Descendents of the Lost

by picabone99

Summary

My take on the clichéd elfing!Harry story, hopefully with better care taken towards the integration of Harry into the LOTR books. Also elfing!Sirius.

Notes

Disclaimer: I make no money from writing this story and all respective characters belong to their correct authors and not myself. This was done solely for fun.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Harry watched in horror as the one man that had promised to take him away from the nightmare of abuse the Dursleys heaped on him was hit by one of Bellatrix's spells, which caused the male to fall towards the shimmering, billowing Veil. Without even thinking about it, Harry's well-honed Seeker instincts had him across the floor and grabbing at the sleeve of Sirius's robe. Unfortunately, Sirius outweighed the slim boy by quite a bit and coupled with the momentum he had, Harry was pulled into the Veil as well. There was maybe a second of shocked silence before it was broken by screams of unimaginable pain coming from Voldemort as he collapsed out of the shadows in the back of the room. Before the combatants shocked eyes, a black cloud rose out of Voldemort's open mouth. As soon as the cloud left him, Voldemort quit screaming and collapsed into a pile of dust. The cloud hovered ominously for a moment over the pile of ashes before being sucked into the Veil by an unknown force. As all of the combatants stood there in shock, Aurors showed up and bound everyone before beginning in depth questioning using Veritaserum.

Once questioned, people were either released to the room at large or escorted down to the holding cells in the depths of the Auror's Department. It was during this questioning under truth serum that Lucius's roll as a spy for the Unspeakables came out, which shocked the room into a brief silence before quiet murmurs filled the air once again. If one were to listen in, he or she could hear anything in those conversations ranging from queries as to where the Veil takes people to someone asking where Dumbledore is during all this to what happened to You-Know-Who and anything in between. Once Lucius was cleared and released he made his way over to the Veil and stared at it pensively.

"I don't suppose you know what happened to my cub? Since it turns out that you work in this Department, after all."

Lucius spun around at hearing the quiet voice almost directly in his ear. A tired looking Remus Lupin with glowing amber eyes is what met his sight. Seeing the grief shining in those amber depths, Lucius made a quick decision. Looking around the room, Lucius could see that no one else was near enough to listen in, but decided to take no chances and began to walk off, gesturing once to Lupin to follow after. They had just exited the room, when a commotion was heard behind them. Glancing briefly back, the two men were able to make out a bright flash of atrocious colored robes before sharing a tired, amused glance and continuing onwards. They continued moving down the hallway until Lucius stopped at an ornately carved and gilded door. Looking around to make sure that no one followed them, Lucius then brought his wand up to his face and murmured something that Remus, even with his exceptional hearing brought on by his furry little problem didn't catch, although he did note the change in Lucuis's eyes as they glowed a neon shade of green. Lucuis quickly scanned the hallway again before the spell faded, before gently knocking on the door in front of him on the side opposite the door handle, causing the door to swing open on the side opposite the hinges. The two males wasted no time and quickly entered the room, only relaxing tense muscles when the door swung shut behind them.

Remus looked around the room he now found himself in with a sense of awe as Lucius made
his way across the room and around a large desk which had oversized chairs placed before it, only stopping briefly to remove his robes and hand them up. He had heard rumors about the Unspeakables, what child growing up in the Wizarding world hadn't, but this was the first time he had ever been able to meet one of the extremely reclusive, generally unknown beings. The office Remus found himself in had numerous diagrams hung up on the walls in between massive, floor to ceiling bookcases. On the shelves were a mix of old tomes, modern reference books, and sealed glass vials that contained who-knew-what, several of which were bubbling and slowly changing colors. Remus was brought out of his visual exploration by Lucius clearing his throat and speaking.

"Drink? I need one after today and I'm rather sure that one would do you some good as well."

"Yes, thank you," Remus quietly replied as he moved forward and let himself finally rest in one of the chairs before the desk.

Lucius opened a drawer on the desk, reached in, and pulled out a dusty bottle of Firewhiskey and a pair of shot glasses. After pouring out a generous amount in both, Lucius slid one across the desk and took the other for himself. He then placed the bottle in the center of the desk, making it clear without words that Remus was to help himself to more liquor whenever he felt the need. The alcohol was consumed in quiet as the two men lost themselves in their own thoughts, neither one quite sure what to make of the events that just occurred. It wasn't until Lucius was finishing his second glass that Remus cleared his throat and straightened himself in the chair, giving a serious look to the aristocratic blond on the other side of the desk.

"I'm sure that you will have to answer many questions about your loyalties and your spying. How you got into it, when you started doing it, are the rest of your family spies or just you, and so on. I'll admit that I'm as curious as the next person, but I can have patience for those answers. They aren't nearly as important in the long run as what happened to my cub and my last remaining pack mate. Please, tell me what you know about the Veil."

Lucius was amazed at the self restraint of the man seated before him. Almost anyone else would be tearing into him for answers about everything he had done, both during this war and the last one. But Remus was willing to push his curiosity aside so that he could have answers about his family first. Lucius paused briefly before answering to pour himself more alcohol. Holding up the bottle towards Remus, and receiving a nod, Lucius poured the werewolf another round as well, before setting the bottle down on the desktop.

"Thank you for holding back your questions. Otherwise it would take a great deal longer to arrive at the answers you seek if I had to start at the beginning. I will let you know about my family though, for your safety and theirs. Draco is innocent of any connection to the Death Eaters. When I felt he was old enough to be trusted with the truth, I asked him to make an Unbreakable Vow for the safety of the both of us then I explained everything to him. Both what I did for my job and what,
exactly, the Dark Lord did. Torture included. Draco chose to join me and had to act a certain way in order to keep himself safe.

"Our family's motto is "A Malfoy bows to no one", and after seeing what my father choose to do as he forgot that, I had to do whatever I could to redeem our family's honor. Narcissa," Lucius spat out. "She needs to be dealt with. She is truly on the Dark Lord's side and always has been. Fortunately I will be able to divorce her with very little difficulty on my part. The marriage contract between our two families was very explicit about the consequences of infidelity and I have irrefutable proof of numerous occasions that she broke the sanctity of our marriage bed. The only good thing in the marriage our parents foisted off on me is Draco. Narcissa is just as crazy as her more well known sister, Bellatrix, but the Blacks, then the Malfoys, have been able to conceal it better. It is rather fortunate that Andromeda failed to fall victim to the Black family affliction.

"Anyway, about the Veil," Lucius poured out more alcohol as he changed the subject. "It has been strenuously tested and examined throughout the years since it was created. And what has been discovered about it is fascinating. It...judges, sorts?...whatever crosses through it and places said items where they belong. Although we still do not know what criteria it judges on. It took a great deal of testing over a long time to determine that much, as items that went through never came back out the way they went in. It was really only luck that found the first "returned" item. Someone tossed one of the prophecy spheres in. It was found the next day back in the Hall of Prophecy in its place, none the worse for wear. It was also discovered that the Veil took all of what was tossed in. That was discovered via a rather childish prank played on the then Head Unspeakable when someone sent a spell at him that gave him a reverse mohawk. He was standing just in front of the Veil when it occurred and some of the hair drifted in. He was completely bald the moment a hair drifted inside.

"Eventually, experiments moved up from inanimate objects to living things and then onto people. Those sentenced to Azkaban were used which is how it was discovered that if a person had creature blood, which all Wizards do, the creature blood was activated and they were sent to where ever the main homeland of whatever blood was activated. Some of the criminals never were found though. It was hypothesized that those never found had creature blood from one of the other planes, such as Abaddon where the demons dwell or Jannah where the Djinn are found, and were returned there. Since not even the Unspeakable department will play around with demon summoning anymore and the Djinn have made it well known that they will not have anything to do with the Wizarding world as it currently exists, there was no way to find out the conclusions to that idea."

"So, what you're saying is that Harry and Sirius could be back where ever the Veil decides "home" is for them? We just have to figure out which creature blood was activated?" Remus looked hopeful as he asked, but then his face morphed into a look of confusion. "What happened to Voldemort then? Why did he scream, then fall to dust? He wasn't anywhere close to the Veil. In fact, no one even knew that he was in the room."

"The Dark Lord first I think," Lucius said pensively. "Remember what I said about all of something being pulled into the Veil? Whether it's hair, blood, skin, bone, whatever, it will be pulled
out of the body and taken by the Veil. The Dark Lord had been creating Horcruxes for years, which is how the Unspeakables came into the picture. Having been marked against my will because of my father and placed in Voldemort's inner circle, it was decided that I had the best chance of finding out what they were, where they were, and the means to destroy them. The only one I had known of for sure was the diary He had entrusted me with. I had been searching for years for a means to destroy it, when it disappeared from my hidden safe. I found out later that Narcissa had used polyjuice to impersonate me and place the diary on Ginny Weasley. It was only Potter's luck that found out that Basilisk venom could destroy the things."

Lucius paused a moment and took a sip of his Firewhiskey before continuing.

"It was thought among the members of the Department that Harry might have also been a Horcrux. It takes a murder to make one, as murder causes a shock to the murderer's soul allowing a brief moment where it is possible to tear a bit of it away and seal it into a vessel, and the fact is that both of Harry's parents were killed immediately before the Dark Lord tried to take Harry's life. The fact that the killing curse rebounded is generally thought to be proof, since the Horcrux would never let its maker destroy it. The proof of Harry being a Horcrux was discovered here, tonight. The way the Dark Lord screamed and collapsed, leaving only ashes and a dark cloud that sped its way into the Veil after the Potter boy was all the proof this department needs. That dark cloud was the tattered remains of a soul torn beyond thought. I wouldn't be surprised to discover when we go back out there that there have been other dark, tattered clouds streaming into the Veil."

"Wait, you said that the Veil would put back the item in the place it belonged. Wouldn't it put You-Know-Who's soul back into his body?"

"I also told you it takes about a day to do so. And if the body is dead, there is nowhere else for the soul to go except on to judgement. The Veil has been extensively studied. Under many different scenarios. Now about Potter and Black," Lucius stared at the remainder of his drink before knocking it back all at once. "There might be a bit of a problem with where they will end up. One of Black's ancestors several thousand years ago was an elf. While it's not uncommon among the Purebloods to have creature blood, this elf was of an unknown species. He looked like the High Elves we know about, but his blood was different.

"Rumors passed down in my family say that the elf just appeared one day as a child, battered and bloody looking. The then Lord Black had his family nurse said child back to health and, once he was an adult, the elf married one of the daughters of the House, fathering many children before he fell ill to one of the many plagues that occurred at that time. I don't know how accurate that is, but it is known that the children married other Purebloods and so on and so forth. Some of the descendents married back into the House of Black, others married into other families. The long and the short of it however is that Black Blood, and other Purebloods, have traces of this foreign blood. The Veil might determine that Black should go back to the place it originates from. Having examined Potter's family tree years ago to determine if it was something in his blood that allowed
him to survive that Halloween night, I can tell you that the House of Black is surprisingly interwoven
with the House of Potter and that Harry carries a great deal of Black blood in his veins. Especially
considering that James' mother was a daughter of that House and that Sirius and he were cousins."

Lucius shifted a bit and looked uncomfortable before continuing on.

"I had Harry's mother's blood tested at one time. It turned out that Lily Evans was also of
Black descent. Her mother was an unknown bastard of the House, fathered by the then Lord, who
was a well-known philanderer and the reason that any marriage contract under taken with that House
had a fidelity clause. I was never able to find a way to slip that knowledge to Lily or James without
breaking cover, and any laws I had tried to get passed in the Wizengamut about required blood
testing for all Muggleborns was consistently blocked by Dumbledore who seemed to have his own
reasons for keeping the muggleborns from knowing if they were related to any Pureblooded
families. So Harry is a Pureblood, with Black blood from both sides of the tree. The only good
news I can see in this circumstance is that the two of them will most likely arrive in their destination
together. That and, of course, the Dark Lord's defeat."
I don’t know how old Sirius is so I’m making his age 35. And since elves live forever, I would think that they have extended childhoods as well. So they are considered babies until age 5, toddlers up to 10, children until 50, teens after that until they are considered to be of age at 100.

Harry bit back a groan as his senses slowly came back online, because the chaotic mess they were relaying to him failed to make much sense at the moment. First, his nervous system was letting him know in no uncertain terms that his body was incredibly stiff and somewhat in pain. Second, Harry was beginning to realise that his body felt somehow...off, different from what he remembered. Focusing a little harder, Harry was able to note that he was also, apparently, laying face down on what had to be outdoor ground, if the leaves and roots digging into his cheek and stomach were any indication. Inhaling deeply, Harry’s sense of smell was met by leaf mold and an almost overpowering smell of fresh pine. His heart gave a sudden jolt as he heard a loud bird call seemingly in his ear. Focusing on his breathing, Harry tried to tune out the oddness of his body until he was able to get his heart rate back down to normal levels.

What his senses were telling him confused Harry: for some reason he knew that the information coming in to him wasn’t right and he forced his hazy thoughts to focus on his most recent memories. What he came up with confirmed that he shouldn’t be feeling roots and what seemed to be a few pinecones, now that Harry thought about it, digging into him as his last hazy memories were telling him that he had been at the Department of Mysteries fighting the Death Eaters.

Concentrating harder than it felt like he ever had before, Harry focused all of his non-existent energy into raising his eyelids. What met the one eye he could force open seemed to confirm the signals coming from his other senses. Harry could easily make out numerous tree trunks and several pine trees in his immediate vicinity. Feeling extremely overwhelmed, Harry did the only thing he could in the circumstances and let himself fall back into blessed darkness.

The next time Harry swam up from unconsciousness, he remembered having the strangest dream about being in the Department of Mysteries one moment, then the next, he was laying about on a forest floor. Mentally laughing at himself and looking forward to sharing the odd dream with Ron before writing it down to use for Trelawny’s class, Harry rolled over off of his stomach and right onto a large rock that jabbed itself rather sharply into the small of his back. Letting out a high pitched
yelp. Harry shot upright off the stabbing pain, both eyes flying wide open and allowing him to see that he was sitting on the ground in the middle of a very small forest clearing. Looking around at the massive old growth trees, with his heart hammering sharply in his breast the whole while, Harry was alarmed to realise that his dream was perhaps a great deal more real than he would be preferring about now.

Just as the beginning flutters of panic began to succeed in their effort to crest over Harry, he heard a faint groan coming from behind him. Snapping his head and body around, Harry was stunned to see that the whole time he had been first laying, then sitting there panicking, there had been a young, unknown preteen laying near him. Deciding that his imminent panic attack could just bloody well sod off in the face of another person clearly needing some assistance, Harry slid onto his knees and carefully moved into a position that had him crouched over the other's body. He then slowly reached out a hand, ready to pull it back in a heartbeat if it looked like there might be cause to do so.

As he reached out, Harry finally focused some of his attention away from his new, unknown environment and turned it instead onto himself as something seemed to be very different from other times he had reached out his hand in the not-so-distant past. Taking a bit closer of a look at his hand, something that he had looked at numerous times before without paying it much attention, Harry noticed that something was very much off about the offending body part, but couldn't quite place what the difference was. It was as he went about trying, and failing, to turn over the other's body so as to see if there were any injuries that he might be able to help with that the nagging differences came raging up to the forefront of his brain.

He had shrunk. Badly.

Letting out a strangled scream, Harry flung himself backwards, landing harshly on his backside as he held out his hands. Staring at the body parts before him in absolute shock, Harry missed seeing the other being jolt upwards at hearing Harry's scream.

He didn't miss when the other person placed a hand on either shoulder and leaned in looking worried and concerned.
"Shh...little one. Everything will be alright. Just calm down. My name's Sirius and I'll help you out. Please don't cry little one."

Looking up into the familiar grey eyes of his Godfather set into a much younger, more androgynous face, Harry was surprised to realise that he did have tears pouring silently out of his eyes and down over his cheeks. Breath catching in a harsh sob, Harry lunged forward and buried himself into Sirius's chest, tightly wrapping his arms about the other's torso, not paying the slightly bit of attention to the fact that everything that he touched was bare skin. Harry snuggled in tightly against his Godfather's chest and took great comfort in the way the other's arms wrapped around him and held him firmly, but gently. Getting himself under some manner of control, Harry turned his face off to one side to ensure that what he was to verbalize wouldn't be muffled into absolute incomprehension.

"Siri? It's me Harry," Harry rasped out. "What happened to us? Where are we? Is it just the two of us? Why are-"

"Whoa! Slow down Prongslet," Sirius said as he pulled back slightly and looked down at what was his Godson if the tiny little child in his arms was correct. "We'll get this figured out, but first, can you stand up for a bit so that I can get a good look at you? I want to make sure that you don't have any injuries. Then you can do the same for me, okay? I don't feel anything, but if nothing else we can compare notes about the differences in our bodies."

Harry sniffled a bit longer as he remained cradled against Sirius's chest seeking security, unable to bring himself to move off of the older male for some reason. He knew that what Sirius suggested was a good idea and so he eventually pushed away the part of him that just wanted to cling to someone that was older and tried to remember his sense of independence that had served him so well over the many years, starting at the Dursley's and continuing onwards into the times when the sheeple of the Wizarding world turned against him. Standing up to the full extent of his now greatly diminished height, Harry took a minute to rub at the last few stubborn tears that were clinging to his lashes before turning his full attention squarely onto Sirius.

Sirius, for his part, was doing the best he could to try and keep the young boy calm while not succumbing to his own bit of a panic attack. He had no idea what-so-ever about what could have
occurred. The last thing he remembered was getting hit by a spell from his crazy cousin and falling backwards into nothingness before suddenly being woken up by the sound of a child's scream. So Sirius took the time afforded him by the child not immediately jumping up and out of his arms to look around, trying to get a look and feel for his current environment.

Well the looking about part was easy enough to do and Sirius was stunned when he beheld the sight of massive, towering trees that indicated an old growth forest the likes of which could never exist anywhere men might be able to reach, which indicated to him that wherever they were, it was most probably out of reach of rescue. Inhaling gently, and grateful for the time spent in his animagus form that taught him how to differentiate between scents to some extent, the immediate scent to greet him was that of something indefinably pure. Tucking his head down briefly, Sirius decided that the delicate scent was emanating from probable-Harry before turning away slightly and breathing deeper. This time, Sirius was able to scent the forest around him: a scent made of leaf mold, rich earth, lingering moisture, and animal musk.

Cocking his head to one side, Sirius closed his eyes and focused deep inside of himself as he let his perceptions of the clearing play throughout his mind. Using his vast experience, first growing up in a Dark family, then becoming an Auror, Sirius was able to tell deep within himself that the clearing the two of them were in was as far from Dark as it was possible to be. In fact, Sirius would make a very expensive wager that if the two of them stayed where they were, even the large animals that he was sure lived in such an old forest would absolutely leave them alone.

It was just as he made that determination that Sirius felt Harry withdrawing from his arms. Sirius had to bite down on his cheek to keep from whining about the loss and forced his arms to release the tiny boy, one who was almost a baby really judging by the way Harry fit in his arms, while some inner part of him screamed out that it was wrong and urged him to snatch up the baby again immediately, just in case. That same inner part was also responsible for the feeling that he was way to young for such a responsibility and left him with a vague nagging sense that he needed to find some adults. Which was a laugh, because, really, he was one.

Once Harry had pulled away from him completely and found his way onto his own two feet, Sirius had enough space to raise up and stand as well. It was a shorter trip than he remembered it being and, when he glanced down at his, bare, feet, he noticed that they were much closer than they should have been. Pushing away a small sense of unease that wanted to become more, Sirius focused his attention firmly on the little one standing before him.
The body was clearly that of a boy, as the unclothed state of him left no questions about his gender, although if Sirius hadn't had that absolute confirmation he might have been confused. He was pleased to note that there were no indications of any bodily trauma and so went onto a more casual perusal. The child's hair hung in soft, ebony waves to just below his shoulders, the large, emerald jewels that were his eyes stared up at Sirius from slightly almond slanted eyes, his face was slightly feminine in its appearance with its high cheek-bones and pink, cupid's bow mouth, tiny snub nose, and his frame was delicate and lithe. It was also glaringly obvious that Harry, if this really was his Harry, was about the size and age of a toddler. Looking down at the boy, Sirius was mildly alarmed to note that the child had pointed ears sticking up from his long locks. Although the sight of them did trigger a very faint echo of an old story passed down in the Black family Lore. Before he could think more about it and try to track down the memory, the toddler-sized Harry launch itself back into his arms.

As Sirius stood there eyeing up Harry, Harry was making his own appraisal of the boy standing in front of him. The body before him, with its lack of clothing, was clearly unharmed as Harry could make out no blood trickling over any part of it. Looking closer as he attempted to confirm that this was his Godfather, Harry saw that he was about twice Harry's height, making Harry have to crane his neck up to make eye contact with the other's beautiful silver-grey orbs, although it was clear to Harry that Sirius wasn't at the same height he had been when they last saw each other before waking up here. It was also obvious that Sirius was way, way younger. It hadn't been just a trick of the light playing havoc with Harry's senses at the first moment that Harry had laid eyes on the slight form laying behind him. Sirius was very clearly only about twelve to, at most, fourteen years old, judging by the lanky, coltish body before him.

Harry gave the other boy a deeper, more scrutinizing, look, paying closer attention to his face. Although much younger looking than what it should be, Harry was able to make several comparisons to the older face that he was accustomed to Sirius having. Both faces had the same colored eyes, the same aristocratic nose and cheek-bones, the same raven-wing hued hair, but it wasn't until the other boy swept his long hair out of the way in the same manner that his Sirius did that Harry felt an intense smile of relief and happiness break over his face before promptly launching himself at the other.

"Oh Sirius! It really is you!" Harry burst into tears as he grabbed tightly at his Godfather. He didn't want to act so childishly but Harry found that he was unable to stop himself. Harry, although he didn't understand fully what was going on, knew that he had been somehow returned to a younger body and just chalked up his more intense emotions and responses to it. As it was, his tiny body was quivering with an overwhelming sense of relief at having someone with him who could take responsibility for him, and so he gave into his urges to seek comfort from his caregiver.
Sirius just let his younger than normal Godson cling to him. While he hadn't seen any overwhelming evidence that the child clinging to him was Harry, he was willing to just go with the flow for now as the last few moments in the Department of Mysteries suddenly flashed before his eyes. The brief flash gave Sirius just a bit more information, like the fact that Harry had lunged after him as he fell and had actually managed to latch onto one of his hands just before Sirius had completely disappeared into the Veil. Closely his eyes tightly against the painful thoughts that had begun to spin themselves about his mind, Sirius simply took comfort in the gentle scent of the boy clinging tightly to him as the tiny body shook with the tears wracking his petite frame.

"Shh...It'll all be alright, Harry," Sirius quietly stated as he freed one hand to gently comb its fingers through long, ebony locks, ignoring the fact that part of him still wished for someone older to be there to take care of the both of them. "You'll see. It's not all that bad, really. We have each other and, although I don't know how we ended up wherever here is after falling though the Veil, I do have an idea as to why we look so different little one."

Sirius heard the sobs quiet down into harsh breathing as he spoke and ran gentle fingers though the tiny boy's hair. He was rewarded a few minutes later by the piping sound of the now calmer boy's voice, although Harry didn't pull away from the comfort that he was finding within Sirius' arms.

"What do you mean?" Came the muffled question.

"Well," Sirius began. "Although I didn't get that good a look at you before you jumped back into my arms..."

Here Sirius paused for a moment to tickle the sides of the toddler, causing breathless peals of happy laughter to ring out across the glade they were in before cuddling the boy tightly against his body once again.

"Something about your ears-"
"My ears!" Came the startled interruption as tiny hands released their hold on Sirius' body and fumbled around about the side of an equally tiny head. "Siri! They have POINTS!"

Sirius smirked in amusement at the adorable squeak in Harry's voice when he said "POINTS", before clearing his throat and getting Harry's full attention back on him, as evidenced by the gleaming emerald eyes turning upwards and making eye contact.

"May I continue, Pup?" Sirius smiled down at his armful, his grin widening as a little head nodded frantically, a thumb unknowingly having made its way into the baby's mouth as Harry sought to calm himself.

'So adorable!' Sirius crooned to himself.

"Give me a minute or two, Pup? Okay? While I don't know why you're a baby-"

"NOT a baby!" Harry's thumb popped out as he scowled at his Godfather, interrupting the other once again. "Just...smaller than I should be. That's all."

"Of course," Sirius smiled as he noted the thumb went right back into the other's mouth. "But still, we are both...smaller than we are used to being, and, even though you really don't weigh hardly anything, it's still a lot to my new smaller self and so I want to go over to one of those trees. That way I can sit down with you in my lap and have something to lean up against as I tell you some Black family Lore."

"Mmmm...fine."
Sirius quickly made his way over to one of the massive old-growth trees that bordered the clearing. Carefully settling himself down on the ground before leaning back against the absolutely huge trunk, Sirius then shifted Harry around in his arms until the tiny boy was seated across his lap with his head resting against Sirius’ chest, the precious lapful still sucking quietly on his thumb as he self-comforted. Both of them choosing to ignore their lack of clothing as they had no other option.

"I think the first thing that you need to know is that while the other magical races are currently looked down upon, that wasn’t the case several centuries ago," Sirius quietly began, cuddling the boy tighter against his body as he sought his own comfort. "In fact, it was a source of pride for the whole family if one of them deemed a wizard or witch of your line to be strong enough to mate with. Any child born of such a union would have much stronger magics as they would be more closely connected back to nature, much more so than the average witch or wizard who was too close to their humanity to listen to the information brought on the winds and the waters and from the earth. As the many centuries passed, the muggles we co-existed with changed how they lived in connection to nature, and while this should not have had any difference to the wizarding world, the wizarding world had been tossing its squibs out to live with the muggles as the thought that only those with powerful magic should be allowed to stay within the community, completely ignoring that even squibs have access to some magic and had been doing just fine for themselves for all the many, many years leading up to the shunning and outcasting.

"The problem was that the two events fed off of each other. I can’t prove anything mind you, but after spending a great deal of time at Grimmould Place lately since I can’t, er...couldn’t, go anywhere else, I did a great deal of reading. And the Blacks, while known for their stance on blood-purity and the Dark-Arts, are also well-known for having one of the best libraries in the world. I found all kinds of papers and treaties on the subject of squibs, some dating all the way back to the time of Merlin where they were referred to as hedge witches and the potions they made were prized greatly as they had a closer connection to the earth, causing a greater potency in all that they would brew. I think that those cast out in the last few centuries as squibs passed down their small magics until, every once and a while, it would flare brightly in one of their descendants, causing that child to be mistaken for a muggle-born as the family lines were forgotten and muddled.

"But now the child that should have been born into the wizarding world and raised with the acceptance of creatures and of magic, is found after living more than a decade of life with the prejudice and fears of the muggle world. And while the old Pure-Bloods would scoff at the thought that muggle-borns have changed the way they think and act, the truth is easily discovered if one takes the time to read old histories and personal accounts that document the increasing segregation of the Wizarding World. Now days, creatures are hunted and in hiding if considered "Dark" or useful in some manner to Wizards, such as in potions, or, if they are among the lucky few to be counted as a
"being", not a "creature", they are sought after as a plaything if beautiful. Not that any respectable Bloodline will allow either to marry into the family any more. Which I think is the real reason for the lack of great magics and the decline of our world lately. Only the families with an exceptionally powerful creature ancestor in the main line have any trace of the greater magic once afforded to wizards and witches.

"Um, sorry for rambling on, I'll get to the point now," Sirius said, looking down into a lightly scowling face with eyes that clearly indicated their owner's impatience when he heard a bit of a growling noise. "Sorry, it's just the first time I had a chance to speak all of my ideas aloud to someone. Moony's been gone on endless errands for the Order and I haven't had anyone to talk to other than Kreacher. But the Lore I wanted to tell you about was tied up with some of that information, I just got carried away!"

Sirius heard a disgruntled sounding *HUFF*, clearly indicating that Harry just wished for Sirius to get on with it. He let out a smile that he carefully hid by tilting his head back against the tree trunk. He still had it, the ability to make someone hang on his every word as he spun a story.

"Family Lore states that over one thousand years ago, at one of the most remote Black Family estates, the Black Lord of the time was out hunting when a blinding light caused his horse to spook, dumping him on the ground. His head hit the ground hard enough to send him unconscious for a few minutes, and when he awoke it was to the sight of a pair of injured toddlers clinging tightly to each other as they stood before him. They Lord could see that they were of no species that he recognized, having a lithe, humanoid build, but with tall, pointed ears. Not knowing what else to do with the children, the then Lord Black brought the injured little ones back to his Estate, had his wife nurse them both back to health, and brought them up within his family as he waited for someone to claim them, all the while seeing to it that they were raised to the best standard possible once they learned enough of the language to explain that their father and mother were of royalty. No one ever did. So when his two daughters and his charges fell in love with one another, he had no objections to the unions, especially once the first of the many children were born and had been found to be extremely powerful.

"All was well, and the years moved forward as they are wont to do. However, the turning of the years brought to light that the foundlings were failing to age, and their children had inherited some of the exceptional longevity, but not all of it by a long shot as they did still age. The brothers, for such they were, buried their adopted parents, their wives, and after several centuries, their beloved children and grand-children. It was then that the two finally died. Most of the family records and Lore indicate that they simply faded away. Most personal accounts from the time guessed that the two of them died of broken hearts. The long life and gifts they brought to the family were simply
passed down though the family until the last few centuries that brought about the increasing inbreeding in the Purebloods as they attempted to force the family gifts and powers to increase by marrying within close family lines, but only caused the rate of loss to accelerate, as the muggle-born's prejudice infected the wizarding world leading to a lack of new creature blood bred back into the family lines.

"Which is how we get down to the two of us," Sirius stopped his gentle ministrations to the child's hair and instead raised his hand to fondle his own pointed ears, confirming his thought that whatever happened, it had been the same to both of them. "Your Grandmother Dorea, married to Charlus and mother of my cousin James who was your father, was a Black, descendant of both of the brothers as the family married back into itself over the centuries, giving you their blood just as I have it.

"Which leads me to the only conclusion possible, whatever else the Veil did, it activated the long dormant bloodline back to our most powerful, non-human, ancestor."
It had been a bit longer than two months since they had first arrived at wherever they were. In that time, the two of them had worked hard to set up a livable camp in the grove where they first appeared. At first, Sirius had been in favor of leaving the area and attempting to find their way back to civilization, but gave up on the idea when Harry put his foot down and demanded to stay where they were. The only reason Sirius complied with the demand was Harry’s very persuasive argument that emphasized the fact that when he had attended muggle grade school, a man who specialized in wilderness rescue had come in one day as part of a career faire and had talked to the class. The man had given the students several tips and rules for what they should do if they ever found themselves lost in the wilderness; one such rule was to stay put and let the searches come to you.

It had been rather difficult at first, but as the days passed by, Sirius and Harry came to be very grateful for the changes to their bodies and the fact that they retained their memories from before the change of species. Whatever they were now, and Harry was convinced that they were elves of the kind that muggles told tales of, had many advantages. Their bodies, although young, were much more resistant to the climate than a human's body would be in similar circumstances, seemingly ignoring the chill in the air, although at night the two of them could be found curled around one another in their nest of pine boughs and rushes as they attempted to conserve some warmth against the evening's harsher bite.

Sirius had always had a more sensitive nose once he had accessed his animagus transformation, but both he and Harry discovered that all of their senses were greatly increased. This meant that they could hear smaller noises over longer distances, their vision had improved to the point that even Harry, who had been practically blind before, could see for miles when they climbed one of the trees in an attempt to locate some sign of civilisation, and their reflexes were instantaneous when they came into play.

Thanks to the fact that they retained their previous memories, Sirius was able to rig some small traps, allowing the two of them to add coney to the diet of roots, berries, and greens that Harry gathered while Sirius made the round of his traps.
When asked about how he knew which of the flora was safe for consumption, Harry looked slightly puzzled for a moment before answering.

"I...well, I recognize several of the leafy greens as something Petunia would have me make into the gourmet salads that she would serve to the higher ups and prospective buyers from Vernon's work, but the rest...Would you believe me if I say that, even without my magic, some part of me knows what is safe and what is bad for us?" Harry looked up at Sirius with large eyes as he asked that last part, unconsciously seeking reassurance from the older male.

"Sure pup," Sirius said with a weary smile as he ruffled the other's raven locks affectionately. "As much as I railed against the loss of our magic, even I'm not dense enough to not notice the fact that we both seem to have gained something else. Even if that something else is so minor that we would be accounted as Squibs under every measurement, I have realized that I can start a fire on the first try and keep it going no matter what, even if it rains. I have also noticed that not only can you find edible plants that fail to poison us, you also seem to be able to find clean, fresh drinking water without a second thought. There's also the fact that you found that incredibly useful salt deposit, without which we wouldn't have been able to preserve the bit of rabbit skin that we are wearing."

"So yes, pup, I believe you."

Harry looked up and beamed at Sirius before skipping ahead a bit and gathering up some more of the dark purple berries that they referred to as blackberries, since that was what they most resembled, into the small basket that Harry had managed to sew together out of large leaves and some plant fibers.

Sirius sighed as he watched his Godson work. This strange, new inheritance of theirs had given the both of them an oddly accurate sense of time and Sirius was coming to the inevitable conclusion that if they hadn't been found by someone on either side in the war after over two full months, then they weren't going to be. Sirius, more and more often, had the suspicion that he and Harry had been shifted, via means of the Veil, to the world that the Black Family's mystery ancestors had originally come from.
He had done his best to keep that idea from Harry though and had had much success in the endeavor as he found himself greatly assisted by Harry's newfound immaturity, one that Sirius guessed was a direct result of the boy appearing to be no more than 3-4 years of age. Sirius wasn't doing much better as he often found himself behaving in such a way as to indicate that whatever age he now was, it obviously wasn't one that was meant to be in complete control of the raising of a youngling. Not that he ever did anything that might have put Harry in danger, but sometimes, when Harry was extremely tired and emotionally overwrought, it could trigger Sirius into having his own crying jag and the two of them would end up wrapped tightly around one another, sobbing themselves to sleep.

Sighing lightly to himself, Sirius pushed his depressing thoughts to one side and forced himself to focus on the here and now. Striding determinedly forward allowed Sirius to quickly catch up to Harry as he knelt before the berry bush and picked off the succulent, little fruits, carefully placing them into the leaf basket. Sirius gently patted the tiny boy on his head as he made his way to the last trap, hoping that this trap had been successful as the other traps had not been, thus allowing them to enjoy a bit of meat tonight for their meal instead of having to fill up on nothing but plants.

Fortunately for their stomachs, the last snare had worked and provided them with a plump coney that Sirius dispatched with a sharp blow to it's head by means of a fist sized rock. Sirius would have to wait until they were back at camp to break it down because the only tools they had to work with were sharp rocks and the amount of effort it took to put an useful edge on the blasted things meant that they had to be careful in their use which in turn meant that they stayed at the campsite in an attempt to keep them from being broken.

Now that the last snare was checked and Harry had filled his basket with his finds, they made short work of returning to camp where the hare was skinned to the best of Sirius' ability, spitted, and placed to cook over the small fire that Sirius somehow always managed to keep burning. While Sirius dealt with the butchering, Harry wrapped the edible roots in several layers of leaves and place them as close to the glowing embers as possible before finding a stick and using it to poke them even closer to the fire. Once done with that, Harry turned his attention to the poor bit of skin left from Sirius' attempt at skinning. Taking a flat rock that they had sharpened one edge of, Harry used it to scrape the hide as best as he was able before rubbing the inside with salt. Hopefully, with the addition of a few more skins, they would soon have enough hides for Harry to make them a warm, if smelly and stiff, blanket.

Finished with his task, Harry stood and moved over to where Sirius stood waiting at the edge of the clearing. He smiled up at his God-father as he handed over the skin that he had prepared so that the older, taller male could place the skin into the one tree that had lower branches. They had
taken to the tree top storage in an attempt to keep pests from entering their campsite and so far, it seemed to be working out fairly well. Once Sirius was back on the ground, the two of them quickly and quietly made their way to the small, rapidly moving stream that provided them with water. They had both realized how lucky they were to have such a source of fresh water so close to the campsite, especially so since they had yet to find a means of transporting water. Every container they tried to make had a leak that allowed the liquid life to escape.

Stripping out of their clothing, which was nothing more sophisticated than a rudely cured rabbit skin to cover their privates tied around their waist with more of Harry's plant twine, Sirius and Harry stepped into the stream where a bend made a shallows. This shallow area had a sandy bottom and very slow moving water, making it perfect for the two of them to bathe or fetch a needed drink.

Sirius stepped in first, making sure that he stayed between Harry and the faster moving, deeper water. Reaching down, he scooped up a fistful of the bottom sand. Harry, used to the routine by now, held out his hands, allowing Sirius to scrub at them with the gritty handful. It did not take very long for Harry to be completely scrubbed down, at which point Sirius left the boy alone to rinse off as best he could while Siri quickly scrubbed at his own hide. As soon as Siri finished polishing himself, he quickly ducked his head under the water and saw to the cleaning of his hair before making sure that he was completely rinsed off. He then had Harry move right up next to the shoreline before helping the tiny boy lay down with his head in the water so that his hair could also be washed, before seeing to it that Harry was thoroughly rinsed. After bathing, the two of them drank as much water as they were able to in order to get through the night without making another trip as Sirius was rightfully worried about the ease an accident could occur around water at night, even with their enhanced eye-sight which allowed for superior vision at all times, including in the dark.

Making their way back to camp, Sirius ended up carrying Harry. The tiny toddler was expending so much energy in his attempts to help that, even with taking a nap in the middle of the day, by the time darkness began to fall, he was completely exhausted and usually fell asleep immediately after dinner.

When they had first arrived, the two of them had spent much time singing snippets of half-remembered songs and sharing stories about their lives to that point, with Sirius passing along more in-depth lessons from the Black Family Lore. However, as the weeks passed and more calories were spent on their survival than were found and consumed, they ended up sending greater amounts of time asleep as their bodies attempted to keep running on insufficient fuel. The missing calories were also causing havoc with their bodies as bones become more prominent and skin stretched tightly across their frames. Siri had tried to slip Harry more of the little bits of food they successfully
scrounged, but the tiny boy put his foot down and had had a temper tantrum that only subsided when Sirius backed down and agreed to go back to equal shares.

Rubbing at Harry’s back and smiling as he heard the tell-tale sucking noise that indicated the toddler was sucking his thumb again, Sirius arrived at the campsite in very short order. Placing his precious bundle down on the log they hauled over near the fire-pit, Sirius checked on the roasting coney spitted over the small fire. As plump as the little thing was, once it was skinned and gutted and set to roasting, it proved to be nothing more than a few mouthfuls for either of them and so, as Sirius checked it over, it was readily apparent that it was completely finished cooking.

Pulling it off of the flames, Siri had Harry hold onto the end of the spit while he used Harry's stick from earlier to poke the root vegetables out of the burning coals. Ignoring them until they were cool enough to touch, Sirius grabbed several of the large leaves that Harry had brought back to camp for them to use as plates and set them down on the log near Harry, at which point the toddler immediately set the hot coney on them. Smiling down at the tired, but happy, boy, Sirius began to pull the sizzling hot meat off of the tiny, fragile bones as quickly as possible in an attempt to spare his fingers from some of the heat. The two of them made very short work of the succulent, if bland as the only seasoning they had access to was a bit of salt, meat before digging into the roasted roots. Once done and as full as they were going to get for the night since the berries Harry had collected were always saved for breakfast, Sirius led the way back to the stream for one last hand and face scrubbing as well as one last chance to drink their fill of water.

By this time, Harry was so tired that he could barely keep his eyes open and Sirius had had to carry him both to and from the stream with the tiny toddler falling asleep in his arms on the way back. Placing the boy gently down on the pile of pine boughs and river grass that serve as their bed, Sirius made sure that the fire was properly banked for the night as he didn't wish for it to burn out leaving them in darkness and without the warmth it provided before making his own way into the nest to cuddle up to the exhausted, sleeping toddler.

Just as he was almost completely asleep, Sirius was alarmed to note that the usual nighttime chorus of wildlife was slightly off. Raising his head from where it had been almost asleep, Sirius looked about the clearing. He was just about to dismiss his uneasiness as a brush with paranoia when his gaze was caught and held by a pair of bright eyes peering at him from the treeline.
NOTES: This will not be Super! anyone fic. I am going to try and make this as close to canon as possible for the characters. That said, while elves don't have the amazing range of powers that the Istari do, they can still do some amazing things and I plan on having Sirius and Harry be elementalists in some form. Just not sure how powerful.

Also: If I forgot to say this before, this will be based on the books. For those who've never read them, DON'T PANIC, the movies do a fairly decent job overall, they just missed some of the details.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

AN: Please assume that all conversations that occur with elves to be held in Sindarian, their common tongue. I thought about doing translations, but could not find a good translator. I will see about what I can do, and will happily accept help and suggestions.

For this chapter, the few words spoken between Sirius and Harry are in English, then the rest of the spoken words are in Sindarin. Future conversations between beings of different races will have the differences of language noted by symbols if needed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sirius froze in fear for a moment when he saw the unknown eyes staring intently at him before frantically gathering up a sleeping Harry in his arms and leaping out of their bracken bower. Grateful that the fire was between the unknown owner of the eyes and them, Sirius sprinted out into the forest, hoping that the firelight would blind the other being enough to buy him a few minutes headstart. Using his vastly improved night vision and his recently gained superior body, Sirius dodged and leapt over anything that would betray their flight by making a noise as he desperately looked around for a place to hide that also wouldn't allow the two of them to be cornered.

"Siri~" Harry began, only to be hushed by Sirius.

"Shh...later, Bambi."

Harry smiled sleepily into Sirius' chest at hearing the affectionate name Sirius had bestowed on him during one of the many stories about the Marauders' adventures and dozed back off to sleep, eased on his way by the gentle swaying of Sirius' body and the comforting noise of a strong heart beating away under his ear.
Sirius knew that he shouldn't look over his shoulder. Just because he couldn't hear anything behind him didn't mean a thing: he had been a well-trained Auror in a war ravaged world at one point and knew damn well that taking his eyes off of the course he was running could lead to all kinds of problems, including missing his footing, thus allowing the other being to catch up. Still, when he thought that he saw something flicker briefly out of the corner of his eye, he wasn't able to stop himself from turning his head slightly off to the one side in an attempt to see more.

It was only taking his eyes partially away from his course, and it was only for a micro-second, but it was enough to have him hit his shoulder on something that was fairly immovable, spinning him about and sending him and his precious burden crashing to the forest floor. Acting on instinct, Sirius managed to turn his body enough that Harry was cradled tightly against his chest as they crashed to the forest floor. Sirius immediately tried to spring back to his feet to continue fleeing from the unknown persuer, but was halted by pressure on his shoulders. Shaking his head slightly in an attempt to clear away the confusion and dizziness caused by the adrenaline and recent tumble, Sirius became even more confused when the pressure on his shoulders holding him down changed into a pulling sensation; one that lifted him and Harry up off of the forest floor and placed him against the chest of the other being.

Sirius would deny for the rest of his life the squeak that escaped him when the other's arms tightened and both he and Harry were lifted to up, with their weight being carried solely by the unknown person. He was even more shocked when he finally realized that the other was talking softly to the two of them, in a beautifully, lyrical language that was most definitely not English, and Sirius could clearly understand the words. It was as though the language was the one that he had grown up speaking and had merely forgotten it until now, when he was able to once again hear its beauty.

"Shh...Everything is alright my little ones. I am so very sorry to have scared you so much that you felt that you had to flee in such terror. That was certainly not my intention when I found your clearing. I was only investigating the fire and hoping that it belong to someone that would not mind sharing a bit of warmth and company for the evening. But come, allow me to carry you and your burden back to your site. We may speak further once we arrive and you have had a chance to calm down from the fright I inadvertently gave you."

The massive jolt of adrenaline that had flooded Sirius' body at the first sight of intelligent eyes staring at Harry and him finally began to release its grip on him, causing a wave of exhaustion to crest over him and making him snuggle up against the other being. He knew that he shouldn't risk his
and Harry's safety on gut feelings, but it was like he recognized the other being on an instinctual level once he heard the other's voice speaking in that lyrical language and knew that the other would never, could never, do anything that might cause any harm to either himself or his Godson. He was convinced that he heard a very faint chuckle overhead as the last dregs of panic left his system and he fell into an exhausted slumber, safe in someone else's care for the first time since he had first met James, Peter, and Remus all those many years ago.

The stranger kept chuckling quietly under his breath even as he noted that his precious burdens were both asleep as he easily made his way back through the nighttime forest, the faint streamers of moonlight more than enough light for his lightly tilted eyes to see the disturbed undergrowth by. He was still feeling an almost over-whelming sense of joy and amazement when he arrived back at the younglings' clearing, but by that time he had managed to contain it enough that he wasn't chortling out loud any more.

"Ho, Gildor Inglorion. I would ask if you were successful in your hunt, but I am able to clearly see by your burden that you were, indeed, most lucky in your pursuit. Will you permit me to come near?"

Gildor looked across the clearing, beaming in joy at the dark-haired, human male that crouched near the firepit and tended the small flames.

