

Elder Wolf

S.L. Armstrong



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Storm Moon Press™

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From the darkness came a low growl, and silver eyes shone in the gloom. The old man lifted his eyes from his book and peered into the blackness of the doorway to his room. The eyes flashed in the orange firelight like quicksilver, and the man felt his heart begin to race with fear. With unblinking eyes, he watched the massive gray wolf stalk into his bedchambers. It made no sound as its paws almost glided across the floorboard, but the man continued to gaze in fear at the prowling beast.

He yelped, the sound shrill in the stifling silence, and cowered as the wolf effortlessly leaped atop the bed. The wolf approached the man carefully, warily, its eyes taking in the withered form of the frightened human. With each step the animal took, the closer it came, the man became more and more aware that this beast was somehow familiar. Not in the way of a hunter faced with long-escaped prey – he had not hunted wolves for many years – but the warm silvery eyes gave him comfort, soothed his trembling spirit. When the wolf was close enough that the man could smell its hot breath and inhale the fur’s woody scent, a flash of memory split his age-battered mind.

The old man relaxed into the softness of his pillows, his weary bones cushioned by the feather mattress, and patted the space next to him. “Come,” he said quietly. “Lay beside me.”

The wolf’s ears twitched and its large muzzle cracked into what reminded the man of a lopsided grin. The great beast collapsed beside him with a tired groan and rested its ample head in the man’s lap. A sense of calm enveloped the human as he began to pet the wolf’s thick, storm-colored pelt. The reassuring scent of the beast took him back through time to a boyhood he had almost forgotten.

He began softly, finding the rhythm in the words as he stroked his unexpected night-time companion.

“Listen, my friend, as I tell you a tale
Of a young boy, tall, handsome and hale –
Who came upon a love devoted and true
In the forest among the birch and the yew.

“Long ago, Elder Wolf, did this story unfold,
And there is so much that has never been told.

“Twas when summer’s love at last did wane,
And winter rose to be all men’s bane,
That this young one, with fear in his heart
Into the bitter cold was forced to depart...”

He was hungry, hungrier than his baby sisters, since he would not take food from the mouths of those in his charge. He was a man, the only man in their house now, and he would do without so that his sisters would not know the pain of hunger. It was the threat of utter starvation that drove him out into the coming blizzard.

Their tiny village had suffered a harsh winter: ice, bare branches, lean meat, and poor crops. His father had died in the early autumn, leaving behind spoiled fields, diseased livestock, and six children. Faolan was the eldest at eighteen summers. His mother was sickly herself, and his sisters were too small to hunt, plant, or gather. Their mediocre root cellar had gone bare within a month of the first snowfall. They had made do with the little dried meat neighbors had given them and the few frozen root vegetables he dug from the failing garden. The stew was not filling, but it offered sustenance and staved off death. Now, however, even that was spent.

Faolan trudged through the snow, his feet bound in thin leather, and wondered if he would ever feel warm again. He clutched a small hunting knife in his numbed hand as he walked closer to the foreboding wood. His heart hammered in his breast. No one in the village hunted in the Cursed Wood, but the prospect of fresh game drew Faolan to the border of the forest.

As he stood in the whipping, biting wind that cut through his rags and chilled him to the bone, he thought of returning to the warm cottage where his family awaited his arrival. But they expected him to bring food, and it was the memory of their hungry, hopeful gazes that made him cross the line of trees and enter the shadowy woods. The wind was not so strong when he was in the safety of the trees, but the cold stillness sent a new shiver through his frozen body. He tread cautiously, his eyes darting around the white landscape of trees and shrubs, searching for some kind of animal life -- rabbit, gopher, even a lame bird -- anything to boil and offer his family.

Amid the falling snow, harsh wind, and the ice-laden boughs of the trees above, Faolan wandered for hours without realizing the time that passed. His lips turned blue and his teeth chattered, frightening any animal within hearing distance. The boy's movements became sluggish and his eyes drooped. He finally stopped to rest for a moment. He chose a hollow tree, tucking himself safely in the nook, and decided to wait for the storm to blow over. As sleep washed over him, he felt warm and content. Just before his eyes slipped shut, Faolan swore he saw the figure of a large dog bound toward him. But he was too drowsy to care if the beast had come to devour him.

