

**VOYAGER 15
SNEAK PEEK**

***TWILIGHT'S DAWN*
A BLACK JEWELS BOOK**

ANNE BISHOP

Winsol Gifts

This story takes place after the events in *Tangled Webs*.

Chapter 1

Daemon Sadi, the Black-Jeweled Warlord Prince of Dhemplan, crossed the bridge that marked the boundary between private property and public land. On one side of the bridge was the drive leading to SaDiablo Hall, his family's seat; on the other side was the public road leading to the village of Halaway.

Fluffy snow dusted the bottom of his trousers as he walked toward the village in blissful solitude. Of course, he'd had to sneak out of his own home in order to *have* that solitude, and he recognized that there was something not quite right about the most powerful male in the Realm of Kaeleer sneaking out in order to avoid three snoozing Sceltie puppies. But whether or not he was allowing little bundles of fur to dictate his actions instead of using his rank and power to do as he pleased wasn't the point. At this moment, here and now, he was alone on a crisp winter morning, and *that* was the point. No one was whining about having cold paws. No one was complaining that he walked too fast. No one was grumbling because he wouldn't stop every few feet so interesting smells could be properly sniffed.

And no one was going to sulk because he refused to carry someone with wet fur under his coat and up against his white silk shirt.

Solitude. Bliss. And if his mother had created the gift he'd asked her to make, fun.

Winsol was almost here. Those thirteen days were a celebration of the Darkness--and they were a celebration of Witch, the living myth, dreams made flesh.

It would be his first Winsol as the ruler of the Dhemlan Territory, his third celebration since he'd come to live in Kaeleer. The first year, he'd still been mentally fragile from the years when he'd wandered the roads in the Twisted Kingdom, lost in the insanity of guilt and grief. And in that first year, he'd also been lost in the wonder of finding Jaenelle Angelline again, alive and well--and still able to love him.

The second year, she had been the one who had been so terrifyingly fragile. She had unleashed her full power to prevent a war between Kaeleer and Terreille that would have destroyed both Realms--and had torn her body apart in the process. She shouldn't have survived--wouldn't have if the kindred and the Weaver of Dreams hadn't done the impossible and remade the living myth, the Queen who was Witch.

But this year he and Jaenelle were together, they were married, and the worst thing looming over their heads was how many invitations to parties and public gatherings they needed to accept in order for him to fulfill his duties as Dhemlan's ruler.

He made his way through Halaway's quiet streets, noticing lights in the windows of most of the houses. The snow wasn't marred yet by many footprints or cart wheels, but soon the merchants would open their shops, people and carriages would fill the sidewalks and streets, and the small village would bustle through another day of holiday preparations.

As he approached the cottage where his mother Torsa lived, he studied the walkways up to her cottage and the neighboring one that was occupied by Manny, an older woman he

considered a friend rather than a former servant. Then he smiled and, using Craft, dealt with the snow as he glided up the walkway and knocked on the cottage door.

He waited a minute, then knocked again.

The third time, he put a bit of temper and Craft into the act of applying knuckles to wood, which guaranteed the sound would roll through the cottage like thunder.

A few seconds later, the door swung open as the young woman on the other side growled, "If someone doesn't answer the door, you could take the hint that it's too early for com--"

She blinked at him. He smiled at the journeymaid Black Widow who lived with Tera as part of her training.

"Lady Allista," he said politely.

"Prince Sadi." Her tone was much less polite. Since he was who and what he was, she couldn't shut the door in his face.

But she wanted to.

Obviously, Allista was one of those women who did not wake up cheerful. That was all right. A few months of marriage to Jaenelle had taught him the value of having a few tricks when it came to dealing with a witch who woke up grumpy--and he had become an expert at all of them.

"Tera asked me to come early," he said, slipping past Allista. "Since my timing is a bit off, why don't I make breakfast for the two of you?"

He shrugged out of his overcoat and vanished it as he continued down the hall to the kitchen, not giving Allista time to answer.

All right. Tera hadn't told him to come *this* early, but she would be awake--and he wanted to slip out with his requested gift before too many people were up and about.

“Good morning, darling,” he said as he walked into the kitchen.

Tersa turned away from the counter and studied him for a moment. Then she smiled.

“It’s the boy. It’s my boy.”

