

Антоному



Вреина
Lyons

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NOTE: This short is a small sequence that connects to the second book in the main portion of Night Warriors, *König Cursebreakers*. Some terms you might want to know before reading are.

Ende Spiel The point in printing when a Warrior must either seal printing or go insane. A Warrior who feels printing may not progress should break printing long before this point.

Printing Like imprinting, a Warrior becomes tied to his mate for life. He cannot choose another if she is lost, cannot be unfaithful while she lives, and cannot ever divorce or otherwise dissolve the union. A printed Warrior is the most stable of men unless his mate or children are endangered or lost. Then, he will suffer the printing madness and may have to be killed by his house. Likewise, a Warrior who breaks printing, even early printing, will suffer for it. A Warrior who breaks printing too close to Ende Spiel will face the madness.

Warriors Also called Cursed Warriors or Sons of the Stone. The Warriors were an ancient race of protectors who spawned the beasts and now are driven to hunt their former brothers to extinction.

In a warrior's life, he or she begins training at fifteen. On the warrior's sixteenth birthday, autonomy is granted. At this point, only a warrior's service in hunting the beasts (what humans erroneously call vampires) and his location are subject to his lord's whims. Once autonomy is reached, a warrior may take release anytime he/she wishes and choose a mate without interference.

Erin grinned as she blew out the candles on her cake, and the assembled warriors cheered. She flicked a glance at Curt then away, unsheathing her sacred weapon and irreverently using it to slice the cake.

Warriors took plates and offered their congratulations on her adulthood, milling away again, but not Curt. He stood back, watching the procession with an unreadable expression etched onto his gorgeous face. Erin filled another plate with cake and set her blade down.

Bryant reached for the plate in her hand, murmuring his thanks, but Erin sidestepped him, skating the plate past his fingertips. Bryant could fend for himself. This slice wasn't intended for him. His younger brother would be the recipient.

Curt didn't move. He stood his ground, letting her come to him: confident, male, perfect. At nineteen, he was more than a head taller than most human men and had been since about her age. His midnight blue eyes met hers, not inviting her to him intimately but more – she hoped.

Erin stopped before him, not quite touching Curt. "Hungry?" she asked, hoping her voice sounded seductive to him.

His eyes flicked to the plate, then to her mouth. "Yes." His voice was dark, full of a dangerous emotion that she prayed was arousal.

He didn't move to take the plate. Erin faltered. How did one seduce a man? Inspiration struck. She

dragged her finger through the icing and brought it to Curt's mouth.

His eyes darkened, and his nostrils flared slightly. His lips parted, and he took the tip of her finger into his mouth. At the first hint of suction, Erin's nipples hardened against her lavender T-shirt, painfully tight in the simple bra beneath. Curt flicked his tongue over her fingertip. He released her slowly, every muscle in his body taut as if he waged some inner battle.

The noise level in the room had dropped considerably. Neither of them turned to look, knowing that the other warriors were watching this interaction carefully, possibly gauging how serious it might be.

Erin took a step closer and tilted her face up to him. "Sweet sixteen," she hinted, praying that Curt was as interested as he seemed.

For a long moment, he didn't move. She cursed her overactive imagination. For all these years, no man had dared touch her on fear of death. Now that one could – with her invitation to do so, the only one she wanted seemed unwilling to touch her.

Curt nodded, and her heart stuttered in response. He raised one hand, his fingers tangling in the short curls clipped close to her scalp as his face closed on hers slowly. The room went silent. Even her heart seemed to still. If it pounded in anticipation, Erin didn't note it. Her eyes fluttered shut, as his mouth touched hers, his tongue parting her lips neatly.

The mating of their mouths wasn't hesitant. Erin

shook herself mentally at that. Why would she expect Curt to be hesitant? He was a warrior, one of the finest alive outside of her own family, and he was experienced with women.

Rational thought deserted her, as their mouths mated fully. The kiss was hot, fevered in its intensity, addictive. Her grip on the plate faltered. The stoneware was lifted up and away as it slipped from her fingertips. The clatter of it being deposited on a countertop registered in her shattered consciousness along with the realization that Curt was the only warrior close enough to have saved the bit of dinnerware.

