



★ The "Need-To-Know" Page ★

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SASE: When writing to the Holt for information, please include a stamp or Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope for a prompt reply. This enables us to respond quicker to your queries. We'd appreciate it!

CONVENTIONS: I would like to start listing Cons in the newsletters, so if you have information on any upcoming conventions, let me know well in time to have it printed in the next forthcoming issue. Anyone attending might have a get together with other TVH'ers, which is good for interest in EQ and for establishing and solidifying interpersonal relationships between members. Besides, it's fun! For those interested in knowing, the Dallas Fantasy Fair will be held over Thanksgiving weekend, November 24-26. I am planning to show up Saturday, and I believe a few Timber Folk will be there. [David Trimble, Deb Whitmer, Melody Luce (?), others?]

CIS REQUESTS: If you are requesting character information sheets, be sure to send money for photocopying and postage to send them to you. The data sheets do exist, but not the extra funds to maintain a "service" to send them free. Suggestion: 25¢ stamps are welcomed in lieu of cash for payment, so long as the worth of the stamps matches the amount of photocopying the information you want (+ postage).

COMEDY REQUEST: Help! The art files of Timber Valley are well stocked, but comical cartoons are a rarity. Bill Nichols has helped in the last few years in providing humorous cartoons and illos to give the issues comic relief, and they've helped out tremendously. However, we need more -- from ALL the artists! A number of the stories in the files are serious in context, and so are the accompanying illos. We need some laughter to go with these. How about it? Are you up to the challenge?

CHARACTER REFERENCE GUIDE: The next major project that had been planned for Timber Valley, the CR Guide, has been scrapped. Many of the CIS's I have are hand-written (by their owners), thus hard to read, if not impossible, and a poor response for this publication hasn't provided much of a need for it. Besides, with the important events stemming from the Troll War, people are likely to change and/or add information in relation to things that may happen from this conflict. It would be unwise to print character sheets that will become obsolete in a few months' time. Sorry, folks -- I know this publication has been promised since 1984, but at this moment, it's not worth the time and effort.

RETREAT: An idea has been suggested to me, and I'd like to know what you think about it. A number of years ago, one large Holt began an annual "Elf Retreat" for its members. This retreat was merely a weekend set aside during the year for members to come together and spend time talking, singing, drawing, discussing characters and/or stories, or just getting acquainted with one another. It was usually held at a campground and those attending would bring tents, sleeping bags, and whatever Holt-related material they wished. A small fee would be charged to purchase food to prepare at the camp-site, and whatever else would be needed (such as paper plates, etc...). **Question:** How would you feel about attending a Timber Valley Elf Retreat? Due to TVH's members being scattered about the country, it probably won't be convenient to most people, but I would be more than willing to pick up anyone who would fly into Oklahoma City for the Retreat. I would like to get a decent idea if anyone's interested before I give out any details (such as where, when, etc...). I want to hear from you first. How do you feel? Write in and give me your opinion.

TIMBERS



Newsletter of the Timber Valley Holt

Vol. 3, No. 18

Gentle Winds, My Friends!

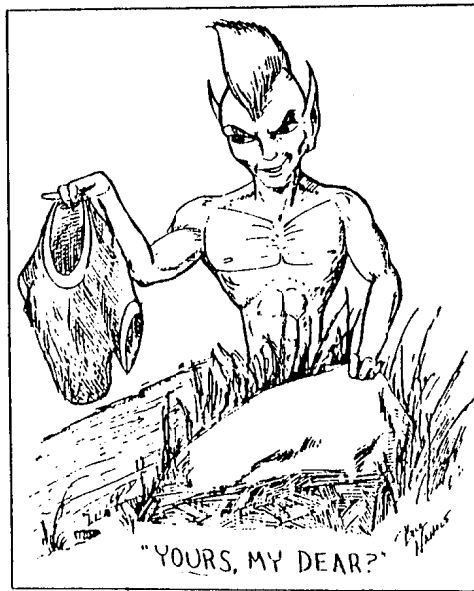
"Now, for the moment you've all been waiting for..." As you can see from the new cover, this issue marks the first of several that will include the long-awaited Timber Valley Troll War. Part One, "Wandering Spirit" appears in this issue, courtesy of the author and illustrator, Ruth Clark and Karyn Ojamaa, respectively. April Lee has helped us start out by submitting our special front cover, and this format will continue through the issues containing the War segments. The main body of the story is separated into seven parts, though there are plans to produce at least two double-issues, so you won't have to wait a year and a half to see the whole story. If your subscription is running low, be sure to keep an eye ready for renewal, because this tale's an exciting one and you won't want to miss it! Before starting on Part One, however, you may wish to return to TIMBERS 12 and read "I'll Met At Moonlight" by Nikki Wieleba. It is the prologue to the Troll War.

From the rumor department, it's been heard that WaRP Graphics is planning the release of a third ELFQUEST series soon. However, I've not read anything to confirm this, and the EQ Fan Club newsletter, The Lodestone, hasn't had a release since the Spring. My local comic shop confirms they've heard the rumors, too, but haven't received anything concrete to say yes or no. If anyone else has any information about this, please let me know so I can pass it on.

In the past, I've always tried to keep my own feelings and opinions out of the pages of TIMBERS, since this is for your reading entertainment, not my soapbox. However, I want to set this personal rule aside for a moment to give acknowledgement

to a few very special friends with whom I've become rather close to over the years. True, I've made some good, supportive friends (as well as a few enemies) since starting this Holt in 1983, but I want to publicly express my thanks and appreciation to Teresa Arellanes, Mark Barnard, and Terri Barnard, for their friendship and support. We've all watched one another go through changes and grow, but our relationship as true friends remain constant. In spite of the griping, complaining and ranting I've done over the years, thanks for being my friends!

As said previously, "Wandering Spirit" -- part one of the Troll War -- is in this issue. Also included are three character profiles, and Part II of "The Decision" for your reading enjoyment. TIMBERS 19 is due out in February 1990 -- see you then!



"YOURS, MY DEAR?"

Mooncrest

DF 23 GT

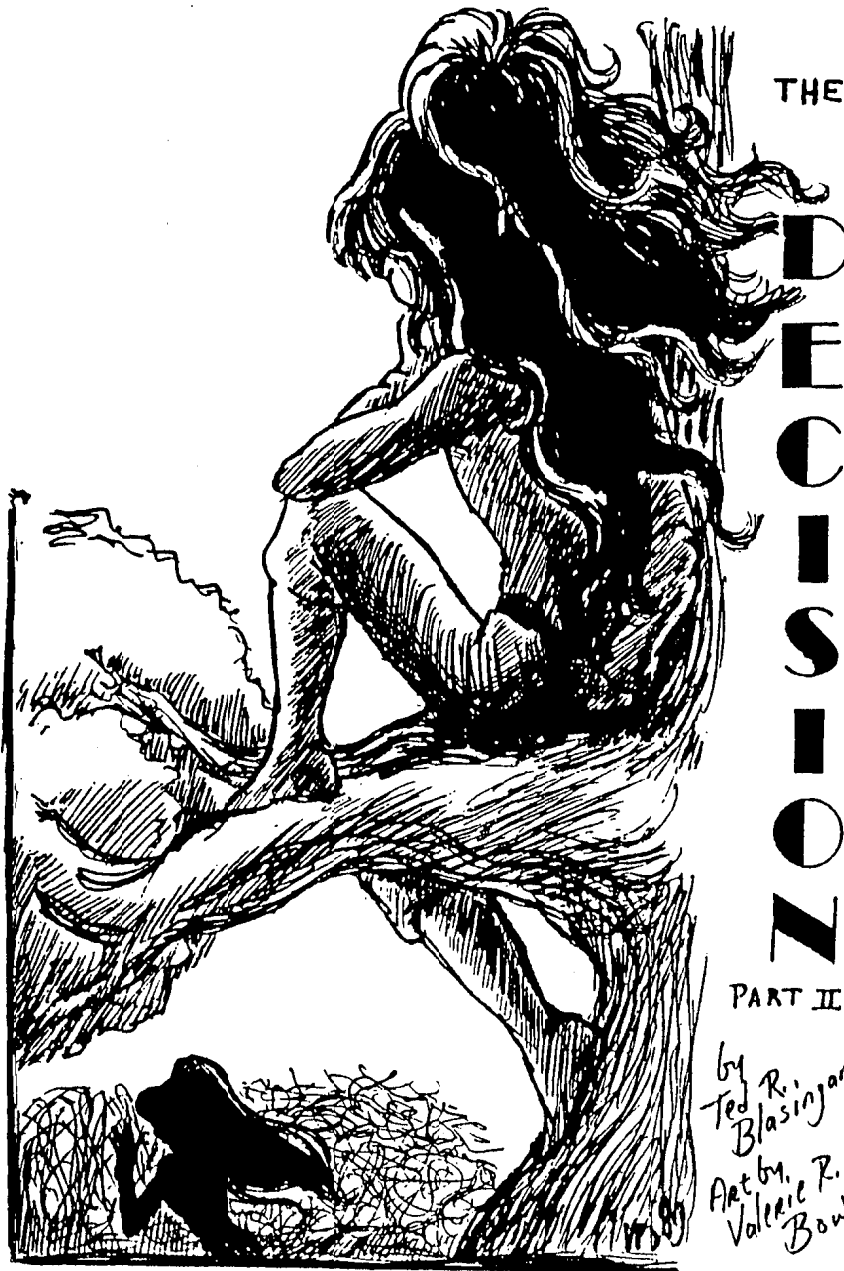
THE DECISION
Part Two
by Ted R Blasingame

