
Sword of the Wolf

A She-Wolf of London / Robin of Sherwood Crossover by Deb Walsh

M

Y DEAR CHILDREN:

WORKING WITH CARLSON ON DIG.
OPERATING ON TIME-SHARE.
FABULOUS FIND, MAY BE YOUR SOLUTION.

COME AT ONCE.

MASON.

The telegram had arrived only two days before, delivered by a Western Union courier to the television station. Ian had torn it open with trembling hands; he was of the generation where telegrams always brought bad news. But the news had been cryptic yet promising; his old Oxford mentor, Professor John Mason (deceased), had found something in his wanderings.

Operating on "time-share." Randi had to laugh. What Mason was time-sharing was Carlson's body, since his own was quite dead and long since washed away in the Thames. She'd have loved to have seen how he negotiated *that* arrangement.

Before she and Ian had left England for sunny California in 1991, Professor Mason had come to lecture at Ian's university, staying at his parents' bed and breakfast. Ian had gone into a total panic, all the while hoping that the Professor would finally offer him a job in his Oxford department. In fact, that job had been Mason's intent, but two wayward spirits had put paid to the plan.

Those two spirits — Ivan, a fanatical Ruritanian patriot, and Sarah, or Svetlana, the surviving daughter of the Ruritanian dictator — had been battling for 100 years by the time their paths brought them back to the Matheson Bed and Breakfast, where they had both died so long before. Taking over the body of Ian's mother, Sarah had asked the Professor how a spirit could escape from another to achieve its final reward; Ivan had used Ian's father's body to kill Mason just as he'd puzzled out the solution. But Mason, having solved the puzzle, transported his own spirit from his dying flesh into the body of Ian's Aunt Elsa. As the two Ruritanian spirits had moved from body to body — not always human — Ian and Randi had raced to discover their secrets. When Ivan had taken over the body of a cockroach (Randi still winced at the memory), Ian had managed to crush him, effectively and permanently killing him.

With Sarah/Svetlana finally on her way to her eternal peace, Professor Mason had elected to explore the world through his new eyes — eyes opened up to the reality of magic and myth by the incursion of the ghosts, his own survival beyond death, and Randi's lycanthropic nature. Before bidding *adieu* and leaping into the body of a passing cat, Professor Mason had promised to search for Randi's cure and get in touch immediately upon finding it.

That was more than three years ago. In the meantime, she and Ian had both been killed and resurrected, had moved from London to Los Angeles, and Ian had gone from university professor of mythology to paranormal talk show host and best-selling horror novelist. Randi had given up her doctoral work to become his producer, while his Aunt Elsa acted as his agent. Instead of being chained up in the Matheson dungeon on the first night of the full moon, each month Randi was shackled to the concrete wall in a specially-built room in the beachhouse they shared —

platonically, of course. They'd done all this in the cause of finding a cure. (Well, all right, Los Angeles had it over London when it came to the beach.) Despite meeting vampires, trolls, wizards, cursed movie houses, aliens from other worlds, and witches, they had had no luck in finding a cure. And they had discovered that the transformation could be triggered by passion, as well as the full moon. The situation was becoming desperate.

The telegram was the first time they'd heard from Professor Mason since that day he'd left the Matheson house. And for Randi, it was a lifeline, a hope, in a world where little hope remained.



What d'you mean, you're going back to London? What's London got that Los Angeles doesn't? Huh? You gonna tell me the babes are hotter there? Yeah, right," Skip Seville, station manager of KBLA and Ian and Randi's boss, scoffed in his characteristically smarmy and offensive way.

"My parents, for one," Ian replied archly. "And quite a bit of culture, for another."

"And it's not like we're returning permanently — Ian has a family emergency that can't wait, Skip," Randi put in, smiling through her clenched teeth. What she really wanted to do was sock Skip in the nose and be done with it, but Ian didn't want to burn his bridges until they knew they had a cure.

"And you're going as his nursemaid? Hah!" Skip snorted.

"No, she's going as my fiancée," Ian pointed out with dignity.

"That's right, I'm going as his ... did you say, 'fiancée'?" Despite her righteous anger at Skip, Randi melted immediately, turning to Ian and coyly stroking his suitcoat lapel. "Fiancée?"

Ian looked down at her tenderly, Skip forgotten for the moment. "Fiancée. If you'll have me," he added, closing his hand over hers.

"I'm gonna hurl," Skip complained. "I suppose next you'll be telling me that you'll be married at Winchester Cathedral!"

"I was rather hoping for something a bit more private," Ian admitted. Patting Randi's hand affectionately, he turned back to Seville, his expression sober once more. "But that doesn't change the fact that my mother is ill and needs me there."

"What, don't they have doctors in England?"

"Of course we have doctors!" This was getting to be too exasperating. "What she does not have is her son, at her bedside, in her hour of need," Ian stated in a clipped voice. He really was getting rather good at creative lying. "I am taking personal leave time for a family emergency, and Randi is, too. You can't stop us, Skip — it's in our contract."

"Contracts are made to be broken, boyo. You step on that plane and I'll replace you with **Badminton with Bambi** so fast your culture'll curdle."

"And won't the Board just love how their ratings hit the cellar?" Randi commented acidly. "You know **How Strange** is your top-rated show. You can't afford to lose it."

"And you have plenty of programs to repeat. A few weeks of reruns won't hurt, and while we're in England, we can research some new guests. Scholarly guests, guests who actually have something interesting to say. Guests who keep their clothes on."

"Why would I want **them**?" Skip asked inanely.

"Why, indeed?" Randi repeated, shaking her head. "C'mon, Ian, let's go. We've got to pick up the tickets and get packed."

"Right," Ian agreed, offering his arm to Randi. "We'll be in touch," he told her, and together they exited Skip Seville's office.



In the seat beside her, Ian was deeply engrossed in a hefty tome on Saxon mythology. Boring up. Professor Mason was sure to quiz Ian, as he always did, on the more obscure deities and myths in the world pantheon. And since Gareth Carlson's specialty was Saxon and Celtic archaeology, he'd had a hunch the majority of questions would revolve around those subtopics in the genre. Especially since Gareth Carlson had been Ian's one great rival at university.

Randi shook her head, smiling, and smoothed out the telegram again, rereading it for the one-hundredth time. The last time she'd felt this excited had been on her first trip to England, her journey to study under her hero, the author of *The Face of Fear*. The man sitting beside her. That was before she'd gone out to the moors to study primal mythology in the raw and gotten bitten by a genuine werewolf. Hopefully *this* trip would turn out better.

"You're going to wear that out, you know," Ian said softly. Randi looked up into his brown eyes. They still had the power to turn her to jelly. Firmly, she put that thought out of her mind; she'd already transformed into a werewolf on one transatlantic flight — she didn't want a repeat performance.

"I know," she answered, chagrined. She folded the telegram and put it away in her knapsack. "It's just ... it's just that ... I'd like to hope, you know? That maybe this time ..."

"Maybe this time we'll find the cure?" he asked, taking her hand in his. "I know. Me, too." Although his words were positive, his tone of voice implied the opposite.

She shook her head, negating his tone. "I've got a good feeling about this, Ian. I really do. This time ... this time we'll find it." He squeezed her hand and went back to reading his book.



The reunion at the Matheson Bed and Breakfast had been emotional, Ian's mother bursting into tears every time she looked at her son. Dad Matheson was gruff as usual, but he'd hugged Randi with an enthusiasm that left her ribs aching. When Ian made his announcement about their engagement, pandemonium erupted.

"Wow, and I thought you guys were just gonna live together in sin," Ian's nephew Julian put in.

"I'll have none of that talk in this house, young man!" Dad Matheson bellowed.

Julian shrugged and went back to his comic book. Aunt Elsa merely grunted, but she did reach over and pat Randi's hand, smiling.

"Did you ... did you see your brother while you were in the States, Ian?" his mother asked plaintively.

Ian's twin brother, Neville, was still incarcerated in a state correction facility outside of Baltimore, Maryland. A career criminal, Neville had been serving time now for five years. Julian had been shipped home to his grandparents when Neville's wife had passed away. Dad Matheson considered this just one more black mark in his black sheep son's copybook. Mum Matheson doted on Julian, trying to recapture his crooked father's lost childhood.

"Sorry, Mum. We never got out to the East Coast," Ian answered uncomfortably.

"Oh. I wonder if they'd let him out for your wedding?"

"They didn't let him out for Ian's funeral, I don't see why they'd spring him for Ian and Randi's wedding," Julian commented cynically.

Ian and Randi exchanged glances, shuddering inwardly at the memory of Ian's death at his department head's hands. None of the family knew that he had truly been dead, brought back to life by the power of the reconstituted Staff of Gilgamesh; Ian had claimed to have gone underground to catch Dr. Stevens and bring her to justice.

"It wasn't a real funeral, Julian. The Home Office was aware of my undercover work," Ian pointed out, lying through his teeth. He really was beginning to excel at that.

"I don't even want to think about that time!" Mum exclaimed. "Randi, dear, how long will you be staying?" she asked hopefully.

Randi looked at Ian. "Well, we'll be staying here just for the night — we're going up to meet Dr. Carlson tomorrow. But we'll be back in a few days," she amended in an effort to forestall another shower of tears. "I expect we'll stay a few days before we have to get back to LA." She glanced meaningfully at Ian; they'd have to be back to make use of the dungeon below at the full moon.

"Yes, Mum. And while we're here, I can go through all that junk you've been accumulating for me."

"You're not going to stay? You're going **back** to Los Angeles?"

Ian shook his head slowly. He stood up and went over to his mother, putting his hands on her shoulders. "I have a very good career in California, Mum. We're only taking a vacation. There's no future for me here in London, Mum," he added gently.

This of course set his mother off again, and she ran from the room wailing. "Now look what you've done!" Dad shouted, racing after her as quickly as his bulk would allow.

"It's been boring without you two," Aunt Elsa piped up. "Nice to have you back. Did you remember my autographed photo of Adrian Zmed?"

"A

h, I **have** missed this!" Ian crowed as he steered his car onto the motorway. Wind whipped through his hair as he threw his head back laughing.

"I thought you liked that fancy car you bought in LA," Randi yelled over the windstream.

"Oh, I do, I do. It's just that nothing can compare with a classic!"

Their leave-taking from the Matheson household had once again been tearful, but with Ian's car out of storage and loaded with their luggage, the duo had taken to the road early to miss the morning traffic. Thanks to directions forwarded to the B&B, they were now on their way to their reunion with Professor Mason/Gareth Carlson.

"Y'know, I hadn't realized how much I missed your family until we got back," Randi commented, holding her hair from blowing in her face.

"Yes, absence does make the heart grow fonder," Ian agreed.

Oh, goodie, he was in one of his pedantic moods again. Randi grimaced. "No, I mean it. LA's nice and all, but this ... this is home," she added.

"This is **my** home, yes," Ian replied, tilting his head toward her as he maneuvered around a lorry. "I was born here. But Los Angeles is **our** home."

"I was **born** there, yes. But when I think of us and home, I think of your parents' place."

"We are **not** going to spend our wedded life living in my Mum and Dad's B&B, Randi."

"You really **are** serious about that, aren't you? Us getting married, I mean. But what if this isn't it, Ian? What if we don't find a cure **this** time, either?"

He glanced over at her, his expression sympathetic. "We'll find a cure. We've got a month of leave and considerably more cash than we ever had when I taught at the university. That gives us more flexibility. If Professor Mason's discovery isn't it, then we can afford to go to places more likely. I thought you said you had a good feeling about this."

She paused, considering. "I do. But you don't. So why marriage? We can't do anything about it — we can't **consummate** as long as I've got my monthly curse."

He was silent for a while, his eyes focussed on the road ahead. Finally, he reached over with one hand and squeezed hers. "I suppose ... because I love you, that's why."

She squeezed back, looking at him. "I guess that'll do."



It was more than 100 miles from London to the dig site outside Wickham. When Ian and Randi pulled up in front of the local inn, The Pig's Trotters, Randi was enchanted. This was the way she'd always envisioned England — Tudor buildings with thatched roofs, mullioned windows, and dark little pubs with ancient beams and worn barstools.

Ian grumbled every step to their room, hauling more than his fair share of the luggage because the quaint little Tudorized Pig's Trotters had no help beyond the desk clerk at this time of day, and "Sorry, sir, I'm afraid I can't help with your bags — it's my lumbago, y'see, sir."

Finally they made their way to their room, and Ian huffed and puffed his way in with the bags. "Come on, Ian, you're in good shape. All that running you do, this should be a piece of cake," Randi called as she skipped up the stairs with her knapsack and overnight case.

"Chivalry is not dead," he kept repeating to himself like a mantra. "Chivalry is not dead. And I shall not wring Randi's pretty little neck ..."

"I love it," Randi breathed as Ian reached the head of the stairs. She dropped her bags and ran out to grab more from Ian. Suddenly overbalanced, Ian stumbled and fell face-first into the room, a room flooded with light and smelling of fresh lavender.

"Randi!" he exclaimed as he picked himself up from the chaos of the luggage. "Oh. I say."

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" She looked at the massive four-poster bed that dominated the room. "Oh."

"Ah."

"Maybe they've got another room ..."

"The desk clerk said they're full up. All the people from the dig." He walked over to her and placed his hands on her shoulders. "We've risen above the flesh under more tempting

circumstances, Randi. I don't foresee a problem here, do you?"

She looked at him for a long moment before replying. "No, I guess not. Keep thinking of Aunt Elsa's cooking. That should put the kibosh on anything remotely romantic ..."

He laughed and let her go. With a wistful glance at the huge bed, he turned to gather up their baggage and begin unpacking.

Professor John Mason, in the body of Dr. Gareth Carlson, met them himself with the dig's main Rover shortly after the bar opened. His expansive greeting, loaded as always with magniloquence, was at odds with the weathered, almost emaciated figure of Carlson. Ian took an odd sort of pleasure at seeing how the dashing figure of his college days had aged. He puffed out his chest and smiled broadly, extending a well-tanned hand in welcome.

"Ah, my children! Have I wonders to show you! Have you dined?" he added, glancing in to the bar, from which wonderful smells wafted on the early afternoon breeze.

"Shall we?" Ian invited, gesturing toward the pub.

Mason was uncharacteristically silent as they were seated and gave their bar orders to the barmaid. Or bar matron; the woman looked old enough to be Randi's mother. When their drinks were served, Mason took a long, satisfying pull from his pint and sat back, sighing.

"Ah. Real ale. Wonderful stuff."

Ian sipped at his beer, watching the Professor, who smiled enigmatically.

"I have one word for you both. **Wayland.**"

"Wayland. Ah. Anglicized name for the Norse forge god Volund. Brought to the British Isles by the Saxons —"

"Yes, quite, my boy. The forge god. Creator of the sword of Beowulf. 'Wayland's work.'"

"Right. There are many legends about places connected to Wayland —"

"But no one has ever found physical evidence that he existed. It has always been assumed that he was a variation on the forge god myth, like Vulcan and Haephaestus. Until now."

"You found Wayland's burial chamber?" Randi asked, incredulous.

"Better than that, my dear. His **forge**. Oh, and his burial chamber is of course connected to it. But the forge. The artifacts! Exquisite work. And one thing in particular which I think you will find fascinating."

Both Randi and Ian watched him with anticipation, but he would explain no further. Their food arrived and he tucked in with relish. "All in good time, my children. All in good time."

"Of course Carlson's done some very good work. But he was never the mythological scholar that you are, Ian. No, it took my expertise to unlock the secrets of the manuscripts he discovered."

Ian basked in the approval of his old mentor, while Randi champed at the bit to get to the site and see this fabulous artifact Mason kept referring to.

"Yes, a manuscript dating back to the time of Gildas. Possibly lost since before the time of the Venerable Bede. But the story of the burial of Wayland ... wonderful stuff."

"You're absolutely positive it's Wayland himself?" Ian demanded. Not that he doubted the possibility — if the woman he loved could be transformed into a slaving wolf every month, then anything could be possible. But the discovery of the tomb of a Norse god?

