

College of Saint Thomas, St. Paul, MN.

February 7th

My family scurried about in the frigid sun of a dim afternoon, loading ham radio gear, the last of their personal possessions and all musical instruments into the vehicles. Having finished all I could do, I shed my bulky down jacket and laid it on the back porch railing. Knowing why I'd broken a heavy sweat in the sub-zero air, I decided to get moving quickly during the first minutes of this oncoming trance, while I still could. *Where I was going this time*, I wondered, descending the icy steps. I felt my fingers tingle with power for the second time in my life and I *Knew*. I had to clear away the snow and widen the trail back to where Marshall had left the snowplow. Then we could begin our exodus.

I stepped across the packed snow of our well-trampled side yard as the unworldly warmth sprung up. God's Power heated me to the core of my being. The morning breeze no longer chilled my body. Reaching the far wall of ice and snow, I saw that the current path was only about a meter wide. Blowing snow had filled the thirty-foot high corridor to a depth of about 25 inches.

I stretched out my right hand and pointed at the narrow pathway which led out to the snowplow. Streams of fire roared from my hand, melting the snow and widening the path almost instantly. Testing my control of the hot, glowing orange stream, I found I could manipulate the flow from trickle to blazing inferno. Then after finding a comfortable stream of the mystical flame, I concentrated on burning a path out to that plow.

I wanted away from this place.



From my vantage point, balanced up behind the metal V-shaped snow plow on the front of the bright yellow Rybind road grader, I could see William waving the white Chevrolet away. Ignoring the man, Marshall gunned Chuck's motor, and easily slid his white car in behind the snow plow. Behind him, Lin skidded the dark blue 4x4 to a halt inches from the antique car's back bumper. I could feel Jennifer's aggravation as she waited her turn in line behind her husband's vehicle. Her powder blue station wagon held our four children. In my mind I heard Marshall's chuckle.

*I intend to keep a close eye on you, my Sweet.*

*Don't trust our fearless leader?*

*In a word: no. Are you strapped in?*

*This machine redlines at a whopping 20 miles an hour.*

*It could still kill you if you're not careful.* He frowned and scolded over the link from his Chevy, its back seat and trunk filled with record albums, CDs, tapes, and stereo equipment. On the front seat were various weapons as William had insisted, just in case.

*I do not die today.*

*You know when?*

I closed my mind to Marshall, watching Liz maneuver the big fuel tanker in behind Jennifer. Judica sat in the passenger seat, the best communications we could give Liz without resorting to two-way radios, which we did not have. William popped the huge grader's clutch and bounced the machine beneath me forward several yards, almost unbalancing me.

*Careful*, I grumbled, regaining my footing on the metal beams that controlled the big grader.

*Hold on tight until I get the feel of this clutch*, William sent back, distracted by all the activity around him. *Right now, just clear about another 40 yards of road so we can line up right.*

*Sir! Yes, sir!* I didn't care if he caught my sarcasm.

Behind the polished silver tanker, Thomas, carrying Tosha and Linus the squirrel, jockeyed an old orange 4x4 in behind his wife's huge vehicle. Mentally signaling William that he was ready, Tom told me privately that Linus had made his way up the driver's seat and had settled in like a warm woolen scarf on the back of Tom's neck. The man seemed pleased across the mental link.

With the loud revving of its powerful engine, the big grader lurched forward, and I fired up my hands, directing my flames to burn and melt the almost 30 foot wall of white before us. William linked with me, monitoring the street through my eyes to determine where the road went. The parade began slowly moving east on Summit Avenue. I found myself wondering how our children would endure a painfully slow procession through the wall of snow. Grateful to be alone outside the big vehicle, I said a silent prayer that our well-used machines would last the trip.

The curb veered to the right, and I continued to burn snow, as the intersection of Fairview Avenue appeared before us. In my head, I heard William ask each local member of *The Thirty* how they were doing. All reports came back positive. An hour later we had reached our first turn a mere fifteen blocks east of the College of St. Thomas, and I burned to the right. We turned onto Ayd Mill Road, a four lane divided highway.

As I melted the great wall of white before me, I found myself thinking of the snow blinding I'd experienced as a child and how I'd spent that day with my vision tainted pink. Passing the thought to Jennifer, I sensed her brief exchange with William. A moment later, our caravan stopped, and Jan hurried forward to hand me a pair of dark sunglasses. With a fast glance at the flames that licked up from my left hand, the girl turned and disappeared back down the line of vehicles. I positioned the shades and fired up my right hand.

The grader jumped forward again.

We finally put our caravan on southbound Interstate 35 sometime in the early afternoon after a painfully slow pilgrimage though St. Paul's surface streets. We broke for a lunch of cold meat sandwiches and half-grown vegetables. Traveling distance to Tennessee, determined by Lin and Marshall seemed to be around seven hundred miles. That would have taken us two days in the before-time, but in our sad new world they calculated in extra time for our trip for detours and for trouble.

Lord William thought the trip would take no more than five days.



Just south of the Route 246 junction, and at Jennifer's bidding I suspect, William called our next break. Lowering my arms, I found them surprisingly unaffected by the hours of being held up pointing at the road before me. With a silent prayer of thanks, I moved carefully from my perch on the snowplow's beams, but before I had reached the ground, William appeared, hand outstretched to assist me. I ignored his help, easing to the wet pavement under my own power. Then I looked at up the high wall of glass-smooth ice where I had burned the snow away. Turning, I looked briefly at the bearded

man who had declared that he never should have married me. His mind was silent. I stepped around William, intent on some hot tea and a bite to eat.

Minutes later, as I leaned against Marshall's white Chevrolet, alone, munching a meat roll and some shoe string potatoes, I found William's dark eyes watching me across the hood of the Tonaka's old blue station wagon. Blue eyes under a worried brow begged questions. I turned my back and coldly studied the front hood of the classic white car.



William handled the huge grader smoothly while I continued burning the snow, unaffected by fatigue or the frigid temperatures. We had smooth road but slow going the rest of the afternoon until just past the Minnesota-Iowa border outside a small town called Kensett. At the base of a slight incline, the highway's lanes had neatly separated, and before us lay an abrupt twelve-foot drop. The pavement was in fine shape, except for a gap in the earth, like a gigantic single stair step down.

William reacted immediately to my mental surprise at seeing the damaged road. Pulling the big grader to a stop, he mentally signaled the other drivers of the emergency at the same time. Dangling over the 12-foot drop, I continued to burn snow to get a better look at our situation while Will climbed from the grader's cab for a closer look. I felt Marshall's request to look through my eyes and opened myself to him while suspecting that Tom and Jennifer would piggyback through William's eyes as he looked down the wall of collapsed earth, ice, and snow.

*Oh God, help us.* William prayed, and I joined him in his petition.

A moment later, Marshall appeared at my side, looking at the crevice as he pulled on his big leather coat. Then Lin's face showed up over William's shoulder. Muttering in

Japanese, the professor turned and walked back the way he came, passing Thomas and Liz as they came.

Climbing onto the front hood of the grader, Marshall looked out and around us, then frowned. Planting his boots on the vehicle's large rear view mirror, he vaulted up the cab's roof in the fading light.

*It seems to level out over there.* He pointed, reporting to those of us who could see through his eyes and hear him mentally. *About 75 yards west of here.*

Looking out through those green eyes, I asked Marshall to look back from where we'd come. As he did, I saw a sloping cone of snow, shaped much like a volcano, centered over our house in St. Paul. Marshall blinked, continuing to stare in that direction for me.

*That's much more pronounced than when I came back in January,* he commented with a tone of mild surprise.

*We were indeed under God's protective wall,* I sent to him with a sad sigh. *No wonder we never saw anyone else.*

*No one could get near us.*

*Hannah?* William called with guarded tones. *You and I looked under water a few weeks ago. Shall we have a look through this snow to see if we can detour across the fields?*

Reminding myself of my duties to the family, I smothered my scorched emotions over our recent fight while watching my tall blond friend gracefully descend the cab roof.

*I'd better sit down for this,* I replied.



“All the vehicles except the big rig should be able to skirt this little cliff.”

William’s breath billowed in the fading light as we gathered near the still warm station wagon engine. “Unfortunately that tanker is a different story. I don’t want to back it up to the previous exit.”

“That would involve a thirty-mile detour according to our maps,” Tom put in.

