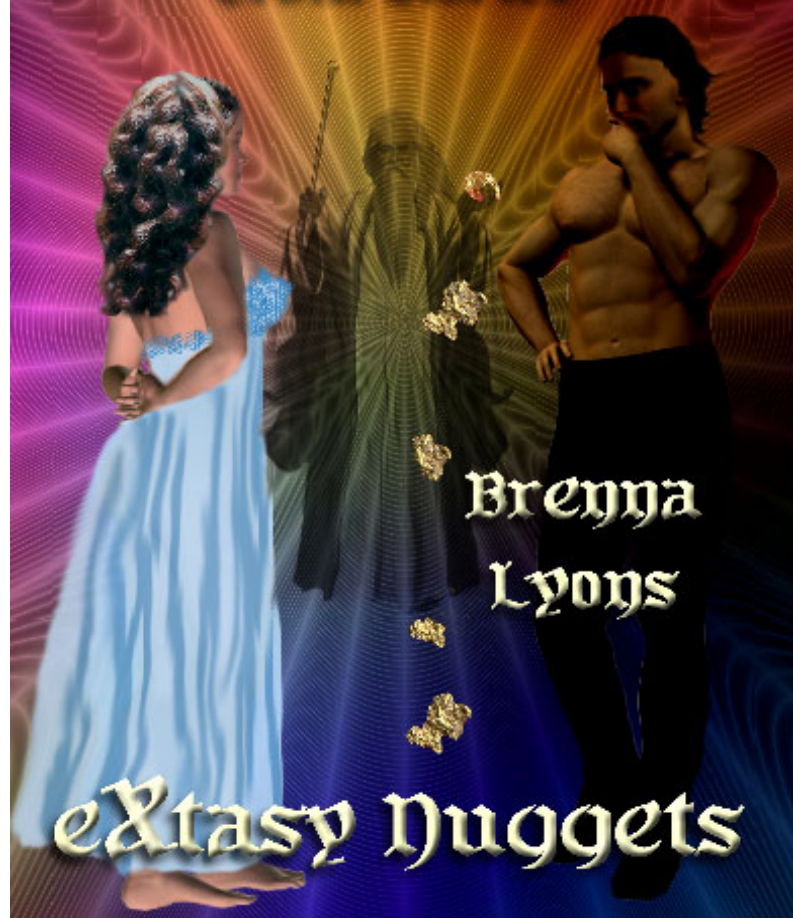


Sensual Shorts

A collection of short
erotic stories



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Brenna Lyons

EARTH-BORN LORD

A short story in the Kegin series

By Brenna Lyons

Abrin 32nd, Ri 25-2994

Justin Hayes sat at the table in the *magetra's* office, shifting nervously and pulling at the collar of his military uniform. The tutors provided for him assured Justin that it was the appropriate attire for a contract day, but he still felt like an imposter.

He wasn't a military man, but Justin held the rank of Captain in the royal guard. His rank was honorary. Justin could order troops. In fact, his estate was populated by two dozen soldiers that he ordered on a daily basis, but Justin had no idea how to hold the laser-edged sword belted to his hip let alone wield it. Any cadet in the Keen army would massacre him in battle, and the Earth-born queen's six-year-old son handled a dagger better than Justin did.

His title was no more noteworthy than his military rank. It was an accident of birth. *Well, aren't all noble titles?* But, Justin's title was a bastardized version of a title at best. "What did I do to deserve a title?" he grumbled in the English he'd only had the opportunity to use with other Earth-born, the King, and a few servants educated in the language for his comfort.

Lord Justin hadn't earned his title — or even been born to it in the normal sense of the word. He didn't even know what noble line his Kegin roots came from. He could know if he asked the Breeding Office, but what would be the point when the man who gave his genetic material had undoubtedly been dead for

generations — perhaps for a century or more?

If most titles were an accident of birth, his was a cosmic joke — literally. Who knew when a six and a half foot tall soldier stepped through a rippling doorway into the center of Justin's bedroom two years ago that the wholly unbelievable tale of his birth would prove true? If the man hadn't known about Justin's condition, he would have dismissed the whole thing as a practical joke. *Well, maybe not. There was that doorway, and I couldn't dismiss that.*

The *magestra* smiled sympathetically. "*Laes sint timetra.*"

Justin swallowed a laugh, his mind providing the translation almost effortlessly after two years of intensive study. Yes. Noblewomen were always late.

He sobered. He would marry Renna in a few moments, and he still didn't know for certain that this would work. Justin had only the word of alien doctors and a few Earth-born re-breds like himself that he could have children on Kegin.

The door opened, and Justin stood abruptly. Renna met his eyes and blushed deeply as she had every time he had seen her since the Breeding Office handled the introductions of young noblewomen interested in contracting with him. Justin had known the first time he met Renna's eyes that she would be the one he would accept.

Her father, Riel, stepped into the room beside her, offering Justin a smile and a nod. The tutors assured Justin that Lord Riel saw this as an advantageous match for his daughter, that he was pleased to have one of the new Keen lords as a close relation.

The queen herself sat as translator, though she was due to have her fifth child almost any day. She was a radiant woman, a third-generation Earth-born re-bred like himself, though she carried herself like a native after almost eight years on Kegin. Queen Susan was a shining example of what he was bred and brought to Kegin for, to produce the children he had wanted so desperately on Earth but couldn't have.

When the contract was sealed, the queen led Renna to him and placed his bride's hand in his. "*You may kiss the bride,*" she whispered in English.

Justin nodded his thanks and leaned toward Renna, expecting a chaste kiss. Her fervor surprised him, delighted him. His arousal was fierce and immediate. He pulled back, shaken by his reaction.

Queen Susan's smile was the widest in the room. "*Her barrier has been taken by her woman healer for you. The certificate is in the packet of paperwork.*" She left the room, trailed by her personal guard, before Justin could form a response.

His heart raced. Some men would be upset that they were denied taking their bride's hymen. Those men were largely human men with human wives. The complications of a Keen first mating were greatly reduced when the barrier had been taken painlessly by a cauter bar.

Justin grasped Riel's wrist in the traditional sign of agreement and led Renna to his private transport, his entire body humming. It would be a long drive back to his estate, but the only alternative would be taking Renna to a common inn. It would be an insult to take her to an inn unless it was an emergency of some sort.

His libido hardly rated as an emergency, no matter how overtaxed it was.

As the transport left the town and wound through the foothills, Renna slid to his side. She leaned her face up to his, nipping at Justin's lips. "Kiss me," she pleaded in Keen.

He obliged her, blindly pressing the button that would close the screen separating them from the driver and guards. Renna reached over his shoulder and pressed another button, closing thick blue drapes over the windows.

Her hands pulled at his jacket, opening the buttons in two tugs. Renna ran her hands over the silin tunic beneath.

"Renna," he cautioned her. He would finish what she was starting in the back of the transport, if she didn't slow down.

"Shhh. I know — Earth men wouldn't." She pushed his jacket off of his shoulders. "You are a Keen lord. I am your bride."

Justin untied her cloak, groaning as it slid away. She wore a presentation dress to the contract table. The ankle-length silin gown was slit neck to navel with her breasts pushed up and in until the edges of her areole peeked from beneath the material. A second slit reached from the hem to the crease of her left thigh.

Renna fingered the length of his cock as it rose behind his trousers. "You are a Keen lord," she whispered.

"The guards will hear."

She smiled. "And know you are what you were

born to be."

Justin eyed the gown breathlessly. "I can do anything? Here?"

"You've waited two years and not taken a schente."

He blushed, shaking his head. No. He hadn't taken schente. At first, he equated the sterilized women with sex slaves. Justin found slavery abhorrent. When the practice was explained to him fully, he still resisted. Justin hadn't resorted to hookers on Earth when finding a woman who wouldn't freak at his condition was difficult. He'd be damned before he'd resort to it when he lived on a world populated with women who reportedly lived for it.

Renna pulled up at his tunic, and Justin helped her remove it. She buried her face in the blonde curls sprinkled over his chest, tasting his skin with the tip of her tongue.

"Your scent is perfect — so strong."

Justin reached through the lower slit in the gown, fingering her weeping lips. He'd been told how sexual the Keen females were, but Justin hadn't expected such a heated response from a virginal bride.

Renna sucked at one of his male nipples. "Do I please you?"

"Very much," he admitted.

"The musk is more potent when taken internally," she told him.

Justin took what should have been a calming breath. Her musk settled in his lungs, a potent aphrodisiac as he was warned it would be. Yes. He

had been educated in the uses of the musk in love play.

He raised his fingers to his mouth, sampling the fluid that coated them. Visions of Renna opened wide while he licked at her assaulted him. His cock surged at the thought.

"Yes," she urged him. "Take what you need."

Justin dropped to his knees in the wide expanse between the screen and the seat, thankful now that the transport seemed built for these antics. He pulled the dress back at the slit, baring her black curls to him.

Renna smiled as he spread her legs wide and eased her to the edge of the seat. "You've waited two years, Justin," she reminded him.

He groaned, dropping his head to the hearty musk calling to him. Two years? No. He'd waited thirty-two years for a woman he could call his own, for a female scent that made him ache and hunger, that scattered his thoughts.

Her flavor was intoxicating — the relaxation of shot after shot of hard Earth liquor without the bite in taste or the certain knowledge of after-effects to come. He lapped at her, sucked at her, massaged her inner walls. His head spun, full of visions of his cock traveling the channel his tongue did.

Renna twisted against him, her hands fisted in his hair. She didn't try to stifle her cries and pleas for him. Justin didn't stop until he tasted the change in her flavor, until she ground her spasming body around his tongue.

