

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Changelings

Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough

About the Book

In *Powers That Be*, *Power Lines* and *Power Play* Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough told the story of a sentient planet, Petaybee. In *Changelings*, the first of a new series, they return to Petaybee.

Ronan and Murel are the twins of Yana Maddock and Sean Shongili. Born on Petaybee, their destiny is intertwined with that of the planet. Like their father, Ronan and Murel can transform into seals. They can also communicate telepathically with the planet's creatures.

After their transformation is witnessed by a visiting scientist the twins face great danger and need a refuge where they can escape capture. Meanwhile Petaybee is changing – and much faster than an ordinary planet's natural evolution. A new landmass suddenly rises from the depths of the sea and Sean heads out to investigate it. But the newly unstable region holds the potential for disaster ...

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Also by Anne McCaffrey

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About the Authors

Changelings

Book One of
THE TWINS OF PETAYBEE

Anne McCaffrey
Elizabeth Ann Scarborough

This book is dedicated to Mary, Ke-ola, and Keoki Poole

Richard Reaser provided valuable feedback and inspiration as well as consultation on scientific matters, while Andy Logan provided dinner.

Mary, Ke-ola (the hula consultant), and Keoki Poole provided valuable information about Hawaiian culture, language, and customs and generously shared their own resources with us.

We'd also like to acknowledge the contributions of Lea Day for her memories of Hawaii and her research of both print and televised sources of information about volcanoes, otters, seals, and sea turtles.

Prologue

PETAYBEE WAS CHANGING. It was always changing. The quakes and eruptions, avalanches and slides, great winds on land and sea, even the ebb and flow of the tide, brought about fundamental changes in the planet's surface, in the way it *was*. The people who lived on Petaybee knew and accepted this. If it had not been for the changes, jump-started and accelerated by a terraforming process begun only a few decades before, no one would have been able to live on Petaybee. The people made songs about the changes, celebrated them.

Their planet, once a cold ball of cosmic rock, was an awakening giant. Each shift, slide, rumble, storm, or explosion was a sign that Petaybee was stretching, growing, continuing to re-form its being into something even grander than it already was. The people and their songs celebrated the changes.

A lot they knew.

If they had bothered to ask their sentient planet just once how *Petaybee* felt instead of always bringing their own hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, into the communion caves where they spoke to the planet and the planet responded, Petaybee would have told them that it sometimes hurt.

All of that grinding of plates, cracking the surface, sloughing away here, washing away there, pushing some bits out and pulling others back, could be painful. Most worlds could take millennia to do what Petaybee did in hours, days, weeks, at the most, years. It was really quite a hectic pace, all this change in such a short time, and

Petaybee was not always sure just what was happening to its great self or why.

The planet did know that its function was to be a home for its creatures, its two-legged, four-legged, winged, shelled, finned, and flippered fauna; its leaved, flowered, vined, barked, or grassy flora. It not only made homes for these life forms, it helped them adapt to its conditions so that their fragile husks did not die. The cycle of life formed by all of these living creatures fed Petaybee's vitality even as the planet nourished them. The two-leggeds who had become part of Petaybee's own great being returned its care by keeping the more destructive members of their species at bay, in space, away from their world.

No one was allowed to drill into it or set explosions on its surface to take away bits of its body it might have a use for later. If life was taken, it was replaced by new life.

Though a small planet whose surface consisted of little more than two ice caps and a sea between them, Petaybee had nevertheless made a lot of progress since its terraforming.

But it wasn't enough. Petaybee had to - *had* to - make other kinds of places where more life forms could live. There was too much sea. Too much ice. If there were warm places, dry places, where life could begin, that life could become part of the cycle too and would add its own special gifts to its world. Though Petaybee was a world that could, as humans understood it, think, this idea was not a thought or even a true idea as such. It was a compulsion that expressed itself as a buildup of pressure in one particular area. Here. Land belonged *here*. The sea felt particularly empty and limitless at that point, but moreover, Petaybee actually felt as if it contained a continent within its core. A continent that belonged in this place where now waves rolled on and on. Some shoreline was needed. Some beach. And eventually, some trees and flowers, perhaps, other plants and animals. Yes. As industriously and deliberately as

a two-legged dweller might move the furniture inside a house, Petaybee began rearranging its own interior to create what belonged on the surface.

