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One-Arm

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Elfquest, fan-fiction story

One-Arm

The cold wind was bringing with it more and more snow. The Holt Halfhill was covered with a thick bed of snow and the world was all white. Hunting parties were out all the time, and in searching for the game they went further and further away from the Holt. The immediate surroundings were only used by trappers in order to preserve the game at normal amounts just in case the hunting would go really bad and famine threatened.

More than half of the whole tribe were away on hunting parties and those left were doing a full-time job in trying to take care of everything at the Holt. Especially keeping the cubs out of the bitter wind inside warm dens seemed an overwhelming hardship at times as every once in a while when the storm abated, and sometimes even during it, a herd of anxious cubs swarmed outside to play in the snow and elders had to crawl out to watch for them.

And as if their number wasn't great enough, two females were pregnant and ready to drop their fawns in a few handful of days.

Foxeye yawned tiredly and rose up a bit to rest her back on the brim of the sleeping level. The furs weighted heavily and she carefully pulled herself at least partly out of them. The cool air even inside the den bit her face and uncovered hands. It was dark and still.

Now, in a more comfortable position she glanced at her mates sleeping on her both sides. Full of anticipation she stroked her big belly knowing that she wouldn't have to wait much longer.

Suddenly her fingers touched another hand. Surprised she looked at her left hand side and met Shortpine's adoring eyes.

"Bright morning, lifemate", he whispered while trying her belly through her clothes.

Foxeye smiled and slowly crawled out under the furs and over his legs and sat on the edge of their sleeping level. Shortpine bent down and lowered his head against her stomach.

Wait. You can feel more..., she said and started to pull open the strings of her leathers.

No, lifemate! It's too cold!

She looked back at her caring lover. **Sweet mate, it's never too cold when you are with me. Feel our cub!**

She bared her chest and stomach, and Shortpine nestled against her pressing his right ear childishly to her belly hoping to hear anything at all from her womb.

Our cub...", Shortpine sent, **How our lives will change I can only wonder...

But it already has, she laughed quietly and lifted his head. **Or do you claim this makes no difference?**

It does! It does! His eyes were laughing. **I'll show you how it'll be very soon.** He sent her an image of all three of them together. They were walking, sitting outside of Halfhill, playing with their newborn; she was sitting between her lifemates, nursing their infant; encompassed by the new-found bliss of parenthood.

But Foxeye's smile faded. Shortpine looked at her in wonder.

What is the matter? He raised his hand on her shoulder.

