

AMAZON ORIGINAL STORIES

ALI HAZELWOOD

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR



HOT for
SLAYER

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Published by Amazon Original Stories, Seattle
www.apub.com

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ISBN-13: 9781662528408 (digital)

Cover design and illustration by Elizabeth Turner Stokes



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Chapter 1

The last time Lazlo Enyedi and I made this much physical contact with each other, the Berlin Wall was falling.

Literally.

As the crowd energetically chiseled chunks of graffitied concrete off the sections surrounding the wall's checkpoints, Lazlo's body pressed so close to mine that his heat nearly melded us together.

That was, of course, over thirty years ago. But for someone who's been around as long as I have, three decades is little more than a shooting star flitting across the night sky, and I remember that moment well. It was history in the making. A watershed hour for the revolution. A shift in the paradigm that led to portentous sea changes in the tides of civilization, and drew people—people like *me*—from all over the world.

Although, to be truthful, I only went to Germany because I was hungry.

Careful research had indicated that a very bad man was prowling around Berlin, doing very bad things to innocent people. Since someone needed to stop him, and since I hadn't fed properly in a few weeks, I decided to pay him a visit and kill two birds with one stone.

Except, it wasn't *fowl* that I killed.

Afterward, I licked my chops, adjusted the shoulder pads of my blazer, and took a stroll through the bustling droves of humans celebrating the epoch-making night.

The thing about creatures of my ilk is, we've seen it all happen already, over and over again. We understand that time is a flat circle. We have witnessed civilizations rise, plateau, fall, then plateau again on their way back up. Rationally, we know better than to get too invested in the affairs of mortals. Still, there is something deliciously sustaining about the energy that surges through a crowd during a landmark event. All that transformative, life-changing power is like a current coursing through our veins, and a luscious juxtaposition to the fixed immutability of our own existence.

All of this is to say: I was hanging out in Berlin and having a pretty good time—until I spotted Lazlo Enyedi. My least yet most favorite slayer. Or maybe just the only one I could have picked out of a lineup.

My familiarity with Enyedi was expected, considering that the Hällsing Guild had specifically tasked him with eradicating my bloodline. Still, most vampire slayers came and went, usually done in by a moment of distraction or by their own reckless, hateful hubris. Enyedi, though, had been around since the early Middle Ages.

Probably because he was irritatingly skilled at his job.

I didn't wonder how he knew that I'd be in Berlin, because there was no point. Tracking me down was a special talent of his, just like simultaneously patting my head and rubbing my belly was mine. Everyone was gifted in their own special way. Enyedi's skills just happened to be useful.

"Vampire," he whispered the second our eyes met across the festive mob. There were several million decibels and the equivalent of an Olympic-size pool between us, but I could hear him as clearly as if he dwelled inside my head.

I studied him for a split second. Took in the colorful tattoos that climbed around his neck to curl under his jawline. His dark hair and amber eyes. The towering stillness of his shoulders as people walked around him, instinctively stepping out of his way.

"Slayer." I sighed.

And then, as was my habit and sole option when faced with Enyedi, I began to run. I wove through the crowd fast enough to lose him but slow enough not to raise suspicions among the celebrants. I ducked under trenches, dodged the hammers and megaphones that were being waved about, and I probably would have vanished into the night—if a sobbing child hadn't materialized right in front of my eyes.

I skidded to a halt. Stared at the clump of reddened cheeks, snot, and inconsolable tears blubbering at my feet. Waited for the toddler to take a breathing break from the bawling to stammer, "Are you, um, okay?"

He—she?—*they* were not. They were desperately looking for their *Mutter*, and even an archetypal monster such as myself couldn't *not* help the brat. "*Entschuldigung?*" I asked, frantically glancing around for a motherly-looking human. Once the *Mutter* in question was located, I scrambled again, but I'd lost too much of my advantage, and . . .

Well. That's how I found myself close enough to Enyedi that I could feel his heart beating against my chest. Pressed between him and the brick side of a house, to be precise.

This kind of shit, I mentally informed the universe, *does not incentivize good deeds*.

The universe didn't reply, probably because it was too scared of Lazlo Enyedi to speak over him as he said, "Aethelthryth. At last, we meet again."

I beamed up, hoping that it would irritate him. "Hey, friend."

We weren't *friends*, not by any correct meaning of the word. But, as much as it pained me to admit it, I did have a bit of a parasocial relationship going on with him, despite us having exchanged a grand total of two dozen words, most of which were some variation of *die*, *monster*, and *no, you die first*. Not that I enjoy relentless harassment, but what's a girl to do when the only constant presence during the last millennium of her life has been a guy who's contractually mandated to murder her?

"How long has it been?" I asked, batting my eyes. "At least since the early eighties. I hope you're still using sunscreen, because those crow's-feet around your eyes don't— *Shit*." I grunted as a dagger sank into my stomach, pinning me to the brick wall.

It wasn't a big deal. The only surefire way to kill a vampire was to drag them kicking and screaming into the sun, which Lazlo knew very well. Still, being skewered fucking *hurt*.

"Nice t-to see you, t-too," I sputtered between coughs, trying to hold my smile in place. A mix of phlegm and blood squirted out of my throat and landed on his button-down, but I didn't feel bad at all.

Fuck him and his dry-cleaning bill.

