

Sweet Jacqueline



Brenna
Lyons

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Sweet Jacqueline
A Night Warriors Story
By Brenna Lyons

Dedicated to...

The Warrior spirit and the urge to protect a lady
with your life and all my SCA friends who possess it.

Jacquine closed her eyes, stroking her hands down her chest and stomach. Her mind supplied a lover for her; Rober's hands traced her wet flesh and he pulled her to his body. Phantoms, wisps of sensation from times he had touched her, played at her senses.

God, I do enjoy when he touches me!

How many stories had the older servants told her about what a man's body would feel like thrusting within hers? Listening had been a guilty pleasure, but she'd never dared do something as wanton as imagining a particular man.

Her fingers found the nub between her thighs, stroking slowly. She sank to her knees in the water. The cool liquid lapped at her, adding touches that were neither of her own hands nor phantoms, undeniably real and wonderfully exciting.

Glossary of Warrior Terms:

- Beast** Beasts are what humans erroneously refer to as vampires. The stories humans tell are obviously not correct, but you can't expect a human to get everything right.
- Blutjagd** The "blood hunt." Warriors crave battle with the beasts, as the beasts crave blood. Warriors are tied to beasts in that they sense many of the beasts' special powers. A Warrior can feel the use of coercion, feeding, and other controls of humans. They also feel other Warriors engaged in Blutjagd, the death of beasts and Warriors in their range, and the presence of nearby beasts who are not ghosted.
- Elder** One of the original beasts, the stone stealers who were damned for their crimes against the stone and the Warriors. The elders are gifted with powers turned beasts are not, including the ability to reproduce with a *Blutjagdfrau*, the ability to turn other beasts, and the inability to be killed by anyone but a Warrior.

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.

Ghosting A talent that both beasts and Cursed Warriors learn to harness. Ghosting can hide the physical form of Cursed Warriors or beasts and all they hold or carry from each other and humans. In a lesser strength, it can “blur” the image of the user so that humans do not note the passage but still see a person there, which avoids accidental collisions. Even a ghosted beast cannot hide uses of power that a Warrior can track.

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.

Veriel The mad elder. The destroyer of lives. The mad deceiver, who led the traitors and freed

the elders from the stone. The most hated and hunted of all the beasts. Fixated on one woman, he would destroy the world to own her. Or... At least, that's what the stories say of him.

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.

December 2nd, 1497

Rober of Kaufmann looked around the cottage in disbelief. It was the type of scene that chilled the most jaded Warrior to the bone. His eldest nephew was dead; his Lord-brother lay dying. The smell of beast blood permeated the space, and he half-swallowed a cough in response, his eyes watering.

“Open the windows,” he ordered his youngest brother, Marcus. Though it was bitterly cold outside, the fresh air would be a welcome reprieve from the foul stench of the dead beast two body lengths from Etienne. They wouldn’t be staying there tonight, in any case...unless Etienne lived until first light.

Marcus obeyed without question, perhaps already thinking of Rober as lord though Etienne still breathed, and he’d not collected his seal.

Rober strode to his eldest brother’s side, fighting back *Blutjagd* at the idea that the beast who’d done this had escaped him. There would be payment for this. Any beast that killed a Warrior was marked for execution above all the rest.

He sank to one knee, meeting the eyes of the woman across Etienne’s body from him. Her dark

eyes were red from crying, her face streaked raw, and locks of her chestnut hair escaped the pins behind her head to curl against her cheeks, some plastered to the tracks of tears. She was in abject misery. His gaze settled at her bare neckline in surprise. No amulet graced the unblemished stretch of skin.

Why is she not protected?

She held her hands to the wound in a vain attempt to save Etienne. Rober lifted them gently, then more forcefully as she fought him.

"You cannot," she protested. "He will bleed to death if you —"

"Shhh. Nothing we do will stop that," he assured her. "It is kinder to let him die quickly." *Once I have the information I need to track his attacker.*

The lady looked to the downed Warrior, shaking her head, fresh tears beading on her lashes.

"Marcus," he called. "Take..." He waited for her to offer her name.

"J—Jacquine, mi'lord," she stammered, already shivering in the cold wind through the open shutters, her breath making thick mist before her mouth.

Rober nodded, offering her a strained smile. "I thank you for your kindness, Jacqueline. Please, go with Marcus. He will protect you and show you to a place to clean your hands." He motioned to his brother to find her a cloak or blanket while he did it.

Marcus grasped her lightly by the waist with the intent to lift her to her feet, and she startled, blushing deeply. Rober shot him a hard look for it. This was obviously not some rouged greensleeves to be handled in so familiar a manner.

He nodded, moving his hands to her elbows. "My apologies, Jacquine," the young man murmured. Marcus eased her to her feet and offered his arm to escort her properly, no doubt noting her shaking as Rober did.

Etienne's breathing was shallow and his color fading, but he still had life. Perhaps there was yet time to learn all he needed to know.

Rober smacked his cheek lightly in an effort to rouse him. "Etienne?" he called. "Etienne, speak to me."

The Lord's eyes opened, full of pain — *no, misery*.

"What is it?"

"I failed her," Etienne whispered. "The Fair Lady Caitrina. I failed her, Rober."

"Which beast?" Rober demanded. "Give me the name, and I will take a blood oath to your vengeance tonight."

"No time for that." He coughed, and blood dotted at the corner of his mouth. "I tried to stop him, but — he's turned her."

Rober shuddered. The texts warned of the horrors a turned female would commit. There was only one elder that was mad enough to attempt it. "The Destroyer of Lives," he managed. "Veriel... Why did you not wait for us? We were less than a day behind." Frustration welled in him. Veriel never lost in single combat, and Franz was little more than a first-night, hardly a match in battle for the Mad Deceiver.

"It was an opportunity that would not come again. He was with her always, even in the misty day. For that moment, the sun was our ally in taking the

women from him."

"Until it fled and left you to battle alone," he exploded then added several curses.

"Enough." Etienne coughed up more blood. "There is more that I must tell you. Lady Caitrina... She was..." He sighed heavily. "She was Regana, Rober. I fear the stone's will has been corrupted, and I am to blame."

For a moment, Rober couldn't find his voice. What his brother believed simply wasn't possible, but was there a way to prove it and put him at ease? "Had she the mark?"

"The beast stole her away before I could check it, but he convinced her it was true and —"

"He is mad! Who knows what games will amuse him?"

