

The book cover features a composite image. In the upper left, a man with long, dark hair is shown in profile, looking towards the right. The background is a night cityscape with numerous illuminated buildings. A prominent skyscraper on the left is lit with a bright blue light. The sky is dark with some clouds and a bright, glowing orb, possibly the moon or a star, visible in the upper right.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL

BOOK I

A NOVEL

A. J. Llewellyn & D. J. Manly

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

...Blue planted a foot into the tub between Max's knees. When the other foot lifted over into the tub, Max swiftly pulled him down and around so that Blue was sitting between his thighs, his back pressed against Max's chest. "Damn, you're tense, relax your body." He pulled him back into his arms. "There. That's better."

No, it wasn't better at all. Blue could feel every hard inch of his body and Max's cock was jutting against his tailbone. Thank God Max had had the mercy to leave his hands on the side of the tub.

"Take what you need," Max invited.

Blue turned to look at him. His gaze traced the shape of Max's square jaw, settled on his full lips. Max lifted a hand and with one nail cut a line across his taunt muscular chest. The gash quickly flooded with blood. The richness of the color, the intoxicating smell was too much for Blue to resist. He lowered his mouth to Max's chest hungrily and licked down the slash with his tongue. Instantly it closed and disappeared. Blue grunted in frustration.

"Don't lick, drink," Max told him, remaking the cut a second time. "Do it now."

Blue placed his lips over the wound again and the thick liquid flowed into his mouth, bringing comfort, and satiation.

The wound began to heal again, but he'd had enough. He raised his blood stained mouth from Max's chest and aggressively pressed it to Max's mouth.

Max accepted the assault on his mouth, even widening his legs so Blue could completely turn around to face him. Blue took his face between his hands, kissed Max deeper, stroked his hair, pressed his own swelling cock against Max's belly...

ALSO BY A. J. LLEWELLYN

The Book And The Rose
Deeper Blue

ALSO BY D. J. MANLY

Skipping Stones

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

BY

A. J. LLEWELLYN & D. J. MANLY

AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

<http://www.AmberQuill.com>

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I
AN AMBER QUILL PRESS BOOK

This book is a work of fiction.
All names, characters, locations, and incidents are products of the
author's imagination, or have been used fictitiously.
Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, locales,
or events is entirely coincidental.

Amber Quill Press, LLC
<http://www.AmberQuill.com>

All rights reserved.
No portion of this book may be transmitted or
reproduced in any form, or by any means, without permission in
writing from the publisher, with the exception of brief
excerpts used for the purposes of review.

Copyright © 2010 by A. J. Llewellyn & D. J. Manly
ISBN 978-1-60272-696-3
Cover Art © 2010 Trace Edward Zaber

Layout and Formatting provided by: Elemental Alchemy

PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To our readers, with love

CHAPTER 1

Paris, July 17, 1793

He heard the crowd screaming. The horse-drawn carriage containing the young Charlotte Corday who in four short days had become a controversial figure in the French revolution, progressed slowly.

“They will kill her before the headsman can,” a man beside him observed over the roar of the thousands in the street.

Galien Forsard touched his throat as he watched Charlotte Corday being led to the scaffolding. He was astonished to see it was the peasant women in the crowd who seemed to hate her and reached out with clawing, grasping hands as if to tear her limb from limb. The *gens d’armes* had to push the frantic, hysterical

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

women from the prisoner.

But she did it for them! She murdered Jean-Paul Marat to stem the tide of so much terror!

The crowd roared for blood as she tore off her own bonnet and handkerchief, in defiance of the executioner who usually made an elaborate ritual of this. The aristocratic woman's calm demeanor fascinated Galien as he watched. She seemed to accept her death, until the headsman moved to bind her feet.

Only then did she react.

The crowd screamed, their sound deafening.

"Are you so bad as to expose me here?"

"No, it is to bind you."

Galien strained to hear her final words.

"Do it then."

She allowed him to tie her feet. Held facedown on the bench, her neck hanging between the uprights, Charlotte's hands were bound behind her back.

Galien watched as the guillotine came down, slicing off her head.

He heard but didn't see it fall into the waiting basket. It sounded like a cluster of heavy fish falling into it.

A gasp came in the midst of the bloodthirsty cheering when the executioner picked up her head and held it to the crowd. Charlotte Corday still seemed to be alive and looked offended when her executioner slapped her face twice.

The *gens d'armes* rushed the scaffolding and arrested him.

Galien had hoped for a reprieve, but no. Another headsman took his place.

Now it was Galien's turn to die.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

* * *

The House of Driscoll
Blois de Sologone
Loire Valley, France, 2010

Max rested on his elbows with his legs falling open slightly while young Claude licked his way up his inner thigh. Normally, he would have enjoyed the way Claude's tongue labored on tasting every inch of him before taking his cock in hand, but not tonight. He fixed his dark eyes intensely on Claude's blond head and silently commanded him, ::*Allons-y!*::

Claude glanced up at him sharply, perhaps startled by the briskness of the order. Max knew Claude's first instinct had been to question him, to ask him why, but after meeting Max's gaze, Claude seemed to think better of it, and instead wrapped one cool hand around the base of Max's cock.

Max closed his eyes and let his head fall back as the vampire's lips wrapped around his shaft. He reached out and applied some pressure to Claude's head while lifting his hips, and thrusting upward. He was desperate to relieve the tension, but he knew it was futile. Like his mind, his cock was to find no release tonight. "*Laissez-moi tranquille*," he grunted abruptly.

Claude immediately slid his mouth off his cock and blinked up at him.

"I did something wrong?"

Max felt an immediate pang of guilt. He reached out and touched Claude's soft blond curls. "No, nothing. And you said that perfectly in English."

"I have a good teacher." He smiled. "My lord"—he sat up on

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

the four poster bed—“tell me how I can please you? I’ll do anything. What troubles you? Maybe I can help you to sort it out.”

Max shook his head. Solitude is what he wanted. “I have to be away for awhile, Claude. Katherine will be in charge while I’m gone.”

“I will miss you. We will all miss you, my lord.”

“Leave me now. *Aller prendre un repos*. The sun will be coming up soon.”

Claude picked up his clothes and left immediately, bowing his head as he went. The door to his chambers vibrated closed with a loud bang. The sound of that massive wood door closing always brought comfort.

He hadn’t always been so reclusive. In fact, at one time, he’d been the toast of Paris, until the revolution that is, until...Galien Forsard.

Chateau Driscoll had been built near the end of the fifteenth century. He’d had it constructed more out of vanity than anything else. There was a kind of tongue-in-cheek aspect to its gothic statue, a home fitting for a vampire. The Chateau Driscoll (or as the vampires referred to it, The House of Driscoll) had an actual moat, which when down, covered a small pond. Made of brick and stone, its very structure made it seem impenetrable, and Max liked that, especially after Galien.

Located southeast of Blois de Sologne, one of those steeped-in-medieval aristocratic-history regions of France, its isolation and small vineyards had been big pluses. Depending on the weather and the season, it could be one of the most dismal areas in central France: damp, flat, featureless and foggy. But at other times, its forests, lakes, ponds and marshes had a quiet magic—in summer, for example, when the heather was in bloom and the ponds were

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

full of water lilies, or in early autumn when mushrooms littered the ground, its beauty was indescribable. Wild boar and deer roamed nearby, and there were ducks, geese, quail and pheasants. In fact, the wildlife far outnumbered the small human population.

In the summer months, the left wing of the Chateau was rented out to tourists, whom Max rarely bothered to meet. Most came to tour the wine region, knowing that the Loire Valley still produced the best French wines, many of them languishing in Max's cellar.

Neither did he directly interact with the mortals who made up the rooms, or fixed the food. He simply signed their checks and had one of the vampires in the house deliver them once a month.

Yes, he thought as he pulled back one of the heavy velvet drapes and gazed out the window at his beautiful, lush hills, he relished his serenity. But it was his turn. And it would remain his turn for the next one hundred years. There was nothing he could do about that.

Galien. The name left a nasty residue in his mouth as his lips attempted to form it. It was like drinking a bottle of wine that had turned. And Galien had not only turned, he was spinning on his out-of-control axis. How could a simple, but extraordinarily beautiful country boy of Germanic and French stock have become the monster some said he now was?

Oh, he had thought he loved Galien once...not for long, but long enough to feel responsibility for the man's life and the threat of his execution.

He had been biding his time, waiting for the right moment to pull a stupid stunt like this. Max was not amused.

"Your turn is up, Max," Ambrose informed him a few nights ago. There had been no change in his expression, but Max knew Ambrose was more than glad to pass on the title. Ambrose had

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

been “the cleaner” these last one hundred years, and he wanted to be rid of the responsibility.

“Are you sure?” he’d asked, already knowing the answer.

Ambrose’s expression had changed then. He looked miffed. “Do you want to take this before the council? It’s on the books, Max.”

“Um, not written in blood, is it?”

It had been his attempt at a joke. Ambrose didn’t find it amusing.

“Come on, Driscoll,” Ambrose muttered. “What in the hell’s your problem? No one would dare get out of line with you as the cleaner. It should be a cinch.”

No one would dare get out of line, except for Galien. He’d dare. In fact, he was poised, ready to get out of line.

It had taken less than a day to receive the hand-delivered letter. It was written in old script with those decorative drop caps. Frankly, Max was surprised that it had taken Galien as long as it had to bring his misdeeds to the attention of the council.

The letter was simple and to the point.

House of Driscoll -

Go to New York City and clean house. Urgent.

The Council awaits resolution.

Max let the curtain drop back down on his quiet valley view with a sigh. Galien had always been uncontrollable. He was what one might call an *extreme* individual, not to mention, toxic as hell. Hell, he regretted making him. He should have forgone the pity and let Galien lose his head, instead of turning him. But he’d been responsible for leading Galien to his execution.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Homosexuality was still a hot-button issue even in today's modern society. In the eighteenth century, it guaranteed you execution.

It still is in a way. Look at what's happening in Iran...all those executions of gay men. I thought we'd left barbaric beheadings behind us. Look at AIDS, the killer disease constantly evolving into new drug-resistant strains still finding new and painful ways to kill so many gay men.

Max picked up a glass and sipped at the muscadet that Claude had brought him. Yes, the grape had suffered due to excessive sun and a dry spell this past season, but the white grape had finally yielded the perfect dry white wine.

He held the sip of wine in his mouth for several seconds, savoring the scent of melon, citrus and even white flowers. He swallowed and thought how well it would pair with fish.

Fish. Even now, he associated fish with the smell of death. The day he rescued Galien from his execution, greedy fishmongers had been selling fish at the guillotine.

He swallowed another mouthful of wine. Very good. He made a notation and moved the tray to the sideboard so Claude would know that he was done. Sampled the six varieties the House of Driscoll would release to the public.

Max wondered if Galien liked wine. He lived in New York in the gated community of Gramercy, he had means, but had he educated himself?

Galien had been no more than an ignorant servant who couldn't even sign his name when they had met. Ruled by his baser instincts, his appetite for sex was insatiable, and he'd made it clear to Max that he wanted him. Max had allowed Galien to seduce him. In fact, he'd encouraged him, and when they were arrested,

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

his conscience wouldn't allow him to let Galien die. But, he'd had no idea that Galien would never let go.

Max knew that time was of no consequence, that no matter what, Galien would find a way to bring Max to him. And he had done just that. Max knew he had no choice but to go and take care of the problem. And since Galien was his fledging, the council would expect Max to punish him, but not to destroy him. That was forbidden, and Galien knew it.

The last few years had seen the development of a highly secret international organization astute at investigating the possibility of vampires.

Freshly drained corpses left in the open for all to see was just fodder for this organization. To Galien this might be a game, but he had no idea how much danger he was putting them all. *Damn you, Galien. I should destroy you.* But he couldn't do that. The Council would never allow it. He smiled, walked over to his bureau and began to take clothes out of his bureau drawers. But he was allowed to punish. And if Galien was indeed responsible for this mess in New York, then maybe he'd given him just what he needed, and he could justify a punishment that would get rid of Galien once and for all. Surely, he had carte blanche to punish his own creation.

Okay, Galien, you want me. I'm coming.

CHAPTER 2

Galien stood looking down at the display of money spread across the glass coffee table like a decorative display. The boys had done well last night, and they'd all come back freshly fed, bodies warm, just the way he liked them. The money wasn't important to the others, of course. He took care of all their needs, except the feeding, which the clients supplied. The trick was to make sure they didn't take too much, and kill the poor saps.

He was feeling very upbeat tonight. Soon, Max would be here, and he'd make him understand this time. They belonged together. "You'll like Max," he said aloud as he turned his attention to Blue. "Although when he finds out what a naughty little vampire you have been, you might not survive too long."

Galien moved closer to the sofa where Blue sat huddled, his

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

knees tucked under his chin. Blue looked away when he got closer. Galien reached out and took Blue's chin in his hand. Blue stiffened, tried to pull back but Galien held his chin steady.

"Tall, with a body to die for, thick black hair, eyes that when they look at you...well..."

He released his chin, a warm feeling creeping between his legs. No one could hold a candle to Max, in bed, or out.

"The first time I saw Max, I knew I had to have him. I belong to him, you see, and he's mine. He is part demon and part angel, and he'll take you to heaven and then plunge you into..." He stopped, swallowing.

Blue's eyes were wide, and he was staring right at him.

"Well, at least that got your attention. You'll be looking into those beautiful dark eyes of his when he destroys you for your crimes. I'll miss you in some small way."

He reached out and smoothed back some of Blue's fair hair. "I'll miss the terror in your eyes, and the screaming, especially the screaming. But then you only screamed once that I can recall, and then...silence. Forever silent...my silent beauty."

Sometimes, the screaming reminded him of the day he was supposed to die. He didn't want to die. He remained haunted, all these centuries later by the martyrdom of Charlotte Corday. He'd followed the story, how her executioner, Legros, had been imprisoned and then dismissed for defiling the decapitated woman's body.

What I will always remember was her defiance, her fury when he hit her. Even after death, she was alive.

The screaming still bothered him.

Yes, silence was so much better. Silence removed the imagery of the crowd screaming for *his* blood.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Galien withdrew his hand and walked over to the window of his lovingly restored brownstone in Gramercy Park. The moon shone full, reflecting in the pond outside. He stared up into the night sky.

“Max, my love,” he whispered, “I’m waiting for you.”

* * *

Blue had no idea what the monster was talking about. And he didn’t want to know. Sometimes the monster talked about screaming and some woman he had known. He talked about her talking head or something about her head. Blue never knew or cared since the monster talked in broken sentences, as if this was a conversation half-finished but started between them.

He gripped his arms around him tighter, ignoring the monster who gazed out from the windows of his house.

Blue liked the private gardens. He liked the big key he had to use to get into the little community. He’d kept his feeding away from his own doorstep, but lately, the hunger was eating a hole through his gut. It burned.

Lately, he saw a way to feed and not go far. He felt better each time he fed. The pain subsided and he could tamp down the urge to scream.

When he didn’t scream, the monster was much nicer to him.

But there was something the monster had said which churned in his brain, something about someone coming, a man, a beautiful man...part demon, part angel, someone who would end this misery once and for all. That was okay, meeting eternal darkness at the hands of beauty would be a fitting end since it was such ugliness that took his life. But tonight he couldn’t think about the horror,

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

the blood, the breaking of skull and bone. He could only think about the hunger, and he'd feed over and over again until the hunger waned, and that monster lay still.

* * *

Claude had never been very good at hiding his feelings. Max watched him closing the suitcase. Unhappiness poured from him even as his gaze remained on the suitcase.

"Everything is in order, my lord."

Max could have thanked him and sent him on his way. *I should never have allowed him to pleasure me. I should never have started this.* He wanted to tell him, *don't fall in love with me*, at the same moment needing to know Claude was there for him. He took a step toward him.

"You are so beautiful. I hate to leave you."

Claude trembled. Oh, he was lovely. Fragile, but lovely.

"Get undressed," Max said, his words soft against Claude's lips.

Claude lost no time. All he wore were the white silk drawstring pants and shirt that Max liked him to wear. They showed off his huge cock and shapely ass. Max liked to fondle Claude when he felt like it. He frowned to himself. He had to stop gratifying Claude. Claude would only become more attached. But dammit, man, he had a magnificent body.

God, Claude was naked and hard as he lay on the bed, reading Max's telepathed instructions. Max ran his hands over the soft skin so taut over the slim, muscular body.

Max leaned beside him, still running his hands over his French valet's body. He liked how much Claude enjoyed his touch. Of all

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

the people who had passed through here, only Claude had proven his loyalty. He commanded Max's attention in a way nobody had in a long time. But this wasn't love. It was lust. He telepathed Claude to relax. He couldn't clearly, which fed Max's ego just a little. There was a certain enjoyment he took in the power he had over the young man's body. Claude reacted to everything, the head of his beautiful cock glistening.

"Your hands feel so good," Claude whispered.

Max looked into his eyes and bent down, sucking the tip into his mouth. He sensed by the way Claude kept arching upward that he wanted Max to take his whole cock, but he wouldn't. Not yet. The passion raged between them, Max helpless to stop as he sucked just the head, running his tongue under the rim, gently licking the vein that ran up the center.

Claude began moaning, begging for Max to fuck him.

Max, aware that Katherine was on her way, couldn't stop. He sucked Claude's entire length into his mouth, letting his hands massage the younger man's belly and chest.

"I'm yours to take, my lord."

Fuck.

Claude began to react as Max moved his hand in a clockwise position over Claude's diaphragm, waking up his whole central nervous system.

"Oh fuck!" Claude shrieked. "Please, my lord. Please!" His fingers plucked at Max's button-down fly.

Max ignored his entreaties. He took his mouth away, his hand moving to Claude's tight ass, putting a finger inside. It felt so hot and tight. Claude humped Max's hand, as if urging more fingers into him. His legs rose to give Max more access.

As Max slipped another finger inside, he watched, fascinated as

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Claude's cock released more juices. It would have been easy to finger-fuck him to a raging climax, but Max found the urge rising in him. He allowed Claude to push down his jeans and he moved between the valet's smooth legs.

"I want you to come with my cock in your ass," he ground out.

Claude shrieked then. "Fuck me! Damn it! Put your cock inside me!

Max's eyes glittered with the thrill of possession. "I am going to fuck you hard and not stop until you come."

He entered Claude slowly at first, the momentum building in the base of his spine. He yearned for swift release, Claude clutching at his back. Oh, he was a sweet ride. They came together, Claude's legs wrapped around his master's thighs, Max feeling the heat of the moment like warm sweet wine.

Max's lips moved to Claude's ear as he whispered. "*Âne chaud*. Hot ass."

* * *

Mad as a hatter. Wasn't that the expression people always used?

Well, Katherine *was* a mad hatter. He studied the way her white hands lay on the black steering wheel. She was a curious, intriguing woman. Tall and elegant, her blonde hair hung in immaculate, sleek, symmetrical lines to her shoulders. It was an exciting contrast to her nails, which were painted black. Her entire wardrobe was black, with the odd touch of burgundy. Usually on her lips.

As he always liked to say, Katherine was Grace Kelly, with fangs.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

He could tell by the way her tapered fingers handled the steering wheel of the reproduction 1954 Mercedes 300 SL Gullwing Coupe that she was in heaven. She handled cars the way a man would a lover. It was a man's car some said, but she was all woman. Katherine had beaten many a sorry fellow on the racetrack, and on the auction floor.

The sun was starting to set. He was taking a seven P.M. flight, which would bring him to New York around ten-thirty P.M. Eastern Daylight Time. With the temperature dropping and night blossoming, he felt her energy level rise. Max had marveled at the way she had coolly outbid so many men to buy this rare, vintage sports car once owned by the Shah of Iran, one of only fourteen hundred such cars in the world.

"Well, what do you think?" she asked for the fiftieth time as the wind whipped their faces.

He took a deep breath, trying to adjust to the speed, to the sensation of leaving his peaceful, ordered life behind.

"Of the car?"

"Brat! Of course the car."

He grinned. She loved her toys, though he still found it disquieting to have his elbow resting on the spare tire hanging on the passenger door. Tires belonged on the ground, not under his arm.

"It's wonderful, *cheri*."

Katherine threw her head back and laughed.

Men adored her, but some asked him why she always wore black nail polish. Max never explained.

What a woman. A sought-after milliner, she had been for three hundred years, her passions for cars and men were superseded only by her obsession with hats. He always found it delightful that she

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

never wore them herself. No, Katherine's only nod to frippery was the sole, pristine black tulip in a stem vase fastened to the dashboard with antique silver clasps.

She was of course, fond of black flowers, deadly black flowers in particular. Along with her passion for deadly flowers and plants, there was her insistence on doing things the old way. That meant using old dyes, inks and other preparations that had gone out with the ark. A certain red dye used to stain straw boaters for years turned out to be lethal to humans.

But not his gorgeous vampire friend. The ink stains had seeped into each nail bed of her fingers, however, giving them the appearance of rust. Or as she put it, *old blood*. Hence, she always wore black polish.

She licked her lips, her habit when she became furious or frustrated. How dare they be held up by a red light? He could practically read her mind.

Well actually, he *could* read her mind but he always thought this a rather intrusive habit, so he didn't. Well, not often anyway.

Katherine's wide, beautiful lips were outlined in the darkest red pencil possible. She wasn't voluptuous, but at five feet eleven inches she had the kind of body the fashion magazines called statuesque. He preferred to think of her as a siren.

If it were possible for him to be in love with a woman, Katherine would be that woman.

She stepped on the gas, resuming her talk of the car's attributes. She hadn't stopped talking since they'd left the chateau. He almost regretted allowing her to drive him to the airport. Usually she'd pause to glance at him, ask if he'd heard what she'd said, but not tonight. She just kept on talking, her words droning in and out of his head as he silently watched the first fall of raindrops

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

batter the windshield.

“Turn on your wipers,” he said suddenly, cutting her off.

“What?”

“Wipers.”

“I don’t need those,” she muttered. “I can see. I’m a vampire for Christ’s sakes. Plus, I’m driving so fast they keep missing us.”

“If you say so.” He smiled slightly, shaking his head.

She flicked a button and the gullwings that had been hovering over their heads, descended, like a big, shiny bird’s wingspan coming back to its sides.

Katherine preened under the envious glances from other drivers on the Autoroute into Paris. Streetlights started to glisten and her face shone. She adored Paris. Max hated it. She pulled over for a fraction of a second to click the wings in place and swerved back into the flow of traffic.

“So, I still don’t get it,” she announced.

He glanced at his watch. They were making good time. Better than good time. The way she drove. The normal two-hour drive would take forty minutes.

“You still don’t get what?”

“Why you’re taking a commercial flight.”

“I like to fly.”

“Can’t you teleport?”

He laughed. “You’ve been watching too many science fiction movies.”

“Very funny, ha, ha.”

“There’s the exit for the airport.”

“The reason you’re flying commercially is because you’re procrastinating, aren’t you?”

“Ah, you know me so well.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“You never did tell me very much about your ex-paramour.”

“He’s not my ex-paramour.”

“That’s not what I hear.”

“You shouldn’t listen to gossip, Kat.”

“You’re not going to tell me, are you?”

“No. I’m not going to tell you.”

“But I already know. He’s all you’ve been thinking about, and not in a good way.”

“Didn’t your mother ever tell you that it’s not nice to listen in on people’s private thoughts?”

“No.”

“That’s one of the reasons you’re not welcome in any other house.”

She smirked. “That, among other things. Why do you put up with me, Max?”

“I’m a sucker for the incorrigible.”

She snorted. “Takes one, to know one. Are there any instructions while you’re away?”

“Don’t eat anyone.”

She saluted him. “Ah, there’s the turnoff for airport over there.”

He gasped when she threw the car into reverse. Right on the A6!

“Slow down. You’ll get a ticket.”

“Why? I’m going the speed limit.”

“Not backward! You’re supposed to go with the flow of traffic.”

Cars screeched and skidded around them. One guy honked, but his gaze moved from the car to its driver and he almost rear-ended another vehicle.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Katherine was oblivious.

"I don't care. I could use a snack."

He eyed her. "Katherine, you're always thinking about food."

She laughed as they veered onto the *périphérique* to reach Charles de Gaulle Airport. "Food and sex, baby. I need a new man."

The last thing Katherine was, was a nun. In fact, she'd been sent to his house because none of the others could control her. She was a free spirit, bound and determined to celebrate her eternal life. But there wasn't a vicious bone in her body, and he'd grown very fond of her. She'd been at the House of Driscoll for over two hundred years now and he knew she had no intention of ever going anywhere else.

"You were thinking who'd want me, right?"

Max glanced at her as he folded his arms over his chest. "Still reading my mind, eh?"

She grinned. "It's such a fun place to visit."

Katherine's last place of employment had been the esteemed, centuries-old Lock and Company. She'd had to relinquish her position when they started to question the remarkable similarities between Katherine and her alleged mother, grandmother and great-grandmother who'd occupied the position of Head Designer before her.

She had cried on her last day. Max had been shocked. He'd never seen Katherine cry over *anything*, not even a man.

He had convinced her she could set up her own business and she'd balked, thinking it would be too constricting. He wondered what could be more constricting than working for a major hat-fashion house, but he realized the truth lay far deeper than that. It had been her excuse *not* to fall in love and connect with a

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

man, mortal, vampire or otherwise.

Her business was doing well and she enjoyed making creations that wealthy women the world over sometimes waited months for, but yes, now she had more time, she'd started to think about love again.

She changed the subject.

"Why do you want to destroy Galien?"

"It's a long story."

"But you were lovers once."

"You're going to miss the turnoff for the airport and if you back up, you'll hit a truck full of chickens. It won't be pretty. Change lanes."

"Don't worry about them," she scoffed. "They're going to die anyway."

He laughed, in spite of himself.

She then proceeded to cross two lanes at once, their shared laughter almost drowning out the symphony of horn blowing coming from behind them. "There. See, I didn't miss it."

Max rolled his eyes. "Remind me never to ask you to drive me anywhere ever again, okay?"

"It was either me or the driverless shuttle," she reminded him.

That sobered him up. The driverless shuttle train freaked him out. It made him think of headless people. Headless people made him think of Galien.

She made a face. "So, Galien is being bad just to get your attention, right? I think that's pretty pathetic. I can't believe he's still into you after all this time. I got the part about his clingy personality, but what was with the heads I saw, dropping into baskets?"

He'd seen many heads being chopped off at that time in Paris.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

La Place de la Revolution was soaked in blood. He could remember the women who brought their knitting with them. They'd count the stitches along with the heads.

And the damned fish. God the fish in baskets...they all had their heads.

"That's gross," Kate said.

"There weren't any televisions."

"Very funny. You didn't rape him, did you?"

"What?"

"This Galien guy. Did you rape him?"

"No, of course not. What would give you that idea? Rape isn't quite my scene."

She grinned, gave him the once over. "I can see why."

