



# **Bound by Blood**

**By  
Cynthia Zeuli**

Copyright © 2003 by Cynthia Zeuli.

eBook Edition  
ISBN: 1-59507-004-4

Published by ArcheBooks Publishing, a wholly owned subsidiary of Gelinas & Wolf, Inc.

**ArcheBooks Publishing**  
4305 State Bridge Road  
Suite 103-121  
Alpharetta, GA 30022

**Gelinas & Wolf**  
9101 W. Sahara Ave.  
Suite 105-112  
Las Vegas, NV 89117

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information about this book, please contact ArcheBooks at [publisher@ArcheBooks.com](mailto:publisher@ArcheBooks.com).

This book is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents depicted herein are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

## **Important Publisher's Notices to Purchaser**

This book, in any form, is fully protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States of America. It is the intellectual property of the author and licensed for publication in this form by ArcheBooks Publishing, the publisher.

This edition of this book, in electronic data-file form, is licensed to the purchaser as a Single-User software license, purely for entertainment, informational, and/or educational purposes only. This file may not be copied and redistributed or sold to any other individual, organization, or party in any form, medium, or manner for any reason. However, the purchaser of this book may place a copy of this book on any computer or display device owned or used by the purchaser, but only for the purchaser's sole convenience and use, provided that this work is not to be made available to other individuals.

Violations of this license agreement may subject the purchaser to prosecution. Please enjoy this book, and if you do, please recommend it to family, friends, and colleagues for their own purchases and enjoyment.

## Prologue

**S**he was waiting for him when he came out of the theater. He poked his nose out of the back door, looking around carefully, no doubt to see if any of the hoards of screaming fans remained.

He did not see her.

Then again, she was no ordinary fan.

He bounded out the door and down the stairs, whistling loudly and slightly off key. Somewhere in the distance, a church bell chimed in the midnight hour. He stopped at the bottom of the stairs, threw back his head, and sucked in a great gulp of air. The wind ruffled his damp, dark blond hair as he ran his fingers through it, leaving it sticking up at odd angles. She saw the glint of the wedding ring on his finger. Her eyes narrowed, though she allowed herself a half smile.

She imagined she could see the moonlight shining in his

dark blue eyes, eyes set above a straight nose and a sensuously full mouth, under arched brows which gave him the look of a surprised boy. They reflected a merriment he could not apparently contain. She wondered what made him so happy. Was it the adulation of the crowds who had watched him reciting the words of a bard four hundred years dead, this very night? Or was it, perhaps, that he was at last alone, slipping into the welcoming embrace of the night?

He began to whistle as he started down the street. She caught the faint scent of his sweat, earthy and human and not at all unpleasant to her. Although she knew she had mere moments to act, knowing he would summon a taxi cab at the corner, she allowed herself the luxury of watching him walk. He was comfortable in his body, a body that he had kept in fine shape. She supposed he was well used to it after thirty-five years, though in truth that amount of time was a mere pittance. Dressed in blue jeans, a green flannel shirt and a caramel colored suede jacket, he was tall, and moved quickly-yet somehow his gait was also rolling and languid. The clothes suited him, and she had no doubt that he was well aware of his appearance.

She felt the hunger rise up within her. She had starved herself with wanting him, waiting far too long for this night. She knew she was going to be brutal with him. He had resisted sweeter seductions. He was strong. His strength was part of the reason why she wanted him. Tonight he would suffer, but after tonight, there would be time for pleasures.

There would be all the time in the world.

He was almost to the corner. She knew his route well. She only needed to get into the small alley between the last two buildings on the street before he passed it. His head turned as she moved by him faster than his eyes could see. She sensed he felt her presence. He stopped at the mouth of the alley, just as she had desired. He peered into the shadowy depths, staring straight at her... and yet seeing her not.

She whispered his name directly into his mind, enjoying his confusion. He stepped forward, but then hesitated.

“Is someone there?” he called.

She didn’t answer as he moved even closer. At last he was able to pick out her form in the darkness. He heaved a sigh when he saw her, rolling his eyes and shaking his head. She nearly laughed aloud. He really had no idea how much danger he was in, and oh, how she delighted in it. Grinning, she held her arms out to him, but he just stood there, hands on his hips, pulling up the sides of the jacket.

“You,” he said. There was no anger in his tone, no annoyance. “I told you, sweetie, I’m married.”

She said nothing, though she lowered her arms. Her smile faded as the hunger piqued her even harder. She fought to keep her pout from becoming a snarl.

He must have detected the malice in her countenance, because he seemed suddenly disturbed. He ran his hand through his hair again.

“You’re very attractive, but... I’m sorry. Listen, I’m tired. I’m going home.”

He turned away from her. She could hold back no longer.

She attacked.

She hurtled towards him with an animalistic cry, seizing his shoulders, knocking him to the ground. He shouted as she landed on him, trying to shake her off, but although he was taller and heavier than she, she had far superior strength.

He seemed stunned for a brief moment after they hit the ground, but then he began to struggle. Blindly she scrambled at the jacket, the collar of his shirt, trying to bare the flesh of his neck, but with him thrashing and twisting and shouting it was impossible. Finally she flipped him over onto his back, knocking his head against the pavement. He groaned and his blue eyes slipped closed.

She laughed.

Her hands were trembling. The moment she had waited for was nigh, and it seemed she might savor it after all. Tenderly she opened the jacket, unbuttoned the first few buttons of his shirt. He was flushed and red, and the throbbing jugular vein stood out prominently.

He let out a groan and she knew he was coming around. *Damn.* She straddled him, gripping his torso with her legs. She pinned his hands above his head with one of her own. As she took his chin in her other hand his eyes opened, foggy at first, but quickly sharpening with understanding as he stared up at her open mouth.

“Whoa! Hey, you’re not going to bite me, are y-”

Before he could finish the last word she turned his face

roughly to the side. The hunger was a spear of cold flame inside her that she must extinguish before she could think rationally. She sank the long fangs into his throat, drinking in his cry of pain with his blood.

Aloysius Daye had no comprehension of what was happening to him at that moment. Fans weren't allowed to attack him. He was an actor—a star. He had to get home to Lisa. Yet as his consciousness began to fade, his thoughts returned to earlier in the evening, to the show, to the sounds of applause... to the image of Lydia...

## Chapter 1

**T**he sound of applause was sweet music to Aloysius Daye's ears. He loved this moment, the few seconds after the curtain fell and before it rose again for the cast to take their bows. He savored it. He stood behind the drawn velvet, which now veiled the stage, listening, and wiped his sweaty brow with back of an equally sweaty hand as he tried to catch his breath. Damn the long-sleeved, billowing shirt, and hot, heavy doublet. It had been a long, strenuous performance, but a rush as well, and he knew the adrenaline would last him far into the night. The applause was no surprise, and the screams, whistles and the sound of his name being chanted were no surprise either, but tonight, as every night, he ate it up.

You didn't get to hear the applause when you were on television. Thank God those days were over. Television might pay well, but from here on in, it was live theater for Aloysius. He didn't need to worry about money anymore. Of course, that *was* thanks to television. He shrugged off

the thought

Aloysius sighed. He needed this. One look at his co-star in the Shakespearean comedy told him that Lydia felt the same way about the applause, about the crowds. She was glowing, almost blushing, her creamy, flawless skin pink-tinged, and the sheen made her even more beautiful.

The fleeting memory of his wife's own beautiful face silenced that thought. Lydia Frost was dangerous. She was young and charming and naive and utterly, utterly fascinated with him. Dark red hair fell in thick, loose ringlets to her waist, and the wide peridot eyes that were her eyes caressed him as she lowered her sweeping lashes.

Aloysius imagined her as she had been two days ago, pinned naked beneath him in his dressing room as he roughly explored all that soft pink skin with hands and lips that seemed out of his own control. One time. He'd only been with her one time, making love to her on the couch in the dressing room like a wild beast. Two days ago, and he'd been able to think about little else since then.

What had he been thinking?

Lydia was barely twenty-two, a good thirteen years younger than he was. Yes, she made him laugh, made him feel young again, and her shameless adoration of him was irresistible. He really had tried to resist, until the other day when he had been unable to hold out any longer. He had broken his vows to Lisa, vows he had never before broken. Though the opportunities to do so had been many, the temptations had been few. Very few.

Lisa, was his wife of fifteen years... fifteen years, to-

night! He wished she could have been here, in the crowd this evening, his longest and most ardent admirer, the one who never gave up on him and his dreams. She'd kill him if she ever discovered what had happened between him and Lydia. She'd kill him if he ever got up the nerve to tell her he wanted a divorce. She knew why. He had always thought he would be able to change her mind, but they were both getting older and soon it would be too late.

When he looked at Lydia, he remembered that there were other women in the world, women who would do anything for him. Women who would be proud to be the mother of his children. Lisa didn't want children, never had. He had known that when he had married her, and fifteen years later, it was time to give up pretending he didn't want them either. He should start a new life, let her go back to California. But how could he do it?

