

BY THE AUTHOR OF

The Clan of the Cave Bear
The Valley of Horses
The Mammoth Hunters

JEAN M. AUDEL

EARTH'S CHILDREN™

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First Edition

For LENORE,

the last to come home,
whose namesake appears in these pages,
and for MICHAEL,
who looks forward with her,
and for DUSTIN JOYCE and WENDY,

with love.

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The woman caught a glimpse of movement through the dusty haze ahead and wondered if it was the wolf she had seen loping in front of them earlier.

She glanced at her companion with a worried frown, then looked for the wolf again, straining to see through the blowing dust.

"Jondalar! Look!" she said, pointing ahead.

Toward her left, the vague outlines of several conical tents could just be seen through the dry, gritty wind.

The wolf was stalking some two-legged creatures that had begun to materialize out of the dusty air, carrying spears aimed directly at them.

"I think we've reached the river, but I don't think we're the only ones who wanted to camp there, Ayla," the man said, pulling on the lead rein to halt his horse.

The woman signaled her horse to a stop by tightening a thigh muscle, exerting a subtle pressure that was so reflexive she didn't even think of it as controlling the animal.

Ayla heard a menacing growl from deep in the wolf's throat and saw that his posture had shifted from a defensive stance to an aggressive one. He was ready to attack! She whistled, a sharp, distinctive sound that resembled a bird call, though not from a bird anyone had ever heard. The wolf gave up his stealthy pursuit and bounded toward the woman astride the horse.

"Wolf, stay close!" she said, signaling with her hand at the same time. The wolf trotted beside the dun yellow mare as the woman and man on horseback slowly approached the people standing between them and the tents.

A gusty, fitful wind, holding the fine loess soil in suspension, swirled around them, obscuring their view of the spear holders. Ayla lifted her leg over and slid down from the horse's back. She knelt beside the wolf, put one arm over his back and the other across his chest, to calm him and hold him back if necessary. She could feel the snarl rumbling in his throat and the eager tautness of muscles ready to spring. She looked up at Jondalar. A light film of powdery dirt coated the shoulders

and long flaxen hair of the tall man and turned the coat of his dark brown mount to the more common dun color of the sturdy breed. She and Whinney looked the same. Though it was still early in the summer, the strong winds off the massive glacier to the north were already desiccating the steppes in a wide band south of the ice.

She felt the wolf tense and strain against her arm, then saw someone new appear from behind the spear holders, dressed as Mamut might have dressed for an important ceremony, in a mask with aurochs's horns and in clothes painted and decorated with enigmatic symbols. The mamut shook a staff at them vigorously and shouted, "Go away, evil spirits! Leave this place!"

Ayla thought it was a woman's voice shouting through the mask, but she wasn't sure; the words had been spoken in Mamutoi, though. The mamut dashed toward them shaking the staff again, while Ayla held back the wolf. Then the costumed figure began chanting and dancing, shaking the staff and high-stepping toward them quickly, then back again, as though trying to scare them off or drive them away, and succeeding, at least, in frightening the horses.

She was surprised that Wolf was so ready to attack, wolves seldom threatened people. But, remembering behavior she had observed, she thought she understood. Ayla had often watched wolves when she was teaching herself to hunt, and she knew they were affectionate and loyal to their own pack. But they were quick to drive strangers away from their territory, and they had been known to kill other wolves to protect what they felt was theirs.

To the tiny wolf pup she had found and brought back to the Mamutoi earthlodge, the Lion Camp was his pack; other people would be like strange wolves to him. He had growled at unknown humans who had come to visit when he was barely half-grown. Now, in unfamiliar territory, perhaps the territory of another pack, it would be natural for him to feel defensive when he first became aware of strangers, especially hostile strangers with spears. Why had the people of this Camp drawn spears?

Ayla thought there was something familiar about the chant; then she realized what it was. The words were in the sacred archaic language that was understood only by the mamuti. Ayla didn't understand all of it, Mamut had just begun to teach her the language before she left, but she did gather that the meaning of the loud chant was essentially the same as the words that had been shouted earlier, though cast in somewhat more cajoling terms. It was an exhortation to the strange wolf and horse-people spirits to go away and leave them alone, to go back to the spirit world where they belonged.

Speaking in Zeiandonii so the people from the Camp wouldn't understand, Ayla told Jondalar what the mamut was saying.

"They think we're spirits? Of course!" he said. "I should have known. They're afraid of us. That's why they're threatening us with spears. Ayla, we may have this problem every time we meet people along the way. We are used to the animals now, but most people have never thought of horses or wolves as anything but food or pelts," he said.

"The Mamutoi at the Summer Meeting were upset in the beginning. It took them a while to get used to the idea of having the horses and Wolf around, but they got over it," Ayla said.

"When I opened my eyes that first time in the cave in your valley and saw you helping Whinney give birth to Racer, I thought the lion had killed me and I had awakened in the spirit world," Jondalar said.

"Maybe I should get down, too, and show them I am a man and not attached to Racer like some kind of man-horse spirit."

Jondalar dismounted, but he held on to the rope attached to the halter he had made. Racer was tossing his head and trying to back away from the advancing mamut, who was still shaking the staff and chanting loudly. Whinney was behind the kneeling woman, with her head down, touching her. Ayla used neither ropes nor halters to guide her horse. She directed the horse entirely with the pressures of her legs and the movements of her body.

Catching a few sounds of the strange language the spirits spoke, and seeing Jondalar dismount, the shaman chanted louder, pleading with the spirits to go away, promising them ceremonies, trying to placate them with offers of gifts.

"I think you should tell them who we are," Ayla said. "That mamut is getting very upset."

Jondalar held the rope close to the stallion's head. Racer was alarmed and trying to rear, and the mamut with her staff and shouting didn't help. Even Whinney looked ready to Spock, and she was usually much more even-tempered than her excitable offspring.

"We are not spirits," Jondalar called out when the mamut paused for a breath. "I am a visitor, a traveler on a Journey, and she"--he pointed toward Ayla--"is Mamutoi, of the Mammoth Hearth."

The people glanced at each other with questioning looks, and the mamut stopped shouting and dancing, but still shook the staff now and then while studying them. Maybe they were spirits who were playing tricks, but at least they had been made to speak in a language everyone could understand. Finally the mamut spoke.

"Why should we believe you? How do we know you are not trying

to trick us? You say she is of the Mammoth Hearth, but where is her mark? She has no tattoo on her face."

Ayla spoke up. "He didn't say I was a mamut. He said I was of the Mammoth Hearth. The old Mamut of the Lion Camp was teaching me before I left, but I am not fully trained."

The mamut conferred with a man and a woman, then turned back.

"This one," she said, nodding toward Jondalar, "he is as he says, a visitor. Though he speaks well enough, it is with the tones of a foreign tongue. You say you are Mamutoi, yet something about the way you speak is not Mamutoi."

Jondalar caught his breath and waited. Ayla did have an unusual quality to her speech. There were certain sounds she could not quite make, and the way she said them was curiously unique. It was perfectly clear what she meant, and not unpleasant—he rather liked it—but it was noticeable. It wasn't quite like the accent of another language; it was more than that, and different. Yet it was just that: an accent, but of a language most people had not heard and would not even recognize as speech. Ayla spoke with the accent of the difficult, guttural, vocally limited language of the people who had taken in the young orphan girl and raised her.

"I was not born to the Mamutoi," Ayla said, still holding Wolf back, though his growl had ceased. "I was adopted by the Mammoth Hearth, by Mamut, himself."

There was a flurry of conversation among the people, and another private consultation between the mamut and the woman and man.

"If you are not of the spirit world, how do you control that wolf and make horses take you on their backs?" the mamut asked, deciding to come right out with it.

"It's not hard to do if you find them when they are young," Ayla said.

"You make it sound so simple. There must be more to it than that."

The woman couldn't fool a mamut, who was also of the Mammoth Hearth.

"I was there when she brought the wolf pup to the lodge," Jondalar tried to explain. "He was so young that he was still nursing, and I was sure he would die. But she fed him cut-up meat and broth, waking up in the middle of the night as you do with a baby. When he lived, and started to grow, everyone was surprised, but that was only the beginning. Later, she taught him to do what she wished—not to pass water or make messes inside the lodge, not to snap at the children even when they hurt him. If I hadn't been there, I would not have believed a wolf could be taught so much or would understand so much. It's true, you

must do more than find them young. She cared for him like a child. She is a mother to that animal, that's why he does what she wants."

"What about the horses?" the man who was standing beside the shaman asked. He'd been eying the spirited stallion, and the tall man who was controlling him.

"It is the same with the horses. You can teach them if you find them young and take care of them. It takes time and patience, but they will learn."

The people had lowered their spears and were listening with great interest. Spirits weren't known to speak in ordinary language, although all the talk of mothering animals was just the kind of strange talk that spirits were known for--words that were not quite what they seemed.

Then the woman of the Camp spoke. "I don't know about being a mother to animals, but I do know that the Mammoth Hearth doesn't adopt strangers and make them Mamutoi. It's not an ordinary hearth. It is dedicated to Those Who Serve the Mother. People choose the Mammoth Hearth, or are chosen. I have kin in the Lion Camp. Mamut is very old, perhaps the oldest man living. Why would he want to adopt anyone? And I don't think Lutie would have allowed it. What you say is very difficult to believe, and I don't know why we should."

Ayla sensed something ambiguous in the way the woman spoke, or rather in the subtle mannerisms that accompanied her words: the stiffness of her back, the tension in the set of her shoulders, the anxious frown. She seemed to be anticipating something unpleasant. Then Ayla realized that it wasn't a slip of the tongue; the woman had purposely put a lie in her statement, a subtle trick in her question. But because of her unique background, the trick was blatantly transparent.

The people who had raised Ayla, known as flatheads, but who called themselves Clan, communicated with depth and precision, though not primarily with words. Few people understood they had a language at all. Their ability to articulate was limited and they were often reviled as less than human, animals that could not talk. They used a language of gestures and signs, but it was no less complex.

The relatively few words the Clan spoke--which Jondalar could hardly reproduce, just as she was not quite able to pronounce certain sounds in Zeiandonii or Mamutoi--were made with a peculiar kind of vocalization, and they were usually used for emphasis, or for names of people or things. Nuances and fine shades of meaning were indicated by bearing, posture, and facial aspects, which added depth and variety to the language, just as tones and inflections did in verbal language. But with such an overt means of communication, it was almost impos-

sible to express an untruth without signaling the fact; they could not lie.

Ayla had learned to perceive and understand the subtle signals of body movement and facial expression as she was learning to speak with signs; it was necessary for complete comprehension. When she was relearning to speak verbally from Jondalar, and becoming fluent in Mamutoi, Ayla discovered that she was perceiving the inadvertent signals that were contained in the slight movements of face and posture even of people who spoke with words, though such gestures were not intentionally meant to be a part of their language.

She discovered that she was understanding more than words, though it caused her some confusion and distress at first, because the words that were spoken did not always match the signals that were given, and she did not know about lies. The closest she could come to untruth was to refrain from speaking.

Eventually she learned that certain small lies were often meant as courtesies. But it was when she gained an understanding of humor—which usually depended on saying one thing but meaning another—that she suddenly grasped the nature of spoken language, and the people who used it. Then her ability to interpret unconscious signals added an unexpected dimension to her developing language skills: an almost uncanny perception of what people really meant. It gave her an unusual advantage. Though she wasn't able to lie herself, except by omission, she usually knew when someone else was not telling the truth.

"There was no one named Lutie in the Lion Camp when I was there." Ayla decided to be direct. "Tulie is the headwoman, and her brother Talut is the headman."

The woman nodded imperceptibly as Ayla went on.

"I know that a person is usually dedicated to the Mammoth Hearth, not adopted. Talut and Nezzie were the ones who asked me, Talut even enlarged the earthlodge to make a special winter shelter for the horses, but the old Mamut surprised everyone. During the ceremony, he adopted me. He said that I belonged to the Mammoth Hearth, that I was born to it."

"If you brought those horses with you to Lion Camp, I can understand why old Mamut might say that," the man said.

The woman looked at him with annoyance and said a few words under her breath. Then the three people spoke together again. The man had decided the strangers were probably people and not spirits playing a trick—or if they were, not harmful ones—but he did not believe they were exactly who they claimed to be. The tall man's

explanation for the strange behavior of the animals was too simple, our he was interested. The horses and wolf intrigued him. The woman felt they spoke too easily, volunteered too much, were too forthcoming, and she was sure there was more to it than either of them said. She didn't trust them and she wanted nothing to do with them.

The mamut's acceptance of them as human came only after apprehending another thought that would, to one who understood such things, account for the extraordinary behavior of the animals much more plausibly. She was sure the blond woman was a powerful Caller, [and the old Mamut must have known she was born with an uncanny I control over animals. Perhaps the man was, too. Later, when their I Camp arrived at the Summer Meeting, it would be interesting to talk ;to the Lion Camp, and the mamuti would be sure to have some ithoughts about these two. It was easier to believe in magic than the preposterous notion that animals could be domesticated.

During their consultation, there was a disagreement. The woman was uncomfortable, the strangers disturbed her. If she had thought about it, she might have admitted she was afraid. She didn't like being I'll around such an overt demonstration of occult power, but she was i overruled. The man spoke.

"This place where the rivers join is a good place to camp. We have had good hunting, and a herd of giant deer are coming this way. They should be here in a few days. We will not mind if you choose to camp nearby and join us in the hunt."

"We appreciate your offer," Jondalar said. "We may camp nearby for the night, but we must be on our way in the morning."

It was a guarded offer, not quite the welcoming that he had often received from strangers when he and his brother had traveled together on foot. The formal greeting, given in the name of the Mother, offered more than hospitality. It was considered an invitation to join them, to stay with them and live among them for a time. The man's more limited invitation showed their uncertainty, but at least they weren't being threatened with spears any more.

"Then, in the name of Mut, at least share an evening meal with us, and eat with us in the morning, too." That much welcome the headman could offer, and Jondalar sensed he would have liked to offer more.

"In the name of the Great Earth Mother, we would be happy to eat with you tonight, after we have set up our camp," Jondalar agreed, "but we must leave early."

"Where are you going in such a hurry?"

The directness that was typical of the Mamutoi still caught Jondalar

by surprise, even after all the time he'd lived with them, especially when it came from a stranger. The headman's question would have been thought somewhat impolite among Jondalar's people; not a major indiscretion, just a sign of immaturity, or lack of appreciation for the more subtle and indirect speech of knowing adults.

But, Jondalar had learned, candor and directness were considered proper among the Mamutoi, and lack of openness was suspect, though their ways were not as completely open as they seemed. Subtleties existed. It was a matter of how one expressed directness, how it was received, and what was not said. But the forthright curiosity of the headman of this Camp was, among the Mamutoi, entirely appropriate.

"I am going home," Jondalar said, "and I'm bringing this woman back with me."

"Why should a day or two make any difference?"

"My home is far to the west. I've been gone ..." Jondalar stopped to consider, "four years, and it will take another year to get back, if we are lucky. There are some dangerous crossings—rivers and ice—along the way, and I don't want to reach them at the wrong season."

"West? It looks like you're traveling south."

"Yes. We are heading for Beran Sea and the Great Mother River.

We will follow her upstream."

"My cousin went west on a trading mission, some years back. He said some people there live near a river they also call the Great Mother," the man said. "He thought it was the same one. They traveled west from here. Depends how far upstream you want to go, but there is a passage south of the Great Ice, but north of the mountains to the west. You might make your Journey much shorter by going that way."

"Talut told me of the northern route, but no one seems to be sure that it is the same river. If it's not, it could take longer trying to find the right one. I came the southern way, and I know that route. Besides, I have kin among the River People. My brother was mated to a Sharamudoi woman, and I lived with them. I'd like to see them once more. It's not likely that I will ever see them again."

"We trade with the River People . . . seems to me I did hear about some strangers, a year or two ago, living with that group that a Mamutoi woman joined. It was two brothers, now that I think about it. The Sharamudoi have different mating customs, but as I recall, she and her mate were going to be joining with another couple—some kind of an adoption, I suppose. They sent word inviting any Mamutoi relations who wanted to come. Several went, and one or two have gone back since."

"That was my brother, Thonolan," Jondalar said, pleased that the account tended to verify his story, although he still could not say his brother's name without feeling pain. "It was his Matrimonial. He joined with Jetamio, and they became cross-mates with Markeno and Tholie. Tholie was the one who first taught me to speak Mamutoi." "Tholie is a distant cousin of mine, and you are the brother of one of her mates?" The man turned to his sister. "Thurie, this man is kin. I think we must welcome them." Without waiting for an answer, he said, "I am Rutan, headman of Falcon Camp. In the name of Mut, the Great Mother, you are welcome."

The woman had no choice. She would not embarrass her brother by refusing to extend a welcome along with him, though she thought of a few choice things to say to him privately. "I am Thurie, headwoman of Falcon Camp. In the name of the Mother, you are welcome here. In summer, we are Feather Grass Camp."

It was not the warmest welcome he had ever received. Jondalar detected a definite reservation and restriction. She was welcoming him "here," to this place specifically, but this was a temporary location. He knew Feather Grass Camp referred to any summer hunting camp site. The Mamutoi were sedentary in the winter, and this group, like the rest, lived in a permanent encampment or community of one or two large or several smaller semisubterranean earthlodges, which they called Falcon Camp. She had not welcomed him there.

"I am Jondalar of the Zeiandonii, I greet you in the name of the Great Earth Mother, whom we call Doni."

"We do have extra sleeping places in the mamut's tent," Thurie continued, "but I don't know about the ... animals."

"If you would not mind," Jondalar said, if only for the sake of courtesy, "it would be easier for us to set up our own camp nearby, rather than stay within your Camp. We appreciate your hospitality, but the horses need to graze, and they know our tent and will return to it. They might be uneasy coming into your Camp."

"Of course," Thurie said, relieved. They would make her uneasy, too.

Ayla realized she needed to exchange welcomes, too. Wolf seemed less defensive, and Ayla tentatively relaxed her hold on him. I can't sit here holding Wolf all the time, she thought. When she stood up, he started to jump up on her, but she motioned him down.

Without extending his hands or offering to come any closer, Rutan welcomed her to his Camp. She returned the greeting, in kind. "I am Ayla of the Mamutoi," she said, then added, "of the Mammoth Hearth. I greet you in the name of Mut."

Thurie added her welcome, hedging to restrict it to only this place, as she had done with Jondalar. Ay la responded formally. She wished more friendliness had been shown, but she supposed she couldn't blame them. The concept of animals traveling willingly with people could be frightening. Not everyone would be as accepting as Talut had been of the strange innovation, Ayla realized, and with a pang, she felt the loss of the people she loved from Lion Camp.

Ayla turned to Jondalar. "Wolf is not feeling so protective now. I think he will mind me, but I should have something to restrain him while he's around this Camp, and for later, to hold him back in case we meet other people," she said in Zeiandonii, not feeling able to speak freely around this Camp of Mamutoi, though wishing she could.

"Maybe something like that rope guider you made for Racer, Jondalar. There's a lot of spare rope and thongs in the bottom of one of my pack baskets. I am going to have to teach him not to go after strangers like that; he has to learn to stay where I want him to."

Wolf must have understood that raising their spears was a threatening gesture. She could hardly blame him for springing to the defense of the people and horses that made up his strange pack. From his point of view, it was perfectly understandable, but that didn't mean it was acceptable. He could not approach all the people they might meet on their Journey as though they were strange wolves. She would have to teach him to modify his behavior, to meet unknown people with more restraint. Even as the thought came to her, she wondered if there were other people who understood that a wolf would respond to the wishes of a woman, or that a horse would let a human ride on his back.

"You stay there with him. I'll get the rope," Jondalar said. Still holding on to Racer's lead, though the young stallion had calmed down, he looked for the rope in Whinney's pack baskets. The hostility of the Camp had abated somewhat, the people seemed hardly more guarded than they would be toward any strangers. From the way they were watching, their fear seemed to have been replaced by curiosity. Whinney had settled down, too. Jondalar scratched and patted her and spoke affectionately while he rummaged through the pack baskets. He was more than fond of the sturdy mare, and though he loved Racer's high spirits, he admired Whinney's serene patience. She had a calming effect on the young stallion. He tied Racer's lead rope to the thong that held the pack baskets on his dam. Jondalar often wished he could control Racer the way Ayla controlled Whinney, with no halter or lead rope. But as he rode the animal, he was discovering the amazing sensitivity of a horse's skin, developing a good seat, and beginning to guide Racer with pressure and posture.

Avia moved to the other side of the mare with Wolf. When Jondalar gave her the rope, he spoke to her quietly. "We don't have to stay here, Avia. It's still early. We can find another place, on this river or another."

"I think it's a good idea for Wolf to get used to people, especially strangers, and even if they're not too friendly, I wouldn't mind visiting. They are Mamutoi, Jondalar, my people. These may be the last Mamutoi I will ever see. I wonder if they are going to the Summer Meeting? Maybe we can send a message to Lion Camp with them."

Ayla and Jondalar set up their own camp a short distance away from Feather Grass Camp, upstream along the large tributary. They unpacked the horses and let them free to graze. Ayla felt a moment of concern watching them disappear into the dusty blowing haze, as they wandered away from their camp.

The woman and man had been traveling along the right bank of a large river, but some distance from it. Though flowing generally south, the river meandered across the landscape, twisting and turning as it gouged a deep trench out of the flat plains. By keeping to the steppes above the river valley, the travelers could take a more direct route, but one that was exposed to the unremitting wind and the harsher effects of sun and rain on open terrain.

"Is this the river Talut talked about?" Ayla asked, unrolling her sleeping furs.

The man reached into one of a pair of pack baskets for a rather large, flat piece of mammoth tusk with markings incised on it. He looked up toward the section of the dingy sky that glowed with an unbearably bright but diffused light, then at the obscured landscape. It was late afternoon, that much he could tell, but not much more.

"There's no way to know, Ayla," Jondalar said, putting the map back. "I can't see any landmarks, and I'm used to judging the distance traveled by my own legs. Racer moves at a different pace."

"Will it really take a whole year to reach your home?" the woman asked.

"It's hard to say for sure. Depends on what we find along the way, how many problems we have, how often we stop. If we make it back to the Zeiandonii by this time next year, we can count ourselves lucky. We haven't even reached Beran Sea, where the Great Mother River ends, and we will have to follow her all the way to the glacier at her source, and then beyond," Jondalar said. His eyes, an intense and unusually vivid shade of blue, looked worried, and his forehead wrinkled in a familiar furrow of concern.

"We'll have some large rivers to cross, but it's that glacier that worries me most, Ayla. We have to cross over it when the ice is frozen solid, which means we have to reach it before spring, and that's always unpredictable. A strong south wind blows in that region that can warm the deepest cold to melting in one day. Then the snow and ice on top melt, and break up like rotten wood. Wide cracks open and the snow bridges over them collapse; streams, even rivers of meltwater flow across the ice, sometimes disappearing into deep holes. It's very dangerous then, and it can happen very suddenly. It's summer now, and though winter may seem a long way off, we have much farther to travel than you might think."

The woman nodded. There was no point in even thinking about how long the Journey would take, or what would happen when they arrived. Better to think of each day as it came, and plan only for the next day or two. Better not to worry about Jondalar's people, and whether they would accept her as one of them the way the Mamutoi had.

"I wish it would stop blowing," she commented.

"I am tired of eating grit, too," Jondalar said. "Why don't we go visit our neighbors, and see if we can get something better to eat."

They took Wolf with them when they returned to Feather Grass Camp, but Ayla kept him close. They joined a group that had gathered near a fire over which a large rump was spitted. Conversation was slow to start, but it wasn't long before curiosity became warm interest and fearful reserve gave way to animated talk. The few people who inhabited those periglacial steppes had little opportunity to meet anyone new, and the excitement of this chance encounter would fuel discussions and fill the stories of Falcon Camp for a long time to come. Ayla became friendly with several of the people, particularly a young woman with a baby daughter just at the age of sitting unassisted and laughing out loud, who charmed them all, but mostly Wolf.

The young mother was very nervous at first when the animal singled out her child for his solicitous attention, but when his eager licks made her giggle with delight, and he showed gentle restraint, even when she grabbed handfuls of fur and pulled, everyone was surprised.

The other children were eager to touch him, and before long Wolf was playing with them. Ayla explained that the wolf had grown up with the children of Lion Camp, and probably missed them. He had always been especially gentle with the very young, or the weak, and he seemed to know the difference between the unintentional overzealous squeeze from a toddler and the purposeful pull of a tail or ear by an older child. He allowed the former with patient forbearance, and

repaid the latter with a warning growl, or a gentle nip that did not illx^k skin but showed that he could.

T londalar mentioned that they had recently left the Summer Meeting, A and Rutan told them that necessary repairs to their earthlodge had fr delayed their departure or they would have been there. He asked fondalar about his travels and about Racer, with many people listening. They seemed more reluctant to question Ayla, and she didn't volunteer much, though the mamut would have liked to have taken her aside for private discussions of more esoteric subjects, but she preferred to stay with the Camp. Even the headwoman was more relaxed and friendly by the time they headed back to their own camp, and Ayla asked her to pass on her love and remembrances to Lion Camp when they finally reached the Summer Meeting.

That night, Ayla lay awake thinking. She was glad she had not let natural hesitation about joining the Camp that had been less than welcoming stop her. Given the opportunity to overcome their fear of the strange or unknown, they had been interested and willing to learn. She had learned, too, that traveling with such unusual companions was likely to inspire strong reactions from anyone they might happen to meet along the way. She had no idea what to expect, but there could be little doubt that this Journey was going to be far more challenging than she had imagined.

'ondalar was eager to be off early the next morning, but Ayla wanted to go back and see the acquaintances she had made at Feather Grass Camp before they left, and while Jondalar grew impatient, Ayla spent some time making her farewells. When they finally left, it was near noon.

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The open grassland of gently rolling hills and far-seeing distances, through which they had been traveling since they left the Summer Meeting, was gaining elevation. The fast-moving current of the tributary river, originating on higher ground, surged with more vigor than the meandering main stream, and it cut a deep channel with steep banks through the wind-sifted loess soil. Though Jondalar wanted to go south, they were forced to travel west, then northwest, while they looked for a convenient place to cross.

The farther they traveled out of their way, the more irritable and impatient Jondalar felt. In his mind, he was questioning his decision to take the longer southern route, rather than the northwestern one that had been suggested--more than once--and in which direction the river seemed determined to take them. True, he wasn't familiar with it, but if it was so much shorter, perhaps they should go that way. If he could just be certain that they would reach the plateau glacier farther to the west, at the source of the Great Mother River, before spring, he would do it, he told himself.

It would mean giving up his last opportunity to see the Sharamudoi, but was that so important? He had to admit that he did want to see them. He had been looking forward to it. Jondalar wasn't sure if his decision to go south really came from his desire to take the familiar, and therefore, safer way to get Ayla and himself back, or his desire to see people who were family to him. He worried about the consequences of making the wrong choice.

Ayla broke into his introspection. "Jondalar, I think we can cross here," she said. "The bank on the other side looks easy to get up." They were at a bend in the river, and they stopped to study the

situation. As the turbulent, swiftly flowing stream swept around the curve, it cut deeply into the outside edge, where they were standing, making a high, steep bank. But the inner side of the turn, on the opposite bank, rose gradually out of the water, forming a narrow shore of hard-packed gray-brown soil backed by brush.

"Do you think the horses can get down this bank?"

"I think so. The deepest part of the river must be near this side, where it cuts into the bank. It's hard to tell how deep it is, or whether the horses will have to swim. It might be better if we would dismount and swim, too," Ayla said, then noticed that Jondalar seemed displeased, "but if it's not too deep, we can ride them across. I hate to get my clothes wet, but I don't feel like taking them off to swim across, either."

They urged the horses over the precipitous edge. Hooves slipped and slid down the fine-grained soil of the bank and into the water with a splash as they were dunked in the fast current and carried down stream. It was deeper than Ayla had thought. The horses had a moment of panic before they got accustomed to their new element and started swimming against the current toward the sloping opposite shore. As they started up the gradual slope on the inner curve of the bend, Ayla looked for Wolf. Turning around, she saw him still on the high bank, whining and yelping, running back and forth.

"He's afraid to jump in," Jondalar said.

"Come, Wolf! Come on," Ayla called. "You can swim." But the young wolf whined plaintively and tucked his tail between his legs.

"What's wrong with him? He's crossed rivers before," Jondalar said, annoyed at another delay. He had hoped to travel a good distance that day, but everything seemed to be conspiring to stall them.

They had gotten off to a late start, then had been forced to double back toward the north and west, a direction he didn't want to go, and now Wolf wouldn't cross the river. He was also aware that they should stop and check the contents of the pack baskets, after their dunking, even if they were closely woven and essentially watertight. To add to his irritation, he was wet, and it was getting late. He could feel the wind cooling, and he knew they ought to change clothes and let the ones they were wearing dry. The summer days were warm enough, but the southing night winds still brought the chill breath of the ice. The effects of the massive glacier that crushed the northern lands under sheets of ice as high as mountains could be felt everywhere on earth, but nowhere as much as on the cold steppes near its edge.

If it were earlier, they could travel in wet clothes; the wind and sun would dry them while they rode. He was tempted to start south any-

way, just to get some distance behind them ... if they could only get moving.

"This river is faster than he's used to, and he can't walk up to it. He has to jump in, and he's never done that before," Ayla said.

"What are you going to do?"

"If I can't encourage him to jump, I'll have to go get him," she replied.

"Ayla, I'm sure if we just rode off, he'd jump in and follow you. If we're going to travel any distance at all today, we have to go."

The withering look of disbelief and anger that appeared on her face made Jondalar wish he could take back his words. "Would you like to be left behind because you were afraid? He doesn't want to jump into the river because he hasn't done anything like it before. What can you expect?"

"I just meant . . . he's only a wolf, Ayla. Wolves cross rivers all the time. He just needs some reason to jump in. If he didn't catch up with us, we'd come back for him. I didn't mean that we should leave him here."

"You won't have to worry about coming back for him. I'll get him now," Ayla said, turning her back on the man and urging Whinney into the water.

The young wolf was still whining, sniffing the broken ground left by the horses' hooves, and looking at the people and the horses across the watery trench. Ayla called out to him again as the horse entered the current. About halfway across, Whinney felt the ground beneath her giving way. She whinnied with alarm, trying to find firmer footing.

"Wolf. Come here. Wolf! It's only water. Come on, Wolf! Jump in!"

Ayla called out, trying to coax the apprehensive young animal into the swirling river. She slid off Whinney's back, deciding she would swim across to the steep bank. Wolf finally got up his courage and jumped in. He landed with a splash and started swimming toward her. "That's it! That's good, Wolf!"

Whinney was backing around, struggling with her footing, and Ayla, with her arm around the wolf, was trying to reach her. Jondalar was already there, up to his chest in water, steadying the mare and starting toward Ayla. They all reached the other side together.

"We'd better hurry if we're going to travel any distance today," Ayla said, eyes still flashing anger as she started to remount the mare.

"No," Jondalar said, holding her back. "We're not leaving until you change out of those wet clothes. And I think we should rub down the horses to dry them off, and maybe that wolf, too. We've traveled far enough today. We can camp here tonight. It took me four years to get

don't care if it takes four years to get back, just so I get you safely, Ayla."

she looked up at him, the look of concern and love in his blue eyes melted her last vestiges of anger. She reached for him, bent his head to her, and she felt the same unbelievable wonder that she had felt the first time he put his lips on hers and showed her what a kiss was, and an inexpressible joy in knowing that she was actually traveling with him, going home with him. She loved him more than she knew how to express, even more now after the long winter when she had thought he didn't love her and would leave with-
out her.

He had feared for her when she went back into the river and now he had kissed her to him, holding her. He loved her more than he ever had. He had believed it was possible for him to love anyone. Until Ayla, he didn't know he could love so much. He nearly lost her once. He had been sure she was going to stay with the dark man with the laughing eyes, and he couldn't bear the thought that he might lose her again. With two horses and a wolf for companions, in a world that had never before known they could be tamed, a man stood alone with the woman he loved in the middle of a vast, cold grassland, filled with a great abundance and diversity of animals, but few humans, and contemplated a Journey that would stretch across a continent. Yet there were times when the mere thought that any harm might come to her could overwhelm him with such fear, he almost couldn't breathe. At those moments, he wished he could hold her forever.

Jondalar felt the warmth of her body and her willing mouth on his, and he felt his need for her rise. But that would wait. She was cold and wet; she needed dry clothes and a fire. The edge of this river was as good a place as any to camp, and if it was a little too early to stop, well, it would give them time to dry out the clothes they were wearing, and they could start early tomorrow.

"Wolf. Put that down!" Ayla shouted, rushing to get the leather-wrapped package from the young animal. "I thought you had learned to stay away from leather." When she tried to take it away, he playfully hung on with his teeth, shaking his head back and forth and growling. She let go, stopping the game. "Put it down!" she said sharply. She brought her hand down as though she meant to strike his nose but stopped short. At the signal and command, Wolf tucked his tail between his legs, abjectly scooted toward her, and dropped the package at her feet, whining in appeasement. That's the second time he's gotten into these things," Ayla said,

picking up the package and some others he had been chewing on. "He knows better, but he just can't seem to stay away from leather." Jondalar came to help her. "I don't know what to say. He drops it when you tell him, but you can't tell him if you're not there, and you can't watch him all the time . . . What's this? I don't remember seeing this before," he said, looking quizzically at a bundle that was carefully wrapped in a soft skin and securely tied.

Flushing slightly, Ayla quickly took the package from him. "It's . . . just something I brought with me . . . something . . . from Lion Camp," she said, and she put it on the bottom of one of her pack baskets.

Her actions puzzled Jondalar. They had both limited their possessions and traveling gear to the minimum, taking little that was not essential. The package wasn't large, but it wasn't small either. She could probably have added another outfit in the space it took. What could she be taking with her?

"Wolf! Stop that!"

Jondalar watched Ayla going after the young wolf again and had to smile. He wasn't sure, but it almost seemed that Wolf was purposely misbehaving, teasing Ayla to make her come after him, playing with her. He had found a camp shoe of hers, a soft moccasin-type of foot-covering that she sometimes wore for comfort after they made camp, particularly if the ground was frozen or damp and cold and she wanted to air out or dry her regular, sturdier footwear.

"I don't know what I'm going to do with him!" Ayla said, exasperated, as she came toward the man. She was holding the object of his latest escapade, and she looked sternly at the miscreant. Wolf was creeping toward her, seemingly contrite, whining in abject misery at her disapproval; but a hint of mischief lurked beneath his distress. He knew she loved him, and the moment she relented, he would be wriggling and yelping with delight and ready to play again.

Though he was adult size, except for some filling out. Wolf was hardly more than a puppy. He had been born in the winter, out of season, to a lone wolf whose mate had died. Wolf's coat was the usual gray-buff shade--the result of bands of white, red, brown, and black that colored each outer hair, creating the indistinct pattern that allowed wolves to fade invisibly into the natural wilderness landscape of brush, grass, earth, rock, and snow--but his mother had been black.

Her unusual coloring had incited the primary and other females of the pack into badgering her unmercifully, giving her the lowest status and eventually driving her away. She roamed alone, learning to survive in between pack territories for a season, until she finally found another

loner, an old male who had left his pack because he couldn't keep up any more. They fared well together for a while. She was the stronger hunter, but he was experienced and they had even begun to define and defend a small piece of territory of their own. It might have been the better diet that two of them working together were able to secure, or the companionship and nearness of a friendly male, or her own genetic predisposition that brought her into heat out of season, but her elderly companion was not unhappy and, without competition, was both willing and able to respond.

Sadly, his stiff old bones were not able to resist the ravages of an other harsh winter on the periglacial steppes. He did not last long into the cold season. It was a devastating loss for the black female, who was left to give birth alone—in winter. The natural environment does not tolerate very well animals with much deviation from the norm, and seasonal cycles enforce themselves. A black hunter in a landscape of tawny grass, dun earth, and windblown or drifted snow is too easily seen by canny and winter-scarce prey. With no mate or friendly aunts, uncles, cousins, and older siblings to help feed and care for the nursing mother and the new pups, the black female weakened, and one after another her babies succumbed until there was only one left.

Ayla knew wolves. She had observed and studied them from the time she first started hunting, but she had no way of knowing the black wolf who tried to steal the ermine she had killed with her sling was a starving, lactating female; it was the wrong season for pups. When she tried to retrieve her pelt and the wolf uncharacteristically attacked, she killed it in self-defense. Then she saw the animal's condition and realized she must have been a loner. Feeling a strange kinship with a wolf she knew had been driven from its pack, Ayla was determined to find the motherless pups, who would have no family to adopt them. Following the wolf's trail back, she found the den, crawled in, and found the last pup, unweaned, eyes barely open. She took it with her to Lion Camp.

It had been a surprise to everyone when Ayla showed them the tiny wolf pup, but she had arrived with horses who answered to her. They had grown used to them and the woman who had an affinity for animals, and they were curious about the wolf and what she would do with it. That she was able to raise it and train it was a wonder to many. Jondalar was still surprised at the intelligence the animal displayed; intelligence that seemed almost human.

"I think he's playing with you, Ayla," the man said.

She looked at Wolf and couldn't resist a smile, which brought his au "P and caused his tail to start thumping the ground in anticipa-

tion. "I think you're right, but that isn't going to help me keep him from chewing on everything," she said, looking at the shredded camp shoe. "I might as well let him have this. He's ruined it already, and maybe he won't be so interested in the rest of our things for a while." She threw it at him, and he leaped up and caught it in the air with, Jondalar was almost sure, a wolfish grin.

"We'd better get packed up," he said, recalling that they hadn't traveled very far south the day before.

Ayla looked around, screening her eyes from the bright sun just beginning to climb the sky toward the east. Seeing Whinney and Racer in the grassy meadow beyond the brushy wooded lobe of land that the river curved around, she whistled a distinctive call, similar to the whistle she used to signal Wolf, but not the same. The dark yellow mare raised her head, whinnied, then galloped toward the woman. The young stallion followed her.

They broke camp, packed the horses, and were nearly ready to start out when Jondalar decided to rearrange the tent poles in one basket and his spears in another to balance out his load. Ayla was leaning against Whinney while she waited. It was a comfortable and familiar posture for both of them, a way of touching that had developed when the young filly was her only companion in the rich but lonely valley. She had killed Whinney's mother, too. By then she had been hunting for years, but only with her sling. Ayla had taught herself to use the easily concealed hunting weapon, and she rationalized her breaking of Clan taboos by hunting primarily predators, who competed for the same food and sometimes stole meat from them. But the horse was the first large, meat-providing animal she had killed, and the first time she had used a spear to accomplish the deed.

In the Clan, it would have been counted as her first kill, if she had been a boy and allowed to hunt with a spear; as a female, if she used a spear, she would not have been allowed to live. But killing the horse had been necessary for her survival, though she did not select a nursing dam to be the one to fall into her pit-trap. When she first noticed the foal, she felt sorry for it, knowing it would die without its mother, yet the thought of raising it herself didn't occur to her. There was no reason why it should; no one had done it before.

But when hyenas went after the frightened baby horse, she remembered the hyena that had tried to drag off Oga's baby son. Ayla hated hyenas, perhaps because of the ordeal she'd had to face when she killed that one and exposed her secret. They were no worse than any other natural predator and scavenger, but to Ayla they had come to represent everything that was cruel, vicious, or wrong. Her reaction then was

spontaneous as it had been the other time, and the swift stones with a sling were just as effective. She killed one, drove the off and rescued the helpless young animal, but this time, in- >f an ordeal, she found company to relieve her loneliness, and

die extraordinary relationship that developed.

i loved the young wolf as she would a bright and delightful but her feeling for the horse was of a different nature. Whinney shared her isolation; they had grown as close as any two such lilar creatures could. They knew each other, understood each trusted each other. The yellow mare was not merely a helpful l companion, or a pet, or even a well-loved child. Whinney had ler only companion for several years and was her friend.

But it had been a spontaneous, even irrational, act the first time Ay la climbed on her back and rode like the wind. The sheer excitement of it brought her back. In the beginning she did not purposely try to direct the horse, but they were so close that their understanding of each other grew with each ride.

While she waited forjondalar to finish, Ay la watched Wolf playfully chewing on her camp shoe and wished she could think of a way to control his destructive habit. Her eye casually noted the vegetation on the spit of land where they had camped. Caught between the high banks on the other side of the river as it curved around the sharp bend, the low land on this side flooded every year, leaving fertile loam to nourish a rich variety of brush, herbs, even small trees, and the rich pasture beyond. She always noticed the plants in her vicinity. It was second nature for her to be aware of everything that grew and, with a knowledge that was so ingrained it was almost instinctive, to catalogue and interpret it.

She saw a bearberry shrub, a dwarf evergreen heath plant with small, dark green, leathery leaves, and an abundance of small, round, pink-tinged white flowers that promised a rich crop of red berries. Though sour and rather astringent, they tasted fine when they were cooked with other food, but more than food, Ayla knew the juice of the berry was good for relieving the burning sensation that could occur when passing water, especially if it was pinkish with blood.

Nearby was a horseradish plant with small white flowers clustered in a bunch on stems with small narrow leaves, and lower down, long, pointed, shiny dark green leaves, growing up from the ground. The root would be stout and rather long with a pungent aroma and a burn- "^ hot taste. In very small quantities, it was an interesting flavor with meats, but Ayla was more intrigued with its medicinal use as a stimu- ant tor the stomach, and for passing water, and as an application to

sore and swollen joints. She wondered if she should stop to collect some, and then decided that she probably shouldn't take the time. But she reached for her pointed digging stick with no hesitation when she saw the antelope sage plant. The root was one of the ingredients of her special morning tea, one she drank during her moon time when she bled. At other times she used different plants in her tea, particularly the golden thread that always grew on other plants and often killed them. Long ago Iza had told her about the magic plants that would make the spirit of her totem strong enough to defeat the spirit of any man's totem, so no baby would start growing inside her. Iza had always warned her not to tell anyone, particularly a man. Ay la wasn't sure if it was spirits that caused babies. She thought a man had more to do with it, but the secret plants worked anyway. No new life had started in her when she drank the special teas, whether she was near a man or not. Not that she would have minded, if they were settled in one place. But Jondalar had made it clear to her that with such a long Journey ahead of them, it would be a risk to get pregnant along the way.

As she pulled out the root of the antelope sage and shook the dirt off, she saw the heart-shaped leaves and long yellow tubular flowers of snakeroot, good for preventing miscarriage. With a twinge of sorrow, she remembered when Iza had gone to get that plant for her. When she stood up and went to put the fresh roots she had collected into a special basket that was attached near the top of one of the pack baskets, she saw Whinney selectively biting off the tops of wild oats. She liked the seeds, too, she thought, when they were cooked, and her mind, continuing its automatic medicinal cataloguing, added the information that the flowers and stalks aided digestion.

The horse had dropped dung, and she noticed flies buzzing around it. In certain seasons insects could be terrible, she thought, and decided she would watch for insect repellent plants. Who knew what kind of territory they would have to travel through?

In her offhand perusal of the local vegetation she noted a spiny bush that she knew was the variety of wormwood with the bitter taste and strong camphor smell, not an insect repellent, she thought, but it had its uses. Nearby were cranesbills, wild geraniums with leaves of many teeth and five-petaled reddish-pink flowers, that grew into fruits that resembled the bills of cranes. The dried and powdered leaves helped stop bleeding and heal wounds; made into a tea it healed mouth sores and rashes; and the roots were good for runny stools and other stomach problems. It tasted bitter and sharp, but was gentle enough for children and old people.

II Glancing around toward Jondalar, she noticed Wolf again, still .Irfiewing on ner shoe- suddenly she hopped her mental ruminations Ntflldfocused again on the last plants she had noted. Why had they S^Bwfat her attention? Something about them seemed important. Then ^^^ne to her. She quickly reached for her digging stick and started ^iiwakine up the ground around the bitter-tasting wormwood with the '%KSfae smell of camphor, and then the sharp, astringent, but relatively harmless geranium.

Jondalar had mounted and was ready to go when he turned to her.

"Ayla why are you collecting plants? We should be leaving. Do you really need those now?"

"Yes," she said, "I won't be long," going next after the long, thick horseradish root with the burning hot taste. "I think I know a way to fceep him away from our things," Ayla said, pointing at the young canine playfully gnawing on what was left of her leather camp shoe. Tm going to make 'Wolf repellent.' "

They headed southeast from their camping place to get back to the river they had been following. The windswept dust had settled overnight, and in the stark, clear air the boundless sky revealed the distant reach of the horizon that had been obscured before. As they rode across country their entire view, from one edge of the earth to the other, north to south, east to west, undulating, billowing, constantly in morion, was grass; one vast, encompassing grassland. The few trees that existed near waterways only accentuated the dominant vegetation. But the magnitude of the grassy plains was more extensive than they knew. Massive sheets of ice, two, three, up to five miles thick, smothered the ends of the earth and sprawled over the northern lands, crushing Ae stony crust of the continent and depressing the bedrock itself with its inconceivable weight. South of the ice were the steppes--cold, dry grassland as wide as the continent, marching from western ocean to eastern sea. All the land bordering the ice was an immense grassy plain. Everywhere, sweeping across the land, from lowland valley to windblown hill, there was grass. Mountains, rivers, lakes, and seas that provided enough moisture for trees were the only intrusions into we essential grassy character of the northern lands during the Ice Age. Ayla and Jondalar felt the level ground begin sloping downhill toward the valley of the larger river, though they were still some distance from the water. Before long they found themselves surrounded by tall grass. Stretching to see over the eight-foot growth, even from Whin- oey's back, Ayla could see little more than Jondalar's head and shoulers between the feathery tops and the nodding stems of minuscule

florets, turning gold with a faintly reddish tinge, atop the thin, blue-green stalks. She glimpsed his dark brown mount now and then, but recognized Racer only because she knew he was there. She was glad for the advantage of height the horses gave them. Had they been walking, she realized, it would have been like traveling through a dense forest of tall green grass waving in the wind.

The high grass was no barrier, parting easily in front of them as they rode, but they could see only a short distance past the nearest stalks, and behind them the grass sprang back, leaving little trace of the way they had come. Their view was limited to the area immediately around them, as though they took with them a pocket of their own space as they moved. With only the brilliant incandescence tracing its familiar path through the clear deep blue above, and the bending stalks to show the direction of the prevailing wind, it would have been more difficult to find their way, and very easy to become separated.

As she rode, she heard the souging wind and the high whine of mosquitoes zinging by her ear. It was hot and close in the middle of the dense growth. Though she could see the tallgrass swaying, she barely felt a breath of wind. The buzz of flies and a whiff of fresh dung told her that Racer had recently dropped scat. Even if he hadn't been just a few paces ahead, she would have known it was the young stallion who had passed that way. His scent was as distinctively familiar to her as that of the horse she was riding--and her own. All around was the rich humus odor of the soil, and the green smell of burgeoning vegetation. She did not classify smells as bad or good; she used her nose as she did her eyes and ears, with knowledgeable discrimination to help her investigate and analyze the perceptible world.

After a time, the sameness of the scenery, of long green stalk after long green stalk, the rhythmic gait of the horse, and the hot sun almost directly above, made Ayla lethargic; awake, but not fully aware. The repetitive tall, thin, pointed grass stems became a blur she no longer saw. Instead, she began to notice all the other vegetation. Much more than grass grew there, and as usual, she took mental note of it, without consciously thinking about it. It was simply the way she saw her environment.

There, Ayla thought, in that open space--some animal must have made that by rolling in it--those are goosefoots, what Nezzie called goosefoots, like the pigweed near the clan's cave. I should pick some, she mused, but made no effort to do so. That plant, with the yellow flowers and leaves wrapped around the stem, that's wild cabbage. That would be good to have tonight, too. She passed it by as well. Those purple-blue flowers, with the small leaves, that's milk vetch, and it has

I wonder if they're ready? Probably not. Up ahead, mat
white flower, sort of rounded, pink in the middle, it's wild carrot.
oks like Racer stepped on some of the leaves. I should get my
ne stick, but there's more over there. Seems to be a lot of it. I can
and it's so hot. She tried to swat away a pair of flies that buzzed
ad her sweat-damp hair. I haven't seen Wolf for a while. I wonder

e he is?

je turned to look for the wolf and saw him following close behind
mare, sniffing the ground. He stopped, lifting his head to catch
her scent, then disappeared into the grass on her left. She saw a
e blue dragonfly with spotted wings, disturbed by the wolfs pas-
t through the dense living screen, hovering near the place he had
i as though marking it. A short time later, a squawk and a whir of
iliffsoas preceded the sudden appearance of a great bustard taking to the
"lltO?. Ayla reached for her sling, wrapped around her head across her
^forehead. It was a handy place to keep it to get it quickly, and it kept
her hair out of the way besides.

But the huge bustard--at twenty-five pounds the heaviest bird on
die steppes--was a speedy flier for its size, and it was out of range
before she got a stone out of her pouch. She watched the mottled bird
with dark-tipped white wings building up speed, its head stretched
forward, its legs backward, as it flew away, wishing she had known
what Wolf had scented. The bustard would have made a wonderful
meal for all three of them, with plenty left over.

"Too bad we weren't faster," Jondalar said.

Ayla noticed he was putting a light spear and his spear-thrower back
in his pack basket. She nodded as she wrapped her leather sling back
around her head. "I wish I had learned to use Brecie's throwing stick.
It's so much faster. When we stopped by that marsh where all the
birds were nesting on the way to hunt mammoths, it was hard to
believe how quick she was with it. And she could get more than one
bird at a time."

"She was good. But she probably practiced as long with that throwing
stick as you did with your sling. I don't think that kind of skill is
something to be gained in one season."

"But if this grass wasn't so tall, I might have been able to see what
Wolf was going after in time to get my sling and some stones out. I
thought it was probably a vole."

"We should keep our eyes open for anything else that Wolf might
sca^ up," Jondalar said.

I had my eyes open. I just can't see anything!" Ayla said. She
looked at the sky to check the position of the sun, and she stretched up

to try to see over the grass. "But you're right. It wouldn't hurt to think about getting fresh meat for tonight. I've seen all kinds of plants that are good to eat. I was going to stop and gather some, but they seem to be all over, and I'd rather do it later and have them fresh, not after they've wilted in this hot sun. We still have some of the bison roast left that we got from Feather Grass Camp, but it will only last one more meal, and there's no reason to use the dried traveling meat at this time of year, when there is plenty of fresh food around. How much longer before we stop?"

"I don't think we're far from the river--it's getting cooler, and this high grass usually grows in lowlands around water. Once we reach it, we can start looking for a place to camp as we go downriver," Jondalar said, starting out again.

The stand of high grass extended all the way to the river's edge, though it was intermixed with trees near the damp bank. They stopped to let the horses drink, and they dismounted to quench their own thirst, using a small, tightly woven basket as a dipper and cup. Wolf soon darted out of the grass, noisily lapped up his own drink, then plopped down and watched Ayla, with his tongue hanging out, panting heavily.

Ayla smiled. "Wolf is hot, too. I think he has been exploring," she said. "I'd like to know all the things he's found out. He sees a lot more than we do in this high grass."

"I'd like to get beyond it before we make camp. I'm used to seeing farther and this makes me feel closed in. I don't know what's out there, and I like knowing what's around me," Jondalar said, as he reached for his mount. Holding on to Racer's back just below his stiff, stand-up mane, with a strong jump the man threw a leg over and, bracing himself with his arms, landed lightly astride the sturdy stallion. He guided the horse away from the softened riverbank to firmer ground, before heading downriver.

The great steppes were by no means a single, huge, undifferentiated landscape of gracefully swaying stalks. Tallgrass grew in selected areas of ample moisture, which also contained a great diversity of other plants. Dominated by grasses more than five feet tall but ranging up to twelve feet in height--big bulbous bluestem, feather grasses, and tufted fescues--the colorful forb meadows added a variety of flowering and broad-leaved herbs: aster and coltsfoot; yellow, many-petaled elecampane and the big white horns of datura; groundnuts and wild carrots, turnips and cabbages; horseradish, mustard, and small onions; irises, lilies, and buttercups; currants and strawberries; red raspberries and black.

semiarid regions of little rainfall, shortgrasses, less than a foot tall, had evolved. They stayed close to the ground with most of their growth underneath, and vigorously sent out new shoots, especially in times of drought. They shared the land with brush, particularly Artemisia like wormwood and sage. Between those two extremes were the midgrasses, filling niches too dry for shortgrass or too wet for tallgrass. Those meadows of moderate fertility could be colorful, too, with many flowering plants intermixed with the grassy ground cover of wild oats, foxtail barley, and, particularly on slopes and uplands, little bluestems. Cordgrass grew where the land was wetter, needlegrass in cooler areas with poor, gravelly soil. There were many sedges, too--stalks were solid in sedges, and where leaves grew out of the stems of grasses--including cottonwoods, primarily in tundra and wetter ground. Marshes abounded with Cyperaceae reeds, cattails, and bulrushes.

" " "

It was cooler near the river, and as afternoon wore into evening, Ysabel was feeling pulled two ways. She wanted to hurry and see an end to the stifling tallgrass, but she also wanted to stop and collect some of the vegetables she was seeing along the way for their evening meal. A rhythm began to develop to her tension; yes she would stop, no she would not, sounded over and over in her mind. Soon the rhythm itself overcame any meaning in the words, and a talent throbbing that felt as though it should have been loud filled her with apprehension. It was disturbing, this sense of deep, loud sound she could not quite hear. Her discomfort was emphasized by the tallgrass crowding in close all around her, which allowed her to see, but not quite far enough. She was more used to seeing long distances, far vistas, to seeing, at least, beyond the immediate screen of grass stems. As they continued, the feeling became more acute, as though it was something coming closer, or they were drawing nearer to the source of the silent sound.

Ysabel noticed that the ground seemed freshly disturbed in several places, and she wrinkled her nose as she sniffed a strong, pungent, musky smell, trying to place it. Then she heard a low growl issue from a wolf's throat.

"Jondalar!" she called out, and she saw that he had stopped and was holding his hand up, signaling her to stop. There was definitely something ahead. Suddenly, the air was split by a great, loud, blasting scream.

'olf! Stay here!" Ayla commanded the young animal, who was inching forward with curiosity. She slid off Whinney's back and moved to catch up with Jondalar, who had dismounted as well, and was cautiously moving through the thinning grass ahead toward the shrill screams and loud rumbles. She reached his side as he stopped, and they both parted the last tall stalks to see. Ayla bent down on one knee to hold Wolf as she looked, but she could not move her eyes away from the scene in the clearing.

An agitated herd of woolly mammoths was milling about--it had been their feeding that had created the clearing near the edge of the tallgrass region; a large mammoth required over six hundred pounds of feed every day, and a herd could strip a considerable area of vegetation quickly. The animals were all ages and sizes, including some that could not have been more than a few weeks old. That meant it was a herd of, primarily, related females: mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, and their offspring; an extended family led by a wise and canny old matriarch, who was noticeably larger.

At a quick glance, the overall color of the woolly mammoths was a reddish brown, but a closer look revealed many variations of the basic shade. Some were more red, some more brown, some tended toward yellow or gold, and a few looked almost black from a distance. The thick, double-layered coats covered them entirely, from their broad trunks and exceptionally small ears, to their stubby tails ending in dark tufts, and their stumpy legs and broad feet. The two layers of fur contributed to the differences in color.

Though much of the warm, dense, amazingly silky-soft underwool had been shed earlier in the summer, the next year's growth had already started, and was lighter in color than the fluffy, though coarser, wind-breaking overlay er, and gave it depth and highlights. The darker outer hairs, of varying lengths, some up to forty inches long, hung down like a skirt along the flanks, and quite thickly from the abdomen and dewlap--the loose skin of the neck and chest--creating a padding underneath them when they lay down on frozen ground.

i was entranced by a pair of young twins with beautiful reddish-fur accented by spiky black guard hairs, who peeked out from ...J the huge legs and long ochre skirt of their hovering mother. dark brown hair of the old matriarch was shot with gray. She d as well, the white birds that were constant companions of the aoths, tolerated or ignored whether they sat on the top of a v head, or adroitly avoided a massive foot, while they feasted on _sects that the great beasts disturbed.

Volf whined his eagerness to investigate the interesting animals _X closely, but Ayla held him back, while Jondalar got the restrain-Jiope from Whinney's basket. The grizzled matriarch turned to look faeir direction for a long moment--they noticed that one of her long Hdcs was broken off--then she turned her attention back to more JuxMtant activity.

HOnly very young males stayed with the females, they usually left »e natal herd sometime after they reached puberty at about twelve, lit several young bachelors, and even a few older ones were included (this group. They had been drawn by a female with a deep chestnut- alored coat. She was in heat, and that was the cause of the commotion

ILyla and Jondalar had heard. A female in heat, estrus, the reproduc- j|tfve period when females were able to conceive, was sexually attractive all males, sometimes more than she liked.

gft; The chestnut female had just rejoined her family group after out- te«Ustancing three young males in their twenties, who had been chasing 'ftaer. The males, who had given up, but only temporarily, were stand- %lng away from the close-packed herd resting, while she sought respite

ij! from her exertions within the midst of the excited females. A two-year- y old calf rushed up to the object of the male's attention, was greeted by

? t gentle touch of a trunk, found one of the two breasts between her front legs and began to suckle, while the female reached for a trunkful <rf grass. She had been chased and harassed by the males all day, and had had little opportunity to feed her calf, or even to eat or drink herself. She was not to have much chance then.

A medium-size bull approached the herd and began touching the Other females with his trunk, well down from the tail between their ""id legs, smelling and tasting, to test their readiness. Since mammoths continued to grow all their lives, his size indicated he was older than the three who had been chasing the beleaguered female before, probably in his thirties. As he neared the chestnut-furred mammoth, she moved away at a fast walk. He immediately abandoned the others Ml" started after her. Ayla gasped when he released his huge organ "from its sheath and it started to swell into a long curving S-shape.

The young man beside her heard the sudden intake of breath and glanced at her. She turned to look at him, and their eyes, equally astonished and full of wonder, held for a moment. Although they had both hunted mammoths, neither of them had observed the great woolly beasts very often from so near, and neither had ever seen them mate. Jondalar felt a quickening in his own loins as he watched Ay la. She was excited, flushed, her mouth slightly open, taking quick breaths, and her eyes, opened wide, held a sparkle of curiosity. Fascinated by the awesome spectacle of the two massive creatures about to show honor to the Great Earth Mother, as She required of all Her children, they quickly turned back.

But the female ran in a large arc, keeping ahead of the larger bull, until she made it back to her family herd again, though it made little difference. In a short time she was being chased again. One male caught up to her and managed to mount, but she was uncooperative and got out from under him, though he sprayed her hind legs. Sometimes her calf tried to follow the chestnut as she sped away from the bachelors several more times, before it finally decided to stay with the other females. Jondalar wondered why she was trying so hard to avoid the interested males. Didn't the Mother expect female mammoths to honor Her, too?

As though they had mutually decided to stop and eat, it was quiet for a while, with all the mammoths moving slowly south through the tallgrass tearing out trunkful after trunkful in a steady rhythm. In the rare moment of relief from the harassment of the males, the chestnut mammoth stood with her head low, looking very tired as she tried to feed.

Mammoths spent most of the day, and night, eating. Though it could be of the roughest, poorest quality--they could even eat shreds of bark torn off with tusks, though that was more often winter feed--mammoth needed huge quantities of the fibrous fare to sustain them. Included in the several hundred pounds of roughage consumed every day, which they passed through their bodies within twelve hours, was a small, though necessary, addition of succulent, broad-leaved, more nutritious plants, or occasionally a few choice leaves of willow, birch, or alder trees, higher in food value than the coarse tallgrass and sedge, but toxic to mammoths in large quantities.

When the great woolly beasts had moved some distance away, Ay la tied the restraining rope on the young wolf, who was if anything even more interested than they were. He kept wanting to get closer, but she didn't want him to disturb the herd or annoy them. Ay la felt the matriarch had given them leave to stay, but only if they kept their

se Leading the horses, who were exhibiting some nervousness
 dtement as well, they circled around through the tallgrass and
 d the herd. Though they had been watching for some time,
 Ayla nor Jondalar was inclined to leave yet. There was still a
 ^of anticipation lingering around the mammoths. Something was
 yw. Perhaps it was just that the mating they felt privileged, almost
 cd to observe, was still incomplete, but it seemed more than that.
 i they slowly followed after the herd, they both studied the huge
 als closely, but each from a separate perspective. Ayla had been a
 _er from an early age, and had observed animals often, but her prey
 Ordinarily much smaller. Mammoths weren't usually hunted by
 sBviduals; they were hunted by large, organized, and coordinated
 mps. She had actually been closer to the great beasts before, when
 ; had gone to hunt them with the Mamutoi. But while hunting there
 S little time to watch and learn, and she didn't know when she would
 a- have the opportunity to get such a good look at them, both female
 l male, again.

||y Though she was aware of their distinctive shape in profile, this time
 J||he took particular note of it. The head of a mammoth was massive
 ^|Hid high-domed--with large sinus cavities that helped to warm the
 ^Bearing cold winter air as it was breathed--accentuated by a hump of
 ^ (at and a conspicuous topknot of stiff, dark hair. Just below the high
 31 head was the deep indentation of the nape of its short neck, leading to
 [: a second hump of fat high on the withers above the shoulders. From
 ^ Acre, the back sloped steeply to the small pelvis and almost dainty
 hips. She knew from the experience of butchering and eating mam-
 ; moth meat that the fat of the second hump had a different quality from
 Ithat of the three-inch-thick layer of blubber that lay under the tough
 inch-thick skin. It was more delicate, tastier.

Woolly mammoths had relatively short legs for their size, making it
 somewhat easier for them to acquire their food, since they fed primarily
 on grass, not the high green leaves of trees as did their browsing
 warm-climate relatives; there were few trees on the steppes. But like
 : them, the mammoth's head was high up off the ground, and too big
 ^ and heavy, especially with enormous tusks, to be supported by a long
 ^ neck so that it could reach food or drink directly the way horses or
 j deer did. The evolution of the trunk had solved the problem of bring- ^ ing food and water to
 the mouth.

| The furry, sinuous snout of the woolly mammoth was strong enough
 to tear out a tree, or to pick up a heavy chunk of ice and send it crashing
 | "wn to break into smaller, more usable pieces for water in winter,
 (and dexterous enough to select and pluck a single leaf. It was also

marvelously adapted to pulling grass. It had two projections on the end of it. A fingerlike appendage on the upper part, which it could delicately control, and a broader, flattened, very flexible structure on the lower part, almost like a hand, but without bones or separate fingers. Jondalar was amazed at the dexterity and strength of the trunk as he watched a mammoth wrap the muscular lower projection around a bunch of closely growing tallgrass, then hold it together while the upper digit fingered more stems that were growing nearby into its clutch, until it had accumulated a good sheaf. Getting a grip by closing the upper finger around the bunch like an opposing thumb, the furry trunk yanked the grass out of the ground, roots and all. After shaking off some of the dirt, the mammoth stuffed it all in its mouth, and while it was chewing, reached for more.

The devastation that a herd left behind them as they made their long migrations across the steppes was considerable, or so it seemed. But for all the grass ripped out by its roots, and bark stripped from trees, their disturbance was beneficial to the steppes, and to other animals. By clearing away the woody-stemmed tallgrass and small trees, a place was made for richer forbs and new grass to grow, food that was essential to several of the other inhabitants of the steppes.

Ayla suddenly shivered and felt a strange sensation deep in her bones. Then she noticed the mammoths had stopped eating. Several raised their heads and faced the south with their furry ears extended, moving their heads back and forth. Jondalar noticed a change in the dark red female, who had been chased by all the males. Her tired look was gone; she seemed, instead, to be anticipating. Suddenly she roared a deep, vibrating rumble. Ayla sensed a head-filling resonance, then felt the chill of gooseflesh as an answer, like the low growl of distant thunder, came from the southwest.

"Jondalar," Ayla said. "Look over there!"

He looked where she had pointed. Rushing toward them, amidst a cloud of dust rising as if flung up by a whirlwind, only his domed head and shoulders visible above the tallgrass, was a huge, pale russet mammoth with fantastic and immense, upward-curving tusks. Where they started, side by side in the upper jaw, they were huge. They flared out as they grew downward, then they curved upward and spiraled inward, slowly tapering to worn tips. Eventually, if he didn't break them, they would form a great circle with their tapered ends crossing in front.

The thick-furred Ice Age elephants were rather compact, seldom exceeding eleven feet at the shoulder, but their tusks grew to enormous size, the most spectacular of any of their kind. By the time a prime male mammoth reached the end of his seventy years, his great curved

tofts of ivory could be a full sixteen feet in length, weighing two hundred sixty pounds each.

A strong, acrid, musky odor arrived long before the russet bull did, aiding a wave of frenzied excitement through the females. When he ached the clearing, they ran toward him, giving him their scent with reat splashes of urine, squealing, trumpeting, and rumbling their reetings. They surrounded him, turning and backing up to him, or •ying to touch him with their trunks. They were attracted, but also perwhelmed. The males, however, retreated to the edge of the group. When he was close enough for Ayla and Jondalar to get a good look t him, they, too, were awed. He held his great domed head high, isplaying his proud coils of ivory to best advantage. Far exceeding in snngth and diameter the smaller and straighter tusks of the females, his npressive tusks made even the more than respectable ivory of the large ulls seem puny. His small, thickly furred ears that were extended, is dark, stiff, erect topknot, and his light reddish-brown coat, long airs loose and flying in the wind, added fullness to his already massive ize. Towering nearly two feet above the largest bulls, and twice the 'eight of the females, he was by far the most gigantic animal either of iem had ever seen. After surviving through hard times and good for lore than forty-five years, he was in peak condition, a dominant bull lammoth in his prime, and he was magnificent.

But it was more than the natural dominance of his size that had made ie other males back off. Ayla noticed that his temples were greatly ivollen and from midway between his eyes and ears, the rich russet ir of his cheeks was stained with black streaks by a musky, viscous uid that was constantly draining. He was also continuously dribbling nd occasionally gushing an acrid, strong-smelling urine, which coated ie fur on his legs and the sheath of his organ with a greenish scum. he wondered if he was sick.

But the swollen temporal glands and other symptoms were not a ickness. Among woolly mammoths, not only did females come into eat, estrus, each year fully adult males went into lust, a period of eightened sexual readiness, called musth. Although a male mammoth iached puberty around twelve, he did not begin musth until he was lose to thirty, and then only for a week or so. But, by the time he iached his late forties, and was in his prime, if he was in top condi-on, he could be in musth for three or four months each year. Though ny male past puberty could mate with a receptive estrus female, bulls 'ere far more successful when they were in musth.

The big russet bull was not only dominant, he was in full rut and he ad come, in answer to her call, to mate with the female in heat.

At close range, male mammoths knew when females were ready to

conceive by their scent, just as most four-legged male animals did. But mammoths ranged over such large territories that they had evolved an additional way to communicate that they were ready for mating. When a female was in estrus, or a male was in musth, the pitch of their voices lowered. Very low-pitched sounds do not die out across long distances the way higher tones do, and the deep rumbling calls that were made only then, carried for miles across the vast plains.

Jondalar and Ayla could hear the low rumbles of the estrus female clearly enough, but the male in musth had such quiet-seeming deep tones that they barely heard him. Even in ordinary circumstances, mammoths often communicated across distances with deep rumbles and calls that most people were not aware of. Yet the bull mammoth's musth calls were actually extremely loud, deep-voiced roars; the female estrus call was even louder. Though a few people could detect the sonic vibrations of the deep tones, most elements of the sounds were so low-pitched that they were below the range of human hearing.

The chestnut female had been holding off the bevy of younger bachelors, who had also been drawn by her attractive odors and by the sonorous rumbling of her low-pitched calls, which could be heard at a great distance by other mammoths, if not people. But she wanted an older, dominant male to sire her potential young, one whose years of living had already proved his health and survival instincts, and one she knew was virile enough to be a sire; in other words, one in musth. She didn't think about it in quite that way, but her body knew.

Now that he was here, she was ready. Her long fringe of hair swaying with each step, the chestnut female ran toward the great bull, bellowing her sonorous rumbles and waving her furry little ears. She passed her water in a great splash, then, stretching her trunk toward his long, S-shaped organ, she sniffed and tasted his urine. Groaning thunderously, she pivoted around and backed into him, her head high. The huge bull laid his trunk across her back, caressing and calming her; his huge organ nearly touched the ground. Then he reared up and mounted, placing his two front legs far forward on her back. He was nearly twice her size, so much larger that it seemed he would crush her, but most of his weight was carried on his hind legs. With the hooked end of his double-curved, marvelously mobile organ, he found her low-slung opening, then lifted up and penetrated deeply. He opened his mouth to bellow a roar.

The deep rumble that Jondalar heard sounded muted and far away, though he felt a throbbing sensation. Ayla heard the roar only slightly louder, but she shuddered violently as a shivering vibration tore through her. The chestnut mammoth and the russet bull held the

position for a long moment. The long reddish strands of his full coat of hair shimmied over his whole body with the intensity and strain, though the movement was slight. Then he dismounted, gushing as he withdrew. She moved forward and uttered a low-toned and prolonged, pulsating bellow, which sent a powerful chill down Ayla's spine and puffed gooseflesh.

The whole herd ran to the dark red female, trumpeting and rumbling, touching her mouth and her wet opening with their trunks, defecating and splashing their water in an outburst of excitement. The russet bull seemed unaware of the joyful pandemonium as he stood (testing with his head down. Finally they calmed down and began wandering away to feed. Only her calf stayed nearby. The chestnut female rumbled deeply again, then rubbed her head against a russet shoulder.

None of the other males approached the herd with the big bull nearby, though the chestnut was no less tempting. Besides lending male mammoths irresistible charm, musth also conferred dominance over males, making them very aggressive even toward those who were larger, unless they were also in that excited state. The other bulls shied away, knowing the russet would be easily irritated. Only another musth bull would try to face him, and only if he was close to the same size. Then, if they were both attracted by the same female, and found themselves in the vicinity of each other, they would invariably fight, with severe injury or death a possible result.

Almost as though they knew the consequences, they took great pains to avoid each other and thus avoid fights. The deep-toned calls and the pungent urine trails of the musth male did more than announce his presence to eager females, they also announced his location to other males. Only three or four other bulls were in musth at the same time, during the six- or seven-month period that females might come into estrus, but it was unlikely that any of those who were also in lust would challenge the big russet for the female who was in heat. He was the dominant bull of the population, whether in musth or not, and they knew where he was.

As they continued to watch, Ayla noticed that even when the dark female and lighter-colored male began to feed, they stayed close together. At one point the female strayed a few feet away, reaching for a particularly succulent trunkful of herbs. One young bull, hardly more than an adolescent, tried to inch toward her, but as she ran back to her consort, the russet bull lunged at him, voicing his rumbling growl. The sharp, pungent scent and distinctive deep roar made their impression on the young male. He quickly ran away, then lowered his

head in deference and kept his distance. Finally, as long as she stayed near the musth bull, the chestnut female could rest and feed without being chased.

The woman and man could not quite bring themselves to leave immediately, though they knew it was over, and Jondalar was again beginning to feel the pressure of getting on their way. They felt awed, and honored, to have been included in witnessing the mating of the mammoths. More than merely having been allowed to observe, they felt a part of it, as though they had coined in on a moving and important ceremony. Ayla wished she could run up and touch them, too, to express her appreciation and share their joy.

Before they left, Ayla noticed that many of the plant foods she had seen all along the way were growing nearby, and she decided to gather some, using her digging stick for roots and a special knife, rather thick but strong, to cut stems and leaves. Jondalar got down beside her to help, though he had to ask her to point out exactly what she wanted. It still surprised her. During the time they lived with the Lion Camp, she had learned the customs and patterns of work of the Mamutoi, which were different from the ways of the Clan. But even there, she often worked with Deegie or Nezzie, or many people worked together, and she had forgotten his willingness to do work that the men of the Clan would have considered the job of women. Yet, since the early days in her valley, Jondalar had never hesitated to do anything that she did, and he was surprised that she didn't expect him to share in the work that needed to be done. With just the two of them, she became aware of that side of him again.

When they finally did leave, they rode in silence for some time. Ayla kept thinking about the mammoths; could not get them out of her mind. She thought, too, about the Mamutoi, who had given her a home and a place to belong when she had no one. They called themselves the Mammoth Hunters, though they hunted many other kinds of animals, and gave the huge woolly beasts a unique place of honor, even while hunting them. Besides providing them with so much of what was necessary for existence--meat, fat, hides, wool for fibers and cordage, ivory for tools and carvings, bones for dwellings and even fuel--mammoth hunts had deep spiritual meaning to them.

She felt even more Mamutoi now, though she was leaving. It was not by chance, she felt, that they had come upon the herd when they did. She was sure there was a reason for it, and wondered if Mut, the Earth Mother, or maybe her totem, was trying to tell her something- She had found herself thinking often, lately, about the Great Cave

i spirit that was the totem Creb had given her, wondering if he still
ected her though she was no longer Clan, and where a Clan totem
_nt would fit into her new life with Jondalar.

Irhe tallgrass finally began thinning out, and they moved closer to
fc river looking for a place to camp. Jondalar glanced toward the sun
Iscending in the west and decided it was too late to try to hunt that
>ening. He wasn't sorry they had stayed to watch the mammoths,
tt he had hoped to hunt for meat, not only for their meal that night,
at to last for the next few days. He didn't want to have to use the
ried traveling food they had with them unless they really needed it.
4ow they'd have to take the time in the morning.

| The valley with its luxuriant bottomland near the river had been
langing, and the vegetation altered with it. As the banks of the swift
aterway were rising in elevation, the character of the grass changed
id, to Jondalar's relief, became shorter. It barely reached the bellies
? the horses. He preferred being able to see where they were going.
fhere the ground began to level out near the top of a slope, the
ndscape took on a familiar feel. It wasn't that they had ever been in
at particular locality before, but that it was similar to the region
ound the Lion Camp, with high banks and eroded gullies leading to
ae river.

They climbed a slight rise and Jondalar noticed that the course of
|the river was veering to the left, toward the east. It was time to leave
|this watery vein of life-supporting liquid meandering slowly toward
l^fhe south and angle westward across country. He stopped to consult
Ithe map Talut had carved on the slab of ivory for him. When he looked
'up, he noticed Ayla had dismounted and was standing on the edge of
i the bank looking across the river. Something about the way she stood
J made him think she was upset or unhappy.

i He shifted his leg over, got down from his mount, and joined her on
the bank. Across the river he saw what had drawn her to the edge.

| Tucked into the slope on a terrace halfway up the opposite side was a
j large, long mound with tufts of grass growing up the sides. It seemed
to be a part of the riverbank itself, but the arched entrance closed by a
heavy mammoth-hide drape revealed its actual nature. It was an earth-
lodge like the one the Lion Camp called home, where they had lived
during the previous winter.

As Ayla stared at the familiar-looking structure, she remembered
vividly the inside of the Lion Camp's earthlodge. The roomy semisub-
terranean dwelling was strong and built to last many years. The floor
had been carved out of the fine loess soil of the riverbank and was
below ground level. Its walls and rounded roof of sod covered with

river clay were firmly supported by a structure of more than a ton of large mammoth bones, with deer antlers entwined and lashed together at the ceiling, and a thick thatch of grass and reeds between the bone and the sod. Benches of earth along the sides were made into warm beds, and storage areas were dug down to the cold permafrost level. The archway was two large curved mammoth tusks, with the butt ends in the ground and the tips facing each other and joined. It was by no means a temporary construction, but a permanent settlement under one roof, large enough to support several large families. She was sure the makers of this earthlodge had every intention of returning, just as the Lion Camp did every winter.

"They must be at the Summer Meeting," Ayla said. "I wonder which Camp's home that is?"

"Maybe it belongs to Feather Grass Camp," Jondalar suggested.

"Maybe," Ayla said, then stared in silence across the rushing stream.

"It looks so empty," she added after a while. "I didn't think when we left that I would never see Lion Camp again. I remember when I was sorting through things to take to the Meeting, I left some behind. If I'd known I wasn't going back, I might have taken them with me."

"Are you sorry you left, Ayla?" Jondalar's concern showed, as always, in the worry wrinkles on his forehead. "I told you I would stay and become a Mamutoi, too, if you wanted me to. I know you found a home with them and were happy. It's not too late. We can still turn back."

"No, I'm sad to be leaving, but I'm not sorry. I want to be with you. That's what I've wanted from the beginning. And I know you want to go home, Jondalar. You have wanted to go back ever since I've known you. You might get used to living here, but you would never really be happy. You would always miss your people, your family, the ones you were born to. It's not as important to me. I will never know who I was born to. The Clan were my people."

Ay la's thoughts turned inward, and Jondalar watched a gentle smile soften her face. "Iza would have been so happy for me if she could have known I was going with you. She would have liked you. She told me long before I left that I wasn't Clan, though I couldn't remember anyone or anything except living with them. Iza was my mother, the only one I knew, but she wanted me to leave the Clan. She was afraid for me. Before she died, she told me, 'Find your own people, find your own mate.' Not a man of the Clan, a man like me; someone I could love, who would care for me. But I was alone so long in the valley, I didn't think I ever would find anyone. And then you came. Iza was right. As hard as it was to leave, I needed to find my own people."

for Durc, I could almost thank Broud for forcing me to go. I
Fnever have found a man to love me, if I hadn't left the Clan, or
^at I cared about so much."

JTe aren't so different, Ayla. I didn't think I'd ever find anyone to
Neither even though I knew many women among the Zeiandonii,
hwe met many more on our Journey. Thonolan made friends easily,
ftamone strangers, and he made it easy for me." He closed his eyes
|n anguished moment, flinching from the memory, as a deep sor-
iatouched his face. The pain was still sharp. Ayla could see it
(never he talked about his brother.

Jhe looked at Jondalar, at his exceptionally tall, muscular body, at
tkme straight, yellow hair tied back with a thong at the nape of his
il at his fine, well-made features. After watching him at the Sum-
Sr Meeting, she doubted that he needed his brother's help to make
ends, especially with women, and she knew why. Even more than
I build or his handsome face, it was his eyes, his startlingly vibrant
d expressive eyes, which seemed to reveal the inner core of this very
bate man, that gave him a magnetic appeal and a presence so com- Uing that he was nearly
irresistible.

JiJust the way he was looking at her that moment, his eyes filled with
"armth and desire. She could feel her body respond to the mere touch
Fhis eyes. She thought of the chestnut mammoth, who kept refusing
B the other males, waiting for the big russet bull to come, and then
&t wanting to wait any more, but there was pleasure in prolonging
ie anticipation, too.

She loved looking at him, filling herself with him. She thought he
|llB!as beautiful the first time she saw him, though she had no one to
ptompare him with. She had since learned that other women loved
gitooking at him, too; considered him remarkably, even overwhelmingly
iltttractive; and that it embarrassed him to be told about it. His outanding
good looks had brought him at least as much pain as pleasure,
p »nd to stand out for qualities that he had nothing to do with, did not
javing him the satisfaction of accomplishment. They were gifts of the
Jg Mother, not the result of his own efforts.

j|^1 But the Great Earth Mother had not stopped with mere outward
y^lppearances. She had endowed him with a rich and lively intelligence,
ijg^lthat tended more toward a sensitivity and understanding of the physi- "il~ ^P@^ or his world,
and a natural dexterity. Abetted by training
^WMn the man to whom his mother had been mated when he was born,
yho was acknowledged as the best in his field, Jondalar was a skilled
^ maker of stone tools who had honed his craft on his Journey by learn- ^iBg the techniques of
other flint knappers.

For Ayla, though, he was beautiful not merely because he was exceptionally attractive by the standards of his people, but because he was the first person she could remember seeing who resembled her. He was a man of the Others, not of the Clan. When he first came to her valley, she had studied his face minutely, if not obviously, even in his sleep. It was such a wonder to see a face with the familiar look of her own after so many years of being the only one who was different, who did not have heavy brow ridges and a sloped-back forehead, or a large, high-bridged, sharp nose, in a face that jutted out, and a jaw with no chin.

Like hers, Jondalar's forehead rose up steeply and smoothly, without heavy brow ridges. His nose, and even his teeth, were small by comparison, and he had a bony protuberance below his mouth, a chin, just as she did. After seeing him, she could understand why the Clan thought of her as having a flat face and bulging forehead. She had seen her own reflection in still water, and she believed what they had told her. In spite of the fact that Jondalar towered over her as much as she had towered over them, and that she had since been told by more than one man that she was beautiful, deep inside she still thought of herself as big and ugly.

But because Jondalar was male, with stronger features and angles more pronounced, to Ayla, he resembled the Clan more than she did. They were the people she grew up with, they were her standard of measure, and unlike the rest of her kind, she thought they were quite handsome. Jondalar, with a face that was like hers, and yet more like a Clan face than hers, was beautiful.

Jondalar's high forehead smoothed as he smiled. "I'm glad you think she would have approved of me. I wish I could have met your Iza," he said, "and the rest of your Clan. But I had to meet you first or I would never have understood that they were people, and that I could meet them. The way you talk about the Clan, they must be good people. I'd like to meet one some time."

"Many people are good people. The Clan took me in after the earthquake, when I was little. After Broud drove me away from the Clan, I had no one. I was Ayla of No People until the Lion Camp accepted me, gave me a place to belong, made me Ayla of the Mamutoi."

"The Mamutoi and the Zeiandonii are not so different. I think you will like my people, and they will like you."

"You haven't always been so sure of that," Ayla said. "I remember when you were afraid they would not want me, because I grew up with the Clan, and because of Durc."

Jondalar felt a flush of embarrassment.

"They would call my son an abomination, a child born of mixed

half-animal--you called him that, once--and because I birthed
^they would think even worse of me."
sayia before we left the Summer Meeting, you made me promise
tell you the truth, and not to keep things to myself. The truth is
I was worried in the beginning. I wanted you to come with me,
I didn't want you to tell people about yourself. I wanted you to
_; your childhood, lie about it, even though I hate lies--and you
rer learned how. I was afraid they would reject you. I know how it
Heels and I didn't want you to be hurt that way. But I was afraid for
Itnyself, too. I was afraid they would reject me for bringing you, and I
didn't want to go through that kind of thing again. Yet I couldn't bear
(o think of living without you. I didn't know what to do."
Ayla remembered only too well her confusion and despair over his
agony of indecision. As happy as she had been with the Mamutoi, she
had also been miserably unhappy because of Jondalar.
"Now I know, though it took almost losing you before I realized it,"
Jondalar continued. "No one is more important to me than you, Ayla.
I want you to be yourself, to say or do whatever you think you should,
because that's what I love about you, and I believe, now, that most
people will welcome you. I've seen it happen. I learned something
important from the Lion Camp and the Mamutoi. Not all people think
alike and opinions can be changed. Some people will stand by you,
sometimes those you least expect to, and some people have enough
compassion to love and raise a child whom others call abomination."
"I didn't like the way they treated Rydag at the Summer Meeting,"
Ayla said. "Some of them didn't even want to give him a proper burial."
Jondalar heard the anger in her voice, but he could see tears
threatening behind the anger.
, "I didn't like it either. Some people won't change. They won't open
| their eyes and look at what is plain to see. It took me a long time. I
| can't promise you that the Zeiandonii will accept you, Ayla, but if
| they don't we'll find some other place. Yes, I want to return. I want to
| go back to my people, I want to see my family, my friends. I want to
| tell my mother about Thonolan, and ask Zeiandoni to look for his spirit
| "I'm case he hasn't found his way to the next world yet. I hope we will
| find a place there. But if not, it's not so important to me any more.
(That's the other thing I learned. That's why I told you I would be
Willing to stay here with you, if you wanted me to. I meant it."
J He was holding her with both his hands clasping her shoulders,
jlooking into her eyes with fierce determination, wanting to be sure she
^Understood him. She saw his conviction, and his love, but now she
Wondered if they should have left.
"If your people don't want us, where will we go?"

He smiled at her. "We'll find another place, Ayla, if we have to, but I don't think we will. I told you, the Zeiandonii are not so different from the Mamutoi. They will love you, just as I do. I'm not even worried about it any more. I'm not sure why I ever was."

Ayla smiled at him, pleased that he was so sure of his people's acceptance of her. She only wished she could share his confidence. He might have forgotten, or perhaps not realized, what a strong and lasting impression his first reaction to learning about her son and her background had made on her. He had jerked away and looked upon her with such disgust that she would never forget it. It was just as though she were some dirty, filthy hyena.

As they got under way again, Ayla kept thinking about what might await her at the end of her Journey. It was true, people could change. Jondalar had changed completely. She knew there was not the least bit of that feeling of aversion left in him, but what about the people he had learned it from? If his response was so immediate, and so strong, his people must have taught it to him as he was growing up. Why should they react any differently to her than he had? As much as she wanted to be with Jondalar, and as glad as she was that he wanted to take her home with him, she was not altogether looking forward to meeting the Zeiandonii.

_.hey stayed close to the river as they continued on their way.

_ilar felt almost certain that the course of the stream was making a
i toward the east, but he worried that it might only be a wide swing
tits general meandering. If the waterway was changing direction, this
ould be the place they would leave it--and the security of following
B easily denned route--to strike out across country, and he wanted to
lake sure they were in the right place.

There were several places they could have stopped for the night but,
Misulting the map often, Jondalar was looking for a campsite that
Falut had indicated. It was the landmark he needed to verify their
ocation. The place was regularly used and he hoped he was right in
Jthinking it was nearby, but the map showed only general directions
and landmarks and was imprecise, at best. It had been quickly

^'Scratched onto the slab of ivory as an aid to the verbal explanations he
ihad been given, and a reminder of them, and it was not meant to be an
jaccurate representation of the route.

I When the bank continued to rise and pull back, they kept to the high
;ground for the wider view it offered, though it was drawing away
(Somewhat from the river. Below, closer to the flowing water, an oxbow
ilake was drying into a marsh. It had begun as a side loop of the river
'that swayed back and forth, as all flowing water did when traversing
Open land. The loop eventually closed back on itself, and then filled in
swith water to form a small lake, which became isolated when the river
.changed course. With no source of water, it began to dry out. The
^sheltered lowland was now a wet meadow where marsh reeds and
jCattails thrived, with water-loving bog plants filling its deep end. Over
jtime, the green swale would become a grassy meadow enriched by this
^wetland stage.

I Jondalar almost reached for a spear when he saw a moose break out
Mf the wooded cover near the edge and walk out into the water, but the
|large deer was out of range, even with his spear-thrower, and it would
S:oe difficult for them to retrieve it from the bog. Ayla watched the
auginly-seeming animal with the overhanging nose and large palmate

antlers, still in velvet, walking into the marsh. He lifted his long legs high, plopping his broad feet, which kept him from sinking into the mucky bottom, until the water reached his flanks. Then he submerged his head and came up with a mouthful of dripping duckweed and water bistort. Nearby waterfowl, nesting in the reeds, ignored his presence. Beyond the marsh, well-drained slopes with gullies and cut banks offered protected crannies for forbs such as goosefoot, nettles, and mats of hairy-leaved, mouse-eared chickweed with small white flowers. Ayla loosened her sling and took a few round stones from a pouch in readiness. At the far end of her valley there had been a similar location, where she had often observed and hunted the exceptionally large ground squirrels of the steppes. One or two could make a satisfying meal.

With the rugged terrain leading to open fields of grass, it was their favored habitat. The rich seeds from the nearby grasslands, stored safely in caches while the squirrels hibernated, sustained them in spring to breed so that at just the time new plants appeared, they would bear their young. The protein-rich forbs were essential for the young to reach maturity before winter. But no ground squirrels chose to show themselves while the people were passing, and Wolf seemed unable, or unwilling to flush them.

As they continued south, the great granite platform beneath the broad plain that stretched far to the east warped upward into rolling hills. Once, in ages long past, the land they were traveling over had been mountains that had long since worn down. Their stumps were a stubborn shield of rock that resisted the immense pressures that buckled land into new mountains, and the fiery inner forces that could shake and rend a less stable earth. Newer rock had formed on the ancient massif, but outcrops of the original mountains still pierced the sedimentary crust.

In the time when mammoths grazed the steppes, the grasses and herbs, like the animals of that ancient land, flourished not only in great abundance, but with a surprising range and diversity, and in unexpected associations. Unlike later grasslands, these steppes were not arranged in wide belts of certain limited kinds of vegetation, determined by temperature and climate. They were, instead, a complex mosaic with a richer diversity of plants, which included many varieties of grasses and prolific herbs and shrubs.

A well-watered valley, a highland meadow, a hilltop, or a slight dip in elevation, each invited its own community of plant life, which grew close beside complexes of unrelated vegetation. A slope facing south might harbor warm-climate growth, surprisingly different from the cold-adapted boreal vegetation on the north face of the same hill.

brjie soil of the rugged upland Ayla and Jondalar were traversing
IS poor, and the grass cover thin and short. The wind had eroded
^per gullies, and in the upper valley of an old spring-flood tributary,
^ riverbed had gone dry and, lacking vegetation, had drifted into
id dunes.

Though later found only in high mountain reaches, in this rough
rain not far from lowland rivers, singing voles and pikas were busily
cans grass, to be dried and stored. Instead of hibernating in winter, ;y built tunnels and nests
under the snowdrifts that accumulated in
>s and hollows and on the lee side of rocks, and fed on their stored
y. Wolf spied the small rodents and took out after them, but Ayla
In't bother with her sling. They were too small to make a meal for
?ple, except in large numbers.

Arctic herbs, which did well in the wetter northern land of bogs
i fens, benefited in spring from the additional moisture of the melt-
; drifts and grew, in an unusual association, alongside small hardy
line shrubs on exposed outcrops and windswept hills. Arctic cinque-
I, with small yellow flowers, found protection from the wind in the
ne sheltered pockets and niches preferred by pikas, while on exposed
faces, cushions of moss campion with purple or pink blossoms
med their own protective hummocks of leafy stems in the cold
fmg winds. Beside them, mountain avens clung to the rocky out-
>ps and hills of this rugged lower land, just as it did on mountain-
es, its low evergreen branches of tiny leaves and solitary yellow
wers spreading out, over many years, into dense mats.

.noticed the fragrant scent of pink catchfly, just beginning to
sn their blooms. It made her realize that it was getting late, and she
need toward the sun lowering in the western sky to verify the hint
" nose had detected. The sticky flowers opened at night, offering a
/en to insects--moths and flies--in return for spreading pollen.
iey had little medicinal or food value, but the pleasant-smelling flow-
pleased her, and she had a fleeting notion to pick some. But it was
eady late in the day and she didn't want to stop. They ought to be
king camp soon, she was thinking, particularly if she was going to
he the meal she had been thinking about before it got dark.

She saw blue-purple pasqueflowers, erect and beautiful, each rising
m expanding leaves covered with fine hairs and, unbidden, the med-
l associations came into her mind--the dried plant was helpful for
idaches and women's cramps--but she enjoyed it as much for its
luty as for its usefulness. When her eye was caught by alpine asters
ch long thin petals of yellow and violet growing from rosettes of
Ey, hairy leaves, her fleeting notion became a conscious temptation
gather a few, along with some of the other flowers, for no reason

except to enjoy them. But where would she put them? They would only wilt, anyway, she thought.

Jondalar was beginning to wonder if they had missed the marked campsite, or if they were farther away from it than he had thought. He was reluctantly coming to the conclusion that they were going to have to make camp soon and look for the landmark campsite tomorrow. With that, and the need to hunt, they would probably lose another day, and he didn't think they could afford to lose so many days. He was deep in thought, still worrying about whether he had made the right decision in continuing south, and imagining the dire consequences, and was not paying close attention to a commotion on a hill to their right, except for noticing that it seemed to be a pack of hyenas that had made a kill.

Though they often scavenged, and when hungry were satisfied with the most noxious of rotten carcasses, the large hyenas with their powerful, bone-cracking jaws were also effective hunters. They had pulled down a yearling bison calf, nearly full-grown, but not fully developed. His lack of experience with the ways of predators had been his undoing. A few other bison were standing around, apparently safe now that one had succumbed, and one was watching the hyenas, bawling uneasily at the smell of fresh blood.

Unlike mammoths, and steppe horses, which were not exceptionally large for their species, the bison were giants. The one nearby stood nearly seven feet at the withers and was heavily built in the chest and shoulders, though his flanks were almost graceful. His hooves were small, adapted to running very fast over firm dry soils, and he avoided bogs in which he would become mired. His large head was protected by massive long black horns, six feet across, that curved out and then up. His dark brown, hairy coat was heavy, especially in the chest and shoulders. Bison tended to face into the frigid winds and were better protected in front, where the hair fell in a fringe that was up to thirty inches long, but even his short tail was covered with hair.

Although they were all grass eaters, the various grazers did not eat precisely the same food. They had different digestive systems or different habits and made subtly different adaptations. The highly fibrous stems that sustained horses and mammoths were not sufficient for bison and other ruminants. They needed grass sheaths and leaves that were higher in protein, and bison preferred the low-growing, more nutritious shortgrass of the drier regions. They only ventured into the midgrass and tallgrass regions of the steppes in search of new growth, usually in spring when all the lands were rich with fresh grass and herbs—which was also the only time of the year when their bones and horns grew. The long, wet, green spring of the periglacial grassland,

e

t bison, and several other animals, a long season for growing, which "feed in'their heroic proportions.

his dark and introspective mood, it took a few moments for the abilities of the scene on the hill to make an impact on Jondalar. By the time he was reaching for his spear-thrower and a spear with the intention of also bringing down a bison, as the hyenas had, Ayla had already sensed the situation, but had decided on a somewhat different course

of action.

"Hai! Hai! Get away from there! Go on, you filthy beasts! Get out of here!" she shouted, galloping Whinney toward them, as she hurtled by with her sling. Wolf was beside her, looking pleased with himself, as he growled and puppy-barked at the retreating pack.

A few yelps of pain made it clear that Ayla's stones had reached their mark, though she had held the force of her weapon in check and aimed for nonvital parts. If she had wished, her stones could have been lethal; it wouldn't have been the first time that she had killed a hyena, but that had not been her intention.

"What are you doing, Ayla?" Jondalar asked, riding toward her as Whinney was returning to the bison the hyenas had killed.

"I'm chasing those filthy, dirty hyenas away," she said, though it certainly must have been obvious.

"But why?"

"Because they are going to share that bison kill with us," she replied.

"I was just going after one of those that are standing around," Jondalar said.

"We don't need a whole bison, unless we're going to dry the meat, but this one is young and tender. The ones that are standing around are mostly tough old bulls," she said as she slid off Whinney to chase Wolf away from the downed animal.

Jondalar looked more closely at the gigantic bulls, who had also retreated from Ayla's hazing, and then at the young one on the ground.

"You're right. This is a male herd, and that one probably left his mother's herd recently and just joined this male group. He still had a right to eat."

"It's a fresh kill," Ayla announced, after she examined it. "They've only torn out the throat, and the gut, so far, and a little of the flank.

We can take what we want, and leave the rest for them. Then we won't need to take the time to hunt down one of those others. They can run away and they might get away. I think I saw a place down by the river where they may have been a camp. If it's the one we're looking for, there's no time for me to make something nice tonight with all the food we gathered and this meat."

She was already cutting through the skin up from the stomach to the

flank before Jondalar really grasped all that she had said. It had happened so fast, but suddenly all his concerns about losing an extra day because of having to hunt and look for the camp were gone.

"Ayla, you're wonderful!" he said, smiling as he dismounted from the young stallion. He pulled a sharp flint knife, that was hafted to a handle of ivory, out of a stiff rawhide sheath attached to his waist thong, and went to help butcher out the parts they wanted. "That's what I love about you. You're always full of surprises that rum out to be good ideas. Let's get the tongue, too. Too bad they already got to the liver, but after all, it is their kill."

"I don't care if it is theirs," Ayla said, "so long as it's a fresh kill. They've taken enough from me. I don't mind taking something back from those nasty animals. I hate hyenas!"

"You really do, don't you? I never hear you talk that way about other animals, not even wolverines, and they scavenge rotten meat sometimes and are more vicious and smell worse."

The hyena pack had been edging back toward the bison they had expected to feast on, snarling their displeasure. Ayla flung a few more stones to drive them back again. One of them whooped, then several cackled a loud laugh that made her skin crawl. By the time the hyenas decided to chance her sling once more, Ayla and Jondalar had gotten what they wanted.

They rode off, heading down a gully toward the river, with Ayla leading the way, leaving the rest of the carcass behind with the snarling beasts, who had immediately returned and begun to tear it apart again. The signs she had seen were not of the camp itself, but a marker cairn pointing the way. Inside the heaped-up pile of stones were some dry emergency rations, a few tools and other implements, a fire drill and platform with some dry tinder, and a rather stiff fur with patches of hair falling out. It would still offer some protection from the cold, but it needed to be replaced. Near the top of the caim, firmly anchored by heavy stones, was the broken-off end of a mammoth tusk with its tip aiming toward a large boulder partly submerged in the middle of the river. On it a horizontal diamond shape was painted in red, with the V-shaped angle at the right end repeated twice, forming a chevron pattern pointing downstream.

After putting everything back exactly as they found it, they followed the river until they came to a second caim with a small tusk pointing inland toward a pleasant glade set back from the river, surrounded by birch and alder trees, with a few pines. They could see a third cairn, and when they reached it, they found beside it a small spring of fresh, pure sparkling water. There were also emergency rations and imple'

its inside this pile of stones, and a large leather tarp, also stiff, but which could be made into a tent or a lean-to. Behind the caim, near a pile of stones that outlined a shallow pit black with charcoal, was a pile of deadfall and driftwood that had been gathered.

This is a good place to know about," Jondalar said. "I'm glad we don't have to use any of the supplies, but if I lived in this region and had to use it, I'd be relieved to know this is here."

It is a good idea," Ayla said, marveling at the foresight of those who had planned and set up the campsite.

They quickly removed the pack baskets and halters from the horses, unfastening the thongs and heavy cords that held them on, and set the pack saddles loose to graze and relax. Smiling, they watched as Racer immediately got down on the grass and rolled on his back, as though he had an itch he couldn't wait to scratch.

I'm feeling hot and itchy, too," Ayla said, untying the thongs from under the soft tops of her footwear and kicking them off. She loosened her belt, which held a knife sheath and pouches, took off a necklace of amber beads with a decorated pouch attached, and pulled off her tunic and leggings, then raced for the water with Wolf bounding beside her. "Are you coming?"

"Later," Jondalar said. "I'd rather wait until after I get the wood, so you won't take dirt and bark dust to bed with me."

Ayla returned soon, changed into a different tunic and leggings that she had worn in the evenings, but put her belt and necklace back on.

Jondalar had unpacked, and she joined him in setting up their camp.

They had already developed a pattern of working together that needed little decision making. They both put up the tent, spreading out an

animal ground cloth, then anchoring slender wooden shafts in the earth

to support a shaped leather tarp made of several hides sewn together.

The conical tent had rounded sides and an opening at the top to let

smoke poke out if they needed to make a fire inside, though they seldom

did, and an extra flap sewn on the inside with which to close the smoke

opening if they wished.

Cords were fastened around the bottom of the tent to tie it down to

stones, which were pounded in the ground. In case of strong winds, the ground cloth

could be tied to the cover tarp with additional ropes, and the entrance

flap could be fastened down securely. They carried a second tarp with

them to make a w-insulated double-walled tent, though they'd as

soon as they had little time to use it.

They spread out their sleeping furs, laying them out the long way

of the oval which left just enough room to fit their pack baskets and

leaves. Ayla lay on her back with Wolf at their feet if the weather

was bad. They had begun with two separate sleeping rolls, but they had quickly managed to combine them so they could sleep together. Once the tent was up, Jondalar went to gather more firewood, to replace whatever they would use, while Ay la began to prepare food. Though she knew how to start a fire with the fire-making kit in the caim, by twirling the long stick between her palms against the flat platform of wood to make a coal that could be blown into a flame. Ayla's fire-making kit was unique. While living alone in her valley, she had made a discovery. She had accidentally picked up a piece of iron pyrite from the litter of stones beside the stream, instead of the hammerstone she was using to make new tools for herself from flint. But she had made fires often, and she understood the implications quickly when striking the iron pyrite and flint together created a long-lived spark that burned her leg.

It took several trials at first, but she had long since worked out the best way to use the firestone. Now she could make fire more quickly than anyone with a fire-drill and hearth, and hard concentrated effort, could even imagine. The first time Jondalar had seen it, he couldn't believe it, and the sheer wonder of it had contributed to her being accepted by the Lion Camp when Talut wanted them to adopt her.

They thought she had done it with magic.

Ayla thought it was magic, too, but she believed the magic was in the firestone, not in her. Before they left her valley for the last time, she and Jondalar had collected as many of the grayish-yellow metallic stones as they could, not knowing if they would ever find them in any other place. They had given some to the Lion Camp and other Mamutoi, but still had many left. Jondalar wanted to share them with his people. The ability to make a fire quickly could be extremely useful, for many purposes.

Inside the ring of stones, the young woman made a small pile of very dry bark shavings and the fuzz from fireweed as tinder, and laid beside it another pile of twigs and smallwood for kindling. Nearby was some of the dry deadfall from the woodpile. Getting down very close to the tinder, Ayla held a piece of iron pyrite at an angle that she knew from experience would work best, then struck the magical yellowish stone, down the middle of a groove that was forming from use, with a piece of flint. A large, bright, long-lived spark flew from the stone and landed on the tinder, sending a wisp of smoke into the air. Quickly she put her hand around it and blew gently. A small coal glowed with a red light and a shower of tiny sun-yellow sparks. A second breath produced a small flame. She added twigs, and smallwood, and when it was going well, a stick of deadfall.

rime Jondalar returned, Ay la had several roundish stones, from a dry wash near the river, heating in the fire for cooking, a chunk of bison spitted over the flames, the outer layer of fat She had washed and was cutting up cattail roots, and another l^tarchy root with dark brown skin called groundnuts, preparing fc them in a tightly woven waterproof basket half-full of water, in l d^e fat-rich tongue was waiting. Beside it was a small pile of c wild carrots. The tall man put down his load of wood. smells good already!" he said. "What are you making?" m roasting the bison, but that's mostly for traveling. It's easy to >ld roast along the way. For tonight, and tomorrow morning, I'm ae soup with the tongue and vegetables, and the little bit we have '•am Feather Grass Camp," she said. yth a stick, she fished a hot stone from the fire and brushed the off with a leafy twig. Then, picking up a second stick and using as tongs, she lifted the stone and dropped it in the basket with fiter and the tongue. It sizzled and steamed as it transferred its to the water. Quickly she dropped several more stones in the t pot, added some leaves she had cut up, and put on a lid. Tiat are you putting in the soup?" •la smiled to herself. He always like to know the details of her ng, even the herbs that she used for making tea. It was another of tie traits that had surprised her because no man of the Clan would dream of showing so much interest, even if he might have been us, in anything that was in the memories of the women. esides these roots, I'm going to add the green tops of the cattails, nibs, leaves, and flowers of these green onions, slices of peeled e stalks, the peas from milk vetch pods, and I just put in some md thyme leaves, for flavor. And maybe I'll put some coltsfoot in ause it has a kind of salty taste. If we're going near Beran Sea, >e we can get some more salt. We had it all the time when I lived the Clan," she mentioned. "I think I'll mash up some of that radish I found this morning, for the roast. I just learned about it the Summer Meeting. It's hot, and you don't need much, but it the meat an interesting taste. You might like it." Tiat are those leaves for?" he asked, indicating a bunch she had d but not mentioned. He liked to know what she used and how lought about food. He enjoyed her cooking, but it was unusual. e were some tastes and flavors that were unique to her methods, lot like the tastes of foods he had grown up with. his is goosefoot, to wrap the roast in when I put it away. They X)d together when they're cold." She paused, looking thoughtful.

"Maybe I'll sprinkle some wood ashes on the roast; they taste a little salty, too. And I might add some of the roast to the soup after it browns, for color, and taste. With the tongue and the roast, it should be a good rich broth, and for tomorrow morning, it will be nice to cook up some of the grain we brought with us. There will be tongue left too, but I'll wrap it in dried grass and put it in my meat-keeper for later. There's room, even with the rest of our raw meat, including the piece we took for Wolf. As long as it stays cold at night, it should all keep for a while."

"It sounds delicious. I can hardly wait," Jondalar said, smiling with anticipation, and something more, Ayla thought. "By the way, do you have an extra basket I can use?"

"Yes, but why?"

"I'll tell you when I get back," he said, grinning with his secret.

Ayla turned the roast, then removed the stones and added more hot ones to the soup. While the food was cooking, she sorted through the herbs she had gathered for "Wolf repellent," putting aside the plant she had gathered for her own uses. She mashed up some of the horseradish root in a bit of broth for their meal, then began mashing the rest of the hot root and bruising the other harsh, sharp, strong-smelling herbs she had gathered that morning, trying to develop the most noxious combination of the plants that she could imagine. She thought the hot horseradish would be the most effective, but the strong camphor smell of the artemisia could be very helpful, too.

But the plant she had put aside occupied her thoughts. I'm glad I found it, she was thinking. I know I don't have enough of the herbs I need for my morning tea to last for the whole Journey. I'm going to have to find more along the way to make sure I don't have a baby, especially being with Jondalar so much. She smiled at the thought. I'm sure that's how babies get started, no matter what people say about spirits. I think that's why men want to put their organs in that place where babies come from, and why women want them to. And why the Mother made that Her Gift of Pleasure. The Gift of Life is from Her, too, and She wants Her children to enjoy making new life, especially since giving birth is not easy. Women might not want to give birth if the Mother hadn't made the starting of them Her Gift of Pleasure. Babies are wonderful, but you don't know how wonderful until you have one. Ayla had been privately developing her unorthodox ideas about the conception of life during the winter as she had been learning about Mut, the Great Earth Mother, from Mamut, the old teacher of the Lion Camp, though the original idea had occurred long before.

lit Broud wasn't a pleasure for me, she recalled. I hated it when he
sd roe, but now I'm sure that's how Durc got started. No one
ved I would ever have a baby. They thought my Cave Lion totem
too strong for any man's totem spirit to overcome. It surprised
yone. But it only happened after Broud began forcing me, and I
d see his look in my baby. He had to be the one that started Durc
yine inside me. My totem knew how much I wanted a baby of my
(.maybe the Mother did, too. Maybe that was the only way.
nut said the way we know Pleasures are a Gift from the Mother is
they are so powerful. It's very hard to resist them. He said it is
l harder for men than for women.

hat's the way it was with that dark red mammoth. All the males
ted her, but she didn't want them. She wanted to wait for her big
.Is that why Broud wouldn't let me alone? Even though he hated
the Mother's Gift of Pleasure was more powerful than his hatred?
laybe, but I don't think he was doing it only for the Pleasures. He
d get that from his own mate, or any woman he wanted. I think
new how much I hated it and that made his Pleasure more. Broud
' have started a baby in me--or maybe my Cave Lion let himself
efeated because he knew how much I wanted one--but Broud
d only give me his organ. He couldn't give me the Mother's Gift
leasures. Only Jondalar did that.

here must be more to Her Gift than just the Pleasures. If She just
ted to give Her children a Gift of Pleasure, why would She put it
iat place, where children are born from? A place of Pleasures could
mywhere. Mine aren't exactly where Jondalar's are. His Pleasure
es when he is inside me, but mine is at that other place. When he
s me Pleasure there, everything feels wonderful, inside and all
' . Then I want to feel him inside me. I would not want to have my
e of Pleasure inside. When I'm very sensitive, Jondalar has to be
' gentle, or it can hurt, and giving birth is not gentle. If a woman's
e of Pleasure was inside, it would make giving birth much harder,
rt's difficult enough as it is.

tow does Jondalar always know just what to do? He knew how to
me Pleasures before I knew what they were. I think that big
Mnoth knew how to give that pretty red one Pleasures, too. I think
made that loud deep sound because he made her feel them, and
s why all her family was so happy for her. Ayla's thoughts were
^Og tingling sensations and a warming glow. She glanced toward
Wooded area where Jondalar had gone, wondering when he'd be
L*

ut a baby doesn't start every time Pleasures are shared. Maybe

spirits are necessary, too. Whether it's the totem spirits of the Clan men, or the essence of a man's spirit that the Mother takes and gives to a woman, it still starts when a man puts his organ inside and leaves his essence there. That's how She gives a child to a woman, not with spirits, with Her Gift of Pleasure. But She decides which man's essence will start the new life, and when the life will begin.

If the Mother decides, why does Iza's medicine keep a woman from getting pregnant? Perhaps it won't let a man's essence, or his spirit mix with a woman's. Iza didn't know why it worked, but it does seem to, most of the time.

I would like to let a baby start when Jondalar shares Pleasures with me. I want to have a baby so much, one that's a part of him. His essence or his spirit. But he's right. We should wait. It was so hard for me to have Durc. If Iza hadn't been there, what would I have done? I'd want to be sure there were people around who would know how to help.

I will keep drinking Iza's tea every morning, and I won't say anything. She was right. I shouldn't talk too much about babies starting from a man's organ, either. It made Jondalar so worried when I mentioned it, he thought we'd have to stop having Pleasures. If I can't have a baby yet, at least, I want to have Pleasures with him.

Like those mammoths were having. Is that what that big mammoth was doing? Making a baby start in that dark red one. That was so wonderful, sharing their Pleasures with the herd. I'm so glad we stayed. I kept wondering why she was running away from all those others, but she wasn't interested in them. She wanted to choose her own mate, not go with anyone who wanted her. She was waiting for that big light brown bull, and as soon as he came, she knew he was the one. She couldn't wait, she ran right to him. She had waited long enough. I know how she feels.

Wolf loped into the clearing, proudly holding up an old rotting bone for her to see. He dropped it at her feet and looked up expectantly. "Whew! That smells rotten! Where did you get that. Wolf? You must have found where someone's leavings were buried. I know you love rotten. Maybe this is a good time to see how you like hot and strong," she said. She picked up the bone and spread some of the mixture she had been making on Wolf's prize. Then she threw it into the middle of the clearing.

The young animal eagerly dashed after it, but he sniffed it warily before he picked it up. It still had the wonderful rotten odor he adored, but he wasn't sure about that other strange smell. Finally he snatched it with his mouth. But very quickly he dropped it and began snorting

luffling and shaking his head. Ayla couldn't help it. His antics
o funny that she laughed out loud. Wolf sniffed the bone again,
acked off and snorted, looking very displeased, and ran toward

ring.
u don't like that, do you, Wolf? Good! You're not supposed to
" she said, feeling the laughter bubbling up inside her as she
ed. Lapping water didn't seem to help much. He lifted a paw
ibbed it down the side of his face, trying to wipe his muzzle, as
l he thought that would get rid of the taste. He was still snorting
iffing and shaking his head as he ran into the woods.
ialar crossed his path, and when he reached the glade he found
aughing so hard there were tears in her eyes. "What is so funny?"
ed.

u should have seen him," she said, still chortling. "Poor Wolf,
s so proud of that rotten old bone he found. He didn't know
l happened to it, and he tried everything to get the taste out of his
i. If you think you can stand the smell of horseradish and cam-
Jondalar, I think I've found a way to keep Wolf away from our
." She held out the wooden bowl she had been using to mix the
ients. "Here it is. 'Wolf repellent!' "

i glad it works," Jondalar said. He was smiling, too, but the glee
lied his eyes wasn't caused by Wolf. Ayla finally noticed that his
were behind his back.

t that have you got behind your back?" she asked, suddenly
is.

U, it just happens that when I was out looking for wood I found
liing else. And if you promise to be good, I just might give you

me what?"

brought the filled basket in front of him. "Big, juicy, red rasp-
s!"

a's eyes lit up. "Oh, I love raspberries."

m't you think I know it? What do I get for them?" he asked with
Me in his eye.

a looked up at him and, walking toward him, smiled, a big
fill wide smile that filled her eyes and beamed her love for him,
ie warmth she had been feeling, and her delight because he
d to give her a surprise.

^nk I just got it," he said, letting out the breath he realized he'd
olding. "Oh, Mother, you are beautiful when you smile. You're
fill all the time, but especially when you smile."

"only he was consciously aware of her, aware of every feature

and detail. Her long, thick, dark blond hair, gleaming with highlights where the sun had lightened it, was held back out of her way with a thong. But it had a natural wave and loose strands that had escaped the leather binding curled around her tanned face; one fell down her forehead in front of her eyes. He restrained an urge to reach out and move it aside.

She was tall, a good match for his own six-foot, six-inch frame, and the lithe, flat, wiry muscles of real physical strength were sharply defined in her long arms and legs. She was one of the strongest women he'd ever met; as physically powerful as many men he knew. The people who had raised her were endowed with an appreciably greater bodily strength than the taller but lighter-weight people she was born to, and though Ayla was not considered particularly strong when she lived with the Clan, she had developed a far greater strength than she normally might have, just to keep up. Coupled with years of observing, tracking, and stalking as a hunter, she used her body with ease and moved with uncommon grace.

The sleeveless leather tunic she wore, belted, over leather leggings fit comfortably, but did not hide her firm, full breasts, which could have seemed heavy but didn't, or her womanly hips that curved back to her well-rounded and firm rear. The laces at the bottom of her leggings were open and she was barefoot. Around her neck was a small, beautifully embroidered and decorated leather pouch, with crane feathers along the bottom, which showed the bumps of the mysterious objects it held.

Hanging from the belt was a knife sheath made of stiff rawhide, the hide of an animal that had been cleaned and scraped but not processed in any way, so that it dried hard in whatever shape it was formed, though a good, thorough wetting could soften it again. She had tucked her sling into the right side of her belt, next to a pouch that held several stones. On the left side was a rather strange, pouchlike object. Though old and worn, it was obvious that it had been made from a whole otter skin, cured with the feet, tail, and head left on. The throat had been cut and the insides removed through the neck, then a cord was strung through slits and pulled tight to close. The flattened head became the flap. It was her medicine bag, the one she had brought with her from the Clan, the one Iza had given her.

She does not have the face of a Zeiandonii woman, Jondalar was thinking; they would notice a foreign look, but her beauty was unthinkably takable. Her large eyes were gray-blue—the color of fine flint—thoughtful and wide-spaced, outlined with lashes a shade or two darker than her hair; her eyebrows were somewhat lighter, between the eyes in color. Her face was heart-shaped, rather wide with high cheekbones.

jaw and a narrow chin. Her nose was straight and finely
her full lips» curving up at the corners, were opened and
If showing her teeth in a smile that lit up her eyes and
her sheer pleasure in the very act of smiling.
her smiles and laughter had once singled her out as differ-
caused her to restrain them, Jondalar loved it when she
and her delight in his laughter, joking, and playfulness magi-
flsfonned the already pleasing arrangement of her features; she
leyen more beautiful when she smiled. He suddenly felt over-
timed by the sight of her and his love for her, and silently thanked
iMother again for giving her back to him.
IWhat do you want me to give you for the raspberries?" Ayla said.
|]l me, and it's yours."
il want you, Ayla," he said, his voice suddenly ragged with feeling.
tput the basket down, and in an instant he had her in his arms,
King her with fierce emotion. "I love you. I don't ever want to lose
H," he said in a hoarse whisper, kissing her again.
A. heady warmth rushed through her and she responded with a
ling as strong. "I love you, too," she said, "and I want you, but can
lush the meat away from the fire first? I don't want it to bum while
>'re. . . busy."
fondalar looked at her for a moment as though he hadn't understood
| words; then he relaxed, gave her a hug, and backed off a step,
iling ruefully. "I didn't mean to be so insistent. It's just that I love
a so much, sometimes it's hard to hold. We can wait until later."
She was still feeling her warm, tingling response to his ardor and
Isn't sure she was ready to stop, now. She regretted, a little, her
iument that had interrupted the moment. "I don't have to put the
tt away," she said.
ondalar laughed. "Ayla, you are an unbelievable woman," he said,
ing his head and smiling. "Do you have any idea how remarkable
are? You're always ready for me, any time I want you. You always
; been. Not just willing to go along, whether you feel like it or not,
right there, ready to interrupt anything, if that's what I want."
'ut, I want you, whenever you want me."
fou don't know how unusual that is. Most women want some
ing, and if they're in the middle of doing something, most are not
ag to be interrupted."
Tie women I grew up with were always ready whenever a man
;her the signal. You gave me your signal, you kissed me and let
now you wanted me."
laybe I'll be sorry I said this, but you can refuse, you know." His
lead wrinkled with the effort of trying to explain. "I hope you

don't think you have to be ready every time I am. You aren't livin with the Clan any more." -

"You don't understand," Ayla said, shaking her head, trying just a hard to make him understand. "I don't think I have to be ready. When you give me your signal, I am ready. Maybe it's because that's how women of the Clan always behaved. Maybe it's because you were the one who taught me how wonderful it is to share Pleasures. Maybe it because I love you so much, but when you give me your signal, I don't think about it, I feel it inside. Your signal, your kiss that tells me you want me, makes me want you."

He was smiling again, with relief and pleasure. "You make me ready, too. Just looking at you." He bent his head to her, and she reached up to him, molding herself against him as he pressed her tight. He restrained the impetuous eagerness he felt, though an extraneous feeling of pleasure that he could still feel so eager for her crossed his mind. Some women he'd tired of after a single experience, but with Ayla it always seemed new. He could feel her firm strong body against his, and her arms around his neck. He slid his hands forward and held the sides of her breasts as he bent farther to kiss the curve of her neck. Ayla removed her arms from around his neck and began to untie her belt, dropping it and all the implements attached to it to the ground. Jondalar reached under her tunic, lifting it as he found the round shapes with the hard, upright nipples. He lifted the tunic farther, exposing a dark pink areola surrounding the raised and sensitive node. Feeling the warm fullness in his hand, he touched the nipple with his tongue, then took it in his mouth and pulled in.

Tingling strings of fire raced to the place deep within as a small moan of pleasure escaped her lips. She could hardly believe how ready she was. Like the dark red mammoth, she felt as though she had been waiting all day and could hardly wait another moment. A fleeting picture of the big russet bull, with his long, curved organ, flashed through her mind. Jondalar let go, and she took hold of the neck opening of her tunic and pulled it over her head in one smooth motion. He caught his breath at seeing her, caressed her smooth skin, and reached for both full breasts. He fondled one hard nipple, squeezing and rubbing, while he suckled and pulled and nibbled on the other. Ayla felt delightful shocks of excitement, and she closed her eyes 3s she gave herself up to them. When he stopped the delicious caressing and nuzzling, she kept her eyes closed, and soon she felt herself being kissed. She opened her mouth to admit a gently exploring tongue When she put her arms around his neck, she could feel the wrinkle5 ° his leather tunic against her still sensitive nipples.

noved his hands over the smooth skin of her back and felt the
ient of her firm muscles. Her immediate response had added to
i ardor, and his hard, erect manhood strained against his cloth-
woman!" he breathed. "How I want you."

a ready for you."

t let me get these off," he said. He unfastened his belt, then
his tunic up his back and over his head. Ayla saw the straining
caressed it, and then began untying his drawstring, while he
id hers. They both stepped out of their leggings and reached for
[her, standing close in a long, slow, sensuous kiss. Jondalar
r scanned the clearing, looking for a place, but Ayla dropped
to her hands and knees, then looked back up at him with a
.smile.

it fur may be yellow, and not light brown, but you are the one
ie," she said.

miled back and dropped down behind her. "And your hair isn't
ed, it's the color of ripe hay, but it holds something that is,
ling like a red flower with many petals. But I don't have a furry
o reach you. I'll have to use something else," he said.

pushed her forward slightly, separated her cheeks to expose her
female opening, then bent down to taste her warm salt. He
i his tongue forward and found her hard nodule buried deep in
ds. She gasped and moved to give him easier access, while he
id and nuzzled, then dipped deep into her inviting opening to
id explore. He always loved to taste of her.

l was moving on a wave of sensations, hardly aware of anything
the hot pulses of feeling coursing through her. She was more
sually sensitive, and every place he touched or kissed burned its
rough her to the ultimate spot deep within that tingled with fire
aming. She didn't hear her own breath coming faster, or the
f pleasure she made, but Jondalar did.

traightened up behind her, moved in closer, and found her deep
ith his eager straining manhood. As he started penetrating, she
back, pushing herself on him until she took all of him in. He
»ut at her unbelievably warm welcome, then, holding her hips,
back a ways. He reached around with his hand and found her
tard node of pleasure and stroked it as she pushed back in. His
on nearly found its peak. He pulled back once more and, sensing
diness, stroked faster and harder, as he penetrated fully. She
'Ut her release, and his own voice cried out with hers.

l ^s lying stretched out, face down in the grass, the pleasant

weight of Jondalar on top of her, and felt his breath on the left side of her back. She opened her eyes and, without any desire to move watched an ant crawling on the ground around a single stem. She felt the man stir and then roll over, keeping his arm around her waist.

"Jondalar, you are an unbelievable man. Do you have any idea how remarkable you are?" Ayla said.

"Haven't I heard those words before? Seems to me I said them to you," he said.

"But they're true for you. How do you know me so well? I get lost inside my own self, just feeling what you do to me."

"I think you were ready."

"That's true. It's always wonderful, but this time, I don't know. Maybe it was the mammoths. I've been thinking about that pretty red mammoth, and her wonderful big bull—and you—all day."

"Well, maybe we'll have to play at being mammoths again," he said, with a big smile, as he rolled over on his back.

Ayla sat up. "All right, but right now I'm going to go play in the river before it gets dark"—she bent down and kissed him and tasted herself on him—"after I check on the food."

She ran to the fireplace, turned the bison roast again, took out the cooking stones and added a couple more from the dying fire that were still hot, put a few pieces of wood in the flames, and ran toward the river. It was cold when she splashed in, but she didn't mind. She was used to cold water. Jondalar soon joined her, carrying a large, soft buckskin hide. He put it down and entered more carefully, finally taking a deep breath and plunging in. He came up pushing his hair out of his eyes.

"That's cold!" he said.

She came up beside him and, with a mischievous smile, splashed him. He splashed her back, and a noisy water fight ensued. With one last splash, Ayla bounded out of the water, grabbed the soft hide, and began to dry herself. She handed it to Jondalar when he emerged from the river, then hurried back to the campsite and quickly dressed. She was ladling the soup into their personal bowls as Jondalar walked up from the river.

the last rays of the summer sun gleamed through the branches of the trees as it dropped over the edge of the high ground to the west. Joe at Jondalar with contentment, Ayla reached into her bowl for the ripe raspberry and popped it in her mouth. Then she got up to get up and arrange things for a quick and easy departure in the

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K gave Wolf the leftovers from their bowls and put cracked and leached grains--the wild wheat, barley, and goosefoot seeds that Nezzad had given her when they left--into the warm soup and left it at the edge of the firepit. The cooked bison roast and tongue from their meal were put into a rawhide parfleche in which she stored food. She folded the large envelope of stiff leather together, tied it with sturdy cords, and suspended it from the center of a tripod of long poles, to keep it out of the reach of night prowlers.

The tapering poles were made from whole trees, tall, thin, straight, and without the branches and bark stripped off, and Ayla carried them with the lashing sticks sticking up from the back of Whinney's two pack saddles, just as Jondalar carried the shorter tent poles. The long poles were also used on occasion to make a travois that could be pulled behind the horses to transport heavy or bulky loads. They also carried long wooden poles along with them because trees that would make suitable replacements were so rare on the open steppes. Even in the winter there was often little more than tangled brush.

As the twilight deepened, Jondalar added more wood to the fire, and he took the slab of ivory with the map scratched on it and brought it close to study it by the firelight. When Ayla finished and sat beside him, he seemed distracted and had that look of anxious concern that she had often noticed the past few days. She watched him for a while, but when he got up to get some stones in the fire to boil water for the evening tea it was too late to make, but instead of the flavorful but innocuous herbs that were normally used, she took some packets out of her otter-skin medicine bag. "Something calming might be helpful, maybe feverfew or yarrow root, in a woodruff tea, she thought, though she wished she

knew what the problem was. She wanted to ask him but wasn't sure if she should. Finally she made a decision.

"Jondalar, do you remember last winter when you weren't sure how I felt, and I wasn't sure how you felt?" she said.

He had been so deeply immersed in his thoughts that it took a few moments before he comprehended her question. "Of course I remember. You don't have any doubts how much I love you, do you? I don't have any doubts about your feelings for me."

"No, I don't have any doubts about that, but misunderstandings can be about many things, not just if you love me, or if I love you, and I don't want to let anything like last winter ever happen again. I don't think I could stand to have any more problems just because we didn't talk about it. Before we left the Summer Meeting, you promised to tell me if anything was bothering you. Jondalar, something is bothering you, and I wish you would tell me what it is."

"It's nothing, Ayla. Nothing you have to worry about."

"But it's something you have to worry about? If something is worrying you, don't you think I should know about it?" she said. She took two small tea holders, each woven out of split reeds into a fine mesh, out of a wicker container in which she kept various bowls and utensils. She paused for a moment, considering, then selected the dried leaves of feverfew and woodruff, added to chamomile for Jondalar, and just the chamomile for herself, and filled the tea holders. "If it concerns you, it must concern me, too. Aren't we traveling together?"

"Well, yes, but I'm the one who made the decision, and I don't want to upset you unnecessarily," Jondalar said, getting up for the waterbag, which was hanging from a pole near the entrance to the tent that was set back a few paces from the fireplace. He poured a quantity of liquid into a small cooking bowl and added the hot stones.

"I don't know if it's necessary or not, but you are already upsetting me. Why not tell me the reason?" She put the tea holders into their individual wooden cups, poured steaming water over them, and put them aside to steep.

Jondalar picked up the marked piece of mammoth tusk and looked at it, wishing it would tell him what lay ahead and whether he was making the right decision. When it was just his brother and him, it didn't matter too much. They were on a Journey, an adventure, and whatever came along was part of it. He wasn't sure, then, if they would ever return; he wasn't even sure if he wanted to. The woman he was forbidden to love had chosen a path that led even farther away, the one he was expected to mate was . . . just not the one he wanted. But this Journey was different. This time, he was with a woman he loved more than life itself. He not only wanted to get back home, but •

I fQ get her there, and safely. The more he thought about the dancers they might encounter along the way, the more he d even greater ones, but his vague worries were not something »1 easily explain.

tf-iust worried about how long this Journey will take. We need to bat glacier before the end of winter," he said.

i told me that before," she said. "But why? What will happen if ft reach it by then?" she asked.

; ice starts to melt in spring and it becomes too dangerous to C a crossing."

l if it's too dangerous, then we won't attempt it. But if we can't what do we do then?" she asked, pushing him to think about irives he had avoided thinking about. "Is there any other way to

l not sure. The ice we have to cross is just a small plateau glacier Ion a highland north of the great mountains. There is land to the I of it, but no one ever goes that way. It would take us even more four way, and it's cold. They say the northern ice is closer there, IS south in that region. The land between the high mountains of ibuth and the great ice of the north is the coldest anywhere. It prgets warm, not even in summer," Jondalar said.

Kit isn't it cold on that glacier you want to cross?"

(&f course, it's cold on the glacier, too, but it's a shorter way, and be other side it's only a few days to Dalanar's Cave." Jondalar put fs. the map to take the cup of hot tea Ayla was handing him, and Hared into the steaming contents for a while. "I suppose we could < northern route around the highland glacier, if we had to, but I W not want to. That's flathead country, anyway," Jondalar tried Xplain.

^t»u mean people of the Clan live north of that glacier we're sup- id to cross?" Ayla asked, stopping just as she was taking the tea w out of her cup. She was feeling a strange mixture of dread and iBftment.

pi sorry. I guess I should call them Clan people, but they are not Onae as the ones you knew. They live very far from here, you ad not believe how far. They are not the same at all."

|"t they are, Jondalar," Ayla said, then took a sip of the hot, j'fal liquid. "Maybe their everyday language and ways might be a 'lifferent, but all Clan people have the same memories, at least der memories. Even at the Clan Gathering, everyone knew the 't sign language that is used to address the spirit world, and spoke a other with it," Ayla said.

Ut they don't want us in their territory," Jondalar said. "They

already let us know that when Thonolan and I happened to be on the wrong side of the river."

"I'm sure that's true. People of the Clan don't like to be around the Others. So, if we can't cross the glacier when we get there, and we can't go around it, then what do we do?" Ayla asked, going back to the original problem. "Can't we wait until the glacier is safe to cross again?"

"Yes. I suppose we'd have to, but it might be almost a year until the next winter."

"But if we waited a year, then we could make it? Is there a place we could wait?"

"Well, yes, there are people we could stay with. The Losadunai have always been friendly. But I want to get home, Ayla," he said with a tone of such anguish that it made her realize just how important it was to him. "I want us to get settled."

"I want to get settled, too, Jondalar, and I think we should do everything we can to try to get there while it's still safe to cross the glacier. But if it's too late, it doesn't mean we won't get back to your home. It only means a longer wait. And we would still be together."

"That's true," Jondalar said, acquiescing but not happy. "I guess it wouldn't be so bad if we did get there late, but I don't want to wait around for a whole year," he said, and then his frown tightened. "And maybe if we went the other way, we would get there in time. It's still not too late."

"There is another way to go?"

"Yes, Talut told me we could go around the north end of the mountain range we'll be coming to. And Rutan of Feather Grass Camp said the route was northwest of here. I've been thinking that maybe we should go that way, but I had hoped to see the Sharamudoi once more. If I don't see them now, I'm afraid I never will, and they live around the south end of the mountains, along the Great Mother River," Jondalar explained.

Ayla nodded, thinking. Now I understand. "The Sharamudoi are the people you lived with for a while; your brother mated a woman of those people, right?"

"Yes, they are like family to me."

"Then of course we must go south so you can visit them one day in time. They are people you love. If it means we may not get to the glacier in time, then we'll wait until the next season for crossing. Even if it means waiting another year before we reach your home, don't you think it would be worth it to see your other family again? If part of the reason you want to go home is to tell your mother about your brother..."

roll think the Sharamudoi would like to know what happened to J- were his family, too." frowned, then brightened. "You're right, Ayla. They at to know about Thonolan. I've been so worried about made the right decision, I just didn't think it through." He relief. idalar watched the flames dancing over the blackened sticks of leaping and cavorting in their short-lived joy as they beat back microaching dark. He sipped his tea, still thinking about the long ey ahead of them, but he didn't feel quite as anxious about it. He d over at Ayla. "It was a good idea to talk it over. I guess I'm still sed to having someone around that I can talk to about . . . things. I think we can make it in time or I wouldn't have decided to go fsy in the first place. It will make a longer trip, but at least I know oute. I don't know the northern way." hink you made the right decision, Jondalar. If I could, if I hadn't cursed with death, I would visit Brun's clan," Ayla said, then l, so low that he could hardly hear her, "If I could, if I only , I would go to see Durc one last time." The forlorn, empty sound " voice made him aware that she was feeling her loss acutely just o you want to try to find him, Ayla?" is, of course I want to, but I can't. It would only cause everyone ss. I was cursed. If they saw me they would think I was an evil , I am dead to them, and there isn't anything I could do or say would convince them that I am alive." Ayla's eyes seemed to be ig far away, but they were seeing an inner vision, a memory. ;sides, Durc isn't the baby I left behind. He is getting close to ood, though I was late in reaching womanhood, for a woman of lan. He is my son, and he may lag behind the other boys, too. aon Ura will be coming to live with Brun's clan--no, it's Broud's now," Ayla said, frowning. "This is the summer of the Clan iring, so this fall Ura will leave her clan and go to live with Brun ^bra, and when they are both old enough, she will be Durc's " She paused, then added, "I wish I could be there to welcome)ut I would only scare her, and maybe make her think Durc is ky, if the spirit of his strange mother won't stay where she be- in the other world." 'e you sure, Ayla? I mean it, we'll take the time to look for them, want," Jondalar said. 'en if I wanted to find him," she said, "I wouldn't know where to I don't know where their new cave is, and I don't know where

the Clan Gathering is. It is not meant for me to see Durc. He is not my son any more. I gave him to Uba. He is Uba's son now." Ayla looked up at Jondalar. He noticed that tears were threatening. "I knew when Rydag died I would never see Durc again. I buried Rydag in Durc's carrying cloak, the one I took with me when I left the Clan and in my heart, I buried Durc at the same time. I know I will never see Durc again. I am dead to him, and it's best if he is dead to me." The tears were wetting her cheeks, though she seemed oblivious to them, as though she didn't know they had begun. "I'm really lucky you know. Think of Nezzie. Rydag was a son to her, she nursed him even if she didn't give birth to him, and she knew she would lose him. She even knew that no matter how long he lived, he would never have a normal life. Other mothers who lose their sons can only imagine them in another world, living with spirits, but I can imagine Durc here, always safe, always lucky, always happy. I can think of him living with Ura, having children at his hearth . . . even if I will never see them." The sob in her voice finally opened the way to let her grief out.

Jondalar took her in his arms and held her. Thinking of Rydag made him sad, too. There was nothing anyone could have done for him, though everyone knew Ayla had tried. He was a weak child. Nezzie said he always had been. But Ayla had given him something no one else could. After she came and started teaching him, and the rest of the Lion Camp, to talk the way the Clan did, with hand signs, he was happier than he had ever been. It was the first time in all his young life that he had been able to communicate with the people he loved. He could let his needs and wishes be known, and he could let people know how he felt, especially Nezzie, who had taken care of him since his real mother died, at his birth. He could finally tell her that he loved her. It had been a surprise to the members of the Lion Camp, but once they realized that he wasn't just a rather clever animal, without the ability to speak, but instead, a different kind of person, with a different kind of language, they began to understand that he was intelligent, and to accept him as a person. It had been no less a surprise to Jondalar, even though she had tried to tell him, after he began to teach her to speak with words again. He had learned the signs along with the others, and he had come to appreciate the gentle humor and the depth of understanding in the young boy from the ancient race. Jondalar held the woman he loved as she heaved great sobs in the release of her sorrow. He knew Ayla had held back her grief over the death of the half-Clan child that Nezzie had adopted, who had warmed her so much of her own son, and understood she was grieving for that son as well.

g it was more than Rydag or Durc. Ayla was grieving for all her the ones from long ago, her loved ones from the Clan, and 's of the Clan itself. Brim's clan had been her family, Iza and raised her, cared for her, and in spite of her difference, there time when she thought of herself as Clan. Though she had to leave with Jondalar because she loved him and wanted to be their talk had made her realize how far away he lived; it he a year, maybe two years just to travel there. The full idine of what that meant had finally come to her; she would nvijrn.

"was not only giving up her new life with the Mamutoi, who had td her a place among them, she was giving up any faint hope she (t have had of seeing the people of her clan again, or the son she feft with them. She had lived with her old sorrows long enough so (they had eased a little, but Rydag had died not long before they lie Summer Meeting, and his death was still too fresh, the grief too raw. The pain of it had brought back the pain of her other S, and the realization of the distance she would be putting between (had brought the knowledge that the hope of recovering that part STpast would have to die, too.

yla had already lost her early life; she had no idea who her real ter was, or who her people were, the ones she had been born to. Spt for faint recollections--feelings more than anything--she could lemember anything before the time of the earthquake, or any 9e before the Clan. But the Clan had banished her; Broud had put snrse of death upon her. To them she was dead and now she came »e full understanding that she had lost that part of her life when |torned her out. From this time on, she would never know where |»me from, she would never meet a childhood friend, she would |;lmow anyone, not even Jondalar, who would comprehend the pwind that made her who she was.

to accepted the loss of her past, except that which lived in her [and in her heart, but she grieved for it, and she wondered what 'd when she reached the end of her Journey. Whatever awaited atever his people were like, she would have nothing else; only '3ries . . . and the future.

i the wooded glade it was completely black. Not the faintest a silhouette or darker shadow could be discerned against the ttding background, except for a faint redness from the lingering i the fireplace, and the blazing epiphany of stars. With only a ^breeze penetrating the protected grove, they had moved their ^e furs outside the tent. Ayla lay awake under the starlit sky,

staring up at the patterns of constellations and listening to the nighr sounds: the wind sifting through the trees, the soft liquid running nf the river, the chirk of crickets, the harsh harumph of a bullfrog. Sh heard a loud plunk and splashing, then the eerie who-iohoing of an owl and in the distance, the deep roar of a lion and the loud trumpet of a mammoth.

Earlier Wolf had quivered with excitement at the sound of wolf howls and then run off. Not long afterward she heard wolf song again and an answering howl much closer. The woman was waiting for the animal to return. When she heard his panting breath--he must have been running, she thought--and felt him snuggle up to her feet, she relaxed.

She had just dozed off when she suddenly found herself wide awake. Alert and tense, she lay still, trying to discover what woke her. First she felt the rumbling, almost silent growl vibrating through her coverings from the warm spot at her feet. Then she heard faint snufflings. Something was in camp with them.

"Jondalar?" she said softly.

"I think the meat is drawing something. It could be a bear, but I think it's more likely to be a wolverine or a hyena," Jondalar replied, his whisper barely audible.

"What should we do? I don't want anything to get our meat."

"Nothing, yet. Whatever it is may not be able to reach it. Let's

-- >

wait.

But Wolf knew exactly what was nosing around and had no intention of waiting. Wherever they set up camp, he denned it as his territory and took it upon himself to defend it. Ayla felt him leave, and an instant later heard him snarl menacingly. The growling response had an entirely different tone and seemed to come from higher up. Ayla sat up and reached for her sling, but Jondalar was already on his feet with the long shaft of a spear resting on his spear-thrower in readiness.

"It's a bear!" he said. "I think he's up on his hind legs, but I can't see a thing."

They heard movement, shuffling sounds from somewhere between the fireplace and the poles from which the meat was suspended, then the growling warnings of the animals facing off. Suddenly, from the other side, Whinney neighed, then, even louder. Racer voiced his nervousness. There were more sounds of movement in the dark, and then Ayla heard the particular excited deep snarling rumble that signaled Wolfs intention to attack.

"Wolf!" Ayla called out, trying to prevent the dangerous encounter' Suddenly, amid vicious snarls, a sonorous bellow rang out, then a

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.of pai" as a scattering of bright sparks flew around a large shape
bline into the fireplace. Ayla heard the whistle of an object mov- ipidly through the air nearby.
A solid thunk was followed by a
and then the noise of something crashing through the trees,
ng away fast. Ayla whistled the call she used for Wolf. She did
rant him to follow.

e knelt down to hug the young wolf with relief when he came to
while Jondalar built up the fire again. In the firelight, he saw a
yf blood left behind by the retreating animal.
was sure my spear had found that bear," the man said, "but I
In't see where it hit. I'd better track it in the morning. A wounded
;can be dangerous, and we don't know who will be using this
site next."

'la came to examine the trail. "I think it's losing a lot of blood. It
not go far," she said, "but I was worried about Wolf. That was a
nimal. It could have hurt him."

m not sure if Wolf should have attacked like that. He could have
id that bear to go after someone else, but it was a brave thing to
and I'm glad to know he's so quick to protect you. I wonder what
|do if anyone ever really tried to hurt you," Jondalar said.
| don't know, but Whinney and Racer were anxious about that
ll think I'll see how they are."

mdalar wanted to check on them, too. They found the horses had
led in close to the fire. Whinney had learned long ago that the fire
k by people usually meant security, and Racer was learning from
Own experience, as well as from his dam. They seemed to relax
| the comforting words and touches of the people they trusted, but
| fcfelt uneasy and knew she'd have trouble going back to sleep. She
(Bed to make herself some calming tea and went into the tent to get
^tter-skin medicine bag.

Rule the cooking stones were heating, she stroked the fur of the
ft bag, remembering when Iza gave it to her and recalling her life
Jl the Clan, especially the last day. Why did Creb have to go back
|The cave? she thought. He might still be alive, even though he was
Ittg old and weak. But he wasn't weak during that last ceremony
|%ht before, when he made Goov the new Mog-ur. He was strong
JN The Mog-ur, just like before. Goov will never be as powerfiil as

*>dalar noticed her pensive mood. He thought she was still think- ff"out the child who had died
and the son she would never see

*>:» and he didn't quite know what to say. He wanted to help but
want to intrude. They were sitting together close to the fire,

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sipping, the tea, when Ayla happened to look up at the sky. She caught her breath.

"Look, Jondalar," she said. "In the sky. It's red, like a fire, but high up and far away. What is it?"

"Ice Fire!" he said. "That's what we call it when it's red like that, or sometimes Fires of the North."

They watched the luminous display for a while as the northern lights arced across the sky like gossamer drapes blowing in a cosmic wind.

"It has white bands in it," Ayla said, "and it's moving, like streaks of smoke, or white chalky water rippling through it. And other colors too."

"Star Smoke," Jondalar said. "That's what some people call it, or Star Clouds when it's white. It has different names. Most people know what you mean when you use any name like that."

"Why haven't I seen this light in the sky before, I wonder?" Ayla said, feeling awe, and a touch of fear.

"Maybe you lived too far south. That's why it is also called Fires of the North. I haven't seen it very often and never this strong, or this red, but people who have made northern Journeys claim the farther north you go, the more you see it."

"But you can only go as far north as the wall of ice."

"You can travel north beyond the ice, if you go by water. West of the place where I was born, several days' distance, depending on the season, the land comes to an end at the edge of the Great Waters. It is very salty, and it never freezes, although large chunks of ice are some times seen. They say some people have traveled beyond the wall of ice in boats, when they are hunting animals that live in the water," Jondalar said.

"You mean like the bowl boats the Mamutoi used to cross rivers?"

"Like them, I think, but bigger and stronger. I never saw them, and I wasn't sure if I believed the stories until I met the Sharamudoi and saw the boats they make. Many trees grow along the Mother River, near their Camp, big trees. They make boats out of them. Wait until you meet them. You won't believe it, Ayla. They don't just cross the river, they travel on it, both upstream and downstream in those boats. Ayla noticed his enthusiasm. He was really looking forward to seeing them again, now that he had resolved his dilemma. But she wasn't thinking about meeting Jondalar's other people. The strange light in the sky worried her. She wasn't sure why, exactly. It was unnerving and she wished she understood what it meant, but it didn't fill her with fear the way earthly disturbances did. She was terrified of a^ movements of the earth, especially earthquakes, not just because the

r of what should be solid earth was frightening in itself, but
[(.ugy had always signaled drastic, wrenching change in her life.
thquake had torn her away from her own people and given
Idhood that was alien to everything she had known, and an
he had led to her ostracism from the Clan, or at least given
l excuse for it. Even the volcanic eruption far to the southeast
showered them with fine, powdered ash seemed to have pre- a- leaving the Mamutoi, though the
choice had been hers and
id on her. But she didn't know what signs from the sky meant,
t if this was a sign.

> would think a sky like this was a sign of something, I'm sure,"
id. "He was the most powerful mog-ur of all the clans, and
ne like this would make him want to meditate until he under-
hat it meant. I think Mamut would think it was a sign, too.
Edo you think, Jondalar? Is it a sign of something? Maybe of
thing . . . not good?"

|y. . I don't know, Ayla." He was hesitant to tell her the beliefs
| people that when the northern lights were red, it was often
Hered a warning, but not always. Sometimes it just presaged
thing important. "I'm not One Who Serves the Mother. It could
|ign of something good."

|lt this Ice Fire is a powerful sign of something, isn't it?"
Equally. At least most people think so."

Ha mixed a little columbine root and wormwood into her chamo-
fepa, making a somewhat more than mildly calming drink for her-
|lut she was uneasy after the bear in their camp and the strange
'in the sky. Even with the sedative, Ayla felt as though sleep was
RPg her. She tried every position to fall asleep, first on her side,
|er back, then the other side, even her stomach, and she was sure
Rising and turning was bothering Jondalar. When she finally did
f, her sleep was disturbed by vivid dreams.

'yy roar shattered the silence, and the watching people jumped back
The huge cave bear pushed at the gate to the cage and sent it crashing
wind. The maddened bear was loose! Broud was standing on his
two other men were clinging to his fur. Suddenly one was in the
sanimal's grip, but his agonized scream was cut short when a powerful
'snapped his spine. The mog-urs picked up the body and, with solemn
^carried it into a cave. Creb, in his bearskin cloak, hobbled in the lead.
^ftared at a white liquid sloshing in a cracked wooden bowl. The liquid
wwod red, and thickened, as white, luminous bands moved in slow ripples
» tt- She felt an anxious worry, she had done something wrong. There

wasn't supposed to be any liquid left in the bowl. She held it to her lips and drained it.

Her perspective changed, the white light was inside her, and she seemed to be growing larger and looking down from high above at stars blazing a path. The stars changed to small flickering lights leading through a long endless cave. Then a red light at the end grew large, filling her vision, and with a sinking sickening feeling, she saw the mog-urs sitting in a circle, half-hidden by stalagmite pillars.

She was sinking deeper into a black abyss, petrified with fear. Suddenly Creb was there with the glowing light inside her, helping her, supporting her, easing her fears. He guided her on a strange trip back to their mutual beginnings through salt water and painful gulps of air, loamy earth and high trees. Then they were on the ground, walking upright on two legs, walking a great distance going west toward a great salty sea. They came to a steep wall that faced a river and a flat plain, with a deep recess under a large overhanging section; it was the cave of an ancient ancestor of his. But as they approached the cave, Creb began fading, leaving her.

The scene grew hazy, Creb was fading faster, was nearly gone, and she felt panicky. "Creb! Don't go, please don't go!" she called out. She scanned the landscape, searching desperately for him. Then she saw him at the top of the cliff, above his ancestor's cave, near a large boulder, a long, slightly flattened column of rock that tilted over the edge, as though frozen in place as it was about to fall. She called out again, but he had faded into the rock. Aylafelt desolate; Creb was gone and she was alone, aching with sorrow, wishing she had something of his to remember, something to touch, to hold, but all she had was an overwhelming sorrow. Suddenly she was running, running as fast as she could; she had to get away, she had to get away.

"Ayla! Ayla! Wake up!" Jondalar said, shaking her.

"Jondalar," she said, sitting up. Then, still feeling the desolation, she clung to him, as tears fell. "He's gone . . . Oh, Jondalar."

"It's all right," he said, holding her. "It must have been a terrible dream. You were shouting and crying. Do you think it would help if you told me?"

"It was Creb. I dreamt about Creb, and that time at the Clan Gathering when I went into the cave and those strange things happened.

For a long time afterward, he was very upset with me. Then, just as we were finally getting back together, he died, before we could even talk very much. He told me Durc was the son of the Clan. I never was sure what he meant. There was so much I wish we could have talked about, so much I wish I could ask him now. Some people just thought of him as the powerful Mog-ur, and his missing eye and arm made him

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" ^ more frightening. But they didn't know him. Creb was kind. He understood the spirit world, but he understood If I wanted to talk to him in my dream, and I think he was (talk to me."

ie he was. I never could understand dreams," Jondalar said. ifeeling better?"

right now," Ayla said, "but I wish I knew more about

: think you should go looking for that bear alone," Ayla said kfast. "You're the one who said a wounded bear could be

_j."

; watchful."

|<o with you, both of us can be watchful, and staying at the (fe won't be any safer. The bear could come back while you're

l-

jt's true. All right, come along."

jteStarted into the woods, following the bear's trail. Wolf decided

c the bear and plunged ahead through the underbrush, heading

an. They had traveled less than a mile when they heard a com- I ahead, snarls and growls. Hurrying ahead, they found Wolf,

ries raised, a low growl deep in his throat, but holding his head

Id his tail between his legs, staying well back from a small pack

|ves who were standing guard over the dark brown carcass of the

Cieast we don't have to worry about a dangerous wounded bear,"

jsad, holding her spear and thrower ready.

|E a pack of dangerous wolves." He was also standing braced to

Its spear. "Did you want some bear meat?"

W,we have enough meat. I don't have room for more. Let's leave till-to them."

|On't care about the meat, but I wouldn't mind having the claws

f»P big teeth," Jondalar said.

|iy don't you take them? They are yours by right. You killed the

<can chase the wolves away with my sling long enough for you

llfaem."

|"uar didn't think it was something he would have tried by him- iwe idea of driving a pack of wolves away from meat they had

sb as theirs seemed a dangerous thing to do, but he remembered

jtionsofthe day before, chasing away the hyenas. "Go ahead,"

W: taking out his sharp knife.

W became very excited when Ayla started to throw stones and

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chase the wolf pack, and he stood guard over the bear carcass as Tondalar quickly cut away the claws. The teeth were somewhat harder to dig out of the jaws, but the man soon had his trophies. Ayla was watching Wolf, smiling. As soon as his "pack" had chased away the wild pack, his entire manner and posture changed. He was holding his head up, his tail straight back, in the stance of a dominant wolf, and his snarl was more aggressive. The pack's leader was watching him closely and seemed close to challenging him.

After they relinquished the bear carcass to the pack again and were walking away, the pack leader threw back his head and howled. It was deep-voiced and powerful. Wolf lifted his head and howled in return but his song lacked the resonance. He was younger, hardly even full grown, and it showed in his tone.

"Come on. Wolf. That one's bigger than you, not to mention older and wiser. He'd have you on your back in a heartbeat or two," Ayla said, but Wolf howled again, not in challenge, but because he was in a community of his kind.

The other wolves of the pack joined in until Tondalar felt surrounded by a chorus of yips and howls. Then, just because she felt like it, Ayla lifted her head and howled. It sent a shiver down the man's back and raised gooseflesh. To his ear, it was a perfect imitation of the wolves. Even Wolf cocked his head toward her, then voiced another long wail of more confident tones. The other wolves answered in kind and soon the woods were again filled with the spine-tingling, beautiful wolf song.

When they got back to camp, Tondalar cleaned up the bear claws and canine teeth, while Ayla packed Whinney, and he was still packing, not quite ready to go when she was done. She was leaning against the mare, absently scratching her and feeling the comfort of her presence, when she noticed that Wolf had found another rotten old bone.

This time he kept to the far edge of the glade, growling playfully at his rank prize, keeping an eye on the woman, but making no attempt to bring it to her.

"Wolf. Come here, Wolf." she called. He dropped his bone and came to her. "I think it's time to begin teaching you something new," she said.

She wanted him to learn to stay in one place when she told him to, even if she went away. It was a command that she felt would be important for him to learn, though she feared he would be a long time in the learning. Judging from the reception they had received thus far from people they had met, and Wolf's reaction, she worried about going after strangers from another "pack" of humans.

once promised Talut that she would kill the wolf herself if
t anyone at Lion Camp, and she still felt it was her respon-
iake sure that the carnivorous animal she had brought into
t with people would not harm anyone. Beyond that, she
out his safety. His threatening approach immediately
fensive reaction, and she feared that some frightened hunter
o kill the strange wolf that seemed to be threatening his
(to she could prevent it.

led to begin by tying him to a tree and telling him to stay
she walked away, but the rope around his neck was too
he slipped his head out of it. She tied it tighter the next
wrried that it would choke him if it was too tight. As she
sed, he whined and howled and jumped up trying to follow
he backed away. From the distance of several yards, she
him to stay there, signaling a stop motion with her hand.
-finally settled down, she came back and praised him. After
attempts, she saw that Jondalar was ready, and she let Wolf
xough practicing for that day, but after struggling to untie
Volf had stretched tighter with his straining against them,
pleased with the rope around his neck. First she'd had to
acdy right, neither too tight nor too loose, and then she
s difficult to untie the knots. She was going to have to think

really think you'll be able to teach him not to threaten
Jondalar asked, after watching the first seemingly unsuc-
mpts. "Didn't you tell me that it's natural for wolves to be
of others? How can you hope to teach him something that
as natural inclinations?" He mounted Racer while she put
ray, and then she climbed on Whinney's back.
atural inclination for that horse to let you ride on his back?"

think that's the same, Ayla," Jondalar said as they started
ie camp riding the horses side by side. "Horses eat grass,
eat meat, and I think they are by nature more inclined to
Me. When they see strangers, or something that seems
,, they want to run away. A stallion may fight another stal-
ttnes, or something directly threatening, but Racer and
rant to get away from a strange situation. Wolf gets defen- ouch more ready to fight."
lid run away, too, Jondalar, if we'd run with him. He gets
ccause he's protecting us. And, yes, he's a meat eater, and
ll a man, but he doesn't. I don't think he would unless he

thought one of us was threatened. Animals can learn, just like peoni can. It's not his natural inclination to think of people and horses as h' 'pack.' Even Whinney has learned things that she would not have 't I she lived with other horses. How natural is it for a horse to think of wolf as a friend? She even had a cave lion for a friend. Is that a natural inclination?"

"Maybe not," Jondalar said, "but I can't tell you how worried I was when Baby showed up at the Summer Meeting and you rode straight up to him on Whinney. How did you know he'd remember you? Or Whinney? Or that Whinney would remember him?"

"They grew up together. Baby ... I mean Baby ..."

The word she used meant "baby" but it had an odd sound and inflection, unlike any language she and Jondalar usually spoke, a rough, guttural quality, as though spoken from the throat. Jondalar could not reproduce it, could hardly even approximate the sound; it was one of the relatively few spoken words from the language of the Clan. Though she had said it often enough that he recognized it, Ayla had formed the habit of immediately translating any Clan word she happened to use to make it easier. When Jondalar referred to the lion Ayla had raised from a cub, he used the translated form of the name she had given him, but it always struck him as incongruous that a gigantic male cave lion should have the name "Baby."

"... Baby was ... a cub when I found him, a baby. He hadn't even been weaned. He'd been kicked in the head, by a running deer, I think, and was almost dead. That's why his mother left him. He was like a baby to Whinney, too. She helped me take care of him--it was so funny when they started playing with each other, especially when Baby would sneak up and try to get Whinney's tail. I know there were times when she waved it at him on purpose. Or they'd each grab an end of a hide and try to pull it away from each other. I lost so many hides that year, but they made me laugh."

Ayla's expression turned pensive. "I never really learned to laugh until then. The people of the Clan didn't laugh out loud. They didn't like unnecessary noises, and loud sounds were usually meant for warnings. And that look you like, with teeth showing, that we call a snul^ They made it to mean they were nervous, or feeling protective and defensive, or with a certain hand sign as implying a threatening g^" ture. It wasn't a happy look to them. They didn't like it when I w^ little if I smiled or laughed, so I learned not to do it very much." They rode along the river's edge for a distance, on a flat, wide stretcii of gravel. "Many people smile when they're nervous, and when they meet strangers," Jondalar said. "It's not meant to be defensive ^

pf

"though. I think a smile is meant to show that you're not

ad in single file, Ayla leaned to the side to guide her horse
i brush growing beside a streamlet that was making its way
After Jondalar had developed the halter device that he
de Racer, Ayla also started using one to help lead Whinney
f or to tie her to something to keep her in one location, but
I the horse was wearing it, Ayla never used it when she was
; had never intended to train the animal when she first got
e's back, and the mutual learning process had been gradual
; beginning, unconscious. Though once she realized what
. ling, the woman did purposely train the horse to do certain
(was always within the framework of the deep understanding
Igrown between them.

(a smile is meant to show that you are not afraid, doesn't that
b think you have nothing to be afraid of? That you feel strong
; nothing to fear?" Ayla said, when they rode abreast again.
r really thought about it before. Thonolan always smiled and
>confident when he met new people, but he wasn't always as
; seemed. He tried to make people think that he wasn't afraid,
ose you could say it was a defensive gesture, a way of saying
ong I have nothing to fear from you."

I isn't showing your strength a way of threatening? When Wolf
(his teeth to strangers, isn't he showing them his strength?" Ayla
td.

Sere may be something about them that is the same, but there is
difference between a smile of greeting and Wolf baring his teeth
(Awling."

Ht> that's true," Ayla conceded. "A smile makes you feel happy."

VVt least relieved. If you've met a stranger and he smiles back at
(hat usually means you've been welcomed, so you know where
tand. Not all smiles are necessarily meant to make you happy."

ybe feeling relieved is the beginning of feeling happy," Ayla

fthey rode together in silence for a while; then the woman contin- fl think there is something
similar about a person smiling in

Bg when he is feeling nervous around strangers, and people of
>n having a gesture in their language of showing their teeth that
(.they're nervous or implying a threat. And when Wolf shows his
Go dangers, he's threatening them because he's feeling nervous
totective."

ten when he shows his teeth to us, to his own pack, it's his smile,"

sal^." "There are times when I'm convinced he's smiling, and

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I know he teases you. I'm sure he loves you, too, but the trouble ' it's natural for him to show his teeth and threaten people he doesn''1 know. If he's protecting you, how are you going to train him to sta where you tell him, if you're not there? How can you teach him not t attack strangers if he decides he wants to?" Jondalar's concern w serious. He wasn't sure that taking the animal with them was such good idea. Wolf could create a lot of problems. "Remember, wolvw attack to get their food; that's the way the Mother made them. Wolfic a hunter. You can teach him many things, but how can you teach a hunter not to be a hunter? Not to attack strangers?"

"You were a stranger when you came to my valley, Jondalar. Do you remember when Baby came back to visit me and found you there'" Ay la asked, as they again separated into single file to start up a gully leading away from the river toward the highland.

Jondalar felt a flush of heat, not exactly embarrassment, but a recollection of the strong emotions of that encounter. He had never been so scared in his life; he had been sure he was going to die.

It took some time to pick their way up the shallow ravine, around rocks that washed down during spring floods, and black-stemmed artemisia brush that burst into life when the rains came and retreated into dry stalks that appeared dead when they stopped. He thought about the time Baby came back to the place where Ayla had raised him and found a stranger on the broad ledge in front of her small cave. None of them were small, but Baby was the biggest cave lion he'd ever seen, nearly as tall as Whinney, and more massive. Jondalar was still recovering from the mauling that same lion, or his mate, had given him earlier when he and his brother had foolishly broached their den. It was the last thing Thonolan was ever to do. Jondalar was sure he was seeing his last moments when the cave lion roared and gathered himself to spring. Suddenly Ayla was between them, holding up her hand in a motion to stop, and the lion stopped! It would have been comical the way that huge beast pulled himself up short and twisted around co avoid her, if he hadn't been so petrified. The next thing he knew, she was scratching the gigantic cat and playing with him.

"Yes, I remember," he said, when they reached the highland and again rode side by side. "I still don't know how you made him stop iil the middle of that attack on me."

"When Baby was just a cub, he made a game of attacking me, but when he started to grow, he got too big for me to play that kind or game with him. He was too rough. I had to teach him to stop," Ay^ explained. "Now I have to teach Wolf not to attack strangers, and to stay behind if I want him to. Not only so he won't hurt people, but so they won't hurt him."

ie can teach him, Ayla, you can," Jondalar said. She had
___)int and if she could, it would make Wolf easier to travel
he still wondered how much trouble the wolf might cause
had delayed their crossing the river and chewed up their
ffh Ayla had apparently worked out that problem, too. It
he didn't like the animal. He did. It was fascinating to
[>lf so closely, and it surprised him how friendly and affec-
F was, but he did require extra time, attention, and proving-
horses took some extra care, but Racer was so responsive to
ley were a real help. The trip back was going to be difficult
icy didn't need the added burden of an animal that was
t; / . ri-i

pyomsome as a child.

I, that would be a problem, Jondalar thought as he rode. I
lithe Great Earth Mother doesn't give Ayla a child before we
fff we were already there and settled, it would be different.
|-could think about children. Not that we can do anything
(anyway, except ask the Mother. I wonder what it would be
e a small one around?

Ayla is right? What if children are started by Pleasures? But
i together for some time, and there are no signs of children
to be Doni who puts the baby inside a woman, but what if
r decides not to give Ayla a child? She did have one, even if
ed. Once Doni gives one, She usually gives more. Maybe
I wonder, can Ayla have a baby that would come from my
'an any woman?

tared Pleasures and honored Doni with many. Did any of them
(W a baby that I started? How does a man know? Ranee knew.
|bring was so strong, and his features so unusual, you could see
teace in some of the children at the Summer Meeting. I don't
ttch strong coloring or features . . . or do I?

>t about that time the Hadumai hunters stopped us on the way
That old Haduma wanted Noria to have a baby with blue eyes
Be, and after her First Rites, Noria told me she would have a
_toy spirit, with my blue eyes. Haduma had told her. I wonder
Wtt had that baby?

<t>o thought she might have been pregnant when I left. I wonder
BM a child with blue eyes the color of mine. Serenio had one
" sne never had any others after that, and Darvo was almost a
@an. I wonder what she'll think of Ayla, or what Ayla will
>Aer?

rbl?she wasn't pregnant. Maybe the Mother still hasn't forgotten
^"» and it's Her way of telling me I don't deserve a child at my
' ut she gave Ayla back to me. Zeiandoni always told me Doni

would never refuse me anything I asked Her, but she warned me to be careful what I asked for, because I would get it, she said. That's why she made me promise not to ask the Mother for her, when she was still Zolena.

Why would anyone ask for something if he didn't want it? I never really understand those who speak to the spirit world. They always have a shadow on their tongue. They used to say Thonolan was a favorite of Doni, when they talked about his flair for getting along with people. But then they say beware of the Mother's favors. If She favors too much, She doesn't want you be away from Her for too long. Is that why Thonolan died? Did the Great Earth Mother take him back? What does it really mean when they say Doni favors someone?

I don't know if She favors me or not. But now I know Zolena made the right choice when she decided to embrace the zeiaandonia. It was right for me, too. What I did was wrong, but I would never have made the Journey with Thonolan if she hadn't become Zeiandoni, and I would never have found Ayla. Maybe She does favor me, a little, but I don't want to take advantage of Doni's goodness to me. I have already asked Her to get us back safely; I can't ask Her to give Ayla a child of my spirit, especially not now. But I wonder, will she ever have one?

via and Jondalar turned away from the river they had been veering toward the west in their general southerly route, and across country. They came upon the valley of another course that was flowing east on its way to joining, somewhat from the one they had left behind. The valley was broad, with a steep slope leading to a swift river that was racing through the middle of a level floodplain, strewn with stones of various sizes, from large boulders to fine sandy gravel. Except for a few tufts of an occasional flowering herb, the rocky course was bare, with little vegetation by the spring deluge. The trees, whole trees stripped of leaves and bark, sprawled across the clearing, while tangled alder brush and shrubs with gray-leaves hovered near the edge. A small herd of giant deer, with magnificent palmate antlers made the large rack of the moose in the valley, were feeding along the outer fringe of woolly willows on the damp lowland near the water. The valley was full of high spirits and had been darting under and around the horses, particularly Racer. Whinney seemed able to tolerate the exuberance, but the stallion was more excitable. Ayla knew the young horse would have responded to Wolf's playfulness if he had been allowed to, but with Jondalar guiding his movements, Wolf's antics only distracted him. The man was not pleased, and required him to keep a closer control over the horse. His mind was building up, and he was considering whether he should tell her she couldn't keep the wolf away from Racer. The wolf, much to Jondalar's relief, dashed away. He had caught the scent of the deer and gone to investigate. The first sight of the legs of a giant deer was irresistible; Wolf decided it was an honour-legged animal for him to play with. But when the stag lowered his head to fend off the charging animal, Wolf was struck by the magnificent spreading antlers of the powerful deer were several feet long! The great beast nibbled on the broad-leaf grass and was not unmindful of the carnivore, but indifferent to him, as he knew he had little to fear from a lone wolf.

Ayla, watching, smiled. "Look at him, Jondalar. Wolf thought that megaceros was another horse he could pester."

Jondalar smiled, too. "He does look surprised. Those antlers are a little more than he expected."

They rode slowly toward the water, understanding without saying so that neither of them wanted to startle the massive deer. They both felt a sense of awe as they neared the enormous creatures that towered over them, even on horseback. With a stately gracefulness, the herd edged away as the people and horses approached, not frightened, but cautious, browsing on the woolly willow leaves as they went.

"They are a little more than I expected, too," Ayla said. "I've never been this close before."

Though only slightly larger than moose in actual physical size, the giant deer, with their magnificent, elaborate antlers, spreading out and up from the tops of their heads, seemed enormous. Each year the fantastic horns were shed and the new pair that grew in to replace them extended to greater lengths and more complexity, eventually reaching twelve feet or more on some old males in a single season. But even when their heads were bare, that greatest member of the deer tribe was huge in comparison with any other of its kind. The shaggy fur and massive shoulder and neck muscles, which had developed to support the weight of the immense horns, contributed to their formidable aspect. Giant deer were animals of the plains. The prodigious antlers were an encumbrance in woodland, and they avoided any trees taller than brush; some had been known to starve to death, trapped by their own glorious rack caught in the branches of a tree.

When they reached the river, Ayla and Jondalar stopped and studied the waterway and the surrounding area to determine the best place to cross. The river was deep and the current swift, and large jagged boulders created rapids in places. They checked the conditions both upstream and downstream, but the nature of the river seemed consistent for some distance. Finally they decided to try to cross at a place that seemed relatively free of rocks.

They both dismounted, tied the side pack baskets to the backs of their horses, and placed inside the foot-coverings and the warm outerwear they had donned in the chill of the morning. Jondalar removed his sleeveless shirt, and Ayla considered stripping entirely so she wouldn't have to worry about drying her clothes, but a check of the water temperature with her foot changed her mind. She was used to cold water, but this fast-moving stream felt as icy as the water she had left out the night before and found in the morning with a thin frost film on top. Even wet, the soft buckskin-leather tunic and leggings would provide some warmth.

the horses were agitated, moving back from the wet edge with - ^eps, whickering, neighing, and tossing their heads. Ayla halter with the lead rope on Whinney to help guide the horse he water. Then, sensing the mare's growing unease, the young hugged the shaggy neck and talked to her with the comforting language she had invented when they were together in the

lad developed it unconsciously, building on the complex signs, narily on the few words that were part of the language of the nd she had added the repetitive nonsense sounds she and her I begun to use, to which she had assigned meaning. It also d horse sounds, which she had gained a sense of and learned to an occasional lion grunt, and even a few bird whistles.

tiar turned to listen. Though he was accustomed to her speak- he horse that way, he had no idea what she was saying. She

uncanny ability to reproduce the sounds the animals made-- I learned their language when she lived alone, before he had ler to speak verbally again--and he thought the language had a , otherworldly quality.

r shifted his feet and tossed his head, squealing anxiously. Jon- >oke to him in soft tones while he stroked and scratched him.

itched, noticing how the tall man's wonderfully sensitive hands almost instant calming effect on the skittish young horse. It her to see the closeness that had developed between them.

icr thoughts turned for a moment to the way his hands could er feel, and she flushed slightly. He didn't calm her.

horses were not the only nervous animals. Wolf knew what was and was not anticipating the cold swim. Whining and pacing down the bank, he finally sat down and pointed his nose up, his complaint in a mournful howl.

ie here, Wolf," Ayla said, stooping down to hug the young "Are you a little frightened, too?"

e going to give us problems again, crossing this river?" Jondalar ill feeling annoyed at the wolf for bothering him and Racer

not a problem for me. He's just a little nervous, like the horses yla said, wondering why Wolfs perfectly understandable fears to annoy Jondalar, especially when he was so understanding of ng stallion.

river was cold, but the horses were strong swimmers, and once ;re coaxed in, they had no problem reaching the opposite shore, Ae humans as much as being led by them. Even Wolf was no He danced and whined on the bank, advancing on the cold

water and retreating a few times, then finally he plunged in. WiriiiiSl nose held high, he struck out after the horses that were piled high J-? packs and bundles, and the humans swimming alongside. Once they gained the other side, they stopped to change and drv nit the animals, then continued on their way. Ay la remembered ore' river crossings she had made when she had traveled alone after leav the Clan, and she was grateful for the sturdy horses. Getting from side to the other of a river was never easy. At the least, when travelim, on foot, it usually involved getting wet. But with the horses, they couS cross many smaller watercourses with little more than a splash or rwn and even big rivers posed far less difficulty. '

As they continued traveling southwest, the terrain changed. The hills of the uplands, that were graduating into higher foothills as they approached the mountains to the west, were crossed with the deeply cut narrow valleys of rivers they had to cross. Some days Jondalar felt that they spent so much time going up and down, they made little progress forward, but the valleys offered sheltered campsites out oft wind, and the rivers supplied the necessary water in a land that v otherwise dry.

They stopped at the top of a high hill within the central area of t hilly upland plains that ran parallel to the rivers. A vast panorai commanded their view in all directions. Except for the faint gr shapes of mountains far to the west, the expansive vista was uninti rupted.

Though the windy, arid land could not have been more differel the steppes, spread out before the two riders in a monotone of endk waving grass flowing over low rolling hills, evoked the sea with ij featureless regularity. The analogy went deeper. For all the mono! nous uniformity, the ancient grassland rippling in the wind was dece tively rich and varied, and like the sea, supported a profuse and exo array of life. Outlandish creatures, displaying a flourish of biologica costly social adornments in the form of luxurious horns and antle shags, ruffs, and humps, shared the great steppes with other aniir grown to magnificent size.

The woolly giants, mammoths and rhinoceroses, resplendent dense double furs--long flowing hair trailing over warm downy u" layers--with thick layers of sustaining fat, flaunted extravagant ti and exaggerated nose horns. Giant deer, bedecked with stately r of immense palmate antlers, grazed alongside aurochs, the spl01 wild forerunners of herds of placid domestic cattle, which were us as huge as the massive bison that sported such enormous horns.

limals displayed the size that was the result of the richness of
ppes; there were great jerboas, giant hamsters, and ground
is that were among the largest found anywhere.
extensive grasslands also supported a bounty of other animals,
yith remarkable proportions. Horses, asses, and onagers parti- mace and food on the lowlands; wild
sheep, chamois, and ibex
higher ground. Saiga antelopes raced across the flatlands. Gal-
ests along river valleys, or near ponds and lakes, and the occa-
yooded steppes and tundra played host to deer of all varieties,
lotted fallow and gentle roe deer to elk, red deer, and reindeer
j moose, elk, and caribou when they migrated to other lands.
md rabbits, mice and voles, marmots, susliks, and lemmings
ed in huge numbers; toads, frogs, snakes, and lizards had their
iirds of every shape and size, from large cranes to tiny pipets,
heir voice and color. Even insects had a role to play.
tremendous herds of grazers, as well as the browsers and seed
were culled and kept in check by the ones who ate meat. Car-
, who were more adaptable in their range of environment and
ive wherever their prey lived, also reached tremendous size
; of the abundance and quality of their food supply. Gigantic
>ns, up to twice the size of their later southern descendants,
the young and old of even the largest grazers, though a woolly
>th in its prime had little to fear. The usual choice of the great
re the huge bison, aurochs, and deer, while packs of oversize
wolves, and dholes selected from more middle-size game.
ivided the plentiful prey with lynxes, leopards, and small wild-

itrous cave bears, essentially vegetarian and only limited
, were twice the weight of the smaller brown or black bears,
illso preferred an omnivorous diet that often included grass,
the white bear of the icy coasts subsisted on meat from the sea.
i wolverines and steppe polecats took their toll of smaller ani-
acluding the vast number and variety of rodents, as did the
I sables, weasels, otters, ferrets, martens, minks, and stoats that
ermine in snow. Some foxes also turned white, or the rich
iled blue, to match the winter scenery and hunt in stealth.
and golden eagles, falcons, hawks, crows, and owls snatched
acting, or unlucky, small prey on the wing, while vultures and
ites cleaned up the leavings of others on the ground.
^reat diversity and size of the animals that lived on those ancient
| and their bonus of exaggerated and richly enhanced appen-
hd supplementary growths, could only be sustained by an en-

vironment of exceptional quality. Yet it was a frigid, sere, demand; I land surrounded by mountain-high barriers of ice and bleak oceans ^s frozen water. It seemed a contradiction that such a harsh environm could provide the richness that was necessary for the lavish growth nt the animals but, in fact, the environment was entirely right for it. tl^ cold, dry climate fostered the growth of grass and inhibited the grort> of trees.

Trees, such as oaks or spruces, are luxuriant growths, but they tak a long time and ample moisture to mature. Woodlands may feed and support a range of other plants and animals, but trees need resource* to maintain themselves, and they do not encourage the development of multitudes of large animals. A few animals may eat nuts or fruits and others may browse leaves, or even twig tips from a tree, but bark and wood are largely inedible, and grow back slowly once destroyed. The same energy and soil nutrients put into an equal weight of grass will feed many, many more, and the grass will constantly renew itself. A forest may be the quintessential example of rich, productive vegetabk life, but it was grass that gave rise to the extraordinary and abundant animal life, and it was the complex grassland that supported and maintained it.

Ay la was feeling uncomfortable, but she wasn't sure why. It was nothing specific, just a strange, edgy feeling. Before they started down the high hill, they had watched storm clouds gathering over the mountains to the west, seen flashes of sheet lightning, and heard distant rolling thunder. The sky above, however, was a clear, deep blue, with the sun still high, though past the zenith. It was unlikely to rain nearby, but she didn't like thunder. The deep rolling roar always reminded her of earthquakes.

Maybe it's just that my moon time should start in a day or two, Aytt thought, trying to dismiss the feeling. I had better keep my leather straps handy, and the mouflon wool Nezzie gave me. She told me it was the best padding to use when traveling, and she was right. Tut blood washes right out in cold water. .

Ay la had not seen onagers before, and with her thoughts turned inward, she wasn't paying attention as they proceeded down the slope- She thought the animals she saw in the distance were horses. Butwn they got closer, she began to notice differences. They were ^S?"' smaller, their ears were longer, and their tails were not a flowingtr^ of many hair strands, but a shorter, thin shaft covered with the sa" " ^ kind of hair that was on their bodies, with a darker tuft at the e0^ Both kinds of animals had erect manes, but the onagers' were o10 j

"The coats of the animals in the small herd were a light reddish
their backs and sides, and a much paler, almost white color-neath, even on their legs and
muzzles, but they had a dark
ting their backbones, plus another across their shoulders, and
ends of the darker shade on their legs.
The young woman compared them with the general coloring of the
though her dun coat was a shade lighter than average, with a
pale yellow tone, most steppe horses were a similar neutral
brown shade and generally resembled Whinney. Racer's deep
color was unusual for his breed. The mare's stiff thick mane
black gray» and the color extended down the middle of her back
and loose tail. Her lower legs were dark, too, almost black, and
it, only the bare suggestion of stripes showed on her upper
bay stallion's color was too dark to show the black dorsal stripe
down his backbone very well, but his black mane, tail, and
followed the typical pattern.
The young woman who was knowledgeable about horses, the body confor-
mation of the animals ahead was somewhat different, as well, yet they
seemed to be horses. Ayla noticed that even Whinney showed more
reaction than she usually did at the sight of other animals, and the herd
stopped grazing and was watching them. Wolf was interested, too,
and assumed a stalking posture, ready to take out after them, but
Ayla talked him to stay. She wanted to observe them. One of the
horses suddenly voiced a sound and the woman noticed another dif-
ference. It wasn't a neigh, or a whinny, but rather a more strident
sound.
The horse tossed his head and neighed an answer, then gingerly
lowered his head forward to sniff at a large pile of fresh dung. It
didn't smell like horse dung to Ayla, when she rode up along-
side. Whinney nickered and sniffed the pile, too, and as the
horse moved up to her a while longer, Ayla thought she detected a faint
scent of something else, perhaps from somewhat different food
sources.
"Do these lose horses?" she asked.
"No, they're not. They're like horses, the way elk are like reindeer, or
they're like megaceroses. They're called onagers," Jondalar ex-
plained.
"I don't know why I haven't seen them before."
"I don't know, but they do seem to like this kind of country," he
said, shaking his head in a gesture that indicated the rocky hills and
arid, semidesert upland plains they were riding.
"Onagers were not a cross between horses and asses, though

they appeared to be, rather a unique and viable species, with characteristics of both, and extremely hardy. They could subsist even coarser food than horses, including bark, leaves, and roots. When they got closer to the herd, Ayla noticed a pair of young and couldn't help smiling. They reminded her of Whinney when she was young. Just when the wolf yelped to get her attention. "All right, Wolf. If you want to chase those . . . onagers"—she called the unfamiliar word slowly, getting used to the sound—"go ahead." She was pleased with the progress she was making in training him, although he didn't like staying in one place for long. He was still too full of puppyish enthusiasm and curiosity. Wolf yelped and bounded after the herd. With a startled burst, they raced away with a sustained six that soon left the young, would-be hunter behind. He caught up with Ayla and Jondalar as they were approaching a broad valley. Though the valleys of rivers carrying the silt of slowly eroding mountains still cut across their path, the land was falling off gradually toward the basin of the Great Mother River delta and Beran Sea. As they were traveling south, the summer was deepening, and the winds caused by the passage of atmospheric depressions across the sea added to the increasing temperatures of the season, and to weather disturbances. The two travelers no longer wore outer clothes, not even when they first got up. Ayla thought the cool, crisp air of early morning was the best time of the day. But the late afternoon was hot, hotter than usual, she thought, wishing for a nice cool stream to swim in. She glanced at the man riding a few paces ahead. He was bare to the waist, and bare-legged, wearing only a loincloth. His long blond hair, pulled back in a thong at the nape of his neck, had lighter streaks from the sun, and was darker where the sweat had made it wet. She caught glimpses of his clean-shaven face and liked being able to see his strong jaw and well-defined chin, though she still had a residual feeling that it was odd to see a grown man without a beard. He had explained to her once that he liked to let his beard grow in winter, to warm his face, but he always cut it off in summer, because it was cooler. He used a special sharp flint blade, one that he knapped himself and replaced when needed, to shave himself every morning. Ayla, too, had stripped down to a short garment, patterned after Jondalar's loincloth. Both were basically a length of soft leather, worn between the legs, and held on with a cord around the waist. . * A loin garment was worn with the loose end at the back tucked inside the one in front left out in a short flap. Hers was also held on with a cord around the waist, but she started with a longer piece, and

»th loose ends out, pulled together at the sides, to hang down
t of apron in front and back. The effect was of a short skirt
the sides. With the soft porous leather to sit on, riding for long
on the back of a sweaty horse was more comfortable, though
(skin across the animal's back helped, too.

Jar had used the high hill to check their location. He was
with their progress, which made him feel easier about the
, Ayla noticed that he seemed more relaxed. Part of it, she
yas his increasing skill in managing the young stallion. Though
ridden the animal frequently before, traveling on horseback
n the constant association that developed an understanding of
character, preferences, and habits, and allowed the horse to
?. Even his muscles had learned to adjust to the animal's motion
seat was more comfortable, both for him and the stallion.