THE

D
E
C
I
S
I
O
N

PART II

by
Ted R.
Blasingame
Art by
Valerie R.
Bowe



An eight-of-days had passed since Mooncrest's disappearance, and during that time Nightway remained silent when anyone asked of his whereabouts; Chief Nightstep grew steadily irritable from day to day. The treeshaper's open refusal to tell him what he wanted to know gnawed at him like a wolf on a bone. Nightway was usually quiet, almost never drawing attention to herself, and that loud outburst directed at him was so out of character that it had shocked everyone who knew her. For three days now, he hadn't said anything to her.

At the moment, Nightstep sat in the upper branches of the Father Tree, gazing out over the Holt and the activities beneath him. The sun had gone down some time ago and the stars were shining brightly against the moonless night.

As he watched his people below, he noticed Nightway's location. She and Silverleaf were tending to a spot in the Thorn Barrier that they must have decided needed some treeshapers' work.

Little missed the chief's attention as he mentally checked off a list, remembering precisely where each of the Timber Folk was or headed toward. Of those numbers, he didn't know where three were: Rogue, Grassy, and of course, Mooncrest.

He wondered about the first two. Both were fairly close friends of the prankster and both had been missing themselves for two days. However, with Rogue, long absences out into the Valley was common, so that was no need for alarm. However, he thought about it now.

Though he had no proof, Nightstep suspected they had gone after the prankster, either knowing where he might be or going on hunch alone. He looked back to where the treeshapers were working and watched them for a moment. Maybe she knew...

Nightway, he sent, **meet me at the Father Tree.** He saw her look up and then say something to Silverleaf, but didn't return his sending as she headed toward the large tree at the Holt's center.

By the time he'd descended through the branches and entered the chambers of the tree, Nightway was waiting for him. He motioned for her to sit beside him on the massive roots. Once she was comfortable, she looked at him, her opaque black eyes displaying no expression.

Though knowing the probable outcome of the conversation, Nightstep proceeded, trying to find a suitable way to begin. He couldn't find one, so he asked the obvious question.

"Nightway, where is Mooncrest?"

She frowned slightly and shook her head, "I can't tell you." Well, he'd expected those words.

"All right, then -- why can't you tell me?" he asked. "For the sake of your lifemate, and the Holt's, I need to know."

She was silent for a moment. Her personality wasn't a strong one, and that uncharacteristic stubbornness she had displayed earlier seemed to soften a bit. She couldn't look him in the eye and gazed down at her feet. "He - he made me promise to keep silent. I cannot break my oath." She looked up at him then and added, "He's my lifemate. He's my life."

The chief put his hand softly on her shoulder. "I understand, Nightway. However, if he's in a situation that puts himself at a great risk, it is possible that your lifemate may lose his life." His eyes held genuine concern. "Please, Nightway, he may need --" He stopped suddenly as a lock-send reached him. Nightway looked at him, puzzled, when she saw the facial expressions he made while sending to someone. Within a moment, he looked at her and helped her up by his side. "Come with me," he said, leading her toward the closest passage through the Thorn Barrier. "Mooncrest has been found."

Before Nightway could speak, Nightstep was sending again, taking his chief's position in swing again. **Greeneyes, Goldenbraid -- Mooncrest has been found by Rogue and Grassy, and he's in a state of shock. Prepare a place for him in the Father Tree and then prepare yourselves. I don't know what kind of healing he will need, but you two should have the best chance at getting him free of his shock.**

Greeneyes, who was already in the huge tree, answered with a question of her

own, **Wouldn't it be better if he were put in his own bed, rather than the furs of Father Tree?*

I don't know, cub, but we'll need room as so not to crowd him -- and there's not much room in his tree.

By this time, other folk knew something was up. They only had to look at the expression on Nightway's face as she and their chief left the Holt. A number of curious individuals followed. Noticing this, Nightstep began to explain what he knew to Nightway and the others.

"Rogue and Grassy have found Mooncrest -- in the Upper World!" he stated.

Though it was no surprise to Nightway, the others had various, but expected reactions. "THE UPPER WORLD?!" Redlace exclaimed, stopping in his tracks, causing Trace to bump into him.

"What was he doing up THERE?!" Tempest asked.

"He HAS gone nuts!" Ivory said as someone else replied, "I never thought he'd go THERE!" Voices rang out in questions, exclamations and other puzzled statements, the whole group buzzing in verbal exchanges. By this time, the entire Holt knew what their chief had just announced.

"However..." Nightstep's voice boomed over the murmur, "He's in a state of shock. Rogue and Grassy are carrying him on a litter, as he's unable to return on his own.

"Is he hurt -- his body, I mean?" Fable asked.

Nightstep shook his head. "None that Rogue could see."

"What was he doing in the Upper World?" asked LongKnife, repeating Tempest's earlier question.

"They don't know. Mooncrest won't answer his questions. He is alive, but won't respond to anything they say or do."

"Is Bushtrail with them?" Skyflame wanted to know.

"No, they haven't seen him." Nightstep answered many other questions, but all replies were similar -- only Mooncrest knew the explanations, but he wasn't talking.

Sapphire, having remained silent during the whole affair, now asked something that had been in the minds of those now following their chief. "Where are we headed?" They didn't seem to be heading in the general direction of Sheercliff Pass.

"We should meet them within a few moments. They had stopped to rest at the Redfruit Grove, when Rogue sent to me. They are going to wait for us there." They had begun to walk faster during the conversation, but now several ran on ahead of the group. Nightway clung to her chief's arm as they jogged through the trees.

Those who had stayed behind in the Holt had gathered in the Council Clearing, all talking, sending and speculating on what the prankster was doing in the Upper World and what had happened to him there. Mooncrest's arguments had been well known and it defied everything he had believed to venture out into that plain. Why had he gone out there on his own? It must have been pretty important.

Ferret and Jasmine sat away from the crowds, talking between themselves. News of the prankster being found in the Upper World was quite a surprise to them, but somehow suspected it was a direct result of their last argument.

It was a long while before Nightstep walked into the Holt. He was followed by others of the group that had gone along. The crowd in the Council Clearing moved as one toward those arriving. Nightstep saw the rushing mass of people and held up his hands for them to stop.

"I know you're anxious to find out what's happened, but this is likely to take a bit of time. Go back to your homes, gardens, hunting, or whatever. I'll let you know anything new that develops." Rustling could be heard inside the Thorn Barrier, a sign of passage within, as well as a few muttered curses. The litter was apparently a little larger than the opening in the wall of thorns. After a bit of thrashing around, Hookwink emerged, holding one end of the makeshift litter. Frost soon came through, supporting the other end of the fur-covered stretcher, followed by Rogue, Grassy, and Nightway.

"They're here, so give them room!" Nightstep commanded. A bit slower than he'd wished, the Timber Folk drifted away from the newly arrived rescuers. Nightway then ran into the Father Tree ahead of the stretcher and waited. When Mooncrest was brought in and set down, Goldenbraid removed the fur blanket and put it aside. Several gasps were issued when they saw him in the dim candlelight. Mooncrest's pale skin was reddened with sunburn and he looked leaner than they'd ever seen him. His travel-worn clothes were filthy and



ragged, and needed replacing. Dark circles underlined his open staring eyes and his lips were parted slightly and dry. He saw none of them as he looked off into the distance somewhere.

Her long dark grey ponytail fell around her shoulders as Nightway knelt next to him and wept over his chest. The elven chief pulled her back to let the Healers work and held her close. He looked up at Rogue, Grassy, Hoodwink and Frost, nodding for them to leave. Rogue stood his ground, unwilling to leave, until Grassy grabbed his arm and pulled gently, **C'mon,** he sent to Rogue. Quietly, they exited the tree as Nightstep's attention was drawn back to the Healers.

Goldenbraid had a hand on Mooncrest's forehead and her eyes were closed. She was a Healer of the body, not of the mind, so she wasn't sure how to help. Greeneyes busied herself by taking a damp cloth to his face while Pebble flitted around nearby. The small Healer used her talent to draw the irritation from his reddened skin as the tiny winged creature landed on the fur next to his head.