Would she let go of him? She seemed to need him so badly. She had a touch of the flu tonight and had not come to the show, but he knew she would be waiting up for him when he got home. She always waited up for him. Did she still love him? He knew, deep down, that his feelings for her were warm but no longer hot. Could that be rekindled? Maybe Lisa would dress up for him tonight, wear something sexy. It had been awhile for them, since they had last made love. She had much on her mind, lately, what with the move to Toronto—a completely different world from Los Angeles—and settling into a new house. They had been here close to four months, but still weren't settled in. Although, even though she was always there, always pa-

tiently waiting for his return, she was usually tired when he came in. He would be wound up, so tightly wound, and up, and alive... and disappointed every time she put him off with yawns and drooping eyes. She wouldn't let him go, and she wouldn't give him what he wanted, needed.

He felt trapped.

It was easier for Aloysius to picture her asleep than awake, her dark eyes closed, her hair in a long chocolate braid, her round face near cherubic. Despite everything, she was ever beautiful to him, his chosen companion for all time. He couldn't imagine life without her. She was his best friend—or at least she had been, it seemed, until they had moved to Toronto. Now he was caught up in life at the theater and she seemed farther and farther away, emotionally.

It was all too easy to imagine a life with someone else. It was easy to think of waking up next to Lydia, seeing that cinnamon hair tousled, her lips bruised from his kisses. It was easy to imagine little red-haired children. Did Lydia even want children? Of course, he had never asked her about such a thing. He didn't want to lead her on, did he? He didn't want to have an affair with her... but it had begun. Could he honestly tell himself there wouldn't be another occurrence like the one in the dressing room? He didn't know, and so he'd been avoiding her lately.

There was no time to dwell on it as the curtain rose again and the applause grew louder, almost dizzying in its volume. Smiling broadly, Aloysius threw an arm around Lydia and squeezed her to him. He ran his other hand

through his hair, then saluted the crowd. They bowed, and Aloysius kissed Lydia on the cheek with a resounding smack, which drew shouts from the crowd. Lydia curtsied, and jealously Aloysius wondered if the men in the front row had as wonderful a view of her cleavage in the low-cut semi-Elizabethan style gown as he did.

It suited her wonderfully, he thought, the forest green darkening the pale lime color of her eyes and providing a terrific background for the waterfall of auburn curls.

*Stop*, he had to stop. It was his wedding anniversary, for heaven's sake! He might not feel the same as he once did, might not even be sure if they had a future together, but he owed her tonight. At least he had tomorrow and the next day to concentrate fully on Lisa, to forget this madness. The theater was closed on Mondays and Tuesdays.

The curtain closed and they were done for the night. Aloysius kept his arm around Lydia as the jocular company headed for the dressing rooms, letting go of her only when they came to the stairs. She went ahead of him down the hall. He slipped into his cluttered little dressing room and fell back exhausted on the couch. His lethargy only lasted a minute, and when his heart rate began at last to slow, his breathing returning to normal, he jumped off the couch and stripped off the sweaty shirt and doublet. He peeled off his pantaloons and slid into comfortable jeans, a favorite old green shirt. Green, the color of the gown Lydia wore in the production. She often wore green even outside of work. It suited her and she knew it.

He was thirsty. Thankfully, there was a bottle of chilled

champagne on his dressing table, nested in a silver bucket of ice that wasn't there earlier, along with a pile of fan mail, three fruit baskets and several ornately wrapped packages. Aloysius grabbed the bottle and popped the cork, tossing aside the gift tag without reading it.

"Cheers," he toasted his reflection in the mirror before tipping up the bottle and taking a long swallow. Damn, it tasted good. Whoever had sent it hadn't skimped. This was the good stuff. He should have taken it home to Lisa. Then again, he already had a bottle chilling in the fridge there.

Lisa. He really should get going.

Aloysius picked up the fan mail and sorted through it. Some of the names he recognized. They wrote to him frequently. Some of the envelopes had been decorated with bats and stars and wolves and coffins and cryptic designs. Some were addressed in calligraphy that looked like dripping blood, or written with silver pens on black envelopes.

Nothing new. No Shakespeare fans here. He could read it tomorrow.

"I'm not a vampire, but I play one on TV," he muttered to himself, tossing down the mail unopened onto the dressing table.

A laugh from behind him made him swerve back around, nearly dropping the champagne bottle.

"Holy Smokes, Lydia! Ever try knocking?" he gasped. He looked at the lucky bottle and took another pull from it. Lydia stared. "Champagne. Want some?"

She laughed again. "Only if you have a glass."

“There might be a package of Dixie cups around here somewhere,” Aloysius said, looking at a stack of bags and cartons that occupied one corner.

He took a step towards them, but there wasn’t much room, and she was in front of him, and he was distinctly, *distinctly*, warmer. If there had been a window, he would have opened it. She, too, had changed into jeans and a frilly little white nothing of a top that revealed just as much as her costume. Her hair was pulled back into a ponytail tied with a white ribbon. One yank at that ribbon and it would spill out all over her shoulders, wild and untamed.

Aloysius moved to go around her, to look for the cups, but she stopped him with a hand on his arm. Somehow she removed the bottle from his hand and guided him down so they were sitting together on the couch. She was holding both his hands in her own, and he was acutely aware of her touch, the warmth of her strong, slender fingers. He bit back the urge to groan aloud.

“Aloysius, we’ve got to talk,” she said.

“Talk?” he asked in a strangled voice. “Can’t it wait? I’ve got to go home.”

“No... it can’t wait. Please, Aloysius,” she pleaded, the lime eyes luminous.

“I’ve really got to go home,” he repeated. “It’s my anniversary. My *wedding* anniversary. To... my wife,” he said incoherently. “Stop doing that.”

“Doing... what?” she asked, her brow wrinkling.

“You’re rubbing my fingers.”

Lydia looked down at their hands, then let go, almost

hesitantly. She sighed, and drew in a great gulp of air, and Aloysius realized that she was on the verge of tears.

“I’m sorry... if I’m rubbing your fingers,” she said almost bitterly. “I’m sorry... for what happened the other day. But it can’t go on this way. You can’t keep avoiding me and ignoring me.”

“Have I been?” He felt like a dunce. He hadn’t been aware of his own actions... but it was true. He *had* been avoiding her—because he was afraid of himself.

Her face was wet now. “I can’t stand it. I am so, so sorry I ever let that happen... it’s ruined our friendship. And I treasured that. More than you know.”

“Oh, Lyd,” Aloysius said, “I never meant to hurt you.”

He drew her against his chest and let her cry into his shirt, let her get it out. He stroked her hair. There was nothing sexual in the gesture. Or so he told himself, over and over. He could treat Lydia as a friend... a... a sister, even.

He rested his cheek against her hair and inhaled the scent of her, and knew he was only fooling himself if he thought this was a “brotherly” gesture. Holding her close was a torture, but he refused to hurt her any more than he already had, no matter what havoc it wreaked on his body. He brushed his lips over her forehead, then took her chin in his hand and tilted her face up.

“No more tears,” he said softly. Then, with more bravado, “I have seen the error of my ways.”

She laughed. She always laughed easily.

“Does this mean we can just forget what happened?”

That we can be friends again.”

“Of course. Of course.”

But he didn't want to forget it. He did want it to happen again. What would it be like if he told her so? Didn't she want that as well? Or was she happy with a one night stand, just so long as he didn't ignore her afterwards?

Lydia heaved a sigh of relief. She put her arms around his waist, her head on his shoulder, closing her eyes and smiling angelically.

“Oh, good,” she muttered.

Carefully he disentangled himself from her, grinning like an idiot all the while, trying to cover his own mixture of emotions.

“Shall we go out and meet the fans, then?” he asked. There were always some few souls waiting in the lobby of the theater after the shows, hoping to catch a glimpse of the actors. Hoping to catch a glimpse of *him*.

“Oh, they don't care about me. They only want to meet Count Von Yogan, Emperor of the Legions of Darkness,” Lydia replied, finished with her tears and back to being the playful tease she always was.

Aloysius groaned and rolled his eyes. “I should give them what they want and spout Shakespeare wearing fangs, in a black cape and a bad accent.”

“You have to admit it would be hilarious,” she said, getting up.

“Maybe to you,” Aloysius said as he rose, following Lydia down the hall.

“It *was* a great TV show, Aloysius,” she said.

“Cut the sarcasm, little girl or I’ll take you over my knee,” he laughed. “It was garbage and you know it.”

“But very popular garbage indeed, Mr. Daye,” Lydia insisted. “*Von Yogan the Eternal* is in syndication on three different stations in Canada—”

“And God knows how many in the US,” Aloysius added. “I wish they would let it die.”

“Ah, but vampires never die,” Lydia said, twirling around to face him.

They had arrived at the door which led to the lobby, hesitating almost superstitiously before it, neither wanting to lead the way.

“I suppose Count Von Yogan will haunt me for the rest of my career,” Aloysius said, only half-joking by now. “They staked me in the final episode, and that was five years ago. But the fans won’t let it rest.”

