

MY ZOMBIE PRIDE

The book cover features two men from the waist up against a black background. The man on the left is seen from the back, with his head turned slightly to the right. He has dark hair and is covered in bright red, bloody-looking makeup on his back, shoulders, and arms. The man on the right is facing forward, looking directly at the camera. He has pale skin with dark, cracked, zombie-like makeup around his eyes and on his chest. He has short dark hair and is wearing blue jeans with a black belt. His hands are also covered in red makeup. The overall theme is zombie erotica.

STEPHANI HECHT
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WITH THIS RING

When Darren meets concert cellist, Jude, he's enraptured. Having gone as long as he has without sex, Jude is not only the passionate lover he's ever experienced, but he has an unusual side-effect to his sleeping disorder. Jude rarely sleeps and has a raging libido and a cock that won't quit. Normally that would be a good thing, but there are some strange things going on with moody, secretive Jude. His teeth and hair seem to be falling out. He also bleeds sometimes. Devastated, Darren consults his writing partner, Titch, and his agent, Suzanne. They ponder the problem. Is it Viagra? Or is it crack or some other illicit drug?

Jude is offended. It's a family problem, he assures Darren. His mom has it, so does his dad sometimes. Darren wants to believe him and tries not to stress. What kind of family problem does he have? HIV? Hepatitis? Leprosy? He becomes increasingly worried when Jude refuses to eat or drink and often disappears. Soon, Titch tells Darren he, too, is pretty ripe. With a huge TV deal pending for a reality show, *With This Ring*, Darren needs to decide just how far he is willing to go for love, a hit TV show and for a wedding ring?

LOUISIANA LUST

Moudoca is the Voodoo king of New Orleans and he is running a lucrative business...creating the perfect men for a group of sleazy pimps. Only thing is, it involves murder and these perfect men are only good for a short time because they start to decay...and crave blood. These perfect men are zombies.

When pretty boy, Craven Beaumont, has the audacity to reject the advances of the Voodoo king, there will be terrible consequences. Moudoca is highly insulted and wants revenge. He knows that Beaumont's' exceptional good looks will fetch a fair price so he puts him in the bottom of the swamp and begins the process which will transform him into zombie slut.

What the Voodoo king doesn't know is that Craven isn't alone at the bottom of the swamp. Something else lurks there, resting, waiting, and his hunger for blood will change everything.

Love in the Bayou sometimes takes the most unusual turn.

SALTING ZOMBIES

Avery Lyons has a problem. He's fallen head over heels for Christian. Christian's not just any guy, however, but someone who died in 1984 and has just recently been brought back to life. But they say you can't pick who you love and that's true, even if that special somebody is a zombie. To be fair though, Christian is the only zombie who has a soul instead of a mad craving for a human smorgasbord. Still he does like to bite.

On the run from the nefarious organization, BOKOR and a bunch of evil zombies, Christian and Avery join forces with a rat-tag group of rebels. Even as they continue to fight for their lives, the men grow closer together. But is Christian as good as he as appears, or is he just another brain-munching zombie waiting for the opportunity to attack?

FOREWORD

I've worked in my local library as a volunteer for the last few years collecting book donations from the public each Saturday for our monthly book sales. I know what books are hot, what books are not...and what books the librarians are desperate to get into stock.

Recently I was surprised to see *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* on top of the list. I was amazed that we never got a single copy turning up at our book sales and learned that people love this book and won't give up their copies of it.

For those who haven't read these *mash* novels, the original classics remain intact with zombie stories woven into the mix.

As a Hollywood screenplay coverage reader, I soon discovered Zombie movies, zombie books and now Zombie TV shows are the new vampires.

It got me thinking...a M/M zombie romance would be a blast. I thought three short books gathered together in one volume by three M/M authors working out of their comfort zone would

be hot, current and, I hoped, a fun project for us all.

My thanks go firstly to our publisher, Tina Haveman, who overcame her initial shock to snap up the trilogy I pitched to her.

We came up with the title *My Zombie Pride* together and she enlisted the help of Martine Jardin to cook up a hot and spooky cover.

My second thanks go to my awesome co-author D.J. Manly who said, "Sounds creepy, I'm in." I could never have proceeded with this project without him or my other frequent partner in crime, the delectable and talented Stephani Hecht, who also wanted to jump in and tackle the blood and fun.

I'd also like to thank our dedicated and hard-working Editor-in-Chief, Jay Austin, who took this on in record time and adjusted all of our deadline schedules to bring *My Zombie Pride* to our readers so quickly--and in secret.

There are three very different stories here by three authors who seek only to entertain and enthrall...so ultimately, our thanks go to our readers for coming along on this epic voyage with us.

We love you.

A.J. Llewellyn

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My Zombie Pride

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MY ZOMBIE PRIDE

AN EXtASY BOOKS ANTHOLOGY

DEDICATION

AJ - I dedicate this book to George A. Romero whose zombie movies fueled my imagination for so many years and to Mary Shelley whose Frankenstein is still the ultimate monster novel of all time.

DJ - To those readers who expect the unexpected...

Stephani - To Lydia, one of my dearest friends.

WITH THIS RING

BY

AJ. LEWELLYN

CHAPTER ONE

I sucked. I sucked and I sucked and I *sucked* and Jude's cock stayed rigid in my mouth. In spite of a pretty intense arsenal of blowjob tricks, I couldn't make the guy come. Bleary-eyed, almost gagging, I had to come off his cock. As a card-carrying NoHo queen, it pained me to say I'd finally met my match. I, Darren Groves, never *ever* thought I'd want to meet a cock that quit, but after spending the better part of the afternoon and evening working that mammoth thing, I needed a break.

Our favorite CD, Corinne Bailey Rae's *The Sea*, played in the background as I tried to calm my sudden and acute gag reflex.

"I'd do it all again," she sang. *No, I wouldn't. I can't feel my tongue anymore!*

Though I was deeply attracted to this angelic-looking, finely chiseled hunk of a man, I couldn't take anymore. I am a cocksman from way back, but this one had me beat. I rolled away from Jude

and onto my back. I stuck tentative fingers in my mouth. Yeah, my tongue was still there.

I felt Jude tensing beside me.

"You always lose interest after you've come," he said.

"Thatth not twue." Man, I couldn't even speak properly. I'd come so many times and never got tired of it, but it was hard to keep giving head when the recipient didn't show any sign of...well, life.

I swallowed some cold coffee from my cup on the floor. Better.

"You know," I ventured, my mouth still feeling rough, my voice sounding hoarse, "Percy Bysshe Shelley had this problem."

"What problem?"

"He never slept."

"What's that got to do with anything, Darren?"

"Well, sometimes...lack of sleep does things to a man."

Jude stared down at me. My lips felt like rubber, I'd been sucking him off so long. Not only could he not come, his erection wouldn't go down and he seemed annoyed, like it was all my fault. We'd had this problem before...always after dark now that I'd come to think about it. He enjoyed fucking me and did so for as long as I wanted, but he could only come in my mouth.

Not this time.

"You got my heart and my head's lost," Corinne sang. My mouth was pretty far gone, too, let me tell you. Every muscle in my face ached.

"Try again," he said, pulling my head toward his massive cock.

"Nooo!" I wrenched myself away from him. Had he not noticed my streaming nose? My discomfort? I went to the bathroom, blew my nose and washed my face, staring at myself in the ancient, pockmarked mirror of the medicine cabinet.

You've lost your mojo, Groves.

A double-bassist with the Los Angeles Symphony orchestra, Jude played constantly, when he wasn't sucking my ass, or my cock, or fucking me. His music and his fucking were beautiful and he turned me on...most of the time. In the early hours of the morning, his music drove my neighbors nuts and had brought the police out twice so far. It still rankled that I now had a ticket to appear in court on charges of disturbing the peace when I wasn't disturbing anyone's peace.

Oh God, he was playing again. The only thing Jude loved more than getting head was playing music...or listening to it.

I rushed into the living room, feeling his reproachful gaze.

"The Hot House is supposed to have a great jazz band there tonight," I said. I'd sort of promised my best friend, Titch, that I'd go, but

after a week-long absence, Jude had turned up at my door.

He stared at me, fingers moving up and down the strings of his double bass. It was barely kissing ten PM, but my neighbor had an itch for calling the cops these days.

"They're supposed to be great," I said.

Jude shrugged, bagged up his bass and pulled on his black boxer briefs. He winced as he edged his black jeans over his still hard cock, now squished to the side in his pants. He covered it all up with a long-sleeved black sweater. He looked so goddamn gorgeous.

"Are you okay?" I asked. "You're not uncomfortable?"

"I'm used to it." His accusatory tone felt like a slap in the face.

"You know, you can't claim ownership of a cock if you can't make it come," he said.

"Okay." I felt bewildered and hurt. He claimed he wasn't taking Viagra, but that kind of erection wasn't...*natural*. I was dying to talk to Titch about it, but I knew her husband would be there and the music would be loud. I threw on jeans and a sweater and we left.

I felt Jude's gaze on me as he put his double bass in the trunk of his SUV and we drove the few short blocks to the café. He never left his double bass anywhere and never walked. He hurt me by not trusting his beloved instrument to be safe in my home, and he'd hurt me with his words, but it

wasn't the first time. I wondered just how long this thing between us could keep going. There were times when he was fantastic and times, like now, when he could be such a jerk.

The air was warm, a rare thing for March once the sun set. The stars hung high in the sky. We'd come off five days of non-stop rain and seeing stars in a Los Angeles sky was such a novelty, we both stopped and looked up through the windshield.

We found parking on the street and Jude put a hand on my arm. See, this was where he got me. He enjoyed being chivalrous. He liked opening doors for me, he liked paying for everything. And he loved satisfying me in bed. He just felt I was Mr. Super-slouch in that department. It was just not true.

Jude let me out of the SUV and held the swing door of the cafe for me. We found a table for two off to the side, Titch and her husband Carlos waving madly to us. They had the table beside us.

The band was on a break and I sat beside them as Jude went to get our drinks.

Was it my imagination or was Titch acting funny? She turned away from me and so did Carlos. Boy, I was taking everything so personally these days. Maybe it wasn't about me. This was a rare date night for my friends. Maybe I got them in the middle of a private discussion. I kept my smile bright as Jude returned with coffee for me. He sat opposite me, toying with his cup of decaf

green tea. We'd tried everything to keep his sleeplessness at bay, but I was no dummy. Something was up, apart from his gigantic cock. I suspected it was drugs, but he was such a touchy guy, I hoped he'd just come right out and tell me.

As he stared into the depths of the green heat, I wished he'd confess that he was hooked on crack, ice or whatever else jacked him up day and night.

His crystal-blue eyes suddenly stared into mine. God, in spite of this little problem, he had my heart. He could have been a model and certainly walked with the gait of one, but music was his passion.

"You really think I'm like Shelley?" He twisted the cup around on the saucer. God, he was harping back to what I'd said in bed. Shelley was famous for long stretches of sleeplessness. I had no idea what the technical term for such a condition was and Jude got awfully touchy when you suggested he had a problem. I tensed, waiting for an argument to start.

His long fingers caressing the lip of the cup reminded me of the things he did to me in bed. He loved to stroke and touch, keeping his hands all over my body, day and night. He fucked me constantly and I was starting to feel the effects of lack of sleep myself. I'd gone from being the guy everyone wanted as a friend to the one who had a lover who was so ardent, I was now complaining about too much sex.

That was another thing. He ordered coffee because it was my obsession, but I never saw him consume it. I was the one who powered through ten cups of coffee a day and I could still sleep--when he let me.

He didn't touch his tea and seemed really down.

"Well," I said, warming to my theme. I smelled apple pie and salivated, but Jude appeared oblivious as the waitress plopped a big slice with chocolate ice cream on top of it right on Titch's table. It was warm in the café, the noise of the espresso machine jostling with the laughter and conversation. Beside the bar was a long and tall bookcase filled with books you were allowed to read and also, to buy. Its eclectic collection always intrigued me. There were three copies of *Damned in Paradise* lying on their spine on one shelf. John Barrymore's proclivity for self-destruction still had Hollywood enthralled decades after the fact. This was one of the first Hollywood biographies most people read when they hit town.

One of the band musicians was tuning up his guitar. The warm weather had brought out a lot of people. Though it often alerted us to a pending earthquake when the heat was unseasonable, California's spring weather was always mercurial. It could be seventy degrees one day and forty-nine the next.

I hoped the band was as good as Titch claimed. The band last night had been pretty lousy. The

Hot House Jazz Cafe, in the heart of NoHo's art district, reflected the temperature. Musical quality changed like the wind.

Jude stared at me. He never blinked. Sometimes it was eerie.

"Shelley stayed up for days and days and I researched him for my thesis. Mary Shelley, his wife, said that it caused..." I cherry-picked my words because he took offense so easily, "Hallucinations."

He nodded, infuriating me by twisting the cup back the other way, in an anti-clockwise direction.

"She said this first gave her the idea for *Frankenstein* and that--"

"Are you calling me a monster?"

Shit! "No, nothing like that. I'm just saying--"

"You think I'm a freak."

Oh, God, here we go. "No, I didn't say that either. I'm trying to tell you, he inspired one of the great classics of all time." *Man, he is so quick to go there!*

In that moment I realized to my horror that the guitarist wasn't tuning up. He was actually playing. Oh, man, Jude was gonna blow a fuse.

"You know what? I don't need this. This music sucks and this tea sucks. I'm going home."

"Okay," I said. I was stunned at first because that was the last thing I expected. I'd had a tough week without him and I thought this time, it was probably over, but I wanted to avoid a public spectacle. We had coveted seats away from the band and he stood, his powerful, mesmerizing

face peering down at me. He was so beautiful, a haunted, hunted angel with his shoulder-length dark hair and wide, curving mouth.

Right now, he was just an angry asshole. Titch said everybody got one of those at some point, gay or straight.

He turned and shoved his way past the tightly packed seating. I thought for a moment as about all the sex I'd be missing. He'd fucked my goddamn brains out and never got tired. He loved to suck cock. Thrived on it actually, and sucked my ass like he'd never had his mouth on one before and discovered the sun shone from it. True, I hadn't shone in the boner-shining department myself, but hey, it wasn't for lack of trying. Yeah, I'd miss it, but geez, he was a moody guy and I needed some sleep.

"This chair free?" somebody asked me.

"Yeah." I felt like Bridget Jones and before her, Eric Carmen. *All by myself.*

"Where's he going?" Titch asked as she saw him outside. We could see him stepping to the left, then to the right. I saw his SUV whizz by. Boy, he really was going home.

"Home."

Titch licked her spoon. They might have been sitting next to us, but they may as well have been a world away. This was their big date night and they had their notoriously unreliable babysitter for a whole two hours.

"Do you think you could talk him into showering sometime?" Titch's husband Carlos asked. I was in shock.

"What are you saying? He smells?"

"You mean you didn't notice?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"Boy, love is blind and has a bad sense of smell."

"Carlos, stop it." Titch leaned toward me. "You okay?"

"Sure."

"You're starting to smell, too," Carlos said.

"I am?"

"Carlos!" Titch shrieked.

I was mortified. I prided myself on cleanliness and had taken a shower that morning. I also had a keen sense of smell. What was wrong with me?

"What kind of smell?" I asked.

Titch gave her husband a warning glance. I stared at their apple pie. Normally she'd invite me to have a bite. She didn't offer and I wondered if that was why they'd declined to push their table next to ours and why she was hogging the pie. *Is my breath bad, too?*

"A fruity smell...ripe." Carlos ignored Titch's infuriated gaze.

"Ripe, but not nice?"

"Right. Like...spoiled fruit left in the car."

"Shit!"

"A bit like that, too. Smelly tennis shoes comes to mind."

Christ.

Titch slapped his arm.

"What?" he huffed. "Darren asked."

I left them then and although they made half-hearted attempts to coax me to stay, I guessed that a friend who smells like ripe shit isn't much of an attraction. I stood outside and sniffed my arms and the backs of my hands. I smelled all right to me.

The lights gleamed over NoHo. To my right, the subway was a hub of activity with hot dog and churro carts. Across the road, dueling Thai cafes were doing huge business. I crossed Magnolia Boulevard, the hand-painted pedestrian crossing in rainbow colors looked especially lovely at night. I hadn't even noticed the sparkles in the paint until Jude pointed them out to me one night. I breathed deeper against my arm. I couldn't smell anything.

Being a Taurus, I could smell the tiniest of odors and I couldn't smell it on me. I walked over to the Pitfire Grill and saw a bunch of people eating around the actual fire pit out front. Inside, I ordered a pumpkin pizza, salad and a red velvet cupcake. They boxed it all in record time, turning my paranoia about my body odor up a notch. Normally the Pitfire made you wait forever for your food.

I crossed the street again and turned down Klump. I still thought it was uncool for a writer to live on a street with a name like Klump, but at

least my apartment was nice. I took the stairs up to the first floor.

The smell hit me, thanks to the heat and my A/C being on the fritz. It was the scent of overripe bananas.

I greeted and fed my cat, Wellington, threw my clothes and sheets in the wash, gingerly ate my pizza since my mouth still felt tender. Then I did some cleaning. Funny that my neighbor never complained about the vacuum, only Jude's music. As I vacuumed, the nozzle sucked up something, jamming the works. I patiently turned it off, opened up the cleaner as Wellington tried to play with the skuzzy lint trapped in the roller. I jiggled and fumbled and out fell a tooth.

Glancing at Wellington, I saw him slink back in horror, as if to say, *It's not mine!*

I examined it. It was a back tooth, pretty large, but I was certain it was human. The only other person who'd been in here was Jude. I stared at the tooth, put it on the coffee table, reassembled the cleaner and finished the vacuuming.

Wellington followed me around as he always did. I realized he was pleased to have me to himself. In the two months since I met and fell in love with--*shit, did I say in love*--Jude and we'd been inseparable until a minor skirmish had him walking out a week ago.

I decided to take a cool shower and lie on the bed and watch a movie with Wellington. I was stunned to see the water from my morning shower

at a standstill in the tub. I fetched the plunger, Wellington's ass up, tail in the air as he crouched on the tub's edge, swatting the water beside me. Even at the age of six, he still liked to play. It was one of his many endearing qualities. I plunged repeatedly over the drain opening. It reminded me of my earlier cock-sucking efforts.

It was a relief to hear the sucking sound of release. When I pulled the plunger away, I was astonished to see long strands of black hair coming away. Lots and lots of hair.

Dropping the plunger, I kept pulling out more hair. My God, it was all Jude's since I have short blond hair, but I had no idea how he kept any hair on his head. I'd never noticed him losing so much hair. I collected enough to cover a small dog. How had it even slipped down the drain? I bagged it and tossed it in the trash. I was pretty rattled by the time I finished.

I cleaned the tub, then took my shower. Ever hopeful, I checked my voicemail just in case, but I didn't really expect Jude to call. Like I said, he's moody. This was now our second fight. Sometimes he had a fantastic sense of humor and found joy in funny details. Other times, he took offense at the smallest things. I'd seen him sulk for hours over a random comment from one of his oldest friends.

What was it Elliot had said? I tried to remember. Oh, yes. There'd been a discussion about horror movies. Elliot said he loved the

George A. Romero movies. That hadn't been the bone of contention. It was Elliot's assertion that zombies were a political metaphor.

Jude said that was crap. Why this should have sent him into a state of depression was beyond me, even now.

I jumped into bed, red velvet cupcake in hand, and found a movie to watch. I thought I'd soon fall asleep. I didn't. The mystery of the tooth and the hair bothered me. It shouldn't have, or so I kept telling myself. I fell asleep finally, around three in the morning and woke up an hour later.

God, I was exhausted. *What's wrong with me? I'm overtired. That's what it is.*

I missed Jude. Not enough to call him, but I did miss him. Wellington however, has never been a creature to allow anything to disturb his rest. He slept curled up on the pillow beside me. I lay awake, thinking about my finds. I realized Jude had a serious drug problem to have his teeth falling out this way and for his hair to be coming out in huge clumps. I wanted to help him, but I also wanted a drama-free existence.

On the TV, an old black and white movie was on. Boris Karloff stumbled around as *Frankenstein*. He plodded through a rain-soaked village, lightning crackling in the sky as townspeople ran from him in their pajamas, screaming hysterically.

He marched on, his wide-open eyes and outstretched arms wreaking unintentional havoc. I

With this Ring

kept thinking of Jude's words, *Are you calling me a monster?*

I turned off the TV and tried to sleep.

CHAPTER TWO

"Darren, you're late."

I'd reached for the phone in my sleep, unable to move much with Wellington sitting on my feet. He looked pissed about my lazy start. I checked the time. Nine AM. I never slept past six. I'd missed a few good hours of work on my new TV pilot and was furious with myself.

My friends and business associates are all wonderful and I love them, but I hate when they don't identify themselves like I'm supposed to know who they are by a few short words. I knew who this was though. My agent.

"Suzanne," I gasped. "I'm on my way."

I grabbed my things, threw on clean clothes and fed the cat a whole can of food. His joyous reaction gave a whole new meaning to the words fancy feast. I jumped in the car. I had typed up the entire pitch, but hadn't printed up the requested four copies. I'd run out of ink. I had however, practiced it enough on both Wellington and Jude

and they thought it was brilliant. I stared at the block of paper on the other side of my windshield. A parking ticket. Street cleaning. Holy heck I was falling apart. Two tickets in one week. I never got tickets for failing to move my car. I saw that it was for ninety dollars and almost wept on the spot.

Debating the best way to reach her office, I decided Suzanne was in a bad enough mood, so I avoided the freeway, which would be a parking lot at this hour, and took Riverside all the way to her offices of Sanborn and Company on the corner of Barham Boulevard. She had a large window with a view of the street and the freeway. Unfortunately, people could also see right inside her office and I once caught her holding her foot to her face and chewing her toenails.

She saw me coming and waved. She picked up her coffee cup, pointed to it, then me. *Coffee*, she was saying, and it was on me. Of course it was.

I parked in one of her agency's assigned slots and drifted over to one of the ten gazillion Starbucks in the city. Suzanne and Titch, her assistant who had become my best friend, arrived within seconds.

Suzanne walked ahead, glancing around, nervous. Behind her back, Titch mimed somebody riding a horse. Great, Suzanne was in one of her high-handed moods. She'd married her Muslim boyfriend, Habib, to keep him and his enticing cock in the country. Now she was targeted every place she went. Or so she believed. The nice Irish-

Catholic girl who never even said the D word--divorce--aloud was convinced the government was following her, jotting down her every move. This was all because Habib, a wonderful guy, was pulled to the side on their trip to Boston and searched by airport security.

She had blogged about it, embellishing the encounter to such a degree the Federal Aviation Authority tracked down security tapes and showed a pretty standard but admittedly slow pat-down, probably because Suzanne acted like such a nut the security guard took his time.

Unbowed, she'd gone on every networking site, moaning about the incident, but everybody else was bored with it. Now she was twitchy and ultra-sensitive.

I'm surrounded by weirdoes...

Suzanne scanned the crowd and must have seen no obvious government agents because she relaxed and gave me a quick, ferocious hug. Her store-bought titties were like rocks in her chest and always hurt me, but I kept smiling.

"You're lucky Steve Janssen's running late. Where's the pitch?" she asked.

I handed her the copies.

"Only two?" She sent Titch back to the office to run off two more copies. Titch hugged me on her way out. She seemed to recoil, though I could have been imagining it.

Suzanne had kept one copy and read through it. "Nice." She looked over at me. "Do I have to beg for coffee?"

"No, sorry." I pulled out my wallet from my back pocket and the tooth I found tumbled out with it.

She picked it up, examining it. "What the heck?" I sighed. "I'll explain."

The line was long as usual and I reached the counter, ordered three Americanos and saw Titch running back in with the extra pitch copies.

Back at the table, the women studied the tooth.

"So." Suzanne pushed it toward me. "'Splain."

I told them what happened the previous night and about my drug addiction theory.

"Weird," Suzanne said. "Normally if somebody's teeth fall out from drugs, it's one of the front ones. And they're usually rotted-out. This is a very healthy-looking tooth."

"What do you make of it?" I asked her.

Suzanne was staring at a man beside us.

"Don't want to say," she whispered dramatically. "The walls have ears."

Oh, my God.

"I don't think they have walls here," said Titch. "I think the joint's made of that chipboard stuff."

Suzanne glared at her. "Hmmp."

She suddenly jumped up. I saw her put something on the ground. The tooth! She picked up her chair and aimed one leg on the tooth, banging on it repeatedly. People started and

stared. I heard the chair crack. A barrista scurried over, but after a few more whacks, Suzanne stopped.

"Huh, what do you know. It really was a tooth." She glanced at me, sheepish. "I thought it was an electronic bug."

Oh, brother.

She sat back down, her chair wobbling dangerously. She got up again, swapped it out for the vacant chair beside me and we ran through our pitch again. Steve Janssen, the executive in charge of development for Underground Productions had met with me and Titch twice. He had no idea Titch was Suzanne's assistant. He thought we were both struggling writers, which we were.

Titch however, had done the unthinkable when our studio jobs in script coverage dried up. She took clerical work. I took freelance assignments when I could and kept quiet about any office assignments I got. Hollywood insiders have this bizarre theory that real writers should live in attics and starve until the Big Break comes. Taking actual work signifies true lack of creative desire.

What it really actually signifies is a desire to pay the rent. With each successive meeting with Steve, Titch and I were closer to being employed writers.

"Oh God," Titch breathed. "He's coming."

"Handsome bugger, isn't he?" Suzanne said as the tall, bronzed Steve strolled into the café. He

smiled at me and seemed genuinely pleased to see me and Titch.

Not as handsome as Jude. I missed him badly now. Nobody was as hot as he was.

"Don't get too close," Titch said in my ear. "You really should have taken a shower, you know."

I opened and closed my mouth. Her shocking words obliterated Steve's excuse about freeway traffic.

"No problem," Suzanne said, as he took the wobbly chair.

"I think this is broken," he said, wriggling around. He stood and swapped chairs with one from the next table.

Holy shit! Jude!

Titch nudged me under the table. He was staring at me and I couldn't breathe. It wasn't surprising for him to be here. His music agent worked for the same company as Suzanne. That's how I met him--in the waiting room.

Our eyes met and I wanted to throw off my clothes and jump on him. He gave me a beautiful smile and I felt it took a lot for him to avert his gaze again. His agent was prattling and he was twirling his coffee cup.

God...he is beautiful.

Men and women alike sent him admiring glances. He could have been gay or straight. As beautiful as he was, he was the essence of masculinity. I had to rip my own gaze away from his face and turn my attention back to my meeting.

"We really like this idea," Steve was saying. "Taboos. Social taboos. Work place taboos. You've covered everything. What about marital taboos? We think that's a fine place to start."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Suzanne bristled and I could see my dreams falling apart at the seams.

"Well, I'm thinking about a Muslim and a Jew marrying...two polar-opposite religions. What about spies marrying one another? Or real social opposites?"

Suzanne's eyes narrowed. "Who do you work for?"

"Excuse me?"

I jumped in when Titch pinched my leg, hard.

"Steve, it's a fantastic suggestion. Titch and I have been working up a whole episode around this idea. A mixed marriage is a great start."

We hadn't been. We'd been thinking lost tribes living in the wilderness. I was lying, but everyone does in Hollywood.

"Great," he said. "I heard there's this...I don't know...underground movement. People marrying people with obvious defects. You find something like that, I'll give you the green light."

"What do you mean by obvious defects?" Suzanne asked.

"How long do we have?" I asked, panicking because Suzanne's paranoia would lose us this deal. I also noticed that Jude's meeting seemed to be winding up. He and his agent were standing.

He caught my gaze, nodded and walked out of the café.

Shit!

"How about two days? Email me a single-page synopsis for Taboo Wedding and it's a go."

"I'll send you the deal memo today," Suzanne said, the smell of money bringing her back to her senses.

"Well, great," Steve said again. He checked his cell phone. "Gotta fly. I have a cremation to watch...another show idea." His voice dropped. "A new French crematorium. They bring you coffee, croissants...they play Piaf! I'm toying with the title *French Fries!* Whaddya think?"

We all froze, staring after him as he raced out the door without waiting for a response.

"I think it's creepy and totally disgusting," Suzanne said.

"Depraved." Titch shuddered.

"I wish I'd thought of it, too," I said.

Suzanne nodded. "It'll make a fortune. Say, where did Jude go?" She craned her neck, trying to see if he was outside.

I shrugged. I had to find me a taboo wedding. Titch would be tied up with Suzanne's nuttiness. *Underground clubs...obvious defects...*and my boyfriend had just walked out with a tiny nod in my direction.

Steve came back. Somebody had swiped his seat and he grabbed one from the next table. It was a pantomime of horror, watching him unwittingly

sitting in the broken chair. We all stared as he fell to the floor.

"You've got a lawsuit on your hands there," Suzanne said as I helped him to his feet.