Justin pulled at the buttons on his trousers,

pushing them down his thighs. She was high on her climax, as she would expect to be when he claimed her for the first time. *Anything*. He eased himself back onto the seat.

Renna didn't ask for direction. She settled astride him and guided Justin's cock to her entrance, throwing her head back as she settled an inch of him inside.

He grasped her hips. "Tell me what you want," he growled the traditional Keen phrase a male asked for first claming and every first claiming after a mother's fast.

She smiled. "*Make love to me, Justin.*"

He didn't question where she'd learned the English response for him. Justin bucked into her, drawing her hips down to seat her deep in his lap. Renna's eyes opened wide, her pupils dilated in her mating frenzy. She gripped his length, her walls hot and satiny, a feast of sensation for his starved body.

"More," she gasped. "Let your instincts guide you."

Justin drew back the silin bodice with his teeth, letting the full breasts beneath spill out to his mouth. He suckled her hard as he thrust into her again and again, shivering as she screamed his name.

Climax came quickly. As he was promised, his body guided him. He clamped her tight around him as his come flooded her. Wave after wave of blinding pleasure drowned his senses. A strangled cry he hardly recognized as his own filled the air around them.

Justin held his breath as it happened, the moment

he'd always dreaded with human women. His cock thickened another twenty-five percent. It wedged into the band of muscle at the os — the gates of her womb.

Renna screamed his name then panted out prayers to Fion, the Keen goddess of love and mercy. She kissed him, running her hands over his body, every movement frantic.

"Has it happened?" he asked as he lessened, hiding his terror that he hadn't stimulated her properly.

She reached between their bodies, bringing her fingers up with a sheen of their mixed fluids. Renna painted his lips then her own, kissing him. Justin bathed her lips with his tongue, and she did the same. His cock hardened within her again.

Renna smiled. "Yes. You know what you were born to do."

"More?" No woman had ever encouraged him to take her again.

"We have hours until we reach your estate. Love me three times before we reach the gates, and I will grant you any boon you wish."

He furrowed his brow, confused at her request. "What do you seek?"

"It took Prince Michael more than a week to impregnate his bride." Her fingers teased at the muscles of his chest.

Justin smiled. "You want to best that?"

"I want no one to ever surpass us. I want to conceive today."

His mind worked at that. With every mating within a day's time, they increased their odds of conceiving. They stood at one in fifty now. They'd be

at one in fifteen if he took her three times today and one in ten if he took her a fourth. Of course, the numbers were largely theoretical. There were few Earth-born re-breds to base the numbers on so far.

"You'll increase your chance of conceiving more than one," he reminded her.

Renna pressed down hard on his length. "It took King Jole more than a month to conceive two at once and Lord Alex more than two months."

Justin lifted her to the carpeted floor, pulling her legs over his forearms. "Be sure."

She shot him a hungry look. "After I conceive, we will have the schen."

He thrust into her, reveling in Renna's scream of pleasure. Justin couldn't imagine the schen. His understanding was that the pregnant Keen female was insatiable. After thirty-two years of sexual famine, that would be reward enough in itself for three times before they reached his home.

* * *

Justin laughed harshly as they passed the gates to the estate. His cock wouldn't lessen for several minutes.

"They'll wait for us," Renna assured him.

He nodded, pulling her cloak around her body and securing it at the neck and waist.

"You could ask anything of me," Renna whispered. "Is this truly what you want?"

Justin scanned his eyes down her body possessively. "I am a Keen lord. You are my bride. There will be no doubt of those two facts."

She blushed, pulling his jacket on over his bare back. He stilled her hands as she started to button it. Justin would enter his home looking his barbarian roots and revel in it.

He slid free of her body as his cock lessened, hiking his trousers up over his hips and buttoning them quickly. Renna brushed her fingertips over his length, and he hardened for her again. She nodded her approval.

I am a Keen lord.

Justin waited for Renna to straighten her cloak then stepped out of the transport, putting a hand out to assist his bride. Men looked away. Renna wasn't theirs to look upon. Women stared in wonder at Justin, with his bare chest visible through the open front of his uniform jacket, his tunic tucked into his beltline, a raging hard-on pressing to the buttons of his trousers, and his bride's presentation dress tossed casually over his shoulder.

There would be talk about this, the knowledge that Renna entered their home in only her boots, stockings and that cloak. Justin was half-barbarian, an Earth-born re-bred Keen lord. He was born for one purpose – to take a mate and produce the children that would make Kegin strong again.

"Send our evening meal to our rooms," he instructed the head of his household.

Justin led Renna to their rooms, gathering fluid from between her thighs as he kicked the door closed. She shuddered, her breathing ragged as he painted her lips and then his own.

"And now my reward for the fourth time in the

transport," he growled. "Before the food arrives, our chances will be one in six."

PLAYING GAMES

A short story in the Night Warriors series
By Brenna Lyons

May 1, 1987

Denise Roberts shook her head at the report again, dropping it on the passenger seat of her car. It didn't make sense, and reading it a hundred times or a thousand times didn't help that situation.

The victims were primarily female, young and attractive. Only one of the ten was male, and only two were over the age of twenty-five. They had all been found at the doors of one of the four local hospitals, hypo-anemic and confused, unable to recall what had happened to them. They were in good health except for their condition when they were found, not drug users or drunk. It was rare to find a mark on them save the one that baffled all the experts.

It was a single puncture over a major artery, too large to be even the largest medical-grade needle for drawing blood — healed sites that the victims and their families all attested had not been there hours earlier. The site had somehow been used to draw off blood, but how was the mystery Denise was ordered to discover.

How was the blood drawn off without leaving an open site anywhere on the body? What caused the discoloration reminiscent of a childhood scar? What caused the memory lapse?

That bothered Denise most. No drugs were found in the blood they took, urine, saliva, or even in the spinal fluid. There were no signs of head injury, indicating that they had been rendered unconscious, and it was simply unbelievable that they would all choose to lie.

While Denise found it intriguing, the street cops were furious over the lack of evidence, and the forensics specialists were scared silly. There had been ten victims in less than five months and not a shred of evidence to link them to an assailant or to each other. Denise was their last line of defense.

She sighed and clicked off the overhead light in her car, cursing herself as a fool again. Denise had been on this case for two months and made no more headway than anyone else. It was embarrassing – and insult to her professional track record.

What Denise did was hard to describe. Even her boss didn't care how she did it. She just found her way to results that no one else seemed able to. If they were desperate enough to assign her for no better reason than that, they were more desperate than she had seen them in years.

So, what am I doing? Skulking around the alleys where these people last recall being. Why? What am I going to find that no one else has and that I haven't up until now? What do I hope to accomplish by coming here at night?

Denise shifted nervously. She *hoped* to catch a sicko who drained blood from unsuspecting victims, but this was crazy. If Adam knew she was doing this, her boss would handcuff her to her desk. As it was, Adam was nervous that Denise had been requested for this assignment. He'd called her into his office more than once to lecture her on all the rules she already knew, his green eyes showing moments of deep emotion while he spoke. Her night excursions without an escort would drive him batty. Worse, Adam would have her banned from the case.

The alley was between a restaurant and a dance club. It led from the main street to the parking lot where she'd left her car. The last victim had disappeared from this alley more than two weeks earlier, and another would go soon. There was never more than three weeks between attacks.

Denise turned on her flashlight and panned it over the ground and walls. There were no doors that opened onto the alley or hiding places large enough for an adult to use. The fire escapes and dumpsters were at the back of the buildings, nowhere near the mouth of the alley. Both ends were well lit and the alley not poorly lit either. There was no conceivable way to sneak up on a person in the alley. The victim hadn't been with anyone else when she entered the alley. *So, how –*

"Lose something?" a deep voice inquired, a rich voice with a faint accent.

Denise turned with a yelp, losing her balance and landing on her ass with a grunt. She swung her flashlight up at the man standing over her.

He blinked stunning sky-blue eyes in the glare of her light then shaded them with one large hand. His hair was a mass of bright blond curls spilling over his forehead almost into those beautiful eyes. "Are you all right?" he asked.

She felt her cheeks heat. Denise pushed to her feet awkwardly. "How did you do that?"

He furrowed his brow. "Do?"

"How did you sneak up on me?" she demanded. "Where did you come from?"

He rolled his eyes. "I didn't sneak up on you. I

walked, and I came from the street.”

Denise ground her teeth in frustration. He did sneak up on her, and she had to know how. Denise didn’t get lost in her own mind. She was always aware of her surroundings.

He smiled. “Are you sure you’re all right?” He reached a hand out as if to check the temperature at the back of her neck.

“Polero,” a new voice barked. “Face me.”

Denise swung toward the new voice, taking in the tall, dark man dressed all in black. He pulled a wicked-looking dagger more than a foot long from a sheath at his waist. She backpedaled, expecting to hit the wall of the blonde’s chest.

She didn’t. Denise glanced over her shoulder and felt her breathing hitch. He was gone, disappeared without a sound, though he had to have traveled more than fifteen feet to leave the alley. Denise turned back to question the new arrival, but he had disappeared as well — silently. She ran a shaking hand over her forehead.

“People do not just disappear,” she assured herself. Denise turned her light to the ground, scowling that the blonde had been on the cobblestones. She spun back to the other man’s position, sighing in relief at the boot prints in the dirt break.

“Okay. They do exist,” she decided. The blonde would be long gone. He was on the street side of the alley. The dark man was on the parking lot side. Unless he could run the hundred in ten flat while hauling that hardware, she’d see him.