Lydia grew serious. “They *do* appreciate your acting, Aloysius, at least I know some of them do. They come to see Aloysius Daye now, not Count Von Yogan. You *are* very talented.”

Aloysius smirked. “Well, *I* know that, and *you* know that, but the question is...”

Lydia rolled her eyes and pushed open the door. They stepped out into the lobby. Immediately several dozen voices were speaking his name. He was quickly surrounded. Lydia was swallowed up by the crowd. He was alone in a sea of faces and hands. Aloysius pasted on a smile... and as much as he hated being known for his role as Count Von Yogan, his buoyant nature and his shameful

love of being fawned over soon kicked in, and he was laughing and joking with the fans who would never let the count Rest In Peace.

*“Mr. Daye, will you sign this...?”*

“Course I will! Who should I make it out to? Spell it, sweetie?”

*“A picture? Oh, please?”*

“Sure! I’m sweating like a beast... are you sure you want to stand next to me?”

*“You were so wonderful tonight.”*

“Thank you!”

*“I wish the series wasn’t canceled... is there any chance of a movie... or a reunion show?”*

“Afraid not, sweetie. The Count was staked through the heart, remember? Besides, I’m too old for that now...” he smiled at the girl, who went on to protest that no, he wasn’t old, he looked just the same as he ever had.

The same as he ever had.

*People tell me I haven’t changed at all, but I don’t feel the same,* Aloysius thought.

He was still smiling, but the smile was no longer genuine. It was time to go home. Lydia—uh, Lisa was waiting for him!

“Who’s going to be here tomorrow? Can I sign for some of you tomorrow? It’s my anniversary, you know. Gotta get home!”

Aloysius said goodnight to all those who remained, who were still begging for more, more, more of him. He had given all he could for tonight. He slipped back through the

door into the hall which led to the dressing rooms, past Henry, the security guard who was supposed to be protecting him if anyone got out of hand, who was instead apparently chatting up a lovely girl young enough to be his granddaughter. He waved at Randy, a nice kid who was an usher at the theater a couple of nights a week.

Aloysius was free again.

He grabbed his leather jacket and, whistling, headed for the back door of the theater.

## Chapter 2

**A**loysius muttered, “What the hell happened to me?” He rubbed his neck. “Must have... passed out...” He couldn’t remember. He was lying on a cold, hard cement floor. His mouth tasted of the bitter iron of blood. Maybe someone had punched him in the teeth. He put his fingers to his lips, but they didn’t seem to be swollen... or sore.

Cold.

He was so cold. It shouldn’t be so cold, should it? It was June... Shivering, he sat up, rubbing his arms. He still had his jacket on, but it was freezing, wherever here was. His body ached, the pain centering in the pit of his stomach.

Hungry.

He was hungry-intensely, fiercely hungry.

Aloysius opened his eyes. He was right about the cement floor. In fact, he found himself in a cement tunnel of

sorts, the walls painted an industrial gray, with encrusted iron pipes overhead, like one might find in a cellar. Hell, it *could* be a cellar for all he knew. He looked up and down the tunnel. There didn't seem to be any source of light, but he had no trouble seeing. And as far as he could see, there was nothing in this tunnel.

What else could he do but follow it?

He got to his feet, finding himself more steady than he expected to be. In fact, except for the painful hunger, which seemed to momentarily abate as he got to his feet, Aloysius actually felt pretty good. Automatically his hand went to his throat, a remembrance of pain there, but the flesh was smooth, whole. What made him think something had happened to his throat?

He couldn't think about it now, couldn't think about anything but this insatiable hunger... He had to get out of here, get something to eat. He started down the hallway. Eventually he came to wall... but it wasn't a wall. It was a door, disguised to look like a wall. Some disguise, if he could tell so easily. Aloysius detected a spot that was slightly worn and pressed on it. The panel slid back, revealing more hallway, going to his left and to his right. Which way?

A sign hung directly across from him. Arrows pointed in both directions. To the left, STABLES. To the right, SWIMMING POOL and GIFT SHOP. Gift shop? How about EXIT? What the hell, he'd go to the left. More walking, and his hunger growing stronger still. What time was it, anyway? He looked at his wrist, but then had a flash

of recollection: his watch sitting on the table in his dressing room. He had eaten before the performance, hadn't he? Yes, he knew he'd eaten before the performance, but he couldn't quite remember what performance that was.

*Can't think. Too hungry.*

The hallway began to look vaguely familiar. Eventually, he came to stairs and more signs to the stables. He went up the stairs and, indeed, found himself in a stable. There were no horses, though the names of horses who had been there once were hung over the stalls, painted in glittering gold letters. Another room, roped off, of old-fashioned carriages and sleighs. This appeared to be a museum of some type.

How on earth had he gotten here, and why couldn't he recall? He recalled on a bottle of champagne, remembering the cool, sweet liquid running down his throat. Maybe somebody had put something in it. Eventually Aloysius found a doorway that led him outside. He stumbled out into the night, but it was not any warmer... nor, thankfully, any colder, outside. Still wondering where the hell he was, he turned and looked up. His mouth dropped.

*Casa Loma?*

At least that explained the sign to the gift shop.

Built in the beginning of the century by a prominent Toronto financier who wanted a medieval castle, and went broke less than ten years after moving in, Casa Loma was now a tourist attraction, and most assuredly was *not* open at night. How, and more importantly *why*, he was here were questions he had no answers for-questions he could not

even ponder now, not feeling as he did.

Aloysius started off over the grounds, heading down Spadina towards Bloor Street. Bloor Street. Yes, lots of restaurants on Bloor. He could get something to eat there. Aloysius put his hand in his pocket. His wallet was still there. He hadn't been robbed, at least. Sighing, he ran a hand through his hair. It felt greasy and tangled.

Walking felt good. Faster and faster he went, amazed at the speed he was picking up. Aloysius laughed aloud. Treading the stage boards must have kept him in good shape! He wasn't even breathing hard. He opened his mouth and began to shout out a speech... Shakespeare. The play! He remembered, he—

He turned the corner onto Bloor and skidded to a stop.

He had left the theater after the performance, and seen one of the fans down the street, in an alley. A girl, a beautiful girl, whom he'd noticed at several of the shows they'd performed this week and last. She was young-looking and slender, nothing like his curvaceous co-star, Lydia. Short, shiny dark hair, cut in a page-boy and luminous blue eyes. The eyes had really been what had captured his attention.

She'd hit on him too, two nights ago. Yes, it was the same day he... the same day he had slept with Lydia. Of course, he'd turned her down.

He thought of Lydia.

*Of course*, he told himself sarcastically.

He shook his head, trying to recall exactly what had happened after he left the theater tonight. The girl had been in an alley, and... and... that was where it ended. How he

had gotten to Casa Loma and how much time had passed he had no earthly idea.

There was a lot more pedestrian traffic here than he expected. How come so many people were out, and so late? Normally Bloor street was all but deserted when he left the theater, and allowing for his blackout, it must be later still. Aloysius stared dumbly at his wrist again, out of habit, but his watch still wasn't there. Oh well, he'd just get something to eat before he went home. He'd go to Cricket's. Sure, they were open late. He only hoped it wasn't karaoke night.

Aloysius started down Bloor towards the pub, walking much more slowly now. It seemed walking had pounded his hunger into a low, raw throb. His mind was starting to function more clearly and he began to notice that the night itself seemed different somehow. He couldn't exactly put his finger on what it was. Yet somehow, the air seemed more pungent, the sounds of traffic more pronounced, the people talking louder, more distinct. If he concentrated, he could eavesdrop on people inside restaurants behind glass, or across the street!

People seemed different too. Dancing with color, teeming with life. More alive, more... succulent... available... delicious.

*Delicious?* He really must be hungry.

But here he was at Cricket's, and although it was crowded, there was thankfully no karaoke, so he made his way inside. All the tables were full, but he knew he could always eat at the bar. He shuffled his way to it, politely

squeezing his way through the herd of men and women there. Whispers buzzed among the babble. Someone had recognized him. Fans.

Ignoring the whispers and pointed looks, Aloysius crooked a finger at the bartender, Selene. She was an older woman, a bit on the portly side. She was perhaps in her early sixties, and she was always cheerful, a gleam in her polished onyx eyes.

“Mr. Daye,” she purred. “How are you, tonight?”

“I’m starving, Selene. How ‘bout one of your fabulous chicken salad croissants? And some soup! Do you have any soup?”

“For you, we always have soup, eh? A cup of cream of asparagus? And chicken salad-no tomato,” she grinned.

He grinned back. “Make it a big bowl... and thanks for remembering about the tomato.”

“I’ll never forget the day Count Von Yogan first came in here and told me he couldn’t stand to eat anything that was red,” the woman said, chuckling as she turned away to take his order out to the kitchen.

Aloysius shook his head. Count Von Yogan? No, he’d never get away from it. He hoped Selene would hurry. He waited rather impatiently, looking around the packed restaurant, waiting for the fans to approach him. They always did. They never stayed whispering in the corner for long. He looked over at the little pocket of them, sipping their drinks, gathered towards the other end of the bar. A couple of the faces looked familiar, but he couldn’t come up with the names for the life of him.