Steve rubbed his sore skull. I was stuck with him, fussing over him as Suzanne and Titch ran outside.

"We should introduced Jude to Steve," I heard Suzanne say. "He's a drug addict. That's a defect."

Shit!

I couldn't leave the floundering executive, now covered in three different cups of coffee. I had no idea what Suzanne and Titch might say to Jude, but I was smart enough to stay with Steve and protect my future.

"Really, I'm okay," Steve said finally, more embarrassed than injured. We walked outside. It was cloudy, but not a chance of rain. Rain teased us in southern California. It came infrequently and when it did, it was in such deluges it created havoc...just like Jude. He was lounging at the entrance to the agency.

"Darren, I'm not a drug addict."

"I didn't say you were, sweetie."

He stared down at his mismatched shoes. "I just canceled a six week tour of South America. I can't be away from you that long."

"Oh, Jude."

"Can we go home?" he asked, straightening. "We should talk. There are things you should know about me."

"You don't want to discuss them here?"

"These things...require full nudity." He smiled and my cock sprang to attention in my pants.

"Where are you parked?"

"Darren!" Suzanne clattered down the stairs as Jude and I locked eyes. Her gaze moved from me to him and back again. "You have to get cracking on this thing. Can't you have a deep and meaningful discussion tomorrow?"

"Love can't wait," Jude said and took my hand. "Make sure his car isn't towed."

"But--" Suzanne's words fell on deaf ears. All I knew was that in spite of everything, I loved this man. I'd missed his touch, his voice in my ear.

He drove me home in his SUV and neither of us spoke the whole way. Our hands kept reaching across one another's laps, fingers creeping toward each other's cocks, becoming bolder, more urgent at every red light. Jude leaned over and kissed me as we parked outside my building. Rain splashed on the windshield, thunder and lightning warred suddenly in the sky. It made me jump, reminding me of the old *Frankenstein* movie.

We made a dash for the building as fat raindrops chased us. Inside the apartment, he shut the door, grabbed me and pushed me against the wall. His mouth roamed over my face as his cock found mine hidden behind the confines of my jeans.

"You're so hard for me, baby."

Jude's hand reached for my shaft, rubbing, touching and stroking me as his tongue slipped into my mouth. He fumbled with the buttons on my fly, moaning his frustration as he took a knee finally and got the job done. Oh...he was good. A few kisses in greeting, a sly smile up at me and his lips closed around my cock head.

The phone rang. Shit. It was the double tone ring I put on Suzanne's calls and my parents. I didn't think it was my parents.

"Need to get that?" Jude asked, releasing me from his mouth, but cuffing me with his fist. My cock bounced in his hand. He let go of me and caught me again.

"I...yeah...sorry." He rose, moving away from me as I ran to the phone, catching it on the third ring before it went to voicemail. The last think I wanted was for Suzanne to think I wasn't taking my deadline seriously. She wanted to think I was slaving over a hot laptop, cooking a high concept show for her. If I didn't talk to her now, she'd call me every half hour until I answered.

Jude looked nervous. I was surprised when he went to fridge and took out some bottled water. I took the portable receiver to my bedroom where Wellington, dozing on top of the warm DVD player, opened an eye, felt a complete lack of interest in my intrusion and went back to sleep.

Lying across my bed, I let Suanne vent a little steam.

I was wrong. It wasn't Suzanne. It was Titch.

"God fucking help me," she said. "She's got me hopping like a dozen trained seals here. I can't work on the pitch, so you'll have to do it. Find us some weirdo people who wanna get hitched. Please, Darren, please. I'm counting on you. I need to get out of this office and..." her voice dropped. "I don't trust her. This is our project, our deal. If we don't come up with something fast, I don't trust her not to take it to a bigger, better-known writer who knows of some guy who's divorcing his favorite dog because he's in love with his neighbor's horse. Crap...here she comes. Gotta go."

I felt Jude kneeling on the bed, straddling my prone body. He held the phone to his forehead. He knew Titch was right. Suzanne was desperate. She hadn't sold anything in weeks, according to Titch, and her partners had given her a deadline to come up with something. In the year since she'd been with them, she'd drawn a salary out of company funds, but with economic conditions being what they were, she had to start contributing...fast.

Jude's long fingers pulled down on my pants. I sighed and let my lover strip me. Jude's face moved to my ass, kissing and licking it. I leaned back and removed Jude's shoes and socks, then rose from the bed, stripping his jeans off.

"Open your legs," he commanded. My knees pulled up so that I was half-lying, half-crouching on the bed. I closed my eyes as Jude started sucking my ass from behind. It never failed to

inflame me and I grabbed handfuls of bedding in my bliss, rocking against the insistent lips and tongue.

Music...whatever he did in bed, or out, my lover made music.

The phone rang again. *Shit!*

"It's her again, isn't it? Take it. I'm gonna grab a quick shower," Jude said.

I cursed the phone.

This time, it was Suzanne. "Doll. You got anything yet?"

"Yeah," I think I do," I lied.

"You do?" she sounded surprised.

"Give me a couple of hours." I'd think of something. I would. I--

Jude was in the room, wet and sexy-looking, drying off with a towel.

Suzanne kept talking. I tried to listen, but Jude was putting on a performance now. He kept drying off his upper back, knowing it showed off his muscular six-pack, his rippled shoulders and powerful arms. That a guy who looked like this played a musical instrument was so hot.

Jude ran the towel over his hardening cock now. It was big. Big and beautiful. I licked my lips. I tried to ignore his insistent cock, but the truth was he was taking an awfully long time drying off. What he was doing was flat-out, hot, gay burlesque.

"I'll call you back...I've got a hot tip," I said, hanging up on Suzanne. I'll say I did. The tip of a very hot cock just screaming for attention.

It touched my arm, grazing my cheek as Jude kept moving the towel up and over his shoulders, down to his butt and across his groin again.

As soon as he realized he had my full attention, he wrapped the towel around his waist, then let it drop. I didn't hesitate. I dropped the phone and crawled over the bedspread to him. He let his cock swipe its way across my mouth. I kissed it.

My shameless baby kept moving closer and closer. It was hard to ignore him with his skin smelling so fresh, like lime and strawberries...his cock, his sweet, juicy cock so close to me and so inviting.

His hand moved down to it. He stroked it a couple of times. I loved that he enjoyed his own body. Sometimes, he enjoyed jerking off, fucking himself with huge dildos. I enjoyed watching him and frequently sucked him as he came this way. Now he was all mine.

Oh, man. How was I supposed to concentrate on my work with this sex god in the house?

As I kissed and licked his cock, his hand cupped his balls and the base of his cock. I leaned closer and licked from the tip up to the base. I didn't suck him, just licked. He smiled and held his hard cock up so the underside got its share of attention.

I started to suck on it and he liked that. He rubbed the back of my head. I moved my mouth up and down and he gently fucked my face. He stroked my cheeks, moving back and forth. I came off his cock to suck his balls. I was in love with his cock. I rubbed the head over my face...across my eyes and nose and mouth...he pointed it right into my mouth and I sucked hard.

My glance upward showed that his blue eyes were smoky. Oh, I was driving him crazy. I licked the slit and looked up into his eyes, his mind and cock enjoying the pleasure I provided. I saw the lust in his eyes.

"Own it, baby," he ground out and I kept him in my mouth, really giving him a solid workout. He seemed surprised.

"Damn, baby...what you're doing with your tongue. Fuck!"

He was close...I knew it. He started rubbing his hand across his belly. I could tell he was really excited, but didn't want to grab my head. That always made me gag. No, he needed to do something with his hands, so he kept his stroking his hand languidly back and forth across his belly, his hips rolling into me as the other hand gently pushed my head right where he wanted it.

He came so hard, I saw stars as his cock tore down my throat. He screamed, the sound so primal, so ferocious that my neighbor thumped on the wall.

I couldn't swallow it all. I tried and tried, but he didn't stop coming. I wiped at my mouth as he finally took his cock from me. Blood. *What the hell?*

"We need to fight more often," Jude said, kissing my forehead. "That was awesome, baby."

"You're bleeding," I gasped. "There's blood in your come."

"No. no."

"Yes, yes." I showed him the back of my hand.

"Oh, man. Look, baby, I'm fine. You'll be fine. It's a family thing...a genetic thing."

"What kind of family thing?" *Please don't tell me HIV, Hepatitis...Leprosy? What the hell caused bleeding like that?*

Jude moved over me. "Which of your favorite things would you like me to do to you?"

He left a trail of kisses down my chest. His lovely, warm mouth made its way to my cock. *Genetic thing? What genetic thing?* Jude licked my cock in a perfunctory way. He knew what floated my boat. His hands slid under my ass. His lips and tongue greeted my balls, but it was my ass he was after, and which wanted his special attention. I let out a cry as his tongue made its way there.

"Mmm...I thought so," he murmured and began to suck hungrily.

"Babe, it's for you." Jude handed me the phone. I was working so hard on coming up with oddball marriages, I'd resorted to scanning Craigslist and

weirdo dating sites. Suzanne was pacing her office.

"We have a live one, babe, you do know that, right?"

I could tell she was pacing because I could hear her heels thumping a well-worn tread in her linoleum-floored office.

"Listen, Darren, I'm not pulling in enough sales to warrant my salary draw each week so I am seriously stressing."

I was surprised she was telling me the truth. I was her client. She was supposed to soothe me, encourage me, not stress me out with *her* problems.

By the sounds of inhaling, I knew she was also smoking, another big no-no in California office buildings, but it meant she was alone.

"Yes, I know." I glanced at the clock. Six-thirty. Jude and I had been fucking all day and now he was getting ready to go to the Amphitheater. He had a performance tonight.

"You have to have something for me by tomorrow," Suzanne said. "As in nine AM. Not ten, not ten-thirty. Are you listening to me?"

"Sure I am, Suze. I got the phone right up against my ear here."

I was aware of Jude lounging in the doorway, watching me. I scanned Rentboy.com. Man I was getting desperate. Some of the gay rent-a-tarts offered to marry creepy old men...and not for too much money either.

"My therapist says this dry spell will pass. That I can close a deal. I need to close this, Darren."

"Do you realize it's very inappropriate for you, my agent, to be telling me, your client, that you have a chronic inability to close a deal?"

"You're my friend," she said. "Find me some wacky wedders and I'll give you head."

"Ha ha. I'm on it."

We ended the call and I could no longer avoid Jude's stare.

"What?" I said at last.

"You're looking for what exactly?"

"Unusual couples. Oddball mismatches...for a TV show."

"How odd exactly?"

I gave him a brief rundown of my meeting with Steve.

"You should marry me," he said.

"Honey, you're weird, I'll grant you that, but we're not mismatched. Some people might say we're a cute couple."

"Except for one small thing."

"What's that?" I asked, my attention briefly taken by a rent boy's ad saying sucking his toes would cost the john another three-hundred dollars.

"You're human."

I smiled. "Yeah, so they tell me."

"Well, I'm not, you see. At least, I was, but, Darren, I suppose you should know that I am a zombie."

CHAPTER THREE

"A zombie."

He nodded. "Yeah. I keep the...er...symptoms at bay with a lot of sex...semen...blood...but yeah, I'm a zombie."

"Holy fuck, are you kidding me?"

He looked hurt. "Hell no, I'm not kidding. I never joke about my ah...life...death...whatever."

"You're...dead? I see dead people?" I couldn't help it. I'm a Hollywood guy. Movie lines tumble out of my mouth.

"Undead, if you want to get technical about it."

"Christ."

"He doesn't have much to do with it." Jude pointed to the floor. "He does."

"Christ," I said again. I sorted through my mixed emotions, my rabid disappointment. I'd finally conquered his unconquerable cock and he was...a zombie.

A monster...

"So this is why your hair falls out, your teeth fall out and coming is like a production of *Gunga Din* with you?"

He nodded. "Lack of blood intake. Semen works...yours is especially potent, but I need blood at least once a week."

"Holy fuck," I said again.

"You're keen on religion all of a sudden." He tilted his head to the side. "That's how all this started. My father met a woman...he loved her. Deeply, deeply loved her. They were musicians traveling through the Congo. She contracted malaria and died in the jungle. The grief almost took him, too. One of his friends took him to a *bokor*, a witch who said he could bring her back. He said she would be a little different, but they could be together forever. The result was, after this whole ritual, that she did revive...she was a sort of...zombie.

"They had sex. She was pregnant with me and here I am. Fuck..." He threw his head back. "They say confession is good for the soul and I feel so much better for telling you. I love you, Darren. And I don't want to live...or unlive without you."

He smiled and kissed me. "Don't worry about a thing. I have to get to work, but as soon as I get back, any questions you have, I'm happy to answer them."

"But--"

He held up his hands. "Babe. I'll be late for overture. But think about it. Now my secret is out and we're copacetic--"

Copacetic? He was high if he thought I was okay with all of this.

He threw on his clothes, gave me one of his best, most seductive grins, blew me a kiss from his fingertips and opened the door.

"Babe...we could be the stars of your new series. We could expose the...prejudice, the misunderstanding. Now you finally understand what I am going through."

"But I don't understand what you're going through," I said.

"The lack of sleep...lack of food...the desire for fuck...for blood...now we can have it all. Darren, we should get married."

"Gay marriage is illegal again in California, remember?"

"Exactly! More drama! We can prove there is another injustice. We fight even harder for Proposition Eight to be defeated. This is ripping stuff, Darren. We're gonna be hotter than Britney Spears driving down the street naked."

My head was spinning.

"We'll talk more when I get back."

With that, he was gone.

Nothing in my life had prepared me for this revelation. I didn't know what to think. I mean...a zombie. Was it contagious?

I checked online and was shocked to see how hot zombies suddenly were in popular culture. The old-fashioned idea of zombies had been replaced with...Jude-like zombies. They were cute...they were hot...they were the new vampires.

A plethora of movies were scheduled, according to Wikipedia, including a zombie version of *Rebel Without a Cause*, to be entitled *Rebel Without a Pulse*. I almost laughed out loud when I saw that a bunch of Public Domain classic novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Tom Sawyer* had been re-published with zombie stories interwoven...and these books were raking in big bucks!

Hollywood was battling for studio rights and now there were plans for the zombification of *War and Peace*, *Crime and Punishment* and, God rest poor Emily Bronte's soul, *Wuthering Heights*.

I sat back in my swivel chair and thought about things.

Absolutely nobody...not a single writer anywhere could possibly match, let alone top, *my* idea.

There were things that Jude and I needed to discuss. I mean, we were rushing into marriage, for God's sake. I also needed to know more about his specific condition.

He said he needed blood once a week. *How does he get it? Can I really live with this?*

I checked the time. Seven o'clock. My phone rang, the special double ring, but this time, I high-fived myself and picked up on the first ring. "Hey, Suzanne."

"You sound...relaxed. Please tell me you're not smoking wacky tobacco."

"Hell, no. I've just been putting together a kick ass for proposal for you is all."

I heard the flick of her cigarette lighter. "Do tell."

"You ready for this?"

"I was ready a year ago. Spit it out, Darren."

"You've got a marriage. You've got a cute couple. They're gay."

She groaned. "Gay's not weird. Gay's just...gay, Darren."

"Wait," I said. "I'm the one getting married."

"Yeah? And? Who are you marrying? Some chick who needs a Green Card? Some--"

I cut her off. "I'm going to marry a zombie."

My ears rang for two days after Suzanne spent several minutes screaming over the phone. She was ecstatic.

It was a statement I got used to saying over the coming days...but then, the actual idea of it was something I didn't think I would ever get used to.

I'm going to marry a zombie.

America quickly became enthralled with our story however, and Steve rushed into production with our TV show, *With This Ring*.

Anyone with any type of affliction, ailment or mental defect flooded the production offices with phone calls. Everyone wanted to show their support and offered us money, accommodations, website maintenance...anything they could think of to be a part of the show.

Jude, Wellington and I had to move to Oakwood Apartments, a security building with leafy trees, a pool and a guard gate. It was an industry hangout that was used to housing visiting celebrities working on TV shows and movies. Jude and I took daily meetings with the production company, the studio and Titch, who got to chuck in her job with Suzanne.

Our formerly hapless agent celebrated her big deal by hiring a more gullible, pliant assistant for minimum wage on Craigslist. She also bought herself a brand new SUV hybrid and was getting an even bigger set of store-bought titties. Newly focused, she zeroed in on ways to get us even more money through merchandising.

"Books," she said. "You can write how-to mixed marriage guides. I'm thinking a zombie wedding planner...also, you know...zombie's guide to healthy living. How do you get your blood, by the way?" she asked Jude.

Before he could answer, her thoughts raced.

"The zombie diet!"

On his thunderous look, she casually mentioned that he would see to it that he could score the TV show. That put a smile on his face.

"We can do a special song each week available on iTunes. Release a CD," he said and picked up his new guitar, strumming a few bars.

I saw dollar signs ka-chinging in her eyes. And Jude's. Even more money. She surprised us with all the stuff she came up with.

Jude had told me privately that blood remained a problem. He belonged to a private club where blood came in via bottles...like exclusive bottles of wine. He said the blood came from private donors who longed to be zombies or vampires and they got to fraternize with actual zombies and vampires.

"Wait...vampires are real?"

"Of course they are, Darren," he snapped.

Somehow, Suzanne got this nugget from him and next thing I knew, our first scenes to be shot were going to be at the Haema Club.

"Haema?" I asked Jude. "As in the Greek word for blood?"

"Yes," he said, very excited now. The money we got from the show meant he could have more blood--since it was expensive--and he could have extra member benefits, such as blood Popsicles in summer, warm blood wine in winter and he could bring guests whenever he wanted.

"Shouldn't I see this club....you know, being your life partner, before we start taking camera crews there?"

"Yes," he said. "I see your point."

He was so amenable lately. With more blood, he assured me, his appetite for food would return, his sense of wellbeing would stay balanced.

"Sometimes, I get these pounding headaches and I think about biting people. I'm still not sure I won't hurt your agent. She's a pain in the ass, isn't she?"

I couldn't disagree with that diagnosis at all.

Jude took me the Haema Club that night, his only night off for the week. We got dressed up and he ran his hand over my crotch.

"You're a hot man, Darren. Anyone ever told you that?"

I shook my head. "Not lately."

The club was on Sunset, the posh side, the north side of the street toward Beverly Hills, snug between the Whiskey A Go Go and one of the ubiquitous Medical Marijuana stores the city of Los Angeles was fighting to close down.

There was no sign, only a door framed in black with frosted white glass and a small intercom to the left. Jude buzzed, his other arm around me.

He led me upstairs, holding my hand, and a very fat man, looking like a caricature of a toad, stood at the top, giving us a baleful stare. His tongue slid in and out of his mouth, his protruding eyes wandering all over the place.

"Ah...Jude, the Obscure. And this must be Darren."

He took my hand and I noticed his sharp teeth. I bit off a scream, but he merely stamped my wrist with an invisible ink.

"Just a minute," he said, before he let us inside. "I need to think of something to make me remember this man. Hmm..." He tapped a cigar-sized finger against his chin.

I tried hard not to stare at the multiple warts on his massive hands.

"I got it!" He looked so pleased with himself. "Darren...Darrin Stevens with an I was married to the witch Samantha on *Bewitched*. You're bewitched being in love with him." He jerked his thumb toward Jude. He nodded. "Yep. Bewitched. Got it. Enjoy your evening, gentlemen."

He opened the door and we walked into a sumptuous, slightly scary club where everything was red.

"You have to learn not to stare at people," Jude whispered as we walked across plush crimson carpeting.

"Sorry," I said. "I couldn't help it. I've never seen so many warts."

"He can't help it." Jude's tone took on some ice. "He's been cursed. He's part toad, part man. But he's actually a very nice guy."

The bartender waved us over and mindful of Jude's annoyance with me, I didn't stare as hard as I would have liked. A few people had odd appearances, but nothing like the toad in the hall. Most of them looked...well, ordinary, eccentric

maybe, but nothing that set off alarm bells in my mind.

"Hey, Jude..." the bartender glanced at me, "sorry, old joke, I know. But anyway, I have a very nice bottle of Viper in the house."

Jude rocked on his heels. A few people at the bar stared at us. Jude was enjoying the attention, I could tell.

"I'll have a glass of that. Is it fresh?"

The bartender glanced at me again.

"Very. Just came in."

"Wonderful." Jude's attention shifted to me. "What would you like, baby?"

Viper? I stared at the chalkboard with the house specials listed against the mirrored wall of the bar. I had the disquieting feeling we were being watched from a secret room. As a struggling writer, I'd done enough Focus groups to know the vibe. You sit in a room, trying to figure out what is behind the slanted, yet obscure questions you are being asked while anonymous, faceless advertisers sit behind one-way mirrors observing, assessing... using the information for their own gain.

I started to feel uncomfortable as I gazed up at the wine list. I realized they were blood types, some mixed with wine. I was guessing that zero percent meant it was straight blood, thereby more expensive.

"Would you like a Bloody Mary?" Jude asked. I nodded, hoping to God it had no blood in it. His lips touched my ear. "It will make you feel a little

more comfortable since most people are drinking blood and wine."

I nodded and the bartender got our drinks. We thanked him and took our glasses over to a deep, red velvet sofa pushed up against a wall. The artwork looked expensive...black and white pictures of very beautiful women in various forms of restrictive, but sexy garments...corsets, tight lingerie...a sadistic edge to burlesque type wear.

Jude seemed very much at home. He leaned back and relaxed into the comfortable sofa. He drew me into his arms and kissed me. People kept to themselves, the hum of chatter seemed pleasant and casual, but I felt on edge. I took a tentative sip of my drink. Nothing out of the ordinary, as far as I could tell.

With my drink at my lips, I sipped again, taking the opportunity to take a closer look at our fellow drinkers. For blood-lusting types, they were sophisticated-looking and elegant. I didn't see anyone obviously drunk like you'd see in a regular bar and no stupid, loud bores spoiled the vibe.

Jude sipped his blood and moaned with appreciation.

"This is so good, baby."

"What makes it a viper?" I asked.

"You really want to know?" he stared into the dark red liquid, not even glancing at me.

"Yeah, I do."

"The donor was bitten by a poisonous spider. It gives the blood a kick."

I blinked. I could tell he wasn't joking.

"Did he...did the donor get bitten by accident or was it a...um..."

"It was a deliberate offering. Some people like the sensation of being poisoned." He smiled, raising his glass. "This gives a whole new meaning to the expression, *what's your poison?*"

I tried to digest this bit of information when he leaned into me.

"Baby," he said. "I really need to suck your cock."

"I...er...what...now?"

He frowned. "Yes, now." Reaching across and behind me, he pressed a button and the wall behind us opened up. The sofa shot backward and my drink sloshed dangerously in my glass. I saw the wall closing again and the sofa turned. We were in another room, people around us in various stages of public lovemaking.

Jude put his glass on the floor, kissed me and began unbuttoning my shirt with his right hand. He moved it up and down my body, pausing at my crotch and rubbing. I lay against his left arm as his right hand rubbed more insistently.

He put his hand inside my shirt, squeezing one nipple, then the other. I was going to be a goner if he sucked either one of them. *Dammit*. He went for it, my carnal senses spiking as I looked at people around us also making out, the sounds of lust echoed everywhere.

Jude took another sip of blood and unzipped my fly.

"Take it out baby, the venom's got me hotter than hell, but my hands are shaking."

I didn't hesitate and felt an extra surge of pleasure as I saw the desire in his eyes. He lowered his mouth as I took my cock out of my boxer briefs. He watched me pull at my cock and balls and with a cry, lowered his lips to my shaft. My hand fell away as he licked and kissed the shaft from the base up to the head. He spent a long time kissing the ridge of my cock, just kissing and kissing, then came his tongue. He spent so much time lavishing affection on me, I was climbing the sofa to get into his mouth.

"Fuck me," I said and his eyes glowed when he raised his head.

"You know I will." He helped me get my pants down and I fumbled with his as his hard cock leaked through his underpants.

"Oh, baby..." his voice was a whimper as he licked at my ass. I knelt on the sofa. All my senses were on fire as I braced myself against the arm. Oh I needed that cock in me. Jude knew it, too. He gave me two fingers to suck as he got behind me. I tilted my head slightly and realized there was blood on his fingers. It tasted like fire and spice and I sucked hard as he held my hips and slowly entered me. I saw a guy across the room taking his lover the same way. I watched them for a moment, but had the strange and not unpleasant image of a

sheik abducting me on the back of a horse, taking me to somewhere dark and private to fuck me.

I thrust back against Jude whose cock plunged deeply into me. He reached in front of me to squeeze and caress my balls.

We came together, my cock in his other hand once I reluctantly released it. He thundered against me and I felt his come seeding my ass and belly from inside.

"Oh...wow...that was great."

Jude kissed my face and neck.

"Yeah, it was," I said.

He finished draining his wine.

"You might need to drive us," he said. "I'm having hallucinations."

"What kind?"

"A guy on a horse," he said.

"Snap."

"You, too?"

"Yeah." I felt bereft when he came out of me.

"I will always be ready to fuck you," he said. "Please don't look so sad. We're bonded now, baby. I belong to you."

CHAPTER FOUR

All the astonishing publicity we got meant that Jude now had to be escorted by a private security firm to and from his shows each night. He was forced to skip matinees after a bunch of old ladies escaped from a Paratransit van and tackled him in the Universal Studios parking lot one Wednesday. It was caught on tape and things got ugly when his mouth bled on the evening news.

Zombie Pride! The headlines screamed.

And our show hadn't even gone to air yet.

With his big secret now in the open, Jude seemed to blossom. He was excited about the wedding. I'd put a call through to my parents. He'd called his...neither of us heard back yet, but then my parents were trekking through Nepal and his were...I had no idea where his parents were and frankly neither did he.

"They take off on road trips...they fly to Paris one week, Kauai the next..."

Jude was excited that the show plans were coming along so well in such a short amount of time. We had a fantastic new attorney who took up our cause to apply for a marriage license.

Steve planned to film us marching to City Hall in West Hollywood, demanding a gay marriage license. He planned to hire tons of extras for a protest when we were denied. Steve and Suzanne salivated over more and more outlandish ideas... but I was now terrified. During our discussion with them, Jude got a cell phone call. His mother had sent him a text message.

We want to meet Darren. Please bring him to dinner Saturday.

"What if they don't like me?" I fretted.

"They'll love you." Jude kissed my cheek.

"What's going on?" Suzanne asked.

"He's meeting my parents," Jude said. "And he's nervous, but it's ridiculous. They are going to *love* him."

"Thanks for the confidence in me." I snuggled up to him.

"Take the camera crew with you," Suzanne said.

"No," we both said at once.

On his next day off, the day of our scheduled dinner plans with his parents, I managed to upset Jude, in spite of trying oh so carefully not to step on his sensitive feelings.

"Sweetie?" I asked after a particularly hot and sweaty romp in bed.

"Uh-huh?"

"I was wondering..."

His hands roamed my belly. He'd just fucked me good and hard and he liked knowing my body still trembled from our shared eruptions. He licked his lips. God, he was getting hard again. His cock slapped against my thigh.

"I know we're having dinner with your folks, but I'm wondering...do they actually...you know...eat dinner? I mean, because you don't eat and--"

"Of course they eat, Darren."

"You don't."

"It's a phase I'm going through. I ate soup last night. You didn't see that?"

"Yes...um...a little."

"My appetite for food is coming back with my appetite for life, thanks to you." His smile was dazzling.

"Okay," I said. "Okay. What do they eat?"

He stared at me. "Food, Darren. They eat *food*."

Things remained tense between us. So much so that I was afraid he'd storm out of my life again, but he didn't. He simmered on a slow heat. I started to wonder if this was such a good idea, after all.

"Do you need more blood?" I asked him.

He sighed. "No. I need some time to think."

"Okay..." *What does that mean?*

We didn't have much time to discuss it. The phone rang and the show's producers wanted to

film the City Hall scenes in half an hour. We scrambled to get ready. The Mayor of Los Angeles greeted us with the cameras on. During the moments the crew reset, he checked his nasal hair and his teeth in a pocket mirror.

Jude and I exchanged glances and laughed. We seemed back on track again.

The Mayor marched into the City Hall offices, vowing to fight for our right to marry one another.

"We'll put a new proposition next to the ballot...Proposition Eight and a half," he boomed.

"We might have to go back east if we want to get married," Jude said to me. "How do you feel about that?"

"Whatever you say."

He leaned down to kiss me, but the Mayor went nuts.

"No, no. I want the zombie wedding here! I want to marry you!"

It all made for smashing television I suppose and Jude sat in the back of the private car that had taken us to City Hall, strumming a zombie wedding song on his guitar.

"My mom is great at hooks," he said, checking his watch. "Wow...we are now running late for them."

I swallowed. "Oh...we are? You want to reschedule?"

"Nice try, babe." He leaned forward and tapped our driver on the shoulder.

