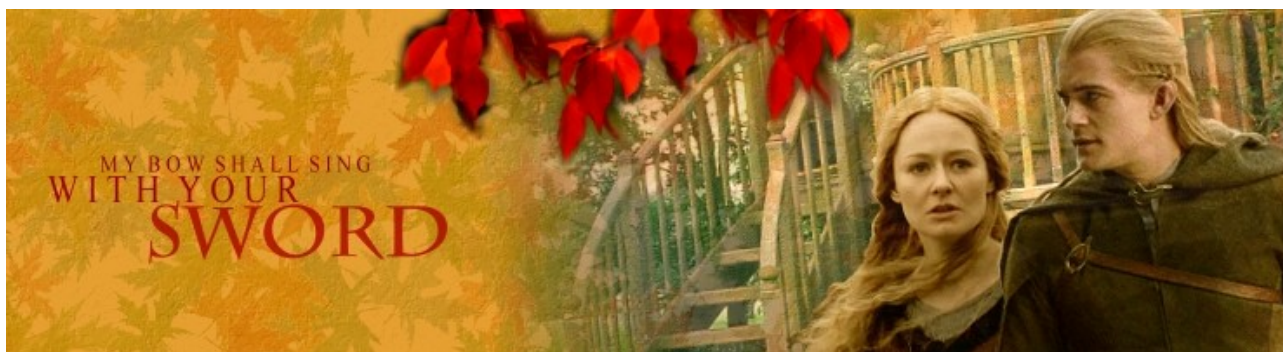


My bow shall sing with your sword



Author: Ningloreth

Title: **My bow shall sing with your sword**

Story Number: 1

Rating: NC-17

Pairing: Legolas/Eowyn

Summary: Eowyn travels to Legolas' colony of Eryn Carantaur, in South Ithilien, to take part in the Harvest Ceremony and finds herself helping him conduct a murder investigation.

Author's notes: Special Edition with eleven extra scenes.

Disclaimers: **This story is rated NC-17 for violence and sexual scenes. Please do not read any further if you are not of legal age.**

The main characters in this story were created by JRR Tolkien and brought to the screen by Peter Jackson. No offence is intended and no profit is being made by borrowing them for use in this story.

#### **Eryn Carantaur**

The name means 'Great Red Forest'. *Eryn* means 'wood'. *Carantaur* is made from two words: *caran*, which means 'red' and *taur* which means 'great wood, forest' and also 'mighty, vast, overwhelming'.

**Downloaded from <http://www.eryn-carantaur.com>**

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## Chapter 1: Longings

**It had taken all day to decorate the banqueting hall of Eryn Carantaur for the colony's first Harvest Ceremony, but now its elegant columns were strung with garlands of corn and rosy red apples, and its large, ring shaped table was decorated with bowls of dried flowers, and autumn fruits, and with hundreds of beeswax candles.**

Legolas Greenleaf, Lord of Eryn Carantaur, took one last, careful look around the hall. All was ready. The banquet would begin in less than three hours. And then—he glanced nervously to centre of the hall—Legolas would perform his very first harvest rite.

...

Maranwë the scullery maid should not have been in Legolas' bedchamber.

It was *her* job to clean all the crockery, cutlery and cooking utensils used in the royal household. She never left the kitchens during the day, except on the very rare occasions when the Cook sent her on errands. *And that, she thought, is probably why the Steward has asked me to help him, too.*

"Lord Legolas has requested a vase of fresh roses in his sitting room," Master Eö had said, "and all my serving ellith are busy decorating the banqueting hall, so I am relying on *you*, Maranwë."

He had handed her a bowl of deep red roses and sent her to Lord Legolas' chambers with precise instructions: "Put the mat on Lord Legolas' desk, to the right of where he sits, and well out of arm's reach; put the bowl of roses on the mat. On *no account* spill any of the water on the desk. And when you have finished there, make sure that you run straight back here."

Maranwë had meant to do exactly as Master Eö had told her; she really had. But, once inside Lord Legolas' chambers, she simply could not bring herself to leave, because—like so many of the female servants—Maranwë believed herself in love with her lord, and to have this opportunity to explore his private quarters...

She had looked around his beautiful sitting room, admiring the huge desk by the window, and the elegant furniture grouped around the fireplace. She had examined the pale, polished wood and the deep red upholstery, tracing with her fingers the embroidered carantaur leaves.

She had even imagined herself sitting by the fire, graciously entertaining the wife of one of Lord Legolas' guests, whilst their husbands discussed important business...

And then she had spotted the door to the bedchamber.

Gingerly, she had opened it, and peeped inside.

Like the sitting room, Lord Legolas' bedchamber was severely elegant, though the effect here was lighter and more decorative. The bed, the nightstand and the dressing table were again of pale wood, but finished with flowing carvings of exquisite delicacy—Maranwë ran her fingers along the swirling edge of the dressing table mirror. The chair seat, like the coverlet and the bed curtains, was of the palest pink silk embroidered with young, green carantaur leaves. Maranwë sat down, picked up Legolas' comb, and ran it through her hair.

In the mirror, she could see the bed, positioned beside the windows, so that Lord Legolas could lie gazing up at the stars.

It looked so inviting.

Maranwë set down the comb.

The bed *was* soft, and luxurious, and she was about to swing her feet up, intending to stretch out upon it—for no more than a moment—when something on the nightstand caught her eye.

It was a large, flat box, ornately carved. Maranwë picked it up, unfastened the catch, and opened it...

The box was some sort of album, and it contained just one picture, the portrait of a beautiful, golden-haired lady.

Maranwë studied her rival. The face was flawless, delicately shaped, with a generous mouth, pale blue-grey eyes and an expression that spoke of strength and determination.

*This lady is a match for my lord*, thought Maranwë.

Then she examined the face more closely, for there was something strange about it, and it took her a moment to work out exactly what—the lady was a *Woman!*

Maranwë was taken aback. *Why in all of Middle-earth would Lord Legolas have a picture of a Woman beside his bed?*

She was still pondering that question when she realised that someone else had entered the chambers! Heart pounding, she peeped around the door to the sitting room and—*Dear Valar!*—there was Lord Legolas!

Quietly, she closed the door.

Perhaps she could leave by the window?

But no, there was a huddle of palace guards outside. She would have to wait, and hope that she was not discovered. She crept back to the door and listened intently. If Lord Legolas should decide to come into his bedchamber, she would need warning...

...

Legolas had been preparing for the Harvest Ceremony for three months.

It was the most important of the wood elves' festivals and—since Legolas would be performing it for the first time—his father, King Thranduil, had sent his own Mistress of the Ceremony to Eryn Carantaur to prepare him.

For three months the terrifying elleth had lectured Legolas on the mysteries of the rite, insisting that he remain 'pure in body and spirit' during his period of preparation.

That had meant three months of complete celibacy and, *Sweet Eru*, it had been difficult—far more difficult than Legolas had expected, even though he already lived a solitary life because—although there was no shortage of ellith nor, it seemed, of elves, ready and willing to give him physical pleasure—Legolas could not bring himself to betray *her*.

Since the day he had met her, three years before, he had lain with no one, satisfying his own body with self-pleasure when necessary. But now, after three months without any opportunity for physical release, his longing for her had begun to affect his spirit—he had started falling into a mortal-like sleep, and dreaming.

*And, Valar, what dreams they were!*

Every night his lady—his sweet, gentle girl—would visit him, and behave like a whore; every

night she would slowly undress before him, touching herself to excite him, then straddle him and—after much unbearable teasing—impale herself upon him with a deep, guttural moan of satisfaction.

She would smile a wicked, wicked smile and, leaning back, pleasure herself with her own hand.

And he, somehow paralysed inside her, would be reduced to begging her for his own release but, only when she had satisfied herself, sometimes more than once, and when she judged him sufficiently humiliated, would she slowly lean forward, brushing his chest with her bare breasts, and ride him into oblivion.

And—*Oh Valar*—it felt good!

Until, as he approached completion, he would wake to find himself alone, his seed splashed across his belly, and his body still aching for proper release.

*Ai, hiril nín—meleth nín! What sickness in me would have you behave so...*

"My lord?"

Legolas' guilty thoughts were interrupted by the Mistress of the Ceremony, who seemed to enter his private chambers whenever she wished, with no regard for common courtesy. "We must make our final preparations, my lord. Please sit down." She moved a dining chair to the centre the room.

Legolas sat reluctantly, then watched, appalled, as she knelt before him and reached for his leggings.

"What are you doing?"

"I am preparing you, my lord. We must ensure that your passions are sufficiently roused to complete the rite."

"That will not be necessary."

"It is a part of the ceremony."

"No, I will not permit it."

"To refuse, my lord, is to dishonour the rite. And if you cannot perform tonight, you will be failing your subjects."

Her standard answer permitted no further discussion. *I have no choice*, he thought and, gritting his teeth, he tried to allow her to do her work. But there was something especially repulsive about the way she handled him.

*Like tickling a trout...*

"My lord, you *must* relax and stop resisting me or we will not achieve the result we desire."

Legolas' stomach churned.

But he told himself again that he had no choice. He was Lord of Eryn Carantaur, and his father's son, and he had committed himself to performing this rite. He knew that there was only one way to 'achieve the result' the Mistress of the Ceremony was demanding of him. Guiltily, he closed his eyes and thought of *her*—not the woman who tortured him in his fevered dreams, but the woman he had fallen in love with the first time he had seen her, the woman who had slipped past him in Theoden's Golden Hall, like a river daughter swimming in the

Anduin!

He thought of her body, slender and graceful, with small, full breasts; and he remembered how, as she had run past him, her white skirts had lifted and he had caught a glimpse of her long, slim legs in little black boots...

*Oh Valar!* His body was beginning to respond.

He let his imagination wander.

...

*She was walking in her garden, beneath the cherry trees. The pink blossoms had just started to fall and several had caught in her golden hair. She smiled at him, holding out a garland of daisies she was weaving. He took the flowers from her, twisting them into a coronet, and placed them upon her head, letting his fingers skim her silky hair and graze her bare shoulders.*

*When he gathered her against his body, she shivered with pleasure: "Make love to me, my lord."*

*He led her behind a low wall, where—shielded by the blossom—they could join their bodies in privacy.*

*Gently, he bent her over the stones, and raised her skirts, running his hands up her smooth thighs and over the perfect curve of her buttocks. She writhed under his touch: "Please, my lord."*

*He pulled open his leggings. Then, slipping one hand beneath her, he lifted her body and, using his other hand to guide himself, he slid inside her, and began to thrust.*

*She was warm and soft, and so sweet that he was losing himself...*

...

He cried out her name. "Eowyn! Oh, Eowyn! Sweet *lady!*"

"No, my lord! You must not spill your seed!" The Mistress of the Ceremony ruthlessly prevented his climax.

Legolas screamed.

And then he cursed.

He called her a perverted hag, her mother a whore, and her father a cuckold. He called the harvest rite a peep show for impotent elves. He ordered her to leave his colony, and to pray to the Valar for protection. "Or I might just hunt you down and carve you up like the disgusting, filthy orc you are!"

Then he wrapped himself in a thick, warm dressing robe and stalked angrily out of his chambers.

He needed some fresh air.

...

*That wicked, wicked elleth, thought Maranwë. How could anyone treat Lord Legolas like that? Touching his—his private parts like that. Then hurting him.*

**My bow shall sing with your sword**

*The Valar will see that she is punished.*

*If I were a warrior, and not just a scullery maid, I would punish her myself.*

Seizing the opportunity to escape unseen, Maranwë slipped out of Legolas' chambers, and headed for the staircase that would take her back to the kitchens.

...

An unexpected guest

The walkway outside Legolas' chambers was one of the busiest in Eryn Carantaur, snaking as it did between the various parts of the 'palace'.

The customs of the Harvest Ceremony discouraged the celebrant from seeing any of his guests before the banquet began, so it had fallen to Legolas' Chief Counsellor to welcome visitors, and to ensure that they were comfortably settled in their quarters.

Fortunately, as Legolas passed the guest chambers, the walkway was deserted.

He smiled.

Though he still ached, he did not feel quite so unclean; the warm autumn air, carrying with it the scents of ripe fruits and newly mown hay, had cleansed his spirit...

"Good afternoon, Lord Legolas."

The merry voice took him by surprise and, for a moment, he froze like a startled animal. Then he pulled his robe tightly across the front of his body, and turned to face her.

"Good afternoon, Princess Eowyn."

She smiled, and his heart broke.

"I do hope you do not mind my being here, my lord," she said—for he had not invited her. "Faramir thought that it would do me good to leave Caras Arnen for a while, so he asked Aragorn and Arwen to bring me to your festival."

Legolas returned her smile. "You are most welcome, my lady."

He allowed himself to look at her, taking in her tall, slender figure, her long golden hair—now worn bound, as befitted a married woman—and her face—still flawless, yet warm and generous when she smiled.

And he must have been staring, because she suddenly seemed uncomfortable and looked away. "Your settlement is very beautiful, my lord."

"Thank you."

There was a long silence, and now it was Legolas' turn to feel uncomfortable. "Might I show you something, my lady?"

She agreed, and he led her to a narrow flight of stairs that wound its way up the tallest of the trees. "It is up here," he said, thinking, *Valar! I sound like a witch luring a little girl to her doom with the promise of sweetmeats...*

But, without any hesitation, Eowyn climbed nimbly up the stairs, and they both stepped out onto a small, open flet.

"This is the highest point of the settlement," said Legolas. "From here, on a clear day like today, you should just be able to see—"

"The sea!" She laughed, clapping her hands together with delight. Then, realising its significance for *him*, she asked, "Do you intend to leave us, my lord?"

"No, my lady. No, I shall remain in Middle-earth for as long as my mortal friends are living," he answered.

"Does it hurt—to see it?"

"It is bitter-sweet, my lady." He smiled, sadly. "The sea longing is not in itself painful, but it *can* be painful to resist it. Yet I could not bear to enter the undying lands knowing that I had left my mortal friends behind. How could I leave and never know their fates?"

Eowyn nodded, gravely: "Death, most times, does not come when we choose it, so we leave our loved ones whether we will or no. I had never thought so before, but our death is easier than your leaving, for you must choose *when* to leave—and I fear that your loyalty will cost you dearly," she added, softly. "Your friends are indeed fortunate, my lord, to have such a friend as you."

"No, my lady. I count myself lucky to have so many mortal friends. Mortals are full of life—they *are* life; and it makes an elf humble to see their fragile beauty, their brightness. I love their brightness, and I love—I..." He stopped, suddenly embarrassed. "I am sorry my lady."

"No, please continue."

"I simply mean that an elf gains much in the company of mortals."

"And yet," she said, delicately, "there will be so much sadness for you." And, for a moment, he thought that her eyes were filled with tears. "Thank you for sharing the sea with me."

He should have left her then, but her earlier delight in the sea and her gentle concern for him now were both addictive. And, on a sudden impulse, he tried to shake off the melancholy he had brought down on them: "Come, my lady!"

"Where?"

Legolas led her down another flight of stairs, back through the leafy canopy of the big carantaur, to a large flet, just above his own private chambers, where he had made himself a secluded garden, a place to entertain his guests. A table and some chairs stood at the centre, with pots of his favourite plants—brightly coloured daisies, small, sweet-scented cabbage roses, lavender, rosemary, and lemon sage—all arranged around it. But he led her past the table to a corner of the flet where, hanging from one of the smaller branches of the carantaur, he had built a swing. He had meant it for the children of his mortal guests, but it seemed to him now the ideal way to cheer Eowyn.

"Sit down, my lady."

She looked surprised and, perhaps, a little insulted. But then she sat on the swing and took a firm hold of the ropes, and Legolas stood behind her and gave her a gentle push.

Eowyn swung to and fro.

He pushed her again. She laughed happily.

He pushed again, and again, and higher and higher she rose—back and forth, back and forth—both of them laughing.

And suddenly Legolas could see himself sitting on the seat, with Eowyn straddling him, her head thrown back, her hair unbound, and each sweep of the swing driving them both closer and closer to completion...

*Oh Valar!*

"I am sorry, my lady," he said, hastily. "I must go now and prepare for the ceremony."

"Oh! Oh, yes. Yes, of course." She climbed down from the swing. "Thank you. And thank you again for showing me the sea."

He took her hand upon his, elven fashion, and led her downwards—this time using a much broader staircase—back to the main walkway.

"Goodness," she said, "do you ever get lost?"

"Not often, my lady."

She gave him a most unladylike grin. "Good bye, my lord. And—and good luck, for this evening."

He placed his hand over his heart and bowed his head, then he watched as she walked gracefully across the walkway to the large open windows of her guest chamber; he watched until she had disappeared inside and closed the windows behind her.

And, unknown to him, two dark haired elves and a beautiful, dark-haired elleth watched him watching.

...

An unwelcome visitor

"Come in!" The Chief Counsellor of Eryn Carantaur looked up from the papers scattered across his desk and, at the sight of his visitor, his heart sank.

But it was a Chief Counsellor's job to soothe and flatter the egos of the colony's more powerful members, and Caranthir took his duties seriously.

Though this particular member needed more flattery than most.

"Master Angaráto," he said, "please take a seat. What can I do for you?"

Angaráto bowed courteously, but remained standing, his hands grasping the back of the proffered chair. "As you know, my Lord Caranthir, my daughter and I are attending the Harvest Ceremony tonight."

Caranthir bowed his head in acknowledgment. A dozen eligible ellith, all unmarried, had been chosen to attend the rite. Caranthir had personally overseen their selection.

"Before I settled in Eryn Carantaur," continued Angaráto, "I farmed a large estate in The Brown Lands, on the borders of what was then called Mirkwood."

Caranthir nodded again—*Though 'farming' is, he thought, something of a euphemism for what you were doing in The Brown Lands.*

"I had—and still have—considerable influence amongst the Men of The Brown Lands and The Wold..."

Yes, thought Caranthir. *It is common knowledge that King Thranduil tried—and failed—to bring*



*you under control.* Indeed, it was said that Angaráto had ruled the human settlements surrounding his estate like a warlord.

"I have trading links with settlements as far north as Bree, and as far South as Near Harad."

*And, it is rumoured,* thought Caranthir, *that you have supplied elven weapons as far south as Far Harad.*

He was finding it hard to see where this conversation was going, but when Angaráto came suddenly to the point, Caranthir was taken by surprise.

"It is widely agreed," said Angaráto, "that the harvest rite is the perfect opportunity for an elven lord to choose a wife. I would think—speaking hypothetically—that if an elf of influence, someone with the ear of his lord, were to recommend a particular elleth—simply on the grounds of her beauty and her spotless character, you understand—and if his recommendation were to—er—bear fruit, then—again hypothetically—I would think that that elf could expect a considerable reward. From his lord—and, perhaps, also from his lord's grateful subjects."

Caranthir suppressed a shudder. Angaráto was truly an elf of the Fourth Age, ambitious and ruthless and totally without honour. *More like a man than an elf.* Except that all the men Caranthir had ever met—King Elessar, Prince Faramir, and Eomer King—were people of exceptional honour.

*Valar help me,* he thought, *how do I deal with this?*

"Master Angaráto," he said, tactfully, "have you attended a Harvest Ceremony before? No? Then let me describe it to you, so that you will enjoy it all the more. At the appropriate time, Lord Legolas, *guided by the Valar themselves,* will make his choice. How the Valar show their preference is a mystery known only to the initiated—that is, to the Mistress of the Ceremony and to the celebrant himself—but, rest assured, Lord Legolas has been well prepared, and can be relied upon to perform the rite correctly and with all due piety.

"Now, if you will excuse me, Master Angaráto, I still have much to do."

...

Since the Mistress of the Ceremony would be leaving once the Harvest Ceremony was over, Legolas had asked her to reveal the mysteries of the rite to a lady of Eryn Carantaur who would then become the colony's own officiant.

The lady he had asked to take on the role was Lessien, a well-liked, unmarried elleth of a good Lorien family who had joined the colony when her parents had departed for the Grey Havens.

"I am not yet ready to leave Middle-earth," she had told Legolas when she arrived. "I do not hear the sea's call. There is still so much to be done here, and I feel that I can make a contribution to your colony, if you will permit me."

Legolas had been impressed, by both her sense of duty and her quiet dignity. "I would be honoured if you would join us, my lady," he had replied.

But to say that Lessien did not see eye to eye with her teacher would be an understatement. Though modest, Lessien had an analytical mind. She accepted nothing at face value, and would continually ask questions. "But *why* must the lord do that?" she would ask. And the Mistress of the Ceremony's standard answers, "Because that is how it is always done," and "Because I say so," had several times driven her close to the point of ending her noviciate.

Today, the Mistress of the Ceremony had arrived, unannounced as usual, to teach Lessien how to prepare the celebrant immediately before the ceremony.

Lessien watched the older elleth pull a strange wooden object from the bag she was carrying, and place it on the table. The thing was so bizarre that it took Lessien a moment to accept that she had really seen it correctly.

She watched as the Mistress of the Ceremony poured a small amount of oil into her hands, rubbed them together, then proceeded to demonstrate the technique, clasping her hands around the wooden phallus, drawing them up its length, swirling them around its head, then pushing them down again. Then she showed Lessien how to detect and prevent the climax.

"You intend to do this to Lord Legolas?" asked Lessien, incredulously.

"The celebrant has already been prepared," said the Mistress of the Ceremony, brusquely. "Now, please show me that you understand this technique."

"No, my lady," said Lessien.

"You are wasting my time—"

"This is going too far," said Lessien. "The rite itself is beautiful—a celebration of life, and a sacrifice to the Valar. But this—this is perverse." Lessien had found that she could not imagine performing this 'technique' on Legolas without having certain lascivious thoughts that, she was sure, were quite inappropriate to the rite.

*Sacrilegious, in fact.*

"You will practice this technique and you will do it *now*," said the Mistress of the Ceremony, icily.

"No, my lady. Lord Legolas has been celibate for three months, and for him to have had to endure this, and at the hands of an elleth not of his choosing..." She shook her head. "I did not agree to become Mistress of the Ceremony in order to torture the celebrant."

The Mistress of the Ceremony drew herself up with dignity. "You," she hissed, "will *never* be Mistress of the Ceremony, not whilst there is a breath left in my body. And I will tell Lord Legolas, and his father, that you are a wilful, disobedient, conceited elleth who thinks she knows better than her teacher, even though her teacher was officiating at this rite before *she* was born. You are a disgrace to your family."

Lessien rose, walked stiffly to the door and held it open. "Please leave now, madam," she said.

...

*Well*, thought Lessien, as she watched the Mistress of the Ceremony hurrying angrily down the walkway, *I have just made myself a most influential enemy.*

And she closed the door.

\*\*\*\*\*

Elvish  
*Ai, hiril nín—meleth nín!* ... Oh, my lady—my love!

## Extra Scene: The Wedding Gift

### "Good morning, Prince Legolas!"

The young apprentice wiped his hands upon his paint-stained smock. "Master Halmir is—er—he is resting, your Highness. Please, come through..." He ushered Legolas into an elegantly-furnished reception room. "Please, take a seat. I will tell the Master you are here." He shuffled backwards through the door, in a semi-bowing posture.

Legolas smiled at the sudden sound of running feet—the lad's footfalls changing subtly as they flew along the tiled corridor, over a rug, and into a room with a wooden floor—the studio, no doubt. There was a rustle of fabric, then some urgent whispering.

*And, if I allowed myself to listen, I could just hear... But men make no allowance for elven hearing, he thought, and it is impolite to eavesdrop.*

To occupy himself, he looked around the room. The walls were hung with tapestries, the furniture upholstered in velvet, the floor covered with a rug from Near Harad. Master Halmir was clearly a successful man. *And this is where he deals with his customers, thought Legolas, the great and the good of Minas Tirith.*

The room had been arranged for a viewing, its furniture clustered around a decorative easel bearing a small, rectangular object hidden under a velvet cover—evidently the Master's most recent painting.

Legolas reached for the corner of the cloth—

"Good morning, your Highness!"

Guiltily, Legolas drew back his hand and turned to face the painter—a short, balding libertine; unwashed, unshaven and smelling strongly of ale. "Master Halmir—"

Halmir bowed, unsteadily. "What might I do for you, your Highness?"

"I would like to commission a painting," said Legolas. "A double portrait."

"I see. Please—take a seat."

"I would need it finished in less than three months," continued Legolas. "Could that be done?"

"Three months. The painting can be ready—though it will require additional time to dry thoroughly. And the couple must, of course, make themselves available—"

"They cannot," said Legolas. "The portrait is a surprise gift. They cannot know it is being painted."

"Your Highness," said Halmir, very clearly, as though speaking to a child, "that is not possible. I paint from the life."

"I can arrange for you to see them," said Legolas, "at a public function."

"That is not acceptable."

"What if I were to obtain other likenesses of them? Of him, at least—"

"Who *are* these people?" asked Halmir.

"The Prince of Ithilien and his betrothed."

Without a word, Master Halmir rose to his feet, walked over to the easel and raised the velvet cover.

Legolas' heart missed a beat. "It is so very like her," he whispered.

She was gazing out of the painting at him, her golden hair framing her face, her grey eyes smiling, her generous lips slightly parted, a light blush on her porcelain cheeks.

"I must confess," said Halmir, "that I believe it to be my finest work."

"She is about to speak," said Legolas. *She is about to say, I love you.*

"To Prince Faramir," said the painter. "He was sitting beside me... On reflection," he decided, "I think I *can* do what you ask. Though my fee must reflect the difficulty of the task."

"The fee is immaterial, Master Halmir. And I have every confidence in your skills. Perhaps you will draw up a contract and have it brought to the King's House? And perhaps," he added, suddenly diffident, "you would allow me to visit you occasionally, to see the work as it progresses?"

"You may call at any time, your Highness."

"Thank you." Legolas rose, placed his hand over his heart and bowed his head. "Good day, Master Halmir."

The apprentice came forward to see him out.

But as he reached the door, the elf suddenly paused and, without turning back, said, "Would you be willing to make a copy of the lady's portrait for *me*, Master Halmir? A copy by your own hand—you may name any price."

## Chapter 2: The Choice

**Eowyn stared worriedly at the green gown she had laid out on her bed; the pleasures of the afternoon had come to an abrupt halt.**

Eowyn generally refused the use of a lady's maid, arguing that a woman who had slain the Witch King of Angmar—and his Fell Beast—could certainly manage to lace up her own gown. But at this moment she was dearly wishing that she had a second opinion to call upon.

She had been transferring reports of orc movements onto her map of North and South Ithilien when Faramir had announced that, as Prince of Ithilien, he had decided to send *her* to Legolas' festival—"One of us should attend,"—and she had packed very quickly, simply choosing the first green gown she had found. Green had seemed an appropriate colour to wear to a festival held by a wood elf but—now that she had seen Legolas' beautiful colony—she felt completely under-dressed.

*I should have known!*

When had she ever seen Legolas look anything less than elegant, even in the heat of battle, smeared with orc blood?

Though, if asked, she would have had to admit that the leather pauldrons he had chosen to wear at Helm's Deep seemed better suited to sport in the bedroom than to protection on the battlefield...

*Bad thoughts, Eowyn!*

She had been hoping to speak to Legolas about her orc map. It was her belief that, by tracking where the orcs had *been*, she could predict where they would attack next. None of the commanders of the North Ithilien guard—not even Faramir himself—took her ideas seriously; she had hoped that Legolas would be different.

But Legolas had obviously been far too preoccupied, and far too nervous, to think about security today. She would have to wait.

She sat down on the edge of the bed and sighed. Lying on the beautiful, embroidered coverlet, her green gown looked rough and common.

Beside it, on her pillow, was a small gauze bag—a personal gift, the Chief Counsellor had said, from the Lord of Eryn Carantaur to his lady guests. She opened it and examined its contents: a leaf-shaped cake of soap, clean smelling, with a hint of ginger; a small earthenware jar of salve, which smelled delicately of roses; and, best of all, a tiny, cut-crystal bottle of perfume oil—she remembered Faramir's telling her that Legolas planned to develop a crystal manufactory in South Ithilien.

She pulled out the glass stopper and sniffed. It smelled of rain—no, it smelled of *forest* rain; it smelled like Legolas.

She dabbed a little on her wrist.

*Gods!* What was she going to wear? How could she possibly attend a banquet held by the exquisite Lord of South Ithilien in her old green gown?

Perhaps she should wrap herself in the coverlet?

She was so preoccupied, she did not hear the knock on her window. "Eowyn?"

She turned to see Arwen framed in the doorway, a picture of elven elegance, with the evening sunlight setting her glossy, dark hair afire.

*Oh, thank you, gods!*

"Is something wrong, Eowyn?"

"Yes—no—oh, I don't know, Arwen, I just feel—I feel..."

*What? Graceless? Ugly?*

*Foolish!*

"Are you missing Faramir?"

"Yes," Eowyn lied.

"Well... I hope you do not mind, Eowyn but, as my maid was unpacking *this*,"—Arwen laid a gown on the bed, next to Eowyn's green monster—"I thought it would look far better on you than on me."

It was made of the finest elven silk, in a pale shade of cream, and embroidered all over with leaves of yellow, green and delicate orange—*Spring, summer and autumn*, Eowyn thought—decorated with tiny beads of pure mithril that glistened like raindrops.

"Oh Arwen," said Eowyn, feeling slightly embarrassed to be so moved by an item of clothing, "it is beautiful, but—"

"I would be honoured if you would wear it. Would you like me to help you dress?"

Eowyn hesitated at the thought of Arwen seeing her naked, but the practical part of her mind was forced to admit that her shieldmaiden training had not equipped her to deal with the tiny fastenings and the intricate lacings of an elven gown.

Moments later, she was examining her reflection in a full-length mirror.

The dress fitted surprisingly well and the colours seemed to make her skin glow. The lightly gathered neckline, scooping far, far, lower than she would normally have worn, flattered her small bosom, and the bodice clung softly to her waist and hips, showing her slender figure to its best advantage. But there was something rather suggestive about the lacing down the front...