Her boy. His mother was a broken Black Widow lost in the madness the Blood called the Twisted Kingdom. Lost in the dreams and visions--and the shattered pieces of her own mind. She remembered him as the child he had been before he’d been taken from her. She remembered him as the youth who had met her again but didn’t know who she was. And sometimes she remembered him as the man he was now. But however she saw him on any given day, he was always the boy. Her boy.

“I’ve come to cook you breakfast,” Daemon said. He gave her his best-boy grin. “And to talk about gifts.”

She narrowed her gold eyes as if she were about to argue. Then she shrugged and turned back to the counter. “There is bacon and eggs and bread for toast.”

“That sounds like breakfast,” Daemon said. “How would you like me to make the eggs?”

She hesitated--and he wondered if she would be able to answer or if her mind had turned down another path too far removed from such mundane things as bacon and eggs.

“I like them scrambled,” she finally said.

He put an arm around her, brushed his lips against her temple, and felt all his love for her well up and squeeze his heart. “Me too.”

~~~~~

Lucivar Yaslana backwinged and landed lightly on the walkway in front of Tersa’s cottage. He looked at the cottage directly in front of him, then at its neighbor.

Manny had spent most of her life as a servant, was used to working with her hands, and didn’t shun physical labor. Even now she’d taken on the duties of housekeeper for Tersa and

Allista, an arrangement that satisfied all three women. But Manny wasn't a young woman by any stretch of truth, and it seemed a bit early for her to have been out sweeping the walkways.

Not swept, he realized as he studied the sharp, perfect edge that divided the snowy lawn from the cleared walkway. Not even a hearth witch could get that kind of edge. Not with a shovel or broom, anyway. So someone had used Craft to remove the snow.

He crouched, held out a hand, and felt warm air.

And then someone had put a warming spell on the flagstones to keep them clear of snow.

The cottage door opened and the *someone* walked out.

Lucivar rose and looked pointedly at the walkways, then at Daemon. "You know, Bastard, using Craft is all well and good, but it wouldn't hurt you to sweat once in a while."

"If I'm going to work up a sweat for a woman, I'm going to be doing something besides sweeping the walk," Daemon replied.

Lucivar grinned.

They were brothers. Half brothers, but they had never made that distinction. They both had the coloring of the three long-lived races--the black hair, light brown skin, and gold eyes. They had inherited much of their looks from their Hayllian father, who was the High Lord of Hell. Daemon's face was a more refined, beautiful version of Saetan's, while his own face was more rugged than their father's. But the real distinction between him and Daemon came from the other side of his dual heritage. He had the dark, membranous wings that set the Eyrien race apart from the Hayllian and Dhemlan Blood.

They studied each other for a moment before Lucivar's mouth curved in a lazy, arrogant smile.

"You're up early," Lucivar said, taking the few steps that separated them.

“You’re up even earlier, since you had to come in from Ebon Rih,” Daemon replied. “You must have left at dawn.”

Lucivar shook his head. “I’m farther east; sun rises earlier. But I was up at dawn.”

“Was that by choice?”

“Hell’s fire, no, but the little beast is up with the sun, and I feel less guilty about Marian holding the leash most of the day if she gets a little extra sleep.”

“How is my darling nephew? Counting the days until Winsol?”

“One of us is,” Lucivar muttered. He smiled grimly in response to Daemon’s laugh. “Last year, Winsol was something that just appeared and dazzled him. This year he’s figured out that Winsol is *coming*.”

“Ah.”

“Ooooh, yeah. So every morning, he climbs into bed with us, pries my eyes open, and says, ‘Papa! Is it Winzel yet?’”

Daemon’s lips were curved in a smile, but his golden eyes were full of sharp understanding. “Can you put a shield around the bed?”

“Tried that. Unfortunately, one that will keep him out also keeps Marian out. She didn’t appreciate smacking into a shield when she wanted to get back into bed after getting up to pee.”

“Lucivar.”

He heard Daemon’s concern wrapped around that single word.

“I’ve got a light shield around Daemonar’s room that will wake me if he starts wandering,” he said. That shield was a necessary precaution now to keep his son safe--from him. A Warlord Prince was a born predator, a natural killer. A Warlord Prince startled awake didn’t think; he attacked. The first morning Daemonar pounced on him, the boy’s physical scent and

psychic scent had penetrated his sleep-fogged brain fast enough that he managed to pull back what might have been a killing blow.

Marian's presence didn't bother him. He was so steeped in the feel of her, she could touch him, mount him, do just about anything to him before he was fully awake without provoking that lethal rise to the killing edge. But Daemonar was male, he was a Warlord Prince, and he'd matured just enough over the past few weeks that Lucivar's aggressive instincts now recognized caste before son.

So even though he let the boy have the fun of prying his eyes open, Lucivar was always awake and aware before Daemonar entered the room.

He looked into his brother's eyes and knew he didn't need to say anything more.

Then Daemon looked pointedly at Tersa's cottage and raised an eyebrow as if asking a question--or demanding an explanation.

