

**Yearning**

**By Amy Lane**

**A Green's Haven Novella**

**Featuring Jack and Teague**

## **Prologue: Jack**

### **Meeting Green**

*Green knocked on the door of Jack's crappy student walk-up about two hours after Sara's funeral.*

*The sounds of Journey were thundering through Jack's blown out speakers, because it was Sarah's music, and because it made him cry, but crying hadn't worked.*

*Jack had gotten home and thrown his fist through the wall of his one-room apartment in an absolute fury. His sister had been shot in some redneck's backyard, and no one seemed to give a ripe shit.*

*Oh yeah, mom and dad had foot the bill for the service, but Jack had been the only one to attend—Sarah didn't fit into their little family picture once she'd revealed her drug use. And after she went the extreme route to get clean...well, mom and dad had been more than willing to pretend that Jack had been an only child.*

*But she'd been the one to help Jack through Algebra, who had told him to keep his grades up so he could be what he wanted to be instead of what they wanted him to be—she'd been the one person at his high school graduation who had mattered, even if she had sat somewhere far apart from mom and dad during the ceremony. Sara had been there for him, his whole life, even when the drugs had made her flaky—and after that, she'd kept visiting him during the feral hours of the night, just to give him hope that even the worst mistakes could be overcome.*

*Being the only one listening to a stranger saying empty words over a hole in the ground just pissed him off.*

*When Green had knocked on his door, he'd been nursing the scrapes and bruises on his knuckles and a serious case of resentment, but one look at Green and all that faded.*

*Green was taller than he was—by at least two inches, maybe three or four—and that didn't happen often. He was also beautiful—satin shiny butter colored hair down to his hips, triangular features too delicate to be male and too bold to be female, and eyes that were greener than his name.*

*Jack, who had enjoyed a healthy, if conservative sex life and never questioned his gender orientation, not even a little, not even in his sophomore year in college when all the Liberal Arts majors thought they were bi, suddenly knew what it felt like to think another man was desirable. But when he shook hands with the beautiful stranger, even that disappeared.*

*There was a terrible, overwhelming sadness about this man, a fraught melancholy at odds with the apology and wry kindness in his voice.*

*"I'm so sorry we didn't make the funeral, mate," Green said, his voice definitely cockney. Jack didn't yet know that the accent slid around, from London's East Side to Lake County, almost to Wales, up to Ireland and back. It was at its barest cockney when he was upset, angry, or grieving himself almost to death.*

*"I thought someone would be there," Jack said numbly. "She said she had people now..." His naked, hurt gaze hit Green's, and Green took his hand as though to shake it again.*

*"She does have people now," Green said softly, stroking the bruised skin of his knuckles. "We're just... we're a little wounded ourselves, Jacky—but don't worry. Your sister won't go unremembered."*

*"She said," all of Jack's anger seemed to drain from his body like the pain from his hand, "she said that Adrian would look after her. Why wasn't he there? Why didn't he save her from that guy?"*

*Green's pain was so excruciating it almost stopped Jack's breath. "Adrian died, my boy, a week ago—about two days before your sister did, actually. I'm sorry—we were..."*

*Jack Barnes had loved his sister, but in a thousand years he didn't think he could conceive of the pain that was vibrating from this intense, magnetic stranger.*

*"Grieving," Jack said softly, and Green met his eyes and smiled, and the sun came out again.*

*"You're a good lad, mate. Sara worried about you, you know—she seemed to think you were too much alone."*

*Jack swallowed. "She taught me how to take care of people. Who do I take care of now?"*

*A faint glimmer of hope and a smile dawned on Green's clean, sunrise features. Casually, he let Jack's hand drop and leaned against the iron railing at the top of the plank landing, confident that it would hold his weight. "There's always someone out there who needs you."*

*Jack couldn't go that way, not right at this moment, so he turned his thought towards the anger, to help keep him upright. "Why did he shoot her, Green? She was just... just a wolf—she wandered in someone's backyard. We don't shoot wolves anymore—why would someone shoot her?"*

*Green grimaced. "There is a group of men—hunters. They...they're throwbacks, really, to the time when men could afford to think theirs was the only race or the only species that deserved to survive. They hunt... my people. The Goddess folk. I don't know about this man in particular but I do know one hunter who's through with it now—he thought he was doing something noble. All he saw was a monster."*

*And Jack's anger was abruptly back. "My sister?"*

*"Shhh... shhh..." Right there in the warped wood of Jack's doorway, Green put his hands on Jack's shoulders and tucked Jacky right into his chest like a parent would comfort a ten year old.*

*"What kind of monster would kill my sister?"*

*"Not all of them are monsters, Jacky," Green murmured. "Some of them... some of them just need to learn better. Some of them even want redemption."*

*"I just want to understand," Jack whispered brokenly. Oh, Sara—she'd never thought she was pretty, with plain brown hair and plain blue eyes, but she'd made Jack feel important, and he'd thought she was the dawn itself, with the sun in her smile.*

*"We've got a hunter on our side, now—does that help to know? That there's a man out there helping people like your sister? Keeping our folks safe from the outside?" Green's voice didn't rumble—but it did vibrate in his chest, and once again Jack was acutely aware of the attraction he felt for this person, this being, when he would have sworn that his body only responded to women.*

*"I want to help them," Jack muttered, surprising himself. "I tried to go to back to school and I can't. I..." And here he was, telling this beautiful stranger a thought he'd barely articulated to himself. "Jesus, I'm so damned lost."*

*Green had nodded and stroked his hair gently, still a parent, in spite of all the pain Jack had felt radiating from the center of his chest. "Right then, Jacky. Well, you're as much ours as your sister was, now, right?"*

*"Am I?" Jack asked, muddled from being comforted like this.*

*"Of course." And just like that, Jack believed him. It had never been in Jack's nature to question things—not even affection or good fortune. Later, he would realize that this was because Sara had given him everything he*

*needed. Later, he would realize that someone without a Sara might not be so accepting of a Green. But right now, Green had a plan.*

*“I’m thinking you’d like a purpose now, am I right?” Those eyes...oh, they did see straight to a body’s core and strip it bare, didn’t they?*

*“Oh yes,” Jack said, an entire ocean of ‘lost’ almost drowning him in its tears, just standing on the cheap metal landing of his crappy student apartment.*

*Green smiled again, this time a little wider. “I’ve got a friend you might want to look up. Your sister was killed by a hunter, and this one—he’s my ‘reformed’ hunter. He works for me now—his job is to keep the other hunters away from my flock, yes?”*

*The idea of Sara in her wolf form being a member of this man’s ‘flock’ made Jack smile in earnest. “I’d like to help,” he’d said in a daze.*

*“Of course you would.”*

*Jack had stepped aside to let Green in then, and for a moment, he closed his eyes and let Green’s smell wash over him. Oh, God, that smell—green grass, good dirt, wildflowers and sunshine. The idea of touching that skin, being bathed in that smell, was suddenly the most amazing, comforting thought Jacky’d had since his sister’s last visit, when she’d been clean, sober, happy, and, yes, Jack had to acknowledge now, loved.*

*Green had come inside then, accepted a soda, and written a name, address, and favorite bar on a piece of paper that Jack had worried worn before he’d used the information. Then he’d shaken Jack’s hand and left.*

*It wasn’t until after he’d left that Jack had realized that his hand was no longer bruised or scraped, not even a little, and that he no longer wanted to throw anything through his wall.*

## Teague

### Dreams of Green's Hill

The pizza place looked like some sort of movie set from the 80's—tacky shellacked tables, dark-glassed tiffany lamps, and a pool table in the middle.

It used to be Teague's favorite place in the world.

But not anymore. He sighed, settling back against the grimy wall, grimacing at the ledge at the seat of the bench that cut through his jeans to his calves. He crossed his ankles, tilted back his head and closed his eyes, hoping that would make the whispers of his one-time 'friends' go away.

*Traitor. Monster lover. Pansy-assed faggot.* It was nice to know that the assholes he used to hang with really were that dumb. It made him feel better for ditching them all behind him, in the land of totally fucking wrong assumptions—it was good not to be the ass in this room.

"Teague, uhm, I don't think this is really working."

The voice was hesitant, soft, a warm tenor or sweet baritone, and Teague opened one eye impatiently to see his partner in hunting sliding across from him in the booth. "I was zenning, here, Jacky-boy, is there any way you could take all that fear somewhere else? You're stinking up the place."

Jack touched the sticky tabletop, a ginger disdain showing on his narrow face. "Oh now you're just being mean."

In spite of the not-so-subtle hostility brewing around the two of them, Teague found himself grinning. The dimples on his cheeks popped, the grooves around his mouth deepened.

"What's the matter, Jacky-boy—this place ain't as classy as the ones we usually haunt?"

Jacky's smile from under his shaggy black bangs didn't quite hit his blue eyes. "Aww, sweetie, you know I go anywhere as long as you're buying."

Teague chuckled, glad that Jack's jitters had receded. Of all the places you didn't want to get caught in with fear on your breath, *Dervish* ranked his top three, right under a vault with a rogue vampire kiss and locked room with a werewolf.

Teague went back to surveying the room under his lowered lashes, and he suppressed a grimace when one of the natives caught his eye. Well, shit, it was inevitable, wasn't it? When they'd been partnered up, he and Jace had been

in *Dervish* five nights in seven—Teague'd been the one to leave the partnership. Jace sort of got to inherit this shitbox, now didn't he?

With a sigh, Teague looked over at Jack and nodded towards the (no shit, honest-to-god) jukebox in the corner. "Darlin'," he hammed with a flutter of his murky green eyes, "go on over and pick us sometin' sweet to dance to, would ya?"

Jack looked up and saw the beefy behemoth in sleeveless flannel lumbering their way. "You don't trust me to play with the big boys?" He asked resentfully, and Teague threw him a look chocked full up with bite-me irritation.

"Buttercup, do you really want to be here when I get bitched out by my ex-wife?" Teague pitched his voice loud enough to catch Jace with it, and the guy's face split with what would have been a winning grin, if his teeth weren't stained with chew.

"Sweetie," Jace said, his joviality as thin as the seat of his two-hundred-year-old jeans, "when you and I have it out, he'll be able to hear it all the way in your faggot-trap in Sacramento."

"Jack, do we live in a faggot trap?" Teague asked Jack disingenuously, his shit-eating grin begging Jack to play along.

"Uhm..." Jack pretended to think, "No. Rats, yeah. Rats, cockroaches, fleas, silverfish, pincer-bugs, spiders and stray cats get stuck there, but faggots are pretty much free to come and go as they please."

Jace grunted, unwilling to concede that Jack had been funny, but Teague had to suppress an out and out guffaw. Their little two-bedroom apartment was actually snug and comfortable, cluttered with Jack's books and Teague's models and the occasional gun safe. He'd known Jacky would come through. And with that thought, Jack nodded briefly and stood up to put his coins in the jukebox, giving Teague the space he needed.

"What're you doin' here, race-traitor," Jace asked bluntly the minute Jack was out of earshot.

Teague's nose wrinkled. "Du-ude, could you *sound* any more like a nine-teen-fucking-fifties KKK leader? Next time I visit, I'm bringing the white pajamas for you, no shit."

Jace snarled and spat brown juice through a missing tooth onto the plain board floor. "This ain't funny, asshole. You used to be worth somethin'. You used to be the best damned hunter I knew, until you started working for the monsters."

Teague's grin turned hard, and his wide green eyes narrowed. "I just figured out that monsters are monstrous on the inside, not the outside. You know as well as I do that there are some damned ugly human beings walking around in pretty skins. A vampire that doesn't kill nothing isn't a monster, but a guy who wipes his feet on his children twice a day—that guy needs to be put down."

Jace sneered and spat again. "I ain't sayin' there ain't some vicious motherfuckers out there, Teague. You know I seen 'em. I'm sayin' that's not our call to make. But monsters—we can see the monsters. Hell, from what I understand, you're *workin'* for 'em."

Teague's eyes went flat, cold, and hard. "Green is not a monster," he said quietly. There were maybe three people in the world who knew that tone, and Jace was one of them.

The sudden silence was so thick that not even the blare of *Journey* from the over-loud jukebox could cut it, although Teague did spare a wince for Jack's selection. *Really, Jacky? Journey? Are you trying to get the shit beat out of us?*

"What do you want here, Teague?" Jace asked, the question an obvious backdown from the danger that was written all over his ex-partner.

Teague sighed, caught Jacky's sideways look from the jukebox, and mimed drinking from a bottle. Jacky nodded and moved to the bar to get the two of them the house beer. This was their dance, even if it was Teague's old floor.

"Katy Garcia."

Teague watched Jace suck in a breath, and then think better of spitting again. "Runaway," he said roughly. "Bad family and bad veins. What you want with her?"

"Her family's looking for her," Teague said, thinking sadly of a pretty girl with dark, hurt eyes. He and Jace had grown up in this area just west of Angel's Camp—their graduating class had been less than a hundred. Not many secrets in a town that amounted to little more than a busy stretch of a lonely county highway.

Jace laughed with no humor. "Her family's her mama, and she's been on the pipe since Katy was a field mouse. That girl ain't got no family lookin' for her!"

Teague's voice dropped again, growing frosty as the beer Jacky was bringing him. "That's not her family anymore."

Jace swallowed and then coughed because he'd been so surprised he'd forgotten about the chaw in his teeth. "How in the hell would you know a thing like that?"

"She's Green's family..."

"She could be dead!" Jace protested, pale with the implication that the little slip of a thing he'd thrown coins at a year ago could be one of the monsters he did so love to hunt down.

"Green would know," Teague said with absolute surety. "Green's people would know. She came here to say goodbye to her mama not more'n a week ago. Someone's got her—and if they got her..."

"She's probably in a shooting gallery—you know there's a shitload of 'em off the old county road!"

"No," Teague said with absolute surety. "You don't get welcomed into Green's family with those kinds of problems. Or," he held up a hand, making eye contact with Jace, which wasn't hard since the other man's eyes were wide and searching for some solid ground, "or, those problems go away, when you get introduced."

"I don't understand," Jace said blankly, and Teague met Jacky's dark blue eyes, as his *smart* partner approached with the drinks in his hands. Jack crossed his eyes and stuck out his tongue, and Teague fought the urge to laugh.

"When a human makes the change to family—either terminally furry or just plain terminal," Jack said patiently, sliding in across from the two of them in the booth and folding his long legs under the short table, "it cleans out the blood. No addiction, no cravings...for Katy, it's just the wind and the moonlight and her packmates. We want her to get back there, that's all."

Jace looked away from Jack, his eyes getting caught by something as he did. "Where'd ya get that pansy-assed tat?" He asked gruffly.

Teague resisted the urge to study the lime-bearing oak tree covered in roses that was inscribed on the tender inside of his wrist. The hard blue veins of his own flesh made up the oak-tree's branches, and if he'd actually gone under the needle for it, that 'pansy-assed tat' would have hurt like a sonofabitch.

"It was a gift from a friend. Don't change the subject." He acknowledged the strangled bark of laughter from Jacky with a sideways glance. Jack flushed and offered him a beer. He took the cold bottle, slick with condensation, out of Jack's fingers, somewhat reassured when their fingers brushed slightly. Jacky had his back. He tilted the bottle back, closing his eyes in satisfaction when the cheap beer—the only kind he drank, really—hit the back of his throat. Some things—good, simple things—you couldn't rush.