Denise vaulted toward the lot, stilling and turning

back at a sound behind her. Dust danced in the beam of her flashlight. Her hand shook. Denise sank to her knees and touched the cool soil where the footprints had been.

* * *

Polero smiled, watching the policewoman examining the alley feverishly. She was special in many ways: intuitive, determined, and intelligent. Her confusion and denial of the truth was the best part of the game so far. When Jörg ordered him to play this game with the Lord Jäger and his brothers, Polero hadn't been pleased. After the disaster of trying to take Lord Jäger's daughter and his near miss with Stephen's young bride, Polero didn't want to be within two states of those warriors, but Jörg was his master, and Jörg's word was law.

Sometimes, Polero cursed his moments of weakness — the moment when he entered Jörg's service and the moment he accepted this damned half-life to escape death at the hands of Jörg's enemies. Polero hadn't realized how the loss of kind emotions would eat at him as the centuries fell away.

He smiled at the policewoman again — *Denise*. There were only two things that made Polero feel truly alive now, and pretty Denise could provide him with both. And, she would provide — willingly.

Polero dematerialized and drifted toward her. Denise wanted answers. Her thirst for that knowledge would be her undoing. In nearly three centuries walking the Earth, Polero hadn't found a woman who

wasn't consumed by curiosity.

He took shape behind her, watching her sift the dirt through her fingers, listening to her internal list of possible explanations, none of them remotely close to the truth. "I take it he didn't harm you," he noted quietly.

Denise jumped to her feet, laying a slap across his cheek, her heart pounding and her mind a riot of thoughts tumbling over each other. She blushed in the sudden realization that she had lost her composure. It wasn't something she was accustomed to doing. "You," she stammered. "Who the hell are you?"

Polero smiled. Being able to tell her was half the fun of this game. "Antonio Pablo Polero, at your service." He executed a formal bow for show.

She took a step back, her eyes widening in surprise. Denise motioned toward the parking lot. "And Conan?" she asked lightly.

Ah yes. Stephen of Jäger. "An adversary."

Denise raised an eyebrow, regaining a bit of her composure. "You must be good at dodging."

"I have means of protecting myself."

"Where did you disappear to?" she demanded.

"I was leading him away from you. I knew he'd rather hurt me than you."

She didn't miss a beat. "Why would he want to hurt you?"

"Because I am a threat to his safety, and you are not."

Denise laughed harshly.

Polero started speaking before she could. "Don't laugh, Officer Roberts. The police cannot touch him. It

isn't safe for you here. You should leave before he comes back."

She paled.

He nodded. "Yes. I know exactly who you are, Denise." Polero turned toward the street, counting the seconds it took her to recover enough to try and stop him. She moved on five.

"You're withholding information in a police investigation, Mr. Polero," she growled. "You're not leaving here until you give me those answers. Or would you rather leave in cuffs?"

Polero stopped and shot her a look of amazement. Denise was a formidable woman. He crossed his arms over his chest. "Your superiors won't believe what I have to say," he warned her.

"What I've seen so far defies logic. How much worse can it get?"

"Don't ask what you don't want to know."

Denise strode to him. "I do want to know. That's why I'm here."

Polero shivered as he felt Stephen's approach. The youngest of the Jäger brothers had always left a slight tremor in his wake that his brothers weren't sloppy enough to leave. That tremor had saved Polero's life more than once.

He launched toward her, covering Denise's mouth before she could scream. He ghosted them both. "Shhh," he soothed her. Polero scooped his crucifix from beneath his t-shirt and held it between them, as if it had meaning.

She stilled, looking at the couple walking through the alley in confusion. Denise furrowed her brow, her

mind desperately trying to analyze why they weren't reacting to her obvious distress.

He nuzzled against her ear, closing his eyes to the sweet smell of her fear. "Shhh," he reminded her, taking his hand away slowly. "He's back."

Denise's eyes darted back and forth, searching for some sign of Stephen. "I don't see him," she whispered.

"You will not unless he wishes to be seen."

As Polero expected, Stephen heard at least part of their exchange, but still he didn't allow himself to be seen.

Stephen's challenge came from nothingness. "I know it's you Polero, you baby-stealing monster. Using the woman as a shield won't last long. Either you will move or reveal yourself. I have all night."

Denise's eyes widened, and her fear intensified, but with it came her innate curiosity.

Polero pressed a kiss to her ear, speaking in a voice too low for Stephen to hear. "I will lead him away again, but you must promise to leave immediately."

She nodded slowly.

"If you wish to know the truth, meet me at the attack site preceding this one three nights from now."

She nodded again, her heart pounding in excitement.

He kissed her ear again, smiling at how easily she was falling into his trap. Polero pushed away from her and released his ghosting. "Come for me, cursed one," he spat, as he turned and ran.

It was a chance. The warrior could choose to stay behind, to educate the woman in what Polero was,

but the odds were against it. Most warriors would choose to leave an uninjured victim that had not been used for feeding behind for the possibility of making a kill.

Polero laughed aloud, laying on speed as he left Denise's line of sight. Stephen was close behind, as Polero knew he would be. Any warrior would follow. To revenge themselves for the loss of the Lord Jäger's wife and child, any warrior of Jäger would pursue Polero to both their deaths.

* * *

May 4, 1987

Polero materialized behind Denise, running his fingertips down her arm slowly. Denise turned to him, her hand fisted on the grip of her handgun. She met his eyes, relaxing with a sigh.

"Mr. Polero," she greeted him stiffly.

He chuckled. "Antonio will be fine," he assured her. "Shall we go, Denise?"

She backed off a step, her eyes narrowing. "Go? Where are we going?" *Why didn't I tell Adam and get backup? Because, he would have had a cow about the first night out, let alone this one! Well, what would he say to you going somewhere with –*

"You want to know the truth?" he interrupted her internal argument.

"Of course." *Adam is going to kill me.*

"Then come with me."

She hesitated. "Tell me why that man called you a baby stealer first."

Polero affected a sigh. "It's not what it sounds like."

"You took his child," she accused.

"No. His master took my brother's wife. He nearly killed Jörg to take her. I was trying to take Anna — I was trying to take her and her child back." He paused for effect — and to push back the true anguish of his failure. "She's dead, and her daughter will never know her. I failed utterly."

"How utterly?" she asked suspiciously.

"There's a reason they want my brother and I dead. If I ever get the chance again —"

She shuddered.

"Do you want to know the truth?" he asked.

Denise nodded. She didn't pull away when he wrapped an arm around her hip and led her along the nearly deserted streets. This was the most amusement Polero had gotten from the game thus far, giving Denise just enough of the truth and avoiding just enough lies to make it more interesting.

He'd chosen this site for a reason. One of his holes was close to this alley. Polero had surrounded himself with books and icons over the centuries, copying or stealing texts to keep a stable library even on those rare occasions when warriors discovered one of his holes. Tonight, Polero would sacrifice one to his pleasures.

She entered his apartment over an abandoned clothing store willingly and looked around at some of his treasures. He'd collected both Christian and warrior icons: artful recreations of the crucifix, religious robes, a few amulets stolen from dead

warriors, and even a sacred weapon. He'd copied religious texts from both religions, some calligraphed meticulously and some rewritten to suit his own needs.

Denise ran her fingers over a twentieth century Roman Catholic collar. "You mugged a priest?" she joked.

Polero chuckled as he dragged off his sweatshirt in favor of the muscle shirt beneath. "I was a priest," he answered honestly. *Not in this time, but I was once of the order.*

She turned to him in surprise, running her eyes from his jean-clad legs to the ladder of muscles up his abdomen to the tattoo of a cross on the front of his right shoulder. "You?"

He nodded. "Surprised?"

"To say the least," she admitted. "What happened? You *were* a priest."

Polero shrugged. "The organized religions aren't into the hunting of evil as they once were."

"Evil?" she asked dubiously.

He strode toward her, pressing lightly to her body as he reached for one of the volumes on the shelves at her back. Polero kept his eyes locked on hers as he brought the book down for her. Denise gasped as he hardened, gazing down between their bodies.

Polero backed away, biting back a smile at her interest. "Natural reaction to a beautiful woman," he decided, opening the book and feigning interest.

Denise blushed. "But, you're a priest," she protested weakly.

"No, I *was* a priest. That was a long time ago, and

even priests react to a beautiful woman."

Polero had certainly reacted to Yzabeau. Whether it was Jörg's possession of her or something nameless about her, Polero could never say. Regana's souls had always captured men, warriors, and beasts alike.

"Beautiful?" she scoffed.

He moved his eyes over the bun of auburn hair and dark eyes to the ample breasts half-disguised beneath her jacket to the outline of her mound through her jeans. "Yes," he answered bluntly.

She blushed deeper and cleared her throat. "Answers," she reminded him.

But, she was pleased that he thought her beautiful, and she wished another man thought so — *Adam. The man must be a fool.* Polero looked back to the book. "Of course."

Denise was the type of woman Polero enjoyed. It wasn't so unusual that she didn't find herself attractive. Americans of the present day leaned toward willowy females, not a woman with lush curves and breasts a man could become lost in.

He sat on the couch below the lamp he'd left burning and waved for her to join him. Polero scowled as she sat on the opposite end. "You speak Latin?" he asked pointedly.

She shook her head, easing next to his body. Denise took the book from his hands, gasping at the illumination. Polero swallowed a laugh. He'd chosen this volume purposefully. Long ago, Polero had designed this seduction piece for nights like this. Her breathing was ragged as she surveyed the illumination of two beasts sharing a woman while

they fed from her, the victim's face a study in exquisite pleasure.

