

**“In the Bleak Midwinter”**  
**A Short Fable of The Six from The Chronicles of Xanadu**  
**Author: D. Sanders**  
**I - No Place Like Home**  
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It had been four long and tiring years since the Mother had come on Mid-Winter and bid Rhys and Curbain on their journey west. Now at last they were heading home, a much larger family than when they had begun their journey. The Six had seen near death, countless terrifying battles and several long and hungry nights together and had grown closer than any blood ties could have made them. None of them at journey's end had wanted to bid farewell to each other so they had decided to follow Rhys and Curbain back to the village they had come from.

“Like I have a choice? I'm bonded to you two fools.” Anda grinned blowing into his cold fingers as they walked the road heading east all six astride the road.

Curbain reached over and took his hand and squeezed, a warming charm trickling through his fingers. “If our cottage still stands, we will need a much larger bed. Rhys and I barely fit and how am I supposed to keep warm between you if I feel like the ham betwixt bread?” Curbain asked grinning and Anda smirked.

“I thought you rather liked that dearest?” Anda winked and Rhys chuckled.

“Aye, but not that close Anda, he kids not, we'd suffocate him in his sleep. We'll manage until I can afford to get us a bigger bed.”

“We've slept worse. Remember the cave up on Glen Haven? We were all elbow to elbow and I thought Senda was going to kill us all.” Anda laughed and Senda snorted.

“Remind me not of those hellish mountains. Next time, and I hope there never is a next time; I am going to pack my boots with dirt and walk on roots. Remember to remind me Rhys. I nearly starved up there.” Senda shivered at the memory and Rhys nodded an affirmative as Eontobar crawled under his arm and frowned.

“Remind me not of that beloved. I was far too worried about you to ever want to remember how close I came to losing you my love.” Eontobar said and Senda leaned over to kiss his brow.

“I'm sorry Puss. I know. Trust me I am glad I did not meet the Maker during that crossing. I want nothing more now than to tend orchards and grow fat on apples and bounce children on my knees and sing horrible drinking songs with all of you around a fire.” Senda said and Tobin nodded.

“Aye. I want to drink enough Ale to drown a dragon, Piss in a warm privy without thought of my manhood dropping off to frostbite and finding peace again. I may have lost my wife and daughter, but it does not mean I cannot be uncle to yours. Every child needs an uncle that spoils them rotten aye?” Tobin said smiling. It still hurt that he’d lost Ayana and his daughter, but he was young and still fertile since his severed bonding. It wasn’t unheard of for an Enf’ Tuvalu male who had lost his shacah as early in the bonding as Tobin had to find another mate again. If he ever regained his libido that was, it had been dormant since Ayana’s loss. He’d be forced into a life of celibacy otherwise. If he did regain his ability to function sexually and found another mate it would not be his soul bond, but a good loving mate nonetheless unless the mother saw fit to send him another shacah.

That too was not unheard of, but the chances exceedingly rare and Tobin wasn’t holding his breath. The bond of Shacah-dua, or Second Blessing Life Mate was perhaps a one in a million chance and he was happy enough with his new family and he loved them all as dearly as they were his blood brothers.

“Speaking of children...” Anda began and Curbain sighed.

“Not again Anda. Would you mind if we got home first before you have me filled with child please. I promised did I not that when we got home I would have one?”

“Aye love, just reminding you beloved what I’d like for twelfth-night gift.” Anda said leaning over to kiss Curbain’s cheek.

“It takes a little longer to cook a babe Anda. You might just have to settle with conception.” Rhys winked and Anda grinned.

“The making is just as merry for presents!”

“You just want me to do it first Anda! I know better you shit.” Curbain grumbled and Anda laughed.

“Aye, that too beloved. Remember dearest before I bonded to the two of you, the only male anatomy I stroked was my own. I always thought I’d be making the children not the one able to carry them myself!” Anda said and Rhys chuckled.

“Aye. When the Mother changed Curbain who was far less attached to his masculinity than you were, I thought it bad enough. You seemed to handle it a little better.”

“I feel no different, that’s why. I just worried over Bain; I had no time to fret over myself. I never want to see you frightened that much again dearest.” Anda said laying an arm around Curbain’s shoulders as they walked.

"I over-reacted and I am sorry I acted so horribly to you both. I'll never forgive myself for what I forced you to do Rhys." Curbain said his regret seeping into both of their cores and both Anda and Rhys folded Curbain into a joint embrace.

"Dearest, you were tired, you were fighting night and day, draining yourself dry and to have the biggest fear of them all, a womb able to breed more of those bastards suddenly thrust on you too? You managed as only you knew how beloved. It's over now, it's past and it can stay there. There is no more and we can go home and carry on again. We're a family and we're still together and that's all that matters." Rhys said and Eontobar cheered.

"Here! Here! I want to find a nice little house, change myself into a lass and have my Senda lose his aversion to bedding women so I too can enjoy the fruits so to speak." Eontobar grinned and Senda shivered.

"So long as you don't bury me in breasts I think I'll manage to poke you Puss." Senda winked and Tobin laughed.

"Are Anda and I the only ones here who appreciate a woman's glories?" Tobin asked and Rhys chuckled.

"Hey, don't leave me out here! I bedded a lass or twenty-two in my time thank you very much."

"I hope you don't miss breasts, you are certainly not getting those from Anda and I." Curbain frowned and Rhys just realized he'd stepped in territory he didn't want to be in. Curbain was annoyed now with him. Curbain, unlike Rhys, had never taken a lover until he'd bonded with Rhys. Rhys had sown many harmless oats prior to his bonding and it was still one of those things that Curbain had yet to lose his shame over.

"You stepped in the shit there love." Anda quipped and coughed.

"Aye. Bain, I'm sorry."

"Don't be, it was my choice not to and not anyone's fault but my own. I never liked women much to be honest. I mean in that way. Most of my friends were women and none of them I wanted to bed." Curbain said and Senda nodded.

"Aye. Love women I do. They are bright, funny, charming and beautiful on the eyes and some of the most loyal friends or downright catty enemies a bloke can have. I prefer them as my friends than my lovers. I tried to bed a lass once and not a glimmer of reaction and she was sinfully beautiful. I kept seeing my mother and well, that's when I realized I was entirely bent on my own gender. It takes all kinds Curbain. You're like me there. Some men prefer women Like Tobin and Anda, some prefer other men Like you and I, some take both equally Like Rhys

and Toba, it's just the way the world works my brother." Senda said as they crested a rise and the apple orchards, dormant for the winter began to spread out as far as the eye could see. They were almost home, just another few miles.

"And the way the world changes. I fall into that 'both' category now." Anda grinned and Rhys chuckled.

"You sort of have to love. You ended up with us as shacah." Rhys grinned and Anda smiled wickedly.

"And boy was I enlightened. I was missing out on fabulous sex."

"I want to hear not your exploits, I heard them the first time around!" Tobin laughed and everyone followed suit. There was little left where modesty was concerned between the six of them after all over the past four years.

The road widened the nearer they got to the town, their black tabards were well worn now, but recognizable the realm over and as they began passing homes people came running out waving and cheering. All new faces until they reached the outskirts of town when two figures came running and Curbain was flat on his back on the road being covered with joyful affectionate kisses.

"Mika! Get off me!" Curbain was laughing and crying as Rhys was being slapped on the back hard by Dirkin.

"Not a chance Bain! Welcome home!" Mika sobbed clinging to him like a long lost sibling.

Curbain wept with joy as he held her close. He'd been half afraid to come home, fearing they'd not welcome the notorious Dragonwise Mage back, but Mika was treating him no differently than she had before she'd known of his secret that horrible night the Tanaocktu came to their village and killed her brand new shacah and almost impregnated her.

"Mika! Let the lad up off the cold Ground! Come in! Come get warm and come eat!" Sterbin, the barkeep bellowed as he lifted Curbain off the ground with a firm hand and a hearty slap on his back.

"We kept hearing news of you lot! Never prouder to call you my friends. I see you bring more with you. Are you home to stay?" Sterbin asked hooking arms around Rhys and Curbain.

"Aye, we're home. I want beer, tell me you have beer my friend."

"For you lad? Only my best!" Sterbin said ushering the Six into his tavern and seating them at the best table by the fire.

Mika brought out a feast of lamb stew, fresh bread, baked apples and cream and enough hearty amber ale to drown a dragon which had Tobin singing praises and almost drunkenly entertaining Mika on his knee, who seemed disinclined to move from the spot of honor.

All their old friends crowded into the pub, asking for tales, sharing some of home, congratulating Rhys and Curbain on their triad bonding and welcoming Anda with unmasked affection, non-prejudice and open arms.

The Village of Wyvern Point was alive with joy and it was like they'd never left. This was home, truly home.

"Sterbin! Tell me our cottage still stands!" Rhys asked finishing his stew.

"Aye lad, never you fear. We all done fixed it up for you while you were away. We'd never let you lose your home when you was out saving all us folks! Don't be daft. You're like my boys!" Sterbin said slapping Rhys' arm and filling the pitchers on the table with more ale.

"What's more, we heard a while back you done picked up a third. Mika made sure we fitted your cottage for a triad. You'll all be fine." Sterbin winked and Anda grinned.

"I adore you my good barkeep and since you're so good to me, I'll make you my family's specialty. Ever hear of Andusfaire Brandy?" Anda asked and Sterbin nodded.

"Aye, best damn brandy ever made and damn Tanaocktu done wiped out the whole clan!"

"Not all my new friend." Anda winked and Sterbin laughed.

"Son, you making a business proposition?" Sterbin looked delighted.

"Oh aye. It's my trade. You help me get reestablished and I'll make you partner in the venture. Deal?"

"Son, you have a deal." Sterbin's eyes lit up with a wicked golden gleam. They'd both be rich men, the demand for Andusfaire brandy had always been high, to have it reestablished would make many people as far away as the Crown City insanely happy to imbibe again in the rich liquor whose recipe had always been a closely guarded family secret thought lost for all time. Anda winked and continued to eat.

