

**Just A Matter Of Time ( A Wolverine Story... )**  
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*This story is easier to understand if you've read Origin, but if you haven't  
the story takes place in the early 1800's*

Iris had always felt different from the others in the encampment. For one, she was a better hunter and tracker than most of the men in camp, and, she was the daughter of chief Nocona, who was the leader of one of the last strains of the Comanche people trying to maintain peace with the cavalry and settlers. Her father did NOT approve of his only daughter out hunting, but also knew that Iris' spirit would not be tamed. Secretly he knew it was his own fault, her mother had died in childbirth and he had raised his young daughter in the ways of a brave. So Iris spent her days on the plains and canyons of what would someday be North Texas, hunting for the women of the tribe who had lost their men to wars and raids. Life remained that way for the first twenty-two years of her life. Then...everything changed.

She was out hunting one day in Palo Duro Canyon, and had already brought down a good-sized antelope. She had taken some time to relax and enjoy the quiet surrounding her. The canyon was like a well-known friend, and there were few places left in its expanse that Iris had not discovered. The red and white hued walls, sprinkled with green mesquite shrubs seemed to call to her. To tell her stories of days long gone by, but not forgotten, at least not to the ones who knew how to listen. And listen Iris did, as often as she could. She lay listening to the wind as it whistled down the canyon walls, and through the cottonwood trees, lost in her own world. A world where everything was simple and had a reason...

Then she heard her horse's sudden scream of fear. She jumped up, only to be immediately knocked back down by the huge grizzly she had just surprised. Cursing her stupidity for letting her guard down, she rolled away from the bear. The slash from the bear's razor claws had carved three deep grooves across her chest, and as she came to her feet she began to have trouble breathing. Clutching her chest, she pulled out her hunting knife and hunched over to brace for an attack. The bear had backed off, but was pawing the ground and growling low in its throat. She quickly glanced around her. She was on open ground, and her horse was nowhere to be seen. Without warning, the bear rushed her. She screamed in fury and raised her knife... and out of nowhere, a man, a WHITE man, jumped headlong and tackled the huge beast. Iris stumbled back in shock, her hand dropping to her side.

The bear backed off from the man, and he now stood crouched ferally between them, muscles bulging from his torn shirt. His face scrunched < don't like that word > into a snarl that rivaled the grizzly's in fierceness... Then her world went dark. When she finally came to, she forced herself to remain absolutely still. She could hear wood crackle and snap from a nearby fire, and she could smell meat cooking. James sat next to the small fire, studying the young woman lying on the other side. He had done all that he could for her. Made a poultice for her chest wound, then bandaged it loosely with the remains of

his shirt, his LAST shirt he thought, shaking his head. For a while, he wasn't sure if she would pull through, but over the last hour, her breathing had steadied. He watched the rise and fall of her chest. Then he smiled. She was awake. "If I'd meant you harm, I'dda let the grizzly finish ya off." Her body tensed at his voice, but then she slowly opened her eyes. She lay for a moment looking up at the stars, then turned her head toward the fire, squinting through the flames. She tried to sit up, then cried out in pain at the fire in her chest. "Easy now, ya got hurt pretty bad... need to rest" She looked at him warily, trying to remember exactly what had happened. She slid her hand to her waistband, reaching for her knife, but it wasn't there. Instead, all she felt was the fresh bear pelt she was lying on. She slowly eased back down, holding her chest, which was wrapped in strips from the man's shirt. It slowly began to come back to her as she glanced over at him again, noticing the slash marks across his muscled chest. "You're hurt." she said quietly.