She lifted her hands to tug the edges together—

"Perfect!" said Arwen, delicately deflecting Eowyn's hands. "Aragorn and I will collect you in half an hour, and we shall all go down to the banquet together. And Eowyn," she added, as she stepped through the door, "I think you should wear your hair loose tonight."

...

Despite having been told earlier that she was a disgrace to the Harvest Ceremony—and would never be allowed to officiate—Lady Lessien had decided to act as though nothing had happened. After all, it was not the first time that the Mistress of the Ceremony had threatened to end her noviciate.

When she arrived at the annex to the banqueting hall, where the potions to be used in the rite were being prepared, the Mistress of the Ceremony was carefully adding ingredients to a steaming, sweet-smelling liquid. Lessien waited patiently for her to finish, anxious not to

disturb her at a critical moment.

The Mistress of the Ceremony picked up a bunch of dried *uil* fronds, selected five, and crumbled them into the cauldron. Then she took up a small piece of *aeglos* root and, with a sharp knife, shaved off three slivers and added those to the potion. Finally, she added two large pinches of ground *alfirin* petals—Lessien could smell their distinctive odour—and began to beat the potion with a willow-twig whisk.

*That is not right*, thought Lessien. "My lady," she said, "what are you doing?"

The Mistress of the Ceremony spun round, startled. "What are *you* doing here?" she demanded. "I told you that you would never be allowed to take part in the Harvest Ceremony. You are not permitted in here. Guards! *Guards!*" she called.

*She looks guilty*, thought Lessien. But, before she could get a better look at the book the Mistress of the Ceremony was working from, two palace guards seized her by the arms and, courteously but firmly, ushered her from the annex.

...

### Later

The banquet was everything Eowyn had expected from the Lord of South Ithilien. *He has chosen the perfect food for his guests*, she thought.

For the dwarves there was roast chicken, suckling pig, red meat on the bone, and limitless dwarven ale. For the men there was a spicy ragout of beef and vegetables with warm farmhouse bread and strong, red, elven wine. For the elves, who ate like birds and loved sweet things, there were ripe cheeses, sweet fruited breads, honey buns and elderflower champagne. And, especially for the ladies, there was a delicate confection of whipped cream, flavoured with mead and decorated with candied lavender.

Eowyn looked at her host. *Gods! He is beautiful*, she thought. *Beautiful, inside and out*. His long, embroidered robe was tied with a sash around his waist but was otherwise open, which left most of his chest bare.

As a shieldmaiden, Eowyn had seen many men stripped to the waist, but never one so perfect as Legolas. *He is so slender*, she thought, *yet so muscular, strong but graceful*. *And his hair...* She had never seen his hair loose before. *It makes him look wild, like a force of nature, like a creature that might carry a helpless woman off into the woods and ravish her...*

*Oh, stop it!*

Legolas suddenly looked straight at her and Eowyn, feeling as though he had heard her thoughts, turned quickly to the guest on her left.

...

Elrohir, on Eowyn's left, and Arwen, on his right, were discussing the harvest ceremony.

"A lord's first time," Elrohir was saying—and he winked at Eowyn—"is a very auspicious moment to choose a wife."

Arwen laughed.

Eowyn had met the twins only briefly before, but she knew of their reputation—and they were certainly living up to it tonight.

"What better way to ensure that his wife is amenable than to test her before all his friends?" continued Elrohir.

"And, perhaps, let his friends test her a little, too," said Elladan.

Eowyn looked at Arwen, expecting her to rebuke her brothers. Instead, she said, "How much do you know about the rite, Eowyn?"

"Only that it means a great deal to Legolas, and that he does not deserve to be ridiculed," she answered, looking at the twins, icily.

The three elves exchanged knowing nods.

"The rite is a sacrifice to the Valar. It takes place on the ceremonial threshing floor," said Arwen, gesturing to the circular patch of earth, strewn with ears of corn, at the centre of the hall. "When it is time, Legolas must choose a lady from the company and lead her onto the floor. Then the Mistress of the Ceremony," she pointed to the forbidding elleth sitting beside Legolas, "will join them, as if in marriage. And Legolas must—consummate—the marriage by making love to her."

"He takes her to his chambers?" said Eowyn, thinking how painful it would be to sit waiting in the banqueting hall, knowing that Legolas and his lady were making love elsewhere—and then to see them return, the elleth flushed with pleasure—No, she could *not* endure that. Perhaps she should make an excuse and retire to her chamber before it all began. Then she could always leave for North Ithilien first thing in the morning. It was not that far, and if *anyone* knew where to travel to avoid roaming orcs, it was she—

Her thoughts were interrupted by Elrohir. "No, sweeting," he said, smiling, "he *takes* her here."

Eowyn's blood ran cold. "And we must *watch*?"

"We must play our part in the ceremony," said Arwen. "The guests tend to find themselves—excited—by the rite. It has been known for them to spend the whole night making love, some of them giving pleasure to many partners. It is a beautiful festival."

Her brothers agreed.

*That does it, thought Eowyn, I am certainly not staying here with two rampant elves. I must make my excuses and leave.* Then a thought suddenly struck her: "That is why those ellith are so excited," she said, softly.

The three elves nodded.

"But he need not choose one of those silly creatures," said Elrohir. "He can choose any elleth here."

"Or *woman*," said Elladan. And his brother and sister nodded in agreement.

Eowyn shook her head. "No, he cannot. *I* am the only *woman* here, and the other ellith are all married."

"It is considered a great honour, for the husband," said Elrohir, "if the lord chooses his wife."

Eowyn was appalled. "But how can the husband possibly bear it?" she asked. "And what if the wife does not *want* to cuckold her husband?"

"Any elleth—or woman—who attends the banquet has already given her consent by being here. No one can leave before the rite ends—and no one can say nay," said Elrohir.



Panicking, Eowyn glanced at Legolas.

And, at that very moment, Legolas chose to look at her! She blushed crimson and looked away.

*Faramir, did you think this would cure me?* she wondered, angrily. *I will kill you when I return home.*

...

*So far,* thought Legolas, *so good.*

A group of excited ellith, carefully selected by his Chief Counsellor, was seated, with their families, at the far side of the table. Some of them, he noticed, were somewhat the worse for wine. When the time came, the Valar would help him choose *the one*.

He tried to remember the girls' names.

There was Idril, the daughter of Tathar, a highly respected sword smith; she seemed a quiet, likeable elleth. There was Nerwen, the daughter of Findecáno, one of the colony's healers; Legolas had heard that she intended to follow her father's calling and had already demonstrated considerable skill, and she seemed pleasant enough, if a little drunk at present.

Then there was Angarátó's daughter, Alatóriël. *Valar!* That elleth thought of nothing but sex—the number of times he had tactfully had to repel her clumsy advances! Tonight she looked like one of those so-called 'bathing attendants' that had been offered to him in Edoras, her bodice cut too low and her transparent skirts revealing her thighs.

The rest of the ellith, he simply could not remember.

He sighed. He supposed they were all pleasant enough and could all be considered attractive, though not to his taste—not like Eowyn.

*Dear Valar,* he prayed, *if only you would give me her! But, then, the rite is not about love...*

*At least,* he thought, *most of my guests seem to be enjoying themselves.* Gimli was busy winning an ale-drinking contest with Haldir and Prince Imrahil; Aragorn, seated beside Chief Counsellor Caranthir, appeared to be discussing a question of ethics; Arwen, happy to see her brothers again, was talking animatedly; and Elrohir and Elladan were clearly enjoying teasing Eowyn.

Only Eowyn seemed uncomfortable.

In fact, she seemed embarrassed. And when Legolas managed to catch her eye, she blushed deeply, and quickly turned away.

...

"Is he not handsome?" whispered Idril, daughter of Tathar, to the elleth sitting beside her.

Idril had been surprised to receive an invitation to the Harvest Ceremony, for she was the daughter of a lowly, though well-respected, sword smith and had never been counted a beauty. *If only he would choose me,* she thought and her heart danced like a butterfly at the prospect. *But such things do not happen to me...*

Her neighbour turned to her and gave her a long appraising look. "You need not look at him so longingly," she said, "he will not choose a little mouse like you."

Idril fought back, gamely. "They say that the Valar themselves guide him in his choice," she said.

"Then they had better guide him to me," said the elleth. "Because *I* want him. And I always get what I want."

...

"My lady?" said a serving elf, placing a goblet of wine before Eowyn.

"Thank you." She took a sip, but the wine tasted strange—salty, and very potent. "What is this?" she asked.

"Lord Legolas asks you to drink it, my lady."

Eowyn took another sip. It was going straight to her head.

And to some other, rather more private, parts of her body.

She looked across at Legolas, but he was no longer looking at her. Why did he want her to drink the wine? "Did he say why?" she asked, but the serving elf had gone.

Eowyn looked around, but there was no sign of him. He had vanished. "Did you see where he went?" she asked Arwen.

"Who?"

"The serving elf who gave me this wine. He was here a moment ago."

"No," said Arwen. "I did not see anyone. In fact, I have been trying to catch the eye of one of the serving elves for quite a while."

Eowyn looked at the twins, but they both shook their heads.

"I did not see anyone," said Elrohir.

"Shhhh. The rite is about to begin," whispered Elladan, excitedly.

The wine had created a glorious, glowing sensation in Eowyn's lower body and she gulped down the rest, hoping that it would somehow make watching Legolas perform the rite a little easier to bear...

...

"My lord, it is time," said the Mistress of the Ceremony, placing a goblet in Legolas' hand.

The lord of Eryn Carantaur took a deep breath, lifted the goblet to his lips, drained it, and waited expectantly.

Nothing happened.

Legolas looked slowly around the assembled company, examining each female face in turn. Nothing was different. None of the eligible ellith had changed in any way.

*Something is wrong*, he thought.

*What if the Valar do not bless our Harvest Ceremony. What if, by lusting after Eowyn when I should have been secluded in meditation, I have doomed the entire colony to bad harvests...*

*What if—*

And then he saw—out of the corner of his eye—a faint silvery glow surrounding one of his guests. And, as he turned to watch, the glow grew into an aura, shimmering and sparkling and completely surrounding the lady who, suddenly becoming aware of his attention, dropped her gaze and stared fixedly at the table.

*No*, thought Legolas, *it is just my wishful thinking. She is mortal and is already married. The Valar would never give her to me.* And yet, when he looked once more at the rest of his female guests, he could see quite clearly that *she* was the only one that was glowing...

The Valar had answered his prayer!

Legolas stumbled to his feet and, with something less than elven grace, half ran towards the radiant woman, holding out his hand: "My lady?"

A murmur of surprise—and some disapproval—rippled through his guests, but Legolas ignored it. *The Valar have answered my prayer, he thought, she is my heart's own choice.*

"My lady?"

Slowly, the woman raised her eyes and studied his face. For a long, heart-faltering moment Legolas thought she might refuse him. But then she rose to her feet and accepted his hand.

And suddenly, Legolas could restrain himself no longer—he swept Eowyn into his arms and, whirling her round, carried her, both of them laughing, to the centre of the threshing floor, where he lowered her to the ground and kissed her, passionately.

...

"Arwen was right," said Elrohir, "he *is* in love with her—and she with him—and now we will have to make do with an elleth."

"A pity," said Elladan, "for I have heard there is nothing to match the carnal appetites of a woman."

"I have heard," began Elrohir, "that they can—" and he whispered the rest in his brother's ear.

"No! 'Tis not possible."

"I have it on the best authority. From one who has tried it."

They both laughed. "I fear poor Legolas may be in for a shock!" said Elladan.

...

Sensing that Aragorn was about to protest, his wife wrapped her small hand firmly round his wrist. "He has chosen her, Estel," she said, "and she has accepted. You cannot stop the rite now."

"But does she know what will happen to her—what he will do to her? Before the entire company?"

"She knows." Arwen did not mention that Eowyn had not seemed to approve of the rite.

"And *you* knew that he would choose her! That is why you gave her your gown! Did he tell you?" Aragorn knew that Arwen and Legolas were as close as brother and sister.

She shook her head. "I only knew that he was in love with her." *And I hoped*, she thought.

**My bow shall sing with your sword**

Aragorn sighed. "She is a married woman, Arwen. Married to a Man. I know that an elven husband would count this a great honour, but Men are possessive, especially when it comes to their wives. A wife's reputation reflects directly on her husband." He sighed wearily. "This could turn into a major diplomatic incident."

...

"A *woman*," hissed Idril's neighbour. "He has chosen a *woman*." She pronounced the word as though it referred to a particularly nasty type of vermin.

Idril turned to her, and smiled sympathetically.

...

Unnoticed, Gimli left the banqueting hall.

He would return later.

When the worst was over.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Extra Scene: Seduction

#### "My lord!"

Legolas was leaning over the flet wall, gazing down the main walkway of his beloved city, wondering whether *she* would ever see the home he was building for her.

"Lord *Legolas!*" The voice had acquired a touch of impatience.

He turned towards its owner. "Alatáriël," he said, "this is my *private* garden."

"And it is charming," she said, advancing on him like a cat stalking a bird.

"*Private,*" Legolas repeated.

Alatáriël smiled conspiratorially. "So no one will disturb us... *Legolas.*" She laid her hands upon his chest, sliding them up, over the fabric, deliberately cupping and squeezing his muscles. "You are so *strong...*" she whispered, "*so...*" She gave him a twisted smile, which she seemed to imagine was seductive.

Gently, but firmly, Legolas removed her hands. "Your father will be wondering where you are, Alatáriël," he said, "I had better take you home."

She came up on tiptoe and whispered in his ear. "He *knows* where I am. *He* is busy—talking to the Mistress of the Ceremony, asking her all sorts of questions about the harvest rite..." She slipped her arms around him and, pulling him close, pressed her groin to his.

"Alatáriël! Please!"

"*You* must be celibate for *three months...*" she said, teasingly.

"Indeed," said Legolas, "so please—"

"But *I* will not tell."

Against everything he believed in, Legolas exerted his strength, grasping her hands and removing them forcibly from around his waist; he held her at arms' length. "This garden is private. Please leave. *Now.* Or I will call a guard."

"You would not dare!"

"Do not test me!"

The elleth shook off his hands. "Just you wait," she cried. "*Just you WAIT!*" And she picked up her skirts and ran from the flet.

### Chapter 3: The Rite

**"My lord?" Her voice was quiet but, as usual, the Mistress of the Ceremony would brook no resistance. She laid her hand upon Legolas' shoulder and firmly pulled him away from Eowyn.**

"You must first be properly joined. And *she* must be prepared for you, my lord."

Legolas stepped back reluctantly, watching as, with much ceremony, the elleth placed a delicate mithril circlet on Eowyn's head. For the first time he noticed that his lady was wearing an elven gown, which revealed her lovely shoulders and the velvety cleft between her breasts.

*That is Arwen's*, he thought. *Arwen must somehow have known...*

"Come, stand beside her, my lord," said the Mistress of the Ceremony and, joining their hands together, she recited the ancient formula:

*"May the union of the Lord of Eryn Carantaur and the lady of the threshing floor be fruitful; may the womb of the lady be filled; may the woods and the fields and the gardens of Eryn Carantaur be blessed."*

The assembled company murmured its assent.

Legolas raised Eowyn's hand to his mouth and pressed his lips to her palm.

Some of the elves began to sing, softly.

"Unlace her gown, my lord," said the Mistress of the Ceremony.

Legolas gently brushed Eowyn's hair over her shoulders, carefully undid the silken cords of her bodice, opened it, and began to slide the gown off.

Eowyn instinctively raised her arms to cover her breasts, but Legolas took hold of one of her hands. "Do not be afraid, melmenya," he said softly, "you are my lady, and my people will honour you." Then he leaned in closer, and whispered, "And *I* will not ask you to do anything you do not wish."

Eowyn nodded her consent; the gown fell to the ground; and Legolas saw her naked for the very first time.

She was even more beautiful than he had imagined—though slender, she was shapely, her limbs delicate but strong, and her hair fell down to her waist in soft waves, like a river of pure gold.

"You must undress his lordship, my lady," said the Mistress of the Ceremony.

Eowyn, blushing, untied the sash at Legolas' waist, slid the embroidered robe off his shoulders, and ran her hands gently down his muscled chest, and his stomach, to the top of his silk leggings. Trembling, she fell to her knees before him and untied his laces, slowly pushing the fabric open—and her hand accidentally brushed his erect penis as it sprang free.

Legolas gasped, and Eowyn pulled her hand away and, for a moment, simply stared at him, fascinated.

Then she stretched out her fingers and caressed him, gently.

Legolas caught her hand: "You will undo me, hiril nín," he whispered.

Her blush deepened.

But Legolas took both of her hands, and brought her to her feet, pulling her into his arms. She could hardly be ignorant of what was expected of her, but Legolas knew that Men had strange ideas about sex, and he needed to be absolutely sure. He pressed his lips to her ear. "Are you certain, *meleth nín*?" he whispered. "You can still say no."

"I am quite certain," she whispered back.

He began to lower her to the floor, but again the Mistress of the Ceremony interrupted him, this time holding a mithril goblet towards Eowyn.

"Is that necessary?" asked Legolas.

"It is a part of the rite, my lord."

"What is it?" asked Eowyn.

"It is a potion to increase your desire, my lady," said the *elleth*.

Legolas frowned, but Eowyn took the goblet and drank.

"Very well, my lord," said the *elleth*, "you may continue."

The guests put out their candles, leaving only the threshing floor bathed in light and, as Legolas lowered his lady to the floor, the watching elves began to sing softly.

"I will make it as loving as I can, *melmenya*," he whispered, stroking his fingers across her stomach, over her mound, and in gentle circles between her thighs, making her laugh with delight but, even as he leaned in to kiss her mouth, the potion suddenly began to torment her, and she arched her back and tried to ride his hand.

"Please, my lord," she whispered, "I need you; I need you *inside* me."

"Does it hurt?" he asked softly.

"Yes," she whispered, "it burns..."

He entered her gently and began to thrust, lifting himself on his hands to watch her response.

"Oh yes, my lord," she moaned, "yes, yes... *Harder*,"—her voice was breathless—"yes, yes, oh yes,"—and her head thrashed from side to side—"harder, please, harder, oh, oh *please*..."

*Harder.*

Legolas braced his arms and thrust desperately.

His own needs, denied release by the potion, were threatening to drive him to madness. But Eowyn, writhing and sobbing beneath him, was already approaching completion. He felt her body ripple around him; he felt the spasms grow stronger; felt her warm, wet essence bathe him; and then...

He felt her joy, flooding his mind, filling his heart, touching his spirit!

*Ilúvatar!*

Legolas could hear his guests cheering and clapping their hands on the table but he was still thrusting, thrusting, thrusting—slowly now, breathlessly, completely exhausted.

And he thought he might die. But then it took him by surprise—his penis, like a great carantaur, with roots deep in his thighs and his back and his chest, was drawing his spirit down to his groin...

"EOWYN!" he screamed, "AI EOWYN! EOWYN! Meleth *nín*!"

...

"Dear Valar!" said the twins, simultaneously; "we *must* find ourselves a woman."

...

The Mistress of the Ceremony covered the lovers with a thick, velvet blanket—for whatever might pass between them now that the rite had been celebrated was no one's business but their own.

Still lying in Eowyn's arms, Legolas listened to the sounds of approval coming from his guests. Some were clapping; others were singing the praises of the lady whose passionate hunger had so aroused her lord. And he knew that they, their blood fired by what they had just witnessed, would soon be making their own sacrifices. It had gone well; all was as it should be. He had the Valar and Eowyn to thank for that.

"Are you all right?" asked his lady, softly.

Legolas, his heart too full to answer her easily, lifted his head and smiled. "Melmenya?"

She reached up, tucking a stray lock of hair behind his ear, and blushed, "You are still *hard*..." she explained.

Legolas, unsure what she was asking, looked at her questioningly.

She cleared her throat. "Did I not satisfy you?"

He smiled radiantly. "Oh, melmenya! How could you think that?"

"Well, you did seem—but, then, why are you still so—so *aroused*?"

"I love you."

"But do you not need time to recover—afterwards?"

Legolas grinned. "It is true what they say about men, then?" He kissed her, playfully. "Sometimes, I do, for a few moments, melmenya, but not tonight—certainly not tonight! Do *you* need to rest, meleth *nín*?"

Eowyn closed her eyes. The potion was beginning to bite again and she shook her head, tightening herself around him.

"Oh, melmenya!" he whispered, and he pressed his hips forward, to bring her relief.

...

Eowyn lay quietly beside the sleeping elf, wishing that the noisy antics around them would stop. Legolas was completely exhausted; he needed to rest.

And *she* needed to think.

Why had she done it? After she had been so horrified by the idea of the rite, why had she had simply taken Legolas' hand and followed him out onto the threshing floor? How could she have



let him undress her in front of the entire company—she blushed crimson—and how could she have undressed him? Gods, she had even fondled his—his penis in front of Aragorn and Prince Imrahil, and those two appalling brothers of the Queen. And then she had let him take her, in full view of the entire company.

And she had enjoyed it—gods, how she had enjoyed it! She had howled like a warg...

She could only be thankful that Eomer had not been there to see it.

Or Faramir.

*She had publicly betrayed Faramir.*

How could she have done it?

*Well, she thought ruefully, that wine he gave me did not help me say no—I must ask him about that.*

*But, in truth, I would have done it without the wine. In truth, I did it because the thought of watching him make love to someone else was unbearable.*

...

*She had been sitting in her garden. It was late autumn, the nights were beginning to close in, and it had really been too cold to be outside in her thin gown, but she had been reluctant to go back indoors to face Faramir and his 'secretary'.*

*Legolas had come looking for her.*

*"You are cold, hiril nín," he had said, and had taken off his cloak and wrapped it around her shoulders.*

*They had sat together, in companionable silence, as the sky had darkened and, one by one, lights had appeared all over the city. The palace was brightly lit; a functionary had worked his way around the courtyards lighting lamps, and had paused to light two lanterns on the gates of her garden.*

*And still Eowyn could not move.*

*Then, softly, Legolas had begun to sing. The song was not elven but human, in the common tongue, and its melody was haunting:*

*The water is wide, I cannot get o'er  
And neither have I wings to fly  
Oh give me a boat that will carry two  
And both shall go, my true love and I.*

*I leaned my back up against an oak,  
Thinking that he was a trusty tree.  
But first he bent and then he broke,  
So did my love prove false to me.*

*O love is handsome and love is fine,  
And love is charming when it is true;  
But when it is old, it groweth cold  
And fades away like morning dew.*

*And, as his beautiful voice held the last note, Eowyn had thought: He knows; he knows and he*

*is being so kind. And she had shivered—though not from cold—and Legolas had drawn her close, to warm and comfort her, elven fashion.*

*And, suddenly, looking at the city lights that glittered like a second sky, she had been happy. For the first time in years, it seemed, she had been happy.*

...

That glorious feeling, that happiness, was attached, in her heart and her mind, to Legolas. After that night, the elf's presence, even the mere thought of him, had been enough to make her happy. And she had wanted to be with him, to be close to him, and to make *him* happy, ever since. And when he had chosen her, when he had run to her and taken her into his arms, and carried her, like a new bride, into the centre of the threshing floor, and kissed her as if he loved her—loved *her*—then she would have let him do anything he wanted.

*I would have let him take me sprawled across Faramir's knees...*

And he had been gentle and loving and passionate and—when he had sensed that she needed it—even a little cruel, for the potion had continued to torment her for hours and her lovely elf had done everything in his power to ease the pain. He had been everything she had ever dreamed of.

She looked at him fondly.

Legolas was lying on his side, completely naked, pale skin glowing, wayward strands of blond hair falling over his face. Some people thought Legolas effeminate—even some that had seen him in battle and should have known better—but Eowyn could see nothing effeminate about him. True, his beautiful face was hairless, but elves did not have beards. His hair was long and soft and silken, but Eowyn found that intensely erotic. And his body! Gods! She had never seen—nor felt the effects of—muscle like it. Before Legolas, Eowyn had been intimate with two men, but neither had aroused such aching desire in her—even before she had drunk the potion.

She blushed. The moment she had unlaced his leggings and seen him, she had had to touch him—and she would have kissed him, too, and taken him in her mouth, right there, had he not stopped her.

She smiled. *He did not stop me later...*

Eowyn stretched out her hand and stroked him gently, running her fingers down his soft length. Immediately he began to harden, his penis thickening from the root and rising across his belly. Eowyn could wait no longer: she bent over, kissed him gently, and took him into her mouth.

"Mmmmmmm." Legolas murmured contentedly; then Eowyn felt his hand in her hair. "I am sorry, melmenya," he said. "Is it hurting again?"

Sadly, she could not keep him in her mouth and reply.

"No; no, I think the effects have worn off now. It is just—I just wanted..." But she stammered, for she had not the courage to say to him, *I love you, Legolas, I love you so much.*

"We will need to talk, meleth nín," he said. "Not now, but we will need to decide what we are going to do, what is best for everyone—"

"I want to stay here with you."

"Are you sure Eowyn? Will you really give up your husband and your palace in North Ithilien,

and court life in Gondor, and come to Eryn Carantaur to live in a tree with a wood elf?"

"Do you want me?"

"Want you? Of course, melmenya. I have *always* wanted you."

"Then I will. I will stay."

"I will come with you to North Ithilien and we will talk to Faramir together—unless you want me to talk to him alone?" Eowyn shook her head. "Very well then; we will come to an agreement with Faramir, and then I shall bring you home."

Eowyn kissed his cheek. She liked the sound of 'home'.

"Eowyn?"

"Yes?"

Legolas gave her one of his most appealing, dimpled smiles. "Remind me what you were doing when I woke up..."

...

Maranwë the scullery maid ran quickly down the main staircase. She was late.

It was almost dawn, and she needed to heat up the water before the serving ellith began clearing the banqueting hall. *There will be a lot of scrubbing to do today*, she thought, as she passed the banqueting hall.

A movement caught her eye, and she turned to look, and opened her mouth to cry out, instinctively wanting to warn the victim, though—in truth—she had no liking for her, but—

Intense pain burst across the back of her head and she fell to her knees.

Then another blow sent her into oblivion.

...

Dawn, breaking through the carantaur trees, was filtering into the banqueting hall as four serving ellith, sent to clear the table and lay out the breakfast food, carefully picked their way through the sleeping guests.

Míriel looked longingly at the velvet-covered couple at the centre of the threshing floor.

What would she not have given to spend a night with Lord Legolas?

But what chance had a serving elleth? Even the ellith who had been chosen to attend the ceremony, daughters of important families, had been disappointed, if the rumour she had heard in the kitchens was true—that Lord Legolas had chosen a woman as his lady.

*And then, they say*, she thought proudly, *he performed the rite with exceptional vigour. Elleth or woman*, she decided, *she is the luckiest lady in Middle-earth.*

She crossed to the table and began clearing away the debris, stacking the soiled plates ready to be carried back to the kitchen. She was concentrating so deeply on the problem of moving the crockery without waking any of the guests that she did not see the elleth until she almost fell over her.

Míriel had never seen death before, but there was no mistaking it now—she could see the thin

leather cord that had been twisted round the elleth's throat, see the livid discoloration of her face, see enough of her expression—

*Oh Valar!* she thought, pressing her hands to her mouth as she recognised the unfortunate victim.

And, immediately, she realised three things: that Lord Legolas must be protected from seeing the body; that the elleth's death must not be allowed to spoil the Harvest Ceremony; and that *she*, therefore, must get help as quickly and discreetly as possible, before the guests awoke.

So, lifting her full skirts, she ran as fast as she could to the kitchens, where she knew she would find the Captain of the Palace Guard.

...

"Where is Maranwë?" asked the Steward of the Household.

"She has not arrived this morning, Master Eö," said the cook. "And I am worried, for she is a conscientious girl and not the sort to be late."

Eö sighed. His first concern was to ensure that the crockery and silverware were cleaned, ready for the banquet that night. "Feärwen," he called to one of the serving ellith. "You will have to take Maranwë's place for now."

That settled, he decided to send someone to look for Maranwë. *Perhaps one of the palace guards*, he thought, *could—*

Eö's train of thought was broken by a commotion in the main part of the kitchen. A very agitated serving elleth—Míriel—was trying to persuade the Captain of the Palace Guard, who had been taking his breakfast at the kitchen table, to follow her to the banqueting hall.

Eö sighed again. *What now?* he wondered.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Extra Scene: The faithless oak

#### **He had known that they were unhappy long before he had understood the cause.**

In fact, he had blamed himself. *I am here too often*, he had thought. *I am spending too much time with her. Demanding too much of her attention...*

His eyes had been opened one evening, in late autumn.

Faramir had reached for the pen just as his secretary had set it back in the inkstand; their hands had touched and stayed for just a moment too long; and their eyes had met and lingered...

And Legolas had *known*.

...

"I must find Eowyn," he said.

Both men turned in surprise, their hands falling to their sides.

"I—er—I need to speak to her—about her lemon trees—before I leave."

He found her, appropriately enough, sitting in her garden. She was shivering.

"You are cold, *hiril nín*," he said; and he took off his cloak and wrapped it around her shoulders. He had no idea what to say; he could think of no way to admit that he understood, no words that might ease her suffering. So he sat with her, in silence, as the sky darkened, and lights appeared all over the city.

And then, because he could not hold her—or kiss her, or make love to her—he sang to her:

*I leaned my back up against an oak,  
Thinking that he was a trusty tree.  
But first he bent and then he broke,  
So did my love prove false to me...*

"Thank you," she said, softly.

And Legolas heard a voice.

*Trust us*, it said. *Trust the Valar*.

Then Eowyn shivered again. And, without thinking, he drew her close, and cradled her head against his chest.

## Extra Scene: Under the blanket

### His kiss was gentle.

But his body *possessed* hers—even now, in the sweet aftermath of lovemaking when, still inside her, he lay unmoving save for the tender exploration of her mouth.

Eowyn ran her hands over the steely contours of his arms, and tangled her fingers in his silken hair (soft as swansdown)—revelling all the while in the delicious feeling of being filled by him.

The potion made her burn; his penis turned the pain into pleasure.