This was not easy, even for an entire sentient planet with a sense of purpose. The landmasses were too far to move them to the empty spot without destroying all of the other life. Besides, the ice would melt and upset everything. The only efficient way to get land in the right spot was to bring it up from the inside, up through the bottom of the sea. And so Petaybee hacked and coughed and spewed and spewed and shot its red hot inner essence up into the sea bed, where some of the minerals within the hot sulfurous gas and magma turned into hollow rock towers that became chimneys for other eruptions.

As the hot vents opened like red mouths, Petaybee swallowed great gouts of seawater. It mixed with the minerals in the molten rock, then, superheated and full of nutrients, it shot back into the sea. When it cooled, it was a warm nutrient for new life. New species of plants and animals sprang up all over. They were not bothered by the sulfurous waters, but thrived in them. Petaybee thought this was as it should be, but then, Petaybee had a very large view of things. It took no particular notice of the *other* life forms lurking near its new cauldron, the ones not of its own creation.

Until that point, the planet's creation had blossomed in relative obscurity – the people had neither navy nor civilian fleets, no boats, in fact, but those used for subsistence fishing and hunting. Fly-bys were rare. There was no satellite surveillance. Once, a seal had swum by, pausing to observe the volcano's birth with interest. But he was on his way elsewhere. Only now, with the newest of the life forms in place, was Petaybee's work monitored, though it was done so unobtrusively that the preoccupied planet took no notice.

Gradually, the lava built up the floor of the sea around its chimneys. It was good, but too slow.

Heaving and squeezing, Petaybee pushed magma and gas up through the center of the elevated sea bottom. Once the pressure built up, it would blow a hole big enough to gush rivers of lava out into the sea. It would build up and up and up until it rose above the waves, then begin spreading out until it was a new place, a new home. Though it would be hot and hazardous at first, the seawater and air would cool it until it too was a warm place for life to flourish.

Though volcanoes had created landmasses on Petaybee shortly after terraforming, it had happened very quickly, while the planet was barely awake. This new volcano, this new island, was a conscious effort, Petaybee's greatest work to date. But work it was, a lot of work. As birthing mothers everywhere knew very well, the process of bringing life into the world was called 'labor' for a reason.

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THE SHONGILI TWINS gave almost simultaneous burps of repletion – the boy on his mother’s shoulder and the girl on her father’s – and were carefully laid on their backs on their fur-lined cots. Sean and Yanaba made no move to leave the nursery, unable to leave the sight of their offspring, safely delivered just a few hours earlier. The babies looked up at their parents, their dark pewter eyes as brightly focused as those of any bird. Each already wore a soft crown of deep brown downy hair, but Yana would have been hard pressed to decide whose nose or cheeks they had. Everything was still rounded and squashy, unformed and utterly adorable.

Even their contented gurgles sounded for all the world like the chortle of a small and active brook swirling among stones.

‘Listen to them,’ Yana said fondly. ‘They sound as if they’re laughing.’ Then, ‘I thought it took longer than that for babies to do things like laugh.’

Sean shrugged. ‘Babies who are always and entirely human perhaps. But a selkie’s development is a bit different. Faster in some ways. I don’t recall when exactly I developed what, but I do recall being aware of my surroundings almost at once. But as to the details, well, too bad my parents aren’t still around to advise us.’

But Yana, lost in wonder at the perfection of her children, answered him only with a dreamy glance. ‘It’s almost too much joy for one person to bear,’ she murmured, feeling tears come to her eyes.