"FUZZY-HEAD HIGHTHING HURT?" the preserver asked in its sing-song voice when the prankster didn't try to swat it out of the air, as was his usual practice.

Yes, Pebble, Greeneyes replied, **he is hurt.**

"AWW..." it said, "WANT PEBBLE MAKE WRAPSTUFF?"

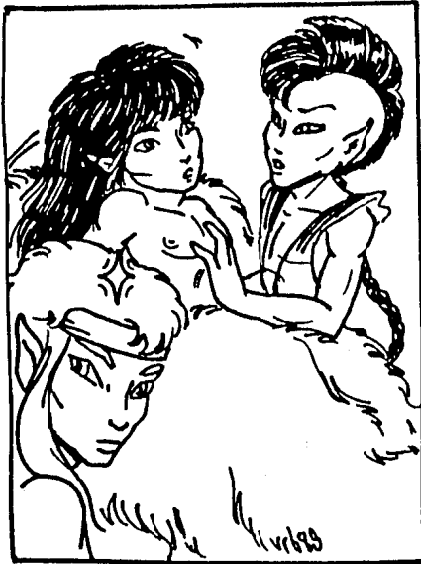
NO! she sent instantly to the bug. Pebble quieted and clung to a lock of the sick elf's hair.

Mooncrest suddenly responded to their touches with a sneeze, but otherwise remained unmoving with the exception of the rise and fall of his chest. They tried calling to him, both in sending and in voice, but it showed no effect.

Much of the night had passed as they waited for any sign of recovery. All he did was lay there and stare, breathing regularly. They tried to feed him, but he wouldn't eat. It was still unknown as to what happened to him. Whispers of speculation moved around the Holt, trying to guess what he'd done. They were still perplexed by the news of WHERE he'd been found. Mooncrest in the Upper World? Nightway had known where he was going, and why, but didn't know what had caused him to go into shock. Now that her lifemate was back in the Holt, she gave in and told Nightstep all the details she'd been holding back. Nightstep, however, was the only one she told. The others would have to wait until Mooncrest recovered.

Later the next night, Two Star was watching over the silent elf as the Healers left to eat. Rogue stayed to the side, lending help to watch his friend. He remembered how he'd gone a little wild when they all believed Mooncrest lost. Though they were friendly rivals and pranksters, they were good friends and Mooncrest meant more to him than he really knew. When Redlace had mentioned that he'd lost Mooncrest's trail near Sheercliff Pass, it had sparked a memory Rogue had of a past conversation about the Upper World. It had only been a hunch, but he decided to follow it and search for his missing friend. Since Grassy was familiar with the immediate area of the grass plains near the Pass, he'd recruited his help for their private search. He thought about all this as he tried sending to Mooncrest's still form, but he got no reply. Nightway had remained at his side since he'd been brought into the tree. She slept now beside him, a slender arm draped across his chest.

As they waited, silently sending to one another to pass the time, neither noticed that Mooncrest had closed his eyes. After a moment or two, he tried to sit and gasped with the effort. Immediately, Two Star and Rogue were at his sides, the Elder sending for the chief. Rogue put a hand on his friend's chest and gently pushed back down. "It's okay, 'Crest, take it easy," he said. Mooncrest nodded and remained planted in the furs.



Nightway held one of his hands and sent her love to him in strong feeling. He smiled but kept his eyes closed. His arms embraced her shoulders as he pulled her down to him.

The Timber chief arrived with Goldenbraid and Silverhair behind him. Mooncrest looked up at his father as tears began streaming down his cheeks.

**Son? Silverhair sent.

"Bushtrail" he said simply through a tired throat. Even though his voice was raspy, they could tell by the tone that his beloved wolf friend would run no longer by his side. It wasn't totally unexpected, for Bushtrail was an old wolf, nearing the end of his life. Though he didn't know the details, Silverhair nodded his understanding.

Nightstep knelt down next to the wayward elf and put a hand on his shoulder. "Mooncrest" he said gently, "I want you to eat something and then rest. After you're feeling better, you will tell me what in your simple mind you thought you were doing in the Upper World." It wasn't a request. It was a command. Mooncrest nodded.

The next night, the Timber Folk assembled together once again at the Father Tree in the Council Clearing, waiting to hear the explanation. Mooncrest was still inside with Nightway, but all others waited to hear the story.

Two Star clapped his hands loudly for attention and stood up on the root-steps of the great tree. Nightstep and Two Star had been present when Mooncrest had told his story and then the Elder had been chosen to relate the tale to the tribe. Nightstep sat to the side with Freshwind snuggled closely under his arm.

The Elder began his narration as the moons' pale light found its way through the trees and into the Holt. A soft breeze filtered through the night and the air was pleasant to the senses. Littlestar bugs winked on and off throughout the Holt as everyone remained quiet for the Elder's words.

Two Star looked over the group, seeing the many faces he'd known and had come to know. "It is no secret that Mooncrest has had a peculiar and strong reaction about the Upper World and the relative safety of this Valley. Although we knew his arguments, we never knew the reason why." He paused, looking around until he found his chief, "He explained it to us a few moments ago, that he'd always had a great fear of wide open places, which meant specifically, the Upper World's Sea of Grass. This fear has plagued him throughout his life and a little over a moon ago, he decided he wanted to conquer it."

Shrike nodded her head in understanding. She, too, had a great fear of wide open spaces. She quickly remembered how she'd been carried into the Valley in a catatonic state of mind herself. She could relate to the prankster in this way.

The Elder sat on the steps before continuing the tale, as the breeze picked up suddenly and blew his hair about, wrestling with the red headband that held it in check. "He decided to conquer his fear by travelling across the plains to the Great Wood, and then returning. If he could do it and survive, he believed he'd be free of this fear.

"Now, the first few days went by for him in constant anxiety which almost paralyzed him from going any further. But Mooncrest was determined to do it. By the fourth day he began to feel more at ease, but not by much. He did finally make it to the Great Wood, but then something happened."

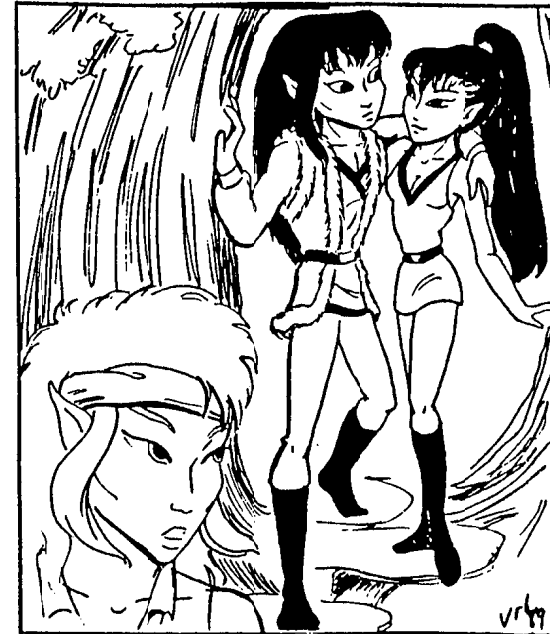
Two Star hesitated for a moment, remembering the sending-pictures the young hunter had given him. "Bushtrail is...was...an old wolf, but excessively loyal to his friend. Even though Mooncrest tried to get the wolf to stay in the Valley, Bushtrail wouldn't let him leave him behind. Having spent two nights in the comfort of the Great Wood, satisfied that his problem might be taken care of, they prepared to head back to Timber Valley. But before they began on their

journey, Bushtrail laid in the forest's shadow and fell into eversleep." The Elder paused again, remembering the pain Mooncrest had sent with the pictures. The loss of an elf's first wolf friend is as great as if a relative had died. He began again.

"Blinded with sorrow over the loss of his wolf-friend, Mooncrest stumbled out into the Sea of Grass and headed for home. He was no longer able to keep his mind off of where he was, and the fear began to eat away at him again, in addition to the grief he felt. He made it as far as the Blue River, but by then, the paralysis of fear had him. That is where Rogue and Grassy found him."

Almost at once, murmurs and whispers broke out in the tribe of gathered elves. Two Star folded his arms across his chest and waited patiently for the noise to subside before continuing. One by one, he stared at individuals who made the most distractions until each noticed his gaze and fell silent.

When all eyes were upon him once more, he waved a hand to the tree behind him. "Mooncrest is back, and alive, but don't expect him to be any more fond of the Upper World than before. He's had a bad experience which will probably strengthen his previous arguments, if nothing else." Two Star raised a hand and then said, "That's all I have. If there's more, you can get it from Mooncrest, himself. But, for at least a little while, be courteous to him by not mentioning the lands outside the Valley. It may take him a while before he's comfortable talking about it again."