^yla thought his easy, relaxed riding indicated more than
facility on horseback. There was less tension in his movements,
sensed that his concern had diminished. Though she couldn't
face, she guessed that his frown of worry would be gone, and
might be in a mood for smiling. She loved it when he smiled
playful. She watched the way his muscles moved beneath his
skin as he matched Racer's gait with a gentle up-and-down
and she felt a glow of warmth that was not from the tempera-
. and smiled to herself. She loved watching him.

ird the west, they could still see the mountains rising up purple
istance, capped by glistening white that pierced the dark clouds
below. They seldom saw the icy peaks, and Jondalar was
j the rare pleasure. Most often they were hidden by low misty
hat clung like soft white furs cloaking a sparkling secret, open-
enough to reveal tempting glimpses and make them more de-

'as feeling warm, too, and wished they were closer to those
j>ped mountaintops, at least as close as the Sharamudoi lodges.
an he noticed the glint of water in the valley below and glanced
ky to check the position of the sun, though it was earlier than
ie decided they might as well stop and make camp. They were
good time, traveling faster than he had estimated, and he didn't
yv long it would take to reach the next source of water.
slope supported a rich growth of grass, primarily feather
|fescues, and herbs mixed with varieties of quick-seeding anses.
The thick loess subsoil, which supported a black fertile
lit was high in the humus of decaying plantlife, even encour-
|es, which, except for the occasional scrub pine struggling for

so

subsoil water, were unusual for the steppes in this vicinity. A mixed woods of birch and larch, conifers that dropped their needles in winter, marched downhill with them, with alder and willow filling in lower down. At the bottom of the slope, where the land leveled some distance from the gurgling stream, Ayla was surprised to see occasional dwarfed oak, beech, or linden in some of the open places. She had not seen many large-leaf trees since she left the cave of the Beran Sea.

The small river weaved its way around brush as it meandered across the level valley floor, but one loop edged close to some tall, thin willows that were an extension of the more thickly forested slope of the other side. They usually liked to cross a river before making camp, so they wouldn't have to get wet when they started in the morning, and they decided to camp near the willows. They rode downstream, looking for a place to cross, and found a wide, stony, fordable crossing, then rode back.

While they were setting up the tent, Jondalar found himself watching Ayla, conscious of her warm, tanned body, and thinking how lucky he was. Not only was she beautiful--her strength, her supple grace, the assurance of her movements, all pleased him--but she was a good traveling companion, contributing equally to their well-being. Though he felt responsible for her safety and wanted to protect her from harm, there was comfort in knowing he could rely on her. In some ways, traveling with Ayla was like traveling with his brother. He had felt protective toward Thonolan, too. It was his nature to be concerned for those he cared about.

But only in some ways. When the young woman lifted her arms to shake out the ground cover, he became aware that the skin was lighter on the underside of her rounded breasts, and he had an urge to compare the tone with her browned arm. He didn't think that he might be staring, but he did notice when she stopped working and turned toward him. When he caught her eye, Ayla smiled slowly. ; Suddenly he felt an urge to do more than compare skin tones. » pleased him to know that if he wanted to share Pleasures with her right then, she would be willing. There was comfort in that, too. It was as necessary to seize every opportunity. The feeling was as strong, " the urgency was less, and sometimes waiting a bit made it better. could think about it and enjoy the anticipation. Jondalar smiled back. ^ After they set up camp, Ayla wanted to explore the valley. u unusual to find such a thickly wooded area in the middle of the steppe" and she was curious. She hadn't seen such vegetation for years.

wanted to explore, too. After their experience with the bear
aosite near the grove of trees, he wanted to check for tracks
jications of the animals that might be in the vicinity. With
v along her sling and collecting basket, and Jondalar his
vet with a couple of spears, they headed into the willows.
ie horses to graze, but Wolf was eager to accompany them.
were an unusual place for him, too, full of fascinating

i the water, the willow trees gave way to alder, then birch
larch became common, and there were some good-size
i eagerly picked a few cones when she saw they were stone
the large, delicious pine nuts they contained. But more
>her were the occasional large-leafed trees. In one area, still
sl valley plain but near the bottom of the slope that led to the
land above, was a pure stand of beech trees.

>ked them over carefully, comparing them with her memory
(Itrees that grew near the cave where she had lived as a child.
'twas smooth and gray, and the leaves were oval narrowing to
tibe end with shallow sharp teeth around the edge, and silky
tderneath. The small brown nuts, encased in their bristly
are not yet ripe, but the mast of nuts and shells on the ground
tseason showed the plentiful yield. She recalled that beechnuts
|d to crack. The trees were not as large as the ones she remem-
Mit respectable. Then she noticed the unusual plants growing
Ie trees and knelt down to take a closer look.

grou going to collect those?" Jondalar asked. "They look dead.
I no leaves on them."

^aren't dead. That's how they grow. Here, feel how fresh it
la said, breaking off the upper few inches of the foot-high,
gteafless stem with slender branches the whole length of it. The
lant was a dull reddish color, including the flower buds, with-
itt of green.

f grow from the roots of other plants," Ayla said, "like the
Used to put on my eyes when I cried, except those were white,
" of shiny. Some people were afraid of them because they
Bleu "--she thought for a moment--"something like dead
<nt, or corpse plant."

"ed into space as she remembered. "Iza thought my eyes were
*ause they watered, and it bothered her." Ayla smiled at the
' she>d get a fresh one of those white corpse plants and
the juice right out of the stem into my eyes. If they were sore

from crying too much, it always made them feel better." She was sile ^
for a time, then shook her head slightly. "I'm not sure if these are gooj
for eyes. Iza used them for little cuts and bruises, and for certa
growths."

"What are they called?"

"I think her name for them would be ... what is your name for thi
tree, Jondalar?"

"I'm not sure. I don't think they grow near my home, but the Sha.
ramudoï name is 'beech.' "

"Then I think these would be called 'beechdrops,' " she said, gettino
up and brushing her hands together to dust them off.

Suddenly Wolf froze, his nose pointed toward the deep woods. Jondalar
noticed his stalking posture and, remembering how Wolf had
scented the bear, reached for a spear. He laid it on top of the groove in
his spear-thrower, a shaped piece of wood about half the length of a
spear, which was held in a horizontal position with his right hand. He
fitted the hollow at the butt of the spear into the notch at the back of
the thrower. Then he put his fingers through the two loops near the
front of the throwing weapon, which reached a place just short of the
middle of the spear, to hold the shaft in place as it rested on top of his
spear-thrower. It was done quickly with a smooth motion, and he
stood with knees slightly flexed, ready to cast. Ayla had reached for
stones and was ready with her sling, wishing she had brought her
spear-thrower, too.

Moving through the sparse undergrowth. Wolf made a dash toward
a tree. There was a scurry of movement in the beechnut mast, then a
small animal raced straight up the smooth trunk. Standing up on his
hind legs, as though he was trying to climb the tree as well, Wolf
yelped after the furry creature.

Suddenly a commotion up in the branches of the tree attracted their
attention. They caught sight of the rich sable-brown coat and long
sinuous shape of a beech marten chasing after the loudly chittennng
squirrel, who thought it had just escaped up the tree. Wolf wasn't the
only one who thought the squirrel was worthy of interest, but the large
weasellike animal, a foot and a half in length with a bushy tail that
added another twelve inches to its dimensions, had a much better
chance of success. Racing through the high branches, it was as ninible
and fleet as its intended prey. "

"I think that squirrel jumped out of the cooking skin into the coalSi
Jondalar said, watching the drama unfold.

"Maybe he'll get away," Ayla said.

"It's doubtful. I wouldn't wager a broken blade on it."

The squirrel was clattering loudly. An excited jay squawking a ra

caw added to the disturbance, then a willow tit stridently announced its presence. Wolf couldn't stand it, he had to join in. Throwing his head back, he voiced a long howl. The small squirrel leaped out to the end of a limb; then, to the surprise of the two listening people, it leaped into the air. Spreading its legs, it stretched the broad skin flap that extended along the sides of its body, joining front and back legs, and soared through the air. Ayla caught her breath as she watched the flying squirrel avoiding rocks and trees. The bushy tail acted as a rudder, and by changing the position of its legs and tail, which changed the tension on the wing membrane, the squirrel could steer clear of objects in its flight as it descended in a long, smooth curve. It was aiming for a tree (distance away and, when it drew near, it turned both its tail and head up, and landed low on the trunk, then quickly scurried up. When it reached some high branches, the furry little animal turned around and limbed down again, headfirst, its outstretched hind claws stuck to the bark to anchor it. It looked around, then disappeared into a hole. The dramatic leap and soaring glide had prevented its capture, though not even that amazing feat was always successful. Wolf was still up on his hind legs against the tree looking for the squirrel that had so easily eluded him. He dropped down, began sniffing through the underbrush, then suddenly dashed away, chasing something else. "Jondalar! I didn't know squirrels could fly," Ayla said, with a surprised wonder. "I should have made that wager, but I've never seen them before, though I have heard of them. I don't think I really believed it. People always talk of seeing the squirrels flying at night, and I thought it was probably a bat that someone mistook for a squirrel. But that was definitely not a bat." With a wry smile he added, "Now I'll be one of those that no one quite believes when he talks about seeing a flying squirrel." "I'm glad it was just a squirrel," Ayla said, suddenly feeling a chill. She glanced up and noticed that a cloud was blocking the sun. She felt a shiver over her shoulders and down her back, though it wasn't particularly cold. "I didn't know what Wolf was after this time." "I was a bit foolish for reacting so strongly to a threat he only pretended, Jondalar relaxed his grip on his spear and thrower, but still remained alert. "I thought it might have been a bear," he said. "Especially in these thick woods." "I know, but I've always seen trees like these since I left the Clan. Isn't this a strange place for them to be?" "It is unusual. This place reminds me of the land of the Sharamudoi,

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but that's south of here, even south of those mountains we see to A west, and near Donau, the Great Mother River."

Suddenly Ayla stopped where she was. Nudging Jondalar, she slowly pointed. At first he didn't see what had caught her attention then he noticed a slight movement of a foxy-red coat, and saw the three-pronged antlers of a roe deer. The commotion and the smell of wolf had caused the small wary deer to freeze. It had stood without moving, hidden in the brush, waiting to see if there was anything to fear from the predator. With the four-legged hunter gone, it had cautiously begun to move away. Jondalar's spear and spear-thrower were still in his right hand. He raised it slowly, and taking aim, hurled the spear at the throat of the animal. The danger it feared had come from an unexpected direction. The hard-flung spear landed true. Even as it hit, the roe deer attempted to leap away, took a few bounding steps then crashed to the ground.

The flight of the squirrel and the unsuccessful sable were quickly forgotten. Jondalar crossed the distance to the roe deer in a few steps, with Ayla beside him. While Ayla turned the head, he knelt down beside the still struggling animal and slit its throat with his sharp blade to finish it off quickly and let it bleed. Then he stood up.

"Roe Deer, when your spirit returns to the Great Earth Mother, thank Her for giving us one of your kind, that we may eat," Jondalar said quietly.

Ayla, standing beside the man, nodded, then prepared to help him skin and butcher their dinner.

, hate to leave the hide. Roe deer makes such soft leather," Ayla she put the last piece of meat in her parfleche, "and did you see on that sable?"

t we don't have time to make leather, and we can't take much with us than we already have," Jondalar said. He was erecting pod of poles from which the parfleche full of meat would be ided.

now, but I still hate to leave it."

y hung the parfleche; then Ayla glanced toward the fireplace, ig about the food she had just put on to cook, though nothing (parent. It was cooking in a ground oven, a hole in the ground with hot rocks into which she had put the deer meat seasoned erbs, along with mushrooms, bracken fern fiddleheads, and cat- its she had gathered, all wrapped in coltsfoot leaves. She then

more hot rocks on top and a layer of dirt. It would be a while it was done, but she was glad they had stopped early enough-- d been lucky enough to get fresh meat soon enough--to cook it ay. It was a favorite method since it made food both flavorful ider.

i hot and the air feels heavy and humid. I'm going to go and cool tie said. "I'm even going to wash my hair. I saw some soaproot ig downstream. Are you going to come for a swim?"

i, I think I will. I may even wash my hair, if you can find enough soaproot for me," Jondalar said, his blue eyes crinkling with a is he held up a lank strand of greasy blond hair that had fallen his forehead.

y walked side by side along the broad sandy bank of the river. winded after them, running in and out of brush, exploring new Then he dashed ahead and disappeared around a bend.

lalar noticed the trail of horse hooves and wolf track they had sarlier. "I wonder what someone would make of spoor like this," l» grinning at the thought.

lat would you make of it?" Ayla asked.

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"If Wolfs track was clear, I'd think a wolf was trailing two hr ___ but in some places it's obvious that the horse prints are on top of"?! wolf prints, so he can't have been following. He was walking le them. That would confuse a tracker," he said. '

"Even if Wolfs prints were clear, I'd wonder why a wolf was foiling these two horses. The tracks show they are both strong and healthy, but look at the impression, how deep it is, and the set of their hooves. You can tell they're carrying weight," Ayla said.

"That would confuse a tracker, too."

"Oh, there they are," Ayla said, seeing the rather tall, somewhat straggling plants with light pink flowers and leaves shaped like sneezeweed points, that she had noticed earlier. With her digging stick she quickly loosened several roots and pulled them out.

On their way back, she searched for a flat, hard stone or piece of wood, and a rounded stone to crush the soaproot and release the saponin, which would foam into a light cleansing lather in the water. At

a bend, upstream but not too far from their campsite, the small river had scoured out a waist-deep pool. The water was cool and refreshing and after washing, they explored the rocky river, swimming and wading farther upstream until they were stopped by a churning waterfall and swift rapids where the sloping sides of the valley narrowed and became steeper.

It reminded Ayla of the small river in her valley, with its fuming, churning waterfall blocking her way upstream, though the rest of the area made her think more of the mountain slopes around the cave where she grew up. There was a waterfall there that she remembered, a gentler, mossy one that had led her to a small cave she had claimed as her own, and that had more than once offered her a haven.

They let the current carry them back, splashing each other and laughing along the way. Ayla loved the sound of Jondalar's laughter. Though he smiled, he didn't laugh often, tending instead to exhibit a more serious demeanor, but when he did, it was such a big, hearty, exuberant laugh, it came as a surprise.

When they got out and dried off, it was still warm. The dark cloud Ayla had noticed earlier was gone from the sky above them, but the sun was lowering toward a black and brooding mass languishing in the west, whose ponderous movement was emphasized by a raggedly streaming swiftly beneath it in the other direction. Once the fire dropped behind the somber clouds and banked above the western ridge, it would cool off fast. Ayla looked for the horses and saw them in an open meadow on the slope, some distance from camp, but within range of a whistle. Wolf was not in sight; still exploring downstream she assumed.

rot out the long-toothed ivory comb and a brush made of stiff
>th-hair bristles that Deegie had given her, then pulled their
r roll out of the tent and spread it out to sit on while she combed
' . Jondalar sat beside her and began to comb his own hair with
pronged comb, struggling with some tangles.
me do that for you, Jondalar," she said, getting up on her knees
him. She combed loose the knots in his long, straight yellow
lighter shade than hers, admiring the color. When she was
r her hair had been almost white, but it had become somewhat
md resembled Whinney's coat with its ashy golden hue.
liar closed his eyes while Ayla worked on his hair, but he was
>f her warm presence behind him as her bare skin brushed
his now and then, and by the time she was through, he was
a warmth from more than the sun.
v it's my turn to comb your hair," he said, getting up to move
her. For a moment, she thought about objecting. It wasn't
ry. He didn't have to comb her hair just because she had
l his, but when he lifted her thick hair off her neck and pulled
gh his fingers, like a caress, she acquiesced.
lair had a tendency to curl, and it tangled easily, but he worked
y, freeing each snarl with very little pulling. Then he brushed
r until it was smooth and nearly dry. She closed her eyes,
a strange, shivery delight. Iza had combed her hair for her when
a little girl, gently pulling out the tangles with a long, smooth,
stick, but no man ever had. Jondalar's combing of her hair gave
ntense feeling of being cared for and loved.
he discovered that he enjoyed combing and brushing her hair.
rk gold color reminded him of ripe grass, but with sun-bleached
its that were nearly white. It was beautiful, and so thick and
indling it was a sensuous pleasure that made him want more.
ie finished, he put the brush down, then lifted up the slightly
i"esses, and, moving them aside, bent down to kiss her shoulders
back of her neck.
kept her eyes closed, feeling the tingles caused by his warm
and soft lips as he brushed them lightly over her skin. He
i at her neck and caressed both her arms, then reached around
both breasts, lifting them and feeling their pleasant substantial
and the firm, upright nipples in his palms.
tt he reached around to kiss her throat, Ayla lifted her head and
slightly, then felt his hot rigid organ against her back. She
around and took it in her hands, enjoying the softness of the
t covered the warm hard shaft. She put one hand above the
md moved them firmly up and down, and Jondalar felt a surge

of sensation, but the feeling magnified beyond measure when he felt the warm wetness of her mouth enclose him.

Letting out an explosive sigh, he closed his eyes as the sensation coursed through him. Then he opened his eyes a crack to watch and could not help but reach for the soft beautiful hair that filled his lane. When she drew him in farther, he thought for a moment he could not hold back and would give it up at that instant. But he wanted to wait, wanted the exquisite pleasure it gave him to please her. He loved to do it, loved knowing he could. He would almost be willing to give up his own pleasure to please her . . . almost.

Hardly knowing how she got there, Ayla found herself on her back on top of their sleeping roll, with Jondalar stretched out beside her. He kissed her. She opened her mouth a little, just enough to allow his tongue entrance, and put her arms around him. She loved the way it felt when his lips were firmly on hers, with his tongue gently exploring. Then he pulled away and looked down at her.

"Woman, do you have any idea how much I love you?"

She knew it was true. She could see it in his eyes, his brilliant, vivid, unbelievable blue eyes that caressed with their look, and even from a distance, could send shivers through her. His eyes expressed the emotions he tried so hard to keep under control. "I know how much I love you," Ayla said.

"I still can hardly believe it, that you are here with me, and not back at the Summer Meeting mated to Raneë." At the thought of how close he came to losing her to the charming, dark-skinned carver of ivory, he suddenly clutched her to him tightly with fierce need.

She held him, too, grateful that their long winter of misunderstanding had finally ended. She had sincerely loved Raneë--he was a good man and would have made a good mate--but he wasn't Jondalar, and her love for the tall man who was holding her in his arms was beyond anything she could explain.

His powerful dread of losing her eased, replaced, as he felt her warm body beside him, by a desire for her that was as strong. Suddenly he was kissing her neck and her shoulders and her breasts, as though he couldn't get enough of her.

Then he stopped and took a deep breath. He wanted to make it last and he wanted to use his skill to give her the best he could--and he was skilled. He had been taught by one who knew, and with more love than she should have felt. He had wanted to please and had been more than willing to learn. He had learned so well that among his people there was a joke about him that had often been made: it was said B was an expert in two crafts; he was also an excellent knapper of "in tools."

It took down at her, watching her breathe, loving the sight of womanly form, and delighting in the mere fact of her shadow. His shadow fell across her, blocking the heat of the sun. He closed her eyes and looked up. The brilliant sun behind him shrouded his fair hair surrounded his shadowed face with a glow. She wanted him, was ready for him, but when he smiled down to kiss her navel, she closed her eyes again and gave up to him, knowing what he wanted, and the Pleasures he could

feel.

He ran his hand along her breasts, then slowly ran his hand along her side, to the top of her waist and lush swelling of her hip, then down her leg, tingled at the touch. He brought his hand back up her inner thigh, feeling the special softness there, and over the springy golden mound. He caressed her stomach, then bent to kiss her neck. When he reached for her breasts again, and kissed both nipples. They were like gentle fire, feeling warm and wonderful, and left her legs with excitement. He caressed her again, and her skin glowed with pleasure at every place he touched.

He kissed her on the mouth and gently, slowly, kissed her eyes and nose, her chin and her jaw, then breathed into her ear. His hand found the hollow of her throat and continued down between her breasts. He took each one in his hands and held them together, feeling in their fullness, the slight salty taste of her, and the feel of his own desire was mounting. His tongue tickled one nipple then the other, and then she felt the deep throbbing surge of pleasure he drew into his mouth. He explored her nipple with his tongue, lulling, nibbling lightly, then reached for the other with his

He pressed up to her, losing herself in the sensations coursing through her body, and centered on the seat of pleasure she felt deep within. With his warm tongue, he found her navel again, and as a light breeze cool on her skin, he circled and then dropped lower, to the top of her mound, then for a quick moment to her warm slit and the hidden lode of her Pleasure. She raised her hips to him, and cried

He moved between her legs, and with his hands, opened her to look at the pink rosy flower of petals and folds. He dipped down to taste her taste and loved it--then held back no longer, and began exploring her. His tongue found the familiar folds, reached deep well, and then reached up higher for the small, hard

He worked his tongue over it, suckling and nibbling, she cried out again, her breath coming faster, and the surge inside

building. All feeling was turned inward, there was no wind, no only the rising intensity of her senses. He knew it was coming all'^ though he could hardly hold back himself, he slowed and backed oft hoping to draw it out, but she reached for him unable to wait. As ' came closer, building, growing, tightening with anticipation, he couU hear her moans of pleasure.

Suddenly it was there, the powerful shuddering waves seizing hp then with a convulsive cry, crashing over her. She burst with rii» spasm of release, and with it came the indescribable desire to feel hi< manhood inside her. She reached for him, trying to bring him to her He felt her spurt of wetness and, sensing her need for him, raised up, clasping his eager shaft to guide it into her deep and welcomim? well. She felt him enter and raised up to meet him as he plunged in The embrace of her warm folds encircled him, and he penetrated deeply, feeling no fear that his size was more than she could hold. That was part of the wonder of her, that she matched him.

He pulled out, feeling the exquisite pleasure of the movement, and with complete abandon, plunged in again, deeply, while she raised up tight against him. He almost reached his peak, but the intensity backed down, and he pulled out again, then pushed in again, and again, and again, with each stroke building higher. Pulsing with the sensations of his movement, she felt the fullness of him, then his drawing back and filling her again, and was beyond feeling anything else.

She heard his strong breathing, and her own, as their cries mingled. Then he cried out her name, she rose to meet him, and, with a great overflowing burst, they felt a release that matched the fiery sun in its glowing flame as it shot its last bright rays into the valley, and dropped behind the dark and rolling clouds, outlined in burnished gold.

After a few more strokes, he relaxed on top of her, feeling her rounded curves beneath him. She always loved that moment with him, the feeling of his weight on her. He never felt heavy; it was just a comfortable pressure and a closeness that warmed her while they rested.

Suddenly a warm tongue was licking her face, and a cold nose v/ss exploring their closeness. "Go away, Wolf," she said, shoving the animal away. "Go on, get out of here."

"Wolf, go away!" Jondalar said harshly, adding his command, an pushing the cold wet nose away, but the mood was broken. As ne lifted off Ay la and rolled to his side, he felt a trifle annoyed, but be couldn't really be angry; he felt too wonderful for that. .

Getting up on one elbow, Jondalar looked at the animal that h3 backed off a few paces and was sitting on his haunches watching ule

rl

, hanging out, panting. He could have sworn the animal
"at them, and he smiled wryly at the woman he loved.
. getting him to stay. Do you think you'll be able to teach
ten you want him to?"

p-B going to try."

Pafwork, having a wolf around," Jondalar said.

it takes a little effort, especially since he's so young. So
but it's worth it. I like having them around. They are
ial friends."

e man thought, the horses gave something back. Whinney
ried them, and their gear; because of them, their Journey
_ e as long. But except for flushing out an animal once in a
ididn't seem to contribute much. Jondalar decided, though,
don his thoughts.

I sun behind the angry rolling black clouds, discoloring to a
id purple as though battered and bruised by the churning,
@f quickly in the wooded valley. Ayla got up and splashed
'er once more. Jondalar followed in after her. Long before,
BiWas growing up, Iza, the Clan medicine woman, had taught
pinfication rituals of womanhood, even though she doubted
|i;Strange and--even she admitted--ugly adopted daughter,
|tir have need for some of them. Nonetheless, she felt it was
ji''and she explained, among other things, how to take care of
Ifter being with a man. She stressed that, whenever possible,
tern with water was especially important to a woman's totem
Cashing, no matter how cold the water, was a ritual that Ayla
tomembered.

jdried off again and dressed, put the sleeping furs back in the
irekindled the fire. Ayla removed the dirt and the stones from
tod oven and, with her wooden tongs, retrieved their meal.

I'd, while Jondalar rearranged his packs, she made her prepa- for an easy departure, including
their usual morning meal of

Btt the evening before, eaten cold except for the hot herbal tea.
|fe put cooking stones to heat for boiling water; she made tea
frying the ingredients for taste or need.

torses wandered back as the last streaks of the departing sun
we sky. Usually they fed during part of the night, since they
s^So much during the day and needed large quantities of the
^ss of the steppes to sustain them. But the meadow grass had
>ecially rich and green, and they liked to stay near the fire at

i Ayla was waiting for the stones to heat, she contemplated the

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valley in the last glow of twilight, adding to her observations knowledge gained during the day: the steeply sloping sides riT^ abruptly .joined the broad flat valley floor with its little river wind; a down the middle. It was a rich valley, reminding her of her childho'l I with the Clan, but she didn't like the place. Something about it ma,i 3 her uneasy, and the feeling worsened with the coming of night Sh " was also feeling some fullness and a little backache, and she attributed her disquiet to the slight discomforts she occasionally experienced when her moon time was coming on. She wished she could go for a walk, activity usually helped, but it was already too dark. She listened to the wind moaning as it sighed through the swavino willow trees, silhouetted against silvery clouds. The glowing full] moon, encircled by a distinct halo, took turns hiding behind, then brilliantly illuminating the softly textured sky. Ayla decided some wil- lowbark tea might relieve her discomfort and quickly got up to cut some fresh. While she was at it, she decided to gather some flexible willow withes.

By the time their evening tea was ready and Jondalar joined her, the night air was damp and cold, cold enough for outer clothes. They sat close to the fire, glad to be sipping the hot tea. Wolf had hovered close to Ayla all evening, following her every step, but he seemed content to curl up by her feet when she sat near the warm flames, as though he'd done enough exploring that day. She picked up the thin, long willow twigs and began weaving with them.

"What are you making?" Jondalar asked.

"A head covering, to make a shade from the sun. It is getting very hot in the middle of the day," Ayla explained. She paused for a moment, then added, "I thought you might find use for one."

"You are making that for me?" he said with a smile. "How did you know I was wishing I had something to shade the sun today?"

"A woman of the Clan learns to anticipate the needs of her mate. She smiled. "And you are my mate, aren't you?"

He smiled back. "Without doubt, my woman of the Clan. And we'll announce it to all the Zeiandonii at the Matrimonial of the first Summer Meeting we join. But how can you anticipate needs? And why must Clan women learn that?"

"It's not difficult. You just think about someone. It was hot today> and I thought about making a head covering . . . making a sun hat. for myself, so I knew it must be hot for you, too," she said, picking "P another willow withe to add to the broadly conical hat that was begin ning to take shape. "Men of the Clan don't like to ask for anything' especially for their own comfort. It is not considered manly behavi

about comfort, so a woman must anticipate a man's
ts her from danger; it's her way of protecting him, to
has the right clothing and eats well. She doesn't want
»happen to him. Who would protect her and her children

In"1

.what you are doing? Protecting me so I will protect you?"
nine. "And your children?" In the firelight, his blue eyes
violet, and they sparkled with fun.
(exactly," she said, looking down at her hands. "I think
s way a Clan woman tells her mate how much she cares for
she has children or not." She watched her rapidly mov-
ough Jondalar had the feeling that she didn't need to see
_j doing. She could have made the hat in the dark. She
| another long twig, then looked directly at him. "But I do
ye another child before I get too old."
we a long way to go for that," he said, putting another piece
i the fire. "You're still young."
l getting to be an old woman. I am already ..." She closed
^concentrate as she pressed her fingers against her leg, saying
er words he had taught her, to verify to herself the right
||the number of years she had lived. "... Eighteen years."
old!" Jondalar laughed. "I have seen twenty-two years. I'm
jtyhoisold."
takes us a year to travel, I will be nineteen years when we
xor home. In the Clan, that would be almost too old for child-
»
K-
grZelandonii women have children at that age. Maybe not their
fit their second or third. You are strong and healthy. I don't
?U're too old to have children, Ayla. But I will tell you this.
|e times when your eyes seem ancient, as though you've lived
crimes in your eighteen years."
»an unusual thing for him to say, and she stopped her work to
|an. The feeling she evoked in him was almost frightening. She
Oeautiful in the light of the fire, and he loved her so much, he
Enow what he would do if anything ever happened to her.
ne, he looked away. Then, to ease the moment, he tried to
» a lighter subject.
me one who should worry about age. I'd be willing to wager
will be the oldest man at the Matrimonial," he said, then
Twenty-three is old for a man to be mated for the first time.
en my age have several children at their hearths."
oked at her, and she saw again that look of overwhelming love

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and fear in his eyes. "Ayla, I want you to have a child, too, but not while we're traveling. Not until we're safely back. Not yet."

"No, not yet," she said.

She worked quietly for a while, thinking about the son she had left behind with Uba, and about Rydag, who had been like her son in many ways. Both of them lost to her. Even Baby, who was in a strange way, like a son—at least, he was the first male animal she found and cared for—had left her. She would never see him again. She looked at Wolf, suddenly worried that she might lose him, too. I wonder, she thought, why is my totem taking all my sons away from me? I must be unlucky with sons.

"Jondalar, do your people have any special customs about wanting children?" Ayla asked. "Women of the Clan are always supposed to want sons."

"No, not really. I think men want a woman to bring sons to his hearth, but I think women like to have daughters first."

"What would you like to have? Someday?"

He turned to study her in the light of the fire. Something seemed to be bothering her. "Ayla, it doesn't matter to me. Whatever you want, or whatever the Mother gives you."

Now it was her turn to study him. She wanted to be sure he really meant it. "Then I think I'm going to wish for a daughter. I don't want to lose any more children."

Jondalar didn't quite know what she meant and didn't know how to respond. "I don't want you to lose any more children, either."

They sat quietly while Ayla worked on the sun hats. Suddenly, he asked, "Ayla, what if you are right? What if children are not given by Doni? What if they are started by sharing Pleasures? You could have a baby starting inside you right now, and not even know it."

"No, Jondalar. I don't think so. I think my moon time is coming on," she said, "and you know that means no babies have started."

She didn't usually like to talk about such personal matters with a man, but Jondalar had always been comfortable around her then, D01 like the Clan men. A woman of the Clan had to be especially careful not to look directly at a man when she was going through her woniai* curse. But even if she wanted to, she couldn't exactly go into seclusion or avoid Jondalar while they were traveling, and she sensed that needed reassurance. She considered, for a moment, telling him a "Iza's secret medicine that she had been taking to fight off any invading essences, but she couldn't do it. Ayla could no more than Iza could, but, short of a direct question, she could refrain from mentioning it. If she didn't bring it up, it wasn't likely that a man would think to ask if she was doing something to prevent pregnancy" /lr

le wouldn't think it was possible that such powerful magic

sure?" he asked.

i sure," she said. "I am not pregnant. No baby has started
linside me." He relaxed then.

Ha was finishing up the sun hats, she felt a soft sprinkling of
[e hurried to finish. They brought everything inside the tent
fed except the parfleche hanging from the poles, and even the
^olf seemed happy to curl up at Ayla's feet. She left the lower
; entrance flap open for him, in case he needed to go out, but
d the smoke-hole flap when the rain began coming down
hey cuddled together when they first lay down, then rolled
t they both had trouble sleeping.

ivas feeling anxious, and achy, but she tried not to toss and
much so she wouldn't disturb Jondalar. She listened to the
: rain on the tent, but it didn't lull her to sleep the way it
, and after a long while she wished it were morning so she
et up and leave.

after all his worry, and being reassured that Ayla had not
d by Doni, began to wonder, again, if there was something
i him. He lay awake thinking, wondering if his spirit, or
essence it was that Doni took from him, was strong enough,
he Mother had forgiven him his youthful indiscretions and would
|it.

gybe it was her. Ayla said she wanted a child. But, with all the
they spent together, if she wasn't pregnant, it could be that
ouldn't have children. Serenio never had any more . . . unless
tas expecting when he left . . . As he stared into the darkness
t inside of the tent, listening to the rain, he wondered if any of
'omen he had known had ever given birth, and if any babies had
born with his blue eyes.

" was climbing, climbing, a steep rocky wall, like the steep path up to
We in the valley, but it was much longer, and she had to hurry. She looked
ttt the small river swirling around the bend, but it wasn't a river. It was
frfall, cascading in a wide spray over jutting rocks softened by lush green

'looked up, and there was Creb! He was beckoning to her and making the
f hurry. He turned around and started climbing, too, leaning heavily on
ff, leading her up a steep but climbable grade beside the waterfall, toward
"»cave in a rocky wall hidden by hazelnut bushes. Above the cave, at the
9 ^ff, was a large, flattened boulder tilting over the edge, ready to fall.
Wnly she was deep in the cave, following a long, narrow passage. There

was a light! A torch with its beckoning flame, and then another, and then sickening roar of an earthquake. A wolf howled. She felt a whirling, spinning,^ vertigo, and then Creb was inside her mind. "Get out!" he common/Sri "Hurry! Get out now!" ^1

She sat up with a start, throwing her sleeping furs off, and bolhJt for the tent opening. I

"Ayla! What is it!" Jondalar said, grabbing her. I

Suddenly a brilliant flash of light could be seen through the skin rf 1 the tent, and in a bright outline around the seams of the smoke-hok I flap, and the crack around the entrance left open for Wolf. It vy>g followed almost instantly by a loud, sharp boom. Ayla screamed and Wolf howled outside the tent.

"Ayla, Ayla. It's all right," the man said, holding her in his arms "It's just lightning and thunder."

"We have to get out! He said to hurry. Get out now!" she said fumbling into her clothes.]

"Who said? We can't go out there. It dark, and it's raining."

"Creb. In my dream. I had that dream again, with Creb. He said. Come on, Jondalar! We have to hurry."

"Ayla, calm down. It was just a dream, and probably the storm.

Listen to it. It sounds like a waterfall out there. You don't want to go ' out in that rain. Let's wait until morning."

"Jondalar! I have to go. Creb told me to, and I can't stand this place," she said. "Please, Jondalar. Hurry." Tears were streaming down her face, though she was oblivious to them, as she piled things into pack baskets.

He decided he might as well. It was obvious she wasn't going to wait until morning, and he'd never get back to sleep now. He reached for his clothes while Ayla opened the entrance flap. The rain poured in as though someone had spilled it from a waterbag. She went outside and whistled, loud and long. It was followed by another wolf howl. After a wait, Ayla whistled again, then began tearing the tent stakes out of the ground.

She heard the hoofbeats of the horses and cried with relief to see them, though the salt of her tears was lost in the pouring deluge. She reached out to Whinney, her friend who had come to help her, an" hugged the soaking-wet mare around the sturdy neck and fell tn frightened horse shivering. She swished her tail and circled nervously with small prancing steps; at the same time she fumed her head ar flicked her ears back and forth, trying to find and identify the soul"*^ of her apprehension. The horse's fears helped the woman bring ne

ntrol. Whinney needed her. She spoke to the animal in stroking and trying to calm her, and then felt Racer 'n y anything more frightened than his dam. Inn settle him, but he soon backed away in prancing little A them together while she hurried to the tent for the i pack baskets. Jondalar had rolled up sleeping furs and I his pack before he heard the sound of hooves, and he had ses and Racer's halter ready. es are very frightened, Jondalar," Ay la said when she t tent. "I think Racer's ready to bolt. Whinney is calming ait she's scared, too, and he's making her more nervous." up the halter and went out. The wind and the pouring over him in sheets, almost knocking him down. It was ltd that he felt as though he were standing in a waterfall. l worse than he thought. Before long the tent would have and the rain would soon have soaked the ground cover cping furs. He was glad Ayla had insisted they get up and ither flash of light, he saw her struggling to tie pack baskets f. The bay stallion was beside them. Xacer, come here. Come on. Racer," he called. A great m tore through the air, sounding as though the very skies ing apart. The young stallion reared and neighed, then kid pivoted in erratic circles. His eyes were rolling, showing IS nostrils were flaring, his tail was lashing violently, and his ?flicking in all directions, trying to focus on the source of his pAey were inexplicable and all around him, and that was t^ Iman reached up for the horse, trying to put his arms around iBbring him down, talking to the animal to steady him. There |Ag bond of trust between them, and the familiar hands and)fe settling. Jondalar managed to get the halter device on, and, |p the harness straps, he hoped the next nerve-shattering bolt Bg and blast of thunder would hold off. |tne to get the last of their things from inside the tent. The ^behind her, though she hadn't noticed the animal before. t;backed out of the conical skin shelter. Wolf yelped, started ftward the willow woods, then ran back and yelped at her ^oing, Wolf," she said, and then to Jondalar, "It's empty. She ran toward Whinney and dumped the armload she carried k basket. w communicated her distress, and Jondalar was afraid Racer

wouldn't stand still much longer. He didn't worry about dismantling the tent. He yanked the support poles out through the smoke hole, tearing off the flap, dropped them in a pack basket, then bunched the heavy waterlogged skins and stuffed them in after. The skittish horse rolled his eyes and backed away as Jondalar reached for the mare as a hold to leap on. Though his jump was a bit awkward, he managed to gain his seat, and then he was nearly pitched off when Racer reared. But he threw his arms around the stallion's neck and held on. Ayla heard a long wolf howl and a strange deep roar as she climbed on Whinney's back, and she turned to see Jondalar holding on to the rearing stallion. As soon as Racer settled back down, she leaned forward urging Whinney to go. The mare sprang ahead in a fast gallop as though something were chasing her, as though, like Ayla, she couldn't wait to get away from there. Wolf bounded ahead, racing through brush, and as Racer and Jondalar followed close on her heels the menacing roar grew louder.

Whinney tore through the woods of the level valley floor, dodging around trees, jumping over obstacles. Keeping her head low, with her arms around the horse's neck, Ayla let the mare find her own way. She couldn't see anything in the darkness and the rain, but she sensed they were heading toward the slope leading to the steppes above. Suddenly another burst of lightning flashed, filling the valley with instant illumination. They were in the beech woods and the slope was not far. She glanced back at Jondalar and gasped.

The trees behind him were moving! Before the light died, tall pines leaned precariously, then it went dark. She hadn't heard the rumble growing louder until she waited to hear the trees became aware that the sound was drowned out by the overpowering noise. Even the crack of thunder seemed to dissolve into the booming roar.

They were on the slope. She knew from the change in Whinney's pace that they were climbing up, though she still couldn't see. She could only trust to the mare's instincts. She felt the animal slip, recover her footing. Then they broke out of the woods and into a clearing. She could even see the rolling clouds through the rain. They must be in that meadow on the slope where the horses had grazed, she thought. Racer and Jondalar pulled up alongside. He, too, hunched over his horse's neck, though it was too dark to see more than the shape of their silhouette, a black-on-black shadow.

Whinney was slowing, and Ayla could feel her labored breath. The woods on the other side of the meadow were thinner, and Whinney was no longer racing at a frantic pace, dodging trees. Ayla ;

it still kept her arms around her mare's neck. Racer had in his burst of speed, but soon he slowed to a walk and lifted up. The rain was easing up. The trees gave way to dead grass, and then the slope leveled out as the steppes before them in a darkness softened only slightly by clouds hidden moon through a veil of rain.

He and Ayla dismounted to let Whinney rest. Jondalar and they stood side by side trying to see into the darkness. A lightning bolt flashed, but it was farther away, and the thunder rolled in a low growl. In a dazed state, they stared out over the edge of the valley, knowing that some great destruction was coming though they could see nothing. They realized they had witnessed a terrible disaster, but they didn't yet comprehend its

strange prickly sensation on her scalp and heard a faint rustle as her nose crinkled at the acrid smell of ozone; it was a peculiar smell, but not of fire, nothing as earthy as that. Suddenly she remembered her that it must be the smell of the streaking fire in the sky. She opened her eyes in wonder and fear and, in a moment she remembered for Jondalar. A tall pine, rooted in the slope below, protected from the cutting winds by a rocky outcrop and projecting over the steppes, glowed with an eerie blue light.

Jondalar put his arm around her, wanting to protect her, but he felt the tremor of his misgivings, and fears, and knew these otherworldly fires were out of his control. He could only hold her close. Then, in an awe-inspiring moment, a jagged crackling bolt arced across the glowing clouds, striking into a network of fiery darts, and in a blinding flash it speared the tall pine, illuminating the valley and the sky with the clarity of noon. Ayla started at the sharp crack, so that her ears ringing, and she cringed as the booming roar spread across the sky. In that moment of radiance they saw the way they had so narrowly escaped.

The valley was ravaged. The entire level floor was a heavy, dark brown. Opposite them, on the far slope, a mudslide had piled up a wall of boulders and fallen trees halfway across the wild landscape, leaving a raw scar of reddish soil exposed.

Some of the torrential onslaught was a set of circumstances not previously had begun in the mountains to the west, and with atmospheric conditions over the inland sea; warm, moisture-laden air had

risen to and condensed into huge billowing clouds with white tops that hung stalled and motionless over the rocky hills. The valley had been invaded by a cold front, and the turbulence of

the resulting combination had created a thunderstorm of unco intensity.

The rains had poured from the bloated skies, disgorging into and hollows that gushed into creeks, burst over rocks, and surged ' streams overflowing with frantic haste. Gathering momentum theh"*' multuous water, abetted by the continuing deluge, raged down A., steep hills, fountained over barriers, and crashed into sister stream I joining together into walls of rampaging, devastating force. ^^S | When the flash flood reached the green dell, it erupted over Hr3 waterfall and, with a ravenous roar, engulfed the entire valley, but tho' lush, verdant depression held a surprise for the churning waters. Dur. ing the era, extensive movements of the earth were uplifting the land. raising the level of the small inland sea to the south, and openino passageways to an even larger sea farther south. Within recent decades.i the uplift had closed off the valley, forming a shallow basin, which had! been filled by the river, creating a small lake behind the natural dam. i But an outlet had broken through a few years before and drained the I small reservoir of water, leaving in its wake moisture enough for a wooded valley in the middle of the dry steppes.

A second mudslide, farther downstream, had dammed the outlet channel again, containing the raging floodwaters within the confines of the valley and causing a backwash. Jondalar thought the scene below must have come from some nightmare. He could hardly believe what he had seen. The entire valley was a wild, turbulent, frenzied slimy of mud and rocks, sloshing back and forth, churning brush and whole trees torn out by their roots, and splintered by the battering. No living thing could have survived in that place, and he shuddered to think what would have happened if Ayla hadn't wakened and insisted that they leave. He doubted if they would have made it to safety without the horses. He glanced around; they were both standing with heads down, feet apart, looking as exhausted as he thought they must be. Wolf was beside Ayla, and when he saw Jondalar look his way he lifted his head straight up and howled. The man had a fleeting memory of a wolf howl disturbing his sleep, just before Ayla woke up. Another lightning bolt flashed, and at the sound of the thunder, he felt Ayla shiver violently in his arms. They were not out of danger we" They were wet and cold, everything was soaked, and, in the middle o the open plain in a thunderstorm, he had no idea where to find shelter-

[pine that had been struck by lightning was burning, ti that fed the fire had to contend with the dousing rain, acring flames shed little light. It was enough, though, to H general contours of the nearby landscape. There was not ||way of shelter on the open plains, except some low brush |jde a nearly overflowing runoff ditch that was dry most of

|r staring down into the darkness of the valley, as if spell- lie scene they had seen below. While she stood there, the Icoming down harder again, sluicing over them, drenching ly soaked clothing, and finally winning out over the strug- A the tree.

|pme on," Jondalar said. "We've got to find some shelter and this rain. You're cold. We're both cold, and wet."

red for a moment longer, then shuddered. "We were down (elooked up at him. "Jondalar, we would have died if we'd |t in that."

»got out in time. Now we need to find shelter. If we don't (rface to warm up, it won't matter that we got out of the .',,,

ied up Racer's lead rope and started toward the brush. Ayla fhinney and followed, with Wolf at her side. When they |e ditch, they noticed that the low bushes led to a thicker igher brush, almost low trees, farther back from the valley Ppes, and they headed for that.

ashed their way into the center of the dense growth of sallow.

?d around the slender, many-stemmed bases of the silvery low brush was wet, and rain still filtered in through the ives, but not quite as hard. They cleared woody stems out of cket, then removed the pack baskets from the horses. Jonda- out the heavy bundle of wet tent and shook it out. Ayla l@ poles and set them around the inside of the brush pocket, !a spread the skins of the tent, still tied to the ground cover,

over them. It was a haphazard construction, but for now they ' wanted shelter from the rain.

They brought their pack baskets and other things into the inakesh'i.l shelter, tore leaves off the trees to line the wet ground, and spread I their damp sleeping furs. Then they took off their outer clothes helrw^ii- each other wring out the soaked leather, and draped them on branch l

Finally, shivering hard, they huddled down and pulled their sleenim.! furs around them. Wolf came in and shook himself vigorously sunn8 ing water, but everything was so wet that it hardly mattered. Th» steppe horses, with their thick shaggy coats, much preferred cold dry winter to the drenching summer storm, but they were used to livino outside. They stood close together beside the stand of brushy growth and let the rain pour over them.

Within the damp shelter, too wet to even consider a fire, Ayla and Jondalar, wrapped in heavy furs, cuddled close together. Wolf curled up on top of their sleeping furs, pressing close to them, and finally their combined body heat warmed them. The woman and man dozed a bit, though neither of them slept much. Near dawn the rain slacked off, and their sleep deepened.

Ayla listened, smiling to herself, before opening her eyes. Within the medley of birdsong that had awakened her, she could distinguish the sharp elaborate call notes of a pipet. Then she heard a melodious warble that seemed to be getting louder, but when she tried to find the source of the trilling song, she had to look carefully to see the drab, brown, inconspicuous little skylark just landing. Ayla rolled on her side to watch him.

The skylark walked along the ground easily and quickly, well-balanced by its large hind claws, then bobbed its crested head and came up with a caterpillar in its beak. With quick, jerky steps, it rushed toward a bare scrape in the ground near the stems of a willow bush, where a camouflaged cluster of newly hatched fluffy chicks suddenly sprang to life, each open mouth begging to be filled with the delectable morsel. Soon a second bird, similar in markings though slightly more drab, and nearly invisible against the dun earth of the steppes, sp" peared with a winged insect. While she stuffed it into an open mouth, the first bird leaped into the air and climbed in circles until he w almost lost from view. But his presence was not lost. He had disap- peared into a spiral of incredibly glorious song. . .

Ayla softly whistled the musical call, replicating the sounds wi such precision that the mother bird stopped pecking at the ground ^ search of food and turned in her direction. Ayla whistled again, wl '

jie grain to offer, as she had done when she lived in her
ilirst began imitating bird calls. After she had gained skill,
Iwhen she called, whether she offered grain or not, and
^ many for her during those lonely days. The mother skylark
looking for the bird that was invading the territory of her
hen she found no other skylarks, she went back to feeding

| repetitive phrases, more mellow and ending with a chuck-
in perked Ayla's interest even more. Sandgrouse were big
ake a decent meal, and so were those cooing turtledoves,
looking around to see if she could spot the buxom birds
ed the brown sandgrouse in general size and shape. In the
s, she saw a simple twig nest with three white eggs in it
aw the plump pigeon with its small head and bill and short- it, dense plumage was a pale brown,
almost pinkish, and its
itted back and wings, which somewhat resembled the
irde, glistened with iridescent patches.

(.rolled over, and Ayla turned to watch the man lying beside
ring with the deep rhythms of sleep. Then she became aware
fipd to get up and relieve herself. She was afraid that if she
|;Would wake up, and she hated to disturb him, but the more
jto forget about it, the more urgent her need became. Maybe
|yed slowly, she thought, trying to ease out of the warm,
lamp furs wrapped around them. He snorted and snuffled and
<(as she extricated herself, but it was when he reached for
bund her missing that he woke up.

Oh, there you are," he mumbled.

^ck to sleep, Jondalar. You don't have to get up yet," she said
jwled out of their nest in the brush.

A bright, fresh morning, the sky a clear sparkling blue without
|> cloud in sight. Wolf was gone, probably hunting or explor- ^ thought. The horses had moved off,
too; she saw them

?ear the edge of the valley. Though the sun was still low,
IS already rising from the wet ground, and Ayla felt the hu- (she hunkered down to pass her water.
Then she noticed the

?on the inside of her legs. Her moon time, she thought. She'd
pGting it; she'd have to wash herself and her undergarment,
(he needed the mouflon wool.

(inoff ditch was only half-full, but the streamlet flowing
?t was clear. She leaned over and rinsed her hands, drank
wpped handfuls of the cool running liquid, and then hurried
peir sleeping place. Jondalar was up, and he smiled when she

made her way into their shelter within the fallow brush to get her pack baskets. She pulled it out in the open and began runn through it. Jondalar brought both of his baskets out with him went back for the rest of their things. He wanted to see how' damage had been done by the soaking rains. Wolf came lopine just then and went straight to Ayla.

"You're looking satisfied with yourself," she said, roughing no k| neck fur, so thick and full it was almost a mane. When she stopped kj jumped up on her, putting his muddy paws on her chest, nearly attril level of her shoulders. He caught her by surprise, almost knocking h*^ down, but she recovered her balance.

"Wolf! Look at all this mud," she said, as he reached to lick hw throat and face, and then, with a low rumbling growl, he opened hit mouth and took her jaw in his teeth. But for all his impressive canim armaments, his action was as restrained and gentle as if he'd bew handling a new puppy. No tooth broke skin; they hardly made aa impression on it. She buried both her hands in his ruff again, pushed his head back, and looked at the devotion in his wolfish eyes with as much affection as he showed her. Then she grabbed his jaw with her' teeth, and gave him the same kind of growling, gentle love-bite back.

"Now, get down, Wolf. Look at the mess you've made of me! I'm going to have to wash this, too." She brushed off the loose, sleeveless leather tunic she wore over the short leggings that had been used as undergarments.

"If I didn't know better, Ayla, I could almost be frightened for you when he does that," Jondalar said. "He's gotten so big, and he is a hunter. He could kill someone."

"You don't have to worry about Wolf when he does that. That's the way wolves greet each other and show their love. I think he's glad we woke up in time to get out of the valley, too."

"Have you looked down there?"

"Not yet ... Wolf, get away from there," she said, pushing him away when he began to sniff between her legs. "It's my moon time. She looked aside and flushed slightly. "I came to get my wool, and I haven't had the chance to look."

While Ayla attended to her personal needs, washing herself and her clothes in the little stream, tying on the straps that held the wool@ place, and getting something else to wear, Jondalar walked toward w" edge of the valley to pass his water and looked down. There was sign of a campsite, or of any place there could be one. The natll" basin of the valley was partially filled with water, and the logs trees and other floating debris were bobbing and dipping as the agit^

i »,, ^se. The small river that fed it was still blocked at
I still creating backwash, though it was not sloshing with
aack-and-forth movement of the night before.
v moved beside Jondalar, who had been staring intently
ad thinking. He looked up when he felt her presence.
, must set narrow downstream, and something must be
jyer " he said, "probably rocks or a mudslide. It's holding
" Maybe that's why it was so green down there, it may

^efore."

h flood alone would have washed us away if it had caught
3d. "My valley used to flood every spring, and that was
l&but this ..." She could find no words to express her
Ishe unconsciously finished her sentence with the motions
uuniage that to her conveyed more strongly and precisely
F dismay and relief.

derstood. He, too, was at a loss for words and shared her
/ both stood silently watching the movement below; then
his forehead knotting with concentration and concern.
he.

islide, or whatever it is, gives away too quickly, that
f downstream will be very dangerous. I hope there are
at way," he said.

Al.be any more dangerous than it was last night," Ayla said.

^

ight it was raining, so people might expect something like a
|tf this breaks through, without the warning of a rainstorm,
SBtch people by surprise, and that would be devastating," he
^.

idded, then said, "But if people are using this river, wouldn't
»S that it had stopped flowing and try to find out why?"
|ed to face her. "But what about us, Ayla? We're traveling,
Wuldn't have any way of knowing that a river had stopped
We could be downstream of something like this sometime,
Buldn't have any warning."

Ined back to look at the water in the valley and didn't answer
tfy. "You're right, Jondalar," she said then. "We could get
another flash flood without warning. Or the lightning could
B instead of that tree. Or an earthquake could open up a crack
tend and take everyone except a little girl, leaving her alone
"d. Or someone could get sick, or be born with a weakness
'"ty. The Mamut said no one can know when the Mother
c to call one of Her children back to Her. There's nothing to

be gained by worrying about things like that. We can't do about them. That's for Her to decide."

^ythingl

Jondalar listened, still frowning with worry; then he relaxed and n his arms around her. "I worry too much. Thonolan used to telliL that. I just started thinking about what would happen if we vvp downstream of that valley, and remembered last night. And then t thought about losing you, and . . ." He tightened his arms around her "Ayla, I don't know what I would do if I ever lost you," he said with sudden fervor, holding her to him. "I'm not sure I'd want to go on

i. * 0 U

living.

She felt a tinge of worry at his strong reaction. "I hope you would go on living, Jondalar, and find someone else to love. If anything ever happened to you, a piece of me, of my spirit, would be gone with you because I love you, but I would go on living, and a piece of your spirit would always be living with me."

"It wouldn't be easy to find someone else to love. I didn't think I'd ever find you. I don't know if I'd even want to look," Jondalar said. They started back, walking together. Ayla was quiet for a while, thinking, then said, "I wonder if that's what happens when you love someone, and that person loves you back? I wonder if you exchange pieces of each other's spirit. Maybe that's why it hurts so much to lose someone you love." She paused, then continued. "It's like the men of the Clan. They are hunting brothers, and they exchange a piece of each other's spirit, particularly when one saves the other's life. It's not easy to go on living when a piece of your spirit is missing, and each hunter knows a piece of himself will go to the next world if the other goes, so he will watch and protect his brother, do almost anything to save his life." She stopped and looked up at him. "Do you think we have exchanged pieces of our spirits, Jondalar? We are hunting partners, aren't we?"

"And you once saved my life, but you are much more than a hunting brother," he said, smiling at the idea. "I love you. I understand now why Thonolan didn't want to go on living when Jetamio died. Some" times I think he was searching for a way into the next world, so could find them, Jetamio and the baby who was never born."

"But if anything ever happened to me, I wouldn't want you to foil. me to any spirit world. I'd want you to stay right here, and someone else," Ayla said, with conviction. She didn't like all tll . about next worlds. She wasn't sure what some other world after one would be like, or even, deep in her heart, if one really exl ^ What she did know was that to get to any next world, you had in this one, and she didn't want to hear about Jondalar dying' e a before or after she did.

ine about worlds of the spirit led to other random thoughts. that's what happens when you get old," she said. "If you . pieces of your spirit with people you love, after you've lost a an so many pieces of your spirit have gone with them to the Id that there's not enough left to keep you alive in this world. , hole inside of you that keeps getting bigger, so you want to e next world where most of your spirit and your loved ones

do you know so much?" Jondalar asked with a little smile. cr lack of knowledge of the world of the spirits, her ingenuous itaneous observations made sense to him in a way, and dis- genuine and thoughtful intelligence, though he had no way of ' if there was any merit in the ideas. If Zeiandoni were there, I ask her, he thought. Then suddenly he realized they were me, and he would be able to ask her, some day soon. : pieces of my spirit when I was a little girl and the people I i to were taken by the earthquake. Then Iza took a piece when , and Creb, and so did Rydag. Even though he isn't dead, even s a piece of me, of my spirit, that I will never see. Your brother ece of you with him, didn't he?"

' Jondalar said, "he did. I will always miss him, and always ut it. Sometimes I still think it was my fault, and I would have rthing to save him."

I't think there is anything you could have done, Jondalar. The wanted him, and it is for Her to decide, not for someone to »r a way to the next world."

they got back to the tall sallow brush where they had spent t, they began going through their belongings. Almost every- is at least damp, and many things were still very wet. They ie swollen knots that still tied the ground cover to the upper >art of the tent and, each taking an end and twisting in oppo- ctions, tried to wring the pieces out. But too much twisting rain on the stitching. When they decided to erect the tent letting it dry out, they discovered they had lost some of the s.

spread the ground cover out over the brush, and then checked 'er clothes, which were also still quite wet. Objects that were ick baskets had fared a little better. Many things were damp, Id probably dry soon enough, if they had a warm, dry place Mi out. The open steppes would be fine during the day, but ten they needed to travel, and it could get damp and cool on nd at night. They did not look forward to sleeping in a wet

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"I think it's time for some hot tea," Ayla said, feeling disco
It was already later than usual. She got a fire started and puth^
stones in it, thinking about breakfast. That was when she realize^
didn't have the food left from their evening meal the night before
"Oh, Jondalar, we don't have anything to eat this morning"
complained. "It's still down in that valley. I left the grains in my
cooking basket near the hot coals in the fireplace. The cooking"
is gone, too. I have others, but it was a good one. At least I still k
my medicine bag," she said with obvious relief when she found
"And the otter skin still resists water, even as old as it is. EvervA
inside is dry. At least I can make tea for us, I have some good-tast
herbs in it. I'll get some water," she said, then looked around. "Whe
my tea-making basket? Did I lose that, too? I thought I brought it i
the tent when it began to rain. It must have dropped when we w
hurrying to leave."

"We left something else back there that isn't going to make you v
happy," Jondalar said.

"What?" Ayla said, looking upset.

"Your parfleche, and the long poles."

She shut her eyes and shook her head in dismay. "Oh, no. Thati
a good meat-keeper and it was full of roe deer meat. And those po!
They were just the right size. It's going to be hard to replace them.
better see if anything else was lost and make sure the emergency fi
is all right."

She reached for the pack basket where she kept the few perso
things she was taking with her and the clothing and equipment t
would be used later. Though all the baskets were wet, and saggi
the spare ropes and cords on the bottom had kept the contents of <
one reasonably dry and undamaged. The food they were using al<
the way was near the top of the basket; below it the emergency tra'
ing-food package was still securely wrapped and essentially dry. '
decided this might be a good time to look over all their supplies)US
be certain nothing was spoiled, and to judge how long the food tl
had with them would last.

She took out all the various kinds of dried preserved food she
brought with them and spread it out on top of their sleeping roll. 1
were berries--blackberries, raspberries, bilberries, elderberries,
berries, strawberries, alone or mixed together--that had been m"
and dried into cakes. Other sweet varieties were cooked down,
dried to a leathery texture, sometimes with added pieces of sma
apples, tart but high in pectin. Whole berries and wild appi05'
with other fruits such as wild pears and plums, were sliced
whole, and sweetened a bit as they dried in the sun. Any of them

is they were, or soaked or cooked with water, and were often
avor soups or meats. There also were grains and seeds, some
been partially cooked and then parched; some shelled and
azelnuts; and the stone-pine cones full of rich nuts she had
from the valley the day before.

ibles were also dried--stems, buds, and particularly starchy
ch as cattail, thistle, licorish fern, and various lily conns.
;re steam-cooked in ground ovens before being dried, but
ere dug, peeled, and strung immediately on cords made of
tv bark of certain plants or sinew from the backbone or leg
of various animals. Mushrooms were also strung, and for
are often hung over smoky fires to dry, and certain edible
/ere steamed and dried into dense, nutritious loaves. Their
s were rounded out by a large selection of dried smoked meat
and in a special packet, put aside for emergencies, was a
of ground-up dried meat, clean rendered fat, and dried fruits,
ato small cakes.

ied food was compact and kept well; some of it was more than
l and had come from the previous winter's supplies, but the
s of certain items were quite limited. Nezzie had collected it
from friends and relatives who had brought it to the Summer
Ay la had drawn sparingly from their store of food; for the
: they were living off the land. It was the season for it. If they
: survive by harvesting the bounty of the Great Earth Mother
r offerings were rich, they could never hope to survive trav- >ss country during leaner times.
acked everything back up. She had no intention of depending
dried traveling food for their morning meal, though the
ad fewer fat birds to feed after they ate. A pair of sandgrouse
a- sling and were roasted on a spit; some pigeon eggs that
ver hatch were lightly cracked and put directly in the fire in
Is. Contributing to a filling breakfast was the fortunate find of
c's cache of spring beauty corms. The hole in the ground was
sir sleeping furs and filled with the sweet and starchy vegeta-
ch had been gathered earlier by the small animal when the
orms were at their peak. They were cooked with the rich pine
l had gathered the day before, which were released from the
s by fire and cracked with a rock. Some fresh ripe dewberries
out the meal.

they left the flooded valley, Ayla and Jondalar continued
ering slightly toward the west, drawing imperceptibly closer
'untain range. Though it was not an exceptionally high range,

the taller peaks of the mountains were perpetually covered with often shrouded with mists and clouds.

They were in the southern region of the cold continent and character of the grassland had changed subtly. It was more than simply a profusion of grass and herbs that accounted for the diversity of animals that thrived on the cold plains. The animals themselves evolved differences in diets and migratory patterns, spatial separation and seasonal variations, which all contributed to the wealth of life in later times on the great equatorial plains far to the south, the one place that came close to matching the profound richness of the Ice Age steppes--the great abundance and variety of animals shared the productive land in complex and mutually sustaining ways.

Some specialized in eating particular plants, some in particular parts of plants; some grazed the same plants at slightly different stages of development; some fed in places that others did not go, or they fed lower later, or migrated differently. The diversity was maintained because eating and living habits of one species fit in between or around those of another in complementary niches.

Woolly mammoths needed great quantities of fibrous filler, rough grasses, stems, and sedges, and because they tended to bog down in deep snows, marshes or sphagnum meadows, they kept to the firm, windswept ground near the glaciers. They made long migrations along the wall of ice, moving south only in spring and summer.

Steppe horses also required bulk; like mammoths, they digested coarse stems and grasses quickly, but were somewhat more selective, preferring the mid-height varieties of grass. They could dig down through snow to find feed, but this used up more energy than they gained, and it was a struggle for them to travel when snow piled up. They could not subsist for long in deep snow and preferred the hard-surfaced, windy plains.

Unlike mammoths and horses, bison needed the leaves and sheaths of grass for the higher protein content and tended to select shortgrass, utilizing the areas of mid- and tallgrass only for new growth, usually in spring. In summer, however, an important, if inadvertent, cooperation was practiced. Horses used their teeth like clippers to bite through the tough stalks. After the horses had passed by, cutting down the stems, the densely rooted grass was stimulated to send out new leaves of regrowth. The migrations of horses were often followed, at an interval of a few days, by the gigantic bison, who welcomed new shoots, in

In winter, bison moved to southern ranges of variable weather more snow, which kept low-growing grass leaves moist and are

northern plains. They were skilled at sweeping snow
„ noses and cheeks to find their preferred close-to-the-
but the snowy steppes of the south were not without risk.
|ft kept them warm in the relatively dry cold, even of the
temore snow fell, the heavy, shaggy coats of bison and other
gssed animals that migrated south in winter could be hazard-
t fatal when the climate turned cold and wet, with frequent
en freezing and thawing. If their coats became soaking wet
ew they could be vulnerable to a fatal chill during a subse-
e especially if a cold snap caught them resting on the
i if their long hair froze fast, they would be unable to get
sly deep snow, or icy crusts on top of snow, could also be
as winter blizzards, or falling through the thin ice of
s, or flooding river valleys.
i and saiga antelopes also thrived by selectively foraging on
Ked to very dry conditions, small herbs and ground-hugging
crass, but unlike bison, saiga did poorly on broken terrain
i snow, and they were not able to leap well. They were fast
tee runners that could outdistance their predators only on
vel surfaces of the windy steppes. Mouflon, the wild sheep,
ter hand, were expert climbers and used steep terrain to
it they could not dig through snow that piled up. They
ji the windblown rocky high ground.
(catlike species related to mouflon, chamois and ibex, divided
Ige by altitude, or by differences of terrain and landscape, with
Igoat-antelope, ibex, taking the highest ground with the steeply
followed at slightly lower elevations by the smaller and very
thamois, with the mouflon below them. But they were all
|k rough terrain of even the lowest levels of the arid steppes,
By were adapted to cold, so long as it was dry.
»oxen were also goatlike animals, although larger, and their
Mible coats, which resembled the fur of mammoths and woolly
(OSes, made them seem bigger and more "oxiike." They nibbled
lusly on the low shrubs and sedges, and they were particularly
to the coldest regions, preferring the extremely cold, windy,
Uns close to the glacier. Though their underwool was shed in
, musk-oxen became stressed if the weather turned too warm.
; deer and reindeer kept to open ground in herds, but most
!er were browsers of tree leaves. The solitary woodland moose
Fe- 1 hey loved the summer leaves of deciduous trees, and the
tt Pondweeds and water plants of marshes and lakes, and with
°oves and long legs, they could negotiate marshy, boggy got-

tomlands. In winter they survived on the more indigestible grass high willow twigs of trees that grew on the low ground of river vail their splay-footed long legs easily carrying them through the w blown snow that drifted and piled up there.

Reindeer were winter-loving animals, feeding on lichens that p on barren soil and rocks. They could smell the favored plants through snow, from a long distance, and their hooves were adaote digging down through deep snows if they needed to. In summer t ate both grass and leafy shrubs.

Elk and reindeer both preferred alpine meadows or herbaceous K lands during spring and summer, but below the elevation of the rs ing sheep, and the elk tended to eat grasses more than shrubs. A and onagers invariably preferred the arid higher hills, while bi ranged a bit lower, though they generally climbed higher than hor which had a broader choice of terrain than mammoths or rhii eroses.

Those primal plains with their complex and diverse grasslands; tained in great multitudes a fantastic mixture of animals. No sil place on a later earth did more than approximate parts of it. The (cold environment of high mountains could not compare, though d were similarities. Mountain-dwelling sheep, goats, and antelopes tended their range to the lower ground then, but large herds of pi animals could not exist in the steep, rocky terrain of high mount when the climate of the lowlands changed.

The soggy and fragile northern bogs were not the same. They v too wet for much grass to grow, and their stinting, acid soils cai plants to develop toxins to avoid being grazed by the great multitu* which would destroy such delicate slow-growing flora. The vane were limited and offered poor nutrients for the diversity of large h(ing animals; there was not sufficient feed. And only those with v splaying hooves, like reindeer, could live there. Huge creatures ofg weight with large stumpy legs, or fast runners with narrow da) hooves became mired in the soft, wet land. They needed firm, < solid ground.

Later, the grassy plains of warmer, more temperate regions de oped distinct bands of more limited vegetation controlled by temp ture and climate. They offered too little diversity in summer, ^w much snow in winter. Snow also bogged down animals that requel firm ground, and it was difficult for many to push aside to reach Deer could live in woods where the snow was deep, but only De^ they browsed leaves and twig tips from trees that grew above the s reindeer could dig through snow to reach the lichen on which they in winter. Bison and aurochs subsisted, but they were reduced i0

r their full potential. Other animals, such as horses, aber as their preferred environment shrunk.

.jaue combination of all the many elements of the Ice at fostered the magnificent multitudes, and each was line the bitter cold, the withering winds, and the ice en the vast glaciers shrank back to polar regions and m the lower latitudes, so, too, did the great herds and i become dwarfed or disappear entirely from a land that j land that could no longer sustain them.

I traveled, the missing parfleche and long poles preyed on ,They were more than useful, they might be necessary i trip ahead. She wanted to replace them, but it would i an overnight stop, and she knew Jondalar was anxious

ever, was not happy about the wet tent, nor the ding on it for shelter. Besides, it wasn't good for wet I up and packed together so tight; it could make them I to be spread out to dry, and the hides would proba- the worked as they were drying to keep them pliable, in fc smoking they had received when the leather was made. pake more than a day, he was sure.

ttmoon they approached the deep trench of another large |l separated the plain from the mountains. From their van- l the plateau of the open steppes, above the broad valley

Ie, swiftly flowing waterway, they could see the terrain on |e. The foothills across the river were fractured with many and gullies, the ravages of flooding, as well as many more ifcitarries. It was a major river, channeling a good proportion a, which drained the eastern face of the mountains into the

'I'.

Bounded the shoulder of the steppe plateau and rode down feyla was reminded of the territory around the Lion Camp, more broken landscape across the river was different. But ;she saw the same kind of deep-cut gullies carved out of the ^rain and melting snow, and high grass drying into standing 6 floodplain below, isolated larch and pine trees were scat- g leafy shrubs, and stands of cattails, tall phragmite reeds, tes marked the river's edge.

sy reached the river, they stopped. This was a major water- It and deep, and swollen from the recent rains. They were are how they were going to get across. It was going to take ing.

wd we don't have a bowl boat," Ayla said, thinking of the

^

skin-covered round boats the Lion Camp had used to cross the

river.

near their lodge.

"You're right. I think we are going to need some kind of a boat to get across this without getting everything all wet. I'm not sure why but I don't remember having so much trouble crossing rivers with Thonolan and I were traveling. We just piled our gear on a couple logs and swam across," Jondalar said. "But I guess we didn't have much, only a back frame for each of us. That's all we could carry. With the horses, we can take more with us, but then, we have more to worry about."

As they rode downstream, looking over the situation, Ayla noticed a stand of tall, slender birches growing near the water. The place had such a familiar feeling that she half expected to see the long, semicircular terranean earthlodge of the Lion Camp tucked into the side of the slope at the back of a river terrace, with grass growing out of the sides of the rounded top, and the perfectly symmetrical arched entrance that had so surprised her when she first saw it. But when she actually saw such an arch, it gave her an eerie, spine-tingling shock.

"Jondalar! Look!"

He looked up the slope where she was pointing. There he saw not just one, but several, perfectly symmetrical archways, each an entrance to a circular, dome-shaped structure. They both dismounted and, following the path up from the river, climbed to the top of the Camp.

Ayla was surprised at how eager she was to meet the people who lived there, and realized how long it had been since they had seen anyone spoken to anyone besides each other. But the place was empty, a small structure planted in the ground between the two curved mammoth tusks whose tips were joined together at the top, forming the arched entrance to one of the dwellings, was a small carved ivory figure of a female with ample breasts and hips.

"They must be gone," Jondalar said. "They left a donkey to guard each lodge."

"They're probably hunting, or at a Summer Meeting, or visiting," Ayla said, feeling real disappointment that there were no people.

"That's too bad. I was looking forward to seeing someone." She wanted to go.

"Wait, Ayla. Where are you going?"

"Back to the river." She looked puzzled.

"But this is perfect," he said. "We can stay here." ...

"They left a muttoi--a donkey--to guard their lodges. The spirit of the Mother is protecting them. We can't stay here and let the spirit know, spirit. It will bring us bad luck," she said, knowing full well she knew it. J

n stay, if we wed to. We just can't take anything we don't
at's always understood. Ayla, we need shelter. Our tent is
We have to give it a chance to dry out. While we're waiting,
>hunting. If we get the right kind of animal, we can use the
ake a bowl boat to cross the river."
frown slowly changed to an enlightened smile, as she grasped
ne and realized the implications. They did need a few days
r from their near disaster and replace some of their losses.
ye can get enough hide to make a new parfleche, too," she
>ce it's cleaned and dehaired, rawhide doesn't take that long
not any longer than it takes to dry meat. It just has to be
and left to get hard." She glanced down toward the river.
i at those birches down there. I think I could make good poles
ne of those. Jondalar, you're right. We need to stay here for
rs. The Mother will understand. And we could leave some
for the people who live here, to thank them for the use of
lp . . . if we're lucky with our hunting. Which lodge should
l?"
lammoth Hearth. That's where visitors usually stay."
>u think there is a Mammoth Hearth? I mean, do you think
lamutoi Camp?" Ayla asked.
t know. It's not one big earthlodge that everyone lives in like
ip," Jondalar said, looking at the group of seven round dwell-
red with a smooth layer of hardened earth and river clay.
an a single, large, multifamily longhouse, like the one they
in during the winter, this place had several smaller dwellings
together, but the purpose was the same. It was a settlement,
ttity of more-or-less related families.
:*s like Wolf Camp, where the Summer Meeting was," Ayla
ping in front of the entrance of one of the small dwellings,
reluctant to push the heavy drape aside and enter the home
ers without being invited, in spite of generally understood
hat had developed out of a mutual necessity for the sake of
n time of need.
of the younger people at the Summer Meeting thought the
s were old-fashioned," Jondalar said. "They liked the idea of
lual lodge for just one or two families."
ttean they wanted to live by themselves? Just one lodge with
o families? For a winter Camp?" Ayla asked.
he said. "No one wanted to live alone all winter. You never
tte of these small lodges by itself; there are always at least five
inetimes more. That was the idea. The people I talked to
l was easier to build a smaller lodge for a new family or two,

than to crowd into one big lodge until they had to build another they wanted to build near their families, and stay with their Ca and share in the activities and the food that everyone worked too to collect and store for winter."

He pushed aside the heavy skin hanging from the joined tusk's formed the entrance, ducked under it and stepped inside. Avia < back, holding up the drape to shed some light.

"What do you think, Ayla? Does it look like a Mamutoi lodgel''

"It could be. It's hard to tell. Remember that Sungaea Camn stopped at on the way to the Summer Meeting? It wasn't very differ»3 from a Mamutoi Camp. Their customs may have been a little differe but they were like the Mammoth Hunters in many ways. Mamut a even the funeral ceremony was very similar. He thought they w< once related to Mamutoi. I did notice the patterns of their decoratk were not the same, though." She paused, trying to think of od differences. "And some of their clothes--like that beautiful shouh blanket made out of mammoth and other wools on the girl who h died. But even Mamutoi Camps have different patterns. Nezzie alws knew what Camp someone was from just by the small changes in I style and shape of the patterns on their tunics, even when I coul' see very much difference at all."

With the light coming in from the entrance, the main suppor construction was plain to see. The lodge was not framed with woodj| although a few of the birch poles were strategically placed; it had be built out of mammoth bones. The large sturdy bones of the huge bea; were the most abundant and accessible building material available i the essentially treeless steppes.

Most of the mammoth bones used for building material did not coi from animals that had been hunted and killed for that purpose. They were from animals that had died of natural causes, gathered fro@ wherever they happened to fall on the steppes or, most often, from accumulated piles that had been swept up by flooding rivers and deposited at certain bends or barriers in the river, like driftwood. Ptf" manent winter shelters were often built on river terraces near succ@ piles, because mammoth bones and tusks were heavy.

It usually took several individuals to lift a single bone and no wanted to carry them very far; the total weight of the mammoth bo0@ that were used to construct one small dwelling was two or three tn sand pounds or more. Building such shelters was not the activity single family, but a community effort, directed by someone ^ knowledge and experience, and organized by someone with the a ^ to persuade others to help.

called a Camp was a settled village, and the people were not nomadic followers of the itinerant game, but ntary hunters and gatherers. The Camp might be left jiile in the summer, when the inhabitants went to hunt ace, which was brought back and kept in nearby storage [family and friends from other villages to trade gossip it was a permanent home site. ik this one is the Mammoth Hearth, or whatever that I here," Jondalar said, letting the drape fall behind him. d of dust.

itened the small female figure, whose feet were purposely irion, leaving the legs in a peglike shape that had been he ground to stand guard in front of the entrance, then [alar to the next lodge.

is probably either the leader's lodge or the mamut's, I." Jondalar said.

Ixd that it was slightly larger, and the woman-figure in lanewhat more elaborate, and she nodded agreement. "A iunk, if they are Mamutoi, or people like them. Both the l and the headman of the Lion Camp had hearths that were |D Mamut's, but his was used for visitors, and by everyone

I?."

Ith stood at the entrance, holding up the drape, waiting for |to adjust to the dimmer light within. But two small lights |o glow. Wolf growled, and Ayla's nose detected a scent that |ervous.

Ijfo in, Jondalar! Wolf! Stay!" she commanded, making the |er hand as well.

yt, Ayla?" Jondalar said.

Du smell it? There's an animal in there, something that can &ng smell, a badger, I think, and if we scare it, it will make tink that lingers. We won't be able to use this lodge, and the (> live here will have trouble getting rid of the smell. Maybe I the drape back, Jondalar, it will come out by itself. They ys and don't like the light much, even if they do hunt in the imes."

Ited a low rumbling growl, and it was obvious he was strain- Bl after the fascinating creature. But like most members of family, the badger could spray an attacker with the power- g and acrid contents of its anal glands. The last thing Ayla is to be around a wolf that stunk of that strong musky odor, isn't sure how long she could hold Wolf back. If the badger

didn't come out soon, she might have to use a more drastic way to -.1 the lodge of the animal.

The badger did not see well with its small and inconspicuous eyes but they were watching the lighted opening with unwavering attention. When it seemed obvious the badger was not going to leave, Ayla reached up for the sling that was wrapped around her head, and the pouch hanging from her waist for stones. Ayla put a stone in the bulging pocket of the sling, took aim on the reflecting points of light and with a quick and expert spin to gain momentum, hurled the stone. She heard a thud, and the two small lights went out.

"I think you got him, Ayla!" Jondalar said, but they waited a while to make sure there was no movement before entering the lodge.

When they did, they were aghast. The rather large animal, three feet from tip of nose to end of tail, was sprawled on the ground with a bloody wound on its head, but it had quite obviously spent some time within the dwelling, destructively exploring everything it could find. The place was a shambles! The hard-packed earthen floor was scratched up and pits had been dug in it, some containing the animal's waste. The woven mats that had covered the floor were torn to shreds, along with various woven containers. Hides and furs on the raised bed-platforms were chewed and ripped apart, and the stuffing of feathers, wools, or grasses of bed padding were strewn over all. Even a portion of the densely compacted wall had been dug out; the badger had made its own entrance.

"Look at this! I would hate to return and find something like this," Ayla said.

"That's always a danger when you leave a place empty. The Mother doesn't protect a lodge from Her other creatures. Her children must appeal to the spirit animal directly and deal with the animals of this world themselves," Jondalar said. "Maybe we can clean this lodge up a little for them, even if we can't repair all the damage."

"I'm going to skin that badger and leave it for them, so they know what caused all this. They should be able to use the hide, anyway.

Ayla said, picking the animal up by the tail to take it outside. In better light, she noted the gray back with its stiff guard hairs darker underparts, and the distinctive black-and-white striped pattern verifying that it was, indeed, a badger. She slit its throat with a sharp flint knife and left it to bleed out. Then she went back to the lodge, pausing for a moment before she went in to look around a rest of the domed dwellings nearby. She tried to visualize what would be like with people, and she felt a strong pang of regret they were gone. It could be very lonely without other people a

ly felt very grateful for Jondalar, and for a moment she was overwhelmed by the love she felt for him. She reached for the amulet around her neck, felt the comforting inside the decorated leather bag, and thought of her totem. She didn't think of her Cave Lion protecting spirit as much as she had. It was a Clan spirit, though Mamut had said her totem always be with her. Jondalar always referred to the Great Aether when he talked about the spirit world, and she thought of Mother more now, since the training she had been receiving from Mamut, but she always felt it was her Cave Lion who had taught Jondalar to her, and she felt moved to communicate with an ancient spirit.

Using the ancient sacred language of silent hand signs that was used to access the spirit world, and to communicate with other clans whose Aen everyday words and more common hand signs were different, Ayla closed her eyes and directed her thoughts to her totem. "At Spirit of Cave Lion," she gestured, "this woman is grateful to the wind worthy; grateful to be chosen by the powerful Cave Lion. Mamut always told this woman that a powerful spirit was difficult to work with, but it was always worth it. The Mog-ur was right. Although the tests and trials have sometimes been difficult, she has gained the gifts of the spirit world. This woman is most grateful for the gifts of learning and understanding. This woman is also grateful for the man her great totem Spirit guided to her, who is taking her back with him to his home. The man does not know the spirit world, and does not fully understand that he was also chosen by the spirit of the Great Cave Lion, but this woman is grateful he was Mid-winter worthy."

As she was about to open her eyes, she had another thought. "Great Cave Lion Spirit," she continued, in her mind and with her silent hand signs, "The Mog-ur told this woman that totem spirits always want a place to return where they are welcome and want to stay. A journey of traveling will end, but the people of the man do not know the names of the Clan totems. The new home of this woman will not be the same, but the man honors the spirit animal of each, and the people of the TO must know and honor the Cave Lion Spirit. This woman can say the Great Spirit of the Cave Lion will always be welcome and they will always have a place wherever this woman is welcome."

As Ayla opened her eyes, she saw Jondalar watching her. "You are . . . occupied," he said. "I didn't want to disturb you." "I am . . . thinking about my totem, my Cave Lion," she said, "and Mamut. I hope he will be . . . comfortable there."

"The spirit animals are all comfortable near Doni. The Great Mother created and gave birth to all of them. The legends tell it," he said.

"Legends? Stories about the times before?"

"I guess you could say they were stories, but they are told ' certain way." '

"There were Clan legends, too. I used to love it when Dorv them. Mog-ur named my son after one of my favorites, 'The Lee ofDurc,' "Aylasaid. c

Jondalar felt a moment of surprise and a twinge of disbelief at th*1 thought that the people of the Clan, the flatheads, could have legend* and stories. It was still difficult for him to overcome certain ingrained3 ideas he had grown up with, but he had already been made aware thtfl they were much more complex than he would have thought possit why couldn't they have had legends and stories, too?

"Do you know any Earth Mother legends?" Ayla asked.

"Well, I think I remember part of one. They are told in a way i make them easier to remember, but only special zeiaandonia know tt all." He paused to remember, then began in a chanting singsong:

"Her birth waters gushed, filling rivers and seas,
Then flooded the land and gave rise to the trees.
From each drop that spilled, new grass and leaves grew
Till sprouting green plants filled all the earth's view."

Ayla smiled. "That's wonderful, Jondalar! It tells the story withlj nice feeling, and a nice sound, something like the rhythms of the| Mamutoi songs. It would be very easy to remember that."]

"It is often sung. Different people sometimes make different song»| for it, but the words mostly stay the same. Some people can sing the whole story, with all the legends."

"Do you know any more?"

"A little. I've heard it all, and generally know the story, but the verses are long, a lot to remember. The first part is about Doni wb% lonely and giving birth to the sun, Ball, 'the Mother's great joy, bright shining boy,' then they tell how She loses him and becomes lonely again. The moon is Her lover, Lumi, but She created him,t00, That story is more of a woman's legend; it's about moon times, an"j becoming a woman. There are other legends about Her giving ^lrtn | all the spirit animals, and to the spirit woman and man, to all ofE3"" | Children." ^|

Wolf barked then, an attention-getting puppy bark that he i° j did accomplish his aim, encouraging him to keep it beyond the P"'17! stage. They both looked in his direction and then saw the cause o

ow on the sparsely wooded, grassy floodplain of the
Isinall herd of aurochs were straggling by. The wild cattle
ch massive horns and shaggy coats, mostly of a solid
> deep it was almost black. But among the herd were a
ds that sported large white spots, primarily around the
larters, mild genetic aberrations that showed up occa-
ilarly among aurochs.

i same moment, Ayla and Jondalar looked at each other,
r a knowing nod, then called their horses. Quickly re-
;k baskets, which they took inside the dwelling, and
iar-throwers and spears, they mounted and headed to-
As they neared the grazing herd, Jondalar stopped to
don and decide upon the best approach. Ayla halted as
f his lead. She knew carnivorous animals, particularly
;s, although animals as large as lynx and the massively
hyena had been among her prey, and a lion had once
, and now a wolf, but she was not as familiar with the
owsers that were normally hunted for food. Though she
r own ways to hunt them when she lived alone, Jondalar
>hunting them and had much more experience.

ause she had been in a mood to communicate with her
; world of the spirits, Ayla was in a strange state of mind
i the herd. It seemed almost too coincidental that, just
ikad decided that the Mother would not object if they stayed
I'to replenish their losses and hunt for an animal with a
Ie and plenty of meat, suddenly a herd of aurochs should
(ria wondered if it was a sign, from the Mother or, maybe,
Mem, that they had been guided there.

lot so unusual, however. All through the year, especially
I ivarmer seasons, various animals, in herds or singly, mi-
BUgh the gallery forests and lush grasslands of large river
t.:wy particular site along a major river, it was usual to see
s <rf animal wander along at least every few days, and in
terns whole processions passed by daily. This time it hap-
Kt a herd of wild cattle, exactly the right kind of animal for
(, though several other species would also have served.
> you see that big cow over there?" Jondalar asked. "The
Be white on its face and across the left shoulder?"
he said.

We should try for her," Jondalar said. "She's full grown, but
>> of her horns, she doesn't look too old, and she's off by

^a chill of recognition. Now she was convinced it was a sign.

Jondalar had chosen the unusual animal! The one with the white
Whenever she had been faced with difficult choices in her life'
after much thought had finally reasoned, or rationalized, her }vav '^w^
decision, her totem had confirmed that it was the correct one by shn ll
ing her a sign, an unusual object of some sort. When she was a iriri l
Creb had explained such signs to her and told her to keep themf
good luck. Most of the small objects that she carried in the decoratwl
pouch around her neck were signs from her totem. The sudden an.
pearance of the aurochs herd, after they had made their decision to
stay, and Jondalar's decision to hunt the unusual one, seemed straneelv
akin to signs from a totem.

Though their decision to stay at this Camp had not been an agonic
ingly personal one, it was an important one that had required serious
thought. This was the permanent winter home of a group of people
who had invoked the power of the Mother to guard it in their absence.
While the needs of survival did allow a passing stranger to use it in case
of necessity, it had to be with legitimate reason. One did not incur the
possible wrath of the Mother lightly.

The earth was richly populated with living creatures. In their travels
they had seen uncounted numbers of a great variety of animals, but
few people. In a world so empty of human life, there was comfort in
the thought that an invisible realm of spirits was aware of their existence,
cared about their actions, and perhaps directed their steps. Even
a stem or inimical spirit who cared enough to demand certain actions
of appeasement was better than the heartless disregard of a harsh and
indifferent world, in which their lives were entirely in their own
hands, with no one else to turn to in time of need, not even in their
thoughts.

Ayla had come to the conclusion that if their hunt was successful, it would mean that it was all
right for them to use the Camp, but if they
failed, they would have to go. They had been shown the sign, the
unusual animal, and to gain good luck they must keep a part of it. u
they could not, if their hunt was unsuccessful, it would mean bad luck,
a sign that the Mother did not want them to stay, and that they should
leave immediately. The young woman wondered what the outcome
would be.

u?

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y.'-
9

I studied the disposition of the aurochs herd along the fettle were spread out between the bottom of the slope and the water among various small pastures of rich green grass, interspersed with brush and trees. The spotted cow was tall lean, with a dense stand of birch and alder brush at one edge her from several other members of the herd. The brush on the base of the slope, giving way to clumps of sedge and reeds on wet low ground at the other end, which led to the inlet choked with tall phragmite reeds and cattails. Ayla pointed toward the marsh. "If you ride along those reeds and cattails, and I come up on her through the alder brush, we'll have her between us and can ride

over the situation and nodded agreement. Then she said, "I want to tie down my spear holder before we start," she picked up the long, tube-shaped rawhide container to the straps of the riding blanket of soft deerskin. Inside the stiff leather were several well-made, graceful spears with slender round shafts ground and polished to a fine sharpness and split at the tip. They were attached to the long wooden shafts. Each spear had a feather at the back end with two straight feathers and indented in the butt.

As Ayla was tying down her holder, Jondalar reached for a spear holder on his back, attached by a strap that went over his shoulder. He had always worn his spear holder when he'd hunted. He was used to it, though when he'd traveled by walking he had worn a backframe, spears were kept in a rack on the side of it. He placed the spear on his spear-holder and held it in readiness.

Jondalar had invented the spear-thrower during the summer he lived in the valley. It was a unique and startling innovation, an invention of sheer genius that had risen out of his natural tech-

nical aptitude and an intuitive sense of physical principles tha»
 not be defined and codified for hundreds of centuries. Though ri^
 was ingenious, the spear-thrower itself was deceptively simple
 Shaped from a single piece of wood, it was about a foot and a k.
 length and an inch and a half wide, narrowing near the front
 was held horizontally and had a groove down the center wh
 spear rested. A simple hook carved into the back of the thrower fi»
 the notch in the butt of the spear, acting as a backstop and hein
 hold the spear in place while it was being thrown, which contrih
 to the accuracy of the hunting weapon. Near the front of TonA
 spear-thrower two soft buckskin loops were attached on either siA
 To use it, the spear was laid on the spear-thrower with its bui
 against the backstop hook. The first and second fingers were
 through the leather loops at the front of the spear-thrower }»
 reached a place somewhat back from the center of the much lo
 spear, at a good balance point, and loosely held the spear in place.
 a more important function came into play when the spear was thn
 Holding the front of the thrower securely as the spear was cast ca
 the back end to raise up, which, like an extension of the arm, ai
 length. The greater length increased leverage and momentum, w
 in turn increased the power and distance of the flight of the spear.
 Hurling a spear with a spear-thrower was similar to throwing i
 hand; the difference was in the results. With it, the long shaft wid
 sharp point could be propelled more than twice as far as a spear thi
 by hand, with many times the force.

Jondalar's invention utilized mechanical advantage to transmit
 amplify the force of muscle power, but it wasn't the first impleme
 use those principles. His people had a tradition of creative invd
 and had utilized similar ideas in other ways. For example, a sharp]
 of flint held in the hand was an effective cutting tool, but attach
 handle to it gave the user an extraordinary increase in force and
 trol. The seemingly simple idea of putting handles on things--kn
 axes, adzes, and other carving, cutting, and drilling tools, a longei
 on shovels and rakes, and even a form of detachable handle to thr
 spear--multiplied their effectiveness many times. It was not)i
 simple idea, it was an important invention that made work easier
 survival more probable.

Though the ones who had come before them had slowly deve
 and improved various implements and tools, the people like Jo"
 and Ayla were the first to imagine and innovate to such an exti^
 degree. Their brains could make abstractions easily. They were
 ble of conceiving of an idea and planning how to implement it.

mple objects that utilized advanced principles that were understood, they drew conclusions and applied them in instances. They did more than invent usable tools, they nee. And from the same wellspring of creativity, utilizing wer to abstract, they were the first people to see the world in symbolic form, to extract its essence and reproduce it; edart.

a finished tying down her holder, she remounted. Then, mdalar had a spear in readiness, she also placed a spear on rower and, holding them easily but carefully, started in l Jondalar had indicated. The wild cattle were moving the river, grazing as they went, and the cow they had was already in a different location, and not so isolated. A another cow were now close by. Ayla followed the river, nney with knees, thighs, and body movements. As she their intended prey, she saw the tall man on his horse een lea approaching through the opening in the brush. rochs were between them.

used his arm, which held the spear, hoping Ayla would cant it as a signal to wait. Perhaps he should have gone itegy in greater depth before they separated, but it was the tactics of a hunt too precisely. So much depended lation they found, and the actions of the prey. The two limals that were now grazing near the white-spotted cow er complication, but there was no need to hurry. The not seem alarmed by their presence, and he wanted to lan before they rushed in.

the cows lifted their heads, and their contented indiffer-anxious concern. Jondalar looked beyond the animals and f annoyance that approached real anger. Wolf had arrived, aoving toward the cattle with his tongue lolling out, man-both menacing and playful at the same time. Ayla hadn't yet, and Jondalar had to stifle an urge to shout to her and ill him off. But a shout would only startle the cows and them off at a run. Instead, when a wave of his arm caught ointed at the wolf with his spear.

ed Wolf then, but she wasn't sure from Jondalar's motions ted, and she tried to signal back to him in Clan gestures, o explain. Though he did have a basic understanding of of the Clan, Jondalar wasn't thinking of gestures as lan- W and didn't recognize her signs. He was concentrating

Ivage a deteriorating situation. The cows had begun low-

ing, and the calf, sensing fear from them, began bawling. Th ^
looked ready to break away. What had started out to be almost n'2
conditions for an easy kill was rapidly becoming a losing effort.
Before things got worse, Jondalar urged Racer forward, msi a .*_
solid-colored cow bolted, running away from the oncoming horse as
man, toward the trees and brush. The bawling calf followed her A^5
waited only long enough to be sure which animal Jondalar was in'
t after, then she, too, galloped after the spotted one. They were on?
;| verging on the aurochs that was still standing in the pasture, watdiin.
^ them and lowing nervously, when the animal suddenly broke into^
^ run, heading toward the marsh. They raced after it, but as they clo»«l
in, the cow suddenly dodged and doubled back, dashing between both
t| horses toward the trees at the opposite end of the meadow.
;;; Ayla shifted her weight, and Whinney quickly changed direction^
it; The mare was accustomed to quick changes. Ayla had hunted from.
^ horseback before, though usually it was for smaller animals that wesc
"? downed with her sling. Jondalar had more trouble. A guiding reak
^ wasn't as quick a command as a shift in body weight, and the man ami
his young stallion had far less experience hunting together, but aftw
|| & some initial hesitation they were soon pounding after the white-spotted!
g:t;i aurochs as well.
&^! The cow was heading at a dead run for the grove of trees and thick
|) ji brush ahead. If she made it to cover, it would be difficult to follow her
through it, and there was a good chance that she could get away. Ayte
on Whinney and, behind them, Jondalar riding Racer were gaining oh
the aurochs, but all grazing animals depended on speed to escape predators,
and wild cattle could be nearly as fleet as horses when pressed.
Jondalar urged Racer on, and the horse responded with an all-out
burst of speed. Trying to steady his spear so he could make an attempt
to get the fleeing animal, Jondalar pulled up alongside Ayla, then
surged ahead, but at a subtle signal from the woman, the mare kept
pace. Ayla held her spear ready to hurl as well, but even at a gallop
she rode with an easy, effortless grace that was the result of practice,
and her initial training of the horse that had been unintentional, bnc
felt that many of her signals to the horse were more an extension oi
thought than an act of guidance. She had only to think of how ano
where she wanted the mare to go, and Whinney complied. They 'w>
such an intimate understanding of each other, she hardly realized v^
the subtle movements of her body that accompanied the thought
given a signal to the sensitive and intelligent animal. .^
As Ayla was taking aim with her spear, suddenly Wolf w^ ra"
alongside the fleeing cow. The aurochs was distracted by the lo

i^a

F^

Her and it veered to the side, slowing its stride. Wolf
jfauee aurochs, and the great spotted cow turned to fend
kmed predator with large sharp horns. The wolf fell back,
wain and, trying to find any vulnerable place, clamped
^soft exposed nose with sharp teeth and strong jaws. The
Rowed, raised her head, lifting Wolf off the ground, and
wing to rid herself of the cause of her pain. Dangling like
(, the dazed young canine held on.
id been quick to see the change of pace, and he was
ake advantage of it. He raced toward them at a gallop and
ear with great force from close quarters. The sharp bone
j-the heaving sides, sliding in deeply between ribs to vital
Ayla was just behind him and her spear found its mark a
r entering at an angle just behind the rib cage on the
penetrating deep. Wolf hung on to the cow's nose until
to the ground. With the weight of the large wolf pulling
e fell heavily on her side, breaking Jondalar's spear.

as a help," Ayla said. "He did stop the cow before she
trees." The man and woman strained to roll the huge
to expose its underside, stepping over the thick blood that
elow the deep cutjondalar had made in its throat.
n't started chasing her when he did, that cow probably
'e started running until we were almost on top-of her. It
een an easy kill," Jondalar said. He picked up the shaft of pear, then threw it down again,
thinking he might have
save it if Wolf hadn't pulled the cow over on it. It took a
) make a good spear.
be sure of that. That cow was quick to dodge us, and a
:oo."

was weren't bothered by us at all, until Wolf came. I tried
call him away, but I didn't want to shout and drive them

now what you wanted. Why didn't you tell me in Clan
asking you, but you weren't paying attention," Ayla said.
? Jondalar thought. It hadn't occurred to him that she was
tnguage. That would be a good way to signal. Then he
'd. "I doubt if it would have done any good," he said. "He
aldn't have stopped even if you had tried to call him."
>t, but I think Wolf could learn to be a help. He already
>h small game. Baby learned to hunt with me. He was a
? partner. If a cave lion can learn to hunt with people,

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Wolf could, too," Ayla said, feeling defensive about him. they had killed the aurochs, and Wolf did help. Jondalar thought Ayla's judgment of the skills a wolf was c learning was unrealistic, but there was no point in arguing She treated the animal like a child, as it was, and it would o her defend him more.

"Well, we'd better gut this cow before it starts to swell. An have to skin it out here and divide it into pieces so we can pack; the Camp," Jondalar said, and then another problem occurred i "But what are we going to do about that wolf?"

"What about Wolf?" Ayla asked.

"If we cut that aurochs into pieces and carry part of it up Camp, he'll be able to eat the meat left here," the man said, hi; tion rising, "and when we come back here to get more, he'll be get to the meat we brought up to the Camp. One of us would] stay here to watch it, and the other will have to stay there, h how do we bring any more back up there? We're going to have i up a tent here to dry the meat instead of using the lodge at the l just because of Wolf!" He was exasperated with the problems l ceived the wolf to be causing and was not thinking clearly. But he made Ayla angry. Maybe Wolf would go after the i she wasn't there, but he wouldn't touch it as long as she was wit She would just make sure Wolf stayed with her. He wasn't that mu of a problem. Why was Jondalar picking on him so much? She i to answer him, then changed her mind and whistled for Wh With a smooth bound, she mounted, then turned back to Jor "Don't worry about it. I'll get that cow up to the Camp," she • she rode away, calling Wolf to her. She rode hard back to the earthlodge, jumped down and h inside, and came out with a stone axe with a short handle, one Jo had made for her. Then she mounted again and urged Whinney t the birch woods.

Jondalar watched her ride up and saw her coming back down •• into the woods, wondering what she was planning. He had start belly cut to remove the intestines and stomach of the cow, but l having mixed feelings as he worked. He did think he was just his concerns about the young wolf, but he was sorry he had l them up to Ayla. He knew how she felt about the animal. Hl complaints were not going to change anything, and he had to adi training had accomplished much more than he would have t possible.

When he heard her chopping wood, he suddenly realized w

»and he headed for the woods, too. He saw Ayla hacking
tell straight birch tree from the center of the grove of
Itrees venting her anger in the process.
& bad as Jondalar says, she was thinking. Maybe he did
iff that aurochs, but then he did help. She paused for a
ang and frowned. What if they hadn't made a kill,
lhave meant they weren't welcome? That the spirit of the
It want them to stay at the Camp? If Wolf had spoiled
t she wouldn't be thinking of how to move that cow, they
lying. But if they were meant to stay, he couldn't have
Ihunting, could he? She started chopping again. It was
iplicated. They had killed the spotted cow, even with
nee--and his help--so it was all right to use the lodge.
l been guided to this place, after all, she thought.
idalar appeared. He tried to take the axe from her.
a look for another tree and let me finish this one," he

I"?

jaot as angry, Ayla resisted his assistance. "I told you I'd
teup to the Camp. I can do it without your help."

btou can, the same way you brought me to your cave in the
Keith both of us, you'll have your new poles much faster,"
id added, "And yes, I have to admit, you are right. Wolf
»r'

tod in midstroke and looked up at him. His brow revealed
llboncem, but his expressive blue eyes showed mixed feel- ^h she didn't understand his misgivings
about Wolf, the

»ve he felt for her showed in his eyes, too. She felt drawn to
^to the sheer male magnetism of his closeness, to the fasci-
he didn't fully realize he had or know the strength of, and
(stance evaporate.

k're right, too," she said, feeling a little contrite. "He did
ytim before we were ready, and he might have spoiled the

S» frown vanished in a relieved smile. "So we're both right,"

»e smiled back, and the next moment they were in each
S, and his mouth found hers. They clung together, relieved
TRument was over, wanting to cancel out the distance that
Ctween them with physical closeness.

»y stopped expressing their fervent relief, but still stood
"ns around each other, Ayla said, "I do think Wolf could
P us hunt. We just have to teach him."

"low. Maybe. But since he's going to be traveling with us,

I think you should teach him as much as he'll learn. If nothing maybe you can train him not to interfere when we're hunting," he <--i^ "You should help, too, so he'll mind both of us." f "I doubt that he'll pay attention to me," he said. Then seeing A I she was ready to disagree, he added, "But if you want, I'll try "u took the stone axe from her and decided to bring up another idea A. had raised. "You said something about using Clan signs when we don' want to shout. That could be useful." As Ayla went to look for another tree of the right shape and size, she was smiling.

Jondalar examined the tree she had been working on to see how much more chopping it would need. It was difficult to cut down a hard tree with a stone axe. The brittle flint of the axe head was made rather thick so that it would not break too easily from the force of the blow and a strike did not cut in deeply, but instead chipped a little away. The tree looked more as if it had been gnawed than cut. Ayla listened to the rhythmic sound of stone hitting wood as she carefully examined the trees in the grove. When she found one that was suitable, she notched the bark then looked for a third.

When the necessary trees were cut down, they dragged them out to the clearing and, using knives and the axe, stripped the branches, then lined them up on the ground. Ayla judged the size and marked them, and they cut them all to an equal length. While Jondalar removed the internal organs from the aurochs, she walked back to the lodge for ropes and a device she had made of leather straps and thongs knotted and braided together. She brought along one of the torn floor mats as well when she returned, then signaled for Whinney and adjusted the special harness on her.

Using two of the long poles--the third was only necessary for the tripod she used to keep food out of the reach of prowling scavengers- she attached the narrower ends to the harness she had put on the horse, crossing them over above the withers. The heavier ends dragged on the ground, one on either side of the mare. With ropes, they fastened the grass mat across the more widely spread poles of the travois, near the ground, and attached extra ropes to tie down and hold the aurochs.

Looking at the size of the huge cow, Ayla began to wonder if perhaps it would be too much even for the strong steppe horse. The man and woman both strained to get the aurochs on the travois. The mat offered only minimal support, but by tying the animal directly to the poles, did not drag on the ground. After their efforts, Ayla was even more concerned that the load would be too much for Whinney, so she almost changed her mind. Jondalar had already removed the stoina

niher organs; perhaps they should skin it out right there
rmore manageable pieces. She didn't feel the need to
she could bring it to the Camp alone any more, but
ady loaded on the travois, she decided to have Whinney

(surprised when the horse began to pull the heavy load
l terrain, Jondalar was even more so. The aurochs was
avier than Whinney, and it was a strain, but with only
logins, and most of the weight borne by the poles resting
the load was manageable. The slope was more difficult,
|y horse of the steppes accomplished even that effort. On
round of any natural surface, the travois was by far the
t conveyance to transport loads.

I was Ayla's invention, the result of need, opportunity,
rive leap. Living alone with no one to help her, she often
fwith the need to move things that were too heavy for her
Irag alone--such as a whole, full-grown animal--and usu-
Teak them down into smaller pieces, and then had to think
sy to protect what was left behind from scavengers. Her
XMTunity was the mare she had raised, and the chance to
| strength of a horse to help her. But her special advantage
H that could recognize a possibility and devise the means.
ley reached the earthlodge, Ayla and Jondalar untied the
ml after words and hugs of thanks and praise, they led the
& down to get the animal's innards. They, too, were useful.
|y reached the clearing, Jondalar picked up his broken spear.
| of the shaft had snapped off; the point was still embedded
|eass, but the long straight back section was still whole. Per- ^ld find a use for it, he thought,
taking it with him.

t the Camp they removed Whinney's harness. Wolf was nos- id the inner organs; intestines were a
favorite of his. Ayla
a moment. If she'd had need, she could have used them for
ttrposes, from fat storage to waterproofing, but it wasn't pos- Ae much more than they already had
with them.

id it seem, she thought, that just because they had horses and
; to take more with them, they needed more? She recalled that
i left the Clan and was traveling on foot, she carried every- I needed in a pack basket on her
back. It was true that their
much more comfortable than the low hide shelter she had
^ and they did have changes of clothes, and winter ones that
? t using, and more food and utensils, and . . . she'd never
> carry everything in a pack basket now, she realized.

She threw the useful, though presently unnecessary, intest' Wolf, and she and Jondalar turned to butchering the wild beef making several strategic cuts, together they began to pull off the k-? a process that was more efficient than skinning it with a knife T?-? only used a sharp implement to sever a few points of attachment w51 a little effort, the membrane between the skin and the muscle seoaisuS a lll.LX^ mjt>., Lll^, m^ni.ui ait l^/t.w^^AA ^tt^, jjvjaa aixu Lll^. lUUSCie Senarrafc^A cleanly, and they ended up with only the two holes of the spear no marring a perfect hide. They rolled it up to keep it from drviup inn quickly, and they put the head aside. The tongue and brains were in* and tender, and they planned to eat those delicacies that night. Tir skull with its large horns, however, they would leave for the Camo h could have special meaning for someone, and if not, there were man» useful parts to it.

Then Ayla took the stomach and bladder to the small stream thtf supplied water for the Camp to wash them, and Jondalar went down to the river to find brush and slender trees that could be bent to make a round bowl-shaped frame for the small boat. They also searched fell deadfall and driftwood. They would need several fires to keep aniindil and insects away from their meat, as well as a fire inside overnight. |1 They worked until it was nearly dark, dividing the cow into land segments, then cutting the meat into small tongue-shaped pieces an)| hanging them to dry over makeshift racks made of brushwood, bat they still didn't finish. They brought the racks into the lodge overnight. Their tent was still damp, but they folded it and brought it in, too. They would set it up again the next day when they brought the meat out, to let the wind and the sun finish the drying. (

In the morning, after they cut up the last of the meat, Jondalar beg- to construct the boat. Using both steam and hot rocks heated in d» fire, he bent the wood for the boat frame. Ayla was very interesteB and wanted to know where he learned the process.

"My brother, Thonolan. He was a spearmaker," Jondalar explainer holding down the end of a small straight tree that he had formed in-- a curve, while she lashed it to a circular section with sinew made a J tendon from the hind legs of the aurochs.

^^
"But what does spear-making have to do with making a boat.
"Thonolan could make a spear shaft perfectly straight and true.
to learn how to take the bend out of wood, you first have to learn
to bend wood, and he could do that just as well. He was much w
at it than I am. He had a real feel for it. I suppose you could say
craft was not only making spears, but shaping wood. He could
the best snowshoes, and that means taking a straight branch o
and bending it completely around. Maybe that's why he felt so "

with the Sharamudoi. They were expert wood shapers. They
rater and steam to bend out their dugouts to the shape they

s a dugout?" Ayla asked.

oat carved out of a whole tree. The front end is shaped to a
the back end, too, and it can glide through the water so
smoothly, it's like cutting with a sharp knife. They're beau-
. This one we're making is clumsy by comparison, but there
' trees around here. You'll see dugouts when we reach the
oi."

much longer before we get there?"

ite a long ways, yet. Beyond those mountains," he said,
;st, toward the high peaks indistinct in the summer haze.
he said, feeling disappointed. "I was hoping it wouldn't be
would be nice to see some people. I wish someone had been
s Camp. Maybe they'll come back before we leave." Jondalar
yistfulness in her tone.

U lonely for people?" he asked. "You spent such a long time
kit valley, I thought you'd be used to it."

that's why. I spent enough time being alone. I don't mind
lile, sometimes I like it, but we haven't seen any people for
. I just thought it would be fun to talk to someone," she
looked at him. "I'm so happy you are with me, Jondalar. It
so lonely without you."

ippy, too, Ayla. Happy I didn't have to make this trip alone,
an I can say that you came with me. I'm looking forward to
pie, too. When we reach the Great Mother River, we should
;. We've been traveling across country. People tend to live
water, rivers or lakes, not out in the open."

dded, then held the end of another slender sapling, which
heating over hot rocks and steam, while Jondalar carefully
a a circle, then helped him lash it to the others. Judging from
it, she began to see that it would take the entire hide of the
> cover it. There would be no more than a few scraps left
enough to make a new rawhide meat-keeper to replace the
id lost in the flash flood. They needed the boat to cross the
would just have to think of something else to use. Maybe a
uld work, she thought, tightly woven, long in shape, and
> with a lid. There were cattails and reeds and willows,
^sket-making materials around, but would a basket work?

>blem with carrying freshly killed meat was that blood con- ^p out, and no matter how tightly
woven, it would even-

tually leak through a basket. That was why thick, hard worked so well. It absorbed the blood, but slowly, and didn't 1 after a period of use, could be washed and redried. She needed thing that would do the same thing. She'd have to think about it The problem of replacing her parfleche stayed on her mind when the frame was finished, and they left it to wait for the sinp dry hard and firm, Ayla headed down to the river to collect < basket-making materials. Jondalar went with her but only as far a' birch woods. Since he was all set up for shaping wood, he decided make some new spears, to replace those that had been lost or broken Wymez had given him some good flint before he left, roughed a and preshaped so that new points could be made easily. He had m^l the bone-pointed spears before they left the Summer Meeting, to how they were done. They were typical of the kind his people but he had learned how to make the flint-tipped Mamutoi spe well, and because he was a skilled flint knapper, they were fas) him to make than shaping and smoothing bone points. In the afternoon Ayla started to make a special meat-keeping h When she lived in the valley, she had spent many long winter easing her loneliness by making baskets and mats, among other t and she had become very quick and adept at weaving. She could; make a basket in the dark, and her new carrying container foi was finished before she went to bed. It was made extremely we had thought carefully about the shape and size, materials and tig] of weave, but she wasn't quite satisfied with it. She went out in the darkening twilight to change her absorbent and wash the piece she was wearing in the small stream. She pi near the fire to dry, but out of Jondalar's sight. Then, without c looking at him, she lay down in their sleeping furs beside him. We of the Clan were taught to avoid men as much as possible when 1 bled, and never to look at them directly. It made Clan men very vious to be around women during that time. It had surprised her Jondalar had no qualms about it, but she still felt uncomfortable, she took pains to be discreet in caring for herself. Jondalar had always been considerate of her during her moon til sensing her disquiet, but once she was in bed, he leaned over to her. Though she kept her eyes closed, she responded with wan and when he rolled over on his back again, and they were lying by side watching the play of firelight on the walls and ceilings ° comfortable structure, they talked, though she was careful not to at him. "I'd like to coat that hide after it's mounted on the frame," ne *

F'

the hooves and scraps of hide and some bones together
a- a long time, it will make a very thick and sticky kind of
Iries hard. Do we have something that I can use to cook

we can think of something. Does it have to cook long?"
ies need to cook down, to thicken."

might be best to cook it directly over the fire, like a soup
t piece of hide. We'll have to watch it, and keep adding
; long as it stays wet, it won't bum . . . wait. What about
of that aurochs? I've been keeping water in it, so it
out, and to have it handy for cooking and washing, but
e a good cooking bag," Ayla said.

link so," Jondalar said. "We don't want to keep adding
ant it to get thick."

ippose a good watertight basket and hot stones might be
ake one in the morning," Ayla said, but as she lay quietly,
tuldn't let her sleep. She kept thinking that there was a
»boil down the mixture Jondalar wanted to make. She just
ite think of it. She was nearly asleep when it came to her.
ow I remember."

was dozing off but was jerked awake. "Huh! What's

> wrong. I just remembered how Nezzie rendered out fat,
t: would be the best way to cook your thick stuff. You dig
Ie in the ground, in the shape of a bowl, and line it with a
there should be a big enough piece left from the aurochs
ik up some bones and scatter them over the bottom, then
tter and the hooves and whatever else you want. You can
long as we keep heating stones, and the little pieces of
;p the hot stones from actually touching the leather, so it
tthrough."

^la. That's what we'll do," Jondalar said, still half-asleep.
sr and was soon snoring.

was still something else on Ayla's mind that kept her
lad planned to leave the aurochs's stomach for the people
to use as a waterbag when they left, but it needed to be
ice it dried out, it got stiff, and would not go back to its
ble, nearly waterproof condition. Even if she filled it with
dd eventually seep out and evaporate away, and she didn't
he people would return.

it came to her. She almost called out again, but muffled it
^s sleeping, and she didn't want to wake him. She would

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let the stomach dry out and use it to line her new meat-keeper a it while it was still wet to fit exactly. As she fell asleep in the da lodge, Ayla felt pleased that she had thought of a way to reola*6' very necessary item that had been lost. '

During the next few days, while the meat dried, they were busy. They finished the bowl boat and coated it with the glue If made by boiling down the hooves, bone, and hide scraps. While drying, Ayla made baskets, for the meat they were leaving as a the people of the Camp, for cooking to replace those she had lo. for gathering, some of which she planned to leave behind. She gat vegetable produce and medicinal herbs daily, drying some to tak< them.

Jondalar accompanied her one day to look for something to into paddles for the boat. Shortly after they started out, he was pi to find the skull of a giant deer that had died before the large pa antlers were shed, giving him two of equal size. Though it was i he stayed out with Ayla for the rest of the morning. He was Ie to identify certain foods himself, and in the process he was beg to understand how much Ayla really knew. Her knowledge of and her memory for their uses were incredible. When they retui the Camp, Jondalar trimmed the tines off the broad antlers a tached them to sturdy, rather short poles, making entirely servic paddles.

The next day he decided to use the wood-shaping apparatus h set up to bend the wood for the boat frame, to straighten shaf new spears. Shaping and smoothing them took most of the next' of days, even with the special tools he had with him, carried in of leather tied with thongs. But while he was working, every ^ passed by the side of the earthlodge where he had thrown it, j noticed the truncated spear shaft he had brought up from thi and felt a flush of annoyance. It was a shame that there wasnt to salvage that straight shaft, short of making a cropped and ' anced spear out of it. Any of the spears he was working so t make could break just as easily.

When he was satisfied that the spears would fly true, he u. another tool, a narrow flint blade with a chisellike tip hafted antler-tine handle, to hollow out a deep notch in the thicker bu of the shafts. Then, from the prepared flint nodules he had witti Jondalar knapped new blades and attached them to the SP6r. with the thick glue he had made as a coating for the boat, a sinew. The tough tendon shrank as it dried, making a strong)

by affixing pairs of long feathers, found near the
"numerous white-tailed eagles, falcons, and black kites
e region feeding on the abundance of susliks and other

n

«t up a target, using a thick, grass-stuffed bed pad that
I torn up and made worthless. Patched with scraps from
; absorbed the force of a throw without damage to the
aidalar and Ayla practiced a little every day. Ay la did it
p accuracy, but Jondalar was experimenting with differ-
J'shaft and sizes of point to see which would work best
jt-thrower.

Sew spears were finished and dried, he and Ayla took
target area to try them out with the spear-thrower and
sones each wanted. Though they were both very adept
fog weapon, some of their practice casts inevitably went
mark and missed the cushioned target, usually landing ^ t the ground. But when Jondalar cast a
newly completed

Ipowerrul throw, and not only missed the target, but hit a
loth bone that was used as an outdoor seat, he flinched. He
bit as it bent and bounced back. The wooden shaft had
^a weak spot about a foot back from the point.
walked over to examine it, he noticed that the brittle flint
I shattered along one edge and spalled off a large chip,
Kided point that was not worth salvaging. He was furious
Ifor wasting a spear that had taken so much time and effort
(are it could be used for anything worthwhile. In a sudden
|Er, he cracked the bent spear across his knee and broke it
tthrew it down.

looked up, he noticed Ayla watching him, and he turned
fed with embarrassment over his outburst, then stooped
(fcked up the broken pieces, wishing he could dispose of
Msively. When he looked up again, Ayla was getting ready
her spear as though she hadn't seen anything. He walked
Wthlodge and dropped the broken spear near the shaft that
'during the hunt, then stared down at the pieces, feeling
Its ridiculous to get so angry over breaking a spear.
I lot of work to make one, he thought, looking at the long
w end broken off, and the section of the other spear with
Hint point still attached that happened to be lying just in
*° bad those pieces can't be put together to make a whole

Beu at them, he began to wonder if maybe he could, and he

picked up both pieces again, examining the broken ends carefully. He fitted them together and, for a while, the splintered ends stayed attached, then fell apart again. Looking over the entire long shaft, he noted the hollowed-out indentation he had carved at the butt end of the pointed hook of the spear-thrower, then turned it around to fit again at the broken end.

If I carved a deeper hold at this end, he thought, and shaved the end of this piece with the broken flint to a tapered point, and put them together, would they stay? Full of excitement, Jondalar went into the lodge and got out his roll of leather and took it outside. He sat on the ground and unrolled it, displaying the variety of carefully made flint tools, and picked out the chisel tool. Setting it down nearby, he examined the broken shaft and reached for his flint knife from its sheath on his belt and began to cut away the splinters and make a smooth end.

Ayla had stopped practicing with her spear-thrower and put it and her spears in the holder that she had adapted to wear across her back over one shoulder, the way Jondalar did. She was walking back toward the lodge carrying some plants she had dug up when he came striding toward her with a big smile on his face.

"Look, Ayla!" he said, holding up the spear. The piece with the broken point still attached was fitted into the top end of the long shaft. "I fixed it. Now I'm going to see if it works!"

She followed him back to the practice target and watched him fit the spear on the thrower, pull back and take aim, then hurl the spear with great force. The long missile hit the target, then bounced back. But when Jondalar went to check, he found that the broken point was attached to the small tapered shaft was embedded firmly in the tail. With the impact, the long shaft had come loose and bounced back, when he went to inspect it, he found it was undamaged. The two spears had worked.

"Ayla! Do you realize what this means?" Jondalar was nearly shouting with excitement.

"I'm not sure," she said.

"See, the point found its mark, then separated from the shaft without breaking. That means, all I have to make next time is a tapered point and attach it to a short piece like this. I don't have to make a new long shaft. I can make two points like this, several, in a roll, and will only need a few long shafts. We can carry a lot more spears with points than long full spears, and if we lose one, it won't be hard to replace. Here, you try it," he said, working the tapered point from the target.

over. "I'm not very good at making a long spear shaft
my points are not as beautiful as yours," she said.
jeould make one of these, I think." She was as excited as

I-
fc

(tV before they planned to leave, they checked over their
he damage caused by the badger, placed the skin of the
way that they hoped would make it obvious that it was the
f mess, and put out their gifts. The basket of dried meat
from a mammoth bone rafter to make it difficult for any
line animal to find. Ayla displayed other baskets, and hung
ches of dried medicinal herbs and food plants as well, par-
ose that were commonly used by the Mamutoi. Jondalar
icr of the lodge an especially well made spear.

3 mounted the partly dried skull of the aurochs cow, with
ms, on a pole outside the lodge, so that scavengers could
:, either. The horns and other bony parts of the skull were
it was a way of explaining what kind of meat was in the

ng wolf and the horses seemed to sense an impending
If bounded around them full of excitement and energy, and
ivere restless, with Racer living up to his name, breaking
fast-breaking dashes, and Whinney staying closer to the
;hing for Ayla and nickering when she saw her.

ey went to bed, they packed everything except their sleep- 1 breakfast essentials, including the
dry tent, though it was

Id and fit into the pack basket. The hides had been smoked
Joins were made into a tent, so that even after a thorough
y would remain reasonably pliable, but the portable shelter
lewhat stiff. It would become more flexible again with use.
last night in the comfort of the lodge, Ayla watched the
?ht of the dying fire playing across the walls of the substan-
feeling her emotions flicker across her mind with a similar
atness and shadow. She was eager to be on their way again,
» be leaving a place that, in the short time they had been
ome to feel like home--except there were no people. In the
ys, she had caught herself looking up at the crest of the
? to see the people who lived at the Camp returning before
leave.

the still wished they would arrive unexpectedly, she had
'ping, and she was looking forward to reaching the Great
sr and perhaps meeting someone along its route. She loved

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Jondalar, but she was lonely for people, for women and children :
elders, for laughing and talking, and sharing with others of her 1'?
But she didn't want to think much beyond the next day, or then
Camp of people. She didn't want to think about Jondalar's people
how long they still had to travel before they reached his home and' k.
didn't want to think about how they were going to cross that large fa»
river with only a small round boat.

Jondalar lay awake as well, worried about their Journey and eager to
be moving again, though he did think their stay had been very worth.
while. Their tent was dry, they had replenished their meat and re.
placed necessary equipment that had been lost or damaged, and he •wu
excited about the development of the two-part spear. He was glad he
had the bowl boat, but even with it, he was worried about crossing the
river. It was a large waterway, wide and swift. They were probably
not very far from the sea, and it was not likely to get smaller. Anything
could happen. He would be glad when they reached the other side.

»yla woke often during the night, and her eyes were open as
xoming glow crept in through the smoke hole and sent its
unating fingers into the tenebrious crannies to disperse the
bring the hidden shapes out of the concealing shadows. By
fie obscuring night had retreated to a dim half-light, she was
ye and could not go back to sleep.
quietly away from Jondalar's warmth, she slipped outside.
; chill enveloped her bare skin and, with its cooling hint of
re layers of ice to the north, clothed her with gooseflesh.
at across the misty river valley, she saw the vague formations
unlighted land on the opposite side, silhouetted against the
ty. She wished they were already over there.
warm fur brushed against her leg. Absently she patted the
scratched the ruff of the wolf who had appeared beside her.
I the air and, finding something interesting, raced off down
She looked for the horses and made out the yellowish coat
e grazing in one of the grassy leas near the water. The dark
se was not visible, but she was sure he was nearby.
ig, she walked through the damp grass toward the small
sensed the rising of the sun in the east. She watched the
cy shade from glowing gray to pastel blue, with a scattering
>uds, reflecting the glory of the morning sun hidden behind
f the slope.
is tempted to walk up and see the rising sun, but she was
y a glint of dazzling brilliance from the other direction.
le gully-scarred slopes across the river were still wrapped in
gray gloom, the mountains to the west, bathed in the clear
e new day's sun, stood out in vivid relief, etched with such
lail that it seemed she could reach out and touch them.
the low southern range, a glittering tiara sparkled from the
"e watched the slowly changing patterns with wonder, held
gnificence of the back side of the sunrise.
^nie she reached the little stream of clear water that was

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racing and skipping down the slope, the morning chill had burned. She put down the waterbag she had taken from the lodge and cherished her wool, was glad to see that her moon time seemed to be over < unfastened her straps, took off her amulet, and stepped into a shallow pool to wash. When she was through, she filled the waterbag and splashing cascade that ran into the slight depression of the pool & got out and pushed the water off with one hand and then the other. Putting her amulet back on and picking up the washed wool and her straps, she hurried back.

Jondalar was knotting a tie around their rolled-up sleeping furs when she stepped down into the semisubterranean earthlodge. He looked and smiled. Noticing that she wasn't wearing her leather straps, his smile took on a decidedly suggestive look.

"Maybe I shouldn't have been so quick to roll up the furs this morning," he said.

She flushed when she realized he was aware that she was past her moon time. Then she looked directly into his eyes, which were full of teasing laughter, love, and burgeoning desire, and smiled back. "You can always unroll them again."

"There go my plans for an early start," he said, pulling an end of the thong that released the knot on the sleeping roll. He unrolled it and stood up as she walked to him.

After their morning meal, it took little time for them to finish packing. Gathering all their possessions and the boat, along with their animal traveling companions, they moved down to the river. But deciding the best way to get across was another matter. They stared at the expanse of water rushing past, so wide that details of the bank on the other side were difficult to see. With its fast current sliding on and around itself in subdued ripples and eddies, making small choppy waves, the sound of the deep river was almost more revealing than its look. It spoke its power in a muted, gurgling roar.

While he was making the circular craft, Jondalar had thought about the river and how to use the boat to get across. He had never made a bowl boat before, and he had only ridden in one a few times. He had become fairly adept at handling the sleek dugout canoes he lived with the Sharamudoi, but when he tried his hand at paddling the round bowl boats of the Mamutoi, he found them very clumsy. They were buoyant, hard to tip over, but difficult to control. The two peoples not only had different types of materials at their disposal to construct their floating craft, they used boats for different purposes. The Mamutoi were primarily hunters of the open steppes; the Sharamudoi were

vasional activity. Their boats were used primarily to get hand their possessions across waterways, whether small trib- he rivers that swept down, continent-wide, from the glaciers

|to the inland seas of the south.

gnudoi, the River People moiety of the Sharamudoi, fished Mother River--though they referred to it as hunting when t after the thirty-foot sturgeons--while the Shamudoi half amois and other animals that lived on the high cliffs and ,that overlooked the river and, near their home, confined it gorge. The Ramudoi lived on the river during the warm iking full advantage of its resources, including the large dur- that lined its banks, which were used to make their beauti- sd and maneuverable boats.

l think we should just put everything in it," Jondalar said, one of his pack baskets. Then he put it down and picked up Erne instead. "It's probably a good idea to put the heaviest he bottom, and this one has my flint and tools in it." dded. She, too, had been thinking about getting them all river with their belongings intact, and she had tried to antic- I of the potential problems, remembering her few excursions i Camp's bowl boats. "We should leave a place for each of us :e sides, so it stays balanced. I'll leave room for Wolf to be

' wondered how the wolf would behave in the fragile floating igh he refrained from saying anything. Ayla saw his frown, ler peace. "We should each have a paddle, too," he said, ie to her.

U of this, I hope we'll be able to fit," she said, putting the boat, thinking she might use it for a seat.

it was cramped, they managed to get everything into the ed boat, except the poles. "We may have to leave those here's no room for them," Jondalar said. They had just ie ones they had lost.

iled and held up some cord she had kept out. "No we won't. at. I'll just tie them to the boat with this so they won't drift ; said.

' wasn't sure that was a good idea, and he was framing an is he thought about it, but Ayla's next question distracted

re we going to do about the horses?" she said.

bout the horses? They can swim across, can't they?"

at you know how nervous they can get, especially about

something that they haven't done before. What if they get fright 1
by something in the water and decide to go back? They won't try a-
to cross the river by themselves. They won't even know we're onri?
^4-l*»----- »^J» 117^ »TA«-.1^ l-.AlTA «-/^ /t/^»-^A t^/»/-l»- ^-^A lrtA/-l 4-U.-.^, ,, ----- '<@
other side. We would have to come back and lead them across so
why

not just lead them to begin with?" Ayla explained.
She was right. The horses probably would get apprehensive anj
could just as easily go back as across, Jondalar thought. "But how a
we going to lead them when we're in the boat?" he said. This w--
becoming complicated. Trying to manage a boat could be difficult
enough without trying to manage panicked horses, besides. He wa«
feeling more and more worried about crossing this river.

"We put on their halters with lead ropes, and tie the ropes to the
boat," Ayla said.

"I don't know . . . That may not be the best way. Maybe we should
think about it some more," he said.

"What is there to think about?" she said, as she was wrapping coril
around the three poles. Then she measured out a length and fastened!
it to the boat. "You were the one who wanted to get started," she
added, while she put Whinney's halter on, attached a lead rope to it,
then fastened it to the boat on the opposite side of the poles. Ho!
the slack, she stood beside the boat, then turned to Jondalar.
ready to go."

He hesitated, then nodded decisively. "All right," he said, gettin|
Racer's halter from his pack basket and calling the horse to him. The|
young stallion lifted his head and neighed when the man first tried
slip the halter over his head, but after Jondalar talked to him
stroked his face and neck. Racer calmed down and allowed it. He
the rope to the boat, then faced Ayla. "Let's go," he said.

Ayla signaled to Wolf to get into the boat. Then, with both of
still holding the lead ropes, to maintain control of the animal^,
pushed the boat into the water and scrambled to get in.

From the beginning, there was trouble. The swift current took
of the small craft and swept it along, but the horses were not q'
ready to enter the wide stream. They reared back as the boat
trying to pull away, jerking the boat so violently that it nearly a!
over, making Wolf stumble to regain his footing and eye the situ
nervously. But the load was so heavy that the boat righted
quickly, though it rode very low in the water. The poles had stre
out in front, trying to follow the strong current. ,

The pull on the horses by the river trying to propel the boa
stream, and the anxious words of encouragement from Ayla an ^
dalar, finally convinced the balky animals to enter the water.

nit in a tentative hoof and found bottom, then Racer, and, oastant tug, they both finally jumped in. The bank fell off ad they were soon swimming. Ayla and Jondalar had no to let the current carry them along downstream until the ifcely combination of three long poles, followed by a round, |en boat carrying a woman, a man, and a very tense wolf, torses behind, stabilized. Then they let go of the lead ropes ook up a paddle and attempted to change their direction so rere moving across the current.

i the side facing the opposite shore, was not at all familiar a paddle. It took several tries, with Jondalar giving advice ras trying to row away from the shore, before she got the and managed to use it in cooperation with him to direct the i then, it was slow going, with the long poles in front and behind, eyes rolling with fear as they were involuntarily ig by the current.

d begin to make progress in crossing the river, though they ling much faster downstream. But ahead, the large swift surging down the gradual decline of the land on its way to as making a sharp curve toward the east. A back current, T a projecting sand spit of the near shore, caught the poles •acing along in front of the boat.

g shafts of birch, free-floating except for the cords that held led back around and hit the hide-covered boat with a hard r Jondalar, making him fear that it had caused a hole. It yone aboard, and gave a spin to the small round bowl boat, ed on the lead ropes of the horses. The horses whinnied in Uowing mouthfuls of water, and tried desperately to swim the relentless current pulling the boat to which they were ably pulled them along.

r efforts were not without effect. They caused the little boat l back and twist around, which yanked on the poles, making into the boat again. The turbulent current, and the jerking ng of the overloaded craft, made it bob and bounce and ship ing more weight. It was threatening to sink.

ntened wolf had been cowering with his tail between his Ayla on the folded tent, while she was frantically trying to boat with a paddle she didn't know how to use, with Jon- cing instructions she didn't know how to apply. The whin- ? panicked horses turned her attention to them and, seeing she suddenly realized she had to cut them free. Dropping to the bottom of the boat, she took her knife from the sheath

at her waist. Knowing that Racer was more excitable, she his rope first, and with only a little effort the sharp flint hi through.

His release caused more bumping and spinning, which was' much for Wolf. He leaped from the boat into the water. Avia ur. him swimming frantically, quickly cut through Whinney's ror^ jumped in after him. ''

"Ayla!" Jondalar screamed, but he was jerked around again a. suddenly released and lighter-weight boat started rotating and craA into the poles. When he looked up, Ayla was trying to tread w encouraging the wolf who was swimming toward her. Whinnev « beyond her, Racer, were heading for the far shore, and the currenti taking him even faster downstream, away from Ayla.

She glanced back and caught one last glimpse of Jondalar and i boat as it rounded the bend of the river and felt a heart-stopn moment of fear that she would never see him again. The thoa flashed through her mind that she should not have left the boat, 1 she had little time to worry about it just then. The wolf was coma her, struggling against the current. She took a few strokes toward 1 but when she reached him, he tried to put his paws on her shoul and lick her face and in his eagerness he dunked her under the w, She came up sputtering, hugged him with one arm, and looked fwi horses.]

The mare was swimming for the shore, pulling away from her. 9 took a deep breath and whistled, loud and long. The horse pricked! her ears and turned toward the sound. Ayla whistled again, andf horse altered direction and tried to swim to her as she reached < toward Whinney with strong strokes. Ayla was a good swim Going generally with the current, though at a diagonal across nevertheless took some effort to reach the wet shaggy animal. V she did, she almost cried with relief. The wolf reached them soon a but he kept on going.

Ayla rested for a moment, holding on to Whinney's neck, and < then noticed how cold the water was. She saw the rope trailing ull water, attached to the halter Whinney still wore, and it occurred to how dangerous it could be for the horse if the rope got tangled in-floating debris. The woman spent a few moments trying to un" the knot, but it was swollen tight, and her fingers were stiff w1011 She took a deep breath and started swimming again, not war put an added burden on the horse and hoping the exercise woi warm her.

When they finally gained the far shore, Ayla stumbled out

J and shivering, and fell to the ground. The wolf and little better. They both shook themselves, spraying ere then Wolf dropped down, breathing hard. Whin- at was heavy even in summer, though it would be much »r when the dense underfur grew in. She stood with her and her body quivering, her head hanging down and

g.

icr sun was high, and the day had warmed, and once Ayla stopped shivering. She stood up, looking for if they had made it across, the stallion would have, i her call for Whinney first, since Racer usually came she whistled for his dam. Then she made Jondalar's him, and she suddenly felt a stab of worry about the made it across the river in that flimsy little boat? And if ; was he? She whistled again, hoping the man would hear i but she wasn't unhappy when the dark brown stallion Sg into view, still wearing the halter, with a short length tanging from it.

ie called out. "You did make it. I knew you would."

feareeted him with a welcoming nicker and Wolf with en- 6ppy barks that worked their way into a full-throated howl.

laded with loud neighs, which Ayla was sure contained a Kef at finding his familiar friends. When he reached them, led noses with Wolf, then stood near his dam with his head Ck, drawing comfort after the frightening river crossing. |Cid them and gave him a hug, then patted and stroked him Swing his halter. He was so used to the device that it didn't fefir him, and it did not interfere with his grazing, but Ayla l| dangling rope could create problems, and she knew she lte to wear something like that all the time. She then took ifaalter off and tucked them both into the waist thong of her |faought about removing her wet clothes, but she felt the Vy, and they were drying on her.

lp've found Racer. Now it's time to find Jondalar," she said

Iwolf looked at her expectantly, and she directed her com-

|». "Wolf, let's find Jondalar!" She mounted Whinney and

lownstream.

Il'

W spins, turns, and bumps, the small, round, hide-covered ^jlondalar's assistance, was calmly following the current J^ne with the three poles trailing behind. Then, with the va and considerable effort, he began to propel the small craft

across the large river. He discovered that the three trailing polpc .3
to stabilize the floating bowl, keeping it from rotating and n> i6"
easier to control, "mnj

All the while, as he worked his way toward the land that wa «i
ping past, he was berating himself for not jumping into the river ^
Ayla. But it had happened so fast. Before he knew it, she was ru
the boat and he was being carried away on the swift stream It
pointless to jump into the river after she was out of sight. He couV
have swum back to her against the current, and they would lost*
boat and everything in it.

He tried to console himself with the knowledge that she was a stn
swimmer, but his concern caused him to increase his efforts to
across the river. When he finally reached the opposite shore, far doi
stream of their starting point, and felt the bottom grate against
rocky beach that jutted out from the inside corner of a bend
breathed a ragged sigh. Then he climbed out and dragged the hes«
loaded small boat up on the shore and sank down, giving in to
exhaustion. After a few moments, though, he stood up and star
walking back along the river in search of Ayla.

He stayed close to the water, and when he came to a small tribut
stream that was adding its measure to the river, he just waded thnw
it. But some time later, when he reached another river of more d
respectable size, he hesitated. This was not a river that could
waded, and if he attempted to swim across so close to the major wai
course, he'd be swept into it. He'd have to walk upstream beside
smaller river until he found a more suitable place to attempt a crossi

Ayla, riding on Whinney, reached the same river not long after, s
she also headed upstream for a distance. But a decision about when
cross on horseback required different considerations. She didn't
nearly as far as Jondalar did before she turned her horse into the wai
Racer and Wolf followed behind, and, with only a short swim aci
the middle, they were soon across. Ayla started down toward the la
river but, looking back, she saw Wolf heading the other way.
"Come on. Wolf. This way," she called. She whistled impatient
then signaled Whinney to continue. The canine hesitated, started
ward her, then went back again before he finally followed her. VV
she reached the large river, she turned downstream and urged the
to a gallop.

Ayla's heart beat faster when she thought she saw a round, "u
shaped object on a rocky beach ahead. "Jondalar! Jondalar.
shouted, racing toward it at full speed. She jumped down befor0

a full stop and rushed toward the boat. She looked inside
ound the beach. Everything seemed to be there, includ-
oles, everything except Jondalar.
boat, but I can't find Jondalar," she said aloud. She
n as if in response. "Why can't I find Jondalar? Where
^boat float here by itself? Didn't he make it across?" Then
JMaybe he went looking for me, she thought. But if I was
h the river, and he was going upstream, how did we miss

Bi.

j|!" she almost shouted. Wolf yipped again. Suddenly she
H hesitation after they had crossed the large tributary.
|alled.

fcfour-legged animal ran toward her and jumped up, putting
| her shoulders. She grabbed the thick fur of his neck with
Ijooked at his long muzzle and intelligent eyes, and remem-
ang, weak boy who had reminded her so much of her son.
ent Wolf to look for her once, and he had traveled across a
; to find her. She knew he could find Jondalar, if she could
m understand what she wanted.

i Jondalar!" she said. He jumped down and began sniffing
|boat, then started back the way they had come, upstream.

|
lihad been waist-high in water, carefully picking his way
Smaller river, when he thought he heard a faint bird whistle
led somehow familiar--and impatient. He stopped and
|yes, trying to place it, then shook his head, not even sure if
|By heard it, and continued across. When he reached the
(Bid started walking toward the major river, he couldn't stop
t^out it. Finally his worry about finding Ayla began to push
| mind, though it kept nagging at him.
to walking for quite a while in his wet clothes, knowing that
wet, too, when it occurred to him that he perhaps should
l the tent, or at least something for shelter. It was getting
tnothing could have happened to her. She might even be
thought made him scan the water, the bank, and the vege- "by more carefully.
y he heard the whistle again, this time much louder and
lowed by a yip, yip, yip, and then a full-blown wolf howl
>und of hoofbeats. Turning around, he broke into a great
I smile as he saw the wolf coming straight for him with Racer
"i and best of all there was Ayla riding Whinney.
Sped up on the man, put his huge paws on Jondalar's chest,

and reached up to lick his jaw. The tall man grabbed his ruff seen Ayla do, and then gave the four-legged beast a hug. Tk pushed the wolf away as Ayla raced up on the horse, jumped d and ran to him.

"Jondalar! Jondalar!" she said as he took her in his arms. "Ayla! Oh, my Ayla," he said, crushing her to his chest. 3 The wolf jumped up and licked both of their faces, and neither * of them pushed him away.

The large river, which the two riders along with the horses and rir wolf had crossed, emptied into the brackish inland body of water th» the Mamutoi called Beran Sea just north of the huge delta of the Gre» Mother River. As the travelers neared the many-mouthed culminatiM of the watercourse that had wound its way across the breadth of the continent for nearly two thousand miles, the downward slope of d» land leveled off. ?

The magnificent grasslands of this flat southern region surprisrf Ayla and Jondalar. A rich new growth, unusual so late in the seasws burgeoned across the open landscape. The violent thunderstorm with its downpour of flooding rains, exceptional in its timing and very wide"; spread, was responsible for the unseasonal greening. It brought l springlike resurgence to the steppes of not only grass, but colorful blooms: dwarf iris in purple and yellow, deep red multipetaled peonies, spotted pink lilies, and vetch in variable colors from yellow and orange to red and purple.

Loud whistling and squawking called Ayla's attention to the vodfr erous black-and-rose birds that were wheeling and dipping, separatin(and coming together in large flocks, creating a confusion of ceaselcs* activity. The heavy concentration of the noisy, gregarious, rose* colored starlings that had gathered nearby made the young wonut uneasy. Though they bred in colonies, fed in flocks, and roosted together at night, she didn't recall ever seeing so many of them at o*

rime. ^L,

She noticed kestrels and other birds were also congregating. 1 noise was growing louder, with a strident humming undercurren expectation. Then she noticed a large dark cloud, though, strang 7' except for that one cloud, the sky was clear. It seemed to be v pounds f-- closer, riding on the wind. Suddenly the great horde of starlings came even more agitated.

"Jondalar," she called to the man who had ridden ahead of "Look at that strange cloud."

The man looked, then stopped as Ayla pulled abreast again. they watched, the cloud grew visibly larger, or perhaps closer.

; that's a rain cloud," Jondalar said.
it is, either, but what else could it be?" Ayla said. She
ountable desire to seek shelter of some kind. "Do you
jid put up the tent and wait it out?"
keep going. Maybe we can outdistance it, if we hurry,"

d the horses to a faster gait across the green field, but both
J the strange cloud outpaced them. The strident noise rose
y overpowering even the raucous starlings. Suddenly Ayla
"ng hit her arm.

»s that?" she said, but even before she got the words out,
again, and again. Something landed on Whinney, then
w, but more came. When she looked at Jondalar, riding
' of her, she saw more of the flying, jumping things. One
; in front of her, and in the moment before it got away, she
r hand on it.

.ed it up carefully to look at it more closely. It was an insect,
pength of her middle finger, thick-bodied with long rear legs.
pike a large grasshopper, but it wasn't a drab green color that
Raid easily into the background, like the ones she had seen
|tfarough dry grass. This insect was striking for its brightly
(triples of black, yellow, and orange.

Bference was wrought by the rain. During the season that was
I dry, they were grasshoppers, shy, solitary creatures, who
|(de others of their kind only long enough to mate, but a re-
Ichange took place after the hard rainstorm. With the growth
I' new grass, the females took advantage of the abundance of
laying many more eggs, and many more larvae survived. As
Chopper population grew, surprising changes took place. The
rasshoppers developed startling new colors, and they began to
each other's company. They were no longer grasshoppers;
'become locusts.

large bands of brightly colored locusts joined with other
nd when they exhausted their local food supply, the locusts
he air in masses. A swarm of five billion was not uncommon,
vering sixty square miles and eating eighty thousand tons of
n in a single night.

I leading edge of the cloud of locusts began dropping down to
die new green grass, Ayla and Jondalar were engulfed by the
banning all around them, hitting and bouncing off them and
"ses. It wasn't hard to urge Whinney and Racer to a gallop; it
^ve been all but impossible to restrain them. As they raced at
J, pelted by the deluge of locusts, Ayla tried to look for Wolf,

but the air was thick with flying, bouncing, hopping, leaping in I
She whistled as loud as she could, hoping he would hear above a
strident roar. ^f
She almost ran into a rose-colored starling as it swooped down -j
caught a locust right in front of her face. Then she realized -h
the birds had gathered in such large numbers. They were drawn to ri'
immense food supply, whose bold colors were easy to see. But Hr
sharp contrasts that attracted the birds also enabled the locusts to loca»»
each other when they needed to fly to new feeding grounds, and even
the huge flocks of birds did little to reduce the swarms of locusts a*
long as the vegetation remained abundant enough to support the ne»
generations. Only when the rains stopped and the grasslands returned
to their normal dry condition that could feed only small number;
would the locusts become well-camouflaged, innocuous grasshopper
again.

The wolf found them shortly after they left the swarm behind. By
the time the voracious insects were settled on the ground for the night,
Ay la and Jondalar were camped far away. When they started out the;
next morning, they headed north again and slightly east, toward a high
hill to get a view above the flat landscape that might give them some
idea of the distance to the Great Mother River. Just beyond the crest
of the hill they saw the edge of the area that had been visited by a
cloud of locusts, the swarming mass blown by the strong winds toward
the sea. They were overwhelmed by the devastation.
The beautiful, springlike countryside full of bright flowers and new
grass was gone, stripped clean. As far as they could see the land was
denuded. Not a leaf, not a blade of grass, not a single hint of green
dressed the bare soil. Every bit of vegetation had been devoured by the
ravenous horde. The only signs of life were some starlings searching
out the last few locusts that had fallen behind. The earth had been
ravaged, laid open, and left indecently exposed. Yet she would recover
from this indignity, brought on by creatures of her own making ;
their natural cycles of life, and from hidden root and windblown seed;
she would clothe herself in green once again. . |
When the woman and man looked the other way, they were greeted
with an entirely different vista, one that set their pulses racing
toward the east, a vast expanse of water glistened in the sun; it was the
Sea. ^j
As she looked. Ay la realized that it was the same sea she had known
in her childhood. At the southern end of a peninsula that jutted out
from the north into that great body of water was the cave where

with Brim's clan when she was young. Living with the people in had often been difficult. Still she had many happy memories of childhood, although thoughts of the son she had been forced behind inevitably saddened her. She knew this was as close as she could get to the son she would never see again. It was the best for him to live with the Clan. With Uba as his mother, she would run to train him to hunt with a spear, and a bola, and a sling, and teach him the ways of the Clan, Durc would be loved and not reviled and made fun of the way Rydag had been. But she couldn't help wondering about him. Was his clan still living on the mainland or had they moved closer to some of the other clans that were on the high eastern mountains? Look, down there. That's the delta, and you can see Donau, and a small part of it. On the other side of the large island, see the muddy water? I think that's the main northern arm. There's the end of the Great Mother River!" Jondalar said, excitement in his voice.

"I was overcome with memories that were tinged with sadness last time he had seen that river, he had been with his friend and now Thonolan was gone to the world of the spirits. I remember the stone with the opalescent surface that he brought from the place where Ayla had buried his brother. She had given me the essence of Thonolan's spirit, and he planned to give it to her and Zeiandoni when he returned. It was in his pack maybe he should get it out and carry it with him, he thought. Jondalar! Over there, by the river, is that smoke? Are people on that river?" Ayla said, excited at the prospect. "It could be," Jondalar said.

"Hurry then." She started back down the hill with Jondalar beside her. "Who do you think it might be?" she asked. "Somebody?"

"The Sharamudoi sometimes come this far in their boats to see what's how Markeno met Tholie. She was with a Mamutoi and it had come for salt and shells." He stopped and glanced back, looking more closely at the delta and the island just across a channel; then he studied the land downstream. "In fact, I don't think they are very far from the place where Brecie had Willow Camp last summer. Was it just last summer? She took us there and she rescued Thonolan and me from the quicksand. . ."

"He closed his eyes, but Ayla saw the pain. "They were the last of his brother ever saw . . . except for me. We traveled together and he was no longer. I kept hoping he would get over her, but he didn't

want to live without Jetamio. He wanted the Mother to take
Jondalar said. Then, looking down, he added, "And then w"*^
Baby." e l<

Jondalar looked up at Ayla, and she saw his expression change T
pain was still there, and she recognized that special look that sho
when his love for her was almost more than he could bear; more A
she could bear. But there was something else, too, somethino 4
frightened her.

"I could never understand why Thonolan wanted to die ... (,«,
He turned away and, urging Racer to a faster pace, called back "Qn
on. You said you wanted to hurry."

Ayla signaled Whinney to a fast run, trying to be more careful as
she trailed behind the man on the galloping stallion who was rad
toward the river. But the ride was exhilarating and had the effect
driving away the strange, sad mood that the place had evoked in be
of them. The wolf, excited by the fast pace, ran along with them x
when they finally reached the water's edge and stopped, Wolf lift
his head and voiced a melodious wolf song of long drawn-out how
Ayla and Jondalar looked at each other and smiled, both thinking
was an appropriate way to announce that they had arrived at the rh
that would be their companion for the greater part of the rest of th
Journey.

"Is this it? Have we reached the Great Mother River?" Ayla sai
her eyes sparkling.

"Yes. This is it," Jondalar said, then looked toward the west, u
stream. He did not want to dampen Ayla's excitement at reaching t
river, but he knew how far they had yet to go.

They would have to retrace his steps all the way back across t
breadth of the continent to the plateau glacier that covered the highlai
at the headwaters of the extensive river, and then beyond, almost
the Great Water at the edge of the earth, far to the west. Along
winding, eighteen-hundred-mile course, Donau--the river of Do'
the Great Earth Mother of the Zeiandonii--swelled with the waters
more than three hundred tributaries, the drainage of two glacier
mountain chains, and acquired a burden of sediment.

Often splitting into many channels as she meandered across
natter stretches of her length, the great waterway transported the pi
digious accumulation of silt suspended within her voluminous sp
But before reaching the end of her course, the fine gritty sou se
out into an immense fan-shaped deposit, a mud-clogged wilderues
low islands and banks surrounded by shallow lakes and wln
streams, as though the Great Mother of rivers was so exhausted

that she dropped her heavy load of silt just short of
^then staggered slowly to the sea.

Idelta they had reached, twice as long as it was wide,
ules from the sea. The river, too full to be held within a
i in the flat plain between the ancient massif of raised
; east and the gentle rolling hills that dropped gradually
ntains to the west, divided into four main arms, each
ent direction. Channels interlaced the diverging arms,
fcyrrinth of meandering streams that spread out to form
: i and lagoons. Great expanses of reed beds surrounded
ranged from bare sandy spits to large islands complete
id steppes, populated by aurochs and deer, and their

i that smoke coming from?" Ayla asked. "There must be
^y."

linight have been from that big island we saw downstream
ithe channel," Jondalar said, pointing in the general direc-

la looked, all she saw at first was a wall of tall phragmite
jfcfeathery purple tops bending in the light wind, more than
|ftbove the waterlogged ground from which they grew. Then
| the beautiful silvery-green leaves of sallow extending up
Wa. It took a moment before she made another observation
|d her. Sallow was usually a shrub that grew so close to
|its roots were often flooded in wet seasons. It resembled
lows, but sallows never grew to the height of trees. Could
Staken? Could those be willow trees? She seldom made a
pfthat.

irted downstream, and when they were opposite the island
id into the channel. Ayla looked back to make sure the drag-
of the travois, with the bowl boat lashed between them,
snagged; then she checked that the crossed ends in front
dy as the poles floated up behind the mare. When they were
getting ready to leave the large river behind, they originally
leave the boat. It had served its purpose in getting them and
S across, but after all the work it had taken to make it, even
i crossing had not gone exactly as they had planned, they
S to abandon the small round boat.

s the one who thought about fastening it to the poles, even
neant Whinney would have to wear the harness and drag it
but it was Jondalar who realized that it would actually
"ng rivers easier. They could load up the boat with their

<(

gear so it wouldn't get wet, but rather than trying to lead the horse across with a rope fastened to a boat, Whinney could swim at her own pace, pulling an easy, floating load. When they tried it on the next river they had to cross, they even found it unnecessary to unharness her.

There was a tendency for the current to drag at the boat and or which worried Ayla, especially after the way Whinney and Racer panicked when they were being pulled into a situation on the river over which they had no control. She decided to redesign the leather straps of the harness so that she could cut it loose in an instant if it seemed to endanger her mare, but the horse compensated for tug of the stream and accepted the burden with little trouble. Ayla

taken the time to let the horse get familiar with the new idea. Whinney was used to the travois and trusted the woman. But the large open bowl was a container that invited filling. They started using it to carry wood, dry dung, and other materials for building that they picked up along the way for the evening fire, and so sometimes they left their pack baskets in the boat after crossing water. There had been several streams of various sizes that had found their way to the inland sea, and Jondalar knew that many tributaries would cut across their path as they continued their Journey, traveling beyond the Great Mother River.

As they waded into the clear water of the outside channel of the delta, the stallion shied and whinnied nervously. Racer was untrusting about rivers since his frightening adventure, but Jondalar had been very patient about guiding the sensitive young animal across smaller waterways they had met, and the horse was overcoming his fear. It pleased the man, since many more rivers would have to be crossed before they reached his home.

The water was slow moving, but so transparent that they could see fish swimming among the water plants. After making their way through the tall reeds, they gained the long, narrow island. Wolf was the first to reach the tongue of land. He shook himself vigorously, then ran up the sloping shore of hard-packed wet sand mixed with silt which led to a bordering woods of beautiful silver-green willows that grew to the size of trees.

"I knew it," Ayla said.

"What did you know?" Jondalar said, smiling at her satisfied expression. . . ^

"These trees are just like those bushes we slept in that night and so hard. I thought they were willows, but I've never seen any of trees before. Willows are usually bushes, but these could be willows."

minted and led the horses into the cool airy woods. Walk-
they noticed the shadows of the leaves, swaying in the
'dappling the rlc^' g^^' ^nlit ground cover, and
Iliffht open woodland they saw aurochs grazing in the dis-
were downwind, and, when the wild cattle caught their
linials moved away rapidly. They've been hunted by peo-
r thought.

,s clipped off mouthfuls of the green fodder with their front
(l while they moved through the delightful wooded land,
Ayla to stop and begin untying Whinney's harness.

>you stopping here?" Jondalar asked.

s want to graze. I thought we might stop for a while."
oked worried. "I think we should go a little farther. I'm
; people on this island, and I'd like to know who they are

p-"

d. "That's right! You did say this was where the smoke
ifrom. It's so beautiful here--I almost forgot."

|in had been gradually rising in elevation, and farther inland
plars, and white willows began to appear in the sallow
iding variation to the light grayish-green foliage. Later a few
fc ancient variety of pines, that had existed in that region as
mountains themselves, added a background of deeper green
aic, with larch contributing a lighter shade, all highlighted
lenish-gold tufts of ripening steppe grasses waving in the
'; climbed up tree trunks while liana hung down from
t the denser forest canopy, and in the sunlit glens prostrate
(ubescent oak and taller hazel brush played their tone against
andscape.

Bd rose no more than twenty-five feet above the water, then
t into a long field that was a steppeland in miniature with
B feather grasses turning gold in the sun. They crossed the
jdth of the island and looked down a far more precipitous
Id dunes, anchored with beach grass, sea holly, and sea kale.
slopes led to a deeply curved inlet, almost a lagoon, outlined
purple-topped reeds, mixed in with cattails and bulrushes,
Varieties of smaller aquatic plants. On the inlet, the water- fere so thick that the water was
hardly visible, and perched
ifcre uncountable numbers of herons.

Ac island was a wide, muddy-brown channel, the Northern-
|ithe great river. Close to the end of the island they watched
^ clear water enter the main channel, and Ayla was amazed
we currents, one transparent, one brown with silt, running
ten other, with a distinct division of color. Eventually,

though, the brown water dominated as the main channel rnu

clear stream.

"Look at that, Jondalar," Ayla said, pointing to the sharp i

of the parallel running waters.

"That's how you know when you're on the Great Mother B-

That arm that will take you directly to the sea," he said. "But look

there." °

Beyond a grove of trees, off to the side of the inlet, a thin streaml

smoke reached for the sky. Ayla smiled with anticipation, but londA

had reservations as they headed for the smoke. If that was smoke ft- a fireplace, why hadn't they
seen anyone? The people must have an

them by now. Why hadn't they come to greet them? Jondalar st

ened the rope he was using to lead Racer and patted his neck rea;

ingly.

When they saw the outline of a conical tent, Ayla knew they I

arrived at a Camp, and she wondered what people these were. The

could even be Mamutoi, she thought, as she signaled Whinney i

follow close. Then she noticed Wolf standing in his defensive postm

and she whistled the signal she had taught him. He retreated to I

side as they entered the small encampment.

inney followed closely behind Ayla as the woman walked
ip, to the fireplace that was still sending up a wavering
e. There were five shelters arranged in a semicircle, and
ug slightly into the ground, was in front of the central
was burning briskly, the Camp had obviously been used
no one announced any claim to the place by coming out
i. Ayla looked around, glancing inside the dwellings that
ut she saw no one. Puzzled, she studied the shelters and
we closely to see if she could learn any more about who
sre, and why they were gone.

part of each of the structures was similar to the conical
the Mamutoi for their summer Camps, but there were
fferences. Where the Mammoth Hunters often enlarged
Mce by attaching semicircular side tents made of hides to
elling unit, often using another pole to help support the
s, the shelters of this Camp had, instead, additions made
marsh grasses. Some were simply sloping roofs mounted
)les, others were completely enclosed, rounded additions
di and woven mats, attached to the main dwelling.
ie the entrance flap of the nearest one, Ayla saw a pile of
I roots on a mat of woven reeds. Beside the mat were two
' was tightly woven and held slightly muddy water, the
if-full of shiny white, freshly peeled roots. Ayla walked
k a root out of the basket. It was still wet; it must have
faere only a moment before.

' it back, she noticed a strange object lying on the ground.
of cattail leaves woven to resemble a person, with two
5 out the sides and two legs, and a piece of soft leather
"nd it like a tunic. Two short lines for eyes had been
s face with charcoal, and another line shaped into a smile.
"cr grass had been fastened to the head as hair.
e Ayla had grown up with did not make images, except
tern signs, such as the marks on her leg. She had been

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deeply scratched by a cave lion as a small girl, leaving her left
scarred with four straight lines. A similar mark was used by A
to indicate a cave lion totem. That was why Creb had been so sure
the Cave Lion was her totem, in spite of the fact that it was con-
a male totem. The Spirit of the Cave Lion had chosen her and m
her himself, and would therefore protect her.

Other Clan totems were indicated in similar ways, with signs
often derived from the movements or gestures of their sign lan-
But the first truly representative image she had ever seen was the
sketch of an animal Jondalar had drawn on a piece of leather used
target, and she was puzzled at first by the object on the ground. T
with a flash of recognition, she knew what it was. She had never li-
doll when she was growing up, but she recalled similar objects
Mamutoi children played with and realized it was a child's playthi-
It was suddenly obvious to Ayla that a woman had been sitting t
with her child only moments before. Now she was gone and she i-
have left in a great hurry, since she had abandoned her food and
not even taken her child's toy with her. Why would she leave in!
a hurry?

Ayla turned and saw Jondalar, still holding Racer's lead rope,
down on one knee amidst a scattering of flint chips and examini-
piece of the stone he had noticed. He looked up.

"Someone ruined a very good point with a badly made final so-
It should have been just a tap, but it landed off the mark, and tool
... as though the knapper was suddenly interrupted. And here!
hammerstone! It was just dropped." The nicks on the hard oval s-
indicated its long use, and the experienced flint knapper found it (

cult to imagine anyone dropping and leaving a favored tool.
Ayla looked around and saw fish drying on a rack, with whole
on the ground close by. One had been split open but left on
ground. There was more evidence of interrupted tasks, but no sij-
the people.

"Jondalar, there were people here not very long ago, but they Ic-
a big hurry. Even the fire is still burning. Where is everyone?

"I don't know, but you're right. They left in a hurry. They
dropped everything and . . . ran away. As if they were . anral

"But why?" Ayla said, looking around. "I don't see anything(
afraid of."

Jondalar started to shake his head, then noticed Wolf sniffing
the abandoned Camp, poking his nose into the entrances 01
and around the places where things had been left. Then his a-
was drawn to the hay-colored mare grazing nearby, draggle

f poles and bowl boat, strangely unconcerned about both
id the wolf. The man turned to look at the young dark-
0 that followed him so willingly. The animal was arrayed
askets and riding blanket and was standing beside him
Id only by a single rope attached to his head with cord and

iat may be the problem, Ayla. We don't see it," he said.
ily stopped his nosy exploring, gazed intently at the
started into them. "Wolf!" he called. The animal stopped
ack at the man, wagging his tail. "Ayla, you'd better call
he'll find the people of this Camp, and scare them even

ed, and he ran to her. She fondled his ruff but was frown- ar. "Are you saying we scare them? That
they ran away
were afraid of us?"

;r Feather Grass Camp? The way they acted when they
nk how we must seem to people when they first see us,
e traveling with two horses and a wolf. Animals don't
eople, they usually avoid them. Even the Mamutoi at the
eting took a while to get used to us, and we arrived with
When you think about it, Talut was very brave to invite
horses, to his Camp when we first met him," Jondalar

iuld we do?"

fe should leave. The people of this Camp are probably
i woods watching us, thinking we must come from some
ie spirit world. That's what I would think if I saw us
out any warning."

alar," Ayla wailed, feeling a rush of disappointment, and
s she stood in the middle of the vacated Camp. "I was so
ard to visiting with some people." She looked around the
more, then nodded her head in acquiescence. "You're
people are gone and didn't want to welcome us, we should
wish I could have met the woman with the child who left
ig, and talked to her." She started walking toward Whin-
s just beyond the Camp. "I don't want people to be afraid
aid, turning to the man. "Will we be able to talk to anyone
icy?"

now about strangers, but I'm sure we'll be able to visit
"amudoi. They might be a little wary at first, but they
^d you know how people are. After they get over their
they get very interested in the animals."

"I'm sorry we frightened these people. Maybe we could leave a gift, even if we didn't share their hospitality," Ayla said. She went to look through her pack baskets. "I think some food would help some meat, I think." Bl

"Yes, that's a good idea. I have some extra points. I think perhaps one to replace the one that toolmaker ruined. There is nothing disappointing than to spoil a good tool just when you're about to find it," Jondalar said.

As he reached into his pack for his leather-wrapped tool kit Tona recalled that when he and his brother were traveling they met many people along the way, and they were usually welcomed and often helped; 'iji helped. There had even been a couple of occasions when their lives had been saved by strangers. But if people were going to be afraid of them because of their animal companions, what would happen if Ayla if he ever needed help?

They left the Camp and climbed back up the sandy dunes to a level field at the top of the long, narrow island, stopping when they reached the grass. They looked down at the thin column of smoke from the Camp and the brown silty river below, its noticeable current leading to the broad blue expanse of Beran Sea. With unspoken agreement they both mounted and turned east to get a better--and a last--look at the great inland sea.

When they reached the eastern tip of the island, though still within the banks of the river they were so close to the choppy waters of the sea that they could watch its waves washing sandbars with briny foam. Ayla looked out across the water and thought she could almost see the outline of a peninsula. The cave of Brun's clan, the place where she had grown up, had been at its southern tip. It was there that she had given birth to her son, and there she had to leave him when she was forced out.

"I wonder how big he is?" she said to herself. "Taller than all the boys his age, I'm sure. Is he strong? Healthy? Is he happy? Does he remember me? I wonder. If only I could just see him one more time, I thought, then realized that if she was ever going to look for him, this would be her last chance. From here, Jondalar planned to turn west; She would never be this close to her clan, or Durc, again. Would they go east, instead? Just make a short side trip before they went on? If they skirted the northern coast of the sea, they could probably reach the peninsula in a few days. Jondalar did say he would be willing to go with her if she wanted to try to find Durc.

"Ayla, look! I didn't know there were seals in Beran Sea!" Ayla

IT)

iroals since I was a youngster and went on a trek with
»ndalar said, his voice full of excitement and longing. "He
lonolan and me to see the Great Waters, and then the
we near the edge of the earth took us north on a boat.
n them before?"

i toward the sea, but closer in, where he was pointing.
sleek, streamlined creatures, with light gray underbellies,
a clumsily along a sandbar that had formed behind some
wed rocks. While they watched, most of the seals dived
I water, chasing a school of fish. They watched heads
rhile the last of them, smaller and younger, dove into the
ien they were gone, disappearing as quickly as they had

i a distance," Ayla said, "during the cold season. They
ring ice offshore. Brun's clan didn't hunt them. No one
iem, though Brun once told about a time he saw some on
a sea cave. Some people thought they were winter water
limals at all, but I saw little ones on the ice once, and I
i^ater spirits had babies. I never knew where they went in
They must have come here."

get home, I'll take you to see the Great Waters, Ayla.
ilieve it. This is a large sea, much bigger than any lakes
l, and salty I'm told, but it's nothing compared to the
. That's like the sky. No one has ever reached the other

I the eagerness in Jondalar's voice, and she sensed his
e home. She knew he wouldn't hesitate to go with her to
I's clan and her son, if she told him that she wanted to.
ved her. But she loved him, too, and knew that he would
about the delay. She looked at the great sweep of water,
;r eyes trying to hold back tears.

I't know where to look for the clan, anyway, she thought.
Brun's clan any more. It was Broud's clan now, and she
welcome. Broud had cursed her with death; she was dead
spirit. If she and Jondalar had frightened the Camp on
scause of the animals, and their seemingly supernatural
[tr0l them, how much more would they scare the clan?
a» and Durc? To them, she would be returning from the
Mid the companionable animals would be proof of it.
- a spirit who came back from the land of the dead came
inn.

le ^rned west, it would be final. From this time on, for

I

the rest of her life, Durc would be no more than a memo i would be no hope of ever seeing him again. That was the <4i had to make. She thought she had made it long ago; she did 'i the pain would be still so sharp. Turning her head so Jondal not see the tears that filled her eyes as she stared at the d ^ expanse of water, Ayla said a silent goodbye to her son fort k time. A fresh stab of grief filled her and she knew she would ca ache in her heart with her forever.

They turned their backs on the sea and started walking throuo waist-high steppe grass of the large island, giving the horses a res time to graze. The sun was high in the sky, bright and hot. Shin ing heat waves rose up from the dusty ground, bringing the' aroma of earth and growing things. On the treeless plain atop the narrow strip of land, they moved within the shade of their grass but the evaporation of the surrounding river channels made d humid and beads of sweat trickled down their dusty skin. They grateful for the occasional cool breath from the sea, a fitful breeze with the rich scent of the life within its deep waters. Ayla stopped and unwound her leather sling from her hea(tucked it into her waistband, not wanting it to get too damp replaced it with a rolled piece of soft leather, similar to the one jot wore, bound across her forehead and tied in the back, to absor moisture that dripped from her forehead.

When she continued, she noticed a dull greenish grasshopper s up, then drop back down and hide in its camouflaged disguise. she saw another. More of them chirked sporadically, bringing to the swarming locusts. But here they were just one of a varit insects, like the butterflies flicking their bright colors in a qu dance across the tops of the fescue, and the harmless drone fly resembled a stinging honeybee, hovering over a buttercup. Though the raised field was much smaller, it had the familiar t» of the dry steppes, but when they came to the other end of the i and looked out, they were astonished by the vast, strange, wet' of the massive delta. To the north, on their right, was the mail beyond a fringe of river brush, a grassland of muted greenish-go to the south and west, spreading all the way to the horizon, and 1 distance seeming as solid and substantial as the land, was the outlet of the great river. It was an extensive bed of rich P^" swaying in a motion as constant as the sea with the gusty rnyu the wind, broken only by occasional trees casting shadows ac waving green and the winding paths of open waterways.

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red down the slope through the open woods, Ayla be-
the birds, more varieties than she had ever seen in one
ime of them unfamiliar. Crows, cuckoos, starlings, and
h called to their kind in distinctive voices. A swallow,
Icon, swooped and twisted, then dived into the reeds.
ick kites and ground-skimming marsh harriers searched
/ine fish. Small warblers and flycatchers flitted from
ree, while tiny stints, redstarts, and shrikes darted from
nch. Gulls floated on air currents, hardly moving a
onderous pelicans, majestic in flight, sailed overhead
wverful wings.

ndalar emerged at a different section of the river when
'ater again, near a clump of goat willow bushes that was
ixed colony of marsh birds: night herons, little egrets,
cormorants, and at this place, mostly glossy ibises all
yc. In the same tree, the grassy roosting place of one
ten only a branch away from the nest of an entirely
es, and several held eggs or young birds. The birds
is indifferent to the people and animals as they were to
:the busy place, bustling with incessant activity, was an
»ssible for the curious young wolf to ignore.

led slowly, trying to stalk, but was distracted by the
ssibilities. Finally he made a dash toward a particular
th loud squawking and flapping of wings, the nearby
o the air and were immediately followed by more who
ming. Still others took to wing. The air was filling with
early the dominant bird life in the delta, until more than
ndividuals of several different species from the mixed
heeling and turning in dramatic flight.

»ack toward the woods, his tail between his legs, howling
fear over the commotion he had caused. Adding to the
irvous, frightened horses were rearing and screaming;
iped into the water.

acted as a restraining force on the mare, who was more
to begin with. She settled down fairly soon, but Jon-
eat deal more trouble with the young stallion. He ran
after the horse, swimming where it deepened, and was
?ht. Ayla managed to get Whinney across the channel
e mainland. After she calmed and comforted the horse,
the dragging poles and removed the harness to let the
tod relax in her own way. Then she whistled for Wolf.
more whistles before he came, and then it was from a

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different direction much farther downstream, far away from the the nesting birds.

Ayla took off her own wet clothes and changed into dry onpc her pack basket, then gathered wood to make a fire while she w for Jondalar. He, too, would need to change, and fortunately his baskets happened to be in the bowl boat, which kept them dry It some time before he found his way back, riding toward Avia's from the west. Racer had gone far upstream before Jondalar caueb with him.

The man was still angry with Wolf, and it was apparent not onl Ayla but to the animal. The wolf waited until Jondalar finally satd< with a cup of hot tea after changing clothes, and then he approaci crouching down on his front legs, wagging his tail like a puppy wan to play and whining with a pleading tone. When he got close enoi Wolf tried to lick his face. The man pushed him away at first. W he did allow the persistent animal closer. Wolf seemed so pleased Jondalar had to relent.

"It seems as though he's trying to say he's sorry, but that's bar believe. How could he? He's an animal. Ayla, could Wolf know he misbehaved and be sorry for it?" Jondalar asked.

Ayla wasn't surprised. She had seen such actions when she teaching herself to hunt and observing carnivorous animals, which had chosen to be her prey. Wolfs actions toward the man were sin to the way a young wolf often behaved toward the male leader i pack.

"I don't know what he knows, or what he thinks," Ayla said. "I only judge from his actions. But isn't that how it is with people? can never know what someone really knows or thinks. You haw judge by actions, don't you?"

Jondalar nodded, still not sure what to believe. Ayla didn't dfi that Wolf was sorry, but she didn't think it would make much du ence. Wolf used to behave the same way to her when she was tryi^ teach him to stay away from the leather footwear of the people of Camp. It took her a long time to train the wolf to leave them w- and she didn't think he was ready to give up chasing birds just y

The sun was skimming the craggy high peaks at the southern the long chain of mountains to the west, lending a glittering sp the icy facets. The range dropped from the heights of the souttie as it marched north, and the sharp angles smoothed out to crests blanketed with shimmering white. Toward the northw mountaintops disappeared behind a curtain of clouds.

ed into an inviting opening in the wooded fringe of the
H nulled to a stop. Jondalar followed behind. The small
is a somewhat larger space within a pleasant open strip of
It led directly to a quiet lagoon.

>e main arms of the great river were full of muddy silt, the
work of channels and side streams that weaved through
the huge delta was clean and drinkable. The channels
widened into large lakes or placid lagoons that were sur- an assortment of reeds, rushes, sedges,
and other water

yere often covered with water lilies. The sturdy lily pads
w places for the smaller herons and innumerable frogs.
ks like a good place," Jondalar said, lifting his leg over
and landing lightly. He removed his pack baskets, riding
I halter, and turned the young stallion loose. The horse
ght for the water, and a moment later Whinney joined

entered the river first and began drinking. After a short
ted pawing the water, making big splashes that soaked her
e young stallion who was drinking nearby. She bent her
sniffing at the water, her ears forward. Then, gathering
.eath her, she got down on her forelegs, dropped lower,
ver on her side, and finally onto her back. Holding her
l with legs nailing the air, she squirmed with delight,
body on the bottom of the lagoon, then flung herself over
side. Racer, who had been watching his dam rolling in the
could wait no longer, and in a similar manner lowered
roll in the shallows near the bank.

Id have thought they'd had enough of water today," Ay la
; up beside Jondalar.

l, the smile from watching the horses still on his face.
we to roll in the water, not to mention the mud or dust. I
horses liked to roll so much."

w how much they like to be scratched. I think it's their
ching themselves," the woman commented. "Sometimes
each other, and they tell each other where they want to

' they tell each other that. Ay la? Sometimes I think you
horses are people."

es are not people. They are themselves, but watch them
when they stand head to tail. One will scratch the other
nd then wait to be scratched back at the same place," Ayla
e I'll give Whinney a good combing with the dry teasel

later. It must get hot and itchy under the leather straps all d
times I think we should leave the bowl boat behind . . but itk a^

"I'm hot and itchy. I think I'm going to take a swim, too Th- without clothes," Jondalar said.
"I will, too, but first I want to unpack. Those clothes that
are still damp. I want to hang them over those bushes so th
dry." She took a damp bundle out of one of her baskets and I*.
draping the clothing across the branches of an alder bush "I'm
sorry the clothes got wet," Ayla said, arranging a loincloth. "I (n
some soaproot and washed mine while I was waiting for you "
Jondalar shook out one garment, helping her to hang up the cloti
and discovered it was his tunic. He held it up to show her. "I thw
you said you washed your clothes while you were waiting for me'
said.

"I washed yours after you changed. Too much sweat makes
leather rot, and they were getting badly stained," she explained.
He didn't recall worrying too much about sweat or stains whel
had traveled with his brother, but he was rather pleased that Ayla <
By the time they were ready to go into the river, Whinney
coming out. She stood on the bank with her legs spread apart, started shaking her head. The
vigorous shake worked back along
body all the way to her tail. Jondalar held up his arms to ward off
spray. Ayla, laughing, ran into the water and, with both hands, i
idly scooped out more water to splash at the man as he was wadinj
As soon as he was knee deep, he returned the favor. Racer, who
finished his bath and was standing nearby, received a share of
dousing and backed away, then he headed for the shore. He li
water, but under conditions of his own choosing.
After they tired of playing and swimming, Ayla began to notice
possibilities for their evening meal. Growing out of the water <
spearhead-shaped leaves and white three-petaled flowers that darke
to purple at the center, and she knew the starchy tuber of the p
was filling and good. She dug some out of the muddy bottom with
toes; the stems were fragile and broke off too easily to pull them»
As Ayla waded back to the shore, she also gathered water plantaii
cook, and tangy watercress to eat raw. A regular pattern of sinal
leaves growing out from a center that was floating on the surface
her attention.

"Jondalar, be careful not to step on those water chestnuts,' she
pointing out the spiky seeds littering the sandy shore.
He picked one up to look more closely. Its four barbs were arra"

while one always caught the ground, the others
s shook his head, then threw it down. Ay la bent to
— along with several others.
inot so good to step on," she said in answer to his quizzical
; good to eat."
i the shade beside the water, she saw a familiar tall
een leaves and looked around for any other plant
'flexible leaves to protect her hands while she picked
would have to exercise care while they were fresh,
leaves would be delicious when cooked. A water
tie very edge of the water and standing nearly as tall
three-foot basal leaves that would work just fine, she
ey could be cooked, too. Nearby there was also colts-
kinds of ferns that had flavorrul roots. The delta of-
;e of foods.
noticed an island of tall grass reeds with cattails
edges. It was likely that cattails would always be a
They were widespread and prolific, and so many parts
| both the old roots, pounded to remove the fibers from the
IGH was made into dough or soup thickening, and the new
S'fresh or cooked, along with the base of the flower stalks,
tion the heavy concentration of pollen, which could also be
lldnd of bread, were all delicious. When young, the flowers,
gether near the end of the tall stalk, like a piece of a cat's
jsere also tasty.
iff the plant was useful in other ways: the leaves for weaving
I and mats, and the fuzz from the flowers after they went to
absorbent padding and excellent tinder. Though with her
|firestones Ayla didn't need to use them, she knew that the
far's dry woody stems could be twirled between the palms
tt or they could be used as fuel.
t, let's take the boat and go out to that island to collect some
Syla said. "There's a lot of other good things to eat growing
I the water, too, like the seed pods of those water lilies, and
The rootstalks of those reeds are not bad either. They're
water, but since we are wet from swimming anyway, we
""I get some. We can put everything in the boat to bring it
"ever been here before. How do you know these plants are
t;>" Jondalar asked as they unfastened the boat from the
tied. "There were marshy places like this near the sea not
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far from our cave on the peninsula. Not as big as this but'» there in the summer, too, like it is here, and Iza knew the where to find them. Nezzie told me about some others."

"I think you must know every plant there is."

"Many of them, but not every plant, especially around here » there was someone I could ask. The woman on that big id nA left while she was cleaning roots, would probably know. I'm" couldn't visit with them," Ayla said.

Her disappointment was apparent, and Jondalar knew how L she was for other people. He missed people, too, and wished could have visited.

They brought the bowl boat to the edge of the water and scran in. The current was slow but more noticeable from the buoyant r craft, and they had to start using the paddles quickly to keep being carried downstream. Away from shore and the disturbance had caused with their bathing, the water was so clear that schoi fish could be seen darting over and around submerged plants. I were of fairly good size and Ayla thought she would catch a few l They stopped at a concentration of water lilies that was so d they could hardly see the surface of the lagoon. When Ayla slippe of the boat and into the water, it was not easy for Jondalar by hi to keep the bowl boat in place. The boat had a tendency to spin' he attempted to back-paddle, but when Ayla's feet found the b(while she was holding on to the side, the small floating bowl stea Using the stems of the flowers as a guide, she searched out the with her toes and loosened them from the soft soil, collecting when they floated to the surface in a cloud of silt.

When Ayla hoisted herself back into the boat, she sent it spil again, but with both of them using the paddles, they got it i control, then aimed for the island that was densely covered with i When they drew near, Ayla noticed that it was the smaller varit cattail that grew so thickly near the edge, along with bay willow b some nearly the size of trees.

They paddled into the heavy growth looking for a bank or s shore, forcing their way through the vegetation. But when they f the reeds aside, they could not find solid ground, not even a sublo sandbar, and after they pushed through, the passage they made c rapidly behind them. Ayla felt a sense of foreboding, and Jondal eerie feeling of being captured by some unseen presence as the) of tall reeds surrounded them. Overhead they saw pelicans nyil^ they had a dizzying impression that their straight flight was c around. When they looked between the large grassy stalks, ba

r

I comCi Ae opposite shore seemed to be slowly revolving

re moving! Turning!" Jondalar said, suddenly realizing
K the land opposite but they who were revolving as the
In swung the boat and the entire island around.

Hit of this place," she said, reaching for her paddle.
f in the delta were impermanent at best, always subject
of the Great Mother of rivers. Even those that supported
of reeds could wash out from underneath, or the growth
o a shallow island could become so dense that it would
Ie of vegetation out over water.

the initial cause, the roots of the floating reeds bound
created a platform for decaying matter--organisms from
well as vegetation--which fertilized the rapid growth of
With time, they became floating islands supporting a va-
r plants. Reed mace, narrow-leaved smaller varieties of
s, ferns, even the bay willow brush that eventually be-
rew along the edges, but extremely tall reed grass, reach-
et in height, was the primary vegetation. Some of the
veloped into large floating landscapes, treacherously de-
heir tangled illusion of solidity and permanence.

small paddles, but no small effort, they forced the little
ick out of the floating island. But by the time they reached ' of the unstable quagmire again,
they discovered they

asite the land. They were facing the open water of a lake,
was a sight so spectacular that they caught their breaths.
nst the background of dark green was a dense concentra-
pelicans; hundreds upon thousands of them packed to-
ing, sitting, lying on tussocky nests of floating reeds.
of the huge colony were flying at many levels, as though
ounds were too full and they were coasting on their great
; for a space.

^hite, with a slight wash of pink and wings edged by dark
ithers, the large birds with their long beaks and sagging
» were tending pods of fuzzy pelican chicks. The noisy
hissed and grunted, the adults responded with deep,
and in such great numbers that the combination was

»ncealed by reeds. Ay la and Jondalar watched the huge
ny, fascinated. Hearing a deep grunting cry, they looked
ymg pelican, coming in for a landing, sailed by overhead
t spanned ten feet. It reached a spot near the middle of

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the lake, then folded back its wings and dropped like a rock the water with a splash in a clumsy, ungainly landing. Not far another pelican with wings outstretched was rushing across the expanse of water, trying to lift itself into flight. Ayla began to stand why they chose to nest on the lake. They needed a great deal of space to raise themselves into the air, though once up, their flight artfully graceful.

Jondalar tapped her arm and pointed toward the shallow water on the island where several of the large birds were swimming, moving forward slowly. Ayla watched for a while, then smiled at the man. Every few moments the whole row of pelicans simultaneously dipped their heads into the water, and then altogether, as though on command, lifted them out, dripping water from their great bills. A few, but not all of them had caught some of the fish swimming in the shallows. The next time others might feed, but all continued to dip, perfectly synchronized with each other.

Single pairs of another variety of pelican with somewhat different markings, and earlier hatched, more mature young, nested at the edge of the large colony. Within and around the compact aggregation of species of water birds were also nesting and breeding: cormorants, grebes, and a variety of ducks, including white-eyed and pochards and ordinary mallards. The marsh teemed with hundreds of birds, all hunting and eating the countless fish.

