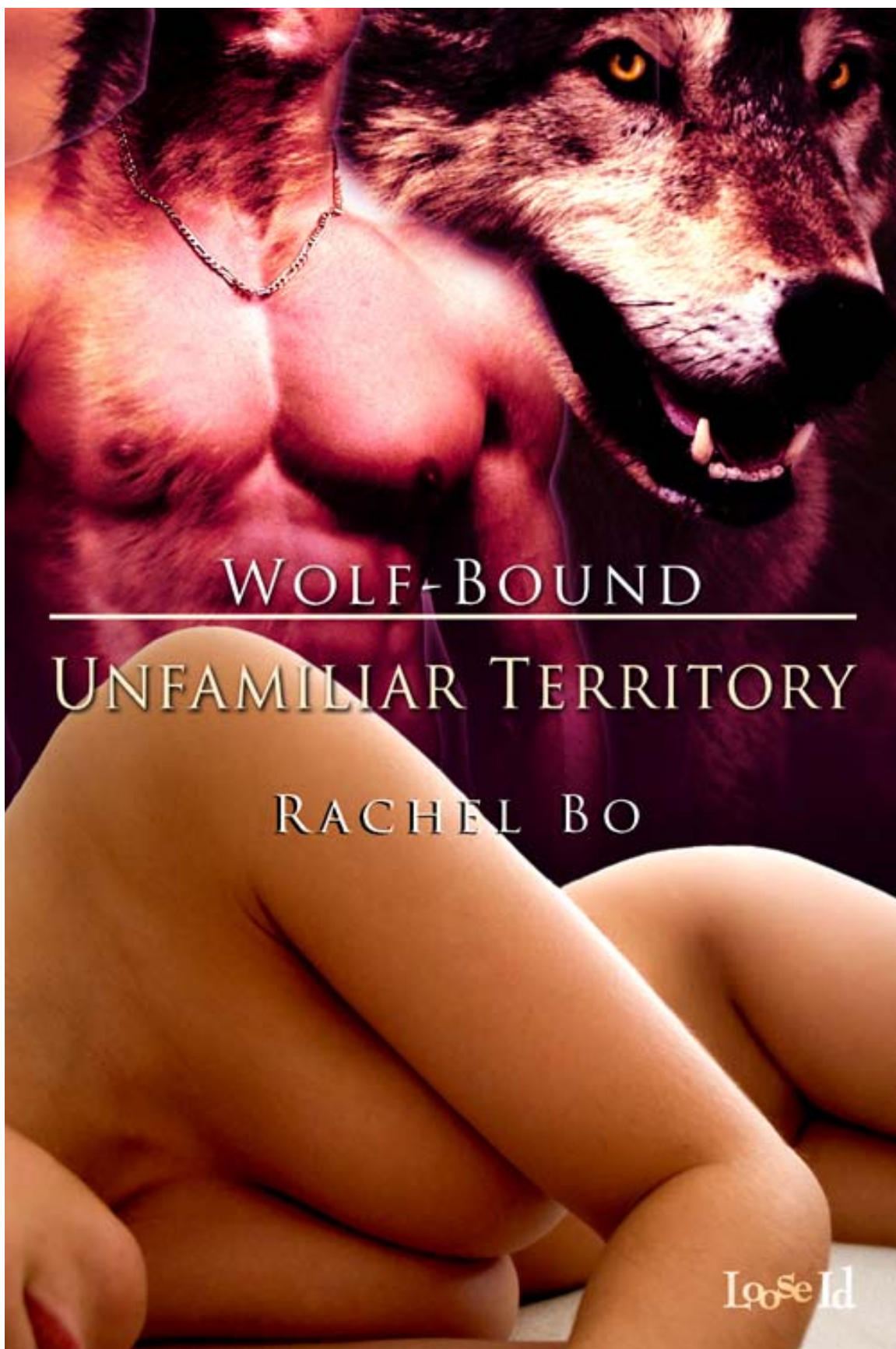




WOLF-BOUND:
UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY

Rachel Bo

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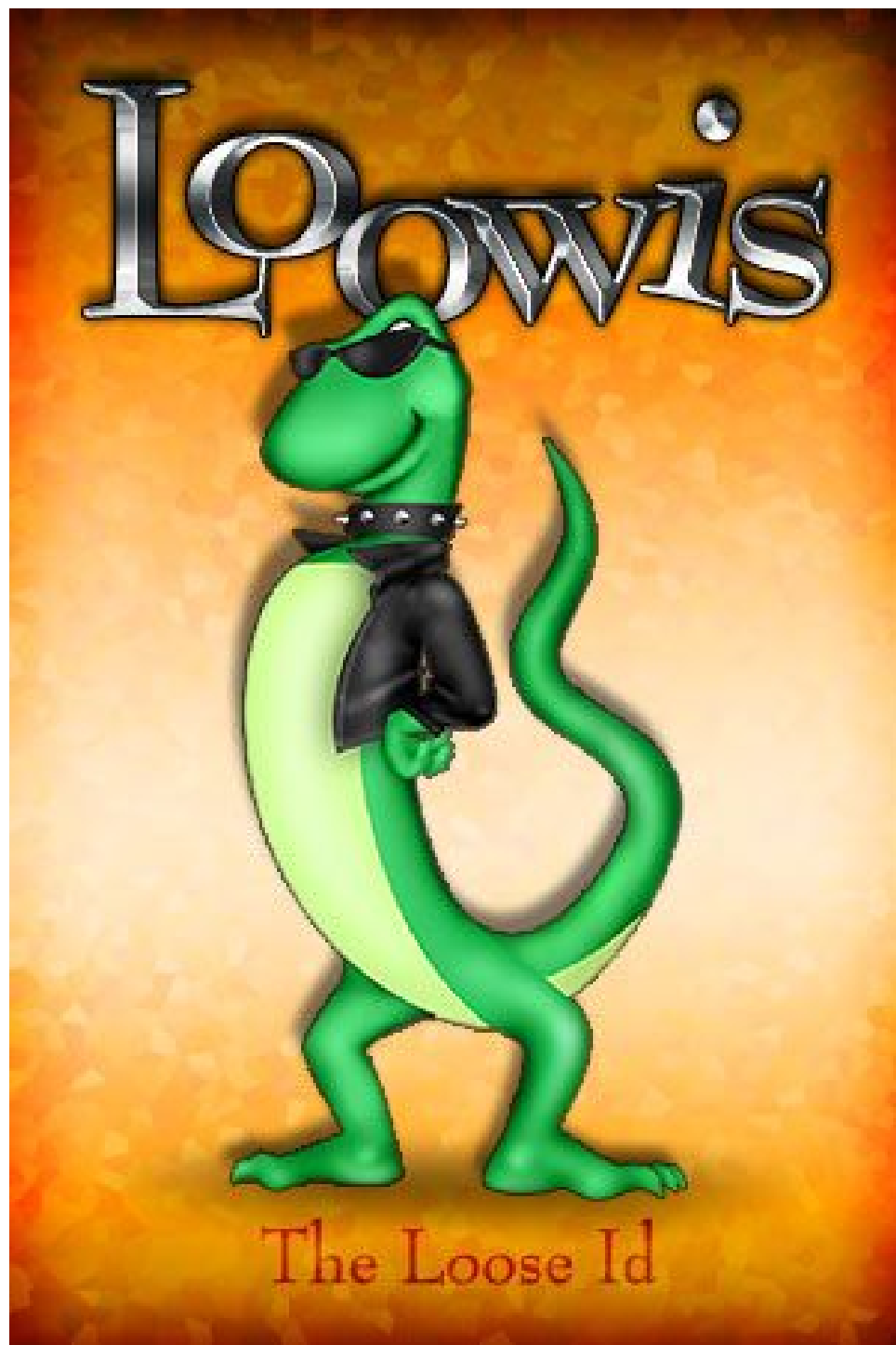
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Prologue

Jake sat up abruptly. The curtains in this seedy dive, worn through by repeated washings over who knew how many years, let in plenty of moonlight. He drew in a deep breath, cataloguing each scent as he scanned the room carefully. A moldy tub, dusty lampshades, his and Johnathan's sour sneakers. He sensed nothing out of place, saw nothing, and yet *something* had disturbed him.

Always one to trust his instincts, he turned to shake his brother awake.

Glass shattered behind him. Instinctively, he grabbed the edge of the blanket beneath him with his left hand and held on as he rolled, pulling it over himself and Johnathan as shards crashed and tinkled.

His brother grunted, flailing as Jake's weight and momentum carried them off the bed and onto the floor. Jake scrambled, crawling out of the blanket. He grabbed Johnathan's arm and dragged him toward the bathroom. Shadows played over the walls as glass crunched beneath footsteps behind them. Jake tightened his grip on Johnny's arm, and with a surge of effort, they dove into the bathroom. He slammed the door, clicking the lock just as something heavy hit the other side.

Jake stood and helped a still-groggy Johnathan to his feet.

Johnny's gaze darted around the tiny room. "What are we going to do?"

Jake thought fast. There was no window in here -- the hotel rooms backed up against each other. The only way out or in was through the front door or the shattered window, both in the other room.

Another thud, and the bathroom door groaned. Jake shook his head. "We have no choice -- we have to change." He stepped in front of his brother. "I'll go first, hit the floor running. No matter what happens, you get *out*."

Johnathan nodded, though they both knew he'd never leave his brother behind.

They arched, lips thinned in concentration. Their bodies rippled, torsos thickening, faces elongating, sprouting fur dark as midnight. In seconds, the bodies of two huge wolves crowded the bathroom. Johnathan backed into the shower stall as Jake crouched against the wall opposite the door, gathered his strength, and leaped.

The door splintered, a long piece down the middle see-sawing over the body of the person now trapped on the floor beneath it. The moment his paws found purchase on the lumpy body and splintered wood beneath him, Jake sprang again.

One quick snap of his jaw, and the man he landed on next no longer had a throat.

"Shit," a shadow to his left hissed.

The dark silhouette scrambled away from him. He moved to follow, but a snatch of quiet syllables murmured in an ancient tongue raised his hackles. Turning quickly, he crouched and growled at this new and greater threat.

Witch.

Snarling, he squared his haunches, powerful muscles bunching.

The chant faltered. "Merrill!"

Jacob vaulted. At the edge of his vision, a shadow outside the window whirled, arms raised. A soft snick sounded, and moonlight glinted off the tip of the bolt whistling toward his throat.

Something slammed onto his back, and he lost his momentum. Hitting the ground hard, his legs buckled. He heard a fleshy thud, a whimper, and then the weight slid off him. *Johnathan.*

Jake struggled to his feet and turned. Johnathan's eyes glinted in the moonlight, a dark stain growing on the floor beneath him. The witch started chanting again, and Jake swept out his paw, slicing her hamstring with his claws.

The woman screamed. Another bolt whizzed through the air, but Jake sprang back, and it thudded harmlessly into the wall. The witch turned, groaning as her damaged leg took her weight. The leg buckled. Jake slashed again, and the woman crumpled to the ground, gasping frantically as life spilled from her jugular.

He turned to the broken window. Curtains billowed, giving him a glimpse of the fourth assailant, who bared his teeth as he thrust another bolt into place and leveled the crossbow at Jake's chest.

Jake crouched low, gathered his strength, then surged forward. As he'd expected, the bowman aimed high, anticipating him, expecting him to go for the neck, and the quarrel riffled the fur on his spine as it sailed harmlessly past. Instead, Jake flowed over the low windowsill. He closed his jaws on the man's right knee and ground his teeth, crushing the kneecap. The man screamed, his bow clattering to the asphalt as he fell backward, aiming desperate punches at Jacob's muzzle.

Jake held on, ignoring the blows until a stabbing pain blossomed in his shoulder. He unclashed his jaws and raised his head. Sparing a brief sideways glance for the quarrel now embedded in his shoulder, he slammed one of his massive forepaws onto his assailant's scrabbling fingers as the guy reached for another bolt. His opponent gasped. His free hand tore ineffectually at Jake's ruff as Jake lowered his jaws, daintily and precisely snipping the man's jugular.

Jake stayed low, scanning the parking lot. There didn't appear to be any more enemies outside the room. No sirens yet, either. Maybe luck. Or maybe in this part of Vegas, anyone who might have heard them had too much to hide to risk calling the police.

Jacob turned back to the room, peering over the windowsill, perking his sensitive ears. The other man, the one who had whispered, "Shit," and scrambled away, appeared to have fled. Johnathan and the witch lay puddled on the floor, but his brother was the only one of the two still breathing.

The man beneath the splintered door breathed, too. Very shallowly, very quietly, staying very still.

Playing dead.

The urge to finish him off was strong, but Jacob hopped the sill and padded over to his brother instead.

Johnathan's human form gleamed palely in the moonlight, his body covered in sweat though his teeth chattered. The bolt protruded from his chest, just between the fifth and sixth ribs. Dispatching the witch and the bowman had taken Jake less than a minute, yet an incredible amount of blood pooled on the ground beneath his brother.

"They got me, big brother." Jake's sensitive wolf ears barely registered the pained, hoarse whisper.

Concentrating briefly, Jacob shivered and warped, changing back to human form. Wincing, he tugged the tip of the bolt, only half-buried, from his injured shoulder and tossed it aside, ignoring the blood that trickled from the wound. He knelt by his brother. "You'll be okay, Johnny-boy. Let's get you to a doctor." He slipped an arm under Johnathan's shoulders, but his brother held up a hand.

"You're...the only...one...can...get away...calling me that."

"I know." Jacob blinked back tears. "You saved my life, little brother." Though they were twins, he had been born two minutes earlier. He was the alpha, the one responsible. For everything.

"S nothin'." Johnathan flung his arm up, grabbed Jake's neck, and pulled him close. "Protect...our...sons."

"Hush now, Johnny." Tears trembled on Jake's lashes as he slipped his other arm beneath Johnathan's thighs and lifted him in one smooth move. "You're going to be all right."

Johnny clutched his shoulder, eyes wide, demanding. "Promise...me."

Jacob nodded wordlessly, and Johnny smiled.

The guy who had been huddled beneath the splintered wood of the door was now crawling toward the window. He froze as they turned, but Jake ignored him as he stepped over the dead witch and carried his brother outside.

A warm breath caressed Jake's ear. "Love...you."

Jake sobbed. "I love you, too, Johnny."

Before he could reach the car, his brother drew in a sharp, rattling gulp of air, then let it out in a long sigh.

He didn't breathe again.

* * * * *

Jacob pried his gummy eyelids apart and slapped at the tickle on his arm, sending a small lizard scurrying for cover. Groaning, he rolled over onto his back and stared at the gray, pre-dawn sky.

He rubbed dirt from his cheek, his chest. He was still naked. His shoulder ached and his fingers throbbed. He glanced over at the fresh grave beside him.

He'd driven out of Las Vegas, heading west, turning off onto a back road into the middle of nowhere and then cutting across the desert itself toward an area of low mesas. In a shallow arroyo between two of the blunt-topped hills, beneath an overhang, he'd dug as a wolf until his pads bled, and then buried his brother. Afterward, exhausted, he'd wept himself asleep atop Johnathan's grave.

His brother shouldn't have died. Weyr were supposed to be near-invincible.

But the quarrel had punctured a lung and pierced his heart.

He wanted to stay. Wanted to lie beside his brother until the sand claimed them both and they hunted together again in the Land of the Goddess.

But he'd promised Johnny.

He grunted, pushing himself to his feet. He could feel their presence. His and Johnathan's sons, inside the woman Johnny had been so sure was meant for them, waiting to be born. He closed his eyes, turning slowly until he felt an abrupt tug on his inner senses. He opened his eyes.

Somewhere to the north.

Jake nodded. Out there, a part of Johnny still lived.

He found the car, pulled a change of clothes from the duffel in the back, and thought while he tugged on jeans and a T-shirt.

First, he needed to do a little backtracking, lay some false trails. The enemy wouldn't find him again easily. Not with his and Johnny's sons at stake.

He'd lost them before, for nearly six years. He could do it again.
He had to.

Unhappy Beginning

“Top you off?”

Eden nodded, and Tara tipped a couple inches of coffee into her cup, wincing as she straightened. She flashed a smile at her customer and headed back behind the counter. Setting the pot down, she rubbed at the small of her back. She was only four months pregnant, but carrying twins, already showing, and uncertain how much longer she would be able to keep working as a waitress. The way her back had been hurting lately, she suspected that wouldn't be long.

Sighing, she stared moodily out of the diner's smoky windows. Marshall Loman, the town's only attorney, had hinted he might take her on as a secretary, but she couldn't help wondering if he expected more than secretarial help in return. She'd had a crush on him off and on in high school, which would make it even harder to work for him if he had the wrong idea about her. Most of the people in town still treated her kindly, at least to her face, but she knew a few whispered behind her back about her going off to New Orleans and turning up pregnant afterwards. There was a population of the trashier single guys -- even a few of the married ones -- who seemed to think she was now the town slut. They mostly left her alone, though, since she'd broken Billy Thompson's nose.

She allowed herself a tiny smile. Taught *him* not to put his hands where they weren't wanted. Of course, he'd threatened to sue her, but Marshall had refused to take the case. “A big, strong guy like you suing a young woman pregnant with twins, because she broke your nose when you ran your hand up her skirt? They'd laugh us both out of the courtroom.” At least, that's what Marshall had told her he'd said when Billy showed up at his office. Over his coffee one day here at the café, he had mentioned the visit. That's also when he had suggested she come to work for him.

Maybe she would. Even though Marshall had been a bit of a ladies' man in high school, he didn't seem to be like that anymore, and she really had to do something about getting off her feet. And besides, she didn't want to be a waitress all her life. Yes, she made enough money to support herself, and the owner of Times Past Café, Rona, had been good to her, but she wanted a steady eight-to-five job, where she didn't have to deal with grease, stray hands, rude comments, and being on her feet constantly. Also, she needed a job with an insurance plan for the babies' sake. Or one that paid enough so she could afford a --

Sharp, stabbing pains just below the curve of her rounded belly made her gasp. She gripped the edge of the counter, breath whistling sharply between her teeth. Eden glanced up from her paper. "Tara, you okay?"

She started to nod, but then the pain came again. Warmth trickled along her inner thigh. She sank to the floor, staring as blood pooled between her legs.

"Tara?" Eden peered over the counter and gasped.

"Call nine-one-one," Tara whispered and doubled over as yet another cramp racked her belly.

Taps and beeps. Eden scrambled around behind the counter, shouting for Rona between firing off answers into her cell phone. "Yes, she's conscious. Yes, but there's an awful lot of blood on the floor. She's pregnant and --"

Rona bustled in from the back, then dashed over and squatted beside her. "Oh, God, honey! What happened?"

Tara opened her mouth to answer, but Rona's round face seemed to be sliding away down a dark tunnel, and Tara was too tired to follow, so she closed her eyes.

* * * * *

Tara woke to bright lights and a concerned, familiar face hovering near hers.

"Damien, she's awake. Get the doctor." Jenny squeezed Tara's hand, smiling, but her eyes were bright with unshed tears, and a worried furrow split her brow.

"A-are the --" Tara's voice cracked.

Jenny grabbed a cup from the bedside table and held the straw while Tara sucked down a sip of icy water.

She tried again. "Are the babies all right?"

Jenny shared a glance with Devlin, who was standing near the foot of the bed. Her lips pressed together tight.

"It's bad news, isn't it?"

Behind Jen, the door banged open and Damien pushed through, holding it while Dr. Tom Byers strode into the room.

"How are you, Tara?" Tom's slender fingers felt for her pulse as he watched the second hand on his watch.

"Have I lost them?" She took a deep, shuddering breath, fighting back a sob.

Jenny reached out and clasped her right hand. Tom closed his eyes for moment, then met her gaze. "There's no easy way to say this." He took a deep breath. "You've lost one of the twins, Tara."

She closed her eyes, clinging to Jenny's hand for dear life. Tom's voice rang in her head as she struggled to keep breathing.

"Oh, Tara." She felt Jenny's cheek, damp with tears, against the back of her hand. "I'm so sorry. But you can't give up, sweetie."

"That's right." Tom's hands gripped her shoulders. "The other baby's doing fine, Tara, and there's no reason you can't carry him to --"

"What happened?" she gasped, opening her eyes to stare at him through a watery haze.

"Honestly, we don't know. Everything seemed fine. Carrying twins can be risky, but your pregnancy was progressing normally. I had no concerns at all." He raked a hand through his graying hair. "The other baby's doing fine. You seem fine." He shook his head. "Some doctors believe that unexpected miscarriages like this happen when nature detects something we can't, but...we may never know what went wrong." He rubbed his head again. "I'm so sorry."

Tara nodded, tears flowing, but her free hand crept to cradle her belly. "But...his brother's all right?"

Tom nodded. "I want to keep you a couple of days, run a few more tests, but the crisis seems to have passed. I'll know more when we have all the test results back."

Tara nodded again, and he backed away.

"Thanks, Dr. Byers." Damien opened the door and held it as Tom left.

Jenny's eyes met hers, and Tara felt her face crumple. Her best friend leaned over and hugged her fiercely. She heard the door click shut as Damien and Devlin gave them their privacy, and then she buried her face in Jen's shoulder and wailed helplessly. Jenny held her tight, a pillar of support, the only thing keeping her afloat amidst a maelstrom of hot tears and waves of bitter loss.

Unselfish Friends

Three days later, she sat staring out the back window of Jenny's hybrid minivan, worrying. None of the tests performed at the hospital had been able to determine why she'd lost one of the twins, so Dr. Byers had decided the safest course for the baby remaining was for Tara to be on bed rest until he was sure the danger had passed. She had no idea how she was going to support herself.

"Here we are, sweetie." Jenny pulled into the parking lot of Tara's apartment building. "It's a good thing your apartment's on the ground floor. Those stairs wouldn't be a good idea."

Tara nodded absently, knowing Jenny was just making busy talk to try and keep her mind off things.

Jenny eased into a space right in front of Tara's door. Damien hopped out of the front passenger seat and opened the rear car door. Devlin, seated next to her, scooted out of the van and turned, gripping her arm to help her step down onto the pavement. "Thanks, guys."

Dev flashed his easy grin. "No problem, Tara."

Despite her protests, he and Damien insisted on practically carrying her to the apartment. Jenny unlocked the front door and led them to the bedroom. Tara balked. "I've been in bed for four days."

Jenny sighed. "But Tom put you on bed rest."

"Yes, but he said I could sit in a recliner, or even in a chair, as long as I keep my feet elevated."

Jenny's men shared a glance. "We'll go get her stuff out of the car," Damien said.

Tara laughed as they nearly tripped over each other in their haste to leave the room. "Do they think we're going to fight?" Then what Damien had said registered. "What stuff? I

didn't have anything at the hospital but the clothes I was wearing when the ambulance took me in."

Jen frowned. "Actually, those were pretty much ruined. The stuff he's talking about is the care package the nurses made up for you -- lotion, a baby book, a bunch of prenatal vitamins, some healthy snacks, that sort of thing. Plus, I checked out your cupboard yesterday. It was pretty bare, and your milk had expired, so I purchased a few groceries, too." She raised a quelling hand as Tara opened her mouth to protest. "Not a lot, just a few things to tide you over. Cereal, soup, some microwave dinners, frozen pizza, fresh fruit. Easy stuff, so you don't have to be on your feet to cook."

Tara felt the hot prickle of impending tears. She turned away, heading back into the living room. Jenny caught up to her, putting an arm around her waist and easing her down into the recliner. Tara tugged on the wooden handle, leaning back into the overstuffed suede as the footrest elevated. She closed her eyes and sighed. "That's better."

She listened for a moment to the comforting sounds of people puttering around her home, cabinets banging somewhat loudly as the brothers helped put up groceries. When she opened her eyes again, Jenny was watching her with a worried expression. Tara raised her eyebrows. "What?"

"I just -- are you sure you don't want me to stay with you for a few days?"

Dev and Damien joined them just in time to hear the question, and Tara sensed their immediate tension. She thought she understood how they felt. They were weyr, and Jenny was their wife and their pack-mate. They'd hate being separated from her. Though they could visit at any time, it was a good two-hour drive from their property on the mountain to this little town. She shook her head. "I need some time alone. To...try and come to terms with what's happened."

Jenny nodded. "I understand. But I'm going to come check on you every day."

"That's too much, Jen! It's such a drive." But her best friend's lips had thinned, her jaw locked in that stubborn, uncompromising position that said she wouldn't be swayed, so Tara just nodded. "Thank you. That would be nice." She hated seeming so helpless, but the truth was that she was relieved. She really did want some alone time, but knew that she would need help over the next few months. She was determined not to lose her remaining baby.

"Do you want me to fix you something to eat before we go? Some soup, maybe?"

Tara shook her head. "They fed me at the hospital, right before you picked me up." She rested her head back against the recliner. Thank goodness Jenny had brought loose, comfy clothes for her to wear home from the hospital. "I really just want to sleep."

"Of course." Jenny stepped up to the chair and knelt down beside it. "You must be exhausted."

Tara's eyes were already drifting closed. "Could you get me a blanket before you go? The quilt folded on the end of the bed would be fine."

“I’ll get it.” Damien went into the bedroom and brought back the quilt.

Jenny draped it over her, kissed her forehead, and stood. “I’ll lock the door behind me.” They had decided that Jenny would keep the extra key to the apartment for the duration of Tara’s pregnancy. “You rest. I’ll be back to check on you in the morning.”

Tara nodded, but sleep was already claiming her, and she barely registered the snick of the deadbolt sliding home as she drifted away.

Unexpected Visit

Tara opened her eyes reluctantly, surprised to be met with darkness. She groped for the switch to the floor lamp next to the recliner, finally managing to twist it. Blinking in the sudden brightness, she lowered the footrest and pushed herself up from the chair. Stiff muscles protested, but the knocking at her door continued. She shuffled slowly to the door and looked through the peephole.

Marshall Loman stood outside, holding a handful of wilting roses and frowning with concern as he knocked harder. "Tara? Tara, are you all right?"

"Just a sec." She turned the deadbolt and tugged the door open. "Marshall?"

"Hi." He smiled, then glanced down at the flowers. "Oh, these are for you. I heard about...well, I just wanted you to know..." His voice trailed off, and he frowned unhappily.

"Thank you, Marshall." Tara waved a hand. "Would you like to come in?"

"Are you sure you're up to it? I don't want to intrude."

Tara sighed, resting her forehead against the door jamb. "Honestly, I wanted to be alone earlier, but now...I'd love some company for dinner. Keep my mind off...things. It'll just be frozen pizza, but --"

"That'd be great." For a lawyer, he appeared extremely unsure of himself, stepping hesitantly into the living room and waiting awkwardly while she shut the door and locked it. "Can I put these in water for you?"

"Sure." Tara led the way into the kitchen and opened the cabinet below the sink, bending over to look for a vase among the clutter. Marshall's hands on her shoulders gently drew her up and guided her to one of the four chairs flanking her small kitchen table. "You sit. I'll take care of it." He rummaged among the junk and pulled out a dusty vase. "I'll just rinse this out." He turned on the hot water and gave it a quick wash, then turned to her.

"Sugar?"

Tara pointed at the canister by the coffee pot. Marshall lifted the lid, used the scoop to add about a teaspoon of sugar to the bottom of the vase, then filled it to the rim with cool water. He glanced at Tara. "My mom always used to add a little sugar to the water. Said it made the flowers last longer."

Tara smiled. "I've heard that, too." Remembering what the doctor had said, she tugged one of the extra chairs over and lifted her legs, resting her heels on the padded seat. Marshall raised a quizzical brow. "Dr. Byers said I should keep my feet elevated."

He nodded, drying the outside of the vase with a hand towel she kept folded on the counter. He carried the vase over to the table and set it in the middle.

"They're beautiful." Tara inhaled deeply of the salmon-colored petals. "And they smell wonderful."

Marshall shrugged self-consciously. "I heard you say one time that you didn't like pink or red roses, that you liked the ones with a little orange or yellow to them."

Tara raised her eyebrows. "And you remembered?"

To her surprise, a hot spot of color appeared on each of his cheeks. Confident, drop-dead-gorgeous attorney Marshall Loman was blushing. "W-where's that pizza? You just stay put, and I'll do the cooking."

Tara stifled a grin. "In the freezer."

The man flushed a shade darker. "Of course." He tugged open the freezer and grabbed a frozen pizza, keeping his eyes on the package as he stepped over to the oven. After a moment of study, he turned the dial to *Preheat* and set the temperature. Still avoiding her gaze, he mumbled, "Do you usually put these on a cookie sheet or something?"

She cocked her head, pointing with her chin. "In that cabinet there's a pizza stone. I know they say you shouldn't put frozen items on them, but I've been doing it for years and haven't had a problem."

She watched him thoughtfully as he opened the box and removed the cellophane, then placed the pizza on the stone. "What's up, Marshall?"

He paused, balling up the trash in his hand. "What do you mean?"

"You seem uncomfortable."

He tossed the wadded cellophane into the plastic garbage can next to her refrigerator, then opened his mouth.

A harsh buzzing sound startled them both. They stared at each other wide-eyed, and then Tara laughed. "Um, the oven's ready."

Marshall nearly tripped hurrying over to twist the knob to *Bake*. He grabbed the stone and put it in the oven, set the timer for twenty minutes, then walked over and sank heavily into the other chair. "I'm really suave, huh?" He grinned wryly.

Tara shrugged. "Maybe not exactly suave, but definitely sweet."

Marshall blushed again, resting his clasped hands on the table. "Look, I think you should consider taking that secretarial position I offered. I really do need the help, and I can drop stuff off here for you to work on, so you can work from home and stay off your feet until the baby's born. That way you'll still be earning a paycheck, and after the baby's born I wouldn't have any problem with you fixing up a place for him in the office and --"

Tara covered his hands with one of hers. "Marshall."

The rush of words stopped, and he finally met her gaze. "Yeah?"

"This is about more than just the job, isn't it?"

He started to look away, but she tightened her grip on his hands and leaned forward, keeping him focused on her. "Well...yeah. I-I know this probably isn't the best time for this, but...I've always liked you, Tara, and I'd like to get to know you better, and I wanted to tell you that, but I also want you to know..." He leaned forward himself, turning his hands to clasp hers. "I have no problem with you just being a secretary. Even if you're not interested in me romantically, I want you to have this job. I know you'll be great, and I really do need a secretary. I just kept putting off advertising for one 'cause I was trying to get up the nerve to ask you. I wasn't even going to tell you how much I like you; I was just going to see how things went, but --"

Tara giggled and covered his lips with her free hand. "Is this how you are in court?"

His face turned a shade of red she couldn't even come up with a name for. He shook his head. She took her hand away. "I'll be honest with you, Marshall. When you first said you needed a secretary, I thought maybe you just wanted someone you could tumble with. I thought maybe, deep down, you believed all that crap Billy and his friends were spreading about me."

Marshall started to speak, but she held up a hand. "I've watched you, Marshall Loman. Out on the town with those honey-blond gals with legs up to here." She indicated a spot near her neck. "I've heard some of that smooth talkin' you do with them, when you bring them in for Rona's homemade caramel pecan pie." She grinned. "And I've got to say, I don't for one second think you're lying to me, because I haven't ever seen you this tongue-tied in the twenty years we've been friends." She drew a finger along his forearm. "You really are sweet on me, aren't you?"

Marshall swallowed hard and nodded.

She looked into his eyes. "Even though I'm pregnant with someone else's child--" She caught herself, swallowed past the lump in her throat. "Child?"

"That doesn't matter to me. Not if...not if you think you might have feelings for me."

Tara turned her head. On the windowsill stood a grinning ceramic leprechaun, his hat brimming with a thick growth of Irish clover. She thought about the men who had given it to her. Jacob and Johnathan O'Connail. She'd met them in New Orleans four months earlier, when she'd treated herself to the trip for her thirtieth birthday. She could still picture them.

Johnathan, tall and dark, sentimental and sweet. Jacob, a little taller, a little darker in more ways than one -- cynical, silent, a lake whose still waters ran very deep. Both spoke with a thick Irish brogue, and both were weyrwolves.

She'd recognized it as soon as she'd seen them, and to her delight, the fantasies she'd had ever since she used to follow and spy on the Blake brothers when she was younger had all been fulfilled. But they were running away from something, though they never said what, and she hadn't heard from them since her last night in New Orleans, waking her final morning to find them gone, leaving only the plant and a card behind. She had the card that had come with the leprechaun in a little frame right next to him, but she'd memorized the words within days of returning home.

Happy Birthday, Irish. I'm sorry we can't be with you today, but there are some things we have to take care of.

The clovers aren't for luck. It is said that St. Patrick used the three leaves of the clover to represent the Holy Trinity. I want you to think of each one as you, me, and Jacob -- as a symbol of our joining.

I hope you like our gift. Keep them safe until we meet again.

Johnathan.

Of course, she'd thought he meant the clovers, but when she'd found out she was pregnant, she'd been convinced that Johnathan had known, somehow, that she had conceived that night, and though it was impossible, that he'd known it was twins.

But they'd never come for her, never even tried to contact her, as far as she knew. So it was crazy to feel guilty for liking Marshall. She did like him -- she liked him a lot, would have gone after him years ago if she'd thought he wanted her to be anything but a friend.

The shrill beep of the timer jerked Tara from her reverie. Marshall jumped up and opened the oven door, reaching for the stone.

"Hot pad!" Tara yelled.

Marshall froze, staring at his outreached hand, then groaned. "You must think I'm a total idiot!"

Tara shook her head. She tugged her feet off the cushioned seat they were resting on, pushed up from the chair, and grabbed a pot holder from its hook on the side of the refrigerator. Smiling, she tugged the padded, strawberry-patterned mitt onto his hand. "Not an idiot, just a really sweet, nervous guy whom I like. A lot."

His gaze went wide. "Honest?"

Tara nodded. "Honest."

He stared at her, grinning, until she gently nudged him. "The pizza?"

“Oh! Yeah.” He was blushing yet again as he pulled their dinner from the oven. A flick of his foot shut the door, and he turned off the timer and the oven.

Tara grabbed a couple of plates, a knife, and two forks from the dish drainer. She handed Marshall the knife and waited while he cut the pizza into eight slices, then held the plates while he put a couple of slices on each one. They returned to the table. Tara used the edge of her fork to cut the first third of each slice into bite-sized pieces, then sat back to let them cool for a minute.

Marshall picked up a slice and took a big bite, then sat there, lips open wide, teeth pressed together, air whistling in and out as he breathed double-time. “Hot,” he mumbled sheepishly after he’d finally swallowed.

“Uh-huh.” Tara grinned.

“Did you mean what you said? About liking me?”

“I did, but...” Tara toyed with a bite of pizza, scooting it around her plate with the fork. “Let’s take it slow, okay? I’ve got a lot on my mind right now and...I just don’t want to jump into anything. I don’t want to make a mistake.” She’d almost said *another* mistake.

Marshall nodded. “I understand. Whatever you want, that’s fine with me. No rush.” He seemed to realize he was babbling again, and pressed his lips together tight.

Tara studied his light brown eyes, noting how they sparkled with flecks of gold when the light hit them just right. He had his light brown hair, slightly graying at the temples even though he was only a couple of years older than she, cut very short, and she had an urge to run her hands through it, just to see how the short bristles would feel. Suddenly, it was her turn to feel shy and awkward. “Um, would you like something to drink?” She stood again and opened the refrigerator. “I’ve got milk, orange juice, apple juice, and root beer. Or I could make some tea.”

He hopped to his feet. “You’re supposed to take it easy, remember? Let me do that.”

“I’m all right. Really. I can do this one little thing.”

He looked doubtful, but said, “Okay, then. Root beer sounds great.”

She fixed their drinks and rejoined him. For the next few minutes, they ate in companionable silence. Marshall went back for seconds, Tara sipping her root beer while she kept him company. When they were done, he found the foil and wrapped up the leftovers and put them in the fridge for her. She invited him into the living room, found a sitcom Marshall said he liked on the television, and sat down beside him on the couch.

“About that job, when would you want me to start?”

Marshall turned to face her, resting his arm along the back of the couch. “You can start tomorrow.” He frowned. “*If* you’re up to it.”

“I am. At least, I think so. I have a computer. It’s an older one, but I’ve got the usual word processing and spreadsheet programs, that sort of stuff. It will be mostly typing, right?”

He nodded. "I've got a stack of things I can bring over tomorrow morning, but you can work on them at your own pace. Right now, I want to get the handwritten notes I took for my cases in Billings into the computer so they'll be available for quick reference. When you're done, I'll put the originals back in the paper files and send them to storage, so we still have access to them if needed. Getting them transcribed will probably take a while. By the time that's done, you'll probably have had the baby, and then I was thinking you could start coming in to the office. You know, taking calls, keeping my calendar, typing, that sort of thing. I thought maybe you could bring a playpen, or one of those portable cribs, while he's still real little, and keep him right there in the office with you."

Tara's eyes welled. "That's awful kind, Marshall. Won't having a baby in there be distracting to clients?"

"I don't think so. You'll be in a separate room, and lots of people in private practice are doing that sort of thing nowadays. No reason it shouldn't work."

Tara had an unexpected thought. "Marshall, you're not...you're not just interested in me because of the baby, are you? I mean, you're not having some kind of early midlife crisis, thinking you need to have a family all at once and --"

He gripped her shoulder. "Tara, no." He sighed. "I know it sounds crazy, considering I have to get up and speak in front of all kinds of people all the time, and...well, I'll admit it, I've dated a *lot* of women, but...I've always been tongue-tied when it came to you. I think I've been in love with you since you were in the fifth grade and me and some of the other seventh-grade boys tried to take that kickball away from you. You stood up to all of us, even though the other kids ran away." He grinned. "Kicked Tommy in the shin even though he was twice your height and probably three times your weight, and wouldn't let go of that ball, screamin' at the top of your lungs. I remember thinking, 'Some day I'm gonna marry that girl,' and I was only twelve. I remember thinking it, even though I wasn't all that terribly interested in girls yet. That didn't happen until I had that growth spurt that summer before my freshman year."

Tara smiled. "I remember. You shot up, and your shoulders got broad. You filled out, finally had some meat on your bones."

He grinned. "And Tammy Woolsey asked me on the first day of school if I'd take her to homecoming, and she was every boy's wet dream." His expression sobered. "But I never stopped thinking about you. Only, you were just in seventh grade by then, so I wanted to wait. I knew your mom would never let you date a high-school boy."

Tara shuddered. Her mama was gone now, but she hadn't forgotten the stern jaw, the gaze that missed nothing. "You got that right. She would have eaten us both, and we'd only have been a light snack." She nudged him with an elbow. "But, hey, what about when I got to high school?"