"None of your business, Bastard," Lucivar said.

It wasn't, and they both knew it. They also knew that Daemon was protective of Tersa and, in the past, had been brutally efficient when it came to dealing with men who had taken the wrong kind of interest in her.

And they also both knew that, in Terreille, Lucivar Yaslana had earned his reputation for being unpredictable, uncontrollable, and explosively violent toward women, so Daemon's concern about his brother spending time with his mother was not without reason.

"Well," Daemon said after an awkward moment. "I'd better get back to the Hall before the rest of the household is up."

Lucivar nodded. "We'll be coming in at the end of the week to help you and Jaenelle get the Hall ready for Winsol."

"Get what ready?"

Lucivar blinked, decided Daemon wasn't being a smart-ass, and gave his brother a pitying look. "Since I've been married longer than you, here's a piece of advice: Never ask questions like that. They'll only get you into trouble."

Daemon huffed out a breath. "There are servants at the Hall. *Lots* of them. They're the ones who are getting things ready."

The pitying look changed to a wicked grin. "You *do* have a lot to learn."

"No, really. They haven't put up any of the fresh greenery because that's done on the first day of Winsol, but yesterday Helene hauled out a century's worth of decorations from the Hall's attics. Hell's fire, one of the young maids even put bells on the Sceltie puppies."

"Did the puppies jingle into your study to complain?" Lucivar asked.

"Of course they did. Until the wolf pups decided the bells sounded fun. So now I have Sceltie puppies prancing up and down the great hall wearing bells while the wolf pups howl."

"Your guests are going to be greeted by a jingle howl?" Correctly interpreting Daemon's look, Lucivar added, "If you try to whack me upside the head, you'll end up on the ground."

Daemon squeezed his eyes shut and muttered, "Maybe I can run away from home."

"We're not allowed to do that. Trust me. We're allowed to hide for an hour or two at a time, but we're not allowed to run away from the festivities."

"Says who?"

"The women we married."

Daemon sighed. "Was life simpler when we were slaves in Terreille?"

"Simpler in some ways, yes. But not as much fun. See you in a few days."

Lucivar stepped aside to let Daemon pass. Choosing to be cautious, because the Sadist had earned his reputation too, he watched until Daemon was out of sight, that gliding walk and feline grace covering a lot of ground. Then he approached the cottage and knocked on the door.

Allista, looking like a cat who had been dunked in a tub of water and then stroked the wrong way, hesitated before letting him into the cottage.

“The witchling is still sleepy,” Tersa said when he walked into the kitchen. “But boys start the day early in order to do all their boy things.”

On another day, it would have been interesting to find out what Tersa considered “boy things,” but one of them needed to stay focused, and it had to be him.

Her mind had shattered centuries ago, but Tersa was still brilliant in her own way, still powerful in her own way. She had given up sanity in order to regain the Hourglass’s Craft and could draw power out of madness in ways that even Saetan didn’t understand.

Lucivar loved her. It was that simple. He had begun these twice-monthly visits for the same reason he had visited his own mother, Luthvian--as a family duty. But unlike Luthvian, who had hated her son because of the heritage she had given him, Tersa had accepted the wings and the fact that he was an Eyrien warrior down to the very marrow of his bones. She didn’t criticize him for what he was--or for what he wasn’t. She didn’t lash out at him physically or verbally. He could sit in her kitchen and enjoy her company, and she seemed to enjoy his.

He should have told Daemon about the visits. Maybe not when Daemon had first arrived in Kaeleer since Sadi had had enough things to deal with, but he should have said something soon after instead of having that nugget of information come out a few weeks ago while they were dealing with that damned spooky house that had been built to trap, and kill, some of their family. He wasn’t sure why he hadn’t said anything. Maybe because he’d been afraid he would be asked to step aside? After all, Tersa was Daemon’s mother, not his, and when the real son was present, a surrogate wasn’t needed. Or maybe, like his father, he had gotten into the habit of not mentioning any relationship that would have given Luthvian an excuse to feel neglected or cast aside. Even now, when his mother was a whisper in the Darkness and truly gone, he had

continued to keep his visits to Tersa private. Either way, by the time Daemon came to Kaeleer, the visits were a long-established habit that he didn't discuss with anyone.

"Do you want food?" Tersa asked. "There are some scrambled eggs and toast left. The boy made them."

In that case, he wasn't going to refuse. No one made scrambled eggs better than Daemon—including his own darling hearth witch wife. Which was something he would never ever admit to anyone. Especially Marian.

Since Allista hadn't joined them, he figured she'd already eaten or would fend for herself, so he got a fork out of the drawer, hefted the bowl, leaned a hip against the counter, and began to eat.

"You should sit at the table," Tersa said.

"I can eat just fine where I am." She looked like she was about to scold, so he added casually, "Did you eat?"

"I ate."

