

E'land

S.M. Wolf

E'land, Denon, K'val, T'for, J'nor and this story are copyrighted 2014 by S.M. Wolf. They may not be used without prior, written permission of the author. Any resemblance to any person, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

E'land stopped dead. Her ears twitched back and forth. She raised her right paw and made a fist. Behind her the eight other wolves of her squad melted into the cover of the forest.

There was nothing immediately obvious, but E'land could not shake the feeling that something was amiss. She silently signaled to J'nor, her best scout, to follow her as she advanced down the narrow game path that they were following.

The two gray wolves quickly covered a hindered yards, but neither saw or heard anything.

“Damn it, J'nor, I know that there is something out there!” E'land whispered.

The young male gray wolf just shrugged. He seemed to have no concerns about what might be out there waiting for them.

E'land frowned and turned away. She liked J'nor and respected his abilities, but he frequently showed no initiative or curiosity.

Above the wolven soldiers, the sun broke through the clouds. A patch of sunlight was suddenly visible through the tall trees surrounding them. E'land raised her head just a bit. She gasped in shock.

“What is it?” J'nor asked.

E'land stood and pointed. Her squad quickly advanced to join them.

“Oh, my...,” K'val said in disbelief.

The trees were ancient. Most were over forty feet in diameter and hundreds of feet tall. They stretched in twin rows on either side of a wide boulevard overgrown with brush and smaller trees.

“What is it?” T'for asked.

E'land said nothing but advanced into the broken sunlight. She walked reverently down the boulevard. As she approached the far end, she could see a mound of debris.

When she reached the debris, E'land set aside her weapons and started to pull branches and leaves off the pile.

"What is it?" T'for asked again.

.Wryly, K'val replied, "The First Altar, no doubt."

Some of the wolves laughed, but others gasped in surprise.

"Do you think it is, K'val?" T'for asked.

E'land replied, "She's just pulling your tail, T'for. Though to be honest, I don't think I have ever seen any of our god's altars that are even close to this old.

"Help me clean it off."

"Do we have time?" K'val asked as she set down her weapons and began to help.

"Probably," E'land replied. She paused for just a moment to ask, "Are you in that much of a hurry to die?"

K'val snorted a negative, but E'land's question reminded all of them that they were heading to a desperate battle that they were certain to lose.

"No, not really," K'val said quietly.

The wolves were able to quickly strip away the debris and dirt. Underneath was an altar made of stone so old that it had turned black as the deepest midnight darkness. The base was an unhewn stone five feet across. On top of it was a thick octagonal slab with a curious cupped surface. An obelisk a foot across rose from the back of the altar stone. It was unadorned except for a single bas-relief carving on the front. It was a feral wolf head, ancient symbol of the wolves' god.

E'land reached into her pack and took out some cleaning supplies for her weapons.

"We're going to wash it?" T'for asked in some surprise.

"Yes," was all that E'land said as she went to work on the dirty surface with a cloth.

T'for and some of the others grumbled, but they quickly set to work. In a half hour the stone surfaces gleamed in the sunlight for the first time in untold centuries.

The squad packed up their gear and picked up their weapons. One by one, each laid a small offering to their god on the altar. E'land was last. She placed a small ceremonial dagger on the cold, dark stone. It had been a gift from many years ago when she was still a cub and had thought that she would become a priestess. She had carried it with her for years, even after she had turned to becoming a warrior. She knew that she would not need it any longer, and she

would rather it be left as an offering to her god rather than lost to the enemy that they would soon face.

The squad moved out smartly. They still had a day or more to reach the gathering point of the Wolf Army on the west bank of Angus Creek. E'land was secretly glad that they had the opportunity to stop at their god's altar and pray one last time, even if it was a brief, silent prayer.

Darkness was falling when J'nor, who had taken point, suddenly stopped. He raised his right paw and gestured forward and to the left. E'land crept forward until she could see what was there.

Sitting on a stump beside a road was a single male wolf. He wore no armor, and he carried no goods. Instead, a mandolin was strapped across his back, and a small bag with what appeared to be other musical instruments lay at his feet. As she watched, he raised a set of Pan pipes to his lips and began to play. The notes drifted across the forest to the watching wolves. E'land nearly gasped at their sheer beauty. She had no idea who this wandering minstrel was, but he was an incredibly accomplished musician. She and the others waited and listened raptly until the last notes of the musician's song drifted away on the light breeze.

E'land stood and walked out onto the road. The unknown wolf looked up at her and smiled broadly.

"Hello!" he said cheerfully. "I gather that I had an audience. A performer always appreciates one."

"My name is E'land," the wolfess said as the rest of her squad gathered around the pair.

"Hello, E'land!" the male said with a broad grin. He seemed to have no care in the world, even as he faced nine heavily armed warriors of unknown intentions. "My name is Denon.

"What brings you to these parts?"

E'land blinked in confusion.

"What?" she asked in shock.

Denon crossed his arms and asked again, "I said, 'What brings you to these parts?'"

"You don't know?" E'land asked in surprise.

"No," Denon replied.

"How the h-," E'land began hotly. She paused for a moment to collect her wits and try to control her anger, but it barely helped.