"Freddie, any chance you could take us up to my parents' house?"

"Sure," he said. "I'm yours to command. Where do they live?"

"On Wonderland. All the way at the top."

He wasn't kidding. Freddie did an excellent job driving us up the tiny, wayward canyon roads.

"They must have money," he said, letting out a whistle when we reached a set of black iron gates at the top of Lookout Mountain.

I felt Jude shift in an agitated way, but he smiled as I put my hand on his knee. He took it and kissed it as the gates swung open without provocation. We pulled into a narrow drive. A few robust-looking dogs and the most gigantic cats I had ever seen roamed the property that apart from the gates, appeared to have no borders.

Staring out at the quaint, cabin-like house, I was mesmerized by the incredible views of the city, the canyons and far beyond, I knew on a clear day you'd be able to see the beach and even planes landing at LAX.

There were pockets of outdoor furniture set up in strategic places, giant Buddhas dotting the lush green grass. I glimpsed angel trumpet trees, huge frangipani and weeping willow...it was a secret garden of mountain delights.

We got out of the car, Jude insisting on opening my door himself.

"I knew you'd like it," he said against my ear, kissing my cheek. To Freddie he said, "Come on in, guy. Have a beer."

A lovely woman with long dark hair and a face as exquisite and as beautiful as Jude's, only more so, approached us. She wore a simple, champagne-colored shift that came below her knees. She was barefoot. I can't explain the feelings she awoke in me, but she felt like a kindred soul. I *knew* her.

"I'm Athalie, Jude's mother," she said. She took my hand. Some shifting energy between us blossomed in my heart. It is the only way I can explain it. She dropped my hand, enveloping me in her arms. I loved her the second I saw her.

"Why did you keep him away from us so long?" she asked Jude who kissed her cheek and took her other hand.

"Oh, Mom..."

She put a graceful hand to his face. "You look wonderful, darling."

"I feel, wonderful, darling."

A massive black cat rubbed against his ankles. I couldn't help but gape at him. He was about five times the size of Wellington. Athalie and I watched Jude bend down to play with the cat.

"He's been with us for a long time," she said.

"Is he allowed out all the time?" I asked. "I mean...with the coyote in the hills here."

"Oh, yes. We never close our doors, but we don't get many predators."

"You don't? How do you manage that?"

Athalie squeezed my hand. "Invisible, electronic fencing. It's a wonderful thing."

Inside the house, I was enthralled by Jude's family photos and the amazing things his parents had collected over the years. Freddie sat on a stone bench in the garden drinking his beer. I realized he was talking to somebody and I caught sight of a tall, handsome man with silver hair.

Athalie looked around my shoulder. "Oh, there's my husband now." She stepped around me. I felt like I'd been hugged and touched by butterflies, angels, gossamer wings, fairy breath and flower nectar all at once. She was absolutely beautiful.

"Niven, come and meet Darren."

He walked into the house, smiling at me, his right hand extended. We shook hands and I liked him, too. It wasn't the visceral experience I'd had with Athalie, but I don't think I could have handled too much more psychic stimulation for one night.

Over dinner of vegetables cooked to perfection, with coconut-perfumed rice and curried shrimp, I found myself feeling right at home. I understood why Niven couldn't bear to lose Athalie. I understood as he explained the ritual he had undergone why he'd taken the risk of bringing her back from the dead.

I was surprised they came right out and discussed the ceremony, but I got the feeling both they and Jude wanted the subject out of the way.

Athalie was a gregarious, engaging speaker, as intelligent as she was beautiful. I wondered where Freddie was as our evening progressed, but soon, I didn't care.

As Niven described the moment, Athalie came back to him, I felt the tears pricking my eyes.

"She smiled at me. She was as lovely and precious as she was the first day I saw her."

"You flatter me," she said.

His face looked fierce. "It's true."

Their mutual passion was evident.

"Did Jude tell you how we met?" Athalie asked.

I shook my head. I longed for more rice and was surprised when Jude took my plate to the kitchen and returned with a fresh scoop of rice on it.

"How did you know?" I asked him.

Athalie grabbed my hand. "He can read your mind already?"

At my open mouth, she laughed. "Oh, Darren, there is so much you will find...beyond your wildest dreams loving my son."

I remembered our intense coupling at Haema Club. "I already have," I said.

As Jude put his arm around me, Athalie's smile hinted at naughtiness. I wondered if she, too, could read my mind.

"Darren, the only thing I can tell you is that I've never, not for a single moment regretted my decision," Niven said. "They can label her anyway they want, but she is my heart, my passion. She is my pulse."

It was one of the greatest testaments of love I'd ever heard.

I was feeling really good about things and so was Jude. We made love all night and in the morning, I dozed off. He went to the recording studio to meet Steve to discuss arrangements for our show's theme song.

"Don't leave this bed until I come home," Jude said, kissing me goodbye.

"All right, I won't."

Wellington dashed under the covers, sleeping against my back and I drifted back to sleep. I found myself smiling at the memory of Niven and Athalie meeting at a punk rock concert in Paris, yet neither of them liked the music.

"It was love at first sight," Jude told me. "Just like us."

I hugged the feeling to myself. I was jolted from dreamland by the special ring of my telephone. I assumed it was Suzanne and now we were shooting parts and pieces of the series, she called constantly. It was usually important.

I was not however, expecting my mom.

"Tell me you're joking, Darren. I've seen the *Today Show*. Prudence and I just Googled zombies

and they eat humans' brains. Why would you want to marry a zombie? You won't make it past your wedding day!"

I cradled the phone against my ear and checked the time. Eight-forty five AM. My mom must have been upset. Not even the 1994 earthquake that destroyed our house got her out of bed before noon.

The space beside me in our bed had never felt emptier and no, Wellington didn't count. Where was Jude? Probably still on his way to Santa Monica. I imagined him roaming the neighborhood, in spite of a GPS system in his SUV. He had the worst sense of direction. It was quite endearing actually.

He'd never attempted to eat my brain. He ate my ass and cock on a regular basis, but I didn't mention that to my mom.

"We're getting married," I told her. And I couldn't be happier."

She gasped.

"Christ, Darren, are you trying to kill me?"

"No," I said. I wanted to add that her constant Botox and bizarre live sheep cell treatments might just do the trick, but I didn't want to start a fight.

My mom apparently had other ideas.

"You think I don't read the paper, Darren? You've applied for a marriage license in the city of West Hollywood. The law might be changed and the new gay governor supports gay marriage.

Under review is gay marriage between the living and the...er...unliving."

This was news to me. *Jude and I are making history! We're paving the way for weirdoes everywhere! Freak flags unite!*

"For God's sake, Darren. What do you see in this..."

I could hear my mother's life partner, Prudence, whispering in the background.

"Person?" my mother finished. Good old Prudence.

"How can I explain about my attraction to him? Who can explain love? You left Dad for another woman...and I love a zombie."

My mother's tone turned icy. "There's a big difference between loving another woman and a zombie."

Not by much.

"Have you thought about counseling?" she asked.

No, have you?

Athalie had warned me about days like this, especially once the show went air, she urged me not to listen to negativity. *You're not the first man to love a male zombie. You're just the first to want to marry one.*

"What do you see in him?" Mom sounded desperate now.

"He has a very big cock and a fantastic sense of humor."

"Oh, God. Thanks for sharing."

"You asked," I reminded her.

"I suppose we should meet him. Does he eat?"

"Yes, he eats. But I don't think it's a good idea. He hates being stared at and I know you'll stare at him."

"Don't be ridiculous. I want to meet him. I'm... ash...curious about how you met him? I mean, this has come as a bit of a shock, you know, sweetie."

How could I tell her it was all a shock to me, too? She would grab onto it and use it against me. I just knew my mother's tricks after a lifetime of dealing with them.

I could hear her and Prudence talking in the background.

"What is she saying?" I asked, struggling to hear. The voices rose. "Hello? Mom?" I waited as I heard Prudence scream.

"Does your father know?" Mom asked.

"I left a message," I said. "He hasn't called back."

"This will kill him."

"Thanks," I said. "I must go now."

I was suddenly very cold. Where the hell was Jude? I shivered slightly at the word *hell*. Sometimes Jude described his life on earth as hell. When he was inside me, when we were fucking, he described it as heaven.

It was hard being alone. I felt isolated, but the truth was, I only wanted to be with him. The phone rang and I was delighted to hear Athalie's voice.

"Come and meet me for lunch," she said.

"I'm not supposed to get out of bed."

"Well, then, I'll come to you."

She made me laugh so hard I agreed. She'd been in the apartment two minutes, winning over a swooning Wellington when my dad called. Athalie spoke to him and suggested he meet us for lunch.

My dad, who still hasn't forgiven my mom for leaving me for their marriage therapist, hesitated. He was so down on women. However, he met us at Pace up on Laurel Canyon and like me, was hypnotized by Athalie.

"You're really dead?" he asked her so many times I was forced to kick him under the table.

"Ow, Darren, ow," he said. "Why are you kicking me?"

Our lunch went on so long that Jude was home, calling me on my cell.

He groaned when I told him we were at Pace.

"Come home, Darren and bring our parents with you."

Athalie and Dad came back to the apartment. I made coffee, but a few minutes later, Niven arrived, brandishing a bottle of Armand de Brignac champagne.

"We must celebrate our two families uniting," Niven said.

I felt quivers of pleasure at having landed such a swell pair of in-laws. My dad's face quivered

with jealousy when he saw Niven and Athalie embrace.

"Dad, how's Ruthie?" I asked, trying to distract him.

"Who?" he asked, looking confused.

"Your fiancée."

"Oh...her." His face registered more confusion. "You know, I think I was supposed to pick her up from work today, I may have forgotten."

I gaped at him. Ruthie was about as smart as a box of rocks, but she loved him. Waited on him hand and foot. More than once, she'd called, crying to me about my dad's callous behavior. I glanced at Jude, who raised his brow at me.

My phone rang again. More bad news. Mom and Prudence wanted to meet us for dinner. Athalie took control once again and invited the women over.

"It will be okay, Darren." She put a hand on my cheek and all my qualms subsided. *We might as well get the circus over with now.*

"Can you please ask them to pick up Ruthie on the way?"

Athalie nodded. I looked over at Jude who was opening the champagne.

"You may never love me again after meeting all my parents."

"Hey," he said, "you still love me after meeting my dead ones."

He kissed me. I wanted to ask him what he meant. Was his dad a zombie, too?

Things could have gone disastrously, but Mom and Prudence both fell madly in love with Athalie and Prudence seemed pleased that my dad wasn't leering after my mom like he normally did.

Ruthie didn't feel like the ugly stepsister around my condescending mother. I could tell because I don't think I'd ever seen her laugh so much.

My dad, who fancies himself a wine connoisseur, found a kindred spirit in Niven, who quickly opened another bottle of Armand de Brignac.

"Oh, Dad, you must tell them about the estate sale," Jude said, sitting beside me on the floor.

Athalie and Niven got the giggles discussing the case of wine they'd bought in Paris.

"We'd never spent so much on anything, except our house," Niven said.

Athalie's laughter was contagious. Nobody except her husband and Jude knew the punch line yet, but she had us all laughing when she described opening the case in the back of their rental car on their way to their hotel.

"Most of it was vinegar. One of the bottles supposedly belonged to Thomas Jefferson, which was why it cost so much. It was a Lafitte and I was so thrilled to own it. I love Thomas Jefferson almost as much as I love my husband."

"Wait a minute," Dad said, apparently unmoved by Athalie's declaration of love. "You said it was mostly vinegar?"

"Undrinkable," Niven confirmed, his hand resting on Athalie's thigh. "We did get three good bottles of champagne though." He held up his glass. "We've been keeping them for a special occasion."

"How sweet," Ruthie said. "It's awfully good champagne."

"How much?" Dad wanted to know, embarrassing me.

Niven stared at him.

"How much did you pay?"

"Two hundred and seventy-four thousand dollars," Niven said before he and Athalie collapsed into laughter again.

Jude shook his head, but my dad was doing mental math. His face paled.

My mom leaned away from Prudence, took one of the bottles from the coffee table and scrutinized it.

"And I thought my father's beer bottle cap collection was suave," she said.

Everybody laughed.

As first-family meetings went, I thought ours went well. Dad and Ruthie left with promises of having us over for dinner soon. Mom and Prudence hugged us and then Athalie and Niven stayed a little longer to tell me how happy they were to have me in their family.

"We love you already," Athalie told me.

I felt my shoulders drop. "I feel exactly the same way."

Jude and I hugged them outside the apartment.

"I am so glad I have you in my life," I told Athalie and meant it.

"You mean the world to me," she said. "You really do. You've put sunshine in Jude's face. It makes my heart so happy."

Jude and I watched his parents drive away.

"That went well, didn't it?" I asked.

"Very."

I fought off a wave of nausea as we headed to bed. Jude was as hungry as ever for me, but suddenly I was sick.

"Gotta barf," I said. As romantic lines went, it sucked. But then, so did spending the entire night with my head in the toilet bowl.

CHAPTER FIVE

"I don't know what I ate," I said, over and over again.

Jude was amazing. He stuck by me, holding my head as I threw up a dozen more times until at last, in the morning, I felt like I might live after all.

"I'm canceling the recording session," he said. "I won't leave you when you feel like this."

Nothing helped to make me feel better and he seemed very worried.

"You want some tea? Water?"

Everything...the thought of anything made me feel woozy.

Late in the afternoon, Athalie arrived with warm, herbed wine. Instantly, I felt better.

"My poor boy," she said. "Sleep now. You'll feel better."

I heard her and Jude whispering, but I was too weak to raise my head from the pillow and too disoriented to really care about their discussion. A

couple of times that night, Jude brought me more of that lovely warm stuff and by morning, the previous twenty-four hours seemed like a nightmare.

"We have some more left over," Jude said as he left for the studio. I felt bad that he'd lost a whole day because of me.

"I love you, you stupid man," he said, kissing me fiercely.

He left for the studio and I tottered over to the laptop. I'd lost a day of work, too.

Suzanne and I had a phone conference with Titch and I began outlining episodes in point form. Reality shows are not as free form as people like to pretend they are. Some are scripted outright, but most, like hours, run to a general theme. We can see what happens once the cameras roll, but like most shows, if it doesn't fit in with the group idea, it gets cut or dropped all together.

"How are things with you and Jude?" Titch asked.

"Fantastic." I told her about all our parents meeting.

"And you didn't have the crew there shooting it all?"

"No," I said. "Some things are best kept private."

"So how come I wasn't invited?" she sounded hurt.

"It was impromptu and it was just our parents, Titch."

She gave me a hard time for a little longer, but I was starting to feel sick again. It hit me in waves. My first thought was that I needed to throw up, my second thought was that I needed the wine.

I found it in the kitchen. I uncorked it, poured a finger's width into a glass and drank it. Oh, it was good.

When I started to panic about the last drop being gone, Jude came home.

I put on my brightest smile.

"You look better," he said. I was surprised I could suddenly hear conversations, traffic noises from the freeway. I felt odd...a kind of heightened sense of awareness. Man, that wine was powerful stuff.

"I'm so glad you're feeling better," he said.

"Baby, I am better. You're home."

He gave me a wonderful smile as I unzipped his fly.

"Mmm....baby," He laughed. I could hear *The Jetsons* playing on somebody else's TV as I dropped my lover's pants. I took off all his clothes and told him to get up on the kitchen bench top.

"I don't feel like having lunch on the floor," I said as his hardening cock juttet up at me, heavy with expectation. I began to lick and suck him in earnest. I took his whole cock into my mouth, he ran his fingers through my hair. I felt him caressing each and every strand. I stopped sucking. I'd never felt such sensations before. My

whole body felt alive, tingling with new vibrations.

"Don't stop," Jude moaned and I blinked. I could feel his pulse racing. I could smell his very essence.

Next door, somebody's phone rang and I could hear both ends of the conversation. My God, I'd become some kind of radio frequency!

I shut my mind to what I knew was the truth.

"Baby." Jude lifted my face from him, his long, lovely hands framing my jaw line.

"I can't marry you," I blurted, tears streaking down my cheeks.

"But...I'm yours!"

I shook my head. "I'm...I'm...becoming a zombie, aren't I? Isn't that what's going on?"

Jude's eyes never wavered from mine. He nodded slowly.

"Holy..." I took a deep breath. "Don't you see? We can't do it."

"Do what?"

"The TV show. I can't marry you and be a legitimate odd couple, not when I'm gonna be a zombie, too."

"That's the only reason you don't want to marry me?"

"I didn't say I don't *want* to--"

"But that's the *only* reason?"

"Of course. Jude...I love you. But I'm no longer the man you met. I--"

"You're very much the man I met. Only now, we can be together forever."

"How old are you exactly?" I asked, feeling now like I'd finally woken up, not become...undead.

"I'll tell you one night when you're really drunk."

Wow, he must be ancient.

"Baby, the TV show will have us set for life. I can take care of you, give you blood, give you a wonderful life. TV is not about reality anyway. We're providing entertainment. Since when did television tell the truth anyway?"

"You're right."

"Damned straight. Now, shut up and fuck me, please."

I bent my head, warming to my task. His skin felt like silk under my fingertips. His body rocked as I sucked his cock. When I moved my mouth back to his balls, he went crazy. His body felt like it was on fire as his leaking cock hit my chin. I had never felt so powerful and connected to another human being as I raised his feet with my hands, parting his thighs. I took my time sucking and licking his ass. He clutched at my head and shoulders.

"Fuck me, Darren. I need you, baby."

His face looked feverish as he watched me drop my pants and get out my cock. I stood on my toes to get inside him. His eyes turned a rich, warm brown as he watched me stick my cock, really, his cock into me.

"You're gonna marry me and you're gonna fuck me like this every day for the rest of our lives," he said.

"Whatever you say."

I reached between our slapping thighs and stroked his ass cheeks and balls as I fucked the man I loved. I felt his ass muscles drawing me in more and more and I wanted him to come with my cock inside him. I felt his fingers tugging my mouth to his and we came, the explosion deeper and more intense than anything I'd ever experienced. I held his cock as his hot juices splashed between us. I fucked my man harder, receiving images of beautiful things, waterfalls, soaring birds...I wanted the images to go on forever and ever.

"They will, baby, they will."

He took my hand and we went back to bed.

To start all over again.

LOUISIANA LUST

BY

D.J. MANLY

"I be making no promises about that, my man," Moudoca said, his hands framing the face of his latest creation. "You take 'em as they come. And if you be smart, you get the money up front in case...ah...they be hankering for blood prematurely."

"The price is getting a little high," the man said, his wide-brimmed cap pulled down over his eyes. "How about a discount since we buy these things in such high volume."

"Not going to happen, man," Moudoca looked at him with his large brown eyes. His skin was as black as ebony, and in the darkness, the only thing visible were those eyes--deep brown surrounded by the starkest white. "Do you understand the process? I'm not raising de dead. I'm creating them fresh. Decay doesn't set in for at least two days. They are recyclable."

"Then raise the dead," the man insisted. "It would cheaper."

"Oui," he muttered, "cheaper, but the dead ain't pretty enough for your games. Decay already dere by the time I raise them. No gentleman want that...they smell, too. Listen, you want this pretty

boy or no?" he pushed it forward. "Moudoca got things he needing to be doing, can't be standing around here wid you all dee night."

"Alright." He sighed. "Hand him over, but he's going to last through thee night, right, ain't going to be falling apart like that one moron?"

"That be a fluke. He do," Moudoca nodded. "He be like that durabond stuff." Moudoca laughed at his own joke. "You got my word."

The light flickered in the abandoned shack. The man glanced around, looking a little startled. He laid his money on the table and pulled the figure toward him. "I lost money on the last one."

Outside the wind howled and sounds of movement stirred in the swamp.

"Shit happens. I told you, he was a fluke. I gave you a discount this time. Stop your complaining or find another supplier."

The man muttered something. He shoved his purchase hastily in the direction of the door and left.

Moudoca blew out the flame which danced on the candle. He didn't need the light. Light was only for those who had something to fear. He walked out of his dwelling and stared at the moonlight. It bathed the swamp in an eerie glow. Somewhere an alligator flopped onto dry land to rest. "You feast well, mon ami?" he asked, his voice echoing on the night air. Then he laughed.

Back inside, he stripped off his black robe, took the multicoloured beads from around his neck and

removed the headband. These props were more for the tourists than anything else. They seemed to like the get up. He changed into black leather pants and a silk shirt, then made his way through the bayou. He feared nothing. Nothing could touch him here or anywhere else for that matter.

As his feet met the beginning of the town, he knew that New Orleans was hopping tonight, alive with desperate people looking to ease their loneliness. Nothing could keep this place down, not floods or any natural disaster. The Big Easy had a rhythm of its own, a mix of French and Creole blood, which gave it its life and made it immortal, just like him. The spirit of this great old city would never die, no matter what happened.

Moudoca knew that to the unsuspecting eye, he could blend into the crowd. Normal people usually didn't recognize him without his get up. His work was done for awhile and he could just play at being an ordinary man. That was always good for a few laughs. It was time for some recreation and relaxation, time for something sexy and male, and beautiful.

Tall and imposing, his ebony skin was considered beautiful by many. He was more than confident that he was a handsome man who was well equipped to please and that the catfish would come snapping. He was looking for a worthy companion to share his bed for the night, someone that could keep up, take all he had to give,

someone who liked the sweetness of the pain mingled with the pleasure.

He walked the room of his favourite speakeasy, searching for a special treat, something that might truly satisfy his itch. Every day he dealt with beauty. He knew it. He created it, but it was always fleeting and always for others. Tonight would change all that. Tonight, he would take something just for him, something special, compensation for all his hard work, all the money he'd made off those stupid moron pimps.

He was disappointed when he didn't find what he was seeking in his favourite place. They were losers, all of them, none worthy of sharing his bed.

He wandered the French Quarter for quite some time and was prepared to give up when he decided to give it one more try. He took a chance and walked into a small smoky bar at the edge of a dead end street...and there he was--his beauty, his reward--the man he'd have on his knees pleasing him before the night was through.

It wasn't the first time he'd seen him. And usually pale white skin didn't hold much appeal, nor did cocky little bad boys for that matter, but this was Craven Beaumont, the son of one of the most powerful men in New Orleans. Corrupting power was extremely enticing to him, especially when it was that pretty.

Beaumont was playing poker at a little table in the corner, oblivious to everything around him. He was a man of no more than twenty-five, who

acted beyond his years, and already, the weight of the world on his shoulders. He would take over all of daddies business ventures eventually, whether he chose to or not.

Tall with beautiful, thick, ashy blond hair and wide green eyes, he even had dimples in his cheeks...he was like a sensational doll, just waiting to be played with. And oh, those broad shoulders and slim hips, with all those muscles in the right places, was more than seductive. Beaumont was definitely top choice on the menu tonight. Moudoca licked his lips.

Moudoca bided his time. He waited until one of the card players left the table, then slipped into his vacant seat and sat directly across from Beaumont, whose intense green eyes carefully watched his cards.

Moudoca stared at Beaumont. *Look at me. Want me. You want to come with me. You want to please me. You want me to hang you upside down and fuck that ass of yours.*

* * * *

Craven Beaumont looked up sharply. It was his turn to play, but he wasn't paying attention to his cards anymore. Someone was talking to him in his head, and the things he was saying were very unsettling. He looked around the table and found himself looking into the eyes of the man across from him, his gaze transfixing him somehow. He

tore his eyes away with great difficulty. He knew who he was--Moudoca, a Voodoo prince, a witchdoctor with extraordinary powers, so they said, but he didn't believe much of that. He did know that was someone you didn't mess with though. *What do you want with me?*

Ah, you have the power of mind. Beautiful and gifted. Come with me tonight, Craven. I will take you to heaven. I want to make you my lover.

I'm not interested.

Moudoca's face changed, his body stiffened. He stood, threw down the cards he'd been dealt but had no intention of playing and boomed out loud, "You dare say no to me!"

Everyone fell quiet and stared at Craven Beaumont.

Craven's best friend, Andy Roche, who was sitting beside him at the table, reached over for his best friend's arm. "Crave, you've pissed off the Voodoo King. Shit. How in the hell did you manage that?"

"I, ah...have no idea," Craven said, embarrassed.

Moudoca was glaring at him as he slinked around the table like he was stalking his prey. He leaned down to where Craven sat, his cards strewn across the table in front of him.

Craven stiffened.

The priest picked up a card and turned it over. "The six of spades," he drawled, smiling broadly. "Death," he mouthed, throwing the card back

down on the table. It swirled around in the air and then landed face up. The crowd let out a collected gasp.

His friend, watching the Voodoo priest walk away, had horror in his eyes. Suddenly, he grabbed Craven by the arm again. "Come on, Ami, we got to get out of here, skip town, whatever. He's marked you for death. He means it. What in hell did you do to him? You must have done something."

Craven laughed, shrugging his arm away. "I told you I have no idea. Man is loco. Come on." He looked at the dealer. "Another hand. Give me some cards."

"Craven!" Andy insisted. "You want to be a zombie boy?"

Craven howled with laughter. "Zombies now? You don't believe that crap, do you?"

"That he makes zombies and sells him to the sex trade? I sure do. They say if you go up to the swamps, you can see 'em floating on the water, what's left of them. Bayou is red. He lets the alligators eat 'em when they start to show."

"What do you mean start to show? He makes pregnant zombies?"

"Stop joking, I mean when they fall apart."

"That's a rumour, only a rumour. I know the man has magic, but not to raise the dead. Only the good Lord can do that."

"You doing what?" the dealer demanded, eyeing him. Above them, the ceiling fans

whooshed around in its attempt to cool the intense heat. It wasn't working. Players around the table waited tensely, sweat dotting their foreheads.

"Hold," he said, pushing his friend off him. "You're distracting me. Stop talking nonsense about zombies."

"I'm not talking nonsense. He's kills them, I tell you when they show, you know, decay like. He kills men and makes them into those things...my grandmother says so."

"Your grandmother is ninety years old and senile. Now, stop this," he lowered his voice, "people are staring at us. And for once I have a good hand and you're going to make me blow it. Tranquil."

* * * *

"No one rejects Moudoca," he declared between clenched teeth as he made his way back to his sanctuary. "Ah, my beautiful Beaumont boy, you will fetch a high price. They will give much money to penetrate that tight little ass of yours! Tonight, you will pay for turning me down." He laughed as he slipped his robe back on.

The truck could be heard now coming up the road. "Ah, there are my boys." Moudoca walked outside, waited. The alligators came up onto the shore. "Hungry my beauties?" he called out to them. "Patience, lovelies. Your feast is on the way."

* * * *

Craven stripped off his clothes and climbed into his bed. He pulled the fine netting down and around the headboard to keep the mosquitoes off. The heat was intense and the old plantation house didn't have any air conditioning. The ceiling fan was just not enough tonight. It cranked away uselessly above his head.

As he tried to settle into sleep, he made an attempt to shake off what Andy had said to him as they headed out of the bar, but it stayed with him, echoing in his mind.

Moudoca will come after you, Crave, he warned. They say he comes in the night, paralysing you so that you can't move. Then he makes you one of them. If I were you, I'd go, get out of here, go where he can't find you.

Craven shuddered at the thought of it and closed his eyes. Andy really believed this shit. "It's all nonsense," he muttered and hankered down to go to sleep.

* * * *

The driver of the truck looked anxious to be out of there. He didn't seem to be able to stand still. "They're all in the back, piled up, squirming like a bunch of worms. Pretty disgusting." He made a face like he was in the process of tasting some bitter medicine.

"Are they ripe?" Moudoca laughed slightly, taking pleasure in the man's terror.

"Disgusting," he repeated, hoping from foot to foot. "They don't pay me enough to do this shit."

"Just open the door."

"I'm not dealing with them. I'll open the door, but then I'm getting back into the truck. So... they're all yours."

He shrugged. "There should be six."

"If you say so. I didn't put them in there and I didn't count them. They made noises all the way. They scare the shit out of me, those things."

"Let them out," Moudoca inclined his head.

The man ran over to the back, sprang the lock on the door and then raced to the front of the truck.

Moudoca heard the door slam and lock. He sniggered. He watched carefully as the stiff bodies dangled their arms and legs, trying in vain to disentangle themselves from each other. Dead eyes stared in his direction with their half-eaten faces and torn patches of skin.

Moudoca came closer to the pile of bodies in the back of the truck. They were irritating when they got to this stage, unable to do anything much, except kill on command. He pulled on one of them, dislodging an arm, but it provided the space the others needed to crawl out on their own.

As the last one tumbled out and began to aimlessly walk around in a circle, Moudoca

banged on the truck. "You can go now, chicken shit, unless you'd like to join us for tea."

The truck roared away.

Moudoca took the time to examine each one. "Line up so I can see if I can salvage any of you." Sometimes they could be recycled if they weren't too far gone. It was a shame to waste them.