"So ya speak English, that'll make things a bit easier." He glanced down at his chest and shrugged. "Nothing I can't handle" Iris sat up and moved to stand "You must let me clean them-" she gasped and fell back down on her side, trying to blink back the tears that were threatening to flow. He jumped up and rushed over "Hey now, I said ya need to rest!" She looked up at him "I... thank you for what you did." He grinned. "Ya weren't doing too bad a job, I just came along to finish 'im off for ya" She snorted; then coughed." Name's James by the way" She nodded, "Iris." The next morning, Iris was feeling well enough to travel much to James' surprise. He helped her onto his horse, made sure she was settled, then took off at a walk, leading the big bay. They continued like that a mile or more, when Iris suddenly moaned and began to fall to the side. James looked back in just enough time to catch her as she tumbled toward the ground. Once again, the world swam around her, but she blinked the blackness away. James looked down at her, concern showing on his face. "Iris, ya gotta rest more girl, ya can't even sit a horse!" She shook her head, and grabbing his shoulders, began to pull herself to a standing position. He grabbed her waist and helped her up. Standing up straight, she offhandedly noticed he was a bit shorter than her self. She held on to his shoulders a moment longer before letting go to stand on her own, as if to prove a point. "My father will be worried, I have to get home" James looked at her and nodded grimly. "Alright, but I'm gonna ride with ya, don't need ya fallin' and hittin' yer head along with everything else."

Once again he helped her up, this time jumping up behind her. She tried to remain sitting straight, but her chest ached even worse that way, and after a moment, gave up and leaned back against him. James turned the horse toward the canyon, and once more, they were off. When they got close to the camp, he stopped the horse. "Almost there darlin' ... wanted to make sure ya were awake enough to explain why ya brought a white man back with ya" he said, trying not to convey his nervousness. Iris sat up and let out a clear whistle. A moment later, a response came from within the camp, and he saw a small crowd began to gather. "That's my father." she said, pointing to the man wearing a headdress in the middle of the group. James inwardly flinched. "Ya didn't tell me your father was the chief." Iris kicked the horse and they headed into camp. As they neared the

crowd, a young man around James' age came out and grabbed the reins, glaring up at the newcomer. He motioned for him to get down. James complied, reaching up to help Iris. Suddenly, he was shoved from behind so hard that he stumbled to the ground. What seemed like a swarm of men began kicking at him, as well as pelting him with rocks and sticks. One landed a hard kick to his temple, then the last thing he heard was Iris screaming in Comanche. When he awoke, Iris was kneeling over him, washing his face with a cool cloth.

"Are you ok?" she said softly. He nodded, wincing at the pain in his head. "My father wants to speak with you" she said, helping him sit up. "Maybe I should just go," He mumbled, moving to rise to his feet. She gently pushed him back. "I spoke with him about what happened. He wants to thank you." He began to object, but she stood quickly, walking out of the teepee. James sighed, and looked at his surroundings. The small hut was adorned with skins and paintings on the walls, a small pit dug in the center of the ground for the fire. She returned momentarily, followed by the man he had seen earlier. He began to rise, but the man raised his hand, gesturing for him to remain seated, then he himself sat down, Iris kneeling next to him. James and the chief looked at each other for a moment, then the chief began in broken English. "My daughter say I am in your debt." James began to object, but the chief held up a hand for silence. "Thank your that you bring her back." At this the chief pointed to his chest. "Nocona." James nodded and returned with his name. Nocona seemed to think about this a moment, then turned to rise, speaking with Iris in Comanche before stepping outside. James relaxed visibly after he left, letting out a deep breath. "He said that you should remain here until your wounds heal. Winter is coming, and you should not be out in the cold until you are well." Iris told him. James considered this before replying. "Tell Nocona I said thank you, and I'll take 'im up on that." She nodded. "You can stay here then." motioning to the surrounding teepee.

The next morning, James awoke to the sound of hushed whispers and giggles. He slowly opened his eyes and turned his head toward the sounds, but all he saw was the edge of the teepee fall back into place. He rubbed his eyes and sat up, trying to get his bearings.

Ok.. now here I need some camp life stuff.. but I've been having a hard time coming up with it.. bah.. maybe you can think of some.