“What do you think we are doing here?!” E’land nearly shouted at the sitting wolf. “The entire Bovine Army is coming this way with the intent to kill and skin all of us!” E’land shouted at Denon in anger, “We’re going to try to stop them!”

“Not that it is going to do any good,” E’land added bitterly. “They outnumber us a hundred to one. We are just going to try to delay them long enough for most of our people to escape to the west into the wastelands. We’ll all be dead in three days.”

Denon cocked his head. He looked up at E’land. His smile never wavered. He said, “Well, in that case, I think have to go with you.”

“What?!” E’land exclaimed.

“Well,” Denon said as he stood and picked up his pack, “it is where the stuff of ballads will be.”

“You crazy bard,” E’land screamed at him. “Didn’t you hear what I said? We are going to all die!”

“Perhaps,” Denon said as he shouldered his pack. “But then again, perhaps not.”

The musician smiled and even laughed, “It will be the stuff of legends!”

E’land clenched her paws. She wanted to throttle this crazy story-teller as he stood there smiling at her. He was certifiably insane to head towards certain death. She actually growled at him.

After several seconds, E’land said, “Fine! Come along if you want to die.”

The wolffess stalked off down the road towards the army’s gathering point. Over her shoulder, she yelled back at Denon, “But don’t complain to me when you do!”

E’land could hear Denon’s hearty laugh behind her as he and the rest of her squad followed E’land.

That night the wolves camped around a small fire. After dinner, the warriors took out their weapons and carefully cleaned and sharpened them. No one spoke until Denon suddenly said, “What a sullen troop! You obviously need a song to cheer you up!”

E’land turned and half opened her mouth to reprimand him when he struck up a lively song on his mandolin. The lyrics told of a knight errant questing for his fair maiden. The song quickly turned bawdy and more than a little risqué as the knight had one comical adventure after another as each verse went by. E’land found herself rolling on the ground laughing as the final verse played out with the knight finding his maiden in a brothel bed with her tail raised high. It was irreverent and almost smutty but so hilarious that she could not take umbrage. The rest of the squad was laughing just as hard.

Denon strummed the last few notes on his mandolin and finished his song. He was grinning even wider as he watched his audience's reactions.

It took quite a bit of effort, but E'land managed to get out past her laughter, "Where- Where did you learn that one?"

Denon gave the mandolin a few negligent strums and replied vaguely, "Oh, it is an old song I heard some time ago. I've been adding to it every so often."

E'land shook her head.

"It is wonderful," she said. "Thank you for the song."

Denon quietly said, "You are welcome."

For the first time in several days, the warriors went to sleep with a light heart.

The next day passed quickly as the wolves travelled mile after mile in their ground covering lope. Denon had no trouble keeping up with the warriors, but E'land was not surprised. As a travelling bard, he had to travel long distances quickly. No doubt he was used to their pace.

The squad met up with other wolves as they grew closer to the gathering point. They entered the temporary camp as part of over one hundred wolven warriors. Several hundred more were already there, waiting for reinforcements and the Bovine Army. A major in the Wolf Army directed E'land's squad and Denon to their bivouac. They set up their tents and then gratefully lay down to get some rest before dinner.

The wolves took a communal dinner at the center of their camp. They were largely silent until the Queen Alpha moved to the center. She had come to be with her warriors in this battle while her mate led the rest of the wolves to the west and questionable safety in the wastelands. She addressed her assembled warriors.

"You know why we are here and what we need to do," she told them. "So I won't go over the details. We hold the line on this side of Angus Creek as long as we can. Every hour we can hold is one more hour headstart for our packs and cubs."

The ruling alpha ducked her head and sighed.

"Unfortunately," she continued, "we are not likely to survive to see sunset tomorrow."

There were several moments of silence before E'land's alpha raised her head again.

"But I am proud of you!" she called out strongly. "Proud of every one of you! You have made this choice of your own free will. You have chosen to stand beside me and sacrifice so that others may live. We may not survive to see them, but we shall surely meet them again when they come to us in our god's house."

“For tonight, you may do as you wish. There will be no military regiment tonight. You deserve one last hurrah, as it were, before tomorrow.”

E’land was shocked when her queen pointed to Denon and added, “For those who wish it, we have some entertainment, thanks to our dear E’land and her troop. I am told that Denon is an accomplished bard.”

Denon strode to the center of the assembled wolves. Without the slightest hint of self-consciousness, he bowed to them and began to play a tune.

Denon did not repeat the salacious song of the previous evening, but instead started with a pair of old ballads about brave warriors fighting against incredible odds and winning. They were well known by all, but somehow in his paws, they turned into something new that heartened all who heard them.

The bard set aside his mandolin and performed a short skit where he played a buyer trying to buy an apple from a slightly deaf merchant. It took a simple, everyday occurrence and turned it upside-down, backwards and inside-out. The queen was laughing as hard as E’land when Denon walked away from the vendor, sans apple, to a thunderous ovation from the gathered army.