“Why didn’t she go to a program,” Jace grunted, but Teague could tell he was softening. Jace had always had a problem staying away from his sweets, and here he was, chasing three-hundred pounds. Maybe Jace knew about addictions, even ones that killed you slow instead of pitching you off a mountain of high.

He saw Jack throw Jace a vicious glance and tried not to sigh. The kid had an unexpected temper sometimes. He’d learned how to spackle and patch after the last time he’d called a job on account of keeping Jacky safe—Jack never threw a punch at a person, but the walls took a hell of a beating.

“You need family to do that sort of thing, Jace,” he said now, keeping his eyes level with Jack’s so the boy would stand down. “You need people. You said it yourself—she didn’t have any people. Now she does. And they’re worried, and we’re their right hand.” He made a fist and put that tat on display. It was Green’s mark, and now was the time to flash it.

“Well, shit,” Jace swore, but without heat. With grim humor and the air of a man mulling things over, he looked over at Jack, who was rather sullenly picking the label off his beer bottle. Jack didn’t like beer, but he knew better by now to order a soda in a dive like this. “If he’s this guy’s right hand,” a shoulder jerk at Teague, “what does that make you?”

Jack’s eyes widened and he flushed, and Teague barely avoided spitting beer out his nose as Jack’s head swung around to Teague with a desperate panic in his eyes. *Please, for the love of all that’s holy, brother, don’t tell this man that story.*

As though Teague would.

“It makes him Green’s ass-kicking toe, Jace, now quit stalling. She’s not dead, but nobody—and I mean *nobody* leaves Green’s protection willingly. Do you have a line on her?”

Jace grunted and sighed. “If he’s an ass-kicker, I’m my Aunt Susie, but I’ve got something that might help. You remember Mikey Daniels?”

Teague grunted and tipped back his beer again. “Complete asshole, snorted his ex-wife’s paycheck every week, shared the leftovers with his teenaged son?”

Jack made a little girl’s sound. “Ewwwwwww…”

Teague nodded in complete understanding. “Like I said, there’s more human monsters than inhuman ones.”

Jace had to concede the point. “Yeah, well word is, he’s got himself a hooker workin’ for free in his shithole, but the thing is, he’s done too much blow…he can’t get his damned pecker up, and the whole town knows it. He’s the most legendary limped-dick disaster in the history of Grim’s Peace.”

Teague raised his eyebrows, and tried not to look concerned, but the truth was Mikey Daniels was mean and stoned and stupid, and at one time, he’d fancied himself a hunter. He’d have the right materials on hand—silver paint for the cage and the collar, and a big hunting knife—that’s really all he’d need. Of course, it figured that the one thing he could hunt would be a tiny girl with barely a month’s worth of practice in how to be something that wouldn’t have to take abuse.

And Mikey was a gun nut, and tonight was the full moon.

Teague blew out a breath on that last thought. “Thanks, Jace—is Mikey still out on Angel’s Fall?”

“Yeah,” Jace grunted. “That’s a shitty drive on a night like this’un. You two might want to wait ‘til tomorrow.”

*Separate Ways* faded from the jukebox, and in the silence between songs, the terrific bluster of the balls-out November storm raged around the squat little brick building that housed *Dervish*, but it wasn’t the storm that was bothering Teague. It was the idea of a panicked werewolf, tortured and in pain, on the night of the full moon.

He met Jack’s eyes and decided that this call was up to Green.



“Good advice,” Teague said out loud, in concession to Jace’s up and being human with them. “I’ll do my best to take it.” *Faithfully* replaced *Separate Ways* and Teague and Jace both cringed.

Jace spat again, trying to regain some of his bravura. “Yeah—well while you’re debating that, you wanna do the public peace a favor?”

“What’s that?” Teague grinned as he downed the last of his beer and eyeballed the icy, hostile regard of the rest of the flannel bearing rednecks in what used to be his favorite watering hole. He already knew the answer.

“Get the fuck out of here.”

Jack was half way out the door before Jace’d finished the sentence.

Teague caught up without trotting—something he was particularly proud of, since Jack was nearly 6’4” tall and Teague was a bandy-legged 5’9”. Damned kid—it also didn’t help that, at twenty-three and eight years Teague’s junior, Jack’s joints hadn’t started to creak yet.

“Coming, old man?” Jack paused at the porch and hid a grin as he zipped up his fraying camo-fatigue jacket against the bitter wind.

“*Journey*, Buttercup? Did you have to play *Journey*?” Teague pulled the collar of his beat-to-shit leather bomber jacket up around his ears and wished for a scarf or a hat or something, because the night was pretty damned vile. “Was *therenot* a band on that play list that would guarantee we wouldn’t be a shoo-in for the ass and pony show at twelve o’clock?”

“Just didn’t want you to get too cozy, there, cuddling up to the ex-wife,” Jack said back, but there was something in his banter that forced Teague to look at him soberly.

“Not a problem,” he said, in a rarely serious moment, not sure why this would be so important to Jack, but not wanting him to have any doubts either. “Let’s just say that my half of the divorce settlement was the title ‘cocksucking faggoty race traitor’.”

Jack let out a low whistle. “Nice. What was his share?”

Teague grinned. “Notice that missing tooth he kept spitting through?”

Jack grinned back at Teague then, his dark blue eyes dancing and worshipful. “Nice.”

On that, they both ducked their shoulders and hustled through the wind-whipped rain, coming to a stop in front of Teague’s baby, a candy-apple-red/Ford-white Mustang fastback, circa 1970, with a 386 V-8, suicide seatbelts, wink mirror, and a stereo system that would loosen your fillings if you played *Nickleback* too loud. Teague insisted that this was the only way to play it. When they’d gotten in out of the rain and Teague cranked the engine and the heater, Jack asked, “Where to?”

“Back to the hotel to call Green,” Teague replied tersely, squinting through the rain.

“Teague—she’s in pain...”

“Yeah—she’s in pain, she’s pissed off, and she’s still a werewolf on the night of a full moon...”

“You’re not doing me any favors by protecting me!”

“I’m not protecting you, dammit! If Green says go, we’re going!”

“But why ask him in the first place?”

“Because what I don’t know about werewolves would crash a computer, book-boy. You’re the one who keeps telling me that going in prepared doesn’t hurt, now drop it!” Teague huffed out a breath and hoped that Jack would, because the truth was, that two years ago, Teague would have gone to do the job. Of course two years ago, the job would have been killing the werewolf and not saving her, but he would have gone anyway. Hell—a year and five months ago he would have gone in alone to do the job, and probably gotten killed in the process. But a year and four and a half months ago, Jack Barnes had walked into a dive bar a lot like *Dervish* to tell Teague that his sister had been shot because she was a werewolf, and that Green had told him about a hunter who helped folks like Sara Barnes.

Teague had been living in fear ever since.

“Teague?” Jack asked now, pulling him from the past, where he’d met the eyes of a hurt kid through a dim room and bled a little at the thought of how that kid had gotten hurt.

“What Jacky?”

“You never did tell me why you switched sides.”

*“Why?” The kid had been tall, with a soft mouth and a flirty smile, and Teague’s first thought had been that he’d probably have to get his nose broken again keeping the roughnecks from breaking him into little pieces.*

*“Why what?” Teague’s response had been short, designed to make the kid back off, but Jacky was surprising that way, because he rarely did back off, but he got aggressive so subtly that it didn’t look like he was being an asshole.*

*“Why don’t you hunt them anymore?”*

*Teague had needed to shut his eyes against a sudden vision of attenuated fingers, skating on the skin of his inner thigh, a hard body pressing along his back, and masculine kisses that tasted of a little boy’s dream day, running through the grass without a thought in his damned fool head. But Jack was waiting for an answer, and he didn’t have time to fight back memories or mentally wrestle an inconvenient hard-on, so he opened his eyes and gave a self-deprecating sneer.*

*“Because Green talks sense, that’s why,” he’d said, but he and the kid both knew there was a lot more to it than that.*

And now, after letting the subject drop for the better part of a year and a half, Jacky was bringing it up again. But after a year and a half of seeing strange shit, weird shit, and shit the likes of which the two of them would never speak of again, Teague owed him a better answer.

“Green saved my life,” he said after a weighted moment of listening to the rain. “He saved my life, and he forgave me for my past, and he offered me a way to live with myself when I’d been so damned wrong...” Teague remembered all of his old kills—every goddamned one of them. For the first one, the old man had been standing there, calling him a pussy and howling at Teague to just shoot the fucking dog cringing in the corner of the woods and looking so, so helpless—and that memory ripped his insides up like snow-tires ripped up roadkill. But it was the last one, the kill he didn’t make, when he was defending a man who had been dead for a hundred and fifty years, that woke him up in cold sweats, praying for forgiveness. He couldn’t talk about that, not right now. He swallowed hard, and tried to finish the thought.

“Anyway, he saved my life, and now I owe him.”

“How long do you owe him?” Jack asked soberly. “Are you going to be a hunter forever?”

Teague shrugged and glanced at Jacky, trying to laugh him off. “Well, Jacky, if I bore you, you could always go back to school, get a desk job, and find yourself a sweet young thing to make you some pretty babies.” He’d been trying, off and on, to get Jack to finish his degree since Jack had signed on with him, saying he wanted to be one of the good guys, like Teague. Teague knew better—he’d rather the kid had something solid under his belt, something that it would be easier to do in his old age—something like alligator wrestling for example.

“No,” Jack said soberly. “I may go back to school, Teague, but I’m not leaving you.”

Teague flushed, his heart in his throat, because every time Jack resisted Teague’s attempts to push him out of the nest, his heart just hopped up there from fear that this time, Jack wouldn’t push back.

“Appreciated,” he said now, gruffly, and considered the subject dropped.

But Jack, damn him, wasn’t dropping shit. “Thanks for not telling him,” he said now, as Teague turned into the no-tell motel parking lot.

Teague killed the motor and grunted.

“No, seriously!” Jacky protested, and Teague closed his eyes and hoped this discussion would just go the hell away.

“What was I going to tell him, Jacky?” Teague asked sourly. “That you’ve got a tattoo under your left nut with Green’s mark on it too?”

“I still don’t know what it says,” Jack muttered glumly, and Teague breathed out hard in what might have been a suppressed laugh.

Because the hell of it was, Teague knew exactly what it said, and he could remember the night they’d gotten them like he could remember the taste of Miller on his tongue now.

Teague made the mistake of looking over at Jacky, in hopes that he had his hand on the door handle, and caught he the younger man looking back. Their eyes collided, connected, held, and both of them flushed, their breathing coming hot and fast, with embarrassment—or that’s what Teague told himself. It was absolutely embarrassment. He refused to believe that it was anything else.

Like desire, maybe.

**Jack**

**Marked**

They sat there, in the steamy silence of the rain pounding on the car, and Jacky refused to look away or back down. He remembered—he remembered and as much as Teague had been willing that moment to go away, Jacky had been willing him to remember it. And to repeat it.

But you couldn't say a thing like that to a man like Teague. You couldn't walk up to him randomly and say, *Hey, I know you've got thirty-one years of heavy-duty heterosexuality impressed on your red-neck backwoods good-ol'-boy psychological make-up and so do I. The fact is, I don't give a shit about that anymore, and I think that maybe I want you more than anything I've ever wanted in my whole life. And I'm pretty sure you want me too. And I'm also pretty sure you're not as straight as you say you are.* That last part was a guess, although it was a good one.

No one who knew Green was as much of a redneck as Teague talked himself up to be.

*Green had come by about two weeks before Christmas to warn them that it might happen. Actually, it was more like he came to ask their permission.*

*"I'm...consolidating my holdings," he said with a smile, standing in their little two bedroom and looking around with the friendly, interested eyes of an involved parent. "There's going to be a marking ceremony—you two don't want to be there, believe me, but...but there will be repercussions."*

*Teague had blinked. "Repercussions," he echoed blankly, trying to sort through all of the ways that word could be used.*

*Green had laughed then, the sound rippling through the apartment, making the dust less thick and their crappy little live Christmas tree look suddenly warm and welcoming and classy. "Yes, brother, repercussions. I'm asking you to bear my mark. It means you're mine to protect..."*

*"But we're supposed to be protecting you!" Teague interrupted, looking distraught. "We've been doing a good job, right? We haven't let anyone down—we've brought 'em back alive with every job, right?"*

*Green's smile had been so kind it made Jack's throat tight, and they both regarded the shorter man with dignity, as his bare, vulnerable fear of failure was brutally exposed. With that smooth, practiced motion, Green took Teague's hand in his own, making no pretense about shaking it.*

*"You're doing a bang-up job, mate," he said softly, pulling the hand up to his chest. Teague just stood there, and Jack, who had seen what Teague did when cornered, saw the pulse that signaled fight-or-flight throbbing in his temple. "In fact, you're doing such a good job, that I want you to be part of my family. The both of you. I'm here to ask if that's good for you—because if it's not, I'll still trust you. But I won't mark you with it."*

*“Family?” Teague asked, swallowing hard, and in his voice, Jack heard the echo of a hundred midnight stakeouts, and stories Teague had told by not telling, about a mom who had left him young and a dad who had wanted a hunting buddy, a whipping boy, a mind he could teach to hate and hate and hate, and a body he could train to shoot first and ask questions never.*

*“Family, mate,” Green had replied gently. “For good and bad, you know. If anyone takes me down in this little community, I’m afraid you’ll go down too.”*

*Teague surprised them both then, but Jacky more than Green.*

*His dark-hazel eyes locked on Green’s in a desperate expression of hope, Teague went down on one knee in front of him. “If anyone takes you out, Green, they’ll do it over my dead, bloody body.”*

*Green had inclined his head, as though he accepted such old-fashioned, formal fealty every day. He took Teague’s vow as seriously as Teague meant it, and Jack had loved Green in that moment, because he had given Teague something that Teague so obviously needed.*

*“Absolutely, Sir Knight,” Green replied with only a ghost of a smile, and with that, he took Teague’s hand up to his soft, delicate mouth and placed a sweet, intimate kiss on the inside of Teague’s wrist. Teague blinked when precise tongue reached out and touched his pulse point, and just like that, it was over.*

*“If it all works, the symbol should just blow through you—like summer wind through a cotton dress.” Green held out a hand and helped Teague to stand.*

*“Where will mine be?” Jack asked then.*

*Green shrugged, and stepped forward, holding his arms out like an uncle asking for a hug. When Jack stepped into the hug, Green kissed him on the cheek, and stepped away. “Wherever you need it to be, I guess,” he said with a grin, and turned again to Teague, who was standing alone, the space around his body a shivering, lost space that made Jack’s chest hurt.*

*Green turned to him and held out his arms, and Teague, shuddering, like a frightened puppy, stepped into Green’s hard, secure embrace. Green leaned forward there and murmured something in Teague’s ear that made Teague jerk back and look at him sharply. Green had grinned that gentle smile again, and then bowed and taken his leave.*

*“What did he say?” Jack asked him.*

*Teague shrugged, and murmured something inaudible, and Jack had wisely left it alone.*

Now, as the car’s heater faded and the chill of the night sunk in, Teague’s haunted eyes wouldn’t leave Jack’s, but damned Teague’s closed-off, macho-be-fucked mouth, he wouldn’t say a word.

“The least you could do,” Jack said with a small, invitational smile, “is tell me what the damned thing says.”