*How could I be so lucky?* she wondered. *How—*

Legolas raised his head, his slight frown only enhancing his flawless beauty. "What is wrong, *melmenya*?" he whispered.

"Wrong? What do you mean?"

"Your mood has—changed." His eyes widened in alarm. "Do you regret—"

"NO!" Eowyn hugged him tightly "No. I have *no* regrets, Legolas. None at all."

"Then what is it—do not say 'nothing', *melmenya*. You—you *withdrew* from me. You—"

"Is that how it felt?" She stroked his hair. "No, I was just... I was admiring your body," she admitted, her cheeks suddenly flaming, "and your—er—"

Legolas raised his head. "You are *blushing*, *melmenya*!"

Eowyn looked away, smiling. "I have never admitted anything like this before..."

...

"My what?"

"Mmm?"

"You were admiring my body and my *what*?"

She chuckled. "*You* know."

Nuzzling her cheek, Legolas moved his hips in a long, lazy thrust.

"Yes," said Eowyn, softly, "oh, that... *Oh gods*, yes, that!" Shivering, she rode out the wave of pleasure he had sent flooding through her.

The elf waited for her spasm to subside, then withdrew slowly, and thrust again.

Eowyn clutched at the ground—her body arching of its own accord—until the pleasure had once more ebbed away. Then she muttered, "Why *me*, Legolas? You could have had any of those—those *beautiful* *ellith*—*Arwen*, even. Why *me*—?"

"*Shhhhh*." He thrust, deep this time and, holding himself inside her, roughly ground his hips.

"I—*oh*—I am—*oh*—I am nothing...!"

"You are my Harvest Queen." Closing his eyes in a frown of concentration, he made a series of long, slow, thorough thrusts. "You are the bravest—the strongest—the most beautiful woman—or elleth—I have ever known. I love you, melmenya—" His strokes hardened, and his rhythm quickened.

"But—the potions," she gasped stubbornly, even as she met his movements, "how can we know—"

"Sh... *Sssssh!*" He suddenly hunched over her, his soothing murmur ending in a ragged hiss, and she felt him spill his seed inside her, again and again.

Then he sank down upon her and whispered, against her cheek, "I have loved you from the moment I first saw you, Eowyn nín. Everything I have done—this colony—I have done to share with you. Everything I ever wanted has been given to me tonight." He withdrew and, rolling onto his back, sighed contentedly.

"How could *I* be so lucky?" asked Eowyn.

There was a long moment's silence, then Legolas answered, with a soft chuckle, "So lucky as to have a lover who thoroughly spends himself, leaving you unsatisfied?"

*So lucky as to have won your love*, she thought. But all she said was: "I am not worried. The night is nowhere near over yet, my Harvest King."

## Chapter 4: The morning after

### Eowyn awoke to the feeling of Legolas' lips pressed gently against her temple.

"Good morning, melmenya," he said softly, pulling her closer, "are you hungry? I am famished—I could eat nothing last night."

Eowyn smiled happily; she was going to spend the rest of her life with this man—this *elf*. "Good morning, my love," she replied. "Let us find you something to eat, then!" And she threw back the blanket and bounded to her feet, holding out her hands to him.

Legolas smiled. "Why do I have the feeling that I have met my match in you?"

He rose—very gracefully, Eowyn thought, for someone who was completely naked and so uncharacteristically dishevelled—and took her hand and together they looked around the banqueting hall. The remains of the banquet had been cleared away, but some of the guests remained, sleeping in various groups.

Eowyn examined a pile of bodies lying beside the table—she recognised Elrohir and Elladan, and one of the disappointed *ellith*, but—who was that, lying naked beside them, on his stomach? *Ah, Prince Imrahil.*

She turned happily to Legolas and pointed at the prince: "That," she said, softly, "but for you, and the grace of the gods, would have been me."

To her surprise Legolas looked away, clearly uncomfortable.

She caught his hand and gave him a questioning look, but he simply drew her to the table, where breakfast had already been laid out—fresh bread rolls, jam, honey, fruit, and jugs of water. The water, Eowyn noticed, bubbled and foamed as she poured it into a glass.

She lifted it up to the light and laughed—and Legolas seemed to recover his good mood. "It comes from a spring in the hills, just outside Doro Lanthron, melmenya," he said. "Gimli tells me that the bubbles are made by 'good stone' dissolving into the rainwater. The local people seal it in jars to stop the bubbles escaping, then sell it at the market, here in Eryn Carantaur. It is very popular as an alternative to wine."

"Is it safe?"

"Yes," he replied, "in fact, my healer tells me its effects are beneficial."

Eowyn tasted it; it felt sharp and refreshing on her tongue. "Your people should take it to Caras Arnen and Minas Tirith. And to Edoras," she said. "I am sure it would be very popular there, too, especially with the ladies."

"You can suggest that at the next meeting of the Council," he said, "to *our* people, meleth nín. Come, sit."

Legolas pulled out a chair and Eowyn heard his breath catch. She stepped forward and peered under the table. Sleeping there, clearly hoping for some privacy, lay a semi-clothed King of Gondor, his wife, and another of the eligible *ellith*. Eowyn and Legolas smiled at each other, conspiratorially.

"Perhaps," said Eowyn, "we should take our breakfast elsewhere."

Legolas nodded in agreement. "Where would you like to go, meleth nín?" he asked. "To my chambers?"



"What I would dearly like," said Eowyn, "is to bathe."

Legolas kissed her forehead. "I thought the Rohirrim were afraid of soap and water."

Eowyn laughed. "Only the men!"

"Let us go to my chambers, then. We can bathe, and eat breakfast in my garden." Legolas picked up the robe he had been wearing the night before and helped her into it, carefully tying the sash around her waist. He himself seemed quite happy to remain naked.

*Elves!* Eowyn thought. She fingered the robe. *But this was very considerate of him.*

They filled a plate with bread, honey and fruit, and Eowyn poured two glasses of the bubbling water, and, together, they escaped from the banqueting hall like two naughty children.

...

"And I am telling you," said Lenwë, Treasurer of Eryn Carantaur, with a wail in his voice, "that we must not tell him. If Lord Legolas were to know about this terrible tragedy, how could he possibly complete the harvest rite? So much depends on his ability to—to perform it successfully. And if he cannot, what future will our colony have?"

"And exactly how do you propose to keep it from him?" asked Chief Counsellor Caranthir. "*She* was central to the rite. Without her it will be impossible to continue. Whoever did this might as well have killed Lord Legolas' lady herself..."

Lord Fingolfin held up his hand. "We have no choice, my friends. We must tell him, for he must not only reassure his guests, he must also discover and punish whoever is responsible. And, as for the rite, I believe there is another who has been trained to take the elleth's role—no, Lenwë, I will hear no further protests. I will go now and tell Lord Legolas myself."

"What worries *me*," said Caranthir, "is, is the rite still *valid*? The murder is surely a sacrilege."

Fingolfin sighed. "If the Valar would truly condemn an entire colony for the wickedness of one elf, my friend, then I fear the damage is already done."

...

*Splash!*

"Melmenya!" Legolas, pretending to be angry, caught her arms and, pinning them to her sides, pulled her between his legs, holding her in place with his thighs.

*His very muscular thighs*, thought Eowyn.

She laid her head on his shoulder and sighed contentedly. She felt him hardening against her belly. "Are all elves completely insatiable?"

Still holding her firmly, Legolas burrowed into the crook of her neck and bit her. Eowyn yelped and they both laughed. Then, with hands and mouths, they started to explore each other's bodies.

"Oh, my lord," she whispered, "make love to me."

He turned them over and, supporting her head and shoulders above the water, entered her body and began to thrust—

They were immediately interrupted by an urgent knocking on the bathing room door.

"Please return later!" shouted Legolas.

"I apologise, Lord Legolas," said a muffled voice, "but this is an urgent matter."

Legolas looked questioningly at Eowyn. She nodded and, with a frustrated sigh, he gently withdrew—"One moment!"—and rested his forehead on Eowyn's shoulder, breathing raggedly, until he had regained control of his body. "Stay here, *melmenya*," he said, "where he cannot see you." Then he climbed out of the bath, hastily put on his robe, and virtually stamped to the door.

*That is not like him*, thought Eowyn. Instinctively, she put on another of his robes and followed him to the door.

"This had better be a matter of life or death," said Legolas sharply.

The elf at the door was taken aback. *He has never seen Legolas angry before*, thought Eowyn. She assumed that he was one of Legolas' counsellors; he was dark, and distinguished-looking, and reminded her a little of Lord Elrond.

"My lord, I—oh, and my lady," he added, with a slight bow.

Legolas glanced over his shoulder, surprised to find Eowyn standing behind him.

"I have bad news, my lord," said the elf, "which I believe you should hear. This morning one of the serving *ellith* found the Mistress of the Ceremony..." He hesitated.

The news was clearly bad and, unseen by the Counsellor, Eowyn took Legolas' hand, supportively; he squeezed her fingers in response. "*And*, my lord Fingolfin?" he prompted.

"She is dead, my lord. She has been strangled."

...

Haldir, formerly March Warden of Lorien, now March Warden of Eryn Carantaur, was rapidly reaching breaking point.

At Legolas' insistence, the emergency meeting of the colony's Inner Council, including the heads of the border and the household guards, had been joined by the woman, Eowyn—Haldir nodded a brief greeting—and the *nogoth*, Gimli. And, thanks mainly to the latter's enthusiastic support of his elven friend, the meeting was proving even louder and more pointless than usual.

Chief Counsellor Caranthir was advising Legolas to cancel the rite and send his guests home: "We cannot guarantee their safety, my lord. What if the killer were to attack King Elessar—or Queen Arwen?" He shuddered at the thought. "My lord—we might even find ourselves at war with Gondor!"

The Treasurer—that cringing fool *Lenwë*—wanted to carry on as if nothing had happened, and kept whimpering, "But the rite, my lord! The colony cannot survive without the blessing of the Valar!" whenever he thought Legolas might hear him.

The so-called Captain of the Palace Guard, Golradir, was merely concerned to cover his own back, bristling at anyone he thought might be questioning his competence.

Haldir sighed; he would have followed Legolas-the-warrior into the fires of Mount Doom itself, but watching Legolas-the-diplomatic-ruler in action drove him to the brink of mutiny. *Just give them orders!* he almost screamed.

But Legolas was being supremely patient, whilst firmly insisting that steps must be taken to find the murderer immediately. "This sort of thing cannot be kept secret. And we do not," he said, "know what the killer's motives are. We do not know whether he intends to kill again or, if so, who his next victim might be." He placed his hand on Eowyn's. "If he intends to disrupt the rite, then *all* the participants are at risk. Our only option is to track him down as quickly as possible, stop him, and make him answer for his crime."

His resolution brought a chorus of protest from Caranthir and Lenwë, but Counsellor Fingolfin—*The only one of the counsellors worth a damn*, thought Haldir—nodded in agreement. And the dwarf pounded the table—presumably in support.

Haldir had had enough. "But we *elves* have no experience of these matters," he said. "How do we find a murderer? I do not know where to start."

"I do," said a firm, quiet voice, taking everyone by surprise.

Haldir turned to face the woman who had, until now, been sitting silently beside Legolas. "I have observed several investigations of this sort," she continued, "and they all follow a similar pattern."

She counted each step on her fingers. "First, you must seal the borders of Eryn Carantaur and ensure that no one leaves until you have had a chance to question him.

"Secondly, you must examine the place where the body was found, looking for anything that might identify the murderer—"

"Do you think me a fool, lady?" asked Golradir angrily. "I have thoroughly searched that part of the hall, myself. The murderer left nothing—"

"I am not making any accusations, Captain, for I am not referring to a cloak or a dropped glove," said Eowyn, firmly. "I am talking about small traces that might easily be overlooked—a few hairs, perhaps, or a shred of cloth—which might, nevertheless, provide you with a clue to the murderer's identity."

Legolas, Haldir noticed, was gazing at the woman with even deeper adoration. And the dwarf's expression was much the same.

"Thirdly," Eowyn continued, "you need to establish exactly where the murder took place—whether the Lady was killed where she was found, or whether her body was moved there afterwards—"

"Why?" asked Haldir. And realised that he, too, was taking the woman seriously.

"Because, March Warden, it will help you eliminate suspects—I will explain that in a moment."

*She is every inch a Princess*, thought Haldir, *and would be a fitting consort for an elf, were she not mortal.*

"The body was moved by the guards—"

"That could hardly be avoided, lady," said Golradir, "since the guests were beginning to waken."

"Yes, I understand that, Captain," she answered. "But evidence may have disappeared when the body was moved, so you need to talk to the girl who found it and to the guards who moved it, and see what they remember.

"Fourthly, your healer must examine the body thoroughly—"

"Why? Why must we violate her still further?" cried Lenwë. "Surely it is time to leave the poor, unfortunate elleth in peace and..." He was silenced by a look from Legolas.

"Because, my lord Lenwë," answered Eowyn, gently, "we owe it to the lady herself to find out who did this terrible thing to her.

"If possible, your healer must ascertain the time of her death. Also, he must examine her for any traces the murderer might have left on her body—hairs or shreds of clothing, perhaps, torn away when she struggled. It would also be useful to know how tall the killer was, how strong, and which hand he favoured—all these things a healer can often tell from the wound.

"*And...* You need to know whether *he* could possibly have been a *she*."

The Counsellors stared at her in horror; even Gimli looked surprised.

Eowyn held up her hand. "I mention it only as a possibility," she said. "If the answer is no, then that reduces the number of suspects. Lastly—" she hesitated, just for a moment, "lastly, it will be necessary to question all of your guests—"

There was pandaemonium.

Legolas quickly called everyone to order.

"You *must* question all the guests," Eowyn insisted, "as soon as possible, and make written records of their statements. If you can establish where the lady was killed, and when, and you use the statements to work out where each guest was when she died, you can eliminate all those who can prove they were elsewhere at the time, and that should help you identify the killer."

"How can we possibly ask our guests what they were doing last night, of all nights, my lady?" asked Caranthir.

"True," said Legolas, "it will not be pleasant, my lord. But our guests will surely understand that our search for the killer must come first."

"That is why Lord Legolas should personally oversee the investigation," said Eowyn. "He is above suspicion. And people will be more co-operative when approached by the lord of the colony."

The counsellors agreed reluctantly.

"Very well," said Legolas. "There is much to do. March Warden, I presume that your guards will have records of anyone who has left the colony since last night?" Haldir nodded. "Good. Have anyone who has left brought back to city, and seal the border until further notice."

"Of course."

"Captain Golradir, have your men close the banqueting hall immediately and stand guard; no one is to enter it until we have examined the area. If we can finish before three o'clock, there will still be time to prepare for the banquet tonight. Have the girl who discovered the body—*Míriel*?—and the guards who moved it sent to my chambers in half an hour. We will talk to them first."

"Yes, my lord."

"Lord Caranthir, is everything prepared for the rite this evening?"

"Lady Eowyn must be fitted for her gown, my lord. And you will need to replace the Mistress of

the Ceremony," replied the Chief Counsellor.

"Lady Lessien has been tutored in that role, my lord. Please explain the situation to her and ask her to prepare herself to officiate tonight."

Caranthir nodded gravely.

"Where is the body?" asked Legolas.

"She lies in her own chamber, my lord," replied Golradir.

"Lord Fingolfin," said Legolas, "who amongst our healers do you think would be best equipped to examine the body?"

Fingolfin thought for a moment. "Master Dínendal, my lord. He is young and has a practical nature, and will, perhaps, be more willing to take part in something of this sort than any of the others."

"And he has already seen the body, my lord," added Golradir.

"Good; that should help," said Legolas. "Lord Fingolfin, please ask Master Dínendal to meet me in the lady's chambers in two hours. And please feel free to join us yourself, my lord—you too, Lord Caranthir." He turned to the Treasurer. "I will spare *you* that burden, Lord Lenwë." He inclined his head, indicating that the meeting was over.

*That, thought Haldir. The ability to grasp the situation and be decisive—whilst charming the birds down from the trees—that is what makes him a king, even though he refuses the title.*

...

"Thank you Gimli," said Legolas. "I am so sorry to have dragged you into this, but I do appreciate your support, *elvellon*."

"Well," said the dwarf, "someone has to keep you elves in order." He winked at Eowyn.

"Will you help us with the investigation?"

"My sharp dwarven mind—like my axe—is at your service. But I should point out that I am as much a suspect as anyone else. I left the banqueting hall before the rite began. I had intended to return once, er,"—he blushed—"once things were over, but—well, I was, er—" Gimli came to a painful decision. "The truth is, I fell asleep and did not wake until you sent for me this morning."

The two friends laughed, despite the grim situation.

"So, you see, there is no proof that I did not kill the lady myself," Gimli continued. "And though I will give you all the support I can, lad, I am not sure that your people would be happy for me to take part in the investigation."

Legolas sighed. "Ai, Gimli, how could anyone accuse you of such a thing? What motive could *you* possibly have?"

"Gimli?" Eowyn interrupted, suddenly. "When you awoke, had the fire in your chambers been tended? Was there hot water in your bathing room?"

Gimli looked surprised, "Yes."

"Then the servants responsible must have seen you asleep in bed. If the healer can determine when the lady died, it may be possible to clear you of any suspicion. And I think that we can

also clear Aragorn and Arwen, and Prince Imrahil and the twins," she looked at Legolas, "and their elleth companions."

"Aragorn!" said Legolas. "I must tell him what has happened and explain why I have decided not involve him in the investigation, as yet. Gimli, if you are happy to remain in the background for the time being, *elvellon*,"—Gimli nodded—"then, at least, meet us in my chambers this afternoon. Who knows, by then, we may have proved your innocence."

He briefly clasped Gimli's hand, then turned to Eowyn. "Come *melmenya*," he said, "let us go and talk to Aragorn."

...

As he swung himself up into the saddle, Haldir caught sight of Legolas and Eowyn walking towards the guest quarters. Though he could not begrudge Legolas his obvious happiness, Haldir was finding it painful to watch his lord court the mortal woman.

*She had found him, barely breathing, on the ramparts of Helm's Deep, had single-handedly dragged him out from under a filthy orc, and had stubbornly insisted that the healers continue treating him, even when they had said there was no hope.*

*He had woken from the darkness to find her sitting beside him...*

*But I was a coward, thought Haldir, and that is another story.*

He spurred his horse and set off for the nearest border post. He had a lot of ground to cover in the next few hours.

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### Extra scene: The first time

**The water was warm and deep. Eowyn watched him add a few handfuls of scented leaves.**

"*Iârloth*," he said, smiling, "to restore you."

"Restore me?"

"You have had a very strenuous time, *melmenya*."

Eowyn laughed. "*That* is the truth!" She pulled at the sash of her robe, unravelling the bow, and let the fabric fall open.

"*Oh, melmenya...*" He slipped his hand inside the silk and slowly brushed his fingers over her waist and upwards, stroking his way to her breast; then, holding her in his hand, he kissed her, gently sucking her nipple into his mouth.

"*Ahhh...*" Eowyn wrapped her arms around his shoulders, pulling him closer. He shifted in her embrace, kissing the silky cleft between her breasts.

Eowyn's body was on fire; she could feel his hardness pressing into her belly and she rubbed herself against it.

"Mmmmm," he raised his head. "Let us get into the water, *melmenya*, before this goes too far." He slid the robe from her shoulders, letting it fall to the floor. "Valar," he whispered, "you are like blossom on a spring morning." He held her hand and steadied her as she stepped into the bath and sat down.

Then Eowyn watched him climb in beside her, admiring his long, muscular legs, his slender hips, his taut belly, and the unexpected bulk of his erection. *Gods, he is big*, she thought; and, remembering the feel of him inside her, she squeezed her muscles tight, and stretched out her hand to stroke him.

"*Melmenya!*" he cried, startled by her touch.

She pulled her hand away. "I am sorry..."

Legolas laughed. "You are a wanton woman, Eowyn *nín*," he said, taking her in his arms and kissing the offending fingers. "A wonderful, beautiful, wanton woman, and I bless the Valar for giving you to me." He nuzzled her neck. "Will you do something for me, *melmenya*? Something *very* intimate?"

"Of course. *Anything*," she whispered.

"Will you wash my hair?"

## Chapter 5: Investigations

**Aragorn opened the door wearing his nightshirt and a dressing robe and looking somewhat the worse for the previous night's activities.**

*He looks,* thought Legolas, *almost as unkempt as he did when we were running across the plains of Rohan.* "May we come in, *mellon nín*?" he asked.

Aragorn showed them into the sitting room. "Should Arwen be here?" he asked. "She is asleep and I would prefer not to wake her..."

"Of course, *mellon nín*; let her rest."

"Is this about your choice of lady last night?" asked Aragorn, seating himself in one of the armchairs and looking pointedly at Eowyn.

"No, Aragorn," said Legolas. "And—before you say anything more—Eowyn and I plan to talk to Faramir once the festival is over, and come to some compromise with him. And, though I would value your support in the matter, *mellon nín*, I will understand if you feel you cannot give it. But know this: it was the Valar that gave Eowyn to me last night. And, though she was my heart's own choice,"—he took her hand—"I would not have performed the rite with her had they given me another."

Aragorn nodded, but Legolas noticed that his jaw was still clenched.

"Now, that matter is closed for the time being," he continued, "for I have bad news. Some time last night, the Mistress of the Ceremony was murdered. One of the serving *ellith* found her in the banqueting hall this morning. She had been strangled."

"By the gods," said Aragorn; "who would wish to harm her?" He thought for a moment, then, "Gods," he murmured, "she must have been killed whilst we were all—er—sleeping in the hall."

"Yes, *mellon nín*. It is a distressing thought; I am sorry." He paused. "We must, of course, find her murderer and bring him to justice, but I have also decided that the Harvest Ceremony will continue."

"For the good of the colony. You are right, of course. But how do you plan to find her killer?"

"I have already met with my Inner Council, the Captain of the Guard, and the March Warden—Haldir—and we have decided that we must question all of the guests. Haldir is sealing the borders of Eryn Carantaur as we speak and has orders to bring back anyone who has left since last night. Naturally, you and Arwen, Arwen's brothers and Prince Imrahil, and the ladies who were with you, are in the clear, since you can no doubt vouch for each other's movements." Aragorn nodded. "And I dare say that most of the other guests will be in a similar position. We will be discreet."

"I will make a formal announcement at the banquet this evening, and will ask the guests to cooperate with the investigation. And I would be grateful if you would join your voice to mine, *mellon nín*."

"Naturally."

"Thank you. Eowyn has agreed to help me interview the witnesses, since she has had some experience of investigations of this sort. We cannot begin until tomorrow because we still need to examine the body and search the banqueting hall—and we must do that before we can prepare for the banquet tonight—but we will post guards throughout the guest quarters to ensure everybody's safety."



"And I would ask you to take care, *mellon nín*," said Legolas, "of yourself and yours,"—he glanced towards the door of the bedchamber where Arwen was sleeping—"for we do not know what this elf's motives are, and we cannot be sure that he will not strike again."

Legolas hesitated. "I have deliberately kept you out of the investigation, Aragorn, because I hope you will preside over the trial, when we catch this orc or an elf."

"Of course," said Aragorn. Then, as Legolas and Eowyn rose to leave, he caught the elf's arm. "Be careful yourself, Legolas," he said, quietly. "If the killer's aim is to disrupt the harvest ceremony, you and Eowyn must also be at risk. If I can do anything to help—anything at all—just send for me."

"I shall." Legolas patted Aragorn's hand. "Thank you, *mellon nín*. We shall speak more, later."

...

Míriel sat uncomfortably in Legolas' private study, trying not to stare at the exotic creature seated before her.

She had never seen a woman before.

She had seen a few human men—King Elessar, Lord Faramir, Eomer King, and their various attendants—and she had always found them interesting.

But this woman was fascinating.

The head cook, who often travelled to Dol Amroth to buy fish, had told her that human women were short and fat. Míriel had not believed it—and this one, on the contrary, was as tall as an elleth, and slender—but she could see how the cook had made the mistake. The woman's body was—well, there was no elvish word for that shape, for the swell of the full breasts, the tiny waist, the curving hips. *Such a beautiful, ripe shape*, thought Míriel. *Yes, that is the word; ripe, like a fruit*. She suffered a sudden, uncharacteristic pang of jealousy. *No wonder Lord Legolas had chosen to perform the rite with this lady. Who better?*

The woman smiled at her, and the glimpse of her generous spirit took Míriel's breath away. *She is worthy of my lord*, she thought.

"Good morning, Míriel," said Legolas, "I believe Captain Golradir has already told you why we have asked you here?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"First, I want to thank you, Míriel, for behaving so responsibly."

Míriel blushed, proudly.

"Then I need you to tell me, Míriel, exactly what you saw when you found the body—every detail, no matter how insignificant it might seem."

Míriel nodded, and then thought for a moment.

"The elleth was lying face down," she said. "I did not see her at first, because I was looking at the table, and there were several chairs lying on the floor around her."

"Were there chairs elsewhere on the floor?" asked the lady.

"Yes," said Míriel, "and people, too, and it was difficult to walk across the floor." She noticed that the lady was writing rapidly. *She is writing down everything I am saying*, she thought.

Why?

"The moment I saw her," she continued, "even before I saw her terrible face, I knew that she was dead. Her *fea* had left her *hroa*," she added softly. Legolas nodded, in understanding.

"Most of her body was hidden under the table—only her head and shoulders were not—but I could see that she had been choked. There was a leather cord around her throat—it had cut into the skin—and her face was bruised. Her eyes were full of blood..." Míriel lost control of her voice.

The lady poured a glass of water and pushed it across the table. Míriel accepted it gratefully.

"Did you see anything near the body that did not seem to belong? Anything that her killer might have left behind?" asked Legolas.

"I did not see anything, my lord, just the cord."

Legolas glanced at Eowyn, silently asking her whether she had any further questions; she nodded. "Apart from yourself and the other serving *ellith*," she asked, "was there anyone else in the banqueting hall who was not asleep?"

Míriel thought carefully, trying to conjure up a picture of the hall in her mind. "I do not think so, my lady, but..."

"Yes?" asked Legolas.

"When I left, I ran through the main door, because that was the easiest way to get out, but when I entered the hall I used one of the side doors, because—because there was someone asleep in the main doorway. It may have been a couple..."

Legolas and Eowyn exchanged glances.

"Did you recognise them Míriel?" asked Legolas.

"No, my Lord. And the more I think about it, the more unsure I am that they were there at all."

...

The other interviews, with Golradir, and the two guards who had moved the body, seemed to uncover nothing more of interest, though Eowyn patiently wrote down each statement, read it back to the witness, and asked him to sign it once he had agreed that it was accurate.

Legolas was full of admiration.

"I am just doing what I have seen—um—seen Faramir do," she said, awkwardly.

"Oh, Eowyn," said Legolas, "I am so sorry. Do you regret—"

"No!" She pressed her fingers to his lips. "*First, I offered to help,*" she said. "*Secondly, do you know the first thing I thought when you woke me this morning? I thought, I am going to spend the rest of my life with him.* And I was so happy! I love you, Legolas. I have loved you since the day you found me in my garden and wrapped me in your cloak and sang me the song about the faithless oak tree. And I would rather be with you, here, than be the Queen of all Middle-earth!"

Legolas laughed and took her in his arms, and kissed her forehead. "So what have we learned so far, *melmenya*?"

"Not much," Eowyn admitted. "We know that someone—or possibly a couple—left the banqueting hall when Míriel found the body."

"And he may have been the killer, pretending to be asleep," said Legolas, "or he may have been an innocent guest who just happened to wake up and crawl off to bed at exactly the wrong time."

Eowyn nodded. "It would help to know what time the elleth died—if she had only just been killed when Míriel found her, then there is more likelihood that he was the murderer. We need to examine the body."

"Let us go to the lady's chambers," said Legolas. "Lord Fingolfin and Master Dínendal should already be waiting for us."

Eowyn picked up a wax tablet and a stylus and followed Legolas out of his study; she would take notes on the tablet, then make a more permanent copy on parchment later. *Then I will have to get the healer to check it and sign it, she thought. Gods, there is so much detail to get right, and Legolas is relying on me. And I am a swordswoman, not a scribe...*

...

Fingolfin and Dínendal were, as Legolas had hoped, already waiting for them.

The Mistress of the Ceremony lay upon the bed, her body arranged as though she were asleep—but her face was contorted in agony.

Legolas felt a sharp pang of guilt. He had disliked her intensely and, when she had—had upset him, the previous afternoon, he had threatened her with violent death.

It was irrational, he knew, but he felt as though he had wished this terrible fate upon her. He placed his hand on his heart, bowed his head, and said, softly, "We had our differences, my teacher, but you accepted my choice of Lady Eowyn last night, and for that I will always be grateful. I swear, by the love that I bear her, that I will do everything in my power to find and punish the person who did this to you."

The two elves beside him whispered their response as witnesses to his oath.

Eowyn stood with her head bowed.

"Master Dínendal," said Legolas, after a respectful pause, "are you willing to examine the body for us?"

"Indeed, my lord," replied the healer, "though I have no experience in these matters, and am not sure what I can tell you."

"I am new to this too, Master Healer," said Legolas, "but I have many questions to ask you and I have the feeling that, as you answer them, you will find that you know more than you think."

"First," he continued, "is it possible to tell when she was killed?"

"It would not ordinarily be so, my lord but, as it happens, the Captain of the Palace Guard summoned me when she was first found—she was still warm and I think he hoped that it might be possible to revive her. When I examined her, though she was clearly dead, her body was still pliant. As you can see it has now begun to stiffen. When Lord Fingolfin asked me to assist you, I consulted my books—in an elf, this stiffening usually happens about six hours after death, though in humans," he glanced at Eowyn, "I believe it may happen sooner. I would estimate that she had been dead no more than a few minutes when she was found."

Eowyn and Legolas exchanged glances. "That is very helpful, Master Dínendal," said Eowyn.

The healer coloured slightly, and bowed.