"Indubitably. The chronicle in the manuscript very specifically details many of the artifacts in the forge. And, my boy, we found 'em. Them and many others. It's a find that'll make the world forget Sutton Hoo ever existed!"

It was impossible not to be infected by Mason's enthusiasm. A find like this would ... well, it would make Carlson world-famous. Ian felt a twinge of jealous rivalry surface at the thought. But if it brought with it a cure for Randi ...

"And the artifact that you want us to see ..." Randi prompted.

"First I want you to read the manuscript. Then you'll see the real significance of it."

They rounded a bend and found themselves on a dirt track cut into the woodland. The Rover bounced and bucked as Mason barrelled down the makeshift roadway, but soon they could see the outlying tents of the dig site. Mason floored the accelerator and suddenly, they were there. He bounded from the vehicle and motioned for them to follow him into the single trailer in the camp, obviously the center of operations. He went immediately to a large safe, incongruous in the primitive surroundings, and quickly dialed the combination. Reverently, he extracted an ancient scroll, and carried it to the work table. With great care, he unrolled the scroll and weighted it with implements from the table. Then he stepped back, spreading his hands to present the scroll.

Randi peered at the scroll, but could make no sense of it. Ian pressed in eagerly, lips moving as he slowly translated the text. "It's in Old English," he said absently, his forefinger touching the fragile scroll to follow the words as they reformed in his head. " ... and in the forge stands the Sword of the ... **Wolf** ... as great a sword ... as any Wayland forged ... a sword of magic so great ... that none may wield Ulfhel — 'wolf death' — save the one ... the one she was born to ... I can't make out that last word," Ian said, straightening.

Mason stared at the word Ian indicated, and smiled. "Serve. At least that's how I translate it. Carlson, too. Interesting, don't you think?"

"A sword? We came all this way for a **sword**? How's that supposed to cure me?"

"Well," Mason prevaricated. "It's the Sword of the Wolf. The **magic** Sword of the Wolf."

"Yeah. And it was probably intended to **kill** a wolf, not cure it."

Ian draped his arm around Randi's shoulders and smiled. "We won't know until we look at it, will we? Can we see it now, Professor?"

"Right this way," Mason replied, gesturing toward the trailer door. "We none of us have removed it from the site." He stopped suddenly and looked at them. "Ah. We'll have to go into the barrow. You two really aren't dressed for the occasion. Let me get you some gear and you can change first, right?"

A little while later, clad in workboots, coveralls and hard hats, Ian and Randi rejoined Professor Mason/Carlson at the buttressed entrance to the barrow. The mound was enormous, rising nearly 100 feet high and extending for nearly an acre. Ian peered dubiously into the dimness beyond. "How did you locate the entrance?"

"The manuscript, my boy. Amazingly precise directions, if one makes an educated guess or two. Now, let's go take a look at history."

As they descended the rough-hewn steps cut into the ground, they could hear the steady hum of the portable generator that kept the lights illuminated. All other sound was muffled, deadened by the earthen walls of the stairway. Randi was reminded uncomfortably of their sojourn into the warrens beneath the cemetery when they had first confronted Dr. Stevens and her army of the dead. She shivered with the memory and grabbed onto Ian's arm for reassurance.

Mason led the way, holding up a lantern to brighten the places between the lights strung along the roof of the excavation. They drove deeper, and they could feel the turn of the path as they veered toward the burial chamber and forge. After a few moments, they found themselves facing a linteled doorway and the shimmer of ancient gold.

"Wow!" Randi breathed, looking into the chamber. Along the perimeter of the room stood shields, daggers, goblets and jewelry of sublime artistry. Toward the back of the chamber stood a dais of roughly carved stone. On the dais rested a massive sarcophagus. Randi took a step toward the coffin. "Is it ... ?"

"Yes," Mason answered softly. "The final resting place of the smithgod Wayland."

The body, strangely mummified, was small, twisted. The legs were pitifully warped, the kneecaps skewed in such a way that Randi winced with sympathetic pain.

"Let them straightway cut his sinews of strength and set him then in Saevarstath ...!," Mason quoted.

"Poetic Edda?" Ian ventured, attempting to place the quote.

"Volundarkvitha," Mason agreed approvingly. "Perhaps the longest surviving Wayland poem. And there he lies, the maimed god."

Randi looked up, her face sober. "Cruel."

"History is cruel, my dear. Would you like to see the forge, now?"

Silently, the trio left the burial chamber and made their way further down the excavated corridor. All around them was the heavy scent of earth, the cold tang of minerals. The smell of candlewax and indefinable, ancient odors mixed into the aroma as they came closer to the entrance of the forge.

If the burial chamber had contained a wealth of magnificent handiworks, the forge was beyond price. Randi and Ian moved slowly, reverently, hushed beyond words by the opulence of the artifacts. Finally, Randi's eyes came to rest on the statue of a wolf, wrought in gold and resembling the illuminated wolves that sometimes appeared in medieval manuscripts. And the sword clutched in its paws. Her hand moved of its own volition toward the blade.

"I wouldn't touch it if I were you," Mason warned. "A few years ago, I'd have thought nothing of taking it up and testing its weight. But the passage in the manuscript ... well, it may well be cursed, you see."

Ian came over to stand by Randi as she examined the sword without touching it. A magnificent weapon, it would have stood nearly the height of a man of the early centuries of the first millennium, A.D. Down the center of the flat of the blade were inscribed runes, deeply etched into the metal.

"Have you translated the runes?" Ian asked quietly.

"No, I'm afraid it's a dialect none of us is familiar with. Breathtaking, isn't it?"

Ian nodded, contorting himself so he could see more of the runes beneath the paws of the golden wolf. Randi stood still, mesmerized by the sword. Suddenly, she began to speak. "Here be I, Ulfhel, killer of wolves. Safe be the hand that wields me, for I will never harm her."

"What did you say, Randi?" Ian demanded, straightening.

"Huh?"

"You ... you — don't you remember what you just said?"

"I didn't say anything."

"Randi, my dear, I'm afraid you did," Mason pointed out, coming over to join them. He bent to peer more closely at the sword.

Randi laughed. "I didn't say anything," she insisted.

"No, my dear, of course you didn't," the Professor agreed quietly, glancing toward Ian. "Well," he added, standing up. "Why don't I show you some of the artifacts we've already removed and catalogued?"

Back in the trailer, they'd changed out of their gear, and Mason showed them the records of the dig, as well as the artifacts that the dig team had already cleaned and tagged. After appropriate murmurs from Ian, he spent the next hour explaining how he used the scroll and his own knowledge of myth to locate the entrance to the barrow and the corridor leading to the burial chamber and forge.

"More than likely, when the forge was actually active, that linteled doorway was open to the world. The amount of earth moved to create the mound is phenomenal — makes you really appreciate the ingenuity of the ancients, don't you think, m'boy?"

"Mmm," Ian agreed, his attention split between Mason's monologue and Randi's odd behavior. Since they'd entered the trailer, she had been sitting silently on the trailer's couch, staring out the window toward the mound. "This is fascinating. Don't you think so, Randi?"

She didn't answer, simply continued staring.

"Randi?" Concerned, Ian went over to her and jarred her slightly. She shook herself and looked up. "Ian? What's wrong?"

"I could ask the same of you. What's with you?"

"With me?" She laughed. "Nothing's with me. I'm just ... thinking ... is all," she added, her gaze drifting back toward the mound.

"Uh-huh," Ian agreed slowly. He made a show of glancing at his watch. "Look, it's getting sort of late. Why don't we head back to the inn, eh? Have some dinner, a little wine ..."

"Splendid idea!" Mason concurred heartily. "The inn serves a particularly nice steak and kidney pie. Let me just let the team know I'm leaving the site, and I'll be right with you." With that, Mason/Carlson bustled out of the trailer.

Ian sat down beside Randi, putting his arm around her shoulders. She turned briefly toward him and smiled, then turned back to the window. "What is it, Randi? What's got your attention so ... riveted?"

Randi shook herself, turning back toward him. "I don't know," she answered, sighing. "There's something about that mound. I feel ... I feel it ... calling to me. It's weird."

Ian's other arm came around to hold her in a light embrace. "If Professor Mason is correct and that is Wayland's tomb, then those artifacts in the forge could well be magic. And dangerous. It's time we got you away from here."

She nodded slowly.

"Good. Besides, it's been a long time since I've had steak and kidney pie. Come on."



he steak and kidney pie was as good as Mason had promised, and as the distance between Randi and dig site had increased, the effect on her seemed to pass. The pub of the inn was full to capacity, with locals, tourists and members of the dig team. Replete and sleepy, Ian and Randi finally made their goodnights shortly before midnight, hauling themselves up the stairs to their room wearily.

Ian changed in the bathroom down the hall, while Randi had first dibs on the bedroom. The church bell tolled midnight as Ian was brushing his teeth. With a quick swipe of his fingers through his hair, he tied the belt on his bathrobe and returned toward the room. He walked into the room to feel the chill of air blowing through the open window, and glanced around apprehensively. "Randi?" he called out. No answer. Then he heard the roar of a gunning motor and he dashed to the window.

His car — his classic, beloved car — was peeling out of the inn's parking lot, a spray of dust and gravel erupting from beneath its squealing tires. At the wheel was Randi, her long hair whipping in the wind created by the car's speed. He called out once to her, then grabbed his clothes and shoes and tore down the stairs.

Mason was still in the bar, regaling his colleagues with yet another story about Gareth Carlson's days at Oxford. Ian had struggled out of his bathrobe on the headlong rush down the stairs, and was now clumsily pulling on his shirt.

"Professor! I need your car!" he demanded, racing into the pub.

"Ian, my boy —"

"Your keys, Professor! Now!" The panic in his voice was a physical presence. Mason's eyes widened, and he dug into his pocket.

"Randi?"

"She's taken my car, I've got to get to the dig," Ian explained quickly, grabbing the keys and turning on his heel. Mason leapt up after him, and as Ian tore open the driver's side door, Mason was already folding himself into the passenger's side.

"Drive, lad, drive!" Mason commanded.

The Rover screamed out of the parking lot into the night.

Ian's car, with Randi at the wheel, slammed down the track toward the dig site. Randi stared ahead, expressionless, as the car shuddered and kicked its way along the rough road. Finally, the car swerved to a stop outside the site trailer, and Randi jumped out of the car, running toward the dig entrance. A soft gleam, like light reflecting off gold, met her as she plunged down the stairs.

Moments later, Mason's Rover made its noisy way into the clearing near the trailer. A little over a mile back, they'd had to pull over so Mason could take over rather than find themselves lost. Ian had managed to wriggle into his clothes and shove his feet into his shoes by the time the Professor had pulled into the clearing, and was racing across the clearing to the entrance to the mound as Mason switched the ignition off. Mason was right behind him. Both men stopped short at the sight of Randi, hands clasped around the hilt of Ulfhel, the blade raised toward the sky. Slowly, she rose up the stairs, her lips moving to a chant, only the rhythm wafting toward them on the night breeze. An eerie light shimmered up the blade, reflecting off Randi's nearly immobile face. Odd sounds filled the night as Ian gasped. An invisible force seemed to hold them in place, and Ian bellowed, turning his will to move his legs. Suddenly he was moving again, sprinting toward Randi.

Mason shook himself, staring at the pair converging in the clearing, Ian wild with panic, Randi serene in the weird glow of the sword. "Ian, no!" he yelled, and with a supreme effort, he too was running toward the tableau.

Abruptly, Randi stopped, her arms rigid as she held the sword aloft. As Ian came within a few feet of her, she turned toward him and snarled. Ian stumbled back a step; Randi was in the first stage of her transformation, yet the full moon was still several days away. Her voice grew louder, the words growing more distinct. She spoke a language he didn't recognize, but he could sense the power behind it as his skin began to crawl. Mason came up behind him, gasping for breath. "I don't recognize the language," the Professor admitted. "I think we're hearing something that hasn't been spoken on this earth for more than a millennia," he added softly.

"I don't care what it is," Ian hissed. "It can't have her."

Randi's voice was still rising in volume, urgent, commanding. A thunderclap crashed, a bolt of lightning rent the night. Ian looked up; a whirlwind was forming overhead, descending toward Randi. "No!" he shouted, and heedless to his safety, leapt at her, attempting to wrestle the sword away from her. She struggled mightily, arms locked over her head, but Ian held on against her superhuman strength. "Help me, Professor!" he commanded, and Mason jumped into the fray. The whirlwind continued to spiral down toward them, lifting Randi's hair in a swirl above her head. Bits of gravel from the track whipped around them, dirt stung their eyes, yet they held on. Her voice lifted higher, ringing with triumph, as the whirlwind touched down around them. Sound amplified beyond pain, and suddenly, there was blackness.

Grimstone Abbey sat atop the escarpment like a leprous toad, silent, dark, reeking of death. He lifted his sensitive nostrils to test the air. Innocent and damned had died there; death had no qualms about the morals of its victims. The death was old, at least a few months, but the scent was still there for those who knew how to sniff it out. Grimly, he turned his horse toward the Abbey and urged it up the trail.

Robert of Huntingdon made his way through Sherwood at daybreak toward Herne's cave. Spring was struggling to bloom in the forest, a spring that was less dreadful than the one he had feared the previous autumn. Somehow, the Sheriff and Gisbourne had managed to convince the King that the villages had had no grain stores to offer the King's soldiers, and reprisals had been few. The grain his band and the villagers had stored in Sherwood had seen the villages through the winter, and now with spring approaching, they had hope of a better harvest.

Since he had left his home at Huntingdon to accept the mantle of Robin i' the Hood, Herne's Son, Robert had visited Herne's sanctuary but a few times. The man-god came to him more often than not, but this time, Herne had summoned him in dreams. Unlike his predecessor, Robert was not of the fey, but he could recognize urgency as well as the next man. Something had disturbed Herne, and Herne's Son must heed his call.

He reached the edge of the lake and pulled the reeds away from the boat that rocked gently at the shore. Silently, he slipped into the little craft and guided it toward the island which Herne held as his own. Birdsong accompanied the muted lapping of the water against the boat's sides, a soft whisper of newborn leaves in the trees urged him on. Finally the coracle nudged the far bank and Robert tied it off on an outcropping and trudged up the muddy slope toward Herne's cave.

The sun was rising to its full glory as Robert entered the cool dimness of the cave. Herne was seated before a pot hung over a fire, his antlered headgear resting beside him. Herne the man looked up as Robert shadowed the doorway.

"You've come. Good," Herne greeted him.

"You called for me — what else could I do?" Robert replied simply.

Herne nodded, satisfied with the answer. He gestured toward the rocky bench across from him and Robert sat down.

"What is it, Herne? Why did you call me?"

The man-god — more man at this moment than god — drew a deep breath and looked directly into Robert's eyes. "Gulnar is dead. Yet there is another who would herald the Time of the Wolf. And he is coming to Sherwood."

Robert's eyes widened as he sat back in surprise. "Who else could summon Fenris?" he demanded.

"Gulnar was an opportunist, a man hungry for power and ready to take on any evil cause that might quench his hunger. Fenris was an opportunity. But there are others who follow the Wolf out of devotion, not desire. One such is coming, drawn by the battle that held Fenris at bay." From his side, Herne picked up a leather drawstring bag and opened it. He withdrew a handful of pungent herbs. "I cannot see clearly ... this one has great power, greater than Gulnar. A sorcerer of ancient evil."

"Can we stop him? What weapons do we have against such power?" Robert pressed, leaning forward.

"Others come to Sherwood. Strangers are drawn, some friend, some foe." The herbs were scattered over the smooth surface of the water in the pot between them. A fine mist began to rise from the cauldron, scented with the herbs. "Your foe bears the mark of the Wolf. Your friend you will know by the sword he carries. The work of Wayland." He shook himself. "Ever Wayland. He forges your destiny as he forged the swords of power."

"How soon?" Robert asked. "How soon until the strangers come?"