The entire vast delta was an extravagant, ostentatious demonstration of natural abundance; a wealth of life flaunted without shame. The land was spoiled, undamaged, ruled by her own natural law and subject to her own will—and the great void whence she sprang—Mother Earth took pleasure in creating and sustaining life of prolific diversity. But pillaged by a plundering dominion, rapacious resources, despoiled by unchecked pollution, and befouled by war and corruption, her fecund ability to create and sustain could no longer be done.

Though rendered sterile by destructive subjugation, her great reproductive fertility exhausted, the final irony would still be hers, barren and stripped, the destitute mother possessed the power to destroy what she had wrought. Dominion cannot be imposed; War cannot be taken without seeking her consent, wooing her cooperation and respecting her needs. Her will to life cannot be suppressed without paying the ultimate penalty. Without her, the presumptuous life created could not survive.

Though Ayla could have watched the pelicans for much longer, she finally began to pull up some of the cattails and put them in the water since that was the reason they had come. Then they started to

e mass of floating reeds. When they came in sight of
v were much closer to their camp. As soon as they
were greeted by a long, drawn-out howl, full of tones
r his hunting foray, Wolf had followed their scent and
ip with no trouble, but when he had not found them,
>l became anxious.

whistled in return, to ease his fears. He ran to the edge
mi lifted his head and howled again. When he stopped,
tracks, ran back and forth on the bank, then plunged
ivimming toward them. As he neared, he veered away
nd headed for the mass of floating reeds, mistaking it

reach the nonexistent shore, just as Ayla and Jondalar
splashed and struggled between the reeds, finding no
ly he swam back to the boat. With difficulty, the man
grabbed the waterlogged coat of the animal and hauled
n-covered bowl. Wolf was so excited and relieved that
Hi Ayla and licked her face, and then did the same to
he finally settled down, he stood in the middle of the
himself, then howled again.

(rise, they heard an answering wolf howl, then a few
ier reply. They were surrounded by another series of
i time sounding very close. Ayla and Jondalar stared at
a chill of apprehension as they sat naked in the small
d to the howls of a pack that came not from the shore
, but from the insubstantial floating island!
ere be wolves there?" Jondalar said. "That is not an
no land, not even a shifting sandbar." Maybe they
olves at all, Jondalar thought, shuddering. Maybe they
thing else . . .

[Tilly between the reed stalks in the direction of the last
caught a glimpse of wolf fur and two yellow eyes
Tien a movement above caught her eye. She looked up
den by foliage, she saw a wolf looking down at them
of a tree, with his tongue lolling out.

t climb trees! At least no wolf she ever saw climbed a
tad watched many wolves. She tapped Jondalar and
^ the animal and caught his breath. It looked like a real
ad it get up in the tree?

!te whispered, "let's go. I don't like this island that is
? wolves that can climb trees and walk on land where

>just as edgy. They quickly paddled back across the

channel. When they were close to shore, Wolf jumped out of a i
They climbed out, quickly dragged the small craft up on the d l
then got their spears and spear-throwers. Both horses were fa
direction of the floating island, their ears pricked forward i
communicated in their stance. Normally wolves were shy and
bother them, especially since the mixed scents of horses, huma
another wolf presented an unfamiliar picture, but they wenen^'
about these wolves. Were they ordinary, real wolves or somethinnl
unnatural?

Had not their seemingly supernatural control over animals
ened away the inhabitants of the large island, they might have li
from the people who were familiar with the marshland that the s
wolves were no more unnatural than they were themselves. Tl
tery land of the great delta was home to many animals, includinm
wolves. They lived primarily in the woodlands on the islands, but!
had adapted so well to their waterlogged environment over thou
of years that they could travel through the floating reed beds (
They had even learned to climb trees, which, in a shifting, flc
landscape, gave them a tremendous advantage when they were is
by floods.

That wolves could thrive in an environment that was almost ai
was evidence of their great adaptability. It was the same adapt!
that allowed them to learn to live with humans so well that over!
though still able to breed with their wild forebears, they becou
fully domesticated that they almost appeared to be a different sft
many of them hardly resembling wolves at all. :

Across the channel on the floating island, several wolves couldl
be seen, two of them in trees. Wolf looked expectantly from Ay
Jondalar, as though waiting for instructions from the leaders d
pack. One of the reed wolves voiced another howl; then the restjf
in, sending a chill down Ayla's spine. The sound seemed ditt
from the wolf song she was used to hearing, though she could nfl
precisely how. It may have been that the reverberations from tbel
changed the tone, but it added to her feelings of uneasiness aboB
mysterious wolves. .

The standoff suddenly ended when the wolves disappeared,
as silently as they had come. One moment the man and woman
their spear-throwers, and Wolf, were facing a pack of strait
across an open channel of water, the next moment the anlffla.,
gone. Ayla and Jondalar, still holding their weapons, found t»
staring intently at harmless reeds and cattails, feeling vagi^ i
and unsettled.

raising gooseflesh on their bare skin, made them
i had dropped behind the mountains to the west and
on. They put their weapons down, hurriedly
ly built up their fire and finished setting up camp,
subdued. Ayla found herself often checking the
glad they had chosen to graze in the green field
ped.

nded the golden glow of their fire, the two people
listening, as the night sounds of the river delta
awkine night herons became active at dusk, then
E An owl sounded a series of mournful hoots. Ayla
the woods nearby and thought it was a boar. Piercing
l^--was startled by the laughing cackle of a cave hyena,
^frustrated scream of a large cat who missed a kill. She
te i lynx, or perhaps a snow leopard, and she kept
l of wolves, but none came.

mess filling in every shadow and outline, an ac-
other sounds grew that filled in all the intervals
m every channel and riverbank, lake and lily-
bon, a chorus of frogs serenaded their unseen
audience.

Iteoices of marsh and edible frogs developed the tone of
^hoir, while fire-bellied toads added their hanging, bell-
((itounterpoint were the fluty trills of variegated toads,
Me gentle croon of spadefoot toads, all set to the cadence
if sharp karreck-karreck-karreck.

Ayla and Jondalar got into their bedroll, the incessant
|| had faded into the background of familiar sounds, but
3W>lf howls, when they finally were heard in the dis-
lAyla chills. Wolf sat up and answered their call.
|te misses a wolf pack?" Jondalar said, putting his arm
the cuddled against him, glad for his warmth and close-
fe?/

W, but I worry, sometimes. Baby left me to find his
felions always leave their home territories to look for
idler pride."

lit Racer will want to leave us?" the man asked.

B» for a while and lived with a herd. I'm not sure how
(took to her, but she came back after her stallion died.
IWses live with female herds. Each herd only chooses
te has to fight off the other males. The young stallions,
gTOually live together in their own herd, but they are all
JWes when it is their season to share Pleasures. I'm sure

^

Racer will be, too, but he would have to fight with the chosen » n
Ayla explained.

"Maybe I can keep him on a lead rope during that time " T
said.

"I don't think you'll have to worry for a while. It is usually in
that horses share Pleasures, soon after they drop their foals. I'm
worried about the people we may meet on our Journey. They
understand that Whinney and Racer are special. Someone may
hurt them. They don't seem very willing to accept us, either."

As Ayla lay in Jondalar's arms, she wondered what his people
think of her. He noticed that she was quiet and pensive. He kissed
but she did not seem as responsive as usual. Perhaps she was tired
thought, it had been a full day. He was tired, himself. He fell
listening to the chorus of frogs. He woke up to the thrasher
calling out of the woman in his arms.

"Ayla! Ayla! Wake up! It's all right."

"Jondalar! Oh, Jondalar," Ayla cried, clinging to him. "I was di
ing . . . about the Clan. Creb was trying to tell me something in
tant, but we were deep in a cave and it was dark. I couldn't see
he was saying."

"You were probably thinking about them today. You talked i
them when we were on that large island looking at the sea. I dn
you seemed upset. Were you thinking that you were leaving
behind?" he asked.

She closed her eyes and nodded, not sure if she could voice
words without tears, and she hesitated to mention her concerns!
his people, whether they would accept not only her, but the h
and Wolf. The Clan and her son had been lost to her, she did not
to lose her family of animals, too, if they managed to reach his l
safely with them. She only wished she knew what Creb had
trying to tell her in her dream.

Jondalar held her, comforting her with his warmth and love, ui
standing her sorrow but not knowing what to say. His closeness
enough.

em arm of the Great Mother River, with its mean-
f channels, was the winding, twisting upper boundary
delta. Brush and trees hovered close to the outer edge
; beyond the narrow border, away from the immediate
ase, the woody vegetation quickly gave way to steppe
E«almost due west through the dry grassland, close to the
" t avoiding the sinuous turns of the river, Ay la and
l the left bank upstream.

l into the marshy wetlands frequently, usually making
; river, and they were often astonished by the diversity
s massive river mouth had seemed so uniform in the
| they had viewed it from the large island, but at close
Id a wide range of landscapes and vegetation, from bare
forest.

(Cy rode past fields upon fields of cattails, with brown
Unched into the shape of sausages, topped by spikes
Qasses of yellow pollen. The next, they saw vast beds of
'reeds, more than twice Jondalar's height, growing to- feshorter, more graceful variety; the
slender plants grew

Iff and were more densely packed together.
formed by the deposition of suspended silt, usually long,
B of land made up of sand and clay, were buffeted by
pe surging river and the conflicting currents of the sea.
I a variegated mosaic of reed beds, wetlands, steppes,
many different stages of development, all subject to rapid
H of surprises. The shifting diversity extended even be-
|Bdary. The travelers unexpectedly came upon oxbow
I completely cut off from the delta, between banks that
pcs of sedimentation in the river.

| were originally stabilized by beach plants and giant
| reached nearly five feet, which the horses loved--the
*tt attracted many other grazing animals as well. But the
W change so rapidly that they sometimes found islands,
^,

^

within the confines of the immense mouth of the river, with implants still surviving on inland dunes beside fully mature woods plete with trailing lianas.

As the woman and man traveled beside the great river they had to cross small tributaries, but the running streams were h noticeable as the horses splashed through them, and the small ra were not difficult to negotiate. The wet lowlands of slowly dn channels that had changed course were another matter. Jondalari ally detoured around them. He was acutely aware of the danse swampy fens and the soft silty soil that often formed in such ola because of the bad experience he and his brother had had when i had come that way before. But he didn't know the dangers that ^ sometimes hidden by rich greenery.

It had been a long, hot day. Jondalar and Ayla, looking for a p to camp for the night, had turned toward the river and saw v appeared to be a likely possibility. They headed down a slope toM a cool, inviting glen with tall tallows shading a particularly green Suddenly a large brown hare bounded into view on the other sid the field. Ayla urged Whinney on as she reached for the sling at waist, but as they started across the green, the horse hesitated w the solid earth beneath her hooves became spongy.

The woman felt the change of pace almost immediately, and it fortunate that her first instinctive reaction was to follow the nu lead, even though her mind was on securing dinner. She pulled short just as Jondatar and Racer came pounding up. The stallion, noticed the softer ground, but his momentum was greater, and it ried him a few steps farther.

The man was almost thrown as Racer's front feet sank into a sh of thick, silty mud, but he caught himself and jumped down along the horse. With a sharp whinny and a wrenching twist, the yo stallion, his hind legs still on solid ground, managed to pull one leg of the sucking morass. Stepping back and finding firmer support, Ki pulled until his other foot was suddenly released from the quicks with a slurping pop.

The young horse was shaken, and the man paused to lay a cam hand on his arching neck, then he twisted off a branch from a nea bush and used it to prod the ground ahead. When that was swallow he took the third long pole, which was. not used for the travel _ explored with it. Though covered with reeds and sedge, the small turned out to be a deep sinkhole of waterlogged clay and silt- horses' agile retreat had averted a possible disaster, but they proached the Great Mother River with more caution from tb^ Her capricious diversity could hold some unwelcome surprises

nued to be the dominant wildlife of the delta, particularly
s of herons, egrets, and ducks, with large numbers of
s geese, cranes, and some black storks and colorful
sting in trees. Nesting seasons varied with species, but
i to reproduce during the warmer times of year. The
ted eggs from all the different birds for quick and easy
fWolf discovered the trick of cracking shells--and devel- fe»r some of the mildly fishy flavored
varieties.

he they became accustomed to the birds of the delta. There
iurprises as they began to know what to expect, but one
Jihey were riding close to silvery willow woods beside the
ne upon a stunning scene. The trees opened up on a large
t a lake, though at first they thought it was a firmer
ice large water-lily plants covered it completely. The
I arrested their attention was hundreds of the smaller
s, standing--long necks curved into an S and long beaks
(lab at fish--on nearly every single one of the sturdy lily
unrounded each fragrant blooming white flower.
fc they watched for a while, then decided to leave, afraid
Olight come bounding up and frighten the birds off their
|y were a short distance beyond the place, setting up their
ta they saw hundreds of the long-necked herons climbing
(S Jondalar and Ayla stopped and gazed at the sight as the
|»ng large wings, became dark silhouettes against the pink
he eastern sky. The wolf came loping into camp then, and
|»ed he had routed them. Though he made no real attempt
Hy, he had such fun chasing the flocks of marsh birds that
fed if he did it because he enjoyed watching them lift into
P was certainly awed by the sight.

Ice the next morning feeling hot and sticky. The heat was
ifaering force, and she didn't want to get up. She wished
?|ust relax for a day. It wasn't so much that she was tired,
ff traveling. Even the horses need a rest, she thought. Jon-
|»een pushing to keep going, and she could sense the need
living him, but if one day would make that much difference
.the glacier he kept talking about, then they were already
aey would need more than one sure day of the right kind of
'be certain of safe travel. But when he got up and started
? did, too.

Homing progressed, the heat and humidity, even on the open
» becoming oppressive, and when Jondalar suggested that
w a swim, Ayla instantly agreed. They turned toward the

river and welcomed the sight of a shaded clearing that opened up to the water. A seasonal streambed that was still slightly soggy, with decaying leaves left only a small patch of grass, but it was cool, inviting pocket surrounded by pines and willows, a muddy backwater ditch, but a short distance beyond, at a bend in the river, a narrow, pebbly beach jutted into a quiet pool, the sun filtering through overhanging willows.

"This is perfect!" Ayla said with a big smile.

As she started to unhitch the travois, Jondalar asked, "Do you think that's necessary? We won't be here long."

"The horses need a rest, too, and they might like to have a swim," she said, removing the pack baskets and riding* from Whinney. "And I'd like to wait for Wolf to catch up with me. I haven't seen him all morning. He must have caught the scent of something wonderful that's giving him a good chase."

"All right," Jondalar said, and he started untying the travois. He put them into the bow of the boat beside him and gave the stallion a friendly slap on the rump, to let him know he was free to follow his dam.

The young woman quickly shed her few garments and waded into the pool, while Jondalar stopped to pass his water. He glanced at her, then couldn't look away. She was standing in shimmering sunlight up to her knees, in a beam of sunlight coming through an opening in the trees, bathing in brilliance that lighted her hair into a golden glow and gleamed off the bare tanned skin of her supple body.

Watching her, Jondalar was struck again by her beauty. His heart, his strong feelings of love for her overpowered him, and he caught in his throat. She bent down to lift a double handful of water and splash down on herself, accenting the rounded fullness of her breasts and exposing the paler skin of her inner thigh, and sending a heat and wanting through him. He looked down at the member still holding in his hand and smiled, beginning to think of inordinately swimming.

She looked at him as he started into the water, saw his smile, his familiar, compelling look in his intense blue eyes, then noticed the shape of his manhood changing. She felt a deep stirring in her heart then she relaxed and a tension she didn't realize was there, went away. They were not going to travel any more today, not unless they help it. They both needed a change of pace, a pleasantly surprising diversion.

He had noticed her eyes glance down at him, and at some point she gave the welcome response and a slight change in her posture.

ion

sirion her stance became somehow more inviting.
vious. He could not have hidden it if he'd wanted

aderful," she said. "It was a good idea you had, to
s getting so hot."
a heat," he said, with a wry grin as he waded
Eft know how you do it, but I have no control around

»u want to? I don't have any around you. You just
t that way, and I'm ready for you." She smiled, the
} that he loved.

Hhe breathed as he took her in his arms. She reached
febent down to touch her soft lips with his in a firm,
|ie ran his hands down her back, feeling her sun-
fc loved his touch and responded to his caress with an
Ssing anticipation.

Iwer, to her smooth rounded mounds, and pulled her
; felt the full length of his warm hardness against her
dc movement had unbalanced her. She tried to catch
»ne gave way beneath her foot. She clutched at him for
|cing him as his footing gave away. They fell into the
Ush, then sat up, laughing.

Ult, are you?" Jondalar asked.

4, "but the water is cold and I was trying to ease in.
H(, I think I'll go for a swim. Isn't that what we came
l^'

fedoesn't mean we can't do other things, too," he said.
*the water reached to just under her arms, and her full
Ming, reminding him of the curving prows of a pair of
,pink lips. He bent over and tickled a nipple with his
l|er warmth within the cool water.

»»y response and tilted her head back to let the sensa- her. He reached for her other breast,
cupped it, then

A along her side and pulled her closer. She was feeling
W»e pressure of his palm sliding across her hard nipple
Jof pleasure through her. He suckled the other, then
| her along her breast and on up her throat and neck.
|* her ear, then found her lips. She opened her mouth
fw touch of his tongue, then his kiss.

S^d, when they separated, getting up and extending a
(fta?. "Let's go swimming."

''' into the pool, until the water reached her waist,

then pulled her close to him, to kiss her again. She felt his k
between her legs, the coolness of the water as he opened her folds
a stronger sensation when he found her hard little node and rubhp^
She let the feeling course through her. Then, she thought Th
happening too fast. I'm almost ready. She took a deep breath
slipped out of his grasp and, with a laugh, splashed him.

"I think we should swim," she said, and reached out for a
strokes. The swimming hole was small, enclosed on the opposite.
by a submerged island covered with a dense reed bed. Once across
she stood up and faced him. He smiled and she felt the force of
magnetism, of his need, of his love, and wanted him. He swam toward
her as she started swimming back toward the beach. When they i
he turned and followed her.

Where the water became shallow, he stood up and said, "All right
we did our swimming," then took her hand and led her out of
water to the beach. He kissed her again and felt her pull him down
and she seemed to melt in his arms as her breasts and stomach
thighs pressed against his body.

"Now it's time for other things," he said.

Her breath caught in her throat, and he watched her eyes dilate
Her voiced quivered slightly as she tried to speak. "What of
things?" she asked, with an attempt at a teasing smile.

He dropped down on the ground cover and held up his hand to her
"Come here and I'll show you."

She sat down next to him. He pushed her back kissing her, down
with no other preliminary, he moved to cover her, and down, pushed
her legs apart, and ran his warm tongue up her cool wet folds. Her
eyes opened wide for an instant as she shivered at the sudden throbbing
rush that pulsed through her, feeling it deep inside. Then she felt
sweet pulling, as he suckled at her place of Pleasures.

He wanted to taste her, to drink her, and he knew she was reacting
His own excitement grew as he felt her respond, and his loins aching
with need as his large, slightly curving manhood swelled to its volume
He nuzzled, nibbled, suckled, manipulating her with his tongue, then
reached to taste her inside, and savored it. For all his need, he wished
he could go on forever. He loved to please her.

She felt the excited frenzy growing inside her, and she moaned,
cried out as she felt the peak rising, almost reaching its crest.
If he allowed it, he could have let himself release without
entering her, but he loved that feeling of her when he was inside
He wished there was some way he could do it all at once.

She reached for him and lifted up to meet him as the calm
storm within her rose, and then almost without warning, slid

her wetness and warmth, then raised himself and
id her welcome entrance and, with a strong surging
npletely. His eager manhood was so ready, he wasn't
i longer he could wait.

.-^it his name, reaching for him, wanting him, arching to
inluneed in again and felt her full embrace. Then, shud- ^aning, he backed out, feeling the
exquisite pull in his
bnsitive organ incited sensations deep within him. Then
was there, he could wait no more and as he pushed in
i burst of Pleasures overtake him. She cried out with him,
ht overflowed.

last strokes; then he collapsed on top of her, both of
n the exhilarating arousal and tempestuous release.
e lifted his head and she reached up to kiss him,
he smell and taste of herself, which always reminded her
de feelings he could evoke in her.

[wanted to make this last, take a long time, but I was so
»

n't mean it can't last, you know," he said, and watched a

)W.

lied off to his side, then sat up. "This rocky beach is not
Srtable," he said. "Why didn't you tell me?"
htotice, but now that you mention it, there is a stone jabbing
Hd another under my shoulder. I think we should find a
|... for you to lie on," she said with a sly grin and a glint
%"But first, I'd like to go for a real swim. Maybe there's a
Bnel nearby."

lied back into the river, swam the short distance of the pool,
itoed upstream, breaking through the shallow, muddy reed
H other side the water was suddenly cooler, then the ground
Cfeet dropped off and they found themselves in an open
|t wound through the reeds.

tehed out and pulled ahead of Jondalar, but he exerted him-
Bght up. They were both strong swimmers, and were soon
pendly competition, racing along the open channel as it
y turned through the tall reeds. They were so evenly
wat the smallest advantage could put one or the other into
yla happened to be ahead when they reached a split with
soannels curving so sharply that, when Jondalar looked up,
Wt of sight.

^yla! Where are you?" he called. There was no answer. He
"E^"1! starting up one of the channels. It twisted around on
|1! he could see were reeds; every place he turned, just walls

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^

;| , of tall reeds. In a sudden panic, he called out again, "Ayla! ^}n.

I the Mother's cold underworld are you?"

I Suddenly he heard a whistle, the one Ayla used to call Wolf a

of relief washed over him, but it sounded much farther away A.

thought it should have. He whistled back and heard her reply

started swimming back along the channel. He reached the place i

the channel split, then turned up the other fork.

It also turned back on itself and into another channel. He

strong current take him, and suddenly he was heading downso

But ahead he saw Ayla swimming hard against the pull of the so

and he swam to meet her. She kept going when he came abreast

the current would take her back down the wrong channel again

stopped. He turned around and swam upstream beside her. Whet

reached the fork, they stopped to rest, treading water.

"Ayla! What were you thinking of? Why didn't you make s

knew which way you were going?" Jondalar scolded in a loud voi

She smiled at him, knowing now that his anger was a relea

tension caused by his fear and worry. "I was just trying to keep)

I I of you. I didn't know that channel would turn back on itself so qui

' | II'- Ij". II' 1.1 !i ' - *

I or that the current would be so strong. I was carried downsi

: j ll before I realized it. Why is it so strong?"

f ' ^ ll ' His tension vented, and relieved that she was safe, Jondalar's

f, ^ . quickly dissipated. "I'm not sure," he said. "It is strange. Maybe

close to the main channel, or the land under the water is droppil

here."

"Well, let's go back. This water is cold, and I'm ready for thats

beach," Ayla said.

' Letting the current help them, their swim back was more leia

' I } ^ Though it was not as strong as the pull of the other channel, it n

I; ^ them along. Ayla turned to float on her back, and she watche

I i| ^ , green reeds slipping by and the dear blue vault above. The sui

[i i; } still in the eastern sky, but high.

Il i ^i i;^ "Do you recall where we came into this channel, Ayla?"]01

^ asked. "It all looks so much the same."

"There were three tall pines in a row on the riverbank, the o

one bigger. They were behind some hanging willows," she saidi

turned over to swim again.

"There are a lot of pines along the water here. Maybe we

head for the shore. We might have gone past them," he said.

"I don't think so. The pine on the downstream side of the "I

had a funny bent shape. I haven't seen it yet. Wait ... up a" ^

there it is, see it?" she said, moving toward the reed bed.

r

» Jondalar said. "Here's where we came through. The

sd back across the reeds to the small pool, which now
i walked out onto the little spit of stony ground with a
|r home.

tot a fire and make some tea," Ayla said, running her
farms to push the water off. She gathered up her hair
|e water out, then headed for their pack baskets, gath-
S of wood along the way.

tyour clothes?" Jondalar asked, dropping more wood.
v off a little first," she said, noting that the horses were
Steppes nearby, but not seeing any sign of Wolf. She
irony, but it wasn't the first time he had gone off alone
|"Why don't you spread out the ground cover on that
l ass. You can relax while I make the tea."

l fire going while Jondalar got some water. Then she
I herbs from her store of them, thinking about them
»ught alfalfa tea would be good, since it was generally
refreshing, with some borage flowers and leaves,
^healthful tonic, and gillyflowers for sweetness and a
He. For Jondalar, she also chose some of the deep red
lorn alder trees that she had collected very early in the
membered having mixed feelings when she picked them,
r Promise to mate with Raneë, but all the while wishing
ddalar instead. She felt a warm glow of happiness as she
tins to his cup.

IS done, she carried the two cups of tea to the patch of
Ondalar was relaxing. Part of the ground cover he had
fcin the shade already, but she was just as glad. The heat
INready warmed away the chill of the swim. She handed
I sat down beside him. They rested together companion- lithe refreshing drinks, not saying much,
watching the

|g together head to back, flicking flies away from each
tBth their tails.

rished, Jondalar lay back, his hands behind his head.
| to see him more relaxed and not pushing to be up and
lay. She put her cup down, then stretched out on her
la, putting her head in the hollow below his shoulder,
teoss his chest. She closed her eyes, breathing in his man
N"ni put his arm around her and his hand moving across
^"conscious gentle caress.

was head and kissed his warm skin, then blew her breath

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toward his neck. He felt a slight shiver and closed his eyes. _ him again, then raised up and pressed a series of nibbling linl. up his shoulder and neck. Her kisses tickled him almost more could bear, but it gave him such excruciating tingles of excitec resisted moving and forced himself to lie still.

She kissed his neck and throat, and his jaw, feeling the stu whiskers on her lips; then she lifted herself up until she reach^l mouth and moved across his lips from one side to the other soft nibbles. When she reached the other side, she pulled l looked down at him. His eyes were closed, but he had an e> of anticipation. Finally he opened his eyes and saw her leaning him and smiling with absolute delight, her hair still damp and' over one shoulder. He wanted to reach for her, crush her to he smiled back.

She bent down and explored his mouth with her tongue, s he could hardly feel it, but the breeze blowing across the wetness! unbelievable shivers through him. Finally, when he thought hi stand it no longer, she kissed him, firmly. He felt her tongue ; entrance and opened his mouth to receive her. Slowly she a inside his lips, and under his tongue, and the ribbed roof of his: testing, touching, tickling, then barely kissed his lips with h< little nibbles until he couldn't stand it. He reached up and grabbed l head and brought her to him as he lifted his head to give her a f strong, satisfying kiss.

When he dropped his head back and let go, she was grinning i chieviously. She had made him react, and they both knew it watched her, being so pleased with herself, he was pleased, t was feeling innovative, playful, and he wondered what other she had in store for him. A surge of sensation pulsed through the thought. This could turn out to be interesting. He smil waited, watching her with his startling, deep blue eyes. She leaned across and kissed his mouth again, and his n< shoulders and chest, then his nipples. Then, in a sudden shift, up on her knees at his side and leaned over him the other way, down and grasped his enlarged organ. As she took as much could hold into her warm mouth, he felt her moist warmth enck sensitive end of his manhood, and go farther. She pulled back s creating suction, and he felt a pulling that seemed to draw frort deep internal place and extend throughout every part of him. He his eyes and let himself feel the growing enjoyment, as she inov hands and warm, pulling mouth up and down his long shaft- She probed the end with her exploring tongue, then road0

id he began to want her with more urgency. She
ce the soft pouch below his member in her hand,
__ told her to always be gentle there--felt the two
round pebbles within. She wondered about them,
and felt they were important in some way. As her
d his tender sac, he felt a different sensation, plea-
touch of concern for this sensitive place, which
j him in another way.

r then and looked at him. His intense pleasure in her
doing showed on his face and in his eyes as he smiled
ig her. She was enjoying the process of Pleasuring
her in a different, but deep and exciting way, and
itde why he so loved to Pleasure her. She kissed him
ing kiss, then pulled back and put her leg over him,
sing his feet.

hest, she bent over and took his hard throbbing
o hands, one above the other. Though he was hard,
felt soft, and when she held it in her mouth, he felt . She made her soft nibbling kisses down its
length.

I the base, she reached farther down for his pouch,
in her mouth, feeling the firm roundnesses inside.
is jolts of unexpected Pleasure eddied through him.

|(oo much. Not only the tumultuous sensations he was
Se sight of her. She had lifted up to reach him, and with
tiling him, he could see her moist, deep pink petals and
|n her delicious opening. She let go of his pouch and
Blake his exciting, throbbing manhood into her mouth to
Sfhen she suddenly felt him move her back a little farther.
ft unexpected shock of excitement, his tongue had found
|tfae place of her Pleasures.

A her eagerly, completely, using his hands and his mouth,
ripulating, feeling the joy of Pleasuring her, and at the
^ excitement she caused within him as she rubbed him
awhile she suckled him.

kdy quickly and could not hold back, but he was trying
tot to let go just yet. He could easily have given in, but
*c> so when she stopped as her charging senses overcame
lack and crying out, he was glad. He felt her wetness,
Us teeth as he struggled for control. Without their earlier
^^s sure he would not have been able to, but he held
"ed a plateau just before he peaked.

te around the other way! I want all of you," he said.

She nodded, understanding. And, wanting all of him backed off and then straddled him the other way. Lifting un ^ his fullness into herself, and then lowered down. He moa called her name, over and over, feeling her deep warm well him. She felt pressures in sensitive different places as she m and down, guiding the direction of the hard fullness inside her At the plateau he had reached, his need was not quite as urn could take a little time. She leaned forward, in yet another different position. He pulled her closer so he could reach her breasts, held one to his mouth, and suckled hard; then he reac. the other, and finally, holding them together, both at the same As always, when he suckled her breasts, he felt the quivering i ment deep and low inside her.

She could feel herself building again as she moved up and do back and forth on him. He was rising above the plateau, feel stronger urges coming over him again, and when she sat bi grasped her hips and helped guide her movements, pushing pulling down. He felt a surge as she lifted up, and then, sudde was there. She moved down on him again, and he cried out v quaking tremor that rose from deep in his loins in a towering er as she moaned and shuddered with the burst that roared within I Jondalar guided her up and down a few more times, then pull down on him and kissed her nipples. Ayla quivered once more, i collapsed on him. They lay still, breathing hard, trying to catch) breaths.

Ayla was just beginning to breathe easy when she felt somet wet on her cheek. For a moment she thought it was Jondalar, b was cold as well as wet, and there was a different, though not unfi iar, smell. She opened her eyes and looked into the grinning teetto) wolf. He nosed at her again, and then between them. I "Wolf! Get away from here!" she said, pushing his cold nose) wolfish breath away, then rolled over on her side beside the man. < reached up and grabbed Wolfs ruff and pulled her fingers through fur. "But I am glad to see you. Where have you been all day? Ij getting a little worried." She sat up and held his head in her two W and put her forehead down on his, then turned toward the mil wonder how long he's been back."

"Well, I'm glad you taught him not to bother us. If he had i rupted us in the middle of that one, I'm not sure what I we done to him," Jondalar said.

He got up, then helped her up. Taking her in his arms, h down at her. "Ayla, that was . . . what can I say? I dont have the words to tell you."

' a look of love and adoration in his eyes, she had to
"Tondalar, I wish I had words, but I don't even know
t would show you what I feel. I don't know if there

guow me, Ayla, in much more than words. You show
i so many ways." Suddenly he pulled her to him and
"ing his throat constrict. "My woman, my Ayla. If I

r of fear at his words, but she only held him tighter.

do you always know what I really want?" Ayla
; sitting in the golden glow of the fire, sipping tea,
om the pitchy pine wood pop and send showers of
; night air.

ling more rested, contented, and at ease than he had
ey had fished in the afternoon--Ayla showed him
fish out of the water by hand--then she found
r had bathed and washed their hair. He had just
ill meal of some of the fish, plus the slightly fishy-
Imarsh birds, a variety of vegetables, a doughy cattail
: rocks, and a few sweet berries.

'I just pay attention to what you tell me," he said.
; first time, I thought I wanted to make it last, but
than I what I really wanted. And then later, you
> Pleasure you, and you let me, until I was ready for
tyou knew when I was ready for you. I didn't tell you."
1. Just not with words. You taught me how to speak
>es, with signs and motions, not words. I just try to
other signs."

teach you any signs like that. I don't really know any.
low to give me Pleasures before you ever learned how
^language of the Clan." She was frowning with serious-
' > understand, which brought a smile to his face.
"at there is an unspoken language among people who
; than they may realize."

ed that," Ayla said, thinking how much she was able
>ut people they met just by paying attention to the
6 without knowing it.

mes you learn how to ... do some things just because
' you pay attention," he said.

l looking into his eyes, seeing in them the love he felt
s delight he seemed to be taking in her questions, and
? Focused look that came over him when he spoke. He

stared into space as though he were seeing something far a, moment, and she knew he was thinking of someone else.

"Especially when the one person you want to learn from to teach you," she said. "Zolena taught you well."

He flushed, stared at her with shocked surprise, then looked disturbed.

"I've learned much from you, too," she added, knowing had troubled him.

He seemed unable to look directly at her. When he finally did his forehead was knotted in a frown. "Ayla, how did you know }x was thinking?" he asked. "I mean, I know you have some special! That's why the Mamut took you into the Mammoth Hearth wh were adopted, but sometimes you seem to know my thoughts. E take those thoughts from my head?"

She was sensing his concern and something more distressing a fear of her. She had encountered a similar fear from some Mamutoi at the Summer Meeting when they thought she had uncanny abilities, but most of it was misunderstanding. Like ^ she had some special control over animals, when all she did ' them when they were babies and raise them as her own.

But ever since the Clan Gathering, something had changed.

It hadn't meant to drink any of the special root mixture that she made(the mog-urs, but she couldn't help it, and she hadn't meant \softline that cave and find the mog-urs, it just happened. When she ;

all sitting in a circle in that alcove deep in the cave and . . the black void that was inside her, she thought she was lost forever*

would never find her way back. Then, somehow, Creb had inside her and had spoken to her. Since then, there had been when she did seem to know things that she couldn't explain.]

when Mamut took her with him when he searched, and she felt rise up and follow him across the steppes. But as she looked at] and saw the strange way he was looking at her, a fear welled u her, a fear that she could lose him.

She looked at him in the light of the fire, then looked down.

There could be no untruths ... no lying between them. Not that she(deliberately say something that wasn't true, anyway, but not e\softline understood "refraining from speaking" that the Clan allowed

sake of privacy, could come between them now. Even at the losing him if she told him the truth, she had to tell him and tr out what was troubling him. She looked directly at him then, find words to begin.

"I did not know your thoughts, Jondalar, but I could gu^5

st talking about the unspoken signs that are made by
»ak with words? You make them, too, you know, and I
them and many times I know what they mean. Maybe
you so much and want to know you, I pay attention to
e." She looked away for a moment, and added, "That's
f the Clan are trained to do."
at him. There was some relief in his expression, and
e continued. "It's not just you. I wasn't raised with . . .
»ple, and I'm used to seeing meaning in the signs people
ed me to learn about people I meet, though it was very
rst because people who talk with words often say one
ir unspoken signs mean something else. When I finally
began to understand more than the words people said.
ozie wouldn't wager with me any more when we played
me games. I always knew which of her hands she was
irked bone in by the way she held them."
about that. She was considered very good at the game."

id you know . . . how could you know I was thinking
She's Zeiandoni now. That's usually how I think of her,
he had when she was young."
ixing you, and your eyes were saying that you loved me,
were happy with me, and I was feeling wonderful. But
ed about wanting to learn certain things, for a moment,
me. It was like you were looking far away. You told me
lefore, about the woman who taught you . . . your gift
roll can make a woman feel. We had just been talking
&, so I knew that's who you must have been thinking

i remarkable!" he said with a big, relieved grin. "Remind
ry to keep a secret from you. Maybe you can't take
Someone's head, but you can certainly do the next thing

omething else you should know, though," she said.
own returned. "What?"

I think I may have . . . some kind of Gift. Something
lie when I was at the Clan Gathering, the time I went
lan, when Durc was a baby. I did something I wasn't
l didn't mean to, but I drank the liquid I made for the
then happened to find them in the cave. I wasn't looking
@'t even know how I got in that cave. They were . . ."
and couldn't finish. "Something happened to me. I got

lost in the darkness. Not in the cave, the darkness inside.
was going to die, but Creb helped me. He put his thoughts
head . . ."

"He what?"

"I don't know how else to explain it. He put his thoughts
head, and ever since then . . . sometimes . . . it's like he
something in me. Sometimes I think I might have some kind'
Gift. Things happen that I don't understand, and can't explain
Mamut knew."

Jondalar was quiet for a while. "So he was right to adopt you
Mammoth Hearth, then, for more than just your healing skills'
She nodded. "Maybe. I think so."

"But you didn't know my thoughts just now?"

"No. The Gift is not like that, exactly. It's more like goin
Mamut when he Searched. Or, like going to deep places, a
places."

"Spirit worlds?"

"I don't know."

Jondalar looked into the air over her head, considering the ii
tions. Then he shook his head, looked at her with a grim sn
think it must be the Mother's joke on me," he said. "The first ^
I loved was called to Serve Her, and I didn't think I'd ever love
And now when I have found a woman to love, she turns ou
destined to Serve Her. Will I lose you, too?"

"Why should you lose me? I don't know if I'm destined

Her. I don't want to Serve anyone. I just want to be with 5
share your hearth, and have your babies," Ayla objected vocif

"Have my babies?" Jondalar said, surprised at her choice 01

"How can you have my babies? I won't have babies, men doi
children. The Great Mother gives children to women. She ma
man's spirit to create them, but they're not his. Except to prov
when his mate has them. Then they are the children of his heal
Ayla had talked about it before, about men starting the r
growing inside a woman, but he hadn't fully realized, then, t
truly was a daughter of the Mammoth Hearth. That she con
spirit worlds, and might be destined to Serve Doni. Maybe
know something.

"You can call my babies children of your hearth, Jondalar.

my babies to be the children of your hearth. I just want to
you, always."

"I want that, too, Ayla. I wanted you, and your children,
before I met you. I just didn't know I would find you. I only WV
Mother doesn't start any growing inside you until we get back.

_.r " Ayla said. "I would rather wait, too."

j^cups and rinsed them out, then finished her prepa- tv start, while Jondalar packed everything except their

fev cuddled together, pleasantly tired. The Zeiandonii

Us woman beside him breathing quietly, but sleep

v"'

he was thinking. Ayla said her babies would be my

? making life begin when we shared Pleasures today?

iMted from that, then it would have to be very special,

sasures were . . . better than any . . . ever . . .

sy better? It isn't as though I never did any of those

tt with Ayla, it's different ... I never get tired of her

Be want her more and more . . . just thinking about

ait her again . . . and she thinks I know how to Plea-

e gets pregnant? She hasn't yet . . . maybe she can't.

tt't have children. But she did have a son. Could it be

srenio for a long time. She didn't get pregnant all the

, and she had a child before. I might have stayed with

if she'd had children ... I think. Just before I left,

ight she might be pregnant. Why didn't I stay? She

want to be mated to me, even though she loved me,

love her the same way. She said I loved my brother

roman. But I did care for her, maybe not the way I

I had really wanted to, I think she would have mated

it then. Did I use it as an excuse to leave? Why did I

Tionolan left and I was worried about him? Is that the

pregnant when I left, if she had another child, would

ted from the essence of my manhood? Would it be

"hat's what Ayla would say. No, that's not possible.

children, unless the Great Mother uses a man's spirit

my spirit, then?"

here, at least I'll know if she had a baby. How would

t, if Serenio has a child that might somehow be a part

r what Serenio will think when she sees Ayla? And

link of her?

^

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A

-yla was eager to be up and moving the next morning, thn it was no less sultry than it had been the day before. As she sti sparks with flint from her firestone, she wished she didn't havi bother with a fire. The food she had set by the night before and a water would have been enough for their morning meal, and thini about the Pleasures she and Jondalar had shared, she wished she cc forget about Iza's magic medicine. If she didn't drink her special maybe she could find out if they had started a baby. But Jondalar so upset at the idea of her getting pregnant on this Journey, that had to drink the tea.

The young woman didn't know how the medicine worked. She knew that if she drank a couple of bitter swallows of a strong decoc of golden thread every morning until her moon time, and a small b of the liquid from boiled antelope sage root each day that she bleeding, she didn't get pregnant.

It would not be so hard to take care of a baby while they v traveling, but she didn't want to be alone when she gave birth. didn't know if she would have lived through Durc's birth if Iza hai been there.

Ay la slapped a mosquito on her arm, then checked her suppi; herbs while the water was heating. She had enough of the ingredii of her morning tea to last a while, which was just as well, since had not noticed any of those plants growing around the marsh, l liked higher elevations and drier conditions. Checking the pouches packages within her worn otter-skin medicine bag, she decided she adequate quantities of most of the medicinal herbs that she needed case of emergency, though she would have liked to replace some 01 year's harvest with fresher plants. Fortunately she hadn't had ir occasion to use her healing herbs so far.

Shortly after they started traveling west again, they came to a Is large, fast stream. As Jondalar unfastened the pack baskets thatb down quite low on Racer's flanks, and loaded them into the bowl mounted on the travois, he took the time to study the rivers. Thesl river joined the Great Mother at a sharp angle, from upstream.

bou notice how this tributary comes into the Mother? It
bht in and flows downstream without even spreading out.
Ibe cause of that fast current we got caught in yesterday."
n are right," she said, seeing what he meant. Then she
s man. "You like to know the reasons for things, don't

aer doesn't suddenly start running fast for no reason. I
thad to be an explanation."
l it," she said.

»ht Jondalar seemed to be in a particularly good mood as
id on after crossing the river, and that made her happy.
ring with them rather than wandering off and that pleased
in the horses seemed more spirited. The rest had been
n. She was feeling alert and rested as well and, perhaps
ad just checked her medicines, she was particularly aware
of the plant and animal life of the great river mouth and
grassland they were traveling through. Though it was
>ticed slight changes.

; still the dominant form of wildlife around them, with
leron family most prevalent, but the abundance of other
V less by comparison. Large flocks of pelicans and beauti- us flew overhead, and many kinds of
raptors, including
d white-tailed eagles, honey buzzards, and hawklike hob- r greater numbers of small birds hopping,
flying, singing,
heir brilliant colors: nightingales and warblers, blackcaps,
red-breasted flycatchers, golden orioles, and many other

ams were common in the delta, but the elusive, well-
marsh birds were heard more often than seen. They sang
iristic, rather hollow, grunting notes all day, and more
h the coming of evening. But when anyone approached,
sir long beaks straight up and blended so well into the
which they nested that they seemed to disappear. She
^lng over the waters hunting for fish, however. Bitterns
stinctive in flight. Their coverts--the small feathers along
ae wings and just over the base of the tail, which covered
s of the larger flight feathers--were quite pale, and pre-
ig contrast to their dark wings and back.

irshlands also accommodated a surprising number of ani- [Ulred a variety of different
environments: roe deer and
the woods; hares, giant hamsters, and giant deer on the
sample. As they rode, they noticed many creatures they
w a while and pointed them out to each other: saiga

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jondalar became even more interested, and he wondered if rh way to attach a handle to the netting so one person could car l,^ without wading into the water. The thought stayed on his yanAl In the morning they headed for the mountain ridges stru ahead through a rare, rich, and diverse woodland. The trees assortment of deciduous and coniferous varieties, that, like the ni of the steppes, were distributed in a mosaic pattern of disri woods, broken by meadows and lakes, and in some lowlands bogs or marshes. Certain trees grew in pure stands or in assocm with other trees or vegetation depending on minor variations in mate, elevation, availability of water, or soil, which could be loam sandy or sand mixed with clay, or several other combinations. Evergreen trees preferred north-facing slopes and sandier soils where the moisture was sufficient, grew to great heights. A d forest of huge spruces, soaring to a hundred sixty feet, occupi lower slope that blended into pines that seemed to reach the I height but, though tall at a hundred thirty feet, were growing 01 higher ground)ust above. Tall stands of deep green fir made -ww thick communities of high, fat, white-barked birch. Even wft reached over seventy-five feet. Where the hills faced south and the soil was moist and fertile, li leaved hardwoods also attained amazing heights. Clusters of giant with perfectly straight trunks and no spreading branches, except crown of green leaves at the top, climbed to over a hundred forty Immense linden and ash trees reached nearly the same height, magnificent maples not far behind. In the distance ahead, the travelers could see the silvery leavi white poplars mixed in with a stand of oaks, and when they rea the place, they found the oak woods alive with breeding tree spar nesting in every conceivable cranny. Ayla even found nests of sparrows with eggs and young birds in them, built inside the nes magpies and buzzards, that were themselves inhabited by eggs young. There were also many robins in the woods, but their y were already fledged. On the slanted hillsides, where breaks in the leafy canopy all1 more sunlight to reach the ground, undergrowth was luxuriant, flowering clematis and other lianas often trailing down from the branches of the canopy. The riders approached a stand of elm5 white willows covered with vines climbing up their trunks and trt plants hanging down. There they found the nests of many st eagles and black storks. They passed aspens quivering over dew^ and thick sallows near a stream. A mixed stand of majestic elm51

md fragrant lindens marching up a hillside, over-
Act of edibles that they stopped to gather: raspberries,
rosh with not-quite-ripe hazelnuts, just the way Ay la
[a few stone pines bearing rich, hard-shelled pine nuts

its- stand of hornbeams crowded out beeches, only to be
wn again later on--and one fallen giant hornbeam,
iwith a yellow-orange coating of honey mushrooms, set
in earnest. The man joined her in collecting the deli-
uri she found, but it was Jondalar who discovered the
the help of a smoky torch and his axe, he climbed a
r made from the fallen trunk of a fir with the stumps of
s still attached, and he braved a few stings to collect
ibs. They gobbled up most of the rare treat then and
e beeswax and a few bees along with it, laughing like
iticky mess they made of themselves.

/m regions had long been the natural preserves of term-
mts, and animals, crowded out by the dry, cold condi-
t of the continent. Some pine species were so ancient
yen seen the mountains grow. Nurtured in small areas
sir survival, the relict species were available, when the
i again, to spread quickly into lands newly open to

I woman, with the two horses and the wolf, continued
direction beside the broad river, heading toward the
ails were becoming sharper, but the snowy ridges were
sight, and their progress toward them was so gradual
y noticed that they were getting closer. They made
's into the hills of the wooded countryside to the north,
' rugged and steep, but for the most part they stayed
il plain near the trench of the river. The terrains were
ie wooded plains had many plants and trees in common
ains.

realized they had come to a major change in the char-
er when they reached a large tributary rushing down
aids. They crossed it with the help of the bowl boat,
irward they came upon another fast river just as they
swing around to the south, where the Great Mother
i from after skirting the lower end of the range. The
climb the northern highlands, had made a sharp turn
ie ridge to reach the sea.

1

The bowl boat proved its usefulness again in crossing the« tributary, though they had to travel upstream from the coJ2 along the adjoining river until they found a less turbulent I'll. cross. Several other smaller streams entered the Mother just beL turn. Then, following the left bank around, the joumeyers slight jog to the west and another swing back around. Thou great river was still on their left, they were no longer facing niou^ The range was now on their right and they were looking due sra dry open steppes. Far ahead, distant purple prominences huew horizon.

Ayla kept watching the river as they traveled upstream. She that all the tributaries were carried downstream and that the great was now less full than it had been. The broad expanse of rw water did not appear any different, yet she felt that the waters < Great Mother were diminished. It was a feeling that went deepci knowing, and she kept trying to see if the immense river had altci any noticeable way.

Before long, however, the huge river's appearance did change. B deep beneath the loess, the fertile soil that had begun as rock dustgi fine by the huge glaciers and strewn by wind, and the clays, sandi gravels deposited over millennia by running water, was the ancient sif. The enduring roots of archaic mountains had formed a stable; so unyielding that the intractable granite crust, which had been f against it by the inexorable movements of the earth, had buckle risen into the mountains whose icy caps now glistened in the sun The hidden massif extended under the river, but an exposed i worn down with time though still high enough to block the rivel odus to the sea, had forced the Great Mother to veer north, seeld outlet. Finally, the ungiving rock grudgingly surrendered a narrow sage, but before she gathered herself together with its tight constr the huge river had run parallel to the sea across the level plain guidly spread out into two arms interlinked by meandering chain The relict forest was left behind as Ayla and Jondalar rode into a region of flat landscape and low rolling hills covered with s ing hay, next to a huge river marsh. The countryside resemble open steppes beside the delta, but it was a hotter, drier land with of sand dunes, mostly stabilized by tough, drought-resistant y' and fewer trees even near water. Brush, primarily wormwood, sage, and aromatic tarragon, dominated the stands of woody y that were trying to force a meager existence from the dry sou» times crowding out the dwarfed and contorted pines and will0 clung close to the banks of streams.

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the often-flooded area between the arms of the river, size only to the great delta and as rich with reeds, plants, and wildlife. Low islands with trees and small [were enclosed by muddy yellow main channels or side rater filled with fish, often unusually large. tariding through an open field quite near the water when I in Racer to a halt. Ayla pulled up beside him. He uzzled expression, but before she spoke he silenced her > his lips and pointed toward a clear pool. Underwater ; seen waving to the motion of unseen currents. At first ig unusual; then, gliding effortlessly out of the green- an enormous and beautiful golden carp appeared. On Itfaey saw several sturgeon in a lagoon; the giant fish were feet long. Jondalar was reminded of an embarrassing inci- m one of the tremendously large fish. He thought about ifaen changed his mind. bikes, and lagoons along the river's meandering course j|to nest, and great flocks of pelicans glided by on uplifting pswarm air, barely flapping their broad wings. Toads and taang their evening chorus, and sometimes provided a meal. JS skittering over muddy banks were ignored by the pass- ps, and snakes were avoided. ttined to be more leeches in these waters, making them more Sective of the places they chose for swimming, though Ayla Wi by the strange creatures that attached themselves and Iwithout their knowing it. But it was the smallest of the Kit were the most troublesome. With the swampy marsh He were also insects to plague them, more it seemed than tetimes forcing them and the animals into the river just to |- . (Mains to the west pulled back as they neared the southern |toge, putting a wider sweep of plains between the great |ere following and the line of craggy crests marching south 8& their left flank. The snow-covered chain ended in a sharp It another branch of the range, going in an east-west direc- wing the southern boundary, met the branch beside them. Ithest southeast corner, too high peaks jutted above all the I' »g south along the river and moving farther away from the K, they gained the perspective of distance. Looking back, _to see the full extent of the long line of lofty crests going stened on the highest tors, while snow mantled their steep

sides and covered the adjoining ridges in white--a constant that the short season of summer heat on the southern plainslcla* a brief interlude in a land ruled by ice. '

After leaving the mountains behind, the view of the west vacant; uninterrupted arid steppes presented a featureless pla"50 as they could see. Without the variety of the forested hills to rf the pace, or the rugged heights to break their view, one dav hi.!3? into another with little change as they followed the left bankrf" marshy waterway south. At one place the river came together c time, and they could see steppes and a richer growth of trees mx* opposite side, though there were still islands and reed bed? within 2 great stream.

Before the day was over, however, the Great Mother was spreads out again. Following her, the joumeyers continued south, veerincal slightly west. As they drew closer, the distant purple hills eaite altitude and began to exhibit their own character. In contrast to A sharp peaks of the north, the mountains to the south, though & reached summits high enough to keep a blanket of snow and ice vat well into summer, were rounded, giving the appearance ofuplands.a The southern mountains also affected the course of the river. Whh the travelers neared them, they noticed the great stream changing, wii a pattern they had seen before. Meandering channels came togetfal and straightened, then joined with others, and finally with the or arms. Reed beds and islands disappeared and the several channd formed one deep, broad channel as the huge waterway came sweep- around a wide bend toward them. 'g Jondalar and Ayla followed her around the inside turn until dMj were again facing west, toward the sun setting in a deep red hazy fl| There were no clouds that Jondalar could see, and he wondered w| was causing the vibrant uniform color that reflected off the cragg pinnacles to the north, the rugged uplands across the river, and ongl1 the rippling water with the hue of blood. 1

They continued upstream along the left bank, looking for a gB< place to camp. Ayla found herself studying the river again, intngBl by the magnificent stream. Several tributaries of various sizes, ^ rather large, had flowed into the broad river from both ^"l contributing to her prodigious volume downstream. Ayla unde ^ that the Great Mother was smaller now, by the volume of eac ^ they had passed, but she was so vast that it was still hard to ^ diminishing of her tremendous capacity. Yet at some deep e ^ young woman felt it. j

before dawn. She loved the mornings, when it was still
|e her bitter-tasting contraceptive medicine, then readied
igon-and-sage tea for the sleeping man and another for
rank it watching the morning sun wake up the mountains
It began with the first pink hint of predawn defining the
spreading slowly at first, reflecting a rosy glow in the
ddenly, even before the edge of the glowing ball of fire
we gleam above the horizon, the blazing mountaintops
lining.

woman and man started out again, they expected to see
r spread out; so they were surprised when she remained
Ie wide channel. A few brush-covered islands formed
?ad stream, but she didn't split into separate waterways.
used to seeing her meandering across the level grasslands
illy path that it seemed strange to see the enormous flood
any distance. But the Great Mother invariably took the
; she wound her way around and between high mountains
ident. The river flowed east through the southernmost
long passage. The low ground was at the foot of the
ains, which constrained and defined her right bank.
bank, between the river and the sharply folded glistening
ite and slate to the north, lay a platform, a foreland of
marily, covered with a mantle of loess. It was a rough
nd subject to violent extremes. Harsh black winds from
ccated the land in summer; high pressure over the north- tried frigid blasts of freezing air
across the open space in
gale storms rising in the sea frequently bore down from
occasional soaking rains and the fast drying winds, along
perature extremes, caused the limestone underlying the
oil to fracture, which created steeply scarped faces on flat

ises survived on the dry windy landscape, but trees were
y absent. The only woody vegetation were certain kinds
: could withstand both arid heat and searing cold. An
n-branched tamarisk bush, with its feathery foliage and
pink flowers, or a buckthorn, with black round berries
>ms, dotted the landscape, and even a few small, bushy,
shrubs could be seen. Most prevalent were several varied- sia, including a wormwood unknown to
Ayla.
^Iks looked bare and dead, but when she picked some,
ould make fuel for a fire, she discovered it was not dry
k green and living. After a brief wet squall, loose-toothed

^

leaves with a silvery down on the underside uncurled and oi^ from the stalks and numerous small yellowish flowers, like-i cupped centers of daisies, appeared on branching spikes. Excenn!' darker stems, it resembled the more familiar, lighter-colored that often grew alongside fescue and crested hair grass, until ch and sun dried the plains. Then it once again appeared lifeless and d With its variety of grasses and brush, the southern plains sunrm, hosts of animals. None they hadn't seen on the steppes farther nn but in different proportions, and some of the more cold-loviw snu such as the musk-ox, never ventured so far south. On the other hi Ayla had never seen so many saiga antelope in one place before T were a widespread animal, seen almost everywhere on the open ok but were not usually very numerous.

Ayla stopped and was watching a herd of the strange, dun looking animals. Jondalar had gone to investigate an inlet in the r with some slender tree trunks stuck into the bank that looked w place. There were no trees on this side of the river, and the arm ment seemed purposeful. When he caught up, she seemed to be lool off in the distance.

"I couldn't tell for sure," he said. "Those logs might have been there by some River People; someone could tie a boat there. Bi could be driftwood from upstream, too."

Ayla nodded, then pointed toward the dry steppes. "Look at those saigas."

Jondalar didn't see them at first. They were the color of the d Then he saw the outline of their straight horns with coiled rid| tipped slightly forward at the ends.

"They remind me of Iza. The spirit of the Saiga was her totem, woman said, smiling.

The saiga antelopes always made Ayla smile, with their long o' hanging noses and peculiar gait, which did not hinder their SPEea' noted. Wolf liked to chase them, but they were so fast that he se» got very close to them, at least not for long.

These saiga seemed to favor the black-stemmed wormwood Ml ticular, and they banded together in much larger than usual he small herd of ten or fifteen animals was common, usually feina leSi_ one and often two young; some mothers were not much nior year old themselves. But in this region the herds were numbering ^ than fifty. Ayla wondered about the males. The only tlme ^ them in any abundance was during their rutting season, ^ tried to Pleasure as many females as he could, as many

toard there were always carcasses of male saigas to be
^almost as though the males wore themselves out with
itfor the rest of the year left the sparse feed they com-
JIbe females and the young.

talso a few ibex and mouflon on the plains, often prefer-
Hear the steep scarped faces, which the wild goats and
sunb with ease. Huge herds of aurochs were scattered
'most of them with solid-color coats of a deep reddish
Surprising number of individuals had white spots, some
"hey saw faintly spotted fallow deer, red deer, and bison,
lagers. Whinney and Racer were aware of most of the
razers, but the onagers, in particular, caught their atten- ratched the herds of horselike asses
and sniffed long at
piles of dung.

the usual complement of small grassland animals: susliks,
boas, hamsters, hares, and a crested porcupine species
to the woman. Keeping their numbers in check were the
preyed on the rest. They saw small wildcats, larger
huge cave lions, and they heard the laughing cackle of

s that followed, the great river changed her course and
;n. While the landscape on the left bank, through which
veling, remained much the same--grassy low rolling hills
.is with sharp-edged scarp faces and jagged mountains
r noticed that the opposite bank became more rugged and
)utary rivers cut deep valleys, and trees climbed the
tains, occasionally covering an entire slope right down to
ige. The indented foothills and rough terrain, which de-
h bank, contributed to the broad curves swinging in every
en back on itself, but overall her course was eastward
a.

mighty turns and twists, the great body of water flowing
did spread out and break up into separate channels, but
'elop into a marshland like the delta again. It was simply
or, over more level ground, a meandering series of large
us with richer brush and greener grass nearer the water.
had sometimes seemed annoying, Ayla missed the chorus
?s, though the flutey trill of variegated toads was still a
2 aleatoric medley of night music. Lizards and steppe
teir place and along with them the distinctively beautiful
anes, who thrived on the reptiles, as well as insects and
'njoyed watching a pair of the long-legged birds, bluish-

gray with black heads and white tufts of feathers behind each feeding their young.

She did not, however, miss the mosquitoes. Without their m. breeding ground, those bothersome biting insects had largely f peared. That was not true of the gnats. Clouds of them still nia the wayfarers, particularly the furry ones.

"Ayla! Look!" Jondalar said, pointing out a simple constructii logs and planks at the edge of the river. "This is a boat landing was made by River People."

Though she did not know what a boat landing was, it was obvil not an accidental arrangement of materials. It had been pum constructed for some human use. The woman felt a surge of e; ment. "Does that mean there are people around here?"

"Probably not right now--there's no boat at the landing--bu far. This must be a place that is used frequently. They wouldn't the trouble of making a landing if they didn't use it a lot, and wouldn't use a place that was far away very often."

Jondalar studied the landing for a moment, then looked upst and across the river. "I'm not certain, but I'd say whoever built lives on the other side of the river, and they land here when they c Maybe they come over to hunt, or collect roots, or something."

Proceeding upriver, they both kept looking across the wide str Except in general, they hadn't paid much attention to the territoi the other side until now, and it occurred to Ayla that there may been people over there that they hadn't noticed before. They ha(gone far when Jondalar caught a movement on the water, some tance upstream. He stopped to verify his sighting.

"Ayla, look over there," he said when she stopped beside him. could be a Ramudoï boat."

She looked and saw something, but she wasn't sure what she seeing. They urged the horses on. When they got closer, Ay"*8 boat unlike anything she had ever seen before. She was only 'all with boats made in the Mamutoï style, hide-covered frames id* the shape of a bowl like the one that was mounted on the trav0^ one she saw on the river was made of wood and came to a p" front. It held several people in a row. As they drew abreast,^ noticed more people on the opposite shore. Lj

"Hola!" Jondalar called out, waving his arm in greeting. He ^ some other words in a language that was unfamiliar to he i ^ there seemed to be a vague similarity to Mamutoï.

The people in the boat did not respond, and Jondalar W

een heard, though he thought they had seen him. He
tin and this time he was sure they had heard him, but
yave back. Instead they began paddling for the other side
could.

id that one of the people on the opposite shore had seen
e ran toward some other people and pointed across the
then he and some of the others left in a hurry. A couple
ed until the boat reached shore; then they left.

rses, again, isn't it?" she said.

ought he saw a tear glisten. "It wouldn't have been a good
the river here, anyway. The Cave of Sharamudoi that I
this side."

so," she said, signaling Whinney to move on. "But they
ossed in their boat. They could at least have answered

>>

Jt how strange we must look, sitting on these horses. We
se something from some spirit world with four legs, and
ie said. "You can't blame people for being afraid of some-
n'tknow."

oss the water, they could see a spacious valley that
n from the mountains nearly to the level of the mighty
' . them. A sizable river rushed through the middle of it
be Great Mother with a turbulence that sent eddies in
is and broadened her width. Adding to the play of coun-
ist beyond the tributary the southern range that bounded
ht bank curved back around.

ey, near the confluence of the two rivers, but up on a
iw several dwellings made of wood, obviously a settle-
ag around them were the people who lived there, gaping
"s passing by across the river.

Ayla said. "Let's get off the horses."

leople will at least see that we look like people, and the
t horses, not some two-headed creatures with four legs,"
> dismounted and began walking in front of the mare.

dded, threw his leg over, and leaped down. Taking hold
pc, he followed her. But the woman had just started out
frsa up to her and greeted her in his customary way. He
ut his paws on her shoulders, licked her, and nuzzled her
with his teeth. When he got down, something, perhaps a
across the wide river, made him conscious of the people
tching. He went to the edge of the bank and, lifting his

head, began a series of yips that led into a heart-stopping ni,,
wolf song.

"Why is he doing that?" Jondalar said.

"I don't know. He hasn't seen anyone else for a lone time ;
Maybe he's glad to see them and wants to greet them," Avia'
would, too, but we can't cross over to their side very easily aA
won't come over here."

Ever since leaving behind the deep curve of the river char
changed their direction toward the setting sun, the travelers had t
bearing slightly south in their generally westward advance. Bur
yond the valley, where the mountains angled back, they began hex
due west. They were as far south as they would go on their Toun
and it was the hottest season of the year.

During the highest days of summer, with an incandescent
scourging the shadeless plains, even when ice as thick as mount
covered a quarter of the earth, the heat could be oppressive in
southern stretches of the continent. A strong, hot, unceasing wind i
wore on their nerves made it worse. The man and woman, riding i
by side, or walking the scorching steppes to let the horses rest, fell
a routine that made traveling, if not easy, at least possible.
They awakened with the first glimmer of dawn glistening off
highest peaks to the north and, after a light breakfast of a hot tea
cold food, were on their way before the day was fully light. As the
rose higher, it struck the open steppes with such intensity that st
mering heat waves issued from the earth. A patina of dehydra
sweat gleamed the deeply tanned skin of the humans and soaked
fur of Wolf and the horses. The wolfs tongue lolled out of his dm
as he panted with the heat. He had no urge to run off on his ow
explore or hunt but kept pace with Whinney and Racer, who plod
along, their heads hanging low. Their passengers drooped lides
allowing the horses to proceed at their own speed, talking little du
the suffocating heat of midday.

When they could not take it any longer, they looked for a *
beach, preferably near a clear backwater or slow-moving channe
the Great Mother. Even Wolf did not resist the slower curre
though he still hesitated a bit when a river ran fast. When the buO
he was traveling with turned toward the river, dismounted, and
to unfasten the baskets, he raced ahead and bounded into the
first. If it was a tributary river, they usually plunged into tw
refreshing water, crossing before removing pack basket or trav
ness.

evived by their swim, Ayla and Jondalar looked for
 ie to eat, if they didn't have enough left over or hadn't
 alone the way. Food was abundant, even on the hot,
 aid particularly in the cool watery element--if one
 J how to get it.
 t;always managed to catch fish when they wanted to,
 r Jondalar's methods or a combination of the two. If the
 fcf for it, they used Ayla's long net, walking in the water
 I between them. Jondalar had devised a handle for some
 ^Creating a kind of dip net. He wasn't entirely happy
 it was useful in certain circumstances. He also fished
 gorge--a piece of bone he had sharpened to a keen
 i both ends and tied in the middle with a strong cord.
 meat, or earthworms were threaded onto it for bait.
 allowed, a quick jerk usually caused the gorge to lodge
 ; throat of the fish with a point sticking in each side.
 ondalar caught rather large fish with the gorge, and after
 lese he made a gaff to help bring others in. He started
 lUng branch of a tree, cut off just below the joint. The
 |tf the fork was used as the handle; the shorter one was
 bto a backward point and used as a hook to haul the fish in.
 liSome small trees and high brush near the river, and the
 te made worked, but he never seemed to find a sturdy
 ing branch to last very long. The weight and struggles of a
 fct'broke it, and he kept looking for stronger wood.
 Hi by the antler the first time he saw it, registering its
 Id that it had probably been shed by a three-year-old red
 R really paying attention to its shape. But the antler stayed
 It until he suddenly remembered the backward-pointing
 tod then he went back to get it. Antlers were tough and
 day difficult to break, and it was just the right size and
 fett little sharpening, it would make an excellent gaff.
 ttshed by hand on occasion, the way Iza had taught her. It
 ifalar to watch her. The process was simple, he kept telling
 tagh he hadn't been able to master it. It just took practice,
 ttd patience--infinite patience. Ayla looked for roots or
 * rocks that overhung the bank, and then for fish that liked
 °se places. They always faced upstream, into the oncoming
 Wing swim muscles and fins just enough to keep them in
 0 they would not be swept away by the current.
 s saw a trout or small salmon, she entered the water down-
 "er hand dangle in the river, then waded slowly upstream.

She moved even more slowly when she got closer to the fish not to stir the mud or disturb the water, which could cause the swimmer to dart away. Carefully, from the rear, she slipped underneath it, touching lightly, or tickling, which the fish didn't notice. When she reached the gills, she grabbed hold swiftly SBB- scooped the fish out of the water onto the bank. Jondalar usual! to get it before it flopped back into the river. ^

Ayla also discovered freshwater mussels, similar to the ones that were in the sea near the cave of Brun's clan. She looked for plants like pigweed, salt bush, and coltsfoot, high in natural salt, to restore the somewhat depleted reserves, along with other roots, leaves and stems that were beginning to ripen. Partridges were common on the arid grassland and scrub near the water, with family coveys joining to form large flocks. The plump birds were good eating and not too hard to catch. ->fl

K^S

They rested during the worst heat of the day, after noon, while they cooked food for their main meal. With only stunted trees near the rim they set up their tent as a lean-to awning to provide a little shade from the searing heat of the open landscape. Late in the afternoon, when it started to cool down, they continued on their way. Riding into the setting sun, they used their conical woven hats to screen their eyes. They began looking for a likely place to stop for the night as the glowing orb dipped below the horizon, setting up their simple camp in twilight, and occasionally, when the moon was full and the steppe ablaze with its cool glow, they rode on into the night. M

Their evening meal was fairly light, often food saved from middling with perhaps the addition of a few fresh vegetables, grains, or meats some had been encountered along the way. Something that could be eaten quickly and cold was prepared for morning. They usually included Wolf, too. Though he foraged for himself at night, he had developed a taste for cooked meat and even enjoyed grains and vegetables. They seldom set up the tent, though the warm sleeping rolls were welcome. The nights cooled rapidly, and morning often brought a misty haze. Occasional summer thunderstorms and drenching rains were unexpected and usually welcome cooling showers, though sometimes the atmosphere was even more oppressive afterward, and Ayla hated the thunder. It reminded her too much of the sound of earthquakes. The sheet lightning that crackled across the heavens, lighting the sky, always filled them with awe, but it was the lightning that came close that bothered Jondalar. He hated to be out in the open when it came, and he always felt like crawling into his sleeping roll and covering the tent over him, though he resisted the urge and never would admit

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j besides the heat, it was the insects that they noticed
s bees, wasps, even flies and a few mosquitoes were , bothersome. It was the smallest of them all,
the clouds

Jeave them the most trouble. But if the people were
ftanimals were miserable. The persistent creatures were
» eyes, noses, and mouths, and the sweaty skin under

usually migrated north during the summer. Their
apact bodies were adapted to the cold, and while there
the southern plains--no predator was more wide-
"came from northern stock. Over time, wolves that lived
m regions had made several adaptations to the extreme
'the south, with its hot, dry summers, and winters that
5 cold as the land closer to the glaciers, but could also see
snow. For example, they shed their fur in far greater
n the weather warmed, and their panting tongues cooled
ficiently.

everything she could for the suffering animals, but even
rs in the river and various medications did not rid them
Ijtfae tiny gnats. Open running sores infested with their
ping eggs grew larger despite the medicine woman's treatises
and Wolf alike shed handfuls of hair, leaving bare spots,
^ick rich coats became matted and dull.

| a soothing wash to a sticky open sore near one of Whin-
|Ayla said, "I'm sick of this hot weather, and these terrible
|it ever be cool again?"

|y wish for this heat before this trip is through, Ayla."
^, as they continued traveling upstream beside the great
Rigged uplands and high peaks of the north angled closer,
(ded chain of mountains to the south increased in elevation.
yists and turns of their generally westward direction, they
leading just slightly north. They veered then toward the
ye making a sharp turn that began taking them northwest,
around to the north, and finally even east for a distance
9ng around a point and going northwest again.

;he couldn't exactly say why--there weren't any particular
he could positively identify--Jondalar felt a familiarity with
ipe. Following the river would take them northwest, but he
} would curve back around again. He decided, for the first
^ey had reached the great delta, to leave the security of the
tter River and ride north beside a tributary, into the foothills
» sharp-peaked mountains that were now much closer to the

river. The route they followed up the feeder river gradually h
northwest.

Ahead the mountains were coming together; a ridge joining rii i
arc of the ice-topped northern range was closing in on the e l
southern highlands, which had become sharper, higher, and icier
they were separated by only a narrow gorge. The ridge had once k
back a deep inland sea that had been surrounded by the soaring ch •
But over the vast millennia the outlet that spilled out the yearly an
mulation of water began to wear down the limestone, sandstone
shale of the mountains. The level of the inland basin was slowlvk
ered to match the height of the corridor that was being ground out
the rock until, eventually, the sea was drained, leaving behind the l
bottom that would become a sea of grass.

The narrow gorge hemmed in the Great Mother River with rmm
precipitous walls of crystalline granite. And volcanic rock which 01
had been outcrops and intrusions in the softer more erodable stone
the mountains, soared up on both sides. It was a long gateway throu
the mountains to the southern plains and ultimately to Beran Sea, i
Jondalar knew there was no way to walk beside the river as she w(
through the gorge. There was no choice but to go around.

>t for the absence of the voluminous flow, the terrain
l when they first turned aside and began following the
-dry, open grassland with stunted brush close by the
yh experienced a sense of loss. The broad expanse of
icr River had been their constant companion for so long,
concerting not to see her comforting presence there be- awing them the way. As they proceeded
toward the
ained altitude, the brush filled out, became taller and
ended farther out into the plains.
; of the great river affected Jondalar, too. One day had
lother with reassuring monotony as they traveled beside
waters in the natural warmth of summer. The predict-
lavish abundance had lulled him into complacency and
ixious worries about getting Ayla home safely. After
from the bountiful Mother of rivers, his concerns re-
e changing countryside made him think about the land- le began to consider their provisions and
wonder if they
od with them. He wasn't as sure about the easy avail-
n the smaller waterway, and even less certain of foraging
mountains.
sn't as familiar with the ways of woodland wildlife. An-
pen plains tended to congregate in herds and could be
Stance, but the fauna that lived in the forest were more
lere were trees and brush to conceal them. When he had
Sharamudoi, he had always hunted with someone who
i region.
doi half of the people liked to hunt the high tors for
faey knew the ways of bear, boar, forest bison, and other
nd prey. Jondalar recalled that Thonolan had developed
m" hunting in the mountains with them. The Ramudoi
e other hand, knew the river and hunted its creatures,
giant sturgeon. Jondalar had been more interested in the
"ing the ways of the river. Though he had climbed the

mountains with the chamois hunters on occasion, he didn't carp for heights.

Sighting a small herd of red deer, Jondalar decided that it }vn n a good opportunity to procure a supply of meat to see them th the next few days until they reached the Sharamudoi, and nprt, bring some with them to share. Ayla was eager when he suggest?*) She enjoyed hunting and they hadn't done much of it recently for bringing down a few partridges and other small game, which usually did with her sling. The Great Mother River had been so eivi it hadn't been necessary to hunt much.

They found a place to set up their camp near the small river their pack baskets and the travois, and started off in the direct of the herd with their spear-throwers and spears. Wolf was exdl they were changing their routine, and the spears and throwers siew their intentions to him. Whinney and Racer seemed friskier, too only because they were no longer carrying pack baskets or drags poles.

This group of red deer was a bachelor herd, and the antlers of ancient elk were thick with velvet. By fall, in time for the run season, when the branching horns had reached their full growth the year, the soft covering of skin and nourishing blood vessels we dry up and peel off--with help from the deer rubbing them agai trees or rocks.

The woman and man stopped to appraise the situation. Wolfi full of anticipation, whining and making false starts. Ayla had to <a mand him to stay still, so he wouldn't chase after and scatter the ht Jondalar, glad to see him settle down, gave a passing thought of ad ration at the way Ayla had trained him, then turned back to study deer. Sitting astride the horse gave the man an overall view, and other advantage he would not have had on foot. Several of the antte animals had stopped feeding, aware of the presence of the newcofflf but horses were not threatening. They were fellow grazers that w usually tolerated or ignored, if they were not signaling fear. Even« the presence of human and wolf, the deer were not yet concen enough to run.

Looking over the herd to decide which one to try for, Jondalar tempted by a magnificent stag with a commanding rack who seem be looking directly at him, as though assessing the man in Perhaps if he'd been with a band of hunters needing food for a Cave, and wanting to show off their prowess, he might have cons going after the majestic animal. But the man was sure that w tumn brought their season of Pleasures, many females would u6

rd that chose him. Jondalar couldn't bring himself to kill
.and beautiful animal just for a little meat. He selected

I
the one near the tall bush? On the edge of the herd?" The
ed. "He seems to be in a good position to break away
rs. Let's try for him."
d over their strategy, then separated. Wolf watched the
e horse closely and, at her signal, sprang forward toward
indicated. Ayla, on the mare, was close on his heels.
coming around from the other side, spear and thrower

snsed danger, and so did the rest of the herd. They were
ly in all directions. The one they had chosen leaped away
eking wolf and the charging woman, straight at the man
i. He came so close that Racer shied back.
d been ready with his spear, but the stallion's quick move
n and distracted him. The stag changed direction, trying
from the horse and human blocking his way, only to find
l his path. In fear, the deer leaped to the side, away from
cedator, and dashed between Ayla and Jondalar.
r made another bound, Ayla shifted weight as she took
y, understanding the signal, pounded after him. Jondalar
balance and hurled his spear at the fleeing stag, just as
icrs.

antlers jerked once, and then again. Both spears landed
rce, almost simultaneously. The large stag tried to leap »ut it was too late. The spears had found
their mark. The
red, then fell in midstride.

were empty. The herd had disappeared, but the hunters
as they jumped off their horses beside the stag. Jondalar
i-handled knife out of its sheath, grabbed the velveted
d the. head back, and slit the throat of the large ancient
od silently and watched the blood pool around the head
he dry earth absorbed it.

return to the Great Earth Mother, give Her our thanks,"
to the red deer lying dead upon the ground.

id agreement. She was accustomed to this ritual of his.
similar words every time they killed an animal, even a
t she sensed it was never done by rote, just to be saying
s feeling and reverence in his words. His thanks were

The low, rolling plains gave way to steep hills, and birch appeared among the brush, then woods of hornbeam and beerk oak intermixed. At the lower elevations, the region resemhio^" wooded hills they had traveled beside near the delta of the o^l! Mother River. Climbing higher, they began to see fir and spruce n?l! few larch and pine among the huge deciduous trees, "'t! They came to a clearing, an open, rounded knoll somewhat h" than the surrounding woodland. Jondalar halted to get his beari but Ay la was stopped by the view. They were higher in altitude she realized. Toward the west, looking down over the tops of she could see the Great Mother River in the distance, all her cha gathered together again, winding through a deep gorge of sheer i walls. She understood now why Jondalar had turned aside to fad^t way around. . .

"I've been on a boat in that passage," he said. "It's called the Gated "The Gate? You mean like a gate you'd make for a surround? Tfl close the opening and trap animals inside?" Ay la asked.

"I don't know. I never asked, but maybe that is where the r came from. Although it's more like the fence you'd build on both! leading up to the gate. It goes on for quite a distance. I wish I c take you on it." He smiled. "Maybe I will."

They headed north toward the mountain, downhill off the knoll a space, then leveled out. In front of them, like an immense wall, w a long line of huge trees, the beginning of a deep, dense, mixed fon of hardwood and evergreens. The moment they stepped within i shade of the high canopy of leaves, they found themselves in a differ world. It took a few moments for their eyes to adjust from the brqj sun to the dim silent umbra of the primeval forest, but they felt n cool damp air immediately and smelled the rich dank luxuriance; growth and decay.

Thick moss covered the ground in a seamless blanket of green «g climbed over boulders, spread over the rounded shapes of ancient 0- long fallen, and circled disintegrating standing stumps and living tl impartially. The large wolf running ahead jumped up on a mossy He broke through the ancient rotted core that was slowly disso" back into the soil, exposing writhing white grubs surprised by the of day. The man and woman soon dismounted to make it easier their way across a forest floor littered with the remnants of lire ^ regenerating offspring. . . , pounds

Seedlings sprouted from mossy rotting logs, and saplings vl ^ place in the sun where a lightning-struck tree had taken ^^-.l down with it. Flies buzzed around the nodding, pink-flowered f^

in the bright rays that reached the forest floor through canopy. The silence was uncanny; the smallest sounds
4 They spoke in whispers for no reason.
rampant; mushrooms of every variety could be found
; they looked. Leafless herbs like beechdrops, lavender
various bright-flowered small orchids, often without
ere everywhere, growing from the roots of other living
decaying remains. When Ay la saw several small, pale,
tstems with nodding heads she stopped to collect some.
I help soothe Wolfs and the horses' eyes," she explained,
te noticed a warm, sad smile playing across her face. "It's
(I used for my eyes when I cried."
was at it, she picked some mushrooms that she was certain
te-Ayla never took chances: she was very careful about
g>; Many varieties were delicious, many were not very tasty
Boiful, some were good as medicine, some would make a
(By sick, a few could help one see spirit worlds, and a few
k. And some of them could be easily confused with others.
d trouble moving the travois with its widely spaced poles
taforest. It kept getting caught between trees growing close
yhen Ayla first developed the simple but efficient method of
Mf strength of Whinney to help her transport objects too
iKsr to carry by herself, she devised a way for the horse to
|keep narrow path to her cave by bringing the poles closer
fet with the bowl boat mounted on it, they couldn't move
||es, and it was difficult getting around objects while drag-
(Ifhe travois was very effective over rough terrain, it did not
Spholes or ditches or mud, but it needed an open landscape.
Boggled for the rest of the afternoon. Jondalar finally untied
Rat entirely and dragged it himself. They were beginning to
K?ty of leaving it behind. It had been more than helpful in
IP many rivers and smaller tributaries that had flowed into
Mother, but they weren't sure if it was worth the trouble it
8(0 get it through the thick growth of trees. Even if there
? more rivers ahead, they could certainly get across them
S boat, and it was slowing them down.
Keaught them still in the forest. They set up camp for the
"ey both felt uneasy and more exposed than in the middle
?Meppes. Out in the open, even in the dark, they could see
^Ctouds, or stars, silhouettes of moving shapes. In the dense
Mhe massive trunks of tall trees that were able to hide even
taes^ the dark was absolute. The amplifying silence that had

'>'>Q

seemed uncanny when they entered the wooded world was in the deep woods at night, though they tried not to show it. The horses were tense, too, and crowded close to the known of fire. Wolf stayed at camp as well. Ayla was glad, and as ' him a serving of their meal, thought she would have kept him any case. Even Jondalar was glad; having a large friendly woli was reassuring. He could smell things, sense things, that a could not.

The night was colder in the damp woods, with a clammy sort of humidity, so heavy it felt almost like rain. They crawled their sleeping furs early, and though they were tired they talked ^^ into the night, not quite ready to trust sleeping. ^^

"I'm not sure we should bother with that bowl boat any more" Jondalar commented. "The horses can wade across the small stream without getting much of anything wet. With deeper rivers, we can IA the pack baskets to their backs, instead of letting them hang down." >| "I tied my things to a log once. After I left the Clan and was looldx for people like me, I came to a wide river. I swam across it pushing tin log," Ayla said. ;

"That must have been hard to do, and maybe more dangerous, oat having your arms free." t

"It was hard, but I had to get across, and I couldn't think of any other way," Ayla said. »

She was quiet for a while, thinking. The man, lying beside her, wondered if she had fallen asleep; then she revealed the direction her thoughts had taken, t

"Jondalar, I'm sure we have already traveled much farther than I <ti(before I found my valley. We have come a long way, haven't we?" |

"Yes, we have come a long way," he replied, a little guarded in his answer. He shifted to his side and raised up on one arm so he could see her. "But we are still a long way from my home. Are you tired of traveling already, Ayla?" ,

"A little. I would like to rest for a while. Then I'll be ready to travel again. As long as I'm with you, I don't care how far we have to go.» just didn't know this world was so big. Does it ever end?"

"To the west of my home, the land ends at the Great Waters. ? one knows what lies beyond that. I know another man who says he traveled even farther, and has seen great waters in the east, tDOUO. many people doubt him. Most people travel a little, but few travel very far, so they find it hard to believe the stories of long Journeys, UIU they see something that convinces them. But there are always a who travel far." He made a disparaging chuckle. "Though I oe

-?in

one. Wymez traveled around the Southern Sea and
s more land even farther to the south."
md Ranees mother and brought her back. It's hard to
Have you ever seen anyone else with brown skin like
had to travel far to find a woman like that," Ayla

at the face glowing in the firelight, feeling a great
__-in beside him, and a great worry. This talk of long
; him think about the long way they still had to go.
h the land ends in ice," she continued. "No one can go

cier."
f ao by boat," Jondalar said. "But I'm told that all you
t land of ice and snow, where white spirit bears live, and
ye are fish bigger than mammoths. Some of the western
t there are shamans powerful enough to Call them to the
ace they are beached, they can't go back, but . . ."
, a sudden crashing among the trees. The man and woman
I with fright, then lay perfectly still, not uttering a sound.
l breathing. A low, rumbling growl came from Wolfs
j Ayla had her arm around him and wasn't about to let him
Jtwas more thrashing about, and then silence. After a while
Iped his rumbling, too. Jondalar wasn't sure if he'd be able to
Ithat night. He finally got up to put a log on the fire, grateful
|d earlier found some good-size broken limbs that he could
tiAlis small ivory-hafted stone axe into pieces.
felcier we have to cross isn't in the north, is it?" Ayla asked
(me back to bed, her mind still on their Journey.
It's north of here, but not as far as that wall of ice to the
tCTe is another range of mountains west of these, and the ice
Bkoss is.on a highland north of them."

Wed to cross ice?"
ly cold, and there can be terrible blizzards. In spring and
fe melts a little and the ice gets rotten. Big cracks split open.
I in a deep crack, no one can get you out. In winter, most of
I fill with snow and ice, though it can still be dangerous."
Uvered suddenly. "You said there's a way around. Why do
o cross the ice?"
i only way we can avoid fla . . . Clan country."
We going to say flathead country."
a the name I've always heard, Ayla," Jondalar tried to ex-
s what everyone calls it. You're going to have to get used to
> you know. That is what most people call them."

She ignored the comment, and went on, "Why do we have r
them?" ^

"There's been some trouble." He frowned. "I don't even }c ^
those northern flatheads are the same as your Clan." He stopoerfA
went on. "But they didn't start the trouble. On our way here
heard of a band of young men who were . . . harassing them Tk
are Losadunai, the people who live near that plateau glacier."
"Why do the Losadunai want to cause trouble with the Clan3" A»
was puzzled.

"It's not the Losadunai. Not all of them. They don't want trouM
It's just this band of young men. I guess they think it's fun, or at la
that's how it started."

Ayla thought that some people's idea of fun didn't sound like mu
fun to her, but it was their Journey that she couldn't get off her mia
and how much farther they had to go. From the way Jondalar talht
they weren't even close yet. She decided that it might be best not
think too far ahead. She tried to put it out of her mind.

She stared up into the night and wished she could see the s
through the high canopy. "Jondalar, I think I see stars up there. C
you see them?"

"Where?" he said, looking up.

"Over there. You have to look straight up and back a little. See?"

"Yes . . . Yes, I think I do. It's nothing like the Mother's path
milk, but I do see a few stars," Jondalar said. 5

"What's the Mother's path of milk?"

"That's another part of the story about the Mother and Her chiK
he explained.

"Tell me it."

"I'm not sure if I can remember. Let's see, it goes somethi
like . . ."He began to chant the rhythm without words, then came
at the middle of a verse.

Her blood clotted and dried into red-ochred soil,
But the luminous child made it all worth the toil.

The Mother's great joy. A bright shining boy.

Mountains rose up spouting flames from their crests,
She suckled Her son from Her mountainous breasts.
He suckled so bard, and the sparks flew so high,
The Mother's hot milk laid a path through the sky.

tehe concluded. "Zeian doni would be pleased that I re-

l-rful Jondalar. I love the sound of it, the way the
i" She closed her eyes, repeating the verses to herself

and was reminded of how quickly she could mem-
it exactly right after only one hearing. He wished
6 as good and his knack for picking up language as quick
8%p
j8y true, is it?" Ayla asked.

teue?"

lars are the Mother's milk."

|k they are really milk," Jondalar said. "But I think there
ft the story means. The whole story."

; the story mean?"

Wit the beginnings of things, how we came to be. That
ide by the Great Earth Mother, out of Her own body; that
lithe same place as the sun and the moon, and is the Great
to them as She is to us; and that the stars are a part of

id. "There could be some truth in that," she said. She
||e said, and thought that maybe, someday, she would like
kZelandoni and ask her to tell the whole story. "Creb told
(Were the hearths of the people who live in the spirit world.
pk who have returned, and all the people not yet born.
be of the spirits of the totems."

luld be truth in that, too," Jondalar said. Flatheads really
tost human, he thought. No animal would think like that.

' ihowed me where my totem's home was, the Great Cave
i said and, stifling a yawn, she rolled over on her side.

'*>,'

^0'see the way ahead, but huge, moss-covered trunks of trees blocked
flapt climbing, not sure where she was going or why, just wishing
^and rest. She was so tired. If she could just sit down. The log
ftvtvtmg, if she could reach it, but it always seemed another step
f'sbe was on top of it, but it gave way beneath her, collapsing into
9>d wriggling grubs. She was falling through it, clawing at the
<o climb back up.

we forest was gone, and she was clambering up the steep side of a
^h an open woods along a familiar path. At the top was a high
'wSma where a small family of deer fed. Hazelnut bushes grew
vc^ of a mountain wall. She was afraid, and there was safety

behind the bushes, but she couldn't find the way in. The opening was the hazelnut bushes, and they were growing, growing to the size of huts with mossy trunks. She tried to see the way ahead, but all she could see were trees, and it was getting dark. She was afraid, but then, in the distance she saw someone moving through the deep shade. '

It was Creb. He was standing in front of the opening of a small cave. He waved her way, his hand signs saying she couldn't stay. This was not her place. She had to leave, to find another place, the place where she belonged. He tried to show her the way, but it was dark and she couldn't quite see what he was showing. Only that she had to keep going. Then he stretched out his good arm and invited her. When she looked ahead, the trees were gone. She started climbing and went toward the opening of another cave. Though she knew she had never seen it before, it was a strangely familiar cave, with an oddly misplaced boulder silhouetted against the sky above it. When she looked back, Creb was waving. She called out to him, pleading with him.

"Creb! Creb! Help me! Don't go!"

"Ayla! Wake up! You're dreaming," Jondalar said, shaking her gently. ;

She opened her eyes, but the fire had gone out and it was dark. She clung to the man.

"Oh, Jondalar, it was Creb. He was blocking the way. He wouldn't let me in--he wouldn't let me stay. He was trying to tell me something, but it was so dark I couldn't see. He was pointing toward a cave, and something about it looked familiar, but he wouldn't stay." Jondalar could feel her shaking in his arms as he held her close, comforting her with his presence. Suddenly she sat up. "That cave! The one he was blocking, that was my cave. That was where I went after Durc was born, when I was afraid they wouldn't let me keep him."

"Dreams are hard to understand. Sometimes a zeiandoni can tell you what they mean. Maybe you are still feeling bad about leaving your son," the man said.

"Maybe," she said. She did feel bad about leaving Durc, but if that was what her dream meant, why was she dreaming it now? Why after she stood on the island looking across Beran Sea, trying to see the peninsula, and cried her final goodbye to him. There was something about it that made her feel there was more to her dream than that. Finally she settled down and they both dozed off for a while. When she woke again, it was daylight, though they were still in the stia gloom of the forest.

started north in the morning on foot, with the
"lashed together, and then fastened across the middle of
nt. With each of them carrying an end, they could lift the
ei-boat over and around obstacles much more easily than
Igthem behind the horse. It gave the horses a rest, too,
eoack baskets to carry and their own feet to worry about.
dale without the guiding hand of the man on his back,
laendency to wander off to browse a little on the green
mt trees, since there hadn't been much pasture. He took a
ride and back a ways when he smelled the grass in a small
e a strong wind had blown down several trees, allowing

terired of going after him, tried for a time to hold on to both
d <rope and his end of the poles, but it was hard to watch
ik'was going to lift the poles out of the way, to watch his
|, and to be careful that he wasn't leading the young horse
|or something worse. He wished that Racer would follow
t rein or harness the way Whinney followed Ayla. Finally,
lar accidentally shoved his end of the poles and jabbed Ayla
, she came up with a suggestion.

B't you tie Racer's lead rope to Whinney?" she said. "You
follow me, and she'll watch her own footing, and won't
Itastray, and he's used to following her. Then you won't have
itemed about him wandering off, or getting into some other
nouble, and you'll only have to worry about your end of the
^.

bped for a moment, frowning, then suddenly broke into a big
|y didn't I think of that?" he said.

hthey had been gaining in elevation slowly, when the land
^et noticeably steeper the forest changed character rather
&tThe woodland thinned out, and they quickly left the large
((hardwood trees behind. Fir and spruce became the primary
ft the remaining hardwoods, even those of the same variety,
lller.

ached the top of a ridge and looked out over it onto a wide
ttt dropped down gently and then extended nearly level for
ttc distance. A mostly coniferous forest of dark green fir,
M pine, accented by a scattering of larch, with needles turn- ^i dominated the plateau. It was set
off by bright greenish-
>TOeadows, and splashed with blue and white tams, reflecting
s>y above and the clouds in the distance. A fast river parti- e space, fed by a rampaging falls
cascading down the moun-

tainside at the far end. Rising up beyond the tableland, and dusky, was the breathtaking vista of a high peak capped in white na^ masked by the clouds.

It seemed so close that Ayla felt she could almost reach on» touch it. The sun behind her illuminated the colors and shapes r»(mountain stone; light tan rock jutting out from pale gray walls- n« white faces contrasting with the dark gray of strangely regular coli that had emerged from the fiery core of the earth and cooled tn angled form of their basic crystal structure. Shimmering above was the beautiful blue-green ice of a true glacier, frosted with a that still lingered on the highest reaches. And while they watched if by magic, the sun and the rain clouds created a glowing rainbow stretched it in a great arc over the mountain.

The man and woman gazed in wonder, drinking in the be and the serenity. Ayla wondered if the rainbow was meant to them something, if only that they were welcome. She noticed the air she was breathing was deliciously cool and fresh, and breathed with relief to be away from the deadening heat of the pis Then she suddenly realized that the swarming bothersome g were gone. As far as she was concerned, she wouldn't have needed go a step farther than this plateau. She could have made her b right there.

She turned to face the man, smiling. Jondalar was stunned f moment by the sheer force of her emotions, her pleasure in the be of the place, and her desire to stay, but he felt it as pleasure in beauty and desire for her. He wanted her that instant, and it sho in his rich blue eyes and his look of love and yearning. Ayla fell force, a reflection of her own, but transmuted, and amplified thrc him.

Mounted on their horses, they stared into each other's eyes, 0" fixed by something' they could not explain but felt the force of: t evenly matched, though unique, emotions; the power of a chan each possessed, aimed at the other; and the strength of their mil love. Unthinking, they reached out to each other--which the go misinterpreted. Whinney started walking downhill and Racer lowed. The movement brought the woman and man back to an a^ ness of where they were. Feeling an inexplicable warffltb tenderness, and just a touch foolish because they didn't quite B what had happened, they smiled at each other with a look that D promise, and they continued down the hill, turning northwest low the plateau.

H» that Tondalar thought they might reach the Sharamu- brought a crisp breath of frost to the air, foretelling the
Icons and Ayla welcomed it. As they rode through the
les she could almost believe she had been there before,
known better. For some reason, she kept expecting to
ndmark. Everything seemed so familiar: the trees, the
nes the lay of the land. The more she saw, the more at
aw hazelnuts, still on the tree in their green prickly
early ripe, the way she liked them, she had to stop and
she cracked a few with her teeth, suddenly it struck her.
e felt that she knew the area, that it felt like home, was
led the mountainous region at the tip of the peninsula,
te of Brun's clan. She had grown up in a place very much
as becoming more familiar to Jondalar, too, with good
hen he found a clearly marked trail that he recognized,
yard a path that led to the outside edge of a cliff face, he
sren't far. He could feel the excitement growing inside
yla found a big thorny briar mound, high in the middle
ikly runners, and branches weighted down with ripe,
ries, he felt an edge of irritation that she wanted to delay
st to pick some.
Stop. Look. Blackberries!" Ayla said, sliding off Whin-
ig to the briar patch.
ilmost there."
ing them some." Her mouth was full. "I haven't had
he this since I left the Clan. Taste them, Jondalar! Have
d anything so sweet and good?" Her hands and mouth
"from picking small handfuls and popping them all in her
:ime.
er, Jondalar suddenly laughed. "You should see your-
"You look like a little girl, full of berry stains and all
shook his head and chuckled. She didn't answer. Her
(full.
"me, decided that they were very sweet and good, and
lore. After a few more handfuls, he stopped. "I thought
we going to pick some to take to them. We don't even
to put them in."
id for a moment, then smiled. "Yes, we do," she said,
sweat-stained, woven conical hat, and looking for some
t. "Use your hat."

They had each filled a hat nearly three-quarters full when they Wolf give a warning growl. They looked up and saw a tall u almost a man, who had come along the trail, gaping at them an wolf who was so near, eyes open wide with fear. Jondalar looked "Darvo? Darvo, is it you? It's me, Jondalar. Jondalar of the 5 donii," he said, striding toward the lad.

Jondalar was speaking a language Ayla wasn't familiar with rt she heard some words and tones that were reminiscent of Man She watched the expression on the young man's face change from to puzzlement, to recognition.

"Jondalar? Jondalar! What are you doing here? I thought you away and were never coming back," Darvo said.

They rushed toward each other and threw their arms around other; then the man backed off and looked at him, holding him b shoulders. "Let me see you! I can't believe how you've grown!" stared at the young man, drawn to the sight of another person aft(seeing one for so long.

Jondalar hugged him again. Ayla could see the genuine afft they shared, but after the first rush of greeting, Darvo seemed a embarrassed. Jondalar understood the sudden reticence. Darvo after all, nearly a man now. Formal hugs of greeting were one t but exuberant displays of unrestrained affection, even for son who had been like the man of your hearth for a time, were some else. Darvo looked at Ayla. Then he noticed the wolf she was ho back, and his eyes opened wide again. Then he saw the horses stai quietly nearby, with baskets and poles hanging on them, and his opened even wider.

"I think I'd better introduce you to my ... friends," Jondalar! "Darvo of the Sharamudoi, this is Ayla of the Mamutoi," Jon said.

Ayla recognized the cadence of the formal introduction, and ea of the words. She signaled Wolf to stay then walked toward the with both hands outstretched, palms up.

"I am Darvalo of the Sharamudoi," the young man said, takm! hands, and he said it in the Mamutoi language. "I welcome you, of the Mamutoi." .

"Tholie has taught you well! You are speaking Mamutoi as you were born to it, Darvo. Or do I say Darvalo now?" JondaW

"I am called Darvalo, now. Darvo is a child's name," the yo^ said; then he suddenly flushed. "But you can call me Darvo' want. I mean, that's the name you know."

"I think Darvalo is a fine name," Jondalar said. "I'm glad YO up the lessons with Tholie."

iffht it would be a good idea. He said I would need the
ye so to trade with the Mamutoi next spring."
aerhaps, like to meet Wolf, Darvalo?" Ayla said.
an knitted his brows in consternation. In his whole
»ected to meet a wolf face to face, and he never wanted
isn't afraid of him, Darvalo thought, and the woman
she's kind of a strange woman . . . she talks a little
t wrong, but not quite like Tholie, either.
your hand over here, and let him smell it, it will give
> know you," Ayla said.
t sure if he wanted his hand to be so close to the wolfs
fo't think there was any way he could back out now.
ached forward. Wolf sniffed his hand, then unexpect-
, His tongue was warm and wet, but it certainly didn't
;was rather nice. The youngster looked at the animal
She had an arm carelessly, and comfortably, draped
*S neck, and she was petting his head with the other
it feel like to pet a living wolf on the head, he won-
ike to feel his fur? "Ay la asked.
d surprised; then he reached out to touch, but Wolf
im and he pulled back.
said, taking his hand and putting it firmly on the
[e likes to be scratched, like this," she said, showing
^ noticed a flea, or the tentative scratchings reminded
sat back on his haunch and, with a spasm of rapid
&d behind his ear with his hind leg. Darvalo smiled.
en a wolf in such a funny position, scratching fast and
Riikes to be scratched. So do the horses," Ayla said,
ity forward.
|d atjondalar. He was just standing and smiling, like
H strange at all about a woman who scratched wolves
L"-'
BP Sharamudoi, this is whinny." Ayla said Whinney's
P»r, the way she had first named the horse, and when
landed exactly like a horse. "That's her real name, but
B» call her Whinney. It's easier forjondalar to say."
jtO horses?" Darvalo said, completely overwhelmed.
pit to a horse, but a horse doesn't listen to everyone.
go know each other first. That's why Racer listens to
JJO know Racer when he was just a baby."

Darvalo spun around to look at Jondalar and took two steps;
"You are sitting on that horse!" he said.

"Yes, I'm sitting on this horse. That's because he knows me
I mean, Darvalo. He even lets me sit on his back when he i
we can go very fast."

The young man looked like he was ready to run himself
dalar swung a leg over and slid down. "About these animals, i
help us, Darvo, if you're willing," he said. The boy looked
and ready to bolt. "We've been traveling a long time, and I'
looking forward to a visit with Dolando and Roshario, and e'
but most people get a little nervous when they first see the
They aren't used to them. Would you walk in with us, I
think if everyone sees that you aren't afraid to stand next \softline mals, they might not be so
worried, either."

The youth relaxed a little. That didn't seem so difficult.
he was already standing next to them, and wouldn't everyone I
prised to see him walking in with Jondalar and the animals? Esp
Dolando and Roshario ...

"I almost forgot," Darvalo said. "I told Roshario I would get
blackberries for her, since she can't pick them any more."

"We have blackberries," Ayla said, at the same time that Jo
said, "Why can't she pick them?"

Darvalo looked from Ayla to Jondalar. "She fell down the cliff I
boat dock and broke her arm. I don't think it will ever be
wasn't set."

"Why not?" they both asked.

"There was no one to set it."

"Where's Shamud? Or your mother?" Jondalar asked.

"Shamud died, last winter."

"I'm sorry to hear that," the man interjected.

"And my mother is gone. A Mamutoi man came to visit Tl
long after you left. He's kin, a cousin. I guess he liked my moth
he asked her to be his mate. She surprised everyone and left to
with the Mamutoi. He asked me to come, too, but Dolando a
shario asked me to stay with them. So I did. I am Sharamudc
Mamutoi," Darvalo explained. Then he looked at Ayla and
"Not that there's anything wrong with being Mamutoi," r
hastily.

"No, of course not," Jondalar said, a frown of worry on w'
understand how you feel, Darvalo. I am still Jondalar of t"
donii. How long ago did Roshario fall?"

"Summer Moon, about now," the boy said.

Jondalar with a questioning glance.

lase of last moon," he explained. "Do you think it's

w^^

Until I see her," Ayla said.

C Darvalo. A very good healer. She might be able to

^

she was shamud. With those animals and all." Dar-

l.moment, looking at the horses and the wolf, and

|ft be a very good healer." He stood up a little taller

(aprs. "I'll walk in with you so no one will be afraid of

|a

Ithese blackberries for me, too? So I can stay close to

?. They are sometimes afraid of people, too."

1

D.

•arvalo led the way downhill along the path through open wooded landscape. At the bottom of the slope they cam, another path and turned right, down a more gradual incline. The r trail was a runoff for excess water during the spring melt and in rail seasons, and though the sometime creek bed was dry at the end (hot summer, it was rocky, which made walking difficult.

Though horses were animals of the plains, Whinney and Racerw surefooted in the mountain terrain. They had learned at a young to negotiate the steep narrow trail up to Ayla's cave in the valley.] she still worried that the horses might injure themselves because of unstable footing, and she was glad when they turned up another p that came from someplace downhill and continued on. The new t was well used and wide enough in most places for two people to w side by side, though not two horses.

After traversing the side of a steep grade and around to the rig they reached a sheer rock wall. When they came to a talus slope, A felt a sense of familiarity. She had seen similar accumulations ofsh rocky debris at the base of steep walls in the mountains where she gi up. She even noticed the large white horn-shaped flowers of a st plant with jagged leaves. The members of the Mammoth Hearth had met called the unpleasant-smelling plant thorn-apple, because oi spiny green fruit, but it brought back memories from her childhood was datura. Creb and Iza had both used it, but for different purpoi The place was familiar to Jondalar because he had collected gra from the loose pile of scree to line paths and fireplaces. He felt a w of anticipation, knowing they were close. Once across the rocky slid slope, the trail had been evened out with a covering of the rock cd as it wound around the foot of the soaring wall. Ahead they could sky between the trees and brush, and Jondalar knew they were preaching the edge of the cliff. „

"Ayla, I think we should take the poles and the pack baskets oft horses here," the man said. "The path around the edge of this w not all that wide. We can come back and get them later."

was unloaded, Ayla, following the young man,
Idistance along the wall toward the open sky. Jondalar,
Ito watch, smiled when she reached the edge of the cliff
|yn--then stepped back quickly. She grabbed for the
Itouch of vertigo, then edged forward and looked out
| dropped in amazement.
|own the sheer cliff, was the same Great Mother River
t; following, but Ayla had never viewed her from this
he had seen all the branches of the river contained in a
_L but it had always been from the level of a bank that
^higher than the water itself. The urge to look down and
|his height was compelling.
JItpread-out and meandering river was gathered together
" i of rock that soared straight out of the water from roots
deep into the earth. As the deep undercurrent raced
self that moved against rock, the constrained force of the
River rolled by with silent power, undulating with an
I, of heaving swells folding and spilling over themselves.
few more tributaries would be added before the magnificent I/attain her full capacity, even this
far from the delta, she
s reached such an enormous size that the decrease was
cable, especially looking down upon her full measure of

rational
pinnacle of soaring stone broke the surface in mid-
|ring the waters with curls of foam, and while she watched,
bog its way blocked, bumped its way around one of them.
liced was a construction of wood directly below, close to the
I; she finally looked up, Ayla scanned the mountains on the
I Though still rounded, they were taller and steeper than
len downstream, nearly matching the height of the sharper
In' side. Separated only by the width of the river, the two
"once been joined until the sharp edge of time and tide cut a
E?h.
Was waiting patiently for Ayla to take in her first sight of
ic entry to the home of his people. He had lived there all his
Me it for granted, but he had seen the reaction of strangers
fave him a sense of pride when people were so overwhelmed,
de him look more closely, seeing it anew through their
tt the woman finally turned to him, he smiled, then led her
edge of the mountain wall, along a path that had been labor- 'rged from the narrow ledge it had
once been. The path
mmodate two people abreast, if they walked close together,

which made it wide enough for someone to carry wood and
had been hunted, and other supplies with relative ease and
horses.

When Jondalar approached the edge of the cliff, he felt the
ache in his groin from looking far down over empty space
that he had never entirely gotten over in all the time he had lived.
It wasn't so bad that he couldn't control it, and he did appreciate
spectacular view, as well as the work it had taken to hack out
short section of solid stone using only stone boulders and hand
axes, but it didn't change the sensation he invariably felt. Even
was better than the other commonly used way of entry.

Keeping Wolf close to her, and Whinney just behind, Ayla
led the youth around the wall. On the other side was a level
U-shaped area of appreciable size. Once, in long ages past
huge inland basin to the west was a sea, and beginning to emerge
self through the defile being worn down through the mountain!
the level of the water was much higher, and a sheltered
embayment had been formed. Now it was a protected embayment, high
river.

Green grass covered the ground in front, growing nearly to
the drop-off. About halfway back brush, huddling close to
side walls, filled out, becoming small trees that continued up
grade at the back. Jondalar knew it was possible to climb the
though few people did. It was an inconvenient, roundabout
was seldom used. On the near side, in the rounded corner at the
was a sandstone overhang, large enough to shelter several dwellings
made of wood, making a comfortable, protected living area.
Across, on the mossy green far side, was the prize possession
site. A spring of pure water starting high up trickled over
splashed down ledges, and spilled over a smaller sandstone
in a long narrow waterfall to a pool beneath. It ran off a
opposite wall to the edge of the cliff and down rocky outcrops
river.

Several people had stopped what they were doing when
saw them, particularly the wolf and the horse, started coming
wall. By the time Jondalar was in, he saw stunned apprehensive
every face.

"Darvo! What are you bringing here?" a voice called out.

"Hola!" Jondalar said, greeting the people in their language- seeing Dolando, he handed Racer's
lead rope to Ayla and, with
an arm around Darvalo's shoulder, walked toward the lead
Cave.

e Jondalar!" he said as he neared.
Bally you?" Dolando said, recognizing the man, but
ie are you coming from?"
Wintered with the Mamutoi."
lando asked.
; man must have been greatly disturbed to have
„ forms of courtesy. "Her name is Ayla, Ayla of
l^animals travel with us, too. They answer to her, or
iem will harm anyone," Jondalar said.
f?" Dolando asked.
Fs head and felt his fur," Darvalo said. "He didn't
f
litthe lad. "You touched him?"
|eu just have to get to know them."
dando. I would not come here with anyone, or any-
(l^use harm. Come and meet Ayla, and the animals.
man back to the center of the field. Several other
tie horses had begun to graze, but they stopped at
group. Winney moved in closer to the woman and
er, whose lead rope Ayla still held. Her other hand
i. The huge northern wolf was standing beside Ayla,
Irely, but was not overtly threatening.
hub make the horses unafraid of the wolf?" Dolando
jC;" ^
'^I'-'i--
||tey have nothing to fear from him. They have known
i|» tiny cub," Jondalar explained.
(tecy running away from us?" the leader asked next, as
|- jways been around people. I was there when the stal-
l^ondalar replied. "I was badly hurt, and Ayla saved
ped suddenly and looked hard at the man. "Is she a
»od.
|>er of the Mammoth Hearth."
y plump young woman spoke up then. "If she is
"Biter tattoo?"
N^she was fully trained, Tholie," Jondalar said, then
W young Mamutoi woman hadn't changed a bit. She
tand outspoken as ever.
«l_his eyes and shook his head. "That's too bad," he
W*ng his despair. "Roshario fell and hurt herself."

"Darvo told me. He said Shamud died."

"Yes, last winter. I wish the woman was a competent heal ? sent a messenger to another Cave, but their shamud had gone on ' ' A runner has gone to a different Cave, upstream, but they are f, away, and I'm afraid it is already too late to do any good."

"The training she lacked was not as a healer. Ayla is a healp lando. A very good one. She was trained by . . ." Suddenly Tr ' recalled one of Dolando's few blind spots. "... the woman who her. It's a long story, but believe me. She is competent." They had reached Ayla and the animals, and she listened watched Jondalar attentively as he spoke. There were some simi between the language he was speaking and Mamutoi, but it wa by observation that she sensed the meaning of his words and stood that he had been trying to convince the other man of sor Jondalar turned to her.

"Ayla of the Mamutoi, this is Dolando, leader of the Shami land-living half of the Sharamudoi," Jondalar said in Mamutoi. then changed to Dolando's language: "Dolando of the Sharamudoi, (is Ayla, Daughter of the Mammoth Hearth of the Mamutoi." Dolando hesitated a moment, eying the horses and then the He was a handsome animal, standing watchfully and quietly I the tall woman. The man was intrigued. He had never been so cl one before, only to a few skins. They didn't often hunt wolf, a had only seen them from a distance or running for cover. Wolf l up at him in a way that made Dolando think he was being eva) in return, then turned back to observe the others. The animal seem to be posing any threat, Dolando thought, and perhaps who had such control over animals was a skilled shamud, of her training. He offered both hands, palms open and i woman.

"In the name of the Great Mother, Mudo, I welcome you, the Mamutoi."

"In the name of Mut, the Great Earth Mother, I thank you, of the Sharamudoi," Ayla said, taking both his hands. The woman has a strange accent, Dolando thought. Sh Mamutoi, but it does have an odd quality. She doesn't exact like Tholie. Maybe she's from a different region. Dolando enough Mamutoi to understand it. He had traveled to the en" ' great river several times in his life to trade with them, a"0 helped to bring back Tholie, the Mamutoi woman. It had Dc- least he could do for the Ramudoi leader, to help the son of his mate the woman he was determined to have. Tholie had ma

. Imew her language, and it had been useful on subse-
pedirions.

rotance of Ayla had opened the way for everyone to
B- back and to meet the woman he had brought with
ned forward, and Jondalar smiled at her. In a complex
5 brother's mating, they were kin, and he was fond of

aid smiling broadly as he took both of her hands in
(tou how wonderful it is to see you."

ill to see you, too. And you have certainly learned to
yell, Jondalar. I must admit there were times when I
wuld ever be fluent."

his hands to reach up and give him a welcoming hug
: over and, on impulse, because he was so happy to be
the short woman up to give her a proper embrace.
ated, she blushed, and it occurred to her that the tall,
times moody man had changed. She didn't recall that
meously demonstrative with his affections in the past.
r down, she studied the man, and the woman he had
e had something to do with it.

Jon Camp of the Mamutoi, meet Tholie of the Sha- ty of the Mamutoi."
of Mut or Mudo, whatever you call Her, I welcome
Mamutoi."

of the Mother of All, I thank you, Tholie of the
ll am very happy to meet you. I have heard so much
't you have kin in the Lion Camp? I think Talut said
d when Jondalar mentioned you," Ayla said. She
oerceptive woman was studying her. If Tholie didn't
»e would soon discover that Ayla had not been born to

related. Not close, though. I came from a southern
i Camp is farther north," Tholie said. "I know them,
ie knows Talut. He's hard not to know, and his sister,
ich respected," Tholie said.

t Mamutoi accent, she thought, and Ayla is not a
I'm not even sure if it's an accent, just a strange way
wds. She speaks well, though. Talut always was one
m. He even took in that complaining old woman, and
o mated way beneath her status. I would like to know
Ayla, and those animals, she thought, then looked at

"Is Thonolan with the Mamutoi?" Tholie asked.

The pain in his eyes told her the answer before he said

"Thonolan is dead."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Markeno will be, too. I can't s
expect it, though. His desire to live died with Jetamio. Some*
can recover from tragedy, some cannot," Tholie said.

Ayla liked the way the woman expressed herself. Not with
ing, but open and direct. She was still very much a Mamutoi

The rest of the Cave who were present greeted Ayla. Sh
reserved acceptance, but curiosity. Their greeting to Jonda
much less restrained. He was family; there was no doubt tl
considered him one of them, and he was warmly welcomed ho;
Darvalo was still holding the hat-basket of blackberries, waitin
all the greetings were finished. He held them up to Dolando.
are some berries for Roshario," he said.

Dolando noticed the unfamiliar basket; it was not made the w
made baskets.

"Ayla gave them to me," Darvalo continued. "They were
blackberries when I met them. These were already picked."

Watching the young man, Jondalar suddenly thought of
mother. He had not expected Serenio to be gone, and he w
pointed. He had truly loved her, in a way, and he realized th
been looking forward to seeing her. Was she expecting a child'
she left? A child of his spirit? Maybe he could ask Roshario. Shel
know.

"Let's bring them to her," Dolando said, nodding a silent that
Ayla. "I'm sure she'll like them. If you want to come in, Jonda
think she's awake, and I know she will want to see you. Bring i
too. She will want to meet her. It's hard on her. You know how
Always up and busy, always the first one to greet visitors."

Jondalar translated for Ayla, and she nodded her willingness
left the horses grazing in the field, but she signaled Wolf to sta
her. She could tell that the carnivore still bothered people- horses were strange but not
considered dangerous. A wolr
hunter, capable of inflicting harm.

"Jondalar, I think it's best if Wolf stays with me for now.
ask Dolando if it is all right to bring him in? Tell him he's ao
to being indoors," Ayla said, speaking Mamutoi.

Jondalar repeated her request, although Dolando had ui
her, and, seeing his subtle reactions, Ayla suspected that he
would keep that in mind.

They walked to the back and under the sandstone she'f
central hearth that was obviously a gathering place, to a wood

a sloping tent. Ayla noticed its construction as Irdeepole was anchored in the ground at the back l oole in front. Tapered oak planks that had been a large tree trunk were leaned against it, graduated Idle back to long in front. When she got closer, she ;re fastened together with slender willow withes ri holes.

ck a yellow drape of soft leather and held it up He tied it back to allow more light in. Inside, could be seen between some of the planks, but ; walls in places to ward off drafts, although there I within the baylike niche carved out of the moun- Ismall fireplace near the front, with a shorter plank roof above it, but no rain cover. The overhang g from rain and snow. Along one wall toward the de wooden shelf, fastened to the wall on one side s on the other, covered by stuffed leather padding i light, Ayla could just make out a woman reclining

aide the bed, holding out the berries. "Here are the promised you, Roshario. But I didn't pick them. Ayla

led her eyes. She had not been sleeping, only trying |did not know visitors had arrived. She didn't quite @arvalo had said.

l&em?" she said in a weak voice.

a''l''

| over the bed, put his hand on her forehead. "To- ^.bere} Jondalar has come back," he said.

j|tssaid, looking at the man who was kneeling beside

iRarvalo. He almost winced at the pain he saw etched

itreally you? Sometimes I dream and think that I see

|10, and then I find out it's not true. Is it you, Jondalar,

s»?"

^m, Rosh," Dolando said. Jondalar thought he saw

If^He's really here. He brought someone with him. A

| Her name is Ayla." He beckoned her forward.

I^Wolf to stay, and she walked toward the woman.

8fennng great pain was immediately apparent. Her eyes

had dark circles around them, making them seem

K was flushed with fever. Even from a distance and

tt covering, Ayla could see that her arm, between the

S>w, was bent in a grotesque angle.

Mamutoi, this is Roshario of the Sharamudoi," Jon-

dalar said. Darvalo moved over and Ayla took his place
bed.

"In the name of the Mother, you are welcome, Ayla of rii
toi," Roshario said, trying to rise, then giving up and lying h
"I am sorry I cannot greet you properly."

"In the Mother's name, I thank you," Ayla said. "There
for you to get up."

Jondalar translated, but Tholie had included everyone to
gree in her language instructions, and she had laid a good gi
for understanding Mamutoi. Roshario had understood the
la's words, and she nodded.

"Jondalar, she's in terrible pain. I'm afraid it could be
want to examine her arm," Ayla said, shifting to Zeiandonu
woman wouldn't know how serious she thought the injury wa
did not disguise the urgency in her voice.

"Roshario, Ayla is a healer, a daughter of the Mammoth
She would like to look at your arm," Jondalar said, then loo
Dolando to make sure he did not disapprove. The man was
try anything that might help, so long as Roshario agreed.

"A healer?" the woman said. "Shamud?"

"Yes, like a shamud. Can she look?"

"I'm afraid it's too late to help, but she can look."

Ayla uncovered the arm. Some attempt had obviously been i
straighten it, and the wound had been cleaned and was healing,,
was swollen and bone protruded beneath the skin at an odd angli
felt the arm, trying to be as gentle as she could. The woman'
only when she lifted the arm to feel underneath but did not'
She knew her examination was painful, but she needed to fee
under the skin. Ayla looked at Roshario's eyes, smelled hi
tions, felt the pulse in her neck and in her wrist, then sat ba
heels.

"It's healing, but it's not properly set. She may eventuall;
but I don't think she will have the use of that arm, or her
way it is, and it will always cause her some pain," Ayla said,
the language they all understood to some extent. She waited
dalar to translate.

"Can you do anything?" Jondalar asked.

"I think so. It may be too late, but I would like to try to reb;
arm where it is healing wrong, and set it right. The proble _
where a broken bone has mended, it is often stronger than
itself. It could break wrong. Then she'd have two breaks,
pain for nothing."

after Jondalar's translation. Finally Roshario

K-

it won't be any worse than it is now, will it?" It
' (ban a question. "I mean, I won't have the use
w so another break won't make it any worse."

jsc words, but Ayla was already picking up the
of the Sharamudoi language and relating it to
an's tone and expression conveyed even more.

Icssence of Roshario's statement.

^through a lot more pain and get nothing for it,"

what Roshario's decision would be but wanting
od all the implications.

w," the woman said, not waiting for a translation.

t it right, will I be able to use my arm then?"

ondalar to restate her words in the language she

; meaning was clear. "You may not have full use,

I at least have some. No one can be certain, though."

K hesitate. "If there is a chance that I might be able

n, I want you to do it. I don't care about pain. Pain

imudoi heeds two good arms to climb down the trail

good is a Shamudoi woman if she can't even get

ioi dock?"

»the translation of her words. Then, looking directly

M said, "Jondalar, tell her I will try to help her, but

IS. is not whether someone has two good arms that is

(knew a man with only one arm, and one eye, but he

gand he was loved and greatly respected by all his

link Roshario would do less. This much I know. She

Jto gives in easily. Whatever the outcome, this woman

fead a useful life. She will find a way, and she will

»d respected."

d back at Ayla as she listened to Jondalar say her

| tightened her lips slightly and nodded. She took a

3osed her eyes.

^already thinking about what she needed to do. "Jon-

It my pack basket, the right-hand one. And tell Doe

slender pieces of wood for splints. And firewood,

Boking bowl, but something he won't mind giving up.

id idea to use it for cooking again. It will be used to

n medicine."

sonrinued racing ahead. I'll need something that will

nen the arm is rebroken, she was thinking. Iza would

use datura. It's strong, but it would be best for the pain, and it make her sleep. I have some dried, but fresh would be best 9^ . . . didn't I see some recently? She closed her eyes trying to r ^^ her. Yes! I did! ^e^

"Jondalar, while you get my basket, I'm going to get some of rij thorn-apple I saw on the way here," she said, reaching the entry ^ few strides. "Wolf, come with me." She was halfway across the &J before Jondalar caught up with her.

Dolando stood at the entrance to the dwelling watching Jondalar and the woman, and the wolf. Though he hadn't said anything he had been very much aware of the animal. He noticed that Wolf stayed rich* beside the woman, matching her stride when she walked. He had observed the subtle hand signals Ayla made when she approached Roshario's bed, and he saw the wolf drop to his stomach, though ln| head was up and his ears alert, watching the woman's every move* ment. When she left, he was up at her command, eager to follow hd again. l

He watched until Ayla, and the wolf that she controlled with sue! absolute assurance, turned the corner around the end of the wall. The he looked back at the woman on the bed. For the first time since tfatf horrible moment when Roshario slipped and fell, Dolando dared tri feel a glimmer of hope. |

When Ayla returned, carrying a pack basket and the datura plant she had washed in the pool, she found a square wooden cooking boa which she decided to examine more closely later, another one fillfl with water, a hot fire burning in the fireplace with several smooth rounded stones heating in it, and some small sections of plank. sb nodded her approval to Dolando. She looked through the contents fl the pack basket until she found several bowls and her old otter-sbl medicine bag.

Using a small bowl, she measured a quantity of water into the cot ing box, added several whole datura plants, including the roots, tn splashed a few drops of water on the cooking stones. Leaving them the fire to heat further, she emptied the contents of her medicine and selected a few packets. As she was putting the rest back, Jor came in.

"The horses are fine, Ayla, enjoying the grass in the field, bu _ asked everyone to stay away from them for now." He turned to lando. "They can get skittish around strangers, and I don't wan one accidentally harmed. Later we can get them used to every ""3 The leader nodded. He didn't think there was much he could say.

lOther, right now. "Wolf doesn't look very happy outside, some people seem a little alarmed by him. I really think you ing him in here."

Li rather have him inside with me, but I thought Dolando jrio might want him to wait out there."

talk to Roshario first. Then I think she can bring the animal ido said, not waiting for a translation and speaking a mixture

Hldoi and Mamutoi that Ayla had no trouble grasping. Jon- him a surprised look, but Ayla just continued the conversa-

to measure these on her for splints, too," she said, holding Ball pieces of plank, "and then I want you to scrape these ril there are no splinters, Dolando." She picked up a loose ather crumbly stone that was near the fireplace. "And rub i this sandstone until they are very smooth. Do you have skins I can cut up?"

0 smiled, though it was a bit grim. "That's what we are r, Ayla. We use the skin of the chamois, and no one makes her than the Shamudoi."

r watched them talking to each other with perfect under- even though the language they used was not exactly perfect : his head in wonder. Ayla must have known Dolando could d Mamutoi, and she was already using some Sharamudoi-- she learned the words for "plank" and "sandstone"?

some after I talk to Roshario," Dolando said.

pproached the woman on the bed. Dolando and Jondalar that Ayla traveled with a wolf as a companion--they didn't mention the horses just yet--and that she wanted to bring ; the dwelling.

s complete control over the animal," Dolando said. "He »her commands and will not harm anyone."

r shot him another look of surprise. Somehow, more had nunicated between Dolando and Ayla than he could account

o quickly agreed. Although she was curious, it didn't seem rising that this woman should be able to control a wolf. It wd her fears more. Jondalar had obviously brought a power- id who knew she needed help, just as their old Shamud had ^i many years before, that Jondalar's brother, who had been > rhinoceros, needed help. She didn't understand how Those ed the Mother knew these things; they just did, and that was r her.

Ayla went to the entry and called Wolf in, then brought him r ' Roshario. "His name is Wolf," she said.)

In some way, when she looked into the eyes of the handsome creature, he seemed to sense her anguish and her vulnerabilih, lifted one paw to the edge of her bed. Then, putting his ears do»i maneuvered his head forward, without being threatening in any and licked her face, whining almost as though he felt her pain was suddenly reminded of Rydag, and the close bond that had A oped between the sickly child and the growing wolf cub. Had experience taught him to comprehend human need and sufferingi They were all surprised at the gentle action of the wolf, but Rod was overwhelmed. She felt that something miraculous had hapm that could only bode well. She reached over with her good an touch him. "Thank you, Wolf," she said.

Ayla laid the pieces of plank bedside Roshario's arm, then gavet to Dolando, indicating the size she wanted them to be. When Dot went out, she led Wolf to a corner of the wooden dwelling, checked the cooking stones again and decided they were ready. started to take a stone out of the fire using two pieces of wood, Jondalar appeared with a bent wood tool especially designed enough spring to hold the hot cooking stones securely, and he she her how to use it. As she put several stones into the cooking b(start the datura boiling, she looked at the unusual container a more closely.

She had never seen anything like it. The square box had been i from a single plank, bent around kerfed grooves that had been cu quite all the way through for three of the corners; it was fast together with pegs at the fourth. As it was bent, the square go was eased into a groove cut the length of the plank. Designs had carved around the outside, and the lid with a handle fit over the tt These people had so many unusual things made out of wood. thought it would be interesting to see how they were made. Dol returned then with some yellow-colored skins and gave them to "Will this be enough?" he asked.

"But these are too fine," she said. "We need soft, absorbent s but they don't have to be your best." „

Jondalar and Dolando both smiled. "These are not our best, lando said. "We would never offer these in trade. There are toot imperfections in them. They are for everyday use."

Ayla knew something about working skins and making leather these were supple and smooth with an exquisitely soft feel and t^ She was very impressed and wanted to know more about theBi

time. Using the knife that Jondalar had made for her, -- flmt blade mounted in an ivory handle made of she cut the chamois skin into wide strips. led one of her packets and poured into a small bowl a F nounded dried spikenard roots, whose leaves rather we but with yellow dandelionlike flowers instead. She t water from the cooking box. Since she was making a the bone fracture mend, a little addition of datura and its numbing quality might help. But she also t yarrow, for its external painkilling and quick-healing ished out the stones and added more hot ones to the ceep the decoction simmering, smelling it to check for

ided it had reached the proper strength, she scooped 'let it cool, then carried it to Roshario. Dolando was r. Then she asked Jondalar to translate exactly what ; would be no misunderstanding. e will both dull the pain and make you sleep," Ayla ry powerful, and it is dangerous. Some people cannot ng a dosage. It will relax your muscles, so I can feel I, but you may pass your water, or mess yourself, ascles will also relax. A few people stop breathing. If u will die, Roshario." or Jondalar to repeat her statement, then longer to fully understood. Dolando was obviously upset. to use it? Can't you break her arm without it?" he

I be too painful, and her muscles are too tight. They ake it much harder to break in the right place. I have will dull the pain as well. I cannot rebreak and set the is, but you must know the danger. She will probably ig, Dolando." useless, and live in pain," Roshario said. "That is not

'e pain, but that doesn't mean you will be useless. ies to ease the pain, though they may take something »ay not be able to think as clearly," Ayla explained. icr be useless or mindless," Roshario said. "If I die, i?" o sleep and not wake up, but no one knows what may dreams. You may feel great fear or pain in your tn may even follow you to the next world."

"Do you believe pain can follow someone to the next world?" Roshario asked.

Ayla shook her head. "No, I don't think that, but I don't know if I will die if I drink that?"

"Do you think I will die if I drink that?"

"I would not offer it to you if I thought you would die. But you have unusual dreams. It is used by some, prepared another travel to other worlds, spirit worlds."

Though Jondalar had been translating the exchange of communication, there was enough understanding between them that his words were only clarified. Ayla and Roshario felt they were talking directly to each other.

"Maybe you should not take the chance, Roshario," Dolando said.

"I don't want to lose you, too."

She looked at the man with loving tenderness. "The Mother will choose one or the other of us to Her first. Either you will lose me, or I will lose you. Nothing we do can stop that. But if you are willing to let me spend more time with you, my Dolando, I don't want to spend it on pain, and it will be useless. I would rather go quietly now. And you heard Ayla, it's not likely that I will die. Even if it doesn't work, and I'm not taken off, at least I will know that I tried, and that will give me heart to go on."

Dolando, sitting on the bed beside her, holding her good hand, looked at the woman he had shared so much of his life with. He saw the determination in her eyes. Finally he nodded. Then he looked at Ayla.

"You have been honest. Now I must be honest. I will not fight against you if you fail to help her, but if she dies, you must leave quickly. I cannot be certain that I will be able to keep from bringing you, and I don't know what I may do. Consider that before we begin."

Jondalar, translating, knew the losses Dolando had suffered: To Roshario's son, the son of his hearth, and the child of his heart, killed just as he had reached the full flush of his manhood; and Jetamio, the girl he had been like a daughter to Roshario and had captured Dolando as well. She had grown to fill the void left by the death of the child after her own mother died. Her struggles to walk again, to come to the same paralysis that had taken so many, gave her a character that endeared her to everyone, including Thonolan. It seemed so understandable that she should have been taken in the agonies of childbirth. He would understand if Dolando blamed Ayla if Roshario died, but he would warn him before he would let the man harm her. He wondered if Ayla was taking on too much.

s you should reconsider," he said, speaking Zeian-

l pain, Jondalar. I have to try to help her, if she wants
willing to accept the risks, I can do no less. There is
I am a medicine woman; it is what I am. I cannot

; than Iza could."

>wn at the woman lying on the bed. "I am ready, if
o.

A

Ayla bent over the woman on the bed, holding the bowl cooling liquid. She dipped her little finger into it to check the temperature, then put it down and, gracefully lowering herself to the ground in a cross-legged position, sat quietly for a moment.

Her thoughts were drawn back to her life with the Clan, and particularly to the training she had received from the skilled and knowledgeable medicine woman who had raised her. Iza had taken care of ordinary illnesses and minor injuries with practical dispatch, but she had to treat a serious problem—an especially bad hunting accident or a life-threatening illness—she asked Creb, in his capacity as shaman, to call upon higher powers for their assistance. Iza was a medicine woman, but in the Clan, Creb was the magician, the holy man, had access to the world of the spirits.

Among the Mamutoi and, from the way Jondalar talked, apparently among his people as well, the functions of medicine woman and shaman were not necessarily separated. Those who healed often interacted with the spirit world, though not all of Those Who Served the Mamutoi were equally well versed in every capacity that was open to them. Mamut of the Lion Camp was much more like Creb. His interests were in things of the spirit and the mind. Though he did have knowledge of certain remedies and procedures, his healing abilities were relatively undeveloped, and it often fell to Talut's mate, Nezzie, to deal with minor injuries and illnesses of the Camp. At the Summer Meeting however, Ayla had met many skilled healers among the mainu who had exchanged knowledge with them.

But Ayla's training had been of the practical kind. Like Iza, she was a medicine woman, a healer. She felt herself to be unknowledgeable about the ways of the spirit world, and she wished at that moment someone like Creb to call on. She wanted, and felt she needed assistance of any powers greater than herself that would be helpful. Though Mamut had begun to train her in the understalk of the spiritual realm of the Great Mother, she was still mostly with the spirit world she grew up with, particularly her own—the spirit of the Great Cave Lion.

As a Clan spirit, she knew it was powerful, and Mamut
; spirits of all animals, indeed all spirits, were part of
Mother. He had even included her protective Cave
e ceremony when she was adopted, and she knew how
from her totem. Even though she wasn't Clan, Ayla
as the spirit of her Cave Lion would help Roshario.
With her eyes and began to make the beautiful flowing most
ancient, sacred, silent language of the Clan, the one
of the clans, used to address the world of the spirits.
; Lion, this woman, who was chosen by the powerful
grateful to have been chosen. This woman is grateful
that have been given, and most grateful for the Gifts
of lessons learned and the knowledge gained.
The Great Protector, who is known to choose males who are
and great protection, but who chose this woman and
in the totem sign when she was only a girl, this woman
this woman knows not why the spirit of the Great Cave
Lion chose a girlchild, and one of the Others, but this
is full that she was found worthy, and this woman is
in the protection of the great totem.
As a Spirit, this woman who has asked before for guid-
ance to ask for assistance. The Great Cave Lion guided this
woman through the ways of a medicine woman. This woman knows
and this woman knows remedies for illness and injury, knows
herbs and poultices and other medicines from plants, this
woman's treatments and practices. This woman is grateful for
the spirit, and grateful for the unknown knowledge of medicine
that the Spirit may guide to this woman. But this woman
knows the ways of the spirit world.
The spirit of the Cave Lion, who dwells with the stars in the
heavens, the woman lying here is not Clan; the woman is
not of the Clan, as is this woman you chose, but help is asked for
; woman suffers great pain, but the pain that is inside
the woman would suffer the pain, but the woman fears that
without us, the woman would be useless. The woman would
not be a useful woman. This medicine woman
is not of the Clan, but the help could be dangerous. This woman
is in the assistance of the spirit of the Great Cave Lion, and any
one of the Totem would choose, to guide this woman, and to
be staying here."
Udo, and Jondalar were as silent as Ayla, as she per-
formed her usual actions. Of the three, Jondalar was
the only one
she was doing, and he found himself watching the

other two as much as Ayla. Though his knowledge of the language was rudimentary--it was far more complex than he knew. He did understand that she was asking for help from the spirit Jondalar simply did not see some of the finer nuances of a merit communicating that had been developed upon an entirely different basis than any verbal language. It was impossible to fully translate anyway. At best, any translation to words seemed simplistic. He did think her graceful motions were beautiful. He recalled that it was a time when he might have been embarrassed over her act* and he smiled to himself now at his foolishness, but he was curious about how Roshario and Dolando would interpret Ayla's behavior. Dolando was perplexed and a little disturbed, since her actions were completely unfamiliar. His concern was for Roshario, and he felt strange, even if it might be for a good purpose, felt slightly threatened. When Ayla was through, Dolando looked at Jondalar with a questioning expression, but the younger man only smiled. The injury had debilitated Roshario, leaving her weak and feverish, not enough to make her delirious, but drained and disoriented, more open to suggestion. She had found herself focusing on the known woman and was strangely moved. She didn't have the least idea what Ayla's movements meant, but she did appreciate their flow and gracefulness. It was as though the woman were dancing with her hands, indeed with more than her hands. She evoked a subtle beauty with her motions. Her arms and shoulders, even her body, seemed integral parts of her dancing hands, responding to some internal rhythm that had a definite purpose. Though she didn't understand any more than she understood how Ayla had known she needed help, Roshario was certain it was important, and that it had something to do with her calling. She was Shamud; that was sufficient. She had knowledge beyond the ken of ordinary people, and anything that seemed mysterious only added to her credibility. Ayla picked up the cup and got up on her knees beside the bed. She tested the liquid again with her smallest finger, then smiled at Roshario.

"May the Great Mother of All watch over you, Roshario," she said, then lifting the woman's head and shoulders up enough for her to drink comfortably, she held the small bowl to the woman's mouth. It was a bitter, rather foetid brew, and Roshario made a face, but she encouraged her to drink more until she finally consumed the entire bowlful. Ayla lowered her back down gently and smiled again to reassure the injured woman, but she was already watching for the effect of its effect.

when you feel sleepy," Ayla said, although it would
er indications she was noting, such as changes in the
^ the depth of her breathing.
(woman could not have said that she had administered
Ibited the parasympathetic nervous system and para-
endines, but she could detect the effects, and she had
^ce to know if they were appropriate. When Ayla no- I eyelids drooping sleepily, she felt her
chest and her
dtor the relaxation of the smooth muscles of her all-
lough she would not have described it that way, and
athing closely to note the response of her lungs and
; When she was sure the woman was sleeping comfort-
»apparent danger, Ayla stood up.
' best that you leave now. Jondalar will stay and help
i firm though quiet voice, but her assured and com- re her authority.
ted to object, but he recalled that Shamud never
d ones around, either, simply refusing to help in any
person left. Perhaps that was how all of them were,
fat, as he took a long look at the sleeping woman, then
s-
} watched Ayla take command in similar situations helmed
to forget herself entirely in her concentration on an
fering person, and without thought directed others to do
(8 necessary. It did not occur to her to question her prerog- SBsomeone who needed her help, and as
a result no one
fer.
(he's sleeping, it is not easy to watch someone break the
Ison you love," Ayla said to the tall man who loved her.
Sodded, and he wondered if that was why Shamud had not
r when Thonolan was gored. It had been a frightening
aping, ragged puncture that almost made Jondalar sick
» saw it, and though he thought he wanted to stay, it
>uld have been difficult to watch Shamud doing whatever
>. He wasn't entirely sure he even wanted to stay and help
lere was no one else. He took a deep breath. If she could
lid at least try to help.
you want me to do?" he said.
I examining Roshario's arm, seeing how far it would
>nd how she reacted to such manipulation. She mumbled
ler head from side to side, but it seemed to be in response
"n or inner prompting, not directly because of pain. Ayla

prodded deeply then, digging into the flaccid muscle, trying the position of the bone. When she was finally satisfied s Jondalar to come, catching a glimpse of Wolf watching intensd ^

his place in the corner. '

"First, I will want you to support her arm at the elbow whil to break it where it is joining wrong," she said. "After it is hml will have to pull on it hard to straighten and fit it back together eriy. With her muscles so lax, the bones of a joint could I apart, and I might dislocate an elbow or a shoulder, so you to hold her firmly, and perhaps pull the other way."

"I understand," he said; at least he thought he did.

"Make sure you are in a comfortable, steady position, straighten I arm and support her elbow up about this far, and let me know you are ready," Ayla directed.

He held her arm and braced himself. "All right, I'm ready," t

With both hands, one on either side of the break that bent unnatural angle, Ayla took hold of Roshario's upper arm, gripping J experimentally in several places, feeling for the protruding end ill-knit bone under the skin and muscle. If it had healed too w would never be able to break the jointure with her bare han would have to attempt some other far less controllable means, haps not be able to rebreak it properly at all. Standing over the get the best leverage, she took a deep breath, then exerted a hard pressure against the bend with her two strong hands.

Ayla felt the snap. Jondalar heard a sickening crack. B jumped spasmodically in her sleep, and then quieted again. Ayl ded through the muscle for the newly broken bone. The go tissue had not cemented the fracture too firmly yet, perhaps] in its unnatural position the bone had not been joined in a way thatj encouraged healing. It was a good clean break. She breathed a sigh OT] relief. That part was done. She wiped the sweat off her brow with the back of her hand.

Jondalar was watching her with amazement. Though only party healed, it took very strong hands to break a bone like that. He bad always loved her sheer physical strength ever since he was first aware of it in her valley. He realized that she needed strength living alonetf she did, and thought that having to do everything for herself probably encouraged more muscle development, but he hadn t k" how strong she really was. .. ^

Ayla's strength came not only from being forced to exert herse J] to survive when she lived in the valley; it had been developing 1 *-h<lf WE*'

the time she was first adopted by Iza. The ordinary tasks inai

had become a conditioning process. Simply to keep up level of competence for a woman of the Clan, she had occasionally strong woman of the Others.

"Good, Jondalar. Now I want you to brace yourself again, lean here at the shoulder," Ayla said, showing him. "You must brace, but if you feel yourself slipping, tell me right away." She felt that the bone had resisted healing in the wrong shape, somewhat easier to break than if it had been set straight for some time, but the muscle and tendon had healed much more. She tightened this arm, some of the muscle will tear, just as it did the first time broken, and the sinews will be stretched. Muscle and tendon; hard to force, and will cause her pain later, but it must be done when you are ready."

"Do you know about this, Ayla?"

"None."

"I taught you, but how do you know this? About rebreak-
: has started to heal?"

"I took his hunters on a hunt to a distant place. They were some time, I don't remember how long. One of the hunters died shortly after they started out, but he refused to return. He was on his side and hunted with one arm. When he returned, Iza said: right," Ayla explained, quickly.

"Could he do it? Go on like that with a broken arm?"

"No," Iza said, looking incredulous. "Wouldn't he have been in great pain? He would have been in great pain, but not much was made of it. Men of the Clan would rather die than admit to pain. That's how they are; they are trained," Ayla said. "Are you ready now?"

"I wanted to ask more, but this was not the time. "Yes, I'm ready." She took a firm hold of Roshario's arm just above the elbow, while Iza held her below the shoulder. With slow but steady force, she started pulling back, not only straightening, but working it to avoid bone rubbing against bone and perhaps crushing it, to keep the ligaments from tearing. At one point it had to be bent slightly beyond its original shape to get it into a normal position.

Jondalar didn't know how she kept up the forceful, controlled tension when he could barely hold on. Ayla strained with the exertion, her forehead sweating, her breath running down her face, but she could not stop now. For the bone to be right, it needed to be straightened in a steady, smooth motion. But once she got beyond the slight overstretch, past the aid of the bone, the arm settled into the proper position, almost

of its. own accord. She felt it fall into place, carefully eased the the bed, and finally let go.

When Jondalar looked up, she was shaking, her eyes were IJ and she was breathing hard. Maintaining control under tension! been the most difficult part, and she was struggling now to control own muscles.

"I think you did it, Ayla," he said.

She took a few more deep breaths, then looked at him and smil»i broad, happy smile of victory. "Yes, I think I did," she said. "is I need to put on the splints." She carefully felt along the stra* normal-looking arm again. "If it heals right, if I haven't done damage to her arm while it was without feeling, I think she will be i to use it, but she is going to be very bruised and it will swell up."

Ayla dipped the strips of chamois skin in the hot water, placed spikenard and yarrow on it, wrapped it loosely around the arm t told Jondalar to ask Dolando if he had the splints ready.

When Jondalar stepped out of the dwelling, a crowd of faces era him. Not only Dolando, but all the rest of the Cave, both Shanu and Ramudoï, had been keeping a vigil in the gathering place aro the large hearth. "Ayla needs the splints, Dolando," he said.

"Did it work?" the Shamudoï leader asked, handing him the p» of smoothed wood.

Jondalar thought he should wait for Ayla to say, but he smi Dolando closed his eyes, took a long deep breath, and shuddered i relief.

Ayla placed the splints in position and wrapped more chamois st around them. The arm would swell, and the poultice would havet replaced. The splints were to hold the arm in place so Rosha movements would not disturb the fresh break. Later, when the s< ing went down and she wanted to move about, birchbark, damp t with hot water, would mold to her arm and dry into a rigid cast.

She checked the woman's breathing again, and the pulses mhen and wrist, listened to her chest, lifted her eyelids, then went to entrance of the dwelling.

"Dolando, you can come in now," she said to the man who was outside the door.

"Is she all right?"

"Come and see for yourself."

The man went in and knelt down beside the sleeping woman, st3 at her face. He watched her through several breaths, assuring 'aal that she was breathing, then finally looked at her arm. Un^ dressings, the outline looked straight and normal.

» Will she be able to use her arm again?"

dat I can. With the help of the spirits and the Great
; should be able to use it. It may not be with the full
e but she should be able to use it. Now, she must

llstay here with her," Dolando said, trying to convince
Soritv though he knew if she insisted, he would leave.
JOia might want to," she said, "but now that it's done,
ac I would like."

|Bve you anything you want," he said, not hesitating,
yhat she would demand of him.
to wash. Can the pool be used for swimming and

at he had expected her to say, and he was taken aback
|? Then he noticed for the first time that her face was
lackberry juice, her arms were scratched from thorny
ties were worn and dirty, and her hair was disheveled.
' chagrin, and a wry smile, he said, "Roshario would
Jane for my lack of hospitality. No one has so much as
(drink of water. You must be exhausted after your long
get Tholie. Anything you want, if we have it, it is

I the saponin-rich flowers between her wet hands until a
d; then she worked it into her hair. The foam from
a't as rich as soaproot lather, but this was a final washing
rblue petals left a pleasant mild scent. The nearby area and
d been so familiar that Ayla was sure she'd be able to find
?faat they could use to wash with, but she was pleasantly
(find both soaproot and ceanothus when they went to get
&ets and travois with the bowl boat. They had stopped to
fe horses, and Ayla told herself she would spend some time
humey later, partly to see to her coat, but also for the
i

e any foaming flowers left?" Jondalar asked.
are, on the rock near Wolf," Ayla said. "But that's the last
e can pick more next time, and some extra to dry and take
ud be nice." She ducked under the water to rinse.
s some chamois skins to dry yourselves with," Tholie said,
? the pool. She had several of the soft yellow hides in her
a t seen her come. The Mamutoi woman had tried to stay
265

as far away from the wolf as possible, circling around and apnr from the open end of the site. A little girl of three or four wk_ been walking behind, clung to her mother's leg and stared at the<3 ers with big eyes and a thumb in her mouth. I

"I left a snack for you inside," Tholie said, putting the town skins down. Jondalar and Ayla had been given a bed inside the d^ ing that she and Markeno used when they were on land. It wa. same shelter that Thonolan and Jetamio had shared with them Jondalar had a few bad moments when they first entered, reman ing the tragedy that had caused his brother to leave, and ultimad die.

"But don't spoil your appetite," Tholie added. "We are having a feast tonight, in honor of Jondalar's return." She did not add th was also in honor of Ayla for helping Roshario. The woman was sleeping, and no one wanted to tempt fate by saying it out loud b< it was known that she would wake up, and would recover.

"Thank you, Tholie. For everything," Jondalar said. Then he sn at the little girl. She put her head down and hung back behind mother even more, but she continued to stare at Jondalar. "It looks the last of the red from the bum on Shamio's face has faded. I (see even a hint of it."

Tholie picked the girl up, giving Jondalar a chance to see her be

"If you look very closely, you can see where the bum was, bui hardly noticeable. I'm grateful, the Mother was kind to her."

"She is a beautiful child," Ayla said, smiling at them and lookii the little girl with genuine longing. "You are so lucky. Somed would like to have a daughter like her." Ayla started walking outo pool. It was refreshing, but almost too cool to stay in for very 1

"Did you say her name was Shamio?"

"Yes, and I do feel lucky to have her," the young mother putting the child down. Tholie couldn't resist the compliment to offspring, and she smiled warmly at the tall, beautiful woman, was not, however, what she claimed to be. Tholie had resolved to her with reserve and caution until she learned more.

Ayla picked up a skin and began drying herself. "This is so soft, nice to dry with," she said, then stretched it around herself and to an end in at the waist. She picked up another to dry her hair, wrapped it around her head. She had noticed Shamio watching wolf, clinging to her mother but obviously curious. Wolf was i ested in her, too, all but squirming with anticipation, but so where he was told. She signaled the animal to her side, then got on one knee and put her arm around him.

> like to meet Wolf?" Ayla asked the girl. When she need up at her mother for approval. Tholie looked fcthe huge animal with the sharp teeth. "He won't jwolf loves children. He grew up with the children

iy let go of her mother and taken a tentative step ated by the creature that had been looking at her >n. The child watched him with unsmiling, solemn F whined with eagerness. Finally she took another icked for him with two hands. Tholie gasped, but ,.ned out by Shamio's giggles when Wolf licked her his eager muzzle away, grabbed a handful of fur, « and fell over him. The wolf waited patiently for then licked her face again, to another string of

e," the girl said, grabbing him by the fur of his neck like him come with her, already claiming him as her ^y.

t Ayla, and yipped a short puppy bark. She hadn't yet ise. "You can go with Shamio, Wolf," she said, giving was waiting for. She could almost believe that the look ^gratitude, but there was no mistaking his delight as he d. Even Tholie smiled.

, been watching the interaction with interest while he Bff. He picked up their clothes and walked toward the [hang with the two women. Tholie was keeping an eye |;Wolf, just in case, but she, too, was intrigued with the

She was not the only one. Many people were watching Se wolf. When a boy a little older than Shamio ap- lias also greeted with a wet invitation to join them. Just

fcr children came out of one of the dwellings, tussling Bden object. The smaller one threw it to keep the other li which Wolf took as a signal that they wanted to play Wite games. He raced after the carved stick, brought it it on the ground, his tongue panting and his tail waving, (gain. The boy picked it up and threw it again.

» must be right--he's playing with them. He must like »lie said. "But why should he like to play? He's a wolf."

* People are alike in some ways," Ayla said. "Wolves like the time they are cubs, siblings in a litter play, and the d adult wolves love to play with the little ones. Wolf y siblings when I found him; he was the only one left,

and he barely had his eyes open. He didn't grow up in a wolf na v
grew up playing with children." ' "

"But look at him. He's so tolerant, even gentle. I'm sure }»\softline Shamio pulls on his fur, it
must hurt. Why does he put up with •

Tholie asked, still trying to understand.

"It's natural for a grown wolf to be gentle with the little ones nf*
pack, so it wasn't hard to teach him to be careful, Tholie. He's e<oJt
cially gentle with small children and babies and will tolerate alrrnT
anything from them. I didn't teach him that, that's just how he is M
they get too rough, he'll move away, but he goes back later. He worite
put up with as much from older children, and he seems to know &
difference between one of them accidentally hurting him and one wt>
is being purposely hurtful. He has never really harmed anyone, but 3
will nip a little—give a little pinch with his teeth—to remind an oldtt
child, who is pulling on his tail or yanking his fur, that some thinf
hurt." °|

"The idea of anyone, particularly a child, even thinking of pullingit
wolfs tail is hard to imagine ... or it would have been until today,!
Tholie said. "And I wouldn't have believed that I'd ever see the dss.
that Shamio would play with a wolf. You have . . . made some peopM

•*• - l ~^s

think, Ayla . . . Ayla of the Mamutoi." Tholie wanted to say more.rt
ask some questions, but she didn't exactly want to accuse the womat
of lying, not after what she had done for Roshario, or at least seemed
to have done. No one knew for sure, yet. l

Ayla sensed Tholie's reservations, and she was sorry about them. tt.
placed an unspoken strain between them, and she liked the shoi^
plump Mamutoi woman. They walked a few steps in silence, watchm|
Wolf with Shamio and the other children, and Ayla thought again bo<
much she would like to have a daughter like Tholie's ... a daughter,
next time, not a son. She was such a beautiful little girl, and her naffl|
matched her. j

"Shamio is a beautiful name, Tholie, and unusual. It sounds like*
Sharamudoi name, but also like a Mamutoi name," Ayla said. _^
Tholie could not resist smiling again. "You're right. Not everfw^
knows it, but that's what I was trying to do. She would be callw
Shamie if she were Mamutoi, although that isn't a name that w^
likely be found in any Camp. It comes from the Sharamudoi laIlgu^
so her name is both. I may be Sharamudoi now, but I was born
Red Deer Hearth, a line of high status. My mother insisted on a g
Bride Price for me from Markeno's people, though he wasnt
Mamutoi. Shamio can be as proud of her Mamutoi backgroun
will be of her Sharamudoi heritage. That's why I wanted to show
in her name."

as a thought occurred to her. She turned to look at
lAvIa is an unusual name, too. What Hearth were you
e said thinking, There, now I'd like to hear you explain

r born Mamutoi, Tholie. I was adopted by the Mammoth
la said, glad that the woman had brought out the questions
pously been bothering her.

s certain she had caught the woman in a lie. "People are
by the Mammoth Hearth," she asserted. "That is the
e mamutii. People choose the way of the spirits, and may
tby the Mammoth Hearth, but they are not adopted."

|ithe usual way, Tholie, but Ayla was adopted," Jondalar
| "I was there. Talut was going to adopt her into his Lion
|t Mamut surprised everyone, and adopted her into the
| Hearth, as his own. He saw something in her--that's why
taining her. He claimed she was born to the Mammoth
|faether she was born a Mamutoi or not."

pd to the Mammoth Hearth? From outside?" Tholie said,
; but she did not doubt Jondalar. After all, she knew him and
i, but she was even more interested. Now that she no longer
istained to be watchful and cautious, her natural forthright
|rose to the surface. "Who were you born to, Ayla?"
ft know, Tholie. My people died in an earthquake when I was
gt much more than Shamio's age. I was raised by the Clan,"

I had never heard of any people called the Clan. They must be
&ose eastern tribes, she thought. That would explain a lot. No
She has such a strange accent, though she does speak the lan- fcU, for an outsider. That Old Mamut
of the Lion Camp was a

l canny old, old man, she mused. He had always been old, it
Even when she was a girl, no one could remember when he
ng, and no one doubted his insights.

a mother's natural instinct, Tholie glanced around to check on
l. Noticing Wolf, she thought once again about how strange it
t an animal would prefer associating with people. Then she
he other way at the horses grazing quietly and contentedly in
so near to their living site. Ayla's control over the animals was
surprising, it was interesting because they seemed so devoted
^he wolf seemed to adore her.

ook at Jondalar. He was obviously captivated by the beautiful
'oman, and Tholie didn't think it was just because she was
I. Serenio had been beautiful, and there had been countless
e women who had tried their best to interest him in a serious

attachment. He had been closer to his brother, and Tholie reci wondering if any woman would ever reach his heart, but this w had. Even without her apparent healing skills, she seemed to nnc some unusual quality. Old Mamut must have been right. It nroh, was her destiny to belong to the Mammoth Hearth. Inside the dwelling, Ayla combed out her hair, tied it back wn piece of soft leather thong, and put on the clean tunic and short it she had been keeping aside in case they met some people, so she we not have to wear her stained traveling clothes for visiting. Then went to check on Roshario. She smiled at Darvalo, who was sic listlessly outside the dwelling, and she nodded to Dolando when entered and approached the woman lying on the bed. She exami her briefly, just to make sure she was all right.

"Should she still be sleeping?" Dolando asked, with a won frown.

"She's fine. She will sleep a while longer yet." Ayla looked at medicine bag, then decided that it would be a good time to gather a fresh ingredients for a reviving tea to help bring Roshario out of datura-induced sleep when she did begin to awaken. "I saw a lin tree on my way here. I want some flowers for a tea for her and, if I find them, a few other herbs. If Roshario wakes up before I get bl you can give her a little water. Expect her to be bewildered and a dizzy. The splints should hold her arm straight, but don't let her m it too much."

"Will you be able to find your way?" Dolando asked. "Maybe; should take Darvo with you."

Ayla was sure she would have no trouble finding her way, but decided to take the lad with her anyway. In all the concern for: shario, he had been somewhat neglected, and he was worried at the woman, too.

"Thank you, I will," she said.

Darvalo had overheard the conversation and was standing and re to go with her, looking pleased to be useful.

"I think I know where that linden tree is," he said. "There are alW a lot of bees around it this time of year." j

"That's the best time to gather the flowers," Ayla said, "when smell like honey. Do you know where I can find a basket to carry back?" . ^

"Roshario stores her baskets back here," Darvalo said, showing ^ to a storage space behind the dwelling. They selected a couple As they stepped out from under the overhang, Ayla n00 watching her, and she called him. She did not feel comfortable

ae with these people just yet, though the children com-
i he left. Later, when everyone felt more familiar with the
jght be different.

ras in the field with the horses and two men. Ayla walked
to tell him where she was going. Wolf ran ahead and they
i watch when he and Whinney rubbed noses, while the
red a greeting. Then the canine struck a playful pose and
my bark at the young stallion. Racer lifted his head in a
.wed the ground, returning the playful gesture. Then the
ched Ayla and put her head across her shoulder. The
ier arms around Whinney's neck, and they leaned against
a familiar posture of comfort and reassurance. Racer took
brward and nuzzled them both, wanting contact, too. She
ieck, then patted and stroked him, realizing that they all
ich other's familiar presence in this place of so many

ntroduce you, Ayla," Jondalar said.

the two men. One was nearly as tall as Jondalar, but
other was shorter, and older, but their similarity was
etheless. The shorter one stepped forward first, with both
itched.

tie Mamutoi, this is Carlono, Ramudo leader of the Shame
of Mudo, Mother of All in water and on land, I wel-
Lyia of the Mamutoi," Carlono said, taking both of her
oke Mamutoi even better than Dolando, a result of several
long to the mouth of the Great Mother River, as well as
hing.

He of Mut, I thank you for your welcome, Carlono of the
"she replied.

i must come down to our dock," Carlono said, thinking,
ge accent she has. I don't believe I've ever heard one like
s heard many. "Jondalar told me he promised you a ride
oat, not one of those oversize Mamutoi bowls."

pleased," Ayla said, offering one of her brilliant smiles.

thoughts were diverted from consideration of her speech
o appreciation of her. This woman Jondalar has brought
beauty. She suits him, he decided.

tias told me of your boats, and about hunting sturgeon,"
ed.

laughed, as though she had made a joke, and they looked
who smiled, too, although he turned slightly red.

"Did he ever tell you how he hunted half a sturgeon?" the tall man said.

"Ayla of the Mamutoi," Jondalar interjected, "this is MarkenoJ Ramudoï, the son of Carlono's hearth, and Tholie's mate." "

"Welcome, Ayla of the Mamutoi," Markeno said, informally lm ing she had been greeted with the proper ritual many times' "H you met Tholie? She will be pleased you are here. She missc* Mamutoi kin sometimes." His command of his mate's languapp almost perfect.

"Yes, I've met her, and Shamio, too. She is a beautiful little girl Markeno beamed. "I think so, too, though one is not supposa say that of the daughter of one's own hearth." Then he turned to youngster. "How is Roshario, Darvo?"

"Ayla has fixed her arm," he said. "She is a healer."

"Jondalar told us she set the break properly," Carlono said, car to be noncommittal. He would wait to see how well her arm heala Ayla noticed the Ramudoï leader's response, but she thought it understandable, given the circumstances. No matter how well t liked Jondalar, she was a stranger, after all.

"Darvalo and I are going to gather some herbs I noticed on the' here, Jondalar," she said. "Roshario is still sleeping, but I want to a a drink for her when she wakes. Dolando is with her. I don't like look of Racer's eyes, either. Later I'll look for more of those w plants to help him, but I don't want to take the time now. You m try rinsing them with cool water," she said. Then, smiling at every* she signaled Wolf, nodded to Darvalo, and headed for the edge of embay ment.

The view from the path at the end of the wall was no less spectac than it had been the first time she saw it. She had to catch her bn as she looked down, but she could not resist doing it. She allo' Darvalo to lead the way and was glad she did when he showed h shortcut he knew. The wolf explored the area around the path, bu chasing after intriguing scents, then rejoining them. The first few 0 Wolf suddenly reappeared, he startled the youth, but as they con ued, Darvalo began to get used to his comings and goings.

The large old linden tree announced its presence long before reached it with a rich fragrance, reminiscent of honey, and the droi hum of bees. The tree came into view around a turn in the pal" revealed the source of the luscious aroma, small green-and-yellow " ers dangling from oblong, winglike bracts. The bees were so collecting nectar that they didn't bother with the people who distill them, though the woman had to shake some bees out of the blo59 they cut. The insects just flew back to the tree and found Others- 272 i

cially good for Rosh?" Darvalo asked. "People tea."

It doesn't it? But it's helpful, too. If you're upset, angry, it can be very soothing; if you're tired, it soothes your spirits. It can make a headache go away and clear your mind. Roshario will be feeling all of those things, Ji that made her go to sleep."

"It would do all that," the youngster said, looking at the spreading tree with smooth dark brown bark, a thing so ordinary had qualities that made it so medicinal.

"The tree I would like to find, Darvalo, but I don't know it," Ayla said. "It's a small tree, sometimes it has thorns on it, and the leaves are shaped a little like fingers. It has clusters of white flowers earlier in the year. Out now, round red berries."

"The bush you want, is it?"

"That's a good guess. The one I want usually grows bigger, but the flowers are smaller, and the leaves are differ-

entiated with concentration, then suddenly smiled. "I think you mean, and there are some not far from here. In the woods they pick the leaf buds and eat them when we walk by."

"The ones like the one. Can you take me to it?"

"The one is in sight, so Ayla whistled. He appeared almost instantly at her with eager anticipation. She signaled him to follow and he walked for a short while until they came to a stand of

"I- |Ctly what I was looking for, Darvalo!" Ayla said. "I know my description was clear enough."

"What do you want to do?" he asked as they were picking berries and some medicinal plants:

"It soothes the heart, restores, strengthens it, and stimulates, makes it healthy, but it's gentle, for a healthy heart. It's not for someone with a weak heart, who needs a strong medicine," Ayla said, trying to explain so that the youngster would understand what she had observed and experienced. She had learned from Iza in a way of teaching that were difficult to translate. "It is also medicinal with other medicines. It stimulates them, makes them

happy as she decided that it was fun to gather stuff with Ayla. She had seen a lot of things that no one else did, and she didn't mind doing them at all. On the way back, she stopped at a dry sunny bank

and cut some pleasant-smelling purple hyssop flowers. "What do you do?" he asked. ^

"It clears the chest, helps breathing. And this," she said, "some soft, downy leaves of mouse-eared hawkweed that were used to stimulate everything. It's stronger, and doesn't taste too good, but only use a little. I want to give her something pleasant to drink; this will clear her mind, make her feel alert."

On the way back, Ayla stopped once more, to gather a large basket of pretty pink gillyflowers. Darvalo expected to learn more medicine when he asked what they were for.

"Just because they smell nice, and add a sweet, spicy flavor. I'll use some for the tea, and I'll put some in water by her bed, to make her feel good. Women like pretty, nice-smelling things, Darvalo, especially when they are sick."

He decided he liked pretty, nice-smelling things, too, like Ayla. He liked the way she always called him Darvalo, and not Darvo, the way everyone else did. Not that he minded so much when Dolando

Jondalar called him that, but it was nice to hear her use his own name. Her voice sounded nice, too, even if she did say some words a little funny. All it did was make you pay attention to her when she talked, and after a while think about what a nice voice she had. There was a time when he wished more than anything that Jondalar would mate his mother and stay with the Sharamudoi. His mother had died when he was young, and there had never been a man who lived with them until the tall Zeiandonii man came. Jondalar treated him like a son of his hearth—he had even begun to teach him to work the flint—and Darvalo had felt hurt when the man left. He had hoped Jondalar would come back, but he never really expected it. When his mother left with that Mamutoi man, Gulec, he was sure there would be no reason for the Zeiandonii man to stay if he did come back. But now that he had come, and with another woman, his mother didn't need to be there. Everyone liked Jondalar, especially since Roshario's accident, everybody talked about how they needed a healer. He was sure Ayla was a good one. Why couldn't they both stay? he thought.

"She woke up once," Dolando said the instant Ayla entered the dwelling. "At least I think she did. She might have just been thrashed in her sleep. She has quieted down and is sleeping again now. The man was relieved to see her, though it was clear that he didn't want to make it obvious. Unlike Talut, who had been completely unfriendly and whose leadership was based on the strength of his character, his willingness to listen, accept differences, and work with

and a voice loud enough to get the attention of a die midst of a heated argument . . . Dolando reminded pie vyas more reserved, and though he was a good nsidered a situation carefully, he did not like to reveal t Ayla was used to interpreting the subtle mannerisms

l with her, and he went to his corner even before she »ut down her basket of herbal flowers to check on To- »ke to the worried man. "She'll be waking up soon, but line to prepare a special tea for her to drink when she

I noticed the fragrance of the flowers as soon as Ayla se steaming liquid she made from them had a warm Ml she brought a cup for him as well as the woman on

for?" he asked.

help Roshario wake up, but you might find it refresh- expecting a light flowery essence, and was surprised as taste rich with character and flavor filled his mouth. he said. "What's in it?"

>. I think he'd be pleased to tell you."

Ided, understanding her implied suggestion. "I should idon to him. I've been so worried about Roshario, I t of anything else, and I'm sure he's been worried about

She was beginning to perceive the qualities that made of this group. She liked the quickness of his mind and % to like him. Roshario made a sound, and their atten- ally diverted to her.

she said in a weak voice.

ie said, and the tenderness in his voice brought a lump ;. "How are you feeling?"

y, and I had the strangest dream," she said.

ething for you to drink." The woman made a face, he last drink she had been given. "You will like this, I nell it," Ayla said, bringing the cup down so that the l was near her nose. The frown faded, and the medicine loshario's head and brought the cup to her lips.

» Roshario said after a few sips, then drank some more.

hen she finished it and closed her eyes, but soon opened l! How is my arm?"

"How does it feel?" Ayla said.

"It's a little painful, but not as much and in a different way |
said. "Let me see it," She craned to look at her arm, then tried I

up. ;

"Let me help you," Ayla said, propping her up. '

"It's straight! My arm looks right. You did it," the woman
Then tears filled her eyes as she lay back down. "Now I won't ha

be a useless old woman." --

"You may not have full use of it," Ayla cautioned, "but it n
correctly now and has a chance to heal right."

"Dolando, can you believe it? Everything is going to be fine m
she sobbed, but her tears were of joy and relief. ;

i

J now," Ayla said, helping Roshario to ease forward
land Markeno, who were stooped down on either side
? bed. "The sling will support your arm and hold it in
t close to you."
she should get up so soon?" Dolando asked Ayla,
>rry.
ihario said. "I've been in this bed too long as it is. I
sjondalar's welcoming celebration."
e doesn't tire herself too much, it will probably be
l?get up and be with everyone for a while," Ayla said.
I to Roshario. "But not too long. Rest is the best healer

» see everyone being happy for a change. Every time
i to see me, they looked so sorry for me. I want them
ig to be all right," the woman said, easing off the bed
jarms of the two young men.
|)tr, watch the sling," Ayla said. Roshario put her good
^dalar's neck. "All right, together, lift her up."
fanan between them, the two men stood up, moving
i SO they could straighten up under the sloping roof of
(They were close to the same height, and they carried
High Jondalar was more obviously muscular, Markeno
l young man. His strength was disguised by his more
lit rowing boats and handling the huge sturgeon the
|dy hunted had given his flat, wiry muscles plenty of

||feel?" Ayla asked.
^W»' Roshario said, smiling at each man in turn. "It's a
Ulnam up here."
KWy, then?"
gok, Ayla?"
^l good job of combing and fixing your hair; I think you
'wSaid.

"The washing you both gave me made me feel better, too. I even feel like combing or washing before. That must mean I'm K," Roshario said.

"Some of it is the pain medicine I gave you. It will wear off. I want to tell me as soon as you start to feel very much pain. Don't try to be brave about it. And let me know when you begin to get tired," Ayla said.

"I will. I'm ready now."

"Look who's coming!" "It's Roshario!" "She must be better," several voices exclaimed as the woman was carried from the dwelling.

"Put her down over here," Tholie said. "I've made a place for her. At some time in the past, a large piece of sandstone had broken off the overhang and lodged near the gathering circle. Tholie had placed a bench against it and covered it with furs. The men took Roshario and lowered her carefully.

"Are you comfortable?" Markeno asked after they had settled her on the padded seat.

"Yes, yes, I'm fine," Roshario said. She was unaccustomed to much dotting attention.

The wolf had followed them out of the dwelling, and, as soon as she was seated, he found a spot and lay down beside her. Roshario was surprised, but when she saw the way he looked at her, and the way how he watched everyone who approached, she had the strange and distinct feeling that he thought he was protecting her.

"Ayla, why is that wolf staying around Roshario? I think you should make him go away from her," Dolando said, wondering what the animal could want with a woman who was still so weak and vulnerable. He knew that wolf packs often hunted the old, sick, and weak members of a herd.

"No, don't make him go," Roshario said, reaching over with her good hand and patting his head. "I don't think he means to harm me, Dolando. I think he's watching out for me."

"I think he is, too, Roshario," Ayla said. "There was a boy at the Lion Camp, a weak, sickly child, but Wolf had a special attachment to him and was very protective. I think he senses that you are weak and he wants to protect you."

"Wasn't that Rydag?" Tholie said. "The one Nezzie adopted was . . ."--she paused, suddenly remembering Dolando's strong and unreasonable feelings--". . . an outsider."

Ayla was aware of her hesitation and knew she had not said what she originally intended to say. She wondered why.

"Is he still with them?" Tholie asked, unaccountably flustered.

yla said. "He died, early in the season, at the Summer Rydag's death still upset and saddened her, and it showed. curiosity vied with her sense of discretion; she wanted to luestions, but this was not the time to ask questions about alar child. "Isn't anyone else hungry? Why don't we eat?"

everyone had their fill, including Roshario, who didn't eat ueh it was more than she had eaten in one meal in some Ie gathered around the fire with cups of tea or lightly fer- adelion wine. It was time to tell stories, recount adventures, ially, to learn more about the visitors and their unusual Mnpanions.

complement of Sharamudoi were there, except those few ned to be away: the Shamudoi, who lived on the land in the

^ment throughout the year, and their river-dwelling kin, the During the warmer seasons the River People lived on a ck moored just below, but in winter they moved up to the » and shared the dwellings of ceremonially joined cross- he dual couples were considered to be as closely related as

the children of both families were treated as siblings. ie most unusual arrangement of closely related groups that lew of, but it worked well for them because of their kinship unique reciprocal relationship that was mutually beneficial. e many practical and ritual bonds between the two moieties, ily the Shamudoi contributed the products of the land and e during rough weather, while the Ramudoi provided the the river and skilled water transportation.

iramudoi thought of Jondalar as kin, but he was kin only s brother. When Thonolan fell in love with a Shamudoi ; had accepted their ways and had chosen to become one of ialar had lived with them just as long and felt they were had learned and accepted their ways, but he had never gone y ritual joining in his own right. In his heart he could not identity with his own people, could not make the decision ^th them permanently. Though his brother had become >i, Jondalar was still Zeiandonii. The evening conversation lerstandably, with questions about his brother. happened after you left here with Thonolan?" Markeno

ul as it might be to talk about, Jondalar knew Markeno had mow. Markeno and Tholie had become cross-tied with "id Jetamio; Markeno was as close in kinship as he, and he

was a brother born of the same mother. Briefly he told how th 3 traveled downriver in the boat Carlono had given them, some of J! close calls, and their meeting with Brecie, the Mamutoi headwom Willow Camp.

"We're related!" Tholie said. "She is a close-cousin."

"I learned that later, when we lived with Lion Camp, but she very good to us even before she knew we were kin," Jondalar sai

"That was what made Thonolan decide to go north and visit orii Mamutoi Camps. He talked about hunting mammoth with them tried to talk him out of it, tried to convince him to come back with m We had reached the end of the Great Mother River, and that's as far he always said he wanted to go." The tall man closed his eyes shn his head as if trying to deny the fact, then bowed his head in anguia The people waited, sharing his pain.

"But it wasn't the Mamutoi," he continued after a while. "That w an excuse. He just couldn't get over Jetamio. All he wanted was follow her to the next world. He told me he was going to travel un the Mother took him. He was ready, he said, but he was more A ready. He wanted to go so much that he took chances. That's why died. And I wasn't paying attention either. It was stupid of me follow him when he went after that lioness who stole his kill. If hadn't been for Ay la, I would have died with him."

Jondalar's last comments piqued everyone's curiosity, but no o wanted to ask questions that would force him to further relive his gra Finally Tholie broke the silence. "How did you meet Ayla? Were y near Lion Camp?"

Jondalar looked up at Tholie and then at Ayla. He had been speald in Sharamudoi and he wasn't sure how much she had understood. I wished she knew more of the language so she could tell her own stoi It was not going to be easy to explain, or rather to make the explanaO believable. The more time that passed, the more unreal it all seernt even to him, but when Ayla told it, it seemed easier to accept.

"No. We didn't know Lion Camp then. Ayla was living alone, u valley several days' journey away from Lion Camp," he said.

"Alone?" Roshario asked.

"Well, not entirely alone. She shared her small cave with a couple animals, for company."

"Do you mean she had another wolf like this one?" the woffl asked, reaching over to pat the animal. .

"No. She didn't have Wolf then. She got him while we were livl at Lion Camp. She had Whinney."

"What is a Whinney?"

r is a horse.'

You mean she had a horse, too?"

it one, right over there," Jondalar said, pointing to the
»ne in the field, silhouetted against the red-streaked eve-

leaves opened big with surprise, which made everyone else
bad all gone through their initial shock, but she hadn't
lorses before. "Ayla lived with those two horses?"
dy. I was there when the stallion was born. Before that,
h just Whinney . . . and the cave lion," Jondalar finished,
r his breath.

what?" Roshario changed to her less than perfect Mamu-
ou should tell us. Jondalar's confused, I think. And maybe
anslate for us."

caught bits and pieces of the conversation, but she looked
or clarification. He looked absolutely relieved.

ll haven't been very clear, Ayla. Roshario wants to hear
Why don't you tell them about living in your valley with
id Baby, and how you found me," he said.

r were you living alone in a valley?" Tholie added.

»ng story," Ayla said, taking a deep breath. The people
with smiles. That was exactly what they wanted to hear,
esting new story. She took a sip of her tea and thought
o begin. "I told Tholie, I don't remember who my people
were lost in an earthquake when I was a little girl, and I
ad raised by the Clan. Iza, the woman who found me, was
woman, a healer, and she began to teach me healing when
oung."

: explained how the young woman could have such skill,
ught, while Tholie was translating. Then Ayla picked up
»

'ith Iza and her brother, Creb; her mate had died in the
uake that took my people. Creb was like the man of the
elped her raise me. She died a few years ago, but before
Cold me I should leave and look for my own people. I didn't
't leave . . ." Ayla hesitated, trying to decide how much to
of then, but after . . . Creb died . . . I had to leave."
led and took another sip of her tea while Tholie restated
laving a little trouble with the strange names. The telling
back the powerful emotions of that time, and Ayla needed
' composure.

^ find my own people, as Iza had told me to do," she

continued, "but I didn't know where to look. I searched from spring until well into summer, without finding anyone. I wonder if I ever would, and I was getting tired of traveling. It came to a small green valley in the middle of the dry steppes was a stream running through it, even a nice little cave. It had everything I needed . . . except people. I didn't know if I would find anyone who did know winter would be coming and if I wasn't ready for it I would never live through it. I decided to stay in the valley until the spring."

The people had become so involved with her story, they were smiling out, nodding in agreement, saying she was right, it was the thing to do. Ayla explained how she trapped a horse in a pit and discovered it was a nursing mare, and later saw a pack of hyenas mauling after the little filly. "I couldn't help myself," she said. "She was a baby, and so helpless. I chased the hyenas away and brought her to live in my cave with me. I'm glad I did. She shared my loneliness and she made it more bearable. She became a friend."

The women, at least, could understand being drawn to a baby, even if it was a baby horse. The way Ayla explained it made seem perfectly reasonable, even if no one had ever heard of adopting an animal before. But it wasn't only the women who were captivated. Jondalar was watching the people. Women and men were equally enthralled, and he realized that Ayla had become a good storyteller. Even he was caught up, and he knew the story. He watched her closely, trying to see what made her so compelling, and he noticed that she used subtle but evocative gestures as well as words.

It wasn't a conscious effort or done for any particular effect, it grew up communicating in the Clan way, and it was natural for her to describe with motions as well as with words, but when she first imitated birdcalls and the nickers and neighs of horses, it surprised her listeners. Living alone in her valley, hearing only the animal life in the vicinity, she began to mimic them, and she learned to reproduce their sounds with uncanny fidelity. After the first shock, her amazingly real animal sounds added a fascinating dimension.

As her story unfolded, especially when she told how she bred and riding and training the horse, even Tholie could hardly wait to translate Ayla's words so she could hear the rest. The young muttoi woman spoke both languages very well, though she could begin to reproduce the whinny of a horse, or the birdcalls made with unnerving accuracy, but it wasn't necessary. People were given a sense of what Ayla said, in part because the languages were slurred but also because of her expressive delivery. They understood

appropriate, but they waited for Tholie's translation they missed. Tholie's words as much as everyone else, but for another reason. Jondalar had observed with awe her ability to learn quickly when he first started teaching her to read. I wondered how she did it. He didn't know her skills were derived from a unique set of circumstances. In order to be a jople who learned from the memories of their ancestors stored from birth in their huge brains as a kind of unconscious form of instinct, the girl of the Others had been able to use her own memorizing abilities. She had trained herself to read quickly so she would not be considered so stupid by the other jople. A normal, talkative little girl before she was adopted, she had lost most of her vocal language when she began to read. When Jondalar did, the patterns were set. Her driving need to learn to speak so she could communicate with Jondalar had given her a natural ability. Once begun, the process she had started could not be stopped. It was further developed when she went to live with the Others and had to learn yet another language. She could learn a new language after one hearing, though syntax and structure were different. But the language of the Sharamudoi was close to the Others', and many words were similar. Ayla listened to Tholie's translation of her words, because as she was relating her story of adopting a baby horse was, even Tholie could not ask her to repeat herself when Ayla talked about the injured cave lion cub. Perhaps loneliness might drive some of the Others to Ufa a grass-eating horse, but a gigantic carnivore? A full-grown lion, walking on all fours, could nearly reach the ears of the smallest steppe horses, and was more massive. Tholie wondered how she could even consider taking in a lion cub. (So big then, not even the size of a small wolf, and he was hurt.) Tholie had meant to describe a smaller animal, people glanced at the wolf beside Roshario. Wolf was of northern stock, and not a large Breed. He was the biggest wolf any of them had seen. The idea of taking in a lion that size did not appeal to many. Tholie named him meant 'baby,' and she called him that until he was full grown. He was the biggest Baby I ever saw," Tholie said, which brought chuckles. Tholie smiled, too, but then told a more sobering fact. "I thought

that was humorous, too, later, but there was nothing funny at first time I saw him. Baby was the lion that killed Thonola ** almost killed me." Dolando looked apprehensively at the wolf h1 his woman again. "But what else can you expect when you walk' * lion's den? Though we had watched his mate leave and didn't iw Baby was in there, it was a stupid thing to do. As it turned out I lucky that it happened to be that particular lion."

"What do you mean, 'lucky'?" Markeno asked.

"I was badly mauled and unconscious, but Ay la was able to s him before he killed me," Jondalar said.

Everyone turned back to the woman. "How could she stop a o lion?" Tholie asked.

"The same way she controls Wolf and Whinney," Jondalar sa

"She told him to stop, and he did."

Heads were shaking in disbelief. "How do you know that's what; did? You said you were unconscious," someone called out.

Jondalar looked to see who the speaker was. It was a young Ri man he had known, though not well. "Because I saw her do the sa thing later, Rondo. Baby came to visit her once when I was still covering. He knew I was a stranger, and perhaps he remembered wl Thonolan and I went into his den. Whatever the reason, he did want me near Ayla's cave, and he immediately sprang to attack. l she stepped in front of him and told him to stop. And he did it. It ^ almost funny the way he pulled himself short in the middle of a Ie but at the time I was too scared to notice."

"Where's the cave lion now?" Dolando asked, looking at the v and wondering if the lion followed her, too. He was not particull interested in being visited by a lion, no matter how well she mi control him.

"He has made his own life," Ayla said. "He stayed with me until was grown. Then, like some children, he left to find a mate, and probably has several by now. Whinney left me for a while, too, she came back. She was pregnant when she returned."

"What about the wolf?" Do you think he will leave someday?" T lie asked.

Ayla caught her breath. It was a question that she had refusec consider. It had come to her mind more than once, but she alw pushed it aside, not even wanting to acknowledge it. Now it was si out in the open, and waiting for an answer.