"And she..." He grimaced.

"She what?" Rober asked, something in his brother's expression making him distinctly uneasy.

"She spoke the language of the ancients as if born to it. I know it sounds mad, but believe me when I tell you, it is true. I failed her, Rober. I failed us all."

"You did not." Etienne's doubts ate at Rober. If there was any way to give his brother peace to carry to the Warrior's Rest, he had to attempt it. "Veriel never loses in single combat. You could not have been expected to best him."

"It was my blade," he groaned. "The Mad Elder would only have taken her again and not turned her had I not misjudged. We could have taken her back. Now, she is lost in body and soul to him."

"An honest error," he surmised. "Etienne Lord

Kaufmann is never sloppy in execution." There was no question in his mind that it was so.

The look of misery his brother shot him made his heart falter. "Only the gods know for certain."

Rober nodded. "Rest, now." It wouldn't take long for Etienne to die. Then the true work would begin.

* * * *

Jacquine looked up from the tabletop as the other Warrior entered the room after half the night at his lord's side. Marcus had told her that his brother's name was Rober, and he was the older of the two though younger than Etienne.

Rober didn't acknowledge her presence. He stood with one of their weapons in hand, his jaw tight and eyes hard. "I am Kaufmann now," he growled, meeting Marcus's gaze.

Without hesitation, the younger man turned toward him and dropped to one knee, his head bowed. "My blade is yours, my duty at your whim. You are my Lord Kaufmann."

She winced, the implications all too clear to her. Etienne was dead, and Marcus was swearing fealty to the new lord.

Rober relaxed, sheathing the blade. His eyes settled on Jacquine, and his expression softened. He waved his brother away. "Take what we must and dispose of the beast. Etienne will have his glory."

Marcus rose and left without a word. Near silence fell in his wake, and Rober took the moment to consider her carefully, his gaze settling on her breasts.

Jacquine pulled the cloak further around her chest, though Marcus hadn't laid this room open to the howling winds as he had the front rooms. "I am sorry for your loss," she managed. It was an inadequate statement; this man had lost a brother and a nephew, but she could construct no better in her exhaustion.

He sat across from her. "Have you refused protection?" he asked bluntly.

"I do not understand. You—you do not mean to protect me?" Marcus had led her to believe that she would be safe with the Warriors, that they would see to her safety.

His eyes widened. "No one has offered it? Etienne or Franz?"

"They took us into their custody. Was that not protection? I did not refuse it." Inspiration struck. Again and again, Lord Etienne had offered Lady Caitrina an amulet, and she'd refused it. *Have you refused protection?* "Do you mean the amulet?"

"Of course," he snapped, as if she should have known it.

"It—it was never offered to me."

His look was one of pure disbelief.

"I speak the truth," she defended herself. "Your Lor—Etienne offered the amulet to Lady Caitrina, but it was never offered to me." The fact that she would have likely refused it as her lady had was better left unsaid. Surely, they wouldn't hold her fear of the unknown against her now.

His gaze roamed over her body, and she felt her cheeks heat at his familiarity. She looked away, her heart pounding in a mixture of unease and interest.

What was he looking for so intently?

"You know what the beast is?" he asked.

"I did not until I saw it," she admitted. "Franz tried to tell me, but..." She chanced a look at his eyes, expecting anger. Instead she found deep compassion.

"You did not believe him," he surmised.

"It was a mad story, but I do believe now," she hastened to add.

"I know. There is no offense in your disbelief. The beasts take the blood of others. You know this?"

Her stomach lurched at the memory of Lord Jörg der Schmidt feeding Lady Caitrina his foul blood. What spell had he cast to allow her to stomach it?

A cool hand touched the back of her neck. "Breathe slowly," he soothed her. "Deeply. In through the nose and out through the mouth."

Jacquine did so, her mind clearing though she emerged more drained than before. "My thanks," she whispered.

Rober knelt to her level. "Did the beast feed from you?" he asked earnestly.

"No." Franz had asked her the same.

He seemed confused by that. "Are you certain?"

"Of course. It is not the sort of thing one could forget, is it?"

His dark eyes narrowed. "Perhaps, I should examine—"

"You wouldn't," she gasped, horrified at the suggestion.

"Jacquine—"

"Unless he was angry, he had attention only for Caitrina." The words tripped out in her haste. He

couldn't have fed from her, and she would not allow Rober to do something so intimate.

* * * *

Rober started to explain the need for certainty, but she pulled from under his hand, shaking like a snared rabbit.

"I will not," he vowed. *But, what if she is wrong and he has fed?* Like most victims left to feed from again, Caitrina had no memory of the Deceiver's feeding the first morning Etienne met her. Jacqueline would not as well.

Whether she was fed on or not, Jacqueline might need his protection. There was still her former mistress to consider. "The beast..."

"Lord Jörg?" she managed shakily.

Blutjagd burned fiercely in him. Something in his expression made Jacqueline shy away. He nodded. "Never speak that name again. The beast's name is Veriel."

She nodded, clearly terrified by his reaction.

"Veriel—had a lover's name for your Lady Caitrina. Tell me what it was." Perhaps, she knew more than it seemed.

"There were three," she stammered.

"Go on."

"He called her 'Dear One' and 'Geliebt'."

"And?" His muscles tensed involuntarily.

"Regana."

His blood ran cold. What foul game was this?

"Will..." She interrupted his thoughts in a meek

voice. "Will Lady Caitrina be like the beast now?"

Rober swallowed a sour lump. "Worse," he admitted. He surveyed her again, a plan taking form. "You must let me protect you."

"Yes," Jacquine breathed, her shoulders sagging in seeming relief. "Thank you, Lord Rober."

He drew out one of the lord's amulets he'd taken from Etienne, settling it over her shoulders. First, he would say the blessing. Then he would explain why she must never remove it, especially for Lady Caitrina.

* * * *

December 8th, 1497

Rober sat, his back against the barn wall, watching Jacquine sleep. The beasts hadn't come for her in the last six days, though by Etienne's account of the she-beast's injuries, it was unlikely they'd had much time to start the search for the missing lady's maid. Perhaps they would never come for her, but it was a chance he would not take.

He grimaced, cursing his printing solidly in a voice that would not disturb her slumber. The sensation was driving him mad. If Veriel did come for her, Rober would meet him, madman to madman.