Curt's free hand wrapped around her hip and pulled Erin closer to his body. She gasped, her eyes opening in surprise as the ridge of his cock pressed into her stomach.

He stared into her eyes. There was no uncertainty in his expression. There was no unasked question. Curt intended to take her to bed and exercise her autonomy fully. He simply waited for her agreement as the rules of sanction decreed.

"Get a room," Bryant grumbled.

Curt didn't bother to issue his typical response to his brother. He didn't smile. He didn't even question that she'd go to bed with him.

"Yours or mine?" he asked.

Erin smiled at that, a giddy laugh bubbling up inside her. "Yes." She didn't care where she exercised her autonomy as long as it was Curt she exercised it with.

He nodded and looked to the warriors around the table as if questioning if any of them had some reason to try and interfere with their rights, perhaps challenging them to try it. Erin followed his line of sight, noting the various reactions of the individuals present.

Bryant was sour, no doubt angry that Erin hadn't sought him out as her first.

Adam shot Curt a look of warning that annoyed her. Vow of protection or no, it wasn't Adam's place to remind his youngest brother that playing with Erin's heart would be dangerous business.

Lewis nodded his approval to his son, though Erin and Curt needed no one's permission to exercise their autonomy--or to mate formally. If he was expressing the stone's permission, it was wasted. As long as Erin took a warrior to mate, the stone would be pleased with her choice.

Kord's reaction was the most striking of anyone in Curt's family. He was amused. Erin swallowed a nervous laugh. No doubt the old lord thanked his family god, *Dobler*, that his youngest grandson hadn't risked death as Kord had at not much older than Curt was now. Sharing the overactive urge to take release and print, Erin knew Kord worried that Curt would follow in his footsteps in other ways.

Her own family's reactions were no surprise to her. The look Hunter shot Curt was a near mirror of Adam's. Maybe that was what older brothers were best at, the look that promised death if you stepped out of line.

Her mother smiled sadly. Jayde's sadness wasn't clear. Maybe she grieved the loss of her youngest child to adulthood. Maybe she wished she'd prepared Erin better for this moment. Erin returned her smile, hoping to put her mother at ease. She couldn't be in safer hands than Curt's.

Talon stood straight and tall, the lord of all lords. Erin found herself holding her breath, though she knew that by the rules of sanction, he couldn't stop them. If anyone could get away with breaking those rules, her father could by nothing more than a decree that would have to go to the council of lords before her autonomy was secure. He met her eyes then Curt's, nodding his agreement, and Erin felt that same giddy joy rising in her.

Curt didn't hesitate. He turned Erin toward the doorway and urged her up the stairs. At the top, she hesitated. Erin hadn't specified which room they'd use, so she wasn't certain which way to turn.

As if reading her confusion perfectly, Curt turned her left, away from her room and toward his. Her heart hammered at that, at the idea of him claiming her maidenhead in his bed, her blood staining his sheets. It seemed more intimate than them going to her bed, more possessive for him to want this.

Erin looked around his room, though she hardly needed to. She'd been here many times, but this time she was free to indulge in the wild fantasies she'd harbored for the last few years, fantasies of Curt's hands and mouth doing glorious things to her without fear of anyone protesting the exploration.

She turned to investigate a sound behind her. The sight of Curt toeing off his boots, already bare-chested, made her head swim. Erin eased her T-shirt from her jeans, numbly noting that having sex with him meant divesting herself of clothing as well.

Curt pulled her hands away, shaking his head. Before she found the words to question his reluctance, he slid his hands beneath her untucked shirt, his palms skating over her ribs and pushing the lavender material toward her rapidly-beating heart. Erin bit her lip at the arousal that simple touch caused, at the knowledge that he wouldn't stop until they were both sated.

He paused at her chest, tracing the sensitive tips of her nipples with the pads of his thumbs. Erin closed her eyes, laying her head back and arching into his hands for more. Curt growled at that, reaching behind her to unhook her bra. He urged her arms up and pushed both articles of clothing up and off smoothly, letting them fall to the floor.

