

MOONBLIND

by Tanith Lee,

Yet once more, from an idea by John Kaline.

To Hunt the Other you must
become The Other. But if you lose
your way back to yourself,
what have you become?

His mother kept the inn, and he was a child when he saw it first, the Hunt. Evading his chores, he had escaped into a high loft, from where he found it easy enough to climb out on the roof. He lay along the thatch, looking down into the stony yard before the inn-house. Sunset had begun, the sky that night red from end to end. As the riders and the dogs assembled, all redness fell and caught on them, as if they had been doused in a shower of freshest blood.

There were 30 men, 30 horses, and 60 dogs.

The inn-maids went round with the cups of drink, finest silver cups, somewhat dented, that the inn kept solely for those 12 nights. *Even* on the roof, the child could smell the strong wine, and the pungency of spice and herbs stirred in.

He noted the powerful horses, and especially the dogs. These hounds were white and gray, long-haired, long-nosed, and bone-slim on long legs. All the men seemed loud and laughing, cracking jokes. Respected and revered, still they would boast of their participation in a Hunt. Already the child had heard how such men. wherever they

went, whatever their birth or station in life, were treated like lords.

Next the red sky changed to a clear plum darkness, and the moon came up over the woods, round and white, with freckles on her surface. The Hunt saluted the moon, standing in their stirrups.

Then they slung the drained cups away, as if worthless, ringing on the stones, and turning their horses' heads, at a sudden gallop raced from the yard, among a streaming torrent of dogs.

It was as they left the light and shadow of the inn that the moonlight instead caught them. What had flashed and dripped scarlet at sunfall now blazed up like a bonfire of molten silver. On the roof, the boy was dazzled, eyes and brain. Ten years later, dazzled still, he presented himself to the Hunt Master in the Big House on the hill.

"You'd be happier — and far more safe — staying on in your family's inn."

"So I've heard, but here I am."

"What of your poor mother? Don't you care how she'll fear for you? How will she manage if you're killed?"

"She'll manage. And I don't care a jot."

Perhaps approving his impudence, the Hunt Master called his servant. He had the boy sent at once to undergo the proper tests. They were difficult and terrible, and he passed them all. By the time he was 18, Kevariz, the inn-woman's son, was himself a member of the Hunt.

Kevariz sat drinking at the inn.

He was 29 years old, and it was the night before Full Moon, and Tyana expected him home. However, his mother had said she wished to see him. Now, if he came to see his mother, . it was always a visit, an occasion. He had brought her a rose-phnt in a pot, and a little silver luck charm to hang on the rafters. She could brag that her son, who rode with the Hunt, had given it to the inn-house — but he doubted she would. After the third tankard, he went up the cranky stair to her room above. Of course he had been up here since his youth, but the room seemed every time more alien to him. Perhaps, even as a boy of nine or ten, it had been so — and all of the inn the same. He had thought himself made for another destiny.

"Mother. You're looking well."

"Yes, you prefer me to be well. It lessens your guilt in leaving me." He put down the rose and the talisman beside it. She nodded.

"Thank you," she said, stiff and cold. "You sent your boy for me."

"I've had a Dream."

Kevariz waited. His mother, when she reported this, meant only a single sort of dream; one which was prophetic. She had had them now and then, and her Dreams were always of something bad, and usually they came true. She had Dreamed, for example, of the wolf which killed Kevariz's father, on his journey back from the south. Three days after she Dreamed it, men carried the body, what was left—not much—home to her.

Kevariz met her eyes steadily now. She was a gray-haired matron, well-off and proud. She had never liked his leaving her, let alone leaving her for a Hunt. On days and nights he had come back from his training to help her at the inn, she treated him with scorn. Always she carped and chided, but never once had she said she did not *want* him to go, to please, *please* not abandon her and throw himself in the way of such danger. As a girl, she had elected to perform her Town Service in the silver mine, alongside the young men. Girls were never forced to do this, and few volunteered; they liked the softer work better, sorting the ore, or helping in the metal shops. But it showed her character.

He thought now, *She'll tell me she's Dreamed I'm going to die tomorrow.*

What if she did? It could make no difference. No man could resign from a Hunt, once he had joined it. Any who deserted before his 50th year was thrown in the jail to rot. It was like that everywhere.

"Well, mother," he said.