“We need to find jobs and homes for the others too. We’re all staying.” Curbain said happily eating his baked apple loaded with cream.

“Aye. Senda obviously is a natural for the orchards and other crops. He can heal them easier than I can you.” Rhys said and Sterbin nodded.

“Oh aye. I’m sure Master Senda will find no lack of work with all the farmer’s once they know he’s here to stay. Never a bad crop when a dryad lives near.” Sterbin said and Senda smiled.

“That is my duty for the mother.” Senda said and Anda laughed.

“Apart from skewering Tanaocktu on thorns naturally.” Anda said and Senda smiled.

“My spearing days are over. Thank the maker. I want good solid earth, a warm house for my Puss and more of those lovely roasted potatoes.” Senda said, eating only the vegetables on the table and liking very much Mika’s potatoes in garlic and basil.

“Aye, your cook must be praised! I haven’t eaten this well in years!” Tobin said and Mika leaned over and kissed his cheek.

“Talk like that handsome and you’ll give me a big head.” Mika said and Tobin grinned.

“Woman, you are a goddess in the kitchen. If I hadn’t planned on staying with my brothers your food would have kept me here.”

Curbain turned to Rhys and smiled. “I have never seen him flirt like that.” He whispered and Rhys nodded smiling.

“Aye, and look at Mika, she’s about ready to explode. Mark my words dearest, we’re witnessing a miracle and a another gift from the mother here.” Rhys said quietly before turning back to Sterbin.

“I doubt there are any, but we need places for our new brothers to stay until spring and we can build them homes.” Rhys said and Sterbin nodded.

“I can put Masters Senda and Eontobar in the back for now. I have that large storage room off the kitchen we can turn into temporary housing for them. Plenty of warm earth back there off the kitchen hearth. No trying to sink roots in earth as hard as iron. I can get some furniture in there in no time and get it cleared out by tonight.”

“That would be lovely. Thank you Master Sterbin.” Eontobar said sopping up his leftover stew gravy with bread and washing it down with the best ale he’d ever had, feeling more at home and at peace than he’d ever felt.

“That just leaves Master Tobin. What’s your trade sir?” Sterbin said and Tobin smiled.

“Fur Trapping. We’re close enough to the forest here to make me quite happy. Just quarter hour’s trek and once I can get some new traps made I’ll be in business again. I just need a bed and a fire to be content. I’ve had much less.” Tobin said and Mika took his hand.

“I live off the end of the path near Rhys and Curbain, just step out my back door and you are in the forest, you are more than welcome to share my fire Master Tobin, I’m all by myself and I have plenty of room in my cottage. I must say it would be nice to have company.” She said and Tobin smiled.

“And no finer company lass. Aye, thank you I’d be honored to share your fire.” Tobin said and Anda smirked and refrained from adding his particular humor to the moment. It took a fool blinder than Tobin not to notice mutual attraction and desire. Even if for once Tobin’s keen senses seemed to have abandoned him. Even a babe could smell the pheromones being emitted by the pair across the table.

“Well that looks like it’s settled then. Come spring, we can turn that land across the path from you into a home site for Master Senda and Master Eontobar. However, until then, I just want you lads to settle in home again, you’ve worked enough I say! It’s time to let other’s take care of you damn it.” Sterbin bellowed and Rhys chuckled.

“Sterbin, I’m home again and there is nothing more I want to do than start taking care of colds again. It’s my calling and I’d go stir crazy not working. A day’s rest to get settled and my door is open again to all. Am I or am I not still this village’s healer?”

“Aye lad you are and we’re damn glad to have you back. I do wish to state however, I hope our Village’s mage will cease hiding and working his fingers raw to the bone as he did before he left.” Sterbin eyed Curbain who smiled slightly.

“I am different than I was before. I have come to accept my calling now as before I feared it much. Where I came from before Rhys and I moved here, I was treated with much scorn and I did not wish to see people fear me here as they did where I came from. I will ever use my gifts for any and all who need them now. This is my home, this is my village and I love everyone here very much. I promise not to hide anymore and my protection will ever be on this village I call home in my heart of hearts. I want my children to grow here in happiness.”

“Children?” Mika asked and Curbain smiled.

“Aye. Children. There are more rumors which you have not heard, for no one knows them yet. I might as well confess since everyone will know eventually.” Curbain said explaining the changes that had happened to his body and Anda’s. That the mother had made them both male and female and that he could now, very literally bear children of his own.

“I’ll be damned! You don’t say. Now that is something isn’t it?” Sterbin laughed and grinned. “Expecting yet?”

“Oh no! Maker bite your tongue! Not yet, but soon we hope. We all wish to start families and just move on now.” Curbain said and Eontobar nodded.

“Aye. I’m sure you’ve all heard I can shift shape; don’t be surprised to see me walking about as a woman once Senda and I start ours. Unlike Curbain and Anda, I have to transform into a female form and remain so for the duration.” Eontobar said and leaned back in his chair full and happy.

“I’m just damn glad to have you all home again. You still owe me fifty marks Rhys!” Dirkin said and Rhys laughed.

“I know, I know. I still think you cheat at cards like Curbain. You waited for years, a few moons I think you’ll last until I can make us money again. I haven’t seen a mark coin in years.” Rhys said and Anda shivered.

“Aye. I am tired of being poor and living off dirt. Unlike Senda, I need food! I want clothes, I want to dress you both in silk and feed you grapes off a vine. I want a comfortable chair and vermilion slippers.” Anda said, going into his own little vain indulgent world.

“Vain prig.” Rhys chuckled and Anda winked.

“But of course. Only the best for my Shacahs damn it.”

“That takes money first dearest, we are all poor men again.”

“Not forever, and we have time at last. We have learned to live with nothing; anything at this point will be heavenly. I just want my bed again and my fire.” Curbain said sipping at his tea, he never did like the taste of ale.

“And your books.” Rhys said and Curbain smiled.

“Aye, and my books. To have time to read again will be a joy in and of itself.” Curbain sighed as Rhys stood and stretched.

"I think we will be off, I'm tired and my bed is calling me. I'd like to see our cottage again." Rhys said taking both Curbain and Anda's hands.

"Go, I'll send someone over with food for your larder later. I'll get started on Master Senda and Eontobar's room and Tobin I think is in fine hands. Rest lads and enjoy the afternoon and evening and welcome home again!" Sterbin said giving them all fond embraces.

Senda and Eontobar disappeared into the back of the tavern with Sterbin to set to work on their room and Mika, Tobin and the triad headed down the path.

Mika's hand firmly held by Tobin as they walked, his staff picking his trail out and watching for ice as they walked.

They first came to Mika's merry little cottage as the path wound around the edge of the forest. "Here we are! Straight shot into the village and walk through the house and you're in the forest. The path curves around to the left and ends at where the forest wraps around it, just another five minutes walk to their cottage when you want to visit. We're quite close. We're the farthest out in this direction from the village. It's nice and quiet out here." Mika said leading Tobin up to the door almost shaking like a leaf as she lifted the latch and he followed her inside stamping his boots off on the step and taking them off once inside.

"It is lovely and warm in here and do I smell peppermint?" Tobin asked and Mika smiled.

"Aye. I add dried leaves to the fire, I like the smell."

"As do I, I used to do that in my home once. My Shacah liked it too."

"You must miss her." Mika said as seeing a sad look come to Tobin's eyes.

"Aye. Hurts less with time, but I cannot lie, I do miss her I lost her and my daughter to those beasts five years ago. I think not a person lives that did not lose someone dear to them. We all carry left over sadness of loss, we just cannot linger or else we never move on with our own lives. Ayana would have been the first to tell anyone that. My wife was most intelligent and correct. She would have been most angry with me that first year I was alone. I was a foul man. It took meeting my brothers and finding purpose again to let go and move on."

"I think you had the right to be cross. Had it not been for Curbain, I'd have been victim too. He saved my life when he took that beast off me." Mika shivered and Tobin wrapped arms around her.

“I am most grateful he was there, else I would have lost you too. Tell me, do you not feel what I am my dear Mika?”

Mika smiled and rested his cheek against a strong broad chest. “I’d be lying if I said I didn’t. I lost my shacah too that night. I never thought I’d ever feel this way again.”

“Nor I. A blessing we are being given Mika. Oon Mei Shacah-dua.”

Mika cried as she wrapped her arms around Tobin and accepted his kiss as their beings connected. They didn’t love the ones they’d lost any less; this was a new love a new beginning. It was different but no less joyous. A Shacah-dua bond was exceedingly rare, and when it did happen it was usually between widowed partners. Thankfully both were still very young. Tobin being only twenty years older than Curbain, not even two-hundred yet and Mika a lass of the same age, they’d be able to have the families they were denied in their first bonding. The mother had rewarded Tobin, the final gift and blessing for her final member of her Six.

A blessing Tobin never expected to have and was joyfully lost in warm arms and soft skin and making love to a glorious woman, his manhood stirring to life again after five years of unwillingly celibacy.

Once bound as shacah, a male could only function with his mate, and after he lost Ayana he thought this part of his existence gone forever. Mika had restored it as she became his new mate and beloved second wife.

He lay tracing her face with his fingers as they lay sated in bed. She was quite a handsome woman, strong of feature and body. She was no stranger to hard work, just like Ayana had been. Her hips large and round and her breasts made Tobin smile, he always loved an ample woman and all this glorious soft skin was his. “You are most beautiful dearest.”

“You have forever to touch me like this beloved. You give me gooseflesh.” Mika chuckled.

“I see with my hands, I think you are safe to assume my hands will ever be upon you.”

“That’s a good thing my handsome.” Mika said snuggling up under his chin.

They lay there a long time, telling each other about their lost spouses, their lives prior to their second bonding and they grew to know each other beyond that of the unique compulsion of Enf’ Tuvalu to bond monogamously to a soul match and compelled them to love unconditionally on a basic instinctual and genetic

level. They grew to love traditionally as they talked long into the evening, loving and caressing and basking in the warmth of love renewed.