"What do her wounds tell us about the killer, Master Dínendal?" asked Legolas. "Would he, for instance, have had to have been very strong to have killed her thus?"

Dínendal considered the question. "No, I do not think so, my lord. Not if he took her by surprise. Once he had the ligature tightly round her neck, she would have been panicking, and struggling to breathe. All her efforts would have been concentrated on trying to pull the cord loose—you can see the scratches where she has clawed at it. And she would soon have lost consciousness. I do not think he needed to have been particularly strong."

"So it could have been another elleth?" asked Legolas.

Dínendal looked surprised. "Well, I suppose so, my lord, provided she was tall enough to get the cord around the neck. It all depends on doing that quickly and cleanly, because if the victim can get her hand inside the cord, the killer will find it impossible to pull it tight. Of course, if the victim were sitting down..."

"Might she have injured the killer?" asked Eowyn.

Dínendal lifted the elleth's hands and examined them carefully. "The knuckles are not damaged—not bruised or grazed—so I do not think she hit him," he said. "There are traces of skin under her fingernails, so she may have scratched him, but—equally—the skin may have come from her own throat."

Legolas nodded. "What about the cord," he asked. "What is it?"

Dínendal shook his head. "I have never seen anything like it before, my lord."

"I believe it is a bootlace, my lord," offered Lord Fingolfin. "When I used to travel between Imladris and Lorien, I often encountered the men who dwell in the foothills of the Misty Mountains and ride across The Wold. They wear long riding boots laced from ankle to knee with thick leather laces, and the ends of the laces are decorated with metal fobs, just like these."

"Yes, my lord," said Eowyn, "I think you are right." She turned to Legolas. "Eomer has a pair of these boots; the laces are decorated with horses' heads."

Legolas stared at her for a moment. *What in Middle-earth does that tell us?* "Master Dínendal," he said, "can I ask you for one last favour? Would you be willing to examine the body for any traces of the killer's hair or clothing? I am talking about tiny traces that the killer would not be aware he had left behind."

The healer looked reluctant, but agreed.

"If you should find anything, please seal it in parchment," said Eowyn, "and bring it to Lord Legolas personally."

Dínendal nodded.

"Thank you, Master Dínendal," said Legolas, "you have been most helpful. Melmenya?" He gestured towards the door. "Will you join us Lord Fingolfin? I would value hearing your thoughts so far."

...

As Legolas, Eowyn, and Fingolfin approached the banqueting hall, they could already hear a commotion, and when they arrived, they were greeted by a very agitated Steward of the Household.

"My lord," said the Steward, "the Captain of the Palace Guard refuses to allow me or my staff to enter the hall. And he says it is on your orders! My lord, I have the table to clear, the floor to clean, the threshing floor to prepare for the coronation; I have decorations to repair and candles to replace; I have silver and crystal to lay out; and the ice sculptures, my lord, the *ice sculptures*..." The Steward finally took a breath.

"I apologise, Master Eö," said Legolas, with genuine remorse, "I should have informed you of my decision to close the banqueting hall. Please accept my apology."

The Steward bowed deeply.

"As you no doubt know, Master Eö," Legolas continued, "the Mistress of the Ceremony died in this hall last night, and it is important that I examine it before it is cleaned. The hall will remain closed for another hour, at most, and I will make sure that one of the guards is sent to inform you when you and your staff may enter.

"In the meantime I have a personal request Master Eö; I need to speak to the servants who tended Lord Gimli's fire and heated the water in his bathing room during the night—no, I have no complaints about their work, but please send them to my chambers as soon as possible—tell them to wait for me if I am not there.

"I am sorry to be making things so much more difficult for you, Master Eö," he added, "but I have every confidence in you and your staff."

"Thank you my lord." Eö bowed once more, and then withdrew. "At least," he muttered, as he passed the Captain of the Palace Guard, "*Lord Legolas* knows how to treat a Steward."

...

The banqueting hall was a large, circular pavilion with a domed roof supported on intricately carved wooden pillars—*Like jets of water transformed into wood*, thought Eowyn. Between the pillars, wide, open windows allowed sunlight and breezes to enter during the day, and at night were hung with sheer silk curtains, delicately embroidered with carantaur leaves, that cast pretty shadows in the candlelight.

Eowyn approached the main entrance.

This was where she had entered last night, directly opposite the head of the table, where Legolas and Aragorn had already been seated, with the Mistress of the Ceremony beside Legolas. But there were also, she noticed now, two smaller doors, to the right and left, designed to allow the serving ellith discreet access.

Golradir had posted guards at all three doors.

Eowyn dropped to her knees, and carefully examined the wooden floor beneath the main entrance, but could see nothing of importance. She wondered if Legolas, with his sharper eyes, might notice something she had missed, but when she looked up at him, questioningly, he shook his head.

He helped her to her feet and, together with Lord Fingolfin, they entered the hall. The velvet blanket was still lying where they had left it in the middle of the threshing floor, and the two lovers smiled at each other.

"Captain Golradir," said Legolas, "where was the body found?"

"There, my lord," replied Golradir, pointing to a spot beneath the table, approximately half way between its head and the main entrance.

"That is not where she was sitting during the banquet," said Eowyn. "Do you think she would have taken part in the—um—activities afterwards? I find it hard to imagine."

"I believe I saw her leave the hall immediately after the completion of the rite, my lady," said Lord Fingolfin, "but I cannot be sure. Perhaps one of the other guests could confirm it."

"If she did, my lord," said Eowyn, "then she must have returned later. But why?"

Legolas was examining the floor under the table; Eowyn noticed several chairs lying close by. "Have any of these chairs been moved, Captain?" she asked.

"We had to move them, my lady, to reach the body."

Though she did not know why, Eowyn was sure that the chairs were significant. "Can you show us where they were, originally?" she asked.

After a moment's thought, Golradir began moving them: "This one was here—this one was on its side, like this—and this one... This one was *here*."

Eowyn made a careful sketch on her wax tablet. "So, this chair," she said, "was nearest to the body?"

"Yes."

"And you are sure it was *this* chair?"

"Yes, my lady."

"What is it, Eowyn?" asked Legolas.

"This chair is damaged. Look—here." She pointed to a jagged gouge in its back.

"It looks as though it has been hit with an axe," said Fingolfin.

"No," said Legolas, "an axe—or any other edged weapon—would have made a cleaner cut."

"A candlestick, perhaps," said Eowyn. She lifted one of the ornate candlesticks from the table and swung it lightly towards the back of the chair. Its bevelled edge fitted the damaged wood perfectly.

"And there is a candlestick missing," said Legolas. He pointed to the table decorations, closest to where the body had been found.

"Valar," muttered Fingolfin. "Do you think the poor elleth tried to defend herself with it?"

"No..." Legolas shook his head. "That does not agree with what the healer told us about the speed of the attack."

"Then perhaps Míriel was right about the couple in the doorway," said Eowyn. "Perhaps there were two killers involved."

"Mmm," said Legolas, thoughtfully. "Perhaps, meleth nín. The more we learn, the more confused I am."

...

Having sent one of the guards to inform the Steward that his staff could begin preparing the hall for the evening's banquet, Legolas suggested that Lord Fingolfin, Eowyn and he should retire to his study to discuss what they had already learned.

By the time they arrived, the servants he had asked Master Eö to send to him were already sitting in the lobby. Asking them to wait a moment longer, he took Fingolfin through to the study and, as he was pouring a glass of bubbling water for his counsellor, he suddenly realised that Eowyn was missing and, for a moment, he was overwhelmed with anxiety—then she walked into the study and the relief that flooded through him was equally intense. Unaware of the tumult of his emotions, Eowyn gave him a small smile as she sat down at his desk, and took up a pen and a fresh piece of parchment.

Legolas called in the first servant, and offered him a seat by the fireplace. The elf bowed to Fingolfin and Eowyn, then sat down diffidently, obviously uncomfortable, his posture stiffly formal.

Legolas smiled. "Thank you for coming, Master er—?"

"Elerossë, my lord."

"Master Elerossë," said Legolas, courteously, "I believe it was you who tended Lord Gimli's fire last night?"

"Yes my lord."

"How many times did you visit his rooms?"

"Three times, my lord, at midnight, three o'clock and just before dawn. Was anything wrong with the fire, my lord?"

"No, Elerossë, your work was excellent. But tell me, did you see Lord Gimli when you were tending his fire?"

"No my lord."

Legolas stared at him, clearly taken aback; Eowyn bit her lip. "You did not see him?"

"No my lord."

"His bed was empty?" asked Eowyn.

"No, my lady," he said, turning towards the desk.

"I do not understand," said Legolas, with the slightest touch of impatience.

"I did not see him, my lord," said Elerossë, turning back to Legolas, "because he was hidden beneath the coverlet. But I did hear him, my lord. He—er—he is a very—*noisy*—sleeper." The servant looked apologetic. He was surprised to be rewarded by one of his lord's most dazzling smiles.

"Thank you, Elerossë," said Legolas. "You have been most helpful. Please let Lady Eowyn read your statement back to you and if you agree with it, we will ask you to sign it."

The second servant, who had lit the water heater in Gimli's bathing room at dawn, told much the same story. Legolas was overjoyed. Gimli was in the clear!

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### Extra scene: The noblest of men

**Míriel tapped lightly on the door of the guest apartment.**

"Come in!" cried a voice.

The answer was in the Common Tongue but, since Legolas encouraged all the colonists to learn Westron, the elleth thought nothing of it. She opened the door and entered—head lowered, eyes fixed on the tray she was carrying—taking great care not to spill the jug of ale.

"Now that is a welcome sight!" The voice had a strange quality—more resonant than she had been expecting. Making sure that the tray was properly balanced, Míriel raised her eyes.

*Oh!*

She had never seen a Man before.

*Sweet Eru! Such LIFE!*

More powerful-looking than a elf, broad-shouldered, with a mane of rippling hair the colour of ripe wheat, and an eagle's dark, all-seeing eyes, he had stripped off his cloak and jerkin, and was standing before her in nothing more than his leather breeches, boots, and a loose white shirt. *And...* Míriel felt a most unfamiliar sensation, deep in her body, at a sudden, unexpected glimpse of dark hair *on his chest!*

"May I?" He took the tray and set it on the table.

Míriel blushed—another unfamiliar sensation—and hid her trembling hands behind her back.

His voice had been gentle, slightly teasing. *He is used to having this effect on foolish elleth*, she thought. "D-do you require anything more, your Majesty?" she stammered.

"Perhaps you would ask Prince Legolas if he would join me?" he asked.

"Y-yes, of course, your Majesty." She curtsied.

But forgot to leave.

"Today?" He smiled, broadly.

She nodded dumbly, turned, and stumbled from the chamber.

...

"Child, whatever is the matter?" asked Legolas, as Míriel collided with him on the walkway. "You are flushed."

"Eomer King asks you to join him, my Lord."

"Eomer? Oh, I see." He smiled. *It must run in the family*, he thought.



## Chapter 6: The coronation

### ***As the second witness was leaving, Chief Counsellor Caranthir arrived.***

"Please come in, Lord Caranthir," said Legolas, waving him towards a seat by the fireplace. "Well, my lords—and my lady," he added, unable to suppress his high spirits at having cleared Gimli of all suspicion, "what have we discovered so far?"

Since neither of the elves answered, Eowyn began: "We know that that the elleth was killed in the banqueting hall, only shortly before she was found, at about six o'clock. Lord Fingolfin thinks he saw her leaving the hall immediately after the rite, so she must have returned later for some reason..."

"Perhaps to meet someone?" said Fingolfin.

"Yes, perhaps," agreed Eowyn. "We know that the killer took her by surprise, and attacked her from behind, so perhaps she was sitting on one of the chairs, waiting for him."

"But we also know," added Legolas, "that there was some sort of struggle, involving a candlestick."

"And the chairs," added Eowyn, "were disturbed *after* the elleth fell to the ground, because her body was surrounded by them and the guard had to move them to reach her. We also know that someone, possibly a couple, was lying in the main doorway when Míriel arrived, and left when she found the body."

"And," added Fingolfin, "we know that the killer used a very distinctive boot lace as a weapon."

"Yes," said Legolas, "that was strange—to use such a personal object, which could so easily be identified. And he must have been carrying it in his pocket, for he could hardly have pulled it out of his boot on impulse. Does that mean that he had planned the murder beforehand?"

"Perhaps, my lord, he is the sort of person who is always prepared." said Chief Counsellor Caranthir.

Legolas gave that idea some thought. "It is certainly not an honourable weapon," he said. "Did you have someone in mind, Lord Caranthir?"

"Well, I had been thinking back over the last few days, my lord, trying to remember anything that struck me as unusual..."

"And?"

"I had a visit yesterday, from Angaráto." The other elves groaned; Angaráto was not a popular elf. "He—I would say that he tried to bribe me, my lord."

"Bribe you to do *what*?" asked Legolas, apalled.

Caranthir glanced at Eowyn uncomfortably. "To persuade you to choose his daughter for the harvest rite, my lord. He had some idea that it might develop into a more *permanent* arrangement."

"And how," said Fingolfin, "did he think you would accomplish that?"

"I do not know, my lord," answered Caranthir, "I gave him a quick lecture about the part the Valar play in the selection of the lady and sent him away. But after the Mistress of the Ceremony was killed, I began to think that an elf who would attempt to use a sacred rite for

his own purposes might not hesitate to commit murder, if it were in his interest."

"Marrying his daughter to Legolas would clearly be in his interest," agreed Eowyn, "but how would killing the Mistress of the Ceremony help him? In fact, that is the strangest thing about this murder—who *would* want to kill her? Unless—"

"I for one," said Legolas, "threatened her with violent death only hours before she was killed."

"My lord!" exclaimed Caranthir.

"I will not go into details, Lord Caranthir, but—believe me—in my position you would have done the same," said Legolas. He rose, and walked to the window. "She was a difficult elleth..." He began to pace up and down. "She had only one purpose in life, and that was to ensure that the Harvest Ceremony was performed correctly."

"That is surely not a bad thing, my lord," said Fingolfin, gently.

"It should not have been," said Legolas. "But she was concerned only with the letter of the rite, not with its spirit. She forgot—or she ignored—that she was dealing with the most intimate of matters. She—she—" Legolas paused, surprised at depth of the feelings welling up inside him as he remembered her hands on his body. "Her obsession with the physical details of the rite led her to overstep—certain boundaries. And she—she... I disliked her. Very much."

"Do you," said Eowyn softly, "think that she may have been killed by someone else she had—distressed?"

Legolas sighed. "I do not know, meleth nín."

"Perhaps," said Fingolfin, tactfully, "we should decide what to do next."

"Yes," said Eowyn, still looking at Legolas with concern, "there are many questions we need to answer. First, why did the elleth return to the hall? If she was meeting someone, who was it? Have we any way of finding out? Perhaps we should search her chambers."

"That is a good idea, meleth nín," said Legolas, and Eowyn smiled at him, relieved to see he had recovered something of his usual composure.

Legolas consulted the hourglass on his desk. "My lords, Eowyn, I believe there is just time to carry out a search before we prepare for the banquet this evening."

...

It was agreed that Legolas and Eowyn should search the elleth's chambers, since Chief Counsellor Caranthir had offered to draw up a list of guests to be interviewed, and Lord Fingolfin had already agreed to take Aragorn and Arwen on a brief tour of the aerial city. "We shall be accompanied both by King Elessar's own guards and by some of Haldir's border guards," said Fingolfin.

"A wise precaution, my lord," said Legolas. "I look forward to seeing both you and Lord Caranthir at the banquet tonight."

"What happens tonight?" asked Eowyn, as they strolled along the walkway towards the guest quarters.

Legolas turned to her in surprise. "I am sorry, melmenya, I forgot that you had never attended a Harvest Ceremony before."

He stopped walking and, together, they leaned over the wall of the walkway and looked out

across Eryn Carantaur. For as far as Eowyn's eyes could see, walkways spread out through the the mighty trees, connecting the flets like branches supporting sprays of blossom. She admired the buildings of carved wood and glass, with their pale green paintwork and their white canvas sunshades; though it was still light, some of the dwellings, in the darker parts of the forest, were already lit by candles. *It is magical*, she thought, *and now it is my home*.

"Tonight, meleth nín," said Legolas, "we will be crowned King and Queen of the Harvest and then, after the banquet, we will perform the rite again."

Eowyn felt the colour rising to her cheeks; she had been hoping that *that* part of the festival was over.

Legolas smiled, "I am sorry, melmenya; I know that making love in public makes you uncomfortable; I know that humans have strange ideas about sex—"

Eowyn laughed, "I would say it is *e/ves* who have the strange ideas!"

"We celebrate life through it, meleth nín. We count the giving and receiving—the sharing—of pleasure through lovemaking the greatest of the Valar's gifts. We offer it back to them in thanks; and we share it with others, as they intended."

"But I was hoping to have you all to myself tonight!" said Eowyn, playfully. Then she continued, more soberly, "What will happen tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow, after the banquet, we will present gifts to all of our guests, and then we will perform the rite for the last time."

Eowyn nodded, seriously; Legolas raised her hand to his lips and kissed her palm.

"Legolas," she said, more seriously still, "I cannot imagine what the Mistress of the Ceremony did to you. No,"—she pressed her fingers to his lips—"you do not have to tell me if it is too painful. I just—I—Oh, I do not know what to say to you, my love, except that I would do anything in my power to spare you the pain I saw in you this afternoon."

"Eowyn nín..." he whispered, and kissed her gently.

After a moment she asked, "What does everyone mean when they say that it was not really you but the Valar that chose me?"

"It is difficult to explain, melmenya," said Legolas.

He led her over to a seat built into the wall of the walkway. "On the first night of the festival, at the appointed time, the Mistress of the Ceremony gives the celebrant a potion."

"I saw you drink it," said Eowyn.

"You did? The potion contains herbs that—well, they delay the pleasurable moment—but they also cause visions. The Mistress of the Ceremony could not tell me what to look for, because that is a mystery known only to the celebrant and the Valar themselves. All she could tell me was that when I saw the sign I would know it in my heart. And when I looked at you—"

"Perhaps you should not tell me what you saw," said Eowyn.

"No, perhaps not. But I can say that I saw your spirit, meleth nín; I saw your spirit shining like Ithil." He kissed her forehead. "Ithildin nín. And *my* spirit sang with joy, because the Valar had given me my heart's own choice."

"Do you think they do that for every celebrant?" Eowyn asked.

"That is a pleasant thought, melmenya."

They sat together in silence for a while. Then Legolas turned to Eowyn. "Come, melmenya," he said, "we have a job to do."

...

As they were approaching the door to the Mistress of the Ceremony's chambers, Eowyn could already see that something was wrong.

The healer, Master Dínendal, having found no further evidence on the elleth's body, had requested Legolas' permission to have her removed to the house of healing and prepared for burial. Legolas had given his permission almost two hours ago, yet the door to the elleth's chambers was still open.

Legolas pulled Eowyn to a stop. "Stay here, melmenya," he said. Then he drew his white knives and cautiously entered the chambers.

Eowyn might normally have protested at being left behind but not this time—this time, the situation demanded speed and stealth, not a loud altercation. *Besides*, she thought ruefully, *I am unarmed. In future I will wear my sword; in future I will not wait safely behind whilst Legolas goes into danger alone.*

But Legolas reappeared almost immediately, unharmed. "It seems to be empty, melmenya, but I am afraid someone has been here before us."

...

Eowyn surveyed the ruins of the elleth's bedchamber. Someone—presumably the killer—had searched it thoroughly. Clothing had been pulled out of the wardrobe, torn apart, and the pieces had been strewn across the floor. Cupboards and chests had been opened, and their contents—*Things that must have been precious to her in life*, thought Eowyn—had been smashed. Books had been ripped apart. And the bedclothes had been dragged from the bed.

Eowyn hated to see books damaged. She stooped and picked one up, smoothing its pages flat. *Love Potions*, she read on its cover. A handful of pages had been torn out of it.

She shook her head. "What could he have been looking for?" she asked Legolas, placing the book on the bed. "In such a frenzy—and with so much *malice*?"

The sitting room and the bathing room were in the same condition.

The culprit had even smashed the plant pots on the small balcony outside the bedchamber window. "Perhaps someone saw him do that?" she suggested.

"We can ask Golradir to make enquiries," said Legolas. "I think the killer is afraid of us, meleth nín. Yes, I think he is afraid."

...

As they walked back to his chambers, Legolas had a sudden thought.

"This shows us that the killer is still in Eryn Carantaur," he said, "so Haldir can return to the city. I would feel much more comfortable if he were here, melmenya; he is far more reliable than Golradir. Perhaps I should ride out—"

"No!" said Eowyn, firmly. "You are tired. In fact, you look exhausted, and not like an elf at all. Come with me!" And she took him by the hand and led him up the stairs to his private garden.

...

She had had a bed made up for him in the shade of the carantaur tree, and food laid out upon the table. "You have not eaten since before the banquet yesterday," she said, "so Gimli is joining us for a light meal, and you can tell him the good news. Then, you are going to lie down for a few hours and rest, whilst I am fitted for my gown."

Legolas shook his head. "Elves do not need as much rest—"

Eowyn silenced him with a look.

Secretly he was enjoying the way she had begun to take care of him. And he *was* hungry. He walked over to the table—there was bread and fresh butter, cooked meat for Gimli, cheeses and cooked vegetables for himself and Eowyn, and lavender cakes.

"I asked Míriel to bring fruit bread," said Eowyn, "but she said that lavender cakes were your particular favourite."

"How did she know that?"

Eowyn laughed. "She is your serving elleth, Legolas, and she is in love with you. She knows everything there is to know about you."

Legolas stared at her.

Eowyn wrapped her arms around his waist. "You really are very innocent in some ways, my love—"

"Ha-hmm," said an unmistakably dwarven voice. "Is it safe to come up, or will I see something that will give me nightmares for a week?"

"It is safe, Gimli. Come up," said Eowyn, "we are waiting for you."

The three friends spent a pleasant hour or so, eating and drinking—Gimli had brought some dwarven ale—and, by common agreement, Legolas did not discuss the murder except to tell Gimli that they had proved his innocence beyond any doubt. Then Eowyn enlisted Gimli's help in persuading the 'crazy elf' to lie down and rest.

"You have scarcely rested or eaten for a week, to my certain knowledge, lad," said Gimli. "And you have a very demanding—er—task to perform tonight." Gimli winked at Eowyn as he pushed Legolas towards the improvised bed. "Just lie down beneath the tree and make your lady happy," he whispered.

Legolas smiled and, for once, did as he was told.

...

The seamstress, Valaina, was waiting for Eowyn in Legolas' sitting room.

As soon as Eowyn entered, Valaina called for Míriel, and together they helped her into the gown she would be wearing for the 'coronation' ceremony that evening.

Eowyn had never seen anything like it. The cloth was woven from threads of softly glowing mithril but the gown was as light as silk; it was embroidered all over with carantaur leaves and acorns in pale gold, and the close fitting bodice, the full skirt, and the wide sleeves were all edged with delicate mithril lace.

Eowyn looked in the mirror. *Gods! I look like one of the faery folk*, she thought. *Let us hope I*

*am not called upon to fight tonight!*

The bodice was loose around the waist; Valaina pulled and tucked and pinned the fabric until she was confident she could make it fit Eowyn's human figure. Then, with Míriel's help, she removed the gown, and began to make the alterations, sewing quickly and efficiently.

...

Legolas lay on his makeshift bed.

He had drawn back the canvas sunshade that Eowyn had thoughtfully provided—*Women, he thought, are afraid of Anor*—and was looking through the canopy of carantaur leaves to the sky.

The pattern of red leaves against the backdrop of bright blue was beautiful—*The second most beautiful thing I have seen today*, he thought, and could not stop himself grinning like an idiot.

He still could not believe that the Valar had given him his heart's desire...

A light footstep disturbed his pleasant thoughts, and he looked towards the staircase.

"My lord?" said a quiet but confident voice.

Legolas sat up and swung his legs off the bed. "Lady Lessien," he said, "please—come and sit in my garden." He indicated a seat by the table.

Lessien walked slowly, her head bowed. *She is troubled*, thought Legolas. "If you are here to 'prepare' me for the rite," he said, "I can assure you, my lady, that that will not be necessary —"

"No my lord!" Lessien blushed.

Legolas eyed her, curiously. "Am I right, Lady Lessien, in thinking that you find the—er—the business of preparation as unacceptable as I do?"

"Indeed I do, my lord. In fact..."

"Yes?"

"Shortly before she died, the Mistress of the Ceremony ended my noviciate for precisely that reason, my lord. So if you would prefer to have someone else officiate tonight..."

"I can think of no one to whom I would rather entrust the rite, my lady," said Legolas, sincerely. He paused. "But if you are not here to—to do that, then why *are* you here?"

"It may be nothing, my lord but, when I heard what happened this morning, I thought that I should tell you: last night, I happened to see the Mistress of the Ceremony preparing the Celebrant's Potion." She hesitated.

"Yes?"

"I am no expert, my lord. Indeed, I have not yet prepared the Celebrant's Potion myself, but I believe she was adding extra ingredients to it. I do not know exactly what she added, nor what effect it might have had on you, my lord—or whether she may have tampered with the Lady's Potion as well."

Legolas started—had that elleth poisoned *Eowyn*? "Why would she do that?" he asked.

"I do not know, my lord. But I suggest that you and your lady both see the healer as soon as

you can."

...

Eowyn waited, feeling most uncomfortable being idle whilst Valaina worked, until—at last—the seamstress seemed satisfied. "My lady," she said, "would you like to try it on again?"

This time, the gown fitted perfectly.

"You look lovely, melmenya!"

The gentle voice sent shivers down Eowyn's spine. She turned to see Legolas smiling at her, his beautiful face radiant, and she offered up a prayer of thanks to the gods for creating this elf and for making her his lady.

...

"I am afraid we do not have much time, Master Dínendal," said Legolas. "The banquet begins in an hour."

He had described the ingredients Lessien had seen the Mistress of the Ceremony adding to the potion—the *uil* fronds, the *aeglos* root and the ground *alfirin* petals—and the willow twig whisk.

"None of those substances in themselves is harmful my lord," said Dínendal. "Indeed, they are all used to promote health—alfirin petal in particular, though it would normally be administered in a fraction of the quantity. And willow bark, I believe, is used by Men to cure the headache. But, when used in combination with whatever else might have been in the potion, I do not know what effect these things might have. Let me examine you, my lord."

Dínendal checked Legolas' eyes and ears and smelled his breath, then counted his pulse and checked his heartbeat.

"You appear to be in good health, my lord. No sign of any poisoning. My lady?"

He checked Eowyn's eyes and her mouth, and the tips of her fingers, pinching them and watching the colour return. Then he wrapped his hand gently around her wrist and counted her pulse.

He blushed slightly. "With your permission, my lady?" he asked.

Eowyn nodded, and he placed his hand upon her breast, and checked her heartbeat.

"You appear to be in perfect health, too, my lady, though I confess I know far less about the bodies of Women. But there is one more test I would like to perform on you, and for that I would need,"—Dínendal hesitated and cleared his throat—"a sample of water."

Legolas smiled; the healer was normally perfectly business-like about such matters, but Eowyn clearly made him nervous.

"Oh," said Eowyn, smiling, "I see; well, perhaps—"

"Perhaps tomorrow?" said Legolas.

"Of course, my lord," agreed Dínendal. "An early morning sample will be the most informative," he added, blushing again.

...

An hour later, Legolas led his Harvest Queen into the banqueting hall of Eryn Carantaur.

Walking slowly round the table, the couple greeted each of their guests in turn. Eowyn smiled bravely at friends old and new—Aragorn and Arwen and the Queen's twin brothers; Gimli and his dwarven companions; Prince Imrahil; and Lords Caranthir, Fingolfin and Lenwë...

Haldir, she noticed, had still not returned from the borders.

When they reached the lower end of the table Eowyn faced the dozen disappointed ellith, and their families, with her shoulders squared and her chin raised, like a true shieldmaiden of Rohan, but with a smile of genuine warmth on her face.

Legolas presented each of the elves to her in turn, including the infamous Angarátó, and Eowyn found herself feeling sorry for the subdued elleth standing beside him, whom he introduced as his daughter.

When all the guests had been properly greeted, Legolas led Eowyn to the centre of the threshing floor and seated her on the leftmost of two ornate thrones standing on a low platform.

*Tonight*, thought Eowyn, *he looks regal*. His hair was not dressed in his usual warrior's style, but like a king, with the sides swept back and caught behind in a single intricate braid; he wore a delicate silver circlet; and his robe, which matched Eowyn's dress, was embroidered all over with ears of corn.

His face seemed to glow in the candlelight.

Legolas waited for the noise to subside, then made his difficult announcement: "Friends," he said, informally, "some of you will already have heard that the Mistress of the Ceremony died this morning." There were murmurs, some of surprise, some of acknowledgement. "My Counsellors and I have nevertheless decided that the Harvest Ceremony should continue, and I invite you all to remain in Eryn Carantaur to witness the remaining rites. Lady Lessien,"—he gestured towards the elleth waiting at the edge of the threshing floor,—"*has agreed to officiate.*"

"As the circumstances of the Mistress of the Ceremony's death must be investigated," he continued, "I ask you all to assist me tomorrow, when either Lord Fingolfin or I will speak to you about anything you may have noticed last night. I assure you that everything you say will be treated in the strictest confidence."

There were a few moments of uncomfortable silence, and Eowyn's heart began to pound. *What if they refuse to stay?* she wondered. *What if they are concerned for their own safety? What if the elves feel that the rite has been ruined?*

But then Aragorn rose to his feet. "I, for one, will be happy to co-operate in any way I can," he said.

The atmosphere changed immediately—others made similar declarations, the guests started to relax, and soon the hall was filled once more with the normal hubbub of a banquet.

Eowyn sighed with relief for Legolas.

...

At a sign from Lady Lessien, a group of musicians, sitting on the small balcony above the hall's main entrance, played a short fanfare, and the guests fell silent once more. Lessien and two attendants walked slowly to the centre of the floor.

"Please stand, my lady," she said softly.