Next Denon took out his Pan pipes. E’land leaned forward to listen. As the first notes of the song filtered across the camp, all the wolves fell silent. Even the fire seemed to quiet to listen to the song. It transported E’land to the high country in winter, the chase across snow, the thrill of the kill and the glad return home to the pack, all without a single spoken word.

Denon continued to perform for another hour. He mixed known and unknown songs with playful skits and somber instrumental pieces. He finished by leading the entire army in a simple campfire song that they had all sung many times before. It somehow helped to make them feel closer to each other.

After the song, the assembled wolves gave Denon a thunderous ovation. As the echo of their clapping died, the wolves began to quietly wander away into the gloom. E’land found herself watching Denon pack up his things. She smiled and sighed.

“Ask him,” K’val said from beside E’land.

E’land looked to her right and found K’val and T’for paw-in-paw.

“Ask him what?” E’land asked in some confusion.

“You know what!” K’val said with some heat. “Why do you think the queen let everyone wander off tonight?”

E’land blinked. She looked around. There were a lot of pairs of wolves heading into the surrounding forest. She even saw many pair kissing and cuddling. E’land gulped.

“I- I’m not sure-“ E’land started to protest.

“E’land,” K’val said, “I am your best friend as well as your second-in-command. Take my advice. Go ask him. You are not going to get another chance.”

K’val turned and gave T’for a rather passionate kiss before turning back to E’land.

“It’s what everyone else is doing, and if you don’t snag him someone else will soon,” K’val finished before walking away with T’for. E’land could see their tails twined about each other as they disappeared into the shadows of the woods.

E’land turned back to look at Denon. He was talking with several other wolves, mostly females. His light voice and easy laugh carried easily to her ears. He seemed to have no care in the world. She had to admit that he looked good. He was long and lanky but muscular under his pelt. It was the body of a runner. His rail was bushy and looked so huggable to her. His eyes were wide and open, free of any deception. Instinctively, she knew that she could trust him and that he would neither abuse nor take advantage of her.

There was, of course, one small problem. E’land had never mated before. She knew about it, had heard her friends talking about it and even spied on some couples that she had caught unaware. She was interested, but she had never found a male that she wanted in that particular way, or even a female.

Still, her time was rapidly running out, and there were only a few choices. Most of the camp had already melted into the woods in pairs and small groups. Even the Queen had taken two of her highest ranking officers to her tent. E’land could not see what was happening, but there was little doubt from the sounds emanating from within what was happening.

E’land reached a decision. She strode up to Denon and asked firmly, “Ready to go?”

“Eh?” Denon said as he cocked an eyebrow.

“Time to go!” she said in a commanding voice.

E’land grabbed the strap of his slung mandolin and pulled him along behind her. She headed towards the woods with the musician in tow. She continued walking with her eyes set firmly forward as they passed copulating couples. She did not stop until they were well past the other wolves.

E’land turned and looked at Denon. He had a mildly amused expression on his face. Suddenly, she felt timid and uncertain. She had never done anything like this before.

“Are we there yet?” Denon asked in a slightly whiny tone.

E'land closed her eyes and laughed. He sounded just like a young cub on a long journey. All of her fears, apprehensions and uncertainties disappeared.

Denon laughed as well.

"I'm glad I can still make you laugh," he told E'land.

Denon's tone turned more serious.

"Did you have a reason for bringing me out here?" he asked.

E'land stared at the ground. She drew circles in the dirt with her toe. She felt so young and inexperienced. As a traveling bard, Denon had probably had any female he wanted for a night's pleasure. He was no doubt very experienced. She was not sure how to ask him for what she wanted.

"Well, yes," she said hesitantly.

After a moment's pause, E'land continued, "It's... It's just that we are all going to die tomorrow."

The wolfess had to swallow hard.

E'land took a deep breath and gathered her courage.

"I've never... You know... And I kind of want to... With you," E'land managed to get out with difficulty.

E'land looked up to see Denon's reaction. He was smiling at her, a very deep and loving smile. He stepped forward and took E'land into his arms. She was surprised at how strong his embrace was. She was not sure if she could have broken it if she desired, but she did not want to do so.

"E'land, are you asking me to mate with you, for your first time?" Denon asked.

E'land could only nod her head yes as she stared into his eyes.

"I am honored. And flattered," Denon said carefully. "But why me? Surely you have someone else in your life that you want."

E'land shook her head no.

"I never had anyone I wanted, at least like that. Now, I only have this one last night. For some reason, I trust and want you. You make me feel good, and you make me laugh, even in the darkest of times."

Denon gently kissed her on the forehead. It was a chaste kiss, yet it seemed to ignite a smoldering fire within her.

“E’land, what if I was to tell you that you would survive tomorrow and live a very long life? Would you still want to do this?” Denon asked.

E’land laughed bitterly.

“I’m not going to live a long life. None of us are,” she said.

“But what if you did?” Denon pressed her. “Would you still want to do this? Have me take your virginity, one of your greatest treasures? And might it be estrus rather than love talking?”

“Yes.” She replied, and she meant it. For some reason, she wanted this male like no other wolf she had ever met.

With that recognition, something besides lust stirred within E’land. She pushed against him. He allowed her to slip from his grasp.

