

The water is wide



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Title: **The water is wide**

Story Number: 5a

Rating: NC-17

Pairing: Legolas/Eowyn

Summary: On the long journey from Mirkwood to South Ithilien, Legolas and Eowyn encounter Beornings, runaway daughters, orcs and werewolves...

Special Note: Written for the LiveJournal fanfic100 challenge.

The rules are: choose a fandom, choose something within the fandom (typically a character or a pairing), then write 100 stories based on the prompts listed in the table below. Each story must be a minimum of 100 words long and you can tackle the prompts in any order...

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, which is intended as a transformative commentary on the original.

The Prompt Table

(Greyed out prompts have been used).

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Elvish

Cram ... cake of compressed flour or meal (often containing honey or milk) used on a long journey.

Le cenithon ned lû thent ... 'I will see you in a short time.'

No i Melain na le, meleth nín ... 'May the Valar be with you, my love.'

Gaur ... werewolf

The Beornings

In case you've forgotten—or haven't read *Misrule* in *Mirkwood*—*the Beornings have real Viking names and all the men have real 'by-names' (nicknames).*

Bergthórr beytill - Bergthórr horse-penis

Thorkell bogsveigir - Thorkell bow-swayer

Heðinn austmannaskelfir - Heðinn, terror of the east-men

Snorri blátönn - Snorri black-tooth

Bjarni bjarki - Bjarni bear-cub

Óttarr in spaka - Óttarr the wise

Chief Bergthórr's children, Bjarni and Gunnhildr, have the 'surnames' Bergthórsson and Bergthórsdottir, 'son of Bergthórr' and 'daughter of Bergthórr'.

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Chapter 1: Heart

prompt #047 heart

It had started in Mirkwood.

...

The great cavalcade had set up camp for the night. Legolas was happy—sitting beside the fire with his arm around his beloved, enjoying the simple food, trading witty insults with Gimli and Eomer—when Eowyn suddenly announced that she was retiring for the night.

She rose and said her good nights, stooping to kiss his forehead and whisper, "Do not be too long Lassui..."

He watched her cross the clearing, to the little hut his warriors had built for her to sleep in, turned away—for just a second—to answer some foolish quip from Gimli; and when he turned back, he saw it.

She had tripped over some exposed root or fallen branch—such a tiny stumble that anyone who did not know her, who had not made a close study of all her movements, would never have noticed—but Haldir, returning from his final inspection of the perimeter, noticed—and immediately offered her his arm.

He led her to her tiny shelter and bade her good night, one hand over his heart.

That was all.

But, standing together under the moon, his head bowed, her face raised—its delicate contours bathed in silvery light—they seemed so *right* together.

And a dark emotion gripped Legolas' heart, as the voice inside his head whispered, *She is not an elf.*

...

Days later, when he sat beside the Anduin, gazing at the flock of noisy white birds wheeling around The Carrock, his fear had not diminished.

"Legolas?" She sat down beside him. "What is wrong, my darling?" She spoke calmly, but he could sense her anxiety.

"Nothing, melmenya..."

"Please do not lie to me, Lassui."

How could he resist her? "He loves you," he said.

She was surprised; but she did not ask, he noticed, to whom he was referring. "What are you saying?"

"Eowyn!" The bitterness in his voice surprised even him. "Do not deny that you care for him."

"Is it wrong to care, Lassui?"

"I do not mean... I am not saying that you would ever do anything—dishonourable."

"What *are* you saying?"

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She began to rise, but he wrapped his arms around her waist, and buried his face in her hair. "You are immortal now, Eowyn nín," he whispered, "you will not be taken from me; but, one day, you may tire of me."

...

For a moment, she was speechless. Then, "Tire of you? Foolish elf! If you want to *make* me tire of you, this is the way! And to think that *I* thought..."

She tried once more to pull away, but he held her fast. "What did you think, melmenya?"

"I found you here, watching the gulls—singing of the sea—what do you suppose I thought?" she asked bitterly, her face averted. "I thought you wanted to sail, Lassui... To go where *I* cannot follow."

...

He fell to the ground before her. "I can never leave you, Eowyn nín—when an elf gives his heart, he gives it for eternity. I am *bound* to you by my very nature. But you... Your heart is human—"

"And *inferior* to yours?"

"No! It is just—human hearts are made to love and love again."

"Because we *die*, Lassui! Time passes and the world changes—we age and our lovers are taken from us. We change... Yes, we love again. But *I* will not change. Not *now*... I will be yours forever. Surely you know that, Legolas?"

But the elf did not reply.

...

"Why does your lady look as if she has lost a silk purse and found a sow's ear?" asked Gimli, bluntly. From his customary seat, behind Legolas on Arod's back, he watched Eowyn as she rode along the Great River's edge, her body slumped in the saddle, her head bowed. "How long are you going to make her wait for an apology?"

"It is complicated, Gimli..."

"No," said the dwarf, "it is simple—you just go to her and you say 'I am sorry'."

Legolas smiled, sadly. "How do you know that *I* am in the wrong?"

"It is obvious," said Gimli, "—*you* are the elf." He squeezed Legolas' arm. "Are you good enough for her?"

"Am I...?"

"That is all you need consider, lad. And if the answer is no, then sort yourself out quick, and go and apologise to her."

...

"I did not know whether you would join me tonight," said Eowyn, softly.

Legolas closed the door of her little hut. "I nearly did not—I was not sure you would want me to," he admitted, "but I... Will you forgive me, melmenya?" He made no move to lie beside her, and Eowyn knew that he would not—not without her permission. "I let myself imagine things,"

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he admitted. "I was intimidated by Haldir."

"By *Haldir*! Why?"

"He... Sometimes he makes me feel... Young. Inexperienced. Foolish."

Eowyn sat up in her bedroll and, reaching out in the dark, laid her hand on his cheek. "Haldir makes *everyone* feel young and inexperienced, Lassui—that is his way—but *you* are a wise ruler and a brave, decisive leader; and where you go, Haldir follows, because he is the first to recognise your qualities. He is entirely loyal to you."

She felt Legolas smile against her fingers. "You will not leave me for him then?"

"You stupid elf!"

"Will you forgive me, melmenya?"

She managed to suppress a laugh; but when she spoke there was a smile in her voice. "Since I am stuck with you for all eternity," she said, "I suppose I better had."

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Chapter 2: More

prompt #034 not enough

Gentle fingers touched her shoulder.

Eowyn—caught somewhere between sleeping and waking—instinctively pulled away; but the hand, sliding down to her waist, drew her close and held her.

“Legolas?”

Soft lips brushed her ear. “*Shhhhh.*”

They had made love already—a tender reconciliation—but her elf, it seemed, needed more than that; and as his warm breath teased her neck, sending shivers through her limbs, she felt him press his erection—long and hard—between her thighs.

“No,” she whispered, though its firm caress was unbearably sweet, “*I want to see you.*”

He pulled away, letting her turn onto her back; then, carefully nudging her legs apart, he knelt between her knees.

Oh, how beautiful he was!

By the light of the stars, filtering through the canvas of her little hut, Eowyn watched him unlace the waistband of his close-fitting leggings and slide them off.

She reached out eagerly. But Legolas seized her ankles and placed her feet on his bare hips and, running his hands firmly down her thighs, moved in closer. “*Guide me,*” he whispered.

So she curled her fingers around him, and drew him down to her core, shifting her hips until—

“*Ohhh.*” Legolas sank himself inside her and began to thrust, *slowly*. “*Oh. Valar.*”

“*Yes...*”

He arched his back and pushed himself deeper.

“*Oh, yes...*”

And his strokes grew shorter, but faster, and more urgent.

And Eowyn, clawing the ground beside her, could not tear her eyes from him—from his face, frowning with determination; from his muscles, taut with fucking *her*; from the beads of sweat running down his throat and chest; from the glimpses of his thick shaft, entirely possessing her body.

And, suddenly, he caught her by the ankles and lifted her legs high, and his penis found some animal part of her and set it free, and she thrashed beneath him, jamming her hand into her mouth to stifle her own scream.

And her elf hunched over her—his long, pale hair brushing her breasts—and he groaned, and groaned again, and his hot, wet seed poured into her belly.

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Chapter 3: Next morning

prompt #071 broken

It was a cool, damp spring morning.

Haldir returned from his nocturnal wanderings to find his fellow travellers—Eomer and Gimli, Legolas and Eowyn—breaking their fast around the still-glowing embers of the fire, eating freshly baked bread with jam and honey, drinking mulled ale, and planning the next stage of their journey.

“Good morning, March Warden,” called Legolas, cheerily. “Are you joining us?”

Haldir glanced around the campsite. His warriors were already working methodically—putting out the perimeter fires, loading the pack horses, dismantling Eowyn’s little shelter—he could afford a few moments.

He took his customary place between Gimli and Eomer, and opposite Eowyn, who, with a welcoming smile, offered him a plate of food. Haldir reached to take it—politely inclining his head in thanks—and, for a split-second, their fingers touched.

Sweet Eru! His spirit, as always, leapt at the contact.

But this morning she seemed to him lovelier than ever—her delicate cheeks flushed, her grey eyes sparkling; and Haldir looked away, because—even had he not chanced to overhear it—there could be no mistaking the cause...

“Have you finished, melmenya?” asked Legolas, suddenly. “Shall I help you saddle Brightstar?” And Haldir’s lowered eyes were unwillingly drawn to the movement of his Lord’s hand slipping around Eowyn’s waist and squeezing her affectionately.

The bread turned to ashes in the big elf’s mouth.

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Chapter 4: Thorkell bogsveigir

prompt #022 enemies

As the sun was burning away the last of the early morning mist, the long column of elves and men wound its way south across the flat Anduin floodplain, following the raised causeway that cut through the marshland east of the river, running parallel to the edge of Greenwood the Great, some ten miles further east.

At the head of the cavalcade the March Warden of Eryn Carantaur led a small detachment hand-picked troops, most of them former Mirkwood elves, familiar with the territory and experienced in dealing with its dangers—including the orcs and Uruk Hai that still roamed the wild central regions of Eryn Lasgalen.

Behind these came Legolas and Eowyn, Gimli and Eomer, followed by their travelling households—lawyers and scholars, healers, cooks and servants—flanked left and right by mounted warriors, and protected by a rearguard of elven archers.

...

"March Warden, there are—"

"I know,"—Haldir cut the elf off sharply—"keep moving." He reined in his horse and fell back until he was riding beside Legolas. "We have an escort," he announced.

"Yes. They have been following us for the past hour—do not look round *melmenya*, they may not realise that we can see them."

"Orcs?" asked Eowyn.

Haldir shook his head. "Beornings. Two dozen riders, keeping to the cover of the trees."

"How can you be sure that they are following us?"

"They were waiting for us," said Legolas, "just south of The Carrock. And they have been keeping pace with us ever since."

"What do they want?"

"Their Chieftain," ventured Gimli, "has just been forced to give up a quarter of his mithril mine to King Thranduil. I would wager he is looking for a chance to save face with a show of force against the King's son and heir."

"What should I do?" asked Haldir.

"Nothing as yet," replied Legolas. "Keep the warriors in check. If there *is* a first move I do not want it to come from us. I will warn Eomer. *Do not look, melmenya!*"

...

Shortly after noon, just north of the Old Ford, the cavalcade drew to a halt. The travellers dismounted and, whilst the riders were stretching their legs, the cooks and their assistants hastily set up a field kitchen and began preparing the midday meal.

Haldir had stationed a discreet line of archers between the company and their mysterious shadows and, within minutes, one of the elves reported that the Beornings had left the Forest and were approaching at the gallop. "But I believe that their leader is carrying a white flag, my lord," he told Legolas.

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"So they want to talk..."

"It could be a trick," warned Gimli.

"I do not think so, elvellon. They are outnumbered more than three to one."

"Unless they have friends, lurking somewhere else." Gimli scanned both banks of the river.

"We would see them coming," said Haldir, though with something less than his usual confidence.

...

With perfect timing—"They are trying to impress the Riders of Rohan," said Eomer—the Beornings reined in their mounts and came to a standstill, waiting in battle formation, whilst two of their number trotted forward, white flag raised.

"It is the horse's *arse*," said Haldir, dryly.

"March Warden?" Eomer turned to the big elf in surprise.

Legolas smiled. "He is referring to Thorkell bogsveigir, Chief Bergthórr's champion,"— he nodded towards the darkly handsome man bearing the white flag—"his behaviour under my father's roof did not endear him to the March Warden."

"He is a skirt-chaser and an arrogant *fool*," muttered Haldir.

Legolas and Eomer exchanged smiles.

"Shall we go and talk?" said the man.

...

"Greetings, your Majesty, your Highness," said Thorkell bogsveigir, bowing low over his horse's neck. "I am ordered by Chief Bergthórr beytill to see that—for your own safety—you proceed to the Old Ford and cross the river without delay."

"For our own safety'," said Eomer, crisply. "That sounds like a threat."

Thorkell bogsveigir's eyes narrowed, though his expression remained otherwise unchanged. "I assure your Majesty," he said, "that it is not. Chief Bergthórr is merely concerned that, whilst you are on Beorning land, you should come to no harm. It is well known that orcs frequent these parts—"

"And what makes you think," asked Eomer, still icily calm, "that *we* need *your* protection?"

"Your Majesty has women in his party," said the Beorning.

"It was already our intention," said Legolas, diplomatically, "to cross the river at the Old Ford and continue south along the far bank. I see no reason to change our plans." He placed a hand on his heart and bowed his head. "Good day to you." He turned Arod's head.

"There *is* another matter, your Highness," said Thorkell bogsveigir. "A private matter between me and one of your followers. May I accompany you to your camp?" He raised his hands. "I am, as you can see, unarmed..."

Legolas and Eomer exchanged glances. "And what is the substance of this matter between you and one of ours, Master Bow-swayer?" asked the man.

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Thorkell bogsveigir bowed again—this time making no pretence at humility. "It is, as I said, a private matter, your Majesty, between me and Berryn son of Hador."

...

"Who is that man?" asked Eowyn. "He seems familiar."

Standing supportively at Eowyn's side as she waited for her husband and her brother to return safely, Berryn son of Hador, cartographer by appointment to the King of Gondor, had no inkling of what was happening on the plain. "His name is Thorkell bogsveigir, my lady," he said. "He is Chief Bergthórr beytill's champion, his foremost warrior."

"Bogsveigir—an archer."

"Apparently."

"You do not like him?"

"I—I was told something about him. In confidence, my lady."

"By Lady Gunnhildr?"

The young man blushed.

"She is lovely, Berryn," said Eowyn.

"But much too far above *me*, my—"

"Why are they bringing him back with them?"

...

"*Wait*," said Legolas—and even the arrogant Beorning responded to the steel in the command. The elf swung himself down from the saddle. "Berryn," he called, "this man claims he has a quarrel with you."

"With me, my lord?" The cartographer looked up at warrior. "You have no business with *me*, sir."

"You are a liar," said Thorkell bogsveigir, urging his horse forward until he loomed menacingly over the much slighter man. "A coward and a debaucher. You have insulted Chief Bergthórr's daughter with your attentions and, as her father's champion, and the lady's intended, I demand satisfaction."

For a moment, Berryn stared up at him, open-mouthed. Then he answered, with quiet dignity, "It is true that I am no warrior—for I am a scholar—but I have never treated Lady Gunnhildr with anything but the utmost respect—"

"Will you fight me like a *man*?"

"I have already admitted that I am not trained to fight," said Berryn. "What honour is there in killing a man who cannot defend himself?"

Thorkell bogsveigir mouth curled in a sneer. "Then, like a maiden, you must find a champion to die on your behalf—for I *will* have satisfaction." He glanced around the dumbstruck travellers. "Who will fight for this coward? Anyone?"

When there was no immediate reaction, the Beorning's sneer turned to a contemptuous snicker.

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Then, "*I will,*" said a quiet, determined voice.

"Oh melmenya," whispered Legolas. "*No...*"

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Chapter 5: Her reasons

prompt #080 why?

A flock of birds, wading at the water's edge, suddenly took flight, filling the sky with a great dark sigh of flapping wings.

"The Lady of the Shield Arm," said Thorkell bogsveigir, bowing low in his saddle. "I am honoured."

"You are a fool, bow-swayer," hissed Eomer, reaching for his sword, "if you think that *I* will permit this—"

"Eomer, stop!" cried Legolas, holding up his hands. "Eowyn has accepted his challenge."

"It is ridiculous! Surely *you* will not—"

"*She has accepted it!*" repeated Legolas. "And we,"—he wrapped his arm around Eowyn's shoulders—"must abide by her decision."

The Beorning acknowledged the elf's reluctant support with a bow of the head, before addressing himself to Eowyn: "Since it was I who issued the challenge, my lady, you may choose the weapons."

"Swords," said Eowyn, without hesitation.

"And your second?"

"My brother, Eomer."

"*What!*" Eomer swung himself down from his horse, but Haldir caught his arm and held him fast.

"I will return at dawn," said Thorkell bogsveigir; and, ignoring the King's curses, he spurred his horse and galloped back to his companions.

...

"*Have you lost your mind?*" cried Eomer, shaking off Haldir's restraining hands.

Eowyn stood her ground.

"By the gods' grace you survive *one* battle and now you think you are a warrior? He will kill you before you have drawn your sword! And as for you!" He turned on Legolas.

"I must speak with Eowyn in private," said the elf, calmly.

"You encouraged this! You took her hunting orcs!"

"Please, give us a moment together."

Legolas held out his arm, and Eowyn took it, and he led her away from the crowd, through the yellow furze bushes, down to the river bank. Only then did he pull her into his arms. "Why, melmenya?" he whispered, "Why? Does what we have been granted—eternity together—mean nothing to you?"

"It means everything to me, Lassui."

"Then *why?*"

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"He was challenging *you*," said Eowyn, softly. "Berryn was just an excuse—he knew that Berryn would not fight. He expected you to defend him."

"Oh, melmenya..." He pressed his lips to her temple. "Did you think he would refuse you? Did you think you could shame him into riding away?"

"No."

"So you thought you were protecting *me*?"

"I thought... I thought that a bully and a coward did not deserve to fight you. I thought that a man who sneered at maidens should be taught a lesson. I thought..." She sighed. "Perhaps I did act foolishly. But I will not go back on my word."

Legolas crushed her to his chest.

"You think that I will lose," she said.

"I fear it, melmenya. Of course I do! He is..."

"A man?"

"A man, yes—bigger and stronger and more experienced than you are."

"Will you stay with me, Lassui? Stay at my side until dawn?"

"How can you ask?"

"And support me?"

"You named Eomer as your second."

"Only to bind him, my love, on his honour; only to stop him doing something foolish, like killing Thorkell bogsveigir during the night."

"Of course I will stay melmenya—till dawn and forever—I have sworn it. No matter what happens tomorrow, I will never leave your side."

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Chapter 6: Impotence

prompt #096 writer's choice

"Will she listen to you?" asked Eomer.

Haldir, gazing intently at the patch of grass before him, did not answer.

"She will not listen to me," continued Eomer, "and, though I *know* Legolas wants to stop her as much as I do, he,"—Eomer sighed—"he will let her have her head. So—will she listen to you? Can *you* persuade her to retract—"

"How can you ask that of me?"

"I am desperate."

"We are all *desperate!*" Haldir pushed the man aside and strode away, along the sloping bank, through the tangle of thorny bushes, far from the cavalcade, far from the lovers at the river's edge.

Eomer drew his sword and followed, hacking at branches to left and right. "So you will stand back, and let the woman you love die," he cried, "because *she* likes to pretend that she is a man, and *he* is too far under her thumb—"

"No!" Haldir turned on the king. "That is not how it is!" He ran his hand through his silvery hair, leaving it in wild disarray. "If she were mine, I would throw her over my horse and gallop away with her—gallop day and night—until I was sure she was safe.

"And—by the Valar!—how she would hate me for it!

"She would *hate* me, Eomer..."

"So let us thank the Valar that she belongs to Legolas. For he is made of braver stuff than you or I. His love for her is pure. And he will never force her against her will."

"You make it sound like—*rape*," muttered Eomer.

"What else would it be? To say to a woman, '*You* have not the right to decide your own fate, as any man or elf may do, you must accept whatever I decide for you—and I value my own desires above your honour'."

"Then what can we do?" cried Eomer.

"Nothing."

...

They stood side-by-side, in silence, watching the Great River flow by, swift and unstoppable.

Then Haldir sighed. "We can return to the others and play our parts," he said. "We can make sure that Legolas and Eowyn have—what may be—their last precious hours alone together.

"And we can pray to our gods that she is victorious tomorrow, Eomer."

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Chapter 7: Just tell me you love me

prompt #006 hours

"Why are you smiling, Eowyn nín?"

They were walking, arm-in-arm, along the river bank, like any pair of sweethearts. The sky overhead was blue and cloudless; the grass underfoot was bright with new life—sprinkled with white and yellow flowers. To Legolas, it seemed that every other being in Middle Earth was singing—

"I am enjoying having you to myself for a while," said Eowyn.

Sadly, he drew her to the water's edge, and sat her down upon a rock.

"You are treating me," she said, still smiling, "like someone who is recovering from an illness—treating me how Faramir treated me, when I left the House of Healing—but I am not ill, Legolas."

"No." He gazed at the water.

"Say it, my love."

"Say what?"

"Say whatever is on your mind. I would rather you said it—however much it may hurt—than stayed silent like this."

"*Hurt?* How can you think that I would hurt you?" He wrapped his arm around her. "It is just... I thought we would have forever, and now we may not. And I do not know how to fit eternity into a few short hours..."

"Then just tell me you love me," said Eowyn, laying her head upon his shoulder.

...

He raised her to her feet and they carried on, following the broken edge of the meandering river bank.

"Do you want to spar?" asked Legolas.

"You are no swordsman, my love."

"Then Haldir, or Eomer could—"

"No. I want to spend these hours with you."

"Do you think you can beat him, melmenya?"

"Yes, if the gods are with me," she said. "He will underestimate a woman—he is sure to. If I can best him quickly, I believe I can win. But the longer it lasts, the more it will shift in *his* favour."

Legolas stopped and, turning to face her, slipped both hands around her waist. "Remember what we promised."

Eowyn shook her head. "I would never hold you to that, Lassui."

"We made a promise—I will follow you, through the light, and join you where men go when

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they die," he said. "After I have dealt with *him*."

...

Later, she fell silent.

"Eowyn?"

"I am frightened, Lassui."

"Of what, meleth nín?"

"I do not know... Suppose they will not let you follow? Suppose—"

He cut her off, crushing her to his chest. "Whatever they ask of me, however long it takes, I will do it. Just do not give up hope, melmenya. Trust me, wait for me, and do not give up hope."

...

It was dark when they slipped back into the camp.

In the privacy of her little shelter he undressed her, marvelling—*Perhaps*, he thought, *for the last time*—at the softness of her breasts, the slenderness of her waist, the smoothness of her slightly swelling stomach, the subtlety of her shapely hips and her lightly muscled thighs...

He bent, and kissed her reverently. "You must sleep," he whispered, lying down beside her.

"I need you," she said. "Inside me."

He unlaced his own leggings and entered her, pushing gently through the slight resistance.

She smiled serenely—"Thank you..."—and drew him down, and their bodies settled together.

...

He made love to her slowly, calling on every ounce of his elven strength, every fibre of his elven self-discipline, to hold her in that place where the world shrinks to nothing but two people; and when he could wait no longer, when his body slipped from his control, he took her with him, filling her with perfect contentment.

"I love you," she murmured.

He raised his head to reply, but she had already drifted into sleep. He kissed her forehead. "Sleep well tonight, Eowyn nín. Sleep well, beloved."

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Chapter 8: Dawn

prompt #031 sunrise

Haldir, lying beneath the stars, watched Eärendil slip inexorably towards the horizon. Less than an hour, he thought.

Eomer, he knew, had been awake all night, pacing back and forth along the river bank.

Gimli had taken a lantern, found a fallen tree, and spent the dark hours chopping—"The Beornings burn their dead," he had explained, between blows, "they will need plenty of firewood."

Berryn, the poor, innocent excuse for all this misery, had tossed and turned in his bedroll, sobbing quietly. Haldir had not known how to comfort him.

And Eowyn?

The Valar only knew what she and Legolas had endured during the night.

One hour, thought Haldir, and then we must find a way to carry on.

He gazed bleakly into a future without her.

If she does not kill that orc's member, he swore, I shall do it myself.

...

"*Melmenya...*" Legolas shook Eowyn gently.

She opened her eyes, and stared up at him in confusion.

Valar, how could he remind her of what the dawn held for her?

But it was not necessary. "Thorkell bogsveigir," she said, her voice still thick with sleep.

He nodded. "The sun will rise in less than an hour."

"I must dress." She sat up.

"Do you want to eat?"

"No."

He wrapped an arm around her shoulders, and kissed her forehead. "I will help you put on your armour."

...

She reached for the door of her little hut—and hesitated.

"*Melmenya?*" Legolas crawled beside her and grasped her outstretched hand. "It is not too late, *meleth nín...*" he whispered.

"*Legolas!*" She turned on him, genuine anger distorting her lovely face. "How could you think...!"

"I—"

"I am not afraid of *him!*"

The water is wide

"Then what, melmenya?"

"The *others*! I cannot face the *others*! Eomer and Haldir, Gimli... Eomer's anger and Haldir's *grief*... I cannot face it."

Legolas pulled her close and hugged her tightly—despite the layers of leather and mail that came between them. She laid her head upon his shoulder.

"First," he said, "say that you forgive me."

"You know I do," she mumbled.

He pressed his lips to her temple. Then, "Now," he continued, unnaturally cheerful, "breathe deeply—in—and out—and in—and out... Good. Keep breathing..." He pushed open the door flap—"And *go!*"—and he slapped her bottom.

She turned and grinned, her coming ordeal momentarily forgotten. "I will pay you back for that, *elf!*" she said, and crawled through the door.

...

As the sky lightened, the Beornings could be seen approaching, trotting in formation, with Chief Bergthórr beytill at the head; his champion, Thorkell bogsveigir, by his side; and six pairs of armed warriors, dressed in mail and carrying streaming pennants, following behind.

"*Jumped-up horse thieves,*" muttered Eomer.

With Haldir's help, the King of Rohan had selected the field of combat with care, settling on a smallish oval of good, solid earth—free from mud and potentially lethal mole holes—and covered with a fine, springy turf. The members of the cavalcade had already assembled around it.

Suddenly a murmur of anticipation spread through the men, and Eomer heard Haldir sigh, and he turned to see the crowd part to admit Eowyn, dressed in her armour and carrying her broadsword, leaning incongruously on Legolas' arm.

She caught his eye and gave him a warning frown.

Eomer raised his hands in a gesture of peace. "I shall not try to dissuade you," he said, quietly. "But..." He cleared his throat. "No man ever had a braver sister," he mumbled, and took his place, as her second, by her side.

...

"My lady..."

With all her attention focussed on the man riding towards her out of the rising sun, Eowyn had failed to notice the slight figure that had worked his way through the crowd and—looking as though he were carrying the entire weight of Middle Earth upon his back—was now approaching her.

"Berryn." She smiled.

"What can I do?" he asked. "Tell me what I can do, and I will do it."

Eowyn patted his arm. "Have courage," she said, "and wish me well."

"Oh, my lady!" He slid to his knees.

The water is wide

Gently, Lord Fingolfin, who had followed Berryn onto the field, raised him to his feet and, giving Eowyn a sympathetic nod, led him back into the crowd.

...

Still on horseback, Chief Bergthórr and his champion forced their way through the ring of spectators.

Completely ignoring Eowyn, Bergthórr addressed Legolas and Eomer. "My champion's challenge has been taken up," he said. "But since the circumstances are,"—he glanced at Eowyn for the first time—"unusual, we are willing to accept a proxy. Who will fight in this woman's stead?"

Before Legolas or Eomer had a chance to respond, Eowyn stepped forward. "There will be no substitute," she said, firmly. "I have given my pledge."

"You have your answer," said Legolas.

"Very well," said Bergthórr, jerking his reins in annoyance. "Then let combat commence without further delay." He nodded to his champion, and left the arena.

...

As Thorkell bogsveigir dismounted, two of the Beorning warriors emerged from the crowd—one took care of his horse, whilst the other, his second, laid three shields upon the ground and invited Eomer to inspect them.

Eomer, gesturing towards a similar pile at Eowyn's end of the field, indicated that the Beorning should do the same.

When both were satisfied, the seconds retired, leaving the two combatants, facing one other.

Thorkell bogsveigir was a slender man but Eowyn seemed tiny in comparison, standing bravely in her leather and mail, her body slightly turned, left hip forward, her shield raised, her sword ready.

Tears welled in Legolas' eyes. Gimli, standing beside his friend, patted his back.

The Beorning banged his sword upon his shield to show that he was ready.

Eowyn answered in kind—and the man immediately rushed forward, scarcely giving her time to block a furious rain of blows that sent her staggering backwards until—taking full advantage of her retreat—he brought his sword upwards in a mighty sweep that knocked her off her feet.

"*Melmenya!*"

"*Awww!*" cried Gimli, flinching in sympathy.

Ignoring the rules of combat—for this was only her first shield—Thorkell bogsveigir went in for the kill. Fortunately, Eowyn blocked with her shield, and his strike damaged nothing but wood.

"Back off!" cried Eomer, racing into the arena. "*Back off!* If you try that again, this contest is ended!"

The Beorning reluctantly obeyed.

Eomer dragged his sister to her feet and, unable to suppress a frown, handed her her second shield. Eowyn tramped back to her own end of the field, and banged the shield twice.

Before the sound had died away, the Beorning was running again, hacking with great, swinging

The water is wide

strokes—"He is no swordsman," muttered Eomer—and Eowyn was once more forced to back away, retreating round the oval space, expertly blocking his cuts but making no attempt to return them.

"She *must* strike back," whispered Haldir. "Soon. She cannot survive much more—"

A massive blow shattered Eowyn's second shield and sent her reeling. She hit the ground with a sickening thud.

Eomer and Gimli held Legolas back. "No," said Eomer. "She is still in the fight."

"This is not *fighting*," grumbled one of the Beornings. Gimli silenced him with a scowl.

Doggedly, Eowyn picked herself up, took her third shield and returned to her position, banging the shield twice.

"She is tired," said Legolas.

Confident now, the man charged at her a third time, hammering left and right, quickly smashing her final shield to pieces. Eowyn dropped the broken wood. The man raised his sword—

"It is over," said the talkative Beorning. "She is already dead—"

But his words were swallowed by a great cheer as Eowyn nimbly stepped aside and, grasping her sword in both hands and using the flat of her blade, delivered a perfectly-timed blow to the back of her opponent's head.

