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Reaching

GREEN'S HILL WEREWOLVES BOOK 3

AMY LANE

Reaching

By Amy Lane

The Third Book Jack & Teague (& Katy) Adventure

A Green's Haven Story

Jack

Reaching

Jack yawned from the chair at the foot of the bed and stood and stretched. “I’m going to shower,” he said pointedly, and looked to where Teague was sprawled out on the bed.

Katy was next to him, sitting with one foot under her bottom, working on some sort of embroidery thing, making polite conversation. She’d been telling them about the weres running on the night of the full moon. They had about two weeks before running under the night sky happened, unless something weird happened to trigger the change.

“We don’t *have* to turn with the moon, you know,” she was saying now, “but it hurts. It feels like you got to take a gigantic dump and someone sewed your cheeks shut, you know what I means?”

Teague laughed a little, the sides of his mouth turning in and up, and his eyes arching

upwards. Katy had carried the bulk of the conversation—she always did when she was there—but Teague had simply lay there, tired from a long day running errands for Grace, the Hill's den mother, and enjoyed Katy's company.

Jack had been counting on it.

Two nights ago, Katy sank to her knees in front of the Goddess and everyone, and took Jack into her mouth. Teague watched and approved, and made noises about the three of them, binding together into a family.

And then stepped back and didn't make a goddamned move.

The tension alone was driving Jack insane.

Granted, Teague had relaxed a little between the two of them—they still had sex (a wondrous thing, whenever Teague touched him with passion and tenderness—Jack was still stunned and proud when their bodies slicked up against each other in the privacy of their room) but it wasn't *here let me fuck you so we don't have to talk* sort of sex.

And when Teague was out and about during the day, doing 'Alpha shit' as Jack called it, Katy and Jack got together, talked, laughed, touched...

But all in all, they were still waiting for Teague.

Jack stood at the entrance to the bathroom and looked at Katy, who rolled her eyes at him and shrugged. Three days in her company already, breathing the smell of her body through his newly heightened senses, hearing the throatiness of her laughter in every sweet note of her voice, and he could read that expression.

I'll try to be naked and sweating, mijo, but I'll probably just be gone.

Jack decided to make that shower quick.

The water sluiced over him, and he thought of the two of them together, Teague's body lean, shredded with muscle and not nearly enough fat, his pale Irish skin almost as scarred as his strong heart. Katy would be smoother, silken, her dusky skin brown and perfect. Katy had round cheeks, round shoulders, round breasts...she was soft, her skin sweet... the memory of her mouth on his cock made him hard and he turned the water off abruptly because he wanted to see them, watch them, catch them.

This was so much easier than he thought it would be.

He could share Teague, if it was with Katy—but only if it was with Katy, because Katy wanted Jack too.

As quickly as possible he dried off his shaggy dark hair and his lanky body, and brushed

his teeth, and then moved quietly to the doorway, his towel around his hips to see if he'd missed anything.

He'd missed Katy—she was gone, and he was two seconds away from breaking the quiet and just, finally, asking Teague when they were going to see this thing through, when he realized what Teague, who was still stretched out on the bed, was actually doing.

He was smelling her.

He'd rolled over from his side and his face was buried in the place she had just sat, and he was scenting the sheets with the enthusiasm of a cat rubbing its face on catnip. His lips were pulled back from his teeth like the wolves they would become and he was *tasting* the spicy, sweet, plump tang of her skin and her body.

Jack opened up his senses—another new thing to learn about becoming a werewolf—and tried to smell her like Teague was doing. At first all he could smell was Teague, the sharp, bold scent of his lover overpowering even the smell of shampoo and soap and the taste of toothpaste on his tongue. But there was a musk in the air, a bold, male print of desire, and underneath it...

Jack could smell Katy's arousal almost as plainly as he could smell Teague's, and his cock went almost immediately hard.

Teague's hand moved to his tighty-whites—Teague was way ahead of Jacky in the hard-on department. The lines of his prick were large and defined through the fabric and Teague pet his erection almost absently, until his palm caught the flare of the sensitive ridge and his attention was suddenly very focused.

Teague made that rough pass of the hand again, and Jack didn't dare breathe. They'd been sharing a bed for nearly two weeks, and Jack was lucky if Teague let Jacky see him naked, and *oh dear God, he was wrapping his hands around his prick and Jack wanted... wanted in.*

Not inside of Teague's body, but inside of that tight network of protective shields that Teague had erected to keep his fragile, vulnerable heart safe. Jack caught glimpses sometimes. Teague had shown him as much as he possibly could, but Jack was hungry for more. He'd given this man everything—all he wanted in return was Teague's soul.

He'd settle for watching the guy touch himself.

Jack's knees went weak as Teague slid a sure hand underneath the elastic band, folding it down as he did so, exposing his erection—fat, thick, and long—to the air. Jack didn't miss the little shiver that passed along Teague's arms at the cool invasion on his skin. His fist closed, hard, over his cock, and a strangled sound escaped his clenched teeth. His other hand came up to his Irish-fair chest and he pinched a nipple between his fingers so hard his fingertips turned purple, the fair skin around them going white. The nipple itself was swollen red, and engorged with broken blood vessels by the time Teague released his hold.

Jack tried not to whimper.

He'd known Teague was rough on himself—he'd seen evidence in the morning, and it was obvious from the way Teague *wanted* Jack to touch him but never asked. But Jack had never seen his lover clench his prick on his fist hard enough to make himself flinch. He'd never seen him pinch his own skin between his fingers hard enough to leave a bruise. Watching it now felt violent and wrong. Nobody got to hurt Teague that way—not even Teague, not anymore.

Before he knew he planned to do it, he'd dropped the towel and was on the bed next to Teague, whispering, “shhh... shhhhh... don't...”

Teague's body jerked in surprise and he made to shove himself up on his elbows, but Jack was taller and almost as strong. He placed a hand on Teague's chest and brushed Teague's ear with his lips. “No, no... keep touching... just be gentle.”

“Oh Christ...” growled Teague, and he tried to get up again, but Jack pushed him flat.

“Please, Teague?” Jack murmured, taking that strong member in his own hand and rubbing it before it got soft with Teague's distraction.

“No..oo...oo...” Teague's hips arched off the bed, and he wasn't nearly as convincing as he had been at first.

Jack chuckled. He never had the upper, uhm, hand, between the two of them. Teague's two front teeth were crooked—no braces for Sean Sullivan's kid—and watching them as they bit that pouty lower lip was like watching Teague become young again, and open to possibility and love. Jack liked that look, and as he stared bemusedly at Teague's face, he liked everything about it. He liked Teague's sharp, high cheekbones and grooved mouth, and he liked the way Teague's brown eyelashes fanned his cheeks when he closed his eyes. Jack really loved the way Teague's brow furrowed because he was concentrating hard on keeping himself in control.

Jack liked the way Teague looked when he was out of control even better.

A tiny drop of pre-come leaked out, and Jack used his thumb to spread it over the head of the erection, letting Teague's gasp ripple through him. Jack moved his hand to the base—firm, but not harsh, and then pulled up, letting the skin skate around for a bit, and it must have felt good because Teague groaned and then abruptly snapped to himself.

“Jesus, Princess, can we turn off a goddamned light?” His voice was sharp and thin, because Jack was making him crazy, and Jack enjoyed that more than he thought he should. But he had a purpose when he lay down, and damned if he'd let the joy of touching Teague's body distract him.

“No, I'm not turning off the light,” he retorted, and then he removed his own hand and replaced it with Teague's.

Teague's hand tightened to the point of pain, and Jack hissed in sympathy.

"Be gentle," he ordered, and Teague's eyes flew open accusingly. He opened his hand and moved his body up off the bed, and Jack moved his shoulder in and leaned over. Teague could throw him off, and pretty goddamned easily, too, but in this as in all things, Jack counted on Teague's innate gentleness, his refusal to hurt Jack because he loved him.

"Turn off the fucking light," Teague growled, "and let's just go to bed."

"Lay back down and touch yourself—it doesn't have to hurt!" Jack protested.

Teague grunted and shoved his underwear up, then threw himself off the bed to kill the switch. He returned, sliding under the covers in the November chill and hunching over into a self-protective little ball. His back and neck just seemed to be daring Jack to do anything about it, and so Jack slid under the covers with him to try.

He started out by going all the way under and kissing the small of Teague's back right at the edge of his underwear.

"Leave me the fuck alone," Teague snarled at him from outside the covers, but Jack ignored him. They shared a bed now, and he knew Teague—had trusted him with his life and his heart and he was damned if he'd let the guy scare him off now.

"Make me," he mumbled, continuing his string of kisses up Teague's spine. He got to Teague's sensitive neck and rubbed his lips against the bare skin there, smiling gently in the dark when Teague shivered.

"Don't we have shit to do in the morning?" Teague asked, and Jack "Uhm-hhmmmd..." him as he moved to the side Teague's neck.

"Don't we have to leave early?" Teague asked, his voice pitching as Jack nipped under his jawbone. "I mean it's your folks..."

"My parents have nothing to do with my hand on your cock," Jack murmured crudely, skating his palm past Teague's hip and then around his body and under his whiteys. Teague grunted and surged against Jack's palm and Jack made what sounded like a muffled crow of triumph as he slid the damned underwear off Teague's hips and to the foot of the bed.

"But Cory's bringing us and she..."

"She doesn't have anything to do with us in bed either," Jack murmured, hoping it was true. He tried very hard not to be jealous of the little sorceress—he knew she didn't love Teague the way he and Katy did, but Teague seemed so hell bent on following her anywhere, it was hard to draw the line around the loves that drew him.

Jack forgot about her now and squeezed—gently—and moved his hand from the base to

the tip, marveling that he couldn't touch his fingers and his thumb. The fact that this thing made it up Jack's ass on an almost nightly basis was almost a wonder of nature.

Teague grunted again and moved in Jack's grip and Jack tried one more time to take Teague's hand and put it on Teague's cock and to goddamnit, teach his stubborn Irishman how to touch himself with kindness. Maybe it was the dark, or maybe it was that he wasn't facing his lover, but this time it took. This time Teague let Jack guide his own hand along the length, from base to tip, teasing, tickling, tormenting—but only for a moment. After a moment, Teague's fingers tightened too strongly and Jack shushed him, whispering in his ear, murmuring comfort things, until Teague was making little grunting whimpers in his throat and Jack was grinding his own erection up against Teague's backside.

Teague's fingers relaxed, and their breaths harshened in the dark. Jack pulled his hand away and licked his palm to make it slippery, and Teague made one last attempt to tighten to pain.

"Goddammit, Teague, I said it doesn't have to hurt!" Jack growled. He wrapped his fingers around Teague's and tried to force him to lighten up, and Teague's control fractured a little.

"Princess, the next time we're naked together, I'm going to hammer you into the mattress... auuuugghhhhhhhh... fuck you!" Because Jack moved lower, to cup and squeeze Teague's balls, but gently and not hard at all. Teague's stomach and chest were thrust forward, and he was reaching... straining for that elusive moment when his body exploded and his mind fragmented in orgasm.

"You do fuck me," Jack rasped, "every night you stick your fence post up my ass and I like it. I'm trying to return the favor. Just once accept a little bit of gentleness."

Teague made a keening sound in frustration, and Jack kept up the gentle fondling of his body. He wanted to take pity on the stubborn asshole and *force* him to come, but he wasn't going to allow any shortcuts that involved bruising or twisting or pinching or pain.

"Buttercup," Teague hissed as Jack loosened his fingers again, "the next time I fuck you, you're going to *wish* it was a fencepost in your ass..."

"Fine," Jack whispered harshly, seeing stars himself as he ground against Teague's tightly muscled flank. "Go ahead and bugger me until I cry. Fuck me into the mattress or the wall or into the ground... I can take it... just don't—nah-nah-nah!! Don't..." stroke "hurt" stroke "yourself."