Polero remembered the night in question well. Every illumination in the book was a recreation of some sensual pleasure in the years since he'd abandoned the church to follow the more powerful gods of the beasts. Having the trappings of his former life around him served only two purposes. It was once a comfort, and it put humans at ease to associate him with the position he once believed in.

"They're—" Denise's eyes went wide in understanding. *He's cracked.* "But that's not—"

"Real? I assure you, the beasts are very real. What you see there is a new beast awakening after his change."

"A what?"

"A turned. A beast made by one of the elders, a master. Some of the elders would just fuck the new recruit while he fed, but that is not as striking a picture as them sharing the turned's first victim." *And, Jörg is not like other elders.*

Polero hardened further at the memory of taking Jörg's blood, Polero's beast demanding other pleasures.

Jörg ordered him to close his feeding site, looking to Polero's engorged member in something resembling pity and ordering him not to make a move. It was maddening, feeling the burn to climax and not having the leave of his master to seek it. For a long moment, Polero believed it was some sort of punishment Jörg was handing down, though he couldn't think clearly enough to reason why Jörg would want to punish him that night.

Polero watched as Jörg drew the woman between them, the elder's hands teasing the woman sexually as he began to take her blood. The woman cried out in ecstasy as Jörg pushed his cock into the depths of her ass.

Polero's fangs itched to taste the blood he smelled. He stroked his cock, needing to taste other depths. Perhaps Jörg would give the woman to Polero when he tired of her, but the waiting would drive him mad, seeing and smelling their blood and sex.

Jörg closed his feeding site and met Polero's eyes. "Join me," he invited. "Feed your beast, but feed it slowly. Feed it gently."

From that day to this, Polero had never felt anything as sublime as sharing that woman with Jörg: kissing her as they thrust inside her, sharing her blood, taking her body in every conceivable combination that night. He and Jörg had shared women on many occasions, but there was something unforgettable in that first time, a dark rush of power, the fellowship of blood before it became jaded and forgotten as every other kind emotion had been.

Polero forced his mind back to the subject at hand.

Denise flipped the page, swallowing hard at the illumination of him taking a woman over a ship's railing.

Ah, yes. The captain's mistress had been luscious and willing. The captain had been a bought human. He had her himself after Polero was done with her, though for her comfort, she had no memory of anyone but her lover.

Polero forced his fangs back as Denise's body prepared for him. She turned another page.

The minister's daughter he'd deflowered, his tongue

taunting her spasming body as he drank from her engorged tissues.

She bit her lower lip, moving her thighs against each other restlessly. Denise turned another page, her breath hitching at the next scene.

Oh yes. She likes that. Polero smiled, morphing his member larger as he had that night.

She'd been a streetwalker he'd picked up for his amusement. Polero had enjoyed watching her mouth spread wide around his increased size.

"No one is that big," Denise whispered.

Polero chuckled. "Really?" he drawled.

Denise glanced at his face then panned her eyes down to his lap. She darkened and looked at the book again, running a hand through her hair nervously. *He was a priest? What a waste!* "These beasts," she choked out. "Vampires — Tell me about them. What does all of this say? Besides their love for screwing anything that moves, of course."

She was sweating, shaking. Her body needed completion almost as much as his own did, but she directed him back to the subject at hand. *Self-preservation. She's afraid to take what she wants.*

He reached across her body, pointing to the text. Denise's eyes strayed to the inked drawing often. Polero snuggled closer to her as he eased his fingertip across the page.

"It talks about the limitations of the beasts, the ways to kill them."

"How?" she asked urgently.

"There are icons."

"Crosses? Holy water?"

Polero laughed harshly. "No. I believed the old stories, too. Nothing so mundane works against them. I learned that the hard way."

Denise searched her eyes over him frantically, locking on the marks Jörg left on him when Polero entered into service with him. She touched the marks, rising to her knees. Her breath was hot on his skin. "Do you remember this?"

"Yes." Jörg wanted him to remember every searing second of that feeding without the pleasure he typically gave his bought humans. It was a punishment, a warning of what cruelty he was capable of if Polero ever crossed him again.

"Why did they leave your memory? That is how they're taking away memories. Right?" She touched the marks gently, as if he would break.

"Yes. The beasts reorder or blank memories to hide their existence." He cupped her hip. "I imagine the one who did this was playing with me. I was a priest, after all."

"You tried to use the usual means to stop a vampire?"

"He walked into my church, killed a bishop, and nearly killed me. Nothing worked against him. It was years later when I found these texts, when I learned that my fellow clerics knew much more than they let on." *Ah, Jonrie. Working for the enemy all that time.*

"You confronted them?"

Polero rubbed her lower back. "Yes. It's amazing the things the church doesn't admit to."

"So, you set out to do this on your own?" she asked in awe.

"Armed with some texts I liberated from the church and a few loyal men with the same beliefs."

"Your brother?" Denise asked, sitting down and meeting his eyes.

"Yes. Jörg and I have always been in this together." Polero smiled at that. *Little comfort that is. I cannot even find comfort in our connection. I cannot find comfort in anything but what Denise can offer.*

"Why?" she mused, her mind abruptly elsewhere, on a track and moving so fast, Polero had trouble following her.

"Why what?" He ran his hands further up her back, easing the tension in her muscles.

Denise sighed.

So typical. My past always makes them feel so safe.

"Why is the vampire doing this? I mean, he has to eat, but it's more than that. He wants these victims found. What is his reason?"

"It's a game," he confided.

"A game? What kind of game?"

"Look at it from the culprit's mindset. This brings attention the pursuer does not want or need." *At a time when he needs the distraction least.* "It flaunts the ability of anyone to stop him. It sends pursuers scrambling to end it."

She nodded. "He's amusing himself."

Not yet. "They live to appease their hungers and still their longings. They want endlessly."

"Blood," she mused.

Polero picked up the book from where she dropped it between them and flipped another page, turning it for her to see. "And other pleasures."

Denise looked at the book for a long moment, barely breathing in her excitement. She blushed deeply.

"What is it?" he asked, though Polero knew well enough that she wanted him desperately. She'd resigned herself to the fact that she could never tell her co-workers about all of this. What Denise learned now was for her own avid thirst for knowledge.

"W-who wrote and illustrated this book?" she stammered.

"Priests," he offered in half-truth. "Working from the actual accounts of copulation of beasts with human women."

"They're drawn— They all seem to be enjoying themselves."

"That surprises you?" he asked.

"Yes," she practically shouted. "They— And they drink blood, and—"

He smiled at her unsettled mind. "Ah. I see. The beasts feed off of emotion almost as much as they feed off of blood. They don't feel kind emotions of their own."

"They want to make the woman happy to experience the rush of her emotions?"

"Absolutely."

And much more. The beast demands satisfaction sexually while it feeds, satisfaction for the beast. Any powerful emotions satisfy the beast. A woman's terror in rape is enough. The stillness— The peace in feeling her pleasure is for the tattered remains of the man not for the beast. One who forgets the pleasure and peace to be had for the man should be exterminated. Jörg taught Polero

that on the night he turned.

Denise fingered the illumination, staring at it again. "There was no sign of sexual assault," she noted.

Polero grimaced. "You're not listening. It wouldn't be an assault."

"You're saying the women willingly screwed a beast?"

"If you want a man badly enough, don't you?" he prodded.

She darkened further and cleared her throat. "How would he convince them so quickly?"

He smiled. "A being that reads minds? He knows exactly how to touch her, exactly what to say to her."

"It can't be that easy."

Polero rolled his eyes at that. It wasn't the easiest thing Jörg had ever charged him with doing. "He picks his victims carefully." He dragged a finger up her arm. Yes, Polero had chosen Denise very carefully.

"And the man?" she asked slowly.

"He's not into men. That was a simple feeding."

"Why vary the typical plan?"

He scowled. "Irritation. Pure and simple. Days without finding a suitable woman. The beast got hungry."

She nodded and leaned back, flipping through the book. Polero counted the pages, mentally picturing each illumination as she went, gauging its effect on her. Gods, but her scent was driving him mad.

"What is it like?" she asked suddenly.

"Like?" Polero traced the outer seam of her jeans

from knee to hip.

"Tracking them. Dodging them."

"Lonely." Loneliness wasn't a kind emotion. Loneliness was something Polero felt every day of his life.

Denise turned the page again, and Polero bit back a chuckle. The illumination was so close to their current situation that Polero knew she would be affected. Her perusal of the book was giving him a very clear picture of what would excite her.

"You don't interact with other people much," she guessed. "Not even your brother."

"He's mourning," Polero excused Jörg immediately. Until he claimed his mate, Jörg would always mourn them. *No. He mourns the lost souls even as he revels in the one he holds. There is no peace for Jörg.*

"You've never married?"

"No. I have never been blessed with something so precious," he decided bitterly. From priest to bought human to damned beast, there was never an appropriate time to marry.

Her hand touched his thigh and lingered, brushing over the muscles, taut in his restraint. She started to pull back, but Polero covered her hand with his. Denise met his eyes and moved her hand beneath the cover of his, toward his inner thigh and up to his crotch. He matched her movements, encouraging her.

She wanted to seduce him. Denise wanted to be bold. That was the fun of this game. He'd known when he'd chosen her that Denise would pursue given the chance to do so.

He tensed as her hand covered his aching length.

She stilled, uncertain.

"Don't stop," he gasped. Polero tipped his hips beneath her.

Denise traced the bulge breathlessly. "So big," she whispered.