"Don't be fresh."

"So, if he spread his legs willingly, you have nothing to be guilty about. He got what he wanted. He took his chances. I hope to hell you were good, good enough to lose his head for."

Charles de Gaulle was now in sight, driving home the fact that he was really headed to New York City. His head spun with images from the past and his instinct was to find Galien and get rid of him once and for all, but he had to play this cool. He couldn't act too impulsively.

"Reason with him," Kate said as Max took his small bag out of the backseat of the silver Seville and closed the door. He kissed her proffered cheek and raised a hand to her in farewell. She, too, looked sad. It had been a long time since they'd been separated.

::I'll come home soon,:: he telepathed, nodded and walked in the direction of the airport entrance. She didn't know Galien.

There was no reasoning with him. He'd discovered that a long time ago.

CHAPTER 3

Blue was curled up into a little ball. He woke up shivering in the damp basement, not sure how he'd gotten there. *Where in the hell am I?* It wasn't the first time he'd woken up feeling lost. The sun had gone down. He knew that even before he struggled to his feet and walked over to peel back the dusty curtain covering the dirty, cracked window. *Screaming. Screaming in his head. Blood.* He couldn't see their faces anymore. They were faded. All he saw was the blood. It was everywhere. And he heard his fiendish laughing.

He'll come to me now. He'll have no choice.

Blue turned around in the basement, wondering if the voice was real or imagined. *Who will come?* Nothing. There was no answer. There was no one here but him and a few frightened rats.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

His eyes adjusted to the darkness quickly and he found the stairs. He mounted them slowly and wrenched open the door. The house was old, drafty. He walked down a long corridor, suddenly wanting desperately to leave this place.

Help me. God, Blue, help me please. Please!

He grunted. Something felt painful in his gut. He glanced around, paused. He looked down. Bodies. Dead, still, white, a pool of blood surrounding them. He almost screamed but nothing came out.

Mother! Father! No, no, no. The monster. The monster stood staring at him in the corner of the room.

"You're mine," he whispered. "The perfect victim, and the perfect killer."

Blue went down on his knees. He reached out to touch the face of someone he loved, but there was nothing but the bare floor. Suddenly he tensed. He heard the sound of a key turning in a lock. *Mortal*. He could smell the blood. He sprang to his feet, teeth barred, a low growl turning in his throat. *Hunger*. His mind shut down. He was ready.

* * *

Sex and death. These were the things that always accompanied him since he'd become a vampire. They became entwined with moments of grief, times of sweet life, the laughter and tears he shared with others. He could never quite shake off meeting Galien. No matter how much he dusted and cleaned, Galien was like psychic soot. He could not be removed.

It wasn't the man so much, but what he represented. Homosexuality was so controversial in medieval France and Max

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

had witnessed terrible atrocities committed on those convicted of sodomy. Up until the revolution, a man or a woman convicted of *sodomite prouvé* endured painful mutilation of their genitalia and were then burned alive.

On that flight on Air France, sipping excellent red wine in first class, Max tried not to think about these things, but it was all a part of his story. And Galien's.

He glanced at the man seated beside him. Fingers clenched on the armrests, his iPod earbuds in his ears, his eyes were closed. He'd already told Max twice that he was a nervous traveller. Max took another sip and listened to the song wafting from the earbuds. An oldie but goodie, The Police's "King of Pain." Not a restful song. A heartbreaking song filled with images of destroyed beauty.

He still remembered the first time he took Galien. They were in the garden of his father's home. No ordinary garden, it was a huge estate. Galien flaunted his body, his huge, thick penis and his open desire for Max.

Max was desperate. With police squads openly trying to trap gay men by using agents called *mouches* (French for fly) they entrapped gay aristocratic men, baiting them into having sex, with disastrous, very bloody results. Max had killed a few *mouches* and slaked his hunger in the process but these were dangerous times. He had escaped to London briefly and sampled the physical pleasures of Molly houses where groups of men met and had fast and furious anonymous sex.

Whenever he felt the urge, Max would go to these houses, vowing like an addict never to return, but the sad fact was, he sought refuge and not just sex in his own kind. These men understood him. There was camaraderie, a lack of judgment he found so refreshing there. He also enjoyed the food served at the

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Molly houses. He discovered turkey, which had not yet found its way to France. There was also, of course, much wine.

When he returned to France after the furor over who killed the *mouches* died down, he travelled to London once a month or so to visit the Molly houses. He learned that his own truth was that he yearned for more. He wanted and needed a sincere connection. The Molly houses were fine, but they set up a serious pattern of relationship avoidance that pervaded the gay community to this day.

No, what Max wanted was something closer, deeper, more constant.

His cousin Arnaud, who'd accompanied him on a visit to London, had been enthralled by the experience there. When he learned of a similar set-up in Paris, in an upstairs room of a tavern, he coaxed Max into going with him. Under cover of darkness, the two cousins met a man in the middle of Le Pont Neuf bridge. Money changed hands. A *lot* of money. The man gave them the address.

"You think it's a trap?" Arnaud asked Max.

"If it is, it's an expensive one."

Neither man felt their fear override their need for sexual stimulation. They found the tavern in the Pigalle district, frequented by prostitutes who paid off the *gens d'armes* to avoid prosecution. They entered the back alley stairs of the tavern, kicking aside rancid rubbish and barrels of empty bottles to do so. It still struck Max as bizarre, considering the small fortunes they had paid to take part in the festivities.

Upstairs, they found a table with *fromages blanc*, white cheese, candied fruits and a giant boar's head on a sideboard. They met other gay men who also had money and raging sexual appetites.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

They drank tankards of wine, their inhibitions loosening. Max was shocked to find a young man dressed as a bride. The eight participants took their turns initiating the young bride. Under his lewd corset, his nipples showed and the men took turns sucking them. He was a hot young number, his cock starting to tent the white dress he wore. Max adored the word *cock*, which he had learned in the Molly houses in England. It was a beautiful, sexy word and this was the first place he was able to use it. The sights and sounds of the passion around him inflamed him. He started kissing another man as one of the men raised the bride to a table and shocked everybody by lifting the long white dress and its petticoats.

The bride lay on the table, grinning. He began to let out a long, pleading sigh as the man breathing over his groin began sucking and licking the waiting cock and balls.

The young man's moans were bewitching.

Each man took his turn, sucking and licking the bride. He seemed to enjoy Max the most, especially when Max's hand darted to the tender flesh of his inner thighs.

There was moment when everything stopped. The bride opened his thighs, a couple of men holding his muscular legs back. Max gazed in wonderment and began pressing gentle kisses on the exposed inner folds of the bride's legs until he reached the crease of his buttocks.

He took a moment to observe. He inhaled the maleness of the man in white. He was aware of the beautiful, soft fabrics of the man-dress and pushed them away to get at the man's hole, waiting so close for his tongue-touch.

Everyone applauded when Max began sucking and licking the bride who began begging to be fucked. A few of the men were

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

married, Max knew, and their wives hadn't begged at all. Ever. One man was a new father and hadn't had sex for almost a year. The frenzy over who would go first was soon replaced with who could recover quickly enough to satisfy the insatiable young man who whimpered for more. The fucking started to turn on the participants, who turned to each other for immediate attention, but it was the young bride still begging for more whom remained the focus of the night. Max just missed out on taking the bride a second time.

He had allowed Arnaud to go first. Arnaud was in the throes of taking the bride to new and dizzying sexual heights when the police arrived. It had all been a setup.

Max and a few of the others managed to escape, but Arnaud and the bride's public executions, their pitiful, agonized screams as they were cut, tortured and burned at the stake still haunted Max.

For months, he abstained from pursuing sex. He couldn't even bring himself to visit the Molly houses of London. Sex brought pain. Sex brought death. He yearned of a nameless, faceless sexual partner, gratifying himself in his boudoir late at night. He was aware that Galien always seemed close to his boudoir, but had no proof the young man saw or heard anything. As Max always told himself, there was no law against self-satisfaction, only homosexuality.

Gradually, he became aware that Galien lusted after him. The lure of having a hot houseman who longed for Max's touch was one that proved also disastrous in other ways.

As Max's family began to cultivate the wild blackberries, strawberries, grapes and lemons growing on their property, Max began to spend long days out in the acres of lush grounds—and soon, Galien came to visit him. Max fancied that it was the hard

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

physical labor that had him so worked up that hot September day, but he didn't resist Galien's entreaties.

No, instead, when he rose from the ground after examining a row of freshly planted seeds, his heart skipped when he saw Galien, really saw him for the first time in his cambric breeches and long shirt, his muddy boots and long, windblown blond hair. He wanted to possess him, to tame him. To love him. Alone late that afternoon, he pushed the younger man into the greenhouse where acorns and nuts awaited packing and shipping for trade in the east.

He thrust Galien against the wall. Apart from the birdsong outside, all he could hear was their harsh breathing.

"Oh," Galien breathed, when Max released the coarse fabric of his handed-down breeches and finally touched his cock for the first time. Max's tongue ran over the head and shaft, tasting him.

"You've bathed," Max said, surprised.

Galien nodded, mute. Already Max could read Galien's thoughts. Already he plotted and planned to turn him from human to vampire, to his beloved companion. He loved the way Galien trembled as Max gobbled at his succulent cockhead, fastening his dirt-covered hand around it. Galien moved his hips in a slight back and forth motion. Max wanted to fuck him badly but satisfied himself with bringing off Galien with his mouth the first time.

He was still swallowing Galien's come when he stood and said, "I want you in my bed this night."

Of course, Galien came and the sex, the bond intensified. For weeks, they kept their love a secret, but Galien was a flashy, boastful kind of guy who told a fellow servant, who told another fellow servant...until the *gens d'armes* arrived at Max's door. He was astonished when Galien lied and said he'd made it up.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Later, as Galien languished in the Bastille and Max bribed guards to allow him to visit, he promised his servant lover that he would free him. Persecution of sodomites had been set aside for execution of the aristocracy but Galien was being used as an example.

* * *

As the flight attendant announced the pending arrival at JFK, Max shook his head and raised the window panel. He should have come here under his own steam, but he felt better now that he'd had time to think, to reflect on the past. The past he never allowed himself to dwell on. He hadn't allowed himself to think about Arnaud for so long. Arnaud, whose wonderful, childlike laugh would never be reflected in his children or grandchildren's faces and voices, since he had left none behind.

The plane landed at JFK at almost four o'clock in the morning Central European Time, almost eleven P.M., five hours earlier in Manhattan.

The man beside him looked absolutely green, his lips chalk white.

"Have you ever experienced such turbulence?" the man gasped. He rushed into the nearest cubicle. Max had felt none of it. He'd been too busy thinking of his time with Galien, a time when they were the hunter and the hunted. Their roles had been the same but the consequences more...pleasurable.

I can't believe he still wants me.

Max took his small black bag at his feet and strode through the airport. He took a cab into the city and checked into the Hotel Elysee on 54th Street in midtown. He finally stood on the balcony

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

watching the night sky, searching for stars, looking for answers.

He found neither.

The endless and repetitious strains of Rachmaninoff had started to irritate him—until now.

The great composer's "All Night Vigil" had begun to play. How apt. It was the sign he had been seeking. He knew exactly where to find Galien. He wasn't hiding. Max sighed. It was time. He left his room and took the elevator to the basement level. There, he took the fire exit and walked quietly around to the back of the hotel, glanced around him for signs of life, then took to the sky.

A few minutes later, he touched down outside a large brownstone in Gramercy. It was beautiful. The rain had stopped and left everything looking crisp and yet, soft. For the longest time he just stood there watching. How far Galien had come from rough peasant boy to owning one of the most luxurious homes in this gated community.

It was as steeped in history as his own life was with Galien. Theodore Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Oscar Wilde, Mark Twain, Arthur Miller...all had once lived here and forged their place in time. *Time*. Would Galien leave behind a legacy of love, or hate? Or would there only be blood?

Max had always known it would come to this moment. His gaze roamed over the house's gabled walls, the ivy climbing up centuries-old stone. He knew Galien had done bad things to come by his fortune. Very bad things. He was in there. He could feel him. Max could feel his anticipation and his fear. And there *was* fear.

And so there should be. How dare you call me out? Did you not think there would be consequences? This is not a game, Galien!

Suddenly without warning, the rain poured out of the skies,

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

soaking Max's hair and his long black coat.

Galien's voice flew into his mind, faint and feathery as a baby bird's wings.

::We can work this out. I'll help you find what you seek.::

::I seek nothing. I came to take care of a problem, that's all. That problem is you.::

::Don't be so sure.::

::Enough with these games!:: Max flew up the steps. The sheer force of his anger caused the door to fly open. And he stood there, his long wet hair clinging to his face, his clothes dripping with the cold rain.

Galien stood in the distance, his profile shadowed by a long stained glass window. He was smiling. "I've missed you."

The door slammed shut. The thunder rolled in the skies. In less than a second, Max's cold fingers curled around Galien's throat. His damp face was very close to his, his fangs exposed, eyes red and deadly. "Your house is out of control. Your irresponsible behavior puts us all at risk. You must pay for your crimes. I'm here to clean house."

Galien's throat was exposed to him, the expression on his face almost serene. He couldn't speak aloud but he answered Max anyway.

::Look into my thoughts and see that I have committed none of these crimes. I need your help. You must help me with one particular renegade. Even now he is in the process of killing innocents.::

Max released him abruptly and moved away. "You're telling the truth. Who is this vampire?"

"Blue. His name is Blue," Galien said, rubbing his throat. He smiled at him. "You look...perfect, as usual."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Enough. Is he yours?”

“Afraid so. I made him out of compassion. He was dying anyway. He lost his entire family, poor fellow. I had no idea he’d lost his mind as well. He must be destroyed. And I’m afraid I don’t have the power or the mandate to do that.”

Max watched Galien walk around the large living room, picking up this and that object d’art. He took pleasure in his valuable things; that was evident. He hadn’t changed a bit. He was still very handsome, but there was a hardness to him. *Time*. It hadn’t brought Galien much happiness. Only stuff. Max didn’t trust him but he knew Galien hadn’t been the perpetrator of these random murders. He wouldn’t be able to hide that from him. He realized now he’d been tricked into coming here.

“Where do I find him?”

“He likes to return to his old neighborhood in Brooklyn, which is where his family died. He hunts there.”

Max narrowed his eyes. “How did his family die?”

Galien turned his back. “I have no idea. Blue doesn’t speak.”

“He’s mute?”

“Yes. I doubt he ever did speak.”

“What makes you say that?”

Galien’s hand lingered at the scalloped edges of a glass bowl. It was a milky rose color. A wonderful piece of glass.

“There were stories...” Galien shrugged. “He was a forgotten son. I get glimpses when I try to read him. His mind goes and returns. Who knows what happened to him?”

Max considered all of this. “Turn around and look at me, Galien.”

He turned slowly. “I’ve missed you. I love you, Max. Never stopped. I’m sorry that you had to come all this way to help me get

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

my house in order. I didn't plan this."

Max was about to dispute that when suddenly two young male vampires walked into the room. When they saw Max, they froze, looking at Galien.

"This is Max," Galien said, "Max Driscoll. Max, Ian and David."

Max nodded at them, eager to get back to the problem at hand. "I'm going to Brooklyn."

The one called Ian moved closer. "Max," he said, his voice soft, seductive. "You could become my obsession."

"Don't bother." Max barely avoided a sneer. "I won't be here that long." He looked back at Galien. "Come on, you're coming with me. You track him. He's yours."

"Don't you want to relax first, spend some time catching up?"

The one called David moved closer. He linked his arm with Ian. "We can help you do that," he murmured, slowly running his gaze up and down Max's tall profile.

"I doubt that," Max scoffed. "I'm as relaxed as I'm going to be right now. And Galien, if you don't find that vampire tonight before he kills again, I'll have your head on that exquisite Murano glass platter of yours. Is that clear?"

"Crystal." Galien looked shocked by the reference to his head.

Max tasted the word in his mouth. He enjoyed Galien's fear. The latter surprised him.

"I'm ready, but then, I've always been ready for you, Max."

Max looked away. "Let's go."

* * *

Galien drove slower than usual, and it had nothing to do with

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

the fresh downpour of heavy rain. He was used to New York's slippery roads thanks to unexpected cloudbursts. His Jaguar, which was often a nuisance in the city with nowhere to park, was a godsend now that Max was here. Max looked out the window as they crossed the Brooklyn Bridge. He wanted to prolong the time they spent alone with one another. The pleasure of just looking at him at this close a distance was intoxicating, and he really didn't care what Max did to him as long as he took him to his bed at the end.

He knew Max was angry, but even his anger fueled Galien's lust. All he wanted was to redeem himself in Max's mind, win his affection, make him think that he'd helped him solve the problem.

"This wasn't a ploy to get you back," he managed all of a sudden.

"Wasn't it?"

"I've given up on us. Moved on."

"Right."

"That's pretty arrogant, Max."

"There's nothing arrogant about it. It's just the way it is."

"Is it my fault that one of my offspring went off his...head? I didn't plan it that way."

"Let's just say, there are too many coincidences, Galien."

"We might as well enjoy each other while you're here."

"Where does he work?" Max asked, coming straight to the point.

"In his old neighborhood. He's a creature of habit."

"And what neighborhood is that?"

Galien took a breath. "Bensonhurst." When Max glanced at him, Galien joked, "He likes Italian. Who doesn't?"

They sped through the streets, pausing for a group of old

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Jewish men to cross the signal from a large temple. Their muttered prayers pervaded the otherwise quiet street.

Max sat up straight as the light turned green.

“What is this house?”

Galien sighed. Damn. Max had such good instincts. “Not this house. He lived up there. Right up ahead.” He flicked on the hazard lights so the car behind him would go around him. He slowed as he turned the corner.

Max seemed to stiffen.

“What is it?”

“I have to get in there now!”

“But—”

Galien’s words fell on Max’s back as he pushed open the car door and sprang from the seat. He moved far faster than Galien could. He was already inside the house before Galien got out of the car. It didn’t matter what happened now. He could destroy Blue if he wanted. Or not. Galien parked and glanced up and down the street. It was quiet. Too quiet. He could smell the fear. Not that it mattered either. All that mattered was that Max was here in the city, and later, Max would be even closer.

* * *

The vampire sat on the floor, the unconscious man lay across his lap. He didn’t even seem to be aware of Max’s presence. Slowly he stroked the man’s hair a little. The mortal was still alive. Max could hear the heart beating, faint but steady.

The vampire was humming a little song. It sounded strange, haunting. He rocked the man back and forth in his arms.

“Blue,” Max spoke his name.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

The vampire glanced up. There was no expression on his face. He had pale blond hair and startling blue eyes, which right now were reflecting the light like two glowing embers.

“Put him down. I can’t let you kill him.”

Blue pulled the body closer. He bared his teeth, growled possessively.

“I don’t want your prey. I just can’t let you kill him.” Max studied him closely for a second. He took a step into the room. When he did, the vampire flew up to the ceiling, the man’s body dangling in one fist.

Max sighed. “Goddamn it,” he snapped and with one lunge, he flew across the room and seized the mortal by the collar. He yanked him out of Blue’s grasp and lowered him to the floor.

On one knee, he checked his pulse, and raised his head, trying to sense if there were others mortal victims. There was only the one.

Max glanced upward to see the vampire still clinging to the ceiling. “Galien should never have made you. You don’t embrace the insane. You must be dealt with.” He held out his hand. “Come with me willingly, or I’ll have to take you by force.”

“Sounds delicious,” a voice said suddenly.

Max looked around to see Galien standing in the door. The vampire clinging to the ceiling appeared to shrink closer to it.

“So, you’ve found the problem,” Galien announced. “Take care of it, and then you can relax.”

“I’m not here to relax. What in the hell is wrong with you, transforming this pathetic creature? He’s sick. It’s forbidden.”

“I didn’t know he was a loon at the time. I told you I made a mistake. Anyone can make a mistake, Max, even you.”

“Get down from there now!” Max demanded. He felt his fury

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

mounting as he looked up at the one called Blue. “Don’t make me come up there and get you. Believe me, you’ll regret it.”

* * *

Slowly Blue sank back down the floor, back against the wall. He watched Max closely. *Beautiful*. He was beautiful but deadly. And it was clear that the monster wanted him.

Max reached out his hand. “Come with me.”

A beautiful, blood sucking fiend...another monster, a monster to end all this. Blue looked around him, suddenly realizing that he knew this place. He ignored the beauty’s face and was rewarded with sharp teeth snapping near his throat. He felt himself being lifted, then forcibly dragged from the house.

My house. This is my fucking house.

He was in the backseat of a car, the beauty holding him facedown on the seat. *Kill me then. Do it. It makes no difference to me.*

He was surprised when the new man’s voice entered his mind.

::I will. But first I have to know where the other victims are. How many did you drain and leave out in the open?::

::Only the monsters.::

A strong hand yanked him around and peered down into his face. Blue stared up into the intensity of those dark eyes. “Don’t play games with me,” he warned. “I’ll destroy you in the most unmerciful way.”

Blue fell into his gaze, felt quite powerless in it. He searched his face, haunting, sensuous, with full soft lips and a square jaw. The planes of his face were sharply angled, saved from being too sharp by his lush mouth and large dark eyes.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

::Torture me if you like. I have nothing to say to you, monster.::

::You're the monster, draining innocents and not even having enough respect to dispose of them proper. You have made yourself an outlaw, an enemy of your kind. I have no choice but to eliminate you.::

::Monster.:: He recoiled from him suddenly, seeing only the sharp teeth, the red eyes, the blood and her face. *::Mother.::*

* * *

Max was perplexed when he walked into the House of Forsard with Blue in tow. "I think he called me his mother," he muttered with disgust, throwing Blue down on the sofa.

"You don't look like anyone's mother," Ian drawled from where he reclined on the love seat. "Is Blue in trouble?"

Galien walked over to the bar and poured himself some whiskey. "Want some?" he held the glass up to Max. "It helps with the cravings." He lifted it to his lips.

"No. I want some time alone with Blue."

Galien paused in mid swallow. "What in the hell for? Why not just dispose of him and get it over with?"

"Because you're far too anxious for me to do just that."

Ian thought that was funny. He started to laugh until Galien threw him a dirty look. He stopped laughing immediately.

"Again with your conspiracy theories, Max?" Galien clicked his tongue. "It's getting old. And, personally, it's bordering on arrogance. To think that I would go to any lengths to have you back. Really! You weren't that good in bed."

"As I recall, neither were you," Max shot back.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Galien stiffened.

"I'm taking him upstairs. I don't want to be disturbed. I'll get to the bottom of this, get the information I need, and be out of here."

"Don't count on leaving this city for awhile," Galien replied. "He's not exactly Mr. Social."

Max swept over and grabbed Galien by the throat. He lifted him off the floor with one hand. "Don't ever mock me. I'm here to do a job. That's all. If you get in my way, Galien, consequences or no, I swear, I'll rip your head off. Is that clear?"

Galien nodded mutely. Max dropped him to the floor.

* * *

Max dragged Blue upstairs. *How crazy.* There on the first landing was Delacroix's sainted painting of Charlotte Corday. He stopped mid step and stared at it. Galien constantly confounded him. He hadn't forgotten the past as he'd feared. He'd forced himself to look upon it, always.

Or was it a reminder to all those who crossed the threshold to trust nobody? That death was only a heartbeat away?

::Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it,::
Galien said in his mind.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Max snapped, looking around.

Blue shrank against him. Max's grip tightened on his arm, but still he couldn't move.

The painting depicted her in the moments after she'd stabbed Jean-Paul Marat in his bathtub.

Unlike an earlier version by Baudry, this one captured her

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

bleakness, her heartbreak at the terror of so much bloodshed in the French Revolution. Half-hidden by a curtain, she seemed terrified yet resolute about the ensuing scrutiny.

What have I done? the picture seemed to say.

She was a victim of the times. It didn't escape him that Blue, too, was somehow a victim. What horrors had happened to him?

He heard Galien's voice inside his head. *::You always were a sucker for handsome blonds, Max::*

::Screw you, Galien,:: he shot back.

Within a few days of Charlotte Corday's execution, in spite of her fearless, signed protestations that she had acted alone, rumors swirled that she had a lover. The gossips wouldn't believe that a woman could carry out an assassination on her own.

The scene of so many peasant women screaming for her blood at her moment of death turned when it became obvious that the Jacobin reign of terror continued. Charlotte became their heroine, to the dismay of their husbands and fathers.

To quell the pending riots, the Surgeon General autopsied her and discovered she was still a virgin. No man had shared her bed. The killings, the gossip, swirled in other directions. It would take a long, long time for Charlotte Corday to be declared a patriot of the revolution.

Max moved across the landing, opening doors. The first bedroom he found, he flung his quarry inside and slammed the door shut behind them.

* * *

"Did you know the Bastille fell because of vampires?" Max asked as he shut the door. "Did you know that the man who

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

executed Charlotte Corday was a carpenter hired to repair the guillotine and as a thank you was allowed to end her life?"

Blue stared as Max's lips moved.

"Forget it," he heard Max say. "These are rhetorical questions."

Blue moved halfway across the room the moment Max finished locking the door. He looked around anxiously. Were there other people here? Had the monster come to slaughter them all?
::Mother?::

"Why do you say mother?" Max asked him curiously, narrowing his eyes. He came closer. "Do I look like your mother?"

Blue winced, turned and hugged the wall.

Max grabbed him, turned him around again. "Stop that. Answer me. I know you can speak. What are you frightened of? Are you scared of Galien? Didn't he teach you anything after he turned you, how to feed?"

Blue fell into that gaze again, its intensity was riveting.

::Kill me::

::Kind of hard to do, since you're already dead. You want oblivion? You won't get it from me, unless you're prepared to tell me where you left the other victims so I can clean up your mess::

::I don't remember:: Blue turned his head away. ::I only remember the monsters. I kill monsters. And there are more and more and—::

"You're talking nonsense."

Blue lowered his head. He was tired. He was so tired. He slid down the wall, his face in his hands, knees up. He knew that this monster was watching him. He closed his eyes. He wanted to sleep, but all he saw was blood every time he closed his eyes.

Max spoke aloud, his voice strangely gentle. "Whose blood? The blood of your victims?"

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Blue raised his eyes to him. *::Blood::* He rubbed his eyes, blood stained tears spread over his fingers like tiny spiders.

“You’re in pain,” those dark eyes looked down at him. “Why so much pain?”

::You can’t help me. Just end this. End it. End it now.::

Blue didn’t realize that he’d sprung up from his sitting position to lunge at the vampire before him. They struggled, the battle ending quickly as he felt his back hit the wall and a hard body crush his own. There was a stirring of something, something he had no familiarity with, a fluttering of what felt like his heartbeat yet his heart no longer beat in his chest. His chest heaved, and again he was held captive by those dark eyes. He had the sudden urge to touch him, to reach out with his hand and caress the dark strands of his dark hair. It made no sense, like everything else.