Herne looked deep into the water, squinting to make out the images only he could see. Yet again Robert regretted the fact that unlike Robin of Loxley, he could rarely pierce the veil beyond this world. Herne shook his head. "They are here. The time is coming, soon. You must prepare. You must find your allies and gain their support. Together you can defeat the Wolf."

"And what of you, Herne? What can you do?"

The mist became a fog. Herne's voice was muffled, dreamy. "The Wolf is the hunter. The hunter becomes the Wolf. Wolf against Wolf. The past sets the future, the future decides the present."

"What do you mean, Herne? What does it all mean?"

Herne shook his head. "Go, now. Everything is confused. You must find the sword-bearer. The sword is the key."



unhngn ..." Ian Matheson groaned, every inch of his skin and at least 99% of his joints and internal organs aching. No, make that 100%. He felt like a walking ... laying ... advertisement for Exedrin.

"Ian?" a plaintive voice whispered, and he felt a stirring beneath him. Randi! Opening his eyes — a definite mistake, but necessary under the circumstances — he saw Randi crumpled beneath him and quickly rolled over. He immediately regretted the action, and the steak and kidney pie he'd had for dinner threatened to make a sudden reappearance.

"Oh, my," breathed another voice not far away. Mason/Carlson! Another moan from Randi captured his attention and he crawled painfully back to her side.

"Randi! Randi, are you all right?" he asked urgently.

"Ooooh," she moaned. "What hit me — I feel like hell," she added, trying to lift her head.

"Join the club," he replied, touching her face. "Do you remember anything?"

"Um, dinner, then up to the room, then ... a sound, like bells. And drums. And ..." She opened her eyes warily and blinked. Another blink. "What the hell —"

Ian looked around him and took in the scenery with a jolt. Where were the tents, the trailer? The cars? The ... the mound was there, but there was no opening, no reassuring lights, no sign of the excavation. Where in hell were they?

Mason was picking himself up from the ground, and stood staring around him. The sky overhead was lightening, presaging dawn. "I don't think we're in Kansas anymore, Toto," he quipped, immediately raising his hand to his head, grimacing as though in pain. "Uhhhn," he commented. "I don't suppose you remembered to bring some aspirin, dear boy?"

Ian and Randi struggled to their feet, Ian shaking his head, and Randi leaning heavily on the staff — no, the sword — in her hand. "Where did this come from?" she demanded.

"You don't remember."

"Ian — what —"

"I'm afraid, my dear, that you may be the one Ulfhel was meant to serve."

"Oh, come on, Professor —"

"The Professor's right, Randi. You left the inn, drove out to the site, and when we got there, you were carrying the sword and chanting some weird language."

"You're telling me this sword did that to me. You are!" She dropped the sword and jumped away from it, screeching. "What the hell is going on?"

Mason looked up at the brightening sky and frowned. "I'd say the sword has its own agenda, and we've found ourselves with a pretty problem."

Ian followed Mason's gaze and his eyes widened. No telephone wires. No jet trails. In fact, the sky was clearer than he'd ever remembered seeing it. Something distinctly odd was going on, and he wasn't sure he liked the conclusions his mind was drawing.

"I think you're right, Professor. We're not in Kansas anymore."

Looking over toward the mound, Mason nodded. "I think it's safe to say we're still in England. But when?"

He laid his hand upon the shattered remnants of the rudely-carved wolf and shook his head. The crudity of its shape mirrored the crudity of Gulnar's design. The druid had always been heavy-handed, inconstant — his master, Fenris, had been a passing fancy to the wizard, a means to an end. No, this time, this time would truly be the Time of the Wolf. Perhaps not today, not even next year, but when it arrived, there would be no resistance, only rejoicing by the hundreds, thousands, millions of Children of the Wolf.

When his pack arrived, he would put them to work to clear away the debris of Gulnar's ill-fated — and ill-conceived — attempt to break the bonds of Fenris. On the edge of awareness, he could hear the Great Wolf's discontent at having been awakened, then thwarted. Unfortunate, but the fault was Gulnar's. With care, planning, and patience, the world could be prepared properly. And he was nothing if not patient. For a thousand years and more, he had tread the earth in search of ways to free his master. And now he had the perfect plan, the perfect pawns to set upon the chessboard of history. He, Wulfring, would set the stage for the triumphant ascension of Fenris from the pit.

But Gulnar had chosen a promising site from which to mount the campaign. With the monks dead, the Abbey was a defensible fortress, its stone walls had withstood tumult and battle before. It was only Gulnar's arrogance and stupidity which had led to his defeat. There was sufficient room for his pack to grow, and the surrounding countryside was populated enough to provide both prey and followers to his cause, yet far enough from power to avoid immediate notice. And the forest of Sherwood was home to one of Fenris's oldest enemies, the Lord of the Trees, Herne.

By accident or design, Gulnar had chosen this location well. And he would see that the choice bore the fruit of his god.

"God, it's cold," Randi Wallace complained as she trudged down the rutted road with Ian and John Mason. Even though the sun overhead told them it was near noon, the day was cool, and their modern clothing offered scant protection from the chill.

"This *is* England, after all, my dear, not sunny California," Mason pointed out, quite reasonably.

"It's not any England I've ever seen," she retorted sullenly. "Just where are we?"

"On the King's Road, friends," came a voice from above and to the right of them. The trio halted, glancing around warily. A rustle from the undergrowth, a soft thud, and suddenly three men moved out onto the track, each proffering dangerous looking weapons. One, a giant of a man, carried a large pole or staff in both hands, waiting. Another, smaller and younger, held a bow, arrow cocked and ready to fly. Brandishing a dagger at them, the third man was a scruffy-looking man in his late twenties, unshaven — and unwashed by the smell of him. "And there's a toll to pay hereabouts," said the man with the blade.

"Look at how he's dressed," Randi whispered to Ian as the three travellers moved into a closer knot.

"Ere, you're a woman!" the man exclaimed, lowering his dagger slightly. "You three — where you bound?" he questioned suspiciously.

"Bound?" Mason echoed. "We're travellers — and lost ones, at that, my friend. What is this place?" he asked.

"You don't know where you are? That's a laugh! You're in Sherwood, that's where you are! And everyone who passes this road's gotta pay a toll. Or die. What's it to be, friend?"

Randi and Ian exchanged puzzled glances, Randi mouthing the word "Sherwood" to Ian and widening her eyes apprehensively. Ian reached into his pocket to pull out his wallet. Mason did the same, while Randi slid the sword out of her makeshift scabbard — a combination of her belt and her jeans' beltloops — and stuck the point of the sword in the ground in front of her and followed suit. They didn't notice the trio of ruffians react to the sight of the sword, nor their backward step away from the travellers. Ian rummaged through his wallet and extracted a handful of notes, thrusting them forward.

"What's that, then?" demanded the leader.

"Why ... money, of course," Ian replied, puzzled. "You said we had to pay a toll —"

"Right! That's not money I ever seen — it's no good to us. Gold! Silver! Copper!" Still keeping his eyes on the sword in front of Randi, the leader sketched a dagger stroke in the air. His companions continued to stand still, weapons at the ready, awaiting a signal from their leader. "Where you from?" he asked, narrowing his eyes.

"Quite a ways away, I'm afraid. We are unfamiliar with the customs of your land," Mason replied calmly. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a fistful of coins. "Is this more of what you're looking for?" He held out the coins and the leader came up and put out his hand for them; Mason dropped the coins into his palm.

Puzzled by the strange shapes and even stranger markings, nevertheless the leader nodded. Ian glanced quickly at Mason and nodded, pulling out his change and dropping it into the outlaw's hand. Glancing apprehensively at the sword still standing at Randi's feet, he announced, "That'll do. Robin Hood's men don't take more than they need."

"Robin Hood!" Randi repeated, incredulous. "Then you must be —"

"Scarlet. Will Scarlet. Now be on your way," he commanded, stepping back a respectable distance from the wicked-looking sword.

Randi reached to pick up the sword and Will stumbled back, hands held up to ward off the expected swordblow. "What's your problem? You've got our money, we don't even have anything to buy a meal with! Now you're acting like a fool!" Exasperated, Randi tucked the sword back into her belt. "Men!" she swore under her breath, stalking off down the road, sword slapping at her behind as she marched.

Behind her, the outlaws stared wide-eyed at the hellion. Then Will looked back toward Ian and Mason, who stared equally wide-eyed at the retreating back of Randi Wallace. Will shook his head in commiseration. "I don't envy you."

"You don't know the half of it, my boy," Mason replied airily as he tugged on Ian's arm. "Let's go — she's gaining ground."

As the pair moved off, the younger man shot out his arm to grab at Ian's. "Is it true? What she said? You don't have any money now?"

Ian stared at the young man, puzzled. "You've just robbed us. Why would we still have money we could spend here?"

The young man mulled this over for a moment, joined by the giant. "Give it back, Will," the giant said in a soft voice. "We've no quarrel with honest travellers, friend," he added, nodding to Ian and Mason.

"John!" Will protested, but the fierce grimace of the big man quelled the objection, and with a surly expression, Scarlet handed back the coins. "If I find out you lied to us ..." he threatened darkly.

Mason beamed as he swept up the coins and deposited them in his pockets. "Thank you, kind sirs. Could you tell us where we might get a bit to eat?"

"Nottingham's back that way," the young man answered, nodding toward the way they'd come. "But you daren't show your faces with a sword like that one."

"Nor clothes like those," added Scarlet, shaking his head. "The Abbott'd declare your lady friend a witch, more'n likely, what with them trousers of hers."

"Then Nottingham's out," Ian pronounced. "We can't risk losing the sword. And Randi's not likely to part with her jeans."

"Newark's a fair way — and the King's men billet there. Best you try one of the villages, or maybe one of the alehouses. You can't miss 'em — just follow your nose," advised the big man with a grin.

"You'd best be movin'," Scarlet added. "She's out of sight."

Ian whipped around, peering down the shaded trail. Randi had disappeared into the woodland. With a bellowed, "Randi, wait up!" he tore down the road after her. Mason shrugged apologetically, and stuck out his hand. "Thank you again, sirs. Might I have your names?"

"I'm Much," answered the young man. "Much the Miller's son."

"And I'm John Little, of Hathersage," the big man replied, shaking Mason's hand.

"And I'm John Mason. Good morrow to you, sirs!" he called, running after his companions.

"They're not from around here," Will observed darkly, then turned and hit John in the arm. "What'd you make me give back their money for, eh?"

John shook his head. "Come on. Let's get back to camp," was all he said in reply.

"A

bsolutely fascinating," Mason gasped as he caught up with Ian and Randi. Randi was still marching at double-time, her bright eyes and flaring nostrils an easy indication that she was still seething.

"I'm glad you're enjoying yourself, Professor," she snapped irritably.

"Oh, I am. To meet three of the most famous figures in British balladry! Do you suppose we might actually meet Robin Hood? Oh, this is splendid!"

"Yeah, right, maybe we can borrow his tights. I'm cold as sin!" she complained. "And I'm tired and I'm hungry and I hate this place."

"Then slow down," Ian cajoled. "You're practically setting fire to your shoes."

Randi stopped suddenly, exhaling forcefully. She drew a deep breath to calm herself, then looked at Ian. "What are we going to do? Where the hell are we, and how are we going to get back home?"

"It's not where, my dear, it's when. And I'd estimate we're in the thirteenth century. That's about when the ballads of Robin Hood originated."

"Dandy. I prefer Kevin Costner, myself. What are we doing here?" she demanded, walking over to the edge of the road and settling onto a rock.

"I think you're holding the answer," Ian pointed out, nodding toward the sword. "And I don't think we'll get home until whatever it wants is done."

Randi looked at the sword sourly, then dropped her chin onto her fists. "So. What do we do?"

"Well ..."

"I think the first order of business should be getting ourselves something to eat. I'm famished," Mason observed.

"Me, too. What do they eat in the thirteenth century? Nuts and berries?"

"Actually, the dishes of the era tended to be quite rich — heavily seasoned to mask the flavor of rotting meat, I believe. The simple folk would probably make due with some sort of porridge or gruel, if they could get it. Filling, although not too palatable."

"I think I just lost my appetite."

"Perhaps foraging in the forest might be just the ticket. Nuts and berries. Perhaps we could fashion some sort of sling — I used to be quite good with a catapult in my younger days. We might catch a rabbit."

"We might catch the Plague," Randi countered nastily.

"Oh, no, my dear — that doesn't come along for several more centuries."

"Oh, goodie — something to look forward to."

"Oh, Christ, give it a rest," Ian snapped. "Let's go see what we can find. It's been a long time since I've used my woodland skills, but I suspect they're still up to snuff."

W

hat do you mean, you just let them go?" Robert of Huntingdon demanded of Will Scarlet.

"What're you yellin' about?" Will demanded in turn. "How was I supposed to know you were lookin' for 'em? They were travellers — strange, but harmless. Except maybe for the woman," he added darkly.

"The woman carried the sword?" Robin asked wonderingly. "Herne didn't say anything about a woman."

"Herne doesn't know everything. She was definitely a woman. And it was definitely a sword."

"Well, come on, Will — we've got to find them. Before whatever it is out there finds them first."



an's woodland skills proved to be so far from snuff that Randi guided him to a rock and told him to stay put while she took care of dinner. After all, she was still a card-carrying member of the Sierra Club.

Dusk was beginning to settle in the darkening forest as Randi set off in search of food. It wasn't long before she found a bush with some dried-up looking berries still clinging to the upper branches. As she stuffed her pockets with the berries, she noticed that the lower branches were denuded, not even the stubs of leaves remaining. That meant there might be small animals about, perhaps rabbits. Before she'd been bitten by a werewolf, Randi Wallace had been a confirmed vegetarian. But the wolf in her blood had transformed her into a raging carnivore, with or without the full moon. She lifted her face into the breeze and sniffed. Another advantage of her condition was vastly heightened senses, especially her sense of smell.

There! An image formed quickly in her mind's eye, and she moved off quietly through the brush. The scent led her through the forest, further and further away from the place she'd left Ian and Mason. At last she came to a small stream, chuckling its way over the rocks on the streambed. Drinking delicately at the far bank was a small deer, the shadow of its ribs outlined against its flesh. Randi crouched down on the ground, watching the deer through slitted eyes. She slid the sword out of her beltloops and laid it on the ground beside her.

She'd never had to kill her food before, and the thought sickened her. Snarfing down burgers at Micky Dee's was one thing, but killing an innocent creature ... that was an entirely different matter. Slowly, she rose, intent on leaving the streamside, when the freshening breeze carried the smell of the deer more strongly in her direction.

Suddenly, she went rigid. Then her head whipped up, her eyes rolling back in her head. A low snarl escaped her lips and her fingers flexed convulsively. As her eyes refocused, the irises were a brilliant gold, pupils slitted. She growled softly, dropping back into a crouch. Soundlessly, she moved toward a shallow spot in the stream, downwind of the deer, and made her way across. As she stalked the deer, her canines grew longer, her hands coarser, tipped with talon-like nails. Hair sprouted on the tops of her hands and between her eyebrows. She was nearly on all fours as she moved to within a body-length of the animal.

In one massive lunge, she was tearing at the throat of the animal, impassive to its screams of anguish as its blood rushed over her. Abruptly, it fell limp, and she shook it angrily. Then she dropped it, falling into a feral crouch and lifting her head to howl triumphantly.

Bodies crashing through the undergrowth caught her attention, and she growled menacingly. Then slowly, she rose from her crouch, poised to leap at the intruders.

On the opposite bank, Ian and Mason ground to a halt, gasping. "Oh my God!" Ian breathed at the sight of Randi, half-woman, half-wolf, and drenched in blood. He started to scramble into the stream when Mason's hand shot out and grabbed his arm in an iron grip.

"Not so fast, Ian! Look at her — she'd kill you before you reached the shoreline."

