

# Dancing In The Dark

## Maggie's World

**Maggie hadn't wanted to go out, but Stephan had talked her into it. Sitting at their booth in the corner, watching the dance floor, Maggie was glad she'd come. The night at Club 9 had been fun so far. She'd danced with Stephan until her feet were tired, as well as a couple of other admirers, and she'd watched them burn up the rest of the night from her current vantage point. While perhaps not idyllic, hanging out in the club was better than sitting on her butt at home, which she would have been doing otherwise.**

**Club 9 was only moderately full. There were a handful of people from the Drake Family in attendance. Local college kids usually filled out the rest of capacity. There must have been a lot of term papers due or something to keep some of them away. The club seemed much less trendy to Maggie when she could actually look across the room and see the table area, the dance floor, and the bar distinctly. The green color scheme on the walls and floors made the place look like it belonged in the 1970s.**

**Maggie watched Stephan dance with a girl he'd met earlier in the evening who professed to be a tourist from New York. Her accent seemed to bear that ancestry out, as well as the rude looks that she'd given Maggie. Not many visitors to the city seemed to find out about the club and visit. This woman had been lucky, though. Stephan appeared to be feeling rather lucky himself dancing with her. She had long dark hair, browned skin, and luscious red lips. Her heritage was a mystery to Maggie, but she looked exotic. It was no surprise that Stephan was attracted to her. The two of them moved together through a medium speed song, their bodies meshing along their lengths, their lips within inches of each other. If Maggie and Stephan were a couple in the normal sense, Maggie would have been insane with jealousy. As it was, she merely smirked at her companion.**

**Stephan finished dancing with the exotic woman after the next song, and the two parted ways. He returned to the table slightly out of breath. It was hard to tell if that condition was due to the physical exercise, or the lust in his dark eyes.**

**"Why'd you quit?" Maggie asked.**

**Stephan collapsed into the booth opposite her and leaned back into the spongy green cushion. "She was too much woman for me," he said, a smile on his lips.**

**"Yeah, right. But you got her number?"**

**The dark-haired man shook his head. "Nah. She said her husband was back at the hotel. I don't get involved in that kind of thing."**

**"Since when?" Maggie asked. She recalled several instances where Stephan had got into more than minor trouble with a married woman.**

**"Since I last got shot," he said, laughing.**

**"That's what I thought," Maggie responded. She hoped Stephan actually kept his word and avoided that situation in the future, but she had her doubts.**

**Stephan pointed to the dance floor. "Look what the cat dragged in."**

**Maggie followed his direction to see Marco Breaux dancing with a young blonde. She looked barely legal, if that, and far out of Marco's league. He had his hands low on her back as they swayed to a slow song.**

**"Does he come here often?" Maggie asked.**

**Stephan shook his head. "Every once in a while, but not too much. I thought he was in the dog house with the old man."**

**Maggie nodded. "He is. I think he's actually beating you out for the troublemaker of the year award."**

**"I need to buy him a drink, then," Stephan said, smiling.**

**Marco saw them and headed over to the booth. He left his dance partner on the floor, but brought a wide smile. "Hey, ya'll. What's cookin'?"**

**Stephan scooted over and patted the seat beside him. "Not much. Have a seat."**

**"Nah, I'm about to split. This place is kind of dead tonight," Marco said.**

**"Yeah, you're right." Stephan looked to Maggie. "I think I'm ready to head home myself. You ready?"**

**Looking out at the dance floor, Maggie had to agree that there was little excitement at Club 9. Half the fun of coming to the place was dancing with different people. She knew most everyone here tonight, and the best one to dance with was Stephan. She'd had enough of that for the night.**

**"Sure," she said.**

**They walked out of the club into a cool night breeze. Foot traffic was typical for a weeknight, with a few travelers mixing with the locals. Stephan's car was parked a few blocks away. The group of three walked in silence toward it.**

**Maggie didn't know how Marco had come from the manor, and she didn't really care to ask him. It didn't hurt to give him a ride if he needed one. Maggie didn't dislike Marco. She was just ambivalent about him. He followed her father like the man was a god, yet he also stepped across lines that even Drake respected.**

**"What do we have here?" Marco whispered.**

**Maggie followed his gaze toward a cross street they were passing. Twenty yards away, two men were huddled near a building making an exchange. A ragged looking man in a black jacket held up a small vial, while a more ordered man in a white T-shirt counted money. Both of them quickly finished their business and stuffed the evidence in their pants pockets.**

**"That's not one of ours," Marco said. He turned down the street and began walking toward the men.**

**Maggie sighed in frustration as she watched him. The T-shirt dealer walked toward Marco without any idea of what was about to happen to him. Maggie followed behind Marco. "Marco, wait."**

**The dark-haired man ignored her. He strode up to the dealer, stepping in front of the man to block his path. "What do you think you're doing?"**

**The man tried to smile, but obviously knew he was in trouble. "Nothin', man. I'm goin' home."**

**The dealer tried to move around him, but Marco stepped back in front of the man. "You're sellin' in the wrong place," Marco said. He put a hand on the other man's shoulder. "The Drake Family can't allow that to happen."**

**“My bad, man. Don’t worry about it and I’ll take my act across town,” the T-shirted dealer said. He looked to be about twenty-five, and not in any way looking for a fight.**

**Marco said nothing else. He just stood there for a moment shaking his head. The fear in the dealer’s eyes intensified the longer they stood there. Marco finally lowered his hand from the man’s shoulder. When he began to move away, though, Marco lashed out with a vicious right hook that impacted against the dealer’s temple. He fell to the ground in a heap, rolling onto his back.**

