eyes sparkled with old wisdom. She wore her hair pulled back into a long, single braid. Although she seemed familiar, Alyssa felt no emotional connection to her. There was no bond or sense of being between them. Only a faint familiarity like a tune whose melody echoes in the back of your mind, yet you cannot remember the words or the context in which you heard it.

She reached out to touch the image; it reached back. Yet before their fingertips touched, Shannon Marie vanished only to be replaced by a three-dimensional screening of a wooded forest. Rich and lush it sported multiple shades of greens, tans, and browns as the forest became fields and forest once again.

As her perspective changed, Alyssa felt herself zooming in to focus on the scene that was the most important. Yet it was more than just pictures and sounds. The smell of the fields and rushing of the river below sparked memories and long sleeping emotions.

No matter where her life led her, she could never find a safe sense of home. Fear always kept her from letting her roots grow too deep. She had never understood. Her childhood was no better or worse than anyone else's. Yet as her spirit drew closer, the familiarity once again made her crave the comfort of home.

Through breaks in the leaves, she saw two girls running quickly. Like a film, she watched them from above. Instead of recalling her own memories, the information flowed to her in unspoken words and images as if someone was narrating their story to catch her up.

Shannon Marie ran breathlessly up the glen, quickly followed by her younger sister, Rachael. Although a year and two months younger, Rachael looked more like Shannon Marie's twin.

Both girls favored their Scottish heritage with their flaming hair and outspoken temperaments. Their two older sisters, Elizabeth Marie and Katherine Anne favored their mother's French heritage both physically and in temperament. Fair-haired beauties they openly used their feminine assets to manipulate others to get what they wanted.

The plain-spoken mannerism of the patriarch of the family and his two youngest daughters frequently came into conflict with the matriarch and the eldest sisters' elitism as they boasted of their unclaimable link to the French throne. They refused to see that no matter which man laid down with the mother, the child could lay no claim to parentage unless they were acknowledged by both the father and family. Jacqueline Marie Katherine de Medici may have lain with the King of France, but the daughter they created was conceived above the sheets--not beneath them. Jacqueline refused to be silenced at court about the parentage of the growing child within her. It was the reason Marie marked her for death. But

Not for Ourselves

instead of a curse on mother and unborn child, the midnight escaped to Scotland became a blessing as the people's revolution sought out the privileged nobles.

In the highlands, Abigail Marie Katherine de Medici was born without a father. The fortune and power of the de Medici family hid the stain but it was never washed away. Having valuable connections in the English and Italian courts, Jacqueline was received as her family's station required. Eventually, she attained a politically well placed estate and fitted herself into the region. Unlike the women born in Scotland, Jacqueline followed her de Medic heritage by keeping control over her assets and her life. But it was her wit and cleverness that turned the estate into one of the most prosperous in the parish.

Abigail was never considered a suitable match for any of the legitimate Clan heirs. The heads of clans refused to allow a match unless the son would take total control of the estate and fortunes.

Jacqueline refused to relinquish her power. Abigail resented her mother for it. Richard Connell had approached her with an offer of marriage; he owned the second largest estate in the Parish. He let it be known that he intended to combine the estates to make himself the largest landowner and the unchallenged heir for the parish leadership.

Jacqueline refused. Instead, she persuaded her daughter to marry Shawn Michael Cullen. Only he was willing to break with tradition. Instead of insisting on control, he offered himself as steward to Jacqueline, claiming nothing for himself and agreeing to allow her to choose who inherited the de Medici affluence

The eldest son of Michael James Cullen. Shawn Michael saw Abigail as an opportunity to restore his clan's fortunes. Reluctantly Abigail agreed; his family estate was not as large as the Connell, but his clan connection opened the path to gain legitimacy and a title. The match was made for the benefit of both families.

Shannon never thought of Seanhair as a woman of wealth and power, only as her Grandmother. None of that interested her, no matter how Seanhair attempted to entice her.