His memory was really shot tonight. He had better pull himself together. Maybe he *had* been punched in the face or had hit his head. Could it be a concussion? But how did it happen? The last person he remembered seeing was that girl. She couldn't have brought him down like that, could she? She was such a little bit of a thing.

The women saw Aloysius staring and all looked away, giggling with each other. Normally he would have looked away himself, but for some reason they all looked so... so attractive tonight. Something about the four of them held his attention. None of them bore any resemblance to each other. Three were brunettes, one an obviously bleached blonde. They ranged in age from perhaps nineteen, the blonde, to fifty. The other two were probably somewhere in their late twenties or early thirties. One of the younger ones was plumper than the rest of her friends, delightfully buxom and blushing. They were all dressed nicely, in neat slacks or skirts with matching tops or blazers, as if they had come there straight from work. They seemed almost shining, healthy and vital. Beautiful, they were just gorgeous, with their creamy, soft skin, flesh that would be warm and inviting.

He was still so cold. Maybe the soup would warm him up. Then again, maybe what he needed was a cold shower.

The women were looking at him again, flustered it seemed, that he was still staring at them. He smiled encouragingly. They all smiled back, whispering back and forth, debating the notion of approaching him. His hearing must be keen tonight, he could hear all of their words... if

he could concentrate on them. It was so noisy, so *loud* in there.

The devil was in him tonight. Casually he lifted a finger, crooked it at them, still smiling. He tilted his head to the side, winked at the heavy girl. She flushed bright red, a most becoming shade, but before he could think on it further a cramp ripped through him. His insides seemed to contract painfully. His hunger was raging. Where was that soup? He looked longingly towards the entrance to the kitchen. There was no sign of Selene, and when he looked back the women were in front of him.

“We didn’t want to disturb you, Mr. Daye,” the blonde trilled.

Her voice was shrill and piercing. Aloysius forced a smile, both attracted and repulsed by her, by all of them, at once. Waves of emotion rose and crashed within him and he found himself wondering if he had a hormone or chemical imbalance or something.

*I must be crazy. Excuse me...* he thought.

“You’re not disturbing me at all,” he said instead. “We’ve met before, haven’t we? At the theater?”

“At the theater,” the older one echoed, and they all chorused in agreement. Aloysius could sense among them varying degrees of joy that he remembered them, mixed with a trace of disappointment that he was just barely remembering them. When had he ever been so in tune to other people’s emotions before? If only he could read everybody like this, like he seemed to be able to tonight. It sure would make dealing with directors and co-stars a hell

of a lot easier!

“Your names, again?” he asked.

They introduced themselves and he did his best to pay attention, to memorize them, to be able to remember when he saw them next. This was what built fan loyalty.

“I just loved *Von Yogan the Eternal*,” gushed Betsy, the girl he had winked at.

“And I dearly loved *being* Von Yogan the Eternal,” Aloysius gave his standard answer, trying not to let any overt sarcasm drip into his voice. “But the show’s over now, sweetie. I’ve moved on.”

He took Betsy’s hand and held it between both of his own as he spoke, trying not to show his perverse thrill at the girl’s reaction of surprise and happiness. Her friends’ jealousy was thick and quick in the air. The blonde—Marisa—pouted. It was absolutely ridiculous for her to feel slighted over a meaningless gesture, Aloysius thought, but he did not reveal his scorn for these silly females.

He turned Betsy’s wrist over, so it faced upwards. He found himself staring at the prominent blue vein which seemed to be straining towards him. He let his thumb rest on that vein, felt her pulse throbbing, and felt an echoing throb within himself.

“Your hands are so cold,” she gasped after a few long, hollow seconds.

“Huh?” He dropped her hand. The spell was broken.

“Your hands...”

“Oh...” Aloysius cleared his throat. “I’m sorry. Excuse me, ladies. I’m not feeling quite like myself tonight.”

“That’s okay,” said Betsy, smiling shyly at him.

The other three instantly chimed in with questions, about Count Von Yogan, about him, about Shakespeare. He held Betsy’s gaze for a few prolonged seconds before looking away and answering them. Every so often his eyes strayed back to her.

*Beautiful. She was so scrumptiously beautiful.*

Selene came out of the kitchen then, and banged a plate down in front of him before turning around and heading back out. For a moment he stared at the sandwich as if it were a foreign object.

“Is something wrong with it?” Selene asked as she returned with the soup. The steaming bowl, at least, she set down a bit more carefully. “You look like you’ve never seen a croissant before, Aloysius.”

He shook his head. “No, no. Sorry. It looks great! Thank you, Selene. I really am very, very...”

He lost it then. He was starving. He grabbed the bowl of soup and drank from it, swallowing the liquid as if his life depended on it. There was something strange about the flavor, something he couldn’t quite put his finger, or his taste buds, on as he bolted it down.

“Hey!” Selene cried out. “Be careful! That’s very—”

Aloysius put down the bowl and gasped. “Aaah!”

“—hot.”

The groupies stared at him aghast. He realized then that he had a Cream of Asparagus mustache, so he wiped off his mouth with the back of his hand. The four of them—well, five, including Selene—stared at him openmouthed.

Finally Selene clucked her tongue. She lifted the soup encrusted hand and stuffed a napkin into it, then turned and went back to the kitchen, muttering about fools who deserved to burn their tongues and the roofs of their mouths right off.

The other women still stared at him, and suddenly he felt embarrassed.

“Excuse me... I... I just don’t know why I...” he stut-tered, until his gaze fell upon the chicken salad croissant.

Aloysius grabbed the croissant and stuffed it almost whole into his mouth, barely chewing, wolfing it down as the ladies stared on. So hungry, he was *so hungry*.

Almost before he swallowed the last bite, he knew it had been a mistake. His stomach screamed in protest. A cramp, even sharper than those he had experienced before he had eaten anything tore through him. He grasped his midriff, cursed under his breath. The cramp abated to be replaced seconds later with an even harsher spasm. In a moment one thing was abundantly clear: the food was not going to stay down.

## Chapter 3

**A**loysius had to get out of the restaurant, and fast, before he embarrassed himself any further that night. He glanced with longing towards the front door of the restaurant, but it was so far away and there were so many people between here and there. He knew there was another way out. Yes, there was a back door in the kitchen. His stomach shuddered violently again, and he knew he had to act. It was now or never.

Aloysius vaulted over the bar, knocking drinks and glasses everywhere. He had a brief impression of Marisa getting doused with beer, of an ashtray sailing over a man's head, of a beer bottle shattering as he moved. He felt people staring, and wondered himself how he managed to do it, but there was no time, *none*, to ponder it. He stumbled into the kitchen, looking around wildly.

“Hey!” Selene exclaimed. “You can’t come in here—”

But he was already on his way out the back. The EXIT sign glowed red like a welcoming beacon as he plunged

forward. Quickly he found himself in a tidy alleyway, empty but for several neat, covered garbage cans. Aloysius reached for the cover of one of these, but now it was truly too late.

He retched, spraying the alley with Cream of Asparagus and chicken salad. Every morsel he had swallowed came back up. When he finished retching and heaving he felt no better. He was surprised to find no aftertaste in his mouth, as the food had had no time to mix with stomach fluids. In fact, it looked much the same as it had looked before he swallowed it. And he...

He was hungrier than ever.

Aloysius stood there in the alley, bent over, his arm cradling his middle, trying to recover. His mind was racing and spinning, trying to figure out what was wrong with him, but... but...

He heard footsteps behind him. He froze. Great! Was he going to get mugged now, as well? This was turning out to be one hell of a night.

“Aloysius? Are you all right?” a voice asked timidly.

It was Betsy.

Aloysius slowly straightened up. He turned around to face her and managed a smile.

It seemed the moonlight filtered in between the buildings and to Aloysius she looked as if she were standing in a spotlight. Her skin was so flushed and pink. She was blushing with the embarrassment that *he* should feel. Yet, suddenly, he didn't feel embarrassed at all. He felt only one thing: Hungry.

Slowly he began to move towards her, closing the gap between them. As he approached he could see she was trembling, the faintest tremor circulating through her bountiful flesh. She began to breathe heavily, until she was almost gasping. The look on her face was a mixture of lust, of surprise, and of terror.

Terror? Why should she be afraid of him.

“The fangs are a nice touch,” she said, trying to sound brave.

“Fangs?” What the hell was she talking about.

“They’re very realistic. But maybe you should have taken them out before you ate. Maybe that’s why you got sick?” she whispered as he began to circle her, walking slowly around her, brushing against her, and finally stopping behind her.

Aloysius had no idea what she was babbling about, and he didn’t care. He put his hands on her shoulders, squeezing slightly. Her flesh was tight. She was tense.

“Relax,” he hissed.

“What are you doing?” she asked, her voice close to a hysterical squeal.

