



The Worst Tomboy Ever

I'm not the kind of writer who has to know everything about her characters going into a book. Most of the time, when I sit down to start writing, I know very little: the main character's full name, the book's premise, maybe the first names of one or two supporting players, and that's pretty much it. But there are a handful of questions that I always find myself asking as I write those first few chapters, a motley list of things I end up wanting to know about the characters I'll be spending a large chunk of my waking hours with for the foreseeable future.

I like to know if my characters have any brothers or sisters, and if so, where they fall in the birth order.

I like to know how early they get up in the morning and whether or not their socks typically match (mine almost never do).

If my main character is a girl, I like to know how often she wears her hair in a ponytail and where she keeps extra ponytail holders when her hair is down.

And last but not least, I like to know about my characters' scars: how they got them, what they look like, and whether or not they're

the kind of thing that other people notice at all.

Bryn, the main character in *Raised by Wolves* and *Trial by Fire*, wears her hair in a ponytail whenever she wants it out of her face—which, considering she spends her free time running, fighting, and training to do both of the above, is more often than not.

She starts out the first book an only child, but since she was raised in the middle of a werewolf pack, there are a lot of people she counts as family who aren't related to her by blood.

Bryn doesn't wear socks unless she absolutely has to, and she has three parallel scars—scratch marks—over her hipbone, given to her by the pack's alpha when she was four years old. For Bryn, the scar holds actual, ceremonial meaning, but even in less extreme cases, I'm a believer that you can tell a lot about a character—or a person—by hearing the stories behind their scars.

From that perspective, it seems appropriate that looking at my own life helps me sort out the parts that influenced me to write the *Raised by Wolves* series. Unlike the mark on Bryn's hip, my scars aren't

particularly big or noticeable, and none of them involved overcoming the odds in the way that Bryn has her entire life. My scars are little, the kind of thing you don't even notice unless you're looking, but they tell you a lot about me—and why I write the things I do.

The Worst Tomboy Ever

99% of the scars on my body were acquired before age twelve, most of them before age eight. Every single one of them can be summed up with a single phrase: *Worst. Tomboy. Ever.* I'm naturally a pretty girly person, but growing up, I was surrounded on all sides by guys. My only sibling is a brother, two years older than myself. Our next-door neighbors had three boys who were four, eight, and ten years older than me, respectively. By the time I was in kindergarten, there were a half dozen other boys on our block and exactly one other girl, who was eleven when I was five. I was the youngest and the smallest and the absolutely most determined to keep up with kids literally twice my size.

Seriously, of the guys in my old neighborhood? Four of them

(including my older brother) are now over six foot five.

Suffice it to say that there were many games of pickup basketball in which I never once managed to lay hands on the ball. There were also many games of “hide and seek” in which I was never found. I spent my formative years thinking that I was some kind of hiding prodigy, but eventually, I realized that no one was looking for me, and with that realization came an implicit understanding: if I wanted to be a part of things, I couldn’t just sit back and wait for people to come find me.

I had to find them.

I also had to keep up. And when I really just *couldn’t*—because, hey, I was the youngest and the smallest and they had me outnumbered about a zillion to one—I still had to try, because if the boys were going to leave me behind, gosh darn it, I was going to make them *work* to do it.

As I’m sure my brother—who is one of my favorite people and with whom I’m very close—would tell you, I was a very vexing, very stubborn little sister.

As a result, I fell out of a lot of trees. I skinned a lot of knees. I made an alliance with one of the oldest boys in the neighborhood, in a calculated Pre-K effort to even the score—but I remember *knowing*, with all of my four-year-old soul, that I would always be the smallest and the youngest and the one who had to fight to keep up.

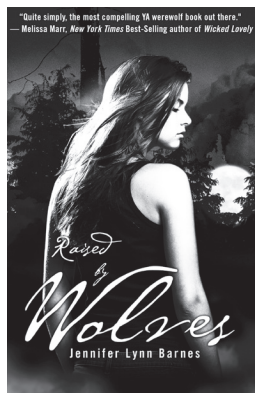
And if someone got hurt? It was probably going to be me.

