

# Rythan's Becoming



Kira Stone

Changeling Press

# **Sons of Zemlya 1: Rythan's Becoming Kira Stone**

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On the twentieth anniversary of his birth, Rythan enters the Temple of Destiny, as the inhabitants on Zemlya have done since the beginning. Should he be found worthy in the Chamber of Judgment, he will Become an adult.

It's not a sure thing. Rythan has seen the UnBecoming -- the unlucky ones who never lost their bi-pedal child form. Rythan knows he must harness his sexual energy and burn through his immature shell to truly Become an adult. But Becoming also requires the help of his catalysts, a pair of adults he's never met, and water doesn't combine easily with fire and air. Can Rythan pass the final test and meet his Destiny?

## Prologue: The Canal Of Dreams

Bells pealed, their sound carrying over the river-ways, tolling the Hour of Darkness. Time to go.

Wearing only a traditional body hugging gold ceraskein, Rythan leaped from the diving deck of his parents' houseboat, arcing out over the black water to pierce the surface with barely a ripple. After a long underwater swim, he popped up for a breath of crisp air and started an easy breaststroke. He had miles to go, and all day to get there. Even so, it would be a test of endurance.

Today was his Day of Becoming -- the beginning of his final transformation from boy to man, child to adult. The agonizing wait to begin his adult life was nearly over. That knowledge gave him the strength to swim the long distance into the heart of the city at a measured pace. It wouldn't do to be too early, but it would be disastrous if he arrived too late.

His destination was the Temple of Destiny, for there, on the precise second of the twentieth anniversary of his birth, he would be called to stand in judgment before Destiny and learn what his future would hold.

His sleek yet simple form marked him as a child among his kind. The adult DNA inside him remained masked. That's what this ritual was about. Removing the barriers that trapped him in childhood to Become. Become *what* was the question he'd spent his whole life thus far preparing for.

Some people wore their inner adult like a second skin. You could look at them and see what their future held. Rythan knew he was of the opposite type. He'd stared at his reflection in the opalescent piece of polished abalone shell for hours, and not found so much as a hint of what awaited him. His Becoming was buried so deep not even a Temple Guardian could discern his destiny.

With a kick of his long legs, Rythan set off in a new direction, down the Canal of Dreams. It was the middle of the night for most of Azure, the canal town that had been his childhood home, but even if it had been midday, Rythan knew he'd encounter no traffic. To interfere with one wearing a gold ceraskein would court disaster of the worst sort. No good soul would ever invite that sort of trouble to disrupt their future streams.

Since this ceremonial swim was supposed to be a time of meditation and reflection, Rythan allowed his thoughts to drift as his body churned through the water. He knew well the murals on the stone walls of the canal, the history and mythology they represented.

Might he morph into one of the vegetative Krakens who patrolled the waterways, always on the lookout for polluters? Did he have it in him to be a doe-eyed Faun, a forest dweller with natural healing talents? Or perhaps he was meant to be a Zephling, riding currents of air as he scattered raindrops upon the thirsty earth. Those creatures and more decorated the canal walls. So many possibilities, each so different from all he'd known.

Soon, he'd Become one of them.

As the first sun began to rise on the horizon, Rythan flipped over onto his back and lazily kicked to propel himself along the gorgeous canal. The grassy banks gave way to elegant platform housing, where the richest and luckiest dwelled. Would he be one of them some day? Would his adulthood bring him such wealth and power?

He heard his educator's advice echoing in his mind. *Focus on the current task until it is complete, then the next and the next. Do not think of where your path might lead. That is only for Destiny to know, until She chooses to reveal it to you in Her own time.*

Rythan tried to do as he asked, but it was impossible not to think of his future. Whenever his eyes closed, he dreamed of air and fire, earth and water mating in a carnal dance that left his body in a fever of sexual ecstasy. He understood that his planet, Zemlya, couldn't exist without those elements living harmoniously together, but never had he heard of an adult who possessed a fraction of all four. So what could his dreams possibly mean? Destiny willing, he'd soon find out.

## Chapter 1 -- The Temple of Destiny

Zemlya's second sun, a distant red orb, hung over the Temple of Destiny as Rythan swam into the reception pool. His lungs burned. His muscles had been strained to their ultimate limit. The effort had been worth it though. He'd made it on time.

Around him the tranquil water grew warm as it leached the excess heat from his boring body. Two arms and two legs, with five digits of unremarkable length at the terminus of each. His chest had room for only one set of lungs, side by side, and his hips were slightly narrower than his shoulders. Daily swimming kept his body from running to fat, but he lacked the bulging muscles of his father and older brother, who'd Become powerful river Krakens.

The body-hugging hood of his ceraskein restrained his bracken-colored hair. When loose, the thick strands fell to his shoulders in waves, one tangible bit of evidence that he'd inherited a fraction of his mother's Dew Maiden DNA. A line of that same dark brown-green hair bisected his torso and curled between his hips to surround his cock. There, again, he wasn't much above average in child terms, but it would get the job done. He hoped.

The only adornment he wore was a strand of twenty pale pink shells that he'd tied around his ankle before leaving home. Each one had been given to him by his parents on the annual anniversary of his Emergence Day. Just today, moments before the bells of Azure tolled the Hour of Darkness, he'd received the last. His journey to adulthood was almost complete.

Rythan closed his eyes to concentrate on slowing his heart rate. He wanted to face his Destiny calm and composed. He almost managed it, too, until a great booming voice scared him half to death.

"I call forth Rythan Tso Mequil to stand in judgment before Destiny."

He jolted to his feet, the goddess-blessed water sloshing over the low walls of the temple's reception pool. His limbs were shaky, from nerves, or exhaustion, or perhaps both. Still, he waded into the vaulted entrance chamber with as much dignity as he could muster.

The temple custodian, a creature with four massive legs terminating in webbed feet and a gray barrel-shaped chest that was discernable as female only by the thumb-sized teats hanging from her belly, waited for him to float over the circular pattern in the center of the pool.

When he achieved the proper position, she opened her droopy jowls and rattled out the ritual phrases as if she'd said them so often she was now completely bored by the honor. "Like stepping stones, your child years have led you to this place at this time. Your transition from boy" -- she gave him a quick but thorough study, as if to verify that she'd used the correct term -- "to man is but a moment away. Are you prepared to meet your Destiny?"

"I am," Rythan said solemnly.

"Have you prepared your mind?"

"I have."

"Have you prepared your body?" Once again her dung-colored eyes swept over him. She seemed to doubt he'd expended any effort in that regard.

Rythan fought the urge to utter a biting phrase. That would have deviated from the ritual pattern, and perhaps cost him his future. "I have."

"Have you prepared your spirit?"

"I have."

"Are you ready to place yourself in the hands of Destiny, accepting whatever She chooses to bestow upon you as your rightful place in adult society?"

"I am."

"I declare that you, Rythan Tso Mequil, have earned the right to stand before Destiny. Shed the last remnants of your childhood and enter the Chamber of Judgment."



Quickly Rythan stripped off the gold ceraskein and dumped it in the waste tube at the edge of the pool. The water felt much colder without that layer of protection, and it quickly pebbled his bare skin. His balls tried to retreat, but his lower abdomen was too tense to make room for them. The best thing for him to do was to keep moving. However, the custodian forced him to endure her bold, assessing gaze one more time before she stood aside to let him pass.

After wading into the Corridor of Accounting where the water came up to his chest, he swam forward, his movements slowed by a steady current pushing against him. A series of clear boxes lined the walls, ten to a side, with clams of various sizes resting at the bottom of each.

As he reached the first container, he removed the string of shells from around his ankle. He bit off the knot at one end so the oldest shell came free in his hand. Afraid he might drop it, he clenched it tightly in his fist. He waited until the old mussel inside had fully opened its jaws before dropping his oldest age marker in. The clam's moss covered lid closed over it, and he moved on to the next box.

Rythan repeated the ritual nineteen more times. Each clam got successively younger until the last was barely older than the piece of shell he fed it, the one his parents had given him that morning. Not a single offering was rejected, verifying their authenticity as true indicators of his age.

That left only one more test. The judgment.

Suddenly the stream of water reversed its flow, nudging him onward rather than forcing him back. It spilled out into the largest temple chamber Rythan had encountered yet. Two mermen with thick, muscular tails caught him as a big gush of water hurled him into their arms. They had white cords around their necks, a visible symbol of their oath bond with Destiny's purpose.

"Ho there, young sir. Be ye Rythan Tso Mequil?"

Rythan nodded, unable to speak for the beauty he found in the mer's blue face. He was so masculine and proud. Confident. And his aquamarine eyes held a special laughter that invited everyone to smile with him.

"Speak up when the time comes so the judges may hear the ring of truth in your words," the other merman instructed him.

"I will," Rythan said, although his response was somewhat lost in the echoes of the water splashing against the chamber's marble walls. He'd literally have to shout to be heard by anyone who was more than a few feet away.

The mers closed in around him. Rythan could scarcely breathe without bumping into one or the other. His body finally started to warm, only this time it wasn't from exertion.

The sexy merman whispered into Rythan's ear, "Forgive us for crowding ya, lad. Ta have ya faint and drown now would be a sorry end to this fine day, no?"

The mer's words stiffened his spine. Rythan squared his shoulders and raised his chin. Even if the verdict was bad, he'd take it like a man.

His show of bravado earned him a wink from the sexy mer, then the bonded guardian's voice thundered through the chamber. "Stand ye now before Destiny and those who have watched over your childhood so that ye may be judged."

The light inside the room dimmed to a dusk-like setting. Slightly above eye level a ring of stone doors slid open, twenty in all. A judge stood on the threshold of each, separated from the central chamber by a filmy veil that obscured their true forms. They would all be adults, Rythan recalled from his lessons, some of whom he'd have known from his earliest memories, others he might never have met.

How much did they really know about him? Had any of them been able to read his mind? Were they aware of his carnal thoughts? His lofty ambitions? His deepest desires? Would it count against him if they did?

An amber glow, much like the sunlight outside, came through the entryway directly in front of him. Rythan could make out a large, boxy shape behind the curtain but no concrete details that gave him a clue as to where the figure might have fit into his childhood.

Until the judge spoke.

Tears filled Rythan's eyes as he heard his father's voice warm with pride and affection say, "I have watched over the childhood of Rythan Tso Mequil for twenty cycles of the seasons and I find him... worthy."

The light dimmed, and the mer-guards nudged him toward the next alcove. This judge said much the same thing when the light shone through the doorway, only in a breathy feminine voice he couldn't place. And so the process went, judge after judge.

It wasn't until they got to the eleventh repetition that an odd thing happened. The judge, a female by the sing-song sound of her voice, invoked her right to ask him one question. "What will you do if you fail to Become?"

Though Rythan felt plenty warm now, he shivered at the thought of a bleak existence where he'd never fulfill his true potential. "Whatever Destiny desires," he stammered out.

"I have watched over the childhood of Rythan Tso Mequil for eleven cycles of the seasons and find him... worthy. Barely."

*Barely?* Rythan flushed with embarrassment. Who was she? In what way did she find him lacking? He searched his mind for a cause.

The mermen had to remind him the next judge was waiting for his full attention. Rythan tried to focus, but it was hard. There were nine judges left. If three felt the same as the female who'd just spoken, Rythan would have to endure another year as a child. If two found him unworthy, he'd never Become at all.

"Chin up," the sexy merman whispered as if he were imparting good news. "T'will be over soon enough."

Rythan listened as the next in line judged him worthy. And the next. And the next. Until they reached the nineteenth judge, a gruff male who nervously twitched the curtain between his fingers. He too chose to ask a question, one that made little sense to Rythan. "Several seasons ago, a wealthy merchant accidentally spilled shells from his money pouch into the canal as you swam by. You stopped and dove to retrieve what you could. How many did you return to him?"