“Look,” she said with some anger, “I know I am not the best looking female in the world. And I know this is sudden, but I don’t have much choice.”

E’land’s anger grew as she put her fists on her hips.

“I’m not in heat, and even if I were it would not matter. I want this, and I want you!”

E’land reached out and grabbed Denon’s jerkin. She pulled him forward and down. Their lips met, and she kissed him briefly.

E’land broke their kiss and commanded Denon, “Now stop screwing around and fuck me!”

Denon only laughed as she dragged him into the bushes. He gave a small tug and directed her to the right. The bushes parted to reveal a small clearing. Pine needles and moss covered the forest floor. From above, the light of the full moon spilled into the wolf-size forest opening, giving it an almost surreal beauty. E’land had to stop and stare. It was a perfect bower for her first mating.

Denon moved beside E’land. His left arm slipped around her waist. He looked into her eyes questioningly. Without a word, E’land knelt and pulled him down beside her.

“Please,” E’land breathed in a barely audible voice.

Denon leaned forward and kissed E’land. There was nothing chaste or brief about this kiss. It was the kiss of a lover. She was barely conscious of his arms encircling her or his paws stroking her back. She was totally lost in his kiss.

E’land came to her senses some when she felt a gentle tug on her jerkin. Denon was untying the strings holding her clothing on. She grabbed his mandolin and lifted it over his head. As soon as

it was clear, her lips found his again. Her paws went to work on his clothing, and she almost ripped off his clothes in her eagerness to undress him.

Denon broke their kiss and asked, "Enthusiastic, are we?"

E'land just pushed him over onto his back. She grabbed his pants and yanked them off. She flung them aside and looked down at the now naked male. Her eyes zeroed in on his crotch. She smiled when she saw his fully erect penis. He was aroused and ready for her. He wanted her as much as she found herself wanting him.

In a predatory fashion, E'land crawled on top of Denon. She pressed his body down into the soft forest floor. She pulled off her jerkin and top and tossed them aside. A moment later her pants joined Denon's on top of a nearby bush.

"I want you *now!*" E'land told Denon emphatically.

E'land used one of her wrestling moves to roll Denon over. He lay belly to belly on top of her. She could feel his hard, hot shaft pressing against her lower belly.

Denon reached out and stroked the left side of E'land's face. He kissed her gently yet passionately. She murred into his lips.

E'land felt Denon shift. He raised his hips. Her heart beat faster as she knew that the piercing of her maidenhead was upon her.

Denon broke his kiss. He asked E'land, "Are you *absolutely* sure about this? There is no going back, once it is done. It may hurt some, and there will likely be blood."

E'land looked into Denon's eyes. She saw genuine concern there. He was worried about her and wanted to be certain that she felt that she was making the right choice.

"Yes, Denon," E'land said softly. "I want this. And I am a warrior. I am used to pain and blood."

Denon flashed her a crooked smile and replied wryly, "Yeah, but 'down there'?"

E'land actually laughed, just as he had intended. She smiled and wrapped her arms around his neck. Their lips met again. She felt his hips push forward. The tip of his penis spread her labia. She braced herself, but there was only a little pressure followed by a brief moment of pain. A few moments later, she could smell the scent of her blood.

E'land closed her eyes. The loss of her virginity at first seemed so anti-climatic. She felt the strange sensation of Denon penetrating her, but she did not understand why the females talked so much about how great sex was when the males were not around to hear them.

That changed quickly as Denon slowly worked his way deeper into her vagina. She was filled and even stretched by his cock. The sensation of his shaft rubbing against her interior walls brought her new, unknown pleasures. Her body responded like it never had before, and she felt a strange sense of completeness and joy beyond the physical pleasure. When Denon found her G-spot, she had the most intense orgasm that she had ever experienced. When she finally came back down to a warm afterglow, she understood at last. She briefly wondered why she had not taken up one of the males' offer before tonight, but then she realized that she had only ever wanted Denon like this and that she was so glad that she had waited for him.

Denon made love to her for what felt like hours. He was gentle and tender, always thinking of her first. He was a seasoned guide on her journey, and he made sure that she had pleasure first. She learned much that night about her body that she had never known, and even more about the pleasures that a male could give a female. She insisted on pleasuring him as well, and more than once they lay muzzle to tail as she licked and sucked his penis.

The night seemed to never end. E'land felt energized, not tired. The moon continued to shine down upon the lovers, illuminating the small clearing and giving them light for their assignation. E'land put the sight of Denon's naked body away in a corner of her memory to take with her to the afterlife.

Eventually, E'land felt her stamina and energy begin to wane. Denon laid her back on the soft forest floor and stroked her face and neck.

"I think it is time for you to go to sleep now, E'land. We have a big day tomorrow," Denon said.

"I'm okay," E'land started to say, but she was asleep before she could finish the second word.

E'land woke to the delicious smell of bacon. She rolled over to see Denon sitting beside her. He was clothed, which disappointed her, but he also had two large breakfasts.

"I thought you might be hungry after last night," he told her with a grin. "I grabbed some food from the camp."

With a jaunty wink and a bit of a knowing leer, he added. "Plenty of protein for you!"