"Look at you," he murmured in his faded Eastern European accent, those yellow animal eyes raking down my skin. "Flushed and plump and beautiful. You just fed, didn't you?"

"Beautiful? Aww, Lazlo, I didn't know you had a crush on— *Motherfucker*." He jockeyed the blade back and forth in my belly, which, *ouch*. On the plus side, it gave me the opportunity to jerk in his arms and fake a seizure-like movement, which I used to retrieve my own dagger from my hip.

Which I then plunged into his flank with relish.

The grunt that rose to his chest was like a whole symphonic orchestra to my ears. "Now we're even," I gritted out.

“Are we?” Lazlo’s expression did not give me the satisfaction of changing a single millimeter. Slayers, too, were unlikely to make a big fuss over some light stabbing. “What about when the sun rises? I have you pinned.”

I scoffed, ignoring the dribble of blood trickling out of the corner of my mouth. “Dawn is in six hours. I hope you have some fun ideas for how to pass the time.”

His lips twitched. “We could reminisce. Thankfully, we share many memories.”

“Thankfully. Like that time you tried to kill me in Constantinople. Or the time you tried to kill me in Lampang. Or the time you tried to kill me in a courtyard in Venice. Or the time in Saskatoon, where—and you may start to notice a pattern—you *also* tried to—”

“Hush, Aethelthryth.” His tone was harsh, even through the warmth of his small smile. He was bleeding profusely, and the scent of it wafted up, strong, metallic, *divine*. Saliva pooled in my mouth, and I wondered how I could feel such hunger while my internal organs were being minced into meat loaf.

How the hell did a slayer’s blood get to smell this *good*? “You’re going to have to knock me out if you want me to shut up until sunrise.”

“And deprive myself of your company?” He clicked his tongue. “Never.”

“Really? Well, allow me to point out that if you get your way, you’re going to be deprived of my company for a hell of a lot longer than—”

“Excuse me, you two?”

We turned, startled—both by the British-sounding voice addressing us and by the fact that, in the process, my forehead brushed against Lazlo’s lips, a gesture too similar to a kiss for comfort.

A shiver ran down my spine.

“We are with the BBC, and overheard you speaking English—would it be possible to interview you about your perspective on tonight’s events?”

Lazlo and I stared at the journalists idling in the dimly lit side street, speechless.

“Sir? Ma’am? You do speak English, right?”

Behind him, a woman was carrying a handheld camera, and an idea light-bulbed its way into my brain.

“We sure do,” I said with a dazzling grin. I freed my hand from where it was trapped between my and Lazlo’s torsos, wiped the blood off my mouth, then gently pushed against his shoulder. “*Baby*, will you get off me for a second?” I schooled my features into a pout, enjoying his clenching jaw *immensely*. “I wanna talk with the BBC. I wanna be on TV.”

“That’s great, ma’am. Will you move to that corner with us? The lighting is much better over there.”

One fun thing about the slayers was they had a governing body. And rumor had it that the Hällsing Guild didn’t love public displays of murder, especially not those caught on camera. Humans, after all, were fragile little souls—I had the right to say that, because I used to be one—and they couldn’t be trusted with finding out that vampires and slayers walked among them. Their reaction would have likely involved running to the grocery store, buying all the canned goods and toilet paper, and then never leaving the house again—they’d cause way too much of a fuss and disrupt the supply chain.

No, thank you.

So, starting with the twentieth century, the Guild had cracked down on slayers killing us in front of witnesses. And by doing so, they saved my life.

“Come on, baby,” I said sweetly, my eyes meeting the cut glass of Lazlo’s. “We can make out later, no?”

Lazlo’s *yes* was a deliciously disgruntled growl. I tried not to wince as he angled our bodies to hide the slide of his dagger out of my abdomen. I did the same with my knife and then glanced down to make sure that the blood wasn’t visible against the dark fabric of my shirt.

Meanwhile, the camera kept filming.

“I know you hate being in the spotlight, *honey pie*. Why don’t you wait here while I do my interview?” Lazlo’s shirt was lighter than mine, and what a poor choice of attire for a hunt. He was in no position to follow us to a place with better illumination, and he knew it.

“Until the next time, then,” he said with a deep frown.

“Right. That might be a while. Sorry!”

“As long as you don’t let anyone get to you before I do, Aethelthryth.”

“Oh, don’t worry. I’ll *always* save myself for you.”

And that’s how I got away from Lazlo Enyedi on the night of November 9, 1989. As I walked side by side with the journalists, I did look back at Lazlo, once, mostly to treat him to my smuggest, most insufferable

grin. He was where I'd left him, still scowling down at his dagger. When he noticed my eyes on him, he lifted the blade up to his face. And with a smile that did not *feel* like a smile, he began to lick it clean of my blood.

It was . . .

Well. It just *was*.

A lot of things, among which the last time we were so close. I've caught glimpses of Lazlo a few times since—at a year 2000 celebration in LA, in the early aughts in Southeast Asia, after that Lilith Fair revival in 2010—but never had as close a call as it was in Berlin, and I always managed to slip away before he could get near.

Until now.

Today, nearly thirty-six years after that night in Germany, his arms wrap tight around me, his body is a heavy blanket above mine, and his only purpose seems to be shielding me from the sunlight.

Today, Lazlo Enyedi saved my life.