I have a scar on my hairline from getting hit in the head with a diving stick at the local pool. There’s a patch of slightly discol-

ored skin on my left knee, from one of numerous dives I took on the pavement. The knuckle on my right middle finger is bigger than it should be from being jammed roughly eight million times, and there’s a small vertical line on my upper lip, whose origin I believe began with the phrase “Catch!”

That’s what happens when you’re the baby. And the only girl. And really, really bad at being a tomboy, despite your best efforts to the contrary.

In *Raised by Wolves*, Bryn is in a similar situation—not because she’s not tough—she is—but



because no matter what she does, she is always going to be the smallest and the slowest and the most likely to lose a fight. She’s a human girl who has grown up surrounded almost entirely by werewolves, and it’s just a fact of her life that no matter what she does, she’ll never be as fast as they are or as strong or as lethal. She’ll never be able to take them in a fair fight, and she knows it—but that doesn’t stop her from pushing herself.

It doesn’t stop her from trying.

Not surprisingly, given my own background, in addition to being the only human among her generation in the pack, Bryn is also one of the only girls. In her world, female werewolves are very rare and only occur as half of a set of fraternal twins. As such, the males are very

protective of the females—and as much as Bryn has to fight to keep up, she has to fight doubly hard to convince them that she’s a big girl who can take care of herself.

Remember that brother I mentioned? The one who’s six foot five? He is, to this day, of the opinion that his little sister should never, ever date. He also has a habit of watching the movie *Taken* every time I’m getting ready to leave the country and then calling to coach me in the art of *not* getting kidnapped. If he could, he’d probably fly around with me and glare at anyone who even thought of looking at me askance—and any guy who thought of looking at me *at all*.

When I sat down to write *Raised by Wolves*, there was never a point where I thought about it and said, “I’m going to write a book about what it means to have to be scrappy, to have to fight tooth and nail just to have a prayer of a chance of *almost* keeping up. And it’s also going to be a book about what it means to be an independent girl who gets underestimated *because* she’s a girl, and who has to fight to keep other people from putting her under glass.”

But, you know, I skinned a lot of knees growing up, and I’m a firm believer that when people say “write what you know,” the most important thing is to write what you *emotionally* know. I write about spies and werewolves, faeries and demon hunters, and a whole slew of other things that I don’t really know—and for the most part, I do very little research. But consciously or not, when a character or premise sticks with me enough to make me want to spend a year

of my life writing and rewriting and polishing a book, it's because it strikes some kind of chord with me. It's because, on some level, I can relate.

That's part of the reason that I feel like one of the most important things an aspiring writer can do—in addition to reading a lot and writing a lot—is to get out and live life. The more experiences you have, the more you know. You might be able to get information from reading or research, but the feelings? The emotional authenticity? That comes from living.

I started writing professionally when I was still a teenager, and part of me was always afraid that



I might look back ten years down the line and think, “Wow, I spent so much time writing books that I missed out on a lot.” And then I'd be out of college and older and wouldn't have had any life experiences other than writing. And if that happened, I figured that I'd eventually run out of things to write about. In order to circumvent such an outcome, I had two rules for my double life as a college student and an author.

First, I was going to major in whatever struck my fancy—even if it had nothing whatsoever to do with English, writing, or books.

And second—I wrote after everyone else went to bed, because

that way, I could be sure I wasn't sacrificing anything other than sleep. I was less well rested than I might have been otherwise, but it was worth it, because there were so many things that I wouldn't have had the chance to experience. It was good for me as a person *and* as a writer.

Because you never know where you're going to get an idea for a book.