Sean took her in his arms. ‘Then let’s share it. I smell food, and you’re still feeding two – one at a time.’ He gave her a

hug and a cuddle and, one arm draped on her shoulders, propelled her gently toward the door of the cube they had hastily attached to one side of the cabin to serve as a nursery. It was spare and spartan except for the furred cots, for it was the custom in Kilcoole to refrain from giving expecting parents items for their unborn children. A superstition really, but since Yana, before conceiving, had thought herself well past childbearing age, it seemed wise to encourage every sort of good luck.

As Sean opened the door, Nanook, his black-and-white track cat, and Coaxtl, his niece Aoifa's snow leopard, slid into the nursery. Nanook took a place under the boy's cot, while Coaxtl, after one long look at her charge, flopped beside the girl's.

'The sentries are on the job,' Sean said, and continued to push his wife to the door.

'I just never thought I'd have children,' Yana said, looking back over her shoulder at her twins even as Sean closed the door behind her. He left it slightly ajar so they could hear the babies if they cried out or if one of the cats needed to go out or get their attention.

No smells had been able to penetrate the cube from the main part of the house, Yana's old one-room cabin. Now, however, delicious odors of pepper and snow onions, roasting fish and unidentifiable savory spices, wafted from the stove. Over it stood the substantial and comforting bulk of Clodagh, the village's shanachie, singer of songs, bearer of culture, rememberer of history, settler of disputes, healer of wounds, and dispenser of medicines. She had also served as Yana's midwife.

'It's about time,' Clodagh said, closing the lid of the pot she had been seasoning. 'I thought you'd never think of yourselves. Now, sit and eat. And Yana, use that longie thing,' as she pointed a ladle at a chaise longue that had recently made its appearance in their home. There was no proscription against giving an expectant mother a gift for

herself. The chaise, which took up a good half of the wall next to the woodstove, had seemed too large and in the way before, but now Yana found it inviting. 'Get your feet up and relax. As much as you can, that is,' she added in an affectionately derisive tone.

Major Yanaba Maddock-Shongili was quite willing to assume the seat and stretch her legs. Her overtaxed muscles carried her that far mostly because of Sean's support. He rearranged her feet a trifle and sat on the end, folding his arms over his chest and giving a sigh.

'Don't you dare look at your desk,' Yana said sternly.

'Even from here I can see the pile of orange flimsies, and they mean urgent.'

'Nothing is so urgent as feeding the pair of you up,' Clodagh said staunchly, 'and there really isn't anything *that* damned pressing that someone else can't handle or defer - preferably until next year.'

'But those hydroelectric engineers were supposed to touch down today . . . and you know how eagerly Sister Igneous Rock is awaiting them.' Sean referred to the planet's geological expert and its self-proclaimed acolyte. The woman and her fellow would-be Petaybean cult followers had surprised Petaybee's longer-term residents by turning out to be quite useful once they discovered they could be of more service to Petaybee practicing their hard-science specialties instead of their misguided attempts at theology.

'Iggierock has 'em and she's dealing with them.' Clodagh gave a deep chuckle. 'She's near as good as I am . . . at some things. But this stew will give you much-needed energy. And we've more urgent matters to consider, such as the babies' naming song and the latchkay. I'm thinking that tomorrow will be none too soon, if Yana can make it back to the lodge and the communion cave to properly introduce your young by name to their people and their world.'

‘She can and she will, if I must carry her,’ Sean said fondly.

‘I can handle it,’ Yana said. Fortunately, those aching muscles of hers were well toned and trained from her years in the Company Corps. ‘It’s the babies we’ll need to be carrying.’

‘Good,’ Clodagh said. ‘All of Kilcoole has been waiting for these young ones, but there’s a time and place for their gawking and well-wishing and filling your house up with doodads for the babbies. The sooner the better, though. Have you thought of what you’ll call them at all?’

She dished up three huge bowls of her concoction, and after serving the new parents, she pulled up one of the new spare chairs to the new huge kitchen table they’d been given by friends who evidently thought they were going to have dozens of children instead of just two. Clodagh passed rolls just out of the oven, and steaming through the white napkin she had covered them with.