Taste it, he begged silently, restraining the mad urge to coerce her. *Nothing the warriors can see until it's too late*, he reminded himself.

Polero moved his free hand between her legs, skating his fingertips over her damp jeans, over the heat he'd created in her. His hunger spiked at that, at her excitement and the blood rushing in her veins.

The hungers of the beast are formidable. He who cannot order his beast doesn't deserve to live another day.

Denise pushed up on her knees and brought her lips to his, tentatively, questioning Polero silently. He captured her mouth, stroking her more purposefully, letting her feel his hunger.

She did feel it. Warriors believed there were few human sensitives, but Polero secretly believed that every woman was one to some extent. They all felt the darkness of the beast. Some were drawn to it. Some were repelled by it. Those who were drawn to it required no coercion to make them hunger to taste the darkness. Denise hungered for it, and the hunger made women behave in unbelievable ways. Denise pulled up at his shirt, and Polero released her long enough to allow her to pull it off.

Strictly speaking, clothing wasn't a necessity for Polero. He could project the illusion of clothing right down to the feel of the fabric against his own skin and the skin of anyone who touched him. He certainly

didn't need them to shield his body from the elements. Even in a solid form, the elements didn't touch him, and dematerialized, he was impervious even to attack.

Polero preferred clothing. He was one of the highest level turned there was. Elders and others like himself were capable of dematerializing solid, inanimate objects worn on their bodies. The illusion of clothing was one of the few powers he possessed that Polero seldom used. He preferred the reality of true clothing, and he preferred feeling women remove them.

She kissed him, sinking into his hunger, matching his rising lust. Denise unbuttoned his jeans with a single pull. Polero groaned at the sensation. He loved the feel of the new jeans: acid-washed, relaxed fit, soft and form fitting. Nothing— Not even leather or silk felt as good against his body.

Denise's mouth closed around the head of his aching cock. *Almost nothing feels better than jeans, but a woman's body tops the list.* She strained to take him in, and Polero wished he'd made himself smaller just to feel Denise take all of him. He smiled. She would take all of him very soon.

Polero dragged her shirt up her body and unhooked her bra, playing at the tips of her breasts. "I will be returning this favor," he promised her.

She met his eyes, peeling her jacket, shirt and bra off as she drove him on, inviting Polero blatantly to use her body. He smiled, the predator raising its head and taking in her scent.

Polero wanted Denise more than he'd wanted a

woman in years. She was a classic beauty. Her hips were made to carry sons that some lucky human man would give her. Her breasts were lush and full, capped with rose-colored nipples. Only one thing was wrong. He reached out and pulled the clips from her hair, letting the heavy waves of auburn hair cascade over her shoulders.

"Now," he ordered. "I have to taste you."

Denise stood before him, unbuttoning her jeans and easing them down those wonderful hips. Polero took over as her curls appeared, sweeping her down onto the couch and stripping off her remaining clothing and shoes. Her gun thumped to the rug, forgotten by its owner.

He buried his tongue in the well of her honey, drawing her essence out and tasting her. Far from assuaging his hunger, it fueled him. Her musk and her cries made him ache for more.

The minister's daughter danced in his mind much as she had danced for Polero, begging him to possess her again. He could take Denise's blood now, drawing it from her as she shattered, her blood and climax mixing in his mouth, but the warriors would be on him before he could find further pleasure with her. Polero rose up over her, determined to feel his cock buried deep inside her.

Denise's eyes opened wide as the engorged head parted her. "No," she gasped.

He ground his teeth, tapping down his frustration. If she told him to stop now, he'd use coercion. He'd feed. Polero would taste her climax any way he had to. "Yes," he counted urgently.

Denise's hand circled him. "Let me get on top." She didn't plead for what she wanted. She ordered what she needed from him.

Polero smiled, visions of Denise stolen from her mind making him pulse in anticipation. He eased off of her and sat on the couch by her feet, stroking his length in invitation. "Yes," he growled his agreement.

She sat beside him, dropping to encase him in her mouth one last time and releasing him before Polero could protest. Denise placed a hand on his shoulder and swung her leg over him. Polero guided his cock, still wet and tingling from her mouth, between the slick outer lips of her sex. Denise lowered herself, sheathing his increased size, inch by torturous inch.

"Yes," he hissed. "Take me. Take all of me." His hands tightened on her hips as Denise settled in his lap, taking him to the root.

She started moving over him, taking what she needed from him, her body and mind a riot. Polero teased at her breasts, guiding her over his length faster, pounding hard into her.

Denise was close, ready to plunge over the edge. It was time. Polero nuzzled her throat, allowing his fangs to extend as she threw her head back.

"Why?" she whispered.

"Why what?"

"Why one puncture? Why not two?"

He kissed at the artery, feeling the pulse of blood to her brain speed. "He's a turned. Long before his master turned him, they went head to head, and one of his eyeteeth was broken in the exchange. It extends, but it isn't sharp enough or long enough to pierce

flesh."

Denise sighed as she wrapped her fingers in the waves of his hair. "How do you know?"

"I was there."

Polero sank his single good fang into her, shuddering as the pain drove her over. Denise screamed in ecstasy, her muddled mind trying to piece together what he was doing to her. Her hands fisted in his hair, and her body clenched rhythmically on his length. He suckled at her, drinking deeply of both her blood and emotions, wrapping her at last in the pleasure he could give her while he fed. He was a master at this, at gauging how much pain a woman would bear in orgasm before he had to trick her mind into finding his feeding a joy.

Polero pulled back as he climaxed, filling Denise with his sterile fluids, the peace he came to associate with sex, blood, and death washing over him. His beast was sated, though the smell of her blood rushing over her chest, called to him, and Polero resumed his feeding. The spilled slick teased at their bodies, as he took her in slow, sensuous strokes.

"Soon. I will clean you and dress you. I will leave you where you will get immediate medical care. I wish I could leave you this memory, but I cannot."

Denise moaned her protest, wanting to hold to this moment as they all did — until they weren't in the arms of the beast and wrapped in the alluring cloak of darkness. Few women pursued the game that far.

"You have earned a page in my book, Denise. You will forget this night, but I never will." The game was all that was left to tickle his morbid sense of humor after all

the centuries of living with his beast. Polero began his reordering of her memory with a heavy heart. Of all the women over the years, few made the game as amusing as Denise had.

* * *

Denise groaned against the harsh light, shading her eyes and reaching for the light switch next to her bed. The switch wasn't there. The wall was tile instead of wallpaper.

She slitted her eyes open and furrowed her brow at the sight of the IV stand over her. The scent of antiseptic was heavy in the air. It was a hospital, but what the hell was she doing here? Denise fought for a clear memory, but her head ached with the effort — almost as much as her body ached.

"Finally," a voice growled at her.

Denise turned to it tenderly. "Adam?"

He nodded grimly. Her boss looked sleep-deprived. Dark circles shadowed his beautiful green eyes, and it looked like he hadn't had a shave recently.

"What the hell did you think you were doing?" he continued.

She closed her eyes, trying desperately to remember what she did to end up here. Denise wasn't a street cop. There was no reason that she should have been shot or beaten, though beaten didn't sound far from the truth by the feel of it.

"You didn't think to ask for backup? You didn't call me?"

"Backup?" she repeated.

"Backup. Something you were ordered to take along if you were going to do something this monumentally — You met a possible suspect alone," he hinted in irritation.

"What suspect? I would never —"

He held up her notebook, his eyes flashing in fury.

A pulse of sexual excitement coursed over her nerves. Denise pushed it away, disconcerted. "And?" she asked weakly.

"You tell me. It's your handwriting, and we retrieved it from your car."

"Adam, all I know is that my head hurts, my stomach is upset, every muscle and joint in my body aches, and you're yelling at me." *And all I can picture is you alone with me somewhere private. What the hell is wrong with me?* She'd always fantasized about Adam, but it never took over her mind like this. Maybe her walls were down.

"You don't remember arranging to meet a Mr. Antonio Pablo Polero?" he demanded.

"Who the hell —"

"Six feet, two-ten, blonde, light blue eyes, slight accent — maybe Spanish — *with a question mark,*" he snapped, his body trembling.

"Sounds cute," she quipped. "Sort of like you, except for the accent and your pretty green eyes. Where can I find this Adonis?"

Adam raised an eyebrow in surprise.

Denise ran a shaking hand over her forehead. *Why did I say that? I am never going to live this one down.*

Adam shook his head, suddenly uncertain.

"Denise — What day is it?"

She glanced at the sunlight streaming around the window blinds. "Daylight," she noted. "Saturday."

He paled. "What's the last thing you remember?"

Denise grimaced at the spike of pain thinking about it caused. "Punching out," she groaned. "I think. No. I had tacos for dinner," she continued hopefully.

"Friday?" he asked urgently.

"Of course, Friday," she snapped. "Adam, what the hell is wrong with you?"

He sank into a chair next to the bed and extended his hand toward her, touching her cheek with a pained look. Adam turned his arm to offer his watch for her inspection. Denise looked at him in confusion.

"Read it," he ordered quietly.

She squinted at the digital numbers. "Eleven-twenty," she noted. "I don't —"

"The date."

"The — Have you lost your mind? I told you the date."

"The date," he insisted.

Denise shook her head, biting back a sick swirl. She locked her eyes on the watch again. "The fifth? Adam, please tell me your watch is fast," she managed weakly. "Otherwise, I've been unconscious a long damn time."

"You've been unconscious for thirteen hours, but you've lost four days."

"Then I did even worse than the civilians," she complained bitterly. *Oh, I will never live this down.*

"Not entirely."