“And at minimum Marshall and I should go as escorts.”

“With me burning snow? No,” I said strongly, looking to Jennifer for support. “I don’t want to split up this little party.”

“Let’s just set up camp here for tonight and pray about this,” Jennifer suggested, twisting a lock of her golden hair. “Tomorrow we’ll know what to do.”

“Professor, just how frozen do you think the soil beneath the snow is?” I asked in an aside to Lin.

“It’s probably not permafrost, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“And how much do you think that truck weighs?” I added.

“Hann! Are you out of your mind?” William shouted, frowning. “Don’t even think it.”

“Why? If the ground is solid and several of us combine our Talents to levitate it along-”

“And if it tips over, and we lose our fuel, we’ll be stuck here.” William scowled behind his thick beard, looking around the small group of adults.

“She may have a good idea, William,” Thomas said slowly. “I should be able to

stabilize it.”

“I can help,” Jennifer and Marshall said in unison.

“No! You’ll all be down with monster migraines,” he said and shook his shaggy head with a sad sigh. “Jennifer’s right. Let’s pray on it tonight and see what comes in the morning.”



Curled up with Judica in the front seat of our cargo-filled 4x4, I had just fallen asleep when something nagged at the back of my mind. I opened my eyes and looked beyond the soft fur of the squirrel wrapped around my neck. In the darkness of the ice corridor, I could make out the silhouette of a man looking at me through the windshield. Before William could verbalize, I blocked my mind and turned my head away while telekinetically activating the door locks. The wolf raised her head momentarily and settled again, but from my lap Tosha mewed a question. Stroking the dark feline with my mitten-covered hand, I told her to go back to sleep and tried to do the same.

February 8

“Ya know, we began this journey peacefully enough, or so I thought,” Liz said through a mouthful of venison sausage wrapped in bread. “But now Thomas says you locked Will out of your 4x4 last night. What’s up with you two?”

“Forgive me, my friend, but this is none of your business,” I replied, standing near the front of the big plow and studying the steam rising from my tea. “Hey! Brighten up! Once we get around this little problem, our convoy should make better time.”

“I was amazed by how fast the snow level dropped yesterday. We left St. Paul under 30 feet of snow, and now I can see over the top of this white wall from the big rig.”

“At this rate I may be able to abandon my snow burning duties soon and let the snow plow do all the work.”

“And then Thomas can learn to handle the big rig.” Liz winced, rolling her left shoulder but smiled. “I’ll be glad for a relief driver.”

“And I bet he’s better company than Judica.”

“Actually...” she said swallowing the last of her breakfast. “I kind of enjoyed a day to myself.”

“You sound like me.”

“Why are you avoiding William?”

“Don’t want to talk about it,” I sighed quietly, as he touched my mind. “Okay! He just gave me the go ahead to fire-up and start burning.”



The path I’d cleared through the 15-foot deep blanket of snow left about 6 inches of snow and ice on the ground, as recommended by Professor Lin. We hoped to keep the earth frozen solid so we could move our convoy easily across it. On top of that layer, several inches of water flowed in the direction of my burn, making my downhill walk a wet one. Behind me, Thomas and William telekinetically removed the run-off by lifting invisible bucketsful at the rate of about two dozen a minute. Back at the road, our family waited, the adults playing Red Rover with the children to keep them occupied. Marshall’s

soothing music drifted through my head.



After all the other vehicles had been backed out of the way, William settled in behind the steering wheel of the fuel tanker, not willing to risk a pregnant Elizabeth to this dangerous detour. He was the only other person who had ever handled an eighteen-wheeler. Throwing the machine in reverse, he slowly backed the long truck up the highway until he could turn it onto our newly constructed detour. Then he ground the gears until he found the lowest gear, and the big rig leapt forward about three feet and stalled. Starting it again, he eased it into gear this time, and the truck slowly crept across the road's shoulder. In front of him, Thomas walked backward, ready to steady the truck with his levitation talent, if necessary. I followed behind the eighteen-wheeler, monitoring its progress with every sense and talent I had.



About 80 miles later, we came upon an old construction site near a railroad overpass. Along the side of the road ahead, the tops of giant Caterpillar tractors and road graders poked through the pristine snow. The virgin white blanket lay untouched except for the indentation of small game tracks here and there off to my right. As we approached the underpass, I heard William's mental call to stop the convoy. I focused on his being. He felt cautious, and then his mental radar swept the roadway ahead. Then the big snowplow's engine wound down as it eased to a halt.

Before I could scan the area myself, gunshots rang out. Dropping behind the plow's huge blade, I mentally placed a protective energy dome around my extended family and the vehicles, like the one I'd surrounded Marshall in on the night on my

imitation wedding.

Ragged soldiers began attacking us from all different directions.

Marshall projected an illusion of a Tyrannosaurus Rex that roared while a thundering blast of real fire erupted from its mouth, compliments of William. As snow melted near the assailants from the dragon's greenish blue fire, I heard Will yell that I'd better pick up my feet. The terrorized soldiers shouted but continued firing on us, unaware that their bullets bounced harmlessly off my force field. Maintaining the protective shield, I burned snow as fast as William could drive the slow plow. As we lumbered forward, Thomas telekinetically pushed the snow back onto the road to deter the soldiers from following us.

That night, we camped on the shoulder of Interstate 80 about 50 miles south of Des Moines at a rest area near Osceola. There was less than three feet of snow on the ground, so we women quickly assembled several makeshift igloos while the men prepared our evening meal. That night, I again slept in a vehicle with only my animal friends' companionship.



February 9, 10, and 11

Lin, Tom, and Marshall wanted our caravan to head east this morning to Chicago, while William insisted that we take Interstate 35 South. Even though I had relatives in the Windy City, I knew they'd been vaporized, so I sided with Lord William. We didn't need to find out how fast our Geiger clickers could go. I insisted that we continue south, getting us out of the snow as soon as possible. Of course, whenever Lord William and Lady Ann agreed, nobody would argue.

Our caravan continued south.

By mid-morning we had crossed the Missouri border, and we stopped for lunch on the side of the road just north of Cameron. As the sun dipped abruptly into the western sky, we skirted Kansas City on the I-435 bypass, still traveling only as fast as the snow plow would allow. We turned East on Interstate 70 toward St. Louis at dusk. After an incident free day of almost painfully boring travel, we camped in the deserted town of Odessa that night.

On our third day of our journey, I no longer perched on the snowplow, no longer had to burn snow as William drove. We started driving slowly into the sunrise. I now drove the Bronco that Thomas had been driving. He took over for Liz in the big rig fuel tanker. We had barely traveled 50 miles when Jennifer's panic flooded the mental plane. She thought young Daniel was riding with Marshall, while my friend had no idea that the boy had asked Jen if he could ride in the old white car.

Daniel was not with Marshall.

So, we backtracked to Odessa and used all our energies and talents for over three hours until we found the boy curled up inside a deserted gas station bathroom, scared and babbling incoherently as he shivered in the cold. William scolded him beyond what I felt was reasonable. Jennifer fussed at the boy so much that I stepped into the mess demanding that they both leave Daniel with me. I took the frightened boy to my vehicle and let my animals care for him. I told both William and Jennifer to calm down, and then we hit the road again.

We had another problem within a few hours. The tanker truck blew a tire, and that took our four inexperienced men many hours to repair it out in the middle of nowhere

north of St. Louis, Missouri. When it became obvious that the task would take our men the rest of the day, Jennifer decided to make camp in the diminishing snow. So we women and children dragged out the camping gear while the men struggled to change a truck tire alongside the frozen road without a tire jack.

Feeling restless after days of the confinement of the caravan, I took Judica and Tosha on a stroll in the 10 inches of older, gray snow to see if I could discover any animal life in the woods and fields that lay beside the interstate highway. My back ached from the stiff suspension of the four-wheel drive vehicle, whose driver's seat didn't quite go forward enough for my short body.

As I returned from my wandering, I realized the walk had done nothing to ease my physical discomfort. In my fatigue, I leaned against my big 4x4 Ford Bronco and watched the children attempt to build yet another igloo in the gray snow. Nearby I heard Thomas curse as he mentally levitated the big rig. Turning, I watched William and Lin pushing the spare tire into position. Then Marshall, wearing just Levis, boots, and a black T-shirt despite the chill of the day, stepped between them and began attaching huge lug nuts that could have slipped on my wrists like bracelets. Shifting my weight in the trampled snow, I felt a spike of pain shoot up my spine and was unable to maintain my mental blocks.

