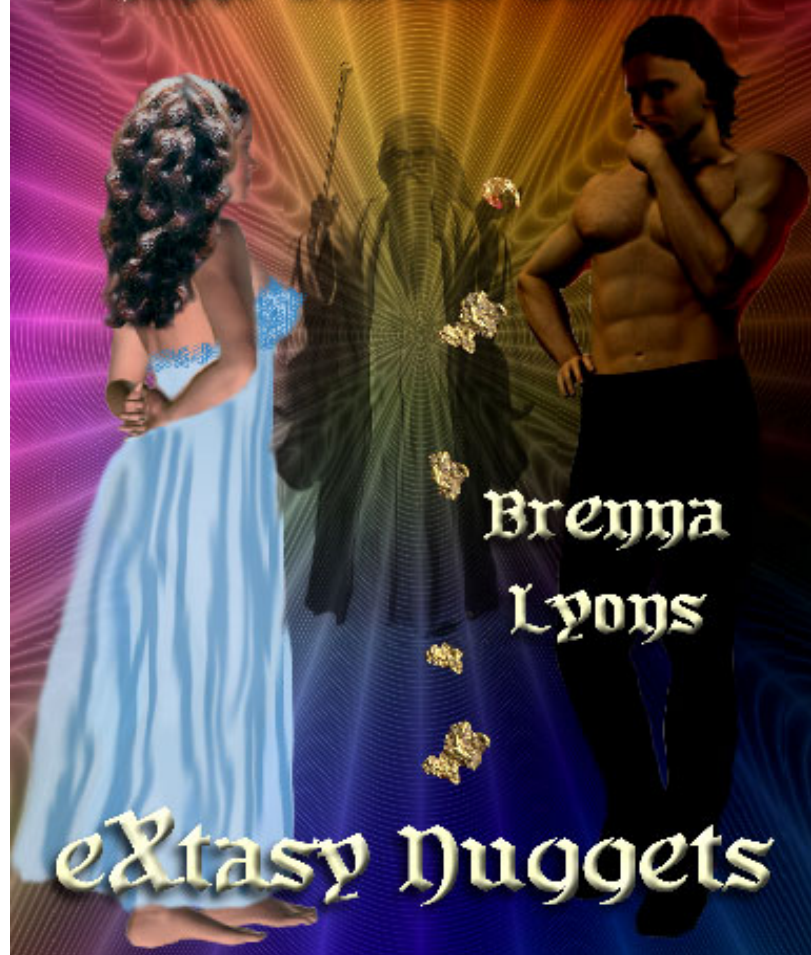


Stealing Innocence

A short story from the
Night Warrior Series



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Stealing Innocence
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Published by eXtasy Books, a division of Zumaya Publications,
2003

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www.zumayapublications.com
www.Extasybooks.com

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-feet-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, gleaming 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.