Faolan slowly woke. His limbs were heavy, but he was warm -- so warm that it was almost uncomfortable. His mother must have become chill in the night and fed the fire. He would have to speak to her about that -- their wood supply was limited and they needed to be wiser about its use. He rolled over and stretched, draping his arm over the warm body snuggling against his naked belly.

The warm, fur-covered body.

His eyes shot open and he drew away from whatever lay against him. He cried out as his back met with a solid form, hot and furry. Wolves. Massive gray wolves were sleeping in a circle around him, offering him warmth. Faolan's breathing was ragged with fear as he searched for a way to escape the ring of wolves without disturbing any of them.

“K’archin!”

The wolves woke immediately and turned their heads toward the source of the sound. Faolan turned, too, and was surprised to see a man standing near a dark cavern opening.

“Etk,” the man barked, and the ring of wolves stood, stretched, and filed out of the chamber. As the final wolf passed by the man, he patted its head and murmured something that caused the wolf’s tail to wag before it finally left them alone.

Faolan pulled one of the skins he had been lying on over his nakedness and stared up at the newcomer with wide, scared eyes.

“Achmos-che?” the man asked.

“I... don’t understand,” Faolan said as he scooted closer to the wall.

The man scoffed as he folded his arms. “You are a... hunter?” he asked in Faolan’s language.

Faolan shook his head. “N-no --”

“You lie,” the man snarled as he flung the small hunting knife to the dirt floor. “Hunter of the wolf.”

Faolan again shook his head. “I was hoping to find a rabbit --”

“It is winter, Man-child. Other than the wolf, all animals hide deep in the woods, far away from the angry wind. Did you not hunt before the snow like most of your kind?” As he spoke, the man crossed the rounded den to fumble with something hanging from the ceiling.

“My father died just before winter. He was the hunter.”

The man cast a snarl over his shoulder. “You are not a child; you should know how to hunt.”

Faolan squirmed in embarrassment. “My parents thought I should learn to plant before I learned to trap.”

“How did you expect to find rabbit if you do not know how to track?” he asked in a tone that dripped with disdain.

Anger flared inside Faolan, and he stood up, the fur falling to the floor. “I don’t know,” he snapped, his nudity forgotten. “All I know is that my sisters and mother are starving and I could not sit idly by and watch. I had to try.” Faolan took a deep breath. “Who are you?”

“I am Ad’en,” the man said as he turned around with a large sack in his hand. His bright amber eyes trailed over Faolan’s naked form. “I am the Wolf-Prince, and you were treading in my territory.” The Wolf-Prince’s eyes seemed to glow as he approached Faolan, and the young man trembled at the strange sight.

“You fear me,” Ad’en said with a trace of a smirk.

“Yes,” Faolan choked out.

Ad’en smiled ferally, exposing elongated canine teeth. “You should, boy. I am the guardian of my pack.”

“I meant your pack no harm.” Faolan didn’t recognize his own voice, high and tight with fear.

Ad’en stopped two paces from the terrified, naked boy and held out the sack. “There are four rabbit carcasses, a shank of deer, and a side of boar, all dried. It should feed your family until the thaw.”

Faolan felt tears of relief spring to his eyes. “Thank you,” he whispered as he clutched the bag to his chest.

“You are too skinny,” Ad’en observed mockingly as he took in Faolan’s body once more. “But you are a survivor, and your eyes remind me of the summer sky. After the first thunderstorm of summer comes, return to the clearing in the wood nearest your village. I desire to see you again.”

“All right,” Faolan agreed, staring into the wolfish gaze. Something inside him demanded to know what Ad’en could want with him. Something inside him demanded to know why his heart raced, why his eyes followed the Wolf-Prince’s every move. Curiosity was too weak of a word to describe the pull he felt, but he needed to know the answer. To know the answer, he would have to return. “Following the first storm, I will come to you.”