He trusted for a moment that Teague would do as he demanded, and slid his finger, slick with fluid from the end of Teague's prick, and rubbed it ever-so-teasingly underneath Teague's balls, and into the dark, slick and secret ring of sensitive flesh. He invaded gently and a groan ripped it's way out of Teague's chest. Teague groaned again and Jacky moved his hand one more time to make sure that trembling hand was gentle on its own flesh, squeezing just a little

harder this time, and Teague convulsed and grunted and came.

Fluid splattered up against their twined hands as Teague spasmed, whimpering, and Jack ground his own erection against Teague's taut bottom, groaning on his own and coming from the pleasure of feeling Teague undone under the combined touch of their hands.

Teague was the first to try to move off the bed when their breathing stilled, but Jack's arm tightened around his chest.

"Stay," he murmured softly.

"But Jacky," Teague complained, "we're covered in... in... in..."

"Come," Jack said dryly. "I think that's the word the kids are using these days."

"Fuck you, Jacky," Teague muttered sourly, but he didn't move, either.

"You do. Every night. We covered that." Jack was laughing, but Teague pushed against his restraining arm and Jack wanted him to lie still for once.

"It dries pretty quick," he murmured, kissing the back of Teague's neck again. He propped himself up on his elbow and leaned over to catch the edge of a stubby, stubborn jaw with a kiss. "Was it really so bad?"

"Was what?" Teague took Jack's slickened hand into his own and pulled it to his mouth, absently kissing it and licking the wettest parts by popping them into his mouth and teasing them moodily with his tongue—basically cleaning Jack up in one way if he couldn't do it in the other.

"Was it so bad reaching for something you wanted when it didn't have to hurt?"

Teague grunted—it was almost an entire shrink session in a syllable. Yes. Yes it was so bad. Yes, it hurt almost as much as brutal fingers on his skin. Teague Sullivan didn't get anything—not even sex—without pain.

"Well tough," Jack murmured, a shitload of heartfelt in his own voice. "You want Katy, you want me... we're here for the taking. Take us, beloved. Don't hurt yourself because you think you shouldn't reach for us."

"Sounds really fucking easy when you say it that way," Teague muttered, and Jack kissed him between his shoulder blades again, reasonably sure that Teague was too far into his own self-protective mental-spiral-shell to spring for the goodnight kiss. Sometimes it was best to just let Teague adapt to something new and not to bother him. Jack had once endured a week's worth of brooding regard when he went out and bought a new couch without Teague's permission, and that was before they were sleeping together. He knew how much Teague feared change—change threatened any tiny corner of happiness Teague felt like he'd cheated from the gods in the first place.

“Not for you, Teague,” he murmured. “For you, I’m perfectly well aware it’s just not.”

Teague sighed and absently tucked Jack’s hand under his chin, then backed into Jack, knowing Jack would spoon him. “I love you, you passive aggressive nightmare.”

“Yeah, and I love you, you dumb motherfucker. Now get some sleep—tomorrow we have to visit my folks and you’ll need to be all shiny in the morning.”

“Whip-fucking-spiffy,” Teague muttered, but he was well on the way to sleep and they both knew it.

“Damned straight.”

Teague

Dreams of Chaos

The dream had changed.

It used to be, all he did was devour Jacky’s intestines, his wolf-muzzle wet and saturated with blood, his snarling, slaverling, chaotic wolf-form reveling in Jack’s prone, thrashing body while Teague screamed and screamed and screamed inside, begging himself to please, anything, please, don’t hurt Jacky.

But that wasn’t enough torment for the dream-gods, apparently.

Now, as he was ripping Jacky’s body to shreds, he heard a whine behind him, and turned. There was Katy, the prettiest little wolf he ever did see, standing in horror, one delicate paw extended as though trying to stop him from destroying the thing they both loved the best.

And Teague, horrified by what he had wrought as a wolf, changed back into a naked hunter with a big, heavy rifle.

And human form or no human form, he was still screaming on the inside when he raised that big fucking cannon to his shoulder, found Katy in the sight, and pulled the trigger.

He was still screaming on the inside as her proud, furry body flew against the wall of the psycho’s house in a spatter of blood and brains.

And he was almost screaming as he woke up, cold-sweating in Jacky’s arms. Jacky woke a little—just enough to know it had been a bad dream and to comfort Teague, shushing in

his ear, rubbing his cheek on Teague's back. For once, Teague couldn't reject the comfort.

He laid there, eyes wide in the night, feeling those big masculine hands on his chest and his hip, and wondered what it would take to make the dream go away.

Some inner part of him perked up, and he almost scented the air—yes, his wolf had grown so strong that scent was his first recourse. Becoming a werewolf was so easy, so seamless—maybe that's one of the things that frightened him the most.

Jacky's breathing evened out next to him, and Teague's eyes searched the dark restlessly—his night-sight was better too, but it didn't matter. He was reasonably certain he wouldn't be able to sleep again, not without some sort of break, some sort of reassurance that he wouldn't go back and have the same dream.

Carefully, quietly, he scooted out of the bed and brought the coverlet up to Jacky's chin, then rummaged in the drawers he and Jacky were using now and came up with some sweat-bottoms and a T-shirt. There was never a moment in Green's Hill where everybody was asleep—if he was going out to the front room to watch TV, he'd better be dressed.

The person he found was the person he'd hoped for, but not the person he'd expected.

There was just something soothing about watching the little college student knit. Cory was sitting on one end of the couch, and Grace, the vampire, was sitting on the other end, and they were knitting silently while watching *Serenity*. Teague grinned in spite of himself. He loved that movie.

Hoping they wouldn't notice him at all, he sat down in the overstuffed chair adjacent to Cory, and tucked his feet under his ass to watch.

Cory turned to him and smiled, never pausing in the movements of her clever fingers, and then she and Grace exchanged looks. He became so caught up in the exploits of Captain Mal and his crew that he barely noticed when Grace stood up, moved to the kitchen, and came back with a bottle of chocolate milk and a plate of cookies. He was startled when she put the milk in his hand and the cookies in front of him.

"Thank you but I don't..."

"I'll take the thanks and leave the disclaimer." Grace's freckled face was as mild as her words, and Teague bobbed his head again and drank his chocolate milk. The movie came to its dramatic end and Teague was surprised to hear sniffing coming from Cory's side of the couch. She smiled gamely at Grace and wiped her cheeks with the back of her hand. Grace shook her head and tsked, and stood up to kiss Cory on the top of the head like a mother.

"I've got a few things to do before dawn, sweetie," she said, "and you need to get some sleep. Tomorrow's a busy day." She eyeballed Teague, who was staring with wonder at the vast cabinet of dvds. Usually the cabinet was closed flush with the wall—he hadn't imagined

there was such a selection. “It’s a busy day for you too, werewolf,” Grace said meaningfully. “I expect you two to be in bed long before I am.”

Cory nodded dutifully. “Yes, Mama Vampire,” and Grace flashed a playful fang in return. When she’d moved on, Cory jerked her chin towards the cabinet. “Pick another movie—or maybe an episode of *Firefly* if you like.”

“That sounds about right,” Teague yawned, moving to the cabinet to pull out the pilot episode. Something short—he was starting to feel sleepy again.

“Bad dreams?” she asked, her fingers still moving, and then, “Me too,” at his non-committal grunt.

“What sorts of bad dreams do you have, Lady Cory?” he surprised himself by asking as he set up the dvd.

Cory shook her head, a faint smile playing at her lips. “You don’t want to know about my dreams, Teague—you want surcease from your own.”

Teague stopped and frowned, mouthing the unfamiliar word, and Cory blushed.

“Surcease,” she mumbled, flushing. “It means ‘ease’ or ‘relief’... sorry. I... when I’m not paying attention that shit just slips out and it’s not...”

Teague found he was smiling to calm her down. “It’s okay, Lady Cory—I just forget, sometimes, that’s all.”

“Forget what?” she asked shortly.

“Forget that there’s a reason you’re a leader to us all.”

“Aww, Jesus, shut up.”

Teague’s shoulders moved in a little bit of private amusement, and he came back and sat down while Cory wielded the remote control.

“No one’s said that to me in a long time,” he said and she laughed too, then reached over to his plate and snagged a cookie.

“So what’d you dream about?” she asked, hitting pause on the remote after a moment.

“Same shit,” he murmured, keeping his eyes on the frozen image on screen. There was silence for a weighted heartbeat and then he sighed. Might as well. Might as well spill his guts—she was listening.

“First I’m a wolf, and I rip out Jacky’s heart, then I’m a human and I shoot Katy... good

stuff, really.”

Cory made a sympathetic sound. “Doesn’t take a genius to analyze that one.”

Teague grunted, and she pressed play. They watched in silence for fifteen minutes, and he was beginning to wonder if she was going to leave it at that, until the first break in the dvd. The screen paused again, and he risked a look at her.

Her knitting was still in her hand, and she was looking at him thoughtfully.

“I was thinking about what I wanted to say,” she told him unnecessarily. “Because Green’s told me shit, and, well, we’ve both seen each other’s scars, you know?”

Teague did know—but he didn’t realize she’d been paying attention. He grunted again and hoped that covered it.

She gave a faint smile, her knitting still unnaturally still in her hands. “So you see, the thing I wanted to say is that it doesn’t have to be that way. I mean, my parents were decent. They never hit me. They didn’t *get* me, but they never hit me. It just wasn’t in them, so I’ve always known that love could be okay. But here, you’ve got even better, you know? You’ve got Green, and you’ve got Arturo and Grace and hell if you want to go for saccharine you’ve got Bracken’s parents who will just blow your mind with being in love and being good people and good parents and all.” She rolled her eyes and grinned at him, inviting him to share the joke, but he couldn’t, not just yet, so she continued on.

“Because I think the thing is, maybe you’re afraid you’re going to hurt Jack & Katy because you don’t know how to operate when you’ve got the power to hurt someone. It’s like...”

She gnawed her lip and looked away, and he was suddenly hit with the notion that the uncertainty was for show. She knew *exactly* what she wanted to say, but she was... translating it somehow. He blinked, and he realized that she was probably editing words like ‘surcease’ out of the explanation, so she could sound exactly like Teague, exactly like Katy—no fanciness, no reason to be ‘Lady Cory’. Just a kid with an idea, that’s all.

His heart lurched, and he fell a little bit in love. Not ‘in love’ in love, not *here*, *you can have my soul and dice it into shreds* in love, like he loved Jacky. More like, *I’ll take a bullet for you* in love.

“It’s like,” she continued, the exact right words she wanted him to hear replacing the exact right words she had planned to say in the first places, “you get a chance to see someone do it right when you’re here. I mean, I know the whole hill thing is freaking you out—you’re not used to being in the middle of a big family and Green’s already looking to fix up one of the little shack-thingies on the grounds for the three of you—but I thought while you were living here, you know, maybe you could look around and see that...”

“Freaking me out?” he interrupted at the same time she blurted “See that love doesn’t have to hurt all the time,” and he blinked and then she blinked.

“Well yeah,” she said after they looked at each other quizzically for a second. “What brand of moron do we look like, Teague? We can tell you’re not used to this—I mean, it’s a little claustrophobic in here when you *are* used to it. You, Jack, Katy—you’re going to want a little space. It’s no big deal, if you can wait for us to set you up, right?”

“Uhm...” He was more than stunned, because he hadn’t said anything to Green. He’d thought about it, promised it to Jacky, but hadn’t wanted to test his luck. He liked living, well, *near* the hill, and he hadn’t wanted to offend Green or Cory by suggesting that it wasn’t right for them. “Uhm, right,” he murmured at last, still processing everything else she’d said, and she gave him a minute or two to do it.

“Love doesn’t have to hurt,” he echoed after another one of those pauses, and she smiled a little and started to knit furiously. Whatever she was working on, it was smoky purple, crème, dark green-brown and really really big. It looked both masculine and lovely, and Teague wondered who it was for.

“No,” she said after a moment, petting the soft wool fondly. “Love doesn’t have to hurt. Wanting things—wanting lovers—it doesn’t have to hurt. You’re entitled, Teague. Entitled to a life of your choosing, to lovers who will care for you. You’re a good person. You get to have those things. Trust me...”