Quietly she stared down at her small breasts. **I'm afraid... I have not

told you... I think I can't feed it.**
She raised her sad eyes to meet his questioning and troubled. **I'm so young, Shortpine, I'm not ready...**
He embraced her passionately. **Oh my love, oh High Ones, why you have kept this a secret, and burdened yourself needlessly? There's no need to worry. You know that many others would gladly feed the cub.**
But then I can't it hold myself...
Don't be silly. Of course you can. We'll hold it together.
He pulled apart and smiling touched lightly her other breast. **Besides, at least I am sure they will grow soon.**
She smiled back, seemingly eased though still with a shade of sadness.
I just thought, have you asked Deerstorm? Maybe she could do something to help.
I haven't even thought about it! Thank you, my friend! This time it was she who pulled them together and didn't let go until suddenly feeling the touch of a third pair of hands on her shoulders pulling her backward.
"Cone!" she exclaimed.
Leaving Shortpine sitting she fell on top of Cone. Her head resting against his chest Cone reached to try her belly as well.
"How long?" he asked impatiently while stroking her stomach with long gentle moves.
"If I recall correctly, only yesterday when we went to sleep, I told you Deerstorm predicted a handful of days. So that would make about seven days today. Must you ask it every morning, every evening, many times a day?"
She turned slowly and clumsily around to face him and lowered herself on his chest and stomach in a way that her own big belly stayed between his legs feeling only very little pressure.
"Oh yes, I have to. You see, I couldn't bear even the thought of missing the birth." He closed his eyes and passionately wrapped his hands around her.
Shortpine stood up smiling and mused by himself while watching his lifemates embracing each other. He turned to leave, "Pleasant moments. I'll go get something to eat."
On the doorway he turned around to remind Foxeye again of the cold air and was relieved when he saw Cone pulling the heavy furs on them. Pushing aside the leathers on the doorway he disappeared to the snow and cold.
Soon the leather barrier on the doorway moved aside again letting in a swift cold breeze and an elf. Cone and Foxeye turned surprised but it wasn't Shortpine coming back earlier than they expected but another elf.
Talon lowered his hood. "Sorry to disturb your pleasure but, Cone, have you forgotten you were supposed to come hunting with us?"
Cone stared at him for a while surprised. "I'm sorry, I forgot! I'll be with you in a moment!"
Trying to hurry, as difficult it was for her, Foxeye crawled off him, and Cone nearly jumped out of the furs to confirm his regret to Talon already disappearing behind the wall of the doorway.
"I forgot entirely!" he bawled while pulling on his warm snow-time leathers. "But it shouldn't take longer a half hand of days! So I'll be here when your time comes!"
Foxeye had put on her clothes at the time Cone had dressed up cap-a-pie and covered in furs. He took his bow and quiver and Foxeye handed him his spear. After a short hug he was ready. "Stay in warm, my love! I'll be back as soon as I can."
He turned to leave when Foxeye pulled him back by his shoulder and leaned over her belly against him. "And you, lifemate, find what you seek so you'll have what you think you need." And she continued by sending, her eyes sparkling in the half dark, **Take your name now! I'll wait for you together with Shortpine and our cub.**
Cone disappeared behind the curve in the tunnel and Foxeye felt the sudden wind on her face. Though it lasted only for a while, she crawled back under the furs to wait for Shortpine.
He soon returned with a few strips of dried meat to gather strength till the hunters would bring fresh meat. After they had eaten Shortpine helped Foxeye to pull on all the heavy furs. When she was covered all over they stepped outside to the cold and snow.
Shortpine went to his own businesses, to see if he could go on a short hunt or help to check the traps for smaller game. Foxeye wandered around her back arched by the weight of her belly, seeing what others what were doing and being happy that nobody expected her to do anything.
"Bright and white morning!" she heard from behind her.
Turning around she saw Longarrow chuckling and beckoning her. Longarrow had

a big belly as well. She was bearing her Recognized lifemate Bluesky's cub. It would be their second, first was Shortpine.

"Morning, mother", Foxeye answered. She had been orphaned very young and had never had anyone whom truly call mother. But some time after she and Shortpine had become lovemates his mother had also become much closer to her and had taken her as part of her family. She finally had the mother she had longed for. It was pleasing to Longarrow to have a daughter, too, and their moments together were blissful. Their pregnancy had now brought them even more closer.

"Why don't you come inside to warm?" Longarrow asked and entered first into her and Bluesky's den. "How is Shortpine today?"

"Just fine."

They sat down on the fur covered sleeping level.

"You mean nervous and over-caring, of course?" the older female laughed.

"Yes, of course", she giggled. "He can't help it, I suppose."

"Bluesky is just the same."

Foxeye stood up and walked around silently.

"What is the matter, daughter? You seem nervous."

"I'm afraid", she said to the cold dirt wall.

"About giving birth?"

"Yes", she finally answered and turned to look at her mother.

Longarrow sat motionless and silent, holding her hands on her big stomach, yet not expressionless. "It's only natural. So did I after Bluesky and I Recognized. You are young, younger than I was then, I recall. But elfin births are always easy. Thank Timmain for that."

"I do. It is not that I fear..."

"But...?"

"But what will happen afterwards, especially with my lifemates. Shortpine is all and well but I've never seen Cone quite like he is now. Sometimes he seems as if he has lost all his good humour and wits."