Aloysius gently stroked her hair with one hand. Carefully, he drew it away from her neck, inhaling the scent of her perfume. He recognized the scent, though he could not think of its name, and yet it was also laced with something deeper, something earthier and more mysterious.

“I thought you liked me,” he said, his lips moving over her throat.

“I *do*,” she gasped. “But...”

“But what?”

He kissed her lightly, then began to suck at the skin.

“But...”

“Trust me, my dear,” he whispered.

He encircled her with his arms and she sagged back against him. She was by no means a small girl, yet it seemed that she weighed less than a feather. He opened his mouth wider. She had something, something he needed. Yet he still didn’t know what it was.

He thought he heard a faint sound of laughter, laughter like bells chiming in the wind, but he ignored it, continuing to mouth Betsy’s throat.

“But you’re married.”

A warning alarm went off inside his head. Oh, no! Not only had he completely forgotten about Lisa, he had forgotten that it was his wedding anniversary as well!

He let go of Betsy. She fell heavily to the ground, on top of his feet and lay there, apparently stunned.

“I have to go home,” he muttered.

“I wouldn’t recommend it,” said a low, sweet voice.

Standing there in front of him was the young girl from the alley—from the last alley he had been in. She was dressed completely in black, in a short leather mini-skirt that revealed her long, long legs. She wore a tight tank top covered with an open leather jacket. She was slender and coltish, pale and beautiful. Her short black hair gleamed, like a model in a shampoo commercial, Aloysius thought. He thought that even if the wind blew through it, it would slip neatly back into place. Her face was fine, delicate and

angular, white as the moon but for her crimson slash of a mouth. Her thin lips curled up in a smile as his mouth dropped open. Her, of all people!

The girl strutted towards him. When she reached him, she took his chin in her hand, looking into his mouth as she turned his face this way and that. When she finished her inspection, she put her hand beneath his chin and closed his mouth for him.

“They’ve come in nicely,” she said.

“What, are you determining my age?” Aloysius asked, almost laughing.

“Your fangs,” the woman said impatiently. “Go ahead, finish your meal. I have need of you tonight, my great beauty.”

“Fangs?” he asked for the second time tonight. “Has everyone gone crazy? I don’t have fangs. See?”

Aloysius put his fingers in his mouth and bit down. He cursed as he felt two sharp pin-pricks and tasted his own blood. He pulled his fingers out of his mouth, but they weren’t bleeding, weren’t even marked. *What the hell?* Carefully, he reached inside his mouth and ran his fingers over his canine teeth. They did seem longer, sharper somehow.

“How—” he started, but he still couldn’t believe it.

Betsy, still lying on his feet, moaned. “You’re a vampire. You really *are* a vampire.”

Aloysius heaved a sigh. “It was just a TV show. It isn’t real. I am not really a vampire.”

With a distasteful look the other girl grabbed Betsy’s

hair and hauled her to her feet with one hand. Betsy looked as if she wanted to run, but the other girl pointed a finger at her and barked out a command.

“Stay!”

Like an obedient pup, Betsy stayed.

How could she have lifted her like that? Aloysius wondered. She seemed like such a little bit of a thing, especially compared to Betsy.

“Who *are* you?” he asked.

“My name is Yva Biondello, and I am your master. Take your meal, and let us be off.” Yva gestured towards the paralytic Betsy.

“Excuse me?” asked Aloysius. “You’re my *what*?”

Smiling with condescension, Yva reached up and gently stroked Aloysius’s cheek, sending a shiver through him. Her hands were even colder than he already felt. Her touch almost burned him with cold.

“I have *made* you, and so I am now your master,” she said in a voice one might use with a child, as if he were missing something that was blatantly obvious. “Don’t worry, my beauty, you will adapt easily. I have seen your *television* work. You were born for the night. You have died for the night.”

“I think you must be nuts.”

“You are immortal now. You have always wanted this, have you not? You have played the role of the vampire with relish and I have now given you the gift of making that *fantasy* a reality. You must give up forever the light of the sun, but endless nights of pleasure will be yours. Now,

drink, grow stronger, and then come with me.”

After a prolonged moment of stunned silence Aloysius asked, “Are you trying to tell me that *you* made *me* into... a vampire?”

“Yes, yes,” Yva cried, “Now, will you—”

Aloysius laughed. “No. No. You’re out of your mind. There are no such things as vampires.”

“Stupid male!” she hissed. “How do you explain your appetite for blood? Mortal food will only make you ill, as I see you have discovered quite well on your own.”

“I just bolted it down too fast,” Aloysius said rationally. “I haven’t had an appetite for *blood*.”

“Had you not dropped your prey, you would have been drinking from her jugular within moments,” Yva said.

“This has got to be a joke.”

She waved her hand at poor Betsy, whose eyes had grown to the size of saucers. The fear reflected in them sent a strange jolt through Aloysius, and he began to worry that this was more than some prank being played on him by a couple of psycho fans.

“Look at her throat, my beauty. You were two steps from the move,” Yva said in a gloating voice. She grinned at him, and he could see that her teeth did indeed look long and sharp... and deadly.

Aloysius looked at the other girl’s throat. He’d given Betsy a huge hickey, a great, swollen purple mark, that looked tender and sore. He swallowed hard.

“Go ahead,” Yva urged. “Take her. You need to feed.”

“I... am... not... a vampire! *You* are not a vampire.

You're a nutcase." Aloysius meant to turn away, meant to leave, but his feet were rooted to the ground. He watched as Yva slunk closer to Betsy.

"Perhaps you need a demonstration," she purred.

"Demonstration?"

Yva looked down at Betsy somewhat appraisingly. She cocked her head to the side, then smiled. There was no warmth in her smile. In fact, it was pure malevolence. Yva extended a hand to Betsy, and the girl, moving as if in a dream, took it. Slowly Yva drew Betsy to her feet. She took her into her arms, cradling her. The girl was limp, her face frozen in a mask empty of expression. Blank, like a china doll. Her head flopped to the side, and Yva coolly kissed the mark Aloysius had made on her throat.

"What are you going to—" he started, but Yva threw her head back, her sharp teeth, her fangs bared. "Hey, wait!"

Yva didn't wait. She ripped into Betsy's jugular. A small spatter of blood sprayed out onto the pavement before she covered the wound with her mouth and began to swallow it audibly. The soft clicking sound of her swallow echoed in Aloysius' ears. He swallowed as well, but his mouth was dry. As Yva fed she locked her gaze with Aloysius'. Her blue eyes shone as diamond stars. Aloysius meant to move forward, meant to stop her, but... but...

But he wished it were him, drinking that blood, taking that life.

It took only a few moments for Betsy to die. Yva dropped the corpse to the pavement and smiled at Aloysius,

her teeth crimsoned. He looked down at the body. The skin was utterly white, like paper. Dead, a dead body lying there... right there...and it was his fault she was dead... and he was so hungry... and...

And Yva stepped over the corpse, and was still smiling that gruesome smile. She put her cold hands on his face and looked up at him. Those hands were not so cold any more, a tiny part of his brain told him. They were warmed by the blood she had just taken. She seemed so tiny, perhaps a mere five-six to his six-two. She stood on tip toe, about to kiss him with her bloody mouth. He was disgusted. Grabbing her wrists, he shoved her back and then away.

Aloysius didn't know his own strength. Yva was sent flying backwards, all the way across the alley into the wall. Her head smacked against it with a loud crack, and she slid to the ground.

"Damn it, what did I do?" he muttered.

Alarmed, Aloysius took a step towards her, but before he could reach her she was up again, she was on her feet and she was laughing at him, her teeth still that ghastly red and *gleaming*. She seemed to slide towards him. This time he took a step backwards. Then she was upon him.

She took his face in her hands again, so tightly and so roughly that he could not pull away. She kissed him then, wrapped around him like a boa constrictor, invaded his mouth and left the flavor of blood lingering inside.

The taste increased his hunger a hundredfold.

It was he who deepened the kiss then.

For the first time ever while kissing a woman, whether his wife or on the stage, Aloysius knew he did not have to hold back. He crushed her mouth in wanton, hungry abandon, taking and taking, until the faint taste she had given him was but a memory. His fingers threaded through her short, shiny hair, pulling her head back harshly.

He knew in a moment he must come up for air, but even as he kissed her, he knew he no longer had the need to breathe. For indeed, he was dead. She had killed him. He really had been transformed into a creature of the night, a vampire.

What irony. The role that had given him fame and fortune, the role he had grown to hate, was the role it seemed he would now play forever. It might have been a humorous, albeit cruel twist of fate, but Aloysius was struck by cold, hard fear. He did not want this. What about Lisa, the Shakespeare production, the rest of his life's plans? He broke the kiss and stepped back from Yva, shaking his head in denial and yet all the while knowing it was true.

"I have to go home," he said. "My wife. It's our anniversary."

Yva smiled. Aloysius saw that her teeth were white again. He'd sucked the last traces of blood away. The only sign that she had ever feasted on a human being's life-giving fluid was a stolen blush in her cheeks, a rosy tinge to her pallid, dead flesh—flesh as dead as his own was now.