"Not to be boastful, Arador, but it was foregone that I would emerge victorious over any and all which I hunt. I just never expected such a joyous outcome for my work. Afterall, when we were notified that something seemed to have moved into the woods nearest Fornost causing said wooded area to seem both oddly welcoming, as it has not been for ages since its abandonment and ruination, and secretly protective, I would never have thought to have been gifted with such as I am laden with currently. And if you will give me but a moment to lower my most precious and desirable burdens to their laboriously gathered bedding, you will be able to see for your very own self the reason for the joy upwelling in my very soul."

Arador looked deeply intrigued as he watched the elf who was his companion and shield brother on this quest kneel beside the rude bracken bed, gently placing his burden there-on. From what he could see with his inferior vision from the time that Gildor arrived back in the settled clearing, it appeared that the tall elf was carrying a young lad that must have gotten lost. And since the nearest settlement was Bree, almost 100 Númenórean miles to the south, Arador was simply
assuming that the lad had come up this way because of a dangerous dare from his friends and gotten lost. However, as the Dunedain Chieftain moved closer to the pile of branches and reeds in order to have a better view, he stopped briefly in shock as the flickering firelight illuminated not one, but two bodies. The second that of an older infant or tiny toddler tightly clasped in the elder's arms.

"Yes, I can see that finding two children alive in this area would be cause for joy-" Arador was shocked when the unfailingly polite elf interrupted him.

"That is not it. Or, at least that is not the sole reason," Gildor clarified with a look of wonder lighting up his immortal countenance. "Look at the ears on the little ones."

Arador gave his friend a look of confusion but did as asked, easily and carefully sliding the long, hiding locks of hair away from the body part under discussion. It was all he could do to contain his gasp of shock at the sight of a tiny, gracefully pointed ear. One the same shape as the tall, blond elf kneeling beside him, but so very, very much smaller.

Reeling back as the shock rang throughout his body, Arador split his gaze between the elven warrior beside him and the completely shocking sight of the elven children laying sleeping before them.

"How can this be?" he whispered. His voice stolen from him in his shock and disbelief.

"I know not," Gildor replied, his voice equally faint. "Children are so rare to my people in this age that one birth is celebrated for centuries, the fact that here are two such miracles...I am beyond words for such an occurrence and can only give praise to the Valar for such a blessing and
wonderance. The only hope I feel we shall have for answers is that the little ones know somewhat of their history and will be able to enlighten us upon the dawning.

"For now," Gildor said, rising from his kneeling position. "Let us guard the clearing and ensure no harm befalls the children. How none has happened before our finding of them, I shall also lay at the feet of the Valar and give them my praise as we guard."

The rest of the evening passed uneventfully and it wasn't until the sun was almost fully risen that anything of interest finally occurred. Gildor and Arador, although seasoned warriors, had both spent much of their patrols lost in wondering thought, allowing their instincts to act as alerts as they periodically cast their gazes over onto the sleeping children. Gildor taking the lion's share of the evening's watches as he was able to find rest in his memories as he watched, thus allowing the ranger a few chances to grab for a bit of sleep. As the sun finally rose and cast its light upon the world, letting it trickle into the clearing, it allowed the two warriors to have a better view of their foundlings.

Deciding that it was safe enough to once again pay more attention to the sleeping miracles, Gildor gave up on his patrol and watch to move back and kneel beside the crude bed. Reaching out a hand to clear away the restless tangles of hair that blocked his view, the elf beheld the little ones in bright light for the first time.

The older one was still nothing more than a child, a young one at that. He had dark hair, high cheekbones, and fine boned features. The tiny bundle that the older child had guarded so well, and that he thought to be an infant or toddler proved, in the bright early morning light, to also be a child, although it was readily apparent that he was only out of toddler hood by the slimmest of margins. The petite child had hair the color of raven wings, the same delicate fineboned features, and the greenest eyes that Gildor had ever been graced to see.

Blinking slightly, Gildor looked again. The littlest one had opened his eyes and was staring wide-eyed as he sucked on his thumb and cuddled deeply against the older boy. Gildor gave the child a small, welcoming smile. Both boys were going to be much sought after: as children, because they were so few and so very precious, and as adults, because they were sure to grow into stunning elves.
'Although,' Gildor thought as he leaned in just a bit farther. 'They look slightly familiar, as though I should know them. Or have seen similar features very recently.'

He was so caught up in his examination of the maddeningly familiar features that he failed to note that the other child had also awoken. It wasn't until the other child had cleared his throat that Gildor relented in his quest to find out what triggered the sense of familiarity. Turning to the older child, Gildor was met with shining silvery-grey orbs alit with curiousity and a sense of relief.

"Good morning," said the piping voice of the youngest child, who had had to pull out his thumb to say the greeting and then promptly placed it back, the whole time looking at Gildor with eyes open wide in wonderment.

"And good morning to you little one," Gildor returned the greeting with a smile which only grew broader when the tiny child cautiously reached out one hand in an attempt to touch Gildor, before quickly pulling it back and snuggling in again with someone that he obviously knew and trusted.

"His ears look just like ours, Siri," was said in a tone of wonder by the youngest who once again removed, then reinserted, his thumb when speaking.

"Yes, they do indeed. Pretty little pointed things that they are," Arador chimed in. "However, now that everyone is awake, I feel that I should point out that the soonest started, the faster arrived. In other words, let us be on our way, as the journey to Bree, then onwards to Imladris, is one of several weeks in length."

"An excellent idea my friend," Gildor exclaimed as he rose to his feet. "It is already far later
than we would normally be started; however, it will still only take us three days to reach Bree from here if we leave now and move at a good pace."

Harry couldn't stop the tears that welled up in his eyes as he heard the first adults, heck, the first *people*, he met in this new place discuss the fact that they would be leaving. He had so hoped that the beautiful man with ears similar to his and Sirius' would at least answer a few questions, if not outright take responsibility for them, but it seemed like he and Siri would once again be on their own. So therefor, it came as a bit of a shock when he felt fingers gently brushing over his cheek, wiping away the tears that fell over it. Looking up, Harry discovered that it wasn't Sirius drying his tears, but someone that looked like a human in a manner that he was familiar with.

"Hush now, child. We have a long enough journey ahead of us without you giving us a flood to deal with at the start of our travels. Dry your eyes, calm yourself, and rise. We have far to go today to meet our goals of reaching the village of Bree in three days time."

Harry looked up in astonishment. Did this mean that the tall, rugged looking man was going to take him and Siri with them as the two men went to wherever this 'Bree' place was? Seeing the gentle smiles both of the adults were wearing on their faces, Harry became excited as he thought that he was correct. Squirming in Sirius' tight grip, he managed to get a bit of slack in the arms clasping him. Enough so that he was able to bounce off of his Godfather, then off of the bed, and right up over to the tall male that looked just like he and Sirius, but with blond hair instead of the dark black hue that Siri had said was a dominant trait of the House of Black. Feeling instinctively that he could trust the other no matter what, Harry held up his arms in a wordless plea to be held. The tall, blond male chuckled happily and picked up Harry with no further prompting, cuddling the small boy tightly against a chest that was covered in flexible leather armor before sliding the tiny boy off to one side and resting him on a hip.

Gildor gently squeezed his precious armful as he turned his full attention to the remaining boy child. He had risen from the bracken bed right after the youngest had so rudely bounced on him and was standing beside the bed, looking hopefully at the two adults. Seeing that the other child was also willing to trust, albeit in a bit more of a cautious manner, lifted a large load of worry and stress from Gildor's shoulders. It could have been very bad with the inadvertent fright given the younglings the previous night, but it seemed that all would be well.
"Now, I wish that I had something more to offer for the two of you in the way of clothing; however, this was a simple scouting mission and so we took along only the absolute bare minimum, counting on our ability to be supplied from the land itself and the fact that it is not yet time for harsh cold. Once we arrive at the village of Bree, we shall procure the most basic of needed items for you before we reclaim our horses and supplies from the Inn. We need do no more than that as there is no doubt in my mind that the artisans at Imladris will fall all over themselves to see to the supplying of any and all items that younglings such as yourselves would need and want."

Gildor was rewarded by a breathless giggling noise coming from the child he held and a blinding smile from the older, as well as the child moving close enough to grab ahold of the bottom of his tunic.

"I think that there is one last thing that needs to be seen to before we leave, Gildor," Arador spoke up, watching the elf lose himself in happiness at being surrounded by elven children. "Before we go anywhere, we should introduce ourselves. I am Arador, Chieftain of the Dunedain, and my companion's name is Gildor Inglorion. Would you give us the gift of knowledge of your names in return, little ones?"

The elder child, the one with the silvery-grey eyes, looked thoughtful for a moment before seemingly making up his mind. With a decisive nod of his head, the lad stepped forward slightly and gave a small bow, speaking for the first time that morning.

"Greetings. My name is Sirius Orion Black and the one Gildor Inglorion is holding is my Godson, Harry James Potter. It is a pleasure to meet you both."
Chapter End Notes

My very disjointed notes that I made to figure out the timeline. Sites hit were the encyclopedia of arda and the LoTR wiki.

Harry meets Bilbo Ages: H65 B50
Lonely mountain ta2941
if harry=15 years old then it's ta2891

that makes Dunedain chieftain Arador(ta2820-ta2930)
father of Arathorn II (ta2873-ta2933)
father of Aragorn Elessar (March 1,2931. Ascended to the throne on May1, 3019. Died at 120)

Bilbo birthday: Sept 22, ta 3001
Frodo arrives in Rivendell Oct 3018
They traveled until the sun was just starting to touch the horizon that first day, at which point Gildor and Arador both agreed that it was better to stop and set a small camp than to continue on until full darkness set with the younglings. During the travels that day, Sirius and the two older men had exchanged stories, both about themselves and about the worlds they were from. Gildor and Arador both admitted to Sirius that they were only touching on the barest bones of the history of Middle-Earth and that he would be more than welcome to learn in greater depth the world's history as recorded by the elves and their kin, the Númenóreans, once at Imladris. The information the two men were able to share while on the move in the dense, old growth forest was enough for now though to help Sirius have a basic mental map of the timeline of the new world he found himself and Harry now living in.

Harry had spent most of the day sleeping in the arms of Gildor, the grown elf having refused to allow the tiny youngling to leave his arms. On occasion, Harry would join in the discussions, his piping voice bringing smiles to the faces of the other participants. Sirius had also spent much of the day being carried, much to his unvoiced chagrin. He, however, was carried pick-a-back by Arador. The two adults did this so that the group could make better time. Sirius understood the reasoning; after all, longer legs make better mileage. But it rankled just a bit when he thought about how old he was, and that just a few weeks ago he had been considered a wizard in the prime of his life. It was just a bit disturbing to have found out that, according to the information Gildor gave him while they were talking earlier, that he was still considered a child, and Harry was just out of toddlerhood.

Making camp that night was relatively easy. Neither fair headed, ethereal Gildor nor the darker, rugged Arador had more than the absolute basic necessities with them, as they were both extremely experienced at living off of the bounty of the land, as well as quite familiar with the area they had been sent out to scout. While overrun by the forest and currently abandoned, Fornost had once played host to the descendents of Númenor and as such a place, it was well documented and had also once been the site of frequent visits by the elves. The most the two elders did for the evening, seeing
as the weather was holding fair, was to set a small fire pit with stones the two elflings had happily
gathered for them. Once the ground was cleared of brush and debris, the stones were arranged in
there circle and a fire was lit.

While the foursome had kept themselves mainly to the old trade road that led from Fornost to
Bree, Arador had excused himself a time or two from the group during the times when Sirius was
allowed to stretch his legs and they would drink a bit of water. During those times, the Ranger
Chieftain, and Sirius had been very impressed to hear even the abridged version of events that led up
to that little bit of knowledge, would slip into the woods. He was never gone very long, but when he
came back, Arador would always have a small, furry creature of some sort: field dressed and hanging
from his belt. Those little absences were now paying off greatly as Arador and Gildor spitted the tiny
carcasses of several squirrels and the slightly larger ones of the two coneys Arador had successfully
shot with his bow.

"Come," Gildor smiled at the two elflings and gestured with one hand. "Now that dinner has
been started, let us go and find some fresher water than that in our water carriers. While I am grateful
indeed for elven ingenuity and the artisans for making such carriers for those of us that travel and
scout: in such things, even with glass linings, the water can get quite stale tasting. Especially on hot
days with long travel times."

Harry giggled at the face Gildor made when he mentioned the water tasting stale and
obediently rose from where he was sitting, going over to stand near to the tall elf. He was quickly
followed by Sirius. Gildor, once he had both boys, turned and lead the way further into the forest, as
they were making their camp just inside the edges nearest the road, having wanted to remain near the
road for ease and speed of travel, but knowing that it was always safer to make a more concealed
place to sleep. After a few minutes of walking away from the direction of the road, Gildor heard
what he had been searching for. The gentle sounds of water flowing over rocks.

"And here we are," Gildor said in a soft voice as he made short work of the few remaining
steps that kept him from the stream. He look on in fond amusement as the two elfings both let out
slight squeals of happiness at the sight of fresh, cool water, before the two of them rushed past him
and into the little trickle of water. They promptly began to scoop the cool, clean water over their
dusty limbs, washing off the grime the road had left on their fair, soft skins, before scooping up
handfuls of the liquid to drink. Laughing quietly under his breath while still keeping an eye on the
little ones, Gildor moved upstream to rinse and re-fill his water bottle. He noted, with his keen
eyesight, that the shore held some water pepper and so picked a few leaves off of each plant that he
could find, knowing that the plant was both healthy to eat as well as the fact that the leaves would be
a welcome flavor addition to the game that was roasting even now.
"What's that?"

Gildor handed over one of the leafs he had just picked to Harry, who had clearly become interested in what Gildor was doing and had waded up the shallow, narrow stream until he could get a better view. Harry took the offered leaf with a beaming smile and a small, breathless thanks, before turning his attention to what his hands now held.

"That, little one, is the leaf of the water pepper. It is a delicate looking plant with its thin stem, and dark, narrow, pointed leaves, and tiny, white, wispy flowers. The leaves can be eaten as a vegetable; although, they are quite pungent and most prefer to use them for what I am intending, which is adding a bit of flavor to the meat tonight. The seeds can be mixed with another root vegetable to create quite the spicy mixture. Perhaps in the future I may be able to introduce you to it. Now, however, I think that it is time to get back to camp so that I may use the leaves before the meat has completed cooking. I trust that the both of you are ready to eat?"

Gildor's question was met with vigorous head nodding from both elfings. Rising from the semi-crouch he had fallen into while harvesting leaves, Gildor was ready to lead the way back to the rough campsite when Harry gave Sirius a blinding smile, opened his mouth as though to say something, then spun on his heels and took off running, leaving a slack jawed Sirius to gather himself up and give chase. Gildor shook his head and followed after without a word. Elladan and Elrohir would find much entertainment with these two, he was sure.

After making his own, much more sedate, way back to the fire, Gildor made short work of pulling the skewers off of the fire and placing the leaves of the water pepper in between the bits of cooking meat. Once done with that, and having replaced the meat back onto the fire, Gildor looked over the enigmas that he and his companion had found. The boys were currently sitting on the ground near the fire and Sirius was tending to some scrapes Harry had picked up racing through the underbrush with a scrap of bandage that was probably given them by Arador.

Gildor refrained from scowling at the sight, but only just. A rough cured, rabbit fur loincloth was just not enough for the children to wear. He was eager to reach Bree with its market and
craftsmen where he and Arador would be able to get in a bit of shopping so that the little ones would have a semblance of proper clothing to wear as well as reclaim their mounts and their packs. Just then, Arador slipped into the firelight, drawing Gildor's attention to him, rather than the children.

"Ho, Gildor. I have found a bit more provinder for our meal tonight while scouting around the campsite," Arador gave a slight smile as he knelt down and laid out his finds. "A couple of wild onions, a handful or two of berries, and I found an unclaimed hoarde of nuts some animal stored away. Also, I found no signs that anything dangerous has past this way in some seasons. No sign of wolf, bear, or of anything that travels on two feet. I find myself grateful indeed to the Valar for this, and now find myself wishing that we had brought our mounts along with us as we could have made excellent time directly back to Imladris."

Before Gildor could respond, Harry's piping voice was heard.

"Um...Why didn't you ride your horses?"

Gildor and Arador turned their heads to better see the tiny boy. His scrapes had been tended too and he was currently sitting in Sirius' lap, the slightly larger boy having his arms wrapped tightly around the other child as they both watched the adults.

"A good question, little one. Arador and I have had much experience in the wilderness and have found that sometimes a mount is actually a hindrance, depending on what one is hunting for of course. If we were hunting foul orcs," Gildor spat out the name with a grimace of distaste and anger, "we would have stayed on our mounts as we hunted them. The foul beasts can cover much ground and we have needed the speed the horses would have provided as well as the fact that we would have been unable to hunt for provisions, thus the mounts would have had to carry much needed supplies. A pack horse would also have been highly likely to be a part of the group.

"If we were sent out after wild animals that had been causing havoc, we would also have brought along our mounts. But, we would have made a central camp in the area we were seeking our prey and left the horses there in a sturdy corral while we hunted on foot. Not knowing what we were
being sent out for, other than a report of an "oddness" about the woods near Fornost, it was for the best to leave the animals behind at an area were they would be safe and well cared for and to go on foot. This let us have the advantage of surprise, as it was far easier on the two of us to slip though the woods without having to find a trail that would admit the much larger bodies of our mounts. The only disadvantage to doing such is the fact that Bree is the only place to have left them, and the village is a good three day trek from where we found you two."

The conversation faded after that, as Harry and Sirius succumb to exhaustion and Gildor and Arador were happy to let the two of them fade into a half aware state where all they did was watch the dancing flames as they cooked the meat. The elflings were briefly roused from their stupor when the meat was declared done and several skewers were presented to them, but they then quickly fell back into a light doze after the meal was consumed. Arador and Gildor talked quietly over their own supper and, after much back and forth, it was finally decided that Gildor would take the watch, allowing Arador to sleep the night away. The elf having won the argument after presenting the fact that as one of the firstborn, he had the greater stamina, endurance, and a greatly reduced need for true sleep: merely spending the night in his memories would be enough to refresh him, which he could easily do while keeping watch. He would have no difficulties holding out until Bree, where they would stay for one night, which would allow Gildor to chance to have a night of real slumber, before leaving bright and early the next day.

After agreeing with his friend, Arador silently moved to the other side of the fire. Gently lifting Harry into his arms, and silently nudging Sirius into a slightly more alert state, Arador was able to arrange the three of them into a better position for sleeping. He had Harry held tight against his chest with one arm, while Sirius was pulled flush against his side with the other arm. He himself was somewhat comfortably propped up against a large knotted bundle of roots. Arador was hoping that between the nearby fire and his own body warmth, the twosome would be kept somewhat warm and comfortable. He was just grateful that it was a warm night for this early in the season. Letting out a sigh, Arador closed his eyes and let his tense muscles relax in preparation for slumber, having all the trust in the world for the sharp senses of Gildor Inglorion. He fell into sleep quickly after that and knew no more until morning.

The next two days were repeats of the first, with Gildor and Arador giving lessons to the two elflings throughout the day and then again when a camp was made for the night: whether it was on the history of men and elves, the wars that had spanned Arda since its inception, the various races of beings that inhabited the face of the world, or just simple lessons involving the local flora and fauna and what was edible or what could be used in healing. It wasn't until the end of the third day that the routine changed.
The small group had finally arrived at Bree.

Arador had sped up his pace near the end of the day, when the group was only a few miles away from their destination, allowing him to reach the gates well before Gildor, Sirius, and Harry did. When the three of them reached the gates in the gathering dusk, Arador stepped silently out of a deep shadow and handed over a bundle of fabric that, when Gildor shook it out and swirled it about himself, turned out to be a cloak with a hood that he promptly pulled up, easily hiding his face.

"Now then little ones," Arador quietly spoke up, wearing a cloak of his own with the hood also pulled up to bury his features in shadow. "It was too late in the day for any shops or marketplace stalls to be open, so I was unable to purchase any clothing for the two of you to wear, and neither myself nor Gildor had extra cloaks within our packs. The best we can do, as it would be for the best to not draw any attention to Gildor or yourselves, is to have the two of you hide yourselves under our cloaks."

Sirius quietly interrupted, curiosity lighting a fire within him.

"Why do we need to hide? Are children that rare here? And why shouldn't Gildor let himself be known?"

"Not precisely...," Gildor trailed off, before releasing a small sigh. "We shall inform you in more detail later, once we are at the inn. The shortest answer I can give you, is that the races of men and elves have become estranged from one another. For now, just please do as we say and stay hidden within our cloaks."

"Also," Arador quietly interjected. "From here on, I shall be holding speech with those needed in the common speech of Men, known as Westron. Gildor and I have been conversing with the two of you in Sindarin, and will do so again once in the privacy of our room and when we are journeying towards Imladris. But for now, needs must."
Sirius gave a small frown, but, drawing on the experience he had growing up in a pureblood household as well as a world at war, knew that some times were better for talking and others were better for just shutting up and following directions. This was apparently one of the latter times. Sirius gave a sharp nod of his head to indicate his assent before sliding under Arador's cloak. Once there, he moved behind the much taller male and grabbed ahold of the bottom edge of his tunic, trusting that his hold on the fabric would be enough to steer by in the darkness.

Harry, seeing what Sirius did, made his way under Gildor's cloak only to be halted by the long, elegant fingers of the elf coming to rest on his shoulders. Looking up, Harry saw Gildor gazing back down at him and holding out his other hand.

"I think, perhaps, that it will far easier on all if I were to carry you."

And with that, the tall elf lifted up Harry and helped get him into place clinging tightly to Gildor's back, under the cloak. Once done, the two adults stepped out of the deep, dark evening shadows and made short work of covering the last bit of remaining distance to the gates, where they were halted by the gatekeeper.

"What do you want, and where do you come from?" asked the swarthy looking man, brandishing a lantern towards them.

"We are travelers seeking rest in the Inn of the Prancing Pony. We have come from the north and will be leaving in the morning, after a short trip to the market," Arador said, stepping forward slightly into the pool of light.

"Very well then," the man scowled as he stepped to one side, allowing the two cloaked and hooded men to pass by the still open gates. "You are lucky to have made it before the gates were closed for the evening. And coming from the north...nothing up there but bandits and no good rangers. Rather curious that..."
"Quite," Arador sharply bit out as he swept past the nosey man, followed closely by a completely silent Gildor.

Once through the gates and away from the light given by the lantern, Arador and Gildor slowed down and took to the shadows once again. Arador reached under and around his cloak to give a comforting squeeze to the small hand he felt trembling against his waist.

"Not too much farther," Arador quietly stated, seeing the inn just up the street.

The small group walked up the muddy, rutted street, keeping to the edge where the grass was beaten down in an attempt to keep some of the mess off of their boots and the bare feet of Sirius. Arriving at the inn, they stepped into the small entry way, halting before the bit of bar that doubled as the innkeeper's desk.

"Good evening, gentlemen!" boomed out a loud, deep voice. If either Sirius or Harry had been able to see, they would have been met with the sight of a heavyset man, sporting a thick, full, brownish-red beard and flushed cheeks with a sweaty brow. He wore a full apron that he was wiping his hands on as he turned his attention fully to the new men arriving at his check in point.

"And what shall it be tonight? Ale and dinner? Or perhaps one of my good rooms for the night?"

"A room for the evening and have two generous sized meals sent up to it, Butterbur," Arador stated, leaning forward to ensure that the he was heard over the raucus noise escaping the main room and pulling down his hood. "And have our packs that we left in keeping here sent up as well, please."
"Well bless me! If it isn't Tripper come back. I'll have your packs and a good dinner set right up to your rooms. Kyler! Guests!" Buttebur shouted out the last couple words, and was rewarded by a younger version of himself running in from the main room. "Show these two up to the top room, then grab the packs outta the back room and take them up, then come to the kitchens to get them their dinner. I'll have the trays ready by then."

The gawky teen gave a sharp nod then, seeing that the two guests were headed his way, turned around and led a weaving path through the tables and drunken crowd to the other side of the room where the stairs were. Turning his head slightly, Kyler saw that they were still with him and hadn't been stalled getting across the room, so he kept going up the stairs until he finally reached the sole room that fit right up under the eaves. Bowing the guests into the room as he held the door open, Kyler left to finish up the directions his dad had given him.

Letting out a sigh of relief as he closed the door behind the boy, Arador turned around to face the room only to see that Gildor had removed his cloak and was settling Harry onto one of the two beds that the room played host to. Deciding that his partner had the correct idea, he removed his own cloak and gently pulled Sirius out from behind him. He gently steered the boy over to the bed and lifted him up onto it so that the two elflings were now seated side by side.

"I will wait for the boy to return and meet him just outside the door," Arador stated as he looked at Gildor. "While I do so, perhaps you should fill in a bit more information on why we wish to keep your presence and that of the little ones here quiet and to ourselves?"

"Agreed," Gildor nodded and turned his full attention onto the boys sitting almost naked on the bed, cuddling up with one another. Arador quietly leaving the room behind him. "I have regaled the two of you for the past three days with snippets, summaries, songs, and bits of history. What you may have missed between everything that has been relayed to you is the fact that relations between the first born, elves, and the second born, men, have become strained over the many millenia that we have both trodden this world. And that doesn't even begin to touch on the issues held between elves and dwarves, let alone the issues all races have with the foul creations of the Great Enemy and the greatest of his servants, Sauron.

"What it all comes down to in the end though, is the fact that our people are hardly to be found
having any sort of interaction any more with those not of our blood, or those descended from it, as
the in the case of the Rangers: known to the wise as Dúnedain and related to the lord of Imladris by
his twin brother, Elros.

"Also, it is imperative to hide the fact that we travel with elflings above and beyond the fact
that I am an adult elf because we have such a low birthrate. We are blessed indeed by such longevity
as to make us immortal in the eyes of men, but we have paid for such by a derth of children. As such,
they are our most precious treasures and are guarded quite closely. It would not do for any news
about the two of you to leak out as you only have Arador and myself to look after the both of you.

"The road to Imladris is nigh onto 300 miles from Bree and is fraught with peril. Wolves,
warg, orcs, and bandits aplenty have been known to accost travelers on it. Trolls have also come
down from the highlands on occasion. No news of the treasure that the two of you are must be
spread about. Some would hunt you for the ransom that would be paid, others would seek you out
for the evil that they would do onto you."

Gildor paused as he took in the wide eyes looking up at him from fearful faces.

"But perhaps that is enough for now."

A sharp, but quiet, rap was heard on the door just then. Rising gracefully to his feet from
where he knelt on the floor before the bed bearing the elflings, Gildor then glided over to the door
and opened it, taking great care to only allow a small sliver of the door to open while he keep his
body well angled in such a manner as to block the view of the room as well as only allowing a small
slice of his face to be seen. His features obscured by the low light given off by the single lantern
within the room, the wood of the door, and the bit of hair that was escaping the tie he keep it in while
traveling, Gildor peered out into the hallway. Seeing that it was only Arador, with whom it could
clearly be seen that he had intercepted the boy Kyler both times as he had the packs on the floor at
his feet and was holding a large tray over flowing with the inn's hearty victuals and a pair of
invitingly beaded tankards with an equally tempting large flagon, Gildor opened the door widely.
Holding it open until Arador passed by, Gildor made short work of retrieving the packs.
Dropping the packs on the floor in the corner nearest the door, Gildor made sure that the door was locked for the evening before rejoining the group on the beds, where Arador had placed the heavy tray. Gildor settled easily back down onto the floor, reaching for one of the chilled tankards. While he normally stayed away from mortal alcohol, the mead served here was uncommonly fine for that brewed by a man and was to be enjoyed whenever chance presented.

"Well, dig in and eat heartily my fine little ones! This, and the morning's meal, will be the only chance we have to dine in relative ease and comfort until reaching the House of Elrond," Arador made sure the the boys had each picked something from the tray before starting to eat. He also pulled out his water skin to ensure that neither child would be wanting for drink, as he wasn't about to allow either of them a chance at the mead.

The meal passed in silence that was only broken by the sound of happy eating, and, once, the sound of giggles as Harry broke into peals of laughter at the way Gildor and Arador were each trying to get the last roll, only to have it snatched out from under their hands by Sirius, who promptly tore the roll in half and shared it with Harry. Once the meal was over with, Arador placed the tray just outside the door for it to be collected by the inn's staff. On his way back over to the bed, he snagged ahold of both of the packs. Dropping them on the unoccupied bed, Arador opened one up and began to riffle though the contents. He let out a triumphant noise as he pulled out what looked like a bundle of fabric, until he shook it out, then it could be seen that it was a well mended, lightly stained tunic.

"It's not much, and we will hopefully be able to purchase better tomorrow, but for now," Arador tossed the tunic towards Sirius, who caught it out of reflex, "it will do just fine. Time to loose that bit of rabbit skin that is the only thing protecting your modesty. Gildor, did you also have an extra tunic packed? If so, do you want to retrieve it or may I?"

Gildor waved a hand, indicating that Arador was allowed to seek out the extra bit of clothing, and started to assist Sirius. He was having troubles untying the rabbit hide and finally, Gildor resorted to using his belt knife to cut the hide at the sides. While his knife was drawn, he then did the same right away for Harry. Once he had placed his knife back in its sheath, Gildor was hit in the head by his own extra tunic. Giving a mock scowl towards the now sniggering Ranger, Gildor helped Harry into the clothing. Standing up and looking at his two charges, Gildor could only hope that they were able to procure the proper sized clothing on the marrow as the little ones were positively drowning in the adult tops.
"This will do for now, as Arador has stated. Now, as much as I find it distasteful, you will have to make do tonight with the chamber pots and a lack of bathing. In the morning, we shall at least be given a pitcher and basin for the washing of hands and faces, then later on, while on the road once again, we will have access to several streams and will be able to clean ourselves better. A truly proper bath will have to be kept until we arrive at our journey's end," Gildor stated as he reached under the bed and pulled out a chamber pot. He then aided the elflings as they made use of it, before sliding it out in the hallway to be emptied. He was not worried about himself, as he would sneak out later to attend to his needs, and Arador could simply stroll out to do as needs must without any worry.

Gildor then tucked Sirius into one bed and Harry into the other. Giving Arador a look and waving a graceful hand towards the occupied beds, Gildor waited until the other male gave a nod towards the bed that Sirius was in before divesting himself of his weapons and several layers of his own clothing. Once clad solely in his own tunic, Gildor slid under the covers of the bed Harry was occupying. He pulled the tiny form close to his own and lay there, Harry's head nestled onto his chest. Raising a hand, he began to gently stroke the baby fine, ebony locks, humming a quiet lullaby as he did so and giving thanks and praise once again to the Valar for such a miracle as he drifted into his own well-deserved slumber.

Chapter End Notes

I'm defending my lack of aggressive orcs and whatnot on the roads by the fact that, even though the roads are rough and dangerous, they are not as deadly as occurs later as this is set before the Hobbit and the build up from the sourcerer of Dol Guldur. A special thanks to all of those who've read, reviewed, alert'd, and fav'd. It really means a lot to me and I've stepped up my writing times to try and get more chapters written so that I may move onto a twice-monthly posting. Fingers are crossed!
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

I was able to write two chapters already this month and am working away at the third, so here is the extra chapter that I said I would post if that got accomplished.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Harry woke up slowly, confused by the softness and warmth he found himself in after so very many weeks spent sleeping in the wilderness and making due with what minor bits of comfort he and Siri were able to scrape together. He gently rubbed at his tired eyes, clearing away the dried tears that were attempting to seal the lashes together. Once that was done, Harry started to look around at the room he was currently residing in, jogging his memory in the process at how he, and his traveling companions, ended up here.

It was obviously an attic room, as the room was small with a ceiling that was almost touching the floor at the sides of the room to where it soared upwards into a high peak overhead. Some care had been spent to make the room cozy and inviting as tongue and groove woodwork had been used on the ceiling overhead, there were braided rag rugs on the wood floor beneath, and the lone, tiny window that graced the room was well hung with heavy curtains that were not completely drawn, allowing the early morning sunlight to stream into the tiny space and light it up. A small nightstand was placed between the sturdy beds, under the window, and was playing host to a currently unlit lantern.

Harry lifted his head slightly and could make out a large lump on the other bed, but was unable to make out any details as the blankets were well and truly pulled up. Deciding that he had seen all that there was to see in the direction he was currently facing, Harry slowly and carefully rolled over and promptly found himself face to face with the tall, androgynous, blond male that had been so easily carrying him through the woods for the last three days, only allowing Harry brief periods of walking in order to stretch his legs. The elf's face was relaxed in slumber, and Harry was able to study him to his heart's content.

Or at least he was until his stomach decided to make itself known to him with a small grumble and a feeling of emptiness. He and Siri made have been eating well for the last three days as they traveled with the experienced, older males, but it didn't make up for the previous two months of scrounging that the two of them had been doing. Even with Sirius' luck in trapping rabbits, and Harry's unbelievable luck, more of a knack really, in finding wild, edible flora, the two of them had
been merely subsisting, not thriving, and Harry's stomach was obviously interested in continuing the well-fed trend it had going on. Gathering up his courage, Harry decided to do something about it and reached out a hand.

The second his tiny, delicate hand touched itself lightly to the shoulder of the sleeping elf, Harry found himself pinned beneath the intense azure gaze of Gildor. Fortunately for his peace of mind, the intensity of the gaze immediately dropped off and instead, Harry was graced with a blinding smile. Pleased with the response, Harry decided to set to voice his immediate needs.

"Breakfast?"

Gildor chuckled warmly at hearing his request, but to Harry's stomach's immense satisfaction, the elegant male gave a small nod of his head before rising from their shared bed. After a brief bit of stretching, Gildor gracefully slid around the foot of the bed and over to the occupants of the other bed. He then placed a cautious hand on the largest part of the mound, causing it to shoot up which made the blankets covering it slide down and reveal Arador. But it was an Arador like Harry and never before seen in the previous days.

The Ranger's light brown hair with its blond highlights was tousled and snarled. Although he had shot up, with both eyes wide open, at the gentle touch Gildor bestowed upon him, the second that he realised who touched him and where he was, the wide open eyes began to slide their way back into rest. He then gave a jaw breaking yawn that he failed to cover completely with his large, well calloused hand.

"Yes?" Arador mumbled as he stretched up to the ceiling, gently twisting his torso side to side. The smaller lump at his side gave a protesting grumble as it moved closer to Arador, causing the older man to give a wryly amused smile and lean back against the headboard as he ceased his movements.

"Have you given thought to how we are to procure the means to break our fast, yet?" Gildor quietly asked, well aware of the bright, emerald hued eyes, trust shining brightly in their depths,
following his every move. "I have been queried by my bed mate about providing such."

A low, rumbling growl punctuated Gildor's last statement, followed by a quiet giggle, and the piping voice that all had come to associate with Harry.

"Hungry!"

Arador smiled and let out a small chuckle while shaking his head, before giving his answer.

"Indeed I did. Last night when I retrieved our bags I made a quick stopover in the kitchens. The cook knows that I shall come down in person to collect our trays. She is neither to send them up with one of the hired hands, nor will she be waiting on either of us to join the masses at the tables. So then," Arador smoothly slid out and away from the small mound of blankets crowding against him and rose to his feet beside the bed. "I shall be but a moment or two."

The ranger quickly slid on his breeches and his belt that still bore his edged weaponry, leaving his tunic untucked, then strode out of the door. Harry, pleased with the fact that his hunger would soon be satisfied, bounced out of the warm bed, the vastly oversized tunic he had been lent falling off of one shoulder and trailing on the wooden floor behind his dainty, bare feet. Curiosity burning within him, Harry clambered onto the low nightstand between the two beds and peered out of the thick, bubbled, wavy glass onto the town that he had been unable to see any of last night.

From his high vantage point, Harry was able to make out a small hill at the edge of town that seemed to have many round doors set into the mounded earth. Closer in, there were several wooden buildings, none as tall as the inn that they were staying in, but all crowned with thatch and sporting smoking chimneys. Looking downwards, Harry could see that the streets in the town were all like the one they had used last night as they made their way to the inn: dirt turned to thick mud, with several standing puddles indicating that it had rained recently, and what little greenery growing on the roads' edges all beaten down. Harry wasn't able to see directly below his window because of the angle, but what little he could see led him to the thought that there was a corral of some kind that was holding livestock. The fact that he could clearly hear several large, farm animals such as cows and
horses reinforced that impression. Harry only saw a couple of townspeople on the limited number of paths he could see from his place at the window, and the few he saw all had a large basket in hand and looked to be in a hurry to get somewhere.

His attention was pulled from watching a stocky boy with curly, brown hair and bright, rosy cheeks eating an apple as he strolled down the hill into town when small arms wrapped around him and pulled him onto the other bed.

"Oomph!" Harry grunted as he landed, then before he could properly get his bearings, he was rolled over and pinned under the heavier weight of Sirius. Scowling up at his Godfather, Harry huffed at a lock of hair that fell into place over his left eye. "Yes? Did you want something?"

"Yep!" Sirius chirped. "Revenge! You sent away my warmth, which woke me up, and so you are going to pay."

And with that said, Sirius began to run his fingers over the sides of his Godson, making the tiny boy squirm and twist as he sought a means of escape from the fingers that happily dug into his very ticklish ribs.

"N-no! S-sor-ry Si-Siri! Hung-gry!" Harry choked out in between bright peels of laughter, the joyous sounds escaping his lips as Sirius continued tickling him. Gildor letting out his own bits of quiet laughter as he watched and listened, unable and unwilling to deny the joy in his heart at the sights and sounds of the two younglings in play.

A quiet knock at the door halted any further bits of mischief, both tiny heads turning to give their full attention to what was occurring when Gildor gracefully slid over to the door and, after a quiet question through the wood, opened it fully to allow Arador and the vastly oversized and overfilled tray he was holding, inside the room. Harry immediately pushed an unprepared Sirius off of him, causing the other to land with a grunt on the floor, and bounced off of the bed once again. Gildor made him wait on the food only long enough to wash up with some of the stale water that was within the canteens before allowing Harry to quench his hunger.
After all had had the chance to break their fast with the inn's hearty fare, a quick discussion was held between the two adults while the children picked over the remains of the meal. It was quickly decided that Arador would get the mounts saddled and have them waiting down in the attached stables, while Gildor would collect the bags and the younglings. Sirius, it was decided, was tall enough that he would wear Arador's cloak and so could pass as a Halfling, and Harry would simply be carried again by Gildor, and the three of them would leave the town and settle out in the forest, where there was less of a chance of discovery by a too curious townsperson.

Arador was the only one who could enter the market without causing too much of a commotion, and so would be the one to shop for two pairs of children's breeches, shirts, soft leather slip-on shoes, and a pair of short cloaks. If possible, Arador would also purchase a pair of daggers and leather belts for Harry and Sirius, but both adults knew that such weapons bought here would be vastly inferior to the craftsmanship of the elves and so would count it of little issue if such could not be procured.

Once their course had been decided upon, it was a matter of only moments for Arador to leave the room, leaving Gildor to pack away the few items brought out of the bags. A bit of spare leather was found and used to cinch up the extra fabric when the cloak Sirius was expected to wear turned out to be too large for him to handle and was the cause of several falls as he moved to the door. Giving the room one last look to ensure that they had everything, Gildor helped Harry get into position on his back, then swirled his cloak over the both of them. He looped the pack handles carefully over his shoulder, his elven heritage allowing him to take to notice of the weight, then reached down and placed a gentle hand on Sirius' shoulders.

"It is time. Remember: do not speak, keep calm, and I will lead the horses out on foot after attaching the packs and placing Sirius onto one. Once out of sight of the town, I will set Harry on the other mount as we make for the clearing that Arador will expect to meet us in. Your too long, borrowed tunics should protect your skin from chafing itself on the leather saddles for the short amount of time you will find yourselves riding."

And with those last words, Gildor opened the door and took the lead as they made their way down the steps, through a common room that was far less rowdy then the night before, and out the back door. Arador had clearly made short work of saddling the horses as both mounts were tethered to a ring set into a post near the door. Gildor made a small, satisfied hum that Harry only heard because he was so close. Gildor set down the packs and gave a quick check to the cinch straps, only
having to tighten one a bit as he found it to be a smidgen loose. He then lifted the packs and tied them in place behind the cantle, making sure that the weight was well balanced and well padded, not wanting the horse to get a sore.

Stooping down, Gildor swept Sirius up and placed him on the taller horse, which was a light grey with fine lines and long, elegant legs. The other mount, a dusty looking brown with white socks and a white blaze, made to crowd against Sirius' legs once he was up, but Gildor put a halt to that. Seeing a stable boy making his way over to them, Gildor freed the reins from the ring and began to lead the way over to the gate, giving a graceful wave of his hand that had the boy switch direction and race over to open the gate for him. As they passed through the opening, Gildor reached into his belt pouch and pulled out a small copper coin, which he tossed to a very pleased looking lad.

They kept to the back alleys this time, instead of the main street that they entered on last night. It was still only a matter of minutes to reach the nearest gate, which was wide open at this time of morning and allowing a steady stream of farmers and their wares into the village of Bree. Unlike last night, where the guard on duty questioned them before letting them enter, the lone gate guard merely waved them through with a lazy gesture before he moved over to assist a farmer whose crates of chickens had come loose, threatening to spill the feathered contents. Gildor led them around the outside of the village until they had come to face the east road, at which point he strode off confidently down the empty road.

Perhaps a quarter of an hour later, Gildor pulled the horses to the side of the road. Stilling the horses, he cocked his head to one side and listened intently. Hearing nothing, he ground tied the horses before pulling Harry off of him and placing him onto the stocky, brown mount. Picking up the reins to once again lead the way, Gildor decided that it was safe enough to talk quietly.

"We shall only travel just a bit further down the road, perhaps another quarter turn of the glass, if that. There will be a bit of running water where we shall be waiting for Arador to rejoin us, which will be used to refill canteens as well as see to a bit of a scrub up for us. I have a small bar of travel soap in my pack which will be put to good use on those hides of yours, little ones."

It was readily apparent that Gildor had traveled this way before and well knew of what he spoke, as it was indeed only another fifteen minutes later that found the small group pulling off of the road and making its way into the cool shadows under the tall, green trees. The gentle trickle of water greeted them as they entered a miniscule clearing just inside of the woods. In fact, calling it a clearing
seemed to be a bit misleading as there was only room within for the two mounts: two mounts that Gildor quickly tied up to a pair of saplings with enough slack in the reins for the horses to do a bit of grazing. He then lifted off first Sirius, then Harry, from the horses backs. Once on the ground, Gildor assisted the two elflings in the removal of the small bit of clothing they had on, laying what he removed onto several low branches to air out. He then, after a quick rummage through the pack on the on tall, light gray horse that netted him a small chunk of lavender scented soap and a scrap of fabric, herded the two children to where the sound of running water was the loudest.

What greeted their eyes was the merest trickle of clear water that ran out of the side of a low hill, over several mossy-green rocks, then disappeared once more into the earth. Gildor knelt near the site where the water sprung forth, reached forth and wet the scrap of fabric he held, then rubbed the chunk of soap hard until his hands and the cloth abounded with a rich lather. Setting down the soap, Gildor gave a sharp gesture with his head that had both Sirius and Harry crowding right up to him. As soon as the little ones were within easy reach, Gildor began to scrub at them. Starting with their faces, and oh, how he wished that he could wash the locks that were beginning to hang limp and greasy, Gildor put the soap to good use. The sand he had used in the clear steams they camped beside did it's job well enough, but the soap he finally had access to was far better.

It took a good deal of scrubbing and time until Gildor counted himself as satisfied. Once they arrived at Imladris, more could be done, but for now, the precious miracles were as clean as they were going to get. He rinsed out his soap rag until it ran clean, then set about removing the soap from the elflings' soft skin. Again taking several long minutes to do so as he had no wish to miss any soap, as doing such would only lead to dry, itchy skin and much irritation on the sensitive skin of the younglings.

Setting his rag down next to his travel soap, Gildor looked over the twosome with a harsh eye. Satisfied with his work, Gildor rocked back onto his heels before standing tall over the tiny forms of his peoples' most cherished treasure. Looking down, he ignored the silvery-grey and emerald-green stares and instead ran his eyes over the finished product of his labor. The two elflings were thinner than he, or any other elf, would ever want, but their beautiful, expressive eyes were lit from within by happiness, their soft, fair skin glowed with health, and it was clear that both were intelligent, well-adjusted children. At that last thought, Gildor mentally frowned.

"How old are the two of you? I do not think that it has ever been stated in any of the tales you have shared with either Arador or I. I have been merely guessing at your respective ages, but an actual count of your years would be much appreciated."
"I'm thirty-five," Sirius answered. "And Harry is fifteen."

Gildor felt his eyes widen in shock.

"Thirty-five? Fifteen? Truly? I had thought the two of you to be older. Or at least in truth, for you, Sirius, to be older as you are quite tall," Gildor's voice wavered, his shock was so great. "Harry could barely be considered as a child, just out of toddlerhood as he is. And Sirius, you have another fifteen years of your own to be considered as a teen, if the youngest of such. It...I..."

Gildor shook his head sharply, clearing it of the shock and fog that befuddled his thoughts.