Yana chewed quickly but deliberately, thinking hard. ‘Of course we’ve thought about it, but now that they’re here, no name seems special enough. Among my mother’s ancestors, you know, babies weren’t named right away. High infant mortality rate was one reason, but also, her people believed a child didn’t get its soul until the first time it laughed.’

She and Sean looked at each other over their full spoons and smiled. ‘Which they’ve already done, and them only a few hours old,’ Sean said. ‘I can tell they’re going to be quick, but then, it’s well-known that all of the children born to my side of the family are very precocious.’

Yana made a face at him. ‘Oh, in my family too, but our babies are also taught to be modest.’

‘You two are too giddy by half!’ Clodagh mock-scolled, shaking her spoon at them. ‘Naming is a serious business. It should fit the baby’s bloodlines – perhaps we could have names from your mother’s people, Yana. There’d be a bit of

novelty. It should also tell the world what the child is all about.'

'This world knows what the children are about,' Yana said. 'It's responsible for their selkie nature, after all – well, it and their father,' she added with a roll of her dark eyes at her husband. 'And how advisable it is to tell the rest of the universe about *that* is debatable.'

'No debate about it,' Sean said in a tone that brooked no argument. 'The universe at large does not need to know that our children mutate into seals when they submerge themselves in water any more than it needs to know that the kids inherited that trait from me.'

'Well, the names don't need to come right out and say, "I'm a selkie",' Clodagh said. 'But they should, for instance, indicate that these children have an affinity for water.'

'Born for Water,' Yana said with a swallow of soup.

'What?'

She gestured with a piece of roll. 'I'm just thinking perhaps we should call them after the Hero Twins my mother's ancestors revered, Born for Water and Monster Slayer. Except at the moment they both seem to be Born for Water and it isn't yet clear who would be Monster Slayer.'

'My money is on the wee lassie,' Sean said. 'She's got something of the look of you in the glint in her eyes and the set of her chin.'

'She's barely *got* a chin,' Yana said, shaking her head. 'No, I think we'll have to go with the Irish side of my family this time. Here in Kilcoole where you're all Irish and Inuit, they'll blend in better with the other children that way anyway. Besides, among the Diné – my mother's people – girls all have war names like mine, and war is the last thing I want my daughter named for. Water's a bit difficult too. The sacred land of Mother's people had very little rain, or standing water either, and so they were extremely short even on fish, not to mention seals and selkies.'

She stopped with her spoon halfway to her mouth. 'I just had a thought. *Will* the babies be transforming every time they get into water? Any water? If so, I'm going to have a fine old time trying to bathe them and it won't be easy keeping their nature a family secret.'

'I used to have the same problem,' Sean grinned. 'Until I taught myself not to fur up the moment a drop touched me. But I had no da to show me the way, and they do. Meanwhile, if you need help with the family secret, well, we've plenty of family here who know all about it. They'll help. And the four-foots will watch to make sure no outsiders come close enough to learn more than they should.'

'You say that, Sean,' Clodagh said, speaking quietly into her soup bowl, 'but there are outsiders who've seen *you* change, and one of them may take it upon himself to wonder if the twins inherited the ability and need studying.' She looked up, her moss green eyes fathomless and deep as one of Petaybee's many artesian springs, seeming troubled. She hated bringing up such worries on what should be a flawlessly happy day. 'You know how much scrutiny this planet is under.'

'Well, how the hell could they possibly interfere with my family peculiarity when Yana and I have the final say as governors of this planet?' Sean asked.

Clodagh shrugged.

'As long as the four-foots are their guards, no one will get near them,' Yana said with far more conviction than she felt. 'And Nanook and Coaxtl will keep them from being seen, won't they?' A nervous tic started in her cheek. She rubbed it. 'Will the cats follow them into the water?'