Whether the monster felt it, too, Blue didn’t know, but suddenly the other vampire careened away from him as if he’d been burned by something.

* * *

When the door burst open, Max was livid to see Galien standing there. “How dare you interrupt me?”

“You don’t need to analyze him,” Galien accused. “You’re not his therapist. He’s a killer. Do your job and get rid of him.”

“As I said, your insistence that I do just that,” Max sneered, “gives me pause. You’re just too anxious for me to do away with him. And the question is why, Galien?”

“You read way too much into this. I just know how anxious you are to get this over with. And we have things to discuss.”

“We have nothing to discuss. Now, get out. I’m not finished

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

here.”

Galien closed the door.

Max turned to Blue. He was sitting on the floor again, his head down, arms hugging his knees. There was something that happened between them a few minutes back, and it was strange. It seemed as if some sort of an electrical charge had surged through them at exactly the same time. He knew Blue had felt it, too.

He sighed. “Blue, if you help me find your victims, just give me some idea if you buried them or...then we can end this. I’ll make the end painless, swift. Help me.”

Blue lifted his head, his cheeks bright with traces of blood. He shook his head.

::I don’t remember::

::Did you always hunt in the same neighborhood, where I found you tonight?::

::I think so::

“Good, that’s a start. Can you show me? Take me to those places so that I can see if the bodies are still there now.”

If he could find the corpses and properly dispose of them then he could assure the council that no one else had discovered them. But if the corpses had been picked up by the authorities, people who sought to prove vampires existed so that they could be destroyed, the situation was much graver.

“Come with me, Blue. We have a few hours before sunrise. Let’s see if we can fix this.” He held out his hand.

Blue ignored the hand and stood on his own.

“That’s exactly what Charlotte Corday did when she stumbled on that scaffolding,” Max mumbled. “She was stubborn and proud, too.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

* * *

Galien glanced up when Max came down the stairs. He had Blue by the arm. Damn it, why couldn't Max just get rid of him?

"Finished now?"

"No. Blue is going to show me where he's been hunting."

Goddamn it, Max had gone soft on him. "The old Max would have just cut off the offender's head and—"

"That won't tell me if the authorities have gotten wind of Blue's activities or not. If they have, it's another story. And you"—Max pointed at him—"you will be implicated in that story as well."

"Me? I've done nothing."

"True, you've done nothing. You've sat back and let your house get fat and lazy, and we may all have to pay for it. You make a vampire and don't teach him fuck all anything. You're not telling me the truth, Galien, and when I come back, we're going to talk."

"My pleasure, preferably without clothes."

Max scowled at him.

"You might just be grateful to not be without your head, forget about your clothes."

"That's my old Max."

"I'm not your old anything. Come on," he told Blue, pulling him to the door.

Galien waited for the door to close and then picked up the decanter of liquor on the bar and threw it across the room. It hit the door and shattered.

"Can I do anything for you, Galien?" Ian appeared suddenly.

"Yeah, you can stay to fuck away from me," he hissed and

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

stomped upstairs.

CHAPTER 4

The rain stopped and a cat jumped out at them, surprising them as they walked through the alley, but the vampire at Blue's side never flinched. He looked straight ahead, his senses on high alert. Blue vaguely recalled roaming this alley, but he couldn't remember why.

::I drink blood::

The taller figure at his side paused, looked at him curiously.

"Yes," he said, "you drink blood. You don't need to drain them though. You also don't need to drink from humans. There are other ways."

The horror of it fascinated him...to sink his teeth into someone's throat, and drink. Was it possible? He wasn't capable of it, surely. Not really.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“You don’t remember feeding?”

The tall vampire was still looking at him, those eyes probing. The alley seemed to recede and contract. He reached out to steady himself against the wall. The vampire at his side touched him, placed a hand on his forearm.

“What is it?”

::A foreign language, French, it sounded like French. Deep moans of pleasure, wild abandon, and decadence. A white linen shirt being pushed up over smooth muscular flesh, exploring lips moving to forbidden places, hard, straining bodies coming together in an exotic heat, possession.::

Blue looked into Max’s eyes.

::He still wants you. He’ll do anything to have you. I wonder, Max Driscoll, are you worth all of this?::

Max froze. He removed his hand.

“We’re here to find your victims, not review my past. You have his memories. He must have given them to you when he made you. Usually, a vampire will cloak thoughts of that nature.”

::You don’t love him. You never loved him. Yet, the monster has compassion. You couldn’t see him die. You made him from pity. But it is far from pity he feels for you, Max. And all of this is because of you. Don’t you know?::

Max narrowed his eyes. “Explain.”

::I can’t. I don’t even know what I’m doing out here. I think I hunt here. I don’t know why. I think I’ve killed here, but I don’t remember. I don’t remember any of it, but when I close my eyes, I see blood. Always blood. And you, and him, the monsters.::

Blue moved away from him. *::You don’t deserve to live. None of us do.::*

Max grabbed his arm. “Spare me your sermon, priest, and find

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

those bodies.”

::Each man kills the thing he loves, yet each man doesn't die::

Max stared at him, looking into his soul, as if peering into the rooms of a house. “Now who...or what creature put that thought in your mind?”

Blue felt Max's fingers tightening on his arm as they hunted for the bodies until the sun was almost in the sky, and Max realized that he could not hunt anymore. They found nothing. That wasn't good news. Blue was silent as they returned to Gramercy, high in the air, Max's hand holding his. Blue had no clear memory of ever having flown before, but realized he did it to get from Point A to Point B alone and in a kind of blank state, but he never enjoyed it. This felt comfortable to him. There was something about this Max. They landed outside The House of Forsard.

It wasn't the first time Blue didn't want to go inside, but he knew he must. Something always took him back inside the big, dark house. Some instinct of survival.

“Sleep now,” Max told him as one of the household assistants came for him. “We'll resume this tomorrow night.”

Blue made his way upstairs while Max stayed at the bottom watching him go.

* * *

For long moments, Max watched the empty stairs, his thoughts back in the past. When he turned around again, Galien was standing a few feet away.

“Did you find anything?”

“Nothing.”

“And I'm sure Blue wasn't any help.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"I haven't figured him out yet, or you."

"Me? You should know me by now, Max." He laughed a tingling laugh. "We've known each other for centuries."

"Why did you make him? Tell me the circumstances. You don't have the right to keep making other vampires. You know that."

Galien was indignant. "I haven't gone over my limit. And he's sweet, don't you think? He looks rather like an angel. And demons are attracted to angels, aren't they, Max?"

"Whatever you're implying is so boring to me."

He walked into the living room, looking around for a wine decanter.

"I have a very nice Opus One," Galien said.

Max stopped in his tracks. He'd been interested in the Napa Valley vintner for decades. He couldn't hide his curiosity.

"It's a 1997 Proprietary Red Wine," Galien said, unable to hide his own glee.

Max worked hard not to scoff. Galien was a man who once had not been above drinking his own bathwater...a 1997? This was the vintage everyone said was perfect now.

Galien picked up a crystal decanter and poured a small amount into a goblet.

Max knew as his nose hovered over the glass that it was a special wine. It crossed his mind that Galien might try and poison him, but he couldn't be poisoned in the way others could. He'd built up a tolerance to poison, to everything, love and even hot sex. He remembered the hot tryst with Claude and blocked it from his mind.

"Very good," he said, sipping a little. As Galien rushed to pour him a little more, it bothered Max that Galien had selected this

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

bottle, this vineyard. He pushed the thought from his mind. He wished he had Katherine here to talk to. Katherine was amazing.

“What traumatized him so?” he asked Galien as he gently swirled the wine in his glass.

“I have no idea.”

“You’re lying. He can’t even speak. He sees blood and monsters. Tell me, Galien, who’s the monster he’s really talking about?”

“Oh, Max, you *have* lost your ability to read me. It’s been too long.”

“You think so?” Max bared his teeth, came closer. “You said you made him out of compassion. Tell me more about that?”

“He was sick. I didn’t want him to die.”

“How touching, but you’ve never been known to shed a tear for your fellow man, mortal or otherwise.”

“He’s insane. You know that.”

Max looked skeptical. “Maybe he is, maybe he isn’t. He talked of the past, my past.”

Galien looked stunned. “He *talked*?”

“Mental chatter.” Max put the glass down, as much as he wanted to drink every last drop. “You transferred all your memories to him. You didn’t bother cloaking them when you embraced him?”

“I forgot.” He shrugged. “Does it bother you that he knows we were lovers?”

“It perplexed me that he started reciting those things back to me.”

“Let’s make new memories, Max.”

“Let’s not.”

“Still an aristocratic snob.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Max laughed harshly. "I have no intention of engaging in a war of words with you." He took a seat. "Now, tell me exactly how you found him. Was he in a hospital?"

"Max," Galien appealed, "wouldn't you rather be fucking than talking?"

"With you, no. You have a way of turning ordinary sex into forever. I've been down that road, and I'm not going down it again."

"Ordinary sex?" Galien protested. "Is that what you call what we had together, ordinary sex?"

"It was for me. It was sex, nothing more."

"You've forgotten then."

Max kept his mind blank. "No. I forget nothing." Fuck. He could still remember how badly he had wanted Galien back then. The smell of the grape-earth, the vines shooting toward the sky...all the sensations still were within reach.

"You need to let go. And if this is all about me, like Blue says, it will be you I'll have to punish for it."

"Like Blue said?"

"Never mind. He rambles. Okay, talk, I'm listening. Where did you first meet Blue?"

* * *

"Do you love me?"

Blue opened his eyes and sat up in bed. He looked around the dark room. He was sure that someone else was in the room with him, but after a few minutes, he reassured himself that he was alone. Light entered the room and Blue raised a hand in front of his face quickly to shield himself, but nothing happened. The light was

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

real. The scene in front of his eyes was one of long ago. The room had changed. It was furnished with beautiful antiques and hanging chandeliers. The figure standing in front of him was easy to recognize. It was Max Driscoll. Another male figure stood in front of him. He pushed the white linen shirt up over Max's smooth chest.

"Do you love me?" he urged.

Max's head went back.

"I love the thought of you," he replied, pressing on the other man's shoulders until he lowered to his knees. "Take it in your mouth. Take my cock."

"On two conditions," the other teased, "one, that you love me. Two, that after I put it in my mouth, you impale me with it, possess me with it. I ache for your member to be deep inside of me."

The scene faded and the room went dark again. Blue lay back down, closed his eyes. It wasn't real. Nothing was real. He was trapped in a nightmare.

* * *

"He had pneumonia," Galien told him, but he knew that Max wasn't buying it. Galien sensed Max's frustration was growing, but it was no match for his own. He'd waited so long to have him again. He had no intention of being denied. If he had to go upstairs and destroy Blue himself, he would.

"You're lying," Max accused. "What I don't know is why."

"He was sick. I saved him."

"Why?"

"I wanted to fuck him, but not nearly as much as I want to fuck you."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Max sat up straight. "Do you know if the authorities discovered any of Blue's victims?"

"If they did, they didn't spread the word around. Are you just going to ignore what I said?"

"About wanting to fuck me? Yes, actually."

"What's a little fucking between vampires?"

"Galien, enough. You take fucking too seriously."

"Could it be that I love you?"

"No such thing. It's an illusion mortals believe in, invented by poets and pop song writers."

"Do you know how cynical you sound? You've never been in love once, not even a little with me?"

"Galien, this isn't the time. Was he in a hospital?"

"Who?"

"You know who? Stop playing games."

"Yes."

"And you walked into a hospital and—"

"Stop it, Max. Enough. I've had enough of your inquisition. I saved him, he's nuts, get rid of him. You have justification. What in hell are you waiting for?"

"I don't have justification, not yet." He stood. "I'm going to get some sleep."

"Max," Galien reached out and grabbed his forearm, "please. I promise I'll let you go this time, no strings. Stay with me, fuck me."

"No." He pulled his arm away and walked up the steps. He found an empty bed, stripped off his clothes, and fell into it. His mind raced. He didn't want to be here, just like he hadn't wanted to be in France when they'd arrested Galien. But in each case, he had no choice.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

* * *

Galien lay in his bed, remembering a time when Max wanted him, when Max, fevered and hungered for him, demanded Galien's presence in his boudoir.

"I did this all wrong," Galien whispered to the ghosts in his room. He lay awake thinking about the events in Paris in 1793. Max's story was more interesting than Galien's own. He'd spent centuries waiting, hoping for a second chance.

All he had was memories.

King Louis XVI was executed in January. He'd been captured and imprisoned and then beheaded with great fanfare. The queen was still in the Bastille as was the prince, but their deaths were pending. Paris was in chaos, one faction no better than the next. The executioners had been kept busy. It was the perfect place for a vampire. With so much turmoil happening, no one noticed his little eccentricities.

Max had installed himself and his family at Chateau Driscoll and hired a host of servants to tend the grounds and the horses. He lived a lavish life, feasting on blood and flesh, indulging his deepest depravities.

He hadn't bothered involving himself with human affairs. After all, he had no stake in any of it.

The original premise of the revolution had been a good one of course, liberty and fraternity for all, but there were too many ideologies and plenty of people looking for excuses to get rid of those who didn't share their opinion. So much for liberty!

It was an odd period of history, an accelerated attempt to get rid of the old ideas and superstitions and replace them with something new. However, to expect the upper echelons of society

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

to fraternize and accept as their equal the peasant masses, was beautiful in theory, but difficult to practice.

They'd tried to loosen the power of the church but in the end, the common man still feared he'd go to hell.

Max had been bored. He'd traveled all over Europe only to return to find that the royal family was in prison and heads were dropping all over the place. Max went to listen to the Jacobins and the Committee of Public Safety spout their philosophies and watched the people being marched up to the guillotine. He soon found himself disenchanted.

He'd been looking for a distraction, and Galien had tried to present him with one. He was young, and sweet, and what he lacked in experience, he more than made up for in enthusiasm.

One night Max had come home late from a hard ride on his mare and he found Galien rubbing down the horses. The time had been ripe.

When he'd ridden into the stables, Max had jumped off his horse rather haphazardly, thinking he was alone. He'd actually bounded off his horse, levitating into the air, not realizing that he was being observed by an awestruck stable boy.

"Oh, hello there," Max landed on his feet with a grin. He did a little bow. "Didn't see you there."

"How did you...how did you do that, sir, if you don't mind me asking that, sir?"

"Ah, a little trick of mine."

"It's incredible."

"Thank you. And you are?"

"Galien, Galien Forsard, sir, and you must be *Monsieur Driscoll*."

"In the flesh," he told him, studying him for a moment. Max

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

had told him later that he'd thought him young and innocently beautiful. "Where do you sleep, Galien?"

"Here in the stables, sir."

"Would you like to sleep in a bed some night?"

"Oh yes, sir."

He'd been surprised that suddenly he was part of the household staff. Not in Max's bed. Not yet. But it was a bed, soft and warm.

Galien turned flat on his back and stared at the ceiling.

Even from the start, he made me wait.

* * *

Do you love me, Max? Max? Do you love me?

Max gasped. He sat up, opened his eyes. And there sitting on the edge of his bed was Blue. He was just sitting there silently staring at him.

"Blue? What is it?"

::There are things he doesn't want you to know.::

::What kind of things?:: Max sat up in the bed.

Blue slid farther down to the edge.

Max kept his voice soft, coaxing. "I have no intention of destroying you...or anybody. You don't have to fear me."

::I don't fear you. I fear the monsters.::

Max sighed heavily, running a hand through his hair.

"I wish you'd speak English, or French, or something other than gibberish. Were you sick?"

::Sick?::

::When Galien found you, were you sick?::

::I don't remember.::

::Why don't you remember?::

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Blue stood. *::I don't know.::*

"And why can't you talk? Were you always this way?"

::I don't know.::

Max growled in frustration and threw off the covers. He forgot that he'd stripped off his clothes before getting into bed. He only realized that he was standing there totally naked, then he noticed Blue staring at him.

"Oh, sorry," he muttered, grabbing the blanket, "some people get uptight about—"

He stopped suddenly as Blue took a step closer. He reached out and ran his hand up over Max's chest. It was a simple gesture. It only lasted a second or two, but it sent shivers up Max's spine.

He swallowed. "Why did you do that?"

Blue shook his head and took a few steps backward. *::Galien plans to kill me.::*

::I won't let him do that. I'm in control here, not Galien. I'm the cleaner.::

Aloud Max said, "That house where I first saw you, I want to go back there tonight."

Blue shook his head, his eyes widening.

"There's something about that place. Maybe we can jog your memory. Sometimes if you relive an experience—"

::I don't want to go back there.::

Max met his eyes. "Please, go back there with me. I won't let anyone hurt you, Blue."

Slowly, he nodded.

* * *

"I know what you're up to, and you're wasting your time,

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Max,” Galien told him as he came downstairs with Blue. “The council wouldn’t approve.”

Max glanced at Galien. He sat on the sofa, three beautiful male vampires draped all around him. “The council isn’t here, is it?”

“It could be.”

“Is that a threat?” Max narrowed his eyes. “I don’t take kindly to threats.”

“Never would I threaten you, Max,” Galien cooed. “I know better.”

“Why don’t you stay, Max?” Ian invited, blowing him a kiss. The other two echoed his sentiments. “I do wonderful things with my tongue.”

“I’m sure,” Max commented dryly, pulling Blue closer to him. “Can I have a rain check?”

“Anytime, stud,” Ian winked as Max propelled Blue out the door.

* * *

“You have clients to go to,” Galien snapped at Ian after the door closed. “You have no time to satisfy your lust with Max. And none of you will touch him. He’s mine, do you understand? Now get moving, all three of you. And someone send Silver to me.”

This game has gone far enough.

* * *

Blue didn’t want to walk in the door this time. When he got to it, he turned and made some noises in his throat. His fists hit Max’s chest and Max grabbed his hands and held them.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“It’s all right.”

Blue’s head lowered itself onto Max’s broad chest. It felt good there. He felt safe, something he hadn’t felt for a long time.

::I don’t want to go in there again.::

“But you were here the other night. What made you come here?”

He shook his head.

Max’s mouth was warm against his cheek. “Did you live here?”

Blue looked up at him. He nodded, closed his eyes.

“You weren’t in a hospital? You weren’t dying?”

Blue turned around and gripped the door handle. He turned and pushed the door in. He reached behind him blindly and Max took his hand. Blue squeezed it.

::Monsters can have hearts. I need this monster now.::

::Gee, thanks, I think.::

Blue took a few steps. He listened. The place was empty. He closed his eyes. He heard laughter. There was a hockey game playing on television. His father was sitting in his chair, screaming at the set. His mother was baking muffins. His little sister was sitting at the kitchen table doing her homework. The clock went *tick tick tick* on the mantle. It was nine-twenty P.M.

He began to shake, a silent scream formed at his throat.

::We’ve come for you, Blue. We’ve come for you. But first, why don’t you watch the show?::

Blood was everywhere. It splattered the walls and the carpets. His father was the first to have his throat torn out, then his mother, and finally his little sister. Blue could still hear her screaming. He’d been helpless to do anything, held back by a big brute of a man who could have broken him in half if he’d so desired. Then he

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

lost consciousness. And when he opened his eyes, the thirst possessed him.

He didn't realize that he was screaming until he felt Max's arms around him.

"Shush, shush, it's all right, Blue. It's all right."

He fell silent again, relaxing into Max's arms. His eyes closed as the blood tears rolled down his cheeks in thick drops.

Max pulled him closer. "Let's get out of here now."

"Not so fast," a voice said.

CHAPTER 5

Max released Blue and turned around. A huge hulk of a vampire stood in front of him. He issued Max a sinister smile.

Blue clutched Max's arm.

"Who in the hell are you?"

"My name is Silver, and I'm afraid I can't let you leave here, Mr. Driscoll."

"Is that so?" Max's mouth tightened. "Well, it looks like we're going to have a little bit of trouble you and I."

"I have orders not to destroy you, but it doesn't mean I can't hurt you bad."

"It's *badly*, and you can try." Max pushed Blue to the side. "Come on, Silver. Let's see what you've got."

Silver withdrew a shiny object from his jacket pocket. He

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

pointed and fired. The first shot hit Max like a freight train, and he went down on one knee.

"They don't call me Silver for nothing." He chuckled, aiming the pistol again.

Max grunted and sprang up off the floor, high enough to land Silver a kick to the head while the other foot knocked the pistol to the floor.

Blue scrambled forth and picked up the weapon.

Silver stumbled back against the wall and Max lunged for him. He grabbed his head firmly in his hands and twisted. Silver's neck cracked and fell to the side. Max let him drop to the floor. The impact of that silver bullet suddenly hit him. He reached out to the wall to steady himself, his vision going double.

"Are you all right?" Blue asked him.

Max picked up his head.

"You spoke."

Blue nodded.

"I've been better. Right now I'm really pissed."

"Will it kill you?"

"Not right away but it has to come out." He looked at him. "I have to take you somewhere safe. Galien is looking to destroy you."

"Because he doesn't want you to know the truth."

"A little late for that. Come on."

"Is it going to come back, that thing on the floor?"

"Not very likely," Max replied, and moved to the door with some difficulty.

"Let me help you," Blue offered.

"I'm all right," Max replied as he pushed himself out onto the porch. Blue took his arm and helped him down the stairs anyway.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Where do we go to get that thing out of you?”

Max took the car keys out of his pocket. “Can’t exactly go to emergency, can we? You’ll have to take it out. I’ll tell you how.”

“Oh, no. I can’t do that.”

“You can, and you will. If you don’t I won’t be around. You need me, monster or not, because, I’m the only one who can protect you from Galien.” He eased himself down behind the wheel. “Hurry up. Get in.”

* * *

Blue was silent as Max drove. He wasn’t quite sure how he felt about being with Max Driscoll. He was a vampire, just like Galien, a monster, but so was he, wasn’t he? He wasn’t sure if there was any difference between Galien and Max. But right now, given that Galien wanted to wipe him off the face of the earth, Driscoll was his only choice.

He was surprised when Max drove the car into an underground parking lot under a fancy hotel in Manhattan.

“Is this smart? He can track me and this is—”

“For someone who had no voice awhile ago, you sure have recovered well.” Max turned off the engine. “I’ve cloaked myself from him. He can’t track me, and as long as you’re with me, he can’t track you either. But if we get separated, you’re a sitting target. You belong to him. He can sense where you are, just like I can sense where he is. Now, do me a favor, come and help me out of here.”

Blue narrowed his eyes, watching Max struggle out of the car, his condition rapidly deteriorating.

“I didn’t know silver bullets could kill us. I thought that

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

vampire said he wasn't supposed to kill you?"

"His plan was to stun me and take me back to Galien where it would have been removed fairly quickly. Time is of essence." Max grunted and pushed Blue away from him when he was finally standing.

"I can do this." He headed to the elevator.

"I...I don't know anything about...where is it?"

"In the groin. One centimeter to the left and I'd be singing soprano."

Blue smiled faintly. "That would be a shame."

Max shot a look at him as they got into the elevator and the doors closed. He lifted an eyebrow but said nothing.

They got off a few floors up and Blue followed Driscoll to his hotel room.

"We're here because I want privacy," Max said as soon as they were inside.

He looked around nervously. He didn't feel safe, and now that he'd crawled out of the fog, he had suddenly developed a taste for survival, although he had no sense of ever really having an actual future.

Max began to undo his pants the minute they walked into the room. "Close the door and get over here."

Blue swallowed hard.

"Come on." Max cast him a look. "This is no time to be acting like a virgin school girl. I need you to get this silver out of me." He sat on the bed, removed his boot and his pants, and threw them aside. He swung his legs up on the bed and motioned to Blue.

Blue glanced down at the wound. It was a hairsbreadth away from his scrotum, and the wound was black in color. He could see the bullet on the surface. "Do I do this with a knife?"

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“No.” Max shook his head. “You have to suck it out in order to get any residue around it. It won’t hurt you to swallow the silver.”

Blue’s jaw dropped. “You want me to—”

“Come on, Blue.” Max actually grinned. “Don’t tell me you’ve never sucked a man’s cock before.”

“I...no, I haven’t,” he said.

“You’re a ladies’ man then.”

“I...I don’t know.” His gaze returned to the wound and then settled on Max’s considerable masculine assets. “I think so.”

“Thank you,” he said.

“For?”

“Thinking I have considerable assets. Now, can we get on with this?”

“Do I have to bite you?”

“You may have to use your teeth to dig it out,” he said. “Don’t worry. You can’t hurt me any more than I’m already hurting.”

Blue nodded. What choice did he have? He knelt down beside him on the bed and moved his head closer to Max’s groin. He felt flushed as he did, and as he moved his head closer to Max’s sex, he felt saliva form in his mouth. His fingers reached out and settled on Max’s thigh and then he lowered his head and formed his lips around the wound. Max’s sex moved against his hair and he breathed in his heady scent. His tongue moved around the wound to coat it and then he sank his teeth into the flesh there.

Max moaned. Blue dug around the wound with his teeth, found the bullet, and lifted it out onto his tongue. He reared back and spat it out.

“Now clean it with your saliva,” Max urged. “It will heal it and destroy any traces of the silver.”

Blue met his eyes. Max smiled at him.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Don’t worry, Blue, this doesn’t mean you have to marry me.”

Blue laughed a little. “That’s good to know.”

He lowered his mouth and licked the wound clean, lingering a little longer than he needed to. As he licked, his tongue met the underside of Max’s shaft and he moved his lips there for a second.

“Blue?”

When Blue raised his head, he seemed surprised. “Am I finished?”

“I think so, unless you intend to suck my cock.”

“No, I...” Blue quickly got up from the floor. “I...it was an accident.”

Max laughed and sat up. “Give me my pants will you?”

“You could have sucked it out yourself, right?”

“Not from my groin, I couldn’t. You must think I’m extra limber. But if he’d shot me in the arm, I could have.”

Blue watched as he put on his pants.

“He killed your entire family, didn’t he?” Max said suddenly.

Blue walked over to the windows, looking outside. “Yes.”

“I’m sorry. He will pay for that.”

“Do you have a beautiful view from your windows at your house?” Blue’s tone was wistful.

“Yes, I have to say I do.” Max did up his pants.

“I thought so.”

Max said nothing.

Blue turned from the window. “He did it so that you’d come back to him. You’re all he cares about. I dream about you in the past. I see this beautiful estate...huge trees, wonderful gardens. There’s a park here...part of the Cloisters. Do you know it?”

He didn’t wait for Max to respond. Words tumbled from him like he needed to purge his soul.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Oh, I love it there. Sometimes, when I am feeling bad...sad...just like I want to die, I go there. There are four acres of medieval gardens. I don’t know why, but I love the herbs they say were once used in magic. I’ve tried to read up on them because somehow, I associate those with you.”