Jacquine sighed in her sleep, and he bit back a groan, his fertile imagination supplying images of her sighing to his caresses, arching her back in the hay beneath her body as he thrust into her. His cock came to aching readiness, and he closed his eyes, praying for a reprieve that he reasoned would not come.

"Problem, Rober?" Marcus asked from beside him, appearing from outside swiftly and silently.

"I need a bit of time," he grumbled. Rober didn't wait for his brother's acknowledgement. He strode into the pink light of the coming dawn, seeking a place to sate his needs in peace. A secluded spot by the river beckoned. He pulled his breeches open and took the rather weighty matter in hand.

Even in his self-release, Rober couldn't escape thoughts of Jacquine. Visions of her danced behind his closed eyelids: Jacquine taking him in her hands, her mouth, her velvet sheath.

His breath came in gasps; his muscles went taut. Rober groaned, not in the relief of release but in the absence of any relief. Self-release had lost its effectiveness.

He closed his breeches over his still-aching cock, grimacing. "Gods, I am far gone." There was no option. He'd have to approach the matter directly and hope the lady accepted him.

* * * *

Jacquine rounded the barn, brushing another bit of straw from her hair in annoyance. As usual, the Warriors had risen before her and a fire was lit, the scent of meat and tea drawing her from sleep. Marcus sat at the fire, and a bolt of relief shot through her. At least she knew there was no chance of happening upon his — amusements this morning.

"Good day, Jacquine," he called out cheerily.

She settled on the ground, accepting the mug of tea

he offered and drinking in its warmth with a muttered thanks to him and God. "Good day. Where is Lord Rober?" The elder brother was nowhere in sight, but he was never far.

Marcus chuckled. "He is—occupied." He raked his gaze over her body, a move he repeated often.

Her face burned in the realization that Rober was busy satiating his needs sexually, as Marcus had done the morning before. "Oh. I see." She looked into the fire, trying to avoid his eyes, trying to avoid any chance that she might see Rober so engaged somewhere nearby, trying to avoid memories of—

He settled beside her, his breath tickling her cheek. "I know you saw me," he stated.

Jacquine fought for a decent breath. "I did not intend to—to watch you. I did leave when I realized..."

"You did not have to leave," he informed her in a voice laced in amusement.

She snapped her eyes up to his, shocked at the thought of such a thing. "You would want me to watch you... To watch you..."

"Take self-release? It would not offend me to have you there. It would excite me quite a bit to have you watch." He shifted closer, his lips hairs away from her ear. "Or to have you join me."

Jacquine scrambled to her feet with a squawk, dropping the mug on his boots. She gasped as she collided with another wall of male body. Her eyes sought out Rober's, terror making her head spin.

His look of confusion disappeared, and fury took its place. Before she could flee, his hands closed

around her arms, easing her toward him.

"Marcus has harmed you?" he asked gruffly.

"Of course not," the younger man protested.

"Silence!" His voice dropped to a whisper. "Did he hurt you?"

Jacquine shook her head, nearly groaning at the way his pungent scent made the dizziness more acute.

"You see," Marcus began.

"Silence," Rober roared. "You did something, frightened her somehow. She is trembling." His hands stroked her back, and Jacqueline sank into his chest fully, letting him support her.

"Just an offer of my companionship," Marcus explained sweetly.

A growl rumbled from Rober's chest. "Apologize. Now."

"Rober?" The amusement left the other Warrior's voice.

"Jacquine is a protected woman, not a tavern whore. Your advances are unwelcome. You frightened her, and you will apologize or face me."

His tone made promises for her safety. Jacqueline sighed, burying her face in the warmth of his chest. His fingers stroked her neck then her scalp, under her tangled hair.

Marcus chuckled then laughed outright.

Rober stiffened, his hands halting their soothing. "I warn you —"

"My most heartfelt apologies, Jacqueline. It will never happen again. You have my solemn vow."

"My thanks," she whispered.

"Set food for us," Rober ordered sharply. "And, if you ever dare approach Jacqueline again, I will leave scars."

"I trust you will," Marcus answered cryptically.

* * * *

Rober watched Jacqueline eat, spellbound by every motion and expression. More often than not, he was broken from his trance by snorts or laughs from his errant brother. As if the thought conjured him, Marcus let loose a snicker, and Rober shot him a warning look. The sound stopped, but the knowing smirk still lit his youthful face in glee.

His *Blutjagd* spiked, and Rober forced it down, nearly losing his calm completely when Marcus let loose another snicker. It was bad enough that Rober was printing in these circumstances. The last thing he needed was his brother's taunting about it.

Of course, it was unlikely Marcus would accost Jacqueline again. If his brother knew he was printing, he'd know the penalty for presuming so much with the woman Rober was fixated on.

Rober fisted his hand at the memory of Marcus sitting with Jacqueline, cheek to cheek with her. He swallowed a growl at the memory of her flight into his arms and the stark fear in her eyes. By the gods, she probably thought he meant to force himself on her when he grabbed her, that they both did.

Marcus half swallowed another laugh, and Rober glared at him.

Jacquine's muttered complaint brought his head

around in concern. She didn't seem to note his attention, and her difficulty became obvious in moments. Her hair was matted in places, and her clothing was in need of a washing. Jacqueline's state had to be intolerable to her, but their situation and the weather limited their options for travel and comforts.

He stood and stepped behind her, working his fingers into her hair. She stilled then lowered her hands, letting him groom her as well as he could. Her hair was smooth and warm as fresh cream against his palms once the knots were worked out.

"My thanks," she sighed, her eyes still shut.

"So beautiful," he replied, running his hands through the fall of hair set free for a few precious moments, half in a daze.

Jacquine wrinkled her nose. "I am a scandal."

Oh, how I would like to make a scandal of you. "Not at all."

"If only I could bathe..."

"In two days. You have my vow."

"Her eyes opened, full of hope. "A bath?" she repeated wistfully.

Rober smiled, his heart skipping happily that he could wash away her upset so easily. "A bath with sage soap, clean clothing... I even guarantee a warm bed with as many quilts as you request of me."

A smile lit her face. "A bed? Clothing? It is a dream."

He massaged her scalp. "Not at all. My departed brother's wife has clothing stored at each of our homes, and —"

She paled, and the smile left her face.

"Jacquine? Are you ill?"