“There are breeches and a thick shirt on the stool behind you, and boots here. You are also free to use the furs of my departed packmates for your family, on the condition that you tell no one of us. My pack is my utmost concern, and I will not hesitate to slaughter your entire village to protect them.” Ad’en’s voice became low and menacing as he spoke this final threat, eyes flashing with warning. “Dress and go, boy, but keep silent.”

Ad’en walked to the room’s entrance, but paused for a moment. “Esula will lead you from the woods by the swiftest path.” As the Wolf-Prince left his presence, a huge She-Wolf appeared, her tongue lolling out of her muzzle as her green-grey eyes took in the sight of him.

Faolan blushed and quickly dressed, his mind whirling at all that had transpired. As he left the heat of the den, close on the tail of the She-Wolf, he found himself eager for the summer to come so that he could learn more about this Wolf-Prince who had saved his life.

The thunder of the first summer storm rocked their little hut, causing his baby sisters to cower close to their mother’s legs. Faolan neither noticed the fear of his siblings nor cared about the dampness and stifling humidity that permeated their small home. He stared up at the blackness that poured the first tears of the season upon the world, and he waited impatiently for the weeping to cease. All winter, all spring, Faolan had felt a restless need in him. A hunger, woken in the depths of a forest cave, that he did not know how to satisfy.

He dreamed during the night. It was something he had not done since early childhood, when his sleeping head had been filled with visions of wolves and bears. Now, when he closed his eyes, he was assaulted with images of the Wolf-Prince. What he saw were unwholesome visions of acts he had never before imagined. His heart would race, he would toss on his bed of straw and rags, and when he did wake with a start, his loins would ache with a sweet pain. As the sun rose, Faolan would breathe deeply, calming his raging blood and willing his hard flesh to soften, desires returning to their quiet home in the shadows of his heart.

Dreaming and waking seemed to collide in his mind so much that Faolan began to doubt the Wolf-Prince had ever rescued him. Yes, he had brought the bag of meats to his mother, but a careless hunter could have left them behind... It did not mean that a wolf in the guise of a man had saved him from the biting cold of winter. No, he had merely been lucky, delusional from the frost and his fears, and had created the myth he had dreamed about for so many months. When the rainstorm passed, he would not go to the verdant clearing where Ad'en had asked him to appear. He would remain with his mother and siblings and help them plant in preparation for the fall harvest.

As the sun came out from hiding behind the veil of black and baked the muddy earth dry, Faolan emerged from their home, blinking at the sudden brightness. Their small plot of land was pathetically sparse, most of the ground infertile, too acidic for any vegetation to seed and thrive. Somehow his father had worked this land, made it give its best so that they always had enough food to fill their bellies. Faolan wished with all he was that he could charm the soil as his father had, but deep down, he knew he would not be. It would be a lean, terrible season again, and by the winter, their stores would be bare once again. He felt an oppressive weight on his shoulders, in his chest, as he stared at the dead ground and worry knotted in his belly.

“Man-child.”

Faolan felt the hairs all over his young body prickle and stand up on end when that gruff, angry voice broke the silence. He turned slowly, his eyes wide as his heart sped in his breast. Standing at the edge of the dense wood was the Wolf-Prince, wearing nothing but loose cloth to cover his sex. His arms were crossed over a broad chest covered in grey-brown fur that Faolan was certain would be as thick and soft as a wolf's pelt. The pleasant ache of the loins he often woke with assailed him in broad daylight, before the object of his attraction, and he blushed with humility as the Wolf-Prince continued to gaze at him with furious eyes.

“Wolf-Prince,” he breathed.

Ad'en stalked toward him, his leg muscles bunching and releasing as he walked, his eyes like coals in a dying fire. “You promised to meet me in the clearing, Man-child. You have broken your oath. Such a thing will not go unpunished.”

Faolan stood frozen under Ad'en's glare, and his desire quickly coalesced into a heated shaft of need. “Punished?” he asked raggedly, both aroused and frightened. He could not understand where the desire came from, but it was a smothering, palpable presence between himself and Ad'en.

