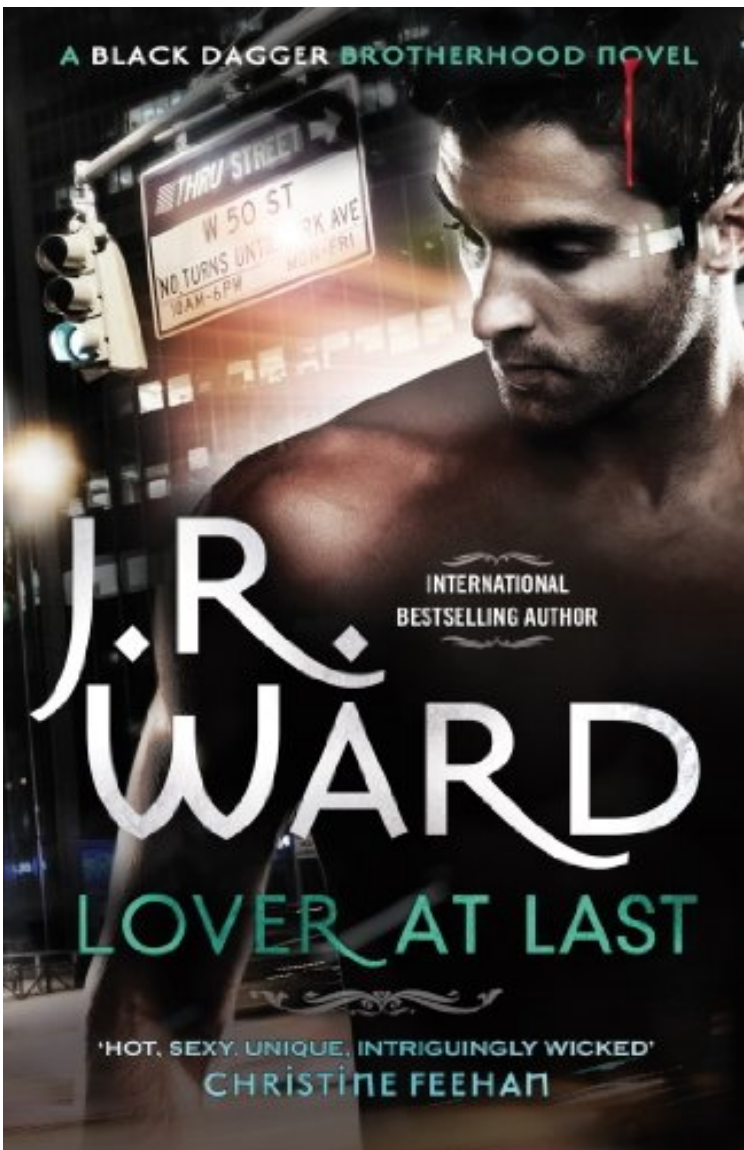


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## Lover at Last: Number 11 in series



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### Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn the darkest corners of the night in Caldwell, New York, a conflict like no other rages. The city is home to a band of brothers born to defend their race: the warrior vampires of the Black Dagger Brotherhood . . .Quinn, son of no one, is used to being on his own. Disavowed from his bloodline, shunned by the aristocracy, he has finally found an identity as one of the most brutal fighters in the war against the Lessening Society. But his life is not complete. Even as the prospect of having a family of his own seems to be within reach, he is empty on the inside, his heart given to another.Blay, after years of unrequited love, has moved on from his feelings for Quinn. And it's about time: the male has found his perfect match in a Chosen female, and they are going to have a young - just as Quinn has always wanted

for himself. It's hard to see the new couple together, but building your life around a pipe dream is just a heartbreak waiting to happen. As he's learned first-hand. Fate seems to have taken these vampire soldiers in different directions . . . but as the battle over the race's throne intensifies, and new players on the scene in Caldwell create mortal danger for the Brotherhood, Qhuinn finally learns the true definition of courage . . .

