

"The Tangle Nymphs are among the most beautiful beings on Innatraea. Many dream of them, but dreams can too easily become nightmares."

-Tavid the Traveler

The Scent of Innocence

Leyja took a deep savoring breath. She could smell him, the tang of dirt common to Danae, the pungent stench of haze flower, and most importantly the pure spiky aroma of his innocence. She closed her eyes to savor the spiky smell, it was always like that, up and down, a chaos equal to each Innatraean's emotions. Eventually the pure and beautiful smell would collapse into the bottom of its spiky movement, when his view of the world changed. He wouldn't be attractive anymore then, not to her anyway.

Leyja opened her eyes as the pungent stench of haze flower again invaded her reverie. He and his friends were out in the forest, her forest, and loudly enjoying the evening with one another. They were heedless of the nearby mercenaries, or perhaps blissfully unaware, they were young and innocent. She closed her eyes again as a night breeze carried the haze flower smoke away, she could smell him again then. Pure and spiky, innocent, so sweet.

He stood and told his friends that he'd be right back, before going into the dark night to relieve himself. Leyja smiled with pleasure, her wings spreading languorously into the cool night as she silently followed him away from the others.

Watching him in the bushes she could feel her need, that very familiar thing pulsed through her veins. Ephemeral, invisible, powerful, and demanding. But it wasn't time yet, she forced herself to savor in



stillness and relax. But then a sound came to her ears, the crunching of armored boots, shouts, and the drawing of blades. The mercenaries had found his friends.

Leyja sighed, she wasn't one to usually care about the fate of a few young Innatraeans. But the violence of these men would steal his innocence, that beautiful spiky aroma would collapse into unappealing mundanity. She stood up, sighing as her wings stretched into the night air, before placing a hex around him. He would not hear, or see anything for a while, hopefully the lingering effects of haze flower would cloud his mind all the further. Leyja inhaled one last time, savoring the pure spiky smell, before flying back to where they had come from.

The mercenaries had his friends, though being sadly normal Innatraean men, they would only care about the two girls. Leyja smiled sardonically, the poor bastards would die tonight, not because she cared about these children, the fates could have them, but he would care. When he saw what would happen to his friends that pure sweet spiky smell of his would be gone. Leyja struck.

No one ever thought of Tangle Nymphs as dangerous in a physical sense. The stories all spoke of their beauty, their languorous seductive nature, and their dark desires. This of course was not the whole truth, Leyja smiled viciously as she spit out a man's jugular and felt his blood flowing over her teeth and lips, only survivors told stories. Dark shadows fell over her as his body hit the ground, the man's friends saw and they were afraid, but the children did not. The silent dark moved with her as she swooped across the small camp towards another of the men.

His eyes were wide with fear and he screamed, dropping the girl he'd been holding as Leyja came for him. No one else heard that scream of his terror, a silent death was all this man deserved. She smiled, licking



the gore from her lips as his corpse fell at her feet, swallowed by the silent dark of her hexes. There was still one more and he was trying to run.

Leyja could smell his fear across the dark forest clearing, its virulent tang floated on the wind like smoke from a fire, pleasing but not what she had truly wanted tonight. Her wings beat the air and she moved, a shadow of death silent as a feather. Fourteen heartbeats, a few footsteps and even fewer wingbeats, was all it took to catch him. He screamed in visceral terror and she broke his neck, killing him quickly, because she was angry. His fear wasn't worth savoring compared to what she had really wanted tonight, and they had ruined that for her.

Leyja turned back to the small campsite only to see him and his friends fleeing back towards their caravan. She sighed, lifting her face to the wind, if only to catch a brief whiff of that beautiful and pure spiky smell of him. She could hear them talking as they ran, they hadn't seen what really happened, her hexes had done their work. They were afraid and confused, but not terrified, so there would be other nights. Leyja smiled as she flew away into the dark, there would be other chances, she could still have what she wanted.