Ankle-deep in water, Ian nodded soundlessly, his face a study in anguish. "Why is this happening?" he whispered. "The moon won't be full for several days —"

"Where's the sword?" Mason demanded suddenly. "She doesn't have the sword on her!"

"Wha —" Ian replied, then realized that the sword must be their ticket home. Frantically, he joined Mason in his search of the nearby ground, crowing with exultation as he leapt up, sword in

hand. The moon was rising now, a gibbous moon, and a beam of moonlight hit the blade and shone across the water. The thin band of light fell across Randi's face, and suddenly she screamed, a very human and frightened scream. Ian was in the water, sword still in hand, before Mason could react.

"Oh my God! Omigod, omigod, omigod! Ian!" screeched Randi, her eyes wild yet very human in a face smooth and furless. She caught sight of her bloodied hands and screamed anew, jumping fearfully away from the steaming carcass of the deer. "Oh, my God, what's happening?"

Ian dropped the sword and wrapped his arms around her, holding on for dear life, murmuring soothing nonsense as he tried to calm her. "It's all right, Randi, we're here, it's okay. Randi, calm down! Randi, I'm here —" He suddenly shifted his arms to grasp her shoulders and shook her. "Calm down! What happened?"

Sobbing hysterically, Randi grabbed at Ian's shoulders, and the renewed sight of her hands caked in gore made her scream again. She broke away from him, plunging into the stream, desperately scrubbing away at her hands, face and neck.

"I'll start a fire," called Mason, and he moved away from the bank to gather dry wood, while Ian waded into the water after Randi.

"Randi, you can stop now — it's all gone. Randi!" he repeated, slapping her face lightly. "Calm down. Tell me what happened," he commanded forcefully, leading her back onto the bank.

Gulping spasmodically, Randi nodded slowly, her eyes still wide with fear. "I ... I found a bush," she began. "It looked like animals had been at it." He smiled encouragingly. Closing her eyes briefly, she nodded again. Opening them, she continued, "I caught the scent of something on the wind, I started to follow it, and I found the deer, here, drinking from the stream —" Her mouth worked soundlessly, eyes glittering with terror.

"And then?" Ian prodded, holding her arms at her sides at arms' length.

"And then ..." she shook her head. "I can't remember anything until I saw you and the ... the blood! Oh, my God, Ian, I'm not safe, I can transform at any moment, you've got to get away —"

"Why did you drop the sword?" he asked quietly.

"The sword? Who cares about the sword —" she demanded, puzzled and suddenly angry.

"The sword has something to do with this, Randi. You started to change back at the site, when you were under its spell. And now, you changed when you dropped the sword, and yet light reflected off of it seemed to change you back. The sword is **very** important, Randi," he pointed out solemnly. "Promise me you won't set it down again."

With a shuddering breath, Randi nodded. "Okay. Okay, I won't. But what are we going to do, Ian? What if I —"

"You won't. Hold onto the sword. It's magic, remember? Believe me, Randi, I won't let anything happen to you again," he added, pulling her into an embrace, and pressing her head against his chest. Stroking her hair, he whispered, "I won't let anything happen to you."

The crackling of breaking branches heralded Mason's return. "Ah. Help me start the fire, will you?" he asked mundanely.



hat was that?" demanded Scarlet in a whisper as he and Robin slipped quietly through the wood.

"Over there!" Robin exclaimed softly, and together the two men set off toward the sound of a woman screaming.



o. I won't."

"Randi, you've got to eat," Ian pointed out pragmatically.

"No. Not *that*," she countered with a shudder of revulsion. She huddled close to the fire, shivering with cold. The sword sat across her feet, glinting in the firelight.

Mason had pulled out Carlson's Swiss Army knife and sliced off sections from the deer's flank, deftly cutting away the soft hide. Chunks of deer meat sizzled and spat over the cheerful fire, filling the air with the tantalizing scent of roasting meat. Ian looked from the makeshift spit to Randi and furrowed his brow with concern. "What then?"

She dug in her pockets and pulled out a fistful of berries, shoving them in her mouth defiantly. Her face screwed up at the sour taste, but resolutely, she continued to chew, staring Ian down. He shrugged, and turned away.

"That's the King's deer you're roasting, friend. A forester would have your hands for that," came a soft, cultured voice from out of the night.

"What? Who's there?" demanded Ian, leaping to his feet.

"Lucky for you, a friend," answered the voice, and a young man, blond, tanned, clean-shaven and barely in his mid-twenties, stepped into the light of the fire. A few feet away, Will Scarlet moved into view.

Mason scrambled to his feet, while Randi continued to sit miserably on the ground. She looked up at the strangers, scowling.

"Looks like you never found that alehouse," Scarlet commented wryly.

"Ah, no," agreed Mason. "Who is your friend?" he asked, nodding toward the blond-haired man.

"This here's Robin Hood," Scarlet replied, hooking a thumb in Robin's direction.

So this was the mythical Robin Hood. Not so mythical, apparently. His eyes swept over the trio, lingering on the sword. He lifted his eyes to look Randi squarely in the face. "You carry a great sword. What is its name?"

Randi frowned a moment, then realized that he meant that the sword had greatness, not that it was nifty. "Ulfhel," she replied.

"The work of Wayland."

"Yes. How did you know — "

"I carry Albion. One of the seven swords of Wayland," he replied, his hand straying to the sword's hilt. "I've never heard of Ulfhel, but Herne told me another of Wayland's swords was here in Sherwood." He turned to the two men. "You've come far. Join us — there'll be food and drink at our camp."

"The deer —" Mason began.

"Leave it. There are wolves out tonight, and it will attract them. You're safer without it."

Randi nodded wretchedly and struggled to her feet. "Are there always wolves in the forest?" she asked softly.

Robin Hood shook his head. "There are more this year. I think, perhaps, that is why you are here."

T

he pack ran free this night, wanton and wild in the forest. Tomorrow, the villages would talk of sheep killed, cattle stolen, the elderly and the infirm lost to the marauding wolves. Tomorrow, fences would be mended, palings erected, and byres closed down as livestock was brought closer to the huts and rude houses of the peasants. But tonight the pack ran free.

He sat upon the abbot's throne and regarded the stars shining clearly in the night sky. Be patient, my Lord, he thought. The pack runs free, and it is growing.

W

an," Ian introduced, then cleared his throat. "Ian Matheson. And this is Randi Wallace, and Professor John Mason," he added, gesturing toward his companions.

"Welcome to Sherwood, Ian Matheson, Randi Wallace and John Mason. A professor, eh? And what faith do you profess, John Mason?" asked Robin mildly as he led the way through the trees.

"I, er, what?" Mason replied. "The faith of the mind, of course. I am a professor of mythology at Oxford University," he added.

"Ah. Then it's Master Mason. You'll find few who speak Latin here in Sherwood, although I know a bit from my tutors."

"Tutors?" Randi asked. "In the forest?"

Robin smiled. "I didn't always live in the forest. I was the only son of the Earl of Huntingdon until the King branded me wolfshead." A shadow of pain flitted across his smooth face, just as Randi's eyes widened at the term 'wolfshead'.

"I'm sorry," Randi said gently, falling in step beside the young man.

"It's a long time ago, now," he agreed.

"Then would you mind telling me what a 'wolfshead' is?"

T

he camp of the outlaws was deep in Sherwood, and after introductions were made, the renegades and their guests helped themselves to the pot. The friar, Tuck, had been in charge of the meal again, and the pot was full of meat, tubers, and forest mushrooms. Thick, hot and pungent, the stew filled the weary travellers quickly. Tuck made suggestive motions toward the mead keg, and Robin approved, smiling. With a clap of pleasure, Tuck broke the seal on the keg and started pouring mugs of mead. It didn't take long for Ian, Randi and Mason to feel the effects of the potent brew.

"Wow," Randi breathed, sipping at the drink. "This stuff is great! Better'n anything I've had at a Ren Faire."

Tuck beamed. "The beekeepers in Sherwood make a fine brew."

"And they're willing enough to let us have a keg or two in exchange for a little help now and again," Will agreed, pulling on his mug.

The Saracen, Nasir, shook his head when Randi glanced his way. "Against his religion," Tuck scoffed. "What God provides, we imbibe!"

"Easy, Tuck. It's your turn on watch tonight," Robin reminded, chuckling. "You have to keep watch, this deep in the forest?" Ian asked around a mouthful of stew.

"There's wolves about," John pointed out seriously. "Edward said he's lost more sheep just this week."

Randi looked at Ian, who nodded once, then nudged her to pay attention.

"Edward's headman in Wickham. And a good friend," Robin explained.

"Aye," Will agreed. "Wolves — more of 'em since last fall. What's bringin' 'em down toward the villages?"

"Mmm. The winter wasn't as hard as some we've had — yet the wolves are coming closer and closer to the villages," added Tuck. "Over in Chalford, the villagers have pulled the flocks back to within sight of the barns."

"Robin, you don't — it couldn't be them Sons of Fenris, now, could it?" Much asked worriedly.

Robin shook his head. "No. Gulnar is dead. The Sons of Fenris are gone." There was something in his tone of voice that made his companions sit up straighter and pay closer attention to him.

"But?" Tuck prompted.

"But Herne warns that the Time of the Wolf may not be over. That another is coming to the forest, another who wants to raise Fenris."

Randi gasped, glancing over at Ulfhel. "Fenris."

"The Norse wolf god," Mason interjected. "Supposed to reenter the world at Ragnarok. The herald of chaos."

Robin nodded slowly. "And mortal enemy of Herne."

"Herne?" Ian asked. He'd heard of Herne the Hunter, the ghost who was supposed to haunt Windsor Forest, but they were far from there, and these men acted as though they were on intimate terms with this 'Herne.'

"Lord of the Trees, the god of the forest," Robin explained. "He called to me, ordered me to come to the forest when Robin of Loxley — the original Robin Hood — was killed. The villagers call me 'Herne's Son'."

"I'd say it's all pagan nonsense, but I've met 'im," Tuck put in. "I've seen what he can do. And it gives the villagers hope to have someone who is Herne's son. Makes the church fathers mad as fighting cocks, but hope's a precious thing hereabouts."

A god. Randi reached over and squeezed Ian's hand. Yes, hope's a precious thing.



he howls of distant wolves carried on the night breeze, filling the clearing with the chilling sound. Robin made one last circuit of the camp, nodding amiably at Tuck, who sat with his back to a large tree facing out into the night, a staff resting across his

updrawn knees. Eyes darting fearfully, Much pulled his brychan closer and hunkered down to sleep, smiling at the sight of Robin. John was already asleep, snoring softly. Will rolled over and pulled his dagger from its pouch, slipped it up his sleeve, then rolled over again. Nasir saluted his leader with the curved blade of his knife, and settled back slowly into the roots of an ancient oak, crossing his arms over his chest, the blade held firmly in his right hand.

Satisfied that the camp was secure, Robin returned to the fire, carefully placing flat rocks around the perimeter to bank the blaze. He glanced over at the trio of strangers and shook his head. So odd, these travellers. Their dress, their manner of speech. A woman with one of Wayland's swords. Even here, he could feel the pulse of its power. Attuned to Albion, he would know if any of Wayland's swords was nearby, but this one sang a strange tune, almost an excited wail. This sword had a purpose, he knew, and it was more than the purpose of Herne. The woman, Randi, lay curled on the ground, several feet away from the man named Ian. In her arms was cradled the sword. Not once since he'd found them had she let go of the sword. A magic talisman? Albion had great power, he knew. More than once he had felt the fey strength of the sword working through him, and more than once it had protected him, though it had been wielded by another. "Herne's son is my master. I cannot slay him." So said the runes inscribed in its blade. Albion's power he knew and trusted. But Ulfhel? This was a wild sword, an unknown.

W

ulfring stood inside the massive doors, awaiting his children. A motley band of men and women, wild-eyed, naked, caked in dirt and detritus, straggled in, their joy expressed in exultant cries and laughter.

"Good hunting, my children?" he asked, smiling.

"Aye, my lord," answered the man at the head of the group. "'Tis a plentiful land. We fed well this night."

"And what have you brought me?" Wulfring inquired, nodding toward the milling crowd.

With a laugh, the leader reached into the group and pulled out a man, bound and gagged and struggling fiercely to break his bonds. "A villager, my lord. A strong man, he nearly cut the ear off Daniel." He poked at the man's tethered arms. "A fine man, sir."

Wulfring laughed, a pealing, ebullient sound. "Excellent, my son. You have done well. Leave him to me and take your rest, all of you. Our master will be pleased with your offering."

As his followers dispersed, a man and a woman came up to him and laid at his feet the carcass of a deer and a barrel of grain. Bowing to him, they passed by and rejoined their comrades who were quickly disappearing into the labyrinth of Grimstone Abbey.

In the deafening silence that followed their departure, Wulfring stood a moment regarding the captive. Then he stepped up to the man and removed his gag. "You have a name."

The man spat in Wulfring face, his face rigid with defiance.

Slowly, Wulfring wiped the spittle from his face, never taking his eyes off the man. "Ah. There's fire in your belly, villager. All the better. My master has no use for lambs."

"To hell with your master," the man cursed. "Robin Hood'll set you right."

"The Hooded Man, eh? Herne's Son. You believe in the man-god, do you? You believe that he will save you?"

"Herne looks after his own," agreed the man, undaunted.

As rapid as a striking serpent, Wulfring's hand shot out and grabbed the man by his hair, yanking

back forcefully. "I'll have your name, man."

Gasping from the pain, the man whispered, "Edward. Edward of Wickham."

"R

obin!" a small voice called urgently. "Robin Hood!"

Tuck roused himself immediately from his light dose, wrenching his bulk into a standing position. "Who's there?" he called out.

"It's me, Tuck, it's Matthew!" the voice answered, and a small boy, no more than ten, stepped out from behind a tree.

"Matthew! What are you doing out so late?"

"It's my father, Tuck. My father's been taken by wolves!"

T

he scene at Wickham was chaotic, panic-stricken. Alison, Edward's wife, was hysterical, tearing at her hair and beating her breasts in time to her sobs and moans. Breathless from running, Robin, his men, Matthew, and the three travellers stumbled across the bridge into the center of the village in the light of flickering torches, pushing their way through the tightly-knotted villagers.

"Alison!" Robin cried, reaching for the maddened woman. She fought him off with clenched fists, wailing. Tuck held Matthew close, his hands on the boy's shoulders.

"Here, let me," Randi offered, shouldering Robin aside. With the flat of her hand, she slapped Alison's face, eliciting a surprised yelp from the villagewoman, then grabbed her in an iron-bound hug Alison could not escape. "Shh! Shhh," she hushed softly. "Calm down — you can't help Edward if you can't tell us what happened."

Alison's tear-streaked face suddenly calmed, her eyes wide. She rubbed absently at the mark left by Randi's hand, and stared at the woman holding her still. "Who are you?" she asked suddenly.

"Friends. We're friends of Robin Hood," Randi replied, glancing over at Robin for support. The outlaw leader nodded approval. "And we'll do what we can to get Edward back, but you've got to tell us what happened. Okay?"

Alison nodded, gulping back her sobs. "Yes."

"Good." Randi let go of Alison and looked over the woman's shoulder at the other villagers. "Can someone get her some water?" At her request, one of the other women scurried off to get a ladle-full of water from the well. She brought it over to Alison and helped her drink. Patting her arm reassuringly, Randi asked Alison, "Are you ready now?"

"Yes, thank you," she replied, handing the ladle back to her neighbor.

Gently, Randi led Alison to join the outlaw band, her arm draped protectively around Alison's shoulders. Robin reached out and grasped her hand, squeezing it sympathetically. The villagers followed silently, clustering around them.

"What can you tell us, Alison?" he asked softly.

The woman closed her eyes for a moment, drawing a deep breath to steady her nerves, and nodded. "You know there've been wolves again this spring," she began. The others nodded encouragement. "Edward was out in the fields with the other men, bringing the livestock closer to the village. We've already lost ... oh, five or six sheep, another three goats, and a cow was brought down the other night." The villagers signaled their assent. "There've been stories ...

anyway, Edward was out, and he and the other men were coming down from the pastureland with what's left of our sheep and cattle and goats. Then suddenly ..." she broke off in a sob.