A year passed, and Iris and James grew in their respect for each other. But no matter how much she respected him, she refused to let him ride with her when she went out hunting. She felt she needed this time alone. When she was in the encampment, she was her father's daughter, but out here, she could truly be herself, and no one would understand that part of her.. not even James. Life in the camp remained the same, except for occasional visits from the cavalry. But so far, chief Nocona had managed to maintain their relative peace with them. One day, Iris had gone hunting in the canyons. She had spotted a herd of antelope not to far out. With a grin, Iris set aside her bow and arrows, and began to sneak closer. She had gotten within sprinting distance when she heard suddenly spooked. Iris started to take off after them when out of the brush came...

James? He came running up next to a big buck and threw it down by its neck. Iris ran to help him, drawing her knife when James fist came up over his head and SNIKT Iris stopped short and gasped as three long... claws... jutted out of James fist in a mist of blood. He paused in mid air, sensing someone behind him. He slowly turned his head, and when he saw Iris, his face drained of all color. The buck kicked out its death throws beneath him, but he didn't even notice. He instantly retracted the claws and slowly stood up. "Iris..." he dropped his head, shaking it wearily. She sank to the ground, and sat there looking at him in shock. "I... I thought I was the only one..." she whispered... tears beginning to flow down her cheeks.

Ok, this whole next paragraph I don't really like, because I haven't settled on the extent of her powers, right now she is basically immortal, but I want something more physical as well.. something that will make her and James recognize that they are the same. Iris is still a work in progress.

< James moved to her side, " Iris? What do you mean? " She looked up at him. "You're not the only one with a gift James." He sank down to his knees and looked at her. I... I cannot die." he frowned, "What do you mean? " She took a shuddering breath. " A year before you came, I was shot in the chest by a soldier down in the canyons... that should have killed me, but it didn't.. not even a day later I was fine.. With no scar. " " I thought it was a curse... but now.. now I know I'm not alone." She said looking into his blue eyes. "Darlin'.. you'll never be alone again " He said, pulling her close.>

From that day on they were inseparable. If one left the camp, it was certain the other one was with them. Nocona watched all this knowingly. "It looks like she's found him at last", he thought to himself as he watched them ride out together. He would never know just how right he was. A few months later, the braves in the camp started going out to get supplies for their trek to hunt the buffalo. James and Iris went out together, hunting down in the canyon. Within a few days time, they had gotten enough meat to last a long while, so they decided to just spend the rest of the time exploring the canyon. They spent their days moving slowly through the canyon, exploring caves and spent their nights out under the stars. One night Iris turned to James and asked " Do you think there are any more like us?" James turned on his side to look at her sitting there, looking out over the expanse of the canyon. " I dunno Iris" He moved his eyes up and down her body as she looked up at the stars " Guess anything's possible, huh? " "I guess so, " she said softly. James tore away from looking at her, to join her in stargazing. Iris looked over at James, smiling softly. " He is very handsome," she thought. She loved his blue eyes, and the way his unruly black hair always seemed to be falling over them. She looked down and saw that the moonlight was illuminating his well-muscled chest quite nicely. She glanced back at his face to see him grinning at her. "What?" "What, what?"

He grinned wider.. " umm.. ya seem to be.. drooling" She sat up indignantly, at the same time going to wipe her mouth " I was NOT!" He grinned again " Yup." She crossed her arms and glared at him. He just kept grinning. She made a waving motion with one hand and muttered something in Comanche. James burst out laughing as he lay back down, arms crossed behind his head. Iris remained sitting, arms supporting her as she leaned back on them.