A shuffling of feet and a light cough drew everyone's attention to a spot behind the elder. Two Star turned and saw Mooncrest standing in the doorway of the tree. His old garments had been discarded; he now wore the new set of clothes Shadowstar and Smoke had made and delivered to him earlier. Nightway was tucked snugly under his left arm. The elder acknowledged him and stepped aside.

Two Star gestured to Nightstep, who stood up and sent as so to be heard* by everyone. **All right, Timber Folk, council's over.**

Voices rose again as the tribe slowly scattered across the Holt, some lingering near the Father Tree to chat while others immediately prepared for the night's hunt. Rogue stepped up to Mooncrest and grasped arms with him, smiling widely. Foxvine stepped out of a nearby crowd and boldly

wedged himself between the two pranksters, holding up a leather pouch in front of their eyes.

"Welcome back, Mooncrest! These are for your safe return to the Holt!" he said merrily.

Mooncrest looked into the pouch of ripe dreamberries and then embraced the keeper tightly. "Thanks, my friend. Thank you!" he replied, changing his embrace to a tight bear-hug.

"Urk!" Foxvine squeaked, "You're welcome!" Laughing, Mooncrest released him and grabbed his lifemate by the hand, pulling her close to his side.

Nightway, usually very quiet in group discussions, surprised her mate with a mischievous grin and a private sending. **You've been out of my sight for one whole moon, and now I'm going to teach you a lesson!**

Mooncrest's eyebrows shot up as he looked into her opaque black eyes. But before he had a chance to respond to her statement, Nightway clasped hands with him and began pulling him away at a fast pace.

"See ya' later, guys!" he said over his shoulder just before he and Nightway disappeared into their hometree. Rogue chuckled and shook his head as Foxvine tapped him on the shoulder.

"I'm feeling rather generous right now," he said, holding out a handful of dreamberries, "so have some fun!"

* * *

Mooncrest lay on his back amongst the furs in the sunken sleeping pit which lay in the center of the room, his lifemate reclining so that her head rested on his chest and an arm draped across his stomach. He watched her sleep contentedly as he thought back to those frightening days in the Upper World. The moonlight that happened to shine lightly into their tree



glistened off fresh tears as they quietly slid down his tanned cheeks. His decision to conquer his fear had cost him a great deal. Not only had he shown himself that the Upper World still scared him, he'd also lost a very loving and loyal friend during the journey.

Nightway awoke to the touch of his tears and looked up at him. She didn't say a word, for she understood. The lifemates looked into the windows of each other's soul, wordless emotions shared.

In the quiet of the night, two voices in a long mournful howl rang out in a final tribute to a lost one.

Bushtrail...

END

ART CREDITS

Valerie Bove: Pg 4 (Nightstep, Nightway).

Pg 7 (Grassy, Rogue).

Pg 8 (Mooncrest, Rogue, Two Star).

Pg 9 (Two Star, Mooncrest, Nightway).

Pg 10 (Mooncrest, Nightway)

Pg 11 (Coppermane).

Pg 12 (Skylight).

Pg 24 "The Successful Hunt"

(Shadowstar, Evenfell, Ivory)

April Lee: Pg 1 (Duskdew, Quicksilver & Trolls)

Pg 10 (Nightstep, Freshwind, Mooncrest)

Pg 13 (Wavesong).

Melody Luke: Pg 23 (Duskdew)

Bill Nichols: Pg 3 (Rogue)

Karyn Ojamaa: Pg 14 (Duskdew, Quicksilver)

Pg 16 (Duskdew).

Pg 17 (Troll attacker, Duskdew)

Pg 18 (Quicksilver, Duskdew, Goldenbraid)



ELF NAME: Coppermane

GENDER: Male

LOVEMATE: --

FATHER: Tarn

MOTHER: Clayshard

SIBLINGS: Skylight (brother)

CHILDREN: --

OTHER RELATIONS: --

ANIMAL FRIEND: Huntson, male wolf cub,
golden tan fur, light brown eyes.

DF DATE BORN: -174 ??

ORIGIN OF BIRTH: Bright Mountain Holt

DF DATE OF ARRIVAL IN VALLEY: 22 LF

EYES: Bright blue, almond shaped.

HAIR: Coppery red, straight, fine texture
shoulder length, worn loose, no part,
bangs taper down to sides.

HEIGHT: 3'11"

TALENT (POWER): Rockshaping, unskilled/
needs training.

WEAPONS USED: Flint knife, flint-point
spear, sling.

SKILLS: Pottery, jewelry/ornament maker,
and hunter.

JEWELRY: None worn.

CLOTHING: Brown short

sleeved leather shirt, open to waist
with lapels to waist also. Dark brown
shoulder lacing. Rust brown leather pants
with dark brown lacing down sides. Top
of pants fold down in front and back to
form loin cloth. Brown rope tied at right
side holds up pants. Legs are bound at
ankles. Brown pull-on boots.

OTHER INFORMATION: Coppermane is easy going and gets along with most everyone. He likes children. Doesn't do much hunting; prefers his pottery making. Females, flirting and joining embarrasses him. Others sometimes tease him about it just to see him blush, which he does readily. He likes to socialize, but is bashful around the maidens. He does not enjoy dreamberries, as they give him rashes -- besides, he doesn't care for the flavor.

Coppermane prefers a cave home, but is trying to get used to living in a tree. He's always organized and knows where everything is. He is frequently dusty, due to his pottery work, but he is generally a clean elf. He's not picky about raw or cooked meat--he eats it either way. He makes frequent trips to hunt for clay (in dry or wet form) to make his pottery and clay beads from. Also hunts for stones, shells, plant materials and suck to make jewelry and trinkets from, and materials to make his paints and brushes. He always had an affinity for rock and stone, but gave up on the notion of becoming a rockshaper like his ancestors on his mother's side. It was a great shock to suddenly discover he has the talent after all. He is primarily a day elf, as he needs sunlight to work with. He likes to play with children, tell them stories, show them how to make pottery, and give them trinkets and things. He has never had a mate yet, but is looking.

CREATIVE CONTROL: Deb Whitmer



ELF NAME: Skylight
 GENDER: Male
 LOVEMATE: Arrowsong
 FATHER: Tarn
 MOTHER: Clayshard
 SIBLINGS: Coppermane (brother)
 CHILDREN: --

OTHER RELATIONS: --
 ANIMAL FRIEND: Drifter, arctic wolf, very pale bluish-grey fur, blue eyes.
 DF DATE BORN: -88 ??
 ORIGIN OF BIRTH: White Wolf Holt
 DF DATE OF ARRIVAL IN VALLEY: 23 IT
 EYES: Burnished copper, slanted.
 HAIR: Burnished copper, very thick loose curls/waves, falls just past shoulders.
 HEIGHT: 3'7"

TALENT (POWER): --
 WEAPONS USED: Bow, belt knife (for skinning, cutting up meat and other uses).
 SKILLS: Cordmaker (thread, snares, fishing lines, rope, nets, strings for instruments, cord for necklaces, etc).
 JEWELRY: Dangling earrings (styles vary) usually worn in both ears, but sometimes just one.

CLOTHING: (Warm weather): One-piece, golden yellow, golden brown or a rich blue, with tank-style top and fringe down the outer legs from the hips. Short boots (styles vary).

OTHER INFORMATION: Skylight is wolf-blooded and it shows. He moves very wolf-like (a smooth runner, lopes, trots, bounds or pads). He tilts his head often and has a wolfish way of grinning. He also has a tendency to growl, usually when angered, but also playfully or seductively. Has a low speaking voice with a sort of thrumming undertone. He talks softly and has laughing eyes. Easily lost in the Now of wolf-thought. He lives primarily in the present with little thought for tomorrow and no thought for time. Possessed of a casual sensuality, rather like a wolf with feline undertones. He doesn't mind teasing and flirtations with the ladies, but is only now experiencing lovemating with Arrowsong. Not interested in casual joinings -- does not care to be physically intimate with someone who he is not emotionally intimate with also. This doesn't necessarily make him more inclined to be monogamous, only that all his relationships, be they long or short, means something to him. He's prone to form strong ties with lovers, close friends, and whatever children he may sire.

Skylight is generally even-tempered and good humored. Seldom one to lose his temper since minor annoyances rouse in him amusement rather than irritation. When he does lose his temper it's explosive; whatever he says, he means, and won't apologize for it later. The first wave of rage passes quickly and he'll usually stomp off to sulk in private. Unless the incident comes up for him daily, he'll quite likely have forgiven and forgotten by morning. Seldom holds a grudge.