For several agonizing minutes, the only sense Erin had of him was Curt's ragged breathing, the heat bathing her already sensitized lips. She lowered her hands, touching the chest she knew so well, the chest she'd practically salivated to taste on their many swims in the lake. Curt didn't move, allowing her to glide her fingertips over his shoulders and arms, his chest and down the taut expanse of his belly, following the line of crisp curls toward his jeans.

Just when she would have opened her eyes, his body moved. The floor vibrated as he dropped to one

knee, and he took her breast in his mouth, suckling at her. Like their kiss downstairs, there was nothing slow and hesitant about the way he touched her. Curt was ravenous, thorough in his attention.

Her womb exploded in sympathetic sensation. The phantom feeling of fingers exploring her core was nearly too much. Erin stifled a scream of pleasure in response, her hands curling into the short black hair on his head.

Curt's mouth retreated, and he laid a kiss on the tip of her quickly-cooling nipple. "Don't," he ordered. "Don't hold back."

She met his eyes, trying to make sense of that. "You want me to scream?"

His eyes announced his decision clearly. That was precisely what he wanted her to do. She nodded, though she didn't understand why he would want it. Maybe he wanted the other men to hear it. No. That wasn't like Curt. His reasons were more personal. She was sure of that.

Erin watched him unbuckle her weapons belt and drop it to the floor. She looked after it, a nervous knot in her stomach. She hadn't been more than two yards from her blades at night in the last four years. Curt knew that.

"I'm your protection tonight," he informed her. "Trust me."

She nodded again. Curt was the one person she did trust that much.

As if testing her agreement to everything he'd asked so far, his mouth closed on her other breast, his

fingers urging her thighs apart to stroke at the spreading damp spot at the apex.

Erin shouted his name, a plea for more mixed with a plea for the end of this torture driving her to it. He looked up at her, a feral smile on his face. He stroked her again, and she rumbled in protest--or perhaps acceptance. Even Erin couldn't be sure which it was.

Curt returned to his suckling, his fingers seeking out the sensitive spot far to the front of her sex through her jeans. With every sound that escaped her lips, his play became more intense until Erin made the connection she'd been searching for. He wanted her to scream, because hearing it excited him.

At last, he broke off. His hands cupped her hips, steadying her. "Your legs are shaking," he noted.

"You—" Erin faltered, as he nipped at her nipple then laid a long, slow lick over the spot, her trembling more pronounced--even to her.

"I think it's time to lie down." Curt stood, hoisting her over his shoulder as he rose.

Some rational kernel in her mind argued that Erin should protest being carried this way, but the realization that he was carrying her off to ravish her stilled that protest before she could utter it. Erin closed her eyes to the sound of the blankets being thrown back. Curt took her down to the cool sheets in a smooth motion that left him crouched over her, his lips pressed to her stomach.

Erin opened her eyes, meeting the midnight blue depths of his. Curt kissed lower, brushing his lips over her navel as his fingers went to work on her

jeans.

It was sweet torture. He peeled back the faded denim, inch by inch, exploring the skin beneath it as it appeared. Erin groaned at that, lifting her buttocks off the bed to speed the process. Curt eased her jeans and underwear down her hips until her curls peeked from the top, pressing a kiss into them, a rumbling groan vibrating through to her womb.

"Curt, please," she whispered. If he didn't take her soon, she'd incinerate right here on his bed.

"A good start," he replied.

"I don't understand," she admitted. Gods, but she wanted to understand!

He peeled her jeans back further, his breath teasing at her engorged tissues, making them throb in a heartbeat of invitation she knew instinctively he could sense. As if confirming that belief, Curt inhaled deeply. The slow approach to undressing her was abandoned. Her Keds were pitched away, and her jeans and underwear soon followed.

Erin forced her breathing to continue, as Curt pulled his weapons belt off and placed it on the headboard as she usually did. He yanked his button fly open in a single tug and pushed his jeans down to his knees. Erin couldn't have recounted how he got his jeans the rest of the way off if asked. She was rapt on the length of his cock bobbing toward her.