She loved hearing the stories about France before the revolution, but for some reason, both she and Papa were more concerned about her becoming more aware of the estate business. She had already started acting independently. Her decisions carried nearly as much weight as the adults.

Alyssa sensed the connection that Shannon Marie had with her father. It drew her closer to the young woman for it was something she had always wanted and never had for reasons that were beyond her control. The richness of their love bond awakened her own sadness and sense of loss for the father she didn't remember. He had died when she three. The only things she really knew of him was what her older sister told her. Their mother had stubbornly refused to talk about him.

Without warning, Alyssa reached out to more fully connect with the young redhead.

Suddenly she felt the grass beneath her feet and the breeze on her face.

She was no longer an observer, but part of the drama and seeing through Shannon's eyes.

Not for Ourselves

The strange feeling again crept up on Shannon Marie and she stopped halfway up the hill. It seemed to be happening more often. At first, it was only in her dreams that she could sense spirits around her, but now she sensed and saw them while awake. The feelings kept getting more intense and harder to ignore. But this time it was different. Yet, in a way, it felt familiar.

Papa had told her that her Aunt Margaret had the same gift. She could see the Earth Folk and the spirits who had not yet crossed over. She asked Bridget to bless her with the same gift; the night of the next full moon, she had her first dream. Since then, the encounters with the dead had become nightly.

Sighing, Shannon shook her head, trying to clear the thoughts. But instead of vanishing the image of an older woman with reddish hair reached for her. Her greenish eyes were so familiar, yet she had never seen them before. She was not afraid, yet she was reluctant to take her hand. The spirit of the raven flew between them and the woman backed away, but did not leave.

Suddenly Alyssa felt herself being pulled away. She remained connected, yet she was no longer in direct contact with Shannon Marie. The emotional bond that had started to form had been thinned, but not broken.

The raven circled and flew back towards them. Shannon followed its flight and it brought her attention back to the hillside. She did not know why her mind filled itself with such things. It was almost as if someone was trying to give her wisdom she was not ready to understand. Each time the feeling passed, she felt that something important had happened, yet she was unable to see how it fit into her life.

She slowly started to climb the hill again. It was like the lessons Seanhair taught her about the lands and court. It did not interest her, but her grandmother's behavior told her that the lessons were important. None of the information was new. It was all old. Yet, it seemed so essential the closer she got to her seventeenth birthday. Suddenly there were no more stories or gossip about the other clans' secrets or stories about the French court, but only constant testing of what she had learned about the estate.

Reaching the crest, she caught up with Rachael. Shannon Marie pointed to the gathering at the bottom. "I told you Papa would make them wait for us!"

She readjusted her crossbow, freeing it from the fold of her breeches. Her attire was another point of contention between her parents. Breeches, boots, and wool shirts were not proper dress for ladies. Father always snapped back that if she had provided him with a son, he would have left the girls to her raising. But she had not, so she needed to be content with the two older girls. The two younger ones were his to raise as he saw fit. Shannon Marie was grateful he had always won. The thought of being turned into court pony turned her stomach. She would disappear into the marshes first.

"Hot damn!" Diverting from the path, Rachael leaped a fallen log for no other reason than it was there and ran down towards the gathering at the bottom.

Shannon Marie stopped for a moment. The sun was warm on her face. The lush greenery of early summer was old enough to be fully developed, yet young enough to still have a multitude of shades of

Not for Ourselves

green. For a moment, she felt homesick as if she had been away for a long time. She blinked and the feeling vanished as quickly as it had come.

As with the island and their people, the greenery was young and old at the same time. She did not regret stopping to honor the forest peoples and her ancestors even if had made them late. It was part of her tradition. Leaving them bits of food and coins every full moon within their circle was such a small thing, but it was enough to honor all those who had gone before. In this moment, she felt happy and at peace.

Below, parish men and youths were preparing for May Day. It was their time to boast and show off their skills with bow, horse, and sword. Only the best could chase the spring maiden in hopes of marrying her.

Last year, Papa had persuaded the Parish Chief to allow her to represent the family in some of the events with the younger boys. She had done well coming in second with her crossbow and third with her sword.