“Come into the wood with me, Man-child. Now,” Ad'en said in a dangerously low growl. It

was a command, not to be mistaken for anything else, and Faolan found himself immediately following the Wolf-Prince.

Once out of sight of his little hut and the dirt paths the villagers used, Ad'en turned to him. Before Faolan could cry out, Ad'en had pounced, and he was swiftly knocked to the forest floor under the Wolf-Prince's substantial bulk. Ad'en pulled on his hair, exposing the tender flesh of Faolan's throat, and pressed sharp, deadly teeth to the pulse pounding under thin flesh. Faolan trembled, weeping silently with terror, and Ad'en slid a clawed hand under the flimsy fabric of the human's tunic. Lethal nails bit into the meat of Faolan's belly, raking across the skin, blood welling in the shallow scratches left in the Wolf-Prince's wake.

In the blink of an eye, Ad'en was on his feet again, his eyes clouded with emotions Faolan knew he was still too young to truly understand. "Do not break another oath, Man-child, or the consequences will be more than you will want to face."

Faolan stiffly got to his feet, his face bright with the chastisement. He was more humiliated than hurt, and he was certain that had been Ad'en's intent. "Stop calling me that," he snapped, pressing his tunic to the superficial wounds on his stomach. "I have a name."

"Of course you do," Ad'en said matter-of-factly. "You simply never provided me with it, and so I call you as I choose."

"My name is Faolan," the boy said almost petulantly. "It means--"

"Wolf," Ad'en murmured, gentleness spreading over his bronze features. The Wolf-Prince scrutinized him, amber eyes boring into Faolan's sapphire gaze as if seeking the secrets to the boy's very being. He nodded slowly, a smile tugging at the corner of his full lips. "Wolf-cub would be more appropriate," he teased.

"I am a man!" Faolan insisted. "I have spent nineteen summers on this earth. I am no child."

Ad'en shook his head. "You do not plant to feed your family. You do not hunt to stock your stores. You do not lay with a woman to slake your lusts. You do nothing a man does."

Faolan felt his blush deepen. "The soil is acidic and hard. I have never learned to hunt, so I would not know how to begin. And I have no lusts; I am no animal!" he lied. He would not be bullied by this creature any longer.

With slow, deliberate steps, Ad'en came to stand before him. Feral eyes gazed down at him, reflecting the raw truth Faolan did not wish to admit. The ache resurfaced as if called up by those all-knowing eyes. He made a choked sound in the back of his throat, reminiscent of a frightened, wounded animal, and more shame mixed with the renewed arousal. Ad'en inhaled deeply, his eyes drooping half-closed, and grinned. "You lie. I can smell your desire. I can feel the heat of your body. You are wracked with lusts you do not understand or control."

The spell was broken in an instant when Ad'en stepped back, his face an unreadable mask. "I will teach you to hunt, Faolan. You may also come to this clearing to plant. The soil is rich and fertile;

it has lain fallow for many years. Perhaps next summer I will view you as more than a cub. Perhaps then I will see you as a man.”

There was a sadness to the words, as if Ad'en wished he could see Faolan as more than he was. Faolan realized he wanted this untamed creature to view him as more than an inexperienced child. He wanted Ad'en to show him the ways of the wild, the things that his father had not been able to explain. His desire to learn all the Wolf-Prince could teach was intense, as was his desire to be possessed by him as a man would possess a woman.

Low in the brush, his head down and his eyes sharp, Faolan prowled the forest. A slight rustle to his left alerted him to the rabbit's presence. He dropped to his hands and knees, the wide blade of his knife held firmly in his teeth as he crawled slowly, carefully, toward his prey. Beyond a bush was the fat, floppy-eared beast. Faolan narrowed his eyes, took the blade from his teeth, and inched closer... closer... then attacked.

The hunt was over in moments. Scarlet covered his hands and thighs from the efficient kill. Without any hesitation, Faolan drew the blade along the rabbit's underbelly from tail to throat, swiftly gutting the animal, leaving the innards for other wild beasts to consume.

“Very good,” the Wolf-Prince praised as he came from behind the thick trunk of a great oak. “This is the fifth hunt you have completed without my help, Faolan. I am proud of your progress.”