"I didn't count them. I gave him all I could find."

Another twitch of the curtain caused it to billow out as if dismissing him, and the judge said, "Worthy. Barely."

Why should he have counted the money? It wasn't his to begin with. The rich old Yakidril had seemed pleased with his act of kindness. He'd even given him a small green pearl for his trouble. Why was that wrong in this judge's eyes?

The question troubled him until, with great relief, Rythan heard the final judge confirm his worthiness. He'd passed. He'd passed!

But as he started to splash around in celebration, the mer-guards tightened their grip. "There's one more. The judge of your future has yet to speak."

Mortified, he froze. By Poseidon's beard, how could he have forgotten? Destiny always had the final say.

The ponderous female custodian waddled out of the corridor where Rythan had deposited his shells. She stood at the edge, on the verge of entering the chamber. There, Rythan watched, transfixed, as the ugly lumps and bumps of her awkward body transformed into a stunningly beautiful child close to his own age. Shapely hips and breasts and pale white skin appeared, features he could appreciate, even if he wasn't moved to touch her.

"I am Destiny's Child and within this temple I speak for Her in all things." The young female's voice was as bright and happy as the play of sunshine over calm water. "I have heard the verdicts of those who know you best. I have seen with my own eyes evidence of the child you are and the adult you may Become. Do you have anything to say before I pass judgment?"

His tongue lay heavy and dry in his mouth. Rythan had prepared a statement for this moment, but no amount of desperate cranial searching could scare up so much as a phrase of it. Instead, he spoke straight from his heart. "I have tried, in all things, to be a good child. My actions speak for themselves, and I stand behind them."

"As it should be when you appear in the Chamber of Judgment." She gave him a gentle, reassuring smile. "I find you... worthy. Go forth and meet your Destiny, Rythan Tso Mequil."

## Chapter 2 -- Draining

The water began to swirl around in the circular chamber, creating a whirlpool. Rythan felt himself being tugged away from the mers but he clung to them as the news sunk in. He would Become!

"Swim fast and sure," the friendly guardsman urged him. "Or else you'll be sucked into the Realm of Unbecoming. Have you come all this way to fail now?"

Faster and faster the water stirred around him. A quick glance down confirmed the escalating current would soon surpass his ability to navigate it. Panic began to fill his heart, causing it to thunder in his breast. "Where? Where do I go?" Rythan couldn't remember.

The guard pointed toward an opening in the wall on their level. "Start to the right of it, let the current carry you around. You'll make it if you swim hard."

Rythan pushed himself away from the pair of mer-guards with all his strength. He churned through the water with long strokes, his feet kicking up a white froth that was swept away into the deepening water funnel. His body screamed in protest, still not recovered from his earlier exertion, but he was closing in on his target. A desperate grab for the marble doorframe, and he was in.

Immediately, the door started to drop into place. He shouted his thanks to the mers, but the only voice he heard in return belonged to the grumpy one who complained, "Just once I'd like to see a child who can remember their own name after hearing their judgment."

Silently berating himself -- he *did* know what was expected of him when his mind wasn't clouded with panic -- Rythan turned around in the small pool to inspect his new surroundings. This is where the change would happen, where he would

Become! When he left this room, it wouldn't be as Rythan, the child. It would be as... as... what?

What form would his future take?

He scanned the room, looking for clues. The pool in which he'd arrived now had no exit. He couldn't see a way out at all, except for a pair of long, unscreened windows. The view looked out over the familiar canals of his childhood, but he knew not everyone came from his corner of the planet.

There were places so hot and dry that water was more precious than the rarest of pearls. Places where darkness was so eternal, so complete, that its denizens had lost their ability to see. Places so high that only the lightest of winged creatures could reach them. Places so lush with vegetation that travel involved vines and rope bridges because there was no room to walk upon the earth. Where would he find his place among them?

One judge among the twenty would be responsible for bringing about that destiny, the one who would serve as his catalyst. His ability to sexually mesh with this chosen judge would determine the characteristics and strengths of his adult form. They would know him well, but there was a good chance he wouldn't be familiar with them at all. If only he had some clue to prepare him for the male -- or, if Destiny willed it, the fem -- who would help him transform.

The room held few clues about his catalyst or his fate. Marble walls, cool white with thin veins of black and green and gold, surrounded him on all sides. The large chamber was longer than it was wide and the pool took up nearly a quarter of it. To the right of the windows, along the wall, stood a narrow table. Flatbread, fruit and dried fish had been laid out in serving dishes, the special kind his mother used for important guests. Opposite the table, to the left of the windows, rested a large sleeping pallet. Dozens of sky blue pillows had been scattered across the top of a white cushion, where he would slumber later.

Food edged out rest in terms of immediate need. He hadn't had a thing to eat since the day's quest began. Now he could partake. He knew better than to gobble

down as much as he could fit in his mouth, though he dearly wanted to. Instead, he selected a pleanar, a large fruit that was equal parts pulp and sweet-tasting juice, and a small piece of flatbread.

He gazed out over the water while he ate. There were no open windows on the other side of the canal, presumably so the residents wouldn't be disturbed by the sights and sounds of the painful transformation that every child must endure as part of the transition into adulthood. Rythan wasn't looking forward to that part of Becoming, but the agony would be short-lived. Or so he hoped.

With his meal in his belly, washed down with a gourd full of fresh water, Rythan tumbled onto the sleeping pallet. He gathered the pillows around him as he would have at home, creating a bowl effect that would keep him safely tucked in should the houseboat rock wildly during the night. Not that he needed to worry about such a thing happening here in the temple, but the old habit was something familiar in this new place, and it helped him to relax.

Comfort alone, however, wasn't enough to let him drift off to sleep. His body hummed with the day's excitement. He felt restless, overly warm. Kicking off the light blanket covering him didn't help.

Maybe pleasuring himself would.

Although sexual intercourse was strongly discouraged among children, and expressly taboo between adult and child, Rythan had done all he could to learn about the process. How complete his information was, he couldn't say. He had discovered enough to do a decent job of servicing himself, the one sexual act children were permitted to engage in. Practice helped to hone his skills, and he'd been getting plenty of practice these last few months.

A thin layer of sweat covered his smooth skin. He ran a hand over his chest, down his belly, and over his thighs. By the time he grasped his hardening cock, he had enough lubrication for an easy stroke. Blood pounded into the rapidly thickening organ. Once it filled to capacity, Rythan knew the size of his penis rivaled that of other adults he'd seen in his research. Would it be sufficient for the task ahead? He had to believe it

would be. The judges would have pronounced him Unbecoming otherwise. No, he had what it took to Become an adult. Including the size of his dick, and a willingness to use it.

Thoughts of what his catalyst might ask of him filled his mind. A female would make matters more difficult. As a sexual partner, the feminine form held no appeal for him. What would please him most was a male, one equal in size to himself, who would spear him with his hard shaft. Repeatedly. Deeply. Until pleasure overrode any other sensation in his body. One who would allow him to do the same, until they both fell into an exhausted sleep.

His stomach burned with a hunger that had nothing to do with food as he pictured just such a coupling. He dug his heels into the soft bedding and lifted his hips as if meeting a lover's thrust. With his free hand, he held his balls out of the way so he could tickle the inch of sensitive skin behind them. His nipples tightened into hard points. A moan slipped past his lips. He felt both reckless and scared. The beast inside him sensed the impending climax, waited for it like a waterwolf about to pounce on its prey.

His hand moved faster, up and down his shaft, squeezing the plump, purpled head. The sensation was both too much and not enough. It felt so good, but not nearly as good as it needed to be to complete his Becoming. He'd never been more aware of that possibility, and what he'd need to do to reach it. He fantasized about another's hand stroking him, another's tongue running over his lips, another's weight pressing him to the mattress...

His balls drew up tight. Climax ripped through his system, temporarily blinding him with searing white light. His cock flexed in his hand, delivering the first gush of semen. Another gut-clenching spasm brought forth a rain of droplets which splattered across his chest and abdomen.

Drained of tension, he sagged back upon the pillows and rubbed the creamy residue into his skin. Each successive circle got slower, until his arm finally dropped to



his side. Rythan entered a dream-filled sleep where, in his child form, he flew over land and water, from lava laced mountains to coastal shores, searching for his new home.

He never heard the other being enter the room.

## Chapter 3 -- Tind

Whether he slept for minutes or hours or days, Rythan didn't know. The only thing that registered on his sleep-laden brain was the heat. Massive amounts of it, as if he were lying in a bantara roasting pit rather than on a couchion. Sweat rolled down his sides, collected at the back of his knees and under his arms. Though fond of water, he didn't relish the idea of drowning in his own perspiration. He had to find a way to cool off, but first he needed to figure out what was causing the problem.

It wasn't the growing season, when the canals would turn into saunas during the hottest hours of the day. Rythan cracked open his lids enough to confirm it was still dark outside, so he couldn't even blame the overwhelming warmth on the suns. Usually Azure got colder at night, so this much heat before dawn was definitely a surprise. What was going on?

He sat up and used one of the many pillows to wipe the perspiration from his face. It did little good, for more readily beaded up. He needed to replace what moisture he was losing.

Scrambling for a candle in the dark, unfamiliar room proved to be something of a challenge. Eventually he was able to find tinder and a candle. The wick fizzled and hissed, as if it too had been sweating, but soon it caught, and Rythan was able to carry the taper to the other side of the room where the food had been.

A pitcher of water was still there. He held his breath as he gulped down the contents. Revived, if only marginally, he looked for the source of the stifling heat.

One patch in the far corner of the room failed to brighten in response to the candle's amber glow. Nothing he recalled of the room's furnishings could account for the darkness. Cautiously, Rythan headed in that direction. Another time, another place

he would have procured a weapon first, but he didn't feel threatened. Just very, very hot.

The dark spot shifted, flattening out. The heat rose exponentially with each step Rythan took, as did the concentration of a rank smell that made his head swim. There was nothing in his knowledge of the ritual to account for this. Could it have something to do with the process of his particular Becoming?

He bent over, intending to inspect the darkness, when cracks appeared in the dark surface, red lines, no wider than the trail of a tear, spiderwebbed. Then two bright red spots appeared at one end. They rose as the darkness shifted, growing in size and shape to take on a vaguely childlike form, a male one at that.

Rythan jumped back, his heart pounding in his breast. Only his fear kept his hand clenched tight around the candle's base. "What are you?" he asked, more of himself rather than expecting a comprehensible answer out of such a strange thing.

The red orbs that now appeared to be eyes were bisected by a sliver of the deepest black. Equally black lids shuttered them for a second, then the red eyes returned. The creature opened his mouth to speak, exposing a ruby red chamber with no discernable teeth, just a set of uneven gums. "I am known as Tind," the darkness said. His voice was quiet and rather high for a male. At least the ones Rythan was familiar with. "From the look on your face, I take it you've never seen a Firebrand before?"

"Only in pictures," Rythan replied. And none of those had resembled this one. They were burning bright, like child-sized embers. Try as he might, he couldn't remember more about the fire creatures than that.

"I ride the lava flows, both below and above ground, guiding the birth of new land." Tind offered his hand in the manner of Azure denizens, palm out. "Though I've seen you many times, I know you were unaware of me. It's nice to cross life streams with you, Rythan Tso Mequil."

Instinctively, Rythan pressed his palm against the Firebrand's, thus symbolizing that no troubled water existed between them. The surface of the adult's skin was

leathery, as if heavily calloused. It didn't occur to Rythan to be nervous about touching the fire creature until his hand turned uncomfortably warm, and he jerked it away quickly. "Are you responsible for this heat?"