"First, I kept telling myself you were too young. Then I started thinking about what it would be like if we started dating and really fell in love and then I had to go away to law

school and all. I didn't think it would be fair to either of us, and... Well, heck, I still had some wild oats to sow, and I couldn't stomach the idea that I might be tempted to do something stupid while we were apart. I finally promised myself that after I'd passed the bar exam, the first thing I'd do when I got back to town was ask you out."

He glanced away. "I kept in touch with friends, so I knew you weren't seeing anyone seriously. But then I got an offer from Whitman and Whitman in Billings, and a job with that firm would seal my reputation if I could manage not to screw up, so I had to accept it. I had visions of becoming a big defense attorney, coming back to Alabaster, and sweeping you off your feet, but...time got away from me. One day I realized I'd been working my butt off for seven years in a job I wasn't really happy with." He turned his gaze back to her. "So I finally came back. I wanted to ask you out that very first day. I went to the diner for lunch, hoping to find a quiet moment to speak with you, but Rona was teasing you that day about never dating the same guy twice, and you told her you weren't ready to settle down and didn't know if you ever would be."

Tara winced. "Oh, Marshall. And then I went off to New Orleans and came back pregnant."

He nodded.

"And after all that, you still want to date me? Even though I'm pregnant with another man's child?" Marshall's interest was like a dream come true, so much like a dream that she was having a hard time convincing herself it could be real.

Marshall looked into her eyes. "Did you love him?"

Tara opened her mouth to correct him, to say "them," but swallowed the word. She might regret it later, but at this moment, she did *not* want him to know she'd been the meat in a twin sandwich. Not that she felt it was wrong, but after everything he'd told her, she thought it might hurt him to know she'd been so free with her body. Though he'd admitted himself that he hadn't exactly been celibate, this honest, good-looking, truly sweet guy that she'd had a crush on in the past was telling her she might just be the one for him, and she couldn't bring herself to do anything that might frustrate the tentative steps they were taking toward building something new. So, instead, she gave his question some serious consideration, then answered him as best she could.

"Honestly, I don't know. At the time, I felt an instant connection." She tapped her chest with a finger. "Deep down, you know? Not just physical attraction. But, of course, we didn't really get to know each other, not in just a few days, and...there seemed to be something going on with him, some kind of problem he didn't want to discuss. Like he was in trouble or something." She shook her head. "Anyway, it might have been that the relationship could have grown into love, but I haven't heard from him since." She didn't add, *Even though he knows I'm pregnant*, though that's what she was thinking, because Marshall wouldn't be able to understand how this hypothetical "guy" could know if she hadn't been in contact with him.

“And you haven’t had any desire to try and contact *him*?”

Tara started. “Huh?” The realization hit her like a tone of bricks. She felt her eyes go wide. “You know, I haven’t. It didn’t even occur to me.” She couldn’t believe it. All this time, she’d been thinking that they’d come to *her* eventually and hadn’t even considered looking for *them*. “I guess...I guess that says a lot about how I really feel, doesn’t it?”

“Well, I hope it means I have a chance, at least.”

Tara scooted a little closer to him. He hesitated a moment, then let his arm rest across her shoulders. “You do, Marshall. As long as we take things slow.” She rested her head against him.

He tightened his arm for a moment in a quick hug. “No problem, Tara. I promise, you’re calling all the shots.”

She smiled to herself.

Grabbing the remote, she turned up the volume a bit, and they watched television for a couple of hours. To her surprise, she felt no need to force additional conversation. They were wrapped in a cocoon of companionable silence, and she allowed herself to simply enjoy his warmth next to her, the steady, reliable beat of his heart.

When she dozed off and he gently lowered her to the couch, rested her head on a pillow, and covered her up with the blanket, then kissed her forehead tenderly before he checked the lock on the front-door handle and pulled it quietly shut behind him, she was awake enough to be aware of it, and knew in that moment that something good was happening between them.

Unthinkable Discovery

Jacob hopped from the back of the truck and walked up to the driver's window. "Thanks for the ride. I really appreciate it." He handed the grizzled old man a twenty.

"Not a problem, son. Glad to help." Gus, of Gus's Tree Service, as the stitching on his shirt proclaimed, waved a hand as he drove away.

Jake slung his backpack over one shoulder and took stock of the town. Alabaster, Wyoming, didn't amount to much, unless you counted the backdrop of gorgeous September foliage -- trees dripping with gold, bronze, and burgundy leaves. Nestled on the lower flank of a mountain in the Absaioka Range, the town boasted a stretch of wooden storefronts along one side of the street that housed a real estate office, an attorney, a doctor, and Wayne's Western Wear. The other side of Main Street consisted of a café, a small two-story apartment complex, a gas station, and Quinn's Country Market and Drug Emporium. He shook his head slightly. You could always tell when you were in a small town -- every business owner had a tendency to proudly include their name in the business's moniker. He shrugged. Savvy, he supposed. If you knew everybody in town, letting them know a business belonged to you probably made good marketing sense.

He crossed the street and pushed open the door to Times Past Café, his lips quirking at the name. Apparently, someone in this town *did* have a bit of imagination.

The bell on the handle jangled. A plump, flushed woman, her flyaway brown hair pulled back into a haphazard bun, bustled out from behind the counter, menu in hand. "Right this way," she said cheerfully, leading him to a booth next to the window. "I'm Rona. Welcome to Alabaster, handsome. Can I get you a drink?"

"Dr. Pepper," he said, nodding.

"One DP, comin' right up." She flashed a smile, one that lit up her kind brown eyes, and he couldn't help smiling back. The expression felt strange, but good, on his face. He hadn't smiled much, since...since Johnathan had died, but her good cheer was infectious.

He shook himself and opened the menu. Rona's -- his lips quirked again; okay, so the woman with imagination wasn't completely immune to the small-town influence -- World Famous Chicken-Fried Steak sounded good. When she returned, he ordered the ten-ouncer, along with mashed potatoes and gravy, homestyle green beans, and a platter of beer batter biscuits.

"Honey, you just made my day!" Rona beamed at him. "I *love* a man who knows how to eat -- not like them boys on that Atcherson's diet or whatever. Some guys are worse than gals nowadays when it comes to watchin' their figures." She wiggled her eyebrows, looking him up and down. "Especially when all it takes is a little hard work to turn all those calories into prime muscle. I can see *you're* a man who's not afraid to break a sweat."

Jake tried to suppress a wide grin, but failed. "Why, ma'am, I do believe you're flirting with me!"

"Damn right. Have to show the youngsters how it's done." She smiled and winked, then hurried back to the kitchen.

Jake sipped the soda, feeling his tension begin to drain. He'd taken a couple of months to lay a series of false trails all across the southwestern portion of the United States, even into Mexico. Only when he felt sure he'd given any possible pursuit the slip had he gone to ground, traveling only at night, as a wolf, for another month.

Today, though, he was nearing his goal. He'd traveled in human form for the last week, still keeping to the woods for the most part, but hitching the occasional ride, slowly reacquainting himself with the human race. It felt good to be civilized again.

Rona returned with his food and, after a little more banter, left him to enjoy his meal. He gulped it down in record time -- it really *was* the best chicken-fried steak he'd ever tasted. The whole meal was wonderful, and he sat back with a contented sigh when he was done. Between the friendly reception and the home cooking, he was beginning to feel like a real person again, instead of a ghost trying to fade into the shadows.

Plus, Rona hadn't said a word about his being Irish. He'd worked hard the last few weeks to eliminate the accent. Just one more way to lose his enemies. Of course, he knew it wasn't completely gone, but it was nice to know he'd pared it down enough that it wasn't something people would immediately comment on.

He turned toward the window, his eyes searching the street. His stomach gave a little flutter. He'd almost reached his destination. Tara was somewhere close, his weyr senses insisted. He inhaled deeply. She must frequent the diner pretty regularly, because even though he hadn't seen her in six months, he remembered her scent, and it was everywhere.

So, this was it. She lived in this town; he was sure of it.

He frowned, though. He wanted to find her, for the babies' sakes and to fulfill the promise he'd made to Johnathan, but he had mixed feelings about where all this might lead. Johnny had been convinced Tara was meant to be their mate, but Jake had never experienced the same certainty. Oh, he'd enjoyed her company and appreciated the chemistry between the three of them. The fact that she knew their true natures and accepted them anyway had been pretty special, too, in a full human.

But in retrospect, after they'd left New Orleans while attempting to throw off their pursuers, Jake had decided they were pretty damned irresponsible. To mate with *anyone* while there was still such danger... He shook his head. They should never have placed Tara or their children in such a position.

He wished Johnathan were still here. His twin had been occasionally precognizant, and he'd seemed utterly confident that Tara, specifically, was meant to bear their children. He'd know what to say to her, what to do next. Johnny would have been a phenomenal father, an exemplary husband. Jake's eyes teared up. His younger twin had been a far better person than he was, in every way.

But he *wasn't* here, and Jake realized he was simply delaying, using his daydreaming as an excuse to put off the encounter with Tara. He blinked away the tears and turned his head to find Rona standing over him, tab in hand. "Care for dessert?"

Jake shook his head and patted his stomach. "I'm stuffed. You're a damn fine cook, Rona. If I were half the man you deserve, I'd ask you to marry me."

Her hearty laugh startled him. "Honey, I'm beginnin' to suspect you're more man than I can handle! You come back anytime, you hear? And dessert's on me."

"I may just take you up on that."

He paid the tab, leaving the woman a generous tip. Stepping outside, he stretched, enjoying the sun's warmth. It felt good to be interacting with people again. Rona was the kind of person that lifted your spirits just being in the same room. Maybe, just maybe, he *would* be able to survive without Johnny.

A door slammed off to his right, and he glanced that way. A woman walked across the apartment complex's parking lot, her hair an auburn cascade that shimmered in the sun.

Jacob drew in a sharp breath. It was her. Tara. He watched her look both ways, then start across the street. Her hair was longer and curlier than he remembered, and of course the rounded bulge of her pregnancy was new to him, but it was definitely her.

He strode swiftly across the street, stepping up onto the wooden porch that ran the length of the four shop fronts. Tara stepped onto the porch a moment after, pausing in front of the attorney's office. She began flipping through the sheaf of papers in her hand, her eyes skimming each page.

Jacob approached slowly, still unsure quite what to say to her. When he was just a step away, she nodded to herself, looked up, and their eyes locked.

Startled, she took a step back. Her eyelids fluttered with uncertainty, then flew open in dawning recognition.

"Jacob?"

He nodded.

She turned her head, her green eyes searching the porch, the street. "Where's Johnathan?"

Jake swallowed. "He...he had an accident."

Tara's gaze swiveled back, locking onto his. "What?"

"H-he's gone."

"You mean..." She clutched the papers to her chest. "Gone as in...passed away?"

"That's too pretty a phrase for it."

"Oh, Jake. I'm so sorry. I --" She broke off, catching her bottom lip between her teeth. "Are...are you all right?"

He nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

She seemed uneasy, which was understandable. "I didn't mean to startle you," he said. She shifted her weight from foot to foot, and he mentally slapped his head. "You're pregnant -- I shouldn't be keeping you on your feet."

Tara gestured toward the attorney's office. "I was just coming back from lunch. Would you like to come in?"

He hesitated.

She seemed to understand his reluctance. "Marshall's in court today. He won't be back until late. We can talk privately."

"Oh. Then, yeah, that would be fine."

She unlocked the door and preceded him into the office, taking her place in a comfortable-looking chair behind a battered wooden desk. Jake sank into one of the two wingback chairs in front of it.

Tara set her papers on the desk and clasped her fingers together. They stared at each other awkwardly for several moments. Tara appeared almost frightened, her lips trembling so faintly that only his enhanced senses picked out the motion. But she abruptly squared her shoulders. "Why are you here, Jake?"

Taken aback, he looked from her face to the top of her rounded tummy, just visible past the edge of the desk, and back to her face. "I came about the twins, of course."

"So you *did* know," she breathed.

"I'm weyr. We know these things." He shook his head in apology. "We should have told you. It wasn't fair to let you leave without knowing." He tried a tentative smile. "But I'm here now, and I want to help you take care of the babies."

Tara's direct gaze faltered. Her already pale face whitened even further. Shit. He should have found a better way to do this. He had created too much stress, with her being pregnant. He shouldn't have told her about Johnathan right away. Should have waited.

"Oh, God, Jake." She looked away, her lips quivering, and passed a shaky hand through her tousled hair. "I don't know how to tell you."

He tilted his head, eyeing her warily. "Tell me what?"

She wouldn't look at him. "It's..." She reached down and cradled her stomach protectively.

Sudden intuition shook him to the core. Without thinking, Jake stood, leaning over the desk to rest his hand on her stomach. Shock, instant and brutal, slammed through him.

"No," he growled.

Tara stared, her features registering sorrow, compassion, and fear.

"Noooo!" Jake wrenched his hand away. He felt the discomfort of transformation, unbidden, his joints popping. "No." Howling, he turned and tore open the door, then dashed across the porch. Tara struggled up and hurried over to the doorway. Jake jumped into the street, turning this way and that.

"Jake!"

Trees crowded against the backs of the building. He turned and looked at her for a long moment, part man, part wolf, then loped around the corner of the building. The rustle of leaves and crunching underbrush marked his frantic passage up the side of the mountain.

Tara leaned against the porch railing, then slid down to the deck, burying her face in her hands. What was she going to *do*?

Jake crashed through the undergrowth, barely registering the loss of his shoes, his backpack. He dropped to all fours, flinging himself fully into the change. Snarling, he ripped at his clothes with his teeth. When he was free, he ran, his lean, rugged wolf form flitting ghostlike between the trees.

Not possible. Can't be gone.

He ran, and kept running, desperate to outstrip the images in his mind.

Johnathan, NO!

He heard again a fleshy thud. A whimper.

Lost.

Blood. A soft whisper. A dying sigh.

How could you, Johnny? How could you LEAVE ME!

The warm curve of her belly, under his hand.

No.

A heart. A single heart, beating.

Nonononononononono!

I promised him. Promised.

One child. Just one.

Supposed to be two. Me and HIM. A piece of HIM, still here with me.

One heartbeat. One.

Green eyes. Wide with compassion and fear.

Not possible. Not POSSIBLE!

Too much. He couldn't face it.

Human thought fled. He ran without awareness, natural instincts guiding him over, under, through. He barely registered a high fence before he was up onto the thick bole of a fallen tree and sailing over the barrier. He didn't come to any semblance of true awareness until dark had fallen and the moonlight slid softly over the silvery white flank of a young buck. Without pausing, the black wolf leaped.

Blood, hot and fresh.

Meat, warming his belly.

The wolf fed, and yet still the gaping void within threatened to consume him.

Loss. Too much loss.

The massive black wolf opened his jaws and raged at the moon.

Unabashed Passion

Jenny paused, her hands poised to drop a silky negligee over her head. An unearthly howling split the night air, sounding very close. She shivered involuntarily.

Damien slipped his arms around her waist, nuzzling her neck. "Chilly?"

Jenny shook her head. "No, it's that sound."

She felt his head move and knew he was sharing a glance with Devlin. She turned and looked from one to the other. Dev, reclining on the bed in all his naked glory, raised an innocent eyebrow, but she sensed the rising tension in the room.

She faced Damien, capturing his gaze. "What is it?"

He shrugged, pulling her close -- well, as close as her rounded belly would allow. "It's nothing," he murmured, lowering his head to press his lips to hers. She opened her mouth to protest, but his tongue snuck in, its silken touch stealing her breath away. She moaned, permitting the nightgown to flutter to the ground as she ran her fingers through his sandy brown hair, tousling his curls.

He growled. In one smooth movement, seemingly effortless, he had swept his arm under her knees and was cradling her, carrying her to the bed. Devlin scooted over, and Damien deposited Jenny between them. Straddling her legs, he leaned over, planting feathery kisses across the middle of her taut, round tummy.

"Mmm. That's nice." Warmth suffused her belly. The children within stirred. "Oh, look! They're moving." Dev sat up, his hands joining Damien's, resting on her belly, feeling the tiny hands and feet move against them.

Devlin's blue eyes shone like a sunlit sky. "No matter how many times I feel that, it's still incredible." He leaned over, his lips brushing hers. "It's so beautiful. *You're* beautiful."

Jenny's nipples tingled as his mouth lightly caressed hers. Moaning, she caught his bottom lip between her teeth, sucking gently.

Dev growled, thrusting his tongue between her lips. His hand glided along the curve of her belly, fingers sliding between her legs.

Jenny sighed and spread her thighs invitingly. Damien grinned and bowed his head. Devlin's fingers slipped inside her pussy just as Damien's mouth closed on her throbbing clit.

Jenny moaned. Devlin's tongue stroked and glided against hers, imitating the movement of his fingers inside her pussy. She moaned again, opening her legs wider.

Damien's teeth nipped her clit. She whimpered, pressing her hips up. His tongue danced, first stroking along the length of her slit, next probing her swollen nub. Corkscrews of electric tingling spread from his probing tongue to her slick pussy.

Gasping, she reached out, burying her fingers in his hair, urging him on. Devlin broke away, sitting back to watch her face as his fingers plunged in and out of her weeping slit. The tip of Damien's tongue flicked back and forth across the apex of her clit. Jenny bucked and whimpered, her fingers tangling in Damien's curls. He caught her hand and pulled it away. Sitting up, he flashed a wicked grin, sliding two fingers into her pussy alongside Devlin's.

"Yes!" Jenny clutched the bedcovers, her gaze darting from one to the other of her lovers, drinking in the sight of their bright blue eyes darkened with lust, their mussed brown hair, streaked blond by the sun, framing their beloved faces.

Damien's gaze locked onto hers. Wiggling his eyebrows, he buried his two fingers deep inside her, probing that delicious spot that drove her wild. Jenny gasped and arched. Alongside his, Devlin's fingers glided in and out, faster and faster. Her pussy spasmed. She thrust, meeting them stroke for stroke as the pressure built within her pelvis.

Damien reached out with his free hand, capturing her clit between his thumb and forefinger, milking urgently. "Damien, yes!" Pleasure burst from her clit, flooding her groin. She pressed her thighs together, arching, trapping them both inside her. "Damien, Devlin! Oh, God, yes. Yes!" Her pussy exploded with delight, contracting, milking their fingers the way Damien was milking her clit. "Oh, God, yes," she sobbed, tossing her head as her body shuddered in ecstasy. "Yes, yes, yes."

When she was finally aware of her surroundings again, she reluctantly parted her legs. Dev grinned, shaking his hand to restore circulation. "That's quite a grip you've got, lover!"

Heat flared in her cheeks. "Sorry." Then she shrugged. "Hey, it's not my fault you guys drive me wild."

"And vice versa." Dev stretched out next to her, lying on his side. His hand found hers, guiding it to his thick cock.

Jenny grinned, wrapping her fingers around him.

Damien joined them, snuggling up close on the other side. Jenny walked her fingers across his abdomen, teasing the tip of his ripe cock with her fingernails. He groaned, stroking his shaft as she tickled.

Jenny squeezed her left hand, running it slowly from the base of Dev's cock to its glistening head. At the same time, she surrounded the tip of Damien's with all five fingers, pressing just below the ridge of his swollen head and twisting back and forth.

They both groaned. Devlin covered her hand with his, tightening her grip, stroking with her while he watched their hands move together. Damien closed his eyes, raising his hips, massaging his own cock while she pressed the palm of her hand against its glistening tip, still twisting.

Damien gasped. His hand froze on his cock. "Quick, Damien! Please." Jenny opened her mouth. He shuddered and sat up, swiftly straddling her shoulders. She pressed her lips around his glistening head, scraping her teeth gently across its tip.

He bucked, driving his shaft into her mouth. Her gaze found his, locking onto those deep blue pools, drowning in them as she sucked, harder and harder, circling her tongue over, under, around. She probed the opening from which she'd drink his essence, darting the tip of her tongue in and out. Damien gasped. His hands grasped her head, holding her tight as he thrust deep.

Devlin's fingers tightened on her left hand, where she still stroked his cock, his eyes sparkling with delight as he watched them, enjoying their pleasure every bit as much as they did. "That's it, baby. Take him." His voice was thick with desire.

Jenny reached up and cupped his brother's balls with her right hand, squeezing lightly, then wrapped her fingers around the rigid shaft gliding in and out of her mouth.

Damien arched, burying himself inside her. The base of his cock swelled, the ring that would normally hold him captive inside her pussy bulging against the palm of her hand. She squeezed tight, and he gasped.

His cock pulsed against her tongue, warmth flowing down the back of her throat. Jenny swallowed, closing her eyes, drinking his essence more than willingly, caressing him with her tongue, milking him with her hand.

"Good God, woman." He shuddered. Once, twice, filling her mouth with his seed. Finally, he uttered a deep sigh. "You are so damn *good*." Sated, he gently removed himself from her, lying beside her on the bed, a hand resting on her tummy.

"No, I'm not." She grinned, turning toward Devlin. "I'm bad. In fact, I'm very, *very* bad."

Their left hands still stroked his cock, slow and steady. Jenny's right forefinger found the base of his shaft, gliding down between his testes. She pressed inward, probing his perineum. Dev grunted, hips bucking. Jenny licked her lips, angling herself across the bed with Damien's help, so that her cheek rested on Devlin's abdomen.

His right hand caught her head, trying to guide her onto him. Jenny resisted. "Not yet," she whispered. "Wait for me, lover." Dev groaned, but gave in, letting his hand drop. Still

stroking rhythmically with her left hand, she brought her right pinky to her mouth, licking until it glistened wetly.

At a glance from her, Damien shifted so that he sat between Devlin's legs. He spread his twin's cheeks. Dev gasped. "Oh, God. Yes, baby." Jenny smiled to herself as she worked the tip of her pinky into the tight pucker between his cheeks. "Oh, yeah." Jenny thrust the finger repeatedly, probing a little deeper each time. "Oh, *hell*, yeah!"

His hand found her own cheeks, his forefinger massaging her anus as she pinky-fucked his. Jenny moaned. He let go of his shaft, his left hand tangling in her dark, silky tresses. She sucked his glistening dome into her mouth, pleased by his sharp intake of breath, his fingers wrapping themselves in her hair. She tightened her hand on him, twisting it back and forth, going down on him, just a little at first, then deeper, mimicking the thrust of her finger in his anus. "Oh, God, baby! Yes. Yes, baby."

Damien's eyes seemed to glow as he watched her finger gliding in and out of his brother's ass. Still holding Dev's cheeks wide, he rearranged himself, thrusting out a foot and using the toes to push apart her legs. Jenny obliged, spreading her thighs wide, releasing a sharp gasp of pleasure as his big toe slid between her slick lips.

She moaned, long and low, knowing the vibrations this sent through Devlin's stiff shaft would drive him wild. He growled, rewarding her by finally pressing the tip of his forefinger in past the rim of her anus. Gasping, Jenny bucked her hips, head bobbing, hand twisting on his cock. Hoping he would follow suit, she wriggled her pinkie, burrowing inside his tight canal.

Dev cried out, pushing her head down, burying his cock in her throat as he drove his finger deep into her ass. Jenny whimpered, swirling her tongue around his cock as the rib along its shaft began to pulse.

Between her slick labia, Damien's toe wiggled deliciously. She grunted, working her hips, thrusting back and forth, driving his toe and Dev's finger deeper into her pussy and ass. Dev gasped, arching. Salty warmth flooded her mouth. She suckled greedily, gulping and slurping noisily because she knew that the sounds of her drinking their essence made them come even harder.

And then she was pressing her thighs together, pure bliss blossoming between her legs as Damien's toe and Devlin's finger trapped her sweet spot between them, palpating over and over. Between swallows she whimpered, riding a wave of sheer pleasure.

When the last delightful tremors had swept through her body and she had lapped the final pearly drops from the tip of Devlin's cock, they helped her lie back, brushing her tangled hair away from her face. "Are you all right?" Damien caressed her belly tenderly.

"Mmm. Never better," she murmured blissfully.

He shook his head in wonder. "I thought pregnant women's sex drives diminished once they were into their third trimester."

Jenny laughed. "I don't know about other women, but there isn't a second of the day or night when I don't want the two of you, pregnant or no." Both of her husbands growled, nuzzling either side of her neck. She grinned wickedly. "Besides, we won't be able to have sex for a while after the twins are born. I don't know about you guys, but *I'm* going to need quite a lot of sex between now and then in order to tide me over."

She heard the breath catch in their throats, their teeth pressing into her neck as they rubbed their cocks against her thighs. She reached down, caressing, feeling them stiffen anew in her grasp. "Oh, yes." She squeezed the rigid shafts, grinning wickedly. "I want them inside me this time. I want to come with your thick, hard cocks deep in --"

Growling, Damien straddled her with one quick movement, driving his cock roughly between her swollen labia.

"Yes," she breathed. "That's it, baby. Take me. Quick and hard."

He gasped, fists tightening on handfuls of blanket, skin glistening with a fine sheen of sweat as he thrust desperately.

"Yes, baby, yes." She wriggled enticingly. "Come for me. Come for me...now!"

Her pussy throbbed as he sank his burgeoning cock deep inside her. Arching, he howled, his jaws and nose lengthening into a muzzle as the familiar swollen ring trapped him inside her. She gasped, wave after wave of pleasure rolling over her, his warm seed bathing her pussy.

He withdrew in the middle of her climax. Jenny tossed her head fitfully in dissatisfaction, but only for a moment, because Devlin's cock plunged inside her, spreading her swollen lips, driving her back up onto the pinnacle of the wave, keeping her there, gasping, body trembling, until his own cock ring swelled inside her, his seed spilling as her pussy tightened painfully, blissfully, then spasmed over and over, jolt after jolt of sheer bliss searing her nerves.

"Oh, God, yes," she whispered. "Yes, yes, yes."

When he withdrew, she thought they were done, the pleasure so complete that she never would have imagined she could want any more. Then their fingers found her throbbing pussy, harvesting their own essences. Devlin drew slick, cool patterns around her nipples, while Damien, his features back to normal, decorated her inner thighs. Jen moaned, not quite believing her sudden desperate need to have something inside her again. Dev painted her mouth, and she shivered, licking their semen and her own juices from his fingers while slipping her hand down between her legs.

"That's it, baby," Devlin prompted. "Come for us again." His wet fingers rubbed her swollen nipples.

Jenny gasped, arching, pressing her fingers into the sweet spot deep inside her pussy.

"That's it." Damien spread her legs so that he could watch her masturbate while his slick thumb caressed her clit. "Make yourself come, baby. Make yourself come."

She bucked, driving her fingers deeper and deeper inside herself.

"Mmm, your pussy." Damien's tongue flicked out, as though he would taste her. "I love watching your slick, red lips." He kissed her inner thigh, his gaze never leaving her fingers as they plunged in and out.

Dev chuckled. "And your fingers, so slim and white," he taunted. "Glistening with our juices, gliding in and out --"

Jen panted, making animal sounds deep in her throat.

"That's it," they coaxed together. Their hands closed on her wrist. She gave herself over to them, letting them guide her, stroking her fingers in and out, faster and faster. Their faces lengthened into muzzles, their cocks hardening again as their desire grew.

Jenny stiffened, trying to bring her thighs together and trap herself inside, ready to come, but they held her legs apart, their grips tight on her wrist, still driving her fingers in and out, in and out. "Not yet," they murmured together, watching her face. "Just a little longer."

She thrashed and moaned, perched on the cusp of an orgasm, spears of pleasure piercing her clit, but her pussy waiting, waiting, sucking her slick fingers desperately, trying to hold them inside her, but they kept moving, kept moving...

"Now!"

Jenny arched, grunting as they buried her fingers deep inside her. They pressed her thighs together, closing them tightly on her wrist, then reached up, pinching and rolling her nipples.

"Damien, Devlin, yes!" She trembled and squeezed every muscle between her waist and her knees tight. "God, yes!" she screamed, over and over, as yet another incredible orgasm slammed through her.

Their shafts ripe once more, they forced her legs apart and pulled her fingers out and away. "Yes," she gasped as they each fucked her again, their hot cocks plunging inside her even as her pussy spasmed forcefully, prolonging the seemingly endless orgasm that throbbed through her. "Oh, God, yes!"

When it was over, she lay limp between them, limbs trembling with fatigue. "Think that'll hold you over?" Damien teased.

Jen shook her head. "Never," she mumbled, voice thick with passion even as her eyelids became too heavy for her to hold open. "It's never enough."

"In that case..."

Their fingers slipped inside her again, tenderly and lovingly caressing her raw lips and swollen canal. Slow and soft, their careful ministrations satisfied even as they sent her to slumber, rocking on the gentle swells of yet another sweet but subdued climax.

Unnerving Disclosures

The next morning, Jenny sat at the breakfast table drinking tea and nibbling on cinnamon toast as Damien and Devlin read the news. Eventually, papers rustled as they folded them. “You finished reading this yesterday, right?” Jenny nodded, and Damien gathered the sections and carried them out to the recycle bin.

When he returned, he stood behind her, rubbing her shoulders. Jenny sighed. “Mmm. That’s nice.”

Damien kissed the top of her head. “Well, we’re off. We decided to ride the fence line today.”

She stifled a burst of disappointment. As large as their portion of the mountain was, that meant they wouldn’t be back until after dark, and would still have to go back out and finish the job the next day. “All right.” Short notice, too. They usually planned these things days in advance. She tilted her head thoughtfully, looking up at him. “You’re worried about that sound we heard last night, aren’t you?”

The look her husbands shared irritated the heck out of her. “Look, just because I’m pregnant doesn’t mean I’m some kind of china doll. Why don’t you go ahead and tell me what’s wrong?” She speared Dev with her gaze.

He looked to Damien.

Jen sighed. Though both her men had strong alpha leanings, Damien had been the first of the twins to be born. In weyr families, the firstborn male of twins was usually the dominant one, and this was certainly true in their case. The fact was evident in both their manner and their appearance. Physically, Devlin stood slightly smaller, his body lithe and athletic. Damien’s build was thicker, more solidly muscled. He also measured an inch or two taller, making his the more formidable build. This was true in their wolf forms, as well.

And when it came to personality, outgoing Devlin radiated positive energy and good humor, but also reacted to things a little less maturely, tending to be rash and impulsive. Damien, on the other hand, was often serious, self-contained, even somewhat tense, but infinitely more responsible.

What all this meant in practical terms was that Devlin ultimately deferred to Damien when it came to serious matters. The only saving grace was that Dev would actually back her up in arguments if he thought what she said had merit. But after last night -- she couldn't help the smile that tugged at the corners of her lips at the memory -- she was really too tired for a long, drawn-out argument.

Dev's gaze flicked back to her. "Don't you think I should know if there's something dangerous going on?" she asked, eyes wide and innocent.

Dev made a sympathetic face, glancing up at Damien again. "She has a point."

His brother frowned. "But she'll want to get involved, and if she gets involved --"

"Hey." Jen raised a hand. "Sitting right here. I hate it when you talk around me like that."

"Sorry." Damien sighed, glancing back and forth between the pleading faces turned up to his. "All right, fine," he grumbled. "You can tell her, but it's only going to cause trouble."

"I did some sniffing around this morning." Dev plunged in immediately. He did, of course, mean this literally. "There's a rogue wolf on the mountain."

"A rogue wolf? Is that a big deal? What exactly *is* a 'rogue' wolf?"

He picked at a nonexistent spot on the table. "A rogue *weyr*, I should have said."

She frowned, still not understanding. "Okaaay."

Damien stepped away from her and leaned against the kitchen counter, taking over the explanation. "It's a lone male weyr, a full weyr." He sighed, rubbing his hands through his hair. "Hell. This is going to require some background information." He crossed his arms over his chest. "Males born to any breeding set that includes a full male weyr are always twins. You know that. What you might not know -- I don't think we've ever talked about it -- is that even when these twins are apart, there's this incredible bond, a psychic connection that's palpable to other weyr. No matter how far away the other twin is, we should sense that connection. We should still perceive that other wolf."

"In this case, we don't. The connection's been severed. This wolf's lost his twin. It's...a very dangerous situation. I'm sure you've heard stories of human twins who fail to thrive after they lose their sibling. Well, it's even worse for weyr. The bond between us, it's..." He shook his head, while across the table Dev shuddered. "I pray we never have to go through anything like that."

"I don't understand. What's so dangerous about it?"

Damien sighed again, plainly reluctant to explain. "Generally, one of three things happens when a twin is lost. If the weyr are over eighty, it's painful, but generally the

remaining twin will survive and finish out his lifespan, maybe a little subdued, but for the most part fine. It's as though nature recognizes that age takes its toll, and lessens the effects for those who have lived more than half their lives.

"If you're under eighty, either the remaining twin becomes...I don't know, sickly, I guess. We call it the 'pining,' and it's the most common response. Basically, they become very passive, losing the will to live and wasting away until they finally die themselves. Then there are the ones that revert."

"Revert."

He nodded. "Their minds can't accept what's happened. It's a form of insanity, I guess, weyr style. They revert to wolf form, in order to run from their loss, and stay there. Instead of pining away, they let the animal take over. They become less and less human, more and more wild, but their urges are still human, so...they can wreak a lot of havoc. They'll still desire human women, but will be more likely to try to take them in wolf form, indiscriminately. They'll kill livestock and pets, not for food, but out of rage. They quit caring who knows what they are and may even shift in public."

Damien pushed away from the cabinet, arms crossed over his chest. "What it boils down to is this: there's no cure, and they can't be allowed to expose us or harm others."

Jenny frowned, the rogue weyr forgotten momentarily as the implications of what he was saying sank in. "So, when we get older, if one of you dies before the other..."

Damien shrugged. "Like I said, if we live past eighty, which is the rule more than the exception considering that the average length of a full weyr's life is a hundred and fifty years, neither the pining or reversion will be an issue. The loss would be hard to weather, but most do manage."

"A hundred and fifty years?" This was the first she'd heard of this. Some day soon, they were absolutely going to *have* to sit down and give her a much more complete understanding of what it meant to be weyr. Of course, that was something her mother should have done when Jenny was younger. It still riled her that her origins had been hidden from her for so long.

Dev leaned forward. "Don't worry. You're going to live almost as long. Half-weyr are almost as resistant to disease as full weyr and tend to have healthier bodies overall than pure humans."

"It's not that. Well, it is, a little, but I'm also wondering how you hide a lifespan that long from society."

"Oh. Well, in our case, eventually the boys will take over the homestead, and we'll build a nice little house in some very secluded portion of the land and keep to ourselves. Outwardly, we only look about ten years younger than normal humans up until we're about sixty; then the difference becomes a little more noticeable, but there are ways around that. You'd be surprised how good a weyr is with makeup. Also, there's a ritual that can be done, where the bond with the land is passed on to a younger pack, and it's not unusual for older

weyr to do that and then move to another country, where the problem isn't an issue -- it's only hard to hide your age among people you know. And then there's the fact that the human lifespan is increasing. Some weyr have lived openly to the age of one hundred and twenty, and they might get a spread in a local newspaper, but other than that, there's no big uproar. There's no medical test that will tell a human physician what we are, just that our body systems aren't wearing down as fast as others."

Jenny held up a hand to stop him, her mind whirling. "You know what? That's an education for another day, I think." She tried to order her muddled thoughts. They needed to get back to the immediate issue, the rogue. What was it Damien had been saying before they veered off on a tangent? Oh, yeah. "You said that the rogue couldn't be allowed to expose us or hurt others. What did you mean by that?"

He looked away, his jaw tightening into something closely resembling granite.

Jenny gasped. "You're not saying...please tell me you don't want to...to *kill* him?"

Her husbands shared *the look*.

"No." They opened their mouths simultaneously to respond, but she placed both hands on the table and stood, body rigid. "No. There has to be some other way."

Damien started shaking his head.

"Damien." She stepped over to him, wrapping her arms around his waist. She looked into his eyes. "Please. Promise me you won't do anything until we've talked some more. Do you even know that he's done anything wrong yet?"

He reluctantly shook his head. "No, but that's why we're going out today. We'll know more by the time we get back." There was regret in his gaze, but also grim determination.

"Please." She placed a hand on her belly. "For our sons' sakes. I don't want something like this happening on our land. I don't want them to inherit that tragedy. Let's think about this, okay? At least *try* to come up with something better."

She could see in his furrowed brow and worried glare that he didn't believe there was a better solution, but as he searched her eyes, his gaze softened. He brushed a stray hair back from her forehead and sighed. Slowly, he nodded. "All right. For you, we'll try to find a better way."

Jenny enfolded him in a tight hug. "Thank you."

He grasped her chin and tilted it up. "As long as you understand that this won't wait indefinitely. We'll go ahead with inspecting our holding, see what we can find out. But if we discover he's attacked a human or gone on a livestock rampage, or see something that indicates he's likely to shift in public, all bets are off. We'll *have* to contain the threat."

"I understand." Though she really didn't. She couldn't imagine that in all their time on earth, the weyr hadn't been able to find a better way of dealing with these instances. Of course, if such an occurrence was as rare as Damien had indicated, that didn't offer much of

an opportunity to study the problem. Still... “But if he’s *not* that far gone yet, maybe there’s a way we can help him through this.”

He and Devlin raised their eyebrows and shook their heads, clearly thinking she was nuts or, more probably, simply incredibly naïve when it came to weyr. Damien kissed her forehead. “We better go. As it is, we’re going to be pretty late getting in tonight.”

Dev nodded in agreement, standing up to peck her cheek. “You stay inside. Don’t go wandering the woods.” They waited for her grudging nod of assent before they strode purposefully together toward the front door.

She watched from the front bay window as they climbed into their old blue truck and revved up the engine. She could tell from their sour glances back at the house that they weren’t too happy with the deal they’d made with her. Still, she knew they wouldn’t break their promise. The man -- wolf -- was safe for at least another day.

She sighed. Now all she had to do was come up with a plan to save him, and convince her stubborn husbands that it would work.

Unforeseen Request

After they'd left, she found herself full of nervous energy. She puttered around, trying to find things to keep herself busy, but Sally, their nearest neighbor's daughter, came weekly to do the deep cleaning while she was pregnant. The guys were surprisingly good about keeping most everything else done, so by ten o'clock she was completely out of busy work. She could bake something, but the heat from the oven really got to her at this stage in her pregnancy, even on cool days. She could read, but perusing the "to be read" file on her e-book reader yielded no particular title that reached out and grabbed her, which was highly unusual.

She thought about going into town to see Tara. Since their mutual obstetrician, Tom Byers, had given her friend the okay to go back to work given that the new job with Marshall would allow her to sit for most of the day, they hadn't seen much of each other. Tara spent her weekdays at the office and was often unavailable in the evenings as well. Jenny didn't know whether to worry that Marshall was working Tara too hard, or be happy that she had lots to keep her busy -- to keep her mind off the lost twin.