Near the cooking fire, Jennifer's head shot up and she spun, gazing at me across the makeshift camp. No doubt she'd felt my discomfort. She turned in William's direction.

*Lady Ann is in pain*, I heard her tell him mentally. *Someone must work the stiffness out of her shoulders and lower back.*

William glared hard at Jennifer, and I saw her totter back a pace. Then he spoke a quiet comment to Marshall, turned, and left camp, calling Judica to him. Marshall frowned, his eyes following the smaller man for many seconds. Placing the last lug nut, he took up a monstrous crescent wrench, positioned it, and then put his back to the task of tightening, his arm muscles straining the dark cloth that covered them.

Lin reached and added his strength to the effort and together they finished the operation while Thomas strolled toward the cook fire. I could sense his head throbbing from the task of levitating the big tanker while the others had changed the tire. His eyes met mine, and he stumbled slightly in the snow.

*Meet me by the blue cooler,* I said with a touch of command in my tone.

Lord Thomas altered his course slightly, watching Liz preparing slabs of meat for the grill as he walked. I could feel his love shining from his heart for my dear friend. I smiled momentarily. Sadly wondering if I would ever feel that way again, I moved to join him, and gestured for him to sit down on the thermal cooler that kept our food from freezing. When he had, I stepped behind the red headed man and laid my hands carefully on his shoulders. A hot energy radiated from high on his neck where his brain met his spinal cord. I focused the healing there.

Almost the reverse of my snow-burning trick, this ad-libbed healing technique involved absorbing heat and dissipating it from the top of my head. I stood quietly for several minutes, manipulating Tom's energy, and sensing his headache subside.

Beneath my hands, the man drew a deep sigh, and I *Knew* he was growing uncomfortable with my presence as well as my touch. After a last, quick examination of his being, I began to disengage the healing when I felt a large presence looming behind

me. Mentally I let Tom go, tensing.

"Time's up, Tom," Marshall said, his big hands gently resting on my shoulders. A dizzying wave of energy flooded through my unusually opened mind, and he immediately grasped my shoulders, steadying me. "I think we'd better let the lady sit down."

Sorry, my Sweet, he whispered with a wave of affection. Keep your mind open and show me where you hurt. Lady Jennifer? Would you please invite all parties who are interested in massage to come over here for a demonstration? Right now I need to concentrate.

My husband missed Marshall Roberts' lesson in massage and chiropractic technique demonstrated on me while I relaxed near a big campfire, warm despite the absence of my big down jacket. Soon everyone got into the act, rubbing, working, and sometimes *beating* on sore muscles for each other.

As night fell and dinner time had passed, William returned to camp with Judica who came to me near the camp fire, her big paws caked with ice. As I worked the frozen particles loose, William told us that tomorrow we would meet 3 new members of *The Thirty*: Candice, Eric, Joy. Between bites of his dinner, he told us what little he knew about their family members who had survived with them in Western Tennessee.

After William had finished his late meal, Lin Tonaka made an announcement. In celebration of Jennifer's birthday, he had managed to create *Cherries Jubilee* for dessert and would share it with us all. The flaming confection was the hit of the evening, only outdone in Jennifer's big eyed response to birthday gifts of fine chocolates from William, and body lotions from Liz, and especially to Lin's gift, a 2 karat diamond and ruby gold

ring.

Later, as Tom sat near the fire, teaching Daniel the basics of chess, William and Liz harmonized to Lin's rich rendition of a love song for Jennifer. Valerie sat near Marshall, working a crossword puzzle with his help while her sister huddled near the fire, engrossed in a Walter Farley horse novel. James settled next to me, his thumb in his mouth, trying unsuccessfully not to be jealous of the attention paid to his mother on her birthday. From our place near the campfire, I tried not to think about birthday celebrations in sad silence and a sour heart.

Everyone, including Liz, had forgotten my birthday three weeks earlier.

February 12

As the convoy was pulling around the last turn and onto the road that went past the farm, I focused tightly against the mind rattling racket that filtered through my brain. Mental conversations flew across that plain from the talented members of my family to those of *The Thirty* waiting several thousand yards ahead. We women of the household talked of sleeping arrangements and exchanged lists of needs while our men discussed hunting and construction projects necessary to our living comfortably here.

William was mentally quiet, fielding answers to occasional questions while carefully driving though the meager 7 inch layer of snow that coated the road. Driving the lead vehicle, he made our job easier, as pathfinder, but that slowed him down. Only occasionally I had sensed his use of talent to find his way over the snow covered country road. Just about the time I figured he'd reached the farm's front gates, Will called to

Jennifer, Thomas, and Marshall on the mental plane. Effectively halting their plotting and planning, William chuckled before he began.

*Please relay what I'm about to say to our spouses and children. This is Candice and David's farm. She's that heavy-set grandma-type trying to get their kids in order and he's the older man with the baby on his shoulders. Eric's in the yellow plaid shirt, with the dark hair. That's his wife Diane, their sons Richard that tall kid, and... oh, Tobias is the shorter of the two black haired boys. The other couple is Nick and Katy Hoffman and the tall blond gal is their daughter Joy.*

From my place at the end of the convoy I could see William turn his truck into the farm's driveway, and then the tanker truck began pulling in at a much slower pace. I listened to Tom asking Eric where he should park the long truck as Chuck's brake lights lit in front of me. Sliding to a stop inches from Marshall's bumper, I heard the farmer's reply. Then Jennifer announced that Daniel really had to go to the bathroom and asked William if they all could cover the last few yards on foot while the tanker lumbered into the big yard.

When Tom hung one of the tanker's wheels over the drainage ditch, William consented to the idea, radiating gratitude at letting the little ones run off some of their pent up energy. As Tom put the big rig in reverse, other vehicles began backing up, and I spun my tires in reverse to give the old car in front of me more backing room.

*You might as well go and be our official greeter,* William sighed as car doors began to open and all non-driving personal spilled into the snow. *This may take a while.*

*Let it sit there all night!* Candice sent with a musical laugh. *Come in, stretch your legs, and use the facilities. It'll still be there in the morning.*

I dropped the vehicle into park and shut off the engine. As I opened my door, the happy squeals of children touched my ears, and I could smell a faint smell of spring on the light breeze as I stepped out into the snow. Judica scrambled quickly out of the car after me, then I turned to get Tosha and Linus. The young brown squirrel wrapped himself around my neck and into my hair while chattering at the cat I hoisted into my arms. Tosha grumbled half-heartedly in return.

“Well at least we’ll be here longer than the last place,” I told my animal friends, slamming the Bronco’s door closed.

I turned to see my Minnesota family, young and old, picking their way through the snowy carpet toward their new home. A half thought formed in my mind.

*Don’t you dare tell them they’ll have to leave here someday,* William said across a tight thought.

*As you wish,* I replied wearily and closed the link, content in thoughts of a warm shower and clean clothes.

“Are you coming, Lord William?” Candice called.

COVINGTON, TENNESSEE

February 24

Marshall referred to it as the “throne room,” but in actuality it was only a modest indoor horse-exercising arena. Eric O’Leary, together with his son Tobias, and Nick Hoffman, altered it in accordance to Candice Stein’s designs during the long winter I spent in St. Paul.

Candice and Eric were part of *The Thirty*, and although neither had physically met William or myself, both had thought that my Minnesota family would all migrate to the Memphis area in the Spring. They, with their own community of eleven, had survived the terror of the devastation that had swept our country and bravely faced the coldest winter Candice and her husband David had seen in their forty years in the Mississippi River Valley. Over ten-feet of snow had accumulated in the fields surrounding the Tennessee State University farm complex they'd adopted for their home. Most had melted shortly after we arrived, but another storm quickly deposited about 6 new inches of the white stuff.

So now, we numbered twenty-three. Candice had gathered the remnant survivors of her area under her aging wings. Of *The Thirty*, eight were now gathered, William, our reluctant, furry-faced leader, me, Jennifer, Thomas, Marshall, and Candice, an elderly Jewess, Eric, a tall black-haired Irish man in his forties, and Joy, an eighteen year old beauty, consecrated to the Lord. Along with these were David, Candice's elderly husband, Eric's wife Diane, (ten years my senior) with their sons Tobias, seventeen and Richard, fifteen. Joy's parents, Nick and Katie and three more orphaned children, Alex at sixteen and ready to fight the Reds, eight-year old Alaina who had cared for Tammy, whom we guessed to be not yet three.