"I Dreamed," said Kevariz's mother, "that you had a son. No, don't interrupt me. He wasn't what you'd care for. He was a wolf."

"God's Silence, mother!"

She had at last managed to shock him.

Not since she had beaten him first, when he was five years old, had she knocked him back like this.

"Sit down," she said.

He sat, and she put one of the best pottery cups in his hand. It had brandy in it—she had kept it ready.

Kevariz drained the brandy.

She added nothing. It was her moment of triumph after all, 12 years waiting to pay him back, one year for every one of a year's Hunt Nights. It must feel as good as the strap had in her hand, when it rang on his shoulders.

"It was a true Dream, you'd say?"

"Yes."

She stood by the mantelpiece, and he sat turning the pottery cup. In the end he said, "I suppose you think Tyana's betrayed me with some—with someone who has the strain."

"She's your woman. What do you think?"

"Four years, we've taken care—we've no children. That suits me fine, and her too. So far as I know, she's never strayed from my bed."

"Better be sure," said his mother.

"All right." He spoke shortly. He got up. "Thanks for your warning. I must be going, tomorrow is—"

"I know what tomorrow is, Kevar. Haven't I watched you ride off at every tomorrow of Full Moon, in your silver, and on your horse and with your dogs?"

He would not look at her; he could hear the mockery and rage in her voice clearly enough. He thought, *Is it that she didn't want to lose me, or that she wishes she could take my place?*

She was a hard woman, his mother.

Tyana was not like that, but wild and fey and loving, passionate and all for him. Or so he had thought.

When he climbed up the hill to his house, the lamp burned its yellow welcome in the window. Tyana was there, laying out the supper plates. Her hair was the color of copper, a fiery veil as she bent above the candles or the fire. She came at once to greet him, shoving the two great dogs away so she could kiss him first.

Tyana seemed just the same. Her scent of warm flesh, cinnamon and mint, her hungry mouth, unchanged and solely his.

As they ate the food, he said, "Sergan's woman's in the family way again." And when Tyana agreed, he added, "You're not missing that, perhaps?"

Tyana laughed. "I? No. I want only you."

"But a child, Tana—"

"I've no fondness for children." She frowned, apparently uneasy. "Is it you that wants me to have children? I will," she said, "if I must, to please you. But I can care for you better if it's just the two of us."

After all, he saw the stubborn streak in her then. Of course, if he had insisted, by law she must obey and allow herself to conceive. She had taken up with a Huntsman, and knew the rules. But oh, he could tell, in that case he would have been made less comfortable.

She would make sure of that.

But well, then, she was not presumably pregnant by some other, or she would have jumped at this excuse. Nor, he thought, would her reluctance let her get herself so.

"Why all this about children?" she asked.

Kevariz said, "I thought, sometimes, those times I'm away with another Hunt—you might like the companionship."

"No, because you leave the dogs with me then, and they're companions enough."

"You're too attached to the dogs. Dogs get slaughtered every Full Moon, somewhere or other."

Heartless despite her smile, Tyana said, "Then the Master would give you another pair."

We grow unfeeling, Kevariz thought later, as he lay beside a Tyana relaxed and sleeping after sexual love. *Heartless. Yes, I'm like that, too.* He was. He knew it. Though he *made* love with Tyana, he did not love her. Nor had he ever loved his mother. Neither did he love his comrades, nor, as some men did, his dogs or his horse, though he would groom them so carefully. *Do I like anything?*

Yes, he thought, I like the Hunt, God help me. That's what I like and love.

As for his mother's Dream—it could have been a lie—just her malice. She was getting old, nearly 50 herself. She was a woman.

He turned on his side and shut his eyes and for a moment was in the black-green forest, not riding but running, and there was fur on him, and he had four feet. Waking with a start, he lay an instant in suspended horror. Then it passed. They all dreamed things like that, once in a while. Had the Master not told him, told them all in the beginning, "You'll become partly what you Hunt, and *they* are also partly like you. But remember, they're of the earth, and *you* are of the world. That's what keeps you separate."