Faolan blushed under the kind words. It had taken him so many months to learn stealth; how to hunt without giving his prey any hint he was there. Summer had passed quickly, and autumn was almost over. The cellar of his small home was full of dried, smoked, or salted meats, more than enough to take his family through until the spring. He stood up, his catch dripping crimson, and bowed his head to Ad'en. “It is you who gave me such skills, my friend, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. We would have starved this winter if you had not come for me.”

Ad'en's eyes glittered in the dying light of the day as he reached out and clasped Faolan's shoulder. “The first snowfall is in the air. Within days, the ground will be frozen and the way to your home barred until spring. Still, I will not come in spring. I am prince of my people and I preside over our mating rites when the snows melt. Come to our clearing after the first summer storm,” he commanded, his eyes deep and his mouth set. “Do not break your oath to me.”

“I swear,” Faolan whispered. “I will not disappoint you again, Ad'en.”

The hand that rested so firmly on his shoulder moved, shifted from shoulder to neck, and from neck to cheek. There was a softness in Ad'en's eyes that Faolan had longed to see since summer. The golden gaze was unfocused as it looked down on him, and that hard, bronzed body was just a little closer. Spattered blood, cooling meat, and the coming separation were all forgotten as those arrogantly curved lips descended upon his, pressing with force and sharp teeth.

Faolan had never been kissed, though he was almost to his twentieth year. Kissing seemed instinctual, and his body opened to Ad'en's questing tongue. Pointed canines scraped at his bottom lip,

mingling blood with sweetness and heat, and Faolan heard a soft mewling sound. It was only as the kiss deepened, as he spread his mouth wide for Ad'en's assault, that he realized the sound was issuing from his own throat. Their tongues met, twirled, and caressed each other, but when Faolan dropped his rabbit to embrace the Wolf-Prince, Ad'en pulled away.

"Forgive me," Ad'en said raggedly before he turned and ran from the clearing, disappearing into the darkened forest.

Tears sprung to Faolan's eyes, but he bit them back, forbidding them to fall. He grabbed the carcass and walked toward home. Ad'en's kiss still burned, his lips tingling from the pressure and the superficial cuts the Wolf-Prince's teeth had left behind. His body continued to ache, unfulfilled desire boiling deep in his veins. All he wanted had been held out toward him and then abruptly snatched away, leaving his heart sore. Was this what love felt like, he wondered? Did he love the wild creature?

The wind blew, and several snow flurries drifted down. Never before had Faolan felt so cold and so alone. Winter was a harsh season, but it would be bearable. Come summer, he would be at Ad'en's side once more.

And he would win the Wolf-Prince's heart.

The scent of rain hung heavy in the air. The stifling heat was broken by the first thunderstorm, which left a thin mist covering the forest floor. Faolan stood tall, having changed much since Ad'en had last seen him. The boy he was had passed into memory, and the man remained. His hair, once limp and dingy, was now full with a curl, lightened by the many spring days spent in the sun planting and harvesting. His meager livestock had survived the dead of winter to bring new life. Managing farmland that was slowly coming back to life had given Faolan broad shoulders, a muscular torso, and corded legs. This was all displayed proudly as he donned the same summer garb Ad'en favored: a simple loincloth made from the last kill he had made with the Wolf-Prince.

His cobalt gaze scanned the surrounding brush, seeking the honeyed eyes that had tormented his dreams and flesh since that first winter. Those eyes stared at him from beside a gnarled willow, unblinking and wide. Faolan gave Ad'en a calculated smile, turning to face him full on. He was still shorter than Ad'en, but he was certain he could give the Wolf-Prince a challenge should they race or hunt together. "Ad'en," he breathed, his voice deeper now, matured and sensual.

"Faolan," came the quiet reply. "You have grown from a cub into a wolf." Ad'en rose from where he had been hiding and approached Faolan, a wariness Faolan had never seen reflected in the gaze.

"I have learned much since we parted," Faolan said steadily.