"Etienne," she whispered. "Oh, his poor... Will she be there when we —"

"No. You misunderstood. Etienne had no wife." Though Sabine would have to be told that her oldest son was dead, she'd faced the loss of Kev already, and she had two other sons to sustain her, neither of them old enough to first night.

Her eyes widened.

"Our eldest brother was lost two years ago."

"Oh. My apologies."

"There is no need." It was the lives they led, fighting beasts until the day one took them.

She moved away self-consciously, arranging her hair with shaking hands.

Rober ground his teeth in frustration. Marcus's expression didn't help. His brother's wince summed up the problem perfectly. If Jacquine couldn't accept the risks they took, she would refuse him. Rober was far gone already. If she refused him, the results would be extremely painful.

* * * *

December 10th, 1497

"Did you find something suitable?" Rober asked, pouring the last pot of hot water into the tub in the center of the kitchen.

She blushed. "More than suitable. You are most kind, Lord Rober."

"Rober is adequate." He glanced at the dress she'd set on the table, controlling the urge to curse — barely.

Without a word, he crossed the room, snatched it up and headed up the back stairs.

She considers this ragged cleaning gown too kind? He seethed that she'd found something so *unsuitable* in his home. It took Rober only moments to find a dark green gown that would show off her beautiful eyes and hair. He coupled it with a pale yellow chemise of the finest silk. Satisfied with his choices, he returned to the kitchen.

Jacquine's eyes widened. "I cannot possibly. Rober, those things are far too—"

"They are yours. Sabine will be pleased to purchase new clothing." He stopped before her, locking his gaze with hers. "I expect you to wear nothing but the finest the trunks have to offer. Do not balk me in something so trivial."

"N—no. Of course not. If you wish it."

The thought of Jacqueline in the gown he'd chosen had him uncomfortably hard. "Oh, I do wish it." And, he wished for the liberty to remove it.

She nodded, breaking eye contact.

Rober turned and started toward the inner door, stifling the urge to make his intentions clear to her. Now was not the time and place. Perhaps when she was clean and fed, he would find the moment he needed. "Very well. I will leave you to bathe then."

"As lord of the house—"

"It is my place to insist that you bathe first," he cut her protest off. Rober pushed through into the dining room and shut the door behind him.

There was a moment of silence. Then the sounds of her disrobing filtered out to him. Visions of her body

appearing slowly made breathing difficult.

Gods, she has to let me claim her!

Rober forced himself to walk away. Listening to her splashes and sighs was likely to make his madness complete.

He went to his room, stripping off his shirt, boots and weapons belt and laying them aside for washing or inspection. Collecting clean clothing didn't take long enough. Rober found himself pacing nervously, trying to decide how to make his interest clear to Jacquine without spooking her as Marcus had.

Though she retreated to his side every time Marcus came too close for comfort, there was no denying that his brother made her uneasy. Eliminating that discomfort was the first thing he had to accomplish.

Marcus wasn't difficult to find. As the youngest Warrior in their party, caring for the horses, including Etienne's horse that Jacquine had been riding and Franz's that they had been leading along with them, and equipment had fallen to him. As Rober expected, he was oiling the straps on the saddles to protect them from the winter weather.

The smirk settled on his face the moment Rober stepped through the doorway. "I see you've prepared to convince her," he noted.

"Marcus," he warned. With comments like those, sending his brother away before he could embarrass Jacquine was essential.

"You cannot claim you do not want her. Every time you touch her, I see it. Every time you look at her —"

"Pack your things. You will be riding ahead to the manor, but... I will tell Sabine that Franz is lost."

Marcus was abruptly serious. "If the Mad Deceiver comes for her, and you are alone —"

"Stay close then," he grumbled. Though he'd like to have Marcus far away while he attempted to win Jacqueline, there was no denying that her protection had to come first, and Veriel would certainly win against Rober alone. "But far enough away that Jacqueline does not know. I think the danger has passed. I intend to extend her the comfort of inns for the rest of the journey."

"And if she refuses you?" Marcus didn't meet his eyes when he asked. A Warrior's printing madness was not a subject widely discussed. Neither was a house lord incapacitated by any means, let alone his own curse.

"I will leave her at the manor in your care and fight my battle."

"The manor is ten days' ride. Though Jacqueline sits a horse well —"

"I will survive it."

Marcus nodded. "Then I will collect a bag and take my leave. If you need me..."

"Thank you, but I can control my curse." *I hope I can.*

* * * *

Jacquine stretched her back, sighing that the water had gone cool. It had been a selfish indulgence she could not resist. Certainly, she would have to refill the tub for Rober and Marcus, but it would be well worth this soak.

She stood and reached for the drying cloth, gasping at the wicked feeling of the water coursing down her skin like the brush of fingers. The temptation was too much, and she touched herself. The slick of water and soap made the feeling of her hands on her breasts a sinful delight.

Jacquine closed her eyes, stroking her hands down her chest and stomach. Her mind supplied a lover for her; Rober's hands traced her wet flesh and he pulled her to his body. Phantoms, wisps of sensation from times he had touched her, played at her senses.

God, I do enjoy when he touches me!

How many stories had the older servants told her about what a man's body would feel like thrusting within hers? Listening had been a guilty pleasure, but she'd never dared do something as wanton as imagining a particular man.

Her fingers found the nub between her thighs, stroking slowly. She sank to her knees in the water. The cool liquid lapped at her, adding touches that were neither of her own hands nor phantoms, undeniably real and wonderfully exciting.

The memory of Marcus 'taking self-release' played at her arousal. His expression had been intense, compelling, his hand stroking his male flesh even more urgently than she was now stroking her own, his muscles tensed.

What would Rober look like when he was aroused? She shivered at the memory of his expression as he untangled her hair the morning Marcus pursued her, stirring the water past her needing flesh. *Yes!* That was what he'd look like. She was certain it was.

Her fingers moved faster, and she licked her lips. Rober would kiss her, not the kiss on the forehead that he'd given her when he gifted her the amulet. He would kiss her as Mara had kissed the gardener in their stolen moments. She wished she knew more of what they did, but she knew only that it was a brazen meeting of two bodies. Just the thought of Rober —

"Jacquine?"

His voice shocked her into reality. Jacqueline started to rise but slipped and landed on her backside instead. The water sloshed over the side of the tub and soaked her body again.

"Jacquine? Do you need my help?" His voice was sharp in anger or concern.