Teague blushed, hard--hard enough for Jack to see the flush hit his lean cheeks and the sudden sweat of embarrassment dew his brow. He took a shuddering breath and ran his hands through his spiky, dark-blond hair, and physically wrenched his gaze from Jack’s.

“It says there’s a wolf we need to track if it’s not going to get us killed and that you’re a total fucking moron for keeping us out here in the cold,” Teague ground out.

Jack slammed the door harder than he needed to as he left the car. It was a measure of how badly this conversation had shaken the shorter man that being mean to the car didn’t even earn Jack a reproachful look.

The alarm clicked in the car behind them.

Teague gruffly ordered Jack into the shower first, and Jack didn't argue. It reassured Teague to give him directions, and Jack didn't mind taking them, never had. It had made him the favorite child of his aesthetic, wealthy parents, but Sara had always worried that he'd find the wrong person to give him orders. Jack knew—knew in the center of his lean stomach—that Teague would never give an order that Jack didn't want to follow. He looked at his foggy reflection and had that thought again—and thought that he could live with what he saw in his eyes even as he overheard Teague's phone conversation with Green.

“No—of course I wouldn't drag him out there tonight. But I could go. Are you sure? She's out there in the cold, Green—I could go if I had to. She's all alone.”

Teague paced—Jack could hear the floor creak. It didn't sit well with either of them that they should leave the girl in the hands of this Mikey Daniels one minute longer than they had to, but Jack's anger built in his chest at the thought that Teague would go alone without him. Of course, Jack thought bitterly, Teague was expendable. It was Jacky the weak, the dreamer, the boy, who had to be protected at all costs.

“What?” Teague sounded surprised and more than a little pissed off. “Wait until noon? What in the hell for? WHO? Yeah, yeah, right—I'll ask him. I just thought...I knew her as a girl, Green.” It was a tortured admission—Teague hated to ask for anything. And Green had obviously put his foot down—the wolf was too dangerous on a night like this, and Green kept his people as safe as he possibly could. Jack appreciated the thought, even as he knew exactly what sort of panicky, itchy anxiety would be worming its way around Teague's stomach all night. It was the same thing that would be in his own innards, gnawing away—except Jack would think of Sara, and Teague would think of...redemption? Salvation? What was it Teague had been driving himself towards these past months?

Jack blew out a breath and started brushing his teeth and combing his hair and hoping the conversation would end soon.

There was a pause on Teague's end, an awkward one, and Jack could almost smell Teague's embarrassment. “Right, Green,” he muttered. “Thanks. I'll take care of him. You know that. Well, yeah, and me too.”

That last part was said so reluctantly that Jack wanted to kick something. Teague never believed he needed taking care of—but that didn't stop Jack from trying.

The mist from the mirror had faded, and Jack, hearing sounds from the bedroom eyeballed the crack between the door and the frame. When he saw that Teague had started cleaning his guns—standard operating procedure when they were on a run—he breathed a sigh of relief and pressed closer to the short counter, putting down the comb.

His marriage tackle hung heavily between his legs, dropping from the heat of the shower, and he settled the weight of his balls into his palm, rolling his eyes when the one-eyed-old-man between them woke up and started looking around. He wasn't interested in that now—what he wanted to see was the four inch tattoo that rested at his inner thigh, just shy of the crease of his scrotum.

He had been as surprised as anyone when that thing appeared.

*“So,” Jack said into the companionable silence that settled over him and Teague during the frosty December evening, “that...ceremony or whatever. Is it happening tonight?”*

*Teague looked up from the bright pool of light and the magnifying glass he'd been using and blinked owlishly. He hit pause on the movie they'd been listening to as he'd been painting the model '68 Camero on his work-table and Jack had read the newest Harry Dresden. Jack had cooked this night—as he did most nights—and Teague had tackled cleanup, and he'd been safely ensconced in his routine until Jack had opened his big fat mouth and talked.*

*Jack regretted his need to interrupt—Teague looked contented. He so rarely settled into contentment, into small things that gave him pleasure. Most of his time at home was spent scrubbing the floors and the bathroom like a fiend, cleaning his guns, or working out until his muscles screamed in protest. Jack had to wonder what Teague's life had been*

like before his father had run his car off of Mokolumne Hill after one too many late night conversations with Jose Cuervo.

“Yeah, I think so,” he muttered and then scowled at his model, making sure his minute brushwork hadn’t been compromised. Teague’s Christmas present from Jack was going to be a set of hand-worked shelves from Green’s Hill, to display his models—Jack was almost as proud of that collection of hand-painted plastic cars as Teague.

“What’s it entail?” Jack asked, and Teague put down the model with a patience Jack would have doubted before he’d gotten to know him. Teague called him pansy names, sneered at his music, and told him he was too pretty to play rough with the big guys. Teague also never yelled at him when he fucked-up, brought home his favorite pizza every Friday, and set up cinderblock shelves for Jack’s books less than a day after Jack had moved in. Jack hadn’t asked him for them—he’d just woken up, and they’d been there. There was more to Teague than met the eye—except right now, Teague wasn’t meeting his eyes.

“Touch, blood, and song,” he mumbled, and Jack had blinked and asked him to repeat that. “Touch. Blood. And Song.” Teague enunciated clearly this time, and when Jack had widened his eyes, expecting more information, Teague shrugged.

“In order for Green’s people to do things, they need touch, blood, and song. Or a proxy, you know? That’s why the kisses on the cheek or the hand, and the hug, and the kind conversation.”

Jack squinted. “You mean all that was to get something from us?” And Teague shook his head violently.

“No—you don’t get it. Green wouldn’t see it that way. He wouldn’t have offered the touch, blood and song if he didn’t want us in. It’s just that those things, all...in conjunction and shit—they’re the magic he’s using. Him and whoever else is there.” Green had mentioned a ‘beloved’, and although he seemed happier than when Jack had seen him last, neither Jack nor Teague were sure he’d ever get over Adrian.

“So what’s going to happen to us when...”

Could he have been asking a more prophetic question?

At that moment a warm summer wind blew through their graceless upstairs Hurley Avenue apartment, and both of them closed their eyes in tandem, sticking their noses in the air and scenting things like wildflowers and shady meadows and freedom. And then Teague said “What the fuck?” And Jack stood up as though stung and ran to the bathroom.

“Jacky, Jacky—you all right?” Teague asked as the door slammed in his face. “Jacky—you’ve got to see this thing on my wrist—it is the damndest tattoo—healed up and everything seriously—what’d Green give you?”

Jack had been so upset as he’d tried to examine himself in the bathroom that he didn’t even bother to pull up his jeans when he threw the door open. “Look!” He cried, grabbing his equipment in one hand and shoving it impatiently to the right. “What in the fuck IS that?” Because while Teague had felt a tingling in his wrist, Jack’s tingling had been a hell of a lot more intimate.

Teague’s expression had been pretty damned comical, and he’d looked down to where Jack was pointing and then averted his eyes to Jack’s face, laughing in shock. “Jesus Humphrey Christmas, Jacky, would you put your shit away?”

But Jack was too distraught to laugh. “Teague—dude...” he gestured helplessly. “Dude—my mark’s under my...my...”

Teague had looked down curiously. “It’s under your left nut,” he said, his voice completely matter-of-fact.

“YES!” Jack cried, practically jumping up and down. “Dude—I can’t see it! Man—what if it says something awful, like, I don’t know, ‘Pull twice to start’ or ‘If lost, call Johnson’—Teague, you’ve got to tell me what the fuck is under my nuts!”

*Teague couldn't help himself. He started to giggle, helplessly, covering his mouth with his hand.*

*"Teague!"*

*"No...no...Jacky, just calm down." He showed his own tattoo with its veiny branches and interlaced oak & lime leaves with the rose bush twining over them. He would admit privately—and only to Jack—that he thought it looked pretty damned cool. "Green wouldn't screw you over like that. Here. Stop...flopping your shit all up and down...dude! Now stand still, and I'll take a look."*

*Jack stopped doing his panic dance then, and Teague dropped to one knee. With hands as clinical on Jack's body as they had been on his model, he pushed Jack's cock and testicles to one side, and squinted a little, moving closer.*

*"It's actually pretty cool, Jacky," he said, losing his embarrassment as he examined the new tattoo. "It's a sword, shoved into a bleeding rock—we'll have to ask Green what all this shit means, by the way—and twined around with the same stuff I've got on my wrist. You know, the leaves and shit...wait..." because Jack was backing up to pull up his pants, "there's something else here."*

*And dammit if that hadn't been when things had gotten weird. Teague may have been able to treat his touch professionally, but it had been anything but professional to Jack. Those rough, capable hands on his intimate equipment—well, Jack's prick took kindly to that unusual attention and perked right up, asking for more. Jack had been relieved when Teague told him that the tattoo wasn't anything embarrassing, and more than ready to back away and resume a normal amount of personal space between them, when Teague had gone in for a closer look. To Jack's mortification, Mr. Happy sprang to attention and put on his party clothes like he was anticipating a really good time.*

*Teague continued to study the tattoo, his breath fanning the fine hairs at Jack's groin, and then he ran a finger musingly at Jack's inner thigh, over the tattoo itself.*

*"Teague..." Jack's voice had gone thin and reedy, and for a moment, he wanted to close his eyes and simply savor the way his body felt under Teague's hands. But at the same time, the sight of Teague, on his knees in front of him...ooh, that mental picture needed to be preserved and mounted on Jack's inner eyeball, because suddenly it had become the most erotic thing he would ever dream of.*

*"It says something here," Teague muttered, still lost in his model-maker's attention to detail. "It's written on the sword..."*

*He took another grip on Jack's equipment—now enlarged and not minding it's own business at ALL, and spared a glance for Jack's change in circumstance. He smirked then and winked up at Jack, all good-ol'-boy in that moment, with the same heart-stopping grin he'd always had. "Don't get no ideas, now, Jacky," he said, "I like women."*

*And he did, too. He'd brought a couple of them home, in that first six months—he had a preference for bleached-blondes with dark roots. Jack had opened the bedroom door to borrow a shirt one morning and caught Teague, his head buried between the plump thighs of a busty young thing while she bit her palm to keep from screaming in what seemed to be a lot of pleasure. From then on he'd knocked, but until this moment, right here, with Teague in a similar position in front of him, that picture had been one of his favorite moments to use when jacking-off.*

*Right then Teague rubbed his thumb across the tattoo, and his other hand convulsively tightened on Jack's cock. Jack's breathing went up a notch, and his entire body tingled under Teague's touch. To his surprise, because he usually wasn't a fast starter, pre-come started leaking out the end of his cock, and he just stood there, paralyzed with arousal and a heart-stopping desire for the man kneeling in front of him.*

*"What's it say, Teague?" Jack had asked breathlessly, trying to break the moment, but the eyes that met Jack's hadn't been nearly so cavalier about Jack's body this time. Almost unconsciously, as though stroking his own skin, Teague's hand had tightened around Jack's cock, stroking up a little, until the rough pad of his thumb came up to the end to smear the pre-come over the purpling head. Jack had no choice but to lean against the bathroom door, tilt his head back, and groan.*



*The sound seemed to bring Teague to himself, and Jack had felt—oh nightmare of nightmares—that lovely, rough, pleasurable grip on his cock ease up, as Teague prepared to leave him high and dry.*

*With a whimper, Jack closed his fist over Teague's, and the little sigh that Teague made as he leaned forward and kissed, ever so gently, the new mark on Jack's skin tickled his balls, but then, so did Teague's pointed tongue as it came out to taste the crease of Jack's thigh.*

*Jack groaned again, and pushed on Teague's hand, and Teague rubbed the pad of his thumb over that slick broad head and pumped his fist smoothly and tightly. Jack's hips thrust, and a little grunt emerged from his throat as Teague's other hand came up to cup his balls and give them a squeeze. Ah, God...another pump, that thumb rubbing him... the sound of his tortured breathing in the deathly still apartment...and stroke again, and the thumb at his balls rubbed gently, a caress, a bit of tenderness, and that, only that, was enough to send Jack's head slamming back into the bathroom door and his ejaculation pumping over the area rug on the bathroom hall.*

*Jack kept his eyes closed then, not wanting to see how Teague backed out of this. He'd sensed Teague shifting, letting go of Jack's body and standing slowly up. He felt Teague's breath on his face and for a moment he'd dared to hope, so he opened his eyes.*

*Teague's pupils were dilated with arousal, but his face...his mouth was grim and flat and his eyes were dark green and liquid and his expression was as yearning and as sad and as serious as Jack had ever seen it.*

*"So what's it say?" Jack asked with a hesitant, gamine smile.*

*"It says," Teague began heavily, "that young men with a future should settle down with a nice girl and not get involved with dumb old bastards who don't know where to draw the line."*

*And with that he stalked off to wash his hands in the kitchen sink and bring back a towel to wipe the come stain off the rug.*

*Jack had hidden in the bathroom and tried to pull himself together. Eventually, the television had gone back on, and he'd gone out into the living room and sat down, picked up his book, and watched as Teague worked patiently on his model with hands that barely shook.*

*Neither of them mentioned the incident again.*

Until this night, in the car, because Jack had been jealous of the ex-partner and willing to face anything, even Teague's pissy brush off, to remind him that Jack was different from Jace in a very important way.

Jack tried to tell himself he was pathetic, but he didn't care.

He gave up studying the mark in the mirror—he never could get close enough to see what it said across the blade—and walked into the room for a T-shirt and boxers to sleep in.

As he was rooting through his duffel, he felt Teague's glare on his bare back like a brand.

"What?" He asked, without turning around.

"You heard?"

"We're not going," Jack said flatly. "I bet you'd bring Jace."

Teague growled. "Didn't care about Jace. Jace was... never more than a friend. A drinking buddy. A spare hand."

Jack turned around and Teague suddenly could look anywhere *but* at him. “And I am?” He asked softly, dreading the answer.

“A friend,” Teague mumbled, watching his hands as they packed up his gun gear, putting everything carefully in the case, including his .22, his .45, and the long-action rifle that he used mostly for the sight. With a heave he thunked the gun case on the ground by the queen-sized bed, and listened to Jack’s waiting silence. “Family,” he said at last. “You and Green—only family I’ve ever really had. And one day, you’ll find a girl and quit this dumb-assed way of living. Have me over once a week for dinner, let me play with your kids. And you’ll still be family.”

Jack gave up trying to make eye contact. He found his clothes and slid them on, rooting under the hotel sheets as Teague shut off the light. He listened to Teague getting undressed, knowing that the plain white T-shirt and jeans would come off in the dark but the tighty-whiteys would stay on. Teague had scars, one of them from under his right nipple down practically to his left hipbone, but he never talked about them. Jack had dreams sometimes, about tracing that longest scar, touching the pale flesh and the dark sand-colored nipples, and hearing the stories that Teague had told nobody else out loud.

But the silence was all he heard now as Teague slid into his bed, grunting a little like an old dog. Jacky knew his sounds and the thought of Teague, in this hotel without anybody at all, wrecked him.

“And you’ll still be alone,” he replied clearly into that breathing darkness, when it was obvious no reply had been expected.

Teague’s next words were spoken lightly, as though he were trying to give Jack a gift. An ugly, fear-knotted, painful gift in black paper.

“Don’t fret yourself too much, Jacky—I’m likely to die on this job more sooner than later. You and your family, you’ll be just fine.”

Jacky waited until Teague’s breathing evened out, wondering that he himself could breathe at all for the ice in his chest. *You and your family, you’ll be just fine.* Asshole. Stupid, blind, dumb-fucking shit-kicking asshole.