The zombies formed what could be only termed as an attempt at a line. They were all over the place, banging into each other, mumbling.

"Your brains are pretty well useless," Moudoca murmured. "Ugly, smelly, dead," he muttered. "Okay, time to feed the wildlife. My lovelies," he said to them, "you seek brains and blood. Walk into the swamp and you shall find what you need. Go now!"

The six decaying corpses turned and walked trance-like into the water. The alligators followed them in like they were on an assembly line. It was quite beautiful to see the symmetry.

There was no sound now except for splashing and gurgling, and the satisfied snapping of the alligators' powerful jaws. The black water turned red and then there was calm, satiation.

Moudoca left the swamp and walked quietly toward the great Beaumont Plantation. *I'm coming, pretty boy. If you listen carefully, you'll hear the demise of your beating heart.*

* * * *

Craven tried to sit up, but he couldn't. He felt as if his legs and arms were made out of concrete. He opened his eyes and saw big brown ones looking down at him. Someone laughed a crazy laugh, raked their gaze over his nakedness.

You are such a pretty boy, beau bebe. Now you are mine forever.

Craven lay on a cement slab, paralysed exactly the way Andy had said he would be. He could only speak with his mind and then Moudoca didn't always answer. *Why are you doing this to me? I've done nothing to you.*

You hurt my feelings, bebe, by rejecting what Moudoca could have given you. And yes, if you wonder, all you heard is le verity, truth. I do make zombies for trade and you will be perfect. You should put more faith in your friends, cher.

Please. No. My father is a rich man and...

You don't want to be a zombie?

Please. I'll pay. My father will give you money.

Moudoca laughed out loud. "I can have money anytime." He looked down at him and then pried open his mouth.

Craven was helpless to do anything to stop him. *What did you put in there?* It tasted like some kind of a spice, a clove or...

Moudoca lifted his arm and with a great knife, sliced through his own wrist.

Craven felt the blood drip into his mouth.

Moudoca began to chant and dance.

Craven tried to struggle in vain.

"You wait until they see you, bebe. But before, I must cover you with my magic so that the alligators won't eat you. You have to ferment in the swamp. It will only take a few days and then you'll be ready."

Please don't. I'm alive. Don't put me down there.

But you're not alive, not entirely, and soon the process will be done...and you will be zombie, the walking dead, and ready for my command, and the commands of the sleazy white boys. Moudoca ran his hands over Craven's body. Your cock is sublime. It must be ready for play. I'm making it hard now and it will remain that way during and after the process is complete. And your ass of course must be ready. He held up what looked like a large size replica of a penis.

What are you doing with that?

This goes up your ass, boy so that you'll be ready. These men pay for horny zombies. You must be open.

What's going to happen to me when I come up out of there? His terror was on the edge, but he couldn't express it.

"You'll be fucked, used by horny men who will make you do the most degrading of things and then you will start to decay, fall apart. That's when I have to feed you to the alligators."

Oh God, this isn't happening.

"Oh, cher, I'm afraid it is." Nice ass, by the way, and it likes a big cock. It wrapped right around this thing. Too bad you hadn't been nicer to me earlier. I

could have given you a nice big cock and you would have been alive to talk about it after. And you would have talked about it.

Moudoca carried Craven out to the swamp. He held him in his arms under the full moon and chanted again. "Into the water you go, to complete the process."

No, please, God... No! But no one heard him and his cries were of no interest to the Voodoo priest who dropped him in the water and waited until he sunk to the bottom. His eyes were open, but he couldn't move his limbs. Creatures moved around him silently, seeming not to notice.

A crocodile swam by.

He screamed in silence but nothing.

The crocodile didn't come near.

As the hours went by, Craven realised that none of the underwater creatures realised that he was there at all. He could see his pale naked body in the water, his cock standing straight up and if he concentrated and let the inertia of the water take him, he knew that there was something hanging out of his backside. But he felt nothing. He couldn't hear his own heartbeat yet he concentrated. Was he dead? He had to be because otherwise he would have drowned a long time ago. What manner of hell was this?

* * * *

There was another one of things and it was floating dangerously close to him--penis erect, ass plugged. This one was fresh, not yet turned all the way. That usually took a little time, but he didn't hang around to see the final end, wasn't his business. Besides, these things rather disgusted him.

Rene moved around it, examining it a little, mostly out of boredom. Moudoca had been very meticulous with this one. It was a wonder he hadn't put a bow around his cock. It looked terrified, even in that frozen state, and he noticed that it was mind conscious, which was unusual. Usually the brain shut down altogether.

Rene listened intently. He could hear its thoughts. It was if it was praying. It had been a long time since he'd heard someone pray. Rene drew a little closer to him in the water. He wondered if the thing could see him. He waved his hand in front of its eyes. If it did, it gave no indication. I'm tired of feasting on Crocodile, he said to himself, how about a little pre-zombie? There had to be some blood left in the body.

He took hold of the rigid body and bit down into the neck. The blood flowed freely, diluting some with the water. He held his mouth over the wound tightly and sucked.

Blood.

Rene paused, looked at the frozen figure. "You want blood?"

You're drinking my blood. Why? You have no right to drink my blood.

The way I see it, you aren't in any shape to protest.

Stop. Or give me some of yours. Now!

You're developing a taste for blood even before you've turned. You're going to be reborn a killer, probably worse than I am. I thought it was brains your sort ate?

If you take someone from someone, put it back, creep!

Rene licked his lips and laughed. *Fine. What the hell!* He examined the thing's mouth and removed the huge weed that Moudoca had stuck in there. It floated away in the water. He bit down into his own wrist and then pressed it to its mouth. Most of the blood floated off into the water, but it seem to swallow some of it.

Rene shook his head. *Your last meal. Poor bastard.* He moved away and floated up to the surface, considering he'd done his good deed for the day. He eyed the alligator, which sat on the shore as he reached the ground, and the alligator moved away.

He could hear Moudoca chanting and dancing around his shelter now, but Rene walked on by. He'd had his encounters with Moudoca, none of them bore fruit. His wet shoes sunk in the mud as he walked in the direction of the House of Monair. This was the last night he was going to sleep in the swamp, no matter what Trace told him.

His hunger for blood had waned, thanks to his snack in the bayou, but he was a little miffed. The treatments hadn't worked. He was still a vampire. Trace had promised him a cure and it hadn't happened yet. At best, he was less ravenous most of the time, but still couldn't feel the sun on his face. And all these rules. He wasn't allowed to drink from anyone. Shit. That was tough. He wondered if that dead thing in the water counted? Naw.

"You must be patient," Trace cautioned. "I told you this would take time."

"I'm tired of sleeping with the slime, not to mention zombies."

"Stop that. There are no zombies."

"I bit one tonight."

"You bit a zombie?"

"Well, a fledging. He wasn't quite dead I don't think, yet." He grinned. "Anyway, I didn't think he counted since he wasn't human or anything. Did he?"

"Technically no. But I feed you, remember? Now, pull up your sleeve. When these treatments are complete, you can sleep here."

"In your bed?" He smiled.

"I believe we said that..."

"I paid you already with my blood. You're never sick. When I'm cured, I walk away, no sleeping in your bed, Doc."

"You want to be alone?"

"I'm a vampire, Doc, I don't believe in love."

"You won't be a vampire one day. This will work."

"Just give it to me all ready. And tell me why I have to sleep in the swamp again?"

"Would you rather sleep in a coffin?"

"Frankly, yes, especially since that witchdoctor feeds all his zombies to the crocodiles." He appeared to shudder.

"Stop making up stories."

Rene shrugged. "Believe me or not."

"All done." The doctor pulled down Rene's sleeve. "Soon this will make you a man."

"I've been told that before. Promises, promises," he teased, batting his eyelashes.

* * * *

His limbs were moving and so were his arms. Craven didn't know if that was a good sign or bad. His throat hurt like hell. Was he supposed to hurt? He hadn't felt anything before. Someone had bitten him and he'd tasted something going down his throat. *Blood*. Who or what would have fed him blood down here? He vaguely remembered someone being in the water with him. Was it a dream? *Where are you? You just can't leave me here?*

* * * *

Rene glanced at Trace who lay on the bed beside him. He always insisted that they lay together like that. He had no idea what the big deal was. It wasn't like Trace would get naked with him or anything. It wasn't as if he wanted him to. Someone or something was calling him in his head, but whom?

He sighed, sat up. The sun would be up soon. He had to get back. No more swamp. Trace was fast asleep. He left quietly. As he walked away from the town, he thought about how long he'd known Trace. It had been twenty years or more since Trace had tried to drive a stake through his heart in the Lafayette Cemetery. He'd paralysed him, but hadn't finished him. Trace had been young then, no more than thirty, a scientist on a mission. He offered him a cure, a cure that had never materialised. And for some stupid reason, that cure had involved him sleeping in the swamp....something about the water purifying him. It was ridiculous.

But God, you can learn a lot from sleeping in the swamp, more than he ever wanted to know. Yuck.

Frustrated with Trace's promised cure, he had solicited Moudoca's help at one time. Moudoca didn't want to cure him. He only wanted to fuck him. So they fucked and Rene grew bored, as usual, and returned to Trace. At least he didn't have to fuck him, not yet anyway.

Trace was his only friend really, and even with the blood Rene had given him, he was still mortal. Eventually he'd die and Rene would move on to something else. But no more sleeping in the swamp, that was decided.

He needed a haven from the sun now as it began to rise in the sky. He sought fresh loose earth and began to dig a nice soft place for him to sleep. At least it was dry.

Help me.

Rene stopped digging. "Bugger off whoever you are. Stop talking in my head."

"Help me!"

Rene gasped and turned around. "Shit. Oh shit." There was that pre-zombie guy, the one he'd bit in the swamp, cock erect and big dildo hanging off the back of him. He was walking and talking around like nothing. "Ah, hey," Rene told him hesitantly. "Ah...you need to find your master. I'll steer you in the right direction if you..."

"I have no master. I'm going to kill that Voodoo bastard."

"Hey," Rene slowly walked over to him, studying him, "you're not right."

"What do you mean I'm not right?"

"I mean you ...you're dead, but not like the usual zombies."

"I'm dead?" he squawked.

"Ah, I'm afraid so."

"Shit. I'm dead?"

"Sorry to be the bearer of bad news." He shrugged.

"And you, what in hell are you? What in hell am I?"

"Told you, you're a zombie. Me? I'm a vampire."

"Vampire?" He took a step back.

"Hey, you're a zombie and you're afraid of me." He burst out laughing. "Get real."

"You find this funny?"

"A little, especially with your..." his gaze moved down, "your cock is going to stay like that, man? That's got to be uncomfortable."

"For good?"

Rene nodded. "I think so. I probably can pull that thing out of your...ah...butt though, if you want me to. No pressure."

"I can do it myself, thanks. What did you do to me?" Craven grabbed onto the handle of the dildo and pulled. "Um," he squirmed a little. "I like it in there. I'm horny as hell. Can you fuck me with it?"

"Can I what?"

"What's happening to me? Did I just ask you to..."

"Yeah, you did. And right now, I'd have to say no. Anyway, given what you're designed for, it's normal."

"What I'm designed for? Normal? Are you out of your mind? Nothing about me is fucking normal."

"Moudoca programs you like that before he gives you to the pimps. You're a slut."

"What do you know about it? Are you his partner?"

"No," he shook his head. "I just know things."

"Great." He pulled on the dildo again and slowly began to move it in and out with great difficulty.

"Do you want to be alone?"

"Very funny. I don't want to do this, especially in front of you."

"Then don't do it. No one's keeping you here. Go away. Anyway, have fun with that."

"So, am I supposed to be like this for good?"

"Yeah, well until you fall apart. You seem different though. No glassy eyes and you're not grey."

"Grey? Jesus. Grey? And I'm going to fall apart?"

"Um. Decay. Decompose. But you look pretty good. I think it might have something to do with the blood I gave you. And I took that thing out of your mouth. I don't know Voodoo, but I think that thing he puts in your mouth has something to do with the process. Guess your zombie condition is a little less...ah, intense."

"Huh?"

"You might not decay and fall apart as fast as the others and you seem to have a brain. Usually they don't. They're mindless."

"Great, not only am a dead man walking around, I really know I'm a dead man walking around."

"Something like that."

"And what in hell are you doing?"

"Me? If it's any of your business, I'm digging my grave."

"Digging your grave? Could this get any weirder?" He put his face in his hands.

"I need a place to sleep. I'm tired of sleeping in the damn swamp."

"I've never heard of a vampire sleeping in a swamp. Why in the hell would you sleep in a swamp?"

"Doctor's orders."

"A vampire with a doctor now?"

"I want to be cured. Anyway, the sun is coming up and I need to sleep so...bugger off."

"Will the sun bother me, too?"

"You probably won't tolerate it well, you could start to smell really bad. If I was you, I wouldn't hang around here. Moudoca doesn't like it when he fucks up. He'll feed you to the alligators."

"I'm going to kill him."

"I'd wait on that if I were you. He won't be that easy to kill."

"Don't worry about it, okay? It's not your problem." He looked around. "I'm not sure where I should go now."

Rene looked at him and sighed. "Well," he hesitated, "you could share my grave."

"Why are you being so nice to me?"

"Because you're...rather pathetic."

"Thanks."

"Come on," he invited, "if you coming. I have to sleep now." He glanced at the sky.

* * * *

Craven wriggled down under the earth pressed against the vampire. He was amazed that somehow he wasn't suffocating under the earth. *God, I'm really dead.*

Rene threw the dirt back over them. "Sleep tight," he said, "and ah..." he reached around and yanked on the dildo, "take that maudit thing out of your ass, will yeah?"

* * * *

Rene couldn't say that he was particularly pleased to open his eyes and find that there was a dead man sucking on his cock. "Ah, excuse me," he pushed him off. He sat up and dislodged the dirt off him. "Do you mind? Who in the hell gave you permission to be hanging off my cock?"

"I was horny. For some reason, cock is all I have on my mind."

Rene brushed off the dirt and stood. "Well, get it off your mind, especially my cock."

"Why am I acting like this?"

"I told you, it's because you're a slut. You were programmed that way. Guess it was a mistake to have taken that thing out of your ass. You seemed so much happier with it in there."

Craven made a face. "So, what's our plan?"

Rene turned to see the dead man following him. "Plan? What do you mean by our plan?"

"Our plan to kill that witchdoctor."

He stopped and looked at him. "Now let me make this perfectly clear. I'm not helping you to kill Moudoca. If you want to kill him, go ahead. Bite off his head. Zombies do that kind of thing. As for me, I've got better things to do with my time."

"Don't you care that he's killing people and making zombie, ah...sluts?"

"Not especially. To each his own I say."

"What if I was your son?"

"Son?" he lifted his eyebrow. "Well, you're not my son, but if you were, I'd wonder what I'd done wrong to raise such an incorrigible boy."

"Stop that. You know what I mean. Or your brother? What if I was your brother?"

He sighed. "Go away, please. You are trying to make a point, but you're not doing it very well, so stop while you're ahead. And, well we're at it, I never told you to call me Rene."

"What am I supposed to do now?"

"Whatever zombies do, I guess."

"I could go home."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Rene continued walking through the swamp. "You might get a hankering to eat your relatives, not pretty."

"Really? I could eat my family? That's like incest, isn't it?"

Rene rolled his eyes. He stopped again and glanced at him. "No, it's not incest. I'm just saying that you can't go home, okay? You're not well... yourself. You got to find a new way to survive out here, and just some friendly advice," he pointed at him, "get out of here before Moudoca discovers you. He's not going to take kindly to having a Zombie around that isn't brain dead."

"What do I eat?"

"Do I look like a zombie to you? How am I supposed to know? Brains, I guess. At least they do in those movies."

"Do you think I look like a zombie?" He patted his face. "Can people tell by looking at me? I used to be handsome."

"You look like...well...like a person I guess. I don't think it would be all that apparent to the outsider. That blood I gave you probably saved you from falling apart. So be grateful and, ah, stop bothering me with this crap."

* * * *

Craven watched as the vampire kept on walking. Rene couldn't just leave him out here in the bayou, surrounded by slimy, salivating creatures. It was scary out here. And he felt safe with the vampire. "I'll pay you," he called, running to catch up with him.

"Go away," Rene said through clenched teeth. "I don't want your money."

"I've give you anything you want. I come from a rich family."

"Not anymore you don't."

"I can still get money. Please," he grabbed his arm. "I'm...scared."

Rene shook his head. "A scared zombie. Merde. Okay, I'll let you hang out with me for a little while, just until you feel...settled into whatever you need to settle into. After that, you're gone."

Craven nodded. "Thanks." He began walking along with him. "So, what's your name anyway?"

"Rene."

"Been a vampire long, Rene?"

"Hey, I said you could hang out with me for awhile, I didn't say you could yap me to death. "

"Just making conversation. And it would be kind of hard to yap you to death, you're as dead as I am. Damn, I wish I could figure out how to get my cock to lie down." Craven started slapping at it.

"Don't look at me. I'm not cock trainer. And knocking the shit out of your dick isn't going to help it none, I wouldn't think. Stop that."

"You're not comedian, you know. Are you a virgin or something?"

"No, I'm not a virgin. Why would you ask me something so stupid?"

"You seem uptight about cocks."

"Maybe I'm afraid if you keep doing that it's going to fall off."

"You think it will?" Craven was alarmed.

"You're the zombie, you tell me."

"You would have an objection to helping me with my problem then?"

"I do have taste. I'm not into zombies."

"Well, vampires...are creepy."

"You've been watching too many vampire movies. They have contributed to giving us a bad reputation. I have a mind to write the networks about that."

"Now he's a social critic." Craven rolled his eyes. "Where are we going?"

"Doctor Trace."

"Oh yeah, you're doctor. Are you sick? I thought vamps were known for their perfect health?"

"I'm being treated for vampirism. I'm going to be cured one day."

"Is it working?"

"I'm not sure."

"Maybe he can treat me."

"I doubt it."

"Don't walk so fast, my legs are stiff."

"Rigor Mortis sitting in, probably."

"Christ."

"It happens to everyone, after they die, that is."

"Didn't happen to you," Craven accused, trying to keep up.

"I'm the undead."

"Now, I never understood that."

Rene shrugged.

"Anyway, you have to keep me around."

"Why, because you have rigor mortis?"

"No, because you are responsible for me."

"How do you figure that?"

"I wouldn't be in this mess if you hadn't fed me blood."

"No, you'd be in a worse mess. You'd be dropping your arms and legs everywhere and drooling all over yourself. Now I have to pay for my generosity?"

"I won't be any bother."

"Yeah, right."

* * * *

Trace stared at Craven and then demanded to know who in the hell this guy was.

"Not a guy, just some zombie I ran across. Remember I told you that I fed on a zombie?" He came into Trace's living room and slumped down on the sofa. "He's imprinted on me like a duck."

"And why are you bringing him to my home, a zombie of all things?" Trace exclaimed.

"I can hear you, you know," Craven said, "and I'm no duck, bat man. And hey," Craven said to Trace, "I know you."

"I know you, too," he pointed, gasping. "My God, you're Craven Beaumont."

"Yeah. That's me."

"Correction, he *was* Craven Beaumont," Rene drawled.

"Shut up," Craven told Rene, then resumed his conversation with Trace. "You treated my grandmother once for gout. Can you cure me?"

"Of course not." Rene laughed. "You're dead. You can't cure the dead. That's ridiculous."

"Will you *please* shut up," Craven insisted. "You're trying to cure him," he pointed at Rene. "He's dead, too."

"Yes, but he's the undead," Trace explained, "and you're a..."

"Reanimated corpse," Rene finished Trace's sentence.

"Rene," Trace said, "I didn't..."

Craven made a lunge for him. He jumped on Rene and started pounding him.

"Ouch, you're sticking me with that erection of yours." He erupted into a laughing fit and rolled Craven onto the floor. "Talk about a dangerous weapon."

"Why is his, ah... penis like that?" Trace asked hesitantly.

Craven scrambled off the floor, giving Rene an angry glare. "Moudoca is making zombie sluts. He's killing people, then killing them again."

"Technically," Rene corrected.

"Shut up, you," he slapped him on the head.

"Now that wasn't right," Rene muttered, rubbing his head.

Trace was aghast. "How could you let this go on, Rene?"

"Me? I had nothing to do with it."

"I asked him to help me put a stop to it and he refused," Craven gulped.

"Rene!" Trace shook his head. "Where are your priorities?"

"Priorities? I'm a vampire, am I supposed to have priorities? I guess if I get cured, I'll have to get me some of those."

"Idiot," Craven muttered.

"You need to take care of that witchdoctor," Trace insisted before Rene could react to Craven's insult.

"Why me?"

"It's bad for my business," he said, glancing at Craven. "If everyone's dead, who will be left for me to treat?"

Rene made a face and shook his head. "Well, count me out," he stood.

"Oh no, you don't," Trace chastised. "If you want to continue to receive treatment, you are going to help Craven here get rid of Moudoca. He's giving doctors a bad name."

"Like television and vampires," Craven mocked.

Rene turned up his nose at him.

"So, how are we going to kill him?" Trace asked, looking from one to the other.

"I'm out of this," Rene put up his hands. "I refuse to work with a zombie."

"What are you, a republican?" Trace scoffed.

"No, I'm not a...look, now you're really pissing me off. It's just that we could be right in the middle of this thing and zombie boy here could start falling apart or something."

"Don't be ridiculous," Craven muttered. "I haven't fallen apart so far."

"Let me examine you," Trace said to Craven. "Maybe I can help you with your little..." his eyes went to the erection.

"Little?" Craven sniffed. "Do you mind?" He looked at Rene. "I'd like some private time with my doctor, please."

Rene sniggered. "Your doctor? Fine. I'll just go out and find some food."

"You stay right there," Trace ordered. "I'll get to you in a bit. Don't think of biting anyone."

* * * *

Rene rolled his eyes as he walked outside. He'd been perfectly content before that zombie had come along, well...except for sleeping in the swamp maybe. How in the hell did he get himself into this one? Moudoca was a powerful Voodoo priest. He could put all kinds of nasty curses on him.

"You can come in now," Trace called to him after a few minutes.

Rene walked back in. "So, is he going to live?" He started to laugh.

Craven glared at him. "I hate you."

Rene laughed. "I'm crushed."

"For a zombie, he's in good shape," Trace said. "Rigor Mortis is minor and even the erection problem is fixable, with the right stimulus."

Rene raised an eyebrow.

"I wouldn't ask you anyway," Craven shot at him. "Don't worry your arrogant little vampire head about it."

"Mercy for small blessings, zombie boy."

"We need a plan," Trace said. "And Moudoca must be taken by surprise. He mustn't know about you, Craven. You will stay here with me and, Rene, you will stay here, too, tonight. We need to talk about this. The two of you can share the basement. It's dark so there shouldn't be any problem."

"Do I need to be afraid of the light, too?" Craven asked him. "I wondered about that."

"Your eyes won't take to the light. You must protect them," Trace said. "Rene, it's time for your cure."

* * * *

Craven noticed that Rene had been standing there, saying nothing. Unusual, given that he always seemed to have something to say. Now that they were in a brightly lit living room, Craven could see him well. Hell, he was one hell of a hunk--great body, tall, thick curly black hair with

deep blue eyes. If he'd run across this guy in life, he would have jumped his bones.

"Don't get any ideas," he said suddenly.

"Stop reading my mind, cretin."

"If you had a mind to read, I would have. No, rather, I read your bedroom eyes and your radar stick there, moving around between your legs."

"Okay, enough," Trace said. "'You two must try to get along if this is to work. What's the problem, Rene?"

"I'm not hanging out in any basement with any zombie. I do have some standards."

"You'll stay there out of trouble until we figure out how to kill off that Voodoo priest," Trace pointed, "or no more cure."

"It isn't working anyway," Rene shot back.

"Give it time. Come," he motioned, "roll up your sleeve."

Trace had put a big mattress down in the basement for them. The windows were blocked. Total blackness.

"I like Trace," Craven said. "He's a nice guy. Treats me like an equal."

"An equal what?" Rene cajoled.

"Are you always so rude?"

"Some people find me charming."

"I find that hard to believe."

"Emphasis was on the word people," he said, sinking onto the mattress, "not corpses." He

stretched out and placed his hands under his head.

"I see perfectly well in the dark," Craven said.

"Congratulations. Consider it a perk."

"You know why he did this to me, don't you?"

"You wouldn't sleep with him?"

"How did you know?"

"I'm a genius."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. I am a genius. Have an IQ of--"

"Tell me," he cut him off. Craven sunk down beside him. "How did you know that?"

"Two things get a man's ire, money and sex. Moudoca doesn't need money. He can conjure up what he needs, and since you look like a movie star, I figured that was it."

"I do?"

"Do what?"

"Look like a movie star?"

"Kind of."

"Thank you."

Rene lifted an eyebrow. "I'm not helping you with your little problem, no matter how much you suck up to me."

"Stop calling it little! It's six and a half. That's average. How long is yours?"

"Eight."

"Go on. Prove it."

"Bugger off, zombie. I'm not showing you my cock okay?"

Craven reached over and kissed him hard on the mouth, then backed away again, placing his hands under his head like Rene. He smiled.

"And that was for?"

"I think you're hot, even if you are a vampire. And I think you like me a little bit."

"Emphasis is on little."

Craven turned on his side and studied him. "You with your emphasis on this word and that, you're full of shit, you know that?"

"I do now."

"You couldn't even get this to go down," he said, looking at his erection. "You have to have talent for that."

"Ha!"

"Ha?"

"Unzip 'em, zombie boy and let me demonstrate," he sat up on the mattress.

Craven smiled and undid his pants. "You're not going to bite it, are you?"

"For what reason?" Rene met his gaze. "I don't eat zombie," he muttered and then lowered his mouth to Craven's cock. "Good lord," he said, looking up at him with surprised eyes, "this is going to be a challenge. Talk about stiff."

Craven slapped him on the head. "Will you shut up and suck?"

Rene's eyes glowed with anger, but he lowered his mouth and opened his jaws wide. Craven could see the two sharp fangs and it excited him. After all, it wasn't like Rene could kill him.

If he'd had any doubt that he would have lost feeling below the waist, it was eliminated as soon as Rene took his cock in his mouth. "Ooh ewwww!" Craven exclaimed. "Lordy, have mercy. This is even better than when I was alive. This boy can suck."

* * * *

Rene pushed Craven down on his back and intensified his efforts, sucking his cock deeper into his throat and then moving the muscles to exert pressure on the head of dead boy's penis. Umm, not too bad. Actually, he was enjoying this, especially with the strongly articulated hoots and howls of appreciation. When the come spewed out into his throat, Rene swallowed and eased off.

"It's down!" Craven glanced at his cock in awe. "You're a bloody genius. Pardon the pun."

"Never send a boy to do a man's job."

"Or a mortal to do the job of a vampire," Craven said, crossing his arms. "Are we friends?"

"Hardly," he snorted. "It would take more than that. And I'm not cuddling either."

"Okay, fine. What would it take for us to be friends then?"

"What are you intending to do for me in return?"

Craven smiled. "Is that an invitation?"

"One of limited engagement. I'm stuck down in the basement with you. My choices are severely--"

"Well if you say it that way, fuck yourself."

"Ah, you're not a nice zombie. I'm not able to actually fuck myself. Plus, I'd rather fuck you. I guarantee I'll be better than that piece of plastic you had up your ass when we met."

* * * *

Craven snorted. "Um, maybe, maybe not."

Rene grinned. "Now, I love a challenge. I met the first one, didn't I?" He undid his shirt.

"Yeah." Thank the good lord for small favours that he was able to see in the dark. Rene had the chest of a god. "Impressive. Let's see the rest of you."

Rene stood. "Patience, patience. And it will cost you."

Craven smiled. He licked his lips. "That's what I was praying for. If you fuck as good as you suck, we're in business." Craven ran his gaze over Rene. Hot damn. He was one red hot vampire... muscles everywhere and a cock that was a sight to behold. "Yum. Did that happen when you became a vampire or did you come with that?"

"Did what happen?" he went down to his knees.

"All that buff you got going on?"

"It's all me. Brought it with me. It's probably what got me into this mess in the first place. Roll over."

"What? No foreplay?"

"Roll over," he insisted. "I'll show you foreplay."

"You're one cocky son of--"

"And you love it," he muttered, pushing Craven onto his stomach. "If I push your thighs apart, I'm not going to come away with one of your legs, am I?"

"Knock it off. I'm not Raggedy Andy."

"Who?"

"Forget it. You're too old."

Rene placed his hands on his butt cheeks and separated them. "How would you know? Open up."

"I miss my plastic...oooooh." The tip of a tongue twirled into his anus. "Um, that's nice. That hits the spot."

"It's my speciality. Now, shut up and enjoy. Put those dead neurons of yours on hold."