"I'm afraid so. I become a furnace when my skin vents are closed. I guess I fell asleep that way. My apologies."

Rythan watched with fascination as the red lines bisecting Tind's body widened and narrowed, drifting with a sluggish tide or speeding along like a set of rapids. Tiny curls of heat, visible even in the already stifling atmosphere of the room, rose from them. Rythan leaned a bit closer and sniffed, confirming that Tind's body was also responsible for the odd and not entirely pleasant odor.

"What is that stuff?" he asked the black-skinned man, pointing at the moving red lines.

"Call it blood. It does have some unusual properties though, so I wouldn't inhale too deeply."

"My blood doesn't do that."

Tind chuckled, quiet and high-pitched. "No, in that respect you're still a child. Once you Become, much of your physiology will change, including the blood that flows through your veins."

"Then you know what I shall Become?" His voice, which had been a stable tenor since his early teens, cracked in his excitement.

"I know what's possible. Only Destiny knows what will be."

Rythan accepted this pronouncement. There was still a chance his Becoming would go awry, changing his future. However, the appearance of Tind gave him some idea of what he could expect when the physical properties of a fire creature combined with the water attributes of his parents. Suddenly, he was no longer quite so tired, though he felt a little dizzy.

"Would you like some refreshment?" Rythan asked him. "Perhaps we could sit and talk for a bit."

Tind shook his massive head slowly. "I look forward to sharing many things with you, Rythan. However, first I must rest so my body can store up energy for the event ahead."

Disappointment swam through him, but Rythan understood. Unfortunately, he didn't think he could go back to sleep now. Between the heat and his mounting excitement at the arrival of his catalyst, the last thing he wanted to do was return to the solitude of his temporary nest -- a fact which was growing more obvious by the minute, should Tind choose to let his gaze drop below Rythan's waist.

Rythan wiped his sweaty brow with the back of his forearm. "I'll let you get some rest then."

There was another one of those odd chuckles. "The heat will dissipate some once my body cools down. Until then, I suggest you relax. You'll need all the energy you can muster for your transformation. That much I can promise you."

Rythan waited until Tind was fully reclined, hoping the candlelight would reveal more about the Firebrand's form. But aside from a general estimation of size and impressive shape, there was nothing to tell him the details about the male's sexual organs.

If his cock was proportional to the rest of his massive body, Rythan was going to have a bit of trouble taking him all in.

That sobering thought stayed with him as he returned to the pile of pillows. Everything felt damp from the moist heat suffusing the room and the perspiration he'd shed during sleep. Turning the bedding over provided a good, if temporary, solution.

As he climbed into his nest once more, his mind remained with his catalyst. Try as he might, Rythan couldn't place him among his acquaintances. What part had Tind played in his life? Centuries of tradition prevented him from asking outright. Since his childhood was officially behind him, their former relationship was supposed to remain in the past. Close relatives were the only exceptions, and Rythan knew Tind didn't fall into that category. Nonetheless, he suspected it would help him come to terms with

thinking of Tind as a lover if he knew what, if anything, they'd once meant to each other.

There was little reason a Firebrand would ever be in Azure, so it seemed their association had to have started before Tind's own Becoming. He could have been an older student, a neighbor, the sibling of a friend. There were so many ways their lifestreams could have intersected before Destiny decided to bring them together in this special way. Rythan had to trust that She knew what She was doing. But could he make the same claim of himself?

So much of his research over the last few cycles had to do with the process of transformation. Layers of his childhood would be peeled away until his true form could emerge. One of the biggest steps was already behind him. He'd been deemed worthy. Now all he had to do was join with his catalyst in the most intimate sense imaginable. If he could survive the combination of forces that would assail his body, he'd cast off the shell of a child and set his adult form free.

The trigger was sex -- mind blowing, life altering sex. So many nights on his parents' houseboat he'd thought about the act itself. Imagined what it would be like to experience intercourse for the first time. Never in all those imaginings had he considered his catalyst would be a male like Tind.

He was so big. Not tall, as he didn't even come up to Rythan's chin, but wide. And strong. Anyone who wrestled with the rivers of fire that erupted from Zemlya's heart had to be strong. Tind could probably crush him using one arm. That was a frightening prospect -- as was being split in two by a penis that was sure to be as massive and powerful as the rest of him.

And hot. Very, very hot.

Would his semen feel like acid against his skin? Surely Destiny would have thought of that...

Yet without that intimate bond, he'd Become a creature less than his full potential. Rythan wouldn't allow that to happen. He'd worked hard to get where he was, and he wasn't about to throw an opportunity away out of fear.

Perhaps Tind had more experience and would be able to guide him. If not, they'd find a way to work it out together.

Just as soon as his catalyst was ready...

## Chapter 4 -- Breakfast

Rythan awoke with a startled grunt as peachy sunlight stabbed him in the eye. Without heavy curtains, the rays came in brazenly through the open windows, uninvited guests who were determined to stay.

*Decidedly unwelcome guests at that,* Rythan grumbled to himself as he blinked to adjust to its intrusion.

"Not a morning lover, I see," Tind observed from where he bobbed in the middle of the pool. It was possible, given his restful position, that he'd been there for some time, watching Rythan sleep.

"No, not really." He struggled to keep his lids from drifting down again. The surest way to do that was to fix his gaze on the most fascinating object in the room. Tind.

With so much sunlight flooding their chamber, Rythan could get a good look at what had eluded him by the single candle flame the night before. Muscles bunched and stretched under his ebony skin as the Firebrand treaded water. Even allowing for some water distortion, Tind had an impressive body. Wide chest, muscled thighs, arms that were a bit longer than a full-grown child had, legs a bit shorter. And a perfectly proportioned cock that bobbed between his legs.

By Destiny's teeth, how was he going to fit such a massive organ inside him? How long was he going to have to wait to find out?

Rythan's own dick began to rise in response, as if answering a sea siren's call. He couldn't help it any more than he could help staring at Tind. It was just the nature of things, preparation for the transformation ahead.

As discreetly as he could, Rythan sought out the waste tube. He ran his fingers through his dark, thick hair, trying to impose some form of order upon it. He wore no



clothes to straighten, nor did he feel the need to dress. As ready as he'd ever be, Rythan approached his catalyst who now hovered at the edge of the pool to greet him. "Have you broken your night's fast?"

"I have, but please help yourself."

Rythan nodded in thanks and headed to the table laden with serving dishes. The fare was quite a bit different from the offerings he'd found the night before. There were many dishes he couldn't identify. He'd prefer one of his typical morning meals of dried kelp, raw turtlefish eggs and steamed rugesset. Miraculously, he found that very meal under the next lid.

His soft sound of surprise drew an explanation from Tind. "While you're in Her temple and Her good graces, Destiny provides the things that will bring you the most comfort, the things you most need. Even if you don't know what they are, trust that She does."

"What did She provide for you?" Rythan asked as he popped a salty orange-colored egg about the size of his thumbnail into his mouth.

Tind used his powerful arms to lever himself out of the water. The droplets clinging to his skin turned into steam as he walked across the room. Now that he was closer, Rythan could see the red heat vents on his body had narrowed to hair-thin cracks. Tind wasn't giving off nearly as much heat as he had the night before, nor was the rotting odor as strong. Rythan was grateful for both.

"This," Tind said, indicating a plate of purplish lumps sitting on top of what appeared to be slices of green honeycomb, "is my favorite snack. It's a type of blooming coral that grows near my home. It's called potinashor. Sweet and spicy."

Rythan broke off a small corner of the green part and put it in his mouth. After the robust flavor of the turtlefish egg, this tasted quite... *hot*.

He made a grab for the nearest pitcher to quench the scalding of his tongue. Not water this time, but the unknown liquid slithered down his throat and did a good job of soothing the prickling heat in his mouth.

"You actually *like* that stuff?" he asked when he could speak again.

"Perhaps it's an acquired taste," Tind mused. "Try this instead."

The object he picked up was paper thin, yellowed by age. Or mold. "Are you sure it's safe?"

Tind broke the piece roughly the size of his longest finger in half and stuck one bit in his mouth. He chewed slowly, savoring whatever it was before he swallowed. "Safe, and not at all hot. Will you try a bite?"

Wary but willing, Rythan moved to take the other half. Tind shook his head. "Open your mouth for me."

Rythan did, and Tind laid the piece on his tongue, then gently urged his mouth to close with a warm finger. "Don't swallow, just let it rest there."

It softened within a few seconds, emitting a hint of... cold? It tasted a bit like the frozen water dessert when all the zurkberry flavoring had drained out. Compared to the potinashor, it was good, if a bit bland.

"Does the taste not burst upon your tongue?" Tind asked him.

Burst, no, he couldn't categorize it as that. Rythan shook his head.

"I thought a child would produce enough heat, but perhaps..." He leaned closer until their lips were but a hand's width apart. "I think a kiss should do it. Will you allow me?"

With Tind so close, Rythan couldn't nod. Instead, he made a sound of assent, trying not to let his anticipation show. His first real kiss!

Hot firm lips pressed against his. Tind radiated strength along with his own particular brand of heat. His hands came up to rest upon Rythan's waist. Tind squeezed gently, drawing Rythan a little closer.

Rythan's head swirled as their mouths became acquainted. Their lips met with gentle pressure, testing each other's resilience. Tind nuzzled Rythan's cheek with his broad, flat nose, then kissed his lips in a line from one side of his mouth to the other. Rythan had to grip Tind's shoulders or risk floating away on the biggest bubble of joy he'd ever known. Tind showed him how to harness that feeling, channel it into their

kiss. Rythan's need to know more of this male grew in the same exponential fashion as his passion.

Their kiss changed from gentle to hot and hungry. Tind's hand glided up Rythan's back to tangle in his hair. Feeling braver, Rythan angled his head, seeking a better fit. His body followed suit, rocking into Tind's solid frame. Tind's hold on him intensified until their chests brushed against each other with every breath.

This new experience brewed up a kettle of tension that sat low in his belly. The longer they kissed, the more Rythan wanted to continue kissing him. Harder. Deeper. Just flat out *more*.

He opened his mouth to explain, forgetting for a moment that it was filled with this strange food. Before he could make a sound, Tind swept in with his tongue. The first touch set off an explosion of flavor so great Rythan nearly choked on it. The faint taste of wild berries became a heady elixir of the most incredible juice he'd ever tasted. He pulled back and swallowed quickly, extracting as much flavor as he could from the fragment disintegrating on his tongue.

"What is that stuff?" he asked when all that remained was a satisfying memory.

Tind rubbed his thumb over Rythan's bottom lip. "The leaf from a gypsudi plant. Rather tasteless until warmed to the right temperature, and then it... bursts."

Something inside him clicked, and he knew he'd passed a point of no return. The frightened child in him wanted to pull away, but his enlightened mind knew it would do no good, and kept him right where he was. "So this is it then? This is how it begins?"

"The beginning of the beginning, perhaps." Tind captured Rythan's mouth in another kiss, this one a little less patient than before but equally as sweet. "We have to await the arrival of another before we can truly begin."

"My transformation requires a second catalyst?" The Annals of Destiny recorded times when such had happened, but they were more rare than finding a natural purple pearl.

"I was advised to wait for a third to join us. Only Destiny can speak to the purpose of it."

"But that means --"

Tind placed a blackened finger over Rythan's lips. "Speculation will only waste energy when it can be better used for other things."

A bit hurt that he wasn't given time to savor this revelation, Rythan looked away. "Such as?"

"Getting to know each other." Tind guided his face back to him with a thick, hot finger and gave him another kiss which ended in a lick of Rythan's lips. "Eat until your belly is full, and then join me by the pool. We have much to discuss."