Actually, Jenny was beginning to suspect there was a little more to Tara's relationship with her boss than she'd admitted so far. There was a certain look in her friend's eyes, when Jenny had seen them together... She grabbed her keys from their hook by the door. Just thinking about Tara set her to missing her best friend like mad. She *would* go. Her husbands wouldn't be in until late tonight; she'd just sleep over at Tara's and drive back in the morning. She'd call Damien on the walkie-talkie and let him know. He'd be thrilled that she was taking herself out of harm's way.

But then she sighed. Tom had emphasized during her appointment earlier in the week that with her being pregnant with twins and so close to full term, she could deliver at any time. Though she felt fine, she couldn't be sure she wouldn't go into labor an hour from now and end up stuck in a car alone on the side of the mountain. As it was, Damien had tried to

get her to agree to let Sally live in with them for the last two months of her pregnancy so that she'd never be alone, but Jenny had nixed the idea -- what if Sally saw something she shouldn't? They'd be careful, of course, but if the girl stayed that long, there was too much of a chance that they'd get careless and give away their secret, and teens were nothing if not curious.

Besides, she wouldn't have felt comfortable having sex with someone else's sixteen-year-old daughter in the house, and she and her husbands *really* enjoyed sex. Desire became a physical ache for them when they hadn't made love even for just one day. A powerful sex drive and an actual physical response to the lack of sex were other common weyr traits, Devlin had explained, and ones Jen had discovered she, as a half-weyr, shared.

She smiled, still amazed that they could want each other so much. Where practical points had failed to sway him, *that* argument had finally convinced Damien not to bring someone into their house to stay. But he went out the same day and purchased two things -- military grade walkie-talkies, one of which was clipped to her waistband even now, its mate either with him or Devlin; and cell phone relay equipment that she hadn't even realized existed, which guaranteed that she'd always have a signal on the mountain. Whichever way she tried to reach them, they'd get the call.

Her mother had suggested that she could come and stay during Jenny's ninth month and for a little while afterward to help with the babies, but Jenny had sensed that her mom's heart wasn't in the offer. Not that she didn't love her daughter and wouldn't adore the babies, but Jen's father had suffered a heart attack in late July. It was mild, and he'd recovered very quickly, but Jen knew the episode had shaken her mom to the core, and she understood completely. She'd feel just the same if it were Damien or Devlin. And now that she knew about the length of weyr lifespans, she understood even better. Her father was human, without the advantages of weyr genes. Her mother couldn't be sure how much longer they would have together, so of course she wouldn't be anxious to go off and leave him behind. For that matter, Jen herself had wanted to go see him, but Tom had advised against flying or a long road trip, so she'd had to settle for frequent phone calls the last couple of months.

That line of thinking served only to renew her irritation over how very little real knowledge she had about weyr, and led to a bunch of questions there was no one around right then to answer. Making a mental promise to visit her parents as soon as the pediatrician felt it was safe for her babies to travel, she turned on the radio in an effort to distract herself. However, instead of listening, she ended up pacing back and forth through the kitchen.

She faced the fact that what she really wanted to do was go outside. She had a feeling that if she could just sink her toes into the loam, she would be able to find the rogue. Not that she would go after him by herself, but she had a special bond with the Goddess. At least, it seemed that way to her, more and more, here lately. Something beyond the usual weyr connection to the land. Perhaps the Goddess would help her to find him, maybe even give

her some insight as to how to help him. She had just decided to make her husbands very angry and leave the house when the gate phone rang.

They weren't expecting anyone, so she considered not answering, but after the fifth ring, she went ahead and picked it up. "Yes?"

"Jenny?"

"Tara? What are you doing here? You didn't drive yourself, did you?"

"Wow, what a greeting!" Laughter floated over the line, though to Jenny the voice sounded strained. "Let's see, to answer your questions, in order: yes, it's Tara. I really need to talk to you. And yes, I drove myself."

"Shame on you. It's a two-hour drive! You can't be up to that."

"I'm fine, Jen. Well, physically, at least. Emotionally...not so good. I really need you, and I wasn't about to drag you out to my place. Besides, this isn't something I wanted to discuss at home. I just...I really needed to see you out *here*."

Jen frowned, worried about her friend. "Tara, you know you're always welcome. Of course. Come on up." She pressed a code into the keypad. "The gate should be opening now."

"It is."

"I'll be waiting for you on the front porch."

Jenny walked slowly to the front of the house. She stepped out onto the wooden decking and sat on the porch swing, wondering what the crisis could be. Had Tara's loss finally caught up with her? After the one outburst in the hospital, she had seemed to accept her baby's fate rather stoically, though her silent tears had flowed like a river at the funeral service a few days later.

Jen's muscles tensed, and she leaned back, determined to relax. She wouldn't be any help to Tara if she became agitated herself. Inhaling deeply, she let the restful scents of pine and juniper and the soft whisper of wind work their magic. That was a good explanation for Tara wanting to meet out here -- the land Jen and her husbands owned was blessed by the Goddess, their mountainside a welcoming sanctuary of rest and renewal for both beast and man. Tara had made remarks in the past, comments that led Jen to believe she knew more about the Blakes than she let on. Perhaps she knew about the Goddess, too. Maybe she just wanted to stay here a while, to rest and heal, both body and soul. Losing a baby...Jenny pressed her hands over her belly protectively, unable to imagine the grief.

She heard a motor and watched Tara's car toil up the long, steeply sloped gravel-over-packed-earth drive. When she pulled up in front of the house, Jen saw that she was driving Marshall's small Nissan, his around-town car. Hmm. Interesting.

Tara opened the car door and squeezed out from behind the wheel. She shut it and pressed a button on Marshall's key to lock the doors, though it was hardly necessary up here. Jen supposed it was force of habit.

The woman shook her head, her auburn curls burnished by the sun as she climbed the porch steps. "I don't understand how a woman almost ready to deliver can be smaller than someone only six months pregnant."

"I'm not!" Jen insisted. "You're seeing things, girl." She patted the seat of the swing. "Come on. Sit with me."

Tara lowered herself onto the swing and sat back with a sigh, letting her gaze travel over the mountainside. Cheerful birdsong and the rustling of small animals in the leaves beneath shedding trees surrounded them. "God, this place is beautiful. I knew coming up here would make me feel better."

Jen put an arm around her shoulders. "What is it, Tara?"

"I don't even know where to start." Her best friend stared at her hands, fingers twisting in her lap.

"Why don't you start at the beginning?"

Tara sighed. "Okay, then...New Orleans. I met these two men. Brothers." She turned her head, smiled a rueful smile. "Twins."

Jenny wasn't surprised, though her heart did speed up a bit as her suspicions seemed about to be validated. "Let me guess." She swallowed, nervous at taking the plunge, but also excited by the possibility of finally being able to share her own secret with her best friend. It was an awful risk, possibly putting Damien and Devlin and her own children in harm's way, but... She took a deep breath, deciding to have faith in her instincts. She loved and trusted Tara and had always felt her friend knew more about Jenny's husbands than she'd ever admitted. "They were weyrwolves."

Tara nodded. "I had a feeling you'd understand what I was getting at." She swallowed hard. "Wow, it's a relief to feel like I can finally be completely honest with you. You have no idea how hard it was not to talk to you about what really went on in New Orleans." She shot a curious, sidelong glance at her friend. "Are you..." She raised her eyebrows questioningly.

"I'm half-weyr." Encouraged by Tara's quiet acceptance, she continued. "I didn't know it, though, until Damien and Devlin told me. My mom hid it from me, while I was growing up. My dad's human, and she seemed to think I'd be happier living a more normal life." She glanced around, grinning. "You see how that turned out."

"Can you...you know, *change*?"

Jenny shook her head. "Half-weyr can't do that. Mostly, we have heightened senses, more stamina, better reflexes, and a stronger resistance to disease than full humans, but I'm not all that different from you."

Tara must have seen the concern in her eyes. "Don't worry. I'm not going to become afraid of you." She glanced away guiltily. "I used to follow them, when we were younger. Damien and Devlin. I saw them shift a few times. They were so beautiful, in both forms." She stared down at her hands, clasped in her lap. "I kind of had a crush on them. It's a

wonder they never caught me spying, but my father was an outdoorsman, so I'd been taught how to walk silently in the woods, stay downwind, all that."

"And they probably just weren't expecting anything like that from a young girl."

"Yeah." Tara looked into Jenny's eyes once more. "But anyway, I think that's why I did what I did in New Orleans. The minute I saw Johnathan and Jacob, I knew what they were." Her face flushed. "I...I didn't feel drawn to them like...like my life mates or anything. I hate to admit it, but it had been a fantasy of mine, ever since..." Her voice trailed off, her cheeks red as apples. "Well, I wanted to --"

"I think I get the picture." Jenny tightened her arm around her friend's shoulders in a hug. "Don't worry. I can't blame you. Weyr have incredible sex appeal."

Tara laughed, an explosive sound that seemed to finally release some of her tension. "Lord, I never in my life thought that some day I'd be confessing to my best friend that I used to have sexual fantasies about her weyrwolf husband." Her gaze turned shrewd. "Or should I say, *husbands*."

It was Jenny's turn to blush. Tara nudged her with a shoulder. "Sorry, I couldn't resist. But I keep getting off track. Time to end this sorry tale."

She slipped out of Jenny's grasp and stood. Walking over to the porch rail, she stared out into the woods. "Bottom line, I didn't think of the consequences. I just accepted their advances and went for it, even though there was obviously something going on with them. They were running from something, or hiding from something or someone, I think."

She turned and faced her friend, leaning against the corner post. "I know this sounds nuts, but I think they knew -- well, Johnathan, at least -- that I'd gotten pregnant. He left me this card with some shamrocks, on the morning I was leaving. It said to take care of *them*, their gift, and I thought they meant the clover at the time, but now I think they knew about the pregnancy, even knew it was twins."

"They probably did." Jenny watched her closely. "It's another aspect of full weyr. They can sense our natural rhythms and know that we're ovulating, that kind of thing. Apparently, if you *are* ovulating when you have sex with both males of a set of full weyr twins, you *will* get pregnant, no matter what. At least, if you're human or half-weyr. If I remember correctly, Damien might have told me full weyr females have some control of their own in that situation."

Tara took a deep, shuddering breath. "So, I come back, and I'm pregnant, and I don't hear from either of them for four months. And then I-I lose one of the babies." She swallowed hard. "I was devastated, but at the same time, I started thinking, finally, about what this pregnancy really means." She met Jenny's gaze pleadingly. "What do I know about weyr? How can I possibly raise a weyr baby by myself?"

Jenny stood and joined her by the rail, facing out toward the wooded mountainside, her hands resting on the wooden railing. "I'm sure you can do it, Tara. I mean, I didn't even know I was weyr. My parents raised me completely oblivious of my origins, and nothing

untoward happened.” She hesitated. “Well, until I met Damien and Dev and... Well, I have to admit, I very much resented not having been raised with the knowledge. Even now, I still have questions.”

Tara shook her head, fighting back tears. “It’s not just that.” She grabbed Jenny’s shoulders, turning her so they could look eye to eye. “I’m not ready for children.” She sobbed. “I wasn’t in love with them. It was a fling, a thirtieth birthday adventure and the fulfillment of a longtime fantasy. And now, Marshall and I...we have something. And he’s perfectly fine with the idea of raising someone else’s child, but it’s not fair to him, and...”

“Oh, honey.” Jen wrapped her arms around Tara and held her close. “Don’t worry. I’ll give you all the help you need. You’re not alone. So many people care about you. We’ll all be here for you. You’ll make it through this, I promise.” She patted Tara’s back. “Everything will be all right. You’ll see.”

Shuddering, Tara rubbed at her brimming eyes. “You don’t understand.” She sniffed noisily, visibly struggling to get a grip on her emotions, and her sobs faded. “I came to ask you...” She shook her head. “God, I’m so selfish. You’re going to think I’m *awful*.”

Jenny pushed Tara’s tear-dampened curls back from her face, cupping her cheeks. “Tara, you’re my best friend. You’re not awful, and nothing can make me think that.”

“I want you to raise the baby.”

Jenny stared, not certain she had heard correctly. For a long moment, she was speechless.

“See?” Tara wailed. “I *knew* you’d think I was horrible!”

“No, no.” Jenny let go of her friend’s face and stepped back, running a hand through her dark brown hair. “This is just...unexpected. I’ve thought from the beginning that you knew more about Damien and Devlin than you let on. To find out all at once that you’ve known since you were kids, and that you’ve been involved with weyr yourself, and... Us raising your baby, it’s... I understand your reasoning, and I don’t think you’re horrible to admit that you’re not ready for children, if that’s the way you really feel. But...are you sure? This is a big decision. Are you sure you’ve thought it through?”

“Yes. And I’ve talked it over with Marshall, too -- leaving the wolf part out, of course.” She wandered over to the swing and sat down, staring up at Jenny. “He’s really wonderful.” Her tone softened as she spoke of him. “I love him, Jen. He hasn’t asked me to marry him yet, but I think he will, and I want to accept. He’s told me over and over that he’ll help with the baby any way he can, but if I marry him, I want to do it right. I want him to myself for a while, and when we do have kids, I want to plan ahead of time, have him with me every step of the way.” Her eyes filled with tears again. “Is that selfish?”

Jen leaned back against the porch rail, giving a half-shrug. “Honestly, it is, but I understand. Still...”

"I shouldn't have come." Tara buried her head in her hands, her words muffled. "It's too much to ask. I knew it was. Why would you want to take on another child? You're having twins; you're going to have your hands full from day one. I just...I couldn't face the idea of giving my baby up to strangers."

Jenny walked over to the swing and rested a hand on Tara's shoulder. "I don't think you're asking too much. A *lot*, yes, but not too much. And I have no qualms whatsoever about raising three boys instead of two, especially if it's for you. It's just that... Well, I have to be honest with you, Tara. If we do this, if Damien and I adopt your baby..." She shook her friend's shoulder gently until Tara raised her head and looked her in the eyes. Jen tried to soften her words, but there was still a bite to her tone. "If you were ever to regret your decision, it would destroy our friendship. I've heard too many horror stories of children living with adoptive parents for, sometimes, several years, and then the biological parent decides they want their baby back. It's traumatic for everyone involved, but we would fight, Tara, because we will love your boy every bit as much as our own; you know we will. And I don't believe a child should be ripped from loving parents, from the only home they've ever known. We'd fight, and we'd win."

Tara grinned, though her eyes were still misted with tears. "That's one of the reasons I love you so much, because you're always honest with me." She rubbed her red eyes. "This is another reason why I want it to be you -- because I know how much you care. I won't regret this, Jen, but there's no way I can prove that now. All I can say is that I know in my heart this is the right thing to do. Theron needs to be raised by people who know and understand what he is, and he needs to be raised by someone who wants children now. And there's something else -- or *someone*, I guess I should say -- that the three of you are better prepared to deal with than I am."

Jen tilted her head. "*Someone?*"

Tara's fingers worried busily at the hem of her maternity blouse. "I-I've seen one of the fathers. Jacob. He's here, in Alabaster. He showed up at the office a couple of weeks ago. He said his brother was...was dead. He seemed fine, at first. He said he wanted to help me raise the twins, so I had to tell him -- Well, I didn't tell him; he figured out --"

Jen sucked in a sharp breath. "That you'd lost one of the babies."

Tara nodded, almost sobbing again. "And-and he looked s-so *horrible*, and he started to ch-change, and he ran out, and --"

Jenny went stiff with shock. The baby's father had to be their rogue weyr. Abruptly feeling weak at the knees, she dropped down beside Tara on the swing. "Oh, no."

Tara nodded, misunderstanding her concern. "I know. He could possibly want custody, but I thought maybe, if he met the three of you and knew his son would be raised by weyr, with such a wonderful family..." Her voice trailed off.

Jen stared out at the mountainside, struggling to wrap her mind around everything that she'd learned. Without a doubt, she *must* save Jacob. There was no way she'd be able to live

with herself if she knew Damien and Devlin had killed the baby's only remaining father. As far as adopting the child, she couldn't say no. Plans might change if they were able to rescue the weyr, of course -- if Jacob wanted custody and was fit, they shouldn't fight him -- but for now, she could at least put Tara's mind at ease. Stress wasn't good for the baby.

Jenny reached out and covered Tara's clasped hands with her own. "We'll do it."

Tara whipped her head around, eyes wide. "You will?"

Jenny's gaze pierced her. "If you're sure."

Tara nodded. "I'm sure." She smiled, patting her tummy. "Theron -- that's his name, Theron Matthew -- he couldn't ask for a better mother or fathers."

Her casual mention of Damien and Devlin both as the boy's fathers, not father, touched Jenny deeply and brought home again the fact that Tara truly understood her situation. She now had at least one friend with whom she could be completely honest, and the thought made her so happy it brought tears to her eyes.

"I'll have to speak to Damien and Devlin, of course, but I can't imagine they'll say no."

"I guess they might be a little angry that I know about them."

Jenny shivered, just a little. "I have to admit, I'm not so thrilled about telling them, but they'll deal with it."

Tara sighed. "I'm sorry."

Jen put an arm around her shoulders and squeezed. "Don't be. Everything will work out all right. I promise. Just please don't let this situation make things awkward between us."

Tara shook her head violently, auburn curls swaying. "Hell, no. I don't know what I'd do without my best friend. I can't remember how I ever functioned without you."

Unasked Question

Hours later, Jenny relaxed in bed, reading an e-book while she waited for her husbands to come home. She and Tara had talked more about Jacob's visit and what it might mean, but after a while Jenny had insisted that they put the problem on the back burner. They'd spent the rest of the day doing normal things -- chatting about their mutual friends, looking through magazines together. They'd even baked after all, the companionship and assistance making the heat more bearable for Jenny, and enjoyed melt-in-your-mouth brownies fresh from the oven with tall, cold glasses of milk. Before she'd left, Tara had mentioned that Marshall could take care of drawing up the adoption papers and making sure everything was completely legal, and Jenny had promised she would call her soon to let her know for sure whether her husbands had agreed.

As she touched the screen to turn the page, a light tread on the porch made her cock her head. She listened intently, then smiled. Damien and Devlin were back. Her weyr senses allowed her to hear their faint murmurs as they slipped off their boots and let themselves quietly in the front door. She hadn't heard the truck, though. She frowned. Must have broken down again.

She shut down her reader and set it on the bedside table. Sitting up in the bed, she arranged herself cross-legged among the pillows, leaning back against the headboard, her hands clenched in her lap. She looked down at them and frowned. Deliberately, she flexed her fingers to loosen them. She had a lot to tell the guys, things that were bound to make them tense. She needed to be as calm as possible.

Dev popped his head in the door. "Honey, we're home!" He flashed a grin, his teeth a dazzling white against his bronzed, rugged face. He walked into the room and flopped onto the bed, his head landing in her lap. He looked up at her, still grinning. "Miss me?"

In answer, Jenny buried her fingers in his hair and tugged, pulling him up so she could meld her lips to his. When she let him go, he mimed wooziness. "Whew, that was something else!" He eyed her shrewdly. Despite his carefree façade, he was sometimes much more canny than she gave him credit for. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Damien saved her an answer by coming through the door. He walked up to the bed and bent over, his lips caressing hers. "Mmm. It's good to be home," he murmured.

She couldn't help it -- the day's stress came crashing in on her. She needed the reassurance of their strong arms around her, craved their familiar touch.

Revelations could wait.

She darted her tongue between his lips. Damien growled and wrapped her tongue in his, stroking, his hands kneading her shoulders. Jenny sighed and leaned back against the pillows. The bed shifted as he sat beside her, one hand straying to the ribbon that tied the neckline of her nightgown.

She reached up, running her fingers over his smooth, firm biceps. The muscles flexed beneath her touch as he deftly unknotted the ribbon, tugging her bodice down so that her plump breasts tumbled out.

He relinquished her lips and sat back, gazing at her exposed nipples. His gaze flicked to hers for just a moment, full of dark promise. Then he leaned forward and lapped at the tip of one swollen dark nipple.

Jenny moaned, settling more comfortably into the pillows. Devlin stretched out beside her and began tracing taut circles around the erect peak of her other nipple.

A weird and wonderful tightening sensation rippled through her breasts. She shivered, her erect nubs tingling. A moment later, a warm, melting sensation washed through her. Tiny drops of clear fluid with just a hint of pearlescence appeared on the tips of her exposed nipples.

"Mmm." Damien caught her right nipple between his lips and sucked. Jenny arched, feeling as though a string ran from the tip of her nipple to her clit as it pulsed and throbbed to the rhythm of his suckling.

Heat. Devlin's eager mouth closed on her other breast, sucking hard, trapping her sensitive nub between his tongue and the roof of his mouth. Jenny gasped. She buried her fingers in their hair, urging them on. Damien's hand glided up along her inner thigh, raising the bottom of her gown, two fingers plunging between the bared lips of her pussy. Jenny moaned and arched. Dev's touch joined his, pushing into her from the other side, their four fingers filling her, massaging her, their mouths working on her tender, swollen nubs as a questing thumb found her clit and rolled it around and around. "Oh, God. Oh, yes!"

Jenny spread her legs wide, thrusting her hips, willing them to go deeper. They read her mind, their fingers diving, finding her sweet spot. She whimpered, bucking. Her nipples stung, just the right side of pain as they suckled hungrily, drinking her, drinking...Jenny's

hands closed tight on their heads, pressing them to her, holding them as she bucked once, twice, a third time, then froze as an electrifying orgasm centered on her clit, then spread. She twitched, crying out, whimpering fitfully as wave after wave of pure bliss crashed through her.

After what seemed like an eternity of mind-numbing pleasure, she slowly came back to her senses. She loosened her grip on her lovers' heads, running her fingers through their hair, whispering their names. "Damien, Devlin. I missed you."

Damien lifted his head and pressed his lips to her forehead tenderly, while Devlin planted a gentle kiss on the corner of her mouth. "We missed you, too."

Wordlessly, Jenny turned on her side, tugging at the snap on Damien's jeans. He grinned, popping the fastener for her, then watching as she slid the zipper down slowly. Jenny pushed his pants down, tugging at his underwear.

He grinned. "Let me help you with that." He pulled off the offending garments and tossed them to the floor. "There. That's better."

Jenny nodded. Devlin had snuggled up behind her, and she could feel his hard cock pressing against her buttocks even through his pants. She reached behind her, fumbling blindly with his waistband. With a growl, he removed his clothing as well, pressing into her, his hard, ripe cock nestling between her cheeks.

She sighed. One hand before her, one hand reaching behind, she captured their cocks, stroking slowly, sensually. Devlin nibbled her left ear, while Damien simply closed his eyes and gave himself to the moment.

Jenny raised her left leg, draping her thigh over Damien's hip. Still stroking the base of his shaft, she angled herself so that her rounded tummy no longer kept his delicious cock from gliding between her slick lips.

He groaned, thrusting gently, nestling the engorged head in her hot pussy.

Jenny moaned. Reaching behind her, she tugged at Devlin's hip. He scooted down and shifted a little, letting her guide him. Jenny caressed his cock, then pressed the swollen head between her buttocks suggestively. He shivered and nipped her ear. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, please," Jen murmured throatily.

She felt a tremor go through the bodies pressed against her, and grinned. "Take me," she whispered in sultry tones. "I want to feel both of you inside me."

Her back chilled as Devlin rolled away to rummage in the drawer of the bedside table and pull out the lubricant. He slipped one arm beneath her, cupping her right breast and kneading her nipple as he coated his erect member with his free hand. Then his slick fingers glided between her cheeks. "Let's get you ready, baby."

Jen moaned, her pussy and anal muscles flexing in response to his touch. He drew in a sharp breath. His index finger found her anus, pushing in past the rim.

“Oh, baby.” Jenny wriggled against him. He worked his finger inside her, tracing slow, steady circles, pressing outward against the rim, stretching her, preparing her for him. “Mmmm. That feels good.”

Damien growled, working his hips slightly, the tip of his cock barely penetrating her pussy with each stroke, stoking her desire and leaving her hungry for more. She caught his head in her hands, pressing her lips to his, biting down on the lower curve, not enough to break the skin, but enough to make him gasp and thrust, sliding his cock in a little further.

Jenny sighed with satisfaction. “Mmmm. That’s what I like.” Devlin’s finger worked deeper. “Oh, yes.” Jenny traced the curve of Damien’s shoulder, his waist, his hip, wrapping her hands around the base of his buttocks and tugging.

His thick cock slid deeper, and she moaned. Devlin growled now, biting her neck as he buried his finger inside her, thrusting hard and deep. “Oh, God! Oh, yes.” Jenny cocked her hips, her ass tightening on Dev’s finger, pussy spasming around Damien’s thick shaft. He groaned, grasping her hips and thrusting hard.

Devlin’s finger wiggled, bumping his brother’s cock through the intervening tissue.

“Dev, please.” Jen glanced over her shoulder at him, licking her lips provocatively. “I want both your cocks inside me!”

Warmth. Slickness. Lubricant cascaded over Jen’s buttocks, trickling between her cheeks. Dev released her breast, his hand slipping from beneath her to reach down and spread her cheeks wider. Jen waited breathlessly.

Pressure. She squirmed. Dev worked a second finger inside her. She bit back a whimper, afraid he would misinterpret it. There was pain, but not more than she could bear -- a throbbing, prickling combination that only heightened her desire.

She squeezed Damien’s buttocks, and he grunted, driving his cock deeper. His mouth closed on hers, sucking on her bottom lip, nipping the fullest portion of its roundness. Jenny gasped, tossing her head, breath quickening as Devlin’s fingers plumbed her ass. “Oh, baby,” she whispered throatily. “Now, baby. Please, please. Now.”

Dev groaned. Abruptly, his thumb was gone, and then his thick, hot cock drove into her ass. “Yes!” Jen tightened her grip on Damien’s cheeks and worked her hips back and forth. Her pussy and asshole spasmed, birthing spirals of delight that gathered at her core.

Damien growled, thrusting hard, his thick cock stretching her lips. She looked at him, watching his face change, elongating, his teeth becoming prominent, his ears developing points tufted with fur.

Behind her, Dev growled, too. His hands on her hips sprouted soft fur, the tips of claws pricking her flesh just so. She shivered, rocking her pelvis. Dev gasped, withdrawing his cock from her tight, throbbing canal and then plunging in again. “Oh, God. Yes! Yes!” Jenny sobbed, squeezing Damien’s buttocks tight. She begged, pleading with them to fuck her hard

and fast. A yip escaped from both her lovers as Dev bucked, burying himself deep, hands tightening on her waist, holding her still as he drove into her.

“Yes, oh, yes.” Jenny arched as their cocks plunged rapidly in and out. Her pussy and ass tightened around them, stinging deliciously. “Oh, God. Damien, Devlin. Yes!”

Her hands followed the curve of Damien’s butt, stroking the fine, soft hairs sprouting there. He was still mostly human, but the wolf was showing. A shiver of anticipation ran through her, and they both must have felt it, because they held her tight, burying themselves deep inside her, their hands tightening.

They both froze. *Oh, yes, yes. This is it!* She waited, her concentration centered desperately on the two cocks buried inside her.

Her ass and pussy stretched simultaneously, expanding as the bases of their cocks swelled, locking them inside her. “Yes!” Jenny sobbed as their cocks expanded and contracted within her, wave after wave of liquid warmth bathing her pussy and ass. “Oh, God, yes!” She arched, whimpering, uttering nonsensical sounds as random bursts of pleasure ripped through her. Their cocks pulsed as one, Jenny’s pussy and ass squeezing them tight, coaxing every last drop of their essence to fill her completely.

When it was over, they lay tangled together, panting, limbs pleasantly weak. “God,” Devlin murmured. “That was *phenomenal*.”

Jenny smiled.

“It always is,” Damien added.

Jenny fully intended to coax them into the shower and then settle them on the bed to talk about all she’d found out that day, but a pleasant exhaustion and the warmth of their bodies pressed close to hers combined to drown her in a comfortable lassitude, and she drifted off to sleep wrapped in the cocoon of their love even as she tried to form the words in her mind.

Undeniable Blessing

Next morning, the sponge glided across Damien's ribcage, circled teasingly over his thigh, then cupped his balls. Jenny grinned up at him, massaging gently as she inched the soapy loofah along his cock, crowned its domed head with a peak of snowy bubbles, then blew them away. Damien laughed, catching her hand and drawing her up into his kiss. Behind her, Devlin drew a washcloth up between her buttocks, catching the ends and working it back and forth along the crevice.

"Mmm." She wiggled her hips, and Devlin let go, leaving the cloth where it was, his hands slipping around her waist. They cradled her tummy, warm and loving.

Damien nipped her bottom lip. His hands joined Dev's, stroking her tummy, both of them chuckling as tiny fists and feet created firm bulges beneath the warmth of their caress. "The boys are lively today," he murmured.

Jenny smiled. "They're lively every day." As Devlin snuggled up against her back, she sighed contentedly. "I'm so happy." She turned her head, nuzzling his rough cheek. "This time last year, we didn't even know each other. Can you believe it?"

Dev shook his head, coarse stubble scratching her cheek. "We've always known you, Jenny. We've been waiting for you all our lives."

Happy tears gathered in the corners of her eyes. "I don't deserve you two, you know that?"

Devlin growled, nipping her neck. "Don't ever say that, baby. We'd be lost without you."

Jen shivered. She brought a hand up, cupping his cheek. "You need a shave." She trailed the tips of her fingers along his jawline.

He gruffed and caught her index finger between his lips, sucking gently. She moaned, tilting her head back to rest against his shoulder.

Damien's warm mouth closed on her nipple. Jenny whimpered, tangling her fingers in his wet curls. One of his hands slipped around her waist, the other between her legs, each capturing one end of the washcloth. She moaned again, pressing her mouth to Devlin's neck and sucking, hard, as Damien worked the cloth back and forth. The rough weave rubbed her anus, a delightful friction that made her ass clench.

Behind her, Dev grunted. He knelt, his hands caressing her cheeks, one slipping into the crevice between them and sneaking between her legs. Two fingers pressed the washcloth aside, wriggling their way into her pussy. She arched, muscles spasming, mouth working, sucking his neck with the same rhythm as the fingers diving in and out of her pussy.

Her right nipple tingled painfully as Damien trapped it between his teeth. Jen gasped. "Yes!" One hand loosed its grip on the washcloth and reached up, fingers closing on her other nipple, milking roughly. The hand that had circled around her waist pressed in between her buttocks, prodding the edge of the cloth into the tight pucker of her anus. "God, yes."

He pressed urgently, working the corner inside her, then let go. A moment later, his thumb found her clit. Jenny bucked. "You're driving me crazy." He sucked hard on her right nipple, milking her left with one hand while his thumb massaged her clit and Devlin's fingers explored her pussy. "Oh, God, Dev, Damien, please." She cocked her legs, driving her hips to meet Devlin's deliciously thrusting fingers. "Please, please," she whimpered. "Make me come!"

Dev forced another finger inside her. "Oh, yes, baby. Fill me!" His middle finger found her sweet spot, pumping rapidly as he drove his other fingers deep. "Yes!" Damien's thumb trapped her swollen clit against her, the nub throbbing deliciously, sending electric pulses to her pussy. "God, yes!" She arched, muscles tightening, and gasped. Wave after wave of pleasure reverberated, pussy to ass and ass to pussy, melting her insides. She screamed, a wordless cry of sheer bliss.

"Holy shit!" Dev and Damien stiffened. She felt them shuddering against her and knew they were coming too, wished she could capture both their cocks in her mouth and drink her fill. But she couldn't move. Her limbs were jelly.

Damien groaned, releasing her nipple, his head coming up to rest on her shoulder. He shuddered one final time. "Good God, Jen," he growled shakily. "Just watching you -- *feeling* you -- made us come."

She shivered, her pussy throbbing anew at yet another confirmation of her unexpected power over them. Dev nuzzled her neck. "You drive us wild, baby." As though to prove the point, his chin lengthened, his mouth and nose becoming a muzzle. He blinked and shook his head, his features blurring back into their human form. "Damn, woman! You see what you do to me?"

She giggled, pushing them both away. "Time to finish up, guys." She laughed at their groans. She had needed the intimacy, both last night and this morning, wrapping herself in

the snug cocoon of their love to insulate herself from her worries. But she could no longer put it off -- she had to tell them what she had learned. "Seriously. I need to talk to you about something."

The three of them finished their shower, soaping each other quickly and thoroughly, washing each other's hair, then stepped shivering onto the rug warming the tile outside the shower. Damien grabbed a thick towel, pausing to bend and kiss Jenny's tummy before he wrapped it around her. "Hope we didn't disturb you there, boys," he teased. Jen smiled and ran her fingers lovingly through his wet curls, then padded into the bedroom and slipped into some comfy black maternity jeans and a loose gray shirt with horizontal blue stripes.

While they dressed, she ran a brush through her hair, then deftly braided the damp, dark brown strands and fastened the ends in a sturdy clip.

Jenny went into the kitchen and poured a cup of coffee, adding sugar and milk. She sat at the table, waiting, running the pads of her thumbs nervously around the lip of the cup.

"What's up?" Devlin came into the room, grabbed a chair, and turned the back toward her, then straddled it, facing her. Damien walked in right behind him, flashing a smile as he poured himself a cup of coffee as well.

"Tara came to see me yesterday."

"Really?" Oblivious to her underlying nervousness, Dev grinned. "I guess she's feeling better. That's great!"

As always, however, Damien sensed her tension and had gone still. "Tara may be feeling better, but there's something more. Right, Jen?"

She nodded. Taking a deep breath, she plunged in. "Tara knows what you are."

Dev's grin disappeared. "What?"

"She knows. Apparently, she had a bit of a crush on you. She followed you a few times, when you were in high school. She saw you change and knew enough woodcraft to keep from being discovered, so you never caught on."

Dev's jaw hung open. Damien's mouth was a thin, grim line.

"It's all right; she's not going to expose you or anything. She's kept your secret all this time, and that isn't going to stop now. I just needed to tell you so that the rest of what I say will make sense." She stared into her coffee mug for a moment, then looked up. "The man she met in New Orleans. It wasn't one man -- it was two. Two weyr."

Her husbands' eyes opened wide in dawning comprehension.

"She's pregnant with weyr babies...I mean, a weyr baby. She thought she could handle it, but she's decided to give him up for adoption. And she'd like that adoptive family to be us."

Dev's mouth started to curve at the corners, but then he frowned. "Wait. She lost one of the babies, right? That...that just isn't possible. I mean, I don't know of any female who's ever lost one of a pair of twins." He glanced up at Damien. "Right?"

"As far as I know." He shook his head. "This is nuts, Jen. I'm not even sure... Has the doctor said the other baby's all right?"

Jenny nodded. "Yes! He has a strong heartbeat; he's moving and kicking. They say he's perfect in every way. They're still not sure what happened with his brother. They have no explanation."

Damien frowned. "Maybe she was mistaken. Maybe they weren't weyr. If she lost one of a set of weyr twins, it would be the first case I've ever heard of. I can't imagine that the other baby would survive -- we talked about this yesterday. When a weyr twin dies, it either drives the remaining twin crazy or kills him, under most circumstances. I would think in the womb the consequences would be even harsher, and nearly immediate."

"In light of what you've told me, I can see why you would think that." Jenny laced her fingers together to keep them from twisting nervously, resting her hands on her belly. "But she *saw* them change, Damien. And once I knew, I could sense the baby inside her. Sense that he's weyr. I'd never noticed before, because I just wasn't expecting that. Wasn't looking for it. You'll see, too." She swallowed hard, dreading what came next. "That's not all, though. One of the boy's fathers came to see her. He told her his twin had died. She said he seemed fine, at first. Lucid, determined to help her raise the babies. But then he found out she'd lost one of the twins and...she said he was changing as he ran off." She took a deep breath. "After the shock had worn off, she tried to find him. Followed his trail up into the trees. She found his clothing, torn up, and a backpack. She took them, so no one else would find them. I think he must be --"

"Our rogue," Damien barked between stiff lips.

"I think so."

"Shit." Devlin ran a hand through his shaggy gold-streaked curls.

"I think...I think maybe he was able to deal with his brother's death because he knew there were two babies on the way, something to live for, something to, I don't know...fill that void, maybe. But then when he found out one of the babies had died..."

Damien nodded. "He went off the deep end."

"It had to be like losing his brother all over again. And maybe...maybe the twins *are* bound to their fathers, somehow. Maybe this baby is still alive because Jacob is."

His brow furrowed. "It *is* strange, but...I just don't know."

"Has anything like this ever happened before?"

"Like I said, not that I know of."

"But surely there have been accidents before, where one father is killed before the children are born."

Damien and Devlin shook their heads. "I don't think so," Damien insisted. "You know injuries and illnesses don't affect us the way they do pure humans. Most weyr die of old age. As far as accidents, well, there are certain types of injuries even we can't heal, but..." He

shook his head. "I honestly can't remember ever hearing a story where one father died while the children were still in the womb. If it's happened, I'd think we would have heard about it, at least about what the consequences were for the children."

Dev piped in. "Who are they, anyway? These weyr. Did she give you names?"

"Yes. Umm, Jacob. Jacob and Johnathan O'Connail."

"Hmm. Doesn't ring a bell, but they're, what, Irish? I think I remember her saying before that the guy she met in New Orleans was Irish."

Jenny nodded. "Yes. And Jacob is the one that came to see her."

"So Johnathan is the one who died."

She nodded again.

Dev pushed up from the table. "Each country's weyr population is pretty tight. I've never heard of these guys, but we have contacts in Ireland. I'll make a couple of calls, see what I can find out about them."

"Wait." Jenny put a hand on his arm, looking from him to Damien. "We have to discuss what we're going to do about him."

He looked at his brother. Damien's gaze narrowed. "What we're going to do about him? Look, Jenny, I told you before --"

"Just hear me out." Jenny took a deep breath. "If this baby survived because Jacob did, then k --" She stopped. Shook her head at her inability to say the word. Tried again. "Killing him isn't an option. We might lose the baby."

Her husbands' faces registered shock. "Hell, I didn't think of that," Devlin murmured.

"But we don't even know --" Damien started.

"Exactly. We *don't* know. Which is why we have to at least try to save Jacob. We can't take the risk that their fates are bound together. There's more than one life at stake, and the baby's an innocent. I didn't like the idea of dealing with the problem in...in *that* way even before I found out who the rogue is, and now..." She slapped a hand decisively on the table. "You can't. You just can't do it."