This year she planned to be first. She would miss competing with her bow. She had switched to the crossbow because each time she learned how and compensated for her breasts, they seem to get bigger. It hurt terribly when she released the bowstring and it hit them. Seanhair promised that they would eventually stop getting bigger.

Michael had teased her so she pushed him face first into the river. He jumped up sputtering. Rachael and Scott had laughed at them both when he eventually caught her and paid her back in kind.

Rachael was going to be able to compete this year with her staff. It would be her first time. Hopefully, not her last. At least for a couple of years, she wouldn't be the only girl competing. Scott not being there, dampened Rachael's excitement. He had been sent to the monastery, not for religious reasons, but to get him the education he would need to properly represent the Parish and his clan.

No longer did the English court respect the old ways. In order to gain regard in the English, they needed a representative that spoke their language and understood their customs, while still being linked to the Parish. Scott was chosen for his instinctive good nature and his quick mind. He knew how to get around the monks, while still being able to keep his faith and learning everything he could from them. However, he agreed to go because it gave him special standing in the parish that overshadowed his birthright and made him eligible to marry Rachael.

At least, they would find happiness together. Growing up, it had always been the four of them--Michael and Shannon Marie and Rachael and Scott. They had created their own bonded tribe. As children, they would go out on scouting raids. Tracking down imagined enemies of the Parish during which their hunting instincts intertwined beyond the need for verbal communication. As they grew, the foursome became two couples, yet the bonds never broke. When Scott left, their connection had been stretched, but it had not been broken. Shannon Marie sighed. They all missed him; Rachael had not been the same since. The two of them had a soul connection. At night, they visited each other in their dreams.

Not for Ourselves

Once Shannon had been awakened by Rachael talking in her sleep. At the foot of Rachael's bed, Scott stood, watching her sleep. When he saw her, he smiled and vanished like a ghostly apparition.

Shaking her head, she cleared the gloomy thoughts from her mind. It was going to be a glorious day. In the afternoon, she would compete; that night, she was going to be presented to the court. Seanhair was going to announce she was naming her legal heir to the de Medici titles and estates. Even with her little knowledge of the court, she knew it was going to be a rude surprise to many.

From below, Papa called her name and waved her to come to join them. For a moment, she stood there looking at him as if she was seeing him for the first time. He could not be considered tall, yet he was not short. His posture was that of a proud man, who knew the meaning of work and warfare. Held back in a silver clasp, his chestnut color hair hung just past his shoulders. A full beard partially covered his oval face. Across the distance, she could not see the bluish-green of his eyes, yet she knew they held an equal amount of love and impatience. Shawn Michael Cullen liked order; she didn't always meet his standards, but he loved her anyway.

Smiling, she weaved her way down the path. The bushes gently brushed against her like angel wings as she quickly joined the clans on the field.

The clans were separated in a semi-circle around the field of combat. Although it was called combat, the only event which permitted physical contact was for the young men who had earned enough points to compete for the spring maiden. But that was not for the younger competitors; only those who had been invited by respect or by winning the challenge learned what happened deep within the forest. But Shannon had no interest in what the rutting beasts, as Papa called them, did in the forest on Beltane night; her only concern was making the Cullen clan proud.

"You were late my Little Elf." Papa chided loud enough for the others to hear.

"Tonight is the full moon." Shannon looked up into his bluish-green eyes. "I needed to honor our ancestors and tonight I won't be able to."

He winked. "The Clan Elders are doing you a great courtesy. You need to honor them by arriving on time. You dishonor our clan by making us all wait."

"Yes, Papa." Shannon nodded and walked to the judging table where the other elders were gathered. She stood before them and slightly bowed. "I have dishonored my family by my tardiness. I was honoring my ancestors. That isn't an excuse. How may I make amends?"

"Heathen! We waited for nothing." Richard Connell grumbled. "She should be back with the rest of the women preparing the feast!"