* * *

Max turned his face away. *He’s so tuned into me...how? Surely it’s not just Galien. He’s somehow tuned into my life...to Katherine. The magic garden at Blois de Sologne is hers.*

“There’s bear’s foot and cornelian cherry...I love the sound of those names but I have no idea what they’re for.” Blue’s eyes widened, as if in trance.

“I find myself...drawn to the herb garden where they grow herbs used by medieval artists. I am tickled by the names...lady’s bedstraw, marguerite...weld. I’ve learned the names, you see...I hear a man laughing, wanting to paint...”

He frowned.

Max bit back the name *Arnaud*. Arnaud loved to paint. His cousin died with half his paintings unfinished. Sometimes Max sat with them, just absorbing their energy, wondering what might have become of them if Arnaud hadn’t died.

“You weren’t the artist,” Blue said, with sudden clarity.

“No, I was not.”

“Then why do I see these images?”

“Um. You have Galien’s memories,” Max said. “Some good and I’m sure...some not so good.”

“You have a conscience. That’s strange for a monster.”

Max glanced at him. “You’re the same as I am. Are you not a

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

monster, too, Blue?"

"I'm not the same. I don't intend on making another. I don't know how and I don't want to know how. But you saved him from execution because you were the one who seduced him. It would have been better if you'd let him die."

"Perhaps."

"This is your fault."

"So you've said."

"If you'd have let him die, I'd be alive today, and my parents would be, too."

"What in the hell do you want to me to say, Blue? I can't change the past. I can only try to bring justice. What happened between Galien and me was three hundred years ago. I had no idea he would take his immortality and abuse the gift."

Max moved around gingerly, taking a cashmere throw from the arm of the sofa.

"I'm sorry for what happened to you, but my only responsibility is to clean house. That's what I'm here for. I will take care of Galien. He's broken the rules."

"And me? I've broken the rules, too."

"I'll take responsibility for you. I'll bring you back to the House of Driscoll and teach you how to deal with what you are."

"I won't go anywhere with you."

"You will if I say so."

"Fuck you, Driscoll." He met Max's eyes. "I'm not afraid of you because I'm not afraid of oblivion as you called it."

"Well then, go out there and let Galien finish you off. You're bullshitting me. I felt your fear when we came into the hotel. You want to survive now, perhaps for the first time since all this happened. Face your past, and go on. I've had to."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Blue sighed. "Now what?"

"We stay here until the sun is down tomorrow and then we go after Galien. You want revenge. You'll have it."

"What about the council? Galien is yours."

"I have plenty of justification. There will be a hearing, but I'll be okay."

Blue walked over and sat on the bed. Max drew the blinds and curtains. They were shrouded in darkness that would have had humans fumbling and groping but for vampires it was the perfect light.

"Why did you choose him?"

"Convenience."

"Convenience? Are you that callous, Max Driscoll?"

"I was."

"So he was in the right place at the right time?"

"Depending on how you look at it."

"The sex was good?"

Max glanced at him. "Look in your crystal ball and decide. Get some sleep, Blue. You're safe here."

"And where are you going to sleep?"

Max laughed. "You are kidding."

"No. I mean, we don't know each other and I think I like women."

"Yes, you told me that already. Your virtue is safe with me. Don't worry. I won't touch you."

Blue nodded. He took off his shoes and lay stiffly on the bed.

"Max? Did you know that Galien runs male escorts out of his house?"

"I had an idea."

"Max?"

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Uh-huh?” he replied from across the room.

“I’m a monster, too, aren’t I?”

Max chose the chaise over the sofa since it faced the door. He hated having his back to any entrance. He draped the cashmere throw across his body and closed his eyes.

Blue tried again. “Why do I see an image of a wooden doll and a man in a bride’s dress?”

“Get some rest,” Max snapped. “You’ll need it.”

“But I want to know.”

Max didn’t answer him.

CHAPTER 6

Katherine sat across from Dace Depaul and watched him sipping mint tea. The spearmint was fresh from Max's garden and she could tell the young man enjoyed the scent and taste of it. Good. It disguised the bitter, but necessary, wolfsbane.

She watched him closely. He had just completed his last round of chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer and yet, next to Max, he was the most elegant man she had ever met.

"You've recovered your sense of taste," she said.

"I have. I can't believe it. I'm sure it's thanks to you. My doctors told me I might never have it again. Boy, nobody tells you the weird stuff that happens to you when you get chemotherapy."

She beamed at him.

"I even feel like eating again."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Do it,” she said and they both laughed.

Dace, whose name meant nobility in the French language, was such a sweetheart. At twenty-two, he should have had the world at his feet. Instead, he was fighting a shocking disease that had derailed his promising football career, and he was quite alone in his struggle. Nobody, he had once told her, likes a guy who can’t keep down his food.

“You’ve been so good to me,” he said. Even bald, his eyelashes missing and his eyebrows half gone from the chemo, he was a magnificent specimen.

“Above and beyond making me those crazy hats that everyone is copying, you never made me feel like I was dying. You never treated me with kid gloves. I appreciate that, Katherine.”

“I adore you,” she said simply.

He grinned.

“Thank you for the herbs.” His face took on a look of wonderment. “I have no idea what was in that tea mixture you gave me, but I feel stronger than I ever have. I did exactly what you told me to do and I swear, the days I’ve been getting chemo, I stopped throwing up.”

If he only knew the cocktail of herbs and plant roots in it. Some would say it was potentially deadly but the medical business doesn’t want people getting well. They want people sick. There’s no money to be gained from having healthy people.

“I’m glad they’re working for you,” she said. “It has nothing to do with your football...as you know, I have never watched a game. But, I want to watch you play, so I had ulterior motives. I want to see you in little shorts, Dace.”

He laughed. “Looks like you’re going to get your chance.”

“*Vraiment?*” She leaned forward. “Tell me everything!”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Dace's features came to life as he talked about the French soccer team that wanted him to play for them. She found herself glowing with pleasure for him.

I make hats. It's not enough anymore. I wish I could save all the sick and dying. I wish I could introduce him to Max. They would be so beautiful together, but Max won't even look at a human male. Maybe I can orchestrate an accidental meeting...hmmm...

She tried to concentrate, really she did. But there was a strange taste in her mouth, a taste of metal. Oh, no.

"Katherine, are you okay?" Dace looked alarmed.

She tried to focus on breathing.

"Sweetheart, I am fine."

She sent a silent message to Claude.

::Meet me in the living room.::

"You don't look fine."

She leaned forward and placed a hand on his knee. "I feel bad about this—" *Get a grip, girlfriend, you sound like an idiot!* "But I forgot I promised to call somebody...a very old client. I am so happy to hear your news and I will come and watch you play."

He smiled and thanked her. She pressed another package of tea in his hands. The brown wax paper felt slippery to her touch.

"More?" he asked.

"You must keep drinking it. Promise me. Until the next full moon."

"But, Katherine, the next full moon is another three weeks away. I never followed these things until I met you. But...but I am going to see you before then, aren't I?"

"Yes, yes, of course." *I think so.*

"Because, I can't do this without you."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

He looked so vulnerable and small.

"We'll have tea next week," she said.

Dace looked relieved and as she stood, he hugged her. He felt thin, but she told herself he was getting stronger.

"Promise me you'll drink it." She gasped.

Dace was full of concern. "Katherine, you don't look so good."

"I'm fine, sweetheart. I must leave you now. Claude will see you out."

She crossed paths with Claude as he entered the room.

They both paused, their gazes locking.

Tears streamed down her face from the metallic taste in her mouth. In the magnificent dining room of the House of Driscoll, her hands shook as she swallowed a jigger of cognac.

Better.

She looked at the view from Max's living room windows. He loved this house and the house loved Max.

"Is he okay?" Claude asked her, entering the room now.

"I...I think so."

She took a deep breath. The taste receded. Thank God.

"What do you think?" Claude asked, sounding anxious.

Katherine stared at the ancient trees, the stand of cedars of Lebanon that Max cherished. Across the great slopes of grass, three sheep that would never be eaten, grazed on the lush greenery.

"He's such a lone wolf. He hates interference...on the other hand, he's always very resistant. And he *is* ignoring our calls."

"Take me with you," Claude suddenly implored.

Katherine's head turned toward him, her frown only half-hearted.

"I haven't decided I'm going to New York yet." This was a lie. She had sort of decided. She just wasn't sure how to do this. Max

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

wanted her in the house, but the truth was, there was nothing Claude couldn't handle.

"Shall I send for a car, *madame*?"

"No, Claude, I'm going to teleport."

She caught the sadness in his gaze. She could read his thoughts so easily.

::You're leaving me behind.::

"I'll be in touch and if I get any inkling he needs your help, you can come right over. In the meantime, there isn't anyone else he trusts with the estate apart from us. You do know that, don't you?"

Claude nodded and she crossed the room, taking his hands in hers.

"We both know he's in trouble, but Claude, without you here, he would be so much worse."

"Okay."

"Claude, look at me."

He did and she held his gaze for another moment. "If it makes you feel any better you should know that you've gotten closer to him than most."

Claude's cheeks reddened. Yes, it did matter. She could see that.

"If anything happens, anything at all, you call me. Okay?"

"Godspeed," he said and she let go of his hands.

As Katherine hurried from the room, she felt her fears rising straight back to the surface. She knew Max was in trouble. She knew he could get out of it, but for the last half hour, she'd tasted silver in her mouth. She and Max were bonded, like brother and sister.

She knew when he was sipping wine, when he was sucking cock...and when he'd been shot with silver.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Silver to an ancient vampire meant almost certain death.

* * *

Max twisted back and forth on the uncomfortable chaise. *How the hell had Blue seen the bride and the wooden doll?* His eyes flew open. *Galien*. And yet Galien hadn't been there either. Oh, he realized, Galien had seen the memory from him.

Shaken, Max got up from the chaise and padded to the wet bar. He found a chilled bottle of Evian water, and although he rarely craved water, the taste of silver was strong in his mouth. He poured some into a crystal tumbler and drank.

Katherine.

He paused. Why was he thinking about her? *Trouble*. No, she would have called him. He walked across the room and took his cell phone from his coat pocket, checking the readout. She'd called three times, Claude had called once.

There were messages to call them back but nothing seemed urgent until Katherine's final call. *I know something's wrong. Please call me.*

He called, knowing it was mid-morning in France, but day and night were all the same to his friend. He got her voice mail, assured her everything was okay and he lay down again.

"Are you okay?" Blue called out from the bed.

"Yes." *No.*

The bride. God...that night...

Try as he might, the images wouldn't leave his brain.

The night at the French tavern, he'd been surprised when one of the participants had produced a wooden doll that he pretended was a baby. He inserted it between the bride's eager thighs,

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

pretending he'd given birth to it. It was a joke. Harmless fun.

As the terror guards tortured the poor young man later in the square, they'd tied him up to the stake, facing away and spread his legs, shoving the doll up his anus. He screamed so loud, even women and children who'd been watching and laughing, began to cry.

When they set fire to him...God...Arnaud. I'm so sorry...I am so sorry.

He shoved the thoughts away. *I need to be strong. Think of happier times. When sex didn't mean death. Galien.* God, why did it always come back to Galien?

Max could smell him even now. Galien had smelled like the stables and it wasn't exactly an inviting smell. Max had directed the servants to fill the tub and he invited Galien to take a bath. Everything was a marvel to the young peasant and Max couldn't help but smile at his reaction to seeing a bathtub for the first time.

"You must be very rich, sir," he said.

"Take off your clothes and get into the tub," Max told him, his gaze zeroing in on the vein that was pulsing at his neck. Blood. Warm and sweet. He wasn't sure which he wanted more, the young man's blood or his smooth pink bottom.

Galien soaked in the bath, acting all shy again when Max decided to wash his back then his chest. Finally, he reached down to soap Galien's cock, which was already hard. Galien came immediately at first contact, making Max howl with laughter. Galien was embarrassed and apologetic, but Max pulled him out of the tub, dried him off, and told him to forget it.

"You'll soon be hard again, my friend. I promise you."

* * *

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Katherine landed in New York on 54th Street. She wanted to do the wave she was so thrilled with herself. She was ecstatic to have made it. She checked her watch, *two hours!* Max would be proud of her. He knew she hated to travel and here she was, she'd done it, all on her own. She felt good. Really good. The herbs had worked, given her energy. The mistletoe still worked its way through her system. She loved New York. If only she had time to look at some hats on this trip. She gazed up at the Hotel Elysee. *Danger.* She felt it all around her.

Two men stepped out of the darkness. She turned to run but found another man right behind her.

"You!" She gasped when they came face to face. "What are you doing here?"

"Hello, Katherine."

He ran a gloved finger along her cheek. She slapped it away.

His face contorted with rage and he gripped hers with a viciousness that shocked her. He spat into her mouth. She tried to pull away, but the two men behind her grabbed her arms.

"We're going to take a little ride, sweetie," he said. His hand clapped over her mouth, choking off her scream. She fought all three men and almost won until they managed to throw her into the back of the black car that skidded to a halt beside her.

"Take her," the man said to the two men who climbed in beside the clawing, struggling Katherine. "But don't hurt her." His lips curled into a sneer as he turned and glanced up at the hotel. "Yet."

* * *

Max heard a scream. He was certain of it. *Katherine.* No...not Katherine. A woman. He moved to the window, pushed back the

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

curtain, and forced an opening between slats in the blind. Nothing. A man walked his dog along the street. He waited as the animal hunched and pooped. Glancing furtively up and down the street, the man didn't pick up after his dog. He just walked faster, away from Max's line of sight.

He turned and found Blue standing behind him.

"What?" he asked.

"Who was the woman screaming?"

"You heard it, too?" For a moment, Max felt discomfited, but didn't want to admit it.

"She screamed your name."

Max stared at him, taken aback. "I didn't hear that."

Blue shrugged. "Maybe I assume everyone wants you."

Max laughed then. "You flatter me."

"It's the truth. Does she love you?"

Max stared at him a beat. "Does who love me?"

"Katherine."

Max met his gaze. "What do you know about Katherine?"

Blue lifted his hands. "I know Galien hates her. He says she's...a manipulator."

Max felt the fury engulfing his senses. "She's no manipulator. She is...she is incredible."

Blue shrugged. "He is angry...jealous that she has your trust. He thinks she's in love with you."

Max shook his head. "Galien doesn't know what love is."

"Do you?"

"*Touché*," Max said.

"Will you make me fall in love with you, too?" Blue asked.

"You think I have the power to do that?"

Blue nodded slowly.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"Is that what you're afraid of? Don't you know that love is an illusion?"

"Not to Galien, it isn't. He's willing to kill for it."

Max knew this was true. Once again, everything came back to Galien. *Damn him. He doesn't control me. I don't love him. I don't want him.*

"Get some rest," Max said, feeling old and tired.

"I can't. I feel agitated."

"Lie down. I'll give you a massage. You need to relax." *Why the hell did I say that?*

"Max."

"I won't massage anything you don't want me to." He laughed. "Come on, chicken. Take off your clothes."

"No."

"I'm not massaging you through your clothes, forget it. You can leave your underwear on, if you're wearing any."

When Blue resisted, Max said, "Forget it. Forget what I just said."

"It's you and your massages and your..." Blue cast around for the right words. "You seduce and rule. You have no idea what you do to a man. You gave Galien hope and light. And then you took it all away."

Max went back to the Evian, swigging it, not even bothering with such niceties as crystal tumblers this time.

"What you are seeing in your mind, Blue, are the distorted images Galien put there. The distorted memories of what he had. You keep calling me a monster. I'm not. I tried to love him. I tried to give him a good life. I was willing to share *everything* with him. But he had to tell everyone."

Max moved over to the chaise again, throwing an arm across

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

his eyes.

Blue walked over to the elegant sofa, his hands touching the antiques and elegant candles that decorated it. He knelt, his fingers playing in the gray sand of a mini Zen garden.

“What will happen to the House when Galien is gone?”

“It will no longer exist.”

“And the others? Will you destroy them?”

“No. They will be invited to join my house or hook up with another one. “ A pause. “Blue, the others, David and Ian, do they act as escorts for Galien?”

“Yes.”

“Are there many more?”

“Yes. But you knew that, didn’t you?”

Max sat up. “I had an inkling.”

“Do you know where we can find them?”

“I have an idea. And you, Blue, were you an escort, too?”

“If I was, I don’t remember.”

“Let’s hope you didn’t get any massages.”

“Very funny, ha, ha.”

The silence between them now wasn’t so strained.

“If you still want to massage me and you promise not to do things that make me scream your name, I think I’d like it.”

Max shook his head as Blue began to take off his shirt.

“I think I might need something stronger than water.”

Max crossed to the wet bar and stood there watching with a smile. He knew Blue didn’t trust him at all.

And do you blame me, given that I know what a leech you were a few centuries back? he heard in Blue’s mind.

“A leech?”

Blue frowned at him. “You can read my mind?”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Max shrugged a shoulder. "Random thoughts." *Geez, and I chided Katherine for reading mine. I must be losing my grip on social form.*

Why did he think I was a leech? Max shook his head. "Now take off your pants and roll over onto your stomach."

He waited for Blue to get into position. "Now, I want you to clear your mind of everything. Think of your most pleasant memory and relax."

At least he doesn't smell of stables.

* * *

Blue closed his eyes and thought of when he was a boy. He liked to run through the woods and jump off a cliff at the edge into the water. He saw the sunshine, the water shining like crystals, and then he moaned softly as strong hands gently massaged his flesh.

Don't worry, you'll be hard again.

Blue licked his lips. He felt his cock lengthen. His nipples stiffened against the soft texture of the blanket. He moved his chest a little, stimulating the feeling a little more. Max's lips touched his throat, licked the pulsing vein there.

It's all right. I only want to love you, Galien.

He lifted his legs up around his waist as the boy's mouth sought out his. As Max lowered him to the bed, he reached up and smoothed the linen shirt up over the smooth muscular torso.

You're beautiful, sir. Make me yours.

"Oh, God," Blue breathed, his cock pumping into the mattress, his hips now moving frantically. "Yes....oh, God!" He grunted. His hand snaked around under him and filled with his own juices. "Max." He moaned.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Max turned him over on the bed. “It’s a perfectly natural reaction to a massage. Don’t read anything into it.”

Those eyes were staring down into his. Blue’s body ached suddenly. “What did you do to me? You’ve bewitched me.”

Max stood. “Don’t be ridiculous,” he snapped. “Many men get a hard-on during a massage.”

Blue sat up. “I saw you with Galien. I saw the way he touched you. I could almost feel it myself. You took advantage of him, addicted him, and made him want you until it hurt. Why? Why when you never really cared about him?”

“I never said I didn’t care about him. It just wasn’t...and anyway”—Max growled—“I can’t control how other people feel, not to that extent. He wanted me. I gave him what he wanted. And at that time, I wanted him.”

“And if right now,” Blue said, “I wanted you? Would you throw me away tomorrow like yesterday’s news?”

Max’s eyes widened. Blue wasn’t sure who was the most shocked, him or Max Driscoll.

“What?” Blue asked, noting his strange expression.

Max said nothing, his face drained of color.

“What is it?” Blue asked, seeing terror in the other man’s eyes.

“It *was* Katherine. Katherine was screaming.” Max closed his eyes.

“Somebody’s taken her?” Blue asked.

But Max was holding his cell phone now, punching numbers. “Claude, please tell me I’m dreaming. Tell me—”

Blue watched as Max nodded. When he ended the call, Max moved to the window, but didn’t open the curtains.

He put a finger to his lips and beckoned Blue to the bathroom.

“Bring your clothes,” he whispered.

CHAPTER 7

“We have company,” Max said in a low voice.

“Company?”

Max’s mouth met Blue’s and Blue felt a peculiar sensation of fire roaring through his veins. He was certain the room exploded, but Max’s strong arms drew him close...closer. They landed with a bang in the middle of a park, falling on the hard ground.

Blue tumbled onto his ass off the stone path, breathing hard as he sprawled in wet grass. He couldn’t get over the unexpected kiss.

“Did you...did you *need* to kiss me?” he asked.

Max, obviously used to teleporting, had landed on his feet, legs spread. He adjusted his long coat.

“No. Not really. It had two advantages though. One, it stopped you from asking more questions.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“And the other advantage?” Blue asked as Max helped him up. Max smiled. It was a disarming sight. “I felt like kissing you.” He turned and walked, Blue scrambling to keep up with him.

“Where are we going?”

“Looking for Katherine,” Max said. Their footsteps echoed as they raced across the stone foot path.

“We’re inside Fort Tryon Park.” Blue recognized the buildings in the distance. From here, at this time, the Hudson River, on the other side of the gates, didn’t smell so bad. In summer, in the heat of the day, it was godawful.

“I think the park is locked at night,” Blue said, but Max ignored him.

“You didn’t mention that Galien brought you here.”

Blue had to trot to keep pace with Max. “You didn’t ask.”

“Where did he bring you?”

Blue scratched his head. So much about Galien confused him. Sometimes he didn’t know if his memories were the recent past or the distant past, memories borrowed from Galien.

“Hurry!” Max’s voice was so loud in the quiet park, his place of refuge, that Blue dropped to the ground. He drew up his knees, his arms around them. Frightened, he talked to himself.

It’s okay, it’s okay, it’s okay...

Max sighed and knelt by him.

“Please, Blue. You’re my only hope. I...I’m stuck. The silver has dulled my senses some. I’ll get over the poison, but right now I need your help. I’m lost without you. Katherine is lost without you.”

He rubbed Blue’s knees and Blue relaxed. Max wasn’t mad at him anymore.

Max stood, helping Blue to his feet for the second time.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Their faces met for a second, so close that Blue felt his eyelashes touching Max's jawline. Their breaths mingled.

Max took a step back. "She's here. I can feel her." He started to pace as Blue felt an inexplicable deprivation at his physical separation from Max.

"I'm afraid I have to invade your thoughts. I must see what you have seen." Max sounded worried. He really loved this Katherine.

"Be my guest."

The sounds of footsteps running.

"Katherine!" Max ran off in the direction of a woman rounding a curve by the household plants garden.

Blue watched enviously as they hugged. Katherine, a tall, elegant blonde trembled as Blue approached.

"It was awful Max. He grabbed me—" She glanced at Blue. "Who is this?"

"This is Blue. Galien's—"

"Ah. His little monster."

"I'm not so little." Blue would teach her to show some respect.

"Nice to meet you," she said, extending a hand as Max hugged her tightly.

"You're really okay?"

She nodded. "Yes, I got away from them. You know, they would never have gotten me in the car if they hadn't triple-teamed me. That, and the element of surprise."

Max ran protective hands up and down her arms. "How did you get away from them?"

"I had some herbs in my pocket. I told them it was killer French weed."

Max laughed. "You didn't!"

"Sure I did. It was bloodwort."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Yeah, you’re right. That stuff *will* kill them if they weren’t vamps.”

She looked smug. “We rolled a joint and it gave them a very nasty case of the runs.”

“Oh, my God.” Max ran a hand over his face.

“Yes,” she said, her smile sweet. “I could have killed them but I don’t have that right. But, I do have the right to put ’em out of commission and in the bathroom for weeks. They went down like a pair of trees, clutching their bellies, moaning for their mothers. I do enjoy making a grown man cry. Do my herbs rock or what?”

Max laughed. “The tricks you pull, Katherine.”

She pretended to flex a bicep. “I am woman, hear me roar.”

Blue kept staring at her. He’d never met anyone quite like Katherine.

Max sobered quickly. “Galien grabbed you. Where did he go?”

“He didn’t go with us. He does have a strange series of cells underground.” She pointed downward. “He spoke to one of the guys by phone. They were supposed to be shackling me, but I convinced them to get high with me. I even suggested”—she shuddered—“that I’d give them both blow jobs.”

“Any idea what Galien is up to?” Max asked. “I still have silver in my system. I’m still cloudy.”

“Yes, I know. I still taste it.”

Blue gaped at her. Boy, she and Max really were connected.

She pulled something from one of her many pockets. It looked like a tiny, twisted braid.

“Here, chew this slowly. It tastes sweet. It will counteract the effects of the silver. It’s Fuller’s teasel. It helps move toxins through the liver.”

Max chewed. “It does taste sweet,” he said approvingly, taking

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

another bite. "Tell me about Galien."

"His operation reminds me of pirates, only not so sexy. He called the two idiots who were holding me. I heard his voice through the cell phone. He said something about a problem at a club." She glanced at Blue. "They said you've been busy picking off guys in clubs. He's got rent boys trying to service and you're eating the customers."

Blue's eyes widened. "It's not my fault."

"Katherine." Max's voice was once again soft. "I want you to wait for us. You know where."

She nodded.

"Where?" Blue tried to read Max's thoughts, but all he saw was darkness.

"Never you mind," Max snapped. "Let's get going."

Katherine vanished into thin air. Blue was impressed.

"What a woman," Max said.

Blue hated to admit it to himself, but he was crushed when Max didn't place his mouth over his when they started to teleport.

* * *

Galien stood looking at the animal tied to the wall in the basement of his house. He was furious. Katherine had gotten away, tricked his two favorite henchmen with offers of a joint. And a blow job. They claimed she'd made them sick. They didn't know what sick was. Wait until *he* got through with them.

It's my fault. I had no idea she was so resourceful. Bitch!

He stared at the animal. He had given it the smallest amount of blood tonight, just to ensure its survival, but not enough to make it too strong.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"I knew you'd come in handy eventually," he whispered, walking over to it. The creature cowered as Galien smoothed back some of the dirty matted hair.

"Are you lonely for your daddy? How could he abandon you like that? You see Max is turning on me. He made me his at one time and now he acts like he can just pretend it never happened. If he wants to play rough, I can play rough.

"I remember the way we used to fuck, oh God, it was incredible. I like it rough you see, and Max can give it. Now, his little boy Blue has done a lot of naughty things, including making you. Now it's time for you to go out and find your daddy. Even though Max is hiding from me, Blue can't hide from you. You're his, and you're going to lead me right to them, aren't you?"

And he began to undo the chains.

* * *

Max felt Blue's regret as they landed at Christopher Street in the Village. He also felt his own mixed feelings. Blue was so beautiful, just his type, as Galien had said, but he had a vicious monster in him that had been picking off gay men in the one neighborhood that was gay-friendly.

It wasn't very friendly to be killing guys who thought they were in for some fun. He took Blue by the sleeve. He had to remember, Blue had a great body, but he had his demons. He still appeared to be terrified of Max, too. Not that Max could blame him for that after what Galien had done to him and his family.

"Are you going to destroy them?" Blue asked as they walked along the street. The neighborhood was jumping. They passed the shuttered Oscar Wilde bookstore, signs still outside protesting its

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

closure due to the poor economy.

The gay park with its statues of same-sex couples stood silent vigil as Max and Blue interwove with the throngs of gay men, laughing, joking, tumbling out of the many bars packed into one small space.

Max read off the names as he followed Blue's directions for a couple of blocks.