"It is difficult for you to notice such, being so much in love with him. He went again today to hunt so he'd finally get his adult name, didn't he?"

Foxeye nodded.

"I think he is troubled because you are now an adult and he still isn't. I know it doesn't mean much to you but to him it does. I remember how much it meant to me but Bluesky hardly noticed his growing up, I think."

Foxeye smiled while listening to her. "Maybe you are right. I hope Cone gets his name this time."

"I hope so, too."

Longarrow bent down on the furs while Foxeye walked out. Pondering over Cone she made her way through the deep snow to see the healer. Now she noticed that she had forgotten to tell Longarrow that Cone also had not yet found his soulname. Maybe that was part of it, she wondered while making her way throw the snowdrifts to Deerstorm's den.

"Deerstorm! Fangslayer!" she yelled from the doorway. But there was no one inside. She would have to go looking for her. But first she rested a bit on the nicely stretched out winter furs in their den. Stroking her belly she gasped for air. It really surprised her how weak and vulnerable she had become. Now she remembered all those warnings at which she had laughed before, the warnings she had received at the time when she had first let the word go round that she was going to pup.

Whitecold was indeed no time to breed! She wrapped her leathers tighter around her and walked out. Fortunately, there was hardly no breeze today. Glancing around she tried to find Deerstorm but the few elves on the common yard were either cubs throwing snowballs at each other or elders who were watching after them or had joined the fun themselves. A few groups were also gathered at the den entrances.

She could've sent for her of course, but why bother her with such a little worry. She made her way to the other side of the common yard and stopped at the bank of the stream. It was frozen solid, of course. The ice was clear with very little snow on it. She stepped on the ice and stamped with her feet just to make sure it was strong enough, as if she wouldn't have known, having walked there many times during the whitecold.

Foxeye took happily a few steps up and down the stream until suddenly her feet disappeared under her and she fell on her face on the smooth ice. It didn't feel like much; falling down was not so unusual and her leathers had softened the fall. She turned around and scrambled to her feet.

It was only then the pain reached her. She stroked her belly in vain to try to stop it and finally realized her stomach had taken most of the fall on it. She tumbled on the bank and screamed in agony both in mind and voice before losing her consciousness.

In only a few moments elves and wolves were gathering around her. The wolves licked her face and when that didn't seem to help one of the cubs rubbed snow on her cheeks. She screamed and opened her eyes.

Deerstorm! Please, I fell... on my belly! she sent and stroked her stomach desperately screaming her pain away. Her vision blurred and she couldn't recognize Two Wolves and Stringsong who picked her up and carried away. Nearly half of the tribe were with her, some holding her hands, a few trying to calm her by sending peaceful thoughts into her mind to block away the pain.

She was carried into her den and lowered on the furs. Soon Deerstorm arrived, panting and face covered in sweat. "Everyone, leave!" she yelled while kneeling beside Foxeye. "Stringsong, you stay here! Where are her lifemates Shortpine and Cone?"

Deerstorm heard Stringsong and others saying something but couldn't make anything out of it as she already falling into a healer's trance. Her hands moved gently from Foxeye's brow to her chest and stomach. She pressed her hands against her skin and pushed through it with her powers to search for her broken tissue. Penetrating ever deeper she finally reached her womb. Within there was tiny little being, inside Foxeye.

The knowledge that she had never healed a pregnant mother before, and certainly not an unborn baby, made it only more horrifying for her when she began examining the child. It was badly hurt and bruised. But before she would turn her attention entirely toward it she would have to search those channels through which the pain reached Foxeye and block them so the mother at least could rest in peace.

Her face was covered in sweat. Finally she broke off panting, her face twisted in agony. "Her baby, Stringsong... its arm is broken!"

"High Ones, no!" he shouted. "Can't you help it?"