CREATIVE CONTROL: Valerie Bowe



ELF NAME: Wavesong
 GENDER: Female
 MATE: Bluetree, Recognized Lifemate. (d)
 FATHER: Stormer
 MOTHER: Springbow (d)
 SISTER: --
 BROTHER: Greylock
 CHILDREN: Twill (m).
 OTHER RELATIONS: Nightstep, nephew.
 Softwill (f) and Season (m), grandchildren.
 DF DATE BORN: -596 WF
 ORIGIN OF BIRTH: Timber Valley
 EYES: Rust colored
 HAIR: Black, Soft and wavy, shoulder length.

HEIGHT: 3'10"
 TALENT (POWER): --
 WEAPONS USED: Black & gold slim dagger. Short sword. Bow & arrows.
 SKILLS: Weaver, personal councillor to Nightstep. Occasional hunter.
 JEWELRY: Triangular-shaped gold earrings.
 CLOTHING: (Warm weather): Tan crossover shirt with high shoulders and bunched-up half-sleeves. Tan deerskin breeches with cream-colored lacings. Soft tan boots. (Cold weather): Add rabbit-fur coat and replace breeches with thick, white fur pants, and replace soft boots with thick black fur boots. Mittens.

OTHER INFORMATION: Wavesong is Nightstep's chief councillor and is one of the more respected elves in the Holt. She is very intelligent, but needs time to think things out before acting. It was for this reason that she turned down the chieftainship when her brother died. She didn't feel that she was capable of enough decisiveness and was afraid she would make serious mistakes when under pressure. She felt much more comfortable in the role of advisor. She also recognized the leadership qualities in Greylock's son, Nightstep, and therefore passed on the chief's position to him.

Wavesong is very wise and is always available to someone needing advice and counsel. She is very close to her son and grandchildren. She and Softwill spend a lot of time together, walking and talking in the forest. Quiet Softwill reminds Wavesong of herself at that age, and she has much sympathy for her granddaughter's self doubt, having turned down the chieftainship for similar reasons. Season does not need her counsel so much, but in her he finds a ready opponent for his riddle-games.

Because she can see all sides of a situation, she supports her son's attitude about humans, in that they need peace between the tribes. She is the one who usually softens Nightstep's wrath after an incident with the five-fingers.

Wavesong loves water, and is especially fond of swimming in the moonlight. A clear night with both moons full always finds her out in the lake. She is also fond of songbirds and has trained a number of them to come to her whistle. She had Nightway shape her a bird feeder which she keeps filled with wild grain seeds for her small friends.

Wavesong has almost no temper. No living member of the Timber Folk has seen her lash out in anger, either with voice or hand. She is competent with weapons, but has only an infrequent taste for hunting. She enjoys the occasional dremberry, but has sense enough not to get drunk on them.

CREATIVE CONTROL: Timber Valley Non-Persona Character.



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE... In DF 23, a hunting party came across a hooded, cloaked figure -- a female Troll named Catgut. She was lost, far from her tribe. The Elves decided to take her to the Valley's Troll Caverns, but were somewhat uneasy about her presence. [ILL MET AT MOONSLIGHT by Nikki Wieleba, TIMBERS 12].

THE TIMBER VALLEY TROLL WAR
Part One

"WANDERING SPIRIT"
by Ruth Clark
DF 24 HT



The Timber Valley Troll War
has just begun!

The forest was simply too quiet. Duskdew looked around nervously, squinting her light green eyes. She didn't like the silence. A moment ago, a handful of steps back, she'd heard songbirds and crickets, the rustling of leaves, the sounds of night animals. Here, she could hear nothing save the wind in the tree branches. No animals. As if something had scared them into silence.

The wind was at the young flirt's back, carrying her own scent back to her. She didn't like that. It was what was ahead she was worried about, where the out of place silence was.

Duskdew reached her hand out toward her younger brother, who walked at her side. ****Quicksilver...****

The silver-haired male grasped her hand, weaving his fingers between hers. ****I know. It's too quiet.**** He turned to look at her, and she could see the worry in his green eyes.

****Snowtail knows, too,**** Duskdew sent. Snowtail, her fox-bond, trotted at her heels. He walked slowly, crouching a little with his ears twitching. ****I don't like it. Let's hunt somewhere else.****

Quicksilver turned around and pulled Duskdew with him. He glanced back over his shoulder. There was something there. He could almost feel its eyes on him. But what was it? Humans? An animal? Or maybe trolls? The glider remembered the peculiar incident with the female troll whom some of the elves had escorted to the troll warren. Something had been forming since her arrival, but none were certain what it was, and the trolls who had contact with the elves couldn't or wouldn't tell them anything more.

Whatever it was, if there was anything there at all, it hadn't attacked. The only weapon Quicksilver carried was a slim dagger, so he didn't want to take the chance of provoking anything he couldn't fight. The best thing to do was leave and tell chief Nightstep.

****Maybe we should go back to the Holt,**** Quicksilver suggested, squeezing his sister's fingers.

****That's probably a good idea,**** Duskdew returned. She bent over and scooped Snowtail up her arm. The fox snarled playfully, snapping at the maiden's blonde-haired braid that fell down in his face.

****All my ideas are good,**** Quicksilver sent jestingly, trying to put her at ease.

****Oh yeah?,**** Duskdew shot back, smiling wickedly at her sibling. ****That about that time you...****

A loud, out of place sound interrupted Duskdew; a sneeze.

Duskdew froze in mid-stride, tightening her hand around Quicksilver's. Without moving her head, she looked at the younger elf. He was staring back at her.

****Troll,**** he sent, although the flirt had already suspected that. No human or animal sneezed like that, so deep and with obvious blockage from a large tongue.

Slowly, both elves looked back over their shoulders. Behind them, all they could see were shadowy bushes and trees.

****Dusky, let's get out of here,**** Quicksilver sent, pulling on his sister's hand.

Duskdew started to walk again, a bit hesitantly, then she broke into an unsteady run. Quicksilver kept pace with her, but the two had only taken a few strides when a voice bellowed, "Don't let them get away! Get them! They'll ruin everything!"

Muttering and cursing, Quicksilver whirled around, snapping his hand out of

Duskdev's hold. Duskdev turned too, dropping Snowtail and pulling out her silver dagger. Three large trolls were pushing out of the bushes; the first was tall and muscularly built with a long beard on his chin and thick brown hair, and his two companions were smaller and fatter. All three carried a blade in hand and had at least one long dagger at leather belts.

One of the smaller trolls attacked Duskdev, the other two going after Quicksilver. The maiden ducked a clumsy thrust that sailed right over her head. She almost laughed. Stupid troll! He moved about as gracefully as a bear after a White Fall season of hibernation.

The troll swung again and missed. Duskdev shot in, slicing open the leather covering his side and then skipped backwards out of his reach. She saw blood saturate the wound. The troll cursed her and stabbed his blade at the maiden, missing again. Duskdev took advantage of the mistake, cutting the troll's arm open.

How's Quicksilver doing, she wondered. She cast a quick glance around for her brother and smiled when she saw him. He was floating above the trolls, and one of the diggers had a cut across his forehead. The brat's smart when he wants to be, Duskdev thought proudly.

The clumsy troll she was fighting suddenly charged at Duskdev while she was distracted, ramming her against a tree and trapping her arm and sword between them. Duskdev cried out in pain, silently berating herself for allowing her attention to wander and for underestimating her enemy.

"Stupid elf," the troll growled in her face, pushing down on her much smaller body. Duskdev gasped, her eyes bulging. He was trying to crush her to death! This was serious. She could die. She hadn't thought of that before.

Quicksilver! the flirt sent desperately, but she could see that the glider wouldn't be able to help her. One of the trolls had caught his ankle and was pulling him down.

So it's up to me, Duskdev thought, fighting to wiggle out from under the troll's bulk. I think I'm in trouble.

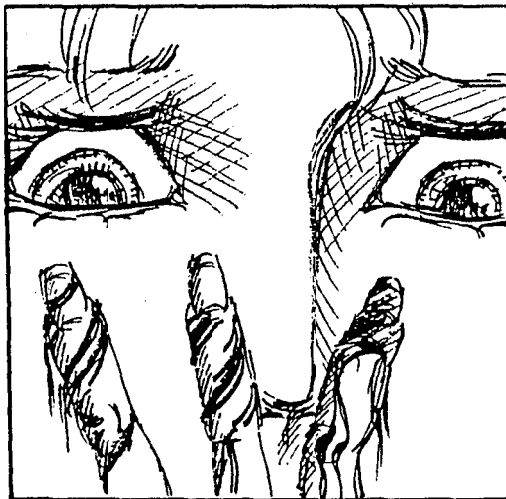
The troll pressed her harder into the tree, and the maiden screamed. It hurt, it hurt, it hurt! Help me, help me, help me! Why didn't he just use his sword, end it quickly? No! Desires to live gave new strength to her body, and she managed to wrench one arm free to stab at the troll's eyes.