Thorkell bogsveigir's legs crumpled beneath him.

...

"Melmenya!" Legolas ran onto the field and, amidst the cheers of men and elves, hugged her fiercely.

But Eowyn had not finished. Disentangling herself with a smile, she stood over the Beorning—placing one foot between his shoulder blades and pressing the point of her sword to the nape of his neck—and addressed Bergthórr beytill directly. "Your champion is beaten," she said.

"Then finish him."

"No," she replied. "I will not take his life."

"You will not..." Bergthórr turned to Eomer in exasperation. "What is this crazy woman saying *now*?"

"I defeated him fairly," said Eowyn. "Everyone here witnessed it. It is not necessary to kill him."

"Can *no one* control her?"

"The Lady of the Shield Arm is her own mistress," said Legolas, standing proudly beside her.

Bergthórr beytill shook his head. "You are as mad as March hares," he said. "All of you! Very well. If you will not kill him, you must feed him, lady. He is yours." He gave Eowyn a mocking bow, leaning low over his horse's neck. Then he gathered up his reins and set off at the gallop, forcing his entourage to dash to their own horses and pursue him.

Legolas looked down at the fallen Beorning. "Well. What are you going to do with him,

The water is wide

melmenya?" he asked.

The water is wide

Chapter 9: A rock and a hard place

prompt #086 choices

"I am too tired to *think* just now," said Eowyn, rubbing her forehead—for the extraordinary courage and resolution she had shown during the single combat had suddenly begun to take their toll. "I will speak to him later..."

Legolas wrapped a supportive arm around her waist. "You need to rest, melmenya." He turned to Eomer. "I propose we spend another night here—I doubt that Bergthórr beytill will give us any more trouble."

"I think we all need a rest," said Eomer. He squeezed Eowyn's shoulder. "Let Legolas take you back to your hut—and do not ever put us through that again."

Eowyn grinned. "I won."

"By the gods' grace you survived another fight."

"By my own *strategy*," corrected Eowyn. She yawned.

"Oh—take her away, Legolas!"

Smiling, the elf lifted her into his arms. "He is as proud of you as I am, melmenya," he said, in a stage whisper.

"Might I suggest," interrupted Gimli, prodding the forgotten Beorning with his toe, "that we put this one somewhere secure before he wakes up."

"Gimli is right," agreed Haldir. "This peacock will not take kindly to finding himself the property of a woman. It would be prudent to restrain him whilst he remains senseless."

"He is not really my property, Haldir," said Eowyn, over Legolas' shoulder, "and he is hardly a prisoner." She yawned again. "Have Master Dínendal examine him and... And tell him I will speak to him later."

...

Legolas carried Eowyn to her little shelter and set her down on her bedroll.

"Let me help you take off your armour, melmenya," he said, "so that you can rest properly." Gently, he moved her hands—she was trying, impatiently, to unlace her cuirass—and untied the leather thongs. "The fight did not go as you had planned," he murmured, sliding the cuirass off her shoulders. "You expected him to hold back against a woman..."

"I expected him to be more chivalrous than he was," admitted Eowyn, with a tired smile, "but he *did* underestimate me."

"Leaving himself open?"

She nodded.

"Raise your arms..." He lifted her heavy mail hauberk off over her head. "I was worried when you did not strike back."

"I am sorry." She smiled again. "That was not *entirely* deliberate."

"Oh, melmenya..." He hugged her tightly.

The water is wide

"But I am a better swordswoman than Eomer thinks, Lassui..."

"You are a fine swordswoman, melmenya." He gave her a final hard squeeze. "We had better take off your boots and get you comfortable. I will stay with you until you fall asleep."

...

"This *must* be death," muttered Thorkell bogsveigir, staring up at the elf tending him.

"You are not dead," said Master Dínendal, the colony's healer. "But you have suffered a severe blow to the head and you did swoon for several minutes. It is important that you remain still until I have determined the full extent of your injury—"

"Is that why I am bound?"

"That is merely a precaution," said a rather acerbic voice, from somewhere behind the healer.

Despite Dínendal's advice, the Beorning pushed himself up on his elbows, shaking off the elf's gentle hands, to look at the speaker. "*You*," he said. "I might have known." He fell back onto the bedroll.

"*Please*," exclaimed Dínendal. "March Warden—I shall have to ask you to leave the tent."

"Wait!" said Thorkell bogsveigir. "Where is she?"

"Lady Eowyn," said Haldir, pointedly, "asked me to inform you that she will speak to you later."

...

Several hours later, Eowyn—well rested, and queenly in her velvet riding gown and boots—drew up a chair to sit beside Thorkell bogsveigir's bed.

The Beorning—propped up, now, on pillows, but still bound hand and foot—greeted her with an almost respectful bow of the head. "That was a clever move," he said.

"No—not really," replied Eowyn. "It is a well-known move that worked because you underestimated me and left yourself unprotected. I could have taken your head off."

"Why did you not?"

"I fully intended to. But..." She sighed. "I have never killed anything without good reason and today did not seem the day to begin."

"Had you misjudged the blow," said the Beorning, with a touch of arrogance, "I would have shown you no mercy. I would have turned on you and killed you."

"In anger," agreed Eowyn, smiling. "If, that is, you could have caught me. But I'll wager that anger would have made you even less of a swordsman, Master Bow-swayer."

"You are *something*."

"I shall take that as a compliment," said Eowyn. "Now,"—she leaned forward—"since your former lord no longer wants you, and has given you to me, what am I to do with you?"

Thorkell bogsveigir sighed. "Dress me in a petticoat and set me to spinning."

"*I may just do that if you do not mind your manners*." Eowyn looked at him curiously—a tall, lean, darkly handsome man with a permanently arrogant air. "Tell me," she said, "why did you challenge Berryn? You knew your accusation was a lie; you knew that he would not fight. Why

The water is wide

did you do it?"

"I wanted the chance to serve as your maid."

"You wanted to compete with Legolas! Did you think you could win? Is that what you told your Chief—Bergthórr beytill?—'I will defeat and humiliate King Thranduil's son'?"

"Is that why *you* accepted my challenge? To protect your precious elf?"

"I accepted," said Eowyn, "because a man who is a coward and a bully does not deserve to breathe the same air as an elf."

She had leaned further forward as she spoke the last and—at exactly the same moment—they both became aware of their physical closeness—so close that her breath was stirring the strand of dark hair that had fallen across Thorkell bogsveigir's cheek—and—at exactly the same moment—they both drew back, uncomfortably.

"I will give you a choice," said Eowyn, rising from her seat. "You can travel, as my prisoner, as far as Minas Tirith, where I will release you to make a life for yourself—a free man—as best you may—"

"Or?"

"Or, I will release you immediately, and you will swear loyalty to Legolas and join the Guards of Eryn Carantaur. Think on it. I will return to hear your decision in the morning."

The water is wide

Chapter 10: Telling Legolas

prompt #042 triangle

Their eyes met again, and each held the other's gaze, each trying to measure something in the other.

Eowyn was the first to look away. She rose from her folding chair, and turned to leave—

"I do not need until the morning," said Thorkell bogsveigir. "Release me now. I will join your Guard."

Eowyn turned back. "You will swear loyalty to Legolas, and take orders from the March Warden?"

"That is what I have said."

"And you will keep your word?"

Thorkell bogsveigir smiled. "Whatever gave you such a low opinion of me?"

"I wonder," said Eowyn, dryly. "*Will you keep your word?*"

"Once I have given it."

Eowyn nodded. "Good. Then I shall ask Master Dínendal to untie you. But you must remain here, in the Healing Tent, until he decides that you are well enough to leave."

"And then?"

"Send for me and I—"

"It will be my pleasure." Thorkell bogsveigir, sitting in his camp bed, hands still bound together, bowed his head.

...

"Melmenya?"

Legolas did not know why he had been pacing, back and forth, outside the Healing Tent—nor why he was so relieved to see Eowyn when she finally emerged—except that she started when she heard his voice and, when she looked up at him, there was an expression on her face that he had never seen before...

"Is everything settled?" he asked, gently (ignoring the pounding of his heart).

"It is."

He took her by the arm and—still unsure why he felt so nervous—drew her back from the canvas wall—well away from any possibility of their being overheard. "*And?*"

"He has agreed to swear loyalty to you and to serve in the Guard under Haldir."

Legolas was momentarily stunned. Then he said, "I shall let *you* break that news to Haldir, melmenya,"—he looked across the campsite, to where the March Warden was training his archers—"he will be overjoyed."

"What *e/se* could I have done, Lassui?"

The water is wide

He was surprised by the sudden anger in her voice, and—always anxious to avoid an argument with her—he pulled her into his arms. “Nothing, melmenya,” he admitted. Then he bent down and craned his neck, trying to meet her averted eyes. “What is wrong?”

“Why would anything be wrong?” she said. But she did not, he noticed, look at him.

“You would tell me if...” The words died on his lips.

“If what?”

“If he insulted you.”

At last she raised her head and looked at him. “I do not need you to step in if anyone insults me, Lassui.”

“I meant... I meant if he tried to seduce you.”

“Legolas! Whatever made you say that?”

“Did he?”

“No!”

“Then why did you look guilty when you came out of the tent? Why does his presence make me feel so uneasy? ”

...

She freed herself from his arms and walked—almost ran—away, down to the riverbank, to the same spot where, on the previous day, they had spent what might have been her last hours together.

Legolas followed. “Melmenya! I am sorry!”

At the water’s edge she turned to him, and said, gravely, “Will you promise to listen until I have finished speaking? To listen to everything I have to say?”

“Do I not always?”

“No.” She shook her head. “No, you do not. At the first sign of a disagreement—if I try to say anything you do not want to hear—you drag me into bed.”

Despite his obvious anxiety, Legolas grinned—and Eowyn could not stop herself smiling back. And suddenly he seemed so young, so innocent. And so beautiful... “You foolish elf. How could anyone rival you?”

She came up close and let him take her in his arms. “As for Thorkell bogsveigir: yes, it is strange,” she said. “I could have killed him this morning, and did not. And he might have died at my hand, and did not. So a bond does seem to exist between us—it is like, I suppose, the kindred a hunter feels with the boar he has killed. But it is not desire, Lassui.”

She half expected him to interrogate her, to question her feelings, to doubt the truth of her words. But Legolas possessed too noble a spirit.

Instead, he simply pressed his lips to the top of her head, and then buried his face in her hair.

“You can take me to bed now, if you like,” said Eowyn, softly.

The water is wide

Chapter 11: Making up

prompt #064 fall

Eowyn untied his leather belt, unbuckled it, and let the ends drop to the ground, ran her hands up the soft suede of his close-fitting jerkin—"Do you remember the first time you spoke to me?"—and unhooked the fastenings, one by one.

Lying on his back, his pale golden hair spreading out across the fur blanket, Legolas smiled up at her. "Of course..."

"We were standing on the wall-walk, outside the Golden Hall, and you said, 'Take care, my lady, you stand too near the edge.' And you took my arm and drew me back." She unfastened his tunic.

"Not my most impressive attempt at seduction," said Legolas.

Eowyn laughed. "I did not know then how typical it was of you—always there, when anyone strays into danger..." She pulled aside the silvery fabric and, leaning down to him, kissed his warm skin. "I thought you were so remote, Lassui—so ethereal. When I looked at you—"

"You *never* looked at me," said Legolas. "Your eyes were fixed on Aragorn—that is why you nearly fell twenty feet and broke your neck."

Eowyn came up on her knees.

"I *did* look at you, my love, " she insisted, "but you seemed so far above the rest of us... So far above *me*. I never dreamed,"—she had pulled open his lacings, and now she peeled back the flap of his leggings—"oh, Lassui!"—and fell upon him, devouring his hard flesh—

"Valar!" he gasped, catching two handfuls of her hair.

"Mmmmmmm." She released him and, raising her head, grinned up at him. "I could not imagine you doing anything like this, Lassui. I had *no idea* what elves were like." She brushed her lips over the head of his erection. "What *this* elf was like..."

"Melmenya?"

"Mmmm?"

"Let *me*, Eowyn nín." He stroked her hair, and she let him take hold of her, and lay her on her back, and settle himself over her. "This morning I might have lost you," he said, kissing her tenderly, "so let *me* make love to *you*..."

Her smile was the only reply he needed.

...

Without taking his eyes from her face, he parted the skirts of her velvet riding gown, unlaced her leggings, and, with her help, pulled them down.

She shifted her hips invitingly, her smile broadening with anticipation.

"Impatient Shieldmaiden." He kissed the tip of her nose. "*Always* so impatient. When I fell in love with you—that day, in the Golden Hall—I had *no idea* the white lady was such a wanton..." And, sure enough, he felt her little hand push between them and, finding him, curl itself around him. And he closed his eyes, breathing a long sigh of pleasure. "No idea at all..."

"Take me, Lassui," whispered Eowyn. "Take me. *Please*..."

The water is wide

He shifted his weight onto his arms. "Guide me, meleth nín."

She drew him close and, the moment he felt her wetness, he entered her with a single, smooth thrust—"Sweet Eru!"—and he shuddered, for—despite his size and their often vigorous lovemaking—her body still held him tightly. But, frowning with concentration, he took a few deep breaths, then lowered himself and buried his face in the crook of her shoulder. "I *did* know, even then," he whispered, "that you would be mine some day. You *had* to be mine, melmenya..." Gently, he rocked his hips—

"Oh—*gods*..." Eowyn wrapped her legs around his waist. "You are so..." she whispered, "so..."—her fingers dug into his back—"oh, Lassui, you are *so*..."

He rose up on his hands and ground harder, pressing himself into her most sensitive flesh.

"*OH!*" Her hands flew to the fur rug beneath her, and she clutched at it and, confined as she was, moved her hips, desperately trying to ride him, until, at last, he reared up and began to thrust in earnest, withdrawing almost fully and—knowing how much she liked it—driving in hard, ending each stroke with an extra push.

"LASSUI!"

"*Shhhhh.*" He covered her mouth with his hand.

"Make it last," she moaned, against his fingers, "like this... *please* make it last..."

...

It did not last.

But it did not matter. Contented, she curled up in his arms.

And Legolas, after a brief but heartfelt prayer of thanks to the Valar, closed his eyes—like his human love—and let himself drift off into reverie.

The water is wide

Chapter 12: Premonition

prompt#035 sixth sense

He could not move.

He could see them—Eowyn, a splash of scarlet velvet, backing away; the dark wolf, head lowered, jaws dripping, padding towards her—

But he could not move.

How cruel, the feigned indifference of the predator—making her think that, if only she could move slowly enough, it would ignore her...

Legolas willed his legs to move, his hands to raise his bow.

But his limbs were leaden.

...

He awoke with a cry.

Her shift was stained with blood.

"It is my monthly flow, my love," she whispered, "that is all."

He hugged her close, weeping.

The water is wide

Chapter 13: Meanings

prompt #084 he

"Shhh, my love..." She clasped him to her bosom, rocking him back and forth. "It was a dream," she murmured, "just a dream,"—though she knew that elves did not dream like humans—"shhh, shhh..."

"I could not protect you," he whispered.

"From what, edhel nín?"

"From the wolf. I tried to shoot, but my arms would not move."

"You were dreaming of a *wolf*..."

She said no more; but Legolas, sensitive to the smallest change in her emotions, lifted his head. "Do you know what it means?"

"I—I have heard an old women's tale."

"Tell me."

She hugged him close, shaking her head. "I do not believe it, Lassui."

"Tell me anyway."

"Well..." She stroked his hair. "They say that to dream of a wolf foretells treachery. So you should beware."

"The wolf was attacking *you*."

"Then we should both beware."

...

There was more to it than Eowyn was saying, he was sure, but Legolas did not question her further. Instead, once breakfast was over, and the elves and men were busily striking camp, he sought out a member of Eomer's entourage—an elderly healer named Wistan, a well-loved and respected man, with a reputation for great wisdom.

The old fellow—too frail, now, to help the others—was sitting on a barrel, indulging his dog, a great, grey hound, with a few choice morsels of breakfast meat.

"May I speak with you, sir?" asked Legolas.

The man raised his head and peered at the elf through misted eyes. "Is that Prince Legolas? Yes it is! Please, your Highness..." He rose, stiffly, offering his seat.

"Oh, no..." Gently, Legolas took him by the arms and helped him down again. "I am quite comfortable sitting on grass, sir." And he sat, cross-legged, beside the dog, at the old man's feet.

"Your Highness sounds troubled," said Wistan, unconsciously turning an ear towards the elf, "very troubled. Is it anything I can help with?"

"I have been told that you understand the meaning of dreams," said Legolas.

The old man smiled—and, for a moment, his face seemed young again. "My mother was a wise

The water is wide

woman, your Highness. Many women—and, in truth, many men, though they under cover of darkness—came to seek her advice—for she could read the future in dreams, and hands, and in the lees of wine... And I was a sickly child, your Highness, and she kept me close by. So I learnt the lore at her knee."

Legolas patted the dog's head. "Suppose a man had told your mother that he had dreamed of a wolf, sir. What would she have said?" And he described his dream in detail, though without mentioning Eowyn's name.

"Was it a wolf or was it a warg?" asked Wistan.

"A wolf," replied Legolas.

"Hmmm," said the old man, thoughtfully. "My mother would have told the man this story, your Highness..." He folded his hands in his lap and took a deep breath. "There was once a young woman of Rohan, who married a stranger—a travelling man. They were brought to their marriage bed with all the customary jollity, and the wife, already undressed by her bride's maids, tried to unlace her husband's shirt. 'Will you not let me see you, my dearest?' she asked.

"But he would not—he blew out the candle, undressed himself in the shadows, and took her in the dark."

"I do not understand..." began Legolas.

Wistan held up a restraining hand. "Morning came and the couple made no appearance—people smiled. Evening came and there was still no sign of them—some of the men folk began to feel jealous. Three days passed and, at last, the bride's mother's curiosity got the better of her. So she sent her son—the girl's brother—to peer in at the window."

"And what did he see?" asked Legolas, quietly.

"His sister. Lying naked upon the bed, her throat ripped out—"

"Oh Valar!"

"And a trail of bloody footprints, leading from the bed to the door."

"The man's."

Wistan shook his head. "A wolf's."

"A *wolf's*?" Legolas frowned. "Are you saying—what?—are you saying that the husband was a shape shifter?"

The old man reached out blindly, found Legolas' slender shoulders and grasped them, like a mother calming her child. "The tale is just a tale, your Highness," he said, "that may or may not have happened. But it tells us a great truth: that every man has a wolf inside him—his baser instincts, his *desire*."

"The wolf means desire..."

"Yes."

"So the dream means that someone desires my—someone desires the woman."

"Yes," said Wistan. "Desires her *violently*."

The water is wide

Chapter 14: Theodred

prompt #001 beginnings

This and the next part were requested by Belle ;-)

The story may seem strange to some American readers, but marriage between first cousins is perfectly legal in the UK. Æðelbert, father of the unfortunate Ædith, is the warlord who has allied with the Beornings in Misrule in Mirkwood.

Legolas had been nervous for days—ever since speaking to Wystan.

Eowyn had no idea what the old man had said to him, and she did not ask—*He will tell me when he is ready*, she thought—but, each day, she unconsciously took pains to put him at his ease, making an extra effort to ensure that the time he spent with her was happy.

Tonight, she had taken him into her little hut, and she sat him down on her bedroll, and carefully unbraided his hair, beginning at his temples with his warrior's braids.

"I love your hair," she said, running her fingers through its length, soothing him with the gentle motion of her hands.

Legolas closed his eyes and leaned back, smiling. "I love *your* hair," he said.

...

"I love your hair."

Startled, Eowyn turned from her mirror, dropping her comb. "*You* should not be in here," she said.

"Why not?"

"Because I am not a little girl anymore." She was wearing nothing but a shawl over her shift and she pulled it tighter across her bosom.

"That is precisely why I am here," said her cousin, smiling. He had closed the door behind him and now he came closer, moving like a hunter, his soft boots making no sound on the stone floor.

"Theodred..."

"Can I comb it?" He stooped with cat-like grace, and picked up the fallen comb.

"What would your father say?"

"He would probably send me out to groom the horses."

Eowyn smiled. "A fitting punishment."

"Punishment? For untangling this mess?" He took a handful of her thick, golden hair and, starting at the roots, carefully worked the comb through it. His hands were surprisingly gentle. "It would be scant *reward*."

"I thought you said you loved my hair."

"Yes..." He separated another strand. "But not when it looks like handful of hay. And," he grinned, "not as much as I love certain other things about you."

Eowyn blushed. "Such as?"

The water is wide

"Oh—let me see. Your excitement, at the sight of a newborn foal; your fierceness, when you practise your quarterstaff drill ..." He laid a hand, lightly, on her shoulder.

"You will be king one day," said Eowyn, for she knew where this conversation was leading—they had had it before. "And your father expects you to make an *alliance*."

"With Ædith, pig-woman of the North."

"Theodred!" Eowyn laughed. Ædith, daughter of Æðelbert, had unfortunately inherited her father's features. "Or with the daughter of Prince Imrahil."

"Whom I have never seen."

"Well—they say there is elven blood in the family," said Eowyn, slipping out of his grasp and rising from her chair, "so she is no doubt very beautiful. Now you must go, because *I* need to dress and you and Eomer need to patrol the Five Villages." She tried to push him towards the door.

"I meant it, Eowyn," said Theodred, suddenly growing serious. "I meant every word of what I said the other night. I was not drunk."

"I know."

"So?"

"I am fond of you, Theodred. You know I am."

"Then say yes. My father can be persuaded. You know *I* can persuade him—on a good day."

"Oh, *Theodred!*" Eowyn shook her head, weakly. "There would need to be more than fondness. There would need to be..." But she could not bring herself to say the word.

"That will come in time."

"But if it did not—"

"It will. I will make sure of it."

"But if it did not," she repeated, gravely, "you would grow to hate me."

"Never."

He took her in his arms and embraced her, and she could feel him restraining himself, in deference to her feelings, and it made her heart ache.

...

"Mm?"

"I said," he repeated, softly, "What are you thinking?"

She realised that her hands, which had been combing his hair, had stopped moving. "Nothing really—just a memory, Lassui."

"Of what?" He was sitting with his back to her and he suddenly turned, and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her close. And it was such an ungainly manoeuvre for an elf that Eowyn knew at once that he wanted to tell her something important.

She laid her head on his shoulder. "Something has been troubling you these last few days."

The water is wide

He told her the story that Wistan had told him, and explained the old man's interpretation of his dream. "But you already knew what it meant."

"I had heard something similar."

"Do you," he said, lowering her onto their bedroll so that they might curl up together, "have any idea who it might be?"

"That desires me violently? *No!* And I am not sure that your dream—well, it may not have been a premonition, Lassui—it may just have been—a *dream*." She snuggled against his chest.

"It was so real."

"Dreams often are."

"You would tell me if there was someone who—scared you—someone like *him*—you would tell me?"

"Him?"

She sensed that Legolas was hesitating over his answer.

"Do you mean Gríma Wormtongue?" she asked.

She felt his head move against hers as he nodded, silently.

"Of course I would, Lassui. I would come *running* to you."

She heard him sigh with relief—and then she heard the sigh turn into a chuckle, and she hugged him, smiling.

...

"*Theodred!*" She flew into his bedchamber.

Her cousin, just returned from patrol and still in full armour, turned in surprise. "What is it? What has happened?"

"Gríma..."

"*What?*" She had thrown her arms around him and he drew her close, cradling her head against his chest. "Shhhh, shhhh, calm down. Tell me what is wrong."

"He—he touched my face—and—"

Theodred's arms tightened around her. "*Just your face?*"

"It was not that, Theodred," she said, though she shuddered at the memory, "it was what he said."

"What?"

"That there would come a day when I would be glad of his *protection*..."

Theodred drew her to his bed and sat her down. "We both know that it may only be a matter of time before he is in complete control, Eowyn," he said. "Every day, my father falls further under his spell."

"Why do you not *do* something, Theodred?"

The water is wide

"What can I do, whilst my father lives and will hear nothing against him—*relies* upon him?"

Eowyn's head sank in despair. Then she asked, quietly, "Where is Eomer?"

"He stayed behind in one of the villages to—er—"

"I do not like her," she said, sullenly.

Theodred smiled. "You hardly like anyone, Shieldmaiden—but Eomer likes her, and that is what matters. Will you help me out of my armour?"

"Of course." Theodred turned his back, and Eowyn went to work on his lacings. "So you are resolved to do nothing?" she asked. "About Gríma?"

"I will go and make some noises—threaten him—though he will not, of course, listen."

"You should challenge him—fight him—"

"I cannot, Eowyn. And neither can you, nor Eomer, not whilst he holds my father's Seal. We must all bide our time—"

"Until when?" She opened his cuirass and he shrugged it off.

"Until he makes a mistake. Until he goes too far—moves too quickly."

Eowyn turned to his nightstand, filled the basin with water, took up the washcloth and a cake of soap.

"In the meantime," said Theodred, stripping down to his shirt, "there is much for us to do, protecting our people from Orcs and Wargs and Woodmen."

"But what if—"

"*Shhhh...*"

...

"You did not answer my question," said Legolas, softly.

"Did I not? What was it?"

She settled her head comfortably on his chest and Legolas stroked her hair. "I asked you what you were thinking; you said it was just a memory; and I said—"

"Of what." Eowyn sighed. "Just Theodred, Lassui. I was thinking about Theodred."

"Ah." It was always a difficult subject between them. But, remembering what they had been talking about just before she fell silent, Legolas suddenly asked, "Did Theodred *force* you, *melmenya*?"

...

He sat on the bed as if sitting on his father's throne, his back straight, his hands resting on his knees. He was of a size with Eomer and, though his features were stronger and his hair long and straight, a stranger might have thought them brothers.

Eowyn cleaned the grime from his face, and carefully rinsed the washcloth. "Roll up your sleeves."

The water is wide

Instead, Theodred pulled his shirt off over his head. Then he held out his arms in front of him.

Blushing, Eowyn took one of his hands, sponged the sweat and dust from it, and slowly worked her way up his arm, the flush spreading from her cheeks to her throat and down to her bosom.

Theodred waited until she had washed and dried both arms, then he said, softly, "I will never let him harm you, Eowyn. I love you."

She kept her eyes lowered. "I know."

Gently, he removed the washcloth from her hands, and dropped it in the basin. Then he slipped his arms around her waist and pulled her close—she did not resist—and, for the first time, he kissed her as a lover might kiss his mistress.

...

"Did he?"

"No," said Eowyn, firmly.

"But he took advantage—"

"No."

...

"Tell me to stop," whispered Theodred. "If you do not want this, tell me to stop."

But Eowyn had made a decision. *He is a good man, she thought, who loves me and who will—at the very least—do everything he can to protect me from Gríma—and perhaps do more if I am by his side.* "I do not want you to stop."

Smiling, he kissed her hands. "Thank you..." He turned her, so that he could reach her back, and, gently brushing her hair aside, he unlaced her gown, and slid it off her shoulders—"Perfect," he whispered, kissing her neck—and he pushed it down to her waist; then he stroked his hands, lightly, down her arms, and slid them forwards to cup her breasts, and smoothed them over her stomach, and under the fabric of her gown, until his fingers slipped between her thighs.

"Ah..."

"Perfection," he whispered.

Surrounded by him, caged in by his arms, Eowyn relaxed into him, turning her head to expose more of her neck to his lips. "Theodred..."

He kissed her tenderly. "Stand up, my love."

She did as she was told, and her gown fell to her feet, and she turned, and stood naked before him.

Theodred shook his head in wonder.

"Are *you* going to undress?"

He laughed. "Bossy Shieldmaiden." Still smiling, he unlaced his leather breeches and slipped them off.

Eowyn had seen many men stripped to the waist, even some naked—and she had seen horses

The water is wide

mate—but she had never seen a man aroused before. She blushed deeply.

Theodred reached out, and took her hands, and placed them on his erection. It was warm and hard and Eowyn marvelled at the silken texture of it smooth, pink head. "You are beautiful."

Theodred pulled her into his arms. "You *do* know what I am going to do to you?"

"Yes."

"You can still say no."

"I want you to do it." She smiled, "I just did not expect you to be so big."

Theodred laughed. "There are many bigger than mine, my love."

Eowyn pulled back from him. "*How do you know?*"

He laughed again. "Never you mind." Then, suddenly serious, he said, "It will hurt you, the first time."

"I know. I have heard other women talk of it—but how do you know about that?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Warriors talk too."

"I am not your first."

"No."

"Who—"

"Shhhh." He put his finger to her lips. "Not now."

Eowyn slipped from his arms and, climbing onto his bed, lay down on her back. "Do it quickly."

"No, love." Theodred shook his head. "You are not ready yet."

...

"He did *nothing* dishonourable, Lassui," said Eowyn, firmly. "He loved me and he believed that, in time, I would love him too. *I* was the one who did the dishonourable thing, because I knew I did not love him." She kissed his chest, whispering, "He was not you, edhel nín."

...

His caresses were gentle, and when he lowered himself upon her, and she felt him between her thighs, pushing gently against her, she reached down and guided him.

Supporting himself on his elbows, he held her face in his hands, and gazed down into her eyes, smiling.

Then he thrust his hips forward.

And Eowyn heard someone scream—but the pain in her head was so intense that she could not be sure where the sound was coming from.

"Oh my love..." He gathered her in his arms and lay still, kissing her, and whispering sweet words, until the tension had left her body. And then he began to thrust, slowly and gently. And Eowyn found that it was not unpleasant, if she relaxed.

The water is wide

...

"I was very fond of him," said Eowyn softly.

"And you would have made him a loving wife, a supportive queen," said Legolas. "And... And I think he was right, *melmenya*—he was a worthy man, and he loved you—and I think that you would have come to love him, in time."

"But not as I love you." She raised her head and smiled down at him (but there was sadness in her eyes). "Poor Theodred."

Related short story: The First Night of Rhîw

The voice was soft—no more than a sigh upon the wind—and, at first, Eowyn thought she had imagined it.

"*Eowyn...*"

Climbing the main staircase, at the end of an afternoon spent sparring with Rumil and Orophin, she stopped, one hand on the rail, listening hard.

"*Eowyn...*"

It was real—she no longer doubted it—and its owner was just behind her!

Eowyn spun round, automatically reaching for the hilt of her sword.

But there was no one else on the stairs.