Jack’s voice echoed flatly in the hotel dark. “You are my family, you dumb motherfucker.”

And with that he rolled away from the window, from Teague’s bed, so he didn’t have to see if the stupid fucking asshole he loved was really awake or if he had fallen asleep in that horrible, numb silence. Jack closed his eyes so tightly he saw stars, so tightly he could pretend the water sliding from his eye creases into the pillow was just tiredness from the drive.

## Teague

### Dreaming and Hunting

*Long fingers skated down the slick damp trickling down the back of Teague's thigh, then traced that fluid along the corner of Teague's mouth. Teague was drowsy—he'd been in a great deal of pain, and then the pain had faded into a startling, invasive pleasure, and by the time he figured out what he was doing and who was doing it to him, he was coming and screaming and weeping in another man's arms.*

*He was still reeling from the shock of all that now, and his mouth opened, and he tasted someone, tasted himself, sucked on that finger hard, swallowed convulsively, tingled and shivered all over.*

*He looked groggily down at his chest, where the wound had opened him from his nipple to his hip, and saw that it was healed—completely healed—and as that long finger traced those same fluids down his chest, the scar faded, tingled with light, and became all but a silver-lit memory in the darkness.*

*"You healed me." It was a statement, because obviously he had been healed or his entrails would be spilling out his stomach and he'd be dead.*

*"Mmmmm..." soft lips grazed his ear, and Teague found that he'd clutched that hand to his chest and was holding it there like a child holds a teddy bear. "Can you live with what we had to do to make that happen?"*

*"Why would you heal me?" Teague had asked, feeling he horror of tears threaten his eyes. "I've hunted people like you..."*

*"But you were trying to save Adrian, mate," said that voice—it was musical, and accented, and comforting. "Granted, he didn't need saving—not at that moment--but that intention... it means the world to me."*

*Teague started shaking all over, and Green's arms came around him to absorb his panic and his pain. "But...you had to touch me...I'm so...why would you want to touch me to save me? You had to...to fuck me..." Shit. He was crying. He hadn't cried since he was six.*

*"Oh...sh sh sh sh..." Those long fingered hands were strong, and Teague found himself being rolled over, and he faced his savior.*

*In his own hill, Green didn't wear glamour, and his delicate features were more than delicate, triangular, pronounced, and his eyes were bigger and set farther apart on higher, sharper cheekbones than humans actually possessed. He looked like anime come to life, and Teague was sobbing like some sort of dumb kid in his bed.*

*"Sh...oh, you are a pure heart under all of that pain, aren't you, Teague Sullivan?" Those hands on his face were beyond comforting. "We're going to need to spend a little time here, I think...so much damage to fix."*

*Teague locked gazes with Green like that eye contact was his lifeline from a vast, frozen ocean. "I'm not bleeding anymore," he said, trying for stoic, but his face was crumpling again like a useless paper sack.*

*“That’s only on the outside, Sir Knight,” Green said with a small, sad smile that seemed in place, even on his lovely, clean and impossibly beautiful features. Then Green held his face and kissed him, the kiss as beautiful and sensual a thing as Teague had ever tasted.*

*The kisses continued, built, and the whole time, Teague had the sense of being touched, truly touched, hands all over his body, Green’s soothing voice all over his soul. When Green moved down his body and took Teague’s cock in his mouth, Teague’s hands had knotted in that long, butter colored hair, not to control Green, not to try to master him, but to anchor himself to the world. That sweet mouth moved on him, licking at his head, squeezing the length of his shaft, and those hands had continued to work, taking the spend that still leaked from his entrance and playing with it, using it to stretch his ass again, to caress his balls and tickle the sensitive space between, and Teague came again, weeping hoarsely, as Green had swallowed his come and his pain, and his little-boy-lost confusion...*

Teague awoke with a start in the darkened hotel room, nursing a case of the antsies to get the job done, an exploding hard-on, and a heart that still hurt. Green said it would, until he allowed someone else to fill it, but there was a Jacky-sized hole there now because Teague wouldn’t let him in.

*You are my family you dumb motherfucker.*

With a look over at Jack to make sure he was still asleep, Teague grasped his cock under his briefs and squeezed.

*You do have a damned fine body,* Green had said during their time together. Teague’s cock was long and thick—not as big as Green’s, but it was still large, especially by human standards. He loved the feeling of his own hands on it, something he could control, a way to give himself a thing he needed since he was so loathe to let anyone he cared about do it for him.

Now he took his hand to the base and tightened to the point of pain, gasping at the sharp pleasure of it and jerking tightly up. Ah, gods, this was what he liked during sex—rough treatment, a little bit of pain to remind him that he didn’t get the pleasure without it. None of that tenderness that Green had shown him, not for Sean Sullivan’s boy.

His other hand came up to his nipple and gave it a brutal squeeze, making him stifle his gasp in dark. He yanked at his cock-head savagely enough to bring tears to his eyes—doing things to his body that he’d never ask a woman to do, because being with a woman was enough to make him come. But not being alone. Not being by himself. Not unless he gave himself the pain he deserved.

His hands continued their assault, yanking on his penis, bruising his nipples and his testicles, putting his sex through as much pain as his heart, because, dammit, he was a killer and a fool, a throwaway redneck with no brains and no future, and Green may forgive him these things but he would never, ever be good enough for his Jacky.

Teague’s orgasm was ripped from him with the violent knife of his own self-inflicted pain, and as his come spattered into the inside of his underwear, he couldn’t stop from snarling Jacky’s name.

Jack jerked in bed, and grunted something incoherent, and Teague couldn’t wait in the dark any longer. He refused to inflict his polluted self on the kid anymore.

He rolled over, cursing that the room now smelled a little like his come, and grabbed a fresh set of tighties, a T-shirt and his sweats from the duffel next to his gun bag on the floor. They had been gifts, he remembered dimly, twin duffel bags, showing up under their tiny Christmas tree last year, literally while they had slept.

In a moment he was dressed and lacing up his running shoes, but not soon enough to avoid waking up Jack.

“Whereyagoin’...” Jack mumbled, and Teague grunted, “Running,” in return, trying to get out the door before he came fully awake.

“It’s four in the fucking morning, Teague, and pissing down rain...” Jack said pleadingly, struggling to sit up in bed.

“Good,” Teague flashed his best, most vibrant fuck-me grin. “With any luck, I’ll get hit by a truck, and you can get on with your life.”

“At least put on a...” but his words were lost as Teague hauled ass out the door into the driving black.

## Jack

## Worth

“Sweatshirt!” Jack hollered, but by that time he was gone, leaving Jack to throw his fist through the cheap bathroom door. “Fuck!”

He looked at his bleeding knuckles and swore again, trying not to weep. Dammit. God-fucking-dammit-all-to-shit.

He had heard Teague, breathing harshly, calling out his name. He’d seen Teague’s body sometimes, over bowls of cold cereal in the morning. He had Irish pale skin and he left bruises on his own chest. Jack had tried once, to bruise his own nipple by pinching, to see what Teague must put himself through, and he hadn’t managed it.

Of course the bruises and that old knife scar weren’t the only marks on Teague’s body. Cuts from a ring hitting pre-adolescent flesh, small, neat cigarette burns with a blistered ocean around them, even the scar on Teague’s chin, the kind of scar that half the people in the world have, Teague had admitted was what happened when you got pushed into a desk from behind. Sean Sullivan had done a number on his baby boy before he did the world a favor and died, hadn’t he?

Too bad he hadn’t died before he’d convinced Teague that love had to hurt, and even painful love was too good for the likes of Teague Sullivan.

With a sigh, Jack stood up and fingered the splintered wooden edges dismally. The hotel was probably going to keep their deposit, he figured glumly, looking at the hole in the door. It’s a good thing Green was paying. He eyed the hole again, still pissed and antsy as hell about not being able to do anything—couldn’t get Katy, couldn’t help Teague, couldn’t do a goddamned *thing* to stop this dull, sore-toothed aching in his chest. The door looked pretty fucking tempting—he briefly contemplated beating the thing to shit since they were going to have to replace it already.

After a few deep breaths he thought of Green and let it go and decided to dress his hand instead. When he was done applying the antiseptic and the dressing, he was too amped up to go back to sleep, so he pulled a book on the history of warfare out of his duffel and lay down to read.

By the time Teague came in two hours later, sopping wet with blue lips and a shiver that wouldn’t quit, Jack had fallen asleep on the book and was leaving a little drool spot on the third page.

Jack sat up quickly, blinking his eyes and wiping his mouth, and then looked at Teague in appalled shock. The wind and the rain hadn’t quit, and as Teague moved across the room he was almost shaking too hard to rip his sodden clothes off on the way to the bathroom. When he got there, Jack pushed behind him and started the hot shower. Teague squashed himself against the counter to let Jack by and Jack scowled at him, even as the steam started coming up.

“Jesus, Teague, look at you,” Jack said softly.

Teague was down to his skivvies, and he held his hands down in front of his privates, giving that fuck-me grin through blue lips. Water was still dripping from his lashes, his hair was plastered to his head almost in his eyes, and his collarbone and scars stood out in stark relief.

“Dude,” he said, striving for a light voice through chattering teeth, “if you could leave, that would be awesome. You know, shrinkage—don’t want my boys to take a reputation hit or anything. They’re sensitive.”

Jack looked at him, his face drawn in anger. “Fuck you, Teague. You didn’t have to do this to yourself.”

Teague looked away, the chattering of his teeth the only sound for a moment. “Jacky-boy, you’re a good kid. I just want better for you, that’s all.”

Jack used his height to his advantage for once, wrapping his arms around Teague’s shoulders, knowing that he must be cold and weak when he didn’t fight back.

“You’re what’s good for me, asshole,” he sighed, and Teague didn’t say anything. When the shivers calmed down, Jack walked him to the tub, helping him step over the side like a child, and making sure he was standing in his skivvies and being pelted by the hot water before he left.

When he came back, fifteen minutes later, a cardboard carrier full of hot chocolate (Teague hated coffee) and hot egg burritos in his hands, Teague was still in the shower. Jack put the stuff down on the little Formica table, then went and sat on the toilet seat and pretended everything was normal.

“So when do we ride?” He asked, closing his eyes and hoping Teague would answer.

“Sometime after noon,” Teague responded, and with the cheap white shower curtain between them, it really felt as though nothing had happened.

“That’s so damned late. Why?” Jack asked, and almost heard Teague’s convulsive shrug. The wait hadn’t set well with either of them.

“Something about Gwane and that guy in King Arthur,” he said, sounding positively flummoxed, even through the curtain.

“Gwane?” Jack asked, clueless.

“Something like that. Some guy whose strength got big in the morning and then after noon it started to drop off. G-gr-eeen said w-w-ere-wolves are l-like that.” Teague’s teeth were starting to chatter again—the water had obviously run cold.

Jack ripped back the curtain and was the recipient of a resentful scowl. “Would you get out of the fucking shower already? Your chocolate’s getting cold.”

“Well would you get out of the fucking bathroom already?” Teague returned, those furious green eyes not giving any quarter. “I’m not a little kid.”

Jack scowled, and deliberately looked at Teague’s crotch, his head jerking back and his eyes widening with some shock. “Dude, if you’re worried about shrinkage, don’t. Now if you don’t get the hell out of this ice-fucking-cold shower, I’m going to wrestle you out.”

Teague squared his shoulders mutinously, and Jack rethought that last statement.

“Or I’m going to call Green,” he added. “Take your pick.”

“Get out of the bathroom, Jack-ass,” Teague growled, and Jack backed up, his hands in the air.

“Two minutes, Teague. I’m timing you now.”

Teague was out—naked, his sopping skivvies in the tub—and fishing through his duffel in a minute and a half while still dripping water from the towel around his waist.

“Hot chocolate?” He asked hopefully.

Jack pointed to the little Formica table where he'd set breakfast. "Is it the gay thing?" He asked bluntly, and Teague glanced at him briefly, pulling on his jeans over yet another set of tighty-whiteys.

"No," he said seriously. But he didn't elaborate, either.

"Gawain," Jack said then, out of the blue and into the sudden silence.

"You've got a pain in the what?" Teague pulled on his last T-shirt and a plain black sweatshirt in short order, grimacing a little when they stuck to his wet skin.

"Gawain, genius. He's the guy whose strength waxed until noon and waned afterwards. He used it in an unfair fight against Lancelot, and Lancelot won anyway."

Teague's eyes widened and he moved to the table to take an appreciative sip of the chocolate. "Gotcha. Where in the hell do you learn something like that, anyway?"

Jack shrugged. "Four-fifths of a Liberal Arts degree."

"What do you *do* knowing something like that?" Teague asked, on another sip of chocolate.

Jack smiled faintly, remembering the idealist he'd been before Sara had been killed. "Become a grade school teacher."

Teague nodded, and reached inside the bag for an egg-burrito. "You should do that. You'd be good at it." He took a bite and spoke with his mouth full. "World needs good men to be around kids. There's not," swallow, bite, chew, "enough of them," swallow.

Jack nodded, knowing what Teague was trying to do and not buying it. "Maybe someday. When you're ready to quit."

Teague winced. "Jacky..."

"We'll talk about it later," Jack said, although if Teague was going to be this much of a mule-headed bastard about something they both wanted, Jack would rather they *not* talk about it, and just keep living the way they had been. "Right now, we'd best take a nap or something, because I don't know about you, but I slept like shit and woke up early. Since waiting's what we've got to do, we've got six hours before we go track down one seriously pissed off werewolf and try to convince her to get in the car. If you're not going to take care of yourself for you, would you at least consider doing it for me?"

Teague gulped the rest of his breakfast. "Fine, Aunt Jacqueline, I'll go to bed like a good boy now!" He sneered, and Jack rolled his eyes, reassured in spite of himself.

Suddenly, he felt brave. "Teague—could we...could we just do one thing?"

"If you say 'share our feelings', I'm going to toss my totally crapfuckingtacular egg burrito." Teague set himself up on the bed, crossing his bare feet at the ankles and folding his hands across his chest in classic catnap position.

"God forbid," Jack said dryly. He stood and pulled a flannel blanket out of his duffel that was laundered soft and not synthetic or slippery or nasty on the skin. Then he kicked off his boots, shed his wet camo jacket and hung it on the chair, and walked over to Teague's bed and lay down next to him, spreading the flannel blanket over them both.

"What in the fuck are you doing, Buttercup?" Teague's voice was irritated and gruff, but it wasn't disgusted, and Jack took that as a good sign.

"I'm getting some sleep, asshole," Jack shot back, and curled up on his side, laying his head on his arm and wrapping his other arm securely over Teague's broad chest. If the guy ever ate, he'd be stocky, and his chest was surprisingly wide.



“Dumbshit kid,” Teague grumbled, but he let his head drop to the side, against Jack’s chest. As Teague’s eyes were closing, Jack caught him rubbing his cheek on the fabric of Jack’s shirt and smiling. Jack was glad the contact made Teague happy, because he could have laid there forever, arms around Teague, knowing he was safe, knowing that for just a moment, he felt he mattered.

As it was, Teague muttered, “Set the alarm for ten,” just before he crashed for good. Jack never disobeyed an order.

## **Teague**

### **Hazards of the Job**

Mikey Daniels had not gone out well.