He caught the hesitation before she answered. She would have eaten something. Daemon wouldn't have left if she hadn't. But she still had the skinniness of someone who had been half-starved for too many years, and even now, when there was plenty of food, she sometimes became too distracted by something only she could see and forgot to eat.

So he never wasted an opportunity to feed her.

Scooping up another forkful of scrambled eggs, he held it in front of her. "Open up."

Her mouth remained stubbornly shut.

He sighed—but his eyes never left her face and his hand remained steady. "Am I going to have to embarrass myself by making funny noises like I do with Daemonar?"

Her mouth fell open in surprise, and he slipped the fork in before she realized what he

was doing.

She scowled at him. He grinned at her. And prudently ate a couple of forkfuls of egg himself before offering her another.

Tersa waved him off and got her own fork.

They polished off the eggs--and he made her work to claim the last bite--then he finished off the toast while enjoying a mug of coffee.

"Were you able to do it?" he asked as he rinsed off the dishes and set them in the sink.

Tersa frowned at him. "I was able to do it, but..."

Grinning, he wiped his hands on a towel. "Let's see."

Using Craft, she called in a small wooden frame and set it at one end of the kitchen table. The carefully constructed web attached to the frame held the illusion spell. She triggered the illusion spell, and they watched as a small black beetle appeared and headed for the other end of the table. It grew and grew with every step. When it got as big as his palm, it burst open with enough gore and green goo to delight a small Eyrien boy.

"You have the box?" Tersa asked.

He called in the long wood-and-glass box he'd had made to hold the illusion web and keep the entire illusion contained. He valued his skin--and his marriage--enough to make sure the bug remained in the box.

After she placed the illusion web into its part of the box, they watched the beetle once more. Lucivar grinned at the way the gore and goo splattered all over the inside of the glass before it all faded away. "Darling, this is *perfect*."

Tersa looked uneasy. "Maybe I should ask your father."

Not quite a statement, not quite a question. More a tentative testing of an idea.

He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, not quite sure if he was troubled or

intrigued by the words. "Why?"

"I made little surprises for my boys before, and it caused trouble. Almost hurt them. I don't want to cause trouble for my boys. Your father will know what to do." She nodded, as if she'd made a decision. "Yes. Your father will know."

Lucivar vanished the box and decided this would be a good time to give her something else to think about--*before* she contacted his father.

*Boys. My boys.*

The ground shifted under his feet. His breath caught. He felt like he was riding a current that could be a very sweet wind or have a cutting edge.

"What boys, darling?" he asked.

"My boys." She glanced at him, suddenly shy and hesitant.

Painfully sweet words, and a possibility he hadn't considered about why Tersa had welcomed him from the first time he'd knocked on her cottage door.

"Am I one of your boys, Tersa?" he asked.

She was Daemon's mother. She would have been around during the childhood years he couldn't remember. She had known him as a child--and he must have known her. That hadn't occurred to him before.

"The girl," Tersa said hesitantly. "Luthvian. So angry because she wanted what couldn't be. So angry because she wanted to deny what was."

She reached out, not quite touching him, her eyes caressing the very thing his own mother had always pretended not to see.

"Sails to the moon," she said softly. "Banners unfurled in the sun. She was always so angry about something as natural as an arm or a leg. Such a foolish reason to hate a child."

"Tersa?"

Her eyes had that unfocused look. She was no longer seeing the room she stood in, wouldn't know where she was physically if he asked. She was looking at a memory seventeen hundred years in the past. Seeing Luthvian. Seeing him when he was Daemonar's age. Maybe even younger.

"She wanted the boy, but did not want the boy to *be* the boy," Torsa said. "But what else could he be? Cuddles and hugs. Their father's love is strong, and they need him, but they want softer love too. Cuddles and hugs. And little surprises." She smiled. "They pick flowers in the meadow. The boy brings his flowers to me. I tell him the names of the ones I remember as we arrange them in a vase. His father tells him the rest. Tells both boys. But the girl... She doesn't want flowers from the meadow. That is too simple, too Eyrien. She will not take the flowers, so the winged boy brings them to me. There is so much fire in his heart, so much laughter. And trouble. That gleam in his eyes. Oh, yes, he is trouble. But there is no meanness. He is a boy. He will be a strong man. She will not look, will not see. So he comes to me for cuddles and hugs and little surprises."

Tears stung Lucivar's eyes. He blinked them away. Swallowed them with his heart.

He took a step closer, touched her shoulder with his fingertips. "Torsa? Am I one of your boys?"

She looked at him, her eyes full of uncertainty. But she nodded. "My winged boy."

He took her in his arms and held her gently as he finally understood why spending time with her mattered so much to him. He hadn't remembered those early years of his childhood; he hadn't remembered her. But his heart had recognized her and knew what she had been for him.

"Thank you," he whispered into her tangled hair. "Thank you." He added silently, *Mother.*