Padded footsteps cut her off, and she looked up almost guiltily as Bracken, her tall, brawny, dark-haired lover rounded the corner.

“Shit,” she muttered, looking around frantically. In a completely unexpected move she took the thing she was working on and shoved it under her over-sized sleep-shirt.

Teague blinked and clapped his hand over his stunned smile.

“Are you coming to bed anytime soon?” Bracken asked darkly, and she folded her arms over the lump of wool in her shirt and smiled winsomely at him.

“Uhm, yeah,” she said brightly, and Bracken started to chuckle, closing his eyes and opening them around the image of her hiding what was obviously a surprise of some sort for him.

“If I give you a chance to put that away,” he said nodding in order to get her to agree with him, “will you come to bed soon?”

Her grin was pure pixie, and Teague felt charmed and honored to see it.

“Yes, beloved,” she sang sweetly. “I’ll be there in a minute.”

Bracken nodded and rolled his eyes in Teague's direction. "That's both of you—wolf-man, you're like a teenager right now—you don't work well without sleep. This is about the last time we should take you off the hill before your change, you know that right?"

Teague nodded, suitably chastened. Green had already seen that most of his and Jacky's little apartment would be packed up and sent to the hill. Their prized possessions—Teague's models, Jacky's books—had been installed in their room as it was. But they needed to get their mail and pay off the landlord and do all the little human business things like change-of-address forms that seemed to be required, and so this trip down to Sacramento. Jacky had asked, since they were going down and all, if he could stop by his parents and tell them he was moving up the hill.

Jack wasn't close to his parents, as far as Teague knew. For the last year and a half the guy had lived less than twenty minutes away, and he hadn't visited them once since he and Teague had started rooming together—but Jacky was pretty sure they'd raise a ruckus if they didn't know where he was. Green had given the okay—but reluctantly. It made sense that they do this, and this seemed to be a good time, but the whole hill was on alert for the two of them. The first change thing seemed to be pretty dramatic—and everybody wanted it to go smoothly.

Bracken nodded back and winked, inviting Teague to laugh with him at Cory, who was looking both uncomfortable and angelic with that wad of knitting stuffed up her shirt. Teague grinned back, for once fully comfortable expressing joy in front of someone other than Jack.

Bracken nodded and said, "Remember—you can't lose sleep—not this week, you hear me?"

Cory grimaced but seemed absolutely determined not to pick a fight. "If you have to wait more than five minutes for me, I promise I'll let you cart me off to bed. Fair deal?"

"I'll hold you to it," Bracken threatened, running a hand through his unruly cropped hair, and then he shook his head and left.

When he was gone Cory slumped against the back of the couch and rolled her eyes. "You two laugh, but do you have any idea how hard it is to make a Christmas present for someone who is with you like a second skin? And he doesn't sleep—seriously—I've had to have the vampires wake me up to tell me when he goes to bed for real because he usually just waits for me to fall asleep before coming out here and partying with the night life. Do you have *any* idea how big he is? Knitting that man a sweater on borrowed time is like squeezing the space-time continuum for water!"

Her eyes narrowed and she glared at Teague, because he couldn't help it—he was giggling helplessly, one hand clapped over his mouth to keep the unfamiliar sounds muffled, but giggling just the same.

He shook his head and tried to shrug, but her indignant glare didn't relent. "I'm so

happy I could amuse you,” she said with dignity, and then she cracked a smile. “And I mean that, Teague.” She stood and dropped a playful kiss on the top of his head from behind the chair. “If you get nothing else from your time here, I hope you get to laugh. And now,” she yawned in earnest, “it’s time for good little sorceresses to go to bed.”

With that she tucked her knitting deep into her knitting bag and handed Teague the remote before padding barefooted off to her room. Teague sat thoughtfully and ate cookies and watched the end of the *Firefly* episode before going back to bed himself. On his way, he passed Cory and Bracken’s room and heard Bracken’s voice, lecturing, and Cory’s voice, reassuring him. Bracken was obviously concerned about more than just a little late-night knitting, but Cory seemed to have the same genius for easing Bracken’s mind that she showed for easing Teague’s.

When he got back to his room he shucked his sweats and pulled on clean underwear and slid back into bed with Jacky, and had a sudden fear that his werewolf bedmate would smell that innocent kiss on the top of his head and jump to totally the wrong conclusion.

He needn’t have worried. Jacky folded Teague’s bantam body up in his long arms and snuffled sleepily at his neck. “Mmmm... cookies...” he mumbled, and Teague had a moment for another laugh before he surprisingly found sleep.

Jacky

Adolescent Rebellion

Jack could remember his parents being distant and irritating. He could remember how disgusted he’d been when they hadn’t attended his sister’s funeral. He could remember how little he’d cared for their perfectly large, perfectly decorated, perfectly manicured house with the white carpet and the crème colored brocaded wallpaper and the taupe furniture. He could remember his father’s fake-hearty voice and his mother’s artificial smile, nose, and cheekbones. He could remember pretty much everything about why he’d stayed away from his parents for nearly the last two years.

He just couldn’t remember *hating* them with such bone-deep, stomach-churning, hackle-raising, teeth-baring intensity.

He glared as his father—resplendent in a white Tennis sweater and casual slacks—looked at Teague as though he was the carcass of vermin-ridden carrion. And Teague... Teague’s mouth was compressed into that expression Jack had seen him use in a barfight that Jack started. He’d thrown himself in front of Jack’s father like he’d thrown himself in front of the redneck who’d tried to pound Jack in that bar. His mouth was flat and his eyes were narrow, but he wasn’t throwing a punch that wasn’t self-defense. It was like he’d *asked* for the beating, dammit, and Jack *loathed* his parents for feeding into that self-directed anger.

“We’re just here to let you know Jacky’s okay,” Teague was saying flatly. “We don’t expect anything, we don’t want anything from you, unless...” Teague turned liquid hazel eyes to him. “Jacky, is there anything here you want?”

Jack shook his head. He’d taken all of the things Sara had loved earlier—they were in a small wooden trunk that Green had already moved into his and Teague’s room. He’d taken his own things when he moved out—all his mom and dad had were memories of him, in his room alone, studying for a future he wasn’t sorry to see in his rearview mirror.

“I just wanted to say goodbye,” Jack said through a dry throat. It came out sounding sad but he wanted it to sound angry and cold.

“Where are you going?” his mother asked, a corner of her mouth lifted in derision. “To your little rathole of an apartment—yes, we know where it is. Oh, wait, no—you and this...” a moue of distaste “this person are going to go live in a *commune* in the hills?”

Teague flinched, visibly, and Jack went to move past him, to defend *Teague* for a change, but Teague wouldn’t let him. “It’s hard to explain,” he said, a little quirk at his mouth.

“Don’t try, Teague,” Jack murmured, putting a tender hand on his lover’s shoulder. “They wouldn’t get it. Let’s just go.”

“Jacky’s a good man,” Teague said softly. “It’s a shame you don’t want to know him better.”

“Well certainly don’t want to know him in the same way *you* know him,” Jackson Barnes said, disdain dripping from his voice and his narrow, handsome face. “Or maybe it’s pretty darned close—he is practically a child, compared to you, isn’t he? What are you, fifteen years older?”

Teague flushed, and Jack could practically smell the shame rolling off him.

“It’s not even eight years, Dad, and that’s *not* fair!” Jack snarled, angry beyond words. Nearly eighteen months he’d hung in there, following Teague around like a lost puppy, and Teague’s age had been one of the wedges he’d used to fend Jack off.

“Jacky, it’s okay,” Teague muttered. “They’re just trying to protect you.”

“They’re just trying to shit all over me—all over *us*.” Jack advanced, leaning against Teague’s shoulder and feeling the unreasonable hatred, the terrible, volatile hostility wash over him again. Teague turned to him, his eyes flashing a surprising blue that stopped Jack for a moment.

“Back down, werewolf,” he growled, and a little bit of human forebrain tried to penetrate Jack’s red haze. *This is what they were worried about. Maintain control!*

“They can’t say things like that about you,” Jack gritted, violence in every word.

“Jack, this man is barely more than a white-trash pedophile and he knows that!” Jack’s father laughed, and Teague visibly recoiled from the words and Jack’s forebrain dove for cover as his basic occipital instinct snarled for dominance.

Jack barely felt his skin peeling back, his bones turning liquid, reforming, his body shifting from solid to fluid to solid again, because he was snarling at the interloper, the old human who had threatened his mate and he was leaping, leaping, snapping, seeing blood in his vision and starving for its taste...

Cory

Fight It or Fuck It

As soon as we parked the car and let the guys out, I scrambled to the front to sit next to Bracken.

Bracken had needed to sit in the front because his legs were so damned long, and I’d been in the back with Jacky, because Teague didn’t give up control of the car to *anyone*, and it hadn’t been a comfortable drive.

It had started out when Jack had sniffed the air and said, “You smell like cookies.” His gaze had been dark and grim and he’d shot a fulminating glare at the back of Teague’s head and I belatedly remembered that kiss I’d dropped on his hair before I’d gone to bed.

I grinned at him, making the kiss truly as playful as it had been meant. “Yeah—Grace kissed my head to shoo me off to bed and I was practicing the mother-bit with him, you know? Besides—I think he really had a bunch of cookies, and I’ve been helping with the baking all morning.”

Jack looked surprised that I’d tackle that so head on, and his darkness eased up a little bit. “You like to mother him,” he asked levelly, and I nodded.

“My guys... they’re all bent up trying to mother me. It’s nice to return the favor—if you hang out with me long enough I’ll be knitting you a sweater or a scarf or something too.”

That got a smile. I thought I’d better live up to my end of that bargain or Jack would assume I wanted Teague for myself and rip my throat out.

Green had warned me—he really had—but I’d been pretty damned blithe this morning as

he'd seen Bracken and me off.

Remember, beloved—they're like teenagers. You never know what's going to set them off. Every shapeshifter in the hill has been telling me these two are ripe—they're the strongest wolves we've had, maybe because of the way we got them, and the consensus is, they're going to turn way before the full moon.

But they were grown men—how do you treat grown men like teenagers? How do you forbid them from leaving a home you pretty much kidnapped them into because they were stronger than the poor, the lost, the drug addled and the weak-willed who normally fell into your pack? I knew that Max—who had been bitten and turned on the same night—had been something of an anomaly, but I had no idea how big a difference a healthy, strong, strong-willed person made to the strength of the beast inside him. We were so used to giving the Goddess' strength to those who needed it, we didn't know what to do with the strong who were graced with it anyway.

So we had agreed to this visit and tried to warn the guys and prepare ourselves, but given Jacky's seething jealousy on the way down, Green's last warning still vibrated in my toes.

If they do turn, they'll have two modes—fight it or fuck it. Given what I know of both of them, I think that choice could turn on a dime. Hopefully, with Teague's level head, he'll turn it into the latter, but you'd better be ready with a shield if it's the former, you hear me, luv?

Oh yeah—I may have been blowing him off (but politely and with lots of kissing) as overprotective earlier, but after being subjected to Jacky's bad vibes for the last hour—and watching it increase after going to settle up with their landlord-- I was way ahead of Green now.

I'd made it crystal clear that unless the guys wanted Bracken and I in the room with them, they had better leave the front door open, and I don't think that started the interview off with Jack's folks on a good note.

I didn't care. Given the way good ol' dad had turned up his sneer at Teague's cherry Mustang, I was sort of okay with the Barnes' bad opinion, and I figured the guys might be too. So I pulled out my knitting and Bracken played with the radio, and we kept our eyes glued to the little domestic drama as it unfolded before us in the living room, in front of the clear glass window.

"This is going to be ugly," Bracken predicted, bumping my knee with his on purpose.

"You didn't see my folks when Arturo came with me to get *my* stuff," I pointed out, and Bracken raised his eyebrow at me, a faint smile on his lips.