E'land laughed

"They also want us back there in about an hour," Denon added in a much more somber voice. Memory of what they would soon face was like being hit with a bucket of ice water. Still, she was glad to be here with Denon right now.

E'land sat up. By all rights, her body should ache from all the things that they had done last night, but she felt strangely rested and refreshed instead. She looked down at her crotch. There was some blood surrounding her slit and on her tail, but hardly more than she would have bled from a small scratch. She had menstruated more in the past.

E'land took the food from Denon and said, "Thank you."

"You're welcome for the food," he replied.

"I meant thank you for last night," E'land replied. She ducked her head and had to look away. "I was rather... insistent."

Denon laughed heartily.

"I would say that you were more than a 'little insistent'. You damn near raped me!" he told her, but he never stopped laughing or smiling, and E'land knew that he was not upset with her.

"I just wanted to see what sex was all about before..."

E'land's words caught in her muzzle.

"Before we all die," Denon finished for her.

Denon leaned in and kissed her. He looked directly into her eyes and said in the most serious voice she had ever heard him use, "We are not dead yet, and not all things have played themselves out. The day is young, and I expect it to have many surprises. I would not dig your grave just yet."

E'land could only close her eyes. Denon seemed so certain, but she knew the truth. She was not a pup. Still, on this wonderful morning, she did not want to argue with him. She started eating her breakfast.

The pair ate in silence, but they often touched and rubbed against one another. E'land found herself aroused and happy again by the time that the food was gone. She wrapped her arms around Denon and asked him, "Do you think we have time for a quickie?"

Before Denon could reply, they heard the sound of a trumpet sounding assembly.

"Bugger!" E'land exclaimed, which caused Denon to laugh.

Denon helped her dress, and the pair returned to camp. There were many pairs coming out of the woods with them. Their expressions ranged from happy to determined to grim. Each knew that the battle would be joined today, and there was no hope of victory or even survival for them. Still, they had made the choice freely to be here and did not regret it.

The wolves gathered around the central fire. The Alpha Queen addressed them.

"The scouts report that the Bovine Army will reach the east side of Angus Creek at mid-afternoon. We will eat lunch and break camp just before noon. We will take up defensive positions on the west bank.

“We are greatly outnumbered, many times over. The Bovines will eventually win by attrition, by overwhelming us or simply by overrunning us and grinding our broken bodies into the ground beneath their hooves. Our goal is to make it take as much time as possible for them to break through. Every hour we gain is a league or more between the Bovines and our pack mates. If we can last just to nightfall, we can practically guarantee their safety.”

E’land knew enough to know how unlikely that was.

“For now,” the Queen finished, “bathe, eat and prepare yourselves.”

E’land found K’val beside her again. The older wolfess took E’land’s right forearm and gently pulled her to one side. She led her back to their tents and picked up a small packet from her pack.

“Something special for us,” she confided with a wink.

The two wolves followed several other females down a small path to a creek. A mile or so further downstream it joined the Angus. Today it was full of naked females washing last night from their pelts.

“So,” K’val asked as she shucked her clothes.

“So what?” E’land said evasively as she started to remove her own clothing.

“‘So what?’?” K’val asked with some exasperation at her friend’s deliberate obtuseness. “Did you like Denon making you howl at the moon?”

E’land felt her entire body grow hot as she blushed in embarrassment. She stared at the ties of her clothes as she removed them to avoid meeting K’val’s eyes. Still, she said, “Yes.”

“Good!” K’val replied heartily as she waded out into the brook and claimed a section for her bath. “I’m glad. I figured you and Denon would be a good match.”

“You did?” E’land asked as she dropped the last of her clothes to the ground and joined K’val. “Why?”

“He is experienced enough to know how to treat a virgin. Probably not the first maidenhead he’s taken either. I figured he would be able to be gentle yet passionate enough to make your first time memorable,” K’val explained as she set the package she had brought to the stream down on a small stone.

E’land had to smile. She told K’val, “He certainly was all of that and more. I hope that our god allows me to be with him when we come before him.”

“Might happen. You never know,” K’val replied as she wet her pet thoroughly.

“What about you and T’for?” E’land asked to distract K’val’s attention from her and Denon.

K’val gave E’land a big, toothy grin.

“Let’s just say we got ‘tied’ last night,” she told E’land.

“Oh, *really!*” E’land exclaimed in some surprise.

K’val shrugged and said, “We’ve been seeing each other quietly for a couple of months now. We like each other, and we had some good times together. No priestess around to consummate it, or time to do it even if there were, but we decided we were mates. I’m hoping that our god sees it that way tonight.”

E’land gave K’val a quick hug. “Congratulations!” she said enthusiastically. “Are you telling anyone else?”

“No, no real need. Plenty of couples made the same decision last night. We’ll see what happens,” K’val told her. “In the meantime...”

K’val reached down and opened the package. She took a handful of the powder within and handed it to E’land.

“Here is my ‘after wedding night gift’ to you. Enjoy!” K’val told E’land.

E’land took the powder but did not know what to do. She could smell a strong fragrance of flowers coming from it. She watched as K’val took the other half of the contents of the package and began to work it into her wet pelt.