Puzzled, she climbed to the top, and stepped onto the walkway. To the right, her and Legolas' chambers stood out from the rest of the buildings, decked with pumpkin lanterns, made by the colony's schoolchildren, to celebrate of the first night of Rhîw.

"*Eowyn...*"

Gods! The voice was louder, and now seemed—somehow—to be coming from up ahead!

Eowyn hurried towards it, her hand on her sword. She could see no one—*No one at all*, she thought, *no servants, no guards—and where is Legolas? Why, tonight of all nights, has he not come out to meet me?*

Beyond the brightly grinning lanterns, the shadows seemed unnaturally dark and Eowyn was surprised to feel herself trembling, but the voice drew her on, past her chambers, and up the stairs to her garden.

There, between the pools of light, she thought she saw a figure, and, "Who are you?" she asked, scarcely expecting a reply.

But the voice responded, "Do you not recognise me, Eowyn?"

He stepped closer, his already insubstantial form fading in the lanterns' glow, but Eowyn could still see his silhouette, and she gasped. "Are you lost?" she whispered. "Are you here because you are not at peace?"

"I am with my ancestors."

"Oh..." Her hands came up to her breast, and she smiled. "Is your father with you?"

The water is wide

"Yes."

"Oh..." She wiped away her tears. "I saw it myself, once, for just a moment."

"I know."

There was a smile in his voice, and Eowyn moved closer. "If you are at peace, why have you come?"

"Because, tonight, we are permitted to visit our loved ones, if they light the way."

"Light the way... You mean the *lanterns*?" She looked up at the grinning faces, which Legolas himself had taught the children to carve (because, he said, the first night of Rhîw meant something to *all* the races of Eryn Carantaur, and the colony should celebrate it). "Do you have a message for me?" she asked. "Or—or is it a warning?"

"I just wanted to see you,"—his voice had changed, become softer, more intimate—"to see what my Shieldmaiden had become."

And, strangely, his tenderness made her blush. "Do you like what you see?"

"You are older, but so much wiser, Eowyn, and stronger, and even more beautiful. You were a girl then, and now you are a woman."

Fresh tears spilled down her cheeks. "I am happy," she told him, because she knew that he had loved her, and because they had once believed that their future lay together.

"I know."

"He—"

"He is the luckiest of beings. But,"—his form began to fade—"he loves you, Eowyn, and will always love you, and will never take you for granted."

"*Wait!*" she cried, rushing towards him, because he was leaving her, every moment growing less and less distinct. "I want to tell you—*wait*—I loved you—I *did*—I did not know it then, but I did—*please!*—I would have made you a good wife—I *would...*"

But he was gone.

Legolas found her sitting in the garden.

"Melmenya? I went down to the practice field, looking for you. What are you doing up here?" He crouched down beside her. "Have you been *crying*?"

"On this night," said Eowyn, softly, "the dead may visit their loved ones."

"And who were you hoping to see, my darling?" He pulled her into his arms, and tried to rub some warmth into her. "Your uncle?—oh, melmenya, you are so cold!"

"It was Theodred who came, Lassui," she said, smiling. "Theodred has given us his blessing."

The water is wide

Chapter 15: Faramir

prompt #002 middles

The first time he caught sight of her, running to her uncle's side in the Golden Hall—proud, fearless, but steeped in sadness—he knew that he would do anything, even dance at her wedding, just to see her smile.

...

The Ceremony was everything she had ever dreamed of.

Dressed in cloth of gold, she swept into the Hall of Kings attended by half-a-dozen maidens; Eomer gave her his arm and led her down the aisle, to Faramir's side, symbolically placing her hand in his; Aragorn, splendid in his kingly robes, said the words; showers of rose petals—Gimli's gift to them—floated down upon them; and, amidst the cheers of the Court and the people of Gondor, they walked out of the Hall, man and wife.

Merry and Pippin rushed forward to congratulate them.

And Eowyn, smiling happily as she hugged Merry, suddenly sensed his eyes upon her, and she looked up and saw him—a tall, lean, graceful figure, standing apart from the others, his normally serene face a mask of sorrow...

...

All the while she sat beside her husband, receiving the pledges of his followers, she could feel him, watching her; and when the formalities were over, and the dancing had begun, she saw him approach Faramir.

"May I request a dance of your lady?" he asked, his voice so gentle.

Faramir smiled, "Of course..."

Legolas turned to her, placing his hand upon his heart and bowing his head. "Your Highness," he murmured, "would you do me the honour?"

Eowyn glanced at Faramir—he nodded towards the elf, a strange expression on his face—half amusement, she thought, but half compassion.

"The honour would be mine, Prince Legolas," she said.

He led her onto the marble floor—the crowds fell back, to watch them—and, to the most exquisite elven music, they danced. And, though she did not know the steps, Eowyn found herself matching his movements, as though her body were somehow in secret communication with his...

Then the music ended. Legolas bowed and, to the guests' applause, led her back to her seat—"Thank you,"—and he bowed again; and, as she watched him thread his way through the clusters of people, his simple dove-grey tunic and leggings a stark contrast to the finery around him, she found herself wondering—just for a moment—what it would be like to have him make love to her.

"He is in love with you," said Faramir.

Eowyn looked towards the great double doors, but the elf had already left the Banqueting Hall. "No—I—no, he cannot be."

"Yes. He is." Faramir smiled, sadly. "Poor Legolas..."

The water is wide

...

Her bride's maids undressed her, and brushed out her hair, crowned her with a simple chain of daisies, and led her to her marriage bed, strewn with lavender and heartsease.

Faramir's groom's men, having drunk to his health—and stamina—pushed him into the bedchamber; the women withdrew; and, with much laughter, and many coarse suggestions, the well-wishers closed the doors, leaving the couple alone together.

Faramir sat down beside her and, with a shy smile, took her hand.

"I did tell you," said Eowyn, softly, "you do know that I am not..."

"I know."

"I would never have done it had I not believed that I would marry him—"

"Shhhh," said Faramir. "What happened in the past is behind us. All that matters now is the future." He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it, tenderly.

"You are such a good man, Faramir."

"Eowyn!" Her husband shook his head. "Though it is gratifying to hear you say that, my dear, there are other words I would prefer to hear on my wedding night."

"Words of love?"

"Can you say them?"

"Of course. But love is blind, Faramir, and may be misled. It is a man's worth that wins his wife's lasting affection."

"What a serious spirit you have, my beautiful wife..." He kissed her hands again. "Shall I put out the candles, my dear?"

Eowyn opened the canvas door of her little hut and stepped outside. The air was cool and misty, promising a warm, sunny day.

She crossed the camp to where Legolas and the others were already sitting down to breakfast, returning the greetings of the elves who were packing up their belongings, and of Eomer, and Gimli (though his mouth was full), and of Lord Fingolfin.

"Good morning, melmenya," said Legolas, holding out his hand. Eowyn sat beside him. "You have a letter from Caras Arnen," he said, softly. "The messenger is waiting for your reply."

Eowyn frowned. "From Faramir?"

The elf nodded. "His man says that Faramir plans to join us at the Falls of Rauros. But the letter is private..." He handed her the folded parchment.

"I will read it later," said Eowyn. "After breakfast."

...

Back in the privacy of her shelter, Eowyn broke the sealing wax—impressed, she noticed, not with the official seal of the Prince of Ithilien, but with Faramir's own monogram—and unfolded the letter.

The water is wide

'My dear,' she read, 'I am sorry to be reminding you of a time that caused you so much pain, but a matter has arisen that requires your attention.'

'As you will no doubt recall, amongst the lands granted to us at the time of our marriage was the Vale of Lothgeleb, which was to be held in trust by us jointly for our eldest son, until he came of age.'

Eowyn sighed. *I thought all this was over...*

'Since our union was childless, and I intend to adopt Sieglinde's sons, I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to sign your title to the land over to me—I would, of course, ensure that you suffered no financial loss as a result...'

Eowyn's hands dropped to her lap, but she resisted the desire to crumple the letter into a ball.

"Melmenya?" Legolas—her *precious* Legolas—was hovering anxiously outside—and Eowyn could hear all kinds of concern in his gentle voice. "Is it bad news?"

"No... No, it is just something that I would rather have forgotten." Eowyn wiped her eyes and put on a brave face. "Come inside, my love."

Legolas raised the canvas flap. "We will be leaving in less than an hour, and—oh, melmenya!" He crawled in beside her and took her in his arms. "I am here," he whispered.

"I know." She hugged him fiercely. "I know."

"What is wrong?"

"Promise me that we will always be happy."

"Oh, Eowyn nín!" He held her tightly.

...

"May I read it?"

"Of course, Lassui." With a sniff, she put the letter into his hand.

Legolas scanned the message. "It cannot be the land that is troubling you so much..." He folded the parchment and gave it back to her. "What is wrong, melmenya?"

"I wanted to *forget* the past," said Eowyn.

"Why?"

"What do you mean?"

"I have heard others say that," said Legolas, tilting his head to see her face more clearly, "*mortals*—they say, 'We must put the past behind us'. Why do they say it?" He saw the pain in her eyes—as though his words had been a criticism of *her*—and he drew her back into his arms, to show her that that was not so.

Moments passed; then Eowyn answered, "Because our mistakes—our *regrets*—will taint the future, if we let them." She snuggled closer. "I wanted to forget that Faramir and I had made that mistake. I wanted to forget the time that I had wasted—time that I could have had with you."

"Was it wasted?"

The water is wide

"How can you ask that?" She pulled away from him. "You loved me, and I married someone else. How can you ask whether the time was wasted?"

"Because *you* did not love *me* when you married Faramir, melmenya—it was only after your marriage had failed that you came to love me. So how could I say that the time was wasted?" He kissed the top of her head. "Shall I tell you what *I* think?"

"I thought you just had."

He laughed softly, his face still buried in her hair. "No, this is something even more profound..." He pressed his cheek to hers. "I think that mortals regret the past because they have so little future. For them, every false step—though they may learn from it—is a loss of precious time. But you are immortal now, my love. Your future with me will last the life of Arda. Had you forgotten that?"

Eowyn did not reply.

"You had." He gathered her close. "So I must make sure that I am always here to remind you, melmenya," he whispered.

The water is wide

Chapter 16: Legolas

prompt #003 ends

"Sometimes," said Legolas, "it hurt to see you."

Warm in her bedroll, covered with two elven cloaks—her own and his—Eowyn lay beside him, her hand resting on his chest. "Did Gimli know? About—about your feelings for me, I mean?"

"He did, though we never spoke of you." Legolas smiled, fondly. "Gimli can be very thoughtful, *melmenya*. Who else would have helped me build a garden for you?"

...

"Prince Legolas!"

The elf looked up from the winter-flowering *êgvor* he was carefully staking out. "My Lady!" He smiled. "I did not expect you back so soon..." He wiped his—already spotless—hands on a rag, rose gracefully, and greeted her formally, hand on heart, head bowed.

"It seems that Faramir's business in Minas Tirith will take another two weeks, at least," said Eowyn. "So I decided to come home. Faramir has Berengar with him, and—and I wanted to see my garden." She held out her hand.

"Then I must show it to you—though there is little to see, as yet—oh, my Lady, you are cold! Please, wear this." He took off his elven cloak and draped it around her shoulders.

Eowyn smiled up at him. "I am no delicate maiden, Master Elf—I have just ridden twenty miles through the early morning mist—but it *is* chilly, here in the shade, so, thank you."

Legolas offered her his arm. "I have particular instructions to draw your attention—to draw *everybody's* attention—to the heap of stones along the southern wall. It is, apparently, a work of genius."

"It is going to be an artificial stream," said Eowyn, smiling.

"So I have heard." The elf raised an eyebrow.

Eowyn laughed. "Yes—Gimli is very proud of it." They stood beside the dwarf's construction—a long, narrow, sloping channel, neatly built from blocks of square-cut granite, capped with tastefully arranged 'banks' of delicately-coloured natural rocks.

"It will look pretty when those are wet," said Eowyn.

"Gimli wants me to plant ferns between them—he has seen something like it in my father's palace—though *this*, he assures me, is far more sophisticated than anything an elf could have devised."

Eowyn scanned the courtyard walls. "Where will all the water come from?"

"It will use only a small amount of water, stored in a cistern hidden underneath—the water will circulate—but you will have to ask Gimli how that will work, I am afraid."

"Show me the trees," said Eowyn, smiling.

...

At the centre of the courtyard, where the light was almost constant—with Gimli's help—Legolas had removed the paving stones, freeing the rich earth beneath, and planted a grove of young

The water is wide

trees, and flowering shrubs. "Do you like them?" he asked.

"They are beautiful."

"This one," said Legolas, stroking a slender trunk, "is a cherry tree. In early spring its boughs will be all but hidden by pink blossoms—the petals will rain down upon this bench—and when the tree grows a little older, it will give you cherries..."

Gently, Eowyn took hold of one of the delicate branches and looked closely at its leaves. "Can they *really* thrive," she asked, "I mean, here—amongst all this stone?"

"They were nervous, at first. But when I described the joy that they would bring to their lady, they said that they—"

"They *spoke* to you?" She frowned, searching his face for the truth.

"All living things have a voice," said Legolas, "and love to tell their tales. Does your horse not speak to you?"

"No," said Eowyn, shaking her head. "No, he does not. Oh—I know when he is scared or angry, when he is happy, too; but no. *I* speak to *him*, and I am sure that he understands me—beyond the simple commands he has been taught, I mean. But he does not speak to me. I wish he *could*..."

"Perhaps," said Legolas, "it is just a matter of learning. It was the elves who taught the trees to speak."

"How strange," said Eowyn. Then she added, shyly, "Could *you* teach *me* to speak to Brightstar?"

Legolas laughed. "One day, perhaps. But—give me your hand. Now place the other on the tree trunk. (It may help to close your eyes)." Then he spoke in what, to Eowyn, sounded like Elvish, though she did not recognise any of the few words she knew—and the tree—

She pulled her hands away, and stared at the elf, open-mouthed.

"My Lady! What is it?"

"I saw it," she whispered. "Heard it—what the tree was thinking—or what *you*..." She took a few steps backwards. "I must go inside—I have things to do. Urgent things..."

Now it was the elf who looked surprised—and worried, she thought—but he recovered quickly, placing his hand upon his heart and bowing his head. "Of course, my Lady. Good day."

...

"It was a beautiful garden," said Eowyn, snuggling close.

"It was *our* garden, melmenya. Yours and mine. I used to sit beneath the cherry tree and imagine—"

"Weaving blossoms in my hair, and making love to me."

Legolas gasped. "How do you know *that*?"

"Because the tree told me," she replied. "In vivid detail."

...

The water is wide

"Mmmm..." Eowyn, stretching luxuriously, caught sight of him, standing in the shadow of the trees. "Prince Legolas! How long have I been asleep?"

The elf smiled. "It is late afternoon, my Lady," he said. "It will soon be time to go inside." He stepped forward, and crouched beside her. "You have blossom in your hair, *nafein*." And he stretched out his long, slender hand and brushed the flowers away...

Then his fingers slid downwards, in a gentle caress, and rested on her bosom.

Smiling, Eowyn rose up, and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"You are like a tree spirit," he whispered.

They kissed, slowly, Legolas pulling her close, so that she could feel him, hard against her belly. "Make love to me," she murmured.

He nuzzled her neck, and she felt his hands move again, turning her over, and raising her skirts; and she set her palms on the stone bench and felt his lean, hard thighs push her legs apart, and his penis press eagerly against her sensitive flesh—"Oh, Legolas!"—until it found its home, and he buried himself inside her.

Then, bending in close, and brushing his lips across her ear—"You must be quiet," he warned—he smiled against her neck, and she moaned as he seemed to be withdrawing from her; but then he thrust in again, hard and deep, and she shuddered with delight, her hands gripping the carved stone—

And then his rhythm grew fast and insistent, and she had no choice but to tell the whole world how wonderful it was.

...

"Am I forgiven?" whispered Legolas, sinking into her waiting arms.

"For telling the trees how you would pleasure me?" She stroked his hair. "I am not sure that I can ever forgive you for that." (With his face in her bosom, he could not see her broad smile). "At the time," she said, "I thought I must be seeing my own wishful thinking. You always seemed so—sexless."

"Sexless!"

"I began to think that I had only *imagined* your trying to seduce me at Edoras—I began to agree with the people who said that you were *effeminate*—"

"You were *married*, *melmenya*! I was just being respectful—"

Eowyn burst out laughing. "No one," she said, hugging him tightly, "could possibly be less effeminate than you." She slid her hand between their bodies, and moved it, up and down, slowly at first, then faster—and harder.

And Legolas, though he had made love to her only moments earlier, closed his eyes—a serene smile on his beautiful face—and waited, patiently, until his hips suddenly jerked, and he cried out—

"Oh yes, *melmenya*! YES!"

The water is wide

Chapter 17: So lucky

prompt #081 how?

Three days later

She was lying on her left side, curled up like a kitten, one small hand, lightly fisted, lying on the pillow beside her cheek.

Is she? Unhooking the fastenings of his tunic, Legolas tilted his head—*Yes, she is smiling!* He chuckled softly. *What are you dreaming of, melmenya?*

He shrugged off his tunic and began unlacing his leggings.

Ever since they had been together, Eowyn had insisted that he have regular doses of male-only company—tonight she had gone to bed early, leaving him with Eomer and Gimli. And it *had* been pleasant—toasting slices of cram, drinking wine, and sharing memories the Ring War—Legolas slid his leggings down his thighs—but he had missed her—her feminine way of drawing out Gimli and of teasing Eomer—her merry laughter.

He climbed into the bedroll beside her.

“Mmmmm.” She stretched, and turned over. “Did you have a good night?”

“Yes.” He took her in his arms. “Were you having a pleasant dream?”

“Dream?” She snuggled close. “I do not remember—” She chuckled, low in her throat. “You are naked...”

“I am an elf.”

“Mmmmm.” Her hand slid downwards. There was a moment’s pause. Then—suddenly awake—she pushed herself up on one arm and stared down at him.

“What is wrong, melmenya?”

“That is what *I* was about to ask.”

“What do you mean?”

She nodded towards her hand.

Legolas frowned. “What?”

“You know what.”

He shook his head.

“Yes you do.”

“No, melmenya, I do not!” But she was clearly upset and he could not bear seeing her unhappy. He pulled her into his arms. “You are tired, my darling.”

“Is it me?”

“Is what you?”

She moved her hand.

“What are you? Oh you mean...” He closed his eyes and concentrated on the feel of her

The water is wide

fingers, casting his mind back, for good measure, to their first time—reliving the moment when he unlaced her bodice, and revealed her slender body—

Eowyn pulled her hand away. "What are you doing?"

"I thought you wanted—"

"I wanted to know why you did not want me—I did not want you to—to perform—"

"Did not *want* you?"

"You have always wanted me—before tonight. *Always.*" She turned away.

"Melmenya!" He pulled her back. "Whatever makes you think that I do not want you tonight?"

"You are not—ready."

Legolas shook his head. "I—"

"You are *always* ready."

"Am I?" He could not keep the touch of pride from his voice.

"You know you are. Why not tonight?"

"I was just looking at you—am I really? *Always?*"

"Yes." She scowled. "What do you mean, looking at me?"

"You looked so sweet." He grinned. "Not at all like you do now."

"So you did not want to make love to me because I looked too sweet?"

"I wanted... You were dreaming, melmenya. I wanted to hold you whilst you dreamed. I wanted to watch you wake in my arms. I wanted—I wanted to do *more* than just make love to you..."

Eowyn said nothing for a long moment. Then, "I am awake now."

"Yes," said Legolas smiling, "you are."

...

He slipped inside her quickly, sighing as much with relief as with pleasure.

"Legolas, if you do not want—"

"Shhhh." He thrust hard, knowing what she liked.

"Oh!"

"*Shhhh.*" He thrust again, and the sensation almost overwhelmed him. "*Manwë* and..." He closed his eyes, grinding his teeth.

And he realised that he was never less like an elf—at least, in *that* respect—than when he was inside her. With others he had learnt to extend it—for two glorious days, on one remarkable occasion—but with *her* it was—well, perhaps not impossible, but he could seldom delay his release. And never for long. She was special. He risked one more thrust. "Oh. Yes. Oh, I am coming... Melmenya—" His voice sounded strange—high-pitched with surprise.

The water is wide

And, not even attempting to fight it now, he sank down into her body, and lost himself in shuddering bliss.

...

"I am sorry. I will make it up to you."

He felt her hand stroke his hair and he knew that he was forgiven—not for climaxing so prematurely, for that never troubled her, but for—

What?

For forgetting the differences that still existed between them—male, female; elf, human; immortal and... Newly immortal.

"For the elves," he said, softly, "the world moves both very swift and very slow. Swift, because they themselves change little, and all else fleets by; slow, because they do not count the running years."

"I am not an elf."

"No." He lifted himself up on his hands and gazed down at her, love welling up in his heart until it overflowed and filled him, body and spirit.

She looked up into his face and—reading the feelings plain there—sighed, and he allowed himself a small smile of triumph. "You will learn to think like one, *melmenya*. I will love you—*want* you—forever. You will find that the ripple of a moment makes no lasting change to the strong current of the years..."

Suddenly hard again, he began to thrust—in slow, deep strokes—"Valar," he groaned, "how could you *think* that I did not want you?" He leaned down, hips still moving rhythmically, and kissed her mouth, slowly and thoroughly; then his head sank into the crook of her shoulder, and he bit her neck.

"Oh gods!" Eowyn's body twisted away from him.

He rose up and thrust harder, faster.

"*LEGOLAS!*"

"*Shhhh!*"

She clasped her arms around his shoulders and, arching up from the ground, desperately met his strokes.

...

"So—you have not always been so—*voracious?*"

Legolas laughed. "Only since I have been lucky enough to have you—"

She took him by surprise, catching his wrists and pinning him down on the bedroll, peering deep into his eyes.

Legolas allowed her her few moments of triumph before, exerting his elven strength, he turned her onto her back and straddled her. "How could you even *think* that I would lie to you?" he muttered, shaking his head.

Then his mock frown turned slowly into a broad smile. "*Wild* Shieldmaiden."

The water is wide

"At least," said Eowyn, nodding at the long, thick erection suddenly looming over her, "you are back to normal now."

The water is wide

Chapter 18: The troublemaker

prompt #005 outsides

She is his weakness, thought Thorkell bogsveigir, watching his new lord take off his cloak and wrap it around the woman's shoulders. To defeat him, all a man needs to do is get rid of her—

"Thorkell!"

One of his new comrades, a grinning, empty-headed elf named Valandil, patted him on the shoulder. "Come, help me prepare Lady Eowyn's shelter."

Reduced to serving in My Lady's bedchamber. I will be emptying the pot next...

He followed the elf reluctantly, grumbling, *This is not warrior's work*, whilst he helped Valandil erect the wooden walls and hammer in the pegs that held down the tented roof. "Why is a woman allowed to use us like this?"

The elf fussed with the canvas door. "What do you mean, use us?"

"If she must have a bedchamber, why do the servants not build it?"

"Lady Eowyn never asked for a shelter," said Valandil. "It was Camthalion's idea to build it for her—to give her some privacy. Women," he explained, coming up beside Thorkell and gently taking the wooden mallet from his hands, "need to—do things."

Frowning, the man watched the elf pull out the peg he had just knocked in, angle it, and drive it back home. "What things?" he asked—already fearing the worst.

"Well, they must wash and dress, morning and night," said Valandil, repositioning another peg, "and," he lowered his voice, "you will know this better than I, Thorkell—women have *monthly* things."

The man shuddered. "Why would I know about that?"

The elf looked up in surprise. "Have you never—er—had a woman?"

"Of course I have!"

"Then how can you not know?"

Thorkell ran his hand through his hair. "A man does not... A man... Orcs' bollocks!—women keep all that stuff to themselves, thank the gods." He seized the mallet, gave several of the pegs a good, hard knock, then handed it back to the elf.

"But... What if it happens when you are with her?" asked Valandil.

"What?"

"What if she starts having it when you are with her?"

"She takes herself off somewhere and deals with it—I do not know." He raised a hand to cut off any further discussion. "You people are..." He gestured, as though pushing Valandil away.

...

"He is a troublemaker," said Haldir, setting down his tankard. Legolas and Eowyn, sitting either side of him, followed his gaze to where Thorkell bogsveigir appeared to be arguing with

The water is wide

Valandil. "Since he took the oath there has been one mishap after another. Setting loose the horses—"

"Fortunately," said Legolas, "elven horses do not stray too far."

"He did not know that. Then he tried to seduce Rothinzil—"

Legolas laughed. "He might as well have set his cap at Gimli—I simply meant, *elvellon*," he added quickly, to the dwarf on his right, "that Rothinzil has eyes for no one but Master Dínendal just as you have eyes for no one but Lady Galadriel."

Gimli grunted.

"Then," continued Haldir, "there was the fire in the Mess tent. I am convinced that that was his doing."

"But you have no proof."

"No. I did, however, see him drop Orodreth's bow in the river."

"That may have been, as he claimed, an accident."

"He is an *archer*," said Haldir, "and, though it pains me to say it, a Bowman of considerable skill. That is not the sort of accident an archer has." He folded his arms. "He never disobeys outright. He just—"

"I am so sorry, March Warden," said Eowyn. "I should have asked your permission—"

"No, no." Haldir shook his head. "I am sorry, Eowyn, I did not mean to imply that... You are Legolas' consort—the joint leader of the colony—you have a perfect right to appoint a man to the Border Guard."

"But you are the one who has to discipline him. I should at least have sought your advice." She smiled sadly at the March Warden. "I will speak to him tomorrow."

"That will not be necessary—"

"Yes," said Eowyn firmly, "it will—oh, I will not mention anything you have just said—I will not mention *you* at all. There are other things I need to discuss with him."

Legolas and Haldir exchanged glances.

"Leave it to the Shieldmaiden, March Warden," said Legolas.

...

Next morning

"My Lady." Thorkell bogsveigir bowed. "Prince Legolas and the March Warden ask you to join them—they are at the river's edge, watering the horses."

Eowyn, sitting beside the fire, eating breakfast with her brother and Gimli, handed the remains of her porridge to the dwarf and rose. "Is there a problem down there, Master Bowsayer?"

"Not that I know of." The man turned to leave.

"Wait." Her voice was commanding. Thorkell, realising that his manner had been less than respectful, assumed that she would rebuke him. Instead, she said, "Will you walk with me?"

The water is wide

He raised an eyebrow. Then, composing his face in what he hoped was an expression of meek subservience, he turned towards her. "Your servant, my lady." He gestured for her to take the lead and followed her through the maze of thorny furze bushes that filled the sloping river bank.

They had gone no more than a few yards—though were well out of her brother's earshot—when she suddenly rounded on him. "You need not do that with me," she said.

"My Lady?"

"Try to hide your nature. *I* know you. I fell—twice—beneath your sword, and beat you the third time—I have seen your spirit, Thorkell bogsveigir. You have not an ounce of humility in you. You do not even know how to counterfeit."

"*Then why did you make me your servant?*"

"I did *not*." There was real anger in her voice now. "I offered you a position of *honour*—in days past men were proud to serve an elven lord."

"The days of Bëor are truly passed, Lady. *Your* elf is no Finrod Felagund."

"How dare you!" She flushed crimson. "Are you saying that Legolas is no more worthy a lord than Bergthórr beytill? Are you saying—?"

"Bergthórr! Bergthórr is nothing but a..." He caught his tongue just in time.

"A what?" she demanded.

Thorkell laughed, mirthlessly. What did it matter now? "Bergthórr beytill is a small man with small ambitions. Horse penis my arse! The man cannot get a rise unless he is whipped by a whore—"

"Sir," said Eowyn icily, "you say too much."

She glanced this way and that, to check, he supposed, that neither her brother nor her husband was watching, then—taking him, he had to admit, by surprise—she grasped the front of his jerkin. "You have the opportunity to serve a *great* lord, Master Bowswayer; to fight beside elves—*elves*, you fool; to use elven weapons, to learn elven skills. You have the chance to become a better man than you are; to make Middle Earth a better place to live in. *I* have given you that chance. If you betray me Master Bowswayer—if you fail Legolas—I will break you." She released him. "Now, return to your comrades."

Seething, Thorkell bogsveigir tramped back to the encampment. *That*, he thought, *is no lady. That is a man in skirts.*

The water is wide

Chapter 19: Loss

prompt #024 family

In 2989 Théodwyn married Éomund of Eastfold, the chief Marshal of the Mark. Her son Éomer was born in 2991, and her daughter Éowyn in 2995. At that time Sauron had arisen again, and the shadow of Mordor reached out to Rohan. Orcs began to raid in the eastern regions and slay or steal horses. Others also came down from the Misty Mountains, many being great uruks in the service of Saruman, though it was long before that was suspected. Éomund's chief charge lay in the east marches; and he was a great lover of horses and hater of Orcs. If news came of a raid he would often ride against them in hot anger, unwarily and with few men. Thus it came about that he was slain in 3002; for he pursued a small band to the borders of the Emyrn Muil, and was there surprised by a strong force that lay in wait in the rocks.

Not long after Théodwyn took sick and died to the great grief of the king. Her children he took into his house, calling them son and daughter. He had only one child of his own, Théodred his son, then twenty-four years old; for the queen Elfhild had died in childbirth, and Théoden did not wed again. Éomer and Éowyn grew up at Edoras and saw the dark shadow fall on the halls of Théoden. Éomer was like his fathers before him; but Éowyn was slender and tall, with a grace and pride that came her out of the South from Morwen of Lossarnach, whom the Rohirrim had called Steelsheen.

JRR Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, Appendix A.

Her mother lies at Edoras, beside her father, with their ancestors; his mother lies in Mirkwood, alone amongst the living.

"I cannot believe that Aredhel told you *that*," whispered Legolas. "There should be a law to prevent an elf's first sweetheart slandering him before his betrothed."

Eowyn smiled. "Is it a slander to say that a young elf was gentle and considerate—"

"And squealed like an elleth when she—*touched* him?"

Eowyn pushed herself up on one elbow and peered down at him. It was dark—moonless—outside her hut, and she could see little more of him than a vague shape amidst a pool of velvety blackness, but she knew that—with his keen elven sight—he could see *her* clearly. "How old were you?"

"About twenty-five."

"Is that young?"

"Well, I suppose I would have been like... Lord Colgan's son."

"Who must be seven or eight," said Eowyn. "So, quite young."

"My father had explained the facts of life to me—after I asked him why my horse was climbing on another horse's back," said Legolas; and Eowyn could almost feel the hot blush staining his cheeks.

She smiled. "But?"