"No, but Arturo graced us with the story for months afterwards when you weren't there," he told me, which was hardly surprising at all, given the hill's propensity for gossip. "And you know what I mean."

I sighed, and leaned my head on his shoulder, because I did know what he meant. Jack's parent's house was in a ritzy section of the city—and I was suspicious of any home that looked *too* perfect. Besides, Green had filled me in on Jack's sister, and it sounded like the sort of cold, unfriendly place that bred passive-aggressive assholes just like Jack.

And just *watching* them through the open doorway and bay window showed that the parent/child relationship was pretty fucking glacial.

Mostly it seemed to be a lot of sneering on the part of Jack's parents and posturing on Jack's part, with Teague, being sturdy and calm in the middle. But Teague's face was taut and unhappy, and I wondered what they were saying about *him*, because Jack was the one who was flushed and angry. Then I saw it—Jack pushed up against Teague, a challenge, and Teague turned towards him, his chin tilted up to meet eyes, and there it was.

“Fuck, did you see that?” Bracken asked me, but I didn't need to answer because we were both on the way out of the car.

We hit the doorway just in time. Jack morphed—and that's such a smooth supernatural mind-fucking spacewarp—one minute he was a man and the next he was a two-hundred pound wolf—and he was lunging for his father with his teeth bared, his clothes tangling around his body.

Teague was a wolf right behind him.

Teague wasn't going to make it—he'd grabbed a hold of Jack's tail, but their momentum carried them so far, so fast, that the gibbering, terrified man who'd started this goatfuck could only stand and watch as his son with the new teeth hurtled for his throat. The power-shield I threw up between wolf and man was quick and dirty—the force of it knocked Mr. Barnes back and Jack yelped as he crunched into the damned thing, probably breaking his nose. He landed and before the damage could even repair itself, he was up again, but this time, Teague was way ahead of him.

Teague's full out wolf-shoulder-tackle sent Jack sprawling, and when he came up and snapped at his alpha, Teague snapped back. Jack whined and Teague growled again, advancing on his lover, until Jacky lay on his back, his pale fur his throat exposed, completely submissive. Teague grumbled in his throat again and jerked his head, and Jack righted himself and slunk towards the front of the house. He was a handsome wolf—dark hair, blue eyes, a white furred belly—but not even his extra height and bulk could make him dominant over the slighter, fiercer blonde wolf who ordered him around.

Like some sort of action-delayed sound-track, Jack's mother started screaming. Bracken looked up at her and growled, “Lady, shut the fuck up.” She noticed us then, and subsided, something about Bracken making her eyes grow big with fear. I ignored her to drop the power shield in front of her husband, and Bracken and I watched cautiously to see what Teague did.

The first thing he did was walk over to Jack's dad and piss on his shoes, and the man was

so shocked he didn't move—although he did make a lot of little-girl-gross sounds that would have cracked me up on any other day. Then, to complete the gesture, Teague trotted to the middle of the white-carpeted room, cocked his blonde, fringed tail and deposited a steaming pile of whatever-he'd-had-for-breakfast in the center.

That did it—this time Bracken really *did* crack up and it occurred to me that we may have to do mental clean-up. Ugh—I hated using my power like this, but Brack liked it. He wasn't great at it—tended to leave a giant whaling migraine in place of the memories he displaced---but that was part of what he liked about it. He only fucked with people's minds when they desperately deserved it.

I trusted (silly fucking me) that the crisis with the wolves was at least stabilized and started damage control with these nice people who had just survived a werewolf attack, whether they realized how lucky they were or not.

“So,” I said gamely, “did Jacky leave you a forwarding address?”

Jack's dad, who was gingerly toeing off his shoes, nodded.

I put some power in my voice—enough to get the truth, and asked, “Were you ever planning to use it?”

“Christmas cards,” said his mother promptly. “And a card for his birthday.”

I nodded. Fair enough. “Did you plan to track him down?” A little more power.

“Absolutely,” snarled Mr. Jack Senior. “They need to pay for that... that... *animal's* damage.”

Okay. Here's where we started doing a little harmless brain alteration. “Uhm yeah. Not going to happen. You deserved it. Whatever you said to Jacky about Teague, it must have been vile. That wolf that just crapped on your rug saved your life—buy a new carpet and get over it.” I was angry, so I put a little more power in my voice than was strictly needed.

“I'm over it,” Mr. Jack Senior echoed tonelessly, and I nodded. Excellent. These were not the werewolves he was looking for—we were good. And then I heard it, outside the open door, loud and clear. A human growl, unmistakable and unmistakably sexual. And an answering growl, a challenge. And then a submissive yelp.

Oh shit. When I spoke again, it was with some urgency.

“And here's what else is going to happen. You're not going to track Jack down. You can send him anything you want, but if you try to find him without his permission, your brain will explode and come out your nose.” This was probably a lie, but they'd believe it and that's what was important. There were grunts now coming from that open door way, and a human yelp, and then the clear sound of flesh slapping across flesh. *Fight it or fuck it*, Green had

said. Well... they weren't fighting.

I started nodding, figuring that if Jack's parents nodded back the whole 'speaking with power' thing would be working. "And under no circumstances are you two going to mention men turning into big fucking," (ouch on the pun!) "dogs, do you both hear me?"

They nodded dumbly, and Bracken and I met eyes and started gathering twisted glops of clothing so we could get the hell out of there. "You hit them so hard you're lucky their brains *don't* run out their noses," Bracken whispered as we juggled shoes and neared the door.

"Well did you *hear* what was going on?" I asked frantically, trying not to trip on someone's pants-leg as we got down the landing stairs. We stopped short when we got there, looking blankly at the two naked men, bent over the hood of the Mustang, fucking like it was a video game and their dicks were killing bad guys.

"I'm *sidhe*," Bracken said numbly as we watched two incredibly private men have sex in public. "Of course I heard." If his body was as treacherous as mine, he had a hard-on that could shatter steel.

Teague was biting Jacky's shoulder, hard enough to leave a bruise if they weren't both werewolves with supersonic healing mojo, and his hand was knotted in Jacky's hair, arching his back, making him completely vulnerable and accepting as Teague pounded the snot out of his widely stretched backside.

This house was in the Fabulous Forties—a block of old, grand houses in downtown Sacramento that was known for its expensive renovations and Christmas light displays. Most of the people who lived here were going to be home the day before Thanksgiving. With horrified fascination we looked around and saw no fewer than four housewives wearing aprons et al, holding phones to their ears as they looked outside at the hot gay werewolf sex.

"We've got to get out of here," Bracken and I said in tandem, and then looked at the guys who showed no signs of stopping.

Fight it or fuck it. If we stopped option B, option A would take its place. I was out of ideas—I'd rather have them doing what they were doing than killing people-- and then Bracken said, "Hey—can you get those guys in a shield bubble?"

Oh yeah. I could do that.

The shield bubble surrounded the two of them and lifted them off the ground—still in fine fucking form-- while Bracken opened the doors and pushed the seats forward (and dumped the clothes in while he was at it). I had to think *squish* like an under-filled balloon and the two guys were dropped with grunts into the black leather backseat.

Where they continued to fuck like lemmings doing highballs of Viagra and Spanish Fly.

Bracken and I looked at each other again, our discomfort reaching exquisite levels. We were both hot—we'd seen men make love before, Bracken had been on the giving and probably the receiving end in his own day—but this... this was unwilling. They were as unaware as children—it felt wrong and exploitive to be in the car with them when they were doing this. It felt even worse to be turned on.

But there were sirens and we really had to get the hell out of there.

The drive didn't make it any better. Fortunately Teague had those blind things on the back window, so I don't think many people figured out what was going on inside the car on the business roads, but the sex—it was never ending.

We thought it ended once. As we were approaching the freeway, things got louder and more intense and there were cries and then groans and then a spattering sound on Teague's upholstery, and as much as we were wiggling in our seats, I almost hit the horn in complete relief.

But by the time we'd gotten on the freeway proper and were up to speed, the 8"X10" youporn.com clip in the rearview was starting up again, same positions, different dangers, as I tried to negotiate pre-Thanksgiving traffic. I just tried to ignore the frenzy of pale flesh and grunting, sweaty, mansexing bodies as I got stuck behind family minivans going twenty miles an hour.

This time we gave a couple of truckers a show—they were alongside us and weren't distracted by the blinds, so they got a nice long look at round two.

And round three.

The refractory period after round three lasted from Ophir to Auburn—Bracken actually looked at me hopefully—the first time we made eye contact since we got in the car. Maybe? Maybe the nightmare in the backseat was...

Teague growled, and if I could have seen his eyes, they may have been wolf-blue, and Jacky gave a yelp and a whine.

Hey, you—you the guy I've been riding for the last hour!

Again?

I'm hard, you're wet, let's go.

Well, if I have to...

Teague-the-man may have trouble reaching for happiness, but Teague-the-wolf-in-man's-body knew what was needed from his beta and his mate: Nothing less than total and complete submission, whether it was to a barked order or... well... more

physical inducements.

They finished round four as we were pulling up the drive, and Jack gave a little whimper of completion. Teague growled then, a low sound almost like a cat purring, and I wondered if he would do that even as they slept.

Bracken and I weren't going to stick around long enough to find out.

I squealed into the garage and came to a hard stop, and we threw open the doors and lunged out of the car. I forgot my purse and barely remembered my knitting, and together the two of us ran for the stairs. I didn't take them fast enough because Bracken caught me up in his arms about halfway up and blurred me to the top, and if we hadn't nearly knocked Green on his ass, we wouldn't have stopped for anything.

I had consciously avoided mental contact with Green on the trip—we could do fairly dramatic things in each other's heads when we were aroused, and, well, I had been driving. But one look at our flushed faces and labored breathing, one scent of the arousal I knew was flooding my body and my panties (and the man-sex that was probably seeping through our clothes) and Green had a pretty good idea of what was up.

"Things didn't go well?" he asked, his voice as urgent as Bracken's pee-pee-hard-on dance, and we both nodded emphatically.

"It was a major wolf-fuck," I confirmed. "In fact, I think it was a couple of them."

"Four," Bracken muttered, "It was four."

Green's eyes widened. "Any bodies?"

"Nope, just some shit on the carpet and some partially wiped memories...the guys are still in the car..."

"Then go!" he cut us off, making shooing motions—if anyone knew the importance of thundering to sexual lightening it was an elf who derived his power from the physical act of mating and love.

Bracken didn't waste any time after that, and although I might have wished to ask Green to join us in a minute (because Erik was in town so Nicky was spoken for) at the moment, privacy was all we needed.

The door was hardly slammed behind us when my pants were yanked around my ankles and I was hefted abruptly on the bed on my hands and knees. Bracken was inside me before I could even scramble for purchase on the smooth sheets or let go of my knitting bag, and he's so damned big it was almost painful, but I was so damned wet that it wasn't. And then it was, but in that glorious, torturous, arousing way that sex can be when *not* being fucked into the mattress would be the most painful thing of all.

Round two began when we were still recovering from round one, but for round three, I managed to get turned around so that we were face to face. There's something reassuring about the good ol' missionary position when your body is spinning out of control, and the feeling of his mouth on mine was erotic and sweet, and we managed to slow the whole works down. Our hands shook when we stroked each other's faces and shoulders, and I felt tears start at the intensity... ah, gods, I was grateful for Bracken. His great strength, the strength of his heart, his humor.

This whole nightmare of voyeurism would have been beyond embarrassing if Bracken's flat, sensual mouth hadn't been quirked in self-mockery even as our eyes closed and he buried himself deep inside me and we groaned and shivered in each other's arms.

The sex-magic ripping through the hill didn't end with us—in my life, it was never just two. About the time Bracken and I were panting and—finally!—contemplating a shower, Green tiptoed in gingerly, looking apologetic and, well, hard up.

Green should never be hard up.

I held out my arms, and his kiss was explosive and skin-shattering, and round four actually kicked up the power a notch, so that it slid out of my fingertips, zinged out of my pores, and when Green had roared and bit my shoulder in a completely satisfying way, his body shimmering into mine like silver music, we all sank into the bed and laughed a little.