The Cock, Boots and Saddle, Chi Chiz... one place, *B Bar*, had a discreet sign out front: *See You Tuesday Night, Fellas*.

"Here."

Blue sounded depressed.

Max glanced inside the club that looked like a 1950s den, the kind that were popularized by crooners of the time.

He focused on reading Blue's thoughts.

"This is where Galien's boys picked up their tricks?" Max asked, trying not to shout over the frantic beat of the music.

Blue nodded. "I think it belongs to Galien. He has some ownership of it, anyway."

Max wanted so badly to be alone with Blue in that moment. To take away his nightmares, tame him, teach him. *Who the fuck am I? The gay Henry Higgins?*

It was a small place with a flashing neon sign that said, "Cocktails." Max made a joke about that as they pushed past some hot guys out front sipping mixed drinks out of gigantic martini glasses.

Blue looked at him curiously.

"Cock and tail, get it?"

Blue shook his head. "You're weird."

"I've been around awhile. Have you figured out where you left your victims yet, speaking of weird?"

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Blue shook his head.

“What time do Galien’s rent boys usually show up?”

Blue shrugged. “They should be here. They come early and wait for the men to flock in.”

Max nodded and headed to the bar. He spotted Ian right away.

Ian looked stunned to see them, but recovered quickly.

“We need to talk,” Max said as the music pulsed a little louder.

“Hey, baby,” Ian replied. “Aren’t you a sight.” He glanced at Blue. “You’re in deep shit. Galien is livid. I’m supposed to call if I see you. He promised me big bucks if I turned you in.”

“Just let me worry about that,” Max said. “I need to speak to you and the others. How many of you live at the house?”

“David, Frank, myself, and Blue, of course.”

“Galien is to be eliminated. You may tell him, or not. It’s up to you. I am declaring the House of Forsard closed. The three of you will now be welcome at the House of Driscoll. You will be under my protection.”

Ian actually smiled. “And does that mean I finally get to show you what I got?”

Max nodded. “When I have the time, of course, that will be most welcome. At the moment, it’s a little inconvenient, but be patient. Find a refuge tonight and wait for my summons. It shouldn’t take long.”

Blue followed Max out of the lounge, and he felt the hostility coming from him like darts in his back.

“What’s the problem now?” Max turned and looked at him.

“You’re a sleaze. You invite me to your bed one minute and someone else the next.”

“I never invited you to my bed.” He shook his head. “I gave you a massage and you ejaculated. I think they call that a happy

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

ending in your trade.”

Blue’s eyes registered fury and hate. “Never mind that. You wanna play games? How about one moment you’re massaging me, and the next night you’re coming on to Ian? Don’t you have any morals?”

Max waited a beat. “My job is to give people what they want...what they need. I don’t want to bump off all the vampires in New York, but I will if I have to...I kinda liked the hippy movement. Make love, not war.”

He paused. “As for my morals, I have a few more than you, Mr. Serial Killer. Now let’s get back to discussing the real issue here. Your victims.”

Blue muttered something. He suddenly reached out and touched Max’s arm. “I know where the bodies are.”

Max nodded. “Good. About time. Take me there.”

* * *

Blue knew that Max was not happy about poking around in the dump. He swore often and wiped at his clothes, placing a hand over his nose to mask the smell. Blue stood there in horror, watching from a distance as Max pulled up the fifth body. Tears formed and rolled down his face.

“Oh, God,” he whispered.

“That’s it.” Max grunted, levitating upward to the ground level. “There were five?”

“No, six, plus the two that Galien insisted I burn.”

“Where is the sixth one?”

“It has to be there.”

“It’s not there. Unless it got up and walked away.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"I can't believe I...all those innocents...what kind of a monster am I?"

"You're a vampire whose main instinct is to drink blood when he's thirsty; a vampire who has had no direction from his maker."

"I'm thirsty, and I feel so ashamed."

"We'll feed later. Hold on. Let's deal with these bodies first and try to find the other one."

"How do you do it?" Blue asked him as they carried the fifth body into the woods and placed it on the pile.

Max doused the bodies with gasoline and lit a match. "I do what I have to do. I'm here to clean. I'm cleaning." He looked at him. "I'll teach you so you never have to go through this again. Try to put it behind you or it will destroy you. I've had to come to terms with my past as well. I found a better way."

"How?"

"Blood bank for one. Feeding during sex is fine if you know when to stop. Animals in a pinch."

Blue nodded miserably. "I never wanted to be this thing."

"No one ever wants it."

"And you, who turned you? Who was your maker, Max?"

"It was a long time ago in Ireland. He left me soon after he made me, told me very little really. In those days, vampires hid in the shadows."

"They say they know we exist now."

"I wouldn't doubt it but let's not hasten them." They stayed, watching the fire burn, and then Max made sure it was out. He scooped the ashes into a bag and dumped them into the river.

"That's it," he said. "I have a bad feeling...somehow I think...yes..."

"What?" Blue prompted.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"I think Galien kept one alive. I think he's tortured another poor soul to be his one-man wrecking crew."

"He kept me alive...barely...for a long time in a cell."

Max's eyes showed immediate interest. "Katherine mentioned the cells."

"They're under his house. He has tunnels under the city. He..." Blue had bad memories of being chained to the wall, of being given blood.

Max stepped into his personal space. "You've never experienced feeding during sex, have you? There is pleasure to this, as well as pain, you know."

"No." Blue shook his head. "For me there is only pain."

Max sighed. "It doesn't have to be like that. The man who made me...he left me like I said, but I can still get hard thinking of how it felt when he made me. He fucked me. He—"

"I think I feel very jealous," Blue said, feeling a little uncomfortable.

Max's lips started to move along Blue's throat. "I feel kinda dirty...let's get back to the hotel."

Before Blue could protest, they were back in the room. Nothing had been touched. Blue felt dizzy, disoriented.

"Come here," Max said.

"Won't they come back...the people who were here?"

"They don't know we're here and besides, we'll be ready for them. You need to feed. We both need a couple of hours sleep."

Max shucked off his clothes and took Blue into the bathroom. He turned on the shower taps and they stepped under the jets for four different showerheads.

Blue gasped at having another man soap his head, his back and, God help him, his cock.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“This is for medicinal purposes only,” Max said, stroking Blue to a powerful orgasm.

Thoughts of what Max had done to Galien in the past mingled with what Blue was experiencing now.

Max’s fingers slid to Blue’s tight ass, made a couple of warm, soapy passes at his hole. Blue would have given Max anything at the moment, but Max drew Blue’s mouth to his neck with his free hand.

“Bite me,” he whispered and Blue glimpsed the vein. His teeth elongated as Max stroked heat, flames...desire through Blue’s young body. He bit into the throbbing vein and drank, blood filling him.

“Easy,” Max said.

Blue’s teeth almost let go of the blessed link to his pleasure. He was coming again, Max coaxing another raging orgasm from him.

He felt Max turning his face away. “Enough. Enough now.”

Blue gulped the blood in his mouth, staring at Max’s throat longingly. He was aware of Max holding two fingers in his ass.

“Fuck me,” Blue urged. “For real.”

“Maybe later.” Max turned off the taps. “Tongue the punctures closed for me.”

Blue reached up and licked the two wounds. Max removed his fingers from Blue’s ass. He grabbed towels, rubbing them down. Blue wanted to come again.

“Still hard, huh?” Max said. “Ah, youth. See how nice it can be?”

Blue had no resistance when Max climbed into bed with him, his arms around him. Blue wriggled around until Max’s cock lay against his crack.

“You’re not hard,” Blue whined.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Rest now.” Max’s arm tightened around Blue’s belly. “Rest.”

* * *

Max never slept more than two hours. He got no rest, for the moment he closed his eyes, sleep brought only dreams of two sweat drenched bodies moving together as Max fucked the stable boy deep and hard almost every night.

Oh, Max, do you love me? He’d been fucking him hard and deep the night they came. Galien had insisted on being tied to the bed. He made a delicious sight with this legs spread wide, bound ankle to wrist. Max had toyed with him that night, moving his cock over his aching hole, teasing him, making him wait until Galien begged.

At the same time as his cock impaled him, Max drank, taking very little, only enough to sustain him.

There had been seven soldiers who blasted through his bedroom door. They had grabbed him and cut the ropes off of Galien. Max could have gotten away, but he knew he’d risk exposure and they’d surely hunt him down. So he allowed himself to be taken away. Galien screamed and kicked all the way as the soldiers dragged him out of Max’s bedroom, naked as the day he was born.

“Max!” he cried out. “Do you love me? Say you love me!”

But he couldn’t because he didn’t. He didn’t know the meaning of that word. To Max, it was all hogwash, no such thing as love. Lust. Only lust.

They didn’t take him to the Bastille. Instead he was taken to a private dungeon, and chained naked to the wall. He was left there for days, wondering which would put an end to him first, the thirst

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

or whatever they had planned for him.

“Sodomite,” they called him when two strangers finally descended into the dank cellar.

He was weak and defeated, mentally preparing himself for the worst. One of the men approached him and walloped his cock with his hand a few times. Another painfully twisted his nipple. They called him a beautiful man, undid the chains and turned him around. They gave him thirty lashes with a sharp razor strap. The pain was excruciating and the loss of blood didn’t serve him well given that he hadn’t fed in days. When the lashing finally ceased, he placed his forehead on the cool concrete and almost fell asleep. “Now,” a voice told him, “we’re going to use your ass, just the way you like. We might even fornicate you to death.”

There was laughter. He accepted whatever they dished out to him, beatings, rape, but then one of them laughingly remarked that Galien was scheduled to be hanged at dawn. *Hanged*. He couldn’t let that happen. He enticed one of the rapists to remain with him, whispering that he’d do marvelous things to his cock with his mouth. He had only to undo his arms so that he might get on his knees.

The guard told the other to go on without him, and foolishly undid the chains around Max’s arms. In a few seconds, he lay dead on the floor of the dungeon. Max had undone the rest of his restraints. He took the clothes from his aggressor and went to find Galien.

When he got there, it was too late to rescue Galien. Guards surrounded him, making the preparations. He would never be able to fight all those guards by himself, especially in his weakened state. So, he stole some clothes from a peasant and pretended to be the boy’s older brother.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

He begged to have five minutes with him if only to tell him how disappointed he was that his only brother had gone so wrong.

The moment Max was in the cell, he didn't hesitate. He grabbed Galien to him like a brother and bit deeply into his throat. Just at the point of death, he sliced a gash in his own throat and forced Galien's mouth there. To the guards watching it looked as if they were saying goodbye.

Galien dropped to the ground.

"You're going to have to hang him unconscious," he told the guard. "Little coward, he can't face what he's done. I sure hope that nobleman swings as well, but of course he won't. Justice is for the rich," he grumbled and made his way out of the prison and onto the streets.

Things changed when Galien signed a petition he couldn't even read, since he was uneducated, saying he had lied, he'd made up what Max had done to him.

Max had been stunned when he was released, spared—the guards had caught him fucking Galien and yet back then, as now, money spoke volumes. He'd been able to bribe the magistrates with money and land. They said they wanted liberty and equality out of one side of their mouths and held their hands under the table as they spoke out of the other side of their mouths, too.

By the time Galien had been scheduled to be executed, to be beheaded, along with the traitor Charlotte Corday, Max had assured him he would rescue him.

"We'll make an example of him," the magistrates said when the death notices were announced in the square.

I saved him, I rescued him. He could have died.

Max awoke after an hour, his body drenched, his thoughts jumping. He rarely allowed himself to go back to the time in the

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

dungeon.

He felt satisfied with the ways things were going. He'd given Galien plenty of chances in the past to repent, apologize to the council, to change. It had all been for naught. He'd get rid of Galien and he could return home to France.

He smiled, wondering how Claude would react to a house full of hookers. He was hesitant about his decision to destroy Galien, not because he doubted its rightness. The council had mandated it. The truth was, he did feel some guilt. Blue kept telling him this was his fault, and it was beginning to ring true. He did seduce an innocent, and he did make him immortal, and now he was going to have to destroy him.

Max rose from the bed, opened the suitcase he'd brought, and hunted for fresh clothes. Last night's clothes reeked of fire and death. He could smell them even now. The only thing he would allow himself to wear was his coat. He loved that coat.

"You feel alone right now," Blue said from where he sat on the bed.

"Yes." Max didn't bother hiding it.

"We're both alone, but I feel better now that I have you."

Max threw Blue some of his own clothes. "Here, try these pants and the shirt. Let's see if they work."

"You remind me of my dad you know."

"I do? Tell me about your family? Were you close?"

Blue fell quiet for a few minutes as he dressed.

"If you don't want to, I'll understand."

"No, it's okay. It just makes me sad, that's all. I remember more and more all the time and..."

"Let's talk about something else then."

"No, I want to. They were good people, my parents. My father

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

liked sports. He was a basketball coach at the hospital, and my mother was a cook in a residence for the elderly. Tammy, my sister loved geography and she was pretty good in school. She would have been seventeen today.”

“Do you have any more family?”

“No, not really. And it’s not like I could go back to them now like this.”

“Um.”

“Am I supposed to feel remorse about you killing my maker?”

“Will you?”

“No. I despise him.”

“Well, you’ve answered your question then. It’s time we moved.”

“Can you lie beside me?”

Max picked up his head. “Why?”

“I’m cold. What we did in the shower...wow...I wanted you. I wanted you so much. Now I feel...alone again. I’m not used to it...feeling what I felt with you.”

“Um, okay.” Max came over to the bed. “For a moment.”

Blue rolled over onto his side and Max slid down beside him.

“Better?”

“If we were naked I’d like it a whole lot more.”

Max chuckled and kissed Blue’s cheek.

* * *

As they prepared to leave the room, Blue struggled with his thoughts and feelings.

He rushed over to Max, throwing himself in his arms.

“You were dreaming.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Max's eyes roamed Blue's face.

"Am I dreaming now?"

"No."

Max seemed tentative as he kissed Blue's lips.

"Don't stop touching me." Blue moaned into Max's mouth.

He took a breath, remembering Max's fingers in his ass, how badly he'd wanted them there. He reared back. "I should stay as far away from you as possible. You're dangerous."

"No, I'm not dangerous."

"You are dangerous to me. I want you and it makes no sense."

"Does it have to?" Max reached up behind Blue's head and pulled his mouth in for a kiss.

The kiss was long and sweet. It tantalized Max's appetite for more.

"You won't care about this after it's over," Blue murmured against his searching mouth. "I'll be alone again."

Their clothes came off in a frenzy. Max pushed Blue back down on his back. He looked into his eyes.

"No. You won't be alone. Let me be clear. I can't promise you love. I can't promise you exclusivity, but you will have my eternal affection and protection. Come back with me to France. You'll be safe there."

"He's coming for us," Blue whispered as Max undid the buttons on Blue's shirt.

"No, Galien can't find us. I've blocked him. He doesn't know where we are." Max kissed a trail down Blue's chest as he spread open his shirt.

"I feel something. It's not Galien."

"Blue," Max whispered, "love me. Make love to me and it will be all right."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Blue's hands tangled in Max's hair as he undid the zipper on Blue's jeans. He pulled off the pants along with the underwear and licked the length of his shaft.

Blue whimpered, then moaned deeply as Max took his cock into his mouth and began to suck and lick it with great energy. Blue's hips bucked as Max reached underneath him to tease his anus as he continued to work on Blue's raging erection.

"Oh, God!" Blue cried out, digging his nails into Max's scalp.

Max came off of his cock and he moved up into his arms. Blue pulled him closer, kissed him now with open mouth and active tongue, grunting to get closer. Max picked up Blue's legs and wrapped them around his waist. "I want to fuck you," he breathed.

"Oh, yeah, yeah. Go on. Do it, Max. I want you."

CHAPTER 8

“Whore!” Galien screamed as he stood on the top of the insurance office tower which was directly across from the hotel where Max and Blue were. He had a first class view thanks to infrared lenses, his own keen vampire sight, and an opening in the hotel room’s blinds.

He watched as Max sucked Blue’s pathetic cock. Now they rolled on the bed, kissing and running their hands everywhere.

“You won’t fuck him,” he muttered, yanking on the chain still attached to the zombie’s throat. And that’s all he was really, a mindless zombie, but nevertheless useful.

Blue’s legs were in the air, Max bearing down.

“Sorry to interrupt but...” Galien howled, and lunged across 54th Street and crashed through the glass window. He had Blue’s

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

half-witted sixth victim with him.

Before Galien could get to his feet, Max was standing over him, a foot on his throat.

“You couldn’t wait to die, Galien, thought you’d make it a day earlier?”

Galien looked up at him, furious, but the sight of Max’s beautiful naked body wiped away all his fear. “I only want you,” he croaked.

Blue was scrambling for his clothes.

Max’s eyes went to the half-dazed creature lying on the carpet.

“Who or what is that? Or should I guess? The missing sixth victim?”

“If you let me up, maybe I’ll tell you.”

Max removed his foot and stood back. He accepted his pants from Blue and began to step into them.

“Talk,” he said as he pulled them up and threw on his clothes again.

“Ask Blue,” Galien got to his feet.

“Listen, Galien, I know the entire story,” Max pointed at him. “I don’t want any more of your bullshit. I could end it right here and now, or take you before the council, but I warn you, your death won’t be slow.”

“And I guess your beloved Blue will have to stand up to face his judgment as well,” Galien folded his arms across his chest.

“He’s not my beloved Blue, he’s yours, remember? You made him, and what a horror circus it was.”

He shrugged. “Still he must pay.”

Blue drew on his own clothes as Galien and Max argued.

“What for? You’re the one responsible for not teaching him how to feed.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Not that. Look at this poor excuse for a vampire. He is Blue’s. It’s how I found you. Blue made a half-hearted attempt to turn him, then just abandoned him. I’ve been taking care of him. Poor thing.”

“Looks like you’ve been doing a bang up job, too,” Max muttered, inspecting it.

“I’ve done my best. I’m not his master, Blue is. And there’s more.”

Max looked at Blue, who was staring at the figure on the floor with utter horror on his face.

“What? Spill it. Don’t waste my time.”

“This creature here, when he was mortal, was on the secret committee appointed to investigate our existence.”

Max’s face registered shock. “What?”

“You heard me.”

Max glanced at Blue. “Where did you do this?”

Blue shook his head. “I don’t remember. But he was the one we couldn’t find, I guess.”

“Right,” Max tasted the word in his mouth. “So, how much do you know about this commission, Galien?”

“A lot. I have an insider who has access to all the developments, but don’t think I’m giving that source to you. You need me.”

“In your dreams.”

“I’ve contacted the council and told them about these latest developments. They have given me permission to destroy him.” Galien shot Blue a look. “But first he must destroy this thing he created.”

Max narrowed his eyes. “They expect you to work with me on this. They want the mortal commission on the investigation of vampires brought down.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"I'm not killing innocent mortals just because they happen to be on a committee. They'll only replace them with others."

Galien shrugged. "I didn't say they said to kill them but they want—"

Max put up a hand. "Enough. I'll talk to the council myself."

"Fine. They're waiting for your call and also a confirmation that the problems have been dealt with."

The creature on the floor began to get up. It bared its teeth and prepared for attack.

"No," Blue demanded. "Don't move."

The creature relaxed.

"It knows that you're his daddy," Galien said lightly to Blue, then smiled at Max. "I'll stay with Blue, make sure he destroys this thing, and then take care of—"

"You'll do nothing until I speak to the council. Now get out."

"Put it off, Max, if you like but—"

"Get out!"

Galien turned and exited through the window.

Max looked at Blue. "This changes everything. The council doesn't seem to trust that I can get the job done anymore, and Galien has wrangled himself into an ideal position, one that enables him to hold me hostage."

"Are you going to kill me?" Blue called out, his voice almost faltering.

Max never answered his question. "You need to deal with this..." He waved his hand at the creature as he headed to the door. "Whatever it is, right now!" His voice sounded like thunder.

"Where are you going?" Blue called out, but his question was met only with the slamming of the door.

He sank down on the edge of the bed. A little while ago when

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Max had been making love to him, he'd begun to see a light at the end of this dark tunnel. Maybe he could learn to exist like this, drink blood from a blood bank, and even find love. But now, a few feet away was a hollow shell of what once had been a man, a creature he had created and not even remembered. And Galien had Max in his corner, making sure that they'd be working side by side. And Blue was beginning to find that thought very unsettling.

* * *

Max sat in the café called David's Potbelly Stove with his cell phone at his ear. He chose it because of its twenty-four hour open-door policy and because it was the least likely place he would ever choose for a conference call. He felt a little paranoid. Scratch that. A lot paranoid. He didn't trust anybody. Everybody emanated danger.

He had to fight that feeling as he listened to the man on the phone. He was having a hell of a time controlling his temper. Not only was the man not hearing a word he said, the council had chosen some low level bureaucrat to deliver the message to him.

"These are the directives, Mr. Driscoll," the voice told him. "Each maker must take care to deal with their errors. The atrocity must be eliminated. The council is not pleased with the behavior of this new vampire creation of Galien's. He apparently made a mess of trying to turn a member of the commission, a commission which is seeking to eliminate us."

"I am not responsible for this. The fault lies with Galien. He turned a young man into a vampire after decimating his entire family in front of his eyes, then abandoned him to run amok. Blue is traumatized. He didn't know what he was doing."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“You must speak to Galien, Max. Rein him in, teach him humility and obedience. Show him the wisdom of your years. You must discipline him, guide him. The problem lies in your abandonment of Galien years ago. It was reckless, irresponsible.”

“My abandonment of...then he’s to be held blameless in all this?” *Someone was fucking somebody.*

“You are his...superior. We expect more from you. We are very disappointed.”

Fuck their disappointment. “He deserves to be eliminated for what he has done. He has broken the laws.”

“Galien is a valuable member of our community. His age counts for something. The other one, this Blue, is barely one vampire-year old. He is dispensable. Make sure this Blue takes care of the monster he sired, then dispose of him quickly. We want you and Galien to give all your attention to this human commission. Find out who these people are, and the one the rogue vampire made a catastrophe of. Make sure these people know that interference will not be tolerated, then do what you must to protect our kind.”

“I’m a cleaner. I’m not a—”

“You will do what you are told, Mr. Driscoll.”

Good thing he was on the phone. “You don’t understand.” Max growled in frustration. “Galien orchestrated all this to get me to come back here. He manipulated me and the council.”

“Rekindle your relationship with your spawn. These are your orders. Heed them or face the consequences.” The line went dead.

“Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!” The cell phone landed across the table, hitting the wall opposite, between two girls drinking coffee together, but texting other people. They both glanced up, their thumbs hovering for a split-second before resuming their tasks. He

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

overheard a snatch of their brief conversation.

They're texting each other! Man, this world is so screwed up.

She looked at him in trepidation as he stood and gave her an apologetic smile. He reached for the phone. He'd thrown it so hard, it was cracked in two. Luckily there was no one else in the café except for a startled girl behind the counter.

"Sorry."

He walked for the longest time outside. It had started to rain and he walked past Broadway, heading downtown. Alone with his thoughts, he passed the memorials to 9/11 victims and stood at the curb on West Street, opposite Battery Park, looking at the Statue of Liberty across the expanse of darkened water.

Liberté, égalité, fraternité! It had been so long since the voices of the revolution had shouted those words, yet Max reflected the world was still no closer to those ideals. Max turned to look uptown toward where the Twin Towers still left a hole. The world was like one big sink hole, not even close to achieving any kind of Utopia.

Destroy Blue. Then what? How dare they tell him what to do? He was far older than most of them. He'd really seen it all. He'd been invited to serve on the council several times. He wasn't interested in their politics or their justice. His instinct was to say *fuck this*, and go home, but he knew that he couldn't. He'd be hunted, and he'd end up having to battle and kill off a half a dozen vampires even before he left the city. No, he had no choice but to investigate this commission.

He started walking again, then took to the night sky until he touched down in Times Square. Hands deep in his pocket, he started walking again. He was disturbed mostly by the request that he coddle Galien, and by the suspicion that Galien had the

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

sympathy of someone on the council. And destroying Blue, of course, was another issue all together. Galien had used Blue to get to him, destroyed an entire family, to create a vampire bound to break the rules. It was damn cleaver. Get him here, and then point the finger to someone else.

When the sun was beginning to break in the sky, he walked up the steps to the House of Forsard and turned the door handle. Galien sat in the living room, all the shades drawn around him. He looked up as Max walked in.

"I thought you'd be with your lover."

"Which lover?" Max asked, folding his arms across his chest.

Galien met his gaze. "Oh, has that grown stale already?"

"Okay, Galien." He walked into the living room and stood in front of him. "I spoke to some little dictator from the council and he told me I have to play nice. I want to know what you know about this commission, and I also want to know who that thing used to be that you dropped into my hotel room tonight."

"Blue's little experiment you mean."

"Yes."

"I have no idea. I am glad to see that you've come to your senses."

"Coming to my senses as you call it has nothing to do with fucking you. I'd like to make that clear."

"You'll change your mind."

"I sincerely fucking wish people would stop telling me what I should think, and when I should think it. The one thing I was told was that you needed discipline. So, no more escorts."

"How do you expect me to make a living? This doesn't come cheap." Galien waved his hands around the living room.

"Surely, you've made enough already. Now, where is Blue?"

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"I thought he was with you."

"That's the other thing. You should know where the members of your house are at all times."

"I thought you told the boys that this house was officially closed."

"Well, I guess I'll have to hold off on that, won't I? Where is Blue's project-gone-wrong now?"

"Chained up in the basement."

"Why isn't it gone?"

"Because," a voice said suddenly, "I couldn't do it."

Max turned around to look at Blue, who'd come down the stairs and was hovering at the entrance to the living room. "So you'd rather let it suffer down in the basement chained to a wall?"

"I can't," he whispered.

"You killed five men, drained them dry, and yet you can't kill this one."

"Kill them both, Max. Get it over with," Galien studied his nails.

"I can't do that and you know it."

"That's right," he said softly, looking at Blue. "I have to kill you. You're mine. But first," he stood, pointing at him, "you have to kill that thing in the basement."

"Come on," Max said. "I'll go with you."

Blue shook his head. "Please, tomorrow?"

Max nodded. "Go to bed."

Blue ran back upstairs.

Galien shook his head. "You've gone soft. I've said it before. You're not the Max I knew."

"You are not going to kill Blue," Max said.

He shrugged. "Orders from the top."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"I said no."

"The council ordered it."

"And I'm your master, and I forbid it."

"Because you have feelings for him!" Galien accused.

"Don't be ridiculous. It's because I feel that you are responsible for what he did and he shouldn't have to pay for it."

"You would have fucked him if I hadn't interrupted you."

"It is not your business who I fuck, and it means nothing to me. You should know that."

"Yes," he muttered, "I do know all too well."

Max sighed. "I saved you. That should be enough."

"To show how much you care." Galien sneered.

"That's right."