"No!" She struggled to her feet and grasped the cloth, wrapping it around her body. Fear that he would barge in on her warred with a sinful certainty that he would — and that he would make her fantasy come true. "I—I fell asleep. My apologies, Rober."

"Are you well?" His voice softened somewhat, making her sigh in relief.

"Yes. Very well, thank you. I will dress and freshen the bath for you."

"You will do no such thing."

Her heart pounded. He couldn't mean that she wasn't to dress, and she argued that fact, though a wild wish that he did mean it lodged in her mind. "Rober?"

"After you dress, you will rest in your room. If you feel equal to the task, you might prepare food when I finish my bath."

"Of course." Jacqueline tried to keep the

disappointment out of her voice, but it hardly seemed possible to do so. For the life of her, she couldn't name what it was about him that made her think such lustful thoughts, but she thought them all the same.

Jacquine wasted no time, drying her body and hair, pulling on the clothing Rober had provided and heading for the door. She steeled her expression, acutely aware of the feeling of silk against her skin.

* * * *

Rober looked away from the window as the kitchen door opened, drinking in the sight of her as if it had been months instead of an hour since he'd seen her last.

The dress was the perfect cut to showcase her body. Though not as plump as Sabine, Jacquine had enough flesh to give a man ease and comfort in loving. Her breasts mounded neatly in the deep green bodice, partly covered by the layer of silk, his amulet nestled atop, almost as if it announced her as his. Her hard nipples drew his eyes, and his already-erect cock started throbbing.

Her gasp broke the spell long enough that he looked to her face, trying to gauge her mood. What he saw shot the throbbing to an ache that rivaled the intensity of his *Blutjagd*.

Her wide eyes darted back and forth, surveying his body, pausing at his bare chest then at the ready length straining his breeches. A light blush colored her cheeks, but she didn't look away. Her eyes took on a dreamy quality, almost hungry, and the urge to

stride to her and kiss her at him. Jacqueline glanced at his face then away, shifting uncomfortably, and the moment passed.

While her reaction to him gave him hope that she would accept him, her hesitancy told him clearly enough that it was not yet the time for such a move.

"Go rest," he suggested. "After I bathe—"

She turned back to him, her brow furrowed. "Marcus will not be bathing?"

Rober smiled. It was time to test her defenses. "Marcus will be riding ahead. I imagine he will bathe at an inn along the way." Since he wouldn't be travelling far from them, it was likely that he was staying at the Golden Stag and enjoying the many comforts of the widowed Jessimie.

A smile lit her eyes, a shy smile that made him want her all the more. He strode to her, scooping her hand to his mouth and kissing her knuckles, his gaze locked with hers.

Jacquine stared up at him, her breathing coming in irregular bursts. "Until supper?" she asked.

"Rest well."

She nodded, easing her hand away and heading for the room he'd assigned her, her bare feet nearly as silent as his own on the smooth wood floors.

He fought back the urge to follow her, reminding himself that her interest wasn't a certain indicator that she was ready or willing to allow more. Her reserve kept him at arm's length. If it weren't for her self-conscious reaction, he would have kissed her full on the lips. He would have taken her on the table had she proven willing, most likely unable to restrain

himself long enough to reach a bed, truth be told. It hardly seemed possible not to touch her.

And her scent... By Ani, the tang of her arousal had him aching, even now that she'd left him.

Rober collected up his clean clothing and headed into the kitchen, determined to put Jacqueline out of his mind long enough to make himself worthy of more than a pinched nose and a sour look from a lady.

Once he'd started the water heating, he deposited her foul clothing in the bag he'd burn. Though she'd scrubbed at the drops of beast blood until the scent had dissipated, the stains would remain on the gray wool forever, weakening then eating holes in it over time.

He dropped his breeches beside the bag and went back to the tub, emptying half the water, bucket by bucket. He grasped the damp drying cloth Jacqueline had used, intent on cleaning the spilled water with it.

A faint scent stopped him short. Rober raised it to his face, inhaling deeply. "Gods," he murmured as his body responded to her female musk. Jacqueline had been aroused when she'd dried herself.

Her halting explanation echoed in his mind, bringing a wide smile to his face. A chuckle rumbled up. She'd been pleasuring herself when he called out to her. What a joy it would have been to walk in on that sight!

* * * *

Jacquine paced the room Rober had sent her to, looking to the darkness beyond the window panes in

stark terror. She fingered the amulet, praying the bit of metal held the magic the Warriors claimed it did. If they lied, the beast Master Jörg – Veriel would surely kill her as he'd killed Etienne and Franz.

She'd been charged with protecting Lady Caitrina. The lady's father would likely die of grief when he learned his daughter was lost, but what of Veriel? Even when Jacqueline had believed he was a caring master, she'd known he wouldn't hesitate to harm any who faltered in his or her service to his lady.

Jacquine had failed her most grievously – more than once.

How she'd missed the beast's foul uses of Lady Caitrina was a mystery that ate at her night and day. Rober had tried to explain the ways a beast could cloud her mind or control her actions, but such magic hardly seemed possible.

Worse – and likely the reason the beast would seek to kill her, she'd allowed Caitrina to be killed. Jacqueline shuddered at the memory of standing in the doorway as the brash Warrior Franz attacked her lady, as Lord Etienne failed in his bid to save her from his nephew, killing her instead.

She'd failed, and now Caitrina reportedly lived in a damned half-life. Jacqueline wrung her hands at the description Marcus wove of the monster her gentle lady was now, a ravenous, soulless beast with no regard for friend or family. If Veriel did not come for her, it was likely to be Caitrina. After all, the lady knew her failure better than any soul alive. Would she seek vengeance for it? Would she kill Jacqueline for nothing more than the thrill of killing a former friend

as Marcus said? Rober had cautioned her not to be taken in by the beguiling lies of her former mistress turned beast.

She will say anything, use your fondest memories against you, all to get you to remove your amulet and fall prey. Do not let her take you, Jacquine. Never remove the amulet. Not even for me.

A knock at the door made Jacquine jump and turn. This was ridiculous! It was only the fact that Rober no longer slept a body length away that made her fear.

"Jacquine?"

She relaxed at the sound of Rober's voice, though she'd already reasoned that it must be him.

"I know you are awake," he informed her, his voice laced in amusement. "I can hear you pacing."

Her cheeks heated. "Come in," she whispered, knowing he would hear her. Jacquine managed a shaky smile for him. "I apologize for disturbing you."