"No matter. Such may be debated later, once we are safely within the well-warded lands of Imladris and have the Lord Elrond at hand. For now, allow me to lift the two of you up so that I may carry your well-cleaned selves back to our clearing where we shall await our missing compatriot, thus keeping your well-clean hides as such."

No sooner said than done as Gildor fitted his actions to his words, making short work of scooping up a naked child in either arm. At the small clearing where the horses were tethered, Gildor placed his armfuls down on a thick patch of grass, asked them to wait there, grabbed the canteens off of the horses, then quietly strode back to the trickle of water.

While they waited, Harry leaned into Sirius, the latter of which raised a hand and ran his fingers through the former's long, greasy hair. After a short while, Harry voiced a question to Sirius, which started a small, quiet debate between the two of them. So caught up in their discussion were they, that neither noticed when Gildor arrived back in the clearing, paused, then made his way over to the mounts where he put away the now-filled canteens.
"Ho there, my little ones. What intense speech the two of you are having with one another. Would one of you grace me with your thoughts, so that I might know what has absorbed your attention?" Gildor gave the two a small, gentle smile.

Harry fidgeted, nudging Sirius with a pointed elbow, only to get a finger that dug into his very ticklish sides in return. As he fell to the ground, laughter once again spilling from his pink lips, Gildor made a lunge and caught him just before he made contact with the earth.

"Ah, ah, ah little one. You are quite clean after a good deal of work on my part, and I would be most appreciative if you would remain as such," Gildor's gentle smile never faltered as he took the opportunity presented and hugged Harry tight against him, savoring the contact with the beautiful, precious child.

"Alright," Harry readily responded, his arms snaking around the older elf as he happily snuggled in. "I was thinking that mine and Sirius' names don't fit, and that we should ask for something new that fit in better here, so that we don't stand out so much. What do you think?"

Gildor easily met the bright, jeweled-hued eyes gazing up at him with trust burning brightly within their depths. Gently smoothing away a stray lock of hair that had fallen into the delicate face looking up at him, Gildor gave the query the thought which it deserved before speaking up.

"I think that if that is what you wish, then that is what shall be done. Perhaps, if you know the meaning of your names, a name could be chosen that matches well with the ones your parents have already bestowed upon you?"

Sirius looked contemplative before responding.

"Well I know that "Harry" means "ruler". Ruler of the army, ruler of the estate, home ruler."
Not that his parents picked it with that in mind, as they named Harry after a favorite grandfather," Sirius paused briefly, clearing gathering his thoughts before continuing on. "Um, I was named according to my family's tradition of giving children names based in astronomy. "Sirius" was the brightest star in our heavens and was named after a God of an ancient people known as Egyptians."

"Well then," Gildor snaked out a hand and pulled Sirius flush against him, giving the youngling a tight squeeze, and getting a squeak of surprise in reward. "Marcaunon would be the nearest equivalent to "Harry" that we have. So if that is agreeable, then that is what Harry shall now be know as. I shall inform Arador of it. I shall also introduce you as thus once we arrive at Imladris, only informing Lord Elrond and those he takes counsel from, of the name you went by in your home world.

"Sirius, you are perhaps a bit more difficult to name, although the traditions of your family suit you well," Gildor adjusted himself so that he was seated on the thick grass with a naked child seated on either leg, getting comfortable and knowing that he had the time to spare for a bit of a tale as they were waiting on Arador's return to do any thing else. "I know that I have relayed somewhat of Lord Elrond's tale, as the Lords Eluréd and Elurín who are his Uncles are also your distant ancestors and the ones that gifted you with the blood of the Eldars. Their younger sister was Elwing, who was born away safely to the Grey Havens where she met, and later wedded, Eärendil."

"Now this is where your apt name comes into its own. Eärendil is known as the Mariner and, after much trials that he and his wife, Elwing the White, overcame, he was gifted with the watch over one of the Silmarils. He wears the gem as he sails on his ship, Vingilot, through the heavens. Now, when first Vingilot was set to sail in the seas of heaven, the star was named Gil-Estel, the Star of High Hope, by those who saw it as they were without hope at the time. It is the brightest star in our heavens."

Gildor paused in his story telling, pulling Sirius slightly away from his body so that he could better see him.

"Perhaps you have one trait that is stronger than another and we could work with that and the word "gîl", meaning star or bright spark," Gildor queried the young elf.
"Mischief," Marcaunon decisively stated before Sirius could state his own wishes. His reward was yet another poke to his sensitive side. As he attempted to squirm away, he could hear Sirius give his wry affirmation of Marcaunon's assessment.

"Well in that case...," Gildor trailed off, then began to speak his thoughts. "Perhaps "trastad" or "rashwe", but that is more along the lines of causing trouble rather than the name for mischief itself. Mayhap "tass" might be the most appropriate. I must say that Gîltass does have a pleasing sound as it rolls off of the tongue. And perhaps it might give fair warning to those who will be meeting you in the future, troublesome star," Gildor gently teased.

Sirius stared at Gildor for a long moment before giving a decisive nod of his dark head.

"I think that I like that. Gîltass I mean. And Har-I mean Marcaunon, had a good point about fitting in. Where we were from doesn't matter any more, we're here now and this is going to be our home."

Gildor smiled sweetly and gently squeezed his precious armfuls closely to his chest. Mandos aid him. They were so young, yet at times, they were so mature. He quietly vowed to himself that he would do all that he could to assist these living treasures in having the remainder of their childhood be all that it should be: playing, laughing, learning, and, most of all, loving. They would find themselves wanting for nothing, and never again would they have to fend for themselves.

Once he released them from the spontaneous hug, Gildor spent the remainder of the time waiting on Arador's arrival by teaching the twosome an elfling's clapping game. It was both fun, and began the process of teaching the elflings some of the necessary muscle control and coordination needed for future weapon lessons. They were able to get in several rounds, each one faster than the last, before Arador finally strode into the clearing; although, with their superior hearing, the three elves had heard the Ranger coming for a while, even over the quiet clapping sounds and happy giggles of the game.
Gildor carefully stood once Arador was within the small clearing and turned to face his returned companion. The lanky Ranger had a small bundle of cloth under one arm and a satisfied air about him, allowing Gildor to arrive at the conclusion that the market trip had been a success. Stepping slowly towards Arador, Gildor was easily passed by a pair of dark haired, laughing boys as they sped around him. Speeding up himself, Gildor halted the younglings just before they crashed into Arador's legs by the simple method of a hand on their shoulders. Ignoring the way both flushed, happy faces turned up to look at him with questions swimming in their beautiful eyes, Gildor gave a small nod of his head towards Arador and moved one of his hands to over his heart.

"Chieftain Arador of the Dúnedain: it it my honor and pleasure to introduce to you the foundlings Gîltass and Marcaunon, descended in the right line from the House of Thingol, King of Doriath and High King of the Sindar by means of his son and Heir, Dior Eluchîl," as Gildor introduced the two, he placed his free hand on the head of the respective elfling he was introducing.

Arador had paused in confusion at Gildor's actions, but as the tall, blond elf continued speaking the confusion cleared up and a look of pleased comprehension took its place. Once Gildor finished his introduction, Arador reached out his unoccupied hand and clasped hands with each child in turn.

"I, Arador the fourteenth Chieftain of the Dúnedain, descendent of Elros Tar-Minyatur the first King of Númenor, who was in turn the child of Eärendil of Gondolin and the brother of Elrond of Imladris, am honored and pleased to meet the descendants of the lost ones and give thanks to the Valar for the arrival of such a day."

And then Arador completely changed the tone when he reached out and ruffled the darks locks that belonged to Gîltass, getting a whine and a pout for his efforts. Chortling at the adorable sight, he began to unwrap the bundle he had returned with.

"Now then, perhaps we may see about dressing the little ones and getting on our merry way? We still have many more days of traveling before us to reach the Last Homely House."

Chapter End Notes
I used the site

www.ambar-eldaron.com

to find the names I gave to Harry and Sirius. They will be referred to as such throughout the rest of the story, with, perhaps, the occasional use of their born names as affectionate nicknames and slip-ups.

The only words I could find for mischief:

trouble: Trastad, tass, or Rashwe
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Just a tiny bit early as I will be out and about tomorrow...lucky all of you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was indeed many more days of travel before the buildings of Imladris shown through the trees and the haunting, beautiful, and melodious singing of the elves could be heard brightening the air. The journey had not been too difficult, with the minor exception of the torrential rain that fell on the second day out of Bree.

~~~~~Flashback~~~~~

The day had begun well enough, if a bit on the overcast side. The four travellers broke their fast with some leftover game meat and a bit of travel bread, then saddled and mounted their horses: Gildor having Gîltass ride with him on his tall grey mount, and Arador riding with Marcaunon on his brown steed. The entire time, there was a sense of urgency about Gildor, who had taken the night watch stating that he had no need for true slumber until they reached Imladris. Gildor had hurried them through breakfast, only taking the time for a mouthful of bread before seeing to the saddling of the mounts. As he did so, he would occasionally cock his head to the side and pause in his actions as he looked up through the leaves that moved in a heavy breeze, before shaking his head and going back to what he was doing. Once they were mounted and moving, Gildor finally gave voice to his unusual actions.

"It seems that we will be travelling in foul weather today. The air is laden with moisture and the winds are turning violent in the treetops. I would wish to get as far down the road as possible before the upcoming storm renders such travel impractical. If naught else," Gildor continued on with. "I have no desire to ride out a storm under the heavy boughs of the forest lest they come crashing down on our heads. Perhaps we will be able to reach the shelter of Amon Sûl before the weather turns too foul, as the hill is only a half's day ride from here. Although uncomfortable, as it promises no true shelter, it would be by far the safer option as there are no great trees near it and the dells below would offer somewhat of a barrier from the winds."
"Indeed, Weathertop is our most promising destination," Arador agreed, twisting slightly as he reached behind him and retrieved a bundle of fabric that, after a bit of shaking out, revealed itself to be a pair of cloaks, one being much larger than the other. "I had hoped to avoid such a storm, 'though this is the season for them. Such is our luck apparently."

He did not say a further word as he swung his cloak over himself and fastened it securely, Gildor doing the same with his own cloak, both adults ensuring that the elflings were also well covered, both in their own smaller cloaks, as well as seeing to it that the younglings were enclosed by the much larger cloaks of the adults seated behind the small bodies.

It was just as well that they did so, as the winds that had been seemingly content with playing amongst the top most boughs, began to pick up shortly after that, sending heavy gusts whipping down the East-West Road. At first the gusts, while fierce, were sporadic, but as they rode, the winds increasingly blew from behind them. Arador felt Marciaun stiffen slightly in his arms, then heard, although very faintly to his less sensitive hearing, a low rolling rumble of thunder in the distance. A gust of wind followed right after, but this gust felt as though it had come from the depths of winter: laden with cold and the promise of ice.

The trees surrounding them had been creaking and groaning out their protests at the harsh treatment the wind was giving them, but Arador now heard the alarming sounds of branches being shaken loose and crashing downwards. He gave his mount a slight nudge, urging it to go from a fast walk to a trot, the shivering and tiny whimpers of distress his charge was giving off encouraging his decision. For while he had no desire to risk straining his mount as cold, unstretched muscles might do to it, they had been walking long enough that he felt confident a trot would not be that much of a risk in the face of the storm that was baring down on their necks. Gildor obviously agreed with his decision, as the elf said not a word against the increase in speed, but instead spurred his mount up alongside.

Arador grabbed his precious charge tightly and hunched over him when the promise the wind had of ice came true in the form of hail that burst without warning from the dark, turbulent clouds peaking through the tossing, overhead boughs. He winced at the feeling of the hard ice pelting against his back, trying his hardest to ignore the loud cries of fear from Marciaun, who was clutching his arm and convulsively tightening his tiny fingers around it every time Arador grunted from the sting of an impact. He was only grateful that the hail was neither as large as he had ever seen and that the leaf-laden branches overhead provided some form of protection.
And then, just as suddenly as it had started, the hail ceased its merciless assault.

Arador was cautiously straightening up when a bright flash tore through the sky, followed shortly afterwards by a deep, rumbling growl. He turned to Gildor, only to see Gildor turning towards him. Both nodded decisively at one another, then each turned their full attention back to their respective mounts and charges.

"Hold one, dear one," Arador harshly whispered. "This is going to be a bit of a rough ride, but we must reach some form of shelter as quickly as possible."

He felt a tiny head nodding frantically against his chest. Taking that as agreement that Marcaunon clearly heard him and understood, Arador kicked hard into steed's sides, sending it into a gallop down the road. Hoping against hope that the road would open up to the tors that surrounded Weathertop before the main part of the storm fell upon them. All around them, as they rode at breakneck speeds, heavy branches crashed down and the wind began to howl, stirring up the bits of dust that the hail hadn't smothered and sending it to swirl and dance in the air alongside leaves and twigs. Flashes of lightning would break the darkness and gloom imposed upon them by the storm, deep crackles of thunder would soon follow, easily heard over the wind and branches and loud hoof beats.

A massive branch was flung to earth on the trail before them, only just missing Gildor as he raced on his fine elven bred steed before Arador, the elf barely having enough time to jump over the obstacle. Arador's only option to spur his horse onward, although he had enough of a warning to cue his mount, allowing him to feel the beast's muscles tense and bunch before a great lurch and a sensation of falling before, once again, they were on the ground and racing onwards. Arador was beginning to despair of reaching the safety the openness of the tors would provide when the trees began to thin, then vanish from sight entirely on his left hand side, leaving the road to wind its way through the low hills and dells, with only the occasional stand of dense trees, of the Weather Hills and the old forest on the right.

Arador could feel the relief spread throughout his body, leaving a feeling of lightness behind. It was only a matter of minutes from here to reach Weathertop. A heavy, dull roaring, faintly heard over the near continuous thunder and harsh winds, broke his hope of reaching safety before the heart
of the storm reached them. Sparing a precious second, Arador quickly shot a glance over his shoulder and saw a heavy, dark curtain of rain chasing them down. He brought his focus back up front and braced himself, knowing that the rain would reach him before they could reach their destination.

And he was correct as he had only a brief warning of a few scattered, icy cold drops before the main body of rain poured over him, drenching him and leaving him completely cold and wet in less than a minute. Gasping in shock at the water's temperature, Arador could only give thanks that both Marcaunon and Gîltass were being somewhat sheltered by himself and Gildor as well as their own cloaks. Hopefully the little ones would not receive too much of a chill; for, even though they were of the heartier blood of an elf, Marcaunon and Gîltass were still only younglings and thus were more prone to taking harm from the elements than their older brethren.

Arador reined in his mount somewhat after the rain curtain had roared past. He may have wished to arrive sooner, but the rain, coupled with the dark sky, had seriously curtailed his vision and he had no wish to ride full speed into an injury. There for it took several minutes of plodding along in the deluge before he could make out the towering hill that was Weathertop. Sighing in relief, Arador turned off of the East-West road and road into the shadow of the tall hill, looking for the particular dell that numerous Dûnedain and their elven compatriots had used over the many long years.

He steered his wet, weary mount over the dips and swells, and through the scraggly underbrush, until he finally reached the low trees and gentle bowl that signaled his arrival at the familiar camp. Letting out a sigh of relief, Arador basked in the cessation of heavy rain and wind that the meager shelter provided as it toned the weather down to a somewhat more managable level of misery. Straightening in his saddle, it wasn't all that much of a surprise to see that Gildor and Gîltass had beaten Marcaunon and himself here. The elf had the superior mount, not to mention the far better senses.

Not bothering to halt his mount's placid trudging, Arador simply swung a leg over and simply dismounted on the move, taking care to keep Marcaunon in his arms as he did so. Once on the ground, it was a short, simple matter to lead his horse over to where Gildor's horse stood and tie him up alongside, making sure to leave enough slack so that if the horse desired, he would be able to graze a bit while they waited out the storm. Arador then moved across the small dell, seeking out the crude lean-to where he was sure to find his other two travelling companions.
Sure enough, after he had encouraged Marcaunon inside of the rough shelter and followed immediately after, he found Gildor holding tightly to a small, well-bundled lump as he sat on the ground.

"Marcaunon, please come over here," Gildor calmly asked, raising his voice just enough to be heard over the elements. "I have no need for my cloak as an aid to keep warm, so it will be better served to wrap up two elflings."

Marcaunon wasted no time and scrambled across what little space separated them, whimpering loudly every time a loud crack of thunder was heard overhead. Gildor simply opened a fold in the fabric, revealing Gîltass's huddled form to the very obviously unhappy elfling. Marcaunon wrapped his tiny arms tightly around Gîltass and tried to burrow into the other. Gildor simply shook his head as he re-covered the two. Bending his head down to ensure that he was heard over the raging forces of nature surrounding them, Gildor began to sing a quiet, elven lullaby, rocking carefully as he did so.

Arador only listened with half an ear, trusting completely in Gildor as he cared for the twosome. The rest of his attention was given over to the storm, with a small part of his mind drawn against his will to the heavy, sodden clothing that was rapidly chilling his already cold body. Several quick sneezes burst from him in rapid succession.

"Your pardon," Arador smiled sheepishly, the back of his hand held up against his nose. "I should not be surprised given the condition I find myself in, but I must confess, I had not thought that it would start quite so soon."

~~~~~End Flashback~~~~~

They had ended up spending the entire rest of the day huddled in the lean-to, trying to ignore the leaks and the cold drafts. The storm had raged for the entire rest of the day, only petering out sometime in the night. After a bit of discussion between the two adults, an extra day was spent in the dell, trying to dry out as much gear as they were able and giving thanks for the elven made packs that
they traveled with, as not much in them had gotten wet. The horses were also scrutinized to ensure that no harm came to them from the hard riding, then having to stand around in the cold rain with no proper shelter for them. Gildor felt that their muscles were perhaps a bit tighter than would normally be acceptable, but they had no hot spots indicating true damage. If they kept to an easy pace for the next several days, there would be no risk of permanent injury to the mounts.

And so that was what they did. It added on several days to their travel time, but not only was it better for the steeds, it was also easier on Arador. The Ranger had come down with a chest cold, according to Gildor, and so any heavy exertion had him gasping and wheezing for breath. The leisurely pace also stood in good stead for the elflings, who were worn out from the trauma of the cold winds and rains. Marcaunon also had been somewhat traumatized by the loud, staccato cracks of thunder, admitting to the adults that the noise hurt his ears and frightened him.

It was with no little relief that Gildor and Arador finally rode across the Bruinen Ford that marked the border to Imladris on the West. As they splashed through the shallow waters, both adults knew that they out watchers had spotted them, and the tiny cloaked bundles seated before them, and sent word onwards. Gildor was grateful for that: it meant that there would be someone ready to meet them at the gates who would take their mounts and see to their care, someone else would see to it that the packs were taken to the appropriate rooms, and someone would be there to escort them to Elrond, or Erestor if the Lord was otherwise occupied.

Gildor smiled slightly, looking forward greatly to the shock and wonder that would accompany the revealing of just who was under the cloaks. As they rode, the valley gradually opened up and allowed the riders glimpses of the buildings before they turned the last corner and there was Imladris in all of its undying glory. It was a truly breathtaking sight with the graceful arches everywhere open to the seasons. The larger buildings blended in well to the surrounding nature with trees encouraged to grow alongside the structures. A covered, open-aired walkway allowed for passage between two of the buildings, tall stone arches supporting its weight over the river passing beneath that cascaded out and into the rest of the valley, ‘til it was shallow enough to cross at the Ford.

Gildor relaxed as he heard the singing wafting throughout the early dusk and he savored the sweet, cool air as they rode over the narrow, stone arch bridge with the waters of the Bruinen raging underneath. He could not stop himself from humming faintly along to the familiar tunes as the tension he was under gradually lifted from him. They had finally arrived and the knowledge that they had done so safely with the precious treasures he and Arador had found was almost too much.
As they rode through the open gates and over to the stables, Gildor knew that he would have to find something active to do that would release the remaining bits of tension that being on alert for days on end had done to him. Perhaps he could find Glorfindel and persuade the other into a spar. Getting thrashed over the training grounds would certainly assist in dissipating the state of alertness he found himself laboring under.

He was drawn from his wandering thoughts when his mount halted. Looking up and glancing around, Gildor was pleased to note that the expected aid was already busy. As he dismounted, he lifted Marcaunon, who had chosen to ride with him that morning, before letting his steed be led off. Settling Marcaunon better in his arms, he could feel one tiny hand fist itself tightly into the fabric of his tunic and the other little hand slide upwards against his chest until it came to rest level with Marcaunon's face. Looking downwards, Gildor was able to catch a glimpse of the tiny elfling's delicate face. Marcaunon's eyes were drooping heavily and his thumb had once again found its way past the soft petal-pink lips.

"'M tired," Marcaunon lisped around the digit, even as he snuggled in tighter against Gildor's muscled chest.

"Shh...I know sweet one," Gildor softly whispered as he gently rubbed a hand up and down the sleepy elfling's back. "Please hold on just a few moments longer."

Gildor then re-adjusted the cloak's hood so that the tiny face was completely covered. He felt the delicate body in his arms relax further as it became darker and could hear the faint breathing begin to even out and slow down. Resigned to the fact that Marcaunon was going to at least take a bit of a nap in his arms, Gildor merely tightened his grip and began to look around to see who had come to escort them.

A harsh, wet cough interrupted his scan of the courtyard. Turning to look worriedly over his shoulder, he wasn't surprised to see that Arador had curled his body around Gîltass, holding the child tightly in his arms even as his head was turned sharply to the side as yet another coughing fit burst from him.
"That, perhaps, is what we should see to first. Do you not agree?" announced the wry sounding voice that Gildor easily recognized as belonging to Erestor.

"Indeed. That would be my choice, as well," Gildor stated, turning back around.

"Come then, I will take you to where you may be healed. We may discuss more once we are there and Arador's comfort has been seen too."

Gildor and Arador strode off behind the dark haired, slender, and slightly short elf who had wasted no more time talking as he turned and immediately walked away. As they moved along the paths, Gildor and Arador both took care with their charges, ensuring that the fabric that enveloped them did not catch any breezes and flap open, revealing the tiny bodies to all and sundry. Gildor knew that all who lived here would treat the babes as the precious treasures that they were, but to reveal them before Lord Elrond had been informed that the Valar had returned a part of his family to him just wouldn't do.

Erestor could freely admit, as he led the two returning scouts towards the healing rooms, that his curiosity was burning fiercely within him. He was able to draw several logical conclusions from his brief, but thorough, visual exam that he did as he drew up to the two. Neither male had any wounds marring their bodies, that was readily apparent from just seeing them and how they moved. It was also easy to tell that they had no sense of alarm or concern about them from what they had been sent out to scout, instead both were acting normal and indicating that there was naught to be concerned over. The last observations that Erestor had noted were that both males were clutching the bundles of coarsely woven fabric within their arms as though each bundle contained one of the Silmarils. Also there was an air of immense joy and happiness about the two, and Gildor even had a hint of a smile toying about his mouth before Arador's coughing fit.

These small clues occupied his mind and teased him all the way to the healing rooms. Once there, he was going to lead the group into the first room, but Gildor held up a hand halting him. Looking at him in silent inquiry, Erestor was quickly given an answer.
"The lesser room at the end of the hallway would be better for this so that we may deliver our report with out any chance of someone overhearing us," Gildor quietly responded. "We have no bad news to deliver, but what we do have to say is sensitive, none the less. Also, while you would certainly be welcome to sit in on our report, no lesser healer would be welcome other than Lord Elrond as our finds concern him personally."

"Very well," Erestor replied, pulling back his hand from the door he was planning on opening and instead striding to the end of the hallway where a more private room was situated. It was the only room that did not have a window within the room as there were the occasional times where someone was wounded badly enough that the healers wished to keep the patient out of all drafts. Once the patient was healthy enough, they would then be moved out of that room and into one of the others that would give them natural light and fresh air to aid in their recovery.

Erestor opened the door and waved the two inside with a graceful gesture of his hands before pulling the door short after them as he went to find Elrond. On his way out of the hallway, he found one of the other healers and informed her that while there was indeed a patient waiting to be attended to, Lord Elrond had been requested, halting her from entering the room and finding out whatever it was that the two were keeping secret for now.

Once the door had closed behind them, Arador set his burden down on the foot of the bed and promptly sat himself down near the head, not wanting to find out what Elrond would do if his patient had the temerity to think himself well enough to stand around waiting for him. As he watched, Gîltass squirmed his way out of the hooded cloak, then slid to the floor and began to explore the nearly empty and completely clean space after getting an encouraging nod and smile from Gildor.

Gildor began to unwrap his own bundle, swaying gently and humming slightly as he did so. Once Marcaunon had been uncovered, Arador could clearly see why the elf was doing what he was as the littlest elfling was clearly asleep, his mouth suckling around a tiny thumb and his cheeks flushed rosily with his hair a riotous mass of dark curls that went every which way. Gildor began to gently run his long fingers through those dark curls, letting the cloak fall to the floor without a care.

A quiet giggle drew the adults attention away from the sleeping toddler and back to the active child that was exploring the room. Not seeing the one that made the noise anywhere from where he
stood, Gildor moved to the other side of the bed where a bit of movement near the floor caught his attention. Looking downwards, Gildor could see the bed linens swinging slightly.

"Are you under the bed little one?" Gildor asked.

"Yep!" came the proud, but muffled, response.

"May I ask why?"

Before the child could give any answer beyond that of a fit of giggling, the door swung open and Elrond entered the room, closely followed by Erestor, who bore the supplies needed by Elrond to treat what he had been told was a wet, hacking cough. Hearing the childish giggles tinkling brightly in the room caused both arrivals to halt abruptly just inside of the door with a look of shock on their normally composed features before both regained control over themselves once again. Elrond quickly strode forward while Erestor ensured that the carved and inlayed, wooden door was securely shut behind them.

As he strode forward, Elrond could not tear his eyes away from what Gildor's arms held once the scout had turned to face the entrance way and thus revealed what he was holding. Coming even with the blond elf, Elrond reached out a cautious hand and gently, hesitantly traced over the tiny, delicate features of the child sleeping safely in Gildor's arms. Elrond ghosted his fingers over the high cheekbones, down the bridge of the button nose, up and over the fine arch of the eyebrows, and finally allowed himself to touch the tips of the pointed ears that were sticking out of a mess of dark curls.

"How?" Elrond quietly gave voice to the question burning fiercely within him.

"That is quite a story," Gildor was equally quiet in his response. "And a rather long one. One
that Arador and I will happily relay to the both of you while seeing to Arador's treatment.

"But first," Gildor gave a faint smile, "allow me the honor and privilege of introducing to you the foundlings Gîltass and Marcaunon, descended in the right line from the House of Thingol, King of Doriath and High King of the Sindar by means of his son and Heir, Dior Eluchîl. Marcaunon is the one sleeping in my arms and Gîltass is the one hiding under the bed for some unknown reason."

"Two elflings? And descended from Dior Eluchîl? But that could only be by one of my mother's lost brothers, Eluréd or Elurín!" Elrond was reeling from shock and so gracefully collapsed on the bed behind him, still looking up at Gildor and the impossibility sleeping so peacefully in his arms.

A small hand patting his knee drew his attention downward where he saw a child with equally dark, wavy hair and silvery-grey eyes smiling cheekily at him with the same signs of mischief about him as his own twin sons showed. Letting out a huff, Elrond reached down and lifted the child onto his lap.

"As Gildor said, it is a long story," piped up the child currently seated on his lap.

"Well then," Elrond said as he carefully lifted the little one off of his lap and placed him on the bed beside him, thus freeing himself and allowing him to rise up. "Perhaps, if you would all be so kind, you might begin the story and enlighten me as to how this came to be while I see to the needs of our friend, Arador, here."

Elrond waved Erestor over from where he was standing with his back firmly against the door then began his check over of the ill Ranger as Gildor started his tale with how they had cautiously approached a small fire burning in the wilderness where no fire should have been.
And again and as always, thanks to those who've been following along with my story. I deeply appreciate all the reviews I've received as well.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

I have been finding my elven at ambar-eldaron . com

Terms will now be sprinkled throughout and I apologize in advance if they are used poorly or incorrectly. And again, this is based much more on the books.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Marcaunon ran on silent feet, carefully not brushing up against any foliage that might snag a thread off of him or that he might crush and break, thus leaving a clear trail for that which he knew followed after him. Seeing a shadowy hole in the greenery that was near to the ground, and hopefully more likely to be overlooked because of it, the young elf quickly threw himself into the space under the evergreen bush. He flattened himself to the ground and worked on controlling his breathing, not wanting what chased him to find him by the simple expedient of hearing his harsh gasps for air. Once in control over his breaths, Marcaunon cautiously scanned what he could see from his hiding place, trying to keep in mind what his trainers had told him about keeping his bright, jeweled hued eyes from giving away his position by accident.

Just when he thought that he was safe, and was beginning to slightly relax in his hiding spot, a large hand wrapped itself around his ankle and pulled him out, backwards, from where he was hiding.

"Found him!"

Marcaunon twisted and laughed brightly as the one holding him upside down with one hand on his ankle began to use the other hand to tickle his sensitive sides.
"Thought that you could get away didn't you, you little imp? I'll have you know that Elladan and I have found, and used, all of the hiding places in the gardens," Elrohir calmly stated as if he wasn't holding an upside down, laughing and twisting elfling child and tickling him. "Now then, I have a few questions for you and they all revolve around ice cold water and how it was used to awaken myself and my brother this morning."

"I d-don't know an-anything -Stop oh please st-stop!- about it," Marcaunon squealed out as he was mercilessly tickled. "I was get-getting f-fitted before you c-came bellowing d-down the ha-hallway."

Elrohir ceased his assault on the young elfling, turned him upright, and steadied him as he regained his balance and his breath. Once the youngling was more collected, Elrohir knelt down and gathered Marcaunon into his arms, rubbing the thin back gently and voiced another query.

"Why did you run then, tithen pen? If you were indeed getting fitted for your new robes for this evening's celebrations at the time that Elladan and I were yelling and dripping at high speeds down the hallway, then you have no cause for alarm from us."

Marcaunon pulled away slightly and gave Elrohir a look of disbelief. Ignoring Elladan, who had finally just arrived in the patch of cultivated wilderness that was the outermost garden of Imladris, Marcaunon focused all of his attention on the dark-haired elf who was kneeling before him and holding him gently.

"I'm not crazy," Marcaunon firmly stated, resolve burning within his eyes. "I remember what you did last year on my birthday. You yelled out "There he is!", grabbed me and carried me out to the swimming area, where you threw me in. Then you grabbed Giltass where he was laughing on the shore, having followed after us, and threw him in, saying that both birthday boys needed to be sparkling clean on their big day."

"Ah...well, yes we did do that. Huh...," Elrohir gazed sheepishly at Marcaunon as he moved one hand to the back of his neck, a bit of color appearing on his pale cheeks. "I offer my apologies to
you. I must confess that I had forgotten that bit of birthday fun."

"I hadn't," Elladan spoke up with a cheeky grin on his face. "The look on Ada's face was truly priceless that morn when the little ones chased us throughout the whole of Imladris. Dripping water everywhere as they did so with the occasional spray if they waved their hands around, as I remember it."

Marcaunon scowled at the twins, though anyone else would describe it as more of an adorable pout, before suddenly pulling away from Elrohir's embrace with a blinding smile. Almost dancing in place with excitement, Marcaunon couldn't wait to share the news he heard while attending the final fitting for his new attire. While he hadn't seen the need for new finery as his last year's set fit him quite well yet, Heryn Gellam, the head seamstress, would not listen to his well-thought out arguments and had him attend several fittings. Including one this morning that Marcaunon had been roused to attend before the first light of the sun had well and truly broken over the land.

"I heard that Glorfindel is finally arriving back in the valley after so many years spent on his travels," Marcaunon proudly shared. He had wanted to meet the elf Lord since he had first heard Gildor Inglorion speak of him, but Glorfindel, Lord of the House of the Golden Flower, had left to travel during the time that Gildor and Arador had been sent out to discover the facts behind the odd rumors swirling about the forest just outside of the ruins of Fornost. The Lord, therefore, had not been around to meet the elflings that the two scouts returned with, although the news of two elflings being found was sent out via scouts on fast horses to all of the settlements of the Eldar.

"Oh?" Elladan cocked his head to the side and raised an eyebrow, surprise coloring his voice as he continued speaking. "I had not heard that bit of gossip yet. I should, perhaps, not be all that surprised about that fact as Elrohir and I arrived rather late last evening. I do not know what course Elrohir took, but I went straight to my rooms and fell into bed."

Elrohir chuckled lightly as he allowed the still tiny elfling to escape his grasp.

"I had heard of that bit of news already," he calmly stated, rising to his full height. "But, then
again, I was the one to have gone to the kitchens and free us a bit of food this morning before we hunted down the, unfortunately, wrong culprit of the rather rude awakening we had this morn."

Marcaunon skipped around the two, giggling in his excitement. Elrohir and Elladan shared a look and a brief smile with each other over the younger's antics, before snagging a small hand with one of their much larger ones and began to tug the youngling back to the heart of Imladris.

"Ah well," Elrohir calmly stated as he raise his hand, which then lifted Marcaunon and allowed him to swing between himself and his brother. "We may discuss this in more depth while we eat, certainly. For I know that neither my much less intelligent brother nor I have had a chance to do ought other than snag a bit of stuffed bread for a meal since our arrival last evening."

"I must agree with what my far less attractive twin has said," Elladan said with laughter in his voice. "I could certainly find it within myself to sit down and eat a properly prepared, hearty meal in comfort and ease. And perhaps for afters, we could find some honey bread and candied fruit as a treat."

Marcaunon gave a happy grunt at the mention of some of his favorite treats as he continued swinging between the much taller males. He may have turned thirty today, as the day that he and Gîltass were found was judged to be the day that their birth would be celebrated and it had been fifteen years since that memorable occasion, but he had not grown much taller in the intervening years. It was of much concern to Elrond, who, after much studying and several examinations, ruled that Marcaunon had missed far too many essential nutrients at too early of an age, and thus, the tiny elfling would never reach the height that he might have had otherwise with a better beginning to his life.

Marcaunon didn't let the diagnosis bother him and just enjoyed the second chance at having a childhood. And it was a proper one too. He was loved and spoiled and had adults that were truly looking out for him and his best interests, letting him be the child that he had never gotten to be before.
Even Gîltass was enjoying the second childhood, his mischievous nature shining though as he
played tricks on the inhabitants of the valley. The more vicious and bullying style of pranking that he
had done in his previous life no where in evidence as the older elfling was now showered in love and
positive attention, in a way that he had never been in his previous life under the ideals of his dark,
pureblood family and the weight such scrutiny left on him.

Marcaunon giggled when he recalled some of the tricks that Gîltass had played, including a
few that he was able lend his aid on with his affinity for plants. Looking up, Marcaunon saw that
they had arrived at the main building and, after placing his feet securely on the ground, shook his
hands free and raced off, intent on being the first one to the dining hall.

The twins shared a grin and took off after the elfling at a gentle jog, letting Marcaunon beat
them to the dining hall. The three of them entered the room, breathing evenly after their impromptu
little race, and took only a moment to look around before deciding to seat themselves nearest the door
to the kitchens. While there was always some sort of food available in the room, laid out on long
trestle tables, it was the type that kept well and consisted of things that were best eaten cold or were
easily grabbed and eaten on the go. If one wanted something made fresh and hot, it was better to
claim a seat near the kitchen and ask one of the chefs to prepare something.

A quick, non-verbal discussion between Elladan and Elrohir had Elrohir sitting down at the
table next toMarcaunon and Elladan striding onwards to the kitchen, where he ducked his head in
and bespoke a hot meal with the promised sweets for afterwards. Elladan spun in place and almost
danced back to the table after the meal was ordered. Once there, the tall, dark-haired elf simply
collapsed onto one of the chairs opposite the two already sitting there, who were playing a small
game of "Scout" while they were waiting.

The loud manner in which Elladan sat himself easily distracted the other two from the simple
children’s game and focused their attention onto their returning table mate. Elladan merely smiled at
the unimpressed looks the others were sporting and reached out a hand, which he used to ruffle the
dark, curly locks of Marcaunon, getting an adorable whine for his efforts.

"The chef says that it will be only a few moments for something hot to be brought out to us.
He did warn me that with the baking and cooking going on for the celebration this evening, not to
expect anything fancier than a platter of grilled sandwiches and the treats I requested. I assured him
that was fine and that anything brought out would be more than fine and that none of us wished to
place more of a burden on him and his staff."

The three of them passed the time waiting on the sandwiches with a discussion over the most likely culprit of the twin’s rude awakening. In the very short time it took for the platter of steaming meat, grilled cheese, and toasted bread to appear on the table alongside of bowls of fresh greens and lightly sautéed root vegetables with tall, water beaded glasses of chilled fruit juice, it had been decided that Giltass was at the top of the miniscule suspect list. Over the hearty meal, the twins shared memories of Glorfindel, many of them consisting of the renowned elf training them. They also told tales of the many battles he had been in.

Marcaunon sat and listened to everything with eyes wide open. If asked what he had dined on, he would be completely unable to answer as he was so completely wrapped up in the tales being told that he ate without thought or care to what he was placing in his mouth. He knew that he lived with many Sindar who were famous in song and story, but he had met them and taken lessons from them, making them "real" to him. Glorfindel was only a name to him, one that was rich in history and spoken of with much honor.

It was also a name that spoke to something deep within him from the very first time that he had heard it.

As the meal drew to a close, Marcaunon casually picked up a handful of honey bread, wrapped it around another, smaller handful of candied fruit, and gave an absentminded farewell to Elrohir and Elladan as he left to go sit in the gardens with his treat and a head full of stories to think over. He found a secluded bench under an arbor that played host to a climbing rose that was mainly covered in hard, little buds at this time of year with a few early blossoms showing here and there on the vine in a bright, ethereal white amongst the deep, glossy green leaves. Marcaunon sat down and leaned back, bracing his weight against the moss covered stones that were at the back of his hideaway as he took a small mouthful of his treat, chewing thoughtfully on it. Reaching out a tiny, delicate hand, Marcaunon gently stroked along several of the closed up, hard little buds that were within his reach. Each time he did so, a new blossom adorned the vine, perfuming the air with its gentle scent.

Marcaunon had been so lost in his thoughts when he left the dining hall that he failed to notice the twins trailing after him. Elrohir and Elladan, seeing that the too tiny elfling had settled in to think in a quiet bit of garden with his treat in hand as he played with his odd power over nature, quietly
withdrew. Once he had deemed himself far enough away that he wouldn’t disturb Marcaun, Elladan broke the silence.

"Well, now that we have appeased our hunger, shall we seek out the one responsible for our unpleasant awakening?"

"A brilliant thought, my brother," Elrohir flashed a wicked grin at Elladan. "We shall go forth to track down the miscreant and render unto him our vengeance."

The raven-haired twins burst into identical grins that promised mayhem and mischief before slipping into the shadows, intent on tracking down Gîltass and making him pay for that morning. They were so focused that they never saw their father, Lord Elrond, staring at them from the balcony overlooking the garden with a faint smirk playing about his lips and an amused gleam lighting up his eyes. He turned and gracefully paced back into his study, where he re-seated himself back at his desk to attend to his correspondence, what there was of it anyway. As the eras slid past, the greater part of his circle of friends and acquaintances had either passed away and were gathered in the Halls of Mandos, or had sailed away over the sea into the west, setting out for the Undying Lands.

"That should keep the three biggest troublemakers entertained for the day, leaving no time for them to plan out any major disruptions," Elrond quietly stated to himself as he pulled the nearest letter closer to himself. "This evening should be most pleasant. Not at all like what occurred two years ago."

It was several hours later that Elrond capped his ink well and put away his writings for the day. The angle of the sun shining into his study, and the prevalence of shadows filling his room, alerting him to the fact that the day was soon to be over. Which meant that it was time for him to place away his work and withdraw to his suite in order to bathe and dress for the festivities. He slid his chair away from his desk, raised his arms above his head as he stretched, then rose. Elrond slowly made his way across the room until he had reached the door. He had just slipped throught the portal when a childish shout and a thundering noise, coupled with his well-honed instincts, had him flattening himself against the wall and looking back over his shoulder towards the raucous noise.
What he saw made him glad that he had gotten himself out of the way.

Gîltass was sprinting down the hallway, Elladan and Elrohir close on his heels, in an almost repeat of last year's rambunciousness, their feet pounding on the wooden floor. With one glaring difference this time. The three males were all bone dry and sporting identical looks of terror as they raced pell-mell down the corridor with a very wet looking Arwen following a short distance behind them. Elrond was so astonished at the sight that he couldn't contain the laughter that burst forth from him, drawing attention to where he was plastered against the door.

"Ada."

"Ada."

"Gwanur."

The three males barely acknowledged his presence as they ran past, clearly fearing for their lives from the vengeful looking female chasing after them. While Elrond would normally never interfere with anyone seeking justice from the twins or his nephew for one of the pranks the jokers would pull, this time he reached out and snagged his beautiful, dark-haired daughter before she could slip past him. Easily ignoring the water that was now seeping into his own clothing and making him uncomfortably damp, Elrond pulled Arwen tight against him as he embraced his firey-tempered daughter. He kissed her wet locks as he tucked her under his chin and began to lightly sway with her.

"I must say that this is a new look for you, my beloved iell. Perhaps not what I would have suggested for you, but you look as lovely as ever. Would you be so kind as to tell me how this fetching new look came about?"

Arwen giggled quietly, her body relaxing in her Ada's warm and loving embrace, the anger she had been brimming full of flowing away like mist before the sun.

"Ada," Arwen smiled as she basked in the love being given to her. "Gîltass and I had been
walking together when we arrived at a door. He, being such a little gentleman, rushed forward to hold it open for me. When he saw what was on the other side, all such manners deserted him and he sought shelter behind myself as a large amount of water flew through the air, landing on my person and causing the look that my own Ada described as "fetching".

Elrond gave a pleased sounding hum as he clasped Arwen to him one last time before releasing her. Looking down at her, he gently brushed some of her wet locks back behind one sharply pointed ear before placing a light kiss on her upturned forehead.

"While the chaos can be unpleasant at times, we have been truly blessed to have the joy of elflings running around Imladris once again after so very many years. May I suggest that instead of chasing the troublemakers down immediately, you go and slip into a warm bath, followed by dressing for the evening? Save the vengeance for another day when they least expect it. If nothing else, you acting as though the matter was already forgotten will thoroughly confuse them."

A smile lighting up her face, Arwen broke out in bright peals of laughter as she allowed her father to settle one of her hands into the crook of his arm and escort her to her rooms. Leaving her, still laughing, at her rooms, Elrond then walked the few remaining steps to his door. Pausing for a moment before opening the carved, wooden portal, Elrond casually spoke without turning his head in any direction.

"I would be terrified if I was the brothers who caused my sister to be drenched, and would be keeping a sharp lookout for my own safety. And perhaps, would be very interested in going out on patrol as soon as possible to try and escape her wrath."

Elrond then entered his private rooms, the tips of his lips ever-so-slightly twitching upwards, closing the door after himself. A bit further down the corridor, where it turned a corner, three males were flattened against the wall: two adults and one adolescent. The two older males shared an alarmed look with one another while the younger one looked relieved as he began to move away.

"Well," he stated, relief making his voice waver slightly. "I really feel for those brothers. Such
a shame. Time for me to be going if I'm going to be somewhat presentable for the party. See ya!"

With that, Gîltass gave a little wave and raced off down the hallway until he reached his bedroom and slipped inside, leaving the shocked, and increasingly nervous, twins behind. Elladan and Elrohir barely noticed as they were still staring at each other and trying to process the warning their Ada had circumspectly passed along. Apprehension was building within them as they separately remembered other incidents that involved their sister seeking her righteous vengeance. Both twins gave a shudder, grimaced at each other, then trudged off to see to their own preparations for the celebration.

It was only about an hour later that saw the main hall filling up with the residents of the valley, bright light and happy noise spilling out into the darkness of the night through the many windows and the open doors as all came together to celebrate the occasion that brought two elflings to them. Full fires had been laid in the many hearths that adorned the walls and were blazing brightly, lighting the room and pushing back the slight chill that was normal to the evening at this time of year. Small tables with chairs set around them, were scattered throughout the hall. Bright fabrics in a myriad of colors covering the tops. Large pillows were carelessly tossed about on the floor, several of them gathered before the fireplaces where several elves had seated themselves and were singing songs that both clashed and complimented the songs being sung from the other groups, blurring into one harmonious whole.

A long table was set to one side and laden with all manner of delicious food, from venison and coney and game birds to the freshest of fruits and vegetables and mushrooms that could be found so early in the season to a massive variety of breads and sweet treats. The table, if it hadn't been so well made, might literally have been groaning under the weight. In another corner, drinks could be found: tankards of sweet fruit juice and chilled spring water, finely crafted goblets filled with lightly fermented beverages.

Everywhere one looked was a riot of color. The fine silks and velvets and leathers being worn, dyed in bright, eye-catching shades that were only brought out on such occasions. Gems adorned necks, ears, heads, arms, and fingers, catching at the light and flashes of bright fire to catch at the eye.