“Well, don’t stand there smelling like a wet dog! Use the soap!” K’val told her.

E’land followed K’val’s lead and worked the soap into her pelt. The fragrance of flowers and other good things intensified and filled her nostrils. Several of the other females downwind of the bathing pair looked at them almost jealously as they were forced to use just water and elbow grease to get rid of the dirt and debris in their pelts.

When E’land rinsed away the last of the soapy water her pelt glistened in the sunlight of the morning. She smelled better than she had in ages as well. She almost hated to put on her dirty clothes, but she had no choice.

Back at camp, E’land found Denon waiting for her. He had bathed as well, and his damp fur lay matted upon his frame. He looked thinner than ever.

Denon rose and came to E’land. She was not quite sure what to say or do, but he confidently took her in his arms and kissed her. When he broke the kiss, he nuzzled the hollow of her throat and said, “You smell marvelous.”

E'land blushed a bit again. She found that she liked getting compliments from Denon.

Before she could say anything, a runner came by and yelled, "Armor up! We leave in fifteen minutes!"

"Shit!" E'land said as she broke free of Denon's gentle grasp,

"Everyone! Get your armor on and your weapons ready!" E'land commanded her squad.

J'nor asked somewhat petulantly, "What's going on?"

"The Bovine Army is here early," E'land told him.

An hour later the wolves stood on the west bank of Angus Creek. It was a good size stream, perhaps thirty feet across and a couple of feet deep here. This was the best ford from the plains where the Bovines lived to the mountain forests that were the Wolves' home. Further downstream the Angus ran into the deep and wide Heifer. Upstream the banks on the west side quickly turned into steep mountain faces that were practically impassable. This was the only place where the Bovine Army could cross easily, and everyone on both sides knew it.

E'land and her squad found themselves just to the right of the Royal Guard contingent in the center of the line. It was normally a place of honor, but today it meant that they would bear the heaviest of the fighting. E'land grimly fidgeted with her armor some more and watched the approaching army.

It was not hard to find the Bovine Army. It stretched across the horizon, and a huge dust cloud rose behind it, obscuring the rear ranks from view. She could feel the vibration of their hooves striking the hard ground of the plains grow as they grew closer. It was almost frightening to realize how many bovines were coming to fight them. She kept a tight grip on the part of her that was screaming for her to turn and run. She knew what was going to happen when she chose to come. Instead, she remembered the look on her pregnant sister's face as she headed west with her two young cubs. E'land would die today, but they would live. Three beloved family members and perhaps three more lives saved at the cost of her life. It was a trade that she was willing to make.

At the forefront of the Bovine Army, about a quarter league in front of the main body, E'land saw a flag being borne by a young bull. It was a solid black pennant with the stylized head of a bull done in silver thread embossed on it. Beside the flag a small bovine, cloaked head to hoof in black robes with silver symbols walked. Behind them a large cart was drawn by more large bulls. To the rear of the cart came perhaps five thousand of the largest bovine warriors that E'land had ever seen. The sunlight glittered off their polished chain mail and weapons.

E'land hissed.

"What is it?" K'val asked in a whisper.

“Remember how I was going to be a priestess? We learned about the other gods in our early teaching,” she replied.

E’land raised her right arm and pointed at the cloaked bull.

“That’s a shaman,” she told K’val. “They are the conduit of their god.”

“Oh, crap,” K’val breathed softly. If a shaman led the army, then their god must have declared this war.

When the shaman and his retinue reached the other side of the stream, the Alpha Queen marched forth from the assembled wolves to the edge of the water. In a clear, loud voice, she demanded, “Why is the army of the Bovines advancing upon our land? We have no quarrel with you! We do not seek your lands, wealth or mates! We wish only to live in peace in our lands, given to us by our god.”

E’land’s heart dropped when the shaman, rather than an officer or one of the nobility, replied. It meant for certain that this was a holy war, and the gods themselves were involved. It was the worst of all worlds.

“We come to claim our own and eliminate a threat to us!” the shaman declared. “Our god has decreed that we will no longer live in fear of you. We will not allow you to hunt us any longer!”

“We have not hunted the Bovine for millennia, since the time that our gods set us apart and apportioned our lands,” the Queen replied. “There is no need for this war.”

The Queen paused for a moment.

“Please,” she said in a softer voice with just a hint of pleading, “do not start this war. We have no desire for it.”

“You may have no desire for it, but our god does!” the shaman replied haughtily. “Let him tell you himself!”

The shaman clapped his hands three times. The bulls drawing the cart dropped the shafts of the cart and quickly pulled back the curtains surrounding the bed.

E’land gasped in fear and amazement.

Lying upon silken cushions was the largest bovine by far that she had ever seen. He had to be more than twice as tall as any of the other bulls and many times heavier. It certainly appeared to be the Bovine God incarnate.

The god set aside the wine that he was drinking from a golden chalice and stood. The late morning sun glinted off the polished metal and oiled leather of the harness that he wore. He

causally pushed one of the draft bulls out of the way as he strode to stand beside the shaman. E'land could see the shaman grinning gleefully at the look of fear on every wolves' face.