The water is wide

"He told me that, with elves, it only happened if the elf really loved the elleth."

"That was clever—he was not telling you a lie, exactly, nor forbidding you, but discouraging you from experimenting too soon." She felt Legolas' hand gently brush her hair over her shoulder and her smile broadened. "No wonder you were shy with Aredhel."

She leaned forward, inviting him to draw her closer, and felt his hand slide obligingly down her back. "Her father told me a story too."

"About *me*?" Legolas kissed the top of her head. "Not about my sexual inadequacies, surely?"

"No!" Chuckling, she found his hand and twined her fingers in his. "He told me that he once came upon you toddling along with a big bow and quiver in your arms, adamant that you were going to teach your father how to use them! You could not be dissuaded."

She felt Legolas' chest rise and fall, and heard his quiet sigh.

"Lassui?" She raised her head. "What is it?"

"I remember that, too," he said.

She squeezed his hand. "It is a painful memory! I am so sorry—"

"No... No, *melmenya*." He kissed her fingers in the darkness. "I was trying to cheer my father—I thought that archery would make him forget. It was the sort of foolish thing a child does."

"Forget what?"

"My mother's death—missing her, I mean—I thought that when he was sad he would be able to lose himself in archery."

"Oh, Legolas!" She slid her arms beneath him and hugged him tightly. Then she said, softly, "How did he react?"

"He cried."

"I am sure," she said, after a few moments' silence, "that that was exactly what he needed. You saved him, Lassui—you gave him something to live for. I only wish..." She fell silent again.

"You must not blame yourself, *melmenya*."

"I do not," said Eowyn. She pulled away from him and rolled onto her back. "I blame *her*."

...

Legolas wondered what to do. "Eowyn...?"

She did not answer.

Now it was *his* turn to seek *her* hand. He held it firmly, but gently. "She did not abandon you, Eowyn *nín*."

"No?" Her tone was bitter. "Then how do you explain her absence?"

Legolas squeezed her hand. "She died."

"*She should not have died!*" She was angry now. "She had *children* to live for! A son and a daughter, who needed her! Your father did not give up and die!"

The water is wide

"My father is different." Legolas turned onto his side and—though she offered him no encouragement—took her in his arms. "If *I* were to lose you as your mother lost your father, *I* would die."

"Not if we had children!"

Legolas closed his eyes and tried to imagine the unimaginable. "Yes," he said, at length, "yes I believe I would. And it would not mean that I did not love our children, *melmenya*. It would mean that I could not live without *you*." Their bodies had settled into their customary closeness, his lying lightly upon hers, hard muscle upon soft curves. He buried his face in her hair. "Could *you* live without *me*, *meleth nín*?"

Eowyn did not reply.

"When I dreamed of the future," he murmured, "you were sailing west with me, and we were both leaving our son behind."

"*To follow us later.*"

"Yes—just as you were expected to follow your mother and father—when you were poisoned, *melmenya*, did you not say that you saw them, waiting for you beyond the light?"

Eowyn said nothing for a long time. Then, "I needed her here."

"I know you did, my darling. But she could not be here."

"I will never forgive them—not my father for the pride that led him into an ambush, nor my mother for the weakness that—that..."

"Took her away from you." He kissed her gently. "But you are so like them, Eowyn *nín*. Call your father's pride 'honour', and your mother's weakness 'love', and you are describing yourself —"

"No! I would never, *ever*, be so foolish as to do what my father did!"

"Then I should call your brother in to witness that oath," said Legolas. "For it would certainly set *my* mind at rest."

"You stupid elf!"

She tried to get out from under him, but she was no match for his gentle elven strength, and he held her until she had calmed. "I am sorry, *melmenya*, that your life was so filled with pain," he whispered. "If there was any way that I could—"

"It was not," said Eowyn. "Not *filled*. There was my uncle and Theodred, and, always, Eomer. And now there is you."

"The stupid elf?"

"The stupid elf."

They lay, once more, in silence, Legolas watching over his beloved, aware of each rise and fall of her chest and of the soft sounds of her breathing.

Then Eowyn said, "Will you sing to me?"

And Legolas smiled.

The water is wide

Chapter 20: The messengers

prompt #074 dark

The quiet commotion drew Legolas out of reverie.

Eowyn was still asleep. Taking care not to wake her, he disentangled himself and crawled out of the hut.

To the north of the camp, just beyond the mess tent, Haldir's lookouts had detained three riders—*Beornings, to judge by those horses*, thought Legolas. *They have probably strayed from the trail, looking for the river, and come upon us unexpectedly.*

The March Warden was already approaching them.

There is no need for me to get involved. He would go back to Eowyn's bed.

Smiling at the thought of his beloved's warm, soft body in his arms, Legolas gave the riders a final glance before he turned away—and one of the men caught his eye.

He stopped, and looked more closely.

The man—from his build, really no more than a youth—was wearing a dark mantle with the hood raised, so that his face was hidden from view, but something about the way he was sitting his horse seemed...

Familiar.

Legolas went closer.

"I bear an urgent message," the first rider was telling Haldir, "for Thorkell bogsveigir."

That man again! "I thought," said Legolas, "that your Chieftain had disowned Master Bowsweyer."

The Beorning, who also seemed familiar, bowed with genuine respect. "This is a family matter, your Highness."

"And it took three riders to deliver it?" asked Haldir, still suspicious.

Is that a trick of the shadows, Legolas wondered, *or does he look uneasy?* But there was no trace of dishonesty in the messenger's voice when he replied, "There are reports of Orcs in these parts, your Highness. It is unwise to travel alone."

It seemed a reasonable explanation. "Valandil," said Legolas, "rouse Thorkell bogsveigir and bring him to the mess tent. You will," he added, pulling back the door flap and inviting the messengers to enter, "be more comfortable breaking your news in here. Orodreth—light a lamp."

"Why are you giving that man preferential treatment?" asked Haldir, watching the tall, dark figure of Thorkell bogsveigir cross the camp and duck under the canvas.

"They are human," said Legolas. "An urgent family matter may mean a death."

"A death," said Haldir. "Of course..."

"Something we can easily forget. But, at such times, men need privacy."

...

The water is wide

Legolas was sitting by the fire with Gimli and a wakeful Eomer, expecting Thorkell bogsveigir to come to him asking leave to set his affairs in order, when he heard the dull thud of hooves.

They are leaving!

Rising to his feet, he watched the Beornings climb the sloping riverbank and turn north, noting, now, that the youngest rider, still muffled up in his mantle, seemed to be sleeping in the saddle, his horse being led by one of his companions.

If they were attacked by Orcs, thought the elf, shaking his head, he would have a rude awakening.

...

"Do you think I should speak to him?" asked Eowyn, pulling on her riding boots—and the sight of the soft suede hugging her slender legs—

"Legolas?"

"Hmm?"

"Should I speak to Thorkell bogsveigir?"

He crawled between her raised knees and, catching her around the waist, lowered her onto the bedroll. "And say what, melmenya?" He nuzzled her neck.

She tried to pull away. "No, Lassui, there is no time."

But the elf sank down upon her, the hard head of his erection pressing persuasively into her sensitive flesh. "Are you sure, meleth nín?" he murmured.

Chuckling, Eowyn brushed her lips across his cheek and, lightly kissing his ear (provoking a delicious tightening in his groin), whispered, "Absolutely. You promised Haldir that you would take part in the archery drill this morning—remember? To raise morale? You should have woken me earlier, melethron nín..."

She was right. "Tonight," said Legolas, rolling onto his side with a heavy sigh, "I will make you beg."

...

Thorkell bogsveigir was sitting—alone amidst his elven comrades—head bowed in concentration, restringing his bow.

Eowyn smiled at Valandil and he, with the uncanny understanding of elves, silently rounded up his fellows and herded them away, leaving the man behind.

Thorkell, sensing the elves' departure, looked up, glanced around, then settled his gaze on Eowyn. "To what do I owe this pleasure?" he asked, sardonically.

"I thought," said Eowyn, stiffly, "you might like to know that Legolas is willing to grant you a leave of absence, should you need it."

"I do not." He looked away, as though dismissing her.

"Very well." Eowyn turned to leave.

"It is killing you," said Thorkell.

The water is wide

She turned back, frowning.

He had picked up his quiver and was slipping his arm through its strap. "Women always have to know," he said, bringing the second strap across his chest and feeding its end through the buckle. "But curiosity kills the cat."

"Whereas it will be one of *us* that kills *you*," said Eowyn. "And quite soon, I should think."

The man laughed. "Well, since you have always shown such an interest in my affairs... They came to tell me that my father is dying," he said, fastening the buckle and tying off the end, "and he wants to see me—no doubt to clear his conscience before he embarks on the Last Journey—or maybe he just wants to congratulate me on my recent change of fortune." He picked up his bow. "So, no, I have no need of a leave of absence, thank you."

He rose and pushed past her—though they were standing in open ground and there was no excuse for the physical contact.

Eowyn spun round. "You will have a lifetime to regret that decision," she called after him.

...

There was a festival atmosphere amongst the Rohirrim as, ale and breakfast meats in hand, they gathered around the practice butts to watch the archery drill. Skirting the crowd, Eowyn heard several men laying bets on the performance of their elven friends—and briefly wondered whether she should place a small wager on Legolas...

She grinned.

The rest of the camp was deserted apart from the servants dismantling the tents and packing away the furniture—and a small group of people still sitting at one of the mess tables, huddled together in what looked like a heated discussion.

Berryn and Lord Fingolfin, thought Eowyn, smiling. *Scholars are worse than drinkers for arguing...*

She stared for a moment at the third figure: a short, lightly built, and—judging by his posture—extremely nervous young man.

She could not remember ever having seen the youth before—not in Eomer's entourage, nor with Berryn and Lord Fingolfin. And yet he seemed familiar—

Oh no!

Forgetting all about the display that was drawing cheers from the crowd behind her, Eowyn ran to confront the stranger.

The water is wide

Chapter 21: The burden

prompt #018 black

The elves of Eryn Carantaur used various drills to hone their skills—clout archery, roving archery, flight archery, even ‘combat’ archery with blunt, padded-tipped arrows—but today Haldir had set up a row of five simple square targets, each identically spotted with coloured circles of various sizes, and his warriors, standing at a distance of fifty yards, were taking turns to shoot at the colours called by the March Warden, their skilled performance drawing excited cheers from the crowd of Rohirrim that had gathered to watch.

When it came to Legolas’ turn, he took his place at the line, standing between Valandil and Thorkell bogsveigir.

“Good morning, my Lord,” said Thorkell, with a slight bow. He drew an arrow from his quiver and fitted it to his bowstring.

“Good morning, Master Bowswayer,” said Legolas. “May I—”

“My Lady,” the man interrupted, “has already been kind enough to inform me of your offer—but I will not be needing a leave of absence.”

Legolas frowned. It was perfectly correct for a servant to refer to his mistress as ‘my Lady’ but in Thorkell’s case something about it had sounded—possessive. He turned to the man—

“Make ready,” called Haldir, raising a red flag.

Since the arrows used in all but the combat drills were tipped with lethal bodkin points, the drills followed a strict procedure. Haldir was standing to the right and slightly forward of the line of archers, where his signals were clearly visible; Orodreth, holding a second red flag, was standing opposite, to the left of the line, and mirroring the March Warden’s actions.

Vowing to speak to the man later, Legolas turned back to the field and, carefully emptying his mind of everything but the target, nocked an arrow.

“You show ‘em, lad.”

Legolas smiled. Gimli had clearly pushed his way to the front of the crowd. The elf re-focused.

“Three in red,” called Haldir, and he and Orodreth dropped their flags.

Legolas promptly shot three arrows into the red circle, placing one at the centre and slightly offsetting the others, to avoid damaging the first shaft. He lowered his bow—suddenly hearing, once more, the cheers of the crowd behind him.

“Make safe!” cried Haldir, raising the red flag. The other archers lowered their bows.

Legolas scanned the targets. The elves had all shot well, each hitting the red circle three times—though none, he thought, had placed the arrows quite as well as he had—but Thorkell bogsveigir had more than matched them, arranging his shafts in a precise triangle—top centre, lower left and lower right of the circle.

“Well done,” said Legolas, quietly.

...

Eowyn ran to the group of people huddled round the mess table—Berryin, Lord Fingolfin and, she was almost *certain*—

The water is wide

The third figure, the nervous youth, suddenly lifted his head, and his hood fell back.

Eowyn slid to a halt, raising a hand to her mouth. The reddish hair had recently been hacked short, and stiff, uneven strands were sticking out in all directions. But the fair, flawless complexion and the pale blue eyes were undisguised, and confirmed her worst fears.

"By the gods," she said. "Have you taken leave of your senses?"

...

With the flags raised, the archers were given permission to retrieve their arrows.

Legolas, walking back to the line, noticed coins changing hands between spectators and shook his head with a faint smile. *Some of them will have made a tidy sum on Master Bowsweaver's performance, he thought. Of course, the short distance favours him...*

He took his place beside the Beorning.

"Make ready," called Haldir.

Legolas nocked an arrow.

"Three in gold." The March Warden lowered his flag.

Legolas loosed. His first arrow flew true, piercing the small golden circle dead-centre. He reached over his shoulder, and—before he had time to withdraw another shaft—a second arrow thudded into his target, a fraction of an inch from the first, and angled as though shot from somewhere to his right...

...

"Please do not blame Berryn," whispered Gunnhildr Bergthórsdóttir. "He did not know that I was coming."

Eowyn pulled out one of the folding chairs and sat down heavily. "How?"

Gunnhildr bit her lip. "I was disguised as one of the messengers."

"Obviously," said Eowyn. "But all three *left*—Legolas saw them go. He was concerned that one of them seemed to be..." She sighed. "He was not sleeping. What was he?"

"A cloth man," said Gunnhildr. "I sewed him from sacking—he fitted into my saddle bag. When I got here, I stuffed him with blankets, and weighted him with grain—there were pockets in all the right places. I did not *steal* the blankets or the grain," she added, quickly, "I paid Eomer King's cook for them." Berryn patted her hand. "Heðinn,"—she was referring to the man who had brought the message for Thorkell bogsveigir—"helped me do it."

"That," began Eowyn, impressed despite herself, "that was—who would have thought that, in the right hands, needlework could be so dangerous?"

...

Legolas heard the crowd gasp.

"MAKE SAFE!" bellowed Haldir. "THORKELL BOGSVEIGIR..."

Despite his barely contained rage, the March Warden waited until the archers had lowered their bows before storming out onto the field to confront the Beorning. "You," he barked, standing eye-to-eye with the equally tall but much slighter man, "will never touch a bow again. You will

The water is wide

spend the rest of your life grooming horses and cleaning tack. *You—*"

"Wait, March Warden," said Legolas, quietly. "Master Bowsayer was issuing a challenge. To *me*. And I accept it."

"No..." said Haldir. He drew Legolas aside. "*Please*. He has broken the rules of practice and endangered all his comrades. He swore an oath of loyalty to you and he has broken that, too. He must be punished."

"Afterwards," said Legolas.

"Suppose he wins?"

Legolas patted Haldir's arm, smiling. "In that unlikely event, March Warden, I will still be a King's son, and *his* lord."

...

Eowyn turned to Fingolfin. "What do *you* advise, my Lord?"

The elf thought for a moment. "Lady Gunnhildr will quickly be missed," he said, "and her father will no doubt track her here. But I do not believe that he will attack. I do not believe he wants to fight—"

"Then why did he send his champion to challenge Berryn," asked Eowyn, "if not to provoke a battle?"

"To put us at a *legal* disadvantage," replied Fingolfin. "I think that Bergthórr beytill wanted Berryn to refuse the challenge so that he could appeal for justice to a higher authority."

"To Legolas?"

"To Thranduil, as Lord Legolas' father and King," said Fingolfin. "Or perhaps to Elessar, as King of the Reunited Kingdom—"

"And I ruined his plan by accepting the challenge on Berryn's behalf."

"If I am right, then, yes. And he will not miss another opportunity."

"With King Thranduil, perhaps he hopes to re-negotiate his rights to the mithril mines," said Eowyn, "though I do not think much for his chances. But what 'justice' can he seek from Aragorn?"

"That, I do not know..."

"My Lady, Lord Fingolfin," said Berryn suddenly. "There is a simple answer to this problem—Gunnhildr and I will leave the cavalcade and travel alone. It will have to be south..." He paused, as though mentally consulting one of his own maps. "Far Harad. We will make for Pelargir and thence to Far Harad." He squeezed the girl's hand. "I have skills that the merchants of the south will be more than willing to pay for. And *you* have just proved how resourceful you are—"

"No," said Eowyn, firmly. "It is far too dangerous. We know that several bands of Orcs are roaming these parts—besides the wolves and the bears. You would not be safe." She rose from the table. "I will ask Legolas what—"

A great cheer suddenly went up from the crowd behind her, and Eowyn belatedly remembered the archery drill. *Had she missed Legolas' turn?* She looked down at Lord Fingolfin. "Keep Lady

The water is wide

Gunnhildr well-hidden," she said, "Thorkell bogsveigir must not see her." Then she ran over to the practice field.

...

The other archers had withdrawn, leaving Legolas and Thorkell standing at the centre of the line. Against his better judgment, Haldir had been persuaded to leave the distance at 50 yards—"To increase it," said Legolas, "would be to put *him* at an unfair disadvantage,"—and to enforce a hastily agreed set of rules: each archer was to shoot a single arrow into the colour called by the March Warden, and this was to continue until one of them missed.

The elf and the man nocked their first arrows.

"Make ready," called Haldir.

They raised their bows and drew to their anchors.

"Red!" cried Haldir.

Two arrows flew down the field and thudded into the targets *almost* simultaneously—Legolas having the dual advantage of elven reflexes and a Galadhrim bow—the elf's hit dead-centre, the man's slightly to the left.

"Gold!" cried Haldir.

The result was almost identical.

"Blue!"

This time Thorkell bogsveigir was slightly slower to loose, but his shot was no less accurate.

"Green!" shouted Haldir.

Legolas immediately took aim, but a familiar voice, saying, "Gimli, what is happening?" broke his concentration—and he loosed just a fraction of a second too soon.

His arrow hit the edge of the circle; Thorkell's buried itself, cleanly, at the centre.

The crowd gasped.

"It is in," said the elf, calmly.

"Make safe!" shouted Haldir. Then, "Captain Eofred, will you confirm, please?"

The Captain of Eomer's Guard examined the target. "It is *well* in," he declared.

Haldir waited until Eofred had safely left the field before calling the next colour: "Make ready. Gold."

This time, it was Thorkell's arrow that went astray, missing the edge of the small gold circle by more than an inch. Cheering, men and elves streamed onto the field and gathered around the Lord of Eryn Carantaur.

Eowyn ran to Legolas' side. "What was that about, Lassui?" she asked and, as Legolas wrapped his arm around her, she frowned up at Thorkell bogsveigir, silently demanding an explanation from the troublemaker.

But the man just winked, and allowed Haldir to drag him away.

The water is wide

Chapter 22: The march warden

prompt #011 red

"Fourteen days," growled Haldir, "fourteen days' kitchen duty.

"*Valandil!*" He gestured to Thorkell bogsveigir's elven comrade. "You are his gaoler—take his bow and quiver from him—during the day I want him bound to his horse; at night you are to hand him over to the Cook,"—he turned back to Thorkell—"who will report on your conduct, first thing every morning."

Thorkell sighed—

"Do that again and it will be the last sound you ever make."

"Oh for the gods' sakes!" The man held up his hands in mock surrender. "I accept your punishment: I will do it. But let us not pretend that I am one of your warriors—"

"You are a member of the Eryn Carantaur Guard," hissed Haldir. "You have taken an oath of *fealty* to Lord Legolas."

"*Balls,*" said Thorkell. "What would *you* have done in my position—beaten senseless by a *bit* of a woman, abandoned by your Lord, given the choice of either remaining in custody or swearing loyalty to Princess Legolas...?" He grinned, suddenly. "She did not ask you, did she? She made me an offer I could not refuse and dropped *you* straight in the privy,"—he spread his hands—"and now you are having to deal with the shit." He gave his bow to a very uncomfortable Valandil and began unbuckling his quiver. "But then, to get up My Lady's skirts, you would happily roll—*agh!*"

The blow came from Valandil—and, as he reeled backwards, Thorkell bogsveigir had to admit that he had seriously misjudged his comrade.

"When you speak of Lady Eowyn," cried the normally placid elf, "you speak with *respect!*" He loomed over the fallen man.

"Valandil... No." Haldir, suddenly icily calm, grasped his warrior by the shoulder. "Go and prepare the horses." He pulled the elf back, roughly. "*Valandil!* Walk away. *Now!*"

"He should not be allowed to say such things," said Valandil.

"I will deal with him. Go and prepare the horses."

...

"What was all that talk about not harming comrades?" asked Thorkell, rubbing his jaw.

"Get up."

The man raised an eyebrow but—with his size and his elven strength, and his aura of fury barely contained—the March Warden was an impressive sight. On reflection, Thorkell bogsveigir did as he was told.

"I have no idea what game you are playing—why you challenged Legolas," said Haldir, quietly. "But there are two things I will not permit. I will *not* allow you to distract my warriors with your antics. And I will *not* allow you to harm *her*—yes, I have seen the way *you* look at her—and I will tell you this now: if you ever lay your hands on her, in anger or in lust, I will make you sorry. Believe me, adan, we elves are patient, and I will make you *beg* for death."

The water is wide

Chapter 23: Eowyn in danger

prompt #077 what?

"Why would he do *that*?" asked Eowyn.

She had waited until the enthusiastic crowd had finally let Legolas go before, taking advantage of the sudden bustle of activity (as everyone turned to striking camp), she had drawn him aside, anxious to break the news. But Legolas had spoken first, voicing his suspicion that Thorkell bogsveigir had *deliberately* lost the contest.

"I have no idea why, melmenya—nor why he challenged me in the first place."

"Well, until this morning, I would have said that *that* was sheer arrogance—"

"What happened this morning?"

"You had better sit down."

Legolas looked at her curiously. "I am not a man, melmenya—you can just tell me what happened—did he—you spoke to him, before the archery drill—did he—*misbehave*?"

"Misbehave?" Her eyes widened. "You mean—"

"He desires you."

Eowyn was incredulous. "He *hates* me, Lassui!" She remembered the wink the man had given her as Haldir was dragging him away, but she deliberately pushed it out of her mind. "He hates us all."

"He likes to *provoke* you. He likes to see you angry—"

"He likes to provoke *everyone*."

"But you are so lively when you are angry, melmenya. So,"—he suddenly caught her in his arms—"you are so desirable, meleth nín. Men like him do not dare be gentle, so they court women with taunts and insults. I want you to be very careful in future—"

"Gods," said Eowyn, pulling away. "Are things not bad enough?"

...

He followed her down the river bank. "What do you mean? Melmenya?"

"I have been trying to tell you." She turned and, grasping his hands, drew him close and spoke quietly. "That third messenger—the one who caught your eye..." She explained about Gunnhildr and the cloth man. "Lord Fingolfin has hidden her."

Legolas glanced back at the camp site. There was still much to do: it would, perhaps, be half an hour before the cavalcade was ready to move off. "Well, maybe we *should* sit down for a while." He slipped off his cloak and laid it on the grass. "There..."

They sat, side-by-side, watching the river flow by and, for a few moments, neither spoke. Then Eowyn said, "What are we going to do, Lassui?"

"My father predicted that this would happen," said Legolas. "He told me to be careful—he was afraid it might lead to war."

The water is wide

Eowyn touched his hand. "No. Lord Fingolfin does not believe so, and I think he is right. Bergthórr beytill knows that the Beornings are no match for the combined might of Rohan, Mirkwood, and Eryn Carantaur—he will not risk starting a war he cannot win. He will use the law..." She fell silent again.

"We should send her back."

"Yes. But you do not want to."

"I—something feels wrong to me, melmenya. Something... Does Berryn really love her? Or is he just being gallant?"

"I was doubtful, too," said Eowyn. "But when I saw them together—when he was planning run away to Far Harad with her—then, yes, it seemed real enough."

"Sewing a cloth man," said Legolas, shaking his head. "It is like a tale of romance."

"The heroines of romances are often escaping from cruel parents."

"Yes." Legolas frowned. "Perhaps that is what I sense... We will let her stay," he decided.

Eowyn squeezed his hand.

"But we will send word to her father telling him that she has joined the colony of her own free will," he continued. "We will assure him that she is under our protection, and that both her life and her honour are safe—"

"He will say that she is a minor and legally incapable of making that decision for herself. He will appeal to your father, Lassui—or to Aragorn—for support."

"Then we will argue that, whilst she resides in the colony, she is subject to elven law."

"So *he* will take her by force—or have her kidnapped."

"Not if what he really wants is to bargain with us," said Legolas.

"And will you? Bargain with him?"

"That will entirely depend," he answered, "on what he is asking for."

...

Legolas helped Eowyn to her feet.

"Do you think," she asked, "that he let *me* win, too?"

"Thorkell bogsveigir?" Legolas picked up his cloak and shook it, lightly. "No, melmenya. No—your blow took him by surprise—I saw his face."

"So—if it was not planned, can we assume that he is not a spy?"

Legolas offered her his arm and they walked slowly back to the cavalcade. "I suppose it is still possible," he said, "that Bergthórr saw the opportunity to place a man in our camp and seized it... But that would assume that Master Bowswayer has the wit to act without direct orders—"

"I think he has."

Legolas nodded. "It *also* assumes that Bergthórr can count on his unswerving loyalty."

The water is wide

"That I am *not* so sure of," admitted Eowyn. "He seems to despise Bergthórr—'a small man with small ambitions' he called him. Of course, that may have been an act, to throw *me* off the scent..." She thought of the man's arrogance—and remembered the wink. "Gods," she sighed, "I should have *killed* him when I had the chance!"

...

That evening

As the light started to fade the cavalcade drew to a halt. The company dismounted and, whilst Legolas was occupied supervising the siting of the latrines, Eowyn found herself wandering along the lightly wooded embankment to the west of the new camp site.

She needed to think.

The journey had been surprisingly uneventful. Legolas, fully knowing the risks, had offered Gunnhildr his protection and the girl had gratefully accepted it. For the rest of the day she had ridden openly at Berryn's side. But Thorkell bogsveigir—quieter than Eowyn had ever seen him—had, as far as she could tell, paid no attention to his former lord's daughter.

Strange, she thought. Though she was *almost* convinced that Bergthórr had genuinely abandoned his former champion, she did not put it past Thorkell to try to win back his favour...

Which only added to the anxiety she had been feeling all day.

Since he winked at me, she realised.

Since Legolas said that he desired me.

...

"Where is Eowyn?"

"Eowyn..." Eomer scanned the camp site. "I have not seen her since she dismounted. She must be in the woods." His hand automatically moved to the hilt of his sword.

Legolas laid a restraining hand on the man's arm. "She is probably just finding somewhere to relieve herself. I will look down by the river. You stay here." When Eomer seemed unconvinced, he added, "Do you want to face the wrath of a Shieldmaiden?"

"No. But..." Eomer handed the elf his hunting horn. "Sound it if you need me. I will have Gimli and Haldir ready."

...

He is planning something, thought Eowyn, *but what? Does he think that he can make me his—what?* An image of Thorkell bogsveigir, hovering over her, suddenly filled her head.

Oh no, she thought. *No! No! No!* And, in frustration, she drew her sword. *He can try; but he will find me a dangerous quarry*.

Ox! She raised her sword to the first position, hands above her head, blade horizontal, pointing at her imaginary enemy's face. *Plough!* Sweeping her hands down to her hip, she held him back, threatening to slice through his throat. *Fool!* Dropping the sword's point and keeping it low, she invited him strike—leaving himself open... *Over the roof!* Then she whipped up her hands, splitting the bastard from groin to throat.

And, in her moment of triumph, she failed to notice the rustle of leaves behind her.

The water is wide

Chapter 24: The unexpected

prompt #050 spade

“What do you think you are doing—?”

His voice took her by surprise, but Eowyn immediately spun round, sword already raised in the Ox guard, its tip aimed straight at Thorkell bogsveigir’s throat.

“Hey!” The Beorning, still partially hidden by the undergrowth, raised one hand in a gesture of surrender.

“Drop it!” said Eowyn, angrily.

“Drop what?”

She took a step forward—the man retreated—“Drop whatever it is that you are holding in your other hand.”

“A *spade*,” said Thorkell, incredulously. “It is just a *spade*...”

“Then *drop* it.”

With a theatrical sigh, Thorkell did as he was told.

Eowyn took another step, adjusting the angle of her blade to maintain its position, tip pressing into his skin. “What did you think you would do? Hit me over the head with it?”

The Beorning frowned. “*What?*”

“You knew that you could not have me any other way.”

“*Have* you?” For a moment he simply stared at her, wide-eyed and open-mouthed; then he burst out laughing, his body shaking so hard that he risked impaling himself on her sword. “It would take a braver man than I to try to fuck *you—gods!*” He took another step backwards. “I would be safer fucking an Orc.”

Eowyn was unconvinced. “Then why were you following me?”

“I was not following you. I just happened to spot you cavorting about here, all by yourself—you stupid woman!”

“I am still your *Lady*, Master Bowsayer,” said Eowyn, coldly, “and the warrior who has a sword at your throat.”

“Alright, then. I happened to spot you here, my stupid *Lady*,” replied Thorkell. “And if there is one place between The Carrock and the Falls of Rauros where you should *not* be dancing about alone, it is here, where the Orcs come to hunt the wolves of southern Greenwood.”

“There have been no confirmed reports of Orcs in this region for months,” said Eowyn, lowering her blade. “I do not believe there is any danger.”

“It would only take *one* stray Orc,” said Thorkell, “to...” He made an obscene gesture with his forearm.

“So *you* rushed in to protect me—with your *spade*.” Eowyn slid her sword back into its scabbard.

The water is wide

"On my way down to the river," the man replied, speaking slowly, with mock patience, "to dig up some angelica for my latest lord and master—Elros the Cook—I took the time and trouble to warn you to get your foolish arse back up to the camp." He retrieved the spade. "And, whilst we are on the subject, let me make it clear, once and for all, that—although it is a choice enough piece of arse, especially in those tight leggings—it is hardly worth having my balls cut off for."

Despite herself, Eowyn smiled. "If your word was worth anything at all, Master Bowsayer," she said, "I would have you swear to that."