~~~~~

Jaenelle leaned back from the breakfast table and stared at the object in front of her. "It's a mousie in a glass dome."

"Yes." Daemon smiled at the illusion he'd talked Tera into making for him.

"It's a mousie dressed as a court official."

"Yes."

"And you intend to give this to Lucivar? The Warlord Prince of Ebon Rih? The man who has said that the only reason for paperwork is to have something to wipe your ass with after taking a crap?"

"Oh, yes."

As they watched, the mousie began squeaking emphatically while gesturing with one paw and waving a scroll held in the other. Of course, the squeaking could barely be heard through the glass dome, but the tone was still clear. Especially when the mousie began jumping up and down in a tantrum.

"He's capable of leaving this out on the desk without a sight shield so that court officials see it," Jaenelle said. "You know he's capable of doing that."

"I know. But I figure having this just might keep him from strangling some pompous ass from a Queen's court."

Jaenelle pursed her lips and studied the mousie. Then she sighed. "You have a point. There have been a few times when he's come too close to strangling a pompous ass."

"All the more reason to give him something to laugh about." Daemon kissed the top of her head and reached for the glass dome. "I'm heading up to the Keep to show this to Father, so I'll--"

"You can't go today."

He stopped, his hand frozen over the dome. "I can't?"

"*Daemon*. You have to help me get ready. This will be our first Winsol when we're officially hosting the family. You can't just shrug off the details."

Sure he could.

"Marian is coming later in the week to help out," Jaenelle continued. "And Winsol begins next week. We have to go over the lists."

"Lists?"

His wife stiffened. Then she turned in her chair and looked at him.

The bones in his legs turned to jelly--and not in a good she's-looking-for-hot-sex kind of way.

"I'll be in my study," he said meekly.

"Good," Jaenelle replied sweetly. "I'll join you there after I finish breakfast. I hope you didn't have anything scheduled for this morning."

Hell's fire, Mother Night, and may the Darkness be merciful.

"Only my Lady's pleasure," he said.

Jaenelle reached up and tugged on his jacket. Obeying the unspoken command, he leaned over and touched his lips to hers.

"Your tone lacks sincerity, Prince," Jaenelle said. "But since this is your first Winsol as a husband, you're forgiven."

Then she kissed him--and he hoped she would have reason to forgive him for a lot of things over the next few days.

This extract is not final and should not be quoted for review purposes.

Extract is copyright 2010, 2011 Anne Bishop

***Twilight's Dawn* by Anne Bishop, published by Voyager, will be out in April 2011**