Dev collapsed back into his chair. Damien tilted his head, staring up at the ceiling. "Jen --"

She grasped his shoulders. "Look at me." When he resisted, she shook him. "Damien, please."

He met her gaze reluctantly.

"Figure out a way to catch him. And a place to confine him." She caught her bottom lip between her teeth, thinking. "That stable in the back that we use for mares about to foal. The birthing barn. It's empty now. If we can keep him from harming himself or others, or exposing weyrfolk, at least until Tara's baby is born, maybe we can use his son to bring him back. Show him there's still something to live for."

Damien caught her head between his hands. "Jenny. You're always fighting the odds. There are some rules that can't be broken. If anything were to go wrong --"

"I think she's right."

Damien's eyes went wide, and he whipped his head around, glaring at his brother.

Dev flashed a rueful smile. "We have to try. We owe it to the baby." He reached out, resting a hand on Jenny's stomach. "Imagine if --"

"Don't," Damien barked harshly. "Don't say it."

"The boy deserves a chance. The man, too, for that matter. Just because we believe something can only happen one way doesn't mean that's the right way, or the only way. When it comes to beating the odds --" He reached out and squeezed Jen's shoulder. "-- I'll bet on our girl every time. *Every* time."

Damien's gaze traveled back and forth between them. His brow creased with worry, he knelt beside Jenny and took her hands in his. "Is this what you really want?" His bright blue eyes seemed to peer into her soul.

"Yes, Damien. Please. There *has* to be a better way."

He stared at her for a long moment, then took a deep breath and stood. "All right."

Jenny jumped up and hugged him tight. "Thank you!"

His hand caressed her hair. "I feel the same way you do, Jen. You probably think I'm heartless, but according to every weyr I've ever known, going rogue is equivalent to having rabies. They can't be saved or cured; the only thing to do is put them down. I'd love it if there was another way, but when it comes to protecting our family..." He shook his head. "I'm worried. If anything were to happen to you or the children..." His dangerous expression said it all.

"I know." She kissed his cheek. "That's one of the reasons I love you. But you can't protect everyone from everything, all by yourself. Sometimes you need help. And sometimes you have to look at things in a different way. Take chances. Maybe you aren't supposed to be protecting *us* from Jacob. Maybe Jacob's the one that needs protection." A strange tingling swept through her from head to toe, a feeling of calm certainty. A shifting, as though something just off-kilter had canted back into place. *That's it*, she thought. *That's what we're supposed to do. Protect him.*

Damien scrubbed both his hands through his hair. "Like I said, we'll give it a try. For you."

"Thank you." One of the babies kicked hard just then, and she stepped out of Damien's arms and settled back into her chair. "Ouch." She grinned wryly. "I think one of these guys is going to be a soccer player."

Damien chuckled. Reaching out, he tugged his brother up from the chair. "We'd better get busy. Let's go see what we can do with that stable. Then we'll hit the phones and check into what the family O'Connail's been up to."

Unconventional Union

The guys had been working in the barn for a couple of hours when Jenny hollered out to them. "I'm going for a walk."

Damien appeared immediately at the stable door, frowning. "Honey, you're almost full term."

"And I feel fine." She rested a hand on her tummy. "I'm half-weyr, remember? Since I found out what I am, my weyr senses have matured. I'll know when it's time."

"But the rogue --"

"Will be resting at this time of day, right?"

Damien nodded grudgingly. "Probably."

"And even a rogue weyr probably avoids signs of civilization in broad daylight. Besides, I have my walkie-talkie *and* my cell phone, and I'm not going far. But I've been cooped up in the house for a couple of weeks, and I *need* to visit the woods."

He couldn't argue further, knowing that her bond with the land was as strong as theirs, an actual physical longing that could even make her ill if denied. "All right, but be careful. And if you sense anything at all out of the ordinary, even a hint --"

"I'll be out of there immediately."

"*While* you're dialing the phone and the talkie."

Jenny laughed. "Of course."

She waved and started off, feeling his eyes watching her until she disappeared among the tree boles. She shook her head. Sometimes she wondered how so-called "normal" women handled being married to only one man. Damien was strong, confident, ambitious, but at times that translated into overbearing, domineering, and confrontational. Devlin, on the other hand, was carefree, outgoing, and humorous...which sometimes meant careless,

impulsive, and frivolous. If she lived with only one of them, it probably never would have worked; they would have driven her crazy. But together they complemented each other, each one's strengths conquering the other's weaknesses.

She deliberately pushed aside all thought and closed her eyes, opening her senses to the land. She dug the toes of her bare feet into the rich, leafy debris beneath the trees. Ever since the night her husbands had bound her, she'd been able to commune with nature in a way that was more than psychological. With her feet buried in the loam, her skin actually tingled with the marching of a thousand ants, felt the pressure of the soft pads and the prickle of claws as a cougar threaded its way cautiously between the trees.

Opening herself to the experience, Jen walked aimlessly, her body automatically avoiding obstacles. Her arms spread wide, she trailed her fingers over rough bark, listened to leaves gossip. Abruptly, the gnarled trunks disappeared from beneath her fingertips, and she felt the warmth of the sun and sensed open space all around her. The wind caressed her like a lover, and she breathed deeply of the fresh air, heavy with the scent of loam and the crisp promise of chill during the coming September night.

"Jenny."

A whisper shivered through her. She opened her eyes.

She stood in the middle of the clearing she could never find when actually looking for it, surrounded by the great, tall trees she still did not recognize, before an altar of stone. The same stone upon which her marriage to Damien and Devlin had been consecrated by the Goddess, and her bond with the land forged.

She dropped to her knees, bending her head, her dark braid draping her shoulder.

A chuckle. "There is no need for that, Daughter of Earth." The wind's caress brushed her cheek like gentle fingers, then lifted her chin.

The Goddess sat cross-legged upon the stone. Hair the deep, dark brown of the richest earth tumbled across shoulders the hue of honey. Jenny gazed upon her for a moment, then looked away, embarrassed as she realized Gaia was naked.

Another chuckle. "Look upon me, Daughter. Turn not away. See what I am, and what you will be. Someday."

Jenny let her gaze travel. The skin covering the Goddess's breasts bore faint patterns of green and yellow, like that of wild gourds. Her belly was a carpet of pale blue moss, her womanhood a patch of clover. Her thighs were tree boles and her calves intertwined canes of vine. Her toes sprouted mushrooms, her fingers flowers. Her hands were the color and texture of sand, her lower arms gray slate, her upper arms pink granite. From shoulders to hairline, she looked much like a human woman, save for the eyes, gray-blue seas in which Jenny could actually *see* waves crashing. So different, and yet the whole blended into something wonderful.

"You're beautiful," she breathed. "I never really saw you, that night. You were just a bright, woman-shaped light."

"Men are never allowed to see me this way."

"Then, thank you. It's an honor."

The Goddess smiled. "Yes. And a rite of passage."

"A rite of passage?"

Gaia patted the rock beneath her. "Did you think that all bonds were forged in this way?"

Wide-eyed, Jenny nodded. "Well...yes."

The Goddess cocked her head. "You were not raised in the Way?"

"Um, if by that, you mean raised as a weyr, then no. I'm only half-weyr, and my mother never felt it necessary to tell me. Since my father was human, she wanted to raise me as a human. I never knew what I was until I met my husbands." She tilted her head curiously. "How come you don't already know that?"

A deep laugh like the booming of surf resonated through the clearing. "I am Gaia. I know every seedling, every grain of sand, each blade of grass, and every breath of wind in which I reside. The fox and the cat, the jay and the hawk, the ant and the centipede, they are all mine. The animals and the land, I rule, but only within certain boundaries, and I cannot see into the mind of man unless invited."

"But I thought -- no, never mind."

"Speak, Daughter."

Jenny shrugged. "It's just that, since the night Damien and Devlin and I bonded, I've...well, I've often felt like you are... *with* me, somehow."

Gaia smiled. "Yes. You belong. The Mother's gift burns within you -- a seed only, for now, but I will teach you to bring it forth, to help it bear fruit. If only you wish it."

"I'm still confused. What does this have to do with that night?"

The Goddess frowned. "Your parent has much to answer for. Still, you are here, as anticipated."

"But you just said you don't really know anything about me. How did you know I was coming?"

"I did not know the Daughter would be you. I simply knew that soon one would come." She sighed, and a great wind whipped Jenny's hair about her face. "Briefly, then, I will explain the Way of the Wolf and the meaning of Gaia."

"It has always been thus, that man must accept the Mother in order to carry the flame of Her magic within their hearts. In times long past, every one of the races of man held this power. A bit of Her magic dwelt in all creatures, but only humans could acknowledge or deny, and by their acceptance, the flame burned in them strongest of all. But as humans grew

in knowledge, they turned away from the Mother, no longer seeking to live in harmony with the natural world, quenching the flame of that power which burned within them. No longer bound to the land, mankind ceased to consider it at all, and the world suffered, and She suffered.

“Yet there were those among men who had fierce hearts and remained sensitive to Her presence. The magic still lived in them, an ember that glowed like a beacon. These ones She called to Her, and gave them the power of transformation, and set them to guard and protect the wild places, and these passed the magic within them down through the ages. These are the weyr, the great wolves who defend the land.

“Yet this was not enough, for while they are powerful and natural creatures, they serve best as protectors, defenders. The magic in them is not as strong as that of yore and offers no sustenance. In order to thrive, the land needs one who nurtures and sustains, giving of their heart and soul, body and blood, and of the magic that lives within them, to enrich the land and those *of* the land. So our great Mother searched and saw that among the ranks of men, there remained rare souls in whom Her magic still burned as a bright and steady flame. She named these ‘Daughters of Earth’ -- Gaia -- and gathered them to her. Together with the weyr, they work to maintain Her against man’s depredations.”

Jenny wrinkled her brow. “I’m confused. The Mother is...who? Earth?”

“Yes. She is the world. She is every natural thing -- man and beast, soil and rock, leaf and flower. The planet as a whole.”

“But I don’t understand. If she is... Did she create us? If so, how could things get so out of hand? Can’t she -- I don’t know -- shrug, or something. Toss us off and start over, if we’re ruining her planet?”

The Goddess frowned. “Gaia did not *create* the world. She *is* the world. She simply became. Over time, Her body changed, and others became -- eukaryotes, prokaryotes, the great lizards, fish and birds and more. All of them, as they developed, carried Her magic within them. Then man became, and suddenly, here was a creature without Her flame. Yet he was seeking, always seeking. And so She offered the eternal blaze, and when mankind accepted, the magic burned within them brighter than ever before.

“But still they sought -- knowledge, power -- and in their continual seeking, turned away. The magic, and their love for Her, died within many of them.

“But She cannot destroy them. Will not. She is the Mother, the bringer of balance, and man is most precious to Her. She works for the day that all of mankind will once again belong.”

“So...I assume you’re trying to tell me I’m like you, one of those that still have the magic.”

Gaia nodded serenely.

“How do you know?”

“Our Mother called, and you answered. You found this glen, hidden from mortal eyes. You felt Her spirit, and you spoke to Her. Only your presence allowed the weyr entry into this sacred dell, and She allowed them to bind you here only because the strength of your thrice-joined love consecrated within this, a place of power, increased your bond with the land and the potency of Her magic within you ninefold, and She is in great need of a powerful agent among you.” She chuckled. “Blood is of the Way, but stone and earth are hers.

“Had your mother taught you, you would know that the Way binds through the sharing of the blood, during a full moon, by way of the bite. There would be no knife, no stone, no bowl, no consecration of the union by her Daughter. My presence here was commanded by the Mother. Her good earth mixed with the blood, and you drank of Her essence.”

Jenny remembered rich, dark soil raining into the hollow, mixing with the blood of their joining.

“She bade me reach out to you, and you opened yourself to me, as only a Daughter can. You became one with me, and so with Her, a Daughter come home. It is now my duty to guide you and teach you, as in time you will become like me.” She laughed as Jenny’s face contorted. “Do not fear. That moment is far into the future. She will wait until your husbands have returned to Her. She would not deprive you of a love so strong. You will have need of their love, their strength, in the trials to come.”

“Please don’t think badly of me. You are beautiful, but not in a way that my husbands would find appealing.”

The Goddess waved a hand in dismissal. “The question is, do you accept? Will you be the Mother’s agent?”

“Does all of this have anything to do with Jacob O’Connail? Earlier, I said to Damien that maybe we were meant to protect him, and I thought I sensed your presence, and I felt as though that was exactly what we’re supposed to do.”

Gaia nodded. “There is a battle looming, and Jacob will play his part, as will you all.” She sighed. “It is unfortunate that destruction so often hovers near, and paradise remains such a distant dream. Understand this: if Jacob O’Connail does not survive this trial, a time will come when the Mother is destroyed. This earth and everything on and within it will be consumed, and that dark day will happen in your mortal lifetime.”

Jenny’s voice squeaked when she spoke. “So. Save Jacob, save the world?” She touched her tummy, cradling her children protectively. “No pressure.”

“It is a little more complicated than that, but yes. That would be your first task.”

“And if I succeed?”

“Yet more tasks will be perceived, as paths into the future become sharper to our Mother. The farther She looks, the less true Her sight, yet each time we succeed at a task She

has set, there comes closer a day which She has discerned, when Gaia will span this earth, and the planet will be whole again. Unlike the threat of destruction, which is a constant danger, this promise of peace lies far into the future. Yet when that day comes, we will join with the Mother, and mankind will awaken once more to Her call. Children shall lay nestled amongst the lion's paws, men will hunt with the fox, and women weave alongside the spider. And this, too, you would witness, for though the path to that future is far and long, in that time and place you will *be* Gaia, and one with us."

Jenny shuddered. "I...I don't know. It's so much to take in."

"The way is there, but it remains to be seen which path each player will tread. Each of us has a choice. You *can* refuse.

"If, however, you wish to help, you must believe in the Mother, in Her power within you, and in the bond She has forged between us. You must accept me as the sister of your heart and open yourself to my presence and guidance."

A year ago, Jenny would have been convinced she was hallucinating, but now... She was married to a couple of weyrwolves, pregnant with their children, possibly adopting *another* weyrwolf child, attempting to save an insane weyr's life -- why *wouldn't* she believe that Earth was somehow alive and that magic, of a sort, was real?

And then she remembered something else. "Once, when I was twelve, we were camping. I was hiking along a gravel road, and a fawn walked out into the middle of the path. Beautiful. She stood there, and I stopped, just watching. Amazed.

"This car came, driving real slow around the curve. The guy inside, a teenager, saw the fawn and grinned. I thought he was like me, feeling blessed by the sight. But he said something to the guy with him and floored the accelerator, and the next thing I knew, they were speeding by me, laughing, and the fawn was lying in the gravel. Broken. Bloody. I ran over to her. I remember wanting so badly to be able to heal her. I thought...I thought I saw someone, a woman. She looked like an angel, and she asked me if...if I was willing to give of myself to make the fawn well.

"I said yes, and...I felt warm, all of the sudden. Hot. My hands burned. 'Touch her,' she said, and I did. It was like when Damien and Devlin change. Her bones knit. Her neck, it was broken, but her head twisted back around, her body healed. She scrambled up onto her legs and dashed off into the trees. I think I fainted. When I woke up, I was back under the trees myself. I thought I had dreamed the whole thing, except there was still blood on the gravel. I checked." She rubbed at the sudden flock of goose bumps on her arms. "I felt drained, but in a good way, you know what I mean? I never told anyone, and I'd actually forgotten about it, until now. It was Her, wasn't it? Or one of you. Even then."

The presence appeared astonished. "She rarely speaks to one untrained or acts through so young an agent. Truly, you are Hers." The apparition stared off into the distance, losing solidity, becoming almost transparent. "And yet, I sense that your choice is still to be made.

She feels you were *too* young to make such a decision binding. She makes the offer again. Will you accept?"

Jenny didn't quite fathom the idea that she could play a pivotal role in the world's future, but in the here and now, there were children, a best friend, and men who needed her, and the bond with nature and with the Goddess felt strong and right. "I do believe, and I accept your presence and guidance."

The Goddess smiled, her semblance abruptly disappearing from atop the stone and reappearing behind it, hovering cross-legged in the air a few feet above the ground.

Earth filled the hollow at the stone's center. Upon the rich brown loam rested a dark green seed. Jenny reached out and tucked the kernel into the moist soil. A green shoot sprang up, topped by a cluster of leaves that unfurled immediately, cupping a brilliant, white-hot flame.

Mother chose wisely. The Goddess spoke directly to her mind. *Welcome, sister.*

When Jenny had joined with Damien and Devlin at last, she had experienced the sensation of something slipping into place within her -- of a missing piece of her soul returning to its rightful place. Her stomach fluttered, and she felt again as though she'd regained a missing bit of herself, moving one step closer to becoming all that she was meant to be.

The Goddess frowned. Cocking her head, she listened to the wind. *Go now. Your husbands are anxious for your return.*

"Thank you." Jenny turned and strode to the edge of the clearing. She looked back. "When will I see you again?"

When I am needed, I will be with you.

Jenny nodded and stepped past the limit of the tree circle, glancing back once more.

The glade was gone, an impenetrable stand of close-set boles and twilight darkness taking its place. However, Jenny could sense the sacred circle just out of reach, like a ghost beyond the world she saw, waiting for her return.

Unavoidable Danger

A few hours later, Jenny watched Damien with wide eyes as he loaded his shotgun. “I thought the plan was to *catch* him.”

“It is, Jen.” He closed the box of ammo and checked the safety once more. “See? The safety’s on. I won’t use it unless it’s absolutely necessary, but plans have a nasty habit of not always working the way people intend them to.”

Jenny hugged herself, rubbing at arms that were suddenly freezing. “Please be careful. I-I don’t know what I’ll do if I lose either one of you.”

She followed him out onto the porch, where Dev stood waiting, holding a sack, the contents of which she had no desire to know. She supposed it was a lure for Jacob, and while she had no problem with the roles of predator and prey in the wild, it bothered her that they were going to trick him and then lock him up. She understood the necessity -- after all, it was her own suggestion -- but this rubbed completely against the grain of what she and her husbands stood for. The idea of confining another human being against his will, no matter the reason, made the hairs on her neck prickle uneasily.

“Lock the doors and stay inside.” Dev put an arm around her and brushed a kiss across her forehead. “No matter what.” It was a measure of how difficult they felt the task would be that *Devlin* was the one warning her rather than Damien.

He stepped away, and Damien rested his hands on her shoulders. He gazed deep into her eyes. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

He kissed her, a hungry kiss that made her heart ache with fear for him. “Don’t do anything rash,” she whispered. “Promise me.”

He chuckled. “Shouldn’t you be saying that to Dev?”

Normally, she would, but there was something in his eyes. She shook her head. "He's not the one I'm worried about."

"Don't worry." He kissed her again. "Everything's going to be all right. I promise."

She watched them disappear into the darkness and tried to draw comfort from the knowledge that neither of them had ever broken a promise.

Jenny sat in bed, holding her e-reader but unable to focus on a single word. Her body tingled with awareness, jumping at every sigh and creak the house made, every muted sound from the woods beyond.

A strangled howl pierced the night, a voice she recognized instantly. "Devlin!"

She scrambled out of bed and raced through the house. She fumbled with the lock for a moment, then flung open the front door and pounded down the porch. Running, barefoot and in her nightgown, she whispered to the Goddess. *Show me. Please, lead me there.*

She heard no answer, but felt a surge of energy and sensed a guiding presence. Despite her condition, she flew over the ground, drawing strength and speed from her weyr blood. Surefooted and fleet as the wolves she loved, she dodged scrub and ducked limbs, trees passing in a blur. Seconds later, she raced into a moonlit clearing and lurched to a stop before a frozen tableau that set her heart pounding.

A black wolf, massive even by weyr standards, straddled Devlin's inert body. Jenny choked back a sob. The weyr stiffened, ears twitching in her direction, but his eyes remained locked on Damien, who was raising the shotgun.

Oh, no. Without thinking, Jenny dashed over to stand between them. "Damien! Put it away."

He stared at her in horror. His gaze dropped to her rounded belly. He shook his head, tear tracks on his cheeks glinting in the moonlight. "You have to move, Jenny. Now."

Her heart ached, but she couldn't let him pull that trigger. "Trust me, Damien. Please."

He hesitated a moment longer, but finally flipped the safety back on and lowered the gun, the tense lines of his body screaming betrayal.

"Trust me," she whispered again and turned to face the wolf.

He growled, lips drawn back from enormous incisors.

Every instinct she had screamed at her to run. She'd thought Damien was big -- of course, she had only Devlin to compare him to -- but *this* wolf was noticeably larger.

But in truth, it wasn't his size that was so frightening. It was an instinctive understanding that, of every being present, perhaps even including her Gaian mentor, Jake was the most dangerous.

His eyes met hers. Wild, haunted, dark as midnight. Jenny struggled to keep from being drawn into their dark abyss.

She drew on her link with the Goddess and her fear for Devlin to give her strength. Slowly, she held out a trembling hand. "Jacob." Pleased that her voice came out firm and strong despite her fear, she took a small step toward him. "Jacob. I know who you are. I know what's happened." He huffed, his hot breath washing over her. Muscles bunched beneath his matted black fur. Jen swallowed hard and halted. "I know you're hurting, and I want to help. Please, change back to human form. Talk to me."

He shook his head roughly, looking for all the world like a dog trying to rid himself of an annoying fly.

Jenny swallowed nervously. "Jacob. We don't want to hurt you. Please believe me." He watched her, but she sensed his awareness was still firmly on Damien. "Damien," she said softly. "Please toss the gun away."

"Jen --"

"Damien, please!"

Tense seconds of waiting. Then, "I have to unload it. I don't want it going off by mistake." Snicks and rattling. A rustle, snap, and the thunk of the stock hitting earth far off to her right.

The next few seconds passed in slow motion for her. The wolf leapt. Jenny scrambled backward and tripped, landing on her back in rotting leaves. Damien screamed her name. Jacob's huge paws pressed into the loam to either side of her waist, straddling her as his head came down, his jaws open wide.

Jen ducked under his chin and threw her arms around his neck, plastering herself against his chest. He shook his head. Stepped back. One step, two. Jen got her feet beneath her and let him draw her upright as he moved. He shook again, but she held tight. "Jacob, please," she whispered into his coarse, tangled ruff. "I'm pregnant. Please don't hurt me."

He stopped, and his forelegs trembled. "Yes, I know," she whispered. "I know about your son. I'm here to help you. I promise." Finding her footing, she loosened her grip on his fur. "Change. Talk to me."

He jerked hard. She lost her hold, but remained standing. He shook his head again, dark eyes glinting dangerously in the moonlight. Her whole body trembled, but Jenny reached out and grabbed the hair behind his jaw, determined to get through to him. "Look at me, Jacob!"

He bared his teeth, breath frosting in the cool air. Her legs wavered, but she forced herself to speak, voice trembling. "You still have one son."

He leaned into her with a low, rumbling growl.

She tightened her grip, steeling her nerves *and* her tone. "Stop that."

The wolf jerked his head, eyes going wide. Jen pressed her advantage. "No more nonsense. Your son doesn't deserve this. There's no reason for you to die. No reason for him to die." He stared. She could see the disbelief in his eyes -- eyes now showing a hint of

human awareness. "I know. Everyone believes no weyr twin can survive his brother's death, but I don't. Sometimes it takes fresh eyes, a fresh mind, to see that beliefs are just that -- beliefs, not necessarily truth." She forced herself to meet his eyes, trying to see past the threatening dark to the spark of humanity gleaming in their depths. "Help me, Jacob. Help me prove them wrong. Help me save your son."

He stared at her for what seemed like hours, but could only have been seconds. She breathed in his warm exhalations, watched his pupils contract, the black abysses disappearing to reveal irises the color of chocolate, glazed with silver by the moonlight. He shuddered. She loosened her grip on his ruff, running her hands through the matted strands gently. "That's it. Come back, Jacob. Come back and let us help you."

He whimpered, settling back on his haunches. Bones shifted in the shoulder beneath her hand.

Jenny let go, backing up. The wolf shivered, joints cracking. Faster than she'd ever seen, he shifted. In moments, a naked man crouched before her, trembling, still on edge, still acutely aware of Damien, whom Jenny prayed would stay where he was.

"Jacob."

The man looked at her.

"I need to check my husband. May I?"

His brow furrowed. She pointed. "Behind you. Devlin."

He nodded, moving so that he could watch her and Damien both. She knelt beside Devlin, reached out to feel his neck for a pulse.

He caught her hand in his.

"Dev!"

He grinned weakly. "Got a knock on the head, but I'm okay. Been playing possum, trying to figure a way out." He reached up and cupped her cheek. "You did good, baby."

She glanced at Jacob, whose eyes darted nervously from her to Devlin to Damien and back. "We're not out of the woods yet," she murmured, surprising herself by being amused at the unintentional pun.

She squeezed his hand and stood. "Will you come with us, Jacob?"

"Wh-who are you?" His voice cracked, raspy from disuse.

"A friend. Someone who cares about you *and* your child." She held out her hand. Jacob winced, backing away. His mouth lengthened into a muzzle.

She froze. "Jacob?"

He shook his head. Moaned as his jaw shifted again to its human form. "I'm trying," he said. "I don't know how long --"

Jenny nodded and grabbed his outstretched hand. Resisting the impulse to run, she forced herself to walk slowly and calmly, leading Jacob from the clearing. Damien waited until they had passed, then hurried to Devlin's side and helped him up.

"I've got to find the shotgun. I can't risk teenagers or poachers coming across it."

His brother nodded.

"Don't let her out of your sight."

He nodded again and strode swiftly in Jenny's footsteps.

Ahead of him, their wife spoke in low tones, letting her instincts guide her back to the house. "Jacob, I'm Jenny. Jenny Blake."

"H-how do you know me?"

Jenny knew mentioning Tara or the baby at this delicate point might be dangerous. "Can we talk about that later?" He stopped abruptly, swinging her around to face him. "I *will* tell you, Jacob. I promise, but..." She decided to plunge in, to be honest. "I see it in your eyes. You're still too close to changing. If I say the wrong thing..." She caught both his hands in hers. "I promise you, we don't want to hurt you. I'll do everything in my power to keep you safe. To bring you back."

His eyes filled with tears. "Can you bring my brother back?"

Her own eyes misted. She didn't answer -- she couldn't. He shuddered and clenched his jaw. "Just...keep going," he barked.

She nodded and moved, swiftly now, dragging him behind her. She heard Devlin shadowing them, but staying out of sight. Bless him. Moments later, she spotted the golden glow of lamplit windows. "Almost there," she urged.

A couple of minutes later, they stepped onto the gravel path that led from the back of the house to the stable, potting shed, and garage. Knowing it was necessary, but still reluctant, she led her charge to the stable. The keys hung on a hook just outside the double doors. She held Jacob's right hand tight in her left as she beckoned Devlin out of the shadows. Silently he joined them, lifting the keys and unlocking the sturdy padlocks holding three thick wooden bars in place. He lifted the bars aside and pushed the doors open, then moved back as Jenny and Jacob stepped inside.

Jenny flipped a switch just inside the door. They faced a spacious stall constructed of thick, sturdy timbers. The gate stood open, revealing a large iron ring bracketed to a huge wooden post sunk into the dirt floor near the back of the stall. Hanging from the ring were three heavy chains. Two were short chains capped with manacles. The third was longer, and looped at the far end like a gigantic choke chain. Jenny did choke when she saw it. She turned to Devlin. "Oh, Dev. No."

But Jacob was nodding. He tugged at her. "I'm fighting, but it's hard." He grunted. She could hear the strain in his voice, feel the tension as his fingers clenched on her hand. "Do it now."

She looked at Devlin, but Jacob shook his head, eyes narrowing. “No. You do it.”

Jenny stepped forward, breathing in short, sharp gasps. She hated this. *Hated it.*

Trembling, she knelt and fastened the manacles around his ankles. “H-hurry,” Jacob gritted through clenched teeth. He shuddered, bones shifting beneath his skin. She picked up the loop with numb fingers and stood. With a deep breath, she guided the loop over his head, settling the chain gently around his neck, then stepped back.

Again, he shifted so quickly she could hardly believe it. One moment, he was a human male. A blink, and a huge wolf lunged at her, yelping as the chains brought him up short.

Jenny backed out of the stall, and Devlin shut the gate as she moved out of the way. She wrapped her arms around herself, staring as Jacob snarled and snapped, claws scrabbling at the hard-packed earth.

Devlin put an arm around her, gently turning her away. She started sobbing, and he sighed. “Oh, honey. You didn’t think it would be easy, did you?” He ran his fingers through her hair as he guided her outside the stable. He pushed her out of Jacob’s line of sight, into Damien’s arms. Damien held her while Dev replaced the wooden bars and secured the padlocks.

Uncomfortable Admission

Jenny took a quick shower and changed into a clean nightgown, then sat on the bed waiting for her husbands to finish cleaning up. Rubbing her belly, she closed her eyes, concentrating her senses on the two lives within. She sensed their hearts beating steadily -- rapid, but not too rapid. Relieved, she sighed. The activities and tension of this night had not adversely affected her boys.

When Damien and Devlin climbed into the bed, she propped herself up on her pillows. "I know he agreed to it, but I really hated locking him up like that."

"We had to, Jen." Dev sighed. "It was a miracle you were able to get through to him out there. I'm surprised he had as much control as he did." He glanced at his brother.

"I agree." Damien stared into the distance thoughtfully. "I guess he really does want help."

"So, you do think it's possible? To save him?"

Damien shrugged. "I don't know what to think anymore. This is unfamiliar territory." He glanced at her, then wrapped his arms around her shoulders and shuddered. "I thought he was going to kill you."

Jen clung to him, then pulled away and reached out a hand to Devlin. "And *I* thought we'd lost *you*."

His hand closed on hers, gripping tightly. He grinned, but the smile didn't reach his eyes. "You know me. Tough as nails," he quipped, but Jen identified an unaccustomed edge to his voice.

"I'm puzzled." She traced a vine pattern stitched into the quilt. "Why weren't you in your weyr forms?"

The brothers exchanged a glance. Devlin looked away, clearly uncomfortable.

Jen looked from one to the other. "What? What is it?"

Dev kept his mouth shut, but gave his brother a hard look. Air exploded from Damien in a forceful grunt. "All right. Fine." His mouth twisted as though he tasted something sour. He collapsed onto his back and stared at the ceiling. "You know how packs work, right?"

"Yes. Well, sort of." A sigh of exasperation escaped her. "Actually, we've never talked much about what it means to be weyr. You guys told me a little, when we were in New York, but whenever I've brought it up again, you've kind of brushed me off. And my mom -- well, she seems to think I'll just discover everything I need to know as I go along."

"Well, you've probably at least heard that in any pack, there's a very particular hierarchy. Males and females vie for position, according to strength, health, ability to provide, etc."

"That much I know. I understand that, for our little pack, you're the alpha."

"Okay. So now we have a new male in the pack, however briefly. At some point, dominance has to be established." He cleared his throat, hesitating, and she knew that whatever he was about to say, he was dragging it out with extreme reluctance. "In a rogue, that instinct would be even stronger -- every reaction is amplified. I knew from signs we discovered yesterday that he was big and unusually powerful. With his size and the kind of additional strength an agitated mental state imparts, we thought..." He growled and rubbed at the stubble on his chin. "Hell. What I'm trying to say is that if the three of us were to meet in weyr form, Jacob would certainly challenge for alpha rights. We couldn't take the chance of having a rogue weyr obtain dominance of our pack. I knew staying in human form would dampen his urge to challenge, so that's what we did."

Jenny started as the true meaning behind his words sank in. "You mean, you think he might actually win?"

Damien grimaced, his jaw tightening. He was clearly appalled at having to admit it, but began ticking off points on his fingers. "As a weyr, he's a hell of a lot bigger than I am. Thinner, yeah, but all muscle. Plus, as a rogue, he'd feel he has absolutely nothing to lose. He figures he has nothing to live for anyway, so he'll fight to the death. And he has scars. When a weyr has scars, they've been in the kind of situations even a shapeshifter doesn't normally survive, which means that even in his normal state of mind, odds are he's a better fighter than I am."

Devlin was nodding. "Yeah. I talked to Eoin today. According to him, the O'Connails were a powerful pack in Ireland, but in the last decade, someone's been killing them off. Jacob and Johnathan were the last. Apparently, something really nasty called the Dark Guard are involved. Eoin seemed amazed, but very pleased, that they were still alive." He looked sheepish. "I didn't tell him about the one brother dying. I figured it might be best to keep what we're trying to do under wraps."

“Good idea, Dev. Anyway, bottom line is that it’s better for us to remain human around him until he’s back on track. That doesn’t mean we won’t face a dominance challenge at some point, but that we’ll be able to put it off until he’s in a more rational state.”

Dev rubbed the back of his head. “You know, for a rogue, he’s pretty damn clever.”

Jenny raised her eyebrows questioningly.

“Rogues generally don’t have a lot of control. Can’t think straight.” He shrugged. “This guy, though, we watched him cross that clearing and disappear into the underbrush on the opposite side, and then it sounded like he kept on heading west. Didn’t it?” He glanced at Damien, who nodded. “I jumped the gun, got ahead of Damien, and was halfway across the clearing when he sprang on me. He came out of nowhere, like he’d never actually left, and I didn’t hear or smell a thing. I can’t figure out how he did it.” He rubbed at the back of his head. “He tossed me like a rag doll. When I landed, it felt like my head exploded.” He looked sheepish. “You heard me scream, didn’t you?”

Jen nodded, shivering as she remembered his agonized howl.

“I went woozy. Then I heard you, and I decided to play unconscious until I could figure out what to do.”

Jenny’s hands were in his hair, tugging his head this way and that, surveying the damage. “You’ve got a good goose-egg, but the skin isn’t broken.”

“Thank the Goddess. I’m not sure what would have happened if he’d scented blood.”

Jenny pictured the dark wolf looming over him and shuddered. “I don’t want to think about that.”

Damien grunted. “But we have to. I know you’re going to try and reason with him.” He raised a quelling hand to forestall any comments as she opened her mouth. “That’s fine. I’ve resigned myself to the fact that the two of you really want this.” He shrugged. “I’ll be honest -- I want to know if it will work, too. It would be great news for weyr, to know that there’s a way for twins to survive the pining. But I definitely don’t want you anywhere near him without one of us with you. Unfortunately, that someone can’t be me. Not yet.”

“But why? He’s already seen you, and you just said that staying in human form keeps him from making the challenge.”

Damien shook his head. “That doesn’t stop him completely, just lessens the urge somewhat. Yes, he’s already seen me, and I was holding a gun on him. He knows I’m the greatest threat here -- I’m the alpha to beat in this pack. Even though his stay’s only temporary, it’s instinct to ascertain rank. If I’m in a room with him, as human or weyr, the urge to determine rank is going to overwhelm him at some point.”

Jenny got it. “But he knows Devlin’s no threat as a weyr, and as a human he’ll be even less so.” She gasped and covered her mouth. “I’m sorry, Dev. I didn’t mean --”

“Hey, no problem.” Dev grinned. “I’m a lover, not a fighter.”

“So,” Damien continued, “for now, you only see the rogue when Devlin can be right there with you. Agreed?”

“Agreed.”

Damien sighed, settling back against the bed. Jenny stretched out beside him. His body was rock hard against hers. He’d hated admitting that Jacob was a stronger wolf than he, at least temporarily, and the strain showed in every taut muscle of his naked body. She smoothed his hair back from his forehead. “Damien, thank you for this.”

He looked exhausted. “I do think it’s worth a try. I really do. I just wish it didn’t have to be *now*.” His hand stroked her belly. “Didn’t have to be *you*.”

“I know.” She ran her hands softly across his neck and over his shoulders. He sighed, closing his eyes. She scratched his arms lightly with the tips of her nails. “It will be all right. You’ll see.” Finding the tautness at the base of his neck, she kneaded gently but firmly and felt the muscles relax. His breath came slower, deeper.

Dev pulled a blanket up from where it was folded at the end of the bed, since they were all lying on top of the actual bedspread, and draped it across the three of them, spooning up against Jenny. She laid her head on Damien’s chest and twined her fingers with Devlin’s where they rested on her hip. Within minutes, they were all fast asleep.

Unanticipated Attraction

The phone rang early the next morning. “That was Marshall,” Damien announced. “Dan Poquiz is on board as director for the next film and has sent in a contract. That land we were looking at for the bamboo nursery is suitable *and* available, and Reyerson has verbally agreed to head the photoelectric paint project. Marshall needs at least one of us to come into town and iron out the contract modifications Poquiz requested, sign off on the land purchase, and help draw up a contract offer for Reyerson.”

Devlin finished downing his orange juice and set the glass on the counter. “I wouldn’t be comfortable leaving Jen here alone with him.” He nodded toward the back window.

Damien nodded. “Good, that’s what I thought. But there are some things that have to be decided today, so one of us is going to have to go.”

“You go.” Dev grinned rakishly. “You’ve got a better head for business anyway.”

“Not when it comes to the film projects,” Damien observed wryly.

Dev laughed. “Yeah, but I’ve done the hard part -- picked the script and the director. Now that Dan’s actually on board, you’re better at fine-tuning the contract than I am.”

“As long as you’re okay with it.”

“Hey, I appreciate the fact that you treat me as an equal partner, but we both know it’s more like seventy-thirty when it comes to management and the numbers game, and I’m not the seventy. I’m a hands-on guy. I like the doing more than the prep work.”

“Hey, you do the PR thing, too. Half our projects wouldn’t get off the ground if it wasn’t for the way you get along with people.”

“True. That’s why we make such a good team.” Dev grinned wickedly. “With my looks and your brains, we’re unbeatable.”

Damien mock-punched his brother for the “looks” crack, then glanced at his watch. “It’s already nine. I’d better hit the road.” He leaned down and kissed Jen’s forehead. “See you later, babe.” He frowned. “Maybe you should wait until I’m back to try and talk to the rogue.”

Jenny sighed. “He has a name, Damien. It’s Jacob. We can’t keep treating him like an animal if we want him to act more human.”

“Sorry.” His eyes searched her face. He sighed. “You’re not going to put this off, are you?”

“Probably not.”

“At least promise me you’ll be careful.”

She hugged him. “Of course I will.”

After he left, she pulled on a pair of maternity jeans and a comfy shirt, then searched out Dev. He was in their office, checking e-mail. “Hey, I got some more info from Eoin. Newspaper articles and stuff on the O’Connails. Looks like he’s right -- someone really has it in for them. It started about twelve years ago. During the next six years, nineteen people died. The last death was almost six years ago, though. Seems like the brothers were able to escape the heat for a while.”