It was somewhere after dinner and the fire was banked for the night Tobin felt the first stirrings of the need. The drive that flared an elven man's senses to mate urgently. He knew this drive and what it meant when it was felt for a woman mate. He had felt this before and the last time he felt this maddening urge it was because Ayana had gone into her fertile cycle. For mates of the same gender it was just the need to mate and mate often, for opposite gender pairings it was to procreate because the female's pheromones had gone into overdrive.

Tobin was the first to take advantage of peace time and Mika was gasping in shocked pleasure by the time Tobin was finished turning her into blissful boneless jelly.

Tobin was fairly positive that the next time Rhys or Curbain looked at his new wife they'd be pleasantly shocked and confirm his suspicions he had just fathered a child on her. He felt it in his bones, even if his magic sense was limited to telepathy, his other senses were sharp and keen. He would bet money on the fact Mika now carried his child.

He fell asleep holding her in his arms, a precious gift he would not lose a second time. He had all he wanted in life and she lay asleep in his arms, warm and soft and smelling of peppermint and a honeysuckle scented soap. Fresh, clean and all his for the rest of their days together.

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"OH MY!" Curbain gasped as they halted at the gate of their transformed cottage. Gone was the tiny single room cottage, it had literally been transformed. A large welcoming covered porch complete with a swing had been added and the house itself was substantially larger than before.

"What have they done?" Rhys asked as they raced through the gate and threw open the door. Someone had come ahead of them and the fire was burning merrily in the large hearth warming the main living area. What was originally the cottage they had left had been rebuilt into a large kitchen and living area with half the original space devoted to Rhys' healing workroom. Large shelves lined the walls for him to store his herbs; a work table was along one section of the wall and a small cot-like bed that doubled as a small couch for the comfort of his patients was along another wall. The old privy still remained and had been sectioned off properly to provide Rhys a place to wash his hands and bathe patients if needed.

The Kitchen area in front of the great hearth and in the center of the dwelling as you walked in the front door held a large table and eight chairs, enough room for

a large gathering of friends around a meal. A new and larger larder had been built and a new hand pump over a basin sink was added and surrounded by cabinets and marble tiled counters. It was the most beautifully and efficiently laid out kitchen Curbain had ever seen. Not even the finest houses in the Crown City had such beautiful detailing of wood and stone. The remaining half of the room that had been their bedroom was the living area.

Soft chairs and a sofa sat around a pot belly stove in the corner for additional warmth on cold nights. More shelves lined the walls and Curbain's books had been lovingly repaired and lined the shelves. Curbain wept with joy running his hands down his precious few belongings. He'd missed his books.

There was a door that lead back into the addition that had been built onto the cottage and all three men opened the door and Rhys gasped.

A small hallway with five more doors was behind the door coming from the living room. Two doors lay down either side of the hallway and it ended with a set of double doors at the end of the hallway.

The first door to the right lay a brand new private privy, complete with a large stone tub dug into the floor with natural shelf seating lining the rim. It was plenty large enough to hold the entire triad if they were so inclined to bathe together.

The privy itself was of porcelain and had a cistern above it that collected rain water from the roof and when pulled washed away their waste. Again only the rich had such facilities in their own homes. Everyone was taken away with the generosity and they'd only opened a single door. There were four more to explore.

The three remaining doors opened into simple bedrooms each with a small single or double bed, warm rugs covered the wooden floors and each held a small pot belly stove for warmth.

The final set double doors opened into a large and spacious master bedroom. A second fireplace that was intricately carved was roaring with a warm fire and there were three individual wardrobes along one wall, each bearing a name carved into the wood along the top. "Rhys", "Curbain" and "Anda". Three tall chests of drawers were along another wall, and the final wall facing the fireplace was taken up by a massive custom made bed that was so high off the ground it required a step stool to crawl into and there was a stool on either side of the bed.

Four massive posters from floor to ceiling had been crafted out of sturdy oak and the mattress was so thick and inviting Curbain whimpered at the sight of it. Thick down comforters and lush fur blankets lay atop the bed and two nightstands on either side of the bed finished off the cottage.

Curbain was sobbing for joy as Rhys spun him around the room and Anda grinned and leaned up against the post of the bed.

“When you told me about the people here, I never believed it really. Now I do. Holy hell I feel like a king!” Anda cried out flopping into bed.

“Aye, this is like nothing I would have ever expected. I’m speechless. And get off my side of the bed! You know I sleep on the right Anda you bed hog!” Rhys chuckled and Anda sat up grinning.

“I could sprawl in this thing and still never find you under the covers. I think Bain will, at last, sleep a night through without my elbow jabbing him or your legs kicking him.” Anda chuckled crawling over to the left side of the bed and throwing off his boots.

“I never minded.” Curbain smiled sitting in a chair by the fire and pulling off his boots.

Rhys leaned over and kissed the top of his head. “Aye, you never do complain dearest.” Rhys said sitting in the chair opposite, taking off his boots.

“I think I am going to go charm some water and heat a bath first. I don’t want to crawl into those lovely fresh sheets feeling as grubby as I do. I pray there is soap in our new privy.” Curbain said standing to undress and tossing his dirty clothes into a basket made for the purpose by the door. Anda and Rhys followed suit and soon all three were sighing content in steamy hot water, warming them clear to the bone.

Anda had his fingers lost in Curbain’s hair. “Dearest, I wish to state again for the record if you ever take shears to thy hair I will weep. So damn beautiful you are.” Anda said rinsing apple scented soap from Curbain’s long tresses.

“Both of you have hair a fetish I swear.” Curbain chuckled, sinking into the water until only his nose and eyes were visible. Rhys groaned.

“And you’re fecking adorable when you do shit like that Bain! If you want to make it back to the bedroom without me ravishing you stop looking so gorgeous my lovely.” Rhys said and Curbain sat up playfully scowling.

“I can’t breathe without you two going into heat, I swear! Can’t a bloke soak in peace?”

“Not when he has two perpetually horny Shacahs to contend with I’m afraid. Face the truth dearest; you are bonded to two rather assertive males who find you edible and then some. As much as I like to occasionally be ewe to Rhys, you

know perfectly well we'd both rather be your ram." Anda purred and Curbain shivered.

"Aye." Curbain hid his blush by sinking into the water again. Rhys playfully splashed him.

"After four years dearest, I cannot believe you can still blush over Anda's bluntness. It's truth and you know it. Just as we've learned you can't come at all unless you're being filled by one of us." Rhys winked and Curbain sighed.

"I never could. I never denied that, but do you have to say it aloud? It's embarrassing to admit I can't function as a male properly." Curbain said and both Anda and Rhys felt the warnings of impending emotional turmoil heading into Curbain's psyche and both men wrapped loving arms around them.

"That's not what we meant dearest and you know it and it has nothing to do with your masculinity and everything to do with what makes you feel good. You just prefer to be taken; it's a personal preference. Just as I have never enjoyed being taken and can't come unless I am in control either."

"Rhys is right beloved. I like it and can come both ways but I do prefer one over the other, we prefer you. It's as simple as that my lovely and nothing more." Anda said kissing Curbain's temple.

"I'm just tired, I'm sorry I'm so out of sorts emotionally."

"Your moon is due, you always get a little more fragile emotionally the week before, just like I turn into the troll who ate his young and am just plain nasty just before mine hits." Anda winked and Curbain laughed.

"You do get awfully grouchy." Curbain grinned and Anda laughed.

"Grouchy? That's a kind way to put it. I know damn well I'm foul. I'm surprised more women don't rip off male heads and shit down the neck holes. I will never, ever think women are anything less than saints for all time. The whole damn business is right annoying and the cramps alone make me want to die sometimes."

"Amen. Thank goodness Rhys makes me hot compresses or I know a few times I'd have sought means of release from the pain by slitting my wrists. I agree. Women are much stronger creatures than I ever gave them credit for." Curbain said and Rhys kept his yap shut. Anything he said at this point of the conversation would have him sleeping on the couch and he had other bedding arrangements in mind for later. He knew when to keep silent.

“The mess as well, Maker, have mercy! I never knew a person could bleed so much without dying. This is shit women don’t ever tell blokes and finding out the hard way was not an experience I’d have wished even on a Tanaocktu! If I ever get a chance to talk to the Mother, I’m going to tell her that perhaps instructions on how to deal with it might have been, ya know, appreciated and pardon the pun, bloody necessary if you ask me. But no, we had to find out the disgusting way with brutal truth and trial and error. I certainly was not going to corner a woman I didn’t know and ask, ‘Pardon me Lassie, I know you don’t know me, but how do you not ruin all your clothes during your moon?’ I think not! I value my hide a little more than that thank you!” Anda laughed and Curbain smiled.

“Aye. S’t ruth.” Curbain said standing and wrapping a towel around him as he crawled out of the bath. “Now I think I will find my place in bed and get lost in big fluffy blankets.” He said almost sashaying out of the room and Anda and Rhys turned to each other and grinned.

“He’s got an ass on him that never ends. Thank you Maker!” Anda said and Rhys laughed.

“An ass I had a hard time sharing with you in the beginning. Even though we were bonded, he makes me positively possessive.”

“Because he’s your primary love and I can’t blame you, he makes me damn bull headed obsessive and he’s my secondary. He’s got all this power dripping off him and yet he’s like this fragile glass bauble too at the same time.” Anda sighed and Rhys nodded.

“That’s it exactly. Our master, Jervas, used to say with power comes equal measures of weakness. Because his powers are so abnormally high, his weaknesses are too and as his mates you and I respond to him like rabid wolfhounds over a bone. It’s genetic, because of our bond we compensate for his fragility by becoming his fortress. It takes two of us sometimes with him; I’m not surprised we are a triad. There were times I’d have been overwhelmed with worry over him without you to lean on for support dearest.”

“Aye, same here love. Same here. I love you both insanely. I’ve never felt so a part of anything before we became a triad, I don’t think I could last a day now without either of you and knowing when I lose one, I lose both kills me sometimes to think about. Your primary bond is very strong, even with my limited senses I can see enough of your auras to see they can never be sundered. I can’t tell you how many times these past four years you both scared the hell out of me and if my hair wasn’t already white, you would have turned it so!” Anda said and Rhys nodded.