It was into this joyous chaos that the cause for the celebration entered together, Marcaunon holding tightly to Gîltass's hand and smiling happily as he gazed around the large room, taking it all
in. Gîltass grinned down at his godson, who was more of a younger brother really, enjoying the look on his face, before raising his eyes to take in the room for himself. It was a feast for the senses. The color of the fabrics, the flashing of the gems, the heavy scent of delicious food wafting throughout the air, and the sounds of merriment in the forms of laughter, singing, and happy chatter. Drawing in a breath to fortify himself, Gîltass gently tugged on the smaller hand clasped so trustingly in his own larger hand and led the way into the throng.

As the moved among the crowd, they would pause on occasion to greet those that they knew as well as pausing to be greeted by those that they had not had much chance to get to know. It took some time to move across the floor with all of the stopping and chatting, but they finally arrived at the table laden with the meal for the evening. Helping themselves to plates, the two of them took their time selecting several of their favorites from the crowded table before moving off to the nearest table that offered two free seats. Gîltass set his plate down, saw to it that Marcaunon was seated, then excused himself to fetch beverages for the both of them.

It was only once his plate was securely settled onto the table and he had sat down, that Marcaunon finally turned his attention to finding out who his table mates were. To his joy and surprise, Gildor Inglorion was seated beside him talking animatedly to a male elf sitting just around the corner of the table that he had never seen before who sported long, light-blond hair and carried himself in such a way that screamed "warrior" to Marcaunon. It was also easy to tell, even with the unknown elf sitting down, that he was quite tall. There was also a feeling of great age and power about him, something that Marcaunon had become more sensitive to the longer he lived among his kin.

Marcaunon waited patiently for Gildor to be done speaking before attempting to greet his friend, and as he waited, he couldn't help but overhear part of the conversation, causing him to choke slightly on the bite of duck he had just placed in his mouth when he heard Gildor refer to the other male as "Glorfindel". Coughing loudly, one hand held in front of his mouth and the other pounding away on his chest, his eyes streaming profusely, Marcaunon spun in his seat to fully face towards the elf he had heard so much about and was so very interested in meeting. The commotion he was making drew all of the nearest eyes to him, especially those belonging to his tablemates.

When Glorfindel's extremely light-blue eyes that seemed to know the secrets of the universe met his own jeweled green ones, it felt like a punch to the chest that robbed Marcaunon of what remained of his air, sending the room spinning around him. The last thing he registered as the spinning room faded into blackness with bright starbursts breaking behind his unwillingly closing eyelids was the feeling of unfamiliar hands catching at him and a deep, powerful voice whispering faintly heard words.
"I did not think such a blessing could befall me."

Chapter End Notes

Gwanur - kinsman

tithen pen - little one

Ada - Daddy

Heryn Gellam - lady (jubilation)

iell - daughter

amdir - hope(based on a reason)

"Scout" = I Spy

2891 + 15 = 2906

Arador 2820-2930

Arathorn II born 2873-2933
A Tolkien Interlude

Chapter Notes

Once again, I do not own, nor do I make money from this.

* denotes direct quotes taken from J.R.R., most from "The Silmarillion", although most of the story Glorfindel is telling is a heavy summary from the book anyway.

A Tolkien Interlude

Gîltass let out an unconscious sigh as he shifted and rubbed at his tired eyes. It had been several hours since Marcaunon collapsed during the celebration and he had spent them sitting on the floor in the hallway just outside the room in the Hall of Healing where Marcaunon had been carried off to. While, on the one hand, he was grateful that no one had exited the room and shooed him off to bed, the other hand kept hitting him upside the head with the fact that if someone had left the room, he might have been able to wheedle some answers. As it was, his uncle, Gildor, Erestor, and that new elf, Glorfindel, had all vanished into that room with his sweet baby godson after sharing excited exclamations, that went over his head, with several of the other elves at the party and didn't say anything to him.

Gîltass rubbed hard at his face with both hands and tried to hold back the yawn that was threatening to split open his face, only to give in to the impulse when it became too much. He didn't notice when he slid further down the wall he was leaning up against and tilted off to one side. Letting out another face splitting yawn almost immediately, Gîltass decided that it was too much of an effort to sit up any longer and so he curled up into ball on the floor with his small hands cushioning his head.

'I'll just rest my eyes for a bit until they come out and tell me what's going on,' he thought to himself as his heavy eyelids came to a gentle close. Within a matter of seconds, the tired elfling was senseless to the rest of the world as sleep claim him. He never noticed Elladan and Elrohir glide down the hallway, pause before his sleeping form, and have a wordless argument. He didn't so much as twitch when Elladan picked him up and carried him off with Elrohir following silently after as
they moved towards the elfling's bedchambers.

A gentle scent of blooming flowers wafted about his nose and short, bright bursts of bird song rang in his ears as Gîltass raised his head and peered blearily about, trying to place where he was, for nothing looked familiar to his eyesight. While he was sure that he had fallen asleep against his wishes last night, that had been in the hallway, which this looked nothing like. The other logical guess was that someone had tripped over him and then carried him off to his room after finding him sound asleep, but, as Gîltass rubbed sleep gunk out of his eyes and took a better look around, it was easy to see that that was also not a possibility.

Looking around the room, Gîltass noted the large windows that overlooked the training courtyard with a pair of overstuffed chairs and a small table before them, several well-worn but obviously extremely well-made and well-cared for weapons, including bows, swords, and daggers, hanging on the walls or in stands, an armor stand sporting very practical looking armor that was as well-cared for and as used as the weapons, several chests that he guessed were holding personal items and clothing, a fantastically carved and inlaid wardrobe to hold more clothing, and a pair of doors. One door was opposite the windows and Gîltass could only guess that that was the exit. The other door was off to the side and as a pressing need made itself known, Gîltass struggled out from under the felted blankets and finely woven sheets as he crawled across the massive bed he woke upon, knowing that one of the two doors would contain the room that he was seeking.

Reaching the edge of the bed, Gîltass sat and stretched out his feet as far as he could and still fell a bit as he left the massive bed. Hurrying across the stone floor, which he absentmindedly noted was covered with a series of fur rugs, he reached the door and tugged it open, pleased to see that his guess was correct and that he had indeed found the necessary. He saw to his morning’s needs and then washed up a bit.

It was just after he had finished drying his face and place the bit of fabric down that he realized that there was a second door to the room, opposite the one by which he had entered. Curious as to where it led, and feeling not the slightest bit of fear as he could easily tell that he was still in Imladris and he knew full well that none that dwelled within or were granted permission to visit would endanger him, Gîltass opened the other door. Revealed to his eyes was a room that was almost identical to the one he found himself waking up in. The only major difference was that the chairs near the large windows were occupied by a pair of very familiar elves and the table between the two was laden with an assortment of breakfast favorites.
Laughing brightly in astonishment and happiness, Gîltass ran forward, jumping onto the first available lap and hugging the elf he was found himself on. Pulling away slightly, he saw that the victim of his exuberance was Elrohir, who was wearing a pleased expression.

"While I'm thrilled to spend more time with the both of you, especially time that isn't spent either on training or in running away from the just rewards of a prank, you could have just tucked me into my own bed," Gîltass babbled out, before reaching out and snagging one of the fruit stuffed sticky buns that was his favorite treats.

"Indeed, that was the plan when we retrieved you from that empty, lonely hallway where you were so soundly sleeping," Elrohir calmly stated as he ignored the excited elf child in his lap, belaying the amusement dancing within his dark eyes. "However, it was by far easier to plan than it was to accomplish as the moment that we attempted to place you within your own bed, you tightened your grip and refused to release my ever-so-cuddly brother. And so, he was forced to adjourn to his room with a most precious tag-along."

Gîltass shrugged at the information and shifted around until he facing the table laden with food. Taking a huge bite of the pastry he was holding and causing his cheeks to puff out, he proceeded to ignore the two brothers in favor of breakfast. He could question them after filling his stomach, because, with all the excitement of Marcaunon collapsing last night, he really didn't get much of a chance to eat and his stomach felt like it was clawing at his spine.

Elrohir and Elladan chuckled lightly at Gîltass's non-response to the gentle teasing as they also set out to fill up. However, they went at the task in a much lighter manner and were able to converse on easy matters as they ate, Elrohir managing to do so with Gîltass still perched on his lap. The two brothers finished eating just ahead of Gîltass who grabbed one last fruit pastry and leaned back against Elrohir's chest while he nibbled on his prize. Pulling it away from his mouth after a few small bites, Gîltass gave voice to the question that had been weighing on his mind since the previous evening.

"What happened?" he quietly asked, knowing that for all the twins were pranksters after his own heart, they could also be deadly serious when needed and were happy to share their knowledge.
"It happens at times," Elladan began, "although it is extremely rare and the occurrence can be counted on two hands and still have leftovers fingers, that a person will meet another person who, for lack of a better term, "completes" them. Neither person will feel the lack and will happily live their life up till that point, but the moment they meet, it is as though the world has stopped, then pivoted around them, and refocused itself to revolve solely around the other. It is a love so intense that the term "soulmates" is the most appropriate to use. And age is of no matter.

"The best example of this is when the elven King Elu Thingol met Melian the Maya. She dwelt in Lorien across the sea before the coming of the elves and when she sang, all would stop what they were doing to listen to her. None were more wise, more beautiful, or more skilled in the singing of enchanted songs than she. When the elves first awoke, she went wandering in the shadowy woods, singing as she went and nightingales flocked around her. When Elu Thingol first met her, they were so lost in one another that it took years of searching for his people to finally find him again and thus most of his people never left the dark shores to come into the undying lands before the light of the sun and the moon."

Elladan looked with great fondness at Gîltass, who was sitting on his brother's lap with wide open eyes and a stunned expression on his young face, his treat held up to his slightly open mouth although it was clearly forgotten about as the elfling hadn't eaten a bite in several minutes.

"I'm sure that Marcaunon is also having this explained to him. Probably in greater depth," Elrohir spoke up. "I'm also sure that he will be loved, cherished, and protected like no other as Glorfindel is a warrior without peer, having slain a Balrog during the fall of Gondolin. While he died as well during that amazing feat, Mandos sent him back. Glorfindel will not speak of the reasons, but most of us have thought that it was so that he could act as an observer for the Valar as he has not involved himself with any great strife since.

"And with that being said, if you have any more questions, or would prefer to enjoy more in-depth knowledge of the subject, may I suggest pestering your tutor, Erestor, for the knowledge? He would be able to explain it far better, tell you the tales of the other known pairings, and will happily impart his theory as to the reasons why."

And with that said, Elrohir snatched the fruit bun from Gîltass with one hand and placed it
back on the platter on the table, while, with the other hand, he unerringly found the sensitive side of
the elfling on his lap and dug his long, calloused fingers into it. Gîltass squirmed to the side to try and
escape the tickling fingers, only to be thwarted when they were joined by the other set that was now
empty of pastry. Letting out peels of bright, happy laughter, Gîltass wiggled on the lap, trying to
escape and finally succeeding by wiggling forward enough that he was able to drop off of Elrohir's
lap.

Panting, his cheeks flushed and his eyes flashing with happiness, Gîltass stumbled forward a
few steps before spinning around to face his tormentor. Shaking a finger at the innocent looking elf,
Gîltass opened his mouth as though to say something, but instead, merely stuck his tongue out at
Elrohir before spinning back around and racing towards the door, laughing loudly. Elrohir gave a
mock-surprised gasp and made to rise from his chair, only to drop back the couple of inches he had
risen once Gîltass escaped the room. Smiling at each other, the two elves listened to the happy
laughter as it bounced off of the corridor walls and mingled with the sound of running footsteps.

Gîltass, for his part, paid no mind to the brothers once he left the room, intent on getting back
to the room where his little Prongslet was being seen to. With his stomach comfortably full, a good
night of sleep behind him, and a laugh on his lips, he bounced and skipped his way down several
hallways and across a few courtyards, making everyone who saw him smile at his exuberance.

Arriving at the room he had been camped out at last night before his unceremonious removal,
Gîltass was pleased to see that the door was open. Hearing vague, soft murmurings that were almost
too faint for his excellent hearing told him that someone was there and so he poked his head around
the door frame. He let out a sharp, excited yell when he saw that Marcaunon was awake, even if his
tiny frame was being held tightly by that new elf, Glorfindel, as they sat on top of the blankets, and
burst into the room, making short work of crossing the distance between door and bed, where he
launched himself onto the incredibly comfortable bed and landed beside the two, laughing loudly and
pleased greatly with himself. Reaching out a hand that was becoming well calloused from his
weapons training, Gîltass gently placed it on the slightly boned shoulder of his Prongslet, ignoring,
for the most part, the gentle smile that Glorfindel was bestowing upon him.

Marcaunon heard the yell, then felt the bed bounce under Gîltass's happy assault, but it wasn't
until he felt the gentle touch on his shoulder that he turned his face away from the muscular chest that
he was burrowed into and turned to face the other. In Gîltass's face, Marcaunon was able to read
many things, worry and love for him in equal measure however were the most prominent. Pulling out
one of his small hands from where it was tightly holding onto Glorfindel's tunic between their bodies,
Marcaunon reached up and placed it over top of Gîltass's hand and gave it a comforting squeeze,
smiling brightly at the other as he did so.
"So," Gîltass suddenly broke the comfortable silence that had fallen in the room once he had stopped laughing. "I was told some of what is going on as well as being informed that if I wished for more complete stories and thoughts on the matter that I should seek out our tutor, Erestor, to enlighten me further. Therefore, I will not be bothering the two of you for any information about what has occurred, or is it occurring? between you."

"I thank you for your forbearance, young one," Glorfindel lightly stated, re-settling Marcaunon on his lap so that the tiny elf was facing Gîltass with his head leaning sideways against his chest. He had been much alarmed at the size of the little one once his shock at finding his other half had cleared away somewhat. He was only somewhat comforted by his Lord Elrond when told that the tiny elfling had grown and filled out from when he had first arrived, and what a story that had been for him to finally hear in its entirety as opposed to the bits and snatches he had heard on his travels. It was heartbreaking for him to have learned that due to a lack of proper nutrients in his earliest years, his little love would never reach the height he might otherwise have had. It was only slightly reassuring for him to be informed that the excellent care that his littlest one had received over the past fifteen years was slowly making a difference and that Marcaunon would, eventually, achieve some height, although he would forever be more delicate and petite than most of their kind.

Feeling the weight of eyes upon him, Glorfindel looked down at the other elfling: Gîltass was his name and Glorfindel had been informed that the name had been well bestowed by many others he had met in just the short time since he had arrived back. He could almost hear the questions wishing to spring forth as he gazed into the other's silvery-grey eyes. Internally releasing a heavy sigh, Glorfindel leaned back and made himself more comfortable, absentmindedly pulling Marcaunon more tightly against himself and beginning to run his long fingers through the long, dark, silky locks the child sported.

"Allow me to tell you a story," Glorfindel quietly murmured...

Gondolin had stood for almost four hundred turns of the sun when its end was brought down upon it. Built within the Echoriath, the Encircling Mountains, on a round, level plain enclosed on all sides with sheer walls with a ravine and tunnel known as the Hidden Way that led out to the southwest, Gondolin was founded by Turgon the Wise when he decided to build a great city on the high hill that lay within the protected ring that he was led to by the Vala Ulmo, and would be hidden from the Dark Lord Morgoth. It took nearly seventy-five years for Turgon and his people, who toiled in utmost secrecy, to build the city, and, once it was finished, they withdrew to it under cover of
darkness and with the aid of Ulmo, leaving no trace as to their whereabouts.

There the people of Turgon stayed, growing stronger and thriving in the city as they poured forth their efforts into it, making Gondolin a rival to Elven Tirion beyond the sea in the undying lands, never coming forth until the Year of Lamentation, and more than three hundred and fifty years had passed. High and white were its walls, and smooth its stairs, and tall and strong was the Tower of the King. There shining fountains played, and in the courts of Turgon stood images of the Trees of old, which Turgon himself wrought with elven-craft; and the Tree which he made of gold was named Glingal, and the Tree whose flowers he made of silver was named Belthil. But fairer than all the wonder of Gondolin was Idril, Turgon's daughter, she that was called Celebrindal, the Silverfoot, whose hair was as the gold of Laurelin before the coming of Melkor. Thus Turgon lived long in bliss.*

When two hundred years had passed since Gondolin was fully wrought, Aredhel Ar-Feiniel, the sister of Turgon, who was accustomed to riding where she willed and walking about in the forests, came to Turgon and spoke with him, asking leave to depart as she had grown tired of the enclosing walls. Turgon was loathe to give her leave, and long did he deny his sister, but at last he fell to her pleading and gave her his blessing, with much misgiving on his part.

He assigned her three lords as her guards and bid them escort her to visit Fingon, their oldest brother. But, once on the road, Aredhel demanded instead to go and visit the sons of Feanor, her friends of old. Not able to persuade her otherwise, the guards turned south with her, where, after some traveling, they fetched up against the borders of Doriath. The march-wardens denied them the right to pass for, under the orders of King Thingol, those who were kin to and friends of the slayers of his kin would never be allowed into his lands. The wardens gave directions to the four travelers, letting them know that the fastest way around was by the paths to the east, although the way was perilous. Aredhel would not be persuaded against such a journey, and so they set forth once again.

It was on the dangerous path that the riders became enmeshed in shadows and Aredhel strayed from her companions and was lost. She was long sought for by the three lords, but, unable to find any trace of her, the three eventually gave up and withdrew back to Gondolin, where they gave their Lord the dire news. The city, and its Lord, lay in sorrow for many years.

Aredhel, however, had continued onwards, not hearing her companions calling out to her. As she rode on, she eventually became ensnared in the deep and heavy woods where the sun never
touched ground as the trees were all old and tall. It was while she was there that Eöl, the Dark Elf and kin of Thingol, came upon her. Struck by beauty, he laid enchantments about her so that she might not find her way out of the woods and by such means did he lead her, exhausted, to the doors of his dim, hidden halls. When she arrived, he revealed himself to her and long was it before she was seen again, for he welcomed her and took her to wife.

She bore him a son in his dark halls, whom Eöl named Maeglin, which meant Sharp Glance for Eöl perceived that his son could read the hearts and secrets of others, beyond the words that spewed from their mouths. Eöl kept his wife under heavy watch, forbidding her to travel and only allowing her about in the forest under darkness. Maeglin grew in this time, his body taking after his mother's kin, but his mind and mannerisms were those of his father. As he grew, Maeglin spent much time at his mother's knee, listening to her tales of their kin and the might and valor of the Princes of their house. At other times, Maeglin would travel afar with his father, learning all that Eöl would teach him, as well as what his father's companions, the dwarves, would share.

It was as Aredhel spun tales for her son that a desire overtook her to once again walk in the light of Gondolin, among the gardens and fountains with her kinsfolk. As she reminisced, she wondered at herself for ever growing tired of the beautiful city.

These tales caused the first discord between father and son, as Maeglin grew increasingly demanding to visit the hidden city and his father was equally determined that his son would have nought to do with his mother's family. It came to a head when Eöl left for a feast with the dwarves, leaving Maeglin and Aredhel behind. Maeglin, seeing it as his chance, took his mother and fled the dark, shadowed halls of his father, letting her lead the two of them to the hidden city as only she knew the way, for she would not betray her brother's trust enough to even tell her son the way there and Maeglin was not able to catch her unawares and read the thought from her mind.

However, Eöl arrived from the celebration two days earlier than planned for and, after hearing from the servants that his wife and son were only two days gone, followed after them, even by the light of day so great was his anger. As he tracked after them, he came to a ford at the same time a Lord who was kin to Aredhel was camping there. Many harsh words were spoken between the two, for Eöl was not well thought of for having brought such a great Lady to wed without the leave and blessing of her kin. Just before Eöl was about to ride off, he was given these words from the Lord:

"This counsel I add: return now to your dwelling in the darkness of Nan Elmoth: for my heart
warns me that if you now pursue those who love you no more, never will you return thither."*

Eöl rode off in haste as he now perceived that his wayward spouse and child were seeking to return to Gondolin, shame and humiliation filling him such that he rode hard after them. Now, though he had the better and faster steed, he did not come into sight of those he sought for until they had dismounted their horses and were proceeding on foot into the secret way. Even then, it was the mounts that betrayed them as the neighing of horses drew his attention and led to his eyes catching sight of the white garments his wife wore as they entered the secret way. He marked which way she went, and crept after her in stealth.

Meanwhile, Aredhel and Maeglin had hurried ahead and, after passing through the seven gates and by the Dark Guards, met with Turgon, who greeted her with great joy and listened to her tale, afterwards he looked favorably upon his sister's son and thought him worthy to be accounted as a Prince of their kindred.

"I rejoice indeed that Ar-Feiniel has returned to Gondolin," he said, "and now more fair again shall my city seem than in the days when I deemed her lost. And Maeglin shall have the highest honor in my realm."*

Maeglin bowed low, and took Turgon for his King and Lord, though he said naught else as he was overwhelmed with the beauty and richness he saw about him. Though nothing was more fair and beautiful in his eyes than the King's daughter, Idril, who seemed to glow golden with the light of her mother's kin, the Vanyar.

But Eöl had crept in silently and unawares, discovering the dry riverbed and the secret path, only to be caught at the gates by the Dark Guard. Once caught, Eöl protested that he had only come to reclaim his wife and son. The guard were amazed that he claimed as his wife Aredhel, and so brought him before the King. Eöl was amazed and stunned no less than his son at the richness and splendor surrounding him, but his heart filled greater with anger at those who were kin of those who had slain his kin and so hate move within him.
But Turgon greeted him as a kinsman, warmly stepping forward to shake hands as he welcomed Eöl to his city and explained that he would now have to live his life there, as the King's laws were such that no one was allowed to leave and take the secret of their city with them. Eöl sneered at him and proclaimed that he would never abide by the laws of kinslayers and that they had no right to divide up the land and rule over it. He agreed that while Turgon might hold some rule over Aredhel who was sister to him, no such claim would be allowed on his son, Maeglin, and so he commanded his son to him, but Maeglin would not move.

Turgon then sat, stern and proud, in his throne and gave Eöl the Dark Elf only two choices: to live in the city, holding to his rule, or to die, the same for your son. Long did silence hold over the court as Eöl pondered. Aredhel, knowing her husband was perilous, grew afraid. Suddenly, Eöl grabbed a javelin from a guard and threw it at Turgon, yelling:

"The second choice I take and for my son also! You shall not hold what is mine!"*

But Aredhel leapt before the spear, letting it smote her, even as guards subdued her husband and led him off, with Maeglin looking on silently. Aredhel and Idris worked on Turgon, moving the King to mercy for Eöl. However, that evening, Aredhel sickened and died, for none knew that the point of the spear had been poisoned.

Therefore, when Eöl was brought before Turgon he found no mercy; and they led him forth to the Caragdur, a precipice of black rock upon the north side of the hill of Gondolin, there to cast him down from the sheer walls of the city. And Maeglin stood by and said nothing; but at the last Eöl cried out:* 

"So you forsake your father and his kin, ill-gotten son! Here shall you fail of all your hopes, and here may you yet die the same death as I."*

Then they cast Eöl over the Caragdur, and so he ended, and to all in Gondolin it seemed just; but Idril was troubled, and from that day she mistrusted her kinsman. But Maeglin grew great among his kinsmen, learning all that might be taught and also teaching much as he had great knowledge of
smithcraft. Often he went out of the city into the high hills and mountains encircling them and so found great veins of ore and rich deposits of ingots. Most of all, he prized the hard iron he found in the mine of Anghabar, which he used to vastly improve the arms and armor of the Gondolindrim, which stood them in good stead in the years to come. He refused to stay in the city as regent when Turgon brought forth his army in aid of his brother during the years of Lamentation, and proved himself brave in battle and a fell warrior.

Thus all seemed well with the fortunes of Maeglin, who had risen to be mighty among the princes of his kin, renowned above all save one. Yet in his heart, darkness was growing. For there was a grief in his heart from the first moment he entered the King's court that stole from him all joy: he loved Idril Celebrendil's great beauty and desired her without hope, for she was of close kin to him. Never had such close kin wed, and never before had there been any desire to do so. Idril, who was able to perceive the thoughts of Maeglin, knew this about him and thought the less of him, thinking him strange and skewed. But still, Maeglin watched Idril, and as the years passed, he sought to have his way in all things, thus increasing his power.

Thus it was in Gondolin; and amid all the bliss of that realm, while its glory lasted, a dark seed of evil was sown.*

As the years slid away, Turgon grew proud of his city, thinking it as fair as the Elven Tirion beyond the Sea. Until one night, a tall man, clad in black and bearing a black sword was led into Gondolin along the secret way by means of the Vala Ulmo, who had led Turgon and his people in hiding so many long years before. He was led to the tower of the King and stood before Turgon, who had Maeglin at his right-hand and Idril at his left-hand. The man introduced himself as Tuor, then proceeded to say words in such a manner as to lend doubt that he was a mortal man, as his words were those of the Lord of the Waters, Lord Ulmo. He gave warning to Turgon that the curse laid upon he and all of his kin by the Vala Mandos was drawing to a close, and it was time to abandon all the works of his hands to depart down the Sirion to the sea.

But Turgon heeded not his words, nor the counsel of the Vala Ulmo, who had come to him once again, reminding the elf that all hope comes from the West and the Sea and to not become attached to the works of his hands. For he loved his city and thought them well hidden, even as rumors began to come to the ears of the Dark Lord about his long lost whereabouts after he had come forth to aid in the battles, before withdrawing once again. Maeglin during this time, spoke ever against Tuor in the ears of the King and in the council, and such was the love of Gondolin in his heart that Maeglin's words weighed heavier in his thoughts than the words of warning from Ulmo. And so he turned away from the warning.
However, the words brought forth echoes of the doom laid by Mandos and thus, fear of treachery was brought up in Turgon's heart and so the passageway into the city was collapsed and the way sealed shut so that none would find them, and he forbid any of his people to pass through the hills.

And thus Tuor remained in Gondolin, learning much of the lore of the exiled elves and becoming mighty in mind and body. So high did he rise, that in seven years time, when he asked for Idril's hand from her father the king, Turgon gave his blessing on the union; for while he would not heed the words of Ulmo, he perceived that the fate of his kin was bound to this man that Ulmo had sent. Then a great and joyful feast was laid and all the people celebrated and were glad; save for Maeglin and those of a mind like to his, who followed him in secret.

And so the second union of man and elf came to pass.

The following springtide saw Idris delivered of a child: Eärendil Half-elven, son of Tuor and Idril Celebrindal. Of surpassing beauty was Eärendil, for a light was in his face as the light of heaven, and he had the beauty and wisdom of the Eldar and the strength and hardiness of the men of old; and the Sea spoke ever in his ear and heart, even as with Tuor his father.*

And the days of Gondolin were full of light and laughter, and the city was blissful in its golden age, for no one residing in the city knew that Morgoth now had knowledge of its general location thanks to rumors and scouts. But Idris was wise and her heart spoke to her of misgivings, leading to a feeling of foreboding over shadowing her. So she had prepared a secret way that led out of the city, passing underneath the plain and the walls, and she contrived it such that the secret was only known to a very trusted few, and that no hint of a whisper should come to the ears of Maeglin, nor any of those that would follow him.

Now while Eärendil was yet young, Maeglin, who was enamored of mining and smithcraft, and was the Master and Leader of those who worked far from the city, seeking metals and improving their craft, went into the high hills with several of his people, seeking out metals for their craft. And thus it was that the edict King Turgon spoke, which forbade his people from passing through the
hills, was broken, and the King knew not that his will was defied. And as fate willed it, orcs captured Maeglin and brought him before the Dark Lord. Such was his fear at the promised torments, that Maeglin gladly betrayed the location of Gondolin to Morgoth. His hatred of Tuor, and his perverse desire for Idril, led him to tell the Dark Lord of the means by which such an assault could take place. Morgoth was so pleased that he promised Maeglin the regency of Gondor under his rule and the possession of Idril. Maeglin was then sent back to Gondor, to wait with a smiling face and a treacherous heart, for the assault to take place and assist from within.

When Eärendil was seven years of age, Morgoth at last was ready and launched his assault with his host of orcs and balrogs and wolves, along with his dragons, over the north mountains, which were the steepest and where the watch was less strict. They attacked during the night of a festival, where all of the people were upon the walls, waiting for the first signs of the sun when they would lift their voices in uprising songs. The host marched freely against the city and many were the battles fought.

Tuor sought out Idril to save her from the battle, only to find that Maeglin had laid hands upon her and their son, and so they fought on the walls on the city, where, at last, Tuor was able to cast Maeglin off the walls and down into the burning fires below. Then did Tuor and Idril gather the remnants of their people and lead them out through the secret way. In this they were inadvertently aided by the dragons, who, with their fiery breath, caused great billows of steam to arise from the many fountains, which hid the refuges as they had to cross a great deal of open plain to reach the mountains through which they would pass. Beyond all hope they climbed the high places, burdened with women, children, and the wounded until they came to a dreadful pass labeled the Eagles' Cleft: on the right hand side it was walled by a precipice and on the left, a terrible drop that fell away into darkness.

Along that narrow way their march was strung, when they were ambushed by orcs, for Morgoth had set watchers all about the encircling hills; and a Balrog was with them. The dreadful was their plight, and hardly would they have been saved by the valour of the yellow-haired Glorfindel, chief of the House of the Golden Flower of Gondolin, had not Thorondor come timely to their aid.*

Many songs were sung in later years of the fall of Gondolin, and among them were ones telling of the battle on the peaks that waged between Glorfindel and the Balrog as Thorondor and his fellow eagles battled the orcs below, until, at last, Glorfindel cast himself and the Balrog into the darkness of the cleft below, slaying the beast at last and letting the remnants of the people of Gondolin escape to the sea. Tuor, Idril, and Eärendil among them.
And thus perished Glorfindel, who passed away over the sea and came into the Halls of Mandos, where he stood before the Vala Namo.

"My Lord," Glorfindel murmured as he knelt, waiting for judgement. Long it seemed he knelt before the Vala, and it felt as thought every thought and deed were weighed, yet at last, Namo, who was also called Mandos, turned to leave, giving the impression that he wished for Glorfindel to accompany him.

Glorfindel looked down and was met by two sets of wide open eyes in small faces, easily reading both the awe and the curiousity that was on display in both sets of features.

"There is not much left to tell of my story after that. I was brought around to several of the Valar as well as several of the Maiar. All of them seemed to looked deep within me, as though weighing me and judging me for some task, or perhaps it was that they were reading my life story. I was sent back from the Undying Lands just after Eärendil was first set to sailing the heavens, never having found out the reasons why they were doing such and have made my home here, in Imladris, under the rule of Lord Elrond, who is the descendent of King Thingol's daughter."

He paused for a moment to gather Marcaunon more tightly to himself, placing a light kiss to the riotous locks of raven-dark hair that spilled down from the crown of the slight child and gently rubbing against the small back.

"It is not something that I flaunt around or make much over, but I am one of the eldest elves; having been born under the stars before the light of the sun ever graced the sky. While I was in the Undying Lands, I was brought before Manwë at one point and, although he also chose not to speak a word to me, he did leave me with more than an impression of weighing and judging; when I left him, there was a sense that I was to observe and that it would be my choice if I did, and that by doing so, I would have the chance to find the greatest gift and happiness ever granted."
"And that lonely, single, almost non-existent feeling that I had thought was perhaps just a hope I had had for some sense of purpose or answers, was given to me last evening when I was granted the privilege and the great gift of finding the other half of my soul."
"That's it. Bring your sword up into the fifth position now and hold it steady."

Marcaunon trembled slightly as he held the training sword over his head, with the blade parallel to the ground and his knuckles facing upwards. While the blade was beautifully balanced and weighted absolutely perfect for his slight form, he had been training with Arador for several hours now; solo instruction on forms and movement as well as intense spars against Arador's son, Arathorn II. And he knew full well that his training was far from over with, as the moment that Arador declared himself satisfied with the day's progress, he would be turned over to Gildor to practice his archery, then, after a quick, but thorough, wash-up on his part, he would be allowed to partake of a bit of dinner before it was time for his first night time tracking lessons, given to him by Elrohir and Elladan with Giltass as the one being hunted. And all of this was after a morning spent on book lessons with Erestor.

"Very good," Arador finally said. "You may lower your weapon and place it away for the day. Make sure that you spend some time this evening going over the blade checking for any nicks as well as taking the time to sharpen the edge again after the sparring you did today. A dull edge is one of the most dangerous things possible on an edged weapon such as a sword or an axe."

Marcaunon nodded his head easily in assent. He had been told such before by several of his other trainers and it was driven home further one day a few years before when he was watching a practice spar involving one of the guards, Aradion, and a visiting Rohirrim warrior. The two had gotten their weapons hung up during their fight just before tripping over each others' feet. The resultant wounds the fall had caused had clearly demonstrated the difference between a dull edge and a sharp edge as Aradion had required a great deal of care and still had the heavy scar tissue to show off while the Rohirrim was simply stitched up and released from the healing rooms the next day, with
the notification that he would barely have a thin line to show off within a few weeks.

Marcaunon walked over to the benches and grabbed one of the soft rags that were piled near the end, using it, as it was intended, to clean the most immediate grit and such off of his blade, before sheathing it in the scabbard at his side. Letting out a soft groan, he straightened his back fully before twisting it sharply from side to side. A firm thump on his back had him looking back over his shoulder, then up almost a foot, and smiling at the tall, dark-haired, and young looking man behind him.

"An excellent bout," Arathorn II said with a smile. "And it was an honor to cross blades with you, as it is every time I am allowed the chance to do so. Now then, I think perhaps that I shall retire to my assigned room, clean myself up, then see to the care of my own blade; I do not wish to tarry long and keep you here talking, as I know that you have more training yet to do and under such ancient, harsh, and brutal taskmasters who will, no doubt, work you to the bone, then thrash you most completely for every failure. But, perhaps, if you live through the horror, we shall meet again at supper, where I might join you and partake of some thoroughly engaging conversation."

Marcaunon stifled his giggles and tried to school his face into an appropriate expression of seriousness as he caught sight of Gildor and Merilin, a lovely elleth with the most amazing blue eyes he had ever seen and a fiery temper who was helping to train him with the bow as she was the best marksman dwelling within Imladris. The two had silently glided up behind Arathorn II, both giving a vastly amused looking Arador polite nods of the head as they passed him by, just in time to hear Arathorn's comments.

"Well then," Merilin calmly stated almost directly into Arathorn's ear, causing the taller male to jump and spin around, a hand clutching his chest, "as we are nothing but ancient, brutal taskmasters, according to this young puppy here, perhaps we should assign him some extra tasks that he could fail at? I am quite sure that he has no true desire to retire to his comfortable room and see about cleansing the drying sweat that is probably beginning to dry and itch like crazy on his hide. Or perhaps we should just bring him along to archery practice so that we may see how well he is able to shoot with his limbs trembling in exhaustion, then beat him for every arrow out of center?"

"Oh, um, well...." Arathorn II stuttered and blustered, a sheepish look on his face, before seeing the twinkle in her eye and drawing himself up. "I thank you for your offer of further training my lady, but I am sure that my worthless hide is unworthy of having such an honor bestowed upon
it. Therefore, I shall stick to my plan and withdraw myself from the present, august company I have so brilliantly and fortuitously found myself in. Farewell!"

On that last word, Arathorn II gave a dramatic bow and made his escape.

"That boy of mine," Arador gave a quiet laugh. "It has been a pleasure to train with you today, Marcaunon, and you have come far in the time since I was last here. Hopefully it will not be another year or so between visitations, but for now: If you will excuse me my lady, gentlemen?"

Arador gave a gentle nod of his head, before taking off in the same direction as his son.

Marcaunon burst out in laughter, finally unable to contain his merriment any longer. He did not protest in the slightest as a hand was laid on his quivering shoulder and used to steer his laughing body away from the bench and out of the bladed weapons' training area. They were halfway to the archery range by the time he had regained control of himself. He inhaled sharply through his nose, let it out through his mouth, then turned his brightly shining eyes towards Gildor, who was the owner of the hand on his shoulder.

"I thank you for that. Truly. The look on his face was spectacular. Now then," he continued on, "what are we going to work on today in archery practice? Arador really put me through my paces today. He led me through stretches and warm-ups, then basic forms, coached me through some slow sparring before turning his son loose on me, then had me do basic forms once again as a cool down."

"We both feel that you have progressed enough to learn the trick for shooting in a prone position and how to get a full draw by doing so," Merilin calmly spoke up. "First, however, you may run on ahead of us and see to getting something to drink. Then I expect you to have your bow strung and be standing at the ready position, on the line, waiting for us. You shall shoot a full quiver while your arms and body are still feeling the full effects of a more vigorous workout, as you will never know just when you might have to shoot. Arador was cooperating fully with us in this, as we wished for you to see the difference shooting with tired, extremely worked muscles versus the light workout..."
Marcaunon gave a sharp nod of his head in assent, then ran off, reaching the range in almost no time. He came to a halt at the enclosed building that housed the bows and arrows, easily opening the carved door that blocked out the elements. Entering the building that was only lit at this time of the day by the narrow windows that broke up the walls at regular intervals, he was gratified to see a heavy earthenware pitcher, its sides beaded enticingly with water, indicating that it was fresh and cold; several cups resided on the table just to the side of it.

Reaching out a slim, dainty hand, Marcaunon made short work of filling a glass, pleased to see that it was a mixture of juice and water that poured out as he found it quenched his thirst far more effectively than just water alone. He quickly drank that cup down and poured himself another, this one he sipped slowly as he moved about the room, retrieving his favored bow and assembling a pair of quivers full of arrows for him to use over the course of his training. Pouring out one last cup, he drank it normally, then strung his bow, hung one full quiver across his back and another from his belt. Grabbing his bow in one hand, he pushed open the door and moved to the line that indicated fifty paces from the target. While there were lines for targets both closer and farther, this was the one that he was training from. Gildor told him that at this point in his training, he knew how to draw the bow and how to aim and thus had no need for the closer targets, but he was not so accurate as to need to move up to shoot at the further targets for more of a challenge.

As he slipped up to the line and his teachers, Marcaunon found himself grateful once again for the growth spurt he had had over the past few years as his head was finally coming up to most people's shoulders, thus making his training far easier on everyone as finding sparring partners for someone of his extremely short stature had been very difficult. Not to mention, he was getting a lot more power out of the larger bow he was now able to use.

"Begin," Gildor calmly stated. "All arrows to be drawn from the hip quiver. Then step to the side and shoot the next target with the full contents of the other quiver. As quickly as you are able."

Marcaunon easily fell into the proper stance with the many years now spent training in archery. He exhaled fully while quickly grabbing an arrow, nocking it, and drawing the bow back to its full extent, then inhaled half while he focused on the center of the target, swiftly loosing the arrow and allowing it to fly and strike. He then proceeded to cast the rest of his arrows in the same manner, the only pause in his shooting was the brief moment that he had to take several steps to the side to
shoot at the other target for this distance. The moment his last arrow had flown away, Marcaunon could feel the strain in his muscles that he had been holding off acknowledgement of by the skin of his teeth overtake him all at once. He almost dropped his bow as the hand holding it fell to his side and began to shake with fine tremors.

"Well done, tithen pen," Merilin was the first to break the silence that had fallen over the range after Gildor's instructions. "You were slightly shaky and unsteady in your earliest casting, when your muscles were still more used to the exertion and pull of a sword, and so your arrows were cast a bit wide; although still easily landing within the inner two circles. About halfway through your first quiver is when your muscles finally began to work with you on the new movements and so your arrows landed fairly within the centermost circle. Stepping to the other target took a bit more time than I would have preferred, but again, you were casting well and so the centermost ring was again the most hit. At least until we arrived near the end of your arrows. The last few shafts that you let loose were progressively under less control and so landed further and further from center. That last arrow barely caught the outermost ring by the barest of margins."

"I agree," Gildor chimed in. "We shall have to plan out more times where you will shoot directly after swordsmanship more often. Perhaps we shall even be able to arrange an opportunity to have you alternate: sword work, then immediately into shooting, then right back into a spar, followed by another bout of archery. Perhaps not this year, but by the next, most assuredly.

"Now then," Gildor continued. "Go and withdraw all of your cast arrows from the targets, give them a quick inspection, place any that do not pass back in the 'reparess needed' bin, replace them so that both quivers are completely full once again, and then get yourself some more to drink. Take your time with that and by all means, please take a cup back out here for yourself. We shall talk you through your shooting, offering our critiques and listening to your questions and concerns as we would normally do while you cool down somewhat and find your breath. Only then shall we work on the prone shooting position."

Marcaunon flashed his two trainers a wry grin as he stood there; huffing and puffing lightly, his arms trembling and fingers slightly numb at the tips, the sweat cooling on him in the light wind and conspiring with the shadows he was standing in to give him a small chill. Nodding his head at the instructions, he moved forward to begin collecting the arrows and looking them over for any sign of damage that would make them less than ideal for shooting immediately: such as, chips and cracks, or torn fletching, or a bend in the wood of the shaft.
That was the last bit of time he had to think or catch his breath. The moment he returned from placing away the three damaged arrows he had found, bearing a full cup of cool, watery juice, he was plunged into a rapid fire discussion and analysis of his shooting then immediately drug off afterwards into the surrounding brush as Merilin saw no point to teaching him how to shoot while prone without forcing him to deal with the obstacles that would cause him to be forced to do so in the first place.

Lucky him.

Gîltass had just sat down at head table with his laden plate, taking a seat just to the side of Arathorn and sharing greetings with the younger man as he did so, when movement in the doorway caught his eyes, drawing his attention away from his plate of food. Looking up, Gîltass saw that it was Marcaunon. A severely bedraggled, worn out, and weary looking Marcaunon. Gently nudging an elbow into the side of his table companion to draw his attention, Gîltass leaned over and quietly voiced a query into the ear of his extremely great-grand nephew.

"Do you know why my beloved, tithen pen, is looking like he has had to clean the entirety of the paths around Imladris, and had to do so at a run?"

Arathorn II looked over at the doorway, seeing the small, frazzled looking elfling being joined by Glorfindel, who was using one of his large hands planted against Marcaunon’s lower back to steer the delicate elfling over to the heavily laden, serving tables that were the preferred methods of distributing food.

"Ah yes...," Arathorn trailed off as he began to laugh lightly at the sight of Marcaunon obviously saying something, then turn his pouting face fully towards Glorfindel, causing the much, much older elf to sigh and resign himself to filling a pair of plates while Marcaunon slowly moved across the floor towards them.
"I might have heard his trainers conspiring against him," Arathorn lightly stated with an amused gleam in his eyes as he regained control of himself before Marcaunon was even halfway across the partially filled dining hall. "It seems that they may have decided that today was the perfect day to put him through the "ordeal". It would also explain why I was asked to not hold back, just to be mindful of his years and his training."

"Oh!" Gîltass perked up at that. He well remembered his own day when his trainers had seemed to go insane and work him into the ground. "I see."

He snickered cruelly, then, seeing the questioning glance Arathorn bestowed on him, spoke again.

"Poor babe still has to undergo night stalking with the twins as his teachers and myself as his "prey" tonight. I wonder if this was planned out, or if his odd form of luck merely kicked in."

Both men began to snigger at that and were hard pressed to regain control over themselves before Marcaunon joined them at their table, taking one of the open seats across from Arathorn. Gîltass, pulling on his years of successful pranks and jokes, easily schooled his features to an appropriately innocent expression. Arathorn, not having the same type of background but well-schooled in controlling his expression to stillness so that none may read him at need, blanked his face and quickly lifted up his mug to help cover his bland expression until he had more control over the urge to laugh. Said urge was not aided in the slightest when Marcaunon sat down, then allowed his head to fall onto the table before him as he let out a heartfelt groan.

"My archery instructors, Gildor and Merilin, are sadists, of that I am quite sure," Marcaunon's voice came out slightly muffled as he was speaking into the thick wood. Turning his head to the side, he gifted Arathorn with a deep scowl, that looked more like a heavy pout if Arathorn were to be asked, then spoke again. "And you and your father are a like pair. I am truly grateful that I only have training in the afternoons, every other day, and that tomorrow I may relax and enjoy learning the healing arts from Lord Elrond, instead. While he is also driven, he gives me no reason to question his sanity."
Arathorn and Gîltass were spared from responding to that when Glorfindel arrived, placing a plate loaded down with Marcaunon's favorites before the elfling and causing his dark expression to lighten immediately as he sat upright and drew the plate closer to himself. Glorfindel set down his own plate, then lightly ran his fingers through the mid-back length, dark hair the Marcaunon sported, the elfling clearly having washed it before coming to dinner as it was still heavily damp and laying loose, as opposed to the tight braid he normally sported.

"Nín meleth, I shall fetch us something to drink and return in but a moment."

"My great thanks, nín aglared galu," Marcuanon looked up with love in his shining eyes and a look of happiness on his finely boned face as the tall, fair male moved gracefully away.

Gîltass decided, as he looked at the blissed out expression covering his god-son's face, that this was the perfect time to have some fun.