Breathe, she admonished herself sternly. Surely, she was only this lightheaded because she'd stopped breathing when his jeans disappeared down his thighs. "Please," she managed again, her voice

slightly strangled in the effort to force speech.

Curt chuckled. "I'm going to give you so much pleasure, you'll beg for it," he promised.

Erin shook her head in disbelief. She *was* begging for him. Her entire body was a live wire of sensation. What more could he want?

He lowered himself to the bed on his stomach, his cock disappearing beneath him as he spread her legs around his shoulders. Curt moved slowly as if challenging Erin not to stop him, daring her to allow him anything he wanted.

He couldn't— She screamed in pleasure, as his tongue stroked up her seam, a leisurely caress of heat against her. Erin bowed up, trying to close her legs to the overwhelming sensations automatically.

Curt held them spread wide. His tongue darted to her clit. He explored slowly then more vigorously, his hands reducing her attempts to thrash away to a mere wriggling that only helped him pleasure her. His tongue traveled back to her slit again, taunting her with his knowledge of sex, promising to educate her properly.

Erin trembled, the vibrations intensifying the already mind-blowing sensations. She groaned, anticipating his next move but unwilling--perhaps unable--to form the words to stop him. She screamed again, as his tongue slid home between her labia, the slight sensation of stretching rocking her to her core. Erin licked her lips, imagining how full his much larger cock would make her feel. It was a sensation she couldn't wait to experience.

Curt didn't give her much time to consider it. His mouth stole her ability to reason with ease and precision. He was relentless. He nibbled at her, licked at her, thrust his tongue in again and again, until Erin felt like her whole body was primed for an explosion. Curt was holding off her climax, she was certain.

That knowledge drove her near mad. Erin panted out pleas for him to take her, to allow her to come, to change what he was doing to speed her there--anything but a plea for him to stop. When he let her slip over, she howled in ecstasy.

His tongue left her. Curt's body was abruptly over her, his mouth fevered against hers. Erin's mind reeled at the heavy musk in his mouth. Was that what she tasted like? Somehow, that thought seemed to step up her arousal another notch.

His cock brushed the skin of her inner thigh, and Erin tried to shift toward it. Had her mouth not been otherwise occupied, she would have cursed her inability to move beneath his bulk.

Curt eased back from the kiss, a taunting smile curving his lips. "You still want it now that you've come?"

If Erin could have reached his blades, she would have given him a scar for that. "Curt," she warned. "If you tease me for one more—"

"Not on your life." His expression was suddenly serious.

She gasped, as he shifted. Curt eased the head of his cock through her labia, stilling as she whimpered. The feeling was exquisite, but the longing to feel all of

him was almost more than she could stand.

"Too much?" he asked.

Erin shook her head, praying he wouldn't stop. It wasn't too much. It wasn't nearly enough. He pushed deeper, and she closed her eyes, reining in her unruly heart rate.

Curt's hands cupped her face. "Look at me," he grumbled.

She complied. His eyes had turned nearly black in arousal, and his expression was fierce, possessive. Erin gulped down a breath at that. He was possessing her in the most intimate way a man could, and she loved it. He eased back then in again, slightly deeper. It wasn't enough, and that fact was maddening. Erin sobbed, needing more.

"Pain?" he asked.

"No."

"I'm going to —"

"Yes," she interrupted him, pleading silently for him to finish what he'd started.

His next stroke filled her. Erin cried out in a mixture of pleasure and pain. The throbbing inside her became an urgent drumbeat, a call for him to match that beat instead of lying nestled to her cervix.

Curt started to soothe her, offering apologies for the pain. Erin shook her head, shifting herself further onto him as Curt retreated.

He didn't question that. His body pistoned in and out of hers, his pleas and promises mixing with Erin's, whispers that bared more than their bodies to each other. She vaguely noted the things he was

saying: a request for her not to leave his bed, promised pleasures he'd gift her while she was there, his love.