'Yes,' Sean said positively. '*If* the little ones elude them long enough to get near water, Nanook and Coaxtl would follow them into the mouth of a volcano if necessary. The cats do converse. We just have to make it plain to them how dangerous it would be for the kids to be caught half in, half out. Like I was.'

‘We’ll hope they don’t take arrows in their anatomy to induce such a condition,’ Yana said, referring to what was nearly a mortal wound for him. ‘And I thought leading training troops on landing parties for the Company Corps was a heavy responsibility!’ She shook her head as if to clear it. ‘We’re borrowing trouble. It’s not as if shape-changing is a viable occupation.’

‘Oh, selkies would be real useful on water worlds,’ Sean argued.

‘Yana’s right, Sean. There’s trouble enough right here and now without borrowing any,’ Clodagh said in a cajoling tone. ‘Don’t fall into *that* water until the ice breaks up. For now your biggest problem is to decide what these babes of yours are to be called. I will think on it, remember the stories of our peoples, see if there’s some appropriate names there. You and Yana should sleep while you have the chance. The cats can’t take care of all the needs those babes will have.’

The drumming began shortly after sunrise. Inside the nursery cube, the twins opened their eyes to the brightness pouring in through the piece of sheeting that covered the cube’s single small window. The babies whimpered and wiggled.

Nanook’s ears were the first part of him to wake up. They pricked to attention. Coaxtl’s tail lashed restlessly before the snow leopard stretched a sleepy paw. The kits had awakened. Both cats stretched and rose, poking their noses over the sides of the cots.

‘Rrrow,’ Nanook told his friend. ‘I’d cry too if I smelled like that. Where are those humans when you need them?’

‘These cubs leak,’ Coaxtl agreed. ‘And they’ve got these things tied around their haunches to hold the leakage in. One wonders how humans come up with such ideas. This arrangement keeps the nest clean but the cubs dirty.’

‘Sean would not want his kits to be dirty,’ Nanook said.

‘Can one pull these haunch harnesses off so one can clean them?’ Coaxtl inquired.

‘Yes, they are meant to be removable. But take care with fang and claw. We want to remove the harnesses only, not the kits’ pelts. Humans, lacking proper coats, have very sensitive hides.’

Nanook’s nose touched the kit’s leg as he grasped a pinch of cloth in his teeth. The kit stopped whimpering. He looked at it anxiously lest it was merely saving its breath for a good howl, but it was staring at him, wide-eyed and curious. Disconcerting, these human younglings, born with their eyes all open and gawking.

‘Hee,’ the kit said aloud, quite distinctly giggling.

‘Hee,’ the female kit echoed, pumping a plump fist in the air.

Tickles, one of them – the female? – said.

Ma? the other inquired.

No, child, I am Nanook, your keeper. Your mother sleeps. And this one is Coaxtl, also your keeper.

‘*Nook*. Nanook realized suddenly that the boy’s more advanced utterances were mental and that it understood as well as transmitted thoughts.

Co’. The female kit was also transmitting thoughts.

Co-ax-tl, the snow leopard said with a dignified fluff of his tufted cheeks. *You may as well get it right to begin with, youngling.*

Co’.

Nanook sat back on his haunches. The harness was too close to the tender skin. ‘Don’t growl, leopard. They will learn. When I was their age, my mother had to lick me to teach me to do what they’ve already done in their harnesses.’

Coaxtl sat back too. ‘This harness removal is for those with thumbs. The drums call. The time has come to wake the parents. *They* can cope with haunch harnesses.’

JUST IN CASE a seventy-five-pound track cat standing over her was not enough of a hint that she should wake, Sean was saying, 'Yana, love, it's time to rise. The drums have begun and the babes are hungry again.'

'Yes, I got that idea,' she said, looking up into Nanook's black-and-white marked face before Sean shooed the cat back to the floor. He had been so good, getting up to change the babies during the night and tucking them in with her so she could breast-feed without disturbing her rest unduly. She attempted to roll out of bed with her customary agility, only to find it sadly lacking. The birthing had not felt too traumatic, thanks to the underwater method Clodagh had employed to ease the way of the children into the world. But what pain had been spared her yesterday seemed to be catching up with her now.