Jen chewed at her lip thoughtfully. “I wonder if that’s when they came to the States.”

“I don’t know. I could check, though.”

“Actually, I wanted to go out and see him. Do you mind?”

“Already?”

“I doubt there’s anything to be gained by putting it off. Sitting in shackles without human contact isn’t exactly conducive to taming the beast, is it?”

“I guess you’re right.” Dev shut down the computer and followed her outside.

As they walked down the gravel path, Jen had a thought. “Shit! I didn’t even think about food and water.” She turned to head back to the house.

Dev held out an arm to block her. “Already done. I gave him water and...other sustenance earlier this morning.” At her questioning glance, he added, “He was still in weyr mode.”

“Oh.” Somehow, she’d known that would be the case, but she was disappointed anyway. *Have no fear.*

Gaia? Jen sensed, rather than heard, an affirmative response. *Couldn’t you...I don’t know, wave your hand and make him right again?*

The presence exuded humor. *I have tried to explain. We are not a god or goddess in the sense that humans understand the word. We do not control. We are aware of certain things and can influence the course of events by bringing alternatives to the attention of willing agents, but the paths are yours to choose and yours to walk. You must do this yourself.*

Jen sighed. *That's all right. I had a feeling it couldn't be that easy.* Again, she was disappointed, but the Goddess's supportive sympathy did loan her a bit of confidence.

She waited while Dev cleared the bars and opened the stable doors. Taking a deep, fortifying breath, she walked in.

The sturdy wooden gate and front half-wall came up to just below her breasts. Jacob, in wolf form, sat in the middle of the stall, eyes wary, watching her. Jen took another deep breath to steady her nerves. "Jacob. Do you remember me?"

For a moment, he just stared, but then he lowered his head once, which she took as a yes. "Would...would it be all right if I came in?" Her voice shook a little, but wasn't too bad. She congratulated herself.

Dev opened his mouth to protest, but she cut him off. "If we keep treating him like a wild animal, how can we expect him to act any differently? He may have to put up with the chain for now, for our safety and his, but in every other way we need to treat him as a person."

Dev grudgingly agreed. "All right, I guess."

She turned back to Jacob. "I'm sorry, Jacob. I didn't see your answer. May I come in?"

He nodded his head again.

"Dev, could you bring that chair for me?" She pointed to a lawn chair leaning up against the wall, then unlatched the gate and pulled it open. Dev carried in the chair. Jen scanned the stall and saw that the chain's length was such that Jacob couldn't reach the half-wall and gate or either of the side walls or front corners. "Put it in that front left corner for me." She actually thought she needed to be closer, but she couldn't justify taking such a risk until she had a better idea how things were going to go. For now, she'd take it easy.

She sat in the chair. Devlin squatted in the opposite corner, eyes sharp, senses primed.

"I'm a friend of Tara's, Jacob. That's how I knew about...about your brother and the baby."

He paced back and forth at the end of the chains, agitated, but his pupils were still normal, undilated. "Jacob, do you think you could change for me? I'd like to talk to you, and it would be nice if you could talk back."

Even in weyr form, he definitely appeared calmer this morning, and she thought she caught a glimpse of the man from the night before in the dark, intelligent eyes. He glanced at Devlin and huffed.

Jenny thought for a moment. "You don't want to change with him here?" He nodded.

She guessed she could understand. Last night, they had tried to trap him, and Damien had held a gun on him. He'd be weak and disoriented briefly after the change, and if Devlin were to transform and jump him, maybe he *could* take Jacob.

"Dev, do you think you could step outside?" She knew he was going to protest, and he didn't disappoint her.

"I don't think that's a good idea, Jen."

"He'll be vulnerable, so I don't think it's too much to ask."

"So will you."

Jen sighed. "Dev, please. I can't reason with him if he won't change."

From his clenched fists, she could see the internal battle he was fighting. After a moment, he growled, "*Damn* it, Jen." But he got up. "I'll be right outside that door." He speared Jacob with his gaze. "*Right* outside."

No response from Jacob. Dev turned and loped out, but she could hear him just outside the stable, muttering under his breath.

"Well?" She raised her eyebrows.

The wolf hesitated.

"Please, Jacob."

Once again, the change was too fast for her to follow. Hell, he was smooth. She wondered if he'd always been able to do it so fluidly, or if his expertise was a product of his state of mind.

She waited while Jacob crouched in the dust, allowing the disorientation to pass. The chain had settled across his shoulders. It took her a moment to realize that as a human, he could simply lift the chain off.

He looked up and caught her staring. He glanced down and shrugged. "Yeah, when I'm human I could take it off, but since I can't do anything about the ankle manacles, what's the point? Besides..." He met her gaze. "...I don't like being this way. It's not something I chose." His tone was bitter.

Jen hesitated, wondering if she should really say what she felt. "I...I know this will sound awful, but I think you did."

He sprang up, glaring. "What the hell?"

She held out her hands in a calming gesture. "I know, I almost didn't say it, because it seems cruel. But think about it." She could feel him, the heat radiating from his body despite the bit of distance between them. This wasn't uncommon with weyrs -- their body temperature ran higher than a normal human's. His scent, too, filled her nostrils. A rich musk. Exotic, very male, and strangely exciting. She experienced a sudden, animal urge to run her tongue across his abdomen, to taste his sweat.

What am I thinking? She collected her thoughts and plunged on. "When did your brother die?"

Jacob closed his eyes, hands clenched.

"I'm sorry." Jen leaned forward. "I'm not doing this very well, I know. But it's an important question."

After a moment, his fists relaxed, and he reached up to rub at his eyelids. "June."

Three months earlier. And Tara had lost her baby in July, so the death of the twin had *not* coincided with the death of Jacob's brother. She wished she knew if that was significant.

"When he died, how did you feel?"

He snorted. "You've *got* to be kidding!"

"Look, I'm not a psychologist, but I *am* trying! I'm sure you were devastated. What I'm trying to ask is, what did you do? Did you...I don't know what to call it. 'Rogue out'? Did you...lose yourself immediately? Or did it happen gradually?"

"Oh." He sat back on his haunches, elbows resting on his knees, hands dangling between his legs. "No. I-I ran. Found what I thought was a safe place to bury him. Someplace they wouldn't find him."

"The Dark Guard?"

"You know about them?"

Jenny shook her head. "Not really. Dev -- he's the one outside, one of my husbands -- he has friends in Ireland. They sent him some information on you, and he mentioned that name. But I don't want to talk about them right now. That can wait. Let's talk about you. Okay?"

He nodded.

"So, you buried him..." she prompted when he seemed to be lost in thought.

"Oh. Yes. I buried him. And then I ditched the car, got another one. Spent a couple of months laying false trails. Then I went to ground. Slowly worked my way up here, mostly at night, in wolf form."

He noticed her eyes widen and shook his head. "Not like I was last night. Normal weyr stuff. It's harder for them to track us as weyr. Nature hides her own. Anyway, I took my time, spent another month coming up here in a roundabout way. I shook them, but I don't know how long it will last. Thank the Goddess no one but us ever knew about Tara.

"Then I found her." His face contorted. "The baby --"

The pain of loss emanated from him in waves. Without thinking, Jen slipped out of her chair and onto her knees in an instant, clasping his hands in hers. "I know, Jacob. I know it hurts."

He looked into her eyes, disbelief, sorrow, and pain mingling in his own. He shuddered, and she felt a subtle rippling in his hands. Her heart missed a beat, but she held on. "Stay with me, Jacob." She leaned in, not flinching from his agonized gaze. "I know you can do this. You're strong. You survived your brother's death. You did. And you can survive this."

He started shaking his head, but she let go of his fingers and clasped his head between her hands, tugging his hair as she had the night before, so that he had to face her.

And just as then, his hot breath washed over her. She breathed in the warm, moist air, thick with his scent. Jacob inhaled, and she breathed out, returning the breath to him.

Warmth flooded her body. Their eyes locked. He brought a hand up, caught a strand of her hair between his fingers, and tugged her close.

Their lips met, his burning like fire. Jen gasped and broke away.

"I-I'm sorry." He tugged a hand through his shaggy, tangled curls. "It's-it's been a while since...any...close human contact. I...it won't happen again."

Jen felt a pang of disappointment at his promise. The ghost of his lips lingered against hers, her body still flushed with heat. *Oh, Goddess. What am I doing?*

She brushed her hair back with shaking hands. "It's all right. I...I understand." She smiled weakly, trying to defuse the situation. "At least you didn't change."

He barked a laugh. "Yeah. There *is* that."

But he was looking at her now. Really seeing her, his chocolate eyes assessing her with a new interest.

Her senses tingled. A rush of his musky scent permeated the air, laden with desire.

Jenny's body responded. Her nipples swelled. Moisture gathered between her legs as her pussy throbbed.

She took a step back. Jacob flowed toward her with animal grace. She tried not to look, but she couldn't keep her eyes from settling on his full, ripe cock. Good Goddess. It had to be eight inches long. She'd thought Damien's was huge, but... She licked her lips.

Jacob gripped her shoulders. She glanced up, and their gazes locked. His eyes, like dark chocolate, pulled her in, daring her to take a bite --

"Jen? You okay in there?"

She jerked her shoulders from Jacob's grasp and scrambled backward, sitting down hard in the chair. It took her a second to find her voice.

"Jen?"

She raised her head, peering over the half-wall. "I'm fine, Dev. Could you, um, could you bring Jacob some clothes, please? A pair of pants, at least?"

"Can't it wait?"

"Actually..." Her gaze flitted, looking everywhere but into Jacob's eyes, and finally settled on the trough against the back wall. "We could fill the trough," she offered. "Let you bathe and change. Into clothes, that is."

"That sounds good." His voice was thick, whether from disuse or desire, she wasn't sure.

She stood and let herself out, still avoiding his gaze as she latched the gate behind her. "We'll be back in a minute."

She caught his nod from the corner of her eyes and fled from the barn, feeling his gaze hot on her back as she slipped out the door.

"What's the plan?" Damien followed her up the path.

"I'll go grab some clothes and soap. If you could fill the trough, he'd like to take a bath."

He raised his eyebrows. "Huh. That's progress, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is." Far from sounding elated, which she should be, her voice came out worried, and she mentally kicked herself for it.

Sure enough, Devlin stepped in front of her and grabbed hold of her upper arms. "Everything all right, Jen?"

"Yes." She met his stare and spoke with what she hoped was conviction. "I just hope I'm doing the right thing."

"Of course you are." He hugged her. "Come on, Jen. Barring last night's fiasco, this is going great so far."

"Yeah, great!" she agreed with false cheer. "I'd better grab that stuff. Can you get busy on the water?"

"Sure thing."

Jenny escaped into the house, hurrying into their bedroom. She flicked a switch and opened the walk-in closet. Stepping inside, she shut the door behind her and slid to the floor. "What the hell am I doing?" She tried to speak to the Goddess, but all was quiet. No help there. Great. Just great.

"I'm happy. Well and truly happy," she whispered, pushing herself to her feet and grabbing a pair of jeans from Damien's shelf. "I love them. I truly love them." *So what was I doing in there?*

She held the pants up and eyed them critically. They'd be short. Damien was five foot eleven, taller than her by about six inches, but Jacob had to be at least six-two, six-three. She shook the pants in frustration. "Why am I even worrying about it? What a stupid thing to worry about."

She turned and pulled open a drawer, rummaging through the guys' tees. *Of course, that's not really what you're worrying about, is it?*

"Oh, shut up!" she told herself. "It was one of those doctor-patient type moments." She grabbed a shirt at random and shoved the drawer shut. "Yeah. That's it. Just...getting too close. Sympathizing too much." She tilted her head, half-convinced it was true. "He's very distraught, all his emotions just under the skin, waiting to pop up at inconvenient times."

Of course, that didn't explain why she'd responded.

She pushed the thought away and strode out of the room. She grabbed a bar of soap and a towel from under the bathroom sink and headed back to the stable.

Devlin had filled the trough and was waiting outside. He brandished a pair of scissors and a brush. "I brought these. Thought he might want to use them."

Jenny frowned. "Maybe not the scissors, not just yet." Jacob seemed very reasonable today, but her own emotions were in turmoil. Could he be manipulating her? Trying to get close so she would set him free?

"I didn't even think about the scissors being, you know, a weapon." He shook his head. "Some guard dog I turned out to be, huh?"

Jenny ruffled his hair, kissing his cheek. "Don't say that. You're wonderful."

He put his arms around her, and she relaxed in his warm embrace.

"Hello? Anyone out there?"

"Oh!" Jenny pushed away and frowned down at the stuff in her hands. "I'd better take these in to him. No, wait." She thrust the bundle into Devlin's arms. "You take them in." She snagged the scissors. "Minus these."

She went back to the house and put up the scissors, then went outside and wandered in the herb garden just south of the stable until Devlin called her name. "Hey, you can come in now. He's decent!"

"I certainly hope so," she muttered under her breath, but she wasn't talking about his appearance.

She toyed with the idea of quitting for the day, but was afraid Jacob would think she was giving up on him and lose whatever ground he might have gained. It wasn't his fault she'd responded the way she had. She couldn't punish him for her own failings.

Steeling herself, she strode into the stable quickly and opened the gate. Afraid she'd balk if she faced him too soon, she didn't look up until she'd latched herself in.

Even noticeably underweight, the man was downright gorgeous, the epitome of tall, dark, and handsome. His eyes -- she avoided his gaze, remembering how dangerous those rich chocolate pools could be. His hair, a dark brown just shy of black, spread in tousled curls across broad shoulders. The tee she'd brought was too short for him, exposing a narrow patch of tan, olive-toned six-pack just above the waistband of the jeans, which were a little loose and riding low.

She averted her eyes as she realized simultaneously that he was still erect beneath the denim and that she'd forgotten to grab him a pair of briefs.

She walked over to the chair, letting her loose hair hide her flushed face. As she sat, she took a deep breath, schooled her expression to what she hoped would appear concerned but neutral, and faced him again.

Jacob backed up and sat down, balancing himself on the edge of the water trough. He'd pulled the plug, and liquid gurgled through the pipe that exited through the back wall into the homemade water filtration unit Devlin had built out back, which made the water safe for them to use to irrigate their garden.

Dust motes danced in slices of sunlight that slipped in between the timbers. Jen's nose tickled, and she sneezed.

"Bless you," Jacob murmured.

"Thanks."

"No, really. Bless you for wanting to help me." He watched her from beneath long lashes, his expression thoughtful, but kept his distance, for which she was grateful.

"How do you feel? Should we go on?"

He nodded. "I think so. I'm feeling...not great, but more normal. I'm just afraid it'll turn out to be temporary."

"You're stronger than you think."

His eyes met hers. "How can you be so sure?"

She wanted desperately to reach out, to feel his skin against hers. Jen swallowed hard, ignoring the question. "Okay. So, it wasn't until you found out about the baby that you...you know."

Jacob grimaced and stood up, pacing back and forth beside the trough. "What really kept me going the last three months was the promise I made to Johnathan."

"Promise?"

"His last request. Protect our sons. I promised him."

Things were beginning to fall into place for Jenny now. "So you spent a couple of months protecting them the best way you knew how -- losing your adversaries?"

He nodded.

"And then came to find Tara. To help her raise them. And continuing to confuse your trail so you could be sure they hadn't followed you."

He nodded again.

"I don't know what happened to the baby, Jacob, but I know it wasn't your fault."

"I know that." His face contorted. "It's not..." He rubbed his face in his hands. "I guess I felt like, as long as the babies were alive, there was still a piece of Johnathan. Here with me, you know what I mean? When I found out one of the babies was gone --" He shook his head, breathing fast and shallow, fists clenched.

"Jacob." Jenny longed to go to him, but forced herself stay put. "Please don't change. We just got you dressed."

For a moment, his eyes narrowed and he glared at her. Maybe humor hadn't been the best tack to take to try and calm him. Then he laughed. A wild, aching kind of laugh, but it seemed to settle him down. "Fair enough."

"I-I'm sorry." She ran a hand through her hair. "I don't know what the hell I'm doing. I have no idea why I imagined I could do this."

"Hey, don't give up on me." Jacob stepped forward, his hands half-reaching for her.

She almost went to him. The strength of her desire to do exactly that scared her. She tightened her fingers on the arms of the chair, jaw clenched.

He noticed. Frowning, he let his hands drop to his sides. "I know I keep getting upset, and you want to keep me lucid so I can get through this." He took a deep breath, let it out. "I can do it." His voice dropped to a whisper. "With your help."

Jenny's heart ached for him, but still she gripped the chair arms. *I will not go to him.* "You know, Jacob, there is still a piece of Johnathan left on this earth." She raised a hand to stall his protest. "I know you think that because he died and the baby...well, I know you think they're related. But the two events happened at different times." She shook her head. "Goddess. I'm probably the worst person in the world to talk to, because I wasn't raised weyr. I don't really know how everything works. But don't you think there's some of you in both the babies?"

Jacob frowned. "I...yes, I...I'm sure there is." He paused thoughtfully. "It was just such a shock, I didn't stop to think."

The room wavered, and Jenny put a hand to her forehead.

"Are you okay?" Jacob walked to the limit of his chains and squatted.

She was glad to see he had taken off the neck chain and was only using the leg shackles. It made her feel better about the situation, however little sense that made.

She hadn't answered, and his expression of concern deepened. "Jen? Are you okay? You went pale all of the sudden."

She hugged her abdomen, fighting off another woozy spell. *Goddess, is something wrong with the babies?*

Her stomach rumbled, and she breathed a sigh of relief. Of course. She hadn't eaten lunch yet. She glanced at her watch -- nearly two o'clock. "Would you mind if we stopped now? I haven't eaten yet."

"Definitely, go." He tilted his head and smiled a little. "Those babies need feeding."

She smiled back, then called Devlin in. He helped her up from the chair and walked her back to the house.

"How'd it go?"

"Well, he's still human." Jen dropped tiredly into a kitchen chair. Devlin grabbed a plate and fixed her a sandwich.

He set it before her, and she took a huge bite. "Mmmm." Turkey, lettuce, and lots of onion, with just a dash of pepper and salt, some mayo and a couple of sprinkles of vinegar and oil. Her favorite, and she wolfed it down in a matter of seconds. "That hits the spot. I was starving."

He moved behind her and started rubbing her shoulders. "Are you sure you're up to this, babe?" He pressed his thumbs into the hollow beneath her shoulder blades. "Collin and Cale are due next week. Are you sure this isn't too much stress for you?"

Jen leaned into his ministrations. “Mmm. Right there. No, I’d be even more stressed if I knew he was still out there. If I felt like we weren’t doing everything we could to make sure he and Tara’s baby are all right.”

“Have you talked to him about the adoption?”

She shook her head. “I think that’s too much for him to take in right now. To be honest, if I can bring him back like I thought, I don’t believe he’ll be willing to give up custody. And I guess that’s fine, as long as he’s back to normal.” She sighed. “That’s an issue that will have to wait.”

“What about this Dark Guard? Are they going to come up here making trouble?”

“I don’t know.” She bowed her head and rubbed at her temples. “I don’t know. We’re just going to have to play this one by ear.”

His hands glided past her neck, slipping beneath her shirt and bra. Jen smiled. “Dev, what are you doing?”

He caught a chair leg with one foot and swung her around to face him. “I’m thirsty.” He grinned, pushing her loose top with its oversized neck down past her shoulders and beneath her bra, exposing her breasts and trapping her arms against her sides. “I think some warm milk might help.”

Jen giggled as he unfastened the flaps to the maternity bra she was wearing, revealing her plump globes and the red-purple nipples that were tightening as he watched. “I know you’re tired. You just sit there, baby. I’ll do all the work,” he promised.

His mouth closed on her left nipple. Still horny from the encounter with Jacob, she responded immediately, moaning and parting her legs eagerly. Heat rippled from her nipple to deep inside her pussy.

Dev brought a hand up, rubbing her clit through her jeans. Jen trembled and sighed, bucking her hips just a little.

His other hand came up, wrapping around her breast, milking. She felt that tingling sensation of release that she knew from her baby books was called “letdown,” and Dev groaned, sucking in earnest as her breasts began to leak.

Jen pushed him back and stood, tugging off her shirt and bra, pushing down her jeans. She turned her back to the table and raised her arms. As Dev lifted her to the tabletop, she grabbed his hair and pulled him in for a deep, hungry kiss. His fingers found her pussy, dancing just inside the rim. She envisioned Jacob’s hot lips pressed to hers again, imagined *his* fingers sliding into her pussy. Her muscles clenched around Dev’s fingers, and she gasped, tightening her grip on his hair, pressing her rounded belly against the rigid cock trapped inside his shorts.

He grabbed her hands and pulled them down, hanging on to them while his mouth traveled her jawline, nipped her neck. He planted tiny kisses across the curve of her breast, then nibbled the tip.

Jen gasped, arching. Dev grinned. Drops of liquid squeezed from her nipple, dripping onto the curve of her belly, trickling down into her bush. Dev's tongue traced the meandering route.

Moaning, Jen spread her legs wide, gasping repeatedly, her clit tingling with each lap of his tongue. "Devlin," she breathed.

His mouth found her clit. He pinched it softly with his lips. "Oh, Goddess." His tongue wriggled, gliding down. Jen waited breathlessly. "Oh, yes!" She dug her nails into the backs of his hands as his tongue slid inside her weeping slit. "Goddess, yes," she sobbed.

He freed his hands and pushed her legs wide, forcing his tongue deeper and deeper. Jen trembled, pussy clenching. "Dev, yes!"

Sucking and slurping. Teeth nibbling her sensitive tissues. "Oh, Dev, Dev. Yes. Yes!" Jen's hands clenched the edges of the table. She arched, screaming, hips bucking as she came.

When it was over, she collapsed onto the tabletop, panting. Dev wrapped an arm around her, pulling her up into his embrace. "I love you, Jenny."

To her horror, she started crying. "I...I l-love you, t-too."

"Baby? What's wrong?"

"Nothing. It's stress." But that wasn't it, and no matter how much she wanted to, she couldn't lie to him. "No. That's not true. It's..." But she couldn't say it.

He held her for a long time, letting her sob it out. Then he helped her gather her clothes and get dressed, and made her cuddle up with him on the couch. "It's Jacob, isn't it?"

Jen nodded, not trusting herself to speak, for fear she'd start crying again.

"Did he do something?"

She took a deep, hitching breath. "Yes." Then she shook her head. "No."

He flashed his devilish grin. "Um, could you be a little more ambiguous?"

Jen chuckled in spite of herself. "I'm sorry." Her anxious fingers twisted the hem of her top. "He kissed me. No, that's not true. It was sort of...mutual. I mean, he did the actual touching of the lips to mine, but --" Tears threatened to drop again, making her voice thick and husky. "I...I think I wanted him to."

Dev sighed, closing his eyes. "I had a feeling."

"Oh, Dev." Jen threw her arms around him, burying her face in his neck. "I love you. I love you and Damien both so much. I can't live without you. I can't. I don't know what happened back there."

"Hey." His hands closed on her upper arms, pushing her back a little. He captured her gaze with his bright blue eyes. "Hey. It's not the end of the world. I promise."

Jen shook her head. "It is. How can you ever forgive me?"

Dev sighed again. "Look." He paused, staring into the distance while he gathered his thoughts. "You know weyr are way more aware of their bodies and other people's bodies

than a normal human. Even you, as a half-weyr, have that enhanced ability, but not quite like a full weyr."

She nodded, not sure where this was going.

"Well, some of us have other kinds of enhanced awareness. You know how Damien and I are pretty opposite. Well, that's common in most all weyr twins. You'll have one that's more dominant, more sensible, and one that's a little flighty, maybe, a dreamer -- the 'sensitive' one. I guess that's nature's way of making it easier for us to live our lives together. It wouldn't work if we both wanted to be in charge, or if neither could take charge. Each sort of complements the other."

Just like she'd been thinking the other day. She searched his eyes. His beautiful blue gaze was open, loving, without a hint of hurt or recrimination. She started to relax a little.

He smiled. "That's better." He wrapped an arm around her and leaned back into the couch with her cheek nestled against his chest. "Anyway, the one that's 'sensitive,' he usually has a bit of precognizance. Not like a true seer, but occasional premonitions. Of course, the strength and accuracy varies; some are more sensitive than others."

"Are you trying to say you knew I'd kiss him?"

"Not that specific. No, I just had this feeling, from the moment we first sensed him on our land, that --" He sighed. "Damien doesn't like it. Doesn't want to hear it, but Jacob's going to join our pack. He's not leaving, Jen. I don't know if he or Damien is going to end up being pack leader, but they *will* fight for it." He tilted her chin up so that she could see him. "For you."

Jen gasped. "No."

"It has to happen. I feel it in my bones."

"No." Jen pushed herself up, sat on the edge of the couch shaking her head. "No. I won't let it."

"Jen." He reached out, caressing her arm with the back of his hand. "It's normal." He sat up himself. "You know how your Uncle Frank and Uncle Fred have those big houses, with all that land, and how the properties abut one another, and how those three other couples have homes on the farm? You've seen how they're all so close, always having dinner together, parties, sometimes spending the night at each other's houses? That's Frank's pack. He's the alpha, but the other ones, at least the ones in each couple that are weyr or half-weyr, are part of the pack, too." He took a deep breath. "Damien and I suspected it wouldn't be just the three of us forever; we just didn't think anything would happen so soon, and it never occurred to either one of us that he might not end up being the alpha. Packs grow, love." He blew out a frustrated breath. "Most weyr don't go lone wolf like your mom, even the ones that marry humans. They choose their human carefully, and either tell them of their true nature, or bond with one whose own nature, even though they're human, is a pack-oriented type of personality. I sure wish your mom would have explained all this to you."

"So do I." She rubbed her arms, riddled with goose bumps. "Of course, you guys could have mentioned it."

Dev made a face. "I think we were trying to ignore the possibility. Keep you to ourselves for as long as possible." He nuzzled her neck. "Can you blame us?"

Jen pushed him away. "How can my uncles do that? Isn't it risky to be so open about it?"

Dev shrugged. "They're not advertising the exact relationships. As far as outsiders are concerned, they probably just look like really good friends, rich folks that like to party. At most, people might suspect they swing. No one's thinking weyr, though. I can tell you that."

"I guess not." Jen tilted her head thoughtfully. "Probably your best protection is today's human skepticism about anything paranormal."

He nodded.

"So, I'm not totally horrible for..." She could hardly bring herself to say it, but Devlin deserved the truth, so she forced it out. "For wanting Jacob?"

He shook his head. "It was unrealistic to think that we would never find others we'd want to add to the pack." He nudged her shoulder. "But, like I said, we're selfish, so we were kind of hoping to keep you to ourselves."

Jen rubbed her aching neck, right at the nape where tension gathered. "I can't believe you're okay with this." She looked him in the eye. "Are you? Really?"

He shrugged. "I've always known there would be others. I don't get a lot of premonitions, but the ones I do experience are never wrong. Besides, I trust my instincts. Jacob's a good guy, deep down. I feel it. My gut tells me he's important somehow, not just to his son, but to us as well. In time, we'll figure it all out, but meanwhile, Damien's the one I'm worried about."

Jen shuddered. "Me, too."

"I can't tell you what to do, baby. I don't know if it would be better to give him some idea what you're feeling now, so it won't be such a shock later, or if it would be better to just wait and let things run their course."

Jen opened her eyes wide at a sudden thought. "Hey! This mean's Jacob's definitely going to be all right, if he's joining our pack. Right? He's not going to die. At least, not soon, not from the pining. And the baby's going to be okay, too."

Dev held up both hands. "Whoa. Hold on there, little lady." He'd done his John Wayne impression, but his expression was serious. "I don't get hard and fast details, just general impressions. Unfortunately, I haven't had any inkling what's going to happen with the baby. I only know that Jacob will challenge Damien for alpha rights and that he'll be joining our pack, but I don't know who will win, or even if this is a strictly positive development. I *think* it is, but I don't know."

Jen felt her expression sag.

“Sorry, baby. I wish I could tell you more.”

Jen shook her head. “That’s all right. We’ll figure it all out somehow.”

Unfettered Longing

Jen rolled over for the umpteenth time, struggling to find a comfortable position. Indian summer had struck unexpectedly that afternoon, driving the temperature into the high eighties. She hadn't wanted to turn on the air conditioner, knowing the heat wouldn't last more than a day or two, preferring instead to open all the windows and let the ceiling fans do their job, but now her nightgown clung to her sweat-damp body.

She listened to Devlin's quiet, rhythmic snores for a while. Glanced at the clock.

Three in the morning.

She eased herself out of the bed, waiting a moment to confirm she hadn't disturbed Devlin. In the kitchen, she poured herself a glass of ice water and stood at the window, gazing out across the moonlit yard.

Damien had called around nine to say his meeting with Marshall had run late. They were going to get some dinner, and he would spend the night at Marshall's, then drive home in the morning. Jenny had been a little surprised, since he knew Jacob was here, but silently thanked the Goddess that she had a little more time to decide what to say to him.

Thoughts of Jacob drew her eyes to the stable. The light was on; neither she nor Devlin had thought to go out there and turn it off. And Jacob couldn't reach it.

She drained the rest of her water and set the glass in the sink, then let herself quietly out onto the back porch. She padded barefoot down the steps and across the gravel. As softly as she could, she unfastened the padlocks.

She hadn't thought how hard it would be to remove the heavy wooden bars. Finally, she was able to jostle them over enough to allow them to clear the brackets on the right, but still gain enough support from the brackets on the left not to fall.

She eased open the right-hand door, then slipped just inside and reached out to turn off the light.

A small sound from beyond the gate startled her. She turned, eyes searching. She couldn't see Jacob.

She crept closer, peeking over the edge of the half-wall.

He was asleep on his back, feet toward her, one arm flung over his eyes. He'd taken off Damien's T-shirt, and the pale yellow sand they kept sprinkled on the packed earth streaked his tan chest. His skin gleamed, its sheen of sweat glimmering in the light.

The jeans, as she'd noticed before, were too short, but Damien also carried more weight -- he wasn't *overweight*, but broad and solid, whereas Jacob stretched wiry and lean -- so the pants were also loose in the waist and hips. They'd worked their way down, exposing a narrow line of dark curls that began just below his belly button and widened into a swath as they approached his crotch.

She should look away...but she couldn't. Her mind flashed on that quick glimpse she'd had of his cock earlier that afternoon, so long and thick. The skin so dark, the way she'd picture an Italian, rather than an Irishman. She licked her lips, her nipples tightening as she remembered that there was nothing between him and the fabric of his jeans.

Silently, she lifted the gate latch and pulled it open just enough to admit her.

She padded over to his side, looking down at him.

Goddess, but he was beautiful.

She knelt. The snap at his waist had come undone. Almost of their own volition, her fingers closed on the zipper tab. She tugged gently, holding her breath. The pewter-hued teeth parted with a quiet rasp.

Jacob stirred slightly, his breath huffing out. She froze. He didn't move again, and after several seconds, her heart started beating once more.

She'd managed to pull the zipper all the way down. Warmth flushed her chest. She carefully tucked the tip of her index nail beneath the edge of the teeth, hardly believing she dared. She lifted the fabric just a little, desperately wanting to see.

His hand closed on her wrist.

Jen gasped, her gaze flying to his face. His dark brown eyes burned with desire. He tugged, guiding her hand beneath the flap, pressing her palm against his cock.

"I --"

He sat up, pressing a finger to her lips. Her breath caught. His dark eyes looked into hers as he guided her hand, stroking his shaft. His flesh burned beneath her palm.

Jen opened her mouth, sucking the tip of the digit between her lips.

Jacob groaned. He pressed his hips up, trapping his cock between her hand and his pelvis. Jenny curled her fingers around him, feeling him grow, harden. She sucked his finger deeper into her mouth, stroking it with her tongue as she ran her hand up and down his rigid length.

He gasped. His finger jerked from her mouth, and he claimed her with his lips. His tongue tickled hers, darting and teasing. Jen moaned. With her free hand, she tugged his jeans down, releasing his cock.

He drew his head back. "Jen --"

She pressed her own finger to his lips. Settling on her hands and knees, she lowered her head, peppering his magnificent cock with kisses.

Growling, Jacob wrapped one hand in her hair, pressing her into him as she sucked and nibbled, following the thick ridge running the length of his cock.

His free hand slipped beneath her nightgown, stroking her buttocks. She moaned, covering his glistening, bruised-looking head with her hungry mouth. He squeezed a handful of cheek.

She sucked his cock hard, taking him deep. He massaged her ass. One of his fingers brushed the rim of her anus. Her muscles spasmed, her cheeks meeting around him. Eagerly, she cupped his balls and lapped urgently at the tip of his cock.

He drew in a sharp breath, wriggling his finger. Jen whimpered and wiggled, going down on him in earnest, taking as much of his feverish flesh into her mouth as she could manage.

Instant ecstasy as his finger plunged abruptly into her anus. She whimpered again, catching him against the roof of her mouth, stroking the base of his cock with insistent fingers.

Her body shivered with desire. Gasping, Jen moved, pushing him back slightly, straddling his legs.

His arms were so long. Long enough that even as she lowered her dripping slit to his ripe cock, he kept his finger in her ass.

Shuddering with pleasure, she closed her eyes as her pussy stretched to accommodate him.

"Jen."

Her lids flew open.

"Don't close your eyes," he whispered.

She met his dark, haunted gaze, moaning. His free hand gripped her waist, pushing her down as he worked his cock deeper. His finger crooked in her ass, a sensation so delicious that she bit her bottom lip to trap an ecstatic shout.

His tongue darted out, tracing the curve of her lips. She trembled, her pussy tightening around him. His eyes wouldn't let her go. Dark chocolate pools, tugging her in, spinning her around and around. She grabbed his shoulders, pushing herself down, taking him deep.

His heat filled her. His finger danced in her ass. She gasped, still staring into his eyes.

"It's up to you, Jenny," he whispered, his hand tightening on her waist. "Do you want me?"

Her body ached for release. She nodded frantically.

"Say it," he murmured against her lips.

"Please," she breathed.

His finger vibrated in her anus. "Say it," he growled.

"I want you!" she cried. "Goddess, Jacob. Please! I want you!"

He rocked his hips slowly and deliberately, thrusting deep, stretching her, filling her. "Call me Jake, love." He stopped moving, and Jenny sobbed, looking into his dark eyes, seeing her own desperate desire mirrored there. "And you can't just *want* me..."

"Need you," she whispered. "Please, Jake. I *need* you." She tightened her grip on his shoulders, watched his eyes cloud with passion as he thrust into her more and more urgently.

Her pussy and ass spasmed. Jacob gasped. He wrapped her waist with his arm, burying his face in her neck, his cock in her pussy.

His finger slipped in and out of her ass in delicious, slow strokes, following the line of his cock through the intervening tissue. Jen arched, wrapping her hands in his hair, staring into his hungry eyes as she whispered, "Yes, yes, yes."

He grunted, burying himself fully, his finger twisting deep inside her. Jenny moaned, then gasped with pleasure as the ring at the base of his cock expanded, stretching her, trapping him inside her as she perched on the edge of a massive orgasm.

Her pussy burned from the heat of him. His cock moved inside her, projecting and retracting the way only weyr cock could. She shuddered, tightening her grip on his hair.

His mouth closed on her left breast through her gown.

Her nipples throbbed, fluid soaking the front of the nightie.

Inside her, his essence erupted, flooding her pussy with heat and fulfillment. Jen screamed his name, bucking against him as wave after wave of bliss surged through her.

Then it was over, and he was holding her tight, and she was crying.

"Hush, baby," he whispered. "Sh-sh-sh. It'll be all right."

She tugged tangled waves, soaked with sweat and tears, away from her eyes. "How can you know?" She wiped tears from her face. "Everything's such a mess right now." She spoke between sobs. "I love you. Goddess help me, I don't know why. I barely know you. But I do." Her nails dug into his skin as she clutched his shoulders. "But Damien -- oh, Goddess, I don't know what he'll do. And we don't even know if...if you'll --" Her voice broke.

"Live?"

She nodded, choking back sobs.

He cupped her cheeks, looking into her eyes. "I will, Jen. For you, I'll live."

Unpleasant Revelation

Jen woke as the sun rose, to find herself lying on her side in the dust, Jacob's right arm around her waist, and his leg draped across her thigh. She closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath. She'd really done it.

She tried to move him gently so that he wouldn't waken, but it wasn't so easy to get up from the ground with an oversized basketball for a stomach. Jake woke and scrambled to his feet, pulled up his jeans and fastened them, then helped her up.

"Thank you." Jen looked down, brushing ineffectually at the dust on her gown.

Jake's ankles filled her view. "Oh." She pushed the gate open wide and grabbed a ring with two tiny silver keys from the hook by the light switch. She returned and held on to his forearms, lowering herself to the ground so she could unlock the manacles.

Jacob took a deep, cleansing breath. "Thank you." He helped her rise, examining her expression. "Are you sure about this?"

"Jake?" The keys jangled as she toyed with them anxiously. She looked up, searching his eyes. "Do you love me?" He'd never said it, though she had. It was stupid to expect it. She accepted that, for whatever reason, however fast it had happened, her heart now belonged to Jacob as well as Damien and Devlin. But for him, was it love, or just chemistry?

"Ahh, Jen." He wrapped his arms around her, holding her tight. Now that he'd had a chance to recover somewhat, she discovered his voice was rich and smooth as molasses. "I'll never let go. Never."

She took that as a yes. "And you think...you think it's over?"

He nodded.

"All right, then." She took a deep breath, let it out. If she really loved him, she had to trust him. "Let's go see what's going to happen."

She held his hand, leading him out of the stable, up to the house.

Devlin was sitting in a chair at the kitchen table. She froze. Jacob tensed.

"Everything all right?" Dev drawled, idly stirring his coffee, his blue eyes piercing her.

She swallowed, heart thumping painfully. "I don't know, Dev. Is it?"

His gaze raked the man beside her from head to toe. "Do you love him?"

She nodded silently, not trusting her voice.

"That's good enough for me, but I'm not the one you have to convince."

She nodded again. "W-we're going to get cleaned up."

"No more rogue?"

"No more rogue," Jake assured in deep, rich tones.

Dev nodded.

Jenny dragged Jake into their bedroom. "I'll grab you some more clothes, then show you to one of the guest bedrooms."

He waited by the door, his mahogany eyes taking in the spacious bed.

She gathered clothing, with briefs this time, and led him to the guest room. Stepping into the bath, she set the clothing on the counter. "Let me make sure there are towels." She peeked into the cabinet under the sink, saw a couple, and grabbed one. "Here you go."

