

Family Affairs

Maggie's World

The Drake Family. People called them that, even though the only Drakes were Maggie and Warin. The rest of the members of their family were people Drake had taken under his wing over the years, usually because they had some quality he valued. Most of the people in New Orleans that new about the family considered it a cult. In a lot of ways, they were right. And if they were a cult, Drake was their messiah.

At the moment, Maggie watched as the flock—about fifty current members —moved into the dining hall to listen to a lecture by Warin Drake. He summoned everyone into such meetings at least once a week. Maggie thought he just wanted to keep tabs on everyone, and to put a thumb on them. The members of the family tended to be on the wild side and justifiably needed to be kept in check.

Looking at her “brothers” and “sisters”, Maggie thought it was a good thing that New Orleans was into goth and the macabre. Most wore black clothes—trench coats for the men and much, much more revealing ensembles for the women—and had dyed black hair. There were also a few blondes in the bunch, and even a few family members that looked relatively normal. Maggie considered herself in league with that group with her plain dress and no frills style.

The space where they waited was anything but unadorned. Ornate torches burned with real flames along the walls. If not for the metal shields on their backs, the house would have long ago burned to the ground. Orange light flickered across the room, reflecting off of silk decorative sashes that hung in between the lights. At the head of the room, behind where Drake would stand, a mural covered the wall. It featured a night sky with a bright silver moon and a scattering of stars with dark birds migrating across.

The family members stood anxiously as they waited for the meeting to start. Some talked to their friends as if they were in a high school lunch line. Others congregated with their companions in quiet conversation. Like Maggie, the rest were islands unto themselves, shunning the remainder of the group.

By the time Drake made his grand entrance, the dining hall was filled to standing room only. Dressed in a black suit, the patriarch walked through the middle of his adoring audience, splitting them like the

Red Sea. Silence blanketed the crowd as he made his way up to the small stage he had built for this purpose at the far end of the room. All eyes were on him in reverence, as if they were too in love to turn away, or too afraid. Even the immature high school crowd quickly quieted in his presence.

Despite the quiet, Drake held up his hands as if he needed to shush his disciples. His black silk suit and matching tie gave him the look of a funeral director, an image personified by his pale white skin caused by lack of exposure to sunlight. Viewing him like this directly contrasted with the picture Maggie normally had of him as a ruggedly handsome businessman. He looked more like a snake oil salesman ready to take money from the next sucker in his path. On this and so many levels, she found her father to be a man of conflict.

“Welcome, children,” Drake said in his deepest baritone.

“Welcome, Father,” the crowd returned in unison.

Drake gave a small smile. “We have much to be joyous about today. Our family is growing, as is our business and wealth.”

Smiles and nods spread around the room. Most of the Family members had no idea that the Drake Family, Warin Drake particularly, had millions of dollars socked away in offshore accounts for rainy days and an equal amount invested. Drake normally told them that the Family was prospering, but he was also not above announcing that the financial picture had taken a downturn if it suited his purposes.

“Before I get to the good news, however, we need to address an issue that I sense is growing amongst you.” Drake passed his dark eyes over every member of the crowd. “I have been told that quite a few of you have experimented with the products we’re selling. This is unacceptable.” He paused for a moment to let his proclamation sink in. “While we use the sale of drugs to the populace as a means to fund our way of life, they can never become a part of our way of life.”

Maggie chortled to herself. Over the years, she’d always known of Family members who became hooked on the narcotics they sold to outsiders. It was nothing new. Members of his audience looked around to one another as if they’d never heard of such a thing before, and as if Drake’s suggestion that usage was a new development became fact the moment the phrase slipped from his lips.

“You all know that use of the drugs we sell can have unintended physical consequences for us. If I discover that anyone in the Family is using drugs, they will be dealt with harshly.” Drake clasped his hands

together and stared over the crowd for several moments. “Next, we need to discuss the introduction of new members into our fold. As some of you might know, an unapproved invitation was recently extended. I dealt with that potential new member as I will anyone who is brought into the Family without my prior approval. This particular gentleman will not be seen again. Please refrain in the future from making such problems for us. There are reasons for the rules and you all need to respect them.”

Most of the crowd nodded and spoke their recalcitrant acceptance of Drake’s order. Maggie wished they’d heeded that particular rule before she’d had to clean up her father’s office after he “dealt” with the poor man who’d been promised membership into the Family. The blood had been everywhere.

“Now, on to the good news. We’ve acquired a new supplier who I anticipate will be much more reliable than our previous one. We’ll be receiving our first shipment shortly. I expect everyone will benefit from this new relationship. Please try to be mindful of our new venture when interacting with them.”

Warin Drake had a sly way of saying that if anyone messed up, he’d have their heads. His flock hardly noticed. His power and confidence seemed to mesmerize them. Having been with him from such a young age, Maggie did not have that problem. She knew his flaws, some of which made her ill, and she knew that he did not have many positive attributes of which to boast.

The meeting was coming to an end, and that made her skin crawl even more because Maggie knew what would happen next. Drake’s eyes began casting about over the crowd. Everyone remained silent in anticipation of his next choice.

“Ella, I’d like to see you after we recess,” he said, pointing to a buxom young woman dressed in black with matching dark makeup.

Ella smiled brightly, an uncomfortable contrast with her gloomy dress. The woman knew that she had been chosen to be their hero’s plaything for the night, to be used and abused in mostly unspeakable ways. Drake had no compunction of taking advantage of his position of power. He’d never tried anything untoward with Maggie, so he at least had that much going for him. Still, he made Maggie sick at times, and now was one of those.