"So...ready for tonight? I know that I'm looking forward to it!" he brightly exclaimed, scooping up a bite of well seasoned duck with wild grains and popping it into his mouth, swallowing down the small bite quickly so that he could say more. "I mean, I remember how much fun it was when I was taken out for my first night tracking lesson. It took hours, and because I was out with my trainers learning something extremely important, I didn't get in any kind of trouble for staying up so late past my bed time! It must have been well into the earliest hours of the day by the time I finally tracked down my "prey" and then, Elladan and Elrohir insisted on going over everything again with my immediately so that I didn't forget it during sleep."

Arathorn watched Marcaunon closely while Gîltass blithly spoke: by the end, Arathorn was almost choking on the laughter that was trying to escape his throat at the elfling's expression and he had to hastily excuse himself from the table with a strangled, "Be right back. My apologies!" as he rushed from the room so that he didn't burst out in laughter right in Marcuanon's horrified face.
Chapter End Notes

arad - day
ion - son
merilin - nightengale
elleth - elf-woman
tithen pen - little one
Nín - my
meleth - love
aglared - glorious
galu - good fortune, blessing
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

A bit early, but in honor of Harry's birthday, and the fact that I will be out of town for the next two weeks chaperoning and driving for my kids' Fife and Drum Corps trip, I decided to post today.

Marcuanon = 57

Gîltass = 77

T.A. = 2933

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gîltass blinked his water-filled eyes, causing them to overflow and spill down his face as he held onto his composure by the skin of his teeth. While he wished that he could be allowed the luxury of a breakdown; right now, he had to concentrate on the small, wailing bundle in his arms as Marcuanon let the whole of Imladris know of his heartbreaking sorrow. It had only been three very short years since the death of Arador, and now, to find out that Arathorn II had also died, leaving behind his wife and two year old son, was almost more than his beloved god-son could bear.

Three years ago, reports had come in to Imladris that trappers were coming up missing and the very few that made their homes in that area were gone; their houses shattered and belongings missing or just flat out destroyed. Arador was visiting during that time and so heard the first rumors of the mysterious disappearances. And while he was only planning on staying a few days before returning home to his family, those few days turned into several weeks as scouts were dispatched, only to have a small handful of them fail to return by their scheduled dates.

The 110 year old man, who was only just approaching the middle years of his life as the Dûnedain accounted such and, thus, was well in the prime of his life, would hear no words against his going out to search for any trace of the scouts and so set out all alone, as all of those who might have accompanied him, were unable to: Gildor had left to visit Mirkwood and check in with King Thranduil as faint whispers had come to Imladris about the darkness in the ancient woods beginning to stir and agitate and spawn and grow, Glorfindel was leading several of the better warriors as escort for Arwen who was travelling to Lothlórien to spend some years visiting with her grandparents, Lord Celeborn and Lady Galadriel, as she did periodically, and most of the scouts were out as orc and goblin activity was beginning to rise, leaving only the few that had returned from the Coldfells to
assist, and they needed some time to recover. Elladan and Elrohir wished to accompany him; however, with so many others gone, they were placed in charge of Rivendell's safety, and thus could not be spared. And although they argued fiercely with Arador, pleading with him to wait just a week until the few scouts that had returned would be recovered and rested enough to stand as his backup, he would not wait and so set out.

It was several weeks later and neither whisper nor word had come to those waiting anxiously within the Last Homely House regarding Arador and the missing scouts. Gildor had finally returned from Mirkwood, and after delivering his report to Elrond and Erestor, partnered up with Elladan to seek out word of the missing ones. After getting a solid night of sleep, Gildor and Elladan spent the day conversing with the sole pair of remaining scouts as the rest had been sent back out. The next day was spent planning, which Giltass was allowed to sit in on as Elrohir, Elladan, and Gildor went over maps of the area and debated whether it would be best to ride or if horses should be left behind. By the evening, they had reached an agreement on what should be done and so set out to gather the needed supplies and bring them out to the stables where they were assembling such; having decided that the speed the mounts would permit them outweighed the drawbacks. Marcaunon put together an emergency aid kit for them under the watchful eyes of Lord Elrond, pleased that he was able to do somewhat to aid the twosome.

Early the next morn, Elrohir stood at the gates, watching them ride out, one hand tightly grasping Marcaunon's slim shoulder as the youth leaned comfortingly into his side and the other convulsively flexing around the hilt of his blade as it hung at his side. As the two rode off into the early morning mists that clung around the valley with its abundance of water, Marcaunon drew in a shuddering breath that was just one step away from being a sob before spinning around and burying his face solidly into Elrohir's lithely-muscled chest.

"They'll find him, right? And they'll all be okay?"

Elrohir said nothing to the faintly heard query, merely wrapping both arms tightly around the small being who was clinging so desperately to his him and bending down to place a light kiss to the top of Marcaunon's head.

Several weeks after that morning, weeks that Marcaunon spent moping about and, when not in lessons, he could frequently be found either hovering about the gates, plastered against Elrohir's side, or cuddled up with an extremely gloomy looking Giltass, the two returned with the news that Arador
had been captured by Hill-Trolls and slain. There were no signs of the missing scouts, and Gildor and Elladan had been forced to conclude that the Hill-Trolls had gotten them as well.

Marcaunon had been inconsolable over the news and it took months to draw a smile from him, and that was only possible with the return of Glorfindel. It was another year before the young elf was able to laugh freely again.

And now, a bare three years since that horrible occurrence, news had come that Arathorn II had been slain while hunting orcs by an arrow to the eye, leaving behind his wife and their two year old child, Aragorn, who were living in Rivendell as had become tradition for the Heirs.

The news had been brought to Rivendell by the remains of the hunting party, led in this horrible endeavor by Arathorn's second in command, his cousin Aranarth III, who was nursing severe wounds of his own as he saw to the return of the remnants of the group; as well as the too still, too quiet bodies of those who fell. Gilrean, Arathorn's spouse, was in the courtyard, playing with her toddler as she waited on the return of her husband; when the battered and lessened group rode in, she took one look at them, seeming to take in all of the faces at once, then collapsed to the hardened ground beneath her feet in a faint, tears leaking from her closed eyes.

The commotion in the courtyard from the riders, as well as one of the guards running to seek aid, brought forth the people of Imladris in droves. Marcaunon had been in lessons with Elrond, working on using his gift with plants to intensify the healing properties they possessed, when they received word that their skills were much needed. Hastily, but thoroughly, they set about filling a pair of bags with several essential emergency supplies; such as, herbs, needles and thread, and fine, linen gauze. The two of them quickly made their way through the spacious, airy hallways bearing the much needed supplies. When they reached the courtyard, they were met by a scene of chaos as riderless mounts milled about as stable hands went about gathering them up, the wounded were crying out in pain, and several still, quiet, shrouded bodies were being gently carried off by grim faced elves.

Marcaunon paused in the archway, his eyes wide and shocked looking in his suddenly bloodless face. He jumped slightly when a large hand suddenly gripped his shoulder tightly. Looking up, Marcaunon was met with Elrond gazing down at him, compassion burning deeply within his eyes and comfort being offered freely with his firm grip.
"Remember: you are a healer. Young, yes, but quite skilled. You will do fine."

Marcaunon nodded his head sharply, drew in a quick, sharp breath, then stepped firmly out of the shadowy archway; making his way to the area where the injured were being gathered together. He lost all track of time after that, merely concentrating on cleaning, poulticing, stitching, and wrapping wounds, and pulling broken bones straight and binding them tightly to stiff wooden frames. Therefore it was quite a shock when he moved to find someone new to heal and discovered that there were no more left to be seen to. Letting out a deep, heartfelt groan, Marcaunon stood up from where he had been kneeling on the ground and stretched upwards while kicking out with his feet, trying to relieve the kinks that had developed in his back and legs and hoping that Glorfindel would be able to give him a massage with warm oil to further help him out.

Looking around him, Marcaunon was pleased to see that the chaos had been settled while he was tied up with patients. Seeing a small knot of people that he knew, gathered together under the light of several torches that had been lit without his awareness, Marcaunon headed over with hope to discover what, precisely, had occurred. As he drew nearer, he felt a vague sense of alarm as the sound of heartbroken weeping began to fill his ears. The disquiet only grew greater as he saw a flash of a shrouded body laying on the ground with a shaking figure draped over the top of it during a momentary parting of the gathered people. It was only as he came up directly behind Gîltass that he was able to finally hear the extremely quiet conversation and so heard, for the first time, the news of Arathorn's death. A noise that was somewhere between a sob and a strangled yell escaped him, causing Gîltass to spin around and meet his denial filled, emerald eyes with silver eyes that were full of tears. Marcaunon took a step backwards, shaking his head frantically, ignoring the way his eyes overflowed with tears as he looked down at the pair of figures laying on the ground in the middle of the group, appalled to see that it was Gilrean hunched over the unmoving shrouded body, sobbing and wailing over it.

"No, no, no, no," Marcaunon's denials became verbal and Gîltass took several fast strides forward and wrapped his arms tightly around the quivering elfling, not even flinching when the denials changed into loud wails that echoed fiercely within his sensitive ears.

"Shh...shh..." Gîltass shushed Marcaunon as he lightly swayed from side to side with his armful, his own tears ignored for the moment. Seeking to comfort his distraught godson, he began to hum a soft lullaby under his breath as he gently steered them back into the small group. After several minutes the harsh, heartbroken wails fell into quiet sobs interspersed with hiccoughs as the younger,
smaller male fisted his delicate hands tightly into Gîltass's clothing and buried his face into the other's broad chest.

Marcaunon tuned out what, exactly, the others around him were saying; just letting it all fade into indistinct murmurs as he latched tightly onto the comfort being so freely given to him by a loved one. As he stood there, swaying lightly with the strong arms lovingly encircling his slight frame and the breathless, almost non-existent humming playing about his ears, Marcaunon was able to slowly gather himself back into some semblance of composure. Squirming a bit, Marcaunon was able to shift around so that he was facing outwards, with Gîltass's arms still encasing and supporting him. While he wasn't up to participating in any of the discussions occurring around him, he was able to listen in. As he listened to the quiet murmurs, he heard Aragorn's name come up, triggering the first memory he had of the child and bringing a small, melancholic smile up to play about his lips. Arathorn II had been so stunned looking when presented with his firstborn son by a happily grinning Marcaunon, who had been allowed to assist, somewhat, in the birth, that he looked as though someone had hit him in the face with a wet fish. Marcaunon had found the look so funny at the time, that he had laughed himself hoarse and was unable to speak above a harsh whisper for several days.

Coming out of the light memory, Marcaunon inhaled deeply of the crisp, night air before blowing it all out at once. Determination flooded his body and filled him with new purpose. Raising his hands up from where they had been uselessly clenching into fists, hidden in the folds of his tunic, Marcaunon gave a firm squeeze to the arms encircling him before he stepped away from Gîltass's strength and comfort. Clearing his throat lightly, Marcaunon addressed the small group.

"Could someone please tell me where Aragorn is?"

"He was taken to the nursery," Erestor quietly stated, his own features showing traces of deep sadness.

"My thanks," Marcaunon gave a shallow bob of his head, then slipped away to find the toddler.
He exited the courtyard and strode purposefully down the open corridors, savoring the memories that flooded into him even as the sorrow and sense of loss threatened to overwhelm him once again. There was where he had first met Arathorn II; bumping into the man as he rounded a corner with his arms full of books that Erestor had sent him off from a lesson with, causing them to fall. That nook was where the two of them had waited for hours, chatting about nothing and everything, until Giltass had finally wandered by under the large window without anyone accompanying him, at which point, they had upended a rather large bucket of water onto him. Out that window was the courtyard the two of them most favored for sparring practice during the hot, summer months as it had a trickling stream full of mountain run-off tucked away along the woodline that was perfect for keeping beverages chilled as well as cooling off their over-heated bodies after strenuous workouts.

Arriving at the door to the nursery, Marcaunon ignored the heavy burning in his eyes as he resolutely pushed back the strands of his ebony hair that were so valiantly attempting an escape from his long braid. Patting everything into some semblance of order, and grateful that he had been thoroughly cleansing his hands after every patient he attended to, Marcaunon centered himself the best he was able and quietly knocked on the door. It was only a matter of a few seconds at most before the heavy wooden door was pulled open and he was greeted by the grieving face of one of the ellith that were so quick to volunteer their time whenever the nursery was in use by the Dúnedain. She was sporting her own set of watery, red-rimmed eyes even as she was bouncing a sleepy looking toddler on her hips and swaying lightly.

Marcaunon swallowed down the wail that wanted to escape him at the sight of that precious child that had such obvious traces of his very recently deceased sire and held his arms out.


The ellith looked him over and it felt as though she was weighing him in that brief moment of time, before giving him a small nod and a flash of a sympathetic smile. Marcaunon latched tightly onto the babe, holding him firmly against himself, although not tightly enough to be even remotely damaging to the little treasure. Bending his head ever so slightly, he was able to press a gentle kiss to the incredibly soft and fine mess of hair the little one sported. Marcaunon drew in a sobbing, harsh breath, met the eyes of the sorrowing ellith, then spun about and almost raced off; only the child that was just shy of slumber kept him to a fast paced, though smooth, walk instead of the sprint that he wished to utilize.
As he raced down the corridors and passed by doors, windows, and through a handful of courtyards, the memories threatened to overwhelm him once again: there a much loved face thrown back in deep laughter, here the place of much conversation and good advice. Marcuanon was grateful when he finally arrived at his destination; a small garden that he had been allowed to claim, just outside his rooms. He had requested the small plot of earth many years ago when it became apparent that he had a true gift for plants. At first, it was only used for hardy, decorative plants; but, as he grew, so to did his abilities, and now the small garden was a flourishing miracle as he nurtured and grew most of the healing herbs that were used. Including several that were previously thought to be uncultivable or were not truly suited for the climate.

He headed straight for the only bit of space in the tiny, sheltered garden that he had allowed to remain as decorative flowers. A small bit of his power had the multiple rose bushes leaning away slightly from him as he strode into the middle of the strongly blooming plants. Once in the center of the plot of thorny plants, Marcuanon collapsed to the ground, rocking back and forth with Aragorn wrapped securely in his arms as he allowed the tears free reign at last, crying silently in his hidden bower while the heavy scent of blooming roses perfumed the air around the two of them.

He didn't know how long he sat and cried while rocking a sleeping Aragorn, but eventually he became aware of someone gently calling for him. Looking up, he blinked away the tears that clouded his vision while gently parting his roses. Gîltass shuffled forward into his vision, the tips of his fingers providing the only illumination to the scene as fire flickered gently about them, his beloved, Glorfindel, just behind the other.

Gîltass blinked away his own tears when the trembling rose bushes parted before him to reveal the delicate tear stained face of his god-son, tears still clinging to his long, curled lashes and threatening to spill over from his verdant eyes. Before he could move, Glorfindel slid around him and glided over to where Marcuanon sat rocking Aragorn. The much older elf didn't say anything, just sat down on the soft earth of the garden right behind Marcuanon, folding his long legs underneath himself and wrapping his strong arms around the two younglings, offering wordless love and support.

"Oh Bambi," Gîltass whispered, shattered at the pain he could read in every line of Marcuanon's body; wishing that there was something that he could do, but knowing that only time and love would be able to help the other over this horrible occurance.
ellith - plural, elf woman

Harry meets Bilbo Ages: H65 B50

Lonely mountain ta2941

if harry=15 years old then it's ta2891

that makes Dunedain chieftain Arador(ta2820-ta2930)

father of Arathorn II (ta2873-ta2933)

father of Aragorn Elessar (March 1, 2931. Ascended to the throne on May 1, 3019. Died at F.A. 120)

Bilbo birthday: Sept 22, ta 3001

Frodo arrives in Rivendell Oct 3018
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

T.A.2941

** - direct quote from the books

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"That's it, Estel," Marcaunon said encouragingly to the ten year old. "Although I do think that next lesson will have us looking at different bows for you as it seems that you've outgrown this one with your latest growth spurt. You're almost as tall as I am now."

That last part was said with a wry grin as grey eyes flashed up slightly to meet his own emerald green ones, brightly lit up with amused glee at the announcement. Marcaunon snorted and reached out, ruffling the dark, wavy locks that hung to the boyishly slim shoulders that only hinted at the height and breath the boy was growing in to.

"As if you weren't fully aware of that, tass, and rubbed it in every chance you are remotely able. Soon enough, I am sure that you will be as tall as your Ada Elrond," Marcaunon felt rewarded by the happy chuckles Estel let loose as he ducked away from the hand mussing his locks. "Now then, I suppose that it is time to cease our practice for the day."

Marcaunon raised his voice over the protests he could see the other opening his mouth spout as the young face formed into what the other probably felt was a deep scowl, but was, in fact, an adorable pout.
"Even with you using a bow that you've outgrown, and hence it is far too easy for you to use, this is still a strain on your muscles and body. I wish to be in no way, shape, or form a cause of deliberate injury to you ever again and I will thank you to respect that after the last time I let you talk me into 'just a few more' shots and ended up getting a pulled muscle in your elbow. Now go and put up the equipment that you used."

Estel looked sheepish and slightly guilty at that, as Marcaunon had been so upset over that occurrence that he had cried himself sick and wouldn't oversee Estel's physical lessons without someone else being there to watch for several months.

Marcaunon sighed as he watched the child set his bow down on the table; the boy looked so much like his birth father. He watched as Estel gave a quick check to ensure that no other archer had come to the range and was shooting, then he ran to the target and began to pull out his arrows, placing them back into his quiver after giving them a thorough inspection. He truly loved the time he was able to spend with Arathorn's child, and was grateful that he was considered old enough, and skilled enough, to join in on training Estel, even if it was only one day a week.

Marcaunon silently walked away from the equipment table, his eyes only occasionally flicking forwards to watch were he was walking as, for the most part, he kept them firmly on the boy who was standing so tall and happy in the bright sun. Coming to the edge of the treeline, and the heavy, cool shade it offered, Marcaunon turned and took only a small handful of steps before coming to a halt at a low, backless stone bench that was nestled under a wispy looking, flowering tree. Sitting himself down, Marcaunon finally drew his attention away from Arathorn's child and instead allowed his eyes to come to rest on the empty seat beside him, loosing himself in the dance of light that happened across the heavy, dark-grey stone every time the breeze picked up and made the fragile, overhead branches sway.

His sensitive hearing easily picked up the sounds Estel made, allowing him to track the boy's progress as he cleaned up the range, got himself a drink, then made his way over to where Marcaunon was seated. What was coming up next was both his favorite time of the week, and the one he dreaded the most at times. Knowing that Estel was almost there, Marcaunon raised his eyes to the other's face and gently patted the open seat next to him. Estel quickly sat himself down, then leaned over, placing his head gently against Marcaunon's shoulder. Marcaunon raised his arm and wrapped it around the boy, giving him a gentle squeeze.
"What would you like to hear this week," Marcaunon quietly asked after several minutes had passed with the two of them just enjoying the comfort the other had to offer.

"Could you please tell me about how mother and father met and married?" Estel asked, his boyish voice a mere whisper.

"Of course," Marcaunon fondly said, bestowing a swift kiss to the top of the head nestled so trustingly against him. "It really isn't that much of a story though, just so that you are aware. Gilraen the Fair, your mother, was out in the market one day when your father bumped into her. Quite literally in this case, causing her to drop one of her baskets.

"I must say, for a Ranger, your father was fearsome indeed when it came to anything weapon related and he was awe-inspiring when he was out in the woods or training someone in anything related to the two, but when his guard was down, it was a whole other story. In other words," Marcaunon said with a bit of a twinkle in his eyes and a light laugh in his voice, "he was a bit of a clutz. He and I had also met by running into each other, causing me to drop several books that Erestor had set me to read. Erestor was not the most pleased person about that as a few corners of his precious books were dinged up and he let Arathorn know that. Loudly and at length."

Estel snorted, his hand coming up to cover the bottom half of his face as chuckles began to escape him.

"However, getting back to the main tale, he swiftly apologized to Gilraen, then insisted on accompanying her on the remainder of her market trip. He bumped into several other people during that trip; this time though it was because he was unable to remove his eyes from the beautiful person of your mother, much to the amusement of everyone watching. When Gilraen was finished with her shopping, he escorted her back to her home. He then spent the next year, when not out fighting or patrolling, learning all he could about her and getting to know her better and falling in love. For it may have been her great beauty that first caught his eyes, but it was her gentle strength and amazing personality that held him. And it was a love that was returned in full measure by your mother. However, when he went to ask for her hand, he was opposed in this by her father, Dirhael, who said that she was much too young, being only just a few years above her coming of age. Also, he had a sense of foreboding that Arathorn would not live long. But her mother, Ivorwen, soothed him and convinced him to allow the match, saying, "If these two wed now, hope may be born for our people; but if they delay, it will not come while this age lasts."**"
Marcaunon paused in his tale telling for a moment, letting himself draw some comfort in his surroundings and the boy resting quietly against him.

"Your mother's father was quite correct in his misgivings, as Arador was killed by Hill Trolls barely a year after the wedding, thrusting Arathorn to the chieftainship, only to be killed himself by foul orcs three years later. The other side of that coin though, is that your mother's mother was also correct in her counsel, as you were born a year after Arathorn became chief, giving much joy and hope to your people."

There was no response made to that, nor did he really expect one as it was a lot to take in.Marcaunon sat in silence, listening to the birds and insects, his arm still wrapped around Estel's slim shoulders as he offered quiet comfort and support. It was almost a quarter of an hour later that Estel finally stirred himself, pulling away from Marcaunon as he sat upright on the bench for the first time that afternoon.

"Thank you," he said as he scrubbed at his eyes, which were red and puffy looking, although no tears had been shed. "I know that it has to hurt you to tell me this kind of stuff, but mother just can't talk about father without breaking down and I don't want to hurt her."

Marcaunon leaned over, carefully avoiding the other's arms and elbows, and placed a soft kiss on Estel's head, then he rose to his feet. Looking down, which was only possible because Estel did not rise with him, Marcaunon was struck all over again by how much Estel was like his father.

"It is my pleasure to do so," he said firmly, a small, melancholy smile playing about his petal pink lips. His expression changed suddenly, morphing into one of vixenish trouble, "Now don't you have lessons with Ada Elrond in a few minutes? I'm pretty sure that you are supposed to be going over herb lore today, especially focusing on the plants that grow around places where your ancestors' dwelled, like the Athelas, or Kingsfoil, plant."
The look of shocked horror on Estel's face was perfect, Marcaunon decided, as the other froze in place at the reminder, before he leapt to his feet and took off running at the highest possible speed. Marcaunon considerately waited until he was out of sight before bursting out in deep laughter, tears actually coming to his eyes as he did so. It was a few minutes until he was able to get some semblance of control over himself, and even then he was prone to releasing a chuckle occasionally. Panting slightly, and feeling quite pleased with himself, Marcaunon started to leave the archery range in search of something to do, as he was finished with his chores for the day, and he had no lessons in the afternoons following Esyel's training. Perhaps he would find Glorfindel and get in some training of his own, or perhaps he could assist the gardeners as it was a lovely day. He would have been very happy to seek out Gîltass, but he knew that his godfather was out and about on near patrol at the farthest points in the valley that were still in the valley.

Just as he was about to step out of the clearing the range was located in, Merilin came into view around the bend in the path before him. Marcaunon smiled brightly at the archery trainer and made to move out of her way, letting her pass freely by him, before leaving the clearing himself; however, the tall, auburn haired, blue eyed elleth clearly had other ideas as she paused when she drew even with the shorter elfling.

"Greetings to you on this fine day," Merilin said with a brief nod of her head.

"Pleasant meet," Marcaunon chirped back, smile still firmly in place as he looked up at her. "If you were looking to join with Estel and I while he had his lessons, you are just a bit late as we have already finished up and he has been sent off to meet with Lord Elrond for his lessons on herb lore."

"Thank you for that information, but no, I was not particularly looking for someone. I came to attend to the "needs repair" barrel in the archery shed. I was told that it was becoming rather full and, as I had a good bit of time on my hands this afternoon, thought that I would spend some of it going through the thing and fixing those that could be fixed and seeing to the disposal of the ones that are non-repairable."

"Do you need any assistance?"
"No, although I thank you for your offer of aid," Merilin said with a small smile. "It shouldn't take me any time at all, especially on such a beautiful day where I can take my work outside into the bright light and fresh air. I know that you have the afternoon off, so why don't you scoot along and enjoy it."

Marcaunon made his farewells and glided off down the sun dappled path, enjoying the way the wind playing in the overhead branches made changed the shadows on the path, making it look like it was a stretch of stream bottom with the water rippling over it. As he walked along, Marcaunon made the decision to spend the day gardening, but instead of working along side of others in the main gardens, he would take the time to tend to his own little patch. Decision now made, his pace picked up until he was skipping merrily along the paths to his destination.

Entering his garden, Marcaunon looked around and let out a happy squeal as he quickly removed his boots and stockings so that he could have a better connection to the earth, allowing him to better "listen" to what the plants could tell him. Stepping forward, he headed straight for the section that played host to the healing herbs he cultivated. Marcaunon knelt down and promptly lost himself for the next several hours and he tended to his plants and "listened" to what they were saying about the world around him.

It was only the combination of his plants letting him know about the vibrations approaching him and the large hand coming to a rest on his slim shoulders that drew him out of his green world. Shaking off the haze that tended to fall over him while he was immersed in his plants, Marcaunon then looked up to see the amused face of Glorfindel peering back down at him. Happiness filled him to the brim and he spun around and leapt up, knowing that his beloved would always be there to catch him.

Glorfindel let out a deep laugh as he caught Marcaunon and spun him around several times before coming to a halt. Letting the petite male slip from his hold until his dainty feet were once again touching the ground, Glorfindel kept his arms wrapped around the precious bundle as he leaned over and pressed a kiss into the mass of dark, curly locks that were straining hard against the braid the other had pulled them back into that morning. While nothing of a physical nature had or would occur between them for many, many years due to Marcaunon's fragile young age, Glorfindel took much comfort in merely spending time with the youth and holding him in his arms was a pleasure that he could not and would not forgo, especially when his tithen pen also took such obvious comfort in it. They spent the next several moments merely savoring one another's company and love before Glorfindel huffed a sigh into Marcaunon's dark locks and released him enough that Glorfindel was able to look the other in the eyes.
"The near patrol just arrived a few moments before I came to get you. Mithrandir has returned and has brought along several Hadhodrim back with him. Also he has brought along a halfling, one of the Shirefolk from near the banks of the Baranduin. It is altogether a most curious group."

Marcaunon looked up, wonder shining in his eyes and lighting up his slim, aristocratic face. He had never seen either of those two races before. In fact, he had only really ever seen elves with the occasional glimpse of one of the second born that would come to Imladris from time to time to do a bit of studying in the vast library. He was kept under heavy watch during those times as the elves wished for no solid news about him to escape out into the world as he was still a child and they took his protection very seriously.

And as for Mithrandir, well, Marcabon had met the Ishtar before. Shortly after his and Giltas’ arrival in Imladris in fact. And what a meeting that was... Marcabon smiled as he buried his face into Glorfindel's chest and remembered...

Gandalf worriedly puffed on his pipe as he snapped the reigns again, encouraging the horse that was drawing his cart to keep it's speed up to a trot. While he was fully aware that the beast had to be tired, after all, he had been making the poor thing keep to this pace for the last two days, they were almost at their destination, having crossed the ford into Imladris just a short bit ago. The messenger that Elrond had sent out had gotten truly lucky as Gandalf was already on his way to visit the Elven Lord, having had a flash of intuition that he had long ago learned to follow.

It was the state of the scout that found him that was causing him to lay on all reasonable speed, however, as the elf was flushed and had quickly relayed Elrond's desire to see him before turning down the hospitality of Gandalf's camp to hurry back to Imladris, thus firing up his immense curiosity.

As he pulled into the heart of the valley, where he was usually able to hear the welcoming
strains of hauntingly beautiful elven voices raised in song, Gandalf found himself puzzled that no melody wafted through the air to greet him. Becoming increasingly alarmed, he *chirked* at his horse once again, trying to speed it along, but the steed was having none of it and refused to advance it's pace beyond that of a tired trot. Finally, they pulled abreast of the wall and Galdalf was able to looked up and take the measure of the guards as they stood in their positions. It did little to reassure him, as they were all in full armor and what features he was able to make out in the gathering gloom all looked quite fierce.

He rolled through the gates, crossed the courtyard, and pulled up just outside the stables, nearest the path that would lead him to the building that played host to Elrond's study, hoping to finally find some answers. But just as he was stepping down from his cart, leaving his very tired steed to catch it's breath, Erestor popped up at his elbow. Gandalf's extremely bushy eyebrows shot up in shock as he took in the elf's appearance, for the elf, normally one of the most composed beings that Gandalf had had the pleasure of meeting, was almost frazzled looking and kept running his long fingers with their callouses from his work as a scribe through his long hair, making it look like a stringy mess.

"Welcome and well met, Mithrandir. I know not how you arrived so soon after we sent out the scouts with their messages for you, but I will lay that miracle at the feet of the Valar as well. Now come, I am to lead you to where you may find our Lord Elrond."

"I thank you for your welcome," Gandalf said, puzzled, even as he followed after the tall elf who was practically running down the paths at the speed he was walking. "I do know the way to Elrond's study, though, if you have somewhere else you must be."

"No, no. We are going to the same place. My Lord has quite happily taken up residence in the nursery for the last three days, not that I can blame him," Erestor muttered the last bit so quietly that Gandalf wasn't quite sure that he had heard him correctly, although he definitely heard the next bit. "If my duties allowed me to do so, I would join him more there more than I already do."

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you?" Gandalf huffed out as they sped around a corner, all the time looking around in shock as he saw more and more elves in the area the closer they came to the nursery. "I thought that Arathorn was doing well and, in fact, was recently sent to visit among his people, and so, he shouldn't be here and the nursery should be empty?"
Just as he spoke, they arrived at the door to the nursery, where they had to fight their way past a crowd that was gathered around the open door, all of whom looked to be experiencing an amazingly pleasant shock. A bright burst of high-pitched laughter rang into the evening air, quickly followed and over-lapped by a second set of high-pitched giggles. Gandalf quickly pushed forward through the last few elves to reach the open doorway, where he froze in shock.

There, before his very eyes, were a pair, A PAIR!, of elflings!

And Elrond of all beings was seated on the floor, holding the two tiny, laughing beings securely on his lap as he tickled their sides, causing the bright joyous noise that was children's laughter to escape them. Dazed, Gandalf staggered into the brightly lit room, drawing the attention of the three beings playing on the floor. The elflings immediately stopped laughing, drawing closer to Elrond and snuggling in tightly against the person they knew. The tiniest elfling had popped a miniscule thumb into his mouth and was also hiding behind the taller elfling, letting only his emerald eyes be occasionally seen as he sought safety from the stranger that Gandalf was to them as the Istar loomed over the trio.

"Wha- but... how!?" Gandalf sputtered as he forced his legs to carry him just far enough into the room so that he was able to land in the nearest chair as his legs gave out from underneath him. He was completely flabbergasted by the sight before him.

Elrond calmly, but with an air of absolute joy about him, elegantly rose from the ground, easily holding onto the two dark-haired elflings. Gandalf watched the three of them closely as the Lord moved closer to him and, in fact, took the nearest seat available. The elven Lord smoothly settled the two miracles on his lap as he took his seat, seemingly paying them no mind as he turned his attention towards Gandalf, but the way his long, elegant fingers rose and began to play with the older elfling's dark locks was quite telling that his attention was divided. Not that Gandalf could even remotely blame the other as his attention was rather fixed on the two little ones as well. It wasn't until he heard Elrond say that Gildor and Arador had found the little ones all alone in the woods just outside of the ruins of Fornost that he was able to focus better on the tale that he was being told, losing himself in the knowledge that somehow, someway, the two little, lost princes that were Elrond's Uncles found their way into a new world to survive and thrive, leading eventually to the return of the two younglings who were currently resting on Elrond's lap. So lost was he in the the information being given to him that he never saw the miniscule fingers reaching out towards him.
Harry - no, his name was now Marcaunon and he should get used to referring to himself as such - Marcaunon knew that he shouldn't do it, but that part of him that he had taken to calling his inner child was right there and egging him on fiercely. His tiny, delicate hand cautiously reached out while his jewel bright eyes flickered between watching his bobbing and dancing target and keeping a careful eye on the adults who were clearly caught up in their rather intense looking discussion. A small body suddenly pressing up against his back caused him to start slightly, but was quickly tuned out as Marcaunon easily identified the warm mass as Gillass; his godfather leaning in to him enough and in such a way that the taller, older elfling was resting his head on top of Marcaunon's messy raven head. Marcaunon narrowed his eyes, his tongue sticking slightly out of the corner of his mouth, as he swiftly closed in on his target.

Gandalf immediately ceased talking the moment he felt something tangle tightly into his beard. Looking down, he was surprised to see wide innocent-looking eyes in a tiny elfling face peering intensely back up at him, even as the other's small, finely-boned fingers kept playing with his long grey beard. A warm chuckle drew his eyes back up to meet with the amused orbs of the elven Lord.

"I can see that you must have had your hands rather full over the last few days," Gandalf said, relaxing into his chair and trying to ignore the tugging on his beard, followed by the pout the elfling gave when the long hairs slid out of his fingers.

"Indeed," Elrond replied contentedly pulling his lapful closer to himself as he also sat back a bit more in his chair. "Now then, what do you think about..."

Marcaunon began to laugh hysterically to himself as another memory made itself known hard on the heels of the first, but his laughing drew Glorfindel's attention fully on himself, making the taller, much older elf pull away slightly once again and use his fingers to gently raise Marcaunon's chin so that their eyes could meet.
"What has you in such a state, dear one?"

"I was just remembering the first time that Gîltass and I first met the reknowned Mithrandir and right at the end, I had a sudden flash of memory to the next day, when Gîltass found out that Mithrandir's cart was loaded with fireworks," Marcaunon stated around bursts of laughter.

"Ah!" Glorfindel exclaimed, humor lighting up his own light blue eyes. "That is something that I truly wish that I had been here for: to see it in person truly must have been a sight for the ages! I am sure that the descriptions given to me were hardly able to do justice to that occurrence.

"But come," he said, suddenly getting more serious, even as a small gleam could be seen in his beautiful eyes. "It is time and past for us to have responded to such news, and I am sure that several of our nearest and dearest are wondering where we are and what has been keeping us from their sides for such a long time, as I was sent out to bring you to dinner so that we may eat alongside of our guests."

Marcaunon nodded and schooled his features into a semblance of solemnity before taking the hand that his life-mate offered to him. It was time indeed.

Chapter End Notes

tass - trouble
Hadhodrim- dwarves
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

** - indicates quotes taken directly from the book "The Hobbit", by J.R.

again, i do not own nor do i make any money from. i'm just playing in the sandbox.

And i really hope that i've manage to strike a halfway decent balance between elves as portrayed in The Hobbit(very silly) and the elves of Lord of the Rings (really, really NOT silly).

June T.A. 2941

Gîltass paused and cocked his head off to one side, intensely listening to the sounds of the forest surrounding him, convinced that he had heard something that just didn't belong. As he stood there, silent and hidden in the shadows the ancient forest, the only noises that came to his sensitive ears were those that he was expecting to hear: the persistent drone of insects, the treetops stirring in the gentle breeze, the faint and few calls the birds let out as twilight settled over the woods and they found roosts for the night, the babbling of the river just on the other side of the thicket of trees he was currently halted in. He wasn't even able to hear any noises that would have revealed his partner, Lalaithnest, who was a very experienced scout that had volunteered to be Gîltass' mentor as the twins, Elladan and Elrohir, were unable to be solely responsible for him and his training as they had so many other duties to tend too, although they happily made time to train him as often as they were able to.

Gîltass waited several long moments, his breathing carefully controlled and his heartbeat regulated so as to not give away his own position. Finally, just when he thought that his senses had played a trick on him just to liven up the dull patrol, and the singing of his brethren began to ring out over the valley, the faint clomp-clomping of hooves could be heard coming steadily nearer to the glade that he was hidden within.

Opening eyes that he had not realized he had closed as he listened, Gîltass patiently waited to see just who was arriving at the Last Homely House, so that he could decided just what action he should take, knowing that Lalaithnest would be waiting on him to make that decision and would be ready to back him up, as it was part of his training after all. He was so intent on watching that he failed to note Lalaithnest coming up behind him and only his training prevented him from jumping
and squeaking when the other placed a hand on his shoulder. He did, however, send a dirty look over his shoulder at his smug-looking mentor, but quickly turned his attention back to the almost unnoticeable path when he heard Lalaithnest speak up.

"Well, well! Just look! Bilbo the hobbit on a pony, my dear! Isn't it delicious!"

Giltass, well used to his mentor by now and his, rather different, sense of humor as well as the fact that the elf seemed to know everyone, played along.

"Most astonishing wonderfull!" he said with sarcasm that only the most sensitive of ears could have caught, which meant that Lalaithnest easily heard it and gave him a bright, happy looking smirk.

The singing from down the valley swelled louder just then and Giltass waited until it died down just a bit before stepping out of the trees, bowing to the two lead riders. Counting on the fact that Lalaithnest clearly seemed to know them, especially when the tallest rider had already dismounted his steed and had come over to chat with the elf, Giltass spoke up in welcome of the strange group.

"Welcome to the valley!" he said.

He received a gruff "Thank you!" in return. Giltass finally took a good, hard look at the group and was astonished to see that it contained Mithrandir, who was the one happily chatting away with the big gossip that was his mentor, thirteen Hadhodrim, and one lonely and out of place looking perian! Shaking off his astonishment, Giltass pulled himself together and did his job.

"You are a little out of your way," he said: "that is, if you are making for the only path across the water and to the house beyond. We will set you right, but you had best get on foot, until you are
over the bridge. Are you going to stay a bit and sing with us,"** Gîltass said with a faint smile as he glanced over at a snickering Lalaithnest, "or will you go straight on? supper is preparing over there. I can smell the wood-fires for the cooking."**

The tired looking *perian* perked up as soon as the tongue-in-cheek offer to stay and sing with them was mentioned, making Gîltass give a silent promise to make sure he spent some time with the small being if it was at all possible with his patrolling schedule; however, the *Hadhodrim* loudly and enthusiastically made their interest in supper quite known and impossible to overrule. Nodding his head sharply in assent, as he truly had not expected a different outcome from the travel-worn looking bunch, Gîltass stepped further out from the trees and onto the pathway, smoothly taking the lead as he continued to glide forward. While he did that, the riders were all busily dismounting, grabbing the steeds' reins, and shuffling around just a bit as a few of the *Hadhodrim* pushed forwards in the group as through they couldn't wait to reach the offered meal.

On they all went, leading their ponies, till they were brought to a good path and so at last to the very brink of the river. It was flowing fast and noisily, as mountain-streams do of a summer evening, when sun has been all day on the snow far up above. There was only a narrow bridge of stone without a parapet, as narrow as a pony could well walk on; and over that they had to go, slow and careful, one by one, each leading his pony by the bridle.**

Several elves had gathered together at the river's edge and their assembled lanterns cast a bright light on the bridge. They were singing a bright and joyous song that broke off as the group began to cross, at which point they began to offer not-so-helpful comments and suggestions, laughing merrily the whole time.

"Don't dip your beard in the foam, father!"** one said to a *Hadhodrim* who was almost bent on to his hands and knees. "It is long enough without watering it."**

"Mind Bilbo doesn't eat all the cakes!"** another gaily cried out. "He is too fat to get through key holes yet!"**
"Hush, hush! Good People! and good night!"** said Mithrandir, who came last. "Valleys have ears, and some elves have over merry tongues. Good night!"**

More bright, merry laughter was sent his way at that, but the teasing comments ceased and the gathered elves went back to their singing, leaving the small group to be led the rest of the way to Imladris by Gîltass, who was trying to hide the smile his brethren's comments had placed on his face. He was just grateful that he hadn't burst out into laughter right alongside them, as the faces the Hadhodrim and the perian made were priceless.

"I can, most assuredly, see that smile that you are sporting, Gîltass."

Startled, Gîltass quickly spared a glance over his shoulder when he heard that quiet comment and was met by the all too knowing eyes of Mithrandir, humor lightening up his weathered face; easily read by one who knew the aged Istar and what signs to look for. Quickly pulling himself together, Gîltass turned back around and focused on doing a proper job of leading the odd little group.

"I have no idea what you are referring to. Are you sure you don't have me confused with someone? You are on the older side of the scale, after all, and must have met far too many people over the long years of your life to be able to keep them all straight," he replied in his most innocent sounding voice, forcing his body to relax muscles that had tensed up with his sudden shock. He really had to get a better handle on paying attention to his surroundings during those times that his heart and gut were trying to tell him that he was completely safe. When he was the one on watch, it was a bad reflex to have.

"Hmm...that is quite possible. Although I am fairly certain that it was a dark-haired, grey-eyed elfling who is a distant relation of Lord Elrond with a penchant for tricks and a delight in seeing others' reactions to them, who also has a rather nifty little gift that gives him an affinity to flames and fire of all sorts that reacted rather poorly to said elfling exploring my cart almost fifty years ago, and who was named in such a way as to pay homage to his ancestry, on both sides of his rather remarkable family, and his extremely mischievous nature to give people some manner of warning. But, I'm sure that you are correct, and I must be thinking of someone completely different who would be smothering a smile at the comments his fellows made," Mithrandir replied loftily, ignoring the quiet sniggering and the shaking shoulders of the young elf gliding along before him.
The two of them fell quiet after that very brief exchange, content to spend the time covering the short distance in companionable silence that was only broken by the loud, to Gîltass’ sensitive hearing, mumbles from those following behind. It was only a matter of minutes after their bantering that had the fifteen unexpected guests finally stumbling their way past the wide open gates and into the shelter of the main courtyard. Gîltass, after a bit of wordless communication with his mentor, saw to it that the group had assistance in putting up their mounts for the night while Lalaithnest slid silently out of sight into the dark corners of the courtyard as he went to notify the Lord of the house that guests had arrived, including the very important personage that was Mithrandir.

Once the steeds had been attended too, Gîltass led the exhausted group of thirteen Hadhodrim, one perian, and one meddlesome Istar who was, perhaps not so surprisingly, quite alert, to the nearest bathhouse; letting the group clean up briefly but thoroughly, before he escorted the, now somewhat cleaner, assortment to the dining hall, where a plethora of amazing smells and bright, happy bursts of laughter and conversation wafting from behind the closed doors had tired, drooping heads perking up and looking around in great interest as they narrowed in on the attention grabbing assaults to their senses. Gîltass blushed as he took note of Lalaithnest's face set into a scolding frown as his mentor flashed several handsigns at him from the shadows where he stood hidden.

"It is rather late, I suppose, but welcome to the Last Homely House west of the Mountains," Gîltass said sheepishly. "You will be seated at Lord Elrond's table to dine; however, please refrain from discussing any of the business that brought you here. He will be more than pleased to meet with you on the morrow once you've rested and I, or anyone else in the House, will gladly escort you to his study at any time after you've broken your fast in the morning."

With that said, Gîltass gently opened the doors and lead the party inside. He was struggling to contain the flush that wanted to spread across his cheeks at the reprimand Lalaithnest gave him, but he wasn't so embarrassed that he failed to note the quiet pocket that they traveled in as the tables they passed ceased their conversations to study the odd group, before returning to their discussions once again, probably with a different topic of conversation. He just hoped that his lapse in manners was only known by Lalaithnest and that the older elf would be merciful on him later.

The Hadhodrim and the perian were too busy looking at the laden tables that they walked past to note the buzz of conversations going on around them, which he supposed he should be grateful for, as his lessons said that Hadhodrim were very easily agitated and quick to take offense. He didn't want a blow-up under his watch. They quickly wove their way in and around the smaller tables,
Giltass easily making his way to the larger, head table near the back that was closest to the serving doors.

"My Lord," Giltass began, giving a brief nod of his head towards the center of the table, where Elrond was seated, "I bring to you; weary travelers that seek your counsel."

"My thanks for your service in guiding them hither," Elrond calmly responded. "It would please me should our guests choose to dine with us this evening and would honor me if they would join my table."

Mithrandir stepped forward from where he was standing just behind Giltass, and gave a brief nod of his own, "It would be our pleasure and joy to dine with you and we thank you for the honor you do us by welcoming us to break bread with you at your table. If I may, however, I wish to make known those who stand before you before we partake of your generous hospitality.

"My Lord Elrond, first, may I introduce Thorin Oakenshield, son of Thrain, grandson of King Thror", Thorin stepped forward and bowed to the ruler of the House as he was being introduced, followed in turn by the rest of the group as Mithrandir continued on, "then we have Glóin, Óin, Ori, Nori, Dori, Dwalin, Balin, Kili, Fili, Bifur, Bofur, and Bombur to round out our complement of Dwarven kin. Accompanying us as well is Bilbo Baggins of the Shire," Bilbo also stepped forward and gave a quick, nervous bow, muttering a greeting under his breath, as he was feeling rather overwhelmed at the moment.