“Aye. But enough now, we made it through and I plan on growing old and portly with a dozen grandchildren sitting by the fire while I tell outrageous fabricated

stories while getting them all hyped up on massive quantities of sugar before I turn them loose on their parents again.”

“Wicked man. I adore you! Speaking of children, I believe we have a pact? We are home again, shall we go start making those babies?”

“Oh Aye and I have an idea so we’re all involved in the making. Let me bounce this off your head.” Rhys began grinning.

“Oh do tell my dear.”

“Curbain always responds best when we’re both loving him, but until now we’ve never really attempted taking him at the same time.”

“Oh, I like where this is going. It might hurt him though, he is rather tight to begin with, we can only try I suppose. I do insist you father the first on him as primary. I’ll take backdoor and if it hurts him, we’ll do what we always do when we couple as a group and I’ll have him suck me. Either way, we’re doing this as a group and I’d like to make all our children this way actually. When it’s my turn, you know I respond best if you’re taking me from behind while I take Bain. I like the notion very much that we’re all involved when we plan on children together. It makes them special.”

“Aye. My thoughts exactly. It matters not who father’s or bears. We are a triad and all the children we have together will be ours together. I know for a fact we’ll all love them equally.”

“Aye. Shall we get started?”

“Oh aye.” Rhys nodded and both men got out of the tub and followed Curbain back into the bedroom. He was already blissfully cocooned in blankets in the middle of the large bed and dozing.

Anda and Rhys grinned at each other as they crawled into opposite sides of the bed; Curbain’s rest was going to be intimately interrupted.

**“In the Bleak Midwinter”**  
**A Short Fable of The Six from The Chronicles of Xanadu**  
**Author: D. Sanders**  
**II - Mid-Winter Warmth**  
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Curbain awoke from his semi-doze being petted and stroked within an inch of his young life. Rhys was paying loving attention to his manhood and womanhood with lips and tongue while Anda toyed with nipples and ears. Curbain moaned and picked up on their joint purpose. They were planning to make him live up to his vow to them this very night; they had every intention to have him pregnant before the night was out.

Not that he minded, he was ready and had been ready, he just wanted to be home first and now they were, they didn't need to wait any longer and he wasn't going to make them wait. He always adored being the center of their attentions, he felt pampered and spoiled and surrounded with love and affection which he drank into his senses like expensive sweet wine.

Rhys made Curbain turn on his side as Anda whispered in his ear as he nibbled an earlobe. “We're going to try something new beloved. Rhys and I want to make this child together on you, tell us if it hurts and we'll stop dearest.” Anda said softly as Rhys began a slow languid tempo, sliding his erection into Curbain's much neglected female anatomy as Anda slid down the sheets and used his fingers to begin toying with Curbain's posterior.

Curbain gasped, suddenly realizing what they intended and unsure if he really wanted them to try this new position.

“Just relax Bain love. If it hurts we'll stop.” Rhys reassured as Curbain lay on his side and Rhys held his leg up to allow both he and Anda access to both his vagina and his anus.

“Aye, love, just relax.” Anda cooed as he liberally coated himself with the oily aloe based lubrication Rhys had made to aide them in loving Curbain without pain.

Anda positioned himself and slowly pushed and both he and Rhys hissed as they double penetrated Curbain who moaned beneath them.

“Does it hurt dearest?” Rhys could barely speak, it felt incredible for him, Curbain's already tight confines became even more so when Anda's manhood found purchase and moved in unison with Rhys.

Curbain was panting and could only sob and shake his head 'no' he was lost in sensation. He felt filled to bursting and having both his mates inside him at the same time nearly made him climax instantly.

"Good, because my gorgeous, this is incredible. God I want to feck you like this always!" Anda moaned increasing his tempo with Rhys.

"Oh aye, so good!" Rhys moaned seeing stars as he gradually increased his thrusts.

"Oh maker, have mercy!" Curbain wailed as both his mates increased to the tempo they usually set and were both forcibly driving him into the mattress. He was sobbing and gasping and feeling wonderfully torn in two as he was mated without mercy from Rhys or Anda. They both knew intimately how much Curbain enjoyed being taken hard and both men were equally just as inclined to play roughly with him in return.

Curbain was gripping sheets with white knuckles and biting his lips to keep from screaming out as he came in shuddering spasms, his muscles constricting and causing two men to shout as their sexes were trapped in tight confines and gripped from within Curbain's body forcing them both to come before either of them were ready. Their bonds were so tightly wound together that when one fell over the edge they all did.

Rhys emptied himself with an agonizing cry into Curbain's womb and Anda was cursing the air blue as Curbain felt the warm wetness that was Anda's semen fill his bowels in ragged thrusts and jets of release.

Both his mates crushed him with affection as they pulled out of him and began kissing and petting him with joyful elation.

"Bain! That was incredible!" Anda cried as he planted kisses along Bain's throat.

"Did you enjoy that dearest?" Rhys asked lovingly, tasting Curbain's lips.

"Oh aye. Whenever you two wish to love me like that, you have my permission. That was wonderful." Curbain sighed, knowing he was going to be sore later and not caring in the slightest as he came down from a glorious sexual high. Anda was right, it had been incredible to feel them both moving in unison inside him, it was a seamless triad bonding in a very physical sense as well as spiritual one.

Rhys' hand was slowly rubbing Curbain's stomach, his hand glowing and urging fertility with subtle manipulation. Curbain was ready, Rhys was just making absolutely sure they had the best possibility of conception by adding his healing magic to the mix. Curbain smiled, Rhys wanted this desperately, he could feel it in their bond.

He'd seen Rhys do this countless times for women who came to him with their mates immediately after they had coupled and were having difficulty conceiving. To be on the receiving end of Rhys' magic was wonderful and Curbain felt content and loved as he shut his eyes and said a silent prayer.

A few long minutes later, Curbain gasped and his eyes shot open. "Did you feel that?"

Rhys was crying. "Aye love. New light. Our Daughter." Rhys was weeping and kissing Curbain's stomach, his hair, his lips, everywhere he could reach as he wept for joy. For mages, sensing conception was easy, they always knew, but for Curbain it was intense.

To feel it inside him was unlike anything he could imagine. He felt her light immediately like fireworks and then it settled into a distinct little glow. He took Anda's hand and laid it to his stomach. "Feel. Close your eyes dearest and I'll show you." Curbain said, knowing Anda would need help to see what he and Rhys could.

"Maker Miracle! I feel her!" Anda sobbed and Curbain laughed through his own tears.

"Aye. Our little girl." Curbain sighed melting into the mattress a huge smile plastered on his face and his eyes were glowing with happiness, "Reyna, I want to name her Reyna." Curbain said, giving her the name of their lost fourth and Anda's primary sister bond that had ended before it could begin. It seemed appropriate and for years, Curbain knew if they had a daughter he'd always wanted in his heart to name her after their beloved lost one.

Rhys smiled and nodded and Anda wept openly, nodding with joy.

Both men wrapped protectively around Curbain and they settled into the mattress and shared warmth and affection under blankets as the wind of a bleak mid-winter whistled in their chimney.

Even the dead cold of mid-winter couldn't touch the warmth of love that filled their cottage as they slept peacefully in the glow of knowing that in nine months, their first child would be born to them.

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Four years of having to live conditioned to rising with the sun, saw Curbain awake and trying to crawl out between Anda and Rhys. Even in such a large bed, they both, as usual, had him firmly sandwiched between them. Rhys was always spooned up behind him, one arm always wrapped around his middle and Anda

somehow always managed to move where Curbain would always awaken nose to nose with him and feel at least one leg draped over his own. His mates were more than highly possessive of him physically, even in their sleep.

Curbain smiled, there were worse things in life than having two witty and intelligent men love you to the point of obsession. Curbain never felt suffocated with their affection, quite the opposite, he felt warm and content and spoiled. He loved them just as much and found himself craving their attention even more now that peace had returned to their realm.

Anda would often playfully tease him and call him a randy little vixen in their bedroom. Curbain had to admit he was correct. All it took sometimes was for one of them to look at him a certain way and he couldn't get naked fast enough for them. He was most definitely what they accused him of being, a responsive ewe, and eager to bend over and submit to their whims on a moment's notice.

It was a genetic impulse for him, all it took was a trickle of desire felt in their bond and Curbain melted and could not resist his biological response to his connection to his mates. In a triad without a female, it was basic common sense that at least one of them would have a sexual drive that complimented the others.

Both Rhys and Anda had very healthy male libidos and were quite assertive in what they wanted. Curbain had never had that sort of sexual drive; his urges had always been more passive. He was far happier taking on a traditionally female role in their triad. It was exactly what Rhys said it was, a personal preference that was just magnified once he'd bonded to his mates.

Everything was magnified in a shacah bonding and theirs doubly so since it was a triad and their needs demanded thrice the attention. Curbain had lost count of the times Rhys and Anda had taken turns on him all night long because one partner would fall into the need and then spark off the other two.

Again, Curbain was not complaining and he was grinning to himself as he finally managed to get out of bed without waking them and headed into the kitchen to start tea and see if there was anything in the larder to fix for breakfast, he was ravenously hungry this morning. He always was hungry the morning after they had coupled the night before. He knew Anda and Rhys would wake even more so and he wanted them to have something to eat so they didn't start gnawing on each other in hunger.

Curbain was dressed in only a thick woolen robe and socks since he didn't have slippers and his hair was a tangled mess down his back and he didn't care in the slightest as he set about getting the kettle on to boil as the sun began to lighten the sky outside frost encrusted windows. He stoked the large kitchen hearth back to life and opened the larder. Thankfully someone had seen to provisions for them sometime the night before. Curbain mused, whomever dropped off goods

probably heard quite a bit a noise coming from the back bedroom if they'd arrived while the triad had been occupied conceiving their child.