Eowyn stood.



**My bow shall sing with your sword**

"My Lord," said Lessien loudly, "have you chosen a lady worthy of this realm?"

"I have."

"Then I call upon all present," she said, "to witness that Legolas Thranduilion, Lord of Eryn Carantaur, has taken Eowyn, daughter of Eomund, Princess of Rohan, as his Harvest Queen."

She joined their hands; the guests murmured their assent.

"Repeat after me, my lord," said Lessien, "My heart is your heart."

"I love you, Eowyn," Legolas whispered, then added, loudly, "my heart is your heart."

Lessien motioned one of her attendants to step forward with her red velvet cushion. The elleth presented Legolas with a delicate silver circlet of carantaur leaves.

"Crown your lady, my lord, and say, *My crown is your crown.*"

Legolas carefully placed the circlet on Eowyn's head, and declared, "My crown is your crown."

"Now enthrone your lady, my lord, and say, *My throne is your throne.*"

Legolas took Eowyn's hand, elven fashion, led her to the throne, and waited for her to sit. "My throne is your throne."

A fanfare filled the hall and the guests cheered.

Lady Lessien called forward her second attendant, who presented Legolas with a mithril goblet. Legolas raised it to his lips and took a sip, then passed it to Eowyn, who also took a sip, and then gave it back to the elleth. The musicians played a final fanfare; the guests cheered, and some applauded. Eowyn looked around the table and was relieved to see that even the disappointed families seemed to be joining in.

"Sing, Legolas," cried one of the twins. "Yes, sing! Sing!" called several of the other guests.

Legolas nodded to the musicians, who waited for silence before beginning to play—a haunting melody floating over a web of soft, shimmering notes—that filled Eowyn with a feeling of profound longing. Then Legolas began to sing, weaving his beautiful alto voice over and under and through the melody, like a thread of pure gold.

*A Elbereth Gilthoniel,  
silivren penna míriel  
o menel aglar elenath!  
Na-chaered palan-díriel  
o galadhremmin ennorath,  
Fanuilos, le linnathon  
nef aear, sí nef aearon!*

*O Elbereth Star-kindler  
Sparkling down like jewels  
Glory of the star-host!  
Far distant having gazed  
From tree-tangled mid-lands,  
Fanuilos, to thee I chant  
From this side of the Ocean!*

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 7: Attempted murder

**Though Eowyn could not eat, she was pleased to see that the rest of the guests were enjoying their food.**

Once again, the hall was exquisitely decorated, with candles and flowers and autumn fruits, and with Master Eö's beloved ice sculptures. Eowyn looked at them carefully—they were shaped like carantaur branches and, as they began to melt, Eowyn realised that the leaves were designed to 'fall' away, leaving only bare branches behind.

"The sculptures are ingenious," she said to Legolas. "Where does Master Eö get the ice?"

"I believe," said Legolas, "that he sends an expedition to Mount Caradhras every winter. And I think that he stores it under ground. But I cannot tell you for certain because the exact details are a secret, known only to Master Eö and his most trusted assistant, meleth nín!"

...

When the banquet was over and the thrones had been removed from the threshing floor, Lady Lessien led Legolas and Eowyn into the centre of the floor.

"The King and Queen of the Harvest stand before you," she cried.

And, as the guests cheered, she added, softly, "Repeat after me, my lord, *As my seed fills the Queen's womb...*"

"As my seed fills the Queen's womb..."

"...so may the grace of the Valar fill the land of Eryn Carantaur."

"...so may the grace of the Valar fill the land of Eryn Carantaur."

"Undress your lady, my lord," she whispered.

Legolas reached for Eowyn and, together, they performed the harvest rite a second time.

...

He froze, his eyes open wide, then he thrust himself deep inside her and she felt his warm seed flood her body.

The guests began clapping their hands on the table.

And Eowyn's heart broke with joy.

...

All around the banquet hall, in the gardens surrounding it, on the walkways above it, and in the forest beyond it, elves, dwarves and humans were finding secluded places to make love.

...

Earlier in the day Elrohir and Elladan had approached Arwen's lady's maid with a proposition. The young woman came from one of Gondor's most illustrious families and had been shocked at first, but the twins were irresistible when they used their charm, for there was no malice in them, and their lust for life was infectious.

So young Richardis had considered their invitation. *Why should I not have some fun?* she

thought, *in this enchanted wood, where the whole world is turned upside down and the people think it a sacred rite to watch their lord make love to his lady? It will be an adventure—just this once in my life.*

And she had agreed.

The twins had arranged to meet her immediately after the rite, in a small forest clearing just outside the palace gardens—and there they were joyfully exploring the pleasures of the flesh, elf and woman and elf.

...

Lord Caranthir and his wife, still happy after three thousand years of marriage, had strolled far out into the forest and, in the starlight, were renewing their vows.

...

Lord Fingolfin, a widower of many years, who usually found the rite and its aftermath a trial, had this year been approached by a beautiful young elleth, one of the eligible girls chosen to attend the ceremony. She had led him up through the branches of a great carantaur, to a small kiosk where her father, the colony's astronomer, made his observations of the night sky. And there she was showing Fingolfin that, old and dignified as he was, he was, nevertheless, neither too old nor too dignified to experience new pleasures.

...

Gimli had again retired to his room before the rite began, but this time with a large flagon of dwarven ale in one hand and a very curious young elleth in the other.

...

Idril, the daughter of Tathar, had left the banqueting hall with a handsome young Gondorian soldier, one of King Elessar's private guards, who had offered to escort her to her chambers.

"We have been told to ensure the safety of all the young ladies, ma'am," he said.

Though quiet and studious, Idril was no fool, and she quickly planned their route to make the walk last as long as possible. When they reached her door the young soldier bowed courteously. "Perhaps I can escort you again, tomorrow night, ma'am," he suggested.

"I should like that very much, sir," said Idril. "Good night."

Idril leaned her back against the door and hugged herself. He was certainly not Lord Legolas, and he was a Man. But Idril knew she would be seeing more of the beautiful young soldier—far more than just another brief walk back to her chambers tomorrow night.

...

Alatárië, daughter of Angarátó, sat at the banqueting table, staring at the couple hidden under the velvet blanket.

"My lady?" said a quiet voice. Alatárië did not respond. The handsome elf, unused to being ignored, persisted. "My lady?" he said again.

But Alatárië could not be distracted.

...

Aragorn and Arwen wandered happily through the gardens—Aragorn with Anduril at his side—

until they found themselves in a tiny courtyard, filled with fragrant roses.

Cupping one of the blooms in both hands, Arwen inhaled its sweet scent. "Are you happy, Estel?" she asked, softly.

"Why do you ask, meleth nín?"

She turned to face him. "I sometimes think that we expected too much of the peace—"

"Are you *unhappy*, Arwen?" he asked, anxiously.

"I? No, my love! *I* have everything I have ever wanted. And now that I have it, I find I want it all the more. But *you* have given up so much..."

"What do you think *I* have given up?" asked Aragorn, genuinely puzzled.

"Your freedom. Your life as a ranger—"

"No, no, my love." He took her in his arms. "It is true that I never wanted the crown. But, when counsellors and diplomats and trade delegations make my life unbearable, all I have to do is seek out my wife." He smiled. "I could not ask for a better Queen, Arwen, or a more loving wife." And he kissed her tenderly.

Arwen laid her head on his shoulder. "Estel?"

"Yes, meleth nín?"

"I have some news. Good news, I hope." She leaned forward and whispered in his ear.

For a moment, Aragorn was stunned, his eyes wide, his mouth slightly open. Then he threw his arms around Arwen, and lifted her off her feet.

...

"Legolas?" whispered Eowyn.

"Yes, meleth nín."

"Am I with child?"

"No, melmenya."

"But the rite..."

"It is symbolic, Eowyn nín. Do you want a child?"

"I do not know..."

"There is no hurry, my love, we have time to decide," he murmured, and kissed her forehead.

...

Just before dawn, Master Eö awoke with a start, and sat bolt upright.

"*Maranwë!*"

With all the stress of the previous day he had forgotten about the little scullery maid! Was she still missing?

Eö dressed quickly, and headed to the kitchens to find out.

...

Legolas and Eowyn awoke together, as the sky began to lighten.

"Good morning, meleth nín," said Legolas, softly.

"Good morning," she whispered, slipping her arms around him, and hugging him tightly. "Thank you."

"For what, melmenya?"

"For last night."

Legolas laughed softly. "The pleasure was mine, Eowyn."

"I meant more than the pleasure," said Eowyn, "though that was..." She had been looking into his startling blue eyes but, suddenly embarrassed, she buried her face in his shoulder. "I did not know what pleasure was until the night before last," she whispered.

"You mean..."

"Never, with a man," she admitted, "so I should thank you for that, too. But I meant something else; I meant—I meant *love*, Legolas. I can *feel* your love for me. When we walk together, sit together, talk together—even when we crawl about the floor looking for blood and hair together. And when you make love to me, it is..." She faltered for a moment. "Whenever I am with you, Legolas, I can feel your love for me. And I love you." She took his hand in hers and lifted it so that they could both see their fingers entwined. "I never thought I would have *this*."

"*Ithildin nín...*"

"*Shhhh*." She kissed him tenderly.

...

Master Eö went directly to the cook, who was busy preparing breakfast for the guests. "Has Maranwë turned up?" he asked.

"No, Master Eö," replied the cook. "I sent Feärwen to look for her last night, but she could find no sign of her. She said it looked as if Maranwë had left her room in a hurry—the bed had not been made, and several things had been dropped on the floor. I am very worried about her."

"Leave it with me, Master Elros," said Eö. "I will talk to Captain Golradir. Do you need me to assign you another scullery maid?"

"Feärwen has agreed to clean the dishes today," said the cook.

"Good; good. If Maranwë should appear, Master Elros, please let me know straight away."

Eö looked across the kitchen. Captain Golradir, sitting at the large table, eating his breakfast, was a prickly fellow who needed handling 'with kid gloves', especially first thing in the morning. Eö decided that flattery was his best option. "Captain Golradir," he began. "I have a problem, and I hoped you might be willing to give me some advice."

Golradir did not look up from his meal, but he motioned Eö to take the seat beside him.

"One of my staff is missing, Captain. She did not turn up for work yesterday morning and she has not been seen since, though one of my serving ellith has checked her room. I am worried because she is a good girl and not the sort to shirk her duties." Eö hesitated. Golradir was

clearly not interested. "I would not normally bother the Captain of the Palace Guard with this sort of thing..."

Golradir nodded in agreement.

Then inspiration struck Eö: "But," he said, "it occurred to me that she must have disappeared at about the same time the Mistress of the Ceremony was killed." He was winning now. "And the route from her rooms to the kitchens would have taken her right past the banqueting hall..."

For the first time, Golradir looked up at him. Then, without a word, the Captain of the Guard rose from the table and hurried away.

And Eö was left wishing that his argument had not sounded so plausible.

...

"Do you have any idea who the murderer might be?" asked Eowyn as they picked their way through the piles of sleeping guests, and quietly left the hall.

Legolas briefly acknowledged the guard at the main door.

"No, meleth nín, none at all."

"What will you do if you do not find him by tonight?"

"I do not know. I cannot keep our guests here by force... I will have to let them leave. And, once they have gone, it will be very much harder to keep my promise to the Mistress of the Ceremony."

"Your promise?"

"To find her killer and bring him to justice." He sighed.

"Then let us bathe, eat, and make a start on interviewing the guests," said Eowyn.

As they were approaching the main staircase, Legolas noticed a groom leading a familiar horse from the stables. "It looks as though the March Warden has finally returned, melmenya," he said. "I have been thinking that perhaps Haldir could help Lord Fingolfin with the interviews. He is far more reliable than Golradir."

"Yes," said Eowyn, "that is a good idea, though I think it would be even more sensible if you were to work with Haldir, and I with Lord Fingolfin."

"It might well be more sensible, meleth nín," said Legolas, "but we are not going to do it!" He kissed her cheek. "We should find Haldir before we do anything else..."

Eowyn hesitated. *She is uncomfortable; she wants to bathe,* thought Legolas. *Perhaps I should send her back to our chambers and see Haldir alone.* He looked up to the main walkway. There were guards stationed at regular intervals all the way to his home; she would be safe.

"Go back to our chambers, melmenya," he said. "I will see Haldir, then join you in the bath."

...

Haldir had, in fact, already left the stables but, instead of going to the guard post, he had climbed the stairs to the main walkway, which ran past Legolas' private chambers, and had been standing for some time on a small flet off the main thoroughfare, leaning over the wall, looking down at the city.

He had managed to avoid the previous night's ceremony, but he could not delay reporting Legolas any longer. *You will simply have to control your jealousy*, he thought. *This is going to be your life from now on, so you had better get used to it.*

Preparing himself for the worst, Haldir went back to the main walkway and, taking a deep breath, approached Legolas' home.

A movement to the right of the building caught his eye, and he turned to look. An elf and a naked elleth were making love in the shadow of the carantaur tree. Haldir tried to look away, to give them some privacy, but the elleth was so extraordinarily beautiful that he could not take his eyes off her. He savoured the sight of her small, full breasts and her tiny waist and the unusual colour of her long waving hair. *She looks just like—*

The realisation came to him fully formed; she was not an elleth, and the elf was not making love to her!

With a cry of anger shading into terror, Haldir surged along the walkway. The other elf, his face still hidden in shadow, looked round in alarm. Then he threw the woman in Haldir's path, and disappeared over the walkway wall.

All of Haldir's military training told him to follow the elf.

But what use would that be if *she* were to die?

Haldir lowered the woman to the ground and desperately tried to remove the leather cord from around her neck.

He cursed the filthy orc that had done this to her; he cursed his own clumsy archer's fingers that could not untie the knot; and, as minute after minute passed by, he began to curse the Valar for letting this woman die...

But, at last, the cord came free and the woman began to breathe, hard and noisy, coughing and gagging.

*Gods, what do I do now?*

Haldir laid Eowyn gently on her side, supporting her head to keep her throat open and prevent any further choking, then he shouted for help.

He examined her neck for signs of a fracture, and he shouted for help.

He checked her throat for swelling, and made sure that she could still breathe, and he shouted for help.

He took off his cloak, and wrapped it around her trembling body, and he shouted for help.

Then he spotted one of Legolas' serving elleth looking out of a window. "Fetch Master Dínendal the healer," he yelled. "Then get Lord Legolas! *Quickly!*"

...

When Dínendal arrived outside Legolas' chambers, he found the March Warden in a state of panic, supporting an unconscious Lady Eowyn.

"What has happened?" he asked as he knelt to examine the woman.

Haldir explained the attack and his subsequent attempts to help Eowyn, and showed Dínendal the leather cord.

"You have done well, March Warden," said the healer.

"Will she live?" asked Haldir, anxiously.

...

Míriel ran—her skirts hiked up around her knees—down the main staircase and towards the stables, where one of the palace guards had told her he had seen Legolas only moments earlier.

"My lord," she called. "Lord Legolas, Lord Legolas!"

Legolas emerged from the stables, lacing a pair of riding breeches he had obviously borrowed from one of the Gondorian grooms. "What is it, child?"

"It is Lady Eowyn, my lord," said Míriel, "she has been attacked by the murderer. The March Warden—"

But Legolas had already pushed past her and was running frantically up the main staircase.

...

"Eowyn!"

Legolas fell to his knees and tried to take the unconscious woman into his arms.

"My lord," said Dínendal, gently deflecting Legolas' hands, "please—she is breathing and her throat does not appear to be swelling, so I do not anticipate any complications there. Her spine is, thankfully, uninjured.

"The danger is that the ligature may have prevented blood from reaching her brain. And without the vital substances carried in the blood her brain may have been starved. In such cases a person may survive, but be altered."

"Altered how?" asked Haldir.

"Sometimes, the mind retreats into childhood," said Dínendal. "Sometimes—beyond."

"What is beyond childhood?" asked Legolas, his voice hoarse.

The healer hesitated; he realised he had said too much. "We do not know whether she has suffered any injury as yet, my lord; let us wait until she regains consciousness."

"Can we move her?" asked Legolas.

"With care, my lord."

Ignoring Haldir's quiet offer of help, Legolas lifted Eowyn into his arms and carried her towards his chambers, but he did not enter them. Instead, he began to climb the staircase to his private garden.

"Where are you going, my lord?" asked Dínendal.

"She likes it up here," said Legolas.

He laid her, still wrapped in Haldir's cloak, on the bed she had had made up for him, then sat beside her, holding her hand, and talking to her softly. "Please, Eowyn, please, meleth nín," he whispered, again and again, "please do not leave me..."



Dínendal sat at the other side of the bed, checking Eowyn's pulse and her breathing.

Haldir, fighting back his own despair, caught the healer's eye. Dínendal shook his head and mouthed, "I do not know."

Haldir began to pace; he needed to do something!

He looked at Legolas. The warrior elf seemed to be disintegrating before his eyes. In desperation, Haldir looked around the flet, praying to the Valar for help—and, half-hidden in the corner by the stairs, he spotted the serving elleth he had earlier sent to fetch help.

Suddenly he knew what to do.

"Child," he said, "go to King Elessar, tell him what has happened, and ask him to come. Then see if you can find Lord Gimli." Though Haldir had no love for the notho, he knew that Legolas would need his best friend, should the worst happen...

The elleth disappeared down the stairs.

Haldir walked over to the bed and sat down beside Legolas.

...

Aragorn, Gimli, and Lord Fingolfin arrived together.

At a sign from Aragorn, Gimli and Fingolfin dragged the now distraught Legolas to a nearby seat built into the low wall of the flet.

"Sit down, lad," said Gimli, "Aragorn will soon have her on the mend."

Legolas stared uncomprehendingly, as though Gimli had been speaking a foreign language. Fingolfin sat down beside him, gently restraining him, and the dwarf gripped his shoulder, trying to pass on some of his own strength.

Aragorn, meanwhile, had placed his hand on Eowyn's forehead and closed his eyes. Moments passed. Then Eowyn's body suddenly convulsed, arching up from the bed, and she took a great, gasping breath, opening her eyes wide.

Legolas slipped through Fingolfin's grasp and was at her side in an instant. "Eowyn," he whispered.

Eowyn tried to reply, but her lips made no sound.

"Do not try to speak yet, Eowyn," said Aragorn. He removed the medicine pouch from his belt. "These herbs," he said, crumbling several dried leaves into a goblet and adding water, "will strengthen your blood." He helped her to drink. "Master Dínendal," he continued, "perhaps you would examine Lady Eowyn for any permanent injury?" The elf nodded. "You are in good hands, Eowyn."

"Thank you for your assistance, your Majesty," said Dínendal, bowing his head, respectfully. He began checking Eowyn's vision and her response to various tests.

"Yes," agreed Legolas, looking up from his place at Eowyn's side, "thank you Aragorn. This is a kindness so great, I can never repay it." Aragorn shook his head, deprecatingly. "Please, mellon nín," Legolas continued, "I could not help her,"—he looked down at Eowyn—"so at least allow me to renew my pledge of allegiance to the man who could. And Gimli—no elf ever had truer friend, *elvellon*."

"For shame, you crazy elf," said Gimli, wiping something from his eye.

The friends waited anxiously for Dínendal's verdict. At length, the healer looked up from his patient. "I believe the lady is unharmed," he said. "Do you remember anything of what happened, my lady?" he asked.

"Do not tire yourself, *meleth nín*," said Legolas anxiously.

Eowyn shook her head; she tried to speak, then—frustrated—she mimed writing.

Without a word, Míriel stepped forward and handed Legolas Eowyn's wax tablet.

"You are sure you want to do this now, *meleth nín*?" asked Legolas.

Eowyn nodded. He handed her the tablet and she began to write, laboriously.

*I was in the bathing room & heard a noise outside. I looked out of the window. He slipped the cord round my neck & dragged me out. I tried to fight but I could not breathe. Haldir stopped him.*

"*Valar*," said Legolas. He turned to Haldir. "*Hannon le, mellon nín.*"

Haldir shook his head.

"Did you see his face, my lady?" asked Fingolfin.

*No.*

"Do you remember anything about him?" he asked.

*He smelled.*

"Of what?"

Eowyn gestured. *I do not know.*

She was clearly exhausted. "My Lord," said Fingolfin to Legolas, "We can all see that the lady needs to rest, and I am sure that you will want to remain here with her, so may I suggest that I begin to interview the guests? Perhaps the March Warden could accompany me?"

Legolas looked at Haldir and, in a moment of complete clarity, thought: *He is in love with her, too, and he wants to stay.*

But Haldir agreed to go with Fingolfin.

"Perhaps Gimli and I can help," offered Aragorn.

"Thank you, your Majesty," said Fingolfin, bowing. "And perhaps Lord Caranthir will help us, too," he added.

"Do not visit any of the guests alone," said Legolas, "have Golradir go with Lord Caranthir—what is it, *melmenya*?"

Eowyn pointed to some papers lying on the table. Míriel brought them over and, with Legolas' help, Eowyn found one and handed it to Fingolfin. It was covered in notes. Part of it read:

*Questions: Ask who they remember seeing, when and where.*

*IMPORTANT: Draw plan of banqueting hall. Mark position of body.*

**My bow shall sing with your sword**

*If two witnesses agree where he was — mark on plan.  
If he was not in hall, check if servants saw in bedchamber.*

**IMPORTANT:** Interview guests separately. Do not allow to confer.

"Thank you, my lady," said Fingolfin, "With your permission, your Majesty?" Aragorn nodded. Fingolfin slipped the parchment in his robes. "We will go now, my lord, my lady. I will return at two, my lord, to report on our progress." He bowed, then motioned to Aragorn and Gimli, inviting them to precede him down the stairs.

"Come, March Warden," he said, "let us follow them."

...

"I will leave you, too," said Master Dínendal. "I am very happy with the lady's condition, but she needs to rest," he said to Legolas. "My lady, I will return in a few hours to check on you. In the meantime, if you are uncomfortable—or if you, my lord, are concerned in any way—send Míriel to fetch me."

"Thank you, Master Healer," said Legolas.

Eowyn watched the healer disappear down the stairs, then she picked up the wax tablet and wrote: *Please sing to me.*

"Oh, Eowyn," whispered Legolas. "I love you." He took the tablet from her hands, climbed into the bed beside her and wrapped his arms around her. Then he turned her so that they could both see the sky, and he began to sing an ancient human riddle:

*I will give my love an apple without e'er a core,  
I will give my love a house without e'er a door,  
I will give my love a palace wherein she may be  
And she may unlock it without e'er a key...*

*My head is the apple without e'er a core,  
My mind is the house without e'er a door,  
My heart is the palace wherein she may be  
And she may unlock it without e'er a key.*

...

Legolas' beautiful voice soared up into the sky, and Eowyn thought that, despite her near brush with death that morning, she had never been so happy.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Extra scene: The White Lady**

#### ***Suppose I had asked her, thought Haldir, on that day...***

*Before Legolas had claimed her heart. Before she had even met Faramir. What would she have said?*

...

He was right in the thick of it, where the casualties were heaviest.

He had taken a painful cut to the arm, and never saw the Uruk Hai blade—mercifully, not poisoned—that entered his back, pierced his lungs and grazed his heart.

He heard Aragorn's voice; felt Aragorn's touch; and then...

By the time the fighting had ended, he was buried beneath a pile of bodies.

...

He was roused from healing sleep—*Strange that I should be sleeping, in the heat of battle*—by the sounds of *men*, the Rohirrim—searching for survivors.

He knew he must call to them—tell them he was still alive—but his limbs would not move; his lips would not speak.

And, smelling the flesh of the dead, burning on the pyres, he cried out in his heart: *Oh Manwë and Varda! Ulmo! Estë! Help me!*

...

Her little hand touched his face.

...

The elven healers pronounced him beyond saving. "Let him make the journey with dignity."

But *she* fetched a human healer and—together—they cleansed and dressed his wounds. She applied the salve with her own sweet hands.

And when—at last—he awoke, she was there: sitting beside him, pale and tired, and—*oh*—so beautiful.

It healed his spirit just to look at her.

...

#### **Five days later**

"You are recovering your strength, my lord!"

Haldir turned, startled—he had been concentrating so hard on walking that he had not heard her footfalls—and the sudden movement made him dizzy. But the White Lady ran forward, slipping beneath his arm and supporting him on her shoulders.

"Your people have remarkable powers of healing," she said, "but perhaps you have done enough for today!" She smiled up at him.

"Yes—perhaps."

She guided him along the walkway, to a small door at the rear of the Great Hall, which led directly to the Royal apartments—for, as the representative of both Elrond and Galadriel, he had been treated as an honoured guest, and lodged with the Royal Family themselves.

All the while, he was marvelling at her strength.

"Would you like one of the guards to help you to bed, my lord?" she asked. "Or my brother? Or perhaps Prince Legolas?"

Haldir shook his head. "I am almost myself again, now, my lady." In truth, he had not needed her assistance beyond that first moment, but he had enjoyed her attention.

"Well. If you are sure..." She allowed him to remove his arm from her shoulders. "Let me open the door at least—*there*." She stepped aside. "If there is anything more you need—please—just send one of the servants to fetch me. And, if you would like some comp—" She stopped in mid sentence. "If you would like me to send Prince Legolas, or one of your other comrades, to sit with you—"

"You admire Prince Legolas," he said.

"My lord?"

*What a foolish thing to say!* But she had already mentioned the elf twice. *And* given him his proper title. "He is a great warrior."

"He is Lord Aragorn's right hand."

"The Crown Prince of Mirkwood."

"That is hard to believe..."

"My lady?"

"He is so modest; so unassuming," she said. "Always anticipating the needs of others."

"Indeed," said Haldir, softly.

She followed him to the bed and helped steady him as he sat down. "You do look tired, my lord," she said. "Can I bring you some wine?"

"That would be most welcome," Haldir admitted, "if I am not keeping you from your duties."

The White Lady smiled. "My duties are few, my lord," she said, pouring out a measure of strong, red wine. "Neither my uncle nor my brother believes that I should be burdened with anything more than a *woman's* responsibilities." She handed him the goblet.

"Yet I heard," said Haldir, "that you fought most bravely in the Glittering Caves, defending the women and children when the orcs broke through."

She blushed. "Who told you that, my lord?"

"I believe it was Prince Legolas himself."

"Oh..." Her blush deepened. "He, perhaps, exaggerated..."

"I do not think so." Haldir twisted the knife in his own entrails. "He is not given to exaggeration. He regards you very highly."

"I think you are mistaken, my lord." She turned her face away.

"I am sorry, my lady," said Haldir. "I am prying; please forgive me. And, please—if there are no others to claim your time at present, will you sit with me a while?"

"I shall be glad to." She took the seat beside his bed. "Lord Gimli has told me much about the Lady Galadriel," she said, "but I should like to hear more about the Golden Wood itself—if you are not too tired, that is. My brother passed through it once, but he is resolutely silent on the subject."

"Perhaps you will visit Lothlorien yourself one day," said Haldir.

"Lothlorien..." she said, experimenting with the strange language, "Loth-lorien. How beautiful it sounds. So different from Rohan!"

"How so, my lady?"

"'Rohan' suggests a people who are rugged, a land that is spare, where life is pared to the bone," she said. "Lothlorien sounds—*expansive*..."

"You will escape your cage, Eowyn."

"My lord?"

She seemed surprised by his sudden intimacy, perhaps affronted by his use of her name, but he persisted. "You are a rare and precious being, Eowyn," he said "and one day some el—some *man*—some very *fortunate* man—will claim you for his own. And he will see the strength and courage in you and—far from trying to restrain you—he will *welcome* that steel in the companion of his spirit."

She swallowed hard. "How strange that you should say all that..."

"Eowyn—"

The door flew open, admitting four feet five inches of pure energy. "How are you feeling laddie? We hear you have been walking!"

"*Gimli!*" The Prince of Mirkwood, like some divine being in a silver tunic, caught the dwarf by the shoulders and held him back.

"Good evening, Prince Legolas, Lord Gimli," said the White Lady, smiling as she rose from her seat. "I shall leave the patient in your capable hands." She turned to Haldir. "Good night, my lord."

"Good night, my lady."

The moment had passed. So he let her leave.

## Chapter 8: The net tightens

**Caranthir had identified forty guests whose innocence had not already been established. He reasoned that, at thirty minutes per interview—*A very optimistic estimate, he thought*—it would take each of the interviewers more than seven hours to talk to the whole list. He had therefore sorted the names in order of priority, placing the least likely suspects at the bottom of the list.**

To the very bottom went Lord Gimli's three dwarven companions. Since he had come to know Gimli, Caranthir no longer distrusted dwarves, and he could see no reason why these three would have killed the Mistress of the Ceremony. *The rite means nothing to them, he thought; this is an elf's crime.*

Also to the bottom went the sword smith, Tathar; the healer, Findecáno; and their families. These were people of unimpeachable character who, moreover, lived in the city and could easily be interviewed at a later date. For the same reasons, Caranthir eliminated all the courtiers who had attended the ceremony.

But that still left over twenty people to be interviewed individually, all of them either ellith—*Whom I myself chose to take part in the ceremony, he thought, his blood running cold*—or their families. *Which does make some sense, because they had the most to gain from the ceremony.*

*And that brings me back to Angaráto...*

He arranged the remaining names in order of urgency, placing those who would be leaving the city tomorrow near the top.

At the very top, he placed Angaráto and his daughter, Alatórië.

...

Fingolfin and Caranthir had insisted that Aragorn take Legolas' place at the head of the Council table and chair the proceedings.

Aragorn looked round the table. Gimli sat beside him, strong and dependable; Fingolfin and Haldir sat to his left; Caranthir and that hot-headed Captain of the Guard—*Why in all of Middle-earth had Legolas appointed him?*—sat to his right. Aragorn felt slightly uncomfortable taking precedence over the old, distinguished elves, but three years of kingship had taught him how to act the part of a monarch.

"Well, my lords," he said, "Lord Caranthir has drawn up a list of guests to be questioned." He indicated the parchment in front of him. "And I suggest that we divide them equally amongst us."