"What do you mean?"

Adam took her hand, squeezing it and offering her a rakish smile. "You came back with two descriptions and a name for the clear description. At least we have somewhere to start. That's more than anyone else has given us."

Denise nodded. "If it does us any good."

He stroked her knuckles, an almost unconscious move. "What do you mean?"

"Just a feeling that someone is playing games with us."

His smile disappeared. "What makes you say that?"

"I have no idea." She blushed. "I just — know it."

Adam nodded grimly. "That was why you were requested. Wasn't it?"

"Yes," she admitted. "Yes, it was."

STEALING INNOCENCE

A short story from the NIGHT WARRIORS
series

By Brenna Lyons

March 15, 2021

Lorian panned his eyes over the packed nightclub, biting back the urge to laugh at the young pups playing at “creatures of the night.” He supposed he should be thankful that humans found such a fascination with the occult that this garish display of that fascination had lasted for almost half a century.

Lorian hated the term “vampire.” Overall, it was a foul, over-commercialized bastardization of his kind, but playing vampire had its use. It was a simple way to find willing, young women without coercing them – or even hiding what he was.

Not that Lorian had problems attracting women. Quite the contrary. Even in his earliest days as a cursed warrior, the days when he was still known as Dado, Lorian had no difficulty having nearly any woman he wanted for the evening. Meeting a woman’s eyes and smiling his wolfish smile was typically enough to send her tumbling into the closest bed with him. Her eyes would survey his six-foot-three-inch frame, muscular from his years of training, and mentally gauge his sexual prowess in thoughts so loud a first-turned couldn’t miss them.

He started moving through the club, rejecting one possible female after another. The one who grasped his backside through the simulation of his jeans was tainted heavily with drugs. This one was with someone, and Lorian was in no mood to play at stealing another man’s property tonight.

That one— He shuddered. Despite what he was, Lorian occasionally encountered a woman who was

more bloodthirsty — he scowled at the pun — than he was. Sometimes, he took the time to educate them in true fear, but tonight was not the night for that.

Tonight, Lorian was restless. He wanted something different. But what? After fifteen hundred years, what hadn't Lorian encountered so many times that he was weary of it?

He paused, scowling deeper as he gave a wide berth to a female protected. One would think that she would avoid places like this, having been bitten once, by one of the remaining turned, but what had she to fear while the cursed warriors protected her? She was in more danger from a human pretender than from Lorian.

A woman laughed, and Lorian perked, turning eagerly to the sound. There was something pure in that laugh, something young and full of life, something Lorian hadn't tasted in a very long time. Yes. A touch of innocence was a rare find in this circle.

Lorian had grown complacent over the years. He'd fallen into the habit of taking what was easy to take, what threw itself on him like a bitch in heat instead of what he would have to entice to his bed. He'd forgotten how sweet the blood of a pure heart could be. It was time to change that.

She came into view, a pale beauty with strawberry blond hair, pale green eyes, and a spray of freckles over her nose and cheeks. She was dressed in a pair of black jeans and a black satin, boned bustier, but she shifted uncomfortably, as if she was embarrassed to be seen in it.

He moved closer, searching her mind and chuckling at her train of thought. Lorian let his fangs extend just far enough to peek past his lips, his beast as pleased as Lorian was with the possibilities this woman represented.

Why did I let Angela talk me into this? How is a man supposed to take me seriously in this getup? She glanced at Lorian and swallowed hard, smoothing the front of her bustier nervously. *Especially a man like that!*

Lorian swallowed a laugh. Innocent or not, she was no more immune to him than dozens of other females he'd brushed away as he walked across the club, but this was the one that Lorian wanted. The thrill of the chase was with him, and there would be no settling for what was readily available tonight. That road led to pain and anguish, and Lorian had learned it well long ago.

He put his hand out to her. "Would you care to dance?" he asked in a voice rough in arousal and rich in his old-world roots. *Very old*, he thought without humor.

Her eyes widened, and a pretty, pink blush stained her cheeks. The woman beside her shot her an acid look as she placed her hand in his.

Lorian ignored the other woman studiously, refusing to meet her eyes when she made obvious overtures for exactly that. Her emotions were dark and twisted: disbelief, envy, hatred. She was Angela, the one who invited this lovely creature out tonight, certain that her diminutive stature and lack of sophistication would make — *Haylie* the perfect offset to her own allure. It galled Angela that Lorian

preferred her plain —

He furrowed his brow. *Plain?* Angela found Haylie plain? She was anything but the typical fare this crowd offered him, and for that reason, she was anything but plain.

Lorian led Haylie onto the dance floor and pulled her close to his body, her face only reaching his mid-chest. Haylie hesitated, winding her arms around his neck and stretching her back uncomfortably to accomplish it. He guided her hands to his chest, pressing them to the heat of his body. Haylie gasped at the connection then again as Lorian wrapped his hands around her waist, brushing his thumbs over her hip bones.

He guided her through a sensuous brush of his body to hers. She licked her lip slowly, pressing her crotch to his thigh as he slid his knee between her thighs. Lorian had danced this dance many times, tens of thousands of willing women over the long centuries. The ones who were new to the dance gave him the greatest thrill — the ones like Haylie.

Her eyes were wide in wonder, her breathing edgy and uneven. Lorian heard the rush of blood in her veins and felt the pounding of her heart against his chest. *Yes. Her blood will be sweet in her innocence and wild in her — not fear — apprehension.* It had been well over a century since he'd tasted that combination, and his cock ached in need.

As a cursed warrior, he'd believed his drive would make him mad. The drive of a damned beast was easily ten times as uncontrolled. He forced his fangs back as his beast demanded to taste Haylie. A prize

like this was not to be rushed.

"Do you honestly enjoy these things?" Haylie asked suddenly.

Lorian looked down at the mounds of her breasts, shelved in the bustier, and smiled. "What would those be, my dear?" he teased.

She followed his line of sight and blushed again. "Not— Oh, for pities sake!"

"Forgive me. Do I like what, precisely?"

Haylie reached up and touched his lips, searching out the tips of his fangs. Lorian shivered, taking the opportunity to suck in her fingertip, savoring her unique flavor on his tongue as he caressed her.

"These," she whispered so low that Lorian would not have heard her over the low throb of music were it not for his superb hearing. Haylie raised her voice, believing him ignorant of her first statement. "Do you really enjoy this scene?"

Lorian nipped playfully at her finger and released it, sighing at the restraint he was showing. "It is a game," he admitted. "It *could* be a very exciting and erotic game," he offered.

"This?" she asked dubiously.

"This."

"How?"

"Let me show you."

Haylie glanced at Angela. The dark-haired woman practically bled and perspired thoughts of wrath. Lorian set his jaw in fury. He would have to educate Angela in fear another night.

He turned Haylie's face back to his gently. "Trust me," he mouthed.

Though she didn't verbally agree, Lorian felt her interest peak. He led her into the dark recesses of the club, corners that were all but unlit. In twenty years, this club hadn't changed much. The recesses were notorious for exhibitionists and voyeurs alike. Over the years, Lorian had taken at least three dozen women in this place, in these dark alcoves.

Haylie lost herself in the gyrations of his lengthening cock against her stomach, pressing herself against him in silent invitation. When the wall met her back, he pressed hard to her, smiling as she moaned. Her scent had the beast all but mad for her.

Lorian cupped Haylie's face, kissing her slowly, dragging his teeth over her tongue and lips. He moved to the line of her jaw and up to her ear. Haylie's hands fisted in the illusion of his black t-shirt and jacket.

"Pretend," he whispered, drawing her earlobe into his mouth. "A vampire wants you. He wants to taste all of you." Lorian trailed his tongue over the seam of her lips. "Your mouth."

She opened for him, sucking at his tongue as she pulled him closer, caressing his fangs with the tip of her tongue. Lorian pulled her into his arms, lifting Haylie until he pressed her to the wall as if he were locked inside her, her legs drawn up over his hips.

"The honey deep inside you," he offered. "He wants to taste that, too."

"And my blood?" she managed weakly.

Lorian kissed at her throat, tracing the tip of his tongue over her. He suckled at her, teasing her with more, marking her in the human way. Haylie pressed

to him, grasping his hair and holding his head to her.

He eased away slowly. "Are love bites really so bad?" he asked.

"No," she admitted, panting.

Lorian teased her nipple through the black satin. "Let me teach you. Let me teach you what loving a vampire is."

She shivered. "Soulless. Heartless. Dead."

"No. Alive and warm. A vampire isn't cruel. He hungers. He needs, and he will give you as much pleasure as you give him."

That was a lie. Not even Haylie could give Lorian true pleasure. She could still the need for a night or two. She could ease the emptiness and longing for everything he lost when he went beast. He could live vicariously through her pleasure, tasting distracting shades of kind emotions while he fed from her.

Any strong emotion in feeding charged him beyond the taking of blood, but kind emotions were best. The faint touch of what Lorian couldn't feel alone anymore drew him to Haylie. He hadn't felt pure desire without design in a long time, only once that he could recall in his lifetime as a cursed warrior – and that had been a lie.

Lorian eased her breast out of the bustier, lowering his mouth to the peak. "He wants to taste all of you, Haylie. Can he?"

"Here?" she asked nervously. She looked around, gasping at the sight of the couple further down the wall. They were just barely visible in the near darkness for her, though they were fully on display for Lorian.

Haylie's reactions were a jumble of half-formed impressions that tickled his dark sense of humor. She was horrified and amazed, repulsed and aroused.

