

Last Bounty

Sample of a work in progress

by

P J Ballantine

Read more samples and find out about upcoming works at <http://www.pjballantine.net/>

Copyright Philippa Ballantine 2003-02-13

No portion of the original articles, stories or poetry contained on this site may be copied, retransmitted, reposted, duplicated or otherwise used without the express written permission of [Philippa Ballantine](#)

The five open mouths of the goddess seemed larger somehow. As Pelanor stood trembling in the thin shift waiting the moment of transformation, she could feel the cool wind of death flowing from those mouths. And it was this she was about to throw herself into. After this there would be no collar of pain or fear about her heart, she would be free of all mortal concerns.

She risked a quick glance out of the corner of her eye to where Alvick stood standing next to her. He wore a matching shift of white, but also the torc of the gewalt.

The only other person in the narrow chamber was the priestess, dressed in a sheer robe of deepest red. She held the long knife, nehmer, the life giver straight before her, and her face was impassive as that slice of steel.

She gestured towards the primus mouth, where the chaos was thickest, and Pelanor and Alvick stepped forward through the chill in their bones. Pelanor held out her hand and he took it, before stepping in further taking her into his arms. She inhaled the strong clean scent of him, burying it into her memory, holding tight to his friendship and goodness.

Quickly the priestess bound them, intoning the words to bind their souls, while the thick cord of the Making cut into their skin, "Two lives end, one greater begins. Strength from love, and power from blood."

Pelanor looked into Alvirk's eyes, feeling his breath mingle with hers, his heart racing to the same beat, and felt an overwhelming peace steal over her. It was not such a bad thing to share death and blood with someone you loved.

Together then, they enchanted her last living words. Almore sun lethe merya. We go together.

And then the priestess blade descended, faster than thought, surer than fate. Pelanor's body arched as the blade drove through her, but only grazed the chest of Alvick. Her death and his blood, just as it had always been for all Blood Witches. He kissed her then, taking her last mortal gasp into him. And the priestess cried out, a wordless joyful sound, before she pushed them into the last mouth of the goddess.

They tumbled together. Pelanor had lost her breath, never to take it again. Her skin was cool, but her faith was all around. Alvick never let her go; he bound her to the edge of the living world, holding her back from the beyond by the barest threads. It was the most magnificent kind of love.

She arched against him in rapture, and took his first Given, the honor of his blood into her mouth. His flesh opened under her teeth willingly, and the Last mouth of the Goddess gave them her boon. Tumbling through a rainbow of darkness, they became the eternal couple. Pelanor's heritage as a Blood Witch was secured, she had passed the test, and so had Alvick. His love for her was found strong enough to bind them, and hold her back from the gate of death.

The goddess had accepted their gifts. She was the center of destruction and life, and she now held them in her grasp forever.

How long they spent within the darkness of the goddess could not be counted, but when finally Pelanor felt cool marble underneath her knees, and heard Alvick gasping next to her she knew the material world had claimed her again.

The descent into faith had not been easy. Her recently transformed body was trembling, and seemed hardly hers to command. She felt Alvick's hand slip from her, but the bond between them was still there. His blood was hers now.

The priestess's voice was now warm and loving, where before it had been cold and clinical, "Welcome back to the world, beloved of the goddess." Gentle hands lifted Pelanor and Alvick up to stand bewildered in the light of their success.

The new Blood Witch found her eyes now sharper could pick out a dark figure at the end of the temple. She did not know the name of this person, but she knew his purpose. He smelt of earth and fire. A Vaerli had come to the temple, and he would provide her first blood price.

The priestess beckoned him forward, and he came, with the lightness of foot his people still possessed. But he looked tired, weighed down with the burden of the Harrowing, and Pelanor could only feel sorry for him.

He did not give his name, as was custom, instead presenting a box inlaid with silver and Vaerli magic. Opening it the priestess took out three scrolls, and ran her eye over them. “And these are most precious to you?” she asked quietly.

A flicker of pain passed over the mans face, “Three songs of our ancient folk, lost and gone. We can no longer read the language, but yes, they are more precious to us than gold.”

The priestess paused, but heard truth in his words. “It is acceptable, “ and then stepping back she gestured to Pelanor, “Give this one the name of the blood, and it shall be done.”

The Vaerli’s head drooped, and his voice when it came was low and sad, “Talis the Dark,” he glanced up looking directly into the face of the newest blood Witch, “To save us all, and prevent another innocent life being lost, kill her. But if you can, make it swift.”

A mighty blood price, Pelanor’s heart raced, a truly heroic one. By doing it she would assure her place in the rolls of the Blessed, and earn Vaerli gratitude for her people. Alvirik’s hand slipped into hers, and he was grinning at her.

Pelanor laughed aloud into the high reaches of the temple.