This Throne Room had troubled me from the moment Candice first brought me and William into it a several days earlier. It had been repainted a delicate shade of pale blue, and a high wooden platform rested at the far end of the oval arena. On top of it stood two ornate wooden armchairs, one slightly larger than the other, both upholstered with royal blue cushions, which matched the platform carpet. I had selectively worn blue

clothing most of my life. Although I'd known of Candice through monitoring my husband's mental contacts I was shocked at her deference toward royalty. The old Jewess laughed lightly at my protest. We were not royalty, William agreed, only *servants*.

Sensing an approaching intruder, I sighed, returning my thoughts to the present, and felt resigned to the fact that I had acquired a bodyguard on William's request.

I had come here to think, this night. Standing just within the open doorway and a bit to the left, I gazed through the gloom at the pedestal set in the dirt floor. I could envision Camelot, and dear Arthur. *If Merlin had been a woman...* I wondered and hurt for him in *his* lifetime. Now, here I hurt for my own loss, Archimedes had flown south when we left St. Paul, but had not appeared here. *He will return*, I reminded myself, *knowing* my Sight was True. Yet I missed my great horned owl.

"Here again, my Sweet?" His whisper was disturbingly near.

"I've been in the stables, Marshall." *Yet I always seem to end up here*, finished in my heart. "He won't take that throne."

"And Thomas is angry about that." He laughed lightly as he stepped through the small open door. "Doesn't *your other-half* understand that this is all in his honor?"

"William can be a stubborn man, but this..." Waving at the unclaimed court, I turned for the door, and this aspiring warrior came with me. "I can only applaud him. But tell me, in your local wandering, have you seen any horses?"

"None yet and we've been looking." He stepped aside to let me pass, then slid the door closed behind us. "Domestic animals—well, they just couldn't survive it."

"Ah, isn't it great to have fresh eggs again?" I breathed in the night's cool air.

"And soon a chicken dinner or two!"

“Optimist,” he muttered sourly.

“The only way to be.”

“You want a horse, my Sweet?” He chuckled, shortening his leggy strides to mine. “Perhaps a mustang of this brave new world?”

“Don’t break your arm playing cowboy. I’ll ask Judica to search for the scent.”

“Then you shall have horses,” Marshall announced. “They travel in packs, eh?”

“Herds, yes. We’ve got 3 decent stalls at the moment. Pasturing... say for no more than four or we’ll be foraging for grain.”

There was silence between us for many paces, and he stopped in the moonlit night. I heard Marshall sigh. Silently I agreed with the awe he radiated as he looked up into the magnificent starry sky and full moon.

“I’ve always felt the moon was a half-sister to me,” I commented.

“Even a man who is pure at heart and says his prayers at night, becomes a wolf when wolf bane blooms, and the autumn moon is bright.” he whispered that famous quote from the classic *Wolfman* movie that starred Lon Chaney Jr.

I gazed at Earth’s nearest neighbor with fondness, again becoming mildly disturbed at its reddish hue, as I shuddered remembering the verses in the bible, and began strolling over the grass toward the big house.

“Why so quiet?” I heard him ask just over my shoulder. We’d reached the building where all of the family had to pack in together because the main barn was still being converted into a dormitory. I considered the tall man at my side, and then smiled, thinking how talented this man had become. I wished I could feel more confident in his relationship with God.

“Do you ever just reflect on what’s happened to us?” I sighed. “I guess residual radiation *could have* caused the increase in our Talents, but I think there’s more.”

“Don’t be troubled,” he chortled in his mock cockney English. “*Your* God is a good friend of mine. You know I was raised Lutheran, but these days you could call me a *Red Letter Christian*.”

“Okay. I like that phrase. I get it.” We walked several more yards before I added, “I should be doing something useful around here.”

“You post the dogs and cats as sentries,” he offered, kicking Daniel’s soccer ball nearer the house. “That saves us from nightly guard duties, and I, for one, am happy to get a full night’s sleep every night.”

“There’s so much more I could be doing.”

“Such as?”

I thought a minute, wondering how much to reveal of the future events I’d dreamed.

“How far is it to the naval air station in Millington?” I asked.

“I’d guess it’s about a twenty minute drive.”

“Do you think that the earthquakes have left the airstrip under water?”

“David said it’s only the Southern half, by the grace of God. So that would be only the barracks, chow hall, and classrooms.” He replied, holding open the kitchen door for me. “There may be a few planes left, but those could be rusted and inoperable.”

“We’ll see.”

“I believe you could astral project and have a look anytime you wanted. ”

Jennifer’s soprano floated in the air mixed with the smell of popcorn, so I knew

the guitars were out tonight. Joy was busy at the stove as we entered, and I turned back to Marshall. “How long has the music been going?”

“About an hour. I was sent to fetch you.”

“Joy? Can I give you a hand?” I called as I stepped into the kitchen. Marshall followed, moving toward the refrigerator for a beer.

Smiling sweetly, the young blond woman quickly deposited a huge bowl of the popcorn into my arms and sweetly suggested I share it. My Marshall accepted a stack of small bowls from the girl.

After popcorn had been distributed to everyone, I curled up on the floor, far away from William and contented myself with just listening to the songs. Hearing him perform brought happy memories to me, and occasionally I’d hum harmonies of my own until he frowned in my direction. Most of the time though, William had been a one-man show, and I realized that he preferred it just that way.

Soon William put aside his guitars in lieu of the snacks, and David quickly began his “Warm fuzzy” story. The younger kids quickly settled at his feet, and we all fell silent except to munch popcorn. William’s mind sought out mine, reminding me of when he’d told the fairy tale to me in the before time while we were stationed together at Memphis Naval Air Station.

*Where are Thomas and Eric?* I asked, blocking my emotions as I sent my thought.

*Still working with Richard and who is that boy? -- Alex?* He asked irritably and placed a brief image in my mind.

*Yes, that is Alex,* I replied chuckling. *When do you think they will finish?*

*Eric says the roof needs to be tested by a good rain, so maybe another week.*

*Why can't the kiddos move in now and we'll see what happens when it rains?*

*Eric's farm, Will remarked evenly. Eric's rules.*

I cringed at this crowd of people while the seventy year old David told his tale with skill to an enthralled group.

*Thank God they gave us the cottage.* William smiled slightly as our eyes met, and I felt myself blush, aware that he was practicing his newly-found charisma.

*It seems a waste not to let somebody have the other bedroom...*

*A blessing, woman.*

*A luxury,* I returned with disapproval.

*What is bothering you?* Concern pulsed in his mental touch.

*Later,* I remarked, frowning at him. *David is finishing his tale.*

Laughter mixed with the sound of childish squeals as the old man concluded with a moral to his story. Then Liz pulled herself up from a beige easy chair, and I found myself amazed at how she glowed despite the temporary inconvenience of her swelling belly.

“Hey, Elizabeth!” I called across the living room. “Being pregnant sure suits you!”

Mrs. Thomas Becker shot me a wide grin and stuck out her belly in playful animation, rubbing it with tender pride.

“We’re making a big one!” she declared loudly and squatted to collect empty bowls.

“With your bone structure and Thomas’s height,” Jennifer remarked, cradling her sleepy son next to her on the floor. “He’ll be a great basketball player.”

“Hopefully with your good sense, woman.” Marshall patted her buns affectionately as she passed him, and I noticed Katie Hoffman squirm in her seat radiating embarrassment to witness the affection between this single man and married woman.

March 1

“I already know how to fly.” I stomped my foot on the wooden porch step of our tiny cottage. His stubborn streak loomed.

“Simulators,” William growled, pacing the lawn before our little cottage. “Not real flight. There are air currents like sea tide. Rip tides and eddies.”

“Just an added dimension, but only the third. I do know how to fly.” I replied controlling my aggravation. “Archimedes took me flying many times. I learned from him.”

Casting my mind back, I savored the memory of those nocturnal flights, navigated by stars, as I remembered one snowy night. Deep friendship radiated from William, and I could sense his comprehension.