But she could only look at him sadly and shake her head. "I can only do so little", she whispered but he didn't hear.

"Then, how is Foxeye?" he asked.

"She doesn't know. But her pains are not yet past. I fear she will have to give birth soon, and painfully".

A familiar sending reached them; chief Freefoot was coming. He ordered a few elves outside to set a fire so they could boil water and make warm broth for Foxeye. Freefoot listened quietly as Deerstorm explained what had happened. He then sent two Wolfriders to go after Shortpine's hunting party to bring him back so he could comfort his mate. Meanwhile Longarrow and Bluesky, Foxeye's chosen parents came to her as well.

Later they woke Foxeye up from her half-sleep to force her eat a little of the warm broth. Then Shortpine arrived. He had run the whole way back after receiving the sending which told him what had happened. Foxeye got visibly better having seen him. But when she asked Deerstorm of her condition, the quiet reply and warning of the presumable birthing soon made her wonder. Fortunately Shortpine's strokes on her hair and face and Longarrow's kind words and endlessly patient smile made her again forget the trouble. She only wished that Cone could be there but he was too far away on his own hunting party to be reached.

When night came, she was already feeling much better. Deerstorm had gone to sleep in her den but Stringsong remained with Shortpine, Longarrow and Foxeye. Two Wolfriders were outside taking care of the fire in case it would be needed again. After Deerstorm's final touch on her, Foxeye had been sleeping well.

Suddenly they all four awoke to Foxeye's scream through sleep. "Shortpine, Shortpine!" she yelled still half asleep and reached desperately for him. "The pain... I must be dropping the cub now!" Longarrow laid her palm on Foxeye's brow to calm her while Shortpine and Stringsong were sending together to Deerstorm.

Deerstorm rushed to them and while running past commanded the ones who were tending the fire to begin heating water. It would be needed soon.

She ran straight to Foxeye's side to start breaking her pangs. Foxeye tried to rise and move herself into a proper birthing position to help the pull of the world do its part but the healer pushed the exhausted mother back on the furs fearing that she couldn't hold herself up during the birthing and ensured her that it would be just as easy with she helping.

Aided by Deerstorm Foxeye started to push to make her fawn come out. Meanwhile, Stringsong brought closer the grease lamp. But soon, to her horror, Deerstorm saw a stream of blood coming from inside of Foxeye. She then commanded Shortpine to go wake up Freefoot so he would not have to see what was happening. Freefoot would also be needed very soon in a most unfortunate task.

"Careful now, you're doing just fine," she spoke to Foxeye while easing her pangs. She and Stringsong knew what had to be done and Foxeye would be too exhausted to do anything, but it was Longarrow for whom she feared. How would she react?

"Oh, Timmain," Stringsong whispered when seeing the amount of birth-blood. Finally the hot water was brought to them and he used it to wash away the blood and to warm Foxeye. The cold winds entered the den once again when water bearers walked away.

Foxeye's cub was nearly halfway out of the womb. But when Deerstorm had helped out its head the terrible truth presented itself: the cub's right arm was twisted, broken. "Just a little more!" Deerstorm urged. Foxeye pushed again and finally the little legs appeared from inside her. "It's done," Deerstorm sighed after cutting its umbilical cord.

"You did it. All is well," Longarrow whispered to Foxeye. Fondling her cheek she continued, "You can sleep now, my daughter. You have surely deserved it." Foxeye smiled and slowly closed her eyes waiting for Deerstorm to lift the cub on her.

But she didn't. *Deerstorm?** Foxeye sent.

Then Longarrow bent down against her. "It would be better if you didn't hold the cub. It is injured."

"Injured?" Foxeye opened her eyes and tried to get up.

But Longarrow pressed her down. "Do not, my daughter! The cub cannot survive. It is The Way! And you live."

