

# The Three Of Swords - ЛЮБОВЬ СРЕДИ ВОЛКОВ

*by* Larry Strattner

Love among wolves is beautiful, a savage thing. Isabella remembers a word, 'spooning.' She and Artem, not really spooners, tend toward the snap and growl interchange of the grey forest ghosts. He crawls upon her back, pulling her hair and clutching at her body seeking to insure another clumsy, big-footed member of the pack be born in spring.

Though unlikely a child will be made, it will not be for lack of practice. Caution will rather prevail. She and Artem are not widely known today. Conversely, they have no reason to doubt someday they will be. Those who find them may make survival difficult. They will either work their way back to obscurity or perish. For a child this would be the end. Particularly if those who discover them see a child as leverage; and evil always does.

Meanwhile, relishing anonymity, Artem carefully explores every inch of Isabella, stopping, taking time and care with any spot he finds causing her body to tense or thrash. He lingers at such spots, gently and persistently until she growls deep in her throat, her veneer of humanity cracked open, leaking primal ooze.

In these encounters Artem's upper body, already tilled with bullet pocks, knife scars, battlefield surgeon's scalpel and suture ridges is constantly redecorated with Isabella's fingernails, sharp and strong. He acquaints her with pleasures whose price for him is blood.

Artem and Isabella sing, shout, dance and laugh, knowing as the warrior must, life is designed to come undone.

She rolls toward him saying, "Booshka." Not truly a word. More a sound, mimicking Russian which is not her tongue. "Booshka," a mood-tone of love, lust and respect.

He not-quite smiles. She sees the not quite. As a lover he is stoic. Guessing he is cold is an error. Rather trained in patience, observation, precise and deadly action, for him games are serious. When the score is posted, unlike at a football pitch, the word Final means the end.

“Booshka.” She runs her fingers over his close cropped hair and cups his cheek with her palm. She goes from a solid to liquid state when she is with him. It amazes her. It happened the very first time they met. Her considered opinion was one did not go through Coronado, Ranger Jump School and CECOM with the SEALs and retain one ounce of romanticism. Artem caused a re-think of this assumption; a pleasant turn of events.

On the heaving deck of a destroyer in the Bering Sea they first shook hands. In the frigid wind it was a moment before she realized more than the environment was moving their clasped fingers. One of the few times she had seen Artem surprised was this first time he touched her. A look flashed across his face as if someone had hooked up his genitals to a car battery. She laughed every time she remembered. It had seemed so right to turn the key.