Smiling up at the man, I watched inspiration dawn as our eyes met. With a leap, he pulled me to my feet and held me at arm’s length. I remember my relief to see he was grinning. Then I got hugged and flooded with his delight. “You are incredible, woman! I’ve been racking my brain--”

“...about how to get us across the Atlantic Ocean,” I laughed into his course wool jacket. “*I know!* I only need to know where you want to land!”

William frowned, thoughtful, then relaxed his embrace. “What happened in England? Camelot will rise again?”

“Only in memory,” I sighed looking up to see William’s expression go blank.

In a moment he regarded me with mild amusement, knowing I’d heard the conversation in which he and Marshall exchanged plans to visit the naval air station where William and I had met in Millington, Tennessee.

“Well, woman? What do I tell your friend?” William inquired. “When shall we take a look?”

“I can be ready in the morning. Ask Lin to join us, too. Full security measures, of course.”

“That is Marshall’s department now.”

The face behind brown whiskers again slipped into the passive expression evident of mental conversation, and I drew away politely not to overhear. Quickly, his eyes again gazed down at me, and then he roughly pulled me back into his arms. He stood laughing into my hair, and I pulled away from him in anger.

“Is this the way you manhandle your wife?” I glowered.

“My wife warns others not to play cowboy yet aspires to fly across the Atlantic Ocean.”

“That’s not for a while!” I insisted, but fell silent suddenly, realizing I’d already seen something else.

William sensed my mood change. Blocking a feeling of dread, I turned away. He snatched my hand. As I chose my next remark, I plopped down on the wooden porch steps. Releasing my hand, this man, who had admitted that he shouldn’t have married to

me, settled next to me.

“I’ve noticed the red in the moon too. I heard your realization earlier tonight.” He sighed and gently poked my arm. “Remember Psalm 91. We are safe under the shadow of His wing.”

“He is our Shield and Sword,” I agreed. “And He is always the answer!”

“To which question, this time?” He laughed, smoothing down my thick hair.

I threw him a solemn gaze.

“That arena. Candice’s Throne Room,” I explained leaning away from his shoulder. “I don’t like it, but what can we do about it without offending our new friends?”

“That room is just not finished, woman.” His tone sounded and felt true. “I intend to finish it tonight.”

“Really? What are you gonna do?” Angered by his lack of sharing his plans with me, I shifted away from William but was immediately stopped when he grabbed me and forcefully pinned my back to his chest.

“Alone, I might add, so do not imagine otherwise.” His warm breath brushed my temple and he whispered, “Call in your animals, woman. Post them to watch here. I want you safe in this cottage when I return. And get some sleep. I’ll see you in the morning.”

March 5

Breakfast finished, I took tea into the old-fashioned living room, to allow another person to have my place at the overcrowded table. We numbered twice the house’s

capacity and meals were served in a formal dining room, buffet style in at least two shifts, children first. Every meal had become a riotous experience, since our arrival.

Almost everyone else had chore assignments and was at their tasks except for those who had worked before the morning meal. Candice, Diane O'Leary, and Katie Hoffman made up the hub of our kitchen crew with Alaine and Joy as alternates. Candice had been declared chief chef, while the rest of the household chores were governed by Jennifer. The system seemed to be working well. I curled up in the window seat with steaming cup in hand, enjoying the warmth of the morning sun, feeling left out of the house routine.

Soon, Marshall meandered quietly into the sitting room, moving to join me. He wore crisp new jeans, boots, and a black shirt that set off his shoulder length blond hair with bursts of fire as he settled into the sunshine with me. Setting his cup on the window ledge, he produced a cigarette and silently lit it. He gazed absently out at the yard, smoking, and sipping at his coffee, neither glancing at me, nor acknowledging my presence. As he was finishing his cigarette, Joy appeared, bearing each of us a glass of amber liquid, but she too was silent. We dutifully swallowed Jennifer's vitamin mixture, a daily ritual, and the strawberry blond teen retreated to the kitchen as quietly as she'd come. I heard myself sighing, and Marshall stepped over and sat next to me, gently taking my hand in his. Resisting the urge to pull away, I commanded my eyes to study the crimson-red pattern on the well-worn Oriental rug.

*You are safe, my Sweet,* he whispered to my mind with a hint of satisfaction. *As long as I live, I will protect you.*

*Take care with your words, dearest one,* I warned with affection, moving to stand.

“How soon till we leave?”

“Liz is fueling the Bronco now,” Marshall reported, standing up on those long legs. “We wait on the Professor.”

“And what is he doing?”

“Lin wants to bring a Geiger counter,” he explained, moving with me to the rear of the huge and oddly quiet farmhouse. “And I want you to go arm yourself for this excursion, or William will have your hide. I know... you hate guns.”

My friend let his words trail off as I increased my pace, mentally calling Judica. He knew me too well, this one, and knew when not to push me.

Leaving the big house, I crossed the 50 meters to my secluded cottage. There, I strapped on my gun belt. William still hadn't returned from what he said would be one night's work, but I wasn't concerned. Feeling confident trust in God I reminded myself of our combined destiny. I *Knew* it was not yet the hour of William's death.



What remained of Memphis Naval Air Station was dreadful. Half of it had been submerged in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico as it had reclaimed the southern portion of the Mississippi River Valley. Skeletons of burned out aircraft were scattered helter-skelter across the weed-infested runways, while around the planes lay picked over bones of the sailors, some cloth still fluttering in the light morning breeze. Within my mind's eye, I sensed glimpses of pilots and ground crews being overcome by nerve gas as they scrambled to their aircraft. Closing my eyes only sent me reeling with a chronological vertigo.

Focusing, I passed these images to Thomas and Marshall who stood near either

side of me. My knees grew weak and I inhaled deeply to overcome the sensations.

“They are merely ghosts of the past, Lady Ann,” I heard Thomas say at my left. “Don’t let this get to you.”

I blocked the images and again focused on the scene before us, disappointed by the few aircraft remaining here. The word gleaning popped into my mind with a sense of Candice as the originator of the thought. Nevertheless, these planes seemed far beyond our abilities to repair them. Yet, we needed a plane.

I’d had visions of an airplane.

“This is not what I had expected,” I sighed, as Marshall took my arm, steadying me. “I Know at least one plane survived.”

“The winter was severe,” my blond friend offered, looking around at the mangled, burnt out aircraft out on the runway. “Seems our enemy is thorough.”

“I am counting on your skills, gentlemen,” I remarked to the five, turning now to the largest of the hangars. “But, first, we must find our airplane. Split up and search?”

“Thomas!” Marshall commanded, pointing off to the left. “You and Lin check those hangars. Eric, you and Toby check out the tower. See if there’s power or a generator. We’ll take a look at the second hangar.”

We split as ordered, each taking their assigned task, while Judica took off at a lope to check the longest runway as I’d requested. I stopped briefly to look over my shoulder to the South, amazed again at the blue horizon. The sea lay a few kilometers beyond the main gates. Marshall cast me an odd look, but silently moved forward, pulling gently at my arm.

“My old barracks are under water,” I commented.

“Mine, too. Ancient history. Come on.”

As we reached the massive aircraft hangar, Eric reported mentally that he'd found the emergency generators. Requesting that he fire them up, I relayed this to my tall companion. Marshall grunted absently in acknowledgment, and drawing his handgun, stepped first through the open hangar door.

“Where is your wolf when we need her for scouting?” He grumbled, pausing for our eyes to adjust to the gloom of the bay.

“Scouting the landing strips,” I remarked, staying behind the man and to his left.

“Need I remind you, we must have a plane first before the landing strip is of any use?”

“We WILL have an airplane, my dear Marshall. Of that I am positive.”

*You have SEEN it, hey wot? Skepticism colored his thoughts.*

*I have.*

Chuckling lightly to himself, the slender man moved forward into the smell of jet propellants and decaying flesh, reaching backwards with his free arm to me. I slipped my hand in his and let him lead me into the gloom. While applying blocks against his potential mental intrusion, I tried not to let my thoughts leak back to him. In the distance, I could see two aircraft, one without a tail. The other craft seemed like some sort of small fighter-jet and it looked intact!

Moments later we emerged from the huge structure, and Marshall, still quiet, was frowning. He continued to scowl in silence as we made our way across the broken concrete to rendezvous at the control tower's entrance. Across the distance, I could see Tobias with his father, Eric, sitting in the shade, waiting. A drone of machinery filled the

air, and I smiled up at Marshall, pleased.