There was a sharp bark and a growl, then the troll released Duskdev, screaming. She inhaled deeply, quickly checking everything. Nothing seemed broken, as she'd feared, although her ribs and chest hurt. She looked to see what had drawn the troll away.

The troll was hobbling around, taking swipes at a furry red blur at his ankle. Duskdev smiled weakly. It was Snowtail, High Ones bless the fuzzy little brat. The fox was gnawing at the troll's lower leg, alternating between ankle and knee and darting back and forth to avoid the troll's hands. The troll finally hit the small animal in the side, sending the fox rolling into a tree, where he lay in a broken little heap.

Hey, that's my fox, you fat toadstool, Duskdev thought angrily. She grabbed her dagger off the ground from where she'd dropped it when the troll had released her and lunged toward the dirt digger. Her rage and pain added force and accuracy to her aim, and she ramed the silver blade up to the hilt into the troll's chest. Without even thinking, she twisted the dagger, pushing it further in and up.

Warm blood gushed out of the wound, soaking the maiden's hands and the front of her shirt. The troll coughed, then gagged, spraying Duskdev's face with spittle and blood. She released the weapon and stumbled backwards, staring at her bloody hands. The troll fell onto his back and lay there,



The troll fell onto his back and lay there,

arms and legs twitching.

"High Ones," Duskdev whispered hoarsely, staring at the body. She'd done that. How? It had all happened so suddenly that she hadn't had time to think. Dead. He was dead. She'd killed a troll. Murder. No, self-preservation. She'd never killed a troll before, never even fought one. She'd taken a life, and no one would profit from it.

I'm gonna be ill, Duskdev told herself, turning away and holding her hand over her mouth. She tasted the troll's blood, and her throat contracted.

Sers! Quicksilver's sending exploded in her head, **Look out!**

Duskdev turned around, her queasiness slowing her motions. For a moment, she'd forgotten about her younger sibling and the other trolls.

The larger troll obviously hadn't forgotten her. He was only steps away, running toward her with his long sword held over his shoulder. Duskdev yelped and stumbled back. He swung and she felt the air move as the blade went by.

He missed! Duskdev staggered back, running into a tree. She couldn't believe her luck. That should have taken her head off. She felt weak and faint, and she sat down heavily against the stout tree trunk.

Sers! Quicksilver sent in anguish and horror. What was wrong with him? Was he in trouble with his troll? Duskdev turned her head and saw that the second of the smaller trolls was dead and Quicksilver was flying toward her. She watched as he landed on the troll's back and killed him. The glider hopped off the digger's back and ran toward her, face pale and eyes large.

It's okay, Silver, Duskdev sent, managing a weak smile and holding up one hand. **The troll missed. He...missed?*

She paused and stared at her upraised hand. It was drenched with blood, as was her arm, not just speckled with troll's blood as it had been before. She looked down. Her shirt, once green and brown, was red. She lifted her hand to her throat and her fingers sank into a wide slice in her flesh. Warm moisture gushed out of the cut, and any pressure she applied did nothing to hinder the flow.

The troll hadn't missed. Duskdev grabbed her throat, trying to stop the blood. It didn't hurt. Why didn't it hurt? Why wasn't she dead, or at least unconscious? She didn't want to be awake for this nightmare.

The maiden looked up. **Quicksilver? she sent, frightened. Quicksilver had stopped a step away and was staring at her, one hand held to his mouth. He quickly pulled his shirt over his head and knelt down beside Duskdev to wrap the cloth around her neck, gently taking her in his arms.

Quicksilver, I'm dying, Duskdev sent dully, staring at the blood on her hands. She felt tired and groggy. The fear was leaving, and she was watching calmly as everything happened. I'm going to die, she thought sleepily, closing heavy eyelids. I thought this would hurt.

Hold on, Dusky, Quicksilver sent, lifting her into his arms and arching into the air. Tears clouded his vision and he coughed on a sob.



Duskdew opened her eyes. ****It's okay, 'Silver. It doesn't hurt,**** she sent weakly. I'm dying, but don't be sad, the maiden thought. She imagined her heart beating, faint and trembling. I'm dying. I'm dying. I'm dead. The flirt went limp in the glider's arms and her eyes closed.

****Sers!*** Quicksilver sent, panicking. ****Sers!*** His sending echoed back at him in an empty shell. No, he thought. Oh no. Not you. He tightened his arms around her and flew as fast as he could, sending for Greeneyes and Goldenbraid.

When Duskdew opened her eyes, she was lying on her back in the grass, watching as Quicksilver flew over. He was carrying her. But how could that be? She couldn't be on the ground and up there with him at the same time.

"Quicksilver, wait! Where are you going?" Duskdew cried, jumping up. Her brother continued on, not hearing her. Why'd he leave me behind, she wondered.

My throat. It occurred to Duskdew that she was no longer bleeding. She touched her neck. It was perfectly healed. Her clothes were clean of any blood, as were her hands and face. What was going on?

I'm dead, Duskdew realized. She balanced on her heels and looked around. So, this is death. Isn't so different. So, what do I do now? She stood there for a while, thinking and waiting. Nothing happened. Hmm. Well, this certainly is fun.

With a resigned sigh, the maiden in spirit form walked away, looking for someone or something to tell her what to do.



When Quicksilver reached the Holt, he flew over the Thorn Barrier. He caught a glimpse of Hushleaf shaping the plants to admit passage, which was no longer necessary, then he landed on the ground in front of Goldenbraid. Greeneyes came sprinting up to join them with Two Star and Nightstep.

"Greeneyes..." Quicksilver said breathlessly, helplessly holding out his sister's still body.

****Put her on the ground. Quickly!*** Greeneyes ordered. Quicksilver did so, and the small Healer knelt over Duskdew. Her face paled as she realized the severity of the wound.

So fleeting, so faint. It could be too late. So much blood, the Healer thought,

starting to heal flesh and urge a heart to beat. She slipped into a deep Healer's trance, bringing forth all of her talent. It might not be enough, even with Goldenbraid's assistance. Oh, sweet cubling, hold on, hold on, she thought before losing herself to body-awareness. Greeneyes was so deeply engrossed that she almost didn't notice Goldenbraid's presence when the native-born Healer added her healing forces.

"What happened?" Nightstep asked Quicksilver. The youth stared at his chief, raw sorrow in his face, tears traced on his skin. "Quicksilver?" Nightstep reached out and shook Quicksilver's shoulder, hoping to bring him out of the daze.

"W-what?" Quicksilver asked, shrinking away from the physical contact. He stared at Duskdew, so pale and lifeless. All the way here, he'd sent to her, trying to make some contact, but there'd been nothing. Just an empty place. They were bound by souls. Nothing could keep him from finding her, nothing save death.

"No," Quicksilver whispered, covering his face with trembling hands. "Not Dusky."

"It's all right, lad." Nightstep pulled Quicksilver into his arms, hugging him tightly. At first, the glider fought the hold, then he relaxed, crying into the chief's shoulder.

"She's dead," Quicksilver said roughly.

"If she were dead, those two wouldn't be working so hard," Nightstep argued. He held Quicksilver at arm's length and jerked his head toward the Healers. "Look, she's still breathing. Don't give up yet." Quicksilver nodded, rubbing moisture from his cheeks and nose. "Now, what happened?"

"Trolls," Quicksilver hissed angrily, his eyes narrowing. He sighed, and the rage slipped away. "W-we were out hunting, and they attacked us. Three of them. Duskdew killed one, but it dazed her. I had two, but one broke away to go after her. If that one troll hadn't slowed me down..." The young elf pounded his fist into his palm, his face twisting. "I might have reached her in time. I shouldn't have let myself get separated from her. I knew she hadn't ever had to fight like that before. Only if..."

"It's already done, cub," Two Star interrupted, shaking his head. "Wishin' won't change what happened."

"Aye, but the trolls," Nightstep said. "Did they say anything? Give a reason for the attack?"

"No." Quicksilver shook his head, glancing at Duskdew and the Healers. It was taking so long. Why? "One of them sneezed, which revealed them. The troll said not to let us get away." The glider pulled his hand over his face. "Said we'd ruin everything."

"Who?" LongKnife asked, approaching with Sapphire and Mooncrest.

"Trolls. They attacked Duskdew and Quicksilver," Two Star replied.

"Is Duskdew going to be all right?" Mooncrest asked, noting the amount of blood that covered Duskdew's clothes as well as her brother's. He couldn't see any physical wound, but he didn't draw any conclusions--no telling how long Goldenbraid and Greeneyes had been working on his tribemate.

"We don't know yet. We're waiting for their say-so," Nightstep said, waving a hand at the Healers. "She was hurt bad. It's taking a while."

Greeneyes slipped out of her trance and sat back on her heels. She sighed and seemed to wilt, bowing head and hunching shoulders. Goldenbraid didn't make any motion to move away, her hands still on Duskdew.