## Chapter 5 -- Fire and Water Mix

Rythan dispatched a few more turtlefish eggs and a mouthful of kelp, barely tasting either, before he rejoined Tind. The catalyst had submerged himself in the water again. The vents in his skin were more noticeable now and steam traced his movements like a phantom twin.

Rythan stretched out along the edge of the pool and waited for him to surface. "Did something raise your temperature?"

Tind's black irises widened, then narrowed speculatively. "Something, no. Someone, yes. How about you? Feeling warm?"

Rythan blushed, knowing his swelling cock made the answer obvious, but managed to maintain eye contact. "Yes, a bit."

"Good." Water cascaded off Tind's bald head, turning into looping fingers of steam. "I thought my appearance might put you off."

What did he say to that? He didn't think it was wise to ignore his reservations, and yet he didn't want to say anything that might offend this kind male. "I find you attractive, although I never imagined Becoming with a Firebrand."

"How do you feel about our joining now that you know I'm involved?"

Rythan caressed the shell of Tind's ear where there were no red lines to burn him. "Nervous. Eager. Curious."

"And I bet a little scared. Am I right?"

Rythan nodded. "But I meant those other things too."

"I'm glad." Tind hovered at the side of the pool's edge, as if patiently waiting for Rythan to make the next move.

With his heart pounding, Rythan slowly bent his head for a kiss. This time Tind remained passive, letting him explore to his heart's content. Tind's lips were firm. They

didn't yield much under Rythan's pressure. In fact, there wasn't much of Tind that did. His skin fit taut over his muscular frame wherever Rythan's hands roamed. Some spots were hotter than others, especially around his neck and over his heart. The strange smell clinging to him was cut somewhat by the water, but a deep breath this close to him still had a tendency to make his head spin. Would it always be like that? There was so much about this male, and this situation, he didn't know.

Rythan pulled back a bit. "Is there any place I shouldn't go?"

Tind's red eyes crinkled with amusement. "No part of my body is off limits to you, if that's what you mean. Feel free to explore to your heart's content. If you're referring to the heat, well, that's why I'm in the water. It'll keep me cool enough so you can touch me without getting burned."

Rythan dribbled a palm-full of water over Tind's exposed shoulder. "You can touch me too. If you want."

"I want," Tind replied in that soft, high voice of his. "I know you haven't been with an adult until now, not sexually, so I want to make sure you're comfortable with me before we join for the transformation. Consider this your time to play, experiment. You can't hurt me, and I promise I'll do everything I can to ensure I don't hurt you."

Too late. Rythan was already hurting. The aching throb between his legs grew with each passing second. His cock was leaking copious amounts of pre-cum onto his belly. It wouldn't take much to get him off. He tried to ignore the need burning inside him and continued on his slow exploration. He didn't know what Tind had in mind, but he suspected he wouldn't find out if he came too soon.

And he really wanted to find out.

He cupped Tind's neck with one hand, kissing him more deeply. A burst of moist heat welcomed him into the depths of his catalyst's mouth. He ran his tongue over Tind's gums. Instead of teeth, the surface was like rough sandpaper. "No teeth. Why?" Rythan asked as he licked Tind's jaw. The dark skin tasted slightly metallic.

"Not much calcium in me. The heat bakes it out. No calcium, no teeth."

"No bones then either?"

"Those I have, but not in the way you think of them."

The answer didn't tell him much. He thought about pursuing the question, but then Rythan halted his tangential thoughts. Did the composition of Tind's bones really matter? Rythan decided it didn't, not at the moment. He went back to kissing the hot-blooded male, so deep and hard that his lips would soon go numb from the pressure. He wanted to feel Tind's hands on his body. He wanted --

*Splash.* Rythan immediately righted himself. A pair of hands lifted him out of the water. Red with embarrassment, he coughed a few times to clear his lungs. "You okay?" Tind asked him, still holding him up with seemingly little effort.

"Fine. Lost my balance, fell in."

Tind chuckled. "So I noticed."

"Sorry."

Gentle, warm fingers pressed against his chin, encouraging him to look up. Rythan met his red eyes and found a great deal of understanding there. "No need to apologize for simple mistakes, Rythan. I just want you to feel safe."

Surrounded by this considerate powerhouse of a being, Rythan did. The fact that Tind was still largely a stranger mattered little. He felt a bond forming between them, a very special bond. It warmed him from the inside out like no physical source could. "I do."

Tind kissed him sweetly, and then changed his grip so that he held onto the pool's edge rather than Rythan. "You're more comfortable in the water, yes?"

Rythan nodded. He put his arms around Tind's neck and brought their bodies together. Naked bodies. With nothing between them to hide the hardness of his cock. To his delight, he found Tind was also aroused.

Ass-splittingly so.

For a moment Rythan did nothing but cling to the strong male, waiting for the sudden wave of trepidation to subside.

Tind stroked Rythan's back. "It's my dick you fear, eh? You think I'm too much for you to handle?"

"It's fabulous!" Rythan blurted out. "It's just that I've never seen one so..." Worried that the description on the tip of his tongue might be offensive, Rythan tried to phrase it another way. "Without experience, I have no way to judge what will fit me. Or if I'll please you."

"You worry too much, Rythan." The amusement in Tind's voice was reflected in his gaze. "Trust Destiny to pair those who will suit each other perfectly. She wants the best Becoming possible for you, as do I."

It was the conclusion he himself had reached last night. But in the bold light of day, having his first chance to really look at what he had to work with, Rythan's fears had flooded back. Now reminded of his earlier resolve to leave such considerations in Destiny's hands, he cleared his mind and returned to his curious exploration.

Rythan rested his back against the marble that formed the wall of the pool. Braced between Tind's arms, he was free to move. His hands glided over Tind's broad chest. His nipples were fractionally softer than the surrounding skin, except where the tiny buds rose up. Those were iron hard, like his cock.

Thinking of what he'd done for himself occasionally, Rythan pinched the swollen nubs. His reward was a soft hiss from the Firebrand's lips. He did it again, harder. Tind's answering groan was music to his ears. Vowing to remember that for later, Rythan raked his short nails over Tind's skin as he moved lower. His chiseled belly had no hair. No hair surrounding his sex, or any other part of his body that Rythan could see either.

Rythan curled his fingers around the hefty shaft. They barely reached, leaving little room to spare. Tind's cock was slightly warmer than the rest of him, and uncut, like Rythan's own. He stroked gently, loving the way the firm organ pulsed in his hand.

"I like the way you touch me," Tind whispered. The hot breath floating past Rythan's ear sparked a new ember of lust in his groin. "Feels good."

"Yeah, I think so too."

"How do *you* feel?"



Another male's hand on his cock. How long had he dreamed about that? Now it was about to happen, and he could barely restrain himself from coming on the spot. "Why don't you..." Rythan had to pause for a deep breath so he didn't pass out from sheer excitement. "Why don't you find out?"

"Wrap your legs around my waist, loosely, but tight enough so you don't sink."

Rythan obeyed instantly, resting his hands on Tind's shoulders once more for better balance. When he looked down -- by Destiny's drawers, what a fine sight that was! His own pale skin next to Tind's charcoal, tiny bubbles of pre-cum rising up from their slits as they rubbed against each other. That sensation alone was... divine.

But when Tind's fist encircled his shaft, Rythan thought the pleasure would drown him. He squeezed his legs tight, holding on to Tind's waist with what trickle of sanity he still possessed. "I'm gonna... I can't..."

"Yes, Rythan, come for me."

Orgasm rushed over him like a violent summer storm coming in off the open sea. Rythan couldn't begin to prepare for the tidal surge of release, let alone stop its approach. The intensity was frightening.

Tind seemed to sense this for, cupping Rythan's ass with both hands, he said, "I'm right here with you. I won't let you fall. Listen to your body. Do what it's telling you to do."

As if he had any other choice! Rythan rocked his hips against Tind's abdomen. His cock scudded over those tense ridges of muscle. It wasn't quite the way he thought sex was supposed to be, but it felt so good he didn't dare question it.

Rythan sensed a liquid heat spreading between their bodies. Tind bucked against him in counter-rhythm. "Oh, yeah, that's it," he encouraged. "Come for me. I want you to come for me."

Release erupted in one gut-busting spasm. Rythan's balls clenched so hard he saw stars. He kept thrusting, riding out the physical tempest. His nails dug into Tind's thick flesh. Cum spewed from the head of his cock with enough force to breach the water's surface, with several droplets landing on his own forearm.

"Talk to me, tell me what's going on inside you," Tind urged him.

A blossom of pleasure spread out from his cock to the rest of his body. It sapped the strength from his muscles and he sagged against Tind. "Incredible. Wild. Drained. Happy." And honesty compelled him to add, "Not quite what I had pictured though."

Warm, damp palms held him at the waist in a loose embrace. Rythan knew if he opened his eyes, Tind would be gazing at him with tenderness. "What did you expect?" he asked softly.

"Something more... intimate."

"Like this?" One hand left his side and slid around to his ass. There was a tentative probing at his anus. Not intrusive enough to be scary, yet slightly alarming because the sensation was so alien. Rythan instinctively clenched his butt muscles and the digit withdrew.

"That's exactly why we didn't go there," Tind explained. "You're not ready yet. But you will be, soon."

Since Tind seemed content to cuddle, Rythan made no attempt to leave his comforting embrace. One thing this new experience had confirmed for him was the fact that he preferred males as sexual partners. He didn't need to try it with a fem to know it could never come close to this experience. Which made him wonder about the third person they were expecting.

"The other one, it won't be a fem, will it?"

"I think --"

A strong current of cold air blew in through the open windows. Rythan shivered from the chill wind rushing over his wet skin. Tind's arms tightened around him protectively. When the sudden wind storm died down, Rythan gaped at the visitor it had left behind.

Tall and thin, with transparent wings laced through with silver, he wore an outfit of what appeared to be supple white leather. His long, straight hair matched the silver of his wings. His visible skin echoed the peachy sunlight streaming in behind him. He stood with hip cocked, hand resting upon it, and a sarcastic arch to his eyebrows. And

either he was carrying a bar of corundum at the front of his white leather pants, or he was *very* happy to see them.

"No, definitely not a fem," Tind said, his habitual amusement much in evidence.

"The name is Ze," the silvery figure informed them.

## Chapter 6 -- A Cool Wind Comes Hard

"You're a Wind Zephyr," Rythan exclaimed, relieved to recognize the new arrival's adult form. He uncurled from Tind's arms to face him.

"I'm a Zephyr, yes, but I'm currently on special assignment." It didn't sound like it was an honor he particularly enjoyed.

"'Bout time you got here." Tind's voice held a note of censure.

"Yeah, well, it was a long trip."

"Funny, Rythan and I made it from the Chamber of Judgment to this room in a fraction of the time it took you," Tind pointed out, the epitome of reasonableness.

Ze glared at him. "I had to run an errand. An urgent errand. 'Sides, I'm here now and that's what counts, right?"

There was a pause several heartbeats long where Rythan feared a fight might break out. Then some of the tension seeped out of Tind's body, and Rythan knew the danger had passed. For now. Ze didn't exactly seem to be the peaceful sort.

Tind performed the introductions. "My name is Tind, and you already know Rythan."

That had to be true as well since Ze would have served as one of his judges, but Rythan didn't know a thing about Zephyr. Another important person from his childhood he'd never met, until now.

Ze drummed his fingers against his thigh, gazing steadily at Rythan. "Are you a top or bottom?"

Rythan blinked, totally speechless.

Tind's friendly expression turned to mild disgust. "You could say hello before you start asking questions like that."

"Why waste time?" Ze started undoing the myriad of buckles and straps that kept his leather outfit in place. "We all know what we're here for."