“Good. They got the generators to work,” I remarked.

Thomas and Lin came up from our right at an easy lope, the older man paces behind Lord Thomas. Both had a cheery grin on their face that told me what Thomas had not reported. I knew they had found my airplane. I found myself again gazing to the South at what had once been the metropolis of Memphis, now under the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. And I wondered what lands had risen as these had sunk.

“Well done, Lord Eric!” I called as we approached. “Could you get the radar going?”

“Unfortunately no, my lady,” came his reply, as he rose from the ground. “Lots of windows broken in the tower, so the harsh winter has taken its toll.”

*Why would you need radar?* Marshall asked on a tight send.

“Let’s let Thomas and Elizabeth be the judge of that.” I laughed happily at his dark Irish face. “I’d bet that between the two of them and a few technical manuals, they’ll have it purring in no time! What it’s like in the control tower? Or should I ask?”

“Messy, to be sure.” O’Leary frowned, cringing. “There’s about a dozen bodies in various states of decay. The stench is terrible.”

“But we did get more windows open!” Young Tobias interrupted with enthusiasm. “Give it a few hours and then Marshall and I can haul the remains away!”

“Now, just wait a minute, young man.” Marshall laughed, laying a hand heavily on the teen’s shoulder. “Since when did you become commander of this expedition?”

The black-haired boy blushed slightly, as he turned his blue eyes admiringly up to Marshall. The glance that went between them was one of affection, and again Marshall

chuckled, thumping Tobias across the back as he did.

“Well, we will have to remove them, none the less, Toby. You’re right, there.” Marshall turned, with a wink at me, then addressed the boy’s father. “Shut ‘em down for now, Lord Eric. They’ll be of no use today, and there’s no sense of wasting the fuel.”

With a smart salute, O’Leary and his son disappeared behind the concrete building, as Thomas with Lin came strolling up.

“So you get your radar too?” The auburn haired man breathed, then executed a stiff bow. “Would you fly a jet? Or will a simple turbo-prop be more to your liking?”

“Oh, Thomas!” I cried, hugging Will’s closest friend. “You found two! Our God is awesome!”

“What kind?” Marshall asked blandly from behind me, but with a strange coldness to his being, which caused me to curb my enthusiasm.

“It’s only a trainer from the looks of it, I’m afraid,” came his reply, as he backed away from me in haste. “And the other looks like a C-118 but has a weird disk-like umbrella thing on top.”

“A Hawkeye!” I laughed, feeling joy flood me. “That’s the simulator I used to work. Thank You, God! Heheheh! A Hawkeye!”

“Not for sure, m’ lady,” Marshall growled, his large hand on my shoulder. “I think we should have a look, heh?”

March 9

“Well, do you know *when* he’ll get back?” Thomas persisted while perched on the red sofa’s arm.

“I’m sorry. I don’t,” I said again.

“Ask him, Ann,” Jennifer put in, frowning. “Surely he’ll tell you.”

“I did,” I sighed, pacing before the window seat, hoping to catch the lights of William’s returning car. “All he says is he must find it —whatever IT is — and that we’ll talk about airplanes when he has less on his mind.”

“Great googally-moogaly!” Marshall exclaimed in aspiration. “He talks with all of us in our heads. Let’s have our discussion and he can easily monitor it.”

“NO!” I swung around angrily to glare at him and then to Thomas, Lin, and finally Liz. Chiding myself, I recalled their enthusiasm for this project happily and drew a deep breath. “It’s too dangerous for him while he’s out there alone. This will have to wait.”

“Why didn’t he take someone along on this mysterious quest,” Jenn moaned. “Marshall, he spoke to you about it?”

“He seemed to know it would take some time and said he wanted this lady protected.”

*Take some time?* I sent him, unnerved for no apparent reason. *How much?*

*I don’t know, my Sweet. I am sorry.*

“Is that then your prime duty?” Thomas hissed, only to have his wife’s elbow jabbed into his ribs “I mean—William’s safety is far more important.”

“Lord William is safe. This is not his time to die, so relax,” I insisted, sensing Marshall’s displeasure behind me. “Bickering will get us nowhere. He walks in the grace of God, doing as He bids him. We will have to wait for its completion.”

“But Ann—“ Thomas remarked in a gentler tone now. “You can sense the future and tell when he will return.”

“My Sight is unfortunately the far-reaching kind. William will return to us safely in a few days—a week perhaps. I don’t know for sure. But he will return. Please, be patient. There is more than enough to be done here and now. Is the dormitory complete? Or the radio antenna up?” I sighed inwardly, as I called mentally for Judica, and moved toward the kitchen door. “Let’s be about our other work until Lord William returns.”

March 12

As I stepped away from the back porch, I stopped to gaze at the crescent moon low on the horizon, and found myself again unnerved by its reddish glow. *The Bible does warn of this*, I reminded myself, but I had not expected to live to see it. *Were we farther into this mess than I had thought?* I wondered, crossing the dark yard. Judica sat waiting at the steps of our cottage, tail wagging uncharacteristically. I could sense her elevated mood.

“And what are you so happy about, my friend?” I greeted her and reached to stroke the huge gray head with affection.

*I HAVE FOUND A MATE.* Came her whispered reply within my head. *WOULD YOU OBJECT?*

“To a litter of *your* pups?” I laughed, opening the front door to snatch my purple cloak against the cool evening. “No, Judica. Of course not. Find your happiness. I must admit, though, that you surprise me. Is he worthy of you?”

*INDEED, YES. MUCH LARGER THAN I AND QUITE INTELLIGENT FOR A MORTAL ANIMAL.*

“I thought you said you were mortal.”

*IN BODY, YES.*

“No matter. Tell me, will he stay with us? Or is he too wild?”

*HE IS WILD, BUT WILL YIELD TO YOU AND LORD WILLIAM. NO OTHERS.* Her tone was oddly definitive, and I let it go as it was, choosing a different subject I had wanted to discuss instead.

“Do you know what a horse smells like?” I inquired, wrapping my cloak around me and walking back down the steps.

*I HAVE NEVER SMELLED ONE. WHERE ARE WE GOING?*

“To smell horses, dear companion.”

*HAVE YOU SEEN ONE OF THESE IN YOUR FUTURE?*

“You too? Why must everyone question the Lord’s gift of *Sight*?”

*CURIOSITY*, she told me.

“Forgive me. You heard that conversation with them?”

*I HAD FELT THEIR IMPATIENCE, SO I WAS LISTENING, AND DO UNDERSTAND.*

“The others, I can understand, but Thomas *and Marshall too!* They are part of *The Thirty*, and really should be more evolved.”

*THEY ARE AS THEY ARE.* The animal shrugged mentally as if that explanation was sufficient. *BUT WHAT OF THESE HORSES?*

“I have seen them through my *Sight*, yes, but will need you to alert the other animals.”

*YOU CAN SPEAK WITH EACH OF THEM.*

“But that is *through* you,” I countered, opening the smaller stable door. “When you know the scent, then I will be sure that your mortal cousins Bingo and *Trapper* know it too.”

*EACH ANIMAL'S SCENT IS INDIVIDUAL. WOULD YOU HAVE US FIND THE ONES WHO ONCE LIVED HERE?*

“Huh? No.” I frowned, swinging open one of the stall doors for the animal to enter. “Can’t you discern a general scent of the species from this?”

*YES. I HEAR SOMEONE APPROACHING.*

Casting my energy in the direction the wolf indicated, I met with a familiar essence.

“It’s Marshall,” I hissed, perturbed by the intrusion, yet somewhat grateful for the company.

*I AM YOUR COMPANY,* Judica said cautiously, as she nosed about the musty darkness within the stall.

*Yes, indeed you are, my friend.* I lapsed into mental language, now hearing my friend’s approach. *Perhaps I yearned for the attention this one gives, since William seems not capable.*

“Not in the Throne Room this time?” He called into the dark.

*YOU ARE LONELY?* The wolf asked.

“Not at this time,” I muttered in reply to both, as the tall man strolled confidently to my side.

“Tis unseemly for our queen to rattle about stables like common folk,” he quipped in a bad renaissance fair accent, peering intently at me, then noticing Judica for the first time. “What’s this? Catching the scent of horses, *pupdog?*”

“Indeed, we are. They do not require processed petroleum products to run.”