"To plant? To tend animals? To become a husband? A father?" Ad'en asked, almost hopefully.

Faolan's smile became secretive. "I have learned to plant and tend my animals, yes. To become a husband and a father is not a call I feel. No, what I learned was about the mating rites of the wolf."

Shock showed on the usually impassive face. “Our mating rites? You seek to mate with one of my pack?”

“Oh, yes. I very much do. For one of your pack stole my heart in my youth, and now I have come to claim his.” Faolan snatched his hand out, quicker than the Wolf-Prince could follow, and buried his hand in the thick mane of brown-black. He pulled Ad’en to him, crushing their mouths together in a vicious, needful meeting of lips and tongues. The kiss continued for mere heartbeats before Ad’en shoved Faolan away.

“We cannot do this, Faolan!” he cried angrily. “We are not even of the same kind!”

“I do not care!” Faolan shouted. “You left me for two seasons, living on the taste of your mouth. Your body hungers for mine as much as mine does for yours. You cannot lie, Ad’en, I can *smell* you!”

Ad’en shook his head. “There has never been a mating of our kind to yours, Faolan. I do not even know if the gods would permit such a thing. It was a mistake to seek you out and I can only ask for your forgiveness. We will not meet again.” Before Faolan could protest, Ad’en dove into the dense forest surrounding their clearing and disappeared.

Faolan glared after the Wolf-Prince, his nostrils flaring and his ears twitching. Ad’en would not elude him for long; he had practiced tracking during the winter, sending his well-protected eldest sister into the woods so he could track her scent. He had learned much from Ad’en, and that would be the Wolf-Prince’s undoing. Faolan crouched down, scented the air briefly, and caught Ad’en’s musky scent. His face broke into an eager grin and he took off, silent behind the Wolf-Prince, easily following the clumsy attempt at escape.

Over rocky terrain, through shallow riverbeds, under fallen ancient trees he followed Ad’en, ever intent on capturing his quarry. Ad’en was his as much as he was Ad’en’s, and it was time they stopped this dance and accepted their love for each other. He would never find happiness with a simple maid from the village, and Faolan knew that when Ad’en’s heart chose him, it damned the Wolf-Prince to never taking a bride of his own.

A wolf mated for life.

Faolan burst through a thicket of brambles and stumbled, coming to a halt before a line of huge, angry wolves protecting the entrance to a den. His face was twisted into a furious scowl; he had not chased Ad’en over so many miles to be stopped now! “Let me pass!” he demanded. When none of the wolves made a move to allow him, Faolan fell to his hands and knees, taking an offensive, aggressive stance. “If you do not allow me to pass, I will fight each one of you. Ad’en himself taught me my skills, and he has taught me well. Now, part!”

One of the wolves relaxed, its eyes becoming soft as if remembering something. It was then Faolan recognized the big She-Wolf. “Esula,” he said to her. “I must speak with Ad’en.”

Esula barked and, when none of the wolves backed down, growled low and deep in her throat.

It was only then that the line of protectors parted, though reluctantly, to allow Faolan's entrance. He walked by them, his head high, and into the darkness of Ad'en's kingdom.

"You should not have followed me," Ad'en hissed from the shadows. "I cannot be near you, Faolan. My body craves yours like a parched man needs water. Do not test my patience or my strength of will. I have neither where you are concerned."

Faolan stalked toward the voice, his fingers fumbling with the ties of his loincloth. "I desire neither of them from you," he said as the feeble excuse for clothing fell to the floor. He stood in front of Ad'en in all his glory, hard and thick, needy and desperate. "This is what you reduce me to. In waking or dreaming, I ache. Please, Ad'en, ease that pain for me. Let us join."

"No!" Ad'en insisted, his eyes fixed on that damp, dark pillar of desire.

"Then I will have to force your hand." Faolan fell to the ground, ripping Ad'en's loincloth from him. He was just as aroused as the human, but his sex was much thicker, longer, than Faolan's, and it was slick with juices a normal man did not have. Faolan felt his cock pulse at the sight, and he reached out to grasp that shaft. Ad'en let out a feral scream when their flesh connected, his eyes wild, sanity and humanity lost in one tentative touch from the one his heart and soul cried out to.