The body he revealed was about as different from Tind's as one could get. Narrow in the shoulders and hips, Ze looked like a strong breeze could blow him away. However, he moved with a grace that Tind, for all his strength, could never match. The Zephyr had a line of silvery hair bisecting his chest. It darted down to his cock where it fanned out in an abundance of curls. His erection, smaller in girth than Tind's but longer than Rythan's, jutted out in its own gesture of greeting.

Ze rubbed his hands together and his wings flexed, stirring up a mild breeze. "Ready to get started?"

No! Rythan was nowhere near ready to handle sex with a male like Ze. He was far too... intense. Rythan had enjoyed the erotic act with Tind, but this guy seemed to have only one speed, and it was far faster than Rythan was currently prepared to go.

"I didn't get much sleep last night," Rythan explained. "I need more rest before I'll be ready to transform."

Tind kissed his cheek. It provided a bit of cover for him to whisper, "Don't be put off by his attitude. He's more bark than bite."

How could Tind know that? It didn't appear that they knew each other any better than Rythan knew them given that introductions were necessary. He trusted Destiny had chosen this wild Zephyr with good reason, but his mind needed more time to adjust to Ze's disruptive presence.

Rythan returned Tind's kiss, then swam the length of the short pool to clean himself up. When he reached the edge, he climbed out and, dripping wet, met Ze face to face. They were roughly the same height, but Rythan felt crowded by him.

Ze gave him a thorough perusal. Rythan had a feeling his quicksilver eyes missed little. "I'd have thought someone as young as you would have more stamina."

"I expected someone as old as you to have better manners," Rythan shot back.

Ze tossed his mane of silvery hair away from his face as he laughed heartily. "Well, you're no mouse. That's something at least." He turned to Tind. "How about you? Does that dragon between your legs require a nap too?"

Tind ran his hand over the length of his engorged shaft, petting it. "I think he'll be up for a while yet."

Rythan couldn't imagine a more unlikely coupling, and yet somehow he thought Tind could handle Ze as easily as he had him. "Enjoy yourselves," Rythan said as he turned toward the large sleeping pallet.

A light touch at his shoulder halted him in his tracks. He looked over his shoulder and found Ze's mouth inches from his own. The Zephyr closed the distance in a heartbeat. His hand slipped up the back of Rythan's neck to tangle in his hair. A none-too-gentle tug tilted Rythan's head back. Ze plundered his mouth with an adventurer's brazen advance. No corner of his mouth was left unexplored by the Zephyr's agile tongue. It almost distracted him from the sensation of having his lungs filled with the sweetest air he'd ever known. The result left him weak in the knees and he gripped Ze's waist in order to remain upright.

"Just wanted you to have a taste of what you were missing out on," Ze said with a cocky grin when he ended the carnal kiss.

"Errr... thanks." Dazed, Rythan stumbled on his way to the large sleeping pallet. At some point the pillows had changed. They were now as white and fluffy as the clouds outside, but still as numerous as before. If anything, the pile had grown. Rythan flopped down in the middle of them and then wriggled around until he made himself comfortable. He closed his eyes, fully intending to rest as he'd claimed. However, the sounds reaching his ears in bits and pieces from the other side of the room made it nearly impossible to do anything *but* listen.

"...didn't answer..."

"I'm adaptable," Tind's voice replied.

There was a splash, then a long, pleased moan. From the timbre, Rythan suspected Ze had made the sexy sound.

"Turn around," Tind ordered.

"Like this?"

"No, more..."

"... how about..."

*Groan.* "Yeah."

The sounds of wet, slapping flesh ensued. Rythan *had* to look. He parted the pillows in the middle to create a spy hole. Tind had Ze pinned against the edge of the pool, his chest facing the wall. The Firebrand was pumping like a billows, presumably ramming his massive cock into Ze's rounded ass. The only thing that slowed him down was a measure of natural resistance provided by the water.

"... stuffed..."

"... so tight." Tind growled, a feral sound despite his high-pitched tone. "Can't... grip."

"Let me... ride..."

Rythan, despite his body being so recently and well drained of lust, felt his cock stir as he watched them.

They climbed out of the pool together. Tind lay flat on his back on the tiles surrounding the water, leaving his lower legs dangling in the water. His thick shaft pointed toward Rythan through the thin veil of steam rising up from his dark skin. Ze straddled Tind's hips, then guided the rigid erection into his ass as he sank down upon it.

Dual moans echoed through the marble chamber. Ze cupped his balls to keep them from slapping against Tind's lower abdomen as he rode that impressive cock. Tind helped by raising his hips to slam in deep every time Ze came down. Adding a gentle thrust of the Zephyr's gossamer wings to the mix seemed to drive their pleasure even higher.

Ze's head fell back to expose the golden column of his neck. Tind's lips curled back in a grimace of concentration. Their flesh slapped together in a staccato rhythm. Soon the smell of sex permeated the muggy air. Rythan's hand strayed to his lap where

he began to stroke his growing erection in time with Tind's aggressive thrusts. His eyes burned with the need to blink but he resisted, unwilling to miss even that much of the action.

Since they were no longer in the water, their conversation came to him with more clarity. "Pretty good," Ze said in between panting breaths, "but I know you can do better."

*Better?* How could Ze possibly take more? Wasn't he risking physical damage already?

Apparently not, for their positions shifted yet again. Without losing the tight connection of their bodies, they rolled toward his bed. Ze now lay against the marble floor, his wings spread out around him. Tind knelt between Ze's legs. He raised one golden knee and hooked it over his shoulder. He planted a meaty hand on Ze's opposite thigh. Then, as Ze turned slightly toward his side, Tind began to thrust again.

A wide red seam split Tind's back from the nape of his neck to his tailbone. Visible steam curled up. The soles of his feet were the same deep, hot red. Obviously all the vigorous fucking was causing Tind to overheat.

And still they continued.

"Oh, fuck yeah. That's it. Harder." Ze clawed at the flooring, moaning blunt encouragement to his partner.

His heavy balls bounced wildly as Tind drove himself deep inside Ze's lithe body. Silvery strands of pre-cum soon streaked across Ze's belly. His face was contorted by strong emotion. Whether pleasure or pain, it was hard to tell. Rythan preferred to think it was pleasure. Surely Tind would stop otherwise. But he couldn't see how such a violent act could induce any pleasure.

However, it was hard not to imagine himself in Tind's place. He thrust through his tight fist in time with the Firebrand's movements, trying to learn the technique that would reduce an arrogant male like Ze to begging.

"I'm close," Tind said over the wet sound of flesh hitting flesh. "Let's finish this. On your knees."



Tind extracted his cock. Rythan could see it glisten with Ze's internal juices. Or it could be that Tind's cock possessed the ability to sweat in a way the rest of him didn't. Either way, Rythan wanted to wrap his lips around the bulbous head and suck until every last bit of cum was drained from the sexy Firebrand. Even if the semen tasted of ash, Rythan wanted it. Wanted it so badly he could almost come just by imagining it.

Ze snagged two plump pillows from the edge of the bed, and Tind fisted his own cock as he waited for Ze to reposition himself. The padding protected the Zephyr's knees from the hard tile. Ze crossed his arms in front of him and put his head down, leaving his ass totally exposed. "Go for it."

Instead of lining up his cock, Tind lowered his face into Ze's crack. From his covert position, Rythan couldn't tell what exactly Tind was doing. Was he inhaling Ze's intimate scent? Was he licking Ze's balls? Was he tongue-fucking him? Whatever the act was, Ze was loving it.

He wiggled his ass. "Fill me up, you big beast. I want it all."

Tind gave him a none-too-gentle spank. "Eager slut."

"So? Fuck me already."

The Firebrand's answering chuckle was drown out by Ze's loud moan as Tind delivered another hard smack before returning to his previous task.

Rythan tightened his grip on his cock. He hadn't thought he'd be able to come again so soon, but the pressure was building in his gut. His thighs were starting to tingle. Orgasm wouldn't be long in coming, but he was determined to wait until the other two were climaxing too.

"Hey, where do you think you're going?" Ze demanded as Tind retreated.

"So deep inside you you'll be coughing up my cum."

"Promises, promises."

Tind plunged into Ze's puckered hole. One extended thrust lodged him in Ze's ass to the hilt.

"Oh! Fuck. Yeah, baby. Fuck." Ze struggled to get the words out. He was panting hard now and his face was turning red from being pressed against the floor.

Tind hammered relentlessly into the Zephyr's ass, pushing him across the floor despite all Ze's attempts to hold his place.

"Oh, yeah. Fuck me. Harder. Harder!"

Rythan couldn't believe Ze meant his demand literally. Any harder and Ze would be crushed under Tind's superior bulk and power. More likely it was a stream of words that Tind was supposed to take as encouragement. Rythan could sympathize with that. He was close to coming himself, and didn't want the action to stop before he did.

"So good, so hot," Tind mumbled. His voice was even higher than usual. Red vents opened in his skin wherever it didn't come in contact with Ze's body. Steam literally poured from them.

"Hot stuff," Ze agreed. "Don't stop."

"Coming," Tind announced. He barely had the word out before his back bowed. His fingers dug deep grooves in Ze's hips. His body jerked as Ze took control of the motion, impaling himself on Tind's orgasming shaft.

"Give it to me. I want it all," Ze chanted.

The pale strands of his hair were plastered to his sweat-slicked body. His cock was so full it dipped to skim over the floor. Rythan wondered if Ze would let him lick it clean, probing the slit with the tip of his tongue...

"You too," Tind replied as he leaned forward to wrap his fingers around Ze's erection. "Squeeze me tight when you come. Now!"

Ze bucked and writhed as cum streamed out of his cock in rapid spurts, his keening loud enough to rattle the glass if there'd been any covering the windows.

Rythan couldn't take any more. A towering wave of lust overrode his need for caution. He flipped onto his belly and humped the pillows underneath him. In his mind, he watched his shaft disappear into Ze's shapely ass. He imagined the Zephyr's internal walls squeezing him tightly, milking the semen from him...

Light burst behind his eyelids like a solar flare on Zemlya's second sun. His body tensed as the ecstasy of release poured into his veins. He bit down hard on another

pillow to muffle his joyous groans. Tind and Ze needed no such restraint. Their cries, mingled with the other sexy sounds, made Rythan feel as if he were truly climaxing with them.

As soon as the spasms ended, feeling returned. A sticky mess at his waist, a heaviness in his limbs, and a spurt of panic that his voyeuristic enjoyment of their sexual romp might be discovered. He listened for any sign that his actions might have disturbed them.

"Hmmm... not bad for a torch," Ze said, sounding lazy and content.

"Not bad yourself, for an old wind bag."

"Get back in the pool before you boil the air," Ze advised. "I'm going to check on our boy."

Rythan didn't hear the Firebrand's response, but he did hear a splash and then the muted whistle of moving wings as Ze rose to his feet.

Knowing the cum-stained pillow would give him away, Rythan wished desperately that it would disappear. Amazingly, a second later the pillow in question vanished, and another in the pile fell forward to take its place. Hoping to avoid a discussion with the Zephyr, he shut his eyes and did his best to feign sleep.

Panting and perspiring heavily, Ze dropped down on the pillows next to him. He stretched out, then curled around Rythan's body, hugging him from the back. He smelled strongly of sex, and sweat, and Tind.

A very arousing position, and although his body couldn't respond quite yet, Rythan felt the sexual tug in his gut. Was adulthood always going to be like this? With his body responding automatically to the slightest erotic stimulus?

Silently cursing his lack of control, Rythan lay limp as Ze wrapped an arm over his chest. "I know you're awake. I know you were watching us. Did you enjoy the show?"