She threw her head back as a breeze moved through, sweeping back her hair, shimmering in the moonlight. James continued to watch her. "Iris?" She looked back over one shoulder at him. "You're beautiful." She blushed deeply, then turned back to look out over the canyon. James sat up and scooted next to her. "Iris," he breathed on her neck and she shivered. "Iris darlin', look at me." She sighed, and turned toward him. "I love you James." "He opened his mouth and then shut it, smiling. "How'd I know you'd get it said before me." She smiled softly and reached over to run her fingers through his hair, moving it out of his eyes. "I love you too, Iris." She smiled as he pulled her close, and they shared their first kiss. A month later, after exchanging many secret looks and smiles in camp, James decided to go talk to Iris' father. They met late at night when the camp was quiet. Nocona knew what James wanted, along with pretty much everyone else in camp, so he sat there waiting for James to speak. James on the other hand, seemed quite content to draw circles in the dirt with a stick. Nocona finally cleared his throat, and James looked up quickly. He took a deep breath and in a rush, burst out with "I love your daughter.", then as if he had forgotten, let out his breath. Nocona looked at the young man who sat across the campfire from him. James had been with them a long time, and he had gained much respect for the young man. He had known in his heart that this was coming, and he approved. "Does my daughter share your feelings?" James nodded, "She does." Nocona looked off into the distance, remembering when he had to do this himself for the hand of Iris' mother. "I have seen the way you look at my daughter, and have also seen the way she looks at you." He sighed. "I am growing old James, as are the days of my people. I fear that we do not have much more time before we are scattered to the winds." James shook his head, "We can fight them." The chief raised his hand for silence. "I have seen what has happened to those that resist. Either they are butchered, or sent to a reservation, where they live like cattle." Nocona shook his head.

"I do not want to see my daughter's spirit broken. When the time comes, I want you to take her away from here." James shook his head. "But Nocona-" The chief looked into James' eyes. "James, keep my daughter safe. I do not want gifts, I just want her safe. Promise me this, and you may have my daughter's hand." James looked at Nocona, and for the first time noticed how weary he looked, how old. He nodded. "I will keep her safe, no matter what that requires." The chief smiled. "Good, then with Iris' consent, you shall be joined." Later that night, James lay out looking up at the stars. Memories of a beautiful red head danced across his vision, and he sighed. "Rose, I don't know of you can hear me... but I feel as though you are still here. Now I know why we couldn't be together, my path was a different one. I just wish that you could be here to see that I finally found my place." "Goodbye Rose"

James stood off to the side of the chief watching the proceedings. This was the second time in as many months that the cavalry had come to talk to Nocona. They were HEAVILY recommending that he signed a treaty that would give the Quohada Comanche land on a reservation. The chief refused as he always did, trying to make it clear to the soldiers why they wouldn't leave their home. The soldiers left with a warning "This will be the last time we come to you offering peace, chief." Later that night James talked to Nocona. "We HAVE to move camp. They'll be back, and this time it won't be to talk." The chief only sighed wearily... he seemed to have aged years in the last few months, his hair starting to gray. "James, this is our HOME." James shook his head in frustration. "Yer stubbornness will be your people's undoing! We always move

the camp when the winter nears, why not move it early?" The chief only shook his head. James stood up, "I won't put my family in danger because yer afraid of change!" At that, he turned and walked back to his teepee, leaving the old man to stare into the flames and remember the days long gone. James quietly opened the flap of the teepee and stepped inside. The small fire illuminating the inside had died down to smoldering coals, but he could still see the shape of his wife under the buffalo hide. He threw a few sticks on the coals, and got the fire going again before crawling under the blanket with her. He snuggled against her warm back and put his arm around her to gently caress her swollen belly. "What did my father say?" she sighed. "The same thing. He refuses to move the camp... he won't leave." He buried his face in her hair, kissing her neck. Iris opened her eyes, and carefully rolled onto her back, moaning softly. She looked up at her husband, reaching out to push his thick black hair off his face. "What are we going to do?" He looked at Iris seriously, "I think as soon as the baby is born, we should go." She closed her eyes and sighed. "I know you're right James, but how can I leave my people to that fate?" James shook his head sadly. "Their fate will not change if you go, but ours will if we stay. We cannot risk it Iris." She nodded slowly. "You know I'll go with you anywhere my love." He kissed her forehead, staring at the fire's illumination on the wall. "I know my love, I know."