"We heard the wolves," put in Granther Miller, an elderly man who'd once operated a mill near Wickham. "Comin' down from the hills, they were, fast. A whole pack!"

"Yes," agreed Alison. "A whole pack. The men started walking faster, pushing the animals ahead of them ..."

"And the wolves broke out of the forest," added another man, about Edward's age, named David.

"Only they wasn't any kind of wolf I've ever seen," interjected another, this one named Michael Smith, the village smith. "These wolves ran on two feet!" he appended with a shiver.

"What do you mean, Michael?" Robin asked. "Sons of Fenris — we killed them all —"

"Nay. These weren't men wearing wolfskins. These were wolves on two feet, like men. But they weren't no men," Michael warned ominously.

"Wolves. On two feet," repeated Randi, glancing at Ian. "What did they look like?"
"Tall, tall as John there. Fur all over. Long snouts — vicious teeth. Wild eyes. They howled like banshees."

Alison sobbed again, twisting her skirt in her hands. "The men were almost to the village ..."
Here she broke down again, and Randi tightened her grip on the woman's shoulders.

"The biggest of 'em, a brute he was, broke from the pack and made straight for Edward. A couple more, they went for poor Hugh."

"What happened to Hugh?"

Michael shuddered. "They brought 'im down, like a dog. We couldn't save 'im," he added, shaking his head sadly.

"Where is he?" Ian asked suddenly. Michael shrugged toward a hut at the edge of the village. "I'm going to go have a look," he told Randi.

"Hope you have a strong stomach, stranger. There ain't much left of 'im."

"What happened to Edward?" Robin pressed.

"They took 'im. The big one and two others closed in on 'im and took 'im. Then they ran for the forest faster'n the hounds of hell."

"Was Edward alive? Well?" Robin demanded urgently.

Michael looked at Alison for a long moment before replying. "Yes. I'm fair sure he was still alive. Knocked out, maybe, but alive."

"Then we'll find him," Robin announced with a confidence he didn't quite feel. He laid his hand over Alison's wrist and squeezed. "We'll find him, Alison."

"Blessed be, son of Herne," Alison breathed, her eyes shining. "If you say you'll find him, I know he'll be home soon."

As always, Robin found the unshakable belief of some of the villagers unnerving. Alison, like

many others, truly believed that he had powers beyond mortal ken. Silently, he prayed that he could fulfill his promise; Edward was a good friend, and leader of these people. Without him, they were already lost.

"Randi, Professor!" Ian called from the hut where Hugh's remains were laid. "Come look at this."

With another hug, Randi released Alison, and joined Mason and Ian at the hut's entrance. They followed Ian inside, where the corpse of Hugh was dimly lit by a torch. Ian picked up the torch and brought it closer to the body. "What do you think?" he asked.

Hugh's throat had been torn out, the trachea severed, and the neck laid open to the spinal column. Flaps of ragged flesh hung away from the wound. Mason bent over to examine it more closely. "Yes, definitely a massive paw of some kind — look at the entry wounds — those are definitely nails, razor sharp." He touched the injury tentatively, splaying his fingers over it. "About the size of a man's hand, perhaps a bit bigger," he pronounced.

Randi was staring at her own hands, eyes wide with fear. She refused to look at the body of the unlucky Hugh. Ian laid a hand on her shoulder and said, "It wasn't you. It couldn't have been you."

"How do you know? I could have changed while you were sleeping —"

Ian shook his head. "No," he told her gently. "I never really fell asleep. And Tuck was on guard. Someone in the camp would have seen you. It wasn't you."

She let go of a pent-up breath and relaxed slightly. "Thanks. But who?"

"Or what?" Mason countered.

"No. Who," Randi replied. "Those wounds were made by a werewolf."

"And it sounds as though there's a pack of them loose in Sherwood," Ian commented. He looked pointedly at Randi's sword. "I think perhaps we've found what it wants."

Randi's hand strayed to the hilt of Ulfhel, now suspended at her hip in a leather scabbard Robin Hood had given her. She raised her eyes to lock with Ian's, her face grim.

Michael led the outlaws and their friends to the site of the strange battle with the man-wolves. Nasir dropped to his knees, examining the hard ground. Randi walked around warily, sniffing the air. Suddenly, she started moving toward the edge of the forest.

"Randi!" Ian called. "Don't go on alone!"

"They went this way, Ian," she replied, and the Saracen stood and nodded.

"She is right," he said simply and followed her.

Shaking Michael's hand, Robin signalled for the others to follow Randi and Nasir.

Edward of Wickham shivered uncontrollably. It wasn't the cold; a byre burned cheerfully nearby, bathing his sweating body in heat. It wasn't any fever he'd ever known. But his body shuddered and convulsed under the onslaught of a pain greater than anything he had ever experienced. His blood burned, searing every nerve ending. A slow trickle escaped the gash in his neck, the gash made by Wulfring.

He was shackled to a pillar in the chapel of Grimstone Abbey, the same pillar that had once held Robin Hood Gulnar's captive. Leaning against the altar, Wulfring watched Edward's suffering with alert interest.

"Eventually, the pain passes. It is but a moment," he observed, waving his hand, dismissing the man's agony. "Then you will begin to see the world through new eyes. Stronger, better eyes."

Edward raised his head and looked at Wulfring, his eyes a brilliant gold, his pupils slitted, and growled.

"R

ecognize the path, Robin?" John asked quietly as he and the others followed the rapid pace set by Randi and Nasir. The sun was rising to the east, filtering through the burgeoning trees like liquid gold. Birds chirruped their greeting to the day, and the woods were filled with the sounds of wildlife.

Robin nodded once. "The path to Grimstone Abbey," he agreed.

"Aye," the big man assented. "Grimstone Abbey." It was a name full of portent, a harbinger of doom. Despite the growing warmth of the day, John Little shivered.

A

t the head of the column, Randi and the Saracen, Nasir, continued to follow their own senses: Nasir, his eyes, ears and nose, Randi primarily her nose. She could smell the wolves — the werewolves — and mixed within the scent, the very human smell of fear. She kept that fact to herself; whatever the pack had planned for Edward of Wickham, it had terrified the man sufficiently to send off olfactory alarms.

As she marched next to the Saracen, she was shocked to realize how quickly she'd come to accept this strange world of the past, how quickly they'd come to accept her. She was as alien to this land as the Arab walking beside her, a woman with a sword. A woman wearing trousers, for that matter, and one who was in no way submissive. And just how could she, Ian and Professor Mason understand these people? She hadn't thought of it before, but surely they must speak an archaic form of English, and yet, there had been no difficulty in understanding them, or making themselves understood to the people of this time. Not for the first time, her hand closed reflexively around the hilt of Ulfhel, their ticket here, and hopefully their passport home. She could only assume that the sword's magic had extended to provide them the keys to communicate in this faraway time.

She glanced over at Nasir, taking an opportunity to study him. His swarthy face was impassive, the dark eyes constantly scanning the thick undergrowth and surrounding trees. She couldn't remember any mention of a Saracen in the Robin Hood ballads collected by Childe, but then again, they'd probably been written by Christians who'd balked at the idea of an infidel hero. So, Kevin Costner got it right, even if he hadn't had the right name.

"Wait," Nasir said abruptly, his arm suddenly blocking her path.

"What is it?" she asked softly.

"Listen."

She strained to hear the sounds that the man had picked up, trying to filter the familiar sounds of the forest away. There it was. Movement. Voices. Human voices.

Quietly, the others moved up behind them, Robin sending a silent query to Nasir.

"Voices, up ahead," the Saracen replied simply. "Stay here." Silently, he moved away from the column, into the artificial twilight of the close-set trees.

"He shouldn't go out there alone —" Randi started to protest.

"Nasir can take care of himself," Robin chided with a faint smile.

Crouching low to the ground, Nasir moved swiftly through the undergrowth toward the sound of the voices. As he came nearer, he could begin to make out words, but the tongue was alien to him. Guttural, harsh. Over the years, he'd become accustomed to the inelegant language of the people here in these cold islands, but this language was the language of the Northern peoples.

He edged closer, screened by the interlacing branches of low-growing bushes. He could see them now, a small group of strangely-dressed men, blithely gathering firewood and shoving and punching each other with good-natured abandon. As he inched a little further into the bushes, he saw one of the men suddenly look up, and gasped at the sight of the man's weird eyes. They were golden, with slitted pupils. And the smile the man directed toward Nasir's hiding place was feral and fanged.

Waiting anxiously where Nasir had left them, the outlaws and their companions heard the cry carry clearly. Immediately, hands shot to the hilts of weapons, and as one, they dropped to a crouch, poised for flight.

"Nasir!" Robin hissed, glancing at Scarlet. Scarlet nodded and moved off swiftly toward the source of the cry. A look toward John, and the big man was off, silent for all his bulk. "Stay here," Robin commanded, but Randi shook her head.

"This thing's gotta be good for something," she replied, slipping the sword free of the scabbard.

Robin spared a glance at the sword grasped in her hand and nodded, freeing Albion. "All right. With me, then."

Taking a deep breath, Randi nodded, and followed the outlaw leader as he sped through the trees.

Tuck, Much, Ian and Professor Mason remained where they were, straining to see where the others had gone.

"It'll be all right," Tuck assured. "Robin'll sort them out." Ian looked at him, unsure whether the friar had spoken for their benefit, or his own.

Robin and Randi burst into the clearing in sight of a bizarre melee. Nasir was struggling in the grasp of a weird beast, a wolf that stood on two feet, blood running freely from scratches and wounds on his exposed arms and face. John was battling another, buffeting the beast with his staff. Scarlet was circling round with yet another man-wolf, feinting with his dagger. A fourth was making its way up onto a rock ledge, poising itself to leap upon the unsuspecting outlaw's back.

"Will! Look out!" Robin called, racing across the clearing, Albion held ready. As the wolf sprang, Robin brought Albion around in a killing arc, slicing through the torso of the beast, severing its spine. With a whimper, it fell upon the ground, convulsing. He turned toward the beast edging off with Nasir in its grasp while Scarlet pressed on against his opponent.

Yet another man-wolf broke cover from the surrounding trees, pelting toward John; Randi sprinted toward it, lifting Ulfhel clumsily. Although she'd done some fencing while in England, it hadn't prepared her for the weight and length of the ancient sword. She overcompensated, and the force of her intended blow sent her somersaulting to the ground. Quickly she reoriented

herself, but the wolfman was already clawing at John's face, clinging to the man's back with fierce determination. His staff was knocked from his hands, and the creature he'd been fending off crouched low, snarling, and lunged at the man's midsection.

Scrambling to her feet, Randi made a running leap toward the first man-wolf, swinging Ulfhel wildly. She connected, feeling the crunch of bone resisting the blade, then the sickly collapse of its ribcage as the sword bit deep into its side. Blood ran down the blade to cover her hand as the man-wolf bellowed its rage, releasing its hold on John and stumbling toward her. She faltered back a step, watching in horror as the man-beast clutched its side, its weird eyes fixed on her as blood dripped from its maw. Then the golden color faded from the eyes, replaced by a brilliant blue, and the muzzle of the wolf smoothed itself out into the face of a man. With a sigh, the man crumpled to the ground and didn't move again.

Meanwhile, John had managed to flip the wolf off his back and retrieve his staff, and now circled around in a parody of court dance with the beast. Little slammed the end of the staff against the beast's head, sending it sprawling on its back. Seeing her opportunity, Randi rushed in with the sword, its hilt slick in her blood-coated hands, and drove the blade into the beast's chest. With a wracking cough, the beast shuddered, its limbs flailing as if in seizure, then fell still. Randi wrenched the sword free with a grunt and looked up at John. He clapped her on the shoulder, nearly knocking her down, and spun off toward Scarlet.

Scarlet had managed to wound the beast, and blood ran down its pelt in numerous places. But Scarlet had not escaped unscathed, and blood seeped through his tunic and down his breeches as he struggled to hold his own against the creature. Of Robin, Nasir, and the beast which had captured him, there was no sign. John waded in to set the odds more to their favor while Randi darted off in search of Robin.

She found him perched at the top of a small promontory overlooking a valley that led up to a massive stone structure. He was pressed against the ground, looking through the scrawny bushes lining the ridge. Albion was sheathed once more, but streaks of blood on its hilt and scabbard indicated the sword had seen more use before he'd put it away. He looked up as Randi dropped down beside him.

"Will and John?" he asked urgently.

"They'll be here in a minute. They're just finishing up." She wiped the hilt of her sword on her jeans and squirmed around so she could slide it back into the scabbard. "What about Nasir?"

Robin shook his head. "Whatever that thing is, it moves fast. I couldn't keep up." He pointed to the valley, where the beast had broken cover and now made its way up the bridge to the building, Nasir still held in its grasp. From here, it looked as though the Saracen was unconscious, limp in the beast's arms and offering no resistance. The great doors to the fortress opened, and the beast slipped inside with its burden. Robin exhaled violently.

"What is that place?" Randi queried softly.

"Grimstone Abbey," he replied. "It was once a Benedictine abbey. Then the Sons of Fenris took it over."

"And now?"

"Now it looks like something worse has come to Sherwood."

W

hen the outlaws had joined Robin and Randi, he sent Randi back in search of the others. Twenty minutes later, Randi arrived, leading Tuck, Much, Ian and the Professor. Randi set about looking after Will's wounds while Robin filled them in all in on the situation as he saw it. Tuck saw to John's injuries.

"I don't know what these things are, but they can be killed."

"We saw the bodies as we came through. They weren't wolves anymore. They were men," Tuck agreed.

"They're werewolves," Ian put in grimly.

"Werewolves?" Robin repeated, puzzled.

"Men who can turn into wolves, wolves which walk like men." He glanced over at Randi, who nodded encouragingly. "But I've never seen werewolves like this — men who change in the daylight, without the full moon. These werewolves seem to change at will."

"Where do they come from?" John asked.

Ian shook his head. "I don't know. We ... we've been searching for the secret," he added, expelling a sigh. "Where we come from, it is a curse. But these creatures ..." He shook his head again.

"Well, they die like any other creature. They're harder to kill, but they die. And if they're magic, then we may need Herne's help."

"A

h, Galen. Another one. You've done well, my son," Wulfring congratulated as his follower deposited Nasir's unconscious body at his feet.

"Not so well, my lord," replied Galen. "The others ... they are dead. Strangers with swords and weapons — the others are all dead, my lord."

Wulfring frowned, turning away to digest this unfortunate news. Then he turned back. "Then we must replace their numbers. We cannot afford to reduce our community. These strangers — what did they look like?"

"A man, very tall, bearded. He fought with a staff, very good he was. Another man, perhaps an ex-soldier, ordinary-looking, but good with a knife. A third man, blond, aristocratic-looking. He wielded a sword of great power, my lord. I could feel it. And a woman — dressed like a man, she was. And she, too, carried a great sword. She felt ... familiar, somehow, my lord," he added, puzzled.

"Familiar, eh? Hmm. This blond man, the one with the great sword. Could he be Herne's Son, I wonder?" Wulfring was silent for a moment, considering the facts as presented. "Follow them. They will not attack the Abbey in such small numbers. But they just might lead us to Herne. I want the Hunter. Gather some of the men, arm yourselves. And bring any survivors back here. We must replace those we have lost."

The man bowed and left the Abbey front hall, leaving Wulfring to ponder the unconscious man at his feet. "A Saracen. Why so far from home, my friend, eh? No matter. Soon all the world will be your home." Bending, he lifted the man as though he were no heavier than a small sack of grain, and carried him back toward the chapel.

I

t was dark by the time they reached their camp, and Will and John were both limping from their injuries. Robin was sick at heart at the loss of Nasir, but he'd kept telling the others that they would get him back. To himself, he wasn't so sure.