"Your anniversary was last night," she said. "You spent the course of the day in my home, and then you rose in search of prey."

“No.” But he knew that explained a lot. Oh my God, Lisa was going to be livid. He was gone all night, on the night of their anniversary, and all the next day too.

“Yes, my beauty. I should have been there for you when you arose. I apologize for my lapse. Still, one who has *experience* with our kind such as yourself—”

“*What*, the TV show? Television isn’t real.”

“Be that as it may, *this is real*. You are as I have made you. You must feed or perish.”

Aloysius shook his head. But it was true. He could feel it inside him, but that didn’t change one fact. He *had* to go home.

## Chapter 4

**Y**va's laughter surrounded Aloysius, pinching and nipping at him like tiny gnats. He found himself waving his hands around his ears, as if he could be rid of it that way.

"You cannot go home," she said when she had finished with this singular torture.

"Try and stop me."

Aloysius pushed past her, but before he could reach the mouth of the alley, she stopped him with her words.

"Do you love your wife?"

Aloysius turned around.

"Of course... I love her," he hissed. But face in his thoughts was that of Lydia. The words sounded automatic to his own ears.

"Yes. Of course you do." Her tone seemed mocking. "If you go to her now, starving as you are, you will kill her." Yva smirked. "She won't believe you, and she won't understand. I'm the only one who understands you now."

Aloysius just stared at her. Satisfied, she crossed her arms and tilted her head back. Instinctively, he knew she was not lying. He could still feel the hunger still burning within him, begging to be quenched. Could he do it? Was it in him to take a human life? Lives? Endless lives?

He didn't want to consciously answer that question, because deep down inside he already knew. He didn't want to die, and he didn't want to kill Lisa, despite what problems that might solve. True, he had played a mythical vampire on a television series for a couple of years, but he knew already that this, this *thing* that was smoldering inside him, whatever it was that was a part of him now, was altogether different. No myth. No legend. Something physical, something physiological. The more he thought about it, the more he realized he really had no other choice but to learn how to live with it—if *living* was the right word—to learn how to deal with it, before he could ever hope to return to his wife or to the theater. And like it or not, this creature called Yva was all he had available to teach him.

He bowed his head, trying to submerge his anger. He was an actor, he told himself. He could play the role of the submissive for awhile. Yes, he concluded, for the time being she must think she had won. And perhaps, for now, she had.

“You're right,” he said at last.

“Yes. I am,” she said with the satisfaction of a cat who has his cream in her voice. She moved to him like quicksilver, sliding through the air, surrounding him, draping her arms over him. Aloysius closed his eyes.

“Feels just like being embraced by a drift of snow,” he murmured.

“And I’m warmer than you are, my precious beauty,” she whispered. “You must feed. And soon.”

“Show me how,” he said resignedly.

“You know how,” she said. “You almost did it. I’m sorry I interrupted.”

Yva slid off of him and Aloysius turned back to look at the corpse lying on the dusty pavement. Betsy’s eyes were closed, her lips parted just slightly. She looked so helpless and empty. He felt an almost physical pain at the sight—a true pang of remorse. This poor young woman would be alive now if she hadn’t found him attractive, if she hadn’t been moved by her concern for him to go out and make sure that he was all right.

Yes, he might as well have killed her himself.

“All you have to do is go inside and lure one of her friends out here,” Yva said. “It’s fairly simple. They like you well enough. And if not, simply prey on their concern for their friend.”

“You’re wicked,” Aloysius’ voice was devoid of any emotion.

“I know what I am. I am a predator,” she replied, not showing any sign of being offended. “And so are you. Go on, Aloysius. We do not have all night. There is more you need to know, despite what you may think you know.”

Aloysius turned away from the body, pacing the alley. He ran a nervous hand through his hair.

“Not here,” he said. “Not one of her friends. Some-

where else. *Someone* else. *Something* else. Is there no other way? Animals, anything?"

"One would think your experience with your soup would be lesson enough. Animals? These humans, these mortal, they *are* animals to us, a lesser species on the food chain. When you learn to think of them as such, it will be easier for you."

"I suppose," he whispered.

But how could he do it? How could he come to think of people, of Lisa, Lydia, his friends—all of them, as mere animals? They all, each and every one, had their individual hopes and dreams and thoughts and plans. He loved them, and they loved him. Would that love die as surely as he had at the hands of this creature, this monster? Would it all fade away as each day passed, until his heart hardened and he thought just as Yva did? He didn't want to think about it. He didn't want to think at all.

"We can go somewhere else tonight," she said. "But you must learn quickly how to rid yourself of these foolish, useless human emotions. You must realize that you are no longer human, no longer of their species."

"Were you not like me once?" Aloysius demanded, staring into her cold glimmering blue eyes, looking for some trace of compassion.

"Yes, long ago. And I am well rid of it. As you shall be. As you must be, to survive. Come," she said, taking his arm. "You've seen my abode beneath the foundations of the castle. Let us return there now. If you like, I'll hunt your meal for you tonight. We'll bring a fitting morsel

back there, to be savored.”

“Savored,” Aloysius muttered, shaking his head.

Yva laughed, “Try and fight it as you might. But you will give in, oh yes. And when you do you will thank me when you have. You only see the pain. What you fail to realize is the unimaginable ecstasy that lies before you.” She suddenly snapped her focus to Betsy’s corpse, remembering, “Oh, the remains. I must not forget.”

She let go of him and went back to Betsy’s still form. She stared at the body for a moment, her mouth twisted in perceived consternation. Finally she grabbed the woman’s arm and dragged her carcass easily along behind her.

“What are you going to do with her?” Aloysius asked. “You can’t just trot down Bloor Street pulling a corpse along after you!”

When she reached Aloysius, Yva hauled the dead woman to her feet. She put her arm around her, so the body leaned against her.

“Take the other side. Anyone who sees us will merely think we are helping an inebriated friend home. Once we get back, I have a place for her.”

“I don’t want to know.”

“Take the other side. Now, Aloysius!”

“You want me to help you carry a dead body?”

“Stop this childish foolishness at once. This is merely the first of many dead human bodies that will cross your path, many of whom you will create yourself. Take the other side *now*.”

Hesitantly, Aloysius did as he was told. It wasn’t as

bad as he feared. The corpse was warmer than he was, and did not seem heavy at all, though it was bulky. Already, he was beginning to think of Betsy's body as an object, not a person with a mind and a soul to whom he had spoken, had touched—and had watched die. Yva steered them out of the alley. It took them a few steps to get in synch, but they managed.

“If you had taken a smaller one, this would have been easier,” Yva grumbled. “I certainly can't bring another one back with us and carry this garbage at the same time.”

“You're the one who killed her,” Aloysius pointed out.

“You're the one who will suffer the pain of the hunger tonight,” Yva snapped back. “Hush. Keep walking. Turn right at the corner.”

“Can't we get a cab?”

“Don't be stupid, Aloysius.”

Despite the bickering, they quickly found themselves at the base of the steps which led from the street up to Casa Loma. There was no one about at that hour of the night. Aloysius still had no watch, but he guessed it was easily after midnight by then.

“I should at least call my wife, so she won't worry,” he said.

“Later,” Yva said peevishly. “Take this burden up the stairs. You can manage it on your own. I'll meet you at the top. Don't hesitate, the police do drive by here on occasion.”

And then she vanished. But in the next moment Aloysius saw her standing at the top of the stairs. Sighing, he

hefted the body and trekked up the stairs to join her. He wondered how long it would take for him to learn to move at that speed. He had been moving pretty fast earlier, when he'd first left Casa Loma, but nothing like he'd just witnessed from Yva.

"How old are you?" he asked, when he reached the top with his awkward burden. He was pleased to note that he wasn't winded. Then again, he wasn't breathing either.

She smiled, displaying a trace of good humor, if she had any at all. "It's not polite to ask a lady her age."

"Are you a lady?" he asked, destroying that humor.

"Don't be a bastard," she hissed. "I will tell you all you need to know. Don't plague me with foolish questions."

Aloysius looked away. "All right. Now what the hell do you want me to do with this thing?"

"Bring it inside," she said. She stared at him for a few moments, then seemed to soften. "We'll talk then. All right?"

"Fine."

She led him towards the stables, in the same door he'd exited earlier. "This way."

"No alarms on this place? I'm surprised."

"The house is alarmed. I have disabled the others, so I might come and go as I please," she said. "Actually, we can go into the house later tonight, if you like. There are ways."

Aloysius detected the faintest hint of pride in her voice. Yes, she was pleased with herself, delighted that she had been able to accomplish this, he noted. How he knew this,

he wasn't sure, but he did. He *was* connected to her, like it or not, which brought to mind a question.

"Uh, how exactly did you do this to me?"

"Do what, my beauty? This way, though the sliding panel. Don't worry, we're safe here, even during the burning hours."

She stopped walking abruptly and Aloysius bumped into her. He dropped the body and she looked down at it, then up at him, not amused.