Faolan was immediately borne to the ground, flipped onto his belly by strength he had never imagined Ad'en to possess. "Up!" Ad'en commanded, pulling on Faolan's hips. Without much thought, Faolan raised himself onto his hands and knees, exposing his backside to Ad'en. He had never given much thought to what their coupling would be like, and now fear struck at his heart. Without warning, Ad'en pressed his ample length into the tightness of Faolan's body.

The twinned cry was one of pleasure and pain, of possession and loss of innocence. Faolan felt himself taken deeply, spread wide by the cock that speared him. Ad'en did not wait, withdrawing and thrusting forward in a mindless quest for completion. Faolan closed his eyes, focused on the way that thickness felt moving inside him, and found he didn't have to try to force pleasure -- Ad'en's hand on his own dripping shaft reignited his desire.

He was lost on the sea of rutting, of moving between the fist surrounding him and the cock that pounded into him, heedless of the newness of the act. Faolan felt his eyes unfocus, his muscles loosen to move with each thrust, each jerk of hand or hips, and he gave himself over to the beast within and without. Ad'en pushed particularly deep, as if seeking the very core of Faolan, and the man could not withhold his surprised shout as the fullness inside and the tightness stroking him wrung a shattering moment of pleasure. The ground was watered with his seed, the pearly fluid flowing freely over Ad'en's moving hand. The Wolf-Prince milked him, every drop precious proof of his love and desire, staining where they made their marital bed.

The howl that ripped through the cave when Faolan was flooded with scalding heat was one of pure joy and terrible regret. Clawed hands gripped his sides tightly, digging into tender flesh. As Ad'en's cock jerked and poured itself into him, the Wolf-Prince bent over his body and buried elongated teeth into the meat of Faolan's shoulder. He marked the man, leaving a wound deep and bloody, a scar that would last long after their bodies parted.

Too soon, that parting came.

Ad'en now took more care, withdrawing from Faolan's abused backside. Faolan's arms trembled under the fatigue he felt, but it was not the fatigue that sent his face into the packed dirt floor. It was the warm, wriggling tongue of his new lover lapping at the trickling moisture leaking from his sore opening, cleaning him with loving tenderness.

"I do love you, Faolan," Ad'en said gruffly. "Throughout the years of your life, never forget how much I love you. Never forget this day."

The sorrow in Ad'en's voice forced Faolan to turn as much as he could, his heavy-lidded eyes seeking the tall, bronze form of his mate. Instead, he saw only the grey-brown figure of a mighty wolf, its amber gaze liquid, swimming in tears the beast could not shed. Faolan shed tears for them both as his Wolf-Prince spread out beside him, offered him the warmth and comfort of his body. In that moment, Faolan knew the terrible punishment that Ad'en had foreseen had come to pass.

The fire in the hearth had burned low, and a chill settled in the small room.

"Never again did they meet on this earth. So ends the tale of the boy and his prince. Two souls forever parted, in penance for that moment's love ever since," the old man said softly, his voice hoarse with wear and tears.

"One a human, sentenced to grow old and die;
The other a beast, who must bid him good-bye.
But though there is sorrow, there is happiness here, too.
For the heart and the soul can never be untrue.

"In the darkness of dreams, the wolf came to the boy,
And in that twilight, they both found their joy."

The wolf gazed up at the man with familiar, amber eyes, filled with such despair that it forced tears from the old man's eyes as he continued.

"Do not weep for me; do not weep for my tale.
Do not weep though my strength begins to fail.
I go now into a sleep you cannot follow –
But in sadness and loss you must not wallow.

"My time is over; of my love I need not convince..."

The old man faltered, his eyes falling shut as his vision blurred and faded. As the arms of death embraced him, drawing him close for an eternity, Faolan felt tears fall upon his chest. The spell was broken; Ad'en again had his human form and it was his warm, gentle hands that caressed his lover's cold brow.

As he sighed his last breath, Faolan whispered the final line: “You shall forever be... my fearless Wolf-Prince.”