"Beloved?" LongKnife ventured, crouching down beside his lifemate. There was worry and concern in his blue eyes.

****Very...tired,**** Greeneyes sent wearily. Bone-tired, she thought. The healing had sapped all of her strength. She tried to stand, but fell forward. ****Oh!*** LongKnife caught her before she landed and gently cradled the small elf in his lap.

"Is Duskdew going to be all right?" Quicksilver asked, leaning over the green-eyed Healer and her mate, afraid to check for himself because he didn't want to disturb Goldenbraid. If Goldenbraid wasn't through, why was Greeneyes, he wondered? Being the stronger of the two, he would have thought that she would have outlasted the elder.

"Greeneyes, are you done with the healing?" Two Star asked, picking up on Quicksilver's doubt. "Why is Goldenbraid still...?"

****What?*** Greeneyes sat up and looked to where the other Healer was sitting over Duskdew, eyes closed with her hands resting on the younger elf. ****Uh-oh. Two Star, take her away gently.****

"Hmmm?" Frowning, Two Star carefully shook his mate's shoulder. Goldenbraid slouched forward, almost falling over Duskdew. "High Ones!" Two Star gasped, picking up the Healer. Her head lulled back limply, coming to a stop against his shoulder. "Greeneyes...?"

****I should have warned her not to not to over-exert herself, but I was thinking only about Duskdew,**** Greeneyes sent. ****She'll be all right, Two Star. She just needs to regain her strength. Take her back to your tree, let her sleep for a long while, and when she wakes, make sure there's something for her to eat and drink.****

"Yes, little Healer," Two Star said softly, carrying Goldenbraid away. Mooncrest went with him to offer assistance and to find his own mate and to tell her what had happened.

"Greeneyes," Quicksilver said, desperation rising in his voice. "Duskdew. Will she be all right?"

****We've done all we can for her right now,**** Greeneyes sent, looking down at Duskdew.

"All you can?" Quicksilver repeated. He sat down and lifted his sister into his arms, holding her close as if to pass some of his life into her. She looked so pale, so drained. He could feel her breathing, faint and shaky, and her heartbeat beneath his fingers was too light. He looked up. "What do you mean? Will she live or won't she?"

****I can't say.**** Greeneyes covered her face with her hands. She hated feeling

this helpless. She'd used all her skills, and still it might not have been enough. **The blood she lost was great. She was practically dead when I first touched her. All Goldenbraid and I could do was stop the bleeding, heal the flesh, and speed up her natural healing abilities. We couldn't replace the blood.**

"So she might still die," Quicksilver whispered, then sent to Duskdew, **Sers? ** There was only echoing emptiness. **Sers! ** He looked at Greeneyes. "She's not in there! I can't find her!" he cried, holding the maiden closer and bowing his head over hers. "S-she's dead...but she's alive."

"Greeneyes!" Nightstep said, waiting for the small Healer to explain.

She's not dead, just lost, Greeneyes sent, sitting forward to touch Duskdew's brow.

"Lost?" Quicksilver echoed. "What do you mean?"

I told you that when I touched her, she was dying. Duskdew thought she was already dead, so her spirit left her body prematurely.

"Will she come back? Can she come back?" Quicksilver asked, grasping at any hope offered. Duskdew had to live, she just had to.

**Well... ** Greeneyes faltered, massaging her forehead. **Her spirit is still anchored to this physical existence by her body. But...I don't know. This is new to me. I'm not sure what will happen. I'm not sure if Duskdew even realizes that she's still alive. If she doesn't... I don't know if she'll even be able to find her way back to herself. I'll try to help her once I'm strong again, but I can't guarantee anything. Are you hurt, Quicksilver? ** It was hard for the Healer to tell if the young man was injured as his shirt was covered with Duskdew's blood. She was sure she didn't have any strength left to heal him, but it was best to know what things had to be done once she was able.

"No, I'm fine," Quicksilver lied. One of the trolls had twisted his ankle, but he wanted Greeneyes to save herself for Duskdew. "I'm going to take her to our tree."

I'll be in to check on her later. Let me know if anything happens. Send for me, no matter what, Greeneyes sent. The glider stood, lifting Duskdew and holding her against his chest. His ankle throbed, but he ignored it. No need to walk anyway--he floated himself a few steps off the ground and headed in the direction of his and Duskdew's tree.

"I think we'll need to have a Council," Nightstep said softly, rubbing his chin beard. "Sapphire, Hushleaf," he said to the two elves who'd been standing nearby, watching silently. "Let everyone know there'll be a council tonight. Longknife, take care of Greeneyes, but try to come to the meeting." Still stroking his dark beard, the chief walked, heading for Two Star's tree and sending for Wavesong. He wanted to check on Goldenbraid and talk to his elder counselor. Something was definitely happening with the trolls, and he wanted to make sure they were prepared.

The day was warm, but Duskdew could barely feel the heat. That annoyed her--she loved the warmth of the sun, to sit in its golden rays and sleep.

The maiden was sitting on top of a tree, the leaves swaying gently beneath her. She'd discovered, quite quickly, that her spirit form could fly. That find had thrilled her for a while, as she'd always admired Quicksilver's talent, but now she was bored with it. What good was such a skill if there was no one around to share it with, to play with?

Duskdew wasn't sure she liked being dead. It didn't bother her too much, but it was definitely boring. Wasn't she supposed to go somewhere, see someone? She'd always thought there'd be dead elves around, but she hadn't seen a single one. In her travels since dying--she'd walked for a great deal, looking for someone--she hadn't seen anything or anyone who could help her. She'd felt things passing her by at a high speed, had caught glimpses of elves as they streaked past, but she could never catch or follow them. Where were they going that was so important, and shouldn't she be going with them?

The solitude had given her time to think, and the flirt had been sad for a while. What if she couldn't join in this new, unexplored plane. What if she couldn't find anyone in which to join with if joining were possible? Was she to spend the rest of her existence sitting on the tops of trees, alone? And then she'd started to miss all her friends back at the Timber Valley Holt. Quicksilver was probably upset about her death, poor kid. Snowtail was dead. She'd cried over losing the small, red fox, then she'd cried over losing all her friends, realizing they were as far from her as Snowtail was.

Duskdew sighed and sat up, looking down at the forest floor. Maybe she'd explore the world of two moons, see if there were other tribes of elves she could

watch. Or, she thought with a bright smile, maybe she'd just go back to the Holt and stay there forever. That might be fun--she could live where ever she wanted, and watch the males while they bathed. She could even haunt Quicksilver for a while--it would serve him right for all the awful tricks he'd played on her most his life.

Duskdew hopped off the tree and landed on the forest floor. With all her walking around, it might a while to get back to the Holt. She wasn't quite sure how her spirit body worked, but she wasn't going to try anything too difficult. Just floating. Once she found someone to talk to, if there was anyone to talk to, she'd find out faster and more convenient ways to travel. And about joining--she had to find out about that.

"Sers," a soft, lilting voice called from behind the young flirt.

"Huh?" Duskdew whirled around, shocked to have heard someone say her soulname aloud. Only Quicksilver knew her soulname, and the strange voice had been definitely female.

A male and female elf stood in the shadow of the tree that Duskdew had just jumped out of. They were oddly familiar. The female was small and petite with a mane of blond-white curls that were drawn back from her brown eyes and tied with green leather. Her eyes were silvery-blue, like sky on a blade, and she was dressed in a short green halter top with a matching shirt that was trimmed with yellow leather. The male, who stood with one arm around the maiden and with his other hand resting on the head of a shadowy wolf, was tall and slender. His hair was a sharp contrast to the female's--it was onyx black, and fell back from his forehead in straight lines. Green eyes were almost covered by a wide, brown headband, and his nose was straight and narrow over thin lips that curved down into a square chin. He was also dressed in leather, brown and grey in color, and a long sword hung at his waist.

"Sers," the female repeated, stepping forward with her arms open to hug Duskdew.

"M-Mother?" Duskdew stammered in disbelief, standing stiffly in front of the woman, making no move to accept the embrace. She looked over the elf's shoulder to where the male elf stood with the wolf. "Father?" She couldn't believe what she was seeing. Both her parents, Lakedove and Truesight, had been lost in the Death Flood, along with her father's wolf, Quietase, when Duskdew had been only eight and two turns. Her memory of them was clear though. She remembered the happiness that had always been in their small hometree, riding Quietase on mock-hunting trips with her father, her mother teaching her how to cure leathers.

"What're you doing here?" Duskdew asked them. Truesight moved forward to stand at his mate's side.

"We've come to take you where you belong, child," Truesight said, holding out a hand for her to take. Duskdew hesitantly took her hand, and her face lit up as knowledge of what they were and where they'd come from filled her. Yes, yes, she was to go with them to a very special place, where there was no pain, no humans, no trolls. Nothing would be able to hurt her there, and she'd be with her family, and with other spirits.