Teague surveyed the destruction on the bottom floor of Daniels' little two-story, one-bedroom house and gave a low whistle. Whatever the guy had been doing to the she-wolf, it must have sucked stinky troll ass, because she had chewed through the silver-painted bars of the giant porta-kennel, and laid waste to Daniels' face.

Literally. There were kick marks on the floor, soaked in blood, so she had chewed on his face for a good long time before she moved on to his genitalia, which had obviously been exposed when she escaped.

"Teague," Jack said, puzzled, staring at the corpse through the nausea, "if she was chewing on him as a wolf, she wouldn't have had her hands, would she?"

"No," came the flat reply. Teague was studying the bloody paw prints—there were a flurry of them, and he wanted to see which way they exited. He frowned when he saw them heading for the back yard. Daniels had a small, fenced in backyard of about half an acre, surrounded by about ten acres of flat out wilderness. If the wolf had gotten over the silver-pained eel-wire and the eight-foot hurricane fence—and who said cocaine didn't make an asshole paranoid?—they would have to hunt her down and tranq her in a wolf's favorite place.

But if she hadn't, she'd be hiding somewhere—behind some of the giant granite boulders, in the woodshed, behind it—about a hundred places for furry, panicky death to come tear-assing out, and Teague couldn't see which one of them had paw prints leading to it.

But Jacky had asked him a question. "No," Teague repeated. "She wouldn't have had her hands."

"Then how'd the beer bottle get shoved up his ass?" And the damned thing had shattered, too, during his feeble struggle for his useless life.

Teague grinned, and it was unpleasant. "I'm thinking he did that himself, Jacky boy, right before Katy got out and he got fucked for reals."

Again with that little girl's sound. "Ewwwwwww..."

But this time Teague had to agree. "Ewwwww. Absolutely. But a lot of fun to tell his ex-wife."

"You think she'll want to hear about this?" Jack looked in horror at the mess and the obvious pain the guy had been in as he'd gone out. Granted Mikey Daniels had been a warty, nasty, drug-ridden, whoring toad instead of a prince, but...

"Oh yeah," Teague smiled happily. "Bonnie's good peeps—she'll want to hear every last detail—she'll probably even take out an ad in the local paper. It'll make her year." The smile faded and he bent his head to the task again.

“Damn...” he murmured, sorting through the broken glass-topped table and the stuffing from the couch. The back door was open, and Teague peered outside to see if the stuffing had gotten tracked in any direction. It hadn’t. He turned then, the nape of his neck gone suddenly cold, towards the stairs coming down from the bedroom.

The world froze, like a fly in an ice-cube.

Jacky was crouched down at Mikey Daniels’ unlamented remains, and one pretty bitch of a pretty black she-wolf with yellow ends to her feathery outer coat was crouched on the landing, getting ready to leap over the railing, straight for Teague’s throat.

Teague’s first thought was relief because, thank Whoever the fuck was in charge, she was going to hit him first. Jacky’s gun was loaded with tranqs—he might be able to stop her before he looked like Mikey there, but as long as she was chewing on Teague’s throat and not Jack’s, it was all good.

He held out his hands, palms up, trying to show little Katy Garcia that she didn’t have to jump, didn’t have to attack him, that he wasn’t a raping fucker out to do her harm. Of course, a dim little voice in his head was whispering. Of course, you fucking, tore-up brain-dead moron, she’s still more girl than wolf. The woods would be scary to a little girl, so she hid upstairs like a kid in a closet.

Jack saw him backing up, and followed his eyes, and before Teague could say, “No, Jacky, no!” he jumped up in front of Teague, in time for Katy to leap for Teague’s throat.

The only thing that saved Jack’s life was that she hadn’t been expecting him.

She ran into him snout first, so shook up that she had barely time to rake his chest with her teeth and rip his stomach with her back claws before giving a yelp and running away, and Teague let her go, falling to the floor on his knees, trying to stop the bleeding practically before Jack hit the ground.

“Aww, fuck...” Teague was ripping his shirt off to tear up for bandages. “Jacky, you dumb motherfucker, she was going for me...”

“Couldn’t...let...her...hurt...you...” Jack gasped, and Teague swore bitterly, even while he was ripping Jack’s shirt and pushing his jacket aside.

“Better me than you,” he cried, pushing back tears and a scream that wanted to rip his chest out. “God—*dammit* Jacky...” He couldn’t finish that sentence. Just couldn’t. First he needed to make a pad of his sweatshirt, then he needed to tie it around Jack’s shoulders with strips from his shirt, then he needed to...oh, dear God...he needed to wrap strips around that lean stomach and tie those edges together so his...his...his innards were spilling out, and they needed to be held inside and...

Teague’s breath was coming in pants and sobs, and his vision kept blurring, but, *dammit*, he was getting the job done. He heard a whine then, and he looked up towards the door, and saw Katy in the doorway, looking frightened.

Teague didn’t know what made her come back. Maybe she had smelled something about them, something good. Maybe his panicked sobbing had stirred the human inside her. Either way, she stood in the doorway and whined.

“Heya, Katy,” Teague said softly, thinking that he needed to get the triage kit from the car. “You’re not back for blood, are you girl? No?” Because she was just standing there, hovering, between the soft rain on the outside and the chaos on the inside, and before Teague left, he needed to know she wasn’t going to come and finish the job she’d done on Jack. “Now we were going to bring you to Green’s—you still up for that?”

Another whine, and some serious uncertainty, and Teague just didn’t have time to sit there and gentle the poor thing inside.

“Jacky,” he said, bunching up his jacket and shoving it under the boy’s head, “I’m going out to the car for the kit, you hear me?”

“I hear you...I’ll come with...”

Teague choked back a laugh. “If you think you’re walking now, buddy boy, you’re high.”

“I...wish,” Jack grunted, and Teague stood up smoothly.

“Katy’s here with you, right? If you can, talk to her, let her know you’re a good guy. I’ll be right back, don’t you be partying while I’m gone, hear?”

“I’ll send...the dancing girls...away.”

Teague dashed out into the rain and popped the trunk of the Mustang. Inside was the little battery operated refrigerator that Green had insisted they carry, complete with bandages, pre-filled triage ampoules, a telescoping IV rack, saline drips and three units of blood, replaced faithfully once a month. One of the units, marked X, was shapeshifter blood, because, as Green told them, once they were bitten by a shifter that was it—they were whatever had bit them. What mattered was surviving the bite—and shifter blood was just the thing.

Teague didn’t think about Jacky being a werewolf. It was immaterial, actually—if Jacky lived, Teague would follow, wherever he went. If Jacky died, Teague would follow him into the dark.

In less than a minute he was back in the house, at Jacky’s side, and Katy Garcia was gone.

“Shit,” Teague muttered, packing the stomach wound with bandages and anti-biotic powder. “They’re going to have to send someone back for her.”

Jack grunted and moaned, and Teague swore again, this time loudly, and then things got silent as he put his fingers up to take Jack’s pulse. It was strong, he thought. Strong and fast, but not thready. Good. He moved his hand to administer the morphine ampoule but Jack caught his hand as it rested on that strong neck, and tightened his fingers around Teague’s.

“Don’t leave me, Teague,” he murmured. “Don’t throw me at a future that doesn’t exist.”

“Anything, Jacky,” Teague murmured back. He framed that narrow face with both his hands, and leaned forward to place a solemn kiss on his partner’s brow. “You live, and I’ll do anything you ask.”

“You’re the one who gives orders,” Jack murmured, and Teague broke away to finish his triage.

“Damned straight I do. And I’m ordering you to stay with me, right?”

But by then he’d pumped in the morphine, and although Jack answered, Teague couldn’t make out what he said.

If anyone would have asked him, he would have said that it was physically impossible for him to actually lift Jack, who had five inches and about fifty pounds on him, plus the IV kit, and put him into the back of the Mustang.

He even would have said it after he’d done it, and Jack was propped up in the corner of the seat, his long legs stretched along the back, the IV suspended from the hanger above the door.

He went back for the triage kit, and to give Katy one more try, and then he was out of there, peeling away in a scatter of muddy gravel and roaring along Hwy 4 as though cops were some mythical creature, like the unicorn.

He plugged the cell into speaker and hit auto-dial to Green.

Later he couldn’t remember exactly what the high elf said, but he could remember feeling calmer, could remember feeling hope.

When he reached the Placer County line, there was a Sheriff's car was waiting there to escort him, sirens blaring in front as Teague followed along, talking to Jacky the whole time.

He'd started talking almost as soon as his foot hit the gas, babbling really, talking things like what he'd do if he stopped hunting, about wishing he could live on Green's Hill forever, about being Sean Sullivan's punching bag for eighteen years and alone for the thirteen after that. He told him about his time with Green, about how Jacky didn't have to worry, because Green would fix him up, show him what real love was, and then if Jack didn't want Teague anymore, Teague would live with that.

He told Teague that he wanted to get a cat, and hoped that werewolves could get along with cats, because he thought their little apartment was like a home, like a real home for the two of them, but that a cat would make it perfect, because that's what real homes had.

Oh God, he told Jack everything, hoping, praying, that the sound of his voice through the drugs would anchor Jack to the world.

It should have taken him three hours to get from Mikey Daniels' place on Angel's Fall to Green's Hill in Forresthill. In the end, it took him two.

Green was waiting outside for them, and unlike Teague, when Green picked Jacky up it looked as natural as a father picking up his child. He detached the drained IV—Teague had stopped twice to hook up a new unit--and blew softly on the blood sopped bandages on Jack's chest and stomach.

Jack breathed in dramatically. His eyes popped open, and Green smiled into them. "Hullo, Jacky. Let's go inside, and I'll make you all better, right?"

"Can't leave Teague," Jack murmured, and Green looked up and caught Teague's terrible, panicked-fraught gaze.

"That wouldn't do, mate," Green murmured to both of them. "You come with me, and I guarantee you, Teague won't be left behind."

Jack nodded dreamily, resting his head on Green's chest, and Green looked over his shoulder to Arturo, his second, whom Teague remembered well. "Arturo, could you get Mr. Sullivan..."

"Clothes," said the cop who'd escorted them in, walking from under the house where the garage was kept. "Don't worry, Green, I've got him."

"There's still a wolf out there," Teague said, trying to think, trying to report, trying to be the only thing he could think of that would make him worth Green's time.

Green had already started towards the great house, wrapped around and sandwiched in between a great hill covered in oak trees, except for the crown. The crown of the hill had actually changed since Teague had been there last, but he could give a fuck how at the moment, and it was Arturo who answered him.

"We know she's there," said the tall, South American elf, his copper-green eyes flashing sparks as he turned his attention to Teague. "We've sent some of her packmates to get her already, but we're waiting for Brack and Nicky to go ride clean-up of," Arturo spat, "that fucker's rat-hole. We're sending a special elf with them—a fire elemental—and he'll burn the place down."

"The wolf'll be all right?" Teague had to make sure. He didn't know why she'd run away, but he knew she'd been sorry about Jacky. Given what he'd seen at Mikey Daniels' place—and really, wasn't the silver cage enough?—Teague couldn't blame her for biting any hand that came near. He wanted her safe. That was his job; he wanted to see it through.

"They'll take care of her," said Max-the-cop, next to him. "Come on, Mr. Sullivan—I've got some clothes in my room."

Teague got a better look at Max—late twenties, a little plus of six-feet, shaggy, center-parted black hair with bangs, and slightly crossed blue eyes. He looked like a smaller Jacky in some ways, and the resemblance was comforting. Together, they walked up the wooden stairs to the landing and then into the front room.

It looked a lot like Teague remembered it—the white brocade couch might have been replaced, and the walls had been...Teague squinted, distracted for just a moment by the water-color-esque tinting of the living room paneling.

“What is that?” He murmured, trying to put a name to the peaceful richness that the deep purple, olive green, and dark turquoise shadings the colors evoked.

Max grunted. “*That*,” he said with a twitch of his lips, “is what happens when three men honeymoon with a sorceress and the goofy kid can’t keep her orgasms in check. I’ll be right back.”

Teague blinked, completely at a loss, and sat down on the brocade couch, looking anxiously down the hall to where he remembered Green’s room to be.

There were no sounds coming from there, no groans of pain or moans of ecstasy, but then, Green had managed to make that business as private as possible in the warren of rooms that made up the hill. Elves, shapeshifters, vampires, and whatever-the-fuck-else lived here, all under Green’s aegis, and that didn’t count the folks who opted to live ‘off-campus’ as it were. And somehow, all of them looked to Green, and Green managed to know most of them by name and face.

And he’d remembered Teague. And helped Jacky.

Teague wanted to weep with the simplicity of coming home.

In a few moments, Officer Max was back with a T-Shirt and a sweatshirt. The T-Shirt smelled like cat and wildflowers, and the sweatshirt was gray with ‘CSUS’ inscribed on the front, but other than that, it was so close to what he’d been wearing at the beginning of the day that Teague wanted to laugh.

And then he remembered Jacky, and the urge changed to ashes.

## Teague

### Lost in Green's Hill

Max left, and Teague was alone in the quiet of the day. He barely looked up when the group of young students walked in the front room and down through the hallway, looking so much like the life he'd wanted for Jacky that it was like one small sting in the riot of bigger wounds.

His attention was almost piqued when one of them—a tiny girl with a riot of flyaway brown hair—returned, completely naked save for a pair of colorful wool socks, morphed smoothly into a giant tabby cat without a word and curled into a ball at his feet, purring comfortingly. Surprised, Teague reached down and stroked her ears, and was rewarded by even more purring.

Some of the students came out from the hallway, followed by Arturo who was giving orders. Teague frowned a little, when he realized the orders regarded Katy Garcia and cleaning up the mess at Angel's Fall, and he looked up briefly, and then paid closer attention because the students were obviously not what they appeared to be.

"And I said be careful, goddammit!" Snapped a short, stocky, plain girl with shoulder-blade length curly red-brown hair pulled back into a ponytail. She was glaring at two elves with an expression that said she was used to being heard and obeyed.

"Lambent, I'm not shitting you. I don't give a pig's liver if it *is* November, this area is fucking terrified of fire—you need to contain this fucker and make it burn clean or we're starting a hill in bum-fuck Antarctica and you're our charter member, am I clear?"

A slight, flickery-thin looking elf with a 'go ahead and do me' grin gave an elaborate bow. "My only wish is but to serve you, my harmonious, silver-tongued liege," he said sweetly.

"Go fuck yourself with a rabid porcupine," the girl responded without batting an eyelash, and the elf (or so his curved, pointed ears and anime features proclaimed) laughed wickedly.

"And you two," she said, her entire demeanor changing dramatically, "you don't screw around. You don't take risks, you don't pretend you're invincible around the angry werewolf, you don't drive fast,"

"Is she serious?" Asked a mid-sized compact young man with dark roots and rust colored ends, and rusty freckles to match.

"That is not the way to get me into bed, Nicky," she snapped affectionately, and Nicky winked at her in return, even as she continued on what amounted to a lover's nag. "And Bracken—you keep your temper and play nice with the locals."

"I won't hurt them," replied a behemoth not quite as tall as Green but broader across the chest. He had dark, shaggy hair falling around subtly pointed ears, a burning-pond-shadow glower, and a look in the face of the little plain girl's nagging of such helpless, besotted passion that Teague had to look twice at the girl to see if they were listening to the same person.

"Bracken..." she wheedled, and he grinned, pulling a reluctant smile from her.