"You do realize that we may not go out while the sun is high. Those are the burning hours. I thought you must surely have known the ways of our kind, but so far you seem lacking in the graces and shadows that raise us above mere humankind."

Aloysius didn't know whether to laugh or to be insulted. "I never claimed to be a vampire. You got your lines crossed, and now we're stuck with each other, at least for the time being. But I want to know. How did you make me a vampire, Yva? And why?"

She smiled, but said nothing. Yet his question was answered in the faintest sheen of desire he saw glimmering distantly inside her large blue eyes. *She wanted him!*

"Bring the corpse this way," she commanded, turning away from him and continuing down the hall.

Aloysius grabbed the body and obediently followed, aware that even though it was pitch black down there, he could see as well as if it had been high noon in the garden.

"You did this to me out of your own selfish lust, didn't you?" he asked in an accusing tone. "I turned you down, so

you... you..."

She had stopped, and he stopped too, to look at what she was pointing at. Built into the wall was what appeared to be some sort of furnace, blazing, hissing and crackling with live flames. It was a veritable oven, large enough for a child or a small adult to step through without bending, should one want to be devoured by the flames of hell itself. Aloysius himself was too tall to fit through easily, but Yva would have no problem ducking inside were she inclined to roast herself.

Aloysius stared into the raging inferno, transfixed. He could feel the searing breath of its heat, but it did not warm him. He was still cold down into his bones, and oh, how he wanted that heat. He took a step towards the opening, and Yva put her hand out across his chest.

"Fire can kill us. Little else can. Stay back," she said.

"Right. Stay back," he repeated, but he still stared with longing into the heart of the blaze.

"The body, Aloysius. Throw it in there," Yva directed.

Shaking his head as if to clear it, Aloysius did exactly as he was told. At once they were overwhelmed with the stench of burning flesh, the agonizing pop and crackle seeming louder than gunshots. Yva slammed the door to the furnace closed and securely bolted it. She turned back to Aloysius, smiling.

"Simple, is it not?"

"Someone will report her missing," he pointed out.

"Undoubtedly. But she will never be found," Yva said confidently.

“What if we *do* get caught?” Aloysius persisted.

“I have never been caught.”

“Never?”

“No. Not in nearly four hundred years,” she said.

“Four hundred? My God, that means—”

Yva held up a hand almost wearily, cutting him off. “Please, stop calling upon your God. Have you not learned this night that there is no God? That there is nothing for us beyond the here and now?”

“It’s just an expression,” he replied.

Aloysius hadn’t thought about what he might be invoking, or what his careless phrases might mean to her. He hadn’t thought about his faith, or more accurately, his lack of faith in a long time.

*When things are going well, who needs faith,* he thought. Then again, he might very well need it now.

They were both silent. She stared at him, simply stared at him. What was he supposed to do?

“So, uh, this is where you live?” he asked awkwardly.

She laughed and took his hand, then pulled him off down the hallway, though various twists and turns. There must have been miles of tunnels and secret passageways beneath this place, Aloysius thought. He knew the owner, Sir Pellatt had been known to be quite eccentric, maybe even a little nuts, but he was obviously far crazier than anyone thought.

“Who knows about these tunnels?” Aloysius shouted as he struggled to follow the flash that was Yva.

More laughter. “No one who lives anymore,” she called

back. “Come on, my beauty. Faster. Faster.”

And then they were in a large, hollow chamber. It was devoid of any furniture, but the floor was covered in layer upon layer of fine carpets—ancient, fraying, Oriental carpets, mounds of them, enough to make his jaw drop. He had to step up on a pile of them to enter the room. He saw that the rugs were of various ages, and most were clean, though he noted small dark stains spattered here or there, bloodstains no doubt. The rugs lay soft and cushioned beneath his feet, as each step he took sank him a little. He was afraid he was going to lose his balance, and she would laugh at him again.

Yva stood in the center of the room, pleased with his reaction, judging by her look. “So, do you like my inner sanctum? My sleeping place, my feeding place, my loving place...?”

He had no doubt what she had in mind then. She began to slip out of her clothing, beckoning him nearer. Her body was thin and pale, slender, not like Lisa, not like the very busty Miss Lydia Frost. Yva had an ethereal glow to her flesh that was undeniably supernatural and supremely erotic.

“You like it,” she repeated, both as a question and a statement.

“Yes,” Aloysius admitted after a moment, unable to take his eyes off of her. He didn't know who she was, or where she had come from, or how she had become this, but in this moment, it didn't really matter. “I like it.”



## August, 1609

Lucy had been very much looking forward to the arrival of her Italian cousin. She'd never met Yva before, but they were so close in age, just two years apart, Lucy just knew they would be the best of friends. Lucy needed a friend. Certainly, she had her family, and acquaintances aplenty, and squadrons of servants, but there was no one she felt truly close to, no one at all—especially not now that her brother Michael had gone.

Yva Biondello had been the talk of the family all of her life. Whenever a letter arrived from her mother's sister, Aunt Sofia, in Italy, Lucy would hide behind the curtains in the drawing room, where Lord and Lady Noelle, the Duke and Duchess of Camford, invariably shared their mail every day at tea-time, eager to hear her cousin's latest exploits. Filled with awe and jealousy, Lucy had learned to love this wayward soul. Sometimes she thought of Yva as her alter ego, doing all the things that Lucy would never have dared.

At ten Yva had been a terror, known for shredding her gowns and abusing her servants, for preferring to run about in boys' clothing and for driving her mother nearly to madness. At fourteen she'd run away with gypsies. Her four older brothers had to be sent to drag her back, kicking and screaming all the while. And now, most recently, at nineteen, Yva had been thrown out of the convent upon which her father, with a sizable donation to the church, had at-

tempted to foist her off.

“Oh dear, oh dear me,” Lucy's mother had whimpered as her husband read her the letter. “Do you really think, John, that we should invite her to stay?”

“I guarantee you I can turn this girl around, Meredith,” Lucy's father' voice was imbued with confidence. “She needs only a firm hand to guide her. Marcello is far too easy on her. I would never stand for such nonsense in my house.”

Although she couldn't see them from behind the curtain, Lucy could picture her parents as they talked. Her frail, wispy china doll of a mother would be huddled on the chaise lounge, seeming to drown in her voluminous skirts and petticoats, invariably a pristine pale pink or apricot in color. She rarely wore any other shade, unless she was in mourning. Mother would motion for the silent servants to pour the tea and The Duke would pace the room as he read the day's mail aloud.

Lucy knew her mother would follow his every move with wide, pale eyes, violet in color, eyes that Lucy had inherited in a darker shade, and those eyes would be filled with admiration for her husband. John Noelle was dark and broad-shouldered, mustached and handsome. He was Lord and Master to his wife.

“We are lucky to have been blessed with such a lamb as our Lucy,” Lady Noelle agreed.

Safe in her hiding place, a blush stained the “lamb's” cheeks. If they knew she was here now, how disappointed they would be. Father would like as have her whipped.

Lucy had never been whipped before. Assuredly, she was terrified of the notion, but when it came to hearing about Yva, Lucy's curiosity overcame her fear.

“We are indeed lucky,” the Duke intoned. “Lucy will be a proper influence on Miss Biondello. And if the little chit doesn't learn from her, she'll learn what discipline is from *me*.”

Lucy knew what Father meant by discipline. She had seen her brother, Michael, beaten and whipped within an inch of his life enough times. It was what had finally driven him out of the house, to make his own way into the world a little over a year ago at barely seventeen. Lucy hadn't seen him since. She missed him, desperately sometimes, for Michael had been the only one she could talk to.

And she had learned from their anger, learned that the only way to protect herself in this house was to be docile and meek, to speak only when spoken to, to do as she was told, to be virtuous in word and deed.

But in *thought*... Lucy was wicked.

She couldn't wait to meet Yva.

## December, 1609

The carriage ride was rough and bumpy, and the problem was amplified by a rickety coach held together with spit and a prayer, uncomfortable, with bench-like seats and a slow, sway-backed horse that should have been put out to pasture a good two years ago. Not even a cushion had

Marcello Biondello spared his youngest daughter! They had been traveling for days, and Yva was bored nearly out of her mind. The elder, or perhaps elderly was a better word, Yva mused, as two of her four servants were constantly ill from the constant rocking and swaying. Their sickness and the stench of their unwashed bodies made the close air of the carriage unbearable, and yet they refused to open the windows, for fear the night air would give them the vapors. Yva was tempted to break it, so they were forced to allow it to remain open, but with her luck it would only start to rain.

Her other two servants consisted of a page and a lady's maid. The maid was a severe, horse-faced woman perhaps in her late thirties or early forties. Constanze spoke only German, a language of which Yva knew only a bare smattering—not nearly enough to hold a conversation. The page was an underfed lad of thirteen, scrawny enough to pass for ten.