Lorian suckled at her breast more feverently. Haylie moaned, her fingers winding in his hair as the other woman dropped to her knees and took her lover in her mouth.

The fool. Never trust a woman who is that eager to pleasure you.

He freed her other breast, smiling as he licked at the hard bead of the nipple, ready for him before he touched it. She shivered, her eyes darting between Lorian's mouth and the length of the other man disappearing between the kneeling woman's lips. Haylie's inhibitions were being forgotten, her objections falling away. She stroked his cock distractedly, but her mind still rebelled at the woman on her knees in the dark corner of the club — *thank the gods.*

The other man pulled his woman to her feet and captured her in a bruising kiss. He whirled her around and pressed her hands to the wall, mounting her with a grunt of satisfaction. Haylie shied, shaking her head. The image was too much for her.

Lorian nodded. "I agree. Not here. Name a place," he offered. "I am not like that beast." *Liar. How many times have I taken pleasure like that — in the early years before I learned control of my beast and even recently with a willing wanton?* He was undeniably a damned beast, but Lorian hadn't taken a woman like Haylie with so little regard in a thousand years. Not since he had gotten over Riberta —

He winced. He wouldn't think about Riberta now. His only regret in how that particular woman had died was that Jörg hadn't known about her talents. Lorian would gladly have told his esteemed youngest brother all he knew just to watch her die in a way more fitting of her crimes.

Haylie met his eyes hopefully, her quaking fingers still laid over his rigid length. She was confused, afraid to believe him, though she ached to experience what he offered.

"Anywhere," he offered. "Anything you want, Haylie."

She nodded. "My place is close."

Lorian smiled, arranging her breasts carefully back into her bustier. He slid her down his body until she settled shakily on her strappy heels. He steadied her for their trek across the club.

Halfway to the door, a vision from Lorian's darkest nightmares appeared in the form of a night warrior – a young one. Lorian held his breath for one heart-stopping moment while he assured himself that it wasn't Hunter of Crossbearer-König. Hunter was the only warrior alive who had a chance of killing Lorian.

He scowled, wishing he had paid more attention to his enemies in recent years. The boy was either one of Stephen or Colin's sons. There were so many Jäger boys, Lorian hadn't seen the point in identifying them all, and taking the time to ask one of his turned to identify the boy was worth even less of his time.

It wasn't unusual for a warrior to show up here. The club was a perfect cover for beasts, and what better break for a roving night warrior than coming to

this club? Lorian wondered, not for the first time, if the warriors made use of the dark recesses to find release while they were here.

Lorian smiled. He could ghost them both fully and slip past the unsuspecting young warrior, but there was a better option, a way to humiliate the pup and teach that vicious she-beast Angela a lesson at the same time.

He picked his two subjects carefully, sending a powerful coercion over them. The pup raised his head, bloodlust rising in an impressive *Blutjagd* for one so young.

The first of Lorian's puppets reached Angela, sweeping her up with offers of sex and more. The fool was flattered — until the second man reached her, doing the same. The duo pulled at her and punched at each other. Angela panicked at her inability to escape them.

The warrior locked on Lorian and pushed his way through the crowd between them. Lorian smiled, letting his fangs extend fully. He jerked his head toward the struggling trio as he sent another flurry of coercion to still the bouncers and management heading into the fray. The struggle grew from three to five to nine bodies in the blink of an eye.

The pup faltered, gleaning the challenge at last. He had a choice — his duty to end Lorian or his duty to protect the humans being injured by his actions. Even if the warrior killed Lorian, a bar fight like this wouldn't end with his death. Lorian had chosen his coercion well. The combatants became more numerous with every passing moment. Too soon,

even the bouncers wouldn't be able to stop it, even without Lorian's push to continue fighting.

Lorian chuckled as the warrior turned into the fray with a series of curses, doing his best to end it without injuring the humans further. *Good choice, warrior. You have no idea how close you came to dying at my hand tonight.* Lorian was an elder, and he was fated to die by König hands. No mere Jäger pup could stand against him.

"Something wrong?" Haylie asked, struggling to peer over the shoulders of the crowd.

"Bar fight. We should go before the police get here."

She nodded. "Or before we get our heads broken open," she agreed.

Lorian cast one last mocking smile at the pup's back. He'd hold his coercion for a few more minutes before he let the humans come to their senses. In the end, the warrior would suffer instruction at his Lord's hand, and Angela would think twice about baiting men. Perhaps she wouldn't die as Riberta had.

* * *

Haylie closed the door to her apartment, an attack of nerves making her hand tremble against the lock. Lorian cupped her waist and drew her to his body, his erection pulsing at the line of hooks down her back.

She shivered. "You're hungry," Haylie whispered.

"Yes. I am." He ran his fingers up the line of hooks, releasing the first two as he kissed the column of her

neck. "Vampires live to taste a woman like you."

Haylie nodded, as he released more of the hooks. "Would a vampire take such care?" she asked.

"An elder would, though the urge to destroy this garment would be nearly maddening." *Nearly? It is maddening.*

"Why don't you?"

Lorian stilled. "You wouldn't mind it?" His cock ached at the game they were playing. Lorian hated the word vampire, but he would gladly play vampire for Haylie for the rush of her excitement.

"I hate this outfit," she assured him. "It was Angela's idea."

He grasped the heavy material of the bustier between his hands and tore it in two, letting it fall away as he cupped her breasts. Haylie whimpered in a combination of arousal and apprehension.

"Turn for me," he requested, crowding her body to the door. Lorian knelt and suckled at her breast, steadying Haylie as he removed her heels.

"How old is my vampire?" she whispered.

Lorian shivered at the longing in her voice, nipping her breast with his fangs as he released her. "The one who wants you is the oldest alive by centuries, the elder Lorian. He's fifteen hundred years old, and his hungers are very strong."

She played her fingers in his hair. "How strong?"

He grasped the waistband of her jeans and ripped them to a point deep on her thigh. "Very strong."

Haylie watched, wide-eyed and barely breathing, as Lorian peeled the fabric away and tasted the skin he uncovered. He traced the edges of her little red

panties — crushed silk, pushing the jeans down her legs and past her knees.

Lorian pulled her feet up one at a time to remove the jeans. He planted his lips as high as he could between her thighs. “Open for me,” he instructed her.

She spread her feet wide, crying out as Lorian snaked his tongue past the silk and deep inside her without preamble. Haylie grasped at his dark curls, her legs trembling at the cascade of sensation that ripped through her.

“That’s hungry,” she noted breathlessly.

Lorian groaned into her body. Yes. He was hungry. It seemed he’d wanted to play with an innocent forever. He pushed the silk away, scraping his teeth over her engorged flesh. The blood pumped in her veins, calling to the beast howling inside him.

Haylie’s fists tightened in his hair. “Please, Lorian,” she begged.

He resolved to send her over in a style she’d never forget. It was a trick he hadn’t used on a woman in decades. As Haylie’s body reached for the elusive orgasm beating at her senses, he caused his tongue to thicken, stretching her body around him.

Had he done it earlier, she would have questioned it, been frightened by the unfamiliar sensation. Haylie screamed in pleasure, begging for more breathlessly.

Lorian lengthened his tongue, leaving the thick shaft rasping inside her, as he nipped at her clit, at the neglected center of her sensation. Haylie’s muscles locked in surprise and the coming wash of orgasm. He suckled hard on her hooded nub and sent her over.

Her mind wouldn't be buried forever. Lorian wanted her awash in a pleasant confusion. He left her body and caught her as Haylie fell into his arms, trembling. He moved for the bed at a speed no being on Earth could match, not even one of the turned beasts, dispelling the illusion of clothing so that he was nude when he ripped away the soaked silk crotch and filled her in a single stroke.

Haylie's hands grasped at his shoulders as he thrust deeper within her, her muddled mind opining that she should push him away even as she dragged him closer, deeper into her. She moved under him, seeking all he had to give.

Lorian nodded, his fangs lengthening in anticipation. "Will you feed me in every way?" he asked. He knew she was willing, but asking would increase her pleasure and his by extension.

"Yes. Taste all of me."

He didn't hesitate, sinking his fangs deep in her neck and erasing the pain automatically. Lorian closed his eyes, basking in memories of emotions, in the tidal wave of her pleasure as he took her over again.

"Let me drink you," she whispered.

Lorian shuddered at her unintended double meaning. Drinking of him as he was drinking of her would be lethal for her. He learned that the hard way.

"Let me taste you," she asked again.

He groaned in need. Lorian avoided that pleasure as a rule, though it had once been his favorite way to climax.

Riberta danced behind his eyes. "Are you saying you

don't want me, Dado?" She chuckled as she stroked his aching cock. "Your body says otherwise."

Oh, yes. He wanted her, but the laws would see him dead. Riberta knew he wanted her, and so she came to Dado again and again, trying to tempt him with her body. He removed her hand, scowling down at her. "If I take your barrier, your brother will kill me."

She pressed her body to him. "You wouldn't be the only warrior who hasn't lived the sanctions," she taunted. "We women talk."

"Who?" he growled, grasping her arms. His rational mind argued touching her, but he was near mad in fury. "How?" Who was breaking the sanctions while Dado was near mad in keeping them, and how did he hope to keep from being caught at it?

"How?" Riberta repeated. She pulled at the lacing on his leggings. "You are not the only man who likes a woman's mouth. It leaves no proof, Dado."

He stood, frozen in a surge of need, as she unlaced him. Dado knew he should stop her, but something dark and dangerous argued his right to a woman who threw herself at him so willingly. She was baiting him. Who could turn her away?