"Too bad, then, that it—*what was that...?*"

They had both spun round, startled by the same noise. Eowyn drew her sword. Thorkell lifted the spade above his shoulder in a two-handed grip. Whatever was coming through the trees—and it was too noisy to be elves, or wolves, or even *men* with any knowledge of woodcraft—it was heading straight for them. Eowyn listened hard to the grunts, snuffles and occasional yelps. "There are at least three of them," she whispered, "maybe five or six."

"Shit," muttered Thorkell.

"Where is your bow?"

"Confiscated."

"Can you climb up there?" She nodded towards one of the trees.

Thorkell frowned at the smooth, bare trunk—its lowest branches were at least three feet higher than his head, but the noises were growing louder—"Yes! Come on!" He grabbed Eowyn's arm and dragged her beneath the tree—"sheathe your sword!"—and made his hands into a stirrup.

"But—"

"*Quick!*"

Eowyn stepped into his hands and, as he lifted her, grasped the tree trunk—and then the lowest branch—and then scrambled up, somehow getting one leg over—and mounted the branch like a horse.

"Lift your feet," cried Thorkell, "or they will drag you down by them. Here, take this!"

He held up the spade. Eowyn struggled to her knees and, holding on to the tree with one hand, took it from him. "Come on," she gasped. "Hurry!"

Thorkell glanced over his shoulder. It was Orcs alright—there was no mistaking those noises now—but they had not yet caught his scent... He backed up a few paces, took a short run, and leaped.

"*Man flesh!*"

The cry went up just as the Beorning caught hold; and—as he dangled, kicking his legs, desperately trying to get his feet up higher—the Orcs broke cover.

Eowyn grabbed a handful of his jerkin.

"No! Get back—against the trunk!" He kicked again, hauling himself up on straining arms—and his right foot grazed the bark—but the first Orc had already caught hold of his left leg—and then one of its fellows grasped his thigh, and pulled—and Thorkell lost his grip...

The water is wide

The leather slipped from Eowyn's fingers. She lunged—"No...!"—but she was too late.

In horror she watched the expression on Thorkell bogsveigir's face turn from hope, to dismay, to fear, as he was dragged down from her, and thrown to the ground, and the Orcs fell upon him—

The water is wide

Chapter 25: The attack

prompt #049 club

"Thorkell!" shrieked Eowyn.

And she hurled the spade with all her might—almost throwing herself with it—hitting the nearest Orc squarely on the back of its head and sending it sprawling over its victim's chest.

"Here," she screamed, leaning down from the branch and beckoning the others, "over here! Come on! Come over here!"

The brutes exchanged glances. One of them smiled: "Woman." It began to rise.

Another grabbed its arm. "Mine."

"Here," shouted Eowyn, "come here!"

"No! MINE!" The first Orc lashed out, its claws ripping the other's face.

Panicking, the second Orc raised its hands to its sightless eyes; then, with a howl of pain and fury, it launched itself at the first, knocking it to the ground and, sitting astride its belly, it pounded its head—left fist, right fist, left fist, right fist...

Meanwhile, the band's single Uruk Hai, ignoring both the brawl and its spade-struck comrade, padded towards Eowyn in an obvious state of arousal.

The fourth Orc turned its attention back to Thorkell bogsveigir.

...

The unconscious Orc was lying upon him like a sated lover—its foul mouth pressed against his cheek—and an unseen pair of hands was opening his breeches, and Eowyn's voice was quavering with fear—and Thorkell panicked.

With a superhuman strength born entirely of terror, the Beorning rose up on his left arm—lifting a good ten stones of unconscious Orc with him—seized the spade, which had fallen down beside him (missing his own face by inches), and swung it at the brute kneeling between his legs.

He missed—*Fuck the gods!*—but the creature was slow-witted even for an Orc and, spurred on by a sudden scream from Eowyn, the man immediately struck again, this time smashing the spade's sharp edge into the brute's throat.

...

"Woman..." The Uruk Hai approached the tree, displaying its big erection like a weapon. "You can not escape."

Almost choking on the fear that had risen, like bile, into her mouth, Eowyn retreated towards the tree trunk, crawling backwards—

The Uruk Hai followed—

Eowyn's foot slipped, and she lurched sideways, crying out as she landed astride the branch, her groin hitting it hard, her fingernails tearing as she grabbed hold of the bark—

Then she screamed in terror as the Uruk Hai seized her ankle.

The water is wide

...

Throwing off the first Orc, Thorkell bogsveigir surged to his feet like a Berserker, finished off his would-be rapist with a single stamp to the neck and—ignoring the blinded Orc, which was still pounding the remains of its companion—went after the Uruk Hai.

...

Grasping the branch with one bloodied hand, Eowyn tried to draw her sword. The Uruk Hai waited until her shaking fingers had closed around its hilt, then yanked her leg.

...

It is playing with her, thought Thorkell, as he raised the spade—Eowyn was still, somehow, clinging to the tree—*her fear is what is giving it that rise*—and he slammed the blade into the brute's neck, cutting through to the bone—*Bastard!*—changed his grip and swung the spade back, smashing it into the side of its head—*Fucker!*—shifted his hands once more—the Uruk had already sunk to its knees—and clubbed it to the ground.

Then he hit it again.

And again.

And he kept on hitting until long after it had stopped moving.

He stared down at its lifeless body—

"*Thorkell...?*"

At last, her voice—sounding strangely small and uncertain—pierced the fog inside his head. He dropped his spade and—overestimating his remaining strength now that his battle rage had subsided—he reached up into the tree, took her in his arms, and lifted her down.

His legs buckled beneath him.

Suddenly, he was lying on his back, staring up at the sky, with Eowyn cradled against his chest.

He held her tight.

The water is wide

Chapter 26: The rescue

prompt #078 where?

Legolas slung Eomer's hunting horn over his shoulder and set off down the trail, scanning the ground for Eowyn's tracks.

The sky was dark now and—though still convinced that Eowyn had simply gone somewhere private to relieve herself—he was starting to worry. *She does not see well in the dark*, he thought. *She could easily get lost. If I do not find her soon, I will go back for one of Eomer's dogs...* Then his elven hearing caught the distant sound of her voice, saying, angrily, "Drop it!"

Legolas broke into a run.

"Drop *what*?"

Recognising the second voice—*Thorkell bogsveigir!*—Legolas reached for the hunting horn—but immediately changed his mind. *By the time Eomer comes*, he thought, *I will have dealt with the Beorning myself. Say something else, melmenya—to help me find you...*

"Drop whatever it is your are holding in your other hand!" said Eowyn.

Yes! Legolas veered left and plunged down the riverbank, darting between the trees, leaping over rocks and fallen branches.

"A *spade*," he heard Thorkell bogsveigir say, "it is just a *spade*..."

And something about the way he said it—with genuine astonishment—took Legolas by surprise, and his senses, which from the moment he had heard Eowyn's voice had been directed entirely at *her*, suddenly widened focus, and detected something else.

Something nearby.

Something *between* him and—

He ducked aside as a long, ragged blade, thrown from somewhere up ahead, flew past his shoulder and hit the ground.

Orcs!

His hands rose automatically, seizing the handles of his white knives, and he drew them, whirling them into alignment.

There were five of the brutes, directly in front of him—three small and quick but relatively weak; the fourth a heavily-muscled, slow-witted creature; the fifth a big Uruk Hai, clad in steel armour. *Weak at the neck*, thought Legolas, *beneath the arms, and just above the belly...*

He cleared his mind and let his instincts take over, launching a spinning attack that took him in close to the first Orc—he thrust both blades into its chest—propelled him under its flailing arms and positioned him before the second beast—he slit its scrawny throat with a snarl—turned him full-circle to face the third—quickly adjusting his grip, he sank his knives into its windpipe—spun him on, inside the Uruk Hai's guard—he found the chink in its armour and ripped out its belly—then—

"*Thorkell!*"

Eowyn! Her voice pierced his battle fury as nothing else could have done and, even as he dispatched the final Orc, his elven senses pinpointed his wife and reached out, beyond her cries of fear, to analyse her situation. *Five more Orcs!* Legolas sheathed his knives and *ran*,

The water is wide

raising the hunting horn to his lips and calling for Eomer with three long blasts.

...

As he drew closer, one sickening sound, suddenly separating itself from the rest, filled his ears—the sound of bone splintering, the sound of a skull being beaten to a pulp—and his step faltered as his heart lurched in despair.

No! EOWYN! No, NO!

Then he heard her voice, sounding small and uncertain but—*Thank the Valar!*—proving that she was still alive, saying, “Thorkell?”; and, his spirit soaring with hope once more, he ran into the clearing, and found her.

...

She was lying on the ground, sprawled across the Beorning, and Legolas fell to his knees and pulled her from the man’s embrace and—barely noticing the expression on Thorkell’s face—he crushed her to his chest.

“They were going to rape us, Lassui,” she whispered.

“I know, my darling.”

“Thorkell stopped them.”

Legolas glanced, over her shoulder, at the Beorning.

“We both stopped them,” said the man, struggling to sit up. “She saved my life, with the spade.”

“We must move,” said Legolas. “More are coming and—*melmenya?*” He had noticed her injured hands and, quickly examining her, had found more bloodstains, on her leggings. “What happened?”

“It is nothing,” said Eowyn. “I just slipped.”

Hugging her tightly, Legolas turned back to the man. “I dare not risk telling the Orcs where we are by sounding the horn again. Can you walk?”

Thorkell shook his head. “No.” Then he added, “Leave me. Get her to safety—”

“I can walk, Lassui,” said Eowyn. “We can both help him.”

Oh, melmenya! His heart brimming with conflicting emotions—with pride at her bravery and fear for her safety—Legolas kissed her forehead. Then, releasing her, he scrambled to his feet and helped her up and, with difficulty, they both raised Thorkell bogsveigir.

“It is my ankle,” gasped the Beorning. “It will not take any weight...” He started at a sudden sound—of splintering wood—somewhere nearby. “They are too close,” he panted, “leave me.”

Legolas glanced at Eowyn—but she shook her head.

“No,” said the elf, firmly. “We will stay together.”

...

They had hobbled less than ten yards when the first Orc broke cover. “Fresh meat,” it growled—shouting to its comrades behind it, “Come on! Get ‘em!”

The water is wide

But Legolas had already lowered Thorkell to the ground and—having nothing to lose now—he unslung the hunting horn and dropped it in the Beorning's lap. "Blow for all you are worth," he ordered, drawing his white knives.

"Give me your bow," cried Thorkell. "I cannot walk but I can still shoot!"

The elf hesitated—for just as long as it took Eowyn, with bloodied fingers, to drag her sword from its scabbard—then he pulled his Galadhrim bow from its strap and gave it to the Beorning with a handful of arrows.

"Stay behind me, melmenya," he called, advancing on the Orcs, "keep your back to my back!"

...

Thorkell bogsveigir put the horn to his lips and blew one long, wavering note.

Then he took up the great elven war bow, and—with grim, human determination—straining muscle and sinew with every draw, he picked off Orc after Orc, keeping Eowyn safe until help arrived in a posse of men and dogs (and one furious dwarf), who came streaming through the trees and began slaughtering the enemy like a pack of terriers killing rats.

...

An hour later

"Agh!"

"Do not be a baby," said Eowyn.

"It is *cold*," said the Beorning, glaring at her.

"The compress should prevent further swelling of the ankle," said Master Dínendal, carefully tying off the binding. "But it is the damage to your shoulder that most concerns me. I will immobilise it with splints and you must rest it until the tissues have healed sufficiently to permit gentle exercise—"

"Rest!" exclaimed Thorkell bogsveigir, derisively. "Bergthórr beytill's healers would have had me strapped up and back in action half an hour ago." He tried to climb off the bed.

Dínendal, exerting his elven strength, restrained him. "No doubt they would," he said. "And *I* can do the same—if *you* want to risk a permanent weakness in your bow arm."

"No, we certainly cannot have that," said Eowyn. She sat down beside the Beorning.

"What *now*?" he grumbled.

"Blood brothers?"

The man frowned. "*Blood*... You mean—like children?"

"We have fought," said Eowyn, seriously, "and now we have saved each others' lives... We are already bonded by blood."

"If you say so... So now you want to cut my hand open?"

Eowyn laughed. "No," she said. "I have bled enough for one day." She held out a bandaged hand.

The Beorning eyed it for a moment; then, with his good hand, he grasped it gingerly. "Now

The water is wide

what?"

"Now we swear that, henceforth, we will be as brothers to one another," she said.

"You mean that we will fight and curse and vie with each other for our father's property?" He looked up suddenly. "Does this make me an heir to the throne of Rohan?"

"—My Lady," called Dínendal from the other side of the tent, "I can see you now."

"Make sure that you do exactly as the healers tell you, Master Bowsayer," said Eowyn, rising. "When I said we needed your bow arm, I meant it."

...

She slipped behind the screen, which Dínendal had improvised by tying a blanket between two tent poles, stripped off her leggings and climbed onto the bed, pulling the sheet over her middle. "I am ready."

Dínendal joined her. "How did it happen?" he asked, folding the sheet back.

"I slipped and landed astride a branch," she said. "But there is nothing wrong *there*. I have grazed my thigh, that is all."

"Bring up your knees..." Eowyn did as he asked and felt his hand examine her, gently. "Good," he said. "You can lower them now."

"It *is* just my thigh?" said Eowyn.

"Yes—fortunately," said Dínendal. "And, like your hands, it is already beginning to heal, but I will clean and dress it for you."

There was a small table beside the bed, with a bowl of herb-infused water upon it, and he took up a clean cloth and dipped it in the liquid. "I would think," he added, gently sponging the dried blood from Eowyn's leg, "that for the next few days at least, you will find riding on horseback quite uncomfortable, my Lady. Perhaps you should travel in one of the carts, with my other patient..."

The water is wide

Chapter 27: The elf

prompt #038 touch

Legolas, having quickly supervised the burning of the Orc bodies, and fortified (with Eomer and Haldir), the perimeter of the encampment against further attack, came swiftly into the Healing Tent.

He glanced at Thorkell bogsveigir, lying bandaged upon one of the beds. "Where is Eowyn?"

"My lady is behind the blanket," said the Beorning, "with the healer."

Legolas thanked him with a brief bow of the head. "You did well, Master Bowsweyer," he added, approaching the temporary screen, "we will speak later—may I enter, Master Dínendal?"

"Indeed, my Lord," replied the healer.

Legolas stepped inside.

...

"How is she?" he asked, sitting down beside Eowyn and gently grasping the bandaged hand that she stretched out towards him.

"I am fine Lassui," said Eowyn. "I told you, it is just a scratch."

Legolas glanced up at Dínendal, who nodded in confirmation, then he turned back to Eowyn, lightly patting the back of her hand. "And these?"

"*Throbbing*," said Eowyn. She grinned.

Legolas shook his head.

"The salve I have applied has dulled the pain," said Dínendal, "and will gradually deaden it altogether. It must be reapplied at least once more—come to me tomorrow morning, my Lady, and I will change your dressings. Lady Eowyn," he added, turning to Legolas, "is healing well—almost as quickly as an elf—but she remains human in that her flesh is still susceptible to corruption."

Eowyn winked at Legolas.

Legolas smiled. "I will make *sure* that she comes to see you first thing, Master Healer," he said. "May I take her away now?"

"You may, my Lord."

Carefully, Legolas lifted Eowyn into his arms, manoeuvred her past the blanket-screen, and—pausing only to let her wave to Thorkell—carried her from the Healing Tent.

...

"Are you going to corrupt me *now*?"

"Later," said Legolas, "if you are lucky."

...

Supper was surprisingly cheerful, for—having ringed the encampment, which was much less dispersed than usual, with a series of bonfires, and posted twice the customary number of

The water is wide

guards—both elves and men (not to mention the dwarf) were in the mood to celebrate the rescue of their lady; and the cooks had, therefore, at remarkably short notice, prepared a sylvan banquet of roasted meats, and herby vegetable ragouts, with chunks of warm bread, ripe cheeses, fruited biscuits, honey tarts and lavender cakes.

And Eowyn, sitting between Legolas and Eomer, had insisted that Thorkell bogsveigir be brought to join the feast, so the Beorning—under protest—had been carried from the Healing Tent by Valandil and Orodreth.

...

"Well?" said Eowyn, toying with the remains of her honey tart.

"Well what?" asked Eomer. He spread a fruited biscuit with a knifeful of soft, ripe cheese.

"Are you not going to say anything?"

"Would it be any more than a waste of breath?" He took a bite. "Mmm."

Eowyn grinned. "In this case, yes, I admit that I made a foolish mistake, so preoccupied was I with—certain thoughts—that I wandered too far from the camp without realising it. I was lucky that Thorkell and Legolas,"—she turned, to grasp the elf's hand, and he broke off from his conversation with Gimli and Haldir to smile at her,— "that *Legolas* found me. So, if you do want to say anything, now is the time."

"Be more careful," said Eomer. "I *mean* it! You are not—well, perhaps you *are* immortal, but you can still be hurt, Eowyn. *Killed.*" He was silent for a moment. Then, "What thoughts?"

"Oh, foolish worries." She smiled. "But Thorkell bogsveigir and I are blood brothers now." She looked over to the Beorning, and was a little surprised to find that he was also looking at her. They both bowed their heads in greeting. "I have been thinking, Eomer," she continued, "that you could use a good archer—"

"Oh no!" Eomer reached for another biscuit.

"Why ever not?"

"Why do *you* want to be rid of him?" He cut a piece of cheese.

"I do not want to be rid of him. I just think that he might be happier serving a human lord."

"He is a troublemaker," said Eomer, taking a bite of biscuit, and adding, with his mouth full, "and *that* I do not need."

"I think he is past that," said Eowyn.

Eomer set the rest of his biscuit on his platter and, turning to his sister, looked her directly in the eye. "You can be very naïve at times, Eowyn."

...

Later

"Come here," said Eowyn, stretching out her arms.

Carefully closing the canvas door of the little hut, Legolas shook his head at her impatience.

"*Lassui...*"

The water is wide

He turned, and smiled at the pout on her lovely face. "You," he said, softly "have had too much wine." He crawled over her. "You are always like this when you are drunk."

Eowyn frowned up at him. "I am not drunk!" Then, "Like *what?*"

"Demanding." He kissed her neck. "Wanton." He sucked and nipped the soft skin, whispering, "*Lascivious...*"

"Oh, *Lassui...*" Her bandaged hand reached under his tunic.

But Legolas caught it and held it fast (against the hard ridge of his erection). "You must not hurt your fingers, *melmenya*." He kissed her cheek. "Tell *me* what you want."

"I want to kiss you—*there*."

"Oh, *meleth nín...*" He pressed his lips to her forehead. Then, straightening up, he unhooked the fastenings of his tunic and shrugged it off.

"I am sorry," said Eowyn.

"For what, my darling?" He pulled at his laces.

"For wandering off and getting you into danger."

Legolas smiled down at her. "You *are* drunk!"

He opened his leggings and, leaning over her, lowered himself to her lips.

Eowyn kissed him, lightly at first, then more passionately, then drew him into her mouth, and stroked him with her tongue—

"Wait!" he gasped. "Wait, wait..."—he pulled himself away from her, trembling and already breathless—"I might fall upon you."

"Then lie on your back," said Eowyn.

"But *I* was going to make love to *you*."

She smiled. "Later, *Lassui*."

"*Melethril nín...*" He raised her bandaged hands to his lips and kissed them. Then he did as she had asked, rolling onto his back and lying, legs apart, with his arms by his sides.

Eowyn, still a little unsteady, knelt between his knees. "You are so beautiful," she murmured, leaning forward and nuzzling his long, thick erection, brushing her mouth over the hot, hard flesh. "*So beautiful...*"

...

Legolas stroked her hair and felt her smile. Then she dipped her head lower and sucked one of his testicles into her mouth.

"Oh yes," he muttered. "Yes..." And his body arched, stomach muscles fluttering, and his erection hardened and rose up from his belly at each caress of her warm tongue. "Oh, sweet Eowyn..." He closed his eyes and lay, grasping the bedroll, stretched out on a rack of pleasure until, just at the critical moment, she suddenly released him, and he collapsed, groaning with disappointment.

But that did not last long—crawling up his body, Eowyn took his penis in one of her bandaged

The water is wide

hands—he squirmed at the feel of the dressing on his erect flesh—then she lifted him, and wrapped her warm, soft mouth around him.

Manwë and Varda!

He almost came.

But he fought back his orgasm—and she, knowing him so well now, waited, letting him step back from the brink before she began. And he raised his head, and watched her—watched her sweet body move rhythmically as her clever mouth sucked the life from him—from his shaking thighs, and his straining belly, and from under his trembling arms—and he moaned at the first faint ripples of another climax, deep in his groin, knowing that this time nothing could stop it.

And he stiffened and jerked as her hand grasped his buttock—and the other was stroking him—up—and down—and up—and down his whole length and—yes—squeezing and stroking—yes—and his hand grabbed his thigh as he came—oh sweet *gods*—he came, shooting long gouts of seed—once, twice, thrice, four times, five—thick and white across his belly—

Then he sank down, smiling up at her gratefully, blissfully emptied.

The water is wide

Chapter 28: His eyes

prompt #015 blue

“Good morning...”

Slowly, Eowyn emerged from beneath her fur blankets. “Lassui,” she mumbled.

Legolas smiled, sympathetically. “Headache?”

“No...” She sat up. “Just tired.”

“Gimli sent you this.” He held out a steaming tankard.

Frowning, Eowyn pulled a hand from the tangle of bedding, took the drink from him and, peering into its smoky depths, sniffed at spiralling vapour. It smelled—disconcertingly—like freshly-oiled chain mail. “What is it?”

“It is a dwarven tonic, *melmenya*. It is supposed to revive a warrior, the morning after.”

“The morning after *what*?” Eowyn sat up. “Does *Gimli* think that I was drunk last night?”

Legolas laughed. “No, Eowyn *nín*! The morning after a *battle*—Gimli knows that you were wounded yesterday. The tonic is usually brewed by dwarven maidens. Dwarves are a very hardy people, *melmenya*. Try it.”

“I was not *wounded*, Lassui, I just slipped and—oh, very well!” Watching her elf over the rim of the tankard, Eowyn took a cautious sip—and screwed up her face in disgust. “*Ugh!*”

“Bad?”

She shook her head. “*Worse!*”

“Aw...” Legolas rubbed her back, encouragingly. “When you have finished it, I will give you a sweetmeat.”

“You have eaten all your sweetmeats.”

“Mmm... A kiss, then.”

“Do not flatter yourself.” Eowyn wiped the tears from her eyes and looked again into the steaming grey liquid. “Are you sure that this is safe?”

“Perfectly, *melmenya*. Master *Dínendal* himself says that it will do you good.”

With a deep sigh, Eowyn lifted the tankard to her lips, threw back her head, and drained the tonic in a single draught.

“*Melmenya!* That was just like a dwarf!” Legolas hugged her proudly.

Eowyn handed him the tankard. “And I *deserve*,” she gasped, between convulsive swallows, “a dwarven helm—for drinking it. Let us hope—that I do not—grow a *beard*.”

“If you do, I am sure that Eomer will show you how to—*ow!*”

“Stupid elf,” she cried, shoving him down onto the bedroll, “stupid, arrogant,”—she pinned his wrists to the ground—“*insufferable*,”—(he did nothing to resist)—“*elf...*” She swooped in and kissed him roughly, at the same time pressing herself against him until she felt his body respond.

The water is wide

Then she raised her head, and smiled at him, wantonly.

"You taste *disgusting*, melmenya," said Legolas.

They both chuckled.

"Is there time?" asked Eowyn.

"That would depend," he replied, "on what you had in mind."

She leaned down and whispered in his ear.

But Legolas was suddenly serious. "We must be careful, Eowyn nín," he said, stroking her hair, "you are bruised there. But I can do what I did last night."

"No." Eowyn came up on her hands. "Last night was lovely, Lassui, but it is not the same. I want to feel you,"—she moved, seductively—"inside me. *Filling* me."

Legolas swallowed hard. "My lethal Shieldmaiden."

...

"Ah—be careful, Eowyn nín." He was holding her by the waist, using his elven strength to support her as she rode him. "If it hurts, melmenya—oh, yes—if it hurts, stop, meleth nín..."

Eowyn leaned down and kissed his mouth. "Nothing hurts when you are inside me, Lassui," she murmured. "You are *so* beautiful."

"No. It is *you* who are beautiful," he said, raising a hand to brush back her thick, dishevelled hair, "so full of life, my darling, so—so—*oh*..." And, suddenly forgetting his fear of hurting her, he slid his hands down to her hips and, grasping them, he started to thrust upwards, with fast, urgent strokes.

...

Eowyn gasped.

His eyes (bluer than the summer sky) had suddenly widened in astonishment and, leaning over him, overflowing with love for him, she watched him come—still riding him, but gently now—and her own climax, which had been prickling inside her for some time, at last burst forth in a dazzling shower of sparks, just as *his* ended in one final—joyful—*thrust*.

The water is wide

Chapter 29: The bow

prompt #093 thanksgiving

Having awoken with a bad hangover, and having then had to suffer the *indignity* of a sponge bath at the hands of Master Dínendal's assistant, Thorkell bogsveigir was in no mood to meekly accept another dressing-down from the March Warden of Eryn Carantaur.

He pushed himself up on his good arm, wincing because the movement jarred his damaged shoulder, and scowled at the elf. "What?" he barked. "I did *nothing wrong*. The cook sent me down to the river—I found her there, wandering about, all alone—the Orcs attacked us before I could get her back—"

Without a word, Haldir laid the Beorning's bow and quiver at the foot of his bed. Then, still saying nothing, he turned and left.

Thorkell stared at the elf's retreating back. "It will be *weeks* before I can use them again," he shouted. He sank back onto his pillow. "Apparently."

The water is wide

Chapter 30: Separation

prompt #007 days

Invisible in the long grass, Orodreth raised his hands to his mouth and whistled like a bird. Within seconds, his comrade was crouching beside him.

"What is it?" whispered Valandil.

Orodreth pointed at the ground.

...

It was Legolas who recovered first, gathering Eowyn into his arms with a contented sigh. He kissed her forehead. "I must speak with the others, Eowyn nín," he murmured. "And I want to talk to Thorkell bogsveigir. If I fetch you some water, can you wash and dress yourself?"

"Of course, Lassui." She stifled a yawn.

Legolas chuckled, kissing her again. "If you are not sitting down to breakfast within half an hour, melmenya, I will come back and wake you," he said.

...

"The scouts have returned," said Haldir, joining Legolas at the camp fire with Eomer and Gimli, "and the news is bad—we may have cleaned the river bank, but Valandil has found fresh tracks further east—several sets—it looks as though the Orcs are gathering forces."

"To attack us," said Legolas. "Where are they now?" He handed the March Warden a tankard of Gimli's dwarven tonic.

"Thank you." Haldir sat down. "Valandil did not see any Orcs," he said, "but he followed the spoor far enough to know that it leads into Mirkwood." He lifted the tankard to his mouth, caught the scent of the steaming liquid, and gasped.

"Get it down you, lad," said Gimli, "it will do you good. It has perked the lass up, no end."

"It is best to down it in one," said Eomer. He turned to Legolas. "We have almost fifty warriors between us. I say we follow the trail into the Forest and finish the job."

"It would make sense to act quickly," Legolas agreed, "but that would leave the cavalcade unprotected. And Eowyn is wounded—"

"I am not *wounded!*"

"Melmenya! Come and sit by the fire."

"I can still fight," said Eowyn, politely declining Gimli's offer of another tankard.

"No," said Eomer.

"What I was *about* to say," Eowyn insisted, as she sat down beside Legolas, "was, leave some of your warriors here with me, Lassui, and you and Eomer take the rest into Mirkwood."

"Oh Eowyn nín!" Legolas patted her mailed arm, proudly. "The camp is too vulnerable, melmenya; you would be defending the young, the old, the sick, the injured—"

"I would be *moving* the camp, Lassui—taking everyone somewhere safe whilst you are dealing with the Orcs. I have done that before." She turned to the March Warden. "You know these

The water is wide

parts, Haldir. Where should we be heading for?"

Haldir glanced at Legolas. Almost imperceptibly, Legolas nodded.

"I would cross the river," said the big elf. "The cavalcade would be less vulnerable on the western bank, and there is an old Galadhrim guard post, about ten miles south, that would make a safe camp tonight. With luck," he added, addressing Eowyn directly now, "you could be in Caras Galadhon by tomorrow."

"It is a good plan," said Legolas.

"I can do it," said Eowyn.

Eomer grunted.

Legolas grasped Eowyn's hands. "You will be in charge, *melmenya*, and Haldir will escort you. If we have not caught up with you by the time you reach Lothlorien, get everyone onto the flets and wait for us there."

"I will not let you down, *Lassui*," said Eowyn.

...

Shortly after

"What is happening?" asked Thorkell bogsveigir the moment Legolas entered the Healing Tent. "Everyone is buzzing around like blue-arsed flies." Then he added, somewhat self-consciously, "My Lord."

Legolas—unable to suppress a smile—folded his arms across his chest. "We have found more Orc tracks," he said. "They are gathering in Mirkwood."

Thorkell sighed. "If you had crossed the river, as I originally advised—"

"That advice, as I remember," interrupted Legolas, "was, in fact, a threat from Bergthórr beytill. But I am not here to argue with you Master Bowswayer—in fact, I am here to thank you for protecting my lady." He placed his hand upon his heart and bowed his head. "I am in your debt."

Thorkell's eyes narrowed. "Meaning what, exactly—my Lord?"

"Meaning that—insofar as you ever *were* tied to me—you are now a free man."

"I see," said Thorkell bogsveigir. "Thank you—but I belong to the Lady."

Legolas laughed. "Yes you do. And, where her welfare is concerned, you have shown yourself a more-than-faithful servant. Few men could draw a Galadhrim bow, Master Bowswayer—fewer still would continue to draw it when the effort was tearing their muscles from their bones."

He sat down on the next bed. "We will take the cavalcade across the river at the southern ford. Eowyn will lead it to Lothlorien whilst Eomer King and I double back and deal with the Orcs. It is unfortunate," he added, "that you, with your local knowledge, cannot be with us—but I expect you to give Eowyn your full support."

"I thought you said I was a free man."

It was one of the Beorning's dry jokes but, this time, Legolas did not laugh. "I *expect*," he said. "I do not *order*."

The water is wide

A look passed between them. Then Thorkell bogsveigir nodded. "Though what I can do for her strapped up like this—"

"You can second her decisions, Master Bowsayer," said Legolas, rising. "That is all she will need."

...

Back at the remains of the camp fire, Eowyn was slipping a few personal things back into her small travelling pack.