Damned if I hadn't redecorated the paneling again.

Usually after an afternoon like this one we would get to sleep until whenever, but it was the day before Thanksgiving—of *course* there was work to do.

Grace woke me up about a half-an-hour after the early November dark. She was both apologetic and unhinged.

"What in the hell did you do?" she asked, setting down a tray and some food. I squinted and swung my legs over the bed, clutching my grandmother's quilt with me. (Of course this dragged it off a sleeping Green and Bracken, but since everybody had seen them naked pretty much anyway, I figured I needed it more.)

The walls were a bright, acid autumn yellow and a deep passion purple with a huge swath of blushing magenta slashing through the two high contrasts. The colors of lust, sex, and embarrassment—wonderful. Thanksgiving colors, they were not—but they would have looked *awesome* on a pair of embarrassed socks.

"Wasn't my fault," I mumbled. "Innocent victims of a sex tsunami, sweartagod."

"Yeah, you and the rest of the hill. I woke up and Arturo was staring at me—I swear that man was two seconds away from total necrophilia."

I gasped and choked on my sandwich and then looked at her reprovingly. She grinned, her fangs extending just a little, and raised her eyebrows suggestively. Goddess, I loved Grace.

“Anyway, he didn’t tell me what got him so het up—like the rest of us he’s got work to do! You and Bracken are due at the shop in half an hour—you know that, right? Setting up for black Friday? Remember?”

Oh dammit. “We’re not going to make it in time,” I told her, “but let me shower and we’ll only be late.”

Grace nodded. “So, are you going to tell me what happened?”

My face heated. “Yeah, we fucked up and let the werewolves out of the house today.”

Grace’s look of horror spoke eloquently of all the things that *could* have happened but didn’t. “Are there any bodies?” she asked, completely literal.

I shook my head and spoke through another bite of sandwich. “Just their naked ones, doing the thing through two counties. I drove.”

Grace shook her head in disbelief. “Well this *is* the season to be thankful—thankful you and Bracken are still alive! But…Teague—does he remember?”

I shrugged, but I knew why she’d ask. “As far as I know, he’s still sleeping it off—probably will be until tomorrow morning. But no. I don’t know how he’ll react.”

Oh Goddess—Teague. He was such an inexpressibly private person—all of that pain, wrapped tight and ripening around his soft, vulnerable heart. He’d been so close to reaching for happiness when he didn’t reach for anything.

Grace and I looked at each other in total accord, our silent prayer so singular, we might as well have said it out loud. It haunted me and Green and Bracken as we ran through our shower and got dressed, and it sat unspoken on all of our shoulders through our night’s work. It kissed me goodnight as we fell into bed, gratefully tired in the wee hours of the morning.

Please Goddess, let this latest development not shatter glass around Teague Sullivan’s reaching hand.

Teague

Meeting Eyes

Teague vaguely remembered the nightmare. This night he was too tired to fight it, but also too tired to sit up in bed screaming, either. He may have twitched and whimpered before smelling Katy and feeling her warmth and convulsing her softness against his hard body. He slept with her sandwiching him against Jacky's long, lean strength.

It was the smell—comfort, softness, sweet acceptance—that calmed him down.

In the morning, that softness was right up against his body, and Jacky was wrapped around his back, thrusting a man's usual morning condition hard against Teague's thigh.

Teague grunted, his hips undulating, and Katy let out a pleasurable groan. Teague gathered her in his arms, and it felt so right, so normal, so *wonderful* that he couldn't make himself stop and think about it. His hand found her breast under her T-shirt, her nipple popping up into his palm, and she gasped. He buried his nose in the hollow of her neck, liking the smell of her hair, and liking the way Jack's body felt behind him. Jack's prick had slid between Teague's thighs, and he was slowly thrusting back and forth, growing slick against Teague's skin.

But it wasn't until Teague's own erection prodded at the edge of Katy's underwear that his eyes truly opened.

Teague never slept naked. Where were his tighty-whiteys? Where was the T-shirt he often slept in? Where were Jacky's boxers?

Memories of the day before crashed behind his eyes like ice into a freezer, so loud and so cold that he was surprised he couldn't hear a clatter.

And just that abruptly, Teague was crouched on the bed between them, then leaping over the end and standing in the middle of the room with wild eyes.

"Oh fuck!"

Jack sat up, his body still hidden under the covers, and spoke gently, like a child to a rabid dog. "Teague... Teague, it's okay. We're... we're mating, right? We like each other?" Something about Teague's anguished look made Jack reassess that statement.

"We *love* each other?"

Teague nodded jerkily. "Yeah. No. It's okay. It's fine. We'll do this. But I'm late. For a run. I need to go for a run. I always go for a run in the morning. I've got to go." He punctuated his words by rifling through his drawers, making a hash of the neat, duffel-folded piles. "Where the fuck are my clothes?" he muttered. "Where are they?" He held out a pair of Jack's boxers. "These aren't mine. WHERE THE FUCK ARE MY UNDERWEAR??!"

A long-fingered, masculine hand came into Teague's vision, steadying itself on Teague's blunter, more powerful one. "They're in the drawer below this one," Jack said softly. "Teague, buddy," swallow, "beloved, there's no reason to freak out."

Teague ripped open the drawer and pulled out his underwear, found his running shorts and a T-shirt, and threw them on with movements so quick he almost blurred. "Not freaking out."

"Teague, *papi*," Katy said gently from the bed, "you are the definition of 'freaking out'."

"Not freaking out." Teague laced his running shoes, forcing himself to slow down so he didn't snap the laces. "Not freaking out. Not...swear I'm not... it's just..." He looked up at both of them, swallowed and closed his eyes. A mini-porn movie featuring him and Jacky played against the back of his eyelids, and his rope officially snapped.

"I love you," he said hoarsely, looking at Jacky. "I love you *both*, but I have *got* to get the *fuck* out of here!"

And then he was gone, pounding across the floor, the door slamming behind him.

Jack

Different Colors

Jack sank back onto the bed, mindless of his nakedness next to Katy, and scrubbed his hands through his overlong hair.

"That could have gone better," he said randomly, and then flopped backwards to stare blankly at the ceiling.

Katy turned on her side to look at him, resting her head on her arm. "*Mijo*, a prison riot would have been better than that."

Jack turned his head to grin at her, and to appreciate again her soft prettiness. "A prison riot might not have left me quite this sore." Blink. "Holy God, what the hell happened to the walls?"

"I thought you'd know, Jacky—whatever happened with you two, Cory came home and got busy. This happened about an hour after Green told me I might want to watch over you guys as you slept." She was frankly curious, and Jack, looking at her—frowzy, desirable, puzzled, and obviously a little bit hurt, figured she had earned the right to know.

"I... I turned yesterday," he said hesitantly, thinking about his snarling hatred of his parents, his slaving anger and need to hurt the people so obviously trying to harm his mate. "I... Teague turned with me."

Katy blanched. "Oh Goddess... did you kill anyone?"

Jack was surprised. "No—*no!* He just..." The blush felt like it swept around his neck and down his chest and up his face. "Uhm. Uhm. You know..." Oh, Goddess... suddenly he couldn't breathe, and Katy's gentle hand feathered on his cheek and he could again.

"Bugged you shitless," she suggested bluntly, and her word choice only made the blush worse.

"I think I took my last dump on mom's marigolds—but the rest is about right." He covered his face with his hands again, blocking out the pleasant room and the bright colors of the wall—purple, yellow, red. The colors of arousal and embarrassment, the same colors he saw behind his eyelids right now.

"I think I see why Teague freaked out," he muttered, not wanting to imagine the Lady of the house and her lover watching him and Teague go at it like gay porn on speed.

"You're not freaking out on me, are you Jacky?" Katy's voice was so unsure, so hesitant, and Jack felt an unfamiliar pressure of having to pull himself together for someone else. Teague always let him do the falling apart, always picked up his pieces. There had only been that one time, right before they'd confronted Katy as a wolf and Jack got bit—once and once only, when Teague had gone running in the rain...

"Aww shit!" he swore, and pushed himself to his elbow, then looked at Katy ruefully, touching her face in turn. She closed her eyes and rubbed up against his hand and he stroked her hair back and leaned in to kiss her mouth. She opened for him, and he felt her hurt recede, felt some of the self-confidence that had bled away replenish itself.

It should have surprised him that nothing about this arrangement between them seemed cumbersome, or odd. It seemed necessary. They would even each other out, keep each other safe. Make sure that when one of them went flying off the deep end, the other two would be there, anchoring, supporting. For the first time he actually saw how Green and Cory and Bracken and even Nicky fit together like puzzle pieces.

"No, sweetheart," he said, remembering Teague's caution about treating her like a princess, "I'm not freaking out. And neither is Teague—not really. He just needs his run. Needs to pull his guts back in and stitch them up down the middle and pretend he never hurt."

Katy frowned, little white teeth nibbling on a lovely full lip. "But he *did* hurt, Jacky—why you think I'm in your bed to start with?"

Jack closed his eyes. “Because Teague whimpered in his sleep like a little kid?” Of course he knew. He’d just been pretending not to see for the last two weeks.

“What you think he dreams about?” she asked seriously, and he shook his head. Even when he was listening to Teague in the middle of the night, he’d never heard truly what the dreams themselves were. But he had a pretty good idea.

“He dreams about hurting us,” he said, and Katy made a whimpering sound.

“I can’t believe we just let him go,” she muttered, and Jack shook his head.

“I can’t believe he won’t let us in,” he muttered. “I can’t believe he’s not safe enough with us to do...” He threw himself on his back again and his hands made a vague, encompassing gesture, and he sighed. He was getting cold—he should either get under the covers or shower and dress.

“This?” Katy asked, and Jack turned to her tenderly and touched her face again and grinned.

“This. This is good. You’re becoming essential to us, Katy—he just needs to be here for it, that’s all.” Jack rolled over and kissed her, and she responded, but both of them pulled back, conscious of Teague’s absence like they’d be conscious of living without their skin.

“He didn’t even bring a jacket,” she said fretfully as he pulled away, and Jack looked out their little skylight window and saw the gray slashes washing the glass. Another wave of sadness and worry and love swamped him for his emotionally naked werewolf lover, running in the rain.

And that was incentive enough. “Is it raining in the grove?” he asked, rolling out of bed, and Katy thought for a moment.

“No—I don’t think so. Not today.”

Jack sighed, and decided to take a shower then. “I can’t catch up with him, but I’ll go wait.”

“Should I...?”

Jack shook his head and leaned over and kissed her again, just because she tasted good and he didn’t want her to feel bad. “This one is between the two of us, field mouse.” It was Teague’s pet name for her—he’d heard Teague use it before. He liked it.

She smiled briefly, as though she could enjoy them both calling her that. “I... I want this so badly, Jacky,” she murmured, and his heart broke a little at the nakedness on her face. “I can feel him reaching for me sometimes... feel him want me... and I’m just afraid he’ll stop himself from it. Something like this... he’s so...”

“Damaged,” Jack said with a swallow. “He’s damaged. He knows it. He doesn’t want anybody else to be hurt by his damage.”

“I’d rather be hurt by his damage than be hurt because he pulls away,” she said honestly, and little tears trembled on her lashes. “To almost have him this morning...and then he runs away?”

Jacky swore, and moved in closer, brushing a teardrop with his thumb. “He was running away from... from what happened between us. From being out of control. From... from fucking me into the backseat of the car instead of ripping my throat out—which is probably what I deserved!” Oh, God, that hurt, but it was the truth. Jack had lost himself, had lost his identity, had been so bent on killing the bad guy that he’d not reckoned on the cost to the person who meant more to him than anything.

He sighed again and looked outside. “He’s going to need us when he’s done—I... he’s done this before. If we’re lucky, it won’t be so long.”

“Dinner is a half-an-hour after dark.” She sounded apprehensive, and Jack remembered her talking about a new dress she’d bought for the dinner alone.