"What do you want from me?" he asked, shaking. Could he make this bargain – whatever it was?

"Choose me."

Dado hesitated, groaning as she took him in her hand and stroked him.

"Your cock is begging for me. Or – does it want someone else?" She pouted, her blue eyes glowing in implied knowledge.

"No," he admitted. "It wants you." Anything you want if you give me this.

"Choose me." Riberta went to her knees and slid most of his length into the hot, moist, welcoming depths of her mouth.

Dado pulled her deeper, thrusting into her hopelessly until he exploded for her. "Yes," he gasped. "I will choose you."

Lorian closed his feeding site. The memories of Riberta made him ache for what he'd denied himself for so long. He rolled to his back, pulling Haylie around him again.

His mind worked furiously as he pistoned in and out of her willing body. Haylie wasn't Riberta. She wasn't offering to serve every man around in hopes of her title.

Lorian had been damned for one reason. He was the only warrior stupid enough to fall for Riberta's offer. Marclef demanded as many willing beasts as he could muster, and he ordered Tilbrand to use any means necessary to get his volunteers.

Dado had been a coward, afraid to die at Wil's hand and willing to be damned to live another night, while Riberta turned her whiles on Ger within a day of Dado's fall from grace. *A coward! At least Jörg chose death and had to be convinced another way.* He sobered. Jörg loved his bride, while Dado had simply taken what was readily available. How he wished he'd waited for the one he loved.

"You want to taste me?" he panted, his resistance crumbling.

Haylie shot him a hungry look and ran her hand down his sweat-coated abdomen to their locked bodies. Gone was the innocent. This woman was lust

unleashed.

His cock pulsed in acceptance. "Take me," he ordered.

She pushed off of him and buried her face in his lap, his length disappearing between her lips. Haylie met his eyes as she worked him in and out. She drove him on ruthlessly.

Lorian felt every muscle tense. Yes. This was perfect. His formidable brothers were long dead. No one was waiting to use this moment against him. He cried out as he filled her throat with his seed. He shivered as she licked the head slowly. Not even Riberta had done that.

Haylie crawled up his body, brushing her breasts over his chest, attempting to entice him into her body again. Lorian took her mouth feverishly, tasting himself in her.

"Don't leave," she offered.

Lorian nipped at her chin. "A vampire always leaves after he's fed."

"Why?"

"He has enemies." Lorian felt the faint stirrings of the pup from the club, as he knew he soon would. He pushed from the bed and strode to the window, opening it a few inches.

Haylie sat up, watching him curiously. "Does he ever return?" she asked.

"Perhaps. Would you like me to return?"

Her arousal was instantaneous. "Yes."

"My enemy will offer you his protection. If you refuse it, I will come to you again."

She furrowed her brow. "Protection from what?"

She looked to the pounding on the door in confusion.

"From me, Haylie."

Lorian waited until she looked back at him then dematerialized. She paled, and her fingers went to the faint marks at her throat.

The pup bypassed her locks and came to her. "Are you all right?" the warrior asked urgently.

Lorian streamed away before she could answer. *The choice is yours, Haylie.*

* * *

Lorian surveyed the scene in the clearing, slitting his eyes behind the dark glasses. The morning sun didn't reach him deep in the recesses of the trees, but the glare of it shining on the grass and flowers made his eyes water and heart ache for the freedoms he could no longer have.

Three youngsters played in the clearing, two of them boys near — or perhaps just after — first night, armed even in play. Corwyn Lord Jäger, elder hunter and stone lord, stood guard over them in the ascending sun.

Lorian ignored them all and focused on the girl. She was the reason the others were armed and watchful. Erin was never alone. Warriors held position at her door and window every moment she slept and trailed in her wake every other moment of her life, serious warriors who were ready to kill at a moment's notice.

He came to see her often, ghosting in to watch her sleep and accepting the pain of facing the sun to

watch her at play. Erin was his, *Blutjagdfrau*, born to be his bride, the one who could give Lorian what he'd ached for since the night he went beast — companionship and children.

It shouldn't have surprised Lorian that Erin looked like Regana. Stone chosen were always of a type. He remembered what Regana looked like at the same age, and the resemblance almost sent him from her. It was no wonder that Jörg was so intent, and the fear or Jörg's wrath was a hard thing to shake.

But, Jörg was dead. All his brethren lay dead, all for the stupidity of trying to possess or kill Erin's mother. Jayde had been fully trained when the others came for her. Lorian hadn't lived this long by making foolish moves like that, and he still wasn't stupid enough.

He'd bide his time until Erin was loosely guarded and take her before she began her training, avoiding her older brother Hunter if he could. It was the only way that Lorian would live long enough to enjoy his bride and children.

He sucked in his breath in surprise as the Frisbee caught in a wind shear and flew his direction. Erin turned, chasing it. Her curls bounced and flew about her face, and her color was high. She laughed as the Frisbee landed at the edge of the woods.

She stopped little more than an arm's length away, close enough for Lorian to grab if the need arose. He watched her in awe, wrapped in the light streaming over the trees as he was bathed in shadow. Lorian scanned his eyes over her, not fully grown but already a woman in her own right. Her breasts were

small mounds and her waist narrow over the lush hips that would support his sons. Erin dropped to one knee and grasped the Frisbee.

Lorian stilled, taking in her scent on the wind. His fangs lengthened in response. Erin was clean and innocent. She smelled of sunshine and her woman's blood. He shivered in the knowledge that her body was ready for him. The mad urge to reach into the light to touch her assaulted him.

Erin shifted, rising to her feet slowly. Lorian locked on the bracer that held her parents' amulet to her wrist, fury rising in him. That was the first thing that had to go — and quickly. No bit of cursed metal was going to steal his bride from him. Erin would take her place as she had been born to.

She gasped, staring into the trees, her eyes going wide while she white-knuckled the Frisbee. Erin took a step back, her eyes darting over his position, as if she were tracking him. Lorian stiffened as an edge of *Blutjagd* burned under her skin, a trainee's level, still invisible to the cursed warriors who surrounded her. He nodded in understanding. Erin had begun the change that would make her his. It wouldn't be long until her parents and Corwyn realized it. Her training would start very soon.

The time had come. Lorian hadn't planned to take her this early, but he had to have her unprinted and untrained, fully innocent. That meant he had to take her soon, before she got more than a month or two into her training — at the height of her cycle, if he could arrange it.

Her eyes locked firmly on his position, and she

took another step back into the light. Lorian watched the move curiously, meeting her eyes fully. Erin felt his presence. She looked at him instead of through him. No warrior saw through his ghosting, not even a glimmer. Even Jörg couldn't match Lorian's prowess in ghosting.

A movement over her shoulder caught his attention. Lorian watched Corwyn stride toward his granddaughter, the lord's brow furrowed and one hand resting on the hilt of his sacred weapon. The two young warriors fell in behind him, sensing at last that something was wrong.

Lorian almost laughed at that. He could have taken his bride and been gone before the pups realized danger was near had it been night. He looked at the bracer in annoyance — *were it not for that!*

Erin didn't seem to note their approach. When Corwyn touched her shoulder, she jumped, dropping the Frisbee at his feet, and turned her wide-eyed, pale face to him. She fell into her grandfather's arms, shivering.

Lorian nodded grimly. She'd been trained to fear her place. They'd turned her against him already, as Lorian knew they would.

Corwyn scanned the trees, lit up for battle, his fury a living force worthy of his title of elder hunter. "What did you see?" he whispered to the girl, as the young men launched to his side, hands on their weapons. "What did you feel?"

"I don't know." She faltered. "Something. There's something there."

"Where?" one of the boys demanded.

She turned her eyes back to Lorian, meeting his eyes though she could not see him with her physical form. Erin motioned to him. "There. Close."

Corwyn nodded and pushed her into the quiet warrior's hands. "Take her to the house — now," he ordered. "Tell the others we're leaving. They have half an hour to pack."

He nodded and took Erin by the arm. "Yes, my lord," he rumbled.

Lorian bit back a groan as she was swept away from him. Warriors had gathered to meet them before they made it to the top of the hillside, probably investigating the blaze of *Blutjagd* from the warriors standing between Lorian and his chosen mate.

"Do you honestly believe that she felt something?" the young warrior asked.

Corwyn nodded. "I have no doubts. Pack. He'll go to ground before we find him. The best we can hope for is to leave him far behind."

"Yes, my lord." He sprinted for the warriors who had closed ranks around Erin.

Lorian nodded. He'd have to take her soon, but he needed leverage. Erin had to give up her amulet willingly. His eyes fell on the knot of her family, leading her inside, and Lorian smiled. Which of them would be her weak spot? He'd have to watch them closely to know her mind.

He sighed, praying to gods who had forsaken him that Hunter wasn't her weak spot. Her older brother was the only member of her family who posed a danger to Lorian, which meant that the stone, *in its amusement*, would set him as her weak link to thwart

Lorian.

In the meantime, Lorian had training to engage in. His bride was an innocent. Lorian would have to practice his technique with the most innocent women he could draw to him in preparation for winning his mate. Once Erin was properly enthralled with him and printed willingly – He smiled. She could never be separated from him.

He played at Haylie's feed thread, smiling that she'd refused the amulet. Lorian would have his playmate, a playmate to give him his pleasures and keep him sane while he practiced at stealing innocence.

"Goodbye, Erin," he whispered, as the door closed behind her. Lorian laughed aloud at Corwyn's look of shock. "We will see each other again, my mate," he promised. "They cannot take you anywhere that I cannot follow." He dematerialized and streamed away, as the Lord Jäger launched toward him.