"Wasn't," Rythan murmured.

"Were," Ze insisted. "Most of it, anyway. What do you think of raw male sex?"

Rythan thought he was quickly becoming addicted to it. Would that hurt his chances of a successful transformation or help them? "I think I'm going to need a healer if either of you try that kind of sexual workout with me."

Ze hugged him a little closer. "You don't think you'll survive the transformation?"

"I don't think I'll survive the sex. Not in one piece anyway."

"We know what we're doing. You'll be begging just like I was by the time we're done with you."

Tind, Rythan knew, wouldn't push him into something he was ill prepared to handle. Ze, on the other hand, seemed more mercurial than the wind he'd blown in on. And yet, somehow, the three of them had to blend into the perfect sexual trio in order to bring about his transformation. Rythan couldn't picture it. Not without him bursting apart like an overripe aquib.

"I trust in Destiny's choices," Rythan replied slowly, willing himself to believe the words as he had in the hours before Ze's arrival. If Tind were part of Destiny's plan for him, then somehow so must the Zephyr be.

"You have no faith in me?"

There was an odd note in the question, one Rythan interpreted as hurt. He turned onto his back so he could look Ze in the face. The Zephyr's body felt lax next to his own, but there was definite strain in his silver-gray eyes. "You're so intense. I don't know how to handle a male like you, in bed or out of it."

Whatever traces of softness were in his face disappeared in a flash. "For your sake, I hope you're wrong about that."

In the wake of that pronouncement silence fell over the room, leaving Rythan more uncertain than ever about the chances of a successful transformation.

## Chapter 7 -- No Way Out

It was late in the day when Rythan woke from his nap. His brain was slow to kick into gear, and it took him a while to notice the changes in the room. The room *had* changed though. The windows were gone, the marble wall looking as solid as if they'd never existed. The sunlight, however, remained behind, sending a swath of golden rays through the center of the room without any visible source.

In the pale shadows diagonally across from his nest, Rythan saw that Tind had left the pool. He was conferring softly with Ze as they nibbled from platters on the serving table. Whatever Tind was saying didn't seem to be getting through because Ze kept shaking his head.

Rythan was growing accustomed to seeing the other two males naked. The sight produced a welcome warm buzz just below his stomach. They were so different physically, but he found he could appreciate them equally. The difference in their personalities was where he became conflicted.

Tind was so gentle, a patient and considerate catalyst. Ze, on the other hand, made him crazy. He didn't understand anything about the Zephyr. Even knowing a bit about his kind didn't help.

Rythan had studied Zephyrs in his preparations for the transformation to adulthood. The attributes of water and air combined to form many of Zemlya's adults, such as those who turned the tides and kept the sea birds aloft on their long ocean voyages. He'd even met a few of the pure air denizens, like the Storm Heralds who brought news of approaching tempests and tornados to his father. None of them seemed to have Ze's hyper-intense temperament. Rythan simply didn't know what to make of him.

If he didn't figure it out, and quickly, his transformation would suffer. Life as one of the Unbecoming... Rythan shuddered. He vowed it wouldn't happen to him. Even if that meant letting Ze and Tind use his body in torturous ways.

By Destiny's grace, he hoped it wouldn't come to that.

Though he wasn't feeling particularly hungry, Rythan walked toward them. "I see you redecorated while I was sleeping."

Though he'd meant it as a joke, Ze scowled. "Wasn't my idea. I'm gonna wash up."

He stormed off, headed for the pool which now resembled a meandering river that flowed in from one corner and out the other in a serpentine shape. Choosing a spot in the shallows, the Zephyr slowly lowered himself into the pool, his wings held aloft to keep them dry.

Rythan turned his attention back to Tind who was building a plate of food that could serve Rythan's entire family back home. "What put him in such a foul mood?"

"He doesn't want to be here."

Another piece of Rythan's hope for the brightest of futures crumbled into emotional dust. "I can't say I'm surprised."

"Why is that?"

"He doesn't seem to like me very much."

"Funny, he said the same thing about you." Tind started eating with gusto, but his high-pitched voice was grave when he spoke. "He said you rejected him."

"I *what*?" Rythan started stabbing randomly at things, dropping them haphazardly on his plate. "I never rejected him!"

"What *did* you say?"

Rythan thought back to their conversation as they cuddled in the pillows. "I told him I was afraid I couldn't handle him. He's very... aggressive."

Tind's red eyes blinked in slow motion. "Aggressive? Ze? A little rough around the edges, maybe, but he's really quite... accommodating."

There was far too much food on his plate. Rythan didn't even know what half of it was. He stared at it helplessly as he replied, "How can you say that when he was demanding that you do all those really violent things to him?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Before, when the two of you were... you know... having sex." Rythan blushed, still reluctant to admit he'd been spying on them. "He kept asking you to hurt him."

What started as a chuckle soon turned into a loud guffaw. Even Ze paused in his bath to look up to see what Tind found so amusing.

Rythan wanted to know himself. "That type of behavior amuses you?"

"No... no... it's just that... sometimes... I forget how young and innocent... you still are."

Rythan bristled. "I'm old enough to Become an adult."

Tind reclaimed his meal and said, "You're no longer a child, that much is true. But you still have much to learn about the ways of adults."

"What will I Become now since Ze has decided he doesn't want to be involved?"

Tind swallowed a mouthful of something that temporarily turned his gums an unusual shade of green. "Who says he doesn't?"

"Well, if he thinks I don't like him and he doesn't like me..."

"Do you honestly believe Destiny would pair you with a catalyst who isn't capable of liking you? You hurt his feelings, so he tried to fly out -- that's why the windows disappeared, by the way -- but he's still here. That means there's a good chance you can change his mind."

"You just said --"

"I said he felt rejected, not that he's unwilling to participate."

"He tried to fly away. That indicates a certain amount of resistance on his part, don't you think?"

"Tell me, would you want to participate in the Becoming of a person who didn't appreciate you?"

Rythan put his overloaded plate down while he pondered Tind's question. If the tables were turned, would he be willing to act as Ze's catalyst? Would he participate, knowing his best efforts were looked upon as a hindrance rather than a help? With another whiplash of stinging regret, he realized the answer was no.

His only excuse was that he'd spoken out of fear, not thinking of how Ze would react to his words. "I didn't set out to hurt him."

"I know that. I think even Ze understands that. But before we go any further, the two of you have to work this out."

"How?" Rythan had no clue how to start mending the rift between them. He was still afraid of Ze. Afraid of hurting him now as well as being hurt by him.

"You could try talking to him," Tind said between bites of potinashor.

"I'm not so sure that's a good idea. Look at how much trouble it got me into last time."

Tind seemed to ponder this for a moment. "When you were watching us earlier..." He paused to see if Rythan would protest. When he didn't, Tind nodded in approval and continued. "Whose place did you picture yourself in?"

"Yours."

"Why?"

Rythan started to explain it was because he didn't want to be on the receiving end of Tind's dragon-sized cock. While he still felt some trepidation about that, Rythan suddenly realized the fact that he wanted to be the one to make Ze beg was a lot closer to the truth. "So he would ask me to do those things," he admitted, his face lowered in shame.

One of Tind's meaty fingers coaxed him into meeting his eyes again. "There's nothing wrong with wanting to bring pleasure to another. For all his big talk, Ze is very submissive when it comes to sex. He only plays the aggressor to encourage you to chase him. His method put you off because you didn't understand the game. The second you call his bluff, he'll submit to whatever your whim might be."



Rythan wasn't so sure, but it was certainly worth a try. Tind hadn't been wrong yet. He glanced over to where the Zephyr splashed around in the shallows. Wet from head to toe, he practically glowed in the sourceless sunlight. A very enticing sight. "Is being an adult always this complex?"

Tind nodded, a wry smile spreading his lips. "If it were easy, there'd be no reason to be judged. Everyone would be worthy."

Rythan considered those words while he slowly approached Ze. He'd been found worthy. He could do this. He'd learn from his mistake and patch things up with Ze.

Although it would be a lot easier if his hands weren't shaking like a sruboar bush in a tempest.

Ze didn't look up as Rythan drew near. "I'll be out of your way in a minute."

"No."

"No?"

Where Ze stood, the water barely covered his knees, but he had trouble withstanding the current. Adjusting to the water's strength was second nature to Rythan, so he joined Ze on the rocky ledge and steadied him with an arm around his waist. "I'd rather you didn't leave."

Ze continued as if he hadn't heard Rythan speak. "I tried earlier, you know. To leave here." He waved a soapy hand in an all-encompassing gesture. "*She* wouldn't let me."

"Why do you think Destiny prevented you from leaving?" Rythan was curious if Ze bought Tind's explanation, or if he had one of his own.

"To keep you alive."

That certainly wasn't an answer Rythan had considered. "Keep me alive? I know a few children have died during their transformation, but it's hardly common enough to worry about. What's so risky about this one?"

Ze nodded toward Tind. "Your Firebrand has a rather harmful air about him."

Everything inside Rythan rejected that conclusion. There was no way Tind would ever intentionally cause him harm. It just wasn't in the large male's nature. "I don't believe that."

"You would if you'd spent much more time alone with him." Ze lowered his wings. They folded up into a compact bundle that was barely noticeable against his bare back. "Have you noticed how high his voice is for a male?"

"Yes," Rythan replied. "But how can that trait be harmful to my health?"

"His body gives off a gas that, when mixed with air, raises the pitch of his voice. If he's talking in the squeaky range, he's leaking harmful gas. After a few hours, if it doesn't get filtered out, there'd be enough of that hazardous gas in the air to knock you out, maybe even kill you."

"And you can protect me from that?" Not that Rythan was convinced he needed protection from Tind. They'd been alone together for several hours before Ze's arrival, and he hadn't suffered any ill effects, although he did remember feeling a bit lightheaded and confused whenever they were in close proximity. He'd chalked that up to lust, but maybe there was a hint of truth in what Ze was saying.

"Remember I said I was on special assignment?" When he nodded, Ze continued. "I'm a Screener these days, until I work off my sentence."

A Screener. Rythan tried to recall what the job entailed. "You clean the air, suck all the impurities out of it."

"That's right. So as long as Tind is keeping you company, I'm afraid you're stuck with me too."

Rythan now understood the necessity, but that didn't seem to be the right thing to say. Instead, he asked, "You said you were being punished. Why?"

"Doesn't matter."

Rythan chuckled, recalling their earlier conversation when he'd replied in much the same way when he didn't want to give an answer. "Does." He gave Ze's waist an encouraging squeeze. "Come on, fess up."

"My boss is very dreamy, in an authoritarian kind of way."

"And?"

"And I guess I kinda lost track of our conversation. So when he gave me my assignment for the day, I didn't really hear him on account of fantasizing about an entirely different *job* I could do for him."

Rythan could see where this was leading, but he pressed Ze to continue. "And?"

"And I answered to my fantasy. I told him I'd absolutely love to suck his dick. He decided that since I had such a dirty imagination, I wouldn't mind spending a few months sucking up garbage to fuel it. Guess that makes me some kind of pathetic loser to you, huh?"

That hurt, defensive note was back in Ze's tone. Rythan wanted to do whatever he could to make it go away, for good. Okay, so maybe his social skills could use a refresher course, but his heart was in the right place. He raised his hand to cup Ze's stubble-roughened cheek. "Look at me."

"Do I have to?"

Rythan grinned. "Yeah, you do." When Ze complied, he said, "I'm glad you're here. That's what I came over to say, before you told me that story. I still mean it."

Ze's eyes melted into pools of molten moonbeams. "Yeah?"