Curbain hugged his stomach, a smile breaking wide across his face. "Reyna dearest, I hope you can feel how much your Papa-Rhys and Papa-Anda want you. I pretty sure you already know how much I love you my dearest." Curbain said pulling eggs and cheese out of the larger and lifting down a beautiful smoked ham that hung from the larder ceiling.

His mouth was already watering as he first scooped flour out of the barrel beside the larder and dug out mixing bowls and started mixing the ingredients for biscuits. He hadn't cooked a decent meal in four years and he was glad to be back in a proper kitchen with fresh ingredients again.

The hearth had built in oven compartments and soon Curbain had them filled with baking biscuits and a treat he'd not been able to give Rhys since they'd left. The smell of sugar and ginger alone brought Rhys out from the bedroom following his nose and he was hovering over the oven like a child the moment he realized what Curbain was baking for him.

Rhys' arms wrapped around a delightfully disheveled Curbain. "Dearest, you spoil me. How do you feel this morning?" Rhys asked his hands cupping Curbain's middle.

Curbain smiled. "A little sore, but what else is new? I'm always a little sore the morning after. I feel wonderful though, I'm so happy. I love her very much already." Curbain said and Rhys drank in a tender kiss.

"Aye." Was all Rhys could choke out before real tears began to flow down his cheeks, his emotions of utter joy laid bare to the world and Curbain folded Rhys into an embrace and let Rhys hold him as he shook with happiness. Rhys never swallowed his emotions like Curbain did. He shouted when he was angry, he cried when he was sad, he laughed when he was happy and now he was crying with joy.

"I love you Bain. Ah maker so much I cannot breathe! You're giving me the world dearest, I cannot put into words how happy I am you carry our child."

"You never need words beloved. I always feel you." Curbain said kissing Rhys' cheek and wriggling. "Now let me go dearest or your cookies will burn!" Curbain laughed and Rhys let go arms wide.

Curbain saved Rhys' cookies and had barely had them out of the oven as Rhys burnt his fingers as he raided the hot confection.

“You never change. Thank the Maker.” Curbain chuckled, leaving Rhys to devour his treat like a five-year-old as he wrapped biscuits in a towel and laid them in a basket to keep warm.

“Will you wake Anda please? I’ll have breakfast ready in another few minutes and he always needs those minutes to wake up and get tea down him first.” Curbain asked looking over his shoulder at Rhys who was drinking a large glass of milk after his cookies. He nodded and stood and wandered back to their bedroom and gently woke Anda with a rather large wet kiss on the back of his neck.

Anda hated that. His neck was extremely ticklish, which of course was the precise reason why Rhys preferred waking Anda up that way.

“Fecker! What?” Anda asked jumping out of his skin into wakefulness.

“Such lovely talk first thing in the morning handsome. Curbain says get up or eat cold food.” Rhys said and Anda yawned and crawled out of bed, finding a robe like Rhys’ in his new wardrobe.

“I’m fairly positive Bain said ‘go wake him up please’ or something equally benign. You rotten man.” Anda said raking fingers through his hair and following a chuckling Rhys back into the kitchen and heading straight for the tea pot sitting on the table and draining a cup in almost one gulp. Before he got up and pretty much repeated the morning greeting of Curbain who was scrambling eggs, diced ham, onions and cheese in a skillet.

“How’s our wee one this morning?” Anda asked and Curbain smiled as he cooked.

“For now, just a light, it will be a long time before she’s anything more. She’s a formless being at the moment. Soon enough she’ll become conscious of her own life. Usually around the time they begin kicking and making mother miserable. I do not look forward to those last few weeks. If I’m anything like my mother it will be painful. There is a reason Rhys was the last child she bore.” Curbain said still smiling.

“Why does it not surprise me Rhys was a beast even in the womb?” Anda smirked and Rhys pouted at the table.

“Hey! I was big, blame my father for that, however, Bain unlike our mother has a healer at his disposal and powers of his own to help assuage the worst discomforts.”

“But I also have a lot less room to host a child too. The only part I worry about is having enough room inside to carry her to term. My womb is smaller because I have male anatomy inside too and there is only so much room in my body to

accommodate everything.” Curbain said setting the food on the table and they all began to eat.

“True, but she changed you a little more than she did Anda. Have you noticed Curbain has hips now?” Rhys asked and Anda nodded.

“I noticed a long time ago his hips got a little wider and rounder. Not much, but enough. I’m bigger though than Bain, she probably didn’t have to with me, I had more room to start with. He had to have extra room added so she changed his hips is my guess.”

“I have hips?”

“Aye.” Rhys grinned and Curbain got up and walked into the bathroom.

“FECK ME! I DO!” They heard him cry, probably looking at himself in the mirror. It had been a long time since any of them had seen their own reflections.

Curbain came back out scowling. “No wonder none of my pants fit right and got tight around my hips. I thought I was just gaining weight at last.”

Anda laughed. “Nope. You’re still our skinny one, you just got given some very nice curves my lovely.”

“Not skinny much longer.” Curbain grinned and Rhys chuckled.

“Aye and I’m putting my husbandly foot down Bain. Because we don’t know how you’re going to handle pregnancy, I want you here at home with me, I don’t want you running a lot of errands or working hard at all. You earned your rest and Maker forbid there’s a problem I want to be within spitting distance. Okay?”

“Aye. That’s sensible and I concur. We don’t know what to expect and it’s safe to assume both Anda and I are high risk. I won’t wander far, I don’t want to either. I love this house and I never did get to read my books. I’m strictly an on-call mage at this point. Besides, what with you working again as healer and Anda itching to get back to work too, someone has to cook and clean and make beds around here. This house won’t keep itself, even if I put charms on it, dirt is still dirt and one of us has to be here to mind it and the children when they come.” Curbain said and both Anda and Rhys nodded.

“Aye. We don’t need three incomes and we do need one of us to, dare I say the ultimate taboo, take up the traditionally woman’s work. Even if I’ve come to truly despise the division of roles at this point being part woman now.” Anda began.

“It’s fact. Before we left I was really already doing it and I learned first hand that a woman’s job at home is no less taxing than a man’s outside the home. Before

you scold me Rhys, I promise not to do it all by hand anymore. I'm just making Anda's point. Just because a woman is not paid to do her work, it's no less important. It has to be done and I'm the most appropriate in this triad for it. My calling isn't needed often and when it is it can usually be done in a single candlemark with a simple incantation. I'm more useful to this triad at home, taking care of us a family and only leaving when my unique services are needed in the community. I happily volunteer to be the house-spouse." Curbain grinned and Rhys laughed.

"Then it's settled. Until of course Anda decides to have a go and then..."

"And then I'm taking off work for the pregnancy and going back to work after I recover. We'll need the extra income for that extra mouth to feed." Anda chuckled and winked and Curbain laughed.

"Aye, and I'm on diaper duty again. Thankfully I'll have practice with Reyna when she comes." Curbain smiled and Rhys nodded.

"I'll be here too don't forget. I thankfully work from home most of the time, you won't be alone with stinky nappies." Rhys winked and Curbain pointed his fork at him.

"I'll make you live up to that statement Rhys. No running off for the nasty part like most fathers I know."

"Trust me, I hate when men take no part of their children. I won't be an absent parent. I can't wait to get my hands on our girl." Rhys said and Anda cheered.

"Here! Here! I want enough cash at hand to spoil my girl rotten. Nothing but the best for my little girl damn it! I grew up quite pampered and loved my childhood and I'll be stone cold in my grave before I let my children go without their whims of fancy. Maker I hope she looks like Bain, can you just imagine little ribbons and bows and silk dresses? I dressed the first Reyna in frills and her namesake will be equally gloriously spoiled."

"You're so bloody materialistic! You vain peacock!" Rhys chuckled and Anda grinned.

"I appreciate the finer things in life, our daughter will live like a princess and have her Papa-Anda wrapped around a dainty pretty little finger."

"Sounds like she already has you wrapped Papa-Anda." Curbain smiled and Anda nodded.

"Oh, Aye." Anda agreed as a knock came to the door and Rhys got up to answer it.

“Good Morning!” Mika and Tobin were at the door and Rhys and Curbain shouted with joy racing over to embrace her.

“Shacah! You’re shacah!” Curbain cried spinning her around the room.

“How did you know?” She asked and Curbain grinned as Rhys was busy slapping Tobin’s back.

“You’re pregnant Mika! Tobin couldn’t have done that without bonding to you.” Curbain said pointing out simple logic.

“He was right then? I am?” Mike asked and Curbain smiled,

“Oh aye. A boy. My daughter will have a play mate!” Curbain grinned and Mika’s eyes went wide.

“Really? You too?”

“Aye. I promised Rhys and Anda I would when we got home, and well they made me live up to my promise last night. We’re having a girl.”

“Dare I ask which one is actually biologically responsible for fathering?” Mika asked and Curbain smiled bringing her over to the table to share breakfast.

“Rhys this time. We may be a triad, but only one can father even if we do try to include all of us in conception. Rhys is the father of this one. I’ve no doubt I’ll bear one for Anda too eventually. But regardless, we’re all fathers equally.”

“True, never knew a triad or a quad that didn’t claim all the children equally even if you could tell which parent was responsible for which child. How wonderful!”

“Oh Aye. With Anda it will be obvious. Drow blood is strong, whether he bears or sires the child will favor his coloring without doubt. I’ve never known a Drow mix breed child to look a mix breed. They always look entirely Drow.”

“Because were damn good looking of course. We wouldn’t make ugly babies.” Anda grinned from his chair and Curbain smiled.

“Aye you certainly are most pleasing to the eyes my dark one.” Curbain purred and Anda waggled his eyebrows.

“Don’t tease me lovely, or pregnant or not you’re in trouble.” Anda winked and Mika laughed.

“Bain, I pity you. Two bulls you have in here to handle. My house is ever open when you want to hide.” Mika said and Curbain laughed.

“As is mine to you, I know Tobin better than you. Feed him not beans and you will be much happier.”