“Teague will knock on your door to take you up,” he promised. “Weren’t you going to go help this morning?”

“Yeah,” she sniffled, and Jack kissed her again, just to make the tears go away.

“I promise you, Katy. I fucked this up. I’ll fix it!”

She grinned at him suddenly, the expression like sunshine in the grey-filtered light. “Jacky, you have no idea what it means, that you two care enough for all of this. It’ll be okay.”

Jack nodded, hoped he could make it true, and jumped off to the shower.

Teague

Wet Heroes

Teague ran so quickly and so blindly that he didn’t hear Cory in front of him until he almost plowed over her.

As it was, he blinked the rain out of his eyes and grunted a ‘scuse me’, and would have

just passed her but she called out, “Wait up, we need to talk about,” wheeze, “tomorrow!” She sounded winded, and her movements were jerky and tight. Concern alone made him look at her again, and he realized that, like him, she was out in a T-shirt and shorts, and that, unlike him, she had slid once and fallen and her shorts and knees were plastered in mud.

“Who let you out without a jacket?” he demanded, and she rolled her eyes. Somewhere beneath the pattering of the rain and the thunder of his own heart, he heard something that sounded like an exasperated grunt from the direction of the trees, but his own self-involvement hammered right over it.

“I could ask the same thing,” she said sourly, seeming to get a rhythm with her feet after a moment, “but I’m pretty sure you woke up and ran the hell out of your bedroom like a jackrabbit instead of a wolf, so I won’t.”

He was silent for a moment, trying to think of a good comeback, but he remembered his behavior of just minutes before and couldn’t.

“How did you know?” he asked after a couple of moments where only their feet and their breathing mattered.

There was a suppressed laugh. “Goddess Teague—do you think you’re the first human to end up here?”

Teague swallowed, and risked a look at her. “I’ve seen what you do,” he said after a few moments. “You’re not human.”

She shrugged, the gesture hard to see in their running pattern. “I was when Adrian brought me home. He knew different. Arturo knew different. Green figured it out in a sweet hurry. But I didn’t.”

“When’d you figure it out?” he asked, and there was another strangled laugh.

“Mmm... I think it was the morning after Adrian and I had sex in the garden, and I healed his heart in front of the entire fucking hill.” She said it matter-of-factly, but his werewolf could smell the embarrassment coming off her from something that must have taken place a while ago.

“On purpose?” Dumb question. *Asinine* question. What the hell was wrong with him to ask such a question? But it didn’t seem to phase her.

“No, Teague, not on purpose—the sex, well, that was between me and Adrian. But the sorcery—I didn’t know about that yet. The whole hill turned out because Green needed to contain us, and I was just a freaking power explosion without a clue.” The self-disgust was hard to hear—not from someone he respected so profoundly.

“You must have been young,” he said comfortingly, and the look she gave him was

enigmatic.

“Yeah. Once upon a time I was young.” She was panting and moving stiffly and suddenly she drew up short and grunted, leaning her hand on a tree and stretching out her calf and thigh with urgency.

He stopped too, and realized that his new werewolf muscles weren’t nearly as offended as his old human muscles would have been. He wasn’t warm—it was cold and he was wet—but his body didn’t need him to run in place like he would have needed to when he was just Teague Sullivan, white-trash survivor.

“Fuck...” she hissed, massaging her muscle. “Goddamned-mother-dicking-cockroach-sucking-sonovabitch-eating-pigeon-rutting-cluster**FUCK!**” She gave a hearty groan and pounded the tree with her fist, and Teague watched her in helpless sympathy. Finally, the muscle spasm passed, and she took a couple of tentative steps in the direction they were going. Her ponytail was dripping down her back and her bangs were plastered to her eyes. Her T-shirt was sticking to her body and he could see the outline of a white lace bra—cute, but not the type of thing you’d run in. His own self-absorption faded, and he realized that her shorts were much too big for her—they were knotted at her waist—and she was running without socks.

“Lady Cory,” he asked, when she’d proven she could limp a few steps on her own, “why did you come out here to run?”

She smiled brightly at him through the pain and the rain. “Why, to stay in shape!” She was not great at lying.

“Okay—why did you want to talk to me, then?”

Her smile cranked up a notch. “Well, to plan about picking up the So Cal alphas—right?”

He shook his head—this was well-covered territory—but her cranked-tight smile dared him to call her on it.

“Screw that,” she sighed, coming clean. “What I’m trying to say now is that we get it. That morning-after with Adrian would have ended me. I would have run away to be a hermit in a cave if it hadn’t been for Green.”

He looked away then, and made as though to run again, and her voice rose in desperation because she was obviously in no shape to keep up with him.

“Teague—how do you think I felt the morning after we created the Goddess Grove?”

He stopped so short he almost slid in the mud. “That was you?” he asked, suddenly blushing furiously. Looking at the trees in the Goddess Grove had made him hard and Jacky

happy more than once in the two weeks since they'd been there.

"Well I had *help!*" she spat cantankerously. "But it was only a few weeks after I healed Adrian—and suddenly, not only did the whole world get to SEE me have sex in public, they got me in a threesome, sculpted in living wood!"

Teague swallowed. Ouch. "It's not just the sex," he muttered involuntarily.

"I know," she retorted, limping gamely along. "Do you...think I...don't know?"

He looked at her hard, and realized her teeth were chattering now that she was no longer running. "Goddammit—you need to go inside..."

"Just shut up!" she snapped. "Look, Teague—you're afraid because you think you screwed it up. You think *Oh my God! I lost complete control! I suck worse than any sucker in the history of suckage!* Am I right?"

Teague found himself laughing in spite of the spiked lead weight in his stomach. "Yes, Lady Cory, I suck worse than any sucker in the history of suckage," he answered, trying not to giggle.

Her slug on his arm completely surprised him. "And *that's* where you're wrong, you dumb motherfucker!"

"Hey!" He held up his hands in self-defense.

"You're wrong. We've been telling you and Jacky for two weeks that this was dangerous for you, but you haven't been listening. It *was* dangerous—but it was more dangerous for Jacky. His self-control is non-existent—he's the type of guy who holds it all in and then beats up a wall to let it all out, and there he was, in an emotionally volatile situation, and suddenly it wasn't beating up walls, it was killing someone. You know who the hero was there, Teague?"

"You, for stopping him?"

"No, asshole, *you* for stopping him. I may have stopped the initial charge, but you had the same idea—and you *did* stop his second one, and that's pretty damned impressive. And as for the sex," she added, when he was going to bring it up, "the sex was your other option. Green told you—he told me, he told Katy—you guys have two choices when you first change. You can fight it or fuck it. You could have ripped him open—you've been dreaming about it, it's your worst goddamned fear."

Teague swallowed and nodded. Yes. It was his worst goddamned fear.

"Well you had a choice, fight it or fuck it. You picked option B. Buddy, you may think you're a screw-up, but I got to tell you, to the rest of the hill, you're a goddamned hero!"

Teague *did* stop short and slide this time, only his shapeshifter muscles keeping him from a classic ass-flop in the mud. “The whole hill?” he said weakly. “You told the whole hill?”

She flushed. “I didn’t *tell* anyone,” she muttered.

“Then how...”

Cory didn’t bother to slip. She gave up all pretense of running and just sat square in the mud, practically in the middle of a wash as the rain continued to batter at their bare heads and over the soft earth. “They just know,” she muttered, scrubbing her face with her hands and leaving thick brown smudges all over the pale, freckled skin. “They know because *I* had sex, and they just fucking know. Everybody knows. And they’ll be cool about it. They’ll mention it so it’s not like the big stinky yellow-and-purple elephant in the room and they’ll give you enough shit to let you know that they don’t really give a shit *about* it. They could find you *fucking* the damned elephant, and they’re the Goddess’ people so they’d still love you. But no.”

She looked up at him, cold and miserable and irritated and suddenly seeming far younger than he assumed she was—he’d thought she was older than Jacky, but now? Was she even Katy’s age? “No what?” he asked, putting out his hand. She sighed and took it and stood clumsily, stiff and sore as though she hadn’t stretched into a run at all.

“No, sweetheart,” she said with faint self-mockery. She ran her hands over her hair and turned it into an instant mud-nest. “No, you don’t have any privacy anymore. You’ve traded it in for a family that gives a damn, and sometimes it will make you bananashit, but most times—like tonight around the table, when you see how many people give a crap that you’re there? It’s going to feel like your heart is the size of the sky, and you’re going to see that reaching for love is like reaching for salt or your fork or another drink of beer. Any little kid can do it, and you’re a grown man. It ain’t no big thing.”

“No big thing?” he repeated blankly, staring into the silver wash that had become their entire world. Beyond it he thought he could see Sean Sullivan, scarred face, heavy hand and all. Beyond the rain he could hear a harsh voice calling him shit, calling him nothing, calling him crap and worthless and a complete waste of time, money, and oxygen.

But in this bubble of rain he heard this little girl’s words, and saw her warrior’s face squinting up at him, and all he could think of was that Jacky and Katy had been warm and hard and soft and *real*, and all he’d had to do was reach for them, and he had been too afraid.

It seemed silly to be afraid to reach for them, as silly as being afraid of the rain.

Cory was looking at him with complete compassion, and he blinked, hard, and again. Not all of it was rain. His eyes stung and his chest suddenly ached for his body to exert itself, for his muscles to heave, for the world to blur so the only person in this bubble of rain was himself and his frantic thoughts and putting them into the order of even footsteps over the muddy ground.

“It’s okay, brother,” she said softly. “Go run. Your thoughts will be there, with your beloveds when you get to the top of the hill.”

“But...you’re cold...” he had to run. He *had* to, but something in him rebelled at leaving her here, as bedraggled as a stray kitten in the rain.

“I’ll be fine. I’ll probably,” her mouth twisted up, “beat you back.”

He didn’t see how she would, but his feet were splatting along the trail before he could finish the thought.

He got to the top of the next rise and his sense of responsibility reasserted itself. He turned back to her, thinking he should walk her back to the hill, but she was gone. He spared a moment to wonder where she went—she’d been limping pretty badly, but that urge, that *drive* to run took over, and he was hauling ass down the trail again.

Jack

Brothers and Lovers and Sisters And Others

Jack wondered if he should have understood the thing between Teague and Cory just a little better. He’d *had* a sister. He understood that instant empathy, the person you could talk to, the opposite side of your coin, the unconditional understanding.

But, dammit, *he* wanted to be that. Why couldn’t Teague say these things to *him*? He had grown up sheltered and been allowed to be shy, to be removed. He hadn’t been forcibly isolated from the rest of the world by violence—he had elected to stay uninvolved because the select few people of his choosing had been more than enough.

Teague—and now Katy—were more than enough to be his whole world. But apparently Cory felt like Teague needed her royal highness in his life in addition to two lovers. Jack had met her as she was being carried in out of the rain by Bracken. She’d been sopping wet and shivering and reassuring Jack that Teague would be all right when his run was over. As Teague ran up the hill, some storm-wrought semblance of peace on his face, Jack didn’t understand why Teague, who had spent so long needing *no one* could now look so much better after talking to someone who wasn’t *him*.

But ‘better’ still wasn’t good, and Jack’s seething resentment all-but evaporated as Teague ran up into the overcast environs Goddess Grove, looking bedraggled and sopping wet and—hard for a werewolf—damned cold.

Jack stood from the cushion-covered bench and sighed, holding out a giant fluffy yellow towel he’d gotten from Grace. Teague didn’t rush into his embrace and cuddle like a child the way Jack may have wanted, but he did take the towel and wipe his face and nod thanks with a

brief, hard smile.

“I’m sorry,” Teague said, wrapping the towel around his shoulders, and Jack shook his head angrily. The guy made it so hard sometimes.

“For what?” he asked, throwing his arm over that surprisingly broad back and *forcing* Teague into his warmth. Teague threw him a bone and rested his cheek against Jack’s chest for a moment.

“For running out of there like an asshole,” Teague mumbled, and, surprisingly, kept his head right where it was. “For... for biting your tail... and fucking it like a nightmare...you know, for everything.”