Kvariz the Huntsman was dressing for the Hunt, with the help of his woman, the excited dogs leaping about in the room below, barking, till he shouted for them to be quiet. Tyana, very skilled after four years, laced him into the linen and leathers, helped push on his boots. She plaited his hair, added as she did so the silver ribbons that must mingle with the braids. She had scrubbed his back in the iron bath, and shaved his jaw and cheeks with care. There must not be a nick on his face, nor any open cut anywhere on his body—if any were found, the wound must be cauterized with a hot metal rod and

sealed by wax. She was adept at all of that, Tyana. But really, all the women on the hill were adept. They had had their training, too.

After the dressing and hair-braiding, Tyana opened the chest and undid the box. She performed this duty with ceremony, as Kevariz sat like a prince in his chair.

The box was of black-lacquered wood, inset with palest mother-of-pearl in a design of leaves and crossed knives. When she undid it, the low sun splashed up again from what lay there. The box was full of silver, and piece by piece, with the correct attention and reverence, Tyana brought the pieces out and laid them before him, and then, as he selected, she put them on his body.

Through the piercings in his ears and nostrils and chin went the silver studs and rings. Around his neck and wrists, and over the ankles of his boots, were clasped the larger rings. Into the lacings of his garments silver chains were threaded, and done up with silver locks. Silver buttons were attached to his coat, not by thread, but with silver claws. On to his fingers slid 10 silver coins set in silver. Then he stood up, and raised his arms, and around his waist was cinched the great belt of silver plates, each with its hammered crescent moon, but the buckle was shaped like the sun. Penultimate from the box, out from under a velvet cloth, the woman drew a pistol of white bone chased with silver, a silver-handled knife, and long, incised, silver-hiked dagger.

"There," she said. "We're almost done."

And finally then, almost slyly, like a secret treat put by for a child, she drew from the bottom of the box the velvet bag and handed it to him. Kevariz himself loosed its drawstrings. He shook into his palm the cache of silver bullets.

"How beautiful you look," Tyana said. Her eyes glowed, catching the glimmer of the silver. "As if the moon had rained white fire on you."

She always said similar things. She wanted sex then against the wall. This frequently occurred at that hour, and not only with them, but among other couples on the hill. He gave her what she wanted, it took little enough out of him, because at such times she was quick as any man.

Downstairs, the dogs were already dressed. He had seen to it as always, when earlier he groomed them. They, too, had their earrings and studs of silver, their collars. Their legs had thin silver rings, their claws were painted thick with silver, and silver wires were fastened in the long hair *of* their backs.

Out of the door they walked, he and they, along the hill, to the Big House.

The houses of Huntsmen clustered the hill, each with its grove, its little orchard, vineyard, kitchen-garden, which the servants and women tended. No one went without any good thing here. There was always plenty of food, and sufficient drink, women, fine clothing, even books if desired.

In the late afternoon light, dense and rich as amber honey, the trees were dark, and where the workers stood to watch, they clapped their hands and waved the men on.

All the Hunt was pouring up toward the Big House. Fifty men this season, and a hundred dogs. From the stables on the hilltop the horses, readied like the dogs that morning, neighed and stamped, calling and eager to be off.

As the Huntsmen greeted each other, at first sober, brief, and businesslike, the grooms began to lead their horses out.

Kevariz saw his gelding appear, black as any night, and with a moon-white mane and tail—a classic horse he had bargained with the Master for, three years ago, after the original horse was eviscerated in the woods. The gelding also had silver through its ears, silver bells plaited in its mane, silver embroidery on the saddlecloth, and flat studs fixed through the saddle. While over stirrups and the iron hoofs, silver was newly plated. This was common with all the horses.

He took the bridle from the groom. Among a crowd of men who did the same, he stroked the face of his horse, the long arch of neck, and the bells shook and made their faint sound. Up into the saddle Kevariz sprang, and the two tall dogs pranced around the horse, as all the dogs did—well-behaved now, used to the mounts, and to each other since they had kenneled together in their puppyhood, and run out together ever after. Only if sent to some other Hunt Meet must a man leave his own hounds behind. He must take loan of the wolfhounds of the Hunt that required him, to save the dogs quarreling. Kevariz had never minded this, providing the loaned animals were healthy and well got-up.

Golden light played on silver. Kevariz recalled how he had seen it first, all that metal blazing in the moonshine. Dazzled, still dazzled. It had been easy, in a way, to be brave and single-minded, and to forego almost every other thing.

Just then the door of the Big House opened and the Master came out in his blood-red brocaded coat and antique silver adornments

passed, father to son, for 16 generations.