"Yeah." Ze's skin was cold, and once again Rythan marveled at the difference between him and Tind. The Firebrand warmed the air around him like a furnace, while Ze seemed to suck in all the heat he could find. Rythan pulled the Zephyr closer, until their bodies touched. "I really am, though there's one thing I'm still curious about."

"You wanna know why I was late." When Rythan nodded, Ze looked down to where his fingers were moving restlessly over Rythan's belly. "I wanted a blessing. You know, from Destiny. So your Becoming would go well."

Rythan's heart squeezed painfully. How wrong he'd been about Ze! "That's incredibly sweet of you."

"Yeah, well, the blond brat -- the one who spoke for Destiny at your judgment -- she made me work for it, rather than taking my currency. Took forever." Ze turned

toward him and hooked his arms over Rythan's shoulders. His head tilted to the side, an arrogant grin curving his lips. "So, are you gonna fuck me or what?"

Something deep within Rythan cracked. Though he had no experience to guide him, he nonetheless recognized it as a new beginning. In some intangible but utterly significant way, his transformation had just begun. "Not until you beg me to," Rythan replied, his voice laced with desire.

When Ze pressed a hard kiss to Rythan's lips, he was ready for it. Welcomed it. Like last time, there was something sharp and demanding in the way the Zephyr tried to devour him. Unlike last time, Rythan didn't sit idly by and let it happen. He slipped his hand up Ze's back, noting how silky his compact wings felt. When he reached the silver mane of hair, he jerked Ze's head back and did a little plundering of his own.

As Tind had predicted, Ze immediately submitted to Rythan's assault. His long fingers curled around Rythan's arms. His cock started to rise in fits and starts. Rythan wanted to get his hands on it. Wrap his lips around it. Suck it dry.

But not yet. There was one question left to be answered.

Rythan backed off, giving both of them a chance to gulp down some much needed air. "Will you help me Become, Ze?"

"Whatever it takes, I'm in."

Tind came upon them so softly that they hadn't realized he was there until he spoke. "Now that that's settled, gentlemen, shall we get started?"

## Chapter 8 -- Starting Again

"I'm way ahead of you," Rythan said, gesturing at the way his erection jutted out from between his hips.

"That's something of a problem," Tind told him.

"Why?"

Ze's fingers grazed the length of Rythan's shaft, sending a torrent of shivers through him. "The power is magnified if we get off together."

"Then the two of you better hurry up." Rythan groaned. His hips began to rock, fucking Ze's hand of their own volition. Why should he stop when it felt so good?

Ze tightened his grip. "Not this time. Right now, you're on a solo mission."

"Transformation is both pleasure and pain," Tind reminded him. "Orgasms help your body relax and prepare for the shock that comes with the change."

Good, because if Ze kept up his artful stroking, Rythan would soon climax. "So what's the problem?"

"Your... inexperience." Tind entered the water. He sat in the shallows, submerged up to his powerful shoulders. "We need you to tell us what's going on inside your mind as well as your body so we can guide you. The closer we get, the harder it'll be for you to do that."

The vents in Tind's black skin were almost invisible. Rythan knew they wouldn't stay that way for long. He reached out with his free hand and circled the smooth skin on top of Tind's head. "You want to hear what's on my mind right now?"

"Yes."

"Coming," he said, tracing little patterns across Tind's bald skull. "Right here."

Tind gave him a wicked smile. "Go for it."

"I get to help, right?" Ze asked, practically bouncing with anticipation.

Rythan shifted so he stood perpendicular to the Firebrand's shoulder and gathered Ze to his side. "I'm counting on you to make it happen."

Ze kissed him with carnal passion, diving deeply into the cavern of Rythan's mouth. Tind stroked Rythan's legs from ankle to ass. Occasionally he stopped at the high point to stroke that tiny strip of skin behind Rythan's balls. Ze continued stroking Rythan's cock with a firm grip that literally tugged the orgasm from his body.

It felt good, really good, to be loved by these two males. Warm emotion combined with their erotic stimulation cast him into an early release. An earth-rattling climax this was not. In fact, it felt almost lazy. The first baby step in a series that would lead him to his Destiny.

Despite the weak release, watching his creamy white semen rain down over Tind's black, bare skull was sexier than anything he'd ever seen. The Firebrand tilted his head back and caught Rythan's next orgasmic burst on his lips. Ze smoothed the pearlescent liquid across them with the plump head of Rythan's dick.

When the mild paroxysms of pleasure subsided, Rythan bent over to kiss those cum-drenched lips. "Thank you," he whispered.

"For?"

"For everything." He kissed Tind again. "So I can't forget to tell you later."

"My turn," Ze announced, pushing himself between their bodies to sample the new taste of Tind's lips. "Hmmm. Next time I want the real thing."

Rythan thought that idea sounded pretty good. His cock didn't show any signs of deflating, nor did the high concentration of lust swimming through his system. The growling need in his belly -- not for food but for something much more necessary to his being -- increased. He was ready for whatever they wanted to do next. "Well?"

"Drop the level of water so when you lay down between us, you won't drown," Tind suggested. "It's time we expanded your horizons a bit."

Ze chuckled. "That's one word for it."

It took no more than a polite, silent request to Destiny to arrange the conditions Tind outlined. Ze mirrored Tind's position at the other end of the oblong, underwater

shelf where the water was now only a few inches deep. "Come over here. Your ass is mine now."

This sharp command from one Tind claimed was a total bottom? Rythan didn't get it. "Errr... shouldn't that be the other way around?"

"Who better to teach you about anal penetration than the one among us with the most experience?" Tind asked with an overly innocent smile.

Good point.

Rythan sprawled out between them, on his back. Ze guided Rythan's legs apart while Tind helped him find a comfortable place to rest his head, which just happened to be near the juncture of Tind's thighs. The Firebrand wasn't fully erect, but he had an impressive start. Rythan nuzzled against the thick, dark shaft with his cheek. In return, Tind threaded his fingers through Rythan's hair, a gesture Rythan found soothing yet arousing at the same time.

Ze rubbed his hands over Rythan's legs, starting at the ankle and working his way up. "Try to relax, Ry. I'll make it good for you."

"I know you will."

But Ze's slow approach was agonizing. Rythan closed his eyes and tried to blank out all thought. A curious feeling tickled his spine. A subtle pressure, as if something inside him were testing him. It wasn't Ze, not yet. And with a jolt, Rythan realized it was the adult in him seeking a way out.

Tind's warm hands massaged his neck and shoulders. "How do you feel?"

"Sexy. Nervous. Like there's another being inside me that wants to share my skin."

"Don't think about that too much right now. Concentrate on what Ze's doing. Enjoy it."

Ze scooted along the shelf, putting Rythan's legs over his own. "A finger, first. Might be a little cold."

Rythan flinched when the digit slid between his legs. The subtle probing ended with pressure against his anus. Instinctively, Rythan tightened up.

Ze smacked his thigh. "Cut that out."

Rythan couldn't pretend to know what he was doing. This was entirely new territory for him. "I didn't mean to. It just happened."

"Perhaps a bit of distraction will help." Tind guided his cock over Rythan's mouth. "Want this?"

"Oh, yeah." Rythan opened up and surrounded the growing cock with his lips. Tind's growl mingled with Rythan's own. He'd never tasted anything better. There was a sweet taste to the intimate skin, not the ash he'd expected. Greedy for more, he increased his suction.

Slowly milking Tind's cock did indeed distract Rythan. It wasn't until Ze's finger started to penetrate him that he realized the Zephyr had resumed his quest and by then it was too late to worry about it. He couldn't classify the intrusion as unpleasant. Just odd.

Tind rose up on his knees. He hung his penis over Rythan's mouth. "Tilt your head back a bit. I want to see how much of me you can take."

As Tind guided his cock down his throat, Ze added another finger to his anal canal. Rythan felt stuffed from both ends. It got even better when they started thrusting into him. Ze impaled him with fingers, slowly working them in and out. Tind gave him breathing room in between filling his throat with his massive erection. The sensations didn't scare him. In fact, they aroused him to the point where he felt moved to take his own cock in hand and begin jacking it.

He barely had time to register the warning tingle before orgasm broke over him again. Cum surged through his shaft and cascaded over the ruddy crown.

Ze knocked Rythan's fist out of the way with his free hand. "This one's mine."

Moist heat surrounded his shaft. Tight suction enveloped him to the root, and magnified the rising tide of pleasure cresting within him. He never knew his body could be made to feel this good.

Ze sucked him as he penetrated him with a third digit. Rythan groaned around a mouthful of Tind's cock. He emptied himself down Ze's throat in one long, continuous



stream until he had no more in him to give. And yet his cock remained rigid with need, and lust continued to burn through his veins.

"Fuck me, please," Rythan begged them between impatient breaths. "Or let me fuck you. I don't care. I just need..."

Tind nodded. "Yes, the change is almost upon you. One more ought to do it."

His words barely registered on Rythan's lust-fevered brain. He felt both hot and cold, strong and fragile, heavy and light. His childhood had faded to a blurred memory. The only thing Rythan knew was the beast inside wanted out, and he needed Ze and Tind to help him set it free.

Ze flipped over onto his back. He brought his knees up, exposing his puckered hole. "Come and get me, Rythan. I'm all yours."

Rythan fell on him like a starving man put in front of a bountiful feast. His body was shaking which made it hard to line up correctly, but Ze guided him to the right spot. The head of Rythan's cock penetrated a fraction, and for one crazy, terrifying moment Rythan wanted to stop. He felt so out of control. He was afraid he'd hurt Ze, and that was one thing he never wanted to do again.

"Ry," Ze said softly, putting his hands on either side of Rythan's face, "it's okay. I can handle it, or I wouldn't be here. Trust me."

That was all the reassurance he needed. Rythan threw his head back and roared as he sank into Ze with one hard thrust. The sensations coursing through him were incredible. He didn't even give the Zephyr time to enjoy the perfect fit of their interlocking bodies before he started flexing his hips, grinding in.

"That's it. Harder. Fuck me, Ry. Make me scream."

Rythan planted his hands on Ze's chest and hammered into him with unrestrained passion. Ze writhed under him, alternately encouraging him and cursing him as he had done with Tind. The actual words mattered little as they all meant the same thing -- don't stop!

From behind, Tind took control of Rythan's hips, forcing him deeper into the lithe Zephyr. "How do you feel, Rythan? Can you feel the adult in you trying to break free?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, yes." There was no longer enough room inside his body to contain the flood of sensations washing over him. The burn of using muscles he never knew he had warred with the ecstasy of plundering Ze's tight ass. His nerves were strained until Rythan thought they might snap, and yet there was another force riding him, telling him it wasn't time to let go yet.

"Bend over Ze's chest and hold still," Tind instructed.

They wanted him to stop? Rythan didn't know if he could.

Ze's arms came around him and pulled him down. He fisted one hand in Rythan's dark mane of hair. "Kiss me, Ry."

Though he'd done so not long before, this time was different. The Zephyr trembled beneath him, and it wasn't entirely out of lust. The fact that this strong, arrogant male was a bit nervous too calmed the last of Rythan's apprehension. It would be all right. All three of them would be just fine.

Rythan let that reassurance pour through his kiss. He was so intent on conveying peace that he paid little attention to Tind's preparations. He felt a warm fluid drip down the crack of his butt. Strong fingers massaged it in. Several exploratory pokes prepared him, until at last Tind started to penetrate him with his mighty shaft.

The heat coming from Tind's cock was tolerable. The pain of penetration was reduced to a mild burn. Slow and steady, stopping frequently to allow Rythan a moment to adjust, Tind claimed him.

"Fire and ash, Rythan. You're the sweetest bit of manhood I've ever had."

Ze's tongue kept his thoroughly engaged, so Rythan couldn't respond. He wasn't even sure what he'd have said if he could. The sensations bubbling inside him were too intense for mere words to explain.