“Hey! You don’t fart roses either Bain!” Tobin said sitting down at the table with Rhys.

“No but Bain is right, you are a foul man with beans. It was gag inducing!” Anda teased and Tobin gave him a rather rude hand gesture.

“Anda, I know your secrets too and that broccoli give you the shits.”

“Oh Maker, I know. It’s why I don’t eat it. You still eat beans and make the rest of us suffer!”

Mika was gasping for air at this point she was laughing so hard. “Stop, oh my side! You’re killing me!” She gasped catching her breath and wiping her eyes. She always did have a bawdy and rude sense of humor.

She was a good match for Tobin who could get a little too serious and needed a good dose of humor in his life to keep him stable. Mika would never be short on supply.

Tobin was smiling and took her hand in his. “Twice I am blessed with a mate who is not afraid to laugh at life and makes sure you laugh with her. Give me not prim and proper ladies you must handle with fear and false modesty. Bless me with charm and humor and strength. If I had not loved you already, you would have won me on your growing merits dearest.”

“Just you remember that Tobin. You get me as is, rude, crude and socially unacceptable. Life’s too short not to tip your glass and sing a good old fashioned bawdy tavern song.”

“Amen! What’s a party without a round of Buxom Berta the Beddable Beauty?” Rhys asked and Anda howled.

“Or Willy Wickerbill Wanker of Wendusfae!” Anda added grinning.

Curbain got up and retrieved his harp and sat back at the table and shocked even Rhys as he began to sing with a truly feral smile. Curbain was the last person Rhys expected to know or sing a tavern song. Let alone the one he was singing!

*Oh Come; oh come Sir Cecil the Strong.  
Whose wanker they say is half a league long  
Knight of the Realm and a King in the Hay  
All pretty lads he'll happily Lay  
Maids go to weeping for lacking his needing  
Lads go to sleeping whilst holding his seeding*

*Oh Come, Oh Come Sir Cecil the Strong  
Defeated a troll with his untamable Dong  
Until the day when young Kirdock the fair  
Caught Cecil's eye at the stone marble stair  
Maids go to weeping for lacking his needing  
Only Kirdock now sleeping whilst holding his seeding*

*Oh Come, Oh Come Sir Cecil the Strong  
Fair Kirdock now knows the joys of his schlong  
Brought to his knees, by shacah bonding needs  
Cecil the Strong no longer sowing his seeds  
Maids go to weeping for lacking his needing  
Only Kirdock now knowing and holding his seeding*

Curbain finished with a flourish and Rhys was jaw agape. "Where the Feck did you learn that song?" Rhys asked and Curbain grinned.

"I lived in the Crown City next door to a tavern bard. That is one of my favorites. Lucky Kirdock no?" Curbain waggled his eyebrows and Anda laughed.

"With a half a league cock up his ass? No!" Anda shivered and Curbain winked.

"It's all in the preference I suppose." Curbain winked right back and once again Mika was choking and strangling on her tea.

Rhys was shaking his head stunned and highly amused and Tobin just sat silent for a moment.

"I have to agree with Anda. Ouch." Tobin finally said and Mika nodded.

"I wonder how he managed to kill a troll with it." She said and Rhys groaned.

"I don't want to know!" Rhys laughed as everyone continued a merry and rude conversation over breakfast as Rhys' first patient of the day arrived not long after.

**“In the Bleak Midwinter”**  
**A Short Fable of The Six from The Chronicles of Xanadu**  
**Author: D. Sanders**  
**III - Peace and Joy**  
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By the end of the week it was as if they'd never left. Curbain was hiding his smile behind his hand as Rhys was bouncing a toddler on his knee while he tended a minor case of what Rhys dubbed the 'seasonal snots' or what most others deemed a cold with a runny nose. While Curbain was mulling spices in a large pot of apple cider bubbling merrily on the fire before bringing over three cups to Rhys, the receptive tot and his amused mother. She was new to the village and had only heard tales of Rhys and Curbain from the older residents and had hardly believed the Great Healer of Light and the Dragonwise Mage were such a young and down to earth pair of normal men.

“I hate to be a gossip, but is it true? I mean... I heard that you're expecting?” She asked shyly and Curbain smiled.

“Aye, it's true. I left here quite completely male and came home changed. I'm both sexes now and yes I'm pregnant.” Curbain smiled sitting down at the table with Rhys and sliding over a plate of cookies for Rhys to share with his lap full of three year old restlessness.

“How? If you don't mind me asking Master Dragonwise sir.” She asked and Curbain shivered.

“First, Curbain or Bain is just fine. Second, the same as everyone else. The mother gave me a womb no different than yours.” Curbain said and Rhys grinned.

“Stop grinning like a fool Rhys. She can figure out what you did to my womb, I'm sure she's quite aware where children come from, seeing as you are being covered in crumbs from hers.” Curbain grinned tossing a napkin at Rhys who chuckled.

“Aye, no need for the making details, those I do understand.” Mother smiled just as the door opened and Anda came in stamping snow off his boots.

“Colder than a Troll's Tit-iddles out there!” Anda said censoring his language noticing the child on Rhys' lap.

“Nice save.” Rhys grinned as Anda hung up his coat with a wink.

“Little ears, aye.” Anda said ruffling the tots hair as he collapsed in a chair and Curbain passed him a cup of hot cider.

“Oh, ta love. This is lovely and warm after traipsing around out there staking out a good field site with Senda and Sterbin.” Anda said warming his hands on the cup.

“So did you find a good area?” Curbain asked knowing Anda was itching to get working again, but needing a sizeable area for a vineyard come spring.

“Ah aye. About a quarter mark down the road is a nice fallow field that Sterbin’s uncle owned and he sold us for a song. Senda and I come first thaw will see to getting vines staked and started. I will beg you love come spring to transport me back to my old village to see if I can salvage some seeds from our fields out there to transplant here.” Anda said and Curbain nodded.

“Easy enough that.”

“I don’t want you transporting in your condition Bain. I’ll take them, no chances.” Rhys said looking horrified and Curbain nodded.

“Ah, I forgot. Aye.” Anda said looking just as scared and Curbain rolled his eyes.

“I don’t think that will cause damage but alright or else both of you will have heart attacks.” Curbain said and the young mother grinned.

“You both sound like my husband when I was carrying Ulasa here! The man was afraid to let me go to the privy by myself. Word to the wise, don’t suffocate your mate or suffer his mood swings and severed heads when he snaps. Ask my man about that sometime.” She winked and Rhys laughed.

“Aye, I know enough of pregnancy mood swings. We just want to be cautious this first time, not knowing what to expect in Bain’s circumstances. He’s a little different than a woman after all. He’s both and his body may have a more difficult time bearing, the less chances we take the better we all will be mentally.” Rhys said handing the boy back to his mother. “And sniffles gone for now. Bring him back if they come back, but I believe I cleared it all.” Rhys said and helped his mother get him bundled up against the cold again.

“Thank you Master Rhys. What do you say Ulasa?”

“THANK YOUUUUUUUUUUUU!” Ulasa yelled and Rhys squatted down and smiled and pressed his nose.

“You’re welcome lad. Be a good boy and I bet if you come back Uncle Curbain will have another cookie for you.” Rhys grinned and Curbain smiled at the table.

“Of course, because I always have cookies for you glutton.” Curbain winked and the young mother laughed as she took her child home as an elderly woman was coming through the gate leaning heavily on a cane. Rhys was immediately outside to help her in and he set her up in a comfortable chair by the fire while he tended her aching arthritic joints and another lovely conversation ensued while Anda described the field and his plans to get his grapes planted and harvested with Senda’s help.

Sterbin and Anda had brought Senda into their partnership and would split the profits equally three ways. Sterbin would provide the start up capital to fund the business and get what they needed, taking repayment for his initial financial backing out of the earnings in small increments over the next five years. Senda would be in charge of the fields themselves and they’d only need to hire workers during harvest time with his tending throughout the year.

Anda would be in charge of the actual brewing of the Brandywine itself. The secret was in his head and he wasn’t about to write down the recipe, it was a long guarded family secret that he intended to keep and pass down to his children as it had been passed to him. Sterbin would be in charge of shipping and orders and the bookkeeping aspects of the venture. Overall Anda was very pleased with his plans and Curbain could see the golden gleam in his eyes.

Anda was a man who loved money and all it could buy and he liked earning it and he knew perfectly well that his Brandy fetched damn near a half golden mark per half-pint. Anda’s family had been recognized by the crown for their spirits for literally generations and the past four Monarch’s vocally professed it their favored brandy above all others. Most folk did, Anda’s family brandy was famous the realm over and he was already spending his profits in his head. Curbain just smiled. He knew damn well Anda was going to cash in a little on his own reputation as well. Famous Brandy remade by the famous Dark Seer of the Six?

Curbain was far from an idiot and he knew his spouse well. Any opportunity Anda had to make money, he seized.

Curbain busied himself making lunch while Anda sketched a tentative layout of the fields on a spare piece of parchment and drawing what looked like a massive distillery. Anda couldn’t actually write, but he drew fabulously and his diagrams and drawings were meticulous in detail, most people couldn’t read or write so the people Anda was going to give this drawing to in order to build his still would have no trouble understanding what Anda needed.

Rhys was chattering away with his patient, massaging her hands and fingers with glowing hands and smiling warmly. He always had a gift with people; he was either a father figure to children, best friend to his peers, favored son or grandson to his elders. People warmed to him immediately and talked openly as he healed

them in body and spirit. The old woman was cackling and pinching his cheeks as he grinned and continued onto her feet. Curbain brought her over some cider and set it on the table at her elbow and she snagged his arm and gave him a toothless grin.

“Your man’s been telling me you’ve got a girl baby a-comin’. I daresay I pity the lad who comes a wooin’ her with three papa’s no less a watchin’ over her!” The old lady laughed and Curbain chuckled.

“Oh Aye. I think Anda is already planning to build a moat around the cottage and ask Greeorg and Rashala to take up living in a spare bedroom.”

“Damn straight!” Anda laughed from the table as he drew his diagrams.