The men cheered the Master. They always did. He bowed to them, as always too, and the servants and grooms clapped again.

"It's a fine night," called the Master, "a clear moon white as starch. We've heard, haven't we, there's one main pack this month, down by the river road. It's those we'll take. And any stragglers. Not too unworthy a job of work."

The first cups went round. These were made of black bronze, and the wine had accordingly a bronze tang. Sergan said, joking, "It'll taste better at the inn."

Kevariz considered his mother a moment, when they were in the inn yard. He puzzled, did she truly spy on him, unseen, from a window?

Why had she told him that stupid fool's rigamarole?

Probably because it could haunt him forever, if he let it. For there were other women he had and could sleep with, and any one might announce she was to give him a son.

One day—one *night*—*they* would have wiped the strain, this strain of Hell, out. Scoured it off the face of the earth. So they always swore.

He put his mother and her Dream from his mind.

It was the earliest training, to be able to clear the brain on a Full Moon Night.

The sun sank into the land. The inn wine had been consumed. They saluted the rising moon. They flung away the silver cups, symbol of their own recklessness in the matter of their own lives, rode for the woods and the forest, flying now, the hounds, horses, and men. This was what Kevariz knew best; this fearful time, strangely, was when he felt the most secure.

The dogs started the first one down by the old mill-pond. As they tore around the tarn, with its water-wheel standing obsolete now, in a moonlit verdigris of moss, across the clearing there loped something thin and white. The hounds were telling, yowking. The men shouted excitedly. The moon-blaze of silver was all around, and through it, as if through an iridescent fog, Kevariz made out the shape of the wolf as it sped away, threading itself like an ivory needle back into the trees. But the dogs were hot on its heels.

The Master yelled. They broke across the clearing and pelted down the ancient overgrown road beyond the ruined mill. Ten years since that mill had been in use. One night, the mill folk had died, all

of them, murdered and eaten. There was barely enough left lying about for the town to identify. But this was what wolves did, a wolf-pack, and usually they were in packs. This individual, running in front of the hounds, though solitary, would be making for the familial lair.

Now the creature ahead, wanting more speed, dropped to its four feet—that was, what passed for feet. It bounded, ungainly, appalling, *swift*, leaping across obstacles along the road, the upthnist paving, the tussocks of weeds and bramble clumps.

Kevariz had seen every action it made before, and countless times. He kicked at his horse's sides, howling like the dogs, longing to catch up to their quarry and have it down.

But as usually happened, the dogs got there first, catching the wolf in the second it swerved and tried to head off again into the deeper forest, away now from where the river was and the lair.

It had made no sound until then, as the dogs sprang on it. When the biting fangs and silvered claws sank in, it began to emit the noises of its fury and agony—a horrible and filthy guttural screeching and growling.

The dogs swarmed over their captive. Huntsmen rode forward into the melee. It was strong, the wolf, as always. One dog was flung up and over, just like the silver cups in the yard—spinning, dented, and silent—broken. One of Kollia's pair, Kevariz vaguely thought, his gelding stampeding forward shaking its head. The bugle yapped, calling the clogs away. As they let go, sprawling down, the guns were out, and their voices barked in turn.

The bullets spat forward in stinging silver jets. Kevariz saw his own shot go home, deep into the shaggy face of the thing writhing now, bloody, wrecked, and refusing to die, there on the forest floor.

Kevariz found himself out of the saddle. He ran in. Into his hand, almost before he expected it, came the great coarse ruff. He pulled the head upward, and felt the claws of the beast scrape at him, sliding on leather, burnt by silver, gouging the flesh between. "*Good night, shitspatm.*" Kevariz plunged the long silver-hilted dagger in at the side of the neck, through fur and skin, flesh and skeleton. He heard the spine crack, felt it, saw the knife reappear on the neck's other side. The beast sagged. Its eyes, black as the darkness, each holding a miniature of the moon, stared into his. They looked blind, blind as his own.

The thing was dead.

Kevariz stood off. Hands clapped him on the back, and a flask

arrived. He swallowed brandy, as in his mother's room. Then they were all up in the saddles again, the living joyous dogs, bearded with blood, yipping for more, and the bugle summoning them on, for the rest.