"You have no idea the pain you have caused me."

"You listen to me"—he reached down and took hold of Galien's throat—"if you ever try to shoot me again with silver, or try to hurt Katherine in any way, I will show you what real pain is all about. Is that clear?"

Galien nodded, aware that now he was being watched by the other residents of the house. Max released him and stood to his full height.

"And let it be known, that this house is no longer the House of Forsard. It is the House of Driscoll." He glanced around at all of them, David, Frank, Ian, and Blue, who again had come down the stairs and hovered, his face pale.

"Anyone dwelling within is subject to my rules. Break them and feel my wrath."

There was silence.

Galien sat up. "You heard him. And it looks like we need to find another profession. The oldest one is now off-limits."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“You still have the club,” Max pointed out. “You can run it but with no prostitution, human or vampire.”

“We’ll just be waiters then?” Ian laughed.

“God, hope the customers tip good,” David muttered.

“Tip well,” Max corrected.

“And I can give it a new look,” a female voice declared.

Katherine smiled at Max as she walked in, eyeing the men in the room. She was so lovely, even after what Galien and his goons had done to her.

She and Max exchanged kisses on either cheek, French-style, then she walked over to Galien.

He gave her his nastiest smile as she wagged a finger at him.

“You have been very bad, *mon ami*. I’m not impressed.”

“Katherine. Thanks for the visit,” he said flatly. “Staying long?”

“It is the House of Driscoll, *n’est pas*?” She turned to look at Max, her eyes wide.

“You are always welcome at my house, love,” he said. “Gentlemen, I expect you to treat the lady with respect.”

She laughed, coming around to the back of Max and hugging his neck. She kissed his cheek.

“Otherwise, I’ll beat the crap out of you.”

She leaned over to Galien. “You still like to smoke?”

His eyes darted back and forth. “Why, what have you got?”

“You wanna try my French weed?”

He took the tiny, elegant joint.

Max glanced at her. Galien was right. She was bad.

::*Didn’t his goons tell him about the joint you gave them?*:: He telepathed to her, blocking Galien’s efforts to invade their frequency.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

::They were too embarrassed::

Max bit his lip as Galien lit up, inhaling deeply, a look of euphoria spreading over his face.

::What's in it?:: He telepathed to Katherine.

::Put it this way...part of him will be very happy...another part of him will be...temporarily out of commission. I'm buying you time, babe::

* * *

Blue watched the scene with some fascination. What must it be like to be that close to Max Driscoll, to feel free to go up and hug onto him like that? And what manner of a woman would come into a house where her archenemy was? He understood perfectly well why Galien would try to get rid of her. He was seething with jealousy.

All in all, he was pleased that Galien was no longer in control, but he wasn't sure if he'd fare much better with Max. He had a feeling it was going to be worse. Anyhow, whatever had started between them back in that hotel room was obviously over. Max would be on his back to destroy the creature in the basement, and after that, Galien would have the green light to end his existence.

Without a word, he went upstairs to his room and closed the door.

* * *

He was dreaming when he thought he heard the door open. *Where have you been? I ache for you. I have waited every night.*

Expert hands caressed his skin, and a warm, passionate mouth

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

captured his. He was taken, possessed, his. Max. Max?

He opened his eyes and sat up. The door did open then and he saw Max standing there in the darkness. He walked over to the bed and sat on the edge. Blue almost reached for him but then Max began to speak.

"I'll do what I can to protect you but I can't guarantee anything. The council has signed your death warrant, and your executioner is more than willing to carry it out."

He swallowed. "I thank you."

"Don't. In the name of fairness, I don't think the council truly sees what is happening here. I believe in fairness. You deserve a chance and, under the right tutelage, I believe you can follow the rules."

"Under your tutelage?"

"Obviously Galien isn't capable. Do you object to my guidance?"

"Will you take me in the bathtub again?" He lowered his head.

Max placed a finger under his chin. "No."

"And that was to teach me that there is pleasure in drinking?"

"That there can be."

"And it is never to happen again?"

"You can make it happen anytime with another as long as you learn control."

"But not with you?"

He shrugged. "Perhaps."

"But then you will do it with someone else after like you did in France. I thought you loved me."

"Blue? What are you talking about?"

He shook his head. "Galien. Why did you take other lovers? Didn't you love him?"

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"I don't believe in love. I thought we talked about this before? Why do you sympathize so much with a vampire who you call a monster?"

"He wasn't always that way. And I have his feelings, his memories. I know how much he loves you. Someone who can love that deeply can be redeemed."

Max met his eyes. "Sleep now." He stood.

"I think I might have had women before I was turned. Now with all this in my head, my desire runs for men. But I can't tell if it's real."

"You'll figure it out." He walked to the door.

"You really regret coming here, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Galien is winning so far. He has you right where he wants you."

"No. Katherine has a slight...advantage right now. Whatever she gave him has him giggling like a schoolgirl, but yes, I know that this was what he wanted."

"Eventually, you will be in his bed. You can't help it, Max. It's natural for you. And so easy to walk away afterward."

Max placed a hand on the door. "I get it, Blue. I'm an insensitive bastard." He laughed.

Blue lay his head down on the pillow. "It's part of your appeal."

"So it seems."

"Katherine loves you, too. If you'd crook your finger, she'd go to your bed as well."

"Goodnight, Blue," he said and closed the door behind him.

The dream resumed where it had left off. Two men, one definitely Max with a white shirt, ruffles at the neck, at the sleeves,

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

pulled half off now by desperate hands. Blue's hand went to his cock and came away a sticky mess.

Where have you been? Why do you leave me here waiting...and waiting...and aching...and you're with another.

You speak out of turn. You know I always come back to your bed. You take sex way too seriously, Galien.

And you don't take it seriously at all.

Blue swallowed, sitting up, leaning on his elbow. He never asked for this, never asked to feel everything that monster felt. It was harder to see him as a monster when he knew how deep his emotions ran when it came to Max. And Max, responsible, in charge, was himself a monster, but in a completely different way. He followed the rules when it came to vampire law, but when it came to the heart he was an offender of the worst kind.

He didn't want to feel this intense desire for Max, but Galien's memories made his entire body ache. It seemed so real, so intense at certain moments that he wasn't sure where Galien's emotions ended and his began. How close he'd come to giving himself over to the pleasure of Max's embrace in that hotel room. And it was pure pleasure, pleasure at the hands of someone who knew the art of lovemaking, who understood far more about pleasing the flesh than perhaps he could even begin to grasp. Max was nothing more than a demon in the guise of an angel, a seducer who'd taken a poor boy like Galien from ruin, taken him beyond anything he'd ever imagined and then left his heart in tatters.

I can't kill that thing in the basement.

Blue folded up his fists and pressed them to his eyes. He had no idea what he'd been thinking when he'd fed that poor soul his blood. *I want to save you.* Perhaps he'd realized that the killing had to stop. Perhaps he'd tried to make retribution with this one, but in

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

the end, all he'd really made was a mess.

He had to remind himself that when he was close to Max his feelings were not his own, that he was in the grasp of past memories from Galien. He didn't want to be Galien, he didn't want to end up being the poor boy who tasted heaven only to be cast out again like some fallen angel. He'd have to learn to keep his distance but that would be difficult, especially since the only thing standing between him and his own demise was Max. Only Max could stop Galien from doing what he'd intended to do since he'd turned him, obliterating him from the face of the earth.

CHAPTER 9

Max stripped off his clothes and walked into the warm shower. He closed his eyes letting the warm water run over his skin, trying to remind himself that all of this mess would soon get regulated. *I hate this job.*

“But you were made for it,” a female voice replied.

Max turned off the water and opened the glass door. He grinned as he saw Katherine standing there, holding out a towel. He swept his hair back from his face and took the towel. “Hello.”

“Hello to you,” she purred, running her gaze over him. “That certainly improves my mood.”

He began toweling off. “By that, do you mean me entirely, or only specific parts of me?”

She grabbed the towel and hit him with it. “Don’t be smug.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

He took it back and wrapped it around his waist.

"Come, I'll brush your hair." She picked up his hairbrush off the bureau.

She sat on the bed and widened her legs. He moved up between them and she began to brush his hair. "Don't say I never opened my legs for you."

He paused, glancing at her over his shoulder. "When have I ever said that?"

"I do have a reputation." She ran the brush through his hair. "Although yours is far more notorious."

"So I've heard."

"Max?"

"Um?" The hair brushing was soothing.

"Why does Blue have Galien's memories? Didn't he cloak himself when he embraced him?"

"No."

"Why would he do that?"

"Maybe he felt the need to share."

"Very funny. It's very confusing for Blue. Which brings me to the subject of Blue. What are you intending to do with him?"

"With him, nothing. To him, I'll have to wait on that. The council expects Galien to destroy him, which he is all too eager to do."

"Because he's jealous of Blue. But while he's at it, he might as well destroy all the men in this house. They'd all bend over for you in a heartbeat...pardon the pun."

"Katherine. You have a wild imagination."

"Don't *Katherine* me. It's not my imagination. God, I walked in the place, and the thoughts of those heavily hung studs assaulted me all at once. They wonder if, as their master, you'll use them—

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

and believe me, they want to be used. They also were glad to see that I was a woman. I'm not a threat. They know you like your sex rough and wild, and I'm too much of a lady for that." She sniffed.

Max howled with laughter.

She punched him. "Enough laughing. So, you are going to defy the council when it comes to Blue because...?"

He looked at her, took the brush, and laid it at his side. Katherine folded him back in her arms and he relaxed against her.

"Justice."

"Yes, but darling could it be that you feel something for him?"

"Pity."

"What was it you felt for Galien all those years ago besides lust?"

"Compassion. I cared for him, cared about what happened to him. That's why I saved him. You share a bed with someone and you can't help feel connected."

"And that connection isn't love?"

He glanced at her, met her gaze. "I don't know love, Katherine. Do you?"

She smiled, pressed her lips to his temple. "Yes," she said. "I know love."

"It's not the same. I suppose I could say that I love you but it's not the same. I have never loved a lover, not to the point where I only wanted to be with that person for always. Does that make me bad?"

"It makes you a bad boy." She grinned. "But that's in style now days...no, I take that back. I think it might have been in style back in your century as well. I think it makes your lover love you more intensely, with almost a sense of desperation at the thought that they could lose you. Not to mention that you are fiendishly

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

promiscuous.”

He laughed.

“Feel better?”

“Was I feeling badly?”

“You were feeling a great deal of trepidation. You never wanted to come here in the first place, to face your past.”

Max pulled out of her embrace, sat on the side of the bed. “I wanted to leave Galien in the past where he belongs.”

“Apparently, he doesn’t share your opinion, darling. And I’m not so sure you’ve completely left him there anyway.”

He stood. “Which means?”

She stretched out and stifled a yawn. “Which means that whatever word you give it in your mind, you still have some feeling for him. That’s what keeps the hope alive inside of him.” She turned on her side and curled up into a little ball.

A few minutes later, she lay quietly sleeping.

He shook his head, smiled. “Guess I have a roommate.” He took the blanket from the bottom of the bed and covered her with it. He pulled on his jeans. He couldn’t sleep anyway, and the sun would go down in three hours. It was their natural sleeping time but his age had permitted him to get away with very little sleep, and the sunlight, as long as it wasn’t at peak hours like noon, didn’t bother him so much in short doses.

Slowly he made his way down the stairs, aware that there were others all around him sleeping. He flicked on the light at the second flight of stairs and walked down into the basement.

He stood there looking at what once was a human being, feeling some regret. “No one deserves to be like this,” he said softly, moving closer. Once a man, probably in his early forties, his face was monstrous, distorted, teeth protruding and dripping, eyes

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

glassy, red. His breathing was labored and he was literally starving to death.

Max reached out and touched his cheek.

The being whimpered, unable to form intelligent words, but Max surmised that maybe he could communicate with his mind or what was left of it.

::Who are you really?::

He answered, mixing both French and English. *::Je suis folie, I am madness. Tuez-moi. Kill me. I beg you. I don't want to be like you, a blood sucking demon.::*

::Vous n'êtes pas comme moi. You are not like me. You're a vampire gone wrong. Je suis désolé. I'm sorry.::

::If your kind actually feels anything, please end my life. My reward is to be found in heaven.::

Blood tears ran down his face. Blue was not going to do this. He didn't have the capacity.

Max nodded. "You know nothing about me, and yet you and your commission of mortal assassins plot to destroy me. And now, it's one of those ironies of life, that I am in a position to mercifully end your life?"

::Yes, isn't it? That I must plead for death at the hand of Michael himself?::

Max narrowed his eyes at the reference to the angel of death. He lifted his hands and took the drooping head between them.

"I'm not the angel of death," he whispered. "I'm just death."

And he twisted.

* * *

Blue sat up in bed with a strangled gasp. He jumped up, pulled

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

on some briefs which had been thrown on the floor, and took the steps two at a time. He saw the light on in the basement and slowed his pace, warily looking around him as he made his way down.

There he saw Max, on one knee. His head was bent forward. For a moment he looked as if he was praying. The figure chained to the wall was no more of this world.

Blue reached out a tentative hand, but Max spoke before his fingers touched him.

"I'm not praying," he said softly, standing. "I did your job for you."

"Why?" Blue asked. "It was my responsibility. I made the mess."

"Because," he said, "I'm the cleaner." There was infinite sadness in Max's gaze as their eyes met briefly. It was gone in a flash. Max brushed past him and walked back up the stairs.

* * *

"Ian," Galien said, "if this is supposed to be exciting, it's not." He pushed Ian's head away from his groin. "God, don't you have any imagination?"

"I thought it was a good way to wake you up." Ian sat up on the bed, sounding wounded.

"With imagination," Galien insisted, his senses honed as he knew Max had just walked past his door.

Galien was secretly worried. His cock had been flaccid for hours. He wondered if Katherine had slipped him something horrible in that joint. *No*. He pushed the thought out of his mind. He'd felt really damned good. He'd felt wonderful.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

He had to step lightly where Katherine was concerned. He couldn't accuse her. Max adored her. The problem was Ian. Galien didn't want him. He only wanted Max.

"Well, since you're not the head of the household anymore"—Ian gave him a triumphant smile—"I guess you're not the one I have to work on pleasing."

Galien reached over and took Ian by the hair. In one motion, he slammed his head down onto the mattress and kept it there.

"I might not be the head of the household anymore, but I'm stronger and older than you. And let me make this clear, try and make yourself Max's whore, and I'll cut off your undersized prick, then your head. Is that clear?"

Ian nodded frantically.

"Besides"—Galien laughed, releasing him—"with moves like you did just now with my cock"—he showed him his still erect cock for emphasis—"the only thing you'd do for Max is put him to sleep."

Ian stood, meeting his gaze. "You won't hurt me, Galien. Max won't let you. You have to have justification."

"Fuck off, Ian. And fuck justification."

Ian shrugged.

Galien pulled on some clothes and left the room. He found Max downstairs, sitting on the sofa, sipping some brandy. He always did know his liquor. "Sleep well?"

"Didn't sleep at all."

He was wearing blue jeans and a creamy beige shirt, left open at the neck. He looked as elegant in that as he would have in evening attire. He was shockingly handsome, white gleaming teeth that kind of blinded you when he smiled, and he oozed sex, even when it was the furthest thing from his mind.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Suddenly Galien gasped. "You got rid of it."

"Yes. I couldn't bear to see it suffer anymore. He was French."

"So?" Galien shrugged. "Maybe he was a tourist."

"You know damn well that he wasn't. He was a member of the commission, and that commission is based in New York. You and I are going to find out everything we can about this organization."

He walked to the window, raised the blind. "Very well. But first I have a job to do."

"Not yet."

"What in hell do you mean, not yet? He couldn't even take care of one little fucking zombie in the basement. I have a mandate to—"

"Fuck your mandate. I said, not yet."

Galien came to stand in front of him. His legs were open and Galien's gaze went automatically to the bulge in those jeans. He swallowed, told himself to focus. "What in hell is your motive in keeping him around?"

"What is your motive in getting rid of him?" He lifted an eyebrow quizzically, and unlike himself, kept his voice perfectly calm.

"I was told to. You were told to clean this place. I'm trying to help you."

Max laughed.

"That wasn't funny."

"It was creative. You don't give a damn about helping me clean up anything. That's pure unadulterated bullshit. You created Blue with the intention of disposing of him all along. Only you thought I'd get here, assume he was the guilty one, and do it for you."

"You think I won't do it? You think I'd hesitate to snap his neck?"

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“No. I don’t think that.” Max stood. “In fact, I know you dream about it. But for now, it’s not going to happen. I need him. We need him.”

“*A ménage a trois*...well, won’t be the first time. But, Max, his little girlfriend won’t like that.”

“What little girlfriend?”

“The only reason our little Blue boy doesn’t throw up at the thought of your cock inside him is because my memories make him want you. Blue is as straight as they come. He had a steady girlfriend before. She sang in the choir.”

Max shook his head. “What did you do, look around for the most fucking wholesome, straight A boy you could find, then corrupt him?”

“Something like that.” Max chuckled. “Blue sang in the choir, too.”

“Why doesn’t that surprise me? When did you turn into such an evil fuck?”

“Oh, that’s rich. You calling me evil,” he smiled at him.

“What is his real name?”

“Blue.” Galien shrugged.

“No. It’s not his name. You called him that. What is his name?”

“Why is that important? He’s not that person anymore. He’s Blue because I say so, and he wants you because he feels the pleasure you are capable of giving, but all that in the hotel room wasn’t coming from him.”

“And that gives you enormous pleasure.”

“Yes, if it deals a blow to your massive ego”—Graham nodded—“it makes my day...maybe even my century.”

Max headed for the stairs.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“What? No kiss?”

Max turned to look at him. “I’m going upstairs to get Blue. Together, we are going to figure out who is on the commission. Blue didn’t just meet that guy by chance. There’s more going on here. Blue can tell us that. He’s remembering more and more.”

“Yes, how convenient for him.”

Max began to mount the stairs.

“And you wanna be wife, how long is she staying?”

“This is now the House of Driscoll, and she is a member of this house.” He turned and eyed him. “You’ll leave before she does. Is that clear?”

“Perfectly, my love.”

* * *

Blue was standing at the window when Max entered his room. He didn’t knock. “We need to talk.”

“So talk.” He didn’t turn around.

“That man in the basement, the one you tried to turn. Why did you do it?”

“I don’t know. I think I was trying to take it back.”

“How did you meet him? Was he at one of the clubs?”

“I can’t remember.”

“Why were you stalking gay clubs anyway?”

“I don’t know that either. Maybe that’s where Galien told me to hunt.”

“I don’t believe that you were under any instructions from Galien. You were killing randomly, who you wanted and where. I find two things curious, one that you were hunting in that area when you profess to be straight, and secondly, that the one victim

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

you didn't kill outright ended up being a member of this commission."

"Coincidence."

"There are no coincidences in life. I think you knew him."

Blue turned and looked at him in shock.

"I think you knew him, and you were horrified to find him in the last place you expected. You began to drain him and then couldn't finish it. That's when you fed him your blood. Then you panicked, didn't know what to do, and you communicated that to Galien, who brought him here, figuring he could use that against you if I didn't immediately take you out."

Blue started to shake.

Max walked over and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't."

Max withdrew it. "He was a member of your church."

"How do you know about my church?"

"Galien told me. You sang in the choir. Your family attended this church."

"It's just a church."

"Mainstream?"

"Yes. Catholic."

"And?"

"They held meetings at night but I wasn't involved. My father went."

"Your latest victim, was he involved in these meetings?"

"I don't know. He was an elder in the church, highly respected."

"And he was in the closet."

Blue nodded. "I guess, if he was hanging around that part of town at that time of night." The bitterness to his tone was evident.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

The whole world has lied to this kid. His whole notion of life, love and death flew out the window the second he met Galien.

“Did you know he was closeted before you encountered him that night you fed on him?”

“I don’t...I don’t think so. Probably not. Why so many questions?”

“It’s important. You were angry that night. You were angry because this man preached to you about the evils of homosexuality, didn’t he?”

He nodded. “Yes.”

“Is that why you sought him out, because you struggled so hard to hide your desire for men, obey the rules of your church, and yet here he was?”

“He was dancing, half naked, his shirt off, running his hands all over some muscle guy. I had him on his knees before I—”

He stopped dead and Max couldn’t help but feel his pain.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry for the hypocrisy and intolerance of this world. Sometimes I think nothing has really changed. “

In Max’s mind, he heard the screams of those men who’d been beaten and tortured for their passions, of Arnaud, who had never hurt a single being in his life. For a second, he closed his eyes.

“Max?”

When he opened them, he was looking into Blue’s.

“Where is this all going?”

“I have to find the members of this commission.”

“You’re going to execute them?” Blue stumbled backward.

“You’re always asking me that, as if I am honor-bound to destroy.”

“Aren’t you?” Blue asked.

Max didn’t really want to answer that. That fool on the phone

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

had suggested that he gently persuade them, but he knew that religious fervor was not easy to quell. Some of these people might be prepared to die for their cause. If these people proved difficult, permanently silencing them might very well end up being the only solution.

“The final solution,” Blue scoffed.

“Stop reading my damn mind,” he pointed out him. “And I’m not a Nazi.”

“You’re a reluctant assassin.”

He sighed.

“That doesn’t make it right.”

“Ah, so now you’re a righteous sinner.”

He sank down onto the bed and placed his head in his hands. “I really don’t know what I am.”

“Well, I’ll tell you who you are.” He pulled Blue to his feet. “Right now you’re a fucked up vampire on the verge of extinction unless he is very, very accommodating in helping me track down these holy crusaders. That’s what you are.”

Blue rolled his eyes at him. “Great. Thanks for enlightening me.”

“Any time.” Max grinned and pulled him toward the door.

* * *

“Do you remember the last time you walked into a church, Max?” Galien inquired.

Max didn’t reply.

Blue had been tense the entire way over here to his old neighborhood, and then tension between Max and Galien, not to mention between Galien and himself...Well, none of it made this

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

exactly a pleasure cruise.

Max parked Galien's car a few blocks away and they walked. It was about nine in the evening and there were people walking around the neighborhood, stopping at Steinbergs' Deli for smoked meat, dropping into the liquor stop for a cheap bottle of wine. The church was on the corner, the huge steeple made like a cross atop the huge bell which called the faithful to mass four times a day.

Blue could see a light shining downstairs in the church hall. "What if someone recognizes me?" he asked.

"They won't," Max said. "Put the hood up on your sweatshirt."

"Maybe your little girlfriend is still around," Galien mocked.

"Shut up, Galien," Max snapped. "Blue needs to concentrate. When those people come out of their meeting, I want him to tell me who they are."

Blue sighed. "You're asking a lot."

Max looked around him, then grabbed Blue and swooped them both up to the roof of the family grocery across the street.

"What, no kiss?" Blue muttered breathlessly. "Would you stop doing that? This flying thing still freaks me out."

Max's gaze was on the church.

Blue persisted. "You could have given me some warning." He brushed off his clothes.

Galien landed now on the roof, right beside him. "What are we doing up here again?" he asked Max.

"Waiting," Max replied.

Blue sat on the roof and pulled his knees up around him. He felt helpless, caught in some sort of web that could only lead them to disaster. Not only was his entire family dead, now they were going to kill off his neighbors as well.

"So"—Galien laughed, nudging him with his foot—"give us a

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

hymn, Blue boy.”

“Fuck off,” Blue told him.

“Cocky now, aren’t we now that Max has your back?”

Max glared at them both. “Grow up.”

Yes, he was cocky. Galien couldn’t hurt him unless Max gave the word.

“So let’s say our boy here can give us name, rank, and serial number,” Galien said. “Then what? We kill them all?”

“No,” Blue blurted out. “Please Max, you said...”

Max didn’t answer.

“How does one convince a bunch of vampire hating religious fanatics to have mercy on the souls of the damned?” Galien was laughing at his own joke. “I know you are a genius, Max, but that’s quite a challenge you got there. Maybe you can do volunteer work at the local old folks home and they’ll change their—”

Max held up a hand. “I’m taking this one step at a time. You’re not helping, and if you’re not a help then you’re a hindrance. So, go home.”

“Come on, Max.” Galien laughed.

“Go home,” Max glared at him.

Galien was gone.

Max returned his attention to the church.

“Sometimes these meetings run late,” Blue said. “We could be here a while.”

“Got anywhere you have to be?”

Blue shook his head. “No. So, are you going to tell me who that guy was dressed like a bride?”

Max sighed. “Why do want to know so badly?”

“When Galien transmitted to me, it seemed like your memory, not his.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"It was."

"It was shrouded in pain. And that surprised me."

"Why?"

"Because Galien is all about pain, but you're not."

"I can't feel pain?" Max looked at him.

"You can't feel love."

"I didn't say I *can't* feel love. I don't believe in its existence."

"Well, if you don't believe it exists, how can you feel it?"

"Are you trying to fuck with my mind?"

"No." Blue laughed. "I'm trying to understand you."

"What for?"

"Something to do. Kicks, you know. It's either that or eating people and, apparently, I can't do that anymore."

Max laughed. "Get another hobby."

"He died horribly, this man, the bride."

"Yes."

"And somehow, you felt responsible?"

"No. I didn't kill him if that's what you mean."

"But you were there. You took pleasure from his body. In fact, you were the one who gave him the most pleasure. You had no inhibitions, not like the others."

"Your point?"

"You felt connected to him because you gave him pleasure."

"Blue..." Max sighed. "Can you do me a favor? Can you refrain from psychoanalyzing me?"

He shrugged.

"There," Max said. "There's one, no two? Who is that? Who are those men?"

Blue studied the two men who came out of the church. "Jacob ah...Faun, and the other one, he's a city councilman...Derek

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Manson.”

“Okay. Only two?”

“My father is dead, and so is the one I...well...you know, and I think there were only five.”

“Who’s the other one?”

“I have no idea.”

“Your father must have spoken about them.”

“No, he didn’t.”

“Do you know where these men live?”

He nodded.

“Okay, in a little while, you’re going to take me there.”

“And what are you going to do?”

“Put a scare into them that will hopefully make them abandon all this craziness.”

“And that will be the end?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if there is more than one of these groups, but I’m not responsible for the others. I’ll take care of this one, and then I’m done.”

Suddenly Blue gasped.

“What?”

“It’s Linda,” he said.

Max looked down to see a young woman walk out of the church. She went into the parking lot where she spoke to the two older men for a moment. They gave a little bow to her and got into their car.

She stood alone in the parking lot, looking around. Suddenly another man walked out from behind the church. They embraced.

“Who’s that?” Max demanded.

“I don’t know.” Blue shook his head.

Max was quiet for a long time. The two turned and walked

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

back into the woods together. "Stay here," he said. And he was gone like a streak in the night.

Blue stood, wrapping his arms around himself, he bit his thumbnail. A flash of memory, some sound in the night, an angry growl.