Foxeye ceased struggling. She knew The Way, or at least had always claimed to know. She snuggled against Longarrow who wrapped her hands around her. It was so cold and only she offered any warmth. Foxeye pressed tighter against her and felt her big belly, and somehow that comforted her. And Longarrow felt warm and heavy tears falling on her skin.

Deerstorm and Stringsong left them alone and moved quietly to the tunnel towards the doorway. Then Freefoot came in, having after quite a trouble managed to leave Shortpine outside. **How is it?** he asked.

Deerstorm answered, **A lot of blood but she is now alright. But the cub... has a broken right arm.**

Freefoot bent down his head. **And you can't...?**

My chief, forgive me.

Deerstorm, it is no-one's fault, he answered compassionately.

She passed him the warm bundle which held in it the greatest wonder of all.

Why must I be the one to do this, he thought. *Why must I be chief*. Very slowly he pulled his stone-axe off from his belt. Deerstorm and Stringsong turned around. Just then Shortpine entered. He couldn't have waited any longer but wanted to see his lifemate and cub. After first sensing the relief in the den he couldn't understand the sudden change to coldness and anxiety, and stepped in nervously.

Both Freefoot and Shortpine froze. "What are you... doing?" Shortpine finally managed to ask, still staring at the raised axe.

"Shortpine, leave!" Freefoot commanded calmly.

What are you doing? he yelled through his sending.

Leave! The chief's powerful and dominating sending pounded in his head but he walked to them.

Stringsong stepped in front of him. "Shortpine, the cub is injured, beyond healing. We have to kill it." And just as quickly understanding how blunt his words had been he added, "To give it a merciful death."

Shortpine only stared, his mouth open. "Please, let me see!"

Freefoot hesitated, then handed the bundle to him.

Shortpine carefully unwrapped it. A tiny girl appeared. She quietly stared at him. Then he noticed that her right arm was indeed broken. It hung dead at her side. Deerstorm had made the pain of the injury subside but couldn't fix it.

Freefoot took the bundle briskly from Shortpine's arms and the cub started to wail. **We have to do it, Shortpine. Such a cub could never survive.**

But... She is strong. Look at her! Listen to her!

How could she ever hunt? Stringsong broke in. **Or defend herself?**

It is only merciful, and it is The Way. Wolves do it, so must we, concluded Freefoot.

It was the last thing he said which made Shortpine's anger rose. He had never felt a strong closeness towards the wolves, not even to his own wolf-friend. **But we are not wolves!** His strong sending battered the three of them. **You would kill her just because she isn't like us! But it isn't her fault!**

It was a challenge. Freefoot knew that but wondered if Shortpine also realized what he had done. Now the chief of the Wolfriders would have to answer by forcing his chief's sending upon him.

But Shortpine snatched the crying bundle away from him and run out of the den. Freefoot, Deerstorm and Stringsong were too surprised to even follow him. Finally Freefoot hurried outside but only saw Shortpine disappearing at the other side of the common yard.

The moons were shining and shedding their light on the snow. Wind blew snow on his face.

Shortpine, come back! We have no other choice. She couldn't survive.

He didn't even wait for an answer but Shortpine sent from behind the bushes near the stream. **She would! She is strong!**

She is injured, and she can never heal. It would only cause her constant misery.

More than killing her and never letting her know what life could have been for her?

She can't hunt for herself and she...

She can hunt with a spear. You only need one hand for that.

Shortpine! We are Wolfriders! We follow the wolves' ways!

The Way has been changed before! We are not wolves! Shortpine sent with a fury Freefoot couldn't recall having met before. And he was right, The Way had been changed before. Rahnee had changed it, so had Two-Spear and Huntress Skyfire. Freefoot pondered for a long time.

Then Shortpine sent again, **Please, my chief, I beg you.**

And now he speaks like a cub again, Freefoot thought. Was Shortpine's anger gone already? *What am I to do now?*

Two days and one night later the Wolfriders and their wolves were gathering on the top of Halfhill. All those who were presently at the Holt were there. They assembled in a circle and raised a howl at the stars and the two moons.