"Wolf was so young when I found him, I think he grew up beli^ that the people of Lion Camp were his pack," she said. "Many we stay with their pack, but some wolves leave and become loners

her loner for a mate. Then a new pack starts. Wolf is
irdly more than a cub. He looks older because he's so
nw what he will do, Tholie, but I worry about it some-
t want him to leave."

ided. "Leaving is difficult, both for the one who leaves,
tthat are left behind," she said, thinking about her own
tern to leave her people to live with Markeno. "I know
idn't you say you left those people who raised you? What
iicm? Clan? I never heard of those people. Where do they

l at Jondalar. He was sitting perfectly still, full of ten-
mee expression on his face. He was very nervous about
suddenly she wondered if he was still ashamed of her
d the people who had raised her. She thought he was
ngs now. She was not ashamed of the Clan. In spite of
anguish he had caused her, she had been cared for and
ough she had been different, and she had loved in return.
Neeling of anger, and a prickly touch of pride, she decided
Sl'not going to deny those people she had loved.
te on the peninsula in Beran Sea," Ayla replied.
tninsula? I didn't know there were people living on the pen-
list's flathead territory . . ." Tholie stopped. It couldn't be,

ivasn't the only one who had seen the implications. Roshario
A: and was furtively watching Dolando, trying to see if he
>By connections, but not wanting it to seem that she had
lytfamg out of the ordinary. The strange names she men- tones that were so hard to pronounce,
could they be names
wen some other kind of animals? But she said the woman
(her had taught her healing medicine. Could there have been
|An living with them? What woman would choose to live
^especially if she knew healing? Would a shamud live with

I ..
IS noticing the strange reactions of some of the people, but
^anced at Dolando and saw him staring at her, she felt a
read. He did not seem to be the same man, the controlled
Hiad cared for his woman with such tenderness. He was not
her with the grateful relief her healing skill had invoked, or
I'the wary acceptance of their first meeting. Instead, she
deeply buried pain and saw a distancing; a menacing hard
> his eyes as though he could not see clearly, but only
? red haze of rage.

"Flatheads!" he exploded. "You lived with those filthy, run animals! I'd like to kill every one of them. And you lived with How could any decent woman live with them?" His fists were clenched as he started to come for her. Both T and Markeno jumped up to hold him back. Wolf was standing of Roshario, teeth bared, a deep low growl in his throat started to cry, and Tholie picked her up and held her prot< close. Under most circumstances, she would never fear for her ter around Dolando, but he was not rational about flatheads an moment he seemed to be in the grip of an uncontrollable madness "Jondalar! How dare you bring a woman like that here!" DolanAS said, trying to shake off the restraining hold of the tall blond man J "Dolando! What are you saying?" Roshario said, trying to get late "She helped me! What difference does it make where she grew unl She helped me!" 1 The people who had gathered for Jondalar's welcoming weft stunned, gaping with shock, and had no idea what to do. Carlono oat up to help Markeno and Jondalar and to try to calm his coleader. sl, Ayla was stunned, too. Dolando's virulent reaction was so conit pletely unexpected that she was at a loss. She saw Roshario attempting to get up, trying to push aside the wolf, who was standing defensive^ in front of her, as confused as everyone else by the commotion, but determined to protect the woman he saw as his charge. She should not get up, Ayla thought, hurrying toward the woman. "Get away from my woman. I don't want her tainted with your filth," Dolando shouted, struggling to free himself from the men trying to hold him back. Ayla stopped. Though she wanted to help Roshario, she didn't want to cause more trouble with Dolando. What is wrong with him? she wondered. Then she noticed that Wolf looked ready to attack, and she signaled him to come to her. That was the last thing she needed, for the wolf to cause anyone harm. Wolf was obviously struggling with himself. He wanted either to stand his ground or jump into the fray, but he did not want to back away from it; yet everything was confusing. Ayla's second signal was accompanied by her whistle, and tnai decided him. He ran to her, then stood defensively in front of her. Though he spoke Sharamudoi, Ayla was aware that Dolando had been shouting about flatheads and directing angry words at ner' " the meaning had not been entirely clear. While she was waltln^.tw with the wolf, suddenly she got a clear sense of his ravings andbe^ to feel angry herself. The people of the Clan were not filthy murde Why was he so enraged by the thought of them?

r
n had gotten up and was trying to approach the struggling
lie gave Shamio to someone nearby and ran to help her.
"Dolando, stop it!" Roshario said. Her voice seemed to
this struggles eased, though the three men still held him.
I looked angrily at Jondalar. "Why did you bring her here?"
"What's wrong with you? Look at me!" Roshario said.
"What would have happened if he hadn't? Ayla was not the one who
lido."
ed at Roshario and for the first time seemed to see the weak,
gaan with her arm in a sling. A quick spasm shook him, and,
ling water, the irrational fury left him. "Roshario, you
be up," he said, reaching for her, but he found himself
, "You can let me go," he said to Jondalar with a voice of
andonii man dropped his hold. Markeno and Carlono waited
were sure he was not struggling before they released him,
tayed nearby, just in case.
"Dolando, you have no call to be angry with Jondalar," Roshario
brought Ayla because I needed her. Everyone is upset,
Come and sit down and show them you are all right."
r a stubborn look in Dolando's eye, but he went with her
e bench and sat beside her. A woman brought them both
hen walked over to the place where Ayla, Jondalar, Carlono,
;no were standing, along with Wolf.
"Do you like tea or a little wine?" she asked.
ouldn't happen to have some of that wonderful bilberry
)lio?" he said. Ayla noticed her resemblance to both Carlono
;no.
;w wine isn't ready, but there might be some left from last
wu, too?" she said to Ayla.
Jondalar wants, I will try it. I don't think we meet," she
ie woman said, as Jondalar was getting ready to jump in and
introductions. "We don't need to be formal. We all know
are, Ayla. I am Carolio, that one's sister." She indicated
he ... likeness," Ayla said, searching for the word, and
addenly realized she was speaking Sharamudoi. He looked
'onder. How did she learn it so fast?
you can overlook Dolando's outburst," Carolio said. "The
dearth, Roshario's son, was killed by flatheads, and he hates
i. Doraldo was a young man, a few years older than Darvo,

and full of high spirits, just beginning his life. It was very hard Dolando. He has never quite gotten over it."

Ayla nodded, but frowned. It was not usual for the Clan to kill others. What had the young man done? she wondered. She saw Roshario motioning to her. Though Dolando's glare was not welcome she hurried toward the woman.

"You are tired?" she asked. "Is time you go to bed? Are you feeling pain?"

"A little. Not much. I'll go to bed soon, but not yet. I want to tell you how sorry I am. I had a son ..."

"Carolio told me. She said he was killed."

"Flatheads ..." Dolando mumbled under his breath.

"We may have all jumped to some conclusions," Roshario said. "You said you lived with . . . some people on the peninsula?" There was suddenly absolute silence.

"Yes," Ayla said. Then she looked at Dolando and took a deep breath. "The Clan. The ones you call flatheads, that is what they call themselves."

"How? They don't talk," a young woman called out. Jondalar saw it was the woman sitting next to Chalono, another young man he knew. She was familiar, but her name eluded him for the moment.

Ayla anticipated her unspoken comment. "They are not animals. They are people, and they do talk, but not with many words, though they use some. Their language is of signs and gestures."

"Is that what you were doing?" Roshario asked. "Before you put me to sleep? I thought you were dancing with your hands."

Ayla smiled. "I was talking to the spirit world, asking my totem spirit to help you."

"Spirit world? Talking with hands? What nonsense!" Dolando spat

"Dolando," Roshario said, reaching for his hand.

"It's true, Dolando," Jondalar said. "I even learned some of it. All the Lion Camp did. Ayla taught us so we could communicate with Rydag.

Everyone was surprised to find out he could talk that way, even though he couldn't say words right. It made them realize he was not an animal.

"You mean the boy Nezzie took in?" Tholie said.

"Boy? Are you talking about that abomination of mixed spirits that we heard some crazy Mamutoi woman took in?"

Ayla's chin went up. She was getting angry now. "Rydag was a child," she said. "He may have come from mixed spirits, but how do you blame a child for who he is? He didn't choose to be born that way. Don't you say it's the Mother who chooses the spirits? Then why is he just as much a child of the Mother as anyone. What right do you have to call him an abomination?"

fflarine at Dolando, and everyone was staring at both of
sed at Ayla's defense, and wondering what Dolando's re-
be. He looked as surprised as the others.

_zie is not crazy. She is a warm, kind, loving woman who
orphan child, and she didn't care what anyone thought,"
lued. "She was like Iza, the woman who took me in when I
even though I was different, one of the Others."

is killed the son of my hearth!" Dolando said.

ty be but it is not usual. The Clan would rather avoid the
at's how they think of people like us." Ayla paused, then
>at the man who still suffered such anguish. "It is hard to
t Dolando, but let me tell you about someone else who lost
e was a woman I met when many of the clans gathered--it
StSummer Meeting, but they don't meet as often. She and
if women were out collecting food when suddenly several
upon them, men of the Others. One of them grabbed her,
a- to have what you call Pleasures."

were gasps among the people. Ayla was talking about a sub- Was never discussed openly, though all
but the very youngest

d about it. Some mothers felt they should take their children
It no one really wanted to leave.

ten of the Clan do what men wish, they don't have to be

But the man who grabbed the woman couldn't wait. He

|,even wait for her to put her baby down. He grabbed her so
that the baby fell, and he didn't even notice. It wasn't until
d, when he allowed her to get up, that she found her baby's
l hit a stone when it fell. Her baby was dead."

of the listeners had tears in their eyes. Jondalar spoke up. "I
fise things can happen. I heard about some young men who
to the west of here who liked to make sport with flatheads,
ithem ganging up to force a clan woman."

*pens around here, too," Chalono admitted.

Omen looked at him with surprise that he said it, and most of
^avoided looking at him altogether, except Rondo, who was
> him as though he were a worm.

ways the big thing boys talk about," Chalono said, trying to
"nself. "Not many of them do it any more, though, especially
ttt happened to Doral ..." He stopped suddenly, glanced
men looked down, wishing he had never opened his mouth.

allowing uneasy silence was broken when Tholie said, "To-
Ou look very tired. Don't you think it's time you went back to

| think I'd like to," she said.

s:

Jondalar and Markeno hurried to help her, and everyone else i-n^B as a signal to get up and leave. No one cared to linger around thijs of the fire talking or gaming on this night. The two young men can't the woman into the dwelling while a stricken Dolando shuffled brf'P

"Thank you, Tholie, but I think it would be better if I slept no.i.l Roshario tonight," Ayla said. "I hope Dolando won't object S^l been through so much, and she is going to have a difficult night I ^ fact, the next few days will not be easy. The arm is already swellim* ; and she will be feeling some pain. I'm not sure she should have gottea up this evening, but she was so insistent I don't think I could haw stopped her. She kept saying she was feeling good, but that was be* cause the drink that made her sleep also stops deep pain, and it hadn't i entirely worn off. I gave her something else besides, but it will all we» off tonight, and I would like to be there." I

Ayla had just come into the dwelling after spending a little time currying and combing Whinney in the dying light of the sunset, h always relaxed her and made her feel better to be near and tend to die mare when she was upset. Jondalar had joined her there for a short time but had sensed that she wanted to be alone for a while, so after some pats and scratches and comforting words to the stallion, he had left them.

"Perhaps Darvo could stay with you," Jondalar suggested now. "He would probably sleep better. It bothers him to see her suffer."

"Of course," Markeno said. "I'll go get him. I wish I could convince Dolando to stay with us for a while, too, but I know he won't, especially after tonight. No one ever told him the full story of Doraldo's death."

"Maybe it's best that it all finally came out. Maybe he can finally put it aside now," Tholie said. "Dolando has been nursing a real hatred toward flatheads for a long time. It seemed fairly harmless, no one really cares that much for them anyway-- I'm sorry, Ayla, but it is true."

Ayla nodded. "I know," she said. ^,

"And we seldom have much contact. In most ways, he's a gooo leader," Tholie continued, "except for anything to do with flatbead^ and it's easy to work other people up about them. But such a stron hatred can't help but leave its mark. I think it's always worse on person who does the hating." ^

"I think it's time to get some rest," Markeno said. "You niu51 exhausted, Ayla." , ^g

Jondalar, Markeno, and Ayla, with Wolf at her heels, walked lu".

to the next dwelling together. Markeno scratched at the lap and waited. Rather than calling out, Dolando came to ce and pushed the flap aside, then stood in the shadows of ce looking at them. lo I think Roshario may have a hard night. I would like to tier," Ayla said. m looked down, then inside toward the woman on the bed. " he said. to stay with Ayla," Jondalar said. He was determined not to alone with the man who had threatened and raged at her, did seem to have calmed down. o nodded and stepped aside. ; to ask Darvo if he'd like to spend the night with us," Mar- ; he should," Dolando said. "Darvo, take your bedding and larkeno tonight." V got up, gathered up his pads and covers in his arms, and ward the opening. Ayla thought he looked relieved but not tded into his corner as soon as they entered. Ayla walked to led rear to check on Roshario. u have a lamp or a torch, Dolando? I'd like a little more said. laybe some extra bedding," Jondalar added, "or should I ask some?" o would have preferred to be alone in the dark, but if To- he up in pain, he knew the young woman would be able to nuch better than he could. From a shelf, he took down a ndstone bowl that had been shaped by pecking and hitting it ler stone. adding is over here," he said to Jondalar. "There is some fat dp in the box by the door, but I'll have to start a fire to light It went out." t the fire," Ayla said, "if you'll tell me where your kindling are." e her the fire-starting materials she asked for, along with a ;k, black with charcoal on one end, and a flattish piece of ll several round holes burned out of it from starting other she didn't use those. Instead, out of a pouch hanging from he withdrew two stones. Dolando watched with curiosity as a small pile of the dry, light shavings of wood and, hovering pounds it, hit one stone against the other. To his surprise, a large

bright spark leaped from the stones and landed on the tinder up a thin column of smoke. She bent close and blew, and the burst into flame.

"How did you do that?" he asked, surprised and a little fea-d Anything so amazing, and unknown, always engendered a little f Was there no end to this woman's shamud magic? he wondered.

"It comes from the firestone," Ayla said, as she added a few stick kindling to keep the fire going, and then larger pieces of wood.

"Ayla discovered them when she was living in her valley," Jondal said. "They were all over the rocky shore there, and I collected son extras. I'll show you how they work tomorrow, and give you one you will know what they look like. There may be some around ha As you can see, they make starting a fire much faster."

"Where did you say the fat was?" Ayla asked.

"In the box by the entrance. I'll get it. The wicks are there, toe Dolando said. He put a dollop of soft white tallow-fat that had be rendered in boiling water and skimmed after it cooled-into the sto bowl, stuck a twisted strand of dried lichen in it, next to the edge, th picked up a burning stick and lit it. It sputtered a bit; then a pool of i started to form in the bottom of the bowl and was absorbed by t lichen, causing a steadier flame and more even light within the wood structure.

Ayla put cooking stones in the fire, then checked the level in t wooden water box. She started outside with it, but Dolando took and went out to get more water instead. While he was gone, Ayla ai Jondalar put the bedding on a sleeping platform. Then Ayla select some dried herbs from her medicine packets to make a relaxing tea l all of them. She put other ingredients in some of her own bowls have it ready for Roshario when she woke up. Not long after Dolan brought in the water, she gave cups of tea to each of them.

They sat in silence, sipping the warm liquid, which was a relief Dolando. He was afraid they would want him to make conversatic and he was in no mood for it. It wasn't a matter of mood to Ayla. a simply didn't know what to say. She had come for Roshario's sal though she would have preferred not to be there at all. The prosp of spending the night within the dwelling of a man who had raged anger against her was not pleasant, and she was grateful Jondalar h chosen to stay with her. Jondalar was also at a loss for words and h been waiting for someone else to say something. When no one didi felt that silence, perhaps, was most appropriate.

With timing that almost seemed planned, just as they were finish* their tea, Roshario began to moan and thrash about. Ayla picked

r

went to her. She put it down on a wooden bench that
» bedside table, moving aside a damp woven cup of spicy
lowers. The woman's arm was swollen and warm to the
rough the wrappings, which were now tighter. The light
»ch woke the woman. Her eyes, glazed with pain, fo-
aedicine woman, and she tried to smile.
»u are awake," Ayla said. "I need to take off the sling and
appings and splints, but you were thrashing in your
l need to keep your arm still. I'll make a fresh poultice
jsen the swelling, but I want to make you something for
Will you be all right for a while?"
o and do what you need to. Dolando can stay and talk to
> said, looking past Ayla's shoulder to one of the men
nd her. "Jondalar, don't you think you should help

> It was obvious that she wanted to talk to Dolando in
e was just as happy to leave them alone. He brought in
r the fire, and then more water, and a few more river- ?e pebbles to use for heating the liquid.
One of the cook- ' cracked when it was transferred from the hot fire to the
ter Dolando had brought in for tea. As he watched Ayla
medications, he heard the low murmur of voices from
dwelling. He was glad he could not hear what they were
Ayla finished treating Roshario and making her more
hey were all tired and ready for sleep.
wakened in the morning by the delightful sound of chil-
and playing, and Wolfs wet nose. When she opened her
iked toward the entrance, where the sounds were coming
; looked back at her and whined.
to go out there and play with those children, don't you?"
whined again.
yff her covers and sat up, noticing that Jondalar was
in sound sleep beside her. She stretched, rubbed her
ced toward Roshario. The woman was still sleeping; she
keful nights to make up for. Dolando, wrapped in a fur
eping on the ground beside her bed. He, too, had spent
s nights.
got up, Wolf dashed to the entrance and stood there
er, his whole body wriggling with anticipation. She
the flap and quickly stepped outside, but told Wolf to
not want him scaring anyone by dashing into the middle
ivithout warning. She looked across and saw several chil-

dren of various ages in the pool made by the waterfall alorur several women, all taking a morning bath. She walked toward with Wolf close to her side. Shamio squealed when she saw him "C'mon, Wuffie. You should take a bath, too," the girl said W«jtl whined, looking up at Ay la. |

"Would anyone mind if Wolf got in the pool, Tholie? Shamio seenr "I to want him to come in and play."

"I was just getting out," the young woman said, "but she can stay in and play with him, if the others don't mind."

When no one made an objection, Ayla gave him a signal. "Go ahead Wolf," she said. The wolf bounded into the water, making a big splash- straight to Shamio. A woman who was coming out of the water alongside Tholie smiled. then said, "I wish my children would mind as well as that wolf does. How do you make him do what you want?" j

"It takes time. You have to go over it a lot, make him repeat what you want many times, and it can be difficult to make him understand at first, but once he learns something, he doesn't forget. He's really very smart," Ayla said. "I've been teaching him every day while we | were traveling."

"Sounds like teaching a child," Tholie said, "but why a wolf? I never knew you could teach them to do anything, but why do you do it?"

"I know he can be frightening to people who don't know him, and I didn't want him to scare anyone," Ayla said. Watching Tholie come out of the pool and dry herself, Ayla was suddenly aware she was pregnant. Not too far along yet, and her plumpness concealed it when she was dressed, but she was definitely pregnant. "I think I'd like to wash, too, but first I have to pass water."

"If you follow that path up the back, you'll find a trench. It's quite a ways up, over the far wall so it runs off the other side when it rains, but it's closer than going around," Tholie said.

Ayla started to call Wolf, then hesitated. As usual, he had lifted his leg in the bushes--she had taught him to go outside of dwellings, but not to use special places. She watched the children playing with him and knew he would rather stay, but she wasn't sure if she should leave him. She was sure everything would be fine, but she didn't know no the mothers would feel.

"I think you can leave him for a while, Ayla," Tholie said. "I've seen him around the children, and you were right. They'd all be disappointed if you called him away so soon."]

Ayla smiled. "Thank you. I'll be right back."

She started up the path that traversed in a diagonal across the st?'j

e wall and then switchbacked toward the other. When far wall she climbed over it on steps made put of short These were held in place with stakes pounded into the of them, so they would not roll, and filled in behind dirt.

ad a level area in front of it, lined with a low fence of >es to sit across, had been dug out of the sloping ground e of the wall. The smell and the buzzing flies made its s, but the sunlight shining through the trees, and the made it a pleasant place to linger when she found herself bowels, as well. She saw a pile of dried moss on the ground guessed its use. It was not at all scratchy and quite absor- i she was through, she noticed that fresh dirt had recently •ed over the bottom of the trench.

i continued downhill and Ay la decided to follow it a ways. ked along, the region felt so much like the area around the she grew up that she had the haunting feeling she had been She would come upon a rock formation that seemed space opening out at the crest of a ridge, or similar e stopped to pick a few hazelnuts off a bush growing wall, and she could not resist pushing aside the low | to see if there was a small cave hidden behind it. hand another large mound of blackberry bushes with long mnners reaching out, heavy with clumps of sweet ripe fruit. fkd herself with them and wondered what had happened to ies she had picked the day before. Then she remembered eating 'Ac welcoming feast. She decided she'd have to come back and tfor Roshario. Suddenly she realized that she had to return. ffxan might be waking up and need some attention. The woods ; so familiar that Ayla had forgotten where she was for a mo- ttttting the hillsides, she had felt like a girl again, using the tfiooking for Iza's medicinal plants to explore.

Ips because it was second nature anyway, or because she had tooked harder for plants on her way back so she'd have some- Nhow for her forays, Ayla paid close attention to the vegeta te almost shouted with excitement, and relief, when she noticed «B yellow vines with tiny leaves and flowers twined around tots that were dead and dried, strangled by the golden thread- is.

8 ltl That's golden thread, Iza's magic plant, she thought. frnat I need for my morning tea, so I won't start a baby grow- JB there's a lot of it. I was running so low that I didn't know if

I'd have enough to last for the whole Journey. I wonder if antelope sage root around here, too? There ought to be. I'll ^

come back and look.

She found a plant with large basal leaves and wove them toeetwi with twigs for a makeshift gathering container, then picked as niany^1 the small plants as she could, without depleting the area entirely, b- had taught her long ago always to leave some from which the ne»

year's growth would start.

On the way back, she took a small detour through a thicker, moi» shaded patch of forest, to look for more of the waxy white plant that I would soothe the horses' eyes, though they did seem to be improving. I She scanned the ground under the trees carefully. With so much that was familiar, it shouldn't have come as a surprise, but when she saw ^ the green leaves of one particular kind of plant, she gasped and felt a ;

cold chill go through her.

Lyia dropped to the moist ground and sat staring at the reathing the rich forest air, while memories came flooding ai in the Clan the secret of the root was little known. The e had belonged to Iza's line, and only those descended from ancestors--or the one to whom she had taught it--knew licated processing required to produce the final result. Ayla red Iza explaining the unusual method of drying the plant s properties would concentrate in the roots, and she recalled actually got stronger with long storage, if kept out of the

h Iza had told her, carefully and repeatedly, how to make the m the dry roots, she couldn't let Ayla practice preparing it e went to the Clan Gathering; it could not be used without cual and, Iza had stressed, it was too sacred to throw away. why Ayla had drunk the dregs she had found in the bottom icient bowl, after she made it for the mog-urs, even though it dden to women, so it wouldn't have to be thrown out. She inking straight by then. There was so much going on, other ; that clouded her mind, and the root drink was so powerful the little she had swallowed while making it had a strong

d wandered along narrow passages through the deep honey-aves, and by the time she saw Creb and the other mog-urs, n't have retreated even if she'd tried. That was when it hap-miehow Creb had known she was there, and he had taken her a, back into the memories. If he hadn't, she would have been it black void forever, but something happened that night that um. He wasn't The Mog-ur afterward, he had no heart for it , until that last time.

lad some of the roots with her when she left the Clan. They er medicine bag in the sacred red-colored pouch, and Mamut very curious when she told him about them. But he didn't power of The Mog-ur, or perhaps the plant affected the

Others differently. She and Mamut were both drawn into the hi. void and almost didn't return.

Sitting on the ground, staring at the seemingly innocuous plant a l could be made into something so powerful, she recalled the experienci Suddenly she shivered with another chill and sensed a shadow of da fc I ness, as though a cloud were passing overhead, and then she wasn'tj just remembering, she was reliving that strange Journey with Manii» I The green woods faded and dimmed as she felt herself drawn back inin ^ her memory of the darkened earthlodge. In the back of her throat she i tasted the dark cool loam and growing fungus of ancient primeval forests. She sensed herself moving with great speed to the stranee worlds she had traveled with Mamut, and she felt the terror of the black void. s

Then faintly, from far away, she heard Jondalar's voice, full of I agonized fear and love, calling to her, pulling her back and Mamut as well, by the sheer strength of his love and his need. In an instant she was back, feeling chilled to the bone in the warmth of late summer sunshine.

"Jondalar brought us back!" she said aloud. At the time she hadn't been aware of it. He was the one she had opened her eyes to, but then he was gone and Raneë was there instead bringing a hot drink to warm her. Mamut had told her that someone had helped them to return. She hadn't realized that it was Jondalar, but suddenly she knew, almost as though she was meant to know.

The old man had said he would never use the root again and warned her against it, but he also said that if she ever did, to make sure someone was there who could call her back. He'd told her the root was more than deadly. It could steal her spirit; she could be lost in the black void forever, and would never be able to return to the Great Earth Mother. It hadn't mattered then, anyway. She'd had no roots left. She had used the last of them with Mamut. But now, in front of her, there was the plant.

Just because it was there didn't mean she had to take it, she thought. If she left it, she would never have to worry that she might use it again and lose her spirit. She had been told the drink was forbidden to her, anyway. It was for mog-urs who dealt with the spirit world, notvaed' icine women who were only supposed to make it for them, but she n already drunk it, twice. And besides, Broud had cursed her; as far the Clan was concerned, she was dead. Who was there to forbid ne now? . j

Ayla didn't even ask herself why she was doing it when she pi011 up the broken branch and used it as a digging stick to carefully extra j

J

E*he plants without damaging the roots. She was one of the
Ie on earth who knew their properties and how to prepare
fccould not leave them. It wasn't that she had any partici-alar
fusing them, which in itself was not unusual. She had m^ny
as of plants that might never be used, but this was different.
t had potential medicinal uses. Even the golden thread, Isea's
cine to fight off impregnating essences, was good for sti^ngs
hen applied externally, but, as far as she knew, this plant
r use. The root was spirit magic.

you are! We were beginning to worry," Tholie called out
»w Ayla coming down the path. "Jondalar said if you di<dn't
»n, he'd send Wolf after you."
yhat took you so long?" Jondalar said, before she could an- olie said you were coming right back."
He had unthinkingly
landonii, which let her know just how worried he had been.
ath kept on going, and I decided to follow it a little fartlier.
and some plants I wanted," Ayla said, holding up the n»-ate- id collected. "This area is so much
like the place I grew n-p. I
Keen some of these since I left."
JIitwas so important about those plants that you had to collect
liy? What is that one for?" Jondalar said, pointing to the golden
i:,,
Understood him well enough, now, to know that the angry <tone
tResult of his concern, but his question caught her by surprise.
^ . . that's for bites . . . and stings," she said, flustered, and
tssed. It felt like a lie; even though her answer was perfectly
|yas not complete.
lhad been raised as a woman of the Clan, and Clan we men
It refuse to answer a direct question, especially when pose^d by
Nit Iza had stressed very strongly never to tell anyone, pa*rtic-
fman, what power the tiny golden threads held. Iza he^rself
|Ot have been able to resist answering Jondalar's question foully,
jwould never have had to. No man of the Clan would consider
tog a medicine woman about her plants or practices. Iza had
Rat Ayla should never volunteer the information.
^ acceptable to refrain from mentioning, but Ayla knew that
l^ance was meant for courtesy and to permit some measu^-re of
i and she had gone beyond that. She was deliberately withknold- pnation. She could administer the
medicine, if she felt ic= was
»te, but Iza had told her that it could be dangerous if pe^ople,
ty men, realized that she knew how to defeat the strongesst of

->oo

spirits and prevent pregnancy. It was secret knowledge meant onl
medicine women.

A thought suddenly occurred to Ayla. If it could prevent Her fr.
blessing a woman, could Iza's magic medicine be stronger than
Mother? How could that be? But if She did create all the plants in
first place. She must have made it on purpose! She must have mea^
for it to be used to help women when it would be dangerous or diffieni*3
for them to become pregnant. But then why didn't more women knn»
about it? Maybe they did. Since it grew so close, maybe these Shara.
mudoioi women were familiar with it. She could ask, but would th»
tell her? And if they didn't know, how could she ask without tellinn
them? But if the Mother meant it for women, wouldn't it be right to
tell them? Ayla's mind raced with questions, but she had no answers.
"Why did you need to get plants for bites and stings now?" Jondalar
said, his concern still showing in his eyes. |

"I didn't meant to worry you," Ayla said, then smiled, "it's just that
this area feels so much like home, I wanted to explore it."

Suddenly he had to smile, too. "And you found some blackberries
for breakfast, didn't you? Now I know what took you so long. I never'
met anyone who loved blackberries more than you do." He had noticed
her discomfiture, but he was delighted when he thought he had discov
ered why she seemed so reluctant to talk about her little side trip.

"Well, yes, I did have a few. Maybe we can go back later and pick
some for everyone. They are so ripe and good now. There are some
other things I want to look for, too."

"I have a feeling we're going to have all the blackberries we could
want, with you around, Ayla," Jondalar said, kissing her purple-
stained mouth.

He was so relieved that she was safe, and so pleased with himself to
think that he had found her out and discovered her weakness for sweet
berries, that she just smiled and let him think what he wanted. She did
like blackberries, but her real weakness was him, and she suddenly re"
such an overwhelming warmth of love for him that she wished they
were alone. She wanted to hold him, and touch him, and Pleasure huDi
and feel him Pleasuring her the way he did so well. Her eyes showed
her feelings, and his wonderful, exceptionally blue eyes returned tbeW
with added measure. She felt a tingling deep inside and had to tuni
away to settle herself.

"How is Roshario?" she said. "Is she awake yet?" ,

"Yes, and she says she's hungry. Carolio came up from the dock su
is fixing something for us, but we thought we should wait until y
came before she ate."

id see how she is, and then I'd like to take a morning swim,"

headed for the dwelling, Dolando pulled back the flap to
le and Wolf came bounding out. He jumped up on her,
s on her shoulders, and licked her jaw.

t down! My hands are full," she said.

is elad to see you," Dolando said. He hesitated, then added,
Ayla. Roshario needs you."

acknowledgment of sorts, at least an admission that he did
;r to keep away from his mate, for all his raving the night
had known it when he allowed her into his dwelling, but
lid it.

anything you need? Anything I can get for you?" the man
lad noticed her hands were full.

no dry these plants and need a rack," she said. "I can make
r that I need some wood, and thongs or sinew for lash-

ave something better. Shamud used to dry plants for his
think I know where his racks are. Would you like to use

hat would be perfect, Dolando," she said. He nodded and
f as she went inside. She smiled when she saw Roshario
n her bed. Putting the plants down, she went to see her.
know Wolf had come back in here," Ayla said. "I hope he
sryou."

was watching out for me, I'm sure. When he first came
was how to get around the flap--he came straight back
I patted him, he went and settled down in that corner
ked this way. That's his place now, you know," Roshario

i sleep well?" Ayla asked the woman, straightening her bed
»g her up with pads and furs to make her more comfortable.
lan I have since I fell. Especially after Dolando and I had a
she said. She looked at the tall blond woman, the stranger
it had brought with him, who had stirred up their life and
I so much change in such a short time. "He really didn't
he said about you, Ayla, but he is upset. He has lived with
leath for years, never able to really put it away. He didn't
iril circumstances until last night. Now he's trying to rec-
s of hatred, and violence, toward what he was convinced
is animals, with all that came out about them, including

"How about you, Roshario? He was your son," Ayla said.

"I hated them, too, but then Jetamio's mother died, and we tnr>i.l
in. She didn't take his place, exactly, but she was so sick and n.JL
so much care that I didn't have time to dwell on his death. As T'
to feel as though she was my own daughter, I was able to le^S
memory of my son rest. Dolando grew to love Jetamio, too but hn
are special to men, especially boys born to their hearth. He could
get over the loss of Doraldo, just as he had reached manhood and }n
his life in front of him." Tears were glistening in Roshario's evi
"Now Jetamio's gone, too. I was almost afraid to take Darvo in (
fear he would die young."

"It's never easy to lose a son," Ayla said, "or a daughter."

i I Roshario thought she saw a look of pain flash across the you
woman's face as she got up and went to the fire to start preparanoi
When she came back, she brought her medicines in her interesti
wooden bowls. The woman had never seen any quite like them. M<
of their tools, utensils, and containers were decorated with carvings
paintings, or both, particularly Shamud's. Ayla's bowls were fine
made, smooth and well-shaped, but starkly plain. There were no d<
orations of any kind, except for the grain of the wood itself.

"Are you feeling much pain now?" Ayla asked as she helped B
shario lie down.

"Some, but not nearly as much as before," the woman said, as t
young healer started to remove the wrappings.

"I think the swelling is down," Ayla said, studying the arm. "Tha
a good sign. I'll put the splints and a sling back on it for now, in cs
you want to get up for a while. I'll put another poultice on tonigl
When there is no more swelling, I'll wrap it in birchbark, which y
should keep on until the bone is healed; at least a moon and halfw
into another," Ayla explained, as she deftly took away the damp cha
ois skin and looked at a spreading bruise caused by her manipulatic
the day before.

"Birchbark?" Roshario said.

"When it is soaked in hot water, it softens and is easy to shape a
fit. It gets hard and stiff as it dries, and will hold your arm rigid so t
bone will heal straight, even when you are up and moving around.

"You mean I'll be able to get up and do something, instead of)'
lying around?" Roshario said with a delighted grin.

"You will only have the use of one arm, but there's no reason y
can't stand on both legs. It was the pain that kept you here."

Roshario nodded. "That's true."

"There is one thing I want you to try before I put the wrap?11

can I want you to move your fingers; it might hurt a

»t to show her concern. If there was some internal
yented Roshario from moving her fingers now, it might
i that she would have only limited use of that arm.
_i watching her hand intently, and both smiled with
i moved her middle finger up, and then the rest of them.
' Ayla said. "Now, can you curl your fingers?"
!" Roshario said as she flexed her fingers.
too much to make a fist?" Ayla watched while she
hand.

[can do it."

ood. How much can you move your hand? Can you
; wrist?"

laced with the effort and breathed in through her teeth,
hand forward.

jh," Ayla said.

I turned to look when they heard Wolf announce Jondalar's
(pith a single bark that sounded like a hoarse cough, and
the entered.

isee if there is anything I can do. Do you want me to help
tside?" Jondalar asked. He had glanced at Roshario's ex-
|Hhen looked away quickly. The swollen, discolored thing
Hgood to him.

|fnow, but sometime in the next few days I will need some
6|0tf fresh birchbark. If you happen to see a good-size birch
Kin mind so you can show me where it is. It's to hold her
frhile it's healing," Ayla replied while she wrapped it with
.te'!

ttir did tell me what all that finger moving was about, Ayla,"
Ad. "What did it mean?"

Red. "It means that, with luck, the chances are good that
VfK full use of your arm again, or close to it."

JJideed good news," Dolando said. He had heard her remark
g&tnmg into the dwelling holding one end of a drying rack.
Nhd was supported by Darvalo. "Will this do?"

|l thank you for bringing it inside. Some of the plants need
| from the light."

J»ysour morning meal is ready," the young man said. "She
tow if you want to eat outside, since it's such a nice day."

^would," Roshario said, then turned to Ayla, "if you think
ft*

I

"Just let me put the arm in a sling, and then you can walk ; Dolando will give you a little support," Ay la said. The Sha M leader's smile was uncharacteristically broad. "And if no one mi i6 would like to take a morning swim before I eat." '

"Are you sure this thing is a boat?" Markeno said, helping Jond u3 to prop the hide-covered round frame against the wall alongside tkJS long poles. "How do you steer this bowl?" I

"It's not as easy to control as your boats, but it's used mostly ft»5 crossing rivers, and the paddles work well enough to push it across Of1 course with the horses, we just attached it to the pole drag and let them pull it," Jondalar said. 1

They both glanced across the field where Ayla was currying Whin.5 ney while Racer stood by. Jondalar had brushed the stallion's coat^ earlier and noticed that bare spots, where hair had fallen out on the hot1 plains, were filling in. Ayla had treated the eyes of both horses. Nwr that they were in a cooler, higher elevation away from the bothersome gnats, there was obvious improvement.

"It's the horses that are most surprising," Markeno said. "I never imagined they would willingly stay near people, but those two seem to enjoy it. Although I think I was more surprised by the wolf at first."

"You are more used to Wolf now. Ayla kept him close to her because she thought he would be more frightening to people than the horses." They saw Tholie walking toward Ayla, with Shamio and Wolf running around her. "Shamio just loves him," Markeno said. "Look at her. I ought to be afraid, that animal could tear her apart, but he's not threatening at all. He's playing with her."

"The horses can be playful, too, but you can't imagine what it's like to ride on the back of that stallion. You can try it, if you want, though there isn't much room here for him to really run."

"That's all right, Jondalar. I think I'll stick to riding in boats," Mar^ keno said. As a man appeared at the edge of the cliff, he added, "And here comes Carlono. I think it's time for Ayla to ride in one."

They all converged near the horses, then walked together toward the cliff and stood at the place where the small stream spilled over the edge into the Great Mother River below. ,

"Do you really think she ought to climb down? It's a long drop a" it can be scary," Jondalar said. "It's even a little unsettling for n^- haven't done it in quite a while." „

"You said you wanted to give her a ride in a real boat, Jondala i Markeno said. "And she might want to see our dock."

at difficult," Tholie said. "There are footholds and ropes
|fl can show her how."

il*t have to climb down," Carlono said. "We can lower her
basket the same way we brought you up the first time,

: be best," Jondalar said.

a with me and we'll send it up."

tened to the discussion while she was looking down at
[the precarious path they used to descend--the path To-
en down, though she had been completely familiar with
e sturdy knotted ropes that were secured to wooden pegs
rrow crevices in the rock, starting at the top where they
' the steep descent was washed by the stream as it fell,
i rock to ledge.

d Carlono step over the edge with practiced ease, grab- nth one hand while his foot found the
first narrow ledge.

dalar blanch a little, take a deep breath, then follow the
| somewhat slower and more carefully. In the meantime,
ith Shamio wanting to help, picked up a large coil of thick
pil ended with a loop that had been woven into the end as
ant and dropped over a heavy stake that was about midway
; walls at the edge of the embayment. The rest of the long
Town over the cliff. Ayla wondered what kind of fiber they
Mdce their ropes. They were the heaviest cordage she had ever
^i' :'

|>lrfterward, Carlono came back up carrying the other end of
i|@e walked toward a second stake not far from the first, then
iltfang up the rope, neatly dropping it in a coil beside him. A
(Bow, basketlike object soon appeared at the edge of the cliff
tfcie two stakes. Full of curiosity, Ayla went to take a closer

II-ropes, the basket was extremely sturdy. The flat woven
Mwch was reinforced and stiffened with wooden planks, was
l|a long oval with straight sides around the edge like a low
?yas easily big enough to hold a person lying down, or a
^e sturgeon with its head and tail over the front and back.
|tsturgeon, one of two varieties that lived only in the river and
Uributaries, reached thirty feet in length and weighed over
"^and pounds, and had to be cut into pieces to be hoisted up.
Bply basket was slung between two ropes that were threaded
pu held in place by four rings made of fiber, two attached to
J?*de. Each rope went down through one ring, and up through

the ring that was diagonally on the opposite side, crossing unde
The four ends of the ropes were plaited together and formed
large heavy loop above, and the rope that had been thrown ov*'1"
edge was threaded through that loop. '

"Just climb in, Ayla. We'll hold it steady and lower you dn
Markeno said, putting on a pair of close-fitting, leather mittens ri
wrapping the long end once around the second stake in preparation^
lowering the basket. ^

When she hesitated, Tholie said, "If you'd rather just climb do»<>l
I'll show you how. I never did like to ride the basket."

Ayla looked at the steep climb again. Neither way looked very inviH.
ing. "I'll try the basket this time," she said.

Where the path down was located, the wall below the cliff was stet»
but sloped enough to make it climbable, barely; near the middle where
the stakes were, the top of the cliff overhung the wall. Ayla climbed!
into the basket, sat down on the bottom, and held on to the edge wiA
a white-knuckled grip.

"Are you ready?" Carlono asked. Ayla turned her head without
letting go and nodded. "Lower her down, Markeno."

The young man loosened his grip as Carlono guided the supply
basket over the edge. While Markeno let the rope slide through htt
leather-covered hands, controlling the descent with the help of the
twist around the stake, the loop at the top of the basket skidded along
the heavy rope and Ayla, suspended in empty space over the dock,
was slowly lowered.

Their device for transporting supplies and people between the deep
ledge above and the dock below was simple but effective. It depended
upon muscle power, but the basket itself, though sturdy, was relatively
lightweight, making it possible for even one person alone to move fairly
large loads. With additional people, quite heavy ones could be moved.

When she first dropped over the top of the cliff, Ayla shut her eyes
and clung to the basket, hearing her heart pound in her ears. But as
she felt herself dropping slowly, she peeked her eyes open, then looked
around in open-mouthed wonder. It was a view from a perspective she
had never seen before and would probably never see again.

Hanging out over the great moving river beside the steep wall oftut
gorge, Ayla felt that she was floating in air. The rock wall across tK
river was slightly more than a mile away, but it felt very close, thoug"
in places along the Gate the walls were much closer. It was a fair?
straight stretch of river and, as she looked east and then west along _
length, she could feel its power. When she had nearly reached W
dock, she looked up and watched a white cloud appear over the edfr.

H and she noticed two figures--one quite small--and the
ine down at her. She waved. Then she landed with a slight
Ie she was still looking up.
tie saw Jondalar's smiling face, she said, "That was exciting!"
etty spectacular, isn't it?" he said, helping her out.
i of people was waiting for her, but she was more interested
x than the people. She felt a swaying movement under her
she stepped out of the basket onto wooden planks, and she
ey were floating on water. It was a sizable dock, large enough
veral dwellings of a construction similar to the ones under
one ledge, plus open areas. There was a fire nearby, built on
mdstone and surrounded by rocks.
of the interesting boats she had seen before, used by the
tvnstream--narrow and coming together in a sharp edge at
md back--were tied to the floating construction. They were
sizes, no two exactly the same, ranging from barely big
hold one person to long ones with several seats.
turned to look around, she saw two very large boats that
a". The prows extended up to become the heads of strange
I the boats were painted with various geometric markings,
ether gave the impression of feathers. Extra eyes were
:ar the water line. The largest craft had a canopy over the
cdon. When she looked at Jondalar to exclaim her amaze-
eyes were closed and his forehead creased with anguish, and
the large boat must have had something to do with his

ther of them had much time to pause or reconsider. They
ed along by the group, which was eager to show the visitor
unusual craft and their boating expertise. Ayla noticed peo- ring up a ladderlike connection
between the dock and the
sn she was urged toward the foot of it, she understood that
Kpected to do the same. Most of the people walked up the
balancing easily even though the boat and the dock some- Wd at cross-purposes, but Ayla was
grateful for the hand
itended to her.
between Markeno and Jondalar under the canopy that ex-
«n one side to the other, on a bench that could easily have
toted more. Other people sat on benches in front and back,
ftem taking up very long-handled paddles. Before she knew
I" cast off the ropes that held them to the dock and were in
tof the river.
^s sister Carolio, singing out from the front of the boat in a

^

strong high voice, began a rhythmic chant that rose above the melody of the Great Mother River. Ayla watched with fascination the rowers pulled against the powerful current, intrigued by the way they rowed in unison to the beat of the song, and she was surprised how swiftly and smoothly they were propelled upstream. At the bend in the river, the sides of the rocky gorge closed. Between the soaring walls that reared out of the depths of the volcanic river, the sound of the water grew louder and more intense. Ayla could feel the air becoming cooler and damper, and her nostrils flared at the wet clear smell of the river and the living and dying of life within it, so different from the crisp dry aromas of the plains. Where the gorge widened out again, trees grew on both sides down to the edge of the water. "This is beginning to look familiar," Jondalar said. "Isn't that the boat-making place ahead? Are we going to stay there?"

"Not this time. We'll keep going and turn around at Half-Fish."

"Half-Fish?" Ayla said. "What is that?"

A man sitting in front of her turned around and grinned. Ayla recalled that he was Carolio's mate. "You should ask him," he glanced at the man beside her. Ayla watched a red glow fill Jondalar's face as he blushed with embarrassment. "It's where he became a Harudo man. Hasn't he told you about it?" Several people laughed. "Why don't you tell it, Barono?" Jondalar said. "I'm sure it won't be the first time."

"Jondalar's right about that," Markeno said. "It's one of Baroi's favorite stories. Carolio says she's tired of hearing it, but everyone knows that he can't stop telling a good story, no matter how many times he's told it."

"Well, you must admit, it was funny, Jondalar," Barono said. "You should tell it."

Jondalar smiled in spite of himself. "To everyone else, maybe." He was looking at him with a puzzled smile. "I was just learning to handle small boats," he began. "I had a harpoon--a spear for fish--with a line and started upriver, and then I noticed the sturgeon were on the mountain. I thought it might be my chance to get the first one, not thinking at the time how I would ever land a big fish like that alone, or what would happen in such a small boat."

"That fish gave him the ride of his life!" Barono said, unable to resist.

"I wasn't even sure I'd be able to spear one; I wasn't used to a spear with a cord attached," Jondalar continued. "I should have worried about what would happen if I did."

"I don't understand," Ayla said.

ntine on land and spear something, like a deer, even if
l it and the spear falls out, you can trail it," Carlono
can't follow a fish in water. A harpoon has barbs that
aid a strong cord attached, so once you spear a fish, the
cord stays in it so it doesn't get lost in the water. The
; cord can be fastened to the boat."

l he speared pulled him upstream, boat and all," Ba-
l again. "We were on the shore back there, and we saw
hanging on to the cord that was tied to the boat. I
one going so fast in my life. It was the funniest thing I
alar thought he hooked the fish, but the fish had hooked

tiling along with everyone else.

s the fish finally lost enough blood and died, I was pretty
' Jondalar continued. "The boat was almost swamped,
(swimming to the shore. In the confusion, the boat went
at the fish ended up in a backwater next to the land. I
i the shore. By then I was pretty cold, but I'd lost my
dn't find any dry wood or anything to make fire. Slid-
d . . . a Clan . . . youngster appeared."
Opened with surprise. The story had taken on a new

wi.'

He to his fire. There was an older woman at his camp and I
to so much that she gave me a wolfskin. After I warmed
fc back to the river. The fl . . . the youngster wanted half
% was glad to let him have it. He cut the sturgeon in half,
S/A took his half with him. Everybody who saw me go by
j|for me, and just about then they found me. Even if they
it, I was more than happy to see them."
|terd to believe that only one flathead carried off half that
(raf. I remember it took three or four men to move the half
Khind," Markeno said. "That was a big sturgeon."
J»e Clan are strong," Ayla said, "but I didn't know there
to people in this region. I thought they were all on the
^''

*6d to be quite a few on the other side of the river," Barono
s"

t»pened to them?" Ayla asked.

w in the boat were suddenly embarrassed, looking down
?naUy Markeno said, "After Doraldo died, Dolando got a
'together and . . . went after them. After a while, most of
%re gone . . . I guess they went away."

"Show that to me again," Roshario said, wishing she could with her own hands. Ayla had put the birchbark cast on her arm morning. Though it was not quite dry, the strong, lightweight m- was already rigid enough to hold the arm securely, and Roshario enjoying the greater mobility it allowed her, but Ayla did not want to attempt to use the hand yet.

They were sitting with Tholie out in the sun amidst several chamois hides. Ayla had her sewing case out and was showing the thread-puller she had developed with the help of the Lion 0

"First you have to cut holes with an awl into both pieces leather you want to sew together," Ayla said.

"The way we always do," Tholie said.

"But you use this to pull the thread through the holes. The goes through this tiny hole at the back end, then when you r point into the cuts in the leather, it pulls the thread with it if both pieces that you want to join together." A thought occurred' Ayla as she was demonstrating the ivory needle. If it we enough, I wonder if the thread-puller could make the he Leather can be tough, though.

"Let me see it," Tholie said. "How do you get the thread the hole?"

"Like this, see?" Ayla said, showing her, then gave it back. tried a few stitches.

"This is so easy!" she said. "You could almost do it with one l Roshario, watching closely, thought Tholie might be right. I she couldn't use her broken arm, if she could use her hand just l the pieces together, with a thread-puller like that, she might be sew with her good hand. "I never saw anything like that. Wl made you think of it?" Roshario asked.

"I don't know," Ayla said. "It was just an idea I had when having trouble trying to sew something, but a lot of people h» I think the hardest part was making a drill out of flint small ei to make the tiny hole at the end. Jondalar and Wymez work that."

"Wymez is Lion Camp's flint knapper," Tholie explained t shario. "I understand he is very good."

"I know Jondalar is," Roshario said. "He worked out so man provements on the tools we use to make boats that everyone was ra» about him. Just little things, but it made a big difference. He l teaching Darvo before he left. Jondalar's good at teaching youngs Maybe he'll be able to show him more."

"Jondalar said he learned much from Wymez," Ayla said.

"That may be, but you both seem to be good at thinking

oas " Tholie said. "This thread-puller of yours is going a lot easier. Even when you know how, it's always thread through holes with an awl, and that spear-lalar's has everyone excited. When you showed how ith it you made people think that anyone could do it, ithink it's as easy as you made it seem. I think you must |more than a little."

Ayla had demonstrated the spear-thrower. It took a "I and patience to get close enough to a chamois to make t the Shamudoi hunters saw how far a spear could be they were eager to try it on the elusive mountain al of the Ramudoi sturgeon hunters were so enthusias- they decided to adapt a harpoon to it, to see how it i the discussion, Jondalar brought up his idea of a spear ^ ith a long back shaft notched with two or three feathers, Idetachable front end tipped with a point. The potential Jitely understood, and several approaches were tried by |iver the next few days.

there was a commotion at the far end of the field. The I looked up and saw several people hauling up the supply |;youngsters were running toward them.

ight one! They caught one with the harpoon-thrower!" Wsd as he approached the women. "And it's a female!" eee!" Tholie said.

head. I'll catch up as soon as I put my thread-puller away." bryou, Ayla," Roshario said.

|C they joined the others, the first part of the sturgeon had Bd and the basket sent down again. It was a huge fish, too Bg up at one time, but the best part had gone up first: Hundred pounds of tiny black sturgeon eggs. It seemed pt the large female was the result of the first sturgeon hunt ^Weapon developed from Jondalar's spear-thrower.

Ig racks were brought out to the end of the field, and most ie there were beginning to cut the great fish into small great mass of caviar, however, was brought back to the » was Roshario's responsibility to oversee its distribution. \$rla and Tholie to help her, and she dished out some for all ste.

'eaten this in years!" Ayla said, taking another bite. "It's when it's fresh from the fish, and there's so much." 'od thing, too, or we wouldn't get to eat much of it," Tholie

?"Ayla asked.

I ^11

"Because sturgeon roe is one of the things we use to make the i
ois skin so soft," Tholie said. "Most of it is used for that."
"I'd like to see how you make that skin so soft sometime," Ayla i
"I have always liked to work with leather and furs. When I lived
the Lion Camp, I learned how to color skins and made a really red w1^
and Crozie showed me how to make white leather. I like your vells
color, too." ^
"I'm surprised Crozie was willing to show you," Tholie said q."
looked significantly at Roshario. "I thought white leather was a seem- of the Crane Hearth." ^^
"She didn't say it was a secret. She said her mother taught her and
her daughter wasn't too interested in working leather. She seemri
pleased to pass the knowledge on to someone."
"Well, since you were both members of Lion Camp, you were d»
same as family," Tholie said, though she was quite surprised. "I don't
think she would have shown an outsider, any more than we wouldl
The Sharamudoi method of treating chamois is a secret. Our skins an
admired and have a high trade value. If everyone knew how to inaU
them, they would not be as valuable, so we don't share it," Tholie saidj
Ay la nodded, but her disappointment showed. "Well, it is nice, and
the yellow is so bright and pretty." |
"The yellow comes from bog myrtle, but we don't use it for iy
color. That just happens. Bog myrtle helps to keep the hides soft ctcb
after they get wet," Roshario volunteered. She paused, then added, "H
you stayed here, Ayla, we could teach you to make yellow chamois
skin."
"Stayed? How long?"
"As long as you want; as long as you live, Ayla," Roshario said,
giving her an earnest look. "Jondalar is kin; we think of him as one flt
us. It wouldn't take much for him to become Sharamudoi. He has even
helped to make a boat already. You said you weren't mated yet. iib
sure we could find someone willing to cross-couple with you, and thol
you could be mated here. I know you would be welcome among us- Ever since our old Shamud died,
we've needed a healer."
"We would be willing to cross-couple," Tholie said. Although Go- shario's offer was spontaneous,
it seemed entirely appropriate thenl0,
ment she mentioned it. "I'd have to talk to Markeno, but I'm sure be
agree. After Jetamio and Thonolan, it's been hard to find ano
couple we wanted to join with. Thonolan's brother would be pc"
Markeno has always liked Jondalar, and I would enjoy sharing 3d .
ing with another Mamutoi woman." She smiled at Ayla. "And 3"
would love having her 'Wuffie' around all the time."

r caught Ay la by surprise. When she fully grasped the mean-
as overwhelmed. She felt tears begin to sting. "Roshario, I
/ what to say. It has felt like home here since I first came.
ould love to share with you ..." The tears overflowed.
» Sharamudoï women felt the contagion of tears and blinked
smiling at each other as though they had conspired in a
plan.

n as Markeno and Jondalar come back, we'll tell them,"
I. "Markeno will be so relieved ..."
know about Jondalar," Ayla said. "I know he wanted to
He even gave up taking a shorter way just to see you, but
)W if he will want to stay. He says he wants to go back to
»»

are his people," Tholie said.
lolie. Even though he was here as long as his brother, Jon-
l Zeiandonii. He could never quite let go of them. I thought
have been why his feelings for Serenio were not as strong,"
lid.

as Darvalo's mother?" Ayla asked.
he older woman said, wondering how much Jondalar had
bout Serenio, "but since it's obvious how he feels about
ie, after all this time, his ties to his own people are weaker.
ou traveled enough? Why should you make such a long
hen you can have a home right here?"

I, it's time for Markeno and me to choose a cross-couple . . .
iter, and before ... I didn't tell you, but the Mother has
; again . . . and we should join before this one comes."
;ht as much. That's wonderful, Tholie," Ayla said. Then
nfocused in a dreamy look. "Maybe, someday, I'll have a
ddle ..."

re cross-mates, the one I'm carrying would be yours, too,
it would be nice to know there was someone around who
, just in case . . . although I didn't have any trouble at all
lamio."

night that she would like to have a baby of her own some- Aar's baby, but what if she couldn't?
She had been careful

;r morning tea every day, and she had not gotten pregnant,
f it wasn't the tea? What if she just wasn't able to make a
' Wouldn't it be wonderful to know that Tholie's children
"ers and Jondalar's? It was true, too, that the area nearby
ch like the region around the cave of Brun's clan, that it felt
The people were nice . . . although she wasn't sure of Do-

lando. Would he really want her to stay? And she wasn't sure
the horses. It was nice to be able to let them rest, but would there
enough feed to last the winter? And was there a big enough plac»

run?

Most important, what about Jondalar? Would he be willing to a,
up his Journey back to the land of the Zeiandonii and settle ha instead?

lie walked to the front of the large fireplace and stood sil- inst the red glow of dying embers and evening sky framed
ride walls of the embay ment. Most of the people were still
ine space just under the sandstone overhang, finishing the
blackberries or sipping a favorite tea or slightly foaming,
nted berry wine. Their feast of fresh sturgeon had begun
st, and only, taste of caviar from the female caught earlier.
of the oily fish eggs would be put to more mundane use
g of soft chamois skins.
say something, Dolando, while we're all gathered together
e said.
nodded, although it wouldn't have mattered. Tholie con- mt waiting for his acknowledgment.
can speak for everyone when I say how glad we are to
it and Ayla here," she said. Several people spoke out in
'We were all worried about Roshario, not only because of
was suffering, but because we feared she would lose the
mn. Ayla changed that. Roshario says she feels no more
ith luck, there is a good chance that she will have full use
gain."
s a chorus of positive comments expressing gratitude and
for good luck.
our kinsman, Jondalar, thanks too," Tholie went on.
w here before, his ideas for changes in the tools we use
dp, and now he has shown us his thrower, and the result
Again the group made vocal expressions of affirmation.
s he has lived with us, he has hunted both sturgeon and
it he has never said whether he prefers the water or the
c he would make a good River man ..."
ght, Tholie. Jondalar's a Ramudoï!" one man shouted out.
half of one!" Barono added, to an uproar of laughter. "No,
a» learning about the water, but he knows the land," a
That's right! Ask him! He threw a spear before he cast

his first harpoon, he's a Shamudoi!" an older man added. ' likes women who hunt!"

Ayla glanced up to see who had made the last comment.

young woman, a little older than Darvalo, named Rakario.

to be around Jondalar all the time, which annoyed the young

had complained that she was always in the way.

Jondalar was smiling broadly at the good-humored argument Tk5

commotion was a demonstration of the friendly competition betw

the moieties; a rivalry within the family that added a little excitement

but was never allowed to go beyond well-understood limits. loir--

bragging, and a certain level of insults were permissible, but anvthin*

that might unduly offend or cause real anger was quickly squelche?

with both sides joining forces to calm tempers and alleviate hurt feelings.

"As I said, I think Jondalar would make a good River man," Tholfc

continued when everyone had settled down, "but Ayla is most familiar

with the land, and I'd like to encourage Jondalar to stay with the land

hunters, if he is willing and they will accept him. If Jondalar and Ayla

would stay and become Sharamudoi, we would make an offer to cross- mate with them, but since

Markeno and I are Ramudoi, they would

have to be Shamudoi."

There was a great outburst of excitement among the people, with

encouraging remarks and even congratulations directed at the two couples.

"That's a wonderful plan, Tholie," Carolio said.

"It was Roshario who gave me the idea," Tholie said.

"But what does Dolando think about accepting Jondalar, and Ayla,

a woman who was raised by the ones who live on the peninsula?"

Carolio asked, looking directly at the Shamudoi leader.

There was a sudden silence. Everyone knew the implications other

question. After his violent reaction to Ayla, would Dolando be willing

to accept her? Ayla had hoped his angry raving would be forgotten and

wondered why Carolio had brought it up, but she had to do it. It was

her responsibility.

Carlono and his mate had originally been cross-coupled with D°";

lando and Roshario, and together they had founded this particular

group of Sharamudoi when they and a few others moved away ironl

their rather crowded birthplace. Positions of leadership were usually

conferred by informal consensus, and they were the natural choice.ln

practice, a leader's mate usually took on the responsibilities of a co- leader, but Carlono's

woman had died when Markeno was ql11

young. The Ramudoi leader never formally mated again and w- twin sister, Carolio, who had stepped

in to care for the boy, began

?i/«

duties of a leader's mate as well. As time went on,
nted as coleader, and, as such, it was her duty to ask the

, joiew Dolando had allowed Ayla to continue treating his
i]Roshario had needed help and Ayla was obviously helping
d not necessarily mean he would want her around perma-
»uld be merely controlling his feelings for the time being,
>uffh they needed a healer, Dolando was one of their own.
t want to take in a stranger who might cause a problem for
md possible dissension within the group.

lando was considering his answer, Ayla's stomach churned
l her throat. She had the uneasy feeling that she had done
Tone and was being judged for it. Yet she knew it wasn't
she had done. She became upset and a little angry, and
|to get up and walk away. The wrong thing was being who
he same kind of thing had happened with the Mamutoi. Is
jl^vould always be? Is this what would happen with Jonda-
|? Well, she thought, Iza and Creb and Brun's clan had taken
(, and she wasn't going to deny the ones she loved, but she
|d and vulnerable.

jbe sensed someone had moved quietly to her side. She turned
^' gratefully at Jondalar and felt better, but she knew it was
l,and that he was waiting to see how it would come out. She
|iWatching him closely, and she knew what his answer to
9ffer would be. But Jondalar was waiting for Dolando's re- Ifore he framed his own reply.
rty, in the middle of the tension, there was a peal of laughter
(Bio. Then she and several other children came rushing out of
^dwellings with Wolf in their midst.

I amazing how that wolf plays with children?" Roshario said.
t|ys ago I would never have believed that I could watch an
&B that in the middle of children that I love and not be afraid
lives. Perhaps that's something to remember. When you get
^n animal that you once hated and feared, it's possible to
fry fond of it. I think it's better to try to understand than to
>te."

10 had been quietly pondering how to respond to Carolio's
| He knew what he was being asked, and how much rested
iswer, but he was not quite sure how to frame what he
I1" felt. He smiled at the woman he loved, grateful that she
> so well. She had sensed his need and shown him a way to
blindly hated," he began, "and I have blindly taken the lives
317

of those I hated, because I thought they had taken the life of one loved. I thought they were vicious animals and I wanted to kin all, but it did not bring Doraldo back. Now I learn they did not de such hate. Animals or not, they were provoked. I must live withi but . . ."

Dolando stopped, started to say something about those who more than they had told him, yet aided him in his rampages he changed his mind.

"This woman," he went on, looking at Ayla, "this healer says fv was raised by them, trained by those I thought were vicious animak those I hated. Even if I still hated them, I could not hate her. Becau» of her, Roshario has been given back to me. Maybe it is time to try ttt understand.

"I think Tholie's idea is a good one. I would be happy if the Sh^i mudoi accepted Ayla and Jondalar." ;

Ayla felt the relief wash over her. Now she truly understood whf this man had been chosen by his people to lead them. In their day-today lives, they had come to know him well, and they knew the basic quality of the man.

"Well, Jondalar?" Roshario said. "What do you say? Don't you think it's time to give up this long Journey of yours? It's time to settle, time to set up your own hearth, time to give the Mother a chance to bless Ayla with a baby or two."

"I cannot find words to tell you how grateful I am," Jondalar began, "that you would welcome us, Roshario. I feel that the Sharamudoi are my people, my kin. It would be very easy to make a home here among you, and you tempt me with your offer. But I must return to the Zeiandonii"--he hesitated for a moment--"if only for Thonolan's sake."

He paused, and Ayla turned to look at him. She had known he would refuse, but that was not what she expected him to say. She noticed a subtle, nearly indiscernible nod, as though he'd thought of something else. Then he smiled at her.

"When he died, Ayla gave Thonolan's spirit what comfort she could for his Journey through the next world, but his spirit was not laid W rest, and I am afraid, I have a feeling, that he wanders lost and alone, trying to find his way back to the Mother."

His remark surprised Ayla, and she watched him closely as he con" tinued.

"I cannot leave it like that. Someone needs to help him find hisv/v!' but I know of only one who might know how: Zeiandoni, a shamll0' very powerful shamud, who was there when he was born. Perhaf"

Of Marthona--his mother and mine--Zeian doni might
d his spirit and guide it on the right path."
, d^at wasn't the reason he wanted to return, at least not
son. She sensed that what he said was perfectly true but,
realized, like the answer she had given him when he
>ut the golden thread plant, it was not complete.
gen gone a long time, Jondalar," Tholie said, her disap- ear. "Even if they could help him, how do
you know if
or this Zeian doni, are still alive?"
low Tholie, but I have to try. Even if they can't help, I
ma and the rest of his kin would like to know how happy
with Jetamio, and you and Markeno. My mother would
tamio, I'm sure, and I know she would like you, Tholie."
tried not to show it, but she could not help being pleased
cnt, even if she was disappointed. "Thonolan made a great
d it always was his Journey. I only followed along to look
I want to tell about his Journey. He traveled all the way
f the Great Mother River, but even more important, he
ye here, with people who loved him. It is a story that
etold."
I think you are still trying to follow your brother, to look
even in the next world," Roshario said. "If that is what
, we can only wish you well. I think Shamud would have
wi must follow your own path."
dered what Jondalar had done. The offer made by Tholie
amudoi, to become one of them, was not made lightly. It
s and very much an honor, and for those reasons it was
e without offending. Only a strong need to fulfill a higher
aw a more compelling quest, could make the rejection
ondalar chose not to mention that even though he thought
an, they were not the kin he was homesick for, but his
ruth had provided a graceful and face-saving refusal.
n, not mentioning was acceptable to allow an element of
society where it was difficult to hide anything, because
i thoughts could be discerned so easily from postures,
and subtle gestures. Jondalar had chosen to show a nec-
leration. She had the feeling that Roshario had suspected
>t she had accepted his excuse for the same reason that he
The subtlety was not lost on Ay la, but she wanted to
it, and she realized that generous offers could have more
' to them.
5 will you stay, Jondalar?" Markeno asked.

"We have traveled farther than I thought we would by now I not expect to get here until fall. I think, because of the horses, we"'^ moving faster than I expected," he explained, "but we still have a In I way to go, and there are difficult obstacles ahead. I would like to lea I as soon as we can." |

"jondalar, we can't leave so soon," Ayla interseced. "I can't eo untill Roshario's arm is healed." ;

"How long will that take?" jondalar said with a frown.

"I told Roshario her arm would have to be held rigid in that birch. bark for a moon and halfway into the next," Ayla said.

"That's too long. We can't stay that long!"

"How long can we stay?" Ayla asked.

"Not very long at all."

"But who will take the bark off? Who will know when the time is right?"

"We have sent a runner for a shamud," Dolando offered. "Wouldn't another healer know?"

"I suppose so," Ayla said, "but I would like to talk to this shamud.

jondalar, can't we stay at least until he comes?"

"If it's not too long, but maybe you should consider telling Dolando or Tholie what to do, pst in case."

jondalar was brushing Racer, and it seemed that the stallion's coat was growing in and thickening fast. He thought he had detected a decided nip in the air that morning, and the stallion seemed particularly frisky.

"I think you are as eager as I am to be moving, aren't you, Racer?" he said. The horse flicked his ears in jondalar's direction at the sound of his name, and Whinney tossed her head and nickered. "You want to go, too, don't you, Whinney? This really isn't a place for horses. You need more open country to run in. I think I should remind Ayla of that."

He gave Racer a final slap on the rump, then headed back toward the overhang. Roshario seems much better, he thought when he no- ticed the woman sitting alone near the large fireplace, sewing with one hand, using one of Ayla's thread-pullers. "Do you know where Ay- is?" he asked her.

"She and Tholie went off with Wolf and Shamio. They said tb^ were going to the boat-making place, but I think Tholie wanted show Ayla the Wishing Tree and make an offering for an easy "iff" and a healthy baby. Tholie is beginning to show her blessing, tv shario said.

r

hunkered down beside her. "Roshario, there is something
neanine to ask you," he said, "about Serenio. I felt terrible
"like I did. Was she ... happy, when she left here?"
k upset, and very unhappy at first. She said you offered to
he told you to go with Thonolan. He needed you more.
He's cousin unexpectedly arrived. He's like her in many
what he thinks."

;smiled. "That's the way they are."

Is like her, too. He's a good head shorter than Serenio, but
made up his mind in a hurry, too. He took one look at her
id she was the one for him--he called her his 'beautiful
' the Mamutoi word for it. I never thought he would con-
I almost told him not to bother--not that anything I said
e stopped him--but I thought it was hopeless, that she'd
risfied with anyone else after you. Then one day I saw them
gether, and I knew I was wrong. It was like she came to life
; winter. She blossomed. I don't think I've seen her so happy
rst man, when she had Darvo."

i for her," Jondalar said. "She deserves to be happy. I was
, though, when I left . . . she said she thought the Mother
; blessed her. Was Serenio pregnant? Had she started a new
; from my spirit?"

know, Jondalar. I remember when you left she said she
e might be. If she was, it would be a special blessing on her
g, but she never told me."

iat do you think, Roshario? Did she look like she was? I
you tell just from looking that soon?"

I could tell you for sure, Jondalar, but I don't know. I can
ie could have been."

) studied him closely, wondering why he was so curious. It
f the child was born to his hearth--he had given up that
n he left--although if she had been pregnant, the baby
mid have by now was likely to be of his spirit. Suddenly she
he idea of a son of Serenio, grown to the size of Jondalar,
e hearth of the short Mamutoi man. Roshario thought it
Mbiy please him.

opened his eyes to the rumpled bedding of the empty place
He pushed the covers aside, sat up on the edge of the bed
pawed and stretched. Looking around, he realized he must
late. Everyone else was up and gone. There had been
d the fire the night before of chamois hunting. Someone

had seen them moving down from the high crags, which meant season for hunting the sure-footed mountain-goatlike antelopes w soon begin.

Ay la had been excited about going on a chamois hunt, but vA they went to bed and talked to each other in quiet tones, as they ofi did, Jondalar had reminded her that they had to leave soon. If chamois were coming down, it meant it was getting cold in the hi meadows, which signaled a turn of the seasons. They had a lone ^"1 to travel yet, and they needed to be on their way. 4

They hadn't argued, exactly, but Ayla had indicated she didn't wai to go. She talked about Roshario's arm, and he knew she wanted hunt chamois. In fact, he felt sure that she wanted to stay with tl_ Sharamudoi, and he wondered if she was trying to delay their depart ture in the hope that he would change his mind. She and Tholie werei already fast friends, and everyone seemed to like her. It pleased hi@ that she was so well liked, but it was going to make the leaving more difficult, and the longer they stayed, the harder it would get. He lay awake far into the night, thinking. He wondered if they should stay, for her sake, but then, they could have stayed with the Mamutoi just as well. He finally came to the conclusion that they would have to leave as soon as possible, within the next day or two. He knew Ayla was not going to be happy about it, and he wasn't sure how to tell her.

He got up, put on his trousers, and started toward the entrance. Pushing aside the drape, he stepped outside and felt a sharp cool wind on his bare chest. He was going to need warmer clothes, he thought, hurrying to the place where the men passed their morning water. Instead of the cloud of colorful butterflies that usually fluttered nearby -he had wondered why they should be so attracted to the strong-smelling place-he suddenly noticed a colorful leaf fluttering down, and then he saw that most of those left on the trees were starting to turn.

Why hadn't he noticed that before? The days had passed so quickly and the weather had been so pleasant that he hadn't paid attention to the changing season. He suddenly recalled that they were facing sou@ in a southern region of the land. It could be much later into the seaso than he thought, and much colder to the north, where they we heading. As he hurried back to the dwelling, he was more deternu than ever that they had to leave very soon.

"You're awake," Ayla said, entering with Darvalo while Jonda was dressing. "I was coming to get you before all the food was p away."

, netting something warm on. It's cool out there," he said. "It's time to let my beard grow." He was telling her more than his words said. He was still telling her the same thing they had talked about the night before; he was changing and they had to be on their way. She didn't think about it. "I'd probably unpack our winter clothes and make sure they are ready for Ayla. Are the pack baskets still at Dolando's?" he said. "If they are. Why is he asking me? You know why, Ayla. I'm trying to think of something to change the subject." "I'm here," Darvalo said, trying to be helpful. "I'll get you a warmer shirt. Do you remember what basket my winter clothes were in, Ayla?" "Yes, she did. So did he. The clothes you are wearing now aren't anything like the ones you wore when you first came, Jondalar," Darvalo said. "They were given to me by a Mamutoi woman. When I came here, I was still wearing my Zeiandonii clothes." "I'll give you the shirt you gave me this morning. It's still too big for me, as much as I like it," the young man said. "Do you still have that shirt, Darvo? I've almost forgotten what it looks like. I want to see it?" "I'll show you," Jondalar said. "I'll get it for herself, Ayla was curious, too. She followed him to the shelter. He took the few steps to Dolando's wooden shelter. From a shelf on the wall, Darvalo took down a carefully wrapped package. He untied the cord, opened the soft leather wrapping, and held up the garment. "It's not as usual, Ayla thought. The decorative patterns, as well as the cut and the looser cut were not at all like the Mamutoi clothing she had seen. One thing surprised her more than anything else. It was decorated with black-tipped white ermine tails. "It's a little strange to Jondalar. So much had happened since he had seen that shirt, it seemed almost quaint, old-fashioned. He had never seen it much in the years he lived with the Sharamudois, prehistoric like the others, and though it was only a few moons since he had given it to Darvo, it felt like ages since he had seen the clothing from his homeland. "I'll get it to fit loose, Darvo. You wear it belted. Go ahead and show me. Do you have something to tie around you?"

The young man pulled the highly decorated and patterned style leather shirt over his head, then handed Jondalar a long lear thong. The man told Darvo to stretch up, then belted it fairly l almost at the hips, so that it bloused in a way that made the enn 'I tails hang free. |

"See? It's not so big on you, Darvo," Jondalar said. "What do vnn ^ think, Ayla?" --'

"It's unusual, I've never seen a shirt like that. But I think it looL, fine, Darvalo," she said.

"I like it," the young man said, holding out his arms and lookino down, trying to see how it looked. Maybe he'd wear it the next time they went to visit the Sharamudoi downriver. She might like it that girl he'd noticed.

"I'm glad I had a chance to show you how to wear it . . ." Jondalar said, "before we left."

"When are you leaving?" Darvalo asked, looking startled.

"Tomorrow, or the day after at the latest," Jondalar said, looking straight at Ayla. "As soon as we can get ready."

"The rains may have started on that side of the mountains," Dolando said, "and you remember what the Sister is like when she's flooding."

"I hope it won't be as bad as that," Jondalar said. "We'd need one of your big boats to cross."

"If you want to go by boat, we would take you to the Sister," Carlono said.

"We need to get more bog myrtle, anyway," Carolio added, "and that's where we go for it."

"I would be happy to go up the river in your boat, but I don't think the horses can ride in one," Jondalar said.

"Didn't you say they can swim across rivers? Maybe they could swim behind the boat," Carlono suggested. "And the wolf could ride."

"Yes, horses can swim across a river, but it's a long way to the Sister, several days as I recall," Jondalar said, "and I don't think they could , swim upriver for such a long distance."

"There is a way over the mountains," Dolando said. "You'll have to do a little backtracking, then go up and around one of the lower peakSi but the trail is marked and it will, eventually, take you close to where the Sister joins the Mother. There is a high ridge pst to the south All makes it easy to see even from a distance, once you reach the lowlall to the west."

"But would that be the best place to cross the Sister?" JondaW asked, remembering the wide swirling waters from the last time.

not but from there you can follow the Sister north until
Ebetter place, although she's not an easy river. Her feeders
out of the mountains hard and fast, her current is much
i the Mother's, and she's more treacherous," Carlono said.
s once went upstream on her for almost a moon. She stayed
ifficult the whole time."
iMother I need to follow to get back, and that means crossing
I Jondalar said.
pi wish you well."
heed food," Roshario said, "and I have something I'd like to
|ondalar."
ta't have much room to take anything extra," Jondalar said.
a" your mother," Roshario said, "Jetamio's favorite necklace.
H to give to Thonolan, if he came back. It won't take much
|ter her mother died, Jetamio needed to know she belonged
are. I told her to remember she was always Sharamudoi. She
I necklace out of chamois teeth and the backbones of a small
to represent the land and the river. I thought your mother
nt something that belonged to her son's chosen woman."
s right. She would," Jondalar said. "Thank you. I know it
I a great deal to Marthona."
Be is Ayla? I have something to give her, too. I hope she will
|fn for it," Roshario said.
8-in with Tholie, packing," Jondalar said. "She doesn't really
cleave, yet, not until your arm is healed. But we really can't
^longer."
Store I'll be fine." Roshario fell into step beside him as they
Howard the dwellings. "Ayla took off the old birchbark and put
Sfa piece yesterday. Except that it's smaller from not using it,
I seems healed, but she wants me to keep this on for a while
She says once I start using my arm again, it will fill out."
ftn-eitwill."
B t know what is taking the runner and the Shamud so long to
^ but Ayla has explained what to do, not only to me, but to
S, Thohe, Carolio, and several others. We'll manage without
Bsure--although we would rather you both stayed. It's not too
l»ange your mind ..."
tens more to me than I can tell you, Roshario, that you would
fr us so willingly . . . especially with Dolando, and Ayla's . . .
^g . . ."
topped and looked at the tall man. "That's bothered you, hasn't

Jondalar felt the red heat of embarrassment. "It did," he admitted. "It really doesn't any more, but knowing how Dolando felt about them, that you would still accept her, makes it ... I can't explain it. It relieves me. I don't want her to be hurt. She's been through enough." v

"She's stronger for it, though." Roshario studied him, noted his frown of concern, the troubled look in his stunning blue eyes. "You've been gone a long time, Jondalar. You've known many people, learned other customs, other ways, even other languages. Your own people may not know you any more--you are not even the same person you were when you left here--and they will not be quite the people you remember. You will think of each other as you were, not as you are now." <

"I've worried so much about Ayla, I hadn't thought of that, but you are right. It has been a long time. She might fit in better than I. They will be strangers, and she will learn about them very quickly, the way I she always does ..."

"And you will have expectations," Roshario said, starting toward the wooden shelters again. Before they entered, the woman stopped again, and "You will always be welcome here, Jondalar. Both of you." ;

"Thank you, but it's such a long way to travel. You have no idea how long, Roshario."

"You're right. I don't. But you do, and you are used to traveling. If you should ever decide that you want to come back, it won't seem so long."

"For someone who never dreamed of making a long Journey, I have already traveled more than I want," Jondalar said. "Once I get back, I think my Journeying days will be over. You were right when you said it was time to settle, but it might make getting used to home easier knowing that I have a choice."

When they pushed the entrance flap aside, they found only Markeno inside. "Where's Ayla?" Jondalar asked.

"She and Tholie went to get the plants she was drying. Didn't you see them, Roshario?"

"We came from the field. I thought she was here," Jondalar said.

"She was. Ayla's been telling Tholie about some of her medicines. After she looked at your arm yesterday, and started explaining what to do for you, they've been talking about nothing but plants, and what they are good for. That woman knows a lot, Jondalar."

"I know it! I don't know how she remembers it all."

"They went out this morning and came back with a basketful of all kinds. Even tiny yellow threads of plants. Now she's explaining how to prepare them," Markeno said. "It's a shame you are leaving."

olie is going to miss Ayla. We're all going to miss you

sy to go, but ..."

Fhonolan. That reminds me. I want to give you some-
eno said, rummaging through a wooden box filled with
and implements made of wood, bone, and horn.

out an odd-looking object made of the primary branch of
h the tines cut away and a hole just below the fork where
ed. It was carved with decorations, but not the geometric
brms of birds and fish typical of the Sharamudoi. Instead,
ll and lifelike animals, deer and ibex, were inscribed
indie. Something about it gave Jondalar a chill. When he
, it became a chill of recognition.

honolan's spear-shaft straightener!" he said. How many
.watched his brother use that tool, he thought. He even
when Thonolan got it.

you might want it, to remember him. And I thought,
uld be helpful when you search for his spirit. Besides,
it him . . . his spirit ... to rest, he might want to have
said.

m, Markeno," Jondalar said, taking the sturdy tool and
with wonder and reverence. It had been so much a part
, it brought back flashes of memory. "This means a lot to
ted it, shifted it for balance, feeling in its weight the
Fhonolan. "I think you might be right. There is so much
i, I can almost feel him."

aething to give Ayla, and this seems to be the time for it,"
l, going out. Jondalar joined her.

l'holie looked up quickly when they entered Roshario's
i for a moment the woman had the strange feeling that
truding on something personal or secret, but smiles of
>elled it. She walked to the back and took a package off a

r you, Ayla," Roshario said, "for helping me. I wrapped
d stay clean on your Journey. You can always use the
a towel, later."

ing surprised and pleased, untied the cord and unfolded
skins to reveal more of the yellow leather, beautifully
h beads and quills. She lifted it up and caught her breath.
>st beautiful tunic she had ever seen. Folded under it was
len's trousers, fully decorated on the front of the legs and
Mtom in a pattern matching the tunic.

l his is beautiful. I have never seen anything so beautiful.

It's too beautiful to wear," Ayla said. Then she put the garments i and hugged the woman. For the first time since she arrived, Rogi, .noticed Ayla's strange accent, particularly in the way she said cen^ words, but she didn't find it unpleasant. ^

"I hope it fits. Why don't you try it on so we can see?" Rosh J said.

"Do you really think I should?" Ayla said, almost afraid to touch n "You have to know if it will fit, so you can wear it when you an Jondalar are mated, don't you?"

Ayla smiled at Jondalar, excited and happy about the outfit, but sh refrained from mentioning that she already had a mating tunic, give to her by Talut's mate, Nezzie of the Lion Camp. She couldn't exacd wear both of them, but she would find a very special occasion for tt beautiful new outfit.

"I have something for you, too, Ayla. Not nearly as beautiful, bi useful," Tholie said, giving her a handful of soft leather straps that sh had tucked away in a pouch that dangled from her waist.

Ayla held them up and avoided looking at Jondalar. She knew a actly what they were. "How did you know I needed fresh straps ft my moon time, Tholie?"

"A woman can always use some new ones, especially when she traveling. I have some nice absorbent padding for you, too. Roshari and I talked about it. She showed me the outfit she had made for yoi and I wanted to give you something beautiful, too, but you can't tall much with you when you travel. So I started to think about what yo might need," Tholie said, explaining her very practical gift.

"It's perfect. You couldn't have given me something I needed, (wanted, more. You are so thoughtful, Tholie," Ayla said, then turne her head and blinked her eyes. "I'm going to miss you."

"Come now, you're not leaving yet. Not until tomorrow morninj There's plenty of time for tears then," Roshario said, though her ow eyes threatened to overflow.

That evening, Ayla emptied both her pack baskets and had ever) thing she wanted to take with her spread out, trying to decide how l pack it all, including the quantities of food they had been given. Joi dalar would take some of it, but he didn't have much room, eithe They had discussed the bowl boat several times, trying to decide it" usefulness in crossing rivers was worth the effort it would take to nio^ it across the wooded mountain slopes. They finally decided to take 1 but not without misgivings.

"How are you going to fit all that in only two baskets?" Jonda" asked, looking at a pile of mysterious bundles and packages, all c

land worried about taking too much. "Are you sure you
,|&t's in that package?".
mmer clothes," Ayla said. "That's the one I'll leave be- to but I will need clothes to wear next
summer. I'm just
ive to pack winter clothes any more."
"he grunted, not able to fault her reasoning, but still
gut the load. He scanned the pile and noticed a package
|»e had seen before. She'd been carrying it since they left,
fal't know what was in it. "What's that one?"
jrou're not being much help," Ayla said. "Why don't you
acres of traveling food Carolio gave us and see if you can
our pack basket for them?"

st. Settle down," Jondalar said, pulling down on the lead
Ung it in close while he patted the stallion's cheek and
sck, trying to calm him. "I think he knows we're ready
to go."

i.yla will be along soon," Markeno said. "Those two have
close in the short time you've been here. Tholie was
,ht, wishing you would stay. To tell you the truth, I'm
ou go, too. We looked around, and we talked to several
we just hadn't found anyone we wanted to share with,
e. We do need to make a commitment soon. Are you sure
it to change your mind?"

know how hard this decision has been for me, Markeno.
what I'll find when I get there. My sister will be grown
biy won't remember me. I have no idea what my older
€doing, or where he'll be. I just hope my mother is still
ir said, "and Dalanar, the man of my hearth. My close-
lughter of his second hearth, ought to be a mother by
m't even know if she has a mate. If she has, I probably
im. I really won't know anyone any more, and I feel so
one here. But I have to go."

added. Whinney nickered softly, and they both looked
Ayla, and Tholie, who was holding Shamio, were corn-
dwelling. The little girl struggled to get down when she

>w what I'm going to do about Shamio when that wolf is
no said. "She wants him around all the time. She'd sleep
i let her."

l can find a wolf cub for her," Carlono said, joining them.
Mne up from the dock.

"I hadn't thought of that. It wouldn't be easy, but maybe I could get one cub from a wolf den," Markeno mused. "At least I could get her to try. I'm going to have to tell her something."

"If you do," Jondalar said, "I'd make sure it's a young one. V still nursing when his mother died."

"How did Ayla feed him without a mother to give him milk?" Pilon asked.

"I wondered that myself," Jondalar said. "She said a baby can eat whatever its mother eats, but it has to be softer and easier to chew. She cooked up broth, soaked a piece of soft leather in it, and let him suck it, and she cut meat up into tiny pieces for him. He eats anything we eat now, but he still likes to hunt for himself sometimes. He even flushes game for us, and he helped us get that elk we brought with us when we came."

"How do you get him to do what you want him to?" Markeno asked.

"Ayla spends a lot of time at it. She shows him and goes over it again and again until he gets it right. It's surprising how much he can learn and he's so eager to please her," Jondalar said.

"Anyone can see that. Do you think it's just her? After all, she is shamud," Carlono said. "Could just anybody make animals do what he wants?"

"I ride on Racer's back," Jondalar said, "and I'm not shamud."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," Markeno said, then laughed. "Remember, I've seen you around women. I think you could make any one of them do whatever you wanted."

Jondalar flushed. He hadn't really thought about that for a while.

As Ayla walked toward them, she wondered about his red face, but then Dolando joined them, coming from around the wall.

"I'll go with you part of the way to show you the trails and the best way over the mountains," he said.

"Thank you. That will be a help," Jondalar said.

"I'll go along, too," Markeno said.

"I would like to come," Darvalo said. Ayla looked in his direction and saw that he was wearing the shirt Jondalar had given him.

"So would I," Rakario said.

Darvalo looked at her with an annoyed frown, expecting to see her staring at Jondalar, but she was looking at him instead, with an adoring smile. Ayla watched his expression change from annoyance, to puzzlement, to understanding, and then to a surprised blush.

Almost everyone had congregated in the middle of the field to say farewell to their visitors, and several others voiced a wish to walk along with them for part of the way.

eoine," Roshario said, looking at Jondalar and then Ayla, "you were staying. I wish you both good Journey."

"You Roshario," he said, giving the woman a hug. "We may not wish before we are through."

"Thank you, Jondalar, for bringing Ayla. I don't even want to know what would have happened to me if she hadn't come." Ayla took Ayla's hand. The young medicine woman took it, and her hand still in the sling, and squeezed both of them, feeling the strength in the grip of both hands in return. Then she said several other goodbyes, but most of the people planned to follow the trail for at least a short way.

"Will you be coming, Tholie?" Markeno asked, falling into step beside her. Her eyes glistened with tears. "I don't want to go. It won't be as good to say goodbye on the trail than it will be right here." She looked at the tall Zeiandonii man. "It's hard for me to be nice to you, Jondalar. I've always been so fond of you, and I liked you more after you brought Ayla here. I wanted so much for you and Ayla, but you won't do it. Even though I understand why you won't (: doesn't make me feel very good."

"I'm sorry you feel so bad, Tholie," Jondalar said. "I wish there was something I could do to make you feel better."

"I know, but you won't do it," she said. "I'm not so like her to say exactly what she was thinking. It was one of the things he liked about her. You never had to guess what she really thought. If I don't be angry at me. If I could stay, nothing would please me more than to join with you and Markeno. You don't know how much I love you, or how hard it is for me to be right now, but something pulls me. To be honest, I'm not sure what it is, but I have to go, Tholie." He looked at her with shining blue eyes full of genuine sorrow, concern, and caring. "Jondalar, you shouldn't say such nice things and look at me like that. It makes me want you to stay even more. Just give me a hug," she said.

"I'll be right here," he said, and he bent down and put his arms around the young woman, and he felt her shaking with her effort to control her tears. She pulled away and looked at the tall blond woman beside him.

"I don't want you to go," she said with a huge sob as they embraced each other's arms.

"I don't want to leave, I wish we could stay. I'm not sure why, but I have to go, and I have to go with him," Ayla said, crying as

hard as Tholie. Suddenly the young mother broke away, picked
Shamio, and ran back toward the shelters, 1,3
Wolf started to go after them. "Stay here, Wolf" Ayla commanded ^
"Wuffie! I want my Wuffie," the little girl cried out, reaching toward ^
the shaggy, four-legged carnivore. |
Wolf whined and looked up at Ayla. "Stay, Wolf," she said. «W» s
are leaving."

A& and Jondalar stood in a clearing that commanded a broad
; mountain, feeling a sense of loss and loneliness as they
llando, Markeno, Carlono, and Darvalo walking back down
he rest of the large crowd that had started out with them
id back by twos and threes along the way. When the last
iached a turn in the trail, they turned and waved.
irned their wave in a "come back" motion with the back of
ward them, suddenly overcome by the knowledge that she
;r see the Sharamudoi again. In the short time she had
m, she had come to love them. They had welcomed her,
> stay, and she could have lived with them gladly.
ying reminded her of their departure from the Mamutoi
summer. They, too, had welcomed her, and she had loved
fim. She could have been happy living with them, except
mid have had to live with the unhappiness she had caused
when she left, there had been the excitement of going home
an she loved. There were no undercurrents of unhappiness
Sharamudoi, which made the parting all the more difficult,
she loved Jondalar and had no doubt that she wanted to go
the had found acceptance and friendships that were hard to
ich finality.
are full of goodbyes, Ayla thought. She had even made her
ll to the son she had left with the Clan . . . though if she
there, someday she might have been able to go with the
l a boat back down the Great Mother River to the delta.
aps, she could have made a trek around to the peninsula, to
; new cave of her son's clan . . . but there was no point in
out it any more.
'ould be no more opportunities to return, no more last
hope for. Her life took her in one direction, her son's life
another. Iza had told her "find your own people, find your
ohe had found acceptance among her own kind of people
d found a man to love who loved her. But for all she had

gained, there were losses. Her son was one of them; she had to ac I
that fact. ^^1

Jondalar felt desolate as well, watching the last four turniw h-xA.
toward their home. They were all friends he had lived with for sev i I
years and had known well. Though their relationship was not thronok ^
his mother and her ties, he felt they were as much kin as his o"n
blood. In his commitment to return to his original roots, they we
family he would never see again, and that saddened him.

When the last of the Sharamudoi that had seen them off moved our
of sight. Wolf sat on his haunches, lifted his head, and gave voice to a
few yips that led to a full, throaty howl, shattering the tranquillity of
the sunny morning. The four men appeared again on the trail below
and waved one last time, acknowledging the wolfs farewell. Suddenly
there was an answering howl from one of his own kind. Markeno
looked to see which direction the second howl came from before they S
started back down the trail. Then Ay la and Jondalar turned and faced i
the mountain with its glistening peaks of blue-green glacial ice.
Though not as high as the range to the west, the mountains in which
they were traveling had been formed at the same time, in the most
recent of the mountain-building epochs—recent only in relation to the ''•
ponderously slow movements of the thick stony crust floating on the
molten core of the ancient earth. Uplifted and folded into a series of
parallel ridges during the orogeny that had brought the whole conti
nent into sharp relief, the rugged terrain of this farthest east expansion
of the extensive mountain system was clothed with verdant life.

A skirt of deciduous trees formed a narrow band between the plains
below, still warmed by the vestiges of summer, and the cooler heights.
Primarily oak and beech with hornbeam and maple also prominent,
the leaves were already changing into a colorful tapestry of reds and
yellows accented by the deep evergreen of spruce at the higher edge.
A cloak of conifers, which included not only spruce, but yew, fir, pine,
and the deciduous-needled larch, starting low, climbed to the rounded
shoulders of lower prominences and covered the steep sides of higher
peaks with, subtle variations of green that shaded to the yellowing
larch. Above the timberline was a collar of summer-green alpine pas
ture that turned white with snow early in the season. Capping it was
the hard helmet of blue-tinged glacial ice.

The heat that had brushed the southern plains below with th@
ephemeral touch of the short hot summer was already fading, g^10?
way to the grasping clutch of cold. Though a warming trend had bee
moderating its worst effects—an interstadial period lasting several
thousands of years—the glacial ice was regrouping for one last assa j

But before the retreat would be turned to a rout thousands of
' But even during the milder lull before the final advance,
not only coated low peaks and mantled the flanks of high
r it held the continent in its grip.
'weed forested landscape, with the added hindrance of haul-
md boat on the pole drag, Ayla and Jondalar walked more
lode the horses. They hiked up sharply pitched slopes, over
oss loose patches of scree, and down the steep sides of dry
ised by the spring runoff of melting snow and ice, and the
rains of the southern mountains. A few of the deep ditches
at the bottom, oozing through the mulch of rotting vegeta-
rft loam, which sucked at the feet of humans and animals
ers carried clear streams, but all would soon be filled again
anapestuous outflow of the downpours of autumn.
ower elevations, in the open forest of broad-leafed trees, they
tded by undergrowth, forcing their way through or finding
itand brush and briars. The stiff canes and thorny vines of
ous blackberries were a formidable barrier that tore at hair,
nd skin as well as hides and fur. The warm shaggy coats
Heppe horses, adapted for living on cold open plains, were
tight and tangled, and even Wolf took his share of burrs and

I
K?ere all glad when they finally reached the elevation of ever-
(yhose relatively constant shade kept the undergrowth to a
0, although on the steep slopes where the canopy was not as
he sun did filter through more than it would have on level
allowing some brush to grow. It was not much easier to ride
Isk forest of tall trees, with the horses having to pick their way
Jhe wooded obstacles and passengers dodging low-hanging
|; They camped the first night in a small clearing on a knoll
fed by needled spires.
approaching evening of the second day before they reached
griine. Finally free of entangling brush and past the obstacle
ttaller trees, they set up their tent beside a fast, cold brook on
^pasture. When the burdens were removed from the horses,
*p eager to graze. Though their customary coarser dry fodder
yer, hotter elevations was adequate, the sweet grass and alpine
we green meadow were a welcome treat.
Wherd of deer shared the pasture, the males busily rubbing
"rs on branches and outcrops to free them of the soft coating
m nourishing blood vessels called velvet in preparation for the

^

"It will soon be their season for Pleasures," Jondalar cominpn...i they were setting up the fireplace. "They are getting ready fo ' fights, and the females."

"Is fighting a Pleasure for males?" Ayla asked.

"I never thought of it that way, but it may be for some," he acknnu,tl i i "'.'..'n edged. |

"Do you like to fight with other men?" I

Jondalar frowned as he gave the question serious consideration. 'T I done my share. Sometimes you get drawn into it, for one reason <> i another, but I can't say I liked it, not if it's serious. I don't ramA wrestling or other competitions, though." '

"Men of the Clan don't fight with each other. It's not allowed but they do have competitions," Ayla said. "Women do, too, but they are a different kind."

"How are theirs different?"

Ayla paused to think about it. "The men compete in what they do- the women in what they make," she said, then smiled, "including babies, though that is a very subtle competition, and nearly everyone thinks she is the winner."

Farther up the mountain, Jondalar noticed a family of mouflon, and he pointed out the wild sheep with huge horns that curled around close to their heads. "Those are the real fighters," Jondalar said. "When they run at each other and bang their heads together, it sounds almost like a clap of thunder."

"When stags and rams run at each other with their antlers or horns, do you think they are really fighting? Or are they competing?" Ayla asked.

"I don't know. They can hurt each other, but they don't very often. Usually one just gives up when another one shows he is stronger, and sometimes they just strut around and bellow, and don't fight at all. Maybe it is more competition than actual fight." He smiled at her.

"You do ask interesting questions, woman."

A fresh cool breeze turned chilly as the sun dipped below the edge of vision. Earlier'in the day, light sittings of snow had drifted down and melted in the open sunny spaces, but some had accumulated in the shady nooks, forecasting the possibility of a cold night, and heavier snows to come.

Wolf disappeared shortly after their hide shelter was set up. "w he hadn't returned by dark, Ayla felt anxious about him. "Do y° think I should whistle to call him back?" she asked as they were getting ready to settle down for the night. ,

"It's not the first time he's gone off to hunt by himself, Ayla. Y00 re

t
im being around because you kept him close to you. He'll
ijalar said.
(back by morning," Ayla said, getting up to look around,
to see into the dark beyond their camp fire.
limal; he knows his way. Come back and sit down," he
mother piece of wood on the fire and watched the sparks
sky. "Look at those stars. Did you ever see so many?"
l np and a feeling of wonder came over her. "It does seem
lybe it's because we're closer up here, and we're seeing
a especially the smaller ones ... or are they farther
a think they go on and on?"
low. I never thought about it. Who could ever know?"

i.
ink your Zeiandonii might?"
:, but I'm not sure she'd tell. There are some things only
lose Who Serve the Mother to know. You do ask the
stions, Ayla," Jondalar said, feeling a chill. Though he
was from the cold, he added, "I'm getting cold, and we
i early start. Dolando said the rains could begin any time.
lean snow up here. I'd like to be down from here before

it there. I just want to make sure Whinney and Racer are
'be Wolf is with them."
all worried when she crawled into their sleeping furs, and
to fall asleep as she strained to hear any sound that might
returning.

too dark to see beyond the many, many stars that were streaming
into the night sky, but she kept looking. Then two stars, two
' the dark moved together. They were eyes, the eyes of a wolf who
l her. He turned and started walking away and she knew he
follow, but when she started after him, her path was suddenly
ge bear.
ack m fear when the bear got up on his hind legs and growled.
wked again, she discovered it wasn't a real bear. It was Creb,
'essed in his bearskin cloak.
we she heard her son calling out to her. She looked beyond the
and saw the wolf, but it wasn't just a wolf. It was the spirit of
'c's totem, and it wanted her to follow. Then the Wolf spirit
'son, and it was Durc who wanted her to follow. He called out
'e, but when she tried logo to him, Creb blocked her way again.
omething behind her.

She turned and saw a path leading up to a cave, not a deep cave but an overhanging shelf of light-colored rock in the side of a cliff, and above it an «Aia boulder that seemed frozen in the act of falling over the edge. When she came back, Creb and Durc were gone. ^wls*

"Creb! Durc! Where are you?" Ayla called out, bolting up.

"Ayla, you're dreaming again," Jondalar said, sitting up, too.

"They're gone. Why wouldn't he let me go with them?" Ayla said with tears in her eyes and a sob in her voice.

"Who's gone?" he said, taking her in his arms.

"Durc is gone, and Creb wouldn't let me go with him. He blocked the way. Why wouldn't he let me go with him?" she said, crying in his arms.

"It was a dream, Ayla. It was only a dream. Maybe it means something, but it was just a dream." ;

"You're right. I know you're right, but it felt so real," Ayla said.

"Have you been thinking about your son, Ayla?" "I guess I have," she said. "I've been thinking I'll never see him again."

"Maybe that's why you dreamed about him. Zeiandoni always said when you have a dream like that, you should try to remember everything about it, and that someday you might understand it," Jondalar said, trying to see her face in the dark. "Go back to sleep now." They both lay awake for some time, but finally they dozed off again. When they woke up the next morning, the sky was overcast and Jondalar was anxious to be on their way, but Wolf had still not returned. Ayla whistled for him periodically as they struck their tent and repacked their gear, but he still did not appear.

"Ayla, we need to go. He'll catch up with us, just like he always does," Jondalar said.

"I'm not going until I know where he is," she said. "You can go or wait here. I'm going to look for him."

"How can you look for him? That animal could be anywhere."

"Maybe he went back down. He did like Shamio," Ayla said.

"Maybe we should go back to look for him."

"We're not going back! Not after we've come this far."

"I will if I have to. I'm not going until I find Wolf," she said.

Jondalar shook his head as Ayla started backtracking. It was obvious she was adamant. They could have been well on their way by now it wasn't for that animal. As far as he was concerned, the Sharafflu could have him!

Ayla kept whistling for him as she went along, and suddenly, I05

j

ie back into the woods, he appeared on the other side of
nd raced toward her. He jumped up on her, almost
>ver put his paws on her shoulder, and licked her mouth,
ler jaw.

f there you are! Where have you been?" Ayla said,
uff rubbing her face next to his, and putting her teeth
greet him in return. "I was so worried about you. You
off like that."

ink we can get started now?" Jondalar said. "The mom-
e."

; did come, and we didn't have to go all the way back,"
?ine up on Whinney's back. "Which way do you want to
n

across the pasture without speaking, irritated with each
iey came to a ridge. Riding alongside, they looked for a
id finally came to a steep grade with sliding gravel and
appeared very unstable, and Jondalar continued trying to
fsy. If it had been just them, they might have been able
at several places, but the only way that seemed at all
ie horses was the slope of sliding rock.

ou think the horses can climb that? I don't think there's
y, except going down and trying to find some way
alar said.

wi didn't want to go back," she said, "especially for an

tifwe have to, we have to. If you think it's too dangerous
, we won't try it."

'bought it was too dangerous for Wolf? Would we leave
ien?" Ayla said.

r, the horses were useful, and though he liked the wolf,
ly did not think it was necessary to delay their passage
t was obvious that Ayla did not agree, and he had sensed
nt of division between them, a feeling of strain probably
wanted to stay with the Sharamudoi. He thought that
some distance between them, she would look forward to
' destination, but he didn't want to make her more un-
ie was.

< I wanted to leave Wolf behind. I just thought he would
us, like he has before," Jondalar said, although he had
ady to leave him.

there was something more to it than he said, but she
have the distance of disagreement between them, and

now that Wolf had come back, she was relieved. With her gone, her anger dissipated. She dismounted and started climbing the slope to test it. She wasn't altogether certain the horses could do it, but he'd said they would look for another way if they couldn't. "I'm not sure, but I think we should try it, Jondalar. I don't think it's quite as bad as it seems. If they can't make it, then we can go ahead and see if we can find some other way," she said. ^^

It actually wasn't quite as unstable as it appeared. Although there were a few bad moments, they were both surprised at how well the horses negotiated the slope. They were glad to put it behind them as they continued to climb, they encountered other difficult areas. In their mutual concern for each other and the horses, they were talking comfortably again.

The slope was easy for Wolf. He had run up to the top and back down again while they were carefully leading the horses up. When they reached the top, Ayla whistled for him and waited, Jondalar watched her and it occurred to him that she seemed much more protective toward the animal. He wondered why, thought about asking her, changed his mind afraid she would get angry, then decided to bring it up anyway.

"Ayla, am I wrong, or are you more concerned about Wolf than you were? You used to let him come and go. I wish you'd tell me what's troubling you. You were the one who said we shouldn't keep things from each other."

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes, her forehead wrinkled in a frown. Then she looked up at him. "You're right. It's not that I was keeping it from you. I've been trying to keep it from myself. Remember those deer down there, that were rubbing the velvet off their antlers?"

"Yes." Jondalar nodded.

"I'm not sure, but it might be the season of Pleasures for wolves, too. I don't even want to think about it, for fear that would make it happen, but Tholie brought it up when I was talking about Baby leaving to find his own mate. She asked me if I thought Wolf would leave someday, like Baby did. I don't want Wolf to leave, Jondalar. He's almost like a child to me, like a son."

"What makes you think he will?"

"Before Baby left, he would go off for longer and longer times, for a day, then several days, and sometimes, when he came back, I could see he had been fighting. I knew he was looking for a mate. And found one. Now, every time Wolf goes, I'm afraid he's looking for a mate," Ayla said.

i

it. I'm not sure we can ^o ^y^ng about it, but is it ilar asked. Unbidden came the thought that he wished it i't want her to be unhappy, but more than once the wolf them or caused tension between them. He had to admit bund a mate and went off with her, he would wish him lad he was gone.

ow " Ayla said. "So far, he's come back every time, and py to be traveling with us. He greets me like he thinks we but you know how it is with Pleasures. It is a powerful id can be very strong."

ie. Well, I don't know if there is anything you can do Cm glad you told me."

together in silence for a while, up another high meadow, ompanionable silence. He was glad she had told him. At rstood her strange behavior a little better. She had been overly concerned mother, though he was glad she didn't ;'d always felt sorry for the boys whose mothers didn't do things that might be a little dangerous, like going deep dimbing high places.

la. There's an ibex," Jondalar said, pointing to a nimble goatlike animal with long curved horns. It was perched ms ledge high up on the mountain. "I have hunted those ook over there. Those are chamois!"

really the animal the Shamudoi hunt?" Ayla asked as she Mitelope relative of the wild mountain goat, with smaller s, gamboling across inaccessible peaks and scarp faces of

^one with them."

anybody hunt animals like that? How do you reach

'er of climbing up behind them. They tend to look down w danger, so if you can get above them, you can usually ough for a kill. You can see why the spear-thrower would vantage," Jondalar explained.

me appreciate that outfit Roshario gave me even more,"

inued their climb and by afternoon were just below the eer walls reared up on both sides of them with patches of not far above. The top of the slope ahead was outlined f and seemed to lead to the very edge of the world. As the rise, they halted and looked. The view was spec-

Behind them was a clear vista of their climb up the mountain the treeline. Below that the evergreen-carpeted slopes cushioned hard rock and disguised the rough terrain they had struggled over *? the east they could even see the plain below with its braided ribbnJI of water flowing sluggishly across it, which surprised Ayla. The 0'S Mother River seemed hardly more than a few trickles from their va ; tage point on the frigid mountaintop, and she couldn't quite belipir that ages ago they had sweltered in the heat traveling beside her I front of them was a view of the next mountain ridge somewhat below and the deep valley of feathery green spires that separated them Looming close above were the glimmering icebound peaks.

Ayla looked around in awe, her eyes glistening with wonder, moved by the grandeur and beauty of the sight. In the chill, sharp air, pufi. of steam escaping her mouth made every excited breath perceptible. "Oh, Jondalar, we are higher than everything. I have never been so high. I feel like we're on the very top of the world!" she said. "And iri so ... so beautiful, so exciting."

As the man watched her expressions of wonder, her sparkling eyes, her beautiful smile, his own enthusiasm for the dramatic panorama was fired by her sheer excitement, and he was moved with immediate desire for her.

"Yes, so beautiful, so exciting," he said. Something in his voice sent a shiver through her and made her turn away from the extraordinary view to look at him.

His eyes were such an impossibly rich shade of blue, it seemed fort moment that he had stolen two small pieces of the deep, luminous blue sky, and filled them with his love and wanting. She was caught by them, captured by his ineffable charm, whose source was as unknow able to her as the magic of his love, but which she could not—and did not want to—deny. Just his desire for her had always been his "signal. For Ayla, it was not an act of will but a physical reaction, a need as strong and driving as his own.

Without being aware that she moved, Ayla was in his arms, feeling his strong embrace and his warm and eager mouth on hers. There w^ certainly no lack of Pleasures in her life; they shared that Gift of "lc Mother regularly, with great enjoyment, but this moment was excep tional. Perhaps it was the excitement of the setting, but she wit heightened awareness of every sensation. Every place she felt the pi^- sure of his body on hers, a tingling coursed through her; his hands her back, his arms around her, his thighs against hers. The bulg6 his groin, felt through the thicknesses of fur-lined winter parK^; seemed warm, and his lips on hers gave her an indescribable sense •• wanting him never to stop.

he released her and stepped back enough to unfasten the
r outer garment, her body ached with the desire and
r y§ touch. She could hardly wait, yet she did not want
' When he reached under her tunic to cup her breast, she
hands were cold for the contrasting shock to the heat she
gaspd when he squeezed a hard nipple, feeling fires
bumps as they raced through her to the place deep
d with wanting more.

i her powerful reactions and felt a corresponding in- own heat. His member surged erect and pulsed
with its

felt her smooth warm tongue reaching inside his mouth
it. Then he released it to seek the soft warmth others, and
felt an overwhelming desire to taste the warm salt and feel
Ids of her other opening, but he did not want to stop kissing
shed he could have all of her all at once. He took both
is hands, played with both nipples, squeezing, rubbing,
her tunic and took one in his mouth and suckled hard,
push against him and hearing her moan with pleasure.

i throbbing and imagined his full manhood being inside her.
|d again and she felt the strength of her need and her wanting
|was hungry for his touch, his hands, his body, his mouth,
K)d.

^pushing her parka off, and she shrugged out of it, delighting
Iwind that felt hot with his mouth on hers and his hands on
||He untied the drawstring of her leggings; she felt them being
!i(ro, and off. Then they were both down on her parka, and
t,nyere caressing her hips, and her stomach, and the inside of
V. She opened to his touch.

IpPpd down between her legs, and the warmth of his tongue as
liner shot spikes of excitement through her. She was so sensi- ^Mctions so powerful, it was almost
unbearable, unbearably

Bfr
!*ed her strong and immediate response to his light touch.

Bad been trained as a flint knapper, a maker of stone tools and
|t!Capons, and was among the most skilled because he was
tvs ^ stone with its fine and subtle variations. Women re his perception and sensitive handling
the way a fine piece
lft» and both brought out the best in him. He sincerely loved
Ite tool emerge from a good piece of flint under his deft touch,

k*^0111'"1 aroused to her full potential, and he had spent a
N«time practicing both.

|» natural inclination and genuine desire to be aware of a
^ particularly Ayla's, at that most intimate of mo-
^

^

ments, he knew that a featherlight touch would arouse her more that moment, though a different technique might be suitable later ' He kissed the inside of her thigh, then ran his tongue up and noric that chill bumps appeared. In the cold wind, he felt her shiver though she had her eyes closed and did not object, he could see <s was covered with gooseflesh. He got up and took off his own parlo cover her but left her bare below the waist.

Although she hadn't minded, his fur-lined outer garment, still vya, from his body and filled with his masculine scent, felt wonderful. T contrast of the cold wind blowing across the skin of her thiehs v from his tongue, made her shiver with delight. She felt the wai wetness moisten her folds, and the instant shiver from the cold fill her with a fierce heat. With a moan, she arched up to him.

With both hands, he held her folds apart, admired the beautiful pi flower of her feminine self and, unable to restrain himself, warmed t cooling petals with his wet tongue, savoring the taste of her. She f the warmth, then the cold, and quivered in response. This was a m feeling, not something he had done before. He was using the very; of the mountaintop as a means to bring her Pleasure, and at some ini level she marveled.

But as he continued, the air was forgotten. With stronger pressi and the familiar provocation of his mouth and hands, stimulatii encouraging, inciting her senses to respond, she lost all sense of wh(she was. She felt only his mouth sucking, his tongue licking and prc ding her place of Pleasure, his knowing fingers reaching inside, a then only the rising tide within her reaching a crest, and washing o her, while she reached for his manhood and guided it to her well. S pushed up as he filled it.

He sunk his shaft deeply, closing his eyes as he felt her warm, me embrace. He waited a moment, then pulled back and felt the caress her deep tunnel, and pushed in again. He plunged in, retracted, ea stroke bringing him closer, the pressure inside him building. He bea her moan, felt her rise to him, and then he was there, and he explod with the release of wave after wave of Pleasure.

In the silence, only the wind spoke. The horses had waited patient the wolf had watched with interest, but had learned to contain more active curiosity. Finally Jondalar lifted himself, rested on arms, and looked down at the woman he loved.

"Ayla, what if we started a baby?" he asked.

"Don't worry, Jondalar. I don't think we did." She was grateful- had found more of her contraceptive plants, and she was teropte"

tell him, as she had told Tholie. But Tholie had been so shocked

ttth she was a woman, that Ayla didn't dare mention it.
n but I don't think this would be a time when I could
she said, and it was true she wasn't absolutely certain.
a daughter, eventually, even though she had taken the
ea for years. Perhaps the special plants lost their effec- gne use, Ayla thought, or maybe Iza
forgot to take it,
»s unlikely. Ayla wondered what would happen if she
ig her morning tea.
ied she was right, although a small part of him wished
; wondered if there would ever be a child at his hearth,
his spirit, or perhaps, of his own essence.

r days before they reached the next ridge, which was
A above the timberline, but from it they had their first
»ad western steppes. It was a crisp clear day, though it
irrier, and in the far distance they glimpsed another,
'ice-encrusted mountains. On the plains below they saw
south into what appeared to be a great swollen lake.
Sreat Mother River?" Ayla asked.
the Sister, and we have to cross her. I'm afraid it will
crossing of our whole Journey," Jondalar explained.
; , toward the south? Where the water is all spread out
s like a lake? That's the Mother, or rather where the
r--or tries to. She backs up and overflows, and the acherous. We won't try our crossing there, but
Carlono
bulent river even upstream."

out, the day they looked down toward the west from
ge was the last clear day. They woke the following
wooding, overcast sky that drooped so low it merged
from depressions and hollows. Mist hung palpably in
thered into miniature droplets on hair and fur. The
draped with an insubstantial shroud that allowed trees
materialize out of indistinct shapes only as they drew

icon, with an unexpected and resounding roar of thun-
pened, lit only heartbeats before by a sudden shaft of
»jerked with surprise, and she shivered with dread as
of white branching light played with the mountaintops
But it wasn't the lightning that scared her, it was the
the explosive noise it presaged.
each time she heard a distant rumble or a nearby rolling
seemed with each burst of thunder that the rain came

down harder, as though frightened out of the clouds by the noise they worked their way down the west-facing slope of the mountain. Rain fell in sheets as thick as waterfalls. Streams filled and overflowed and rivulets spilling over ledges became gushing torrents. The ground grew slick and dangerous in places.

They were both grateful for their Mamutoi rain parkas made of dehaired deer hides, Jondalar's from megaceros, the giant deer of the steppes, and Ayla's from the northern reindeer. They wore their fur parkas, when the weather was cold, or over their reeltunics when it was warmer. The exterior surfaces were colored with red and yellow ochres. The mineral pigments had been mixed with fats, and the color was worked into the hides with a special burnish tool made of rib bone that brought the garments to a hard, shiny luster that was also quite water repellent. Even wet, it provided some protection, but the burnished, fat-soaked finish was unable to entirely resist the soaking deluge.

When they stopped for the night and put up the tent, everything was damp, even their sleeping furs, and no fire was possible. They brought wood into their tent, mostly the dead lower branches of a ferns, hoping it would dry overnight. In the morning the rains poured and their clothes were still damp, but using a firestone and tinder she had with her, Ayla managed to get a small fire going, enough to boil a little water to make a warming tea. They ate only the square compressed cakes of traveling food Roshario had given them, which were a variation of the commonly made, filling, nutritious, corny food that could sustain a person indefinitely even if that was all he had. It consisted of some variety of meat that was dried then ground up and mixed with fat, usually some dried fruit or berries, and occasionally partially cooked grains or roots.

The horses were standing outside the tent impassively, their heads drooping and water dripping from long winter fur, and the bowl that had fallen over and was half-full of water. They were ready to leave and the dragging poles behind. The travois that had been so useful hauling loads across the open grasslands, and with the addition of round boat effective for transporting their gear across rivers, had become an encumbrance in the rugged, forested mountains. It had hampered and slowed their travel, and it could even be dangerous going down difficult slopes in the pouring rain. If Jondalar hadn't known that most of the rest of their Journey the passage would still be a0 plains, he would have left it long before.

They unfastened the boat from the poles and poured out the water, turning the boat upside down and eventually lifting it over the

ierneath, holding the round boat above their heads, they
h other and grinned. For a moment they were out of the
't occurred to them that the boat that held them out of the
rer could also be a roof to keep off the rain. Not while they
, perhaps, but they could at least get out of the rain for a
hen it pelted down in earnest.

iscovery didn't solve the problem of how they were going
it. Then, as though they both thought of it at the same
fed the bowl boat over Whinney's back. If they could find
I it in place, it could help to keep their tent and two of the
dry. Using the poles and some cordage, they worked out
port the boat across the patient mare's back. It was some-
rd, and they knew it would be too wide, occasionally,
tier finding another way around, or lifting it off, but they
it would be any more trouble than it had been before, and
ride some benefit.

sred and packed the horses, but with no intention of riding
td, the heavy wet leather tent and ground cloth were
Whinney's back, and the round boat was hoisted over
ited by crossed poles. A heavy tarp made of mammoth
Ayla had used to cover the pack basket in which she
food, was draped across Racer's back to cover both his

y started out, Ayla spent some time with Whinney, re-
thanking her, using the special language she had devel-
valley. It didn't occur to Ayla to question whether
ually understood her. The language was familiar and calm-
mare definitely responded to certain sounds and move-
tals.

er perked his ears, tossed his head, and nickered as she
tondalar assumed she was communicating with the horses
ial way that he was incapable of grasping, even though he
t little of it. It was part of the mystery of her that kept him

f started down the rough terrain in front of the horses,
way. Wolf, who had spent the night inside the tent and
> as soaked to begin with, soon looked even worse than the
usually thick and fluffy fur was plastered to his body,
iimmish his size and showing the outlines of bone and
de. The damp fur parkas of the man and woman were
"< if not completely comfortable, especially with the wet
"ir inside the hoods. After a while water trickled down

their necks, but there was little they could do about it. As the dr T| skies continued to leak, Ayla decided that rain was her least fav^1 kind of weather. lc I

It rained during the next few days almost constantly, all the w down the side of the mountain. When they reached the tall conif ^ there was some protection under the canopy, but they left most of Hut trees behind them where a broad terrace leveled out, though the riv was still far below them. Ayla began to realize that the river she had seen from above must be much farther and even bigger than sh» thought. Though it had slacked up occasionally, the rain did not stoo and without the protection of the trees, scant though it was, they we» wet and miserable, but they gained one advantage. They were able to ride the horses, at least part of the time.

They rode west down a series of loess terraces that fell off from the mountains, the higher ones dissected by countless small streams filled and overflowing with drainage from the highland, the result of die deluge that poured from the sky. They slogged through mud and crossed several swirling waterways rushing down from the heights. Then they dropped down to another terrace and unexpectedly came upon a small settlement. ;

The rough wooden shelters, little more than lean-tos, obviously put! together quickly, looked ramshackle, but they offered some protection ; from the constantly falling water and were a welcome sight to the travelers. Ayla and Jondalar hurried toward them. They dismounted, conscious of the fear that the tame animals might cause people to fed, ; and called out in Sharamudoi, hoping it would be a familiar language, j But there was no answer, and when they looked closer, it was obvious that no one was about. ;

"I'm sure the Mother realizes we need shelter. Doni will not object if we go in," Jondalar said, stepping inside one of the shacks and looking around. It was completely empty, except for a leather thong hanging from a peg, and its dirt floor was sloppy mud where a stream ; had run through it before it was diverted. They went out and headed for the largest one.

As they approached it, Ayla became aware that something importaw was missing. "Jondalar, where is the donii? There is no figure of Mother guarding the entrance."

He looked around and nodded. "This must be a temporary sutasa camp. They did not leave a donii because they did not call upon to protect it. Whoever built these doesn't expect them to last the ^ ter. They have abandoned this place, gone and taken everything „ j them. They probably moved to higher ground when the rains begall'

J the larger structure and found it was more substantial
- There were unfilled cracks in the walls, and the rain
h the roof in several places, but the rough wooden floor
owe the level of the sticky mud, and a few pieces of wood
J near a hearth built up with stones to floor height. It was
oost comfortable place they had seen for days.
at out unharnessed the travois, and brought the horses in.
l a fire while Jondalar went into one of the smaller struc-
egan tearing wood from the dry inner walls for firewood.
j he returned, she had strung heavy cordage across the room
I she found in the wall, and she was draping wet clothes and
ver them. Jondalar helped her spread the tent across a rope,
i to bunch it up to avoid a steady stream from a leak.
Sit to do something about the leaks in the roof," Jondalar

Icattails growing nearby," Ayla said. "It wouldn't take long to
I leaves into mats that we could cover the holes with."
rent out to gather the tough, rather stiff, cattail leaves to patch
ig roof, both cutting down an armload of the plants. The
at were wrapped around the stem averaged about two feet
>ut an inch or more in width, tapering to a point. Ayla had
;hing Jondalar the basics of weaving, and after watching her
i method she was using to make square sections of flat mats,
m to make one like them. Ayla looked down at her work, smiling
(elf. She couldn't help it. She still felt a sense of surprise that
|T was able to do woman's work, and she was delighted by his
taess. With both of them working, they soon had as many
S made as there were leaks.

structures were made of a rather thin thatch of reeds fastened
isic frame of long tree trunks, not much more than saplings,
together. Though not made of planks, they were similar to the
ed dwellings made by the Sharamudoi, except the ridgepole did
pc and they were asymmetrical. The side with the entrance
g, facing the river, was nearly vertical; the opposite side leaned
it at a sharp angle. The ends were closed, but they could be
d up somewhat like awnings.

(^went out and attached the mats, tying them down with lengths
ough, stringy cattail leaves. There were two leaks near the peak
ere difficult to reach even with Jondalar's six-foot-six-inch
and they did not think the structure would bear the weight of
if them. They decided to go back inside and try to think of a
patch them, remembering at the last moment to fill a waterbag

and some bowls with water for drinking and cooking. When Tondal reached up and blocked one of the leaks with his hand, it finally curred to them to fasten the patch from the inside.

After they covered the entrance with the mammoth hide tarp Avi looked around the darkened interior, lit only by the fire that was stan ing to warm the place, feeling snug. The rain was outside and they were inside a place that was dry and warm, though it was staiting to get steamy as the wet things began to dry, and there was no smokehole in the summer dwelling. The smoke from fires had usually escaped through the less-than-airtight walls and ceiling, or the ends, which were often left open in warmer weather. But the dried grass and reeds had expanded with the moisture, making it harder for smoke to escape and it began to accumulate along the ridgepole at the ceiling.

Though horses were accustomed to being out in the elements and usually preferred it, Whinney and Racer had been raised around people and were used to sharing human habitations, even darkened smoky ones. They stayed at the end that Ayla had decided would be their place, and even they seemed glad to be out of the waterlogged world. Ayla put cooking rocks in the fire; then she and Jondalar rubbed down the horses and Wolf, to help them dry.

They opened all the packages and bundles to see if anything had been damaged by the excess moisture, found dry clothes and changed into them, and sat by the fire drinking hot tea, while a soup, made from the compressed traveling food, was cooking. When the smoke began to fill the upper levels of the dwelling, they broke holes through the light thatch of both ends near the top, which cleared it out and added a little more light.

It felt good to relax. They hadn't realized how tired they were, and before it was even fully dark, the woman and man crawled into their still slightly damp sleeping furs. But as tired as he was, Jondalar could not go to sleep. He remembered the last time he had faced the swift and treacherous river called the Sister, and in the dark he felt a chill 01 dread at the thought of having to cross her with the woman he loved.

Lyia and Jondalar stayed at the abandoned summer camp the next day, and the next. By the morning of the third day, finally slacked off. The dull, solid gray cloud cover broke up, and afternoon bright sunlight beamed through the blue patches between fleecy white clouds. A brisk wind puffed and sputtered in one direction and then another, as if trying out different directions, unable to decide which would best suit the occasion.

When their things were dry, but they opened the ends of the bags to let the wind blow through to dry completely the last few seeds and air everything out. Some of their leather items had become stiff. They would need working and stretching, though regular use probably be sufficient to make them supple again, but they were initially undamaged. Their woven pack baskets, however, were another matter. They had dried misshapen and badly frayed, and mildew had developed. The moisture had softened them, and the weight of their contents had caused them to sag and the fibers to stretch and break.

Lyia decided she would have to make new ones, even though the seeds, plants, and trees of autumn were not the strongest or most durable materials to use. When she told Jondalar, he brought up another

"The pack baskets have been bothering me, anyway," he said. "When we cross a river deep enough for the horses to have to swim, we don't take them off, the baskets get wet. With the bowl and the pole drag, it hasn't been much of a problem. We just put the baskets in the boat, and as long as we're in open country, it's easy to use the drag. Most of the way ahead is open grassland, but there will be some woods and rough country. Then, just like in these mountains, it might not be so easy to drag those poles and the boat. So we may decide to leave them behind, but if we do, we need baskets that won't get wet when the horses have to swim a river. Can you make some like that?"

It was Ay la's turn to frown. "You're right, they do get wet.

When I made the pack baskets, I didn't have to cross many riven those I did weren't very deep." She wrinkled her forehead in an aQ^ tration; then she remembered the pannier she had first devised <^1 didn't use pack baskets in the beginning. The first time I }va "I Whinney to carry something on her back, I made a big, shallow ha }r ^ Maybe I can work out something like that again. It would be easi-c we didn't ride the horses, but ..."

Ayla closed her eyes, trying to visualize an idea she was getting "Maybe ... I could make pack baskets that could be lifted up to th*" ' backs while we're in the water. . . . No, that wouldn't work if we wei> riding at the same time . . . but . . . maybe, I could make something the horses could carry on their rumps, behind us . . ." She looked at Jondalar. "Yes, I think I can make carriers that will work."

They gathered reed and cattail leaves, osier willow withes, lone thin spruce roots, and whatever else Ayla saw that she thought could be used as material for baskets or for cordage to construct woven containers. Trying various approaches and fitting it on Whinney, Ayla and Jondalar worked on the project all day. By late afternoon they had made a sort of pack-saddle basket that was sufficient to hold Ayla's belongings and traveling gear, that could be carried by the mare while she was riding, and that would stay reasonably dry when the horse was swimming. They started immediately on another one for Racer. His went much faster because they had worked out the method and the details.

In the evening the wind picked up and shifted, bringing a sharp norther that was fast blowing the clouds south. As twilight turned to dark, the sky was almost clear, but it was much colder. They planned to leave in the morning, and both of them decided to go through their things to lighten their load. The pack baskets had been bigger and it was a tighter fit in the new pack-saddle carriers. No matter how they tried to arrange it, there just wasn't as much room. Some things had to go. They spread everything out that both of them were carrying.

Ayla pointed to the slab of ivory on which Talut had carved the map showing the first part of their Journey. "We don't need that any more. Talut's land is far behind us," she said, feeling a touch of sadness. "You're right, we don't need it. I hate to leave it, though," Jondalar said, grimacing at the thought of getting rid of it. "It would be interesting to show the kind of maps the Mamutoi make, and it reminds w of Talut."

Ayla nodded with understanding. "Well, if you have the room, ta^ it, but it isn't essential." ,

Jondalar glanced at Ayla's array spread out on the floor, and p10", j up the mysterious wrapped package he had seen before. "What is this. jj

something I made last winter," she said, taking it out of his looking away quickly as a flush rose to her face. She put it shoving it under the pile of things she was taking. "I'm ave my summer traveling clothes, they're all stained and ay and I'll be wearing my winter ones. That gives me some »> looked at her sharply, but he made no further comment.

old when they awoke the next morning. A fine cloud of showed every breath. Ayla and Jondalar hurriedly dressed, arring a fire for a morning cup of hot tea, they packed their iger to be off. But when they went outside, they stopped

WE of shimmering hoarfrost had transformed the surround- t sparkled and glinted in the bright morning sun with an ddness. As the frost melted, each drop of water became a ;dng a brilliant bit of rainbow in a tiny burst of red, green, »ld, which flickered from one color to another when they saw the spectrum from a different angle. But the beauty of iphernal jewels was a reminder that the season of warmth aore than a fleeting flash of color in a world controlled by I the short hot summer was over.

iey were packed and ready to go, Ayla looked back at the mp that had been such a welcome refuge. It was even more , since they had torn down parts of the smaller shelters to fireplace, but she knew the flimsy temporary dwellings ist much longer anyway. She was grateful they had found i they did.

ntinued west toward the Sister River, dropping down a other level terrace, though they were still high enough in > see the wide grasslands of the steppes on the other side of ait waterway they were approaching. It gave them a per- the region as well as showing the extent of the river flood- 1. The level land that was usually under water during times is about ten miles across, but broader on the far bank. The the near side limited the floodwaters' normal expansion, re were elevations, hills and bluffs, across the river, too. sst to the grasslands, the floodplain was a wilderness of mall lakes, woods, and tangled undergrowth with the river hrough it. Though it lacked meandering channels, it re- ^la of the tremendous delta of the Great Mother River, but a" scale. The sallows and seasonal brush that seemed to be t of the water along the edges of the swiftly flowing stream

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indicated both the amount of flooding caused by the recent rains a the sizable portion of land already given up to the river.

Ayla's attention was brought back to her immediate surroundin when Whinney's gait suddenly changed, caused by her hooves sink; into sand. The small streams that had cut across the terraces above h a become deeply entrenched riverbeds between shifting dunes of sand marl. The horses floundered as they proceeded, kicking up fountain of loose, calcium-rich soil with each step.

Near evening, as the setting sun, nearly blinding in its intensity approached the earth, the man and woman, trying to shade their eyes' peered ahead, looking for a place to make camp. Drawing nearer to the floodplain, they noticed that the fine shifting sand was developing a slightly different character. Like the upper terraces, it was primarily loess-rock dust created by the grinding action of the glacier and de posited by the wind-but occasionally the river's flooding was extreme enough to reach their elevation. The clayey silt that was added to the soil hardened and stabilized the ground. When they began to see fa miliar steppe grasses growing beside the stream they were following, one of the many that were racing down the mountain toward the Sister, they decided to stop.

After they set up their tent, the woman and man went in separate directions to hunt for their dinner. Ayla took Wolf, who ran ahead and in a short time flushed up a covey of ptarmigan. He pounced on one as Ayla whipped out her sling and brought down another that thought it had reached the safety of the sky. She considered allowing Wolf to keep the bird he had caught, but when he resisted giving it up at once, she decided against it. Though one fat fowl could-certainly have satis fied both her and Jondalar, she wanted to rei^orce to the wolf the understanding that, when she expected it, he would have to share his kills with them, because she didn't know what lay ahead.

She didn't fully reason it out, but the nippy air had made her realize that they would be traveling during the cold season into an unknown land. The people she had known, both the Clan and the Mamutoi, seldom traveled very far during the severe glacial winters. They settled into a place that was secure from bitter cold and wind-driven blizzards, and they ate food they had stored. The idea of traveling in winter made her uneasy. ,

Jondalar's spear-thrower had found a large hare, which they decided to save for later. Ayla wanted to roast the birds on a spit over a nre, but they were camped on the open steppes, beside a stream with only scanty brush beside it. Looking around, she^pied a couple of antle ' unequal in size and obviously from different animals, that had bee

the previous year. Though antler was much harder to break
l with Jondalar's help, sharp flint knives, and the small axe
i'his belt, they broke them apart. Ayla used part to skewer
and the broken-off tines became forks to support the spit.
the effort, she decided she would keep them to use again,
since antler was slow to catch fire.

re Wolf his share of the cooked fowl, along with a portion of
e reed roots she had dug from a backwater ditch beside the
id the meadow mushrooms that she recognized as edible and
er their evening meal, they sat next to the fire and watched
aw dark. The days were getting shorter, and they weren't as
ieht, especially since it was so much easier riding the horses
; open plains than it had been making their way over the
lountains.

birds were good," Jondalar said. "I like the skin crisp like

ime of year, when they're so nice and fat, that's the best way
lem," Ayla said. "The feathers are changing color already,
reast down is so thick. I wanted to take it with us. It would
ice soft filling for something. Ptarmigan feathers make the
id warmest bedding, but I don't have room for them."

; next year, Ayla. The Zeiandonii hunt ptarmigan, too,"
aid, as a gentle encouragement, something for her to antici-
e end of their Journey.

igan were Creb's favorite," Ayla said.

r thought she seemed sad, and when she said nothing more,
n talking, hoping it would take her mind off whatever was
her. "There's even one kind of ptarmigan, not around our
it south of us, that doesn't turn white. All year it looks like a
i does in summer, and it tastes like the same kind of bird.
Ie who live in that region call it a red grouse, and they like to
Gathers on their headwear and clothes. They make special
for a Red Grouse ceremony, and they dance with the bird's
ts, stamping their feet and everything, like the males do when
lying to entice the females. It's part of their Mother Festival."
d, but when she still had no comment to make, he continued,
nt the birds with nets, and get many at one time."

>ne of these with my sling, but Wolf got the other one," Ayla
in she said nothing more, Jondalar decided she just didn't feel
>g» and they sat in silence for a while, watching the fire con-
sh and dried dung that had redried after the rains enough to
'ally she spoke again. "Remember Brecie's throwing stick? I

wish I knew how to use something like that. She could brine d several birds at one time with it."

The night cooled quickly, and they were glad for the tent. Thoi nk? Ay la had seemed unusually silent, full of sadness and rememberi she was warmly responsive to his touch, and Jondalar soon stonr"! worrying about her quiet mood.

In the morning the air was still brisk, and the condensed moisting had brought a ghostly shimmer of frost to the land again. The icv stream was cold but invigorating when they used it to wash. They had buried Jondalar's hare, encased in its furry hide, under the hot coals to cook overnight. When they peeled off the blackened skin, the rich layer of winter fat just underneath had basted the usually lean and often stringy meat, and slow cooking within its natural container made it moist and tender. It was the best time of the year to hunt the lone-eared animals.

They rode side by side through the tall ripe grass, not rushing but keeping a steady pace, talking occasionally. Small game was plentiful as they headed toward the Sister, but the only large animals they saw all morning were across the river in the distance: a small band of male mammoths, heading north. Later in the day they saw a mixed herd of horses and saiga antelope, also on the other side. Whinney and Racer noticed them, too.

"Iza's totem was the Saiga," Ayla said. "That was a very powerful totem for a woman. Even stronger than Creb's birth totem, the Roe Deer. Of course, the Cave Bear had chosen him and was his second totem before he became Mog-ur."

"But your totem is the Cave Lion. That's a much more powerful animal than a saiga antelope," Jondalar said. ff

"I know. It's a man's totem, a hunter's totem. Thaffi why it was so hard for them to believe it, at first," Ayla said. "I don't really remember, but Iza told me that Brun even got angry at Creb when he named it at my adoption ceremony. That's why everyone was sure I would never have any children. No man had a totem powerful enough to defeat the Cave Lion. It was a big surprise when I got pregnant with Durc, but I'm sure it was Broud who started him, when he forced me." She frowned at the unpleasant thought. "And if totem spirits have something to do with starting babies, Broud's totem was the Woolly Rhinoceros. I remember the Clan hunters talking about a woolly rhino that killed a cave lion, so it could have been strong enough, and, like Broud, they can be mean." .,

"Woolly rhinos are unpredictable and can be vicious," Jondalar sal

I

I was gored by one not far from here. He would have died - gharamudoi hadn't found us." The man closed his eyes a painful memory, letting Racer carry him along. They didn't l while, then he asked, "Does everyone in the Clan have a

l^yla replied. "A totem is for guidance and protection. Each -ur discovers every new baby's totem, usually before the end Jhing year. He gives the child an amulet with a piece of the | inside it at the totem ceremony. The amulet is the totem

toe."

lean like a donii is a place for the Mother spirit to rest?" sked.

ing like that, I think, but a totem protects you, not your ough it is happier if you live in a place that's familiar. You ;p your amulet with you. It is how your totem spirit recog- Creb told me that the spirit of my Cave Lion would not be d me without it. Then I would lose his protection. Creb said >st my amulet, I would die," Ayla explained.

r hadn't understood the full implications of Ayla's amulet - why she was so protective of it. He had occasionally thought id it too far. She seldom took it off, except to bathe or swim, itimes not even then. He had supposed it was her way of (to her Clan childhood, and he hoped she would someday get 'Now he realized there was more to it than that. If a man of logical power had given him something, and told him he would |e ever lost it, he would be protective of it, too. Jondalar no lloubted that the holy man of the Clan, who had raised her, ed true power derived from the spirit world.

idso for the signs your totem leaves for you if you make the pcision about something important in your life," Ayla contin- Haggling worry that had been bothering her suddenly struck her |>re force. Why hadn't her totem given her a sign to confirm

S had made the right choice when she decided to go with Jon- i his home? She had not found a single object that she could

6t as a sign from her totem since they left the Mamutoi.

'very many Zeiandonii have personal totems," Jondalar said, the do. It's usually considered lucky. Willomar has one."

5 your mother's mate, right?" Ayla asked.

Thonolan and Folara were both born to his hearth, and he treated me as though I was."

>t is his totem?"

we Golden Eagle. The story is told that when he was a baby, a

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golden eagle swooped down and picked him up, but his mnrk grabbed him before he could be taken away. He still bears the 'et from the talons on his chest. Their zeian doni said that the eagle recognized him as his own and came for him. That's how they knew [t° his totem. Marthona thinks that's why he likes to travel so much n can't fly like the eagle, but he has a need to see the land."

"That's a powerful totem, like the Cave Lion, or the Cave Bear " Ay la commented. "Creb always said that powerful totems were nor easy to live with, and it's true, but I have been given so much. He even sent you to me. I think I have been very lucky. I hope the Cave Lion will be lucky for you, Jondalar. He is also your totem now."

Jondalar smiled. "You've said that before."

"The Cave Lion chose you, and you have the scars to prove it. Just as Willomar was marked by his totem."

Jondalar looked thoughtful for a moment. "Perhaps you are right. I hadn't thought of it that way."

Wolf, who had been off exploring, suddenly appeared. He yipped to get Ayla's attention, then fell into place beside Whinney. She watched him, tongue lolling out of the side of his-mouth, ears perked up, running with the wolfs usual untiring, ground-covering pace through the standing hay, which sometimes hid him from view. He seemed so happy and alert. He loved to go off and explore on his own, but he always returned, which made her happy. Riding with the man and the stallion beside her made her happy, too.

"From the way you always talk about him, I think your brother must have been like the man of his hearth," Ayla said, resuming the conversation. "Thonolan liked to travel, too, didn'the? Did he look like Willomar?" If

"Yes, but not as much as I resemble Dalanar. Everyone remarks on it. Thonolan had a lot more of Marthona in him," Jondalar smiled, "but he was never chosen by an eagle, so that doesn't explain his travel urge." The smile faded. "My brother's scars were from that unpredictable woolly rhinoceros." He was thoughtful for a while. "But then Thonolan always was a bit unpredictable. Maybe it was his totem, ." didn't seem to be very lucky for him, although the Sharamudoi did find us, and I never saw him as happy as he was after he met Jetamio-

"I don't think the Woolly Rhino is a lucky totem," Ayla said, "but^ think the Cave Lion is. When he chose me, he even gave me the saffl marks the Clan uses for a Cave Lion totem, so Creb would know^ i° scars are not Clan marks, but they are clear. You were marked y Cave Lion." ^.

"I definitely do have the scars to prove that I was marked by y J cave lion, Ayla."

the spirit of the Cave Lion chose you so that your totem
I'd be strong enough for mine, so that someday I will be able
to raise your children," Ayla said.
"You said it was a man who made a baby start growing
without spirits," Jondalar said.
"A man but maybe spirits need to help. Since I have such a
strong one, the man who is my mate would need a strong one, too.
The Mother decided to tell the Cave Lion to choose you, so
to raise the babies together."
They sat side together in silence again, thinking their own thoughts.
"I'm imagining a baby that looked like Jondalar, except a girl, not
a boy; didn't seem to be lucky with sons. Maybe she'd be able to
raise a daughter."
"I was thinking about children, too. If it was true that a man
with his organ, they had certainly given a baby plenty of
start. Why wasn't she pregnant?
"I was pregnant when I left? he thought. I'm glad she found
a man to be happy with, but I wish she had said something to
me. Are any children in the world in some way a part of me?
"I tried to think of the women he had known and remembered
; a young woman of Haduma's people with whom he shared
his love. Both Noria and the old Haduma herself had seemed con-
vinced that his spirit had entered her and that a new life had begun.
"I supposed to give birth to a son with blue eyes like his. They were going to name him Jondal. Was it true?
"He wondered. Had
she decided to begin a new life?
"Haduma's people didn't live so far away, and in the right direc- ; north and west. Maybe they could
stop for a visit, except,
"I only realized, he didn't really know how to find them. They
knew where to where he and Thonolan had been camped. He knew their
directions were not only west of the Sister, they were west of the
Mother River, but he didn't know where. He did recall that they
had hunted in the region between the two rivers, but that was
helpless. He would probably never know if Noria had that baby.
"The Noughts had turned from waiting until they reached Jonda-
lar before they started having children, to his people, and what
it was like. She wondered if they would find her acceptable. She
was more confident, after meeting the Sharamudoi, that there
was a place for her somewhere, but she wasn't sure if it would be
pleasant. She remembered that Jondalar had reacted with
astonishment when he first discovered she had been raised by the
Mamutoi, then she recalled his strange behavior the previous winter
with the Mamutoi.

Some of it was because of Raneë. She came to know that before A l left/though she hadn't understood it in the beginning. Jealousy ^e^! not a part of her upbringing. Even if they had felt such an emotion ^ man of the Clan would ever show jealousy over a woman. But oarr^ Jondalar's strange behavior also stemmed from his concern about h l his people would accept her. She knew now that, though he loved h ? he had been ashamed of her living with the Clan and, especially li* had been ashamed of her son. True, he did not seem concerned an ^ more. He was protective of her and not at all uneasy when her Clan background came out when they were with the Sharamudoi, but he must have had some reason for feeling that way in the first place. Well, she loved Jondalar and wanted to live with him, and besides. it was too late now to change her mind, but she hoped she had done the right thing in coming with him. She wished once again that her Cave Lion totem would give her a sign so that she would know she had made the right decision, but no sign seemed to be forthcoming, i As the travelers neared the turbulent expanse of water at the confluence of the Sister River with the Great Mother River, the loose, crumbly marls-sands and clays rich in calcium-of the upper terraces gave way to gravels and loess soils on the low levels. | In that wintry world, glaciated mountain crests filled streams and : rivers during the warmer season with meltwater. Near the end of the season, with the addition of heavy rains that accumulated as snow in the higher elevations, which sharp temperature changes could release suddenly, the swift streams became torrential floods. With no lakes on the western face of the mountains to hold back the gathering deluge in a natural reservoir and dole the outpour in more measured tribute, the increasing tide fell over itself down the steep sloASTs. The cascading waters gouged sand and gravel out of the sandstones, limestones, and shales of the mountains, which was washed down to the mighty nver and deposited on the beds and floodplains. The central plains, once the floor of an inland sea, occupier a Dasln between two massive mountain ranges on the east and west and higu' lands to the north and south. Almost equal in volume to the burgeoning Mother as she neared their meeting, the swollen Sister held the drainage of part of the plains, and the entire western face of the mountain chain that curved around in a great arc toward the northwest. l Sister River raced along the lowest depression of the basin to deliver offering of floodwater to the Great Mother of Rivers, but b surging current was rebuffed by the higher water level of the mo til ^ already filled to capacity. Forced back on herself, she dissipated j offertory in a vortex of countercurrents and destructive spreading ov I flow.

As the man and woman approached the marshy wilder-
F-drowned underbrush and occasional stands of trees with
I trunks beneath the water. Ayla thought the similarity to
marshland of the eastern delta grew stronger as they drew
eot that the currents and countercurrents of the joining riv-
tvirline maelstroms. With the weather much cooler, the in-
» less bothersome, but the carcasses of bloated, partially
and rotting animals that had been caught up by the flood
faeir share. To the south, a massif with densely forested
.rising out of a purple mist caused by the surging eddies.
must be the Wooded Hills Carlono told us about," Ayla

it they are more than hills," Jondalar said. "They are higher
dunk, and they extend for a long way. The Great Mother
s south until she reaches that barrier. Those hills turn the
it."

de around a large quiet pool, a backwater that was separated
loving waters, and stopped at the eastern edge of the swollen
ewhat upstream from the confluence. As Ayla stared across
r flood at the other side, she began to understand Jondalar's
about the difficulty of crossing the Sister.

ddy waters, swirling around the slender trunks of willows
is, tore loose those trees whose roots were not as securely
nto the soil of low islands that were surrounded by channels
asons. Many trees were pitched at precarious angles, and
nches and boles that had been wrenched from upstream
re trapped in muck along the banks or circled in a dizzy
ie river.

ently wondered how they would ever get across the river,
ted, "Where do you think we should cross?"

' wished the large Ramudoï boat that had rescued Thonolan
few years before would appear and take them to the other
reminder of his brother again brought a piercing stab of
ilso a sudden concern for Ayla.

it's obvious we can't cross here," he said. "I didn't know
ie this bad so soon. We'll have to go upstream to look for
)lace to attempt it. I just hope it doesn't rain again before
Another rainstorm like the last one, and this whole flood-
be under water. No wonder that summer camp was aban-

ver wouldn't go up as high as that, would it?" Ayla asked,
ien wide.

think it would, yet, but it might. All the water falling on

those mountains will eventually end up here. Besides, flash could easily come down the stream that ran so near the camp probably do. Frequently. I think we should hurry, Ayla. This is safe place to be if it starts to rain again," Jondalar said, looking the sky. He urged the stallion to a gallop and kept to such a fast n that Wolf was hard pressed to keep up with them. After a while lr slowed down again, but not to the leisurely pace they had maintain*^ before.

Jondalar stopped occasionally and studied the river and its far bank t before continuing north, glancing at the sky anxiously. The river did i seem narrower in some places and wider in others, but it was so full) and broad that it was hard to tell for sure. They rode- until it was nearly dark without finding a suitable crossing place, but Jondalar insisted that they ride to higher ground to make camp for the nieht and they halted only when it became too dark to travel safely.

"Ayla! Ayla! Wake up!" Jondalar said, shaking her gently. "We have to get moving."

"What? Jondalar! What's wrong?" Ayla said.

She was usually awake before him, and she felt disconcerted to be awakened so early. When she moved the sleeping fur aside, she felt a chill breeze, and then she noticed the tent flap was open. The diffused radiance of seething clouds was outlined by the opening, providing the only illumination inside their sleeping quarters. She could barely make out Jondalar's face in the dim gray light, but it was enough to see that he was worried, and she shivered with foreboding.

"We have to go," Jondalar said. He had hardly slept all night. He couldn't exactly say why he felt they had to get across the river as soon as possible, but the feeling was so strong that it gAs him a knot of fear in the pit of his stomach, not for himself, but for Ayla.

She got up, not asking why. She knew he would not have awakened her if he didn't think their situation was serious. She dressed quickly, then got out her fire-making kit.

"Let's not take the time for a fire this morning," Jondalar said.

She frowned, then nodded and poured out cold water for them to drink. They packed while eating cakes of traveling food. When they were ready to leave, Ayla looked for Wolf, but he was not in camp.

"Where is Wolf," Ayla said, a note of desperation in her voice.

"He's probably hunting. He'll catch up with us, Ayla. He always does." . .

"I'll whistle for him," she said, then pierced the early morning a'' with the distinctive sound she used to call him.

[i Ayla. We need to go," Jondalar said, feeling a familiar
er the wolf.
|--ng without him," she said, whistling again louder, giving
"re urgency.
to find a place to cross this river before the ram starts, or
>t get across," Jondalar said.
; just keep on going upstream? This river is bound to get
H't it?" she argued.
t starts to rain, it will only get bigger. Even upstream it will
ban it is here now, and we don't know what kind of rivers
nine down off those mountains. We could easily get caught
flood. Dolando said they were common once the rains
we could be stopped by a large tributary. Then what do
mb back up the mountain to get around it? We need to get
^Sister while we can," Jondalar said. He mounted the stallion
Id down at the woman standing beside the mare with the
tiling behind her.
irned her back and whistled again.
Have to go, Ayla."
(can't we wait a little while? He'll come."
(mly an animal. Your life is more important to me than his."
med around and looked up at him, then looked back down,
fe deeply. Was it as dangerous to wait as Jondalar thought? Or
|ust being impatient? If it was, shouldn't his life be more im- j(o her than Wolf's, too? Just
then, Wolf loped into sight. Ayla
| a sigh of relief and braced as he jumped up to greet her,
|us paws on her shoulders and licking her jaw. She climbed up
iney's back, using one of the travois poles to assist her. Then,
g Wolf to stay close, she followed Jondalar and Racer.
6 was no sunrise. The day just kept getting imperceptibly
but never bright. The cloud cover hung low, giving the sky a i gray, and there was a cool dampness
in the air. Later in the
; they stopped to rest. Ayla made a hot tea to warm them, then
oup out of a cake of traveling food. She added lemony sorrel
ind wild rose hips, after removing the seeds and the sharp
Mirs from inside, and a few leaves from the tips of the clump
roses growing nearby. For a while, the tea and the warm soup
to relieve Jondalar's concerns, until he noticed darker clouds
«
Pged her to pack her things quickly, and they started out again.
r "ixiously watched the sky to note the progress of the oncom- m- He watched the river, too,
looking for a place to cross. He

hoped for some abatement of the swift churning current: a w'^ :'
shallower spot, or an island or even a sandbar between the two h ?^
Finally, fearing the storm would not hold off much longer, he dec'l8!
they would have to take a chance, though the tumultuous Sister lonlr2 I
no different than it had all along. Knowing that once the rains beoa ^
the situation would only get worse, he headed toward a section ofbat]
that offered fairly easy access. They stopped and dismounted. I
"Do you think we should try to ride the horses across?" Tondal
asked, glancing nervously at the threatening sky.
Ayla studied the racing river and the debris it carried along. Often
large whole trees floated by, along with many broken ones, that had
been washed down from stands higher in the mountains. She shod.
dered when she noticed a large, bloated deer carcass, its antlers caught
and entwined in the branches of a tree that was lodged near the shore. \softline The dead animal
made her fear for the horses. }
"I think it would be easier for them to cross if we are not on their
backs," she said. "I think we should swim beside them."
"That's what I thought," Jondalar said.
"But we'll need a rope to hold on," she said.
They got out short lengths of rope, then checked over the harnesses
and baskets to make sure their tent, food, and few precious belongings
were secure. Ayla unhitched the travois from Whinney, deciding it
might be too dangerous for her to try to swim the tumultuous river in
full harness, but they did not want to lose the poles and bowl boat, if
they could help it.
With that in mind, they bound the long poles together with cordage.
While Jondalar fastened one end to the sidfe of the bowl boat, Ayla
secured the other end to the harness that was used to hold on Whin
ney's pack-saddle basket. She used a slip knot that could readily be
released if she felt it was necessary. Then, to the flat braided cord that
went down around behind the mare's front legs and up across her
chest, used to hold Ayla's riding blanket on the mare,' the woman
attached another rope, much more securely.
Jondalar attached a similar rope to Racer; then he took off his boots,
his inner foot-coverings, and his heavy outer clothes and furs. When
soaked, they would weigh him down, making swimming all but imp08'
sible. He wrapped them together and piled them on top of the pac
saddle, but he kept his under tunic and leggings on. Even when we i
the leather would provide some warmth. Ayla did the same.
The animals sensed the urgency and anxiety of the humans and we
disturbed by the roiling water. The horses had shied away from
dead deer, and they were prancing around with short steps, tossmi!

Is and rolling their eyes, but their ears were perked up and ward. Wolf, on the other hand, had gone to the edge of the dvesrigate the deer, but he didn't go in. |o you think the horses will do, Ayla?"Jondalar asked, as big adrops began to fall. re nervous, but I think they'll be all right, especially since we th them, but I'm not so sure about Wolf," Ayla said. n't carry him across. He has to make it on his own--you -"Jondalar said. But seeing her distress, he added, "Wolf's a immer, he should be all right." so," she said, kneeling down to give the wolf a hug. r noticed that the raindrops were falling thicker and faster. ;r get started," he said, taking hold of Racer's halter directly, lead rope was fastened farther back. He closed his eyes for a tnd wished for good luck. He thought of Doni, the Great ther, but he couldn't think of anything to promise Her in their safety. He made a silent request for help in crossing anyway. Though he knew he would someday, he did not leet the Mother just yet, but even more, he did not want to

illion tossed his head and tried to rear as Jondalar led him e river. "Easy now, Racer," the man said. The water was swirled around his bare feet, and up his covered calves and ace in the water, Jondalar let go of Racer's halter, giving him and he wrapped the dangling rope around his hand, relying rdy young stallion to find his way across. rapped the rope that was attached at the top of the mare's ound her hand several times, tucking the end in and around, losed her fist tightly to hold it. Then she started in behind an, walking beside Whinney. She pulled on the other rope, at was fastened to the poles and boat, making sure it did not d as they entered the river. 'ung woman felt the cold water and the tug of the strong mediately. She looked back toward the land. Wolf was still erbank, advancing and retreating, whining anxiously, hesi- ter the fast-moving river. She called to him, encouragingly. back and forth, looking at the water and the widening dis- veen him and the woman. Suddenly, just as the rain began ;amest, he sat down and howled. Ayla whistled to him and, ' more false starts, he finally plunged in and started paddling 'r. She turned her attention back to the horse and the river

The rain, coming down harder, seemed to flatten out the waves in the distance, but nearby the wild water was even mottled with debris than she had thought. Broken trunks and branches swirled around or bumped into her, some still with leaves waterlogged and almost hidden. The bloated animals were often torn open by the violence of the flood that had caught them swept them down the mountain and into the muddy river. |

She saw several birch mice and pine voles. A large ground squirrel was harder to recognize; its pale brown pelt was dark and the thick fluffy tail was plastered down. A collared lemming, long white winter hair, lank but shiny, growing out through fur of summer gray that looked black, showed the bottom of its feet already covered with white fur. It had probably come from high on the mountain near the snow. The large animals showed more damage. A chamois floated past with a horn broken off and the fur gone from half its face, exposing pinkish muscle. When she saw the carcass of a young snow leopard, she looked back again for Wolf, but he was not in sight. :

She noticed, however, that the rope dragging behind the mare was hauling along a snag as well as the poles and boat. The broken stump with spreading roots was adding an unnecessary burden and slowing Whinney down. Ayla pulled and tugged on the rope, trying to bring it closer to her, but it suddenly came loose by itself. A small forked branch was still clinging, but it was nothing to worry about. She was concerned about not seeing any sign of Wolf, even though she was so low in the water that she couldn't see much. It upset her, especially since there was nothing she could do about it. She whistled for him once, but she wondered if he would hear it above the noise of the rushing water.

She turned back and took a critical look at Whinney, worried that the heavy snag might have tired her, but she was still swimming strongly. Ayla looked ahead and was relieved to see Racer with Jondalar bobbing along beside him. She kicked and pulled with her free arm, trying not to be a greater burden than she had to be. But as they continued, more and more she just hung on to the rope, beginning to shiver. She began to feel that it was taking an unreasonably long time to cross the river. The opposite shore still seemed so far ahead. Shivering wasn't too bad at first, but with more time in the cold water, it became more intense and wouldn't stop. Her muscles were becoming very tense, and her teeth were chattering. < i

She looked back for Wolf again, but she still did not see him. She should go back for him, he's so cold, she thought, as she shivered violently. Maybe Whinney can turn around and go back. But w

I speak* her jaw was so tense and chattering that she could
Iwords out. No, Whinney shouldn't have to go. I'll do it.
"i unwrap the rope from around her hand, but it was tight
and her hand was so numb that she could hardly feel it.
lalar can go back for him. Where is Jondalar? Is he in the
e eo back for Wolf? Oh, there's a log caught up in the rope
;to . . . something . . . pull something . . . take rope away
' ir Whinney.
ing had stopped, but her muscles were so tense that she
e. She closed her eyes to rest. It felt so good to close her
Irest.

A

ryla was almost unconscious when she felt the solid stones J
the riverbed under her. She tried to stumble to her feet as Whinnert
dragged her across the rocky bottom, taking a few steps onto a beaA
of smooth round stones at a bend in the river. Then she fell. The rooe.
still tightly wrapped around her hand, jerked her around and halted
the horse. ;

Jondalar, too, had shivered through the first stages of hypothennit
while crossing the river, but he had reached the opposite shore sooner
than she, before he became too uncoordinated or irrational. She would
have made it across more quickly, but so much debris had gotten
caught up in Whinney's rope that it had slowed the horse considerably.
Even Whinney was beginning to suffer from the cold river before the
slip knot, though swollen from the water, finally worked itself loose,
freeing her from the encumbering weight.

Unfortunately, when he first reached the other side, the cold had
affected Jondalar enough so that he wasn't entirely coherent. He pulled
his outer fur parka over his wet clothing and started out to lode
for Ayla, on foot, leading the stallion, but he headed in the wrong
direction along the river's edge. The exercise waraied him and cleared
away the confusion. They had both been carried downstream for
some distance, but since she had taken longer to get across, she had
to be farther downriver. He turned around and walked back. When
Racer nickered and he heard an answering whinny, he started to

run' ' inr

When Jondalar saw Ayla, she was lying on her back on the rocky
shore, beside the patient mare, her arm held up by the rope entangled
around her hand. He rushed to her, his heart racing with fear. After
first making sure she was still breathing, he gathered her up in his arms
and held her close, tears filling his eyes.

"Ayla! Ayla! You're alive!" he cried. "I was so afraid you were gone.
But you're so cold!" j

He had to get her warm. He loosened the rope from her hand
picked her up. She stirred and opened her eyes. Her muscles

368

ad she could hardly speak, but she was straining to
; bent closer.

>lf " she said in a hoarse whisper.

^ take care of you!"

Wolf. Lose too many sons. Not Wolf, too," she said

id jaw.

so full of sorrow and pleading that he couldn't refuse.

>k for him, but I have to get you into a shelter first."

hard as he carried Ay la up a gentle slope. It leveled
terrace with a stand of willows, some brush and sedge,
jack, a few pines. He looked for a flat place with no
across it, then quickly set up the tent. After putting
_moth hide on top of the ground cover for extra protec-
saturated soil, he brought Ayla in, then the packs, and
sleeping furs. He stripped off her wet clothes and his
it her between the furs, and crawled in with her.

[uite unconscious, but in a dazed stupor. Her skin was
ay, her body stiff. He tried to cover her with his body
When she began to shiver again, Jondalar breathed a little
it she was warming inside, but with the beginnings of a
awareness, she also remembered Wolf, and irrationally,
she insisted that she was going to find him.

lit," she said through chattering teeth. "I told him to
he river. I whistled. He trusted me. I have to find Wolf." She
|o get up.

Iforget about Wolf. You don't even know where to begin to
laid, trying to hold her down.

tig and sobbing hysterically, she tried to get out of the sleep- "T've got to find him," she cried.

jAyla, I'll go. If you stay here, I'll go look for him," he said,

^Convince her to stay under the warm furs. "But promise me
!stay here, and stay covered."

find him," she said.

cidy put on dry clothes and his outer parka. Then he took out
>f squares of traveling food, full of energy-rich fat and protein.
g now," he said. "Eat this, and stay in the furs."

abbed his hand as he turned to go. "Promise me you will
' him," she said, looking into his troubled blue eyes. She was
ttng, but she seemed to be talking with more ease.

ked back into her gray-blue eyes, full of worry and pleading
hed her to him, hard and close. "I was so afraid you were

She held on to him, reassured by his strength, and his love. "r) you, Jondalar, I would never want to lose you, but, please, find W I couldn't bear to lose him. He's like ... a child ... a son. I pa give up another son." Her voice cracked and tears filled her eyes He pulled back and looked down at her. "I'll look for him. Bin can't promise I'll find him, Ayla, and even if I do, I can't promise h< be alive."

A look of fear and horror filled her eyes; then she closed them ai nodded. "Just try to find him," she said, but as he started to mo away, she clung to him.

He wasn't sure if he had really planned to search for the wolf wh he first started to get up. He had wanted to get some wood for a fire get some warm tea or soup into her and see to the horses, but he h promised. Racer and Whinney were standing within the grove ofw lows, their riding blankets and Racer's halter still on, but the stun animals seemed fine for the moment, so he headed down the slope.

He didn't know which direction to go when he reached the rm but he finally decided to try downstream. Pulling his hood down fs ther to keep off the rain, he started hiking along the bank, checldi through piles of driftwood and concentrations ofFdebris. He fom many dead animals and saw as many carnivores and scavengers, go four-legged and winged, feasting on the river's leavings, even a pack southern wolves, but none that looked like Wolf.

Finally he turned around and headed back. He would go upstrea a way, but he doubted if he'd have any better luck. He didn't real expect to find the animal, and he realized that it saddened him. W(could be troublesome sometimes, but he had developed a real affecrif for the intelligent beast. He would miss him, at@ he knew Ayla wou be distraught.

He reached the rocky shore where he had found Ayla and walla around the bend, not sure how far he ought to go in the other direcna especially when he noticed that the river was rising. He decided tin would move the tent farther away from the river as soon <s Ayla w fit to travel. Maybe I ought to forget about looking upstream and raw sure she is all right, he said to himself, hesitating. Well, maybe IU(a short distance; she'll ask if I searched in both directions.

He started up the river, working his way around a pile of logs branches, but when he saw the majestic silhouette of an icaperiw ^v gliding on outstretched wings, he stopped and watched withn Suddenly the large, graceful bird folded his powerful win^^ dropped rapidly to the bank of the river, then swooped up again a large suslik hanging from its talons. . i^

A little farther on, where the bird had found its meal, ah _

mine into a slight delta, added its share to the waters of thought he saw something familiar on the wide stretch where they came together, and he smiled with recognition. A small boat, but when he looked closer, he frowned lining toward it. Beside the boat, Ayla was sitting in the wolf's head in her lap. A wound above his left eye was blood.

"Sat are you doing here? How did you get here?" he asked in fear and worry rather than in anger.

Jondalar," she said, shaking with cold and at the same time so hard that she was almost incoherent. "He's hurt, but

he had jumped into the river, he swam toward Ayla, but he had the lightweight, empty bowl boat skimming over the water. He used his paws across the poles that were attached to it. He held on to the familiar objects, letting the buoyant boat and the wolf support him. It wasn't until the slip knot came loose, and the boat started careening wildly over the choppy waves, that he fell into the heavy, waterlogged tree trunk. By then they were on the other side. The boat skittered up on the sandy bank, the poles with the wolf draped across them partially out of the water. The blow had stunned him, but being half-submerged in the water was worse. Even wolves were subject to hypothermia and poor posture.

"Ayla, you're shivering again. We have to get you back. Come out? I told you I'd look for him," Jondalar said. "I'll find him." He lifted the wolf from her lap and then tried to

take a few steps, he knew they were going to have a difficult time getting back to the tent. Ayla was hardly able to walk, and the wolf was a heavy animal. His waterlogged fur added even more weight. No man could not carry both of them, and he knew Ayla would not let him leave Wolf and come back for him later. If only he could tie for the horses the way Ayla did . . . but why couldn't he? He had developed a whistle for Racer, but he hadn't really worked hard at training him to respond. He'd never had to. The wolf always came with his dam when Ayla called Whinney. Whinney would come to him if he whistled. At least he could imitate Ayla's signal, hoping he had managed to come close enough just in case they didn't respond, he was determined to do it. He shifted Wolf in his arms, and he tried to put an arm around her to give her more support.

He hadn't even reached the pile of driftwood and he was already

tiring from the effort. He was holding his own exhaustion off by sheer effort of will. He, too, had swum the mighty river, and then he had carried Ayla up the slope and set up the tent. And then he had tramped up and down the riverbank searching for the wolf. When he heard neigh, he looked up. Relief and joy flooded through him at the sight of the two horses.

He laid the wolf across Whinney's back, since she had carried him before and was used to it; then he helped Ayla up on Racer and led him toward the rocky beach. Whinney followed. Ayla, shivering in her wet clothes as the rain began to pour down harder, had trouble staying on the horse when they started up the slope. But, taking it slowly, they made it back to the tent near the grove of trees. Jondalar helped Ayla down and got her into the tent, but hypothermia was making her irrational again and she was getting hysterical about the wolf. He had to bring him in immediately, then had to promise he would dry him off. He searched through the packs for something with which to rub him down. But when she wanted to bring him into their sleeping roll, he adamantly refused, though he did find a cover for him. While she sobbed uncontrollably, he helped Ayla undress and wrapped her with the furs.

He went out again, removed Racer's halter and the riding blankets from both horses, patted them gratefully, and gave them some words of thanks. Even though horses normally lived outside in all kinds of weather, and were adapted to the cold, he knew they didn't care much for rain, and he hoped they would not suffer for it. Then, finally, Jondalar went into the tent, undressed, and crawled in beside the violently shaking woman. Ayla huddled close to Wolf, while Jondalar cuddled her back, wrapping himself around her. After a time, with the warming body of a wolf on one side and the man on the other, the woman's shaking stopped, and they both gave in to their exhaustion and fell asleep.

Ayla woke up to a wet tongue licking her face. She pushed Wolf away, smiling with joy, then hugged him. Holding his head between her hands, she looked at his wound closely. The rain had washed the dirt away from the injury, and he had stopped bleeding. Though she wanted to treat him with some medicines later, he seemed fine to her now. It wasn't so much the bump on the head, but the cold river that had weakened him. Sleep and warmth had been the best medicine. She became conscious that Jondalar had his arms around her, though he was sleeping, and she lay still being held and holding Wolf, listening to the rain drumming on the tent.

he remembering bits and pieces of the day before: stumbling
Re brush and driftwood, searching the riverbank for Wolf;
Blurtinr because the rope wrapped around it had become so
Efillar carrying her. She smiled at the thought of him so close
Kn remembered watching him set up the tent. She felt a little
•that she had not helped him more, even though she had been
^th cold that she couldn't move.
Brieled out of her constraining hold and went out, nosing his
•nd the tent flap. She heard Whinney nicker and, with a
|aoy almost answered her, but then she remembered Jondalar
tShe began to worry about the horses out in the rain. They
| to dry weather, not this wet, soggy rain. Even freezing cold
af it was dry. But she recalled that she had seen horses, so
gt live in this region. Horses did have undercoats that were
|se, and warm even when wet. She supposed they could cope
Q long as it didn't rain all the time.
Bftlized that she didn't like the heavy autumn rains that fell in
icm region, though she had welcomed the long wet northern
with their warming mists and drizzles. The cave of Brun's
south, and it had rained quite a lot in autumn, but she didn't
|er such drenching downpours. The southern regions were not
|me. Ayla thought about getting up, but before she got around
I went back to sleep.
l she awoke the second time, the man beside her was stirring.
by in the furs, there was a difference she couldn't quite place.
be realized the sound of the rain had stopped. She got up and
Xtside. It was late afternoon and rather more cool than it had
|d she wished she had put on something warm. She passed her
Car a bush, then walked toward the horses that were grazing on
^ass near the willows where a creek ran through. Wolf was with
ihey all came toward her as she approached, and she spent
EDe stroking and scratching and talking to them. Then she went
the tent, and into the sleeping furs beside the warm man.
're cold, woman!" he said.
I you're nice and warm," she said, snuggling up to him.
"rapped his arms around her and nuzzled her neck, relieved that
ttth was returning so quickly. It had taken so long for her to
P after being chilled by the water. "I don't know what I could
en thinking of, letting you get so wet and cold," Jondalar said.
Mildn't have tried to cross that river."
Jondalar, what else could we do? You were right. As hard as it
ung, we would have had to cross some river, and it would have

been worse trying to get across one that was coming down the tain," she said.

"If we had left the Sharamudoi sooner, we would have misseri a* rain. Then the Sister wouldn't have been nearly as hard to crrJ«* Jondalar said, continuing to berate himself. '

"But it was my fault we didn't leave sooner, and even Carl thought we would make it here before the rains."

"No, it was my fault. I knew what this river was like. If I had ma<U the effort, we would have left earlier. And if we had left that bow behind, it wouldn't have taken so long to get over the mountain » slowed you down in the river. I was so stupid!"

"Jondalar, why are you blaming yourself?" Ayla asked. "You are not stupid. You could not foresee what would happen. Not even One Who Serves the Mother can do it very well. It's never clear. And y» did make it. We're here now, and everyone is all right, thanks to you, including Wolf. We even have the boat, and who knows how useful that might still be."

"But I almost lost you," he said, burying his head i;i her neck and clutching her so hard that it hurt, though she did not stop him. "I can't tell you how much I love you. I care about you so much, but the wordt that say it are so small. They are not enough to say what I feel for you." He held her close as if he thought that by holding her tight enough, he could somehow make her part of him, and would therefore never lose her.

She held him tightly, too, loving him and wishing she could do something to relieve his anguish and suddenly otwwhelming need. Then she realized she knew what to do. She breathed in his ear and kissed his neck. His response was immediate. He kissed her with ; fierce passion, caressing her arms and molding her breasts in his hands, sucking on her nipples with a hungry need. She put her leg aroun" him, and rolled him over on top of her, then opened her thighs, "c backed away, prodding and groping with his full member, trying to find her opening. She reached down and helped to guide him in, W, she found herself as eager for him as he was for her. „

As he plunged in and felt the warm embrace of her deep well, Dc, moaned with the sudden indescribable sensation. All his nightmans* j thoughts and fearful worries fled for the moment as the sensuous)^j of this wondrous Gift of Pleasure from the Mother filled him, leavm8j no room for any other thoughts except his love for her. He pulled o j and then he felt her motion match his as they came together again. I response incited stronger passions in him.

As they backed away and drew together again, he felt so right

hink at all. His body and hers flowed apart and back to-
rhvtiunic pattern that she gave herself up to completely as
er glorying in the senses of that moment. Individual fires
aced through her, centering deep within, as they moved

rth- eeling himself build with volcanic power, waves of excite-
inff over him, engulfing him, and then almost before he
rating through with sweet release. As he moved the last few
It a few aftershocks from the violent eruption, and then the
dewing feeling of utter relaxation.

>n top of her, catching his breath after the sudden and
;ertion. She closed her eyes with contentment. After a time
Fand cuddled next to her, as she backed into him. Nesting
e two ladles, they lay quietly, happily entwined together.
te a long time, Ayla said softly, "Jondalar?"

?" he mumbled. He was in a pleasant, languorous state, not
not wanting to move.

my more rivers like that will we have to cross?" she asked.
ed over and kissed her ear. "None."

iccause there are no other rivers quite like the Sister," Jon-
ned.

n the Great Mother River?"

n the Mother is as fast and treacherous, or as dangerous as
he said, "but we won't be crossing the Great Mother River.
m this side most of the way to the plateau glacier. When we
the ice, there are some people I'd like to visit who live on
de of the Mother. But that's a long way from here, and by
ill be little more than a mountain stream." He rolled over
"Not that we don't have some good-size rivers to get across
oss these plains, the Mother branches into many channels
Tand join again. By the time we see her all together again,
so much smaller that you'll hardly recognize her as the
icr River."

: all the water from the Sister, I'm not sure if I'd recognize
said.

you would. As big as the Sister is, when they join, the
rill bigger. There is a major river that feeds from the other
fore the Wooded Hills that turn her east. Thonolan and I
eople who took us across on rafts at that place. Several more
ie in from the big mountains to the west, but we'll be going
e center plain, and we won't even see them."

Jondalar sat up. The conversation had put him in the mood to ---- about getting on their way, although they wouldn't be leaving unr'I"?!! following morning. He was rested and relaxed, and he didn't feel i^i staying in bed any more. ^a

"We won't be crossing many rivers at all until we reach the hiehl nj. to the north," he continued. "At least, that's what Haduma's n^m? told me. They say there are a few hills, but it's pretty flat count-^, Most of the rivers we'll see will be channels of the Mother. They^ she wanders all over the place through here. It's good hunting ground^ though. Haduma's people cross the channels all the time to hunt here" "Haduma's people? I think you told me about them, but you never said much," Ayla said, getting up as well, and reaching for her pack. saddle basket.

"We didn't visit with them long, just long enough for a . . ." Tondalar hesitated, thinking about the First Rites he had shared with the pretty young woman, Noria. Ayla noticed a strange expression as though he was slightly embarrassed, but also pleased with himself.

". . . Ceremony, a festival," he finished.

"A festival to honor the Great Earth Mother?" Ayla asked.

"Ah . . . yes, as a matter of fact. They asked me . 7 . ah, they asked Thonolan and me, to share it with them."

"Are we going to visit Haduma's people?" Ayla said from the opening, holding a Sharamudoi chamois skin to dry herself with after she washed in the creek by the willows.

"I'd like to, but I don't know where they live," Jondalar said. Then, seeing her puzzled expression, he quickly explained. "Some of their hunters found our camp, and then they sent for Haduma. She was the one who decided to have the festival, and she sentTSw the rest." He paused, thinking back. "Haduma was quite a woman. She was the oldest person I've ever met. Even older than Mamut. She's the mother of six generations." At least I hope so, he thought. "I really would like to see her again, but we can't take the time to look for them. I imagine she's dead by now, anyway, although her son, Tamen, would still be alive. He was the only one who spoke Zeiandonii."

Ayla went out, and Jondalar was feeling a strong need to pass his water. He quickly pulled his tunic over his head and went outside, too. While he was holding his member, watching the steaming arco strong-smelling yellow water pouring on the ground, he wondered Noria ever did have the baby Haduma said she would, and ll ul organ he was holding was responsible for it.

He noticed Ayla heading toward the willows with only the chafflo* skin thrown over her shoulders. He supposed he ought to go and w3

ah he'd had his fill of cold water today. It wasn't that he
;t into it, if he had to, crossing the river, for example, but it
led that washing frequently in cold water was so important
is traveling with his brother.

wasn't that Ayla ever said anything to him, but since she
?ld water stop her, he felt he could hardly use that as an
wid washing himself--and he had to admit he liked the fact
ually smelled so fresh. But sometimes she actually broke
to reach water, and he wondered how she stood it so cold.
the was up and around. He had thought they might have to
> for several days, as chilled as she was, or even that she
ick. Maybe all that cold washing has made her accustomed
er, he said to himself. Maybe a little washing wouldn't hurt
He came to the realization that he had been watching the
re bottom peeked below the edge of the hide, moving back
nticingly as she walked.

sasures had been exciting and more satisfying than he would
ned, considering how quickly they were over, but as he
yla drape the soft skin over a branch and wade into the
ad an urge to start all over again, only this time he would
t slowly, lovingly, enjoying every part of her.

s continued intermittently as they started across the lowland
[ed between the Great Mother River and the tributary that
ched her in size, the Sister. They headed northwest, al- ir route was far from direct. The central
plains resembled
to the east and were in fact an extension of them, but the
rsing the ancient basin from north to south played a domi- in the character of the land. The
frequently changing,
and widely meandering course of the Great Mother River,
ir, created enormous wetlands with the vast dry grasslands.
lakes developed in the sharply curved bends of the larger
iat sprawled over the land, and the marshes, wet meadows,
elds that gave diversity to the magnificent steppes were a
nbelievable numbers and varieties of birds, but they also
>urs for land-bound travelers. The diversity of the skies was
ited by a rich plant life and a variegated population of
*t paralleled that of the eastern grasslands, but was more
sd, as though a larger landscape had shrunk while its corn- living creatures remained the same
size.

ded by mountains and highlands that funneled more mois-
land, the central plains, especially in the south, were also

more wooded, often in subtle ways. Rather than stunted dwarf.; brush and trees that crowded close to watercourses were often full and filled out. In the southeastern section, near the broad turbul confluence, bogs and swamps stood in valleys and hollows, and A became enormous during flood seasons. Small soggy fen wood^ alder, ash, and birch mired the unwary between knolls capped w.a groves of willow, occasionally spiced with oak and beech, while oima took root in sandier soils. ^

Most soils were either a mixture of rich loess and black loams » sands and alluvial gravels, with an occasional outcrop of ancient roA interrupting the flat relief. Those isolated highlands were usually fos ested with conifers, which sometimes extended down to the plain*. providing a place for several species of animals that could not live or the open ground exclusively; life was richest at the margins. But wiA all the complexity, the primary vegetation was still grass. Tallgrass and short steppe grasses and herbs, feather grasses and fescues, the cental steppic plains were an extraordinarily rich, abundantly productive grassland blowing in the wind. ^ s

As Ayla and Jondalar left the southern plains and approached tfat cold north, the season seemed to progress more quickly than usuali The wind in their faces carried a hint of the earth-chilling cold of hi source. The inconceivably massive accumulation of glacial ice, stretch ing over vast areas of northern lands, lay directly in front of them, within a walking distance much less than they had already traveled. With the changing season, the increasing force of the icy air held l deep undercurrent of its potential power. The rains diminished and finally ceased altogether as ragged streaks of white replacecwe thun- derheads, the clouds torn to shreds by the strong steady wmus. Sharp blasts tore the dry leaves from deciduous trees and scattered them in » loose carpet at their feet. Then, in a sudden change of mood, a sudden updraft lifted the brittle skeletons of summer growth, churned them around furiously and, tiring of the game, resettled them Hi another place.

But the dry, cold weather was more to the travelers' liking, familial even comfortable with their fur-lined hoods and parkas. Jondalar wa been told correctly; hunting was easy in the central plains and animals were fat and healthy after a summer of eating. It was also time of year when many grains, fruits, nuts, and roots were "P0. harvesting. They had no need to use their emergency traveling r and they even replenished supplies they had used when they kill , giant deer, then decided to stop and rest for a few days while ' dried the meat. Their faces glowed with vigorous health and the D rj piness of being alive and in love.

were rejuvenated, too. It was their milieu, the climate is to which they had been adapted. Their heavy coats with winter growth, and they were frisky and eager each like the wolf, nose pointed into the wind, picking up scents from the deep instinctive recesses of his brain, looped contentedly on occasional forays on his own, then suddenly appeared like a glib smug, Ayla thought.

Problems presented no problems. Most waterways ran parallel to the south direction of the Great Mother River, though they were some that crossed the plain, but the patterns were variable. The channels meandered so widely they weren't always straight. A sharp turn running across their path was a turn in the river or one of the streams coming down from higher ground. Some parallel to the river ended abruptly in a westerly flowing stream that, in turn, formed so another channel of the Mother.

But they sometimes had to detour from their northerly direction for a wide swing of the river, it was the kind of open grassland that made traveling on horseback such an advantage over traveling on foot. They made exceptionally good time, covering such long distances that they made up for previous delays. Jondalar was pleased that they were even compensating, somewhat, for his decision to take the long way around so they could visit the Sharamudoi.

The crisp, cold, clear days gave them a wide panoramic view, only by morning mists when the sun warmed the condensed

air from the night to above freezing. To the east now were the mountains they had skirted when they followed the great river across the southern plains, the same mountains over whose southwest they had climbed. The glistening glaciated peaks moved imperceptibly closer as the range curved toward the northwest in a great

line. To their left, the highest chain of mountains on the continent, bearing a heavy crown of glacial ice that reached halfway down its flanks, lay in ridges from east to west. The towering, shining peaks shone in the purple distance as a vaguely sinister presence, an apparent unmountable barrier between the travelers and their ultimate goal. The Great Mother River would take them around the southern face of the range to a relatively small glacier that covered with an armor of ice, an ancient rounded massif at the north-end of the alpine foreland of the mountains.

As they moved on and closer, beyond a grassy plain broken up by pine woods, a granite massif rose. The granite highland overlooked steppe meadows of the Great Mother, but gradually decreased as they continued north, leading into the rolling hills that continued all the way to the foothills

of the western mountains. Fewer and fewer trees broke the oi_ of the grassy landscape, and those that did began to take on the f dwarfed contortions of trees sculptured by wind.

Ayla and Jondalar had traveled nearly three-quarters of the distance, from south to north, of the immense central plains before'^* first snow flurries began.

"Jondalar, look! It's snowing!" Ayla said, and her smile was radiant "It's the first snow of winter." She had been smelling snow in the air I and the first snow of the season always seemed special to her. 'I "I can't understand why you look so happy about it," he said huy^ her smile was contagious and he couldn't help smiling back. "You'tt going to be very tired of snow, and ice, before we see the last of it I'm afraid."

"You're right, I know, but I still love the first snow." After a few more paces, she asked, "Can we make camp soon?"

"It's only a little past noon," Jondalar said, looking puzzled. "Why1 are you talking about making camp already?"

"I saw some ptarmigan a little while ago. They have started to turn white, but with no snow on the ground, they are easy to see right now. They won't be after it snows, and they always taste so good this time of year, especially the way Creb liked them, but it takes a long time to cook them that way." She was remembering, looking off into the distance.

"You have to dig a hole in the ground, line it with rocks, and build a fire in it, then put the birds in, all wrapped in hay, cover them up, and then wait." The words had tumbled out of her mouth so fast, she almost tripped over them. "But it's worth the wait."