Erin answered all of them in the affirmative, the concept that Curt wanted more than one night of simple release like a heady drug. His profession of love propelled her toward another climax.

His final request came without warning. "Take me as your mate."

She stared at him, certain that she'd started hallucinating. She couldn't have heard him right. Erin started to ask him to repeat himself, but Curt beat her to the punch.

"I want you to be my mate. I don't want you to leave me--ever." He said it calmly, in a voice that sounded almost too rational. Only his eyes belied that outward calm, their turbulent blue expressing a mixture of fear and longing he wouldn't admit in words.

"Yes," she whispered.

As if her quiet admission was too much, Curt roared out his possession of her, his body filling hers with heat, the gentle pounding of that release sending her over again.

* * *

And, he woke. Curt fisted his hands in his sheets, venting a growl of frustration into his pillow. His body ached, so close to release he could taste the sweet endorphin rush. Curt cursed softly, well aware

that relieving himself now would do no good. After these dreams, it never did.

They hadn't been this bad in more than a month. Now, he'd suffered them for four straight days.

In addition to that, he woke every time with the maddening urge to go to her. At first, he'd considered jumping in his car and driving all the way to New Hampshire. Now he felt he'd die if he didn't get on a plane. Never mind that his own family, the Cross family, and the Königs would all kill him for that choice.

Not if the dreams are true, his mind argued. If she does want you like that, they would all forgive you for jumping ship and showing up at her doorstep unannounced. You were wrong to let her leave.

Curt shook his head in an attempt to dislodge that thought. *Right. I'm going to just show up and give Erin the lovestruck look, and she'll fall into my arms.*

He growled again. He hadn't been wrong to let her leave. Erin's choice could not be argued. The rules of sanction were clear on that point. Curt wasn't a rogue who convinced unwilling women--no matter how much he wanted this one.

Still, the urge to go to her ate at him until Curt felt he was going mad. He groaned at that. Was he suffering for breaking printing? Was that what was driving him? No. That would have come sooner, the moment Erin walked out of his life. This was simply torturing himself with the knowledge that Erin would soon have autonomy.

Curt glanced at the bedside clock, sighing deeply. It was eleven thirty--past midnight on the east coast

where Erin was. "Happy birthday, Erin," he offered sadly. "I hope you enjoy your autonomy."

He curled to his side, fighting back the misery drowning him. Four years! For four long years he'd waited for Erin's right to choose a mate. Now she had it, and she'd used it to leave him. Now she was half a continent away, suffering from some mysterious ailment that Lewis had sent Adam to guard her through. Adam! As if Erin wanted his oldest brother anywhere near her!

She wouldn't even talk to Curt. Erin had cut herself off from him completely when she'd left Maher range. And, it was within her rights to do it.

Curt closed his eyes, praying for sweeter dreams, burying the nagging calculation that he could be in Crossbearer before Erin cut her cake. He drifted off to sleep.

Erin grinned as she blew out the candles on her cake, and the assembled warriors cheered. She flicked a glance at Curt then away, unsheathing her sacred weapon and irreverently using it to slice the cake.

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Erin stared out the window, raising her wrist to check the time. *What difference did it make? Did she really think Curt was coming?*

He might. He would if you called him. You have autonomy now. You could offer –

She growled at that. Erin had all but thrown herself at her dear friend. For what? What had it gotten her? A pat on the head and a reminder that she was

nothing more than a little sister to Curt.

It was pathetic. She was pathetic! If he drove up that road right now, she'd have him in bed in thirty seconds. Only, there was no way he would drive up that road.

Erin knew the whole warrior world wanted her to choose a mate, but they were in for a very big surprise. If that mate wasn't Curt, there wouldn't be a mate. "Autonomy," she grumbled. "I have the right to choose."

She curled into bed, ignoring the nagging voice in the back of her mind. *Autonomy. You have the right to make your own mistakes like any other adult.*

Sleep claimed Erin, an unsettled sleep in which Curt stood across the room as she blew out her candles: wanting her, loving her, and waiting for Erin to come claim him.

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