Freefoot stepped in the middle and spoke, "Tribemates, another Wolfrider has been born amongst us. Come and show us!" he beckoned Shortpine and Foxeye.

Shortpine was holding the small bundle. Foxeye still looked tired and sick as she hadn't recovered completely yet. Freefoot took the bundle and lifted it up while turning around for everyone to see. Then he gave it back to Shortpine.

Shortpine started to speak. "This is our daughter. Her other sire is on a hunt now." Then he opened the other end of the bundle presenting the head and face of her daughter. He walked around in the circle so everyone could take a good look. He then continued, "Though her life has not started well, she is strong and healthy. Fate was hard on her but so far she has proved her worth."

Shortpine unwrapped the leather hoping for the best, and then lifted the one-armed naked cub in the air. Her other arm was completely missing, Deerstorm had gone through a true hardship when she had had to work against her healer's instincts to simultaneously remove her right hand and repair the terrible wound.

Freefoot had been right when warning him that he might very well indeed get the anger of many Wolfriders upon him. He could hear around him many doubting words and unpleasant murmurs. He didn't see it but even Foxeye watched with a quiet disapproval.

"She will be a strong fighter and a sly hunter!" he added but it didn't seem to help. It was the chief's decision but the tribe could still decide not to accept it.

Freefoot watched quietly what was happening. He knew he should have killed the cub right when it had been born. That was the wolves way. But The Wolfrider Way could differ, as it had done before, from it. He would have to speak now or watch the tribe taking matters to their own hands. Remembering his promise to Shortpine he stepped forward.

"Quiet you all!" he shouted. His raising voice was uncommon enough to get the attention. "This cub has been born a Wolfrider. Many a Wolfrider during years gone have been injured as well, too badly to be healed completely, or who could not have healed by themselves. So has this cub been injured. But she is not to be blamed. The only one that could be blamed, if we chose to do so, would be the healer who could not help her."

It was a terrible thing to say, and he had to watch as Deerstorm bent down her head. How could he ever appease her? Would she ever forgive him?

The murmur began to quiet down. He could only hope that they had accepted this. He turned to Shortpine. "What is her name?"

"One-Arm," he answered shortly.

Freefoot turned again to face his tribe. "Like food when there is hunger, so is One-Arm welcome to the tribe!"

It was decided.

Shortpine and Foxeye turned to leave the middle of the circle with the cub now wrapped up again. Their smiles, especially Shortpine's, did not go unnoticed.

But without warning Freefoot took hold of Shortpine's shoulder and pulled him back. "We also have another new Wolfrider, one who has so suddenly grown up and become an adult. His name is Waybender!"

Shortpine looked more than a little amazed. Unexpected certainly, what had he done to deserve to become an adult? He remembered how Foxeye, before known as Warmstone, had gotten her adult name. It had happened during a hunt. But he would have to ask from Freefoot what he done to make him so grown-up.

Everyone started to howl or repeat his and One-Arm's name. But he just couldn't understand what they knew and he didn't. Finally, after having seen Foxeye joined the howl, he joined too.

Soon the whole tribe returned to their dens for it was far too cold for a proper howl.

Foxeye and Waybender and One-Arm, too, went to theirs.

"Wonder what Cone will look like when he learns what we've done during his absence?" he said and laughed.

"You seem amused, my love." she answered with an unmistakably cool tone. "He at least would not have gone against The Way."

"I don't understand you. I am happy for what has happened."

She didn't answer but bared her other breast to feed One-Arm. There was a little milk in her dugs now but she didn't know how long it would last.

Even after the feeding she pushed away Waybender's caressing hand and turned her back on him.

Maybe it was the cub, he thought, and nervousness and her poor condition which made her act this way. Having pulled the furs on her and himself he soon fell asleep, but this time only embracing the fur and not her.