Jack closed his eyes tight, and for a bare moment realized why Teague might want to talk to another leader about dealing with a world full of betas.

“It wasn’t your fault,” he muttered, and then smiled a little, rubbing his own cheek in Teague’s wet hair. “Okay--the running out like an asshole—that was all you, but the other shit? Teague, that was me. That was me being...an asshole, I guess. Dumber than a box of snot. Just—just dumb. I’m glad you stopped me from killing my old man—and I’m sorry I didn’t listen when everybody told me that having it all under control was a load of horseshit.” Oh God, he’d done that... no wonder Teague didn’t want to ride with him. No wonder he got left home like the little woman, while Teague went out and ran the missions.

Jack’s voice trembled, and now he was the one who needed the embrace. “You are *never* going to trust me to have your back again, are you?”

Teague looked up at him through wet eyelashes, managing to look young and vulnerable, when he’d never been the first and would die before admitting the second.

“That’s just my life, Jacky—fuck that. I trust you to...” he blushed, the heat steaming off his cold, wet skin, “you know. Keep my heart safe.” He ducked his head and mumbled that last part, but Jack still heard it. His arms convulsed around Teague and he felt as though his whole body shuddered.

“Your life *is* my heart you dumb motherfucker,” he rasped, and Teague didn’t just submit to the hug—he returned it.

“Yeah, well backatcha,” he muttered.

They stood like that for a while, until the emotion got too much for Teague and he pulled back and changed the subject.

“You have to admit though--it was a helluva thing, turning like that.” Abruptly he sat—not on the bench Jack had been sitting on, but on the ground.

Jack followed him, ignoring the wet that sank into his jeans. He'd take another shower—hell, he'd sit in a cold tub all damned day if he could just get Teague to talk to him.

"It was," Jack agreed, switching gears—talking about the werewolf was a necessary thing. "It was actually kind of...cool." He smiled, remembering the power and the speed he'd had, the freedom of being a creature that *could* rip someone's throat out.

Teague cocked a sardonic eyebrow at Jack's dreamy smile, and Jack blushed.

"It was quiet," Teague murmured into the silence. "In my head—there wasn't all this... should-I-or-shouldn't-I bullshit. Wasn't this," Teague's turn to blush, "fear, you know? Of taking something that wasn't mine." He shot Jack a quick grin, his eyes full of something Jack had longed to see. "You are mine."

He said it with such a simple pride that Jack found himself swallowing and nodding. It really had been that easy.

"But it was nice," Teague said, nodding in return. "Not worrying whether I was good enough, whether I could provide for you and Katy, whether I could do right by you." He shook his head, wrapping his arms around his legs and resting his chin on his knees like a little kid. "I just wanted you and took you. So easy."

Jack nodded and swallowed again, and threw his arm around Teague's shoulders again, pulling his lover in, forcing his head to his chest and shielding him from the cold and the loneliness with sheer force of will.

"It can be that easy, Teague," he murmured after a moment. "All you have to do is reach for us, and we'll be there."

There was quiet then, between the two of them, and Jack treasured the feel of Teague's breath against his neck and the strong heartbeat his new hypersenses could hear throbbing under Teague's Irish-pale skin.

"Do you think Katy will forgive me?" Teague asked, after that fraught, peace-filled moment, and Jack dropped a kiss on the top of his head.

"It's done. She was puzzled, I think—maybe a little hurt. But if she can walk down to banquet tonight on our arms, it will all be forgiven."

Teague chuckled a little, the effort making his shoulders shake.

"What?" Jack asked, curious and liking the feeling of Teague's laughter.

"I told ya, Jacky—this place is just like high school but worse."

Jack nodded and pulled back so they could both stand—even he was getting

cold. “That’s true—you did. So?”

Teague shrugged and started to shoulder his way towards the trap door. “I just never thought my total happiness would ever boil down to taking a girl to prom.”

Jack rolled his eyes and grunted, then grabbed Teague’s hand before he could disappear down the granite staircase. “Our happiness, beloved,” he said hoarsely, and then, because Teague let him, gave him just enough power to do so, he pulled his lover into a kiss.

For once Teague opened his mouth, let Jack lead, let him invade, let him take, returned softly and finally pulled back and gave a lingering, soft, playful little suction on Jack’s closing lips. Jack smiled shyly. He’d gotten to lead—it was a first.

And typical Teague, he didn’t say a word about it—just pounded his way down the stairs in stoic silence.

A silence that was broken when he hit the hallway and said, “Hey—what in the fuck happened to the paneling?”

Jack guffawed and blushed and followed downstairs to tell him.

Teague

A Fork, Some Salt, and Beer

“You sure you don’t know where the clothes came from?” Teague grimaced in the bathroom mirror and slid his finger under the collar (!) of the olive green shirt that had been waiting on his bed when he got out of the shower. It had been paired with some black slacks and leather dress shoes—none of which had been in Teague’s possession when he’d woken up that morning.

“Positive,” Jack echoed dryly. Unlike Teague, he *had* dress clothes—back when he’d been a student, he’d worn them dancing and on dates. Tonight he wore black slacks and a cerulean blue mandarin collared shirt and Teague was pretty sure he was vain enough to know that it matched his eyes.

“I think,” Jack told him, reaching for the hair gel on the counter and squeezing a dollop into his palm, “that Green probably left them. Katy says he likes giving gifts.” With deft movements he slicked the gel in Teague’s rough-cut, dark-blond hair before Teague could duck like he’d been planning to.

“Fucking girl shit,” he bitched, mostly for form. He didn’t know much about dressing

up—usually, when he got laid, he showed up in a bar wearing his usual Henley-shirt and flannel, and the girl of his choice would follow him home. He didn't know why they did it, but he was usually pretty damned grateful. But tonight he was trying to show Katy he valued her. Looking decent was part of it.

He grimaced into the mirror. "I look like a redneck in dumbshit's clothing," he grumbled sourly, and was unprepared for Jack's arms to wrap around his shoulder. He was abruptly confronted with both their reflections in the mirror, and his face heated as he remembered the first time they'd had sex...shit. Made love.

"You look handsome and wonderful," Jacky said thickly, and Teague blushed even more.

"I can't believe you said that with a straight face," he muttered, not able to look either of them in the eyes.

"Look at me, Teague," Jack ordered, and Teague scowled unaccustomed obedience into his lover's eyes in the mirror. And swallowed—hard—because it was all there. Everything Jacky felt for him, everything he couldn't see for himself, it was all there for him to take. All he had to do was reach for it.

"Yeah," he said with a gruff, jerky nod. "I hear you."

"I love you too, you..."

"Dumb motherfucker—I know." Teague's mouth twitched. It really was starting to sound like an endearment. "We're going to be late."

It was imperative that they not be late—not when Katy was waiting for them, thinking that Teague might bail out in sheer terror.

Teague looked at Jack again and at their black slacks, which were cut similarly. "You don't think she's dressing to match us, do you? Because that would be just too damned squishy."

Jack laughed and shooed him out the door. "No, beloved. I think it would be impossible to make us all match. We're as different as salt and beer."

As easy as reaching for the salt or a fork or another drink of beer...

Teague almost tripped on the smooth carpet as he heard Cory's voice in his head, but they were at Katy's door now and he'd already done 'asshole' this day and was trying hard to avoid that mistake again.

He stood in front of Jack and stared at the blonde wood of Katy's door and wondered when he'd felt so nervous. Maybe that first time with Jacky, when he'd kissed the unmarked column of his spine and felt the scar that Jack's belly sported, just for Teague. He'd been scared

to death, scared of rejection, almost as scared of acceptance, because either one would mean change.

As easy as reaching for the salt or a fork or another drink of beer...

His hard raps on the door were unnaturally loud, and when the door swung open almost immediately, he almost jumped in the air like a spaz.

And then his heart and his balls jumped up in his throat and he had a hard time moving at all.

“Urgh...” He swallowed hard and tried again. “Urgh...”

Jack covered a laugh with a cough. *Real fuckin’ subtle, Jacky.* “You look really nice, Katy,” Jack said softly, and Katy beamed shyly from darkly-exotic made-up eyes.

“You think?” The dress was a dark wine color, form fitting above the v-shaped waist, with a black wrap around her shoulders. The skirt flared softly and ended just below her knees, and her fine, plump calves showed off black stockings with a little line up the back.

Teague swallowed, blushing. “Nice dress, Katy. You look real fine.” He managed a strangled smile and was going to ask her if she was ready to go, but she backed up a step.

“Can you guys wait a sec? Green gave me a necklace I need to put on—I need help.”

So together they ventured into the sanctuary of her room.

She had made it her own.

Green was free with his money—he’d frequently urged Jack and Teague to spend more of their salary and all of their allowance, but Teague, being frugal to start with, had declined. Katy had no such reservations, and her room was decorated with gauzy, jewel toned silk scarves draped everywhere, including over the canopy of her queen-sized bed.

The bed itself had a quilt on it with a giant wolf applique, and Teague would bet it was Grace’s work right there. The dark blue, red, and green colors around the quilt reminded Teague of something, but he was damned if he could think of what it was—he just knew that the vanilla and cinnamon scented room was a wonder of strength and femininity and he liked it very much.

“Nice room, Katy,” he said gruffly. “It’s you. A lot you.”

Katy’s white smile as she came out of the bathroom actually quickened his breathing. “You like?”

She handed Teague a white-gold necklace with an ornate, abstract charm in the front, and Teague found his hands shook as she swept aside that luxurious swath of curled black hair so he

could fasten it.

“It’s real pretty. All girl. You might want to think, you know, after we’re all mated and stuff, about keeping it still.”

“Why?” Her voice cracked with worry, and Teague would have kicked himself but Jack’s hand smacking the back of his head did it for him.

“Sanctuary,” he croaked, putting his rough palms on her soft shoulders and turning her around so he could adjust the charm. The skin on her neck heated his fingers, and he found he was stroking it softly, just to see the way Katy rocked sinuously to lengthen that touch. “Jacky and I are...” he grimaced and scowled at Jacky, “we’re men. I’m a grumpy bastard, and Jacky can bad-vibe the sky ‘til it’s black. You deserve a ‘Katy place’, where you don’t have to put up with that bullshit.”

He couldn’t tell from her bemused expression if she understood that this was for her own sake, and he wasn’t trying to push her away. “You’d still sleep with us and everything, Katy,” he said, trying to reassure her, and her throaty laughter finally told him that even if she didn’t understand what he was trying to give her, she at least understood that he wanted to give her the world.

His hands were sweating and he pulled them from her shoulders so she couldn’t tell, but they were shaking too, and she took them in hers and raised herself on her toes and kissed him softly. He opened his mouth in wonder, and then *she* invaded, tasted, found a home inside him, and when she pulled back her expression was kind and a little amazed.

“When would the ‘sleeping’ with you start, *papi*?” she asked softly, and he flushed. He was aware—more than aware—that they were on something of a timeline, if they were going to be three mates instead of just him and Jacky.

“If you want to start tonight, that would be fine.” He swallowed—from what he’d heard, the entire hill would be up tonight, for long and long, talking and celebrating. He had discussed with nobody and admitted not even to himself that the idea of taking part in something like that held a charm and amazement for him. If the group of people he’d worked with on his run with Cory would let him, he wouldn’t mind sitting in the back of that crowd for a while.

“Just to sleep?” she asked, looking as though he was about give her the sun and the moon and the stars—with a caveat.

“Well, you know,” Teague flushed, “whatever comes up. I mean, if you plan to stay with us, then when stuff, uhm,”

“Comes up?” she asked, her mouth quirking upwards, and he found his humor to answer her back with twinkling eyes and a straight face.

“Yup, darlin’—‘comes up’. If anything comes up, well then, you’re staying with us, and

that's a plan, right? We've planned for that. It's not happening because I'm an out-of-control horny bastard, or because I'm naked and you're soft...it's happening because that's what we want, and it's for real. So, you start sleeping in our room, and we call it done. We're mated. The other thing—that'll happen."