Crying with joy, the maiden flew into the arms of her dead parents.

Unknown to the three spirits, another spirit was watching them, keeping hidden from sight. Quietly, so not to give his presence away, the being slipped away, returning to his own body.

Durran Shadowhand stood slowly, massaging the back of his neck to work out a kink. He'd been watching the female spirit, Duskdew, for several days, knowing she was lost. His discovery of the one spirit had led to his search for other elves, and he'd found the Timber Valley Holt, a tribe of small-statured tree-dwellers. Amusing little group, running around so desperately, trying to get everything done, like ants. He'd learned of Duskdew's dilemma through watching them--the poor maiden believed she was dead while her body actually continued to live. Would she return to her body? That hadn't concerned Durran too much. After all, she was just one small elf, of no significance to him. So he'd simply sat back to watch what would happen before returning to his travels.

His opinion of the situation had changed with the arrival of the two spirits who did belong, her parents. Durran walked over to his horse and picked up a saddle to place on the steed. He smiled to himself while he worked, a smile that actually reached his dark blue eyes. Long, slender fingers worked the ties and belts together in a routine he'd been performing for centuries. Saddle bags and rolled furs were tied on next.

"Sers," the tall, slim elf murmured elegantly, his smile deepening. So simple, as was the maiden who the name belonged to. She'd be perfect for what he needed.

Healthy and pure-blooded. The vessel he'd been searching for, and the knowledge of her soulname would make his task easier as well as possible.

Durran swung up onto the stallion's back, gathering his long coat around his legs and holding the reins loosely in his gloved hand. He clicked softly, pressing knees into the horse's sides. "Move, Rorwin." It was time to find a place where he could make a more secure, secreted camp. He would be staying for a while, watching and waiting, and he didn't want the small valley folk to know of his existence. Duskdew would be the only one he'd have contact with, and once he was through with her, she wouldn't even know he'd touched her life.

In his and Duskdew's hometree, Quicksilver sat on some sleeping furs at his sister's side, watching while Greeneyes tended the comatose maiden. There were two candles burning on separate shelves to light the chamber as the sun had long since disappeared behind the horizon. The room, one of two in the hometree, was Duskdew's dwelling place, and it was decorated with colorful weavings and rugs.

Quicksilver sighed impatiently, waiting for Greeneyes to finish. Five nights had passed since the trolls' attack on them, but Duskdew hadn't shown any signs of waking. Soon, Greeneyes wouldn't be able to help the maiden, and her body would die. Someone suggested preserving her body in wrapstuff, but how would they know if she'd returned or not? Would Duskdew be able to return to a body covered with wrapstuff?

Nothing, Greeneyes sent in a defeated tone, startling the young glider from his worried thoughts. She sat back in the furs, whipping a hand across her brow. Her skin was damp with perspiration, her blonde hair clinging damply to her forehead. **I was sure I was getting closer yesternight, or that she'd gotten closer to me, but now it feels like she's even further away.**

"That's bad," Quicksilver said, taking one of Duskdew's hands in his own.

Yes. Greeneyes touched Quicksilver's shoulder. **The food and water we do manage to get into her isn't enough anymore. She's becoming thinner each night. I was against it at first, but I didn't think it would take this long. Preserving her in wrapstuff may be the only alternative.**

"Yes," Quicksilver agreed, not voicing his doubts on the method. The important thing was that Duskdew remained alive.

I'll check on her later. I have to go talk with Nightstep. The Healer rose from the bed to leave. In the five nights since the attack, there'd been talks of a confrontation with the underground-dwellers, and Greeneyes wanted to find out if there'd been any changes during the day. She placed her hand on Quicksilver's cheek, lifting his chin. **Don't give up, cub. And eat something and sleep--you'll pass out from exhaustion and hunger.**

"Yes, Healer," Quicksilver said solemnly. Greeneyes left, and he remained in his comfortable position, holding his sister's slack hand. On impulse, he leaned closer to Duskdew, staring at her intently.

Sers! he sent, hoping that he could reach her even though Greeneyes hadn't been able to. **Sers, please come back! Sers!** Again, as the past eights upon eight times, silence was all he received.

"Curse it." Quicksilver drew back and stared at the tree's wall. He exhaled shakily, bowing his head into his hand. What if she died, or never returned to her body? Quicksilver couldn't imagine life without his older sibling. It seemed like they'd always been together, bickering, prank-pulling, teasing, hunting, getting drunk, causing trouble. What would he do without her?

"Dusky, you just have to come back," Quicksilver told her, turning his head to look at the maiden. Her mouth moved slightly, and the glider drew in his breath, sitting forward, thinking he'd been mistaken. Duskdew gasped sharply and her eyes bulged open.

Sers! Quicksilver grabbed the maiden and clasped her to his chest, tears of happiness and relief filling his eyes and spilling out.

"Don't touch me!" Duskdew gasped, struggling weakly. Her eyes were large and dilated, her expression frightened and lined with pain. "You're hurting me! Stop it! Get me out, get me out! It hurts too much!"

"Duskdew, what's wrong?" Quicksilver asked, releasing her. "What is it? Out of where? You're safe now. No one's going to hurt you."

Duskdew wrestled with an invisible foe, kicking off the furs that covered her and clawing at her arms, torso, and head. Her voice was shrill with desperation. "It hurts! Let me out! Everything's pressing me in!"

Greeneyes! Come quick! Duskdew's awake, and she's in pain! Quicksilver sent. Even though he was afraid of hurting her, he caught his sister's hands and held them down at her side so she wouldn't harm herself. "Dusky, what's wrong?"

Greeneyes wasn't far away, and she arrived quickly with her lifemate, LongKnife. She sank into the sleeping pit and placed her hands on Duskdew.

All right, Quicksilver, let her go. Easy cubling. Don't fight so. You'll hurt yourself, Greeneyes sent calmly, searching for any injury she or Goldenbraid might have missed. She found nothing. Physically, Duskdew was fine, save for her weakness because of blood loss. Duskdew's mental state was another matter. The maiden was distraught, and it was her spirit-self in pain, not her body. Greeneyes had heard of such things happening, but had never seen it. The world they lived in put much pressure on their bodies that the spirit didn't experience when freed. Upon returning to the body, some found it painful, as if they were being shoved into too small a space.

Greeneyes gently soothed the girl, healing her soul as much as she could. As was unavoidable in such touching of minds, and this time something she wished to know, Greeneyes viewed some of Duskdew's memory over the past few nights. She learned of her contact with Lakedove and Truesight, and was surprised and awed at such intimate commerce with spirits of those long dead.

She'll be all right, Greeneyes sent. Duskdew had relaxed and lay peacefully in the bed, eyes closed and breathing regular. Quicksilver sighed in relief, his shoulders sagging. Greeneyes stroked Duskdew's brow. **How do you feel, cub?*

Duskdew opened her green eyes and stared at the ceiling. "I'm not dead," she whispered in a raspy, monotone voice. Her lips trembled and she turned her head to the side, closing her eyes tightly. The flicker of the candles caused the tears on her cheeks to glisten like jewels. "Why'd they bring me back here?!" the maiden cried, pounding her fist on the furs with as much strength as she possessed. Violent sobs shook her body and tears flooded her pale face. "I don't want to be here! I wanted to go with them! Why'd they leave me behind again?!"

Quicksilver tried to comfort Duskdew, but she pushed him away, hiding her face in her arms and turning toward the wall. Quicksilver looked at Greeneyes, his expression bewildered.

She had contact with both her parents. They guided her back to her body, Greeneyes sent. She bowed her head and sighed sadly. LongKnife placed his hand on the Healer's shoulder, and she patted his fingers. **She didn't understand where they were taking her, but she didn't want to return to her body. She wanted to go with her parents.**

"But they're dead, and if she went with them, she'd be dead too. No, that can't be," Quicksilver refuted, shaking his head. "Not Dusky. She would never want to be dead. You've seen her, both of you. She's one of the happiest, liveliest elves in the Holt." LongKnife and Greeneyes exchanged worried glances. What Quicksilver said was true, but what Greeneyes had seen and felt was undeniable.

Duskdew was staring at the wall of the tree, closing her ears to what was being said. She felt trapped, as if everything were pressing her spirit into a small ball inside her body. It hurt. She wanted out. "Why'd they leave me behind? Didn't they want me to be with them?" she whispered, her throat closing. She shut her eyes and mourned the loss of the freedom she'd found in the touching of her father's hand. How she longed to be free again.

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NEXT: Part Two of the Troll War picks up with "The Thunder Below", written by Melissa Ackroyd-Livingston. A hostile takeover in the Troll Kingdom threatens the very existence of a gambling/trading party of elves. Tension mounts when the group doesn't return...