His arms snaked around her waist, and he nibbled the back of her neck. "Jen. Don't go."

She started to refuse, but he was already moving toward the shower, pulling her with him. He reached in and turned on the water. Stepping in, fully clothed, he tugged her after him.

She stood in the pounding spray, letting it pour over her, draining some of her tension away. Jacob tugged at her nightgown. She lifted her arms, and he pulled it off, letting the soggy bundle drop. His dark gaze drank in the sight of her, huge belly and all.

Heat flushed her cheeks. Silly to be embarrassed after what had taken place last night, but there it was. To hide her reaction, she unsnapped his jeans and worked them down over his hips without even unzipping them.

He picked up the soap, lathering his hands liberally. His eyes watched her face, noting every gasp, every quiet sigh, as his hands massaged her breasts, caressed her belly, soaped her legs.

He stepped back, drawing her under the spray, rinsing the suds off with tender strokes. Turning her around, he soaped her again. His hands kneaded her neck and shoulders, her lower back. She sighed. Calloused palms skimmed her buttocks. She spread her legs slightly. His fingers snaked into the crevice, glided up, massaged her ass. Grazed the tight pucker between her buttocks.

Jenny groaned and bent slightly, reaching back to pull her cheeks aside for him. He slipped the tip of his little finger inside her. Leaning over, he whispered, "Most women don't like this."

Jen pushed her hips back, driving him deeper. "I'm not most women," she growled.

"I noticed." He pricked her rim with another finger, twisting from side to side. She moaned, leaning forward a little more, poking her butt out.

He grabbed her hip with his left hand, holding her steady, his fingers probing her tight canal. "Mmm, I love playing with your ass, baby. Let's see, can I..." He twitched his fingers, holding them apart, working yet another inside her.

Jen gasped, pussy and ass clenching. "Jacob!"

He knelt behind her, pulling her down onto her knees before him. He drove his fingers deep while guiding his stiff cock into her pussy.

"Goddess, yes!"

"Jenny, Jenny, Jenny," he breathed. "This is driving me crazy." He pressed a kiss between her shoulder blades, sending a thrill down her spine. She whimpered. He straightened and drove his cock inside her, fingers exploring her ass while her lips stretched around him. "Sweet Jenny. Do you think, someday, I could --" He broke off and pumped his hand fiercely, finger-fucking her ass.

"Yes!" she cried.

"Yes, what?" he murmured, slowing down, stroking his shaft and fingers slowly in and out of a pussy and ass aching with need.

"Yes, you can fuck my ass." She drove herself backward, wound tight as a spring, about to pop. "Fuck my ass with your cock someday. Promise me you will!"

He gasped. "I will, baby. Oh, Goddess. I will!"

Delighted, Jen pushed herself up, pressing her back against his chest. Jacob's free arm wrapped around her waist, steadying her while she let gravity drive him deep inside her.

"Oh, damn." His voice shook. "Oh, damn!"

The ring at the base of his cock expanded. They arched in unison, gasping, water cascading over their faces, locked together as her pussy and ass clenched, pure bliss coursing through every nerve in her body as his seed warmed her pussy and his fingers danced in her ass.

"Goddess, Jenny," he breathed after they had finished bathing and were drying each other. "What you do to me." He rested his forehead against hers, running his fingers through her hair.

She pressed her lips to his. "I feel the same," she murmured. "But we'd better hurry. Damien will be home soon. I'd like to come up with some kind of plan to gently introduce this concept to him."

Jacob tugged on his clothes, but Jenny hadn't brought any, so she wrapped the towel around her as best she could, though her pregnancy meant it didn't really cover much but her breasts and her backside. She shrugged as they walked into the guest room. "I'll just --"

Damien stood in the doorway, his face like thunder. His eyes took in her nakedness, Jacob's arm around her waist, their wet hair. His fists clenched, body trembling.

"Damien --"

He slammed a hand against the doorjamb. "Outside," he gritted at Jacob. "Now." He stepped out of the doorway, into the hall.

Jake nodded, tossing aside the towel he'd been rubbing through his hair. Very deliberately, he kissed Jenny's forehead.

Damien growled, bones shifting in his face. Jake walked past him calmly.

"Stop!" Jenny hurried after them, trying to tie the towel across her breasts. It wasn't wide enough, and she stepped onto the back porch holding it up with one hand. Jacob and Damien circled each other on the gravel path at the foot of the steps. She saw Devlin standing to one side. "Help me," she said. "Stop them."

He didn't answer, watching the two men warily.

"She's ours," Damien growled.

Jake grinned wolfishly. "She's mine, too."

"Only if I let it happen."

Jake nodded. "So we fight."

"We sure as hell do."

"Stop talking about me like I'm not here! I have something to say about this."

Jake speared her with his dark gaze. "You made your decision last night. You gave yourself to me, Jenny." He nodded toward Damien. "All that's left is for us to decide who has primary rights."

A strange thrill shook her to the core. A primal arousal awakened in her at the idea of two men fighting over her. No, two *wolves*.

A wild yearning filled her, making her breasts ache. The blood pounded in her veins. She sniffed the air, excited by the mixture of desire and fear, determination and need wafting from each of the men before her. She couldn't wait to fuck the winner.

What am I thinking? She tried to shake off her need. Tried once more to stop them. "Jake, Damien. Please, don't do this. Let's talk."

Two heads shook. "This has to happen, Jen," they snarled in unison. After sharing a startled look, the opponents crouched, squaring off against each other.

Devlin backed away, giving them plenty of room.

Jen shivered, the two sides of her nature warring. Her human half hated the thought of this challenge, but her weyr half...

The adversaries circled now, growling and snapping. Bones shifted, clothes ripping as the change came.

As she'd already seen, Jacob morphed faster. She saw surprise in Damien's eyes, apprehension. But Jake just paced, churning up gravel with his huge paws as he waited for Damien to finish.

They faced each other.

Goddess, Jacob was huge. Just as in his human form, he stood a head taller than Damien as a wolf and simply looked more rugged. His hair, no longer matted and clumped but still thick and coarse, bristled, as though each strand stood ready to defend its master. Early morning sunlight seemed to disappear into the dark abysses that were his eyes. The first word that came to mind as she looked at him was *dangerous*.

Damien, in contrast, was shorter, but stockier. Thick muscles bulged as his legs tensed. His silver-gray fur rippled, soft and supple in the morning's breeze. The sunlight glinted from his eyes as from the surface of an unruffled, sky-blue lake.

Unfortunately, at least in the sense of a fight, the first word that came to mind was *beautiful*.

Weak-kneed, she sank down to sit on the top step of the porch.

She had brought Jacob into this. She had chosen to lay with him, even after Devlin had told her what it would mean. She wanted him, *needed* him, as much as she needed Damien and Devlin. She wished there was some way to settle this peacefully, but after all, she had married two weyr. Taken another as a lover. And *she* was half-wolf. That part of her understood that this ritual was necessary. Jacob *had* to have a place in their hierarchy, and this was the only way.

And, Goddess help her, it was making her horny.

Despite her mixed feelings, her eyes were drawn to the adversaries. Damien sprang and snapped, aiming to sink his teeth into the muscle high on Jacob's right front leg.

Jake dodged, cuffing the silver wolf's head with one gigantic paw.

Damien landed roughly. He shook his head, got his bearings. He rushed again, coming up under Jake's chin, snapping at his neck.

Jake slammed his chin into the top of Damien's head. The silver wolf's front legs buckled. He scrambled back, keeping his head low, panting heavily.

Blood dripped from Jake's chin and stained the top of Damien's silver head. Jen shivered, her nipples hardening. She was shocked at herself, but she couldn't help it. Her weyr senses kicked into overdrive, and her body responded accordingly.

Jake's musk permeated the air, Damien's earthier scent a strong undercurrent.

Damien had recovered. He circled the larger wolf warily, watching for an opening.

Jake stood still. Despite his injured jaw, he seemed as strong and confident as ever. His eyes found Jenny, held her captivated while his ears perked and swiveled, following Damien's movements.

Her groin ached. She shifted, her legs falling apart, her scent wafting into the air.

The two wolves and Devlin breathed deep.

The fight started in earnest.

Damien leapt onto Jake's back, his claws raking across the dark wolf's ribs as his weight carried them both down. Snapping and snarling, they rolled, fur flying.

Jenny's nipples throbbed. She let the towel fall, shivering as the soft nap grazed her erect nubs.

Jake raised his head. Jenny arched, thrusting out her peaked nipples, spreading her legs so he could see her red, swollen sex.

The dark wolf's eyes flashed. His mouth closed on Damien's ruff. He shook him, then flung him to the side, taking a step toward Jenny.

Damien sprang back immediately. He knocked the black wolf on his side. Jen shivered, reaching down, her only thought to relieve her burning need. The silver wolf stood panting, his eyes following Jenny's movements as her fingers found her sex, sliding in and out as he watched.

A new growl, to her left. She glanced that way. Devlin had changed and was pacing back and forth, back and forth, outside the circle of the fight, his eyes on her, nostrils flaring. Jake scrambled to his feet, threw a warning bark in Dev's direction. The smaller silver wolf dropped to his belly, covering his head with one paw, whimpering in submission.

Jenny's nipples twanged painfully, deliciously. Goddess! Jen grasped her left breast, guiding its swollen peak to her mouth. She suckled, supporting her breast with her left hand while rubbing her clit with the pad of her right thumb, the two middle fingers dipping in and out of her pussy.

Still, it wasn't enough. She wanted them. Wanted one of them to take her, to fuck her.

Jake snarled. He lunged, snapping, his jaws closing on Damien's right hind leg. He jerked.

Damien went down, front legs scrabbling at gravel as he tried to pull loose. Jake let go and stepped onto him, his forepaws pinning Damien to the ground.

Her eyes locked on the huge black beast. She let her breast go, panting. Damien struggled ineffectually.

Jake ignored him, watching her. The furry sheath between his legs drew back, revealing a glistening red protrusion.

Jen's breath came in short, strangled gasps. She was so hot, so horny. With the towel beneath her, she slid her butt down to the second step, the third. Her head resting against the top step now, she worked the fingers inside her pussy frantically.

Damien growled, snapping at Jake.

The black wolf opened huge jaws and lowered his head, bracketing Damien's neck with a terrifying mouthful of teeth.

She should be trying to stop this.

Instead, she moaned. She wanted one of them to win. Release, *please!* Her fingers weren't enough. She needed the winner to take her, hard and fast. Make her come. Make her *howl*.

Jake was watching. Both wolves were panting, eyes glazed with desire.

Jenny spread her fingers, pushing aside her labia, exposing her raw sex to their hot gazes.

Jake's glistening red cock swelled to delicious proportions. Damien scrabbled at the dirt once more, straining to gain purchase, striving to squirm out from beneath the weight of Jake's front paws.

The dark wolf closed his jaws just enough that his teeth pressed into the skin of Damien's neck.

The silver wolf growled low. Jake's jaws tightened just a touch more. Jen saw in his eyes that he was reluctant to truly injure Damien, but that he was determined to win.

Damien jerked his head and snapped.

Jake's teeth pierced his skin, but still the huge wolf held back, watching Jen, obviously seeing fear for her husband in her eyes.

For several moments, nothing happened. A frozen tableau. Then Damien whimpered. Jake hesitated, loosening his jaws. Damien whimpered again.

Jake raised his head, freeing the smaller wolf's neck. Removing his weight from Damien's torso, he straddled the lower half of his opponent's body, keeping his head down to protect his chest and throat.

The silver wolf rolled over, exposing his tender underbelly.

Jake had won.

Jenny's heart pounded, her pussy clenching. *Yes*, she thought. *Yes, please, come take me.*

Jake raised his head, a triumphant howl bursting from his throat. Then he lowered his muzzle and nudged Damien's belly, acknowledging his submission, and stepped over him, approaching the porch.

He rested his huge front paws to either side of Jenny's legs. She withdrew her fingers and gripped the steps.

His sandpaper tongue laved her swollen labia.

Jen cried out, muscles spasming. Jacob nudged her leg, urging her over onto her knees. She crawled up to the porch landing and settled on hands and knees, the better to protect her taut belly. He followed her, the boards creaking beneath his weight.

His tongue swept between her legs again and forced itself into the hollow between her cheeks, rasping over her anus. She trembled, juices dripping from her waiting pussy.

Jake's nostrils flared. He growled, nipping her back gently as he stepped forward, straddling her, towering over her. Jenny let her head hang. Whimpered because she wanted to watch him enter her and couldn't, because her belly was too big.

His slick red protrusion prodded her raw lips, and all thought fled.

He was enormous, thicker than Damien, longer than Devlin. "Goddess, Jake. I can't," she gasped.

Above her, bone crunched softly, and she heard the unmistakable whispery sound of shifting. Jenny raised her head and saw Jacob reflected in the glass French door. Half-human, half-weyr, with an ugly, half-healed bruise under his chin, he thrust himself inside her.

Jenny arched. "Yes!" He buried himself deep, then changed again. Jen moaned as he morphed back into the wolf, his dark eyes watching her in the glass as his cock grew, stretching her, stretching her. It hurt, but she wanted him so badly. Wanted to know him as both a wolf and a man. She clenched her hands against the floorboards. "Goddess. Oh, Goddess."

Jake hesitated, shifting his weight as though to back away, his muzzle beginning to flatten. Jenny shook her head, meeting his eyes in the reflection. "No. Don't stop!"

His wolf form stabilized. One final expansion, one strangled cry from her, and his cock was well and truly buried inside her. "Yes," she whimpered. "Oh, Jake. Yes."

He started thrusting shallowly. Jenny whimpered with each lunge. Again, there was pain, but not more than she could handle. As a matter of fact, feeling him -- every inch of him, packed so tight inside her -- drove her fucking wild.

She tossed her head, rocking back hard. "More," she gasped. "Faster."

Jake snorted. He thrust again, harder, harder. She felt him deep inside her, deeper than she had ever though possible, impaling her with his thick, scrumptious weyr cock. "Oh, yes. Oh, Goddess, yes!"

Involuntary shivers ran through her, the hot core of her need wound so tight she almost screamed in frustration.

Just when she thought she'd go crazy without some kind of release, the base of his cock expanded. Her pussy clenched, her entire body shuddering as the first orgasm swept through her. "Yes," she whispered. "Jacob, yes. Yes, yes, yes."

His jaws closed on her shoulders.

“Yes,” she breathed. “Yes, Jake. Mark me.” Her eyes met his in the reflective glass. “I’m yours.”

He did. Pressing gently but insistently, his teeth just broke the skin, laying his mark atop Damien and Devlin’s, confirming his dominance.

Jen’s pussy spasmed over and over, white-hot pleasure searing her nerves in a prolonged, fiery orgasm that threatened to turn her limbs to putty. “Jacob!”

He shuddered repeatedly, his cock expanding and contracting, filling her with his hot seed while his tongue lapped at the tiny drops of blood welling from her skin. Jen shivered, the first wave of pleasure passing, then was racked time after time by short, fiercely intense orgasms. She sobbed, whispering his name over and over. Resting the top of her head on the wooden planks, she watched as pearly droplets spangled the porch, his seed seeping out from between her tight lips and the base of his cock. The hot coil inside her twisted once more and broke, sprung at last in a final, phenomenal climax that milked Jake dry, melted her limbs, and left them both limp as rag dolls.

Jake groaned, morphing as he collapsed onto his back on the porch.

Jen panted, rolling over onto her back, knocked for a loop by the intensity of the experience. She’d lain with Damien and Devlin as wolves before, but this was the first time she’d felt so much of her *own* weyr nature coming through.

The result was incredibly satisfying. She resolved to give in to her wild side more often.

They lay there for some time, unmoving, regaining their breath and senses. Eventually, however, whimpering impinged on Jenny’s overloaded senses. She rose up onto her elbows and looked around.

Oh. Damien and Devlin paced back and forth in the gravel at the bottom of the porch, their nostrils flaring, their cocks red and glistening.

“Jake.”

He sat up, following the direction of her gaze. When he stood, both wolves dropped to their bellies, tails tucked, looking up at him with their tongues out, panting hopefully.

He snapped his fingers and nodded, and they loped up the stairs. Jen gasped as their tongues lapped at her body, cleaning her, cooling the heat between her legs.

When Damien moved to straddle her, Jake barked, “That’s enough.”

Damien growled.

Jake took a step toward him.

Devlin backed away, belly to the floor. Damien hesitated, then lowered his head and grudgingly abased himself as well.

“She’s had enough.” Jake glanced at her as though to confirm his suspicion, and she nodded. He knelt and picked up the towel from the steps, wrapping it around her shoulders. “Later,” he promised as he helped her to rise. “Later, we’ll all take her.”

Jen shivered, and he nibbled her earlobe. "Would you like that, Jenny?"

"Yes," she gasped. "Definitely, yes."

Damien stretched and huffed, joints cracking. Moments later, he and Dev had morphed and stood before them.

Jenny glanced between the three men. "Is that it?" she asked. "Is everything settled?"

Jake nodded confidently, his eyes assessing as he looked to Damien and Devlin for their reactions.

Damien grimaced, but nodded. "It'll take some getting used to, but...yeah. Everything's settled."

Dev spread his hands. "Hey, I told you I was fine with it. Either way, *I'm* no alpha."

"Good." Jake's arm slid around her waist.

As they turned and took a step toward the French doors, warmth gushed down her legs. Startled, she hesitated. *Jake's seed? Surely there wasn't that much?*

For a moment, she was totally disoriented. Then a ripple passed across her belly, and the pieces clicked. "Oh, shit."

"What is it?" Jake's arm tightened on her waist.

"I-I think this is a contraction." She cupped her belly with her hands. "My water broke."

"What?" Three identically shocked faces stared at her.

"My water broke."

Damien sprang to her side. He and Jake draped her arms across their shoulders, half-dragging, half-carrying her in to the couch.

"What -- what do we do?" Jake rubbed his hair, setting the wild strands on end. He might be the alpha, but he didn't know a thing about pregnancy.

Jen brushed her hair back from her face. "Call Tom. Let him know we're coming in. Then put our bags in the car. Oh, grab one for Jake; throw some things in for him."

Damien picked up the phone and started dialing. Devlin headed for the bedroom.

Jake stared at her in horror. "I did this. It's my fault."

Jenny shook her head. "Don't be silly. It's time, that's all."

He knelt in front of her. "Are you sure?"

She smiled. "Jake. I think you can see that I *really* like sex, and I don't mind it a little rough. You love a weyr, it comes with the territory. I understand that." She reached out and brushed a lock of hair from his eyes. "I *like* it. And ever since I got pregnant, I've been horny as hell. I've been screwing Damien and Dev like crazy, in human *and* weyr form." She shrugged. "I'm due in five days. It's happening just the tiniest bit ahead of schedule, that's all."

His hands closed on her shoulders. "I'd go crazy if I thought I'd done anything to hurt you." His eyes drifted down to her crotch. He looked away, flustered. "Well, to hurt you outside of --"

She leaned forward and nipped his ear. "You haven't hurt me," she whispered, "I told you. I like it a little rough."

He shivered. "I know, but --"

"Everything's fine." She rested her hands on her belly and closed her eyes, turning her senses inward. The babies seemed fine, their heartbeats regular, their bodies in the correct positions, no aberrations as far as she could tell. The one who was a bit larger, the one she thought of as Collin, would come first. She opened her eyes and grabbed Jake's hand, brought it down to her tummy. "Can't you feel them? They're fine."

His brow wrinkled as he concentrated. Then his lips quirked. "They are, aren't they?"

She nodded, and he sighed with relief.

Damien covered the mouth of the phone with his hand. "Jenny. Are we driving in, or does Tom need to send the chopper?"

"Well, I haven't had another contraction yet. I believe it's still early labor. I think we'll be fine driving in."

He nodded and started speaking into the phone again.

Dev loped through the living room with their prepared bags and headed out to the van. He came back carrying an empty duffel from the trunk and stuffed clothes for Jake into it from a pile he'd carried in and tossed onto the couch.

"Oh." Jen made a face, resting a hand on her tummy. "There goes another one. Check the time so we can see how far apart they are." Jake glanced at his watch.

Damien hung up the phone and turned to them. "Okay, we're set. You ready?"

Jen grinned. "I guess so. Clothing *might* be optional."

"Shit!" The guys gaped at each other and at her. Dev slapped his forehead and dashed back into the bedroom. He came out with a pair of brown knit maternity pants, a beige top, and one of her maternity bras.

The three of them helped her dress.

"Um, underwear?" Jake queried as they tugged on her pants.

"I never wear them." Jen smiled sultrily.

His breath caught. "Mmm. I like that."

Dev shook his head. "You two. Focus, would you?"

Jen laughed and shooed them away, waiting on the couch while they all ran to the bedroom and dressed hastily.

Dev returned first, carrying her tennis shoes and a pair of socks. She settled back against the cushions as he slipped them onto her feet.

Damien rushed through the living room into the kitchen and grabbed the keys from their hook by the door. "Everybody ready?"

Jake walked in, snagging Jen's purse as he passed the end table. "I think so." He looked at Jen.

"Yep." She struggled to push herself up from the couch.

Jake and Dev came and lifted her gently to her feet, then guided her out the front door.

Damien locked up the house behind them and followed them to the car. After Jen was situated comfortably in the passenger seat, he hesitated a moment, then held the keys out to Jake.

Jen held her breath as the two men looked at each other.

"I'm not familiar with the car or the roads," Jake said. "You drive."

Jen let her breath out slowly. By deferring to Jake in human form, Damien had reinforced Jake's place as their new pack leader. By allowing Damien to drive, Jake demonstrated to all of them that he held no grudge and would be an honorable alpha.

With the babies on the way and the three men in her life seemingly content, things were definitely looking up.

"Oh!" She grabbed Jake's arm. "Another contraction. How long has it been?"

"Seventeen minutes."

"We'd better get going."

Unabashed Adoration

Jenny gazed down at the tiny, sleeping newborns nestled in the crook of each arm. Damien and Devlin beamed, great smiles plastered across their faces. They couldn't stop touching her -- pushing a damp brown strand of hair back from her temple, running a hand along her arm, pressing a kiss to her cheek. The babies, too -- her husbands gently caressed ruddy cheeks with the backs of their fingers.

"They're beautiful, Jenny."

She nodded smugly. The infant in her right arm yawned, opening dark blue eyes and seeming to study her face with immense concentration. "Well, hello, Collin," she cooed. He'd come out first, just as she'd thought, kicking and screaming, six pounds one ounce of pure alpha male. His brother Cale had taken his time, moseying into the world a full twenty minutes later, six ounces lighter and wondering why the heck they wanted him to cry. He finally humored the masses and let out one hearty wail, then settled into sleep with an exact replica of Devlin's devilish grin plastered across his face.

Their fathers all over again, as far as she was concerned.

Dev rubbed Cale's cheek with his finger, then looked up. "Do you mind if I hold him?" he asked, boyish anticipation on his face.

"Of course not." He lifted their son reverently, his big hands careful and tender, and sat in a chair by her bedside.

Damien was standing on the right-hand side of the bed, so she transferred Collin to her left arm so she could hold Damien's hand.

He grinned down at her, and she grinned back.

She couldn't seem to stop smiling. Her lips hurt, she'd done so much of it. The feeling she had now was better than sex. She chuckled silently. *And I've had some damn good sex!*

And now she'd have to wait...how long? She shook her head. Her sons barely six hours old, and she was already wondering how long she'd have to wait to have sex again.

Which reminded her of Jacob. Poor man, he'd been relegated to the waiting room, of course. No one would have understood if Jenny had asked someone who was a stranger to all her friends to come in and experience the birth with them. It saddened her, but might have been for the best. Jake's psyche was still pretty tender. They needed to avoid things that might send him back into the wild state.

Then again, dealing with issues right away had been working pretty well for them, so far. "Damien, would you bring Jake in, please?"

His brilliant blue eyes met hers. He hesitated a moment.

"I...I know all of this with Jake was unexpected, but he's here now, and he's not going away. As a part of our family, our pack, I think he should share this moment with us, don't you?"

Damien took a deep breath, then nodded. She reached out and put her free hand around his neck, pulling him in for a long, lingering kiss.

"Mmm." His finger traced the curve of the hospital gown's neck.

"If I could," she murmured in his ear, "I'd fuck you now." He trembled, and her heart thrilled. "You know how much I love you."

He nodded, looking into her eyes. "I know." She studied his face and must have seemed worried, because he smiled and stroked her cheek with his thumb. "*Don't* worry. I'm okay with this. Like I said, it'll take a little getting used to, the knowledge that there's a stronger male around, but I'll deal with it." His eyes were calm blue lakes, and she longed to dive into them again and lose herself. "Besides, you love him, too. If I do anything to mess this up, it will hurt you, and that's something I can never do."

She rubbed her cheek against his hand. "I don't deserve you."

Dev, who had looked up from Cale to watch the byplay, grinned. "Nope, but we'll just have to keep suffering in silence."

Jenny glared at him in mock indignation. "How can you say that to the woman who just bore your children?" But she smiled, grateful that Devlin always seemed to know when things were getting too maudlin for comfort.

Damien straightened. "I'll go get Jake."

Jenny nodded. They had talked a little about the situation, after the babies were in her arms and the nurses and doctors had left them alone to bond. (Tom hadn't questioned it at all when Jenny had told him during one of her prenatal visits that both the brothers would be present at the birth. He'd agreed, his gaze shrewd and knowing. If the idea of a ménage-à-trois relationship bothered him, he hid it well, and if the nurses had wondered, they'd kept their mouths shut.)

They had decided that Jacob would be introduced to their friends and neighbors as a close college buddy of Damien's who had relocated to Wyoming and was now working for them, moving onto the Blake estate to assist in managing their conservation efforts in the area.

Of course, there was also Jacob's son to consider.

Damien returned. "He's on his way."

A minute later, Jake entered the room. He waited until the door thumped closed, shutting out the curious glances of passersby in the hall, then stole Jenny's breath away with a deep, hungry kiss that left her toes tingling.

"Wow." She ran her free hand through her sweat-damp, tangled hair, suddenly self-conscious. She'd been living with Damien and Devlin long enough to be comfortable around them no matter how she looked, but this thing with Jacob was still new enough that she hated him seeing her at less than her best.

She needn't have worried. He had eyes only for the boys. Collin was awake again and had managed to free one tiny hand. "Hey, little fella." Jake held out his pinkie, and Collin instinctively grasped it.

Jenny's heart ached as a flash of sorrow flickered across Jake's face, quickly masked. He must be thinking of the lost twin.

He jiggled his finger, murmuring nonsensical noises until Collin let go, his face screwing into a wrinkled mass as he opened his mouth and began wailing.

Jenny shifted him closer to her chest. He turned his head, rooting in his blanket. "Uh-oh. I think the little man's hungry."

She untied the side of her gown and flipped it back, then released the flap of her maternity bra. She held her nipple, waiting while Collin searched, then guiding it between his lips when he opened his mouth wide. He sucked a couple of times. Stopped. Sucked again. Stopped. She felt the sensation of quickening she'd begun noticing late in her pregnancy.

Collin made a funny sound in the back of his throat, and she started to pull her left nipple away, thinking he was choking, but then his gums clamped down, and he was swallowing noisily.

Jake smiled. "Greedy little sucker." He laughed. "Pun intended."

Everyone chuckled. "I'm supposed to be the comic around here," Dev protested in mock indignation.

Jake moved around to squat near Damien and Devlin. "This one's wide-eyed and bushy-tailed," he observed. Everyone laughed again. "Oops." He chuckled. "Actually, no pun intended that time."

Jenny glanced over at them. Cale's arms waved, his dark blue gaze darting here, there, and everywhere, seeming to take in every detail of the room, though Jen knew newborns couldn't really see that well.

She looked down at Collin, whose tiny fist rested on her breast. His eyes were open again, and his gaze traveled over her, from her eyes to her nose to her mouth and back to her eyes. Then again, these were weyr babies. Even half-weyr had sharper senses, and there'd been a fifty-fifty chance these twins would be full weyr. Maybe they were seeing a lot better than she would expect.

Curious, she raised a finger on her free hand, holding it before his face, wiggling it a little until he seemed to have it in focus. She then moved her hand slowly to the left, then to the right. He tracked her movements perfectly. When she took the finger away, his gaze went right back to her face.

"Yes, dear?" Damien had noticed her little experiment.

She blushed. "It seems like they can see us. I mean, really see us, even though infants aren't supposed to be able to focus on anything for several weeks."

Damien nodded. "Yep. They're both full weyr. Our eyesight's a lot sharper and develops faster. Also, you might not be breastfeeding for long. Our teeth come in sooner, and sharper, than humans. Might not be too comfortable for you."

So, they *were* full weyr. Though she could sense weyr blood, she hadn't been able to tell for sure. She didn't know if that was because she was only half-weyr, or if it was because she was simply untrained. "Oh, well. I'll just do it as long as I can."

Collin had fallen back to sleep, not really sucking anymore. She slipped her nipple from his mouth. She looked at Damien. "Can you take him? I want to talk to Jake." Her husband jumped up and carefully lifted his son from her arms.

Jake walked back to the right side of the bed, pulling a third chair close to the rail. Jenny depressed the trigger that lowered the side rail. He leaned in, resting an elbow on the edge of the bed, taking her hand in his. "What is it?"

"I wanted to talk to you about your baby. Theron. That's what Tara decided to name him, after her grandfather. If that's all right with you."

He shrugged, looking uncomfortable.

She took his hand in both of hers, resting it on her tummy. "You need to know, she asked if Damien and I would adopt the baby."

"What?"

"She was the first person I met when I came to this town, and we've become the best of friends, as close as sisters. She grew up with Damien and Devlin. She knows what they are, and she knows her baby will be half-weyr. She wants us to adopt him and raise him as our own."

She saw the muscle in his jaw jump as he clenched his teeth. "She doesn't want our baby."

"It's not like that, Jake. She's worried that she doesn't know enough. Isn't prepared to raise a weyr. She knows how confusing it's been for me since I found out what I am, what world I belong to. She doesn't want that to happen to Theron."

"I thought...I don't know. Now that I'm here, I thought I'd be able to help her with that."

"I suppose she might consider it, but...there's someone else in her life. Someone she's begun to care a great deal about. It would be hard, trying to raise Theron in the Way, while having to keep it a secret from Marshall." She turned onto her side, a little painfully, and brought his hand up, resting her cheek against his palm. "I think if I tell her exactly what the situation is between us, she'll give you full custody, if that's what you want."

He relaxed. "You know it is."

She smiled. "The guys and I have been talking. There are a couple of empty cottages on our land. The story's going to be that you're an old college buddy of Damien's who ran into Tara in New Orleans. When you found out about the pregnancy, you decided to relocate to Wyoming, to be near your son, and Damien hired you to head our conservation efforts on the mountain. We'll lead people to believe that you're living in one of the other homes, but of course you won't have to do that."

"Sounds plausible." But he frowned. "Do you think Tara will still want to be a part of Theron's life?"

"Not as a mother. I think she'll be satisfied with being our friend and being able to watch him grow in that capacity."

He nodded thoughtfully. "All right."

Jenny studied his face. "Jake?"

"Hmm?"

"What did you feel for her?"

His brow creased. "I'm not sure. She's attractive, of course. And she knew what we were. It was exciting, having sex with a full human that wanted us so badly. Wanted us specifically *that* way. We'd never had sex with a full human in our weyr forms before." He shook his head. "But mostly, it was Johnathan. He used to have premonitions..." He peeked at her from beneath his long lashes, as if he thought she wouldn't believe him.

"I understand. Devlin's the same way."

"He told me she was the one. That we were fated to mate with her. I didn't feel that way, but he never doubted his visions, so I went along with it. But I guess he didn't see...the rest." His eyes searched hers. "Does it bother you?"

Jen shook her head. "I believe everything has happened this way for a reason. How else would we have met? Maybe Tara's pregnancy and...other things have all been leading to this, to you joining our pack."

A shadow of pain crossed his face. "I would have wished for an easier way."

"Oh, Jake." Jen kissed his hand. "Me, too. But you're here now, head of the pack, and your son will be here soon. Your brother would be happy for you, don't you think?"

He grimaced, pulling her into a tight embrace. "I can't do it without you."

"You don't have to, Jake. I'm yours, and you're ours. Forever."

"Jen's right." Dev had settled Cale in his crib and snuck up on them. He flung an arm over each of their shoulders. "You're stuck with us now. That's what you get for choosing a pack while you're rogue."

Jake stiffened at first, then started chuckling. He leaned back, tears in his eyes, but a smile on his face. "Is he always like this?"

Jenny grinned. "Always."

A few hours later, she rested quietly in bed.

Nurses had taken the babies to the nursery for the usual round of checks, and the guys had gone out to get something to eat. With dominance established, they appeared to be settling into an easy camaraderie, though she didn't kid herself that there wouldn't be times in the future when they'd butt heads.

Soft tapping interrupted her train of thought. She glanced up as Tara peeked her head in. "Hey, Jen! You up to a visit?"

"Yes!" Jenny raised the head of the bed and held out her arms.

Tara walked in and gave her a hug. "I went by the nursery. Oh, my God, they're *adorable!*"

"Thanks." She suspected she fairly glowed with pride. "How are *you* feeling?"

Tara made herself comfortable in the chair Jake had been using. She patted her stomach. "Everything's going fine. Tom's making me come in every week, since...you know. The baby's heartbeat is strong and regular, and he's looking normal, growing right, according to the sonograms."

"I'm so happy."

"Me, too." Tara toyed with the strap of her purse. "Um, have you guys thought any more about --"

"Ohmigosh. I have so much to tell you." Jen arranged herself more comfortably against the pillows and raised the lighting. "I almost don't know where to begin."

"What is it?"

"Well..." She paused a moment, gathering her thoughts. "The day you told me about Jake, Damien and Devlin discovered there was a rogue weyr on our property."

"A rogue?"

"Yes. It's involved, so to make a long story short -- when Jake found out he'd lost both Johnathan *and* one of the babies, he went a little nuts, spent all his time as a wolfie. A rogue. The prognosis isn't good for weyrs who lose their twins, so Damien and Devlin were going to..." She swallowed. "Well, they were going to put him down."

Tara's brow wrinkled. "Pu -- you mean *kill* him?"

"I promise, I'll explain everything someday, but for now all you have to know is, I convinced them to bring him in instead. Let me see if I could talk him back. It worked, but..." Heat flooded her cheeks. She looked away. "Um, in the process --"

"Oh, my God. You like him?"

Jen looked back. "More than like him. He's part of our pack now."

"Part of your pack?"

Jenny nodded. "He's going to stay, Tara. He's living with us."

Tara's mouth dropped open, her eyes wide. "Holy cow. And Damien's all right with this? I mean, Dev was always laid back, but Damien seems pretty possessive."

"There were some issues, but we've gotten them hammered out."

"Wow. So...where does that leave me and Theron?"

"I talked to Jake today. We wondered if you would...well, we thought you might give him full custody. He's all right now, and he'll be living with us -- I thought that might make you feel a little more comfortable with it. Theron will still be raised by weyr; he'll just be raised by his real dad. And I'll be there, of course, and Damien and Devlin. And he'll have Collin and Cale. And Jake has no problem with you remaining in their lives, if that's what you want."

"Wow." Tara shook her head.

Jen's heart dropped. "You don't want to do that?"

"No -- I mean, yes." Tara threw her hands up. "No, I'm not saying no, and yes, that sounds like a good solution. It's just a lot to take in."

"Nobody wants to force this on you, Tara. If you've changed your mind --"

"No." Tara rested her hand on her tummy. "I want to do what's best for Theron. I don't know if I could let him go if Jake intended to take him far away, but if he's going to be with you, just two hours away, and he won't mind Theron knowing his mom, then...yes."

"Yes?"

Tara nodded.

Jenny held out her hand. "Thank you. This means so much to Jake. To all of us."

Tara reached out and clasped her fingers. “The more I learn about weyr, the more certain I am that my son needs to be with you.” She raised her eyebrows. “Three men? Hon, I can barely handle the one guy I’ve got now, and he’s tame compared to your boys. I don’t know how you do it.”

Jenny laughed. “Sometimes, neither do I!”

Indescribable Bliss

Six months later, Jenny sat in the living room with Theron nestled in her arms. He suckled lazily on her nipple, his dark eyes watching her, his fingers toying with a long strand of hair that had fallen across her breast. She smiled.

“How’s our boy?” Jake dumped an armload of wood in the bin next to the big stone fireplace. He tossed a couple of the logs onto the dying fire, rearranging with the poker until he was satisfied with the blaze, then came and sat by her on the couch.

“He’s got quite an appetite, just like his father.”

Jake laughed and lowered his head, nipping her other nipple through the fabric of her T-shirt. “Jake! The baby.”

He grinned wolfishly. “What?” He nuzzled her neck, his hand creeping up, pulling the left side of her shirt aside and catching her nub through the fabric of her bra. He rolled it between his thumb and forefinger, making her clit tingle. “Daddy *is* hungry.”

Jenny turned her head, catching his bottom lip between her teeth. She thrust her tongue into his mouth, moaning as his fingers tightened on her nipple. “Jake?”

“Hmm?”

“Remember what you promised me?” His brow furrowed. She brought her lips to his ear. “After he’s finished and I put him down for his nap, will you...” She snaked her free hand under his hip, squeezing his buttock.

He inhaled sharply, his pupils dilating. “Jen?” With his lips, he traced the line of her jaw to the earlobe. “You want me to fuck you, honey? In the ass?”

She nodded wordlessly, her breath already coming hard and fast in anticipation.

He toyed with a strand of hair, tickling her ear, making her shiver. “You know I like to hear you say it.”

"Jake," she whispered. "Will you please, please, fuck me in the ass?"

He groaned, reaching down to rearrange his jeans, which seemed suddenly too tight for him. "He's close to being done, right?"

She smiled, nodding.

"Good." He pushed himself up from the couch. "I'd better go find something else to do, or I might just take you right in front of him."

He walked toward the hallway, with Jenny watching his gorgeous butt move in his tight jeans. At the doorway, he glanced back, grinning as he caught her looking. "Hold that thought." He disappeared down the hall.

Jenny squirmed, her pussy already wet at the thought of the treat to come.

She looked down at the innocent face nestled against her breast. "I'd better stop having such thoughts," she murmured. "They might corrupt you."

Theron just watched, his eyes darkly observant, full of hidden depths, like his father's. She sighed with contentment. The twins' teeth had started coming in a couple of weeks before Christmas, so she'd had to stop breastfeeding them before she was ready to. But things had worked out well. At Tara's request, she'd pumped her breasts to keep her milk production going, and her friend had gone into labor on December twenty-seventh. Tara had stayed with them for the first couple of weeks, breastfeeding Theron so that he'd have the benefit of her colostrum, but when her milk had come in, she'd asked Jen to take over.