The tongue hit his anus again and then dug in. "Umm." A hand went under his stomach and lifted him some, bending him so that the tongue could go deeper. "Lordy mercy, oh yeah."

The hand on his stomach moved lower and began to massage his cock which was lifting again. Craven began to squirm. This vamp didn't have much of a personality, but he certainly knew his way around a man's anatomy.

A finger now turned around in his ass, fucking him. His body was lifting as if he were nothing but a feather, effortless. Then without warning, Rene pulled him back and down onto his cock, impaling his ass.

"Oohhhhh....yeah! Fuck that ass," he urged, gritting his teeth. It felt fantastic, better than that old plastic. "Use me, fuck me. I'm your slut." *Why in the hell did I say that? Damn that witchdoctor.*

Rene pushed him to the front now and began slamming into his ass, hard, so hard Craven's teeth were rattling. He hoped to hell they weren't falling out.

"Stroke my cock," he demanded as Rene took it in hand and emptied his come into Craven's grateful ass.

Craven fell forward, cock spent and ass soothed. He smiled into the mattress. "That was nice."

"Nice? You told me you were my slut."

"I didn't mean it," Craven said. "It just came out." He sat up. "Why in the hell would I want to be your slut?"

"Stop fretting," he said, lying back on the pillow, "you're programmed to be a slut, remember?"

"I'm going to kill that Voodoo asshole."

"Um, so I've been told. And apparently, I'm killing him with you," he sneered.

Craven glanced at him. He licked his lips. "Nice cock. I mean that in the nicest possible way. So, how did you become..."

"So hot?"

"No, asshole, a vampire. How did you become a vampire?"

"Oh, I participated in an orgy and some chick bit me."

"You were straight when you were a human?"

"No, not really. She got off watching guys fuck and she just bit me."

"In front of everyone?"

"No. In the can."

"So you were at an all male orgy and a woman bit you." He started to laugh. "What are the odds?"

"She was the only vampire there. That's why she got to watch."

"So she bit you in the bathroom?"

"Yah."

"And then what happened?"

"She took me home, tied me to the bed, did everything to me imaginable and then fed me blood."

"This was when?"

"1998."

"You're only twelve?"

"You've been corrupting a minor." He smirked.

"Not funny."

"And you've been looking for a cure ever since?"

"You bet your ass. And she's looking for me. And when she finds me, I'm going to stake her."

"Why?"

"Because she killed me?" He gave him an ironic look.

"She gave you eternity."

"She gave me a pain in the neck and an unlimited need for sunscreen. I never asked to be her pet. She also thinks she owns me."

"She loves you."

"I doubt that."

"See, that's how I feel about that witchdoctor."

"You love him?"

"No, idiot. I want to kill him for what he did to me."

"Yeah, and he's your problem. I didn't ask you to help me with Daisy, did I?"

"Daisy? A vampire named Daisy?" He started to laugh.

"You're a zombie called Craven. What in hell is that?"

"Okay, you're weird."

"So how we supposed to kill Moudoca? Any ideas?"

"We could poison him."

"How?"

"You hold him down and--"

"Get real."

"Shoot him."

"He's immortal."

"Is he? How did that happen?"

"He's probably a zombie, too, but the new and improved kind."

"Like me."

"You're the old-fashioned kind. Only thing is my blood got you out of the water in time and you

didn't complete the process...plus you're probably a little bit of a vamp."

"I don't want to drink blood, or..." he felt his teeth. "I have no fangs."

"I said a little bit of a vampire. It could wear off any time."

"You think it will?"

He shrugged.

"What if I drink some more of your blood?"

"No way! Not going to happen."

"Okay, relax, just a thought. So, am I going to eat blood? What do I eat? I don't feel hungry."

"Look, I'm no zombie connoisseur. You'll probably need blood eventually, but this blood bank is closed. Sun is coming up. Get some rest and we'll think about what we're going to do tomorrow night."

Craven lay down and looked at the ceiling. His cock was erect again. "Damn. There it goes."

"Don't think about it."

"Can't you just jerk me off?"

"No. Sleep."

"I can be your slut."

"You were my slut already. Turn off the engine, zombie boy."

Craven sighed. Maybe before he killed that bastard, he could see him suffer a little, hit him where it counted. He sat up. "I know what we're going to do, Rene." He glanced at him. He was sound asleep. "You sleep like the dead," he

muttered and lay back down. He smiled as he dozed. *I can't wait.*

* * * *

"Absolutely not," Rene said, shaking his head.

"I think it's a marvellous idea," Trace said.

Craven folded his arms across his chest and issued Rene a smug smile.

"So how many times did you fuck him, the witchdoctor?" Trace mused, staring at him.

Me, and my big mouth. "Once, and I doubt he even remembers."

"Oh, he'd remember," Trace and Dead Boy said together, then slapped hands as if they were a team.

"Great, you two are now bosom buddies?" Rene muttered. "Maudit. Trace, you do realise that the zombie here could start decaying at any moment."

"He's fine. Forget it. This is perfect," Trace said, matter of fact. "You renew your association and Craven and I will work on ruining his sales record. But don't fuck him."

Rene narrowed his eyes. "What would you like me to do then, bring him chocolate bonbons?"

"I think Trace is right, tease him, keep him on a string, but don't actually give him any action," Craven said, looking at Rene.

"What's with you two?"

"Nothing, but damn it, Rene, you promised me that..." Trace trailed off. "I don't want used goods."

"Too late for that," Rene said under his breath.

"He promised you?" Craven piped in, looking at Trace.

"Down boys," Rene said.

"You'd sleep with that Voodoo monster and not me," Trace protested.

"Trace, I didn't even know you then. I'd just come to town. It was six years ago. It was one night. It wasn't that great. And you said you wouldn't sleep with me unless I was cured. You tried to stake me when we met, remember?"

"He's saying that all between his teeth, Trace, don't believe him," Craven shook his head.

"Will you not help me, please?" Rene growled. "And tell me, what is me shaking my thing in front of Moudoca supposed to contribute here? You want me to fuck him to death?"

"Distraction of course." Trace laughed.

"Information," Craven added. "We want to know where all his zombie sluts are, also what he needs to make these sluts."

"And why have I suddenly developed a re-interest in the great priest? I dumped him high and dry last time. What am I suppose to tell him?"

"You're fickle," Trace shrugged.

"I'm fickle," he repeated, nodding. "Somehow I don't think that will get me far."

"Come and take your medicine, then off you go," Trace instructed.

"Tonight?"

"There's no time like the presence," Craven sat down on the sofa.

Rene rolled up his sleeve while Trace picked him with the needle. "There, all finished, now," he waved his hands at him, "off you go."

Rene made a face. "So how does one seduce a Voodoo priest--flowers, champagne, blood sacrifice?"

"You did it once, didn't you? You'll think of something," Trace told him, shoving him toward the door.

"Good thing I'm not hungry," Rene opened his jaws and displayed his fangs.

"Show off," Craven threw at him.

"Well, at least mine aren't on the verge of falling out." He smirked and left with a bang of the door.

* * * *

Craven reached up and pressed on his teeth. "Are they?" He looked at the doctor. "Are they falling out?"

Trace shook his head.

* * * *

Rene paused when he heard the sound of the truck coming up the road. He stood in the

distance, then floated up to sit on a branch in one of the trees.

A little guy got out, looking terrified. He held a clipboard in his hand and showed something to Moudoca.

Moudoca nodded, stood back, waved his hand at the man to open the back.

The man scampered round the truck, slid open the lock, then ran like hell to the front and practically flew inside of it. Several bodies literally tumbled out.

Rene counted, "One, two...ah...there's another, or part of another, three, four, five, six...and seven."

Corpses, some already in advanced stages of decay, were banging into each other, limbs hanging off bodies and then dropping off.

"Monstrous," Rene clicked his tongue.

The truck was idling, the driver anxious to get on his way. There were echoes, murmurs, "Blood, blood," the zombies groaned, already heading toward the front of the truck.

The driver screamed when several zombies crawled onto the hood, floundering like a bunch of faltering seals.

Glass shattered in the windshield as the zombies reached for the terrified driver.

Rene sighed. "Okay," he muttered as he jumped down from the tree. "This is too B movie, even for me." He was there within seconds, dragging the zombies off the bloodied driver, one by one, and

twisting their necks. "One, two, three...ah...there you are," he reached for another, "four, five...ah...you, get back here, that's six, and where is the seventh?" Rene walked around the truck.

The seventh was trying to get into the truck from the other side.

"No, no, no," Rene wagged a finger at him, "that's very sneaky." He reached out and pulled on his head. It snapped off and went rolling on the ground. "Yuck," he said, wiping his hands on his shirt.

The driver was hysterical and kind of frozen to the spot, but he'd live.

"If I were you," Rene told him, coming back around to the driver's side, "I'd get the fuck out of here. And tomorrow, I'd be combing the help wanted section of the daily newspaper."

He nodded a little too hard.

"Off you go now."

The truck rolled forward, trampling some of the bodies on the way.

Rene surveyed his handiwork. A few zombies lay motionless with bugged eyes, staring at nothing. Two others had been squashed by the truck and one had lost his head. They'd all be rising off the ground soon enough.

The slow clapping of hands now invaded his ears. Rene looked over.

Moudoca was applauding. "Very impressive, mon beau, Rene. Come give us a kiss."

"Wasn't sure if you'd approve." Rene smiled, moving toward the powerful priest. He pulled him hard against his chest and kissed him passionately, then released him.

Moudoca waved his hands in front of his face. "You do that well. Be still my heart. And what brings you here, Rene? You've been ignoring me for ages."

"I missed you." Rene smiled.

"Try again, handsome. Your charms are disarming, but I know you, remember?"

"In the biblical sense, if I recall."

"Um, once was not enough. You have the kind of cock a poor boy remembers." He licked his lips.

Rene laughed. "I would have never called you a poor boy."

"I want to show you something, but first I need to take care of the mess you made," he surveyed the scattered bodies.

"Take your time. I have all night."

He laughed deeply in his throat. "And what makes you think I want to spend my night with you, vampire? And we haven't even gotten around to discovering what you really want."

"Laissez le bon temp rouler, cher."

"Your bon temp I remember can get pretty messy," Moudoca raised his hands in the air.

"You take your chances."

"And I remember you bein' worth it, vampire." He looked back at him. "But I will expect to know

more about the reasons for gracing me with your presence."

"For sure," he said, watching as the corpses rose and were directed into the swamp.

An Alligator sitting quietly on the other side flopped into the water. Somewhere in the distance, others followed.

Moudoca smiled as he came back over to where Rene stood. "Good job done."

"Good for wildlife preservation. What did you want to show me?"

"I want to show you my latest creation. It's time to bring him up out of the water. The process is complete."

Rene followed him reluctantly to the edge of the swamp.

"This one will fetch a pretty price, son of a rich man. We might even want to play with him a little tonight before I send him off. Consider it a gift." He turned and smiled again at Rene. "Ready?"

"Ah...sure," Rene nodded, closing his eyes. *Ah, maudit merde.*

* * * *

"Whatever possessed Rene to bite you?" Trace demanded as they walked through the old French Quarter to Bourbon Street.

"I don't know."

"And then feed you on top of it?" Trace shook his head.

"He never did say, probably saved me."

"It interrupted the process...made you unique."

"Oh shit," Craven said suddenly, spotting a poster tacked to a telephone pole. He walked up to it and peered at it. "Doc, that's me."

Trace eyed the poster, too, then reached up and tore it down. "Your family is looking for you. Maybe you should contact them, let them know you're okay."

"Like this?"

"You don't look much different, a little grey maybe, nothing that a little makeup won't hide. Come on," he pointed straight ahead, "the club is there around the corner."

The sign on the door read *Gents Club*.

"I've never been to this one," Craven said, opening a wobbly door, which took them down a flight of stairs. "New code word for gay men," Craven sneered.

"Or men who like corpses, no offence," Trace said. "Just play it cool."

"How did you know?"

"This place has a rep for renting out boys. It's the only place I know where the pimps are."

The place was half-empty. Some old man played the accordion in the corner and a bartender was pouring himself a drink at the bar.

"Bonsoir," Trace walked over to him. "I'm looking for something very special tonight."

"Like?" he demanded gruffly.

"A beauty to fill my every need," Trace told him. "Money is no object."

"Leave your number, someone will call you."

"I have no time for that. I'll pay double," Trace said. "I want it here and now."

"Rester," he barked and disappeared into a back room.

"I don't like this," Craven said. "What do we do once we have the zombie?"

"We take it and leave it outside Moudoca's place, tie a note around its neck, saying we know his scam. That should put the panic into him for a start."

Craven smiled. "Wonder how Rene is doing."

* * * *

Rene was wringing his hands. Over and over, Moudoca gave the command to rise and nothing happened.

"This doesn't make sense. Where in the fuck is he?"

"Who?" Rene folded his arms across his chest.

"I told you, the son of a very rich man here in the Big Easy."

"Why is the son of a rich man at the bottom of the swamp?"

"To complete the process. I made him into a zombie. He will be worth..." He trailed off, watching the swamp. "I've got to go in and get him."

"Are you sure you want to do that?"

"Of course I'm sure. He's valuable."

"I'll wait here."

Moudoca didn't reply. He walked into the swamp and disappeared underneath in one fluid motion.

Rene had seen him do that before and emerge completely dry.

A little while later, the priest came back up, walking across the water to the dry ground. "He's not there."

"Ah, must be the crocs got him."

"The pets will not eat the zombies. I coat them with a special substance that makes them undetectable."

Pets? This guy had been living in the Bayou too long.

"Something went wrong," he rubbed his chin. "I will call him."

Rene tensed. "Call him?"

Moudoca walked into his shelter.

Rene followed, ducking a little when he came in the door.

"He's connected to me by blood. He will come when I call. Come, come to me. Rise from your grave and come." Moudoca started to chant and dance.

* * * *

"Craven?" Trace said suddenly. "Why are you standing on top of the bar? Get down from there."

"I don't know," Craven shook his head. "I had the sudden urge to climb on something. I feel... funny."

"Funny ha ha or funny strange?"

"Strange, funny. I have to..." he turned in the direction of the door and got down off the bar.

Trace held onto him. "Where are you going?"

"He's calling me."

"Who?"

"Him, the priest."

"Resist," Trace held on.

Craven grunted. "I'll try."

Just then a big guy with a beard came out of the back. "You want a boy?"

"Yes, please," Trace held Craven tighter. He was struggling.

"What's wrong with him?" the big man demanded.

"He's sick."

"Is it catching?"

"No. Where's my boy? How much?"

"It will cost you a grand."

"A grand?" Trace's mouth fell open.

"I'm giving you a bargain, take it or leave it?"

"You take checks?"

"No. Cash or get lost."

"I'll be back," Trace said and dragged Craven up the stairs.

"What happened?" Craven asked.

"I don't have that kind of money. We got to find out where they keep them. Use your zombie senses."

"I don't think I have any of those."

"Is he still calling?"

"No."

"Let's go around back in that alley. Maybe we can find them."

"And then what?"

"We release them."

"We can't do that. They'll kill everybody."

"Well, we'll kidnap them then, put them in my basement. That should piss off Moudoca."

Craven smiled. "Oh yeah."

* * * *

The priest went about smashing things for at least ten minutes or so. Rene stood aside, watching, running a hand through his hair. When Moudoca had calmed down, he narrowed his eyes and focussed on Rene.

"You have something to do with this?"

"You think?" He was damn grateful Craven hadn't showed up here, responding to the priest's compelling magic.

"It's a funny coincidence, you showing up here out of the blue and losing me best zombie. What is it you're doing here?"

He thought fast. "I want you to help me find Daisy."

"The one who made you? And why's that?"

"I want revenge."

"Rene, you're not the vengeful type. You're a Rene beau temps."

"I've changed. I can't find a cure and you won't help me, so I'm stuck as this fiend. She should be punished."

"And in return, if I locate your pretty sire?"

"Name your price." Rene smiled.

"For starters," he raked his gaze over him, "Daddy needs some comfort. Show me the sights."

* * * *

"Holy shit," Craven muttered, "look at them all. There must be at least thirty of them. Where are we going to put them? How do we get them out of here?"

"Shush," Trace said, "keep your voice down."

They had managed to break the lock on the door which led into the underground cellar. Below was a large handmade cage housing the zombies."

"They all look pretty fresh," the doctor said. "They're not dangerous and are easy to control. You stay here with them. I'm going to steal a bus from the bus depot down the street."

"Steal a bus?" Craven's eyes widened. "Wow, you're, ah...more than meets the eye, Doc."

"One does what one has to do. Look at all these dead guys. No wonder I don't have any patients."

"What do I do with them in the meantime?"

"Nothing. Just stay here, and if you hear someone coming, hide."

Craven listened as Trace's footsteps disappeared up the makeshift stairs. He heard the door close back down. He glanced at the zombies who looked back at him. They seemed docile enough. "You don't bite, do you?"

No answer.

"So, you guys like to do anything?"

Silence, just blinking eyes looking back, heads turning to the side, listening.

"Can you play chess? Ah, poker?" He paused. "Hey, I know you," he pointed to one of them. "I went to school with you. How in the hell are you? Oh, not good I suppose, stupid question." He sighed. "Guess, we'll just endure the uncomfortable silence, right?" Suddenly he heard a sound. "Shit," he whispered.

Two men were talking rapidly in French. They were coming down into the cellar.

Craven looked around and couldn't find a place to hide. He undid the latch on the cage and quickly slipped inside among the others. He placed a blank expression on his face and tilted his head to the side. He could feel the others pressing around him. He swallowed.

The men stopped in front of the cage. One chastised the other for leaving it unlocked. "Lucky they're too stupid to figure it out. They could have escaped," he bellowed. "Fou. Here," he reached in

and grabbed Craven's shirt, "this one will do. Come on, moron."

Craven allowed himself to be dragged forward. The big one picked him up, hoisted him over his shoulder and carried him up the ladder. Craven felt the fear mount.

"Where we taking him?" someone called out. It was the driver of a truck.

He grunted as the man threw him in the back and closed him in.

Someone rattled off an address and the truck bounded forward. Craven sat up. *Oh ah...Rene!*

* * * *

Moudoca had Rene's shirt undone. He'd spread it open and was suckling one of his nipples while his hand flirted with the zipper on his pants.

Rene? I'm in big trouble here. Help!

A voice in his head, a voice which sounded like that dumb zombie got louder and louder. *Merde, Craven. I'm just about to get blown here.*

I'm just about to be in worse trouble. Come and get me, you insensitive, blood sucking undead...son of--

That's what I get for putting my blood in your veins. Nag, nag, nag. I'm coming...but not in a good way.

Moudoca had his pants open now. "Such a big boy," he cooed. "If I cut it up, it would make me a nice mantelpiece."

He didn't much care for the sound of that. "I think," he said, easing away and doing up his pants, "you just put a damper on my, ah... enthusiasm."

"You leaving me now?"

"You need to show me you are going to make an effort to find Daisy, then the reward."

He sighed, backed up. "I'll work on it, but first I need your help to find my zombie boy, me prize."

"I'll go now, see if I can find him. How do I know him?"

"He's special. You'll know."

You're special all right, Beaumont, a special pain in my ass.

* * * *

"Here he is, special delivery," the driver said, opening the back door.

A big, obese man stood there, shirtless, rolls of fat hanging over his pants, thinning hair plastered to his head with sweat. "And he'll do whatever I say?"

"Programmed to please," the driver said, pulling him forward.

Craven stayed silent, making no indication he understood what was going on. This guy was gross. He didn't want him touching him.

"Sign here," the driver said. "You know that as soon as the morning comes, you have to call to

have us pick him up. After twenty-four hours, it can be dangerous."

"Yeah, come back at dawn. I should have plugged that fine little ass enough by then."

Rene!

Hold on. Play along. I'm coming.

Play along? Play along! He's going to plug my ass.

You're panicking. You're a slut. You'll like it.

Dance for him.

Very funny.

I thought it was.

The big man dragged him into the house and closed the door.

This could be the house of a serial killer.

You're already dead, remember?

"Strip off those clothes," the fat man growled, falling on the tattered old sofa. A baseball game was playing on the television.

Craven slowly reached for the button on his shirt.

"Faster than that. Damn it. These things are slow as black molasses. Can't keep it up for hours. Go on, strip."

The shirt was off.

"Nice. Now the pants." The fat man undid his own pants and fiddled with something hidden under the layers of fat.

Craven slowly pulled down his pants, then took Rene's advice. He pulled them back up and started to sway his hips.

"If I wanted a dancer, I'd go to the ballet."

Dancing is not working.

Relax, zombie, I'm here.

Someone pounded on the door.

"Go away," the fat man yelled.

The pounding came again.

"Dang it all," he muttered, getting up off the sofa. "You stay right here, stop your damn dancin' and get your britches off."

Craven breathed a sigh of relief when he heard Rene's deep voice.

"Excuse me, sir, I was wondering if you were in line for a new vacuum cleaner? These babies suck like no..."

Vacuum cleaners? Very cute.

Indulge me.

"I ain't interested in no vacuum, young fellow, so just move off my property before I get out my double barrel shotgun."

"Time for a sleep," Rene said.

Craven ran into the hallway, holding up his pants.

The big man was on the floor.

"Is he dead?"

"No, he isn't dead. And how in the hell did you get yourself here?"

"Long story," Craven did up his pants. "Now we have to help the doc. Let me get my shirt and we're out of here."

"Help him do what exactly?"

"Put a whole bunch of zombies on a bus."

"Why? Are they going on a field trip?"

"No, they're going to the Doc's basement."

Rene lifted an eyebrow. "This just gets better and better," he sneered.

"Where in hell have you been?" Trace demanded when he spotted Craven.

Rene was right behind him.

"And you're supposed to be with Moudoca, keeping him occupied while we steal the merchandise."

"Nice bus," Rene said, slapping the sides of it. It was purple and blue with graffiti all over the sides.

"I couldn't get a school bus. What's going on?"

"How 'bout we get the zombies first and you interrogate me later, cher?" Rene suggested.

"Fine. Anyway, we can use your help."

Rene threw up his hands. "So unappreciated."

Thanks for what you did, Craven mouthed.

"He was kind of cute," Rene teased.

Craven gave him the finger.

"Not nice," he clicked his tongue.

"Knock it off, guys, let's do this," Trace said.

One by one the zombies were brought up. Rene brought two up at a time, and Craven and Trace herded the others up the staircase. They filed onto the bus without protest.

Trace got behind the wheel and Craven sat in the front. Suddenly Craven cried out.

"What?" Rene demanded.

"Shit, he knows," Craven announced. "He's fit to be tied."

"Rene, handle him," Trace said.

"I have to go with Rene," Craven stood. "He knows where I am now. I'll lead him to all the rest."

"Okay, get off. I'll take care of these guys. They're not going to eat me, are they?" he looked at Rene.

"Not until breakfast time." Rene grinned.

"Nice. Go on." He shut the door of the bus and the bus roared off down Bourbon street.

Rene looked at Craven. "Well, looks like it's just you and me, kid. I've always dreamed I'd end it with a zombie. It's been a fantasy of mine."

"Rene, shut your hole, will you?"

Rene laughed.

"What's the plan?"

"We have a plan?"

"Come on, Rene. Oh shit. He's calling me."

Rene sighed. "Okay, look into my eyes. You have my blood, too. I do have power over you."

"I don't like this."

"It's either me or Moudoca. Take your pick."

"He's cuter."

"Ni...ces...but he'll feed you to the alligators."

"And you?"

"I'd say your chances were better."

"Okay, do it."

Rene looked into his eyes. "From now on, you will hear no other voice but mine. Do you understand?"

"I do."

"And you will do what I say even if it involves depraved sexual acts and..."

"Don't push it."

Rene howled with laughter. "It was worth a try. Let's go back to the bayou. And you stay out of sight, deal?"

He nodded and they headed back to the swamp.

* * * *

Rene and Craven stayed behind the tree and watched.

Moudoca march up and down, mumbling to himself. Another man stood nearby. "I'm out a lot of money, priest," he said, "I want it back."

"Keep your trap shut or I'll turn you into a toad. I'll get your money, don't worry. As soon as I find out who's behind this, now get lost."

The man walked off toward his vehicle and drove away.

Rene looked at Craven. "Bury yourself underground and I'll find you at dawn."

"I don't like that plan."

"I don't care if you like it, or not. Do it," Rene said and walked out into the clear. "I'm back, miss me," he cried out to Moudoca.

"You," the priest accused, "you're behind this."

"Behind what?"

"Someone took my zombies."

"Who would do such a thing? And what would I want with your zombies?"

"I don't know. I sense Craven. You know where he is."

"I don't even know him. We don't move in the same circles, cher. Now, where were we?"

Moudoca seemed to calm down a little. He smiled. "I have someone who'd like to see you."

"See me?" Rene paused. Suddenly out of the shelter, a woman appeared. "Oh shit," he said. "Daisy? How are you?"

"You've been looking for me?"

"Ah, just wondering how...well...now that I've seen you, guess we should..."

Daisy came closer. She put her hands on Rene's chest. "Um, beautiful, isn't he? Should we share him tonight, priest, and then torture the information out of him?"

Rene shook his head. "I know nothing."

"We'll see," she said, bright red nails moving down his torso to his belt, "we'll see."

You in a bit of trouble there, Rene?

It seems. Go and bury yourself like I told you.

I better help you before you become a sandwich cookie. What do I do?

Well, if you insist, reveal yourself and run. I'll catch up.

Here it goes. "Hey," Craven yelled, coming out into the open, "Moudoca, want your zombies? You'll have to catch me first."

Moudoca screamed and went running after Craven.

Daisy looked at him. "I've missed you."

"Pity," he said. "I'd love to chat, but..." He began to run. If Moudoca got a hold of Craven...it was going to be a mess.

Okay, running through the Louisiana Bayou with the Voodoo priest chasing a zombie and a vampire chasing him was not giving him a lot of optimism for the future. *Where in hell are you exactly, zombie boy?*

Hiding up in the tree.

What tree? He looked up and there was Daisy, flying right over him. "Shiiittt!" He ducked off to the side and then felt a hand reach down and yank him up by the collar. He found himself in the tree next to Craven.

"Hey," Craven said, grinning.

"Hey? How did you do that?"

"I don't know. I got strength."

"Thanks."

"Don't thank me yet. So, is your maker going to kill you...or...disable you?"

"She wants me back. I want her dead. Not the makings of a good relationship."

"So, what do we do? Can either one of them be killed?"

"Not easily."

"Then we're doomed."

"Not necessarily. I got an idea, but we have to go back to Moudoca's shelter."

"Why?"

"I need stuff. Come on, get on my back. It's faster that way."

"Are you serious?"

"Come on, do it," he urged.

Craven crawled onto Rene's back and Rene flew through the air back to the shelter.

Suddenly Daisy and Moudoca were following again.

Rene hit the ground with a thud, knocking Craven off his back. He raced into the shelter and began to mix some herbs, then he chanted something.

"What in the...this better work!"

Rene smiled. He came out of the shelter and listened. Suddenly there were some noises, struggling, howling.

"What in the..." Craven demanded. "Oh my Lord," he exclaimed, pointing to the sky, "Daisy and Moudoca are fighting. What's going on? What did you do?"

"Daisy thinks he's me and Moudoca thinks Daisy is you."

"She doesn't look like me."

"She does to the priest. Anyway, you can hang around to find out who wins if you want to, but I'm out of here."

"Wait, me, too," Craven said, hurrying along beside Rene. "We need to get back to Trace."

"If he's hasn't become someone's breakfast by now."

"What are we going to do with all those zombies?" Craven asked.

"Open a circus?"

"You are not a comedian, so stop trying so hard."

Rene sighed. "Okay, okay."

"What happens when the spell wears off?"

"I plan to be far away."

"Me, too," Craven looked down at his feet.

"Different place or..."

"Are you proposing?"

Craven hit him in the arm, "No. And take that spell off, okay? I'm not going to say I'm your slut anymore."

"Never put one on. And you said you were my slut before, remember?"

"Yeah, but--"

"You're are a slut, that's all, hot for my body."

"You are so full of yourself. I'm not going to wake up in the night and have a sudden urge to suck your cock, am I, because you put some sort of a--"

"Maybe." He grinned. "But that will be all you, buddy."

* * * *

Trace was sleeping on the sofa when they walked in. There were all kinds of noises coming from the basement below. "That can't be good," Craven muttered, glancing at the floor.

"What I want to know is how he can sleep through all that. Trace?" he touched his shoulder. "I'd wake up if I were you. The natives are restless, either that or you got rats, big ones."

"Rene," he said sleepily, "Craven? Are you guys okay?"

"For now," Rene said, "but I think my Bayou days are over."

Trace sat up. "You got to help me with the zombies," he told Rene.

Rene sighed. "Okay, I'll go down and--"

"No," Craven said, looking at the doctor, "maybe you can help them. Develop something which would stop the decay and..."