“Much,” he amended. “I won’t hurt them much. It’ll feel like a hangover, really—I’m getting better with the whole...” he made vague gestures with his hands.

“Blinding Vulcan mind-fuck?” She supplied sweetly, and he grinned back. For a moment, they were the only two people in the room.

“I’m almost subtle, beloved,” he murmured, moving into her and surrounding her with those broad shoulders.

“You,” she grinned gently, “are as subtle as a backhoe on steroids.” She put her face up towards him, like a cat facing a sunbeam, and basked in the gentle kiss he started with. The kiss deepened, melted scorchingly until the golden-haired flickery elf looked at the rust colored man in disgust.

“Can’t you do something about that?” He asked with a sneer.

“When I get sloppy seconds and horny thirds? Are you shitting me?” Nicky responded smartly, and Bracken-the-behemoth reluctantly parted from the short, plain girl who apparently had the whole hill wrapped around her little finger.

“Be safe,” she cautioned everybody, while Arturo watched on approvingly. “I’m sending some of the vampires your way when it gets dark—who fed from Katy last?”

“Marcus,” Arturo supplied. “We already checked.”

“Him and Phillip then—are they talking?” She asked, with a raise in her eyebrows.

“When they’re not fucking each other and any girl they can talk into their bed,” Nicky replied, and she grinned at him.

“Good. Send Kyle with them—he doesn’t swing that way and they’ll keep their mind on business,” she said hopefully, then looked around at all of them. “You’re in the SUV so the vamps can ride home with you if they want. Arturo?”

The South-American elf flashed his silver-capped teeth in a responsive smile.

“The solar blankets are loaded in the back, right?”

“Absolutely, Lady Cory,” he said with a bow, and of all the strange things about that conversation, *that* was the one that discomfited her.

“Arturo...” she whined and he laughed evilly.

“You’re doing fine—I’ll go gas up the SUV, and don’t take too long kissing Bracken.”

She grinned, and Teague was starting to find the expression more than charming. It was, in fact, becoming completely enchanting, an amazing sunrise breaking across a plain dirt landscape, showing both strength and a remarkable beauty. “There’s no such thing as too long kissing Bracken,” she replied, and Arturo smiled in appreciation and then grew sober.

Teague sensed a look in his direction that she followed, and she nodded. “I’ll do what I can,” she murmured, “but I’m not Green.”

“Speaking of...” Arturo said meaningfully, and she snorted.

“Now *that* is one thing you don’t have remind me to do,” she replied dryly. And with that she placed an affectionate, passionate kiss on Nicky that he returned with interest, and she broke off from that breathlessly for another knee-melter with Bracken. Then she shooed them all out the door and started moving around the kitchen, calling over her shoulder until Teague realized she was talking to him.



“Sullivan...you’re Mr. Sullivan, right?”

Teague blinked, as though coming out of a dream, the reality of this strangely magnetic little person being in the same room with him actually penetrating the awful waiting misery of the past hour.

“Call me Teague,” he said, wishing he knew how to be gracious.

“Well how about last night’s meatloaf for dinner, ‘kay? It’s good.” She looked at him hopefully, and although he’d never felt less like eating in his life, he couldn’t find it in himself to argue with her.

“Sounds good,” he lied, and she laughed and called him on it.

“It sounds like fermented sewage with a booger-snot chaser,” she said with a gentle laugh. “It always does when I’m where you’re at. But you need to eat.”

Teague looked at her, surprised again. “Where I’m at?”

‘Lady Cory’ made little hand gestures and then pulled a plate out of the microwave which she put on a placemat and brought to him, talking the whole time. “Beloved in trouble? Fucking up the universe? Having your heart ripped into six-billion pieces every time the second-hand pops on the clock?” She looked at him and nodded expectantly, until he nodded back, bemused. “You know—what you’re doing right now. Waiting for Green to help your beloved...”

“Partner,” he corrected automatically, and she shook her head and rolled her eyes, while handing him the plate gently, making sure none of his bare skin was touching the hot edges.

“Bullshit.” She looked him head on and dared him to square off with her.

To his surprise, Teague found himself tempted to back down, but he never went under easy.

“I like women,” he said obstinately, and to his surprise (she was *constantly* surprising him) she smiled a heavy-lidded, sexy woman’s smile. The real shocker was that she pulled it off—in that moment, she was every hot, sexy bombshell he’d ever sprung a boner for, except *she* had more class.

“So does Green,” she said throatily, and then she laughed—again, gently—when he blushed. “But I see you know that.”

Teague shoved a forkful of mashed potatoes in his mouth in a transparent attempt not to answer. Suddenly, the surprising woman let out a purely female shriek of outrage.

“Renny, you bitch—could you at least take the fucking socks off!”

The cat at his feet changed into a girl again, gave a sheepish smile and a “Sorry, Cory,” before taking the wool socks off. She turned back into a cat again while holding the socks in her hand, and this time she kneaded them as she purred at his feet.

“Fuck,” said Cory, just looking at the cat and the socks. She stood up then and dashed out of the room, swearing the entire time. “Fuck, fuck fuck fuck bugger fuck shit damn cocksucking cuntwhore bitchkissing assreaming bugger bugger bugger fuck fuck fuck...”

Teague blinked, taking another bemused bite of food (the meatloaf really was wonderful) and watched as Cory returned with a quilted bag of knitting at her side. The swearing stopped abruptly, and the plain girl with the flat chest and the entire hill wrapped around her little finger looked up at him apologetically.

“Sorry,” she muttered. “It wouldn’t be so bad, but see,” she held up a completely finished sock in a rusty red and purple color, and a partial one that looked like it was wrestling with a Chinese throwing star, “I’m making like, her third pair. And that one she’s got in her paws and is making a hash out of? That one in mine and Adrian’s colors!” (Her voice rose a little on those last words.) “*That pair is mine!*”

Renny's cat's eyes shot open, and she got a good look at the purple, orange, and turquoise socks in her claws. She gave a startled 'mreowr!' dropped the socks, and shot off for parts unknown.

Cory bent down and picked up the much-abused socks, pushing her hands through them and looking for holes. Satisfied after a couple of moments, she folded them neatly and put them on her lap, then picked up the Chinese throwing star and started knitting with it.

Teague's bemusement gave way to blank shock.

"Adrian?" He asked, looking at her with new eyes.

She looked away. "Yeah," she murmured. "Adrian." She turned back to him with a beautiful, heartbreaking smile. "See—I do know something about pain, right? Now eat."

He took another bite and let her gain her composure back with the five metal sticks and the pretty, multi-color wool between her fingers. The colors were familiar and he looked at the walls and had another revelation.

"You're the sorceress," he murmured, "the one who went honeymooning with three men and couldn't keep her orgasms in check."

And now he had surprised her badly, because she actually dropped a stitch and spent the next few moments blushing and stammering and fixing the mistake. When she was done, she looked at him irritably. "And you're the one breaking his heart over his 'partner' because he only likes women."

He shoved another bite of food in his mouth and then spoke through it, because he had behaved badly and she was right. "Touche`."

She rewarded him with another brilliant, heartbreaking smile. "So you knew Adrian?" She asked hopefully, and he flushed again.

"I..." he shook his head. He'd been so amazingly stupid back then. And he felt the urge to come clean in front of this surprising woman. "I thought I was saving his life," he said lamely. And then it came out, the whole stupid story. A bunch of dumber-than-hammered-whale-shit kids had been out at Lake Clementine, and they'd thought they'd seen a wolf. The story had made the hunter bar in Auburn, and Teague, worried that the damned fool kids would go out and shoot themselves, told them he'd take care of it—and now, sitting in an elf's living room with his beloved (and didn't that word just seem to fit her more and more?) the shocking hubris of going to a place under Green's aegis and trying to take over wounded his sensibilities like a crossbow wounded a sparrow.

"And there was Adrian, crouched by the lake—and, man, I'd seen vampires before, you know, the ones I usually saw had gone...you know...wild and..."

"Bloodlust," she supplied gently, nodding. "The ones who weren't treated right, after they died—they go insane. Those were the ones you saw."

Oh, God—she knew. She knew who he was and what he'd done, and she forgave him. "Yeah," he exhaled. "Yeah. And Adrian...he...damn, he actually breathed, in and out, like a person..."

Cory laughed a little, but her eyes were bright. "He could blush," she murmured. "After he fed...sometimes, just if he wasn't hungry. He would blush."

Teague looked at her, smiling at him brightly through pending tears, and felt his heart beat just a little stronger. "So he looked like some kid, crouching by the lake, and here came this big-assed Mexican dude with a knife, moving faster than human..."

"Why did Arturo have a knife?" She asked, drawn into a story that he hadn't ever told anyone, not even Jack.

“Because they were out looking for the same thing I was—stupid kids or rabid wolves. But I saw Arturo, and I stepped in front of Adrian and caught that big fucking silver machete in my guts.” Teague shook his head. “It was bad. I think it was even...” this, thoughtfully, “I think it was even worse than Jacky, you know? But Green, he took me in and healed me, because as far as he was concerned...”

“You were protecting Adrian,” she finished, looking at him with shining eyes, like he was some sort of hero.

“I was a hunter...you know, not the good kind, right?” He couldn’t have her thinking good about him that wasn’t there. It wasn’t right. It wasn’t fair that she should think he was a good guy.

“Nah, baby,” she said with a smile and a kind pat to his knee. “You were a good guy—you were just working for the wrong side. I bet...I bet the minute you woke up, and Green looked you in the eyes...I’m betting you suddenly had a whole lot of better things to do than to hunt down poor virgin vampires or werewolves that got lost, didn’t you?”

“How does he do that?” Teague asked, almost to himself.

“I don’t know,” she murmured, “but he did it for me. He did it for Adrian...the three of us were...we were spe-fucking-tacular, you know? But me? Even Adrian too—we would have been nothing, if Green hadn’t seen the something in us.”

Teague looked at her again, his sight blurring with worry and loneliness that he’d had a pretty good hold on until that pat on his knee. With the sheen of tears in his eyes, her plain face, with its freckles and pointed nose and chin assumed an unearthly beauty that shipped his breath off somewhere to go find that fucking cat.

“Who *are* you?” He asked, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand.

“I’m Cory Kirkpatrick op Crocken Green,” she said, making his eyes cross with the length of her name. She grinned again. “Don’t even try—that’s not even all of it, either.”

“What do people call you?” He asked in wonder.

“Lady Cory,” said a crisp, maternal voice, and Teague looked up in time to see a rangy woman with freckles, curly red hair and an outstanding pair of incisors walking towards them. He recognized Grace, Green’s cook/housekeeper/den mother, and he was not surprised when she walked up to ‘Lady Cory’ with a plate of food.

“Cory,” Lady Cory corrected with a roll of her eyes.

Grace ignored her. “Let me guess—she dished you up a complete plate, but didn’t eat a damned thing, did she?”

“Right,” said Teague, smiling as Lady Cory stuck her tongue out at him.

“I’m not hungry,” she said back, smiling winningly, and Grace rolled her eyes.

“She’s never hungry when the boys are gone—any one of them. But if you don’t eat, darling, there will be nothing left of you when they get back, so here.” And then Lady Cory, who wrought miracles like Teague’s laughter and peace of mind with a few stitches on her Chinese-throwing-star of a sock, sat in chastened silence and ate her meatloaf like an obedient child.

Teague must have dozed off then for a while in the corner of the couch. When he woke up, the rainy gray light coming in through the wraparound window was gone. There was a rustle of people through the living room, and then someone ran up the granite steps in the back of the living room (another new addition since Teague’s last visit) and when he looked to the love seat, Lady Cory was there, blinking groggily over a textbook, her knitting sitting neglected in her lap. She caught his gaze in mid-yawn, laughed self-consciously, and pointed to the granite staircase.

“Your wolf’s back,” she said softly. “The pack brought Katy in a few minutes ago—she’s a bit shook, but she seems to be fine. Marcus took her to the grove. It’s soothing when the vampires feed from them—makes them feel

protected, you know? So Marcus is going to have a snack, and Katy is going to nap in the Goddess Grove, and in the morning, Green will have some time with her and hopefully, we'll all live, you think?"

Teague blinked trying to process all of that, but the only word that could come out of his mouth was, "Jacky?"

Her face went blank for a moment, and a brief woman's smile quirked at her full lips. "He'll be fine, Teague," she said after a pause. "But you of all people should know, we can't rush Green when he's doing this, right?"

Teague nodded. Right. Absolutely. Absolutely should not rush the god currently fucking Jacky silly, because then Jacky might not realize what a total loser Teague was and all of the reasons he had to not hang with an old bastard who couldn't tell the person he loved any of the things that he deserved to know.

"So, what are you going to do, now that Jack's a werewolf?" Cory asked now. She dragged a hand through her riotous hair, wrecking her ponytail and exposing lines of tiny earrings up the curve of each ear. "I mean—he will be, as soon as the moon's full, and then pretty much anytime he wants after that. It's not something the two of you planned—most of our wolves and weres are here by choice, you know? He may want to stay here—at least until after Christmas and the next full moon."

The thought of going back to their little apartment without Jack made the meatloaf congeal in Teague's stomach. *Don't leave me, Teague. Don't push me away for a future I don't want.*

Teague's vision went in and out again, replaced by the smell of Jacky's skin as Teague lay in his arms that morning.

"Will Katy be all right, after the vampire's done with her?" He asked groggily, and Cory's glance seemed to understand what he was asking.

"She will. You didn't answer my question," she said softly.

"I'd follow him anywhere," Teague replied, his heart and soul naked in the words.

Her hug was unexpected, but her kiss on his temple felt like a blessing. "Of course you would," she whispered. She sat down again and opened her textbook. "Now do you know anything about math, because if we're going to sit out here and wait any longer, I've got a statistics class to study for."

He knew nothing about math, but Cory was amusing company—if nothing else, she taught him some new swear words while scuffling with her homework, and that in itself was entertaining. Now he knew Jack would be all right, he could afford to smile at her, to be company for her, to not sink so completely into misery and fear that he lost all personality in front of this fascinating, terrifying person.

About an hour after his nap, her face went blank again, and then she got a look of annoyance. "If you're both going to be in my head at the same time, for crap's sake take turns," she said shortly, and then the annoyance was replaced with a soft dreaminess that made Teague's eyes widen. And then the dreaminess was replaced with the demeanor of a general, taking a report.

She looked up then, smiling at him as though she had never stopped talking about statistics. "Okay—when Marcus comes down the stairs, Katy will be ready to see you—she wants to apologize, if that's okay."

"It's not necessary."

"It is for her." Cory looked very seriously into his eyes then, and he bowed his head to the order that he'd been given. "Good. And Green has..." she blushed, "Not too much longer—if you're going to talk to Katy, it might as well be now."

Teague blinked and stood up, wondering why it felt like he should bow. "Uhm," he stammered, blushing, and she looked up at him, her expression as open and sunny as the college student he'd assumed she was when she'd first walked into Green's home.

He tried again. “Lady Cory, uhm...”

She stood up with him and threw her arms around him, fitting into his embrace like a lover, but he knew without a doubt that she was too, too bright for the likes of Teague Sullivan. “You’re going to be all right, Teague,” she murmured. “Jacky’s going to be fine, and you...you’re going to follow him.” She backed up then and grabbed his hand, giving him just enough time for him to grab his jacket off the couch.