She smiled at him, and reached up to give him a kiss "Now, rub my back, it hurts". James smiled as she rolled back over (with a little help) and he massaged her back until she fell asleep. He tried not to think of what the coming months would bring as he moved against her again. He couldn't have been happier about the birth of his child, but having to leave their home, knowing that they would probably never see the others again, hurt his heart. These people had taken him in when he had nothing, and now he felt as if he were leaving them to die alone.

All of the sudden, he felt a tiny kick under his hand. He smiled and lightly pressed on Iris' stomach. That one small kick steeled his resolve. "I can't... WON'T... put my family in harms way." He thought. The next month found James pacing back and forth outside the teepee, Iris' father and brothers watching him from the seat they had found nearby. "How could it TAKE so long? ... Maybe I should go in." Red Cloud grinned at him, "Believe me brother, you are better off out here." Inside he could hear Iris' moans and cries. He wanted to be with her, and started inside once, but one of the old midwives shoed him away before he could even clear the door. James finally joined them on the log, and dropped his head into his hands, repeatedly running his fingers through his hair. Suddenly, the noise inside the tent stopped. James looked worriedly from the teepee to the faces of the men. They only shrugged. Then, a tiny wail pierced the night air. The flap of the teepee opened and one of the midwives stepped out, holding a small bundle wrapped in skins. James seemed glued to his seat for a moment, until her father gave him a nudge. Then, he jumped up and approached the old woman with the air of approaching a spooked horse. "You have a strong daughter." she said smiling, and held out the bundle

to James. He awkwardly took it in his arms, and pulled down the blanket to reveal... the most beautifully, angelic face he had ever seen. He drew in his breath slowly. "She's... she's perfect" he said softly. The child opened her dark lashes to reveal her sky blue eyes for a moment, and James smiled. "Hello little one... I'm your papa" He touched her tiny hand and watched the fingers curl around his own. James thought his heart would burst.

“ How is my wife?”The old woman grinned, showing off her three remaining teeth. “ Iris is strong, she is resting now.” James nodded, unable to tear his eyes away from his daughter. “ Can I see her? “The woman nodded, and stepped aside from the entrance. James carefully stepped inside and smiled at Iris who lay propped against a stack of blankets. James knelt next to her and handed her their daughter. Iris looked down at her and the baby, who was getting aggravated with all the looking and no feeding, scrunched up her face and let out a wail. James and Iris smiled.” She’s got YOUR patience.” James told his wife. The next night when Iris had fallen asleep, James took the sleeping infant out under the stars. He held her close to his chest, rocking slowly back and forth.“ Well lil’ one, yer coming signals a big change for us. “ he said softly. He felt Iris’ hands around his waist. James opened the buffalo robe that she had made him, and she slipped inside. James handed her their daughter, and pulled the robe close around them.“ What should her name be? “Iris looked down at the beautiful little girl. “ Alupe. It means the promise. “ A tear meandered down her cheek. “ The promise of a new life, “ she whispered. James looked over the sleeping camp and then turned Iris to face him. “Ya know it’s for the best. “She took a shuddering breath. “ I know, but that doesn’t make it any easier. “

The next weeks seemed to fly by, and Iris and James began to make preparations to leave. Alupe was a healthy, happy infant, and they knew that the longer they stayed, the more danger they were putting themselves in. James begged with the chief to move the camp, but he refused. He did not want to leave the home of his ancestors. Iris sewed warm clothes for them to wear, and James set out on one last hunting trip before they left. All day long, the wind had been whipping up more and more, and as James finally brought down a deer, clouds had begun rolling in. His senses had been telling him all day that a storm was coming, and now he could hear distant thunder, and felt the breeze turn cold. James threw the deer up on his horse, and turned toward home. When he got to the last hill before the camp, he stopped for a moment and looked out over the rolling plains. A sudden gust of wind ruffled his hair, and as he looked up, the first raindrops landed on his face. His horse snorted and stomped a foot, and James grinned.“ I agree, let’s head for home. “