Where the river opened up the forest, in places the banks were steep and full of holes and caves. Frequently this was where they chose, the wolf-packs, to lair. As the Hunt had been told, tonight it was the same.

Two males came bounding out, one nearly pure white and one much browner. They leapt at the horses, straight up, and Kevariz saw Zivender's mare fall shrieking, even as Ziv seized the monster's hair and stuck in his knife. Then they were lost in a kaleidoscope of limbs and weapons.

A female came out next, after the males were down. They had heard this pack comprised four or five members, which meant, when the dogs had also got the female down, and the Master himself had ridden over to dispatch her, that one more beast might still be inside the cave.

Presently, as the shouts and shots died away, and the bubbling growling was silenced, they heard the final wolf, there inside the bank. It had begun howling, enraged, or frantic, but it did not come out.

The hounds were fierce, their blood was up, and the same for the men. The Master pointed. Sergan, and Ziv, who had struggled off his dying horse unharmed, but weeping with sorrow and anger, scrambled up the bank, their four dogs moving belly-down beside them, like snakes. They all vanished in at the maw of the cave.

Utter quiet was maintained outside. The Huntsmen there waited. guns positioned, their well-trained horses rock-still, so even the bells made no noise, the dogs crouched ready yet motionless.

The interior hubbub of battle was brief. The last wolf was one against six. Though these things had the strength of devils, seldom could even the larger packs of 10 or more do much against the amalgamated might of a Hunt, protected by its silver—for which any town's youth were prepared to die in the mines—armed and organized like warriors for war.

After a few minutes the disturbance in the cave stopped, Zivender and Sergan's dogs instead bayed in triumph. They alone, having entered the lair, would be allowed the hearts and livers, the rest of the hounds must make do with a chop or two. The Master had done excellently, selecting Sergan for the honor, and Ziv, who had

loved his horse as much as his woman, and would mourn her for months.

He was not the first to enter the cave. The Hunt Master had called to Kevariz, and embraced him for his bold kill of the previous wolf. Possibly, when they all dined that night in the hall of the Big House, the Master would publicly title Kevariz "son." They were related that way, because Kevariz lived with Tyana, one of the Master's own daughters, but it was always "son" not "son-by-law" that the Master titled Kevariz when he had been particularly effective in a Hunt.

The brandy had gone round once more. Next they would quarter the woods hereabouts, to be sure. But the reliable reports had only been of this one pack. As a rule there was at least one wolf to be dealt with every month. No sooner had a Hunt burned out a nest, than more of the creatures slipped into the area, often inadvertently driven in from other spots, by other Hunts. Only twice, in all the years Kevariz had been a Huntsman, had they ridden all night without a single kill.

It was Zivender who asked Kevariz to go into the cave.

"I've lost my pocket-watch, damn my carelessness. No, it's not on poor Sdina." Sdina was the dead mare. "It must have dropped out of my coat in the lair. It's silver—"

"I know," said Kevariz.

"My father gave it to me for my first Hunt. I'd go back in but I've got Sdina to see to, can't just leave her lying."

"I'll be glad to have a look for the watch. Do what you have to here."

And so Kevariz climbed up to the cave.

The moon was going over by now, toward the west, and shone diagonally through the trees below, and across the inky water stretched a pointing finger of bleached fire.

So beautiful, the moon, that stirred up so much stinking dirt.

Kevariz had seen and entered other lairs. They were generally similar. Bones lay about, reeking and foul, though wolves, unless very old or sick, would empty their bladders and bowels elsewhere. There were always possessions in the lairs—sometimes a new Huntsman was unnerved to find a hairbrush or a doll. They had furniture too, many of them. Not the rough wooden stools and mattresses stuffed with dried grass that were normally found, but wonderful things that perhaps had come from great houses—a carved

chest, or decorated ebony chair. However fine, no man coveted them. The lair would be fired and burned out, and anything like that with it.

There was some furniture in this cave, but only of the crudely made sort. The bed, though, had a raised wooden frame, and he discovered the clogs and men had killed the last wolf on it. It was another female, and initially he thought the copious bloodstains were only from the slaughter.

Ziv's silver watch was nowhere Kevariz could see, despite spending a while turning over the stuff in the lair, even picking about in the cold fireplace. In the end, Kevariz bent down to look under the bed-frame, for during the skirmish the watch could have rolled there.

Something had.