There wouldn't be much rest for his band this night, he knew. They'd have to double-up on their watch to prevent any of the man-beasts — the werewolves, as Ian called them — from

getting to the camp. While there'd been no sign of pursuit, he was sure that the creatures would follow.

As to his next step, they would have to enlist the aid of the men of Wickham in storming the Abbey. It was more than his small group could accomplish alone, even with the added advantage of the sword the woman Randi carried. She wasn't expert with the sword; he'd seen that before he'd gone off in pursuit of Nasir's captor. They couldn't afford to trust to her achieving a lucky blow or two to turn the tide in their favor. And the two men, Ian and Master Mason — they were untried in battle. He didn't even know if either could handle a sword or staff. But it was too dangerous to send anyone to the village in the dark; that would have to wait until morning, when they'd have the advantage of light. What could not wait was a conference with Herne.

As Tuck set about preparing their evening meal, Robin walked over to the two outlander men. "We'll have to attack the Abbey, and soon. Are either of you trained in combat?"

The question didn't surprise either man, but neither was quick to claim battle skills. At last, Ian spoke up, "Nothing in real battle. I've had some training in, ah, hand-to-hand, a little fencing. But I learn quickly."

"Will can help you. He was a soldier, and he's very good in close quarters. And try to remember anything you can think of that might help us with these creatures. Any advantage will be welcome. And you, Master Mason?"

"Sorry, no. But like Ian, I learn quickly."

Robin clapped them each on the shoulder and nodded. "Then you both should eat and get some rest now, and later you can work with Will and John. Then get some sleep — you'll each have to take a watch tonight — we'll need at least two men for each watch."

Both men nodded agreement and moved off. Robin went over to speak with Will.

"How're you feeling?" he asked gently.

Will shrugged. "I've been better. But I'll heal. What's up with them?" he inquired, nodding toward the two strangers.

"Just trying to find out what good they'll be in a fight. I want you to work with them, you and John. We need every man we can get, but I don't want them going in unprepared."

Will nodded and Robin smiled. Will seemed to have learned his lesson about "civilians" when they'd battled the Sons of Fenris with the aid of the men of Wickham. Both men seemed fit, although Mason was thin and a little sickly-looking — no worse than any villager, really. "Good."

"What about you?" Will added.

"I'm going to see Herne. He might have more information for us, maybe some ideas of what we can do to protect ourselves."

Will nodded slowly. The Hunter had been looking over them all for several years now, and he trusted him. Over time, he'd come to understand that the death of Robin of Loxley had somehow been necessary, and had Herne been able to stop it, he would have. If Herne was able to give them aid, he would. If not, then they were on their own.

Will grasped Robin's hand and squeezed it. "We'll get Edward and Nasir back. You'll see."

"I know, Will. I know."

Next, Robin made his way to join Randi, who was carefully cleaning away the encrusted blood on her sword. She looked up expectantly.

"I'm going to speak with Herne. I want you to come with me."

"Herne? Why?"

"He warned me of these creatures, and he told me to expect you. He said that together, we could defeat the Wolf. You carry a sword forged by Wayland, as I do. I think Herne may be able to tell us more, and I think you should be there to hear it."

Randi studied the young man's face, then slowly inclined her head in acknowledgement. "When?"

"Now."

Galen, flanked by a trio of hand-picked men, hovered just beyond the range of mortal hearing from the camp of the outlaws, downwind and beyond sight. Like his fellows, his senses were greater than those of normal men, and the voices from the camp carried clearly to his ears. He heard the outlaw leader speak of Herne, and he smiled. His master had been right. With a flick of his wrist, he signalled for the others to come closer, and caught the scent of the man and the woman on the breeze. They were leaving the camp, making their way to the man-god's hideaway.

In the chapel of Grimstone Abbey, Edward of Wickham still stood shackled to the pillar, although one of Wulfring's followers held a bowl of stew up for him to eat. At first, he'd refused food, but when he'd seen Nasir carried in and manacled to another pillar, he'd known that Robin Hood and his men could not be far. There was a chance he might yet escape, and he needed his strength so he would not be a burden to the Hooded Man. With that in mind, he relented, and accepted the food offered to him. The chains on the manacles were long enough so that he could feed himself, so he took the bowl and ate while the man watched.

The broth of the stew was hot, but the meat was cold, raw, bloody. He found himself ravenous, gulping down chunks of the meat without chewing. The pain had passed hours ago, but his body felt strange, alien. The raw meat fueled that strangeness, making him feel giddy, yet at the same time, stronger. He glanced over at Nasir, who hung unconscious from the shackles of the pillar. Then he noticed a slight movement from the Saracen, and Nasir opened one eye, frowning slightly to indicate that Edward should remain silent. With an imperceptible nod, Edward agreed, and returned his attention to the food.

Robin reached out his hand, and helped Randi down into the boat. It rocked gently, but she found her footing and sat down in the stern. Robin seated himself at the bow and poled the boat away from shore. A heavy mist had risen on the water, swirling around them as they moved quietly toward the opposite bank. The moon hung high in the sky, only a thin crescent away from full. The full moon was two days hence. Randi shivered, staring at the moon, but Robin's attention was fastened on bringing the boat in safely in the muffling fog.

Mooring the boat, he jumped onto the shore, and Randi followed. Then they made their way up the embankment toward Herne's cave.

The Hunter was waiting for them, imposing in his antlered headdress and deerskin cape. He bent low and reentered the cave, followed by the Hooded Man and the strange woman who carried one of Wayland's swords.

The interior of the cave was warmed by the fire from the fire pit, and scented with the smell of strange herbs. As they entered, Herne turned and handed each a rude cup full of steaming liquid. "Drink," he commanded them.

Glancing at Robin, Randi did as she was told. Robin drained the cup and handed it back to Herne. She followed suit.

"Sit."

Looking around for a chair, Randi shrugged and seated herself on a rock; Robin settled next to her. Both sat quietly, waiting for the man-god to speak.

"You each carry swords fashioned by Wayland, and your destinies are intertwined. You need each other if you are to survive. You need each other if Fenris is to be kept at bay."

Robin nodded. Randi did, too. Nothing surprising so far.

Herne looked at Randi, studying her for a long time. Then he spoke, "You come from a land far away, yet very near. Your destiny was written long ago. The sword you carry has waited for you century upon century until you came to claim it. All that has happened to you was meant to be. You are the chosen of Ulfhel, you are the wolf-death."

"Why? Why me?" she demanded.

Herne spread his hands, shaking his head. "The whims of the old gods are beyond even me," he replied.

"The wolves at Grimstone Abbey," began Robin. "They are men and beasts as one. What can we do to stop them?"

Herne shook his head. "They are the children of Wulfring, the sorcerer. The Father Wolf. He has walked this earth for more than a thousand years, plotting for the freedom of Fenris. He is the key. Without him, the Children of the Wolf will not flourish."

"But how do we stop him?" asked Randi.

Herne looked at the sword belted at her side. "The sword will set you free."

Randi sat back, mouth open. "My sword. Not Albion. Not Robin's sword."

"The sword will set you free," Herne repeated. He sighed heavily. "The time is almost upon you. The pack runs. The Wolf is the hunter. The hunter becomes the wolf." He stared directly into Randi's eyes. "Wolf against Wolf. The past sets the future, the future decides the past." Abruptly, he stood. "Go, now. Gather your men. Silver is the bane of the wolf — silver will kill when blades will not. Now go."

Back in the boat, Randi was silent as Robin shoved away from shore. Out on the water, Robin swore. "Riddles! Always riddles!"

Randi looked out over the fog-enshrouded water and asked, "Have you any silver?"

Robin nodded. "Coins, jewelry, plate — there's silver in the chests at the camp. We were going to pass it out among the villages. Not any use in combat. Why?"

"One of the ways to kill a werewolf is with a silver bullet."

"What is a 'bullet'?"

Randi shook her head. Technology ahead of its time. "Then arrows. Tip the arrows in silver."

Robin considered this for a moment, then nodded. "We could melt down some of the coins, coat the arrow heads in silver. But the arrows might not be as accurate —"

"They'll be more deadly. 'Silver will kill when blades will not', remember? Do you have any weapons made of silver?"

The boat thudded up against the bank. Robin got out and tethered it to its mooring while Randi got out of the boat. "A dagger. Maybe two. We took them from some rich Norman lords. They're decorative —"

"They could be the difference," Randi replied seriously. "We've got to get all the silver together we can. If something can be used as a weapon, use it. It's our only hope, Robin."

He stared at her for a long moment, searching her face. Then he nodded. "Let's get back to camp."

They stood still as stone as the woman and man passed by, and again Galen was struck by the chord of familiarity the woman aroused in him. He shook off the sensation, listening carefully for sounds of doubling back. Finally, the wood fell silent, except for the usual night sounds, and he signalled his companions forward. At the water's edge, they found the boat, and Galen assessed that it could carry only two of them. Two of them to capture a god. It would have to do.

"A god, you say? Fascinating," John Mason observed after listening to Randi's tale of her visit with Herne. The trio of time travellers was standing watch on the outlaw camp, while the others slept. "I've never heard of legends of a Herne god in Sherwood. I shall have to do more research when we get back to our own time." He returned his attention to the work at hand, fashioning silver arrowheads for the outlaws' arrows. On Robin and Randi's return, he had volunteered to oversee the project, since, as he had admitted, he'd dabbled in metal-working during the "somewhat artsy-fartsy '60s, when everyone was trying something."

Randi looked up at him curiously from the arrow she was re-fletching, checking its balance on the tip of her finger. "Look, Professor, do you ever let him out?"

"Him'? Who?"

"Carlson. I mean, you've been in continuous ... possession ... of his body for going on three days now. Do you ever let him take over?"

Ian was surprised at the question, but he had to admit that he had wondered the same thing. Both he and Randi awaited the answer by the light of the fire flickering under the cauldron of molten silver.

Mason blushed. "Ah. Yes, of course." Then he made a face. "Well, you see ... yes, of course, I do. Normally I would have relinquished control of the body at the end of the day's work. That was our arrangement."

"What?" Ian pressed.

Mason looked distinctly uncomfortable at the scrutiny, and devoted his entire attention to the arrow in his hands.

"He **does** know you take over his body, doesn't he, Professor Mason?" Ian challenged, setting down the arrow that he was coating in silver.

"Yes, of course he knows! We made a bargain several months ago when I ran across him in the British Museum. I was ... borrowing ... the body of a student when I saw him. Took some convincing to make him believe it was me. But he saw the possibilities immediately. It's just that ... well, my boy, you see ... Gareth is jealous of your success. Those books and that TV show of yours, you see."

"Gareth is jealous of **me**?" Ian repeated incredulously. "How did he ever see it?"

"He's always been jealous of you. Ever since you were both at Oxford. Don't tell me you didn't know!" Ian shook his head. "He's followed your career every step of the way. Of course, I didn't know that when I came to visit you that time. But he was envious that you'd managed to land such a prime position after graduation, that you'd published several reasonably successful books, when he always had to scramble for funding for his projects and never seemed to get his papers published. He followed your publishing career, often dropping in on signings in disguise. He imported tapes of the show, **Hollywood Variety** to check its ratings."

"And?" Randi prompted.

"And the opportunity to take credit for the discovery of Wayland's tomb, with me actually doing the work, was just too attractive to him. It was something that was beyond his abilities, but not mine."

"You mean, he traded his body for the chance to become world-famous," Randi guessed.

"Precisely. Oh, he'd found the scroll in some forgotten ruins of a church in northern England. But he couldn't read it. He never did have the facility for language that you possess, my boy," Mason added, nodding toward Ian.

"So —" Randi prodded.

"So. I do the work of translation and guide the dig, Gareth takes the credit. Very simple, really."

"And is he aware — of what you do, I mean?" Ian inquired.

"Oh yes. He's in here. It's just that I am in control until I ... well, until I take leave of the body."

"And why haven't you ... taken leave of the body all this time?"

Mason frowned. Well, he'd already given up Gareth Carlson's worst secrets, another wouldn't hurt. "This is all too much for him, I'm afraid. Moving back in time, facing werewolves, meeting an historical Robin Hood. I'm afraid our Gareth really doesn't have much of an imagination."

Ian clapped his hands and laughed out loud. "The old faker! All those years he had me believing that he was the great adventurer! Allan Quartermain of the '80s. Hah!"

"Yes, well, the discovery will make him famous," Mason reminded.

"And the idea to trade places was his," Randi suggested, eyeing Mason.

"Well, no, not exactly, my dear. Gareth rather thought that finding the scroll was sufficient. I pointed out the possibilities in actually discovering the tomb. Gareth was bright enough to pounce on the opportunity. And of course, I suspected there might be something in it that could be of use to you."

Ian wiped tears of laughter from his eyes and settled back with a self-satisfied sigh. "All those years ..." he shook his head. "Here I'm a greater success than I would have credited." "Don't let it go to your head. We've still got to do whatever it is this thing wants us to do, and find a way to get home."

Ian sobered immediately and nodded. "And we've still got a great many arrows to prepare."

"And a full moon and a pack of werewolves to face," Randi added.

John and Tuck made for Wickham before first light the next morning. Robin led the others to the practice ground to try out the silver-tipped arrows Randi, Ian and Master Mason had fashioned during the night. The arrows were heavier than normal arrows, but the balance seemed right as he tested one in his hand. Randi had done a decent job of adding feathers to the shaft to counterbalance the heavier arrowheads. Now they'd find out how well they worked.

Scarlet was first up. He nocked the arrow in the bow, resettled his feet to locate his new center of gravity, and let fly. The arrow shuddered a spiral toward the target, and fell a good five feet short.

"Try again, Will," Robin ordered. "We've got to be able to shoot these things if we've got a hope of defeating these werewolves."

Will scowled, but pulled another arrow from his quiver, shifting the position of the arrowhead to a higher point along the bowstring. He pulled back with greater force, and sent the arrow flying. This time, it arced high, its flight more stable, and hit the target outside the bullseye. At least he'd hit the target this try.

"Better. We're going to have to practice, all of us. Are you any good with a bow?" Robin asked the outlanders.

"Well, I did a bit of archery at school ... I imagine I can have a go," Ian replied, picking up a bow and stepping up to the mark as Scarlet stepped aside. He shuffled his feet to find the right stance, nocked the arrow, and pulled back on the bow. The released arrow spiraled upward, hung, and spiraled back down again, a mere ten feet from his position.

"Have a bit of practice," Will warned, grinning.

It was late morning when Tuck and John returned from Wickham, a column of men straggling behind them. Every able-bodied man in the village, and some who were not, had volunteered to help in the expedition against Grimstone Abbey. John had selected some of the best archers, leaving a few to guard the village. As they entered the camp, Randi claimed their arrows and passed them on to Mason for silvering, while Much directed them toward the practice ground to learn how to use the modified arrows. With grim determination, the men of Wickham and the men of Sherwood prepared for battle against the Father Wolf.

By evening, Robin was satisfied that the new arrows would work, and that the assembled "army" would be able to handle them. While the evening meal was being prepared, he slipped away to visit Herne once more.

Shock and panic greeted him as he entered Herne's cave. The place was in disarray, jars and implements scattered and broken on the cave floor. Herne's cauldron had been overturned, the fire burned down to cold cinders. Scraps of deerskin lay where they'd been torn from his clothing. The distinctive smell of wolf clung to the air, and Robin knew the stakes in the battle had been raised to an unacceptable level. He raced back to the camp, as fast as the boat and then his feet would carry him.

Wulfring was a happy man. Although Galen had shied from a skirmish with the Hooded Man, he had nonetheless brought him the Hunter. And the Hunter stood shackled to a third pillar in the chapel, his human body already undergoing the Great Change. Three fine choices — the headman of a local village, the Saracen assassin, and the Lord of the Trees. He could almost feel his master's purr of approval.

And, surely, today the Hooded Man and his men would come to the Abbey, to try to reclaim their people. And his Children would grow stronger.

"Herne? Taken?" Tuck repeated in shock.

"Are the men ready?" Robin demanded.