The elves murmured their agreement.

"Lady Eowyn has made some suggestions about how we should proceed, which I believe you have all read. She suggests that we should interview people one at a time, to ensure that they give us independent testimony, and that we ask each person who else they remember seeing, when, and where. Lady Eowyn believes that, whilst they may lie about their own whereabouts, if two or more of them agree about someone else's whereabouts, we can probably assume that they are telling the truth."

"I think we all agree that that is a wise approach, your Majesty," said Fingolfin.

The elves nodded.

"She also asks us to make a written record of each interview and ask the witness to sign it," continued Aragorn, "and I think that is a sensible idea, too. The Gondorian Guard do something similar. I am not sure what she means about drawing a plan of the banqueting hall, so I suggest we leave that to her."

The elves agreed.

"How *is* Lady Eowyn, your Majesty?" asked Caranthir, with genuine concern.

Aragorn looked at the Chief Counsellor. *They have already accepted her as their Queen*, he thought. "She is tired, my lord," he replied, "but I believe she will recover with no ill effects."

Caranthir's relief was evident.

"Now," said Aragorn, "before we begin the interviews, I think it would be useful if you can tell me what you have already discovered. Obviously, Gimli and I have not been involved in your investigations so far."

Lord Fingolfin described what Legolas and Eowyn had uncovered: that the elleth had been killed just before dawn, that she had been strangled using a boot lace, that there had also been some sort of struggle involving a candlestick, possibly after the elleth was dead, and that the culprit had later searched his victim's chambers.

Caranthir talked about his visit from Angaráto and the elf's attempts to bribe him. "He wanted me to persuade Lord Legolas to choose his daughter for the Harvest Ceremony, your Majesty," he explained.

Haldir described what he had seen of Eowyn's attacker. "He was wearing a long cloak with the hood raised, so I could not see his face. But he was definitely an elf, your Majesty, average height, slightly heavy build, but fast—he was over the wall and away before I realised what he was doing. And he used another bootlace. He—he tied it around Lady Eowyn's neck..." Haldir's voice faltered, and Aragorn saw Gimli look up in surprise. *Yes*, he thought, *the haughty March Warden has lost his heart*.

Then Golradir reported Maranwë's disappearance. "She must have disappeared at about the same time that the Mistress of the Ceremony was killed," he said, repeating Eö's words exactly, "and the route from her rooms to the kitchens would have taken her past the banqueting hall. I have assigned two of the palace guards to search for her, your Majesty."

"Let us hope they find her alive," said Aragorn, gravely.

The elves agreed, and Gimli gripped the haft of his axe at the thought of any harm coming to a young elleth.

"My lords, Haldir, Captain Golradir," said Aragorn, coming to the point, "do any of you have any idea who may have been responsible?"

"No," said Fingolfin. Haldir and Golradir both shook their heads.

Caranthir sighed. "My—for want of a better word—*intuition* tells me that it was Angaráto, your Majesty. But for no other reason than that I do not like the elf."

...

Aragorn and Gimli spent almost five hours interviewing the elves on their list.

Their fourth interview was with a pleasant wood elf called Arafinwë. He had travelled to Eryn Carantaur from the rural settlement at Doro Lanthron with his wife, and his daughter, who had



been selected to take part in the Harvest Ceremony.

"Lord Legolas did not choose my daughter, your Majesty but, in truth, I think she preferred one of his friends," he smiled at Gimli, who blushed beneath his beard.

Aragorn tried hard to put Gimli's love life out of his mind.

"We have all had a wonderful time," Arafinwë continued. Then he remembered himself. "Though, of course," he added, quickly, "we are sorry that the elleth was killed."

Aragorn nodded. *She is not mourned*, he thought.

He asked Arafinwë whom he had seen at the banquet, and during the festivities afterwards, but—apart from Aragorn himself, Arwen, Legolas and Gimli, and, of course, Eowyn—"The most beautiful lady I have ever seen,"—and the elf sitting beside him, whose name he could not remember—Arafinwë had noticed no one.

It was not until Aragorn thought to ask him whether he had met any of the other guests *before* the Ceremony, that Arafinwë said something startling: "Only Master Angaráto, your Majesty, for he protects us."

"Protects you?"

"Yes, your Majesty. He keeps the orcs away from our settlement."

Gimli and Aragorn exchanged glances.

"Do you pay for his services?" asked Aragorn, tactfully.

"Well, yes, your Majesty. And at first I refused. But then we were attacked, and—well I would pay anything to prevent that happening again."

"Why did you not tell Lord Legolas about this?" asked Gimli.

"Master Angaráto said that it was not necessary to trouble Lord Legolas, Lord Gimli..." His voice trailed off.

Aragorn had the distinct impression that Arafinwë had been threatened.

Gimli made a careful note of Arafinwë's evidence and asked him to sign the statement; Aragorn thanked him for his time, and asked him to send in his wife.

"I wonder," said Gimli, "if Angaráto had a hand in that orc attack?"

"I was wondering exactly the same thing myself, Gimli," said Aragorn. Then he added, "So now we know that Angaráto is a thoroughly bad elf, but we still have no proof that he is the murderer."

Arafinwë's wife, Amarië, was a beautiful, lively elleth, whose recollections were as precise as her husband's were vague. This was the first time she had been to a function at court and she had missed nothing. Over the course of the evening she had watched the other guests with keen interest—though, Aragorn noticed, no malice—and could tell them exactly who had been where, and with whom, throughout the night and into the small hours of the morning. She had retired to bed, with her husband and daughter, at about four.

Gimli carefully transcribed every detail of her testimony onto parchment, then read it back to her, corrected some points, and asked her to sign it.

The couple's daughter, Eámanë, beamed affectionately at Gimli throughout the interview, but

she also confirmed much of her mother's testimony.

"That is our list completed," said Aragorn, "and it is almost two. Let us return to Legolas' garden and let him know what we have found."

...

Eowyn awoke feeling strangely elated, her body tingling. Legolas was sitting beside her, holding her hand, but his back was against the carantaur trunk and his eyes were fixed on the sky. Eowyn took the opportunity to admire him unnoticed: his blond hair, falling loose about his face, his well-muscled arms and chest, and his long legs in those Gondorian riding breeches. His feet were bare.

Eowyn slipped her hand out of his, took up the wax tablet, wrote a few words, and gave it to him. Then she slid her hand up his thigh...

Startled, Legolas looked up from the tablet. Then, slowly and deliberately, he rubbed the words out with his thumb. She had written, *You look nice in leather breeches*.

He bent over and kissed her mouth.

Eowyn took the opportunity to slip her hand between his legs.

"*Valar*, Eowyn!" he gasped.

Playfully, Eowyn pushed him onto his back and straddled him, brushing her fingers up the front of his breeches, feeling his hard, thick penis straining beneath the leather. Then, with a wicked smile, she grasped the ends of his laces and pulled. The knot came undone and she unlaced him, teasing him with the tiniest touches as her fingers worked back and forth.

By the time he was free, Legolas' whole body was trembling.

Eowyn leaned forward and took the head of his penis in her mouth, whilst her hands massaged its shaft.

"*Ahhhhh*, melmenya," Legolas gasped, "I want to be inside you—" But it was already too late; his body suddenly arched like a drawn bow, and Eowyn, still holding him, watched as a stream of warm, pearly seed shot onto her breasts, once, twice, three times, then his whole body suffered one last, intense convulsion, and he sobbed as he emptied himself completely.

*That is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen*, she thought. She caressed his penis.

"Agh!" he yelped.

"Did I hurt you?" she asked, anxiously, her voice little more than a croak.

He gathered her into his arms. "It is very sensitive, *meleth nín*—immediately afterwards," he explained.

"I am sorry," she said, in a plaintive little squawk.

He kissed her tenderly. "*Shhhhh*. Give me one moment, melmenya," he said, taking her hand and rubbing her fingers. "And then,"—he smiled—"I will make sure that you *are* sorry—very sorry—I will make you beg for mercy. And I will not stop until you have been severely punished." He placed her hand on his now fully recovered penis, and pressed his lips to her ear. "I will *not* stop punishing you, *meleth nín*, no matter how hard you beg."

...

It had been agreed that Lord Caranthir should not interview Angaráto, since he could not be impartial. The task therefore fell to Lord Fingolfin, and this had the benefit of giving Haldir the chance to take a good look at Angaráto and see whether he resembled Eowyn's attacker.

Angaráto's testimony was unenlightening. He had noticed nothing, spoken to no one, and had retired to bed early.

Haldir made a note in the margin: *Check with servants*. He read the sparse testimony back to the elf and asked him to sign it.

Then, as Angaráto rose to leave, Lord Fingolfin said, "That is a very beautiful jerkin Master Angaráto. I have never seen anything like it."

Haldir stared at the older elf as if he had lost his mind. Angaráto nodded but said nothing.

"It was made by Men, if I am not mistaken," Fingolfin continued. "The workmanship is exceptionally fine."

"It is a traditional riding jerkin from the foothills of the Misty Mountains," said Angaráto, reluctantly. "The Men there make them from the hides of their favourite horses. As a kind of memorial."

"They apply some sort of treatment to the leather?"

"Fish oil," said Angaráto, warily. "They import it specially. It makes the leather waterproof."

"But it is quite pungent," said Fingolfin. "And the lacings, I see, are decorated with metal fobs." He lifted one to look at it more closely. "Curious..." Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Haldir's hand close around the hilt of his sword and he shot the March Warden a warning look.

Haldir released his sword, but his eyes remained wild with anger.

Angaráto bowed stiffly. "If that is all, Lord Fingolfin?"

Fingolfin nodded, and Angaráto left.

"That *orc*," Haldir exploded, "that filthy orc, that—that *Balrog*—"

"Hush, March Warden," said Fingolfin, "we are about to see his daughter. We shall discuss this later."

Alatáriël was even less helpful than her father had been. She sat sullenly throughout the entire interview, answering Fingolfin's questions with monosyllables, and then—when he finally gave her permission to leave—she walked from the room without a further word.

"That," said Fingolfin, "is a very disturbed young elleth."

"Why did you not allow me to take him prisoner, my lord?" asked Haldir. "The laces, the smell of his jerkin—even his build condemns him."

"It is not sufficient, March Warden, said Fingolfin, "we need more conclusive evidence."

"Evidence! That warg's-member *attacked* Eowyn, and would have killed her had I not happened to disturb him; he could attack her again! Yet we have let him go free! Perhaps you would like me to hold her down while he finishes the job—"

"*March Warden!*" cried Fingolfin, "I will overlook your hasty words, because I know that you are not yourself where Lady Eowyn is concerned." Haldir gave him a withering look. "But let me remind you that we still have three more guests to interview, and that the sooner we do

so, the sooner we can report back to the others. In the meantime, I think we can trust Lord Legolas to take care of his lady."

...

Eowyn lay in Legolas' arms, as contented as a cat.

She smiled; he had indeed made her beg—squeakily—but the word 'stop' had never passed her lips. *Gods, she thought, elves do have stamina. At least, this elf does—oh, gods! What time is it? What time did Lord Fingolfin say they would be back?*

It was one thing to perform the harvest rite before an audience—she was actually beginning to find that quite exciting—but it was another thing altogether to have their friends intrude on their private moments.

"Legolas," she said, as softly as her cracked voice would allow.

Legolas sighed, sleepily. "I am sorry meleth nín, I do not think I can..."

Eowyn managed a small laugh. "You had better be recovered by tonight!" she said.

"Of course, melmenya." Then he added, with a touch of pride, "I am an elf."

She hugged him tightly. "An elf who needs to bathe and dress before his friends and counsellors arrive," she croaked.

"Orc's breath," said Legolas, "I had forgotten, meleth nín."

She helped him to his feet and, together, they went downstairs to the bathing room—Eowyn taking her wax tablet with her—and, whilst Legolas organised the hot water, she wrote a series of instructions for Míriel.

*Please arrange food for our guests—eight people, including King Elessar and Lord Gimli.*

Míriel made some helpful suggestions—it seemed that Legolas was not the only elf who loved lavender cakes, and that the dwarf was particularly partial to a delicacy called 'honey buns'.

*Have the food laid out on the table in the garden—we will need three more chairs.*

"Yes, my lady."

*Then please go to my chambers in the guest quarters and bring my white gown. It is in the chest at the end of the bed.*

"Very well, my lady."

Eowyn wrote one final instruction.

"My lady?"

Eowyn nodded emphatically.

"Are you quite sure, my lady? Lord Legolas may not like—" She fell silent when she saw the determination on Eowyn's face. "Very well, my lady."

...

Master Gelmir, his wife, Orelindë, and his daughter, Eldarwen, were Caranthir's last interviewees.

So far, the Chief Counsellor had learned very little, aided not one whit by Captain Golradir, but he had high hopes of Master Gelmir, the colony's astronomer; it was *his* job to observe.

He did not disappoint.

"I am so glad to have this opportunity to talk to you, my lord," he said, "because the more we think about it, the more my wife and I believe we may have seen something important, the morning the elleth was killed.

"At the time, I was not sure, but now..."

"Please explain, Master Gelmir," prompted Caranthir, gently.

"I am sorry, my lord, it is just that I feel—well, foolish. And if anything has happened to the elleth..."

Gelmir pulled himself together. "We—my wife and I, my lord—we fell asleep just outside the main entrance to the banqueting hall, some time during the night. We woke shortly after dawn, because the serving ellith had begun to clear the table—they were being very quiet, my lord, but my wife is a light sleeper.

"I noticed a couple lying in the doorway and, at first, I thought it was another pair of lovers who had fallen asleep. But then the elf stood up, picked up the elleth, and hurried away."

"What made you suspicious, Master Gelmir?" asked Caranthir.

"Two things, my lord. The elleth seemed to have no *life* in her. And then, there was something about the way he just threw her over his shoulder, with no regard for her. It was as if,"—he hesitated—"it was as if she were dead."

"Why did you not report this before?" asked Golradir.

*His first question of the day*, thought Caranthir.

"Because I thought they might be—er—playing rough," Gelmir said.

Ah. "Can you describe the elleth, Master Gelmir?" asked Caranthir.

"I did not see her well, my lord," said Gelmir, "but she was dressed very plainly—like a servant."

The wife confirmed her husband's story, adding that she had, in fact, been woken by a loud noise—"Like chairs falling over,"—shortly before her husband awoke.

The daughter, whom Caranthir remembered having seen with Lord Fingolfin the previous night, had nothing more to add. She had gone to bed early—*No doubt disappointed not to have been chosen by Lord Legolas*, thought Caranthir. *Still, she has recovered quickly.*

Relieved that the interviews were over, Caranthir carefully gathered up his sheaf of signed statements, and his own pages of notes. "Let us return to Lord Legolas' garden," he said to Golradir, "and see what the others have found out."

...

Eowyn walked into Legolas' bedchamber, lacing up her white gown.

Legolas was standing before the full-length mirror wearing pale grey leggings and black boots and holding a tunic of fine black velvet against his chest. Eowyn smiled. She loved him dearly, but she was more used to men who would happily wear the same linen all year round if their

servants did not take the trouble to lay out fresh each day. *And even then...* she thought.

"I prefer the other one," she croaked, pointing to an exquisite tunic of pearly grey silk, embroidered with a darker grey blackberry pattern, lying on the bed.

Legolas turned, and thanked her with a dazzling smile.

*But I could easily get used to helping him choose his clothes,* she thought.

"You were wearing that gown the first time I saw you, *meleth nín*," said Legolas, fastening his tunic, "but your feet were not bare—"

"No?" she asked, concentrating on tying her laces.

"No," he said, suddenly quite close, "you were wearing little black *boots*."

And he grabbed her, and nipped her neck, and Eowyn laughed—or, rather, squawked—and squirmed in his arms.

"You are an elf with very strange tastes," she croaked. "Stop it! You need to rest or you will disgrace yourself tonight."

Legolas laughed too, burying his face in her shoulder.

The main door to their chambers opened and closed, and Eowyn stiffened in his arms.

"What is it, *melmenya*?" he asked, concerned.

"My sword," she said.

He released her and she ran into the sitting room. "Thank you, *Míriel*," she croaked; and she took the sword belt and fastened it around her hips.

*Míriel* looked anxiously at Legolas.

But Legolas was smiling.

...

By two o'clock, everyone had assembled in Legolas' private garden.

Legolas welcomed them and seated them at the table, suggesting that they should eat whilst they discussed their findings.

Aragorn explained that they had followed Eowyn's suggestions. "Gimli and I have gathered a great deal of information about the whereabouts of the guests throughout the night," he said, "and I am sure that Lord Fingolfin and Lord Caranthir will have done the same." The two elves nodded in agreement. "But we have left it to you, Eowyn, to interpret all this."

Eowyn looked ruefully at the mountain of paper lying on the table.

Fingolfin glanced at Haldir. "The March Warden and I interviewed Angaráto," he said, "and I must say that I am now inclined to agree with Lord Caranthir—I think that *he* is the killer—"

"I," said Haldir, "am absolutely certain."

"Why do you say that, *mellon nín*?" asked Legolas.

Haldir glanced tactfully at Fingolfin for permission to continue; the older elf nodded. "He was

not co-operative during questioning," said the March Warden, "and he claims that he was in bed at the time of the murder, which, of course, we must check with the servants, as Lady Eowyn suggested." He bowed his head to Eowyn. "But, as he left, Lord Fingolfin asked him about a leather riding jerkin he was wearing. He was very reluctant to talk about it, for he knew it had given him away. Apparently, it was made by the men of the Misty Mountains. It has laces similar to those used by the killer, and it is treated with fish oil to make it waterproof —"

"Fish," croaked Eowyn, "yes!" Then she smiled, embarrassed by the strange sound of her own voice. Legolas hugged her.

"It is a very distinctive smell, my lady," agreed Haldir.

"That is not enough, though," said Fingolfin, "to prove Angaráto's guilt conclusively. Especially as we still cannot show why he did it."

"No," said Aragorn, "you are right my lord." He patted a paper lying beside him on the table. "But Gimli and I also discovered something interesting about our friend Angaráto, which will give you the opportunity to question him further. Tell them Gimli, whilst I make up a soothing draft for Eowyn's throat."

Gimli explained about the 'protection' that Angaráto was providing to the people of Doro Lanthron, and his and Aragorn's suspicions that he might have somehow managed the orc attack himself.

"Why," said Legolas, "did they not come to *me* with this? Did they think I was in league with him?"

"No, no my friend," said Gimli. "We believe he threatened them." He clapped Legolas on the shoulder.

"But I should have known—I should have realised," said Legolas. "I swear I would lock that orc away and lose the key, if I were not going to kill him for attacking Eowyn."

Aragorn stirred his herbal concoction. "We need more solid proof before we can accuse him of that, mellon nín—or of the murder. Did *you* find out anything that might help us, Lord Caranthir?" He handed the goblet to Eowyn.

Caranthir described Astronomer Gelmir's testimony. "It seems that one of the servants, a good dependable girl, my lord," he said to Legolas, "went missing at about the time of the murder. Captain Golradir has had his men looking for her since dawn this morning. We think that she saw something—and that the murderer either knocked her out or—or possibly killed her—then lay down with her in the doorway so that the serving ellith would think they were lovers and ignore them. Then, when he thought that no one was looking, he made his escape, carrying her with him."

Eowyn sipped Aragorn's soothing draft slowly, listening to Caranthir's reasoning; it made perfect sense. *Please, gods, let that poor elleth be alive*, she thought. They needed to find her...

"That he took her with him," she thought aloud, "suggests that she *was* still alive." The others turned to her in surprise. "Had she been dead," she explained croakily, "he could have left her. What difference would a second body have made? But alive she could tell us what she saw—though he may have killed her since, of course."

"Eowyn, you are right; but you must stop trying to talk," said Aragorn, "or your voice will never get better. Drink!"

**My bow shall sing with your sword**

The liquid was thick and green, and tasted slightly bitter, but not unpleasant, and it reminded her of the potion she had drunk at the coronation ceremony.

*I never did find out what effect that potion was supposed to have,* she thought. It had been different from the potion she had been given on the first night—that had given her real physical pain, creating an aching void between her legs that only Legolas could fill.

*Gods, I love him!*

She looked up from the goblet and watched him talking to Aragorn. *He feels so bad that his people have suffered at Angaráto's hands,* she thought.

*...Or do I love him?*

For a terrible, heart-stopping moment it occurred to Eowyn that her feelings for Legolas, and all her present happiness, might be an illusion. The potion had induced an intense, unreasoning desire, and Legolas had fulfilled it.

*Perhaps I only feel as if I love him!*

*But if I feel that I love him, and the feeling persists, how is that different from 'true love'?* she thought. *And even if the feeling were to wear off—well, so does true love, sometimes.*

*Who is more worthy of love than Legolas?*

*And what does it matter how love begins?*

And suddenly the motive for the murder became clear to her. *Love Potions!* she thought, *Love Potions!* And she waved her hands frantically, to catch everyone's attention.

\*\*\*\*\*



### Extra scene: The rival

***He saved her, thought Legolas. I let her walk into danger but he saved her.***

*Why did I let her come back alone? I should have stayed with her. I should have made sure she was safe. I knew she was at risk!*

*I shall never let her out of my sight again.*

*But he saved her, thank the Valar!*

*He saved her and Aragorn revived her...*

*He leaned back against the carantaur tree, nursing his misery. Eowyn has always admired rugged men—men like her brother. And like Aragorn.*

*And Haldir is a rugged elf..*

*I have heard men call me girlish—Lego-lass—and wonder if I really do have male parts. Well I have, thank you; and fully working, too.*

*But am I really what Eowyn needs? After her life with Faramir? Will she really stay with me when the Harvest Ceremony is over?*

He felt her withdraw her hand from his, and he looked down in fear. But she was smiling at him, and offering him her wax tablet. He took it, and scanned the words. Her hand was firm and upright, but not particularly neat; he read what she had written:

*You look nice in leather breeches.*

She grinned.

*Dear Valar, instant erection! Well, if that is what she wants...*

Very deliberately, he rubbed the words out with his thumb, leaned down, and kissed her mouth.

Her hand took him completely by surprise.

"Valar, Eowyn!" he gasped.

And it did not stop there! Aggressive now, she pushed him onto his back and straddled him, stroking her hands hard over his confined penis, pressing down on his belly, making him want to come, *right there*. Half-heartedly, he tried to pull away—tried to regain control—but *she* would have none of it. And by the time she had unlaced his breeches and freed him—stroked him, kissed him, nuzzled and—*Sweet Eru*—nipped him—he was trembling all over. All it took, then, was the lightest of touches...

"Ahhhhh, melmenya," he gasped, "OH!"

And, like some primitive creature, ruled entirely by instinct, he arched his back and came—stream after stream of hot seed erupting from deep in his groin—wailing, "Melmenya!" until his body convulsed in one final, gut-wrenching spasm, and he emptied himself on her belly.

*Bliss.*

He sank back to the wooden floor, smiling.

Something sharp and searing touched his penis. "Agh!"

"Did I hurt you?" Her voice was a precious little croak.

"It is very sensitive, meleth nín, immediately afterwards."

"I am sorry..." Her voice cracked.

"Oh, no, my darling... Shhhhh, *shhhhh*." He wrapped her in his arms. *She thinks she has done something wrong*, he thought, *when she could not have done anything more right*.

The memory of her desire for him—for *him* (he grinned) in leather breeches—was all he needed to banish his earlier doubts.

"Give me one more moment, melmenya," he said, taking her hand and kissing her fingers. "And then I will make sure that you *are* sorry—very sorry." He nuzzled her ear. "I shall make you beg for mercy, melmenya. And I will not stop until you have been severely punished." He placed her hand on his now fully recovered penis, and pressed his lips to her ear. "I will *not stop punishing you*, meleth nín, no matter how hard you beg."

### **Extra scene: Little black boots**

**Alone, at the very summit of The Hornburg, Legolas leaned against the cool, hard stone.**

Far below him, in pursuit of Aragorn, the White Lady of Rohan ran along the Deeping Wall, lifted her skirts, and took the flight of stone steps two at a time, giving him the briefest glimpse of her long, slim legs in their little black boots.

*Valar, those boots! Laced at her slender ankles.*

...

*You are a fool, he thought. She has no time for you. Besides, an elf and a woman could never be.*

*Still...*

He closed his eyes and, for a few moments, allowed himself to imagine how it might happen.

...

*He would ask for the chance to bathe. She would take him to the bathing room herself, find him soap, and a clean towel.*

*"Can I help you undress, my lord?"*

*He would stand, motionless, whilst she removed his leather pauldrons, his jerkin, and slipped off his tunic; he would sit obediently whilst she pulled off his boots.*

*Then she would reach for the lacings of his leggings. "Relax, my lord," she would say, pulling at the points. She would loosen the waistband and carefully pull down the fabric—and gasp at his straining erection—*

*"You are still tense after the battle, my lord; will you let me help you?"*

*She would kneel before him, wrapping her little hand around him, drawing him down to her mouth. His body would arch as her tongue caressed him in slow, deliberate circles; her teeth would lightly graze his flesh; and, all the while, her long, thick, golden hair would brush his belly and thighs...*

No! No! He must not come! Not yet!

*Crushing the chair with his hands, he would regain some control, and bid her stop. Then, though his body would protest at the loss, he would withdraw—carefully, so as not to hurt her mouth.*

*"Was I not pleasing you, my lord?" she would ask.*

*"Ai, nadithen nín," he would say, "you were pleasing me far too much..."*

*He would stand, and draw her to her feet, lift her into the air—delighting her with his elven strength—and, holding her with arms outstretched, he would carry her to the massage table, where he would lay her on her back, feet in the air, one booted ankle over each of his shoulders...*

*And then, at last—unable to suppress the groan of pleasure from deep within—he would*

*sink himself inside her.*

*"Oh my Lord," she would cry, "you are so big!"*

*A few shallow thrusts would show him that he could not last long; so, reaching back over his shoulders, he would grasp her ankles and, in turn, bring each foot to his lips.*

*"Ai hiril nín," he moaned, his hand inside his leggings, "oh, sweet life—those little black boots!"*

*"Is that better, my Lord?" she would ask, stroking his hair. "Can you rest now?"*

*That was when he would raise his head and give her his most winning smile. "Rest, hiril nín?" he would say, watching her smile grow as he pushed himself deeper inside her.*

*"We shall not be resting. We have a whole night ahead of us!"*

## Chapter 9: The verdict

**It was frustrating to have to write it all down, but Eowyn knew that Aragorn would not have let her speak, even had she been able. She indicated that she needed more space than her wax tablet provided, and Legolas found her some blank parchment.**

She gathered her thoughts.

*Lady Lessien saw the Mistress of the Ceremony adding extra ingredients to the potion Legolas drank on the first night of the harvest ceremony, she wrote.*

The rest of the company was surprised and concerned—they had not known about the potion.

Legolas held up his hands. "I have been examined by Master Dínendal and appear to be none the worse for it," he said.

*When Legolas and I searched the elleth's chambers, I found a book lying on the floor. It was called Love Potions and some of its pages were missing. I assumed that the murderer had torn it accidentally, or through malice, but now I think that it was what he was looking for.*

"It contained the recipe she used?" asked Fingolfin.

Eowyn nodded. *I think so.*

*I think that Angaráto either bribed or threatened her, and that she agreed to alter the potion.*

"To make Lord Legolas choose Alatáriël," said Fingolfin. "But she did not do it."

*Or it did not work.*

"I think the Valar had a hand in that," said Legolas, squeezing Eowyn's hand.

"Indeed, my lord," agreed Fingolfin.

*Angaráto must have been angry. He must have told her to meet him in the banqueting hall.*

"She may have thought she was safe in a public place," said Aragorn. "But we were all sleeping too heavily to help her."

*He must have lost his temper, because he attacked her with one of the candlesticks.*

*Or perhaps she attacked him?*

"I would not put that past her," said Legolas. "She was strong-willed. She would not have grovelled."

"But in the end he strangled her," said Aragorn. "It must have been a crime of passion, because he took an enormous risk—any one of us could have woken up and seen him. There must have been some noise."

*The servant must have seen him. But why did she not shout for help?*

Then Eowyn wrote rapidly, and Legolas cried out, simultaneously, "The third person!"

"Eowyn and I originally thought there was a third person involved," he explained. "The third person could have attacked the servant and silenced her whilst Angaráto was murdering the Mistress of the Ceremony."

"So," said Aragorn, "we have the start of a convincing case against Angaráto, especially if the servants confirm that he was not in bed at the time of the murder. I would suggest that you arrest him and question him closely, mellon nín," he said to Legolas.

"And his daughter," said Fingolfin.

"Do you think *she* was the third person?" asked Legolas. He had never liked Alatóriël, but he found it hard to imagine her as a murderer.

"I do not know, my lord," said Fingolfin, "but when we questioned her, she appeared to be in a state of shock."

"Captain Golradir—" Legolas began.

"A moment, my lord," said Caranthir. "There is the final part of the rite to consider." He looked around the table, "Would it be too great a risk to wait until after Lord Legolas has performed the rite? We could assign some of the palace guard to watch Angaráto and his daughter until the guests have—er—relaxed, then Captain Golradir could look for an opportunity to arrest them discreetly."

"It is too risky," said Haldir, looking at Eowyn, "he is as slippery as an eel—"

"He will not touch her again, mellon nín," said Legolas, firmly.

"It must be your decision, my lord," said Fingolfin.

"Lord Caranthir is right," said Legolas, after a moment's thought, "we must avoid tainting the rite any further. Do as he suggests, Golradir, but if an opportunity arises to arrest Angaráto quietly, before the banquet, take it. Now I suggest that we all prepare ourselves for this evening."

...

The final part of the Harvest Ceremony began officially at eight o'clock, when Legolas led Eowyn into the banqueting hall. Several of the guests clapped their hands as he seated her on the throne beside his own, at the head of the table.

Angaráto and his daughter were sitting together, at the far end of the table, near the main entrance. *So Golradir did not get the chance to arrest them before the banquet*, Eowyn thought. *I do hope he has guards covering the door*. She looked discreetly round the hall, trying to spot the guards, but they were too well disguised, or they were elsewhere.