“Nor good roads to travel on.” His light laugh brightened the night air. “I’m beginning to see a method to your madness. Horses could be useful when the enemy

arrives. Quiet they are and with good night vision.”

“I really wasn’t thinking about battle,” I admitted, as Judica finished her survey and trotted toward the closed door. “Hunting and pleasure riding was more of what I had in mind.”

“Ah, but war horses shall indeed be useful.”

“Do you ride well?”

Marshall was suspiciously silent to my question, as I followed Judica, throwing the door open, then stepping through after her. Once out in the cold night air, I turned back to see his face screwed up in distasteful thought.

“They travel well in snow too,” I commented to his silence, seeing two dark figures loping in our direction.

Two dogs scurried up as we strolled casually across the deep grass. Bingo arrived first, a scruffy oversized beagle followed by Trapper who resembled a golden retriever. Both were fine hunting dogs, Eric had told us when we had first arrived; and later, in private, Liz had confirmed this.

*THEY WISH TO INSPECT THE STALL*, Judica remarked, after being nose to nose with each of them.

“Okay, guys. Come on.”

Chuckling, I reversed my steps, passing Lord Marshall. Then I let the three animals back into the stable and leaned against the open door to wait. A soft mew cut the night air as Tosha scurried past my feet into the building. Behind her came our second feline resident whom Joy had named Ebony. He was a chocolate point Siamese of unusual habits, and he was friendly, although he would disappear for days on end.

“Looks like everybody wants in on it,” Marshall remarked, lighting a joint while we waited.

“Not unlike the humans in the house with the airplanes.”

“Can’t say as I blame them. Want some of this?”

The pungent smell floated in the air and I reached out to accept his offer.

“You’ll like this. It’s from private stock,” I heard him say as I took a drag. “As a matter of fact, you got the seeds from this batch.”

“It’ll be a good harvest, then,” I replied, as that feeling already began to take hold.

“Only the best for you, m’ lady.”

As I passed the hand rolled joint back to him, animals erupted from within the barn and scattered across the lawn. Bingo bayed enthusiastically, and I called him to silence, lest he wake the sleeping youngsters or alarm the adults in the big house.

“Sounds like he has the scent,” Marshall remarked as we again moved across the yard.

“Indeed, he has. No hunting tonight, my canine friend,” I called to the beagle, as he and Trapper romped around us playfully.

“Perhaps in the morning,” Marshall agreed, knowing Judica would convey his words to the other animals. The weed passed into my fingers again as he continued.

“Tonight, you guard this lady well!”

After a long hug and a tender kiss to my forehead, Marshall Roberts took a last drag on his smoke and passed it back to me, his face hidden in the dark of the night.

“Dear lady, this will help you rest. Sleep as best you can. I’ll be nearby.”

Touching my shoulders, Marshall turned me toward my small house, knowing I

could feel the emotional storm in his soul. He gently pushed me toward the bungalow.

Only after I had lit two oil lamps was Marshall satisfied of my safety. He did not like my staying there alone, I knew, but with Judica at my side, he knew he would not win any argument. Mentally threatening to sleep out on the porch, he reminded me to put the dogs outside to guard the little cottage. Tosha and Ebony quickly found separate spots to curl up on my bed. From the front windows, I watched his tall slim silhouette bob across the lawn and disappear into the big house. Finally I was left to the stillness of my small house.

I was grateful for the quiet and the solitude. Living under the same roof with William proved even more difficult than I'd anticipated. I'd been a loner so much of my life, and adjusting to these days at times wore on me considerably. To my dismay, I found myself pleased that he would be away for a few more days. This is not to say that he was under foot. Quite the contrary, days would pass when we only saw each other at meals. Most of our times were spent working on the farm or in the evening in the big house, and often I would retire before him. So great was his physical energy that he needed very little sleep to sustain him, something that I'd often marveled at, both now and in the before time.

Settling under the reading lamp, I regretted the absence of electricity in the cottage, wishing for some classical music to soothe me while I studied yet another volume on modern mid-eastern history. Marshall sensed my musical wish and complied. The first notes of Beck's *Bolero* floated in my head.

March 16

The day was dreary and overcast. Rains fell almost continually, sometimes heavily and I chose to stay within my small fortress. Joy brought me breakfast to accompany the tea I'd brewed on the old wood burning stove. The morning chill never left the air as if trapped by the rain clouds. I kept a fire going throughout the day, as I contented myself with clearing junk from the smaller second bedroom. I knew William had plans for it, but he had not confided in me more than that it needed clearing and cleaning, an oversight on David's part when he'd prepared this "honeymoon cottage" for us.

William had not returned, nor did he seek me out on the astral plane. I was unconcerned, knowing that I would know if he were in danger, hurt, or in need. He wished to remain incognito, and had insisted that during our most recent conversation, so I left him to his quest, praying for his welfare, and trusting in God for his safe passage. Yet my feminine curiosity dwelled on his purpose. I imagined him hunting for the finest diamond wedding ring for me, or perhaps he scouted the countryside in search of yet more information on Israel from the surviving libraries of abandoned cities. Maybe, I considered, he'd returned one last time to his boyhood haunts near what had been Paducah, Kentucky in hope of locating survivors of his family. But, I did not know any of this for certain, and accounted it all as silly female fantasy.

Through Jennifer's gracious intercession I was left alone for the day, communicating via mental channels only. I refused several inquiries from Marshall on that plane and curious as I was, I nevertheless blocked two communiqués requested by Eric O'Leary. And so, I happily continued in my solitude beyond dinner time with

apologies to Jennifer, breaking from my writing at sunset. Even on this overcast day, I stopped to watch with renewed awe as day slipped away into dusk, and darkness again filled the land.

I recognized the flavor of the shadowy figure as he moved from the Big House in my direction. Watching from under shelter of the porch stoop, I sensed his identity more than I knew it from physical features. As he came closer I recognized the bulk under the light-weight jacket as the Irish warrior, Eric O'Leary, but I'd never noticed the limp in his stride.

*HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN HOW TO USE YOUR EYES?* came Judica's casual tones. *THIS ONE ALWAYS WALKS THAT WAY.*

There was no hint of haste in the man's pace, despite the sprinkling of rain that fell, and I heard myself chuckling. I loved the feel of a gentle rain on my face, and apparently so did O'Leary, for he walked with head high, as if catching the same joy I knew so well.

"Good evening," I smiled as I opened the front door when he reached the bottom step. "How is it that my Southern Warrior carries food trays?"

"At your service, Lady Ann." He blushed, motioning for me to precede him into the cottage. As I moved past him, he added "How else can I get an audience with you?"

I gestured for him to place the tray on a low table before the couch in the tiny living room, and when he had straightened again I had collected myself sufficiently. I waved him to the old green armchair and sat down to my meal. I was not hungry, but ate nonetheless, surprised at the Irishman's appearance in my home.

O'Leary had struck me as a man of few words when first we'd met. In his late

thirties, and father of two teens, Tobias and Richard (who was two years junior to his brother at fifteen), Eric's striking Saxon face showed the beginnings of crows' feet, and traces of his outdoor life spent farming the Tennessee soil. He had blossomed within the war, Candice had told me, becoming leader of the community pending William's arrival. Such a job had not been easy, because of David's disbelief in The Thirty and Nick Hoffman's inability to accept his own eighteen year old daughter as party to the tale. Eric was indeed a strong ally, I reminded myself, and must not be put aside or slighted in any way.

"Would you be silent through the whole meal?" I smiled, after the first few mouthfuls. "Talk! I can eat and listen at the same time."

"You eat first."

The black haired man shifted nervously in his seat, distracting his eyes to the wall somewhere off to my left. I rose, with a wink at the man, and disappeared into the kitchen long enough to pour us each a cup of tea. Then I settled again on the sofa, eyeing him slyly.

"Contrary to popular belief, Lord Eric, I cannot read minds. What troubles you?"

"My sons," he remarked, barely audible even in the silent room. "Will they live?"

My fork halted in mid-motion, and I turned to see his steely gray eyes tipped with moisture, sincerely pleading with me. I set the food aside with a deep breath that caught in my chest, and hung there. Reaching for my tea, I settled back into the sagging sofa, and exhaled slowly.

"Have you had a vision that they will be in danger?"

"No. No vision nor dream," he admitted grudgingly as he again shifted his body.

“More like a feeling, really. A hunch.”

“Have you said anything about this to your wife?”