"Behold the God of the Bovine and your destruction!" the shaman yelled.

E'land was ready to turn and run. All the other wolves were at the edge of breaking as well.

All except one wolf.

"You call *that* the God of the Bovines?" Denon yelled derisively at the shaman as he strode from the wolves forces.

"I doubt it!" Denon added contemptuously as he jumped lithely from stone to stone in the creek before settling on one of the larger ones near the middle of the stream. He sat down and took out his Pan pipes.

"The Bovine God is as tall as a mountain! His steps shake the ground like an earthquake! This," Denon declared as he pointed towards the tall bull, "is nothing but a fake!"

"Kill him!" the shaman shouted. Several armed bulls rushed forward to attack Denon.

"Denon!" E'land screamed as she started to run forward to try to defend him.

Denon raised his Pan pipes to his lips and began to play. On both sides, everyone came to a sudden, complete stop. Even the wind died.

E'land was transported in her mind's-eye to the rolling plains of the Bovine Nation. She saw league after league of open grassland. She strode across them, but her view seemed to be from the vantage point of a hawk. The lilting melody brought her to the western edge of the plains, to the very spot where the armies stood, before letting her go.

Stunned, E'land looked around her. She could see total confusion in every furs' face. All were perplexed. All except Denon.

"Tell me, shaman," Denon asked in a dangerously sweet voice, "do you feel an earthquake coming?"

E'land felt a small tremble in her feet. A moment later, there was a second one. Then a third and a fourth. Each grew slightly stronger.

Far out on the horizon, E'land saw movement. At first, she could not tell what it was, but eventually it dawned upon her that she was seeing the horns of a huge bull, one that could be seen from miles away.

The horns grew larger, and a head of a bull appeared. His massive body rose up above the horizon, and still he came toward E'land. By the time his lower body, girded in a simple leather harness, appeared, each of his steps was enough to rattle the furs.

The wolves looked on in terror as the Bovine God took a final step over his people and came to a halt beside the creek. It gradually dawned upon E'land that he had a perplexed look upon his face as he looked back and forth between the two armies.

"Denon," the god asked in a voice like distant thunder, "what is going on here?"

Before Denon could speak, the shaman cried out, "Do not listen to this one, my god! He is a deceitful wolf!"

The Bovine God slowly knelt beside the creek. It was like watching a living avalanche fall towards E'land. He looked down at the shaman and asked, "Why would my brother lie to me?"

It was impossible to say who was the most shocked.

The Bovine God turned to Denon and asked, "What is happening here?"

"Your people are attacking mine with the intent of taking their lands and killing my wolves off," Denon replied. "I am guessing, but it appears that your shaman has developed a lust for power. His 'god' reeks of dark magics. My guess is that he created him and pawned him off as you, Bob. From there, his minion convinced your people that they needed more land. Any voices against the plan were silenced, one way or another."

Denon blew a few notes on his pipes. The world darkened for just a moment, and she seemed to see a regal bull and cow cut down in the night by assassins as the shaman watched from the shadows.

Apparently, the bovines had the same vision, because even the faux god was looking at the shaman angrily. They moved away from him, and several drew their weapons.

"I suspect that your shaman has made plans to get all of the wealth of my people, or at least most of it," Denon mused as he looked up at the Bovine God.

The god looked down at Denon for several seconds.

Bob turned his head to look at the shaman.

"Is this true?" the towering god asked.

"Lies! All of it is lies!" the shaman shouted back, but E'land could see and even smell his fear.

The god looked down at the shaman. He pointed an index finger bigger than most trees at the cloaked bull and demanded, "Is it true?"

The air about the shaman practically sizzled with energy. His body contorted as he fought against the geas of his god, but in the end, he croaked out, "Yes."

The assembled bovines growled almost like wolves in anger. They had been deceived, and the word of their god perverted. They were enraged, and they wanted blood.

Bob rose back to his full height. He glared down at the now cowering and largely broken bull.

"You have killed our own in my name, against my express injunction," the Bovine god said in a rumbling voice filled with anger. "You have made war when we are to live in peace with all about us. You have brought us to the brink of a war of genocide against my brother's people."

In a loud, ringing voice that carried to every corner of the far-flung plain, Bob declared, "You are no shaman of mine!"

The god lifted his left hoof. He brought it down hard on the ground where the shaman stood. There was a brief scream of utter terror followed by a sickening squish and the cracking of bones.

The god turned to his people and announced, "This war is over! Go back to your homes. Disturb the wolves no more. This I command!"

The Bovine God knelt again.

"I am sorry, Brother," he said in a voice filled with sorrow.

"It's okay, Bob," Denon replied quietly. "It is one of the consequences of giving our children free will."

"Thank you for your understanding, Denon. I will make sure that none uses me like this again."

The towering god looked down at his imposter. He scratched his jawl and said contemplatively, "I think I know a good way to ensure that it does not happen again..."

Bob pointed at the imposter. The air about him turned a bright blue. Small bolts of lightning arced within the haze.

The god said, "You are now my Acolyte. I bind you to me, now and forever. You shall be my voice among the herds, and you shall answer only to me."