.ExtraitPRELUDEQhuinn, son of Lohstrong, entered his familys home through its grand front door. The instant he stepped over the threshold, the smell of the place curled up into his nose. Lemon polish. Beeswax candles. Fresh flowers from the garden that the doggen brought in daily. Perfumehis mothers. Colognehis fathers and his brothers. Cinnamon gumhis sisters.If the Glade company ever did an air freshener like this, it would be called something like Meadow of Old Money. Or Sunrise over a Fat Bank Account.Or maybe the ever-popular Were Just Better Than Everyone Else.Distant voices drifted over from the dining room, the vowels round as brilliant-cut diamonds, the consonants drawled out smooth and long as satin ribbons.Oh, Lillie, this is lovely, thank you, his mother said to the server. But thats too much for me. And do not give Solange so all that. Shes getting heavy.Ah, yes, his mothers perma-diet inflicted on the next generation: Glymera females were supposed to disappear from sight when they turned sideways, each jutting collarbone, sunken cheek, and bony upper arm some kind of fucked-up badge of honor.As if resembling like a fire poker would make you a better person.And Scribe Virgin forefend if your daughter looked like she was healthy.Ah, yes, thank you, Lilith, his father said evenly. More for me, please.Qhuinn closed his eyes and tried to convince his body to step forward. One foot after another. It was not that tough.His brandy-new Ed Hardy kicks middle-fingered that suggestion. Then again, in so many ways, walking into that dining room was belly-of-the-beast time.He let his duffel fall to the floor. The couple of days at his best friend Blays house had done him good, a break from the complete lack of air in this house. Unfortunately, the burn on reentry was so bad, the cost-benefit of leaving was nearly equal.Okay, this was ridiculous. He couldnt keep standing here like an inanimate object.Turning to the side wall, he leaned into the full-length antique mirror that was placed right by the door. So thoughtful. So in keeping with the aristocracys need to look good. This way, visitors could check their hair and clothes as the butler accepted coats and hats.The young pretrans face that stared back at him was all even features, good jawline, and a mouth that, he had to admit, looked like it could do some serious damage to naked skin when he got older. Or maybe that was just wishful thinking. Hair was Vlad the Impaler, spikes standing up straight from his head. Neck was strung with a bike chainand not one bought at Urban Outfitters, but the link that had previously motivated his twelve-speed.All things being equal, he looked like a thief who had broken in and was prepared to trash the place on the hunt for sterling silver, jewelry, and portable electronics.The irony was that the Goth bullcrap wasnt actually the most offensive part of his appearance to his fam. In fact, he could have stripped down, hung a light fixture off his ass, and run around the first floor playing Jose Canseco with the art and antiques and not come close to how much the real problem pissed off his parents.It was his eyes.One blue. One green.Oopsy. His bad.The glymera didnt like defects. Not in their porcelain or their rose gardens. Not in their wallpaper or their carpets or their countertops. Not in the silk of their underwear or the wool of their blazers or the chiffon of their gowns.And certainly not ever in their children.Sister was okaywell, except for the little weight problem that didnt actually exist, and a lisp that her transition hadnt cured oh, and the fact that she had the personality of their mother. And there was no fixing that shit. Brother, on the other hand, was the real fucking star, a physically perfect, firstborn son prepared to carry forth the family bloodline by reproducing in a very genteel, non-moaning, no-sweat situation with a female chosen for him by the family.Hell, his sperm recipient had already been lined up. He was going to mate her as soon as he went through his transitionHow are you feeling, my son? his father asked with hesitation.Tired, sir, a deep voice answered. But this is going to help.A chill frog-marched up Qhuinns spine. That didnt sound like his brother. Way too much bass. Far too masculine. TooHoly shit, the guy had gone through his transition.Now Qhuinns Ed Hardys got with the program, taking him forward until he could see into the dining room. Father was in his seat at the head of the table. Check. Mother was in her seat at the foot of the table opposite the kitchens flap door. Check. Sister was facing out of the room, all but licking the gold rim off her plate from hunger. Check.The male whose back was to Qhuinn was not part of the SOP.Luchas was twice the size hed been when Qhuinn had been approached by a doggen and told to get his things and go to Blays.Well, that explained the vacay. Hed assumed his father had finally relented and given in to the request Qhuinn had filed weeks before. But nope, the guy had just wanted Qhuinn out of the house because the change had come to the gene pools golden child.Had his brother laid the chick? Who had they used for bloodHis father, never the demonstrative type, reached out a hand and gave Luchas an awkward pat on the forearm. Were so proud of you. You