Monkey Girl

In addition to scars of the “Worst Tomboy Ever” variety, I also have a tiny, pinpoint-sized scar where my right hand meets my wrist, and one that looks like a fork in the road on the middle finger on my left hand. I refer to them as “monkey scars”—though one of them technically came from working with lemurs.

In middle and high school, when people asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, the answer was always “a writer and”—what followed the “and” varied. I went through a doctor phase. And a lawyer phase. Somehow, I ended up a scientist. Starting my sophomore year in college, I worked as a research assistant for a professor whose specialty was primate cognition. I eventually went on to grad school, designing my own experiments and spending chunks of time at a variety of field sites, one of which we affectionately refer to as “Monkey Island.”

The island itself is relatively small—you can hike from one side to the other in a little over twenty minutes—but it's home to nearly a thousand free-ranging rhesus monkeys. No humans live on the island, so if you're among the small num-

ber of researchers who travel there via boat each morning, it doesn't take long to realize that you're massively outnumbered. It also doesn't take long to realize that the whole “Oh, they're so cute and cuddly and funny!” thing is nothing more than monkey propaganda.

I've studied many species of primates in a variety of different locations, and while they are occasionally cute and often funny, “cuddly” isn't nearly as apt a description as “cunning.” These are wild animals, and during my first summer on the island, firsthand experience taught me that thinking like a human around animals who, in many ways, do not is a recipe for disaster.

For example, you might think, “Hey, that monkey is smiling at me!” And you might be very, very wrong, because the monkey facial expression that looks the most like a human smile is a fear grimace, and chances are pretty good that the monkey who's making it at you *doesn't* want you to come any closer.

Eventually, that first summer, I started picking up on the subtleties—the posture, the facial expressions, the importance of eye gaze and the fact that looking certain monkeys straight in the eye might be seen (by them) as a challenge. In some ways, it's like speaking another language—and without even realizing I was doing it, that's something I integrated into Bryn's perspective in *Raised by Wolves*. Growing up around werewolves has made her more or less fluent in the unspoken—and animal—cues that define even their human interactions. Bryn knows what it might cost her if she meets a dominant

wolf's gaze head-on, and she's just as aware of what it communicates if she looks away. A lifetime of experience has taught her how to hold her head, how to keep from showing fear, and how to read their body language for signs of danger.

She's pretty much a werewolf whisperer, and even though that wasn't something I intentionally set out to do, it impacts everything she says and does. Ultimately, the fact that werewolves don't always think about things like violence and survival in human terms becomes one of the driving forces behind the conflicts and themes of the series. The biggest example of this can be summed up in a single word: *hierarchy*. Bryn's mentor in the books—a thousand-year-old werewolf named Callum—is the alpha of the pack she grew up in, and the fact that he is alpha means that he can't always behave the way he would if the two of them were human. Hierarchy matters to werewolves, and a challenge to the alpha is settled in ways best described as *brutal* or *vicious*.

Like my experiences learning how to read monkeys' posture, expressions, and behavior, the importance of hierarchy to pack animals—and specifically the importance of knowing where a given individual falls in that hierarchy—was something I learned firsthand. My first summer on Monkey Island, after I'd just started to feel comfortable as one of the only humans surrounded by a thousand wild animals, I ran into a fairly typical Monkey Island problem.

I wanted my experimental apparatus. Unfortunately, the monkey who was sitting on it wanted it,

too. I waited for him to get up and move. He showed no inclination whatsoever to do so. I inched closer and closer to him, in an attempt to make him just uncomfortable enough to get up to leave.

The monkey was not impressed. He did not get up and leave.

I remember that he looked so peaceful there, sitting on my apparatus, like he was one with the monkey world. I felt horrible for what I had to do next, and even apologized to him for it. I believe the dialogue went something like this:

“Sorry, Mr. Monkey, but they said that if something like this happened, I should just make a mildly threatening motion, and even though you seem like a very sweet, albeit *gargantuan* monkey, I'm going to have to—[insert bloodcurdling scream here].”