**“Marco!” Maggie called, but there was no stopping the man.**

**Falling onto his prey like a lion on an antelope, Marco pounced upon the man with fists flying. The dealer put up his hands in defense, but he could not stop the powerful punches reigning down upon him. Within a few moments, the man was unconscious, each blow rocking his body as if it were a wet leaf in the wind.**

**Maggie took Marco by the shoulder and tried to pull him away. He shrugged off her attempt with barely a disruption in his attack.**

**“Marco, you’d better stop right now, or you’re going to regret it,” Maggie said,**

**Either he didn’t hear her, or Marco chose to ignore the command. He put a fist in the man’s midsection again. Maggie looked back at Stephan, who stood behind her with a quizzical look on his face. Her friend shrugged as if to say, “What are you gonna do?” That wasn’t good enough for Maggie, though. Her father had given the Family permission to take The Company out if provoked. What Marco was doing—which is exactly what she’d feared would happen—was hunting down prey.**

**“You asked for it,” she said under her breath as she reached out again. This time, she grabbed Marco with both hands and pulled him to the side. He flew off the drug dealer—likely dead now—and hit the wall with force. Marco’s face contorted from rage, to pain, and back again to rage as he staggered back toward her.**

**“What the hell?” he asked.**

**Maggie gave him no response, and no time to react. She lashed out with her right fist, connecting solidly with Marco’s jaw. He fell back into the wall again, his head bouncing off bricks weathered by the mist off the Mississippi. Maggie rushed forward, raising a knee into**

**Marco's midsection, knocking the breath from his lungs. She pinned him against the wall, her hands around his throat, before he could make another sound. He flailed at her hands, trying to pry them free.**

**"When my father finally decides that he's had enough of you, I'm not even going to pretend that I don't enjoy killing you," she said. When Marco's frantic movements slowed, Maggie released him. He fell to the ground beside his victim. "Find your own way home, asshole."**

**Turning away from Marco, Maggie joined Stephan and continued on to his car and home.**



**Maggie stepped into her father's study, dreading the conversation that she needed to have with the man. Her eyes did not need to adjust coming from the darkened hall into the equally lightless office space. Her father sat in the corner at his desk. A small lamp and a computer monitor provided the only illumination, casting his shadow onto the bookcases behind him. The temperature in the room seemed to be colder than the rest of the home, and Maggie felt goosebumps mass on her skin.**

**"To what do I owe this pleasure?" Drake asked, looking up from his computer screen.**

**"Bad news, of course," Maggie responded. She crossed the room to stand on the far side of his desk.**

**Given his age and background, it was strange that Drake had such an affinity for computers. She'd been in a generation that grew up with personal computers to some degree, and she considered herself only mildly proficient. Her father, on the other hand, had been past old when the first super computer, too big to be housed in his study, had been invented. Yet Drake considered knowledge to be power, and he'd been smart enough to see that computers were revolutionizing the way the world worked. As a result, he'd forced himself to learn their ins and outs. In another world, he could have been a professional programmer and probably would have enjoyed it.**

**Drake shook his head, his light, graying hair waiving. "You have a lot of bad news lately. When will you bring good news?"**

**"I'm not that kind of girl," Maggie said.**

**Chuckling, Drake twirled his finger at her. "Out with it, then."**

**Maggie cleared her throat and tried to think back to the speech she'd prepared for this. "That detective came back into the shop. He hasn't really found anything solid. At least not that he told me about. But he did have something kind of scary," she said.**

**"I think you worry too much," Drake said.**

**"He had a picture of Marco."**

**Drake gasped in mild surprise. "Or not."**

**"I don't know what the officer knows, but he is delving deeper all the time," Maggie said.**

**Drake leaned forward on his elbows, his hands crossed beneath his chin. Maggie wished that she knew what he was thinking. "That man is stirring up trouble."**

**"What should we do?"**

**"About the officer? Nothing right now. We could eliminate him, but that could worsen the situation. It might be best to eliminate the source of his inquiry, however," Drake said.**

**Maggie shook her head. "Marco?"**

**"Yes. Perhaps it is time for our difficult friend Marco to get another new identity."**

**Pleased that her father seemed to be taking a conservative approach to this entire issue, Maggie sat down in one of the chairs on the far side of his desk. "They'll be trying to link him through DNA most likely. Should we send Marco away?"**

**Drake shook his head in the negative. "No, we need to keep an eye on him. We can just seclude him at the estate."**

**"You really think Marco would just stay on the estate and never leave? I find that unlikely," Maggie said.**

**"You could be right. If he refuses, he might need to be eliminated."**

**That reminded Maggie that there was another related subject that she needed to discuss with her father. "Marco attacked one of Jeremiah's dealers unprovoked last night and probably killed him," she said.**

**Drake's dark eyes narrowed and cooled. "Or he might need to be taken care of right now."**

**"I told you that you were opening a can of worms with Jeremiah. So many of our people have a destructive side that if you give them an inch, their going to eat up a mile," Maggie said. She knew she risked her father's ire by speaking to him so bluntly, but it needed to be said.**

**Drake pinned her with his glare for a long moment. "Find Marco and bring him to me. We need to have a little talk."**

**"I'll go look for him right now." Maggie swallowed and prepared herself to give the news that she'd most been dreading to share. "Detective Hackman wants to speak with you."**

**Maggie watched as Drake's jaw clinched and he sighed. Her father didn't allow himself to get frustrated often, but she'd managed to bring him to the brink. Hopefully he would not fall over into that chasm, as witnessing her father in a fit of anger was no pleasant event.**

**"Make arrangements for me to meet him at police headquarters. We need to show them that we fear nothing."**