"Are you ready, my darling?" Legolas wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "Remember," he murmured, pressing his lips to her forehead, "that if riding hurts, you can always travel in the cart with Thorkell bogsveigir."

"Did I do the right thing, Lassui? Was I right to suggest that we separate like this? What if—"

"Shhhhh." He hugged her tightly. "I will be back before you know it, Eowyn," he said. "I promise."

The water is wide

Chapter 31: Men

prompt #027 parents

With the help of Legolas and his Mirkwood elves, the cavalcade crossed the Anduin at the Southern Ford, the able-bodied—leading their horses—wading through the swiftly-flowing shallows on foot, the injured and the elderly riding across on the baggage carts.

"Le cenithon ned lû thent, melmenya," murmured Legolas, kissing Eowyn's forehead. "We will join you in Lorien, on the fifth day." He sprang upon Arod's back—"No i Melain na le, meleth nín," he added, with a smile—and, with Gimli clinging on behind, he crossed the river and, signalling his warriors to follow, he galloped across the floodplain, to where Eomer and the Rohirrim were waiting for him.

"Take care, Lassui," whispered Eowyn. "Gods speed, my darling."

...

The going was easier on the western bank.

Eowyn, riding beside the March Warden, led the travelling households of Rohan and Eryn Carantaur—the lawyers and scholars, the healers, cooks and servants—flanked left and right by a small band of mounted warriors and followed by a rearguard of elven archers, along the broad, grassy plain, keeping a sharp lookout for any sign of danger.

At noon, having—by Haldir's estimation—already covered more than half the distance to the guard post where they planned to spend the night, she brought the cavalcade to a halt, and gave orders for the warriors to form a protective circle, whilst the cooks prepared a midday meal.

"I have been thinking," she said to the March Warden, as they threaded their way through the temporary encampment, checking the condition of the travellers, their horses, and the carts, "that before we enter the Forest, we should send out scouts, to make sure that the way is safe."

"It will leave the column more vulnerable."

"I know. But we will only send two—Lorien elves, who know the terrain—and we will wait on the river bank until they return. If there is danger ahead, Haldir, I would prefer to face it in the open."

"Very well, I will see to it."

"Thank you."

...

"Why do you do it?" asked Eowyn, sitting down beside Thorkell bogsveigir.

"Do *what*?" asked the Beorning—trying, one-handed, to slice a lump of cheese with his plate balanced precariously upon his knees.

"Do what, *my Lady*," corrected Eowyn.

"Arrgh!" cried Beorning, watching the cheese shoot off his platter, and land upon the grass.

"You *know* that Rothinzil is betrothed to Master Dínendal," Eowyn insisted, retrieving the food, wiping it, and putting it back on his plate, "and you know that she dislikes you; so why do you

The water is wide

keep hounding her? *Here.*" She set down her own platter and, grasping his plate, held it steady for him.

"Why are you getting your draws in such a twist over it?" He cut off a chunk of cheese and put it in his mouth. "My Lady."

"Because the cavalcade is my responsibility now."

"Ah, yes. The hen is in charge of the foxes."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning that *I* am a man—"

"Oh, a man. Of course." Eowyn picked up her own platter. "One of those strange, exotic, never-understood-by-women-and-always-allowed-to-do-whatever-they-want creatures, a *man*."

Thorkell bogsveigir took a bite of bread. "What would you know of men," he mumbled, "married to an elf? We Beornings are *real* men—my father, he..."

His voice trailed away.

"Your father is dying," said Eowyn, quietly. "Why do you refuse to make peace with him?"

The man did not reply.

"Do you know what I think?"

"I am sure that you will tell me. My *Lady*."

"I think that your father was cruel to you—not deliberately, perhaps, but because he believed that men should be hard."

The Beorning sneered. "He favoured me. I was his *son*."

"So it was your *mother* he treated as a chattel—"

"*You* should get yourself a bag of seeing stones," said Thorkell bogsveigir. "If we knocked out a few of your teeth and rubbed a bit of dirt on your face, you could make a good living as an old crone, cackling out your visions and your warnings."

"Do you want a warning, Thorkell? Do you? *Leave Rothinzil alone or else!*"

"Or else what?"

"There are honourable men in this world," said Eowyn, ignoring his question. "There are men that even you must look up to—my brother, for one. And Legolas—elves show us what men can be—what *you* can be. Think about it, Thorkell. Now,"—she rose to her feet—"I have a cavalcade to get moving."

The Beorning watched her stride across the campsite in her little suede jerkin and her elven boots, small but determined, and he smiled affectionately, in spite of himself.

...

Two hours later

The elven scouts ran silently down the Forest trail, carefully noting every twist and turn, assessing each steep slope and sudden narrow gap, seeking, where necessary, alternative

The water is wide

routes for the carts—and, all the while, watching and listening, and reaching out with their sharp elven senses, for the slightest hint of danger.

Half an hour after leaving the others, they reached the guard post, climbed its ladders, and searched its deserted flets. "Clear," said Belegorn.

His companion nodded.

Back on the ground, the elves made a final inspection. "If we draw the carts into here," said Belegorn, indicating the gaps in the natural ring of trees, "they will form a fence."

"There is no need," replied Celeblas. "We will be safe here—the Lady's grace still protects the Forest. Let us deliver the good—"

"*Wait!*" Belegorn caught his companion by the arm. "Look! What is that—over there?"

"Ai," cried Celeblas, flinching from the hideous sight, "I spoke too soon."

...

An hour later

"Describe it," said Haldir.

Celeblas turned to Eowyn. "It is not—it is hardly fit for your ears, my Lady."

"Speak to me as you would to Lord Legolas," said Eowyn.

The elf acknowledged her order; but he continued reluctantly, glancing, from time to time, at the woman, as though to make sure that his words were not causing her distress. "It was the body of a man, my Lady," he said, "naked, and daubed with red—not blood, I think, but some stain. He was hanging from a tree. His flesh was corrupted,"—he flushed—"like a beast's..."

"He had been *impaled*," added Belegorn, quietly, "upon a branch that had been cut and sharpened for the purpose, like a giant thorn."

"And hanging beside him," said Celeblas, "was another figure, fashioned from bundles of twigs."

...

"What do you think, March Warden?" asked Eowyn.

Haldir shook his head. "It is not the work of Orcs."

"No. Orcs would never have wasted human flesh." She scanned the Forest, her eyes lingering upon the distant mountain range, beyond. "Who lives to the west?"

"West of Lothlorien? There are Orcs and goblins in the Misty Mountains."

"But no men?"

"Not in any numbers, to my knowledge."

"That leaves only the Beornings to the north, and Rohan to the south."

"There is Fangorn to the south west."

"I doubt that the ents would permit whoever did this to shelter in there." She turned to the elf.

The water is wide

"This was done by a man, Haldir—by a man or by men. I am sure of it."

"But why?"

Eowyn shrugged. "As a warning, perhaps. Or in triumph. Or..." She looked down the length of the cavalcade. "We must speak with Master Wystan, and with Thorkell bogsveigir—he has lived east of the river all his life and may know something of local lore. In the meantime," she added, "I think we will be safer making camp out here, beside the river."

The water is wide

Chapter 32: The hunt

prompt #079 when?

"No i Melain na le, meleth nín," he had said. *May the Valar be with you, my love.*

Then, galloping across the plain with Gimli at his back, Eomer at his side, and forty elven and human warriors following close behind, Legolas tried to focus on the task ahead.

This was no time for stealth. A few hundred yards from the trees, Eomer raised his hunting horn and blew—*Ta-rat-ta-raa, Ta-rat-ta-raaaaa!*—and his men let loose the dogs.

Into the woods they flew, with trackers and footsoldiers close on their heels, and the mounted warriors following behind, crashing through the bracken and hacking through the bramble.

Within minutes they had found their quarry.

Gimli, wasting no time, rolled off Arod's back, drew his small throwing axe, and buried it in the back of a fleeing Orc.

Legolas, still mounted, raised his bow and shot. "One!"—he dropped a big Uruk Hai looming up behind Gimli—"Two!"—he skewered a small Orc lying in wait for Valandil—"Three, four, *five!*"—he felled three goblins converging on Orodreth.

"After them!" cried Eomer, as the remaining Orcs, abandoning their dead and dying, fled into the undergrowth. "Do not let them escape!"

"Come, elvallon," shouted Legolas, wheeling Arod. He reached down and grasped the dwarf's arm—

...

A ball of light exploded before Legolas' eyes and, there, silhouetted within it, stood a dark figure. He was tall like an elf, with a man's muscular chest and powerful thighs, but his head...

Reluctantly, Legolas met the creature's wild eyes—and the werewolf snarled, blood-flecked spittle dripping from its cruel jaws.

...

"Elf," yelled Gimli, "*e/f!* Either pull me up or put me down!"

"Gimli?"

"What is wrong, lad?"

"Eowyn," gasped Legolas. "We must get back to Eowyn!"

...

They found Eomer, deeper in the Forest. "How can you know," he cried, hacking right and left at the Orcs who scurried, panic-stricken, before his onslaught, "that this thing—if it exists outside your—your vision—has anything to do with my sister?"

"Master Wystan," shouted Legolas, nocking and loosing an arrow, "read my dream."

"You dreamed of a *wolf?*" Eomer urged his horse forward.

"Yes."

The water is wide

The King grunted, pulling his spear from its straps. "What are you,"—he weighed the weapon in his hand, took aim, and threw—"what are you going to do?"

"Gimli and I will turn back," shouted Legolas, picking off an Orc that tried to rush Eomer as he bent to retrieve his spear.

The King grunted again. "Yes," he said—though it was plain that he was sceptical of his friend's premonition. "I have said all along,"—he thrust his spear through an Uruk Hai—"that you should not encourage her warrior-games."

"Eowyn is a *fine* warrior," cried Legolas, loyally, "but I must go to her, Eomer—I must go *now*. This is not something she can fight alone. May the Valar be with you, mellon nín," he added. "And pray to them that Gimli and I reach her in time."

The water is wide

Chapter 33: Decisions

prompt #026 team mates

When they reached the southern ford, the light was already fading.

"Hold tight, elvellon," cried Legolas, urging Arod towards the water, "the river has swollen since we crossed it this morning, but I dare not wait..."

Grunting in agreement, Gimli grasped the elf's belt, and in they plunged. The current was swift, but Arod, brave and sure-footed, quickly crossed the submerged path and climbed the western bank.

Within minutes, they were galloping south.

As the members of the cavalcade were setting up camp for the night—pitching the tents, under Haldir's direction, within a protective ring of carts and wagons—Eowyn sought out Master Wystan, an elderly healer with great knowledge of local lore.

"You must have heard, sir," she said, sitting down beside the old man and his wolfhound, "what our scouts have found." She patted the dog's head.

"Indeed I have, my Lady," replied Wystan. He pulled a piece of dried meat from his pocket and, no longer able to see his friend, simply held out his hand and let the dog eat from his palm. "Who could have done such a thing?"

"You cannot tell me?"

The old man frowned. "I do not understand, my Lady."

"I thought..." Eowyn sighed. "I *hoped* that you might have come across it before—that it might be a charm, or something—"

"Not in Rohan, my Lady," said Wystan. "Not that I have ever heard."

"Does it remind you of *anything*, sir?" she persisted. "Have you ever heard of anything like it—of any tale that talks of something similar?"

The old man frowned, absently patting his dog. "No tale, my Lady, but—but, I suppose it does remind me of the creature in your husband's dream—the wolf—marking his territory."

Eowyn nodded. "Yes," she said, quietly, "that is exactly what I was thinking."

"Though a wolf, of course, uses its own water. Beasts do not waste their prey."

They sat in silence. Then the old man turned his sightless eyes upon Eowyn, his face suddenly animated. "A wolf," he said, "marks the entire boundary of his territory."

"So there may be more corpses hanging in the Forest." Eowyn sighed. "Thank you, Master Wystan," she said, rising to her feet, "I will leave you to your rest—"

"Wait, my Lady!" The old man reached out and clumsily caught her hand. "Remember," he said, "that a wolf seldom hunts alone."

...

"Sick bastards," said Thorkell bogsveigir.

The water is wide

"You have never heard of anything like it? In Mirkwood? Or around Dol Guldur? Not amongst the men who followed Sauron?"

"Never." The Beorning looked at her, shrewdly. "What do you intend to do? Your husband," he added, when Eowyn seemed surprised by his question, "asked me to take care of you."

"He did *not*!"

"Yes, he did. 'With your local knowledge, Master Bowsayer,'"—he affected a high voice that sounded enough like Legolas to make Eowyn simultaneously amused and annoyed—"I expect you to give my Lady the benefit of your advice."

"Ha!"

"Ask him if you do not believe me."

Eowyn shook her head. "Oh, I am sure that he said something to you, though I doubt that 'the benefit of your advice' ever came into it. Of course," she added, "this phantom order is the *one* that you intend to follow."

"To the letter," said Thorkell. "What do you intend to do?"

"Stay here," said Eowyn, "where the terrain is flat and open and, if anyone comes, we will see them coming. We shall stay here until Legolas and the others arrive. Does that meet with your approval?"

"Absolutely."

...

By the time Eowyn reached the mess tent, having first inspected the improvised defences, and then walked through the camp, reassuring her anxious charges, she was exhausted. Haldir pulled out a folding chair and she collapsed into it.

"Not just now," said the March Warden, fending off a group of servants hovering nearby. "Your lady needs to rest."

"But sir," said one of the women, beckoning him closer, "this is urgent. Little Hob—"

"Hobbie, the baker's son?" said Eowyn, suddenly alert. "What about him?"

"He's disappeared, my Lady—vanished. And Averell overheard him asking those two elves all about—well, all about the dead body—so she's convinced that he's gone to see it for himself."

Haldir swore—fortunately in Elvish. "You have searched the camp?"

"Every square inch, Master Haldir. Every tent, cart and wagon. He is not here."

"The river?"

"No footprints on the bank."

"Tell Averell to have courage," said Eowyn, already on her feet. "We will find him."

...

Minutes later, Haldir had assembled ten volunteers, including the elves Belegorn and Celeblas. "We will be equipped with flaming torches," said Eowyn. "Belegorn tells me that the trail is clear for all to see. I want you to search the Forest immediately to the left and right of it,

The water is wide

working in pairs—no one is to stray too far from the rest.”

“I know that you do not want to hear this,” said the March Warden, quietly, as the search party was preparing to leave, “but I am going to say it anyway: stay here.”

“Haldir,” hissed Eowyn, in exasperation, “*no!* Legolas left the cavalcade in *my* care.”

“Which is precisely why you should not be taking any risks.”

“No, it is precisely why I *have* to take risks,” she countered. “I cannot stay behind—how could I face these people—give them orders, decide their fate—after proving myself a coward? I *must* take risks, Haldir, and—oh, *no!*” She ducked past the March Warden and stalked towards Thorkell bogsveigir, who was limping towards her, carrying his bow. “What are you doing?”

“What your elf told me to do: keeping an eye on you.”

“Thorkell! You can hardly stand! And you certainly cannot use a weapon. No—and *that,*” she added, guiding him into the mess tent and forcing him to sit down, “really is an order—look at you—you are sweating just from walking!”

“At least wait until dawn,” said the Beorning, wearily.

“I would if I could, believe me. But there is a little boy wandering somewhere in the Forest, Master Bowswayer, and we must find him quickly. A healthy dog will not harm a puppy” she added, quietly, “but a *mad* dog has no such scruples.”

The water is wide

Chapter 34: The search

prompt #053 earth

"Ho-bbieeee!" Eowyn lowered her torch and, trying to think like a tracker (as Legolas had shown her), searched the ground for signs of the boy's passage—trampled earth, broken branches...

She glanced at Haldir, searching by her side.

The elf shook his head. "He is small and quick-witted," he said, "we will not find him if he does not want to be found. That is, unless..." But he did not finish the sentence, for the idea of a child's body, hanging from the trees, was too terrible to be spoken aloud.

Eowyn frowned. All around them, men and elves were calling—"Hob!", "Hob?", "Hobbie!"—and some of the voices sounded angry—"HOB! Where *are* you, boy?"

"Do not be afraid, Hobbie," she shouted, "it is just Lady Eowyn, come to take you back to your mother. Hobbie?"

She saw Haldir's head turn and, raising her torch and holding it out before her, she followed his gaze. There seemed to be something—*perhaps* a small, dark figure—hiding in the trees to the north of the path, less than ten yards away. "Is it...?"

"Yes," said Haldir. "*Quiet*," he called to the searchers, "quiet, now!" He turned back to Eowyn. "Go to him."

Eowyn took a few cautious steps towards the boy. "Do not be afraid, Hobbie. Look,"—she brought the torch closer to her face—"you know me."

"Lady 'Owen!"

"That is right—come to me, Hobbie."

The child hesitated for just a moment longer. Then, suddenly, he darted from his hiding place, and ran to Eowyn, throwing his arms around her waist.

"Oh, you silly boy," she said, rubbing his back with her free hand, "whatever were you doing, out here in the dark?"

"I don't know," the boy mumbled.

Eowyn held out her torch, Haldir took it from her, and she grasped Hob, gently, by the shoulders. "Did you come here to see the dead man that everyone was talking about?" The other searchers had begun to gather round them, but Eowyn signalled for them to stay back. "Is that why you were hiding from us, Hobbie?" she persisted. "Is that why you were afraid? Did you think that we would be angry with you?"

"I thought you were the bad men."

Eowyn hugged him close. "What bad men? Did you see bad men, Hobbie?"

"Yes," whispered the boy. "Wolf-men." There were grunts and murmurs from some of the searchers. "Two wolf-men."

"What do you mean, Hobbie," asked Eowyn, gently, "what made you think they were *wolf*-men?"

"They had wolf's heads, Lady 'Owen," cried the boy. "And *fur*."

The water is wide

"Shhh, Hobbie. It is all right."

"Where did you see them?" asked Haldir.

"I don't know."

"Think hard, Hobbie. It is very important," said Eowyn, giving him another hug.

The boy lifted his head and looked about him. "Down the path, I think," he said, frowning. "There was a tree with stairs."

"Yes. One of the outer ring of talans," said Haldir.

"It was past there. There was a big tree. Over that way."

"The major mallorn," said Haldir, nodding. "It is one of the oldest trees in the Forest."

"That's where I saw them," said Hob. He looked up at Eowyn. "I dropped my *knife*..." He did not need to add, *Because I was scared*.

Eowyn kissed the top of his head. "You are a very brave boy," she said—ignoring the mutterings from some of her men—"and if we do not find your knife, Hobbie, I will give you mine. Now, Osbert and Liulf,"—she thought for a moment—"and Kenric and Herolt will take you back to your mother." She handed the boy to Osbert. "Take good care of him," she said, giving the man a meaningful look.

...

"Well—do we press on now," she asked, quietly, "or do we wait until dawn?" She looked up at Haldir. "Are these wolf-men werewolves, or just depraved men who want to make us *think* that they are demons?"

"I have no idea."

"What do you advise?"

Haldir glanced around the remaining members of the search party. "Men or wolves, they are creatures of the ground. I suggest that we take to the trees, and see what more we can learn from up there."

Eowyn agreed. "But I will need help—climbing."

"Of course." Haldir showed her the length of elven rope hanging from his belt.

"I do wish that Legolas were here," she said.

...

They doused the torches and, moving in elven silence now, made their way along the winding path—Eowyn staying close to Haldir—until they reached the stairs to the talan.

Belegorn examined the steps. "The boy climbed," he said, softly, "up to the first level, and crouched there for some time—there are small hand and knee prints beside his footprints—but there are no adult-sized prints, nor any wolf claw marks."

"Then we will climb up," said Eowyn.

...

The water is wide

The talan, small and leaf-shaped, sat precariously on a slender branch, high up in the Forest canopy. Eowyn, used to the sturdier flets of Eryn Carantaur, with their walls and handrails, immediately felt dizzy and, like Hob before her, dropped to her hands and knees and crawled to the centre of the swaying platform.

Haldir laid a strong hand upon her shoulder. "You will get used to it," he said, softly.

Eowyn watched Belegorn and Celeblas step off the talan, walk out along its supporting branch, and leap effortlessly into the next tree, followed immediately by Faerval and Cúven, and then by the men, Goduin and Osgar, using ropes. "No," she said, sadly, "not quickly enough."

"Then I will carry you."

But she shook her head. "It would hold you back, Haldir," she said, "and I need you at the front, in charge of the others. Better to leave me here—where at least there is a flet for me to sit on. Find out all you can, then come back for me. I shall be quite safe here."

Haldir scanned the branches above, hoping to find a better hiding place for her, but could see nowhere more secure. He squeezed her shoulder. "I will send back one of the elves," he said, "just in case you should need an archer."

...

Later

Eowyn had lost track of how long she had been sitting in the middle of the flet, listening to the sounds of the Forest at night—the leaves gently rustling, the insects quietly chirruping, and, now and then, a bird calling softly to its mate—when another sound, loud and clumsy, startled her and, at the very same moment, the Forest fell silent—

She raised her head, saw the elf, Cúven, and one of the men, Osgar, making their way back to her, and she held up her hand, signalling them to stop—

Something is wrong!

Trembling, she crawled, flat on her belly, to the very edge of the flet and peered, through the branches, at the ground, far, far below.

"Oh no," she whispered. "Oh, dear gods, no!"

The water is wide

Chapter 35: Trapped

prompt #041: shapes

Legolas ... gave a sudden cry.

'There are eyes!' he said. 'Eyes looking out from the shadows of the boughs! I never saw such eyes before.'

The Two Towers, Book 3, Chapter 8, The Road to Isengard

As they galloped south, following the course of the river, Gimli could see lights—a crown of flaming torches—flickering in the distance. Clinging to Legolas' back, he shouted, "Is that the cavalcade?"

"Yes, elvellon."

"I thought the plan—was to camp in the Forest?"

"It was," cried Legolas. "But something must have gone wrong." The elf leaned over Arod's neck, silently begging the horse to hurry, and the gallant steed responded.

Along the bank they flew, leaping over bush and briar, splashing through mud and mire, swiftly eating up the miles, until—

...

Legolas brought Arod to a sudden halt.

"What?" Gimli peered into the woods, his hand automatically reaching for his axe. "What is it?" The elf seemed unusually nervous.

"Shapes," said Legolas. "Dark shapes, lurking amongst the boughs."

"Orcs?"

"No." He slid from Arod's back.

"Then what—*wait*," hissed the dwarf, "Legolas, where are you going? What about Eowyn? *Wait!*"

But the elf, holding a hand before his eyes as though shielding them from a bright light, did not wait—and, a moment later, he had vanished into the trees.

"Avo visto, Arod," muttered Gimli, jumping down to the ground. "Be ready to come and rescue your crazy master if I whistle."

...

Caution did not come naturally to Gimli son of Gloin but nothing about his present situation *was* natural: one moment Legolas had been galloping through the night, risking both their necks, convinced that Eowyn was in imminent danger, the next he was chasing shadows, apparently having forgotten that his wife existed.

What can be wrong with him? Gimli drew his axe and—mouthing a silent apology to The Lady's trees for his threatening behaviour—crept into the Forest. "*Hssst! Hssst! Legolas!*"

The water is wide

He found himself following a narrow, well-worn path that twisted back and forth between the massive trunks, quickly leading him into the dark heart of the Forest, and leaving him completely disoriented. *But someone is close by*, he thought, *and it is no elf, for an elf's feet do not wear away the earth, and nor does an elf*—and this Gimli knew for certain—*cause this prickling feeling on the back of the neck.*

He stopped walking and, narrowing his eyes, listened hard.

Silence.

His pursuer was making no sound. *He knows that I know that he is following me—*

The dwarf frowned. *Silence?*

What has happened to all the little night creatures? Even Mirkwood in the days of Sauron was never completely silent...

And, at that moment, Gimli knew two things—first, that whatever had been following him was profoundly *unnatural* and, secondly, that (unfortunately) it was standing right behind him.

"Awwwww!" he roared, spinning round to face the abomination, his axe held high.

And a vast, dark shape fell upon him.

...

Pain.

Pain shooting through his chest at every breath; pain burning its way up his arms and into his shoulders; pain exploding in his head...

Silently calling out to Aulë for strength, Gimli met the agony head on, and sent it scurrying away.

He opened his eyes. *Earth. Good, clean earth. The Lady's own soil!*

He was lying face down—no longer on the winding path (in fact, his instincts told him that he was in a different part of the Forest altogether), but there was surely no harm in trying. The dwarf pursed his lips, whistled long and low, and waited for a blow from his captor.

Nothing happened.

Cautiously, he whistled again—and, this time, he thought he heard Arod, somewhere in the distance, neighing in reply. *Good horse*, he thought, *come, find your master...*

Slowly, he raised his head.

He was definitely in another part of the Forest—the dwarf's sharp eyes spotted the remains of a Galadhrim staircase, winding up one of the trees a few yards off to the right. Gingerly, he turned to face the left.

Something was happening, just a few paces away.

Gimli craned his neck.

Legolas!

The dwarf frowned. Legolas was kneeling on the ground, his hands tied behind his back, his head bowed. And something was wrong—*very wrong*—for all the spirit, that infuriating, elven

The water is wide

jauntiness, had gone out of him—he looked as though he had been enchanted, or perhaps brained with the flat of an axe.

Gimli strained to raise his head higher.

Six figures were standing over the elf. Five of them were men, dressed in wolf skins—the wolf heads worn as hoods, the wolf legs, ending in claws, hanging down by their sides. But the sixth was not.

The sixth figure was taller than the rest, and broader, with powerful, heavily muscled limbs covered in shaggy, dark hair that spread up his back, thickened as it reached his long neck, and turned to fur over his wolveren head.

Gimli gasped. *The elf's vision!*

And, as the dwarf watched, struggling to break free of his bonds, the werewolf reached down, and stroked Legolas' cheek.

"*Beau-ti-ful...*" he growled, forming the word in a series of soft barks. He fondled the elf's hair, lifting the pale strands, and letting them fall. "Beau-ti-ful."

Then, roughly, he grasped Legolas by the scruff of the neck and forced him down on all fours. And, signalling two of his men to hold the elf still, he knelt down behind him...

The water is wide

Chapter 36: The rescuers

prompt #030 death

"Oh, dear gods, no..."

Gripping the edge of the flet, Eowyn looked down—unseen—from the lofty platform. Two men, grotesquely cloaked in wolf skins, had shoved Legolas to his knees.

Oh Lassui!

Why does he not resist? She leaned down, peering anxiously at the elf. His hands were bound behind his back. But why is he not struggling, she wondered. Gods, what have they done to him? More wolf-men crowded in on him, blocking her view. What are they DOING?

She felt a motion—no more than a movement of the air—beside her and, dragging her eyes from Legolas, she turned to find that one of the warriors Haldir had sent to protect her had leaped onto the flet, and was crouching beside her.

She looked back at Legolas. *I must do something, she thought. Three up here against—how many?—five on the ground. What can I do?*

The knot of wolf-men suddenly parted to admit a sixth shadowy figure. Eowyn saw him reach for Legolas' face—"No!" she hissed—and her hand went for her sword, but the elf beside her grasped her arm and, reading the warning on his face, she instantly made a decision. "Find Haldir," she whispered. "Tell him—"

It was unnecessary to say more. The elf nodded. And, rising gracefully, he sprang onto to a nearby bough, and disappeared into the foliage.

Eowyn signalled to his human companion. "Come," she gestured. "Quickly."

...

"Beau-ti-ful..."

The word—not spoken, but growled—sent a shiver through Eowyn's body and she swallowed hard, trying to control her trembling limbs. *That is no man, she thought.*

It is a monster, and Lassui is in its power...

"Gaur," whispered a voice at her elbow. Eowyn's hand flew to her mouth, suppressing a cry of surprise—she had forgotten that she had summoned the second warrior. "A werewolf, my Lady," said the man.

"And the others?" The creature had pushed Legolas down on all fours.

"Its followers."

"But mortal men?" Again her hand went to her sword; she loosened it in its scabbard.

"Perhaps."

"Can you shoot the werewolf from here? Kill it?" Forgetting her fear of heights, she scrambled to her feet.

"Yes,"—Osgar fitted an arrow to his bow—"but a simple arrow cannot kill a demon, my Lady." He took aim.

The water is wide

Down on the ground, the werewolf had dropped to its knees—Eowyn saw it seize Legolas by the waist—

"*SHOOT,*" she cried, launching herself down the spiralling stair, "shoot—shoot—shoot them *ALL!*" Half running, half tumbling, she plunged downwards—dimly aware of the arrows whistling past her—oblivious to the pain that jolted her body each time she slipped down the steps and lurched into the tree trunk.

...

She heard the werewolf roar—saw it rise up on its knees, twisting in pain, and rip an arrow from its shoulder—heard it barking orders to its men who, though harried by Osgar, rushed to the foot of the stair—and Eowyn knew that she had little chance of surviving the next few minutes.

But, in the confusion, Legolas had been forgotten—*Haldir will come soon*, she thought, *and then Lassui will be safe*—and that was all that mattered now.

On she went.

Then, from the corner of her eye, she spotted Gimli, trussed like a rabbit but struggling to free himself and, with renewed hope, she leapt over the handrail and miraculously hit the ground running. And, dodging one of the wolf-men (who threw out his arms to catch her), she drew her sword, and sliced through the dwarf's bonds, before turning and darting back to face the werewolf.

Behind her, Gimli—with a blood-curdling cry—broke free of the ropes and, armed with nothing but a knotted cord, charged the pack.

"Get away from Legolas!" cried Eowyn. "*Move!*"

The creature turned.

...

Amidst the chaos of shouts and screams, and the falling arrows, their eyes met; and Eowyn saw something alter in the creature's gaze; and she felt its desire, like a physical touch, violating her at her very core, and she heard its seductive whisper: *Give yourself to me and become like me—cheat death, and live forever...*

Cheat death, thought Eowyn, feeling a longing swell within her. *Cheat...*

Death?

"*I AM ALREADY IMMORTAL,*" she roared, swinging her sword.

It was a clumsy stroke, but anger gave her strength, and surprise was on her side. Her steel sank into flesh and bone.

The werewolf threw back its head and howled.

She struck again, slashing its belly.

The creature dropped to all fours.

Eowyn raised her sword in a high guard, and moved in for the kill.

The water is wide

Chapter 37: the changeling

prompt #040 sight

"AWWWWWW!" roared Gimli, advancing on the pack. Eowyn would rescue the elf; it was *his* job to buy her enough time.

"Who wants to be *first*?" He swung the heavy, knotted rope—the remains of his bonds—around his head. "Come on, *fight*!"