When he saw the glint of light, he took it for silver, and reached out and only snatched back his fingers in time. Under the bed, where the female must have thrust it when the Hunt approached, was a wolf-cub, not two days old. Kevariz stared in at it. It was too young yet, for much to happen with it on a Full Moon. To the unaccustomed eye, it looked only like a baby, rather thick-haired and downy, with wide, gleaming eyes. Even the dogs had overlooked it, its small scent hidden by the odor of the lair, the blood, and entrails.

"God's Silence." Kevariz stood up. He had heard of, but never before had to contend with, such an eventuality. To butcher the full-grown ones, even if he had been told to do it at other times of a month, when they appeared nearly human, would have been seen to without a qualm, once he was sure. He had witnessed this once, a female wolf in her woman shape, hanged in the market by a silver rope, her feet weighted by iron. He cheered with everyone else when the rope pulled off her head. But this—this cub—this *child*—

Kevariz stepped back, knelt down, peered again in under the bed-frame. It was crying now, the—the cub. So tiny and feeble, it made scarcely any sound, as he had sometimes found with sickly human infants when so young.

It was female.

"Devil's turd" Kevariz said to it. "*Werewolf*," he said, giving it for once its full title. He hated it. He pushed his hatred in at it, like a blade.

The baby only lay crying under the bed, under the mattress and the corpse of its mother, whose heart, liver, and lights had already

been removed and thrown to the hounds of Zivender and Sergan.

"God," said Kevariz.

He stood up again, again stepped backward, and trod with a crunch on the face of Ziv's silver watch, lying unseen among the general mess.

Kevariz sat drinking at the Master's table.

It was the Hunt Dinner, and Tyana would not expect him home much before the third hour of morning. None of the women were present. The Dinners at Full Moon, especially after such a successful Hunt, were often rowdy.

The men recounted what they had done, over and over-the audience, which had already seen most of it, was not bored. They told how Zivender and Sergan had gone into the cave, how Kevar had wrenched hack the first wolf's head and sliced its spine, they told the courage of the clogs,; the rewarding offal. They admired the claw-scorings on Kevariz's arm, which Tyana had already attended to.

"You see, son," the Hunt Master said to Kevariz, putting an arm about his shoulders, "when I was your age, I was the same. Riding through, getting a grip, that second when the knife *bites*-God and Hell, there's nothing like it. Not even sex."

Kevariz nodded. "It's like true love," he said.

"Yes-you're right. *Love*. We *love* the brutes, don't we, we *love* them and we kill them. Can't do the one without the other."

They laughed. The fortified wines by then were passing round, purple in color, heavy and fiery, after the meats and sweets.

The welter of blood had not put any of them off the food.

When they staggered back to their houses on the hill, most of the Huntsmen would be busy with their women.

But *Better than sex-*

"Did you ever kill a cub?" Kevariz asked, as if curious. His face was happy, flushed with wine and good-will.

"It was my luck, just the once. They look like real babies, even on Full Moon. Mostly."

"I heard of a man once," Kevariz said, "my mother told me about it at the inn-it made him ill to do that, though he was a terror with the grown ones, male or female, they could hardly hold him off from them."

"Your mother? She was trying to put you off," said the Master.

"Yes, I believe she was," Kevariz nodded.

"If ever you come across a wolf-cub and you're squeamish, son, you call for me. I'll see you through."

"I-," said Kevariz. His voice was weak suddenly, with recollection. But the Master never noticed, as he had not suspected the lie of Kevariz's mother's tale. Instead the Master was getting to his feet, calling out another toast for the night, and the victory in one more battle.

Play-fighting, some of the Huntsmen crashed onto the table, and the remains of food, cutlery, and some wine spilled on the ground. The Master only laughed again. He valued his men. He was a good sort.

Tyana sat up from his body, and gazed down at her by-law husband. She was surprised and disappointed.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I drank too much at dinner in the Big House." "You drank too much-that's happened before on Hunt Nights, *It makes no odds. You still want me.*" "I want you. But I'm unable."

She sighed. He saw now she could be petulant, as well as stubborn. Her attractions, even her glory of hair, tonight grated on him like the stinging salves she had applied to the scratches the wolf had made as he killed it.

Soon she gave up on him. She lay down, sullen, and turned her back. "You don't love me so well as you did."