lookperfect. You do, Qhuinns mother piped up. Just perfect. Doesnt your brother look perfect, Solange? Yes, he does. Perfect. And I have something for you, Lohstrong said. The male reached into the inside pocket of his sport coat and took out a black velvet box the size of a baseball. Qhuinns mother started to tear up and dabbed under her eyes. This is for you, my precious son. The box was slid across the white damask tablecloth, and his brothers now-big hands shook as he took the thing and popped the lid. Qhuinn caught the flash of gold all the way out in the foyer. As everyone at the table went silent, his brother stared at the signet ring, clearly overwhelmed, as their mother kept up with the dab-dab, and even their father grew misty. And his sister sneaked a roll from the bread basket. Thank you, sir, Luchas said as he put the heavy gold ring on his forefinger. It fits, does it not? Lohstrong asked. Yes, sir. Perfectly. We wear the same size, then. Of course they did. At that moment, their father glanced away, like he was hoping the movement of his eyeballs would take care of the sheen of tears that had come over his vision. He caught Qhuinn lurking outside the dining room. There was a brief flash of recognition. Not the hi-howre-ya kind, or the oh-good-my-other-sons-home. More like when you were walking through the grass and noticed a pile of dog shit too late to stop your foot from landing in it. The male went back to staring at his family, locking Qhuinn out. Clearly, the last thing Lohstrong wanted was such a historic moment to be ruined and that was probably why he didnt do the hand signals that warded off the evil eye. Usually everyone in the household performed the ritual when they saw Qhuinn. Not tonight. Daddio didnt want the others to know. Qhuinn went over to his duffel. Slinging the weight onto his shoulder, he took the front stairs to his room. Usually his mother preferred him to use the servants set, but that would mean hed have to cut through all the love in there. His room was as far away from the others as you could get, all the way over to the right. Hed often wondered why they didnt take the leap completely and put him in with the doggen but then the staff would probably quit. Closing himself in, he dumped his duds on the bare floor and sat on his bed. Staring at his only piece of luggage, he figured he had better do that laundry soon, as there was a wet bathing suit in there. The maids refused to touch his clothes like the evil in him lingered in the fibers of his jeans and his T-shirts. The upside was, he was never welcome at formal events, so his wardrobe was just wash-n-wear, baby. He discovered he was crying when he looked down at his Ed Hardys and realized that there were a couple of drops of water right in the middle of the laces. Qhuinn was never getting a ring. Ah, hell this hurt. He was scrubbing his face with his palms when his phone rang. Taking the thing out of his biker jacket, he had to blink a couple of times to focus. He hit send to accept the call, but he didnt answer. I just heard, Blay said across the connection. How are you doing? Qhuinn opened his mouth to reply, his brain coughing up all kinds of responses: Peachy fucking jim-dandy. At least Im not fat like my sister. No, I dont know if my brother got laid. Instead, he said, They got me out of the house. They didnt want me to curse the transition. Guess it worked, because the guy looks like he came through it okay. Blay swore softly. Oh, and he got his ring just now. My father gave him his ring. The signet ring with the family crest on it, the symbol that all males of good bloodlines wore to attest to the value of their lineage. I watched Luchas put it on his finger, Qhuinn said, feeling as if he were taking a sharp knife and drawing it up the insides of his arms. Fit perfectly. Looked great. You know, though like, how could it not? He began weeping at that point. Just fucking lost it. The awful truth was that under his counterculture fuck-you, he wanted his family to love him. As prissy as his sister was, as scholar-geek as his brother was, as reserved as his parents were, he saw the love among the four of them. He felt the love among them. It was the tie that bound those individuals together, the invisible string from one heart to the another, the commitment of caring about everything from the mundane shit to any true, mortal drama. And the only thing more powerful than that connection was what it was like to get shut out from it. Every fucking day of your life. Blays voice cut in through the heaving. Im here for you. And Im so damned sorry. Im here for you. Just dont do anything stupid, okay? Let me come over. Leave it to Blay to know that he was thinking about things that involved ropes and showerheads. In fact, his free hand had already gone down to the makeshift belt hed fashioned out of a nice, strong weave of nylon because his parents didnt give him much money for clothes, and the proper one hed owned had broken years ago. Pulling the length free, he glanced across to the closed door of his bath. All he needed to do was tie the thing to the fixture in his shower. God knew those water pipes had been run in the good old days, when things were strong enough to hold some weight. He even had a chair he could stand up on and then kick out from underneath him. I gotta go. Qhuinn? Dont you hang up on me. Dont you dare hang up on me. Listen, man, I gotta go. Im coming over right now. Lot of flapping in the background, like Blay was getting his clothes on. Qhuinn! Do not hang up the phone. Qhuinn! ONE PRESENT DAY. Now, that a mutha fuckn whip rite chur. Jonsey looked over at the idiot who was hunkered down next to him in the bus stop. The pair of them had been parked in the Plexiglas gerbil cage for three hours. At least.