There is only room for one.

It seemed like eternity before Blue heard Max's voice calling to him. He wasn't sure why it felt like that, except that he imagined all kinds of things.

::You're in danger, Max.::

::Come, Blue. Come to me now.::

Blue grasped the handle of the heavy church door and pulled.

::It's not going to fall in on me, is it?:: he telepathed.

::Not unless there's an earthquake. Come downstairs.::

Blue felt intensely uncomfortable here, but he swallowed and went to join Max Driscoll downstairs. "Where are you?"

"In the back. Come take a look at this."

Blue walked across the church hall and around back of the small stage where the Sunday school children put on Christmas recitals with the three wise men and the baby Jesus.

When Blue walked into the room, which he remembered having served as the supply room, he whistled.

"What is it?"

"The second coming," Max muttered, studying the image.

"It's of that guy who came out of the woods and met Linda a while ago."

"Yes. Recognize him?"

"His name is Jimmy something or other. I went to high school with him." He thought for a moment. "I remember now. Jimmy McGill. Why is there a picture of him? And what's all this stuff?"

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

He took in the plethora of candles and various religious items.

"It's a shrine."

"I don't get it."

"I followed him and your girlfriend. He's not human. He's a vampire."

"I thought this commission was set up to destroy vampires."

"It is, save one. He has somehow convinced these people that he is the reincarnation of Christ, and that the rest of us are false prophets. We have to be destroyed. He uses them as blood sacrifices. And in turn, they drink his blood. It's like communion. That's why you couldn't turn your latest victim, Blue. He'd already ingested Jimmy's blood. When another vampire tries to turn one already infected, it won't take."

"This is insane. And Linda, why in hell would Linda be involved in all this?"

"I don't know but if you care about her, you'd better get her out of there. This is not the same game anymore," Max told him. He reached up and put his fist through the portrait of Jimmy.

"This is war!"

* * *

Max helped himself to some cognac after he sent Blue to bed. The kid was in trouble. Everybody wanted him dead. He wondered about Jimmy McGill. For the first time in a long time, he was exhausted. He needed sleep.

He felt a pair of arms go around him. He let the glass fall onto the highly polished tabletop opening of the wet bar and turned around.

Whatever Galien had experienced the night before, his cock

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

was hard now.

Max felt Galien's tongue on his lips and didn't resist his kisses. It had been so long, the erotic thrill was better than any French weed Katherine could give him.

Galien's cock rubbed against his and he was tempted, oh-so-sorely tempted to fuck the man right here in his living room.

"Take me," Galien said.

With difficulty, Max pulled himself away. He needed sleep. He needed to get away. He stumbled toward his room.

"Shame," he heard Galien say.

Max fell into bed, his sleep troubled, his mind jolting him awake with new and increasingly troubled thoughts.

"It's bad, isn't it?" Katherine asked.

"Huh?"

Max was disoriented when she woke him.

"What time is it?"

"Sunset. After seven actually. Hard day?" She sniffed suddenly. "You didn't?"

"I didn't what?"

"Fuck that shit head. You have his scent all over you. Max! I'm disappointed."

"Sorry," he muttered. "You'll get over it. I didn't fuck him, just a dry hump and a pretty goddamned hot kiss."

"Why?"

"It was convenient."

"After all the trouble he's caused you?"

"He's the least of it now."

"I heard. Do you need me?"

"Always. But what's going on?"

"My friend, Dace Depaul, the sick one."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"The soccer player.

She nodded. "He called me. He needs me. Some family trouble."

"Are you in love with this mortal?"

"Now, are we jealous?"

"No," he said, hugging her, "we are cautious."

"You don't need to be suspicious of everyone. He's a good guy. He's had some hard times. I'll send Claude if you like. He seems very anxious to see you."

Max sighed. "Hold off on that."

Katherine regarded him for a moment while he dressed. "You know, I get it."

"What do you get?"

"Why you fucked that stable boy."

"He's not a stable boy anymore."

"You can take the boy out of stable but—"

"I get it. Go on."

"You fucked him to—"

He tweaked her cheek. "I fucked his sweet tight little ass because I was horny. And he was more than willing to spread his legs. Satisfied?"

"That's only part of the story. Also a way to get him off the trip of wanting to get rid of Blue."

"Will you get over that? I didn't do anything but kiss him. And there is nothing between Blue and me. I have a cock, sometimes that cock is totally irresponsible and egotistical. That's the real story, love."

She walked down the stairs with him. "So, is this guy from the church really the second Christ?"

"No, he's a bored vampire who thinks immortality gives him

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

the power to rule the world.”

She laughed. “You’re going to take him down, aren’t you?”

“Oh yeah,” he said. “I’m going to take him down.”

CHAPTER 10

When Max and Blue came into the house after having walked the gardens alone, Galien knew something was wrong. He could read Max. He knew him well. And he wasn't amused. David, Ian, and Frank were lounging around in the living room, and their relaxed demeanors immediately grew tense when the door opened.

"Damn it," Max muttered. "Katherine's gone already?"

"Something about a sick friend," Galien offered. "So, were you successful in—"

"You," he said, looking at Ian, "you're a vampire of this age. I want you to get on the Internet. Find any underground forum or news group that might have to do with the Second Coming."

"Second Coming?" Galien laughed. "That only happens in bed with you, Max. In fact, I remember a third."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“We’re under attack,” Max said. “These are not humans. Jimmy McGill is a vampire gone insane, high on his own power. Not only does he threaten to destroy us, he threatens to expose us all with his arrogance.”

“Vampire?” Galien gawked.

“Yes. I want you to find out who turned him.”

Ian had his laptop out.

“Frank, David, ask around. Find out everything you can about Jimmy McGill.”

They nodded, standing.

Galien came and put a hand on his shoulder. “I had no idea.”

“No, I know,” Max said. “You were given the privilege of leading your own house and you had no idea of what in hell was going on around you. You were right in that neighborhood, among those people and you—”

“Wait one second,” Galien said. “I didn’t just happen to be there. I was led there.”

Max’s eyes narrowed.

Blue came closer. “Someone targeted me, targeted my family?”

“That neighborhood, that’s not a place I’d go to hunt,” Galien mused. “I was there for a reason that night.”

“You wanted a patsy,” Max muttered.

“All right, yes, yes, but...damn it, Max,” Galien said, “I met him.”

“Met who? Jimmy?”

He nodded. “I met him in the club. He told me about this family. He said they were trouble. He glanced at Blue. “He said that they knew about vampires, and that several times they’d reported seeing them.”

“Why didn’t you say this before?” Max demanded.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"I didn't really take him seriously, but I know that's why I chose that house. And I was a little drunk."

Max stared at Galien. "Drunk?"

"I'll kill him," Blue muttered. "I'll cut that bastard up into—"

Max placed a hand on his shoulder, but he was still staring at Galien. "How drunk?"

"Drunk. And high."

Max groaned. "And the other vampires who were with you? Who were they? How many?"

"Four, five."

"He was there." Max gasped. "Jimmy was with you."

"He...he could have been."

Blue was halfway out the door, muttering that he was going to kill someone.

Max pulled him back. "We can't go off half cocked. Think. Why would Jimmy target your family?"

"I don't know why." He yanked his arm away, angry.

"Do you remember anything that happened differently before you were attacked? Think!"

He shook his head. "No. I can't remember. Damn it."

"Hey," Ian spoke up suddenly. "I got a site here, a group, by membership only. It's devoted to the Second Coming. They say he's a God who drinks blood and will save only those who are worthy, those who murder the imposters."

"How many members?" Max demanded, coming to stand behind Ian to examine the webpage.

Ian looked up. "To date, five thousand and fifty two."

Max's eyes widened. "Damn."

Blue was shaking.

"Ian, take him upstairs," he said. "Stay with him."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Ian put down his laptop and placed an arm around Blue. "Come on."

Max sank down on the sofa. He put his head back, closed his eyes. "Blue's in trouble. Everyone wants him dead."

Galien came and sat beside him and put a hand on his thigh. "Do you remember what I used to do when you were tense?"

"Ride my cock," he whispered wearily.

"Yeah." Galien groaned. "Oh yeah." He reached over and began to undo the buttons on Max's shirt. "Are you going to stop me?"

"Not this time."

He opened his eyes and looked at him. "Come on. Ride me. But remember, it's sex, nothing more."

"I've matured."

"Yeah right." Max laughed slightly.

Galien spread open the shirt, trailed a finger down the middle of his chest and then around each nipple. "You're a gorgeous son of bitch." He got up on his knees and straddled him, kissing his mouth hotly. He closed his eyes. Paradise.

Max turned his head to the side so that Galien could kiss him deeper but he didn't move. Galien had seen him in this mood before, passive, as if all the get had gone out of him. He wanted pleasure and it was Galien's pleasure to give it to him.

He put his hands on his shoulders, continued to brutally kiss those lips, moving his tongue around his. Galien was gasping when Max grabbed his ass cheeks and squeezed. His mouth moved to Max's throat where he scraped the flesh with his teeth, and then down to his chest where he licked and bit at his nipples until he saw Max lick his lips, which was the telltale sign he was really turned on. Galien leaned back and undid the jeans, licking his own

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

lips as Max's cock sprang out of his jeans.

"God, I love you cock," he said, callously rubbing it back and forth in both hands. "So big and thick. Your cock is powerful, like you."

Max lifted his hips and pulled his jeans down. "Then fuck it. Stop talking about it and take it, if you can."

Galien met Max's gaze. He kissed him again, and then moved off, stripping down his clothes. He was so excited, he could scarcely breathe. Max's head still lay back against the sofa. With his shirt open and his boner out of his pants, he was so incredibly sexy, Galien could barely contain himself. His cock was already dripping pre-come.

He got down between his legs, licked up the length of his cock, held it to his cheek. "I love you."

"Fuck my cock," Max told him. "Come on." Max seized him, pulled him forward onto his knees, spreading his thighs wide over his lap. He moved his hands over Galien's chest, teasing both nipples, punishing them for a moment, then sliding his hand over his erection.

He licked his fingers and, making sure to brush his hand against his balls, two fingers drove into his ass, moving around until they found what they sought.

Galien cried out. "Oh yeah." He moaned.

"Move your ass for me, Galien."

He moved his hips forward as Max fucked his ass with two, then three fingers.

"More."

"You want my hand or my cock?" Max's hand came away and he grabbed Galien's hips. "Open yourself to me," he urged. "Wider. Wider. Come on."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Oh, God, I’m your whore. Your slut. Use me, Max. Oh, God, use me.” He let out a cry as Max’s cock moved past the first ring of muscles and he pulled down on his hips, slamming upward, all the way in.

“Fuck me! Fuck me, Max! Oh yeah, yeah. Holy...holy....oh yessssss!”

* * *

Blue sat on the end of the bed with Ian. The sounds of Max fucking Galien were so clear they could have been in the same room.

“Wow,” Ian commented, his eyes wide. “Wow. Lucky guy.”

Blue nodded. “Guess so.”

“You guess so?” He laughed. “I’d kill to be fucked like that. I can’t wait to get my crack at Max.”

“Galien won’t let you near Max.”

“Max does what he wants.”

“I almost had him.” Blue looked at the full moon gleaming outside the window.

“Almost had who?”

“Max. In his hotel room.”

“No shit. What happened?”

“Galien. And you know I’m not even sure I wanted him.”

“Are you blind?”

“No, he’s handsome enough.”

“Handsome? He’s hot as hell. And listen. What’s more, he knows what to do with it.”

Blue smiled. The sounds of Galien still crying out with pleasure were more than convincing. “So it seems.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“But I think I’m straight, or at least I was struggling, you know.”

“Good,” Ian said, nodding, “less competition.”

“I’m surprised,” Blue said with a sigh, “surprised that Max would fuck Galien again. He must have some feelings for him left.”

“They have a history. And Galien took advantage of his mood. You could have had him tonight if you’d been quick enough.”

“Um. So it doesn’t matter where Mr. Driscoll sticks it really, does it?”

“You sound like that disturbs you a little.”

He wasn’t sure how to answer that. All he knew was that when Galien’s cries of ecstasy grew silent, he could have wept with gratitude.

* * *

“Max Driscoll,” Jimmy drawled, studying the photograph carefully. “He could be the poster boy for the hottest vampire enforcer ever seen. I’d love to fuck him for hours.”

Linda laughed. “Don’t let the others hear you say that.” She licked his chest, studying the picture herself. “They’d yank you off your pedestal.”

“Even Christ had his temptations, remember that, Linda. Those poor excuses for worshippers?” He laughed, stretching out in his four poster bed. “Fuck them. They think the way to heaven is deprivation. I’ll show them depravity.”

He laughed. “I’ll share him with you though, honey.” He kissed her lips hotly. “Blood,” he said suddenly, “go now, get me some.”

She slid off the bed and went to do his bidding.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Crazy slut, he thought. God, he hated the smell of her but she was such a devoted little whore, and capable, too. She had no qualms about bleeding someone to the point of death for him. This was the life. Supported monetarily by his followers, worshipped by the thousands, and growing, and he had mortal soldiers training now to kill vampires. Soon, he would be the only one, a God among these worthless, fragile beasts.

“And Max,” he traced his jaw with his finger, “as beautiful as you are and as deadly, you won’t stop me. You gave me intense pleasure once, more intense than anyone before or after you. I remember watching the blade come down. Chop, chop, chop, but never for you, Max. You were too cleaver for the lot of them.

“I’ll have you on your knees soon, and on your back, on your face, every which way I can. I’ll bleed you and make you beg for me to end it. Come and get me, baby.” He wrapped the photograph around his hard cock and raised his eyes to the ceiling as he masturbated on Max’s unsuspecting image.

* * *

Katherine listened to Dace as he sat across from her in his Parisian condo. He appeared to be very upset, and she wasn’t quite sure how to comfort him.

“Nothing is the way it is supposed to be,” he said. “Thanks, Katherine, for coming back from your business trip to see me. I don’t know what I would have done if you hadn’t come.”

Katherine sipped her tea slowly. It had a very original flavor.

“Is it from India?”

“No,” he said, “Egypt actually.”

Katherine studied him. He looked so much better, color in his

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

cheeks now, his hair showing signs of growing back in.

“When was the last time you heard from your father?”

“Three weeks ago. The police in New York have no answers. I thought maybe you could help me. Maybe your friend Max Driscoll could find him for me? Isn’t he in New York?”

She’d never mentioned Max to him before.

“How do you...” she began. Suddenly, she had the oddest sensation. She couldn’t seem to make words.

Max. Help me. She lowered the tea to the table, tipping it over.

“I don’t...I don’t feel—”

“Is that so?” Dace smiled as she slumped forward on the table.

* * *

“Katherine,” Max breathed.

Galien lay back on the sofa, smoking a cigarette. Max hated the smell of those things. Galien sat up suddenly. “I’m deeply offended.”

Max tucked his cock back into his pants and buttoned up his shirt. “Offended by what?”

“You fuck the hell out of me and say *her* name.”

“She’s in trouble.” Max stood. “I’m going home.”

“You can’t. The council. This Jimmy McGill maniac and your pet project, Blue boy. You must stay here.”

“He’s yours, not mine. Katherine needs me. She’s in trouble.”

“I’ll come with you.” Galien looked at him.

“I can’t leave Blue here unprotected. If you promise you’ll protect him.”

“I won’t promise shit.”

“He could be in danger due to his involvement in all this.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Either come or go, but I'm taking him with me."

"Fuck, Max. What is your fucking hang up with this turd?"

"Galien, he's yours. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

"I'm yours, and you don't even give a damn. Why should it mean something to me? Anyway, he should be dead."

"Damn, Galien, I'm taking Blue with me. I can't trust you with him."

"The council won't like this."

"Fuck the council," he said and ran upstairs.

* * *

Ian was kissing him. It was almost an experiment to see if he really liked women or men. Ian's kiss was nice but Blue didn't want it to go further. There was no chemistry. When the door flew open, Ian's lips were still caressing his.

Max cleared his throat loudly.

Ian jumped off the bed as if he had been burned. "I don't want to interrupt this little interlude but, Blue, you're coming with me to France."

"France?"

"I thought we were all going to your house in France?" Ian asked.

"Eventually. Right now, Katherine is in trouble and I can't leave you alone here, Blue." He looked at him. "Get ready."

"Are we flying like real people or...?" Blue asked anxiously.

"No time for that."

"You won't kiss me?"

Ian stared at him. "Huh?"

"He kisses me on take-off." Blue actually smiled.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Max was preoccupied and didn't react. "Five minutes. Meet me outside."

When he left the room, Ian said, "He kisses you on take-off?"

"Yeah. Or was it landing? Anyway, it's strange. I wonder what's up with Katherine?"

"You better hurry," Ian urged. "He's waiting, and he doesn't seem the kind who likes to be kept waiting."

"Guess not."

When he got outside, Galien looked pissed. He was shooting daggers at Max with his eyes. "Watch where he puts his dick," he practically spat at Blue.

"Don't worry," Blue said, "it won't be in me."

"Fucking Katherine, always causing shit," Galien muttered and walked back inside.

Max held out his hand. "Come on, hurry up."

Blue took his hand. "I don't like flying."

"Well then"—Max placed his hand over his eyes—"don't look."

It was like a whirlwind as Blue moved and shifted in the air at a dizzying pace, clutching onto Max for dear life. When they touched down it was in a field, and Max stood there in the moonlight looking down at him, his hair in disarray. For a moment, Blue felt disoriented. His legs were like rubber and he couldn't for the life of him take his eyes off of Max.

"My God, but you're beautiful," he whispered.

"You're hallucinating."

He nodded, accepting Max's hand as he got to his feet. "Where in hell are we?"

"Not far from my home. I need to be in the clear, away from structures, to see if I can hear Katherine again." He began to walk.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Blue followed, half stumbling through the tall grass. "Is that a vineyard over there?"

"Yes," Max said but didn't slow his pace. "Be quiet." He stood still, listening. The wind blew cold around them, the stars looking like silver ice in the inky sky. "Damn it, Kat, where are you?"

Blue put a hand on his arm. "You love her a lot."

"I have great affection for her."

"Come on, Driscoll, Jesus Christ. Would it hurt you to say the fucking word?"

Max looked at him, clearly surprised, then he laughed. "There's a tiger inside that gentle exterior."

"You piss me off."

"But I'm beautiful." He chuckled, moving across the field a little faster.

"Do you know why Ian was kissing me?"

"It's really none of my business."

"I wanted to see if I was attracted to men or women. I was confused when Galien turned me and I'm still confused."

"You weren't confused. You were afraid. And so? How was Ian?"

"He doesn't kiss like you."

Max stopped, looked at him. "Which means?"

"Which means that when you kiss me, I think maybe I like men; but when Ian kisses me, I think maybe I don't."

Max howled with laughter. "Better not tell poor Ian that. He looked smitten."

"Smitten?"

"You don't let a guy kiss you without expecting consequences."

"It was a test. He doesn't need to get carried away."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Max was still sniggering when the Chateau Driscoll came into view.

Blue was aghast. "This is where you live?"

"Yes."

"There's a moat...like a castle."

"Yes. It's old."

"And the vineyard is yours?"

"It is. This is actually not a great time of year to see my house. It's isolated here, the land is damp. There's a lot of fog. Not very scenic."

It was a huge structure made of stone and brick, and the most incredible thing Blue had ever seen.

"Nice in the summer," Max said, trudging on toward his home.

"Why didn't we land closer to the house?"

"I wanted to see if I could hear her."

"I'm sure she's fine."

"She's not fine," he snapped. "I know. And the fact that I can't hear her is not a good sign. I have a feeling that this is somehow connected to what's happening in New York."

Blue fell quiet as the moat bridge lowered and they walked across. Blue gazed down to the water below.

"My lord," a young man called out, running to meet them.

Blue raised an eyebrow. "Lord?"

"Go with it." He grinned. "We have different customs here."

"I am not calling you *lord*."

"You might," he teased.

Blue flushed.

"I'm so glad to have you back. I have a warm bath waiting."

"No time for that. Have you seen Katherine?"

"No, my lord." His eyes strayed to Blue.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"This is Blue," Max said, "a guest in our house."

Claude lowered his head. "Of course."

"Blue, this is Claude. If you need something, he will provide it for you." Max brushed past Claude and headed to the house.

"Follow me," Claude said curtly.

* * *

Dace clutched the phone. "I've done what you asked. Now, you need to honor your part of the bargain. I need the final dose."

"Of course," the voice on the other end said. "And you shall have it soon."

"Have you found my father?"

"Your father was murdered by Max Driscoll."

"That bastard! I'll kill him."

"No, you won't kill him. You'll do as I asked, or you'll die."

"I don't have much time. I need more blood."

"Take it from Katherine. I'll send you some more when the time comes. Katherine's blood will keep you alive for now."

Tears ran down his face. "She was kind to me. You promised not to hurt her."

"She's a blood sucker, the bad kind, an imposter who threatens my dominion. Do you want all I have to offer or not?"

"Yes."

"Eternal health and eternal life? Think of it, boy, no more pain."

"Yes. Oh yes."

"I'm about the light. I'm about life eternal, and the resurrection. They are all about death, all these vampires. They killed your father. Don't forget that."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“I won’t.”

“When Max comes for her, and he will come, tell me. I’ll be there.”

“All right,” he said and hung up.

He glanced over to where Katherine was on the bed, tied down securely with chains. She couldn’t get away. Every once in awhile he went over to make sure she was all right, but he had no way to tell. She hadn’t regained consciousness and these things didn’t breathe like people. He had to remind himself when he looked at her sweet face that she was death. *Vampires*. Not like the Lord. He was special, the second coming. He would make all pain go away. *Vampires*. One of them had murdered his father.

* * *

“There’s nothing you can do now,” Claude said. “The sun will soon be up. You are at your best at the night. Come, enjoy the hot bath I’ve prepared. I’ll join you”—he moved closer, placing a hand on his chest—“feed you.”

“No,” he said, “not tonight. I’d rather be alone. Where is Blue?”

“Installed comfortably in one of the rooms down the hallway.”

“Thank you, Claude. Leave me now.”

“I would love to comfort you, my lord.”

“Good night, Claude,” he said sharply, stepping away from him.

Claude lowered his head and quickly left the room.

The bathroom was large, and there was a tub big enough for three grown men, with several outlets that massaged you as you lay in it. Max looked longingly at the bathtub, already perfumed with

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

scented oils. Perhaps he did need to relax. He stripped off his clothes and lowered himself into the tub. The warm water felt good caressing his flesh. He laid his head back and closed his eyes, thinking of Katherine. He had to remind himself that Katherine could take care of herself. He'd find her if she was in trouble. And she'd be all right.

* * *

Blue knew that Max was aware of his presence even though his eyes were still closed. "Yes?" Max said without opening his eyes.

"I'm sorry," Blue muttered. "I don't want to interrupt you. It's just that I'm hungry, and I don't know what I should do about that." He tried to avoid looking at him lying there in the tub, his shoulders and chest gleaming with moisture.

"There is always blood in the refrigerator. You are welcome to that. How hungry are you?"

"Ravenous."

Max opened his eyes. "Didn't Galien teach you anything?"

"Afraid not."

"There are woods here, filled with game. It's easy to hunt."

"I don't consciously remember hunting...even humans."

"Okay. Come." He motioned to him with his hand. "I'll feed you this time, but I will need to take you out soon, teach you."

"Aw...will it be like before at the hotel?" He looked down at his feet. He remembered the taste of his blood, so rich and satisfying. He hadn't been hungry for days after. And the intimacy. He remembered the intimacy even more.

Max let his head loll to the side. He was looking at him now. "Just get into the tub with me and I'll let you feed. Or"—Max

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

turned his head away—"there's always the blood in the refrigerator, but it's cold and you'll have to warm it up in that contraption."

Blue slowly began to take off his clothes. "The microwave," he murmured.

"Yes, that thing."

"Maybe just for a few minutes," he said, feeling shy all of a sudden.

"It might take a bit longer than a few minutes," Max drawled.

"I..."

"Just stop talking about it and get in here, okay?"

Blue planted a foot into the tub between Max's knees. When the other foot lifted over into the tub, Max swiftly pulled him down and around so that Blue was sitting between his thighs, his back pressed against Max's chest. "Damn, you're tense, relax your body." He pulled him back into his arms. "There. That's better."

No, it wasn't better at all. Blue could feel every hard inch of his body and Max's cock was jutting against his tailbone. Thank God Max had had the mercy to leave his hands on the side of the tub.

"Take what you need," Max invited.

Blue turned to look at him. His gaze traced the shape of Max's square jaw, settled on his full lips. Max lifted a hand and with one nail cut a line across his taunt muscular chest. The gash quickly flooded with blood. The richness of the color, the intoxicating smell was too much for Blue to resist. He lowered his mouth to Max's chest hungrily and licked down the slash with his tongue. Instantly it closed and disappeared. Blue grunted in frustration.

"Don't lick, drink," Max told him, remaking the cut a second time. "Do it now."

Blue placed his lips over the wound again and the thick liquid

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

flowed into his mouth, bringing comfort, and satiation.

The wound began to heal again, but he'd had enough. He raised his blood stained mouth from Max's chest and aggressively pressed it to Max's mouth.

Max accepted the assault on his mouth, even widening his legs so Blue could completely turn around to face him. Blue took his face between his hands, kissed Max deeper, stroked his hair, pressed his own swelling cock against Max's belly.

He wasn't sure what he was doing. All he knew was that it felt right. It felt perfect. He pulled his mouth away, finding it hard to catch his breath. Max's hands were still on the sides of the tub.

Max met his gaze suddenly, and looked deeply into Blue's eyes. "What do you want from me?"

"I want you to make me cry out the way you did to Galien." He kissed him again, this time even more passionately, grasping some of Max's hair and pulling his head back so he could kiss him even deeper. "Fuck me," he breathed, breaking away for a moment, his hands on Max's chest. He moved his lips down to Max's throat. "Fuck me now."

"Whoa," Max told him. "Is that you, or Galien's desire talking?"

"I haven't had any flashes from Galien since we got here. Let's not talk." He groaned, his mouth now moving across the place when he'd just feasted. He reached down between Max's legs and took his cock in hand, enjoying the feel of the slippery, hard length in his hand.

CHAPTER 11

Max tightened his fingers on the edge of the tub. He wasn't sure if Blue's sudden amorousness was due to the feeding that could sometimes make a vampire a little high, especially when the blood was from a vampire as old as himself, or if Galien was fueling the fire. Whereever this sudden passionate interest in him was coming from, it was intense, and the determination on Blue's face was nothing to scoff at.

Max reached into the tub and seized his hand, pulling it away from his already erect cock. Some vampires had some difficulty with getting hard, but that had never been his problem. His was often to the contrary, having a mind of its own, and often insistent on being noticed. Max brought Blue's hand to his mouth. This did not endear him.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“You’re rejecting me.”