The introductions made, the group was quickly seated at the large table, filling in all of the available seats minus three, which puzzled several of the members of the group as they were sure that the elves could count and wouldn't have made such a blunder; once the entire group had sat down, one of the remaining empty seats was promptly filled by their escort, the young elf that had yet to introduce himself to them. It was while the food they were promised was being brought out and set before them, that the last bit of mystery surrounding the empty place settings was taken care of, as a clearly older, warrior elf came in leading someone that had most of the dwarves staring bugged eyed in shock: an elf that was clearly a child. Something that was so rare a sight as to be practically non-existent.
They watched in wonder as the older elf led his companion to the table and pulled out the chair nearest the Lord Elrond, on the other side from Gandalf, allowing the elfling to be seated first, before taking the last chair, just to the side of the elfling, for himself. The two last elves seating themselves seemed to be a signal of sorts that the rest of the hall recognized as the quiet, lilting murmur of elven voices was joined by the gentle chiming of silverware on plates. Looking around, the dwarves saw that the Lord Elrond and Gandalf, as well as the three other elves sitting with them, had started to serve themselves from the nearest available platters. Taking that to be permission to start, they did the same, passing platters around when done filling their plate, before settling in to eat their fill. The older dwarves recalling feast day manners and trying to apply what they had learned so long ago to the meal and the younger ones surreptitiously watching them and trying to copy their elders.

Bilbo, who had taken the seat nearest the empty three chairs, thus placing him at the side of the young scout once he had seated himself, was feeling particularly overwhelmed. Meeting the elves was one of his greatest wishes and now, here he was, seated at their high table, dining with the Lord Elrond himself, an elf sitting in the chair just beside him! He didn't know what to do or where to look first and when the singing started up from a group near the large, open windows, well...it was just a dream come true and he was never able afterward to tell people what, exactly, he dined upon that night so lost was he in his enjoyment.

Gîltass, catching movement out of the corner of his eye, turned his head, then looked down to see the little perian trying to look everywhere at once, his head turning every which way as he absentmindedly brought bits of food up to his mouth. Gîltass valiantly refrained from laughing, as he was seated right beside Bilbo, but he once again promised himself to see to it that the little man had the chance to meet with several of the elves and talk to them as much as his heart could desire. Perhaps getting Bilbo together with his adorable godson would be the best way to go about it, he mused to himself, shooting a pensive glance towards Marcaunon. The little fawn tended to attract the numerous residents of Imladris to him like bees to nectar and, if he were to encourage the little one to practice his harp, the perian would almost be guaranteed a chance to hear elven singing up close as others would join Marcaunon. Perhaps that was the way to go about it then, as he wasn't altogether sure about how long he would be allowed to linger amongst the buildings before he was sent back out on near patrol. He would love to be able to stay and find out more about what brought such an odd assortment to Imladris, as his curiosity was prodding at him mercilessly and, from what he was easily able to overhear Elrond and Mithrandir speaking about, it would be something fairly major, especially the tantalizing bits Thorin, who was seated next to Mithrandir, was chiming in with from time to time: although the three of them did keep it light and didn't really touch on the full reason for the visit, just as requested before entering the hall.

Gîltass wanted to bang his head on the table and groan at his own stupidity when, near the end of the feast, after the desserts had been served and were almost all gone and it was more than time to call it a night, he realized that he had been sitting beside one of the odd group and, instead of trying
to piece together what they were doing here by the fascinating snippets he was over-hearing, he could have just asked the perian that obviously held elves in high regard and who would have been, most likely, overjoyed at sharing his information during a conversation with an actual elf. Well, he would just have to fix that right now! Turning to more fully face the perian, excitement beginning to flood him, his mouth open to introduce himself finally before he began to flood Bilbo with his questions, Giltass released a whimper and his mouth snapped shut when his vision fell on a sleeping body. The perian had gotten so tired and overwhelmed that he had fallen asleep at table, his crossed arms cushioning his head as he gently snored with one hand clasped firmly around a half eaten piece of honey bread.

It just wasn't fair!

Chapter End Notes

nest [nist] name heart, core, center
lalaith [lalaith] name laughter
Dwarfs (people) name Hadhodrim
perian - halfling, hobbit,
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

from this chapter to the end of my story, all conversations will assumed to be in Westron, or Common Tongue unless it is between elves: I will attempt to write it out in elven if it is only an aside or two with translations provided at the bottom of the story. Estel/Aragorn will be counted among the elves if they are speaking to him.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been seventy-seven years since Gîltass had met his first halfling; or, as he had learned so many years previously from one of the little beings, hobbits. Yet, here he was, silently treading on the outskirts of one of their main villages, Hobbiton. His eyes scanned over everything, taking it all in even in the heavy dusk of the pleasant June evening: the small hills with round doors and windows set within them and warm, welcoming light streaming from the windows, the sounds of laughter and singing that were easily heard even through closed doors, the rustling noises of the domesticated beasts as they settled in for the night.

His flawless vision finally saw that which he was seeking as he came round a low hill on the outside of the village proper: a round door, brightly painted in an eye-catching emerald green color set high into the side of a larger hill than most in the area, with a massive, ancient, sprawling tree just behind and to one side of it, casting most of the hill into even greater darkness at this time of the day. Gîltass paused for a moment just to take in the sight. When Bilbo had described the "birthday celebration" tree to him, the hobbit did not do it justice. It was a monstrous beast of an old tree and had to be a remnant of the original forest that used to cover the land. Gîltass made a mental note to brag about seeing such a wondrous tree to Legolas the next time he saw the prissy woodland prince.

Shaking off the awe he felt, Gîltass recalled himself to his original task. He had been travelling with the Brown Istar, Radagast, for several seasons now as the White Council was becoming increasingly concerned over the news that they had been receiving the last few decades involving things and beings associated with the dark. He was one of many scouts that had been sent out and about to find out the truth as to why the orcs, goblins, and the other vile creatures were increasing and making themselves known in areas that had been cleared of them in the past. It had just been his luck to stumble into Radagast and not get shooed away, as the Brown Istari was one of the most reclusive of the brotherhood and shied away from dealing with the sentient races of Arda, preferring to spend his time among the wild beasts.
Just recently, word had reached them from the leader of the Heren Istarion: Curunir to the Sindar, or Saruman to everyone else. The white wizard needed to speak with Mithrandir about some new information that had been recently uncovered, but was having a difficult time tracking him down. Fortunately, he had been able to get a message to Radagast, which was how Gîltass found himself visiting the Shire; a place he had heard much about, but had never had the opportunity to visit before.

Slipping quietly up to the door, Gîltass was just about to knock when he heard the faintest of noises coming from around the back of the hill. Stilling himself completely, head cocked slightly to one side, Gîltass broke out into a pleased, self-congratulatory smirk when he identified the noises as the sounds of a pipe being packed by someone wearing long, sweeping sleeves. Gliding away from the door, Gîltass followed along the beaten pathway, staying in the shadows and out of sight, until he came to the back of the hill and saw the back of a large, man-shaped figure sporting a peaked hat with a very wide brim, sitting quietly on the tufts of grass, casually blowing smoke rings into the evening air. Scanning the area, Gîltass was pleased to note that it was only the two of them at the moment and saw this as the best opportunity to speak with Mithrandir without having to involve anyone else.

Knowing that sneaking up on an Istari was a colossally bad idea, Gîltass lightly cleared his throat and allowed his feet to make a scuffing noise on the path. Mithrandir casually looked over his shoulder, not pausing for a moment in his enjoyment of his pipe, saw who it was, and gave a sharp gesture with his head that Gîltass easily took to mean that the Istar wished for him to move closer. Dropping the pretense of clumsy feet, he gilded forward the last bit of distance and crouched down.

"Well? What news brings one of the Eldest born to the humble Shire in search of myself?" Mithrandir quietly voiced his query after a few moments of puffing on his pipe.

"A long, boring story short, I have been traveling with Radagast for several seasons now. He received a missive that the Head of your particular order wishes to be passed on to you, as Curunir was apparently unable to track you down any other way and knew that the beasts would happily assist your Brown brethren," Gîltass replied, equally quiet in his turn, even as he kept scanning the area, looking for threats.
Mithrandir’s bushy eyebrows rose up towards his ancient looking hat.

"Well then," Mithrandir smoothly rose to his feet. "Let us not keep Radagast waiting as it was truly spectacular of him to leave the deep wilderness to come find me."

Gîltass silently nodded his agreement; both at the tacit implication that he would be doing the leading, and the knowledge of Radagast’s love of all things wild. After all, the entire time the two of them had travelled together, the closest they had come to any form of civilization was a tiny enclave of elves who were out on a hunting and gathering mission for Imladris a couple of months ago. Gîltass had seen this as quite the opportunity and had sent off his written reports with the lead guard, taking a few minutes to talk with the elf as he handed the papers over, while the other elves kept busy picking the ancient fruit trees bare of their summer bounty and Radagast hurried around the perimeter, his worn, brown robes flapping and fluttering behind him, muttering to a small, golden finch perched on his forefinger.

It was extremely easy to lead Mithrandir out of the village to where Radagast waited at the minimalistic campsite the two of them had set up. It was really nothing more than a fire pit, well cleared of any plant matter and ringed with stones, with their cloaks spread out on top of a generous pile of ever-green boughs. The remnants of their evening meal lingered in the air as faint scents hinting at roasted apples, toasted nuts, and the heavy earthiness of fungi. Upon arrival, Mithrandir rushed forward, clearly anxious to meet up with his brother. While the two of them immediately fell into discussion and the passing of news as Radagast fumbled around in his robes looking for the missive, Gîltass took a walk around the perimeter of the campsite, checking for signs that would indicate that someone had approached and using the opportunity to give the two Istari a bit of privacy.

Several turns about the perimeter later, Gîltass finally heard his name called and so he gave up on patrolling, deeming it safe to return if they were calling for him. Stepping into the tiny clearing where they had set up, he was able to see that the news had both excited Mithrandir and slightly worried him.

"Gîltass, would you please do this old wizard a great favor? I was going to stay in Hobbiton, visiting the nephew of our old friend Bilbo, for the rest of the summer while keeping an eye on him
and occasionally slipping out for a bit of a check for any suspicious characters. However, the information that Saruman says he has is far too important for me to not leave immediately to speak with him. So what I am going to ask you for is this: would you please keep watch over the Shire? And Frodo Baggins in particular? The plans are in place for him to leave Hobbiton in the fall, specifically September the twenty-second, when he will move to Buckland, and, from there, leave the Shire altogether. Also, he will be travelling with his gardener, a Mr. Samwise Gamgee, who was altogether too curious for his own good but I'm sure will be a most fortuitous companion."

"I would be pleased to do so, Mithrandir," Gîtass said, giving a brief nod of his head. "However, I will only be able to do so for the next couple of months, as my scouting duties require me to have returned to Lord Elrond's home by the first of September."

Mithrandir's face took on a look of deep thought and he started to mutter to himself as he appeared to use his fingers to count. After several long moments, his face cleared and he spoke.

"That should be fine. It will be close, no getting around that, but I should be back near that time as I have planned to accompany Frodo and his companion, Samwise Gamgee out of the Shire and all the way to Rivendell. I will plan to leave first thing in the morning, after making my farewells."

Mithrandir started to stride away from the campsite before suddenly halting himself and spinning around. Fixing an intense stare on the two remaining behind, he gave voice to one last request.

"Please seek out Aragorn when the time comes for the two of you to leave. I will do the same, as well as leaving messages where I think I may have the best chance of him coming across them. I know that you both will be leaving at different times from one another, but hopefully, between the three of us, he will get the message that I will have need of him and that I would wish him to meet with me in the Inn at Bree near the end of September."

He only waited until he heard the quietly voiced agreements before turning once again and
striding rapidly from the tiny camp, quickly becoming lost to sight among the trees and heavy shadows, if not from hearing as he walked back through the woods. Gîltass sighed a bit and rubbed his forehead, slightly regretting the fact that his pleasant scouting trip through the wilderness had come to its end and he was now facing a guarding and patrolling assignment instead. Not that he didn't agree with Mithrandir's request. Bilbo had been terribly fun to talk with and had become something of a close friend to him; looking after his nephew was the least that Gîltass could do for the old Hobbit. He also had to admit that he was grateful that he could get away with only trying to pass along a message to Estel as actually tracking down the Dûnedain Chieftain could take forever when you didn't already know where he was.

Gîltass turned to face Istari that he was left with and saw that the other was beginning to settle in for the evening onto his nest of boughs and fabric. Probably a good idea, not that Gîltass would be getting much sleep for the next couple of months as he did what he could all by his lonesome. Laying down, he mentally nudged himself to wake up in two hours to take a patrol. While he could, and did, forgo sleep now that he was older and able to gently rest while lost in his memories, on such a long term missions away from safe sleeping locations it was better to snatch catnaps to keep up his energy in times of ease; thus allowing him to forego sleep altogether during times of crises.

And that was how the night passed. Gîltass would wake up, take several turns about the camp as he inspected the area but saw nothing and heard only the expected sounds of nature with the noises of the nearby town sounding off from time to time, stoke the small, smokeless fire he had laid earlier, then lay back down and catch another two hours of light slumber. The entire time he did this, Radagast slept on; his eyes wide open and staring up at the rustling forest canopy overhead, with the occasional snort or grumble in his sleep.

He was on his last patrol of the night, the sky beginning to lighten off to the east as the clouds were painted with dull pinks and oranges, when heavy rustling indicated that his travelling partner was rising. As he finished the last quarter of the circle, Gîltass was able to hear the Istar beginning to prep the morning meal from the remnants of their foraging the day before as they hiked. While he had greatly enjoyed traveling with the eccentric Istar and had learned much from him, and thought it was a true stroke of luck to have met him at all as the Istar was almost phobic about approaching any forms of civilization, Gîltass was looking forward to being able to hunt once again, something he had foregone as the Brown Istari looked at the beasts as his family. The mere thought of roasted coney made his mouth water and Gîltass forcibly pushed away the image even as he swallowed rapidly.

Gliding into the campsite, Gîltass sharp, silver eyes noted that the Istar had just finished making the morning meal. Thanking the man politely, he closed the distance and lifted the sandwich, consisting of a pair of large mushrooms that had been toasted slightly over the small fire and were
holding together a large, healthy assortment of wild greens. Gîltass looked around as he began to break his fast, noting that the Istar had already donned his cloak and was making short work of his food. Clearly, Radagast was in a hurry to leave and get on the road, not wanting to linger in such a populous area any longer now that his message was delivered. After the last couple of bites were hastily devoured, Radagast picked up his staff and rose from the pile of boughs that had been his bed.

"It has been quite the experience meeting you and I thank you for your company in my travels," Radagast stated with a small, quick bob of his head, "but now is the time to part ways. I wish you all the best and perhaps our paths will cross again in the future."

Gîltass paused in his eating and bowed formally to the Istar who had so graciously taught him much about the natural world, but when he rose again, his mouth open to give voice to the gratefulness he felt, the Brown wizard was already hustling away. The elf merely smiled at this and continued on with his eating, watching the brown, patched robes flutter and flap as they moved away from him at a high speed. As soon as he had finished eating, Gîltass looked around the small clearing and assessed the place with an eye towards making it his permanent campsite for the next few months.

There were both pros and cons to this site, he decided as he looked around and thought about it. For one thing, while the Shire folk clearly loved their nature and trees were rather plentiful, there just were not that many groves this close to Hobbiton, especially ones of this size. And while being closer to his assigned target was nothing to sneeze at, it was also a potential disaster waiting to happen: he easily recalled the fact that when a hobbit so desired, they moved quietly enough to sneak up on even elves. A fact that Bilbo had demonstrated no few times. Also there was the fact that game would be scarcer this close to civilization and foraging for wild edibles much more difficult in an area where the earth had been tamed and turned into rolling farms, gardens, and orchards. Gîltass had no desire what-so-ever to help himself to the fruits of someone else's labors without invitation or payment and so refused to even remotely entertain the thought about foraging amongst the farmer's fields unless the situation was dire indeed.

Sighing and sagging slightly as he looked around, Gîltass sadly reached the conclusion that he would be spending his time not in this pleasant little clearing, sleeping when he could on soft, springy boughs, but traveling wide circuits around the area as he looked for any suspicious characters or goings on. The most he could look forward to was a hot meal that he had cooked before moving onwards again. Gîltass wanted to sigh again as he realized that he would be catching what sleep he could up in trees on the widest, yet most sheltered and hidden, branch that possible for him to find and praying to the Valar that it wouldn't storm all that much.
Giving in to the inevitable, Gîltass went about breaking the camp, making sure that nothing was left behind to give any hints that it was even a campsite at one time. The tiny fire was taken care of by kicking dirt over the flames. The stones surrounding making up the fire pit needed to be left alone for a bit to allow them a chance to cool down slightly so Gîltass set out to deconstruct the pine-bough beds. Knowing that it was a bad idea to just kick them about and leave them all to wither away in the same area, as there were a great number of branches, he grab about half of them and went about the grove; nestling some into the trees from which they came so that they would merely look like yet another dead branch that would fall in the first bit of heavy wind, others were dropped here and there about the woods as though they had been brought down by the previous wind storm the area had had.

Returning to the clearing, Gîltass used the remaining branches to make a very crude lean-to. One that was extremely low to the ground, as though made by hobbit children. Stepping back to take a better look at his work, he felt that something was missing. Giving the entire thing a thorough going over, he saw that, while it was crude and small, it was missing something that no child building a "fort" would have left out. Going over to where his travel sack was waiting for him, Gîltass fumbled around in the exterior pockets until he let out a triumphant, though subdued, yell and pulled out a scrap of colorful fabric whose normal duty was that of a wash-cloth. Gîltass strode back over to the "fort" and tied the "flag" to the topmost section of the branches. Now it looked like something the local children had made and wouldn't be commented on should it be found.

Looking up at the sky, Gîltass decided that the hour it had taken him to deal with the branches would have to be enough and headed over to the ring of stones surrounding the fire pit. Kicking at them to break them apart, he then set about nudging them into different areas about the small clearing, making sure to have the side scorched and blackened by the fire facing down. Once that was done, Gîltass grabbed the circle of greenery that had been cut out of the ground the night before and replaced it back where it had come from, which was the place where the fire had been. That done, Gîltass gave one last look over the area and was pleased to note that the overall impression was that children had been playing here; judging by the "fort" and the trampled plants.

Leaving the clearing, Gîltass quietly made his way to the edge of the grove where he took great care to stay out of sight in the brighter light and thinner coverage offered. He looked around the area, pleased to note that it was still free and clear of anyone else even at this late hour: why, it had to be an hour past full sunrise already! After thinking it over for a bit, Gîltass decided that his best bet for keeping a secure eye on Frodo was to ensure that he was waiting out on the doorstep of Bag End and could follow the hobbit from there for a day or two to get a feel for his habits, which would make it easier to keep track of him in the future.
Singing a faint aire under his breath, Gîltass cut around the outside of the town once again; well pleased that Bag End was on the outskirts, even if there was little coverage near the building because it was on the edge of the farming fields on one side, bracketed by pensioner's cottages on the other, and had the main path leading out of and through the village on a third. This made it all the more challenging, but it could be worked around. First things first however, was that Gîltass needed to get a good view of Frodo and his travelling companion so that he knew, precisely, who he was looking out for. While he could easily guess that Frodo would have some of the looks of his Uncle Bilbo, it was better to be sure. And he had no idea at all as to the looks of his companion: a Mr. Samwise Gamgee. That needed to be remedied. Once done with that, he would be able to withdraw back a good distance and split his time between directly watching over the two and keeping watch over the area as a whole.

As Gîltass walked along, he was amused and surprised to note that the hardly saw anyone up and about. It seemed that Bilbo's love of late mornings was the norm for the species, and not the exception. Finally arriving at a decent spot that overlooked the front door of Bag End without putting him at too much of a risk of being seen, Gîltass settled in to wait. And wait. And wait some more.

The only bit of excitement he had during that extremely long morning was the arrival of the gardener, who had to be Samwise, thus giving him a good long look at one of the two people he needed to keep watch over; otherwise the day was placid and dull to the extreme and he had to fight off the urge to just close his eyes and drift off. It wasn't until late afternoon that the door finally opened to reveal the other one: Mr. Frodo Baggins, who stood still only long enough to greet his gardener and then took off at a rather brisk pace compared to those who Gîltass had seen going by on the little, dusty path throughout the day. Gîltass could feel his brains softening by the minute and decided that he would need to do something to speed the time along or the next few months were going to be sending him home, hollering for a solo scouting mission right into the heart of goblin territory. Either that, or Imladris would be suffering under a reign of pranking the likes of which would probably get him killed by the inhabitants.

It was as he was quietly slipping away from his viewing area that he came up with an idea. Moving around the outskirts of Hobbiton once again as he made to slip into the sparse trees and begin patrolling, he came across some random hobbit lady's wet laundry sitting out near her clothesline. Intense listening brought the faint sounds of a childish tantrum coming from within the
nearby burrow, explaining the good lady's mysterious absence. With a bright smile lighting up his face, Giltass went about spreading some mischief for the day.

Later that evening, when he had finished his preliminary rounds of the area nearest to Hobbiton and had moved back into town to do a spot check on Frodo, he was extremely pleased and amused to hear about the rash of good deeds being done all over the area that no one was taking the credit for.

"A rash of good deeds, huh?" Giltass muttered under his breath, a twinkle appearing in his silvery eyes. "Wonder what they'll make of several months of mysterious good deeds."

Chapter End Notes

the image i used for my idea of bag end came from the site:

bookysh . files . wordpress 2012/06/179504_ 483089991706606_ 829393600_ n . jpg

i do not own the image.

Heren Istarion - order of wizards
It was a crisp, fall day when Gîltass finally arrived back at Imladris. The previous evening, knowing how close he was to home, caused him to push on through the night; thus allowing him to walk through the gates near mid-morning. He let out a happy sigh as he strode across the courtyard, loosening his cloak as he went and thinking longingly of a long, hot soak in one of the massive tubs followed by a change of truly clean clothes. But first, Gîltass knew that he would have to check in with Elrond and deliver his report. While he had been able to send back several missives over the course of his trip as he bumped into various scouts, both elven and Dûnedain, the last few months since he and Radagast had parted ways had had him locked into watching over the Shire and, while he was eventually joined in this effort by many of the Dûnedain, it was not conducive to sending back missives as everyone who showed up, ending up staying to keep on eye on the Hobbits.

Gîltass, reaching the other side of the large courtyard finally, entered one of the larger buildings in the valley; being the one that played host to the main dining hall, the library, a few of the larger meeting halls, and several large studies where one was almost guaranteed to find Elrond or Erestor hard at work. It was with a weary tread that Gîltass meandered the long hallways that were open to the elements and nature via massive, arched windows that did double duty as doors to the various courtyards and small gardens that he passed. With every weary step and every stolen, savored, glance out of the windows into their sheltered greenery that sported the occasional laughing, singing elf who would wave to him, Gîltass could feel the stress and tension leaving his muscles as the sights, smells, and sounds of home flooded his senses. It was a much more relaxed Gîltass that knocked on a sturdy, beautifully carved and inlaid door when he reached his final destination.

"Enter," came a familiar, though muted, voice from the other side of the thick door.
"Greetings, my Lord Elrond," Gîltass brightly called out as he practically *bounced* into the large, airy study. "Through dangers untold and hardships unnumbered, I have fought my way here to the valley beyond the howling wilderness to take back the child that you have heavily borrowed from me. And speaking of the *tîthen pen*, any thoughts on where I would be able to find him after I have given my report to you? Seeing him while I look and smell like I do should be great for a laugh!"

Elrond snorted ever so faintly and the corners of his lips quirked upward at his relative's antics as he switched the parchment he was currently scribing for new. He then gave a graceful nod of his head even as he used his free hand to gesture to one of the nearest chairs.

"Of course. If I may though, that is not all that original of an idea. My *gwanûn*, troublemakers that they are, have done something quite similar to their poor *gwathel* once after returning from a particularly gruelling mission. That she did not take kindly to it would be a bit of an understatement, and you should take that into consideration I feel, when you think of how similar Arwen and Marcaunon are in personality."

Gîltass looked vaguely contemplative for the few seconds it took him to settle himself into the comfortably overstuffed chair before waving off the slight words of warning with a flick of his wrist and a mischievous grin. Elrond gave a small shake of his head accompanied by a slight shrug of his shoulders and silently vowed to himself to make sure that he had a good view of the ensuing fallout, while also making sure that he wasn't close enough to get caught up in the whole mess. What Arwen had done to the *gwanûn* hadn't been pretty and his sons had spent the week afterwards flinching every time they came across their *gwathel*.

"Very well," Elrond calmly stated. "Three reports have been previously received from you, one for each season but this last. If you have no reason to expand upon them, you may just begin speaking from the end of the springtide missive."

Gîltass' face lost it's look of smug humor and instead took on a more serious mein, his body following suit as he unconsciously straightened from his comfortable slouch and leaned forward slightly. He then spoke non-stop for the next several hours, only taking a moment or two to wet his throat on the mulled cider that Elrond had summoned for the both of them. He went into detail on the prevalence of areas in the wilderness that felt dark and closed off; something that had come as a sharp surprise to him considering all of the older reports he had read over and all of the conversations...
he had had with other scouts, let alone the few long term missions that he had already gone out on. Finally, he covered in great detail covering the change in mission status that happened at Mithrandir's request; changing a long scout assignment into one of a border and body guarding mission.

"I had the great luck to bump into Halbarad as I was making my way back from the Shire and passed along the message to him that Mithrandir was looking for Estel and wanted to have them meet up in Bree near the end of this month. Halbarad swore that he knew where Estel was and would be able to let him know before the week has passed; thus, Mithrandir will have Aragorn waiting for him in Bree just as he requested."

Elrond nodded his agreement with Gîltass' statement as he finished writing, put down his quill, and lightly sanded the parchment to ensure that the ink would dry in a speedy manner so that the report could be filed immediately; allowing others the chance to read for themselves the results of Gîltass' mission and give their own feedback on the subject.

"You were indeed fortunate to run into someone so immediately familiar with both Estel himself, and his whereabouts at that particular time and place. My adopted ion has become rather troublesome to keep track of ever since he came of age and been allowed to take his place as the Chieftain of the remnants of my twin's people," Elrond looked off into the distance, his eyes taking on a tinge of sorrow as he lost himself in ancient memories. It was only a moment later that Elrond shook off his slight melancholy and rose from his seat, focusing all of his attention on the patiently waiting Gîltass.

"The tithen pen should be found out and about in his garden at this time of day. He has been taking advantage of the lovely weather we've been blessed with this past season to baby along several of the more difficult plants that he has had an interest in working with in healing."

Gîltass rose and gave a sketchy bow towards Elrond. As he rose from his seat, his tiredness had caught up to him all at once; the energy that had risen within him at the welcome assault on his senses that spelled out home to him and given him a second wind, finally having run out, leaving him with the exhaustion that had been dogging his steps the entire way back from the Shire. Leaving the room, only saved from staggering by his inate elven gracefulness, Gîltass realized that he would have to forego any truly horrific mental torture on his godson and merely assure himself that the other was well, before finding his room and trying to meld with his oh-so-comfortable bed. He would attempt to scour the filth from his hide on the morrow, for the hasty, though thorough, baths he had snatched
whenever he was near a body of fresh water were truly no match for a long soak in a real tub with actual soaps and oils.

He slowly made his way down the many hallways that led to the more private sections of Imladris; the places that visitors were not encouraged to go as the sleeping chambers of the residents were generally to be found there. As he moved closer to Marcaunon's garden, a pair of beautiful voices could be heard raised in song and accompanied by a masterly played lap harp. The two voices, one a sweet, gentle alto, the other a low, resounding tenor, brought tears to his eyes as he came closer and was able to hear the actual words, not just the amazing harmony of the duo.

As Beren looked into her eyes
Within the shadows of her hair,
The trembling starlight of the skies
He saw there mirrored shimmering.

Tinúviel the elven-fair,
Immortal maiden elven-wise,
About him cast her shadowy hair
And arms like silver glimmering.**

Long was the way that fate them bore,
O'er stony mountains cold and grey,
Through halls of iron and darkling door,
And woods of nightshade morrowless.
The Sundering Seas between them lay,
And yet at last they met once more,
And long ago they passed away
In the forest singing sorrowless. **

He had heard the Lay of Beren and Lúthien before, even sung by the very two that were singing now as he rounded the final corner and saw Marcaunon and Glorfindel seated side by side with Marcaunon gracefully playing the accompaniment on a plainly decorated, though finely made, lap harp, and it never failed to bring a tear to his eyes; even more so when he was tired, as he was now. The love Beren and Tinúviel bore for one another was humbling, and more, the path that fate placed the two of them on was inspiring. Gîltass also, every time he heard the song, gave thanks to the Valar that Marcaunon had met his match in one of the Eldar and that the two of them would have
forever to be together; whether here, or in the Undying lands to the West. It was perhaps selfish of him, but he was still grateful for it.

Leaning against the nearest wall for some support as he took in the scene of the two singers cuddled together on one of the benches and surrounded by flowers with a halfling audience who was sitting on a bench out in the sun with his eyes closed as he dreamed to the singing, Giltass' exhaustion swept over him the moment that he stood still and he found himself lost in a gentle memory from seventy-seven years previously, when he had come across almost the exact same scene under very similar circumstances...

Giltass would forever deny that he was pouting as he slunk along the hallway towards his rooms, intent on cleaning himself up from the last week out on near patrol, devour as much well-prepared, non-trail preserved food as he was able to wrap himself around, then attempt to become one with his very comfortable mattress for the next day or so. His mentor, Lalaithnest, was just plain evil! He had gone to sleep on the comfort of his bed after the dinner where Mithrandir's fascinating group had been introduced, thinking that he would have time the next day to track down some answers to his burning curiosity, only to be woken up after a handful of hours by Lalaithnest who then drug him back out to finish the final week of his patrol.

By now, the odd group was surely gone and, while Giltass would be able to at least find out the reasons why they had arrived, he would have to make do with second hand information. He also would be unable to have the chance to personally speak with any Hadhodrim or the perian and learn more about them and their races.

Giltass' shoulders slumped a bit more at the thought. He had really been excited over finally having a chance to meet some of the other races in person, instead of just reading about them and talking to the older scouts about their experiences. The sounds of singing perked him up slightly and he raised his head and looked around, knowing that he was nearing his little fawn's garden. He sped up slightly, his shoulders rising once again and a small, happy smile appearing on his face, as he rounded the last corner and saw Marcaunon and Glorfindel seated together on Marcaunon's favorite bench; the one that sat under the massive arch of roses that tended to bloom earlier in the season,
have heavier blooms, and stay blooming longer in the fall thanks to Marcaunon's gift. His smile deepened when he actually listened to what was being sung, instead of just enjoying the harmonies the two created when they dueted. The two of them were singing a traditional courting song; one of the more humorous ones at that as the first singer's part was a string of subtle innuendoes that attempted to coax the second singer into a bit of physical activity and the second singer was completely, naively unaware of this and kept misinterpreting the first singer's words and intentions.

When the two came to the end of their song, Gîltass stepped out into the garden, clapping his hands and intent on greeting the two, only to come to a standstill after a couple of steps. He raised his hand and pointed his finger at the small person sitting on a bench in the sun that he had somehow over looked until just now, his mouth opening and closing in shock. It was the perian! His look of shock morphed into one of excitement and he bounced over towards the bench and slid into the space next to the small, curly headed male. Beaming down at the perian, Gîltass gave a very brief nod of his head in greeting and opened his mouth to begin the first of the many burning questions he had to have answers for, but before he could get out his first word, he was tackled by a slight body and fell backwards over the bench onto the ground. Cocking his head to look at his assailant, he was met with a faceful of dark hair, pulled back into a complicated looking plait. Gîltass let his head fall back onto the ground and raised his hands to wrap around Marcaunon, hugging the slight body tightly as well as gently rubbing the other's slim, but muscular, back.

"Not that I'm not glad to see you, tithen pen, but why such an exuberant greeting?"

Emerald green eyes that were almost glowing with mischievous delight raised up to meet his own slivery hued ones.

"Well, how was I supposed to know that? You came into my garden without so much as a hello and settled right down next to dear Bilbo, who was enjoying listening to Glorfindel and I singing, and looked like you were about to devour the poor, poor Hobbit. I just wanted to be sure that you still loved me, since I am, apparently, not nearing as interesting any more to you as a complete stranger."

"Now Bambi, you know that that is just not true," Gîltass protested as his hands sought out, and found, Marcaunon's very ticklish sides, causing squeals and bright laughter to spill forth from Marcaunon's petal pink lips in between protests and pleas for Gîltass to cease. "I find you very interesting! And far too much fun to torment for me to pass up any chances to do so."
After a few moments, where the tickle attack became more of a rough housing session, it occurred to Gîltass that something wasn’t quite right. Normally by this point, Glorfindel would have either swooped in to save Marcaunon, or help the much smaller elf turn the attack around onto Gîltass’ own person. Ceasing his attacks, Gîltass let Marcaunon escape from his clutches and set about rising from the ground, straightening his clothing as he did so. Looking around once he was up, Gîltass’ happy expression changed to one of puzzlement; Glorfindel had left. Gîltass stood there for a second or two before brushing the oddity away and turning his attention back to the perian, or Hobbit, as his sweet godson had referred to him.

There was no Hobbit sitting on the bench any more! Alarmed, Gîltass spun about and began to frantically search the lovely garden, thinking that perhaps the small being had gone wandering off to explore a bit while the two young elves, who clearly knew one another, acted the fools. After several intense minutes of searching where he was focused entirely on what he was doing, Gîltass finally heard muffled snickering coming from over by the garden’s building entrance. Spinning around from the thorny bushes he was attempting to part and look within, Gîltass’ eyes saw Marcaunon standing just inside the building, a delicate hand covering his mouth as he attempted to stifle the escaping laughter. A sudden horrible realization caused Gîltass to straighten up. Narrowing his eyes and pursing his lips, Gîltass sent a glare towards his snickering godson, causing the boy to sober up and wave nervously back as he began to shuffle his feet under him.

"Um, you need to get cleaned up and we’ll see you at dinner so love you bye!"

Marcaunon was gone before Gîltass was able to move more than a step in his direction, leaving the older elf with a deep desire to throw the brat into the river at the first available opportunity.

Gîltass was drawn from his memories by a soft touch on his shoulder. Recalling himself to the
here and now, he was met by the same emerald eyes that he had just been remembering, although this time, they were not lit by the fires of mischief, but were alight with loving concern as they peered up at him. Seeing that his attention had been gained, the eyes crinkled slightly at the corners as the owner broke into smile and pulled back slightly.

"While I am always over-joyed to see you and spend time with you, Gîltass, even more so when we have been parted for some length of time, perhaps it would be better to forego the extended greetings at this point and just allow me to assist you in getting to your rooms and into your bed. You are in no condition right now to do much else," Marcaunon stated calmly, taking a firm hold of Gîltass’ elbow to steady the older elf as he began to gently pull him down the corridor to his rooms. "I mean really, what would Haldir say if he were to miraculously bump into you right now when you look like something the cat dragged in? You don't want to lock that door before you've even had a chance to open it right?"

Gîltass glared down at his godson as the little brat lightly teased him. He knew it had been a mistake to wax on about the handsome marchwarden after his return from his first trip to Lothlórien; retrieving Arwen and escorting her back home several years ago. The only thing saving the tithen pen from some truly epic pranking was the fact that he never brought up Haldir in front of anyone else. Marcaunon however, merely ignored the fierce glare sent his way and continued to calmly pull him along with a steadying hand on his arm until they reached the door to his room.

But instead of leaving now that Gîltass had arrived at his room, Marcaunon merely opened the door and tugged Gîltass along until the older elf had been practically bullied into a seat on the edge of his bed. Marcaunon then flitted off, ignoring Gîltass' very vocal protests and his flailing limbs. Seconds later, the sound of running water greeted Gîltass' ears, indicating that Marcaunon had begun to run him a bath. The lithe, emerald eyed male glided back into the room after several minutes when the sound of water had halted, kneeling down before Gîltass and seeing to the unlacing and removal of his tattered, well-worn leather boots; something that Gîltass would have to see about replacing as soon as possible and he made a mental note to attend to it after a visit to Heryn Gellam for some repairs on his scout gear and a replenishment on his emergency repair kit.

As he let his thoughts wander freely, Gîltass barely paid any attention to fact that Marcaunon had gotten his boots off, then, after encouraging him to rise up, his cloak, followed immediately by his doublet, tunic, and under shirt, leaving him clad only in his leggings. He only came back to himself when he felt an incessant tugging on those leggings, indicating that someone was pulling them down. Looking around, Gîltass noted that he was now standing before a filled bath tub and Marcaunon hold gotten his leggings all the way down to the floor and was encouraging him to lift his feet out of them one at a time. Gîltass absent-mindedly did so as he looked intently at the tub full of
cold, fresh, mountain stream water.

All the running water in the Last Homely House came from one of the many streams falling down from the surrounding valley walls, thus it was as fresh and as pure as it could be. If one desired a hot bath, there was a communal bath house that was supplied with plenty of hot water that was heated in boilers adjoining the kitchen to take advantage of the almost never ending fires that lit the stoves and ovens. Or if one desired a bit more privacy, a request would be made and several vessels bearing the boiling hot water would be brought and used to fill up the requested tub partially, then filled up the rest of the way with the fresh, cold water till reaching the desired temperature.

Gîtass had a completely different method.

Concentrating hard through his exhaustion, Gîtass brought his powers to bare on the water as though trying to force it to burn. The result, after several minutes of intense concentration, was a plethora of rising steam from the surface of the water. Letting out a sigh of relief as he ceased his efforts at heating his bath, Gîtass merely stared at the inviting hot water as he suddenly wondered what happened to his decision to just fall into bed and see about getting clean tomorrow. Getting a shove to the small of his back that caused him to stagger and grab at the edge of the tub to keep his balance reminded him of just what brought about the change in plans as he glared back at his godson, who was glaring right back at him with both hands on his hips. Letting out another sigh, Gîtass fumbled his way into the steaming water and stretched out; the hot water forcing his too tense muscles to relax for the first time in who-knows-how-long. A deep breath in and a long breath out, and his eyes were sealed shut once again, not even rousing when Marcaunon released a fond yet exasperated sigh of his own as he began to scrub at the accumulated filth. Gîtass only faintly roused when he felt strong arms wrap around him and lift him from the cooling water, carry him into another room, then lay him down on the softest surface that he could ever recall feeling before.

Then there was nothing more than blackness and silence.
I don't own The Labyrinth either, but kudos to those that caught the reference!

tithen pen- little one

gwanûn- pair of twins

gwathel- sister

ion- son

Been meaning to say this for quite some time, but keep forgetting when it comes time to upload the new chapter:

LOVE the response this story has had and deeply appreciate all of you! Whether an alert, a favorite, posting it to a community, or dropping me a line or two in a review, really thankful and happy over the love being shown.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The air almost crackled with tension as the residents of Imladris went about their daily lives. Rumors had been abundant over the last several weeks, ever since Giltass and several of the other scouts had come back, all with varying reports of gathering darkness in the world and places where it felt that the firstborn just were not welcome to tread without experiencing great danger; one scout was still over due and no word had come from him indicating that this was to be expected. A few scouts, both elves and Dúnedain, brought back information that the Black Riders had been seen and were asking for the whereabouts of a place called "Shire" and a person named "Baggins".

At last, the missing scout finally returned; haggard, worn to the bone, and many days overdue. He bore witness to the truth of the tales that the Black Riders rode once again, for he had stumbled across one on his return from the Grey Havens and only luck saw him through the ordeal. Such news caused a ripple of alarm, for the Grey Havens were perilously near the Shire and that fact, coupled with the previous reports, indicated that the Dark Lord Sauron was nearer to achieving whatever it was that he wished for than those that opposed him would hope for. A meeting was called that very day, and after intense, though thorough, discussion, it was decided to immediately send out those that dwelt within Imladris that had some manner of power and strength that would allow them to stand against the Black Riders, few though those were; for Aragorn, Gandalf, and those they were escorting were late for their looked upon arrival.

Marcaunon sat in that meeting at Glorfindel's side, thus he heard first hand how his love would be one of those sent out, for his love had such power over the enemy; being one of the eldest and having dwelt in the undying lands during the time of the two trees. He raised no protest, merely tightening his hold on Glorfindel's hand and, once the meeting ended, tugged his much older love after him to their shared set of rooms. Once they arrived and the door had been shut behind them, Marcaunon instantly wrapped his slender, yet lithely muscled, arms tightly around the taller, older male who did the same in return with his longer, more strongly muscled arms. The two let the world pass them by, lost in the comfort being both sent and received by the other, for only a few moments before they reluctantly parted.
Marcaunon stared up intently at Glorfindel before giving an abrupt nod of his head and then spinning about on his heels, striding determinedly over to the chest where he kept most of his on-hand healing supplies.

"Well," he quietly and calmly spoke, as he knelt down on the floor before the sturdy, yet beautiful chest, "I may not be able to partner you on this, for I know that I would only hinder you on this particular mission, but I may at least ensure that you go well equipped for dealing with emergencies; for I find myself hoping and wishing that all that is holding them up is a torn or sprained muscle, or a broken bone, or perhaps an illness. However, I know that hope is a futile one, for Lord Elrond and myself taught Estel much about the healing arts and he was an apt student for our tutelage."

While Marcaunon was quietly talking and preparing an emergency medical satchel for him, Glorfindel had silently set about gathering all of the items he would need and packing them away into a pair of saddlebags. If the Riders were abroad once more, he would need the speed his mount, Asfolath, would impart to him. As he tended to keep all of his most necessary scouting items in one place and mostly packed so that he could grab and go at a moment's notice, Glorfindel finished ahead of his intensely busy little love and he allowed himself a precious moment to savor the sight of the petite male kneeling on the floor, his back end raised up into the air and wiggling about as he bent over and leaned into the open chest. Faint mutters reached his sharp hearing, but Glorfindel tuned them out as they were merely Marcaunon speaking to himself under his breath about various herbs, pastes, and tisanes, while he tried to decide which would be the most needed and which would be better left behind.

Several long minutes later, Marcaunon finally declared himself satisfied with what he had assembled and rose to his feet, slinging the small sack over his slim shoulders. Glorfindel gave him a look that invited inquiry, even as he picked up his own saddlebags and weapons. Marcaunon returned a look that was fondly exasperated, even as he spoke up in answer as he led the way out the door.

"I know that you are fully able to carry such a small bag, along with all of your needed things, but there is the fact of the matter that there is no need for you to do so when we both know that I will be there to see you off. Also, I ensured that I choose a weatherproof satchel so that it may be tied closer to hand rather than being packed away and taking more time to get to than might be desired at the time."
The rest of the walk to the main courtyard was done with neither one speaking further, though Marcaunon did raise his free hand to rest it gently and carefully on one of Glorfindel's laden arms, taking care that no additional weight was distributed onto him. Far sooner than either elf wished, the courtyard came into view, revealing a scene of controlled chaos that was rarely witnessed at Imaldris: horses were everywhere in various stages of readiness, some with their full turnout including saddlebags, and others that had yet to be finished with their grooming; scouts were striding about, meeting up with one another and comparing notes while getting and giving advice; and above all, loved ones were quietly assisting, rushing about as they sought out last minute, forgotten bits and bobs, or were stoically assisting their loved ones as they prepped their steeds.

Marcaunon and Glorfindel paused for only a second before they strode out and joined the wildly chaotic, yet oddly structured, dance, making for the section of wall where Asfolath was halfway through the process of being saddled by one of the many stablehands. As soon as they arrived, Glorfindel immediately took over the saddling, making sure that he inspected the straps before tightening them, as he didn't want a flaw in the leather causing problems at an inopportune time, as well as the fact that being out in the wilderness while the enemy was abroad meant that he might not have the time or means to do a proper repair. With the saddling finished, Glorfindel accepted Marcaunon's aid in tying off the saddlebags and medical satchel, as well as loading Asfolath with Glorfindel's chosen weaponry; both working together to ensure that the lode was properly balanced and padded so that sores would not have a chance to develop on the steed.

When the last tie was cinched tight, Glorfindel knew that their parting could be put off no longer. Reaching out, he grabbed at Marcaunon, spinning the small male about and pulling him tight against himself. Glorfindel ducked his head down and buried his nose in the other's dark hair, nuzzling gently against the silken plait that the other used to keep the wildness of his locks confined by. He would deeply miss his *tithen meleth* as they had not been separated by missions or traveling since Marcaunon had come of age and was finally allowed to leave the safety of Imladris. Glorfindel stole one last kiss from Marcaunon's sweet, soft lips, a kiss that Marcaunon was more than happy to participate in the stealing of, then swung up onto Asfolath. He only took a moment to settle in his saddle as the great mount paced in place beneath him, then Glorfindel was riding out of the gates and down the main road, which he had been set to search as the most powerful of those being sent out.

Marcaunon watched him ride out, the pain of parting causing tears to fill his emerald eyes and overflow down his pale face. He stood there, unknowing and uncaring of long he did so, staring in the direction he last saw his love in. It wasn't until he felt a gentle hand on his shoulder, causing him to come back to himself with a small start, that he was able to realize that the sun had set long ago and he was just standing around in the courtyard in the dark. Looking over his shoulder and then up, Marcaunon met the compassionate, grey eyes of Elrond looking back down at him. Without a word being said, Elrond took Marcaunon by the elbow and carefully led the petite male out of the courtyard, back down the hallways, and into his own set of rooms, where Elrond gently settled the tiny male onto his own bed.
Seeing Marcaunon open his mouth, no doubt to question Elrond as to why they were in Elrond's room, Elrond placed one of his large hands over Marcaunon's mouth and spoke up first.