Trying to dispel her feelings of anxiety, Eowyn scanned the rest of the guests. They all seemed happy. Several had changed places—a beautiful elleth was now seated next to Gimli, and was gazing at him with unconcealed affection. Elladan and Elrohir had placed an extra chair between them and were entertaining a guest of their own; Eowyn recognised the young woman as Arwen's lady's maid. *Well*, she thought, *they have found themselves a woman, and now they are treating her like a princess!*

"Those orcs," said Legolas. "I had better rescue her—"

"No, my love," said Eowyn, placing a restraining hand on his arm, "I know Richardis. She is a strong, forthright young woman and would not be with them if she did not choose to be. Arwen does not seem concerned. And every woman should have an elven lover—or two—once in her life," she added.

Legolas smiled, and kissed her hand.

"Can you see Captain Golradir's guards?" Eowyn whispered.

"Yes."

"Good, I was beginning to worry."

"Will you have some roasted vegetables, Princess Eowyn?" came a deep, resonant voice from Eowyn's left.

She turned, "Thank you, Prince Imrahil," she said, grateful that Aragorn's soothing draught had restored most of her own voice. Then, because Imrahil always liked to talk, she asked, "Have you visited Eryn Carantaur before?"

"No," he said, with a pointed glance at Legolas, "this is the first time I have been invited."

Eowyn was surprised. *Change the subject*, she thought. "Are you enjoying the festival?"

"It has been most interesting, my lady. Though I was surprised to see *you* taking such a prominent part in it."

"Faramir sent me here alone, Prince Imrahil," said Eowyn, firmly, "knowing much more about the rite than I did. But I must admit, my role has been something of a surprise to me, too." She smiled at the elf on her right, but Legolas was staring straight ahead.

"I believe it is considered a great honour for the husband," said Imrahil. "So let us leave it at that."

Eowyn spent the next hour in pleasant conversation with Imrahil, who was something of a raconteur, but—to her surprise—Legolas resisted all her attempts to draw him into the conversation.

...

As the serving ellith entered the hall bearing dessert, Captain Golradir took the opportunity to slip by unnoticed and report briefly to Legolas: "We have found the scullery maid, Maranwë, my lord."

"Is she alive?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Thank the Valar! Where was she?"

"She had been hidden in one of the caves near Doro Lanthron, my lord. She was blindfolded, and chained to a rock. She says she did not see her attacker clearly, but that he told her he was going to take her back to his estate with him."

"So he was from outside the city. Did she see the murder?"

"I believe so, my lord, though I have not asked her for any details. I thought you would want to question her yourself. With the lady." He indicated Eowyn.

Legolas nodded. "Did he harm her?"

"She has a wound on her head, my lord, but Master Dínendal has examined her and says that she should suffer no lasting harm. And she is tired and hungry; the cook is feeding her now, my lord."

"Thank you, Golradir, this is most welcome news," said Legolas.

And he turned to tell Eowyn, but she was still talking to that ingratiating orc, Imrahil.

...

At length, the meal was over.

The musicians played a fanfare, and Lady Lessien and six attendants carried wooden trays, laden with objects wrapped in brightly coloured gauze, to the centre of the threshing floor.

"It is time to perform the gift-giving, meleth nín," said Legolas to Eowyn.

Starting at the head of the table, the couple greeted each guest in turn and presented him or her with a gift. For the men and elves there were bottles of fragrant port wine; for the dwarves there were stone jugs of mead; and for the ladies there were bottles of perfumed oil, carefully blended from the pressed seeds of local fruits and berries. Eowyn did not think she had ever seen anyone more pleased to receive a gift than Richardis, especially when the twins promised to help her apply the oil.

The couple was so engrossed in the gift-giving that neither of them noticed Alatóriël becoming more and more agitated, and Legolas was taken completely by surprise when, as he handed her the gauze-wrapped bottle, the elleth suddenly slapped him across the face.

"No!" she cried, "No! I will *not* take that from you! You, who should be mine! How dare you choose her? That *woman*? I have seen what happens to them! They shrivel, and their breasts sag, and their teeth fall out! They dry up and they die! They are disgusting! Disgusting!"

"You were supposed to choose me! It was all arranged! But that stupid Mistress of the Ceremony..."

She turned to her father.

"You! You did not pay her enough. I should have known I could not rely on you! You said he would be mine!"

And she picked up a candlestick and lunged at Legolas.

A cry of horror went up from the guests; Haldir rose to his feet; Gimli grasped his axe; Golradir's guards ran forward, but the shieldmaiden was faster than any of them. With a single efficient movement she drew her sword and pressed the point against the elleth's throat, holding her back from Legolas.

"If you ever try to harm my lord again," she said, icily, "I will kill you."

"Captain Golradir," cried Legolas, recovering quickly, "arrest Angaráto and his daughter and keep them under guard. I will deal with them after we have completed the rite."

Angaráto tried to protest his innocence, but Legolas waved him away.

"Now, my friends," he continued, "let us finish the gift-giving and perform the final part of the rite. And let us pray that the Valar still see fit to bless our colony, and do not hold against the rest of us the actions of these two wicked elves."

...

Legolas slid Eowyn's gown off her shoulders. *It will be difficult to make love, he thought, even to her, after what has just happened.*

"My lord," said Lady Lessien, softly, "I have made the potion slightly stronger tonight, to help



you put the unpleasantness behind you."

"Thank you, Lessien," said Legolas, "I could not have chosen a better officiant."

Lessien smiled gratefully. "Repeat after me, my lord..."

...

The guests applauded enthusiastically, then fell to performing their own rites with equal vigour.

*Gods*, thought Legolas, *if she had made it any stronger I would have killed us. And I am still so hard it hurts.*

He turned to Eowyn. She was lying curled beside him and his heart twisted in sudden fear. "Are you all right, meleth nín?" he asked anxiously, "did I hurt you?"

She raised her head; her face was wet with tears.

"I did," he wailed. "I am so sorry, melmenya!"

But she pressed her hand to his mouth and shook her head.

"She is right," she said.

"Who is right, meleth nín?"

"I *will* age, Legolas; I am no longer the young girl I was when we first met, and soon I will age, and my body will shrivel and sag, and you will no longer want to make love to me—"

"Eowyn," he whispered, "since the day we met I have wanted no one but you. I have lain with no one but you." She stared at him; he shook his head. "No, no one in three years, meleth nín. Once an elf gives his heart, he is faithful for eternity."

"Legolas—"

"I do not know the answer, meleth nín. But I do know that it was the Valar who gave you to me. And I trust them to show us the way. We will be happy, melmenya; I know we will."

Eowyn smiled; it was a shaky little smile, but a smile nonetheless.

"Eowyn?"

"Yes?"

"I am sorry, meleth nín, but I need—"

She silenced him with a kiss and a loving caress. "I know, my beloved elf," she whispered, her fingers stroking him gently. "And you did not hurt me before—though you nearly killed me! But," she added, brushing her lips across his ear, "I will gladly risk death with you again..."

...

The following morning, Míriel was sent to the kitchen to order breakfast for ten in Legolas' garden.

The kitchen was buzzing with talk of Lady Eowyn's swordsmanship the night before. Several elves and serving ellith had gathered around Captain Golradir, who was not normally a morning person, to hear in detail how Lady Eowyn had drawn her sword—"She is almost fast enough to join my guards,"—and threatened to kill Alatóriël if she so much as *looked* at Lord Legolas

again. "Then I arrested the pair of them," he added.

"Did you know that Lady Eowyn was such a swordswoman?" asked Feärwen.

"Oh yes," said Míriel. "In fact, I am the one she asked to fetch her sword."

...

Legolas and Eowyn welcomed Aragorn and Arwen, Fingolfin, Caranathir and his wife, Haldir, and Gimli and his young elvish friend, to breakfast in Legolas' garden.

It was pleasant, after the worries of the past two days, to relax and share light-hearted conversation, and the friends were enjoying their meal when Arwen suddenly excused herself and hurried down the stairs. Aragorn rose to follow her, but Eowyn, suspecting the truth, said, "No, Aragorn, let me."

She found Arwen in the bathing room.

"Are congratulations in order?" she asked, smiling.

"Yes," said Arwen and, despite her obvious queasiness, she smiled too.

"I am so happy for you, Arwen."

"Thank you. But please do not tell anyone. I have asked Estel to keep it secret. I am mortal now and the healer at Minas Tirith tells me that things sometimes go wrong in the first three months of a Woman's pregnancy—and though we do not know if that applies to me, if the worst were to happen—well, I would rather no one knew."

"Of course," said Eowyn, sympathetically, "I understand. But may I at least tell Legolas? You are like a sister to him and he will be concerned."

Arwen smiled. "Yes," she said, "but swear him to secrecy."

"Lie down and get some rest," said Eowyn, guiding her to the bed. "You are near the bathing room if you need it and, when breakfast is over, I will send Aragorn to take you back to your own chambers."

"Thank you, Eowyn."

Eowyn climbed back up to the garden.

"The Queen is slightly indisposed," she said.

"Should I send for Master Dínendal?" asked Legolas.

"No, my love, it is not that sort of illness," said Eowyn. And she smiled at Aragorn, and Aragorn smiled back at her.

...

Legolas convened his Inner Council to try Angaráto and Alatóriël, and asked Aragorn to preside. The trial was open to the public, and Eowyn and Gimli sat together at the front of the crowd.

"Master Angaráto," said Aragorn, "you are charged with the murder of the Mistress of the Ceremony, the attempted murder of Lady Eowyn, and a grievous assault on the scullery maid, Maranwë. How do you plead?"

"Not guilty," said Angarátó.

"Alatáriël, daughter of Angarátó, you are charged with being an accessory to the murder of the Mistress of the Ceremony, an accessory to the attempted murder of Lady Eowyn, an accessory to the grievous assault on the scullery maid Maranwë, and with an attempted assault on Lord Legolas. How do you plead?"

The elleth said nothing.

"You must answer the charges," said Aragorn. "How do you plead?"

"She is not guilty," said Angarátó.

"She must plead herself."

Angarátó gently shook his daughter and she mumbled something unintelligible. Aragorn decided to proceed.

"Call the first witness," he said.

Lady Lessien described seeing the Mistress of the Ceremony adding extra ingredients to the Celebrant's Potion.

The healer, Master Dínendal, described examining the book found in the Mistress of the Ceremony's chamber. Though the page containing the recipe had been torn out, Dínendal had found enough information in the appendices to work out the effect the potion had been intended to have.

"The potion Lady Lessien told us about was, in fact, one half of a pair of potions," he explained. "One is given to the lady, and—by some mechanism I do not understand, your Majesty—is intended to make her attractive to the celebrant.

"The Celebrant's Potion is adulterated with *uil* fronds to harness his sea longing, *aeglos* root to intensify his visions, and a large quantity of ground *alfirin* petal, which counteracts the soporific effects of the *aeglos* root."

"So the two potions were intended to ensure that Lord Legolas chose a particular lady?" asked Aragorn.

"Yes, your Majesty," said Dínendal.

"But it does not appear to have been successful."

"No, your Majesty. As I say, I do not understand the mechanism by which the attraction is supposed to work. It is magic rather than healing. But perhaps the potion was not given to the elleth."

"Thank you, Master Dínendal."

Next, Maranwë was brought into the courtroom, and one of Golradir's guards ushered her to the witness seat. The crowd gasped when they saw the bandage around her head.

Aragorn tried to put her at her ease: "Good morning, Maranwë, we all hope you are feeling better."

"Thank you, your Majesty," said Maranwë, without a trace of nerves.

"Please tell the Council what you saw just before you were attacked."

Maranwë nodded. "I was running past the banqueting hall—I was late—and, as I passed the main entrance, something caught my eye and I looked in. The Mistress of the Ceremony was sitting by the table, facing the entrance—she was looking straight at me. I saw an elleth behind her take up a candlestick and swing it towards her head, and I tried to shout. But someone hit me and I woke up blindfolded in the cave."

"Can you describe the elleth who used the candlestick?" asked Aragorn.

"I did not see her face properly, your Majesty, but she was wearing a bright blue gown. It was beautiful,"—Maranwë illustrated her description with her hands—"with the neck scooped very low, and silver beads down the front, and the skirt was full, and almost transparent—"

"Alatáriël," murmured some of the crowd.

"You say your captor kept you blindfolded. Can you tell us anything about him?"

"Yes, your Majesty. He smelled fishy."

Aragorn looked surprised. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, your Majesty. I scrub dishes; I know the smell of fish."

"Thank you, Maranwë."

Next, Gelmir described waking up and seeing an elf throwing an elleth over his shoulder and carrying her away.

"Do you see the elleth in the court room?" asked Aragorn.

"Yes, your Majesty." He pointed to Maranwë.

"Do you see the elf?"

Gelmir hesitated. "I cannot be sure, your Majesty."

Then Eowyn described how she had been attacked, the morning after she had begun helping Legolas investigate the murder. She explained that she had not seen her attacker's face but that he had a distinctive smell, which she had not recognised at the time.

Haldir described disturbing the elf as he attacked Eowyn. "He was wearing a cloak with a hood pulled down over his face, but he was average height, quite heavily built, agile." He described the bootlace that had been tied around Eowyn's neck and its metal fobs.

Finally, Lord Fingolfin recounted questioning Angaráto and described his riding jerkin with its metal fobs and its fish oil waterproofing.

When all the evidence had been given, Aragorn asked Angaráto if he had anything to say in his own defence. For a moment, it looked as though Angaráto might protest his innocence. But then he put his arm around Alatáriël's shoulders. "My daughter is innocent," he said, "any guilt is mine."

Alatáriël was asked the same question, but did not respond at all.

Aragorn turned to Legolas and his three counsellors.

"My lords, you have heard all the evidence," he said. "How do you find Angaráto?"

"Guilty," said Finwë.

**My bow shall sing with your sword**

"Guilty," said Fingolfin.

"Guilty," said Caranthir.

Legolas nodded. "Guilty," he said.

"How do you find Alatóriël?"

"Guilty."

"Guilty."

"Guilty."

"Yes, guilty," agreed Legolas.

"We may never know exactly what happened," said Aragorn, summing up. "I suspect that after Alatóriël attacked the Mistress of the Ceremony with the candlestick, Angarátó was forced to silence her. And he kidnapped Maranwë to keep her quiet, too. But I think he attacked Lady Eowyn to appease his daughter. And perhaps they thought that, with his lady gone, Lord Legolas would be forced to choose another.

"Angarátó and Alatóriël," he said, "you will be kept in confinement until the Council of Eryn Carantaur has decided on your punishment.

"The trial is now ended."

...

### **Several days later**

It was a cool, crisp autumn morning.

"The weather has changed," said Eowyn as they walked down the main stairway and towards the stables. "It will soon be winter."

"Yes, *melmenya*," said Legolas. "Soon the nights will be drawing in, and you will need someone to warm your bed and keep you safe in the dark."

Eowyn smiled. "Do you know anyone who might do that for me? Perhaps Captain Golradir could assign me one of his guards—*agh!*"

Legolas had punished her by slipping his arm around her waist and squeezing, and they both laughed.

When they reached the stables, Aragorn, Arwen and their retinue were almost ready to depart. Eowyn had travelled to Eryn Carantaur with them and, although she had no doubts about staying with Legolas, she felt a small twinge of regret that she would be saying goodbye to her friends.

"Farewell, *mellon nín*," said Legolas to Aragorn. "And thank you again for everything you have done both for Eryn Carantaur and for me—especially," he added, glancing at Eowyn, "for restoring my lady to health."

Aragorn shook his head. "It was my pleasure," he replied. "And do not forget that Arwen and I expect you both at Minas Tirith to celebrate Yule." He leaned closer to Legolas. "I apologise, *mellon nín*, for my earlier disapproval. She is happier with you than I have ever seen her."

"You still care for her," said Legolas, softly, and Aragorn smiled. "Rest assured, Aragorn, I will

take good care of her."

"As she will of you, my friend," replied Aragorn. "Your people already love her and she makes a fine elven queen! I pray that you will reach your agreement with Faramir, and that all three of you will find the happiness you deserve. In the meantime, you have my support in this."

Legolas placed his hand on his heart and bowed his head in a formal gesture of thanks, but Aragorn embraced his friend and slapped his back, Man-fashion, and the two smiled at each other, warmly.

"Good bye," said Eowyn to Aragorn.

"Good bye, Eowyn, take good care of him."

Eowyn smiled. "I shall."

Then the couple said their goodbyes to Arwen, and the twins, and the great procession set off along the road out of Eryn Carantaur, with four soldiers in the vanguard, followed by Aragorn riding Hasufel, and Arwen on her pretty elven horse.

"Should she be riding in her condition?" asked Legolas.

"*Shhhh*," replied Eowyn.

Next, came Elladan and Elrohir, with Richardis riding between them.

*That, thought Eowyn, will raise some eyebrows in Minas Tirith!*

And, finally, came the remainder of the Gondorian Guard, their armour shining, and their pennants fluttering in the light breeze.

Legolas and Eowyn watched the procession until it disappeared.

"Any regrets, meleth nín?" asked Legolas.

"None at all," she replied.

And hand-in-hand they walked back to the main staircase.

...

Shortly after the King and Queen of Gondor's procession had left, Arafinwë, the farmer from Doro Lanthron, his wife, Amarië, and the couple's daughter, Eámanë, also set off for home.

"Thank you, Lord Gimli," said Arafinwë, "for dealing with that—that matter for me." He was referring to Angarátó's 'protection'. "My neighbours and I will always be honoured to offer you hospitality, my lord, whenever you are in the neighbourhood of Doro Lanthron.

"And there is a certain young lady," he added, "who will be very disappointed if we do not see you soon, my lord."

Eámanë bent, and tenderly kissed Gimli on the forehead, then mounted her pony and set off with her parents. Gimli watched the family until they reached the bend in the road, returning the elleth's wave as she disappeared behind the trees.

*She is fair, thought Gimli, and gentle and good, and perhaps if I had never seen Lady Galadriel I might have spent the rest of my days with her.*

And he walked sadly back to the main staircase.

...

Eowyn glanced at herself in the full-length mirror. She was dressed for travel, in leggings and boots and a green suede jerkin she had borrowed from Lord Lenwë's son.

*I look like a short Legolas! she thought.*

She had come to her former chamber to pick up a few items for the journey to North Ithilien, whilst Legolas was getting the horses ready.

She took her hunting knife, a pair of gloves, a spare shift, a box of toothpowder and—though she knew it was foolish—the small jar of soothing salve that Legolas had given her when she had first arrived, slipped them into her travelling pack, slung it across her shoulders, and ran out onto the walkway and down the main staircase to join Legolas.

But, as she reached the stable, she heard something that made her stop, and step back into the shadow of the stable door.

"What did you think you were doing last night?"

"I was exchanging pleasantries with your lady." Eowyn recognised the deep, resonant voice of Prince Imrahil. "She is beautiful, clever, and a charming companion at dinner—"

"Stay away from her," said Legolas.

"Legolas—"

"DO NOT TOUCH ME!"

"I am sorry."

"Just what do you plan to tell her?"

"Tell her? Why would I tell her anything?"

"If you try to turn her against me, I swear I will kill you!"

Eowyn gasped, then clamped her hand over her mouth, guiltily.

"Wait, Legolas!" cried Imrahil.

But Legolas came striding out of the stable door and, not noticing Eowyn, walked angrily into the forest.

...

"Legolas?"

She had followed him, cautiously, into a clearing, not far from the stables.

He was sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, his head buried in his hands but, at the sound of her voice, his head shot up and he smiled... and Eowyn had never seen such relief on a face!

"Eowyn nín," he whispered, and stretched his arms out to her.

Eowyn did not hesitate for a second—not for one *fraction* of one second. She wrapped her arms around him and crushed him against her body.

Whatever had upset him—whatever had really passed between him and Imrahil—she could

**My bow shall sing with your sword**

trust him. She knew that. And she knew that he would tell her everything, as soon as he was ready.

\*\*\*\*\*



### Extra scene: The mysterious serving elf

#### It was to be their first real night together.

Legolas had had Eowyn's luggage moved into his chambers and they had spent a delightful evening installing her belongings in his elegant bedroom, hanging her gowns in the wardrobe—"This green one will have to go, melmenya, it does not suit you,"—folding her undergarments—with much laughing and teasing—and adding them to his own in the linen chest; arranging her combs, and her perfumes, and her jars of salve on the dressing table.

"You may soon regret asking me to move into your chambers with you," said Eowyn, glancing round, "for I am not nearly so neat as you are. I shall annoy you with my untidy ways, just as I annoyed—" She broke off, biting her lip, and looked at him anxiously.

But Legolas did not seem to have noticed that she had almost mentioned her husband. Instead he pulled her into his arms, laughing. "You will *never* annoy me, melmenya!" He kissed her forehead. "Would you like a drink? Some wine?"

"Mmm; thank you."

"Wait here." He disappeared into the sitting room.

Eowyn, resting on the bed, ran her fingers over a large, flat, ornately carved box lying on the nightstand. *Beautiful*, she thought. She picked it up. *I wonder if there is anything inside...* She unfastened the catch and opened it. "Oh!"

"Here you are—this is one of my father's best vint—" Legolas stopped in mid stride, one hand outstretched. "I see you have found my guilty secret," he said.

"It is just like the portrait that Faramir had painted of me."

"It is an exact copy, melmenya, also by Master Halmir. I wanted a copy of you, here, with me." He placed the goblets on the nightstand. "But now that I have the original, she, poor lady, must live elsewhere." Gently, he took the painting from her, closed and fastened the box, and placed it on a shelf at the top of the wardrobe.

He sat down beside her. "You do not mind, do you, melmenya?"

"Mind? No, of course not. It is just that I did not know, Legolas. And I am sorry."

"For what?"

"For not recognising your feelings earlier—in the past."

Legolas smiled. "The past does not matter any more, melmenya. Here." He handed her a glass of wine. "To us. To our *future*."

Eowyn touched her glass to his and took a sip. Then she gazed into the ruby liquid, suddenly reminded of something that had troubled her when she had heard Master Dínendal giving his evidence, earlier that day. "Legolas..."

"Mmmm?"

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course, melmenya."

"The wine you sent me, at the banquet on that first night—was it the potion that the Mistress of the Ceremony prepared? The one that was supposed to make you choose Alatóriël?"

"Wine, melmenya? What wine?"

"The goblet of wine you sent me, just before the rite began."

"I did not send you any wine, melmenya."

"But the serving elf told me that it was from you—I would not have drunk it otherwise, for it tasted strange." She thought for a moment. "He said, 'Lord Legolas asks you to drink it.'"

Legolas stroked a strand of hair from her face. "What did it taste like?" he asked.

"Salty. And it was strong. *Very* strong. It..." She smiled. "It had a very swift and noticeable effect on—er—certain parts." Her smile broadened into a grin.

Legolas kissed her nose. "I shall have to have a word with this servant who gave my lady a dangerous potion, claiming to do so on my behalf. What did he look like?"

"He was an elf."

"That is not much help, melmenya."

"I did not see him clearly; I would not recognise him again. And no one else saw him—at least, they said they did not. At the time, I thought it might be Arwen—well, her brothers—playing tricks on me." She turned to face him, fired by a sudden thought. "You do not think—you do not think that the Mistress of the Ceremony intended it for Alatóriël, but the serving elf gave it to me by mistake?"

"If that is what happened, melmenya," he said, kissing her tenderly, "I think the Valar had a hand in it. But we may never know." He kissed her again. "What I *do* know, though, is that it would have taken more than a love potion to make Alatóriël attractive to *me*."

Eowyn laughed.

Grinning, Legolas lowered her onto the bed, and lay between her legs, and kissed her with increasing urgency...

Eowyn pulled him close. "Legolas... Did you look at my portrait when you..." She whispered the rest in his ear.

Legolas laughed. "Of course, melmenya."

## Chapter 10: Faramir

### **It had taken five days to reach North Ithilien on horseback.**

Eowyn had spent the days riding by Legolas' side, and the nights sleeping, safe and secure, in his arms. It had been blissful. But now Caras Arnen, the City on the Hills, was looming on the horizon.

*It no longer feels like my home, thought Eowyn, and, compared to Eryn Carantaur, it is dark and dismal.*

Though she knew that Faramir was as unhappy in their marriage as she was, she also knew that the reasons for their unhappiness must remain a secret forever.

*So finding a public solution to this problem, she thought, will be difficult. And finding a private solution may expose raw wounds and cause pain.*

*But how much harder would it be if Faramir and I had children—*

"What are you thinking about, meleth nín?" asked Legolas, clearly concerned by her sudden silence.

"I am thinking that I will do anything, accept any terms, to be with you," she said, gravely.

"It will not come to that, meleth nín," he said. "Trust the Valar."

...

The gatekeeper hurried to greet the two elves riding up to the barbican. He had recognised Lord Legolas immediately—for *he* was a regular visitor to Caras Arnen—but the other elf was a newcomer. *And small for an elf*, he thought.

"Good evening, Lord Legolas," he said, bowing deeply. "Good evening, my lo—oh, my lady!"

And the gatekeeper stood, open-mouthed, as the two travellers bowed courteously from horseback and passed through the barbican, through the gatehouse, and into the City on the Hills.

...

The reaction of the Palace Guard was similar, but more respectful, since the soldiers genuinely loved and admired their princess. Eowyn and Legolas were escorted with proper ceremony into the main entrance hall, arriving just as Faramir strode down the wide staircase to greet them.

"So," he said, looking from his wife to Legolas and back again, "I was right to send you."

"Yes, Faramir," replied Eowyn.

"Come into my study," he said, "we three need to talk."

...

Faramir's study was a large, comfortable room on the first floor, lined with books and filled with the day-to-day clutter of rule. Eowyn had spent many happy hours there, discussing civil and military matters with Faramir and his advisors, and working on her orc map.

*I will miss this room, she thought. And I will miss him. He has been my best friend. And for some people that would have been enough.*

**My bow shall sing with your sword**

*But not for me.*

*And not for him.*

"So," said Faramir, "what are we going to do?"

"I assume," said Legolas, "that you do not object to Eowyn's coming to live with me as my wife?"

Faramir shook his head. "I want her to be happy."

Legolas nodded, solemnly. "Then we need to make a series of decisions," he said. "First, you must decide whether you want your marriage officially dissolved or whether you want your separation kept secret.

"In the former case," he continued, "Aragorn has already pledged us his support and, assuming that it is legally possible, will no doubt dissolve the marriage by decree. But, in that case, it may be necessary to provide him with a *reason*," he added, tactfully.

*He has thought about this a great deal*, thought Eowyn.

"If you wish to keep your separation secret, then we need only think of some reason why Eowyn must move to the forest—for her health, for example. My people will know that she is living as my wife, but it will not concern them since the marriage of Men is so different from our customs, we elves do not recognise it as binding.

"But visitors to Eryn Carantaur may be shocked by it—and may gossip on their return to the world of Men. And that would trouble me greatly, for I would not want Eowyn vilified by strangers."

Faramir nodded.

"What do you have to say, *meleth nín*?" asked Legolas.

"I would prefer for our marriage to be dissolved honourably," said Eowyn to Faramir, "so that Legolas and I might return freely to Caras Arnen in the future—for we would miss your friendship, Faramir." Faramir smiled. "But if that is not possible," she continued, "I will accept whatever arrangement you prefer, so long as I can remain with Legolas."

Faramir rose, and walked to the window, where he stood for a few moments, deep in thought. Then he said, "For some time now, a solution has been forming itself in my mind.

"I knew of your love for one another, of course, just as you, my dear, knew of my love for,"—he hesitated—"for *him*," he said. "And I realised that neither of you knew of the other's feelings. Perhaps I should have said something sooner, but—instead—I sent Eowyn to Eryn Carantaur for the Harvest Ceremony, and you seem to have worked it out between you."

"By the grace of the Valar," said Legolas.

Faramir nodded.

"As you know, the Prince of Ithilien needs a wife and an heir. In Caras Arnen," he said, "there is a widowed lady of noble birth with two fine young sons—"

"Sieglinde," said Eowyn.

"Yes, my dear. She—she, like me, suffers a forbidden love. And she would be willing to enter into a marriage of convenience with me. I would adopt her sons and they would become my

heirs, but we would both live separate lives, though behaving with discretion."

"But would that truly make you happy, Faramir?" asked Eowyn, passionately. She was genuinely concerned for him.

Legolas took her hand and squeezed it gently.

Faramir smiled. "He and I can never live openly, Eowyn. So, yes, I think this arrangement would make me happy."

The three were silent for a while. Then Legolas said, "But we still need to provide Aragorn with a reason why your marriage should be dissolved."

"You can say that I am barren," said Eowyn, suddenly. Legolas and Faramir both turned to her in surprise. "You can say that our marriage would never have produced an heir—which is the truth," she added.

"Melmenya..." Legolas began, for he could not bear that anyone should think Eowyn less than perfect.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because, in the future, you and Legolas may want a child," said Faramir.

"Ah, but then we would just say that elves are more potent than men," she said, smiling.

...

Faramir began drafting a letter to Aragorn, requesting that the King of Gondor issue a royal decree dissolving the marriage between himself and Princess Eowyn.

The three friends worked carefully on the wording, for though Aragorn did not know of Faramir's love for another, and could not be told in an official letter, Faramir was loath to deceive his friend.

At length, the letter was completed and a messenger was sent from Caras Arnen to Minas Tirith.

And then Eowyn and Legolas spent almost two weeks in the City on the Hills, waiting anxiously for Aragorn's response.

...

Legolas sat on the windowsill of his bedchamber, his legs dangling two storeys above the ground.

Autumn was already shading into winter and, as Legolas savoured the cool, misty, Eryn Arnen day, the slight chill filled him with a longing to begin the journey home. He would take Eowyn back along the eastern bank of the Anduin, where she would see the great falls to the south of Eryn Arnen. And they would spend a night in the shallow cave behind the waterfall—which Gimli, bless him, had discovered—watching the stars sparkling through the curtain of water.