He set off at a slow and easy gallop, as the clouds boiled overhead, and the rain began to pour. A slow build up of thunder rolled ominously over the plains, and a bolt of lightning cut across the sky. The light began to fade as the clouds increased.“ Almost there, “ James thinks. The next roll of thunder drowns out the gunshots. James would have rode in blind if not for the next bolt of lightning, which revealed the Quohada being cut down as the cavalry rode through, firing their rifles and dropping them by the handfuls. “NOOO!!!” He bolted off the horse and ran for the camp. “IRIS!! ALUPE!!” he screamed. When he first reached the outskirts of the camp, one of the horse-bound cavalry saw him coming, and fired his rifle, catching James dead in the chest. He dropped to the ground rolling, the pain flaring up, but was almost immediately back up. Roaring in rage, he ran straight toward the man, quickly cutting him down from the horse. When he had finished the man off, he ran toward his teepee, cutting down cavalry almost as an afterthought. Arriving at the teepee, he found it empty, causing his panic to shoot up another notch.

Taking off like a madman through the camp, James called Iris’ name over and over, with no result. Everyway he turns, more cavalry confront him, and by this time, he has

several bullet holes in his body; but after the first time, he doesn't fall down. He is beyond feeling, and every pain just strengthens his growing rage. Suddenly he hears a familiar voice call his name. He doubles back to see Nocona lying next to his son, Red Cloud. He has been run through by a bayonet, and a piece of his scalp is missing. Blood flows over his face and chest, as he lay gasping for breath. "James..." He says weakly, "You were right..." James knelt beside him. "Where are they? WHERE ARE IRIS AND ALUPE?!" Nocona coughed and mumbled something to himself. "Nocona, Where are they?!" James shook the chief's shoulders, trying to get him to concentrate on what he was saying. Nocona looked at James' hand, which had three bloody claws jutting out of it. He looked into James' eyes in shock, as he began coughing up blood. "My.. teepee.."

James took off at a dead run, and as he came around the corner, an image instantly burned itself on his mind. Four men held Iris down, with a fifth on top of her. She is struggling desperately, her head turned to the side. James follows her gaze and sees a tiny body lying in the blood soaked mud. Roaring in rage, James slices the head off the man who is on his wife before the others even realize what has happened. Iris kicked the body off of her, as the other four turn to face James. They all at once come at him, and watching the fight is similar to watching a cornered animal take on a pack of pursuers. One gets in a lucky blow with a bayonet, catching James under the ribs, but he is beyond feeling, and all the men are quickly dispatched in a shower of blood. Iris crawls over to Alupe, and carefully picks up the tiny broken body in her arms. Calling her name, she wails her heartbreak to the heavens. James runs to her side, but there is nothing either of them can do. Looking over his shoulder, he sees more soldiers headed in their direction. He quickly turns to Iris. "Head for the cave darlin. Head for the cave." Iris, nodding numbly, stumbles to her feet and off into the night, carrying her daughter's body close to her chest.

James turned to face the pursuers, bracing himself for the onslaught, and with both arms at his sides, popped both sets of claws. Standing with every muscle tensed, and a snarl spread across his face, he gestured the soldiers to him. A few paused as they saw the claws, but most ran headlong toward him, bayonets raised to run him through. He laughed maniacally as he took them out, blood flying along with body parts in every direction. When the last of them fell, he continued slashing, his rage so great that for a moment, he didn't realize that the fight was over. As he was fighting, the rest ran back to the company to report a demon loose in the camp, and they thought it wise to escape with the few of them that remained.

When James regained his senses, he looked over the remains of the camp. The Quohada had been caught completely off guard. None had escaped. He slowly walked through, looking in vain for survivors. The slowing rain was working at putting the last of the fires out that the soldiers had started, and as it fell, blood washed in rivulets across the ground. James approached their teepee, but stopped short, gazing at the home he had known for the last five years. Steeling himself, he walked inside, and began to look for supplies. He went to grab his buffalo robe, and as he lifted it, he realized that it was covering Alupe's cradle. He paused for a moment, remembering carefully fashioning it, thinking of the coming months when it would hold his child. He turned his head away from it, and quickly gathering some clothes, backed out of the teepee. Looking around, him, he found a campfire that was still burning, and quickly grabbed a stick from it, and

thrust it inside the teepee. He watched for a moment as the flames began to lick the sides, before turning away to disappear into the night.