Out of breath, Maggie skidded to a stop in her father's office. Drake sat behind his chair, phone in hand, his face red and angry. When he'd called Maggie, she'd known by the tone of his voice that he was extremely upset. He didn't lose his cool very often, so it had frightened her. Every member of the Drake Family knew that they were all one slip away from messing up and compromising their entire way of life.

"She'll be there in ten minutes," Drake said, then slammed down the phone.

Maggie didn't like the look he was giving her. There was nothing worse than facing her father when he thought she'd done something wrong.

"You need to head down to the police station and bail out your friend Blackwolf," he said, his voice strained.

Maggie cringed. She wasn't sure she'd call Stephan Blackwolf her friend, at least at the moment, but they were inextricably linked. "What did he do?"

"The idiot was arrested for possession of heroin again. If there was any chance that he'd turn informant on us, I would have killed him long ago."

Shaking her head, Maggie had no doubt that her father was telling the truth. Drake might decide to kill Stephan at some point anyway just because of all the annoyance he caused. If he wasn't so good looking and charming in his arrogant, self-absorbed way, Maggie might have done the deed herself.

"I'll go get him," she said, and turned to leave.

"Tell him that one of these days I'm going to leave him to rot in jail," her father called to her.

Maggie's Toyota zoomed by the few other cars on the deserted highway between the Drake Family compound and the downtown jail. As she left the outskirts where they lived, the houses became older and closer together, until she was in the true center of New Orleans and the structures were packed together like matchbox houses.

Over the years, Maggie had come to know the police station more than she would have liked. Family members often found themselves in trouble. Rather than having Drake show up and make his face overly known to the police, he sent his daughter down to the station to do his

dirty work. It was one of her official jobs in the Family. Since she had no direct dealings in the drug trade, Maggie really didn't mind.

There was little risk of any Family member actually serving hard time. Between the cops who were beholden to Drake, and a couple of judges, freedom could be purchased for almost any crime. The good cops on the force that knew of him despised Drake and his power to make that happen, no doubt, but there was nothing they could do about it. Not to mention that if someone did get in more serious trouble, there were certain non-legal measures that could be taken to get them out of jail and begin their life anew.

The officer who worked the reception desk at the NOPD greeted Maggie with a smile. Unlike many in the organized crime world, they usually found her pleasant enough. Everyone was familiar with the drill, and within thirty minutes Stephan's bond was paid and the police were bringing him out.

Stephan Blackwolf was a good looking man. When he emerged from the secured door to the general lobby, a roguish smile played on his lips. His dark hair was combed down in the back and spiked in the front, and looked as if he had just come from a salon. He wore his traditional black jeans, faded black T-shirt, and black leather jacket. The cloths did little to hide his toned body underneath. Maggie didn't usually think of herself as someone obsessed with sex and the need of it, but seeing Stephan always brought out a little bit of lust in her.

Maggie didn't speak to her friend inside the station; she merely glared at him. When they got in her car, only a foot apart in the front bucket seats, she looked at him and shook her head. "What the hell is wrong with you?" she asked.

The dark-haired man laughed. "Thanks for getting me out, Maggs."

"Thank me now, but you won't be thanking me when Drake tears into you over this. He's about had enough."

Stephan did not appear worried. "The old man loves me," Stephan said.

One of the rake's best qualities was that he had almost as much contempt for her father as Maggie did. "I'm serious. If you get arrested one more time, he's going to recycle you."

Stephan waved her off with a swish of his hand. "Let's go by Club 9 on the way home."

“You’re insane,” she said, but without hesitation, she drove them to his requested destination.

Club 9 was an old warehouse a few blocks away from the French Quarter that had become a very popular hang out for members of the Drake Family. Even on a Thursday night at three in the morning it would be filled with young people dancing and sweating to a pulsating beat. Despite the Drake Family’s reputation for being a cult, the young urban set of New Orleans gravitated to them like the moon to the earth. It was probably the air of mystery surrounding the Family, not to mention all the powerful drugs that could be scored.

Maggie did not particularly like to dance, and she never did drugs. Yet with Stephan’s ungodly influence over her, she found herself out on the dance floor and among the throng of bodies within a few minutes. Even above some of the other members of their clan, people were attracted to Maggie. She always found herself surrounded by those who were most eager to join them. She supposed it was because they assumed she had more power with Drake. Three boys no more than eighteen, blonde and buff, danced around her in an arc. Two young women, one brunette and one with hair as black as night, joined them to make a circle. Maggie closed her eyes and felt the beat, forgetting about it all for a few moments.

One of the boys kept touching her arm, trying to pull her into a one-on-one gyration in which she had no intention of participating. Part of her was flattered, but most of her just wanted to be left alone. She was reluctantly relieved when she felt Stephan’s hands on her hips. She turned into his arms and opened her eyes to see him with his perpetual rogue smile on his lips.

Not thinking of anything other than how nice it felt to be held, the hot beat of the music, and that she was with someone who held her in esteem, Maggie pulled Stephan down into a lingering kiss. It lingered so long that at some point, it became more than a kiss, and she could feel her heat rising and the dance floor completely melting away. It lasted forever.

Maggie came back to herself when one of her blonde admirers bumped into her. She opened her eyes and caught Stephan’s self-satisfied stare. She wanted to slap him, and she wanted to slap herself for wanting him. If she could have something uncomplicated in life, she wished for a man to fall in love with, who would be there for her despite the things about her that made love impossible. Unfortunately, she had no hope that could ever happen. For now, to fulfill her needs emotional and physical, she had Stephan.

“Come on,” she said to him, and began pulling him toward the door.