"Slow down, Ayla. You're all excited," he said, smiling with ionise- ment and delight. He loved to watch her when she was filled wim such

enthusiasm. "If you are sure they will be that delicious, then I guess we ought to make an early camp, and go hunt ptarmigan."

"Oh, they will be," she said, looking at Jondalar with a serious expression, "but you've eaten them that way. You know how' they taste." Then she noticed his smile and realized he had been playing with her. She pulled her sling out of her waistband. "You make camp. I'll hunt ptarmigan, and if you'll help me dig the hole, I'll even let you taste one," she said, grinning as she urged Whinney on.

"Ayla!" Jondalar called before she got very far. "If you leave me the pole drag, I'll have camp all set up for you, 'Woman Who Hunts.

She looked startled. "I didn't know you remembered what Br110 named me when he allowed me to hunt," she said, returning an stopping in front of him.

have your Clan's memories, but I do remember some
Uv about the woman I love," he said, and he watched
smile make her even more beautiful. "Besides, if you
, where to set up, you'll know where to come back and

_ds."

Usee you, I would track you, but I will come and leave the
;y can't turn very fast with it."

until they saw a likely place to make a camp, near a
i level area for the tent, a few trees, and, most important
;ky beach with stones that could be used for her ground

i well help set up camp, since I'm here," Ayla said, dis-

ryour ptarmigan. Just tell me where you want me to start
le," Jondalar said.

ed, then nodded. The sooner the birds were killed, the
ould start cooking them, and they would take some time
maybe to hunt. She walked over the area and picked a
ked right for the ground oven. "Over here," she said, "not
|in these stones." She scanned the beach, deciding that she
ivell pick out some nice round stones for her sling while she

paled Wolf to come with her and backtracked along their
img for the ptarmigan she had sighted. Once she started look- J1 fat birds, she saw several
species that resembled them. She
led first by the covey of gray partridges she saw pecking at
N|sds of ryegrass and einkom wheat. She identified the sur-
large number of young by their slightly less defined mark- Ay their size. Though the middle-size
stocky birds laid as JBventy eggs in a clutch, they were usually subject to such
Klation that not many survived to adulthood.

totridges were also flavorful, but Ayla decided she would
tin, keeping their location in mind in case she didn't find the
t-she had a taste for. A flock, several family coveys, of smaller
| quails startled her as they took to wing. The rotund little
IB tasty, too, and if she had known how to use a throwing
could bring down several at one time, she might have tried

"c had decided to pass by the others, Ayla was glad to see
y well camouflaged ptarmigan near the place she had seen
yre- Though they still showed some patterning on their backs
81 tnelr predominantly white feathers made them stand out

against the grayish ground and dark gold dry grass. The fat birds had already grown winter feathers on their legs, extending to their feet for both warmth and for use as snowshoes. Though often traveled longer distances, both partridge and ptarmigan grouse that turned white in snow, normally stayed within a small area close to their birthplace, migrating only a short distance between winter and summer ranges.

In the way of that wintry world, which allowed close associations of living things whose habitats would at other times be far apart each had its niche and both would stay on the central plains through the winter. While the partridge kept to the windblown open grassland-eating seeds and roosting at night in trees near rivers and highlands, the ptarmigan would stay in the drifting snow, burrowing out snow caves to keep warm, and living on twigs, shoots, and buds of brush, often varieties containing strong oils that were distasteful or even poisonous to other animals. ;

Ayla signaled Wolf to stay while she picked out two stones from her pouch and readied her sling. From Whinney's back, she sighted on one nearly white bird and hurled the first stone. Wolf, understanding her motion as a signal, dashed for another bird at the same time. With a burst of wings and loud squawks of protest, the rest of the covey of heavy birds took to the air, their large flight muscles beating strongly. Their normal camouflaged markings on the ground made a startling change in the air when erect plumage displayed distinct patterns, making it easier for others of their kind to follow and keep together in a flock.

After the impetus of the first surge of activity and sudden flay of feathers, the flight of the ptarmigan eased into a long glide. With a pressure and movement of her body that was second nature, Ayla signaled Whinney to follow the birds, while she prepared to throw a second stone. The young woman grabbed the sling on the downstroke, slid her hand down to the loose end, and, with a smooth practiced action that moved with the motion, she brought it back to her throwing hand and dropped the second stone in the pocket before she let go. Though she sometimes took an extra swing for the first cast, she seldom required the buildup of momentum for her second throw.

Her ability to cast stones so quickly was such a difficult skill that if she had asked, she would have been told it was impossible. But there was no one for her to ask, no one to tell her it couldn't be done, Ayla had taught herself the double-stone technique. Over the years she had perfected it, and she was very accurate with both stones. The first bird she had aimed for on the ground never took flight. As the se

ailing out of the sky, she quickly grabbed two more stones, and the flock was out of reach.

He picked up with a third in his mouth. Ayla slid off the mare and signaled the wolf dropped the ptarmigan at her feet. Then he looked up at her, pleased with himself, a soft white feather on the side of his mouth.

"It is good. Wolf," she said, grabbing his winter-thickened ruff and putting his hand on her forehead to his. Then she turned to the horse. "This horse appreciates your help, Whinny," she said in her special language, which was partly Clan signs and soft horse nickers. The horse nodded, snorted, and stepped closer to the woman. Ayla held her head up and blew into her nostrils, exchanging scents of friendship.

She cut the neck of one bird that wasn't dead; then, using some string, she tied the feathered feet of the birds together. She put the horse and draped them across the pack-saddle basket. On her way back, she came upon the partridges again, and she couldn't resist trying for a couple of them as well. With two more she got two more birds, but she missed on her try for a third. She let him, and this time she let him keep his.

Tonight she would cook them all at once to compare both kinds. She would save the leftovers for the next day or two. Then she would think about what she might stuff the cavities with. If they were roasting, she would have used their own eggs, but she had none when she lived with the Mamutoi. It would take a long time; enough grains, though. Harvesting wild grains was a time-consuming process best done with a group of people. The big ground would be good, maybe with wild carrots and onions.

Thinking about the meal she was going to prepare, the young woman wasn't paying much attention to her surroundings, but she suddenly help noticing when Whinney came to a complete halt. She crossed her head and neighed, then stood perfectly still, but she could feel her tension. The horse was actually shaking, and the woman understood why.

A

-yla sat on Whinney's back staring ahead, feeling an unar. countable apprehension, a fear welling up inside that sent a chill un

her spine. She closed her eyes and shook her head to dispel the sensation.

After all, there was nothing to fear. Opening her eyes, she looked again at the large herd of horses in front of them. What was so fearsome about a herd of horses?

Most of the horses were looking in their direction, and Whinney's attention was just as intensely focused on the other members of her species as they were on her. Ayla signaled Wolf to stay, noticing that he was very curious and overly eager to investigate. -Horses, after all, were often prey to wolves, and the wild ones wouldn't like it if he got too close.

As Ayla studied the herd more closely, not quite sure what they or Whinney would do, she realized that it was not one, but two different herds. Dominating the area were the mares with their young, and Ayla assumed that the one standing aggressively forward of the others was the lead mare. In the background was a smaller herd of bachelors. Suddenly she noticed one standing between them, and then she couldn't help staring. It was the most unusual horse she lAd ever seen. w

Most horses were variations of Whinney's shade of dun yellow, some tending more to tans, some more pale. Racer's dark brown coloring was unusual, she had never seen another horse as dark, but the coloring of the herd stallion was just as strange in the other direction. She uaa never seen a horse as light. The mature, well-formed stallion approaching warily was pure white! Before he noticed Whinney, the white had been keeping the other males at bay, making it clear that, if they didn't come too close, they might be tolerated since it was not the season for horses to mate, he was the only one who had the right to mingle with the females. sudden appearance of a strange female, however, piqued his intere » and it caught the attention of the rest of the horses as well. .. Horses, by nature, were social animals. They liked to associate

r

res. Mares in particular tended to form permanent relation- (ut unlike the pattern of most herding animals, where the
rs remained with their mothers in close kinship groups, horses
f formed herds of unrelated mares. Young females usually left
^ group when they were fully mature, at about two years old.
A establish dominance hierarchies, which brought privileges
fefits to mares of high rank, and to their young--including first
>water and the best feeding areas--but their attachments were
d by mutual grooming and other friendly activities.
ueh they playfully sparred with each other when they were
was not until the young male horses joined the mature stal-
about four years old, that they began training in earnest for
when they would fight for the right to mate. Although they
I each other in the bachelor herd, vying for dominance was the
;rivity. Beginning with pushing and shoving, and ritualized
w and sniffing, the contests escalated, especially during the
fitting season, to rearing, biting necks, striking at knees, and
)Ut hind legs toward faces, heads, and chests. It was only after
fears in such associations that males were able to steal young
or displace an established herd male.
unattached female who had wandered into their range, Whin-
the object of intense interest on the part of both the female
I the individual bachelors. Ayla decided she didn't like the way
1 stallion was moving toward them, so proud and forceful, as
ie was about to make a claim.
don't have to stay any more. Wolf," she said, giving him a sign
ased him, and she watched while he stalked. To Wolf, it was
herd of Racers and Whinneys, and he wanted to play with
yla was sure that his actions would not pose a serious threat to
ies. He could not bring down such a strong animal alone,
. That would have required a pack of wolves, and packs seldom
mature animals in the prime of health.
urged Whinney to start back to the camp. The mare hesitated
>ment, but her habit of obeying the woman was stronger than
rest in the other horses. She started walking, but slowly, and
itinual hesitations. Then Wolf dashed into the herd. He was
Tin chasing them, and Ayla was glad to see them scatter. It
sir attention away from her Whinney.
Ayla arrived back at camp, everything was ready for her.
had just finished erecting the three poles to keep the food
ned out of the reach of most of the animals that might be inter- V.. The tent was up, the hole was
dug and lined with rocks,

385

and he had even used some stones to make a boundary for the fi ^
place.

"Look at that island," he told her as she dismounted. He pointed t
a stretch of land, built of accumulated silt, in the middle of the riv
with sedge, reeds, and several trees growing on it. "There's a whol
flock of storks over there, black ones and white ones. I watched them
land," he said with a pleased smile. "I kept wishing you would come
It was a sight worth seeing. They were diving and soaring, even flint
ping over. They just folded their wings and dropped from the sky tn
land; then when they were almost down, they opened their wings, h
looked like they were heading south. They'll probably leave in the
morning."

Ay la looked across the water at the large, long-billed, long-legged
stately birds. They were actively feeding, walking or running on the
land or in the shallow water, snapping at anything that moved with
their long, strong beaks, taking fish, lizards, frogs, insects, and earth
worms. They even ate carrion, judging from the way they went after
the remains of a bison washed up on the beach. The two species were
quite similar in general shape, though different in coloring. The white
storks had black-edged wings and there were more of them; the black
storks had white underparts, and most of them were in the water after
fish.

"We saw a big herd of horses on the way back," Ay la said, reaching
for the ptarmigan and partridges. "A lot of mares and young ones, but
a male was close by. The herd stallion is white."

"White?"

"As white as those white storks. He didn't even Hwe black legs,"
she said, unfastening the thongs of the pack-saddle basket. "You'd
never see him in snow."

"White is rare. I've never seen a white horse," Jondalar said. Then,
thinking back to Noria and the First Rites ceremony, he recalled the
white horsehide hanging on the wall behind the bed, decorated with
the red heads of immature great spotted woodpeckers. "But I did once
see the hide of a white horse," he said.

Something about the tone of his voice made Ayla look closer. He
saw her look, blushed a little as he turned away to lift the carrier basket
off Whinney, then felt compelled to explain further.

"It was during the . . . ceremony with the Hadumai."

"Are they horse hunters?" Ayla asked. She folded the riding blanket,
then picked up the birds and walked to the edge of the river.

"Well, they do hunt horses. Why?" Jondalar asked, walking along
with her.

iber Talut telling us about hunting the white mammoth? It sacred to the Mamutoi because they are the Mammoth Avia said. "If the Hadumai use a white horsehide during ' I wondered if they thought horses were special animals." sable but we weren't with them long enough to know,"

lid.

"Why do hunt horses?" she asked, starting to pluck the feathers birds.

"They were hunting horses when Thonolan met them. They were very happy with us at first, because we had scattered the herd after, but we didn't know."

"I will put Whinney's halter on tonight, and tie her next to Ayla said. "If there are horse hunters out there, I'd rather lose by. And besides, I didn't like the way that white stallion g for her."

"You may be right. Maybe I should stake Racer down, too. I can't find seeing that white stallion, though," Jondalar said.

"You'll never see him again. He was too interested in Whinney. It was unusual, and beautiful. You're right, white is rare," Ayla said. "The stallions were flying as she pulled them out with rapid movements. I paused for a moment. "Black is rare, too," she said. "Do you remember when Ranee said that? I'm sure he meant himself as though he was brown, not really black."

"I felt a pang of jealousy at the mention of the name of the almost mated, even though she had come away with him. "Are you sorry you did not stay with the Mamutoi and mate her?" he asked.

"I led and looked at him directly, her hands stopping her task. "You know the only reason I Promised Ranee was that I thought you didn't love me any more, and I knew he did . . . but, yes, I'm sorry. I could have stayed with the Mamutoi. If I had not thought I could have been happy with Ranee. I did love him, but not the way I love you."

"That's an honest answer, anyway," he said, frowning.

"I could have stayed with the Sharamudoi, too, but I want to be with you. If you need to return to your home, then I want to go with you." Ayla continued, trying to explain. Noticing his frown, she wasn't quite the answer he wanted to hear.

"I lied me, Jondalar. When you ask, I will always tell you what you want to hear. When I ask, I want you to tell me how you feel. Even if I don't want to hear what you have to say. I don't ever want that misunderstanding we had last winter to come between us,

where I don't know what you mean, and you won't tell me n ^1
guess that I feel something, but you don't ask. Promise me that ^ott^
will always tell me, Jondalar." /au

She looked so serious and so earnest that it made him want to sm-i
with affection. "I promise, Ayla. I would never want to go thronri.
time like that again, either. I couldn't stand it when you were w«ril
Ranee, especially when I could see why any woman would be im
ested in him. He was funny, and friendly. And he was a fine carver
true artist. My mother would have liked him. She likes artists ami
carvers. If things had been different, I would have liked him myself
He reminded me of Thonolan, in a way. He may have looked differi
ent, but he was just like the Mamutoi, outspoken, confident."

"He was a Mamutoi," Ayla said. "I do miss the Lion Camp. I niisg
the people. We haven't seen many people on this Journey. I didn't
know how far you had traveled, Jondalar, or how much land there is.
So much land and so few people."

As the sun moved closer to the earth, the clouds over the high
mountains to the west were reaching up to embrace the fiery orb and
glowing pink in their excitement. The brightness settled into the brilliant
enveloping display, then faded into darkness while Ayla and Jondalar
finished their meal. Ayla got up to put the extra birds away; she
had cooked much more than they could eat. Jondalar put cooking
stones back in the fire in preparation for their evening tea.

"They were delicious," Jondalar said. "I'm glad you wanted to stop
early. It was worth it."

Ayla happened to glance toward the island, and, ^wh a gasp, her
eyes opened wide. Jondalar heard her startled intake"x>f breath, and
looked up.

Several people carrying spears had appeared out of the gloom and
stepped into the edge of the light by the fire. Two of them wore capes
of horsehide, with the dried head still attached and worn over the head
like a hood. Jondalar stood up. One of the men pulled his horse-head
hood back and walked toward him.

"Zei-an-don-yee!" the man said, pointing at the tall blond man- Then he slapped himself on his
chest. "Hadumai! Jeren!" He was
grinning broadly. ,

Jondalar looked closely, then grinned back. "Jeren! Is that you.
Great Mother, I can't believe it! It is you."

The man started talking in a language just as unintelligible to J°
dalar as his was to Jeren, but the friendly smiles were understood^.

"Ayla!" Jondalar said, motioning her over. "This is Jeren. Hes |

hunter who stopped us when we were heading the other
n't believe it!" Both were still grinning with delight. Jeren
Avia and his smile took on an appreciative gleam as he
Jondalar.

this is Ayla, Ayla of the Mamutoi," Jondalar said, making
reductions. "Ayla, this is Jeren, one of Haduma's people."
;ld out both her hands. "Welcome to our camp, Jeren of
people," she said.

iderstood the intent, although it wasn't a customary greeting
people. He put his spear into a holder slung across his back,
her hands, and said, "Ayla," knowing it was her name, but
ehending the rest of the words. He slapped himself on the
i. "Jeren," he said, then added some unfamiliar words.
ie man jerked with sudden apprehension. He had seen a wolf
yla's side. Seeing his reaction, Ayla immediately knelt down
in arm around the wolf's neck. Jeren's eyes opened with

' she said, standing up and making the motions of a formal
on. "This is Wolf. Wolf, this is Jeren, one of Haduma's

' he said, his eyes still full of concern.
it her hand in front of Wolf's nose, as if letting him smell her
en she knelt down beside the wolf and put her arm around
, demonstrating her closeness and lack of fear. She touched
nd, then put her hand to Wolf's nose again, showing him
wanted him to do. Hesitantly Jeren extended his hand toward
I.

uched it with his cold wet nose and pulled back. He had
igh a similar introduction many times when they had stayed
>haramudoi, and he seemed to understand Ayla's intention.
> took Jeren's hand and, looking up at him, guided it toward
head to let him feel the fur, showing him how to stroke
id. When Jeren looked at her with a smile of acknowledgment
I Wolf's head on his own accord, she relaxed.

rned around and looked at the others. "Wolf!" he said, mak- are toward him. He said some other
things, then spoke her

ir men stepped into the light of the fire. Ayla made welcom-
is to come and sit.

"> who had been watching, was smiling his approval. "That
l idea, Ayla," he said.

l think they're hungry? We have a lot of food left," she said.
on't you offer it and see."

She took out a platter made of mammoth ivory that she had the birds they had eaten, picked up something that looked like"" ed bundle of hay, and opened it to reveal a whole cooked ptarm^111^ She held it out toward Jeren and the rest. The aroma precedp'T01^ Jeren went to break off a leg and he found a tender and micv n of meat in his hand. The smile on his face after tasting it encouraoS the others, '"^ged

Ay la brought out a partridge as well, served out the stuffing ofrn n* and grains onto a makeshift assortment of bowls and smaller olatw some woven, some made of ivory, and one of wood. She left the men to divide up the meat as they wanted, while she got out a large wooden bowl, one she had made, and filled it with water for tea.

The men looked much more relaxed after the meal, even when Avh brought Wolf to sniff them. As they all sat around the fire holdine cups of tea, they tried to communicate beyond the level of smilinc friendliness and hospitality.

Jondalar started. "Haduma?" he asked.

Jeren shook his head and looked sad. He made a motion toward the ground with his hand that Ayla sensed meant she had returned to the Great Earth Mother. Jondalar understood as well that the old woman he had grown so fond of was gone.

"Tamen?" he asked.

Smiling, Jeren nodded in an exaggerated fashion. Then he pointed to one of the others and said something that included Tamen's name. A young man, hardly more than a boy, smiled at them, and Jondalar saw a similarity to the man he had known.

"Tamen, yes," Jondalar said, smiling and nodding. "Tamen's son, or perhaps grandson, I think. I wish Tamen were hAc," he said to Ayla. "He knew some Zeiandonii, and we could talk aMittle. He made a long Journey there when he was a young man."

Jeren looked around the camp, then at Jondalar, and said "Zei-an-don-ye . . . Ton . . . Tonolan?"

This time Jondalar shook his head and looked sad. Then, thinking about it, he made the motion toward the ground. Jeren looked surprised, but he nodded and said a word that was a question. Jondalar didn't understand, and he looked at Ayla. "Do you know what hes asking?"

Though the language was unfamiliar, there was a quality about most languages she had heard that felt familiar. Jeren said the wor again, and something about his expression or his tone gave her an idea- She held her hand in the shape of a claw and growled like a cave lion.

the made was so realistic that all the men gaped at her
surprise, but Jeren nodded with understanding. He had
honolan died, and she had told him. One of the other men
as to Jeren. When Jeren responded, Jondalar heard an-
r name, Noria. The one who asked smiled at the tall blond
I at him, and then at his own eye, and smiled again.
lfelt a flush of excitement. Maybe it meant that Noria did
>V with his blue eyes. But then he wondered if it was just
enter had heard of the man with the blue eyes who had
Ifirst Rites with her? He couldn't be sure. The other men
ane at their eyes and smiling. Were they smiling about a
blue eyes? Or grinning about Pleasures with a blue-eyed

leht about saying Nona's name and rocking his arms as
; were holding a baby, but then he glanced at Ay la and held
^hadn't said anything to her about Noria, or about the anal
Haduma had made the next day that the Mother had
; ceremony and that the young woman would have a child,
edjondal, who would have eyes like his. He knew that Ay la
i child of his ... or of his spirit. How would she feel about it
ew Noria already had one? If he were Ayla, he would proba- Uous.
|was making motions indicating that the hunters should sleep t fire. Several nodded and got up to
get their sleeping rolls.

ml stashed them downriver before they approached the fire they
jnled, hoping it was a friendly fire, but not sure. But when Ayla
|m heading around the tent, toward the place where she had
(he horses, she ran in front of the men and held up her hand
t'them. They looked at each other with questioning glances
be disappeared into the dark. When they started to leave again,
it made a motion to wait. They smiled and nodded acquies-

r expression changed to one of fear when Ayla reappeared lead- »horses. She stood between the two
animals and tried to explain
lotions and even the expressive Clan gestures that these were
horses that should not be hunted, but neither she nor Jondalar
re they understood. Jondalar was even concerned that they
think she had some unique powers to Call horses and had
t these expressly for them to hunt. He told Ayla that he thought
"stration might help.

jot a spear from inside the tent and made motions with it as
he were going to stab Racer, but Ayla stood barring the way

with her arms held up and crossed in front of her, shaking emphatically. Jeren scratched his head and the other men looked. Finally Jeren nodded, took one of his own spears out of his back, aimed it toward Racer, and then stabbed it into the ground. Jondalar didn't know if the man thought Ayla was telling him not to hunt those two horses, or not to hunt horses at all but the point had been understood.

The men slept near their fire that night but were up just after first light. Jeren said some words to Ayla that Jondalar vaguely remembered referred to appreciation for food. The visitor smiled at the woman when Wolf sniffed at him and allowed himself to be petted again. She tried to invite them to share their morning meal, but they left quickly.

"I wish I had known some of their language," Ayla said. "It was nice to visit, but we couldn't talk."

"Yes, I wish we could have, too," Jondalar said, sincerely wishing that he had found out whether Noria ever did have a baby, and if it had his blue eyes.

"In the Clan, different clans used some words in their everyday language that weren't always understood by everyone, but everyone knew the silent language of gestures. You could always communicate," Ayla said. "Too bad the Others don't have a language everyone can understand."

"It would be helpful, especially when you are on a Journey, but it's hard for me to imagine a language that everyone would understand. Do you really think that people of the Clan everywhere can understand the same sign language?" Jondalar asked.

"It's not like a language they have to learn. They are born with it, Jondalar. It is so ancient that it is in their memories, and their memories go back to the beginning. You can't imagine how far back that is," Ayla said.

She shivered with a chill of fear as she remembered the time that Creb, to save her life, had taken her back with them, against all tradition. By the unwritten law of the Clan, he should have let her die. But to the Clan, she was dead, now. It occurred to her how ironic that was. When Broud had cursed her with death, he shouldn't have. He didn't have a good reason. Creb did have a reason; she had broken the most powerful taboo of the Clan. Perhaps he should have made sure that she died, but he didn't.

They began striking camp and stowing their tent, sleeping rolls, cooking utensils, ropes, and other equipment in the pack-saddle baskets, with the efficiency of unspoken routine. Ayla was filling water

when Jeren and his hunters returned. With smiles and
lofwhat were obviously profuse thanks, the men presented
A oackae wrapped in a piece of fresh aurochs hide. She
fe find the tender rump, butchered from a recent kill.
teful, Jeren," Ayla said, and she gave him the beautiful
ways made Jondalar melt with love. It seemed to have a
t on Jeren, and Jondalar smiled inwardly when he saw the
sion on the man's face. It took Jeren a moment to collect
i he turned to Jondalar and began talking, trying very hard
ate something. He stopped when he saw he was not being
I and he talked to the other men. Then he turned back to

K

t," he said, and began walking toward the south and motion-
Run to follow. "Tamen," he repeated, beckoning and adding
ip words.

^ he wants you to go with him," Ayla said, "to see that man
I'. The one who speaks Zeiandonii."

a, Zei-an-don-yee. Hadumai," Jeren said, beckoning both of

st want us to visit. What do you think?" Jondalar said.

think you're right," Ayla said. "Do you want to stop and

?''

lOuld mean going back," Jondalar said, "and I don't know how
|e had met them farther south, I wouldn't have minded stop- la little while on the way, but I hate
to go back now that we've

gbfar."

godded. "You'll have to tell him, somehow."

tiar smiled at Jeren, then shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said,

|need to go north. North," he repeated, pointing in that direc- 1^

^looked distressed, shook his head, then closed his eyes as if

ID think. He walked toward them and took a short staff out of

& Jondalar noticed the top of it was carved. He knew he had

te like it before, and he tried to remember where. Jeren cleared

on the ground, then drew a line with the staff, and another

} it. Below the first line, he drew a figure that vaguely resem- orse. At the end of the second

line pointing toward the channel

»reat Mother River, he drew a circle with a few lines radiating

Ayla looked more closely.

»Iar," she said, with excitement in her voice, "when Mamut

Wing me symbols and teaching me what they meant, that was

m- 'sun.' "

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"And that line points in the direction of the setting sun," Jondalar said, pointing west. "Where he drew the horse, that must be sourti •» He indicated the direction when he said it.

Jeren was nodding vigorously. Then he pointed north and frowned. He walked to the north end of the line he had drawn and stood facing them. He lifted his arms and crossed them in front of him, in the same way that Ayla had done when she was trying to tell Jeren not to hunt Whinney and Racer. Then he shook his head no. Ayla and Jondalar looked at each other and back at Jeren.

"Do you think he's trying to tell us not to go north?" Ayla asked. Jondalar felt a dawning recognition of what Jeren was trying to communicate. "Ayla, I don't think he just wants us to go south with him and visit. I think he's trying to tell us something more. I think he's trying to warn us not to go north."

"Warn us? What could be north that he would warn us against?" Ayla said.

"Could it be the great wall of ice?" Jondalar wondered.

"We know about the ice. We hunted mammoth near it with the Mamutoi. It's cold, but not really dangerous, is it?"

"It does move," Jondalar said, "over many years, and sometimes it even uproots trees with the changing seasons, but it doesn't move so fast that you can't get out of its way."

"I don't think it's the ice," Ayla said. "But he's telling us not to go north, and he seems very concerned."

"I think you're right, but I can't imagine what could be so dangerous," Jondalar said. "Sometimes people who don't travel much beyond their own range imagine that the world outside their territory is dangerous, because it's different."

"I don't think Jeren is a man who fears very much," Ayla said.

"I have to agree," Jondalar said, then faced the man. "Jeren, I wish I could understand you."

Jeren had been watching them. He guessed from their expressions that they had understood his warning, and he was waiting for their response.

"Do you think we should go with him and talk to Tamen?" Ayla asked.

"I hate to turn back and lose time now. We still have to reach that glacier before the end of winter. If we keep going, we should make it easily, with time to spare, but if anything happens to delay us, it could be spring and melting, and too dangerous to cross," Jondalar said.

"So we'll keep going north," Ayla said.

"I think we should, but we will be watchful. I just wish I knew what

>e watching for." He looked at the man again. "Jeren, my
hank y011 ^or yoll11' warning," he said. "We will be careful,
k we should keep on going." He pointed south, then shook
ad pointed north.
ying to protest, shook his head again, but he finally gave up
d acceptance. He had done what he could. He went to talk
er man in the horse-head cape, spoke for a moment, then
nd indicated they were going.
d Jondalar waved as Jeren and his hunters left. Then they
b their packing and, with some reservations, started out to-
lorth.

oumeyers traveled across the northern end of the vast central
they could see the terrain ahead was changing; the flat low-
; giving way to rugged hills. The occasional highlands that
noted the central plain were connected, though partly sub- neath the soil in the midland basin, to
great broken blocks
sedimentary rock running in an irregular backbone from
to southwest through the plain. Relatively recent volcanic
had covered the highlands with fertile soils that nurtured
Mne, spruce, and larch on the upper reaches, with birch and
i the lower slopes, while brush and steppe grass grew on the
es.

' started up into the rugged hills, they found themselves
backtrack and work their way around deep holes and broken
> that blocked their way. Ay la thought the land seemed more
ough with the deepening cold she wondered if it might be
ng season that gave that impression. Looking back from the
l elevation, they gained a new perspective of the land they
d. The few deciduous trees and brush were bare of leaves,
ntral plain was covered with the dusty gold of dry standing
wild feed multitudes through the winter.
^hted many large grazing animals, in herds and individually.
aned most prevalent to Ayla, perhaps because she was espe-
cious of them, but giant deer, red deer, and, particularly as
ied the northern steppes, reindeer were also abundant. The
e gathering into large migratory herds and heading south.
ie whole day, the great humpy beasts with huge black horns
ir the rolling hills of the northern grassland in a thick, un-
arpet, and Ayla and Jondalar stopped often to watch. The
to cast an obscuring pall over the great moving mass, the
k with the pounding hooves of their passage, and the com-

W

bined roar of the multitude of deep rolling grunts and bawls grn like thunder.

They saw mammoths less often, usually traveling north, but from a distance the giant woolly beasts commanded attention W not driven by the demands of reproduction, male mammoths tenil^ to form small herds with loose ties for companionship. Occasion id one would join a female herd and travel with it for a while, but wh^1 ever the Joumeyers noticed a lone mammoth, it was invariably maU The larger permanent herds were of closely related females; a graniL mother, the old and wily matriarch who was their leader, and some. times a sister or two, with their daughters and grandchildren. Th> female herds were easy to identify because their tusks tended to be somewhat smaller and less curved, and there were always youne ones with them.

Though also impressive when they were sighted, woolly rhinocer-' oses were most rare and least social. They didn't, as a rule, heni^ together. Females kept to small family groups and, except during max-5 ing, males were solitary. Neither mammoths nor rhinoceroses, except for the young and the very old, had much to fear from four-legged hunters, not even the huge cave lion. The males in particular could afford to be solitary; the females needed the herds to help protect their young.

The smaller woolly musk-oxen, however, who were goatlike creatures, all banded together for protection. When they were under attack, the adults usually packed themselves into a circular phalanx facing outward, with the young ones in the middle. A few chamois and ibex made an appearance as Ayla and Jondalar climbed higher m the hills; they often dropped down to lower ground with the approach of winter.

Many of the small animals were secure for the winter in their nests burrowed deep in the ground, surrounded by stores of seeds, nuts, bulbs, roots, and, in the case of pikas, piles of hay that they had cut and dried. The rabbits and hares were changing color, not to white, but to a lighter mottled shade, and on a wooded knoll they saw a beaver and a tree squirrel. Jondalar used his spear-thrower to get the beaver. Besides the meat, the fatty beaver tail was a rare and rich delicacy, roasted by itself on a spit over the fireplace.

They usually used the spear-throwers for the larger game we' hunted. They were both quite accurate with the weapons, butjondal had more power, could throw farther. Ayla often brought down the smaller animals with her sling.

Though they didn't hunt them, they noticed that otter, badge'

narten, and mink were also numerous. The carnivores-- Ives lynxes, and larger cats--found sustenance in small game or herbivores. And though they seldom fished on this leg of the Jondalar knew there were sizable fish in the river, including trout, pike, and very big carp.

In the evening they saw a cave with a large opening and decided to enter it. As they approached, the horses did not show any signs which the humans took to be a good sign. Wolf sniffed with interest when they entered the cave, obviously curious, and his whiskers were raised. Seeing the unconcerned behavior of the Wla felt confident that the cave was empty, and they decided to enter it that night.

Building a fire, they made a torch to explore a little deeper. In the front were many signs that the cave had been used before. The scapes on the walls were either from a bear or a wolf. Wolf smelled out droppings nearby but they were so dry that it was hard to tell what animal had made them. They found some dry leg bones that had been partly eaten. The way they were broken and the teeth marks made Ayla think cave hyenas had been in the cave with their extremely powerful jaws. She shuddered with fear at the thought.

They were no worse an animal than any other. They scavenged on the bones of animals that had died naturally and the kills of others, but so were the predators, including wolves, lions, and humans, and hyenas were effective pack hunters. That didn't matter, Ayla's hatred of predators was irrational. To her they represented the worst of all that was

The cave had not been used recently. All the signs were old, including the charcoal in a shallow pit from the fire of some other visitor. Ayla and Jondalar went into the cave for some distance, but they had to go on forever, and beyond the dry front opening there were no signs of use. Stone columns, seeming to grow up from the floor and down from the ceiling and sometimes meeting in the middle, were the only inhabitants of the cool damp interior.

When they came to a bend, they thought they heard running water nearby, and they decided to turn back. They knew the torch would not last long, and neither of them wanted to go back in the fading light from the entrance. They walked back along the limestone walls and were glad to see the drab gold of dry earth and brilliant golden light outlining clouds in the west.

As they rode deeper into the highlands north of the great plain, Ayla and Jondalar noticed more changes. The terrain coming pocked with caves, caverns, and sinkholes that ranged from bowl-shaped dips covered with grass, to inaccessible drop-offs to great depths. It was a peculiar landscape that made them vaguely uneasy. While surface streams and lakes were rare, they sometimes heard the eerie sound of rivers running underground. Unknown creatures of warm ancient seas were the cause of this strange and unpredictable land. Over untold millennia, the sea floor grew thick with their settling shells and skeletons. After even millions of years, the sediment of calcium hardened, was lifted high by tectonic movements of the earth, and became rocks of calcium carbonate limestone. Underlying great stretches of land, most of the earth's caves were formed out of limestone because, given the right conditions the hard sedimentary rock will dissolve. In pure water, it is hardly soluble at all, but water that is even slightly acid attacks limestone. During warmer seasons and when climates were humid, circulating ground water, bearing carbonic acid from plants and charged with carbon dioxide, dissolved vast quantities of the carbonate rock. Flowing along flat bedding planes and down minute cracks at the vertical joints in the thick layers of the calcareous stone, the ground water gradually widened and deepened the fissures. It carved jagged pavements and intricate grooves as it carried the dissolved limestone away, to escape in seepages and springs. Forced to lower levels by gravity, the acidic water enlarged underground cracks into caves. Caves became caverns and stream channels, with narrow vertical shafts opening into them, and eventually joined with others to become entire subterranean water systems. The dissolving rock below the ground had a profound effect on the land above it, and the landscape, called karst, displayed unusual and distinctive features. As caves became larger, and their tops extended closer to the surface, they collapsed, creating steep-walled sinkholes. Occasional remnants of the cavern roofs left natural bridges. Streams and rivers running along the surface would suddenly disappear in the sinkholes and flow underground, sometimes leaving valleys that had been formed earlier by rivers, high and dry.

Water was becoming harder to find. Running water quickly seeped into cavities and potholes in the rocks. Even after a heavy rainfall, water disappeared almost instantly, with no rivulets or streams running across the ground. Once the travelers had to go to a small pool

of a sinkhole for the precious fluid. Another time, water appeared in a large spring, flowed across the surface for a while and disappeared underground again.

The land was barren and rocky, with thin surface soil that exposed the underlying rock. Animal life was scarce as well. Except for some birds with their tightly curled wool coats thickened for winter, and mountain sheep and horns, the only animals they saw were a few rock marmots. Quick, wily little creatures were adept at evading their many predators. Whether it was wolves, arctic foxes, hawks, or golden eagle whistles from a lookout sent them scurrying into the shadows and caves.

Ayla decided to follow them in pursuit, to no avail, but since long-ears were not normally perceived as dangerous, Ayla managed to catch a few with her sling. The furry little rodents, fattened

for hibernation, tasted much like rabbit, but they were small, and Ayla had never eaten them before; first time since the previous summer, they often fished the Great Mother River for their dinner.

Their uneasiness made Ayla and Jondalar very careful through the karst landscape, with its strange formations, caves, and narrow paths, but familiarity lessened their concern. They were walking slowly, giving their horses a rest. Jondalar had Racer on a long lead but let him graze a mouthful of the sparse dry grass now and then. Whinnying the same, biting off a mouthful, then following Ayla, Racer was not using the halter.

"I wish if the danger Jeren was trying to warn us about was this land full of caves and holes," Ayla was saying. "I don't like it here."

"I don't either. I didn't know it would be like this," Jondalar

asked. "Have you been here before? But I thought you came this way," Ayla said, looking surprised. "You said you followed the Great Mother River."

"I followed the Great Mother River, but we stayed on the other side and didn't cross until we were much farther south. I thought it was easier to stay on this side coming back, and I was curious about the other side. The river makes a very sharp turn not far from here, turning leading east then, and I wondered about the highland that stretched south. I knew this would be the only chance I'd ever have

to cross."

"No difference does it make? We're still following the river." "I thought you were familiar with this area. You don't know

any more about it than I do." Ayla wasn't quite sure why it
her so much, except that she had counted on him to know what
expect, and now she found that he didn't. It made her feel nervous
about the strange place. 01

They had been walking along, involved in the conversation that was
edging toward a grievance, if not an argument, and not paying
attention to where they were going. Suddenly Wolf, who had been
trotting alongside of Ayla, yipped and nudged her leg. They had
turned to look and stopped short. Ayla felt a sudden surge of fright.
and Jondalar blanched. ^^

woman and man looked toward the ground ahead and saw the land in front of them had ceased to be there. They had stepped over the edge of a precipice. Jondalar felt the familiar pain in his groin as he stared down at the steep drop-off, but he wanted to see that far below was a long, flat green field, with a stream flowing through it.

Some of the big sinkholes were usually covered with a deep layer of insoluble residue of the limestone, and some of the deep sinkholes lined together and opened out into elongated depressions, large areas of land deep below the normal surface. With both of them, the vegetation below was rich and inviting. The problem was that neither of them could see any way to get down to the bottom of the steep-sided hole.

"There's something wrong about this place," Ayla said. "It's cold and barren, hardly anything can live up here; down there is a lush meadow with a stream and trees, but nothing can reach the top. A deer that tried would die in the fall. It's all mixed up. It feels

like something's wrong. And maybe you're right, Ayla. Maybe this is why I was trying to warn us about. There's not much here for you, and it's dangerous. I've never known of a place where you had to be careful about falling over a cliff when you're just walking across the

ground. She pulled down, grabbed Wolf's head with both her hands, and pressed her forehead to his. "Thank you, Wolf, for warning us when we were paying attention," she said. He whined his affection and responded with a low growl.

Jondalar picked up and led the horses around the deep hole, with much difficulty. Ayla couldn't even remember what was so important about the argument they almost had. She only thought that they must have gotten so distracted that they didn't even see where they were going. Continuing north, the river on their left began flowing

through a gorge that was becoming deeper as the rocky cliff higher. Jondalar wondered whether they should try to follow the water or keep to the highland above, but he was glad they were following the river's course and not attempting to cross it. Rather than valleys with grassy slopes and broad floodplains, in karst region large rivers that could be seen from the surface tended to flow in w sided limestone gorges. As difficult as it was to use waterways as tra routes with no stream edge to walk along, it was even harder to across them.

Remembering the great gorge farther south, with long stretch where there were no banks, Jondalar decided to stay on the highland. As they continued to climb, he was relieved to see a long thin stream of water falling down the face of the rock into the water of the rim below. Although the waterfall was across the river, it meant some water was available on the higher ground, even though most of it quickly disappeared into the cracks of the karst. But karst was also a landscape with many caves. They were more frequent than Ayla and Jondalar, and the horses, spent the next two nights protected from the weather by stone walls, without having to put up the tent. After examining several, they began to develop a sense about which openings in the rock were likely to be suitable for them. Since Although water-filled caverns deep underground were continuing to increase in size, most enterable caves near the surface were no longer growing larger. Instead, the space inside was decreasing, sometimes rapidly when the general conditions were wet, though hardly changing at all during dry spells. Some caves could only be entered in dry weather; they would fill up during heavy rains. Some, though always open, had running streams covering the floors. The travelers looked for dry caves, usually somewhat higher up, but water, along with limestone, had been the instrument that had shaped and sculpted all of them.

Rainwater, slowly seeping through the rock of the roof, absorbed the dissolved limestone. Each drip of calcareous water, even the tiniest droplet of moisture in the air, was saturated with calcium carbonate solution, which was redeposited inside the cave. Though usually white, the hardened mineral could be beautifully translucent, or mottled and shaded with gray, or faintly colored with tints of red yellow. Pavements of travertine were created, and immovable drape ries festooned the walls. Icicles of stone hanging from the ceiling strained with each wet drop to meet their counterparts growing slowly from the floor. Some were joined in thin-waisted columns, which grew thicker with time in the ever-changing cycle of the living earth.

here setting noticeably colder and windier, and Ayla and
k clad for the prevalence of caves to break the chill of the
cially checked potential shelters to make sure they were
khv four-legged inhabitants before they moved in, but
ihv could rely on the keener senses of their traveling
to warn them of danger. Without saying so, or consciously
t they depended on the smell of smoke to tell them if
luman occupants--humans were the only animals that
it they encountered no one, and even other animal species

they were surprised when they came to a region that was
nsh in vegetation, at least compared with the rest of the
w landscape. Limestone was not all the same. It varied
w easily it dissolved, and in the proportion that was insol-
esult, some areas of limestone karst were fertile, with
l trees growing beside normal streams that flowed on the
ing lands and caves and underground rivers did exist in
mt they were rarer.

r came upon a herd of reindeer grazing in a field of dry
, Jondalar looked at Ayla with a smile, then pulled out his
r. Ayla nodded in agreement and urged Whinney to fol-
and the stallion. With nothing around but a few small
ring had been poor, and as the river was by then far below
they hadn't been able to fish. They had been subsisting
i dried food and emergency traveling rations, even sharing
ie wolf. The horses were hard pressed, too. The scraggly
maged to grow in the thin soil had been barely sufficient

it the throat to bleed the small-antlered doe they killed.
fted the carcass into the bowl boat attached to the travois
r a place to camp nearby. Ayla wanted to dry some of the
nder the animal's winter fat, and Jondalar was looking
good piece of roast haunch and some tender liver. They
'd stay a day or so, especially with the meadow nearby.
leeded the feed. Wolf had discovered an abundance of
es, voles, lemmings, and pikas, and had gone off to hunt

' noticed a cave tucked into a hillside, they headed for it.
; smaller than they would have liked, but it seemed suffi-
Dropped the pole drag and unloaded the horses to let them
iadow, put the packs beside the cave, and dragged the
Aemselves, then spread out to collect woody brush and

Ayla was looking forward to making a meal with fresh meat and ^ thinking about what to cook with it. She gathered some dried wl* heads and grains from the meadow grasses, and handfuls of th ^ black seeds from the pigweed that was growing beside a small vt'H somewhat north of the cave. When she returned, Jondalar had alrf^? started the fire, and she asked him to go to the stream and fill unr7 waterbags.

Wolf arrived before the man came back, but when the animal an. proached the cave, he bared his teeth and snarled menacingly. Avfa felt the hairs on the back of her neck rise.

"Wolf, what is it?" she said, unconsciously reaching for her slin» and picking up a stone, although her spear-thrower was just as close. The wolf stalked slowly into the cave, his throat rumbling with a deeo snarl. Ayla followed behind, ducking her head to enter the small dark opening in the rock, and she wished she had brought a torch. But her nose told her what her eyes could not see. It had been many years since she had smelled that odor, but she would never forget it. Suddenly her mind pictured that first time so long ago. r

They were in the foothills of the mountains not far from the Claa Gathering. Her son was riding on her hip, supported by his carrying cloak, and though she was young and one of the Others, she wa» walking in the medicine woman's position. They had all stopped in their tracks and were staring at the monstrous cave bear, nonchalantly scratching his back against the bark of the tree. ' Though the huge creature, twice the size of ordinary brown bears, was the most revered totem of all the Clan, the young people of Bruns clan had never seen a living one. There were none left in the mountains near their cave, though dry bones attested to the fact that that once had been. For the powerful magic they contained, Creb had re the few tufts of hair that had been caught in the bark after the cave bear finally lumbered off, leaving only his distinctive smell behind.

Ayla signaled Wolf and backed out of the cave. She noticed the sbttf in her hand and tucked it in her waist tie with a wry face. What goo" was a sling against a cave bear? She was just grateful that the bear begun his long sleep and hadn't been disturbed by her intrusion. quickly threw dirt on the fire and stamped it out, then picke ""P.^ pack-saddle basket and moved it away from the cave. Fortunately ^^ hadn't unpacked very much. She went back for Jondalar's P30 ^jj then dragged the travois by herself. She had just picked up her

we it farther away when Jondalar appeared with the full

; you doing, Ayla?" he asked.

i cave bear in that cave," she said. At his look of apprehended.

"He's started his long sleep, I think, but they some-

if they are disturbed early in winter, at least that's what

I?"

ters of Brun's clan. I used to watch them when they talked

ne . . sometimes," Ayla explained. Then she grinned.

)metimes. I watched as often as I could, especially after

icticing with my sling. The men usually didn't pay atten- l busying herself nearby. I knew they would never teach

tching when they exchanged hunting stories was a way to

light they might be angry if they found out what I was

[didn't know how severe the punishment would be ...

f anyone would, the Clan would know about cave bears,"

l. "Do you think it's safe to stay around here?"

now, but I don't think I want to," she said.

I't you call Whinney. We have time before it gets dark to

place."

ading the night in their tent out in the open, they started

the morning, wanting to put still more distance between

md the cave bear. Jondalar didn't want to take the time to

it, and he convinced Ayla that the temperature was cold

it to keep. He was in a hurry to get out of the region

Where there was one bear, there were usually more.

i they reached the top of a ridge, they stopped. In the

cold air, they could see in all directions, and the view was

Directly east, a snow-covered mountain of somewhat

ion rose in the foreground, drawing attention to the eastern

r now and curving around them. Though not exceptionally

acred mountains reached their highest point to the north,

"m a line of jagged white peaks, shadowed with hints of

against the deep azure sky.

northern mountains were in the broad outer belt of the

the travelers were in the innermost arc, in the foothills of

at encompassed them, standing on a ridge that stretched

loithem end of the ancient basin that formed the central

?reat glacier, the densely packed cake of solid ice that had

spread down from the north until it covered nearly a quarter land, ended in a mountainous wall that was hidden just beyond the peaks. Toward the northwest, highlands that were lower but dominated the horizon. Shimmering in the distance the northern polar ice could be glimpsed hovering like a pale horizon above the heights. The huge range of much higher mountains to the west lost in clouds. '*'

The distant mountains that surrounded them were magnificent but the most heart-stopping sight was closer at hand. Down below in the deep gorge, the course of the Great Mother River had changed. It was now coming from the west. As Ayla and Jondalar stood down from the ridge and looked upstream at the wavering course of the river, they, too, felt as though they had reached a turning point. "The glacier we have to cross is due west of here," Jondalar said in voice taking on a faraway tone that matched his thoughts, "but we follow the Mother and she'll veer a little to the northwest after a while then southwest again until we reach it. It's not a huge glacier and except for a higher region in the northeast, nearly flat once we get up to it, like a big high plain made out of ice. After we get across it, we'll head slightly southwest again, but essentially, from here on, we'll be traveling west all the way home." |

In breaking through the ridge of limestone and crystalline rock, the river, as though hesitating, unable to make up her mind, jogged north, then dipped south, and then north again, forming a lobe that the river traced, before finally heading south through the plain.

"Is that the Mother?" Ayla asked. "All of her, I mean, not just channel?"

"That's all of her. She's still a good-size river, but nothing like she was," Jondalar conceded.

"We've been beside her for quite a while, then. I didn't know that I'm used to seeing the Great Mother River so much more full, when she isn't all spread out. I thought we were following a channel. We crossed feeders that were greater," Ayla said, feeling a little disappointed that the enormous swollen Mother of rivers had become another large waterway. '^

"We're up high. She looks different from here. There is more to her than you think," he said. "We have some large tributaries to cross, and there will be stretches where she breaks into channels again, she will keep getting smaller." Jondalar stared toward the west for a time; then he added, "This is just the beginning of it. We should make it to the glacier in plenty of time . . . it doesn't happen to delay us."

mevcrs turned west along the high ridge, following the
A of the river. The elevation continued to increase on the
if the river until they were looking down from a high point
little southward lobe. The drop-off toward the west was
and they headed north down a slightly more gradual slope
ttered brush. At the bottom, a tributary that curled around
the lofty prominence from the northeast cut a deep gorge.
I it upstream until they found a crossing. It was only hilly
r side, and they rode beside the feeder until they reached
lother again, then continued west.
oad central plain there had been only a few tributaries, but
now in an area where many rivers and streams fed the m the north. They came upon another large
tributary later
nd their legs got wet in the crossing. It was not like crossing
,e warm summertime, when it didn't matter if they got a
He temperature was dipping down to freezing at night.
chilled by the icy cold water, and they decided to camp on
c to get warm and dry,
irinued due west. After passing through the hilly terrain,
id the lowland again, a marshy grassland, but not like the
ownstream. These were on acid soils, and more swampy
y, with moors of sphagnum mosses that in places were
into peat. They discovered the peat would bum when they
one day and inadvertently built a fire on top of a dry patch
allowing day they collected some on purpose for their next
ey came to a large, fast tributary that fanned into a broad
confluence with the Mother, they decided to follow it up-
Mt distance to see if they could find an easier place to cross.
ied a fork where two rivers converged, followed the right
l came to another fork where yet another river joined. The
ly waded across the smaller river, and the middle fork,
er, wasn't too difficult. The land between the middle and
was a boggy lowland with sphagnum moors, and it was
"g-
fork was deep, and there was no way to cross it without
> but on the other side they disturbed a megaceros with an
ack of palmate antlers and decided to go after him. The
with his long legs, easily outdistanced the stocky horses,
*cer and Wolf gave him a good run. Whinney, hauling the
ouldn't keep up, but the exercise had put them all in a good
red-faced and windblown, his fur hood thrown back, was

smiling when he came back. Ayla felt an unexplainable pang of longing as he rode up. He had let his pale yellow beard grow; he usually did in winter, to help keep his face warm, and she always did like him with a beard. He liked to call her beautiful but in her mind, he was beautiful.

"That animal can sure run!" he said. "And did you see that magnificent rack? One of his antlers must be twice as big as I am!" Ayla was smiling, too. "He was magnificent, and beautiful but I'm glad we didn't get him. He was too big for us, anyway. We couldn't take all that meat, and it would have been a shame to kill him when we didn't need it."

They rode back to the Mother, and even though their clothes had dried on them somewhat, they were glad to make camp and change. They made a point of hanging their damp clothing near the fire so it could dry further.

The next day they started out heading west; then the river veered toward the northwest. Some distance beyond, they could see another high ridge. The high prominence that reached all the way to the Great Mother River was the farthest northwest finger, the last they would see, of the great chain of mountains that had been with them almost from the beginning. The range had been west of them then, and they had traveled around its broad southern end following the lower course of the Great Mother River. The whitened mountain peaks had marched along to the east of them in a great curving arc, as they rode up the central plain beside the river's winding middle course. Going west along the Mother's upper course, the ridge ahead was the last outlier.

No tributaries joined the long river until they were almost up to the ridge, and Ayla and Jondalar realized they must have been between channels again. The river that joined from the east at the foot of the rocky promontory was the other end of the northern channel of the Great Mother. From there the river flowed between the ridge and a high hill across the water, but there was enough lowland riverbank to wind around the base of the high rocky point.

They crossed another large tributary just on the other side of the ridge, a river whose great valley marked the separation between two groups of mountain ranges. The high hills to the west were the farthest eastern foreland of the enormous western chain. As the ridge fell behind them, the Great Mother River separated again into three channels. They followed the outer bank of the northernmost stream through the steppes of a smaller northern basin that was a continuation of the central plain.

ies when the central basin had been a great sea, this wide
if grassy steppes, along with the swampy bogs and moors
ide wetlands and the grasslands to the north of them, were
that ancient inland body of water. The inner curve of the
ntain chain contained lines of weakness in the hard crust
that became the vents for great outpourings of volcanic
iat material, combined with the ancient sea deposits and
ivn loess, created a rich and fertile soil. But only the skel-
winter gave evidence of it.

' fingers and leafless limbs of a few birch trees near the
in the rapacious wind from the north. Dry brushwood,
ead ferns lined the banks, where crusts of ice were forming
hicken and build up jagged levees; the beginning of spring
t the northern faces and higher ground of the rolling hills
divide, the wind combed billowing fields of gray standing
nhmic strokes, while dark evergreen boughs of spruce and
and shivered in erratic gusts that found their way around
cted south-facing sides. Powdery snow churned around,
lightly on the ground.

tier had definitely turned cold, but snow flurries were not
Fhe horses, the wolf, and even the people were accustomed
;m loess steppes with its dry cold and light winter snows.
ivy snow, that could bog down and tire the horses, and
irder to find, would Ay la begin to worry. She had another
moment. She had seen horses in the distance, and Whin-
er had noticed them, too.

happened to look back, Jondalar thought he saw smoke
i the high hill across the river from the last ridge they had
.d earlier. He wondered if there were people nearby, but
ee smoke again though he turned around to check several

vening, they followed a small feeder upstream through an
ind of bare-branched willows and birch, to a stand of stone
y nights had given a still pond nearby a transparent layer
>, and had frozen the edges of the little creek, but it still
l the center, and they set up camp beside it. A dry snow
ind dusted the north-facing slopes with white.

had been agitated ever since they had seen the horses in
i which in turn made Ay la nervous. She decided to put the
r mare that evening, and she fastened it with a long tether
pine. Jondalar tied Racer's lead rope to a tree near her.
collected deadfall and snapped off the dead branches still

attached to the trunks of the pine trees underneath the living hr
"women's wood" Jondalar's people had always called it. It was s^
on most coniferous trees, and even in the wettest of condition's^8^
usually dry. It could be collected without having to use an axe ^'8
a knife. They built the fire just outside the entrance of the tent a J3
the flap open to heat it inside. ^

A varying hare, already turned white, dashed through their tt?
when, by sheer chance, Jondalar happened to be checking the hefr"5
his spear-thrower with a new spear he'd been working on for the n-k
few evenings. He threw almost by instinct, but he was surprised wlww
the shorter spear with a smaller point, made out of flint not bonei
found its mark. He walked over, picked up the hare, and tried te
pull out the shaft. When it didn't come easily, he took out his knife-
cut out the point, and was pleased to see that the new spear wu
undamaged. g|

"Here's meat for tonight," Jondalar said, handing the hare «|
Ay la. "It almost makes me wonder if this one didn't come by just to
help me test the new spears. They're light and easy. You'll have to tn|
one out." ||

"I think it's more likely that we camped in the middle of his regular
run," Ayla said, "but that was a good throw. I would like to try th>
light spear. Right now, though, I think I'll start this cooking and set
what I can find for the rest of our meal." I

She cleaned out the entrails but did not skin the hare, so the winttk
fat would not be lost. Then she skewered it on a sharpened will(W|
branch and propped it up over the fire between two forked sridaj
Next, through she had to break the ice to dig them out, Ayla collected
several cattail roots, and the rhizomes from some dormant licorice fenu|
She pounded both of them together with a rounded stone in a woodcuj
bowl with water to extract the tough, stringy fibers, then let the whrtt
starchy pulp settle in the bottom of the bowl while she looked througBj
her supplies to see what else she had. .1

When the starch had settled and the liquid was almost clei"'slB|
carefully poured off most of it and added dried blue elderberries. Whit
she waited for them to plump up and absorb more of the water^ ^
stripped away the outer bark of a birch tree, scraped off some OI^
soft, sweet, edible cambium layer underneath, and added it to her row
starch-and-berry mixture. She gathered cones of the stone pines,
when she put them on the fire, she was pleased to see that seve
them still had large, hard-shelled pine nuts in them that the heat ,
helped to crack, j ^

When the hare was cooked, she broke off some of the blackened

I the inside on a few stones she had put in the fire, to spread
» them. Then she took small handfuls of the doughy root
j»d with the berries, the sweet, flavorful licorice-fem root
he sweetening and thickening sap from the birch cambium,
d them on the hot rocks.

had been watching her. She could still surprise him with
ye knowledge of growing things. Most people, particularly
ew where to find edible plants, but he had never met any-
iew so much. When she had several of the doughy, unleav-
ts cooked, he took a bite out of one.

delicious!" he said. "You really are amazing, Ayla. Not very
[e can find growing food to eat in the cold of winter."
the cold of winter, yet, Jondalar, and not so hard to find
it now. Wait until the ground is frozen solid," Ayla said,
ie hare off the spit, peeled back the crispy charcoaled skin,
meat on the mammoth-ivory platter, from which they both

roll could find something to eat even then," Jondalar said.
rbe not plants," she said, offering him a tender leg of hare.
ey finished the hare and the cattail-root biscuits, Ayla gave
s to Wolf, including the bones. She started their herb tea
Iding some birch cambium for the wintergreen flavor, then
ie cones out of the edge of the fire. They sat by the fire for
>ping their tea and eating pine nuts, cracked with rocks or
with their teeth. After their meal, they made preparations
start, checked to make sure the horses were all right, then
their warm furs for the night.

'd down the corridor of a long, 'winding cave, and the line of fires
vwing the way cast light upon beautiful draped and flowing for-
saw one that resembled the long flowing tail of a horse. As she
the dun-yellow animal nickered and swished its dark tail, seeming
closer. She started to follow, but the rocky cave grew dark, and
es crowded in.

' down to see where she was going, and when she looked up, it
e that was beckoning, after all. It seemed to be a man. She strained
was, and was startled to see Creb stepping out of the shadows. He
on, urging her to hurry and come with him; then he turned and

i to follow him, then heard a horse whinny. When she turned
^k for the yellow mare, the dark tail disappeared into a herd of
orses. She ran after them, but they turned into flowing stone and

then into a jumble of stone columns. When she looked back, Creb was d'ing down a dark tunnel.

She ran after him, trying to catch up with him, until she came to a f i i she didn't know which branch Creb had taken. She was in a panic Amf one and then the other. Finally she started up the right fork, and'she f° man standing in the middle of it, blocking her way.

It was jeren! He was filling the entire passage, standing with his leas an, and his arms crossed in front of him, shaking his head no. She pleaded vjitkli to let her get by, but he didn't understand. Then, with a short, carved staff pointed toward the wall behind her. *

When she turned to look, she saw a dark yellow horse running and a yella haired man running after. Suddenly the herd surrounded the man, hid him fr sight. Her stomach churned into a knot of fear. As she ran to him, she ha horses whinnying, and Creb was at the mouth of the cave, beckoning uithw urgency, telling her to hurry, before it was too late. Suddenly the pound) hooves of horses were louder. She heard whinnying, neighing, and, will sinking feeling of horror and panic, the sound of a horse screaming.

Ay la bolted awake. Jondalar was up, too. There was a commoti outside the tent, horses neighing and hooves stamping. They hea Wolf snarling, then a yelp of pain. They threw back their covers a rushed out of the tent.

It was very dark, with only a sliver of a moon, which shed lit light, but there were more horses in the pine woods than the two th had left there. They could tell from the sounds, though they could see anything. As she ran toward the sounds of horses, Ayla tripped an exposed root and fell heavily to the ground, knocking the wind (of her.

"Ayla! Are you all right?" Jondalar said, searching for her in dark. He'd only heard her fall.

"Here I am," she said, her voice hoarse, trying to catch her breal She felt his hands on her, and she tried to get up. When they hea the sounds of horses racing off into the night, she pulled herself up a they ran toward the place where the horses were tied. Whinney v gone!

"She's gone," Ayla cried. She whistled and called her name. Tb< was an answering whinny in the distance.

"That's her! That's Whinney! Those horses, they've taken her have to get her back!" The woman started after the horses, stuinb through the woods in the dark. ,

Jondalar caught up to her in a few strides. "Ayla, wait! We can now, it's dark. You can't even see where you're going."

w to get her back, Jondalar!"
In the morning," he said, taking her in his arms.
he gone by then," the woman wailed.
be light then, and we'll see their tracks. We'll follow them.
fcbback, Ayla. I promise, we'll get her back."
lalar. What will I do without Whinney? She's my friend.
Ime, she was my only friend," Ayla said, giving in to the
argument, but breaking down into tears.
held her and let her cry for a moment, then said, "Right
ed to see if Racer is gone, too, and find Wolf."
denly remembered hearing the wolf yelp in pain, and she
ned for him and for the young stallion. She whistled once
id then she made the sound she used to call the horses.
rd a whinny first, and then a whine. Jondalar went to find
Ie Ayla followed the sound of the wolf in pain until she
She reached down to comfort the animal and felt something
ky.
ou're hurt." She tried to pick him up to carry him to the
here she could restart the fire and see. He yelped in pain as
id under his weight. Then he struggled out of her arms,
ip on his own legs, and though she knew it cost him some
alked back to their camp on his own.
llo also returned to the camp, leading Racer, while Ayla was
the fire. "His rope held," the man announced. He had
the habit of using sturdy ropes to hold the stallion, who
been a little harder for him to handle than Whinney was
lad he's safe," the woman said, hugging the stallion's neck,
ig back to look him over more closely, just to make sure.
tl use a stronger rope, Jondalar?" Ayla said, angry with
I had been more careful, Whinney wouldn't have gotten
relationship with the mare was closer. Whinney was a
i did what she wanted because the horse wanted to, and
sed a light tether to keep the horse from wandering too far
l always been enough.
t your fault, Ayla. The herd wasn't after Racer. They
lare, not a stallion. Whinney wouldn't have gone if the
't made her go."
ew those horses were out there, and I should have realized
come for Whinney. Now she's gone, and even Wolf is
r bad?" Jondalar asked.

"I don't know," Ayla said. "It hurts him too much when I touclil to be certain, but I think his rib is either badly bruised or broken must have gotten kicked. I'll give him something for pain, and I'll to find out for sure in the morning . . . before we look for Whinno» Suddenly she reached out for the man. "Oh, Jondalar, what ifwed^" find her? What if I've lost her forever?" she cried.

r

25

wk, Ayla," Jondalar said, bending down on one knee to
I ground that was covered with the imprint of horse hooves.
; herd must have been here last night. The trail is clear. I
ivould be easy to track them once it got light."
red down at the tracks, then up toward the northeast in the
cy seemed to be heading. They were near the edge of the
s, and she could see far into the distance across the open
i, but as hard as she tried, she could not see a single horse.
l herself thinking, The tracks are plain enough here, but who
long we will be able to follow them?
ig woman had not slept at all after she had been awakened
motion and discovered that her beloved friend was gone.
it the sky lightened, shading from ebony to indigo, she was
it was still too dark to see any distinctive features on the
ad stirred up the fire and started water boiling for tea while i transformed, shifting through a
monochromatic spectrum
' paler shades of blue.
I crept near her while she was staring into the flames, but
hine to get her attention. She had taken the opportunity to
m closely. Though he had winced when she prodded
was grateful to find no broken bones. A bruise was bad
idalar had gotten up soon after the morning tea was ready,
fore it was light enough to search for signs.
rry and leave right away, so they don't get too far ahead of
lid. "We can pile everything into the bowl boat and ... no
i't do that." She suddenly realized that, without the mare
to find, they couldn't just pack up and go. "Racer doesn't
to pull the pole drag, so we can't take it or the bowl boat.
en take Whinney's pack-saddle basket."
we're going to have any chance to catch up with that herd,
o ride double on Racer. That means we can't even take his
We'll have to cut our load down to bare necessities,"
d.

415

They stopped to digest the new situation the loss of Will put them in. Both of them realized there were some hard decisions to make.

"If we take just the sleeping rolls and the ground cover which can be used as a low tent, and roll them up together, that should be fine. Racer's back behind us," Jondalar suggested.

"A low tent should be enough," Ayla agreed. "That's all we took when we went with the hunters of our clan. We used a stick to prop up the front, and rocks or heavy bones that we found to wedge down around the edges." She began to remember the times when she and several women accompanied the men when they went to hunt.

"The women had to carry everything except the hunting spears; we had to move fast to keep up, so we traveled light."

"What else did you take? How light do you think we can travel?" Jondalar asked, his curiosity piqued.

"We'll need the fire-making kit and some tools. A chopper to cut wood to burn, and to break up the bones of any animals we might want to butcher. We can burn dried dung and grass, too, but we need something to cut the stems. A knife to skin animals, and a knife to cut meat," she began. Ayla was remembering not only the times that she accompanied the hunters, but the time she traveled alone when she left the clan.

"I'll wear my belt with the loops for holding my axe, and my hunting knife," Jondalar said. "You should wear yours, too."

"A digging stick is always a help, and it can be used to prop up the tent. Some extra warm clothes in case it turns really cold and extra foot-coverings," the woman continued.

"An extra pair of boot liners. That's a good idea. Under tunics and breeches, fur mitts, and we can always wrap our sleeping furs around us if we have to."

"A waterbag or two ..."

"We can tie those to our belts, too, and with enough cord to make a loop to go over the arm, we can wear them close to the body when it gets too cold, so they won't freeze."

"I'll need my medicine bag, and maybe I should take the sewing --it doesn't take much room--and my sling."

"Don't forget the spear-throwers and spears," Jondalar added.

"Do you think I should take any flint-knapping tools, or flint blanks, in case a knife or something breaks?"

"Whatever we take, it should be no more than I can carry on my back ... or could if I had a carrying basket."

"If anyone carries anything on his back, I think it should be me," Jondalar said, "but I don't have my backframe."

e can make a back-carrier of some kind, probably out of
sk-saddles and some rope or thong, but how can I sit
rou're wearing it?" Ayla asked.

ang to sit behind ..." They looked at each other and
even had to decide how to ride, and both of them had
n assumptions. It was the first time Ayla had smiled all
lalar noticed.

o guide Racer, so I have to be in back," Ayla said.
; him with you in front of me," the man said, "but if you
u won't be able to see anything but my back. I don't
: happy if you couldn't see ahead, and we both need to
ie trail. It may be harder to follow over hard ground or
e other tracks to confuse it, and you are a good tracker."
e widened. "You're right, Jondalar. I don't know if I
if I couldn't see ahead." She understood that he had been
it following the trail left by the horses, just as she had,
considered her feelings. Tears suddenly filled her eyes
she felt overflowing inside her, and then the tears over-
/h.

Ayla. We'll find Whinney."
ying about Whinney. I was thinking how much I love
ears just came out."
too," he said, reaching for her, feeling a constriction in

she was in his arms, sobbing on his shoulder, and the
e were for Whinney as well. "Jondalar, we've got to find

i^e'll just keep looking until we do. Now, how about fix- tack for me. Something that can hold the
spear-throwers

rs on the outside, where they will be easy to reach."
dn't be too hard. We'll have to take dried traveling food,
^a said, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand.
i do you think we'll need?" he asked.

. How long will we be gone?" she asked.
>n stopped them both. How long would they be gone?
lid it take them to find Whinney and get her back?
r won't take more than a few days to track the herd and
perhaps we should take enough for half a moon cycle,"

I, thinking of the counting words. "That's more than ten
s much as three hands, fifteen days. Do you think it will

t think so, but it's best to be prepared," Jondalar said.

"We can't leave this camp alone for that long," Ayla said " kind of animal will come and tear it apart, wolves or hyenas or i'll*8 ines or bears . . . no, bears are sleeping, but something. They'll k^^ up the tent, the bowl boat, anything leather, and the extra food U^ ^ will we do with everything we have to leave behind?"

"Maybe Wolf could stay behind and watch the camp?" Jondalar <saL* wrinkling his forehead. "Wouldn't he stay if you told him to3 ?? hurt, anyway. Wouldn't it be better for him not to travel?"

"Yes, it would be better for him, but he won't stay. He would for while, but he'd come looking for us if we didn't get back within a daw or so." '

"Maybe we could tie him close to the camp ..."

"No! He would hate that, Jondalar!" Ayla exclaimed. "You wouldn't like to be made to stay someplace that you didn't want to be! Besides if wolves or something did come, they could attack him and he wouldn't be able to fight, or run out of their way. We'll just have to think of some other way to protect our things."

They walked back to their camp in silence, Jondalar a little cha grined and Ayla worried, but both of them still trying to resolve the problem of what to do with their gear while they were gone. As they s approached the tent, Ayla remembered something. }

"I have an idea," she said. "Maybe we could put everything in the ; tent and close it up. I still have some of that wolf repellent I made to keep Wolf from chewing on things. I could soften it up and spread it on the tent. That might keep some animals away."

"It might, for a while at least, until the rains washed it away, and that could take some time, but it wouldn't keep out the ones that tried to dig or burrow under it." Jondalar paused. "Why couldn't we gather everything together and wrap it up with a tent? Then you could put your repellent on it ... but we shouldn't just leave it out."

"No, I think we have to get it up, off the ground, like we do with the meat," Ayla said, then more excited, "Maybe we could put it up ^ on the poles. And cover it with the bowl boat, to keep the rain away."

"That's a good idea!" Jondalar said, then paused again. "But those poles could be knocked over by a cave lion, or even a determined pa" of wolves or hyenas." He looked around trying to think, and he noticed a large clump of brambles with long leafless canes full of sharp thorns spreading out from the middle. "Ayla," he said, "do you think w6 could poke the three poles through the middle of those brambles, o them together about halfway up, put our tent bundle on top of ttia» and cover it all with the bowl boat?" „

Ayla's smiled broadened as he talked. "I think we could caretuyi

' those canes so we could get close enough to get the poles and put everything on top, then weave them back in with Small animals would still be able to get to it, but most of eepine, or staying in their nests, and those sharp thorns ably keep the bigger animals away. Even lions will avoid s. Tondalar, I think it would work!"

the few items they could take required thought and consid- sy decided to take a little extra flint and a few essential tools with, some extra rope and cordage, and as much food as rack. In sorting through her things, Ay la located the special ; mammoth-tusk dagger that Talut had given to her at the dien she was adopted by the Lion Camp. The belt had thin igs threaded through it that could be pulled out into loops

- things, in particular the dagger, although the carrying belt e used to hold many other useful objects close at hand.

he belt around her hips, over her outer fur tunic, then took »ut and turned it over in her hands, wondering if she should

- ugh its point was very sharp, it was more ceremonial than lamut had used one like it to cut her arm, and then, with e had drawn, to mark the ivory plaque that he had worn .leek, counting her among the Mamutoi.

also watched a similar dagger used to make tattoos, by lines in the skin with the point. Black charcoal from ash hen put into the resulting wounds. She didn't know that oduced a natural antiseptic that inhibited infection, and it ly that the Mamut who told her knew exactly why it ie only knew that it had been strongly impressed on her e anything but burned ash wood to darken the scar when ttoo.

the dagger back in its rawhide sheath and left it there. eked up another leather sheath that protected the extremely >lade of a small ivory-handled knife Jondalar had made for t it through a loop in her belt, and then she put the handle let he had given her through yet another loop. The stone small axe was also wrapped in leather to protect it. led that there was no reason the belt couldn't hold her w. Then she tucked her sling through it, and she finally pouch that held stones for her sling. She felt weighted it was a convenient way to carry things when they had to erylittle. She added her spears to the ones Jondalar had

- n the carrier of the backpack.
- nger than they had thought to decide what to take, and

even more time to safely stow everything they were leaving
Ayla felt anxious over the delay, but by noon they were
mounted and leaving.

When they started out, Wolf loped along beside them but
lagged behind, obviously in some pain. Ayla worried about
sure how far or how fast he could travel, but she decided she
have to let him follow at his own pace, and if he couldn't
would have to catch up when they stopped. She was torn
for both animals, but Wolf was nearby and, though injured
confident that he would recover. Whinney could be anywhere
longer they delayed, the farther away she might be.

They followed the trail of the herd more or less northeast for some
distance; then the tracks of the horses inexplicably changed direction.
Ayla and Jondalar overshot the turn and thought for a moment that
they had lost the trail. They turned back, but it was late afternoon
the time they found it again, going east, and it was near nightfall
when they came to a river.

It was evident that the horses had crossed, but it was getting too
dark to see the hoofprints and they decided to camp beside the river.
The question was, which side? If they crossed now, their wet clothes
would probably dry before morning, but Ayla was afraid Wolf would
not be able to find them if they crossed the water before he caught
with them. They decided to wait for him and set up their camp where
they were.

With their minimal gear, the camp felt bare and depressing. They
hadn't seen any more than tracks the whole day. Ayla was beginning
to worry that they might be following the wrong herd, and she was
worried about Wolf. Jondalar tried to ease her anxieties, but when
Wolf hadn't appeared by the time the night sky was filled with stars,
her concern for him grew. She waited up quite late, but when
Jondalar finally convinced her to join him in their sleeping furs,
she still couldn't go to sleep, though she was tired. She had almost
dozed off when she felt a cold wet nose nuzzle her.

"Wolf! You made it! You're here! Jondalar, look! Wolf is here,"
Ayla cried, feeling him wince under her hugs. Jondalar felt relieved
and glad to see him, too, though he told himself his happiness was
mostly for Ayla's sake. At least she might get some sleep. But
first she got up to give the animal the share she had saved for
him of their meal, a steamed piece of dried meat, roots, and a
cake of traveling food. Earlier, she had mixed dried willowbark
tea into a bowl of water, had put aside for him, and he was
thirsty enough to lap it up, pail by pail.

ition and all. He curled up beside their sleeping roll and Beep with one arm around him, while Jondalar cuddled close t arm around her. In the freezing cold but clear night, they or clothes, except for their boots and fur outer garments, idn't bother with setting up the low tent.

mght Wolf seemed better in the morning, but she took more l out of her otter-skin medicine bag and added a cup of the » his food. They all had to face crossing the cold river, and sure how it would affect the animal's injury. It might chill uch, but on the other hand, the cold water might actually healing wound, and the internal bruising.

young woman wasn't any too eager to get her clothing wet. tie dousing of cold water so much--she had often bathed in er--it was the idea of wearing wet trousers and footwear in eezing air. When she started to wrap the upper leather of Opped moccasinlike boots around her calf, she suddenly a" mind.

t going to wear these into the water," she declared. "I'd arefoot and get my feet wet. At least I'd have dry footwear vhea we get across."

iaiy not be a bad idea," Jondalar said.

I'm not even going to wear these," Ayla said, pulling off rs and standing there bare from her tunic down--which lalar smile and want to do something else besides chase t he knew Ayla was too concerned about Whinney to think r'mg.

y as it might look, he had to admit it was an intelligent "he river wasn't exceptionally large, though it did look swift. l cross the water riding double on Racer, with bare legs and put dry clothes on when they reached the other side. It only be more comfortable, it would keep them from a pro- l.

you're right, Ayla. It's better not to get these wet," he said, his leg-coverings.

put on the backpack, and Ayla held the sleeping roll, just re it wouldn't get wet. The man felt a little silly getting up se with his lower half bare, but feeling Ayla's skin between "e him forget it. The obvious result of his thoughts was not ' If she hadn't been so filled with her need to hurry, she, have been tempted to stay a little longer. In the back of her "ought that some other time they might ride double again, l. but this was not the time for fun.

The water was icy cold when the brown stallion entered the sr breaking through the crust of ice near the edge. Though the river 'l"*'! swift, and soon deep enough to wet their legs to midway up tli-^ thighs, the horse did not lose his footing; it was not so deep that he liiSI to swim. Racer's two riders tried to curl their legs out of the water I first, but soon felt numbed to the cold river. About halfway acms. ^ Ay la turned around to look for Wolf. He was still on the bank padi' back and forth, avoiding the initial plunge, as he often did. Ayla wh'^ tied to encourage him on, and she saw him finally jump in.

They reached the opposite shore without incident, except for feeliir cold. The chill wind blowing on their wet legs when they dismounted didn't help. After pushing most of the water off with their hands they hurried to put on their pants and moccasin-boots, with liners of dowirol chamois wool felted together—a departing gift from the Sharamudoi. I for which they were more than grateful at that moment. Their legs and feet tingled with the returning warmth. When Wolf reached the shore,; he climbed on the bank and shook himself. Ayla checked him over to! satisfy herself that he was none the worse for the cold swim. ; They located the trail easily and remounted the young stallion. Wotf again tried to keep up, but he soon lagged behind. Ayla worriedly' watched him falling farther and farther back. That he had found them' the night before eased her fears a little, and she consoled herself with the knowledge that he had often run off hunting or exploring on his own and had always caught up with them again. She hated to leave him behind, but they had to find Whinney.

It was midafternoon before they finally caught sight of horses in the distance. As they drew nearer, Ayla strained to find her friend amidst the others. She thought she caught a glimpse of a familiar hay-colored coat, but she couldn't be sure. There were too many other horses with coats that were similar, and when the wind carried their scent to the herd, they raced away.

"Those horses have been hunted before," Jondalar remarked. But he was glad that he caught himself in time before he voiced his next thought out loud: There must be people in this region who like horse-meat. He didn't want to upset Ayla even more. The herd soon outdis tanced a young stallion that was carrying two passengers, but 0167 continued to follow the trail. It was all they could do for now. The herd turned south, for some reason only they knew, heawfv back toward the Great Mother River. Before long, the ground beg^ to slope up. The land became rugged and rocky, and the grass id sparse. They continued until they came to a broad field high aDove^ rest of the landscape. When they caught sight of water sparkm'Bj

realized they were on a plateau on top of the prominence
Inrtd around the base of a few days before. The river they
i hugged its western face before joining the Mother.
erd started to graze, they moved in closer.
ehe is, Jondalar!" Ayla said with excitement, pointing to a
inimal.
m you be sure? Several of those horses have a similar color."
her coloration was similar to others, the woman knew the
Information of her friend too well to doubt it. She whistled
ley looked up. "I told you. It is her!"
stied again, and Whinney started toward her. But the lead
we, graceful animal with a darker than usual, grayish-gold
he newest addition to the herd moving away from the fold
I in to head her off. The herd stallion joined in to help. He
stunning, cream-colored horse with a high-standing silver
w stripe down his back, and a flowing silvery tail that looked
te when he swished it. His lower legs were silver-gray, too.
at Whinney's hocks and herded her toward the rest of the
ho were watching with nervous interest; then he cantered
allenge the younger stallion. He pawed the ground, then
neighed, daring Racer to fight.
aig brown stallion backed away, intimidated, and could not
to move in closer, much to the frustration of his human
s. From a safe distance, he neighed to his dam, and they
[imey's familiar answering nicker. Ayla and Jondalar dis-
) discuss the situation.
re we going to do, Jondalar?" Ayla wailed. "They won't let
w are we going to get her?"
vorry, we will," he said. "If necessary, we'll use the spear- lut I don't think we'll have to."
trance calmed her, and she hadn't thought of the spear-
She didn't want to kill any horses if she didn't have to, but
aything to get Whinney back. "Do you have a plan?" she
tty sure this herd has been hunted before, so they have some
pie. That gives us an advantage. The herd stallion probably
er was trying to challenge him. He and that big mare were
rcep him from stealing one of their herd. So we have to
" away," Jondalar began. "Whinney will come when you
her. If I can distract the stallion, you can help her avoid
intil you get close enough to get on her back. Then, if
at the big mare, or even poke her with your spear if she

crowds in on Whinney, I think she'll keep her distance until v

> y-u

away.

Ayla smiled, feeling relieved. "It sounds easy enough. What will ~3^ do with Racer?" wulWe'

"There was a rock a little ways back with a couple of bushes ern • near it. I can tether him to one of them. It wouldn't hold if he rZiS? fought it, but he's used to being tied, and I think he'll stay the l^ Taking the young stallion's lead rope, Jondalar started back with 1 strides. ^~

When they reached the rock, Jondalar said, "Here, take your soear thrower and a spear or two." Then he slipped off the backpack. "Pin going to take this off and leave it for now. It limits my movement." He took his own thrower and spears out of the holder. "Once you net Whinney, you can get Racer and come back for me."

The highland angled in a northeast-to-southwest direction, with Is gradual incline on the north that became somewhat steeper toward thr east. At the southwestern end, it jutted up like a precipice. On die western side, facing the river they had crossed earlier, it fell off sharply enough, but toward the south and the Great Mother River there was • high precipice with a sheer drop. As Ayla and Jondalar walked back toward the horses, the day was clear, and the sun was high in the sly,; though well past its zenith. They looked over the steep western edge, | then shied back from it, afraid that a misstep or a stumble might carry; them down.

When they got closer to the grazing herd, they stopped and tried t>j find Whinney. The herd—mares, foals, and yearlings—was grazing a | the middle of a field of waist-high dry grass; the herd stallion was off to one side, somewhat away from the others. Ayla thought she saw her horse far back, toward the south. She whistled, the dun-yellow mare's head came up, and Whinney started toward them. With his spear-thrower in hand and a spear in place ready to go, Jondalar slowly edged toward the cream-colored stallion, attempting to get between him and the herd, while Ayla walked toward the mares, determined to reach ^ Whinney.

While she was working her way toward the mare, some of the wrses stopped grazing and looked up, but they weren't looking at her. a had a sudden feeling that something was not right. She turned aro to look for Jondalar, and she saw a wisp of smoke, and then another— was the smell of smoke she had noticed. The field of dry grass ablaze in several places. Suddenly, through the haze of the srooke,-^ saw figures running toward the horses, shouting and brandi ^ torches! They were chasing the horses toward the edge of the ^ toward the sharp drop-off, and Whinney was among them!

•ces were beginning to panic, but among the high-pitched
»thought she heard a familiar neigh coming from another
Looking north, she spied Racer with his lead rope dragging
inning toward the herd. Why did he have to break loose
i ^where was Jondalar? The air was filled with more than
e could feel the tension and smell the contagious fear of the
bey started moving away from the fire.
were lostling around her, and she couldn't see Whinney any
Racer was coming toward her, running fast, caught up in
She whistled loud and long, then made a dash for him. He
l turned in her direction, but his ears were laid flat back and
ere rolling with fear. She reached him and grabbed for the
ing from his halter, yanking his head around. He screamed
l as horses dodged around him. The rope burned as he
hrough Ayla's hands, but she held on, and when his forefeet
ie ground, she grabbed his mane and leaped up on his back.
;ared again. Ayla was nearly thrown, but she held on. The
still full of fear, but he was used to a weight on his back.
a comfort in it, and in the familiar woman. He settled down
mt it was difficult for her to control the horse Jondalar had
hough she had ridden Racer a few times and knew the signals
wen developed for the horse, she was not accustomed to
ith reins or a rope. The man had used both with equal ease,
allion knew the confidence of his usual rider. He did not
ell to Ayla's first tentative attempts, but she was looking for
while trying to settle him down, and she was distracted by
s need to find her friend.
were running, crowding together all around her, neighing,
;, screaming, and their fear was strong in her nostrils. She
gain, loud and piercing, but she wasn't sure if she could be
^e the din, and she knew the urge to run was powerful.
ly, in the haze of dust and smoke, Ayla saw a horse slow, try
'ay and resist the urgings of the panicked horses racing past
lunicating their fear of the fire. Though her coat was the
ie choking air, Ayla knew it was Whinney. She whistled
courage her, and she saw her beloved mare stop, undecided.
ct to run with the herd was strong in her, but that whistle
s meant safety, security, love, and she was not as frightened
She had been raised with the smell of smoke nearby. It had
led the proximity of people.
v Whinney standing her ground while other horses brushed
umped her while trying to avoid her. The woman urged
i^ard. The mare started to turn back toward the woman, but

a light-colored horse suddenly appeared, seemingly out of
The big herd stallion tried to head her off, screaming a warnin[^] ' lunge at Racer, even in his panic, trying to keep his new mare- from the younger male. This time Racer screamed a response "[^]P!
pranced and pawed the ground and started for the bigger ani[^] forgetting in all the excitement that he was too young and inei----* [^] ended to fight a mature stallion. [^]1
Then, for some reason--a sudden change of mind or contagion nfl fear--the stallion wheeled and pounded away. Whinney started tn[^] follow, and Racer rushed to overtake her. As the herd raced closer and closer to the edge of the cliff and the sure death waiting below the mare with a coat the color of sun-ripened hay and the young brown stallion she had foaled, with the woman on his back, were being carried along with them! With fierce determination, Ayla pulled Racer to a stop in front of his dam. He whinnied with fear, wanting to run in panic with the rest of the horses, but he was held in check by Ac? woman and the commands he was trained to obey. .;
Then all the horses had passed her by. As Whinney and Racer stood shivering with fear, the last of the herd disappeared over the edge of the cliff. Ayla shuddered at the distant sound of neighing, screaming, I whinnying horses, and then she was stunned by the silence. Whinney' and Racer and she, herself, could have been with them. She breathed deeply at the close call, then looked around for Jondalar. She didn't see him. The fire was moving south but east; the wind was blowing away from the southwestern edge of the field--but die flames had served their purpose. She looked in all directions, but Jondalar was nowhere in sight. Ayla and the two horses were alone on the smoking field. She felt a lump of fear and anxiety rise in her throat. What happened to Jondalar?
She slid off Racer and, still holding his lead rope, leaped easily onto Whinney's back, then headed back to the place where they had separated. She scanned the area carefully, walking back and forth, looking for tracks, but the ground was covered with hoofprints. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she spied something and ran to see what it was. With her heart pounding in her throat, she picked up Jondalar's spear-thrower!
Looking more closely, she saw footprints, obviously many P[^]". but distinctive among them were the imprints of Jondalar's large t encased in his well-worn boots. She had seen those prints too many times at their campsites to be mistaken. Then she saw a dark spot o the ground. She reached down to touch it and pulled back a fingertip red with blood.

.s opened wide, and fear caught in her throat. Standing was so as not to disturb the signs, she carefully looked vine to piece together some sense of what had happened. l experienced tracker, and to her trained eye, it soon became someone had hurt Jondalar and dragged him away. She he tracks north for a while. Then she took note of her sur- so she could pick up the trail again, mounted Whinney, r*s lead firmly in hand, and turned west to retrieve the back- ode toward the west, she was scowling, and the hard angry ressed exactly how she felt, but she had to think things out ; what to do. Someone had hurt Jondalar and taken him no one had the right to do that. Perhaps she didn't under- le ways of the Others, but that was one thing she knew. She ithing else, too. She didn't know how yet, but she was going back. relieved when she saw the backpack still leaning against the as they'd left it. She dumped everything out of it and made stments so Racer could carry it on his back, then began to ie had left off her carrying belt that morning--it had felt nsy--and stuffed everything into the backpack. She lifted d examined the sharp ceremonial dagger that was still in the lentally pricking herself with the point. She stared at the of blood beading up, and for some strange reason she felt like e was alone again. Someone had taken Jondalar away. iy she put the belt on again and stuffed her dagger, knife, id hunting weapons back into it. He wasn't going to be gone he packed the tent on Racer's back, but she kept the sleeping er. Who could tell what kind of weather she might run into? i waterbag, too. Then she took out a cake of traveling food wn on the rock. It wasn't so much that she was hungry, but she had to keep her strength up if she was going to follow td find Jondalar. icr nagging worry that had been bothering her besides the ui, was the missing wolf. She couldn't leave to find Jondalar ound Wolf. He was more than just an animal companion ved, he could be essential in following the trail. She hoped tpppear before nightfall, and she wondered if she could back- their trail until she found him. But what if he was hunting? miss him. As impatient as it made her feel, she decided it) wait. d to think about what she could do, but she couldn't even

think of possible courses of action. The very act of hurting
and taking him away was so alien to her that it was hard
beyond it. It seemed such an unreasonable, illogical thing to
Intruding on her thoughts she heard a whine and then a
turned to see Wolf running toward her, obviously happy to see her.
She was greatly relieved.

"Wolf!" she cried with joy. "You made it, and much earlier than
yesterday. Are you better?" After greeting him affectionately she
examined him and was glad when she confirmed again that although Wolf
was definitely bruised, nothing was broken, and he seemed much improved.

She decided to leave immediately, so she could pick up the trail
while it was still light. She tied Racer's lead to a strap that held
his riding blanket on, then mounted the mare. Calling Wolf to follow
her, she started back toward the trail, then rode all the way to the place
where she had found his footprints along with the others, his spear-
thrower, and the spot of blood, now a slightly brownish stain on the
ground. She dismounted to examine the place again.

"We have to find Jondalar, Wolf," she said. The animal looked at
her quizzically.

She lowered herself and, sitting comfortably on her haunches,
looked more closely at the footprints, making an effort to identify
individuals so she could estimate how many there were, and to commit
the size and shapes of them to memory. The wolf waited, sitting on
his haunches and staring at her, sensing something unusual and impor-
tant. Finally she pointed to the bloodstain.

"Someone hurt Jondalar and carried him away. We need to find
him." The wolf sniffed the blood, then wagged his tail and yipped.

"That's Jondalar's footprint," she said, pointing to the distinctive large
impression among the smaller ones. Wolf again sniffed where she
pointed, then looked at her, as if waiting for her next move. "They
took him away," she said, indicating the other imprints of human feet.

Suddenly she stood up and walked over to Racer. She took Jondalar's
spear-thrower out of the pack on Racer's back and knelt to let the
wolf sniff it. "We have to find Jondalar, Wolf! Someone took him
away, and we're going to get him back!"

it slowly became aware that he was awake, but caution lie still until he could sort out what was wrong, because most certainly was. For one thing, his head was throbbing. his eyes a crack. There was only dim light, but enough to ',, hard-packed dirt he was lying on. Something felt dry and ie side of his face, but when he attempted to reach up and >at it was, he discovered that his hands were tied together t)ack. His feet were tied together, too.

l to his side and looked around. He was inside a small round kind of wooden frame covered with skins, which he sensed i larger enclosure. There were no sounds of wind, no drafts, ig of the hides as there would have been if he had been i though it was cool, it wasn't freezing. And he suddenly t he was no longer wearing his fur parka.

struggled to sit up, and a wave of dizziness washed over irobbing in his head localized to a sharp pain above his left ir the dry, caked residue. He stopped when he heard the ices drawing near. Two women were speaking an unfamil- i, though he thought he detected a few words that sounded mutoi.

it there. I'm awake," he called out, in the language of the Hunters. "Will someone come and untie me? These ropes ssary. I'm sure there has been a misunderstanding. I mean The voices stopped for a moment, then continued, but no nswered or came.

lying facedown on the dirt, tried to remember how he had ;, and what he might have done that would have prompted tie him up. In his experience, the only time people were when they behaved wildly and tried to hurt someone. He ^all of fire--and horses racing toward the drop-off at the field. People must have been hunting the horses, and he'd l up in the middle of it.

Then he remembered seeing Ayla riding Racer, but having to
controlling him. He wondered how the stallion had ended up in the
middle of the stampeding herd when he had left him tied to a high
Jondalar had almost panicked then, afraid the horse would react
to his herding instinct and follow the others over the edge, taking
with him. He remembered running toward them with his spear fixed
in his spear-thrower. As much as he loved that brown stallion, he
would have killed Racer before allowing him to carry Ayla over the
cliff. That was the last thing he remembered, except for a fleeting
recollection of a sharp pain before everything went dark. ^
Someone must have hit me with something, Jondalar thought. It
was a hard blow, too, because I don't remember anything about being
brought here, and my head still hurts. Did they think I was spoiling
their hunting strategy? The first time he'd met Jeren and his hunters,
it had been under similar circumstances. He and Thonolan had inadvertently
run off a herd of horses the hunters had been driving toward
a trap. But Jeren had understood, once he got over his anger, that it
wasn't intentional, and they had become friends. I didn't spoil the hunt
of these people, did I?
He tried again to sit up. Bracing himself on his side, he pulled his
knees up, then strained to roll and bob up into a sitting position, but it
took a few tries and left his head throbbing from the effort, but he
finally succeeded. He sat with his eyes closed, hoping the pain would
soon subside. But as it eased off, his concern for Ayla and the animals
grew. Had Whinney and Racer been swept over the edge with the
herd, and had Racer taken Ayla with him?
Was she dead? He felt his heart beat with fear just thinking about it.
Were they all gone, Ayla and the horses? What about Wolf? When the
injured animal finally reached the field, he would find no one. Jondalar
imagined him sniffing around, trying to follow a trail that went nowhere.
What would he do? Wolf was a good hunter, but he was hurt.
How well could he hunt for himself with his injury? He would miss
Ayla and the rest of his "pack." He wasn't used to living alone. How
would he get along? What would happen when he came up against a
pack of wild wolves? Would he be able to defend himself? |
Isn't anyone going to come? I'd like a drink of water, Jondalar
thought. They must have heard me. I'm hungry, too, but I'm
thirsty. His mouth felt drier and drier, and his craving for water grew
stronger. "Hey, out there! I'm thirsty! Can't someone bring a
drink of water?" he shouted. "What kind of people are you? Tying a
man up and not even giving him a drink of water!" , ^
No one answered. After shouting a few more times, he decided

ith. It was only making him more thirsty, and his head still
nsidered lying down, but it had taken so much effort to get
wasn't sure if he could do it again.

rime passed, he began to feel morose. He was weak, bor-
'lirious, and he imagined the worst, vividly. He convinced
Ayla was dead, and both the horses as well. When he
Wolf, he pictured the poor beast wandering alone, injured
o hunt, looking for Ayla and open to attack by local wolves
ir some other animal . . . better, perhaps, than dying of
ie wondered if he was going to be left to die of thirst, and
hoped he would, if Ayla was gone. Identifying with the
visioned for the wolf, the man decided that he and Wolf
last surviving members of their unusual band of travelers,
y would soon be gone.

ulled out of his despair by the sound of people approach-
itance flap of the small structure was thrown back, and
opening he saw a figure standing, feet apart and hands on
etted by torchlight. She issued a sharp command. Two
red the enclosed space, walked to either side of him, lifted
I dragged him out. They propped him up on his knees in
, his hands and feet still bound. His head was throbbing
,e leaned unsteadily against one of the women. She pushed

ian who had ordered him to be brought forward looked
l for a moment or two and then she laughed. It was harsh
at, a demented, jarring curse of a sound. Jondalar recoiled
f and felt a shudder of fear. She spoke a few sharp words
iidn't understand, but he tried to straighten up and look at
ision blurred, and he weaved unsteadily. The woman
rked more orders, then turned on her heel and stalked out.
who were holding him up dropped him and followed her,
veral others. Jondalar toppled over on his side, dizzy and

e bindings on his feet being cut, and then water was poured
fa. It almost choked him, but he tried eagerly to swallow
yoman who was holding the waterbag spoke a few words
isgust, and then she thrust the bladder of liquid at an older
me forward and held the waterbag to Jondalar's mouth,
*t up, not more gently, exactly, but with more patience, so
r could swallow and finally slake his ravenous thirst.
; was fully satisfied, the woman impatiently spat out a
he man took the water away. Then she pulled Jondalar to

his feet. He staggered with dizziness as she pushed him ahead the shelter, and in with a group of other men. It was cold, but'n l< offered him his fur parka or even untied his hands so he could 01 them together.

But the cool air revived him, and he noticed that some of the men had their hands tied behind their backs, too. He looked closely at the people among whom he had been thrust. They wei*2 ages, from young men—more like boys actually—to oldsters. All*21 them looked thin, weak, and dirty, with tattered, inadequate cloriw^ and matted hair. A few had untended wounds, full of dried blood and dirt. ^i

Jondalar tried to speak to the man standing next to him in Mamutf-i but he just shook his head. Jondalar thought he didn't understand as he tried Sharamudoi. The man looked away just as a woman holdingt: spear came and threatened Jondalar with it, barking a sharp commandl He didn't know her words, but her actions were plain enough, andht wondered if the reason the man had not spoken was that he didn't understand him, or if he had, had not wanted to speak, j

Several women with spears spaced themselves around the group of men. One of them shouted some words and the men started walldnB Jondalar used the opportunity to look around and try to get a sense of where he was. The settlement, consisting of several rounded dwdfc-i ings, felt vaguely familiar, which was strange because the countrysid| was totally unknown to him. Then he realized it was the dwellings* They resembled Mamutoi earthlodges. Though they were not exactly the same, they appeared to be constructed in a similar fashion, probes biy using the bones of mammoths as structural supports that wct< covered with thatch, then sod and clay. 5

They started walking uphill, which afforded Jondalar a broadtf view. The countryside was mostly grassy steppeland or tundra—tree less plains on land with frozen subsoil that thawed to a black inucly surface in summer. Tundra was able to support only dwarfed aetvs, but in spring their conspicuous blossoms added color and beauty, aw they fed musk-oxen, reindeer, and other animals that could dige» them. There were also stretches of taiga, low-growing evergreen treeo so uniform in height that their tops could have been sheared on By some gigantic cutting tool, and in fact they were. Icy winds unv^ needles of sleet or sharp bits of gritty loess cut short any indivi twig or tip that dared to strive above its brethren. -^.

As they trudged higher, Jondalar saw a herd of mammoths y9" ' far to the north, and somewhat closer, reindeer. He knew ^ roamed nearby—the people had been hunting them—and he gu that bison and bear frequented the region in the warmer seasons.

iled his own country more than it did the dry grassy steppes at least in the types of plants that grew, although the vegetation was different, and probably the proportional mix

too.

ie corner of his eye, Jondalar caught movement to the left. n time to see a white hare dash across the hill chased by an }s he watched, the large rabbit suddenly bounded in an- ion, passing by the partially decomposed skull of a woolly then scooted into its hole.

tere are mammoths and rhinoceroses, Jondalar thought, ive lions, and with the other herding animals, probably [certainly wolves. Plenty of meat and fur-bearing animals, at grows. This is a bountiful land. Making such an assess- iecond nature to him, as it was to some degree to most ey lived off the land, and careful observations about its ere necessary.

s group reached a high, level place on the side of the hill, id. Jondalar looked down the hillside and saw that the o lived in this area had a unique advantage. Not only could be seen from a distance, the vast and various herds that land had to pass through a narrow corridor below that lay ;ep walls of limestone and a river. They would be easy to here. It made him wonder why they had been hunting the Great Mother River.

g wail brought Jondalar's attention back to his immediate fs. A woman with long, stringy, disheveled gray hair was)rted by two somewhat younger women as she wailed and dous grief. Suddenly she broke free, fell on her knees, and elf over something on the ground. Jondalar edged forward ser look. He was a good head taller than most of the other ith a few steps he understood the woman's grief.

i obviously a funeral. Stretched out on the ground were le--young, probably late teens or early twenties, he vo of them were definitely male; they were bearded. The was probably the youngest. His light facial hair was still parse. The gray-haired woman was sobbing over the body male, whose brown hair and short beard were more appar- wd one was fairly tall but thin, and something about the

le way it lay made him wonder if that person had had some iblem. He could see no facial hair, which made him think Man at first, but it also could have been a rather tall young taved, just as easily.

ils of clothing were not much help. They were all dressed

in leg coverings and loose tunics that disguised distinctive characteristics. The clothes appeared to be new, but lacked decorative details. It was almost as though someone didn't want them recognized in this world and had attempted to make them anonymous.

The gray-haired woman was lifted, almost dragged roughly away from the body of the young man by the two women who had tried to support her. Then another woman stepped forward and something about her made Jondalar look again. Her face strangely skewed, oddly unsymmetrical, with one side seemingly pushed back and slightly smaller than the other. She made no attempt to hide it. Her hair was light-colored, perhaps gray, pulled back and piled up into a bun on top of her head. ;

Jondalar thought she was about his mother's age, and she moved with the same grace and dignity, although there was no resemblance to Marthona. In spite of her slight deformity, the woman was not unattractive, and her face commanded attention. When she caught his eye, he realized he had been staring, but she looked away rather quickly, he thought. As she began to speak, he realized that she was conducting the funeral ceremony. She must be a mamut, he thought, a woman who communicates with the spirit world, a zeiatf donii for these people. 1

Something made him turn and look to the side of the congregation! Another woman was staring at him. She was tall, quite muscular and strong featured, but a handsome woman with light brown hair and, interestingly, very dark eyes. She did not turn away when he looked at her, but appraised him quite frankly. She had the size and shape of the general appearance of a woman that he would ordinarily be attracted to, he thought, but her smile made him uneasy. ?

Then he noticed she was standing with her legs apart and her hands on her hips, and suddenly he knew who she was: the woman who had laughed so menacingly. He fought an urge to move back and hide among the other men, knowing he couldn't even if he tried. He was not only a head taller, he was far healthier and more muscular than they. He would be conspicuous no matter where he stood. ^

The ceremony seemed rather perfunctory, as if it were an "obligation", rather than a solemn, important occasion. With no shrouds, the bodies were simply carried to a single shallow grave at a time. They were limp when they were picked up, Jondalar noted. They could not have been dead very long; no stiffness had set in yet and there was no smell. The tall, thin body went in first, placed on its back, and powdered red ochre was sprinkled on the head and neck, and, strangely, over the pelvis, the powerful generative area, making Jondalar wonder if, perhaps, it was indeed a woman.

, two were handled differently, but even more strangely. haired male was put in the common grave, to the left of rose from Jondalar's viewpoint, but on the figure's right, on his side, facing the first body. Then his arm was it so that his hand rested on the red-ochred pubic region of Tie third body was almost thrown into the grave, facedown, : side of the body that had been put in first. Red ochre was led on both of their heads. The sacred red powder was neant for protection, but for whom? And against what? aidedered.

e loosely piled dirt was being scooped back into the shallow rray-haired woman broke loose again. She ran to the grave something in it. Jondalar saw a couple of stone knives and a ear points.

eyed woman strode forward, clearly incensed. She cracked one of the men, pointing at the grave. He cringed but did then the shaman stepped forward and spoke, shaking her sther woman screamed at her in anger and frustration, but stood her ground and continued to shake her head. The led back and slapped her face with the back of her hand. a collective gasp, and then the angry woman stalked off, ie of spear-carrying females following her.

ian did not acknowledge the blow, not even to put her hand t, though Jondalar could see the growing redness even from :ood. The grave was hurriedly filled in, with soil that had es of loose charcoal and partially burned wood mixed in. res must have burned here, Jondalar thought. He glanced narrow corridor below. With dawning insight, it occurred this high ground was a perfect lookout from which fires ed to signal when animals--or anything else--approached. as the bodies were covered, the men were marched back lill and taken to an area surrounded by a high palisade of se trunks placed side by side and lashed together. Mammoth piled against a section of the fence, and Jondalar wondered ips the bones helped to prop it up. He was separated from uid taken back to the earthlodge, then shoved toward the liar, hide-covered enclosure again. But before he went in, w it was made.

iy frame was constructed of poles made from slender trees. r butt ends had been buried in the ground; the tops were er and joined. Leather hides covered the frame on the out- ^ entrance flap he had seen from inside was barred on the l a gatelike closure that could be secured shut with lashings.

Once inside, he continued his examination of the structure completely bare, lacking even a sleeping pallet. He could not st straight, except in the very middle, but he bent over to get clo<o^ side, then walked slowly around the small, dark space, studvino carefully. He noticed that the hides were old and torn, soinei* vt shreds that they seemed almost rotten, and they had been only to a! sewn together, as though done in a hurry. There were gaos a^ seams through which he could see some of the area beyond his cranm. quarters. He lowered himself to the ground and sat watching thf* trance of the earthlodge, which was open. A few people walked na but none entered.

After a time, he began to feel an urge to pass his water. With 1 hands tied, he could not even bare his member to relieve himself someone didn't come and untie him soon, he would wet himself I sides that, his wrists were getting raw where the ropes were rubbia He was getting angry. This was ridiculous! It had gone far enough! "Hey, out there!" he shouted. "Why am I being held like this? Ij an animal in a trap? I have done nothing to harm anyone. I need i hands free. If someone doesn't untie me soon, I will wet myself." 1 waited for a while, then shouted again. "Someone out there, come a untie me! What strange kind of people are you?"

He stood up and leaned against the structure. It was well made, h it gave a little. He stepped back and, aiming with his shoulder, r into the framing, trying to break it down. It gave a little more, and rammed it again. With a feeling of satisfaction, he heard a piece wood crack. He stepped back, ready to try again, when he hea people running into the earthlodge.

"It's about time someone came! Let me out of here! Let me out here now!" he shouted.

He heard the rustlings of someone unlashng the gate. Then t entrance flap was thrown back to reveal several women holding spe aimed at him. Jondalar ignored them and pushed his way out of t opening.

"Untie me!" he said, turning to the side so they could see him raist up the hands that were tied behind his back. "Get these ropes off me The older man who had helped him drink water stepped forwal "Zeiandonii! You ... far ... away," he said, obviously struggling remember the words.

Jondalar hadn't realized that in his anger, he had been speaking his native tongue. "You speak Zeiandonii?" he said to the roan surprise, but his overwhelming need came first. "Then tell them to E these ropes off me before I make a mess all over myself!"

e to one of the women. She answered, shaking her
e again. Finally she took a knife out of a sheath at her
command that made the rest of the women surround
irine spears, she stepped forward and motioned him
,ed his back to her and waited while she hacked at his
must need a good flint knapper around here, he
t think. Her knife is dull.
seemed forever, he felt the ropes fall away. Immediately
unfasten his closure flap, and, too much in need to be
ie pulled out his organ and frantically looked for a corner
f-the-way place to go. But the spear-holding women
lim move. In anger and defiance, he purposely turned
d, with a great sigh of relief, let his water come.
them all as the long yellow stream slowly emptied his
s as it hit the cold ground and raising up a strong
n in command seemed appalled, though she tried not
.pie of the women turned their heads or averted their
i in fascination, as if they'd never seen a man pass his
; older man was trying very hard not to smile, though
|hide his delight.
fpldalar was through, he tucked himself back in and then
|amentors, determined not to let them tie his hands again.
|ed himself to the man. "I am Jondalar of the Zeiandonii,
(Qa Journey."
|amey far, Zeiandonii. Maybe . . . too far."
(raveled much farther. I wintered last year with the Mamu-
gsturning home now."
'what I thought I heard you speaking before," the old man
ing into the language in which he was much more fluent.
*.. a few here who understand the language of the Mammoth
but the Mamutoi usually come from the north. You came
outh."
heard me speaking before, why didn't you come? I'm sure
n some misunderstanding. Why was I tied up?"
man shook his head, Jondalar thought with sadness. "You
lit soon enough, Zeiandonii."
y the woman interrupted with a spate of angry words. The
Mted to limp away, leaning on a staff.
^n't go! Who are you? Who are these people? And who is
o who told them to take me here?" Jondalar asked.
man halted and looked back. "Here, I am called Ardemun.- 6 are the S'Armunai. And the woman is ...
Attaroa."

1

Jondalar missed the emphasis that had been put on the name of the woman. "S'Armunai? Where have I heard that name before?"
... I remember. Laduni, the leader of the Losadunai ..."
"Laduni is leader?" Ardemun said.

"Yes. He told me about the Sarmunai when we were traveling but my brother didn't want to stop," Jondalar said.

"It's well you didn't, and too bad you are here now."

"Why?"

The woman in command of the spear holders interrupted again with a sharp order.

"Once I was a Losadunai. Unfortunately, I made a Journey," Ardemun said as he limped out of the earthlodge.

After he left, the woman in command said some sharp words to Jondalar. He guessed that she wanted to lead him someplace, but he decided to feign complete ignorance.

"I don't understand you," Jondalar said. "You'll have to call Ardemun back."

She spoke to him again, more angrily, then poked her spear at him. It broke the skin, and a line of blood trickled down his arm. Ardemun's eyes flared in his eyes. He reached over and touched the cut, then looked at his bloody fingers.

"That wasn't necessary—" he started to say.

She interrupted with more angry words. The other women circled him with their weapons as the woman walked out of the earthlodge, then they prodded Jondalar to follow. Outside, the cold made him shiver. They went past the palisaded enclosure, and though he couldn't see in, he sensed that he was being watched through the cracks between those inside. The whole idea puzzled him. Animals were sometimes driven into surrounds like that, so they couldn't get away. It was a way of hunting them, but why were people kept there? And how many were in there?

It's not all that large, he thought, there can't be too many in there. He imagined how much work it must have taken to fence in even a small area with wooden stakes. Trees were scarce on the hills. There was some woody vegetation in the form of brush, but the trees for the fence had to come from the valley below. They had to pull the trees down, trim them of branches, carry them up the hill, dig deep enough to hold them upright, make rope and cord, and tie the trees together with it. Why had these people been willing to put forth so much effort for something that made so little sense? He was led toward a small creek, largely frozen over, where Ardemun and several women were overseeing some young men who were

aw mammoth bones. The men all looked half-starved, and J where they found the strength to work so hard. yed him up and down once, her only acknowledgment of snored him. Jondalar waited, still wondering about the these strange people. After a while he became chilled, and oving around, jumping up and down and beating his arms inn himself. He was getting more and more angry at the it all, and, finally deciding he wasn't going to stand there he turned on his heel and started back. In the earthlodge, l be out of the wind. His sudden movement caught the ers by surprise, and when they put up their phalanx of aushed them aside with his arm and kept on going. He s, which he ignored.

all cold when he got inside the earthlodge. Looking around ng to warm himself, he strode to the round structure, he leather cover, and wrapped it around him. Just then ten burst in, brandishing their weapons again. The woman ;ed him before was among them, and she was obviously e lunged at him with her spear. He ducked aside and it, but they were all stopped in their tracks by harsh and hter. nii!" Attaroa sneered, then spoke other words that he didn't

its you to come outside," Ardemun said. Jondalar hadn't near the entrance. "She thinks you are clever, too clever. wants you where she can have her women surround you." [don't want to go outside?" Jondalar said. e'll probably have you killed here and now." The words "I a woman, speaking in perfect Zeiandonii, without even a iccent! Jondalar shot a look of surprise in the direction of It was the shaman! "If you go outside, Attaroa will prob- l live a little longer. You interest her, but eventually she'll way." Tiat am I to her?" Jondalar asked.

? I've never threatened her." aten her control. She'll want to make an example of you." tterrupted, and though Jondalar didn't understand her, the uned fury of her words seemed to be directed at the sha- ilder woman's response was reserved but showed no fear. change, she spoke again to Jondalar. "She wanted to know to you. I told her."

"Tell her I'll come outside," he said.

When the message was relayed, Attaroa laughed, said then sauntered out.

"What did she say?" Jondalar asked.

"She said she knew it. Men will do anything for one more] of their miserable lives."

"Perhaps not anything," Jondalar said, starting out, then he i back to the shaman. "What is your name?"

"I am called S'Armuna," she said.

"I thought you might be. Where did you learn to speak my laiumaas so well?" °^-J

"I lived among your people for a time," S'Armuna said, but thens cut off his obvious desire to know more. "It's a long story."

Though the man had rather expected to be asked to give his idem in return, S'Armuna simply turned her back. He volunteered the i formation. "I am Jondalar of the Ninth Cave of the Zeiandonii " 1 said.

S'Armuna's eyes opened with surprise. "The Ninth Cave?" she sai "Yes," he said. He would have continued to name his ties, but 1 was stopped by the look on her face, though he could not fathom id meaning. A moment later her expression showed nothing, and Joe wondered if he had imagined it.

"She's waiting," S'Armuna said, leaving the earthlodge.

Outside, Attaroa was sitting on a fur-covered seat on a raised form of earth, which had been dug from the floor of the large semisuNJ terranean earthlodge just behind her. She was opposite the fenced: and, as he walked past it, Jondalar sensed again that he was b watched through the cracks.

As he drew near, he was sure the fur on her seat was from a wonCj The hood of her parka, thrown back off her head, was trimmed wiA| wolf fur, and around her neck she wore a necklace made primarily ol the sharp canine teeth of wolves, although there were some from arctic fox, and at least one cave-bear tooth. She was holding a carved staff j similar to the Speaking Staff Talut had used when there were issues t0j be discussed or arguments to be resolved. That stick had helped j keep the talk orderly. Whoever held it had the right to speak, and when j someone else had something to say, it was necessary first to ask tor j Speaking Staff, --i

Something else was familiar about the staff she held, though j couldn't quite place it. Could it be the carving? It bore the sty ^ shape of a seated woman, with an enlarging series of concentric ci j representing breasts and stomach, and a strange triangular hea , j

an with a face of enigmatic designs. It wasn't like Mar but he felt he'd seen it before.

ker women surrounded Attaroa. Other women he hadn't 'e only a few of them with children, were standing observed him for a while; then she spoke, looking at in standing off to the side, began a stumbling trans-elandonii. Jondalar was about to suggest that he speak t S'Armuna interrupted, said something to Attaroa, then

slate," she said.

de a sneering comment that made the women around her Armuna did not translate it. "She was speaking to me," lid, her face impassive. The seated woman spoke again, Midalar.

ow as Attaroa," S'Armuna said, beginning to translate. b come here?"

come here voluntarily. I was brought here, tied up," while S'Armuna translated almost simultaneously. "I am sy. Or I was. I don't understand why I was tied up. No to tell me."

l you come from?" Attaroa said through S'Armuna, ig-Enments.

I last year with the Mamutoi."

'ou came from the south."

; long way around. I wanted to visit kin who live near the r River, at the south end of the eastern mountains."

i lie! The Zeiandonii live far to the west of here. How can to the east?"

lie. I traveled with my brother. Unlike the S'Armunai, doi welcomed us. My brother mated a woman there.

kin through him."

of righteous indignation, Jondalar continued. It was the le'd had to speak to someone who was listening. "Don't lose on a Journey have rights of passage? Most people tors. They exchange stories, share with them. But not was hit on the head and though I was injured, my wound eated. No one gave me water or food. My fur parka was >e, and it was not given back even when I was made to go

he spoke, the angrier he got. He had been very badly »s brought outside in the cold and left standing. No other long Journey have ever treated me like this. Even animals

of the plains share their pasture, their water. What kind of you?"

Attaroa interrupted him. "Why did you try to steal our meat - was fuming, but she tried not to show it. Although she knew ^ thing he said was true, she didn't like being told that she was soi"? less than others, especially in front of her people.

"I wasn't trying to steal your meat," Jondalar said, denvim» accusation vigorously. S'Armuna's translation was so smooH" quick and Jondalar's need to communicate so intense, that he ah forgot his interpreter. He felt he was talking directly with Attan» "You are lying! You were seen running into that herd we were a with a spear in your hand."

"I am not lying! I was only trying to save Ayla. She was on the I of one of those horses, and I couldn't let them carry her alone " "Ayla?"

"Didn't you see her? She is the woman I have been traveling wit Attaroa laughed. "You were traveling with a woman who ridd the backs of horses? If you are not a traveling storyteller, you 1 missed your calling." Then she leaned forward and, jabbing herfu at him for emphasis, said, "Everything you've said is untrue. You a liar and a thief!"

"I am neither a liar nor a thief! I have told the truth and I have st nothing," Jondalar said with conviction. But in his heart he coul really blame her for not believing him. Unless someone had seen A who would believe that they had traveled by riding on the back horses? He began to worry about how he would ever convince Att that he wasn't lying, that he had not intentionally interfered with t hunt. If he'd known the full extent of his plight, he would have t more than concerned.

Attaroa studied the tall, muscular, handsome man standing in t of her, wrapped in the hides he had torn from his cage. She not that his blond beard was a shade darker than his hair and that his e an unbelievably vivid shade of blue, were compelling. She felt stroi attracted to him, but the very strength of her response dredged painful memories long suppressed and provoked a powerful strangely twisted reaction. She would not allow herself to be attra" to any man, because to have feelings for one might give him co over her--and never again would she allow anyone, particularly a to have control over her.

She had taken his parka and left him standing in the cold for same reason she had withheld food and water. Deprivation made 1 easier to control. While they still had the strength to resist, 1

»them tied. But the Zeiandonii man, wrapped in those supposed to have, showed no fear, she thought. Look ; there, so sure of himself.

nt and cocky, he had even dared to criticize her in including the men in the Holding. He did not hurry to please her as they did. But she vowed that she was through with him. She was determined to , She would show them all how to handle a man like , . he would die.

break him, she said to herself, I will play with him for ; , he's a strong man, and he'll be hard to control if he He's suspicious now, so I need to make him lower his s to be weakened. S'Armuna will know of something. d to the shaman and spoke to her privately. Then she man and smiled, but the smile held such malice that it is spine.

»nly threatened her leadership, he threatened the fragile ick mind had led her to create. He even threatened her i reality, which had recently been stretched very thin. ne," S'Armuna said when she left Attaroa.

'e going?" Jondalar asked, as he stepped in beside her. th spears followed behind.

Jwants me to treat your wound."

Jondalar to a dwelling on the far edge of the settlement, |he big earthlodge that Attaroa had been seated near, but I more dome-shaped. A low, narrow entrance led through a ^eway to another' low opening. Jondalar had to bend over »ent-kneed for a few paces, then step down three stairs. No t a child, could enter her dwelling easily, but once inside, OS able to stand to his full height with room to spare. The tt who had followed stayed outside.

8 eyes adjusted to the dim interior, he noticed a bed platform ; far wall. It was covered with a white fur of some kind . . . d unusual white animals were held sacred among his people d discovered in his travels, by many others as well. Dried } from roof supports and racks, and many of the baskets and wives along the walls probably contained more. Any mamut M could have moved in and been completely at home, except °S- Among most people, the hearth or dwelling place of the served the Mother was a ceremonial area, or adjacent to one, gcr space was also where visitors stayed. But this was not a l" inviting area for activities and visitors. It had a closed and

secretive feeling. Jondalar felt sure that S'Armuna lived alone a
other people seldom entered her domain.

He watched her stir up the fire, add dried dung and a few wi l- 4
wood, and pour water into a blackened, pouchlike container fomn8^"
the stomach of an animal, attached to a frame of bone. From a hadS
on one of her shelves, she added a small handful of some dried mai-p'?
and when the water began to soak through the container, she mov»?3
directly over the flames. As long as there was liquid in it, even if it
boiling, the pouch could not catch fire.

Though Jondalar did not know what it was, the odor that rose fit- the pot was familiar and,
strangely, made him think of home. With
sudden flash of memory, he knew why. It was a smell that had oft»
emanated from a zeiandoni's fire. They used the decoction to waA
wounds and injuries.

"You speak the language very well. Did you live among the Zeiao.
donii long?" Jondalar asked, i

S'Armuna looked up at him and seemed to consider her reply. "Several
years," she said. ;

"Then you know that the Zeiandonii welcome their visitors. I don^t
understand these people. What could I possibly have done to deserve
such treatment?" Jondalar said. "You shared the hospitality of the
Zeiandonii--why don't you explain to them about rights of passage
and courtesy to visitors? It's really more than a courtesy, it's an obligation."
S'Armuna's only response was a sardonic glance. "'

He knew he wasn't handling the situation well, but he was still SB
incredulous over his recent experiences that he found himself with at
almost childish need to explain how things should be, as if that wouldB
put them right. He decided to try another approach. .

"I wonder, since you lived there so long, if you knew my mother. I
am the son of Marthona ... " He would have continued, but the
expression on her somewhat misshapen face stopped him. She registered
such shock that it contorted her features even more. ^ .

"You are the son of Marthona, born to the hearth ofjoconan?" s»
finally said, more as a question. ,

"No, that's my brother Joharran. I was born to Dalanar's heartn*
the man she mated later. Did you know Joconan?" ^_

"Yes," S'Armuna said, looking down, then turning her attentKW
back to the skin pot that was almost boiling.

"Then you must have known my mother, too!" Jondalar w ^
cited. "If you knew Marthona, then you know I'm not a lial'- would never put up with that in a
child of hers. I know it so
unbelievable--I'm not even sure I'd believe it, if I didn't know

yofflan I was traveling with was sitting on the back of one
rises that was being chased over the cliff. It was one she
a foal, not one that really belonged to that herd. Now I
wow if she's alive. You must tell Attaroa I'm not lying! I've
for her. I've got to know if she's still alive!"
j impassioned plea elicited no response from the woman.
t even look up from the pouch of boiling water she was
t, unlike Attaroa, she did not doubt him. One of Attaroa's
come to her with a story about seeing a woman riding on
orses, afraid because she thought it was a spirit. S'Armuna
;re could be something to Jondalar's story, but she won-
ier it was real or supernatural.
know Marthona, didn't you?" Jondalar asked, walking to
'et her attention. He had gotten her to respond before by
I mother.
e looked up, her face was impassive. "Yes, I knew Mar- i. I was sent, when I was young, to be
trained by the
fthe Ninth Cave. Sit here," she said. Then she moved the
from the fire, turned away from him, and reached for a soft
need when she washed his injury with the antiseptic solu-
i prepared, but he was sure her medicine was good. She
it from his people.
was clean, S'Armuna looked closely at his wound. "You
id for a while, but it is not serious. It will heal by itself."
her eyes, then said, "But you probably have a headache. I
a something for it."
m't need anything now, but I am still thirsty. All I really
ie water. Is it all right if I drink from your waterbag?"
d, walking over to the large damp bladder of water, from
ad filled the pot. "I'll refill it for you, if you'd like. Do you
can use?"
tted, then got a cup from a shelf.
an I fill your waterbag?" he asked when he was through.
avorite place nearby?"
any about the water," she said.
d closer and looked at her, realizing she was not going to
i freely, not even for water. "We weren't trying to hunt the
were after. Even if we had been, Attaroa should have
would have offered something to compensate. Although
whole herd driven off the cliff, there should have been
it hope Ayla isn't with them. S'Armuna, I need to go and
' her, don't you?" S'Armuna asked.

"Yes, I love her," he said. He saw her expression change
There was an element of gloating bitterness, but something soft- "We were on our way back to my
home to be mated, but I almost
to tell my mother about the death of my younger brother Th B
We started out together, but he ... died. She will be very unti-
It's hard to lose a child." DaPP^^
S'Armuna nodded but made no comment. 3
"That funeral earlier, what happened to those youngsters?" ^
"They weren't much younger than you are," S'Armuna said "nuff
enough to make some wrong decisions for themselves." ' ;
Jondalar thought she looked distinctly uncomfortable. "How did
they die?" he asked.
"They ate something that was bad for them." |
Jondalar didn't believe she was quite telling the truth, but before to
could say more, she handed him his hide coverings and led him back
out to the two women who had been guarding the entrance. They
marched on either side of him, but this time he was not taken back to
the earthlodge. Instead he was led to the fenced enclosure, and the
was opened just enough to push him inside. ^

hyla sipped tea at her afternoon campfire and stared, unseeing the grassy landscape. When she had stopped to let Wolf noticed a large rock formation outlined against the blue sky to west, but as the conspicuous limestone hill faded into mists in the distance, it receded from memory as her thoughts ward, worrying about Jondalar.

In her tracking skills and Wolf's keen nose, they had managed the trail that she felt sure was left by the people who had Jondalar. After making a gradual descent off the highland, travel, they had turned west until they reached the river she and had crossed earlier, but they did not cross over. They turned on, along the river, leaving a trail that was easier to follow. Camped the first night beside the flowing stream and continued the next day. She wasn't sure how many people she was but she occasionally saw several sets of footprints on the banks of the river, a couple of which she was beginning to notice. None of them, however, were Jondalar's large prints, and she began to wonder if he was still with them.

She recalled that occasionally something large was put down, the grass or leaving an impression in the dust or damp ground beneath it, and she remembered seeing that sign, along with other signs, from the beginning. It wouldn't have been a horse, she reasoned, because the horses had been driven over the trail. This load had been carried down from the top. She decided it was the man who was being carried on some kind of litter, which brought her both worry and relief.

It had to be Jondalar, it must mean he couldn't walk himself, but God she had found it did indicate a serious injury, but they wouldn't bother to carry him if he was dead. She drew the conclusion that he was still alive but seriously hurt, and she hoped they could get him someplace where his injuries could be treated. But how could anyone hurt him in the first place?

Her first thought was that the man she was following had been moving fast, but the trail was

getting colder and she knew she was falling behind. The telkal showing the way they had gone were not always easy to find slowed her down, and even Wolf had some trouble keeping nn l^^1 out the animal, she wasn't sure if she could have tracked them th' I-?1 especially over areas of rocky ground, where the subtle marks ofA**^ passing were all but nonexistent. But more than that, she didn't w.* to let Wolf out of her sight and risk losing him, too. Nonetheless r felt an anxious need to hurry, and she was grateful that he seenuj better each day.

She had awakened that morning with a strong sense of forebodinn and she was glad to see that Wolf seemed eager to start out butS afternoon she could tell he was tiring. She decided to stop and make* cup of tea to let him rest and give the horses time to graze.

Not long after starting out again she came to a fork in the river. Shi had easily crossed a couple of small streams flowing down from thjr highlands, but she wasn't sure if she should cross the river. She hadnitl seen tracks for some time, and she didn't know whether to take the east fork or make the crossing and follow the west one. She kept to the east for a while, weaving back and forth, trying to find the trail, and just: before nightfall she saw an unusual sight that clearly showed her the way to go. ;

Even in the failing light, she knew the posts sticking out of the water had been put there for a purpose. They had been pounded into Ac riverbed near several logs that were lodged into the bank. From the time she spent with the Sharamudoi, she recognized the construction; as a rather simple docking place for some kind of watercraft. Aytt' started to make her camp beside it, then changed her mind. She didn't know anything about the people she was following, except that they had hurt Jondalar and then taken him with them. She did not wart such people to come upon her unawares, while she was sleeping and vulnerable. She chose a place around a bend in the river instead. In the morning she carefully examined the wolf before entering the river. Though not especially wide, the water was cold and deep, a"" he would have to swim it. His bruises were still tender to the touA but he was very much improved, and he was eager to go. He see to want to find Jondalar as much as she did.

Not for the first time, she decided to remove her leggings bet getting on Whinney's back, so they would not get wet. She didn t to take the time to worry about drying clothes. Much to her surp Wolf did not hesitate to enter the water. Instead of pacing back ^ forth on the bank, he jumped in and paddled after her, as ^^im^ no more wanted to let her out of his sight than she wanted to let out others.

icy reached the other side. Ay la moved out of the way to
oray from the animals shaking off excess moisture while she
r leewear. She checked the wolf again, just to satisfy herself,
showed no discomfort when he shook himself vigorously
egan searching for the trail. Somewhat downstream of their
^olf discovered the watercraft that had been used by the ones
ickine to make the crossing, hidden in some brush and trees
near the water. It took her a while, however, to understand
it was.

assumed the people would use a boat, something similar to
nudoi boats--beautifully crafted dugouts with gracefully
ows and stems, or perhaps like the more pedestrian but
owl boat that she and Jondalar used. But the contrivance
i was a platform of logs, and she was unfamiliar with a raft.
understood its purpose, she thought it was rather clever, if
ungainly. Wolf sniffed around the crude craft curiously.
came to a certain place, he stopped and made a low growl
i throat.

s it, Wolf?" Ay la said. Looking more closely, she found a
n on one of the logs and felt a touch of panic drain her face.
d blood, she was sure, probably Jondalar's blood. She patted
's head. "We'll find him," she said, to reassure herself as
ie wolf, but she wasn't at all sure that they would find him

l leading from the landing ran between fields of tall dry grass
I with brush and was much easier to follow. The problem
was so well used that she couldn't be sure it had been taken
is she was pursuing. Wolf was in the lead, for which Ay la
more than grateful. They had not been on the path long
topped in his tracks, wrinkling his nose and baring his teeth

What is it? Is someone coming?" Ayla said, even as she
unney off the path and headed for some thick brush, signal- So follow. She slid off the mare's
back as soon as they were

>y the tall, bare branches and grass, grabbed Racer's lead
we him behind the mare, since he was wearing the pack, and
en the horses herself. She knelt on one knee and put an arm
alfs neck to keep him quiet, then waited.

fesment was not wrong. Before long, two young women ran
(Misly heading for the river. She signaled Wolf to stay and
8 the stealth she had learned when tracking carnivores as a
wlowed them back, creeping close through the grass, then
("id some brush to watch.

The two women talked to each other as they uncovered the language though the language was unfamiliar, she noticed a similarity to the mutoi. She wasn't quite able to understand them, but she then caught the meaning of a word or two.

The women pushed the log platform almost into the water and retrieved two long poles that had been underneath it. They fastened one end of a large coil of rope around a tree, then climbed on

and began to pole across the river, the other played out the rope until they were near the other side, where the current was not as swift. They started poling upstream until they reached the docking place. The ropes fastened to the raft, they secured it to the poles sticking up in the water and stepped off to the logs stuck into the bank. Leaving the raft, they started running back the way Ayla had just come.

She returned to the animals, thinking about what to do. She was sure the women would be returning soon, but "soon" could be

any day, or the next, or the one after. She wanted to find Jondalar as soon as possible, but she didn't want to continue following the trail and let them catch up with her. She was also reluctant to approach them directly until she knew more about them. She finally decided to wait for a place to wait for them where she could watch them without being seen.

She was pleased that her wait was not too long. By afternoon she saw the two women returning, along with several other people, carrying litters of butchered meat and sections of horse. They were moving surprisingly fast in spite of their loads. When they drew nearer, Ayla realized there was not a single man in the hunting party. All the hunters were women! She watched them load the meat on the raft, then pole across using the rope for a guide. They hid the raft after unloading it, but they left the guide rope strung across the river, which puzzled her.

Ayla was again surprised at how fast they traveled as they stepped up the trail. Almost before she knew it, they were gone. She was some time before she followed, and she kept well behind.

Jondalar was appalled at the conditions inside the fence. The only shelter was a rather large, crude lean-to, which offered scant protection from rain or snow, and the fence of posts, itself, which blocked the wind. There were no fires, little water, and no food available. The only people within the Holding were male, and they showed the effects of the poor conditions. As they came out of the shelter to stand and stare at him, he saw that they were thin, dirty, and ill-clad. Jondalar and them had sufficient clothing for the weather, and they probably huddled together in the lean-to in an attempt to keep warm.

zed one or two from the walk up to the funeral, and he
V the men and boys were living in such a place. Suddenly
os things came together: the attitude of the women with
yyase comments of Ardemun, the behavior of the men
e funeral, the reticence of S'Armuna, the belated exami-
wounds, and their generally harsh treatment of him.
n't the result of a misunderstanding that would be cleared
| he convinced Attaroa that he wasn't lying.
usion he was forced to seemed preposterous, but the full
[Tuck him with the force to shatter his disbelief. It was so
'he wondered why it had taken him so long to see it. The
pt here against their will by the women!
It was such a waste to keep people inactive like this when
U be contributing to the welfare and benefit of the entire
He thought of the prosperous Lion Camp of the Mamutoi,
ind Tulie organizing the necessary activities of the Camp
fit of everyone. They all contributed, and they still had
ie to work on their own individual projects.
law much was her doing? She was obviously the head- ;ader of this Camp. If she wasn't entirely
responsible, at
; seemed determined to maintain the peculiar situation.
l should be hunting and collecting food, Jondalar thought,
storage pits, making new shelters and repairing old ones;
, not huddling together trying to keep warm. No wonder
were out hunting horses this late in the season. Did they
ough food stored to last through the winter? And why did
far away when they had such a perfect hunting opportu-
at hand?
ie one they call the Zeiandonii man," one of the men said,
mutoi. Jondalar thought he recognized him as one whose
;en tied when they marched up to the funeral.
t Jondalar of the Zeiandonii."
llan of the S'Armunai," he said, then added sardonically,
; of Muna, the Mother of All, let me welcome you to the
Attaroa likes to call this place. We have other names: the
>, the Mother's Frozen Underworld, and Attaroa's Man
four pick."
nderstand. Why are you ... all of you, here?" Jondalar
g story, but essentially we were all tricked, one way or
>ulan said. Then, with an ironic grimace, he continued,
en tricked into building this place. Or most of it."
t you just climb over the wall and get out?" Jondalar said.

"And get pierced by Epadoa and her spear-stickers?" another said.

Olamun is right. Besides, I'm not sure how many could make an effort, any more," Ebulan added. "Attaroa likes to keep us weak or worse."

"Worse?" Jondalar said, frowning.

"Show him, S'Amodun," Ebulan said to a tall, cadaverously thin man with gray matted hair and a long beard that was almost white. He had a strong, craggy face with a long, high-bridged beak of a nose, heavy brows that were accented by his gaunt face, but it was his eyes that captured the attention. They were compelling, as dark as Attaroa's, but rather than malice they held depths of ancient wisdom, mystery, and compassion. Jondalar wasn't sure what it was about him, some quality of carriage or demeanor, but he sensed that this was a man who commanded great respect, even in these wretched conditions. The old man nodded and led the way to the lean-to. As they neared, Jondalar could see that a few people were still inside. As he ducked under the sloping roof, an overpowering stench assaulted him. A man was lying on a plank that might have been torn from the roof, and he was covered with only a ripped piece of hide. The old man pulled back the cover and exposed a putrefying wound in his side.

Jondalar was aghast. "Why is this man here?"

"Epadoa's spear-stickers did that," Ebulan said.

"Does S'Armuna know about this? She could do something for him."

"S'Armuna! Hah! What makes you think she would do anything?" said Olamun, who was among those who had followed them. "Who do you think helped Attaroa in the first place?"

"But she cleaned the wound on my head," Jondalar said.

"Then Attaroa must have plans for you," Ebulan said.

"Plans for me? What do you mean?"

"She likes to put the men who are young and strong enough to work as long as she can control them," Olamun said.

"What if someone doesn't want to do her work?" Jondalar asked.

"How can she control them?"

"By withholding food or water. If that doesn't work, by threatening kin," Ebulan said. "If you know that the man of your hearth or your brother will be put in the cage without food or water, you'll usually do what she wants."

"The cage?"

"The place you were kept," Ebulan said. Then he smiled wryly.

"Where you got that magnificent cloak." Other men were smiling.

oked at the ragged hide he had torn from the structure
Alodee and wrapped around him.

.Ea good one!" Olamun said. "Ardemun told us how you
I down the cage, too. I don't think she expected that."
fe she make stronger cage," said another man. It was oh-
> was not entirely familiar with the language. Ebulan and
ie so fluent that Jondalar had forgotten that Mamutoi was
re language of these people. But apparently others knew
ost seemed to understand what was being said.

lon the ground moaned, and the old man knelt to comfort
far noticed a couple of other figures stirring, farther back
|an-to.

I matter. If she doesn't have a cage, she'll threaten to hurt
i make you do what she wants. If you were mated before
theadwoman, and were unlucky enough to have a son born
jUth, she can make you do anything," Ebulan said.

tididn't like the implication, and he frowned deeply. "Why
; unlucky to have a son born to your hearth?"

'anced toward the old man. "S'Amodun?"

[if they want to meet the Zeiandonii," he said.

; first time S'Amodun had spoken, and Jondalar wondered
; so deep and rich could emanate from so spare a man. He

; back of the lean-to, bending down to talk to the figures

In the space where the slanting roof reached the ground. They
|r the deep mellow tones of his voice, but not his words, and

Sound of younger voices. With the old man's help, one of the
Bgures got up and hobbled toward them.

s Ardoban," the old man announced.

'ondalar of the Ninth Cave of the Zeiandonii, and in the name

(he Great Earth Mother, I greet you, Ardoban," he said with
nality, holding out both his hands to the youngster, somehow
at the boy needed to be treated with dignity.

vy tried to stand straighter and take his hands, but Jondalar
wince with pain. He started to reach for him to support him,
it himself.

y prefer to be called Jondalar," he said, with a smile, trying
ver the awkward moment.

" Doban. Not like Ardoban. Attaroa always say Ardoban.

s me say S'Attaroa. I not say anymore."

"looked puzzled.

fd to translate. It's a form of respect," Ebulan said. "It means
held in the highest regard."

"And Doban does not respect Attaroa anymore."

"Doban hate Attaroa!" the youngster said, his voice rising to the edge of tears as he tried to turn away and hobble back. S'AmtJ.S waved them out as he helped the youngster. ^^1

"What happened to him?" Jondalar asked after they were out and somewhat away from the lean-to. ^

"His leg was pulled until it became dislocated at the hip " Rk, i..- said. "Attaroa did it, or rather, she told Epadoa to do it." ^^1

"What!" Jondalar said, his eyes open wide in disbelief. "Are you saying she purposely dislocated the leg of that child? What kind of abomination is this woman?" ,

"She did the same thing to the other boy, and Odevan's younger " "What possible justification can she even give to herself for doing such a thing?" j

"With the younger one, it was to make an example. The boy's mother didn't like the way Attaroa was treating us, and she wanted her mate back at her hearth. Avanoa even managed to get in her sometimes and spend the night with him, and she used to sneak extra food to us. She's not the only woman who does that sometimes, but she was stirring up the other women, and Armodan, her man, was . . . resisting Attaroa, refusing to work. She took it out on the boy. She said at seven years he was old enough to leave his mother and live with the men, but she dislocated his leg first."

"The other boy is seven years?" Jondalar said, shaking his head and shuddering with horror. "I have never heard of anything so terrible."

"Odevan is in pain, and he misses his mother, but Ardoban's story is worse." It was S'Amodun who spoke. He had left the lean-to and just joined the group.

"It's hard to imagine anything worse," Jondalar said.

"I think he suffers more from the pain of betrayal than from the physical pain," S'Amodun said. "Ardoban thought of Attaroa as his mother. His own mother died when he was young and Attaroa took him in, but she treated him more like a favored plaything than a child. She liked to dress him in girl's clothes and adorn him with silly things but she fed him well, and she often gave him special tidbits. She even cuddled him, sometimes, and took him to her bed to sleep with her when she was in the mood. But when she got tired of him, she'd push him out and make him sleep on the ground. A few years ago, Attarwa began to think people were trying to poison her."

"They say that's what she did to her mate," Olamun interjected, j "She made Ardoban taste everything before she ate it," the old ID^ continued, "and when he got older, she tied him up, sometimes, convinced he was going to run away. But she was the only mother

loved her and tried to please her. He treated the other boys
yay she treated the men, and he began telling the men what
course, she encouraged him."
s insufferable," Ebulan added. "You'd think the whole Camp
o him, and he made the other boys' lives miserable."
iat happened?" Jondalar asked.
iched the age of manhood," S'Amodun said. Then, seeing
puzzled look, he explained. "The Mother came to him in his
ie form of a young woman and brought his manhood to life."
srse. That happens to all young men," Jondalar said.
a found out," S'Amodun explained, "and it was as though he
isely turned into a man just to displease her. She was livid!
ned at him, called him terrible names, then banished him to
Camp, but not before she had his leg dislocated."
3devan, it was easier," Ebulan said. "He was younger. I'm
ure if they originally intended to tear his joint loose. I think
wanted to make his mother and her mate suffer by listening
ams, but once it happened, I think Attaroa thought it would
way to disable a man, make him easier to control."
d Ardemun as an example," Olamun said.
e dislocate his leg, too?" Jondalar asked.
'ay," S'Amodun said. "It was an accident, but it happened
was trying to get away. Attaroa would not allow S'Armuna
n, although I believe she wanted to."
was harder to disable a boy of twelve years. He fought and
but it did no good," Ebulan said. "And I will tell you, after
o his agony, no one here could be angry with him any more.
Alan paid for his childish behavior."
ue that she has told the women that all children, including
iat is expected, if they are boys, will have their legs dislo-
lamun asked.
what Ardemun said," Ebulan confirmed.
the think she can tell the Mother what to do? Force Her to
r girl babies?" Jondalar asked. "She is tempting her fate, I
>s," Ebulan said, "but it will take the Mother Herself to stop
fraid."
'«the Zeiandonii may be right," S'Amodun said. "I think the
>s already tried to warn her. Look how few babies have been
w last several years. This latest outrage of hers, injuring
j^ay be more than She will stand for. Children are supposed
^ed, not harmed."
r Ayla would never stand for it. She wouldn't stand for any

of this," Jondalar said. Then, remembering, he frowned and lowered his head. "But I don't even know if she's alive." v
The men glanced at each other, hesitant to speak, though Hi thought the same question. Finally Ebulan found his voice. "Is there a woman you claimed could ride on the backs of horses? She might be a woman of great powers if she can control horses like that." *
"She wouldn't say so." Jondalar smiled. "But I think she has 'power' than she will acknowledge. She doesn't ride all horses 'all she only rides the mare that she raised, although she has ridden my horse too. But he's a little harder to control. That was the problem."
"You can ride horses, too?" Olamun said in tones of disbelief.
"I can ride one . . . well, I can ride hers, too, but . . ."
"Are you saying that the story you told Attaroa is true?" Ebulan said. ,
"Of course it's true. Why would I make up something like that?" He looked at the skeptical faces. "Maybe I'd better start at the beginning." Ayla raised a little filly . . ." -
"Where did she get a filly?" Olamun asked.
"She was hunting and killed its dam, and then she saw the foal." j
"But why would she raise it?" Ebulan asked.
"Because it was alone, and she was alone . . . and that's a long story," Jondalar sidestepped, "but she wanted company and decided to take in the filly. When Whinney grew up--Ayla named the horse Whinney--she gave birth to a colt, just about the time we met. She showed me how to ride and gave me the colt to train. I named him Racer. That's a Zeiandonii word that means a fast runner, and he likes to run fast. We have traveled all the way from the Mamutoi Summer Meeting, around the southern end of those mountains to the east, riding those horses. It really doesn't have anything to do with special powers. It's a matter of raising them from the time they are born, just like a mother would take care of a baby." |
"Well . . . if you say so," Ebulan said. |
"I say so because it's true," Jondalar countered, then decided it was worthless to pursue the subject. They would have to see it to believe it, and it was unlikely that they ever would. Ayla was gone, and j were the horses. f
Just then the gate opened and they all turned to see. Epadoa entered first along with a few of her women. Now that he knew Inorea, her, Jondalar studied the woman who had actually caused such pain to the two children. He wasn't sure who was more of an ancestor, the one who conceived of the idea or the one who carried it out. Though he had no doubt that Attaroa would have done it be

4.S/;

lent that something was wrong with her. She was not whole. Her spirit must have touched her and stolen a vital part of her. What about Epadoa? She seemed sound and whole, but why was she and still be so cruel and unfeeling? Was she also the essential part? To everyone's surprise, Attaroa herself came in next. "Ever comes in here," Olamun said. "What can she want?" Her behavior frightened him. When she came several women carrying steaming trays of cooked food in tightly woven baskets of some delicious-smelling rich soup. Horsemeat! Have the hunters returned? Jondalar thought. He hadn't eaten horsemeat for a long time, the thought of its usually appeal to him, but at that moment it smelled delicious. A full waterbag with a few cups was also carried in. Jondalar watched the arriving procession avidly, but none of them caught anything except his eyes, afraid to do anything that might cause her to change her mind. They feared that it might be another cruel trick to bring it in and show them and then take it away. "Zeiandonii!" Attaroa said, making the word sound like a command. Jondalar looked at her closely as he approached. She seemed almost perfect. . . . no, he decided, not exactly that. Her features were defined and sharp, but cleanly denned and well shaped. She was accurate and beautiful, in her way, or could have been, if she had not been so cruel. There was cruelty in the set of her mouth, and the lack in her eyes. S'Armuna appeared at her side. She must have come in with the headwomen, he thought, though he hadn't noticed her before. "Speak for Attaroa," S'Armuna said in Zeiandonii. "I have a lot to answer for, yourself," Jondalar said. "How could you do that? Attaroa lacks reason, but you do not. I hold you responsible. Your blue eyes were icy with outrage. You spoke angrily to the shaman. You do not want you to speak to me. I am here to translate for you. Attaroa wants you to look at her when you speak," S'Armuna said. Jondalar looked at the headwoman and waited while she spoke. S'Armuna began the translation. "Attaroa is speaking now: How do you like your new . . . , accomplish what you expect me to like them?" Jondalar said to S'Armuna, and he turned his look and spoke to Attaroa. A wondrous smile played across the headwoman's face. "I'm sure

you've heard many things about me already, but you should believe everything you hear."

"I believe what I see," Jondalar said.

"Well, you saw me bring food in here."

"I don't see anyone eating it, and I know they are hungry."

Her smile broadened when she heard the translation. "They h n and you must, too. You will need your strength." Attaroa laughetl*

ll 0 ^>*'MR

loud.

"I'm sure I will," Jondalar said.

After S'Armuna translated, Attaroa left abruptly, signaling Hu woman to follow.

"I hold you responsible," Jondalar said to S'Armuna's retreatiir back. °

As soon as the gate closed, one of the guard women said, "You'd better come and get it, before she changes her mind." ,.

The men rushed for the platters of meat on the ground. As S'AmoK dun passed by, he stopped. "Be very careful, Zeiandonii. She htf something special in mind for you."

The next few days passed slowly for Jondalar. Some water, but little additional food was brought in, and no one was allowed out, not eveal to work, which was very unusual. It made the men uneasy, especially8 since Ardemun was also kept inside the Holding. His knowledge of several languages had made Ardemun first a translator and then a' spokesman between Attaroa and the men. Because of his lame, disk)-8 cated leg, she felt he posed no threat and, further, would not be abhl to run away. He was given more freedom to move around the Campx* and he often brought back bits of information about the life outside the; Men's Camp and occasionally extra food. '

Most of the men passed the time playing games and gambling W future promises, using as playing pieces small sticks of wood, pebbles,, and even some broken pieces of bone from meat they had been g^@*" The legbone from the shank of horsemeat had been put aside, ^^ was stripped clean and cracked for the marrow, for just such a possiwfr

purpose' dose

Jondalar spent the first day of his confinement examining in " ^ detail and testing the strength of the entire fence that surrounded theBB,j He found several places that he thought he could have broken tD^OU^| or climbed over, but through the cracks Epadoa and her women j be seen diligently guarding them, and the terrible infection of the ^. with the wound deterred him from such a direct approach. He looked over the lean-to, thinking of several things that could be

acs

and make it more weatherproof ... if only he'd had the materials.

All consent, one end of the enclosed space, behind a jumble. The only other feature beside the lean-to in their barren (had been set aside for passing water and eliminating). Jondalar became nauseatingly aware of the smell permeating the entire enclosure on the second day. It was worse near the where the putrefying flesh of morbid infection added its malodorousness, but at night he had no choice. He huddled together with others for warmth, sharing his makeshift cloak with those who had less to cover them.

Days that followed, his sensitivity to the odor dulled, and he ignored his hunger, but he did seem to feel the cold more and more and was light-headed occasionally. He wished for some willow-bark headache, too.

Circumstances began to change when the man with the wound arrived. Ardemun went to the gate and asked to speak to Attaroon so the body could be removed and buried. Several men were sent for the purpose, and later they were told that all who were to attend the burial rites. Jondalar was almost ashamed by the leniency he felt at the thought of getting out of the Holding, but the reason for the temporary release was a death.

Long shadows of a late afternoon sun spread across the blighting features of the distant valley and river below, and cast an almost overwhelming sense of the beauty and grandeur of the landscape. His appreciation was interrupted by a prick of pain on his arm. He looked down with annoyance at Epadoa and three others surrounding him with spears, and it took a large measure of self-control to prevent himself from pushing them out of his way. They told him to put his hands behind his back so they could tie them. Ardemun said, "You can't go if your hands are not tied." Jondalar scowled, but he complied. As he followed Ardemun, he thought about his predicament. He wasn't even sure where he was, or how long he had been here, but the thought of spending any more time in that Holding, with nothing but the fence to look at, was something he could bear. One way or another, he was getting out, and he didn't, he could foresee a time when he might not be able to. Days without food was no great problem, but if it continued long enough, it could become one. Besides, if there was any chance at all that he was still alive, hurt perhaps, but still alive, he had to find a way out. He didn't know yet how he was going to accomplish it, but he knew he wasn't going to stay there very much longer.

They walked some distance, crossing a stream and getting w
along the way. The perfunctory funeral was over quickly and T
wondered why Attaroa bothered with a burial ceremony at all"0?11^
she showed no concern for the man while he was alive. If she h <^leBtl
might not have died. He had not known the man, he didn't even In'0?!
his name, he had only seen him in his suffering--unnecessary a&?l
ing. Now he was gone, walking in the next world, but freef^
Attaroa. Perhaps that was better than spending years looking anr
inside of a fence.

As short as the ceremony was, Jondalar's feet were cold from stanA.a
ing in wet footwear. On the way back, he paid more attention to Hr
small waterway, trying to find a stepping-stone or a way across tha»
would keep his feet dry. But when he looked down, he didn't care- Almost as though it were
intended, he saw two stones next to each
other at the edge of the stream. One was a small but adequate nodule
of flint; the other was a roundish stone that looked at though it would
just fit in his hand--the perfect shape for a hammerstone.

"Ardemun," he said to the man in back of him, then spoke in Zeian- donii. "Do you see these two
stones?" He indicated them with his foot.

"Can you get them for me? It's very important."

"That is flint?"

"Yes, and I'm a flint knapper."

Suddenly Ardemun appeared to trip, and he fell down heavily. The
crippled man had trouble getting up, and a woman with a spear approached.
She spoke sharply to one of the men, who offered his hand
to help him up. Epadoa marched back to see what was holding up the
men. Ardemun got to his feet just before she arrived, and he stood
contritely apologetic while she railed at him.

When they got back, Ardemun and Jondalar went to the end of the
Holding, where the stones were, to pass their water. When they returned
to the lean-to, Ardemun told the men that the hunters had
returned with more meat from the horse kill, but something had hap-
, ;n pened while the second group was returning. He didn't know what i
| j! was, but it was causing some commotion among the women. They
were all talking, but he hadn't been able to overhear anything specific.
That evening, food and water were brought to the men again,
not even the servers were allowed to stay and slice the meat. It
been precut into chunks and left for the men on a few log.., wll"
conversation. The men talked about it while they were eating.

"Something strange is going on," Ebulan said, switching to Mainu
so Jondalar could understand. "I think the women were ordered no
speak to us."

esn't make sense," Olamun said. "If we did know some-
could we do about it?"

"ieht, Olamun. It doesn't make sense, but I agree with
unk the women were told not to speak," S'Amodun said.
his is the time, then," Jondalar said. "If Epadoa's women
king, maybe they won't notice."
what?" Olamun said.

n managed to pick up a piece of flint ..."
, what it was all about," Ebulan said. "I couldn't see any- wild make him trip and fall."
it good is a piece of flint?" Olamun said. "You have to have
:e it into anything. I used to watch the flint knapper, before

: he also picked up a hammerstone, and there is some bone
;. It's enough to make a few blades and shape them into
wints, and a few other tools--if it's a good piece of flint."
flint knapper?" Olamun said.

: I'm going to need some help. Some noise to cover up the
mes hitting stones," Jondalar said.
l if he can make some knives, what good will they be? The
e spears," Olamun said.

thing, they're good for cutting the rope off someone whose
ed," Ebulan said. "I'm sure we can think of a competition
t will cover up the noise. The light is almost gone, though."
^lould be enough. It won't take me long to make the tools
nts. Then tomorrow I can work inside the lean-to, where
;e. I'll need that legbone and those logs, and maybe a piece
"from the lean-to. It would help if I had some sinew, but thin
ther should work. And, Ardemun, if you find any feathers
re out of the Holding, I could use them."

i nodded, then said, "You're going to make something that
re a throwing spear?"
lething that will fly. It will take careful whittling and shap-
»t will take some time. But I think I can make a weapon
surprise you," Jondalar said.

rr}
i
he next morning, before Jondalar began further work on dal
flint tools, he talked to S'Amodun about the two injured younestera i
He had thought about it the night before, and, recalling how Darro
had taken to flint knapping even as a young boy, he felt that if theifl
'Ji could be taught a craft, like flint knapping, they could lead indepcik.1
i dent and useful lives even though they were crippled. ,j
) "With Attaroa as headwoman, do you really think they will evtfl
j! have the opportunity?" S'Amodun asked. I
'^ "She allows Ardemun more freedom; she might feel that the two'l
ll boys will not be a threat, either, and let them out of the Holding morel
iV often. Even Attaroa might be persuaded to see the logic of having a
i||ll couple of toolmakers around. Her hunters' weapons are poorly made,S|
^. Jondalar said. "And who knows? She may not be a leader much
^ longer." .i
'1| !l S'Amodun eyed the blond stranger speculatively. "I wonder ifyo»|
i)lll C know something I don't," he said. "In any case, I will encourage themj
j|!|!li(lil| to come and watch you." -.1
Jondalar had worked outside the evening before, so the sharp chipt!
that broke off in the process of knapping the flint would not be scat
tered around their only shelter. He had picked a spot somewhat behind <
the stone pile near the place where they passed their wastes. Because j
of the smell, it was the end of the enclosure that the guards tended to j
avoid, and was watched the least. |
Ijlll The blade-shaped pieces he had quickly detached from the flint case j
ll were at least four times as lone as they were wide with rounded ends,,
iNi'i''! 0 • i TTrf* •
iji and these were the blanks from which other tools would be made. n» \softline edges were razor
sharp as they were cleaved from the flint core, sharp
enough to cut through tough leather as if it were congealed fat. ^
blades were so sharp, in fact, that often the edges had to be dulled
t;1!]] the tool could be handled without cutting the user.
S| Inside the lean-to the following morning, the first thing Jondalar <
I was to select a place under a crack in the roof, so he would
^ sufficient light to work by. Then he cut off a piece of leather froiD
makeshift cloak and spread it out on the ground to catch the imvi

if flint debris. With the two lame boys and several others
id him, he proceeded to demonstrate how a hard oval stone
ieces of bone could be used to make tools of flint, which in
)e used to shape and make things out of leather, wood, and
K>h they had to be careful not to draw attention to their
Itine up occasionally to maintain a normal routine, then
k and huddling together for warmth, which also served to
ew of their guards, they all watched with fascination.
picked up a blade and examined it critically. There were
;rent tools he wanted to make, and he was trying to decide
;m would lend itself best to this particular blank. One long,
was nearly straight, the other wavered somewhat. He
ulline the uneven edge by scraping the hammerstone across
ies. He left the other edge as it was. Then, with the long
of a broken legbone, he pressure-flaked the rounded end,
; carefully controlled small chips until it was a point. If he'd
m" glue, or pitch, or a number of other materials with which
he could have added a handle, but when he was through,
equate knife as it was.
of was passed around and tested on the hair of an arm or
icr, Jondalar picked up another blade blank. Both edges of
to a narrow waist near the middle. Applying careful pres-
ic knobby, rounded end of the legbone, he broke off only
: edge of both lengths, which dulled them only slightly but,
tant, strengthened them, so this piece could be used as a
liape and smooth a piece of wood or bone. He showed how
and passed it around, too.
next blank, he dulled both edges so the tool could be
ily. Then, with two carefully placed blows at one end of
led a couple of spalls, leaving a sharp, chisellike point. To
; its use, he cut a groove into a piece of bone, then went
ove many times, making it deeper and deeper and creating
>f curled shavings. He explained how a shaft, or a point, or
Mild be cut out with roughly the desired shape, then fin-
aping or smoothing.
i demonstration was almost a revelation. None of the boys
men had ever seen an expert flint-knapping toolmaker
few of the older men had ever seen one so skilled. In the
its of twilight the night before, he had managed to cleave
Urty usable blanks from the single nodule of flint before the
s too small to work. By the next day, most of the men had
more of the tools he made from them.
toed to explain the hunting weapon he wanted to show

them. Some of the men seemed to understand him immediately, though they invariably questioned the accuracy and speed he'd achieved for a spear thrown with a spear-thrower. Others couldn't seem to grasp the concept of it at all, but it didn't matter, however. Having good serviceable tools in their hands, and working on something constructive with them, gave the men a sense of purpose and doing anything that opposed Attaroa, and the conditions she'd forced upon them, lifted the despair of the Men's Camp and fostered the hope that it might be possible, someday, to regain control of their own destiny.

Epadoa and her guards sensed a change in attitude over the next few days, and she felt sure something was going on. The men seemed to walk with a lighter step, and they smiled too much, but as hard as she looked, she couldn't see anything different. The men had been extremely careful to hide not only the knives and scrapers and chisels Jondalar had made, and the objects they were making, but even the waste products of their efforts. The smallest flint chip or spall, the tiniest curled shaving of wood or bone, was buried inside the lean-to and covered with a roof plank or a piece of leather. I

But the greatest change of all was in the two crippled boys. Jondalar not only showed the youngsters how the tools were made, he made special tools for them, and then showed them both how to use them. They stopped hiding in the shadows of the lean-to and began to get acquainted with the other, older boys in the Holding. Both idolized the tall Zeiandonii, Doban in particular, who was old enough to comprehend more, though he was reluctant to show it.

For as long as he could remember, living with the disturbed and irrational Attaroa, Ardoban had always felt helpless, completely at the mercy of circumstances beyond his control. In a tiny corner of the being, he had always expected something terrible to happen to him, and after the excruciatingly painful and terrifying trauma of his experience, he was convinced that his life would only get worse. He often wished he were dead. But watching someone take two stones found near a stream and with them, using the skill of his hands and the knowledge in his mind, offer the hope of changing his world, made a deep impression. Doban was afraid to ask--he still couldn't trust anyone--but more than anything, he wanted to learn to make tools of stone. ^

The man sensed his interest and wished that he had more, he could begin to teach him, at least to get him started. Did people go to any kind of Summer Meetings or Gatherings, he wondered, where ideas and information and goods could be exchanged?

I to be some flint knappers in the region who could train
e needed to learn a skill like that, where being lame wouldn't

Jondalar made a sample spear-thrower out of wood, to show
t it looked like and how to make it, several of the men began
copies of the strange implement. He also made flint spear
m some of the blanks, and out of the strongest leather they
thin strips for bindings to fasten them with. Ardemun even
ground nest of a golden eagle and brought back some good
lers. The only thing lacking were the shafts for the spears.
to make one out of the scanty materials that were available,
ut a fairly long, thin piece out of a plank with the sharp chisel
ised it to show the younger men how to fasten the point and
I feathers, and he demonstrated how to hold the spear- ad the basic technique for using it,
without actually casting

But cutting a spear shaft out of a plank was a long and
b, and the wood was dry and brittle, with no spring, and it
ly.

e needed were young, straight saplings, or reasonably long
hat could be straightened; though for that he needed the heat
He felt so frustrated stuck in the Holding. If only he could
id look for something with which to make shafts. If only he
mice Attaroa to let him out. When he mentioned his feelings
as they were getting ready to sleep, the man looked at him
started to say something, then shook his head, closed his
turned away. Jondalar thought it was a strange reaction, but
Tgot about it and fell asleep thinking about the problem.

had been thinking about Jondalar, too. She was looking
o the diversion he would give her through the long winter,
Mitrol over him, and seeing him do her bidding, showing
that she was more powerful than the tall, handsome man.
ien she was through with him, she had other plans for him.
cen wondering if he was ready to be let out and set to work.
*d told her that she thought something was going on inside
ng, and that the stranger was involved, but she hadn't yet
l what it was. Perhaps it was time to separate him from the
l for a while, Attaroa thought, maybe put him back in the
^ a good way to keep them all unsettled.

Morning she told her women that she wanted a work crew,
lude the Zeiandonii man. Jondalar was glad just to be getting
; he could see something besides bare earth and desperate

men. It was the first time he had been allowed outside the work, and he had no idea what she planned to have him hoped he would have an opportunity to look for young, straightl" Finding a way to get them into the Holding would be another nrol Later in the day, Attaroa strode out of her earthlodge, accom by two of her women and S'Armuna, and wearing--flauntingp- dalar's fur parka. The men had been carrying mammoth bonp had been brought earlier from some other place, and they were them up where Attaroa wanted. They had worked all mornin into the afternoon with nothing to eat and little to drink. Even d he was out of the Holding, he had not been able to look for poi spear shafts, much less think of a way of cutting them dowi bringing them back. He was watched too closely and given no timel rest. He was not only frustrated, he was tired, and hungry thirsty, and angry.

Jondalar put down one end of the legbone that he and Olamun' carrying, then stood up and faced the approaching women. a! neared, he noticed how tall she was, taller than many men. S have been very attractive. What had happened to make her l so much? he wondered. When she spoke to him, lier sarcasm v though he didn't understand her words.

"Well, Zeiandonii, are you ready to tell us another story] last? I'm ready to be entertained," S'Armuna translated, comp sarcastic intonation.

"I did not tell you a story. I told you the truth," Jondalar si "That you were traveling with a woman who rides on the horses? Where is this woman, then? If she has the power you; hasn't she come to claim you?" Attaroa said, standing with h on her hips, as though to face him down.

"I don't know where she is. I wish I did. I'm afraid she went' the cliff with the horses you were hunting," Jondalar said.

"You lie, Zeiandonii! My hunters saw no woman on the back horse, and no body of a woman was found with the horses. I think have heard that the penalty for stealing from the S'Armunai is de and you are trying to lie your way out of it," Attaroa said.

No body was found? Jondalar was elated in spite of himself ^ S'Armuna translated, feeling a surge of hope that Ayla might stil alive.

"Why do you smile when I have just told you that the penalt) stealing is death? Do you doubt that I will do it?" Attaroa said, p< ing to him, and then to herself for emphasis. .

"Death?" he said, then paled. Could someone be put to deatti

I? ye had been so happy to think that Ayla might still be Fhadn't really comprehended what she had said. When he fer returned. "Horses were not given to the S'Armunai are here for all of Earth's Children. How can you call n stealing? Even if I had been hunting the horses, it would rfood."

^I've caught you in your lies. You admit you were hunting

I said, 'Even if I had been hunting the horses.' I didn't iras." He looked at the translator. "Tell her, S'Armuna. the Zeiandonii, son of Marthona, former leader of the does not lie."

i say you are the son of a woman who was a leader? This ; an accomplished liar, covering one lie about a miraculous another about a woman leader."

to many women who were leaders. You are not the only , Attaroa. Many Mamutoi women are leaders," Jondalar

s! They share leadership with a man."

ler was a leader for ten years. She became leader when her nd she shared it with no one. She was respected by both men, and gave the leadership over to my brother Joharran he people did not wish it."

d by women and men? Listen to him! You think I don't Zeiandonii? You think I was never mated? Am I so ugly Id have me?"

as nearly screaming at him, and S'Armuna was translating itaneously, as though she knew the words the headwoman ying. Jondalar could almost forget that the shaman was her, it seemed as though he were hearing and understand- lerself, but the shaman's unemotional tone gave the words tachment from the woman who was behaving so belliger- :er, deranged look came into her eyes as she continued to idalar.

; was the leader here. He was a strong leader, a strong m paused.

opie are strong. Strength doesn't make a leader," Jondalar

dn't really hear him. She wasn't listening. Her pause was her own thoughts, to gather her own memories. "Brugar Hong leader that he had to beat me every day to prove it." "Wasn't it a shame that the mushrooms he ate were

poisonous?" Her smile was malignant. "I beat his sister's son in a fight to become leader. He was a weakling. He died." She looked at Jondalar. "But you are no weakling, Zeiandonii. Wouldn't you have a chance to fight me for your life?"

"I have no desire to fight you, Attaroa. But I will defend myself if I must." y u

"No, you will not fight me, because you know I would win. I am a woman. I have the power of Muna on my side. The Mother has honored women; they are the ones who bring forth life. They should be the leaders," Attaroa said.

"No," Jondalar said. Some of the people watching flinched when he disagreed so openly with Attaroa. "Leadership doesn't necessarily belong to one who is blessed by the Mother any more than it does to one who is physically strong. The leader of the berry pickers, for instance, is the one who knows where the berries grow, when they will be ripe, and the best way to pick them." Jondalar was working up a tirade of his own. "A leader has to be dependable, trustworthy. Good leaders have to know what they are doing."

Attaroa was scowling. His words had no effect on her, she listened only to her own counsel, but she didn't like the scolding tone of his voice, as though he thought he had the right to speak so freely, to presume to tell her anything.

"It doesn't matter what the task is," Jondalar continued. "The leader of the hunt is the one who knows where the animals will be and where they will be there; he is the one who can track them. He's the one most skilled at hunting. Marthona always said leaders of people should choose about the people they lead. If they don't, they won't be leaders for very long." Jondalar was lecturing, venting his anger, oblivious to Attaroa's glowering face. "Why should it matter if they are women or men?"

"I will not allow men to be leaders any more," Attaroa interrupted. "Here, men know that women are leaders, the young ones are ready to understand it. Women are the hunters here. We don't need men to track or lead. Do you think women cannot hunt?"

"Of course women can hunt. My mother was a hunter before she became leader, and the woman I traveled with was one of the best hunters I know. She loved to hunt and was very good. She could throw a spear farther, but she was more accurate. She could knock a bird out of the sky or kill a rabbit on the run with a arrow or stone from her sling." i^

"More stories!" Attaroa snorted. "It's easy enough to vaake^^ for a woman that doesn't exist. My women didn't hunt; they

When Brugar was leader, no women were even allowed to
pon and it was not easy for us when I became leader. No
W to hunt, but I taught them. Do you see these practice

ointed to a series of sturdy posts stuck in the ground.
I noticed them in passing before, though he hadn't known
were for. Now he saw a large section of a horse carcass
n a thick wooden peg near the top of one. A few spears
e out of it.

yomen must practice every day, and not just jabbing the
enough to kill--throwing them, too. The best of them
hunters. But even before we learned to make and use
ivere able to hunt. There is a certain cliff north of here,
x, I grew up. People there chase horses off that cliff at least
year. We learned to hunt horses like that. It is not so
tampede horses off a cliff, if you can entice them up."

K>ked at Epadoa with obvious pride. "Epadoa discovered
lorses like salt. She makes the women save the water they
;s it to lead the horses along. My hunters are my wolves,"
I, smiling in the direction of the women with spears who
l around.

k evident pleasure in her praise, standing taller as she
alar hadn't paid much attention to their clothing before,
realized that all of the hunters wore something that came
. Most of them had a fringe of wolf fur around their hoods
one wolf tooth, but often more, dangling around their
i of them also had a fringe of wolf fur around the cuffs of
, or the hem, or both, plus additional decorative panels.
od was entirely wolf fur, with a portion of a wolf's head,
wed, decorating the top. Both the hem and cuffs of her
'ringed, wolf paws hung down from her shoulders in front,
tail hung behind from a center panel of wolf skin.

ears are their fangs, they kill in a pack, and bring the food
feet are their paws, they run steady all day, and go a long
?oa said in a rhythmic meter that he felt sure had been
my times. "Epadoa is their leader, Zeiandonii. I wouldn't
art her. She is very clever."

she is," Jondalar said, feeling outnumbered. But he also P feeling a touch of admiration for what
they had accom-

fng with so little knowledge. "It just seems such a waste
'sitting idle when they could be contributing, too, helping
Ping to gather food, making tools. Then the women alone

wouldn't have to be working so hard. I'm not saying women can it, but why should they have to do it all, for both men and women s»?^ Attaroa laughed, the harsh, demented laugh that gave him a chill <a have wondered the same thing. Women are the ones who produce ' life; why do we need men at all? Some of the women don't wait to give men up yet, but what good are they? For Pleasures? It's men who get the Pleasure. Here we don't worry about giving men Pleasures^ more. Instead of sharing a hearth with a man, I have put women together. They share the work, they help each other with their children, they understand each other. When there are no men around the Mother will have to mix the spirits of women, and only female children will be born." ^

Would it work? Jondalar wondered. S'Amudun had said that very few babies had been born in the last few years. Suddenly he remembered Ayla's idea that it was the Pleasures that men and women shared that started new life growing inside a woman. Attaroa had kept men and women separated. Could that be why there were so few babies?

"How many children have been born?" he asked, out of curiosity.

"Not many, but some, and where there are some, there can be more."

"Have they all been girls?" he asked then.

"The men are still too close. It confuses the Mother. Soon enough all the men will be gone; then we will see how many boy babies are born," Attaroa said.

"Or how many babies are born at all," Jondalar said. "The Great Earth Mother made both women and men, and like Her, women are blessed to give birth to both male and female, but it is the Mother who decides which man's spirit is mingled with the woman's. It is slowly man's spirit. Do you really think you can alter what She has ordained?"

"Don't try to tell me what the Mother will do! You are not a woman, Zeiandonii," she said contemptuously. "You just don't like to be how worthless you are, or perhaps you don't want to give up your Pleasures. That's it, isn't it?"

Suddenly Attaroa changed her tone, affecting a purr of attraction.

"Do you want Pleasures, Zeiandonii? If you will not fight me, will you do to gain your freedom? Ah, I know! Pleasures. For such a strong, handsome man, Attaroa might be willing to give you Pleasures. But can you give Attaroa Pleasures?" . ^

S'Armuna's change to speaking about the woman, rather than her, made him suddenly aware that all the words he had heard been translated. It was one thing to speak as the voice of Attar-

„ it was quite another to speak as the voice of Attaroa the
'Annuna could translate the words; she just couldn't take on
te persona of the woman. As S'Armuna continued to trans- lar heard both of them.
so fair, so perfect, he could be the mate of the Mother
ook he is even taller than Attaroa, and not many men are.
riven many women Pleasure, haven't you? One smile from
lU handsome man with his blue, blue eyes and women
climb into his furs. Do you Pleasure them all, Zeiandonii

(refused to answer. Yes, there was once a time when he
(easuring many women, but now he only wanted Ay la. A
i pain of grief threatened to overcome him. What would he
ther? Did it matter if he lived or died?

Zeiandonii, if you give Attaroa great pleasure, you can have
|on. Attaroa knows you can do it." The tall, attractive head-
liked seductively toward him. "See? Attaroa will give herself
tow everyone how a strong man gives a woman Pleasures.
(Gift of Muna, the Great Earth Mother, with Attaroa, Jon-
I Zeiandonii."

Aut her arms around his neck and pressed herself against
liar did not respond. She tried to kiss him, but he was too
I, and he would not bend down. She was not used to a man
taller; it wasn't often that she had to reach up to a man,
little she could not bend. It made her feel foolish and flamed
t

pnii! I am willing to couple with you, and give you a chance
ledom!"

I share the Mother's Gift of Pleasures under these circum-
mdalar said. His quiet, controlled voice belied his great
jdid not hide it. How did she dare to insult the Mother like
|Gift is sacred, meant to be shared with willingness and joy.
he this would be contemptuous of the Mother. It would
»ift and anger Her just as much as taking a woman against
jchoose the woman I want to couple with, and I have no
kre Her Gift with you, Attaroa."

Ought have responded to Attaroa's invitation, but he knew
.genuine. He was an exciting, handsome man to most
I had gained skill at pleasing them, and experience in the
tual attraction and invitation. For all her sinuous walking,
E> warmth to Attaroa, and she gave him no spark of desire.
^t even if he had tried, he could not have pleased her.

But Attaroa looked stunned when she heard the translation men had been more than willing to share the Gift of Pleasures w' ^ handsome woman to gain their freedom. Visitors unfortunate en to pass through her territory and get caught by her hunters had01!! ally jumped at the chance to get away from the Wolf Women irfA-1 S'Armunai so easily. Though some had hesitated, doubtful and wTl dering what she was up to, none had ever refused her outright Th«»l soon found out they were right to doubt. --'^

"You refuse ..." the headwoman sputtered, unbelieving TlnJ translation was spoken without feeling, but her reaction was dea»l enough. "You refuse Attaroa. How dare you refuse!" she screamed I then turned to her Wolf Women. "Strip him and tie him to the pracric* I target."

That had been her intention all along, just not so soon. She wanted Jondalar to keep her occupied through the whole long, dn winter. She enjoyed tantalizing men with promises of freedom in vsil change for Pleasures. To her, it was the height of irony. From thai point, she led them into further acts of humiliation or degradation, anil she usually managed to get them to do whatever she wanted before! ' was ready to play her final game. They would even strip themsel when she told them she would let them go if they did, hoping it we please her enough.

But no man could give Attaroa Pleasure. She had been used ba when she was a girl, and she had looked forward to mating the pov ful leader of another group. Then she discovered that the man she joined with was worse than the situation she had left behind. I Pleasures were always done with painful beatings and humiliaoc until she finally rebelled and caused his painful, humiliating death. B she had learned her lesson too well. Warped by the cruelty she i ceived, she could not feel Pleasure without causing pain. Attaroa c" little for sharing the Mother's Gift with men, or even women. She j herself Pleasures watching men die slow and painful deaths.

When there was a long time between visitors, Attaroa had < played with S'Armunai men, but after the first two or three fell to D "Pleasures," they knew her game and would not play it. iaⓄ. pleaded for their lives. She usually, but not always, gave in to UK* who had a woman to plead their case. Some of the women were n cooperative--they didn't understand it was for them that she n to eliminate men--but they could usually be controlled throug males to whom they were tied, so she kept them alive.

Travelers ordinarily came during the warmer season. People s* traveled very far in the cold of winter, especially those on a Jo

There had been fewer travelers lately, none the previous summer. Jondalar, by a lucky fluke, managed to escape, and some women ran and warned others. Most people who heard the stories passed them on as rumors, or fantastic tales of storytellers, but the rumors of the Wolf Women had been growing, and people were staying

Jondalar had been delighted when he was brought back, but he would not be worse than one of her own men. He wouldn't go along with her and he didn't even give her the satisfaction of watching her if she had, she might have even let him live a little longer, for the pleasure of seeing him bend to her will.

Ammand, Attaroa's Wolf Women rushed Jondalar. He fought mildly, knocking aside spears and landing hard blows that did little, telling aftereffects. His struggles to get free were almost over, but he was eventually overwhelmed by sheer force of numbers. He continued to fight while they cut the lashing closures of his trousers to strip him of his clothes. But they expected it and they had blades to his neck.

Ammand tore off his tunic and bared his chest, they tied his hands with a length of slack rope between them, then lifted him up with his hands over his head from the high peg on the wall. He kicked while they pulled off his boots and trousers, with strong blows that would leave bruises, but all his resistance served to make the women want to get back at him. And Ammand's pity could.

Ammand was hanging naked from the post, they all stood back and looked over with self-satisfied smirks, pleased with themselves. Ammand, as he was, his fighting had done him no good. Jondalar's feet dangled the ground, but just barely, and it was clear that most of his body had dangled there. It gave him some slight feeling of contact with the earth, and he sent a vague, unvoiced appeal to the Mother to somehow deliver him from this unexpected and humiliating predicament.

Ammand was interested in the massive scar on his upper thigh and how well it had healed. He had given no hint that he had sustained this injury, no limping or favoring of that leg. If he was that tough, he would last longer than most. He might give her something to think about yet. She smiled at the thought.

Ammand's detached appraisal gave Jondalar second thoughts. He felt those goose bumps, and he shivered, but not only with the cold. When he looked up, he saw Attaroa smiling at him. Her face was flushed, her breathing fast; she looked pleased and strangely sen-

sual. Her enjoyment was always greater if the man she Pie
 self with was handsome. Attracted in her own way to the tallr^^
 the unconscious charisma, she anticipated making this one last as possible. '
 He looked across at the fence made of poles, and he knew rh
 were watching through the cracks. He wondered why they h
 warned him. It was obviously not the first time something like th" l
 happened. Would it have done any good if they had? Would he h- just anticipated with fear? Perhaps
 they thought he would be better
 not knowing.

In truth, some of the men had talked about it. They all liked *)
 Zeiandonii and admired his toolmaking skills. With the sharp knn
 and tools that were his legacy, they each hoped they might find
 opportunity to break away. They would always remember him
 that, but each of them knew in his heart that if there was too Ion
 time between visitors, Attaroa was likely to hang one of them iron
 target post. A couple of them had already been strung up once, a
 they knew that their abject pleadings would probably not move her|
 delay her deadly game again. They secretly cheered his refusal to i
 in to her demands, but they were afraid that any noise would
 attention to themselves. Instead they watched in silence as the fan
 scene unfolded, each of them feeling compassion and fear and a s
 stab of shame.

Not only her Wolf Women, but all the women of the Camp
 expected to bear witness to the man's ordeal. Most of them hated l
 watch, but they feared Attaroa, even her hunters. They stood as f
 back as they dared. It made some of them sick, but if they did n
 appear, then any man they had spoken up for in the past was the nc
 one chosen. Some women had tried to run away, and a few had inan*j
 aged it, but most were caught and brought back. If there were men l»j
 the Holding they cared about--mates, brothers, sons--as punishment,
 the women were made to watch them suffer days in the cay
 without food or water. And occasionally, though rarely, they were put
 in the cage themselves. |

The women with boys were particularly fearful, not knowing W»|
 would become of their sons, especially after what she had ^onew |
 Odevan and Ardoban, but the women who feared the most wercffle j
 two with infants and the one who was pregnant. Attaroa was delig"tw j
 with them, gave them special treats and asked after their welfare. ^
 they each harbored a guilty secret and were afraid that if she e
 found out, they would end up hanging from the target posts. ^
 The headwoman stepped in front of her hunters and picked r j

liar noticed it was rather heavy and clumsy and, in spite of thought about how he could make them a better one. But taade thick point was nonetheless sharp and effective. He K woman take careful aim and noticed she was aiming low. I mean to kill, but to maim. He was conscious of his naked whatever pain she chose to inflict on him, and he fought lift his legs to try to protect himself. But then he'd be 0 and he felt that would make him even more vulnerable, s expose his fear.

patched him through narrowed eyes, knowing that he md enjoying it. Some of them begged. This one she knew at least not immediately. She pulled her arm back as she .make her throw. He closed his eyes and thought of Ayla, if she was alive or dead, her body crushed and broken d of horses at the bottom of the cliff. With a pain sharper ear could inflict, he knew that if she were dead, life had no him anyway.

a tbunk as a spear landed on the target, but above him, not inful. Suddenly he dropped to his heels as his arms were >oked at his hands and saw that the short length of slack in tdch had been hung over the peg, was severed. Attaroa still ar in her hand. The spear he heard had not come from her. >ked up at the target pole and saw a neat, somewhat small, spear embedded beside the peg, its feathered end still quiv- thin, finely made point had cut the cord. He knew that

d back to look in the direction from which it had come. hind Attaroa he saw movement. His vision became blurry illed with tears of relief. He could hardly believe it. Could ler? Was she really alive? He glanced down to blink several could see more clearly. Looking up, he saw four nearly legs attached to a yellow horse with a woman on her back. ie cried, "you're alive!"

-ttaroa spun around to see who had thrown the spear. Pn
the far edge of the field that was just outside the Camp, she sa»4
woman coming toward her riding on the back of a horse. The hood i
the woman's fur parka was thrown back, and her dark blond hair
the horse's dun-yellow coat were so nearly the same color that
fearful apparition seemed truly of one flesh. Could the spear have <
from the woman-horse? she wondered. But how could anyone i
spear from that distance? Then she saw that the woman had :
spear close at hand.

A chilling wash of fear crawled up Attaroa's scalp, the sensation i
her hair rising, but the cold tingling terror that she felt at that rnonn
had little to do with anything so material as spears. The apparition s
saw was not a woman; of that she was certain. In a moment of sui
lucidity, she knew the full and unspeakable atrocity of her hei
acts, and she saw the figure coming across the field as one of the i
forms of the Mother, a munai, this one an avenging spirit sent to (
retribution. In her heart, Attaroa almost welcomed Her; it would I
relief to have the nightmare of this life ended.