“No. Katie is...well, she’s not too keen about all this *hocus-pocus*, as she calls it.”

“I would advise not telling her about this, just yet.” I interjected, bending to place my cup on the make shift coffee table. “I’d like to look into this further.”

Judica came up at this point, not to me, but went directly to Eric, resting her big gray head upon his knee. I could feel compassion flowing out from the animal toward the human, and wondered if the man also felt it. Absently, Eric reached down to scratch her furry head, but brought it back suddenly.

“She’s special. Will she mind?”

“She loves it! Just like any dog, especially on her ears and forehead.”

Judica almost purred under Eric’s heavy scratching, rumbling happily deep in her throat. Ignoring the scene, I lapsed into my own thoughts momentarily while my wolf friend kept the human occupied. Could I see into the future guided only by the inclination of another? *How to do it*, I wondered, as I felt my energy level increase as if by another’s will. Focusing my eyes back on my visitor, I found Eric watching me intently. Judica backed away from him and lay down on the floor at his feet.

“Lean back, Lord Eric, relax as best you can,” I began, careful to keep my voice, soft, hypnotic. “Close your eyes. That’s good, and breathe deeply, slowly.”

“My lady?”

“Hush, my friend. Relax your being. No, keep your eyes closed.” Taking a long breath, I closed my own eyes and scanned the man across from me. “Just breathe deeply and let your body go limp. Yes, that’s it. That’s good. Relax.”

As the Irishman's metabolism decreased with my suggestive coaxing, I carefully lowered my own, but to a lesser degree. Then I waited several breaths.

*Judica, please post guard.*

*I ALREADY DID*, I heard her imitation of a human chuckle. *WHEN YOU DECIDED THIS ACTION.*

*Thank you.*

“All right, Eric,” I began softly with an intentional pitch to my voice. “You are doing beautifully. Now, keep in mind—Relax. I want you to feel what we were talking about. Don't think about it, Eric, feel it. Relax. Just recall that feeling. Keep it clear of your own emotions. Easy, relax Eric. Watch your breathing slowly...in... out. That's it. There you go. Nice and easy...“You're doing fine.”

I sighed, nudging my mind gently into his now, I continued. “I want you to remain relaxed and calm. I'm going to touch your mind. Now. Yes, you can feel me with you. I want you to remember that feeling on my command this time, Eric. You will have no fear of this premonition, and we will look at it objectively. Ready? Good, now feel it one more time. Easy now, just relax and let it pass through you. You're doing fine. Just fine...Yes I have it now. Hold on to it, easy. Let me look into it. Hold it...Hold it. Ah...yes...I see...”

I heard a sigh, mine or his, I'll never know, as the scene rushed past my inner eye. I filed it in my memory and concentrated again on the farmer across from me, opening my eyes. The dark Irishman sat slumped in the armchair breathing deeply.

“You can let go now, Eric, that's fine. Think pleasant thoughts and relax. Feel your own body. I am no longer in your mind, but you may remember all of this, and you will no longer be anxious about this feeling. All right, Eric, come back. You may awaken.

Now.”

The burly man’s chest expanded in a deep long breath, as his eyes opened slowly. Blinking, he straightened himself in his chair and gazed blankly my way. I watched as his gray eyes focused on me, and saw a slight smile pass briefly over his face.

“How do you feel?” I smiled, reaching to find my tea had turned cold.

“Fine. Much better than when I came here. What next?”

“I’ll need to go over this in my mind for a while. I’ve done all I can for tonight.”

“Well, God bless you for what you have done,” he replied evenly, rising to leave.

“I do feel better about the whole business.”

I rose with the man and followed him to the front door. Judica slipped out as he opened it, and I patted Eric lightly on his broad back.

“Sleep well and rest easy. Hopefully, I will have an answer for you in the morning’s light.”

As the big man made his way through the mist toward his home, I cast my senses on the air. Nearby, my senses told me, someone had been watching. Someone could mentally block my searching probe. I could neither recognize direction, nor the source.



I had anticipated a night of haunting dreams mixed with prophetic visions, but I was very wrong. Early in my sleep, William touched me, with assurance of his well-being, but his attitude was less than loving. Dutifully, he reported his location and lack of success in his search. Deep puzzlement filled his spirit, confusion that bordered on despair, and I recall relaying my confidence to him. We prayed together, praising God and thanking Him for both our joys and our sorrows. Then without asking, *he who was*

*my husband* took all of my strength and left. Drained and exhausted, I had no energy for dreams.

March 18

Jennifer sat at the foot of my bed, when I opened my eyes to the new day. Worry lines and fatigue showed on the blond woman's face, as she watched me flop heavily onto my back. The house was warm and smelled of wood burning mixed with the aroma of sweet herbs. I smiled, attempting to raise my head, but found that to be too much of an effort. Dark circles under her eyes made Mrs. Tonaka look like she'd been awake all night, and I wondered briefly if one of the kiddos was the cause. Over her shoulder, spent candles lined my dresser. She moved to sit closer.

"I've over slept?" I asked weakly, wondering the reasons for the woman's appearance. "I'm glad you're here. My head weighs three tons. My eyes hurt, and I think I'm getting sick."

"Overslept? Just slightly! You've been out for over thirty-six hours," she informed me, palming my forehead. "William told me he'd tapped some of your energy. He asked me to convey his apologizes."

"He's returned?" My stomach flipped with the unhappy prospect of dealing with my husband when feeling this poorly.

"Not yet. Another few days perhaps. Ann, why do you allow him to use you like this?"

"His safety," I muttered, again trying to raise myself. "He couldn't rest. Needed

my strength to go on.”

“Lay back down, Ann. You’ll need to take it easy for a while.”

“I’d like to use the bathroom.” I swallowed twice. “Please.”

“Wait a minute,” she said and turned her head to the open bedroom door. “Lord Marshall?”

My dearest friend quickly appeared at the door, and I felt shock at his haggard features. *Had they not slept all the while I had?* Black circles ringed his usually bright green eyes, as he smiled down on me. His usually impeccable attire was rumpled and unkempt. *Were these the clothes I’d last seen him in?* The reddish stubble of his beard told me he had not shaved. Now, relief colored his face when our eyes met and Jennifer smiled, gently patting my shoulder.

Reaching mentally to Marshall, I found I couldn’t find the way!

“Would you please help her to the bathroom?” Jennifer asked with a chuckle, skirting the bed and pulling away the blankets. I was surprised to find myself wearing a silken blue nightgown.

Jennifer laughed, while I sought Judica in my mind.

“I really wish you’d dress for bed,” I heard her saying as Marshall moved closer. “I had a devil of a time dressing you this morning.”

“I shall try to be more considerate next time,” was my strained reply through parched lips.

Bending, Marshall slid a large hand behind my back and helped me sit up. I could smell the man as he slipped his other arm under my knees and drew me to him. The musk of his natural scent brought back pleasant, but unwanted memories. He had not showered

either.

“There will be no next time!” Mrs. Tonaka growled uncharacteristically, as I was lifted into Marshall’s strong arms. “You wait until William gets home! I intend to give that man a piece of my mind.”

“You gave me quite a scare, m’ lady,” Lord Marshall spoke for my ears only. “I will have words with William over this.”

“No. Not over me,” I moaned as he carried me gently. I looked at him, his eyes now dark with anger, and knew my protest fell on deaf ears, but I had to persist. “Please, Marshall. You two must not quarrel over me.”

“Hush,” he whispered, as he eased my feet to the cold linoleum of the small old-fashion bathroom.

The tall blond man easily allowed me to lean on him. Stretching out his free arm, he turned on the tap, wet his hand, and then began wiping it across my cheeks and forehead. Jennifer squeezed into the small room. The cold water helped to revive me, but I motioned for him to stop. Jennifer came up to my other side, telling the man to leave, as she now took most of my weight. I wanted to support myself and did try, but couldn’t. Marshall’s green eyes met mine searching the depth of my being. I felt sure I should have felt his mental voice, but no familiar surge of power and energy flowed. I heard nothing in my mind.

“I’ll be in the kitchen.” He announced suddenly and left, closing the door behind him before I could speak. “Call me when you need me again.”

“Would you heat up that potion for me, Marshall?” Jennifer called after him, then looked critically into me, “Do you think you can sit in the bathtub? A hot bath will help

get your circulation back up to normal.”

