

The Stag's Song

By Donna Lyon Rhose

Sitting in a circle near a spring that bubbled almost noisily, Tamlynn and a few other men sat and talked. They strung for fishing or carved wood for bows, though that was not really the purpose Tamlynn had taken them to sit out in the woods. They had gone quite a ways away from the Healer's Village to a place Tamlynn had discovered himself once when he had been hunting. It had a quietness about it that Tamlynn enjoyed so much that he found himself wanting to share it. Since Taliesin's departure he kept remembering the wonder of the Wild Hunt he had partaken of and that he now had something he was meant to partake of with other men. He wasn't sure he understood how he might be seen as the Guardian of the Island, but he did want to find a way to open up the experience of that strange and fated Ride.

They had been in the woods for several days away from any other contact but themselves. Because it was a fairly small island, they used no horses, so that even that sort of presence was missing and the only animals they heard were those in the wild. The men in the Healer Village liked Tamlynn's insistence on these 'trips' and even if they might hunt as well, it was obvious it was not the real purpose of it. Not that the Village didn't have it's own means of male bonding as did the women, but, this was less structured or directed. It even allowed for a great deal of playfulness and a willingness to truly open up one's feelings.

For Tamlynn, it was a way for him to begin to understand what Taliesin had charged of him, to bridge the meaning of his experience with the Wild Hunt into a meaningful experience for others. To touch other men, to help them begin to comprehend as well. Was he really doing that, he sometimes wondered as he looked at the others. It had to be admitted that after these trips the men who had participated were calmer, more relaxed, and more open to their mates or lovers. Could he really be making better husbands, fathers, even Healers? Could a Bard really even think he could bequeath such things to authentic Healers as such? Besides, there were his own people that he must be concerned of. As Taliesin promised, a small faction of Sacred Dancers, Musicians and Singers now made their home on the Holy Isle. And Runners came in their travels, news from the People of the Cymric Mainland as well as the Bardic Council. Much of the news was disturbing as well, for war had begun to break out between the Britons and the Cymru to the extent that Tamlynn's advice had become much sought for his understanding of the Elves. In this he always shared his thoughts with Dori; for him she 'was' the Lady of the Holy Isle, of the Healer's Flame, so her opinion and knowledge provided a balance. He wanted his words, his decisions as a Bard to be 'of the Holy Isle' as it went forth back into the mainland. And truly, it was received as such. The Wandering Bards who came through to either give news and/or seek advice were very impressed at the equilibrium Tamlynn had struck there, the only true Bard living in the midst of what amounted to as a Healer culture. He may have felt it at times, but to others, he never seemed lost, or ill at ease, it had become 'his' Island as much as it was theirs.

Watching the other men, smiling, telling tales, getting the others to talk, this trip had been pleasant and almost too mild. Still, some of them had been on a trip a time or two before and it appeared they were beginning to hit a certain symmetry of their own. For a long while that day they had shown Tamlynn various wild herbs and plants, being

pleasantly surprised to find a whole batch of a rare plant that they took many cuttings from and resolved to remember where these had been found. Not that Tamlynn's own background didn't give him some knowledge, but he conceded an enjoyment at the others 'showing' him.

That night, there was a lot of movement in the woods and Tamlynn surmised there might be a predator nearby, causing him to instruct that a good fire be kept a lit all night and that turns would be taken to tend it and keep it well built. Having kept the first watch, Tamlynn found himself quite groggy as he lay down into the grasses next to the others. It didn't seem long when he awoke with a start and looked quickly about the camp. "Bevin," he said to the man tending the fire, "Where's Drew?"

"Just stepped a little ways to relieve himself." Bevin shrugged. "Ought be back in a moment.

Tamlynn listened into the woods a space when a chill instantaneously ran down his spine. "Something's wrong... Wake a couple others, the rest of you stay here and stay put. We need to find him, the woods have danger tonight and I don't hear him. But, don't the rest of you scatter after us. We'll either bring him back here or wait until morning." With torches and short swords, Tamlynn and two others began to move in the direction Bevin indicated Drew had gone. Calling the man's name into the night's aires, Tamlynn could feel the chill in him growing stronger. Halting a space so he might calm his mind, the other two men did the same as if in wordless communion as they all seemed to reach out at once. Drawing in his breath, Tamlynn spoke shortly, "Ahead... Just keep going." After a few moments, Tamlynn abruptly stopped, sensing a quick drop at his feet. "Drew?!" He called and heard an echo of his voice in the breeze.

"Tamlynn?" Called back a weak voice beneath them, "I've fallen... Gods, I think my leg's broken. I can't move."

"Hold tight." Said Tamlynn as he began to investigate the drop. Carefully the three men picked their way down to finally find their friend in a precarious niche. He was badly bruised and bloodied as well, causing Tamlynn to exclaim, "What happened, Brother? How did you get so far away from camp?"

Fear still lit the man's eyes, telling Tamlynn there had been an ordeal. "I was about to come back..." He explained somewhat breathless. "I heard a noise, a growl and I was chased. I tried to run back to camp, but it wouldn't let me. I think there was more than one... I ran, I could barely see. I fell... I became afraid I'd be attacked, but nothing happened after. Then I heard you call... Thank Gods."

The pain in the man's voice told Tamlynn he was in trouble. When the other men made some moves to try to lift Drew, Tamlynn quickly said, "No... no... I know it's dangerous, but we better leave this 'til morning... Make a small fire, we'll guard him tonight." As the others built the flames, Tamlynn quietly wrapped himself about the wounded man, "Lay back." He nearly commanded, "Sleep... I'll protect you with my energy..." As the man became settled in Tamlynn's arms, Tamlynn began to softly sing. It was the way Bards tried to help other Bards in sickness or pain, so he was a little uncertain if it really would help this man, but it was all he knew to give. He was pleased as he felt the man relax and go into a quiet slumber at last. The additional two men realized to keep a watch, putting up a healing blanket of energy of their own for their friend. As Tamlynn sang, it began to slowly die down into a hum as he, too, fell asleep wrapped about the wounded man. His dreams became filled with impressions of a stag,

running and leaping through the woods. Feeling himself running with the stag, the air rushing by as branches and leaves strew about, he became the stag, muscles stretching, straining as he continued to run. Suddenly he stopped and turned, snorting and pawing the ground. The figure of Drew lay before him and he could feel the man's spirit trying to slip away. "Get up." The stag directed, "I do not hunt tonight. Your friends shall take you home and you shall be a wonderful Healer of your own." The figure of Drew did get up at that, an awe drawn through his features. Waking in the morning light, Tamlynn's arms still enfolding Drew, he said softly, "How are you, Brother?"

The man's intake of breath was brisk, "My Lord,..." he nearly gasped, "the Stag, the Guardian... He came to wake me, to command my spirit to stay...Your songs..."

"Shhh...We shall have to try to move you soon, and get back to the Village as quickly as possible. Are you stronger?" A look of amazement lit Drew's face as he looked into Tamlynn's eyes to see the eyes of the Stag before him. "My Lord... Tell me I will be well and I know I shall."

Tamlynn nodded slightly, "You shall be well."

Getting back to the Village and Drew properly attended to, the men began to see Tamlynn very differently, a difference Tamlynn sensed would grow as time went on. A breakthrough had erupted and Tamlynn saw what he would come to mean to others. That the trips 'were exactly' what he was supposed to do and that the slow comradeship he would build would bring a brightness and that the Island would always maintain a true band of protection.