A muted buzz went off in the adjoining cube, which was the main office of the Shongilis. Sean paused halfway to the nursery cube, waiting until a second mechanical noise clicked in.

'It's working?' Yana asked in surprise. This was not the latest or most up-to-date answering machine, but it was the one that worked on their planet. They all listened for a second click, and then a red light appeared on the bar above the door into the cube, indicating a message was waiting. More efficient communication was one of the 'improvements' that almost had to be implemented with all of the attention - most of it unwanted - Petaybee received from offworld interests. One com shed could no longer handle all of the messages, now that Intergal

communications had pulled out when Space Base was dismantled. The landing area and fueling station had been left intact, and for a small consideration and a trade agreement regarding the fuel for visiting vessels, Kilcoole was allowed to retain it as a civilian concession.

‘That thing can wait,’ Sean said. While recognizing the need for the ‘labor-saving’ device, at the same time he resented its intrusion into what had once been their comparatively peaceful life. ‘I’ll help you with the twins.’

First he had to help her hobble into the ‘nursery’. Coaxtl looked up, yawned, stretched, and padded out. One’s shift was over, one presumed. Nanook joined the snow leopard, and the two stood by the door until Sean retraced his steps and opened it for them to go out.

The blast of cold air that blew in when the cats departed chilled the overheated room that had been so efficiently warmed by the woodstove and the hot burning Petaybean alder wood. The nursery cube, like the office cube also attached to the cabin, had its own temperature- and humidity-controlled environment, which was why they had chosen it for the twins, in spite of its lack of the individuality that characterized Petaybean dwellings.

Both twins were wide awake and smelly. The little girl held up a fist full of white fur. ‘Coaxtl got too close to you, I see, my little Monster Slayer,’ Yana said, pulling off the dirty diaper and cleaning the child with the moistened moss compresses Clodagh recommended for the job. ‘You need to choose your monsters more wisely, though, my love. Coaxtl is a friend.’

‘Hee,’ the little girl said.

‘Hee,’ echoed her brother, spraying his father with urine the minute the diaper was removed and air touched his skin.

‘Here now,’ Sean said. ‘I think your mummy said your role model was called Born *for* Water, not Born *to* Water!’

‘Hee,’ the baby said again, so of course his sister had to say it again too, so as not to be outdone.

Sean held the boy and walked him around the cabin, talking to him while Yana fed her daughter. Then they switched babies. Finally the little ones were fed, changed, rediapered, and swaddled in clean furs.

Yana had finished washing up and pulled on a pair of old uniform trousers and a fleece top when someone knocked on the door.

She opened it to admit Bunny Rourke, Sean’s niece and her closest friend since she had first arrived on Petaybee. Beside Bunny was Aoifa, Bunny’s sister. Coaxtl considered Aoifa her twolegged cub.

‘Clodagh said we should come to help with the babes while you and Sean get ready.’

‘Clodagh’s reputation as a wise woman is richly deserved,’ Yana said thankfully. ‘You missed the messy bits for the time being, but they can use distraction for a moment.’

With the help of the girls, the entire family unit was ready to mobilize within an hour. Yana and Sean carried the twins, while the girls followed with their changes of diapers, their packets of moss wipes, and extra furs in case the twins messed the ones they were wrapped in. ‘We look more like an expeditionary force than a family,’ Yana remarked.

Sean smiled. ‘You’ve not been around all that many families up till now, love. Families with new babies can make expeditionary forces seem underpacked.’

‘Good thing we brought the snocle,’ Bunny said. ‘And a curly coat to carry the gear.’

‘Have packhorse will go next door,’ Yana quipped when the girls loaded the supplies on the shaggy little Petaybean horse with its thick curly coat. Sometime during the night it had begun to snow. A blanket three or four inches deep covered the well-tramped path to the river road. Snow still sifted down from a light pewter sky. Soon the sun, which had just risen, would be setting again.