The god picked up the large bull. He glowed dark blue for just a moment.

"And I will know everything that you do and every thought that you have, no matter how you try to hide them from me," Bob added, "so do not try to deceive our people ever again!"

The god stood and looked down at the assembled herds. In a voice similar to a mother scolding her errant children, he yelled, "Home! Now!"

It was such a strange end to a battle that never occurred.

E'land looked at Denon. He returned her look and smiled. He looked just the same as always, the waifish troubadour, not her god.

The Alpha Queen took a hesitant step forward and said, "My God..."

Denon raised his pipes to his lips. There was a short melody that reminded E'land of an errant breeze. Denon disappeared into nothingness with the last notes, leaving E'land and his people behind.

Two weeks later E'land was working deep in the woods. She had returned to the site of the ancient altar to escape her people. They all treated her so strangely. She had not known who or, more importantly, what Denon was when she mated with him, and she certainly did not want to be exalted and praised for such a carnal act. She had managed to slip away from the Royal Guards with help from K'val and the rest of her squad. She suspected that the queen had allowed them to go. No wolf had followed them.

E'land sighed as she ran the brush back and forth over the altar stone. It gleamed in the sunlight let in through the recently cleared trees. She wondered about its history again.

"I think you missed a spot," a familiar cheerful voice said behind E'land.

E'land whirled to find Denon standing a few feet away from her. He was grinning broadly, just like he always seemed to do during the brief time she had known him.

"Den- My God," E'land said as she started to kneel. She brushed away the dirt on her pelt and silently cursed that she was so disheveled from her work.

Denon took three steps forward and grabbed E'land's arms. He raised her to her feet and looked into her eyes. She had to turn her head away from the look of love in his eyes. She was not deserving of it.

"E'land, I will always be Denon to you," he told her in a gentle voice.

"Even after..." E'land replied as she looked to the ground to one side.

"Even after you raped me?" Denon asked quizzically. She did not see the huge grin on his muzzle.

E'land's entire body burned as she blushed furiously. She could not find her voice. She could only nod yes.

Denon's laugh was full of joy and happiness. E'land had to turn her head and look at him.

Denon grinned broadly and asked her, "Do you really think that I could not have stopped you? I wanted it as much as you did, E'land."

Denon drew E'land into his arms. She resisted for just a moment before allowing him to embrace her. He nuzzled her and held her tight against his body. She quickly found herself relaxing in the arms of her lover. That he was also her god seemed a distant and unimportant detail when he held her like this.

"So what now?" E'land asked after what seemed an eternity of enjoying his warm body pressed against hers and his slightly musky scent filling her nostrils.

"What do you want, High Priestess?" Denon replied

"High Priestess?" E'land exclaimed in shock.

"Well," he told her as he started to get very serious about nipping her neck provocatively, "that is what my mortal mate becomes, if she desires it. Since you are restoring my first altar, I assume that you had plans to go into the priesthood, like you had intended before," Denon started undoing the ties of her bodice.

"Starting at the top does have certain advantages," he told her.

His paws paused for a moment above her breasts.

With a chuckle, he added, "And we can work our way down from your 'peaks'."

E'land was confused, but one point did make it through her muddled and increasingly aroused brain.

"This is the legendary First Altar?" she asked.

Denon stopped undressing E'land long enough to put his muzzle nose-to-nose with her.

"Yep!" he said nonchalantly. "My very first one, set down on the day that we divided this earth and took each people as our own. It was consecrated with the blood of a thousand virgins."

"You killed a thousand virgins here?" E'land blurted out without thinking.

Denon looked at her silently. For the first time, she saw some doubt in his eyes.

"Do you think that I would kill my children upon my altar for some barbaric ritual?" he asked in a low voice filled with sadness.

"No!" E'land replied. It's just..."

She paused for several seconds before asking, "If you didn't kill them, how did you get the blood?"

The smile returned to Denon's muzzle, and a mischievous glint appeared in his eyes.

"I'm glad that you asked, E'land," he said jovially.

E'land's clothes disappeared, as well as Denon's. The dirt and grime were gone from her pelt, and her well-groomed fur smelled of flowers and other pleasant fragrances as it had that morning of the battle.

Denon reached down and grabbed her behind her thighs. He lifted E'land up and placed her upon the altar stone. He pushed her back gently, and she found herself lying in the strange depression in the altar stone. Only now it felt as if it were molded to her body, holding and supporting her gently.

Denon crouched above E'land. His pink shaft jutted from his crotch, and she could see his knot forming as he looked down upon her.

"One thousand willing females came to this altar that day, most with their mates or betrotheds. I gave them my blessing, and then she lay upon the stone as he took her. The blood was from her maidenhead. It was a rite of fertility and love, not of death."

Denon kissed E'land long and hard.

"It was also the best damn orgy we ever had!" he added with a laugh.

"Maybe," E'land said as she settled her body firmly on the altar and wrapped her arms and legs around her lover, "we should mate a thousand times to reconsecrate the altar."

It was many hours later, well after the sun had set, before a sated god and his mortal mate left the altar and began their life together.