She hauled him through the hallway, and then took a left away from the vampire darkling and then another left, and stopped in front of a door with a quilted hanging in front of it showing two wolves, howling at the moon.

“Here—this is your guest room. You’re welcome to stay as long as you like—and we’re hoping you’ll stay at least until the moon after Christmas, okay? Green asked for some stuff—clothes and things—to be brought over from your apartment, and he probably bought some for you too—he likes doing that. Now you remember where this is?”

Teague nodded dumbly, and she grabbed his hand again and hauled him back (right and right, he remembered) and then shoved him towards the granite staircase, where a vampire about his height, with dark hair and limpid eyes, was just coming down. Markus shook his hand with a cool, strong grip, and gestured him up, and Teague found himself stumbling into the cool mist of the crown of Green’s Hill.

## Teague

### In the Goddess Grove

The crown of Green's hill used to be the same scrub oak/lower elevation pine that was prevalent around Placer County and Forresthill. Sometime in the last two years, all of that had changed.

Now it was a grove of trees—oak trees, lime trees and rose trees without thorns, growing together, sinuously intertwined, the shapes of the boles and the trunks and the branches startlingly like human bodies—the oak tree always female, and the rose and the lime always male. There was a soft, ambient light from fuck-all-knew, and it permeated the grove with a misty sort of romance.

Teague stopped as he emerged from the trap door and blinked. *Jacky, you will never believe this, but there is a fucking erotic Pan's Labyrinth up here—all it needs is the squishy music and a dreamy woman in a white dress.*

As it turned out, Katy was wearing jeans and a T-shirt.

She was sitting on a marble bench, with a carved silhouette on it, and Teague was startled into identifying the likeness. "Adrian."

Katy looked over her shoulder and smiled at him. "Yeah—rumor has it, if Cory's out here, you can see his ghost. They talk and everything."

"Does Green see him too?" Teague asked, concerned. Green and Adrian had been together for 150 years—it didn't seem fair that Cory, no matter how...amazing, would see him and Green wouldn't.

"Yeah," Katy nodded with a soft smile. "Green too. I remember you, you know. When you worked at the diner. You used to give me pie." She patted the empty space on the bench next to her, and gathered her legs and arms further under the quilt on her shoulders, the calm given to her by the vampire's visit sitting very comfortably on her narrow shoulders. Her dark hair, layer cut around a pretty, dusky, valentine-shaped face, and brown eyes were just as he remembered them from when she was a pup, only now they were all grown up.

Teague found himself remembering her as a wolf as he sat down—he'd always been a sucker for blondes with dark roots. The pretty girl, clean, healthy, plump around the cheeks and smiling packed a helluva punch, and unlike Cory, who scared him silly, Katy was very warm and real, out here in the ethereal holiness of what Cory had called 'the Goddess Grove'.

"I didn't think you'd remember that," he said, staring out into the gray night. There was a lime tree and a rose tree a little to his left, doing something that he'd been dreaming about for a year. "You were just a little kid." His father had made a living doing odd jobs and odd cons, but Teague, tired of not knowing when their next meal would come from, had worked at the diner from the time he'd wandered in at fourteen and out and out begged for a job. Sean had drunk his paycheck and tip money, of course, but at least Teague got to eat.

"You think a little girl forgets kindness?" Asked Katy now, and he looked at her, caught by her smile. His pulse started doing a jackhammer tap-dance in his throat, then, because she wasn't a little girl anymore and that woman's smile, sweet and sexy and vulnerable—oooh, did *that* do a number on Teague's libido. He breathed in hard, a slug-to-the-gut breath, and looked at that tree again, and thought about Jacky.

“I should have done more for you,” he said now, remembering how her mother would come in for coffee, because that’s all she could afford, and because at least the diner was warm, when their little apartment had no heat.

“You were a kid, Teague—and it’s not like you didn’t have your own problems.” She put her hand on his knee and he swallowed. Of course she knew. The whole fucking town knew, which is why—when he’d come to his senses and changed sides—he’d migrated anywhere but Angel’s Fucking Camp.

“I’m glad you found this place,” he said after a moment, covering her hand with his own. Her skin was warm and soft, and he wondered when just touching a woman and thinking about a man had become the nexus, the epicenter of his universe. “Green’s good—he’ll take care of you.”

“And you?” She asked softly. “Who takes care of you?”

Teague shrugged, swallowed, remembered Cory telling him that everything was going to be all right. “Jacky,” he said softly, and Katy frowned.

“I’m so sorry—I thought you guys were...” She trailed off and started to shiver, and Teague moved into her instinctively, wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

“You thought we were friends of...fuckhead dickwad...”

Katy laughed at his irreverence, and Teague smiled at her, a soft little armful of sweet werewolf.

“You grew up pretty, Katy—you’re a fine looking wolf, too.”

She grinned, her dark eyes dancing, then sobered. “Jacky—he’s going to be all right?”

Teague nodded, stroking her back again, loving her smell. She’d bathed—women used flower stuff when they bathed, and Teague liked it. Always had—sometimes, it was the only softness in his life.

“You love him?” She asked, tentatively. They both knew the world they grew up in, where a girl didn’t ask a grown man a question like that and expect to escape with a whole jaw.

“I like women,” he said softly, allowing himself to bury his nose in her coarse black hair like a dog, scenting home. “I like the way you smell, I like the way you sound—your voices. Damn. So damned soft. I like the way you feel...” he thought about plump breasts in his palm, chubby nipples under his tongue, and what an armful of Katy Garcia was doing to his body. His voice hoarsened. “The sounds you make when I’m inside you...I love women.”

He sighed and moved away from her a little. “I love women, but...I’d miss Jacky more.”

She sighed as his warmth left her, but she kept hold of his hand. “You know, Teague—you may be in one of the few places in the universe that won’t force you to make that choice.”

He grinned a little, and reached out and touched her cheek, rubbing it with his thumb. “I promised I wouldn’t leave him—and he’s going to be okay, right?”

Katy nodded, knowing where this was going—had known, really, since Teague had dropped to his knees and howled at the still body of his friend. That was the moment which brought her back into the house—any man who grieved like that, when his friend was in danger—he couldn’t be a bad person. Even a freaked out werewolf knew the truth there.

“Right,” she whispered, leaning into his touch.

“You feel like you owe us—you don’t, but...if you want to put paid to everything, could you do me a favor?” He looked at her hopefully, and she gazed back, her brown eyes locked with his murky green ones, the air between them static and waiting.

“Bite me?” He said hopefully, and she laughed a little, still savoring the touch of the nice boy who had given her pie when she’d been hungry, and smiles when the rest of the town had kicked her to the curb.

Before his heart could beat again, before he could change his mind and move out of her world, she turned into a wolf and bit his left hand hard enough to draw blood, to snag on the flesh, to make sure he was good and marked. He howled and jumped up and down, and she stood there, in the puddle of clothes she’d shed and looked at him pointedly until he took the hint and left.

It was way too early in their relationship for him to see her naked.



## **Green**

### **Being Leader of Green's Hill**

Teague staggered into Green on the way to the room with the wolf quilt, exhausted and shocky from the sudden pain and the blood loss and the confounding, horrible, fucked up day.

Green took one look at him, weaving and blinking hard in front of the door and sighed, literally scooping Teague's tough, spare body into his arms and opening the door with his hip.

"You had to go and do things the hard way, didn't you, you stubborn Irishman," Green tsked, but Teague saw Jacky, lying across the king-sized bed then, his shaggy head pillowed on his outstretched arm. He smiled such a beatific, lovely, peaceful smile that all of Green's irritation dissipated.

"Yes, Teague, he's going to be fine," Green sighed, depositing him on the bed and going about untying his big steel-toed, waffle-soled boots.

"I couldn't let him go somewhere without me, Green," Teague explained like a child, and Green shook his head.

"Well of course you couldn't—but we could have had a ceremony, and someone there to make sure you didn't bleed half to death and then I could have done this." He was tired—Jacky's wounds had been severe. Not as severe as Teague's had been, nearly two years before, but it had taken some doing to fix him up before Teague's nervous exhaustion exploded through the whole damned hill. Oh yes, Green had felt that as his beloved had been holding down the conversation—she was getting good at letting him into her head when he needed to be.

But as tired as he might be, he wasn't too tired to take Teague's hand in his own and kiss it, watching as the wolf bite healed. Green didn't take away the scar though—Teague didn't know it, but in were-creature culture, that scar passing on the blessing of the Goddess was something to be worn with pride. Green imagined that Teague would have guessed anyway, because Teague's gut level knowledge of what to respect was a formidable thing.

Green had left the scar on Teague's chest for almost the same reason. Whether the stubborn, wounded old soul knew it or not, that scar was what connected him to Green's Hill, at least in his battered, beaten great heart.

If anyone needed a place to call home, it was Teague Sullivan.

Teague pulled his wrist from Green's tender hold and stroked the healed scars. "Thank you," he murmured, but Green recaptured it, and looking Teague in the eyes, very deliberately reached out to his chest and rubbed a thumb over the bruised nipple that lay under Max's old white T-shirt, starting a tingle that grabbed Teague's groin in both hands.

Abruptly, the sexual desire that had been teasing Teague all day—what, between Jacky, Katy, and the Lady of the house-- burgeoned into something so full under his chest that it stopped his breath.

"No more of that, hey?" Green asked softly, and Teague was caught helplessly in those kind emerald eyes.

"I don't need it when I'm with a woman," Teague muttered, and Green moved his hand and rubbed the other nipple.

“No, brother—it’s only when you reach for something for yourself that you think it needs to hurt,” and with that, Green turned him towards Jacky’s breathing body, naked and wrapped up in a quilt from Green’s own bed. Teague stretched a little, touched a naked, pale shoulder sticking out from under the quilt and stroked the skin with one finger, like a little girl touching a rabbit.

“He…” Teague’s shoulders began to shake, and he scooted across the bed to rest his head on the spare bones of Jacky’s hip, wiping his eyes on his hands. “He deserves better than me,” he said at last, rubbing his cheek against that quilt-swaddled, hard, lean body.

Green reached out and stroked Teague’s shoulder, wondering how many people thought Teague was a tough sonovabitch who didn’t give a flying pig’s shit about anyone or anything. “He deserves to be happy, Teague,” Green told him softly, “and you make him happy.”

Teague nodded, not breaking contact with the sleeping man in his bed. “Okay,” he murmured, as though accepting something that had been offered. “Okay.” He wiped his eyes then and sat up, trying to settle a tough look over lean, pretty features. When he spoke, his voice was firmed up, like a man’s, and Green pinched the bridge of his nose and fought the urge to kick him.

“Thank you for this, Green,” Teague managed, “I can’t thank you enough…” and as quickly as that, the trauma of the day took over, and Teague lost out to the pain and the fear and the terror that had been blasting down his blood vessels since he’d first seen Katy, terrified and angry, looking for an escape from that shithole.

Green wouldn’t let him weather the storm alone.

By the time the last sob shook his scrawny Irishman’s frame, Teague was sitting in Green’s lap like a child. Green kissed his temple then, and murmured things about what a good boy he was, to take such care of Jack Barnes like that, and how smart he had been to keep Jack alive. Teague hiccupped a little, and Green took off his jeans then, his touch as clinical as a doctor’s, in spite of Teague’s prettiness and the way his stubborn tough pride had always moved Green’s heart.

Green tucked him in, next to Jacky, and leaned over and kissed his cheek again.

“You’ve got your second chance, mate,” he murmured. “I tried to claim him for you, but you didn’t take my gift. You’ve made it clear you’ll follow him anywhere—but he doesn’t want you there unless you make him yours.”

“Mine,” Teague echoed, tightening his arms around Jack’s chest. Jack murmured in his sleep and Teague rubbed his cheek against his partner’s back. “I’ve never had anyone that’s mine.”

Green shook his head then and left them to sleep, laughing softly at the foolishness of humans. Of course Jacky was his—Jack had told Green repeatedly as their bodies had twined and heaved and mingled, that the dumb motherfucker was the only home he wanted.

Green found Cory in his bed when he returned, in spite of the fact that he usually cleaned up—both his sheets and his body—after healing somebody.

She was naked, and looking at him very determinedly.

He stripped his sweats and slid into sheets that smelled like sex between two men and felt her hands smoothing over him, reacquainting herself with him, marking him for her own, and he almost sighed with the healing she gave her healer, just by possessing him as her own.

“If we make love here,” she whispered, moving down to his swelling cock and licking experimentally, “will we feel them? Jacky and Teague?” She engulfed him then, and he gasped, throwing his head back as her lips traced his head through his foreskin, and then moved lower, taking him all the way to the base. It had taken her practice to do that, he thought vaguely. Practice made perfect, and she did it again, and all of his control left him and he groaned richly, arching his hips and letting her touch replenish everything he gave to the rest of the world.

“Will we?” She persisted throatily, her lips moving slickly against his head as she spoke, and he groaned again.

“Yes...” Because the smell of him and Jack was all around the two of them, and she throated him to his base again in reward for his answer.

“Good,” she said when she came up, moving her lips around his purpling head, “because they were perfect, and Teague...he was so much like him...” her voice trailed off, and Green said the name for her.

“Adrian...”

“Oh yes,” Cory tasted him again and again and again, until his fist knotted in her hair and her mouth closed around his base, and he came, willingly giving over all of his power, all of his pain, to her willing mouth and her sweet, soft body, and her vast, sensual heart.

## Jacky

### Being Teague's

Teague being next to Jacky when he woke up was like Christmas to a six year old—the good Christmas where you got the video game player you always wanted.

Jacky groaned and rolled over, wrapping his arms around that slight, sturdy frame, and grinned when Teague burrowed in like a kitten. For a moment he just breathed Teague in, leather from his jacket, sweat and...sadness. Jack pulled back and tried to read the strains on Teague's face, even as he slept. For just this moment, when his lips weren't pulled back and mocking, when the tension at his eyes wasn't fierce, he was impossibly pretty. Jack could pretend that when he opened those murky green eyes, he would see the softness that made a glory of that masculine beauty.

Jack's full-throttle woody was completely unexpected, and abruptly he remembered what he had been doing before he fell asleep.

He couldn't touch Teague like this, he thought muzzily—his head hurt a little, but the rest of his soreness was pleasant so he wasn't sure why that would be bothering him. He wiggled out from Teague's death grip, and stumbled naked to the bathroom. It was pretty—everything here was pretty. The walls were stained azure and purple and olive and he liked that combo—better than sterile hotel white, anyway.

He opened the medicine cabinet and blinked. Hard.

"Whatcha lookin' for, Princess," Teague grumbled from the bed.

"Ibuprofin," Jack replied, his tongue and teeth feeling alien—'ibuprofin' was a long-ass word. "They don't have any. Just lots of...Jesus, who has seven different kinds of lubricant in their medicine cabinet?"

Teague's chuckle was helpless and rusty. "This place would." There was a groan and a creak of a mattress, and Jack heard Teague's noises. If anything, his erection got worse, and if he'd realized that Teague was going to wake up he would have dragged the quilt around his hips with him.

"You don't need ibuprofin anyway," Teague's voice got closer, and Jack reached out and grabbed a towel from the rack behind him, wrapping it around his hips and avoiding any look at Teague, either personally or in the full-sized mirror in front of him.

"What do I need?" Jack said this to his own reflection, and wondered why he didn't look any different. After the things he'd done in bed with Green... ah...God, Green... and the erection wasn't getting any better.