"Hush tîthen pen, what sort of family would I be if I left you alone and in pain at such a time. You will be staying with me until Glorfindel returns, as Gîltass, while physically remaining here as he has not the strength to come up against the Black Riders of Mordor, will be kept quite busy patrolling the boundaries and standing guard, and the twins were sent out into the highlands in case Estel and Mithrandir were forced to travel far afield and thus come to Imladris from the wastelands behind the valley. You will also be spending some time with Arwen, though not quite as much, as she is suffering from her own set of anxieties as Estel is one of those missing, even if he has the strength to hold his own against the might of Mordor."

Elrond felt well rewarded for his choice when Marcaunon leapt off of the bed and crashed hard into him, wrapping his lithe arms tightly about his midriff and squeezing, while sobs rattled in his chest and tears fell from his jeweled-hued eyes. Elrond brought his own arms, which he had raised in surprise when Marcaunon first moved, down and returned the hug, though with a less desperate strength than the young male. He raised one hand, freed the ebony locks from the tie that kept them confined, then began to comb his hand through the silken locks until they were loose and spilling down the slim back in heavy waves to just below his slender waist.

How long this went on, Elrond would not be able to say, but during this time, Marcaunon's arms loosened and his sobs lessened until finally, Elrond was supporting all of the slight weight of the young elf. Looking down, Elrond saw that Marcaunon had finally succumbed to the exhaustion that high emotions generally brought about. Giving the youth one last, gentle squeeze, Elrond carried Marcaunon over to the side of the bed, pulled the covers down, and set the slumbering male down on top of his mattress, taking care to remove his boots before swinging his legs fully onto the bed.

Elrond felt his normally stern features soften as he rose up and took in the other's face, which still displayed his stress and unhappiness even in his sleep, and ran his hand over the raven dark head once again before turning about and striding off to his bathing chamber, where he made short work of his evening ablutions. Once done, he returned to Marcaunon's side with a damp, cool cloth which he laid down across Marcaunon's closed eyes in an attempt to ease the dry, itchy, soreness that would surely plague the youth in the morning after how hard he had been crying. Gliding around to the other side of the bed, Elrond blew out the table lamp before sliding under the covers. Reaching across the mattress, Elrond carefully pulled Marcaunon into his arms, making sure not to disturb the
wet cloth over his eyes. Once Marcaunon was settled to his comfort, Elrond let himself fall into the gentle memories of happier times, ignoring his own tears that fell as he recalled his own parted love.

The next morning when Marcaunon awoke set the tone for the days that followed. Marcaunon would rise, train hard before the sun rose, break for a small meal, tend to his garden until midday where he would break for a larger meal and a thorough cleaning of himself and his gear, before he would spend the rest of the afternoon seeing to it that the rooms of healing were fully and properly stocked. His evenings, after taking a meal with those still residing within Imladris, would be spent with Arwen; the two of them seeking comfort in the other as they strolled about in the gardens quietly chatting or merely sat in some corner in silence.

The break in this routine came about when Mithrandir came thundering through the open, though thoroughly guarded, gates, mounted on a magnificent stallion one late afternoon, many days after the scouts had ridden out. The noise and ruckus of his arrival brought those nearest the courtyard to come at a run to see what the fuss was about. When they arrived, it was just in time to see Mithrandir whisper something into a pair of pointed ears and give one last fond pat to the stallion's proudly arched neck before the horse wheeled about on his rear hooves and ran back out the still open gates.

Marcaunon had been one of those who had run into the courtyard as he had been out seeking wild herbs that afternoon, thus causing him to be near the main path as he returned from his foraging with his hard-sought for finds, when he heard the pounding of hooves. Running towards the path only granted him enough time to see a mounted figure disappearing through the many trees. Hope abounding within him, Marcaunon took off in a sprint after the figure, completely ignoring the weight of his laden basket. He arrived at the main gates just in time to see the horse running back out, this time without a rider. Disappointment flooded him as he failed to recognize the steed, and he fell to a slow walk with his head bowed down as he made the rest of the way inside the courtyard, his heavy basket hanging from his hands as he sought to reclaim his breath.

A deep, familiar voice had him snapping his head right back up and made him burst into a sprint again, a smile spreading across his face as he took in the sight of Mithrandir greeting Erestor. As he ran, Marcaunon glanced about the courtyard, expecting to see Estel and a pair of perian. When he didn't, Marcaunon just ignored it, thinking that they had already left the area and that he would be able to catch up to them in a few moments. He was so happy that they had finally arrived safely! Now Glorfindel could be recalled, Marcaunon was thinking happily to himself, only to come up short as he finally reached Mithrandir and Erestor just in time to hear the aged Istar state that he had been unable to join the group and, in fact, had no idea where they were or any information about them except for the facts that Aragorn was indeed with them, and the two Hobbits had become four.
That statement made Marcaunon's face fall again, the happiness that had just been thrumming throughout him fleeing and leaving an aching sense of loss behind. Coming to a halt just to the side of Mithrandir, Marcaunon forced his feelings back into some semblance of calm and prepared himself to greet the aged Istar. Looking up into the scowling, clearly worried face, Marcaunon was able to read lines that indicated deep exhaustion and see that the high cheekbones were even more prominent than they should be, indicating to his experienced Healer's eyes that the male had gone without food and sleep for longer than was healthy.

His verdant eyes narrowing and a scowl taking over his features, Marcaunon almost completely ignored the greeting Mithrandir was giving him, only giving it enough attention to note the stress tones present in his voice, before he thrust his heavy basket into Erestor's arms, and latched onto Mithrandir's sleeves. Tugging the Istar after him as he went into the depths of Imladris, Marcaunon ignored all attempts by the much taller male to free himself and completely tuned out the sputtered questions and protests he gave. Erestor, who had lived for many centuries among the famed Healers of Imladris at this point and knew how they thought and operated, quietly followed after the pair while easily carrying the basket which had been pushed onto him. When they passed a house servant, who was smiling fondly at the sight, Erestor took a moment to ask her to pass along a request for Lord Elrond to join them and that they would most probably be found in the Healing rooms, before gliding down the corridor after the other two.

Erestor's experienced guess was proven correct when Marcaunon pulled Mithrandir into one of the smaller rooms and forced him to take a seat on the raised, padded platform that the Healers used to examine a patient. A small smirk tugged at the corners of his mouth, one which he took care to lose whenever a scowling Mithrandir glared at him. Not that the Istar was able to send that many burning glares in Erestor's direction considering the fact that Marcaunon was practically demanding the other male's entire attention as he proceeded to give the Istar a full examination.

Movement near the door caught at his attention and he turned his head to see that his Lord, Elrond, had finally arrived. Erestor was also gratified to note that his Lord's lips were also quirked faintly upwards as he took in the humorous sight of the very tall Istar being tended to, and quite frankly bullied by, the tiniest known, adult elf. Clearing his throat slightly made both Marcaunon's and Mithrandir's attention snap to him, at which point Erestor gave a subtle nod of his head in Elrond's direction, making the two heads swivel in tandem. Erestor was forced to swallow a chuckle when he saw the look of hope dawning on Mithrandir's face and the determined scowl that still graced Marcaunon's delicate features.
"If you have no more need of me, my Lord?" Erestor queried as he sat the laden basket down on the nearest flat surface, ignoring the room's other two occupants who were nodding their heads and murmuring greetings.

"No, please stay, my friend," Elrond held up a hand as though to physically stop Erestor from leaving the room. "I am more than sure that I would be seeking you out later for your consul anyway after telling you what news was given to me. You might as well hear it firsthand and voice your queries to the one most likely to have the answers immediately, over waiting and trying to track him down later.

"But first," Elrond turned his attention towards Marcaunon. "May I inquire as to why we are meeting in the infirmary?"

"It is because our dear friend Mithrandir is clearly suffering from a period of starvation as well as a dirth of slumber," Marcaunon said with his fiercest scowl firmly in place on his face, ignoring the fact that Glorfindel had said his scowl reminded him of a grumpy kitten. "What news he might bring with him may be relayed anywhere, and I had no fear of you failing to seek him our immediately, so I felt that tending to him and ensuring that he is brought back up to full health as quickly as possible would be the wise thing to do, as we do not know what the future will bring us."

Elrond stared at the tiny elf, pride filling him as he gazed at the determined adult that the precious, unlooked for elfling had grown so wonderfully into and that he had been blessed to have a hand in the raising of.

"You are indeed correct," he said with a small bow, internally laughing at the look of puffed up satisfaction that Marcaunon now sported that was beautifully offset by the look of betrayal that now graced Mithrandir's stern features as he glanced towards Elrond.

With no further words, Marcaunon went back to tending his patient, mixing up tisanes for Mithrandir to drink and applying balm to the injuries he discovered once he parted Mithrandir from
his concealing clothing. As he did this, he was forced to listen to the news that a trusted ally had turned from them and now sought for power from at the side of the Dark Lord of Mordor, even going so far as to welcome orcs within his lands as well as sending them out to render death and destruction upon his once allies. Shortly after hearing that, Marcaunon reached the end of what healing could be done, the rest merely needing time to correct now, and excused himself from the intense discussion.

Only a couple of days later, Frodo Baggins was brought by one of the near patrol scouts to the Halls of Healing, where Marcaunon assisted his Lord in healing the Hobbit. It was his first contact with the evil that the enemy in the East could more personally deliver and left Marcaunon in desperate need of comfort. Comfort that his mate was thankfully able to provide as he had been the one to finally come across the group and escort them to the safety of Imladris, arriving just at the end of the first round of healing to save Frodo's life, though it wouldn't be the last as Elrond was suspicious that there was some trace of the cursed blade left behind in the wound.

Marcaunon fell into exhausted slumber that night in the loving enclosure of Glorfindel's strong arms and dreamt that Imladris was an island in the middle of a fierce storm. And something that disturbed him greatly upon awakening was Marcaunon recalling that the storm kept eroding the island's shores with every battering wave.

Chapter End Notes

- tithen - little
- pen - one
- meleth - love
Chapter 17

Marcaunon let out a tiny, happy sigh and tilted his head back, trying to catch the last of the fading light as he sat in a quiet, out-of-the-way section of the vast gardens surrounding the buildings of Imladris. It had been a long, exhausting three days of intense, frantic healing with only brief snatches of rest for those involved, but finally, just last evening, Elrond had found the splinter of the cursed sword and removed it from the Hobbit's body, sending Frodo into a more natural, healing slumber at last. The surgery's success was further proved this morning when Frodo had awoken and carried on a very lucid conversation with Mithrandir. The news was so joyous that a feast had immediately been called for this very evening and Marcaunon knew that he should be inside, getting ready for the celebration of life, but it had been a long three days and he had truly missed being outdoors for a longer period of time then that of a hastily grabbed bit of fresh air in between attempts at healing the perian.

Several timeless moments later, the last of the sun's rays slipped from the evening's sky, leaving Marcaunon in twilight with only the insects and the plants for company, with an occasional twitter from the birds that made Imladris their home year round. Another sigh slipped from his lips, this one regretful, and Marcaunon opened eyes that he didn't even realize had closed. It was time, and more than, for him to make his appearance at the feast, and he was sure that the only reason no one had come in search of him was that they were already there and couldn't escape!

Snickering lightly at the thought of the mighty Lord Elrond having to make his excuses as he rose from the table to go in search of his Uncle's descendent, Marcaunon rose from his own seat on the leaf strewn ground, brushing at the slight mess on his fine robes. On the one hand, dressing so early for the celebration might not have been the best idea he had had, but on the other, it meant that he was able to spend a greater portion of his time awake outdoors, rather than having to take the time to re-bathe and dress for the evening.

A slight smile on his lips, Marcaunon gracefully transversed the shadowed pathways, his long robes brushing over the ground and sweeping the fallen leaves along with it, until he arrived at the brightly lit great hall, where he paused for a moment to take in the sights. The hall gave the impression this night that it was filled to the rafters: representatives of the many races gracing the hall on this eve, many having traveled great distances bearing rumors and tales of war and large movements of the enemy. Not that much was known in that direction, as Lord Elrond had had the
travelers escorted directly to him, only to instruct them to hold much of their counsel until the large meeting that was scheduled for the morrow. Marcaunon frowned slightly at that last thought, knowing that the news that was bound to come to light in the meeting would not, could not, be among the best.

Shaking off the faint melancholy his thoughts were bringing about, Marcaunon let the general air of celebration that pervaded the hall lift his spirits and, reclaiming his slight smile, glided forward into the chaos. Great joy filled him as he drew nearer the head table where Elrond sat, looking wise beyond measure and strong as a warrior in his prime. Glorfindel sat to his side, clothed in white, his golden hair gleaming in the room's lights, and his voice ringing out like the finest song as he partook in conversation with Mithrandir, who looked stern, yet knowledgeable of things beyond the mortal ken. The joy that filled his breast was because, as Marcaunon looked at the three great men, he knew that, regardless of what news might come tomorrow, he, Marcaunon, would be protected and loved and supported as he had never been in his life prior to arriving here through the Veil of Death, when he had still been a child known as Harry Potter with the weight of the world on his slim, young shoulders.

That sense of joy and the realization that was brought to him along with it, let him truly relax for the first time in some days and he found himself slipping into the open seat near end of the table and shooting a loving glance over towards Glorfindel; giving his mate a slight shake of his head when it seemed that the other was about to rise from his seat, leaving his discussion to join him. While he had truly, deeply missed the other with every fiber of his being, Marcaunon knew that the two of them had been spending every free moment together for the last several days and he was beyond positive that Glorfindel, Mithrandir, and Elrond needed this time to catch up and plan somewhat for the big meeting ahead.

Looking around the table, then the room, revealed to Marcaunon that he had been one of, if not the last to arrive. In fact, the food was already served, he saw as he happily filled a plate and settled in to listen to, and perhaps join in with, the various conversations taking place around him. Marcaunon was slightly disappointed to see that Frodo was seated at the far end of the table and couldn't contain the very slight pout at the fact that he would have to wait on meeting Bilbo's nephew when he was actually awake, but pushed it back as he saw that the Hobbit was happily chatting away with one of the Hadhodrim.

Seeing the Hadhodrim seated at the other end of the table made Marcaunon's excitement level rise exponentially. He may have teased Gîltass mercilessly during and after the last visit made to Imladris by such notable beings, but he himself had been firmly kept away from any sort of interaction with them. In fact, he was only allowed the most mild and miniscule of interactions with
Suddenly, out of nowhere, a pair of long, calloused yet extremely graceful, fingers reached out and pinched at his barely out-thrust lower lip.

Turning in the direction the fingers were tugging him, Marcaunon felt his eyes widen in happy surprise when his stunned, emerald green orbs met the laughing, light grey eyes of an elf that he had not seen for quite some time.

"Legolas!" Marcaunon happily exclaimed, ignoring the fingers that had released him the moment that their eyes met. "It has been far too long since last we met. It has to have been...what, about fifty years, give or take, since last our paths crossed? It warms me to see you looking so well. But if I may, what brings you here? In your most recent correspondence, you were saying that your Ada was loathe to give you leave of the forest, for it had grown most dangerous since last we met, and the dark was growing and spreading and infecting your homeland and twisting the creatures that call your woods their home."

Marcaunon absentmindedly fed himself bites in between speaking as he queried the long absent elf, hardly paying any attention to what was upon his plate as he was far too intent on the blond warrior sitting beside him.

"Aye," Legolas began. "My lord Ada has indeed been loathe to spare any warriors over the last several years. The spiders have increased their territory, while orcs, goblins, and other such foul, erchion beings have been pressing in on us and marching through our homeland. Battles have already been fought against them, with several of our brethren falling to their poisoned weapons and departing for the Halls of Mandos."
"That is partially why I am here, in fact," Legolas continued on, his voice lowered and hushed. "I would tell you more, but the Lord Elrond has requested I wait 'til the counsel on the morrow, along with everyone else, as he feels that it would be best to reveal and share our information all at once, just in case one revelation leads to another."

"Well then," Marcaunon answered with a grave, understanding look that quickly morphed into one of pure trouble, raising his voice ever so slightly as it did so. "Perhaps we should instead turn our conversation to reminiscences on the past? There was that time that Elrohir and Elladan challenged you to an archery contest and there you were, standing on the course with a weapon that any warrior, anywhere, would be most proud to own and trying to shoot an arrow that was a child's draw length."

Legolas scowled fiercely at him, though the effect was severely curtailed at the bright blush that flooded his fair skin. Before he was able to find his voice and raise a protest in the face of Marcaunon's innocent delivery and the interested faces of the nearest listeners, Gîltass plopped down on the other side of Marcaunon, taking the last free seat at the head table. Glancing over and all around, Gîltass beamed as he took in the flushed, gaping face of Legolas and the oh-so-innocent expression on Marcaunon's face as he calmly continued eating.

"Ah, talking about the time we first met Thranduil are you," Gîltass knowingly spoke up as he loaded his plate with food. "That's the only thing I can think of that would put such a look on our fine prince's face. It was quite the day after all and I still, after so many years, find myself wondering how such a cascade of events ended up occurring. Though I must admit, after all of the excitement and chaos had died down, that Legolas looked stunning beyond words in that gown."

It was all Marcaunon could do to stop the laughter that fought to spill forth, and as it was, his eyes widened as far as they could go and began to tear from his efforts while he had to roll in his lips and bite down on them. Poor Legolas looked as though he wished the floor could swallow him whole and his face was almost glowing as he sought to avoid eye contact with the numerous people staring at him with almost predatory interest. And Gîltass: he merely went about eating his chosen food, though if one were to look closely, a quirk to the corner of his lips could be seen as well as a bit of a quiver to his chin, as though he were holding back a bark of laughter.

"We swore never to speak of that day again," Legolas hissed, finally finding his voice.
Giltass looked up from his plate, a puzzled expression on his fine features.

"What? I have never spoken of that day! Although I must confess that I thought it was rather odd that you asked, I’ve honored your request and have never mentioned that date ever again. Why you dislike that particular set of numbers enough to wish to never speak of them is beyond my ken, but..." Giltass trailed off, giving an eloquent shoulder and head movement that managed to convey both acceptance and confusion, before turning his attention back to his food once again.

Legolas scowled at the two younger elves, stabbing viciously into a bit of venison when both looked at him with wide, happy eyes and innocence shining from their features. After a moment of hard staring on his part, Legolas snorted elegantly in self-deprecation and mentally applauded the two of them. They were hardly the first set of terrors to grace the woodlands, and he was sure that they wouldn’t be the last. And that he would get caught up in whatever mad plan would be hatched by the newest set. Really though, after Elrohir and Elladan, he had had a faint bit of hope that he would have been spared just a bit of it and would be able to merely sit back and savor the torment of someone else for a change.

"Did you ever get the full story of what the twins did when they were first introduced to my Ada?" Legolas queried, leaning back slightly and relaxing muscles that had been far too tense for far too long as he settled in to enjoy an evening like he had not been able to experience in years as the Greatwood was essentially under siege. Legolas felt well-rewarded for his question when Marcaunon and Giltass shared a wicked look with one another, looked down the table at the laughing, chatting twins, then leaned forward with matching expectant looks.

Legolas spent the rest of the evening sharing stories of others’ embarrassing deeds with the young elves, continuing the tales even when they removed themselves from the dining hall and adjourned to the Halls of Fire to finish up the evening, finding a quiet, out of the way corner to all sit in. Not only did it help keep Legolas’ mind away from the meeting and what news might be shared during it, it also had the wonderful benefit of distracting the duo from sharing embarrassing tales about him with those gathered around them, seeking their own bit of escape from the crushing thoughts and emotions that were floating around Imladris.

It was a happily distracted, and rather relaxed Legolas that bid farewell to Marcaunon when
Glorfindel came to collect his mate later in the evening, though still far earlier than most celebrations would normally have run. Marcaunon pouted slightly at Glorfindel, not wanting to leave the merry group and the stories being shared, but his mate merely raised an eyebrow at him and looked unimpressed, though slightly amused.

"It is time and past for us to withdrawal," Glorfindel calmly stated as he led the way to their rooms. "You are still young and have been working quite intensely on saving the perian alongside of Lord Elrond, only achieving success late last night. My advice to you, as an experienced warrior who has lived through such cycles of strife and conflict before, is to rest and recover as such chances are afforded to you, for they will become scarce and of great value far too soon for anyone's peace of mind."

Marcaunon, who had cuddled into the tall elf as they walked down the quiet, dark hallways, nodded his head in agreement and made no further signs of protest. Arriving at their rooms, the two males made short work of preparing for slumber before tumbling onto their bed and holding one another close. While Glorfindel, as an elf of great age, could and did regularly find rest in the gentle memories of his past, this evening he took his own advice and chased after true sleep; the warmth and comfort of Marcaunon pressed against his side aiding him in his quest. Neither elf stirred until dawn, when the beams of light shining in through their windows and falling onto their faces caused them to wake.

A faint, disappointed grumble was heard, then, with an abrupt throw of the covers, Marcaunon rose from the bed in one graceful movement, ignoring the way Glorfindel's hands tried to gently hold onto him. Smirking wickedly down at his lightly scowling mate, Marcaunon announced, in an airy, pleasant tone of voice,

"Someone just recently mentioned to me that I should grab ahold of every opportunity to rest that I am afforded in times such as we are finding ourselves in, but I'm quite sure that said rest shouldn't come at the expense of other things. Such as the meeting that one's Lord has scheduled for this very morning."

Glorfindel huffed out some exasperated sounding laughter even as he rose. After doing a bit of stretching, and taking a bit of time to lavish attention on his little, happily laughing mate, Glorfindel chose appropriate attire for the day and withdrew to their bathing chamber. As he prepared for the long day ahead of him, Glorfindel was briefly joined by Marcaunon who had slipped in to prepare
for his day. When Glorfindel took a moment to wrap his arms around his little mate and query him as to his plans, Marcaunon's features, which had been light and happy, took a bit of a darker, more solemn cast as he responded that he was planning to spend his day working with the healing supplies to make sure that everyone traveling out of Imladris on missions would be able to grab a bag containing the absolute essentials of emergency care. Glorfindel leaned over slightly and pressed a kiss to the wild mane that had yet to be tamed for the day and wished that his little love could have been spared the horror that was once again returning to plague Arda.

Several more kisses and cuddles later, the two finally left their rooms, set for the day ahead.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the shorter chapter, this one just didn't want to come out and gave me all kinds of trouble.
erchion-orkish adj.
Gîltass grunted as his raised sword took the full brunt of the driving force behind the over-head swing from the orc in front of him and actually staggered slightly as he fought to regain his balance from the jarring impact. All around him were the sounds of battle: cries and screams of both rage and pain, the ringing clang of weapons hitting other weapons and the dull thud that they made as they hit against a heavy shield, the horrible speech of the orcs and the fluid, beautiful language of his fellow elves in the distance as both sides called out commands into the melee. What had been a small, patrol in the high hills at the very far, outside edge of Imladris as they searched for a sign that any of the Black Riders had come out of the flood whole and undamaged had changed in an instant.

Gîltass couldn't help but be grateful that the six of them were still in the almost forest when the ambush came as he used the nearest tree to his advantage; forcing his current opponent into facing the way he wanted and, by ducking at just the right moment, causing the massive iron blade to become crucially lodged for just long enough to allow Gîltass the opportunity to slide his sword through the weak points in the orc's armor and into his heart while the beast was extended. Not that he had any time to gloat over the use of the environment in his fight; as soon as his current opponent had been dispatched, Gîltass immediately turned his attention to the next swinging weapon coming at him.
He raised his sword just in time to block the low swing aimed at his legs, but, because of this, was unable to do anything about the small dagger another orc at his back plunged into his shoulder. Letting out a shocked gasp of pain, Gîltass dropped quickly to the ground, spinning around rapidly as he did so and slicing into the orcs’ legs just above their boots, sending the two monsters crashing to the ground as well. Leaping up, and trying to ignore the way his shoulder was burning and tearing just slightly under the strain, Gîltass quickly used his sword to slice across the neck of one orc before ramming the blade into and through the faceplate of the other. He immediately withdrew his weapon and swirled about to check around himself. Not seeing anyone, he tried to control his harsh, gasping breaths to allow him a better chance of hearing beyond his immediate environment as he tucked away the hand that belonged to his wounded shoulder into his belt and cinched it tightly to try and prevent the wound from becoming worse through overuse.

There! Gîltass narrowed his eyes as he heard the clang of weapon on weapon coming from over on his right and took off at the fastest pace he could currently manage. Speeding through the trees, Gîltass took the opportunity to look about him at the carnage. Dead orcs appeared to be everywhere to his tired eyes, and, to his horror and sorrow, he saw a leg clad in elvish scout gear sticking out from under a pile of the enemy. Swallowing hard and forcing away the tears that sight brought, Gîltass re-focused his emotions back into the proper mindset for battle. There would be time for mourning later.

As the trees began to thin slightly, Gîltass was able to finally see the fight that his ears were telling him about. Sadronial, the scout placed in charge of their little band, was fighting against a pair of orcs. From what Gîltass could see as he charged forward, Sadronial was only just holding his own against the two. A gaping wound that let open his left leg from upper thigh to just above his knee was one obvious reason for Sadronial’s struggle in dispatching his opponents. Lunging forward, Gîltass was just able to deflect one of the orcs’ blades in time to prevent it from skewering the tall, blond elf. Slipping into the fight like he had always been a part of it, Gîltass stood back to back with Sadronial as they parried and blocked as best they could with their wounds and tried to bring down their opponents.

A high, sharp whistling noise, followed by the orc he was fighting against grabbing at an arrow suddenly lodged in his neck as he falls down let Gîltass know that at least one other member of their patrol was still alive and relatively unharmed. The orc in front of him, falling to the ground with an arrow in its neck, was quickly followed by its foul brethren. Gîltass cautiously lowers his sword ever so slightly as he looks about him, trying to once again control his breathing so that he could listen better, but this time, having to also try and tune out Sadronial's harsh gasps.
He can hear nothing immediately worrisome: the wind in the high branches, his leader's and his own gasping breaths, the far off and very faint cries of a few birds. He is, therefore, understandably startled when a slim hand comes out of nowhere and gracefully places itself on top of his hand where it grasp's at his hilt so tightly that all of his knuckles are almost glowing white in the dim, shadowy light under the trees. Snapping his head about, Gîltass almost lets out a shout of joy and relief to see that he and Sadronial have been joined in their survival by Merilin: although, as Gîltass turns about more fully and is better able to see the amazing archeress, controlling his impulse to shout with joy becomes far easier to do as he takes in the details of her appearance.

The lovely elleth with sea blue eyes and bright, unusual, coppery-red hair is swaying like a drunken sailor in a high wind, she is splattered with blood and bits and pieces of the foul orcs, and she is clearly, horribly wounded. Gîltass shakes off her slight hand, hastily wipes his blade off somewhat on his trousers before slamming it home in its sheath, then grabs ahold of Merilin's shoulders to try and steady her as he carefully leads her over to a tree and helps her to sit down against it. Gîltass quickly fumbles off his heavy leather and chain armor, ignoring the pain and pulling of his own wound to do so. Grabbing ahold of his somewhat clean, undamaged sleeve on his unwounded arm, Gîltass gives a good, hard tug and feels rewarded when he hears the fabric rip and feels the sleeve give way at his shoulder, tuning out the way he can feel new blood pouring out of his wound and rolling down his skin and soaking into his clothes. Cautiously, he reaches out and gently pulls off the hastily applied dressing that Merilin must have done herself, wincing as it pulls against the skin of her face and trying to control his expression when he finally sees what is hiding under the field wrapping covering the right side of her face.

Not pretty would be an understatement.

Gîltass shakes his head; not knowing if it is done in sorrow, denial, or horror. She would not be able to keep her eye with damage like he was seeing even if they were to somehow be miraculously transported directly to Imladris and have both Elrond and Marcaunon working immediately on her. And out in the field like they were, and so far away from the sanitary conditions afforded them in the healers' care, it would be a miracle if they would be able to prevent the infection that he knew was coming from claiming her life. Frantically, Gîltass fumbled around in the small belt pack that he keeps on him at all times when he is out in the field; a tiny flame of triumph flaring briefly within his breast when he finds the miniscule flask he keeps in it. Opening it, he pours the strongly smelling, darkly colored, concoction onto the middle of his sleeve remnant before gently pressing the wet stain up against the pulpy looking wound and tying the ragged ends together around Merilin's head, ignoring her faint moans and sharp gasps of pain and the weak, ineffectual flutters of her hands. Only then does he rock back onto his heels and look about him once again.
While he was busy doing what he could to try and save Merilin's life from infection, Sadronial had been joined by Brêgamrnùn. The small, dark haired scout looked to be doing what he could for Sadronial's injuries. Grunting, Gîltass forced himself to his feet and staggered over the short distance to the two ellyn, where he was able to better note that the smallest member of their troop looked to be in the best shape of them all. Not that Gîltass found himself all that surprised: Brêgamrnùn, the second shortest ellon that he knew of, behind Marcaunon, was one of the best archers he had ever worked with outside of the Greenwood and tended to favor shooting from high, hidden vantage points, such as near the tops of trees like those surrounding them right now. Gîltass could only count his blessings that they had come out of the ambush with at least one heathy scout.

"How is he?" Gîltass quietly asked, his voice rasping harshly in his too dry throat.

"He'll live, with the scars to tell the tale and, most probably, a bad limp that will always hinder that graceful prowl that he calls his normal walk," Brêgamrnùn answered just as quietly. "How's our fiery, tempered one over there?"

"It's not looking good, from the brief glance I took before recovering the wound. The eye was popped and the bone around the socket looks to have been crushed in some manner, while the skin is a pulpy, shredded mess."

Brêgamrnùn winced, then let out a deep, remorseful sounding sigh as his slim shoulders slumped in defeat. Gîltass, seeing this, hastily spoke up.

"I have a small, emergency field healer's kit in my travel pack. I slung my pack off at the very beginning of this nightmare and flung it under a tree and into some bushes. I'll go get it now if you can hold everything down here."

Brêgamrnùn, cocked his head to the side and pursed his lips before slowly answering, "That would be helpful yes, and I'll be sending prayers to the Valar that your pack survived either being found and deliberately destroyed or just plain trampled on. However," here Brêgamrnùn look genuinely worried as he gazed up at Gîltass, "I am worried about you going off on your own, even if
we have no other option to offer. Merlin and Sadronial both, desperately, need the medications your kit could give them, and you, yourself, are clearly in some need of medical attention as well. The problem and worry lies in the fact that just because we have neither seen nor heard more of the foul glemyg, does not mean that they are gone, or even that there might be one or more playing at being dead, only to jump on you when your back is to them."

Brêgamrún paused and the two of them shared a worried look. The medicines were needed, that was fact. It was also fact that of the four, known, survivors of their troop, three of them were wounded: two severely and one partially so, leaving no one able to go with Gîltass without leaving the two in dire need of aid alone and undefended.

"I'll go slowly and take care to stab every body that I come across through the eyes and into the brain," Gîltass said decisively. "I'll also keep on eye out for any signs of Habaderui and Raegûr."

Brêgamrún reluctantly gave his assent, as there was truly nothing else that could be done if they were to have even the slightest chance of returning to Imladris as more than a duo, and even that was chancey as there was who knew what coated on the blade that inflicted the wound onto Gîltass.

"I would have you fetch my own pack as well, were it not for the fact that I was not so fortunate in the manner of its removal," Brêgamrún quietly stated as he stood up and moved closer to Gîltass. "But before you leave here, first let me see what I may do to stabilize that shoulder injury."

Gîltass turned away from his wounded shoulder and tilted his head as far out of the way of Brêgamrún's small hands as he could without pulling more on the painful injury, hissing when he felt those dainty but very muscular and calloused fingers prod carefully at the area.

"This is going to hurt, and I am deeply sorry for it, but I need something to make a bandage and since you've already made a start on your shirt as a use for bandage material, I'm going to claim the use of this sleeve to make one for your wound."
After that bit of warning, Brêgamrún removed Gîltass' arm from where it was tucked firmly into his belt and let it hang uselessly at his side, making Gîltass grit his teeth at the pain and strain it put on his shoulder. Brêgamrún worked quickly however and had the shirt sleeve deftly cut away at the shoulder seam with a dagger and pulled off his arm before any noticable length of time had passed. He then folded the fabric scrap and placed it firmly against the seeping wound with one hand while, with the other one, fumbled a bit with Gîltass' slim, double length, leather belt before getting it un-buckled and pulled free of Gîltass' trousers. While a belt was absolutely unnecessary with the tightly fitting, well tailored, leather pants, it was such a useful item to have at hand that it was almost considered to be a required part of the gear for any and all scouts working out of Imladris and Brêgamrún proved its usefulness once again as he wrapped the long strip of leather deftly around Gîltass; making a contraption that both held the makeshift bandage in place as well as a sort of sling that strapped the arm below the wound tightly against Gîltass' body and held it there.

Stepping back, Brêgamrún eyed his extremely rough first aid treatment before taking in the over all appearance of the ellon standing in front of him.

"You'll do, I guess. Not like we have much choice," Brêgamrún grunted out. "One last thing and I'll let you go. We need to rig your leather and chain armor onto you in some manner. Going out like this, with a strapped arm, no sleeves, and a white chest cover, is just asking for trouble."

Gîltass grunted his agreement, but just wished the other ellon would let him go already! He was tired, hurt, and really wanted nothing more than to drop to the ground and curl up around the burning, throbbing pain of his wound while whimpering and gasping. He could only stand there hoarding what energy he had left after the fight, not able to muster up any extra to move and assist Brêgamrún. Instead, he let the other do all of the work involved with fetching his abandoned top, slipping it on over his head, which Gîltass did at least kneel for as otherwise the much shorter ellon would never have been able to reach, and tightening down all of the straps once again. When he staggered back to his feet, with yet more assistance from Brêgamrún, it was with his strapped arm forming a bulge beneath the armor and one sleeve danging uselessly. But only for a moment as it was quickly tied down and thus halted from flailing around making noise and getting in the way.

Gîltass let out a deep breath, gave a nod of farewell to Brêgamrún, and quietly made his way from the clearing that they had all ended up in. Looking about, Gîltass cautiously flitted from tree to shadow to dense shrubbery, moving slowly and carefully while making sure that there were no bodies anywhere in his sight. He progressed in this manner until he found himself near the small clearing that he had passed earlier as he ran towards the distant sounds of a fight; the clearing he had
seen that contained many orc bodies, both scattered about as they had been felled and in a bit of a pile atop what appeared to be an elvish leg.

Drawing in and releasing several deep, quiet breaths, Gîltass took just a bare handful of moments to try and steady himself, then went about sliding his way noiselessly about the small forest clearing with his sword drawn and ready in his hand. Every time he came to a body near the shadowed tree line, he would pause for a moment as he listened and looked about, then he would take his sword and force it through an eye and deep into the foul creature's brain. Only once, as he made his way slowly around the area, did he have any sort of response, and as it was only a brief yet frenzied thrashing, Gîltass pushed it off as an orc that was wounded nigh to death, but not actually there yet until he had come along to ensure the being's final demise.

Arriving back at the beginning his slow circle of the clearing, Gîltass knew that there was no more putting off the inevitable and began the more nerve wracking task of moving about in the open. Gliding silently forward, he went from one downed body to the next, still moving somewhat in a circle as he did so with the small mound near the center as his final goal. When he finally reached the mound of bodies, it was all he could do to keep his attention focused on the orcs and not shift his focus onto the leg that clearly belonged to one of his companions as it stuck out near the bottom of the pile.

Not quite sure how to go about this, as the bodies were intertwined with one another, thus making it much more difficult to slide his blade into their diseased brain from either the front or the back of the head, Gîltass wavered between trying to stab the bodies where they were and attempting to roll them off of the pile, where he could then stab them more easily. He eventually decided on a combination of the two, stabbing the topmost body then rolling it slightly out of the way so that he could get to the next body in the pile more easily.

It was while he was rolling the third orc body out of the way after stabbing it through the eye slit in its visor that he was finally able to get a better look at the body of the elf that was present in the tangle and Gîltass had to bite down on a cry of despair and horror at the sight.

Habaderui lay chest down, with his face turned to the side in an unnatural angle. But where the face before him should show a fair, yet stern, looking visage, there was only a bloody, bony skull with fragments of various tissues hanging in strips from it. Gîltass dropped to his knees, forgetting all about the last two bodies he needed to check as he dropped his sword to the ground and reached out.
a trembling hand towards the ellon. He was about to touch the body when a slobbering sound drew his attention sharply to his right and his eyes widened in horror when they were met with the sight of gleaming orc eyes shining brightly at him in a face that had very unusual coloring to it. Gîtass did not think his horror and despair could spiral any higher, as he scrambled to his feet with his sword clutched back in his hand, until he realized that the orc’s unusual coloring was mainly centered about the mouth, chin, and lower cheeks.

And that it was caused by blood and fragments of skin, muscle, and fat.

Anger rushed through him, almost as sharp as the despair that was flooding him. Habaderui had been a very good friend to him; the two of them getting closer to one another after Gîtass had joined the ranks of the scouts. Habaderui’s serious nature turned out to be hiding the soul of a born prankster, one that got away with quite a bit as he rarely played any pranks, and of the ones he did, he preferred to set up quite a long ways in advance so that he had the best alibi: that of not being present. The much older ellon had taken Gîtass under his wing once his apprenticeship had ended and made sure that he was fluent in all of the little things that made being a scout easier and more enjoyable.

And now, this foul glamog had come along and, not only killed the immortal warrior that was his friend, but had actually eaten him! Gîtass snarled in fury, lunging forward before the orc was able to rise fully to his feet and ramming his blade into the foul thing so hard that it went out the other side of his head by a good few inches. As the thing convulsed around the several inches of well-forged metal sticking through its head, its limbs thrashed around, beating a tattoo on the ground while, at the same time, releasing a high, piercing cry that was oddly guttural at the same time. The noises the orc made in its dying moments were loud enough that Gîtass had no warning before he was struck through his wounded shoulder once again: this time by a thick, black arrow coming through from his back as the unknown archer hit the one place on his armor that was critically weakened already.

The shock of it was so great that Gîtass lost control over his gift of fire for a critical moment, letting his gift flare outwards from himself and creating a miniature firestorm in the clearing. Dropping to his knees in the center of the small inferno, Gîtass grasped at the thick arrow; gasping and keening out his pain as he ignored the bellows and yells that erupted from the edge of the burning clearing only briefly before falling away into silence. Gîtass moved his hand away from the arrow shaft and fumbled at his belt, feeling around for a dagger. When he was unable to find one, ignoring the fire burning all around him as he fought against going into shock, he scrambled the minute distance back to Habaderui’s body and struggled to roll the last orc corpse off of it. Once he did so, Gîtass, mentally begging for his friend's pardon all the while, frantically groped around
Habaderui's belt for one of the many daggers his friend was so fond of using. Giltass let out a faint sound of triumph when his questing hand was victorious in its search and pulled it back once the well-used grip was well and truly held tightly in his hand.

Bracing himself and praying that the adrenalin currently flooding his system would be enough to keep him awake and aware through the next few moments of torture, Giltass leaned forward until the point of the arrow was braced against the ground, took a deep breath and held it, then used the dagger to cut away at the wicked looking, multi-barbed point that had ripped through his already wounded shoulder. When he had finally cut through the overly thick shaft, Giltass tried to blink away the tears and greying vision that was over taking him; the hardest, most painful bit was yet to come, and he still had to get the medicines and get back to the other survivors, he couldn't afford to pass out yet! Carefully gripping Habaderui's body, Giltass slowly and gently laid himself down on the ground, maneuvering skillfully until he had it arranged that the arrow that he knew he couldn't reach well enough to pull out by himself was underneath the full weight of his friend's body, at which point he began to slowly inch himself forward along the ground. His plan worked; as the weight of Habaderui pinning the arrow’s shaft, along with the fletching providing a bit more friction to latch onto between the body and the ground, allowed Giltass the means to remove the arrow from his body. When the arrow finally slid out of his shoulder with a sucking noise, Giltass rolled over and promptly threw up what felt like every meal he had every eaten, shaking violently the entire time he did so.

Eventually regaining some semblance of control over his body after what felt like hours, Giltass pushed himself back to his feet. Upon staggering upright, Giltass had to battle against another bout of nausea that threatened to send him right back down onto his knees. Pushing it away for the moment, Giltass tried to take stock of what he had and what he needed to do, but the pain and shock where becoming too much for him and what little coherency he could manage to scrape up was letting him know that getting to his satchel and back was the most important thing he could do right now. Grunting softly, he slowly and carefully approached the orc that was sporting his sword through its head. While the majority of his mental capacity was focused on his wounds and the pain of them, and the lesser portion of his thoughts were solely around finding the medicine and retreating, a tiny, tiny portion of him knew that having a weapon would most likely allow him to come out of this nightmare alive. Giltass grasped weakly at the hilt and gave as strong a tug as he could manage, but nothing budged. Letting his hand fall away, knowing that whatever strength he could manage right now would be more effective at just keeping upright and moving, Giltass began to shuffle forward once again, pushing away that tiny part of him that screamed out to be armed. A couple of slow, shuffling steps later, his foot stubbed up against something heavy and metal. Looking down, Giltass felt a miniscule smile tug at the corners of his mouth as he recognized the blade he had chanced upon.

Even in death, it seemed that Habaderui was looking out for him.
Much carefull maneuvering later, along with grunts, groans and swearing, and Gîltass was making his way from the tiny, charred clearing, well armed just as he wished to be. Knowing that he now had no extra energy whatsoever to spare, Gîltass was exceptionally cautious as he silently stumbled from one corps of trees to the next, always ensuring that he looked about him and listened for a count of fifty before even making the attempt of moving to the next and always taking the time as he moved to drive his new blade through the head of any orc body he came across. It was in this manner that he finally arrived near to where he had purposefully dropped his carry bag.

Leaning up against a tree in his current hiding place, Gîltass paused for even longer than his previous rests, using the time spent scanning the immediate area to gather up what he could of his reserves. Finally deciding that he could put it off no longer, he moved. Sliding from tree to tree and shadow to shadow, Gîltass at last knelt on the ground and reached under the bushes where he recalled throwing his carry all. A tiny bit of fumbling later and he was triumphantly pulling out the small shoulder bag that looked none the worse for the lack of time and care in the manner in which it was stashed. Gîltass staggered upright, clutching tightly to the bag’s straps.

Once back up on his feet, he gritted his teeth against the pain he knew was going to come and swung the small bag onto his good shoulder, letting the momentum of the swing and the weight of the bag carry it around to his wounded shoulder, where, with a quick grab of his one good hand, he was able to slide the other strap onto himself while attempting to ignore the fiery bursts of pain that the strapped caused him as it rubbed over the twin wounds. Breathing harshly, Gîltass awkwardly used his one hand to tie the two straps together across his chest, thus ensuring that the bag wouldn’t be able to just slide off of his wounded shoulder since he was unable to place that arm through the strapping.

Gîltass, once he knew that he had the bag containing the precious medicines secure, silently headed back the way he came. He found himself overwhelmingly grateful, as he headed back down the already cleared trail by which he had come, that he was not being forced to circle around the long way to come to the clearing where the others waited from the back.

He knew that would not have been able to make it.

It was all that he could do to move in a quiet, coordinated manner and force himself to take the
time to look and listen. The shock of the double wounds was setting in harshly and, worse, Gîltass had the feeling, judging by the light-headedness, irregular heart beats, and muscle spasms, that the arrow he took to his already wounded shoulder had been coated in something foul. Forcing himself to continue onwards, when all he wanted to do was to collapse to the ground and let the darkness pulling away at the edges of his vision take him, Gîltass eventually forewent any semblance of true caution and merely stumbled his way forward. He was at least able to maintain his silence as he moved, not that it was from any actual effort on his part; instead, it was because of his natural elven gracefulness that he failed to make any noise as he stumbled his way back to the others through sheer stubbornness.

He never remembered finally reaching the clearing and falling to the ground, or the quiet shout of alarm Brêgamrún released as he ran over.

Chapter End Notes

sadron [sedryn] name faithful one
ial name shout, cry
amrún [emryn] name Orient, sunrise, East
brêg [brîg] adj lively, sudden, quick
ellon [ellyn] name elf-man
orc name glamog [glemyg]
habad [hebaid] name shore
erui adv. alone, first, single
raeg adj. false, hidden, tricked
ûr [uir] name heat, fire

Gîltass -(Sirius) m tall, black hair, grey eyes, proficient enough with weapons, first aid, twin shoulder wounds(sword, then poisoned arrow)

Brêgamrún - m very short, dark hair, incredible talent at archery
Habaderui - m tallish, green-grey eyes, dirty blond, sword and dagger combo, deceased

Raegûr - f short, dark hair, grey eyes, all-around proficiency favors edged weapons, missing

Sadronial - m tall, blond, grey eyes, mainly a swordsman, sword gash up the thigh

Merilin - f tallish, red hair, sea-blue eyes, good at archery, better at teaching archery, bashed in the face, lost an eye, critical condition
Marcanon fidgeted restlessly: playing with the reins in his fingers, lightly scuffing the toes of his fine, leather-work boots on the frost covered stones of the courtyard, flexing his head from side to side. Anything he could do to try and distract himself from his turbulent thoughts. He didn't know exactly what happened last evening as he had spent it out in a sheltered corner of his garden, taking a short break from tending to those scouts that had returned wounded over the course of the last several months, including a couple of scouts that had received horribly severe ones very early on in the war against the Dark Lord. He had been playing his harp to accompany Glorfindel's glorious singing, but what ever it was had been enough that a full muster of riders was being sent out immediately. And the twins, Elrohir and Elladan, Glorfindel, and himself were being sent out as a part of it.