Aoifa led the horse, while Sean and Yana – who were clad in parkas, snow pants, hats, mittens, and mukluks – squeezed themselves and their fur-wrapped offspring into the snocle beside Bunny.

Smoke poured from the smoke hole of the latchkay lodge, a great plume among the pinion feathers emitted by the chimneys of Kilcoole's other houses. In front of the lodge, men stirred soups and stews in sterilized fuel drums over open fires. The smells didn't travel far in the air, which was so frigid it froze the hairs inside people's nostrils.

The drums drowned out all other noises now, calling the people together. Their beat was so strong the snow seemed to fall in time to it.

The babies wiggled in their parents' arms, wanting to see what all the noise and fuss was about. The thing in which they had been squeezed, the thing that roared and slid, stopped, and suddenly they felt cold air rush in through their furs. It felt wonderful!

Strange and familiar voices mingled all around them. Their parents walked forward until the cold went away and the babies were enveloped in great warmth and felt themselves being passed from their parents to other people. When they were handed back, their furs were removed and their mother had changed from the furry beast she'd transformed into outside back to the soft-slender-dark-haired-sweet-milk-smelling giver of food and cuddles who spoke to them in long utterances and smiled often.

Many faces peered down at them, touching their cheeks and chins, toes and fingers, all of the features of their land shapes. People spoke in odd voices that had 'ooo' sounds.

They had slept well and were as curious as the cats who prowled among the people sitting and standing in the hall. The drums stopped for a while as people ate. During the eating, several people stood and spoke, saying things that seemed to make their mother happy.

Then they were both in their father's arms as the one drum began again and their mother stood and danced with other mothers, a slow pacing dance around the center of the big space. Father spoke to them then. He was easier to understand than anyone else, and half of what he said was inside their heads, his meanings confusing and mysterious but clearly important clues to what lay before them. His silvery eyes shone happily down at them as he spoke, and his voice held a lilt of laughter and good feeling.

'Children, we are at your naming latchkay. What's a latchkay? I'm glad you asked. The people of our village and I come from two peoples of Old Earth – the Inuit and the Irish. When something wonderful or important happened, the people would gather to eat and speak, dance and sing together. Among the Inuit, this was called a potlatch. Food and gifts were given to all. Among the Irish, it was a kay-lee, where there was much music and food and drink. We on Petaybee celebrate our occasions with something that mixes the two customs and we call it a latchkay. At this one, people will give us gifts for you. When you are five, we will hold a latchkay to redistribute the baby gifts you no longer use, and you will add gifts of your own to ones we make or barter for. Today your mother and I shall sing and dance with you, and everyone will suggest names and explain why they are good names. Clodagh will probably come up with the best ones. Clodagh was the lady you both saw yesterday, before you saw your mother's face or mine. Your mother has finished dancing now and it is my turn. Any questions?'

'Hee hee,' the twins said. Then, "Kay.'

But their father, passing them to their mother again, didn't hear.

Then Father picked Her up and mother picked Him up and they all danced, a happy jiggly rhythm such as the parents had used to put them to sleep. Two drumbeats, twin hearts,

moved the people up and down, back and forth, up and down.

After that there was some more fun. Mother and Father sat down, each still holding one of them, and a round lady not Clodagh brought bright-colored soft things with shiny little round things in pretty patterns all over the front.

‘Thank you, Aisling,’ Mother said. ‘Carry pouches are exactly what we need. Now the twins can see what’s going on too.’ Mother handed Him to Father and stuck her arms into the bright soft thing she said was ‘kind of a cobalt blue.’ Father handed Him back to her, and she put Him into the thing, so that His legs were apart but stuck through the front, His middle held in by the strip with the shiny round things that sparkled in the light, and His head, though cradled between Mother’s food-givers, faced forward. He could see everything! Everything!