One of the men drew a pair of knives and—

Schhhhum! A single arrow, slicing down through the foliage, buried itself between his eyes. The startled man frowned, staggered forwards, and dropped like a stone, his weapons falling from his dead hands.

"Thank ye, laddie!" Gimli shouted to his unseen comrade.

Then he charged, whirling his rope; and the thick knots, propelled by dwarven muscle, hit the next man full in the face. The wolf-man stumbled; Gimli struck again, bringing him to his knees, and again, laying him out cold. He dropped the rope and picked up the dead man's knives. "Who is next?"

One of the wolf-men turned and fled.

"*You!*" cried the dwarf, brandishing the blades at the larger of the two who remained. "I will take *you* next!"

The big wolf-man, intimidated by the dwarf's relentless advance, looked to his companion for support; but other man, relieved by his own reprieve, was already backing away.

"Divide and conquer," muttered Gimli. "Forget *him*," he shouted, "I have chosen *you*."

Reluctantly, the wolf-man drew a battle axe.

"Aw," growled the dwarf. "Now *that* is cheating!"

The pair circled; and Gimli, unused to knife work, realised that he was hesitating. "Aw, bugger this!" he cried, and charged.

The wolf-man swung, badly misjudged the dwarf's height, and missed; Gimli, safely past his enemy's guard and quicker, despite his armour, stabbed.

With a gasp, the wolf-man, dropping his weapon, clutched at his chest.

Gimli swept up the battle axe. "Never challenge a dwarf with his own steel, laddie," he cried. "Now—"

But the wolf-man lay, still and white, upon the ground, staring upwards with sightless eyes. Grunting, Gimli leaned down to close his eyelids.

Suddenly the man's arms flew out and his body stretched, his back arching and his hips rising high, twisting and turning, as a terrible sound—like wood splitting beneath a blade—came up from his vitals.

Blood spattered his shirt and breeches.

"The *rope*, Lord Gimli!" yelled Osgar, who—having shot his last arrow—had rushed down from the flet. He scooped up the knotted cord and threw it to the dwarf. "Is there more?"

The water is wide

"Over there..."

"Bind him, my Lord!" cried the man. "Bind him now, whilst he is still weak!" He ran back to Gimli with a second length of rope.

"By the gods," muttered the dwarf, "what a sight."

The wolf-man was changing—his skin, ripped by his own nails, was falling in ribbons about his face and neck, and dark fur was sprouting from the bloody flesh; his jaws, working furiously, were growing longer and broader, crammed with cruel teeth; and foaming red-flecked spittle was flying from his snarling mouth...

"Now, my Lord, *now!*" cried Osgar; and man and dwarf pounced, Gimli slipping a hastily-tied noose over one of the flailing arms, Osgar doing the same to a clawed foot. "Over here," cried the man, and battling with the wolf-man's growing strength, the pair dragged the shrieking, writhing, blood-soaked creature to the foot of one of the trees and, passing the ropes around its trunk, bound him as tightly as they could.

"Will that hold him?" asked Gimli, doubtfully, as the werewolf, in its determination to escape, began to gnaw at its own wrist.

"I do not know, my Lord," muttered the man, desperately searching for more rope. "I do not know!"

The water is wide

Chapter 38: Threats and promises

prompt #055 spirit

Much earlier

"I have your woman."

The voice—a deep, throaty growl—stopped Legolas in his tracks. Panic had been gripping his heart (as always when Eowyn was in danger), but something about that voice, something about the way it gruffly caressed the words, was reassuring.

Soothing...

Trying to resist the lethargy that had suddenly begun to invade his limbs, Legolas peered at the dark silhouette—

An explosion of light almost blinded him—he raised a hand to shield his eyes—and, standing at its centre, he saw again the powerful figure of the werewolf.

"She is waiting for us."

No... Legolas frowned. *That cannot be true; she would not...* "No," he whispered.

"Come, elf,"—the growl had become a purr—"join our *sport*." The creature set its clawed hands upon its hips and spread its muscular legs. "The woman is so passionate—"

"No," whispered Legolas.

"Enjoy her with me,"—the growl had hardened to a snarl—"or *watch* me enjoy her with my wolves." The creature swept its hand past the dark shapes lurking beside it and, one-by-one, men draped in wolf skins appeared in the sphere of light.

"No," whispered Legolas, tears running down his cheeks.

But he followed the creature into the Forest.

...

On and on they tramped, and Legolas—his mind growing duller, his limbs heavier with every step—had no idea where they were going, no idea where they had been, only that, in their wake, they were leaving the Forest empty.

Silent.

At last, the werewolf brought them to a halt, and Legolas heard its followers dump something on the ground—something that groaned—*What?* he wondered and, from the depths of his sluggish brain, he dragged an answer.

Gimli.

Then another impression jogged his blunted senses.

Eowyn! Nearby! Legolas' spirit reached out to her—

One of the wolf men pushed him to his knees.

She is somewhere up above...

The water is wide

A clawed hand stroked his face. "Beau-ti-ful."

"Where is Eowyn?" whispered Legolas. "What have you done to Eowyn?"

But the werewolf seized him by the scruff of the neck, forcing him down on all fours; and Legolas, feeling its hands grasp his waist, and unable to prevent what was about to happen, closed his eyes, tightly—

...

Eowyn's anger exploded above him, like a flask of spirits thrown upon a fire, and he heard her voice ring out, loud and clear: "SHOOT!" she cried. "Shoot! *Shoot!* Kill them all!"

And, suddenly, the werewolf was howling in pain, and its hands had fallen from Legolas' flanks, and at the same moment—only dimly aware of the skirmish around him—the elf felt its curse lift from his mind like mist in the sunlight, and his own anger flare up, keen and bright.

And, as he rose to his knees, already looking for his bow and white knives, he felt a beloved presence, running up behind him, and heard her voice, shouting, "Get away from Legolas! *MOVE!*"

The water is wide

Chapter 39: Escape

prompt #004: insides

Reverting to the animal part of its nature, the werewolf backed away on all fours, baring its teeth, and growling.

Its head, thought Eowyn, holding its gaze, *I must take off its head*. Automatically, she rotated her right hand, extending her arm and readying her blade for the strike—

"Melmenya, get *down!*" Legolas' voice, sounding fearful but commanding, took her by surprise; then his full weight, hitting her from behind and sending her sword flying, pinned her to the ground as a hail of arrows fell from the trees above.

Haldir and his warriors had arrived!

Eowyn heard the werewolf howl; and she lifted her head, and saw it—pierced in the forehead, neck, and twice in the chest—rise up on its hind legs, holding its clawed hands aloft, and roaring—

Then Legolas pushed her down again, and she heard a second and a third volley of arrows find their targets.

Nothing could survive that, she thought. *Not even a demon*.

But when Legolas released her, and she looked again, the werewolf's body was nowhere to be seen.

...

Later

"None of our warriors is injured," said Haldir, as he and Gimli dealt quickly with the aftermath of the fight.

Eowyn, still crouching beside Legolas, drew out her hunting knife and cut a strip of silk from his tunic. "I have promised to give this to Hobbie," she said, slipping the knife into its sheath, "when we get back to the camp." She wound the cloth around a deep scratch on the elf's arm.

"Thank you, melmenya."

"We have one changeling—" said Gimli.

Eowyn glanced at the bloody creature—bound to a tree with several lengths of rope and, for good measure, a torn-up jerkin—as it sat, eyeing its captors. She shuddered.

"—one unconscious human," continued the dwarf, "also bound; and one dead human—both of whom, for the present, seem content to *remain* human."

"Master Dínendal will clean and dress this properly," said Eowyn, "when we get back to the camp. Does it hurt?"

Legolas shook his head. "It is just a scratch."

"Sirs," said Osgar, urgently, "you *must* kill the changeling and the human whilst you have the chance—and you must make sure that the dead man is really dead."

"How?" asked Haldir. "We have seen that arrows have no effect."

The water is wide

"I have heard that a *silver* dart will kill them for certain," the man replied, "but, failing that, you must strike off their heads."

Eowyn frowned. *How did I know that?* she wondered.

"Easily done," said Gimli. Seconds later, his axe fell on the dead man's neck.

"Do not kill the others, elvellon," said Legolas.

Eowyn heard Gimli growl.

"Are you sure, Lassui?" she asked. "Are you feeling all right?"

The elf smiled. "I am fine. How are you, melmenya?"

"A bit bruised."

Legolas leaned forward and pressed his lips to her forehead. "Thank you for saving me again, Shieldmaiden." He looked up at Haldir. "Tie the man to a tree," he said, "then get our people up onto the flets. It will be light soon—the werewolf will not return until nightfall."

He turned to Gimli. "These creatures do not like being up in the air, elvellon, they are bound to the earth—to the soil. In the trees, we will be safe; and when they come back for our captives, we will be waiting, with silver arrows."

"How do you know so much about them, Lassui?" asked Eowyn, softly.

The water is wide

Chapter 40: Watching and waiting

prompt #054 air

"How do you know so much about them, Lassui?" asked Eowyn, softly.

"I think," said Legolas, "that the *gaur* told me." He frowned, trying to remember the exact moment when he had become aware of the knowledge. "Or, rather, that when the *gaur* invaded my mind, it also revealed something of its own nature. But, come, *melmenya*,"—he rose to his feet, and held out his hands—"we have much to do."

...

Gimli and Osgar, having volunteered to stay behind and guard the prisoners, bound the unconscious human to the tree, beside his changeling friend.

Eowyn mounted Arod—who had galloped, bravely, to his master's aid—and she and Legolas, with the remainder of the search party, hurried back to the river. By the time they reached the encampment, dawn was already breaking.

Legolas surveyed the ring of overturned wagons protecting the tents. "You did well, *melmenya*," he said. "March Warden, have everyone gather outside the mess tent. As quickly as possible."

...

When all the travellers had assembled, the elf sprang up onto one of the carts and addressed them.

"I do not need to describe to you," he said, "the danger that now faces us."

A murmur rippled through the crowd.

"Very shortly, we will be moving up onto the flets, where we will all be safe. But the climb will be taxing, and space will be short, so I ask you to take nothing with you but a blanket and the rations that the cooks will give you as you leave. Everything else—*everything*—must be left here in the tents. Once we have dealt with the *goer*, we will return, collect our belongings, and continue on our journey."

At that, a few of the Rohirrim began muttering, but no one went so far as to complain out loud.

Legolas went on. "Before we leave the camp, I have a favour to ask of you." He held up his betrothal ring, so that everyone could see it. "A *gaur* may be killed, it is said, by silver. Princess Eowyn and I will be giving our silver jewellery to the arrowsmiths, to be melted down and cast into arrow heads. I ask all of *you* to do the same."

Now there *were* protests—"How do we know that silver will work?" asked one; "What if you melt it down for nothing?" grumbled another—but a tall, dark, limping figure pushed his way to the front.

"Here," said Thorkell bogsveigir, tugging at the chain about his neck. "Use this."

...

Less than an hour later, the crowd of travellers—each of them carrying a blanket, and food rations wrapped in a cloth—had begun filing into the Forest, led by the two Lorien elves, Belegorn and Celeblas, and helped by the other warriors, who were transporting the elderly and the injured on stretchers, or lifting them onto horseback and leading them down the trail.

The water is wide

...

Eowyn hurried along the line of people looking for Hobbie, for she had promised to give him her hunting knife.

"My Lady!"

She turned. One of the servants was following her. "Oh, er, Heryeth, and,"—she glanced at the little boy clinging to his mother's skirts—"Cuthbert..."

"Yes, my Lady." The servant curtsied, clumsily. "My Lady, I know as—"

"I am afraid I *am* rather busy, Heryeth—"

"But it's the little un, my Lady." The woman pushed her son forward. "Lord Legolas said as we wasn't to take nothing with us, ma'am, but Cuthbert—he can't sleep without his horsie."

"Oh." Eowyn looked down at the boy. "Well," she said, "in that case..." She crouched down beside him. "Can I see your horsie, Cuthbert?"

Shyly, the child held out a small, shapeless toy, made from sack cloth and wool.

"Does he fit into your pocket?"

He nodded.

"Well, put him in there," she said, "and keep him nice and safe until you are up in the trees." She smiled at his mother and, to her surprise, saw a familiar figure rush past, behind her.

"Oh, what do you say, Cuthbert," said Heryeth. "*Thank you, my Lady.*"

But Eowyn was already hastening away.

...

"Legolas!" Eowyn pushed her way through the crowd, trying to catch up with the elf. They had arranged to meet at the arrowsmiths' forge, where he would be examining the first castings, so she was surprised to see him disappear into the Healing Tent.

I was right! she thought. *That scratch on his arm is deep, and it was bleeding badly. He must have decided to ask Master Dínendal to bind it properly.*

...

Inside the Healing Tent, Thorkell bogsveigir was making a fuss. "I do no need a bloody stretcher," he growled at the elves who had come to carry him up onto the flets. "I can walk as well as you can!"

"Can you *climb*?" asked Eowyn. She smiled at Legolas, and was relieved to see him smile back.

"Up *stairs*?" The man raised his eyebrows.

"But can you shoot?" asked Legolas, mischievously.

"Bollocks."

"Let him walk," said Eowyn to the elves. "There are people who *deserve* your help." The Beorning gave her an impudent salute, and limped out of the tent.

The water is wide

Master Dínendal, meanwhile, had sat Legolas down on one of the beds and was carefully unravelling Eowyn's improvised dressing.

She came up behind the healer. "It is a deep scratch," she said, hovering at his elbow. "From the gaur's claws. And it looked as though there was some sort of *dirt* in it..."

"My Lady," said Dínendal, "would you be so kind as to fetch me some clean water from one of the pitchers outside? Rothinzil will give you a bowl."

"Oh... Yes, of course."

...

Dínendal turned back to Legolas. "Did the gaur—"

"No," said Legolas, quickly. "It did not."

"You are quite sure—"

"Yes."

"—because I understand that they can cloud their victims' minds—"

"I am *certain*."

"Good." The healer nodded. "Then all should be well—ah, thank you, my Lady. Please put it on the table."

Gently supporting Legolas' arm, he peeled back the final layer of silk.

...

Eowyn gasped. The wound had closed, but the skin surrounding the ragged scab was red and angry—and she could not recall ever having seen elven flesh inflamed before. "I told you that it was deep, Master Dínendal," she said, "and dirty."

"Elven bodies, my Lady," said the healer, selecting a small vial and adding a few drops of reddish liquid to the bowl of water, "heal much more readily than human."

"Yes, I know," said Eowyn, "but..." She smiled, nervously. "So, are you saying that it is all right?"

"There is no cause for worry. This tincture will cool it." He dipped a pad of clean cloth into the fluid and gently bathed the wound. "Once I have renewed the dressing, my Lord, you should have no difficulty drawing a bow."

...

Legolas handed the silver arrowhead back to the smith. "Have it set on a shaft," he said. "I want to test it before you cast any more."

He gestured to Eowyn, and they drew aside to wait, watching the cooks' assistants as they handed out food parcels to the waiting travellers. "We will soon see if Master Dínendal is right about drawing a bow, melmenya."

"How does it feel?"

"Warm. But otherwise fine." He smiled down at her. "Did you find Hobbie?"

The water is wide

"No..." she said, frowning. "But I did find Haldir, and he and I set some of the horses free. I thought they would be safer if they were able to run away from the gaur—"

"Goer."

"Goer, then. But when everyone has been moved, Lassui, I think we should turn the other horses loose, too."

Legolas nodded, thoughtfully. "Good thinking."

"I also sent Osbert and Liulf with a message for Eomer," she continued. "I have asked him to come as quickly as he can, but warned him to be cautious."

Legolas smiled. "Good."

"And I hid our betrothal contract in the iron chest." Her hand went to the key, hanging around her neck. "The goer will have to break the lock to get at it."

Legolas laughed. "I very much doubt that they are interested in papers, melmenya!"

"Well, you can never be too,"—she reached out, and caught hold of his hand—"you must *not* scratch your arm, my darling!"

...

By nightfall, everything was ready.

They had moved the travellers, including the injured, up onto the highest of the flets, and made them as comfortable as possible.

"I wish," said Haldir, "that we were in Caras Galadhon itself. The city talans are more like the sort of dwelling humans are used to."

Legolas nodded, gravely. "Well, we have no time to build walls and handrails, mellon nín. Select your three least capable archers and have them patrol the upper flets. Tell them to keep everyone away from the edge, and to look out for any signs of trouble—men arguing, boys in high spirits—anything that might end in a fall."

"We can ill afford to lose warriors."

"I know," said Legolas. "But the last thing we want is for one of the children to drop straight into the hands of the goer."

He crossed to the next flet, where the fletchers, using the arrowheads cast earlier, were making up the special, silver-tipped arrows. "Good work, Master Mahtan."

"Thank you, my Lord."

"Keep it up..."

He descended to the lower ring of flets, where he had stationed all available archers—including Eowyn—overlooking the tree to which the two prisoners were lashed. "Anything?"

Gimli, waiting at the top of the stairs with a small band of hand-picked axemen, shook his head. "No. Though the changeling may have perked up a bit..."

"Perhaps he senses that the gaur is close."

"That is exactly what I was thinking."

The water is wide

Legolas patted his shoulder. "Good luck, elvellon."

"Aye. And you, elf."

Legolas crossed the flet and took his place beside Eowyn.

"Celeblas just caught Master Dínendal sneaking down to check on the prisoners," she whispered.

Legolas sighed. "Where is Dínendal now?"

"I sent him up aloft, and made him give me his word that he would stay there until you or Haldir sent for him."

Legolas nodded. "Good." He took his bow from its strap and drew it slowly, testing its action. Then, "Melmenya," he said, softly, "please do not look at me like that."

"Like what?"

"Like you expected to see fur sprouting from my arm at any moment."

"Lassui!" she hissed. "I am *not*—"

"Yes you are. And there is no need. I know that you went to see Master Wystan, and I think I know what you asked him, but—whatever he may have told you—there is only *one* way for an elf to become a gaur, and that..." He saw the look of horror on her face, and gasped, "*What?*"

"*Look,*" she said.

He turned, following her gaze. To the east, the Forest was aglow.

"Fire!" cried one of the warriors.

And the word travelled, from flet to flet, growing louder and more frightened with each repetition: "FIRE! *FIRE! FIIIRE!*"

The water is wide

Chapter 41: Confrontation

prompt #052 fire

"Oh gods," murmured Eowyn, thinking of all the people aloft—of Hobbie and little Cuthbert, of Master Wystan and Thorkell bogsveigir—all trapped, all at the mercy of the flames. "Lassui..."

"Courage, melmenya." He gripped her hand.

Haldir was sending warriors up to the higher flets to maintain control, even as he rushed to Legolas' side.

"Should we not be moving everyone, Lassui?" asked Eowyn.

"It might be kinder," agreed Haldir, quietly, "to keep them occupied."

"No," said Legolas.

...

But, up on the flets, panic was spreading.

The red glow seemed to be growing brighter, and the dull crackle of flames to be growing louder, and the sobs of fear were turning to shouts of anger. And the warriors were forced to use threats, and to brandish weapons, to hold the terrified people back from the stairs.

...

"They are trying to frighten us," said Legolas, "to drive us down from the trees so they can finish us off on the ground. But fire is as much of a threat to *them* as it is to us, so the flames *cannot* be as close as they seem..."

Haldir and Eowyn exchanged doubtful glances.

"If I were they," he continued, thinking aloud—and he was not sure whether this was common sense or some lingering connection with the gaur—"I would set fire to the camp site... Yes... We must stay with our original plan. March Warden, we have too many warriors aloft. Bring them down. The goer will be coming for the prisoners."

He squeezed Eowyn's hand. "You, be careful. I will be as quick as I can."

"Where are you going?"

"To make certain that I am right." He glanced round the lower flets. "Osgar—come with me."

...

"*Mummeeeee...*" Cuthbert jiggled in his mummy's arms.

"Hush, love..." She pulled him close, cradling his head and shielding him from the angry crowd, as she shouldered her way to Grandpa Herewart, who was struggling with the tall, dark man barring his way.

"Sit down, Dad," she hissed.

But Grandpa did not sit down. "Come on, girl," he cried. "Bring the little un." And he pushed the tall man, hard.

The water is wide

"Mummy," Cuthbert shouted.

Then the tall man grasped Grandpa's shoulder and—quite gently—pushed him back. "You *must* stay here. You must *all* stay here. It is the safest place."

There were lots of angry grunts, and people waved their arms and pointed towards the fire, and another old man tried to push past, but an elf-man held him back. "This Forest is still under the Lady's protection," said the elf—and Cuthbert thought he must mean the lady who had asked to see Horsie—"so there is nothing to fear."

"Mummy..."

"Do as the elf says," said the tall man, loudly. "Sit down. All of you."

A woman started crying.

Grandpa Herewart shoved the tall man's hand away and (though Cuthbert could see that he did not want to) did as the man said, and sat down. Then other people, though still angry, sat down too, and the elf-man walked amongst them, talking, and Cuthbert could see that he was trying to cheer them up.

"Pray to your gods, whoever they are," muttered the tall man, "that the elves know what they're doing..."

Cuthbert tugged at his mummy's shoulder, but she caught hold of his hand.

"Thank you, Master Thorkell," she said. "Dad could never have got down all those steps by himself. He'd have fallen..." She stepped closer, and whispered, "You *do* believe we'll be all right up here?"

The tall man shrugged, then rubbed his shoulder.

"I've some apple brandy as would ease that, sir."

"No, ma'am. Thank you—"

"Mummeeee!"

"Oh, *hush*, pup. I'm talking. He's been like this ever since we came up here."

"What is it, little fellow?" asked the tall man.

"*Horsie*," wailed Cuthbert, at last, pointing to where it had happened, "Horsie fell *down*."

...

The two warriors halted at the edge of the Forest.

"I *was* right," murmured Legolas.

On the plain, the camp site was in flames, its ring of wagons transformed into a wall of fire, ten feet high. Wheels were crumpling, planks falling, roofs collapsing; inside the circle, swathes of canvas were burning loose, rising on the updraught, and fluttering away, leaving the tents' charred skeletons exposed.

"Thank the Valar," breathed the elf, softly, "that Eowyn thought to set the horses free."

"The wind is westerly, my Lord," said Osgar, "so it will push the flames down to the river, and the water will put them out. The Forest is safe, so long as the wind does not change. But our

The water is wide

supplies are gone and, without the carts, we cannot move the sick and elderly. We are trapped here, like sitting ducks..."

"That is their plan," agreed Legolas, "but they have underestimated us, *mellon nín*, and overlooked the March Warden's knowledge of Lothlórien. Come. We must get back. We have goer to kill."

...

*"O Elbereth! Gilthoniel!
We still remember, we who dwell
In this far land beneath the trees,
Thy starlight on the Western Seas."*

The elves on the upper flets had begun singing a sweet, uplifting melody, and some of the humans seemed to be joining in, their deeper voices adding a hushed chorus to the soaring verses.

Eowyn turned to Haldir. "He should be back by now."

"It has not been long."

"*You* are worried, too."

"No..."

"You have seen how he keeps scratching at it."

Haldir shook his head. "There is only *one* way—" But Eowyn grasped his arm. "What?"

"Down there." She pointed, through the foliage, towards the prisoners. "Something moved."

Haldir could see nothing. But he knew that Gimli had spotted it, for the dwarf had brought his foot soldiers to attention; and it seemed that the prisoners had sensed it, too, because the changeling, who, since his transformation, had been in a state of torpor, was now fully alert, and fighting his bonds.

The elf signalled to his archers, and they raised their bows.

Suddenly, two men broke cover and, keeping low, streaked towards the prisoners, knives ready to cut the ropes.

"*Shoot!*" cried Haldir.

The silver-tipped arrows sliced down.

One of the men, pierced through forehead, dropped silently to the ground and lay there, unmoving, but the second, hit twice in the chest, let out a great roar, fell backwards, and writhed—skin splitting, bones bursting forth—striving to transform himself before death claimed him.

That one, at least, thought Haldir, watching the death throes, *was a gaur. But where is the leader of the pack? He must not be allowed to escape—*

"*Chaaaarge!*" yelled Gimli, doubtless thinking the same thing, and he launched himself down the stair at the head of his axemen, pursued—before Haldir could stop her—by Eowyn.

The big elf cursed. He had no choice but join her on the ground. "DOWN!" he bellowed at his archers. "It is all *knife* work from now on!"

The water is wide

...

Standing on the Forest floor, Eowyn was already wondering whether following Gimli had been a mistake, for the trees were shrouded in deep shadow and, though the dwarf's axemen were all around her, noisily searching for the gaur, something about the darkness made her feel vulnerable.

She drew her sword, and advanced slowly through a patch of moonlight, peering into the blackness beyond. There was something lying on the ground—a small object that did not belong. She crouched down beside it.

Horsie! she thought, wondering how the toy had come to be there, and imagining how miserable little Cuthbert must be without it.

Glancing round to make sure it was safe, she laid down her sword, picked up the toy horse, and pushed it down the front of her cuirass—

And the hair on the back of her neck stood on end.

Someone was standing behind her!

She heard a growl—so deep and resonant, it seemed to penetrate her vitals—and instinctively reached for her sword.

But it was too late.

As her fingers touched the hilt, a clawed foot lashed out, and kicked it beyond her reach.

The water is wide

Chapter 42: Seduction

prompt #023 lovers

Fear gripping her heart, Eowyn rose slowly, turning, expecting—at any moment—to feel the creature's foul teeth ripping her flesh.

Instead, the thing spoke to her, its words rumbling deep in its chest: "Look at me..."

She raised her eyes, reluctantly—up its powerful, all too human body—to the wolverine face, with its angry, yellow stare.

"Do you like what you see, woman?"

"Like?" she whispered. "What do you mean?"

But she knew exactly what it meant and, though she tried, she could not keep her horrified gaze from dropping back to its groin. "No! No!"

"Come," growled the gaur, grasping her wrist with a clawed hand. "Receive my seed and, with it, my gift of power."

Power? Eowyn struggled against the fog invading her mind.

Power to change, at will, into this form, whispered the gaur, inside her head, *with all of its strength and speed and savage beauty; power to make others like yourself; power to live forever...*

No, thought Eowyn, *none of that means anything to me...*

But, even as she rejected the gaur's 'gift', something else—some terrible, primitive urge—was uncoiling, deep inside her.

"It is always so," purred the gaur, drawing its claws lightly across her cheek, "with women."

Eowyn shivered.

"Women want to be taken..." It pushed her against the tree trunk, and its hand dropped to her belly, and she heard the sudden rending of silk and leather, felt the chill of air upon her bare skin, and the sharp kiss of claw-tips raking her flesh. "*Beau-ti-ful...*" growled the gaur.

And the awakening animal in her leaned into its touch—keen and teasing—and shuddered with violent pleasure as it toyed with her.

"*Beau-ti-ful...*"

But that word—strangely familiar—seemed to awaken something else within her—something clean and pure that was nestling safely in her heart—and, whilst her primitive self responded to the rough caress, Eowyn searched for it, trying to make sense of the sadness its imminent loss aroused in her...

Gods!

The memory of Legolas filled her mind—his face, his smile, his voice.

His love.

"NO," she screamed, and—still hanging in the gaur's grip—she crouched, driving her free hand upwards, smashing her hard fist into its testicles.

The water is wide

The creature roared.

Branches fell, and leaves spun down in a smothering rain, but Eowyn gritted her teeth, and punched again, though a swipe of the gaur's hand all but knocked her head from her shoulders, and its claws left livid trails across her cheek.

But the blow had set her free!

And, as the thing struggled to retain its wolveren form, Eowyn rolled out from under it and scuttled away, crawling over tree roots and falling into hollows, searching for her sword...

Chapter 43: The lady's blessing

66 rain

It started with a few, isolated drops, pattering down from leaf to leaf.

Some of the travellers, huddled in fear on the upper flets, raised their heads, and looked about them, unable to believe what they were hearing.

But the drops soon became a shower, drumming down upon the wooden platforms, and then the shower became a deluge, soaking the refugees, and they—having, moments earlier, expected to die in the flames—scrambled to their feet and, hugging each other, danced in the rain.

Thorkell bogsveigir, their self-appointed warden, standing between the crowd and the staircase, offered a silent—and most uncharacteristic—prayer of thanks to the gods.

And, far below him on the ground, Gimli raised his face skywards, letting the rain soak his beard. "It is the Lady's blessing," he muttered. "Now, we are safe..."

"My Lord?" Osgar skidded to a halt behind Legolas. "My Lord, what is it?"

The elf had closed his eyes, and he bowed his head, frowning with concentration. "Eowyn has disappeared," he murmured. "I can no longer feel her. Something... Something has—*oh!*"

A strange sensation had begun teasing his loins and, trembling at its power, he suddenly arched his back, and stretched out his arms, letting it flood into his thighs and spread into his belly, heating up his innards—

Rock hard, he threw back his head, and howled into the rain.

"*My Lord!*" Osgar leaped back, drawing his sword.

"Not yet," snarled Legolas—raising a still-commanding hand.

An answering roar echoed through the Forest.

"There," he growled. "It has her! It *has* Eowyn! Let me save her. Then deal with *me* however you must."

...

The exchange of demonic howls brought Gimli back to his senses.

We are surrounded!

The water is wide

He peered through the downpour, quickly locating his men—*All present*—and, shouldering his axe, took a deep breath, preparing to bellow the command to regroup—

Somewhere up ahead, Eowyn shouted, triumphantly, "Look—*silver*. Our weapons are tipped with silver! And if *I* do not kill you, Lassui will! With *silver*! *Yaaaaah!*"

The dwarf's eyes met Haldir's.

The pair charged.

...

As he raced across the Forest floor, Legolas grimly resisted the urge to drop to all fours. His skin was tingling and his body felt stange—his limbs powerful; his chest deep; his phallus long; his testicles big and brimming.

This, he realised, is what the gaur wants.

Two wolves, fighting for one mate.

And if I lose, both she and I will be its playthings...

He snarled—and saw that Osgar, assuming the worst, was reaching for his sword.

"Not yet!" he growled. "*Wait!*"

The gaur is hiding Eowyn from me—he rubbed his forehead, and ran his hand over his wet hair—it is clouding my mind, or clouding hers, but its own anger is shining bright, giving it away, because—

"She has *injured* it," he cried. "She has stood up to it, and humiliated it, and—oh, Valar—how it hates her! Come, Osgar! *Run!* Eowyn needs us!"

...

Gimli jumped down between the roots of the great mallorn, and peered around in the gloom. "Where is she?"