He raised an eyebrow at that. "You have nothing to apologize for. I am typically awake at this hour."

"Of course." *How stupid of me.* Rober typically hunted the night as all his kind did. He would walk the halls of his home at night if he were not hunting. It only made sense.

"You are troubled," he noted.

She didn't bother to deny it. What else would explain her night roaming?

Rober sighed. "You still worry that the beasts will come for you." He didn't question it.

It was abruptly difficult to meet his eyes. "I do not doubt you," she blurted out. She could not doubt him. If Rober thought such a thing of her, what would

become of her?

He strode to her, taking her shoulders in his hands gently. "I am glad to hear that," he drawled.

"Truly," she attested.

"Then you doubt the amulet." He rushed on before she could answer. "Or, perhaps you fear that I misspoke the blessing."

Her horror at that idea surely showed on her face. What if he had misspoken? Would the amulet still protect her?

"I see." Rober's voice was thick in some strong emotion. "I did not misspeak, but if it will put your mind at ease, perhaps I should repeat the ceremony."

The intensity in his eyes made her knees weak. "Yes." She cleared her throat, embarrassed by her rasping voice and the tightness in her ribcage. "Perhaps that is best."

* * * *

Rober nearly groaned at that. Her attention flicked to his mouth and back to his eyes, her nipples coming to hard nubs that brushed her dress with every breath much as he'd like to stroke them. By the sublime smell surrounding her, he knew her cleft was warm and wet for him.

He cupped his hands around her neck, letting the blessing roll off his lips in the language of the ancients. The choice to lay his lips over hers instead of over her cheek or forehead seemed a foregone conclusion.

Jacquine's eyes fluttered closed, and a light sound

of longing escaped her lips.

His hunger took on a sharp edge at that. He'd dreamed of this moment since he'd seen her weeping over Etienne's body. Rober tilted his head, teasing the tip of his tongue through her slightly-parted lips, suggesting the further intimacies he desired as gently as he could.

She opened further for him, seemingly uncertain. Her hands grasped at his tunic as he thrust more purposefully into her mouth. Rober eased back his fervor as she stiffened, closing his eyes in pleasure at her muffled cry of protest to the change. He let his arousal lead him.

Her body trembled against his, and some measure of sense returned to him. Jacquine was not a lady to be tumbled lightly, and he wouldn't allow her to question his purpose for an instant.

Rober broke off the kiss, feathering his lips over hers several times. It was the telling moment. Either she accepted him or not. *Either she allows me to end this madness or I battle it, once she's safe in Marcus's hands.* He had to fight the urge to fist his hand at that image. *Not Marcus.* He would leave Jacquine in the keeping of his last *mated* brother, Jean, with orders to keep Marcus at the furthest reaches of Kaufmann.

"My priest will join us tomorrow on your word," he vowed.

Her dark eyes opened slowly, drunk on his kiss. "Rober?" she breathed.

"Say you will marry me. Say it, and I will make you mine."

She looked to the door, no doubt noting for the first

time that they were alone in the house, an innocent and a man twice her size, intent on having her. He'd sent Marcus ahead, knowing Jacqueline would shy at the idea of consummating what she would deem an illicit interlude in the company of his younger brother. Perhaps, he'd acted in error.

"You have my vow that I mean to wed you. A Warrior always keeps to his word."

Her expression was abruptly uncertain. "Why? You could have any woman you wish."

"I wish for no woman but you." In the grips of printing, no woman could sate him *but* Jacqueline.

Jacquine started to answer but faltered, shifting uncomfortably.

"Is it the thought of being my bride?" He forced his voice to remain gentle when the thought that she might refuse him tortured him.

"No," she gasped. "Any woman would be honored to have such a husband." Her cheeks went a stunning shade of pink. "I meant—Well, you are kind, a strong protector, fair and..."

"And?" His voice went rough at that, half in restraint and half in anticipation.

She flicked another glance to his lips, swallowing hard.

"Is it the thought of intimacy before the formalities then?"

She darkened to crimson. "I—Oh, dear Lord," she breathed.

Rober smiled, biting back a hearty laugh. "I can wait for you," he promised though his heart ached. Other portions of his anatomy ached as well, but he

forced himself not to think about them. "Will you be my bride, Jacquine?" His errant cock demanded release. If she agreed, he would be in agony until they were joined.

"Yes. I will."

He brushed another kiss over her lips and turned to leave, already calculating the earliest possible hour to demand this service of Pierre.

"Must you leave?" Jacquine asked hastily, panic edging her voice.

He stilled. His printing demanded that he soothe her, but it also demanded release she was not willing to grant him yet. Self-release would be useless, so fighting off the madness in solitude until morning would be the smartest move.

But, she's frightened. "No. If you need me, I will stay."

Once Pierre joined them in matrimony, there would be no need for Jacquine to fear this way. Not even the Destroyer of Lives had ever been insane enough to attack a Warrior wife...since Regana. She would be safe soon, even if he had to leave her to hunt the night.

Her hands touched his arms, and her cheek pressed to his back through his tunic. His cock went from an uncomfortable fullness to a drumbeat that pounded painfully at both his body and soul. He had to touch her.

"I know a way to induce sleep," he found himself offering. *Gods, I will be mad by the time we consummate.*

Jacquine circled his body, her brow furrowed, biting her lip. "A tea? A glass of wine or milk,

perhaps?"

He shook his head. "If I promise not to take your maidenhead tonight, will you let me bring you bliss?"

Her initial shock at the idea melted into a look of curiosity. "How would you do such a thing?"

Rober held himself in rigid control, his breathing labored. "May I?"

She nodded, her eyes hungry.

He groaned, swooping down on her lips and resuming his manic exploration.

* * * *

Jacquine gasped into his mouth as Rober lifted her at the waist and carried her. Some portion of her mind urged her to open her eyes and see where he was headed. Another argued that she knew where he meant to take her — and how he meant to take her, that by not looking she could pretend to be surprised when he pressed her into the bed.

The bed did meet her back, but Rober didn't press his body to hers. She opened her eyes, craving his weight over her. He stared at her, dropping to his knees before her. Jacquine shivered as he eased her skirts up, his eyes locked on the area beneath them.

Yes! He means to take me. He cannot help himself. She moaned at that as her skirts settled at her waist. She opened her eyes wide as his breath teased at her ready body, stiffening as his tongue flicked over the eye center of her need.