Trace looked thoughtful. "I can try. I'd need an assistant." He looked at Craven.

Craven shook his head. "I got to take care of Rene. He's useless when I'm not around."

Rene raised an eyebrow.

"If I increased the amount of X for the serum of Y, I think..." Trace was muttering as he walked off to his lab.

"Craven, do you think it's realistic for Trace to keep all those zombies in his basement?"

"It will give him something to do. What about your treatments?"

He shrugged. "They weren't really working."

Craven nodded. "How many bedrooms are there in this place?"

Rene smiled. "Four."

"Ever slept in any of them?"

"No. There were conditions."

"Ah. I think that suggestion you gave me worked. I feel as if I'm really under your power now." He looked at him.

"Is that so?" Rene grinned.

"Um. Try it to make sure."

Rene walked down the hallway and opened the door to one of the bedrooms. "Take off all your clothes."

Craven walked in and closed the door. He began to undress.

Rene went to lie on the bed.

"Rene," Craven appeared to protest. "This isn't right. I am standing here naked."

"Pinch your nipples slowly and stroke your cock."

Craven hid a smile. "I think you're abusing your powers." Craven rubbed his hands over himself, pinched his nipples and then began to stroke his own cock.

"Come over here and give me a kiss."

Craven walked over, leaned down and kissed his mouth. His hands reached for the buttons on Rene's shirt.

"Hey, I didn't order that," he laughed.

"I am programmed to get you naked," he said.
"In fact, I have no control over my urge."

Rene was laughing as Craven crawled onto the bed and straddled him, undoing the rest of his shirt. "What should I do now?" he asked.

"Make love to me," he whispered.

"Is this an order or a request?" Craven enquired.

"Um, a request, a plea?"

Craven laughed. "Well, since you put it that way." Again, he leaned down to kiss his mouth, then moved his lips to his throat, his chest. Sliding down, he undid Rene's pants and pulled them down over his hips. "You have a beautiful--"

"I know, suck it," he urged.

Craven grinned and took the head into his mouth. It tasted delicious.

"Don't get any ideas about making a meal out of it."

Stop reading my mind. That's not what I mean. But I am kind of hungry.

"Forget it."

Craven continued to suck and lick Rene's big cock. When Rene was about to come, he removed his mouth and lifted his hips so that he could take him inside of him.

Rene looked wary.

"What? You want to fuck me, don't you?"

"Yeah but--"

"I'm fine." He grinned, bearing down on him.
"It's not the first time."

"Ooooh...yeah...you're fine," he grunted as Craven began to move up and down on his shaft.

After a few minutes, they found a good pace and Rene matched Craven, hump for hump. They came together with a big shout and Craven hankered down in Rene's arms.

"I could get used to this zombie stuff."

"You're a zombie vampire."

He looked at him. "I belong to you."

"Don't go crazy."

"I do," he whispered. "I think I might love you. Zombies love, don't they?"

"I have no idea."

"I think I may need some brains."

"Its okay, sweetie, you're not as dumb as you think."

"To eat, stupid," he punched him.

Rene looked at him. "Don't look at me. I need mine."

"No, animal brains. Can't you buy them at a butcher shop?"

"You're asking me? I don't know."

"I love you."

Rene met his gaze. "You do, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"Zombies have shitty taste."

Craven hugged him tight. "No, we don't. Not this one anyone. You're beautiful. Do you think I look grey? Doc says I need makeup."

"You're okay."

"Gee thanks. Not beautiful?"

"That, too." Rene kissed his mouth. "Before we leave, we should make sure Trace doesn't get in over his head with those things in the basement."

"I think he can handle it."

"Um, I don't know." Rene sat up. "Is it dark enough in here?"

"Close the blinds. Tired?"

"Yeah. Time to sleep." Rene got up and closed the blinds and then got back into the bed. He pulled him close again.

"Rene?"

"Um?"

"You will take me with you, won't you?"

"What do you think?"

"I think you will."

"Go to sleep, zombie boy."

Craven settled his head down on Rene's chest and sighed with contentment. Could it be that suddenly he was happier than he'd even been?"

* * * *

That evening, Rene and Craven left the room, arm in arm. As they walked into the living room, Trace was sitting there and across from him at the table, was a zombie. His face was black, so were his fingers, not at all attractive, but he was sitting up straight.

"Say good evening," Trace told the zombie.

It nodded. "Good evening."

Rene looked at Craven.

"Look what it can do," Trace announced with excitement. "Drink your tea."

The zombie picked up the teacup and put it to its mouth. The tea dribbled out the side.

"We haven't got it down completely yet," Trace said apologetically.

Craven looked at Rene. *He's losing it.*

"Ah, Trace," Rene said gently. "I don't think..."

"Listen, Rene, it's good. This one is smarter than most."

"That's what I was afraid of," Rene said. "Trace, they can turn on you."

"No, I injected them all with something to keep them calm. And I fed them all animal brains earlier."

"Animal brains?" Craven piped up.

Trace nodded.

"Any of those left?"

"Tons, in the kitchen," Trace said.

Craven made a beeline for the kitchen.

Rene made a face.

"I've prepared some serum, should keep you going for awhile," Trace said, talking gently to the zombie, who was looking right at Rene.

"Handsome," it said, smiling, and one of its teeth fell into its teacup.

"Did you hear that, Rene?" Trace exclaimed.

"Yeah, he's finds me handsome. Lucky me. What is it with me and zombies anyway?"

"You're a zombie magnet," Craven said suddenly from behind him.

"Are you full of brains now?" he muttered.

"Excellent," he smacked his lips.

Rene shuddered.

"Come on, you drink blood for a living."

"Not anymore," Trace spoke up, "he's been a real good boy."

"Thanks," Rene said. *As long as he thought so.*

"So, where you guys going?" he asked, wiping the dribble off the zombie's mouth.

"Someplace warm?" Craven suggested.

"Not a good idea for a corpse," Rene said.

"Stop that," Craven said, cuffing him across the head.

"Ouch." Rene laughed. "Call your family before we leave."

"And tell them what?"

"That you're dead, but fine."

Craven rolled his eyes.

"Brains," the zombie muttered. He looked at Rene and reached out his arm. "Pretty brain."

"I'm out of here." Rene looked at Craven. "Are you ready?"

Craven nodded. He walked over and hugged Trace. "Thanks. I hope it will be a long time before that priest considers starting up his business again."

"Me, too. I'll keep watch," Trace said. He looked at Rene. "I'll miss you. We never did get to do the nasty."

Rene smiled. "Looks like you got your hands full for now."

Trace nodded and hugged Rene. "Love you."

"You, too," he said and looked at the zombie.

"Ah, bye there, whatever your name is."

"Pretty brain." It smiled with its black teeth.

"Good luck," Rene made a face and he and Craven left the house.

They walked through the French quarter, hand in hand, oblivious to who saw them.

Everywhere Craven found his poster, he ripped it down. Finally, he stopped at a phone booth. He dialled his house. He got the answering machine. "Hello? I hope everyone is well. It's Craven. I'm fine. Actually, I'm a lot better than before. And I'm in love. We're leaving today. Sorry I missed you." He hung up. "How was that?" he asked Rene.

"Not exactly poetry, but it did the trick."

"Are we walking wherever we're heading?"

"Naw. Let's buy a car."

"You got money?"

"Sure. We have to be able to get your...ah... brains, don't we?"

Craven laughed. "Some people consider them to be a delicacy."

"Right. Zombies and alley cats."

"Funny."

"Really?" he was surprised.

"Really, but don't give up your day job."

"I don't have a day job."

"Oh yeah, that's right. Can I choose the car?"

Rene looked at him. "Why not?"

They stopped by the first late night car dealership they found. Craven chose a brand new dark blue Corvette and insisted on driving.

Ten miles out of the city, Rene told him to pull over.

"What?"

"You're driving all over the road. I don't think zombies are made to drive."

"My coordination seems to be off," Craven shrugged and changed places with Rene. "So," he asked him after they started off again, Rene at the wheel, "do you think zombies can vote?"

Rene stared at him.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know how to answer that. I'm not even sure you asked me such a thing? Did you just ask me if zombies could vote?"

"Yeah. I thought I'd run for office."

Rene's eyes widened.

"We should go to California. I can sleep in a freezer or something."

"You won't be sleeping with me in a freezer."

"Why not? You can do cold."

"I don't want to do cold."

"We'll work it out. It's time to get some rights for the undead. Maybe we can find others. You can be a spokesperson. You'd be good in public."

"No thanks. Are you on a mission?"

"I need a project since I'm going to be around for awhile. Got nothing else to do. There's only so many ways you can cook brains."

"Thought you ate them raw?"

"I did eat them raw, but they gave me indigestion."

"If you wanted a mission, why didn't you just stay and help Trace civilize your confreres?"

"Damn it, you're right, turn around."

"Huh? I was kidding."

"You're brilliant." He grabbed him and kissed him. "That's it! Turn around!"

"I am not going back there. I'll end up as alligator food in the bottom of the bayou and those zombies scare the crap out of me, thinking I have cute brains and all."

"You do have cute brains, among other things. And it's a mission, Rene, to save those zombies."

"You mean like saving stray kittens?"

"Stop it," he hit him in the arm, "turn around."

"And you're going to deal with Moudoca when we get there?"

"He won't dare come after us. We showed him what we were made of."

Rene turned around and began driving back toward New Orleans, regretting every mile. "We tricked him with a cheap magic spell, Craven, that's not showing him anything. Right about now, he's pissed and making little dolls in our image."

"Don't be so negative."

"I'm not negative. I'm not really looking forward to working with a bunch of--"

"I'm one of those, so watch it. And you'll redeem yourself."

"I don't want to redeem myself."

"Rene! You do."

"No," he muttered, "I really don't." He sighed.
Either I'm in love or I've lost my mind.

Craven grinned at him as they pulled up in front of Trace's house. He kissed him hard on the mouth. "You're in love," he said.

Rene followed him slowly into the house, nodding. That's what he figured, and that was worse than losing his mind.

Trace looked up from where he sat at the table when Rene and Craven walked in. "I knew you'd come back." There were three zombies sitting around the table now, plates of cookies in front of them. One zombie was gnawing on a cookie as if it was a piece of board. "Look, guys, we're having a tea party."

"That's super," Craven said. "Isn't it, Rene?"

"Ah, maudit merde," Rene groaned under his breath.

SALTING ZOMBIES

BY

STEPHAN J. HECHT

CHAPTER ONE

There is a time and a place to get an erection and this is definitely not it.

Avery stretched his body as far as possible so he could slap the blood pressure cuff around his patient's arm. The task had seemed easy enough when he first started--get a simple set of vitals and get out. That was before he had to add in the fact that medical orders dictated he use the left arm and that side of the patient's bed just happened to be wedged against the wall.

To add to the whole *erection issue*, his patient had to be the hottest piece of man meat in God's creation. Not just good looking, not just *hawt*, but utter perfection. With short, dark hair that curled just a bit at the nape of his neck to deep, chocolate brown eyes that one could get lost in and a body that would put a model to shame.

Yes, Christian Sheppard was the perfect man. There was a problem. Just one, but that single issue made all the difference in the world.

He was a zombie.

Well, not technically. He wasn't a flesh-eating, creature with joneses for brains. Nor did he lumber around like a Lurch with a stick up his rump. He didn't have rotten skin hanging down or dark rimmed eyes.

However, Christian had died and been brought back from the grave.

Avery continued to stretch over Christian so he could get the damn blood pressure and retreat to his office. All the while, he fought to keep his back bowed up so his hard cock didn't brush against Christian and give him away.

"Here, does this help?" Christian asked softly as he lifted his arm to the side.

Avery started to thank him before he remembered rules forbade him to talk to the zombies, or *the reanimated* as the scientists at BOKOR kept insisting on calling them. He clamped his lips together as he fought hard not to breathe in deep. Christian had a warm, sensual smell that never failed to turn Avery on. Given the current condition he was already in, he didn't need any added stimuli.

When he got the cuff in place, he almost did a happy jig. He retreated to his machine so he could push the button to inflate the cuff. While he waited, he started to make notations in the chart.

"It would make it a lot easier for you if they moved my bed into the middle of the room," Christian said.

Avery didn't answer, good little employee that he was pretending to be, but he did cast a knowing look at the heavy shackles mounted to the wall by Christian's bed.

"Oh, come on. You guys have never had to use those on me. I'm not like the *Others*."

At the mention of *Others*, Avery had to work hard to repress a shudder of fear and revulsion. They had over a hundred of *the reanimated* in the building and they had not reacted well to being

brought back. Now, they *did* fit the stereotypical image of zombie, minus the decaying flesh. They even had the cannibalistic urges. Something one of the guards learned the hard way. Ever since then, the manacles had become standard operating procedure.

"Is that why they've been taking so much blood lately?" Christian shot a jaded look at the medical cart that held all of Avery's syringes. "They can't figure it out, can they?" Christian persisted with his one-side conversation. "Why I'm so different than the *Others*."

The machine beeped, the numbers flashing the blood pressure readout. Avery wrote it down on the chart before he walked over to the bed to pull off the cuff. That required him to lean over Christian again, and the man wasn't kind enough to lift his arm to help this time.

"Have I ever told you how nice you look in scrubs?" Christian whispered in his ear.

Avery sucked in a breath, shocked from both the words and the sensation of Christian's breath skating over his neck. Even though he should have immediately stepped back and left the room, Avery froze in place as desire thrummed in his body.

"It shows off every asset of your sweet body. And I mean *every*. Don't think I haven't noticed how hard your cock gets whenever you come in here," Christian continued to whisper, no doubt because of the security cameras in the room. "Four months I've had to watch that. Four months of pure torture because I want you just as much." Christian's tongue darted out briefly to lick the shell of Avery's ear.

Avery had to bite his bottom lip to hold back the moan of approval. This was so wrong and worst of all, if his bosses found out, it could very well get him and Christian killed. If talking was frowned upon, he could only imagine what the reaction would be if they became physical. Despite that worry, Avery still could not bring himself to move away.

"Do you have any idea how horny you make me?" Again, Christian's tongue flicked out, this time to caress the skin above Avery's jugular.

"No," Avery whispered, the arousal coursing through his body, making him momentarily forget the no-talking rule.

"I had to jack off in the shower last night, just so I could get some sleep. Even though I know the cameras are always on me and they're watching, I

still took my dick out and stroked off as I thought about you."

A soft whimper escaped Avery's lips at the image of Christian--wet, slick and slack-jawed with pleasure. How beautiful his long cock would look as it slid in his tight fist.

"Don't worry though, I made sure not to scream your name when I came. I don't want them to stop you from coming in to evaluate me. It's the only thing that keeps me sane. That makes the endless isolation tolerable. So long as I know you'll be coming in at least once a day, I can hang on."

Avery clawed at the blood pressure cuff, pulling it free so he could move back. Retreating a couple of steps, he shot a nervous glance at the camera as he fought to regain his breath.

"Why are you here, Avery?" Christian asked, his voice soft, tinged with sorrow. "You're nothing like the rest of the medical staff."

Avery just gave a curt shake of his head. Even if he was free to share how he'd ended up working in Hell's Hospital, he could never tell Christian. That piece of information was something he held close to his chest. Only he and his contacts knew it and he'd die to keep it that way.

Off in the distance, a loud scream ripped through the air. It was a common sound in the facility and Avery had long grown accustomed to them. However, this one bothered him because it seemed edged with more anger and pain than usual.

"Sounds like one of my buddies is having a bad day," Christian quipped, one corner of his mouth kicking up into a lazy smile.

Avery let out a soft half-chuckle before he caught himself. *Damn it! If I keep this up, I'll get the worst kind of attention from the bosses. The kind that involves whips and probes in all the wrong places. I need to focus and calm down before they realize something is wrong.*

He gave himself an internal bitch slap and grabbed the stuff he needed to draw blood. As he applied the tourniquet and swabbed the crook of Christian's elbow, Avery was dismayed to see how much his own hands were trembling.

"Careful there, skippy," Christian muttered as he watched the shaky needle approaching his skin.

Not that Avery blamed the man for his fear. The needle was bouncing around so much it looked like a Geiger Counter. Avery took a deep

calming breath and willed his hand still. It helped--a little.

It was thanks to years of experience as a medic that Avery was able to hit the vein on his first attempt. As he filled several vials with blood, he kept his gaze directed on his work so he didn't have to meet Christian's intense stare.

"Why do I get the feeling that you're just as much of a prisoner as I am?"

Avery held his breath, amazed at how close to the truth Christian was. "You don't know anything about me," he whispered, trying his best not to move his lips as he spoke.

"I know that you're nothing like the rest of the sadistic bastards around here. I could tell that the first day you came here." Christian kept his voice low, too.

Avery gave just a small shake of his head.

"I saw the way you acted around the other guys in the experiment. Even as they slobbered, screamed and ripped at their own flesh, you never looked at them as if they were animals. You've always treated them--us, like we're human. After all this time, you have no idea what a gift that is."

"You need to be quiet before you get us in trouble," Avery pleaded as he looked up from under his lashes at the camera. His hands started to shake again, but this time it was due to ball-numbing fear. A second wail of agony rang through the building, emphasizing his terror.

"*Us in trouble?*" Christian echoed with a raised brow. "See? I knew you were in the same fucked-up, no-win situation as me."

"No," Avery rasped desperately. "I'm just doing my job, nothing more."

"Wow, you really are a shitty liar."

Christian could not have been more wrong. In the past few months, Avery had learned to lie better than anyone because his life had depended on it. Taking the needle out, Avery grabbed a cotton ball and held it firmly in place to stop the bleeding.

Christian reached out to take over pressure, their fingers brushing together.

Avery gasped as the touch sent a warm fissure of pleasure up his arm. If he hadn't already been hard, his cock sure as hell would have stood up and taken attention right then. He lifted his head

and found Christian had dipped his head so their lips were just mere inches apart.

"You smell so good," Christian observed tenderly.

"Not good enough to eat, I hope," Avery blurted, thinking back to the autopsy photos of the guard.

"Yes, but in a good way. You'd enjoy every second of it, I promise."

Christian gave a grin so wicked it sent a shiver of delight down Avery's spine.

A third scream ripped through the air, this one hard with anger. Christian's head jerked up as his warm eyes narrowed. "They seem even more restless than usual."

"Which means I should get back. They'll need me." Avery hastily gathered up his supplies and ran out before he said more things he'd be made to regret.

* * * *

Christian had to fight back a smile as Avery scurried out of the room so fast, his sneakers almost left behind streaks on the shiny white tile. He watched through the small window in the door as Avery turned around to look back, his bright blue eyes marred with confusion and perhaps a bit of fear, too.

Avery and his adorable ass were quickly becoming to be all Christian thought about. The strange thing was, Avery was nothing like the men Christian went for. Usually, he liked them big, dark-haired and muscular. Avery could not have been any more different. With light blond hair that was slightly spiked in the front to his small build and gentle manner, he looked like he should be fronting a boy band instead of taking care of a bunch of psychotic killers.

Somewhere in the building, one of his fellow residents continued to have a fit. The screaming was now punctuated with loud thumps. Christian got up so he could press his face to the small window that overlooked the corridor. Like the rest of the facility, his room and the long hall were all white, from the walls to the ceilings and then the floor. They even kept him in white cotton pants and a matching t-shirt.

The only splash of color was the dark blue scrubs Avery wore. The doctors and other medical

professionals wore white lab jackets. It had gotten to the point that color had the power to make him nauseous. If he ever managed to get out this little piece of Hades, he would never allow that color, that horrible white around him again.

How he'd actually ended up here was still a damn mystery. The last thing he'd remembered from his outside life was that he'd been driving in his Dodge Ram 50 truck. He'd been listening to David Bowie with the window cranked down so the night air could come in and he'd been in a great mood. He'd just finished working a long shift on base and he'd been looking forward to having a couple days off. Then everything was a blank after that. The next thing he knew, he'd woke up in the facility. All he'd been able to learn about the place was they called it BOKOR and they ran experiments that would make an Inquisitor shudder.

They'd told him he'd died. That he'd been in some horrible car crash and the paramedics hadn't been able to save him. Whenever Christian had pushed the doctors for more details, they'd refused to give them up--how he'd come to be in this place, with all his limbs and unbroken body. What their plans for him were. Most of all, they refused to tell him how he'd come back to life.

By his best guess, he'd say he'd been here six months. Something about the way the doctors and staff talked though, led Christian to believe a big chunk of time was missing between him coming to BOKOR and his death. Not only were the hairstyles and shoes all different from what he'd remembered, but also some of the slang and wording didn't match either.

He watched as two of the guards ran down the hall, toward the direction the thumps had been coming from. Their faces were twisted with fear and they held their guns so tight that, even at a distance, he could see their knuckles were white. *That's strange.* In all the time he'd been here, he'd never seen them act that skittish. Not even when one of the subjects had attacked and killed that man.

A scream filled the air.

The low guttural sound let him know it was from one of the subjects and not the men. Another yell joined it, quickly followed by two more. The voices seemed to join in some freakish, horror movie harmony that made the hairs on the back of his arm stand on end.

Something was seriously fucked up. More loud bangs and thuds. Some of them so loud, the walls trembled. Christian flattened his palms against the

door as he strained closer to the window, trying hard to get a better view so he could garner a clue as to what might be going on.

A burst of semi-automatic gunfire made him jump in shock. It was followed by a scream that was definitely from one of the guards. High-pitched and with a touch of sobbing, it made Christian feel sorry for the poor bastard. Although he'd wasn't a fan of the guards, he never wanted anything bad to happen to them, and from the sounds of it, that's just what happened.

The automatic lock on his door clicked open and Christian's confusion grew. Unless someone was standing directly in front of his room, punching the code into that panel, the only way his door could be unlocked would be if someone did it from the control tower.

A second round of gunfire clattered through the air. A louder scream. It wasn't until he saw a bright, crimson spray of blood paint the hall that he truly realized what'd happened.

The Others! They'd somehow managed to escape and now they were taking over the facility. Fear made a cold sweat break out over his body. All of the subjects, him included, had super strength and could move faster than any normal

man could run. Even with their guns, there would be no way the guards could stop them.

Fear gave way to panic as he realized Avery was still out there. Sweet, innocent Avery who didn't seem capable of hurting anyone, let alone defending himself against one of the *Others*.

Not even thinking twice or pausing to consider the danger or risk to himself, Christian opened the door and ran out to find the man. He only hoped to get to him before the *Others* did.

Chapter Two

Avery walked into the small break room so he could get some caffeine and recoup from the intense exchange he'd just shared with Christian. As he poured some coffee into his mug, he wondered how long it would take his superiors to call him in to reprimand him for talking to the man.

Damn, he'd rather go in and face one of the zombies than deal with his bosses. Brothers, who were more dedicated to science than humanity, they were doctors in only the loosest sense. Not only did they refuse to follow the Hippocratic

Oath, he suspected they kept a copy just so they could piss on it.

So cruel, heartless and sadistic they would make Ted Bundy or Ed Gein say, *You guys may be taking things a tad too far.*

He reached for a stirrer and nearly jumped out of his skin as the alarm went off. He paused, waiting for the usual calming female voice to come over the PA and reassure that *this was just a drill*. Only the voice never came.

The lights flickered a few times, then went out completely and plunged the room into darkness.

His heart skipped a beat, then another.

The backup lights flickered on and a weak glow was cast over everything, which just made things look even spookier.

One of the guards came tearing down the hallway, his steps punctuated by sharp cries of terror. "Please, no! I don't want to die like this."

A blur shot down the hall, tackling the man and taking him down. By the time Avery realized it was one of the zombies, a bright red geyser of blood shot out of the man's neck. It pumped once, twice, before it settled to a low trickle.

The coffee slipped from Avery's hand, the cup shattering as hot liquid splashed over his shoes and pants. His breath seized in his throat as he realized the loud sound of breaking ceramic was sure to bring at least one zombie his way.

He tried to run, but his feet remained rooted in place. Instantly, he became just like all those too-stupid-to-live chicks from the slasher flicks that die because they can't make their legs move.

Run! Run! Run! he screamed inside his head, but his white Converse-shoed feet refused to obey. He just stood there, like some damn deer in the scope of a hunter's rifle. His chest heaved as he sucked in hard breaths.

Outside, he could hear sickening sucking sounds as the zombie feasted on the corpse. His stomach rolled at the sound even as the coppery tang of fresh blood assaulted his nose.

A hand shot from behind and clamped over Avery's mouth. He yelled in surprise, the sound muffled as he started to struggle. At the same time, an arm reached around his waist to hold him in place. *Fuck! One of the zombies. Great, what a way to go--death by snack attack.*

"Be quiet and settle down. It's me," Christian's rich voice ordered.

Avery released a pent up breath of relief once he realized he wasn't on the menu. At least not yet. He sagged against Christian, taking some comfort in the sensation of the man's chest pressed against his back.

"If I move my hand, are you going to be okay?" Christian asked.

Avery nodded. The zombie moved his palm away, but still kept the arm around his waist in place. "What's going on?" Avery whispered, still vividly aware of the zombie in the hall.

"The *Others* got out and are running around killing everything on two legs," Christian explained in a low voice.

Even under all the fear and panic, it wasn't lost on Avery that they were once again reduced to whispering. "How in the hell did they get out of their rooms? Those things are more secure than Fort Knox. Not even *MacGyver* could have figured a way out."

"Who?"

It took Avery a second to realize Christian's confusion came from the fact that TV show had aired after his death. "Sorry, he's nobody you'd know," Avery explained, knowing this wasn't the

time to let Christian know that he'd missed over twenty-five years on the outside world.

"We need to get out of here," Christian said as his arm slid away from Avery's waist.

"The procedure is to lock the door and wait for the building to be cleared," Avery recited from the handbook he'd been forced to memorize as a trainee.

"Hate to break it too you, but there is nobody left to come to the rescue."

"BOKOR has military backing so this place is always crawling with soldiers," Avery argued, even as dread built inside.

"You don't get it. Right now, there are over a hundred *Others* free and they have a major need for revenge. They're meaner, quicker, and stronger than any of the guards, too. If we want to have any chance of living, we're going to have to get out on our own."

Avery turned so they could face each other. Christian looked scared, but he also looked determined and a little fierce, too. Although the dangerous glint in the man's eyes should have terrified Avery, it brought him a measure of comfort. He could do this. So long as he had

Christian at his back, they had a chance at getting out of this hellhole with their asses intact. "Okay, I'm willing to try."

"I knew you wouldn't let me down." Christian smiled, making the most delicious tingle go through Avery.

"If we go down this hall a ways, that's where the kitchens are. I know of a back door we can escape through. They use it for deliveries."

"How far away is it?" Christian carefully peeked out the open door, his head turning left, then right as he scanned the hall.

Avery noticed the zombie had finished eating the dead guard and was no longer around. "It's pretty close." He tried not to shudder when Christian reached out and snagged the dead guard's rifle. The thing was shiny from the spattered blood covering it. Not that he was squeamish or anything. He was a medic after all. Just the thought of stripping a murder victim of his weapon disturbed Avery.

"Come here," Christian ordered in a way that let Avery know he was used to his orders being obeyed. Or at least he had been before he'd died.

Avery found himself complying, his feet almost getting tangled up in his haste to get to the man. As soon as he was within arm's reach, Christian reached out and cupped Avery's chin.

"There is one thing we need to do before we make a break for it," Christian declared, his gaze warmer than ever.

"There is?" Avery found himself locked into that gaze, his heart fluttering wildly in his chest.

"Yes, if I do die, I want to make sure I get at least this." Leaning forward, Christian pressed his lips to Avery's mouth.

At first, Avery tensed, his body stiff. This had been the last thing he'd expected. Then Christian's tongue darted out to lick and tease. Avery moaned, melting into the man's embrace. All too soon, Christian pulled back, leaving Avery feeling distraught and hungry for more. He let out a cry of disappointment that brought a smile to Christian's face.

"Don't worry, we can finish this later, once we're safe and don't have to worry about an *Other* attacking us."

"I'd like that," Avery confessed. "I mean the kissing, not the zombie attacks."

* * * *

Even though he was trying hard to hide it, Christian could tell Avery was terrified. Not only was he breathing fast, but his eyes had this glazed oh-shit thing going on. That still didn't stop him from issuing some orders of his own though.

"Once we do get out, I have a car stashed a block down. If I don't make it, I want you to go to it and use the cell phone under the seat to call for help."

"I won't know how to use one of those phones," Christian confessed, still dismayed at the thought of him having to go on if Avery were taken down.

"Just open it, push one and then talk. The guy on the other end will know what to do. Just make sure you tell him I sent you." Avery paused, his gaze intent. "Do you understand? You have to make sure you use my name and let him know we were together."

Christian paused, seeing a whole new side to the normally docile man. "Why do I get the feeling you're not just a medic?"