The March Warden said nothing; he reached out, detached something from the tree bark, and held it out for the dwarf to see.

"Elven cloth," said Gimli. "From her leggings, by the looks..." He took the tiny fragment in his gloved fingers and, shielding it from the rain, examined it carefully. "No sign of blood," he concluded, hopefully.

The elf, meanwhile, had crouched down in the shelter of the tree, and was searching for tracks. "It had her captive *here*," he said. "She was moving about—*struggling*—but her footprints do not lead anywhere." He looked upwards. There were no stairs close by; the nearest flets were high in the trees. "It is as though she and the gaur both vanished into thin air..."

"Well, they cannot have gone far," said Gimli, practically. "Not in the few moments since we heard her voice."

He climbed out of the hollow with a grunt. "And she did not sound like a helpless victim to *me*,"—he batted the dripping undergrowth with the flat of his axe—"that lassie is a warrior,"—he suddenly remembered where he was, offered a silent apology to the Lady, and continued his search more carefully. "Wait a minute! Look! *Under here!*" He leaned down, pushing the leaves aside with his arm. "She got away!"

The water is wide

Haldir sprang out of the hollow and came up beside him. "She was running," he agreed, "and the gaur leaped after her—here is where it landed." He turned to the dwarf. "Its footprints lie on top of hers, Gimli. It is chasing her as a wolf chases its prey!"

The water is wide

Chapter 44: Cat and mouse

prompt #087 life

Eowyn sprinted through the rain, driving her arms—as Theodred had once taught her—to hasten her feet. She had dropped her sword some yards back, and was now unarmed, save for the little hunting knife she had promised Hobbie.

She leaped atop a spur of rock, dropped down the other side, and raced on.

She dared not take the time to look back, but she did not need to: she could hear the gaur's breathing, harsh and feral, close behind her. She jumped, and cleared a tree root.

Gods, she had been foolish!

...

With the gaur at its most vulnerable, doubled over and clutching its groin, she had gone in for the kill, striking at its unprotected neck.

"Silver!" she had cried. And the creature's hand had instantly come up, caught her blade, and pushed it away.

She had missed her target.

But, even so, the sword had bitten deep into its palm and, for a long moment, she had thought that she still might triumph, for the fine spines of silver, welded to the steel by an elven blacksmith, must surely have had some effect?

The gaur had simply held up its hand, and shown her its uncorrupted flesh.

Eowyn had taken to her heels.

...

She veered right, pounding down the muddy track. The rain was heavy now, making the going hard, and she was tiring—her throat was burning, her chest had begun to ache, and her legs were numb below the knee—but, *panting*, she pushed on.

If I could just double back, and find my way to Legolas...

She stumbled, recovered, and ran on, painfully aware that she was slowing down. And it occurred to her, then, that the gaur could easily have overtaken her. *You are playing with me*, she thought. *Why?*

But she already knew the answer: *Because you want me to think I might escape you! Because proving me wrong will make your victory so much sweeter!*

Well, you are just giving Legolas more time to find me!

That thought revived her and, digging deep within herself, she put on an extra spurt, suddenly hopeful—until, a few yards further down the trail, she slipped in the mud and turned her ankle.

She staggered on, but every step cut through her joint like a knife, and she knew that it was over.

Legolas will find me, she thought. *But he will be too late...*

The water is wide

Chapter 45: The duel

prompt #072 fixed

I will not let you take me without a fight, thought Eowyn, drawing her little hunting knife. I will geld you, or I will die in the attempt! She turned and—crouching slightly, arms extended—prepared herself, as best she could with an injured ankle, to fight.

For several long, heart-pounding moments she waited, but nothing happened. The gaur was lurking, deep in the shadows, about three yards down the trail. Gripping her blade, Eowyn took a cautious step towards it.

The thing growled, but did not move.

Hopeful, Eowyn took another step, and then another.

Then something—some small change in the gaur's posture or, perhaps, some sixth sense of her own—told her to look up, at the branches above her head.

...

Racing towards his beloved, Legolas found himself preternaturally aware of every living thing around him—of Eowyn's ripe, intoxicating scent; of Gimli's coppery odour; of Haldir's earthiness; of the honest, meaty stink of the human at his heels; of the faint, stale whiff of some other human, somewhere nearby; and, most of all, of the overpowering male reek of the gaur, directly ahead.

...

"*There,*" puffed Gimli, "there she is! And there is the beast!"

The March Warden had already fitted an arrow to his bowstring and, quickly planting his feet, he raised his bow, took aim, and loosed.

His arrow flew true, slicing through the air with deadly precision—

...

A blur of green and brown and bright blond hair dragged Eowyn's gaze from the grotesque object hanging above her—

...

Legolas flew at his rival, and brought it down—

...

Haldir's arrow missed the falling gaur, and buried itself in a mallorn trunk.

...

The thing was strong but—blood pounding, phallus straining, muscles bulging—Legolas' body was *throbbing* with power and, baring his teeth in a feral snarl, he pinned the creature beneath him, and bit deep into its flesh.

The gaur roared, thrashing its head from side to side, spittle flying, until—somehow breaking Legolas' grip—it threw the elf off and, rising up from the ground, forced him down upon his back and straddled him, throwing its arms wide and thrusting its erection forward, baying in triumph.

The water is wide

Legolas seized its testicles.

The creature's victory shout turned to a yelp of pain and—as it slumped over, frantically clawing at Legolas' wrist—the elf used his free hand, pounding its head until it cowered, and he could wrench himself free.

But the fight was far from over and, grabbing the elf's ankle, the gaur hauled him back and, looming over him, went for his throat; Legolas, fighting for his life, snatched up a fallen branch and smashed it into the closing jaws.

And over and over the pair rolled, snapping and snarling, first one on top, and then the other...

...

"No, my Lords—Lord Gimli! *NO!*" Osgar set himself in front of the dwarf and, with grim determination, held him back at sword point. "You must let Lord Legolas kill it himself." His free hand shot out. "You, too, March Warden! Lower your bow."

...

Eowyn watched, some crude part of her body excited by the sexual aggression driving the battle, and already preparing to mate with the victor.

The gaur suddenly reared up, dashing Legolas to the ground with a sickening thud, and Eowyn cried out,—"*Lassui!*"—and drew her hunting knife, hobbling closer, looking for an opening.

But a thin, reedy voice, from somewhere close behind her, piped out, "*Young lady! Do not stray too far.*"

...

"Let me pass, lad!" Gimli hefted his axe and took a step forward, scowling up at Osgar menacingly.

So far, the elf was holding his own, but all the biting and the clawing—all the downright *dirty* fighting—on his friend's part had convinced the dwarf that the sooner the gaur was dealt with, and the fight was over, the better.

"No, my Lord," said Osgar, unflinching. "If Lord Legolas wins, I believe he may still have a chance. If he loses... Well, *then* you will need your axe, my Lord."

...

Locked in a crushing embrace, Legolas and the gaur lay face-to-face.

"You cannot best *me*," panted the creature. "Submit!"

"Never," gasped the elf. He felt his blood rising in response to the madness coursing through the gaur's veins, but still he clung to his elven honour, and to his love for Eowyn—"I will *never* let you violate me—never submit to your foul ways!"

"Then *die*, fool!" snarled the gaur.

And, suddenly, it seemed to grow in size, its neck curving upwards, its jaws extending towards Legolas' throat. The elf, making one last, wild attempt to save himself, wrenched a hand free and, clamping it round the gaur's muzzle, pushed with all his might—

And then he was falling, falling, *falling*...

The water is wide

...

"Lassui!" shrieked Eowyn. "No! No! *Lassui!*"

She staggered to the spot where Legolas had disappeared—"Careful, young lady!"—and, dropping to her knees, peered down into the pit.

Far below her, the gaur lay impaled upon a bed of wooden stakes; Legolas, still clinging to the crumbling edge of the trap, was smiling up at her, as though all were well.

"Oh, *gods*, Lassui!" She grabbed his wrists. "I have you, my darling," she cried, pulling with all her might, "I have you..." But she could not lift him—she lacked the strength—"Lassui!"

Then powerful arms were reaching over her, and big elven hands were grasping Legolas, and Legolas was rising—Eowyn let go—and then her beloved elf was safe beside her, holding her, and she was clinging to him.

"Thank you, mellon nín," said Legolas to Haldir.

"Help me."

A look of horror passed between the two elves.

The gaur's growl was not pleading—not even commanding—it was soft, and seductive. "Help me."

"You must shoot it, my Lord," said Osgar. He had retrieved Legolas' great Galadhrim bow, and was holding it out to him. "Through the *heart*, my Lord."

Frowning, Legolas took the weapon and drew it slowly, tentatively, as though feeling its draw weight for the very first time.

"You shall not—kill me," said the gaur, in ragged gasps, "not *now*..." It made a sudden, desperate effort to wrench itself free but, failing, sank back onto the spikes. "You know—what I can give you—I have shown you—how it feels—and you want it—with *her*,"—it nodded, weakly, towards Eowyn—"and with other women—and with men—for there is no—no pleasure—greater—that making a man submit—then *taking* him—"

Legolas loosed a single arrow.

Osgar insisted that the gaur's remains must be properly burned

Using elven rope, Haldir climbed down into the pit and, carefully leaving the fatal shaft in place, lifted the body; Gimli took it from him and, together with the man, carried it out of the Forest and onto the plain, and—not far from where the travellers, slowly descending from the trees, had begun to congregate—the pair gathered a pile of unburnt timbers.

"Here," said Thorkell bogsveigir, directing two men to dump the body of the captive changeling beside that of his leader, "this one is dead meat. The other is alive, and still looks human, but who knows?" He nodded towards the gaur's remaining follower, being escorted towards them by four elderly Rohirrim.

With a grunt, Gimli signalled Osgar to light the wood; the man touched a smouldering brand to base of the pyre. "We will take care of him," he said to the Beorning.

...

The water is wide

"Primitive," said Haldir, referring to the stakes at the bottom of the trap, "but effective."

"And not Galadhrim," said Legolas, crouching at the edge of the pit. He seemed entirely recovered, but Eowyn kept a supportive hand upon his shoulder.

"No," agreed Haldir. "No more than *that* is." He gestured at the naked male corpse hanging, a few paces from the trap, impaled upon a sharpened branch, its rotting flesh daubed with a thick, red stain.

"Tell us more about the voice you heard, melmenya," said Legolas, patting her hand.

"It sounded—well, *gentle*," said Eowyn. "Old, and kindly."

"Kindly? Are you sure?" said Haldir.

She nodded. "I think he was trying to keep me safe."

"Away from the pit," said Legolas.

"Yes, but... More than that. He was trying to keep me close to the body. Look at it, Lassui—Haldir—what does it remind you of?"

Neither elf answered.

"It looks like one of *them*," she said, "when they are changing. And the branch goes straight through its heart. The gaur would not go anywhere near it. Standing beneath it *saved* me, Lassui."

...

Later

"And when Eomer King returns," said Legolas, addressing the assembled travellers, "we will round up the rest of the horses."

He had divided the able-bodied into three groups. The first—all elves—were to search the nearby Forest for materials with which to construct temporary shelters for the elderly and infirm; the second—mostly humans, and including the cooks and their assistants—were to pick over the smoking ruins of the campsite for anything that could be salvaged; the third group—led by the March Warden—would hurry on to Caras Galadhon, looking for wagons or boats, for warm clothing and food—and for anything else useful that the elves of Lothlórien might have left behind.

...

As the rest of the search party was making its final preparations, Eowyn drew Legolas aside. "Is it *really* over, Lassui?" she asked, looking up into his eyes.

"Of course, melmenya."

"I know your wound has gone," she insisted, "but,"—she took hold of his hands—"I heard what it said to you at the end, and I know how you felt—how a part of you *still* feels."

"It will pass," said Legolas. His pale cheeks had flushed a deep, shameful crimson. "I am sure it will soon pass—"

"You kept trying to tell me how a gaur makes another person into something like itself—with its *seed*—that is why it was about to rape you when I rescued you; that is why,"—she squeezed his hands—"fighting it made you so—*aroused*—"

The water is wide

"I was like an animal."

"You were magnificent! You have *nothing* to be ashamed of—you fought it—fought its seduction—to the very end. But why should you have to suffer now? Why should you have to feel so wretched?" Gently, she lifted his hands to her lips and kissed them. "There is time, Lassui, before we leave. Let me finish it for you. I can finish it. For both of us."

...

She led him a little way down the trail and, there, out of sight of the others, she reached up under his jerkin, and he felt the fabric of his leggings suddenly loosen, and her strong fingers wrap around him, and he leaned in, and kissed her mouth, in long and lingering thanks.

Then he sank back against the tree and—head thrown back and muscles taut—he let her, with her loving hands and her soft, warm mouth, work him up to a climax, coaxing the tension from deep inside him, drawing the sting from his trembling limbs—

"Aghhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Release ripped through him, and the cries that came with it started deep in his belly and forced themselves out, leaving his body jerking and shuddering in their wake.

"Ai. *Meleth...*" He sank to his hands and knees and Eowyn was beside him. And she wrapped her arms around him, and gathered him close.

"Now," he whispered, resting his head against her shoulder, "now it *is* over."

The water is wide

Chapter 46: An interlude

prompt #028 children

Legolas and Eowyn returned to the campsite to find everybody fully occupied: the elves, having already dismantled one of the lower flets, had begun lashing the planks together to form the framework of a shelter; the cooks, having rescued a few pots, had set their assistants to picking herbs and digging up roots; and several groups of men and women, searching the remains of the tents, were gathering up blackened objects and laying them in a pile, close to where the elves were building.

No one, it appeared, had missed their Lord and Lady.

The March Warden was briefing volunteers for the expedition to Caras Galadhon. "We will concentrate on three areas," he said, pointing with a stick at the simple plan of the city he had scratched into the dirt. "The first group, led by Lord Gimli, will search *here*, along the Hythe,"—he greeted Legolas and Eowyn with a nod—"the second, led by Lord Legolas, will search the Chamber of Celeborn itself; the third, which *I* shall lead, will search the flets to the north of the Lawn."

"Good," said Legolas, stepping forward to take command. "Gather up your rations, say your farewells. We move out in half an hour."

The warriors quickly dispersed, leaving the couple alone with Haldir.

"Perfect," said Eowyn, smiling at the elves, "because *I* have a few things to do before we leave."

"Melmenya," said Legolas, glancing at Haldir—and Eowyn knew what was coming—"are you sure that you are well enough?"

"Of course," she said, firmly. "Master Dínendal says that I am healing quickly, but should rest my ankle for a day or so. Very well: I shall be riding Brightstar for the rest of the day, and sitting by the camp fire all night. By tomorrow morning, after a good night's sleep, I shall be fine." She looked up at Legolas, her expression suddenly changing. "And Eomer has told me so much about the Chamber of Celeborn..."

Defeated, the elf put an arm around her shoulders. "What are these things you need to do before we leave?" he asked, shaking his head at Haldir.

...

They found young Hobbie helping his mother check a wagon-load of food that had miraculously survived the fire.

"There's a fair amount that's still edible, my Lord," said Averell, raising one of the lids, and sniffing, "though it may taste a bit smoky..."

"That is good news, mistress," said Legolas.

"Hobbie," said Eowyn, "I have have not forgotten my promise." She unbuckled her belt, slid off her hunting knife (in its tooled leather scabbard), and held it out to him.

The boy stared at her outstretched hand.

Eowyn pushed the knife a little closer.

The boy continued to stare.

The water is wide

"Hobbie?" His mother looked, uncomfortably, from her son, to Eowyn and Legolas, and back again. "He's not usually like this, my Lord—Hobbie, where are your manners?"

"Do you not want it, Hobbie?" asked Eowyn.

The boy shook his head. "I never thought you *meant* it, Lady 'Owen."

"Oh,"—she smiled—"of course I did, Hobbie." She held out the knife again. "It is yours."

The boy took it—"Thank you, my Lady,"—and drew it from its scabbard, holding it up to the light. The blade, broad and sturdy, glinted in the pale sun, and the intricately decorated handle glittered.

"Thank you, my Lady," said his mother, with a quick curtsey. "It's a beautiful knife; he'll treasure it."

"It is a *fine* knife," said Legolas. "It has served its former mistress well, and I am sure it will do the same for its new master."

"I was worried, Hobbie," said Eowyn, "when I could not find you on the flets, just before the fire. I thought that you might still be in the Forest."

"He was up at the very top, my Lady," said Averell, "keeping the young 'uns in order."

Since Hobbie, though a sturdy little boy, could not have been much more than seven himself, Eowyn's heart was filled with pride. "Brave boy," she said.

...

"What next?" asked Legolas.

...

Thorkell bogsveigir and his elderly Rohirrim were searching what was left of the mess tent. "Lucky no one was sitting in *here* when it went up," he said. Then, "A small iron chest, you say?"

"Yes," said Eowyn. "It was in my shelter. About... Oh, *this* big." She moved her hands to indicate—in mid air—a box, ten inches wide and eight deep.

"And what was inside it," asked the Beorning, "gold? Jewels?" He attempted to raise—one handed—the charred top of a trestle table.

"No. Papers."

"*Papers?*" He frowned. "Egric! Come and help—" Legolas grasped the other end of the table, and lifted it with him. "Thank you, my Lord." There was nothing underneath; they set it down again.

"Our betrothal contract," persisted Eowyn.

"I see." Thorkell glanced at Legolas; the elf nodded. "In that case, my Lady," he said, with a slight bow, "consider it found."

"Thank you!" Eowyn grinned up at him. "And, when you have it—"

"I shall give it to Eomer King for safe-keeping, as soon as he arrives."

Eowyn patted his arm. "Thank you, blood brother."

The water is wide

...

"Just *one* more errand..."

...

Little Cuthbert—standing quietly beside his mother, who was helping one of the cooks—was sucking his thumb, a picture of misery. Eowyn squeezed Legolas' hand.

"Cuthbert," she said, crouching down beside him, "look what I have found." She reached inside her cuirass and pulled out a battered toy, sewn from rough brown sacking and embroidered with big, lop-sided eyes and a straggly mane of dark grey wool. "Horsie."

"Oh!" His mother laid down her knife, and the vegetable she was paring, and dropped into a very awkward curtsey. "*Thank* you, my Lady," she cried, "*thank* you! What do you say to Lady Eowyn, puppy?"

The toddler said nothing but, stretching out a pudgy little hand, he took the toy from Eowyn and, turning it carefully, this way and that, he examined it, frowning.

"He has come to no harm," Eowyn reassured him.

"*Thank* Lady Eowyn, pup," said his mother.

Cuthbert crushed Horsie to his chest and, still silent, dug his other hand into his pocket, pulled something out, and gave it to Eowyn.

"Master Thorkell gave him that, to cheer him up, my Lady," said his mother. "But it looks as though he wants you to have it."

It was a child's hunting horn of polished brass. "Thank you, Cuthbert," said Eowyn, smiling, "but I cannot take something that was given to you as a gift. Besides, I would rather have a hug." She leaned closer. "Will you give me a big hug?"

Cuthbert nodded, solemnly. Then he stretched out his plump little arms, and Eowyn bent forward, and gathered him up.

The water is wide

Chapter 47: Salvage

prompt #019 white

"I feel so guilty," said Eowyn. She sighed, fingering the little hunting horn lying upon her breast. "I should not have taken it."

"But he *insisted*, *melmenya*," said Legolas, remembering how the ungainly little toddler had run after them, and pressed the horn into Eowyn's hand. "It would have been cruel to refuse him again."

They had been travelling for almost two hours—Eowyn riding on Brightstar, Legolas walking beside her—following Haldir along the meandering Forest trail, which the Lórien elves had decided was the best route along which to drag the wagon they had managed to rescue.

"But I wonder *why*—"

"He did not want it, *melmenya*. He had his beloved Horsie back. And who better to give it to than the Lady who rescued Horsie?"

"Hmm," said Eowyn, "I suppose that makes sense..."

"And, I must admit, *melmenya*, that I am grateful to him. I only wish that you had had it when the gaur cornered you."

Eowyn ducked beneath a low branch. "What I was actually going to say, Lassui, was, 'I wonder why *Thorkell* had it with him, up in the trees?'"

Legolas frowned. When he had ordered the travellers to climb onto the flets, he had forbidden them to take any personal possessions. "Perhaps he was already wearing it."

Eowyn touched the horn again "But why? It is a child's toy."

Legolas laughed. "I have given up trying to understand Master Bowsweaver's antics, *melmenya*."

"Well *I* wonder," said Eowyn, "if it has anything to do with that strange business with his father."

...

The trail had been rising gently since they had left the river bank, but now the ground sloped sharply, and Eowyn dismounted and, leading Brightstar, climbed carefully up the rocky path until she reached the summit, and emerged from the trees, and caught her first glimpse of Caras Galadhon.

"Oh..." She stood for a few moments, gazing out over the broad depression to the circular grove of tall, gold-leafed mallorns, threaded with silvery walkways, that shone in the afternoon sun. Then, with Legolas at her side, she followed the others down into the hollow. "It cannot compare," she whispered, "with Eryn Carantaur."

Legolas squeezed her hand. "Because Eryn Carantaur is your *home*, *melmenya*," he replied, smiling.

...

They approached the city from the north east and continued westwards, along the deep, defensive fosse, until they found the stone path that joined the Cerin Amroth road with the Great Gates at the south.

The water is wide

The going was slower, then, for the way was overgrown, and many of the paving stones, dislodged by the new growth, were loose and treacherous.

Eowyn, guiding Brightstar along the grassy margin, studied the fosse and the strange green wall beyond it. "There are places," she said to Legolas, "where we could cross the moat, even with the wagon, and push our way through the hedge."

"I know, *melmenya*," replied Legolas, softly, "but that would be disrespectful."

Eowyn frowned; then, glancing ahead, she saw Haldir leading the column, and Gimli walking beside him, and she understood what he meant.

...

With the sun setting at their backs, they crossed the bridge and passed down the deep lane—which, in former times, had served as a barbican, shielding the approach to the city—and entered through the Great Gates.

"We will camp here tonight," said Legolas, "and begin the search at first light."

Eowyn dismounted, and set Brightstar free to graze and, whilst the others were making themselves comfortable, she wandered between the mallorns—gazing up through the foliage—tracing the empty flets from tree to tree. The buildings seemed to float among the branches like mistletoe on oaks, with long, slender columns that reached down like roots, and she could well imagine how magical they must have seemed when glowing with candlelight, but—to her—there was something strange about them—and something intimidating.

"Are you any more impressed, *melmenya*?" asked Legolas, coming up beside her.

"It,"—she shrugged—"it is barren."

"*Abandoned*," he corrected.

"No—no, it is not just that, *Lassui*. It is beautiful, yes, I will admit—and imposing—but it is not *welcoming*. And I do not believe it was ever vital, like Eryn Carantaur."

"The elves who built it were ancient, Eowyn *nín*; they had erred, and had suffered for it, and they were exiled here—"

"*You* are an elf," she interrupted, "yet you have built something that lives; something that grows; something that does not say, 'Elven. Keep Out.'"

"I built Eryn Carantaur for *you*, my darling,"—gently, he took her hands, and raised them to his lips—"in the hope that—one day—you would share it with me. That is why it seems to welcome you."

"Then the ancient writers were wrong," said Eowyn, firmly, "because the love between an elf and a woman *has borne fruit*."

...

Morning

"We will gather here, at the Gates, at midday," said Legolas, "to report our findings, to decide what we will salvage, and to work out how to move it."

They had risen before dawn and eaten their simple rations, and—as the weak sunlight began filtering through the trees—they packed up their belongings and set off in three separate

The water is wide

groups: Gimli's, to search the Hythe; Haldir's, to search the galadhrim flets; and Legolas and Eowyn's, to search the home of the Lord and Lady of Lothlórien.

The city's main thoroughfare—a simple path through the mallorn roots, paved in places with polished stones, that reminded Eowyn of the rose gardens at Eryn Carantaur—took them gradually northwards, following the natural contours of the hill, then curved back upon itself, and approached the crest.

Eowyn looked up at the cluster of flets. "How will we know which one was theirs?" she asked.

Legolas smiled. "We will know, melmenya."

The path ended at a circular clearing, filled with soft, green turf but littered with fallen leaves. "The trees are unwell," said Eowyn.

"They mourn," said Legolas. "This is the Lawn, melmenya,"—he approached the foot of the central tree—"beneath the house of Celeborn and Galadriel; this is where the Fellowship stayed, in the pavilion they bade their warriors build for us." He opened the gates to the staircase that spiralled up the trunk. "There were guards stationed here—ancient elves, like living statues."

The stairs were roofed with exquisite pointed arches, like interwoven branches, that sprang from the carved steps. He took her by the hand, and they began to climb; the rest of their search party followed close behind.

"You are in awe of this place."

"I am a Silvan elf, melmenya. A simple, country cousin to the ones who built all this."

"No," said Eowyn, vehemently, and pride shone in her eyes. "You are the Lord of Eryn Carantaur, the prince of all the elves who have stayed behind, the founder of a city that promotes peace and goodwill between elves, and dwarves and men."

They climbed higher, passing clusters of flets branching out from the massive trunk. At each level, Legolas sent out pairs of men to search the buildings: "You are looking for weapons," he told them, "warm clothing, blankets, and anything edible."

"What about silver, my Lord?" asked one of the men.

"Silver?"

"In case we meet with any more werewolves."

"Yes. Good thinking."

By the time they reached the top, Legolas and Eowyn were alone. "This is the entrance to the famous Chamber of Celeborn, melmenya," said Legolas, leading her across the leaf-shaped platform. "The last time I stood here, it was as part of the Fellowship. We had just lost Gandalf..." He fell silent.

"Lassui?" She grasped his hand. "What is it?"

"I blamed *Gimli*," replied Legolas, softly. "I did not consider that he had lost his kin—had found their lifeless hröar in the mines of Moria—I blamed him, for Gandalf's decision to travel underground, and for my own pain..."

"Oh, Lassui..." Eowyn squeezed his hand. "That is all behind you, my darling. And *you* are his kin now—"

The water is wide

"A dwarf-friend."

"Yes." She smiled up at him, tears filling her eyes. "Yes, Lassui." Then, gently, she urged him to look about the chamber. "Where do we go?"

Legolas nodded towards a shallow flight of stairs leading up amongst the branches. "Galadriel and Celeborn descended those steps," he said. "Their private apartments must be up there."

She squeezed his hand again. "Are you ready?"

"Yes."

They climbed slowly, Legolas recalling the moment when Galadriel had, one by one, entered the hearts of the Fellowship and tested their resolve, Eowyn acutely aware that she was trespassing in the private domain of two of Middle Earth's most powerful beings.

"Would the Lord and Lady begrudge us their help?" she asked, suddenly.

"Oh, no, *melmenya*. No. Though the elves of Lothlórien seldom interfered in the affairs of men, they were always aware of them, and I think that, had the Lady been here, she would have given us her aid even before we asked for it."

They passed through another elegant archway, and entered a lofty apartment, suspended between the tree's great branches, filling the spaces like a spray of leaves; they crossed its winding floor, and passed into another chamber, similar in size to the first, but furnished in more feminine taste.

"They slept apart," said Eowyn.

"They had been married for many years."

"Well, I shall tell you now, Legolas, that no matter how many years you and I are married, you will never have your own bedchamber."

Smiling, Legolas pulled her close, and kissed her temple.

"This one," she said, "must have been *hers*..."

Legolas released her and, whilst he examined the row of wooden chests standing along one of the curving walls, she bent over the couch, and ran her fingers over its silken cover. "Everything is in place. It is as though she still lived here..."

"That quilt will be warm, *melmenya*," said Legolas. "We will take it, and any other bed clothes you can find." He opened the first of the chests, releasing a cloud of delicate perfume. Inside, gowns and mantles of the most exquisite fabrics—silvery silk and pale gold velvet, and the softest white wool—lay carefully folded.

"Perhaps we should take these, too," said Legolas.

Eowyn joined him. "Our people would glitter in the sunlight."

"Grey galadhrim cloaks would certainly serve us better," he admitted, "if Haldir can find them. If not, these will have to do."

"*Lassui!*" cried Eowyn, scandalised. Then, "Imagine," she said, thoughtfully, "how Averell, or how Cuthbert's mother, would treasure something like this." She lifted a silken gown from the chest, and held it against her body.

"Try it on," said Legolas.

The water is wide

"Lassui!" she said again, laughing.

But whether it was the strange, timelessness of the place that had affected them, or whether the opportunity to spend a few quiet moments together had seduced them, their sense of urgency seemed to have vanished.

"I will help you," said Legolas. He sat her down on the bed, and pulled off her boots; she slipped out of her tunic and leggings; he draped the gown over her shoulders; she turned, and he laced it up the back. "There..."

Eowyn rose, stretching out her arms and took a few steps. The weight of the beaded bodice made her feel regal, but the sheerness of the fabric floating about her limbs made her feel like a sprite. She stood before the looking glass and smiled at her own reflection. Her face was smeared with two days' grime and her hair was tangled in a thousand elf locks, but the white gown seemed to turn her every imperfection into beauty.

"You look," said Legolas—and Eowyn heard a catch in his voice—"like an earthbound star."

She coloured deeply. "Well... We should get on now."

...

They quickly searched the rest of Galadriel's chamber, then returned to Celeborn's and searched that; then they ransacked the servants' quarters, gathering up the most practical of the clothing and the warmest of the bedding, and taking it back to the top of the staircase, where they arranged it in piles.

"We will have to lower it on ropes," said Legolas, thoughtfully. "I will go down to the next level and see what the others have found; you,"—he grinned—"had better change back into your leggings."

"Unlace me," said Eowyn. She turned her back, and let him loosen her bodice.

"There."

"Thank you. I will meet you downstairs." She sauntered back to Galadriel's chambers—slipping out of the gown as she went—and, as she passed the looking glass, she caught another glimpse of herself in the mirror.

Still fully dressed!

She frowned, stepped back, and stared at the reflection.

A face that was not her own was staring back!

Her hands flew to her face—the reflection did not move; she tried to call for Legolas—

"Do not be afraid, Eowyn, daughter of Eomund," said a deep, feminine voice that seemed to float upon the air. *"You have good reason to be proud of your husband-to-be. But his achievement hangs upon a thread, and its future rests upon a choice that you will make. You are soon to be tested."*

"Lady... Galadriel?" whispered Eowyn.

"Think carefully upon what I have said."

"I..."

The reflection rippled, and Eowyn saw herself—half-naked, dirty, and tousled—before the world

The water is wide

turned white, and the floor spun away from her.

TO BE CONTINUED...