Rober kissed the spot tenderly, easing her legs over his shoulders when she moved away slightly. "Shhh,"

he soothed her. "Ride the sensations."

He didn't wait for her to fumble the words to question him. His tongue stroked at her, alternately tormenting her and driving her on.

Jacquine moved against him, begging him to continue, to explain what magic he held over her, screaming that she could take no more, screaming in ecstasy as the pleasure washed over her but did not abate. Rober groaned into her body, and the low rumble seemed to chase up her limbs, sensitizing every fingerwidth of her body, and still he lapped at her like a kitten with cream.

She arched her back, but he moved with her, thwarting her desperate attempt to escape the unending cascade of pleasure bordering on pain. She sobbed out a request for him to stop, pushing half-heartedly at his head and shoulders.

Realization that he might take her at her rash words and end the experience assaulted her, and Jacquine quickly begged him to continue. She screamed as he groaned into her again, adding a richer layer of feeling to those already blurring the edges of her consciousness.

Before long, her cries became moans of exhausted contentment. Her hands slid away from his shoulders to the quilt below her. She watched in detached comprehension as Rober kissed her mound slowly, his breath coming in sharp blasts that made the ache for him pulse in response. He lifted her onto the bed fully, sweeping the quilt over her with a smile.

He kissed her forehead sweetly. "Sleep well, my love. I will be standing guard over you."

Jacquine couldn't form an answer to that. Her eyes slid shut to dreams of Rober filling the aching void within her.

* * * *

December 11th, 1497

"Do you swear by your Gods, Rober, and the God of Jacquine that you will live to these vows until the dark ones take you?"

Rober shot him a look of warning. Not only was Pierre asking completely useless questions of him, but he'd brought a reminder of his bride's greatest fear into what should be a happy moment for her.

"I do, indeed," Rober answered proudly. "In the way of my kind, my vow is unto death. It can be no other way." He slid the emerald band onto her middle finger then raised her hand and kissed it solemnly. It had to be her hand. If he dared kiss her mouth, he would commit sacrilege, especially considering the fact that she'd spoken her vows promising forever, and his printing screamed to seal her to it.

She blushed, looking to Pierre shyly.

"Then by all the Gods assembled, I join you, man and bride. May they bless this union with a new generation of young Warriors."

Her blush deepened, but Jacquine nodded to the old priest.

Rober sucked in his breath painfully, repeating the reminder that she'd not given him leave to plant those babes by that movement over and over.

Pierre raised an eyebrow, making a show of laying a fond kiss on Jacqueline's brow and saying a prayer of blessing for her health and safety. He clasped Rober's hand then hobbled away with parting words of luck and love.

Rober had no attention to spare him. The hope shining in his bride's eyes held him captive.

She'd given him such looks since she'd awakened that morning. Her willingness so acute, it had been all Rober could do to force himself to honor his vow to wed her before he bedded her.

But now, her ceremony was behind them, and the time to claim his bride in the way of the Warriors was upon them. Without a sound, he wrapped an arm around her and led Jacqueline to the carriage, lifting her to the seat effortlessly. It wasn't a fashionable affair; the last time it had been used was when Sabine's youngest son was a nursing babe, but it was functional and in good repair.

Rober took his seat beside her and urged the horses to a trot. She didn't question him, and she fairly radiated excitement as they neared the house. At the doors, he unhooked the horses and left them to graze on the few remaining green plants while he swung his bride into his arms and carried her to his bedroom.

He hesitated, holding her over his bed. "Tell me you are mine forever," he requested.

Her fingers pulled at the neck of his tunic, untying it. "Yes. You know I am."

The fierce need to possess her was even more powerful than it had been when she'd agreed to the

vows Pierre spoke. He eased her to the bed, following her down until he lay full over her. She raised her head, seeking his kiss urgently. Rober obliged her, working the lacings on her dress until it could be pulled over her head.

He rolled away, freeing her from the press of his body long enough to remove it then her shoes and stockings. His tunic and boots followed. He returned to his play, sucking at her already-hard nipples through the chemise, unable to resist touching her though he intended to see her body—soon. Still, though she'd chosen a more modest gown to wear before Pierre, the chemise was not much of a barrier between them.

Jacquine cried out much as she had the night before, her fingers curling in his hair. He stared at the expression of bliss on her beautiful face, wishing he could see her eyes. Rober moved to her other breast, his gaze still locked on her expression.

Slowly, he cautioned himself. He'd asked Jacqueline that morning if she were virginal or not, knowing he would claim her too roughly in his need if he didn't keep her state firmly in mind. While he knew he had to ask it, knowing he was her first had nearly driven him to take her then, using her eager looks as reason to break his vow to wed her first.

She arched her shoulders to force her breast further into his mouth. His hands trailed beneath the chemise, working it up her body slowly. Jacqueline licked her lips, throwing her head back and forth, moving restlessly against his body, needy little sounds escaping her lips. The chemise slid off of her

left shoulder...

Rober froze in a mixture of disbelief and the *Blutjagd* burning cheerily in him. *Marked!* The two pale ovals on her shoulder were a beast feeding site. It was undeniable.

But, she swore she hadn't been fed on, he seethed.

He fought his rage back far enough to reason clearly. It was likely that Jacquine didn't know the beast had fed. If the elder reordered her memories as he did it, she could remember anything from seeing to her duties to a pleasant conversation with her Lady Caitrina to nothing at all in its place. Even if she saw the marks in a mirror, Jacquine might not recognize them for what they were — or even note the slight discoloration of her skin.

Questions with no answers filled his mind, taunting him with what he would never know. Did his sweet Jacquine come upon some proof of what the beast was? Did she question what the beast did not want questioned? Or, was she simply a ready food source when the beast chose to partake?

Why did I never examine her? Because, it would have frightened and embarrassed her? It seemed such a weak excuse now that he knew. Being in the beast's company as long as she had, it was nearly a given that he would have slaked his foul hungers with her. *Why did I never check?*

His stomach lurched uncomfortably. *Which hungers did Veriel slake? Just his lust for blood or his lust for female flesh as well?*

"Rober?" Jacquine asked, seemingly concerned.