I'd been told that most monkeys respond to this type of threat by scampering off—but, as it turned out, the monkey sitting on my apparatus wasn't like most monkeys. Of the thousand monkeys on the island, he had, at one point, been *numero uno*, the alpha of the largest, strongest group on the island—and, therefore, not the monkey a scrawny human girl wanted to halfheartedly threaten.

On the bright side, the monkey did get off my apparatus.

On the down side, he immediately leapt *at me*.

I took off running. He ran after me. I kept running. So did he. I was screaming. He was screaming.

Luckily, this story does not end with me acquiring a rather large and impressive monkey scar. But

it *could have*—all because I didn't know that the monkey I was dealing with was far enough up in the island's hierarchy that he wouldn't respond well to that kind of challenge.

I didn't decide to write a book about werewolves because I had firsthand experience with pack animals. I didn't even make that connection until a friend read the book and pointed out to me that it had that particular aspect of my college experience written all over it. But much like growing up as the youngest and the only girl, the time I've spent on Monkey Island—and at other field sites—has shaped the way I think about the world, and those are the kinds of things that naturally work their way into books.

I'm currently hard at work writing the third book in the Raised by Wolves series (book two, *Trial by Fire*, came out in June). I'm still living a double life, as a PhD student and a writer, and I can see that reflected in Bryn's growing realization that she's always going to be pulled between two worlds, too—but honestly?

I don't think either one of us would have it any other way.

When she's not writing about werewolves, Jennifer Lynn Barnes spends her time playing with monkeys and four-year-old children (who have more in common than one might think), because she's working on a PhD in developmental psychology and does research on child and primate cognition. In the course of her life, she's been a Fulbright Scholar, a debutante, a competitive cheerleader, a volleyball player, and a devoted fan of the supernatural, the spooky, and the surreal. She graduated from

Yale University in 2006 with a degree in cognitive science and Cambridge University in 2007 with a master's in psychiatry. She wrote her first published novel when she was still a teenager and has since written six others, including *Raised by Wolves*,

Tattoo, Fate, and The Squad series. Her obsessions include all things Joss Whedon, potential superpowers (of which she has several, including, but not limited to, the ability to get ready in under three minutes in the morning, really good parking mojo,

and occasionally prophetic dreams), the psychology of fiction, and things that go bump in the night. When she's not visiting Monkey Island or writing in Irish castles, she splits her time between New Haven, Connecticut, and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Call for Candidates for CEL 2012 Election

In the 2012 election, CEL members will choose an Associate Chair and two Members-at-Large. The Nominating Committee is now ready to accept nominees for next year's election. *To be eligible for Associate Chair*, a nominee must have been or currently be serving as an elected or appointed member of the CEL Executive Committee. The Associate Chair has many duties, such as presiding at business meetings in the absence of the Chair and coordinating the CEL State Liaison Network and the Exemplary Leadership award. The term of the Associate Chair is six years (two as Associate Chair, two as Chair, and two as Past Chair). *To be eligible for Member-at-Large*, a nominee generally will have attended two or more CEL conventions and volunteered in some capacity, such as working on the Hospitality Committee or presenting/presiding at a concurrent session. A Member-at-Large represents the general membership on the Executive Committee and assists in planning functions of the Executive Committee. The term of the Member-at-Large is three years. Two candidates for Associate Chair and four candidates for Member-at-Large will be on the 2012 ballot. *Those who wish to nominate a qualified CEL member should check with the individual and affirm her/his willingness to serve prior to submitting a nomination letter.* Nominations should include as much pertinent information as possible about the nominee as a leader and her/his involvement in CEL as well as contact information (home mailing address, email address, and phone number). Nominations may be mailed **by November 1** to Ken Spurlock, CEL Nominations Chair, 2705 Tanglewood Court, Villa Hills, KY 41017, emailed to ken46s@fuse.net by November 1, or hand-delivered to Spurlock at the 2011 Convention in Chicago.