Shawn Michael clenched his fists and marched to stand beside her, squaring off with the slightly older man. "My daughter was paying respects. As she was taught."

Shannon Marie turned to face the Parish Elder, hoping that the wind would not change and she

Not for Ourselves

remained upwind of him. His particular branch of the Connell family had only a passing familiarity with water and soap. If he had not left the old ways, he would not have complained so loudly about her honoring them. Her eyes drifted down to the scar on his right hand and arm where he had scraped off the tattoo of the horned snake. Feeling him staring, she met his hard hazel eyes again; only this time she refused to look away. "I meant no disrespect to the Parish Council." She kept her voice even, but her fear made her voice quiver.

"Many of us still follow the old ways." Shawn Michael stepped between them, pushing his daughter behind him. "Both religions are honored. Both are accepted equally."

"That will soon change." His short hair glistened in the sunshine as he jutted his chin forward in defiance.

Rumor had it that he cut his hair short to please the Christos; through them, he intended to steal control over the Parish.

Shannon Marie heard her father and Seanhair talking. But they never seem to finish the conversation once they knew she was listening.

"Silence!" The Parish Chieftain's voice ran clear among the trees. Laird George Francis MacDonald was the eldest member of the Clan council; a man of age, yet he retained the aura of strength and distinction. The passage of time had settled on his shoulders. No longer was he the young warrior who fought for Bonnie Prince Charlie. Nearly twenty years before, he became chief when his uncle, died without an heir. Laird Malcolm Michael Howard Connell's choice was much debated before his death, but afterward, his wishes were not challenged by anyone besides his nephew, Richard.

Fifteen years younger than George, Richard had to settle for being second in line for both the Parish Chieftain and the head of his clan. Laird MacDonald focused on his shorter kinsman and continued, his voice unwavering; time had not begun to touch his dynamic spirit "Your objection was noted and dismissed. I am still head of our clan and this parish. You will be silent!"

Even though she knew the Connell clan was a close cousin to the MacDonald--George and Richard were blood cousins, Shannon Marie could see little resemblance. Although they had the same black hair and angular features., the MacDonalds were lean, tall, and strong, being used to hard work both with the plow and sword. Many members became courtiers in the British court and in times past, the French. Although the Connells were still lanky, MacDonalds towered over them both in stature and breeding. Whereas the MacDonalds and the other cousin clans valued learning, the Connells recognized nothing but brute force.

Last year, there was more than a little teasing of Keith Connell. He was nearly two years her senior, yet she still had the height to look him in the eyes. She had not heard what was said, but laughter caught her attention. Suddenly Keith spun around, his white-knuckled fist flying towards her face. Michael had jumped in front of her and took the punch. Although he was knocked back a step, he did not fall. His exposed shoulder reddened at the point of impact but did not bruise. His cousins laughed harder. Keith sulked away, rejoining the elder members of his family clan. The next morning several of the

Not for Ourselves

MacDonald's horses were found with their throats cut.

Richard Connell bowed his head but there was no respect in his posture. He brushed the white carnation and turned to speak quietly with his many sons. There were rumors that his branch of the clan had tried several attempts to reawaken the old feuds by inciting the passions of the younger members of his clan and others. He promised them power and rewards beyond their imaginings. Several younger men left their clans and joined in the private discussion. Their voices rumbled together, becoming a single garbled protest.

Squaring his shoulders, Laird MacDonald silently focused his green-gray eyes on them. One by one most discreetly separated themselves and returned to stand behind their family elders. Those that remained did not seem to notice their ranks had diminished.

“Child, rejoin your clan.” With a wave of his slender fingers, he carelessly dismissed her and walked to the center of the semi-circle. “Greetings Kinsman and Clans. We have a glorious day!”

“Eye, Laird MacDonald.” Quickly, Shannon bowed and looked up at her father. “Did I do it right Papa?”

He nodded as he led her back to the Cullen clan.

“Stay away from Connell and his brood. He is unpredictable.”