The headwoman was not alone in fearing the strange woman-ho
Jondalar had tried to tell them, but no one had believed him. No (
had ever conceived of a human riding a horse; even seeing it, it W
hard to believe. Ay la's sudden appearance struck each person individ
ually. For some she was only intimidating because of the strangencat
of a woman on horseback and their fear of the unknown; others lookw
upon her uncanny entrance as a sign of otherworldly power and wcff
filled with foreboding. Many of them saw her as Attaroa did: melrowBI
personal nemesis, a reflection of their own consciences about tnor
wrongdoings. Encouraged or forced by Attaroa, more than one ^
committed appalling brutalities, or allowed and abetted tneln',^;
which, in the quiet moments of the night, they felt deep shame or
of retribution. -^

Even Jondalar wondered, for a moment, if Ayla had come back ^
the next world to save his life, convinced at that moment that ,

r» she could. He watched her unhurried approach, study-
til of her, carefully and lovingly, wanting to fill up his
sight he had thought he would never see again: the
ed riding the familiar mare. Her face was ruddy with
oers of hair that had escaped the restraining thong at the
;ck whipped in the wind. Wispy clouds of warmed air
with each breath exhaled by both the woman and the
r Tondalar suddenly conscious of his exposed flesh and

ring her carrying belt over her fur parka and, in a loop
;r made from the tusk of a mammoth that had been a
FTalut. The ivory-handled flint knife he had made for her
tin its sheath, and he saw his hatchet in her belt, too. The
on of her medicine bag hung down her other side.

i: horse with easy grace, Ayla seemed dauntingly sure and
at Jondalar could see her tense readiness. She held her
ight hand, and he knew how swiftly she could let fly from
I. With her left hand, which he was sure held a couple of
supported a spear, set in place on her spear-thrower and
ffionally across Whinney's withers from Ayla's right leg to
^left shoulder. More spears stuck up from a woven grass
||>ehind her leg.

approach, Ayla had watched the tall headwoman's face re-
|inner reactions, showing shock and fear, and the despair of
Kt of clarity, but as the woman on horseback drew closer,
twanged shadows clouded the leader's mind again. Attaroa
(ter eyes to watch the blond woman, then slowly smiled, a
listed, calculating malice.

6 never seen madness, but she interpreted Attaroa's uncon-
kessions, and she understood that this woman who threat-
alar was someone to be wary of; she was a hyena. The
[horseback had killed many carnivores and knew how unpre- ey could be, but it was only hyenas that
she despised. They
tetaphor for the very worst that people could be, and Attaroa
*a, a dangerously malignant manifestation of evil who could
listed.

ogry glare was focused on the tall headwoman, though she
i* to keep an eye on the entire group, including the stunned
»en, and it was fortunate that she did. When Whinney was
w feet of Attaroa, in the periphery of her vision Ayla caught
movement off to the side. With motions so swift they were
°w, a stone was in her sling, whipped around, and flung.

Epadoa squawked with pain and grabbed her arm as her soea tered to the frozen ground. Ayla could have broken a bone if ci, c tried, but she had deliberately aimed for the woman's upper arm checked her force. Even so, the leader of the Wolf Women would ll a very painful bruise for some time.

"Tell spear-women stop, Attaroa!" Ayla demanded.

It took Jondalar a moment to comprehend that she was spealdn a strange language because he found that he had understood hernM ing. Then he was stunned when he realized that the words she sn were in S'Armunai! How could Ayla possibly know how to sb S'Armunai? She had never heard it before, had she?

It surprised the headwoman, too, to hear a complete stranger add her by name, but she was more shocked to hear the peculiarity Ayla's speech that was like the accent of another language, yet i The voice aroused feelings Attaroa had all but forgotten; a bui memory of a complex of emotions, including fear, which filled with a disquieting unease. It reinforced her inner conviction that approaching figure was not simply a woman on a horse.

It had been many years since she'd had those feelings. Attaroa ha liked the conditions that first provoked them, and she liked even being reminded of them now. It made her nervous, agitated, angry. She wanted to push the memory away. She had to get rid o: destroy it completely, so it would never come back. But how? ; looked up at Ayla sitting on the horse, and at that instant she deci it was the blond woman's fault. She was the one who had brought all back, the memory, the feelings. If the woman was gone—destro —it would all go away and everything would be fine again. With quick, if twisted, intelligence, Attaroa began to consider how she cc destroy the woman. A sly, crafty smile spread across her face.

"Well, it seems the Zeiandonii was telling the truth after all," said. "You came just in time. We thought he was trying to steal m and we have barely enough for ourselves. Among the S'Armunai, penalty for stealing is death. He told us some story about ruling horses, but you can understand why we found it so unbelievable . Attaroa noticed her words were not being translated and stopf "S'Armuna! You are not speaking my words," she snapped.

S'Armuna had been staring at Ayla. She recalled that one of the' hunters who had returned with the group carrying the man ha vealed a frightening vision she'd had during the hunt, wanting interpret it. She told of a woman sitting on the back of one o horses they were driving over the cliff, struggling to gain contro and finally making it turn back. When the hunters carrying the s

at talked about seeing a woman riding away on a horse, Fondered at the meaning of the strange visions. itics had been bothering the One Who Served the Mother tie but when the man they brought in turned out to be a 'who seemed to have materialized out of her own past, and |ry of a woman on horseback, it distressed her. It had to be ifae had not been able to discern the meaning. The idea had Si'Annuna's mind while she considered various interpreta-recurring vision. A woman actually riding into their Camp fof a horse gave the sign unprecedented power. It was the ai of a vision, and the impact of it put her in a turmoil. She giving her full attention to Attaroa, but a part of her had be quickly translated the headwoman's words into Zeian-

> a hunter as a punishment for hunting is not the way of [other of All," Ayla said in Zeiandonii when she heard the though she had understood the gist of Attaroa's statement. was so close to Mamutoi that she could understand much e had learned a few words, but Zeiandonii was easier, and [press herself better. "The Mother charges Her children to nd offer hospitality to visitors." len she was speaking in Zeiandonii that S'Armuna noticed :h peculiarity. Though she spoke the language perfectly, anething . . . but there was no time to think about it now. waiting.

why we have the penalty," Attaroa smoothly explained, mger she was fighting to control was evident to both S'Ar- ^yla. "It discourages stealing so there will be enough to

i woman like you, so good with weapons, how could you the way it was for us when no woman could hunt. Food We all suffered."

Great Earth Mother provides more than meat for Her atainly the women here know the foods that grow and can i" Ayla said.

d to forbid that! If I had allowed them to spend their time ley would not have learned to hunt."

ur scarcity was of your own doing, and the choice of those long with you. That is not a reason to kill people who are f your customs," Ayla said. "You have taken on yourself s right. She calls Her children to Her when She is ready. r place to assume Her authority."

'Ie have customs and traditions that are important, and if

their ways are broken, some of them require a punishment Attaroa said.

That was true enough; Ayla knew it from experience.

should your custom require a punishment of death for wantiner she said. "The Mother's ways must come before all other custom requires sharing of food, and hospitality to visitors. You are courteous and inhospitable, Attaroa."

Discourteous and inhospitable! Jondalar fought to control a der laugh. More like murderous and inhuman! He had been watching listening with amazement, and he was grinning with appreciation^ Ayla's understatement. He remembered when she couldn't derstand a joke, much less make subtle insults.

Attaroa was obviously irritated; it was all she could do t(herself. She had felt the barb of Ayla's "courteous" criticism. been scolded as if she were a mere child; a bad girl. She would preferred the implied power of being called evil, a powerfully woman to be respected and greatly feared. The mildness of the w made her seem laughable. Attaroa noticed Jondalar's grin and glar him balefully, certain that everyone watching wanted to laugh him. She vowed to herself that he would be sorry, and so would woman!

Ayla seemed to resettle herself on Whinney, but she had a< shifted her position unobtrusively in order to get a better grip spear-thrower.

"I believe Jondalar needs his clothes," Ayla continued, lifti] _ spear slightly, making it apparent that she held it without being overttyj threatening. "Don't forget his outer fur, the one you are wearing. perhaps you should send someone into your lodge to get his bell mitts, his waterbag, his knife, and the tools he had with him.' waited for S'Armuna to translate.

Attaroa clenched her teeth but smiled, though it was more i mace. She signaled Epadoa with a nod. With her left arm, the on(wasn't sore--Epadoa knew she would also have a bruise on he where Jondalar had kicked her--the woman who was the lead Attaroa's Wolves picked up the clothes they had struggled so ha pull off the man and dropped them down in front of him; thei went inside the large earthlodge.

While they waited, the headwoman suddenly spoke up, tryn assume a friendlier tone. "You have traveled a long way, you niu tired--what did he say your name was? Ayla?"

The woman on horseback nodded, understanding her well enoup This leader cared little for formal introductions, Ayla noticed; not subtle.

I put such importance on it, you must allow me to extend
v of my lodge. You will stay with me, won't you?"
iler Ayla or Jondalar could respond, S'Armuna spoke up.
Kis customary to offer visitors a place with the One Who
other. You are welcome to share my lodge."
nine to Attaroa and waiting for the translation, the shiv-
alled on his trousers. Jondalar hadn't
thought too much
old he was before, when his life was in immediate jeop-
i fingers were so stiff that he fumbled to tie knots in the
s that held his legwear on. Though it was torn, he was
ave his tunic, but he stopped for a moment, surprised,
rd S'Armuna's offer. Looking up after he pulled the tunic
l, he noticed that Attaroa was scowling at the shaman;
I down to put on his foot-coverings and boots as quickly as

|hear from me later, Attaroa thought, but she said, "Then
ftllow me to share food with you, Ay la. We will prepare a
you will be the honored guests. Both of you." She included
It her glance. "We have recently had a successful hunt, and I
W you to leave, thinking too badly of me."
^thought her attempt at a friendly smile was ludicrous, and
|;desire either to eat their food or to stay in this encampment
H longer, but before he could voice his opinion, Ayla an-
Ill
O1 be happy to accept your hospitality, Attaroa. When do you
|ve this feast? I would like to make something to bring, but it
(he day."
| is late," Attaroa said, "and there are some things I will want
ib, too. The feast will be tomorrow, but of course, you will
Sisimple meal tonight?"
? are things I must do for my contribution to your feast. We
lack tomorrow," Ayla said. Then she added, "Jondalar still
l outer fur, Attaroa. Of course, he will return the 'cloak' he
ing."
Oman pulled the parka up over her head and gave it to the
smelled her female scent when he pulled it on, but he appre-
e warmth. Attaroa's smile was pure evil as she stood in the
bt thin inner garment.
he rest of his things?" Ayla reminded her.
* glanced at the entrance to her lodge and motioned to the
Vuo had been standing there for some time. Epadoa quickly
londalar's gear and put it on the ground some feet away from
^s not happy about returning his things. Attaroa had prom-

ised some of them to her. She had particularly wanted the
had never seen one so beautifully made. ^
Jondalar tied on his belt, then put his tools and implements
places, hardly believing he had everything back. He had doulJ!
he'd ever see them again. For that matter, he had doubted tharL
ever leave alive. Then, to everyone's surprise, he leaped up behinrfJ
woman on the horse. This was one Camp he would be glad to <so>
last of. Ayla scanned the area, making sure no one was in a posirin
try to prevent them from leaving, or to cast a spear after them. T
she turned Whinney and left at a gallop.
"Follow them! I want them back. They aren't getting away a
easily," Attaroa snarled to Epadoa, as she stomped into her lodge in
hot rage, shivering with cold.

Ayla kept Whinney at a fast pace until they were some
away and heading down the hill. They slowed when they e
wooded stretch at the bottom, near the river, then doubled ba<
direction they had come, toward her camp, which was actual
close to the S'Armunai settlement. Once they settled into
steady pace, Jondalar became aware of Ayla's closeness, ant
such an overwhelming gratitude to be with her again that i
took his breath away. He put his arms around her waist and I
feeling her hair on his cheek and breathing in her unique warm'
scent.

"You're here, with me. It's so hard to believe. I was afraid yi
gone, walking in the next world," he said softly. "I'm so gra
have you back, I don't know what to say."

"I love you so much, Jondalar," she replied. She leaned bad
ing herself even more into his arms, feeling such a relief to be v
again. Her love for him welled up and filled her to overflowing.
found a bloodstain, and all the while I was following your tra
to find you, I never knew if you were alive or dead. When]
they were carrying you, I thought you must be alive, but
enough that you couldn't walk. I was so worried, but the trai
easy to follow, and I knew I was falling behind. Attaroa's hunters can j
travel very fast, for being on foot, and they knew the way."

"You got here just in time. It's a good thing you arrived
did. A little later and it would have been too late," Jondalar;
"I didn't just get here."

"You didn't? When did you arrive?"

"I came right after the second load ofhorsemeat. I was ahe
of them at first, but the ones carrying the first load caught u

v

crossing. It was lucky that I saw two women going to meet
to a place to hide and waited for them to go past me, and
|an but the hunters with the second load of meat were
| knew. I think they might have seen me, at least from a
has riding at the time, and I rode away from the trail fast.
t back and followed again, but I was more careful, in case
third load."

Mild explain the 'commotion' Ardemun was talking about.
now what it was, he just knew everyone was nervous and
they brought in the second load. But if you've been here,
a wait so long to get me out of there?" Jondalar asked.
watch for a long time, waiting for a chance to get you out
sd keeping place--what do they call it, a Holding?"
made a sound of assent. "Weren't you afraid someone
ou?"

rhed real wolves in their den; next to them, Attaroa's
noisy and easy to avoid. I was close enough to hear them
C of the time. There's a knoll behind the Camp, up the hill.
you can see the whole settlement and directly into that
ehind it, if you look up, you can see three big white rocks
;h in the hillside.

l them. I wish I'd known you were there. It would have
el better every time I saw those white rocks."

l couple of the women call them the Three Girls or maybe
listers," Ayla said.

U it the Camp of the Three Sisters," Jondalar said.
don't know the language very well, yet."

w more than I do. I think you surprised Attaroa when you
;ir language."

aai is so much like Mamutoi that it's easy to get a sense of
Ayla said.

thought to ask if the white rocks had a name. They make
landmark, it seems logical that they would be named."

lole highland is a good landmark. You can see it from a long
listance it resembles a sleeping animal, even on this side.
ace ahead with a good view, you'll see."

the hill must have a name, too, especially since it's such a
>n for hunting, but I've only seen a little of it, when we
erals. There have been two of them, just in the time I've
nd the first time they buried three young people," Jondalar
'g his head to avoid the bare branches of a tree.

^ you to the second funeral," Ayla said. "I thought I might

be able to get you out then, but you were too closely watchp^ * ^
then you found the flint and were showing everyone about ^BB
throwers," Ayla said. "I had to wait until the time was riohr cr> il6'6*
' .11, 6""i au l COOU
surprise them. I m sorry it took so long. ^^
"How did you know about the flint? We thought we were carpfi,i »
Jondalar said. "
"I was watching you all the time. Those Wolf Women really amA
very good watchers. You would have seen that and found a way to
out yourself, if you hadn't gotten distracted with the flint. For thi»
matter, they aren't very good hunters, either," she said.
"When you consider that they didn't know anything to start with
they haven't done badly. Attaroa said they didn't know how to uk
spears, so they had to chase animals," Jondalar said.
"They waste their time going all the way to the Great Mother River
to chase horses off a cliff, when they could hunt better right hast,
Animals following this river have to go across a narrow stretch between
the water and the highland, and you can easily see them coming," Avit
said. ' ^
"I saw that when we went to the first funeral. The place they wall
buried would be a good lookout, and someone has signaled with balfr
fires from up there before, though I don't know how recently. I could
see the charcoal from large fires," Jondalar commented. ;
"Instead of building surrounds for men, they could have made one
to hold animals and chased them into that, even without spears," Ayh
said, then pulled Whinney to a halt. "Look, there it is." She pointed t(
the limestone highland outlined against the horizon. |
"It does look like an animal sleeping, and look, you can even see de- three white stones, the
Three Sisters," Jondalar said. -
They rode in silence for a while. Then, as though he had bceB^
thinking about it, Jondalar said, "If it's so easy to get out of the homk
ing, why haven't the men done it?" .
"I don't think they have really tried," Ayla said. "Maybe that's whyi
the women have stopped watching so closely. But a lot of the womo^
even some of the hunters, don't want the men kept in there any fflOTCj
They are just afraid of Attaroa." Ayla stopped then. "This is where ^
have been camping," she said. -,iAi
As if to confirm it. Racer nickered a greeting as they entered a ^
secluded space that was clear of brush. The young stallionwasr.^|eS
securely to a tree. Ayla had set up a minimal camp in the midd ^
copse each night, but she had packed everything on Racer's bac
morning to be ready to leave immediately if it was necessary- ^
"You saved both of them from going over that cliff!" Jondalar

now if y011 had, and I was afraid to ask. The last thing I before I was hit on the head, was seeing you on Racer's ae some trouble controlling him."

o get used to the rein, that's all. The biggest problem was Stallion, but now he's gone and I'm sorry. Whinney came to ; as soon as they stopped herding her away from me," Ay la

as just as glad to see Jondalar. He dropped his head, then lp in greeting, and he would have walked to the man if he 0 tied. The stallion, his ears forward and his tail lifted high, to Jondalar with eager anticipation as he approached. Then i his head to nuzzle the man's hand. Jondalar greeted the e a friend he thought he would never see again, hugging, , stroking, and talking to the animal.

med when he thought of another question, one he almost ;k. "What about Wolf?"

died, then pierced the air with an unfamiliar whistle. Wolf iding out of the brush, so glad to see Jondalar that he couldn't He ran to him, wagging his tail, barked a little yip, then i and put his paws on the man's shoulders and licked his jaw. Fabbed him by the ruff as he'd seen Ay la do so many times, up a bit, then pressed his forehead against the wolf's.

?ver done that to me before," Jondalar said, surprised. sed you. I think he wanted to find you as much as I did, and re I would have been able to track you without him. We're stance from the Great Mother River, and there were long »f rocky dry ground that showed no tracks. But his nose trail," Ayla said. Then she greeted the wolf.

was waiting there in that brush all the time? And he didn't you signaled? It must have been hard to teach him that, but ou?"

» teach him to hide because I didn't know who might be re, and I didn't want them to know about him. They eat » '

its wolf meat?" Jondalar asked, wrinkling his nose with re-land her hunters."

;y that hungry?" Jondalar asked.

they were once, but now they do it as a ritual. I watched night. They were initiating a new hunter, making a young rt of their Wolf Pack. They keep it a secret from the other 3 away from the lodges to a special place. They had a live

1

wolf in a cage and killed it, butchered it, then cooked it and They. like to think they are getting the strength and cunning "SP wolf that way. It would be better if they just watched wolves^S learn more," Ayla said. ' *1

No wonder she seemed so disapproving of the Wolf Worn their hunting skills, Jondalar thought, suddenly understandin * she didn't like them. Their initiation rites threatened her wolf «<L taught Wolf to stay in hiding until you called him. That's a new I tie, isn't it?" he said.

"I'll teach it to you, but even if he does stay in hiding--most of a time--when I tell him, I still worry about him. Whinney and] too. Horses and wolves are the only animals I've ever seen At women kill," she said, looking around at her beloved animals.

"You've learned a lot about them, Ayla," Jondalar said.

"I had to learn everything I could, so I could get you out oft she said. "But maybe I learned too much."

"Too much? How could you learn too much?"

"When I first found you, I only thought about getting you out» that place, and then getting away from here as soon as we could, now we can't go."

"What do you mean we can't go? Why not?" Jondalar said, frw ing.

"We can't leave those children living in such terrible conditions, i the men, either. We have to get them out of that Holding," Ayla i Jondalar became worried. He had seen that determined look be

"It's dangerous to stay here, Ayla, and not just for us. Think' easy targets those two horses would make. They don't run away people. And you don't want to see Wolfs teeth hanging around i roa's neck, do you? I want to help those people, too. I lived inside place, and no one should have to live like that, especially children, I what can we do? We are only two people."

He did want to help them, but he feared that if they stayed, At roa might harm Ayla. He thought he had lost her, and now that th were back together he was afraid that if they stayed, he might real lose her. He was trying to find a strong reason to convince her I leave.

"We are not alone. There are more than the two of us who want* change things. We have to find a way to help them," Ayla said, u* paused, thinking. "I think S'Armuna wants us to come backtn» why she offered her hospitality. We must go to that feast tomorrow "Attaroa has used poison before. If we go back there, we may n leave," Jondalar cautioned her. "She hates you, you know.'

but we have to go back anyway. For the sake of the children't eat, except what I bring, and only if it doesn't leave to you think we should change our camp or stay here?"Ayla
Ie a lot to do before tomorrow."
hink moving will help. They will just trail us. That's why
leave now," Jondalar said, clasping both her arms. He
her eyes, concentrating as if trying to will her to change
Finally he let her go, knowing she wouldn't leave and that
ay to help her. In his heart it was what he wanted to do,
to be convinced that he couldn't persuade her to go. He
mself that he would let nothing harm her.
t" he said. "I told the men you would never stand for
ie treated like that. I don't think they believed me, but we
elp to get them out. I admit I was surprised to hear S'Ar-
st that we stay with her," Jondalar said. "I don't think she
ay often. Her lodge is small and out of the way. She is not
commodate visitors, but why do you think she wants us to

she interrupted Attaroa to ask. I don't think that head-
i happy about it. Do you trust S'Armuna, Jondalar?"
stopped to think. "I don't know. I trust her more than I
a, but I guess that's not saying much. Did you know S'Ar-
my mother? She lived with the Ninth Cave when she was
they were friends."
s why she speaks your language so well. But if she knows
r, why didn't she help you?"
red that myself. Maybe she didn't want to. I think some-
have happened between her and Marthona. I don't remem-
' mother ever talked about knowing someone who came to
em when she was young, either. But I have a feeling about
She did treat my injury, and though that's more than she's
>st of the men, I think she wants to do more. I don't think
I allow it."
lacked Racer and set up their camp, although both of them
Jondalar started the fire while Ayla began to prepare a
an. She started with the portions she usually estimated for
in, but then she remembered how little the men in the
d been given to eat and decided to increase the quantity.
rted eating again, he was going to be very hungry.
hunkered near the heat for a while after he had the fire
tching the woman he loved. Then he walked over to her.
I get too busy, woman," he said, taking her into his arms,

"I've greeted a horse and a wolf, but I haven't yet greeted tk
who's most important to me." e
She smiled in the way that always evoked a warm feeling of In ^
tenderness. "I'm never too busy for you," she said. *1
He bent down to kiss her mouth, slowly at first, but then all h' el
and anguish at the thought of losing her suddenly overcame hi
was so afraid I would never see you again. I thought you were deaA
His voice cracked with a sob of strain and relief as he held her cin.

"Nothing Attaroa could have done to me would be worse than Imen
** -^n

you.

He held her so tight she could hardly breathe, but she didn't wa
him to let her go. He kissed her mouth, then her neck, and he bee
to explore her familiar body with his knowing hands.

"Jondalar, I'm sure Epadoa is following us . . ."

The man pulled back and caught his breath. "You're right, this
not the right time. We'd be too vulnerable if they came upon us." (
should have known better. He felt a need to explain. "It's just that.,
I thought I'd never see you again. It's like a Gift from the Mother
be here with you, and . . . well . . . the urge came over me to hon
Her."

Ayla held him, wanting to let him know that she felt the same. T
thought occurred to her that she had never heard him try to expla
why he wanted her before. She didn't need an explanation. It was!
she could do to keep herself from forgetting the danger they were
and giving in to her own desire for him. Then, as she felt her warm
for the man growing, she reconsidered their situation.

"Jondalar . . ." The tone of her voice caught his attention. "Ify
really think about it, we are probably so far ahead of Epadoa, it w
take a while for her to track us here . . . and Wolf would warn us. .
As Jondalar looked at her and began to perceive her meaning, l
frown of concern slowly eased into a smile, and his compelling "I
eyes filled with his wanting and his love. "Ayla, my woman, my hea
tiful loving woman," he said, his voice husky with need.

It had been a long time, and Jondalar was ready, but he took C
time to kiss her slowly and fully. The feel of her lips parting to gi
access to her warm mouth encouraged thoughts of other parting
and warm moist openings, and he felt the strivings of his manhoofl
anticipation. It was going to be difficult to hold back enough to n
sure her. ^

Ayla held him close, closing her eyes to think only of his woat
hers, and his gently exploring tongue. She felt his turgid heat P^
against her, and her response was as immediate as his; an urge so s

a't want to wait. She wanted to be closer to him, to be as
, yhg feel of him within her could be. Keeping her lips on
ied her arms down from around his neck to untie the waist
r fur leggings. She dropped them down, then reached for

eit her rumbling with the knots he had had to tie in the
ngs that had been cut. He straightened up, breaking their
fled into eyes that were the blue-gray color of a certain fine- t unsheathed his knife, and cut
through his lacings again.

cd to be replaced anyway. She grinned, then held up her
tent long enough to take a few steps to the sleeping rolls,
ed down on top of them. He followed her while she unlaced
hen untied his own.

i their sides, they kissed again, as Jondalar reached beneath
ka and tunic for a firm breast. He felt her nipple harden in
of his palm, then pushed up her heavy garments to expose
ing tip. It contracted with the cold, until he took it in his
en it warmed but did not relax. Not wanting to wait, she
r back, pulling him with her, and opened to receive him.
'eeling of joy that she was as ready as he was, he knelt
r warm thighs and guided his eager member into her deep
moist warmth enveloped him, caressing his fullness as he
depths with a moaning sigh of pleasure.

him inside her, penetrating deeply, bringing him closer to
" her being. She let herself forget everything except the
him filling her as she arched to reach him. She felt him
k, caressing her from within, and then he filled her again.
ut her welcome and delight as his long shaft withdrew and
again, in just the right position so that each time he entered,
id rubbed against her small center of pleasure, sending
rcitement through her.

was building quickly; for a moment he feared it was too
ut he could not have held back if he'd tried, and this time
y. He let himself advance and retreat as his need directed,
willingness in the rhythm of her motion matching his as he
dily faster. Suddenly, overpoweringly, he was there.
intensity that met his, she was ready for him. She whis-
w, oh now," as she strained to meet him. Her encourage-
a surprise. She had not done it before, but it had an
effect. With the next stroke, his building force reached an
ish and burst through in an eruption of release and pleasure.
ily a step behind, and, with a cry of exquisite delight, she

reached her peak a moment later. A few more strokes and the
lay still. '

Though it was over quickly, the moment had been so intense it
took the woman a while to come down from the culminating
When Jondalar, feeling his weight on her was becoming too
rolled over and disengaged, she felt an inexplicable sense of loss"
wished they could stay linked together longer. Somehow he commu-
her, and the full realization of how much she had feared for him
missed his presence struck her with such poignancy that she felt
sting her eyes.

Jondalar saw a transparent bead of water fall from the outside corner
of her eye and run down the side of her face to her ear. He raised
himself up and looked at her. "What's wrong, Ayla?" ;

"I'm just so happy to be with you," she said, as another tear welled
up and quivered at the edge of her eye before it spilled over. Yet
Jondalar reached for it with a finger and brought the salty drop to
his mouth. "If you are happy, why are you crying?" he said, though
he knew.]

She shook her head, unable to speak at that moment. He smiled with
the knowledge that she shared his powerful feelings of relief and grati-
tude that they were together again. He bent down to kiss her eyes, and
her cheek, and finally her beautiful smiling mouth. "I love you, too," |
he whispered in her ear. ;

He felt a faint stirring in his manhood, and he wished they could |
start all over again, but this was not the time. Epadoa was certain to be ;
trailing them, and sooner or later she would find them. ;

"There is a stream nearby," Ayla said. "I need to wash, and I might j
as well fill the waterbags."

"I'll go with you," the man said, partly because he still wanted to be
close to her, and partly because he felt protective, i

They picked up their lower garments and boots, then the waterbags, ^
and walked to a fairly wide stream, nearly closed over with ice, leaving j
only a small section in the middle still flowing. He shivered with tw ^
shock of freezing water and knew he washed himself only because she ^
did. He would have been content to let himself dry off in the warmth
of his clothes, but if she had any opportunity at all, even in the cold
water, she always cleaned herself. He knew it was a ritual her ^
stepmother had taught her, although now she invoked the Mother
mumbled words spoken in Mamutoi. ...

They filled up the waterbags, and, as they walked back to
campsite, Ayla recalled the scene she had witnessed just before
lacings had been cut the first time.

't you couple with Attaroa?" she asked. "You damaged
ont of her people."
Ie, too. No one is going to force me to share the Mother's
wouldn't have made any difference. I'm sure it was her
long to make a target out of me. But now, I think you are
has to be careful. 'Discourteous and inhospitable' ..."
then he became more serious. "She hates you, you know.
»oth, if she gets the chance."

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A

[|i & 1 JL JLs Ayla and Jondalar settled down for the night, both w
l ; wary of every sound they heard. The horses were staked nearby
j Ayla kept Wolf beside her bedroll, knowing he would warn her
j anything unusual that he sensed, but she still slept poorly. Her drea
ji| felt threatening, but amorphous and disorganized, with no messages
iJii'ijt warnings that she could define, except that Wolf kept appeariiw
rlll!l,'pllli!llil!ll:lli them.
'P111! M 'I 1 ^'|
i|j ^ [i n^i She awoke as the first glimmerings of day broke through the h
I [illl^1^" branches of willow and birch to the east, near the stream. It was s
,1 |)i) |A ^t dark in the rest of their secluded glen, but as she watched, she bee
' jjjp^h;:;! to see thick-needled spruce and the longer needle-shafts of stone pi
, :i'!';:1!i|^ 'i& defined in the growing light. A fine powdering of dry snow had spr
ji ti^il^S kled down during the night, dusting evergreens, tangled brush, d
ijj |^ ^; grass, and bedrolls with white, but Ayla was cozily warm.
,^ ^fii | She had almost forgotten how good it felt to have Jondalar sleepi
::^;||lW^^ beside her, and she stayed still for a while, just enjoying his neame
' But her mind would not stay still. She kept worrying about the d
ahead and thinking over what she was going to make for the feast. S
finally decided to get up, but when she tried to slip out of the furs, s
jl^tl feltjondalar's arm tightening around her, holding her back.
'i| ||^ ^ "Do you have to get up? It's been so long since I've felt you besi
me, I hate to let you go," Jondalar said, nuzzling her neck.
She settled back into his warmth. "I don't want to get up either. I
7(.w,»i,i,; cold, and I'd like to stay here in the furs with you, but I need to sc
t|i|^ ^ cooking something for Attaroa's 'feast,' and make your morning me
Aren't you hungry?" ,
"Now that you mention it, I think I could eat a horse!" Jonda
said, eying the two nearby exaggeratedly. "Jondalar!" Ayla said, looking shocked. ^ .^
He grinned at her. "Not one of ours, but that is what I've
eating lately--when I've had anything at all. If I hadn't been so
gry, I don't think I would have eaten horsemeat, but when tne^
nothing else, you eat what you can get. And there's nothing
with it." j

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lut you don't have to eat it any more. We have other food,"
lev snuggled together for a moment longer, then Ayla
he fur. "The fire has gone out. If you start a new one, I'll
mine tea. We'll need a hot fire today, and a lot of wood."
neal the evening before, Ayla had prepared a larger than
t of a hearty soup from dried bison meat and dried roots,
pine nuts from the cones of the stone pines, but Jondalar
i able to eat as much as he thought. After she put the rest
d taken out a basket of small whole apples, hardly bigger
i which she had found while trailing Jondalar. They had
we still clinging to a dwarfed clump of leafless trees on
x of a hillside. She had cut the hard little apples in half,
, then boiled them for a while with dried rose hips. She
It overnight near the fire. By morning it had cooled and
>m the natural pectin to a sauce of a jellylike consistency
;hewy apple skin.
; made their morning tea, Ayla added a little water to the
s left and put extra cooking stones in the fire to heat it for
St. She also tasted the thickened apple mixture. Freezing
ed the usual tart sourness of the hard apples and adding
i imparted a reddish tinge and a tangy sweet flavor. She
"I to Jondalar along with his soup.
ie best food I've ever eaten!" Jondalar said after the first
Vh&t did you put in it to make it taste so good?"
d. "It's flavored with hunger."
odded, and between mouthfuls he said, "I suppose you're
es me feel sorry for the ones still in the Holding."
. 'hould have to go hungry when there is food available,"
er anger flaring for a moment. "It's another thing when
tarving."
;s, near the end of a bad winter, that can happen," Jon-
iave you ever gone hungry?"
id a few meals, and favorite foods always seem to go first,
low where to look, you can usually find something to eat
free to go looking!"
ti of people who starved because they ran out of food and
where to find more, but you always seem to find some-
Ayla. How do you know so much?"
f me. I think I've always been interested in food and things
^yla said, then paused. "I guess there was a time when I
d, just before Iza found me. I was young, and I don't
uch about it." A fond smile of remembrance flitted across
a said that she never knew anyone who learned to find

food as fast as I did, especially since I was not born with the of where or how to look for it. She told me that hunger taueh^01'* After he finished devouring a second large serving, Jondalar w ^. Ayla sort through her carefully hoarded preserved food suooli begin preparations for the dish she wanted to make for the feast had been thinking about what container she could cook in that vi be large enough to make the amount she would need for the w S'Armunai Camp, since they had cached most of their equipment brought only bare essentials with them.

She took down their largest waterbag and emptied it into sin bowls and cooking utensils, then separated the lining from the covering, which had been sewn together with the fur side out lining had been made from the stomach of an aurochs, which was i exactly waterproof, but seeped very slowly. The moisture was sorbed by the soft leather of the covering and wicked away by the hi which kept the outside essentially dry. She cut open the top of i lining, tied it to a frame of wood with sinew from her sewing kit, (refilled it with water and waited until a thin film of moisture seeped through.

By then the hot fire they had started earlier had burned down searing coals, and she placed the mounted waterbag directly over the making sure she had additional water close at hand to keep the skin j filled. While she waited for it to boil, she started weaving a tight bar out of willow withes and yellowed grasses made flexible by moist from the snow.

When bubbles appeared, she broke strips of lean dried meat! some fatty cakes of traveling food into the water to make a rich, me broth. Then she added a mixture of various grains. Later she plan to mix in some dry roots--wild carrots and starchy groundnuts--j: other pod and stem vegetables, and dried currants and bluebemes. l flavored it all with a choice selection of herbs including coltsfoot, rafl»"j sons, sorrel, basil, and meadowsweet, and a bit of salt saved since uMf left the Mamutoi Summer Meeting, which Jondalar didn't even know she still had. . ^

He had no desire to go very far, and he stayed nearby g31116"0^ wood, getting more water, picking grasses, and cutting willow wi for the baskets she was weaving. He was so happy to be with her he didn't want to let her out of his sight. She was just as happyto j in his company again. But when the man noticed the large quantity' their food supplies she was using, he became concerned. He ha; been through a very hungry time and was unusually aware of tooa- ^ "Ayla, a lot of our emergency food stores are in that dish. li y up too much, it could leave us short."

I make enough for all of them, the women and the men of
and to show them what they could have in their own
they work together," Ayla explained.
I should take my spear-thrower and see if I can find fresh
meat with a worried frown.
Ayla looked up at him, surprised at his concern. By far, the majority
of the food they had eaten on their Journey had been gleaned from the
land passed through, and most of the time, when they did dip
into the woods, it was more for convenience than necessity. Besides,
the food supplies stashed away with the rest of their things
were safe. She looked at him closely. For the first time, she noticed
he was thinner, and she began to understand his uncharacteristic

concern. "It might be a good idea," she agreed. "Maybe you should take
Wolf with you. He's good at finding and flushing out game, and he
will warn you if anyone was near. I'm sure Epadoa and Attaroa's
sons are looking for us."
"What if the wolf like Wolf, who will warn you?" Jondalar said.
"He will. She'll know if strangers are approaching. But I
do not want to leave here as soon as this is done and head back to the
cave. The trip will be very long?" he asked, his forehead knotted deeper as
he considered the alternatives.
"I don't know. I hope, I hope, I hope, but I'm not used to cooking this much at one
time. I'm not sure."
"You should wait, and go hunting later."
"I'll go with you, but if you stay here, I could use more wood," she

said.
"I'll get you some wood," he decided. Looking around, he added,
"I'll pick up everything you're not using so we'll be ready to go."
Ayla was gone longer than she expected, and around midmorning,
Jondalar took Wolf to survey the area, more to make sure that
there was no danger nearby than to look for game. He was a little surprised
that the wolf was to accompany him . . . once Ayla told him
that she had always thought of the animal as hers alone and never
of taking Wolf along with him. The animal turned out to be
friendly, and he did flush something, but Jondalar decided to let
Ayla have the meal of the rabbit by himself.
When Ayla came back, Ayla handed Jondalar a large hot serving of
the mixture she had prepared for the Camp. Though they
ate no more than twice a day, as soon as he saw the bowl piled
with food, he realized that he was very hungry. She took some
and gave a little to Wolf as well.

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It was just after noon before they were ready to leave. Wh-i
 food was cooking, Ayla had completed two rather steep-sided h^
 shaped baskets, both of good size but one somewhat larger rh
 other, and both were filled with the thick, rich combination Sh i
 even added some oily pine nuts from the cones of the stone oinp <
 knew with their diet of mostly lean meat, it was the richness nf ^
 and oils that would be most appealing to the people of the Camn «
 also knew, without entirely understanding why, that it was what ri
 needed the most, especially in winter, for warmth and energy
 along with the grains, to make everyone feel full and satisfied.
 Ayla covered the heaping bowls with inverted shallow baskets u
 as lids, lifted them to Whinney's back, and secured them in a roue
 made holder of dry grass and willow withes that she had worked
 gether quickly, since it would be used only once and then disposed
 Then they started back to the S'Armunai settlement, using a differ
 route. On the way they discussed what to do with the animals o
 they reached Attaroa's Camp.

"We can hide the horses in the woods by the river. Tie them t
 tree and walk the rest of the way,"jondalar suggested.

"I don't want to tie them. If Attaroa's hunters happened to i
 them, they'd be too easy to kill," Ayla said. "If they are free, at 1<
 they have a chance to get away, and they'll be able to come when
 whistle. I would rather have them close by, where we can see them

"In that case, the field of dry grass next to the Camp might be a g»
 place for them. I think they would stay there without being tied. Tl
 usually stay close by if we put them where they have something
 graze," Jondalar said. "And it would make a big impression on Atta
 and the S'Armunai if we both ride horses into the Camp. If they're)
 everyone else we've met, the S'Armunai are probably a little afraic
 people who can control horses. They all think it has to do with spi
 or magical powers or something, but as long as they're afraid, it gi
 us an edge. With only two of us, we need every advantage we can gt

"That's true," Ayla said, frowning, both because other concerns
 them and the animals, and because she hated the thought of tak
 advantage of the unfounded fears of the S'Armunai. It made her as if she were lying, but their
 lives were at stake, and very likely
 lives of the boys and men in the Holding.

It was a difficult moment for Ayla. She was being required to m
 a choice between two wrongs, but she was the one who had i
 that they return to help, even though it put their own lives in J^P
 She had to overcome her ingrained compulsion to be absolute y
 ful; she had to choose the lesser wrong, to adapt, if they were

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f savins the boys and men of the Camp, and themselves,
jnessofAttaroa.

mdalar said. "Ayla?" he repeated, when she had not re-
iis question.

yesr
iat about Wolf? Are you going to take him into the Camp,

d to think about it. "No, I don't think so. They know
rses but they don't know about a wolf. Considering what
lo with wolves, I don't see any reason why we should give
XMTunity to get too close to him. I'll tell him to stay in
ik he will, if he sees me once in a while."

ill he hide? It's mostly open country around the settle-

ight for a moment. "Wolf can stay where I was hiding
;hed you, Jondalar. We can go around from here to the
rhere are some trees and brush along a small stream lead-
e place. You can wait for me there with the horses; then
ck around and ride into the Camp from another direction."

oriced them entering the field from the fringe of woods,
ones who saw the woman and man, each on a separate
ring across the open land toward the settlement, had the
hey had simply appeared. By the time they reached Atta-
arthlodge, everyone who could had gathered to watch
the men in the Holding were crowded behind the fence
ough the cracks.

ood with her hands on her hips and her legs apart, assum-
ade of command. Though she would never admit it, she
and more than a little concerned to see them, and this
i horses. The few times that anyone had ever gotten away
; had run as far and as fast as he could. No one had ever
»me back. What power did these two possess that they
t enough to return? With her underlying fear of reprisal
cat Mother and Her world of spirits, Attaroa wondered
Ppearance of the enigmatic woman and the tall, handsome
ignify, but her words showed none of her worry.

id decide to come back," she said, looking to S'Armuna to

"ought the shaman seemed surprised, too, but he sensed
efore she translated Attaroa's words into Zeiandonii, she
n directly.

"No matter what she says, I would advise you not to stay ' lodge, son of Marthona. My offer is still open to both of you " ch before repeating Attaroa's comment. ' l

The headwoman eyed S'Armuna, sure she had spoken more w than were necessary to translate. But without knowing the lanpic she couldn't be sure.

"Why shouldn't we come back, Attaroa? Weren't we invited feast in our honor?" Ayla said. "We have brought our contriburim food."

As her words were translated, Ayla threw her leg over and slid do from Whinney's back, then lifted the largest bowl and set it on ground between Attaroa and S'Armuna. She picked up the has cover, and the delicious aroma from the huge mound of grains coo' with other foods made everyone stare in wonder as their mou watered. It was a treat they had seldom enjoyed in recent years, es cially in winter. Even Attaroa was momentarily overwhelmed.

"There seems to be enough for everyone," she said.

"That is only for the women and children," Ayla said. Then took the slightly smaller woven bowl that Jondalar had just brou and put it down beside the first. She lifted the lid and announc "This is for the men."

A murmuring undercurrent arose from behind the fence, and ft the women who had come out of their lodges, but Attaroa was furic "What do you mean, for the men?"

"Certainly when the leader of a Camp announces a feast in hono) a visitor, it includes all the people? I presumed that you were the lea of the entire Camp, and that I was expected to bring enough for You are the leader of everyone, aren't you?"

"Of course I am the leader of everyone," Attaroa sputtered, can' at a loss for words.

"If you aren't ready yet, I think I should take these bowls inside, they don't freeze," Ayla said, picking up the larger bowl again l turning toward S'Armuna. Jondalar took the other.

Attaroa quickly recovered. "I invited you to stay in my lodge, ' said.

"But I'm sure you are busy with preparations," Ayla said, so would not want to impose on the leader of this Camp. It is appropriate for us to stay with the One Who Serves the Motne S'Armuna translated, then added, "It is the way it is always done^ Ayla turned to go, saying to Jondalar under her breath, "Start ing toward S'Armuna's lodge!"

As Attaroa watched them go with the shaman, a smile ofp"l'6

^ },

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her features, turning a face that could have been beautiful subhuman caricature. They were stupid to come »thought, knowing that their return had given her the he wanted: her chance to destroy them. But she also Id have to catch them off guard. When she thought about d to let them go with S'Armuna. It would get them out ie wanted time to think and discuss plans with Epadoa, et returned.

e being, however, she would have to go along with this ialized one of the women, the one who had a baby girl and and told her to tell the other women to prepare some ibration. "Make enough for everyone," the headwoman ig the men in the Holding." i looked surprised, but she nodded and hurried away.

aess you are ready for some hot tea," S'Armuna said, 'ed Ayla and Jondalar to their sleeping places, expecting ne charging in any moment. But after they had drunk nit being disturbed, she relaxed a little. The longer Ayla were there without the headwoman objecting, the more ley would be allowed to stay.

ension of worrying about Attaroa eased, an uncomfort-iscended on the three people seated around the hearth. he woman Who Served the Mother, trying not to be too face had a peculiar skew, the left side was much more n the right, and she guessed S'Armuna might even have the underdeveloped right jaw when she chewed. The riling to hide the abnormality, wearing her graying, light 'ith straightforward dignity, pulled back and up in a car the top of her head. For some inexplicable reason, n to the older woman.

not help but notice, however, a hesitancy in her manner, d that S'Armuna was pulled by indecision. She kept "d Jondalar as if she wanted to say something to him but to begin, as if she were trying to find a delicate way to "It subject.

instinct, Ayla spoke up. "Jondalar told me that you knew Armuna," she said. "I wondered where you learned to aagesowell."

l turned to the visitor with a look of surprise. His lan->ught, not hers? Ayla almost felt the shaman's sudden, ^on of her, but her return gaze was just as strong.

"Yes, I knew Marthona, and the man she mated as well."
It seemed as though she wanted to say more, but instead <ih
silent. Jondalar filled the void, eager to talk about his home and f w<*<
especially with someone who once knew them. <un^y^

Ni

"Was Joconan leader of the Ninth Cave when you were rilriu-m
Jondalar asked. ^E^

"No, but I'm not surprised that he became leader."

"They say Marthona was almost a coleader, like a Mamutoi hpa.1"
woman, I suppose. That's why, after Joconan died ..."

"Joconan is dead?" S'Annuna interrupted. Ayla sensed her shock
and noted an expression that showed something akin to grief. Then dx
seemed to gather her composure. "It must have been a difficult tm»
for your mother."

"I'm sure it was, although I don't think she had much time to tfamk
about it, or to grieve too long. Everyone was pressing her to be leader
I don't know when she met Dalanar, but by the time she mated hnn.
she had been leader of the Ninth Cave for several years. Zeiandoni toU
me she was already blessed with me before the mating, so it shouU
have been lucky, but they severed the knot a couple of years after I
was born, and he chose to leave. I don't know what happened, but sli
stories and songs about their love are still recalled. They emban-Ml
Mother."

It was Ayla who prompted him to continue, for her own interest,
although S'Armuna's interest was also obvious. "She mated again, and
had more children, didn't she? I know you had another brother." <
Jondalar continued, directing his comments at S'Annuna. "M|
brother Thonolan was born to Willomar's hearth, and my sister FolaB^
too. I think that was a good mating for her. Marthona is very happy
with him, and he was always very good to me. He used to travel a wh
go on trading missions for my mother. He took me with him sodbb'
times. Thonolan, too, when he got old enough. For a long tunel
thought of Willomar as the man of my hearth, until I went to live ww
Dalanar and sot to know him a little better. I still feei close to bun,
-- i l>trtt-

although Dalanar was also very kind to me, and I grew to love nw
too. But everyone likes Dalanar. He found a flint mine, metjenka,--
started his own Cave. They had a daughter, Joplaya, my close-cous ^
It suddenly occurred to Ayla that if a man was as much respo
for starting a new life growing inside a woman as the woman wa ,
the "cousin" he called Joplaya was actually his sibling; as much a ^
as the one named Folarara. Close-cousin, he had called her; W3 ^
because they recognized it was a closer tie than the relationship
i l 3 "The ''^'?

children of a mother's sisters or the mates of her brothers." i "I-

fondalar's mother had gone on while she pondered the ofjondalar's kin.

M

to my mother turned the leadership over to Joharran, al-
?Snsisted that she stay on as adviser to him," Jondalar was
low did you happen to know my mother?"

aa hesitated for a while, staring into space as though she
B an image from the past; then slowly she began to speak. "I
aore than a girl when I was taken there. My mother's brother
here, and I was his favorite child, the only girl born to
js two sisters. He had made a Journey when he was young
amed of the renowned zeiaondonia. When it was felt that I
alent or gift to Serve the Mother, he wanted me to be trained
,t. He took me to the Ninth Cave because your Zeiaondoni
mong those Who Serve the Mother."

serns to be a tradition with the Ninth Cave. When I left, our
had just been chosen First," Jondalar commented.

l know the former name of the one who is First now?"

asked, interested.

made a wry smile, and Ayla thought she understood why.

a" as Zolena."

? She's young to be First, isn't she? She was just a pretty
lien I was there."

perhaps, but dedicated," Jondalar said.

aa nodded, then picked up the thread of her story. "Mar-
l were close to the same age, and the hearth of her mother
f high status. My uncle and your grandmother, Jondalar,
rrangement for me to live with her. He stayed just long
make sure I was settled." S'Armuna's eyes held a faraway
she smiled. "Marthona and I were like sisters. Even closer
s, more like twins. We liked the same things, and shared
. She even decided to train to be zeiaondoni along with me."
know that," Jondalar said. "Maybe that's where she gained
hip qualities."

i, but neither of us were thinking about leadership then. We
^separable, and wanted the same things . . . until it became
" S'Armuna stopped speaking then.

n?" Ayla encouraged. "There was a problem with feeling so
friend?" She had been thinking about Deegie, and how
it had been to have a good friend, if only for a little while.
have loved knowing someone like that when she was grow-
>a had been like a sister, but as much as she had loved her,
Jan. No matter how close she felt, there were some things

they could never understand about each other, such as Avi ' 3
curiosity, and Uba's memories. s m

"Yes," S'Armuna said, looking at the young woman, suddeni
of her unusual accent again. "The problem was that we feU'^
with the same man. I think Joconan may have loved us both r»^
talked of a double mating, and I think Marthona and I would i
been willing, but by then the old Zeiandoni had died, and whe»
conan went to the new one for advice, he told him to choose Marth
I thought then it was because Marthona was so beautiful and her
wasn't twisted, but now I think it may have been because my u
had told them he wanted me to come back. I didn't stay for i
Matrimonial; I was too bitter and angry. I started back soon after
told me."

"You came back here alone?" Jondalar asked. "Across the glacie
yourself?"

"Yes," the woman said.

"Not many women make such long Journeys, especially by d
selves. It was a dangerous and a brave thing to do, alone," Joa
said.

"Dangerous, yes. I almost fell into a crevasse, but I'm not sure
brave it was. I think my anger sustained me. But when I got h
everything had changed; I had been gone for many years. My me
and aunt had moved north, where many other S'Armunai live, a
with my cousins and brothers, and my mother had died there.
uncle was dead, too, and another man was leader, a stranger na
Brugar. I'm not sure where he came from. He seemed charmin
first, not handsome, but very attractive in a rugged sort of way, bi
was cruel and vicious."

"Brugar . . . Brugar," Jondalar said, closing his eyes and tryili
remember where he had heard the name. "Wasn't he Attaroa's mai
S'Armuna got up, suddenly very agitated. "Would anyone like i
tea?" she asked. Ayla and Jondalar both accepted. She brought t
each fresh hot cups of the herbal beverage, then got one for her
but before she sat down, she addressed the visitors. "I've never tol
this to anyone before."

"Why are you telling us now?" Ayla asked.

"So you will understand." She turned to Jondalar. "Yes, Brugar
Attaroa's mate. Apparently he began to make changes shortly aft*
became leader, and he started by making men more important
women. Small things at first. Women had to sit and wait until
were granted permission to speak. Women were not allowed
weapons. It didn't seem so serious at first, and the men were en) ,
the power, but after the first woman was beaten to death as p

>aking her mind, the rest began to realize things were
5. By then people didn't know what had happened or
oge things back. Brugar brought out the worst in men.
md of followers, and I think the others were scared not to

r where he ever got such ideas?" Jondalar said.
idden inspiration, Ayla asked, "What did this Brugar look

strong-featured, rugged, as I said, but very charming and
hen he wanted to be."
e many people of the Clan, many flatheads, in this area?"

sed to be, but not too many any more. There are a lot more
he west of here. Why?"

i the S'Armunai feel toward them? Particularly those of
s?"

icy are not considered abominations, the way they are
^elandonii. Some men have taken flathead women as mates,
pring are tolerated, but they are not well accepted by either
iderstand it."

think Brugar could have been born of mixed spirits?" Ayla

you asking all these questions?"

I think he must have lived with, perhaps grown up with,
i call flatheads," Ayla replied.

ikes you think so?" the shaman asked.

die things you describe are Clan ways."

'hat 'flatheads' call themselves," Ayla explained, then began

. "But if he could speak so well that he was charming, he
»ve lived with them always. He probably was not born to
vent to live with them later and, as a mixture, he would
arely tolerated, and perhaps considered deformed. I doubt
inderstood their ways, so he would have been an outsider.
probably miserable."

* was surprised. She wondered how Ayla, a complete
aid know so much. "For someone you never met, you seem
reat deal about Brugar."

was born of mixed spirits?" Jondalar said.

sroa told me about his background, what she knew of it.

"is mother was a full mixture, half-human, half-flathead;

tt born to a full flathead mother," S'Armuna began.

a child caused by some man of the Others who forced her,

Ayla thought, like the baby girl at the Clan Meeting who was to Durc.

"Her childhood must have been unhappy. She left her Dennl she was barely a woman, with a man from a Cave of the p" e live to the west of here." e l

"The Losadunai?" Jondalar asked.

"Yes, I think that's what they are called. Anyway, not lone afr ran away, she had a baby boy. That was Brugar," S'Armuna cmn ued.

"Brugar, but sometimes called Brug?" Ayla interjected.

"How did you know?"

"Brug could have been his Clan name."

"I guess the man his mother ran away with used to beat her V knows why? Some men are like that."

"Women of the Clan are raised to accept that," Ayla said. "Thei are not allowed to strike each other, but they can hit a womar reprimand her. They are not supposed to beat them, but some i do."

S'Armuna nodded with understanding. "So perhaps in the be ning Brugar's mother took it for granted when the man she lived i hit her, but it must have gotten worse. Men like that usually do, i he started beating on the boy, too. That may have been what fin prompted her to leave. Anyway, she took him and ran away from mate, back to her people," S'Armuna said.

"And if it was hard on her to grow up with the Clan, it must h been worse for her son, who was not even a full mixture," Ayla sat

"If the spirits mixed as expected, he would have been three p human, and only one part flathead," S'Armuna said.

Ayla suddenly thought of her son, Durc. Broud is bound to m his life difficult. What if he turns out like Brugar? But Durc is a mixture, and he has Uba to love him, and Brun to train him. o accepted him into the Clan when he was leader and Durc was a ba He will make sure Durc knows the ways of the Clan. I know he we be capable of talking, if there was someone to teach him, but he l also have the memories. If he does, he could be full Clan, with Bn help.

S'Armuna had a sudden inkling about the mysterious young woffl

"How do you know so much about flatheads, Ayla?" she asked.

The question caught Ayla by surprise. She wasn't on her gu she would have been with Attaroa, and she wasn't prepared to it. Instead she blurted out the truth. "I was raised by them, s "My people died in an earthquake and they took me in.

Idhood must have been even more difficult than Brugar's,"

aid.

ink in a way it was easier. I wasn't considered a deformed Clan; I was just different. One of the Others--^hich is all us. They didn't have expectations of me. Some of the l were so strange to them that they didn't know what to Except I'm sure some of them did think I was rather slow id such a hard time remembering things. I'm not saying it awing up with them. I had to learn to speak their way, and m to live according to their ways, learn their traditions. It fit in, but I was lucky. Iza and Creb, the people who raised ie and I know that without them I would not have lived at

l of her statements raised questions in S'Armuna's mind, e was not appropriate to ask them. "It is a good thing that o mixture in you," she said, giving Jondalar a significant lially since you are going to meet the Zeiandonii." the the look, and she had an idea what the woman meant. i the way Jondalar had first reacted when he discovered ised her, and it was even worse when he found out about lixed spirits.

you know she hasn't met them already?" Jondalar asked.

a paused to consider the question. How had she known?

at the man. "You said you were going home, and she said, e' not hers." Suddenly a thought came to her, a revelation. age! The accent! Now I know where I've heard it before.

an accent like that! Not quite as much as yours, Ayla,

lidn't speak his own language as well as you speak Jonda- ; must have developed that speech . . .

mannerism--it isn't

ent--when he lived with the flatheads. There is something rond of your speech, and now that I hear it, I don't think ?et again."

embarrassed. She had worked so hard to speak correctly, never been quite able to make some sounds. For the most ceased to bother her when people mentioned it, but S'Ar- naking such an issue of it.

nan noticed her discomfiture. "I'm sorry, Ayla. I don't abarrass you. You really do speak Zeiandonii very well, ^er than I do, since I've forgotten so much. And it isn't 'cent you have. It's something else. I'm sure most people lotice. It's just that you have given me such an insight into l that helps me to understand Attaroa."

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"Helps you to understand Attaroa?" Jondalar asked. "I wish ^ understand how someone could be so cruel." ' "

"She wasn't always so bad. I really grew to admire her wh came back, although I felt very sorry for her, too. But in a w was prepared for Brugar as few women could have been."

"Prepared? That's a strange thing to say. Prepared for what?"

"Prepared for his cruelty," S'Armuna explained. "Attaroa was badly when she was a girl. She never said much about it but I In she felt her own mother hated her. I learned from someone else her mother did abandon her, or so it was thought. She left and nori was heard from her again. Attaroa was finally taken in by a man wt mate had died in childbirth, under very suspicious circumstances baby with her. The suspicions were borne out when it was discov* that he beat Attaroa and took her before she was even a woman no one else wanted responsibility for her. It was something about mother, some question about her background, but it left Attaroa to raised with and warped by his cruelty. Finally the man died, and x people of her Camp arranged for her to be mated to the new leadc this Camp."

"Arranged without her consent?" Jondalar asked.

"They 'encouraged' her to agree, and they brought her to a Brugar. As I said, he could be very charming, and I'm sure he fw her attractive."

Jondalar nodded agreement. He had noticed that she could h been quite attractive.

"I think she looked forward to the mating," S'Armuna continii

"She felt it would be a chance for a new beginning. Then she disc ered the man with whom she had joined was even worse than the she had known before. Brugar's Pleasures were always done with b ings, and humiliation, and worse. In his way, he did ... I hesitaC say he loved her, but I think he did have feeling for her. He was: so ... twisted. Yet she was the only one who dared to defy him spite of everything he did to her."

S'Armuna paused, shook her head, and then continued. "Brugarl a strong man, very strong, and he liked to hurt people, especi women. I really think he enjoyed causing women pain. You saia flatheads don't allow men to hit other men, though they caa women. That might have something to do with it. But Brugar Attaroa's defiance. She was a good deal taller than he was, and s very strong herself. He liked the challenge of breaking down her re tance, and he was delighted when she fought him. It ga^ excuse to hurt her, which seemed to make him feel powerful.

ndered, recalling a situation not too dissimilar, and she felt
f empathy and compassion for the headwoman.

ged about it to the other men, and they encouraged him,
hey went along with him," the older woman said. "The
sisted, the worse he made it for her, until she finally broke.
mid want her. I used to wonder, if she had been complai-
beginning, would he have grown tired of her and stopped
i"

iffht about that. Broud had grown tired of her when she
sting.

chow I doubt it," S'Armuna continued. "Later, when she
and did stop fighting him, he didn't change. She was his
s far as he was concerned, she belonged to him. He could
r he wanted to her."

er Broud's mate, Ayla thought, and Brun wouldn't let him
>t after the first time. Though it was his right, the rest of
thought his interest in me was strange. They discouraged

iidn't stop beating her, even when Attaroa became preg-
alar asked, appalled.

ough he seemed pleased that she was going to have a baby,"
said.

pregnant, too, Ayla thought. Her life and Attaroa's had
irities.

came to me for healing," S'Armuna was continuing, closing
id shaking her head as if to dispel the memory. "It was
.e things he did to her, I cannot tell you. Bruises from
re the least of it."

l she put up with it?" Jondalar asked.

no other place to go. She had no kin, no friends. The
er other Camp had made it clear to her that they didn't
ad at first she was too proud to go back and let them know
ring to the new leader was so bad. In a way, I knew how
Armuna said. "No one beat me, although Brugar did try it
believed there was no other place for me to go, even though
^datives. I was the One Who Served the Mother, and I
nit how bad things had become. It would have seemed that

>>> -

noded his understanding. He, too, had once felt that he
e- He glanced at Ayla, and he felt his love for her warm
hated Brugar," S'Armuna continued, "but, in a strange
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way, she may have loved him, too. Sometimes she provoked purpose, I think. I wondered if it was because when the pain w*^ he would take her and, if not love her, or even Pleasure her make her feel wanted. She may have learned to take a perversp ir-1'^ Pleasure from his cruelty. Now she wants no one. She Pleasnn.'L^ self by causing men pain. If you watch her, you can see her (1 ment." ^c^1

"I almost pity her," Jondalar said. J

"Pity her, if you want, but do not trust her," the shaman said "<t is insane, possessed by some great evil. I wonder if you can uiwU

stand? Have you ever been filled with such rage that all reason lean *," ^v< you?" ^

Jondalar's eyes were huge as he felt compelled to nod his assent H had felt such rage. He had beaten a man until he was unconscious -- still he had been unable to stop.

"With Attaroa, it is as though she is constantly filled by such a rau She doesn't always show it--in fact, she is very good at hiding it--h her thoughts and feelings are so full of this evil rage that she is i longer able to think or to feel the way ordinary people do. She is n human any more," the shaman explained.

"Surely she must have some human feeling?" Jondalar said.

"Do you recall the funeral shortly after you came here?" S'Anma asked.

"Yes, three young people. Two men and I wasn't sure about d third, even though they were all dressed the same. I remember wx dering what had caused their deaths. They were so young."

"Attaroa caused their deaths," S'Armuna said. "And the one yB weren't sure of? That was her own child."

They heard a sound and turned as one toward the entrance of S'A muna's earthlodge.

t, young woman stood in the entrance passage of the earth-
king nervously at the three people within. Jondalar noticed
dy that she was quite young, hardly more than a girl; Ayla
at she was quite pregnant.
is it, Cavao?" S'Armuna said.
a and her hunters just returned, and Attaroa is yelling at
you for telling me," the older woman said, then turned back
sts. "The walls of this earthlodge are so thick that it is hard
ything beyond them. Perhaps we should go out there."
urried out, past the pregnant young woman, who tried to
to let them by. Ayla smiled at her. "Not wait much more?"
i S'Annunai.
miled nervously, then looked down.
ought she seemed frightened and unhappy, which was un-
an expectant mother, but then, she reasoned, most women
their first were a little nervous. As soon as they stepped
they heard Attaroa.
ll me you found where they camped. You missed your
ou're not much of a Wolf Woman if you can't even track,"
'oman railed in loud derision.
stood tight-lipped, anger flaring from her eyes, but made no
;rowd had gathered, not too closely, but the young woman
wolf skins noticed that most of them had turned to look in
rectum. She glanced to see what had commanded their atten-
she was startled at the sight of the blond woman coming
cm, followed, even more surprisingly, by the tall man. She
known a man to return once he got away.
tfe you doing here?" Epadoa blurted.
wu. You missed your chance," Attaroa sneered. "They came
teir own."
faouldn't we be here?" Ayla said. "Weren't we invited to a
^rmuna translated.

"The feast is not ready yet. Tonight," Attaroa said to the dismissing them curtly, then addressing her head Wolf Vu "Come inside, Epadoa. I want to talk to you." She turned her head to look at all the watchers and entered her lodge. Epadoa stared at Avla's frown indenting her forehead; then she followed the headwoman. After she was gone, Ayla looked out across the field a bit anxiously. After all, Epadoa and the hunters were known to hunt her. She felt relieved when she saw Whinney and Racer at the opposite of the sloping field of dry brittle grass some distance away. She turned and studied the woods and brush on the uphill slope outside of Camp, wishing she could see Wolf, yet glad that she could not. She wanted him to stay in hiding, but she did make a point of standing in plain sight looking in his direction, hoping that he could see her. As the visitors walked back with S'Armuna toward her dwelling, Jondalar recalled a comment she had made earlier that had piqued his curiosity. "How did you keep Brugar away from you?" he asked. "He said he tried once to beat you like he did the other women; how do you stop him?"

The older woman halted and looked hard at the young man, the woman beside him. Ayla felt the shaman's indecision and sensed she was evaluating them, trying to decide how much to tell them. "He tolerated me because I am a healer--he always referred to me as a medicine woman," S'Armuna said, "but more than anything, he feared the world of the spirits."

Her comments brought a question to Ayla's mind. "Medicine women have a unique status in the Clan," she said, "but they are not healers. Mogs are the ones who communicate with the spirits. The spirits known to the flatheads, perhaps, but Brugar feared the power of the Mother. I think he realized that she knew the harm she did, and the evil that corrupted his spirit. I think he feared her retribution. When I showed him that I could draw on her power, he did not bother me any more," S'Armuna said.

"You can draw on her power? How?" Jondalar asked. S'Armuna reached inside her shirt and pulled out a small figure of a woman, perhaps four inches high. Both Ayla and Jondalar had many similar objects, usually carved out of ivory, bone, or wood. Jondalar had even seen a few that had been carefully and lovingly sculpted out of stone, using only stone tools. They were Mother's gifts, and, except for the Clan, every group of people either of them had met, from the Mammoth Hunters in the east to Jondalar's people in the west, depicted some version of her. Some of the figures were quite rough, some were exquisitely

•hiffhiy abstract, some were perfectly proportional images of mature women, except for certain abstract aspects. Most of S emph^i^^ ^e sttributes of bountiful motherhood—large I stomachs, wide hips—and purposely deemphasized other ics. Often the arms were only suggested, or the legs ended father than feet, so the figure could be stuck in the ground. kbiy they lacked facial features. The figures were not meant Irak of any particular woman, and certainly no artist could ace of the Great Earth Mother. Sometimes the face was left |as given enigmatic markings, sometimes the hair was elab- |ed and continued all around the head, covering the face. '» portrayal of a woman's face that either of them had ever |e sweet and tender carving Jondalar had made of Ay la when Uone in her valley, not long after they had met. But Jondalar ilegretted his impulsive indiscretion. He had not meant it to b* figure; he had made it because he had fallen in love with wanted to capture her spirit. But he realized, after it was Ht carried tremendous power. He feared it might bring her icularly if it ever got into the hands of someone who wanted Strol over her. He was even afraid to destroy it, for fear that Ion might harm her. He had decided to give it to her to keep la loved the small sculpture of a woman, with a carved face Wsemblance to her own, because Jondalar had made it. She ttdered any power it might have; she just thought it was ^

|k the Mother figures were often considered beautiful, they lubile young women made to appeal to some male canon of Ky were symbolic representations of Woman, of her ability Id produce life from within her body, and to nourish it with Mintiful fullness, and by analogy they symbolized the Great tth, Who created and produced all life from Her body, and)bu Her children with Her wondrous bounty. The figures fceptacles for the spirit of the Great Mother of All, a spirit |take many forms.

particular Mother figure was unique. S'Armuna gave the Bndalar. "Tell me what this is made of," she said. I turned the small figure over in his hands, examining it it was endowed with pendulous breasts and wide hips, the Suggested only to the elbow, the legs tapered, and though a 'as mdicated, the face bore no markings. It was not much (size or shape from many he had seen, but the material from ^ made was most unusual. The color was uniformly dark.

When he tried, he could make no indentation in it with his
It was not made of wood or bone or ivory or antler. It was a*^
stone, but smoothly formed, with no indication or marks of<
was not any stone he knew.

He looked up at S'Armuna with a puzzled expression. "
seen anything like this before," he said.

Jondalar gave the figure to Ayla, and a shiver went through L_
the moment she touched it. I should have taken my fur parka when
went out, she said to herself, but she could not help feeling that it
more than the cold that had made her feel such a sharp chill.

"That munai began as the dust of the earth," the woman stated
"Dust?" Ayla said. "But this is stone!"

"Yes, it is now. I turned it to stone."

"You turned it to stone? How can you turn dust to stone?" TonA
said, full of disbelief.

The woman smiled. "If I tell you, would it make you believe'
power?"

"If you can convince me," the man retorted.

"I will tell you, but I won't try to convince you. You will have!
convince yourself. I started with hard, dry clay from the river's «
and pounded it to dusty earth. Then I mixed in water." S'Anni
paused for a moment, wondering if she should say anything mi
about the mixture. She decided against it for now. "When it was l
right consistency, it was shaped. Fire and hot air turned it to stoi
the shaman stated, watching to see how the two young strangers we
react, whether they would show disdain or be impressed, whether t
would doubt or believe her.

The man closed his eyes trying to recall something. "I remeffl
hearing . . . from a Losadunai man, I think . . . something ac
Mother figures made of mud."

S'Armuna smiled. "Yes, you could say we make munai out offflt
Animals, too, when we have need to call upon their spirits, many kit
of animals, bears, lions, mammoths, rhinos, horses, whatever we wai
But they are mud only while they are being shaped. A figure made*
the dust of the earth mixed with water, even after it has hardened, wi
melt in water back to the mud from which it was formed, thenturn,
dust, but after it is brought to life by Her sacred flame, it is fore'.1
changed. Passing through the Mother's searing heat makes the "P"]
as hard as stone. The living spirit of the fire makes them endure.
Ayla saw the fire of excitement in the woman's eyes, and it ^"^^
her of Jondalar's excitement when he was first developing thesr^
thrower. She realized that S'Armuna was reliving the thrill 01
ery, and it convinced her.

Ibritde, even more than flint," the woman continued. I Herself has shown how they can be broken, but water -g them. A munai made of mud, once touched by Her n stay outside in the rain and snow, can even soak in I never melt."

eed command the power of the Mother," Ayla said. hesitated an instant, then asked, "Would you like to

would," Ayla said at the same time as Jondalar replied, lyery interested."

ne, I will show you."

'. my parka?" Ayla said.

6 " S'Armuna said. "We should all put warmer clothes on, ye were having the Fire Ceremony, it would be so hot that anywhere near it, you would not need furs, not even on a , Everything is nearly ready. We would have made the fire he ceremony tonight, but it takes time, and the proper n. We'll wait until tomorrow. Tonight we have an impor- i attend."

i stopped for a moment and closed her eyes, as though considering a thought that had occurred to her. "Yes, a int feast," she repeated, looking straight at Ayla. Does she Idanger that threatens her? the shaman wondered. If she is ik, she must.

locked into the shaman's lodge and slipped on their outer |Ayla noticed the young woman had left. Then S'Armuna Xttne distance beyond her dwelling to the farthest edge of the t, toward a group of women working around a rather innoc- |Puction that resembled a small earthlodge with a sloped roof. |n were bringing dried dung, wood, and bone into the small 'materials for a fire, Ayla realized. She recognized the preg- |g woman among them and smiled at her. Cavao smiled shyly

Bia went into the low entrance of the small structure, ducking then turned and beckoned to the visitors when they held su^e if they were supposed to follow. Inside, a fireplace with Bines licking at glowing coals kept the small, somewhat cir- ""ooni quite warm. Separate piles of bone, wood, and dung

Ost the entire left half of the space. Along the right curved several rough shelves, flattish shoulder and pelvic bones of is supported by stones, displaying many small objects. loved closer and were surprised to see that the objects were 'Aat had been shaped and molded out of muddy clay and left

to dry. Several of the figures were of women. Mother figures k I
/-l i- ir-.i. 5"11-*, OUTi

of them were not complete, just the distinguishing parts of the
lower half of the body, including the legs, for example, or the h«
On other shelves were animals, again not always in their c
form, heads of lions, and of bears, and the distinctive shapes of
moths with high domed heads, humped withers, and sloping hapW
The figurines seemed to have been made by different people- "
were quite crude, showing little artistic skill, other objects wen»
phisticated in concept and well made. Though neither Ayla nor'
dalar understood why the molders of the pieces made the o
shapes they did, they felt that each was inspired by some in
reason or feeling.

Opposite the entrance was a smaller opening that led to an
space within the structure, which had been scooped out of the
soil of a hillside. Except that it opened into the side, it reminded At
of a large ground oven, the kind that was dug into the earth, ha
with hot rocks, and used to cook food, but she felt that no food ever been cooked in this oven.
When she went to look inside, she i
a fireplace within the second room.

From the bits of charred material in the ash, she realized bone'
burned as fuel, and, looking closer, she recognized that it was a fir
similar to the ones used by the Mamutoi, but even deeper. Ayla loo
around, wondering where the indrawing air vent was. In order to b
bone, a very hot fire was needed, which required that air be forced H
The Mamutoi firepits were fed by the constantly blowing wind r ^
side, brought in through trench-vents that were controlled by da
ers. Jondalar examined the interior of the second room closely
drew similar conclusions; from the color and hardness of the walls,
was sure that very hot fires had been sustained within the space 1
long periods of time. He guessed that the small clay objects on
shelves were destined for the same treatment.

The man had been right when he said he had never before s
anything like the Mother figure S'Armuna showed him. The fig'
made by the woman standing in front of him, had not been manu
tured by modifying--carving or shaping or polishing--a material
occurred naturally. It was made of ceramic, fired clay, and it was
first material ever created by human hand and human intelligent- heating chamber was not a cooking
oven, it was a kiln. <j

And the first kiln ever devised was not invented for the puip0 ^j
making useful waterproof containers. Long before pottery, sin ^
ramie sculptures were fired into impermeable hardness. The g
they had seen on the shelves resembled animals and humans,

mien--no men were made, only women--and other living
se not considered actual portrayals. They were symbols,
meant to represent more than they showed, to suggest an
liritual similarity. They were art; art came before utility.
indicated the space that would be heated, and he said to the
his is the place where the Mother's sacred fire burns?" It
l statement as question.
k nodded, knowing he believed her now. The woman had
re she saw the place; it had taken the man a little longer.
dad when the woman led them out of the place. She didn't
as the heat from the fire inside the small space, or the clay
Mnething else, but she had begun to feel quite uneasy. She
lid be dangerous in there.
you discover this?" Jondalar asked, waving his arm to take
complex of ceramic objects and kiln.
her led me to it," the woman said.
in of that, but how?" he asked again.
l smiled at his persistence. It seemed appropriate that a son
i would want to understand. "The first idea came when we
ig an earthlodge," she said. "Do you know how we make

>. Yours seem to be similar to the Mamutoi lodges, and we
t and the others make an addition to Lion Camp," Jondalar
started with the supporting frame made of mammoth
>ver that attached a thick thatch of willow withes, followed
Alatch of grasses, and reeds. Then a layer of sod. On top
spread a coating slurry of river clay, which got very hard
d."
ssendally what we do," S'Armuna said. "It was when we
that last coating of clay that the Mother revealed the first
secret to me. We were finishing up the final section, but it
lark, so we built a big fire. The clay slurry was thickening,
it was accidentally dropped in the fire. It was a hot fire,
f bone for fuel, and we kept it going most of the night. In
; , Brugar told me to clean out the fireplace, and I found
clay had hardened. I noticed, in particular, a piece that
lion."
'otecdve totem is a lion," Jondalar commented.
an glanced at her, then nodded as though to herself as she
'When I discovered that the lion figure didn't soften in
ided to try to make more. It took a lot of trying, and other
ie Mother, before I finally worked it out."

"Why are you telling us your secrets? Showing us your nou,
Ay la asked.

The question was so direct that it caught the woman off guard l
then she smiled. "Do not imagine I am telling you all my secrets I
only showing you the obvious. Brugar thought he knew my seen.
too, but he soon learned."

"I'm sure Brugar must have been aware of your trials," Ayla sa
"You can't make a hot fire without everyone knowing about it. Hr
were you able to keep secrets from him?"

"At first he didn't really care what I was doing, so long as I supoli
my own fuel, until he saw some of the results. Then he thought
would make figures himself, but he did not know all that the Mod
had revealed to me." The smile of the One Who Served showed I
sense of vindication and triumph. "The Mother rejected his effo
with great fury. Brugar's figures burst apart with loud noises and bro
into many pieces when he tried to fire them. The Great Mother flu
them away with such speed that they caused painful injuries to t
people close by. Brugar feared my power after that, and he stopp
trying to control me."

Ayla could imagine being inside the small anteroom with pieces
red-hot clay flying around at great speeds. "But that still doesn't <
plain why you are telling us so much about your power. It's possil
that someone else who can understand the ways of the Mother coi
learn your secrets."

S'Armuna nodded. She had almost expected as much from t
woman, and she had already decided that complete openness would
the best course to follow. "You're right, of course. I do have a reasc
I need your help. With this magic, the Mother has given me gn
power, even over Attaroa. She fears my magic, but she is shrewd ai
unpredictable, and someday she will overcome her fear, I'm sure of
Then she will kill me." The woman looked at Jondalar. "My dea
would not be very important, except to me. It's the rest of my pe°p
this whole Camp, that I fear the most for. When you talked abc
Marthona passing the leadership on to her son, it made me realize h(
bad things have become. I know Attaroa would never willingly to
over leadership to anyone, and by the time she is gone, I'm afraid tb(
may be no Camp left." ,

"What makes you so certain? If she is so unpredictable, couldn t s
just as easily grow tired of it all?" Jondalar asked.

"I'm certain because she has already killed one person to whoffl
might have passed on her leadership, her own child."

"She killed her child?!" Jondalar said. "When you said Attar

death of the three young people, I assumed it was an accident. Attaroa poisoned them, though she doesn't

her own child! How could anyone kill her own child?"

. "And why?"

r plotting to help a friend. Cavoia, the young woman you
s in love with a man and was planning to run away with
xher was trying to help them, too. All four were caught.

ed Cavoia only because she was pregnant, but she has
iat if the baby is a boy, she will kill them both."

er she seems so unhappy and afraid," Ayla said.

o be held responsible," S'Armuna said, the blood draining
; as she said the words.

at did you have against those young people?" Jondalar

ling against them. Attaroa's child was my acolyte, almost
child. I feel for Cavoia, hurt for her, but just as surely as
hem the poison myself, I am responsible for their deaths.

: for me, Attaroa would not have known where to get the
owntouse it."

d both see that the woman was obviously distraught, Mitrolled it well.

l her own child," Ayla said, shaking her head as if to rid
e idea. She was horror-stricken by the mere thought.

she?"

low. I will tell you what I do know, but it is a long story.

ould go back to my lodge," S'Armuna suggested, looking

did not want to spend any more time talking about Atta-
public place.

ondalar followed her back to her earthlodge, doffed their
les, then stood by the fire while the older woman added

i cooking stones for hot tea. When they were settled with
herbal drink, S'Armuna paused to collect her thoughts.

:o know where it all began, probably with the early diffi-

tarooa and Brugar, but it didn't stop there. Even when

far along in her pregnancy, Brugar continued to beat her.

'nt into labor, he did not send for me. I only knew about

rd her crying out in pain. I went to her, but he refused to

her when she gave birth. It was not an easy delivery, and

>w nothing to help her with the pain. I am convinced he

itch her suffer. Apparently the baby was born with some

deformity. My guess is that it was caused by all the bearing l. Attaroa, and though it wasn't obvious at birth, it soon became a that the spine of the child was bent and weak. I was never alln make an examination, so I'm not sure, but there may have been* problems," S'Armuna said.

"Was her child a boy or a girl?" Jondalar asked, realizing it been made clear.

"I don't know," S'Armuna declared.

"I don't understand. How can you not know?" Ayla said

"No one did, except Brugar and Attaroa, and for some reason kept it a secret. Even as an infant, the child was never allowed" appear in public without clothes, the way most babies and children are, and they chose a name with neither a male nor a ending. The child was called Omel," the woman explained.

"Did the child never say?" Ayla asked.

"No. Omel kept the secret, too. I think Brugar may have threat _ dire consequences to them both if the child's gender was ever vealed," S'Armuna said.

"There must have been some hint, especially as the child grew o The body that was buried appeared to be of adult size," Jondalar!

"Omel did not shave, but could have been a male late in develi and it was hard to tell if breasts developed. Omel wore loose cli that disguised the shape. Omel did grow to be quite tall for a f< in spite of the crooked spine, but quite thin. Perhaps it was because d the weakness, but Attaroa herself is very tall, and there was a certain delicacy there that men don't usually have." '

"Did you have no sense of the child as it was growing up?" Ayte asked. i?

The woman is perceptive, S'Armuna thought, then nodded. "In vsf heart, I always thought of Omel as a girl, but perhaps that is what I wanted. Brugar wanted people to think of the child as male." i

"You are probably right about Brugar," Ayla said. "In the Clan, every man wants his mate to have sons. He thinks of himself as lest *--iffr K l

than a man if she doesn't have at least one. It means his totem sp"11"! weak. If the infant was a girl, Brugar might have been trying to bwj the fact that his mate had given birth to a female," Ayla ?PWSS~^ j then paused and considered a different point of view. "But ueronD- i newboms are usually taken away and left exposed. So it could b€^ if the baby was born deformed, especially if it was a boy and una e j learn the necessary hunting skills required of a man, Brugar caly have wanted to hide that." ^J

"It's not easy to interpret his motivations, but whatever they j Attaroa went along with him."

w did Omel die? And the two young men?" Jondalar asked.
rrange, complicated story," S'Armuna said, not wanting to
"In spite of all the problems, and secrecy, the child became
ivorite. Omel was the only person he never struck or tried to
ne way. I was glad, but I often wondered why."
suspect that he might have caused the deformity because he
oa so much before birth?" Jondalar asked. "Was he trying to

M-it?"

s, but Brugar laid the blame on Attaroa. He often told her
i inadequate woman who could not deliver a perfect baby.
become angry and beat her. But his beatings were no longer
Pleasures with his mate. Instead he demeaned Attaroa and
affection on the child. Omel began to treat Attaroa the same
tie did, and as the woman felt more estranged, she became
her own offspring, jealous of the affection Brugar showed
and even more of the love Omel felt for Brugar."

wild have been very hard to bear," Ayla said.

Brugar had discovered a new way to cause Attaroa pain, but
t the only one who suffered because of him," S'Armuna
, "As time went on, all the women were treated worse and
Brugar and the other men. The men who tried to resist his
; sometimes beaten, too, or they were forced out. Finally,
ticularly bad occasion that left Attaroa with a broken arm
l broken ribs from being jumped on and kicked, she rebelled.
she would kill him, and she begged me to give her something
th."

u?" Jondalar asked, unable to restrain his curiosity.

n^o Serves the Mother learns many secrets, Jondalar, often
secrets, especially one who has studied with the zeian-
Armuna explained. "But those who are admitted into the
ad must swear by the Sacred Caves and the Elder Legends
crets will not be misused. One Who Serves the Mother gives
and identity, and takes on the name and identity of her
scornes the link between the Great Earth Mother and Her
md the means by which Earth's Children communicate with
of the spirits. Therefore, to Serve the Mother means to serve
en as well."

"stand that," Jondalar said.

u may not understand that the people become engraved on
of One Who Serves. The need to consider their welfare
'cry strong, second only to the needs of the Mother. It is
itter of leadership. Not directly, usually, but in the sense of
tte way. One Who Serves the Mother becomes a guide to

understanding, and to finding the meaning inherent in the unknwn |
Part of the training is to learn the lore, the knowledge to enablpA
One to interpret the signs, visions, and dreams sent to Her child
There are tools to help, and ways to seek guidance from the world-»
the spirits, but ultimately it all comes down to the One's own iud
ment. I wrestled with the thought of how best to Serve, but I'm afci°i
my judgment was clouded by my own bitterness and anger. I can..
back here hating men, and watching Brugar I learned to hate them
more.

"You said that you felt responsible for the death of the three youna
people. Did you teach her about poisons?" Jondalar asked, unablēm
let it go.

"I taught Attaroa many things, Marthona's son, but she was not
training to be One Who Serves. However, she has a quick mind and is
able to learn more than may be intended . . . but I also knew that."
S'Armuna stopped then, stopped just short of admitting to a grievous
transgression, making it clear, but allowing them to draw their own
conclusions. She waited until she saw Jondalar frown with concern
and Ayla nod in acknowledgment.

"In any case, I did help Attaroa establish her power over the men in
the beginning--maybe I wanted power over them myself. In truth, I
did more than that. I prodded and encouraged her, convinced her that
the Great Earth Mother wanted women to lead, and I helped her to
convince the women, or most of them. After the way they had been
treated by Brugar and the men, it wasn't hard. I gave her something to
put the men to sleep, and I told her to put it in their favorite drink--a
brew they fermented from birch sap."

"The Mamutoi make a similar drink," Jondalar commented, listening
with amazement.

"When the men were sleeping, the women tied them up. They were
glad to do it. It was almost a game, a way of getting back at the men.
But Brugar never woke up. Attaroa tried to imply that he was ust
more susceptible to the sleeping liquid, but I'm sure she put something
else in his drink. She said she wanted to kill him, and I believe she did.
She all but admits it now, but, whatever the truth is, I was the one
who led her to believe that women would be better off if the men we
.l-A

gone. I was the one who convinced her that if there were no men, ul
spirits of women would have to mix with the spirits of other worneil
create new life, and only girl children would be born."

"Do you really think so?" Jondalar asked, frowning.

"I think I almost persuaded myself that I did. I didn't actually s^ ^
--I didn't want to make the Mother angry--but I know I made j
think so. Attaroa thinks the pregnancy of a few women proves it.

wrong," Ayla said.

Of course she is, and I should have known better. The Mother [eluded by my ruse. I know in my heart that men are here] that is how the Mother planned it. If She didn't want men, I did not have made them. Their spirits are necessary. But if the yeak, their spirits are not strong enough for the Mother to 's why so few children have been born." She smiled at Jon-»u are such a strong young man, I would not doubt that your already been used by Her."

When men were freed, I think you would find they are more than High to make the women pregnant," Ayla said, "with no help lalar."

A blond man glanced at her and grinned. "But I'd be more willing to help," he said, knowing exactly what she meant, even if entirely sure if he shared her opinion.

Perhaps you should," Ayla said. "I just said I didn't think it necessary."

He suddenly stopped smiling. It occurred to him that no matter right, he had no reason to think he was capable of engender- l. Jona looked at both of them, knowing they were making something that she wasn't privy to. She waited, but when it obvious that they were waiting for her, she continued. "I r, and I encouraged her, but I didn't know it would be worse roa as leader than it was with Brugar. In fact, right after he , it was better . . . for the women, at least. But not for the not for Omel. Cavao's brother understood; he was a special Omel. That child was the only one who grieved for him."

Understandable, under the circumstances," Jondalar said. "I didn't see it that way," S'Armuna said. "Omel was sure roa had caused Brugar's death, became very angry and defied was beaten for it. Attaroa told me once that she only wanted)mel understand what Brugar had done to her and the other Although she didn't say it, I think she thought, or hoped, that jar was gone, Omel would turn to her, love her."

Things are not likely to make someone love you," Ayla said. "s right," the older woman said. "Omel had never been beaten I hated Attaroa even worse after that. They were mother and ; they couldn't stand to be near each other, it seemed. That's Tered to take Omel as an acolyte."

"Jona stopped, picked up her cup to drink, saw it was empty, put it down. "Attaroa seemed glad that Omel was out of her t thinking back, I realized that she took it out on the men. In

^8

fact, ever since Omel left her lodge, Attaroa has been getting
She has become more cruel than Brugar ever was. I should have
it before. Instead of keeping them apart, I should have tried
ways to reconcile them. What will she do now that Omel
Killed by her own hand?" she said.

The woman stared into the dancing air above the fire as though
were seeing something that wasn't apparent to anyone else. "Oh
Mother! I've been blind!" she suddenly said. "She had Ardohan
pled and put in the Holding and I know she cared for that boy
she killed Omel and the others."

"Had him crippled?" Ayla said. "Those children in the Holding
That was done on purpose?"

"Yes, to make the boys weak, and fearful," S'Armuna said shaking
her head. "Attaroa has lost all reason. I fear for us all." Suddenly
broke down and held her face in her hands. "Where will it end?
this pain and suffering I have wrought," she sobbed.

"It was not your doing alone, S'Armuna," Ayla said. "You may have
allowed it, even encouraged it, but do not take it all on yourself. The
evil is Attaroa's, and perhaps belongs, too, to those who treated her
badly." Ayla shook her head. "Cruelty breeds cruelty, pain breeds
pain, abuse fosters abuse."

"And how many of the young ones that she has hurt will pass it
to the next generation?" the older woman cried out, as though in pain
herself. She began rocking back and forth, keening with grief. "What
of the boys behind that fence has she condemned to carry on
terrible legacy? And which of the girls who look up to her will want
be like her? Seeing Jondalar here has reminded me of my training.
all people, I should not have allowed it. That is what makes me responsible.
Oh, Mother! What have I done?"

"The question is not what you have done. It is what you can
now," Ayla said.

"I must help them. Somehow, I must help them, but what can
do?"

"It is too late to help Attaroa, but she must be stopped. It is the
children and men in the Holding we must help, but first they must
be freed. Then we must think of how to help them."

S'Armuna looked at the young woman, who seemed at that moment
so positive and so powerful, and wondered who she really was.
One Who Served the Mother had been made to see the damage
had caused and to know she had abused her power. She feared
her own spirit, as well as for the life of the Camp. ^.

There was silence in the lodge. Ayla got up and picked up the

y tea. "Let me make tea this time. I have a very nice herbs with me," she said. When S'Armuna nodded without word, Ayla reached for her otter-skin medicine bag. What about those two crippled youngsters in the Holding," she said. "Even if they can't walk well, they could learn to be flint or something like that, if they had someone to train them. I would be someone among the S'Armunai who could teach them. I could find someone at your Summer Meeting who would

go to the Summer Meetings with the other S'Armunai," S'Armuna said. "Why?" he asked.

"I don't want to," S'Armuna said, speaking in a dull monotone. "The other people had never been especially kind to her; her own people tolerated her. After she became leader, she didn't want to do with anyone else. Not long after she took over, some of the tribes sent a delegation, inviting us to join them. They had somewhat what we had many women without mates. Attaroa insulted them and drove them away, and within a few years she had alienated the tribes. No one comes, not kin, not friends. They all avoid

her. To a target post is more than an insult," Jondalar said. "I know. I know that she's getting worse. You aren't the first. What she has done before," the woman said. "A few years ago, a visitor came, on a Journey. Seeing so many women apparently so arrogant and condescending. He assumed he would be welcomed, but in great demand. Attaroa played with him, and he will play with its prey; then she killed him. She enjoyed it so much that she began detaining all visitors. She liked to make their life miserable, then make them promises, torment them, and finally get rid of them. That was her plan for you, Jondalar." "I considered as she added some calming and soothing medicines to the ingredients for S'Armuna's tea. "You were right when you said she was a woman. Mog-ur sometimes told of evil spirits, but I always thought they were legends, stories to frighten children into minding, and a shiver through everyone. But Attaroa is no legend. She

I know. When no visitors came, she began toying with the men in the tribe." S'Armuna kept on, as though unable to stop once she started. She would tell what she had seen and heard, but kept inside. "She always chooses the longer ones first, the leaders or the rebellious ones. There will be fewer and fewer men, and the ones that are left are

losing their will to rebel. She keeps them half-starved, exposed cold and weather. She puts them in cages or ties them up. They are not even able to clean themselves. Many have died from exposure to the bad conditions. And not many children are being born to replace them. As the men die, the Camp is dying. We were all surprised when Cavoa became pregnant."

"She must have been going into the Holding to stay with a man," Ayla said. "Probably the one she fell in love with. I'm sure you know that." - TO(nr S'Armuna did know, but she wondered how Ayla knew. "Some

women do sneak in to see the men, and sometimes they bring them food. Jondalar probably told you," she said.

"No, I didn't tell her," Jondalar said. "But I don't understand why the women allow the men to be held."

"They fear Attaroa. A few of them follow her willingly, but most would rather have their men back. And now she is threatening to cripple their sons."

"Tell the women the men must be set free, or no more children will be born," Ayla said, in tones that sent a chill through both Jondalar and S'Armuna. They turned to stare. Jondalar recognized her expression. It was the distanced, somewhat objective way she looked when her mind was occupied with someone who was sick or injured, although in this case, he saw more than her need to help. He also saw in her a cold, hard anger he had not seen before.

But the older woman saw Ayla as something else, and she interpreted her pronouncement as a prophecy, or a judgment.

After Ayla served the tea, they sat in silence together, each deeply affected. Suddenly Ayla felt a strong need to go outside and breathe the clean, crisp, cold air, and she wanted to check on the animals, but as she quietly observed S'Armuna, she didn't think it was the best time to leave just yet. She knew the older woman had been devastated, and she sensed that she needed something of meaning to cling to.

Jondalar found himself wondering about the men he had left behind in the Holding, and what they were thinking. They no doubt knew he was back but had not been put back in with them. He wished he could talk to Ebulan and S'Amodun, and reassure Doban, but he needed some reassuring himself. They were on dangerous ground, and they hadn't done anything yet, except talk. Part of him wanted to get out there as fast as possible, but the larger part of him wanted to help. They were going to do something, he wished they would do it. He hated just sitting there.

Finally, out of desperation, he said, "I want to do something about those men in the Holding. How can I help?"

ir you already have," S'Armuna said, feeling a need to plan
eey herself. "When you refused her, it gave the men heart,
v itself would not have been enough. Men have resisted her
a while, but this was the first time a man walked away from
yen more important, came back," S'Armuna said. "Attaroa
ys, and that gives others hope."
pe doesn't get them out of there," he replied.
id Attaroa will not let them out willingly. No man leaves
if she can help it, although a few have gotten away, but
n't often make Journeys. You are the first who has come this
n
she kill a woman?" Jondalar asked, unconsciously moving
> protect the woman he loved.
der for her to justify killing a woman, or even putting her in
ig, although many of the women here are held against their
rfi they have no fence around them. She has threatened the
love, and they are held by their feelings for their sons or
lat's why your life is in danger," S'Armuna said, looking
Ayla. "You have no ties to this place. She has no hold over
f she succeeds in killing you, it will make it easier for her to
women. I'm telling you this not only to warn you, but be- le danger to the whole Camp. You can
both still get away,
ps that is what you should do."
annot leave," Ayla said. "How can I walk away from those
3r those men? The women will need help, too. Brugar called
iicine woman, S'Armuna. I don't know if you know what
5, but I am a medicine woman of the Clan."
e a medicine woman? I should have known," S'Armuna said.
(entirely sure what a medicine woman was, but she had
;h respect from Brugar after he had ranked her within that
on, that she had granted the position the highest significance.
I why I can't go," Ayla said. "It is not so much something I
do; it is what a medicine woman must do, it is what she is.
;. A piece of my spirit is already in the next world"--Ayla
>r the amulet around her neck--"given in exchange for the
ration of those people who will need my help. It's difficult to
ut I can't allow Attaroa to abuse them any more, and this
I need help after the ones in the Holding are free. I must
ag as I need to."
oa nodded, feeling that she understood. It was not an easy
explain. She equated Ayla's fascination with healing and
ttate need to help with her own feelings about being called
ie Mother, and she identified with the young woman.

"We will stay as long as we can," Jondalar amended that they still had to cross a glacier that winter. "The question is are we going to persuade Attaroa to let the men out?" "She fears you, Ayla," the shaman said, "and I think Wolf Women do, too. Those who don't fear you are in it. The S'Armunai are horse-hunting people. We hunt other animals including mammoths, but we know horses. To the north there is a place that we have driven horses over for generations. You cannot deny that control over horses is powerful magic. It is so powerful that it is unbelievable, even seeing it."

"There is nothing mysterious about it," Ayla snorted. "I raised the mare from the time she was a foal. I was living alone, and she was my only friend. Whinney does what I want because she wants to because we are friends," she said, trying to explain.

The way she said the name was the gentle nicker that was the sound made by a horse. Traveling alone with only Jondalar and the aninuk for so long, she had slipped back into the habit of saying Whinocy's name in its original form. The nicker coming from the woman's mouth startled S'Armuna, and the very idea of being the friend of a horse was beyond comprehension. It didn't matter that Ayla had said it wasn't magic. She had just convinced S'Armuna that it was.

"Perhaps," the woman said. But she thought. No matter how simple you try to make it, you can't stop people from wondering who you really are, and why you have come here. "People want to think, and hope, that you have come to help them," she continued. "They fear Attaroa, but I think with your help, and Jondalar's, they may be willing to stand up to her and make her free the men. They may refuse to let her intimidate them any more."

Ayla was again feeling a strong need to get out of the lodge, which was more uncomfortable. "All this tea," she said, standing up. "I need to pass water. Can you tell me where to go, S'Armuna?" After she listened to the directions, she added, "We need to see to the horses while we're out, make sure they are comfortable. Is it all right to leave these bowls here for a while?" She had lifted a lid and was looking at the contents. "It's cooling off fast. It's too bad this can't be served hot- It would be better."

"Of course, leave it," S'Armuna said, picking up her cup and drinking the last of her tea as she watched the two strangers leave. Perhaps Ayla wasn't an incarnation of the Great Mother, and Jondalar really was Marthona's son, but the idea that someday retribution would exact Her

Who Served Her. After all, she was . After all, she was S'Armuna. She had exchanged

onal identity for the power of the spirit world, and this Camp
.charge, all the people, women and men. She had been en- with the care of the spiritual essence of
the Camp, and Her
^depended on her. Looking from the view of outsiders, of the
b had served to remind her of her calling, and the woman with
powers, S'Armuna knew she had failed them. She only hoped
ffl possible to redeem herself and to help the Camp recover a
healthy life.

S

'Armuna stepped outside her lodge and watched the two visitors as they walked away toward the edge of the Camp. She saw Attaroa and Epadoa, standing in front of the headwoman's lodge had turned to watch them, too. The shaman was about to go back in when she noticed Ayla suddenly changing direction and heading for the palisade. Attaroa and her chief Wolf Woman also saw her and both moved forward in quick strides to intercept the blond woman. They reached the fenced enclosure almost simultaneously. The older woman arrived a moment later.

Through the cracks, Ayla looked directly into the eyes and faces of silent watchers on the other side of the sturdy poles. On close inspection, they were a sorry sight, dirty and unkempt, and dressed in ragged skins, but even worse was the stench emanating from the Holding. It was not only malodorous; to the perceptive nose of the medicine woman it was revealing. Normal body odors of healthy individuals did not bother her, even a certain amount of normal bodily wastes was not offensive, but she smelled sickness. The foetid breath of starvation, the noisome filth of excrement resulting from stomach ailments and fever, the foul odor of pus from infected, suppurating wounds, and even the putrid rot of progressed gangrene, all assaulted her senses and infuriated her.

Epadoa stepped in front of Ayla, trying to block her view, but she had seen enough. She turned and confronted Attaroa. "Why are these people held here behind this fence, like animals in a surround?" There was a gasp of surprise from the people who were watching when they heard the translation, and they held their breaths waiting for the headwoman's reaction. No one had ever dared to ask her before.

Attaroa glared at Ayla, who stared back with dauntless anger, they were nearly equal in height, though the dark-eyed woman was a shade taller. Both were physically strong women, but Attaroa was more muscular as a natural attribute of her heredity, while Ayla had and wiry muscles developed from use. The headwoman was silent.

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ler than the stranger, more experienced, crafty, and totally
table; the visitor was a skilled tracker and hunter, quick
details, draw conclusions, and able to react swiftly on her

ts.

oly Attaroa laughed, and the familiar manic sound sent a
iroueh Jondalar. "Because they deserve it!" the headwoman

ne deserves that kind of treatment," Ayla retorted, before
ia had a chance to translate. The woman instead respoke
anment to Attaroa.

: do you know? You were not here. You don't know how they
s," the dark-eyed woman said.

hey make you stay outside when it was cold? Did they not
food and clothing?" Some of the women who had gathered
ooked a little uneasy. "Are you any better than they were if
; them worse than you were treated?"

a did not bother to reply to the words repeated by the shaman,
mile was harsh and cruel.

aoticed movement beyond the fence, and she saw some of
standing aside so the two boys who had been in the lean-to
np to the front. All the others crowded around them. It
her even more to see the injured youngsters, and other
d and hungry. Then she saw that some of the Wolf Women
red the Holding with their spears. She felt such fury that
hardly able to suppress it, and she addressed the women

did these boys also treat you badly? What did they do to you
' this?" S'Armuna made sure all could understand.

~e are the mothers of these children?" she asked Epadoa.

ader of the Wolf Women glanced at Attaroa after hearing the
her own language, looking for some kind of direction, but the
nan only looked back with her cruel smile, as though waiting
fhat she would say.

I are dead," Epadoa said.

l when they tried to run away with their sons," one of the
from the crowd standing nearby said. "The rest are afraid to
ing for fear their children will be hurt."

ooked and saw it was an old woman who had spoken, and
noticed it was the one who had grieved so loudly at the funeral
^ young people. Epadoa shot her a threatening look.

: more can you do to me, Epadoa?" the woman said, stepping
the forefront. "You've already taken my son, and my daugh-

ter will soon be gone, one way or another. I'm too old to care if r
or die." ll

"They betrayed us," Epadoa said. "Now they all know whar
happen if they try to run away."

Attaroa gave no sign of approval or disapproval to indicate
Epadoa had voiced her own feelings. Instead, with a bored look
turned her back on the tense scene and walked to her lodge leavm
Epadoa and her Wolf Women to guard the Holding. But she'stoi
and spun around when she heard a loud, shrill whistle. A nc<
expression of dread replaced her cold, cruel smile when she saw
horses, who had been almost out of sight at the far edge of the f
galloping toward Ayla. She quickly entered her earthlodge.
Feelings of stunned amazement filled the rest of the settlement as l
blond woman, and the man with even lighter yellow hair, leaped i
the backs of the animals and galloped away. Most of those remaina.
wished they could leave as quickly and easily, and many wondered i
they would ever see the two again.

"I wish we could keep on going," Jondalar said, after they
slowed down and he had pulled Racer up alongside Ayla and W
ney.

"I wish we could, too," she said. "That Camp is so unbearable; JR
fills me with anger and sadness. I'm even angry about S'Armuna allow^
ing it to go on for so long, though I pity her and understand hfl
remorse. Jondalar, how are we going to free those boys and men?" »
"We're going to have to work that out with S'Armuna," Jondalal
said. "I think it's obvious that most of the women want things fl(
change, and I'm sure many of them would help, if they knew what»
do. S'Armuna will know who they are." }

They had entered the open woods from the field, and they rode
through its cover, though in places it was quite sparse, toward the nvtfj
and then back around to the place they had left the wolf. As soon M
they neared, Ayla signaled with a soft whistle, and Wolf bounded out
to greet them, almost beside himself with happiness. He had acefl
watching from the place Ayla had told him to stay, and they both ga^
him praise and attention for waiting. Ayla did notice he had huo
and brought his kill back, which meant he had left his hiding ?"_
least for a while. It worried her, since they were so close to me-- and its Wolf Women, but she
found it hard to blame him. Itmau- all the more determined, however, to get him away from the n ^
women who ate wolves as soon as possible.

They walked the horses quietly back toward the river, to the i

ihad hidden their packs. Ay la got out one of their
a cakes of traveling food, broke it in two, and gave the
to Tondalar. They sat amidst the brush, eating their
i be away from the depressing environment of the S'Ar-

I"

hhe heard a low rumbling growl from Wolf, and the hair
^i Ayla's neck stood on end.

I coming," Jondalar whispered, feeling a quick rush of
found.

o the sharp edge of awareness by the warning, Ayla and
Aed the area, certain that Wolfs keener senses had de-
diate danger. Noticing the direction Wolfs nose was
'la looked carefully through the screen of brush and saw
approaching. One of them, she was almost certain, was
tapped Jondalar's arm and pointed. He nodded when he

, keep horses quiet," she signed to him in the silent lan-
Clan. "I make Wolf hide. I go stalk women, keep women

idalar signed, shaking his head.

more listen to me," Ayla replied.

odded reluctantly. "I watch here with spear-thrower," he
tures. "You take spear-thrower."

ed in agreement. "And sling," she signaled back.

t stealth, Ayla circled around in front of the two women,

As they slowly approached, she heard them talking.

hey came this way after they left their campsite last night,

; head Wolf Woman said.

already came to our Camp since last night. Why are we
lere?"

y come back this way, and even if they don't, we may find
g about them."

pie are saying they disappear, or turn into birds or horses
ave," the younger Wolf Woman said.

silly," Epadoa said. "Didn't we find where they camped
i^hy would they have to make a camp if they could turn

» Ayla thought. At least she uses her head and thinks, and
ly so bad at tracking. She's probably even a decent hunter;
le's so close to Attaroa.

ching behind bare tangled brush and yellowed knee-high
sd as they drew closer. At a moment when both women

were looking down, she silently stood up, holding her spear poised.

Epadoa started with surprise, and Unavoa jumped back a little squeal of shock when they looked up and saw stranger.

"You look for me?" Ayla said, speaking in their language here." °

Unavoa appeared ready to break and run, and even Epadoa nervous and frightened.

"We were . . . we were hunting," Epadoa said.

"No horses here to chase over edge," Ayla said.

"We weren't hunting horses."

"I know. You hunt Ayla andjondalar."

Her sudden appearance, and the strange quality to the wa said the words in their language, made her seem exotic, from soi far away, perhaps even from another world. She made both want nothing more than to get as far away as possible fn woman, who seemed endowed with attributes that were more human.

"I think these two should return to their Camp, or they may the big feast tonight."

The voice came from the woods, and it was speaking Mamutoi, both women understood the language and recognized that it w dalar who spoke. They looked back in the direction from wh voice had come and saw the tall blond man leaning nonch against the bole of a large white-barked birch, holding his spt spear-thrower ready.

"Yes. You are right. We don't want to miss the feast," Epadc Prodding her speechless young companion, she wasted no time in) ing around and leaving.

When they were gone, Jondalar could not resist cracking a big grm^

The sun was descending toward late afternoon of the short wata day when Ayla and Jondalar rode back to the S'Armunai Camp. Thc^ had changed Wolf's hiding place, leaving him somewhat closer to w settlement, since it would soon be dark, and people seldom wSat.^ yond the comfort of firelight at night, though Ayla still worried j he might be captured. pdBel

S'Armuna was just leaving her lodge as they dismounted at "^-^l of the field, and she smiled with relief when she saw them. In spi j i jj «*^nirir* 'si their promises, she couldn't help wondering if they would ^y After all, why should strangers put themselves in jeopardy

r didn't even know? Their own kin had not even come
t several years to find out if all was well with them. Of
nds and kin had not been made welcome the last time

t
removed Racer's halter so he would not be encumbered in
md both gave the horses friendly slaps on the rump to
hem to move away from the Camp. S'Armuna walked over

two.
just finishing our preparations for the Fire Ceremony to-
'e always start a warming fire the night before; would you
; and warm up?" the woman said.

j " Jondalar said. They both walked beside her to the kiln
r side of the Camp.

id a way to heat the food you brought, Ayla. You said it
etter warm, and I'm sure you are right. It smells wonder-
iuna smiled.

a you heat such a thick mixture in baskets?"
r you," the woman said, ducking into the anteroom of the
:ure. Ayla followed her, with Jondalar right behind. Al-
are burned in the small fireplace, it was quite warm inside.
went directly to the opening of the second chamber and
e mammoth shoulder bone that was covering it. The air
was hot, hot enough to cook, Ayla thought. She looked in
t a fire had been started inside the chamber, and just inside
, some distance from the fire itself, were her two baskets.
mell good!" Jondalar said.

'e no idea how many people have been asking when the
.g to start," S'Armuna said. "They can even smell it in the
rdemun came to me and asked if the men are really going
"e. It's not only this. I'm surprised, but Attaroa did tell the
repare food for a feast, and to make enough for everyone.
mber when we last had a real feast . . . but we haven't had
n to celebrate. It makes me wonder what we have to cele-
it."

," Ayla said. "You are honoring visitors."
tors," the woman said. "Remember, that was her excuse to
ome back. I must warn you. Do not drink or eat any food
Torn a dish that she has not eaten from first. Attaroa knows
fol things that can be disguised in food. If necessary, only
u have brought. I have watched it carefully."
here?" Jondalar said.

dares come in here without my permission," the One Who

Served the Mother said, "but outside of this place, be very Attaroa and Epadoa have had their heads together most of tt"^ They are planning something.")

"And they have many to help them, all the Wolf Women we count on to help us?" Jondalar said.

"Nearly everyone else wants to see a change," S'Armuna said

"But who will help?" Ayla said.

"I think we can count on Cavao, my acolyte."

"But she's pregnant," Jondalar said.

"All the more reason," the woman said. "All the signs indicate i-- she will have a boy. She will fight for the life of her baby, as wdll her own. Even if she has a girl, the chances are Attaroa won't let I live long once the baby is weaned, and Cavao knows it."

"What about the woman who spoke out today?" Ayla said.

"That was Esadoa, Cavao's mother. I'm sure you can count on i but she blames me as much as Attaroa for the death of her son."

"I remember her at the funeral," Jondalar said. "She threw thing in the grave that made Attaroa angry."

"Yes, some tools for the next world. Attaroa had forbidden s to give them anything that might help them in the world of the sc

"I think you stood up to her."

S'Armuna shrugged as if to pass it off. "I told her once the were given, they could not be taken back. Not even she dared l retrieve them."

Jondalar nodded. "I'm sure all the men in the Holding would h he said.

"Of course, but first we have to get them out," S'Armuna said.' guards are being especially watchful. I don't think anyone could» sneak in right now. In a few days, perhaps. That will give us time (talk to the women quietly. When we know how many we can coin on, then we can work out a plan to overpower Attaroa and the Wfl Women. We're going to have to fight them, I'm afraid. That's the f way we'll get the men out of the Holding."

"I think you're right," Jondalar said, looking grim.

Ayla shook her head in sorrow at the thought. There had been' much pain in this Camp already that the idea of fighting, of cau more trouble and pain, was distressing. She wished there was other way.

"You said you gave Attaroa something to make the men s Couldn't you give something to Attaroa and her Wolf Women to them sleep?" Ayla asked. . ,

"Attaroa is wary. She will not eat or drink anything that isn

one else. That was what Doban did once. Now, I think
'out one of the other children," S'Armuna said, glancing
aost dark. If you are ready, I think it's time for the

[alar each picked up one of the baskets from the inner
the One Who Served closed it up again. Once outside,
; that a big bonfire had been started in front of Attaroa's

| if she was going to invite you in, but it appears the feast
I eaten outside, in spite of the cold," S'Armuna said.
»proached, bearing their baskets, Attaroa turned to face
I you wanted to share this feast with the men, it seemed
it here, so you can watch them," she said. S'Armuna
liough Ayla understood the woman perfectly, and even
enough of their language to get the meaning of her

rd to see them in the dark. It would help if you built
|to their side," Ayla said.

Mused a moment, then laughed, but she made no move to
b the request.

I seemed to be an extravagant affair with many dishes, but
BS primarily lean meat with hardly any fat, very few vege-
irains or filling starchy roots, and no dried fruit or hint of
not even from the inner bark of a tree. There was some of
^fermented brew made from birch sap, but Ayla decided she
drink it, and she was pleased to see a woman coming around
Iff hot herb tea into cups for those who wanted it. She'd had
Iwith Talut's brew and knew it could cloud her judgment;
S wanted all her wits about her.

B, it was a rather meager feast, Ayla thought, although the
die Camp would not have agreed. The food was more like
!iat might be left at the end of the season, not what should
available in the middle of winter. A few furs had been
round Attaroa's raised platform near the large fire for the
te rest of the people were bringing their own to sit upon
ate.

na led Ayla and Jondalar toward Attaroa's fur-covered plat-
they stood waiting until the headwoman swaggered to her
was dressed in all her wolf-fur finery and necklaces of teeth,
y» and shell, decorated with bits of fur and feathers. Most
to Ayla was the staff she held, which was made from a
id mammoth tusk.

^

Attaroa commanded that the food be served and, with a points at Ayla, ordered that the share set aside for the men be taken i Holding, including the bowl Ayla and Jondalar had provided l she sat down on her platform. Everyone else took it as a signal down on their furs. Ayla noticed that the raised seat put the h woman in an interesting position. She was above everyone else w enabled her to see over the heads of the others and also to look d on them. Ayla recalled that there had been times when peoole stood on logs or rocks when they had something to say to a eroun they wanted everyone to hear, but it had always been a temoo position.

It was a powerful placement Attaroa had created, Ayla realize she observed the unconscious postures and gestures of the pe around. Everyone seemed to express toward Attaroa the attitud deference that the women of the Clan did when they sat in sileu front of a man, waiting for the tap on the shoulder that gave then right to make their thoughts known. But there was a difference was hard to characterize. In the Clan, she never sensed resentt from the women, which she felt here, or lack of respect from the i It was just the way things were done, inherent behavior, not fora coerced, and it served to make sure that both parties were paying < attention to the communication between them, which was expre primarily with signs and gestures.

While they were waiting to be served, Ayla tried to get a better at the headwoman's staff. It was similar to the Speaking Staff use Talut and the Lion Camp, except the carvings were very unusual, at all like Talut's staff, yet they seemed so familiar. Ayla recalled Talut brought out the Speaking Staff for various occasions inclu ceremonies, but particularly during meetings or arguments.

The Speaking Staff invested the one who held it with the rig! speak, and allowed each person to make a statement, or express a f of view without interruption. The next person with something M then asked for the staff. In principle, only the one holding the Spea Staff was supposed to talk, although at Lion Camp, especially a midst of a heated discussion or argument, people didn't always their turn. But with some reminding, Talut was usually able to go people to abide by the principle, so that everyone who wanted given a chance to have a say. . c>

"That is a most unusual and beautifully carved Speaking Ayla said. "May I see it?" ^

Attaroa smiled when she heard S'Armuna's translation. 5he it toward Ayla and closer to the firelight, but she did not give i -

rious that she had no intention of letting it go at all, and
hat the headwoman was using the Speaking Staff to invest
ts power. As long as Attaroa held it, anyone who wanted
to request permission from her, and by extension, other
n to serve the food, or when to begin eating, for example
her permission. Like her raised platform, Ayla realized, it
; of affecting, and controlling, the way people behaved
t save the younger woman much to think about.
itself was quite unusual. It was not newly carved, that vious. The color of the mammoth ivory had
begun to turn
the area where it was usually held was gray and shiny,
e accumulated dirt and oils of the many hands that had
l been used by many generations.
a carved into the straightened tusk was a geometric ab-
die Great Earth Mother, formed by concentric ovals to
ndulous breasts, rounded belly, and voluptuous thighs.
is the symbol for all, everything, the totality of the known
a worlds, and symbolized the Great Mother of All. The
rcles, especially the way they were used to suggest the
?theriy elements, reinforced the symbolism.
was an inverted triangle, with the point forming the chin,
, curved slightly into a domelike shape, at the top. The
ointing triangle was the universal symbol for Woman; it
'ard shape of her generative organ and therefore also sym-
erhood and the Great Mother of All. The area of the face
lorizontal series of double parallel bars, joined by laterally
going from the pointed chin up to the position of the eyes.
>ace between the top set of double horizontal lines and the
s that paralleled the curved top was filled in with three
e lines that were perpendicular, joining where eyes would
ometric designs were not a face. Except that the inverted
placed in the position of a head, the carved markings
fen have suggested a face. The awesome countenance of
>ther was too much for an ordinary human to behold. Her
so great that Her look alone could overwhelm. The ab-
lism of the figure on Attaroa's Speaking Staff conveyed
power with subtlety and elegance.
inherited from the training she had begun with Mamut the
ing of some of the symbols. The three sides of the triangle
Her primary number--represented the three major sea- Gar, spring, summer, and winter, although two
additional

minor seasons were also recognized, fall and midwinter th
which signaled changes to come, making five. Five, Ayla had 1^
.was Her hidden, power number, but the three-sided, inverted »•
were understood by everyone. ^**

She recalled the triangular shapes on the bird-woman carvin
resenting the transcendent Mother changing into Her bird shan»
Ranee had made . . . Ranee . . . Suddenly, Ayla rememberedtt
she had seen the figure on Attaroa's Speaking Staff before R
shirt! The beautiful, creamy white, soft leather shirt that he had <
at her adoption ceremony. It had been stunning partly because c
unusual style with its tapered body and wide flaring sleeves aid
cause the color looked so good with his brown skin, but mostly bee
of its decoration.

It had been embroidered with brightly dyed porcupine quills
threads of sinew with an abstract Mother figure that could have I
copied directly from the carving on the staff that Attaroa held. It
the same concentric circles, the same triangular head; the S'Ann
must be the distant relatives of the Mamutoi that Ranee's shirt
originally come from, she realized. If they had taken the northern i
that Talut had suggested, they would have had to pass by this Cai
When they had left, Nezzie's son, Danug, the young man who
growing into the image of Talut, had told her that someday he w
make a Journey to the Zeiandonii to visit her and Jondalar. Wh
Danug did decide to make such a Journey when he got a few)
older, and what if he came this way? What if Danug, or any (
Mamutoi, got caught by Attaroa's camp and came to harm?
thought strengthened her resolve to help these people put an en
Attaroa's power.

The headwoman pulled back the staff Ayla had been studying
turned to her with a wooden bowl. "Since you are our honored vis
and since you have provided an accompaniment to this feast th
collecting so many compliments," Attaroa said, her tone heavy
sarcasm, "let me offer you a taste of the specialty of one of
women." The bowl was full of mushrooms, but since they were cu
and cooked, there was no way to identify the variety.

S'Armuna translated, adding a cautionary, "Be careful.'

But Ayla needed neither the translation nor the warning. (
want any mushrooms right now," she said. .

Attaroa laughed when she heard Ayla's words repeated, as
she had expected such an answer. "Too bad," she said, ^PP"^
the bowl with her hand and lifting out a large mouthful. ^len s.
swallowed enough to speak, she added, "These are delicious.

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mouthfuls, then handed the bowl to Epadoa, smiled and downed her cup of birch brew. As the feast progressed, she drank several more cups and was beginning to feel the effects; she was becoming loud and insulting. One of the women who'd been left guarding the Holding--they had been assigned with other guards so that everyone could share in the feast--tied Epadoa, who then came to Attaroa and spoke to

"Ardemun wants to come out and bring thanks from the men at the feast," Attaroa said, and she laughed with derision. "I'm not the one they want to thank. It is our most honored man who ; turned to Epadoa. "Bring the old man out." Epadoa went back and soon Ardemun was limping toward the gate of the wooden fence. Jondalar was surprised at how quickly ; to see him, and he realized that he hadn't seen any men since I left the Holding. He wondered how they all were. "Do you men want to thank me for this feast?" the headwoman said. "I'm sorry, Attaroa. They asked me to come and tell you." "I'm sorry, old man, why do I have trouble believing you?" "I know I know better than to reply. He simply stood there, looking at the ; ground, as though he wished he could disappear. "Damn! He's worthless! No fight in him at all," Attaroa spat . "Just like all of them. They're all worthless." She turned to Hsy do you keep yourself tied to that man?" she said, looking at Jondalar. "Are you not strong enough to be free of him?" "I'm sorry, Sited until S'Armuna translated, which gave her time to confer. "I choose to be with him. I lived alone long enough,"

"I will be with you when he becomes weak and feeble like the old man |there," Attaroa said, casting a sneering glance at the old man. "When his pen his tool is too limp to give you pleasure, he'll be as weak as the rest of them." "I'm sorry, ^yla waited for the older woman, though she understood the man's a. "No one stays young forever. There is more to a man than M." "I should get rid of that one; he won't last long." She motioned toward the tall blond man. "He looks strong, but it's all show. "I'm sorry, he won't have the strength to take Attaroa, or perhaps he was just not ; ne laughed and swallowed another cupful of brew, then turned to Jondalar. "That was it! Admit it, you fear me. That's why I'm sorry ; tt'ttakeme." "I'm sorry, also understood her, and it made him angry. "There is a

difference between fear and lack of desire, Attaroa. You can desire. I did not share the Mother's Gift because I did not want Jondalar said.

S'Armuna glanced at Attaroa and cringed before she began the translation, almost forcing herself not to modify his words, "••m* "That's a lie!" Attaroa screamed, incensed. She stood up and Iw-fered over him. "You feared me, Zeiandonii. I could see it. I've fnoled men before, and you were even afraid to fight me." <w Jondalar stood up, too, and Ayla with him. Several of her wommen closed in around them.

"These people are our guests," S'Armuna said, also getting un, "They were invited to share our feast. Have we forgotten how to treat visitors?" ^

"Yes, of course. Our guests," Attaroa said scornfully. "We must be courteous and hospitable to visitors, or the woman won't think well of us. I'll show you how much I care what she thinks of us. You both }rftj here without my permission. Do you know what we do to people who would run away from here? We kill them! Just like I will kill you " headwoman screeched, as she lunged for Ayla with a sharp pointed fibula of a horse in her hand, a formidable dagger. Jondalar tried to intercede, but Attaroa's Wolf Women rounded him, and their spear points were pushed to his chest, and back so hard that they had pierced the skin and drawn blood. Before he knew it, his hands were tied behind his back, as she knocked Ayla down, straddled her, and raised a dagger to her without a hint of the drunkenness she had shown before. She had planned it all along, Jondalar realized. While they had been talking, trying to think of ways to blunt Attaroa's power, she had been planning to kill them. He felt so stupid, he should have known he had sworn to himself he would protect Ayla. Instead he was wall helplessly, full of fear for her, while the woman he loved tried to get off her attacker. That was why everyone feared Attaroa. She did so without hesitation or remorse.

Ayla had been taken completely by surprise. She'd had no time to reach for a knife or a sling, or anything, and she was not experienced in fighting with people. She had never fought anyone in her un Attaroa was on top of her, with a sharp dagger in her hand, trying to kill her. Ayla grabbed the headwoman's wrist and struggled to get her arm away. Ayla was strong, but Attaroa was both strong and cunning, and she was pushing down, against Ayla's resistance, the sharp tip toward Ayla's throat. Instinctively, Ayla rolled over at the last moment, but the

ik, leaving a line of red welling up, before the weapon
airway into the ground. And Ay la was still pinned by
hose demented anger added to her strength. Attaroa
igger out of the ground, then hit the blond woman,
straddled her once again, and pulled back to plunge her

'ondalar closed his eyes, unable to watch the violent final moment of Ayla's life. His own life would have no meaning to him when she was gone ... So why was he standing there afraid of threatening spears when he didn't care if he lived or died? His hands were trembling but his legs weren't. He could run over there and maybe knock Attar away.

For

He heard a commotion near the gate of the Holding at the instant he decided to ignore the sharp spears and try to help Ayla. The noise from the Holding distracted his guards as he unexpectedly lured them forward, pushed aside their spears, and ran toward the two women struggling on the ground.

Suddenly a dark blur dashed past the watching people, brushed against his leg, and leaped at Attar. The momentum of the attack knocked the headwoman backward as sharp fangs clamped around her throat, tearing through the skin. The headwoman found herself on the ground, trying to fight off a fury of snarling teeth and claws. She managed to make a stab into the heavy, furry body before she dropped the dagger, but it only evoked a deadly snarl and a tight grip of the viselike jaws pressing together in a stranglehold that cut off her air.

Attar tried to scream as she felt darkness overcoming her, but at that moment a sharp canine tooth severed an artery, and the sound that emerged was a horrible, suffocating gurgle. Then, the tall, muscular woman fell limp and fought no more. Still snarling, Wolf snatched her, making sure there was no more resistance. ^

"Wolf!" Ayla cried, overcoming her shock and sitting up.

Wolf." ^

As the wolf let go, blood spurted from the severed artery and sprayed him. He crept toward Ayla with his tail tucked between his legs, whining apologetically, asking for her approval. The woman told him to stay in hiding, and he knew he had acted ^.^ as he wished. When he saw the attack and understood that she was in

ng to her defense, but now he wasn't sure how his misbe-
d be received. More than anything, he hated being scolded
ian.

led her arms and reached for him. Quick to realize that he
xrectly and was forgiven for his transgression, he rushed
joy. She hugged him, burying her face in his fur, while
f ran from her eyes.

>u saved my life," she sobbed. He licked her, staining her
ttaroa's warm, wet blood that was still on his muzzle.
ile of the Camp backed away from the scene, staring open-
th incomprehension and wonder at the blond woman who
in her arms a large wolf that had just killed another woman
assault. She had addressed the animal with the Mamutoi
if, but it was similar to their own name for the meat-eating
they knew she was talking to him, just as though he could
her, the same way she talked to the horses.

ler this stranger had shown no fear of Attaroa. Her magic
erful that she could not only make horses do her bidding,
Miunand wolves! The man had not shown concern either,
d, when they saw him drop to his knees beside the woman
If. He had even ignored the spears of the Wolf Women,
so stepped back a few paces and stood gaping. Suddenly
man behind Jondalar, and he had a knife! Where did the
from?

;ut these cords for you, Jondalar," Ebulan said, slashing the

glanced around as he felt his hands come free. Other men
through the crowd, and more were coming from the direc- iolding. "Who let you out?"
," Ebulan said.

> you mean? I was tied up."

gave us the knives . . . and the courage to try," Ebulan
man sneaked up behind the guard at the gate and hit her
iff. Then we cut the cords that kept the gate closed up.
^as watching the fight, and then the wolf came ..." His
I off and he shook his head as he watched the woman and

didn't notice that the man was too overcome to continue.
else was more important. "Are you all right, Ayla? Did she
he said, taking both the woman and the wolf in his arms.
turned from licking Ayla to licking him.

'cratch on the neck. It's nothing," she said, clinging to the

man and the excited wolf, "and I think Wolf was cut, but it ^
seem to bother him."

"I would never have let you come back here if I'd thought slip '^
try to kill you, Ayla, right here at the feast. But I should have kn aow
I was stupid not to realize how dangerous she was," he said h l<r^
her close. ' ^t

"No, you're not stupid. It didn't even occur to me that she wn»u
try to attack me, and I didn't know how to defend myself. If i(haAA
been for Wolf ..." They both looked at the animal, full of eraritudo

"I have to admit, there have been times on this Journey when I
wanted to leave Wolf behind, Ayla. I thought he was an extra burden
making our travels more difficult. When I found that you had gone M
look for him after crossing the Sister, I was so angry. The thought dw
you had put yourself in jeopardy for this animal upset me." ||

Jondalar took the wolfs head in both his hands and looked htfj
straight in the eyes. "Wolf, I promise, I will never leave you behind^!
would risk my life to save yours, you glorious, furious beast," the mfflg
said, roughing his fur and rubbing behind his ears. |

Wolf licked Jondalar's neck and face, and with his jaws, he grasi
the exposed and trusting throat and jaw of the man, and held it gent
showing his affection. Wolf felt nearly as strongly about Jondalar as
did about Ayla, and he growled contentedly at the attention and
proval he was getting from both of his humans.

But the people who were watching made sounds of wonder and!
to see the man expose his vulnerable throat to the animal. They
watched that same wolf grab the throat of Attaroa with those powe
jaws and kill her, and to them Jondalar's action bespoke magic,
imaginable control over the spirits of animals.

Ayla and Jondalar stood up with the wolf between them, while
people watched with some trepidation, not sure what to expect r
Several of them looked toward S'Armuna. She stepped toward
visitors, eying the wolf warily.

"We are finally free of her," she said.

Ayla smiled; she could see the woman's anxiety. "Wolf wont
you," she said. "He attacked only to protect me."

S'Armuna noticed that Ayla didn't translate the name of the a
into Zeiandonii, and she sensed that the word was used as a pel
name for the animal. "It is appropriate that her end should come
a wolf. I knew you were here for a reason. We are no longer clu
in her grip, held by her madness," the woman said. "But w^at.
do now?" The question was rhetorical, spoken more to herself
any of the listeners.

iked down at the still body of the woman who had only before been so malevolently, but vibrantly alive, and it made us of how fragile a thing life was. Except for Wolf, it could pierce her lying dead on the ground. She shuddered at the thought. Someone should take this headwoman away and prepare her for burial. She spoke in Mamutoi so that more people would understand the need for translation. Why not throw her body to the carrion? She was a male voice that had spoken. "What are you thinking?" Ayla asked. He knew the man who stepped forward, somewhat hesitantly. "I don't want to," said Olamun. "I recognized you in recognition. You have a right to feel angry, Olamun. You were driven to violence by the violence done to her. Her spirit is eager to carry it on, to leave you with a legacy of pain. Give it up. Don't let your rightful anger make you fall into the trap her restless spirit has set. It is time to break the pattern. She is human. Bury her with the dignity she was not able to find and let her spirit rest." Ayla was surprised by her response. It was the kind of answer a woman might make, wise and restrained. He nodded with acquiescence. "But who will bury her? Who will care for her? She has no kin," he said. "It is the responsibility of the One Who Serves the Mother," said Olamun. "I will do it with the help of those who followed her in this life," Ayla said. The body was obviously too heavy for the older woman to lift. She turned to face Epadoa and the Wolf Women. They seemed to gather together as though to draw strength from each other. "I will not let them follow her to the next world," another male voice said. There were shouts of agreement from the crowd, and a surge toward the hunters. Epadoa stood her ground, brandishing her spear. Only one young Wolf Woman stepped away from the others. "I wanted to be a Wolf Woman. I just wanted to learn to hunt so I could have something to eat. I have to be hungry." Epadoa beared at her, but the young woman looked back defiantly. "Let Epadoa find out what it's like to be hungry," the male voice said. "Let her go without food until she reaches the next world. Her spirit will be hungry, too." Ayla stepped forward, piecing toward the hunters, and toward Ayla, brought a snarl from Wolf. Jondalar quickly knelt to quiet him, but

his reaction did have the effect of making the people back away tv ^
looked at the woman and the animal with some trepidation. ^*
Ayla didn't ask who had spoken that time. "Attaroa's soii-ir --it
walks among us," Ayla said, "encouraging violence and revenge "
"But Epadoa must pay for the evil she has done." Ayla saw a- mother of Cavoia stepping forward. Her
young, pregnant dauoh
stood just behind her, offering moral support. "W
Jondalar got up and stood beside Ayla. He could not help thinlmw
that the woman had a right to retribution for the death of her sonH"
looked to S'Armuna. The One Who Served the Mother ought to ho
answering, he thought, but she, too, was waiting for Ayla to reply
"The woman who killed your son has already gone to the dcm
world," Ayla said. "Epadoa should pay for the evil she has done."
"She has more than that to pay for. What about the harm she did to
these boys?" It was Ebulan who spoke. He stood back to let Ayla see
two youngsters leaning on a cadaverous old man. 4
Ayla was startled when she saw the man; for an instant she thought
she was looking at Creb! He was tall and thin, where the holy man rf
the Clan had been short and stocky, but his craggy face and dark eyei
held the same kind of compassion and dignity, and he obviously com*j
manded the same kind of esteem. '¥
Ayla's first thought was to offer him the Clan gesture of respect by
sitting at his feet and waiting for him to tap her shoulder, but she knew
the action would be misunderstood. Instead, she decided to offer hia;
the regard of formal courtesy. She turned to the tall man beside her. ;s
"Jondalar, I cannot properly address this man without an introduce
tion," she said. r1
He was quick to understand her sensitivity. He, too, had felt awe&j
by the man. He stepped forward and led Ayla to him. "S'Amodua»
most respected of the S'Armunai, may I introduce Ayla, of the LuK^
Camp of the Mamutoi, Daughter of the Mammoth Hearth, Chosen of
the spirit of the Cave Lion, and Protected by the Cave Bear." |
Ayla was surprised that Jondalar had added the last part. N000^
had ever named the Cave Bear as her protector, but when she coB^
^ - . . - - - - - < i /"'-^i^ Inc
naa ever namea me i^avc near as ncr pruiuccu-ii, "ui v»"- " --- ^^
sidered it, she thought it might be true, at least through Creb. 1^
Cave Bear had chosen him--it was the totem of Mog-ur--and j
had been in her dreams so much that she was sure he was guiding ^
protecting her, perhaps with the help of the Great Cave Bear o ^
clan. Uflflll^
"S'Amodun of the S'Armunai welcomes the Daughter of the.'y^
moth Hearth," the old man said, holding out both of his hand^
was not alone in singling out the Mammoth Hearth as the m

her relationships. Most of the people there understood the of the Mammoth Hearth to the Mamutoi; it named her the of S'Armuna, One Who Served the Mother.

mmoth Hearth, of course, thought S'Armuna. It cleared up itions she'd had. But where was her tattoo? Weren't those > the Mammoth Hearth marked with a tattoo?

iPPV y011 welcome, Most Respected S'Amodun," Ayla said, i S'Armunai.

l smiled. "You have learned much of our language, but you omething twice. My name is Amodun. S'Amodun means xcted, Amodun,' or 'Greatly Honored,' or whatever you i mean singled out for special notice," he said. "It is a title f the will of the Camp. I am not sure why I have earned it."

w why. "I thank you, S'Amodun," Ayla said, looking down ig with gratitude. Up close, he reminded her even more of l his deep, dark, luminous eyes, prominent nose, heavy I generally strong features. She had to consciously overcome aining--women were not supposed to stare directly at men ip and talk to him. "I would ask you a question," she said, t Mamutoi, in which she was more fluent.

nswer if I can," he replied.

red at the two boys who stood on either side of him. "The this Camp want Epadoa to pay for the evil she has done.

's, in particular, have suffered great harm at her hands.

' I will see if I can do anything to help them, but what should Epadoa pay for carrying out the wishes of her

arily most people glanced at the body of Attaroa, still ivhere Wolf had left her; then their eyes were drawn to "he woman stood straight and unflinching, ready to accept ment. In her heart, she had known that someday she would f.

looked at Ayla, a little awed. She had done exactly the right bought. No matter what she might have said, even with the >ect she had gained, the words of a stranger would never be y these people as willingly as the words of S'Amodun.

Epadoa should pay for her evil," the man said. Many people th satisfaction, particularly Cavao and her mother. "But in i not the next. You were right when you said it was time to pattern. There has been too much violence and evil in this :oo long. The men have suffered greatly in recent years, but Wn to the women first. It is time to end it."

"Then what retribution will Epadoa pay?" the grieving ^^
asked. "What will be her punishment?" ^^
"Not punishment, Esadoa. Restitution. She should give k, i, '
much as she has taken, and more. She can start with Doban. No m "'
what the Daughter of the Mammoth Hearth may be able to do fw

ieht," Jondalar said. "I have seen and eaten food that Ayla even in winter. You even ate some of it tonight. She gathered nuts from the stone pines near the river."

lichens that reindeer like can be eaten," one of the older said "if you cook them right."

Some of the wheats, and millets, and other grasses still bear it," Esadoa said. "They can be collected."

But be careful of ryegrass. It can foster a growth that is harmful. If it looks and smells bad, it's probably full of ergot, which should be avoided," Ayla advised. "But certain edible berries stay on the bush well into winter--I even found a tree with berries still clinging to it--and the inner bark of most trees can

be cut down to it," Esadoa said. "The ones we use are every good."

Can you make some," Jondalar volunteered.

Can you teach me to make knives, Zeiandon?" Doban suddenly

asked. "Yes, I will show you how to make knives and other tools, too."

Zealot to learn more about that, too," Ebulan said. "We will need to hunt."

But anyone who wants to learn, or at least get you started. It may take years to gain real skill. Perhaps next summer, if you go to the Council Meeting, you will find someone to continue your training," Jondalar said.

Zealot's smile turned to a frown; he knew the tall man would not help.

Can you help you all I can," Jondalar said. "We've had to make many spears on this Journey."

What about that . . . stick that throws spears . . . like the one she showed you?" It was Epadoa who had spoken, and everyone stared. The head Wolf Woman had not spoken before, but her words reminded them of the long and accurate cast Ayla had made from the target post. It had seemed so miraculous that people didn't consider that it was a skill that could be

taught. "Can you teach me to throw spears like that?"

Can you teach the women?" Epadoa asked.

Can you teach the women," Jondalar said. "When you learn to use good spears, you won't have to go to the Great Mother River to

chase horses off a cliff. You have one of the best hunrine snnrc r'
....." & 'f--10 l we ante
seen, right here down by the river. ^
"Yes, we do," Ebulan said. "I especially remember them h I
mammoths. When I was a boy, they used to post a lookout and l-?
signal fires when anything was seen." "*
"I thought as much," Jondalar said.
Ayla was smiling. "I think the pattern is breaking. I don't h--
Attaroa's spirit talking any more," she said, stroking Wolfs fur T^
she spoke to the head Wolf Woman. "Epadoa, I learned to hunt fums.
legged hunters when I first started, including wolves. Wolf hides can
be warm and useful for hoods, and a wolf that seriously threaten*
ought to be killed, but you would learn more from watching livino
wolves than from trapping and eating them after they are dead."
All the Wolf Women looked at each other with guilty expressiona.
How had she known? Among the S'Armunai, wolf meat was prohib"
ited, and it was considered particularly bad for women.
The chief hunter studied the blond woman, trying to see if then
was more to her than there appeared. Now that Attaroa was dead, and
she knew she would not be killed for her actions, Epadoa felt a release.;
She was glad it was over. The headwoman had been so compelling ri»^
the young hunter had become enamored and did many things to please
her that she didn't like thinking about. Many of these things had both*
ered her even while she did them, though she had not admitted it, even
to herself. When she saw the tall man, while they were hunting hoi-set,'
she had hoped that if she brought him back for Attaroa to toy with,]
she might spare one of their own men from the Holding, ^
She hadn't wanted to hurt Doban, but she was afraid that if she;
didn't do as Attaroa commanded, the headwoman would kill him, --
she had killed her own child. Why had this Daughter of the Mammoth
Hearth selected S'Amodun rather than Esadoa to pronounce judgment]
on her? It was a choice that had spared her life. It wouldn't be easy;
living in this Camp any longer. Many people hated her, but she wk
grateful for the chance to redeem herself. She would take care of tn^
boy, even if he hated her. She owed him that much. ,]
But who was this Ayla? Had she come to break the grip of Attar^
on the Camp as everyone seemed to think? What about the man?.''.^|
magic did he have that spears couldn't touch him? And how "'^jg
men in the Holding get knives? Had he been responsible for that. _^
they ride horses because that was the animal the Wolf Women 3
hunted most, even though the rest of the S'Armunai were as m^j
mammoth hunters as their kin, the Mamutoi? Was the wolf*
wolf, come to revenge his kind? One thing she knew. She would'

f again, and she was going to stop calling herself a Wolf

ked back toward the dead leader and saw S'Armuna. The
served the Mother had watched everything but said little,
emembered her anguish and remorse. She spoke to her in
ite tones.

na, even if the spirit ofAttaroa is finally leaving this Camp,
easy to change old ways. The men are out of the Holding
they managed to free themselves, they will remember it
but it will be a long time before they forget Attaroa and
ley were held in there. You are the one who can help, but
heavy responsibility."

ian nodded her head in acquiescence. She felt she had been
lance to make right her abuse of the Mother's power; it was
the had hoped for. The first thing to do was to bury Attaroa
behind them. She turned to the crowd.

i food left. Let us finish this feast together. It is time to tear
ence that was raised between the men and women of this
ie to share food together, and fire, and the warmth of com-
ime for us to come back together as a whole people, with
more than the other. Everyone has skills and abilities, and
erson contributing and helping, this Camp will thrive."
nen and men nodded in agreement. Many had found the
i whom they had long been separated; the others joined to
ind fire, and human company.

," S'Armuna called, as the people were getting their food.
woman walked over to her, she said, "I think it is time to
oa's body away and prepare her for burial."

e take her to her lodge?" the hunting woman said.

>a thought. "No," she said. "Take her to the Holding and
the lean-to. I think the men should have the warmth of
uthlodge tonight. Many are weak and sick. We may need it
me. Do you have another place to sleep?"

hen I could get away from Attaroa, I had a place with
the lodge she shares."

?ht consider moving in with her for now, if that's agreeable
you."

we would both like that," Epadoa said.

^e'U work something out with Doban."

padoasaid, "we will."

watched Ayla as she walked with Epadoa and the hunters

^y of the headwoman, and he felt proud of her and a little

surprised. Somehow Ayla had assumed the wisdom and the s -
Zeiani herself. The only time he had seen Ayla assume
of a situation before was when someone was hurt, or sick and
of her special skills. Then, when he thought of it, he realized th «'
people were hurt and sick. Perhaps it wasn't so strange that Ayla
know what to do.

In the morning Jondalar took the horses and brought back the ^
cessities they had taken when they left the Great Mother River &! went to get Whinney. It seemed
so long ago, and it made him nJb
that their Journey had been considerably delayed. They had bewr
far ahead of the distance he thought they would have to cover to r
the glacier that he had been sure they would make it in plenty of t
Now they were well into winter, and they were farther away.
This Camp did need help, and he knew Ayla would not leave she had done everything she felt she
could. He had promised to l
too, and he was excited about the prospect of teaching Doban and (
others to work the flint, and the ones who wanted, to use the sn
thrower, but a small knot of worry had begun. They had to cross l
glacier before the spring melt made it too treacherous, and he wai
to get under way again, soon.

S'Armuna and Ayla worked together to examine and treat the I
and men of the Camp. Their help was too late for one man. He i
in Attaroa's lodge the first night out of the Holding, of gangrene)
advanced that both legs were already dead. Most of the rest ne
treatment for some injury or illness, and they were all underfed.'
also smelled of the sickness of the Holding and were unbeliel
filthy.

S'Armuna decided to delay firing of the kiln. She didn't have l
and the feeling was wrong for it, though she did think it could be)
powerful healing ceremony at the right moment. They used the t
fire chamber to heat water for bathing and treating of wounds inst
but the treatment that was needed most was food and warmth, c
the healers had administered whatever help they could, those
were not in serious difficulty and had mothers or mates, or other
to live with, moved back in with them.

It was the youngsters, the ones who were nearing or barely '
adolescence, that made Ayla particularly angry. Even S'Armuna
appalled. She had closed her eyes to the severity of their situation^
That evening, after another meal shared together, Ayla and
muna described some of the problems they had found, explaining IT
eral needs and answering questions. But the day had been longi

' said she had to rest. As she stood up to leave, someone question about one of the youngsters. When Ayla replied, inan made a comment about the evil headwoman, laying all ttaroa's feet, and self-righteously absolving herself of all tv. It raised Ayla's are, and she made an announcement that 'the deep anger that had been growing all day. was a strong woman, with a strong will, but no matter how srson is, two people, or five people, or ten people are ' all of you had been willing to resist her, she could have cd long before this. Therefore, you are all, as a Camp, men, partly responsible for the suffering of these children. tell you now, any of those youngsters, or even any of the niffer for a long time as a result of this . . . this abomina- l struggled to contain her fury--"must be cared for by this p. You are all responsible for them, for the rest of their have suffered, and in their suffering have become the chosen jiyone who refuses to help them will answer to Her." led and left, and Jondalar followed, but her words carried it than she could know. Most people already felt that she ordinary woman, and many were saying that she was an of the Great Mother Herself; a living munai in human had come to take Attaroa and set the men free. What else in horses that came at her whistle? Or a wolf, huge even large northern breed, following her wherever she went and dy at her command? Wasn't it the Great Earth Mother Who irth to the spirit forms of all the animals? g to the rumors, the Mother had created both women and reason, and She had given them the Gift of Pleasures to The spirits of both men and women were necessary to ife, and Muna had come to make it clear that anyone trying [er children some other way was an abomination to Her. brought the Zeiandonii to show them how She felt? A man ie embodiment of Her lover and mate? Taller and more han most men, and light and fair like the moon. Jondalar g a difference in the way the Camp was acting toward him, s him uneasy. He didn't much like it.

d been so much to do the first day, even with both healers from most of the Camp, that Ayla put off the special treat- "anted to try on the boys with the dislocations. S'Armuna elayed the burial of Attaroa. The following morning a site ' and the grave was dug. A simple ceremony conducted by

B ^ -11 I ^B

j the One Who Served finally returned the headwoman to the bo«irJa
' I the Great Mother Earth. ^^

.[i A few even felt some grief. Epadoa had not expected to fepi 's
thing, and yet she did. Because of the way most of the Camp felrJ
couldn't express it, but Ayla could see from her body language L
postures and expressions, that she was struggling with it. Doban'A
exhibited strange behavior, and she guessed he was trying to deal u'
his own mixed emotions. For most of his young life, Attaroa had ho.
the only mother he knew. He had felt betrayed when she turned
him, but her love had always been erratic, and he couldn't entirely l
go of his feelings for her.

Grief needed to be released. Ayla knew that from her own losse
She had planned to try to treat the boy right after the burial, but d
wondered if she should wait longer. This might not be the right di
for it, but maybe having something else to concentrate on would I
better for both of them. She approached Epadoa on the way back i
the Camp.

"I'm going to try to reset Doban's dislocated leg, and I'm going i
I i need help. Will you assist me?"

,n jr ; I I" i'l ~

"Won't it be painful for him?" Epadoa said. She recalled only u
well his screams of pain, and she was beginning to feel protective i
him. He was, if not her son, at least her charge, and she took
seriously. Her life, she was sure, depended on it.

|ij || "I will put him to sleep. He won't feel it, though he will have son
pain when he wakes up, and he will have to be moved very careful
for some time," Ayla explained. "He won't be able to walk."

"I will carry him," Epadoa said.

When they got back to the big lodge, Ayla explained to the boy th
she wanted to try to straighten his leg. He pulled away from he
looking very nervous, and when he saw Epadoa coming into the lodg
his eyes filled with fear.

"No! She's going to hurt me!" Doban screamed at the sight of d
Wolf Woman. If he could have run away, he would have.

Epadoa stood straight and stiff beside the bed platform he was sittu
on. "I will not hurt you. I promise you, I will never hurt you again
she said. "And I will never let anyone else hurt you, not even tfl
woman.

timaii. -

He glanced up at her, apprehensive, but wanting to believe
Desperately wanting to believe her.

"S'Armuna, please make sure he understands what I am g01"?

say," Ayla said. Then she stooped down until she could look into
frightened eyes.

554

i

I'm going to give you something to drink. It won't taste but I want you to drink it all anyway. After a while, you 5 feel very sleepy. When you feel like it, you can lie down

While you are asleep, I'm going to try to make your leg a put it back the way it was. You won't feel it because you ping. When you wake up, you will feel some pain, but it tter in a way, too. If it hurts too much, tell me, or S'Arpadoa--someone will be here with you all the time--and ; you something to drink that will make the pain go away a »u understand?"

ndon come here to see me?"

ill get him now, if you want."

jnodun?"

h of them, if you want."

oked up at Epadoa. "And you won't let her hurt me?"

e. I won't let her hurt you. I won't let anyone hurt you."

i at S'Armuna, then back at Ayla. "Give me the drink," he

ess was not unlike the resetting of Roshario's broken arm. oth relaxed his muscles and put him to sleep. It took sheer sngth to pull the leg straight, but when it slipped back into (obvious to everyone. There had been some breakage, Ayla d it would never be entirely right, but his body looked lal again.

loved back into the large earthlodge, since most of the men ad moved in with their kin, and she stayed near Doban tandy. Ayla noticed the tentative beginnings of trust devel- ien them. She was sure that was exactly what S'Amodun led.

nt through a similar procedure with Odevan, but Ayla icaling process would be more difficult and that his leg a tendency to pop out and become dislocated more easily

a was impressed and a little in awe of Ayla, privately won- ; rumors about her might not have some truth in them. She an ordinary woman, talked and slept and shared Pleasures l» fair man, like any other woman, but her knowledge of re that grew in the earth, and their medical properties in was phenomenal. Everyone talked about it; S'Armuna Age by association. And though the older woman learned ^e wolf, it was almost impossible to see him around Ayla eve that she controlled his spirit. When he wasn't following

-a

her, his eyes were. It was the same with the man, although h ^
as obvious about it. a9^

The older woman didn't notice the horses as much becauw a
were left to graze most of the time--Ayla said she was glad r -^
them the rest--but S'Armuna did see the two people ride them ??
man rode the brown stallion easily enough, but seeing the v
woman on the back of the mare made one think they were of the ^^
flesh. ^^

But though she wondered, the One Who Served the Mother w--
skeptical. She had been trained by the zeia donia, and she knew dm
such ideas were often encouraged. She had learned, and often em.
ployed, ways to misdirect people, to lead them into believing what she.
and they, wanted to believe. She didn't think of it as trickery--no one
was more convinced of the rightness of her calling--but she used die
means at her disposal to smooth the way and persuade others to follow.
People could often be helped by such means, especially some of those
whose problems and illnesses had no discernible cause, except, perhaps,
curses by powerful evil people.

Though she herself was not willing to accept all the rumors, S'Ar-
muna did not discourage them. The people of the Camp wanted 0

believe that anything Ayla and Jondalar said was a pronouncement
from the Mother, and she used their belief to set in place some necea-
sary changes. When Ayla talked about the Mamutoi Council of Sister.

and Council of Brothers, for example, S'Armuna organized the Cany
to set up similar Councils. When Jondalar mentioned finding someoneK
from another Camp to continue the training in flint-toolmaking that ht;
had begun, she instigated plans to send a delegation to several othtfl]
S'Armunai Camps to renew ties with kin and reestablish friendships. *

On a night that fell so cold and clear the stars blazed from th(|
f the

heavens, a group of people were clustered outside the entrance or w
former headwoman's large earthlodge, which was becoming a cento-
for community activities after it had served as a place for healing aKj

recovery. They were talking about the mysterious twinkling lights ,
the sky, and S'Armuna was answering questions and offering lnte^^B'j
tations. She had to spend so much time in the place--healing ww
medicines and ceremonies, and gathering with people to make P ;
and discuss problems--that she had begun to move some of her wvav^
in, and she often left Ayla and Jondalar alone in her small lodge.

arrangement was starting to resemble other Camps and ~av€^
Ayla and Jondalar knew, with the lodging of the One Who Serv j
Mother acting as a focus and gathering place for the people.
After the two visitors left the stargazers, with Wolf at their

asked S'Armuna about the wolf that followed Ayla every-
be One Who Served the Mother pointed to one of the bright
be sky. "That is the Wolf Star," was all she said.

ys passed quickly. As the men and boys began to recover and
needed her as a medicine woman, Ayla went out with those
; collecting the sparse winter foods. Jondalar got caught up in
his craft and showing how to make spear-throwers and hunt
a. The Camp began to accumulate more supplies of a variety
hat were easy to preserve and store in the freezing weather,
ly meat. At first there had been some difficulties in getting
ed to the new arrangements, with the men moving into lodges
romen considered theirs, but they were working it out.
ina felt that the timing was right to fire the figures in the kiln,
ad talked about establishing a new Firing Ceremony with her
m"s. They were at the kiln lodge, gathering some of the fuel
ollected over the summer and fall to bum for her firing, for
imposes, and for everyday uses. She explained that they
we to gather more fuel and it would be a lot of work.
ou make some tree-cutting tools, Jondalar?" she asked.
glad to make some axes, and mauls and wedges, whatever
, but green trees don't bum well," he said.
be burning mammoth bone, too, but we have to get the fire
hot first, and it has to bum for a long time. It takes a great
el for a Firing Ceremony."
y came out of the small lodge, Ayla looked across the settle-
he Holding. Although people had been using bits and pieces
f hadn't torn it down. She had mentioned at one time that the
Id be used for a hunting surround, a corral into which animals
chased. The people of the Camp tended to avoid using the
a" that, and now that they had all become accustomed to it,
>st didn't see it.
lly Ayla said, "You don't need to cut down trees. Jondalar
wood-cutting tools to cut up the wood of the Holding."
U saw the fence in a new way, but S'Armuna saw even more.
Q to see the outlines of her new ceremony. "That's perfect!"
'The destruction of that place to create a new and healing
' ' Everyone can take part, and everyone will be glad to see it
l mark the new beginning for us, and you'll be here, too."
> sure about that," Jondalar said. "How long will it take?"
< something that can be hurried. It's too important."
l what I thought. We have to be leaving soon," he said.

"But it will soon be the coldest part of winter," S'Armuna obi>>>3
"And not long after that, the spring melt. You've crossed th^
cier, S'Armuna. You know it can only be crossed in winter A ^
promised some Losadunai that I would visit their Cave on the
back and spend a little time with them. Though we couldn't stay In.
it would be a good place to stop and prepare for the crossing."
S'Armuna nodded. "Then I will use the Firing Ceremony to
your leaving as well. There are many of us who had hoped you wn>
stay, and all will feel your absence."

"I had hoped to see a firing," Ayla said, "and Cavao's babv t
Jondalar is right. It's time for us to leave."
Jondalar decided to make the tools for S'Armuna immediately l
had located a supply of good flint nearby, and, with a couple ofothe
he went to get some that could be made into axes and wood-cuttf
implements. Ayla went into the small lodge to gather together th
belongings and see what else they might need. She had spread eva
thing out when she heard a noise at the entrance. She looked up to i
Cavao.

"Am I bothering you, Ayla?" she asked.

"No, come in."

The young, very pregnant woman entered and eased herself dw
on the edge of a sleeping platform, across from Ayla. "S'Armuna U
me you are leaving."

"Yes, in a day or so."

"I thought you were going to stay for the firing."

"I wanted to, but Jondalar is anxious to go. He says we must cros
ghcier before spring."

"I made something that I was going to give you after the firinj
Cavao said, taking a small leather package out of her shirt. "I'd still li
to give it to you, but if it gets wet, it won't last." She handed I
package to Ayla.

Inside the package was a small head of a lioness powerfully model
out of clay. "Cavao! This is beautiful. More than beautiful. It is t
essence of a cave lioness. I didn't know you were so skilled."

The young woman smiled. "You like it?"

"I knew a man, a Mamutoi man, who was a carver of ivory, a
fine artist. He showed me how to see things that are carved
painted, and I know he would love this," Ayla said. .

"I have carved figures out of wood, ivory, antler. I've been doing
as long as I can remember. That's why S'Armuna asked me to
with her. She has been so wonderful to me. She tried to help Vs- She was good to Omel, too. She
let Omel keep the secret and n

nds, the way some would have. Many people were so curious
l looked down and seemed to be struggling to hold back

you miss your friends," Ayla said gently. "It must have
It for Omel to keep a secret like that."

id to keep that secret."

of Brugar? S'Armuna said she thought he might have
great harm."

because of Brugar, or Attaroa. I didn't like Brugar, and I
low he blamed her for Omel, even though I was little, but
eared Omel more than Omel feared him, and Attaroa knew

ied what was bothering Cavoia. "And you knew, too, didn't

w woman frowned. "Yes," she whispered; then she looked
eyes. "I was hoping you would be here when the time
mt everything to be right with my baby, not like ..."
necessary to say more, or to explain in detail. Cavoia feared
by might be born with some abnormality, and naming an
we it power.

m not leaving yet, and who knows? It appears to me that
lave that baby any time," Ayla said. "Perhaps we will still

a. You have done so much for us. I only wish you had come
sl and the others ..."

r tears glittering in her eyes. "You miss your friends, I
soon you will have a brand-new baby all your own. I think
;lp. Have you thought about a name?"

for a long time. I knew there wouldn't be much point in
out a boy's name, and I didn't know if I'd be allowed to
. Now, if it's a boy, I don't know whether to name it after
, or ... another man I knew. But if it's a girl, I want to
S'Armuna. She helped me to see . . . him . . ."A sob of
irrupted her words.

It the young woman in her arms. Grief needed to be ex-
was good for her to get it out. This Camp was still full of
>d to come out. Ayla hoped the ceremony that S'Armuna
uld help. When her tears finally abated, Cavoia pulled back
^er eyes with the side of her hand. Ayla looked around for
> give her to dry her tears, and she opened up a package
ned with her for years to let the young woman use the soft
Ppmg. But when Cavoia saw what was inside, her eyes

opened wide in disbelief. It was a munai, a small figure of a carved out of ivory, but this munai had a face, and the face was Ai*11' She averted her eyes, as though she had seen somethin -^ shouldn't have, dried her eyes, and quickly left. Ayla frowned TO wrapped the carving Jondalar had made of her back in the soft leari^6 She knew it had frightened Cavoia. ^tr*'

She tried to put it out of her mind as she packed their few th' She picked up the pouch that held their firestones, and she emori^1' to see how many of the grayish yellow metallic pieces of iron ovric they had left. She wanted to give one to S'Armuna, but she didn't know how plentiful they would be near Jondalar's home, and did wanted to have some for gifts to his kin. She decided to pan with from; but only one, and she selected a good-size nodule, then put the rear away. ,

When Ayla went out, she noticed Cavoia leaving the large earthlodne as she entered. She smiled at the young woman, who smiled nervously back, and when she went in, she thought S'Armuna looked at her strangely. Jondalar's carving had created some worry, it seemed. Ayh; waited until another person had left the lodge, and S'Armuna wif, alone. ^1

"I have something I want to give you before I leave. I discovered this when I was living alone in my valley," she said, opening her palm to show her the stone. "I thought you might be able to make use of it for your Fire Ceremony."

S'Armuna looked at it, then looked up at Ayla questioningly. ;;

"I know it doesn't look like it, but there is fire inside this stone. L^tj me show you." 1

Ayla went to the fireplace, got out the tinder they used, and arranged small shavings of wood loosely around dried cattail fluff. She; placed sticks of kindling nearby, then bent down low and struck the iron pyrite with flint. A large hot spark was drawn off and fell on vac tinder, and when she blew on it, a small flame miraculously appeared. She added kindling to keep it going, and when she looked up she saw the stunned woman gaping at her incredulously.

"Cavoia told me she saw a munai with your face, and now you maW fire appear. Are you . . . who they say you are?" ..

Ayla smiled. "Jondalar made that carving, because he loved rae' said he wanted to capture my spirit, and then he gave it to me. Its _ a donii, or a munai. It's just a token of his feeling, and I will be ^PP^ to show you how to make fire appear. It's not me, it's something 10 j firestone." ,

"Should I be here?" The voice came from the entrance, and

aed to look at Cavao. "I forgot my mitts and came back for
a and Ayla looked at each other. "I don't see why not,"

i my acolyte," S'Armuna remarked.

l show both of you how the firestone works," Ayla said.
e had gone through the process again and let them both try
e feeling more relaxed, though they were no less amazed at
ies of the strange stone. Cavao even felt brave enough to ask
the munai.

rare I saw . . ."

r made it for me, not long after we met. It was meant to
eling for me," Ayla explained.

an, if I wanted to show a person how important I think that
could make a carving of that person's face?" Cavao said.

see why not," Ayla said. "When you make a munai, you
you are making it. You have a special feeling inside you
»n't you?"

j certain rituals go along with it," the young woman said.
it's the feeling you put into it that makes the difference."
uld carve someone's face, if the feeling I put into it was

think there would be anything wrong with that at all. You
ine artist, Cavao."

rhaphs, it would be best," S'Armuna cautioned, "if you did
tie whole figure. If you just made the head, there would be
n."

xided in agreement; then both of them looked at Ayla, as
iring for her approval. In the recesses of their private
»oth women still wondered who this visitor really was.

l Jondalar woke the next morning with every intention of
t outside the lodge a dry snow was blowing so fiercely that
even to see across the settlement.

think we'll be leaving today, not with a blizzard in the
ondalar said, though he hated the thought of the delay. "I
ivs over soon."

nt to the field and whistled for the horses, to make sure
w "ght. She was relieved to see them appear out of the
nd-driven snow, and she led them to an area nearer the
was protected from the wind. As she walked back, her
on their return trip to the Great Mother River, since she

was the one who knew the way. She didn't hear her name wh' at first. r<
"Ayla!" The whisper was louder. She looked around and saw? on the far side of the small lodge, staying out of view and beckon' her.

"What is it, Cavao?"

"I want to show you something, to see how you like it," the vn woman said. When Ayla got close, Cavao took off her mitt. In hand was a small roundish object, the color of mammoth ivory placed it carefully in Ayla's palm. "I just finished it," she said. Ayla held it up and smiled with a look of wonder. "Cavao! I h you were good. I didn't know you were this good," she said, caref examining the small carving of S'Armuna.

It was just the head of the woman, no hint of a body, not ew neck, but there was no doubt who the carving was meant to del The hair was pulled up into a bun near the top of the head, and narrow face was slightly skewed, with one side somewhat smaller t the other, yet the beauty and the dignity of the woman were evid It seemed to emanate from within the small work of art.

"Do you think it's all right? Do you think she'll like it?" Cavao s

"I wanted to make something special for her."

"I would like it," Ayla said, "and I think it expresses your fee for her very well. You have a rare and wonderful Gift, Cavao, but must be sure to use it well. There could be great power in it. S'Ann was wise to choose you as her acolyte."

By evening, a howling blizzard was raging, making it dangerou move more than a few feet beyond the entrance of a lodge. S'Ann was reaching for a bunch of dried greenery hanging from the rack l the entryway, planning to add it to a new batch of herbs she mixing together for a potent drink she was preparing for the I Ceremony. The fire in the fireplace was burning low, and Ayla Jondalar had just gone to bed. The woman planned to retire as soo she finished. . ,

Suddenly a blast of cold air and a flurry of snow accompanied opening of the heavy drape stretched across the entrance to the room. Esadoa pushed through the second drape in evident distress.

"S'Armuna! Hurry! It's Cavao! Her time has come."

Ayla was out of bed pulling on clothes before the woman reply- . (.a

"She picked a good night for it," S'Armuna said, maintaining ^ in part to soothe the agitated expectant grandmother. "It wlu^ right, Esadoa. She won't have the baby before we reach your loo@

in my lodge. She insisted on going out in this storm to
e. I don't know why, but she wants to have the baby there.
its Ayla to come, too. She says it's the only way to be sure
| be all right."
frowned with concern. "No one is there tonight, and it
(for her to go out in this weather."
but I couldn't stop her," Esadoa said, starting back out.
loment," S'Armuna said. "We might as well all go together.
: lost going from one lodge to the next in a storm like this."
>n't let us get lost," Ayla said, signaling the animal, who
irled up beside their bed.
t be inappropriate for me to come?" Jondalar said. It wasn't
at he wanted to be there for the birthing as that he was
aut Ayla going out in the blizzard. S'Armuna looked at

|mind, but should a man be at a birthing?" Esadoa said.
|is no reason why not," S'Armuna said, "and it might be a
; to have a man nearby since she has no mate."
I braved the brunt of the wind together as the three women
an went out into the howling gale. When they reached the
they found the young woman huddled over a cold, empty
|her body tense with pain and a look of fear in her eyes. She
id with relief when she saw her mother arrive with the others.
timents, Ayla had a fire lit--much to the surprise of Esadoa
it was back outside getting snow from a drift to melt for
ittdo found the bedding that had been put away and arranged
td platform, and S'Armuna was selecting various herbs that
tneed from the supply she had brought there before.
Cttled the young woman, arranging everything so she could
mfortably or lie down if she chose, but she waited for S'Ar- i then both examined her. After
reassuring Cavao and leaving
her mother, the two healers walked back to the fireplace and
iedy with each other.
Wi notice?" S'Armuna asked.
Oo you know what it means?" Ayla said.
s an idea, but I think we'll just have to wait and see."
*r had been trying to stay out of the way, and he approached
yomen slowly. Something about their expressions made him
t they felt some concern, which caused him to worry as well.
own on a sleeping platform and absently stroked the wolfs

Y waited, Jondalar paced nervously while Wolf watched him.
^ the time would pass more quickly, or that the storm would

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I

let up, or that he had something to do. He talked to the young
a little, trying to be encouraging, and he smiled at her often K
felt entirely useless. There was nothing he could do. Finally i,
night dragged on, he dozed a little on one of the beds, while the'riuJ
sound of the storm outside wailed an eerie counterpoint to the w^
scene inside, punctuated by periodic sounds of straining labor sl
but inexorably drawing closer together.

He awoke to the sound of excited voices amidst a flurry of active
Light was coming through the cracks around the smoke hole. He e
up, stretched, and rubbed his eyes. Ignored by the three women.'
went outside to pass his morning water. He was glad to see the sta
had abated, though a few dry flakes were swirling in the wind.
As he started into the lodge, he heard the unmistakable squall of
newborn. He smiled but waited outside, not sure if it was an apn
priate moment to go back in. Suddenly, to his surprise, he hea
another squall, which caused the first one to make it a duet. Two
them! He couldn't resist. He had to go in.

Ayla, holding a swaddled infant in her arms, smiled as he cai
through the entrance. "A boy, Jondalar!"

S'Armuna was lifting a second baby, preparing to tie the umbilk
cord. "And a girl," she said. "Twins! It's a favorable sign. So 6
babies were born while Attaroa was leader, but now I think that w
change. I think this is the Mother's way of telling us the Camp oft
Three Sisters will soon be growing and full of life again."

"Will you come back someday?" Doban asked the tall man. He w
getting around much better, though he still used the crutch that Jo
dalar had made for him.

"I don't think so, Doban. One long Journey is enough. It's time
go home, settle down, and establish my hearth."

"I wish you lived closer, Zeiandon."

"So do I. You are going to be a good flint knapper, and I would ll
to continue training you. And, by the way, Doban, you can call r
Jondalar."

"No. You are Zeiandon."

"You mean Zeiandonii?"

"No, I mean Zeiandon." »

S'Amodun smiled. "He doesn't mean the name of your people- has made your name Elandon, but honors
you with S'Elandon.

Jondalar flushed with embarrassment and pleasure. "Thank y
Doban. Maybe I should call you S'Ardoban." ^

"Not yet. When I learn to work the flint like you, then they ^
call me S'Ardoban."

wve the young man a warm hug, clasped the shoulders of
; and chatted with them. The horses, packed and ready to
idered off a short distance, and Wolf had dropped to the
tching the man. He got up when he saw Ayla and S'Ar-
ic out of the lodge. Jondalar was glad to see them, too.
i beautiful," the older woman was saying, "and I'm over-
at she cared so much that she wanted to do it, but . . . you
it's dangerous?"
as you keep the carving of your face, how can it be danger-
' bring you closer to the Mother, give you deeper under- lyla said.
wed each other, then S'Armuna gave Jondalar a big hug.
back when they called the horses, but she reached out and
arm to detain him another moment.
, when you see Marthona, tell her S'Armuna . . . no, tell her
iher love."
think it will please her," he said, mounting the stallion.
ned around and waved, but Jondalar was relieved to be
could never be able to think of this Camp without mixed

pm filtering down again as they rode away. The people of
wed and wished them well. "Good Journey, S'Elandon."
s, S'Ayla."
isappeared into the softly obscuring white flakes, there was
ll who did not believe--or want to believe--that Ayla and
l come to rid them of Attaroa and free their men. As soon
^riding couple were out of sight, they would transform
into the Great Earth Mother and Her Fair Celestial Mate,
>uld ride the wind across the skies, trailed by their faithful
ie Wolf Star.

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i

. hey started back to the Great Mother River with Ayla leaf the way over the same trail that she had followed to find the S'Anni Camp, but when they reached the river crossing, they decided to i the smaller tributary and then head southwest. They rode across cc try over the windy plains of the ancient lowland basin that sepan the two major mountain systems, heading for the river.

Despite the scant snowfall, they often had to take cover from t zardlike conditions. In the intense cold, the dry snowflakes were pic up and blown from place to place by the unremitting winds until t were ground into frozen grit, sometimes mixed with the pulveri particles of rock dust--loess--from the margins of the moving glad When the wind blew especially hard, it blasted their skin raw. withered grass in the most exposed places had long since been l tened, but the winds that kept snow from accumulating, excepti sheltered pockets, bared the sere and yellowed fodder enough for horses to graze.

For Ayla, the trek back was much faster--she was not trying follow a trail over difficult terrain--but Jondalar was surprised at distance they had to travel before reaching the river. He hadn't reali how far north they had been. He guessed that the S'Armunai Ca was not far from the Great Ice.

His speculation was correct. If they had gone north, they could b reached the massive frontal wall of the continental ice sheet in a fl of a handful or two of days. In early summer, just before they star on their Journey, they had hunted mammoths at the frozen face ol same vast northern barrier, but far to the east. Since then, they traveled down the full length of the eastern side of a great curved of mountains, around the southern base, and up the western nan* the range almost to the land-spanning glacier again.

Leaving behind the last outliers and flysch foothills of the moun that had dominated their travels, they turned west when they r the Great Mother River and began approaching the northern to^ of the even larger and loftier range to the west. They were re

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looking for the place where they had left their equipment
x following the same route they had begun earlier in the
en Tondalar thought they had plenty of time . . . until the
iVhinney was taken by the wild herd.

Anarks seem familiar--it should be around here," he said.
you're right. I remember that bluff, but everything else
fferent," Ayla said, surveying the changed landscape with

yw had accumulated and settled in this vicinity. The edge
was frozen, and, with the snow blown into drifts and filling
ession, it was hard to know where the bank ended and the
i. Strong winds and ice, which had formed on branches
alternate freezing and thawing earlier in the season, had
>wn several trees. Brush and brambles sagged under the
he frozen water clinging to them; covered with snow, they
ired to the travelers to be hillocks or mounds of rocks until
through when they attempted to climb them.

nan and man stopped near a small stand of trees and care- ed the area, trying to find something
that would give them

e site of their stashed tent and food.

st be close. I know this is the right area, but everything is
t," Ayla said, then paused and looked at the man. "Many
iifferent from what they seem, aren't they, Jondalar?"
sd at her with a puzzled expression. "Well, yes, in winter
different than in summer."

mean just the land," Ayla said. "It's hard to explain. It's like
eft, and S'Armuna told you to tell your mother that she
owe, but she said Bodoa sends it. That was the name your
led her, wasn't it?"

a sure that's what she meant. When she was young she was
ailed Bodoa."

had to give up her own name when she became S'Armuna.

.e Zeiandoni you talk about, the one you knew as Zolena,"

*ne is given up willingly. It's part of becoming One Who
Mother," Jondalar said.

stand. It was the same when Creb became The Mog-ur. He
; to give up his birth name, but when he was conducting a
as The Mog-ur, he was a different person. When he was
'as like his birth totem, the Roe Deer, shy and quiet, never
A, almost as though he were watching from a hiding place.
ie was Mog-ur, then he was powerful and commanding, like

his Cave Bear totem," Ayla said. "He was never quite u/t, ^1
seemed." aat Wl

"You're a little like that, Ayla. Most of the time you listen a l "4
don't say much, but when someone is hurting or in trouble von I ^^
become a different person. You take control. You tell people wh
do, and they do it."

Ayla frowned. "I never thought of it that way. It's just that I
to help."

"I know that. But it's more than wanting to help. You usually I
what to do, and most people recognize that. I think that's why they<
what you say. I think you could be One Who Serves the Mother
you wanted to," Jondalar said.

Ayla's frown deepened. "I don't think I would want that. I woul<
want to give up my name. It's the only thing I have left from my i
mother, from the time before I lived with the Clan," the young we
said. Then she suddenly tensed and pointed at a snow-covered me
that seemed unusually symmetrical. "Jondalar! Look over there."
The man looked where she pointed, not seeing what she saw at i
then the shape leaped into his awareness. "Could that be ... ?" i
said, urging Racer forward.

The mound was in the middle of a tangle of briars, which increa
their excitement. They dismounted. Jondalar found a sturdy bnd
and beat their way through the thicket of canes. When he reached t
middle and hit the symmetrical mound, the snow fell away,
their upturned bowl boat.

"That's it!" Ayla cried.

They stomped and beat down the long thorny runners until
could reach the boat and the carefully wrapped packages cached i
derneath.

Their storage place had not been entirely effective, though it i
Wolf who gave them the first indication. He was obviously agitatedj
a scent still clinging to the area, and when they found wolf scat, IT
understood why. Wolves had vandalized their cache. Attempts tol
open carefully wrapped bundles had succeeded in some cases'
the tent was torn, but they were surprised it wasn't worse. W
usually couldn't stay away from leather, and once they got hold
they loved to chew it up. j,

"The repellent! That must have been what kept them froni
more damage," Jondalar said, pleased that Ayla's mixture had q^
just their canine traveling companion away from their things^
later kept away the other wolves as well. "And all the while 1 ^
that Wolf was making our Journey more difficult. Instead,

we probably wouldn't even have a tent. Come here,
r said, patting his chest and inviting the animal to jump
is paws on it. "You did it again! Saved our lives, or at
»?

ed him grab the thick fur of the wolfs neck and smiled.
sed to see his change in attitude toward the animal. It
Midalar had ever been unkind to him, or even that he
It was just that he'd never been so openly friendly and
efore. It was obvious that Wolf enjoyed the attention,

sy would have sustained much more damage if it hadn't
volf repellent, it hadn't kept the wolves away from their
od stores. They suffered a devastating loss. Most of their
id cakes of traveling food were gone, and many of the
id fruit, vegetables, and grain had been torn open or were
aps taken by other animals after the wolves had left.
; should have taken more of the food the S'Armunai of-
n we left," Ayla said, "but they had little enough for
suppose we could go back."

not go back," Jondalar said. "Let's see what we have.
, we may have enough to make it as far as the Losadunai.
} I met some of them and stayed overnight with them.
s to come back and spend some time with them."

;y give us food to continue our Journey?" Ayla asked.
, " Jondalar said. Then he smiled. "In fact, I know they
future claim on them!"

daim?" Ayla said, with a questioning frown. "Are they
:e the Sharamudoi?"

re not kin, but they are friendly, and they have traded
ndonii. Some of them know the language."

Iked about it before, but I never have quite understood
s claim' means, Jondalar."

daim is a promise to give whatever is asked for, at some
tture, in exchange for something given or, more usually,
St. Mostly it's used to pay a debt when someone has been
ost more than that person can pay, but it's used in other
te man explained.

W ways?" Ayla asked. She had a feeling there was more
Id that it would be important for her to understand.
tetunes to repay someone for something he's done, usually
Kaal, but difficult to value," Jondalar said. "Since there is
f on it, a future claim can be a heavy obligation, but most

people will not ask for more than is appropriate. Often just ar^x the obligation of a future claim shows trust and good faith Ir'fl of offering friendship." a ^

Ay la nodded. There was more to it.

"Laduni owes me a future claim," the man continued. "It major claim, but he is required to give me whatever I ask and I ask for anything. I think he'll be glad to fulfill his obligation nothing more than a little food, which he would probably my. anyway."

"Is it far to the Losadunai?" Ayla asked.

"It's quite a distance. They live at the western end of these nwi tains, and we're at the eastern end, but it's not hard travelina if follow the river. We will have to cross it, though. They live on other side, but we can do that farther upstream," Jondalar said.

They decided to camp there overnight, and they carefully m through all their belongings. It was mostly food that was gone. W they put all they could salvage together, it made a meager pile they realized the situation could have been worse. They would have hunt and gather extensively along the way, but most of their gear intact and would be entirely serviceable with some mending and pairing, except for the meat-keeper, which had been chewed to shn The bowl boat had protected their cache from the weather, if not fi the wolves. In the morning they had to make a decision about whd or not to continue dragging along the round, skin-covered boat.

"We're getting into more mountainous country. It could be n trouble taking it than leaving it behind," Jondalar said.

Ayla had been checking over the poles. Of the three poles she used to keep their food away from animals, one was broken, but t only needed two for the travois. "Why don't we take it along for o and if it turns out to be a real problem, we can always leave it lat she said.

Traveling west, they soon left behind the low-lying basin of wfl plains. The east-west course of the Great Mother River, which t followed, marked the line of a great battle between the most powe forces of the earth, waged in the infinitely slow motion of ge° time. To the south was the foreland of the high western mount* whose uppermost reaches were never warmed by the gentle j' summer. The lofty prominences accumulated snow and ice y year and, farther back, the tallest peaks of the range glistened clear, cold air. . ji

The highlands on the north were the basic crystalline roc

massifs, rounded and smoothed vestiges of ancient mountains over eons of time. They had risen from the land in the high and were anchored to the deepest bedrock. Against that foundation, the irresistible force of continents, moving inexorably from the south, had crushed and folded the edge of hard rock, uplifting the massive system of mountains across the land.

The mountainous south was the fertile land of rich loess beneath the Great Mother River flowed. The Jondalar were heading almost due west as they continued slowly, traveling along the northern bank of the waterway to the open plains of the river valley. While no longer the huge Great Mother of rivers that she had been downstream, the Great River was still substantial, and after a few days, true to character, separated once again into several channels.

^

Half a day's travel beyond, they reached another large tri3 whose roiling confluence, tumbling down from higher ground l formidable, with icicles extended into frozen curtains and m ' .°S broken ice lining both banks. No longer were the rivers joinin north coming from the uplands and foothills of the familiar mo OH they were leaving behind. This water came from the unfamiliar r to the west. Rather than cross the perilous river, or attempt to fcl it upstream, Jondalar decided to backtrack and cross the en branches of the Mother instead.

It turned out to be a good choice. Though some of the channels < wide and choked with ice along the edges, for the most part the fr water barely reached as high as the horses' flanks. They didn't d much about it until later that evening, but Ayla and Jondalar the horses, and the wolf had finally crossed the Great Mother River. A their dangerous and traumatic adventures on other rivers, they aco plished it with so little incident that it seemed an anticlimax, but t were not sorry.

In the deep cold of winter, simply traveling was dangerous enw Most people were snugly settled in warm lodges, and friends and would come looking if anyone was outside for too long. Ayla Jondalar were entirely on their own. If anything happened, they only each other, and their animal companions, to depend on. The land gradually sloped upward, and they began to notice a su shift in the vegetation. Fir and larch appeared among the spruce pine near the river. The temperature on the plains of the river val was extremely cold; due to atmospheric inversions, often colder tha was higher in the surrounding mountains. Although snow and whitened the highlands that flanked them, snow seldom fell on river valley. The few light, dry sittings that did produced little buil on the frozen ground, except in hollows and depressions, and so times not even there. When snow was lacking, the only way they cc get drinking water for themselves and the animals was to use ti stone axes to chop ice from the frozen river and then melt it. It made Ayla more aware of the animals that roamed the plains al the valley of the Mother. They were the same varieties as those t had seen on the steppes all along the way, but the cold-loving creat* predominated. She knew these animals could subsist on the dry ration that was easily available on the subfreezing but essentially s" less plains, but she wondered how they found water. She thought that wolves and other carnivores probably derived of their liquid requirement from the blood of those they nuD food, and they ranged over a large territory and could find pw

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ge ice to chew. But what about horses and the other grazing animals? How did they find water in a land that in a frozen desert? There was enough snow in some areas, but the barren regions of rock and ice. Yet no matter how dry, if some kind of fodder, it was inhabited by animals. Still rare, Ayla saw more woolly rhinoceroses than she had seen in one place, and though they didn't herd together, whenever they were together, they often saw musk-oxen, too. Both species preferred the open, windy, dry land, but the rhinos liked grass and sedge, and true to the goatlike creatures they were, browsed on wood. Large reindeer and the gigantic megaceroses with massive horns shared the frozen land, and horses with thick winter coats, but the mammoth was one animal that stood out among the populations in the upper course of the Great Mother River, it was mam-

moth. The mammoth grew tired of watching the huge beasts. Though they occasionally hunted, they were so unafraid that they seemed fearless. They often allowed the woman and man to come quite close, seeing no danger from them. The danger was, if anything, to the mammoth. Though woolly mammoths were not the most gigantic of their species, they were the most gigantic animals they had ever seen--or that most people were ever likely to see--and their shaggy coats even more filled out for winter, and their long, curved tusks, they looked bigger, up close, than Ayla remem-

bered. The mammoth's tusks began, in calves, with inch-and-a-half-long curved upper incisors. After a year, the baby tusks were lost and replaced by permanent tusks that grew continually from then on. The tusks of mammoths were social adornments, important in addition to those with their own kind, they also had a more practical function. They were used to break up ice, and the ice-breaking abilities of mammoths were phenomenal.