"Sure, as ready as they can be, but it's dark, Robin — they've already gone back to Wickham for the night. They'll be back in the morning."

"At first light," John promised. "We can't do anything until then, Robin."
Robin nodded curtly. He was nearly shaking with nervous energy. Father Wolf had Herne. And if he could capture the Lord of the Trees, what chance had they?

"The men are ready," Will advised, laying a soothing hand on Robin's shoulder. "We'll get Herne back. And Nasir and Edward, too."

"I just hope we're in time."

Clustered together where they ate their meal, Randi and Ian exchanged concerned glances. Time was running out. Ian had confirmed that tomorrow night was the full moon, and they had no idea how it would affect Randi, sword or no sword. There was no place to contain her in Sherwood, and they couldn't afford to take her into a populated area in case the sword did not prevent her transformation. In this backward time, such a transformation would mean a death sentence for Randi, and she would likely be burned at the stake, or simply slaughtered outright.

"I think our best bet may just be to go to the Abbey," Ian offered.

"What?"

"You saw the place, Randi. It's a fortress. Tuck said it stood against armies in the war between Stephen and Maude. That war tore apart most of the country, and yet that Abbey still stands, and you'd never know it had seen war."

"It also must have cellars. Some of these ancient abbeys have dungeons," added Mason. "If it looks as though we're not winning —"

"Even if we are, once the moon rises, I've got to be chained up," Randi insisted. "These people won't be safe with me. I'm not like these other werewolves — I can't control the change. I could kill them faster than the others!"

Ian had to admit that she was right. Perhaps the sword would prevent the change. But with the lives of so many people at risk, they couldn't take the chance. "We've got to tell Robin the truth. He's been inside the Abbey. He might know where we could take you if necessary."

Ian drew Robin aside, leading him away from the others. Out of earshot of the camp, he laid out their problem.

"She's one of them?" Robin demanded warily.

"She's like them, but ..." he shook his head. "These wolfmen are unlike anything we've ever seen ..." He paused, remembering the man who'd made Randi a werewolf. He had changed in broad daylight, the transformation brought on by the mere sight of Randi. So much they didn't know, didn't understand. He shook his head again. "She only changes on the first night of the full moon. If we can get her to a place where she can be chained up, it will be safe. My guess is the Abbey has dungeons we can use."

Robin nodded, distracted. First this scourge had come to the forest. Then Edward, Nasir and now Herne taken. Now their ally, Randi Wallace, was herself a werewolf. "Yes. There are wine cellars below the main level. The Sons of Fenris kept the villagers and my men captive there. I was chained in the chapel. But we mustn't tell the others — they'll never trust Randi if they know."

Ian agreed. "She's no danger until the moon is risen. If we set off at first light —"

"We'll know one way or another by the time the moon rises," Robin finished grimly.

The sound of approaching men greeted John and Will, at sentry duty, long before the sun had started to make its morning ascent. Both men stood, hands on their weapons, tensed for battle. Michael and David stepped out of the brush, followed by the men of Wickham. Michael raised his hand in greeting, and led his men toward the camp as John and Will stepped aside.

In the camp, the outlaws were already awake, and a breakfast of oatmeal was heating up in the pot over the fire pit. Packs were being loaded with light provisions, and quivers being filled with the modified arrows. Bowstrings were being checked, and blade edges honed. The men of Sherwood prepared for war.

Michael walked up to Robin and stuck out his hand. "Blessed be, son of Herne," he greeted formally.

"Blessed be, Michael." He looked out at the assembled men. "Get your gear and we'll be on the march before daylight."

Randi had taken responsibility for handing out the arrows, and helped each villager fill their quivers with the silver-tipped weapons. Ian checked their packs, and where men had forgotten to carry, or didn't have it to bring, food for the march, gave them small packets of dried meat and grain. Professor Mason checked over the villagers' weapons, and if they didn't come up to snuff, directed them to Much for bow repair, and Tuck for blade sharpening. Finally, all the men were fed, provisioned and armed. Robin stood in the middle of the camp and said simply, "Let's go."

Edward had watched with horror and a strange sort of excitement when Wulfring had bitten deep into Nasir neck, drawing blood and sending the Saracen into a swoon. Nasir had bled for a long time, and then the fever had taken him. He had still been in the throes of the fever when Wulfring had brought Herne into the chapel and chained him to the third pillar. Three pillars. The Church's Holy Trinity. Wulfring's unholy victims.

The sight of Herne, captive, had truly chilled Edward's heart. Until that time, he'd held out hope that Robin would be able to rescue him and Nasir. But with the Lord of the Trees himself Wulfring's hostage ... Edward felt hope ebbing rapidly. When Wulfring turned his attentions to

Herne, and infected him with the burning blood, Edward felt real fear, potent and undeniable.



he march to Grimstone Abbey took longer this time than earlier due to the size of the band, and it was mid-afternoon by the time they came to the forest edging the Abbey's valley. Robin sent Tuck and John and Much and Will to scout ahead, and instructed the villagers to take a rest and eat from their packs. With Ian and Randi, he moved on to the promontory overlooking the Abbey.

The open space in front of the Abbey was empty, silent. The earthworks ringing the building were naked, the Abbey gatehouse unoccupied. "They haven't posted any sentries," Robin observed.

"Perhaps they don't feel they need to," Randi commented grimly.

"What's the plan, then?" Ian asked.

Robin continued to look out over the land for a moment before replying. "We can't batter down the doors — they were built to stand against the assault of armies. We've got to get them to open up the doors. We'll set archers there, on the earthworks."

"We're just going to go up to the door and knock?" Randi demanded mockingly.

"Can you think of a better way to get the door open? We can't scale the walls — they're too smooth. We can't knock the doors down. The walls around the orchards and fields are too high to scale, too."

Randi listened to this with growing concern. "Whoever knocks on the door will be a target for the wolves."

Robin nodded, his eyes straying back to the Abbey.

"Then I'm the one who has to knock," Randi added.

"No."

"Yes. I've got the sword — remember, its name means 'wolf-death.' And they won't be expecting a woman. The surprise may give you an extra edge."

"What if they take you — what if —"

"Then once the moon rises, I can do more damage in there than you can," she told him with grim finality.

Robin stared at her for a full minute, then nodded once, reluctantly. Ian remained silent; he knew better than to argue with Randi when she was in this mood.



inside the Abbey, Wulfring sat on the abbot's throne, watching his three captives with delight. He lifted his head, nostrils flaring. "Ah. Others come. You won't be alone for much longer, my children," he told Edward, Nasir and Herne. As he passed them, each raised his head, turning golden, slitted eyes upon the Father Wolf.



don't like it, Robin," Will complained from his position on the windward side of the mound surrounding the Abbey.

"Nor do I, Will," Robin agreed. "But trust me — she's the best choice."

"I don't like trustin' a woman to do a man's job."

"She's an unusual woman," John observed. "She'll do fine."

Ahead of them, approaching the Abbey doors, Randi marched stiffly, Ulfhel held in her right hand. Robin had spent some time with her over the past two days teaching her better swordsmanship. It was now or never.

She came up to the doors and pounded on them with the swordhilt. "Hey! Anybody in there? Open up!"

There was no answer from within the Abbey, only a mocking silence. Glancing over her shoulder at the men hidden behind the earthwork, she shrugged, and tried again.

"Wulfring! I know you're in there! I've got a bone to pick with you, you miserable bastard!"

She heard the sound of a heavy object being moved; the brace across the inside of the doors was being removed. She turned and gave a quick thumbs-up signal to the men, then took a few steps back, positioning herself for a running leap. The door opened a crack, then a little wider. Then it opened even wider, and a man with wild hair and even wilder eyes stepped into view.

"On your way, woman!" the man called in a guttural accent. "There be no Wulfring here to see the likes of you."

"Try again, bucko," she replied and launched herself toward the door. She brought the man down and leapt up again, driving the blade into his chest. With a gurgle, he flinched and fell still. Growling from within warned her that more were coming, and she flung herself into the breach between the doors to ensure they weren't closed against her. Suddenly, she heard the loud twang of a dozens arrows loosed, and dropped to her knees as the arrows whizzed overhead. Three of them found their marks, and the men dropped, convulsing, their faces masks of shock and understanding. A pause, a moment of silence, and then there was shouting, cheering, and the pounding of feet as Robin and his men surged across the gap toward the doors.

Looking around her, she saw a dozen men and more, each in some stage of transformation to werewolf. Ian and Mason were armed with silver daggers, and the villagers had the silver-tipped arrows; they could take care of themselves. She made a feint to her right with the sword, and one of the werewolves jumped out of the way. Good. They recognized Ulfhel. She swung the sword around her in a wide arc, catching one werewolf in the mid-section, and it fell away, clutching its stomach and shaking uncontrollably. Then it, like its comrade, dropped to the ground, returning to the form of a man. The others had gained the hall, and with a glance over her shoulder, Randi raced toward the closed doors to the chapel.

The doors gave easily, and Randi pushed her way into the chapel, stopping in her tracks at the sight of the three men shackled to pillars near the altar. Nasir and Herne she recognized; the third must be Edward. A sound behind her caught her attention and she whirled, coming face to face with the biggest werewolf she'd ever seen. With a feral smile, it kicked the door closed. It snarled, lunging at her with its great paws outstretched. She backpedaled away, suddenly feeling the hot breath of another werewolf behind her.

"Sorry, I gave at the office," she said inanely, and dropped down into a kneebend, Ulfhel held out straight before her, and jumped up, driving the blade into the entrails of the wolf pursuing her. Tugging to free the sword, she struggled in terror as the second wolf slowly moved toward her. Finally, the blade came free, and she whirled with the sword, catching the wolf in the neck. As it fell to its knees, she raced up the chapel aisle toward the pillars.

She ran up to Herne, who hung limply from the manacles, and pulled his head up. She let go her hold and stepped back, mouth agape, as Herne's eyes opened, brilliant gold, black slitted pupils, his mouth full of fangs. "Wha —" A growling from the other two prisoners told her that Wulfring

had already worked the transformation on them. Then a soft voice called her from behind the altar.

"Why do you fight me? You are one of my children. Am I not the Father Wolf? Am I not the one who gave you your great power?"

Wulfring was tall, ascetic-looking, his long dark hair brushed back from a high forehead. He wore dark-colored robes, emblazoned with strange, arcane symbols. He smiled at her, a fatherly, loving smile.

"Great power? You call this curse 'great power'?" she demanded, tightening her hold on the sword.

"Put down the sword," he ordered quietly. "You cannot hurt me."

"Think again," Randi snapped. She started to move toward the altar.

Wulfring looked at her with puzzlement. "No. You are not like my other children. The blood is in you, but it's wild, uncontrolled." He tilted his head, studying her. "Where are you from?" "A place you'll never see," Randi replied, still advancing.

"The blood rules you!" he exclaimed. "You cannot control it. Even now, it rises to meet the full moon." His voice dropped to a seductive whisper. "No wonder you hate me — the gift is a curse for you. But I can teach you to control it."

This halted Randi, and she watched him warily.

"Yes. I can teach you. My children here," he went on, waving his hands toward the three prisoners, who growled and struggled against the manacles, "they will learn to harness the power. To turn it to their wills. It will not rule them, as it has ruled you. But it will give them great strength, it will raise them above all men. You know the thrill of the hunt. You know the pleasure of the kill. Each day of your life, you know the power the blood gives you — would you truly give that up, if you could learn to control it, learn to raise the wolf when **you** wanted to?" he asked, his voice seductive.

Randi lowered the sword slowly. "You could teach me to control it? Teach me not to kill?"

"To kill is the greatest pleasure, but yes, I could teach you to choose **when** and **what** you kill."

"And what would it cost me?" she asked, watching him move from behind the altar, stepping slowly down to the chapel floor. He moved sinuously, graceful despite his height.

"A simple thing. Obeisance to my lord, Fenris. The Great Wolf. He calls you in your blood. Can you not feel him? Can you not hear the wild call? In Fenris, all things are possible, my child. I have lived more than a thousand years. His gift. I have watched civilizations rise and fall. When the whim takes me, I hunt. I feed. I enjoy all that life has to offer. Can you turn your back on that, that greatness? For mere mortals? They are our prey. They exist to serve our needs. Can you put them ahead of your own desires when everything is within your grasp?" he demanded, reaching out and caressing her cheek with his hand.

Randi looked up at him, deep into his velvet brown eyes. She smiled. "No. Of course not."

He smiled in return, cupping her chin in his palm. "Blood speaks to blood. My children will breed, both through the blood and through the children of their flesh. One day, the Children of the Wolf will prepare the way for Fenris's ascension. You could stand by me on that day, be my consort in the world my lord brings forth." He bent his head to kiss her, and she lifted her face to meet his

lips.

Pounding on the doors arrested his attention, and his head snapped up to look down the chapel aisle toward the doors. The bodies of the two werewolves Randi had killed lay by the doors, blocking them. Wulfring smiled. "Even now, you serve my master's wishes," he said softly. "But our numbers have dwindled. It is time to swell our ranks." He smiled, exposing his long canines. "Open the doors, my child. Let them in. I wish to greet them properly."

He took his hand away from her face, and she took a few steps forward. Then she stopped suddenly, drawing in on herself. With a mighty "No!" she lunged at him, sword held high, the blade biting deeply into his neck. With a sickening crunch, Wulfring's head separated from his body, falling to the floor and rolling toward Edward's feet. Blood fountained from the beheaded neck and the body convulsed wildly for what seemed an eternity before it fell to the cold stones. Edward, Nasir and Herne all raised their heads, their golden eyes glowing, and let forth with open-throated howls. Then a stream of brilliant white light erupted from the corpse, and thousands of tiny explosions shook the body. The head, too, was glowing, light rising from it like an infernal flame. Randi watched, goggle-eyed, as light consumed the body of Wulfring, growing to a blinding intensity.

Just then, the doors broke open, the bodies of the fallen werewolves pushed rudely aside. "Randi!" called Ian, but she was frozen in place, watching the bizarre light show.

"Edward!" called another voice, while another hailed "Nasir!" She heard Robin's voice calling to Herne. She glanced around her, noticing that none of the prisoners showed signs of lycanthropy. "Sever the bloodline." That was it. She'd severed their bloodline. They would not become werewolves.

Suddenly the chapel was full of people rushing up the aisle toward her and the captives.

"Randi!" breathed Ian, grabbing her and hugging her wildly. "You're all right — you did it!"

"The werewolves — what — "

Ian shook his head, swallowing. "I don't know. All of a sudden, they all fell back, howling. We killed some of them, but the others — they just ran off."

"I didn't hear the howling," she answered numbly. "It must have happened when Wulfring died."

Ian touched her cheek with concern and turned her face to look at him. "Randi? Are you all right?"

Abruptly, she doubled over, moaning in pain. "Oh, my God, Ian!" she wailed, dropping the sword as she grabbed onto both his forearms. "It's happening!"

Tuck was lighting torches around the altar to dispel the gloom of sunset. A dim gleam through the chapel's stained-glass windows told the story: The moon had risen.

Randi writhed in pain as Ian tried to grab hold of her. Robin, who had released Herne from his bondage and was helping him to rub feeling back into his arms, looked up in alarm. "Get out!" he shouted. "All of you! Get out!"

"What's happening?" demanded Will. "Is she possessed?"

Herne's calm voice cut through the melee as he bent down to pick up his antlered helmet, tucking it under his arm. "For your own safety, leave the Abbey. Head for Rhiannon's Wheel. You will be safe there."

Clapping Edward on the back, Will nodded, and the men started to move quickly toward the doors.

"Let me help," Robin told Ian as he struggled with Randi. She looked up at him and snarled, her fangs already long and sharp, her eyes wild and golden. Robin took an involuntary step backward, stunned.

"Get out. Get moving!" Ian bellowed.

"Ian!" Randi wailed.

"Go!"

Robin took another step back, raising his eyes to meet Ian's. Then he nodded, turned on his heel, and raced down the aisle.