“He's a horse's ass.” Seanair grumbled, brushed back his graying red hair and looked over his shoulder at the Connell family talking in a tight bunch. Unlike Laird MacDonald, age had weighed heavily upon her father's father. A blacksmith by necessity, his hands were scarred and roughened by decades of hard labor.

Although Shannon Marie had never seen him work the anvil, she heard stories. It was said that the people of the forest once came to him late one evening, asking him to repair one of the rune blades of old; it was said to be one of the same family of runic swords as Excalibur. For his service, they blessed him and his line with special gifts of sight.

“Why do they hate us so?” Shannon looked from Papa to his father. “And if they do, why are you letting Elizabeth Marie marry William Connell? They don't really like each other.”

The men looked at one another and Papa shook his head. Kneeling to her eye level, he tilted her head up to further focus her attention on him. “There are reasons, child. Reasons you cannot understand. But it is necessary to make peace. Your sister understands and she is willing. All you need to know is she will receive the title, but you, my Little Elf, will keep the land because it belongs to your Seanhair. Not to me.”

“Shawn Jacob, it's a terrible thing to do the child.” Seanair continued to grumble. “It will only make it worse--for everyone.”

Not for Ourselves

“It is her Seanhair’s wishes. I am keeping my word to her.” Shawn stood. “Besides the Laird MacDonald gave his word—”

“The man is dying. That ass Connell intends to usurp the Parish leadership. We all know it, but the words never seem to be spoken.”

“Shannon Marie,” Papa cut him off and turned to her, “they are getting ready for the archery competition.”

“I’m not entered. Only the crossbow.”

“Go watch them anyway.”

“Papa?”

“Go child.” Gentle Shawn Jacob pushed her toward the other contestants. “For now you needn’t hear these things. There will be time enough later.”

Shannon Marie slowly walked away, trying to hear what they did not want her to know. But they said no more until she was out of earshot. She did not understand what they meant. How was Papa making it worse? Seanair said he was doing something terrible. Papa would never. And never to a child, especially his own. Tossing her braid over her shoulder, she dismissed the conversation as her misunderstanding.

The connection between them was suddenly severed. No longer in the spiritual realms, Alyssa snapped awake. The phone rang in the other room. She ignored it. This late, it could only be one person and she had no wish to listen to his abuse.

The candle had burned itself out. The room was dark except for the light shining in through the window. She wasn’t sure if it was the sliver of the moon or the streetlight at the corner. It didn’t matter. Awkwardly, she stood and stretched the kinks out of her limbs. She wondered how late it was. Not that it mattered. It’s not like she had to worry about being at work the next morning. No longer satisfied with following and harassing her, Deputy Nevel’s intimidating tactics spread to her employer and co-workers.

Alyssa complained verbally and in writing, as did her co-workers. Their complaints fell on deaf ears. After nearly a month of reasonless traffic stops and searches, she found herself suddenly no longer welcome at the clinic. Officially, she was laid off, but she had no expectation of returning. Too many had been frightened; too many blamed her for it. Alyssa understood. If she could magically escape the torment she would--that was the purpose of the ritual.

Walking back into the living room, the bright lights temporarily blinded her. She blinked until her eyes adjusted. The clock read one am. She had been away for almost an hour. Her stomach growled. On her way to the kitchen, she checked the answering machine. She had missed three calls. She checked the caller Id. All three had been blocked numbers. Reluctantly she picked up the micro-recorder and

Not for Ourselves

pushed record. "June 1, 2007." She pushed play on her answering machine.

The computerized voice responded. "Three new messages. Message received 12:20 a.m."

The familiar male voice followed. "I know you're there. Answer the phone bitch!" He paused. "Not answering the phone won't help you. I'll burn your house down around you! Thou shall not suffer a witch to live!" He hung up.

"Message received 12:30 a.m."

"Are you going to call your devils to torment me? It won't work. You'll be dead and they'll be gone. Just one bullet." The call ended.

"Message received 12:55 am."

"You can't hide—"

Suddenly another voice spoke in the background. "One Adam six—" The phone call abruptly ended.