I never loved you, said the voice in his heart. He had only fancied her body, and needed a woman to keep his house better than a servant, and the Master anyway had said to him, playfully, "My Yana looks at you a lot." The Master had 13 daughters by various of his women, but no sons. He must get sons, therefore, through liaisons between his Huntsmen and his daughters. Was Tyana the loveliest daughter? Was Kevariz likely to be the one the Master chose to follow him in the Master's role? On other nights, when he called Kevariz "son," Kevariz had thought it might be so.

Kevariz said, "I love you like the spring, Tyana. Now close your eyes and go to sleep."

"How can I sleep without-?"

Kevariz felt himself heave out of the bed, landing on his feet on the night-frigid floor. "Be quiet!" he bellowed at her.

Then he saw her looking up at him in fright, afraid of a blow that would spoil her looks. Kevariz shook himself. He sat down leadenly in the chair by the hearth.

"Listen, 'Yana, tonight I had to kill-I had to kill a cub."

"A wolf-cub?"

"Yes, what else would I mean. God's Curse, it was bad for me. It looked just like a human baby. And-it cried so."

Her face was all incomprehension. Well, she had said she had no feeling for children. But the face of any one of his comrades would be the same. *It* had not *been* a human baby. It was a *wolf's* child. Left to live, it would grow, swiftly as any actual beast, to adulthood- and then the murder of the real children would begin, and it would rejoice as it ate their meat.

These lands were rife with wolves. Indeed, it *was* a war. And though a child in an ordinary war might be spared, *not* a child that, less than two years on, would wield the powers and blood-lust of a full-grown, supernatural enemy.

"Oh, I know," Kevariz said. "Oh, 'Yana, I won't hurt you. Stop cowering and lie down. Go to sleep. I'll take a walk along the hill. Clear my head. The dawn's coming and the moon's down. It's safe enough."

Did he realize, as he walked along the slope? Maybe he did. All the lights were out in the houses, save for the lamps left here and there in a porch. The windows of the Big House glistened only with the dim return of morning, and the sky was hollow. The grass was wet with dew. Kevariz walked on, toward the woods, the forest.

He knew, and had known. Of course he had known. He had come out of the lair and coined at once his beginning lie. "Ziv- look- I found it like this on the floor-you or Sergan must have trodden on it as you slaughtered that thing on the bed." And Ziven-der's long face, not just his beloved mare dead, but now his family keepsake smashed.

On another night, Kevariz would have told him the facts. That *he* had inadvertently trodden on the watch. He would have paid in the town for a repair, which anyway very likely would be done free for any Huntsman. But Kevariz lied to practice.

Then, Kevariz had strolled off a way into the trees, mentioning he needed to relieve himself. No one was suspicious, why should they be?

He thought it might have smothered, bundled there inside his coat, and the silver button-claws scorching it. It was so little, not one of the others had taken it for anything more than the pack of cloth he held in there, to a nonexistent wound. Nor did it cry anymore, frozen

by its contact with this otherness-Kevariz-which had dragged it from beneath the bed-frame, parceled it into the cloth kept for staunching blood, clutched it between a coat and an inimically silvered body that, to the cub, must scratch, scald, and *smell* so very wrong, a human man whose odor was not of wolf, but of wolf-killing.

The dogs still did not nose it either. Even his two, when they came bouncing at him-but to them he smelled properly of butchery, and besides, he threw them the chops that were their lot. That was what interested them.

Down in among the trees, out of sight, he had found a bush of wild eucalypt, removed the baby and rolled the cloth in the bush. Then he put the baby back into the perfumed cloth, and stowed it in one of 50 craters in the tree trunks, well off the ground, higher than his own head would be, when he rode a horse.

He thought he was giving it, the cub, a chance. But later, after they had ridden through the woods and no one had discovered the child, or even wondered if anything was in a tree, Kevariz grasped the thorny idea that really he had only given it a slow, painful death—instead of a painful death that was fast.

Again and again that night, he cut himself on this idea, while thrusting it from his mind. For always it came back.

Now *he* was going back, back to the cratered tree, around the tumble of the river bank.

He knew what he would find, and found it. Light by then was coming through the wood-like rosy smoke. In the soft rays, as he lifted the cub from the tree, a human baby lay in his hands, watching him with clear and fully focussed eyes that were like two blue moons.