Avery smiled, a wicked glint coming to his blue eyes. It made him look so damn sexy that it took all Christian had not to grab the man and throw him on the table so he could have his way with him, attacking *Others* or not.

"Let's get the hell out of here," Avery said, his brave words at odds with the terrified expression on his face.

Christian nodded, but as soon as they got away and to some place quiet, he had some questions for his hot medic. They left the break room and crept down the hall. Where the white had once been overpowering, in the dim light of the backup lights, it appeared nearly gray.

An *Other* jumped out from a doorway and charged. Dressed in the same white outfit as all non-humans, the blond-haired man's wild eyes almost looked black because the pupils were so blown. Blood splattered his face and mouth, some of it dripping down his shirt as he raised gore-covered fingers to attack.

Years of military training kicking in, Christian didn't hesitate as he raised the gun and fired. It was a little different from the one he used to carry, but he managed.

The *Other* screamed as it went down, its hands digging at its own ashen flesh. A huge bullet hole took up a good portion of the creature's chest, its own blood mingling in with the gore that had already covered him.

"Damn, they don't die easy," Christian observed as he stared down at what had once been a sane man.

The *Other* rolled around, still alive, despite the fact it had a man-hole sized wound in its chest. Then things went to a whole new level of freak when it stopped moving long enough to let out a cackling laugh.

"Gross," Avery breathed, right before he brought his foot back to kick the thing in the head. It still didn't kill it, but it did shut it up. Turning back to Christian, he said, "Next time, shoot them in the head. That's the only way to kill them."

Christian opened his mouth to ask how Avery knew that before he decided it probably was best not to discuss that topic when they were running for their lives. Clamping his mouth closed, he just settled for a nod.

Even though he had never been to the kitchens, he still took the lead, following Avery's directions. A strong need to protect the other man drove

Christian's actions. The fact that Avery was also a little liar who wasn't as he appeared to be didn't dissuade Christian.

As they entered the large room, his heart dropped. There had to be at least a half dozen *Others* there. Almost as if they had been lying in wait.

Avery let out a muttered curse as he picked up a meat cleaver from one of the stainless steel tables. "Remember, head shots only," he said as he pulled the makeshift weapon back.

Like he could forget something that gruesome. The *Others* had finally noticed they had company and they attacked with enhanced speed. While Christian knew he could handle it since he had the same skill, he worried about Avery.

The man seemed to be trained how to face such a threat. As an *Other* charged him, the medic crouched down, but kept the cleaver up.

Christian watched in awe as the *Other* ran neck first into the weapon, his own speed decapitating him. The force drove Avery back, but he recovered fast, scrambling back to his feet.

Despite the display of skill, Christian still wanted to go help, but had his own *Other* running

at him. The creature moved so quick he almost appeared as blur. Moving just as quick, Christian brought up his rifle and fired. He made sure this one was a head shot, too.

The *Other's* head exploded, gore splashing onto a silver industrial freezer door. While that had to be one of the top ten grossest things Christian had seen that night, he couldn't take time out to heave. Another *Other* had taken the place of its headless buddy and was now moving in for the kill.

Christian realized Avery had taken out another when an monstrous scream was suddenly cut short. While he yearned to look over to make sure the man was okay, Christian didn't dare take his gaze off the ugly thing coming his way. As always, it had the same wild, black-eyed stare. It never failed to send shivers down his spine. Christian didn't waste any time, taking this one down with another head shot.

That left two more *Others*. At first, they didn't look over, too occupied with something on the floor.

The sounds of wet smacking hit his ears and Christian's gut rolled when he realized the first *Other's* body was gone, red streaks showing he'd been dragged across the tile. "Disgusting fucks,"

Christian said right before he lifted the rifle and took them out with two neat shots.

"Let's go before more of them show up." Avery still clutched the cleaver and didn't seem inclined to let it go anytime soon.

While things had been bad inside, they didn't come close to the hell that waited for them once they left the building. Small fires had broken out at various places in the compound, the bright orange flames highlighting the carnage outside. Crumpled, ravaged bodies lay scattered through the grounds and parking lot. Off in the distance, toward the front entrance, Christian could see some of the workers from the facility trying to run either to their cars or to the main gate. Most of them weren't making it very far before *Others* took them down. Even though they were at the back, the terrified screams still were loud and heartbreaking.

There were only a few bodies around Christian and Avery and no more of the *Others*. He pulled a Glock from a dead soldier's holster and handed it to Avery. "I'm going to guess that you know how to use this."

The practiced way the man handled the gun answered that question. He even finally tossed the cleaver to the side. While he still had a sickly pallor, he seemed to be handling this way too good to be just some guy with a medic's license.

"What are you? Military?" Christian quizzed.

"Something like that," Avery muttered as he bent down and took another gun off the body.

Christian noticed Avery took great care to avoid the bloody spots. "What branch are you from?"

"Not one you would have heard of." Avery went over to a large delivery truck and climbed up on the runner so he could look inside the driver's window.

"Are you foreign? Like from Russia maybe?"

Avery smiled as he pulled on the door. "Russia's not really our main threat anymore."

Once he had the door opened, he leaned in. After a few moments of fumbling, the engine roared to life. Avery climbed in and motioned Christian to get into the passenger side. As soon as he was in and settled in the seat, he studied Avery's features. "Are you from some other

country?" He tried, still hating that he didn't know who and what Avery was.

The sad thing was, even with the mystery, he'd never been more turned on. The way Avery's trim body had looked as he fought--moving with an easy grace that still managed to look dangerous and hard--made Christian want to rip off those scrubs so he could lick every one of the muscles he saw rippling under that thin material.

"I'll explain everything once we're safe," Avery promised as he put the truck into gear.

When he headed straight for the closed gate, Christian threw up his hands over his face in a protective pose. The fence was tall, thick and didn't look like it would give easily.

Avery didn't back down and floored it, picking up speed as they crashed through the gates.

"Son of a bitch," Christian yelled, his heart hammering from fear and a healthy dose of adrenaline.

Safely on the road, the facility well behind them, Christian turned to Avery and said, "So are you going to tell me what the fuck is going on? Who are you and why did you help me escape?"

CHAPTER THREE

Avery pressed his lips together in a hard line as he debated how much he should reveal. "You may not like all the answers I give you."

"Try me. I promise not to get munchy if I get pissed," Christian replied dryly.

"I would appreciate that," Avery quipped as he shot a worried glance in the review mirror. He sighed with relief when he didn't spot any headlights. At least they weren't being followed. Not yet anyway. He had no doubt that he and

Christian would be running for their lives again before this was all played out.

"What year is it?" Christian demanded as he eyed up the CD radio and GPS in the dash.

Avery flinched. He would have to start with that one. "It's 2010." He braced himself for the outburst as Christian's face registered first shock, then disbelief.

"How is that possible? It was 1984 when I..." he broke off, obviously not able to vocalize the word *died*.

"From what I was able to gather, they kept you cryogenically frozen until around six months ago when they brought you back to life." Even if he hadn't been attracted to the guy, Avery would have felt bad for him. He didn't think anyone could take finding out they'd lost a quarter of a century with a shrug and an oh-well!

"How did they do it?" Christian finally croaked.

"Again that's something I'm not too sure of. I was still pretty new so they didn't let me in on a lot of secrets. All I do know for certain is you were the only one they considered a success. They'd never been able to control the other subjects' need

to kill and feed." Avery thought his last comment was obvious, given the blood bath they'd just left.

"Why am I different? If they did the same procedure to me, why don't I have a hankering for human flesh?" Christian looked a little green as he held a hand to his stomach.

"That's something both sides have been trying to figure out." Avery took a left and let himself feel another measure of relief now that the glow from the fire at the compound was out of view. They just may make it out of this intact after all.

"*Both sides?*" Christian shot him a suspicious look.

"I guess it can't hurt to tell you. BOKOR would be one. They're the ones who made you in the first place."

"Why? What can they possibly gain from making a building full of monsters?"

For some reason it didn't settle well with Avery that Christian seemed to be lumping himself with all the zombies when he said *monsters*. "They wanted to make the perfect soldier. One who not only has incredible strength and speed, but who won't question orders."

"That's sick." Christian rubbed his stomach again.

Avery returned his gaze to the road. If this shocked Christian, he could only imagine how the man would react once he heard the whole truth. Avery had just given him a glimpse of the tip of the iceberg.

"What's the other group?" Christian asked.

That had been number two on the questions Avery had hoped to avoid. He couldn't, though. After all Christian had been through, he deserved to know everything. "A group of rebels who are determined to stop BOKOR from making any more zombies."

"Zombies? Is that what you call us?" Christian sounded wounded.

"That's what you are. Once dead, brought back from the grave only to mindlessly serve your master's need."

"But I don't even look like a zombie. They're all gross and decayed, with bulging eyes and missing limbs. I saw the music video *Thriller*. I know how things are supposed to be," Christian protested, his outrage ringing loud in the enclosed cab of the truck.

"Look, Michael Jackson may have been a great musician, but I don't think he was the foremost zombie expert," Avery cracked, hoping to lighten the mood.

"What do you mean *may have been*? He's still around, isn't he?"

Ouch, so much for easing the tension. "He died last summer."

"Oh," Christian replied, looking crestfallen.

Avery wanted to reach over and put an arm around the man's shoulder to comfort him. "Sorry," he mumbled, for lack of anything better to say.

"So what group do you belong to?" Christian asked, bringing the subject back around.

It took Avery a moment to realize what he meant before he caught up and answered. "I'm with the rebels."

"Then why were you working at the facility?"

"I was working undercover."

"You mean, like as a spy?" Christian flicked a dubious glance up Avery's body, probably

wondering how someone with his wimpy build thought he could possibly take on such a dangerous mission.

"I guess you could say that." Even now the whole assignment seemed surreal to Avery. All his life he'd been Mr. Boring. Happy as long as he could live in the background and not get noticed. The last thing he ever wanted was to play the intrigue and stealth scene.

"What were you trying to find out? It must have been pretty damn important for them to ask you to risk your life like that."

"Why you're different than the other zombies. How you managed to be brought back, but kept your sanity and free will," Avery admitted, seeing no reason to hide that tidbit. Maybe Christian could give them some of the answers they'd been looking for. Avery pulled the truck to the side of the road and put it in park before killing the engine. "We'll walk the rest of the way. For all I know, they can track the truck and we don't want to lead them straight to us."

"I thought you said the car was only a block from the facility?" Christian quizzed as they got out and shut the doors. The night seemed so dark and quiet compared to what they'd left back at the parking lot.

"The one we're going to is a different one. I figured the further we drove before switching cars, the safer it would be." Avery only hoped he'd made the right decision. God, he sucked when it came to this kind of stuff.

Avery led the way through a thick patch of trees so they would be hidden by passing cars. The air was so much cleaner, fresh against his smoke-singed lungs and he took several breaths, trying to get the scent of fire and blood out of his senses.

"So was everything you said and did inside there a lie?" Christian asked, his voice neutral.

"No, not everything," Avery replied, thankful the darkness helped to hide his burning face.

Christian's hand snapped out and grabbed a handful of Avery's shirt.

Before he could even gasp, he found his back pressed against a tree trunk. Christian leaned forward so their faces were only a whisper apart.

"How about your reaction to me?" Christian's free hand drifted down and cupped Avery's cock.

"This really isn't the time for this," Avery whispered as he felt his cock respond, swelling against his briefs.

"Was it all an act?" Christian persisted as he gave Avery's erection a gentle squeeze.

"Damn it. Does it feel like an act?" Avery bit back a moan as he fought to regain his senses. They needed to get to the car, not spend time in the woods answering the needs of their cocks.

"No, it feels like you want me as much as I do you." Christian dipped his head down so his lips were hovering over Avery's throat.

"I do," Avery confessed, trembling with need. Christian's breath skimmed across his flesh, making Avery groan. It felt so good, so erotic, so right that for a moment, he let himself forget about zombies, his mission and the fact they were running for their lives.

"I wasn't kidding earlier. You smell so good." Christian's tongue darted out to lick. "Taste good, too. I've been dying to know how other parts of you taste."

"We should go," Avery protested weakly. His hands shot out to grab Christian's shoulders and it wasn't to push him away.

"Five minutes, that's all I ask." Christian started to nibble a path down Avery's neck, pausing every now and to suck certain spots. Almost as if he

were giving a preview as to what he really wanted to do.

"Yes." Avery closed his eyes in surrender.

Christian let out a low growl of approval before he started to really suck on Avery's neck.

Avery let out a soft cry as he tilted his head to the side to give Christian better access. When he felt his scrub pants being untied, Avery didn't even try to stop Christian. "Your mouth feels so good," he said, his voice thick with passion.

Christian pulled back before dropping to his knees. Looking up from under his lashes, he said, "You have no idea of the things I can do with it."

Avery opened his mouth to speak, but all that came out was a rush of air as Christian's strong fingers wrapped around his cock. Avery didn't even fight it when Christian pulled his pants and briefs down roughly so they pooled around his ankles.

Avery hissed as Christian slowly licked the tip of his cock, the man's move slow and deliberate, as if he was savoring a treat. Avery tossed his head back, his skull connecting hard with the bark of the tree. While it should have hurt like hell, he

didn't feel anything but the magic Christian's mouth was working.

"I've been wanting to do this since the first day you walked into my room."

Christian's admission shocked Avery. "That would have got both of us into trouble for sure." The last word came out high-pitched, almost a wail, as Avery lost control because Christian had started to run his tongue up and down his shaft.

"You're so fucking beautiful," Christian declared roughly as he gazed up with passion-infused eyes.

Strong emotions slammed into Avery's chest as he found himself frozen by the intensity of the situation. He'd had an instant attraction to Christian as well and to hear the man felt the same pull made him wish for things he had not right to.

Christian swirled his tongue over the head of Avery's cock before he finally opened his lips and sucked him in. Avery yelled as he found himself quickly engulfed in the warm heat of Christian's mouth.

Christian sucked hard and fast, like a man starving. His didn't just give Avery a blowjob, he nearly devoured his cock in a frenzy that proved

to be contagious. The medic in Avery knew it was because of the adrenaline still in their systems from the fight, but that didn't mean he tried to end it.

"That's it, take it all," he groaned as he thrust his hips forward so his cock went further down Christian's throat. The man didn't choke or pull back, but grabbed Avery's hips and aided in the thrusts. His hold was so tight it made Avery wince in pain, but he didn't tell Christian to stop. The mixture of pain with pleasure added to the wild need coursing through his body.

"Fuck me," he nearly snarled. When Christian stilled, a look of uncertainty passing over his face, Avery repeated his command adding a hard, "Now!" Christian eagerly nodded before he got to his feet and spun Avery around. They didn't have a condom, but Avery wasn't worried since the zombies were immune to all diseases. He shivered as the sound of rustling clothes told him Christian was pulling down his pants.

"I don't have any lube. Are you sure?" Christian asked.

His concern touched Avery, but didn't damper his need. He arched his back as he looked over his shoulder. "I've never been more certain of anything." He tensed, waiting for the welcoming

burn of Christian thrusting into him, only to feel the velvet heat of the man's tongue on his ass instead. "What are you doing?" Avery asked, stupidly since the answer was damn obvious.

"If we're going to do this, I want to make sure you enjoy every second of it," Christian replied before he started to slowly rim Avery's hole.

Avery jerked, then moaned as pleasure bloomed through his body. He'd always loved to have his ass eaten and Christian knew what he was doing. He licked and sucked on Avery for several minutes before he finally eased one finger inside.

It was almost too much and Avery had to dig his nails into the bark to fight back the orgasm threatening to overtake him. Several small chunks of wood dug into the tender flesh under his nails. Avery knew it was going to be a bitch to pull them all out, but he'd worry about that later. All that mattered to him at the moment was getting Christian's cock up his ass. "Going to come," he warned, jumping when Christian slid a second finger inside him.

"No, you're not, because you want my cock just as much as I want your ass." Christian scissored his fingers, stretching Avery to take him.

"Hurry then, please." Avery was aware he'd started babbling, but didn't give a damn. Christian's fingers and mouth left him right before the man stood and put one hand on Avery's hip. Soon he felt the tip of Christian's cock pressing into him. Christian started to slowly inch in until Avery let out a growl of frustration and thrust back as hard as he could.

"Oh God," Christian cried as his cock went in balls deep.

Avery moaned as the welcoming burning sensation came, soon to be followed by pleasure. Christian's cock must have been huge because Avery had never felt this filled before.

"Are you okay?" Christian stilled as he ran his hand down the small of Avery's back.

"No, because you're just standing there instead of fucking me," Avery snapped as he thrust back a third time.

Christian finally got the hint and started to pound into Avery.

A cry ripped from Avery's throat as he pressed his cheek against the tree. "So. Damn. Good," he nearly shouted, his words punctuated by Christian's thrusts.

"Who knew that my shy, little medic had such a wild streak?"

"Harder, I need to feel all of it," Avery demanded as he clawed at the tree for purchase. More chunks of bark cut into his skin and his hands became sticky from sweat or blood, maybe both.

"You're a bossy thing, too."

The thing was, Avery never acted this way. If someone had told him a few months ago that he'd be half-naked, in some random field, pressed against a tree, getting the snot fucked out of him, he would have called them crazy. But he'd never felt more alive. It wasn't because he'd just had to fight his way through an army of zombies either.

It had everything to do with Christian. He'd always felt some deep connection to the man, even before they'd broken rules and talked. To actually have the man pressed up against his back, his cock buried, driving into him, made Avery feel, for the first time, that he wasn't alone in the world.

"It's been so long. I don't think I can hold out long, babe," Christian moaned.

Not that Avery could blame him, if he'd gone over twenty-five years without sex, he'd shoot off

quick, too. It was a wonder that the man had been able to hold back this long.

Christian reached around and grabbed Avery's cock.

Avery shouted as pleasure ripped up his spine. The combination of Christian fucking him while giving him a hand job at the same time proved to be too much. Closing his eyes, Avery groaned as he came, his cum covering Christian's hand.

"Thank God," Christian breathed. He thrust a few more times before his body grew stiff. His cock pulsed, then shot waves of hot semen up Avery's passage.

Avery still had his eyes closed, lost in that euphoria only great sex could bring. He allowed himself to relax totally. He didn't even have a chance to fight back when Christian let out a growl and clamped his teeth into the area where Avery's neck met his shoulder.

He let out a shout of alarm as pain shot from the area. He tried to fight back, but Christian's enhanced strength held him immobile. Panic coursed through his body for several seconds before he realized the bite didn't hurt anymore as pleasure slowly took the place of pain. He sagged

against Christian and moaned as tendrils of delight curled up his body.

Even though he'd just come, he could feel his cock stirring again. It all seemed distant, like he was in the middle of some erotic dream. He let out a happy sigh as he tilted his head to the side so Christian had more room to work. He never wanted it to end.

Chapter Four

Good. Avery tastes so good. Christian sank his teeth in deeper, a savage snarl rumbling in his chest. *Mine! This one is mine and nobody else can have him.*

"Christian," Avery whispered, his voice full of passion and trust.

That was enough to snap Christian out of his trance. *Avery! I just bit him. Oh God, what did I do?* Christian let out a cry of distress as he jumped back, almost tripping over his pants that were still pushed down around his ankles. His chest ached

as he looked at the wound he left on Avery's neck. An angry, ragged and still bleeding bite mark stood out vividly against the man's tan skin.

Disgusted with himself, Christian pulled up his pants, not even caring one of his hands was still covered in cum. He was no better than the rest of the monsters. First, he'd fucked Avery like some kind of animal, throwing him against a tree and plowing into him without any tenderness. Then he'd finished it off by trying to make lunch out of the guy's neck. "I'm so sorry," he said, sick from self-hatred.

"Don't be," Avery replied as he turned around and pulled up his scrub bottoms. "It was great."

"What part? Where I attacked you like a sex fiend or where I vamped out on your throat?" Christian let loose with the sarcasm.

Avery cocked his head to the side thoughtfully. "Actually, both."

Christian gaped at him for a second, open-mouthed from shock. "This isn't some joke. I hurt you."

"Really, it wasn't that bad."

"Not that bad! You're bleeding because I broke the skin. It isn't just a hickey I gave you."

Avery hesitantly brought his hand up to his neck to assess the wound. "Wow, I guess you did. It did hurt at first, but afterward, it felt so good I didn't think you bit me that hard." He shrugged. "No biggie, there's a first aid kit in the car."

"It *is* a big deal," Christian continued to argue even as Avery started walking again.

"Maybe it is. All I do know is we can't stand around all night talking about it. You might not have been the only zombie who escaped the facility and I'm not in the mood to fight any more of them tonight."

"But we should take a few minutes at least to examine this situation." Christian followed him, grabbing Avery's arm for support when he tripped over a rock.

"No, we've already wasted enough time as it is." Avery's mouth spread into a sexy grin.

"Avery!" Christian shouted to get his full attention. "After what I did to you, how do you know it's even safe to be around me?"

"Please," Avery rolled his eyes, "like you're the first guy to give me a love bite."

"I'm serious," Christian snapped, even as a wave of jealousy went through him at the mention of previous men in Avery's past.

Avery stopped and turned to fully face Christian, the humor replaced by tender understanding. "You're not like the other zombies," he said simply.

"How can you be so sure?" Christian's voice broke a bit. If he started to turn, he didn't think he'd be able to cope. He'd rather be dead than to become a mindless killing machine.

"Because you stopped. Even though you had me pinned and at your mercy, you managed to pull back."

Avery's blind trust rendered Christian speechless. Especially when the man punctuated his declaration with a soft kiss.

"Besides, I was the one screaming to be fucked. Remember?" Avery added, the most adorable flush coming to his cheeks.

"Of course I do. My ears are still ringing," he teased, hoping to ease some of Avery's embarrassment.

"Come on. We really do need to get moving."

It only took a few more moments before they came upon a car hidden in a private back road. Avery grabbed a large set of keys out of his pocket. There were also several black box-like things that looked like small remote controls on the ring. Avery hit the button on one and the trunk popped open.

"Cool," Christian blurted.

"Yeah, some things have changed," Avery said as he went over and started rummaging around in the trunk.

"Were you even alive in 1984?"

"No, I was born in 85."

Christian groaned as he realized the actual age difference between them. He hadn't thought anything could have made him feel more guilty than the bite, but this was up there. "Great, I just had sex with someone who I'm twice the age of."

"Not really. You were frozen for the last twenty-five so I don't think they count." Avery finally pulled out a large duffle bag and a small first aid kit.

Christian went up behind Avery so he could peer inside to see what supplies they had. When he noted how bare it was, he frowned. "Things must have really changed. I would think this group of yours would have weapons or at least a better first aid kit."

"We may be a bit smaller than I let on," Avery hedged.

Christian's heart lurched. "How small?"

"There's a few dozen of us and we're scattered all over the country. I have only a half-dozen in my group."

Christian's blood turned to ice as he realized just how big a risk Avery had been in the past few months. "You went undercover, without any backup or support!" he shouted.

"So? I was doing fine. If it hadn't been for the massive uprising today, my cover would still be in place," Avery argued with a calmness that only infuriated Christian more.

"How in the hell did you even manage to infiltrate the facility in the first place? BOKOR's security is so tight a mouse's fart couldn't get in."

"Oh, that was easy. I already was on the military's payroll when I joined the rebel group. When they needed some information about the lab that you were at, I just requested a transfer. Given my experience, they were happy to approve it." Avery opened the bag and pulled out some clothes.

"So if you were part of the military, how is it you ended up with a bunch of zombie-killing rebels?"

"That question will be easier to answer once we get to base. The rest of the group will be able to help me give you all the details of our operation and stuff." Avery handed Christian a dark blue sweatshirt and some jeans. "Here put these on. That all-white outfit may as well be a blinking neon sign."

"Thanks." Christian grabbed them.

"Here take this, too." Avery tossed him a bottle of water. "You know, to clean up and stuff."

He ducked his head, but not before Christian caught the embarrassment that marked his face.

"I love it when you blush," Christian admitted.

Avery didn't reply, simply retrieved his own set of clothes.

Christian changed, pouring some water on his old shirt to give himself a makeshift sponge bath. It wasn't the best cleaning he'd ever had, but it was better than nothing. It did feel like pure heaven to get out of that damn white outfit, though. The only drawback to his new pants was they seemed to be a little large.

"You doing okay?" Avery asked as he came around the car.

He'd changed, too. His sweatshirt was black, but his pants looked just as baggy.

Christian decided it must be the style now. It struck him as odd that he'd never seen the man in anything but his usual dark blue scrubs up until that point. The civilian clothes looked damn good on Avery. He seemed more at ease and younger. He must have run a damp hand through his hair because his blond spikes were messed up more than usual. "Sit down and let me do something for your neck," Christian urged as he patted the edge of the still-open trunk.

"We don't have time," Avery protested. "I just slapped a *Band Aid* on it to get us to our next stop."

"We're making time. Now sit your ass down," Christian ordered as he tapped the car again.

Avery sighed heavily, but obeyed, sitting down.

Christian winced when he noticed the scrapes all over one side of Avery's face. He lightly fingered it. "Did I give you that when I shoved you against the tree."

"I think we can both take blame for that, since I was just as out of control." Avery hissed in pain when Christian's fingers touched what must have been a particularly tender spot.

"Let me check out your neck first, then I'll put some ointment on this." Thanks to the last six months he'd spent stewing in the lab, the one thing he did know was how to treat injuries. Usually he was on the receiving end. His *medical lessons* had commenced when the scientists had started to pit zombie against zombie. While they'd claimed it was for the sake of research, Christian had always suspected it was for their own sadistic viewing pleasure. He tugged down the collar of Avery's shirt and was dismayed to see blood already soaking through the overly large bandage. "I am so sorry. I don't know what got into me."

"I already told you, it's okay, so stop apologizing."

Christian gently pulled back the bandage, then used the rest of his water to clean the wounds. They sat in silence as he worked. He made sure to clean it well, not wanting infection to settle in. Afterward, he grabbed a fresh gauze pad and pressed direct pressure to stem the trickle of blood. "Promise me something," he said, past the lump in his throat.

"Anything," Avery replied with such sincerity it made the lump grow.

"If I attack you like that again, shoot me. I don't want to become like the *Others*." He blinked furiously, trying to hide the fact he'd gotten misty-eyed.

Avery reached up and held Christian's wrist. "Look, I'm not going to act like you biting me that hard during sex is normal. But I do know one thing--you never have nor will you ever be anything like them."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because you still have your soul. They don't." Avery tilted his head up as he gave the most innocent of smiles.

At that moment, Christian knew he had a heart because it had become the sole personal property of Avery. "They're going to come after you, too. It won't take them long to figure out I escaped and you helped me."

"I know. I guess that means you're stuck with me for a while since we're both going to be on the run." Avery let out a small chuckle. "I never thought I would be seriously saying things like *on the run* and *undercover*."

It shouldn't have warmed Christian inside so much that Avery just assumed they'd stay together, but it did. "I promise I'll figure out a way for you to get your old life back."

"I don't want my old life back." Avery gazed up with those soulful blue eyes.

"What do you want?" Christian asked thickly, his body alive with hope.

"I want you."

Christian shook with pent-up happiness. "Are you sure about that? I've already hurt you once."

"I've never been more sure of anything in my life. Besides, the bite wasn't all about pain. Near

the end, it felt really good." Avery's eyes grew large with worry. "Unless, you don't want me."

Christian leaned down and gave him a soft, sensual kiss, his tongue sliding inside Avery's mouth to explore and taste.

Avery returned the passion, a muffled whimper bursting from him as he grabbed a handful of Christian's shirt.

"I want you. I always have," Christian declared between passes. Avery did that whimpering thing again and the sound shot right to Christian's cock, making him hard and aching.

Avery parted his legs and Christian slid in closer. Their hard cocks met, rubbing and grinding through the thick denim of their jeans. In his want for more, Christian surged forward and almost made Avery topple backward into the trunk. He reached out and caught the medic just in time.

"Wow, you saved me and still managed to keep pressure on my wound at the same time. I'm impressed," Avery teased, with a dopey grin on his face.

"What can I say? I'm a man of many talents." Christian fanned his thumb over Avery's swollen lips.

"Don't I know that."

"Be good or we're never going to get out of here." Christian pulled back the gauze, satisfied to see the bleeding had stopped.

"That's horror movie rule number one," Avery declared.

Christian chuckled in confusion. "I don't get it."

"Rule number one, when running from baddies, never take time out for sex because you'll always get killed right in the middle of doing the deed."

"That wouldn't apply to us since we already did it and nobody jumped out to murder us." Christian applied a fresh bandage to Avery's neck.

"There's no sense in pressing our luck. I don't know about you, but when I do bite it, I don't want it to be with my pants around my ankles and my bare ass on display."

Christian laughed for the first time since he could remember. Avery and his reasoning were so amusing. What's worse, he acted like he half-believed his theory, too. "I guess it wouldn't be a real dignified way to go," Christian conceded.