He smiled. *She will love that.*

*Then we will wait for Gimli where the Anduin joined the Erui, and all return to Eryn Carantaur in time for the first tasting of this year's wine.*

If only that decree would arrive!

It was not that their stay in the City on the Hills was unpleasant. Faramir was an excellent host. During the day, the three of them—sometimes the four of them—spent their free hours talking or riding or entertaining guests. And at night, Faramir had tactfully arranged it so that Legolas and Eowyn could be together.

The nights! Legolas felt a deep throb of physical pleasure recalling the nights!

But, the longer they stayed, the more he became aware of the depth of Eowyn's feelings for Faramir. *She is so fond of him, he thought, that it will break her heart to leave him—and all the other people she loves here. In Caras Arnen she is a Princess of Men.*

*But I know it would break her heart to lose me, too. And she is so happy in Eryn Carantaur—there she is a creature of the forest, my Elven Queen.*

*If only we had not needed to come here...*

He heard the chamber door behind him open and close, and a familiar voice sigh deeply. Then it said, "Legolas, what are you doing? You will break your neck!"

Legolas laughed. "I am an elf, meleth nín, so no, I will not break my neck. And I am looking out of the window."

After a few seconds' silence she said, "Can I look out of the window too?"

*By the two trees, he thought, I love her. She has the spirit of an elf.*

He helped her climb up beside him, holding her firmly, for her balance was not so sure as his.

"Thank you—goodness, I did not realise it was such a long way down!" After a moment she managed to relax a little. "Things do look different from out here," she said.

He hugged her.

"What was the sigh for, meleth nín?" he asked.

"The sigh? Oh, I just—I just want to go home."

"Home?"

"I miss our garden, Legolas," she said. "I miss the trees."

For a moment he thought his heart might burst. "So do I, meleth nín; so do I, my darling."

...

At dawn on the eleventh day, the messenger returned from Minas Tirith.

Faramir tactfully went to Legolas' chamber himself, and knocked at the door. The elf appeared immediately, wearing a long white night shirt and looking, Faramir thought, surprisingly dishevelled.

"It has arrived," he said. "I have not opened it. I suggest you and Eowyn come to my study as soon as possible."

Legolas nodded and closed the door.

...

The three friends stood side by side, staring at Faramir's desk. Lying upon it, sealed in a red

leather dispatch bag, was Aragorn's reply.

"Open it, Faramir," said Eowyn, shakily.

Faramir nodded. He reached for the leather bag—his movements clumsy with nerves—broke the official seal, unbuckled the strap, and opened it.

Eowyn sat down, heavily. Legolas put his hand upon her shoulder.

"There is a letter," said Faramir. "And there is a royal decree."

Legolas sighed with relief. "That must be a good sign," he said, "surely."

Faramir nodded "I think so..." He broke the seal on the decree and unrolled it. It was a beautiful document, headed with a large illuminated panel depicting the White Tree of Gondor, its details picked out in gold leaf. Beneath the panel were the words that would seal their fates, written a formal, flowing, hand.

Faramir scanned the document, ignoring the long-winded preamble and read out Aragorn's judgement:

*Elessar Telcontar, Aragorn Arathornion, Edhelharn, King of Gondor and Lord of the Westlands, decrees that the marriage of Faramir, son of Denethor, Prince of Ithilien, and Eowyn, daughter of Eomund, Princess of Rohan, is dissolved.*

*The grounds for this dissolution have been made known to us, and we have judged them sufficient, but they are not to be made public.*

*The dissolution will become law on the third reading of this decree.*

*The two parties may thereafter live as befits their unmarried state.*

With a cry of joy, Legolas lifted Eowyn off the chair and whirled her round and round the room. And Faramir's secretary stepped out from the shadow by the window and embraced his lord.

...

Aragorn's letter was as personal as his decree had been impersonal.

*My dear friends,*

*Legolas assured me that you would not oppose his choice of Eowyn, Faramir, but I confess I doubted him—I am sorry mellon nín, I see now that you were right.*

*I cannot say I understand your motives, Faramir, but I sincerely hope that you will be as happy in your new life as I know Legolas and Eowyn are in theirs.*

*When she heard the news, Arwen, who knows so much more about these things than I do, said that the heart does not always know its true nature until it is tested, and that life should not deny us the chance to correct our past mistakes. I pass her words on to you with all my best wishes.*

*And now I remind you that you have all three promised to spend Yule here with us in Minas Tirith. And I look forward to seeing you then.*

*Stay friends, my friends,*

*Aragorn*

...

There had been rumours that Prince Faramir was about to make an important announcement, and a large crowd had gathered in the Palace Square.

At exactly ten o'clock, the Chief Herald appeared on the palace steps. He waited until the bell ringers had finished ringing the hour, then he stepped forward, unrolled the decree and read out its contents in a loud voice.

The crowd was restive and chattered through the long preamble, but fell silent when they heard:

*...decrees that the marriage of Faramir, son of Denethor, Prince of Ithilien, and Eowyn, daughter of Eomund, Princess of Rohan, is dissolved...*

The crowd was stunned.

...

Everyone in the tavern had heard the Chief Herald read King Elessar's decree a second time that morning.

"One more reading," said the landlord of *The Sparking Clog*, "and the poor lady will be out on her ear."

"Who says that the lady's to blame?" asked the barmaid.

"I'm not saying she's to blame, Rosie, I'm saying it's always the lady that suffers," he replied, philosophically.

"I have heard," said one of the regulars, "that the lady is being sent away to live with the elves. And that's why old Leglass has been staying at the palace. He's to take her off to his woodland realm, as soon as the decree's law."

"Why?" asked Rosie.

"So she's never seen again."

"You've got it all wrong," said a voice by the door. The patrons of *The Sparking Clog* moved aside to allow a tall man in palace livery to come closer to the bar. "I heard it from my Bronwyn, who heard it from her friend Aileen, who was scrubbing the floor outside Prince Faramir's study the night it was all decided. The marriage has been dissolved because the Princess is barren, and Prince Faramir needs an heir. He will marry again, and soon, you mark my words—though he still loves the Princess," he added.

"Well, who would not?" asked Rosie. "A beautiful lady, so kind to the poor and sick, and always so well-dressed."

"But why is she going to live with old Leglass?" asked the landlord.

"Because *he* can get her with child," said the palace servant.

"You just said she was barren," protested Rosie.

"Ah, yes," said the servant, "but elf seed's much stronger than men's, so Leg-o-lass can father a child on anyone," he said.

His audience was suitably impressed.



...

*Just fifteen more minutes*, thought Legolas. *Fifteen minutes, and Eowyn is free.*

*And I can take her home.*

He was standing by the window of Faramir's study, which commanded a good view of the palace steps, waiting to hear the decree read out for the last time. He heard the door open and, assuming it was his lady, turned round smiling. But it was Faramir.

"Eowyn is not here?" Faramir asked, glancing around the room.

"No," said Legolas, "she is packing a few belongings to take back to Eryn Carantaur with us, but I am expecting her to join me at any moment."

"Then I must be quick," said Faramir.

He pulled a chair to the window and sat astride it.

"I do not doubt your love for Eowyn, Legolas, nor hers for you," he began. "Things did not work out between us as husband and wife, but I still love her. She is my dearest friend."

Legolas nodded. "I know," he said.

"And there is something that worries me..." His voice trailed off.

"Yes, *mellon nín*?" Legolas prompted, after a long silence.

"Immortality," said Faramir, softly.

"Ah."

"You must have thought about this already, I know, but I cannot see any solution," said Faramir. "She will age whilst you remain unchanged, then she will die and you will be left alone—or perhaps die of grief. And we do not know if you will meet again, if you both die."

"No."

"I know that you would never deliberately hurt her, Legolas, but—still—I worry about her, and about you, too, my friend—and yet your union feels right to me."

Legolas put his hands on Faramir's shoulders. "I can only tell you what I told her, Faramir: I have no answer, except to trust the Valar. *You* sent her to me at Eryn Carantaur but, when the time came for me to choose my lady, it was *they* who made her shine like Ithil; it was *they* who gave me a mortal love.

"I could have disobeyed them and chosen an elleth. But I accepted her willingly because she was my heart's own choice. And I was already bound to her, Faramir. I have been bound to her since the first moment I saw her, in the Golden Hall at Edoras.

"I will never forsake her, *mellon nín*, for though her body may lose some of its bloom, and her hair may lose its colour, she will always be my Eowyn. And I will willingly remain faithful to her throughout eternity. For me there is no choice."

Faramir rose from the chair and embraced his friend.

Moments later, Eowyn entered the study. "Goodness," she said, seeing the sadness lingering in both pairs of eyes, "I thought we would all be happy today."

"We will be, meleth nín," said Legolas, "we will all be very happy."

...

At dawn the following morning, having said their goodbyes, Eowyn and Legolas at last set out for Eryn Carantaur, and began winding their way slowly through the foothills of Emyrn Arnen, towards the eastern bank of the Anduin.

"You are quiet, melmenya," said Legolas, softly.

It pained him to see her hesitate to answer, and her expression told him she that was unsure whether she should share her present thoughts with him. "I know that you will miss him, Eowyn," he said, gently.

"I love you, Legolas," said Eowyn, vehemently. "I have been looking for you all my life,"—she hesitated again— "but—"

"I know, meleth nín," he said. "It does not stop you loving Faramir—like a brother."

"Something like a brother, yes," she agreed. Then she smiled. "You always seem to know what I am thinking and feeling."

Legolas reached over and squeezed her hand, and she smiled again, gratefully. But, after a few minutes, she added, "Why does life have to be so cruel, Legolas? Faramir is a good man. Why should the love he shares be frowned upon? It is not so amongst your people."

"No, meleth nín, it is not—"

"I wish he could have come home with us, Legolas," she said. "At Eryn Carantaur they could live together openly. They could be as happy as we are."

"We will invite him, melmenya. And one day, when his heirs have grown to manhood, and Faramir feels that he has discharged his duty to North Ithilien and can safely hand it to his sons for safe-keeping—then, perhaps, he and his love can come and live with us."

"Thank you," she whispered, and Legolas thought her smile the most precious thing he had ever been given.

"Would you like to stop for a while, meleth nín," he asked, for he suddenly wanted to hold her, "or would you prefer to press on until we reach the falls?"

"How long will it take to reach the falls?" she asked.

"Another five or six hours, if all goes well."

"I would like to see the falls," she said. "And if we reach them by three o'clock, it will still be light."

Legolas smiled. "Then let us continue, meleth nín. And," he added, "I have a surprise for you when we get there."

...

Legolas set the horses free to graze.

Eowyn was standing by the river's edge, gazing up at the great sheet of falling water. "Look, Legolas," she said, pointing to the sky above the wide arc of the waterfall, "a rainbow!"

Legolas laughed. "I know, melmenya. Every waterfall seems to have its own rainbow."

"Why?"

"I do not know."

"Can we go closer?"

Legolas took her by the hand and led her towards the falls but, instead of staying by the water's edge, the path they were following drew them away from the main cataract.

"Where are we going?" Eowyn shouted, above the sound of rushing water.

"It is a surprise," Legolas shouted back.

The path ended at a vertical rock face.

"*Here?*" she asked. It was cold and wet, drenched by spray from the waterfall.

"No meleth nín, follow me."

There was a narrow chimney running upward through the rock face; Legolas stepped into the recess and began to climb effortlessly.

Eowyn watched him with increasing horror. "Legolas!" she yelled. "You elves are as sure-footed as mountain goats, but we women are not."

"I am sorry, Eowyn nín. Come here." He reached down, took her hand and helped her climb up beside him.

But, although it was a relief to be in the shelter of the rock chimney, where it was drier and quieter, Eowyn had no experience of climbing, and could not see a way up; she wiped her clammy hands on her tunic. *Well, she thought, you always wanted your lover to treat you as an equal. But maybe you should not have chosen an elf...*

"Now," said Legolas, "see that small ledge, there? Put your right hand on it—now put your left hand here—and your right foot here—and pull yourself up."

"I will fall!"

"No, Eowyn nín, I will not let you fall—that is it. Now, put your left hand here..."

Slowly Eowyn began to climb the chimney. "How much further is it?" she asked. It was obvious that she was afraid—and tired—in spite of her efforts to hide it, and her breathing was becoming laboured.

"Just a few more feet, Eowyn nín."

"How will I ever get down again?"

"I will carry you."

"Why could you not have carried me up as well?"

Legolas laughed. "Because you will appreciate it so much more having climbed up yourself, melmenya," he said.

"Have I ever told you how infuriating you can be?" she asked, her fear expressing itself as anger.

"No, melmenya, you have not." And he was genuinely surprised, now he thought about it, that

she had never said it before. "But I should think I can look forward to many years of hearing it, Eowyn nín."

"You must be feeling very guilty, Legolas," she said, pausing to catch her breath, "because you only call me 'Eowyn nín' when you are feeling guilty, and you have called me—oh! Legolas! Look! There is a cave!"

"I know, Eowyn nín. Can you get into it?"

"I will try."

The cave was in reality a narrow tunnel, disappearing into the rock face. Eowyn hauled her upper body into it, then shuffled forward and, for a terrifying moment, her legs dangled unsupported... But Legolas put his hands around her hips and held her safe until she managed to get a firm hold on a ridge in the rock and pull herself inside. The tunnel ran from the chimney towards the waterfall and, as Eowyn crawled along it, she found that it widened out until it joined a broad ledge spanning the full width of the main cataract.

"We are behind the waterfall!" she whispered.

"I know, meleth nín," said Legolas. He wrapped his arms round her and hugged her, laughing. "My brave shieldmaiden!" he said. "Come..."

He led her to the very back of the ledge, where the spray did not reach, rolled out their bedrolls, and set her comfortably against the back wall of the cave. Then he took from his pack the food he had brought specially for this adventure: cheese, fresh bread, a bottle of elderflower champagne, and a small box of sweetmeats he had bought from the market in Caras Arnen.

"Do you want to eat now," he asked, "or later?"

Eowyn stretched out her arms to him.

...

"Legolas?" she said, sleepily.

"Yes, meleth nín?"

"Promise me that you will carry me down..."

**THE END**

## Epilogue

### Legolas had been restless all day.

It was two weeks since they had returned from North Ithilien.

For two happy, noisy weeks, full of fun and laughter, Legolas and Gimli had recounted—with some exaggeration—their past adventures to Eowyn; and Legolas had proudly boasted of Eowyn's accomplishments—including her orc map—to Gimli, and of Gimli's accomplishments to Eowyn; and all three friends had merrily made plans for future adventures together.

But Gimli had left for Aglarond that morning and, even though he had promised to see them at Minas Tirith for the Yuletide celebrations, just three months hence, Legolas was already missing him.

Two hours after Gimli's departure Eowyn had found him pacing up and down the walkway outside their chambers.

Three hours after Gimli's departure she could not find him at all.

Five hours after Gimli's departure she was still looking.

She had tried his study, but the uncharacteristic clutter there had told her that he had last been in it with Gimli. She had climbed down the main staircase and tried the stables, but none of the grooms had seen him, and Arod, Brightstar and her new elven horse, Vanyasul, were all standing quietly in their stalls. She had walked to the archery practice field, where Haldir was putting a group of his border guards through their paces, but Haldir had not seen him. She had called on Lord Fingolfin, on Lord Caranthir and on Lady Lessien, but none of them had seen him, either.

And she had just decided to wait for him in their private chambers when she heard something that made her heart stand still.

*To the Sea, to the Sea! The white gulls are crying  
The wind is blowing, and the white foam is flying  
West, west away, the round sun is falling.*

He was singing in the common tongue—which did not strike her as strange until much later—but the melody was pure elven, each note like a bead of liquid gold suspended on a silken thread. It was so beautiful that Eowyn's eyes filled with tears, and her throat burned, to hear it.

*Grey ship, grey ship, do you hear them calling  
The voices of my people that have gone before me?  
I will leave, I will leave the woods that bore me—*

*Oh gods, NO!* Eowyn lifted her skirts and ran: up the staircase to Legolas' garden, across the flet—knocking over the chairs in her hurry—to the very furthest corner, then up a tiny, concealed staircase and onto the sea-flet.

And there he was: standing on the top of the low flet-wall, reaching out towards the sea, singing:

*For our days are ending and our years failing  
I will pass the wide waters lonely sailing*

What should she do?

"Legolas?" she called softly. But he did not hear her.

*Long are the waves on the Last Shore falling,  
Sweet are the voices in the Lost Isle calling,  
In Eressea, in Elvenhome that no man can discover,  
Where the leaves fall not: land of my people for ever!*

Could she draw his attention without distressing him further? Might he fall? And if he did,  
*Could even an elf survive a fall from this height?*

"Legolas," she whispered again, her heart breaking.

And then a miracle happened.

He turned, and he saw her, and the expression on his face was rapturous. "Come, Eowyn; come and look." He stretched out his hand.

She ran to the flet-wall and—forgetting her terror of heights—she scrambled onto it and stood beside him. And her heart leaped with joy when he wrapped a strong arm around her.

"Are you leaving, my love?" she asked, softly. He pressed his lips to her forehead, but his only reply was to sing again:

*To the Sea, to the Sea! The white gulls are crying,  
The wind is blowing, and the white foam is flying.  
West, west away, the round sun is falling.  
Grey ship, grey ship, do you hear them calling,  
The voices of my people that have gone before me?  
I will leave, I will leave the woods that bore me;  
For our days are ending and our years failing.  
I will pass the wide waters lonely sailing...*

His voice trailed away.

Then, "Eowyn nín," he whispered, kissing her again. "I will not leave you, no, I will never leave you whilst I remember—but, sometimes, I forget..."

"Forget what, Legolas?"

"Everything, meleth nín—my life; my love."

He turned to face her, his eyes still large with sea-longing, but his mind suddenly lucid. "The sea-longing is like physical desire, meleth nín," he said, "it is deep and visceral and it demands satisfaction. When I am with Gimli or Aragorn, or when I am distracted by the demands of rule, the sea's call has less power; and when I am with you, Eowyn nín, her call has no power at all.

"But sometimes, when I am alone, she takes me by surprise. And her voice holds such temptation—she whispers of a life of eternal joy, where pain and sadness have been banished; a life of sailing and singing.

"She promises me a peace and contentment I cannot resist.

"And I am so afraid meleth nín—I am afraid that I might one day heed her call and leave for Valinor without knowing—until it is too late—what I am leaving behind—oh, Eowyn nín! Melethril nín," he sobbed.

*Oh, Legolas, do not leave me, she thought. Do not ever leave me, my love. I could not live*

**My bow shall sing with your sword**

*without you...*

But she said, in a voice full of courage, "I will not let you leave, Legolas! If the sea should seduce you, or force you against your will, I will sail after you and I will pull you back—even if you reach Valinor I will find my way there and bring you back. And if the Valar turn me away from the undying lands, I will wait out to sea, calling to you, until your senses return and you swim back to me. I will not abandon you, Legolas. Not while there is breath still left in my body!"

"Do you promise, Eowyn nín," he sobbed, "do you swear it?"

"On my life," she said. And then, because her life did not seem precious enough, she added, "I swear it on my love for you."

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**Extra Scene: Look at the stars, melmenya**

**"LOOK at the stars! look, look up at the skies!  
O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!  
The bright boroughs, the circle-citadels there!"**

**Gerard Manley Hopkins**

...

"Do you want to eat now," he asked, "or later?"

Eowyn stretched out her arms.

He knelt before her and, with expert elven fingers, unhooked her clasps, and unfastened her lacings, and removed her tunic and leggings.

"My little *flower*," he whispered, shaking his head at the sight of her; he pulled her close.

"NO," she squealed, "your buckles are cold!"

Laughing, Legolas leaned back and held his arms open, waiting patiently as she—with less skilled hands—removed his belt and jerkin, unfastened his silken tunic and pulled open its skirts. "Oh!" she gasped—his erection was very visible in his leggings.

"Melmenya?" Legolas stretched out his hand and gently stroked her cheek. "Surely you have not become shy, *meleth nín*?" he chided softly.

"It is not shyness," she said, "it is—sometimes I am afraid."

"Of me?"

"When I first saw you, Legolas, at the Harvest Ceremony, with your chest bare and your hair loose—so beautiful and strong and graceful—so *wild*—I thought you looked like a force of nature..."

Legolas smiled.

But Eowyn shook her head. "It is exciting, that you are so different—so *elven*—but it scares me, too."

"Melmenya..." With one hand, he unlaced and pulled open his leggings; then he took her hand and laid it on his penis, gently closing her fingers around it. "I will never hurt you, Eowyn *nín*."

"Oh, my love! I know *that!* I did not mean *that!* I meant... *I* am just a woman, Legolas. And *you*... You are an elf..." Tears ran down her cheeks.

"I am your husband."

"We are *not* married, my love."

He pulled her into his arms. "Look at the stars, melmenya—look." He pointed to the clusters of light miraculously visible through the curtain of moving water. "See how they shine? Eternal, imperishable... See the one that shines brighter than the rest? That is Eärendil, our most beloved star. Eärendil was half elven, half mortal—he won, for the Peoples of Beleriand, the mercy of the Valar, and now he sails the heavens, bearing one of the Silmarils, as a sign of hope to all those oppressed by evil."



"He is beautiful," said Eowyn, with a sniff.

"Will you make a vow with me? Before Eärendil?"

"What sort of vow?"

"Will you vow to be mine—only mine—my *wife*, Eowyn nín? Will you accept my vow in return?"

Her tears were flowing unchecked now. She nodded, unable to speak.

Legolas took her hand and kissed it, tenderly. "*Mîl sui lotheg i edlothia an-uir, híril nín,*" he said. "*Im hervenn chîn; no hervess nín.*"

"What do *I* say?" she whispered.

"What do you *want* to say, meleth nín?"

"I love you—in *elvish*."

Legolas kissed her forehead. "*Le annon veleth nín.*"

"*Le annon veleth nín,*" she repeated, slowly, taking great care over the pronunciation. "I want to be your wife. Forever."

"*Im hervess chîn; no hervenn nín.*"

"*Im hervess chîn; no hervenn nín,*" she said, her eyes shining.

"*An-uir,*" said Legolas.

"*An-uir.*"

"*Ai, hervess nín!*" Gently, he laid her down on the bedroll.

"*Ic þe lufu do,* Legolas," said Eowyn, in her own tongue. Then, reaching up and touching his face with wonder, "I give you my love, *forever.*"

## A related short story: The surprise

### *Legolas?*

For the first time since coming to live with him, Eowyn had awoken without his strong arms around her.

She turned over.

He was not lying beside her.. He was not in their bed chamber.

She threw back the coverlet and climbed out of bed.

Winter was already approaching and the room felt chilly, but elves, Eowyn had found, did not light fires for warmth, only for light and cheer. *Just one of the many strange things I must learn to live with*, she thought, slipping on her thick velvet dressing robe and hunting for her fur-lined slippers.

"Legolas?"

There was no reply from the bathing room.

*Nor do elves*, she thought, looking at herself in the mirror, *get tangles in their hair*. She raked a hand through her own dishevelled locks. *In fact, they hardly get dirty at all*. (She had once asked Legolas how he could bear to sleep with a sweaty, smelly human, and he had laughed, and kissed the tip of her nose, and told her that she was beautiful).

Eowyn stifled a yawn.

Elves, of course, did not sleep, either—not in the normal way. They rested their spirits by communing with Arda, singing to the stars or walking beneath the trees. And if they did lie down, it was open-eyed—something that Eowyn still found slightly unnerving.

But Legolas *always* joined her in bed. *Always*.

So where was he this morning?

They had not quarrelled. They seldom did, and never for long, since Legolas' answer to almost any disagreement was beautifully simple—immediate and prolonged sex.

*Where is he?* She reached for the door latch, just as the door opened.

"Melmenya!" Keeping one hand—suspiciously, Eowyn thought—behind his back, Legolas entered the bed chamber, and gently propelled her towards the bed.

"Where were you?"

It sounded petulant. But her elf simply smiled.

"Wh—"

"*Shhhhhh...*" Using one strong arm, he lifted her onto the bed, sat down beside her and, with an elaborate flourish, conjured up something small and silken, which he dropped into her lap.

Eowyn stared at the exquisitely embroidered pouch. "What is it?" she asked.

"Open it and see!"

...

*The first time he made love to her—without the Harvest Rite and its potions adding fire to her blood—was a profound revelation.*

*They were sitting, side by side, upon their bed, drinking wine and talking. He made some prediction about their future together, she turned to him, smiling, and his expression suddenly grew serious. Without a word, he took the glass from her hand and set it down upon the nightstand.*

"What—?"

"Shhhhh."

*He drew her close, kissing her tenderly, and his hand moved between their bodies.*

"Leg—?"

"Shhhhh." *He pressed his lips to her forehead.*

*She glanced down, and her heart fluttered at the sight of him, standing free of his leggings—his size still made her breathless! She sank back onto the bed.*

*Legolas grasped her waist. "Turn over," he said, softly.*

*Turn over? Ignoring some tiny misgivings, Eowyn did as he asked.*

*"Now come up on your hands and knees." Nuzzling and nipping her neck, he gently slipped his hands under her belly—"Up..."—and lifted her into the strange position. "Yes—like that..."*

"Legolas?"

"Shhhhh." *He slid his hands over her bottom, and down her thighs, and she felt him grasp at the fabric of her skirts and draw them up around her waist, leaving her buttocks exposed and vulnerable.*

*"Oh. Valar." His hands cupped her naked flesh, caressing her, lightly at first, then harder, kneading her, making her squirm and squeeze her muscles tight to savour the delicious ache inside her. Her legs were already shaking, and she tried to sink down—*

*"No..." He held her up, wrapping his arms around her, one hand supporting her belly, the other her breasts. "Trust me, melmenya, you will enjoy it like this," he murmured, smiling against her skin. "Open your legs for me..."*

"Open...?" *Did he intend to mount her, like a stallion, from behind?*

*She hesitated. But his hand slid down to her groin and his fingers slipped between her thighs—"Open them..."—and his voice was commanding but so gentle, and his hand—*

Oh gods, his hand!

*Eowyn spread her knees, and was amply rewarded by his penis, slipping between her legs, teasing, teasing, then probing gently. "You are so wet..." He lodged himself just inside her—kissing and biting her neck—and his long, slim fingers pressed on her sensitive flesh—until she spread her legs further—and he pushed himself home.*

Oh, dear gods!

*Eowyn's arms gave way, and she fell on her face, her buttocks still high in the air—"Oh gods,*

*gods, gods," she moaned—her body was trembling all over. "Oh, oh, oh!" His thrusts were a sword of fire. And she screamed—clawed at the bedsheets, screaming—as her vital spirits rushed down to her core and she climaxed around her beloved elf.*

...

"Thank you."

*Legolas, gazing deep into her eyes, smiled lazily. "For what, melmenya?"*

*She kissed his hand. "For making me feel like this..."*

...

"Open it!" said Legolas excitedly.

His mood was infectious. Eowyn untied the drawstring, pulled open the pouch and peered inside. "A key..." She tipped it into the palm of her hand. It was small and—like everything Elven—elegant, fashioned in silver, with a beautiful leaf-shaped bow.

"What do you suppose it fits?" asked Legolas.

Eowyn shook her head. "I have no idea." She had never noticed many locks in Eryn Carantaur.

"Shall we see if we can find something?"

Eowyn grinned—he was acting like a child with a new pony. "What are you up to?"

Legolas laughed. "Come, melmenya." He held out his hand.

"I am not dressed."

"We shall not be going far. Come." She let him lead her into the lobby and 'discover' a small wooden chest, sitting in the middle of the floor. "Where can that have come from?"

He released her and she knelt beside it, examining the familiar emblem on its lid—an Elven sword surrounded by a ring of birch leaves. "The arms of the Woodland Realm."

"Do you think your key will fit?" asked Legolas.

"I would be willing to wager Brightstar on it," she said, grinning up at him. She turned the lock and raised the lid—"It smells of lavender!"—and peered inside, at what appeared to be a bale of plain black cloth.

She looked up at Legolas, questioningly.

Smiling, he reached down, and pulled open the black wrapping.

Eowyn gasped. Inside was a mantle of pale silver-green velvet, embroidered with fresh young leaves of every kind, and hemmed with a delicate fringe of silvery silk. She ran her fingers over the sumptuous fabric.

"Let me help you put it on," said Legolas, lifting it from the chest.

Eowyn slipped off her dressing robe and Legolas, with a proud smile, draped the mantle about her shoulders. "It was made for my grandmother," he explained, carefully lifting her hair. "My father gave it to my mother when they married. Then Ada gave it to me, when I came of age, so that I could give to *my* wife."

"Oh, Legolas..."

"I sent for it before we left for Caras Arnen, melmenya, but it did not arrive until this morning."

"That is where you had gone..."

He nodded. "Galathil told me that a chest had arrived from Mirkwood, but I wanted to make sure."

"Does your father know that you sent for it?" asked Eowyn, softly.

Legolas laughed. "My father personally weighs, measures, and docketts everything that passes in or out of the palace gates, melmenya."

"Will he not be angry that you are giving your mother's mantle to *me*?"

"I have not yet read his letter—but I understand that he has sent one of his spies to investigate you." Laughing at her horrified expression, he kissed the tip of her nose. "The mantle is *mine* to give to whomever I choose, melmenya, and I have chosen *you*. Nothing my father can do or say will change that."

He looked down at her, his expression suddenly serious.

"What—?"

"Shhhhh."

He drew her close, kissing her tenderly, and his hand moved between their bodies...

...

Eowyn folded the Leafy Mantle, placed it back in its lavender-scented chest, and carefully locked it away.

She had not told Legolas of the gift that Faramir had given her, in the House of Healing—a lifetime ago it seemed, now—his mother's blue mantle.

She had feared it might hurt him.

But, for her, there could be no surer sign of the rightness of their union than this gift and the feelings it stirred within her—and than the blissful lovemaking that had followed his giving it to her.

She patted the lid of the chest, and went to join her elf in the garden.

**THE END**