The firelight in the cave bounces off the couple huddled together in the corner. James sits with his back against the cold wall, and Iris lay huddled in his lap. He holds her so tight she can barely breathe, but she doesn't notice. She still cradles the now cold infant in her arms, tears falling in as steady stream down her face." I had gone to tell my father we were leaving..." she said hoarsely, "when I heard them coming, I hid Alupe under the blankets. They caught me coming out of the teepee... I tries to run, to get them away from her... but they held me down, then she started crying." She held the tiny body closer to her "One of them went in and came out holding her by her foot..." She started sobbing, "He threw - he threw her..." She broke down completely; her whole body shaking as if her grief was determined to tear it's way out of her.

James held her close, rocking her, glaring into the firelight, his tears falling unheeded onto Iris' hair. All strength has left his body, and he is still bleeding slowly from numerous wounds that have not yet healed, but none of that matters now. Nothing matters to him except holding onto Iris, and trying to change the night's events by force of will. A thousand thoughts of "If Id's" rolls through his mind, through BOTH their minds, along with curses thrown at unseen and unknown gods who could let such a thing happen to innocents. The night wears on as it always does, unaware that under it's skies, two people's lives lay uprooted and frozen, never to be the same.

The next morning, they made their way to the near by creek, where Iris carefully and gently washed away the blood and mud covering the tiny child. Once she is done, James wrapped Alupe in a blanket he had brought from the camp, and then without discussing it, they begin their trek to the red bluffs, where they had first revealed their love for each other. When they arrived, James sank to his knees, and held the small bundle to his heart, his shoulders shaking as he sobbed. Iris knelt next to him, and he pulled her to him, wrapping his arms around her as they cradled their daughter between them. They clung to each other in desperation, as if afraid the other would vanish if they let go. When the tears slowed, James moved away from Iris, leaving her to hold Alupe, and began digging. He began by scraping mud from the surface, then, when he hit hard dirt, he began bitterly gouging at it with his claws, not even noticing when he cracked one up the middle. Even as he dug, memories from Alupe's short life ran pell-mell through his mind. Memories of holding her that first night, the first time her fingers closed around one of his. When the grave was deep enough, he knelt next to his wife. "It's time to say goodbye darlin." He whispered softly. Iris looked at him through tear-reddened eyes, then slowly nodded. She rose to her feet and they both moved to stand next to the grave.

James took the bundle and moved back the blanket quick enough for one last kiss, then gently placed her in the grave. When it was filled, they covered it in stones to keep the animals away. They stood holding each other, staring at the small mound. A sudden gust of cool wind swept over the bluffs, and James shivered, looking up at the sky. The sun had burned off the last of the rain clouds, and it was now a pale blue. "How can the sun still rise," Iris whispered, "When my people are not here to greet it?"

James took a shuddering breath. “Iris “ he turned her to face him, “ Iris, Darlin’, look at me, “ he said gently raising her chin. He looked into her beautiful dark eyes, now rimmed in red. “ We have to go on for them. As long as we’re here, their memory will live on through us. “That night, as they slept in the cave, James was haunted by nightmares that made no sense, yet seemed familiar. Dreams of a young boy thrust alone into a world he wasn’t ready to meet. Death and pain; love and sorrow. Each time he awakened, he could almost remember the voices haunting his mind, but after a moment, they would fade away again. He drew nearer to Iris, holding her as close to himself as he could, trying to sleep once again.

*This is all I have written so far.. I’m still working on the ending, which involves James and Iris being separated, then reuniting again in present day.. hence “Just a Matter of Time” Any suggestions are welcome and appreciated .*

*~Jennifer Leamon*