“I’m slowing you down.”

“Why? You wanted me in the hotel.”

“You were convenient in the hotel, and as I recall, you wanted me.”

“You’re a prick.”

Max laughed.

Blue went to hit him and Max grabbed Blue’s wrists. He laughed all the harder to see him struggle in the water, his eyes glowing red with anger. “You’re quite sweet when you get your temper up.”

Blue kned him in the groin.

Max gritted his teeth. “Now, that wasn’t nice.”

Blue’s chest was heaving and as Max relaxed his hold a little, Blue attacked his mouth once again, jabbing his tongue into his mouth and clamping his mouth on his.

Max took his hands off the sides of the tub and grasped Blue’s buttocks in both hands. He drew him closer, deepening the kiss.

Blue’s groin bucked into Max’s belly and Max found himself suddenly very engaged. He squeezed his ass cheeks, separating them with his hands and then teasing Blue’s entrance with the tip of his finger.

Blue moaned into his mouth, his hands burrowing in Max’s hair. Max plunged his finger in deeper, adding two more, right up to the knuckles, bending and moving them until he located his prostate.

Blue went wild, humping down on Max’s fingers, letting his head go back now and moaning, his own hands moving over his chest. “Max,” he breathed.

Max’s mouth moved across Blue’s chest, teasing his nipples

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

with his tongue as he continued to finger fuck Blue's ass. The other hand sank down into the water and grasped Blue's slick cock, hard and thick and pulsing with need.

"Max," a voice said sharply.

Max released Blue, withdrawing his hands from the water and glanced at Claude who was standing now in front of the tub.

Blue glared at him. "Don't you believe in privacy?"

Claude ignored him, and spoke in French. "Max, I'm sorry to interrupt but you have a phone call," he held up the mobile. "It's some man called Raymond, from the council. He says it's urgent."

Max lifted himself out of the bath, the water running down over him. Claude handed him a towel. He took the towel, then the phone, and left the room.

* * *

Blue lay back in the tub, frustrated, and deeply resentful of this servant, or whoever he was standing there staring at him.

"What?" he snapped. "You feel pretty good, don't you, Claude? So, how long has it been since he fucked you?"

Claude continued to look at him for a long moment, then said, "Too long."

"Sorry to take your place in line." Blue sneered.

"Listen, you," Claude muttered in a voice strongly laced with a thick French accent, dipping his head down close to Blue's ear, "don't get too full of yourself, asshole. Max doesn't play exclusive. He'll take you when he wants you, and when he doesn't, you'll sleep alone."

"Is that what you're doing, champ, sleeping alone?" Blue sneered.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Claude casually held up his middle finger and then walked out.

Blue sighed, deciding to get out of the bathtub. He doubted that Max would come back. He toweled off, trying not to think about it. So, they'd had a little fun. If he was going to experiment, he might as well do it with someone who really knew how. And Blue knew Max was a learned man, in and out of the bedroom.

* * *

"Do you remember me, Mr. Driscoll?" the voice droned on the other end.

"How could I forget?"

"Splendid. We have been informed that you have left the city, returned to the House of Driscoll."

"Have you now?"

"You have orders."

"Yes, I know. Katherine has disappeared."

"We know."

"Is there anything you don't know? How about how large my cock is?" He couldn't disguise the anger in his voice no longer.

"Vulgarity is not called for, Mr. Driscoll."

"How's this for vulgarity, go fuck yourself."

"Max."

"Now I'm *Max*. What's your name?"

"You may call me Ray."

"Well, Ray, Katherine is in trouble and it's all related to what's happening in that fair city of yours, so I'm still following orders, only in French."

"Clever. Nevertheless, Galien is alone. We expect you to guide him."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“And this is what this is all about, Galien, isn’t it? What is it you’re getting from him exactly?”

“I assure you, I follow orders just like you. If you sincerely think you can find out more about his commission in France, then Galien should be involved. And the commission wishes to know why Galien has not yet taken care of his offspring.”

“Perhaps you should ask Galien.”

“You are standing in the way. He has a duty to obey you, and you have forbidden it.”

“Blue is connected to all this. He’s useful to me right now.”

“Useful in what way, Mr. Driscoll? We are well aware of your reputation.”

“I’m not even going to answer that question. This is a waste of my time. This commission is not a human invention. It is headed by a vampire named Jimmy who wants to wipe us all out so that he can be the only one. He fancies himself some kind of messiah, or something.”

“This is not good. You need to track down this rogue and destroy him.”

“Um, right.”

“Galien is on his way as we speak. We’d better see some results soon before you, too, Mr. Driscoll, find yourself being thought of as a rogue.” The line went dead.

* * *

“Who is this council?” Blue asked him.

Max stood out on the balcony of his room, wrapped in a white terry cloth robe, a glass of brandy in his hand. He’d made the error of leaving his door open, and Blue had taken it as an invitation to

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

just walk right in.

Actually what he wanted now the most was to be alone, but the vampire council must be weighing heavy enough on his mind to have permeated Blue's thoughts as well.

"And ancient group of vampires of which I am a member."

"If you are a member, why does this council get to boss you around?" Blue came and stood beside him, looking out onto the frosted lawn.

In spite of the cold night air, Max didn't really feel it in any negative way. He liked it actually, and right now it suited his mood.

Max laughed faintly. Blue was so young in comparison, and the modern way he had of speaking amused him. "They're not really bossing me around, so to speak. We all take turns being cleaners. It's just my turn. And when you are active...a cleaner, you don't get to take part in the decision making. You are merely the..." He searched for the word.

"Flunky," Blue provided, making a face.

"I prefer *enforcer*, but I suppose it's the same thing."

"When you are on this council, are you bossy like that?"

He sipped his brandy. "I don't really participate."

"You don't? Don't you have to?"

"Yes, but"—he smiled—"I don't attend the meetings. If it's really important, they can always find me."

"How did you end up on this council if you don't even want to be on it?"

"I have no choice. I'm an elder so I'm just automatically a member."

"Oh."

"You sure ask a lot of questions," Max muttered, going inside.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

He put down his empty glass.

"Galien is coming, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"The council thinks he needs discipline. I'm supposed to be giving him that."

"Claude hates me."

"Oh?" He lifted an eyebrow. "Why's that?"

"He wants you. Galien does, too. So how are you going to manage that? Do they have to take a number?"

Max smiled. He moved closer to Blue, placed his hands on his shoulders and looked down at him. "Are you going to take one, too?"

Blue pushed his hands away. "No."

Max laughed. "Well, at least I'll just have the two of them to juggle."

"It's not funny Max! It's callous, insensitive and—"

"And what?" Max asked, pressing Blue suddenly against the wall.

Blue's chest heaved, he moaned a little when Max worked his hand down between his thighs and rubbed his cock through his jeans. "Stop," he pleaded, his eyes closed, he licked his lips.

Max pressed his lips lightly against the corner of his mouth. "Are you sure you don't want a number after all?"

Blue shoved him away. He glared at him. "Like I said...callous, insensitive, and did I add, full of yourself?"

He chuckled, folding his arms across his chest. "No, I believe you forget the full of yourself one. Blue, you tell me you want to find your sexuality yet you already know all about it. You play with me. You don't want me because I'm callous and insensitive,

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

but you do want me because you know I'm the only one who can truly give you what you want. You play a dangerous game. And I'm wondering if Claude hadn't interrupted us, if you would have left me hard and longing, the moment my cock found that empty ache inside you, you would have changed your mind."

"You don't know what you're talking about. And you were right, it wasn't me. It was Galien. It's all about Galien. All he thinks about is your cock, and well, he can have it. I won't let him confuse me anymore."

"You're not human anymore, Blue. You're a vampire. And you're going to discover that a vampire's sexual needs run hotter and a little rougher than most. You can't deny yourself forever. Don't judge those needs by the yardstick a mortal would use. You'll come up wanting."

"What would you know about it?"

"I know that you did the same as a mortal. You let the church curtail your desires, used the church as an excuse to cloister yourself in a closet, under the guise of being some good little heterosexual. But you're not a heterosexual and you never were one. Your excuse was the church when you were human, I'm not going to be your excuse now that you're not."

"What are you talking about?" He shook his head.

"You want my cock, take it. Don't try and rationalize in your head that wanting me has nothing to do with you, that somehow you're under some spell, either from Galien or from me. Take it, use it, get what you need, and then move on."

"Like you, never feeling anything?" he accused.

"You think I've never felt anything?"

"Not too much, except for lust and sexual release."

"Sometimes that's enough." He shrugged.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"All right then," Blue breathed. "Take it off."

Max raised an eyebrow.

"Take off the robe. Fuel this lust inside me and let's just leave it at that, Max Driscoll."

He smiled. "Not now," he replied softly. "We have company."

Blue bunched his fists at his side. "Bastard."

Max chuckled and left the room.

Galien stood at the bottom of the stairs as Max walked down the staircase, a smile on his face. Blue had to realize that he was no one's plaything. Things didn't just happen because Blue suddenly decided that he wanted them, too. If Blue wanted him badly enough, he'd just have to wait for a more opportune moment.

* * *

"Up to no good?" Galien asked, looking up at Max as he descended the stairs.

Max raised an eyebrow and tightened the belt of his robe around him. "Now, what would make you say that?"

"My offspring is ready to bust a gasket it seems."

"Is that so?"

Galien smiled like a cat that had just drunk a particularly satisfying bowl of milk. "Heartless," he whispered softly.

Max walked past him and into the salon without commenting.

Claude was there in a flash. "Can I get you anything?" he asked Max, giving Galien a look, then dismissing him.

"So this is the haughty Claude." Galien smirked. He looked at him and made a hissing sound.

"Play nice, boys," Max said, shaking his head at Claude. "No thank you."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

"I was a servant once," Galien told him. "There is a lot of waiting involved and in more ways than just one." He laughed loudly at his joke until he realized that Max was not appreciating it.

He quieted after Claude left him.

"Gives you pleasure to torment him, I see." Max stood glancing out the window as if searching the night sky for something.

"As much as it gives you to torment Blue," he replied, throwing himself down on the sofa.

"I was not tormenting Blue," he snapped, turning around to glare at him. "And if you're intending on giving me grief, you can turn around and go back to that modern cesspool you come from."

"You're in a nasty mood. I can take care of that for you."

"There is nothing you can do to change my mood. I've been dictated to by some snotty little brown-nosed lackey and now I'm forced to baby-sit you until the council has decided that you've reformed. And the worse part is, Katherine is gone and I have no idea where she is."

"She'll come back." He shrugged.

"No, she won't come back. She's in trouble. And your nonchalant *laissez faire* attitude is pissing me royally, so stop it. I know you couldn't give a damn."

"If I appear to give a damn, will it get me into your bed?" Galien asked, sitting up now. He gave him a look of mock hopefulness.

"Not as easy as it looks," a voice announced suddenly.

Galien groaned and rolled his eyes when he saw Blue. "I was hoping to pretend that you weren't around."

Max turned back to the window.

"Sorry to destroy your illusion," Blue muttered.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“You might want to experiment on someone else, Blue,” Galien scoffed. “Watching a good gay porn will give you the answers you seek. You don’t need Max’s cock up your ass for that.”

Max turned around and fixed Galien with his stare. “That’s enough. We have bigger problems. We have a vampire who thinks he’s a god and someone I care about very much is missing.” He looked at Blue. “Both of you.”

Galien knew that look. Max wasn’t kidding. He sobered, cautioning Blue in his mind to cool it. *::I’ll deal with you later.::*

::I’m under Max’s protection, in his house. I’m not afraid of you. Max is the law here.::

Galien couldn’t argue with that. The kid was a fast learner. They were in the House of Driscoll now, and he knew Max was the law. He didn’t want to think of the consequences if he defied him.

“We should go back to New York, learn more about these mortals who are out there doing Jimmy’s business,” Galien commented.

“I can’t believe,” Max told him, “that you never heard about this Jimmy before, especially since you went right to that neighborhood and killed Blue’s father, who was one of them.”

Galien glanced at Blue. “Unfortunate.”

“I think he was trying to get out,” Blue said suddenly.

“What would make you say that?” Max asked.

“He stopped going to the meetings and there were some phone calls that seemed heated. My father was upset when he got off the phone.”

Max looked at Galien.

“Oh no,” he stood. “Don’t think I was working for Jimmy.”

“Who led you to that neighborhood?” Max demanded.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

He shrugged. "Maybe someone at the club."

"Think damn it," Max insisted.

Galien sighed, scratched his jaw. "I was talking to someone...might have been my barman."

"Mortal or vampire?"

"Mortal, but he doesn't work for me anymore."

"We need to find him," Max said.

"Let's go," Galien said.

"First, we need to find Katherine. I need to be alone, concentrate." He headed out of the room. "Don't drink each other dry while I'm away."

* * *

Blue cast a wary glance at his maker when Max left the room. "If I find out you're involved in all this..."

"Involved with all what?"

"This Jimmy. You let him use you to murder my father because he didn't want to be a part of his bullshit anymore."

"I don't even know this Jimmy," Galien protested. "You'd like nothing better than to turn Max against me so that you could have him."

"Have him? I don't want him," Blue growled. "He's a cock tease and just a little too arrogant for me."

"Better not let him hear you say that."

"I don't care if he hears me or not. He likes the fact that everyone wants to fall to their knees and worship his cock. He doesn't feel anything, for you, for Claude, and certainly not for me." Blue was rather taken aback at the bitterness in his own voice as he spoke. He didn't realize how angry he was until he began to

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

vocalize it.

"Is that so?" Max said suddenly, poking his head in the door.

Blue narrowed his eyes when he looked at him. He was laughing at him, a grin on his face the size of the Grand Canyon. "Only you could find this funny."

"I'm suddenly in an excellent mood. I know where Katherine is."

Galien jumped up from the sofa. "Let's go."

"Oh no. You're staying here," Max told him. "I'm going alone. I'll be back."

"Max," Claude came to the door suddenly. He clutched his arm. "It could be dangerous, a trap. Let me come with you."

Blue rolled his eyes.

"Always the faithful servant," Galien muttered.

"Max can take care of himself," Blue announced.

"Why thank you, Blue." Max winked, and was gone.

* * *

Galien was pacing the floor a few minutes later while Blue kept his distance, sitting in the corner by the fire. "He calls me here then doesn't let me help him."

"He doesn't need your help," Blue reiterated. "And you're only here because Max has been told to watch you. If he didn't come for you in all these years, do you think he's suddenly fallen madly in love with you?"

"You can shut up now."

Blue clamped his teeth together.

"If Max ever cared for anyone, it was me."

"I doubt it," Blue said. "You know what I think?"

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Do you mind if I don’t give a shit?”

“I think,” Blue said, ignoring that, “that no one has ever penetrated Max’s heart, no one, vampire or mortal. And if in all this time, he’s never been passionately in love with anyone, well...you have your answer.”

“He does love me. He just doesn’t call it that.”

“He’s not a stupid man,” Blue told him. “I think he’s intelligent enough to recognize love. He just doesn’t feel it. I don’t believe he’s capable of it.”

Galien growled something and marched out of the room.

Blue got out of the chair and went to stand at the window. He opened it out onto the garden and stared up at the starlit night.
::Max. Are you all right? If you need me, I’ll come to you. Even if you are an unfeeling son of a bitch.::

He slammed the window shut. None of it mattered. He didn’t need Max Driscoll in any capacity, except maybe to protect him temporarily from his own maker. As far as discovering himself, Max was right. He was more than aware of what he wanted, what he’d always wanted. And that definitely wasn’t some ancient arrogant vampire with a waiting list.

* * *

Max had been communicating with Katherine for the past fifteen minutes. She was weak but she was okay. She was rambling on about being foolish about Dace. She kept telling him to be careful.

::It’s a trap.::

::A trap for whom? Me?::

::It’s a vampire named Jimmy. He wants to talk to you. He’s

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

insane, Max. He thinks he's the reincarnation of Jesus.::

::Keep talking to me. I'm near. Is Dace a vampire? I smell death.::

::He's not a vampire. He's dying.::

::Dying? Is this the man you gave the potions to?::

::Not potions.::

::He can't sense me.::

::The place is rigged with alarms everywhere. I'm not sure what else.::

Max moved swiftly through the rose garden, faster than the human eye could actually see. He scaled the balcony and landed silently on both feet. Katherine was close. When he opened the balcony door, he heard the slightest sound. Instinctively he went to the floor, just in time to dodge a cavalcade of silver bullets that seemed to come from nowhere. He had a feeling this was only the first of many booby traps.

He waited and then softly lifted himself to his feet. He was standing on a thick red carpet. He scanned the length of it, all the way to the door leading into a dark corridor. Something about the carpet disturbed him. A discernible bulge ran down the middle. He scanned the room and noticed the finest rays of light protruding from all directions. So, he would have to bypass those rays and avoid whatever wire lay rigged under the carpet.

"Well," he murmured, "here goes nothing." Like an acrobat, he rolled himself up into a ball and flitted in between each grove between the rays, never touching the floor. He vaulted through the door and into the corridor, his heels digging into the carpet, then the alarm went off.

It pierced through his eardrums like a buzz saw, vibrating so loudly it drove him to his knees. He placed his hands over his ears

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

to try to buffer it, but it didn't help.

"Hello, Mr. Driscoll," a man said.

Max found himself looking at a pair of running shoes. They seemed a little worse for wear, covered in mud and grass.

The alarm suddenly went off, and Max rose to his feet, lowering his hands from his ears.

"Don't make any sudden moves, Mr. Driscoll," the man said. "I have silver bullets in this gun."

"Did you rig all that up yourself in there?" he asked, eyeing the gun. It would be easy enough to take the gun away from this man, who looked like Max might be able to blow over with his breath.

"Yes, Mr. Driscoll," he said, seeming nervous, his hand shaking.

"Please, given our history, Dace, call me Max."

"History? And how did...did you know my name?"

"You're dying. I can hear your body shutting down as we speak."

The man stumbled back and Max made his move, easily taking the gun away from the mortal and throwing it backward out the open window behind him. He pressed the man's shoulder against the wall. "Now, you will take me to Katherine."

Tears ran down the man's young face and for a second, Max felt a pang of pity for him, but only for a moment. "I never wanted to hurt her," he whispered.

"Um," Max took his arm. "Take me to her now. And you'd better hope you didn't hurt her, or I shall quicken your impending death."

Dace led Max down the hallway and in through another room where the mortal descended the staircase and led him into a basement.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Katherine was lying on a makeshift bed, chains about her arms and legs. Max moved forward and snapped them off, relieved to see that her eyes were open and she was grinning at him.

He held onto the mortal with one hand, aware of how weak Katherine was, and how badly she needed to feed. He pulled her up with one arm. "Are you all right?"

"I think so," she whispered, putting her arms around his neck and kissing his cheek. "I just was reminded of how much I want to remain in this life."

She was scared. He glared at the mortal who hung off his arm, furious that he would terrify his Katherine like that. He lifted his wrist to her. "Drink, *ma belle*," he urged.

As she leaned forward to drink, the mortal he held onto began to say some sort of a prayer. Max heard the word *evil* and swung his arm backward. The mortal went flying across the room.

Katherine lifted her mouth from his arm. She licked her lips, her eyes rimmed with blood. They were tears. "It's not his fault. Don't hurt him."

"Katherine. He took you hostage. You were nothing but kind to him and he—"

"Please Max," she said, clinging to him, the blood running down her cheeks. "He's dying."

"I know that."

"That psychopath promised his life. It hasn't been my herbs and potions that has been keeping him alive, it's been vampire blood. He even took some of mine. Jimmy has promised him a cure. He told him."

"What does Jimmy want with me?" Max cast a disparaging look at the mortal who was unconscious on the floor.

"I think he wants to destroy you. He considers you a rival,

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

maybe. I don't know. Max," she said, moving past him and leaning down beside Dace on the floor, "can't you save him?"

"No. You know our blood can't cure him, Kat, we can only turn him."

"Can we do it, make him one of us?"

"You know my rule. No one in the House makes others. I haven't made another since Galien."

"One exception?" she tenderly stroked Dace's head as if he was a child.

"You have great feeling for this mortal." Max sighed.

She looked up at him. "I don't blame him for what he did. I understand how desperately he wants to survive. I understood that when I was starving for blood. Even after all this time that I have inhabited this earth, it's not enough. Imagine the short lifespan of a mortal man."

Max pursed his lips. "When he regains consciousness, I want him to follow through. I want him to call Jimmy and tell him I'm here."

"No."

"Yes," Max said with a smile.

"He plans to destroy you."

"I can take care of myself"—he grinned—"as you know. Wake him up. If he makes the phone call, if he doesn't double cross me, I'll consider your request."

"You'll let me turn him?"

"I said I'd consider it."

* * *

When Dace opened his eyes, he was lying on the bed.

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

Katherine patted his forehead with a cool cloth. "Are you all right?" she asked him.

"You shouldn't care how I am. Oh, Katherine," he whispered, "I didn't mean it. What have I done?"

"You have done what anyone in your place would have done, but Jimmy is a charlatan. He can't save you unless he makes you a vampire. And he'll never do that. He intends to be the only one."

"No, he would never." Dace pulled his hand away. "And he's not like you. You are evil."

"Dace, don't talk nonsense." She sighed in frustration. "You know that's not true. He is like me. He drinks blood to live, only he is the one that's evil, not me."

"Where is it? Where is that....thing?"

"That thing"—Max walked into the room—"is right here."

Dace immediately started to tremble.

"You don't have to be afraid." Max came over and placed his hand on the bed frame. "Katherine won't let me hurt you. I have a proposition for you."

"I can't make a deal with the likes of you," he said.

Katherine's heart sank. He'd really been brainwashed to the point where everything they'd shared up to this time seemed insignificant. She had no idea how to convince him they weren't evil, and that the only evil was the one that had taken hold of him.

Max perched on the edge of the bed, folding his arms across his chest. "Why would you think we are evil?"

"Jimmy told me so."

"Jimmy told you?" He looked at Katherine, who lowered her head. "So, what do you think this Jimmy is? Isn't he like us?"

"No, he's the one, the one who has risen, come again to bring eternal life, end pain."

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Like Christ.”

“Yes. Exactly like Christ.”

“And vampires are what...the anti-Christ?”

“No, vampires are legions. Demon foot soldiers.”

“So we are the legions of the devil?”

“Stop it, Max. Don’t bait him,” Katherine pleaded. She couldn’t bear to hear anymore of this.

“Katherine,” he said, putting up a hand. He looked at Dace again. “So, we are legions of the devil? Is that what you’re saying?”

Katherine gasped as Dace looked directly at Max and said, “No, Mr. Driscoll, you’re not a legion. You are the devil.”

* * *

Max was sputtering away under his breath as Katherine accompanied him out of the room and into the hallway. “That Jimmy is as mad as a hatter. He thinks I’m the bloody devil.”

“Well, you can be a bit devilish,” Katherine made an attempt at a joke but it fell flat.

“Katherine,” he scowled at her. “How many people has this nut case convinced that I’m the devil?”

She sighed.

“God, I hate this enforcer stuff. It all comes down to me being the cleaner. He’s concocted this story in his head. I think this vampire may be insane.”

“What are we going to do about Dace?”

“He’s completely brainwashed. He’s dangerous.”

“I can change his mind.”

“I don’t think you can.”

THE HOUSE OF DRISCOLL, BOOK I

“Please, let’s take him back to the house. We can use him. I’m sure he has a lot of information.”

Max sighed. She wanted so much to save him. “Okay, we’ll take him. I want him to call this Jimmy, want to meet with him. But if he doesn’t cooperate I will—”

“You won’t need to,” she said. “He’s dying, remember? I’ll get him.”

“Put him out. I’ve had enough preaching for the evening.”

She kissed him on the cheek.

“I’ll see you back at the house,” he said and left by the open window.

To Be Continued...

A. J. LLEWELLYN & D. J. MANLY

A. J. Llewellyn divides his time between California and Hawaii. Bags of Kona coffee in the fridge and a healthy collection of Hawaiian records keep him refueled when he is on the mainland.

A. J.'s passion for the islands led him to writing a play about the last ruling monarch of Hawaii, Queen Lili'uokalani. He has written a non-erotic novel about the overthrow of her kingdom—in diary form from her maid's point of view.

He never lacks inspiration for his male/male erotic romances and has to force his fingers from the computer keyboard to pursue his other passions: collecting books on Hawaiiana, surfing and spending time with his family, friends and his animal companions.

A. J. Llewellyn believes that love is a song best sung out loud. To find out more about A.J., visit his website at www.ajllewellyn.com or you can reach him at aj@ajllewellyn.com.

* * *

D. J. Manly says, “I write not only for my own pleasure, but for the pleasure of my readers. I can’t remember a time in my life when I haven’t written and told stories. When I’m not writing, I’m dreaming about writing, doing something wild and adventurous, or trying to make the world a better and more open-minded place to live in. I adore beautiful men, and I know I’m not alone in this!

Eroticism between consenting adults, in all its many forms, is the icing on the cake of life!"

To find out more about D. J., visit the author's website at <http://www.djmanlyfiction.com>.

* * *

**Don't miss *Fawnskin*
by A. J. Llewellyn & D. J. Manly,
available at AmberAllure.com!**

When Rallus quits his FBI job and moves to the mountain town of Fawnskin, California, to get away from it all, he has no clue that rural life will mean falling in love with another mysterious newcomer. He falls hard and fast for Knox Baylor, who's taken an unusual job as a shommerin, a corpse watcher at a funeral home.

For Knox, the job should be easy money, even if the hours are long...except that he falls asleep on the job and accidentally releases Mr. Harold Hoxheimer's angry spirit, or dybbuk, which starts creating unholy havoc in Fawnskin.

Harold opens all the secret wounds festering under Fawnskin's pretty, postcard exterior. Fawnskin is home to a fake fortuneteller who blackmails residents but hides an even more sinister secret. And why do individuals keep dying in the old people's home? Rallus barely has time to deal with these problems when a grizzly murder takes place and a small boy is abducted.

As they investigate, Rallus and Knox find that nothing is what it seems in this once-quiet town with the warm and fuzzy name...everybody has a secret, and some are willing to go to deadly lengths to keep them.

How can they keep Mr. Hoxheimer's vengeful dybbuk from jumping from one host body to the next? What exactly does he want? And can Rallus and Knox defeat the growing evil with true love?

AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

THE GOLD STANDARD IN PUBLISHING

QUALITY BOOKS
IN BOTH PRINT AND ELECTRONIC FORMATS

ACTION/ADVENTURE

SUSPENSE/THRILLER

SCIENCE FICTION

DARK FANTASY

MAINSTREAM

ROMANCE

HORROR

EROTICA

FANTASY

GLBT

WESTERN

MYSTERY

PARANORMAL

HISTORICAL

BUY DIRECT AND SAVE
www.AmberQuill.com
www.AmberHeat.com
www.AmberAllure.com