Marshall had handled the legal side of matters, and Jake now had full custody of Theron. Tara visited as often as she could, and they planned on telling Theron who she really was as soon as he was old enough to understand, but Tara had wanted Jen to be as much of a mother to him as she would have been had she adopted him. "I want him to bond with you, Jen," she'd said. "To know without a doubt that he belongs."

Jenny had secretly feared it wouldn't work, but to her joy, Theron had taken to her milk like a wolf to the wild.

Ten minutes later, she was settling him in his crib. As a newborn, he'd originally shared a room with the twins, but their sleeping schedules were too different. Theron had awakened every one-and-a-half to two hours for feedings, while the twins would sleep for three to four hours unless disturbed by Theron's cries, so they'd moved him into his own room. Tilting her head thoughtfully as she tucked a blanket around him, she decided that she'd have the guys move the crib back into the room with the other boys this weekend. Their sleeping schedules were close enough now that it shouldn't be a problem any longer.

She stopped in the other bedroom as well, peeking in on Collin and Cale, who were also sleeping peacefully. She shut the door carefully and went to find Jake.

He was in the master bedroom with Damien and Devlin, fiddling with some contraption they were putting together. Jenny raised her eyebrows questioningly.

"Just give us a minute," Jake said.

"Okay."

She grabbed her reader and headed back into the living room, though she found it hard to concentrate on the e-book as she waited for her promised treat.

Jake finally came and fetched her. The delay felt like hours, but was only about fifteen minutes. She followed him back to the bedroom, and from there into the playroom he and the guys had added onto the house once she'd come home from the hospital with the twins.

An *adult* playroom. Because they sometimes liked to use toys and engage in a little bondage play, her husbands had decided they needed to build an addition to the bedroom, with no windows. One that could be locked, secure from tiny, questioning eyes and probing fingers. They'd seen no reason to delay, and the three of them working together had pretty much finished it in two and a half days.

Now there was a new item of furniture among the toys -- a canted, soft suede bench, with a semicircle missing from the lower edge and stirrups protruding to the left and right about a third of the way up toward the top. In the upper portion there were two padded holes, big enough for her breasts to fit through. In front of the holes there was a bench, just at the right height for a man to sit and... Her pussy tingled as she imagined what they might choose to do to her breasts. Across the middle there was a wide, padded belt. Below the canted bench was a horizontal one. She couldn't quite figure out what that bench was for.

"What do you think?" Jake's hot breath tickled her ear.

"Looks very interesting," she murmured.

Damien and Devlin came in from the bedroom. Dev set the two baby monitors on a shelf near the light switch and shut the door.

Jake's hand snaked up under her shirt, unfastening the back of her bra. Damien stood in front of her, unbuttoning the dress shirt she'd borrowed from his closet, his knuckles grazing her nipples as he worked his way down.

The last button came free, and Jenny held her arms out and back as Jake slipped the shirt off. Damien caught the straps of her bra, then tugged it off and tossed it into a corner. He stepped back.

Devlin knelt before her. He unbuttoned her jeans and slowly pulled down the zipper. Jenny's breath quickened. She was naked beneath, and barefoot. She raised each foot. Dev slipped the jeans from her legs and tossed them away as well.

Jake's hands roamed her belly. She moaned, reaching back to cup his ass and pull him tight against her back. "Nuh-uh-uh," he chided. "Don't touch unless we tell you to."

Jenny groaned, the warm flush of anticipation flooding her abdomen.

Jake guided her to the new contraption. He placed a stepstool in front of it and patted the top step. "Climb up here."

Jenny obliged. She saw that, in her initial perusal, she had missed a couple of padded bars that stuck out to the side. Jacob grasped her waist. "Now put your right leg over the bar." She did, and Devlin guided her foot into the right stirrup, fastening a strap across her ankle. "Now the left one."

She complied. Jake was still helping to support her weight. Her legs were open wide, her butt and pussy now hanging just below the innermost curve of the missing semicircle at the canted bench's lower edge.

While Damien supported her butt, Jake pushed her forward, guiding her breasts into the holes. Devlin fastened the strap across her waist. Then he grabbed her arms and pulled them up along the outside of the bench. Again, she'd missed something -- the wrist straps at the top. He fastened her in; then they all let go. She was wide open to them, totally vulnerable.

The fire of need inside her had never burned hotter.

Her head was turned to the left, her right cheek resting on the brushed suede. Jake came around to where she could see him. "How does it feel?"

Jenny considered. There was pressure at the strap points on her wrists and waist, and behind her knees where they rested on the padded bars, but it wasn't unbearable. She nodded. "I'm okay."

He grinned. "Good."

He ran his fingers through her hair, down along her back. Devlin sat on the bench in front of her. She couldn't see him, but his fingers tweaked her nipples. Jenny moaned, her pussy clenching. Behind her, Jake chuckled. "Oh, Jen. We've barely even begun, baby." She jerked involuntarily as his fingers outlined her gaping lips. "Goddess. You're dripping wet. Maybe this will help."

He worked something cool, with lots of rounded protuberances, like tiny fingers, into her pussy. Jen gasped, attempting to wiggle, but their contraption held her tight. Jake chuckled as her pussy spasmed repeatedly. "So eager!"

She heard a snick, and then the fingers were vibrating. "Oh, Goddess." Jenny squirmed, what little she could, and Jake twisted the vibrator inside her as Dev's fingers tightened on her nipples. She felt her climax approaching already and knew they were right -- they were just getting started, and oh, it felt so good. They were going to --

The sweet sensation disappeared. "No!"

"Not yet, baby. You don't get to come yet." Devlin stopped twisting her nipples.

Jen moaned. "Jake --"

"Shh, baby." He ran his fingers lightly down her back. Calming her, bringing her down, until her tremors faded.

He must have given some kind of signal. Damien strode to the counter just in her line of sight. A metallic object clinked against the stainless-steel countertop as he scooped it up. He walked toward her, taking Devlin's place on the stool.

She couldn't see his face. Couldn't see any of them unless they moved to her left. It was maddening, but at the same time incredibly erotic, not knowing where that next touch would be, who it would be.

Ice-cold prongs, pinching her breasts. Jen gasped. Weights, pulling down on her nipples, swayed with each breath. She whimpered fitfully.

Jake whispered in her ear. "What is it, baby? You like that?"

She nodded. "Yes."

Sharp tugs, stretching her nipples. She drew in a shuddering breath. The sensitive nubs stung, bolts of electric sensation spiraling from the throbbing peaks to her pussy. "Oh, Goddess." She moaned, straining her legs, trying to lift herself so that she could press her clit against the table, make herself come.

Jake tapped her buttock. "None of that, now, or we'll stop playing."

Jen froze. Jake stepped behind her, his hands massaging her buttocks. Swirling, twisting, her nipples buzzed with sensation as Damien twirled whatever was attached to her breasts in delicious, rapid circles. "Oh, please," Jen gasped.

Devlin's head popped into view. He grinned as he grabbed the edge of her bench, sliding onto his back on the one beneath her.

"Oh, God." She trembled with expectation.

A thumb and forefinger pinched her clit. She moaned, clenching her pussy. Another pinch. His two hands alternated, one pinching her clit and stretching it out, then the other, milking her incessantly.

Her nipples throbbed; her pussy wept. The scent of her sex filled the air, light and mossy, overlaid by Jake's rich musk, Damien's earthy odor, and Devlin's woodsy aroma.

Her clit and nipples twisted simultaneously. Jen cried out, tightening her ass muscles, her pussy contracting. "Yes, yes!"

Again, the sweet torture ended. "Please, please," she sobbed. "Please, Jake."

His breath tickled her ear. "Please what?"

He liked her to say things, liked her to talk dirty. "Please, let me come, Jake."

"Why, Jenny? Are you horny?"

He slipped a finger into her pussy, stroking.

"Goddess, yes!" she sobbed. "Yes! I'm so horny. I need to come, Jake. Please let me come." She tightened her pussy, wishing he would stroke a little deeper. She was almost there. Almost.

His pressed a kiss to her cheek, removing his finger. "Not just yet," he murmured.

She moaned. They were driving her crazy, but it was the most delicious torture she could ever imagine.

He waited, grinning ear to ear as her breathing slowed, steadied. When he was sure she had settled down, he disappeared.

The metallic clamps on her nipples were removed, leaving them pulsing, sensitive.

Fingers tugged her labia apart.

Wet, slapping noises accompanied by light, stinging impacts. Corkscrews of delight twisted through her abdomen as slender strands whipped the tender flesh between her swollen lips. "Oh!"

Warmth. Mouths closing on her nipples, sucking hard. Both breasts tingled. She squeezed her pussy, desperately trying to catch one of the tantalizing flails inside. She wanted something inside her, anything, please, so she could come. "Oh, Goddess." She moaned, gasping, already climbing the peak again.

Fingers plunged into her pussy. Once. Twice. She no longer knew who was doing what. Didn't care. *Only let me* come --

Gone. All the sweet sensations. She tossed her head. Panting. Sobbing. She kept squeezing her pussy. She had to come. Had to.

"Jen." A warning tone from Jake.

She stopped, breathing heavy. Begging. "Please. Please-please-please."

But they waited.

They left her alone this time, waiting for her to calm on her own. She closed her eyes, breathing deeply, almost dozing.

Friction. Bristles, drawn across her raw, aching nipples. Jen arched. "Oh, please. Please."

"What do you want?" Damien now, at her ear. She wasn't even looking anymore, her eyes closed, all her concentration on the myriad sensations they were giving her. "Suck them," she begged. "Please, Damien. Suck my nipples."

Hands, pushing her breasts against one another, pulling the nipples in so that one mouth closed on them both. Sucking on the tips, a tongue flicking lightly across the hypersensitive peaks. Jen whimpered, wanting to beg, wanting to tighten her pussy, resisting because if they knew how close she was, they might stop.

Tongue in her pussy, wriggling, probing. "Goddess!" She clenched her hands, fighting the urge to squeeze.

Hands on her cheeks. Pressing them aside, holding them wide while a tongue flicked back and forth across her anus. She sobbed, all her will going into keeping her muscles still, so they wouldn't stop.

A kiss, pressed to her rump. "Good girl," Jacob murmured.

Hot tongue again, working its way inside the tight canal. And...tongue in her pussy, tongue on her breasts. She breathed in gasps, her body trembling.

Warmth, running down between her buttocks. Jen shuddered. Jake leaned over her. "Let's take it slow, okay?" His pinky glided in on the oil.

She shuddered again. The tongue inside her pussy disappeared, replaced by a questing finger.

Jake's pinky slipped out. Another finger slipped in. A little thicker. A little longer.

Cool clamps closed on her nipples again. Jen caught her lip between her teeth, afraid to cry out, afraid they'd hear how good it felt and make her wait again. The -- chains? cords? -- were being tugged criss-cross, pulling her breasts together. Then Damien must have fastened them to something, because the pulling stopped, but her breasts remained close together. She took a deep breath, whimpering as she felt her swollen peaks touching one another.

Her ass. Another finger gone, another one in.

Two fingers in her pussy now. Devlin, digging deep, stroking the finger Jake had buried in her ass. It felt so good, she couldn't help it. She moaned.

A shadow fell across her. She raised her head, glancing up. Damien was kneeling on the front bench. He grinned, his hands busy where she couldn't see them. Warm oil trickled between her breasts. A thick, hot cock slid up between them.

Jacob's fingers on her cheeks again, pulling them wide. His thumb thrust into her. She tossed her head, barely able to keep from clenching her muscles tight around him.

Damien's cock slipped slowly up and down between her oiled breasts while his fingers tugged at the chains, making her aching peaks buzz.

Devlin's fingers plunged in and out of her weeping slit while his tongue lapped at the edges of her pussy, drinking her essence.

Jacob's thumb swirling, swirling in her ass.

"Please," she sobbed.

Jake didn't answer, and he didn't stop.

She knew what he wanted.

"Please, Jake. You promised. You promised to fuck me in the ass."

He gasped, shoving his thumb deep inside her. Dev's fingers danced in her pussy. Damien's cock stroked faster and faster in the hollow between her breasts.

"Please," she begged. "I've been waiting so long. I've dreamt about it, Jake. Your thick, hard cock, so long, buried deep inside my ass. Fucking me."

He groaned. His thumb disappeared. She heard the quiet rasp of a zipper.

"Fuck my ass, Jake," she whispered. "Fuck me. All of you."

Three ragged groans.

Jake's hands tugged her cheeks apart. His feverish cock pressed against her rim. "Sorry, Jen," he whispered. "Waited too long. Can't...can't go slow." He shoved himself inside her.

Stretching and pain. But the pain was lost beneath the pleasure. Jen moaned, savoring the feel of him inside her. So big, so thick, his flesh like fire where it pressed against hers. Her ass clenched, holding him tight.

Pressure. Jen gripped the corners of the apparatus, moaning as he forced himself deep inside her. Her ass ached, but ached in time to the piercing pleasure in her clit. "All the way," she whispered. "Please."

Jake groaned, bending over her, grabbing her shoulders, pressing her down. Down.

She screamed.

Jake's cock. Buried. Oh, thank the Goddess. Buried inside her. "Yes. Yes!"

Her pussy clenched, closing tight on Devlin's fingers.

Her breasts throbbed. Damien thrust between them, his balls slapping her flesh. He froze, moaning, the ring at the base of his cock expanding between her slick orbs.

Jake withdrew slowly, so slowly, then rammed into her again. "Jake!"

"Talk to me, Jen."

"Please, Jake. Hard and fast. Please!"

Her ass spasmed.

He slammed into her again. And again.

"Yes!"

The ring at the base of Jake's cock swelled inside her.

He gasped. "Touch it, Dev. Stroke it."

Dev's fingers burrowed deep, stroking Jake's cock through the intervening tissues.

Jen gasped, moaning.

Damien squeezed her breasts tight, shuddering, his cock throbbing between them.

Jake's cock erupted, flooding her ass.

She screamed, the pressure inside her finally exploding, her ass and pussy sucking frantically at the cock and fingers buried within.

White-hot incandescence burned in her veins, sizzled along her nerves. She arched, holding her breath, frozen in ecstasy.

Damien's cock fountained. He caught the liquid in his hand, held it to her mouth. She drank, lapping like a puppy, looking up into his eyes like lakes of blue fire, drowning in the desire that burned there. Endlessly coming, coming, draining Jake's cock dry, pussy-sucking Dev's fingers, running her tongue across Damien's hand to catch every last drop of his pearly seed.

Jake collapsed against her back, his breathing ragged, whispering her name over and over. "Jen, Jen, Jen. Goddess, baby. What you do to me. You're so good, so good." He rested for a moment, then backed away.

Devlin slipped out from beneath her. Stepped in behind her. His cock slipped into her slick cunt. "Oh, Devlin," she whimpered. "Dev, I can't."

"Yes, you can, baby." Jacob was at her side, stroking her back, watching Dev's cock glide in and out, slick with her juices.

Jen shook her head no, but to her surprise, the pressure was already building in her pelvis again. Good Goddess, how could they do this to her? After that incredible orgasm, how could she want them again so badly?

Dev leaned over her, his hands slipping beneath the bench. His fingers found her clit. He spread the tiny slit there, held it apart with two fingers, tickling inside with the tip of his pinky nail.

"Goddess, yes!" He thrust, harder and harder, milking her clit, pressing it against her pubic bone. She tossed her head. "Make me come. Make me come!"

He sheathed his cock, his whole length immersed in her pussy. Jenny's fingers gripped the corners of her bench tightly. "Yes, Dev. Oh, Goddess, yes!"

The ring expanded, locking them together. His cock thrust and retreated, thrust and retreated, still inside her, but expanding and retracting within its sheath as only weyr cock could. "Oh, Goddess," she moaned. "I love weyr cock. Love the way it feels inside me."

Dev growled, nipping her back.

Pleasure blossomed in her clit, her pussy. Warmth melted her abdomen, spreading as his essence permeated her pussy. His fingers milked her clit, prolonging her climax, driving her higher and higher until she couldn't take it. "No more! Please, no more," she sobbed. "It's too much."

He tweaked her clit, and she tipped over the peak, pleasure slamming through her in shuddering waves. She gripped the bench for dear life, drowning in pure bliss, until the waves began to subside. A shiver. Another shiver. And then it was done.

Damien unstrapped her wrists, Dev her ankles. Jake unfastened the belt across her middle, and they lifted her off. Jake cradled her in his arms. Dev opened the door, and Jake carried her into the bedroom, placing her gently on the bed.

"Can we do that again?" she murmured sleepily, already burrowing into the sheets.

He chuckled. "You liked that, huh?"

"Very much."

"Every now and again," he promised. "When you've been very, very good."

She smiled, sinking into the pillows, allowing sleep to overtake her.

Unrevealed Concerns

A few days later, the four of them stood on the porch of a house surrounded by drifts of snowy white. Jenny sighed. "It's so beautiful."

"It sure is," Damien said, but he was looking at her.

She smiled, moving into the crook of his arm, pressing her body against his solid length.

Jacob and Devlin moved a little closer to the two of them. Jake seemed distracted, his head up, sniffing the air.

Dev frowned at him. "Jake? Something wrong?"

Jake huffed. "Don't know." He paced the length of the porch, staring out into the rising twilight. He shook his head. "Let's go inside."

Tara and Marshall were in the living room, lounging on a quilt in front of the fireplace. They had come up for a visit and were stranded by the late March snowstorm. Jenny's tummy rumbled at the buttery smell of fresh-popped corn coming from the bamboo bowl on the floor between them. She snagged a handful and headed for the couch.

Devlin settled into a recliner by the hearth, near the poker and the extra firewood. A baby's grunt sounded through the monitor. "I'll bet that's Collin," he teased. "Probably smelled the popcorn. Kid could eat a horse." Everyone laughed, but it was true. Collin never missed a meal, and ate twice as much as the other two. He made up for it by growing twice as fast.

"I can't believe they're six months old." Tara stared into the dancing flames. "Sometimes I forget they're three months older than Theron."

"Me, too." Damien and Jake settled to either side of her on the couch.

She studied Jake's profile surreptitiously as she leaned her head on Damien's shoulder. As they had the last two nights, to keep up appearances while they had guests, Devlin and Jake would each sleep in separate spare bedrooms. Tara and Marshall would occupy the third spare room, and Jenny would share her bed only with Damien. Tara knew the truth of their relationship, of course, but Marshall didn't. Not yet.

The thought of spending yet a third night separated from two of her husbands created an actual pain deep in her chest. It was silly, and she knew she could handle it for a few nights more -- she'd done so in the past, when it had just been the three of them and Damien or Devlin had gone away on business -- but it bothered her anyway, maybe the more so because they were still there in the house.

Jake must have been feeling anxious as well, because there was definitely something bothering him. He sat unnaturally still, and she had the impression that his every sense was on guard and focused outward. She longed to wrap her arms around him and make whatever was wrong right, but of course Marshall would never understand a move like that on her part. As far as he was concerned, Damien was her husband. Devlin was just the twin brother who continued living in the house simply because it was home, he and Damien were business partners, and he hadn't yet found someone of his own. Jake was the hired hand who helped to manage their vast property and happened to be Theron's father.

As a matter of fact, Marshall actually thought Jake and the baby lived in a small cabin of their own further up the mountain and had simply come down to join them for dinner and gotten stuck as well. Tara knew the truth, of course, but she kept their secrets well.

Damien draped an arm around her shoulders, casually caressing the outer curve of her breast with the pad of his thumb. Her body immediately responded, her nipples tightening. She glanced toward their guests, but they were wrapped in their own embrace, oblivious to the rest of them. Still, she nudged him with her elbow. He had adjusted pretty well to his replacement as the head of the pack, but he did tend to use opportunities like these to bait Jacob, knowing the man could not respond. Probably not a good idea tonight, given Jake's obvious tension.

Their alpha didn't seem to notice, however. Lost in some private reverie, he ignored the other five people in the room. Shrugging, Jenny leaned into Damien's embrace, trailing her hand along the inner side of his thigh. He sighed, resting his cheek against the top of her head. Jenny glanced at Tara and Marshall again, assuring herself that they were not paying attention, and traced the firm bulge of his cock through the fabric of his jeans. He smiled. His hand dropped down, sneaking up under her shirt, sliding beneath the waistband of her sweats to caress her bare hip.

Fabric swished softly against fabric as Devlin shifted in the recliner opposite them. Jenny looked over to find that he was watching them, one leg up and turned slightly to hide his hard-on from Tara's and Marshall's eyes. An anticipatory shiver traveled down Jenny's spine. It was going to be so good, a couple of days from now, when the weather let up

enough for their guests to leave. She and Damien, making out like school kids with guests in the same room, restricted only to each other, due to the situation. Goddess, it was making her horny. She couldn't wait until she had access to all three of them again. She pictured them touching her all over, hands and lips and cocks, all three of them loving her, making her come again and again. Her breath quickened, and her right hand stroked Damien's shaft through his jeans. She shifted, raising one leg slightly to hide her left hand as she reached between her thighs and began toying with her clit.

Damien cleared his throat. Jen started, glaring at him as she pulled her wandering hands into her lap. "I think I'll turn in," he announced. "Snowstorms make me sleepy, for some reason."

Tara and Marshall glanced up from their makeshift pallet. "Sounds good," Marshall responded, with a knowing glint in his eye. "As a matter of fact, I think we'll call it a night, too."

Tara grinned and stood. "I'll put up the popcorn if you'll fold the blanket and grab the pillows." Marshall nodded.

Jenny got up and busied herself turning out lights and making sure the doors were locked. When she returned, Tara and Marshall said goodnight and headed for their room.

Damien was damping down the fire. The embers glowed, casting a red gleam into the living room as Jenny turned out the last lamp,

Devlin stood and stretched. Glancing down the hall, he made sure their guests had gone into their room and shut the door. Then he hugged Jen tight, sighing as he rubbed his bulging pants against her. "I hope the snow stops tomorrow."

She grinned mischievously. "Still might take a couple of days for the roads to be passable."

He groaned. "Then I might just have to fuck you in the pantry or something," he muttered, sliding his hands down the back of her pants to cup her cheeks and press her close. "I'm serious, Jen. This is driving me crazy."

She laced her hands behind his neck. "Maybe something could be arranged. If you'd like to meet me in the pantry at, say, six in the morning, before they get up," she whispered into his ear, "I'll let you fuck me silly, but we'll have to be quiet."

His cock jerked inside his jeans. "Goddess, Jen," he groaned.

"I'm not kidding," she whispered. "In the morning. Six sharp. Be there." Thick and husky with need, her voice betrayed how much she wanted him.

He nodded. "I'll be there. But, just let me --" He slipped his hand around to the front of her pants, and Jenny spread her legs without hesitation, moaning softly as he slid two fingers into her weeping pussy. He brought them out, holding them up to his nose, drawing in a deep breath, growling as he licked her essence from his glimmering fingertips. He shuddered. "That *might* hold me over."

Jenny rubbed her crotch against one of his rock-hard thighs. "You'd better go, or I might not be able to --"

He nodded, pulling away abruptly. "Hell, yeah." He turned to go, but looked back and winked. *See you in the morning*, he mouthed silently.

Damien embraced her from behind, his hands cradling the small, rounded pooch she hadn't quite gotten rid of since the babies had been born. "Ready for bed?" he murmured, nibbling at her ear.

Her nipples tingled at the sexy promise in his voice. "Yes." She turned her head, planting a quick kiss at the corner of his lips. "You go on. I'll be there in a minute."

He headed for the bedroom. Jenny walked over and knelt down in front of Jake, sitting silent in the dark. "Jake, honey?" She touched his leg.

He blinked. "Huh?" His gaze took in the room, the red glow of the fireplace. "Where is everybody?"

"They've all gone to bed." She squeezed his thigh. "Are you okay?"

"Uh...yeah. Sure. Just tired. Cold does that to me."

She found it amusing that he would use a similar excuse to Damien's, but could tell it was just as false. Still, she'd found that when he became moody -- and he often did, which was understandable, given what he'd been through in his life -- it was usually better to wait until he decided he was ready to talk. "All right, then." She stood, bending over to kiss him goodnight.

So quickly she barely knew what was happening, he tugged her across his lap and pulled down her pants. "Jake," she hissed, glancing toward the hall.

He cocked his head. Grunted. "They're fine," he murmured. "They're having some fun of their own." He pushed her legs apart, thrusting his middle finger deep into her pussy.

She arched, muscles clenching. He drew the finger out slowly, buried his thumb instead, then looked at her with an abiding hunger in his eyes, teasing her crack with the first finger. She gasped, nodding, drawing up her legs, reaching down to pull her cheeks apart for him.

He teased the rim of her anus for just a moment, long enough to make her whisper, "Please," then pressed inside her, quick and hard, his brown eyes black and limned in the reddish glow from the fire. Jenny turned on her side, pressing her thighs tight around his forearm. "Come for me," he growled, wiggling his fingers inside her.

"Yes." Jenny whimpered softly, bucking, wanting to scream with delight but knowing Tara and Marshall would hear.

Jake groaned. "Turn back," he ordered. "I want to see." He helped her, guided her, his fingers still working inside her as she turned on the couch so that her pussy lay bare to his ravenous gaze. "That's it." He leaned forward, watching his fingers glide in and out, hard and fast. Jenny pulled her knees up toward her chest, using her hands to spread her cheeks wide

so he could see as much as possible in the fireglow. His breathing quickened. His fingers drove in deep. "Goddess, Jenny," he whispered. "I wish you could see. See how much your ass likes my finger. How it clings, not wanting to let go." Jenny gasped, arching, pussy and ass spasming. "That's it, baby. Suck me. Suck my finger." His thumb wiggled. "Your pussy, too, baby. It's so red and wet, starving for me. Desperate for --"

She yelped softly, reaching down to grasp Jake's wrist and trap him, keeping his fingers buried deep inside her as racking shudders swept through her body. "Goddess, Jake. Goddess," she whispered over and over, drowning in pleasure.

His eyes watched her pussy, her ass. "I never thought I'd find a woman who loved this as much as I do," he whispered.

"I do," she whispered frantically. "Goddess, I do. And I love you."

"I love you, too." He covered her with his body, kissing her while she surrendered to the last desperate throes of a most magnificent orgasm. His lips brushed her forehead, her cheeks, her eyelids, the tip of her nose, while she came and came, until she lay trembling and spent beneath him.

He withdrew his hand, then found her waistband and tugged her sweatpants up to cover her hips. "Thank you," he whispered. "I hope you know how much the sight of you, of you letting me touch you that way..." He closed his eyes, shuddering. "I hope you know how much it means to me. I'll never forget it."

Jenny frowned, filled with dread. Sitting up, she threw her arms around him. "You're scaring me. You say that like it will never happen again." She searched his face once more for a clue as to what worried him, but could read nothing in the fading fireglow.

"Of course it will," he muttered, but his voice shook, and he wouldn't meet her gaze.

"Jake --"

"Go on," he whispered. "Damien's waiting for you."

She wanted to argue, but knew he was right. A moment more, and Damien would come looking for her, and if she tried to press this issue, they'd end up waking up -- well, *disturbing* anyway, if Jake was right -- Tara and Marshall. She shook her head. "Fine." But she wrapped her fingers in his hair and pulled his face close. "But we're going to talk about this, right? About whatever's bothering you. In the morning."

He shrugged, almost nodding, but not quite, and still not meeting her gaze. Jenny stood abruptly, exasperated. Without a second glance, she stormed from the room. She managed to keep her irritation in check while she peeked in on the babies, but barely avoided slamming the door when she entered the master bedroom.

Unexpected Confrontation

“Something wrong?” Damien drawled.

“Isn’t there always?” she snapped, stripping off her sweatshirt and sweatpants and tossing them into the laundry basket. She crawled onto the bed, naked as a jaybird. “I mean, he’s always so Goddess-damned moody.”

Damien shrugged. “Well, he’s been through a lot.”

She noticed he hadn’t had to ask who she was talking about. “Well, so have we. And Tara. And a million other people in the world, and we don’t get all --”

His lips crushed hers, his warm, hard body pressing her into the mattress as his tongue invaded her mouth, thrusting and sparring until she responded, her own tongue stroking his slowly, taming him, taming herself. She sighed as their lips parted. “You know me so well.”

“Mm-hmm.” He rolled off her, lying on his side while his finger traced the hollow between her breasts, forging a path down to her belly button, swirling around the brim. She shivered, goose bumps rising on her skin. “He *has* been through a lot, you know. He shouldn’t even be alive -- he’s a miracle among weyr. And we can’t even publicize it, at least until we figure out how to deal with the people that were after him.”

Jenny stroked his cheek with one finger. “I’m surprised you’re defending him.”

“Why?” His finger slid over the curve of her belly, teasing the curls just above her clit. “Because he beat me?” The tip of his fingernail grazed the apex of her clit. She drew in a sharp breath, holding still, knowing he would stop if she moved. “It’s the law of the jungle, babe.” He pressed the hood protecting the swollen nub aside with his thumb and middle finger, gliding the nail of his index finger along the tiny groove revealed. Jen shivered, gasping. “I still have *you*, don’t I? That hasn’t changed.” His blue eyes watched her face, his fingers milking her clit.

“Goddess!” She arched, reaching up to grip the corners of her pillow.

"You still want me, don't you?" His fingers stroked her slit.

"Mmm. Yes."

He got up on hands and knees and crawled, settling down with his head between her legs. Jenny trembled with expectation. "Still love me?"

She nodded, licking her lips.

He grinned, his hands parting her slick labia. "So wet already," he murmured, drawing his tongue along her slit. "And so red," he continued, watching her face. Jenny cocked her head and watched him watching her -- *such* a turn-on! She tightened her muscles, putting her Kegel exercises to good use. "Oh, ho," he observed. "Somebody's hungry." He grinned wickedly, thrusting two fingers inside her. "Care to suck on these?"

Her pussy spasmed. "Damien." She wriggled, driving him deeper.

"Uh-uh-uh." His fingers withdrew. "Not just yet, baby. I'm not through playing."

He got up and padded into the playroom while Jenny waited breathlessly, and returned holding cuffs and a small white jar she had not seen before. "It's called Winter Ice. Let's see what you think, shall we?"

He unscrewed the lid and set the jar on the bed. "And just to make sure you keep your hands to yourself..." He carefully cuffed her wrists to the headboard. "And..." He padded over to the door and turned the lock. "The kids can't walk yet, but we'd best get into the habit, don't you think?" She nodded wordlessly, breathless, so horny from her encounters with both Jake and Devlin that she could hardly bear to wait for him to ram his thick, hot cock deep inside her. But if she became aggressive, he might not pleasure her at all. Complete submission, she'd discovered, drove all three of her weyr lovers wild. They didn't mind if she came on strong in the beginning, but once they responded, they wanted her completely under their spell.

And she was more than happy to oblige.

"I almost brought cuffs for your ankles, too, but..." His bright blue gaze searched her face. "You'll be good, won't you?"

She nodded again, so anxious for his touch that her head spun. Meeting his gaze, she felt light as a feather, floating on the surface of the bright blue pools of his eyes.

He brought her knees up, then pushed her heels back to where they almost touched the cheeks of her butt. "Now, let them drop," he demanded.

She did, letting gravity press her knees toward the bed, exposing her sex. He took a good, long look, making the muscles in her pussy jump. Damien grinned. Picking up the jar, he dipped his fingers in, then ran them around her swollen labia and inside her pussy, massaging the clear gel into her tissues.

At first, she didn't feel much, just a cool sensation. Then, as the gel penetrated, she felt a tantalizing tingle. "Mmmm." She wanted to wiggle, experiment a little, but held back, waiting to see what would happen.

He covered her liberally, even smearing a dab on her clit, then set the jar aside. He brought his lips close to her while she watched, his face framed by her thighs.

He blew, mouth open wide, warm, moist air that would fog a window.

Instead, a piercing cold penetrated her lips, pricked her clit. "Oh!" Cold, but also prickly, tingling, tickly. She wanted him to rub her, wanted to rub herself, anything to satisfy the itch. "Oh, wow."

He grinned. Eyes still on her, he slid a finger inside her slippery tunnel.

"Goddess!" She almost bucked, but held back, knowing he would stop if she did. God, it felt so good. The sensation of cold, his finger gliding like an icicle inside her, like a popsicle covered in white lightning, tickling and prickling, stinging and itching. "Oh, yes," she moaned, holding still as he pressed further and further.

She watched, panting, as his lips hovered above her clit, trying to imagine how it was going to feel. She moaned, and he sucked her clit into his mouth.

"Oh!" She cried out as quietly as she could, her fingers grasping the cuff chains. "Oh, Goddess, that's -- Oh. Oh!" As his tongue and fingers danced, frosty coils of delight twisted through her abdomen.

She moaned as he changed position. His thumb pressed against her clit. Her skin tingled at the touch, chilled where their skin met, but with a buzzing sensation like a tiny vibrator. She moaned again, clutching at the chains of her cuffs.

His tongue slithered into her pussy, right alongside his finger. Freezing. Waves of chilly tingles spread through her abdomen. Her pussy clenched. Jenny gasped, out of breath, not knowing how much more she could take. "Damien, please," she begged, voice rasping. "Please. I *need* to come."

His answer was to slide out his finger. While his tongue lapped her juices, each lick an icy pleasure, he dipped his finger in the ointment again, then slid it along her crack.

"Oh!" Jenny's muscles clenched as she thought of having those delicious sensations in her ass as well. "Oh, Damien. Yes."

He pushed his finger inside her rim, massaging the gel into her tissues, working it deeper and deeper.

His thumb and forefinger caught her clit, milking. He buried his tongue in her pussy, licking, sucking noisily. Inside her ass, his frosty finger swirled urgently.

Jenny arched, gasping, head thrashing. "Goddess, Damien. Now. Please!" He just kept working, torturing her with his touch, driving her to the brink, but she knew the only thing that would push her over the edge was his beautiful thick cock. "Please, Damien, please," she sobbed. "Fuck me." She raised her head, looking him in the eye, pleading. "Please, baby. I need your cock. I need it inside me. Please!"

He raised his head, fingers still milking, still probing. "What do you need?" he asked, eyes twinkling wickedly.

"Your cock," she gasped. "Inside. Fucking me. I need it. So hot. And...so *cold*." She shivered, imagining how it would feel. "Please, Damien."

He hesitated, but only for a moment. Quickly, he reached up with one hand, pressing the releases on her cuffs. "Roll over," he rasped, his own breath coming fast and hard now, desire darkening his eyes to a storm-tossed gray-blue.

His finger plumbed her ass even as she turned, and she murmured desperate cries of pleasure into her pillow.

Damien's free hand caught her waist, guiding her up onto her knees. She pressed her cheek and shoulders into the pillow, her hands clutching it tightly, involuntary tremors racking her body as her ass milked his finger while she waited.

With his free hand, he coated himself with a thin layer of the gel, drew in a sharp breath. "Oh, damn," he breathed. "Oh, shit. That's *good*!"

"Yes." Jenny wiggled her butt. "Damien, please *hurry*!"

"Hell, yes!" His cock pierced her slick pussy.

Jenny moaned, biting the pillow. His cock, the tingling cold -- so unlike the heat she usually felt, and yet delicious. Goddess, cold never felt so *hot* before!

"Yes," Damien moaned. "Oh, Jen. Yes." She felt him shiver. His free hand gripped her left hip. He drove his cock deep, a cold flame that pierced her to the core.

Jen arched, lunging back. His finger pumped in and out of her ass. His cock stretched her pussy, driven deep, a glacier inexorably claiming every inch of her. "Yes!" She wanted desperately to scream, but Tara and Marshall were down the hall. She buried her mouth in her pillow and screamed anyway.

Damien growled, plunging his thick, icy-hot cock into her again and again. Jen rocked back, meeting each thrust, pussy squeezing, ass squeezing, the cold fire building inside them both.

They froze at the same time. Froze, and then the base of his cock expanded, locking them together even as his thick seed -- icy, yet boiling, freezing, but hot -- poured inside her. They shuddered together, again and again, wave after wave of deliciously decadent delight rolling over them.

"Goddess," she mumbled, voice trembling, when it was over and they lay wrapped in each other's arms. "Every time, I think it can't be any better, and then..." She shook her head.

He nodded. "Mmm. That stuff is something, isn't it?"

"Yes. It makes every touch so cold, but in *such* a way...mmmm. It's wonderful."

They lay quiet for a while, resting, but Jenny finally dragged herself from the bed and pulled on a pair of flannel pajamas and tossed Damien a pair of flannel drawstring pants and a long-sleeved tee. She and her men usually slept in the nude, but with guests in the house, she'd figured it was better to have something on, in case of emergency.

Jenny turned off the overhead light and nestled in beside him. After several minutes, she sighed. "Damien?"

"Hmm?" He was nearly asleep, she thought.

"I need to go check on him."

"The babies?" he mumbled.

"No, hon. Jake. I'm worried about him."

She could feel him nodding.

She crept out of the room and down the hall. Jake's door was shut, of course, and she winced as she twisted the knob, hoping it was unlocked. It turned, and she slipped inside, shutting the door quietly behind her.

Jake wasn't in the bed. Even as the knowledge registered, a voice whispered in her mind. *Jenny. He needs you.*

Gaia? She turned and slipped out the door, running down the hall. *What's wrong?*

They are here.

Her heart leapt into her throat. *They? Who?*

No answer, though she still felt the spirit's presence.

She flung Devlin's door open. "Dev. Come quick." Not waiting for him, she continued down the hall and stopped before the room Tara and Marshall were staying in. She knocked softly. "Tara?"

Muffled sounds from inside, and then the door opened and Tara peeked out, her auburn hair tousled. "Jen?"

"I need your help. Jake's in -- he's in trouble. We have to go out. I need you to stay with the babies."

Tara ran a hand through her hair, yawning. "Trouble? What kind of trouble?"

"I think whoever's been after him...I think they're here."

Tara's eyes opened wide. "Oh, no!" She glanced back, then slipped out the door and shut it quietly. "Marshall's sleeping. I'll go sit in the babies' room."

Jen hugged her quick. "Thank you."

Tara hesitated. "You don't think they'll come after the boys, do you?"

"I don't know. I never found out why they're after Jake. If they know he has a son..."

Her friend's expression hardened. "I'm waking Marshall."

"But what will you tell him?"

"I don't know. I'll think of something. But we need him. He's smart, he's strong, and he'll protect them like they were his own."