Father handed Her to Mother too. Mother had a hard time hanging on to Her, because She wanted to see too and tried to twist in Mother’s arms. Mother’s cuddle wasn’t as comfortable as usual because He was in the way.

But Father put on his new soft bright thing, which he said was ‘Hot pink, not my color, but Hers,’ and then She too faced forward.

Thus they were able to see all of the gifts. Soft warm things, not furs, for covering during sleep. Moss wipes and haunch harnesses, as the cats called them, though Mother and Father called them diapers. Small versions of Mother’s fur-faced thing that made her big when she went outside. Other things like that, garments, clothes, they were called, that their parents held against them or stuck over their arms and legs a little ways to show.

The pile in front of them grew and grew until they couldn’t tell one thing from another. Then two men came forward, ‘Seamus’ and ‘Johnny.’ If the first thing was the best so far, these last things were best too. They brought between them a cot surrounded by a box that had images of fishes

swimming all around it. The bottom had things they took off and put on again.

‘Rockers for in the house,’ Johnny said. ‘Runners for sledding them over the snows,’ Seamus said. ‘Wheels for when it’s dry,’ they both said, attaching round things to the front and back and taking them off again. ‘And when you’re near water and you don’t want them in it, use nothing at all on this and it will float tight and dry as any boat.’

Best of all, it was not one cot but big enough for two. Mother and Father laid the twins together in it, so they could see each other and snuggle together. It was very nice but the twins did not let them get away with it, of course. Sleep could not come without food.

Before the latchkay adjourned to the communion place for the Night Chants, the singing was interrupted by the howls of the dogs tethered outside and answered by dogs running toward them. The lodge’s doors were flung open and three figures, heavily covered in fur parkas, snow pants, and boots, stamped inside. Bunny and Aoifa Rourke, Diego Metaxos, and young Chugiak rushed out to tend to the newcomers’ teams.

‘Friends, we’re so pleased you’ve come to honor these children and their parents!’

The first person, now stripped of his parka, was a small dark-haired man. In his plaid shirt and snow pants, he walked in among the celebrants and said, ‘We are not the only ones to honor them! For weeks the seals have been gathering along the beach, thick as snowflakes. Dolphins and whales come too in great profusion, not to their killing grounds but near our settlements, as if waiting for something to happen. Then yesterday the ice began to crack and break up as if it were spring. Finally, a giant wave came rolling in and crashed onto the shore, carrying fish and other creatures, some we have never seen before, and washed away half the village. We heard twins were born

here in Kilcoole at the same time the wave rolled in, and the three of us, who have the fastest teams in our area, were sent to greet the children and bring them naming gifts.'

The twins, seemingly oblivious to the noise, were asleep in their new cradle when the coastal people arrived, but by the time the visitors stood dripping melted snow from their hair in front of Sean and Yana, the little ones had awakened again.

One man pulled out a length of string and began making figures with it a few inches above the twins' faces. 'A story string to amuse them and help them trap the best stories in its net. It is made of good strong synweb too, so they can use it to snare rabbits if they want.'

The next person, a woman, handed Yana two knives: a dagger, and a blade that looked as if it were a quarter cut from a circle, the point removed and replaced by a bone handle. 'A hunting knife and an ulu, so they will never go hungry or cold.'

The third person, also a woman, handed Yana a large-eyed steel needle with a cutting end. 'My mother always said a needle was the true magic of our people because without a needle, we would not be able to make the clothing we need to survive. Actually, my mother wanted me to bring you her old treadle sewing machine, but there wasn't time to load it, even if there had been room on the sled.'

Yana and Sean laughed and thanked them all.

The baby girl reached up and snagged the story string in her tiny fingers.

The man who had been demonstrating its use beamed.

Then the food was served, musicians brought out their rusty instruments, and people began dancing the reels and figure dances from long ago, separated by occasional waltzes.

Marduk, the orange and white striped cat who had adopted Yana when she first arrived at Kilcoole, hopped into the cradle and wrapped himself around the twins' feet,