Rhys just shook his head as his patient laughed. “I pray I live long enough to watch.” She winked and Curbain smiled.

“I hope I live through it myself. She’s not even here yet.” Curbain said returning to his preparations for lunch as the door opened and Eontobar poked his head in the door.

“Can I intrude?” he asked and Curbain smiled.

“Always.” Curbain waved him in and in he came carrying a package.

“Can I hide this here? It’s a twelfth night gift for Senda and I have no where to hide this from him the sneak.” Eontobar said and Curbain took him back to a spare room where they hid it under a bed.

“You know you’re both welcome to stay with us rather than the tavern. We had no idea we had so much new room.” Curbain said and Eontobar shook his head.

“I like the Tavern, it’s much fun. Besides with Tobin not wanting Mika working anymore I took over her duties and it’s much more convenient for me. Who knew I’d enjoy being a tavern boy? She’s teaching me her cooking secrets and getting me trained to take over for her and I love it. Sterbin is showing me how to brew beer too; I think I at last can learn a good trade I will like very much. So right now living off the pub is best.” Eontobar said as they came back out into the living room and Curbain made him stay for lunch as Rhys’ patient left, leaving him quite a healthy purse of coins.

“Senda was saying how nice the room is Sterbin set up for you.” Anda said setting aside his drawings in favor of a winter green salad, Curbain’s apple and butternut squash soup and some lightly grilled chicken sprinkled into the salad with a cranberry and walnut vinegar and oil dressing. Curbain was a fabulous cook himself Eontobar noted as he devoured his lunch.

“Aye, it’s lovely and warm, the bed is heavenly! It’s like yours a real feather mattress; I’ve never slept in a feather mattress I’m in bliss. Especially since the floor is earth and Senda can sleep with me and still root if he needs too. That’s the best part, I hate sleeping without Senda and it’s lovely to have him near. I do not miss our journey in the slightest.”

“Amen Toba! SO when are you and Senda going to try for a family?” Rhys asked filling his plate with seconds.

“Late Summer. Remember, Senda’s a dryad and giving birth to a dryad in winter is difficult. The babies are really susceptible to the cold. Goodness the adults are! You saw how hard it was for him a few days, I’m glad I can keep him warm when he needs it. Cold just saps his strength and babies are known to die from cold. So we want to time conception so I am pregnant during the coldest months and if I give birth early spring he or she will have a long warm season to grow some before the cold.”

“That’s wise. But you could have a babe that takes after you too.” Anda said and Eontobar smiled.

“True, but we don’t want the risk just in case Senda’s blood runs stronger than mine.” Toba said just as Senda arrived.

“I thought I’d find you here Puss.” Senda said joining his brothers at the table.

“Curbain feeds me, of course I stay.” Toba said as Curbain passed Senda salad sans the chicken and a bowl of soup.

Senda rolled his eyes in bliss as he tasted. “I must have your dressing secret. Finally a meat eater that knows how to make use of nature to it’s finest.” Senda sighed and Curbain beamed.

“It’s just crushed cranberry and walnuts in a little white wine vinegar and olive oil.” Curbain said, glowing with simple praise.

“It’s wonderful and sweet against the bitter greens and this soup is amazing. Apples and Butternut squash?”

“Aye.”

“You have dryad blood in you somewhere.” Senda winked and Curbain laughed.

“Hardly, but thank you.” Curbain laughed as they finished lunch and another knock came to the door. Anda got up to answer it, there was a very familiar

looking couple standing at the door, their faces so familiar Anda was sure he'd seen them somewhere before.

A plate crashed to the floor behind them and Anda felt Curbain's emotions shoot through him like a dart before he squashed them and his face became a cool mask, just as Rhys whipped around, triggered by Curbain and whereas Curbain held an emotionless countenance, Rhys' face was furious and his eyes narrowed.

Anda was confused, then it dawned on him, the faces he seemed to recognized were because blended together they were the faces of his mates and it was up to Anda to say anything. Senda and Toba just seemed confused at the sudden coldness in the room.

"Okay, it looks like I'm mediator here. Rhys sit down, Curbain sit too and you two come in and no shouting from any of you." Anda said pointing to the living area.

Rhys opted to stand and was leaning against the wall next to Curbain who sat in a chair his hands folded in his lap and his eyes not making eye contact with anyone or anything. Anda sighed as his mates Parents sat rigid in the living room.

"What are you doing here?" Rhys finally asked and his father spoke.

"We moved here a few years ago, after those things came. We heard you had been living here before and we hardly believed what we heard of you both." Rubain began and Rhys cocked an eyebrow.

"What was so hard? That we were sent off by the Mother to fight? Or that we were shacah?" Rhys asked icily and Anda frowned, Rhys was more than livid and this was a very old wound that was being opened.

"Rhys. Don't dearest, please." Curbain said softly, still avoiding looking at his parents. Rhys laid a hand to Curbain's hair in apology.

"So it's true? You were shacah even then?" Candhys asked and Curbain nodded.

"Aye. It's not unheard of you realize." Rhys said with an edge of irritation in his voice.

"Explains his unnatural obsession with you since you were born." Rubain snorted and Curbain visibly flinched.

"Enough, you can get out of my house if you are still so bent on torturing him! I will not allow it in my own home!" Rhys roared and Anda stood.

“Shut up both of you! You’re BOTH hurting Bain! Rhys cool off and shut up and you sir, can hold your tongue of your prejudices!” Anda said and remained standing in-between both pairs.

Senda and Eontobar quietly sat as still as mice, there for support just in case but not wanting to intrude on the conversation or be noticed.

“Now, let’s set some rules here. No shouting, no accusations, no snide remarks are allowed. Yes, Rhys and Curbain were shacah already when the Mother came and made them two of her Six. They were well bonded by the time they found me near death in agony of soul loss from losing my Undatta, my own sister too and ripped to shreds by the Tanaocktu. When they power meshed to save my life, we became a triad. Yes, all the rumors you heard of the Six are true. Right down to Curbain’s glorious powers and wisdom that saved hundreds of thousands of lives and earned him the title Dragonwise. Rhys’ healing saved thousands more, and combined the Six are just what you heard. That’s Eontobar, Master of Fire and Senda, Master of Earth sitting there trying to be inconspicuous and I am the one they called the Dark Seer simply because I could see those beasts in whatever form they wore. So now, the facts confirmed. What other questions do you have?” Anda asked folding his arms across his chest and waiting.

“Was the journey as difficult as I heard? I heard you almost died Rhys.” Candhys asked and Rhys nodded.

“More than once. I really have no desire to relive the past four years. Take whatever fear you felt and multiply it by about a million and then face it every damn day whether you want to or not. Aye, most difficult and I am glad it is behind me and we are all safe and home again.” Rhys answered bluntly.

“Is it true what I heard about, I mean I heard this morning that there is a babe?” Candhys’ voice shook.

“Aye. I have been changed Mama. I am pregnant.” Curbain said quietly, his eyes still not rising above his own lap.

“It figures. I always thought you were too womanish.” Rubain said and Rhys had to be physically restrained by Anda.

“This is your last warning sir. If you cannot be civil you will leave. I have the same changes on me sir and I am in no way less a man than I was when I began this journey.” Anda said and Rubain’s eyes went wide.

“I see you’re shocked. Aye I don’t look half woman now do I? No. So keep your prejudices to yourself and hold a viperous tongue. I’ll not have you upset my spouses further.” Anda said standing elbow to elbow with Rhys, practically blocking Curbain from view completely.

“Who’s the father?” Candhys asked and Rhys sighed.

“Oh for feck’s sake! This is a pointless conversation; I can see you’re only worried about yourselves here. I am the father however, we are a triad, it matters not whose seed does the deed! If you cannot lose your misplaced hatred and misconceptions I will stand by what I said when I left with Bain all those years ago. I will call no man father and no woman mother who can treat their children as you treated Bain! You’ve never addressed him directly ONCE woman since you arrived and you sir can only still insult him. I’m done talking. Never fear your so valued reputation is safe, I have no parents.” Rhys said going over to the door and slamming it open. “Get out.”

“Stop this please!” Curbain sobbed from his chair. “I am very sorry I cannot live up to your expectations of me. I am who I am and I cannot change. I am mage whether you approve or not. I am Dragonwise because I have a duty to others I cannot forsake to please you. I am shacah to Rhys and Anda because the mother blesses me with our bonding and I am changed so I may have children of my own whom I will never treat as you have treated me all these years. I am sorry that I cannot be more to please you.” Curbain said as tears streamed down his cheeks.

“Love me not, even if I will ever love you for giving me life.” Curbain added before rushing out of the room back into their bedroom.

“Are you happy now? One more time to see him reduced to tears?” Rhys shouted and Candhys broke into her own tears and Rubain growled.

“Don’t yell at your mother!”

“Feck you! How many times did you shout at him? Curse him? Belittle and malign him? All the while bragging about me to any and all that would listen? Let me tell you something you bastard! Curbain has bigger balls than ten men! I didn’t see you out there risking your hide day after day until you dropped with exhaustion just to make safe places for people to hide in to survive! You lived here under Bain’s protections for four years and I bet you never even thought once that you were SAFE because of him did you? I bet you never thought about him once while he was out there fighting all the while fearing become a victim himself! The Mother changed him over three years ago, all this time he had to fight knowing that all it would take was one of those bastards to catch him and kill him with breeding. Nevertheless, he didn’t give up and he fought on. We all did. So if you can’t see he has the strength of will of ten men then I really truly pity your small minds and hearts!” Rhys was shaking with fury.

Rubain stood and dragged Candhys up with him. “Come on woman, this was a mistake. I won’t be talked to like this from my own son.”

“Stop it Rubain! He’s RIGHT! We never did think about Bain being responsible for our safety. All I ever heard was you and I was a fool to let you convince me Bain was a beast! No beast would have done what he did! He’s our son too! Why do you hate him so much?” Candhys asked and Rubain snorted.

“Too much power is unnatural!”