Alyssa shook her head and turned off the micro-recorder, putting it in the drawer. Calling the police and reporting the threats would do no good. The blue wall protects its own, especially when it's the sheriff's nephew. But there are other ways of getting justice.

Every one of the calls had been combined with pictures of the six deputies involved and put up on YouTube complete with the full names, ranks, and departments. The videos had been shared not only in the Wiccan communities but well beyond into individuals' blogs and news articles. No matter what happened to her, their names would be forever tagged with the details of the festival and the telephone messages.

No longer hungry, she continued into the kitchen and turned on the small light over the stove. She might not want to eat, but she needed to. The harassment and threats did have a bright side; she did lose twenty pounds in the last month and a half since her first encounter with Nevel at the Festival.

It had been mid-afternoon when a half-dozen stubble-headed men forced their way into the festival. Ranging in age from mid to late twenties, they screamed how evil they were and started destroying the displays. On their own, none of them could be considered imposing or threatening, but as a pack, their furor was magnified. They were lanky without much to distinguish them either in the way of looks or personality. The tallest had the darkest hair; the rest ranged from dark brown to blonde. One of the six came to where she had been reading Tarot cards.

Although he was the shortest one in his group, he had the biggest attitude. Walking like a John Wayne wannabe, he reached over to upturn her table.

Alyssa jumped between him and it. He shoved her. She pushed back. He pulled his deputy badge out of the back pocket of his jeans and flashed it in her face, screaming he was going to arrest her for assaulting an officer.

Not for Ourselves

Stunned she stepped to the side but did not give ground. Changing her position brought her downwind of him and she could smell the alcohol, which seem to seep from his pores. Brown-haired and hazel-brown eyed, he stared at her with contempt. On the collar of his brown shirt, he wore a Confederate flag with a blue cross encircle in the center. The rage in his eyes made her flinch. It seemed so personal to him, yet Alyssa had never met him before. How could he hate her without knowing her? He grabbed at her and she stepped out of his reach.

A crowd gathered, heckling, surrounding the six and interceding between Alyssa and her attacker. Two of the uniformed city police, who had been keeping the fundamentalist from harassing the festival-goers, arrived and quickly separated them.

Nevel screamed that she had attacked him. The crowd shouted him down. Alyssa had marched across the distance and informed the officers she wanted to press charges.

The one turned and pointed at Nevel, saying that he was the sheriff's nephew and it wouldn't be happening. The uniformed officers briefly argued with the six before escorting them out.

Another city officer pointed at her and said, "You weren't hurt. Don't push it or you will be."

Many sleepless nights those words echoed in the darkness. She hadn't dropped it. They had no right to harass them. Monday morning, she had filed an official complaint.

Sheriff Nevel had dismissed her grievance and threatened to arrest her for filing a false report. That night the phone calls began. That morning she contacted the newspaper and the prosecutor. She wasn't going to let the matter just simply drop; she had been threatened for no reason and she wanted justice. Two weeks later, she was interviewed by a Detective. On the way home, she was stopped and ticketed for illegal beeping. The harassment escalated.

Opening the refrigerator, she pulled out the bag of cheese and took out a handful of the squares. Zipping the bag closed, she put it back on the shelf and closed the door.

It had been almost a month, since the interview. Each time she was harassed, she informed the detective in charge of her case. Although he seemed to be sympathetic, he did nothing.

She turned off the light and walked back to her bedroom. Finishing the cheese, she slipped into bed. Trying to find a comfortable position, she tossed and turned. Pixie and Dixie would curl up next to her and purr as she fell asleep. She missed them, but she loved them too much to keep putting them at risk. They would stay with her sister until things blew over or she was able to move.

Lying alone in the dark, the idea of dropping the complaint seemed really attractive; but she knew that no matter what she did, Nevel wouldn't just let it drop. It was simply going to have to play out to the end. Spiritually, she reached out to her furkids. Sensing they were safe, she relaxed enough for sleep to overtake her.

Not for Ourselves