He closed his eyes and breathed in her smell, and Jack bumped him—on purpose—from behind. He opened his eyes and swallowed, and saw that her face had grown soft and bemused and her lips were slightly parted, just from standing close, hand in hand. "Oh yeah, Princess—that'll happen."

He took a sudden step back, thinking that her pretty dress and done-up hair shouldn't be wasted on just him and Jacky, and offered her his arm.

She took it and smiled, and together they made it out the door, with Jacky behind her, his hand on her shoulder.

The banquet room was nearly filled up when they arrived there and Katy floated down the staircase in pride. Jack and Teague met eyes then, and saw through her eyes, the formal she'd never had in school, the feeling of being valued and happy that had never been hers.

Until now.

Green, Cory and Bracken were waiting at the end of the staircase with smiles, and Cory chirpily took them to their places. She was dressed nicely in dark green, with high heels that she wobbled on once or twice, and as she approached their table, Nicky—who was sitting next to a slightly built, sandy-haired man who smelled like shapeshifter—turned around and guffawed.

"What in the hell was Bracken thinking, putting you in those?" he snorted.

Cory cast a fulminating glance to where *Green* was standing with narrowed eyes and a dark twist to his sensual mouth. "They're payback," she muttered, "for going out in the rain this morning."

"Well good for Green!" Renny snapped from across the table. Teague noted with some surprise that she was dressed in a gold/brown sweater and skirt, and the little were-kitty's usually flyaway brown hair was secured nicely in a gold clip. "Don't you have any respect for what happened last year?"

Cory's mouth thinned, and Teague realized he'd heard mutters of this all week. Bracken, Green, and even Nicky had been nagging her about her health and being careful—he just hadn't realized it was related to anything other than their usual concern.

"Just because we're supernatural doesn't mean we have to be superstitious," she said mutinously, and Nicky caught her hand before she could turn back and resume her place on the receiving line.

“Would you please, though,” Nicky asked nicely, “for us? All of us?”

Cory looked up—almost in spite of herself—and saw the same thing Teague did as he was taking his place between Jacky and Katy. He saw Renny and her husband, Max, Phillip and Marcus, Mario and Lambent and others whose names he didn’t know but whose attention was focused on the little sorceress in concern and affection.

She rolled her eyes and shook her head and blew out a breath. “Fine. Fine—I’ll send Bracken with you all tomorrow and stay in the house like a good little woman until school starts up again. No more running in the rain...”

“No more nights in the garden?” Nicky asked meaningfully, and Cory shrugged.

“After tonight?” she negotiated, and Nicky glanced at Green and Bracken and nodded.

“Fair enough,” he said softly and kissed her hand. She bent down and kissed his cheek and then smiled somewhat gamely at Teague, Jacky, and Katy.

“Ignore us our little melodramas,” she said with a bright face, and then nodded her head at everybody and walked back to talk quietly to her mates, who both nodded their heads emphatically.

It was on the tip of Teague’s tongue to ask what it was he didn’t know, but Mario turned to him with rolled eyes and said, “Hey, wolfman!”

“What?” he asked warily, but in good humor.

“Whatever it was you did to make that woman think ‘yellow’, could you not do it again? The new paneling is making my eyeball twitch!”

They’ll give you enough shit about it so you know they don’t really give a shit about it.

Teague had to laugh. “If it’s at all possible to not repeat what happened yesterday, I’d like to find a way to do that,” he said dryly, and there was a burst of laughter at the table.

Nicky spoke up impudently, saying, “Yeah—well if we could keep Bracken from pissing her off, that might work better. That black and pond-muck thing she does with the trim puts me in a funk for a week.”

“Yeah, but the make-up-sex paneling is my favorite color,” Renny chimed in innocently, and Teague glared at them both.

“Now you’re just pulling my leg!”

“Why not?” Max grinned. “It’s not like you don’t have three more and a tail!”

“Which is more than I can say for myself,” Jacky muttered. “He ‘bout chewed mine off yesterday.”

Teague colored, and Katy’s eyes twinkled as she said, “Oh, is *that* what happened to your tail?” and then Jacky flushed and the banter turned to other things.

Green stood up after a few moments and welcomed his people to Thanksgiving dinner. “We have much to be grateful for,” he said, his voice heart-full, and Teague believed him, even when the leader shocked him badly by mentioning him and Jacky and Katy in the list of people who had joined them in the past year. Max was mentioned too, and Teague was amused to see the stoic cop blush, even as his winsome kitty-bride patted his cheek playfully. Green finished up with, “And of course the good health and happiness of our Lady Corinne Carol-Anne is something we are all grateful for—she has come to set the order of our stars, and she fills my heart with every breath.”

With that the lovely, graceful sidhe turned to his beloved and bowed, and Teague watched with interest as the plain college student with the freckles and high heels all but squirmed in her seat and hid her face like a little kid. She did understand—she got it *all* Teague marveled—every insecurity he had, every doubt about himself, she felt it too. And then she stood up and rose above all of that.

“And you give life to our souls, beloved,” she said, just loudly enough to carry to the happy assembly. Then she turned to the tables and grinned. “But we still need to eat—the Goddess bless us all, and lets begin.”

Teague blinked, surprised, as dinner rolls appeared with beverages on the table in front of him. He was sure there was a carrier—a sprite, a tiny creature of some sort, but they had been so efficient—and so motivated—that they moved quicker than the eye.

There, next to his plate, was a chilled bottle of Miller, and he couldn’t for the life of him figure out how anybody had known. He looked at Jacky and saw a tall glass filled with ice and what was probably Vanilla Coke, and shook his head. Someone had known.

Jack raised his eyebrows, and Teague felt *your heart will be bigger than the sky* and did his best not to tear up like a total and complete pussy. He reached for his beer instead.

you’re going to see that reaching for love is like reaching for salt or your fork or another drink of beer

He heard her voice in his head, and looked up suddenly at Katy, who was smiling at something Renny had said, and then at Jacky, who was still gazing at him thoughtfully. He slipped the reaching hand under the table then, and the other one too, and reached instead for Jacky and Katy. He ignored their startled looks and simply squeezed their warm, welcoming hands and then released them. He put his elbows on the table and leaned forward to listen to Nicky as he started the story of why everybody was so worried about the Lady Cory this week. But he felt Jacky’s shiny eyes on him, and he turned and gave his beloved a wink, then

brushed Katy's shoulder with his own when she looked at him curiously.

A child can do that. It ain't no big thing.

Cory

Supernatural-- Not Superstitious

I sat in the garden with my bare feet tucked under my bottom and pulled the newest shawl Grace had knit me around my shoulders. This one was violet and green, a little thicker than most, and alpaca, so it actually helped keep out the chill of the rain that was hammering every place except the top of Green's hill.

I didn't have to hear the trap door open to know that Green was behind me, but I didn't turn to him. Instead I just continued to gaze at the trio of trees where I most usually saw that beloved pair of sky-spangled eyes materialize.

He wasn't coming tonight. I knew that. We'd spent a long, giddy night in the garden together, the three of us—those didn't come without a price.

Green continued on graceful stockinged feet—stockings I'd made him, actually, with beads and special old-fashioned cuff-petals and stuff. He liked them—and I liked making them for him, since there were so few occasions when he would wear socks. His hand was warm on my shoulder and I leaned into it, acknowledging his tenderness but not quite ready to break my useless focus on the place where Adrian appeared.

"Was it worth it?" Green asked, and for a moment I was confused—and a little angry. Of course it was worth it—I'd stopped asking that question last year. Then I realized that he was talking about this morning and my little foray into the rain.

"I got wet and cramped, Green," I said dryly. "It was no big deal."

Green made a Bracken sound—a sort of harassed, irritated growl. They had both been furious this morning, but I think Green more so than Bracken. (For one thing, Green got to be mad at Bracken as well as at me—double the ire, double the fun!) But I couldn't take it back. I'd seen Teague bolting out of the house in his running shoes, so blind he didn't even remember plowing me over, and I knew that *someone* had to talk with him, someone had to calm him down, or all of his healing, all of his acceptance of himself and his self-worth—it would all be shot to shit.

So I'd made Bracken blur me to the running trail, wearing whatever I could slap on in thirty seconds. His running shorts would never be the same—and my shoes weren't in such

great shape either. It had been a good plan—even if Bracken had almost blown it by making “I told you so” sounds in the brush—and if it hadn’t been pissing down rain, Teague would have either heard him or scented him nearby.

“I’d do it again,” I told Green now, hugging my knees. “I’d do it twice, and you can growl all you want, but you have to admit—they looked really happy tonight.”

Green sighed—even through his worry it was hard for him to stay mad at me. Which was good, because it was next to impossible for me to be mad at him. He came around the bench and nudged his way next to me, then seized my chin and pulled my eyes around to meet his.

“They did,” he said softly, letting his sincerity shimmer in his wide-set emerald eyes. “And I’m glad it worked out. But you need to take our worry seriously...”

“I do,” I told him, admitting for the first time—even to myself—that I remembered last year, and the great driving gulf of pain I’d almost thrown myself into. The elves—and Nicky, and Grace and Renny and pretty much everybody who remembered the events of last year—all agreed that, in the preternatural world, bad shit celebrated anniversaries too.

I’d almost died last year. I’d been so close, it had taken Adrian to come into my dreams and force me to stay. I tended to brush it off now—I was healthy, I was strong, I was beyond happy—but some things, some terrible, painful things, really did leave psychic scars. The people who loved me were afraid I’d be more susceptible to danger, to sickness, to accidents in this next week.

I kept trying to reassure them--I was almost a different person this year--but that didn’t keep Green from having a seismic aneurism when Bracken carried me in with blue lips and a universe-class charley-horse in my calf.

“You’re really going to give a grown man advice, ou’e’eir, when you’re not wise enough to get out of the rain?”

“If I am your ou’e’eir, you’ll give me credit for knowing that a little water won’t hurt!”

Of course, I’d have made a better impression if my teeth hadn’t been chattering, and if I hadn’t needed Green’s healing touch on my calf to ease the clenched and screaming muscles.

“You’ll stay close, then?” Green asked tonight, rubbing his cheek against mine, all angry words forgotten. I smiled, and the perfection of his touch made tears start at my eyes. I hadn’t been shitting Teague when I’d told him how he’d feel tonight. Ask me how I knew.

“Beloved, if I could, I’d wear you like a whole other skin.” I burrowed into his touch then, not wanting to gaze into the night anymore, not wanting to long for the thing that could no longer be. I had Green. I had Bracken. I had happiness. For this next week, at least, I needed to let my sadness be.

Green gathered me in then, and I sat on his lap with my shawl wrapped securely around my bare shoulders. We touched in silence, simply being grateful and happy for a moment—a scant moment—of peace.

Green was the one who broke the silence, uncharacteristically insecure about the fate of some of our people. “You think they’ll be alright, then luv?”

“The werewolves?” Like I needed to ask. “I think Jack is better for Teague than he will be for us,” I told him truthfully. Teague wanted Jack to take over Mario’s place in the group of students who usually went down to Sac State. I thought of long car rides with the irritated jealousy that had beaten at me the day before and almost forgot I was happy. But I should be able to overcome that, right? I certainly had no designs on Teague—wouldn’t Jack see that eventually?

“I think you’re right,” Green said surprisingly. “But I think they’re ours—both of them. Just like Katy has been. And I think I’ll be more at rest when they all actually mate and bond.”

I perked up. That’s right. Werewolves would bond—lose all desire for anybody other than their mates. An entire taut-wire of tension I didn’t know I’d had dribbled out of my spine, and I collapsed a little more securely against Green.

“Absolutely,” I murmured. “They’ll bond, Jacky will stop wishing I was dead, and it will all be gravy.”

Green chuckled, the last of his irritation at me disappearing, and he whispered in my ear. “Speaking of bonding, beloved...we *are* alone.”

“Absolutely,” I murmured back, raising my face to his.

My beloved tasted like Thanksgiving.