"All right. Do what you have to." She turned, nearly running into Devlin.

"What's up?"

She crooked a finger, motioning for him to follow, and ran back down the hall to the master bedroom.

"Damien, Jake's in trouble." She sat on the edge of the bed and tugged on sneakers. She tossed Damien's and Devlin's shoes their way.

Dev shook his head. "Don't need shoes. We'd only ruin them."

If they changed. Of course.

The cold wouldn't bother them, anyway. Jen raced down the hall and into the kitchen, grabbing the house key from its hook. She opened the back door, tapping her foot impatiently while they stepped out onto the porch. She locked the door behind them and tossed the key into the brush. If anyone came after the babies, that would delay them a little.

Damien grabbed her arm. "Where is he?"

"I don't know!" She closed her eyes. *Gaia, help me.*

Here. Jen held on to Damien, gripped by vertigo as dark limbs and white snow raced past in her mind's eye. She nodded, recognizing the bare promontory where Jake was trapped. Dark shadows slunk up the mountain, hemming him in. *He led them away, to protect all of you.* Jen blinked back tears. "This way."

As she had done once before on a cool night in September, she ran for Jake's life. White drifts of snow gleamed in the moonlight, scarcely slowing her as the Goddess's wind pushed at her back, giving her wings. Her shoes barely seemed to penetrate the crust before she had lifted her foot and gone on.

Damien and Devlin had shifted, shadowing her every step. She slowed as they neared the bluff, halting inside the edge of the tree line. As she struggled to regain her breath, her wolves paced, sniffing the air.

A semicircle of figures moved slowly up the slope. Jake stood near the edge of the outcropping, calmly facing his attackers.

Dev's hackles rose, his hair standing out in a bushy halo around his head. He plunged without warning into the trees to her left. Damien sped to the right.

Snarling and cursing. Crashing in the underbrush. The figures before her turned their heads. Moonlight glinted from the whites of their eyes as they scanned the trees to the west.

Damien burst from the trees to the east, bowling over the two bodies nearest Jake on that side. He advanced on two others, jaws snapping.

The figures turned again, facing this new threat.

They really weren't very smart, she thought hysterically as Devlin repeated his brother's ploy. He downed two more, leaping at their backs while they were focused on Damien. You would expect the bad guys to be a little more intelligent. A little more challenging.

"Enough." The man in the middle hadn't spoken very loudly, but his men froze in the act of turning once more. "I've enjoyed toying with you, O'Connail, but it's time to finish this." He raised his arms. Moonlight glinted off a silver-tipped bolt loaded in an enormous crossbow.

The snap as the bolt released echoed like a gunshot in her ears.

Jake didn't even move. He watched the bolt fly toward him, a look of inevitability in his eyes. "Help him!" she screamed.

A gust of wind deflected the bolt to the right. At the same time, Damien leaped. Jenny heard a meaty thunk, and he dropped to the ground.

"No!" Her scream and Devlin's howl shattered the night.

Jake stood frozen, staring at Damien. "No. No!"

Devlin dashed toward his brother. Two men moved to intercept him. Dev tore through them, snarling, his ruff a wild mane. He turned and stood before Damien, his growl low and menacing. His fangs dripped blood, staining his beautiful silver fur ochre.

Jenny's gaze darted, searching for something, anything, that she could use as a weapon. There was nothing, and there were seven men left. As she watched, the one holding the crossbow reloaded, and then they were advancing once more toward the men she loved.

She dashed out of the concealing trees, snow crunching beneath her feet. The man with the crossbow glanced her way. He turned back, dismissing her as any kind of threat.

"Jake, do something," she sobbed, dropping to her knees. She peered at Damien, trying to see if his sides were moving, if he was breathing. "Please."

Faster than her eyes could follow, he was a wolf. He stalked over to Devlin's side, his huge form straddling Damien's body.

The man in the middle laughed. "You've led us a merry chase, my friend." His gaze narrowed in the moonlight. "But we'll end it now, once and for all." He glanced down the mountain. "And then we'll finish off the brats." His eyes met Jenny's, and he smiled, but the look was death. "All three of them, just to be sure."

She snarled, leaping to her feet. One moment she was on her knees. The next, she was on top of him, her hands tearing at his throat, his weapon lying on the ground.

The black wolf sprang. One of the men scrambled for the crossbow and managed to raise it up and slam it against the side of Jake's head. Jake fell to the ground.

Devlin growled and launched himself at Jake's attacker, driving him to the ground. The bow flew from the man's grip, landing near Jenny. Instinctively, she let go of her opponent for a second, reaching for the weapon. The man beneath her slammed his fist into her temple. He reached over and jerked the bow from beneath her fingers, then turned it on Jake.

He stumbled to his feet, rubbing at his throat. "Got a grip, you do," he choked out. He bent over, retrieving the dropped crossbow, and turned it on Jake. "First you, O'Connail. Then the woman." He grinned at Devlin. "And the little pup, too."

Jake stirred, paws scrabbling at the earth.

The man calmly checked his bow, then took aim. Dev tensed, preparing to pounce.

Jenny dug her fingers into the wet soil, scoured clean of snow by the wind that was still blowing. "Help me," she begged, not even sure who she was asking. God, Gaia, the Mother -- she didn't care who answered, as long as someone did. She cast her senses out, into the ground.

Even above the tree line as they were, strong roots criss-crossed the soil beneath them. Jen felt their stirring beneath her fingers. "Grow," she whispered.

Roots burst from the earth, clutching the feet and ankles of the men surrounding her.

Her awareness expanded, rising with the wind. Jen looked down on the tableau as if from a great height. "Blow," she demanded, her voice stronger.

The wind whipped, lashing out at the seven men in black jeans and dark, hooded shirts. The one with the crossbow stumbled as the gale tore it from his hands. He watched, a circle of white surrounding his irises, as the weapon soared to the edge of the clearing and lodged in a tree, only to be torn apart by its limbs.

Jenny pushed herself up onto hands and knees, then struggled to her feet. She kicked off her shoes, digging her toes into the mud.

She was an island of calm amidst the storm. The gale that buffeted her enemies eddied gently around her. Her hair floated, lifted by the swirling currents.

"Witch." The bold one didn't look so bold now. "No one told us they had a *witch*."

"We had a witch," one of the others said, "and that didn't help *us*."

The leader's expression hardened. "That's right." He steeled himself and took a step toward her.

What do I do? She sought Gaia in her mind, in the land around her. *I don't want to kill them.* She glanced at the bodies already on the ground and shuddered. *But I can't let them come after him again.*

Seal the Land, Gaia whispered. *With the blood of the Way, and the Mother's magic within you, it can be done.*

How? A fleeting series of images. Jenny nodded. She knelt and reached out, sensing the rock she wanted before her hand touched it. As she lifted it, she drew her palm along the sharp edge, drawing blood.

The crossbow guy laughed. "You won't stop me with a rock, lass." He fought the wind, struggling to reach her.

Jenny walked over to Devlin's side, skirting her enemies, unhampered by the wind. She knelt beside him, looking down at Damien.

He was breathing, shallowly. Blood seeped from around the bolt buried in his shoulder. Good. She turned to Devlin. "I need your blood," she whispered, showing him the sharp edge of the rock.

He sat on his haunches, head dipping once to show he understood.

Jenny slit a line across his chest.

Blood dripped from the wound, mingling with Damien's, soaking into their land.

She pressed her bloody palm to the earth.

The land drank, recognizing those who protected it. She felt the Mother's energy flowing through her, into the land, joining with the power in their blood. Writhing, shimmering, it was a river of gold, just outside her reach. She tried to grasp it, to shape it, but the torrent was too wild.

She needed more. More strength. She rested a hand on Damien's ruff and felt the slow, but steady, beat of his heart. She leaned against Devlin's side, swallowing a sob of relief.

Dev's pulse thrummed in her ears. She drew from them both, augmenting her strength with what little remained of theirs. She reached out again in her mind, grasping the turbulent stream of power, yet still she could not shape it.

Jake was on his feet now. Jenny held their enemies in place with the wind as he weaved his way to her side. A cut near his eye bled, crimson droplets dotting the earth. He reached out, resting a paw in her lap.

She grasped his leg, opening her mind and senses to him. Power flowed into her.

Goddess, he was strong, so much stronger than any of them. His cut bled, his blood mingling with theirs, sinking into the ground. Jenny reached out with her mind again, grasping their four wriggling streams of energy. With his strength, she tamed them, shaping the flows.

Jake's was the anchor thread. She flung this out, surrounding their vast holdings and the small town of Alabaster with the gleaming river of light. She wrapped the other threads around it, fortifying, weaving the ancient power of the Way and the magic of the Mother into something new. Something stronger.

The threads came together, a barrier of light wrapped around the land to which they were bound.

The ground beneath them shook. Golden light emanated from her, illuminating the clearing, bright as day. Power seethed, waiting for her command.

She glared at the trespassers, and gasped.

Her sight blazed through them, illuminating their very souls. Darkness dwelt in each of them, a black tangle wrapped tightly around their hearts. As she looked to their leader,

loathing nearly overwhelmed her. He was filled with a writhing, seething mass that flung tendrils outward. She sensed its dark purpose and shuddered. The thing was trying to rip its way out of him, drawn toward her and her husbands, craving the light. It wanted desperately to sink its blackness into their souls, to suck their power dry, to shape them into the ultimate tools for its dark purpose.

To quench the light.

Jenny clenched her fingers. The mountain trembled again. Roots ripped up from the soil, entangling her enemies' arms and legs. "Out!" she commanded.

Wind screamed. Two of the trespassers sailed into the trees, where they were caught by limbs and thrown roughly down the mountain.

Roots encased the others, including the leader, hauling them into the tree line. There, vines and lower limbs dragged them onward, immune to their struggles, imbued with only one purpose: to cast them outside the warding Jenny had woven.

She closed her eyes, mentally following their progress. Kicking and screaming, bruised and battered, the trespassers were yanked off the mountain, and the land did not stop until they were gone from within the boundaries of light. She had a sense of time expanding, altered by the energies placed into use. In a matter of minutes, they had been exiled to a place outside the limits of Blake influence, including the town of Alabaster. To return, even in a vehicle, would take at least three hours.

Clothes torn, skin scraped raw and bleeding, six of their enemies scuttled away like spiders. Some spouted gibberish, and she sensed their minds were broken. But they were alive, when they had been ready to kill three innocent babes just to be sure of one.

She considered their fate merciful.

But the leader still was not cowed. He stood and strode purposefully back toward the perimeter limned by their power.

He slammed backward as though hit by a shotgun blast the moment the toe of his black sneakers encountered the edge of that boundary.

He lay gasping on the ground, glaring into the trees. She sensed that he could not quite see what protected them. He struggled back to his feet, approaching more slowly this time. He could not see the warding, but having been alerted, he did sense it this time. Just outside the cord of forces that was visible to her, he halted, reaching out a tentative hand. His fingers touched the edge of her warding and jerked back. He snarled, hugging his hand to his chest, flexing the fingers as though they'd gone numb.

Their land was sealed. None of the Dark Guard could enter now.

And he knew it. She sensed it in his tightened jaw, his angry stance. He stared up the mountain, his gaze so intense she almost thought he could see her. "My compliments, witch." He grinned and bowed with a flourish. "Until we meet again."

Turning, he disappeared into the night.

Jen sagged, her body drained. *It is done*, Gaia whispered. *The balance is restored, for a while, at least.*

How long? Jen thought.

Come to me, the Goddess sent. *Tomorrow.* Her presence retreated.

Strong arms lifted her up. "I'd really love to know what just happened, but for now --" Jake's face hovered over hers. He had shifted. There was a goose egg just below his temple, mottled black and purple, still oozing blood, but he was alive. Jen pushed at him, trying to make him put her down. "Not me. Get Damien."

He tilted his head toward his right. "Don't think that's necessary."

Damien and Devlin crouched together on the ground. Dev had a firm grip on the shaft of the bolt. "Push it through," Damien grunted.

Dev obliged, forcing the tip of the bolt through Damien's bicep, where it had almost gone through on its own. Damien's breath hissed. Fresh blood dripped down his arm. "Now, break off the haft and --"

"Can't." Jake shook his head. "It's tempered steel. We'll have to wait until we get to the house. You have tools we can use to cut off the fletch?"

Dev nodded.

"Then we'll remove it there and pull the bolt out clean. Save the muscle as much tearing as possible."

Damien nodded and stood, leaning on his brother for support.

The trip back to the house took a lot longer than the trip out. Jenny wrapped her arms around Jake's neck and clung. The higher temperature of his weyr blood took the edge off the cold, but she was still shivering by the time the greenhouse and stables were in sight.

"Take her to the birthing stable." Damien grunted. "We have extra clothes stashed in there."

Jake nodded.

It was the same stable he had occupied only a few months before, what now seemed like a lifetime ago. The padlocks and shackles were gone, of course. He carried her inside, out of the wind, and waited while Devlin pulled clothes from a canvas bag on one of the shelves. Sweatshirt and a pair of sweatpants. Damien leaned against the wall for support while Jake and Devlin dressed her. Dev rolled up the overlong legs, but she tucked her freezing fingers inside the long sleeves, each into its opposite, using them like muffs to warm her hands.

She waited as the others pulled on sweatpants -- more to cover their naked bodies than for the warmth.

Jake studied her anxiously. "Are you feeling better?"

She nodded. "Just tired." Her body shivered. "And cold."

He glanced at her bare feet. "Let's get you inside."

He went to pick her up again, but she pushed him away. "I can walk. You take care of Damien. I'll be waiting."

She walked cautiously on legs like rubber. At the steps up to the back porch, she struggled, weak knees threatening to buckle as she dragged herself up by the handrail. At the door, she remembered throwing the key into the brush. "Damn." She knocked softly, hoping Tara would answer. Maybe there was a chance she could keep Marshall from seeing them in this condition.

But Marshall opened the door. He reached out, cupping her elbow with his hand, guiding her inside and shutting the door behind her.

"Ummm..." She frantically racked her brain for a remotely plausible explanation for her appearance.

"Tara explained, Jen."

"She...explained?"

He held up a hand at her shocked expression. "Don't worry. I've always thought there was something different about the Blakes. The truth was not quite what I was expecting, I'll admit, but --"

"She told you *everything*?" The last word came out as a squeak.

He nodded. "Don't worry. My grandfather told me that this mountain would never die as long as the Blakes were around. He didn't know what they were, but he knew the family did everything in its power to protect this land, the town, and its people. That's the way it's always been, he said. I'm willing to offer that same loyalty. Your secret's safe with me.

"Besides," he said, putting an arm around her in a friendly hug. "Tara and I are getting married, and since she considers you the sister she never had, we'll practically be related. I'd never betray family."

"Married?" It was too much. She couldn't grasp it all.

He grinned. "I asked her tonight. Right after she told me what was going on."

Jenny shook her head in confusion. "Whatever possessed you -- it seems like an odd time for a proposal."

"What better time than the moment I realized she trusted me enough to share that kind of secret? Or the second it dawned on me that she was right to do so. That I would never betray that trust, because I love her."

"I guess congratulations --" She put a hand to her head, swaying on her feet.

"Whoa." He tightened his arm around her and half-supported, half-carried her into the living room. A blaze crackled merrily in the fireplace. He deposited her in the recliner closest to the hearth. "Sit here. I'll let Tara know you're back."

"Tara knows." Her best friend stepped into the room. "I heard your voices from the babies' room." She walked over and knelt by Jenny's chair. "Is everything okay? What happened?"

Jen pushed her tangled hair back from her face. "I still don't know exactly why they're after Jake, but it won't happen again. Not here. Not on Blake land."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive." She reached out and squeezed Tara's shoulder. "The babies are safe. Safer now than they've ever been, I think."

"So they've given up?"

Jen remembered her brief glimpse of the ringleader's face, his last words. *Until we meet again*. She shivered. "I'm not sure." She remembered Gaia. "This will sound strange, but I think I'll know more tomorrow."

Tara nodded just as Damien, Devlin, and Jake stepped into the room and froze.

"Um, uhh --" the three of them stammered, obviously searching for words.

Jenny waved a hand. "They both know. Don't question it; just trust me."

Marshall nodded. He stepped toward Jake and held out his hand. "I'll never betray you. You have my word."

Jake stared at his outstretched palm for a long moment, then reached out and shook.

Inside Jenny, something clicked into place, just as it had when she'd decided several months ago that they were meant to protect Jake. "That's it," she whispered.

"What?" Tara asked.

"Oh. Nothing." Jen shook her head. "I know you've probably got a million questions, but can we fill you in tomorrow? I'm exhausted."

"Of course." Tara eyed her critically. "You look like death warmed over." She winced. "And you've got a nasty bump on your temple. Let me get some ice."

"I'll be all right. Really. I just need some rest."

Tara surveyed her skeptically, but nodded. "All right." She stood and slipped her hand into the crook of Marshall's elbow. "Goodnight, all." At the arch into the hall, she glanced back. "The babies are fine, Jen. They slept through everything."

She nodded. "Thank you."

"And you guys can, you know, go ahead and spend the night where you normally do." Her tone wasn't suggestive, just supportive. "I know it's probably important for you to be together right now."

Jenny blinked back tears. "It is. Thank you."

Their guests turned and disappeared down the hall. A moment later, their door clicked shut.

"That was interesting," Jake said, raising his eyebrows.

“I’ll explain tomorrow. Can we please go to bed now?” Jen could barely keep her eyes open.

Jake nodded, gathering her in his arms and carrying her -- this was becoming a habit -- with her other husbands flanking him, to their room. She was vaguely aware of being undressed and held between them in a warm shower, her hurts being cleaned, and then being tucked into bed.

Unfinished Business

The bed bounced, and Jenny reluctantly opened her eyes to see sunshine streaming in the window and Devlin grinning down at her, blue gaze bright and mischievous as a child's. "The weather broke. It's sixty degrees and not a cloud in the sky."

"Mm." Jen rubbed her eyes. "What time is it?"

"Almost ten. We let you sleep in." He looked awfully proud of himself.

Jen hated morning people. At least today she did. She touched a swollen breast and winced. No wonder she was so sore. "What about the babies?"

"They're fine. We fed Collin and Cale their cereal. Theron had a bottle around seven-thirty, but he's acting hungry again. That's the only reason I woke you. I figured you might be getting a little uncomfortable."

"Thanks, I am." Sitting up, she pulled a couple of pillows over and stuffed them behind her back. "Will you bring him in?"

"Sure thing."

Dev, Damien, and Jake trooped in, each carrying a baby. Damien handed over Theron, and they all three settled in to wait -- and watch. Her husbands liked watching her breastfeed. She didn't mind; she wanted them to be as much a part of the boys' lives as she was, and it only seemed natural to have them there while the boys fed. Also, it was incredibly erotic. Sometimes, after she had nursed the babies with the guys watching and then put the boys down to sleep, her husbands would nurse as well, two of them sucking her nipples while a third sucked her clit, not touching anything else, just sucking her nipples and clit until she came so hard she screamed.

Jen reluctantly pulled her mind away from such thoughts. She nursed Theron first from the breast that was most engorged. She smoothed his tousled hair, dark brown with bright strands of auburn that caught the sun's light scattered throughout. All three of the

boys had hair unusually thick for babies, Collin's and Cale's straight and golden as cornsilk, while Theron's tended to stick out every which way, just like his father's.

Theron gulped eagerly for a while, then settled down to a slow, contented rhythm. She had switched him to the other breast and was just deciding he'd had enough when he suddenly clamped his gums down. "Ow!" She winced, then pressed a finger in between his lips and tugged her nipple free. He grinned up at her as she ran her pinky over his upper gums. "Oh, look! He's getting a tooth."

She and the baby cooed and giggled at each other while her husbands oohed and aahed over the tiny white pinpoint just peeking out of the gum, but then Jenny made a face. "I guess he won't be breastfeeding much longer, either."

Damien patted her shoulder. "Sorry, hon. Weyr and half-weyr develop physically faster than humans. But don't worry; they'll still be mama's boys for a long time to come."

Jenny grinned and jounced her bare breast. "Aren't you all?"

Dev gasped dramatically and held a hand over Cale's eyes. "Jenny! Such behavior, and in front of the children!" He shook his head in mock disappointment.

"I agree. I think we'll have to take you to task for that later." Jake's eyes were dark with the promise of a night in the toy room. Jenny shivered and felt an answering tremor in Damien's hand on her back. My, but it was nice to have three gorgeous hunks salivating over her!

"Whatever you say, Jake," she answered in a meek tone, looking at him through lowered lashes. She was rewarded by his intense, hungry gaze and the shifting of his hips as he subtly tried to make the erection now straining at his pants a little more comfortable. She grinned. "At any rate, I think Theron's done for now."

She relinquished him to his father. Jake swept his thumb mischievously across the tip of her sensitive nipple as he gathered Theron up. "Later," he promised, and she nodded.

They trooped out. She dressed slowly, a bit stiff and sore from their ordeal the night before. She checked her shiner in the bathroom mirror -- not looking too bad, considering -- then joined everyone in the kitchen, where she finished off the pancakes Devlin had saved for her.

They spent the next couple of hours chatting with Tara and Marshall, giving them the rundown on what had happened the night before. Jenny explained to all of them exactly what she'd done, how she'd sealed the land against harmful influences.

For a human just introduced to the concept, Marshall took all the talk of weyrwolves, assassins bearing crossbows, animated tree roots, and time dilation quite well. When they were surprised by his acceptance, he mentioned again that his grandfather had been an old soul, full of stories about the mountain and odd things that had happened there. "Well, my parents said they were just stories, but Gramps always maintained they were real. We were close, really close, and deep down inside, I always halfway believed him. I don't know..." He

rubbed his neck, looking sheepish. "I guess I kind of *wanted* the stuff he talked about to be real."

By two in the afternoon, the mountainside was riddled with streams of melting snow. Marshall and Tara decided to attempt going home. "The snow's pretty much history, but the mud!" Jen protested.

"We've got our cell phones," Tara assured them. "If we get stuck, believe me, I won't hesitate to call."

Marshall nodded. "And we've decided Tara's going to go ahead and move in with me." He looked at her and grinned. "You'll have to pardon me if I seem anxious to get on with that."

Tara blushed. "Marshall!"

After they'd said their goodbyes, Jen wandered into the boys' bedroom. They'd gone down for their nap a half-hour earlier, and she smiled at their serene faces. She was tugging a blanket up over Cale's shoulders when Jake's arms slid around her waist. "They're so beautiful," she whispered.

"They are." Jake pressed a kiss to her earlobe. "Jen, I --" Intense but quiet, his voice cracked, and she heard him swallow hard before he continued. "I don't know if I'll ever be able to express how much you mean to me. All of you." She turned into his embrace, looking up into his dark brown eyes. "I thought I'd lost everything when Johnathan died. Now, I have you and Theron, and Damien and Devlin and the two boys... I have a family again." His hand cupped her cheek. "It's all because of you."

Jenny shook her head. "It's not just me, Jake. It's all of us. We're in this together, that's what makes us strong." She rubbed her cheek against his palm. "Something important happened last night, Jake."

"You mean Damien taking that bolt for me? Goddess, when I saw that, it was..." He shuddered. "It was Johnathan all over again. If he had died, I --"

"Shhh." She pressed a finger to his lips. "It's over. I was talking about more than that. There's..." She closed her eyes, remembering the presence she had sensed in the Dark Guard the night before. "There's something out there, Jake. It's hard to describe. Not necessarily evil, but greedy and destructive. It's trying to find a way into our world. What we did last night -- not just Damien, but all of us, refusing to abandon each other, blending our powers -- we stopped it. The sealing of the land protects *us*, but that isn't all. The four of us working together, combining our strength -- our *love* -- in that way, kept something bad from entering this world."

"I know," he said. "I felt it. The Dark Guard..." He shook his head. "We have to sit down one day, so I can tell you what they are. But not today." His arms tightened around her. "Was he right? Are you a witch?"

Jen shrugged. "To be honest, I'm not quite sure what I am anymore. I'm tied to the land in more than one way now, not just through the bond with Damien and Devlin and now you. I've spoken to the one we call Goddess, the feminine entity that inhabits these mountains. I'm sure you've sensed her. Weyr always do." Jake nodded. "She says I'm like her. She's a...caretaker. A nurturer. You, Damien, and Devlin protect the land and the people associated with it from without. She and I, we foster and nourish, cultivate and guide. We strengthen the land from within. According to her, the magic that is Earth is in all of us, but in most it's lost its potential. In all weyr, that ember remains and has been fashioned into the Way and the bond. In me, it's something more -- a flame, not just a coal. If that's where a witch's abilities come from, then maybe so." She did not mention that she was destined to join Gaia, long after their lives were done. It didn't seem necessary for them to know at this point.

"The seal...that means it's really over, for now. They can't hurt us."

Jen nodded. "Not here. Not on any of the land under our influence." She frowned, gripping his shoulders. "But that doesn't mean they won't find other ways to get to us. We still have to be careful, but I have this feeling we're going to be all right. At least for a while."

"I sense it, too. My head's having a hard time buying it, but..." He tapped his chest. "I feel it in here. So do Damien and Devlin. We talked about it this morning, while you were sleeping. Even Tara and Marshall sense it. Tara said the earth just seemed like a brighter place all of the sudden. Marshall agreed. He said it felt like the world was full of possibilities that hadn't been there before."

"I think that ember still glows in them, too." She tilted her head, studying him. Though all three of her husbands had the enhanced weyr senses, Jake seemed so much more perceptive to the currents and undercurrents than they did, possibly because he'd lived such a dangerous life compared to them. He'd *had* to be more alert. "You do know they're part of our pack now, right? Tara and Marshall?"

He nodded. "Yeah, I know. I felt it, too, when Marshall and I shook hands. Our pack's complete, isn't it?"

"I think so."

Jake nodded again. "I'm glad. I can't think of any other people I'd rather share my life with. Or my son's life. And..." Tears glimmered in his eyes, but he blinked them back. "I know Johnathan would approve."

Jenny fought back tears of her own, hugging Jake tight. So strong, and yet so vulnerable. Wasn't it strange that more than anything, all she wanted was to be able to protect the protectors?

Speaking of which... She sighed and nuzzled Jake's chest. He loosened his hold, and she looked up. "I need to go into the woods for a while."

He frowned, but then comprehension dawned. "The Goddess. You need to talk."

"She calls herself Gaia." Jen snorted. "Actually, she calls all the caretakers Gaia, but that's as good a name as any to use when we speak of her."

"All right. I guess I'll stay here and keep an eye on the boys while Damien and Devlin head out to check for storm damage."

"Thanks." She glanced at the baby, assuring herself that their quiet conversation hadn't awakened him, then headed for the door. She shut it quietly behind them and gave Jake a quick hug. "I'll be back shortly."

She walked the woods, letting her path meander aimlessly. At first, she hiked in her blue jeans, a thick turtleneck, and sturdy boots, but despite the chill of the last few days and the cold of the melting snow, the warmer air coupled with the exertion soon had her sweating. She shucked the turtleneck, tying it around her waist, knowing that this deep into the trees she was safe from the prying eyes that might wonder why she was haunting the woods in her bra. She held out her hands for a moment, catching the melted snow drops like rain in her palms.

Struck by the urge to feel the earth between her toes, she knelt and tugged at her laces, kicking off the heavy boots to bury her feet in wet leaves. A shiver ran through her from toe to head as the now familiar sense of becoming one with the earth enveloped her. Suddenly, even her jeans and bra were too much to bear. She untied the turtleneck from around her waist and tugged off her jeans and the cumbersome nursing bra, hanging all three on a sturdy branch.

Naked, she lay on the leafy carpet, staring past the stark brown branches and bits of pale mistletoe that towered above her to a sky the clear, brilliant blue of Damien and Devlin's eyes.

The odor of wet earth, rich and pungent, tickled her nose. She breathed in deeply, savoring the scent.

A rabbit hopped out of the underbrush, pausing near her foot.

A falcon landed on a branch above her, preening its feathers while watching her with one eye.

"They like you." Gaia stood over her. Jenny started to push herself up, but the spirit shook her head. "Remain where you are. Be one with the earth."

She lay there for what seemed like hours, but of course it couldn't have been, for the sun barely moved in the sky. Beneath her, the leaves disappeared and became the thick grass of an overshadowed glade. The trees above rustled, covered in new spring growth. She felt a deep thrumming, like a pulse. No -- less rhythmic, more pervasive. Stuttering, then staccato, then slow and steady, altering as conditions in the world altered. The heartbeat of a planet. She dug her fingers into the loam beneath the green blades, letting the sound travel into her body.

Warmth flooded her. Her breasts tingled and plumped, milk trickling from her nipples. Her pussy throbbed, and her womb ached. "What-what is it?" she whispered.

"It is a sign from the Mother," Gaia answered reverently. "She is pleased. There is nothing more precious to her than love and life, and you embody both. She wishes you to revel in it, as she does. That is her Nature."

"Thank you for your help last night."

The vision shook her head. "I gave you only knowledge. The power is within you and those you love."

"Are we really safe? All of us?"

Gaia gazed into the distance. "For now. That which has threatened must bide a while. You have thwarted its plan."

She felt the danger still, however, faint but on the horizon. "This isn't finished, though, is it?"

"At this time, She can see only that you and yours will be safe until your sons are grown. After that, the Sight becomes murky again. Uncountable paths appear, and only the choices made at that time will clarify the vision."

"I guess it's enough to know that we're safe at least that long."

"It will have to be."

"What *is* he?" Silly to personify it, the Presence she had felt last night, but she couldn't help thinking of the darkness as a male influence.

"Chaos? The Devil? Your kind has many different names for that which opposes us. To me, and those like me, it is simply the enemy. It is the antithesis of the Mother." Gaia sighed. "Life is love and war and growth and death and joining -- so many things. There is no good without bad, no darkness without light. Yet, there must be balance. Aggression must be held in check, lest it lead to the ultimate destruction. Likewise, the urge to do good and to encourage this in others must be fostered in such a way that it does not become the ill light of fanaticism. This, the Mother seeks to do. Without her influence, this world would be completely without harmony."

"You see it today, in those places where the Mother has no representatives, no Weyr, no Gaia, to work through. Places where the whims of the few are answered daily, and become more and more extravagant even as their enjoyment of life itself wanes."

"The enemy is a being who wants all the world to be like that. He has attempted this before. Sometimes, where the world's heart is weak and has lost its people, he succeeds."

"He-he's actually succeeded?"

Gaia nodded. "In other galaxies, on other worlds. In other...dimensions, I think you would call them. And he seeks to break through, into *our* world. Already, he is able to exert his influence beyond the border between his current realm and ours, in the places and on the people in our world where the Mother's influence has waned."

"I sensed him, last night. I could *see* the darkness in those men. And one of them --" She shivered. "I think it was looking at me, through him. I thought he reached out for me. For all of us."

"Yes. He would acquire great power if he were to corrupt you." Gaia chuckled. "His chagrin at the ease with which you cast him out -- that was gratifying. He is arrogant, you see, for he has found it surprisingly easy to attract followers in this world. At first, he seems like a benevolent god, for he offers all things to all people, their heart's desire. Every want is granted, while needs are forgotten. But those wants -- they grow, into something sick and twisted. Even those who desire to do good find that, without limits, all paths lead to destruction. His is the living Death -- the absence of love, compassion, and companionship, for all of those cease to exist in a world where the only thing that is made to matter is what we *think* we want. If we cannot defeat him, as we face him time and time again, he will destroy us all, for without love -- the primary essence, that which leads to birth and growth -- the Mother cannot thrive. Cannot nurture and cultivate. There will be no more birth, no more life. The world would end."

Jen sat up. "And this might actually happen? Could even happen in *my* lifetime?" she asked, remembering what the Goddess had told her before.

A delicate shrug. "That was one path. For now it is averted. You cannot imagine how your denial of him, your love for each other, strengthened the Mother. But he is not defeated, only weakened for a time. There will be other attempts." Gaia's eyes like oceans drew her in. "We may prevail only if your love is strong and true. The ones who surround you are potent. Their strength is your strength, but only through you can they become that which may continue to defy the enemy."

"Go now. Know that I will be with you whenever you call, but your task now is to raise your family. Your love will lift them up, and when the time comes, they will be equal to the task."

"You've seen this?"

Gaia shook her head. "That future is still cloudy." She touched her breast, over her heart. "I feel it, here. Again, I say the Mother has chosen well."

Jenny shook her head. So many people, counting on her for so much. What if she failed them? What if she wasn't as strong as everyone seemed to think? "But --"

Gaia was gone. Jen sat naked on a patch of wet leaves. There was a flapping sound above her as the falcon took flight. The rabbit's ears twitched, and it bounded into the dripping brush.

She pushed herself up and started to brush off, but no leaf clung to her. Her skin remained clean, dry, and warm. She smiled. Nice trick, that.

The rush of ripeness the Mother had called to her remained. Her breasts were plump, full, aching to be suckled. Her flesh burned with desire, every inch of her body longing to be

touched, her pussy aching to be filled. With a few concise movements, she dressed and then strode quickly back toward the house. Time to do just what the Mother wanted.

Revel in life...and love.

Epilogue

James O'Shea stretched prostrate on the floor, while Lazaa's whip crossed his back again. "Three wolfling whelps and an untrained witch! How could you *fail*?"

"N-no one warned us about her." O'Shea swallowed the liquid seeping into his mouth from his swollen lip.

A sharp crack. Moist, slapping sounds as the flails encountered his bloodied flesh. He bit down on his lip again, but this time, a whimper escaped.

He froze in fear. The sounds of suffering usually fed Lazaa's rage, worked him into a frenzy. O'Shea had watched men die under his whip because they couldn't hold their tongues.

To his utter surprise, the man stepped back. "Stand up."

He struggled to his feet, every movement making the flesh on his back scream. He ground his teeth together. His lip poured blood as he bit through. He had lots of practice with pain, but *this* --

His superior's sharp black gaze cut him like a knife. He almost whimpered again. Almost, but now that the pain had receded just a bit, the other emotion was making itself felt. Desire, a need only heightened and fed by his agony.

Lazaa's dark gaze flicked to Jimmy's stiff cock. Shame filled him as the man smiled. That was the only reason he had lasted so long in this guy's employ. He had a thing for pain, and his boss knew it. The man sensed with uncanny accuracy just how far he could go, leaving Jim bloody but not quite broken, with his traitorous cock standing at attention, aching with need.

He dreaded the day it went past that point. Hoped he could somehow get out before it happened. Because it would. Lazaa had a way of breaking the people around him, giving

them what they wanted to an extent they'd never imagined, until they just couldn't take any more.

His tormentor ran the dripping red cords of the lash through his hand. "I-I could go back," O'Shea stammered. "Now that I know, I'll find a way. I --"

The man looked at his palm and grinned. Bad things happened when Lazaa smiled. It was all Jimmy could do to keep from wetting himself.

"No." Lazaa's black eyes pierced him again. "The moment is lost. The door has closed, and the Mother's victory has weakened our benefactor, and so has weakened *us*." His jaw tightened, and Jimmy tensed, thinking he would strike out again. But the man calmed himself, a half-smile curling the edges of his lips. "It will be some time before we can attempt the transition again." He drew the lash through his palm once more. "I do believe you lasted longer than any of the others, before crying out. I admire that. I've always admired that about you."

Jimmy trembled. This was something new, this almost genuine flattery. He didn't know what to say, what to do. He remained silent.

The whip-thin figure nodded. "I also like a man who knows when to keep quiet." He lifted a hand, crooking a finger. "Ezell."

The witch stepped out of the shadows.

"Heal him." His gaze narrowed. "But leave the scars."

The woman nodded, her red gown shimmering in the light as she swayed gracefully to his side.

Her hands touched his ragged flesh. Jimmy tore at his lip again while she worked, her every touch a new agony.

The healing took quite a while. His legs trembled with exhaustion by the time she was finished, and the witch's voice was a hoarse, tired whisper. "I've done all I can. There is so much damage, time will have to finish the job."

Lazaa stepped behind him. "Mm. That will do."

Ezell glanced up at O'Shea as she moved past. "Oh." She reached out a hand to touch his lip.

"No." Lazaa's voice cracked like a flail. "Leave that."

She nodded and scurried from the room.

"Melaine."

The naked, voluptuous redhead lolling on the couch stood and padded across the room. Lazaa rested an arm across her shoulders, his fingers toying with the ring piercing her nipple.

"Our benefactor has a new plan. More subtle. It will take years to accomplish, and someone dedicated to nothing but its completion must oversee it." The dark eyes pinned him once more. "*You* are very dedicated, are you not?"

O'Shea dropped to the floor, abasing himself before the man. "Completely, Master Lazaa." His voice shook with conviction.

"Up!" The impatience in his tone had Jimmy leaping to his feet despite his stiff back and weak limbs.

"Please him," Lazaa murmured to the woman beside him. "Then feed him."

"Th-thank --" The Master held up a hand, and Jimmy pressed his lips together tightly. "Come to me tomorrow."

"Yes, Master Lazaa."

"Jimmy." The voice was a purr, and he stopped breathing as the man stepped close. His hot tongue lapped at the trail of blood on O'Shea's chin. "Don't fail this time. You won't like what happens if you fail. You will beg for death, but that would only be a release, and why would I offer you that? Do you understand?"

He cursed himself for the ripple of pleasure that ran through his body as the man sucked the last droplets of blood from his swollen lip while watching him with knowing eyes. "Yes, Master Lazaa," he whispered.

The master of the Dark Guard turned and strode from the room.

Melaine clapped her hands. Half a dozen girls materialized from behind the doors and curtains lining the walls.

Shelly dragged him to the carpet. Her teeth closed on the lobe of his ear, drawing blood. Melaine's mouth surrounded his cock, roughly biting its head. A blonde he didn't know pressed her lips to his, grinding his injured flesh against his teeth.

He gasped, fingers digging into the carpet's thick nap.

Nails scratched, marking his flesh.

He writhed, his body trembling. Bites peppered his chest, his abdomen. "Yes," he whimpered, though some small part of him hated what he had become, what he was allowing them to do. Melaine grasped his balls, squeezing hard. "Yes!"

The fire built in his groin, every hurt driving him higher and higher, until agony and ecstasy were one and the same, and he laughed and cried at the same time, cock spurting. In the beginning, he'd thought this was heaven.

Now, he knew it was only the beginning of hell.

 THE END 

Rachel Bo

Rachel Bo is an award-winning author currently published in several genres. On the weekends, she works as a Clinical Laboratory Scientist. During the week, Rachel writes and rides herd on her handsome husband, two wonderful daughters, a rabbit, a snake and several remarkably hardy goldfish.

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