As Ayla observed the practice, she had been watching a mammoth herd approach the frozen river. Several of them used their tusks in a somewhat smaller and straighter than the ivory shafts of males, to break up ice that was caught in the lee of rock crevices. It puzzled her until she noticed a small one pick up a piece with her little mouth and put it in her mouth.

Ayla said. "That's how they get water, Jondalar. I was never told about that."

"I don't know. I never thought much about it before, but now that I think about it, I think Dalanar said something about that. But there

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are lots of sayings about mammoths. The only one I remenii?

'Never go forth when mammoths go north,' though you could
same for rhinos." ^

"I don't understand that saying," Ay la said.

"It means a snowstorm is coming," Jondalar said. "They I,
seem to know. Those big woollies don't like snow much. It cov
their food. They can use their tusks and their trunks to brush
some, but not when it gets really deep, and they get bogged don
it. It's especially bad when it's thawing and freezing. They lie don
night when it's still slushy from the afternoon sun, and by mm
their fur is frozen to the ground. They can't move. They are eai
hunt then, but if there are no hunters around and it doesn't thaw
can slowly starve. Some have been known to freeze to death esoec
little ones."

"What does that have to do with going north?"

"The closer you get to the ice, the less snow there is. Rernei
how it was when we went hunting mammoths with the Mamutoi?
only water around was the stream coming from the glacier itself
that was summer. In winter, that's all frozen."

"Is that why there's so little snow around here?"

"Yes, this region is always cold and dry, especially in winter. E one says it's because the
glaciers are so close. They are on the m
tains to the south, and the Great Ice is not very far north. Most o
land in between is flathead ... I mean Clan country. It starts a
west of here." Jondalar noticed Ayla's expression at his slip of
tongue, and he felt embarrassed. "Anyway, there's another sa
about mammoths and water, but I can't remember exactly how it
It's something like, 'If you can't find water, look for a mammoth.

"I can understand that saying," Ay la said, looking beyond I
Jondalar turned to see.

The female mammoths had moved upstream and joined forces
a few males. Several females were working on a narrow, almost <
'T->l L*

cal, bank of ice that had built up along the river's edge. The 01
males, including one dignified elder with streaks of gray hair, w
impressive, if less useful, tusks had grown so long that they ^
crossed in front, were scraping and gouging out huge chunks
from the banks. Then, lifting them high with their trunks, the a moths threw the ice down with a
loud crash to shatter into more
pieces, all accompanied by bellowings, snortings, stomping5*
trumpetings. The huge woolly creatures seemed to be making a e
of it.

The noisy business of breaking ice was a practice that all m

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gi young ones only two or three years old, who had barely
iby tushes, showed wear on the outside edges at the ends y two-inch tusks from scraping ice, and
the tips of the
prongs of ten-year-olds were worn smooth from moving
up and down against the vertical surfaces. By the time the
moths reached twenty-five, their tusks were beginning to
rd, upward, and inward, and the way they used them
ie lower surfaces began to show some of the wear of scrap-
brushing aside what snow did fall on the dry grass and
; steppes. Ice breaking, though, could be a dangerous busi-
iisks often broke along with the ice. But even broken ends
vom smooth again by later scraping and gouging of ice.
ced that other animals had gathered around. The herds of
lals, with their powerful tusks, broke up enough ice for
including their young and old, and for a community of
well. Many animals benefited by trailing close on the heels
; mammoths. The big woollies not only created piles of
s of ice in winter that were chewed for moisture by animals
hemselves, in summer they sometimes used their tusks and
loles in dry riverbeds, which would fill with water. The
hus created were also used by other animals to slake their

blowed the frozen waterway, the woman and man rode,
alked, fairly close to the banks of the Great Mother River.
Ie snow, there was no soft blanket of concealing white to
md, and the dormant vegetation exposed its drab winter
ill stalks of last summer's phragmite reeds and spikes of
valiantly from their frozen bed of marshland, while dead
dges lay prostrate near the ice heaped up along the edges.
ng to rocks like the scabs of healing wounds, and mosses
d into brittle dry mats.
i skeletal fingers of leafless limbs rattled in the sharp and
td, though only a practiced eye could discern whether they
, birch, or alder brush. The deep green conifers--spruces,
cs--were easier to distinguish, and though the larches had
ar needles, their shape was revealing. When they climbed
wations to hunt, they saw recumbent dwarf birch and knee
? close to the ground.
ae provided most of their meals; big game usually required
^ stalk and hunt than they wanted to spend, although they
tte to try for a deer when they saw one. The meat froze

quickly, and even Wolf didn't have to hunt for a while. Rabt and an occasional beaver, abundant in the mountainous reeion more usual fare, but the steppe animals of drier continental < ' marmots and giant hamsters, were also prevalent, and they ways glad to see ptarmigan, the fat white birds with the f feet.

Ayla's sling was often put to good use; they tended to save the sne«a throwers for larger game. It was easier to find stones than to make^ spears to replace missiles that were lost or broken. But some A^ hunting took more of their time than they wished, and anything riSI took time made Jondalar edgy. ^*

They often supplemented their diet, which was heavily concentrate on lean meat, with the inner bark of conifers and other trees usuail» cooked into a broth with meat, and they were delighted when they found berries, frozen but still clinging to the bush. Juniper berriet which were particularly good with meat if they didn't use too many. were prevalent; rose hips were more sporadic, but usually plentiful when found, and always sweeter after freezing; creeping crowbenyl with a needlelike evergreen foliage, had small shiny black berries tfaft often persisted through the winter, as did blue bearberries and ndl lingonberries. ?|

Grains and seeds were also added to the meat soups, gathered painstakingly from dried grasses and herbs that still bore seed heada, though it took time to find them. Most of the foliage of seed-bearing herbs had long since disintegrated, the plants lying dormant until spring thaws would awaken them to new life. Ayla wished for the dried vegetables and fruits that had been destroyed by the wolves, though she didn't begrudge the supplies she had given to the S'Armuna.

Though Whinney and Racer were grass eaters almost exclusively all summer, Ayla noticed that their diet had extended to browsing on tw^ tips, chewing through to the inner bark of trees, and included a paroc" ular variety of lichen, the kind reindeer preferred. She collected some and tested small amounts on herself, then made some for both of than. They found the taste strong but tolerable, and she was experimenting with ways to cook it.

Another source of winter food was small rodents such as voles, mice, and lemmings; not the animals themselves--Ayla usually let WoaW6 those as a reward for helping to sniff them out--but their nests. looked for the subtle features that hinted at a burrow, then bro through the frozen ground with a digging stick to find the small anii"" surrounded by the seeds, nuts, and bulbs they had laid by. ,g And Ayla also had her medicine bag. When she thought of al

at had been done to the things they had cached, she shud- clink about what would have happened if she had left her
oe. Not that she would have, but the thought of losing it
itomach chum. It was so much a part of her that she would
>st without it. But even more, the materials in the otter-skin
be long history of lore accumulated by trial and error that
passed down to her, kept the travelers healthier than either
Uy realized.
nple, Ayla knew that various herbs, barks, and roots could
treat, and avoid getting, certain diseases. Though she didn't
leficiency diseases, or have a name for the vitamins and trace
ie herbs contained, or even know exactly how they worked,
I many of them with her in her medicine bag, and she regu-
them into the teas they drank.
used the vegetation that was readily available even in win-
s the needles of evergreens, particularly the newest growth
ips of branches, which were rich in the vitamins that pre-
irvy. She regularly added them to their daily teas, mostly
ey liked the tangy, citruslike flavor, though she did know
beneficial and had a good idea of when and how to use them.
ten made needle tea for people with soft bloody gums whose
me loose during long winters of subsisting essentially on
s, either by choice or necessity.
veloped a pattern of opportunistic foraging as they moved
llowed them as much time as possible for traveling. Though
nal meal was skimpy, they seldom missed one entirely, but
'Ie fat in their diet and the constant exercise every day, they
eight. They didn't talk about it often, but they were both
ary of the traveling and longed to reach their destination.
; day, they didn't talk much at all.
he horses, or walking and leading them, Ayla and Jondalar
single-file, close enough to hear a comment if it was spoken
voice, but not close enough for casual conversation. As a
y both had long stretches of quiet time to think their own
ivhich they sometimes talked about in the evening when they
? or lying together side by side in their sleeping furs.
[en thought about their recent experiences. She had been
bout the Camp of the Three Sisters, comparing the S'Ar-
l their cruel leaders, like Attaroa and Brugar, with their
the Mamutoi, and their cooperative and friendly sister- leaders. And she wondered about the
Zeiandonii, the people
l she loved. Jondalar had so many good qualities, she felt

sure they had to be basically good people, but considering their f r
toward the Clan, she still wondered how they would accept her P^*
S'Armuna had made oblique references to their strong aversion r •?
ones they called flatheads, but she felt sure no Zeiandonii would
be as cruel as the woman who had been the leader of the S'Annun''
"I don't know how Attaroa could do the things she did Tondal '»
Ayla remarked as they were finishing an evening meal. "It makes '
i ii "Vi'3 IQB
wonder.

"What do you wonder about?"

"My kind of people, the Others. When I first met you, I was m
grateful just to finally find someone like me. It was a relief to know I
wasn't the only one in the world. Then, when you turned out to be a
wonderful, so good and caring and loving, I thought all of my kind of
people would be like you," she said, "and it made me feel good." She
was going to add, until he reacted with such disgust when she told him
about her life with the Clan, but she changed her mind when she saw
Jondalar smiling, flushed with embarrassed delight, obviously pleased.
He had felt a rush of warmth at her words, thinking that she was
pretty wonderful, too. I

"Then, when we met the Mamutoi, Talut and the Lion Campy11
Ayla continued, "I was sure the Others were all good people. That
helped each other, and everyone had a voice in the decisions. They
were friendly and laughed a lot, and they didn't reject an idea just
because they hadn't heard about it before. There was Frebec, <rf
course, but he turned out not to be so bad, either. Even those at th<
Summer Meeting who sided against me for a while because of the Clan^
and even some of the Sharamudoï, did it out of misplaced fear, not evB
intentions. But Attaroa was as vicious as a hyena." •)

"Attaroa was only one person," Jondalar reminded her. ,

"Yes, but look how many she influenced. S'Armuna used her sacrw
• •' . f •» J • /1 furl

knowledge to help Attaroa kill and hurt people, even if she did "»
sorry about it later, and Epadoa was willing to do anything Attaint
said," Ayla said. ,»

"They had reasons for it. The women had been badly treated,^
Jondalar said. ..^

"I know the reasons. S'Armuna thought she was doing the ng»|
thing, and I think Epadoa loved to hunt and loved Attaroa for lett^j
her do it. I know that feeling. I love to hunt, too, and I went af"
the Clan and did things I wasn't supposed to so I could hunt. ^

"Well, Epadoa can hunt for the whole Camp now, and I dont _
she was so bad," Jondalar said. "She seemed to be discovering tt<^
of love a mother feels. Doban told me she promised him she

r him again and would never let anyone else hurt him,"
lid. "Her feelings for him may be even stronger because she
o much and now she has a chance to make up for it."
i didn't want to hurt those boys. She told S'Armuna that she
if she didn't do what Attaroa wanted, she would kill them.
e her reasons. Even Attaroa had reasons. There was so much
that was bad, she became an evil thing. She wasn't human
but no reasons are good enough to excuse her. How could
things she did? Even Broud, as bad as he was, was not as
ie hated me. He never purposely hurt children. I used to
rind of people were so good, but I'm not so sure any more,"
>oking sad and distressed.

are good people and bad people, Ayla, and everyone has
I and some bad in them," Jondalar said, his wrinkled fore-
ing his concern. He sensed that she was trying to fit the new
s she had gathered from her latest unpleasant experience into
lal scheme of things, and he knew it was important. "But
ile are decent and try to help each other. They know it's
--after all, you never know when you may need help--and
Ie would rather be friendly."

are are some who are twisted, like Attaroa," Ayla said.
true." The man nodded, having to agree. "And there are
only give what they must and would rather not give at all,
)esn't make them bad."

e bad person can bring out the worst in good people, like
d to S'Armuna and Epadoa."
vse the best we can do is try to keep the evil and cruel ones
ng too much harm. Maybe we should count ourselves lucky
't more like her. But Ayla, don't let one bad person spoil the
>l about people."

l can't make me feel any different about the people I know,
are you are right about most people, Jondalar, but she has
norc wary, and more cautious."
n't hurt to be a little cautious, at first, but give people a
show their good side before you judge them bad."

"land on the north side of the river paced along with them
itmued their westward trek. Wind-sculptured evergreens on
"^ tops and level plateaus of the massif were silhouetted
t sky. The river split out again into several channels across a
ism that formed an embayment. The southern and northern
k °fthe valley maintained their characteristic differences, but

the base rock was cracked and down-faulted to great depths
the river and the limestone foreland of the high southern moi,
Toward the west was the steep limestone edge of a fault line
course of the river turned northwest.

The east end of the lowland basin was also bordered by a fault
caused not so much by uplifting of the limestone as by the deorcs" ^
of the land of the embayment. Toward the south, the land spread
on a level grade for some distance before it rose up toward the mount
tains, but the granite plateau in the north drew closer to the river umal
it was rising steeply just across the water. ; |

They camped within the low embayment. In the valley near d»'
river, the smooth gray bark and the bare branches of beech made an
appearance among the spruce, fir, pine, and larch; the area was omJ
tected enough to shelter the growth of a few large-leafed deciduoc;
trees. Milling around near the trees in seeming confusion was a smaB
herd of mammoths, both females and males. Ayla edged closer to see3
what was going on. ;

One mammoth was down, a giant of an elder with enormous tush
that crossed in front. She wondered if it was the same group they had
seen earlier breaking ice. Could there be two mammoths who were so
old in the same region? Jondalar walked up beside her.

"I'm afraid he's dying. I wish there was something I could do for
him," Ayla said.

"His teeth are probably gone. Once that happens, there is nothing
anyone can do, except what they are doing. Staying with him, keeping
him company," Jondalar said.

"Perhaps none of us can ask for more," Ayla said.

In spite of their relatively compact size, each adult mammoth consumed
large quantities of food every day, primarily woody-stemmed
tall grass and occasional small trees. With such a rough diet, their teeth
were essential. They were so important that a mammoth's lifespan was
determined by its teeth.

A woolly mammoth developed several sets of large grinding molars
throughout its span of some seventy years, usually six to a side botu
upper and lower. Each tooth weighed about eight pounds and was
especially adapted to grinding coarse grasses. The surface was mad
up of many extremely hard, thin, parallel ridges--plates of denOiw
covered with enamel--and had higher crowns and more ridges tua"
the teeth of any other of its species, before or since. Mammoths
primarily grass eaters. The shreds of bark that they tore from trees.
particularly in winter, the spring forbs, and the occasional I63 ,
branches, and small trees, were only incidental to their main di
tough fibrous grass. J

iest and smallest grinders were formed near the front of each
he rest grew in behind and moved forward in a steady
t during the animal's life, with only one or two teeth in use
time. As hard as it was, the important grinding surface wore
. moved toward the front, and the roots dissolved. Finally
n useless fragments of tooth were dropped as the new ones
»place.

l teeth were in use by age fifty, and when they were nearly
old gray-hair could not chew the tough grass any more.
es and plants could still be eaten, spring plants, but in other
ey were not available. In desperation, the undernourished
left the herd, searching for greener pastures, but found only
; herd knew when the end was close, and it wasn't uncom-
them sharing the elder's last days.
er mammoths were as protective of the dying as they were
as, and they gathered around trying to make the fallen one
len all was over, they buried the dead ancestor under piles
iss, leaves, or snow. Mammoths were even known to bury
animals, including humans.

i Jondalar and their four-legged traveling companions found
getting steeper and more difficult when they left behind the
id the mammoths. They were approaching a gorge. A foot
ent massif of the north had stretched too far south and was
e dividing waters of the river. They climbed higher as the
d through the narrow defile, moving too fast to freeze but
dth it ice floes from quieter sections farther west. It was
see moving water after so much ice. In front of the high-
iparts to the south were mesas, massiflike hills topped with
ilateaus, carrying thick stands of conifers, their branches
with snow. The thin limbs of deciduous trees and brush
d in white from a coating of freezing rain, which accentuated
md branch, captivating Ayla with their winter beauty.
^ide continued to increase, the lowlands between the ridges 'ing quite as low as the preceding
ones. The air was cold,
clear, and even when it was cloudy, no snow fell. Precipi-
eased as winter deepened. The only moisture in the air was
)reath expelled by humans and animals.
sr of ice became smaller each time they passed a frozen
'alley. At the west end of the lowland was another gorge.
^d the rocky ridge, and when they reached the highest
' looked ahead and stopped, awed by the sight. Ahead the
olit again. The travelers didn't know it was the last time that

it would divide into the branches and channels that had cha
its progress across the flat plains over which it had flowed for'
of its length. The gorge just before the lowlands curved sharnTlt
gathered the separate channels into one, causing a furious whill^
that carried ice and floating debris into its depths, before diseorm^^
in a gush farther downstream, where it rapidly refroze. °^
They stopped at the highest place, looked down, and watchni
small log whirling around and around, going deeper and deeper viJi!
each spiraling turn.

"I would not want to fall into that," Ayla said, shuddering at A»
thought.

"Nor would I," Jondalar responded.

Ayla's gaze was drawn to another site in the distance. "Where are
those clouds of steam coming from, Jondalar?" she asked. "It's fre@.
ing, and the hills are covered with snow."

"There are pools of hot water over there, water warmed by the hot
breath of Doni Herself. Some people are afraid to go near such placca,
but the people I want to visit live near such a deep hot well, or so they
told me. The hot wells are sacred to them, even though some smell
very bad. It's said they use the water to cure illness." ;

"How long before we reach those people you know? The ones wool
use water to cure illness," she asked. Anything that might add to her
wealth of medical knowledge always piqued her interest. Besides, food
was getting scarcer, or they didn't want to take the time to look for it
--but they had gone to bed hungry a couple of days.

The slope of the land increased noticeably beyond the last flat basin.
They were hemmed in by highlands on both sides as the mountain*
pressed in. The mantel of ice to the south was increasing in height at
they continued west. Far to the south and still somewhat west, tw@
peaks soared far above all the other rugged mountaintops, one higher
than the other, like a mated pair watching over their brood of children.
Where the highland leveled out near a shallower place in the river,
Jondalar turned south, away from the river, toward a cloud of rising
steam in the distance. They climbed a low ridge and looked down from
the top across a snow-covered meadow at a steaming pool of water near
a cave.

Several people had noticed their approach and stared in constero^
tion, too shocked to move. One man, however, was aiming a spear
them.

link we'd better get off the horses and approach them on dalar said, watching several more spear-carrying men and irily coming forward. "You'd think by now I would remember people are scared and suspicious of riding on horses. We should have left them out of sight and walked in, then gone in after we had time to explain about the animals." Both dismounted, and Jondalar had a sudden and poignant flash of his "little brother," Thonolan, smiling his big, friendly grin as he came confidently up to a Cave or Camp of strangers. Taking it that the tall blond man smiled broadly, waved in friendliness, and pulled back the hood of his parka so he could be more easily seen, he stepped forward with both hands outstretched, showing he was open to them openly, with nothing to hide. "I am waiting for Laduni of the Losadunai. I am Jondalar of the Great Plains," he said. "My brother and I were traveling east on a Your-Your years ago, and Laduni asked us to stop and visit on the way

aduni," said a man, speaking a slightly accented Zeiandonii. He stepped toward them, holding his spear in readiness, looking closely at the strange man who he said he was. "Jondalar? Of the Great Plains? You do look like the man I met." Thonolan sensed the cautious tone. "That's because I am! It's good to see you, aduni," he said with warmth. "I wasn't sure if I turned off the Great Plains place. I've been all the way to the end of the Great Mother Mountain beyond, and then, closer to home, I had trouble finding the Great Plains; but the steam from your hot wells helped. I brought some-thing to meet." Thonolan eyed Jondalar, trying to detect any hint that he was anything other than what he seemed: a man he knew who happened to come in a most peculiar fashion. He looked a little older, which was not surprising, and even more like Dalanar. He had seen the old flint trader gain a few years before when he came on a trading mission to the Great Plains. Thonolan suspected, to find out whether the son of his hearth and

his brother had passed that way. Dalanar will be very glad to see !, "I Laduni thought. He walked toward Jondalar, holding his spear ^ easily, but still in a position from which it could be thrown an'L??^ He glanced toward the two unusually docile horses, and he saw fn .?' first time that it was a woman who was standing near them.

"Those horses are not anything like the ones around here. Are kill* em horses more docile? They must be much easier to hunt " Lad said. '

Suddenly the man tensed, brought his spear into position to throw and had it aimed toward Ayla. "Don't move, Jondalar.'" he said * It happened so fast, Jondalar didn't have time to react. "Ladunfl What are you doing?"

"A wolf has been trailing you. One fearless enough to come in olai m^ ^s^- " ^

"No!" Ayla shouted, throwing herself between the wolf and the mar with the spear. l

"This wolf travels with us. Don't kill him!" Jondalar said, rushuM to interpose himself between Laduni and Ayla.

Jxifl j She dropped down and wrapped her arms around the wolf, holdiM him firmly, partly to protect him, and partly to protect the man wiA; the spear. Wolfs hair was bristling, his lips were pulled back to show his fangs, and a savage snarl issued from his throat.

Laduni was taken aback. He had moved to protect the visitors, but they were acting as if he meant to harm them. He gave Jondalar » ft ^, ;J questioning look. '

i ^!! "Put down your spear, Laduni. Please," Jondalar said. "The wotfil i our companion, just as the horses are. He saved our lives. I promise, I ti; ^ he won't hurt anyone as long as no one threatens him, or the woman. I know it must seem strange, but if you'll give me a chance, I'll cx-

t| p^- "

^j Laduni slowly lowered his spear, eyeing the large wolf wanly. Ow» ,|| the threat was removed, Ayla calmed the animal, then stood up a" , l:l |f: (I walked toward Jondalar and Laduni, signaling Wolf to stay close to her ?. side. ,

J |:J "Please excuse Wolf for raising his hackles," Ayla said. "He reeay (i(j likes people, once he gets to know them, but we had a bad expen fe 'if with some people east of here. It has made him more nervous aro /|l|''ll.lilil!l r *

(^ ;i|; strangers, and he has become more protective." ^

!^| Laduni noticed that she spoke Zeiandonii quite well, but her sffaay j^J accent branded her as a foreigner immediately. He also fww€,,.f^^ jijU something else . . . he wasn't sure. It was nothing he could spec ^S |:i| define. He'd seen many blond, blue-eyed women before, but the J

m-:"/'S ' JH

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Mies, the shape of her features or face, something gave her look as well. Whatever it was, it did not detract in the least let that she was a strikingly beautiful woman. If anything, it element of mystery.

rd at Jondalar and smiled. Remembering his last visit, it arise him that the tall, handsome Zeiandonii would return w Journey with an exotic beauty, but no one could have iving, breathing souvenirs of his adventures, like horses and ; could hardly wait to hear the stories they had to tell.

• had seen the look of appreciation in Laduni's eyes when he and, when the man smiled, he began to relax.

; the person I wanted you to meet," Jondalar said. "Laduni, the Losadunai, this is Ayla of the Lion Camp of the Mamun by the Cave Lion, Protected by the Cave Bear, and Daugh- ^lammoth Hearth."

d raised both hands, palms up, in the greeting of openness ship, when Jondalar began the formal introduction. "I greet m. Master Hunter of the Losadunai," Ayla said.

wondered how she knew he was the hunt leader of his peo- lar hadn't said it. Perhaps he'd said something to her before, is astute for mentioning it. But then, she would understand s of things. With so many titles and affiliations, she must be)fhigh standing among her people, he thought. I might have at any woman he brought back would be, considering that lother and the man of his hearth have known the responsibil- dership. The child will tell the blood of the mother and the ie man.

took both her hands. "In the name of Duna, the Great Earth ou are welcome, Ayla of the Lion Camp of the Mamutoi, the Lion, Protected by the Great Bear, and Daughter of the i Hearth," Laduni said.

t you for your welcome," Ayla said, still in a formal mode. may, I would like to introduce you to Wolf, so that he will are a friend."

frowned, not sure if he really wanted to meet a wolf, but circumstances he felt he had no choice.

dus is Laduni of the Losadunai," she said, taking the man's bringing it to the wolfs nose. "He is a friend." After he ie hand of the strange man, mixed with the smell of Ayla's If seemed to understand that this was someone to accept. He '• man's male parts, much to Laduni's consternation.

enough, Wolf," Ayla said, signaling him back. Then to La-

^

i> and |

„ i ^

duni, she added, "He has now learned that you are a friend and you are a man. If you would like to welcome him, he likes to be on the head and scratched behind the ears." ^^

Though still wary, the idea of touching a living wolf intrigued li Gingerly he reached out and felt the rough fur, and seeing tha^ touch was accepted, he stroked the animal's head, then rubbed a lin behind his ears, pleased about the whole thing. It wasn't that he haA touched wolf fur before, just not on a living animal.

"I am sorry I threatened your companion," he said. "But I ha never seen a wolf accompany people of his own free will before horses either, for that matter."

"It is understandable," Ayla said. "I will take you to meet the hon later. They tend to be shy of strangers, and they need some time get used to new people."

"Are all the eastern animals this friendly?" Laduni asked, pressi for an answer to a question that would be of interest to any hunter. Jondalar smiled. "No, animals are the same everywhere. These i special because of Ayla."

Laduni nodded, fighting his impulse to ask them further questiw knowing the whole Cave would want to hear their stories. "I ha welcomed you, and I invite you to come inside to share warmth ai food, and a place to rest, but I think I should go first and explain abc you to the rest of the Cave."

Laduni walked back toward the group gathered in front of a lar opening in the side of a rock wall. He explained about meeting Jondal a few years before, when he was starting on his Journey, and invid) him to visit on his way back. He mentioned that Jondalar was relat to Dalanar, and emphasized that they were people, not some kind threatening spirits, and that they would tell them about the horses ai the wolf. "They should have some interesting stories to tell," he co eluded, knowing what an enticement that would be to a group people who had been essentially cavebound since the beginning winter and were getting bored.

The language he spoke was not the Zeiandonii he had spoken to t travelers, but after listening for a while, Ayla was sure she hea similarities. She realized that although they had a different stress a) pronunciation, Losadunai was related to Zeiandonii in the same _ that S'Armunai, and Sharamudoi for that matter, were related to m mutoi. This language even had a link with S'Armunai. She had un stood some of the words and had picked up the gist of some o comments. She would be speaking with these people in a few ^Y . Ayla's gift for languages did not seem unusual to her. She

try to learn them, but her sharp ear for nuance and inflection ability to see the connections made it easy for her. Losing her people in the trauma of losing her people when she was and having to learn a different way of communicating, but utilized the same areas of the brain as spoken language, inherent language skills. Her need to learn to communicate she discovered that she could not, gave her an unconscious incentive to learn any unfamiliar language. It was the lack of natural ability and circumstances that made her so

Laduni says you are most welcome to stay at the visitors' hearth," he said to them after his explanation.

"I want to unpack the horses and get them settled first," Jondalar said. "The field right outside your cave seems to have some good energy. Will anyone mind if we leave them here?"

"I think everyone would be glad to see horses so close." He couldn't help glancing at Ayla, wondering what she had done to the animals. It seemed obvious that she commanded very powerful spirits.

"I don't want to ask anything else," Ayla said. "Wolf is accustomed to us. He would be quite unhappy anywhere else. If having him inside would make your Losaduna, or your Cave, uncomfortable, we'll set up our tent and sleep outside."

"I'll go and poke again to the people, and after some conversation he'll let them in (to the visitors). "They want you to come in, but some of them have a little fear for their children," he said.

"I'll stand their fear. I can promise that Wolf will not harm anyone. If that is not enough, we will stay outside."

"I'll have as much conversation, then Laduni said, "They say you can come in."

Laduni went with them when Ayla and Jondalar went to unpack the horses. He was just as thrilled to meet Whinney and Racer as he was to meet Wolf. He had done his share of horse hunting, but he had never touched one, except by chance when he managed to get his hands on one during the chase. Ayla recognized his enjoyment, and she knew that later she might offer him a ride on Whinney's back.

Laduni walked back toward the cave, dragging their things in the saddlebags. Laduni asked Jondalar about his brother. When he saw pain in the tall man's face, he knew there had been a tragedy before.

"Your brother died. He was killed by a cave lion."

"I'm glad to hear that. I liked him," Laduni said.

"Everyone liked him."

"He was so eager to follow the Great Mother River all the way to the end. Did he get there?"

"Yes, he did reach the end of Donau before he died, but he had a broken heart for it by then. He had fallen in love with a woman, and married her, but she died in childbirth," Jondalar said. "It changed him inside the heart out of him. He didn't want to live after that."

Laduni shook his head. "What a shame. He was so full of life. Filnona thought about him for a long time after you left. She kept hoping he would come back."

"How is Filonia?" Jondalar asked, remembering the pretty young daughter of Laduni's hearth.

The older man grinned. "She's mated now, and Duna smiles on her. She has two children. Shortly after you and Thonolan left, she discovered she had been blessed. When the word got around that she was pregnant, I think every eligible Losadunai man found a reason to visit our Cave."

"I can imagine. As I recall, she was a lovely young woman. She made a Journey, didn't she?"

"Yes, with an older cousin."

"And she has two children?" Jondalar said.

Laduni's eyes sparkled with pleasure. "A daughter from the first blessing, Thonolia—Filonia was sure she was a child of your brother's spirit—and not long ago, she had a son. She is living with her mate's Cave. They had more room, but it's not too far away and we see her, and the children, regularly." There was satisfaction and joy in Laduni's voice.

"I hope Thonolia is a child of Thonolan's spirit. I'd like to think that there is still a piece of his spirit in this world," Jondalar said.

Could it happen so fast? Jondalar wondered. He only spent one night with her. Was his spirit so potent? Or, if Ayla is right, could Thonolan have started a baby growing inside Filonia with the essence of his manhood that night they stayed with them? He remembered the woman he had been with.

"How is Lanalia?" he asked.

"She is fine. She is visiting kin at another Cave. They are going to arrange a mating for her. A man lost his mate and is left with two young children at his hearth. Lanalia never had any children, though she always wanted some. If she finds him compatible, they will and she will adopt the children. It could be a very happy arrangement and she is very excited about it."

"I'm pleased for her, and wish her much happiness," Jondalar

id his disappointment. He was hoping that she might have regnant after sharing Pleasures with him. Whatever it is, a it or the essence of his manhood, Thonolan has proved the jc his, but what about me? Is my essence or spirit potent ondalar wondered.

; entered the cave, Ay la looked around with interest. She had y dwellings of the Others: lightweight or portable shelters used in summer, and sturdier permanent structures able to the rigors of winter. Some were constructed out of mam- es and covered with sod and clay, some out of wood and ay under an overhang or on a floating platform, but she had t cave like this since she left the Clan. It had a large mouth southeast, and it was nice and roomy inside. Brun would ithis cave, she thought.

er eyes became accustomed to the dim light and she saw the he was surprised. She had expected to see several fireplaces I locations, the hearths of each family. There were family Within the cave, but they were inside or near the openings of made of hides fastened to poles. They were similar to tents, inical in shape, and open at the top--they needed no protec- the weather inside the cave. As far as she could tell, they as panels to screen the interior space from casual sight. Ayla ie Clan's prohibition against looking directly into the living lefined by boundary stones, of another man's hearth. It was rf tradition and self-control, but the purpose, she realized, me: privacy.

was leading them toward one of the screened-off dwelling 'our bad experience didn't involve a band of rowdies, did it?"

is there been trouble?" Jondalar asked. "When we met bespoke about some young man who had gathered together Uowers. They were making sport of the Cl . . . flatheads." id at Ayla, but he knew Laduni would never understand ihey were baiting the men, then taking their Pleasures with Q. Something about high spirits leading to trouble for every-

yla heard "flatheads," she listened closely, curious to know sre many Clan people nearby.

^ose are the ones. Charoli and his band," Laduni said. "It Started with high spirits, but it has gone much beyond that." d have thought by now that those young men would have hat kind of behavior," Jondalar said.

"It's Charoli. Individually, I suppose, they are not bad voun but he encourages them. Losaduna says he wants to show how^*1^! he is, to show he is a man, because he grew up without a ma ^**! hearth." ^Nll

"Many women have raised boys alone, who have turned out t k- fine men," Jondalar said. They had become so involved in the en sation that they had stopped walking and were standing in the mi<U^ of the cave. People were gathering around. ^^

"Yes, of course. But his mother's mate disappeared when he w-- just a baby, and she never took another. Instead she lavished all he attention on him, indulging him long beyond his early years, when h> should have been learning a craft and the duties of an adult. Now iA up to everyone to put a stop to him."

"What happened?" Jondalar asked.

"A girl of our Cave was near the river setting snares. She had just become a young woman a few moons before, and she hadn't yet had her Rites of First Pleasures. She was looking forward to the ceremony at the next gathering. Charoli and his band happened to see her alone, and they all took her ..."

"All of them? Took her? By force?" Jondalar said, appalled. "Agiri, not yet a woman. I can't believe it!"

"All of them," Laduni said, with a cold anger that was worse than any heat of the moment. "And we will not put up with it! I don't know if they got tired of flathead females, or what excuse they gave themselves, but that was too much. They caused her pain, and bleeding.

She says she wants nothing more to do with men, ever again. She has refused to go through with her womanhood rites."

"That's terrible, but it's hard to blame her. It is not the way for a young woman to learn of Doni's Gift," Jondalar said.

"Her mother is afraid that if she forgoes honoring the Mother with the ceremony, she will never have children."

"She could be right, but what can be done?" Jondalar asked.

"Her mother wants Charoli dead, and she wants us to declare a blood feud against his Cave," Laduni said. "Revenge is her right, but a blood feud can destroy everyone. Besides, it's not Charoli's Cave tua has caused the trouble. It's that band of his, and some of them aren even from the Cave of Charoli's birth. I've sent a message to Toinasi, the hunt leader there, and put an idea to him."

"An idea? What's your plan?" j

"I think it's up to all of the Losadunai to stop Charoli and his ban^ I'm hoping that Tomasi will join with me in trying to convince ev j one to bring those young men back under the supervision of the l/a I've even suggested that he allow Madenia's mother her revenge. ra ^

er the bloodshed of a feud over them. But Tomasi is related
li's mother."
would be a hard decision," Jondalar said. He noticed that
l been listening closely. "Does anyone know where Charoli's
7S? They can't be with any of your people. I can't believe any
.^osadunai would shelter such ruffians in their midst."
l of here is a barren area, with underground rivers and many
is rumored that they are hiding in one of the caves near the
hat region."
could be hard to find if there are many caves."
tthey can't stay there all the time. They have to get food, and
be trailed and followed. A good tracker could trail them easier
ould an animal, but we need all the Caves to cooperate. Then
I't take long to find them."
will you do with them after you find them?" This time it was
o asked the question.
k that once all those young ruffians are separated, it wouldn't
to break their ties to each other. Each Cave can handle one or
;eir own in their own way. I doubt if most of them really want
itside the Losadunai, and not be a part of a Cave. They will
tes, someday, and not many women would choose to live the
-do."
k you are right," Jondalar said.
ery sorry to hear about this young woman," Ayla said. "What
name? Madenia?" Her expression showed how troubled she
too," Jondalar added. "I wish we could stay and help, but if
cross the glacier soon, we may have to stay until next winter."
y already be too late to make it across this winter," Laduni
ate?" Jondalar said. "But it's cold, winter. Everything is fro-
. All the crevasses should be filled with snow."
It is winter now, but this late in the season, you never know.
id still make it, but if the foehn winds come early--and they
hen all the snow will melt fast. The glacier can be treacherous
le first spring melt, and under the circumstances, I don't think
0 go around through the flathead country to the north. They
°o friendly these days. Charoli's band has antagonized them.
t^als have some feeling of protection for their females and will
»otect their own."
are not animals," Ayla said, springing to their defense. "They
le. Just a different kind of people."
* held his tongue; he did not want to offend a visitor and a

guest. With her closeness to animals, she might think of all ani
people. If a wolf protects her, and she treats it like a human
wonder that she thinks of flatheads as people, too? he thought
they can be clever, but they are not human.

Several people had gathered around while they were talking
them, a small, thin, rather rumped middle-aged man with a shv^^i?
spoke up. "Don't you think you should let them get settled Ladui'y6'
"I'm beginning to wonder if you are going to keep them here talknr
all day," the woman standing beside him added. She was a nlun°
woman, just a shade shorter than the man, with a friendly face. ^^
"I'm sorry, you are right, of course. Let me introduce you," Laduri
said. He looked at Ay la first, then turned toward the man. "Losaduna
the One Who Serves the Mother for Hot Well Cave of the Losadunai. I
this is Ayla of the Lion Camp of the Mamutoi, Chosen of the Lkm. '
Protected by the Great Bear, and Daughter of the Mammoth Hearth.'" ^
"The Mammoth Hearth! Then you are One Who Serves the I
Mother, too," the man said with a surprised smile, before he even-I
greeted her. 1

"No, I am a Daughter of the Mammoth Hearth. Mamut was training
me, but I have never been initiated," Ayla explained.

"But born to it! You must be chosen of the Mother, too, along with
all the rest," the man said, obviously delighted.

"Losaduna, you have not greeted her yet," the plump woman
chided.

The man looked befuddled for a moment. "Oh, I guess not. Always
these formalities. In the name of Duna, the Great Earth Mother, may
I welcome you, Ayla of the Mamutoi, Chosen by the Lion Camp, and
Daughter of the Mammoth Hearth."

The woman beside him sighed and shook her head. "He got it mixed
up, but if it was some little-known ceremony, or legend about the
Mother, he wouldn't forget a bit of it," she said.

Ayla couldn't help smiling. She had never met One Who Served the
Mother who seemed more unlikely to function in that capacity. Th08*
she had met before were each self-possessed, easily recognized mul^
uals, with a powerful presence, not at all like this absentminded, diffident
man, unmindful of his appearance, with a pleasant, rather s y
demeanor. But the woman seemed to know where his strengths we ^
and Laduni showed no lack of respect. Losaduna was obviously il10 than he seemed. .(
"That's all right," Ayla said to the woman. "He didn't really ^
wrong." She was, after all, chosen by the Lion Camp, too; a dopi_
not born to them, Ayla thought. Then she addressed the man,

I both her hands and was still holding them. "I greet the One
jcs the Great Mother of All, and thank you for your welcome,
ff
fed at Ayla's use of another of the names of the Duna, as
wan to speak. "Solandia of the Losadunai, born to the Hill
ie Mate of the Losaduna, this is Ayla of the Lion Camp of ttoi Chosen of the Lion, Protected by
the Great Bear, and
of the Mammoth Hearth."
:you, Ayla of the Mamutoi, and invite you to our lodgings,"
said. The full titles and affiliations had been said enough
e didn't think they needed to be repeated again.
:you, Solandia," she said.
then looked at Jondalar. "Losaduna, One Who Serves the
>r the Hot Well Cave of the Losadunai, this is Jondalar,
lint Knapper of the Ninth Cave of the Zeiandonii, son of
, former leader of the Ninth Cave, brother of Joharran,
the Ninth Cave, born to the Hearth of Dalanar, leader and
ftthe Lanzadonii."
id never heard all of Jondalar's titles and ties before, and she
ised. Though she didn't fully understand the significance, it
mpressive. After Jondalar repeated the litany and was for-
oduced, they were finally led to the large living and ceremo-
allocated to Losaduna.
who had been sitting quietly close to Ayla's leg, gave a little
they reached the entrance to the dwelling space. He had seen
side, but his reaction frightened Solandia. She ran in and
:he baby up off the floor. "I have four children; I don't know
ilf should be in here," she said, fear raising the pitch of her
icheri can't even walk. How can I be sure he won't go after
)oy?"
vil} not harm the little one," Ayla said. "He grew up with
nd loves them. He is more gentle with them than with adults.
: going after the baby, he was just so happy to see him."
^d signaled Wolf to stay down, but he couldn't hide his eager
)n in seeing the children. Solandia eyed the carnivore warily.
n't tell if he was showing eagerness out of happiness or hun-
he was also curious about the visitors. One of the best parts
ne mate of Losaduna was that she had the advantage of being
) talk with the infrequent visitors, and she could spend more
them because they usually stayed at the ceremonial hearth.
t did say he could stay," she said.
alked Wolf inside, led him to an out-of-the-way corner, and

signaled him to stay. She stayed with him for a while would be particularly difficult for him, but just having chiT watch seemed to satisfy him for the moment. His behavior calmed Solandia, and after serving her guests a ing hot tea, she introduced her children, then went back to ore the meal she had started. The presence of the animal slippedl^1 back of her mind, but the children were fascinated. Ay la studied trying to be unobtrusive. The oldest of the four youngsters L was a boy of about ten years, she guessed. There was a girl of dc seven years, Dosalia, and another of four or so, Neladia. Thouehl baby was not yet walking, that did not limit his mobility. He was m the crawling stage and was fast and efficient on all fours. 'I The older children were wary of Wolf, and the elder of the riA picked up the baby and held him while they watched the animal txtf after a while when nothing happened, she put him down. While lon- dalar spoke with Losaduna, Ayla began to set out their things. TheM was spare bedding for guests and she hoped she would have time 4 clean their sleeping furs while they were here. | Suddenly there was a peal of babyish laughter. Ayla caught her breath and looked in the corner where she had left Wolf. There w« absolute silence in the rest of the dwelling space as everyone stared l wonder and awe at the baby, who had crawled to the corner and w-- sitting beside the large wolf, pulling on his fur. Ayla glanced at Solan and saw her staring transfixed as her precious baby boy proceeded to poke and prod and pull at the wolf, who simply wagged his tail aod looked pleased. Finally Ayla walked over, picked up the child, and brought him to his mother. "You're right," Solandia said with amazement, "that wolf loves children! If I hadn't seen it myself, I would never have believed it." It wasn't long before the rest of Solandia's children approached the wolf who liked to play. After a small problem with some teasing by the oldest boy, which Wolf responded to by taking the child's hand a his teeth and growling, but not biting down, Ayla explained that they had to treat him with respect. Wolfs reaction frightened the boy lvsk enough to make him pay attention. When they went outside, w children of the community watched Solandia's four and the wolf W_ fascination. Solandia's children were envied for their special privilege of living with the animal, up Before it got dark, Ayla went out to check on the horses. When stepped outside the cave, she heard Whinney nicker in greeting^ she felt that her friend had been a little worried. When she nick

g several heads to turn in her direction and stare in sur-
r responded with a somewhat louder neigh. She walked
ield heavy with snow nearer the cave, to give the horses
fion and make sure they were both all right. Whinney
t coming with her tail raised, looking alert and responsive.
tan neared, she dropped her head, then flipped it high and
Circle in the air with her nose. Racer, just as happy to see
i and reared up on his hind legs.
lew situation for them to be around so many people again,
liliar woman brought reassurance. Racer arched his neck
his ears forward when Jondalar appeared at the mouth of
id he met the man halfway across the field. After hugging
and talking to the mare. Ay la decided she would comb
ie next day, for the relaxation it would give them both.
lolandia's four, all the children had clustered together and
I toward them and the horses. The fascinating visitors al-
hildren to touch or pet one or the other of the horses, and
few ride on Whinney's back, which many of the adults
tfa a little envy. Ay la planned to let any adults ride who
ry it, but she felt that it was too soon for that. The horses
, and she did not want to put too much strain on them.
ivels made from large antlers, she and Jondalar began to
snow away from some of the pasturage nearer the cave, to
er for the horses to forage. Several others joined in, making
;, but shoveling snow reminded Jondalar of a concern he
ymg to resolve for some time. How were they going to find
)rage, and, more important, enough drinkable water for
a wolf, and two horses while crossing a frozen expanse of

he evening everyone gathered in the large ceremonial space
Jondalar and Ayla tell about their travels and adventures.
mai were particularly interested in the animals. Solandia
begun to rely on Wolf to keep her children distracted, and
e wolf playing with them even distracted the adults. It was
eve. Ayla didn't go into detail about the Clan, or the death
ad forced her to leave, though she did hint at differences
sen.
idunai thought the Clan were just a group of people who
the east, and though she tried to explain that the process of
oals accustomed to people was not anything supernatural,
s believed her. The idea that just anyone could tame a wild

horse or wolf was too hard to accept. Most people assumed time of living alone in a valley was a period of trial and abstinence^{10^} many who felt called to Serve the Mother endured, and to the way with animals verified the appropriateness of her Callings wasn't One Who Served yet, it was only a matter of time.) But the Losadunai were distressed to learn of their visitors' difficulties with Attaroa and the Sarmunai. ^^

"No wonder we've had so few visitors from the east during the several years. And you say one of the men who was held there by the Losadunai?" Laduni asked.

"Yes. I don't know what his name was here, but there he was called Ardemun," Jondalar said. "He had hurt himself and was crippled couldn't walk very well, and he certainly couldn't run away, so Attar let him move around the Camp freely. He's the one who set the men free."

"I remember a young man who went on a Journey," an older woman said. "I did know his name once, but I can't recall ... let me think he had a nickname . . . Ardemun . . . Ardi . . . no, Mardi. He used to call himself Mardi!"

"You mean Menardi?" a man said. "I remember him from Sunu Meetings. He was called Mardi, and he did go on a Journey. So that's what happened to him. He has a brother who would be glad to know he's alive."

"It's good to know that it's safe to travel that way again. You were lucky you missed them on your way east," Laduni said.

"Thonolan was in a hurry to get as far along the Great Mother River as we could. He didn't want to stop," Jondalar explained, "and he stayed on this side of the river. We were lucky." When the gathering broke up, Ayla was glad to go to bed in a warm, dry place with no wind, and she fell asleep quickly.

Ayla smiled at Solandia, who was sitting beside the fireplace near Micheri. She had awakened early and decided to make the morning for herself and Jondalar. She looked for the pile of wood or dried dung whatever fuel they used, that was usually kept nearby, but all she found was a pile of brown stones.

"I want to make some tea," she said. "What do you know? If you know where it is, I'll go get it."

"Don't have to. Plenty here," Solandia said.

Ayla looked around and, still not seeing the fireplace burning brightly, wondered if she had been understood.

Solandia saw her puzzled look and smiled. She reached over

one of the brown stones. "We use this, burning stone," she

At the stone from her hand and examined it closely. She saw
the wood grain, yet it was definitely stone, not wood. She had
never seen anything quite like it before; it was lignite, brown coal, a
type between peat and bituminous coal. Jondalar had awakened, Iked up behind her. She smiled at him,
then gave the stone

Solandia says this is what they burn in the fireplace," she
holding the smudge it left on her hand.

Jondalar's turn to examine it and look puzzled. "It does look
like wood, but it's stone. Not a hard stone like flint, though.
It breaks up easily."

Solandia said. "Burning stone breaks easy."

"Where does it come from?" Jondalar asked.

"In the mountains, are fields of it. Still use some wood,
but this burns hotter, longer than wood," the woman said.

Jondalar looked at each other, and a knowing expression
passed between them. "I'll get one," Jondalar
said. By the

time turned, Losaduna and the eldest boy, Larogi, were awake.

"These burning stones, we have a firestone, a stone that will start

burning. Was Ayla who discovered it?" Losaduna said, more a state-
of mind question.

"Did you know?" Jondalar said.

"Yes, because he discovered the stones that burn," Solandia said.

"It burned enough like wood that I thought I would try burning it.

"Losaduna said.

"He nodded. "Ayla, why don't you show them," he said, giving
her a piece of pyrite and flint along with the tinder.

Solandia arranged the tinder, then turned the metallic yellow stone
in her hand until it felt comfortable and the groove worn into

the pyrite from continued use faced the right way. Then she
held the piece of flint. Her motion was so practiced that it almost

required more than one strike to draw off a spark. It was caught by
her hand and, with just a few blows of air, a little flame burst forth.

A collective sigh from the watchers, who had been holding
their breaths.

"How amazing," Losaduna said.

"How amazing than your stones that burn," Ayla said. "We

have extra. I'd like to give you one, for the Cave. Perhaps we can
use it during the Ceremony."

"That would be a perfect time, and I will be happy to accept

your gift for the Cave," Losaduna said. "But we must give you thing in return."

"Laduni has already promised to give us whatever we need r over the glacier and continue our Journey. He owes me a future rl though he would have done as much anyway. Wolves broke inr cache and got our traveling food," Jondalar said.

"You plan to cross the glacier with the horses?" Losaduna asked "Yes, of course," Ayla said.

"What will you do for food for them? And two horses must dri much more than two people--what will you do for water when eve thing is frozen solid?" the One Who Serves asked.

Ayla looked at Jondalar. "I've been thinking about that," he said.' thought we could take some dry grass in the bowl boat."

"And perhaps burning stones? If you can find a place to start a i on top of the ice. You don't have to worry about getting them wet, a it would be much less to carry," Losaduna said.

Jondalar looked thoughtful, and then a big happy grin warmed face. "That would do it! We can put them in the bowl boat--it v slide across the ice even with a heavy load--and add a few other stoi to use as a base for a fireplace. I've been worrying about that for! long ... I can't thank you enough, Losaduna."

Ayla discovered by accident, when she happened to overhear s of the people talking about her, that they considered her unu speech mannerism to be a Mamutoi accent, although Solandia thoi it was a minor speech impediment. No matter how hard she tried, s could not overcome the difficulty she had with certain sounds, but s was glad that no one else seemed very concerned about it.

Over the next few days, Ayla became better acquainted with t group of Losadunai who lived near the hot well--the group was call a "Cave" whether they lived in one or not. She particularly enjoy the people whose dwelling space they shared, Solandia, Losaduna, s the children, and she realized how much she had missed the coinp of friendly people who behaved in a normal way. The woman the language ofjondalar's people reasonably well, with some L nai words mixed in, but she and Ayla had no trouble underst each other.

She was even more drawn to the mate of the One Who Served w she discovered they had a common interest. Although Losad was the one who was supposed to have learned about plants, he and medicines, it was actually Solandia who had picked up of the lore. The arrangement reminded Ayla of Iza and Creb,

adne the Cave's illnesses with practical herbal medicine, exorcism of spirits and other unknown harmful emanar mate. Ayla was also intrigued by Losaduna with his listories, legends, myths, and the spirit world--the intelcts she was forbidden to know when she lived with the she was coming to appreciate the wealth of knowledge he

as he discovered her genuine interest in the Great Earth the nonmaterial world of the spirits, and her quick intelliimazing ability to memorize, he was eager to pass on the ut even understanding them completely, Ayla was soon I verses of legends and histories and the precise content and ials and ceremonies. He was fluent in Zeiandonii, though with a strong Losadunai flavor in the expression and phras; the languages so close that most of the rhythm and meter s were retained although some of the rhyme was lost. Even iring to both of them were the minor differences, and many between his interpretation and the received wisdom of the josaduna wanted to know the variations and divergences, und herself being not only an acolyte, as she had been with t a teacher of sorts, explaining the eastern ways, at least lew.

was also enjoying the Cave of people, and becoming aware h he had missed having a variety of individuals around. He a lot of time with Laduni and several of the hunters, a was surprised at the interest he showed in her children. children, but it wasn't so much her offspring that interas watching her with her youngsters. Especially when the baby, it made him long for Ayla to have a baby, lis spirit, he hoped, but at least a son or daughter of his

s youngest, Micheri, aroused similar feelings in Ayla, but ed to make her special contraceptive tea each morning. The i of the glacier they had yet to cross were so intimidating uld not even consider trying to make a baby with Jondalar

e was grateful it hadn't happened while they were travel- T was filled with mixed emotions. He was getting worried "lure of the Great Earth Mother to bless Ayla with preg" g that in some way it was his fault. One afternoon he his misgivings to Losaduna. ther will decide when the time is right," the man said.

"Perhaps She understood how difficult your travels would be- ever, this may be the time for a ceremony to honor Her. Th rl

could ask Her to give Ayla a baby."

"Maybe you're right," Jondalar said. "It certainly couldn't hurt" k^
laughed disparagingly. "Somebody once told me that I was a fa IBS
of the Mother, and that She would never refuse anything I a<h.7^
Then his brow wrinkled. "But Thonolan still died." ^<^'

"Did you actually ask Her not to let him die?" Losaduni said

"Well, no. It happened too fast," Jondalar admitted. "That Jim
mauled me, too."

"Think about it sometime. Try to remember if you have ever A.
rectly asked Her for anything, and if She complied or refused vonr
request. Anyway, I will talk to Laduni and the council about
ceremony to honor the Mother," Losaduna said. "I want to do son».
thing to try to help Madenia, and an Honoring Ceremony might be
exactly the right thing. She won't get out of bed. She wouldn't even
get up to hear your stories, and Madenia used to love stories abool
traveling."

"What a terrible ordeal it must have been for her," Jondalar said^
shuddering at the thought. ,,

"Yes. I was hoping she would be recovering from it by now. I
wonder if a cleansing ritual at the Hot Well would help," he said, bat
it was obvious he didn't expect an answer from Jondalar. His mild
was already lost in thought as he began to consider the ritual. Su<fc
denly, he looked up. "Do you know where Ayla is? I think I'll ask her
to join us. She could be a help." t

"Losaduna has been explaining it, and I'm very interested in tfail,
ritual we are planning," Ayla said. "But I'm not so sure about Afc
Ceremony to Honor the Mother." ^

"It's an important one," Jondalar said, frowning. "Most people loot
forward to it." If she were not happy about it, he wondered whether
it would work. ;

"Perhaps if I knew more about it, I would, too. I have so much W
learn, and Losaduna is willing to teach me. I'd like to stay a while.

"We have to leave soon. If we wait much longer, it will be SPTvy
We'll stay for the Ceremony to Honor the Mother, and then we M
to go," Jondalar said. .1 ^

"I almost wish we could stay here until next winter. I'm soww^
traveling," Ayla said. She didn't voice her next thought, though i
been bothering her. These people are willing to accept me;
know if your people will.

d of traveling, too, but once we get across the glacier, it
C. We'll stop off to visit with Dalanar and let him know I'm
ben the rest of the way will be easy."
(ded in agreement, but she had the feeling they still had a
I go, and the saying would be easier than the going.

Am

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'ill you want me to do anything?" Ayla asked.

"I don't know yet," Losaduna said. "I feel, under the circumstan that a woman should be with us. Madenia knows I am the One Serves the Mother, but I am a man, and she has a fear of men r now. I believe it would be very helpful if she would talk about it sometimes it's easier to talk to a sympathetic stranger. People fear' someone they know will always remember the deep secrets that t reveal, and every time they see that person again, it may remind d of their pain and anger."

"Is there anything I should not say or do?"

"You have a natural sensitivity and will know that yourself. ' have a rare, natural ability for new language, too. I am genuil amazed at how quickly you have learned to speak Losadunai, grateful, too, for Madenia's sake," Losaduna said.

Ayla felt uncomfortable with his praise and glanced away. It di seem especially amazing to her. "It is quite similar to Zeiandonii," said.

He could see her discomfort and didn't make any further issue o They both looked up when Solandia came in.

"Everything's ready," she said. "I'll take the children and have place prepared for you when you are through. Oh, and that remi me, Ayla, do you mind if I take Wolf? The baby has grown so attac to him, and he keeps them all occupied." The woman chuckled. V would have thought that I'd ever be asking for a wolf to come watch my children?"

"I think it would be better if he went with you," Ayla said. l denia doesn't know Wolf."

"Shall we go and get her, then?" Losaduna said.

As they walked together toward the dwelling space of Aad6?^ her mother, Ayla noticed she was taller than the man, and she reca that her first impression of him had been that he was small a" She was surprised at how much her perception of him had c Although he was short in height, and reserved in demeanor,

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t stature, and his quiet dignity cloaked a deep sensitivity
r presence.

scratched at the stiff rawhide leather stretched between a
slender poles. The entry door was pushed outward and
idmitted by an older woman. She frowned when she saw
ive her a sour look, obviously unhappy that the stranger

ian started right in, full of bitterness and anger. "Has that
>und, yet? The one who stole my grandchildren from me,
ever had a chance to be born."

Charoli won't return your grandchildren, Verdegia, and
y concern right now. Madenia is. How is she?" Losaduna

t't get out of bed, and she hardly eats a thing. She won't
;nxe. She was such a pretty child, and she was growing into
woman. She would have had no trouble finding a mate,
li and his men ruined her."

you think she is ruined?" Ayla asked.

r woman looked at Ayla as if she were stupid. "Doesn't this
w anything?" Verdegia said to Losaduna, then turned to
enia didn't even have her First Rites. She is fouled, ruined.
r will never bless her now."

; too sure of that. The Mother is not so unforgiving," the
'She knows the ways of Her children and has provided
r ways to help them. Madenia can be cleansed and purified,
> that she can still have her Rites of First Pleasures."
do.any good. She refuses to have anything to do with men,
' First Rites," Verdegia said. "All my sons have gone to live
lates; everyone said we didn't have room in our cave for so
amilies. Madenia is my last child, my only daughter. Ever
in died, I have been looking forward to her bringing a mate
a man around to help provide for the children she would
randchildren. Now I won't have any grandchildren living
cause of that . . . that man," she sputtered, "and no one is
ang about it."

W that Laduni is waiting to hear from Tomasi," Losaduna

Verdegia spat out the name. "What good is he? It was his
awnedthat . . . that man."

6 to give them a chance. But we don't have to wait for them
"cip Madenia. After she is cleansed and renewed, she may
'Quid about her First Rites. At least we need to try."

"You can try, but she won't get up," the woman said.

"Perhaps we can encourage her," Losaduna said. "Where is she?"

"Over there, behind the drape," Verdegia said, pointing to a closed space near the stone wall.

Losaduna went to the place and pulled the drape back, admitting light into the darkened alcove. The girl on the bed put up her hand to ward off the brightness.

"Madenia, get up now," he said. His tone was firm but gentle. She turned her face away. "Help me with her, Ayla."

The two of them pulled her to a sitting position, then helped her to her feet. Madenia didn't resist, but she didn't cooperate. With one man on each side, they led her out of the enclosed space, and then out of the cave. The girl didn't seem to notice the freezing, snow-covered ground; even with bare feet. They guided her toward a large conical tent that Ayla hadn't noticed before. It was tucked away around the side of the cave, screened by rocks and brush, and steam came from the smoke hole at the top. A strong smell of sulfur permeated the air.

After they entered, Losaduna pulled a leather covering across the opening and fastened it. They were in a small entrance space that partitioned from the rest of the interior by heavy leather drapes, made of moosehide, Ayla thought. Although the temperature was freezing outside, it was warm inside. A double-walled tent had been erected over a spring, which provided the heating; but for all the steam, the women were reasonably dry. Though some moisture collected, beading up and running down the sloping sides to the edge of the ground cloth, most of the condensation occurred on the inside of the outer wall, where the cold outside met the steamy warmth inside. The insulating air space between was warmer, keeping the inner liner nearly dry.

Losaduna directed them to undress, and when Madenia did not, he told Ayla to do it for her. The young woman clutched at her breasts when Ayla attempted to remove them, staring with wide eyes.

One Who Served the Mother.

"Try to get her clothes off, but if she won't let you, bring them on," Losaduna said, then slipped behind the heavy drape, allowing a wisp of steam to escape. Once the man left, Ayla returned to ease the girl's clothing off, then quickly undressed herself.

Madenia to the room beyond the drape. Clouds of steam obscured the space inside with a warm, blurred outlines and concealed details, but Ayla could make out a room lined with stones beside a steaming natural hot spring. A hole connecting the two was plugged with a carved wooden stopper. On the side of the pool, a hollowed-out log, which brought in cold water.

tream, had been lifted and made to slope the wrong way, tie flow from entering the pool. When the billowing steam a moment, she saw that the inside of the tent was painted ds, many of them pregnant, most of them faded from water on, along with enigmatic triangles, circles, trapezoids, and ictric shapes. the pools, extending not quite all the way to the wall of the pads of felted mouflon wool had been placed on top of the th, wonderfully soft and warm under bare feet. They were th shapes and lines that led to the more shallow left side of Stone benches could be seen under the water, against the ; deeper right side. Near the back was a raised dais of earth three nickered stone lamps--saucer-shaped bowls filled d fat with a wick of something aromatic floating in the center rounded a small statue of an amply endowed woman. Ayla it as a figure representing the Great Earth Mother. illy laid hearth within a nearly perfect circle of round stones, ntical in shape and size, was in front of the earthen altar. appeared out of the steaming mist and picked up a small e one of the lamps. It had a blob of dark material at one end, leld to the flame. It caught quickly, and from the smell, Ayla d been dipped in pitch. Losaduna carried the small brand, xe flame with his hand, to the prepared fireplace, and by e tinder, started the fire. It gave off a strongly aromatic but aell that masked the odor of sulfur. me," he said. Then, placing his left foot on one of the wool sen the two parallel lines, he started walking around the pool ecisely laid-out path. Madenia shuffled along behind him, iwing nor caring where she put her feet, but Ayla, watching wed in his footsteps. They made a complete circuit of the ie hot spring, stepping over the cold water inlet and across a t trench. As he started around a second time, Losaduna iting in a singsong voice, invoking the Mother with names

>a. Great Earth Mother, Great and Beneficent Provider, her of All, Original One, First Mother, She Who blesses all lost Compassionate Mother, hear our plea." The man re- uivocation over and over as they circled the water for the ie.' laced his left foot between the parallel lines of the starting po the third circle, he had reached "Most Compassionate ^ our plea," but instead of repeating, he continued with,

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"O Duna, Great Earth Mother, one of Your own has been h ^
One of Your own has been violated. One of Your own rm
cleansed and purified to receive Your blessing. Great and Ben>&
Provider, one of Your own needs Your help. She must be healeri
must be mended. Renew her, Great Mother of All, and helo lu
know the joy of Your Gifts. Help her, Original One, to know Rites of First Pleasures. Help her,
First Mother, to receive Your Rl
ing. Most Compassionate Mother, help Madenia, daughter of Vn
gia, child of the Losadunai, the Earth's Children who live near the I
mountains."

Ayla was moved and fascinated by the words and the ceremony
she thought she noticed signs of interest in Madenia, which old
her. After completing the third circuit, Losaduna led them, again i
carefully placed steps as he continued his plea, to the earthen i
where the three lamps burned around the small Mother figure
dunai. Beside another lamp was a knifelike object, carved out of b<
It was fairly wide, double edged, with a somewhat rounded rip.
picked it up, then led them to the fireplace.
They sat down around the fire facing the pool, close together, <
Madenia in the middle. The man added brown burning stones to
flames from a nearby pile. Then, from an alcove at the side of
raised platform of earth, Losaduna took a bowl. It was made of st
and probably originally had a natural bowl shape, but it had t
deepened by pecking at it with a hard hammerstone. The bottom <
was blackened. He filled the bowl with water from a small water
that was also in the niche, added dried leaves from a small basket,
put the stone bowl directly on top of the hot coals.
Then, in a flat area of fine dry soil surrounded by wool pads,
made a mark with the bone knife. Suddenly, Ayla understood v
the bone implement was. The Mamutoi had used a similar tool to nn
marks in the dirt, to keep track of scores and gambling counts, to |
hunting strategies, and as a storytelling knife, drawing picture
illustrations. As Losaduna continued making marks, Ayla realized
was using the knife to help tell a story, but not one meant sunplj
entertain. He told it in the chanting singsong that he had used to ffl
his plea, drawing birds to emphasize and reinforce the points
wanted to stress. Ayla soon realized that the story was an allcgw
retelling of the attack on Madenia, using birds as the characters.
The young woman was definitely responding now, identiiyi"?
the young female bird he was telling about, and suddenly,^* .
sob, she began to cry. With the flat side of the drawing knife, w
Who Served the Mother wiped out the whole scene.

ae! It never happened," he said, then drew only a picture of bird. "She is whole again, just as she was in the beginning. elp of the Mother, that's what will happen to you, Madenia. (one, as'though it never happened."
r aroma with a familiar pungency that Ayla couldn't quite n to fill the steamy tent. Losaduna checked the steaming ie coal, then dipped out a cupful. "Drink this," he said. (was caught off guard, and before she could think, or object, d the liquid. He scooped out another cup for Ayla and took aself. Then he got up and led them to the pool.
a moved into the steaming water slowly, but without hesi- denia followed him and, without thinking, Ayla followed rhen she put her foot in the water, she yanked it out again. This water is nearly hot enough to cook with, she thought. cat concentration of will did she force herself to put her foot } water, but she stood there for some time before she could df take another step. Ayla had often bathed or swum in the s of rivers, streams, and pools, even water so cold she broke film of ice, and she had washed with water warmed by a ie had never stepped into hot water before.
Losaduna led them into the pool slowly, to allow them to >the heat, it took Ayla much longer to reach the stone seats. went in deeper, she felt a soothing warmth penetrate. When wn, and the water reached her chin, she began to relax. It ad, once you got used to it, she thought. The heat felt good,

icy were settled and accustomed to the water, Losaduna Ayla to hold her breath and dip her head under the water. came up, smiling, he told Madenia to do the same. Then he i himself and led them out of the pool.
xd to the draped entrance and picked up a wooden bowl ist inside. Mounded in the bowl was a thick, pale yellowish at resembled heavy foam. Losaduna put the bowl down in t was paved with close-fitting flat stones. He dipped in, took rf the foam, and smoothed it over his body, telling Ayla to e to Madenia and then herself, and not to forget their hair. l chanted without words while he rubbed himself with the y stuff, but Ayla had the feeling that his chanting was not tQd as an expression of enjoyment. She was feeling a little d, and she wondered if it might be from the decoction they

'@y were through, and had used all of the sudsy foam, Lo-

"I saduna picked up the wooden bowl, walked to the pool and filla.i with water, then walked back to the stone-paved area and 001 o^ ? over himself, rinsing the foam away. He poured two more bowlfi l < *afr<=>r nn himc^l^" t'h^n hmnrrl-it' mnr^ and ru"inv>rl it r^r^r A^-j ^ water on himself, then brought more and poured it over Madenia i then Ayla. The water ran off away from the pool and between A? cracks of the paving stones. Then the One Who Served the Mother us them back to the hot pool, chanting wordlessly again.

As they sat and soaked, almost floating in the mineralized watw Ayla felt completely relaxed. The hot pool reminded her of the M * mutoi sweat baths, but was, perhaps, even better. When Losadmr decided they had had enough, he reached down into the deep end rf the pool and removed a wooden stopper. As the water began to run out of the deep outlet trench, the man began to shout, which shocked her for a moment.

"Evil spirits, go! Cleansing waters of the Mother, take away all trace» of the touch of Charoli and all of his men. Impurities, run out with the water, leave this place. When this water is gone, Madenia will be cleansed, purified. The powers of the Mother have made her as she was before!" They walked out of the water.

Not stopping for their clothes, Losaduna led them out. They weft so warm from the hot water that the cold wind and the freezing ground on their bare skin felt refreshing. The few people who were out ignored them or turned their heads aside as they passed. With an unpleasant feeling, Ayla was suddenly reminded of another time when people looked directly at her but refused to see her. But this wasn't like bsaaf, cursed by the Clan. She could tell that the people really did see them.? They just affected not to, more as a courtesy than a curse. The walk cooled them down quickly, and by the time they reached the ceremo* nial shelter, they were happy to find soft dry blankets to wrap theint selves in and hot mint tea.

Ayla looked at her hands curved around the cup. They were wnn* kled, but absolutely clean! When she began to comb her hair wlth^ implement with several teeth made of bone, she noticed that her j squeaked when she pulled it through her fingers. ^| "What was that soft, slippery foam?" she asked. "It cleans like soapj root, but much more thoroughly."

"Solandia makes it," Losaduna said. "It has something to do wood ashes and fat, but you'll have to ask her." . , When she finished her own, Ayla began to comb Madenia s "How do you make the water so hot?" .

The man smiled. "That's a Gift of the Mother to the Losad There are several hot springs in this region. Some are used by .

but some are more sacred. We consider this one to be the
; one from which the others come, so it is the most sacred of
es this Cave especially honored. That's why it's so hard for
leave, but our cave is getting so crowded that a group of
iple are thinking of founding a new Cave. There is a place
m and across the river they would like, but that's flathead
or very close to it, so they haven't decided what they will

dded, feeling so warm and relaxed that she didn't want to
noticed that Madenia was more relaxed, too, not as stiff and
i. "What a wonderful Gift that heated water is!" Ay la said.
portant that we learn to appreciate all the Mother's Gifts,"
lid, "but especially her Gift of Pleasure."
i stiffened. "Her Gift is a lie! It is no pleasure, only pain!" It
st time she had actually spoken. "No matter how I begged
y wouldn't stop. They just laughed, and when one got
nother started! I wanted to die," she said, then heaved a sob.
t up, went over to the girl, and held her. "It was my first
they wouldn't stop! They wouldn't stop," Madenia cried
>ver. "No man will ever touch me again!"
ive a right to be angry. You have a right to cry. It was a
ing they did to you. I know how you feel," Ayla said.
ang woman pulled away. "How do you know how I feel?"
nil of bitterness and anger.
t was pain and humiliation for me, too," Ayla said.
ung woman looked surprised, but Losaduna nodded, as
suddenly understood something.
ia," Ayla said gently, "when I was near your age, a little
think, but not long after I started my moon time, I was
o. It was my first time. I didn't know it was meant for
For me it was only pain."
ly one man?" Madenia said.
>ne man, but he demanded it of me many times after that,
d it!" Ayla said, surprised herself at the anger she still felt.
tunes? Even after being forced the first time? Why didn't
top him?" Madenia said.
believed it was his right. They thought I was wrong for
ch anger and hatred, and they didn't understand why I
l pain. I began to wonder if there was something wrong with a while, I felt no pain, but no
Pleasure either. It was not
leasure. It was done to humiliate me, and I never stopped
FROM ... I stopped caring. Something wonderful happened,

and no matter what he did, I thought about something else happy, and I ignored him. When he couldn't make me feel anvr not even anger, I think he felt humiliated, and he finally stood. I didn't ever want a man to touch me again."

"No man will ever touch me again!" Madenia said.

"All men are not like Charoli and his band, Madenia. Some are like Jondalar. He was the one who taught me the joy and the Pleasii ^? the Mother's Gift, and I promise you, it is a wonderful Gift for yourself a chance to meet a man like Jondalar, and you will learn a joy, too." "j

Madenia shook her head. "No! No! It is terrible!"

"I know it was terrible. Even the best Gifts can be misused and a good turned to evil. But someday you will want to be a mother, you will never be a mother, Madenia, if you don't share the Mother's Gift with a man," Ayla said. g

Madenia was crying, her face wet with tears. "Don't say that. I don't want to hear that." |

"I know you don't, but it's true. Don't let Charoli spoil the good for you. Don't let him take away your chance to be a mother. Have your First Rites so you can learn that it doesn't have to be terrible. I finally learned, though there was no gathering and no ceremony to celebrate it. The Mother found a way to give me that joy. She sent me Jondalar's Gift. The Gift is more than Pleasures, Madenia, much more, if it is shared! with caring, and love. If the pain I had the first time was the price I had to pay, I would gladly pay it many times for the love I have known. You have suffered so much, maybe the Mother will give you someone special, too, if you give Her a chance. Just think about it, Madenia. Don't say no until you think about it."

Ayla woke up feeling more rested and refreshed than she could ever remember. She smiled lazily to herself and reached for Jondalar, but he was up and gone already. She felt a moment of disappointment, then remembered that he had awakened her to remind her that he was going hunting with Laduni and some of the hunters, and to ask her again if she wanted to join them. She had declined the same offer made the evening before because she had other plans for the day, so she had stayed in bed enjoying the rare luxury of snuggling back into warm furs. j^

This time she decided to get up. She stretched and ran her hands through her hair, delighting in the silky softness of it. Solandia promised to tell her how to make the foamy lather that made her hair so clean and her hair so soft. I

t was the same food they'd eaten ever since they arrived, a reconstituted pieces of a dried freshwater fish, netted earlier from the Great Mother River.

had told her that the Cave was low on supplies, which was were going hunting, though it wasn't meat or fish that most red. They weren't starving, or even lacking food--they had gat--but it was so close to the end of winter that the variety d. Everyone was tired of dried meat and dried fish. Even would be a change, though it wouldn't satisfy completely. ; hungry for the greens and shoots of vegetables, and new first products of spring. Ayla had made a foray into the area ; cave, but the Losadunai had been out all season and it was in. They still had a reasonable supply of fat left, which kept i protein starvation and supplied enough calories to keep by, though it was usually added to the soups that were made eals.

t that was to be part of the Mother Ceremony the next day . limited one. Ayla had already decided to contribute the last , and some other herbs to season and add flavor as well as utrients; the vitamins and minerals their bodies needed, the primary cause of the cravings. Solandia had shown her supply of fermented beverages, mostly birch beer, that she make the occasion festive.

man would also be using some of her stored fat to make a of soap. When Ayla voiced her concern that they would be ssary food, Solandia said Losaduna liked to use it for cere- id she claimed their soap supply was almost exhausted. older woman tended to her children and got everything la went out with Wolf to check on Whinney and Racer and e time with them.

i went to the large opening of the cave to tell Ayla she was she stood at the mouth for a while and watched the visitor. list returned from a gallop across the field and was laughing g with the animals. It occurred to the older woman, from yla behaved toward them, that the animals were like her

the youngsters of the Cave were watching, too, including a her own. They were shouting and calling to Wolf, who k at Ayla, obviously eager to join them but waiting for her »yla saw the woman standing at the mouth of the cave and her.

oping Wolf could keep the baby entertained," Solandia said.

"Verdegia and Madenia are coming over to help, but the process concentration."

"Oh; Mother!" the eldest girl, Dosalia, said. She was one who ha.) been trying to entice the wolf to come. "The baby always gets to I'll with him." y

"Well, if you want to watch the baby instead ..."

The girl frowned; then she smiled. "Can we take him outside? It' not blowing, and I'll dress him warm."

"I guess you can," Solandia said.

Ayla looked down at the wolf who was looking up at her exoec. tantly. "Watch the baby, Wolf," she said. He yipped, seemingly in response.

"I've got some good mammoth fat that I rendered out last fall" Solandia said as they walked to the area of her enclosed dwelling space.

"We had good luck hunting mammoth last year. That's why we still have so much fat, and a good thing, too. It would have been a hard winter without it. I've started the fat melting." They reached the entranceway just as the children were running out, carrying the young. est. "Don't lose Micheri's mitts," Solandia called out after them.

Verdegia and Madenia were already inside. "I brought some ashes," Verdegia said. Madenia just smiled, a bit hesitantly.

Solandia was pleased to see her willing to get up out of bed and be around people again. Whatever they did at the hot spring, it seemed to have helped. "I put some cooking stones in the fire for tea. Madenia, would you make some for us?" she asked. "Then I'll use the rest to reheat the water melting the fat."

"Where do you want these ashes?" Verdegia asked.

"You can mix them with mine. I started them leaching, but not long ago."

"Losaduna said you use fat and ashes," Ayla commented.

"And water," Solandia added.

"That seems to be a strange combination."

"Yes, it is."

"What made you decide to mix those things together? I mean, how did you come to make it? The first time?"

Solandia smiled. "It was really an accident. We had been hunting^ had a fire going outside in a fireplace with a deep pit, and some w mammoth meat roasting over it. It started to rain, hard. I grabbed the meat, spit and all, and ran for cover. As soon as it let up, we head back here to the cave, but I forgot a good wooden cooking bowl, aa went back for it the next day. The fireplace was full of water, w. something that looked like thick foamy scum floating on it. I we

ye bothered with it, except I dropped a ladle in it and had to land fish it out. I went to the stream to rinse it off. It felt Hid slippery, like good soaproot, but more, and my hands got I The ladle, too. All the grease washed off. I went back and foam in the bowl, and brought it back."

feat easy to make?" Ay la asked.

It really isn't. Not that it's hard to make, but it does take some |" Solandia said. "The first time I was lucky. Everything must hi just right. I've been working with it ever since, but it still lerimes."

f do you make it? You must have developed some ways that ^st of the time."

lot hard to explain. I melt clean rendered fat--any kind will at each one makes it a little different. I like mammoth fat best. he wood ashes, mix them with warm water and let them soak I while. Then strain it through a mesh, or a basket with holes ttom. The mixture that leaches out is strong. It can sting or ir skin, I found out. You need to rinse it off right away. f, you stir the strong mixture into the fat. If you are lucky, you jpft: foam, that will clean anything, even leather."

twou're not always lucky," Verdegia said.

ifcLots of things can go wrong. Sometimes you can stir and stir |r, and it won't mix. If that happens, heating it a little will fines help. Sometimes it separates and you get a layer that's too |and a layer that's too greasy. Sometimes it curdles into lumps be not quite mixed. Sometimes it comes out harder than others, |t's not bad. It tends to harden as it ages, anyway."

| sometimes it does work, like the first time," Ay la said.

|e thing I've learned is that both the fat and the liquid from the have to be about the same warmth as the skin of your wrist," lia said. "When you sprinkle a little on, it shouldn't feel either i" warm. The ash liquid is harder to tell because it's strong and ttn a little, then you have to wash it off right away with cool Ir it burns too much, you know you need to add more water. It t bum too bad, usually, but I wouldn't want to get it in my eyes. sting if you just get too close to the fumes."

id it can stink!" Madenia said.

at's true," Solandia said. "It can stink. That's why I usually go to the middle of the cave to mix it, even though I get everything to mix here."

ther! Mother! Come quick!" Solandia's second daughter Neladia lashing in, then ran out.

"What's wrong? Did something happen to the baby?" the said, rushing out after her. Everyone else followed behind and the mouth of the cave.

"Look!" Dosalia said. They all looked outside. "The baby is coming!"

There was Micheri, standing up beside the wolf, hanging on (n h- fur, with a big self-satisfied smile, taking unsteady steps as Wolfca ^ fully and slowly moved forward. Everyone smiled with relief and ri<-- j delight. ^BB |

"Is that wolf smiling?" Solandia asked. "It looks to me as thourii)r ^ is. He seems to be so pleased with himself that he's smiling."

"I think he is, too," Ayla said. "I have often thought he could smile "

"It's not only for ceremony, Ayla," Losaduna was saying. "We often l use the hot waters just to soak. If you want to take Jondalar in just to I relax, we have no objections. The Sacred Waters of the Mother are like I Her other Gifts to Her children. They are meant to be used and ' enjoyed, and appreciated. Just as this tea you made should be appreciated," he added, holding up the cup.

Nearly the whole Cave, those that had not gone hunting, were silting around a fireplace in the open central area of the cave. Most meals : were very unstructured, except for special occasions. The people sometimes ate separately, in family groups, and sometimes with others.

This time, those who had stayed at the cave had stopped for a midday meal and eaten together, largely because they were all interested in the visitors. The meal consisted of a hearty meat soup of lean, dried deer, made rich with the addition of some mammoth fat, which made it filling and satisfying enough. They were finishing off with tea that Ayla had made, and all had remarked on how good it was.

"When they come back, maybe we will use the pool. I think he'd enjoy a hot soak, and I'd like to share it with him," Ayla said.

"You'd better warn her, Losaduna," a woman said, with a knowing smile. She had been introduced as Laduni's mate.

"Warn me of what, Laronia?" Ayla said.

"Sometimes you have to choose between the Mother's Gifts.'

"What do you mean?"

"She means the Sacred Waters can be too relaxing," Solandia said.

"I still don't understand," Ayla said, frowning. She knew everyone was talking about the subject, and there was an element of hum involved. . i^

"If you take Jondalar for a hot soak, it will relax the strength ng^ out of his manhood," Verdegia said, more direct than the others,

he a couple of hours before it can stand up again. So don't
> much of him, after a soak. Not right away. Some men won't
e Mother's Sacred Waters for that reason. They are afraid
hood will drain out in the Sacred Waters and never come

at happen?" Ayla asked, looking at Losaduna.

jaS. I've ever seen, or heard about," the man said. "If anything,
site seems to be true. A man is more eager, after a while, but
iat's because he's relaxed and feels good."

Ifeel wonderful after the hot soak, and I slept very well, but I
,re was more than water to it," Ayla said. "Perhaps the tea?"
ian smiled. "That was an important ritual. There is always
i ceremony."

I'm ready to go back to the Sacred Waters, but I think I'll
Jondalar. Do you think the hunters will be back soon?"

are they will," Laronia said. "Laduni knows there are things

>re the Mother Festival tomorrow. I don't think they would

c today, except that he wanted to see how Jondalar's long- rating weapon works. What does he call
it?"

sar-thrower, and it works very well," Ayla said, "but like
Z, it takes practice. We've had lots of practice on this Journey."

roll use his spear-thrower?" Madenia asked.

re my own," Ayla said. "I've always liked to hunt."

^f didn't you go with them today?" the girl asked.

ause I wanted to learn how to make that cleansing material.

(ttve some clothes I want to clean and mend," Ayla said, getting

I heading toward the ceremonial tent. Then she stopped. "I have

Sag I'd like to show everyone, too," she said. "Has anyone ever

i<hread-puller?" She saw puzzled looks and shaking heads. "If

VS. here a moment, I'll get mine and show you."

I returned from the dwelling space with her sewing kit and some

g she wanted to repair. With everyone crowded around to see tther amazing thing brought by the

travelers, she took a small

Sr out of her kit--it had come from the lightweight, hollow leg

rd--and shook two ivory needles out of it. She handed one to

ia.

woman examined the highly polished miniature shaft closely.

brought to a sharp point at one end, somewhat like an awl. The

>d was a bit thicker and, surprisingly, had a very small hole

TO all the way through. She thought about it, and suddenly got

u^ of what it was for. "Did you say this was a thread-puller?"

a» handing it to Laronia.

"Yes. I'll show you how I use it," Ayla said, separating a thin of sinew from a fibrous thicker strand. She wet the end and snor it to a point, then waited for it to dry. The thread of tendon hard "lca slightly and held its shape. She threaded it through the hole at the ht end of the tiny ivory shaft, then put it aside for the moment. Nexfk? picked up a small flint tool with a sharp point and used it to poke hnl near the edges of a garment whose stitches along a side seam had oullni out, a few of them tearing through the leather in the process. The ncu. holes were back slightly from the previous ones. Once she had made the holes for a new seam, Ayla settled down tn demonstrate the new implement. She put the point of the ivory needip through the holes in the leather and, grasping the small shaft, pulled the thread through, ending with a flourish.

"Oooh!" The people seated nearby, especially the women, breathed out a collective sigh. "Look at that!" "She didn't have to pick the thread out, she pulled it right through." "Can I try that?"

Ayla passed the garment around and let them experiment, explaining and showing, and telling them how the idea had come to her, and how everyone at Lion Camp had helped her to develop and make it.

"This is a very well-made awl," Solandia commented, examining it closely.

"Wymez, of the Lion Camp, made it. He also made the borer that was used to make the hole that the thread goes through," Ayla said.

"That would be a very difficult tool to make," Losaduna said.

"Jondalar says Wymez is the only flint knapper he's ever met who is as good as Dalanar, and, possibly, a little better."

"That's high praise from him," Losaduna said. "Everyone acknowledges Dalanar as the master stoneworker. His skill is known even on this side of the glacier, among the Losadunai."

"But Wymez is also a master."

They all turned in surprise at the sound of the voice that had just spoken, and saw Jondalar, Laduni, and several others coming into the cave, bringing with them an ibex they had killed.

"You had luck!" Verdegia said. "And if no one minds, I'd like to have the skin. I've been wanting some ibex wool to make bedding lo*" Madenia's Matrimonial." She wanted to get her bid in before anyone else.

"Mother!" Madenia said, embarrassed. "How can you talk about a Matrimonial?"

"Madenia must have First Rites before any Matrimonial can be co sidered," Losaduna said. . .1

"As far as I'm concerned, she can have the hide," Laronia s

ver she wants to use it for." She knew there was a touch of
. in Verdegia's request. They didn't often hunt the elusive wild
md its wool was rare and therefore valuable, particularly in late
> after a whole season of growing thick and dense, but before the
yw of spring gave it a tattered look.
[on't care either. Verdegia can have it," Solandia said. "Fresh
teat will be a welcome change no matter who gets the hide, and
illy nice for the Mother Festival."
gral others acquiesced, and no one objected. Verdegia smiled and
aot to look smug. By laying claim first, she had secured the
ie hide, just as she had hoped.
;sh ibex will be good with the dried onion I brought, and I have
irries, too."
in everyone looked toward the mouth of the cave. Ayla saw a
woman she hadn't met before, carrying a baby and leading a
iiri by the hand, followed by a young man.
onia!" several people chorused.
Mlia and Laduni rushed toward her, joined by all the rest of the
The young woman was obviously not a stranger here. After
hugs of greeting, Laronia took the baby, and Laduni picked up
de girl, who had run toward him, and put her up on his shoul-
She looked down at everyone with a pleased grin.
ialar was standing beside Ayla, smiling at the happy scene.
girl could be my sister!" he said.
onia, look who's here," Laduni said, leading the young woman
l them.
idalar? Is it you?" she said, looking at him with shocked surprise.
n't think you'd ever come back. Where's Thonolan? There is
ne I want him to meet!"
i sorry, Filonia. He walks the next world now," Jondalar said.
l. I'm sorry to hear that. I wanted him to meet Thonolia. I'm
le's the child of his spirit."
m sure, too. She looks just like my sister, and they were both
o the same hearth. I wish my mother could see her, but I think
please her to know that there is something left of him in this
i a child of his spirit," Jondalar said.
' young woman noticed Ayla. "But you didn't return alone," she
S he didn't," Laduni said, "and wait until you see some of his
Taveling companions. You won't believe it."
u you came at just the right time. We're having a Mother Festi-
norrow," Laronia said.

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, he people of the Cave of the Sacred Hot Springs were anrid.
paring the Festival to Honor the Mother with great enthusiasm. In the
deep of winter, when life was usually most dull and boring, Ayla and
Jondalar had arrived and provoked enough excitement to keep the Cave
stimulated for a long time, and with the inevitable storytelling that
would result, the interest would last for years. From the moment they
rode up, sitting on the backs of horses and followed by the Wolf Who
Liked Children, everyone had been buzzing with speculation. They
had enthralling stories to tell about their travels, arresting new ideas to
share, and fascinating devices like spear-throwers and thread-pullers to
demonstrate.

Now everyone was talking about something magical that the woman
would show them during the ceremony, something having to do with
fire, like their burning stones. Losaduna had mentioned it while they
were eating their evening meal. The visitors had also promised to give
a demonstration of the spear-thrower in the field outside the cave so
everyone could see its possibilities, and Ayla was going to show what
could be done with a sling. But even the promised demonstrations did
not pique their curiosity as much as the mystery involving fire.
Ayla discovered that constantly being the center of attention could
be as exhausting, in a different kind of way, as constantly traveling.
All evening people had plied her with eager questions and sought her
opinion and ideas on subjects about which she had no knowledge. By
the time the sun was setting, she was tired and didn't feel like talking
any more. Soon after dark she left the gathering around the fire in the
central part of the cave to go to bed. Wolf went with her and Jondalar
followed shortly afterward, leaving the Cave free to gossip and speculate
in their absence. .

In the sleeping area allocated to them within the ceremonial aw
dwelling space of Losaduna, they puttered around with preparao
for the next day, then crawled into their furs. Jondalar held her an
1 A hie Sl(?"
considered making the initial overtures that Ayla considered ni-> o
nal" to couple, but she seemed nervous and distracted, and he w

618

himself. One never knew what to expect at a Mother Festival, isaduna had hinted that it might be a good idea to hold back and »honor the Mother until after the special ritual they had planned. had spoken with the One Who Served the Mother about his OS regarding his ability to have children born to his hearth, fcr the Great Mother would find his spirit acceptable for a new bey had decided on a private ritual before the festival to appeal y to the Mother for Her help.

I lay awake long after she heard the heavier breathing of sleep he man beside her, tired but unable to fall asleep herself. She [position frequently, trying not to disturb Jondalar with her I turnings. Though she dozed off, sound sleep was slow in corn- id her thoughts drifted in strange patterns as she wavered be- wakeful imaginings and fitful dreams . . .

|meadow was freshly green with the lush new growth of spring, hed by the varied hues of colorful flowers. In the distance, the ivory- jcarp face of a rock wall, pocked with caves and textured with black '.sweeping up and around into roomy cliff overhangs, almost gleamed in k blazing down from high in the clear azure sky. Reflected sunlight from the river that flowed along its base, hugging close one moment, firing away, generally tracing the contours of the wall without following ^

wit halfway down the field that spread out across level ground away from (er, a man stood watching her, a man of the Clan. Then he turned and ^rfoward the cliff, leaning on a staff and dragging afoot, yet walking at '^face. Though he didn't say or signal a word, she knew he wanted her to aUm. She hurried toward him, and when they came abreast, he glanced itoitb his one good eye. It was a deep liquid brown, full of compassion and l/Sbe knew his bearskin cloak covered the stump of an arm that had been yted at the elbow when he was a boy. His grandmother, a medicine 9 of renowned reputation, had cut off the useless, paralyzed limb when it ^gangrenous after he was mangled by a cave bear. Creb had lost his eye ^itbe same encounter.

wey neared the rock wall, she noticed a strange formation near the top of wnging cliff. A longish, somewhat flat, column-shaped boulder, darker fie creamy matrix of limestone that held it, leaned over the edge as if m place just as it started to tumble down. The stone not only gave the ''that it would fall any moment, making her uneasy, but she knew "ig about it was important; something she should remember, something lihne, or was supposed to do--or wasn't supposed to do. Closed her eyes trying to recall. She saw darkness, thick, velvet, palpable

darkness, as utterly lacking in light as only a cave deep in a mountain could h. A tiny flickering of light appeared in the distance and she groped her way aln» a narrow passage toward it. As she neared, she saw Creb with other rnoa-u ^ and she suddenly felt great fear. She didn't want that memory and auicU' opened her eyes. J

And found herself on the bank of the small river that wound its way along the base of the wall. She looked across the water and saw Creb trudging up the path toward the falling stone formation. She had gotten behind him and now didn't know how to cross the river to catch up. She called after him, "Creb I'm sorry. I didn't mean to follow you into the cave."

He turned around and beckoned to her again, signaling great urgency. "Hurry," he signed from across the river, which had become wider and deeper and full of ice. "Don't wait any longer! Hurry!" The ice was expanding, taking him farther away. "Wait for me! Creb, don't leave me here!" she cried.

"Ayla! Ayla, wake up! You're dreaming again," Jondalar said, shaking her gently.

She opened her eyes and felt a great sense of loss and a strangely intense fear. She noticed the hide-covered walls of the dwelling space and a reddish glow from the fireplace as she looked at the shadowed silhouette of the man beside her. She reached out and clung to him.

"We have to hurry, Jondalar! We have to leave here right away," she said.

"We will," he said. "As soon as we can. But tomorrow is the Mother Festival, and then we have to decide what we need to take to cross the ice."

"Ice!" she said. "We have to cross a river of ice!"

"Yes, I know," he said, holding her and trying to calm her. "But we have to plan how we're going to do it with the horses and Wolf. We'll need food, and a way to get water for all of us. The ice is frozen solid up there."

"Creb said to hurry. We have to leave!"

"As soon as we can, Ayla. I promise, as soon as we can," Jondalar said, feeling a nagging edge of worry. They did need to leave and go across the glacier as soon as possible, but they couldn't go before Mother Festival, could they?

Though it did little to warm the freezing air, the late afternoon sun streamed through the branches of trees, which broke up the confusing rays but did not block the blinding western light. To the east, glaciated mountain peaks, reflecting the brilliant orb that was des

>fiery clouds, were suffused with a soft rosy glow that seemed late from within the ice. The light would soon be failing, but r and Ayla were still in the field outside the cave, although he tching along with everyone else.

took a deep breath, then held it, not wanting to obstruct her ith the steamy fog of her breath while she took careful aim. She the two stones in her hand, then placed one in the pocket of the whirled it around and flung it, letting go of one end. Then, at the end she still held, she quickly ran it through her hand to ; the loose end, dropped the second stone in the cup, whirled it it. She could cast two stones faster than anyone had ever ;d.

h!" "Look at that!" People who had been standing at the large of the cave during the demonstrations of spear-throwing and nging let out the breaths they, too, had been holding and made [its of surprise and appreciation. "She broke up both snowballs l the way across the field." "I thought she was good with the u-ower, but she's even better with that sling."

said it would take practice to learn to throw spears with accu- ut how much practice did it take to throw rocks like that?"

said. "I think it would be easier to learn to use the spear- ."

demonstration was over, and as night was closing in, Laduni in front of the people and announced that the feast was almost 'It will be served at the central hearth, but first, Losaduna will ; the Festival to the Mother at the Ceremonial Hearth, and Ayla ' to give another demonstration. What she is going to show you kable."

>e people excitedly began making their way back into the cave from the large open mouth, Ayla noticed Madenia talking with iends and was glad to see that she was smiling. Many had ited on how pleased they were to see her joining in the group's s, though she was still shy and withdrawn. Ayla could not help ^ what a difference it made when people cared. Unlike her ice, where everyone felt Broud had the right to force her any wanted, and thought she was odd for resisting and hating him, a had the support of her people. They took her side. They were t those who had forced her, understood what an ordeal it had id wanted to correct the wrong that had been done to her.

everyone was settled inside the enclosed space of the Ceremo- wh, the One Who Served the Mother came out of the shadows

M behind a lighted fireplace surrounded by a circle of almost

perfectly matched round stones. He picked up a small stick w'H, pitch-dipped end, held it to the fire until it caught, then turned arn '?' and walked to the stone wall of the cave.

With his body blocking the view, Ayla could not see what he doing, but when a glowing light spread out around him, she knew k» had lit a fire of some kind, probably a lamp. He made some rnotin and began chanting a familiar litany, the same repetition of the varini names of the Mother that he had chanted during Madenia's cleansim. ritual. He was invoking the spirit of the Mother.

When he backed away and turned to face the gathering, Ayla saw that the glow came from a stone lamp he had lit in a niche in the cave wall. The fire cast dancing shadows, larger than life, of a small dunai and highlighted the exquisitely carved figure of a woman with substantial motherly attributes—large breasts and rounded stomach, not pregnant but well endowed with reserves of stored fat.

"Great Earth Mother, Original Ancestor and Creator of All Life Your children have come to show appreciation, to thank You for all Your Gifts, great and small, to honor You," Losaduna intoned, and the people of the Cave joined in. "For the rocks and stones, the bones of the land that give of their spirit to nourish the soil, we have come to honor You. For the soil that gives of its spirit to nourish the plants that grow, we have come to honor You. For the plants that grow and give of their spirit to nourish the animals, we have come to honor You. For the animals that give of their spirit to nourish the meat-eaters, we have come to honor You. And for all of them that give of their spirit to feed and clothe and protect Your children, we have come to honor You."

Everyone knew all the words. Even Jondalar, Ayla noticed, had joined in, though he said the words in Zeiandonii. She soon began repeating the "honor" part, and though she didn't know the rest, she knew they were important, and once she heard them, she knew she would never forget them.

"For Your great glowing son who lights the day, and Your fair shining mate who guards the night, we have come to honor You. For Your life-giving birth waters that fill the rivers and seas and rain down from the skies, we have come to honor You. For Your Gift of Life ao" Your blessing of women to bring forth life as You do, we have cooic" honor You. For the men, who were made to help women to P^' | for the new life, and whose spirit You take to help women create it, come to honor You. And for Your Gift of Pleasures that both me" women take in each other, and that opens a woman so she C9no birth, we have come to honor You. Great Earth Mother, Your chil come together on this night to honor You."

ence that filled the cave after the communal invocation ended
»und. Then a baby cried, and it seemed entirely appropriate.
ina stepped back and seemed to fade into the shadows. Then
got up, picked up a basket that was near the Ceremonial
nd poured ashes and dirt on the flames in the round fireplace,
; ceremonial fire and plunging them into near darkness. There
;w surprised oohhs and aahhs from the crowd, as people sat
amectantly. The only light came from the small oil lamp that
jng in the niche, which made the dancing shadows of the
gure seem to grow, until they seemed to fill the entire space.
he fire had never been put out like that before, the effect was
n Losaduna.

f0 visitors and the people who lived at the Ceremonial Hearth
iced earlier, and each knew what to do. When everyone had
own, Ayla walked into the darkened area toward a different
It had been decided that the capabilities of the firestone
; shown to the best advantage, and with the most dramatic
Ayla started a new fire at a cold hearth as quickly as possible
ceremonial fire was out. A quick-starting tinder of dried moss
placed in the second fireplace, kindling beside it, and some
;ks of wood for burning. Brown coal would then be added to
fire going.

dtley were practicing, it had been discovered that wind helped
ip the spark, particularly the draft that whipped in when the
of the Ceremonial space was opened, and Jondalar was stand-
s it. Ayla knelt down and, holding the iron pyrite in one hand
se of flint in the other, struck them together, creating a spark
d be clearly seen in the darkened area. She struck the two
tgain, holding them at a slightly different angle, which caused
she drew off to fall on the tinder.

'as the signal to Jondalar, who opened the entry door. As the
: blew in, Ayla, bending close to the bare spark smoldering in
moss, blew gently. Suddenly the moss flared up and envel-
rinder, bringing on a chorus of surprised and excited remarks.
was then added. In the darkened shelter, the flame cast a
?ow illuminating everyone's face and seemed larger than it
vss.

opie began talking, rapidly and excitedly, full of wonder, and
* the tension Ayla had built with the suspense. Within mo-
o the Cave it seemed almost instantaneous—a fire had been
Ayla heard a few of the comments. "How did she do it?"
lid anyone start a fire so fast?" A second fire was kindled from

a

the first in the Ceremonial Hearth; then the One Who Served k
Mother stood between the two areas of glowing names and spoke
"Most people who have not seen it do not believe that stones unii
burn, unless we have one to show, but burning stones are the Cnw.
Earth Mother's gift to the Losadunai. Our visitors have also been giv
a gift, a firestone; a stone that will make a fire-starting spark when ir
struck with a piece of flint. Ayla and Jondalar are willing to give uv
piece of firestone, not only to use, but also so that we will recognize a
if we find any. In return, they want enough food and other supplies to
get them over the glacier," Losaduna said.

"I've already promised that," Laduni said. "Jondalar has a Future
Claim on me, and that's what he asked for--not that it's much of a
claim. We'd give them food and supplies anyway." There was a refrain
of agreement from the gathering.

j;ifj Jondalar knew that the Losadunai would have given them food, just
| as Ayla and he would have given the Cave a firestone, but he didn't
want them to feel sorry later about giving up food supplies that could
I i leave them stretched thin if spring and the new growing season came
j^ late. He wanted them to feel they were getting the best of a good
^ bargain, and he wanted something else. He stood up then.

|il "We have given Losaduna a firestone for everyone's use," he said,
:ff "but there is more to my claim than it seems. We need more than food
Jj (and supplies for ourselves. We don't travel alone. Our companions are
j li two horses and a wolf, and we need help to get them across the ice.
jjj i: We will need food for ourselves, and for them, but even more impor-
t tant, we will need water. If it were just Ayla and me, we could wear a
| waterbag full of snow or ice under our tunics next to our skin to melt
enough water for us, and maybe for Wolf, but horses drink a lot of
| tl water. We can't melt enough for them that way. I will tell you the
' I truth; we need to find a way to carry or melt enough water to get us
j] all across the glacier."

There was a chorus of voices full of suggestions and ideas, but Laduni
quieted them. "Let's think about it and meet tomorrow with
suggestions. Tonight is Festival." ,

Jondalar and Ayla had already brought delicious excitement and
mystery to enliven the usually quiet winter months of the Cave, ana
to give them stories to tell at Summer Meetings. Now there was w
gift of the firestone and, as a bonus, the challenge of solving a UIU(^ll
problem, a fascinating practical and intellectual puzzle that would gi
them all a chance to stretch their mental muscles. The travelers we
have willing and eager assistance.

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enia had come to the Ceremonial Hearth to see the firestone ararion, and Jondalar could hardly help noticing that she had ratching him closely. He had smiled at her several times, to she had responded by blushing and looking away. He walked her as the gathering was breaking up and leaving the Ceremo-

arth.
to Madenia," he said. "What did you think of the firestone?"
pit the attraction he often had for shy young women before their ites, who didn't know what to expect and were a little afraid, |ly those he had been called upon to introduce to the Mother's ' Pleasures. He had always enjoyed showing them Her Gift their First Rites, and he had a special feeling for it, which was ; was called upon so often. Madenia's fear was well grounded, amorphous worries of most young women, and he would have sred it an even greater challenge to bring her around to knowing rather than the pain.

alar looked at her with his amazingly vivid blue eyes, and he they were staying long enough to participate in the Losadunai r rituals. He genuinely wanted to help her to overcome her nd was truly attracted to her, which brought out the full power sharm, his sheer male magnetism. The handsome and sensitive liled at her then and left her nearly breathless.

enia had never experienced a feeling like it before. Her whole bit warm, almost on fire, and she had an overwhelming urge to iim, and to have him touch her, but the young woman had no liat to do with such feelings. She tried to smile; then, embar- she opened her eyes wide and gasped at her audacity. She away and almost ran to her dwelling space. Her mother saw ving and followed after her. Jondalar had seen Madenia's reac- fore. It was not unusual for shy young women to respond to it way, and it only made her more endearing.

at did you do to that poor child, Jondalar?"
ooked at the woman who had spoken, and turned his smile on

need I ask? I remember a time when that look very nearly tvered me. But your brother had his charm, too."
l left you blessed," Jondalar said. "You are looking well, Filonia.

i Thonolan did leave a piece of his spirit with me, and I am You seem happy, too. Where did you meet this Ayla?"
a long story, but she saved my life. It was too late for Thono-

"I heard a cave lion got him. I'm sorry."

Jondalar nodded, and closed his eyes with the inevitable frown ^e pain.

"Mother?" a girl said. It was Thonolia, holding hands with Solandia's eldest daughter. "Can I eat at 'Salia's hearth and play with i-k> wolf? He likes children, you know."

Filonia looked at Jondalar with an apprehensive frown.

"Wolf won't hurt her. He does like children. Ask Solandia. She uses him to entertain her baby," Jondalar said. "Wolf was raised with children and Ayla has trained him, and you're right. She is a remarkable woman, particularly with animals."

"I guess it's all right, Thonolia. I don't think this man would let you do anything that might harm you. He is the brother of the man you're named after."

There was a loud commotion. They looked to see what the trouble was, as the girls ran off together.

"When is someone going to do something about that . . . that Charoli? How long does a mother have to wait?" Verdegia complained to Laduni. "Maybe we need to call a Council of Mothers, if the men can't handle it. I'm sure they would understand the feelings in a mother's heart, and pass judgment fast enough."

Losaduna had joined Laduni, to lend him support. Calling a Council of Mothers was usually a last resort. It could have serious repercussions and was used only when no other way could be found to solve a problem. "Let's not be hasty, Verdegia. The messenger we sent to talk to Tomasi should be back any time. Certainly you can wait a little longer. And Madenia is much better. Don't you think so?"

"I'm not so sure. She ran away to our hearth and won't tell me what's wrong. She says it's nothing, and tells me not to worry about it, but how can I help it?" Verdegia said.

"I could tell her what's wrong," Filonia said under her breath, "but I'm not sure Verdegia would understand. She's right, though. Some thing does have to be done about Charoli. All the Caves are talking about him."

"What can be done?" Ayla asked, joining the two.

"I don't know," Filonia said, smiling at the woman. Ayla had come to see her baby and had obviously enjoyed holding him. "But I ttunK Laduni's plan is a good one. He thinks all the Caves should vfor together to find and bring the young men back. He would like to the members of that band separated from each other, and away ir° Charoli's influence."

"It does seem like a good idea," Jondalar said.

. problem is Charoli's Cave, and whether Tomasi, who is related
oli's mother, would be willing to go along with it," Filonia said.
|aiow better when the messenger gets back, but I can under-
ow Verdegia feels. If anything like that ever happened to Tho-
." She shook her head, unable to go on.
ink most people understand how Madenia and her mother feel,"
r said. "People are mostly decent, but a bad one can make a lot
>le for everyone else."
was remembering Attaroa and thinking the same thing.
leone's coming! Someone's coming!" Larogi and several of his
came running into the cave shouting the news, making Ay la
• what they had been doing outside in the cold and dark. A few
ts later they were followed in by a middle-aged man.
idoli! You couldn't have come at a better time," Laduni said, his
bvious. "Here, let me take your pack and get you something hot
i. You made it back in time for a Mother Festival."
it's the messenger Laduni sent to Tomasi," Filonia said, sur-
:o see him.
l, what did he say?" Verdegia demanded.
degia," Losaduna said. "Let the man rest and catch his breath.
: got here!"
all right," Rendoli said, shrugging off his pack and accepting a
lot tea from Solandia. "Charoli's band raided the Cave that lives
e barrens where they've been hiding. They stole food and weap-
l almost killed someone who tried to stop them. The woman is
dly hurt, and she may not recover. All the Caves are angry.
hey heard about Madenia, it was the final blow. In spite of his
with Charoli's mother, Tomasi is ready to join with the other
to go after them and put a stop to them. Tomasi called for a
? with as many Caves as possible—that's what took me so long
back. I waited for the meeting. Most of the nearby Caves sent
people. I had to make some decisions for us."
sure they were good ones," Laduni said. "I'm glad you were
^hat did they think of my suggestion?"
y have already taken it, Laduni. Each Cave is going to send out
to track them—some have already left. Once Charoli's band is
most of the hunters of each Cave will go after them and bring
ack. No one wants to put up with them any more. Tomasi
o have them before the Summer Meeting." The man turned to
Verdegia. "And they would like you to be there to make a
and a claim," he said.
legia was almost appeased, but still not happy about Madenia's

reluctance to participate in the ceremony that would officially make her a woman, and, with luck, able to bear children--her potential grandchildren.

"I'll be glad to charge and claim," Verdegia said, "and if she were to agree to First Rites, you can be certain I won't forget it."

"I am hopeful that by next summer, she will change her mind and see progress since the cleansing ritual. She is out mingling with neonians more. I think Ayla helped," Losaduna said.

After Rendoli went to his dwelling space, Losaduna caught Tondalar's eye and nodded to him. The tall man excused himself and followed Losaduna into the Ceremonial Hearth. Ayla would have liked to follow them, but she sensed from their manner that they wanted to be alone.

"I wonder what they are going to do," Ayla said.

"I would guess it's some kind of personal ritual," Filonia said, which made Ayla even more curious.

"Have you brought something you made?" Losaduna asked.

"I made a blade. I didn't have time to haft it, but it is as perfect as I could make it," Jondalar said, taking a small leather-wrapped package from inside his tunic. He opened it to reveal a small stone point with an unretouched edge that was sharp enough to shave with. One end was worked to a point. The other end had a tang that could be fitted into a knife handle.

Losaduna looked it over carefully. "This is excellent workmanship," he commented. "I feel certain it will be acceptable."

Jondalar breathed a sigh of relief, though he hadn't realized he was so concerned.

"And something others?"

"That was harder. We have been traveling with only the bare essentials, for the most part, and she knows where she puts everything she has. She has a few things packed away, gifts from people, mostly, and I didn't want to disturb them. Then I remembered that you said it didn't matter how small it was, so long as it was very personal," Jondalar said, picking up a tiny object that was also in the leather pouch, then went on to explain. "She wears an amulet, a small decorated pouch with objects from her childhood inside. It's very important to her, and the only time she takes it off is when she's swimming or bathing, and not always then. She left it behind when she went to the sacred hot springs, and I cut away one of the beads that decorate it." Losaduna smiled. "Good! That's perfect! And very clever. I've saved that amulet, and it is very personal to her. Wrap them back up together and give me the package."

did as he was told, but Losaduna noticed a questioning look
; handed it to him.
not tell you where I will put it, but She will know. Now,
; some things I must explain to you, and some questions I must
saduna said.
lar nodded. "I will try to answer."
u want a child to be born to your hearth, to the woman, Ayla,
right?"
^"
in do understand that a child born to your hearth may not be of
pirit?"
s."
W do you feel about that? Does it matter to you whose spirit is
>
ould like it to be of my spirit, but . . . my spirit may not be
Maybe it isn't strong enough or the Mother can't use it, or maybe
oesn't want to. No one is ever sure whose spirit it is, anyway,
a child was born to Ayla, and born to my hearth, that would be
h. I think I would almost feel like a mother myself," Jondalar
nd his conviction was obvious.
aduna nodded. "Good. Tonight we honor the Mother, so this is
propitious time. You know that those women who honor Her
>re the ones who are most often blessed. Ayla is a beautiful
a, and she will have no trouble finding a man or men to share
res with."
en the One Who Served the Mother saw the tall man's frown, he
d that Jondalar was one of those who found it difficult to see the
a he chose choose someone else, even though it was only for
any. "You must encourage her, Jondalar. It honors the Mother
most important if you are sincere in wanting Ayla to have a
yom to your hearth. I have seen it work before. Many women
e pregnant almost immediately. The Mother may be so pleased
ou, She might even use your spirit, especially if you also honor
ell."
lalar closed his eyes and nodded, but Losaduna saw his jaw
and grind. It was not going to be easy for the man.
e has never taken part in a Festival to Honor the Mother. What
. doesn't want anyone else?" Jondalar asked. "Should I refuse
u must encourage her to share with others, but the choice is, of
, hers. You must never refuse any woman, if you can help it, at
estival, but especially not the one you have chosen to be your
I wouldn't worry about it, Jondalar. Most women get into the

spirit of it and have no trouble enjoying the Mother Festival " I duna said. "But it is strange that Ay la wasn't raised to know th Mother. I didn't know there were any people who don't acknowledged Her." ge

"The people who raised her were . . . unusual in many ways " Tondalar said.

"I'm sure that's true," Losaduna said. "Now, let's go ask the Mother."

Ask the Mother. Ask the Mother. The phrase went through Tondalar's thoughts as they walked toward the back of the ceremonial space He suddenly remembered being told that he was favored by the Mother, so favored that no woman could refuse him, not even Doni Herself; so favored that if he ever asked the Mother for anything, She would grant his request. He had also been warned to be wary of such favor; he might get what he asked for. At that moment, he fervently hoped it was true.

They stopped at the niche where the lamp still burned. "Pick the dunai up and hold her in your hands," the One Who Served the Mother instructed.

Jondalar reached into the niche and gently picked up the Mother figure. It was one of the most beautifully made carvings he had ever seen. Her body was perfectly shaped. The figure in his hand looked as if the sculptor had carved it from a living model of a well-proportioned woman who was quite substantial in size. He had seen naked women often enough, in the normal course of living in close quarters, to know how one looked. The arms, resting on top of the ample breasts of the figure, were only suggested, but even so, fingers were defined, as well as the bracelets on her forearms. Her two legs came together into a kind of peg that went into the ground.

The head was most surprising. Most of the donii he had seen had hardly more than a knob for the head, sometimes with a face denned by the hairline but no features. This one had an elaborate hairstyle of rows of tight knobby curls that went all the way around the head and face. Except for the difference in shape, there was no difference between the back and the front of the head.

When he looked closely, he was surprised to see that it had been carved out of limestone. Ivory or bone or wood were much easier work, and the figure was so perfectly detailed and beautifully in^ that it was hard to believe someone had made her out of stone. Many flint tools must have been dulled to make this, he thought. .

The One Who Served the Mother had been chanting, Jondalar real^ ized. He had been so involved in studying the donii that he ba

J it at first, but he had learned enough Losadunai that when he
d carefully, he understood some of the names of the Mother, knew that Losaduna had started the
ritual. He waited, hoping
preciation of the material aesthetic qualities of the carving would
stract from the greater spiritual essence of the ceremony. Al-
l the donii was a symbol for the Mother and, it was thought,
l a resting place for one of Her many spirit forms, he knew the
| figure was not the Great Earth Mother.
W, think about it clearly, and in your own words, from your
ask the Mother for what you want," Losaduna said. "Holding
inai will help you to concentrate all your thoughts and feelings
aw request. Don't hesitate to say anything that comes to you.
nber, what you are asking for is pleasing to the Mother of All."
falar closed his eyes to think about it, to help himself concen-
"O Doni, Great Earth Mother," he began. "There have been
in my life when I thought . . . some things I did may have
ised You. I did not mean to displease You, but . . . things hap-
, There was a time when I thought I would never find a woman
l really love, and I wondered if it was because You were angry
. . . those things."
tething very bad must have happened in this man's life. He is
good man, and he seems so confident; it is hard to believe that
Id suffer from so much shame and worry, Losaduna thought.
ien, after traveling beyond the end of Your river, and losing . . .
other, whom I loved more than anyone. You brought Ayla into
e, and finally I knew what it meant to fall in love. I am grateful
^la. If there was no one else in my life, no family, no friends, I
be content as long as Ayla was there. But, if it would please
Sreat Mother, I would like . . . I would wish for . . . one thing
I would ask for . . . a child. A child, born to Ayla, born to my
» and, if it is possible, born of my spirit, or born of my own
e as Ayla believes. If it is not possible, if my spirit is not . . .
ti, then let Ayla have the baby she wants, and let it be born to
arth, so it can be mine in my heart."
ialar started to put the donii back, but he wasn't quite through.
>pped and held the figure in both hands. "One more thing. If
should ever become pregnant with a child of my spirit, I would
know that it is the child of my spirit."
'esting request, Losaduna thought. Most men might like to
but it doesn't really matter that much. I wonder why it's so
^t to him? And what did he mean by a child of his essence . . .
a believes? I'd like to ask her, but this is a private ritual. I can't

tell her what he has said here. Maybe we can discuss it from a philosophical point of view sometime.

Ayla watched the two men leave the Ceremonial Hearth. She felt sure they both had accomplished what they meant to do but the shorter man had a questioning expression and an unsatisfied set to his shoulders, and the tall one had stiffened and looked rather unhappy but determined. The strange undercurrent made her even more curious about what went on inside.

"I hope she will change her mind," Losaduna was saying as they drew near. "I think the best way for her to overcome her terrible experience is to go ahead with her First Rites. We will have to be very careful who we choose for her, though. I wish you were Stavim? Jondalar. She seems to have developed an interest in you. I think it's good to see her warming toward a man."

"I would like to help, but we just can't stay. We have to leave as soon as we can, tomorrow or the next day, if possible."

"You're right, of course. The season could turn any time. Be wary if you notice either one of you getting irritable," Losaduna said.

"The Malaise," Jondalar said.

"What is Malaise?" Ayla asked.

"It comes with the foehn, the snow-melter, the spring wind," Losaduna said. "The wind comes out of the southwest, warm and dry, and hard enough to uproot trees. It melts snow so fast that high drifts can be gone in a day, and if it hits when you are on the glacier, you may not make it across. The ice could melt beneath your feet and drop you into a crevasse, or it could send a river across your path, or open a crack in front of you. It comes so fast that the evil spirits that like the cold can't get out of its way. It cleans them out, sweeps them out of hidden places, pushes them on ahead. That's why the evil spirits ride the headwinds of the snow-melter and usually arrive just before it. They bring the Malaise. If you know what to expect and can control them, they can be a warning, but they're subtle, and it's not easy to turn the evil spirits to your advantage."

"How do you know when the evil spirits have come?" Ayla asked.

"As I mentioned, watch out if you start feeling irritable. They can make you sick, and if you are already sick, they can make it worse, more often they just make you want to argue or fight. Some people go into a rage, but everyone knows that it's caused by the Malaise, and people are not held to blame--unless they do serious damage or die, and even then much is excused. Afterward, people are glad for snow-melter because it brings new growth, new life, but no one goes forward to the Malaise."

rae and eat!" It was Solandia who spoke; they hadn't seen her
r "People are already going back for second portions. If you
lurry, there won't be any left."

^ walked toward the central hearth where a large fire was burn-
lipped up by drafts coming in the mouth of the cave. Though
|y dressed for the intense cold outside, most people wore warm
Pin the unscreened areas of the cave that were open to the cold
inds. The roast haunch of ibex was rare in the middle, though
& it hot was cooking it a bit more; fresh meat was welcome.
sjyas also a rich meaty soup, made with dried meat, mammoth
few bits of dried roots, and mountain bilberries; nearly the last
If stored vegetables and fruits. Everyone could hardly wait for
fib greens of spring.

|he hard cold winter was still upon them, and as much as he
('for spring, Jondalar wished even more for the winter to last a
tager, just until they got across the glacier that still lay beyond

A

After the meal Losaduna announced that something was being offered at the Ceremonial Hearth. Ayla and Jondalar didn't understand the word, but they soon learned it was a drink that was served warm. The taste was pleasant and vaguely familiar. Ayla thought it might be some kind of mildly fermented fruit juice flavored with herbs. She was surprised to learn from Solandia that birch sap was a primary ingredient, though fruit juice was only part of the recipe.

It turned out that the taste was deceiving. The drink was stronger than Ayla had thought, and when she asked, Solandia confided that the herbs contributed a large measure of its potency. Then Ayla realized that the vaguely familiar taste came from wormwood artemisia, a very powerful herb that could be dangerous if too much was taken, or if it was used too frequently. It had been difficult to detect because of the pleasant-tasting but highly perfumed woodruff and other aromatic flavors. It made her wonder what else was in it, which led her to taste and analyze the drink more seriously.

She asked Solandia about the powerful herb, mentioning its possible dangers. The woman explained that the plant, which she called absinthe, was seldom used except in that drink, reserved only for Mother Festivals. Because of its sacred nature, Solandia was usually reluctant to reveal the specific ingredients in the drink, but Ayla's questions were so precise and knowledgeable that she couldn't help but answer. Ayla discovered that the beverage was not at all what it seemed. What she had first thought to be a simple, pleasant-tasting, mild drink was in fact a potent, complex mixture made especially to encourage the relaxation, spontaneity, and warm interaction that were desirable during the Festival to Honor the Mother.

As the people of the Cave began coming into the Ceremonial Hearth, Ayla first noticed a heightened awareness as a result of all her tasting, but it soon gave way to a pleasant, languorous, warm feeling that made her forget about analyzing. She noticed Jondalar and several others, talking to Madenia, and, abruptly leaving Solandia, she headed toward them. Every man there saw her coming and liked what he saw.

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as she approached the group, and Jondalar felt the powerful smile always evoked. It was not going to be easy to follow [una's instructions and encourage her to experience the Mother ral fully» even with the relaxing drink that the One Who Served [other had urged on him. He took a deep breath, then downed ilance of the liquid in his cup.

Mlia, and especially her mate, Daraldi, whom she had met earlier, among those who greeted Ay la warmly.

»ur cup is empty," he said, dipping out a ladleful from a wooden and filling Ay la's cup.

ya can pour a little more for me, too," Jondalar said in an overly v voice. Losaduna noticed the man's forced friendliness, but he : think the others would pay much attention. There was one who lowever. Ayla glanced at him, saw his jaw working, and knew hing was bothering him. She caught Losaduna's quick observa-too. Something was going on between them, she realized, but the was having its effect on her, and she put it in the back of her to think about later. Suddenly drumbeats filled the enclosed

tie dancing is starting!" Filonia said. "Come on, Jondalar. Let me you the steps." She took his hand and led him toward the middle 'area.

adenia, you go along, too," Losaduna urged.

is," Jondalar said. "You come too. Do you know the steps?" He i at her, and Ayla thought he seemed to relax.

dalar had been talking and paying attention to Madenia through-le day, and though she had felt shy and tongue-tied, she had been ly conscious of the tall man's presence. Every time he looked at ith his compelling eyes, she had felt her heart race. When he took md to lead her to the dancing area, she felt a tingling of chills and it the same time, and she could not have resisted even if she had

Mlia frowned for a moment, but then smiled at the girl. "We can teach him the steps," she said, leading them to the dancing area.

ay I show ..." Daraldi started to say to Ayla, just as Laduni

"I would be happy ..." They smiled at each other, trying to ach other a chance to speak.

la's smile took them both in. "Perhaps both of you could show e steps," she said.

l'aldi bobbed his head in agreement, and Laduni gave her a happy

is they each took one of her hands and led her toward the

where the dancers were gathering. While they were arranging

themselves in a circle, the visitors were shown some basic steps- rk ^ they all joined hands as a flute sounded. Ayla was startled h'v ? sound. She hadn't heard a flute since Manen's playing at the Sum Meeting of the Mamutoi. Had it been less than a year since they l ^ the Meeting? It seemed so long ago, and she would never see th again.

She blinked away tears at the thought, but as the dancing began sh had little time to dwell on poignant reminiscences. The rhythm'wa easy to follow in the beginning, but became faster and more complex as the evening progressed. Ayla was unquestionably the center of attention. Every man found her irresistible. They crowded around her vying for her attention, making innuendos and even blatant invitations thinly veiled as jokes. Jondalar flirted gently with Madenia and more obviously with Filonia, but he was aware of every man circling around Ayla.

The dancing became more complicated, with intricate steps and changing of places, and Ayla danced with them all. She laughed at their jokes and bawdy remarks as people broke away to refill their cups, or couples retreated to secluded corners. Laduni jumped into the middle and did an energetic solo performance. Toward the end, his mate joined him.

Ayla was feeling thirsty, and several people went with her to get another drink. She found Daraldi walking beside her.

"I would like some, too," Madenia said.

"I'm sorry," Losaduna said, putting his hand over her cup. "You have not had your Rites of First Pleasures, yet, my dear. You will have to settle for tea." Madenia frowned and started to object; then she went to get a cup of the innocuous beverage she had been drinking.

He did not intend to allow her any of the privileges of womanhood until she went through the ceremony that bestowed womanhood, and he was doing everything he could to encourage her to agree to the important ritual. At the same time, he was letting everyone know that in spite of her terrible experience, she had been purified, restored to her former state, and was to be subject to the same restrictions and treated with the same special care and attention given to any other girl on the verge of becoming a woman. He felt it was the only way she would ever fully recover from the unconscionable attack and multiple rape she had suffered.

Ayla and Daraldi were the last to drink, and as everyone else wandered away in one direction or the other, they were left alone.

turned to her.

"Ayla, you are such a beautiful woman," he said.

ien she was growing up she had always been the tall, ugly one, c many times as Jondalar had told her she was beautiful, she s thought it was because he loved her. She didn't think of herself utiful, and his comment surprised her.

y " she said, laughing. "I'm not beautiful!"

r remark took him aback. It wasn't what he had expected to hear. it. . . but, you are," he said.

aldi had been trying to interest her all evening, and though her rsation was friendly and warm, and she obviously enjoyed the w, moving with a natural sensuality that encouraged his efforts, dn't been able to strike the spark that would lead to further ces. He knew he was not an unattractive man, and this was a M' Festival, but he couldn't seem to make his desires known.

y he decided on a more direct approach.

^la," he said, putting his arm around her waist. He felt her stiffen moment, but he persisted, leaning over to nuzzle her ear. "You (eautiful woman," he whispered.

e turned to face him, but instead of leaning toward him in a Ig response, she pulled back. He put his other arm around her ; to bring her closer. She leaned back and put her hands on his ders and looked him full in the face.

'la hadn't quite understood the real meaning of the Mother Festi- |She had thought it was just a warm and friendly gathering, (though they had talked about "honoring" the Mother and jknew what that usually meant. As she had noticed couples, and crimes three or more, retiring to the darker areas around the i partitions, she was getting more of an idea, but it wasn't until looked at Daraldi and saw his desire that she finally knew what he bcted.

Ee pulled her toward him and leaned forward to kiss her. Ayla felt innth for him, and she responded with some feeling. His hand id her breast, and then he tried to reach under her tunic. He was ictive, the feeling wasn't unpleasant, she was relaxed and in the <i to be willing, but she wanted time to think. It was hard to resist, ound was not clear; then she heard rhythmic sounds.

-<t's go back to the dancers," she said.

why? There aren't many left dancing anyway."

want to do a Mamutoi dance," she said. He acquiesced. She had onded; he could wait a little longer.

hen they reached the central area, Ayla noticed that Jondalar was there. He was dancing with Madenia, holding both her hands and ^ing her a step he had learned from the Sharamudoi. Filonia,

Losaduna, Solandia, and a few others were clapping their nearby; the flute player and the one beating the rhythms had fit^ partners. ^1

Ayla and Daraldi joined in clapping their hands together. She caiiok* Jondalar's eye and changed from slapping both hands together to slapping her thighs, in the Mamutoi style. Madenia stopped to look th ^ backed away as Jondalar joined Ayla in a complicated thigh-slaoni rhythm. Soon they were moving together, then backing away ar5 around each other, looking at each other over their shoulders. When they came face-to-face, they reached for each other's hands. From thr moment she caught his eye, Ayla saw no one but Jondalar. The een. eralized warmth and friendliness she had felt for Daraldi was lost in her overpowering response to the desire, the need, and the love in the blue, blue eyes looking at her at that moment.

The intensity between them was apparent to everyone. Losaduna watched them closely for a while, then nodded imperceptibly. It was clear that the Mother was making Her wishes known. Daraldi shrugged his shoulders, then smiled at Filonia. Madenia's eyes opened wide. She knew she was seeing something rare and beautiful. When Ayla and Jondalar stopped dancing, they were in each other's arms oblivious to everyone around them. Solandia started clapping and soon all of those who were left joined in the applause. The sound finally reached them. They backed away from each other, feeling a bit self-conscious.

"I think there is still a drink or two left," Solandia said. "Shall we finish it off?"

"That's a good idea!" Jondalar said, his arm around Ayla. He wasn't about to let her go now.

Daraldi picked up the large wooden bowl to pour out the last of the special drink, then looked at Filonia. I'm really very lucky, he thought. She is a beautiful woman, and she has brought two children to my hearth. Just because it was Mother Festival didn't mean he had to honor Her with someone other than his mate.

Jondalar finished his drink in one swallow, put his cup down, then suddenly picked Ayla up and carried her to their bed. She re strangely giddy, full of joy, almost as though she had escaped some unpleasant fate, but her joy was nothing to Jondalar's. He had watch her all night, seen the way all the men wanted her, tried to give b every opportunity as Losaduna had advised, and was sure she we end up choosing someone else. .

He could have gone with someone else many times himself, bu wouldn't leave until he was sure she was gone. Instead, he staye

a, knowing she was not available to any man yet. He enjoyed attention to her, seeing her relax around him, appreciating the Ogs of the woman she was going to be. Although he wouldn't anied Filonia if she had gone with someone else, and she had (pportunities, he was glad she'd stayed near him. He would ited being left alone if Ayla had chosen someone else. They ibout many things. Thonolan and their travels together, her l especially Thonolia, and Daraldi and how much she cared but Jondalar couldn't bring himself to speak very much about

l, in the end, when she came to him, he could hardly believe it. l her down carefully on their sleeping platform, looked at her / the love in her eyes, and felt an aching soreness in his throat leld back tears. He had done everything Losaduna had said, er every chance, even tried to encourage her, but she had come He wondered if that was a sign from the Mother telling him ^yla became pregnant, it would be a child of his spirit? hanged the position of the movable privacy screens, and when ted to get up and remove her clothes, he gently pushed her wn. "Tonight is mine," he said. "I want to do it all." ay back down and nodded with a little smile, feeling a thrill of ition. He went outside the screens, brought back a lighted stick, all lamp, and set it in a niche. It didn't shed much light, just to barely see. He started to remove her clothes, then stopped. you think we could find our way to the hot springs with this?" i, indicating the lamp. y say it drains a man, makes his manhood soften," Ayla said. eve me, that won't happen tonight," he said, with a grin. n I think it might be fun," she said. ' put on their parkas, picked up the lamp, and quietly headed Losaduna wondered if they were going to relieve themselves, aught again, and he smiled. The hot springs had never slowed wn for very long. It just gave him a little extra measure of sometimes. But Losaduna was not the only one watching them

Iren were never excluded from Mother Festivals. They learned s and activities they were expected to know as adults by watch- Its. When they played games, they often mimicked their elders, ore they were actually capable of any serious sexual acts, boys i on girls in imitation of their fathers, and girls pretended to th to dolls in imitation of their mothers. Soon after they were , they passed into adulthood with rituals that not only brought

them adult status but adult responsibilities, although they didn't necessarily choose a mate for several years. Babies were born in their time, when the Mother chose to bless a woman, but surprisingly seldom born to very young women. All babies were welcomed, and cared for by the extended family and close friend's made up a Cave.

Madenia had observed Mother Festivals as long as she could remember, but this time it took on new meaning. She had watched several of the couples--it did not seem to hurt anyone, not the way she had been hurt, even when some of the women chose several men--but she was particularly interested in Ayla and Jondalar. As soon as they left the cave, she put on her parka and followed them.

They found their way to the double-walled tent and went into the second enclosure, welcoming the steamy warmth. They stood just inside, looked around, then put the lamp down on the raised earth altar. They took off their outer parkas and sat down on the felted wool pads that covered the ground.

Jondalar began by taking off Ayla's boots; then he removed his own. He kissed her long and lovingly, while he undid the fastenings on her tunic and undergarment, and pulled them up over her head, then bent down to kiss each nipple. He untied her fur-lined leggings and breech-cloutlike underwear and pulled them off, stopping to caress her mound covered with soft hair--they hadn't bothered to put on their outer leggings with the fur facing out. Then he undressed himself and took her in his arms, delighting in the feel of her skin next to his, and wanted her that instant.

He led her into the steaming pool, they immersed once, then went to the washing area. Jondalar scooped out a handful of soft soap from the bowl and began rubbing it over Ayla's back and her twin mounds, avoiding her enticingly warm, moist places for the moment. It was smooth and slippery, and he loved the way it felt on her skin. Ayla closed her eyes, felt his hands caress her in the way he knew best to please her, and gave herself over to his wonderfully smooth touch, feeling every tingling sensation.

He took another handful and smoothed it on her legs, lifting each foot and feeling her slight spasm at the tickling of the bottom of her feet. Then he turned her around and faced her front, but took time to kiss her, gently and slowly exploring her lips and her tongue, to her response. His own response had swelled, and his manhood seemed to move of its own volition, striving to reach her.

With another small handful of soap, he started under her armpits, caressing with the delightful slippery foam down to her navel.

,, feeling her nipples harden under his palms. Shivers, like light-
aced through her body when he touched her amazingly sensitive
s and found the place deep inside her that wanted him. When
>ved down to her stomach and her thighs, she moaned with
>ation. With hands still soapy, he caressed her folds and found
ace of Pleasures, rubbing just lightly. Then he picked up the
r bowl, filled it with water from the hot pool, and began pouring
her. He poured several more bowlfuls over her before he led
ck into the hot water.

;y sat on the stone seats and held each other close, pressing warm
rainst warm skin, and dunking under until only their heads were
the water. Then, taking her hand, Jondalar led Ayla out of the
once more. He laid her down on the soft mats, and just looked
for a while, glowing and wet, and waiting for him.

her surprise, he spread her thighs first and ran his tongue the full
; of her folds. He tasted no salt, and her special taste was gone; it
new experience, to taste her without tasting her, but as he
i in the novelty of it, he heard her begin to moan and cry out. It
emed so sudden, but she realized she was so ready. She felt her
ment build, and reach a peak, then spasms of delight washed
er again and again, and suddenly he tasted her.

reached for him, and as he mounted and penetrated, she guided
inside. She pressed up as he plunged down, and they sighed with
atisfaction. As he pulled out, she ached to have him back. He
r full warm caress enclose his member completely, and he nearly
fd his pulsing burst. When he pulled back again, he knew he was
as a high-pitched moan escaped his lips. She pulled up to him
e was ready as the bursting momentum escaped and filled her
veil and mixed with her own warm wetness and he cried out the
is of her joy.

rested on her for a time, because he knew she loved his weight
" then. When he finally rolled over, he looked down at her and
er languid smile and had to kiss it. Their tongues explored,
gently, without prodding, and she began to feel a touch of
ment again. He noticed her heightened response and responded
d. Without the great urgency this time, he kissed her mouth,
sach of her eyes, and found her ears, and the tender, ticklish
of her throat. He moved lower and found her nipple. In no
i he suckled and nibbled on one while he fondled and squeezed
tier, then traded off, until she was pressing herself to him, want- are and more as the sensation
grew.

l his own as well. His spent manhood was swelling again, and

w

when she felt it, she abruptly sat up and bent down to take it into k ^
mouth and help it along. He lay back to enjoy the sensations she
coursing through him, as she took in as much as she could suc
hard, then releasing and letting it slide back. She found the hard rid^
on the underside and rubbed her tongue across it rapidly; then pulli
back the foreskin a little, she circled the smooth head with her ton"
faster and faster. He moaned with the fiery waves coursing throuoh
him, then pulled her around until she straddled him, and he reached
up to taste the warm petal of her flower.

At almost the same moment, they felt themselves and each other
mount and mount, and when he tasted her again, he pulled himself
back, turned her around so that she was on her knees, guided
himself in, and felt her full, deep well again. She pushed back with
each stroke, rocking, moving, plunging in and pulling back, feeliiv
every push, every pull, and then, it came again, first she and, at the
next stroke, he felt the marvelous surge of the Mother's great Gift of
Pleasure.

They both collapsed, exhausted, pleurably, wonderfully, languorously
exhausted. They felt a draft for a moment, but didn't move, and
they even dozed off for a time. When they woke, they got up and
washed again, then soaked in the hot waters. To their surprise, when
they got out, they found clean, dry, velvety soft leather blankets to
dry themselves with beside the entrance.

Madenia walked back to the cave, experiencing feelings she had
never known before. She had been moved by Jondalar's intense but
controlled passion and his caring tenderness, and by Ay la's eager response
and unreserved willingness to abandon herself to him, to trust
him completely. Their experience was not at all like the one she had
endured. Their Pleasures had been fiery and physical but not brutal; it
was not taking from one to serve the other's lust, but giving and sharing
to please and gratify each other. Ayla had told her the truth; the
Mother's Pleasures could be an exciting, sensual delight, a joyful and
pleasurable celebration of their love.

And though she didn't quite know what to do about it, she was
aroused, physically and emotionally. She had tears in her eyes. At tba
moment, she wanted Jondalar. She wished he could be the one to share
her womanhood rites, though she knew that wasn't possible. But s e
decided, at that moment, that if she could have someone like him. s e
would agree to go through with the ceremony and have her Ki e
First Pleasures at the next Summer Meeting.

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ne was feeling particularly lively the next morning. Ayla made
)rning-after" drink she had developed for the after-celebration
ies at the Lion Camp, though she only had enough ingredients
people of the Ceremonial Hearth. She carefully checked her
of the contraceptive tea she took each morning, and decided it
last until the growing season when she could collect more.
itely it wasn't necessary to take much.
snia came to see the visitors before noon. Smiling shyly at Jon-
he announced that she had decided to have her First Rites.
t's wonderful, Madenia. You won't be sorry," the tall, hand-
vonderfully gentle man said. She looked up at him with such
eyes that he bent down and kissed her cheek, then nuzzled her
d breathed in her ear. He stood up and smiled at her, and she
[in his remarkable blue eyes. Her heart was beating so fast that
Id hardly breathe. At that moment, more than anything, Ma-
dshed that Jondalar could be the one who would be chosen for
es of First Pleasures. Then she felt embarrassed, afraid, that
w he knew what she was thinking. Suddenly she ran out of the
irea.
bad we don't live closer to the Losadunai," he said, watching
"I would like to help that young woman, but I'm sure they'll
neone."
, I'm sure they will, but I hope she hasn't built up her expecta-
o high. I told her that someday she might find someone like
ndalar, that she had suffered enough and deserved it. I hope so,
sake," Ayla said. "But there aren't many like you."
young women have high hopes and expectations," Jondalar
'lit it's all imagination before the first time."
she has something to base her imagination on."
:ourse, they all know more or less what to expect. It's not like
ven't been around men and women," he said.
more than that, Jondalar. Who do you think left us those dry
5 last night?"
Might it was Losaduna, or maybe Solandia."
y went to their bed before we did; they had their own honoring
asked them. They didn't even know we had gone to the sacred
-although Losaduna seemed particularly pleased about it."
cy didn't, then who . . . Madenia?"
almost certain it was."
liar frowned with concentration. "We've been traveling alone
r for so long that . . . I've never really said it before, but . . . I
ttle . . . I don't know . . . reluctant, I guess, to be as impetu-

ous, as free when we're around people. I thought we were alone la, night. If I'd known she was there, I might not have been as ... unstrained," he said.

Ayla smiled. "I know," she said. She was becoming more and more aware that he didn't like to reveal the deeply sensitive side of her nature, and she was pleased that he would express himself to her in words and actions. "I'm glad you didn't know she was there, both for me, and for her."

"Why for her?" he asked.

"I think that's what convinced her to go ahead with her womanhood ceremony. She had been around men and women sharing Pleasures often enough that she didn't think about it, until those men forced her. Afterward she could only think about the pain, and the horror of being used as a thing, with no thought for her as a woman. It's hard to explain, Jondalar. Something like that makes you feel so ... terrible."

"I'm sure that's true, but I think there was more to it," the man said. "After a girl has her first moon time, but before she has had her First Rites, a woman is most vulnerable--and most desirable. Every man is drawn to her, perhaps because she may not be touched. At any other time, a woman is free to choose any man, or none, but at that time, it is dangerous for her."

"Like Latie wasn't even supposed to look at her brothers," Ayla said.

"Mamut explained about that."

"Maybe not entirely," Jondalar said. "It is up to the girl-woman to show restraint then, and it's not always easy. She is the center of attention; every man wants her, particularly the younger ones, and it can be hard for her to resist. They follow her around, trying every way they can to get her to give in to them. Some girls do, especially those who have a long wait before the Summer Meeting. But if she allows herself to be opened without the proper rituals, she is . . . not well thought of. If it's found out, and sometimes the Mother blesses her before she is a woman, making sure everyone knows that she was opened--people can be cruel. They blame her and make fun of her."

"But why should they blame her? They should blame the men who won't let her alone," Ayla said, irked at the unfairness.

"People say if she can't show restraint, she lacks the qualities to assume the responsibilities of Motherhood and Leadership. She will never be chosen to sit on the Council of Mothers, or Sisters, or whatever name her people give to their council of highest authority, so she loses status, which makes her less desirable as a mate. Not that she loses the status of her mother or her hearth--nothing she is born with

gi away--but she will never be chosen by a man of high status,
0 one who has the potential for it. I think Madenia feared that as
as anything," Jondalar said.
i wonder Verdegia said she was ruined." Ay la's brow creased
Kconcem. "Jondalar, will her people accept Losaduna's cleansing
H7 You know that once she is open, she can never really go back to
|ray she was."
think so. It wasn't that she didn't show restraint. She was forced,
Keople are angry enough about Charoli to use that against him.
Be may be a few who will have reservations, but she will have a lot
lenders, too."
Elda was silent for a while. "People are complicated, aren't they?
Hetimes I wonder if anything is really what it seems."

I.
Ithink it will work, Laduni," Jondalar said. "I do think it will work!
me go through it again. We'll use the bowl boat to carry dried
i, and enough burning stones to melt ice for water, plus extra rocks
|uild a fire on, and the heavy mammoth hide to put the rocks on so
I won't sink into the ice when they get hot. We can carry food for
Itnd probably Wolf, in pack baskets and our backframes."
Bit will be a heavy load," Laduni said, "but you don't have to boil
jwater--that will save on burning stones. You just have to melt it
Sigh so the horses can drink it; both of you and the wolf, too. It
|Bi't have to be hot, but make sure it's not icy. And make sure you
ttk enough; don't try to be sparing. If you have warm clothes, get
|agh rest, and drink enough water, you can resist the cold."
| think they should try it out in advance, to see how much they will
B," Laronia said.
tLyla saw that Laduni's mate had made the suggestion. "That's a
id idea," she said.
But Laduni's right, it will be a heavy load," Laronia added.
Then we'll have to go through our things and get rid of everything
can," Jondalar said. "We won't need much. Once we get across,
II be close to Dalanar's Camp."
they were already down to bare necessities. How much more could
Y get rid of? Ay la thought as the meeting broke up. Madenia fell in
lue her as she walked back to their sleeping place. The girl-woman
l not only developed a strong crush on Jondalar, but a bit of hero-
^hip toward Ayla, which made Ayla a little uncomfortable. But
"ked Madenia and asked her if she would like to sit with her while
sorted through her things.
" Ayla began unpacking and spreading out her belongings, she

tried to remember how many times she had done this before o .ijBI
Journey. It would be difficult to make choices. Everything had ^at
meaning to her, but if they were going to get across this fonnid^
glacier that Jondalar had been worrying about from the berinn"
with Whinney and Racer, and Wolf, she had to eliminate as much*
possible.

The first package she opened contained the beautiful outfit made of
soft chamois that Roshario had given to her. She held it up, then SDread
it out in front of her.

"Oooh! How beautiful! The patterns that are sewn on, and the way
it's cut, I've never seen anything like it," Madenia said, unable to resist
reaching out to touch it. "And so soft! I have never felt anything so
soft."

"It was given to me by a woman of the Sharamudoi, people who live
far away from here, near the end of the Great Mother River, where
she is truly a great river. You wouldn't believe how big the Mother
River gets. The Sharamudoi are really two people. The Shamudoi live
on the land and hunt chamois. Do you know that animal?" Ayla asked.
Madenia shook her head. "It is a mountain animal, something like an
ibex, but smaller."

"Yes, I do know that, but we call it by a different name," Madenia
said.

"The Ramudoi are River People and hunt the great sturgeon--mat's
a huge fish. Together, they have a special way of curing the hides of
the chamois to make them soft and supple like this."

Ayla picked up the embroidered tunic and thought about the Sharamudoi
people she had met. It seemed so long ago. She could have
lived with them; she still felt the same way, and she knew she would
never see them again. She hated the thought of leaving the gift from
Roshario behind. Then she looked into Madenia's shining eyes as she
admired it, and Ayla made a decision.

"Would you like to have this, Madenia?"

Madenia jerked her hands back as though she had touched something
hot. "I couldn't! It was a gift to you," she said.

"We have to lighten our load. I think Roshario would be pleased if
you would accept it, since you love it so. It was meant to be a matrimonial
outfit, but I already have one."

"Are you sure?" Madenia said. .

Ayla could see her eyes glistening, incredulous at the thought o
such a beautiful, exotic outfit. "Yes, I'm sure. You might consider it
for your Matrimonial, if it is appropriate. Think of it as a giit
remember me."

"I won't need a gift to remember you," Madenia said, her eyes brim- with tears. "I will never forget you. Because of you, maybe, I will have a Matrimonial, and if I do, I will wear it then." Ayla couldn't wait to show it to her mother, and to all her friends and relatives at the Summer Meeting.

Ayla was glad she had decided to give it to her. "Would you like to wear the Matrimonial outfit?"

"Yes," Madenia said.

Ayla unwrapped the tunic Nezzie had made for her when she had mated with Raneer. It was an ochre yellow, the color of her horse's carving. The carving of a horse had been wrapped inside it, and two almost perfectly matched pieces of honey-colored amber. Madenia couldn't believe Ayla could have two outfits that were so exotically beautiful, different from each other, but she was afraid to say too much, Ayla might feel required to give her this one, too. Ayla studied it, trying to decide what to do with it. Then she shook her head. No, she could not part with it, it was her Matrimonial tunic. Ayla would wear it when she mated with Jondalar. In a way, it had a piece of Raneer in it, too. She picked up the small horse carved out of ivory and fondled it absentmindedly. This, too, she would think about Raneer, wondered how he was. No one had loved her more, and she would never forget him. She could have had him and been happy with him, if she hadn't loved Jondalar so

Madenia had tried to restrain her curiosity, but finally she had to ask. "That are those stones?"

"They're called amber. They were given to me by the headwoman at the Camp."

"What about the carving of your horse?"

Ayla smiled at her. "Yes, it's a carving of Whinney. It was made for a man with laughing eyes and skin the color of Racer's coat. Jondalar said he had never known a better carver."

"What about the man with brown skin?" Madenia asked, incredulous.

Ayla smiled wryly. She couldn't blame her for doubting. "Yes. He was a Mamutoi, and his name was Raneer. The first time I saw him, I was just help staring at him. I'm afraid I was very impolite. I was told my mother was as dark as ... a piece of that burning stone. She was taken to the south, across a great sea. A Mamutoi man named Raneer made a long Journey. He mated her, and her son was born to her. She died on their way back, so he returned with only the child. The man's sister raised him."

Madenia gave a little shiver of excitement. She thought the only

thing south was the mountains, and that they went on forever. Avla had traveled so far and knew so much. Maybe someday she would make a Journey like Ayla, and meet a brown man who would carve a beautiful horse for her, and people who would give her beautiful clothes, and find horses that would let her ride them, and a wolf that loved children, and a man like Jondalar, who would ride the horses and make the long Journey with her. Madenia was lost in daydreams of great adventure.

She had never met anyone like Ayla. She idolized the beautiful woman who led such an exciting life, and she hoped she might be like her in some way. Ayla spoke with a strange accent, but that only added to her mystery, and hadn't she suffered a forced attack by a man when she was a girl, too? Ayla had gotten over it but understood how someone else felt. In the warmth, love, and understanding of the people around her, Madenia was beginning to recover from the horror of the incident. She began to imagine herself, mature and wise, telling some young girl, who had suffered such an attack, about her experience, to help her overcome it.

While Madenia daydreamed, she watched Ayla pick up a neatly tied package. The woman held it but didn't open it; she knew exactly what was inside it, and she had no intention of leaving it behind.

"What's that?" the girl asked, as Ayla put it aside.

Ayla picked it up again; she hadn't seen it herself for some time. She looked around to make sure Jondalar was not in sight, then untied the knots. Inside was a pure white tunic decorated with ermine tails. Madenia's eyes became big and round.

"That's as white as snow! I've never seen any leather colored white like that," she said.

"Making white leather is a secret of the Crane Hearth. I learned how to make it from an old woman, who learned it from her mother," Ayla explained. "She had no one to pass the knowledge down to, so when I asked her to teach me, she agreed."

"You made that?" Madenia said.

"Yes. For Jondalar, but he doesn't know it. I'm going to give it to him when we reach his home, I think for our Matrimonial," Ayla said.

When she held it up, a package fell out of it, too. Madenia could see it was a man's tunic. Except for the ermine tails, there were no decorations; no embroidered patterns or designs, no shells or beads, but it needed none. Decorations would have detracted. In its simplicity, the pure whiteness of the color made it stunning.

Ayla opened the smaller package. Inside was the strange figure of a woman with a carved face. If she hadn't just seen wonder after wonder'

old have frightened the girl; dunai never had faces. But somehow
5 all right for Ay la to have one.
mdalar made this for me," Ayla said. "He told me he made it to
are my spirit, and for my womanhood ceremony, the first time he
it me the Mother's Gift of Pleasure. There was no one else to
; in it, but we didn't need it. Jondalar made it a ceremony. Later
[ye this to me to keep because it has great power, he says."
believe it," Madenia said. She had no desire to touch it, but she
t doubt that Ayla could control any power it held.
da sensed her uneasiness and wrapped the figure back up again.
.Ticked it inside the carefully folded white tunic and wrapped that
e fine, thin sewn-together rabbit hides that protected it, then tied
[h the cords.
lother wrapped package held some of the gifts she had received at
doption ceremony, when she was accepted into the Mamutoi. She
d keep them. Her medicine bag would go with her, of course,
ones and fire-making kit, her sewing kit, one change of inner
es, and felt boot liners, sleeping rolls, and hunting weapons. She
id over her bowls and cooking implements and eliminated all but
bsolute essentials. She would have to wait for Jondalar to decide
t the tents, ropes, and other gear.
st as she and Madenia were about to go out, Jondalar came into
welling space. He and several others had just returned with a load
own coal, and he had come in to sort through his things. Several
people came in then, too, including Solandia and her children
Wolf.
we really come to depend on this animal, and I'm going to miss
I don't suppose you'd like to leave him," she said.
r signaled Wolf. For all his love of the children, he came to her
ediately and stood at her feet looking at her expectantly. "No,
idia. I don't think I could."
didn't think so, but I had to ask. I'm going to miss you, too, you
/," she added.
Jid I will miss you. The hardest part of this Journey has been
og friends, then leaving and knowing that I would probably never
dem again," Ayla said.
aduni," Jondalar said, carrying a piece of mammoth ivory with
ge markings incised on it. "Talut, the headman of the Lion Camp,
; this map of the country far to the east, showing the first part of
ourney. I had hoped to keep it as a remembrance of him. It's not
itial, but I would hate to throw it away. Would you keep it for
Who knows, someday I may come back for it."

"Yes r'll l-
IooHng'itovereep^lt^fofyou'" ^duni said r I.-

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:y^^^S^^^^
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.^^.te..^^ . . ^"'^eWf,,

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"^^p^^t^^"'^,^^^^^^ . »p »
Look at this," he said glven her'

, "Wyma n,,d.71;hI]anship " rv. e^*" " not '*'. Thi, ,,

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Jond^ g,,e "^^ate ". ^uni ^d.

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"We h-eZ^S;l0*^;^ Ayh ^ "-*«'," h. ^L.
^terf ofrocksandstones-1^--".
^S^^"0"----- "

to you really think we need them?"

a suggest you take them," Laduni said. "Ropes can be very useful glacier."

f.you think so, I'll take your advice," Jondalar said.

ley had packed as much as possible the night before and spent the ^w saying their farewells to the people they had come to care for uch in the short time they were there. Verdegia made a point of fur to talk to Ay la.

want to thank you. Ay la."

^s not necessary to thank me. We need to thank everyone here."

mean for what you did for Madenia. To be honest, I'm not sure ; you did, or what you said to her, but I know that you made the fence. Before you came, she was hiding in a dark corner, wishing yere dead. She wouldn't even talk to me, and she wanted nothing > with becoming a woman. I thought all was lost. Now, she's st like her old self, and looking forward to her First Rites. I just nothing happens to make her change her mind again before sum-

>>

think she will be all right, as long as everyone continues to support

'Ayla said. "That has been the biggest help, you know."

still want to see Charoli punished," Verdegia said.

think everyone does. Now that everyone has agreed to go after

I think he will be. Madenia will be vindicated, and she will have

I'irst Rites and become a woman. You will have grandchildren yet,

legia."

the morning they got up early, did their final packing, and came

into the cave for a last morning meal with the Losadunai. Every- ivas there to bid them farewell.

Losaduna had Ayla memorize a

more verses of lore, and then almost became emotional when she

ed him goodbye. Then he quickly went to talk to Jondalar. Solan- aade no qualms about how she felt, and she told them how sorry

was to see them go. Even Wolf seemed to know he would not see

hildren again, and so did they. He licked the baby's face and for

rst time Micheri cried.

it as they walked out of the cave, it was Madenia who surprised

' She had put on the magnificent outfit Ayla had given her, and

lung to Ayla and tried not to cry. Jondalar told her how beautiful

^as, and he meant it. The clothes lent her an air of uncommon

ty and maturity and hinted at the real woman she would someday

me.

; they mounted the horses, rested now and eager to go, they looked

back at the people standing around the mouth of the cave, and it was Madenia who stood out. But she was still young and, as they waved tears streamed down her face.

"I will never forget you, either of you," she called out, then ran into the cave.

As they rode away, back toward the Great Mother River, which was hardly more than a stream, Ay la thought she would never forget Madenia, or her people either. Jondalar was sorry to say goodbye, too but his thoughts were on the difficulties they had yet to face. He knew the toughest part of their Journey still lay ahead.

Jondalar and Ayla headed north, back toward Donau, the Great Idler River that had guided their steps for so much of their Journey. When they reached her, they turned west again and continued to follow the stream back toward her beginnings, but the great waterway had changed character. She was no longer a huge meandering surge flowing with ponderous dignity across the flat plains, taking in countless tributaries and volumes of silt, then breaking into channels and forming oxbow lakes.

Near her source, she was fresher, sprightlier, a leaner, shallower stream that tumbled over her wide rocky bed as she raced down the steep mountainside. But the westward route of the travelers along the flowing river had become a continuous uphill climb, one that drew them ever closer to their inevitable rendezvous with the thick layer of unmelting ice that capped the broad high plateau of the rugged land ahead.

The shapes of glaciers followed the contours of the land. Those on mountaintops were craggy tors of ice, those on level ground spread out like pancakes, with a nearly uniform thickness, rising slightly higher in the middle, leaving behind gravel banks and gouging out depressions that became lakes and ponds. At its farthest advance, the southernmost edge of the vast continental cake of ice, whose nearly level top was as high as the mountains around them, missed by less than five degrees of latitude a meeting with the northern reaches of the mountain glaciers. The land between the two was the coldest anywhere on earth. Unlike mountain glaciers, frozen rivers creeping slowly down the sides of mountains, the unmelting ice on the rounded, nearly flat highlands--the glacier Jondalar was so concerned about still to the west of it--was a plateau glacier, a miniature version of the great thick sheet of ice that spread across the plains of the continent to the north. "Ayla and Jondalar continued along the river, they gained altitude with each step. They made the ascent with an eye toward sparing the weary laden horses, most often leading them instead of riding. Ayla

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was particularly concerned for Whinney, who was hauling the ma' portion of the burning stones that they hoped would ensure the survival of their traveling companions when they crossed the icy surface a terrain that horses would never attempt on their own. '

In addition to Whinney's pole drag, both horses carried heavy packs though the load on the mare's back was lighter, to compensate for the travois she pulled. Racer's load was piled so high that it was somewhat unwieldy, but even the backpacks of the woman and man were substantial. Only the wolf was free of additional burdens, and Ayla had begun to eye his unfettered movements, thinking that he, too could carry a share.

"All this effort to carry rocks," Ayla remarked one morning as she shrugged on her backpack. "Some people would think we were strange to be hauling this heavy load of stones up these mountains."

"Many more think we're strange for traveling with two horses and a wolf," Jondalar countered, "but if we're going to get them across the ice, we're going to have to get these stones up there. And there is one thing to be glad for."

"What is that?"

"How easy it will be once we reach the other side."

The upper course of the river traversed the northern foreland of the range of mountains to the south, which was so huge that the travelers had little real sense of its immense scale. The Losadunai lived in a region, just south of the river, of more rounded, massiflike limestone mountains with extensive areas of relatively level plateaus. Though worn down by eons of wind and water, the eroded eminences were lofty enough to bear glistening crowns of ice throughout the year. Between the river and the mountains was a landscape of dormant vegetation overlaying a flysch zone of sandstone. This in turn was covered by a light mantle of winter snow that blurred the lower boundary of the unmelting ice, but the shimmer of glacial blue revealed its nature.

Farther south, gleaming in the sun like giant shards of broken alabaster, the exalted crags of the central zone, almost a separate range within the great mass of uplifted earth, soared high above the nearer heights. As the travelers continued their climb toward the higher western chain within the complex range, the silent march of the central mountains followed their progression, watched over by a brooding p311" of jagged peaks towering far above the rest.

To the north, across the river, the ancient crystalline massif rose steeply, its undulating surface occasionally overtopped by rocky crags and covered by block fields with raised meadows in between. Looki f>

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westward, higher rounded hills, some topped with small icy
; of their own, reached across the frozen river, no boundary to
s join the ice of the younger folded ridges of the southern range.
powdery snow drifted down less frequently as their Journey
icin closer to the coldest part of the continent, the region be- the farthest northern extension
of the mountain glacier and the
nmost reaches of the vast, continent-spanning ice sheets. Not
ie windy loess steppes of the eastern plains could match the
v of its bitter cold. The land was saved from the desolation of
ice sheets only by the moderating maritime influence of the
i ocean.

highland glacier they planned to go over, without the air
d by the unfrozen ocean keeping the encroaching ice at bay,
lave expanded and become impossible to cross. The maritime
ces that allowed passage to the western steppes and tundras also
ie glaciers away from the land of the Zeiandonii, sparing it the
layer of ice that covered other lands at the same latitude.

alar and Ayla fell easily back into their traveling routine, al-
it seemed to Ayla that they had been traveling forever. She
to reach the end of their Journey. Memories of the quiet winter
earthlodge of the Lion Camp flashed into her mind as they
d forward through the monotony of the winter landscape. She
i small incidents with pleasure, forgetting the misery that had
idowed her days the whole time when she'd thought that Jon-
ad stopped loving her.

ough all their water had to be melted, usually from river ice
than snow--the land was bleak and barren with few snowdrifts
i decided there were some benefits to the freezing cold. The
ties to the Great Mother River were smaller, and frozen solid,
; them easier to cross. But they invariably hurried across the
ank openings because of the fierce winds that roared through
of the rivers and streams. These blasts funneled frigid air from
h-pressure areas of the southern mountains, adding wind chill
ilready freezing air.

ering even in her heavy furs, Ayla felt relieved when they finally
t: across a wide valley to the protective barrier of nearby higher
"I'm so cold!" she said through chattering teeth. "I wish it
warm up a little."

alar looked alarmed. "Don't wish that, Ayla!"

y not?"

have to be across the glacier before the weather turns. A warm

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wind means the foehn, the snow-melter, that will break the seas. Then we'll have to go around to the north, through Clan country. I will take much longer, and with all the trouble Charoli has been causing them, I don't think they will be very welcoming," Jondalar said. She nodded with understanding, looking across to the north side of the river. After studying it for some distance, Ayla said, "They have the better side."

"What makes you say that?"

"Even from here you can see that there are plains that have good grass, and that would bring more animals to hunt. On this side are mostly scrub pines--that means sandy earth and poor grass, except for a few places. This side must be just enough closer to the ice to be colder, and less rich," she explained.

"You may be right," Jondalar said, thinking her evaluation was astute.

"I don't know what it's like in summer; I've only been here in winter."

Ayla had judged accurately. The soils of the northern plains of the valley of the great river were primarily loess over a limestone bedrock, and more fertile than the southern side. In addition, the mountain glaciers of the south crowded closer, making the winters more harsh and the summers cooler, barely warm enough to melt the accumulated snows and ground frost of winter back to the previous summer's snow line--almost. Most of the glaciers were growing again, slowly, but enough to signal a shift from the current milieu, the slightly warmer interval, back to colder times, and one last glacial advance before the long melt that would leave ice only in polar regions.

The dormant state of the trees often left Ayla unsure of their variety, until she tasted a twig tip or bud or bit of inner bark. Where alder dominated near the river, and along the lower valleys of its tributaries, she knew they would be in peaty fen woods if it were summer; where it was mixed with willow and poplar would be the wettest parts, and the occasional ash, elm, or hornbeam, hardly more than woody brush, indicated drier ground. The rare dwarfed oak, struggling to survive in more protected niches, barely hinted at the massive oak forests that would one day cover a more temperate land. Trees were absent entirely from the sandy soils of the raised heath land, able to nourish only heather, whins, sparse grasses, mosses, and lichens.

Even in the frigid climate, some birds and animals thrived; cold-adapted animals of the steppes and mountains abounded, and hunting was easy. Only rarely did they use the supplies given to them by the Losadunai, which they wanted to save for the crossing anyway. JN until they reached the frozen wasteland would they need to rely entirely on the resources they carried. J

la saw an uncommon pygmy snow owl and pointed it out to Jar. He became adept at finding willow grouse, which tasted like bite-feathered ptarmigan that he had grown so fond of, particularly the way that Ay la cooked them. Its mixed coloration gave it better camouflage in a landscape not entirely covered by snow. Jondalar did not recall that there had been more snow the last time he had that way.

The region was influenced by both the continental east and the time west, revealed by the unusual mixture of plants and animals seldom lived near each other. The small furry creatures were an example that Ay la noticed, although during the freezing season, the dormice, voles, susliks, and hamsters were seldom seen, except when she broke through a nest for the vegetable foods they had stored. Although she sometimes took the animals too, for Wolf or, particularly she found giant hamsters, for themselves, the little animals more often only gave sustenance to martens, foxes, and the small wildcats. On the high plains and along river valleys, they often sighted woolly mammoths, usually in herds of related females, with an occasional bull traveling along for company, though in the cold season groups of mammoths often banded together. Rhinoceroses were invariably loners, except for females with one or two immature young. In the warmer months, bison, aurochs, and every variety of deer, from the giant mammoths to small shy roe deer, were numerous, but only reindeer were common in winter. Instead mouflon, chamois, and ibex had migrated from their high summer habitat, and Jondalar had never seen so many musk-oxen.

It seemed to be a year when the musk-ox population was at a high point in its cycle. Next year they would probably crash down to minimum numbers, but in the meantime, Ayla and Jondalar found the spear-thrower proving its worth. When threatened, musk-oxen, particularly the belligerent males, formed a tight phalanx of lowered horns pointing outward from a circle in order to protect the calves and certain females. This behavior was effective against most predators, but not against a spear-thrower.

Without having to get close enough to put themselves in danger from a direct, break-away charge, Ayla and Jondalar could take their pick of mammoths standing their ground and aim from a safe distance. It was not too easy, although they had to be accurate and throw hard to be sure the spear would penetrate the dense undercoat.

With several varieties of animals to choose from, they didn't often waste or food, and they frequently left the less choice pieces of meat for carnivores and scavengers. It wasn't a matter of waste but of efficiency. Their high-protein diet of lean meat often left them less than

satisfied, even when they had eaten their fill. Inner barks, and t I made from the needles and twig tips of trees offered only limited relief j Omnivorous humans could subsist on a variety of foods, and n teins were essential, but not adequate alone. People had been known to die of protein starvation without, at least, one or the other of vegetable produce or fats. Traveling at the end of winter with very little of the way of plant food, they needed fat to survive, but it was so late in the season that the animals they hunted had used most of their own reserves. The travelers selectively took the meat and inner organs that contained the most fat, and left the lean, or gave it to Wolf. He found ample nourishment on his own from the woods and plains along the way.

Another animal did inhabit the region, and though they always noticed them, neither Jondalar nor Ayla could bring themselves to hunt horses. Their fellow travelers fared well enough on the rough dry grass, mosses, lichens, and even small twigs and thin bark.

Ayla and Jondalar traveled west, following the course of the river and angling slightly north, with the massif across the river pacing them. When the river turned somewhat southwest, Jondalar knew they were getting close. The depression between the ancient northern highland and the southern mountains climbed upward toward a wild landscape that outcropped in rugged crags. They passed the place where three streams joined to form the recognizable beginning of the Great Mother River, then crossed over and followed the left bank of the middle course, the Middle Mother. It was the one that Jondalar had been told was considered the true Mother River, though any one of the three could have been.

Reaching what was essentially the beginning of the great river was not the profound experience that Ayla had thought it might be. The Great Mother River didn't spring forth from some clearly defined place, like the great inland sea where she ended. There was no clear beginning, and even the boundary of the northern territory, considered flathead country, was uncertain, but Jondalar had a familiar feeling about the area they were in. He thought they were close to the edge of the actual glacier, though they had been traveling over snow for some time and it was hard to tell.

Although it was only afternoon, they decided to start looking for a place to set up camp, and they cut across the land to the right bank of the upper feeder. They decided to stop ahead, just beyond the valley of a fairly large stream that joined from the north side. j When Ayla saw an exposed gravel bar beside the river, she stopped."

; out several smooth round stones that would be perfect for her and she put them in her pouch. She thought she might go hunt- r ptarmigan or white hare later in the afternoon, or perhaps the aorning.

oories of their short stay with the Losadunai were already fad- epia- ced by concerns about the glacier ahead, particularly for

ar. On foot and heavily loaded, they had been traveling more r than he had planned and he feared the end of the long winter come too soon. The arrival of spring was always unpredictable, is was one year that he hoped it would be late.

y unloaded the horses and set up their camp. Since it was early,

ecided to hunt fresh meat. They entered a lightly wooded area line across deer tracks, which surprised them both and worried

ar. He hoped that returning deer were not a sign that spring

soon follow. Ayla signaled Wolf, and they continued through

oods single file, with Jondalar in front. Ayla followed close be- s.with Wolf at her heel. She did not want him dashing off and

g away their prey.

ley followed the trail through the open woods toward a high jut-

Butcrop that blocked their view ahead. Ayla saw Jondalar's shoul-

slump and the tension of his stalking relax, and she understood

twhen the tracks of the deer showed that it had bounded away.

tthing had obviously scared it off.

ley both froze at the sound of Wolf's low growl. He sensed some-

and they had come to respect his warnings. Ayla was sure she

jl scuffling noises from the other side of the large rock projecting

rf the earth and blocking their path. She and Jondalar looked at

jotfaer; the man had heard it too. They crept ahead slowly, edging

(d the outcrop. Then there were shouts, the sound of something

tng heavily, and, almost simultaneously, a scream of agony.

»ere was a quality to the scream that sent a chill down Ayla's back,

ll of recognition. "Jondalar! Someone's in trouble!" she said, dash- round the stone.

rait, Ayla! It could be dangerous!" he called in warning, but it

dready too late. Clutching his spear, he raced to catch up.

Wind the outcrop, several young men were struggling with some-

Mi the ground who was trying to fight them off without much

^s. Others were making crude remarks to a man who was on his

s ^d stretched out on top of a person that two others were trying

'Id down.

lurry up, Danasi! How much more help do you need? This one's

!gling."

"Maybe he needs help finding it."

"He just doesn't know what to do with it."

"Then give someone else a chance."

Ayla caught a glimpse of blond hair and, with an angry feeling of disgust, she realized that they were holding down a woman and she knew what they were trying to do. As she ran toward them, she had another insight. Perhaps it was the shape of a leg or an arm or the sound of a voice, but suddenly she knew it was a Clan woman- blond Clan woman! She was stunned, but only for a moment.

Wolf was growling, eager, but watching Ayla and holding back.

"It must be Charoli's band!" Jondalar said, coming up behind her

He dropped off his hunting pack with his spear holder, and in a few long strides he reached the three men who were molesting the woman. He grabbed the one on top by the back of his parka at the scruff of his neck and yanked him off the woman. Then he stepped around and doubling up his fist, slammed it into the man's face. The man dropped to the ground. The other two gaped in shock, then let go of the woman and turned to attack the stranger. One jumped on his back, while the other threw punches at his face and chest. The big man flung off the one on his back, took a hard blow to his shoulder, and countered with a powerful belt to the stomach of the man in front of him.

The woman rolled over and backed off to get away when the two men went after Jondalar, and she ran toward the other group of struggling men. While one man was doubled over in pain, Jondalar turned to the other. Ayla saw the first one struggling to get up.

"Wolf! Help Jondalar! Get those men!" she said, signaling to the animal.

The big wolf raced eagerly into the fray, while she dropped her pack, loosened the sling from around her head, and reached into her pouch for stones. One man of the three was down again, and she watched another, with terror in his eyes, fling up an arm to fend off the huge wolf that was coming for him. The animal jumped up on his hind legs, sank his teeth into the arm of a heavy winter coat, and ripped off the sleeve, while Jondalar landed a solid punch on the jaw of the third.

Putting a stone in the pocket of her sling, Ayla turned her attention toward the other group of struggling men. One had raised a heavy bone club with two hands and was ready to smash it down. He quickly hurled the stone and watched the man with the club fall to the

ground. Another man, who was holding a spear in a threatening way over someone on the ground, watched his friend fall with a look of incredulity. He shook his head and didn't see the second stone coming

filled in pain when it hit. The spear dropped to the ground as he
id for his injured arm.
men had been struggling with the one on the ground, yet having
l time of it. Her sling had brought two down, and the woman
iad been attacked was pummeling a third, to good effect. The
/as holding up his arms in defense. Another, who had gotten too
to the man they had been trying to restrain, was jarred by a
ful blow. He staggered back. Ayla had two more stones ready to
ie let fly with one, aimed at a nonvital muscular thigh, giving the
id man--a man of the Clan, as Ayla had guessed--an opening.
A he was sitting, he grabbed the man closest to him, lifted him
; ground, and threw him at another man.
; Clan woman renewed her frenzied attack, finally driving away
an she had been struggling with. Though not accustomed to
ig, women of the Clan were as strong as their men, in proportion
ir size. And though she would have preferred to acquiesce rather
ight to defend herself against a man who wanted to use her to
; his needs, this woman had been moved to fight in defense of
jured mate.
there was no fight left in any of the young men. One lay uncon-
near the leg of the Clan man, a wound on his head oozing blood
latted his dirty blond hair and was swelling into a discolored
. Another was rubbing his arm, glowering at the woman who
icr sling ready. The others were bruised and battered, one with
; that was puffing up and closing. The three who had been after
Mnan were cowering in a huddle on the ground, their clothes in
, in fear of a wolf who was standing watch over them with fangs
and a mean snarl in his throat.
ialar, who had also taken a share of punishment but didn't seem
ice, walked over to make sure Ayla was unharmed, then looked
t at the man on the ground and was suddenly struck by the fact
was a man of the Clan. He had known it when they first came
the scene, but it hadn't made an impression until that moment.
ndered why the man was still down. He pulled the unconscious
way from him, and rolled him over; he was breathing. And then
r why the man of the Clan did not get up.
I reason was immediately apparent. The thigh of his right leg,
>ove the knee, was bent at an unnatural angle. Jondalar looked at
in with awe. With a broken leg, he had been holding off six men!
ew flatheads were strong, but he hadn't realized how strong, or
letermined. The man had to be in great pain, but he was not
igit.

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Suddenly another man, who had not been involved in any of his struggles, swaggered into view. He looked around at the battered band and raised an eyebrow. All the young men seemed to squirm with discomfort under his disdain. They didn't know how to explain what had happened. One moment they were in the midst of roughing up and making sport with the two flatheads unfortunate enough to have crossed their path, and the next they were at the mercy of a woman who could sling rocks, hard, a big man with fists as hard as rocks, and the biggest wolf they had ever seen! Not to mention the two flatheads "What happened?" he asked.

"Your men have finally gotten a little back," Ayla said. "It will be your turn next."

The woman was a total stranger. How did she know this was his band, or anything else about them? She spoke in his language, but with a strange accent, and he wondered who she was. The woman of the Clan turned her head at the sound of Ayla's voice and studied her closely, though it was not apparent to anyone else. The man with the bump on his head was waking up, and Ayla went to see how badly he was hurt.

"Get away from him," the man said, but the bravado was belied by the fear she detected in his voice.

Ayla paused, frankly appraised the man, and realized his objection was for the benefit of the band of men, not because he particularly cared about the one who was wounded.

She continued her examination. "He'll have a headache for a few days, but he'll be fine. If I had seriously meant to harm him, I would not have held back. He would be dead, Charoli."

"How do you know my name?" the young man blurted out, frightened but trying not to show it. How did this stranger know who he was?

Ayla shrugged. "We know more than your name."

She glanced in the direction of the man and woman of the Clan. To most of the people there, they seemed impassive, but Ayla could see their shock and uneasiness in the subtle shadings of expression and posture. They were warily watching the people of the Others, trying to make sense out of the strange turn of events.

For the time being, the man thought, they seemed to be in no danger of further attack, but that big man, why had he helped them . . . or seemed to help them. Why would a man of the Others fight men of his kind to help them? And what about the woman? If she was a woman.

She used a weapon, one he understood, better than most men he'd seen. What kind of woman used a weapon? Against men of her own kind-

more disquieting was the wolf, an animal that seemed to be Jig those men that had been hurting his woman . . . his own ial new woman. Perhaps the tall man had a Wolf Totem, but ere spirits, and that was a real wolf. All he could do was wait. pain inside himself and wait.

his subtle glance at Wolf, and guessing his fears, Ayla de- l to get all the shocks over with at once. She whistled, a distinc- imperative sound that resembled the call of a bird, but no bird ie had ever heard. Everyone stared at her, apprehensively, but nothing happened immediately, they relaxed. Too soon. Before they heard hoofbeats, and then two docile horses, a mare and an iual brown stallion, appeared and went straight to the woman. hat kind of strangeness was this? Was he dead, and in the world ie spirits? the man of the Clan wondered.

he horses seemed to frighten the young men even more than the >le of the Clan. Though they buried it under sarcasm and bravado, Iding each other into more and more daring and degrading activi- s, each of them carried a tight knot of guilt and fear deep inside. meday, each man was sure, he would be discovered and held ac- untable. Some of them actually wished for it, to get it over with fore things got even worse, if it wasn't too late already.

Danasi, the one who had been subject to derision because he was ving trouble subduing the woman, had talked about it to a couple of f others that he thought he could trust. Flathead women were one Hag, but that girl, not even a woman yet, who cried and fought. (anted, it was exciting at the time—women at that stage were always riting—but afterward he had been ashamed, and fearful of Duna's Eriburion. What would She do to them?

And now, suddenly here was a woman, a stranger, with a big fair- Bed man—wasn't Her lover supposed to be bigger and more fair i other men?—and a wolf! And horses that came at her call. No had ever seen her before, yet she knew who they were. She had a ge way of speaking, she must have come from far away, but she ' their language. Did they speak where she came from? Was she a ? A Mother spirit in human form? Danasi shuddered.

Tiat do you want with us?" Charoli said. "We weren't bothering We were just having a little fun with some flatheads. What's with having a little sport with some animals?"

lar watched Ayla struggle to restrain herself. "And Madenia?" l. "Was she animal, too?"

knew! The young men looked at each other, and then to ill for guidance. The man's accent was not the same as hers. He

was Zeiandonii. If the Zeiandonii knew, they wouldn't be able to f there and hide if they needed to, pretending to be on a Journey A way they'd planned. Who else knew? Was there any place they c'oul^ go?

"These people are not animals," Ayla said, with a cold rage thai made Jondalar look twice. He had never seen her quite so angry bin

she was so controlled that he wasn't sure if the young men knew it "if they were animals, would you even try to force them? Do you force wolves? Do you force horses? No, you are looking for a woman and no woman wants you. These are the only women you can find " she said. "But these people are not animals." She glanced at the Clan couple. "You are the animals! You are hyenas! Snuffling around the middens and smelling rotten, smelling of your evil. Hurting people forcing women, stealing what is not yours. I will tell you, if you don't return now, you will lose everything. You will have no family, no Cave, no people, and you will never have a woman at your hearth. You will spend your life as a hyena, always taking the leavings of others, and having to steal from your own people."

"They know about that, too!" one of the men said.

"Don't say anything!" Charoli said. "They don't know, they're only guessing."

"We know," Jondalar said. "Every people know." His command of their language was not perfect, but perfectly understandable.

"That's what you say, but we don't even know you," Charoli said.

"You're a stranger, not even Losadunai. We're not going back. We don't need anyone. We have our own Cave."

"Is that why you need to steal food and force women?" Ayla said.

"A Cave without women at your hearths is no Cave."

Charoli tried to assume a casual tone. "We don't need to listen to this. We'll take what we want, when we want--food, women. No one has stopped us before, and no one is going to now. Come on, let's get away from here," he said, turning to leave.

"Charoli!" Jondalar said, calling after the young man and catching up in a few strides.

"What do you want?"

"I have something to give you," the big man said.

Then, without warning, Jondalar doubled up his fist and rammed it into Charoli's face. Charoli's head jerked back and he was lifted off his feet by the stunning blow.

"That's for Madenia!" Jondalar said, looking down at the man sprawled out on the ground. Then he turned on his heel and waike away.

\9. looked at the dazed young man. A trickle of blood flowed from
»rner of his mouth, but she made no move to offer assistance.
of his friends helped him up. Then she turned her attention to
land of young men, eying each one individually. They were a
-looking lot, unkempt and dirty, their clothes tattered and grimy.
|r gaunt faces spoke of hunger, too. No wonder they had stolen
V They were in need of the help and support from the family and
Ids of a Cave. Perhaps the unrestricted life of roaming freely with
toU's band had begun to lose its appeal and they were ready to

m.

[hey are looking for you," she said. "Everyone has agreed that you
i gone too far, even Tomasi, who is kin to Charoli. If you return to
' Caves and take what's coming to you, you may have a chance to
your families again. If you wait until they find you, it will go
(e for you."

that why She was here? Had She come to warn them, Danasi
dered, before it was too late? If they returned before they were
d, and tried to make amends, would their Caves take them back?

fter Charoli's band left, Ayla approached the Clan couple. They
watched with amazement both Ayla's direct confrontation of the
and Jondalar's final punch that had knocked the other man down.
of the Clan never hit other men of the Clan, but all the men of
Others were strange. They looked something like men, but they
't act much like men, especially the man that had been struck. All
clans knew about him, and the man on the ground had to admit
he felt a certain satisfaction in seeing that one downed. He was
more pleased to see them all go.

ow he wished the other two would go. Their actions had been so
tpected that they made him uncomfortable. He pst wanted to get
to his clan, although he didn't know how he was going to do it
a broken leg. Ayla's next gesture took both the man and woman
pletely by surprise. Even Jondalar could see their stunned confu-
She gracefully lowered herself to a cross-legged position in front
ie man and looked demurely down at the ground.
ndalar was surprised himself. She had done that to him on occa-
. usually when she had something important to say to him and was
Tated because she couldn't find the words to express herself, but
was the first time he had ever seen her use that posture in its
ier context. It was a gesture of respect. She was requesting permis-
to address him, but it astonished the tall man to see Ayla, who
so capable and independent, approach this nathead, this man of

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the Clan, with such deference. She had tried to explain to him on that it was courtesy, tradition, their manner of speaking, and not necessarily denigrating, but Jondalar knew that no Zeiandonii woman any other woman he knew, would ever approach anyone, man woman, in that way.

As Ayla sat patiently waiting for the man to tap her shoulder she wasn't even sure if the sign language of these Clan people was the same as the language of the clan that had raised her. The distance between them was great, and these people had a different look. But she had noticed similarities of spoken languages, although the farther apart people lived, the less alike the language was. She could only hope that the sign language of these people would also be similar.

She thought their gestural language, like much of their knowledge and patterns of activities, came from their memories; the racial memories, akin to instinct, that each child was born with. If these people of the Clan came from the same ancient beginnings as the ones she had known, their language should be, at least, similar.

As she waited nervously, she began to wonder if the man had any idea what she was trying to do. Then she felt a tap on her shoulder and took a deep breath. It had been a long time since she had spoken with people of the Clan, not since she had been cursed. . . . She had to forget about that. She couldn't let these people know that she was dead as far as the Clan was concerned or they would cease to see her, just as though she didn't exist. She looked up at the man, and they studied each other.

He could see no hint of Clan in her. She was a woman of the Others. She was not like one of those that seemed oddly deformed by a mixture of spirits, the way so many were born these days. But where had this woman of the Others learned the correct way to address a man?

Ayla had not seen a Clan face for many years, and his was a true Clan face, but it was not quite like the faces of the people she had known. His hair and beard were a lighter brown and appeared soft, and not quite as curly. His eyes were lighter, too, brown, but not the deep, liquid, almost black eyes of her people. His features were stronger, more accentuated: his brow ridges were heavier, his nose sharper, his face jutted out farther, his forehead even seemed to sweep back more abruptly, and his head was longer. He seemed somehow more Clan than her Clan.