A hand holding a water bottle shimmied in between Jack's ribs and the sink, and Teague's whole body was practically plastered against Jack's back as he filled it up.

The water bottle was suddenly in front of Jack's nose, and he couldn't help but meet Teague's eyes in the mirror as he took what was offered.

"You're dehydrated—Green fixed you up, but you need water to replace all your blood and..." a flush stained those razor cheekbones, and Jack saw the freckles that were usually hidden in Teague's tanned skin. "Stuff," Teague added lamely into the silence between them.

Jack took a swig of water, and even as the headache went away he felt too close. A year of yearning to be close enough to put his hand along Teague's throat, to feel the texture of the skin on his collarbone, and now he couldn't bear that Teague would touch him after last night.

"I've got to shower," he said hoarsely, and to his surprise, Teague's reflection shook its head.

"No," Teague said gruffly, and Jack's heart stopped beating in his stomach and started beating in his balls when Teague bent his head forward and dropped a kiss on the naked skin of Jack's shoulder blade.

"Teague... what Green and I did..."

Teague's hand appeared, tattooed on the wrist, and broad and tanned on the back, and the rough skin of his fingers started stroking Jack's stomach at the line of the towel. Carefully he traced the scars there, still pink and fresh, and Jack grabbed his hand, because Teague was shaking so hard it was starting to tickle.

"Do you think I don't know?" Teague asked roughly. "Do you think I don't know how Green heals? How do you think I knew to bring you here, Jacky?"

Jack jerked a little, but Teague wouldn't let him go. He leaned his cheek against Jack's back, and Jack felt their skin sliding together on something wet.

"Is that why all the affection?" Jack asked, trying not to let the hurt this thought caused leak through his voice. "I smell like Green now, and it's okay to love him?"

"Right, Jacky," Teague murmured, his sarcasm sounding clogged. "That's why I'm making an ass of myself, moving on you when you can barely walk." Now he was the one who tried to jerk away, but Jack wouldn't let him.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, wishing he could see Teague's face, see those intense eyes, know what Teague was thinking.

"Don't be." Teague rubbed his face against Jack's shoulder, and Jack could feel the entire line of his body along his back, including a rather thick bulge at the back of his thigh. "I'm not easy to care about. I just kept thinking you'd figure out I wasn't worth it, that's all."

Jack pulled up the hand around his middle and kissed the tattoo on the inside of the wrist, loving the shiver that coursed through Teague's body.

"You are so easy to love," Jack whispered. "It just sucks to make you see it, when it's so clear to everyone else."

Teague's left arm wrapped around Jack's middle and Jack looked, surprised, at the newly healed scars on the front. "Not everyone—just you, you dumbassed kid."

Jack took Teague's other wrist in his hand and started to stroke off the dried, flaking blood. "What happened?" He asked gently. Teague tried to jerk away again, and Jack still wouldn't let him.

"Got bit by a wolf," Teague muttered into the skin of Jack's back, and Jack frowned.

"When? Here? Why would a wolf bite you here?"

The silence froze the room, and Jack could hear his heartbeat in it, could feel the pulse at Teague's wrists beating against his stomach, and when Teague spoke, his voice sounded surprisingly normal.

"I asked her to, Buttercup. Don't sweat it."

Jack's whole body went cold, then flushed, and Teague's arms tightened around his stomach. "Teague..."

He turned then, in Teague's arms, looking down at the shorter man with dazed blue eyes. "Teague..." he repeated, and Teague wouldn't meet his eyes.

"You told me not to leave you. I don't see why it's a big fucking deal, Buttercup—if you don't want me, all you have to do is say..."

Jack kissed him. Jesus, it was the only way to shut the guy up!

But even that Teague couldn't make easy, because he took over the kiss, forced Jack roughly back against the counter, shoving his tongue inside Jack's mouth and tasting and possessing and invading.

Ah, God, Jack let him. It felt so good—Teague, his partner, the guy who'd had his back for so long, and he wanted Jack—really wanted him. Wanted his body, wanted his love—it felt as though Jack had held his hands out for a year and a half with his heart in his palms, and his arms had been shaking from the strain. Holding Teague tight, letting his mouth be possessed and claimed, feeling that small, compact, vital vibration of muscle, skin, and bone assault his senses...it was all he needed to heal the pain of waiting.

Jack groaned, clutching at Teague's shoulders, trying to pull him closer, but Teague pulled away, dropping to his knees and pulling off the towel. Jack was going to pull away—he still hadn't showered—but Teague did the unexpected.

He stroked Jack's cock tenderly, promise in the touch, and then moved it aside, putting his lips firmly on the mark on that tender inside of Jack's inner thigh.

"Did Green tell you what it says?" Teague asked, bumping Jack's thigh with his forehead, like a dog looking for affection.

"No." Jack replied, knotting his hand in Teague's spiky, dark-blond hair. He hadn't even thought to ask.

"It says 'Teague's'."

Jack leaned back against the bathroom door, his vision going dark. "Yes," he murmured. "Yes."

"No matter what else we do—we both like women, Jacky. You know that. But always—you're mine. Hear me?"

"Yes."

"Say it!" Teague demanded, his voice harsh and needing, his cheek bumping Jack's erection until he wanted to howl, because Jack was needy too.

"I'm yours!" Jack rasped, and then he groaned, stars popping behind his eyes, because Teague had engulfed him, swallowed him, taken his cock down to the back of his mouth and moved his lips over the base. "Ah, God..." And Teague pulled back and took one of Jack's testicles into his mouth, gently, so gently, and then the other, and Jack's knees were trembling, and he wanted...he so wanted...

Teague turned him then, faced him towards the mirror, and Jack stared at his own reflection in shock. His cheeks were flushed darkly and his eyes were dilated, heavy lidded, and the expression on his face was naked with wanting...wanting a thing he hadn't known he'd crave until the night before, in Green's bed.

And then Teague gave it to him, his tongue and mouth and fingers working in concert until he couldn't keep his eyes open anymore, and he bent double over the marble counter and groaned, the hoarse sound ripping out his chest with its intensity.

Teague continued, tongue and fingers, stretching and tasting, and Jacky groaned his name, begging, and again, afraid that he would come, so afraid he would come before Teague was inside of him, possessing him, making his mark, taking everything Jack had offered for so damned long.

And then Teague stood up, his underwear kicked off at his ankles, and Jack heard his own voice, hoarse with wanting. “The shirt too, Teague,” he begged, and Teague complied, standing behind him, his scarred chest slick with sweat, the tense lines around his eyes and his mouth making damned sure Jack knew he wasn’t playing around.

“Am I naked enough for you, Jacky,” he asked harshly, and Jack met his eyes in the mirror, bent over the counter, his ass in the air.

“Am I naked enough for you?” He countered, daring the man to take him.

Teague reached over his shoulder, a small pagan smile quirking at his mouth. “Seven kinds of lubricant? Any preferences, Princess?”

“Yeah—if you call me Princess again, I’d prefer you jerk off and die!”

Teague gave his best fuck-me grin and half emptied the tube in his hand down Jack’s backside, and then his fingers moved inside Jack again, more stretching, a twinge of pain, and then...and then...

“Aaaaaugggaghhhhh...” Teague thrust so deeply inside of him that Jack was surprised he didn’t taste that thick cock in the back of his throat.

And then he began to move, to thrust, to pump, to grunt in harsh puffs. Jack almost sobbed at the feeling, the fullness, the amazing completion and joining of the two of them, and then Teague’s hand knotted in Jack’s hair, keeping his head up so they could meet eyes in the mirror. It was then, in the midst of his toughest grimace that Jack saw it. Teague’s eyes dropped to Jack’s, the hard lines of his face eased, and in one moment his face was so soft, so vulnerable, so sweet, and he was looking at Jack with everything that was tender, and everything that was love.

Jack’s head dropped, and Teague’s hand came around to grasp his prick firmly and jerk on him until he screamed with the pleasure, coming in spurts across the wooden cabinets, clenching around the tender thing inside him until Teague’s head fell forward and he cried Jack’s name, grabbing him with both hands around the middle and holding him tight, so tight, that Jack could hardly get his breath, could hardly separate their bodies in his mind, could hardly conceive of a moment when they might ever be apart.

They stayed in that position, panting for a moment, and then met eyes in the mirror again. Teague’s harsh expression was belied by the total nakedness in his eyes.

“Mine,” he asserted, trying not to make it a question.

“Yours,” Jack reassured, taking the hand at his waist and kissing it again.

“Shower?” Teague asked playfully, and Jack nodded, laughing a little and shaking his head.

“Please?”

Teague’s expression sobered, became intense and erotic and promising. “Say it again,” he ordered, and Jack met his eyes just as soberly.

“Please,” he repeated, trusting Teague would keep that promise.

“Please what?” Teague smiled a little, and Jack wondered what sort of hells he would leap through, just to see that raw, vulnerable, promising smile on his lover’s face.

“Please do anything you want to me,” Jack begged, and that smile became all triumph.

The shower lasted a while. Jack had hoped that when it was done, he’d know Teague’s taste as thoroughly as Teague knew Jack’s, but no. Teague had given again, had touched, had tasted, and Jack had let him, hoping the trust would come later. But he did know some things by the time they emerged, tired, dripping, laughing shyly into each other’s eyes.

He knew the way Teague liked to be touched, how tightly the skin puckered around his little tan nipples, the sensitive spot right underneath his cockhead. He was terribly aware of the awesome power he had when he spanned Teague's scrawny, muscle-knotted waist with his long-fingered hands, or when he stroked those sharp collarbones with his thumbs and pushed their mouths together for a kiss.

They fell into bed still damp, still laughing, still breathless, and very, very tired.

"Will this be different, you think," Jack asked, stroking the side of Teague's face with his knuckles, appreciating every touch of their bare skin.

"When we're wolves?"

"Yeah."

"No. It will be us. It will be sex. And we'll still be family."

Jack laughed a little and shook his head. "Say it, Teague. It will make you feel better."

"Whiny bitch," Teague grumbled, turning into Jack's arms, resting his head on Jack's upper arm.

"Just say it, asshole. I'm tired and I want to hear it, and you already know I love you. Just fucking say it." Stubborn fucking Irishman.

"I love you, Jacky," Teague murmured, surprising them both with how quickly he gave in.

"I love you too, you dumb motherfucker."

Teague chuckled a little, and they fell gently asleep.



## Epilogue

### Green

### Family

Green was in the kitchen in his sweats after all the students had left for the morning. He and Arturo were eating sweet little kids cereal and appreciating the late morning quiet in the hill. Katy was supposed to be joining him in his room in a few moments, and he was glad Cory had left already. His beloved was so very gracious about his appointments, but he liked to limit how much graciousness she actually had to expend.

Teague stumbled in, wearing the same thing Green was, and looking surprised and embarrassed to find people there.

“I was...” he flushed, looking uncomfortable, and Arturo excused himself, carrying his bowl with him and pushing spoonfuls in his mouth as he left.

“He didn’t have to do that,” Teague grumbled, “I was just looking for food.”

“There’s always some sandwiches in the refrigerator,” Green supplied, “and crackers and snacks in the cupboards. Help yourself.”

Teague bowed his head and mumbled thanks and started rooting around in the refrigerator. Roast beef for him, turkey for Jacky, and two bottles of cold chocolate milk, and... he eyed the package of double-stuffed Oreos longingly, thinking that Jacky didn’t particularly care for sweets, but that he’d always liked cookies himself.

“Take them, Teague,” Green said gently. “Grace has about fifty other packages in the outside pantry. I meant it—help yourself.”

Teague flushed and picked up the package, putting it under the plate he’d made with sandwiches and fruit.

“Before you pick all that up, I do have a few things to talk to you about—sit down, right?”

Teague looked uncomfortable, and Green laughed. “It’s not bloody awful mate, it’s just house business, that’s all. You and Jacky—you’ve filled a void here, you know?”

Teague dropped bonelessly into the wooden chair opposite Green. “No,” he responded. “I have no idea.”

Green rolled his eyes. “We have sort of an unusual operation here, mate. Most times, werewolves need an alpha. We’re a collective. The werewolves have, for the most part, looked to the vampires here—so the head of the vampires has been the head of the weres, too.”

“Adrian,” Teague said blankly, and Green nodded.

“Yes—and for the last year and a half, Cory.”

Teague blinked. He’d known she was terrifying, but... “The little student?” It felt unreal to contemplate.

“Oh yes—that mark on your wrist binds you as completely to her as it does to me. Why? Doesn’t she meet your qualifications?”

Teague shook his head violently. “She’s perfect,” he said fervently, and Green smiled benevolently, as though he had passed a test.

“Oh yes—you have no idea. But she’s not a werewolf. Nicky, one of our bound mates, is an Avian—so she does have a tie to the shape-shifter community, but wolves are tricky. There are many physiological and psychological things that go into being a wolf, even part time, and they need someone special to look to. And none of the wolves here at the hill are alphas.”

Teague blinked. “Why are you telling me this?”

“Because you are, Teague.”

Teague shook his head. “Oh no. I’m nobody’s leader—I’m...I’m an idiot! I led Jacky into an ambush, I fought for the bad guys because I was too stupid to know better... believe me. I’m a two bit loser son of the world’s biggest loser, and the *last* person you want...”

“Stop it!” Green’s eyes were flashing hotly, and for the first time Teague wondered what it took to make the elf angry. “That’s more than enough of that shit, Teague Sullivan. You wouldn’t accept it before, but you bloody well have to now. You’re ours. You’re family. No one talks about my family like that, you fuckwit wank, now shut up and listen to me!”

Teague’s mouth dropped open, and it occurred to him that he was seeing the flip side of kindness. It was fucking scary, that’s what it was. “What would I have to do?” He asked, not wanting to watch Green’s eyes flash like that again.

Green’s grin turned lopsided. “Nothing horrible, mate. Just stay for Christmas. Let us help you through transition.”

Teague wanted to jump on that. Brave words to Jacky or no, the thought of turning into something different, something alien, frightened the piss out of him. But...his thoughts turned unhappily to their cozy little apartment in Sacramento, all of the tiny, important things they had done to make it their own.

“But we wouldn’t have to stay?” He asked, making sure.

“No, Teague—many, many of us live off-campus—you know that.” Green’s demeanor relaxed a little, and Teague’s did too in sympathy.

“What else then?” Teague asked, still suspicious.

“Dinner here, once a week—that’s all. Give the werewolves someone to come to with their problems. You’ll eat up at the leader’s table, and after dinner, they’ll approach you. It’s our tradition—once they see you, one of their own, up at the table, they’ll know they can turn to you. And you, in turn, have some very special qualifications and abilities to help them out. Trust me—give it a few months, and you’ll forget you were ever worried.”

Teague frowned a little, thought about it. Nodded. “We can do that. It’ll do Jacky good to have family,” he said decisively, standing up and going back for the food. “Jacky deserves to have people who care about him, you know?”

And with that characteristically terse reply, Teague ghosted down the hallway again, as silent as the wolf he hadn’t turned into yet.

Green rolled his eyes at Katy Garcia, who had wandered into his room unnoticed when Teague sat down. She’d stuck her head out of his room the moment Teague had passed the doorway, and now she shook it in exasperations.

*Jacky deserves to have people who care about him, you know?*

“So do you, you dumb motherfucker,” Green muttered in exasperation, using Jack’s own words. Katy heard him and laughed softly, her eyes following Teague long after his shadow had disappeared down the hall.