Kevariz carried her down to the river, and washed her gently in the water. By this he demonstrated to himself he knew also she was far more than human. No human child so young could have stood the water's dawn cold—but she did not mind. He too was now clean of the tang of blood. He fed her the milk he had stolen from his own cupboard in the house, the home the Master gave him, that was no longer his. The wolf-child drank the milk. She was far more couth and coordinated than the human baby she seemed to be. She could already help hold the crock. Tomorrow, he must find a cow on the edge of the town, where they went out to pasture after Full Moon. But soon she could be weaned to easier stuff.

Kevariz tucked the baby in his arms, sitting under the tree, as sunlight bloomed in a giant flower of flame, and altered the forest

from shadowed savagery to innocence.

It was as if he had been waiting for this hour.

Kevariz felt no compunction. As he had not when he left the inn, as he had not ever when he slew a wolf. He was pitiless, even in compassion, Kevariz.

The baby slept. Idly he rocked her, as he had seen women do.

For now—for a year and a half, at most, two—she would be his child, the child he had never wanted, and now did. Then she would be grown, like all her kind, into a young woman of about 17 years—Tyana's age, when he courted her. As in a pack it happened, they would thereafter be different with each other, the wolf-girl and Kevariz the Huntsman.

Except, he would never Hunt in that way again.

He would have to become one with her, live as she did, always potentially concealed, canny; if located then pursued. With Kevariz and his Huntsman's education to help her, she—and he—could perhaps survive a great while. But, if he considered sensibly, in fact they would not last long at all.

Already he had removed his silver, dropped it under the hill. The dogs, sleeping by the fire, had glanced up. He had nodded, and gone out of the door.

He recalled now the Master's words, "You'll become partly what you Hunt, as *they* are also partly like you." They were of the earth, the Master said, but men were of the world—this was not honest. Kevariz did not believe it finally. Men too were of the earth, men too were wolves, or how else, in the case of *her* kind, could they ever be both at once?

Startling him, despite everything, the child spoke her first word to him at that moment. "Da," she said, "Da—." "Yes, baby, I'm your da."

And in two years, he thought and knew, he would be her husband, by the oldest law there was. She was very fair, blonde and pale. Once a month, she would be one of the pure white ones.

Soon he got up, and walked them deeper into the forest, into those areas he had come across in the past, the wolf-places. For now, secure enough.

They would think, at the Big House, on the hill, he had lost his nerve and become a coward, as sometimes Huntsmen did, after which they ran away. They would search for him in the town, and in other towns—never in the woods. They understood Kevariz, the Huntsman, was too wise to hide there from jail, where the wolves

might get him.

How many others, through the years, had done as he did?

It had been waiting for him, oh, yes. He who had never loved or liked, not mother or wife, not child, not even friend, not even loyal horse and hound. And when he killed the wolves, *loving* it—it had been *fear* of love, not *love* at all, that had made him brave and mad. Protesting too much, he had blinded himself, as at the start the silver ornaments had blinded him, in the moonlight. Now, he saw. He had seen the instant he had looked at her, beneath the bed.

Like his mother, however, Kevariz had discovered he possessed the prophetic streak. His Dream was a waking one, as he walked away into the wolf-heart of the forest, beyond the lairs of men.

He saw it all before him. The way she would grow, his adopted daughter. He saw the way, at each Full Moon, she changed, coated in fur, running now upright, now on taloned hands and feet, her back raised impossibly, her face all eyes and fangs. He saw it did not count anymore, the numbers of her kind he had killed, nor the countless numbers of his kind, killed by hers. He saw that she would never, even as a beast, hurt a hair on his head. While he, to save her, would die.

He beheld them living in caves, the boles of dead trees, or running fleetly from a shouting pack of silver-clad men. He beheld them lovers, and their own first, and only, child—a boy, who, naturally, would inherit her blood, not his. His son that, as Kevariz's mother had foretold, would be a wolf. Somewhere too he watched them slain together, all three of them—but yet there was so much before that to come, so much of *life*, a living life Kevariz had never known. Surely it was worth the price.

The baby slept. This deep in the forest, even by day, the world grew darker and more profound. Since he had prophesied like his mother, and because of her foretelling of his fate, he decided he would call the child in his arms by his mother's name, Sosfiya.-