Although comments like that had made it seem a matter of days. And were going to make shit justifiable homicide. You a white boy, you know that? Jonsey pointed out. Say whaaaaat? Okay, make that three years of waiting. Caucasian, dude. As in you need fuckin sunblock in the summer. As in not like myself. Whatever, man, check out that ride. As in why you gotta talk like you from the hood? You act a fool, yo. At this point, he just wanted to get the night over. It was cold, it was snowing, and he had to wonder who hed pissed off to get stuck with Vanilla Ice over here. Matter of fact, he was thinking about pulling out of this bullshit altogether. He was making good paper dealing in Caldwell; he was two months out of prison for those murders hed done as a juvie; the last thing he was interested in was hanging with some white bitch determined to get street cred through vocabulary. Oh, and then there was the Richie Rich neighborhood they were in. For all he knew, there was an ordinance out here that you werent allowed on the streets after ten p.m. Why the hell had he agreed to this? Will. You. Please. Look. At. That. Fine. Automobile. Just to shut the guy up, Jonsey turned his head and leaned out of the shelter. As blowing snow got into his eyes, he cursed. Fucking upstate New York in the winter. Cold enough to ice-cube your balls. Wellhello, there. Across a shallow parking lot, sitting right in front of a sparkling-clean, no-graffitid, twenty-four-hour CVS, there was, in fact, a sweet-ass fucking whip. The Hummer was totally blacked out, no chrome anywherenot on the wheels, not around the windows, not even on the grille. And it was the big-body and, going by all that trim, no doubt had the big engine in it. The ride was the kind of thing youd see on the streets where he was from, the vehicle of a major dealer. Except they were far from the inner city out here, so it was just some cracker trying to look like he had a dick. Vanilla-man hiked up his backpack, one-strapping it. Ima check it out. Bus is coming soon. Jonsey checked his watch, and did some wishful thinking. Five, maybe ten minutes. Come on. Bye, asshole. You scared or some shit? The SOB lifted his hands and started going Paranormal Activity. Oh, scurrrrry. Jonsey outted his gun and punched the muzzle right into that dumb-ass face. I got no problem killin you right here. I done it before. I do it again. Now back the fuck off and do yself a favor. Shut the fuck up. As Jonsey met the guys eyes, he didnt particularly care what the outcome was. Shoot the bitch. Dont shoot him. Whatever. Okay, okay, okay. Mr. Chatty backed away and left the bus stop. Thank. Fuck. Jonesy put his gat away, crossed his arms, and stared in the direction the bus was going to come out of like that might help. Stupid fucking idiot. He looked at his watch again. Man, enough with this shit. If a bus heading back into downtown got here first, he was just going to get on and fuck it all. Shifting the backpack hed been told to get, he felt the hard contour of the jar inside. The pack he understood. If he was going to transport product from the sticks into the hood, then yeah. But the jar? What the hell you need that for? Unless it was loose powder? The fact that hed been chosen by C-Rider, the man himself, for this had been pretty fucking cool. Until hed met White Boy and then the idea he was special lost some juice. The boss mans instructions had been clear: Hook up with the dude at the Fourth Street stop. Take the last bus out to the burbs and wait. Transfer to the rural line when service resumed near dawn. Get off at the Warren County stop. Hoof it one mile to a farm property. C-Rider would meet them and a bunch of other dudes out there for the business. And after that? Jonsey would be part of a new crew set to dominate the scene in Caldie. Revue de presse. J.R. Ward's unique band of brothers is to die for. I love this series! New York Times bestselling author bestseller Suzanne Brockmann Utterly absorbing and deliciously erotic.... The Brotherhood is the hottest collection of studs in romance. I cant wait for the next one! New York Times bestseller Angela Knight