"Remember, go to Rhiannon's Wheel!" Herne called after him.

"You'd better go, too," Ian warned, dragging the resisting woman toward one of the pillars.

"You'll need help restraining her," the Lord of the Trees reminded him, lifting one of the manacles. He reached out and snapped it around Randi's left wrist. "Now the other." Ian fought to keep hold of the arm as he lifted her right wrist toward the manacle. Herne closed the manacle and said simply, "Let's go." Ian swallowed hard and nodded once, picked up Ulfhel, and then the pair of them were running away from the Abbey chapel.

F

ully transformed, Randi tugged and pulled against the manacles, contorting this way and that for leverage. The shackles had been intended for men, normal men, and it wasn't long before the plates holding them to the pillar began to give way.

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hiannon's Wheel, the stone circle that had long been a place of power, was closer to Grimstone than the Ring of the Nine Maidens, where Robin had killed Gulnar's creature the autumn before. As the column of men raced toward the safety of the ring, thunder crashed overhead, and a drenching downpour erupted out of the sky.

The more superstitious among them were convinced that the gods were angry at their work this day, but their companions reminded them that their own god, Herne, had needed them, and directed them on this headlong rush. The bodies of the fallen had been left at the Abbey, but they would return to reclaim and bury their comrades. But tonight, tonight they must put as much ground between them and the remaining man-wolves.

Ian and Herne had caught up with the column not far from the Abbey, and they walked quickly on either side of Robin Hood.

"There were survivors," Herne stated.

"Yes."

"They will be more dangerous now without the guidance of Wulfring," he observed ominously. "Everyone should take care."

"More dangerous? Are you saying we shouldn't have killed Wulfring?" Robin demanded.

Herne shook his head. "No. Wulfring had to die. He planned to take the entire area, turn them into his kind. From here they would have taken over all of England, and then the continent. Now there are only a few left, and they can be driven off. But until then, everyone should be careful."

"It's possible, too, that without him, they won't operate in groups anymore. No more concerted action," Ian added.

"And the breakthrough of Fenris averted again," Mason pointed out sagely.

Galen, Wulfring's lieutenant, had escaped the carnage at the Abbey, and although he mourned his master's death, he sought vengeance against the rude villagers and outlaws who had taken his master's life. A thousand years and more, ended in a single night at the hands of rabble. He didn't know who had killed Wulfring, but they would all pay for it. Retaining the form of a man through sheer determination, he stalked them, following the column of men as they moved toward Rhiannon's Wheel. He felt the pull of the moon risen high and full in the sky, but he was chosen and trained by his master; as long as he concentrated, he could hold the blood back until the time was right.

At last the manacles sheared away from the pillar, and the wolf was free. Howling triumphantly, it bounded down the chapel aisle, over the human bodies of the werewolves it had killed as Randi Wallace, and out into the night. The scent of other wolves was on the air, the spoor going off in all directions. The strongest scent led directly to Rhiannon's Wheel.

It was still dark when the men, weary, sodden and footsore, finally came in sight of Rhiannon's Wheel. The moon hung directly overhead, framed by the two largest stones in the circle. Robin stood at the entrance to the circle, counting off the men as they filed into the ring. Twenty men, plus his own band. They'd lost three this night. Edward embraced Robin as he passed, thanking the Hooded Man for his rescue. Nasir nodded thanks, too, as he joined the men in the circle. As Tuck passed by, Robin instructed him to try to start a fire if he could, and make sure the men ate something. Finally, only Herne remained outside the protection of the ring with him.

"Go. Look after your men."

"What of you, Herne?" Robin asked worriedly.

"There is still more to be done. I will be all right. You have saved me from the Wolf. It will be a long time before anyone attempts to free Fenris, my son. Now I must set protections against the wolves that still run free."

Clasping hands, Robin lowered his head in agreement. "Blessed be, Robin i' the Hood. You have done well. Now go to your friends." With that, the Hunter walked away, suddenly enveloped by mists that rose up from the ground.

Ian and Mason were helping Tuck set up the fire when Robin rejoined them. He tapped Ian on the shoulder and motioned for him to join him, a little ways away from the rest of the men.

"Will she be all right?" he asked softly.

"If the chains hold," Ian replied. "If not, I'll have a hell of a time finding her. But I will. We've been through this before."

Robin shook his head. "Such a terrible burden. You must love her very much."

Ian smiled wanly. "Oh, yes. I do. We had hopes that ... that we would find a cure." It was Ian's turn to shake his head. "We'll keep looking."

Robin looked off in the distance for a moment, then turned back to Ian. "Herne said that the

sword would set her free. She killed Wulfring with it. Herne, Edward and Nasir were released then. Why not her?"

Ian was silent for a long time. Then he answered, "Perhaps there are too many years between them. We don't come from another land, Robin. We come from another time. Over 700 years in the future."

Robin stared at him, stunned. Then he said, "'The sword you carry has waited for you century upon century until you came to claim it.' That's what Herne told her. That she was the chosen of Ulfhel. I thought it was like me, Herne chose me, and his chosen always carries Albion. But the sword waited for her all the way in the future —"

"To come back to this time to kill Wulfring? Perhaps. We may never know." He lifted the sword and stared at it, watching the newborn firelight dance along the runes inscribed in the blade.

"I was raised a Christian," Robin said suddenly. "But the longer I live out here, the more I find I believe that our lives are directed by gods older than time."

"I —" Ian was cut off by the wail of a wolf, loud and close. Suddenly, an enormous man-wolf burst out of the darkness, standing at the entrance to the ring, snarling and spitting. The men scrambled up, edging away from the mammoth creature. It advanced slowly, dropping to a crouch, and there was intelligence in its brilliant eyes.

Robin put his hand out to halt Ian's advance. "The sword —" Ian protested.

"You don't have the skill," Robin warned. "And the sword has not chosen you. That thing would tear you to pieces."

As suddenly as the first werewolf had appeared, a second, more feminine in shape, catapulted out of the blackness beyond the ring, slamming into the back of the first. The howling creatures locked in a contest of wills and power, rolling back and forth across the soil by the fire. Embers popped and shot out from the fire, and the acrid smell of burning fur travelled across the circle.

Robin watched the battle through narrowed eyes, then dropped his hand. "Now, while the beast is distracted."

Ian nodded, skirting around the edge of the circle, sword held point down toward the ground. The big wolf succeeded in throwing off the smaller, but the smaller one simply shook itself and launched itself anew at the male. The men were silent, but the clearing was alive with the tumult of the battle. The smaller werewolf tore at the neck of the larger, pulling away a mouthful of fur and skin. The larger wolf bellowed its rage, erupting from the ground and sending the smaller wolf flying through the air to land back-first atop the fire. It screeched, scrambling away from the flames and rolling over in the dirt to put out the fire that ate away at its pelt.

Ian stood still, watching the melee, his eyes widening with terror as the larger wolf stood not more than five feet away from him. It looked him square in the face, and he would swear it smiled. Its golden eyes dropped to the sword, and then back to his face. With a snarl, it started forward, inexorably, toward him.

He backed up, finding one of the standing stones at his back. Glancing wildly left and right, Ian realized he didn't have time to run away from this demon, and suddenly remembered the sword in his hand. As the creature lunged for him, he brought the sword up, piercing its hide and driving all the way through. He felt it bite into flesh again, and to his horror, he saw the smaller wolf had leapt onto the male's back, and now hung, impaled on the sword. He felt the hot breath of the werewolf's last exhalation as it fell atop him. He hit his head as he fell, and knew no more.

As soon as the wolves fell on Ian, Robin was racing across the clearing, Will and John right behind. They pulled the smaller wolf off the sword, then the larger, pulling Ian away from the dead animals. To their surprise, both werewolves started to change back into human form.

"Randi," Robin breathed, as the smaller wolf resolved itself into the naked form of the woman who had fought beside him. She wasn't breathing, and blood continued to seep slowly out of the massive wound in her chest. The blade had pierced her in the heart, and already, that heart had ceased to beat. John shrugged off his cape of animal skins and laid it respectfully over Randi's body.

Ian was coming around, and the first thing he saw was Randi's body a few feet away. Quickly he crawled to her, gathering her up in his arms. "No!" he cried, hugging her to him, the hilt of the sword still grasped in his hand. "**No!**" Her lifeless face rolled away from him, and he grabbed at it with his free hand, holding it to his face as hot tears poured down his cheeks.

"The sword will set you free!" called Herne. "The Wheel turns!"

Suddenly, the stones were in motion, revolving faster and faster until they were nothing but a blur. The ground beneath their feet buckled and shifted, sending men sprawling. Mason crawled to Ian, grabbing hold of his shoulders as the man rocked back and forth, the body of the woman he loved held tightly in his arms.

Thunder crashed overhead. Lightning rent the sky. The whirlwind descended and touched down on the ground. And suddenly all was still, and the strange trio were gone.

A jet on its night-time run to Scotland roared overhead, leaving a vapor trail across the full moon. A sudden whirlwind descending from the sky shredded the vapor trail into wisps and fragments. As the mini-cyclone neared the earth, tall grass flattened against the rocky turf. A flash of lightning illuminated the few remaining stones of the ancient stone circle once known as Rhiannon's Wheel, and faded away.

In the somewhat flat space near the headstone of the ring, a huddled trio appeared, two men and the body of a young woman. In one man's hand was grasped a glowing sword. Gradually, the glow faded, and the circle was still.

"Ian?" asked one of the men, raising his head and looking around him. "Ian," he repeated more urgently.

Ian Matheson lifted his tear-streaked face and turned to his mentor and friend, John Mason. He followed the direction of Mason's pointing finger, and found himself looking at telephone wires suspended overhead. A quick glance at the circle showed him an area overgrown with grass and weeds, several of the stones canting dangerous toward the earth, still others missing. Of the outlaws and men of Wickham, there was no sign.

"We're home," Mason said softly.

"Home," Ian repeated dully. He looked down at the body of Randi Wallace and stroked her face. "What does it matter now?" he asked desolately. As he stared down at her face, he frowned. Was that a movement beneath her eyelids? Frantically, he felt for a pulse. It was there! Strong, steady. He hugged her forcefully, causing her to cough.

"Ian?" she asked faintly, opening her eyes. "Ian, what —" Suddenly her eyes widened. The full moon. She pushed him away urgently, staring at the moon. "Ian, we've got to get me —"

"Hush," he replied, grinning like an idiot. "Do you feel any of the symptoms of the change?"

She dropped her eyes, looking at the ground as she studied her internal sensations. "No," she answered in wonder. "But I *did* change. I remember, in the Abbey —"

"That was more than 700 years ago, my dear," Mason said with a smile. "700 years and a curse away."

"You mean —"

"I think we can hope this time," Ian answered, helping her to her feet. "I really do."



It was well past dawn by the time Ian, Randi and Mason found their way back to the Pig's Trotters in 1994 Wickham. The town had changed beyond recognition in 700 years, and they were sure no one would remember Edward, or his wife Alison, or the men who had fought the Father Wolf one early spring day in the early years of the thirteenth century. They would carry that memory always.



The desk clerk looked up curiously at the bizarre trio that trudged into the inn's foyer. His eyes widened further when he realized that it was Professors Matheson and Mason and their friend, all of who, had been missing for several days.

"I say, we've managed to lose our room keys —" Professor Matheson began, gesturing toward the inn's key board.

"Ah. Yes, sir," the desk clerk agreed distantly, reaching for the keys and handing them over. "Ah, will you be needing anything else, sir?"

"I don't suppose we could have some food brought up, my good man?" The clerk nodded, his mouth open. "Wonderful. Steak and kidney pie?" Mason asked Ian and Randi.

"Two," Ian said, his mouth watering.

"I'll ... I'll just have a salad," Randi said, wrinkling her nose. "And some fruit, please."

"Salad? Fruit?" Ian repeated, peering closely at Randi. "No hamburger? No thick and juicy steak?" She shook her head, grimacing. He grinned broadly. "I think you're well and truly cured, my dear," he told her, laughing, and hugged her. She hugged him back, but when John Little's furs started to slip, she gasped, pulled them close, and ran up the stairs before she embarrassed herself further.

"And wine, if you please," Ian added, and raced after Randi.

"Ah. Young love. Inspiring, don't you think?" Mason inquired, and whistling softly to himself, ascended the stairs.

The desk clerk was left to stare after them, shaking his head. "And I thought London was weird."



"Oh, that was good," Randi sighed, leaning back on the pillows. "I can't remember ever being so hungry in my life."

Ian chased the last drop of gravy around his plate with a piece of bread, nodding assent. "Time travel takes a lot of one," he agreed around a mouthful of food.

"So does dying." She snuggled back against the pillows, watching him. "Do you suppose I'm like a cat? Nine lives? I've already died twice, if what you tell me is true."

"Oh, it's true. The sword took you there," he answered, poking her in the chest. "You had no

pulse. Nothing. You were dead."

She nodded, toying with the coverlet. "What are we going to do about the sword, Ian? We can't take it back to the States — we'd never get through Customs with it, and we'd be arrested for trafficking in stolen artifacts. We can't leave it — it's too dangerous."

He shook his head. "I don't think it's a danger in anyone else's hands, now. It's served its purpose. And it seemed to have its greatest power when you wielded it. I think ... I think we'll give it to my parents. Knowing them, they'll sling it in the basement and forget all about it. It'll be safe enough there."

Randi laughed. Then she grew quiet again. "You're sure it's over?" she asked softly.

Ian looked at her for a long time before answering. Slowly, he got up, cleared away their plates, and then settled himself on the edge of the huge bed. "There's one final test I think we can perform ... to assure ourselves of the fact."

"What?" Randi inquired, her eyes suddenly fearful.

"This." Ian leaned over and kissed her. Her arms slid over his shoulders, pulling him closer. Their lips parted, and they simply looked at each other for a long moment. Then they both smiled. When the thing they feared would happen didn't, the thing they'd both longed for finally did.

E pilogue

Randi Wallace lounged on the sofa in the Matheson's sitting room, feet dangling over the edge of the arms, the Sunday paper spread out around her. She smiled as she read the story of the archaeological dig near Wickham, where the entire excavation was suddenly brought to a halt when explosions racked the site, levelling the mound. "Ancient chemicals in the forge area of the dig,' claimed the dig leader, Dr. Gareth Carlson." More likely strategically located chemical explosives designed to bury Wayland's forge forever, safeguarding the magical artifacts and the world at large.

Ian Matheson came back into the sitting room, smiling absently. He sat on the back of the sofa, and kneaded the muscles of Randi's neck.

"Mmm. That feels good. Who was on the phone?"

"Oh. No one, really," he answered cryptically.

She looked up at him, and saw the barely suppressed grin he was trying to hide. She grabbed him and pulled him over the back of the sofa on top of her. "Who was it?" she demanded, her face inches from his.

He kissed her, then lifted his head and smiled. "Did you really mean it when you said you think of England as our home?"

"Yes," she replied tentatively. "Who was on the phone, Ian?"

"Oh, just the program director for Channel 4. They're looking into launching a program. A serious study of the paranormal. With worldwide distribution."

"And ...?"

He rolled over, dropping to sit on the floor beside her, his arm draped over her shoulders. "And ... they want me to host it. Well, create it, research it, write it, and star in it. I call the shots. No bimbos. No idiot UFO-chasers. Scholarly."

"And ...?"

"And I said I'd think it over. I told him I had a contract with KBLA. He said they'd have their lawyers look at it, and then he tossed out a few figures."

"Nice figures?"

"Very nice," he replied, smiling and kissing her again. "So. You have your choice — where would you like to live, eh?"

She settled back onto the couch, her hand behind her head. "Oh, I don't know. Why don't we try going ... bi-continental for a while? Spend part of the year in California, and the rest of the year here. Think they'll go for it?"

"I think it's worth a try." He pulled her down to kiss her again and smiled.

"And we can start with the legend of Robin Hood, and Herne the Hunter. They deserve to be remembered accurately."

"Amen to that."