"It would make for a cool headstone." Avery waved his finger in the air as if he was reading along with the imaginary words. *"Here lies Avery Lyons, who died from becoming a zombie's lunchmeat. May he rest in peace."*

"As much as it pains me, I'll have to deny you that awesome headstone. Let's hit the road." Christian snapped the first aid kit closed, then tossed it in the car.

"Okay," Avery grumbled good-naturedly as Christian hauled him to his feet.

Once they got in the car, Christian asked, "So where to now?"

"We need to check in at home base and regroup." Avery turned the car on and pulled out into the dark street.

"So is your base at some hidden clandestine location?"

"Not exactly," Avery hedged.

CHAPTER FIVE

It was in some basement. Not just any basement, but some thirty-year old man's parent's basement. Christian didn't know whether to laugh, cry or grab Avery and run in the opposite direction as fast as he could.

As they walked up the steps of the picture perfect two-story home, Christian found himself shaking his head in disbelief. How in the hell did this group think they could possibly take on someone as big as BOKOR when they couldn't even secure a damn lease or renter's agreement?

An older woman answered the door. "Hello, are you here for Robbie's comic book club?"

Christian sucked in a huge breath of shock and ended up coughing as he choked on it.

Avery patted him on the back and answered, "Yes, ma'am, we are. Has it started already?"

"Oh, no it's just him and Tommy." She opened the screen to let them in. "Come on, you can follow me. I was just bringing down some snacks."

Snacks? Comic books? Names like Robbie and Tommy? Things just kept getting better. The only thing missing were some *Star Wars* posters and the nerd boy image would be complete. "Tell me this is some joke," Christian whispered out of the corner of his mouth so only Avery heard.

"Hey, this is a shock to me, too. I've never been here before either."

"I almost forgot my manners. What are your names?" She brushed a strand of graying brown hair out of her face as she studied them.

Christian's mouth opened and closed several times as his mind scrambled for a good answer. If they gave her their real names, it might make it easier for their pursuers to find them. "Murdock,"

he blurted, using a name from his favorite show, *The A-Team*.

"Nice, and what's your name?" She blinked at Avery.

"He's Crockett," Christian supplied, this time taking a name from *Miami Vice*.

Avery, to his credit didn't show any surprise. He just gave a small wave.

"Well, you boys can just call me, Mom. All of Robbie's friends do. Here, take this for me." Mom thrust a plate full of pizza rolls at Christian.

His stomach growled as the scent of processed meat and cheese hit him.

Avery grinned as he reached over and snagged one.

Instead of putting it in his own mouth, he lifted it to Christian's lips.

"Here, you look hungry."

Damn, how was it possible that Avery could make something as normal as a pizza roll seem sexy? Christian parted his lips and let Avery slide the food into his mouth. All the while Mom continued to bustle around the kitchen. Finally

turning their way again, she handed a huge bowl of chips over to Avery and headed toward a door off the side to the kitchen.

They went down a set of wooden stairs that led to a partially finished basement. The strong scent of mildew, wet and incense tickled Christian's nose. He almost dropped the plate of pizza rolls when he saw not one, but three *Star Wars* posters on the wall.

Two men were sitting on a battered, red couch, playing what Christian guessed to be a modern video game. The pair could not have been more different. One was overly thin and tall with short brown hair. His gray eyes looked large behind his thick glasses and he wore a button up shirt that had a patch on the breast that read *Tech Swat Team*. Under it was clipped a badge with the man's picture on it.

The second couch potato, on the other hand, looked like a...well couch potato. He had to be well over three hundred pounds and must not have been shy about it because a roll of flab hung out under the hem of his stretched out, faded gray t-shirt. He completed his look with a pair of bright red shorts and black crew socks. Even his blond hair was slobby since it was greasy and hanging down past his shoulders.

"Robbie, Crocket and Murdock are here," Mom sang.

The heavy guy stopped playing to shoot over a shocked glance. "Nice to see you guys made it," he finally said, his voice hesitant and halting.

"Becky sent us," Avery said smoothly. It must have been a code for something because both Robbie and Tommy jumped in shock as they hurriedly turned off the game.

"Thanks, Ma. We can take it from here." Robbie made a shooping motion with his hands.

Mom gave one more wave before she disappeared up the stairs. Once the door slammed, Tommy went over to peer up. "Okay, it's clear."

"Why in the hell didn't you call before you came?" Robbie demanded.

"The cell phone in our getaway car was dead," Avery replied in cool, clipped tones.

"Sorry, my bad," Tommy said, guilt stamped over his rat-like face.

"That's all you have to say?" Christian demanded, seeing red. "You could have gotten him killed."

"Is this the zombie?" Robbie directed his question to Avery.

"His name is Christian, but yeah, he's the one sane patient from the lab." When Avery took a step toward him in a sign of support, it helped to ease Christian's anger, some.

"So you actually call this home base?" Christian flicked a disgusted look over the basement. It might not have been too bad if someone actually picked up around the place. At the moment, it looked like a junk heap with several empty pizza boxes, pop cans and electrical equipment.

"I'll have you know this is a full-functioning apartment," Robbie defended, sounding hurt.

"Yeah, it even has its own bathroom," Tommy added with a proud lift of his chin.

"Well, that just makes all the difference. Please forgive me for judging too soon," Christian drawled.

"Are you being sarcastic with us?" Robbie asked.

"Ah, yeah," Christian replied, just as sarcastically.

"He's just like Han Solo," Tommy observed with a hint of awe in his voice.

Christian considered doing the zombies a favor and taking these two idiots out himself. He quickly dismissed the idea because it would only upset Mom and he liked the lady.

"What are you doing here and why did you bring the zombie with you?" Robbie quizzed Avery.

"There was a huge uprising at the facility and it didn't end pretty," Avery said. He grew a bit pale as he went into a detailed explanation of the night's events.

"How did the zombies escape? I thought you said the security was tight," Tommy said as he sat back down onto the couch. He and Robbie both had this stupefied, just-been-bitch-slapped look on their mugs.

"Easy, they didn't escape. Someone let them out," Christian said in clipped tones.

"Why would they do that?" Robbie shook his head.

"Because they want to see how much damage their creations are capable of."

* * * *

Avery got cold pit in his stomach as the ramifications of Christian's theory hit him. "You think they'd sacrifice a building full of workers just as a test?"

"You don't think they wouldn't?" Christian countered with a cocked brow.

Avery couldn't argue that. He'd seen the pit they'd thrown the zombies in so they could fight each other. More times than not, only one of them came out alive, too. But to take the giant leap to allow hundreds of scientists, medical staff and guards die? Were the brothers that eager to make their super weapon? Even though it sickened him, Avery knew the answer to those questions and it was a big, fat yes.

"But why would they sacrifice you? You were the only success they had?" Robbie shook his head as he ran a trembling hand over his face.

"Actually, they looked at me as a failure," Christian said bitterly. "When they ordered me to kill, I was the only one who had the audacity to ask *why*."

It all suddenly became too much for Avery--the horrors of the lab, finding out they'd all just been pawns, the fact that he couldn't even go home now. He needed to get away from it all. "Does the bathroom down here have a shower?" he asked, Robbie.

"Yeah, of course it does." Robbie scratched at his gut.

"Do you mind if I use it? Things got pretty bloody back there and I want to make sure it's all off me." Avery just hoped the shower was cleaner than the rest of place.

"Sure, but you can't borrow any of my underwear."

Avery looked over some of the food crusted to Robbie's shirt. "I think I can live with that disappointment," he deadpanned as he repressed a shudder. No way he'd even touch Robbie's grimy whities with a ten-inch probe, let alone put them against his body.

"Fine, it's in the back." Robbie jerked his head in the direction.

Avery thanked him, then waded his way through the mess to a small, closet-sized bathroom. At least it was clean. Must be Mom's doing since Avery doubted Robbie wouldn't know a mop if it came up and introduced itself. He stripped and stepped into a shower stall that had to be the size of a postage stamp.

The hot water felt like heaven and he tilted his head back, letting it run down his chest and stomach. The bandage on his neck itched, but he didn't take it off, not wanting to risk the other rebels seeing the bite mark and jumping to conclusions. They barely trusted Christian as it was. When he heard the door open, he smiled. "That better be you, Christian, or there's going to a fight."

Christian's rich chuckle warmed him. "You're safe...it's me."

The irony that he felt more secure being around a zombie than a game geek wasn't lost on Avery. "I would invite you to come in here with me, but there's no room. I don't know how Robbie manages."

"That's okay, I can wait. The main reason I came in here was to ask you a question and I didn't want Robbie or Tommy to overhear."

Avery tensed. "Okay." His voice sounded tight, even to his own ears. He had an idea what Christian's question was going to be. Avery closed his eyes as the all-too-familiar feeling of loss and guilt hit him.

"Why did you agree to help Robbie's group? You had to know there was no way in hell they would have a chance of standing against an operation like BOKOR."

"Does it matter why I did it?" Avery asked, even though he knew Christian wasn't going to let the subject slide.

"Yes, I want to know why you would willingly go along with what was basically a suicide mission."

"Because I didn't think I had anything to live for," Avery replied, his admission so low, he didn't know if Christian would be able to hear. There was a long pause as Avery turned off the shower. He wrapped a towel around his waist, but made no move to leave the stall, instead leaning his forehead against the tile.

After what seemed like forever, Christian broke the silence. "What happened?"

"The BOKOR facility you were in wasn't the first of its kind. There was another one in Minnesota. They did the same kind of experiments and it was operated by the same sadistic bastards. One of the brothers wanted to see if using fresh bodies for the procedure would give better results. Until then, they'd always used already dead soldiers like you. So they brought in a group of soldiers and threw them in the pit with the zombies. One of those men murdered that day was my partner." Avery wiped at his face, realizing all the wetness on his cheeks wasn't from the shower.

"What was his name?" Christian's voice was so soft, caring and the only thing holding Avery together at the moment.

"Sebastian. At first, I thought he'd died in a training exercise, but then eight months ago the leader of the rebels, Chad, phoned and told me the truth. I didn't believe him until he emailed me a video. It was of the pit and it showed..." Avery trailed off, unable to continue. A sob broke free from his chest as the tears started to fall freely.

The shower curtain snapped open and suddenly he was in the comfort of Christian's embrace.

Avery buried his face in his lover's shirt and didn't even bother to hide the fact he was bawling like a kid. "It was awful. The zombies just cut through those soldiers like they were nothing. Sebastian never stood a chance," Avery sobbed.

"Did they ever bring him back?" Christian held him tight with one arm and used his free hand to rub a soothing path up and down his back.

"Yes, but he was just as mindless as all the *Others*."

"What happened to the facility in Minnesota?"

"The zombies escaped, just like they did last night. Only that time, some of them made it to a nearby town and a bunch people died. To cover it up, the government blew up the facility and took the town and zombies with it. Everyone thought it was just some tragic accident. Only the rebels knew the truth. Then BOKOR relocated to Michigan and started all over again."

"I've just got one more question for you?" Christian reached down to cup Avery's chin, forcing him to look up. "Do you still want to die?"

As he gazed into Christian's eyes, Avery made no attempt to hide the love he felt for the man. "No, not anymore."

"Why?" Christian demanded, his eyes growing dark with unreadable emotions.

Avery hoped they were the same ones he was experiencing. "Because you gave me a reason to live again," he confessed as his heart pounded. Doubts swirled inside his head. What if Christian thought it was too soon? What if their encounter had just been a quick fuck as far as Christian was concerned?

"I love you. You know that, right?" Christian said as he fanned the pad of his thumb along Avery's jaw.

Avery grinned as he felt true happiness for the first time in over a year. "No, I didn't, but it's good to hear because I love you, too."

Christian tilted his head down and gently kissed Avery. "I don't suppose I could convince you to run away to Canada with me? We could just slip in and pretend we've never heard of BOKOR or zombies."

"We both know that neither of us can turn our backs on this. Even as we speak, they're taking

more men like you and Sebastian and turning them into monsters. Plus, it's only a matter of time before another town is attacked. We couldn't live with ourselves if we didn't do something to stop it."

Christian sighed. "You're right. I just want to protect you from all this."

"And I want to protect you, too." Avery gave him a second kiss. Even though it was brief, it still left him breathless. "But this is something we have to do."

CHAPTER SIX

After he'd showered, Christian redressed and joined the self-proclaimed rebels. While he'd been gone, a small woman had arrived. Actually to use the word woman was as stretch. With her bright pink hair that she'd pulled into pigtails, even brighter yellow jeans and blindingly bright purple top, she looked like a character from *Rainbow Brite*.

"Wow, the zombie looks yummy," she drawled as she devoured Christian with her gaze.

"Be good, Harmony," Avery chastised, although the corners of his mouth twitched as if he was fighting back a grin.

"How can I be good when this piece of man-meat makes me think such naughty things?" She gave Christian an exaggerated wink, her purple false lashes so large, they brushed against her cheek.

"You can't have him because he's with Avery," Tommy butted in, his face full of jealousy. It was obvious he had a major attraction to Harmony.

"That's okay. Maybe they'll be really giving and let me watch while do make nasty." Her bright red lips broke out into a wicked grin.

"Har!" Avery cried, obviously friendly with the female hurricane since he had a nickname for her.

"Ave!" she returned, using the same tone. Sighing, she wagged a finger at him. "Oh, don't get your scrubs all in a bunch. All I asked for is that you give me a private sex show. You act like I ordered you to donate a kidney or something."

Tommy sputtered, his face turning beet red as he fought to talk. Robbie looked resigned to the whole situation. Avery just gave Christian an apologetic look.

"Oh, Harmony, I would so take you up on your offer, but I don't think even Avery and I together would be man enough to handle you," Christian teased back. He couldn't help it...something about her just made him instantly like her, no matter how outlandish she was.

"You're probably right, but I would have so much fun gobbling you both up." She snapped her front teeth together with a high-pitched growl.

"Harmony has graciously offered to let us stay at her house," Avery informed Christian.

Christian debated as he looked around the basement. *Stay with the gamers or with the she-animal?* "Does she have a separate bedroom for us?"

"Yeah, she promised us the guestroom." Avery was no longer attempting to hide his grin.

"One that doesn't have a peep hole or camera in it?"

Instead of answering that one for himself, Avery turned and raised a questioning brow to Harmony.

She let out an aggravated sigh. "It's totally private, I swear."

"Okay, Harmony's it is," he said to Avery. When Tommy looked crestfallen, Christian leaned over and confided in a stage whisper. "No worries, dude. I can assure you that neither one of us will make the moves on her."

"Let's get out and leave these two to their conspiracy theories and role playing." Harmony blew a kiss to Tommy and Robbie before she bounced up the stairs.

"Thanks for everything," Christian said as he shook Robbie's hand. "Make sure you tell your mother that we appreciated the food."

"We'll be in touch as soon as we have a permanent location," Avery added.

They followed Harmony out and to her huge car. Christian shook his head in amusement as she got behind the wheel. How she managed to reach the pedals of the monstrosity was a wonder. Avery took the backseat, which left Christian the front. By the time they pulled out of the neighborhood and were on a main road, Avery was already asleep, his head resting against the window.

"It looks like you guys have been through a lot," Harmony observed as she peeked into the review mirror to watch Avery.

"You can say that," Christian said before he gave her a brief rundown of the events. She listened in silence, a feat he didn't know she was capable of until he had finished.

"Wow, if you hadn't been there, then Avery would have died," her voice cracked a bit.

"You guys are close?" There was no jealousy behind Christian's question--since Avery had declared his love, he knew his guy wouldn't stray.

"Yeah, since I was his main contact, we got pretty tight."

"How did you get involved in all this? No offense, but you look like you should be partying, not fighting zombies."

"My brother served on the same team as Sebastian," she said softly. She returned her gaze to the road, but not before he caught a tear sliding down her cheek.

"I'm so sorry," Christian replied, not knowing what else to say.

"The grief killed our mother and since my dad died years ago, it left me alone. That was until I found out about the rebels. Then I finally had meaning back in my life. I've never looked back."

They drove in silence for a few minutes before Harmony glanced at him.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure, since you shared, it only seems fair."

"Do you remember anything about how you died?"

As always, the subject of his death made his gut clench. "No, all I remember is being in my truck and the next thing I know I'm in some lab and it's 2010."

"Are you sure? I don't mean to pry or anything, but I think it may be connected to why you're so much different than the other..." She trailed off, obviously not wanting to insult him.

"Zombies," he finished for her. "It's okay to call me that. The only time Avery gets upset is when someone throws it in my face as an insult. So how do you think my death could be the key?"

"Did you ever hear the legend that says if you throw salt on a zombie, they regain their senses?"

"No, but up until now all my knowledge of zombies came from a music video." He laughed.

"Are you talking about *Thriller*?"

"Yes."

"Oh, that's a classic."

"Thanks for reminding me how old I really am," he joked. "Getting back on topic, though, how does my death have anything to do with salt?"

"Let me do a little more research today and I'll have an answer for you in a few hours." She pursed her lips together thoughtfully.

Christian studied her for a few moments. "Why do I get the feeling that under all that dye and makeup, you're one smart woman?"

She grinned at him as she crinkled her nose. "Because it's true. Obi-Wan and Yoda have nothing on me."

"Oh, a *Star Wars* reference? No wonder Tommy is in love with you."

* * * *

Avery came awake as Harmony pulled into the drive of her house. He stumbled out of the car and blinked up at her two-story Victorian that was in direct odds to her appearance and personality.

The sun had started to rise, but the light was still weak so in his sleepy state, he tripped a few times. Christian was always there to steady his arm. The crisp air helped to eventually wake him up so by the time they got to the house, he was alert.

The inside of the house was much like the outside, very conservative and un-Harmony-like. Once Avery had asked why she hadn't redecorated when she'd inherited the place. She'd said something about *needing to leave some memoirs intact* as a sad look passed over her usually full-of-life eyes. After that, he never asked again.

"Same room as always?" he asked before he yawned.

"Yup. I changed the sheets before I left to pick you and zombie boy up. You guys go ahead and get some sleep. I'll go out and get you some clothes and stuff."

He put one arm around her and gave her a kiss on top of her ridiculous hair. "Thanks, I owe you."

"No, you don't. This is what friends do for each other. You guys can stay as long as you need. I mean that, too." She stood up on tiptoe to give him a return peck.

"You're the best, but that still doesn't mean I'm going to let you watch though."

"You have always been such a buzzkill." She gave him a playful shove in the chest. "Now, take Mr. Yummy upstairs and I expect to hear all kinds of interesting noises coming from that room."

"I'll do my best to make sure that happens," Christian said, giving a sexy wink to Avery.

The words of promise shot straight to Avery's cock, making him very eager to find the bed. He grabbed Christian's hand and led him up the stairs. The short trip to the guestroom seemed to take forever, but they finally made it. The decor was very conservative, the best part being the large king-sized bed that took up almost the entire space.

Avery closed the door and went into Christian's waiting embrace. With a happy sigh, he rested his cheek against Christian's strong chest. The touch, the warmth, all of it raised his need.

"Are you tired?" Christian started to rub Avery's back in slow easy passes.

"Yes, but I don't want to sleep." Avery turned his face so he could nip at Christian's chest through the fabric of his shirt.

"You sure you want to chance this after the way I lost control last time?" Christian's casual tone didn't fool Avery for one moment.

In answer, Avery pulled out of Christian's arms and took a couple steps back so he could start taking off his own clothes. He moved slow, lavishing in the way Christian's gaze flared with each new piece of skin exposed. Completely naked, he went back over to Christian and tugged on the hem of his shirt.

"I guess that means you're sure." Christian's lips curled into a crooked smile before he lifted his arms so Avery could pull off his shirt.

Once Avery had Christian's bare chest in front of him, he finally gave into his yearning to slowly explore it. He kissed, nipped and licked every reachable area, paying special attention to Christian's nipples. A thrill went through Avery as he realized Christian was submitting to him. For this encounter, he would be in control and Avery

had just enough Alpha in him to delight in that. "Lie down on the bed," Avery commanded.

Christian immediately complied, only pausing long enough to kick off his shoes. They were still the same standard white ones BOKOR had given him and Avery silently vowed that he'd buy his man a new pair at the first opportunity.

Once Christian was on his back, Avery climbed onto the bed, slowly crawling over the man's body until their lips were inches apart. Christian strained forward, seeking a kiss, but Avery moved his head to the side. With a chuckle, he started to nuzzle the side of Christian's neck.

"Tease," Christian accused with a breathless laugh.

"You just wait. I'm only getting started," Avery promised, then he started to move his mouth lower.

"Are you going to bite me?" Christian quipped before he hissed in pleasure.

"Yes, but I swear you're going to like it." Avery did as promised, only his bites were light nips, followed by gentle sucks. He moved all over Christian's chest, probably leaving a few hickeys, but nothing more vicious. When he got to

Christian's jeans, Avery unzipped, then slid them down the man's long legs.

Once he had Christian naked, Avery straddled his thighs and took both of their cocks at once in his hand. The sensation of their dicks rubbing together, combined by his own stroking, soon had Avery panting in pleasure. Pre-cum leaked from both of them, the liquid dripping down his fingers. The most erotic thing had to be the look of pure pleasure on Christian's face. The way his dark-eyed gaze seemed to sear into Avery's soul.

"I love you," Avery had to tell him.

"I love you, too." Christian's lids fluttered shut before he thrust up into Avery's fist.

After a few moments, Avery let go. He didn't want things to end too soon. "Don't move, I'll be right back," Avery assured him before climbing off the bed and running to the attached bathroom. He grabbed the hand lotion Harmony always kept by the sink and rushed back to the bed. He waved it in the air, making Christian smile. Once he climbed back on the bed, Christian held out his hand.

"Here, give it to me."

Avery handed it over and Christian squirted some on his fingers. "Move up a little and let me get you ready to take me."

Even though Avery wanted Christian's cock up him right away, he still scooted up some so he was within easy arm's reach. He moaned at the cool sensation of Christian's slick finger. It rimmed his hole several times before sinking in.

"It was worth it," Christian said as he slowly worked his finger in and out.

"What?" Avery asked, even though having an intelligent conversation ranked low on the list at the moment.

"Waiting twenty-five years for you." Christian added another finger, curling them so they brushed against Avery's sweet spot.

Avery cried out as hot lances of pleasure shot through his body. "Please, Christian, I can't take anymore."

Christian moved his fingers.

Avery didn't waste any time. Grabbing Christian's cock with one hand, he slowly impaled himself on it. They both moaned in unison as Avery took in every inch.

"Fuck, you feel so good," Christian growled, but didn't move, still letting Avery run the show.

Avery started to ride him, setting a slow, sensual rhythm so they could both savor every moment. He grabbed his own cock and started to stroke it in time to his thrusts. While he could have asked Christian to do it for him, Avery could tell by the man's heated gaze he enjoyed watching him do it himself more.

All too soon, Avery's balls grew tight as an orgasm rushed over him. He let out a hoarse cry as his cock exploded, white streams of semen splashing over his hand and onto Christian's chest and stomach.

Christian's hands shot out and grabbed Avery's hips for purchase as he thrust up into him a few more times. With a loud moan, he came, too, his cock emptying into Avery's ass. After it was over, Avery collapsed on Christian's chest while they both caught their breath.

"Promise me we'll do this every night," Christian murmured in a sleepy voice.

"It will be a challenge, but I think I'm up to it," Avery promised.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The sound of someone knocking on the door woke Christian up. He opened his eyes to find Avery still asleep, his body snuggled close. Once he pulled the blankets up to cover both their nudity, Christian called, "Come in."

Harmony peaked her head in, an impish grin on her face. "Wowser, I could get used to this sight. The two of you tangled up in the sheets like that is a wet dream come true."

"Be good, Har," Avery admonished sleepily as he stirred.

"What fun is that?" She came all the way into the room, a large shopping bag in her hand. "I got you two everything you'll need. Don't worry, I made sure all the clothes were respectable and boring."

"Thanks," Christian said as he smiled at her. He could see why Avery liked her so much.

"I have a pizza downstairs and all the research I promised you, too."

"What research?" Avery sat up and stretched.

"Something about salt and zombies," Christian informed.

"Sounds interesting." Avery rolled his eyes.

"It is so you can lose that look on your face." Harmony struck her tongue out, the gesture making her look even younger than normal. "Now get dressed and meet me downstairs."

Once she left them, they quickly washed up and got their new clothes on. Christian suspected Avery's haste had more to do with the promise of pizza than the desire to hear about her findings.

They went downstairs and got their food before they joined her at the kitchen table. She had her laptop with her and several pieces of paper with notes scribbled on it.

"I finally figured out how you died," she informed Christian with a proud smirk on her face.

"A car accident. We already knew that." Avery shrugged.

"Ah, but it wasn't just any car accident. Mr. Zombie here had a very close and personal encounter with a salt truck."

"I'm not following," Christian said, not even trying to hide his confusion.

"You were driving on a highway and it'd just snowed. A chain-reaction accident happened and you were caught in the middle of it. During all the crash and bash, a salt truck tipped over on its side. It created a huge mess that took forever to clean up."

"Okay, but how do Christian and the other zombies fit into all this?" Avery prompted.

Harmony popped him on the shoulder. "Be patient, I'm just getting to that. Christian, naughty

boy that he was, didn't have his seatbelt on and went through the windshield and splatted onto the pavement."

Christian winced, glad he didn't remember that. "Let me guess, I landed in the middle of the spilled salt."

"Bingo! So since sprinkling salt on zombies is supposed to bring them to their senses, I'm guessing if one takes a swan dive into a pile of the stuff before their death, it works, too."

"You realize how crazy this all sounds?" Avery gave her an are-you-shitting-me look.

"Not any more crazy than the fact that we're fighting a nefarious organization bent on world domination and the manufacturing of monsters. Or the fact that your boyfriend probably knows all the words to *Karma Chameleon* and would be entertained by Rubik's Cube."

"She does have a point." Christian laughed.

"There's one way we can know for sure." She jumped out of her seat and reached behind the door, producing a shotgun.

Christian jumped. "What are you planning?"

"I replaced the buckshot with rock salt. I saw them do it in a TV show I watch."

"Are you going to shoot me with it?" Christian slowly stood in case he had to make a run for it.

"Of course not. Since you already have your senses, what would that prove?"

Christian breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm going to use it on the zombie I have tied up in my shed."

Avery did a double take so violent, he almost toppled from his chair. "Did you just say you have a zombie?"

Harmony beamed as she nodded, "Yup."

"Where did you get it?" Avery exchanged looks of shock with Christian.

"Chad brought it while you guys were sleeping." She spun on her heel and went to the back door of the house.

Avery and Christian had no choice but to follow her.

"So, you didn't think that you should wake me up so I could finally meet Chad in person?" Avery

called after her. "It would have been the polite thing to do."

"He was in a rush and didn't want to disturb you," Harmony replied airily as they walked out into a huge backyard.

"I would have woken up for that." Avery threw his hands up in frustration.

Harmony didn't respond, seeming to be too intent on her task. She led them over to a huge, barn-shaped shed. Once she opened the doors, Christian was only mildly surprised to see the zombie chained up inside.

Once upon a time, the zombie probably had been a good-looking man. Now it just snarled as it lunged at them. Without even so much as a hello, Harmony brought the shotgun up and fired. Both Christian and Avery cursed in shock as the zombie flew backward and landed in a heap.

"If this works, then we'll finally have a way to fight BOKOR and return the zombies back to what they used to be," Harmony said as she continued to study the zombie. "Even though the facility they kept you in was destroyed last night, we all know they'll just build a new one like last time."

"She's right," Avery agreed.

The zombie stirred, then sat up and rubbed its leg where the buckshot had hit. "Ouch, what happened?"

Christian's jaw dropped when he saw the feral, crazed look had left the zombie's face and now the creature looked completely sane and human.

Harmony did a small happy dance before she pinned Avery with a hard stare. "This one is mine. You already have a zombie."

"Holy Moses on a pogo stick, she actually made it work," Christian breathed.

"Where am I?" the blond asked as he looked around with a confused expression.

"Here, baby, you let me take care of you," Harmony cooed as she started to rush to his side. Halfway there, she stopped to glance back at Avery and Christian, "So, are you guys going to stay and continue to fight the good fight with the rest of us?"

Avery looked over at Christian, his brow raised in question. "What do you think?"

"A zombie, a medic, a fashion disaster and two gamers against BOKOR and all their muscle?"

Christian gave what he knew to be a wicked grin.
"Of course I'm in. Let the adventures begin."

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A. J. Llewellyn lives in California, but dreams of living in Hawaii. Frequent trips to all the islands, bags of Kona coffee in his fridge and a healthy collection of Hawaiian records keep this writer refueled. A. J. loves male/male erotica, has a passion for all animals (especially the dog, the cat and the turtle). A. J. believes that love is a song best sung out loud.

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