Tind filled him completely, to the point that he felt as if he might split apart. Ze's body gripped him just as tightly. The Firebrand's skin was so hot it almost scalded his

back and thighs where they touched. Ze's body, surrounded by the trickle of water flowing around him, was ice cold in comparison. And both his catalysts seemed to be frozen in place, waiting for a signal from him.

"Now." Had he really said it, or was it just the way the word reverberated through his mind that made him think so? Either way, Rythan moved. First backward, against Tind's rock-hard body, then forward into Ze's supple one. Back and forth, over and over. Fucking and being fucked, awash with pleasure, until the rhythm took on a life of its own.

The passionate cries increased as Ze bucked up, shoving Ry onto Tind. Tind thrust in return, forcing Rythan deeper into Ze. The catalyst bond between the three of them was forged by their perfect rhythm. What one felt, they all did to a certain degree.

"Fucking fantastic," Ze shouted. "It's like I have both of you inside me."

Rythan gasped as pain and pleasure and promise boiled together in the physical melting pot that used to be his body. The adult beast within him demanded release. The barrier between the being he was and the being he would become was paper thin. It wouldn't be long now.

"Let it burn through you," Tind growled from behind him.

"Let it fly," Ze encouraged him.

"It's... coming," Rythan panted out. "I'm... coming." It was true. He could no longer hold back in any sense of the word. These two men had pushed him to the edge, and orgasm was hurling him over into the black abyss of transformation.

Semen shot from Rythan's cock into Ze's tight ass. With that release it was as if he'd jettisoned every unneeded molecule that made up his former child self. He lost track of the number of spasms that wracked his muscles. They were so violent he couldn't remain sheathed inside Ze's body. It just kept going on and on.

And then a new note entered his maelstrom of change. Tind's massive cock quaked inside him. "Rythan, I'm coming for you."

The Firebrand's release set off a more intense round of muscular tremors inside Rythan. His body contorted in unnatural ways, the pain made bearable only by the erotic attentions of his catalysts.

"My turn," Ze announced before he sealed his mouth down to Rythan's. He stole the air from Rythan's lungs, then rapidly changed position until he could guide his cock into Rythan's mouth. "Suck me dry now, Ry. Breathe it all in!"

Breathe in his cum? It went against his lifelong instincts of keeping liquid out of his lungs, but Rythan did as Ze bid him. He sucked on the Zephyr's cock, inhaling the creamy man juice that spilled out onto his tongue. He'd choked on water often enough to loathe the sensation of fluid in his lungs, but it didn't happen with Ze's cum. Instead, it became the headiest air Rythan had ever known.

When there was no more of the substance to be had, he continued to lick and suck Ze's shaft just for the sheer pleasure of holding another man's dick so intimately. One up his ass, another down his throat. They'd given him everything they had to offer. They *believed* in him. That knowledge gave him the courage to snap the last restraint and allow the beast to go free.

The sharp feelings inside him intensified. Every nerve ending in his body stung as if singed. At the same time, he felt lighter than the clouds. The throbbing pulse of his blood crashed through his veins, forging new paths. Rythan had never known so much pain in his life. Nor had he ever experienced so much pleasure.

Silver, red and blue sparks showered across his vision. The rain of colors was so dense Rythan couldn't make out any details further than an arm's length away. At some point in the physical maelstrom his catalysts left him, and he knew they'd done so because the thing inside him required more room to claim its new shape.

Bone snapped, lengthened, joined with new sinew and muscle. His skin stretched, ripped and grew back. Organs shifted, expanded, collapsed. New tissue joined with the old. New input reached his brain but the messages were too confusing to register. Finally, his body contorted one last time as the dregs of the child he'd once been were cast out.

Then, rag doll limp, Rythan sank to the bottom of the pool where he died.  
And was reborn.

## Chapter 9 -- A New Perspective

Acting on instinct more than any actual thought, Rythan launched himself out of the water and landed on the solid surface at the edge of the pool. He teetered uncertainly there for a moment, then stepped back to steady himself. He tripped over something, felt a sharp pain in a region of his body that he couldn't immediately identify, and fell over backward.

"Weak and clumsy as a newborn," Rythan heard Ze say with a chuckle.

"He *is* a newborn," Tind replied.

A pair of very strong hands helped Rythan to his feet. Oddly, they didn't seem as warm to him as they had before. Assuming that they really were Tind's. Rythan looked down... and down... and down to confirm. But the height gave him a bit of vertigo, and he was in danger of falling over again so he snapped his head back up and stared at the top of the windows which were once again visible and open.

And, if he wasn't mistaken, they were considerably wider than before.

"Guys, what happened? The room looks different."

Ze appeared at his side, not quite reaching Rythan's shoulder when before they'd been almost eye to eye, and grinned up at him. "So do you."

Tind playfully slapped him on the butt. "Congratulations, Dragon Flyer. You've got a long and interesting life ahead of you."

Dragon Flyer? *Dragon* Flyer? Rythan couldn't quite believe he'd Become an adult form that hadn't been seen in several generations. "Are you sure?"

"That was the role Destiny hand picked for you. That's what Tind and I were told you'd Become. Naturally, I thought someone had screwed up the star charts, but it looks like the fortuneteller Goddess knew what She was doing."

Rythan shuffled forward, careful not to unbalance himself again. There was a strange weight on his back, and he felt like he was dragging a heavy burden behind him.

Peering down into the crystalline blue water, Rythan saw his new face for the first time. What he saw stole his breath as neatly as Ze's little trick. His ears were longer but flatter against his skull and half hidden under a cap of deep royal blue hair. His cheekbones were pronounced, but his nose was almost nonexistent. His shoulders didn't seem to be as wide, but his arms were longer when he flexed them. His legs hadn't changed much except for the way his toes had an extra joint and could now be used for gripping, but he knew one good leap would launch him into the air.

The freaking air!

The tips of his wings poked up from behind his shoulders. He spread them, marveling at the way iridescent blue light radiated from them. There was a whip of a tail too, though it was hard to see from the angle of the water's reflection.

He was looking at a complete stranger, and at the same time there was no question in his mind that this was who he was always meant to be.

A Dragon Flyer.

A thin stream of tears sizzled across Tind's cheeks. "I'm so proud of you, Rythan. You've done it."

Rythan reached out blindly for the Firebrand's hand and gave it a tight squeeze. His mind was awash with fresh input from his new body. A Dragon Flyer, and from the color of his skin, one who'd care for one of the ocean dwelling variety. He'd be able to fly with his gossamer wings. His thick hide would provide immunity from their flaming breath. Best of all, he wouldn't have to give up his love of swimming for this rare breed of adult could breathe underwater as well as above.

Blue dragons spent so much time slumbering in their underwater lairs. His duties would involve caring for one of the elegant creatures, seeing that his -- or her -- hide stayed clean and healthy, and that its treasure remained untouched. His future was assured for generations, as Dragon Flyers usually lived as long as their wards.

He couldn't believe his good fortune. He'd never dreamed of an honor so great. There was perhaps one Dragon Flyer born in a thousand seasons, and somehow he'd been chosen. Now he better understood why those two judges had been so critical.

He owed these two catalysts more than a word of thanks, but words were all he had. "I couldn't have done it without you. Either of you."

Ze grimaced. "Save your thanks, Rythan. I'm undeserving. You almost didn't do it at all because of me."

"What do you mean?"

"I judged you barely worthy." He said it with a straight back, almost defiant.

"You asked me about the shells. I remember now." Good thing he hadn't connected the question and the twitchy judge with the Zephyr before the transformation. It would have made their initial bonding even more problematic. "May I know why?"

Ze flexed his wings to create a temperate breeze, a sign of his irritation at being questioned. It no longer frightened Rythan. Now he could give back as good as the Zephyr gave, and then some. So he waited in silence for a more forthcoming response.

"I thought you were too good, too careful. You gave the merchant all you had, not keeping anything in reserve for yourself. Surely you knew you had enough in hand to buy a favor from one of Destiny's Children. Perhaps several of them. And yet you returned it all."

It never occurred to Rythan to use someone else's money for his own gain. "Why is that so wrong?"

"You're very naïve when it comes to people, Ry. I really thought you were too innocent in the ways of the world, too selfless to look after your own interests let alone those of a dragon. Not everyone has your generous heart, and it would be a shame if your trusting, open nature got you killed when you have such an exciting life ahead of you."

"Ignorance is curable," Rythan told him. "I may make a few mistakes, but I'll live and learn."



"I know that now," Ze admitted. "If I could change my verdict, the Annals of Destiny would show you are completely worthy of your Destiny in my eyes."

"As you are to me. Both of you." Rythan stretched and flexed, trying to learn the mysteries of this adult body, and nearly knocked his catalysts over in the process. "Sorry, guys. I haven't quite gotten the hang of this form yet."

Tind's warm presence radiated over his scales. "You're doing just fine for a Dragon Flyer who's less than an hour old."

"Clumsy or not, I'd fly with you any time," Ze admitted gruffly.

Tind added, "Since blue dragons have been spotted flying over my lava gardens, I hope you'll visit me often."

"I'd like to see you again. Both of you. But right now..." Rythan sneaked a glance over his shoulder at the open windows. He knew that was the way he was meant to leave, just as he knew this body would be able to fly as long as he didn't think too much about it beforehand.

"Time to spread your wings?" Ze guessed.

Rythan nodded. He leaned down to kiss the Zephyr. The passion he'd come to expect from Ze -- hot and hard and quick to ignite -- was still there. With a tug on his heart, Rythan whispered a goodbye before pulling back.

"You'll get no goodbyes from me," Tind warned him. "I fully expect to see you again. If you don't come around on your own, I'll just go looking for you. You understand me?"

"I understand." He gave the compassionate Firebrand a parting kiss anyway. "Dinner, one night soon. Maybe breakfast too."

"You're on," Tind replied with a smile.

"Maybe I'll visit you both from time to time too," Ze announced, looking a bit uncertain of how his statement would be received.

"I'd like that." Rythan meant it. There'd be plenty of time in his new life to visit with friends... and mercurial lovers.

Ze's smile was nearly as bright as the sunlight around him.

Rythan turned to go, but a hail from Tind brought him back. "You're a full adult now, able to choose a new name for yourself if you wish. What should we call you when we meet again?"

The name that had been hovering at the back of his mind, waiting for the opportunity to be called forward, came to the tip of his tongue. "I shall be known as Zander."

The Temple of Destiny let out a ripe peal of the bells from its highest tower, informing the citizens of Azure that Rythan's -- now Zander's -- Becoming was complete.

The parting had to be quick or else he might lose his nerve. He dove out the window and started to plummet toward the waterway below. Quickly he spread his wings. His descent slowed, then stopped, then, finally, started to reverse itself. He glided upward, getting a feeling for the way the air rushed over and under him and the minute adjustments needed to keep him aloft.

Then, with a cry of pure joy, Zander winged his way toward his new Destiny.

## **Kira Stone**

Kira's a bonnie lass who lives in a warm, many-chambered cave tucked away in the Scottish Highlands. A small band of ever-changing heroes keeps her company. As they relax in front of a roaring fire, devils dance and angels sing her bawdy songs. Faerie folk often stop in for a cup of mulled wine and to listen to her spin a yarn or two. And when daylight turns to dusk, together they somehow find a way to keep the cold, uncaring world at bay for another night...

When Kira isn't living in her fantasy world, she's writing about one from her ordinary house in Ohio with her feline companions (who don't sing nearly as well as the angels do). Is it any wonder she prefers the cave? You can check out Kira's website at <http://www.kirastonebooks.com>, or join her Yahoo! group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/kirastonebooks>.