“Since when? How can you be so blind you fool! He was given those powers in order to save you! The Mother herself blessed him how can he be unnatural?”

“I used to catch him sleeping next to you as children! What fifteen year old has to sleep next to his five year old brother every night?”

“Ones that have a soul bond you fool! The mother herself told us we were soul bound since my BIRTH! Even so, he never so much as breathed sexually at me! It was just being close for comfort since you gave him NONE! It was I who had to get him to admit he was in Undatta after fifteen years of brutal denial! We were only bonded in our youth, when we met again after so many years we BOTH fell into Undatta. However, because he couldn’t face it and had so many other emotional upsets because of you I had to squash mine too in order to heal him inside until his physical health was failing and I had to FORCE HIM to accept me as shacah because you made him feel foul for NEEDING and loving me! You know damn well a shacah bond is involuntary it just is fact and nothing is more NATURAL to feel for Enf’ Tuvalu! If there is anyone to blame here sir, it lies firmly on your shoulders.” Rhys said still letting the cold air in waiting for them to leave and by this time, with the door open a crowd had begun to gather outside hearing the arguments and all standing in the cold wide-eyed.

They never knew Rubain and Candhys were Rhys and Curbain’s parents and obviously ones that did not deserve to call them sons by what they were all hearing.

“I suggest you both leave now. This is going nowhere and I have to agree with my Shacah. You have destroyed this relationship beyond repair. Unless you can change I don’t think this will work. Curbain is making himself ill with weeping over you, he comes first to us and I’ll not have you upset him anymore. His heart is too large and loves too deeply. Even people who hurt him repeatedly. I personally feel you deserve not his love, but loves you still he does. Now, Please leave.” Anda said joining Rhys in anger now, he could feel in his bond how upset Curbain was and if HE could feel it he was surprised Rhys was still standing, the pain was crippling in Curbain’s heart.

“We’ll escort you back to your home, it looks as if there are many here who love Curbain as we do and it would hurt him to know you had to face an angry mob on his behalf.” Senda said appearing looking just as irate, Eontobar by his side.

“Aye. Hurt my brother you will not and nor will I let harm come to those my brother loves unconditionally.” Toba said as they grabbed elbows and escorted Rubain and Candhys through an almost hissing mob of people.

Both Anda and Rhys rushed back into their room and just held Curbain while he cried himself to sleep, emotionally a wreck. He had not been prepared to face their parents; even the great Dragonwise mage was just a simple young man who hurt just as easily as the next.

Rhys and Anda barely left his side all evening and Anda cheered Curbain enough with fresh baked apple pie, knowing it was Curbain’s favorite and it was something Anda knew how to make well. One of the only things he could bake well, he usually bowed to Curbain’s superior skills in the kitchen, but this was one thing Anda was pleased he could provide for the man he loved more than life itself.

Curbain went to bed early and both Rhys and Anda cocooned him in affection until he was sleeping peacefully again.

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Curbain learned the very next day just how many more people loved him. It was the first day of twelfth-night and all day people had been stopping by the cottage with gifts and baked treasures, new clothes, knitted scarves, gloves and hats, beaded jewelry trinkets and baubles, hand crated presents abounded and all of them delivered with hugs and smiles and kisses and overwhelming warmth of caring.

The elderly lady from the day before bringing over the best fruit cake Curbain had ever tasted. They sat sharing it with her over tea at the table when she turned to Curbain.

“My pretty, I’m too old not to be blunt and while your mates are chewing I be talking plain. I had to face what you do once. Shacah bonded to my sister I was. Our parents furious that two women should bed each other let alone be bonded and full blooded sisters. Eventually they come around pet and if they don’t they don’t. Lost her I did, goodness hundred years ago now, my Alys. Some folks can’t see beyond their short noses. Trust me, folks here adore you and have for the most part very long noses in Wyvern Point. It’s why me and Alys moved here, Wyvern Point loves first asks questions later. Fear not my pretty lad, we stand up for our own. Your folks will either learn to grow in love with Wyvern Point’s influence or they’ll run from love. It’s their choice and let not their choices affect you dearest. Look at your bright mates who love you much, look at your friends who would fight tooth and nail for you. No man is worthless, no woman worthless

who can say they are truly loved.” She said patting his hand and Curbain smiled and leaned over and kissed her cheek.

“Thank you Grandmama.” Curbain said affectionately and she just pinched his cheeks.

“Anytime pet. Now where are those gingersnaps you made? My tea is lonely.”

Curbain laughed and slid over the plate. “Then be lonely no more.” He said with a wink feeling in much brighter spirits. He adored this woman and prayed she had many more years to pinch his cheeks with and many more years he could feed her gingersnaps while eating her cake in return.

Anda and Rhys just smiled at each other, thanking the old crone internally for doing more for Curbain’s spirits than them all combined.

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The next twelve days were a blur of festivities. From a small gathering of the Six, plus Mika in the cottage over a large feast, to a party in the pub for all the town folks to feast again in a massive pot luck of food, drink and music. Curbain’s voice was hoarse from singing and thankfully he never saw his parents sitting in the back corner listening to him play and sing. He was surrounded by townsfolk who purposefully blocked his view so he wouldn’t be upset again because they loved him dearly too and were not about to see his mood ruined by a foolish pair.

Presents and merriment abounded and Curbain was snuggled into a brand new down filled coat as they walked home from the pub. A joint present from Anda and Rhys who immediately went out to buy it when Curbain made mention he missed his old coat.

Winter soon turned to spring and Anda and Senda got up with the dawn and went home at sundown getting their fields planted and tended. Transporting had not been necessary. Senda had taken the image of Anda’s fields and ‘called’ the plants to a new bed. Rich and old vines now covered thirty acres of land. Overnight by removing themselves from their old beds in Anda’s village and making a new home in Wyvern Point.

Senda coaxed and tended them into fruit and healed them of transplant shock while Anda set to work on his distillery with Sterbin, his plants under a beloved new master of earth.

Summer’s end saw two new additions to Wyvern Point too.

Curbain looked exhausted but elated as he held a tiny crying infant. The delivery had been difficult, his extra internal anatomy making it difficult to push her out

and Rhys had Anda help by pushing down on Curbain's stomach and literally reached inside to help pull her out.

The pain worth it all to Curbain who wept loving tears over a little girl that looked like him save for having Rhys' nose. Rhys after cleaning Curbain up brought over a warmed bottle of milk. "Is my little one hungry?" He asked kissing the soles of her tiny feet.

Curbain smiled and tried to get her to accept her bottle, which she fought, she didn't like it and it was Rhys who managed to coax her to accepting the bottle. "Come on dearest, I know you want something else precious, but your Papa doesn't have breasts sweetheart. You'll just have to like this beloved." Rhys said as he pushed the bottle past her lips and then gave up the bottle to Curbain who held her and took over feeding her.

"I half wish I had them now too. I can honestly say I feel more a mother than a father right at the moment." Curbain sighed and yawned as he fed their daughter.

"I don't doubt it Dearest. You just did give birth to her and you did well." Rhys said kissing Curbain's temple as he and Anda stretched out on either side of him, fawning over their daughter and exhausted spouse.

The baby got passed between her fathers and Anda grinned as he held the tiny bundle.

"Precious, Papa-Anda is going to spoil you rotten, yes I am beautiful, I vow. There's absolutely nothing I wouldn't give you my lovely." He cooed rubbing his nose against hers and she burped and cooed right back.

"She's her father's daughter. She belches as good as you do!" Anda laughed turning to Rhys who grinned.

"Naturally." He winked and Curbain chuckled his eyes dropping with fatigue. "Go to sleep dearest. We'll take care of Reyna while you rest. Don't fret a minute and just rest, you need it dearest." Rhys said standing with Anda who had yet to let her go.

"Aye, I'm gonna test our new rocking chair while you sleep. I love you dearest." Anda said leaning over to kiss Curbain.

"I love you too. I love you all." Curbain said losing the battle of wakefulness and passing out asleep as Rhys and Anda took their daughter out to the living room, where Toba and Senda were waiting with Mika, Tobin with their five day old son Hoba, asleep on a large fluffy blanket on the floor.

Once again the baby got passed around to her Uncles and Aunt before she was returned to Anda who sat rocking her lovingly in the chair he'd had made especially for her and Curbain.

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Curbain was fixing lunch, Anda was due home soon for his lunch hour and Rhys was on the floor with Reyna, between patients and he was getting her to squeal by blowing air on her belly and making horrible noises as his lips buzzed against her tender and ticklish skin.

"DA!DA!DA!" The nearly one-year-old said and Rhys froze.

"Did you say Da?" He asked picking her up grinning ear to ear.

Curbain rushed over. "I think so! Say it again sweetheart. Who is that?" Curbain asked pointing at Rhys.

"DA!DA!DA!" Curbain squealed himself her first words. Anda chose just that minute to come in the door.

"She's talking!" Curbain called and had her repeat herself.

"She's got her papa's smarts I see!" Anda crowed pointing at Curbain. "Who is this Reyna love?"

"PAPAPAPAPPAPAPAPAPPA" Reyna grinned, four little teeth coming in showing.

"AH! YES!" Curbain howled smothering her with joyful kisses that got her giggling all over again.

"Now who's this?" Rhys asked pointing to Anda.

"PANDA!"

The triad lost it entirely and howled with laughter. "Close enough baby girl!" Anda said and laughed wiping his eyes free of mirth as they all got up off the floor and got Reyna seated in her high chair at the table. Curbain fed her pulverized squash and applesauce off a tiny teaspoon while Anda and Rhys shoveled in several chicken, turkey and ham sandwiches before Anda kissed them all good-bye while he went back to work and Rhys' afternoon patients began to arrive.

Curbain took Reyna over to the sofa and sat her on his lap as he read her a story from one of his books.

Life was warm and marvelous and their family was all they could have wished for. Mika showed up later with Hoba, pregnant again and coming for a checkup and the babies played on the floor with blocks together.

Life was indeed grand and the little cottage in Wyvern Point was never filled with more happiness, peace and joy.

END