Ayla started speaking with the gestures and words of the every ay language of Brun's clan, the language of the Clan she had learned as child. It was immediately apparent that he did not understand.

the man made some sounds. They had the tone and quality of voi

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e Clan, rather guttural with the vowels almost swallowed, and she
ained to understand.

The man had a broken leg and she wanted to help him, but she also
mited to know more about these Clan people. In a certain way, she
I more comfortable around them than the people of the Others. But
|ielp him, she needed to communicate with him, to make him un-
Istand. He spoke again and made signs. The gestures seemed as
bugh they ought to be familiar, but she couldn't make sense of them,
d his word sounds were not familiar to her at all. Was the language
|ier Clan so different that she wouldn't be able to communicate with
| clans in this region?

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>.yla thought about how to make herself understood to the man of the Clan, glancing at the young woman sitting nearby who looked nervous and upset. Then, remembering the Clan Gathering she tried the ancient, formal, and primarily silent language that was used to address the world of the spirits, and to communicate with other clans that had a different common language.

The man nodded and made a gesture. Ay la felt a great wash of relief when she found that she understood him, and a rush of excitement. These people did come from the same beginnings as her Clan! Sometime, in some far distant past, this man had the same ancestors as Creb and Iza. With a sudden insight, she recalled a strange vision, and knew that she, too, shared roots, even more ancient, with him, but her line had diverged, taken a different path.

Jondalar watched, fascinated, as they began to talk with signs. It was hard to follow the quick flowing movements they made, which gave him a sense of much greater complexity and subtlety to the language than he had supposed. When Ayla had taught people of the Lion Camp some of the Clan sign language so that Rydag could communicate with them for the first time in his life--the formal language because it was easier for the youngster to learn--she had taught them only the basic rudiments. The boy had always enjoyed talking with her more than anyone. Jondalar had guessed that Rydag could communicate with her more fully, but he was beginning to understand the range and depth of the language.

Ayla was surprised when the man skipped over some of the formalities of introduction. He didn't establish names, places, or kinship lines. "Woman of the Others, this man would know where you learned to speak."

"When this woman was a young child, family and people were lost to an earthquake. This woman was raised by a clan," she explained.

"This man knows of no clan that took in a child of the Others, the man signed.

"The clan of this woman lives far away. Does the man know or t river known to the Others as Great Mother?"

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It is the boundary," he motioned impatiently.

glie river goes on for a greater distance than many know, to a great
tfar to the east. The clan of this woman lives beyond the end of
|at Mother," Ayla signed.

Ie looked incredulous, then studied her. He knew that, unlike the
Ie of the Clan whose language included the understanding of un-
scious body movements and gestures, which made it almost impos-
to say one thing and mean something else, the people of the
rs, who spoke with sounds, were different. He couldn't be sure
t her. He could see no signs of dissimulation, but her story seemed
fetched.

his woman has been traveling since the beginning of last warm
on," she added.

Ie became impatient again, and Ayla realized he was in great pain.
hat does the woman want? Others are gone, why does the woman
t go?" He knew that she had probably saved his life and had helped
I mate, which meant he owed her an obligation; that would make
m the next thing to kin. The thought was unsettling.

'This woman is a medicine woman. This woman would look at the
tl's leg," Ayla explained.

ie snorted with disdain. "The woman cannot be a medicine
tnan. The woman is not Clan."

JAYla did not argue. She thought a moment, then decided to try
|)ther approach. "This woman would speak to the man of the Oth- fe," she requested. He nodded
approval. She stood up, then backed

Way before she turned around and went to talk tojondalar.

|"Are you able to communicate with him very well?" he asked her.
l'know you are making a good attempt, but the Clan you lived with
sso far away, I can't help but wonder how successful you are."

l*'I started out using the everyday language of my clan, and we
kuldn't understand each other. I should have known their ordinary
gns and words would not be the same, but when I used ancient
Tmal language, we had no trouble communicating," Ayla explained.

"Did I understand you right? Are you saying that the Clan can Bn-
municate in a way that is understood by all of them? No matter
here they live? That's hard to believe."

"I suppose it is," she said, "but their ancient way is in their memos."

You mean they are born knowing how to speak in that way? Any
^y can do it?"

'Not exactly. They are born with their memories, but they have to
; taught' how to use them. I'm not sure how it works, I don't have
^ memories, but it seems to be more like 'reminding' them of what

[I they know. Usually they only have to be reminded once, and then it's set. That's why some of them thought I wasn't very smart. I was slow to learn, until I taught myself to memorize fast, and even then it wasn't easy. Rydag had the memories, but he didn't have anyone to teach him ... to remind him. That's why he didn't know the sien language until I came."

"You, slow to learn? I've never seen anyone learn languages so fast," Jondalar said.

She shrugged off the comment. "That's different. I think the Others have a kind of memory for word language, but we learn to speak the sounds of those around us. To learn a different language, you just have to memorize another set of sounds, and sometimes another way of putting them together," she said. "Even if you aren't perfect, you can understand each other. His language is more difficult, for us, but communication isn't the problem I'm having with him. Obligation is the problem."

"Obligation? I don't understand," Jondalar said.

"He's in terrible pain, though he'll never let you know it. I want to help him, I want to set that leg. I don't know how they're going to get back to their clan, but we can worry about that later. First I need to fix his leg. But he is already in our debt, and he knows that if I can understand his language, I understand the obligation. If he believes we saved his life, it's a kinship debt. He doesn't want to owe us more," Ayla said, trying to explain a very complex relationship in a simple way.

"What's a kinship debt?"

"It's an obligation ..." Ayla tried to think of a way to put it that would make it clear. "It's usually between hunters of a clan. If one man saves another man's life, he 'owns' a piece of the other's spirit. The man that would have died gives up a piece to be restored to life. Since a man doesn't want any pieces of his spirit to die--to walk the next world before he does--if another man owns a piece of his spirit, he will do anything to save that man's life. That makes them kin, closer than brothers."

"That makes sense," Jondalar said, nodding.

"When men hunt together," Ayla continued, "they have to help each other, and they often save each other's lives, so a piece of each one's spirit usually belongs to each of the others. It makes them kin in a way that goes beyond family. Hunters in a clan may be related, but the kinship of family cannot be stronger than the bond between hunters, because they cannot favor one over the other. They all have to depend on each other."

There is wisdom in that," Jondalar said thoughtfully. That's called a kinship debt. This man doesn't know the customs he Others, and he doesn't think much of what he does know." After Charoli and his band, who can blame him?" It goes much beyond that, Jondalar. But he's not happy about being hit debt." He told you all this?" No, of course not, but the language of the Clan is more than signs je with the hands. It's the way a person sits, or stands, expressions the face, small things, but they all have meaning. I grew up with a i. Those things are as much a part of me as they are of him. I know it's bothering him. If he could accept me as a medicine woman of Clan, it would help." What difference would that make?" Jondalar said. It means I already own a piece of his spirit," Ayla said. But you don't even know him! How can you own a piece of his rit?" A medicine woman saves lives. She could claim a piece of the spirit everyone she saves, could 'own' pieces of everyone before many rs have gone by. So when she is made a medicine woman, she gives iiece of her spirit to the Clan, and receives a piece of every Clan son in return. That way, no matter who she saves, the debt is sady paid. That's why a medicine woman has status in her own it." Ayla looked thoughtful, then said, "This is the first time I'm i the Clan spirits were not taken back ..." She paused. ondalar started to speak. Then he noticed that she was staring into empty air, and he realized she was looking inside herself. . . . When I was cursed with death," she continued. "I've worried >ut that for a long time. After Iza died, Creb took all the spirit pieces k, so they would not go with her to the next world. But when >ud had me cursed, no one took them back from me, even though to Clan I am dead." What would happen if they knew that?" Jondalar asked, indicating h a discreet twist of his head the two Clan people who were watch- them. I would not exist to them any more. They would not see me; they uld not let themselves see me. I could stand right in front of them I scream, and they would not hear it. They would think I was a bad ^t trying to trap them into the next world," Ayla said, closing her s and shuddering with the memory. But why did you say you were glad that you still had the spirit ces?" Jondalar asked.

"Because I can't say one thing and mean something else. I can't lie to him. He would know it. But I can refrain from mentioning. That's allowed, out of courtesy, for the sake of privacy. I don't have to say anything about the curse, even though he would probably know I was holding something back, but I can talk about being a medicine woman of the Clan, because it's true. I still am. I still own the spirit pieces " She frowned then, with worry. "But someday I will really die, Jondalar. If I go to the next world with the spirit pieces of everyone in the Clan, what will happen to them?"

"I don't know, Ayla," he said.

She shrugged, putting the thought aside. "Well, it's this world I need to worry about now. If he will accept me as a medicine woman of the Clan, then he won't have to be so concerned about owing a debt to me. It's bad enough for him to owe a kinship debt to one of the Others, but worse if it's a woman, especially one who used a weapon."

"But you hunted when you lived with the Clan," Jondalar reminded her.

"That was a special exception, and only because I survived a moon-cycle curse of death for hunting and using a sling. Brun allowed it because my Cave Lion totem protected me. He thought of it as a testing, and I think it finally gave him a reason to accept a woman with such a strong totem. He's the one who gave me my hunting talisman and called me the Woman Who Hunts."

Ayla touched the leather bag she always wore around her neck, and thought of her first one, the simple drawstring pouch that Iza had made for her. As her mother, Iza had put the piece of red ochre inside it when Ayla was accepted by the Clan. That amulet was nothing like the finely decorated one she wore now, which had been given to her at her Mamutoi adoption ceremony, but it still held her special tokens, including that original piece of red ochre. All the signs her totem had given to her were in it, as well as the red-stained oval from the tip of a mammoth tusk that was her hunting talisman, and the black stone, the small chunk of black manganese dioxide that held the spirit pieces of the Clan, which had been given to her when she became the medicine woman of Brun's clan.

"Jondalar, I think it would help if you would talk to him. He's unsure. His ways are very traditional, and too many unusual things have been going on. If he had a man to talk to, even one of the Others, rather than a woman, it might ease his mind. Do you remember the sign for a man to greet a man?"

Jondalar made a motion, and Ayla nodded. She knew it lacked finesse, but the meaning was clear. "Don't attempt to greet the woman

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et It would be in bad taste, and he might consider it an insult. It is at customary or appropriate for men to talk to women without a good Jason, especially strangers, and you will need his permission even ten. With kin, there are fewer formalities, and a close friend could len relieve his needs—share Pleasures—with her, though it's considered polite to ask his permission first."

'<i>"Ask his permission, but not hers? Why do the women allow themselves to be treated as though they are less important than men?">
>ndalar asked.

"They don't think of it that way. They know, within themselves, that women and men are just as important, but men and women of the Clan are very different from each other," Ayla tried to explain.

;> "Of course they are different. All men and women are different . . . I'm glad to say."

"I don't just mean different in the way you can see. You can do anything a woman can do, Jondalar, except have a baby, and although you are stronger, I can do almost everything you can do. But men of the Clan cannot do many things that women do, just as women cannot do the things that men do. They don't have the memories for it. When I taught myself to hunt, many people were more surprised that I had the same ability to learn, or even the desire, than that I had gone against the tradition of the Clan. It wouldn't have astounded them any more if you had given birth to a baby. I think the women were more surprised than the men. The idea would never occur to a Clan woman."

"I thought you said the people of the Clan and the Others are very much alike," Jondalar said.

"They are. But in some ways, they are more different than you can imagine. Even I can't imagine it, and I was one of them, for a while," Lyia said. "Are you ready to talk to him now?"

"I think so," he said.

The tall, blond man walked toward the powerful, stocky man who was still sitting on the ground, with his thigh bent at an unnatural angle. Ayla followed. Jondalar lowered himself to sit in front of the man, glancing at Ayla, who nodded approval.

He had never been so close to an adult flathead male before, and his first thought was a memory of Rydag. Looking at this man, it was even more obvious that the boy had not been full Clan. As Jondalar recalled the strange, bright, sickly child, he realized that Rydag's features had been greatly modified in comparison—softened was the word that came to him. This man's face was large, both long and wide, and jutted out somewhat, led by a sizable, protruding, sharp nose. His fine-haired beard, which showed signs of having been recently trimmed to a uni-

form length, did not entirely succeed in hiding a rather receding jaw with no chin.

His facial hair blended into a mass of thick, softly curled, liph brown hair covering a huge, long head, that was full and rounded at the back. But the man's heavy brow ridges took up most of his forehead, which sloped back into a hairline that started low. Jondalar had to restrain an urge to reach up and touch his own sharply rising high forehead and domed head. He could understand why they were called flatheads. It was as if someone had taken a head that was shaped like his, but somewhat larger, and made of material as malleable as wet clay, then reshaped it by pushing down and flattening his forehead forcing the bulk of the size toward the back.

The man's heavy brows were accentuated by bushy eyebrows, and his gold-flecked, almost hazel eyes showed curiosity, intelligence, and an undercurrent of pain. Jondalar could understand why Ayla wanted to help him.

Jondalar felt clumsy making the gesture for greeting; but he was heartened by the look of surprise on the face of the man of the Clan, who returned the gesture. Jondalar wasn't sure what to do next. He thought about what he would do if he were meeting any stranger from another Cave or Camp, and he tried to remember the signs he had learned to make with Rydag.

He gestured, "This man is called ..." then spoke his name and primary affiliation, "Jondalar of the Zeiandonii."

It was too melodic, too full of syllables, too much for the man of the Clan to hear all at once. He shook his head, as if trying to unplug his ear, inclined his head, as though it would help him to listen better, then tapped Jondalar's chest.

It wasn't hard to understand what he meant, Jondalar thought. He made the signs again for "This man is called ..." then spoke his name, but only his given name, and more slowly, "Jondalar."

The man closed his eyes, concentrating, then opened them and, taking a breath, spoke out loud, "Dyondar."

Jondalar smiled, and nodded yes. There was a deep-voiced, not fully articulated quality to the word, and a sense of swallowing the vowels, but it was close enough. And strangely familiar. Then it came to him. Of course! Ayla! Her words still had that same quality, though not nearly as strong. That was her unusual accent. No wonder no one could identify it. She had a Clan accent, and no one knew they could talk!

Ayla was surprised at how well the man had said Jondalar's name- She doubted if she had said it that well the first time she tried, and she

ordered if this man had had contact with Others before. If he had
been chosen to represent his people, or make some form of contact
with the ones known as the Others, it would be an indication of high
status. All the more reason, she understood, for him to be wary of
establishing bonds with Others, especially Others of unknown status. He
did not want to devalue his own status, but an obligation was an
obligation, and whether he or his mate was ready to admit it, they still
needed help. Somehow she had to convince him that they were Others
who understood the significance and were worthy of the association.
The man facing Jondalar slapped his chest once, then leaned forward
and said, "Guban," he said.

Jondalar had as much trouble repeating his name as Guban had had
with "Jondalar," and Guban was as generous in accepting the tall man's
mispronunciation as Jondalar had been of his.

Ayla felt relieved. An exchange of names wasn't much, but it was a
start. She glanced at the woman, still startled to see hair coloring
darker than her own on a woman of the Clan. Her head was covered
with a fluff of soft curls, so light that it was almost white, but she was
young and very attractive. Probably a second woman at his hearth.
Suban was a man in his prime, and this woman was probably from a
different clan, and quite a prize.

The woman looked at Ayla, then away quickly. Ayla wondered
what she had seen worry and fear in the woman's eyes and looked more
closely, but with as much subtlety as the young Clan woman had used.
Was there a thickening at the waist? Did her wrap fit a little tight
across her breasts? She's pregnant! No wonder she's worried. A man
with a badly healed broken leg would no longer be in his prime. And
if this man might have high status, he no doubt had heavy respon- sibilities as well. Somehow,
Ayla thought, she had to convince Guban
to let her help him.

The two men had been sitting watching each other. Jondalar was
not sure what to do next, and Guban was waiting to see what he would
do. Finally, in desperation, he turned to her.

"This woman is Ayla," he said, using his simple signs and then
speaking her name.

At first Ayla thought he might have committed a social blunder, but
seeing Guban's reaction, decided perhaps not. Introducing her so
openly was an indication of the high esteem in which she was held,
inappropriate for a medicine woman. Then, as he continued, she won-
dered if he had seen into her thoughts.

Ayla is healer. Very good healer. Good medicine. Want help
Suban."

To the man of the Clan, Jondalar's signs were hardly more than baby talk. There were no nuances to his meaning, no suggestive shadings, no degrees of complexity, but his sincerity was clear. It was a surprise in itself to discover a man of the Others who could speak properly at all. Most of them chattered, or muttered, or growled like animals. They were like children in their excessive use of sound but then, the Others weren't considered very bright.

The woman, on the other hand, had a surprising depth of understanding with a fine grasp of nuance; and a clear and expressive ability to communicate. With inconspicuous finesse, she had translated some of Dyondar's subtler meanings, easing their communication without embarrassment to anyone. As difficult as it was to believe that she had been raised by a clan and had traveled such a great distance, she was so adept at speaking that one could almost believe she was Clan.

Guban had never heard of the clan of whom the woman spoke, and he knew many, but the common language she had used was quite unfamiliar. Even the language of the clan of his yellow-hair was not as strange, yet this woman of the Others knew the ancient sacred signs and could use them with great skill and precision. Rare for a woman. There was a suggestion that she might be withholding something, though he couldn't be certain. She was, after all, a woman of the Others, and he wouldn't ask in any case. Women, especially medicine women, liked to keep a few things to themselves.

The pain of his broken leg throbbed and threatened to escape his control, and he had to focus on holding it in for a time.

But how could she be a medicine woman? She wasn't Clan. She had no memories for it. Dyondar claimed she was a healer, and he spoke of her skill with great conviction . . . and his leg was broken--Guban flinched inwardly, then gritted his teeth. Perhaps she was a healer; the Others had to have them, too, but that didn't make her a medicine woman of the Clan. His obligation was already so great. A kinship debt to this man would be bad enough, but to a woman, and a woman who used a weapon?

Yet where would he and his yellow-hair be without their help? His yellow-hair . . . and expecting a young one already. The thought of her made him feel soft inside. He had felt anger beyond anything he had ever known when those men went after her, hurting her, trying to take her. That was why he had jumped down from the top of the rock. It had taken him a long time to climb to the top, and he couldn't wait that long to get back down.

He had seen deer tracks and had climbed up to look around, to see what he might hunt, while she collected inner bark and set traps

e that would soon be rising. She had said it would warm soon, Hugh some of the others hadn't believed her. She was still a stranger, ^jhe said she had the memories for it and knew. He wanted to let prove it to the others, so he had agreed to take her out, though he w the dangers . . . from those men.

tut it was cold, and he thought they'd avoid them if they stayed g to the icetop. The top of the rock seemed like a good place to Kut the area. The agonizing pain when he landed hard and felt his f snap made him dizzy, but he could not succumb. The men were top of him, and he had to fight them, pain or no. He felt warmed Kiembering how she had rushed to him. He had been surprised to e her hitting at those men. He had never known a woman to do that, Bd he would never tell anyone, but it had pleased him that she had Red so hard to help him.

B'He shifted his weight, controlling the sharp stab of pain. But it jbsn't so much the pain. He had learned long ago to resist pain. Other its were harder to control. What would happen if he could never llk again? A broken leg or arm could take a long time to heal, and if ; bones mended wrong, twisted, or misshapen, or too short . . . |hat if he couldn't hunt?

If he couldn't hunt, he would lose status. He would no longer be ader. He had promised the leader of her clan to take care of her. She id been a favorite, but his status was great, and she wanted to go Jnth him. She even told him, in the privacy of their own furs, that she lad wished for him.

I His first woman had not been too happy when he came home with (young and beautiful second woman, but she was a good Clan woman. |he had taken good care of his hearth, and she would keep the status if First Woman. He promised to take care of her and her two daugh- lers. He hadn't minded that. Though he had always wished she would tove a son, the daughters of his mate were a delight to have around the tearth, though they would soon be grown and gone.

f, But if he couldn't hunt, he wouldn't be able to take care of anyone. wsk an old man, the clan would have to take care of him instead. And bs beautiful yellow-hair, who might give birth to a son, how could he >ke care of her? She would have no trouble finding a man willing to ake her, but he would lose her.

He could not even get back to the clan if he couldn't walk. She Could have to go for help, and they would have to come and get him. » he couldn't make it back on his own, he would be less in the eyes of tts clan, but it would be so much worse if the broken leg slowed him town and he lost his skill at hunting, or could never hunt again.

Perhaps I should talk to this healer of the Others, he thought, even if she is a woman who uses a weapon. Her status must be high, Dyondar holds her in high regard, and his must be high, or he would not be mated to a medicine woman. She had made those other men leave as much as the man . . . she and the wolf. Why would a wolf help them? He had seen her talking to the animal. The signal was simple and direct, she told him to wait over there, by the tree near the horses, but the wolf understood her and did it. He was still there, waiting. Guban looked away. It was difficult even to think about those animals without feeling a deep, underlying fear of spirits. What else would draw the wolf or the horses to them? What else would make animals behave so . . . unlike animals?

He could tell his yellow-hair was worried; how could he blame her? Since Dyondar had seen fit to acknowledge his woman, perhaps it would be appropriate to mention his. He would not want them to think the status she gained from him was any less than Dyondar's. Guban made a very subtle motion to the woman who had watched and seen everything, but, like a good Clan woman, had managed to make herself very inconspicuous.

"This woman is . . ." he motioned, then tapped her shoulder and said, "Yorga."

Jondalar had the impression of two swallows separated by a rolled R. He could not even begin to reproduce the sound. Ayla saw his struggle, and she had to think of a way to gracefully handle the situation. She repeated her name in a way Jondalar could say it, but addressed her as a woman.

"Yorga," adding with signs, "this woman greets you. This woman is called . . ." and very slowly and carefully said, "Ayla." Then in both signs and words, so Jondalar could understand, "The man named Dyondar would also greet the woman of Guban."

It was not the way it would have been done in the Clan, Guban thought, but then these people were Others, and it was not offensive. He was curious to see what Yorga would do.

She nicked her eyes in Jondalar's direction, very briefly, then looked back down at the ground. Guban shifted position just enough to let her know he was pleased. She had acknowledged Dyondar's existence, but no more.

Jondalar was less subtle. He had never been so close to Clan people . . . and he was fascinated. His look took much longer. Her features were similar to Guban's, with feminine modifications, and he had noticed before that she was sturdy but short, the height of a girl. She was far from beautiful, at least in his opinion, except for her pa

^1Q

How, downy-soft fluff of curls, but he could understand why Guban
At think so. Suddenly mindful of Guban watching him, he nodded
rfunctorily, then looked away. The Clan man was glowering; he
mid have to be careful.

Ruban hadn't liked the attention Jondalar had paid to his woman,
K he did sense there was no lack of respect intended, and he was
ring more difficulty controlling his pain. He needed to know more
gut this healer.

"I would speak to your . . . healer, Dyondar," Guban signed.
fcdalar got the sense of his meaning and nodded. Ay la had been
tching, quickly came forward, and sat in respectful posture in front
Itfae man.

"Dyondar has said the woman is a healer. The woman says medicine
Oman. Guban would know how a woman of the Others can be a
cdicine woman of the Clan."

Ayla spoke as she made the signs, so that Jondalar would understand
Bcdy what she was telling Guban. "The woman who took me in,
10 raised me, was a medicine woman of highest rank. Iza came from
ost ancient line of medicine woman. Iza was like mother to this
Oman, trained this woman with the daughter born to the line," Ayla
Epiained. She could see he was skeptical but interested in knowing
|ore. "Iza knew this woman did not have the memories as her true
laughter did."

t Guban nodded, of course not.

| "Iza made this woman remember, made this woman tell Iza over and
liver, show over and over, until the medicine woman knew this woman
Kould not lose the memories. This woman was happy to practice, to
Bpeat many times to learn the ways of a medicine woman."

f Although her gestures remained stylized and formal, her words be-
attne less so as she continued her explanation.

"Iza told me she thought this woman came from a long line of med- dne women, too, medicine women
of the Others. Iza said I thought

lie a medicine woman, but she taught me how to think about medicine
Bte a woman of the Clan. This woman was not born with the memo-
esofa medicine woman, but Iza's memories are my memories now."

Ayla had everyone's attention. "Iza got sick, a coughing sickness that
ot even she could heal, and I began to do more. Even the leader was
tteased when I treated a burn, but Iza gave status to the clan. When
he was too sick to make the trip to the Clan Gathering, and her true
laughter was still too young, the leader and the Mog-ur decided to
Qake me medicine woman. They said that since I had her memories, I
^as a medicine woman of her line. The other mog-urs and leaders at

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the Clan Gathering didn't like the idea at first, but they finally accepted me, too."

Ayla could see Guban was interested, and she sensed he wanted to believe her, but he still had doubts. She took off the decorated bao from around her neck, untied the cords, and spilled out some of the contents into her palm, then picked out a small black stone and held it out to him.

Guban knew what it was, the black stone that would leave a mark was a mystery. Even the smallest piece could hold a tiny fraction of the spirits of all the people of the Clan, and was given to a medicine woman when a piece of hers was taken. The amulet she wore was strange, he thought, typical of the way the Others made things, but he hadn't known they wore amulets at all. Maybe the Others weren't all ignorant and brutish.

Guban noticed another of the objects from her amulet and pointed to it. "What is that?"

Ayla put the rest of her objects back in her amulet and put it down so she could answer. "It is my hunting talisman," she said.

That could not be true, Guban thought. This would prove her wrong. "Women of the Clan do not hunt."

"I know, but I was not born to the Clan. I was chosen by a Clan totem who protected me and led me to the clan that became mine, and my totem wanted me to hunt. Our mog-ur reached back and found the old spirits who told him. They made a special ceremony. I was called the Woman Who Hunts."

"What is this Clan totem that chose you?"

Much to Guban's surprise, Ayla lifted her tunic, unloosened the drawstring ties from around the waist of her leggings, and lowered the side enough to show her left thigh. Four parallel lines, the scars left by the claws that had raked her thigh when she was a girl, showed clearly.

"My totem is the Cave Lion."

The Clan woman caught her breath. The totem was too strong for a woman. It would be difficult for her to have children.

Guban grunted acknowledgment. The Cave Lion was the strongest hunting totem, a man's totem. He had never known a woman to have it, yet those were the marks that were cut into the right thigh of a boy whose totem was the Cave Lion, after he'd made his first major kill and become a man. "It is on the left leg. The mark is put on a man's right leg."

"I am a woman, not a man. The woman's side is the left side."

"Your mog-ur marked you there?"

"The Cave Lion himself marked me, when I was a girl, just before my clan found me."

'That would explain using the weapon," Guban signed, "but what
|>ut children? Does this man with hair the color of Yorga's have a
jyn strong enough to overcome such a totem?"

gbdndalar looked uncomfortable. He had wondered something like
|t himself.

^The Cave Lion also chose him, and left his mark. I know because
lie Mog-ur told me the Cave Lion chose me, and put the marks on
'y leg to show it, just as the Cave Bear chose him, and took his
' >>

re .

iGuban sat up, visibly shaken. He slipped out of the formal language,
It Ay la understood him.

"Mogor One-Eye! You know Mogor One-Eye?"

"I lived at his hearth. He raised me. He and Iza were siblings, and
ter her mate died, he took her and her children in. At the Clan
athering, he was called the Mog-ur, but to those who lived at his
arth, he was Creb."

"Even at our Clan Gatherings, there is talk of Mogor One-Eye, and
s powerful ..." He was going to say more, but thought better of it.
.en were not supposed to talk about the private esoteric male cere-
onies around women. That would explain her skill with the ancient
ps', too, if she was taught by Mogor One-Eye. And Guban did recall
at the great Mogor One-Eye had a sibling who was a respected
edicine woman from an ancient line. Suddenly Guban seemed to
lax, and he allowed a fleeting look of pain to cloud his face. He took
deep breath, then looked at Ayla, who was sitting cross-legged, look-
g down, in the position of a proper Clan woman. He tapped her
oulder.

"Respected medicine woman, this man has a ... small problem,"
uban signaled in the ancient silent language of the Clan of the Cave
;ar. "This man would ask the medicine woman to look at leg. The
], may be broken."

Ayla closed her eyes and let out her breath. She had managed to
nvince him. He would allow her to treat his leg. She signaled to
irga, telling her to prepare a sleeping place for him. The broken bone
d not pierced the skin, and she thought there was a good chance that
' would have full use of it again, but for the leg to heal properly, she
ould have to straighten it, set it back in place, and then she would
ike a birchbark cast to hold it stiff, so he could not move it.

"It will be painful to straighten it, but I have something that will
lax the leg, and make him sleep." Then she turned to Jondalar. "Will
'u move our camp here? I know it's a chore with all those burning
Mies, but I want to set up the tent for him. They didn't plan to be
ne overnight, and he needs to be out of the cold, especially when I

give him something to sleep. We'll need some firewood, too, I don't want to use the burning stones, and we'll need to cut some wood for splints. I'll get birchbark when he's asleep, and maybe I can make some crutches for him. He'll want to move around later."

Jondalar watched her take charge, and he smiled to himself. Hp hated the delay, even one more day seemed too much, but he wanted to help, too. Besides, Ayla wouldn't leave now. He just hoped they wouldn't be there too long.

Jondalar took the horses to their first camp, repacked, moved, and unpacked again, then led Whinney and Racer to a clearing where they could search out dried grass. There was some standing hay, but more flat against the ground under old snow. It was a little distance from their new location, but out of sight so the animals would trouble the Clan people less. They seemed to think that the tame animals were another manifestation of the strange behavior of Others, but Ayla noticed that both Guban and Yorga seemed relieved when the unnaturally complaisant horses were out of sight, and she was pleased that Jondalar had thought of it.

As soon as he returned, Ayla got her medicine bag out of a pack basket. For all that he had decided to accept her help as a medicine woman, Guban was relieved to see her old Clan-style otter-skin medicine bag, functional and not decorated. She made a point of keeping Wolf out of the way as well, and strangely, the animal, though usually curious and approachable by people whom Ayla and Jondalar had made friends with, showed no inclination to befriend the people of the Clan. He seemed content to stay in the background, watchful, though in no way menacing, and Ayla wondered if he sensed their uneasiness about him.

Jondalar helped Yorga and Ayla move Guban into the tent. He was surprised at how much the man weighed, but the sheer volume of muscle in a body so strong that six men could barely hold it down, was bound to add weight. Jondalar also realized that the move was very painful, though Guban's impassive face showed no sign of it. The man's refusal to admit pain made Jondalar wonder if he felt it as much, until Ayla explained that such stoic denial was ingrained in Clan men from boyhood. Jondalar's respect for the man increased. His was not a race of weaklings.

The woman was amazingly strong, too, smaller than the man but not greatly so. She could lift as much as Jondalar could, and when she chose to exert force, the grip of her hand was unbelievably powerful, yet he'd seen her use her hands with fine precision and control. W

. becoming intrigued with discovering the similarities between people of the Clan and his own kind, as well as the differences. He wasn't exactly when it happened, but at some point he realized that he anger questioned in any way the fact that they were human. They are different, certainly, but most definitely the people of the Clan are people, not animals.

Ayla ended up using a few of the burning stones after all to make a better fire to prepare the datura more quickly, adding hot cooking oil directly to the water to make it boil. But Guban resisted drinking all that she felt he should, claiming that he didn't like the idea of drinking too long for its effects to wear off, but she wondered if part of the problem was his doubt whether she could prepare the datura properly. With help from both Yorga and Jondalar, Ayla set the leg, and then made a sturdy splint. When it was all over, Guban finally slept. Yorga insisted on making the meal, although Jondalar's interest in the processes and tastes embarrassed her. At night, by the fire, he was whittling out a pair of crutches for Guban, while Ayla enjoyed being acquainted with Yorga and explained to her how to make medicine for pain. Ayla described the use of crutches and the need for padding (adding under the arms. Yorga was constantly surprised at Ayla's knowledge of the Clan and Clan ways, but she had noticed her Clan accent" earlier. Eventually she told Ayla about herself, and Ayla translated for Jondalar.

Yorga wanted to get inner bark and tap certain trees. Guban had come along to protect her because so many women had been attacked by Charoli's band that no women were allowed to go out alone any more, which was a hardship on the clan. Men had less time to hunt since they had to spend time accompanying women. That was why Guban decided to climb the big rock, to look for animals to hunt while Yorga collected inner bark. Charoli's men probably thought she was alone, and they might not have attacked if they had seen Guban, but when he saw them attack her, he jumped off the wall to her defense. "I'm surprised all he broke was one leg," Jondalar said, looking up at the top of the wall.

"Clan bones are very heavy," Ayla said, "and thick. They don't break very easily."

"Those men didn't have to be so rough with me," Yorga commented, with signs. "I would have assumed the position if they had given me the signal, and if I hadn't heard his scream. I knew something was very wrong then."

She continued with the story. Several men attacked Guban, while three tried to force Yorga. From his scream of pain, she knew some-

thing was wrong with Guban, so she tried to get away from the mp
That's when the other two held her down. Then suddenly Jondal
was there, hitting the men of the Others, and the wolf jumped at them
and was biting them.

She looked at Ay la slyly. "Your man is very tall, and his nose is very
small, but when I saw him there fighting the other men, this woman
could think of him as a child."

Ay la looked puzzled, and then she smiled.

"I didn't quite understand what she said, or what she meant," Jon-
dalar said.

"She made a little joke."

"A joke?" he said. He didn't think they were capable of making
jokes.

"What she said, more or less, is that even though you are an ugly
man, when you came to her rescue, she could have kissed you," Ayla
said, then explained to Yorga.

The woman looked embarrassed, but glanced toward Jondalar, then
looked again at Ayla. "I am grateful to your tall man. Perhaps, if the
child I carry is a boy, and if Guban will allow me to suggest a name, I
will say to him, Dyondar is not such a bad name."

"That wasn't a joke, was it, Ayla?" Jondalar said, surprised at the
sudden rush of feeling.

"No, I don't think that was a joke, but she can only suggest, and it
could be a difficult name for a boy of the Clan to grow up with because
it's unusual. Guban might be willing, though. He's exceptionally open
to new ideas, for a man of the Clan. Yorga told me about their mating,
and I think they fell in love, which is quite rare. Most matings are
planned and arranged."

"What makes you think they fell in love?" Jondalar asked. He was
interested in hearing a Clan love story.

"Yorga is Guban's second woman. Her clan lives quite far from here,
but he went there to bring word of a large Clan Gathering, and plans
to discuss us, the Others. Charoli bothering their women, for one thing
--I told her about the Losadunai plans to put a stop to them--but if I
understand it right, some group of Others have approached a couple of
clans about some trading."

"That's a surprise!"

"Yes. Communication is the biggest problem, but men of the Clan,
including Guban, don't trust the Others. While Guban was visiting
the distant clan, he saw Yorga, and she saw him. Guban wanted her,
but the reason he gave was to establish closer ties with some of the
distant clans, so they could share news, particularly about all these

^ ideas. He brought her back with him! Men of the Clan don't do at. Most of them would have made an intention known to the leader, turned and discussed it with his own clan, and given his first woman chance to get used to the idea of sharing her hearth with another Wnan," Ayla said.

"The first woman at his hearth didn't know? That's a brave man," Jondalar said.

"His first woman had two daughters; he wants a woman who will die a son. Men of the Clan put great store in the sons of their mates, and, of course, Yorga hopes the baby she is carrying will be the boy she wants. She has had some trouble getting used to the new clan--they've been slow to accept her--and if Guban's leg doesn't heal properly, and he loses status, she's afraid they will blame her."

"No wonder she seemed so upset."

Ayla refrained from mentioning to Jondalar that she had told Yorga she was on her way to her man's home, away from her people, too. Jondalar didn't see any reason to add to his worries, but she was still concerned about how his people would accept her.

Ayla and Yorga both wished it was possible to visit with each other and share their experiences. They felt they were almost kin, since there is probably a kinship debt between Guban and Jondalar, and Yorga is closer to Ayla, in the brief time they had known each other, than any of the other women she had met. But Clan and Others didn't sit.

Guban woke up in the middle of the night, but he was still groggy. The next morning he was alert, but his reaction to the stresses of the previous day left him exhausted. When Jondalar ducked his head in the tent in the afternoon, Guban was surprised at how glad he was to see the tall man, but he didn't know what to make of the crutches he held.

"I use same thing after lion attack me," Jondalar explained. "Help me walk."

Guban was suddenly interested and wanted to try them, but Ayla would not allow it. It was too soon. Guban finally acquiesced, but only after announcing that he would try them the next day. In the evening, Yorga let Ayla know that Guban wanted to talk to Jondalar about some very important matters and was requesting her help with translation. Ayla knew it was serious, guessed what it was about, and talked to Jondalar in advance so she could help him to understand what the B&C duties might be. Guban was still concerned about owing a kinship debt to Ayla, beyond the acceptable medicine woman spirit exchange, since she had saved his life using a weapon.

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"We need to convince him that the debt is owed to you, Jondalar. If you tell him that you are my mate, you could tell him that since you have responsibility for me, any debts owed to me are actually owed to you."

Jondalar agreed, and after some preliminaries to establish procedures, they began the more serious discussion. "Ayla is my mate she belongs to me," he said, while Ayla translated with the full range of subtleties. "I am responsible for her, debts owed to her are owed to me." Then, to her surprise, Jondalar added, "I, too, have an obligation that weighs on my spirit. I owe a kinship debt to the Clan."

Guban was curious.

"The debt has weighed heavily on my spirit because I haven't known how to repay it."

"Tell me about it," Guban signed. "Perhaps I can help."

"I was attacked by a cave lion, as Ayla mentioned. Marked, chosen by the Cave Lion, which is now my totem. It was Ayla who found me. I was near death, and my brother, who was with me, already walked the spirit world."

"I am sorry to hear that. It is hard to lose a brother."

Jondalar only nodded. "If Ayla had not found me, I, too, would be dead, but when Ayla was a child, and near death, the Clan took her in and raised her. If the Clan had not taken Ayla in when she was a child, she would not have lived. If Ayla had not lived and been taught to heal by a Clan medicine woman, I would not be alive. I would be walking in the next world now. I owe my life to the Clan, but I don't know how to pay that debt, or to whom."

Guban nodded with great sympathy. It was a serious problem and a large debt.

"I would make a request of Guban," Jondalar continued. "Since Guban owes a kinship debt to me, I ask him to accept my kinship debt to the Clan in exchange."

The man of the Clan considered the request gravely, but he was grateful to learn of the problem. Exchanging a kinship debt was far more acceptable than simply owing his life to a man of the Others, and giving him a piece of his spirit. Finally he nodded. "Guban will accept the exchange," he said, feeling great relief.

Guban took his amulet from around his neck and opened it. He shook the contents into his hand and picked out one of the objects, a tooth, one of his own first molars. Though he had no cavities, his teeth were worn down in a peculiar way, mainly because he used them as a tool. The tooth in his hand was worn, but not nearly so badly as his permanent teeth.

"Please accept this as a token of kinship," Guban said.

Jondalar was embarrassed. He hadn't realized there would be an exchange of some personal token to mark the exchange of debts, and he didn't know what to give to the man of the Clan that would be as meaningful. They were traveling very light, and he had very little to offer. Suddenly it came to him.

He took a pouch from a loop of his belt and poured its contents into his hand. Guban looked surprised. In Jondalar's hand were several bones and two canine teeth of a cave bear, the cave bear he had killed the previous summer shortly after they had started on their long journey. He held out one of the teeth. "Please accept this as a token of

restraint."

Guban restrained his eagerness. A cave bear tooth was a powerful token, it bestowed high status, and the giving of one showed great honor. It pleased him to think that this man of the Others had acknowledged his position, and the debt he owed the entire Clan so appropriately. It would make the proper impression when he told the rest about this exchange. He accepted the token of kinship, closed it inside his pouch, and gripped it firmly.

"Good!" Guban said with finality, as though completing a trade.

Then he made a request. "Since we are now kin, perhaps we should discuss now the location of each other's clan, and the territory they use." Jondalar described the general location of his homeland. Most of the territory across the glacier was Zeiandonii or related, and then he described specifically the Ninth Cave of the Zeiandonii. Guban described his homeland, and Ayla got the impression they were not as far from each other as she had supposed.

Charoli's name came up before they were through. Jondalar talked about the problems the young man had been creating for everyone, and he explained in some detail what they planned to do to stop him. Guban thought the information was important enough to tell the others, and he wondered to himself if his broken leg might not turn out to be a great asset.

If Guban would have much to tell to his clan. Not only that the Others themselves had problems with the man, and planned to do something about it, but that some of the Others were willing to fight their own land to help people of the Clan. There were also some who could speak properly! A woman who could communicate very well, and a man with limited but useful ability, which in some ways could be more valuable because he was a male, and he was now kin. Such contact with Others, and the insights and knowledge about them, could bring Guban even more status, especially if he had full use of his leg again.

Ayla applied the birchbark cast in the evening. Guban went to bed feeling very good. And his leg hardly pained him at all.

Ayla woke up in the morning feeling very uneasy. She had a strange dream again, very vivid, with caves and Creb in it. She mentioned it to Jondalar; then they talked about how they were going to get Guban back to his people. Jondalar suggested the horses, but he was very worried about delaying any longer. Ayla felt that Guban would never consent. The tame horses upset him.

When they got up, they helped Guban out of the tent, and while Ayla and Yorga prepared a morning meal, Jondalar demonstrated the crutches. Guban insisted on trying, over Ayla's objections, and after a little practicing, was surprised at how effective they were. He could actually walk without putting any weight on his leg.

"Yorga," Guban called to his woman, after he put the crutches down, "make ready to leave. After the morning meal, we will go. It is time to return to the clan."

"It's too soon," Ayla said, using the Clan gestures at the same time.

"You need to rest your leg, or it will not heal properly."

"My leg will rest while I walk with these." He motioned toward the crutches.

"If you must go now, you can ride one of the horses," Jondalar said.

Guban looked startled. "No! Guban walks on own legs. With the help of these walking sticks. We will share one more meal with new kin, and then we go."

After sharing their morning meal, both couples prepared to
» their separate ways. When Guban and Yorga were ready, they
mply looked at Jondalar and Ayla for a moment, avoiding the wolf
(d two horses packed with gear. Then, leaning on his crutches,
uban began hobbling away. Yorga fell in behind him.
There were no goodbyes, no thank-yous; such concepts were foreign
the people of the Clan. It wasn't customary to comment on one's
sparture, it was obvious, and acts of assistance or kindness, especially
from kin, were expected. Understood obligations required no thanks,
dy reciprocity, should it ever be necessary. Ayla knew how difficult
could be if Guban ever had to reciprocate. In his mind, he owed
.em more than he might ever be able to repay. He had been given
ore than his life; he had been given a chance to retain his position,
s status, which meant more to him than simply being alive--espe- rily if that meant living as a
cripple.

"I hope they don't have far to go. Traveling any distance on those
alking sticks is not easy," Jondalar said. "I hope he makes it."

"He'll make it," Ayla said, "no matter how far it is. Even without
e walking sticks, he would get back, if he had to crawl the whole
ay. Don't worry, Jondalar. Guban is a man of the Clan. He will
ake it ... or die in the trying."

Jondalar's brow wrinkled into a thoughtful frown. He watched Ayla
he Whinney's lead rope; then he shook his head and found Racer's.
^ spite of the difficulty for Guban, he had to admit he was glad they
id refused his offer of riding back to their clan on the horses. There
id been too many delays already.

From their campsite, they continued riding through open woods
ttil they reached a high point; then they stopped and looked out over
e way they had come. Tall pines, standing straight as sentinels,
larded the banks of the Mother River for a long distance back; a
Hiding column of trees leading away from the legion of conifers they
'uld see below, spreading out over the flanks of the mountains that
owed close from the south.

Ahead their uphill climb temporarily leveled off, and an extension of the pine forest, starting at the river, marched across a small valley. They dismounted to lead the horses into the dense woodland and entered a twilight space of profound and eerie silence. Straight dark boles supported a low canopy of spreading long-needed boughs that blocked sunlight and inhibited undergrowth. A layer of brown needles, accumulating for centuries, muffled both footsteps and hoofbeats.

Ayla noticed a collection of mushrooms at the base of a tree, and she knelt to examine them. They were frozen solid, caught by a sudden frost of the previous autumn that had never let up. But no snow had filtered in to betray the season. It was as though the time of harvest had been captured and held in suspension, preserved in the still cold forest. Wolf appeared beside her and pushed his muzzle into her ungloved hand. She rubbed the top of his head, noticed his steamy breath and then her own, and had a fleeting impression that their small company of travelers were the only things alive.

On the far side of the valley, the climb became precipitous and shimmery silver fir appeared, accented by stately deep green spruce. The long-needed pines became stunted with increasing elevation and finally disappeared, leaving the spruce and fir to march beside the Middle Mother.

As he rode, Jondalar's thoughts kept returning to the Clan people they had met--he would never again be able to think about them as anything other than people. I need to convince my brother. Perhaps he could try to make contact with them--if he is still leader. When they stopped to rest and make some hot tea, Jondalar spoke his thoughts out loud.

"When we get home, I'm going to talk to Joharran about the Clan people, Ayla. If other people can trade with them, we could, too, and he should know that they are meeting with distant clans to discuss the troubles they are having with us," Jondalar said. "It could mean trouble and I would not want to fight the likes of Guban."

"I don't think there is any hurry. It will take a long time for them to reach any decisions. Change is difficult for them," Ayla said.

"What about trading--do you think they would be willing?"

"I think Guban would be more willing than most. He's interested in knowing more about us, and he was willing to try the walking sticks, even if he wouldn't ride the horses. Bringing home such an unusual woman from a faraway clan shows something about him, too. He was taking a chance, even if she is beautiful."

"Do you think she is beautiful?"

Don't you?"

(I can see why Guban would think so," Jondalar said.

B guess what a man considers beautiful depends on who he is," she

es, and I think you are beautiful."

smiled, making him all the more convinced of her beauty. "I'm
d you think so."

'It is true, you know. Remember all the attention you got at the
Either Ceremony? Did I ever tell you how glad I was that you picked
|?" he said, smiling at the memory.

|She recalled something he had said to Guban. "Well, I belong to
Id don't I?" she said, then grinned. "It's good that you don't know
|an language too well. Guban would have seen that you were not
leaking true when you said I was your mate."

"No, he wouldn't. We may not have had a Matrimonial yet, but in
y heart, we are mated. It wasn't a lie," Jondalar said.

Ayla was moved. "I, too, feel that way," she said softly, looking
>wn because she wanted to show deference to the emotions that filled
|er. "I have since the valley."

| Jondalar felt such a fierce surge of love fill him that he thought he
|buld burst. He reached for her and took her in his arms, feeling at
hat moment, with those few words, that he had experienced a Mating
ceremonial. It didn't matter if he ever had one that would be recog-
Bzed by his people. He would go through with it, to please Ayla, but
ie didn't need it. He only needed to get her home safely.

1A. Sudden gust of wind chilled Jondalar, driving away the flush of
Nrmth he had felt and leaving him with a strange ambivalence. He
^E>t up and, walking away from the warmth of the small fire, took a
(eep breath. It left him gasping as the desiccating, freezing air seared
Bs lungs. He ducked behind his fur hood and pulled it tight around
US face to allow his body heat to warm the air he breathed. Though
he last thing he wanted to feel was a warm wind, he knew such bitter
sold was extremely dangerous.

To the north of them the great continental glacier had dipped southd,
as though straining to encompass the beautiful icy mountains
Whin its overwhelming frozen embrace. They were in the most frigid
hid on earth, between the glistening mountain tors and the immense
lorthem ice, and it was the depths of winter. The air itself was sucked
"y by the moisture-stealing glaciers greedily usurping every drop to
Increase their bloated, bedrock-crushing mass, building up reserves to
Withstand the onslaught of summer heat.

The battle between glacial cold and melting warmth for control of

the Great Mother Earth was almost at a standstill, but the tide was turning; the glacier was gaining. It would make one more advance, and reach its farthest southward point, before it was beaten back to polar lands. But even there, it would only bide its time.

As they continued to mount the highland, each moment seemed colder than the one before. Their increasing altitude was bringing them inexorably closer to their rendezvous with ice. Fodder was getting harder for the horses to find. The sere withered grass near the stream of solid ice was flat against the frozen ground. The only snow was made up of hard dry stinging grains, whipped by driving wind. They rode silently, but after they made camp and were cuddled together warmly within their tent, they talked.

"Yorga's hair is beautiful," Ay la said, snuggling into their furs.

"Yes, it is," Jondalar said, with honest conviction.

"I wish Iza could have seen it, or anyone from Brun's clan. They always thought my hair was so unusual, though Iza always said it was my best feature. It used to be light like hers, but it's darker now."

"I love the color of your hair, Ay la, and the way it falls in waves when you wear it loose," Jondalar commented, touching a strand next to her face.

"I didn't know people of the Clan lived so far away from the peninsula."

Jondalar could tell her mind was not on hair, or on anything close and personal. She was thinking about the Clan people, as he had been earlier.

"Guban looks different, though. He seems ... I don't know, it's hard to explain. His brows are heavier, his nose is bigger, his face is more . . . out. Everything about him seems more . . . pronounced, more Clan, in a way. I think he is even more muscular than Brun was. He didn't seem to notice the cold as much, either. His skin was warm to the touch even when he was lying on the frozen ground. And his heart beat faster."

"Maybe they've gotten used to cold. Laduni said a lot of them live north of here, and it hardly gets warm at all up there, even in summer, Jondalar said.

"You may be right. They think alike, though. What made you tell Guban you were repaying a kinship debt to the Clan? It was the best argument you could have made."

"I'm not sure. It's true, though. I do owe my life to the Clan. If they hadn't taken you in, you wouldn't be alive, and then neither would I.

"And by giving him that cave bear tooth, you could not have given

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im a better token. You were quick to understand their ways, Jonda-
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"Their ways are not so different. The Zeiandonii are careful about
iHgations, too. Any obligations left unpaid when you go to the next
orid can give the one you owe control over your spirit. I've heard
at a few of Those Who Serve the Mother try to keep people in their
ebt so they can control their spirits, but it's probably just talk. Just
ccause people say things doesn't mean they're true," the man said.

j "Guban believes that his spirit and yours are now intertwined, in
Us life and the next. A piece of your spirit will always be with him,
let as a piece of his will always be with you. That's why he was so
Micemed. He lost his piece when you saved his life, but you gave him
Be back, so there is no hole, no emptiness."

"I wasn't the only one who saved his life. You did as much as I did,
nd more."

"But I am a woman, and a woman of the Clan is not the same as a
lan of the Clan. It is not an even exchange because one cannot do
fba.t the other does. They don't have the memories for it."

"But you set his leg and fixed it so he could get back."

"He would have gotten back; I wasn't worried about that. I was
fraid his leg wouldn't heal right. Then he wouldn't be able to hunt."

"Is it so bad not to hunt? Couldn't he do something else? Like those
'Armunai boys?"

"The status of a Clan man depends on his ability to hunt, and his
atus means more to him than his life. Guban has responsibilities. He
as two women at his hearth. His first woman has two daughters, and
orga is pregnant. He promised to care for all of them."

"What if he can't?" Jondalar asked. "What will happen to them?"

"They wouldn't starve, his clan would take care of them, but their
atus—the way they live, their food and clothes, the respect they are
lown—depends on his status. And he would lose Yorga. She's young
id beautiful, another man would be glad to take her, but if she has
ie son Guban has always wanted, she would take him with her."

"What happens when he gets too old to hunt?"

"An old man can give up hunting slowly, gracefully. He would go
»live with the sons of his mate, or the daughters if they were still
ving with the same clan, and he wouldn't be a burden on the whole
'an. Zoug developed his skill with a sling so he could still contribute,
id even Dorv's advice was still valued, though he could hardly see.
ut Guban is a man in his prime, and a leader. To lose it all at once
'ould take the heart out of him."

Jondalar nodded. "I think I understand. Not hunting wouldn't

bother me so much. I would hate it, though, if something happened to me so that I couldn't work the flint any more." He paused to reflect then said, "You did a lot for him, Ayla. Even if Clan women are different, shouldn't that count for something? Couldn't he at least acknowledge it?"

"Guban expressed his gratitude to me, Jondalar, but it was subtle as it had to be."

"It must have been subtle. I didn't see it," Jondalar said, looking surprised.

"He communicated directly to me, not through you, and he paid attention to my opinions. He allowed his woman to speak to you which acknowledged me as her equal, and since he has a very high status, so was hers. He thought very highly of you, you know. Paid you a compliment."

"He did?"

"He thought your tools were well made and he admired your workmanship. If he hadn't, he would not have accepted the walking sticks, or your token," Ayla explained.

"What would he have done? I accepted his tooth. I thought it was a strange gift, but I understood his meaning. I would have accepted his token, no matter what it was."

"If he had felt it was not appropriate, he would have refused it, but that token was more than a gift. He accepted a serious obligation. If he did not respect you, he would not have accepted your spirit piece in exchange for his; he values his too much. He would rather have an emptiness, a hole, than accept a piece of an unworthy spirit."

"You're right. There are many subtleties to those Clan people, shades of meaning within shades of meaning. I don't know if I'd ever be able to sort it all out," Jondalar said.

"Do you think the Others are any different? I still have trouble understanding all the shades within shades," Ayla said, "but your people are more tolerant. Your people do more visiting, more traveling than the Clan, and they are more used to strangers. I'm sure I've made mistakes, but I think your people have overlooked them because I'm a visitor and they realize the customs of my people may be different."

"Ayla, my people are your people, too," Jondalar said, gently. She looked at him as if she didn't quite understand him at first. Then she said, "I hope so, Jondalar. I hope so."

The spruce and fir trees were thinning out and becoming stunted as the travelers climbed, but even though they could see past the vegetation, their route along the river took them beside outcrops and through

Deep valleys that blocked their view of the heights around them. At a bend in the river, an upland stream fell into the Middle Mother, which itself came from higher ground. The marrow-chilling air had caught and stilled the waters in the act of falling, and the strong dry winds had sculpted them into strange and grotesque shapes. Caricatures of manas creatures captured by frost, poised to begin a headlong flight down the course of the long river, seemed to be waiting impatiently, as if knowing the turning of the season, and their release, was not far

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The man and woman led the horses carefully over the jumbled bro-31 ice, and around to the higher ground of the frozen waterfall, then stopped, spellbound, as the massive plateau glacier loomed into view. They had caught glimpses of it before; now it seemed close enough to touch, but the stunning effect was misleading. The majestic, brooding glacier with its nearly level top was farther away than it seemed.

The frozen stream beside them was unmoving, but their eyes followed its tortuous route as it twisted and turned, then ducked out of sight. It reappeared higher up, along with several other narrow channels spaced at irregular intervals that leaked off the glacier like a hand-

ful of silvery ribbons trimming the massive cap of ice. Far mountains and nearer ridges framed the plateau with their rugged, sharp-edged, frozen tops, so starkly white their undertones of glacial blue seemed likely to reflect the clear deep hue of the sky.

The twin high peaks to the south, which for a while had accompanied their recent travels, had long since passed from view. A new high pinnacle that had appeared farther west was receding to the east, and the summits of the southern range that had traced their path still towed their glistening crowns.

To the north were dual ridges of more ancient rock, but the massif that had formed the northern edge of the river valley had been left behind at the bend where the river turned back from its most northern point, before the place where they had met the people of the Clan. The river was closer to the new highland of limestone that had taken over the northern boundary as they climbed southwest, toward the river's source.

The vegetation continued to change as they ascended. Spruce and fir gave ground to larch and pine on the acid soils that thinly covered the impervious bedrock, but these were not the stately sentinels of lower elevations. They had reached a patch of mountainous

vegetation, stunted evergreens whose crowns held a covering of hard-packed snow and ice that was cemented to the branches for most of the year.

Although quite dense in places, any shoot brave enough to project above

the others was quickly pruned by wind and frost, which reduced the tops of all the trees to a common level.

Small animals moved freely along beaten tracks they had made beneath the trees, but large game forged trails by main force. Jondalar decided to veer away from the unnamed small stream they had been following, one of many that would eventually form the beginning of a great river, and take a game trail through the thick fringe of dwarfed conifers.

As they approached the timberline, the trees thinned out and they could see the region beyond that was completely bereft of upright woody growths. But life is tenacious. Low-growing shrubs and herbs, and extensive fields of grassy turf, partly buried under a blanket of snow, still flourished.

Though much more expansive, similar regions existed in the low elevations of the northern continents. Relict areas of temperate deciduous trees were maintained in certain protected areas and at the lower latitudes, with hardier needled evergreens appearing in the boreal regions to the north of them. Farther north, where they existed at all, trees were usually dwarfed and stunted. Because of the extensive glaciers, the counterparts of the high meadows that surrounded the perpetual ice of the mountains were the vast steppes and tundras, where only those plants that could complete their life cycles quickly survived. Above the timberline many hardy plants adapted to the harshness of the environment. Ayla, leading her mare, noticed the changes with interest, and she wished she had more time to examine the differences. The mountains in the region where she had grown up were much farther south, and because of the warming influence of the inland sea, the vegetation was primarily of the cold temperate variety. The plants that existed in the higher elevations of the bitterly cold arid regions were fascinating to her.

Stately willows, which graced nearly every river, stream, or brook that sustained even a trace of moisture, grew as low shrubs, and tall sturdy birches and pines became prostrate woody growths that crawled along the ground. Blueberries and bilberries spread out as thick carpets, only four inches high. She wondered if, like the berries that grew near the northern glacier, they bore full-size but sweeter and wilder fruits. Though the bare skeletons of withered branches gave evidence of many plants, she didn't always know what variety they were, or how familiar plants might be different, and she wondered how the high meadows would look in warmer seasons.

Traveling in the dead of winter, Ayla and Jondalar did not see the spring and summer beauty of the highlands. No wild roses or rhodo-

ndrons colored the landscape with blooms of pink; no crocuses or
icmones, or beautiful blue gentians, or yellow narcissus were
mpted to brave the harsh wind; and no primroses or violets would
irst with polychrome splendor until the first warmth of spring. There
ere no bellflowers, rampions, worts, groundsels, daisies, lilies, saxi-
aees, pinks, monkshoods, or beautiful little edelweiss to ease the
fcter cold monotony of the freezing fields of winter.

But another, more awesome sight filled their view. A dazzling for-
ess of gleaming ice lay athwart their path. It blazed in the sun like a
iflgnificent, many-faceted diamond. Its sheer crystalline white glowed
ith luminous blue shadows that hid its flaws: the crevasses, tunnels,
ives, and pockets that riddled the gigantic gem.

They had reached the glacier.

As the travelers neared the crest of the worn stump of the primordial
ountain that bore the flat-topped crown of ice, they weren't even sure
the narrow mountain stream beside them was still the same river that
id been their companion for so long. The diminutive trail of ice was
distinguishable from the many frozen little waterways waiting for
ring to release their cascading flows to race down the crystalline rocks
F the high plateau.

The Great Mother River they had followed all the way from her
road delta where she had emptied into the inland sea, the great water-
ay that had guided their steps over so much of their arduous Journey,
as gone. Even the ice-locked hint of a wild little stream would soon
f left behind. The travelers would no longer have the comforting
xnirity of the river to show them the way. They would have to
Mitinue their Journey west by dead reckoning, with only the sun and
ars to act as guides, and landmarks that Jondalar hoped he would
member.

Above the high meadow, the vegetation was more intermittent.
nly algae, lichens, and mosses that were typical of rocks and scree
>uld derive a struggling existence beyond the cushion plants and a
w other rare species. Ay la had begun to feed the horses some of the
"ass they carried for them. Without their heavy, shaggy coats and
lick undercoat, neither horses nor wolf would have survived, but
iture had adapted them to the cold. Lacking fur of their own, the
timans had made their own adaptations. They took the furs of the
limals they hunted; without them they would not have survived. But
ien, without the protection of furs and fire, their ancestors would
sver have come north in the first place.

Ibex, chamois, and mouflon were at home in mountain meadows,
eluding those in more precipitous rugged regions, and frequented

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higher ground, though usually not so late in the season, but horses were an anomaly at this high elevation. Even the gentler slopes of the massif did not usually encourage their kind to climb so high, but Whinney and Racer were sure-footed.

The horses, with their heads bent low, plodded up the incline at the base of the ice hauling supplies and brownish-black burning stones that would mean the difference between life and death for all of them. The humans, who led the horses to places they would not ordinarily go were looking for a level spot to set up a tent and make camp.

They were all weary of fighting the intense cold and sharp wind, of climbing the steep terrain. It was exhausting work. Even the wolf was content to stay close rather than to run off and explore.

"I'm so tired," Ay la said as they were trying to set up camp with gusty winds blowing. "Tired of the wind, and tired of the cold. I don't think it'll ever get warm again. I didn't know it could be so cold." Jondalar nodded, acknowledging the cold, but he knew the cold they had yet to face would be worse. He saw her glance at the great mass of ice, then look away as though she didn't want to see it, and he suspected she was concerned with more than cold.

"Are we really going to go across all that ice?" she asked, finally acknowledging her fears. "Is it possible? I don't even know how we're going to get up to the top."

"It's not easy, but it's possible," Jondalar said. "Thonolan and I did it. While there is still light, I'd like to look for the best way to get the horses up there."

"It feels like we've been traveling forever. How much farther do we have to go, Jondalar?"

"It's still a ways to the Ninth Cave, but not too far, not near as far as we have come, and once we get across the ice, it's only a short distance to Dalanar's Cave. We'll stop there for a while; it will give you a chance to meet him, and Jerika and everyone--I can hardly wait to show Dalanar and Joplaya some of the flint-knapping techniques I learned from Wymez--but even if we stay and visit, we should be home before summer."

Ayla felt distressed. Summer! But this is winter, she thought. If she had really understood how long the Journey would be, she wondered if she would have been so eager to go with Jondalar all the way back to his home. She might have tried harder to persuade him to stay with the Mamutoi.

"Let's go take a closer look at that glacier," Jondalar said, "and plan the best way to get up on it. Then we should make sure we have everything and are ready to cross the ice." ^

"We'll have to use some of the burning stones to make a fire tonight,

yla said. "There's nothing to bum around here. And we'll have to
eit ice for water . . . we shouldn't have any trouble finding enough
^tbat."

Except for a few shaded pockets of negligible accumulation, there
as no snow in the area where they camped, and there had been very
ale for most of their trek up the slope. Jondalar had only been that
ay once before, but the whole area seemed much drier than he re-
icmbered. He was right. They were in the rain shadow of the high-
dd, the back side; the sparse
snows that did fall in the region usually
rived a little later, after the season had begun to turn. He and Thon-
an had run into a snowstorm
on their way down.

During the winter, the warmer, water-laden air, riding the prevail-
ig winds coming from the western ocean, rose up the slopes until it
ached the large level area of cold ice with high pressure centered over
> Having the effect of a giant funnel that was aimed at the high massif,
be moist air cooled, condensed, and turned to snow, which fell only
l the ice below, feeding the hungry maw of the demanding glacier.
The ice covering the entire worn and rounded top of the ancient
assif spread the precipitation over the whole area, creating a nearly
vel surface, except at the periphery. The cooled air, milked dry of
pud, dropped low and raced down the sides, bringing no snow be-
)hd the edges of the ice.

As Jondalar and Ayla hiked around the base of the ice looking for
ie easiest way up, they noticed areas that seemed newly disturbed,
ith dirt and rocks gouged up by prongs of advancing ice. The glacier
as growing.

In many areas, the ancient rock of the highland was exposed at the
of of the glacier. The massif, folded and uplifted by the immense
essures that had created the mountains to the south, had once been
solid block of crystalline granite that incorporated a similar highland
i the west. The forces that pushed against the immovable old moun-
in, the most ancient rock on earth, left evidence in the form of a great
ft, a fault that had cleaved the block asunder.

Directly across toward the west, on the opposite side of the glacier,
e massifs western slope was steep, and matched by an east-facing
irallel edge across the rift valley. A river flowed along the middle of
fi broad valley floor of the fault trough protected by the high parallel
ies of the cracked massif. But Jondalar planned to head southwest,
cross the glacier diagonally and come down a more gradual grade.
e wanted to cross the river nearer its source high in the southern
ountains, before it flowed around the glaciated massif and through
e rift valley.

"Where did this come from?" Ayla asked, holding up the object in question. It consisted of two oval wooden disks mounted in a frame that held them rigid and fastened fairly close together, with leather thongs attached to the outside edges. A thin slit was cut the lone way down the middle of the wooden ovals for almost the full length, nearly dividing them in half.

"I made it before we left. I have one for you, too. It's for your eyes. Sometimes the glare of the ice on the glacier is so bright that you can't see anything but white--people call it snow-blind. The blindness usually goes away after a while, but your eyes can get awfully red and sore. This will protect your eyes. Go ahead, put it on," Jondalar said. Then, seeing her rumble with them, he added, "Here, I'll show you." He put the unusual sunshields on and tied the thongs behind his head.

"How can you see?" Ayla asked. She could just barely make out his eyes behind the long horizontal slits, but she put on the pair he gave her. "You can see almost everything! You just have to turn your head to see to the side." She was surprised; then she smiled. "You look so funny with your big blank eyes, like some kind of strange spirit . . . or a bug. Maybe the spirit of a bug."

"You look funny, too," he said, smiling back, "but those bug eyes could save your life. You need to see where you are going up on the ice."

"These mouflon-wool boot liners from Madenia's mother have been so nice to have," Ayla commented as she put them in a handy place to get at them easily. "Even when they're wet, they keep your feet warm."

"We may be grateful to have the extra pair when we're on the ice, too," Jondalar said.

"I used to stuff my foot-coverings with sedge grass, when I lived with the Clan."

"Sedge grass?"

"Yes. It keeps your feet warm and dries fast."

"That's useful to know," Jondalar said, then picked up a boot. "Wear the boots with the mammoth-hide soles. They're almost waterproof and they're tough. Sometimes ice can be sharp, and they're rough enough so you won't slip, especially on the way up. Let's see, well need the adze to chop up ice." He put the tool on top of a pile he was making. "And rope. Good strong cord, too. We'll need the tent, sleeping furs, food, of course. Can we leave some of the cooking equipment. We won't need much on the ice, and we can get more from the Lanza- donii." "We'll be using traveling food. I won't be cooking, and I decided to

"Use the big skin pot attached to the frame that we got from Solandia to melt the ice for water, and put it directly over the fire. It's faster that way, and we don't have to boil the water. Just melt it," Ayla said.

"Be sure to keep a spear with you."

"Why? There are no animals on the ice, are there?"

"No, but you can use it to prod ahead of you to make sure the ice is solid. What about this mammoth hide?" Jondalar asked. "We've carried it with us ever since we started out, but do we need it? It's heavy."

"It's a good hide, nice and pliable now, and a good waterproof cover for the bowl boat. You said it snows on the ice." She really hated to throw it away.

"But we can use the tent as a cover."

"That's true . . . but," Ayla said, pursing her lips, considering . . .

Then she noticed something else. "Where did you get those torches?"

"From Laduni. We'll be up before sunrise and will need light to pack. I want to reach the top of the plateau before the sun is very high, while everything is still frozen solid," Jondalar said. "Even when it's this cold, the sun can melt the ice a little and it will be difficult enough to reach the top."

They went to bed early, but Ayla couldn't fall asleep. She was nervous and excited. This was the glacier that Jondalar had talked about from the beginning.

"Wha . . . What's wrong?" Ayla said, startled wide awake.

"Nothing's wrong. It's time to get up," Jondalar said, holding up the torch. He pushed the handle into the gravel to support it, then handed her a cup of steaming tea. "I started a fire. Here's some tea."

She smiled, and he looked pleased. She had made his morning tea nearly every single day of their Journey, and he was delighted that he'd gotten up first, for once, and made tea for her. Actually, he'd never gone to sleep. He hadn't been able to. He'd been too nervous, too excited, and too worried.

Wolf watched his humans, his eyes reflecting the light. Sensing something unusual, he capered and pranced back and forth. The horses were frisky, too, full of snorting, nickering, and vibrato blowing with clouds of steam. Using the burning stones, Ayla melted ice for water and fed them grain. She gave Wolf a cake of Losadunai traveling food along with one for her and Jondalar. By the light of the torch, they packed the tent, the sleeping furs, and a few implements. They left a few odds and ends behind, an empty container of grain, a few stone tools, but at the last moment Ayla threw the mammoth hide over the brown coal in the bowl boat.

Jondalar picked up the torch to light the way. Taking Racer's lead rope, he started out, but the firelight was distracting. He could see a small lighted circle in the immediate vicinity, but not much beyond even when he held it up high. The moon was nearly full, and he began to feel he could find their way better without the fire. The man finally threw it down and walked ahead in the dark. Ayla followed, and in a few moments their eyes adjusted. Behind them the torch still burned on the graveled ground as they moved away.

In the light of a moon that lacked only a sliver from being full, the monstrous bastion of ice glowed with an eerie, evanescent light. The black sky was hazy with stars, the air brittle and crackling with cold; an amorphous ether charged with a life of its own.

As cold as it was, the freezing air had a deeper intensity as they neared the great wall of ice, but Ayla's shiver was caused by the thrill of awe and anticipation. Jondalar watched her glowing eyes, her slightly open mouth as she took deeper, faster breaths. He was always aroused by her excitement, and he felt a stirring in his loins. But he shook his head. There was no time now. The glacier was waiting.

Jondalar took a long rope out of his pack. "We need to tie ourselves together," he said.

"The horses, too?"

"No. We might be able to support each other, but if the horses slip, they'll take us with them." As much as he would hate to lose either Racer or Whinney, it was Ayla he was most concerned about.

Ayla frowned, but she nodded her agreement.

They spoke in hushed whispers, the silent brooding ice quieting their voices. They didn't want to disturb its hulking splendor or warn it of their impending assault.

Jondalar tied one end of the rope around his waist and the other end around Ayla, coiling up the slack and putting his arm through to carry it on his shoulder. Then each of them picked up the lead rope of a horse. Wolf would have to make his own way.

Jondalar felt a moment of panic before he started. What could he have been thinking of? What ever made him think he could bring Ayla and the horses across the glacier? They should have gone the long way around. Even if it took longer, it was safer. At least they would have made it. Then he stepped on the ice.

At the foot of a glacier there was often a separation between the ice and the land, which created a cavelike space beneath the ice, or an overhanging ice shelf that extended out over the accumulated gravels of glacial till. At the place Jondalar chose to start, the overhang had collapsed, providing a gradual ascent. It was also mixed with gravel,

^giving them better footing. Starting from the collapsed edge a heavy
I accumulation of gravel--a moraine--led up the side of the ice like a
I well-defined trail and, except near the top, it did not appear too steep
I for them or the sure-footed horses. Getting over the top edge could be
I a problem, but he wouldn't know how much of one until he got there.
t- With Jondalar leading the way, they started up the slope. Racer
I falked for a moment. Although they had trimmed it down, his large
load was still unwieldy and the shift in elevation from a moderate to a
i steeper grade unsettled him. A hoof slipped, then caught hold, and
' .With some hesitation the young stallion started up. Then it was Ayla's
turn, and Whinney dragging the travois. But the mare had hauled the
pole drag for so long, across such varied terrain, that she was accustomed
to it, and, unlike the large load Racer carried on his back, the
wide-spaced poles helped to steady the mare.
Wolf brought up the rear. It was easier for him. He was lower to the
ground and his callused paws provided friction against slipping. But
fhe sensed the danger to his companions and followed behind as though
guarding the rear, watchful for some unseen menace.
In the bright moonlight, reflections from jagged outcrops of bare ice
shimmered, and the mirrorlike surfaces of sheer planes had a deep
liquid quality, like still black pools. It was not difficult to see the
moraine that was spilling down, like a river of sand and stones in slow
motion, but the night lighting obscured the size and perspective of
objects and hid small details.
Jondalar set a slow and cautious pace, carefully leading his horse
around obstructions. Ayla was more concerned with finding the best
path for the horse she was leading than she was for her own safety. As
the slope became steeper, the horses, unbalanced by the sharper incline
and their heavy loads, struggled for footing. When a hoof slipped as
Jondalar tried to lead Racer up a precipitous rise near the top, the horse
neighed and tried to rear.
"Come on. Racer," Jondalar urged, pulling his lead rope taut, as if
he could pull him up by sheer brute strength. "We're almost there,
you can do it."
The stallion made an effort, but his hooves slipped on treacherous
ice below a thin layer of snow, and Jondalar felt himself pulled back
by the lead rope. He eased up on the rope, giving Racer his head, and
finally let go altogether. There were things in the pack he would hate
to lose, and even more, it would pain him to lose the animal, but he
feared the stallion could not make it.
But when his hooves found gravel. Racer's slide stopped, and with
no restraint on him, he lifted his head and plunged forward. Suddenly

the stallion was over the edge, adroitly stepping over a narrow crack at the end of a crevasse as the way leveled out. Jondalar noticed that the color of the sky had shifted from black to deep indigo blue, with a faint lightening of the shade on the eastern horizon, as he stroked the horse and praised him warmly.

Then he felt a tug on the rope over his shoulder. Ayla must have slipped back, he thought, as he gave her more slack. She must have reached the steep rise. Suddenly the rope was slipping through his hand, until he felt a strong tug at his waist. She must be holding on to Whinney's lead rope, he thought. She's got to let go.

He grabbed the rope with both hands and shouted, "Let go, Ayla! She'll pull you down with her!"

But Ayla didn't hear, or if she did, she didn't comprehend. Whinney had started up the incline, but her hooves could find no purchase and she kept slipping back. Ayla was holding on to the lead rope, as though she could keep the mare from falling, but she was sliding back, too. Jondalar felt himself being pulled dangerously close to the edge. Looking for something to hold on to, he grabbed Racer's lead rope. The stallion neighed.

But it was the travois that checked Whinney's descent. One of the poles caught in a crack and held long enough for the mare to get her balance. Then her hooves plunged through a snowdrift that held her steady, and she found gravel. As he felt the pull ease, he let go of Racer's lead. Bracing his foot against the crack in the ice, Jondalar pulled up on the rope around his waist.

"Give me a little slack," Ayla called out, as she held on to the lead rope while Whinney pushed forward.

Suddenly, miraculously, he saw Ayla over the edge, and he pulled her the rest of the way. Then Whinney appeared. With a forward vault, she scrambled up past the crack and her feet were on the level ice, the poles of the travois jutting out into the air and the bowl boat resting on the edge they had surmounted. A streak of pink appeared across the early morning sky, defining the edge of the earth, as Jondalar heaved a great sigh.

Wolf suddenly bounded up over the edge and raced over to Ayla.

He started to jump up on her, but, feeling none too steady, she signaled him down. He backed off, looked at Jondalar and then the horses. Lifting his head and starting with a few preliminary yips, he howled his wolf song loud and long.

Although they had climbed up a steep incline and the ice had leveled out, they were not quite on the top surface of the glacier. There were cracks near the edge, and broken blocks of expanded ice that had surged up. Jondalar crossed a mound of snow that covered a jagg^'

splintered pile behind the edge, and finally he set his feet on a level surface of the ice plateau. Racer followed him, sending broken chunks bouncing and rolling in a clattering fall over the edge. The man kept the rope attached to his waist taut as Ayla traced over his last steps. Wolf raced ahead while Whinney followed behind.

The sky had become a fleeting and unique shade of dawn blue, while coruscating rays of light radiated from just behind the edge of the earth. Ayla looked back over the steep incline and wondered how they had made it up the slope. From their vantage point at the top, it didn't if possible. Then she turned to go on, and she caught her breath. The rising sun had peeked over the eastern edge with a blinding burst of light that illuminated an incredible scene. To the west, a flat, utterly featureless, dazzling white plain stretched out before them. Above it the sky was a shade of blue she had never seen in her life. It had somehow absorbed the reflection of the red dawn, and the blue-green undertone of glacial ice, and yet remained blue. But it was a blue so stunningly brilliant that it seemed to glow with its own light in a color beyond description. It shaded to a hazy blue-black on the distant horizon in the southwest.

As the sun rose in the east, the faded image of a slightly less than perfect circle that had glowed with such brilliant reflection in the black sky of their predawn awakening hovered over the far western edge; a dim memory of its earlier glory. But nothing interrupted the unearthly splendor of the vast desert of frozen water; no tree, no rock, no movement of any kind marred the majesty of the seemingly unbroken surface.

Ayla expelled her breath explosively. She hadn't known she was holding it. "Jondalar! It's magnificent! Why didn't you tell me? I would have journeyed twice the distance just to see this," she said in an awed voice.

"It is spectacular," he said, smiling at her reaction, but just as overwhelmed. "But I couldn't tell you. I've never seen it like this before. It's not often this still. The blizzards up here can be spectacular, too. Let's move while we can see the way. It's not as solid as it seems, and with this clear sky and the bright sun, a crevasse could open up or an overhanging cornice give way."

They started across the plain of ice, preceded by their long shadows. Before the sun was very high, they were sweating in their heavy clothes. Ayla started to remove her hooded outer fur parka.

"Take it off, if you want," Jondalar said, "but keep yourself covered. You can get a bad sunburn up here, and not just from above. When the sun shines on it, the ice can burn you, too."

Small cumulus clouds began to form during the morning. By noon they had drawn together into large cumulus clouds. The wind started picking up in the afternoon. About the time Ayla and Jondalar decided to stop to melt snow and ice for water, she was more than happy to put her warm outer fur back on. The sun was hidden by moisture-laden cumulonimbus that sprinkled a light dusting of dry powder snow on the travelers. The glacier was growing.

The plateau glacier they were crossing had been spawned in the peaks of the craggy mountains far to the south. Moist air, rising as it swept up the tall barriers, condensed into misty droplets, but temperature decided whether it would fall as cold rain or, with just a slight drop, as snow. It was not perpetual freezing that made glaciers; rather an accumulation of snow from one year to the next gave rise to glaciers that, in time, became sheets of ice that eventually spanned continents. In spite of a few hot days, solid cold winters in combination with cool cloudy summers that don't quite melt the leftover snow and ice at winter's end--a lower yearly average temperature--will swing the balance toward a glacial epoch.

Just below the soaring spires of the southern mountains, too steep themselves for snow to rest upon, small basins formed, cirques that nestled against the sides of the pinnacles; and these cirques were the birthplaces of glaciers. As the light, dry, lacy snowflakes drifted into the depressions high in the mountains, created by minute amounts of water freezing in cracks and then expanding to loosen tons of rock, they piled up. Eventually the weight of the mass of frozen water broke the delicate flakes into pieces that coalesced into small round balls of ice: fim, corn snow.

Fim did not form at the surface, but deep in the cirque, and when more snow fell, the heavier compact spheres were pushed up and over the edge of the nest. As more of them accumulated, the nearly circular balls of ice were pressed together so hard by the sheer weight above that a fraction of the energy was released as heat. For just an instant, they melted at the many points of contact and immediately refroze, welding the balls together. As the layers of ice deepened, the greater pressure rearranged the structure of the molecules into solid, crystalline ice, but with a subtle difference: the ice flowed.

Glacier ice, formed under tremendous pressure, was more dense; yet at the lower levels the great mass of solid ice flowed as smoothly as any liquid. Separating around obstructions, such as the soaring tops of mountains, and rejoining on the other side--often taking a large part of the rock with it and leaving behind sharp-peaked islands--a glacier followed the contours of the land, grinding and reshaping it as it went.

I The river of solid ice had currents and eddies, stagnant pools and
ing centers, but it moved to a different time, as ponderously
' as it was massively huge. It could take years to move inches. But
; didn't matter. It had all the time in the world. As long as the
age temperature stayed below the critical line, the glacier fed and
^.

Mountain cirques were not the only birthplaces. Glaciers formed on
vel ground, too, and once they covered a large enough area, the
tilling effect spread the precipitation out of the anticyclone runnel,
altered in the middle, to the extreme margins; the thickness of the ice
mained nearly the same throughout.

Glaciers were never entirely dry. Some water was always seeping
)wn from the melting caused by pressure. It filled in small cracks and
armies, and when it chilled and refroze, it expanded in all directions.
he motion of a glacier was outward in all directions from its origin,
id the speed of its motion depended on the slope of its surface, not
i the slope of the ground underneath. If the surface slope was great,
ie water within the glacier flowed downhill faster through the chinks
Kin the ice and spread out the ice as it refroze. They grew faster when
||hey were young, near large oceans or seas, or in mountains where the
Jhigh peaks assured heavy snowfall. They slowed down after they
^spread out, their broad surface reflecting the sunlight away and the air
tabove the center turning colder and drier with less snow.

I The glaciers in the mountains to the south had spread out from their
high peaks, filled the valleys to the level of high mountain passes, and
spilled through them. During an earlier advancing period, the moun-
| tain glaciers filled the deep trench of a fault line separating the moun-
| tain foreland and the ancient massif. It covered the highland, then
| spread across to the old eroded mountains on the northern fringe. The
; ice receded during the temporary warming--which was coming to an
| end--and melted in the lowland fault valley, creating a large river and
; a long, moraine-dammed lake, but the plateau glacier on the highland
> they were crossing stayed frozen.

', They could not build a fire directly on the ice and had planned to
; use the bowl boat as a base for the river stones they had brought to
build the fire on. But first they had to empty all the burning stones out
of the round craft. As Ay la picked up the heavy mammoth hide, it
occurred to her that they could just as well use it as a base upon which
to build a fire. Even if it scorched a little, it wouldn't matter. It pleased
her that she had thought to bring it. Everyone, including the horses,
had water and a little food.

While they were stopped, the sun disappeared entirely behind heavy clouds, and before they started on their way again, thick snow been falling with grim determination. The north wind howled across the icy expanse; there was nothing on the whole vast sheet covering the massif to stand in its way. A blizzard was in the making.

A

,s the snowfall thickened, the force of the wind from the northwest suddenly increased. It slammed into them with a blast of cold air that shoved them along as though they were no more than an insignificant piece of the horizontal curtain of white that surrounded them.

"I think we'd better wait this out," Jondalar shouted to be heard above the howl.

They fought to set up their tent while the icy blasts seized the small shelter, tore the stakes out of the ice, and left the tent billowing and napping. The violent, sinewy wind threatened to rip the sheet of leather from the grasp of the two puny living souls trying to make their way across the ice, daring to present an obstacle to the furious, snow-choked blizzard raging across the flat surface.

"How are we going to keep the tent down?" Ayla asked. "Is it always this bad up here?"

"I don't remember it blowing this hard before, but I'm not surprised."

The horses were standing mutely, their heads down, stoically enduring the storm. Wolf was close beside them, digging out a hole for himself. "Maybe we could get one of the horses to stand on the loose end and hold it down until we get it staked," Ayla suggested.

With one thing leading to another, they came up with a makeshift solution, using the horses as both stakes and tent supports. They draped the leather tent over the backs of both horses, then Ayla coaxed Whinney to stand on one of the edges, turned under, hoping the mare wouldn't shift too much and let it up. Ayla and Jondalar huddled together, with the wolf under their bent knees, sitting, almost under the bellies of the horses, on the other end of the tent that was wrapped around underneath them.

It was dark before the squall blew itself out, and they had to camp for the night at the same place, but they set the tent up properly first. In the morning, Ayla was puzzled by some dark stains near the edge of the tent that Whinney had stood on. She wondered about them as they hurried to break camp early the next morning.

They made more progress the second day, in spite of climbing over pressure mounds of broken ice and working their way around an area of several yawning cracks, all oriented in the same direction. A storm blew up in the afternoon again, though the wind was not as strong and it blew over more quickly, allowing them to continue their Journey during the late afternoon.

Toward evening, Ayla noticed that Whinney was limping. She felt her heart beat faster and a rush of fear when she looked closer and saw red smudges on the ice. She picked up Whinney's foot and examined her hoof. It was cut to the quick and bleeding.

"Jondalar, look at this. Her feet are all cut up. What did that to her?" Ayla said.

He looked, and then he examined Racer's hooves while Ayla was looking at the rest of Whinney's. He found the same kind of injuries, then frowned. "It must be the ice," he said. "You'd better check Wolf, too."

The pads of the wolfs paws showed damage, though not quite as bad as the horses' hooves. "What are we going to do?" Ayla said.

"They're crippled, or will be soon."

"It never occurred to me that the ice could be so sharp it could cut up their hooves," Jondalar said, very upset. "I tried to think of everything, but I didn't think about that." He was stricken with remorse.

"Hooves are hard, but they're not like stone. More like fingernails.

They can be damaged. Jondalar, they can't go on. They'll be so crippled in another day that they won't be able to walk at all," Ayla said.

"We've got to help them."

"But what can we do?" Jondalar said.

"Well, I still have my medicine bag. I can treat their injuries."

"But we can't stay here until they're healed. And as soon as they start walking again, it will be just as bad." The man stopped and closed his eyes. He didn't even want to think what he was thinking, much less say it, but he could see only one way out of their dilemma. "Ayla, we're going to have to leave them," the man said, as gently as he could.

"Leave them? What do you mean, 'leave them'? We can't leave Whinney, or Racer. Where would they find water? Or food? There s nothing to graze on the ice, not even twig tips. They'd starve, or freeze. We can't do that!" Ayla said, her face showing her distress. "We can't leave them here like that! We can't, Jondalar!"

"You're right, we can't leave them here like that. It wouldn't be fair. They would suffer too much . . . but . . . we do have spears and the spear-throwers . . ." Jondalar said.

"No! No!" Ayla screamed. "I won't let you!"

"It would be better than leaving them here to die slowly, to suffer. It's not like horses haven't been . . . hunted before. That's what most people do."

"But these aren't like other horses. Whinney and Racer are friends. We've been through so much together. They've helped us. Whinney saved my life. I can't leave her."

"I don't want to leave them any more than you do," Jondalar said, "but what else can we do?" The idea of killing the stallion after traveling so far together was almost more than he could bear, and he knew Ibow Ayla felt about Whinney.

"We'll go back. We'll just have to turn back. You said there was another way around!"

"We've already traveled two days on this ice, and the horses are the most crippled. We can try to go back, Ayla, but I don't think they will make it," Jondalar said. He wasn't even sure if Wolf would be able to make it. Guilt and remorse filled him. "I'm sorry, Ayla. It's my fault. It was stupid of me to think we could cross this glacier with the horses. We should have gone the long way around, but I'm afraid it's too late now."

Ayla saw tears in his eyes. She had not often seen him in tears. Though it was not so unusual for men of the Others to cry, it was his nature to hide those emotions. In a way, it made his love for her more intense. He had given of himself, almost completely, only to her, and she loved him for it, but she could not give up Whinney. The horse was her friend; the only friend she had had in the valley, until Jondalar came.

"We've got to do something, Jondalar!" she sobbed.

"But what?" He had never felt so desolate, so totally frustrated at his inability to find some solution.

"Well, for now," Ayla said, wiping her eyes, her tears freezing on her face, "I'm going to treat their injuries. I can do that much, anyway." She got out her otter-skin medicine bag. "We'll have to make a good fire, hot enough to boil water, not just melt ice."

She took the mammoth hide off the brown burning stones and spread it out on the ice. She noticed some scorch marks on the supple leather, but they hadn't damaged the tough old hide. She put the river rocks on a different spot, but near the middle, as a base upon which to build a fire. At least they didn't have to worry about conserving fuel any more. They could leave most of it behind.

She didn't talk, she couldn't, and Jondalar had nothing to say either. It seemed impossible. All the thought, planning, and preparation that had gone into the trek across this glacier, only to be stopped by some-

thing they hadn't even considered. Ayla stared at the small fire. Wolf crawled up to her and whined, not in pain, but because he knew something was wrong. Ayla checked his paws again. They weren't as bad. He had more control over where he put his feet, and he carefully licked off snow and ice when they stopped to rest. She didn't want to think about losing him, either.

She hadn't consciously thought of Durc for some time, though he was always there, a memory, a cold pain that she would never forget. She found herself musing about him. Has he started to hunt with the clan, yet? Has he learned to use a sling? Uba would be a good mother to him, she would take care of him, make his food, make him warm winter clothes.

Ayla shivered, thinking about the cold, then thought about the first winter clothes Iza had made for her. She had loved the rabbit skin hat with the fur worn on the inside. The winter foot-coverings had fur inside too. She recalled stomping around in a pair of new ones, and she remembered how the simple foot-coverings were made. It was just a piece of hide, gathered up and tied at the ankle. They conformed to the shape of the foot after a while, though at first they were rather clumsy, but that was part of the fun of new ones.

Ayla kept staring at the fire, watching the water start to simmer. Something was nagging her. Something important, she was sure.

Something about . . .

Suddenly she drew in her breath. "Jondalar! Oh, Jondalar!"

She seemed agitated to him. "What's the matter, Ayla?"

"It's not what's wrong, it's what's right," she cried. "I just remembered something!"

He thought she was acting strangely. "I don't understand," he said.

He wondered if the thought of losing her two horses was too much for her. She pulled at the heavy tarp of mammoth hide under the fire, knocking a hot coal directly onto the leather.

"Give me a knife, Jondalar. Your sharpest knife."

"My knife?" he said.

"Yes, your knife," she said. "I'm going to make boots for the horses!"

"You're going to do what?"

"I'm going to make boots for the horses, and Wolf, too. Out of this mammoth hide!"

"How do you make horse boots?"

"I'll cut circles out of the mammoth leather, then cut holes around the edges, thread some cord through, and tie it around the horses ankles. If mammoth hide can keep our feet from getting cut up by the ice, it's bound to protect theirs," Ayla explained.

Tondalar thought for a moment, visualizing what she described; then
> smiled. "Ayla! I think it will work. By the Great Mother, I think it
ill work! What a wonderful idea! Whatever made you think of it?"
."That's the way Iza made boots for me. That's how the people of
g Clan make foot-coverings. Hand-coverings, too. I'm trying to re- gmb
er if that's the kind Guban
and Yorga wore. It's hard to tell,
ecause after a while they shape to your feet."
"Will that hide be enough?"
| "It should be. While I've got the fire going, I'll finish preparing this
nedy for the cuts, and maybe some hot tea for us. We haven't had
f for a couple of days, and we probably won't again until we get
wn off this ice. We're going to have to conserve fuel, but I think a
i of hot tea would taste very good right now."
"I think you're right!" Jondalar agreed, smiling again and feeling ood.
Ayla very carefully examined each hoof on both horses, trimmed
i»way the rough places, applied her medication, then tied the
Bianunoth-hide horse boots on them. They tried to shake off the
Strange foot-coverings at first, but they were tied on securely, and
Stfae horses quickly got used to them. Then she took the set she had
'made for Wolf and tied them on. He chewed and gnawed at them,
trying to get rid of the unfamiliar encumbrances, but after a while he
s stopped fighting them, too. His oversize wolf feet were in much better
shape.
The next morning they loaded a slightly lighter pack on the horses;
I they had burned some of the brown coal, and the heavy mammoth
| hide was now on their feet. Ayla unloaded them when they stopped
I for a rest, and she took on a little more of the load herself. But she
| couldn't begin to carry what the sturdy horses could. In spite of trav-
| eling, their hooves and feet seemed much improved by that night.
^Wolfs seemed perfectly normal, which was a great relief for both Ayla
|; and Jondalar. The boots provided an unexpected benefit: they acted as
a kind of snowshoe when there was deep snow, and the large, heavy
; animals didn't sink in as far.
; The pattern of the first day held, with some variation. They made
their best time in the morning; the afternoons brought snow and wind
, of varying intensity. Sometimes they were able to travel a little farther
i after the storm, other times they had to stay where they stopped in the
afternoon through the night, and on one occasion for two days, but
none of the blizzards were as fierce as the one they had encountered
the first day.
The surface of the glacier wasn't quite as flat and smooth as it had

appeared on that first glistening day in the sun. They floundered through deep drifts of soft powdered snow piled high from localized snowstorms. Other times, where driving winds cleared the surface they crunched over sharp projections and slid into shallow ditches their feet catching in narrow spaces and their ankles twisting under them on the uneven surface. Instant squalls blew down without warning, the fierce winds almost never let up, and they felt constant anxiety about unseen crevasses covered over with flimsy bridges or overhanging cornices of snow.

They detoured around open cracks, especially near the center where the dry air held so little moisture that the snows were not heavy enough to fill the crevasses. And the cold, the deep, bitter, bone-chilling cold, never let up. Their breath froze on the fur of their hoods around their mouths; a drop of water spilling from a cup was frozen before it touched the ground. Their faces, exposed to raw winds and bright sun, cracked, peeled, and blackened. Frostbite was a constant threat.

The strain was beginning to tell. Their responses were beginning to deteriorate, and so was their judgment. A furious afternoon storm had held on into the night. In the morning, Jondalar was anxious to get under way. They had lost much more time than he had planned. In the bitter cold, it took longer for the water to heat, and their supply of burning stones was dwindling.

Ayla was going through her backpack; then she began searching around her sleeping fur. She couldn't remember how many days they had been on the ice, but as far as she was concerned, it was too many, she thought as she searched.

"Hurry up, Ayla! What's taking you so long?" Jondalar snapped,

"I can't find my eye protectors," she said.

"I told you not to lose them. Do you want to go blind?" he exploded.

"No, I don't want to go blind. Why do you think I'm looking for them?" Ayla retorted. Jondalar snatched her fur up and shook it vigorously.

The wooden goggles fell to the ground.

"Be careful where you put them next time," he said. "Now let's get moving."

They quickly packed up their camp, but Ayla sulked and refused to talk to Jondalar. He came over and double-checked her lashings, as he usually did. Ayla grabbed Whinney's rope and started out taking the lead, moving the horse away before Jondalar could examine her pack.

"Don't you think I know how to pack a horse myself? You said you wanted to get moving. Why are you wasting time?" she flung back over her shoulder.

He had just been trying to be careful, Jondalar thought angrily. She doesn't even know the way. Wait until she wanders around in circles for a while. Then she will come asking me to lead, he thought, falling tin behind her.

Ayla was cold and fatigued from the grueling march. She plunged tahead, careless of her surroundings. If he wants to hurry so much, ^then we'll hurry, she thought. If we ever get to the end of this ice, I ifaope I never see a glacier again.

» Wolf was nervously racing between Ayla in the lead and Jondalar I following behind. He didn't like the sudden change in their positions. ^The tall man had always started out ahead before. The wolf struck out I ahead of the woman, who was trudging blindly on, oblivious to every- | thing except the miserable cold and her injured feelings. Suddenly he I stopped directly in front of her, blocking her way.

, Ayla, leading the mare, went around him. He ran back around and stopped in front of her again. She ignored him. He nudged at her legs; she shoved him aside. He ran ahead a short distance, then sat down whining to get her attention. She plodded past him. He raced back toward Jondalar, pranced and whined in front of him, then bounded a few steps toward Ayla, whining, then advanced toward the man once more.

"Is something wrong, Wolf?" Jondalar said, finally noticing the animal's agitation.

Suddenly he heard a terrifying sound, a muffled boom. His head shot up as fountains of light snow filled the air ahead.

"No! Oh no!" Jondalar cried out in anguish, running forward. When the snow settled, a lone animal stood on the brink of a yawning crack. Wolf pointed his nose straight up and wailed a long, desolate howl. Jondalar threw himself flat on the ice at the edge of the crevasse and looked over the edge. "Ayla!" he cried in desperation. "Ayla!" His stomach was a hard knot. He knew it was useless. She would never hear him. She was dead, at the bottom of the deep crack in the ice.

"Jondalar?"

He heard a small frightened voice coming from far away.

"Ayla?" He felt a rush of hope and looked down. Far below him, standing on a narrow ice ledge that hugged the wall of the deep trench, was the terrified woman. "Ayla, don't move!" he commanded. "Stand perfectly still. That ledge could go, too."

She's alive, he thought. I can't believe it. It's a miracle. But how am I going to get her out?

Inside the icy chasm, Ayla leaned in toward the wall, clinging desperately to a crack and a projecting piece, petrified with fear. She had

been plodding through snow halfway to her knees, lost in her own thoughts. She was tired, so tired of it all: tired of the cold, tired of fighting her way through deep snow, tired of the glacier. The trek across the ice had drained her energy, and she was bone-weary with exhaustion. Though she struggled on, her only thought was to reach the end of the massive glacier.

Then she was startled out of her brooding thoughts by a loud crack. She felt the sickening sensation of the solid ice giving way beneath her feet, and she was suddenly reminded of an earthquake many years before. Instinctively she tried to reach for something to hold on to, but the falling ice and snow offered nothing. She felt herself dropping nearly suffocating in the midst of the avalanching snow bridge that had collapsed beneath her feet, and she had no idea how she had ended up on the narrow ledge.

She looked up, afraid to move even that much, for fear the slightest shift in weight would jar her precarious support loose. Above, the sky looked almost black, and she thought she saw the faint glimmerings of stars. An occasional sliver of ice or puff of snow dropped belatedly from the edge, finally letting go of its precarious hold and showering the woman with fragments on the way down.

Her ledge was a narrow jutting extension of an older surface long buried by new snows. It rested on a large jagged boulder that had been torn from solid rock as the ice slowly filled a valley and overflowed down the sides of an adjacent one. The majestically flowing river of ice accumulated great quantities of dust, sand, gravel, and boulders that it gouged out of hard rock, which were slowly carried toward the faster-moving current at the center. These moraines formed long ribbons of rubble on the surface as they moved along the current. When the temperature eventually rose enough to melt the massive glaciers, they would leave evidence of their passage in ridges and hills of unsorted rock.

While she was waiting, afraid to move and holding herself very still, she heard faint mutterings and muted rumblings in the deep icy cavern. She thought at first that she imagined them. But the mass of ice was not as solid as it seemed on the hard surface above. It was constantly readjusting, expanding, shifting, sliding. The explosive boom of a new crack opening or closing at some distant point, on the surface or deep within the glacier, sent vibrations through the strangely viscous solid. The great mountain of ice was riddled with catacombs: passages that came to an abrupt halt, long galleries that turned and twisted, dropped off or soared upward; pockets and caves that opened invitingly, then sealed shut.

Ayla began to look around her. The sheer walls of ice glowed with a

luminous, unbelievably rich blue light that had a deep undertone of green. With a sudden jolt, she realized she had seen that color before, but in only one other place. Jondalar's eyes were the same rich, stunning blue! She longed to see them again. The fractured planes of the | huge ice crystal gave her the sensation of mysterious flitting movement SWSC beyond her peripheral vision. She felt that if she turned her head quickly enough she would see some ephemeral shape disappearing into Kthe mirrored walls.

;.. But it was all illusion, a magician's trick of angles and light. The crystal ice filtered out most of the red spectrum of the light from the Iburning orb in the sky, leaving the deep blue-green, and the edges and planes of the tinted, mirrored surfaces played games of refraction and reflection with each other.

Ayla glanced up when she felt a shower of snow. She saw Jondalar's head extending beyond the rim of the crevasse, then a length of rope came snaking down toward her.

"Tie the rope around your waist, Ayla," he called, "and make sure you tie it well. Let me know when you're ready."

He was doing it again, Jondalar said to himself. Why did he always recheck what she did when he knew she was more than capable of doing it herself? Why did he tell her to do something that was perfectly obvious? She knew the rope had to be tied securely. That was why she had gotten angry and stomped off ahead and was now in this dangerous predicament . . . but she should have known better.

"I'm ready, Jondalar," she called, after wrapping it around her and fastening it with many knots. "These knots won't slip."

"All right. Now hang on to the rope. We're going to pull you up," he said.

Ayla felt the rope grow taut, then lift her from the ledge. Her feet were dangling in air as she felt herself slowly rising toward the edge of the crevasse. She saw Jondalar's face, and his beautiful, worried blue eyes, and she gripped the hand he held out to her to help her over the rim. Then she was on the surface again, and Jondalar was crushing her in his arms. She clung to him as tightly.

"I thought you were gone for sure," he said, kissing and holding her.

"I'm sorry I yelled at you, Ayla. I know you can load your own packs. I just worry so much."

"No, it's my fault. I shouldn't have been so careless with my eye protectors, and I should never have rushed ahead of you like that. I'm still not familiar with ice."

"But I let you, and I should have known better."

"I should have known better," Ayla said at the same time. They smiled at each other at the inadvertent matching of words.

Ayla felt a tug at her waist and saw that the other end of the rope was fastened to the brown stallion. Racer had pulled her out of the crevasse. She rumbled to untie the knots around her waist while Jondalar held the sturdy horse close by. She finally had to use a knife to cut the rope. She had made so many knots and had pulled them so tight--and they'd grown even tighter as she was lifted out--that they were impossible to untie.

Detouring around the crack that had so nearly proved disastrous they continued their southwesterly course across the ice. They were growing seriously concerned as their supply of burning stones was becoming depleted.

"How much longer before we reach the other side, Jondalar?" Ayla asked in the morning after melting water for them all. "We don't have many burning stones left."

"I know. I had hoped that we would be there by now. The storms have caused more delay than I planned on, and I'm getting worried that the weather will turn while we are on the ice. It can happen so fast," Jondalar said, scanning the sky carefully as he spoke. "I'm afraid it may be coming soon."

"Why?"

"I got to thinking about that silly argument we had before you fell into the crevasse. Remember how everyone was warning us about the evil spirits that ride ahead of the snow-melter?"

"Yes!" Ayla said. "Solandia and Verdegia said they make you feel irritable, and I was feeling very irritable. I still do. I am so sick and tired of this ice, I have to force myself to keep going. Could that be what it is?"

"That's what I was wondering. Ayla, if it's true, we have to hurry. If the foehn comes while we're up on this glacier, we may all fall into the cracks," Jondalar said.

They tried to ration the peaty brown stones more carefully, drinking their water barely melted. Ayla and Jondalar started carrying their waterbags full of snow underneath their fur parkas so their body heat would melt enough for them and Wolf. But the conservation wasn't enough. Their bodies couldn't melt enough for the horses that way, and when the last of the burning stones were gone, there was no water for the horses. She had run out of feed for them, too, but water was more important. Ayla noticed them chewing ice, but it worried her. Both dehydration and eating ice could chill them so that they wouldn't be able to maintain sufficient body heat to keep warm on the freezing cold glacier.

Both horses had come to her looking for water, after they had set up their tent, but all Ayla could do was give them a few sips of her own water and break up some ice for them. There had been no afternoon torm that day, and they had kept going until it was almost too dark to eg. They had traveled a good distance, and should have been glad, »ut she felt strangely uncomfortable. She had trouble getting to sleep bat night. She tried to shrug it off, telling herself she was just worried bout the horses.

i Jondalar lay awake for a long time, too. He thought the horizon was ooking closer, but he was afraid it was wishful thinking and didn't want to mention it. When he finally dozed off, he awoke in the middle |bf the night to find Ayla wide awake, too. They got up at the first faint l|duft from black to blue, and they started out with stars still in the sky. I, By midmorning the wind had shifted, and Jondalar was sure his Iworst fears were about to materialize. The wind wasn't so much warm ^s less cold, but it was coming from the south.

j "Hurry, Ayla! We've got to hurry," he said, almost breaking into a run. She nodded and kept up with him.

By noon the sky was clear, and the brisk breeze blowing in their faces was so warm that it was almost balmy. The force of the wind increased, enough to slow them down as they leaned into it. And its warmth blowing across the cold surface of the ice was a deadly caress. The drifts of dry powdery snow became wet and compact, then turned to slush. Little puddles of water began to form in small depressions on the surface. They became deeper and took on a vivid blue color that seemed to glow out of the center of the ice, but the woman and man had no time, or heart, to appreciate the beauty. The horses' need for water was easily satisfied, but it gave them little comfort now.

A soft mist began to rise, clinging close to the surface; the driving, warm south wind carried it away before it could get too high. Jondalar was using a long spear to feel the way ahead, but he was still almost running, and Ayla was hard-pressed to keep up. She wished she could jump on Whinney's back and let the horse carry her away, but more and more cracks were opening in the ice. He was almost certain the horizon was closer, but the low-lying fog made distances deceptive.

Little rivulets began streaming over the surface of the ice, connecting the puddles and making footing treacherous. They splashed through the water, feeling its icy chill penetrate, then squish through their boots. Suddenly, a few feet in front of them, a large section of what had seemed to be solid ice fell away, exposing a yawning gulf. Wolf

yipped and whined, and the horses shied away, squealing with fear. Jondalar turned and followed the edge of the crack, looking for a way around.

"Jondalar, I can't keep going. I'm exhausted. I've got to stop," Ayla said with a sob, then started crying. "We'll never make it."

He stopped, then went back and comforted her. "We're almost there, Ayla. Look. You can see how close the edge is."

"But we almost walked into a crevasse, and some of those puddles have become deep blue holes with streams falling into them."

"Do you want to stay here?" he said.

Ayla took a deep breath. "No, of course not," she said. "I don't know why I'm crying like this. If we stay here, we'll die for sure."

Jondalar worked his way around the large crack, but as they turned south again, the winds were as strong as any from the north had been, and they could feel the temperature rising. Rivulets turned into streams crisscrossing the ice and grew into rivers. They worked their way around two more large cracks and could see beyond the ice. They ran the last short distance, and then they stood looking down over the edge.

They had reached the other side of the glacier.

A waterfall of milky clouded water, glacier milk, was just below them, gushing out of the bottom of the ice. In the distance, below the snowline, was a thin cover of light green.

"Do you want to stop here and rest a while?" Jondalar asked, but he looked worried.

"I just want to get off this ice. We can rest when we reach that meadow," Ayla said.

"It's farther than it looks. This is not the place to rush or be careless.

We'll rope ourselves together, and I think you should go first. If you slip, I can support your weight. Pick a way down carefully. We can lead the horses."

"No, I don't think we should. I think we should take off their halters and packs, and the pole drag, and let them find their own way down,"

Ayla said.

"Maybe you're right, but then we'll have to leave the packs here . . . unless . . ."

Ayla saw where he was looking. "Let's put everything in the bowl boat and let it slide down!" she said.

"Except a small pack with some necessities that we can take with us," he said, smiling.

"If we tie it all down well, and watch which way it goes, we should be able to find it."

"What if it breaks up?"

"What would break?"

"The frame could crack," Jondalar said, "but even if it did, the hide would probably hold it together."

"And whatever was inside would still be all right, wouldn't it?"

"It should be." Jondalar smiled. "I think that's a good idea."

After the round boat was repacked, Jondalar picked up the small pack of essentials while Ayla led Whinney. Although somewhat fearful of slipping, they walked along the edge looking for a way down. As if to make up for the delays and dangers they had endured in the crossing, they soon found the gradual slope of a moraine, with all its gravel, that appeared possible, just beyond a somewhat steeper grade of slick ice. They dragged the boat to the icy slope; then Ayla unfastened the travois. They removed all the halters and ropes from both animals, but not the mammoth-hide horse boots. Ayla checked them to make sure they were securely tied; they had conformed to the shape of the horses' hooves and now fit snugly. Then they led the horses to the top of the moraine.

Whinney nickered, and Ayla calmed her, calling her by the whinny name she was most familiar with, and she spoke in their language of signals and sounds and made-up words. "Whinney, you need to make your own way down," the woman said. "No one else can find your footing on this ice better than you can."

Jondalar reassured the young stallion. The descent would be dangerous, anything could happen, but at least they had gotten the horses across. They would have to get themselves down. Wolf was pacing nervously back and forth along the edge of the ice, the way he did when he was afraid to jump into a river.

With Ayla's urgings, Whinney was the first to go over the edge, picking her way carefully. Racer was close on her heels and soon outdistanced her. They came to a slick spot, slipped and slid, gained momentum, and moved down faster to keep up. They would be down safely--or not--by the time Ayla and Jondalar reached the bottom. Wolf was whining at the top, his tail tucked between his legs, not ashamed to show the fear he felt as he watched the horses go.

"Let's push the boat over and get started. It's a long way down, and it won't be easy," Jondalar said.

As they pushed the boat near the steeper icy edge, Wolf suddenly jumped in it. "He must think we're getting ready to ride across a river," Ayla said. "I wish we could float down this ice."

They both looked at each other and started to smile.

"What do you think?" Jondalar said.

"Why not? You said it should hold together."

"But will we?"

"Let's find out!"

They shifted a few things around to make room, then climbed into the bowl-shaped boat with Wolf. Jondalar sent a hopeful thought to the Mother, and, using one of the travois poles, they pushed off.

"Hold on!" Jondalar said as they started over the edge.

They gained speed quickly, but headed straight ahead at first. Then they hit a bump and the boat bounced and spun around. They swerved sideward, then rode up a slight incline and found themselves in midair. They both screamed with the fearful excitement. They landed with a jolt that lifted them all up, the wolf included, then spun around again while they clutched the edge. The wolf was trying to crouch down and poke his nose over the side at the same time.

Ayla and Jondalar held on for all they were worth; it was all they could do. They had absolutely no control over the round boat that was racing down the side of the glacier. It zigged and zagged, bounced and spun around as though leaping with joy, but it was heavily loaded, bottom heavy enough to resist tipping over. Though the man and woman screamed involuntarily, they couldn't help smiling. It was the fastest, most thrilling ride either of them had ever taken, but it was not over.

They didn't think about how the ride would end, and, as they neared the bottom, Jondalar remembered the usual crevasse at the foot separating the ice from the ground below. A hard landing on gravel could throw them out and cause injury, or worse, but the sound didn't make an impression on him when he first heard it. It wasn't until they landed with a hard bump and a huge splash into the middle of a roaring waterfall of cloudy water that he realized their descent down the wet slippery ice had taken them back toward the river of meltwater that was gushing out of the bottom of the glacier.

They landed at the bottom of the falls with another splash, and soon they were floating calmly in the middle of a small lake of cloudy green glacier melt. Wolf was so happy that he was all over both of them, licking their faces. He finally sat down and lifted his head in a howl of greeting.

Jondalar looked at the woman, "Ayla, we made it! We made it!

We're over the glacier!"

"We did, didn't we?" she said, smiling broadly.

"That was a dangerous thing to do, though," he said. "We could have been hurt, or even killed."

"It may have been dangerous, but it was fun," Ayla said, her eyes still sparkling with excitement.

Her enthusiasm was contagious, and for all his concern about getting her home safely, he had to smile. "You're right. It was fun, and fitting, somehow. I don't think I'll ever try to cross a glacier again. Twice in one lifetime is enough, but I'm glad I can say I did it, and I'll never forget that ride."

"Now, all we have to do is reach that land over there," Ayla said, pointing toward the shore, "and then find Whinney and Racer."

The sun was setting, and, between the blinding brightness at the horizon and twilight's deceptive shadows, it was difficult to see. The evening chill had brought the temperature to below freezing again.

They could see the comforting security of the black loam of solid ground, intermixed with patches of snow, around the perimeter of the lake, but they didn't know how to get there. They had no paddle, and they had left the pole on top of the glacier.

But although the lake seemed calm, the fast-flowing glacial melt gave it an undercurrent that was slowly taking them toward the shore.

When they were close, they both jumped out of the boat, followed by the wolf, and pulled it up on the land. Wolf shook himself, spraying water, but neither Ayla nor Jondalar noticed. They were in each other's arms, expressing their love and their relief at having actually reached solid ground.

"We did make it. We're almost home, Ayla. We're almost home," Jondalar said, holding her, grateful that she was there to be held.

The snow around the lake was beginning to refreeze, turning soft slush into hard-crusting ice. They walked across the gravel in the near dark holding hands, until they reached a field. There was no wood for a fire, but they didn't care. They ate the dry concentrated traveling food that had been their sustenance on the ice, and they drank water from bags filled on the glacier. Then they set up their tent and spread out their sleeping furs, but before they settled in, Ayla looked across the darkened landscape and wondered where the horses were.

She whistled for Whinney and waited to hear the sound of hooves, but no horses came. She looked up at the swirling clouds above and wondered where they were, then whistled again. It was too dark to look for them now; it would have to wait until morning. Ayla crawled into her sleeping furs beside the tall man and reached for the wolf who was curled up beside her place. She thought about the horses as she sank into an exhausted sleep.

The man looked at the tousled blond hair of the woman beside him her head resting comfortably in the hollow beneath his shoulder, and he changed his mind about getting up. There was no longer a need to keep moving, but the absence of worry left him at loose ends. He had to keep reminding himself they were over the glacier; they didn't have to hurry any more. They could lie around in their sleeping furs all day if they wanted to.

The glacier was behind them now, and Ayla was safe. He shivered at the thought of her close call, and he tightened his hold on her. The woman raised herself up on her elbow and looked at him. She loved looking at him. The dim light inside the hide tent softened the vivid blue of his eyes, and his forehead, so often knotted in concentration or concern, was relaxed now. She ran a finger lightly across the worry lines, then traced his features.

"Do you know, before I saw you I tried to imagine how a man would look. Not a man of the Clan, one like me. I never could. You are beautiful, Jondalar," she said.

Jondalar laughed. "Ayla, women are beautiful. Not men."

"What is a man then?"

"You might say he's strong, or brave."

"You are strong and brave, but that's not the same as beautiful. What would you call a man who is beautiful?"

"Handsome, I suppose." He felt a little embarrassed. He had been called handsome too often.

"Handsome. Handsome," she repeated to herself. "I like beautiful better. Beautiful I understand."

Jondalar laughed again, his rich, surprisingly lusty laugh. The uninhibited warmth of it was unexpected, and Ayla caught herself staring at him. He had been so serious on this trip. Though he had smiled, he'd seldom laughed out loud.

"If you want to call me beautiful, go ahead," he said, pulling her closer to him. "How can I object to a beautiful woman calling me beautiful?"

Ayla felt the spasms of his laughter, and she started giggling. "I love it when you laugh, Jondalar."

"And, I love you, funny woman."

He held her after they stopped laughing. Feeling her warmth and soft full breasts, he reached for one and pulled her down so he could kiss her. She slipped her tongue into his mouth and felt herself respond with a surprising hunger for him. It had been some time, she realized. All the time they were on the glacier, they both had been so anxious and so exhausted that they hadn't been in the mood, or able to relax enough to get there.

He sensed her eager willingness and felt his own sudden need. He rolled her over as they kissed; then, moving the furs out of the way, he kissed her throat and neck on the way to finding her breast. He enclosed her hard nipple with his mouth and suckled.

She moaned as a sharp shiver of unbelievable Pleasure charged through her with an intensity that left her gasping. She was stunned by her own reaction. He had barely touched her, and she was ready, and she felt so eager. It hadn't been that long, had it? She pushed herself toward him.

Jondalar reached down to touch her place of Pleasures between her thighs, felt her hard knob and massaged it. With a few cries, she reached a sudden peak, and was there, ready for him, wanting him.

He felt her sudden moist warmth, and understood her readiness. His need had risen to match hers. Pushing at the furs to get them out of the way, she opened to him. He reached for her deep well with his proud manhood and entered.

She pulled him to her as he thrust forward, penetrating deeply. He felt her full embrace, and she cried out with her joy. She had needed him, and he felt so right, it was beyond delight, more than Pleasure.

He was as ready as she. He pulled back, then thrust again, and only once more, and suddenly, there was no holding back. He felt the surge rise, reach, and overflow. With a last few motions, he drained himself, then pushed in, and relaxed on top of her.

She lay still with her eyes closed, feeling his weight on her, and feeling wonderful. She didn't want to move. When he finally got up and looked down at her, he had to kiss her. She opened her eyes and looked up at him.

"That was wonderful, Jondalar," she said, feeling languid and satisfied.

"It was fast. You were ready; we were both ready. And you had the strangest smile on your face just now."

"That's because I'm so happy."

"I am, too," he said, kissing her again, then rolling onto his side.

They lay together quietly and dozed off again. Jondalar woke before Ayla did, and he watched her while she slept. The strange little smile appeared again and made him wonder what she was dreaming of. He couldn't resist. He kissed her softly and caressed her breast. She opened her eyes. They were dilated, dark and liquid, and full of deep secrets.

He kissed each eyelid, then nibbled playfully at an earlobe and then a nipple. She smiled at him when he reached for her mound and felt

her soft hair, receptive, if not quite ready again, making him wish they were just beginning instead of just through. Suddenly he held her tight, kissed her fiercely, stroked her body, her breasts and hips and thighs. He could hardly keep his hands away from her, as though coming so close to losing her had created a need as deep as the crevasse that almost took her. He couldn't touch her enough, hold her enough love her enough.

"I never thought I'd fall in love," he said, relaxing again and idly caressing the dip at the small of her back and the smooth mound beyond. "Why did I have to travel beyond the end of the Great Mother River to find a woman I could love?"

He had been thinking about that ever since he woke up and realized they were almost home. It was good to be on this side of the glacier, but he was full of anticipation, wondering about everyone, and eager to see them.

"Because my totem meant you for me. The Cave Lion guided you."

"Then why did the Mother cause us to be born so far apart?"

Ayla lifted her head and looked at him. "I've been learning, but I still know very little about the ways of the Great Earth Mother, and not much more about the protective spirits of the Clan totems, but I know this: you found me."

"And then I almost lost you." A sudden rush of cold fear clutched at him. "Ayla, what would I do if I lost you?" he said, his voice hoarse with the emotion he seldom showed openly. He rolled over, covering her body with his, and buried his head in her neck, holding her so tightly she could hardly breathe. "What would I do?"

She clung to him, wishing there was some way she could become a part of him, and she gratefully opened herself to him when she felt his need swell again. With an urgency as demanding as his love, he took her as she came to him with a need as driving.

It was over even more quickly, and with the release, the tension of their fierce emotion melted into a warm afterglow. When he started to move aside, she held him, wanting to cling to the intensity of the moment.

"I wouldn't want to live without you, Jondalar," Ayla said, picking up the conversation begun before their lovemaking. "A piece of me would go with you to the spirit world, I'd never be whole again. But we're lucky. Think of all the people who never find love, and those who love someone who cannot love them back."

"Like Ranee?"

"Yes, like Ranee. I still hurt inside when I think of him."

Jondalar rolled over and sat up. "I feel sorry for him. I liked Ranee --or I could have." Suddenly he was eager to be moving. "We'll never get to Dalanar's this way," he said, starting to roll up sleeping furs. "I can't wait to see him again."
"But first, we have to find the horses," Ayla said.

A

>.yla got up and went outside the tent. A mist hovered close to the ground and the air felt cold and damp on her bare skin. She could hear the roar of the waterfall in the distance, but the vapor thickened into a dense fog near the back end of the lake, a long narrow body of greenish water, so cloudy it was nearly opaque. No fish lived in such a place, she was sure, just as no vegetation grew along the edge; it was too new for life, too raw. There was only water and stone, and a quality of time before time, of ancient beginnings before life began. Ayla shivered and felt a stark taste of Her terrible loneliness before the Great Mother Earth gave birth to all living things.

She stopped to pass her water, then hurried across the sharp-edged gravel shore, waded in, then ducked down. It was icy cold and gritty with silt. She wanted to bathe--it hadn't been possible while they were crossing the ice--but not in this water. She didn't mind the cold so much, but she wanted clear, fresh water.

She started back to the tent to dress and help Jondalar pack up. On the way, she looked through the mist across the lifeless landscape to a hint of trees below. Suddenly she smiled.

"There you are!" she said, sounding a loud whistle.

Jondalar was out of the tent in an instant. He smiled as broadly as Ayla to see the two horses galloping toward them. Wolf followed along behind, and Ayla thought he looked pleased with himself. He hadn't been around that morning, and she wondered if he had played any part in the horses' return. She shook her head, realizing she would probably never know.

They greeted each horse with hugs, caressing strokes, friendly scratches, and words of affection. Ayla checked them over carefully at the same time, wanting to be sure they had not injured themselves. The horse boot on Whinney's right rear foot was missing and the mare seemed to flinch when Ayla examined her leg. Could she have broken through the ice at the edge of the glacier and, in pulling free, torn on the boot and bruised her leg? It was the only thing she could think of.

; Ayla removed the rest of the mare's boots, lifting each leg to untie them while Jondalar stood close to steady the animal. Racer still had all his horse boots, although Jondalar noticed they were wearing thin over the sharp hooves; even mammoth hide would not last long worn over hooves.

When they had gathered all their things together and gone to drag the bowl boat closer, they discovered the bottom was wet and soggy. It had developed a leak.

"I don't think I'd want to try getting across a river in this, any more," Jondalar said. "Do you think we should leave it?"

"We have to, unless we want to drag it ourselves. We don't have the poles for the travois. We left them behind when we came flying down that ice, and there are no trees around here for new ones," Ayla said.

"Well, that settles it!" Jondalar said. "It's a good thing we don't need to haul rocks any more, and we've lightened our load so much that I think we could carry everything ourselves, even without the horses."

"If they hadn't come back, that's what we'd be doing while we were looking for them," Ayla said, "but I am so glad they found us."

"I was worried about them, too," Jondalar said.

!

As they descended the steep southwestern face of the ancient massif that supported the harrowing ice field on its worn summit, a light rain fell, flushing out pockets of dirty snow that filled shaded hollows in the open spruce forest they passed through. But a watercolor wash of green tinged the brown earth of a sloping meadow and brushed the tips of shrubs nearby. Below, through openings in the misty fog, they caught glimpses of a river curling from west to north, forced by the surrounding highlands to follow a deep rift valley. Across the river to the south, the rugged alpine foreland faded into a purple haze, but rising wraith-like out of the haze was the high mountain range with ice halfway down its slopes.

"You're going to like Dalanar," Jondalar was saying as they rode comfortably side by side. "You'll like all the Lanzadonii. Most of them used to be Zeiandonii, like me."

"What made him decide to start a new Cave?"

"I'm not sure. I was so young when he and my mother parted, I didn't really get to know him until I went to live with him, and he taught Joplaya and me how to work the stone. I don't think he decided to settle and start a new Cave until he met Jerika, but he chose this place because he found the flint mine. People were already talking about Lanzadonii stone when I was a boy," Jondalar explained.

"Jerika is his mate, and . . . Joplaya . . . is your cousin, right?"

"Yes. Close-cousin. Jerika's daughter, born to Dalanar's hearth. She's a good flint knapper, too, but don't ever tell her I said so. She's a great tease, always joking. I wonder if she's found a mate. Great Mother! It's been so long. They are going to be so surprised to see us!" "Jondalar!" Ayla said in a loud, urgent whisper. He pulled up short. "Look over there, near those trees. There's a deer!" The man smiled. "Let's get it!" he said, reaching for a spear as he pulled out his spear-thrower and signaled Racer with his knees. Although his method of guiding his mount was not quite the same as hers, after nearly a year of traveling, he was as good a rider as Ayla. She turned Whinney almost in tandem--she enjoyed being free and unencumbered by the travois for a change--and set her spear in her spear-thrower. Startled by the quick movement, the deer bounded off with high leaps, but they raced after it, coming up on either side and, with the help of the spear-throwers, dispatched the young, inexperienced buck easily. They butchered out their favorite parts and selected other choice cuts to bring as a gift to Dalanar's people, then let Wolf have his pick of what was left.

Toward evening, they found a racing, bubbling, healthy-looking stream and followed it until they came to a large open field with a few trees and some brush beside the water. They decided to make camp early and cook some of their deer meat. The rain had let up and there wasn't any hurry any more, though they had to keep reminding themselves of that.

The following morning, when Ayla stepped out of the tent, she stopped and gaped in amazement, stunned by the sight. The landscape seemed unreal, with the quality of an especially vivid dream. It seemed impossible that they could have endured the most harshly bitter intensity of extreme winter conditions only days ago and, suddenly, it was spring!

"Jondalar! Oh, Jondalar. Come and see!"

The man put his sleepy head out of the opening, and she watched his smile grow.

They were at a lower elevation, and the rainy drizzle and fog of the day before had given way to a bright new sun. The sky was a rich azure blue decorated with mounds of white. Trees and brush were flocked with the fresh bright green of new leaves and the grass in the field looked good enough to eat. Flowers--jonquils, lilies, columbines, irises, and more--bloomed in profusion. Birds of every color and many varieties darted and wheeled through the air, chirping and singing. Ayla recognized most of them--thrushes, nightingales, bluethroats, nutcrackers, black-headed woodpeckers, and river warblers--and

whistled their song back to them. Jondalar got up and came out of the tent in time to watch with admiration while she patiently coaxed a gray shrike to her hand.

"I don't know how you do that," he said, as the bird flew away.

Ayla smiled. "I'm going to look for something fresh and delicious to eat this morning," she said.

Wolf was gone again, and Ayla was sure he was exploring or hunting; spring brought adventures for him, too. She headed toward the horses, who were in the middle of the spring meadow grazing on the fine short blades of sweet grass. It was the rich season, the time of growth throughout the land.

For most of the year the broad plains surrounding the miles-thick sheets of ice, and the high mountain meadows, were dry and cold. Only scant rain or snow managed to fall on the land; the glaciers usually captured most of the moisture circulating in the air for themselves.

Though permafrost was as pervasive on the ancient steppes as in the wetter northern tundras of later times, the glacier-driven winds kept the summers arid, and the land dry and firm, with few bogs. In winter, the winds kept the light snows blown into drifts, leaving large sections of the frozen ground bare of snow, but covered with grass that had dried into hay; feed that maintained the uncountable numbers of huge grazing animals.

But not all grasslands are the same. To create the rich abundance of the Ice Age plains, it wasn't so much the amount of precipitation--so long as it was sufficient--as when it fell; a combination of moisture and drying winds in the right proportions and at the right times made the difference.

Because of the angle of incoming sunlight, in lower latitudes the sun begins to warm the earth not long after the winter solstice. Where snow or ice have accumulated, most of the early spring sunlight is reflected back into space, and the little that is absorbed and converted to heat must be used to melt the snow cover before plants can grow.

But on the ancient grasslands, where winds had laid the plains bare, the sun poured its energy onto the dark soil, and received a warm welcome. The dry, frozen top layers of permafrost began to warm and thaw, and though it was still cold, the wealth of solar energy impelled seeds and extensive roots to prepare to send up shoots. But water in usable form was necessary if they were to flourish.

The glistening ice resisted the warming rays of spring, reflecting back the sunlight. But with so much moisture stored in the mountain-high icy sheets, it could not entirely reject the sun's advances or its caress of warming winds. The tops of the glaciers began to melt, and

some water trickled down through the fissures and slowly began to fill streams, and then rivers, which would bring the precious liquid to the parched land later in summer. But even more important were the fogs and the mists evaporating off the glacial masses of frozen water, because they filled the skies with rain clouds.

In spring, the warm sunlight caused the great mass of ice to give off moisture rather than to take it. For almost the only time during the entire year, rain fell, not on the glacier, but on the thirsty and fertile land that bounded it. An Ice Age summer could be hot, but it was brief; the primeval spring was long and wet, and plant growth was explosive and profuse.

Ice Age animals also did their growing in spring when everything was fresh and green, and rich in the nutrients they needed, at just the time they needed them. By nature, whether the season is lush or dry, spring is the time of the year when animals add size to young bones or to old tusks and horns, or grow new and bigger antlers, or shed thick winter coats and begin new ones. Because spring started early and lasted long, the growing season for animals was long as well, which encouraged their lavish size, and the impressive horny adornments.

During the long spring, all the species partook of the herbaceous green bounty indiscriminately, but with the end of the growing season they faced fierce competition from each other for the maturing and less nutritious or less digestible grasses and herbs. The competition did not express itself in squabbling over who would eat first or most, or in guarding boundaries. Herding animals of the plains were not territorial. They migrated over great distances and were highly social, seeking the company of their own kind as they traveled, and sharing their ranges with others that were adapted to open grasslands.

But whenever more than one species of animal had nearly identical eating and living habits, invariably only one would prevail. The others would evolve new ways to exploit another niche, utilize some other element of the available food, migrate to a new area, or die off. None of the many different grazing and browsing animals were in direct competition with each other for exactly the same food.

Fighting was always between males of the same kind, and was saved for rutting season, when often the mere display of a particularly imposing rack of antlers or pair of horns or tusks was enough to establish dominance and the right to breed--genetically compelling reasons for the magnificent embellishments that the rich spring growth encouraged. But once the surfeit of spring was over, life for the itinerant dwellers of the steppes settled into established patterns, and it was never as

easy. In summer they had to maintain the spectacular growth spring had wrought and fill out and put on fat for the harsh season ahead. Autumn brought the demanding rutting season for some; for others the growth of heavy fur and other protective measures. But hardest of all was winter; in winter they had to survive.

Winter determined the carrying capacity of the land; winter decided who would live and who would die. Winter was hard on males, with a larger body size and heavy social adornments to maintain or regrow. Winter was hard on females, who were smaller in size because they had not only to sustain themselves with essentially the same amount of available food, but also the next generation either developing inside them, or nursing, or both. But winter was particularly hard on the young, who lacked the size of adults to store reserves, and spent what they had accumulated on growth. If they could survive their first year, their chances were much better.

On the dry, cold, ancient grasslands near the glaciers, the great diversity of animals shared the complex and productive land and were maintained because eating and living habits of one species fit in between or around those of another. Even the carnivores had preferred prey. But an inventive, creative new species, one that didn't so much adapt to the environment as alter the environment to suit itself, was beginning to make its presence felt.

Ayla was strangely quiet when they stopped for a rest near another gurgling mountain stream, to finish the venison and fresh greens they had cooked that morning. "It's not very far now. Thonolan and I stopped near here when we left," Jondalar said.

"It's breathtaking," she answered, but only part of her mind appreciated the breathtaking view.

"Why so quiet, Ayla?"

"I've been thinking about your kin. It makes me realize, I don't have any kin."

"You have kin! What about the Mamutoi? Aren't you Ayla of the Mamutoi?"

"It's not the same. I miss them, and I'll always love them, but .it wasn't so hard to leave. It was harder the other time, when I had to leave Durc behind." A look of pain filled her eyes.

"Ayla, I know it must have been difficult to leave a son." He took her in his arms. "It wouldn't bring him back, but the Mother may give you other children . . . someday . . . perhaps even children of my spirit."

She didn't seem to hear him. "They said Durc was deformed, but he wasn't. He was Clan, but he was mine, too. He was part of both. They didn't think I was deformed, just ugly, and I was taller than any man of the Clan . . . big and ugly . . ."

"Ayla, you are not big and ugly. You are beautiful, and remember, my kin are your kin."

She looked up at him. "Until you came, I had no one, Jondalar. Now I have you to love and maybe, someday, a child of yours. That would make me happy," she said, smiling.

Her smile relieved him, and her mention of a child even more. He looked up at the sun's position in the sky. "We won't make it to Dal-anar's cave today if we don't hurry. Come on, Ayla, the horses need a good run. I'll race you across the meadow. I don't think I could stand another night in the tent when we're so close."

Wolf bounded out of the woods, full of energy and playfulness. He jumped up, put his paws on her chest, and licked her jaw. This was her family, she thought, as she grabbed his neck fur. This magnificent wolf, the faithful and patient mare, the spirited stallion, and the man, the wonderful caring man. Soon she would be meeting his family.

She fell silent while she packed the few things; then suddenly she started digging things out of a different pack. "Jondalar, I'm going to take a bath in this stream and put on a clean tunic and leggings," she said, taking off the leather tunic she had been wearing.

"Why don't you wait until we get there. You'll freeze, Ayla. That water is probably straight off the glacier."

"I don't care, I don't want to meet your kin all dirty and travel stained."

They came to a river, cloudy green with glacial runoff, and running high, though the rushing water would be much higher when it reached its full volume later in the season. They turned east, upstream, until they found a place shallow enough to ford, then climbed in a southeasterly direction. It was late afternoon when they reached a gradual slope that leveled out near a rock wall. The dark hole of a cave was tucked under an overhanging ledge.

A young woman was seated on the ground, her back to them, surrounded by broken chips and nodules of flint. She held a punch, a pointed wooden stick, to a core of the dark gray stone with one hand, concentrating on the exact placement, and preparing to hit the punch with a heavy bone hammer held in the other. She was so absorbed in her task that she didn't notice Jondalar slipping up silently behind her.

"Keep practicing, Joplaya. Someday you'll be as good as I am," he said with a grin.

The bone mallet came down wrong, shattering the blade she was about to flake off as she whirled around, a look of stunned disbelief on her face.

"Jondalar! Oh, Jondalar! Is it really you?" she cried, throwing herself into his arms. With his arms around her waist, he picked her up and spun her around. She clung to him, as though she never wanted to let him go. "Mother! Dalanar! Jondalar's back! Jondalar came back!" she shouted.

People came running out of the cave, and an older man, as tall as Jondalar, raced toward him. They grabbed each other, stood back and looked, then hugged again.

Ayla signaled Wolf, who crowded close to her as she stood back and watched, holding the lead ropes of both horses.

"So, you came back! You were gone so long, I didn't think you would," the man said.

Then, over Jondalar's shoulder, the older man spied a most astounding sight. Two horses, with baskets and bundles fastened to them, and hides draped across their backs, and a large wolf, were hovering close to a tall woman, dressed in a fur parka and leggings cut in an unusual style and decorated with unfamiliar patterns. Her hood was thrown back, and the woman's deep golden hair cascaded around her face in waves. There was a decidedly foreign cast to her features, rather like the unfamiliar cut of her clothing, but it only added to her outstanding beauty.

"I don't see your brother, but you did not return alone," the man said.

"Thonolan is dead," Jondalar said, closing his eyes involuntarily. "I would be, too, if it wasn't for Ayla."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I liked the boy. Willomar and your mother will be grief-stricken. But I notice your taste in women has not changed. You always did have a liking for beautiful zeiaondonia."

Jondalar wondered why he thought Ayla was One Who Served the Mother. Then he looked at her, surrounded by the animals, and suddenly saw her as the older man would, and he smiled. He strode to the edge of the clearing, took Racer's lead, and started walking back, followed by Ayla, Whinney, and Wolf.

"Dalanar of the Lanzadonii, please welcome Ayla of the Mamutoi," he said.

Dalanar held out both hands, palms up, in the greeting of openness and friendship. Ayla grasped them with both of hers.

"In the name of Doni, the Great Earth Mother, I welcome you, Ayla of the Mamutoi," Dalanar said.

"I greet you, Dalanar of the Lanzadonii," Ayla replied, with the proper formality.

"You speak our language well for someone from so far away. It is my pleasure to meet you." His formality was belied by his smile. He had noticed her manner of speaking and thought it most intriguing. "Jondalar taught me to speak," she said, hardly able to keep from staring. She glanced at Jondalar, then back at Dalanar, stunned by their resemblance.

Dalanar's long blond hair was a little thinner on top and his waist a little thicker, but he had the same intensely blue eyes—a few creases at the comers—and the same high forehead, his worry lines etched a little deeper. His voice had the same quality, too, the same pitch, the same tone. He even stressed the word pleasure the same way, giving it the hint of a double meaning. It was uncanny. The warmth of his hands started a tingling response in her. His similarity even confused her body for a moment.

Dalanar felt her response and smiled Jondalar's smile, understanding the reason and liking her for it. With that strange accent, he thought, she must come from someplace quite far away. When he dropped her hands, the wolf suddenly approached him, quite fearlessly, although he couldn't say he felt the same way himself. Wolf insinuated his head under Dalanar's hand, looking for attention, as though he knew the man. To his own surprise, Dalanar found himself stroking the hand some animal, as though it were perfectly natural to pet a large living wolf.

Jondalar was grinning. "Wolf thinks you're me. Everyone always said we looked alike. Next you'll be on Racer's back." He held the lead rope toward the man.

"Did you say 'Racer's back'?" Dalanar said.

"Yes. Most of the way here, we rode on the backs of those horses; Racer is the name I gave the stallion," Jondalar explained. "Ayla's horse is Whinney, and this big beast that's taken such a liking to you is called 'Wolf.' That's the Mamutoi word for a wolf."

"How did you ever get a wolf, and horses ..." Dalanar began.

"Dalanar, where are your manners? Don't you think other people want to meet her and hear their stories?"

Ayla, still slightly flustered by Dalanar's amazing resemblance to Jondalar, turned to the one who spoke—and found herself staring again. The woman resembled no one Ayla had ever seen before. Her hair, pulled back from her face into a roll at the back of her head, was glossy black, streaked with gray at the temples. But it was her face that

held Ay la's attention. It was round and flat with high cheekbones, a tiny nose, and dark slanting eyes. The woman's smile contradicted her stem voice and Dalanar beamed as he looked down at her.

"Jerika!" Jondalar said, smiling with delight.

"Jondalar! It's so good to have you back!" They hugged with obvious affection. "Since this great bear of a man of mine has no manners, why don't you introduce me to your companion? And then you can tell me why those animals stand there and don't run away," the woman said.

She moved between the two men and was dwarfed by them. They were exactly the same height, and the top of her head barely reached midway up their chests. Her walk was quick and energetic. She reminded Ay la of a bird, an impression reinforced by her diminutive size.

"Jerika of the Lanzadonii, please greet Ayla of the Mamutoi. She is the one responsible for the behavior of the animals," Jondalar said, beaming at the small woman with Dalanar's expression. "She can tell you better than I why they don't run away."

"You are welcome here, Ayla of the Mamutoi," Jerika said, with hands outstretched. "And the animals as well, if you can promise they will continue such uncommon ways." She was eying Wolf as she spoke.

"I greet you, Jerika of the Lanzadonii." Ayla returned her smile. The small woman's grip had a strength that was surprising and, Ayla sensed, a character to match. "The wolf will not harm anyone, unless someone threatens one of us. He is friendly, but very protective. The horses are nervous around strangers and may rear if they are crowded, which could be dangerous. It would be better if people would stay away from them in the beginning, until they get to know everyone better."

"That's sensible, but I am glad you told us," she replied, then looked at Ayla with disconcerting directness. "You have come a long way. The Mamutoi live beyond the end of Donau."

"Do you know the land of the Mammoth Hunters?" Ayla asked, surprised.

"Yes, and even farther east, though I don't remember as much of that. Hochaman will be glad to tell you about it. Nothing would please him more than a new ear to listen to his stories. My mother and he came from a land near the Endless Sea, as far east as the land goes. I was born on the way. We lived with many people, sometimes for several years. I remember the Mamutoi. Good people. Fine hunters. They wanted us to stay with them," Jerika related.

"Why didn't you?"

"Hochaman wasn't ready to settle down. His dream was to travel to the ends of the world, to see how far the land would go. We met Dalanar not long after my mother died and decided to stay and help him get the flint mine started. But Hochaman has lived to see his dream," Jerika said, glancing at her tall mate. "He has traveled all the way from the Endless Sea of the east to the Great Waters of the west. Dalanar helped him finish his Journey, some years ago, carried him on his back most of the way. Hochaman shed tears when he saw the great western sea, and he washed them away with salt water. He can't walk much now, but no one has made so long a Journey as Hochaman."

"Or you, Jerika," Dalanar added proudly. "You've traveled nearly as far."

"Hmmmf." She shrugged. "It's not as though I made the choice. But here I scold Dalanar, and then I talk too much."

Jondalar had his arm around the waist of the woman he had surprised.

"I'd like to meet your traveling companion," she said.

"I'm sorry, of course," Jondalar said. "Ayla of the Mamutoi, this is my cousin, Joplaya of the Lanzadonii."

"I welcome you, Ayla of the Mamutoi," she said, holding out her hands.

"I greet you, Joplaya of the Lanzadonii," Ayla said, suddenly conscious of her accent and glad she had a clean tunic under her parka.

Joplaya was as tall as she, perhaps a shade taller. She had her mother's high cheekbones, but her face was not as flat and her nose was like Jondalar's, only more delicate and finely chisled. Smooth dark eyebrows matched long black hair, and thick black lashes framed eyes with a hint of her mother's slant, but a dazzling green!

Joplaya was a stunningly beautiful woman.

"I am pleased to greet you," Ayla said. "Jondalar has spoken of you so often."

"I'm pleased he didn't forget me, altogether," Joplaya replied. She stepped back and Jondalar's arm found her waist again.

Others had crowded around, and Ayla went through a formal greeting with each member of the Cave. They were all curious about the woman Jondalar had brought back, but their scrutiny and questions made her uncomfortable, and she was glad when Jerika intervened.

"I think we should save some questions for later. I'm sure they both have many stories to tell, but they must be tired. Come, Ayla, I will show you where you can stay. Do the animals require anything special?"

"I just need to remove their loads and find a place for them to graze. Wolf will stay inside with us, if you don't object," Ayla said.

She saw that Jondalar was deep in conversation with Joplaya, and she unloaded the packs from both horses herself, but he hurried over to help her take their things into the cave.

"I think I know just the place for the horses," he said. "I'll take them there. Do you want to keep the lead on Whinney? I'm going to tie Racer down with a long rope."

"No, I don't think so. She'll stay near Racer." Ayla noticed that he was feeling so entirely comfortable, he didn't even have to ask. But why not? These people were his kin. "I'll go with you, though. To settle her in."

They walked to a small grassy dell with a creek running through it that was off around the side. Wolf came with them. After he tied Racer's lead securely, Jondalar started back. "Are you coming?" he asked.

"I'll stay with Whinney a little longer," she said.

"Why don't I go carry our things in, then?"

"Yes, go ahead." He seemed eager to get back, not that she blamed him. She signaled the wolf to stay with her. Everything was new to him, too. They all needed some time to settle in, except for Jondalar. When she returned she looked for him and found him deep in conversation with Joplaya. She hesitated to interrupt.

"Ayla," he said, when he noticed her. "I was telling Joplaya about Wymez. Later, will you show her the spear point he gave you?"

She nodded. Jondalar turned back to Joplaya. "Wait until you see it.

The Mamutoi are excellent mammoth hunters, they tip their spears with flint instead of bone. It pierces thick hides better, especially if the blades are thin. Wymez developed a new technique. The point is bifacially knapped, but not like a crude axehead. He heats the stone-- that makes the difference. Finer, thinner flakes sheer off. He can make a point that is longer than my hand with a cross-section so thin and an edge so sharp, you won't believe it."

They were standing so close together their bodies were touching as Jondalar excitedly explained the details of the new technique, and their casual intimacy made Ayla uneasy. They had lived together during their adolescent years. What secrets had he told her? What joys and sorrows had they known together? What frustrations and triumphs had they shared as they both learned the difficult art of knapping flint? How much better did Joplaya know him than she did?

Before, they had both been strangers to the people they met on their Journey. Now, only she was a stranger.

He turned back to Ayla. "Why don't I go and get that point? What basket was it in?" he asked, already on his way.

She told him and smiled nervously at the dark-haired woman after he left, but neither of them spoke. Jondalar was back almost instantly.

"Joplaya, I told Dalanar to come--I've been wanting to show him this point. Wait until you see it."

He carefully opened the wrapped package and uncovered a beautifully made flint point just as Dalanar came up. At the sight of the fine spear point, Dalanar took it from Jondalar and examined it closely.

"It's a masterwork! I have never seen such fine craftsmanship," Dalanar exclaimed. "Look at this, Joplaya. It's bifacially worked, but very thin, small flakes are removed. Think of the control, the concentration it must have taken. The feel of this flint is different, and the sheen. It seems almost . . . oily. Where did you get this? Do they have a different kind of flint in the east?"

"No, it's a new process, developed by a Mamutoi man named Wymez. He's the only knapper I've ever met who compares with you, Dalanar. He heats the stone. That's what gives it the sheen, and the feel, but even better, after it's heated, you can remove those fine flakes," Jondalar was explaining with great animation.

Ay la found herself watching him.

"They almost chip off by themselves--that's what gives you the control. I'll show you how he does it. I'm not as good as he is--I need to work on perfecting my technique--but you'll see what I mean. I want to get some good flint while we're here. With the horses, we can carry more weight, and I'd like to bring some Lanzadonii stone home with me."

"This is your home, too, Jondalar," Dalanar said quietly. "But, yes, we can go to the mine tomorrow and quarry some fresh stone. I'd like to see how this is done, but is this really a spear point? It looks so thin, and graceful, it almost seems too fragile to hunt with."

"They use these spear points for hunting mammoth. It does break more easily, but the sharp flint pierces the thick hide better than a bone point and will slide in between ribs," Jondalar said. "I have something else to show you, too. I developed it when I was recovering from the cave lion mauling, in Ayla's valley. It's a spear-thrower. With it, a spear will fly twice as far. Wait until you see how it works!"

"I think they want us to come and eat, Jondalar," Dalanar said, noticing people at the mouth of the cave, beckoning. "Everyone will want to hear your stories. Come inside where you can be comfortable and all can hear. You tease us with these animals that obey your wishes, and comments about cave lion maulings, spear-throwers, new stone-knapping techniques. What other adventures and marvels do you have to share?"

Jondalar laughed. "We haven't even begun. Would you believe we have seen stones that make fire and stones that bum? Dwellings made out of the bones of mammoths, ivory points that pull thread, and huge rivercraft used to hunt fish so big, it would take five men your size, one on top of the other, to reach tip to tail."

Ayla had never seen Jondalar so happy and relaxed, so free and unrestrained, and she realized how glad he was to be with his people. He put an arm around both Ayla and Joplaya as they walked toward the cave. "Have you chosen a mate yet, Joplaya?" Jondalar asked. "I didn't see anyone who seemed to have a claim on you."

Joplaya laughed. "No, I've been waiting for you, Jondalar."

"There you go, making a joke again," Jondalar said, chuckling. He turned to explain to Ayla. "Close-cousins can't mate, you know."

"I have it all planned," Joplaya continued, "I thought we'd run off together and start our own Cave, like Dalanar did. But, of course, we'd only allow flint knappers." Her laugh seemed forced, and she looked only at Jondalar.

"See what I mean, Ayla?" Jondalar said, turning to her but giving Joplaya a squeeze. "Always joking. Joplaya is the worst tease." Ayla wasn't sure she understood the joke.

"Seriously, Joplaya, you must be promised anyway."

"Echozar has asked, but I haven't decided yet."

"Echozar? I don't think I know him. Is he Zeiandonii?"

"He's Lanzadonii. He joined us a few years ago. Dalanar saved his life, found him almost drowned. I think he's still in the cave. He's shy; you'll understand why when you meet him. He looks . . . well, different. He doesn't like meeting strangers, he says he doesn't want to come with us to the Zeiandonii Summer Meeting. But he's sweet when you get to know him, and he'd do anything for Dalanar."

"Are you going to the Summer Meeting this year? I hope so, at least for the Matrimonial. Ayla and I are going to be mated." This time he gave Ayla a squeeze.

"I don't know," Joplaya said, looking at the ground. Then she looked at him. "I always knew you would never mate that Marona woman who was waiting for you the year you left, but I didn't think you'd bring a woman back with you."

Jondalar flushed at the mention of the woman he had promised to mate and left behind, and he didn't notice Ayla stiffen as Joplaya hurried toward a man just coming out of the cave.

"Jondalar! That man!" He caught the startled tone in her voice and turned to look at her. She was ashen.

"What's wrong, Ayla?"

"He looks like Durc! Or maybe the way my son will look when he grows up. Jondalar, that man is part Clan!"

Jondalar looked closer. It was true. The man Joplaya was urging toward them had the look of the Clan. But as they approached. Ayla noticed one striking difference between this man and the men of the Clan she knew. He was almost as tall as she.

When he neared, she made a motion with her hand. It was subtle, hardly noticeable to anyone else, but the man's large brown eyes opened wide with surprise.

"Where did you learn that?" he asked, making the same gesture. His voice was deep, but clear and distinct. He had no problem speaking; a sure sign he was a mixture.

"I was raised by a clan. They found me when I was a little girl. I don't remember any family before that."

"A clan raised you? They cursed my mother because she gave birth to me," he said bitterly. "What clan would raise you?"

"I didn't think her accent was Mamutoi," Jerika interjected. Several people were standing around them.

Jondalar took a deep breath and squared his shoulders. He had known from the beginning Ayla's background would come out sooner or later. "When I met her, she couldn't even talk, Jerika, at least not with words. But she saved my life after I was attacked by a cave lion. She was adopted by the Mamutoi into the Mammoth Hearth because she is so skilled in healing."

"She is Mamut? One Who Serves the Mother? Where is her mark? I don't see any tattoo on her cheek," Jerika said.

"Ayla learned to heal from the woman who raised her, a medicine woman of the people she calls Clan--natheads--but she's as good as any zeiandoni. The Mamut was only starting to train her to Serve the Mother before we left; she was never initiated. That's why she has no mark," Jondalar explained.

"I knew she was zeiandoni. She has to be to control animals like that, but how could she learn healing from a flathead woman?" Dalanar exclaimed. "Before I met Echozar, I thought they were little more than animals. I understand from him that they can talk, in a way, and now you say they have healers. You should have told me, Echozar."

"How would I know? I'm not a flathead!" Echozar spat the word out.

"I only knew my mother, and Andovan."

Ayla was surprised at the venom in his voice. "You said your mother was cursed? And yet she survived to raise you? She must have been a remarkable woman."

Echozar looked directly into the gray-blue eyes of the tall blond

woman. There was no hesitation, no drawing back to avoid staring at him. He felt strangely drawn to this woman he had never seen before, comfortable with her.

"She didn't talk about it much," Echozar said. "She was attacked by some men, who killed her mate when he tried to protect her. He was the brother of the leader of her clan, and she was blamed for his death. The leader said she brought bad luck. But later, when she learned she was expecting a child, he took her as a second woman. When I was born, he said it proved she was a bad-luck woman. She had not only killed her mate, she gave birth to a deformed baby. Then he cursed her, a death curse." He was talking more openly to this woman than he normally did, and he was surprised at himself.

"I'm not sure what that means--a death curse," Echozar continued.

"She only told me once, and then she couldn't finish. She said everyone turned away from her, as though they could not see her. They said she was dead, and even though she tried to make them look at her, it was like she wasn't there, like she was dead. It must have been terrible."

"It was," Ayla said softly. "It's hard to go on living if you don't exist to the ones you love." Her eyes misted with memory.

"My mother took me and left them to go and die, like she was supposed to, but Andovan found her. He was old even then, and living alone. He never did tell me why he left his Cave, it was something about a cruel leader ..."

"Andovan ..." Ayla interrupted. "Was he S'Armunai?"

"Yes, I think so," Echozar said. "He didn't talk about his people much."

"We know about their cruel leader," Jondalar said, grimly.

"Andovan took care of us," Echozar continued. "He taught me to hunt. He learned to speak the sign language of the Clan from my mother, but she never could say more than a few words. I learned both, though it surprised her that I could make his word sounds. Andovan died a few years ago, and with him my mother's will to live. The death curse finally took her."

"What did you do then?" Jondalar asked.

"I lived alone."

"That is not easy," Ayla said.

"No, it's not easy. I tried to find someone to live with. No clan would let me near them. They threw stones at me and said I was deformed and unlucky. No Cave would have anything to do with me, either. They said I was an abomination of mixed spirits, half-man and half-animal. After a while I got tired of trying. I didn't want to be alone any more. One day I jumped off a cliff into the river. The next

thing I knew, Dalanar was looking at me. He took me to his Cave. Now I am Echozar of the Lanzadonii," he finished proudly, glancing at the tall man he idolized.

Ayla thought of her son, grateful he had been accepted as a baby, and grateful there were people who loved him and wanted him when she had to leave him behind.

"Echozar, don't hate your mother's people," she said. "It is not that they are bad, they are just so ancient that it's hard for them to change. Their traditions go back so far, and they don't understand new ways."

"And they are people," Jondalar said to Dalanar. "That's one thing I've learned on this Journey. We met a couple just before we started over the glacier--that's another story--but they're planning meetings about the problems they've been having with some of us, especially some young Losadunai men. Someone has even approached them about trading."

"Flatheads having meetings? Trading? This world is changing faster than I can understand," Dalanar said. "Until I met Echozar, I wouldn't have believed it."

"People may call them flatheads, and animals, but you know your mother was a brave woman, Echozar," Ayla said, then held out her hands to him. "I know how it feels to have no people. Now I am Ayla of the Mamutoi. Will you welcome me, Echozar of the Lanzadonii?" He took her hands and she felt them tremble. "You are welcome here, Ayla of the Mamutoi," he said.

Jondalar stepped forward with his hands outstretched. "I greet you, Echozar of the Lanzadonii," he said.

"I welcome you, Jondalar of the Zeiandonii," Echozar said, "but you don't need to be welcomed here. I've heard about the son of Dalanar's hearth. There's no doubt you were born of his spirit. You are much like him."

Jondalar grinned. "Everyone says so, but don't you think his nose is a little bigger than mine?"

"I don't. I think yours is bigger than mine," Dalanar laughed, clapping the younger man's shoulder. "Come inside. The food is getting cold."

Ayla lingered a moment to talk to Echozar, and when she turned to go in, Joplaya detained her.

"I want to talk to Ayla, Echozar, but don't go in yet. I want to talk to you, too," she said. He walked away quickly to leave the two women alone, but not before Ayla saw the adoration in his eyes when he looked at Joplaya.

"Ayla, I . . ." Joplaya began. "I ... think I know why Jondalar loves you. I want to say ... I want to wish you both happiness."

Ayla studied the dark-haired woman. She sensed a change in her, a drawing in, a feeling of grim finality. Suddenly Ayla knew why she had been so uneasy about the woman.

"Thank you, Joplaya. I love him very much; it would be hard to live without him. It would leave me with a great emptiness inside that would be very hard to bear."

"Yes, very hard to bear," Joplaya said, closing her eyes for a moment.

"Aren't you going to come in and eat?" Jondalar said, coming back out of the cave.

"You go ahead, Ayla. There's something I have to do first."

E

' chozar glanced at the large piece of obsidian, then looked away. The ripples in the shiny black glass distorted his reflection, but nothing could change it, and he didn't want to see himself today. He was dressed in a deerskin tunic, fringed with tufts of fur and decorated with beads made of hollow bird bones, dyed quills, and sharp animal teeth. He had never owned anything so fine. Joplaya had made it for him, for the ceremony that officially adopted him into the First Cave of the Lanzadonii.

As he walked into the main area of the cave, he felt the soft leather, smoothing it with reverence knowing her hands had made it. It almost hurt just to think about her. He had loved her from the first. It was she who had talked to him, listened to him, tried to draw him out. He would never have faced all those Zeiandonii at the Summer Meeting that year if it hadn't been for her, and when he saw how the men nocked around her, he wanted to die. It had taken months to work up the courage to ask her: How could anyone who looked like him dare to dream of a woman like her? When she didn't refuse, he nourished his hope. But she had put off giving him an answer for so long, he was sure it was her way of saying no.

Then, on the day Ayla and Jondalar arrived, when she asked him if he still wanted her, he couldn't believe it. Wanted her! He had never wanted anything so much in his life. He waited for a time when he could talk to Dalanar alone. But the visitors were always with him. He didn't want to bother them. And he was afraid to ask. Only the thought of losing his one chance for more happiness than he ever dreamed possible gave him the courage.

Then Dalanar said she was Jerika's daughter and he'd have to talk it over with her, but all he had asked was did Joplaya agree, and did he love her. Did he love her? Did he love her? O Mother, did he love her! Echozar took his place among the people waiting expectantly, and he felt his heart beat faster when he saw Dalanar get up and walk toward a hearth in the middle of the cave. A small wood sculpture of a well-rounded female was stuck in the ground in front of the hearth. The ample breasts, full stomach, and broad buttocks of the donii were

accurately portrayed, but the head was little more than a knob with no features and the arms and legs were only suggested. Dalanar stood beside the hearth and faced the assembled group.

"First I want to announce that we are going to the Zeiandonii Summer Meeting again this year," Dalanar began, "and we invite any who want to join us to come. It's a long trip for us, but I hope to persuade one of the younger zeiaandoni to return and make a home with us. We have no lanzadoni, and we need One Who Serves the Mother. We are growing, soon there will be a Second Cave, and someday the Lanza-donii will have their own Summer Meetings.

"There is another reason for going. Not only will the mating of Jondalar and Ay la be sanctified at the Matrimonial, we will have another reason to celebrate it this year, too."

Dalanar picked up the wooden representation of the Great Earth Mother and nodded. Echozar was nervous, even though he knew this was only an announcement ceremony and much more casual than the elaborate Matrimonial would be, with its purifying rituals and taboos. When they both stood before him, Dalanar began.

"Echozar, Son of Woman blessed of Doni, of the First Cave of the Lanzadonii, you have asked Joplaya, Daughter of Jerika mated to Dalanar, to be your mate. This is true?"

"It is true," Echozar said in a voice so weak it could hardly be heard.

"Joplaya, Daughter of Jerika mated to Dalanar ..."

The words were not the same, but the meaning was, and Ayla shook with sobs as she recalled a similar ceremony when she stood beside a dusky man who looked at her the way Echozar looked at Joplaya.

"Ayla, don't cry, this is a happy occasion," Jondalar said, holding her tenderly.

She could hardly speak; she knew how it felt to stand beside the wrong man. But there was no hope for Joplaya, not even dreams that someday the man she loved would flout custom for her. He didn't even know she loved him, and she couldn't speak of it. He was a cousin, a close-cousin, more sibling than cousin, an unmatable man--and he loved another. Ayla felt Joplaya's pain as her own as she sobbed beside the man they both loved.

"I was thinking of the time I stood beside Raneé like that," she finally said.

Jondalar remembered only too well. He felt a constriction in his chest, a pain in his throat, and he held her fiercely. "Hey, woman, you're going to have me crying soon."

He glanced at Jerika, who sat with stiff dignity while tears rolled down her face. "Why do women always cry at these things?" he said. Jerika looked at Jondalar with an unfathomable expression, then at

Ayla sobbing quietly in his arms. "It's time she mated, time she put away impossible dreams. We can't all have the perfect man," she whispered softly, then turned back to the ceremony.

". . . Does the First Cave of the Lanzadonii accept this mating?"

Dalanar asked, looking up.

"We accept," they all replied in unison.

"Echozar, Joplaya, you have promised to mate. May Doni, the Great Earth Mother, bless your mating," the leader concluded, touching the wooden carving to the top of Echozar's head and Joplaya's stomach. He put the donii back in front of the hearth, pushing the peglike legs into the ground so it would stand unsupported.

The couple turned to face the assembled Cave, then began to walk slowly around the central hearth. In the solemn silence, the ineffable air of melancholy surrounding the compellingly beautiful woman added a quality that made her seem even more exquisitely lovely. The man beside her was a fraction shorter. His large beaky nose protruded beyond a heavy chinless jaw that jutted forward. His overhanging brow ridges, joined at the center, were accented by thick, unruly eyebrows that crossed his forehead in a single hairy line. His arms were heavily muscled, and his huge barrel chest and long body were supported by short, hairy, bowed legs. Those were the features that marked him as Clan. But he could not be called flathead. Unlike them, he lacked the low sloping forehead that swept back into a large long head--the squashed-flat look that prompted the name. Instead, Echozar's forehead rose as straight and high above his bony brow ridges as that of any other member of the Cave.

But Echozar was incredibly ugly. The antithesis of the woman beside him. Only his eyes belied the comparison, but they overwhelmed. His large, liquid, brown eyes were so full of tender adoration for the woman he loved, they even overwhelmed the unspeakable sadness that hung in the atmosphere through which Joplaya moved.

But not even that evidence of Echozar's love could overcome the pain Ayla felt for Joplaya. She buried her head in Jondalar's chest because it hurt too much to look, though she fought to overcome the desolation of her empathy.

When the couple completed the third circuit, the silence was broken as people got up to offer good wishes. Ayla held back, trying to compose herself. Finally, urged by Jondalar, they went to extend their wishes of happiness.

"Joplaya, I'm so glad you'll be celebrating your Matrimonial with us," Jondalar said, giving her a hug. She clung to him. He was surprised at the intensity of her embrace. He had the disconcerting feeling she was saying goodbye, as though she would never see him again.

"I don't have to wish you happiness, Echozar," Ayla said. "I will wish instead that you are always as happy as you are now."

"With Joplaya, how can it be any other way?" he said. Spontaneously, she hugged him. He wasn't ugly to her, he had a comfortable, familiar look. It took him a moment to respond; beautiful women didn't hug him often, and he felt a warm affection for the golden-haired woman.

Then she turned to Joplaya. As she looked into eyes as green as Jondalar's were blue, the words she meant to say stuck in her throat. With an aching cry she reached for Joplaya, overcome by her hopeless acceptance. Joplaya held her, patting her back as though it were Ayla who needed consolation.

"It's all right, Ayla," Joplaya said, in a voice that sounded hollow, empty. Her eyes were dry. "What else could I do? I'll never find a man who loves me as much as Echozar does. I've known for a long time I would mate him. There just wasn't any reason to wait any more."

Ayla stood back, fighting to control tears she shed for the woman who could not, and she saw Echozar move closer. He put a tentative arm around Joplaya's waist, still not quite able to believe it. He was afraid he would wake up and find it was all a dream. He didn't know he had only the shell of the woman he loved. It didn't matter. The shell was enough.

"Well, no. I didn't see it with my own eyes," Hochaman said, "and I can't say that I believed it, then. But if you can ride horses and teach a wolf to follow you around, then why couldn't someone ride the back of a mammoth?"

"Where did you say this happened?" Dalanar asked.

"It was not long after we started out, far to the east. It must have been a four-toed mammoth," Hochaman said.

"A four-toed mammoth? I've never heard of such a thing," Jondalar said, "not even from the Mamutoi."

"They are not the only ones who hunt mammoths, you know,"

Hochaman said, "and they don't live far enough to the east. Believe me, they are close neighbors, in comparison. When you really go east, and get close to the Endless Sea, mammoths have four toes on their hind feet. They tend to be darker, too. A lot of them are almost black."

"Well, if Ayla could ride on the back of a cave lion, I don't doubt that someone could learn to ride a mammoth. What do you think?"

Jondalar asked, looking at Ayla.

"If you got one young enough," she said. "I think if you raised almost any animal around people from the time it was a baby, you could teach it something. At least not to be afraid of people. Mam-

moths are smart; they could learn a lot. We watched the way they broke up ice for water. Many other animals used it, too."
"They can smell it from a long distance away, too," Hochaman said.
"It's a lot drier in the east, and the people there always say, 'If you run out of water, look for a mammoth.' They can go for quite a while without it, if they have to, but eventually they will lead you to it."
"That's good to know," Echozar said.
"Yes, especially if you travel much," Joplaya said.
"I don't plan to travel much," he said.
"But you will be coming to the Zeiandonii Summer Meeting," Jondalar said.
"For our Matrimonial, of course," Echozar said. "And I'd like to see you again." He smiled tentatively. "It would be nice if you and Ayla lived here."
"Yes. I hope you will both consider our offer," Dalanar said. "You know this is always your home, Jondalar, and we don't have a healer, except for Jerika, who is not really trained. We need a lanzadoni and we both think Ayla would be perfect. You could visit with your mother, and return with us after the Summer Meeting."
"Believe me, we appreciate your offer, Dalanar," Jondalar said, "and we will consider it."

Ayla glanced at Joplaya. She had withdrawn, closed in on herself. She liked the woman, but they talked mostly of superficial things. Ayla could not overcome her sorrow at Joplaya's plight--she had come too close to a similar circumstance--and her own happiness was a constant reminder of Joplaya's pain. As much as she had grown to like everyone, she was glad they would be leaving in the morning. She would particularly miss Jerika and Dalanar, and listening to their heated "discussions." The woman was tiny; when Dalanar held his arm out, she could walk under it with room to spare, but she had an indomitable will. She was as much a leader of the Cave as he was and argued vociferously when her opinion differed from his. Dalanar listened to her seriously, but by no means did he always yield. The welfare of his people was his main concern, and he often took the question at issue to them, but he made most decisions himself as matter-of-factly as any natural leader. He never made demands, he simply commanded respect. After the first few times, when she misunderstood, Ayla loved to listen to them argue, hardly bothering to hide a smile at the sight of the child-size woman in heated debate with the giant of a man. What amazed her most was the way they could interrupt a violent discussion with a tender word of affection, or to talk of something else, just as

though they had not been at each other's throats, and then resume the verbal combat as though they were the bitterest of enemies. Once the arguments were resolved, they were promptly forgotten. But they seemed to enjoy the intellectual duels, and for all their difference in size, it was a battle of equals. They not only loved each other, they had great respect for each other.

The weather was warming and spring was in full bloom when Ayla and Jondalar started out again. Dalanar passed on good wishes to the Ninth Cave of the Zeiandonii, and he reminded them again of his offer. They had both felt welcome, but Ayla's sensitivity to Joplaya made it difficult for her to think about living with the Lanzadonii. It would be too hard on both of them, but it was not something she could explain to Jondalar.

He did sense a peculiar strain in the relationship between the two women, though they seemed to like each other. Joplaya behaved differently toward him, too. She was more distant, didn't joke and tease the way she always had. But he had been surprised at the vehemence of her last embrace. Tears had filled her eyes. He had reminded her that he was not going on a long Journey, he had just come back, and they would see each other soon, at the Summer Meeting.

He had been relieved that they had both been so warmly welcomed, and he would definitely consider Dalanar's offer, particularly if the Zeiandonii were not as accepting of Ayla. It was good to know they would have a place, but in his heart, as much as he loved Dalanar and the Lanzadonii, the Zeiandonii were his people. If possible, that was where he wanted to live with Ayla.

When they finally left, Ayla felt as though a burden had lifted. In spite of the rains, she was happy to feel the weather warming, and on sunny days it was too beautiful to be sad for long. She was a woman in love traveling with her man, and going to meet his people, going to her new home. She could not help feeling ambivalent about it, though, full of hope and worry.

It was country Jondalar knew, and he greeted every familiar landmark with excitement, and often a comment or story about it. They rode through a pass between two mountain ridges, then picked up a river that twisted and turned in the right general direction. They left it at its source, and crossed several large rivers flowing from north to south across a low valley, then climbed a large massif overtopped with volcanoes, one still smoking, others quiescent. Crossing over a plateau, near the source of a river, they passed by some hot springs.

"I'm sure this is the beginning of the river that flows right in front

of the Ninth Cave," Jondalar said, full of enthusiasm. "We're almost there, Ayla! We can be home by nightfall."

"Are these the hot healing waters you told me about?" Ayla asked.

"Yes. We call them Doni's Healing Waters," he said.

"Let's stay here tonight," she said.

"But we're almost there," Jondalar said, "almost at the end of our Journey, and I've been away for so long."

"That's why I want to spend the night here. It's the end of our Journey. I want to bathe in the hot water, and I want to spend one last night alone with just you, before we meet all your kin."

Jondalar looked at her and smiled. "You're right. After all this time, what's one more night? And it is the last time we'll be alone together for a long time. Besides"--his smile warmed--"I like being with you around hot springs."

They put up their tent at a site that had obviously been used before.

Ayla thought the horses seemed agitated when they were let free to graze on the fresh grass of the plateau, but she had seen some young coltsfoot and sorrel leaves. When she went to pick them, she saw some spring mushrooms and then crab apple blossoms and elder shoots. She returned to their campsite holding the front of her tunic out like a basket, full of fresh greens and other delicacies.

"I think you are planning a feast," Jondalar said.

"It's not a bad idea. I saw a nest that I want to go back and check for eggs," Ayla said.

"Then what do you think of this?" he said, holding up a trout. Ayla smiled with delight. "I thought I saw it in the stream, sharpened a green stick into a gorge, and dug up a worm to thread around it. This fish bit so fast, it was almost like it was waiting for me."

"Definitely the makings for a feast!"

"But it can wait, can't it?" Jondalar said. "I think I'd rather see a hot bath right now." His blue eyes filled with his thoughts of her and aroused her response.

"A wonderful idea," she said, emptying her tunic beside the firepit, then walking into his arms.

They sat side by side, a little back from the fire, feeling replete, satisfied, and entirely relaxed, watching sparks dance an arabesque and disappear into the night. Wolf was dozing nearby. Suddenly he raised his head and cocked his ears toward the dark plateau. They heard a loud, full-throated neigh, but it was not familiar. Then the mare squealed, and Racer whinnied.

"There's a strange horse in the field," Ayla said, jumping up. It was a moonless night and hard to see.

"You'll never find your way out there tonight. Let me try to find something to make a torch."

Whinney squealed again, the strange horse neighed, and they heard hoofbeats racing off into the night.

"That does it," Jondalar said. "It's too late tonight. I think she's gone. A horse has captured her again."

"This time, I think she left because she wanted to. I thought she seemed nervous; I should have paid closer attention," Ayla said. "It's her season, Jondalar. I'm sure that was a stallion, and I think Racer went with them. He's too young, yet, but I'm sure other mares are in season, too, and he would be drawn to them."

"It's too dark to look for them now, but I do know this region. We can track them in the morning."

"The last time, I took her out, and the brown stallion came for her. She came back to me on her own, and later, she had Racer. I think she's out starting a baby again," Ayla said, sitting down by the fire. She looked at Jondalar and grinned. "It seems right, both of us pregnant at the same time."

It took a moment for her statement to register. "Both of you . . . pregnant . . . at the same time? Ayla! Are you saying you are pregnant? Are you going to have a baby?"

"Yes," she said, nodding. "I am going to have your baby, Jondalar."

"My baby? You're going to have my baby? Ayla! Ayla." He picked her up, spun her around, and then kissed her. "Are you sure? I mean, are you sure you are going to have a baby? The spirit could have come from one of the men at Dalanar's Cave, or even the Losadunai. . . . That's all right, if that's what the Mother wants."

"I passed my moon time without bleeding, and I feel pregnant. I've even been getting a little sick in the morning. Not bad, though. I think we started it when we got down off the glacier," Ayla said. "And it is your baby, Jondalar, I'm sure of it. It can't be anyone else's. Started with your essence. The essence of your manhood."

"My baby?" he said, a look of soft wonder in his eyes. He put his hand on her stomach. "You have my baby in there? I've wanted that so much," he said, looking away and blinking his eyes. "Do you know, I even asked the Mother for it."

"Didn't you tell me the Mother always gives you what you ask for, Jondalar?" She smiled with his happiness, and her own. "Tell me, did you ask for a boy or a girl?"

"Just a baby, Ayla. It doesn't matter which."

"Then you won't mind if I hope for a girl this time?"

He shook his head. "Just your baby, and maybe, mine."

"The trouble with tracking horses on foot is that they can travel so much faster than we can," Ayla said.

"But I think I know where they might be going," Jondalar said, "and I know a shorter way, up over the top of that ridge."

"What if they aren't where you think?"

"Then we'll have to come back and pick up their trail again, but their tracks are heading in the right direction," he said. "Don't worry, Ayla. We'll find them."

"We have to, Jondalar. We've been through too much. I can't let her go back to a herd now."

Jondalar led the way to a sheltered field where he had often seen horses before. They found many horses there. It did not take Ayla long to identify her friend. They clambered down to the edge of the grassy bottomland, although Jondalar watched Ayla closely, a little worried that she might be doing more than she should. She whistled the familiar call.

Whinney lifted her head and galloped toward the woman, followed by a large pale stallion and a young brown one. The pale stallion detoured to challenge the young one, who quickly backed away. Although he was excited by the presence of females in heat, he was not ready to challenge the experienced herd stallion for his own dam. Jondalar ran toward Racer, spear-thrower in hand, ready to protect him from the powerful dominant animal, but the young stallion's own actions had protected him. The pale horse veered back toward the receptive mare.

Ayla was standing with her arms around Whinney's neck when the stallion arrived, reared, and displayed his full potential. Whinney backed away from the woman and answered. Jondalar approached, leading Racer with a sturdy rope attached to his halter, looking worried.

"You can try putting her halter on her," Jondalar said.

"No. We'll have to camp here tonight. She's not ready to come yet. They are making a baby, and Whinney wants one. I want to let her," Ayla said.

Jondalar shrugged his acquiescence. "Why not? There's no hurry. We can camp here for a while." He watched Racer strain toward the herd. "He wants to join the others, too. Do you think it would be safe to let him go?"

"I don't think they'll go anyplace. This is a big field, and if they do go away, we can climb up and see where they're heading. It might be good for him to be with other horses for a while. Maybe he can learn from them," Ayla said.

"I think you're right," he said, slipping off the halter, and watching Racer gallop down the field. "I wonder if Racer will ever be a herd stallion? And share Pleasures with all of the females." And, maybe, start young horses growing inside them, he thought.

"We might as well find a place to make camp and make ourselves comfortable," Ayla said. "And think about hunting something to eat. There may be willow grouse in those trees by that stream."

"Too bad there are no hot springs here," Jondalar said. "It's amazing how relaxing a hot bath is."

Ayla looked down from a great height at an unending expanse of water. In the opposite direction, the broad grassy plains stretched out as far as she could see. Nearby was a familiar mountain meadow, with a small cave in a rock wall at the edge. Hazelnut brush grew against the wall, hiding the entrance. She was afraid. It was snowing outside the cave, blocking the entrance, but when she pushed the brush aside and stepped out, it was spring. Flowers were blooming and birds singing. New life was everywhere. The lusty cry of a newborn came from the cave.

She was following someone down the mountain, carrying a baby on her hip with the help of a carrying cloak. He limped and walked with a staff and carried something in a cloak on his back that bulged out. It was Creb, and he was protecting her newborn. They walked, it seemed forever, but traveled a great distance across mountains and vast plains, until they came to a valley with a grassy sheltered field. Horses went there frequently.

Creb stopped, took off his bulging cloak and laid it on the ground. She thought she saw the white of bone inside, but a young brown horse stepped away from the cloak, and ran to a dun yellow mare. She whistled to the horse, but she galloped away with a pale stallion.

Creb turned and beckoned to her, but she couldn't quite understand his sign. It was an everyday language she didn't know. He made a new signal. "Come, we can be there before dark."

She was in a long tunnel deep in a cave. Ahead a light flickered. It was an opening to the outside. She was walking up a steep path along a wall of creamy white rock, following a man taking long, eager strides. She knew the place, and she hurried to catch up.

"Wait! Wait for me. I'm coming," she called out.

"Ayla! Ayla!" Jondalar was shaking her. "Were you having a bad dream?"

"A strange dream, but not a bad dream," she said. She got up, felt a wave of nausea, and lay back down, hoping it would go away.

Jondalar flapped the leather ground cloth at the pale stallion, and Wolf yipped and harried him, while Ayla slipped a halter over Whinney's head. She had only a small pack. Racer, tied securely to a tree, carried most of the burden.

Ayla leaped to the mare's back and urged her to a gallop, guiding her along the edge of the long field. The stallion chased them, but he slowed as they gained distance from the rest of the mares. Finally he pulled to a halt, reared, and neighed, calling to Whinney. He reared again and raced back toward the herd. Several stallions had already tried to take advantage of his absence. He closed in and reared again, screaming a challenge.

Ayla on Whinney kept going, but she slowed down from the fast gallop. When she heard hoofbeats behind, she stopped and waited for Jondalar and Racer, with Wolf on their heels.

"If we hurry, we can be there before dark," Jondalar said.

Ayla and Whinney fell in beside them. She had the strange feeling that she had done this before.

They rode at a comfortable pace. "I think we are both going to have babies, now," Ayla said, "our second ones, and we both had sons before. I think that's good. We can share this time together."

"You'll have many people to share your pregnancy with," Jondalar said.

"I'm sure you are right, but it will be nice to share it with Whinney, too, since we both got pregnant on this Journey." They rode in silence for a while. "She's a lot younger than I am, though. I'm old to be having a baby."

"You're not so old, Ayla. I'm the old man."

"I am nineteen years this spring. That's old to have a baby."

"I am much older. I am past twenty and three years, by now. That is old for a man to be settling down to his own hearth for the first time. Do you realize I've been gone five years? I wonder if anyone will even remember me," Jondalar said.

"Of course they will remember you. Dalanar didn't have any trouble, and neither did Joplaya," Ayla said. Everyone will know him, she thought, but no one will know me.

"Look! See that rock over there? Just beyond the turn in the river? That's where I made my first kill!" Jondalar said, urging Racer on a little faster. "It was a big deer. I don't know what I was most afraid of --those big antlers, or missing and going home empty-handed."

Ayla smiled, pleased at his remembrances, but there was nothing for her to remember. She would be a stranger again. They would all stare at her, and they would ask about her strange accent and where she came from.

"We had a Summer Meeting here once," Jondalar said. "There were hearths set up all over this place. It was my first after I became a man. Oh, how I strutted, trying to act so old, but so afraid that no young woman would invite me to her First Rites. I guess I didn't have to worry. I was invited to three, and that scared me even more!"

"There are some people over there, watching us, Jondalar," Ayla said.

"That's the Fourteenth Cave!" he said, and waved. No one waved back. Instead they disappeared under a deep overhang.

"It must be the horses," Ayla said.

He frowned, then shook his head. "They'll get used to them."

I hope so, Ayla thought, and me, too. The only thing familiar around here will be Jondalar.

"Ayla! There it is!" Jondalar said. "The Ninth Cave of the Zeian-donii."

She looked in the direction he was pointing, and she felt herself blanch.

"It's always easy to find because of that outcrop on top. See, where it looks like a stone is ready to fall? It won't though, unless the whole thing does." Jondalar turned to look at her. "Ayla, are you ill? You're so pale."

She stopped. "I've seen that place before, Jondalar!"

"How could you? You've never been here before."

Suddenly it all came together. It was the cave in my dreams! The one that came from Creb's memories, she thought. Now I know what he was trying to tell me in my dreams.

"I told you my totem meant you for me and sent you to come and get me. He wanted you to take me home, the place where my Cave Lion spirit will be happy. This is it. I have come home, too, Jondalar. Your home is my home," Ayla said.

He smiled; but before he could answer, they heard a voice shouting his name. "Jondalar! Jondalar!"

They looked up along a path to a cliff overhang, and saw a young woman.

"Mother! Come quick," she said. "Jondalar is back. Jondalar is home!"

And so am I, Ayla thought.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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' Each of the books in this Earth's Children™ series has posed its own unique challenges, but from the beginning, when the sometime novel/six-book outline was first conceived, the fourth book, the "travel book," has been both the most difficult and the most interesting to research and write. The Plains of Passage required some additional travel for the author as well, including a return visit to Czechoslovakia, and trips to Hungary, Austria, and Germany to follow a portion of the Danube (the Great Mother River). But to put the setting into the Ice Age, even more time was needed for library research.

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Finding the pieces of the puzzle that were necessary to create this fictional world of the prehistoric past was a challenge; putting them together was another. After studying the material available about glaciers and the environment that surrounded them, I still could not get a completely clear picture of all the northern lands, so that I could move my characters through their world. There were questions, theories at odds with each other--some of which did not seem very well thought out--pieces that did not fit.

Finally, with great relief and growing enthusiasm, I found the one clearly explained and thoughtfully constructed study that brought the Ice Age world into sharp focus. It answered the questions that had risen in my mind, and enabled me to fit in the rest of the pieces from other sources and my own speculations so that I could make a logical setting. I will be eternally grateful to R. Dale Guthrie for his article "Mammals of the Mammoth Steppe as Paleoenvironmental Indicators," pages 307-326, from *Paleoecology of Beringia* (Ed. by David M. Hopkins, John V. Matthews, Jr., Charles E. Schweger, and Steven B. Young, Academic Press, 1982). More than any other single work, that paper helped this book come together as a cohesive, comprehensive, and comprehensible whole.

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