He kissed her, possessing her mouth as he dragged

the chemise up her body, releasing her as he pulled it over her head. She was exposed to him now, and yet he hardly dared notice all the little things he'd wanted to know about her. Rober explored every fingerwidth, assuring himself that there was only one feeding site, so relieved to find site after site unmarked that he trailed hands and mouth over the unblemished skin. Jacqueline moaned and writhed, mistaking his actions for lovemaking, and soon they were indistinguishable, even to him. And yet, what would he do if his final moves indicated that the beast had committed other atrocities?

Hunt! The primal urge to see the damned beast dead for such a heinous act burned in him, making his loveplay more fevered and desperate.

Jacquine gasped in delight, licking her lips and pressing her mound to him in a mute plea to give her what they both burned for.

Rober pulled at his breeches, freeing his cock and settling over her. Blood would be spilled, her blood on his length or beast blood on his blade, before the sun rose again. *She is mine.* His mind decreed that clearly. No beast would ever touch her again. Rober eased inside her body in one long glide.

He shivered as she screamed then sobbed, her short nails biting into his hips, the unmistakable tang of blood scenting the air around them. He held himself still inside her though the urge to thrust hard and fast beat at his entire body, whispering prayers of thanks to Ani and Jee for watching over her, smoothing her hair and placing kisses on her forehead and cheeks.

Her trembling subsided slowly, and her hands unclenched. Rober kissed her lips solemnly, sliding back to the music of her whimper of delight. He thrust again, closing his eyes at her pleas for more. His intention of taking her slowly was forgotten amid kisses and cries, bodies moving against each other, seeking that one thing each of them needed beyond reason. Before he quite knew what was happening, he was thrusting madly, her sheath rippling around his length, his name a scream ripped from her lips.

Rober cried out harshly at that, his seed pumping into her and the Gods-given ties between them solidifying. He groaned at the sense of peace it gave him, being grounded to a gentle, feminine soul. He laid kisses on her face, swearing a solemn vow that Veriel would pay for marking his woman, and that payment would be very dear indeed.

* * * *

February 25th, 1498

Caitrina stood outside the Kaufmann manor house, untouched by the elements, unseen by either human eyes or the senses of the Warriors in her ghosted state.

Jörg's arms circled her, and his lips teased at her throat. "If she is with the Warriors, you know she is safe," he stated again.

They are only a danger to me, she thought sadly.

"No more," he answered that concern, though she hadn't spoken it to his mind. "You are more powerful than they are."

She nodded. "I know. I must be certain, Jörg. I

must know that she is happy here. If not..."

He sighed. "It is unlikely that she will accept your aid, even in offering her a better place."

"I know." But, she had to know that Jacqueline was content here. It had taken them almost three months to find her former maid due to the blasted amulet that hid her feed string from them, and Caitrina could not walk away until she'd settled her uncertainties.

She approached the house, her acute hearing picking up the sounds of laughing women and children. The sounds of putting children to bed were unmistakable. Was Jacqueline their nurse then? Her move to mist and enter the dwelling was stilled by someone coming down the stairs into the kitchen.

Her breath caught at the sight of Jacqueline. The young woman fairly glowed in happiness, and her clothing rivaled those that Caitrina had owned as a human. In a fashionable wrap and with her chestnut hair loose around her shoulders, she hardly seemed the same woman they'd left behind.

A mixture of scents teased her hunter's senses, and Caitrina drew them in, starved for any knowledge of her former friend. Her anger that one of the damned Warriors was bedding her diminished with the additional scents. A whisper of new life lived in her, and if Jacqueline carried a child, she was more than someone's plaything. She was mate to one of the men of this house.

As if they'd shared that thought, Jacqueline suddenly smiled, reaching for a pitcher of water on the table.

Despite the amulet that stood between them and

the mistrust Jacqueline would harbor, Caitrina ached to hug her close and wish her well.

"No, Caitrina," Jörg spoke sharply.

She ignored him, unghosting.

* * * *

Jacquine looked up, confused at the sound of a male voice outside. Jean and Rober were upstairs with Sabine, Natalie and the children. Marcus had only left on trail the night before. What would bring him back so quickly?

Her heart stuttered at the face in the window. *No!* It wasn't possible. It was a dark dream, and she was sleeping. Yes, that would be the answer. She'd fallen asleep while they put the children in their beds and was dreaming this.

Caitrina smiled, placing her hand on the glass between them, and Jacqueline shook her head in disbelief, setting the pitcher on the edge of the table numbly.

"Jean," Rober called out sharply, no doubt sensing that Caitrina was near.

A second face appeared next to Caitrina's. Veriel's expression was one of fury, and Jacqueline screamed, scrambling back to the wall, the pitcher overturning and shattering on the floor, water and broken pottery raining over her feet.

The thunder of footsteps matched the thudding beats of her heart. In the instant Jacqueline blinked her eyes, the faces were gone as if they'd never existed. Then Rober had her in his arms, lifting her away from

the scattered bits of pitcher and placing her at his back, pulling her hands around his waist with a murmured command to stay at his back.

The cold blast of air let her know that Jean had reached the door. A series of curses left his lips, then the door slammed shut again. "Both of them," he stated. "It must have been the Deceiver and the she-beast."

Jacquine shuddered at the memory of Veriel's anger.

Rober sheathed his weapon and gathered her back into his arms. "He will never touch you," he breathed. His fingertips caressed her still-flat womb. "He knows the lengths I will go to now, and he will never dare."

She pressed her face into his chest. "I know." But, the sense of loss still plagued her. For just a moment, she'd believed the gentle look on Caitrina's face. Was this the deception Rober and Marcus had warned her would come? Or was there something even they didn't know? What was her former lady now?

About the Author

Brenna Lyons lives in Haverhill, MA with her husband, three children, and a zoo of pets. She was born and raised in the Hazelwood/Glenwood area of Pittsburgh, PA and toured the east coast as a Navy wife for thirteen years.

She enjoys the Society for Creative Anachronism and is a member of such groups as Broad Universe, EPIC, WRW and ERA.

Brenna holds a BS in Accounting and a Certificate of Computer Programming. Why? An auditing teacher commented that she would either "make the perfect auditor or the perfect thief," and she had been writing for eleven years with little professional training – in effect, a thief of attention by misdirection.

Never one to pass up a challenge, Brenna has worked as an auditor, tracking down fraud suspects, finding the backdoors into exchange computer systems, creating accounting programs for government and small businesses, and as a writer. Overall, it's the best of both worlds.

Brenna enjoys talking to readers and can be reached via her site at <http://www.brennalyons.com>