Rodolfo was a gorgeous little creature, Yva decided, staring at him now. She'd overlooked him at home because of his size, but as he'd been thrust upon her for the journey, as he was the only male along with them, with the exception of the disease-ridden coachman, she was forced to re-evaluate him. Rodolfo did as he was told for the most part, fulfilling his duties of feeding the horse, carrying her luggage, and other menial tasks beneath the dignity of the elderly Rosa and Maria. Like the others, he was also terrified of her. Yva was trying her hardest to thaw him out, but she was not doing well.

She needed a man. It had been nearly two months since her last tryst with Father Fabritzio, the one with whom she had been caught, and the reason she had been ousted from the convent. If only his heart hadn't given out in the middle of their passion. Of course, getting returned home was the main reason she had taken up with the good Father—who was older than her own father—who came to the convent once each week to assist the nuns in their efforts. He had been more than happy to *assist* Yva as well. She didn't mourn his passing, only the indelicate manner in which it had occurred.

Now, jouncing and bouncing in the rickety coach, she smiled as she thought of him. Yva loved men... and boys... of all ages. Sometimes she loved girls, too, if they were pretty enough. She was wild and wanton, and did not care who knew it. She had figured out early in life that she had only one person to look out for in this world, and that she wanted to enjoy her stay in it. As a child, her wildness had been indulged and allowed to grow. Her parents had spoiled and cosseted her, and she knew it. They were sorry now. She was glad of it. She was entirely beyond their control.

Yet somehow they had bound her into going on this long, tedious journey to England to stay with relatives she had never met and be companion to a cousin who was sure to be her opposite in mind and manner. Yva smiled. The Lady Lucy was going to learn a few things that might shock her tender, sensible mind.

Yva had agreed to the trip, knowing anything would be

preferable to staying at home, where she would be followed, shadowed and spied upon. Surely her parents had not revealed all of her wicked ways to her aunt and uncle, or they would not have invited her to stay. She might lull them into complacency, with manners she knew well, yet seldom practiced, then be free to do as she pleased behind their backs.

Trying not to breathe the foul air of the carriage, she dreamed of her arrival in England.



They were as different as day and night, Yva Biondello and his Lucy, thought John Noelle. The family resemblance—flowing raven tresses and creamy skin—was there, but aside from that they were lamb and lioness. Lucy curved and blossomed, plump-cheeked and full of sunlight. Yva was slim as a boy and moved like a serpent, ready to coil and hiss and strike.

He watched his niece descend from her carriage, a lopsided contraption that looked as if it were on the verge of losing a wheel. Noelle smirked. Apparently his brother-in-law thought very little of his precious daughter if he sent her abroad in such a thing. Very little. Her safety and well being were obviously of no concern. Why, just imagine, he thought to himself, if the coach had broken down along the highway—they could have been robbed, murdered... raped.

The girl was a beauty, despite the insolence he knew to be brimming within her. He imagined a highwayman

plucking her from the coach, forcing her down onto the ground and tearing away her skirts. She was almost so slender as to be delicate, but had narrowly missed the mark. No, she was sturdy, made to be roughed up and battled. Her limbs would be long and smooth and coltish, and she would buck and claw beneath him... the highwayman rapist... as he bent her to his will.

Yva saw Noelle watching her. He swallowed hard as Marcello's chit raked her eyes up and down him, her little pink tongue darting over her lips.

His wife and daughter didn't notice. They were too busy overwhelming the girl with hugs and welcomes, while he stood back, his arms folded, knowing he cut a fine, imposing figure. He was but thirty-eight years, none too old. His hair was still the same black, barely riffled with strands of silver. His body was firm and lean, his face sharp and handsome. John stroked his beard as the little witch taunted him with her cold blue eyes. Discipline. She would need discipline. Yes, he would see to that.

Her servants were bustling about, three old women and a ragamuffin of a boy, unloading her trunks from the coach. There were so many, he noted, as if she had brought all she owned in the world with her, as if she were not expected to return. A smile twisted his lips.

The commotion caused Meredith to grow faint, as she often did, and begging her niece to excuse her allowed her own maid, who accompanied her everywhere these days, it seemed, to help her inside.

“Lucy, dear, do bring Yva up to me for tea in an hour or

so,” Meredith whispered as she took her leave.

John shook his head. His wife had changed in the years they had been married. Once she had been strong, full of life. Now she played the invalid more often than not, perhaps in response to his own infidelities. She pretended not to know about the late hours he sometimes kept or the private clubs he often visited, clubs that catered discreetly to the needs of lords such as himself. But she knew. He knew she knew.

Lucy was chattering away a mile a minute about what good friends the two would be, directing the servants, and exclaiming over the coach all at once. A fierce pride flooded John Noelle as he watched her, and watched Yva as she seemed to soften under his daughter's spell. He saw all that was good in him in Lucy, and more. Perhaps that was why there was so little of it left in himself. She was strong and she was beautiful, he thought. She would marry well, and soon. But before she did, Noelle wanted to give her a chance to live. She deserved that much. She had always been sheltered. He hated to see her flame extinguished before it had even begun to glow.

Travel, perhaps. A tour of the continent, suitably chaperoned of course. He would look into it when he found the time. As he watched the two of them, Lucy looked up and met his gaze.

“But you haven't met Father, cousin Yva,” she cried, taking the girl's hands and drawing her towards him.

“Niece,” he said, nodding.

Yva inclined her head as if to appear meek, but she

peeked up at him through the fall of her long black hair with snapping fire in her sky-colored eyes.

“Uncle.”

“You are welcome in my home,” he began but she interrupted.

“Thank you, my gracious lord,” she said in a buttery tone.

He scowled. “Under my roof, you follow my rules. If you do not, I will not be kind. I am no cowering dog such as your father. Do you understand me?”

“Completely, uncle,” she replied, and there was something maddening in her tone, but nothing he could pin down, could specifically point out. “I submit to you in *every* way,” she said, and there was no mistaking her meaning.

A tremor ran through him. He turned on his heel before she could see how she had affected him.

“Very well,” he said as he marched back into the house. He paused in the doorway and looked back over his shoulder before entering, letting his eyes travel over her once again in appraisal. “See that you do.”



Yva liked Lucy. She had not expected to, though she had entertained every notion of using her cousin to entertain herself. She had expected Lucy to be something of a milk-sop, but instead she found that the girl was a kindred spirit who lacked in just one thing—nerve. Lucy was clearly terri-

fied of her father, but Yva was not. Uncle John was looking for an excuse to make Yva his plaything. If he found one, she might bend to his will as long as it suited her. She had seen his collection of leather whips. Unlike Lucy, Yva was not afraid of being whipped.

Seducing Uncle John might have been amusing, but Yva was wholly distracted by Lucy. The girl could certainly chatter, and she adopted Yva as a confidant. The first time Yva kissed her, she had done so to shock her cousin into silence. It had worked, for a few minutes anyway. The iridescent violet eyes had widened in her surprise. Lucy had lifted a hand to slap her away, but Yva caught her wrist as she captured her tongue.

Lucy had melted. She leaned up against Yva, her large, soft breasts pressing against her slender cousin, the thin muslin of their gowns a thin barrier that did not keep out the heat of two bodies longing for the same thing, something neither had been aware that the other might provide until this impulsive moment. Their arms slipped around each other and Yva had felt breathless, light headed. She had never felt this way while kissing anyone at all before, man or woman.

When the kiss broke, Lucy had stared at her for a moment, then jumped up and fled the room. Well, at least Yva had achieved the silence she wanted. Why was she already filled with regret? Yva had been so frustrated that she spent the rest of the day attempting to read a book, or at least she thought she had been until Aunt Meredith pointed out that she was holding it upside down.

That night, Yva had lain alone in her large bed in the gaudy chamber that she had been given, staring at the gilded furniture which reflected the moonlight from her window and made it nearly as bright as day. She had tossed and turned. She had silently cursed her parents, her uncle, and Father Fabrizio for getting her into this mess. She cursed herself for desiring Lucy.

Unrequited desire was not her way, she thought. But what to do? No one had ever refused her or run away from her before. How could she convince Lucy that they might have an awfully good time together, if Lucy just gave in a little bit?

To Yva's surprise, in the midnight hour the door to her room creaked open. Her heart began to pound in her chest. Was it Uncle John? She was not in the mood to stomach him right now, if he had chosen this night of nights to come after her. Instead, slipping softly towards the bed as though she expected its occupant to be sleeping, she saw Lucy.

Lucy, like a plump goddess in the moonlight, all round cheeks and breasts and hips, long black hair hanging unbound to her narrow waist, violet eyes filled with a shadowy determination that was something Yva had seen before in her own reflection. Lucy, licking her lips as she stalked her prize like a cat after a bowl of cream. Herself, eager to be that cream. She sat up and pulled back the sheet, inviting Lucy into the bed.

“They always said you were a very *bad* girl,” Lucy whispered, taking her soft, warm hands. “I want you to show me how bad you are.”

“They always said you were a very *good* girl,” Yva replied slyly. She leaned forward and kissed Lucy's throat. She felt the other girl's pulse flutter underneath her lips. “I want you to show me how good you can be.”

And it was true. Lucy was good. Lucy was very good. All she had needed was Yva to show her the way.