In fact, they were the only fully Eldar that were going to be traveling with the group, which consisted of twenty-nine Dúnedain warriors. The finest warriors the remnants of the King's people in the North had to offer were the ones being sent out in the group, which was being led by Halbarad, Estel's second in command. From what little Marcanon had heard as he was saddling his mount early that morning, they were being sent out on the advice of the Lady Galadriel to meet up with Estel, and were laden down with advice from Lord Elrond.

He and Glorfindel would be riding out with them, although they would not be staying till the end of the journey. As the troop rode past Lothlorien, for the plan was to use the high pass near Imladris then ride hard alongside the banks of the mighty Anduin, Glorfindel and Marcanon were to peel off from the rest and slip inside the ancient forest. Glofindel had been entrusted with a heavy missive to deliver into the hands of the Lady of the Woods; then the both of them would stay to lend their assistance against Khamul, the Ringwraith, second in command to the Witch-King of Angmar, who had been attacking both Lothlórien to the west of his fortress of Dol Guldur as well as the forest of Mirkwood, home to King Thranduil's people.
While scouts and messenger birds had their places and uses, the birds could only carry so much and for the scouts, on both places' parts, the trip had become too dangerous for anything less than the large, fast moving group that was about to be sent out. And even then, the best warrior that resided within Imladris was being sent out alongside of a full healer. Of course, the Lady Galadriel could and did reach out with her powers to pass along bits of advice to the rulers of the other elven realms, but her powers were limited by the distance, leaving her unable to hold the connection for long periods of time; especially now, with the might of the Dark Lord pressing so heavily on the world. She was also unable to spare much of her time and attention away from the threat of Dol Guldur.

Marcaunon just barely restrained himself from sighing and instead of fidgeting any further, decided to spend the time waiting on Elrond and Arwen to show themselves and give their blessings on the departure of the group by going through his healer's satchel. Again. But before he could do more than twitch in the direction of his bag as it hung on his mounts saddle, the long, strong arms of his mate wrapped themselves around him and pulled him tight against the much larger body of his love; his back to Glorfindel's chest. Marcaunon immediately felt much of the tension building within him leave as Glorfindel gently set his chin resting on top of Marcaunon's head while holding tightly to him.

They stayed that way for several minutes as the sun slowly rose from its place just on the horizon, holding and comforting one another as they stood still near the front of the company, listening to the mounts stomping and blowing all around them as well as the gentle murmurs of their fellow assembled. A few minutes later, Elrond and Arwen slipped silently into the courtyard and Glorfindel and Marcaunon reluctantly parted, Glorfindel to move up and stand beside Halbarad and the twins while Marcaunon stayed back in the second line. As he watched, Marcaunon saw several quiet words pass between Lord Elrond and his daughter, the Lady Arwen, before she glided forward and passed a dark, tightly wrapped bundle into the hands of her brother, Elrohir, with a determined expression on her lovely face and several quiet words on her lips.

Marcaunon didn't even try to pay attention to what she might be saying to her brothers as he was far to caught up in her appearance. While still the loveliest elf maiden to walk the lands since Lúthien herself had graced the world, Arwen now looked like a fragile work of glass art; translucent and delicate, as though she wasn’t entirely part of the world anymore. And as he watched her, clearly giving her brothers their instructions, and saw her shiver slightly in the early morning's gloom, Marcaunon had a sudden flash of insight and knew, to his great and overwhelming sorrow, that if the worst occurred and the Eldar were forced to flee in their ships into the West over the Sundering Sea, his beloved family would be forever split. For Arwen, there could never be a ship that would bare her hence from this land.
She had chosen the same as their ancestor, Lúthien; both the bitter and the sweet, and had chosen mortality to stay with her love, Estel.

Marcaunon swallowed hard and blinked his furiously burning eyes until he had somewhat regained his composure. To try and ensure that he wouldn't lose it again, he swung all of his attention back around to Elrond. Not that there was much time to see anything other than Lord Elrond giving the signal to mount up and ride off and Marcaunon quickly followed suit, joining the other members of the company in an uneven wave as they all mounted at slightly different times and rhythms.

His mount pranced excitedly in place as he swung up and settled down onto the saddle, before he was able to regain control over her; Gwilwileth always had been very excitable, even as a young foal, and he had never seen the need to train her fully out of it. After several seconds of slight confusion where everyone was milling about and getting firmly settled, an unseen, unheard signal seemed to go through the company and suddenly all thirty-three riders were wheeling about and heading out of the courtyard at a fast trot; as they moved, they sorted themselves out into a semblance of order and formed into a ragged line, the heavy grey cloaks they all wore bouncing and swaying to the movement and confusing the eyes, especially in the dark shadows the early morning sun was causing to form in the surrounding forest.

The company rode hard all that morning, alternating gaits so that they could get the most from their mounts over the easiest, safest part of their journey, thus conserving the horses' strength for when it would be truly needed; the ascent over the High Pass, followed by the, hopefully unseen, dash down the banks of the Anduin. No words were spoken until midday when they reached one of the many mountain streams that were common in the area.

"We shall stop here," Halbarad called out, reigning in his horse and dismounting in one fluid motion. "We have been walking the steeds for some time now, so we shall have no need to worry about them foundering after the morning's ride if they drink. While halted, make sure to grab something to fill your stomach with as well for we shall be on the move again before the hour glass' sands would be half fallen."

Marcaunon slipped from Gwilwileth's back and patiently waited his turn to bring her up to the little bit of bracken and shrub free bank the small, mountain-fed brook sported, absentmindedly
patting her on the withers as she snorted and tossed her head while he fumbled around in his bags, looking for one of the trail rations bars that he knew he had packed. The bars were made in two varieties; dried meat with grain and vegetables, or dried fruit with grain, nuts, and a bit of honey. Both could be eaten as they were, once they were unwrapped from the waxed cloth they travelled in, or could be used to make a hot stew, in the case of the meat one, or a hot porridge, in the case of the dried fruit one. Frankly, Marcaunon didn't care at this point which one he found as he knew that he would be heartily sick of both of them by the end of the journey, regardless of how tasty they actually were, and he found himself hoping, as he finally pulled out a meat bar, that the company would have a bit of luck as they traveled and find some fresh game on their journey.

After letting Gwilwileth drink her fill, Marcaunon gently led her out of the way to allow for someone else to take their place. He then, after joining the growing crowd of those who had finished watering their mounts, grabbed out a double handful of grain from one of his other saddlebags, piled it up in the grass at his feet, before slipping Gwilwileth's reins around the horn of his saddle and tying them off so that they wouldn't tangle around her feet as he let her eat for just a bit, the bitless bridles the elves favored assisting greatly with that. Looking around, he saw that he wasn't the only one to take this chance and try to assist his mount with a bit of high protein food to attempt to counter the lack of grazing time that they would be given on this trip. Now that his horse was attended to, Marcaunon could see to his needs, which he did; making short work of his meat bar and draining one of the two water skins he was traveling with. Looking around, he saw that the stream was clear of horses and riders, so he took the chance offered to re-fill with fresh, cold water. He was the first to do so, but by no means the last as the others in the Company drifted over in ones and twos bearing their own water skins. He spent the last bit of the halt at Glorfindel's side, saying nothing as he listened to Halbarad and Glorfindel discussing the path they would be taking and how they should use the horses to get the most from them.

The moment the last rider had filled his skin and rejoined the milling group, Halbarad gave the order to remount. As they rode off, Marcaunon knew that they were pushing hard to reach the foot of the pass, as it was only fifty miles away; an easy two day ride accounting for the well-worn road they were on and the rolling foothills that would come into play on the second day. With them pouring on the speed and pushing the mounts, they could just make the foot of the pass in one day, and that was if they rode till just past sunset. Sighing quietly to himself, Marcaunon resigned himself to a very long day of riding and gave himself a bit of a mental pat on the back for having the foresight to pack along a bit of muscle liniment, as he was not as accustomed to such lengths of time ahorse as the rest of the troop, regardless of the few times he had ridden out to accompany Arwen and her guards on her trips to visit with her Grandparents, the Lord Celeborn and Lady Galadriel of Lothlorien, as those trips were taken in a much more leisurely manner, and generally in seasons that promoted fair weather.

As they rode onwards, Marcaunon set his mind to the task of attempting to figure out just where they would halt for each evening or at the very least, figure out just how many days it was take to arrive at Lothlorien if they continued their rapid pace, even as his eyes flickered here and
there, keeping watch and his ears strained to hear any oddity over the dull thunking, pounding noise of the steeds' hooves. He eventually decided that it would take a minimum of three days to reach the Old Ford, and more likely four days as the weather in the High Pass was always chancy; more so during this time of year when storms could blow up without any warning and had an equal chance of dumping either snow or torrents of rain, and possibly both, with generous portions of lightning. It would take a further five to seven days to ride down the length of the Anduin to reach Lothlorien. Marcaunon mentally shuddered as he contemplated the fact that the rest of the company would have yet more hard and fast riding to do, even with Lady Galadriel's assistance to point them in the correct direction. The only bright side he could see to their travels was the fact that spring would be more advanced in the season as they rode further south, and that really wasn't all that much to look forward too.

Several hours of varied gaits later and Marcaunon couldn't have been more grateful to follow Halbarad's orders to rein in once again. This time though, the company had pulled off the main road and gone deeper into the scraggly remnants of forest that nestled forlornly at the base of the mountains they would attempt to climb their way through on the morrow. The troop wound their way through old, dark pines, trees that were only showing the faintest, earliest hints of green coverage, and scrub brush until they reached a small, sheltered dale. The members of the company made short work of setting up a rough camp for the night. Marcaunon, after seeing to Gwilwileth's needs and care, made sure to give her enough time to drink at the small, fresh water spring the dell boasted, before finally turning her loose to get in some semblance of grazing alongside of Glorfindel's mount, grabbed his gear and, after looking around and easily spotting the fair hair of his love amongst all of the dark locks the rest sported, made his way over to the patch of ground that Glorfindel had claimed for the two of them.

Quietly setting his gear down, Marcaunon followed immediately after it, but he took care so that he ended up leaning against his love's side and was able to wrap an arm around Glorfindel even as he buried his face into the side of Glorfindel's neck and released a deep sigh that was evenly split in tone between contentment and exhaustion. Glofindel chuckled softly, wrapping the arm that wasn't holding a fruit and grain bar tightly around the slighter male and rubbing the lithely muscled back with that hand.

"Hush now, nín meleth," Glofindel gently and quietly breathed into the nearest pointed ear. "I am here with you."

Marcaunon huffed lightly, before pulling back slightly and looking up into the much loved face.
"Perhaps," Marcaunon responded equally quietly, so that it was a mere breath on the air. "But I missed you greatly while riding this day, for you were hardly at my side, instead choosing to ride at the forefront of the Company."

"Indeed, will you ever be able to find it in your heart to forgive me my distance from you this day? Perhaps if I were to share with you that which Halbarad and I spoke over, it would be able to persuade you to turn aside your wrath?"

Marcaunon tried not to look too eager as he gave a graceful nod of assent, but he was sure that he had failed terribly judging by the ever so slight quirk at the corners of Glorfindel's lips. Glorfindel set his fruit and grain bar back down on its wrapper and used both arms to pull Marcaunon more tightly against his body, before leaning down just a bit more and breathing out some of the wanted answers into his ear.

"Our Lord Elrond has sent out the best remnants of his brother's people, as well as his own sons, to deliver a very important message to our beloved Estel. While we shall be swinging off to stay briefly in the woods under the Lady Galadriel's watch, the rest of our exalted company shall be riding with all haste to reach Estel. For if there is to be hope of him having enough time to accomplish that which he must, reminder must be sent to him about the Paths of the Dead and the words of the Seer."

Marcaunon bit lightly at his bottom lip as he took in the offered information. Glorfindel pulled back a bit and, seeing his mate's face turn contemplative, picked his dinner back up and went about eating it, while still keeping Marcaunon held firm against himself with an arm.

"Do you think that you could tell me a bit more about the Paths of the Dead, or the Seer?" Marcaunon finally asked; his voice a soft whisper of sound, just carrying over the sounds of around thirty men making camp for the evening with their horses moving about in the background. "I am afraid that I just don't quite recognize the name."
"Of course, nín meleth. But before I do so, you need to grab yourself something to eat, as well as the fact that we should make ourselves more comfortable for the evening. Halbarad has asked that we not take any of the night watches or patrols; instead he has requested that we spend the entire trip within the camps we set each evening. The same request stands for Elladan and Elrohir. And the reason for that is because he wished us to forego true sleep for the entire trip and take what rest we may while lending our senses to those on active patrol. Halbarad knows the toll this would take on us and so has excused us from more active duties in the evenings."

Marcaunon nodded his agreement even as he moved away from Glorfindel and over towards his dropped gear. A short flurry of activity later saw the two of them laying nestled together on top of Glorfindel's blanket and under Marcaunon's, with the saddles used as both backrests and pillows for the two of them. A judicious flexing of Marcaunon's gift had the sparse grass grow beneath their bedding, and indeed beneath the bedding of all who rode within their company, into a thick and luxurious nest. After a quick moment's thought, Marcaunon sent tendrils of his power out and over to where the mounts still grazed in the rapidly descending darkness, making the grass thicker there as well as offering more nutrition to the hungry mouths.

Now settled in, Marcaunon looked questioningly up at Glorfindel, one arm curled up and trapped between them as Marcaunon laid on his side tightly up against Glorfindel, who was reclining on his back, well propped against the saddles; Marcaunon with his own fruit and grain bar held in his other hand.

"The Paths of the Dead," Glorfindel began, "is a short, but dark, tale. Back when man first drew together to do battle with Sauron, the people of the hills swore allegiance to Estel's fore-father, Isildur. But when he went to call on them to fulfill their sworn promises, they proved themselves to be Oathbreakers and ran back into the dark hills, and faded and dwindled into a hidden shadow of a people, until at last, they were no more, merely shadows and haunts, cursed to linger forever in a tortured existence. The Seer goes hand in hand with this story:

Over the land there lies a long shadow,
westward reaching wings of darkness.
The Tower trembles; to the tombs of kings
doom approaches. The Dead awaken;
for the hour is come for the oathbreakers:
at the Stone of Ereh they shall stand again
and hear there a horn in the hills ringing.
Whose shall the horn be? Who shall call them
from the grey twilight, the forgotten people?
The heir of him to whom the oath they swore.

From the North shall he come, need shall drive him:
he shall pass the Door to the Paths of the Dead.*1

"They can have no rest until their shades have filled their Oath, and only Estel, heir of Isildur,
can be the one to call them forth from where their spirits lay."

"I thank you, nín mîn," Marcaunon finally said, gently pressing a kiss to Glorfindel's smooth cheek after several moments had passed in silence. "You have given me much to contemplate while we rest this night."

"Then rest well, nín meleth, for I have been grimly assured that we shall be spending our next evening on the other side of the mountain."

In the morning, if it could truly be called such when the sun was only vague hints below the horizon and was completely blocked by the mountains' bulk before them, Glorfindel's words proved to be the only warning Marcaunon had as to the harshness of the day's journey. The camp was broken, the mounts saddled, and they were on their way before the sun had more then a sliver showing. Marcaunon found himself grateful all over again for the changes wrought upon him when first he and Giltass appeared in this world, back when he was still known as Harry. If he still had the body of the human he once was, he would be truly suffering this morning between the extremely long ride the day before, followed by sleeping on the ground with only two blankets, only to wake to frost covered everything this morning. Marcaunon didn't know how the men around him could be so alert and functioning so well, but mentally attributed it to a combination of experience and their bloodline.
As they rode up the climbing, deeply shadowed path that morning, Marcaunon took every opportunity to study the backlit peaks around, and before, him. And he wasn't too pleased with what he saw. Several of the lowest peaks sported only hints of snow; however, the peaks directly before them, still had what looked like generous piles of the white stuff resting on their flanks, and, in fact, they were starting to ride past slushy, grey piles of melting, icy snow. Chirruping softly to *Gwilwileth*, Marcaunon encouraged her to speed up just a bit, allowing him to carefully pass several riders until he came to be level with Elladan, where he reined *Gwilwileth* in so that the two of them were pacing alongside of the older, more experienced elf.

"Will we make it through the pass?" Marcaunon wasted no time on pleasantries, not knowing how long he would be able to continue riding alongside of his friend before the pathway would narrow and become single file only.

Elladan flashed Marcaunon a bright smile and laughed lightly before replying.

"Indeed young one. It will be hard going, and the mounts as well as ourselves will be severely pressed and pushed beyond what we might wish, but make it over we shall. One of the scouts has already made his way though the pass and sent word via messenger bird, thus allowing us to make our way to the other side of the mountain on the only pass that will accommodate a troop of our size and doesn't take us far too near to the traitor's tower and control. Hopefully, we shall arrive unseen and unmarked by all eyes."

Marcaunon nodded sharply and spent what time he could riding beside Elladan in companionable silence before the way became too narrow, at which point he slid in behind and followed in Elladan's path.

As the day wore on, and the sun shifted from being an orb of light that was completely unseen because of the mountains then became a barely seen sliver peaking over the mountains before them, to shining high over head and finally giving them enough light to truly see the pathway, the company made their way up the mountain side; taking the meandering switchback path at a fast walk or trot for the most part, picking up the gaits to a canter whenever the trail leveled out enough to spare the steeds some strain. They rode several abreast whenever the opportunity was afforded to them, but the majority of the trial was strictly single file, especially as they made their way higher. On several
occasions, all where forced to dismount and trudge on foot, leading the horses over loose and shifting rocks or parts of the trail that were to steep to add to the horses strain by riding, or, to broach the way through deep snow. There were only two breaks that were called and they were to water the steeds, all riders using one of the three basins brought along just for that purpose and using their extra water skins to fill it with.

They finally reached the highest part of the trail just after midday and all were extremely cautious, as well as worn out already, for the peaks around them were heavy with snow and many bore the signs that much of the snow had found another way of coming off of the mountain than melting slowly. The signs of avalanche were unmistakable on the mountain flanks and they led their horses through the narrow, high pass with tension tightened muscles and steps, and no extra noise. In fact, several riders had taken the time on the way up to wrap up any metal on metal to prevent even the faint chiming it would give off and suggested the same trick to the others in the group. It seemed that the entire company even forswore breathing until they had successfully made their way through and were a goodly ways down the other side of the pass, where there was almost a collective sigh of relief and the tensions seemed to suddenly bleed away.

Not that the trail down was any easier than the one up on the other side. In fact, Marcaunon would have sworn that it was, if anything, more difficult. While the other side had more snow, collecting as it did the moisture off of the sea to the west, the east side was clearly being gifted by warmer winds coming up from down south and what snow had fallen on this side of the high pass had clearly melted. However, the temperatures being what they were, the water didn't have much of a chance to drain away before being re-frozen into ice, making the pathway down treacherous. They had almost lost one of the horses when they were almost halfway down when the steed slipped badly on some invisible ice, being led at the time as the path was becoming quite difficult to see in the heavy, dark shadow the sun setting on the other side of the mountain was causing. Fortunately, the horse only slid a few feet off of the trail before coming to a jarring halt up against a massive boulder. The company took a much longer rest at that point as Marcaunon examined the spooked horse and had to put a poultice on a swollen and torn up hock. The pace down the mountain side decreased after that incident by quite a bit, both to accommodate the limping horse and to try and prevent anyone else from finding any patches of ice. In quite a few places, they found that the trail had been completely wiped out, forcing them to spend a great deal of time and effort to either clear the blockage or find a way around.

It wasn't until full night had fallen and the moon was up that the company finally was able to call a halt to the day's journey, and at that, they were still technically on the mountain, having found a deep crevasse that opened to the front as it split apart the stone back in the directions of the mountain peaks to spend the night in. As they unsaddled the horses and saw to it that they all had some grain to eat while a few of the riders went out with the extra water skins to get them refilled so that the steeds could be watered, a heavy rumbling could be heard coming from the area of the high pass. Marcaunon shuddered as he cleaned out Gwilwileth's hooves, taking care to ensure that there were no hidden stones lodged in there that might cause her discomfort or lameness, grateful beyond words
that they had the worst, most dangerous part of the journey behind them now.

The next day was spent slowly making their way completely off of the mountain side and down into the lowlands. They had a late start in the morning and camped early that night, making their way along at no more than a slow trot for the entire day as well as taking plenty of breaks. This was to allow the mounts some rest and recovery from the gruelling one day crossing of the High Pass, as well as to allow Marcaunon the much needed opportunity to closely monitor the steed that was injured in the crossing. With the gentle pace and the healing poultices, the steed was judged to be fine by the next morning and the company resume the more strenuous pace from the first day out of Imladris. The troop made excellent time over the following two days, the weather cooperating with them as well as the terrain, until they fetched up against the Ninglor early in the evening on the third night from the High Pass.

The river, while broad and fast flowing, was normally shallow, coming no higher than the knees on a horse and sported a clear view to the sandy and pebbled bottom. However, that night when the company arrived, it was clearly in the beginning stages of a flood and the river water was dark as it swirled and frothed with the added mountain melt. The group halted and several of the more experienced members moved forward to stand near the churning edge as the water lapped at the banks and came up a goodly ways onto the slope that marked the ford that they had planned to take across the river.

Marcaunon, having only traveled this way a handful of times in the past, knew better than to move forward and join the small group, even when he noted that both Elladan and Elrohir were a part of it as was his mate, Glorfindel. Besides, he was near enough that, with his excellent hearing, he was privy to the discussion going on anyway. As he listened, it seemed that everyone taking part in the discussion agree to the fact that the river had to be crossed by no later than tomorrow evening or the company would miss the deadline by which they needed to be at Estel's side. Another fact that they agreed on was the lack of bridges in any reasonable distance, let alone a one day ride away. What they seemed to be arguing over was whether the river should be attempted this evening in the dying light, or if it should be put off until the next day. The advantages to doing it tomorrow all had to do with more light to see by as well as the secondary fact that getting the horses to cross the river this evening after a long, hard day of riding might cause them to cramp up and injure themselves; the major disadvantage was the fact that the river would obviously get higher, as it was noticeable, to elven eyes, that the river was still rising even as the conference was occurring. After the three elves gave a few well reasoned arguments and several intense gestures towards the place where the water met the old pathway that the company had been following, it was apparent by the way the rest of the group acted that they had come to the decision to attempt the river passage tonight.
Marcaunon gently patted *Gwilwileth*'s side as she stomped and nudged at him, watching calmly as Glorfindel made his way back over to where he had ground tied the beautiful white *Asfaloth* near to Marcaunon and *Gwilwileth*. Marcaunon did not say anything, and Glorfindel did not speak, knowing that his love had been able to clearly listen in, just as he was to those few left near the rushing, churning water who were putting together some form of a plan of attack. Glorfindel cocked his head to the side when he heard the final suggestion, put forth by the twins. It would be a gamble, but it did much to minimize the greatest risks and played to the strengths of the group. Truly, they should count themselves lucky in the fact that the company was playing host to a total of four of the elder born and their mounts, not just the two that were originally planning to accompany the Dúnedain until the path chosen sent them passing by Lothlorien.

Glorfindel freed the hank of rope attached to his packs, gave Marcaunon a quick hug and a whisper of thanks as he took the rope that his *meleth* gravely offered, and made his return to the banks of the rising river, trusting to Marcaunon to lead his beloved *Asfaloth* after him as he began the all important task of braiding the ends of the two ropes together to make the two lengths into one, strong whole; while he was not a true expert in the practice as it was easy to tell that he had joined the two lengths, Glorfindel could at least consider himself proficient enough to put together a strong bond between the two lengths, one that he would trust with his life and, more importantly, at least to his mind, his *meleth*'s life. It took him a good deal of time to weave the ropes into one continuous length, but the rest of the group did not stand around doing nothing. They had spread out and were gathering what dry wood they could find in the gathering darkness; several had even taken out a few hand axes and were taking apart a deadfall and bundling up that wood for the other riders to transport.

While the wood would be a heavy burden to cart across the river, the freezing cold, mountain melt made it a matter of necessity to have a fire, or several: both to warm up the riders who would, no doubt, get wet, but also the horses, who would be in real danger of pulling muscles and injuring themselves as they forded the icy melt with bodies that were too hot from the hard day's work, causing instant contractions as the heat met the ice. The only hope they had to prevent time stealing injuries to the steeds was to get them warm on the other side, which meant fire and brisk rubdowns, as well as covering them with blankets through the night.

The sun was almost completely set when Glofindel was finally satisfied with the strength of his work. Not wanting to waste any more time, as the river continued to rise and the mountains cast a long, dark, heavy shadow over them, Glorfindel quickly, but securely, tied one end of the rope to Marcaunon's saddle, then grasped Marcaunon tightly on his shoulders while ignoring the other end of the rope that he was also clutching, and pulled his *meleth* into a deep kiss before pulling away with a final, gentle caress to his cheek. Glorfindel then swung up onto *Asfaloth* and rode just a bit upstream from the ford until his came to a large, securely rooted, healthy looking tree, where he rode around it, fixing the rope at chest height to himself as he sat upon his horse before tightly tying the end to his saddlehorn.
Marcaunon took a deep breath, then bent down and swooped up the remainder of the rope from where it sat coiled on the ground. He then quickly mounted Gwilwileth and rode her just into the beginnings of the flooded ford, where the water could swirl about her hooves. He was immediately joined and flanked by Elladan and Elrohir on their mounts. Giving the other two a grim smile, and getting one in return from each of them, Marcaunon gently began to encourage Gwilwileth to step out, letting the rope play out as he did so; Elladan and Elrohir doing the same as they kept their mounts so close that all three riders were banging their knees into one another and their feet into the others' mounts. The water rapidly rose up as they slowly moved forward, passing the normal height at the mounts' knees quite early and surging upwards to lap at their bellies. All three mounts were snorting and tossing their heads in distress, but were still clearly listening and responding to their riders as they did their level best to keep the three horses calm and steady as they made their way across. Elladan, Elrohir, and Marcaunon were all tense and trying to keep from relaying it to their horses as they cautiously made their way across. Elladan, Elrohir, and Marcaunon were all tense and trying to keep from relaying it to their horses as they did their level best to keep the three horses calm and steady as they made their way across. Elladan, Elrohir, and Marcaunon were all tense and trying to keep from relaying it to their horses as they cautiously made their way through the flood, one misstep could cause even the sturdy elven bred mounts to get swept off of their feet and send them tumbling down stream.

They were almost three quarters of the way across when Elladan's horse, who was on the upstream side of the trio, stumbled off of the unseen, raised ford way and floundered his way into a deep pit. Elladan, while somewhat braced for just such an occurrence, was still taken somewhat by surprise and was jounced about in his saddle as he attempted to pull the struggling horse back onto the higher, smoother path of the ford. The struggling horse stumbled abruptly into Gwilwileth, who, in turn, stumbled about and bumped harshly into Elrohir's steed. The three sets of horses and riders pulled apart slightly due to the bumping and stumbling of the horses as well as the strength of the current pushing against them harder the moment that they lost formation as a large, uniform, slow moving block of muscle. Loud shouts could clearly be heard coming from behind them as those remaining on the far bank called out their encouragement.

Marcaunon, knowing that they were almost across and that it was his only chance as Gwilwileth was the smallest mount out of the three and thus the easiest one to upset in the swirling, forceful water, starting yelling harshly and kicking furiously against her flanks as he urged the still stumbling mare forward to the bank that was just a few lengths beyond them. Just when it seemed that they were never going to make it there, and would have to hope that the rope that they were plying out would be enough to catch them and bring them safely back over to the original bank, Elladan and Elrohir surged up beside them and helped carry Gwilwileth and himself the last few steps to safety.

Marcaunon immediately slid off of the saddle, his heart pounding fit to break through his chest, and started to fumble the knot loose from his saddlehorn. Getting the knot free, Marcaunon looked about him and saw Elrohir waving to him from over near a sturdy looking tree.
"Just bring me the end of the rope, Marcaunon," Elrohir calmly called out. "Then you and Elladan can see to the care of our mounts while I supervise the others' crossing."

Marcaunon, after happily turning over the rope, grabbed ahold of Gwilwileth's reins and led the trembling mare over to where he could see the sparks of Elladan's attempts to start a fire. He took the small bundle of wood off of the back of his saddle and dropped beside the pile that Elladan had started with his and his brother's bundles before turning to the three mounts, as Elladan had clearly pulled Elrohir's steed along with himself. Seeing that the three mounts had yet to be unsaddled in the haste and need to get a fire started, Marcaunon went about correcting that, dropping all the saddles and gear just to the other side of the small fire that Elladan was now cautiously tending too. Reaching into the pile of gear, Marcaunon came up with the three blankets he was searching for and carried them back over to the steeds, where he dropped two of them on to the ground and set about using the third one to towel dry the first horse in the crude line they were standing in. Once finished with each horse, and before he moved onto the next one, Marcaunon would swing the damp, wool blanket over top of the horse and fasten them shut down the front. By the time all three mounts had been seen to, Marcaunon was joined in his efforts by several of the Dúnedain who had also successfully made the turbulent crossing.

Knowing that it was vital to keep the horses warm after their cold crossing, Marcaunon went back over to the growing pile of gear and sorted through it until he was able to emerge from the pile with a trio of large basins and a small sack of their precious grain. Marcaunon carefully opened the sack and poured out an equal measure of grain into the three basins before reclosing the bag once again; although, he did not set it back too deep into the pile, merely leaning it upright against the nearest saddle so that it would be easy to find once again. Looking around, Marcaunon was able to see several other smaller fires now going as more and more of the riders made it safely across the flooded ford with the assistance of the guide rope to steady them. Leaving one of the basins with Elladan, with the whispered instructions to add some water and make up a hot mash to give to the horses, Marcaunon shared out the last two basins at separate fires with the same instructions. Moving around, Marcaunon did a count of the bodies, coming to the conclusion that they were still missing at least five of their company.

Deciding to see for himself just how the crossing was going on, and passing two of the missing riders as he moved to the river, Marcaunon saw that they were only allowing two riders in the river at any one time. One rider would be attached to the safety line on one side and the other would be attached to the line on the other side, the two riders fording the flooded crossing side by side to assist them against the force of the water. Marcaunon stood in the growing darkness, ignoring the way the air rapidly cooled in the dark of the set sun and heavy mountain shadow, watching the crossing and feeling greatly pleased when the two he was watching made it safely to the shore,
where the ties holding them to the safety line were released. He would have stepped forward to offer directions to the small fires and hot mash, but the light of the flames were clearly visible at this distance, even in the midst of the heavy scrub, pine trees, and newly sprouting leaves on the deciduous trees.

Looking across the river as he forced his attention away from those who were safely arrived, no problem at all for his superior vision, Marcaunon watched as the last two Dúnedain forced their very uncooperative mounts into the freezing rush. Neither steed was all that keen on listening to their riders and it showed as they were only to the halfway point in the crossing in the same amount of time that the previous two were almost at the end. Watching the snorting, trembling horses ignore most of the cues the riders were giving made Marcaunon very nervous and he wished that the two of them had been paired up differently; if with a better behaving mount on the other side, the crossing might have gone smoother for the two riders. Just when Marcaunon felt that he might be able to relax somewhat for the two currently crossing, if not for Glorfindel who would be forced to cross by his lonesome, as the two were finally almost fully across, disaster struck.

One of the horses, the one on the upstream side, had pulled ahead of his companion; for the downstream horse had almost completely tuned out any commands given by his rider and seemed to only be finishing the crossing by sheer momentum and stubbornness at this point. The upstream horse, who had seemed to be progressing fine, if slowly, suddenly panicked for no reason any could see and surged forwards and off to the side just a bit. That bit off to the side was just enough for the horse to stumble off of the raised fordway and into the hole that Elladan had found on the first crossing. This horse however did not have the advantages of being an elven steed and braced by two other elven bred mounts; he didn't even have the advantage of crossing flank to flank with his assigned partner.

And so the horse, panicking and floundering and whinnying out its distress while ignoring all attempts by his rider to pull the horse back onto the raised crossing, was caught in the raging current and swept out from under his rider; who only had enough time to grab at the line he was tied to and keep his head above the water as the horse was carried downriver, his cries of alarm buried beneath the louder calls of his struggling mount. What became of the horse, none could say, for his calls faded out into the distance before halting altogether and no time could be spent to try and find where the river might allow its grip to release the horse. All attention was on the clinging rider, who was struggling to keep his head above the raging water that was rapidly sapping his strength between its cold temperature and fierce nature. Fortunately, for the rider at any rate, his partner in the crossing was able to get to him in time and the two managed to stumble their way out of the water on the one horse.
Marcaunon, heart in turmoil as he wouldn't be able to watch his meleth make the crossing, hurried forward to where the downed rider was collapsed on the cold, hard ground.

"Elladan!" Marcaunon called out, pleased when the other elf came immediately at his cry. "I need you to grab and carry him to our fire! I'll meet you there. Make sure to strip off the wet and get him well wrapped up in something warm and dry!"

Marcaunon didn't wait to see if his orders were going to be followed and took off at a sprint. Reaching the fire where his gear awaited him, Marcaunon wasted no time whatsoever in tearing through the pile of stuff until his healer's bag was in his hands. Pulling harshly at the ties securing the bag shut, Marcaunon let out a cry of triumph when the ties gave way to his fingers and he was able to reach into the sack. Grabbing out the mug that sat at the top of the sack, Marcaunon thrust it blindly behind him, trusting that someone at the fire would take it from him.

"Please fill that with water and set it to heating," he stated when the weight of the mug left his fingers. Reaching into the bag with one hand while the other held it open, Marcaunon mumbled lightly under his breath as he fumbled different herbs, small bags, and tiny, well-wrapped blocks that only a healer would recognize out of the way until he reached almost to the bottom of the bag. His hand closed around a small block that was wrapped up in a sapphire blue cloth, waxed cloth and he let out a small cry of triumph as he pulled it forth.

"Is the water boiling yet?" Marcaunon queried as he re-closed and tied the bag, before setting off to the side once again.

"Almost, Healer," came the quiet, respectful answer from one of the Dúnedain sharing the fire with him. "Small bubbles have appeared on the sides of the vessel."

Marcaunon cocked his head to the side as he scooted around to the fireside, coming to a halt near the side of the rescued rider as he was propped up between Elladan and Halbarad, well wrapped in several cloaks. Taking a quick glance under the hood into the shadowed face, Marcaunon was able to make out the features of Ondoher, one of those he had met for the first time on this journey.
"It should be fine then," Marcaunon absent-mindedly replied. "The medicine truly needs hot wine to work best, but hot water will do the trick in a pinch. And if it was too hot, if it was at a full boil for instance, the person in need of it most wouldn't be able to drink it down in a timely manner. The sooner the better in this case as, between the wet skin and the temperature, pneumonia is an all to real possibility and needs to be nipped in the bud before it can get itself established."

Marcaunon reached out and snagged the mug, pulling down his cuff to grab at the heated sides, before unwrapping the small block and dropping what looked like a compressed, sticky cube of various herbs into the lightly boiling water.

"Breath this in," Marcaunon stated, shoving the steaming mug under Ondoher's nose without any warning. "After 500 counts, drink it down. I'll warn you that it isn't the most pleasant of things to drink, but you need to drink all of it for it to be the most effective it can be for you. At the very least, hold this thought to the forefront of your mind: it will be hot and will help warm you back up."

The rider gave a jerky nod, sending the hood flopping around, and reached out a trembling and shaking hand for the steaming mug. Marcaunon, shooting the unsteady appendage a dubious look, shook his head and lightly batted the other's hand away.

"On second thought, let me hold it for you."

As Marcaunon lightly counted under his breath, his attention was snagged by Glorfindel coming over to share his fire. Not loosing his place in the count, Marcaunon shot a bright, happy, relieved smile over the flames to his mate, getting a small, pleased, loving small in return.

Marcaunon, after reaching 500, adjusted his hold on the mug to assist Ondoher in swallowing the drink; the whole time, listening in on the conversation going on around him. Those gathered around this small fire were intensely debating about what options there were to deal with the now horseless rider. The final argument seemed to be in favor of passing Ondoher around during the day to ride double with the other riders to spare any one horse from bearing too great of a burden at the pace they would still have to keep to, as well as whoever was giving Ondoher a lift would have to give up all extra saddlebags to another ride to try and cut down on weight. Hearing this, Marcaunon decided
to chime in with a bit of an additional suggestion.

"I am, without a doubt, the smallest of the riders. All can agree on this. And Asfaloth is the strongest mount that travels with our troop. I will give up the use of Gwilwileth to Ondoher and ride double with Glorfindel, at least until we arrive at Lothlorien where we will hopefully be able to beg the use of a mount. My gear will remain with Gwilwileth."

While his words brought forth a bit more discussion and a tiny bit more planning, it was eventually decided that Marcaunon's offer was the best idea and so it was decided to do as the small elf suggested.

Chapter End Notes

Asfaloth - the name of Glorfindel's horse as given in the "Fellowship of the Ring"
gwilwileth - butterfly
nín - my pron.
meleth - love name

min, mîn - name one, number one

*1 - is a quote directly taken from the Return of the King

Scale I used to estimate travel times and distances via horse. Distance given in American miles. 1 mile = 1.609344 Km

On Roads / trails
Level or rolling terrain: 40
Hilly terrain: 30
Mountainous terrain: 20
Off-Road (or unkempt trails etc)
Level/rolling grasslands: 30
Hilly grasslands: 25
Level/rolling forest/thick scrub: 20
Very hilly forest/thick scrub: 15

Un-blazed Mountain passes: 10
Marshland: 10

Assumptions
An average quality horse, of a breed suitable for riding, conditioned for overland travel and in good condition.
Roads and trails are in good condition.
Weather is good to fair, and travelers are riding for around ten hours a day.

I remember when I was a young child watching my dad unweave the ends of one rope and reweave them with another, making a longer section. He was very good at it and the only way to tell that the rope had been added onto was the fact that it was slightly thicker were the two ropes joined together.
When the ancient, timeless woods of Lothlórien finally came into view, Marcaunon immediately felt a rise in his spirits. The journey, short in time though it may have been, had been thoroughly nerve-racking as the group covered the great distance between Ímladris and Lothlórien. There were worries about avalanche while crossing the high pass, then a, luckily, minor injury to one of the mounts while descending, the loss of a horse and almost a rider as well while crossing a flooded ford, and the entire time, they had had to ensure that they drew no attention from the evil that was making its home in Dol Guldur and sending out attacks and patrols into the area. From where he was pressed up against Glorfindel as the two of them shared a mount, Marcaunon could feel that his love had also been pleased to finally arrive at the lands governed by Galadriel and Celeborn as too tight muscles minutely unclenched themselves. The entire group must have felt similar as, without a word being said, the over-all pace gradually sped up until it was a slow canter instead of a fast walk. It still took a little more than an hour from the first sighting of the forest until the entire group was safely within the outer-most trees, where the horses were immediately pulled back into a walk.

While everyone in the group knew that they still weren't entirely safe as Khamûl, the Nazgûl that was ruling over Dol Guldur, had thrice attacked Lothlórien and the remnants of Oropher's people that once called Dol Guldur their home when it was known by the name Amon Lanc, the capital of the Silven realm, and who were now led by his son, Thranduil, Lothlórien had the advantages of providing cover and, in case an attack was launched, could provide the company with an advantage in the number department. It was a company of lighter spirits and growing weariness that made their slow way in towards the heart of the realm. As they rode, everyone in the group could feel eyes passing over them and assessing the company, but no guardian of the forest came out of hiding to meet them until several hours later when the company stopped to water the mounts at a small, spring-fed pond.

It was during this small break that a tall shadow peeled away from the forest and revealed itself to be a being wearing a grey cloak that worked to fool the eyes into over-looking the wearer; the movement garnering everyone's attention. This person, seeing itself to be the focus of over thirty pairs of eyes, slowly raised his or her hands and pushed back the hood that was obscuring the person's face, revealing features that were familiar to several in the party.

"Rúmil!" was heard from several throats and the elves in the group all took at least one step
forward to greet the marchwarden before halting themselves and turning to look at Halbarad, who had been given the task of leading the group. Halbarad let out a light laugh at the expectant looks that he was bestowed with and threw his hands up into the air.

"Do as you wish! Just keep the gossiping to relevant topics, be sure to give me the highlights, and do your gossiping on the move. We are still too close to the outer edge of the forest for my comfort, regardless of all of the eyes on lookout all around us. We do need to get to a place where we can have a bit of rest and recovery before the majority of our group needs to leave again."

The four elves in the party and Rúmil, who understood the gist of the speech though he did not speak common enough to be even remotely fluent, all nodded. Rúmil, once the other four elves were near him, quietly spoke to them while gesturing, getting several nods in return from the other four; those who had already finished watering their mounts watching the five with interest.

"He lets us know that their scouts have been tracking us for the last two days, having kept their eyes open for any sign of our troop or that we had been found on the journey by the enemy," Glorfindel turned suddenly and relayed Rúmil's words to Halbarad and the rest. "He also informed us that a place has been prepared for the group to camp for the next day or two and has been fully equipped, including being well stocked with extra supplies, so that our empty bags may be refilled once again while we tend to our needs and those of our well-used mounts. If you will be so good as to walk the horses at a slow pace, he will happily lead us."

Halbarad gravely bowed his head towards the marchwarden, deeply pleased at the offered hospitality. He knew that it was only the fact of the elven blood that he and the rest of the Dúnedain shared, combined with them also being descendants of the lines of man that held faithful to their sworn allegiance that permitted them any form of entrance to these ancient woods; the fact that they would be offered such hospitality was an unlooked for, but greatly appreciated, bonus. The elves rightfully held no love for the second born, who had turned on them time and time again; falling repeatedly for the pretty lies offered by the dark.

It was a quiet, weary group that left the small pond, following happily after the five elves chattering away in their tongue as they walked through the twilight woods alongside of one another, three of the five leading their mounts. Several of the company were also taking this chance to walk along, leading their horses so that they could stretch out muscles that had seen far too much riding and not enough of any thing else; Halbarad completely unashamed to be one of them as he attempted
to work out the stiffness in his joints and the tightness of his muscles.

Halbarad lost all track of time in the twilight under the leafy canopy that they walked through, content to merely take in the dreamlike wilderness that showed no sign of anyone's hand laying upon it, as well as savoring the peace that came with the knowledge that the company was being well-guarded and was currently safe; therefore, it came as a bit of a surprise when they rounded the base of a small hillock and were met by the first signs, other than meeting Rúmil, of the habitation of the ancient woods.

What met the eyes of everyone in the troop was a large pavilion, open on one side, and made from swathes of heavy silk fabric fastened to light weight ropes that were, in turn, attached to the nearby trees; the "floor" was made up of thick rugs, piled high, that were beautifully woven and dyed, with a large brazier already burning merrily away in the center of the "floor". Many large, over-stuffed pillows were also scattered carelessly about the area defined as the "floor", and along the entire back "wall" of the pavilion were the promised bags of supplies. Several bottles, platters, and bowls were set about the pavilion, all looking to be filled with well cooked, hot food or cool drink, judging by the steam rising from one and the beads of condensation dripping down the sides of the other. A much simpler affair was situated off to the side and was obviously meant for the comfort of the horses as it was merely a "roof" with one "wall" in an area that was fenced off with more of the light weight rope. Several ceramic basins, some laden with water and others filled with a rich looking grain mash, lay about the fenced in area as well as large mounds of hay, giving more weight to the notion that it was intended to be a corral.

Each Dúnedain paused for only a moment as they took in the sight and, once the image had been fully comprehended, then went about seeing to the horses needs before allowing themselves to partake of the offered hospitality. While this was occurring, Glorfindel, Marcaunon, Elrohir, and Elladan were all standing off to one side, holding tightly to the reigns of the three mounts that bore the four of them and conversing still with Rúmil. Halbarad joined them after quickly tending to the needs of his horse and making a tiny detour into the offered shelter to grab several thick slices of what looked to be venison and wrapping it well in a piece of flatbread. Eating quickly, but as neatly as he could, Halbarad patiently waited for a natural lull in the conversation before clearing his throat to indicate that he would like to be given a chance to speak with someone.

"Do we have a definite plan then?" he queried when all five pairs of eyes were gazing at him, most alight with curiosity.
Glorfindel translated the question, then nodded along several times to the answer Rúmil was giving.

"While the Lady has been hard pressed to keep Khamûl and his various forces out from these ancient woods, she has made the time to check on our company as well as following along with what has occurred with the Fellowship of the Ring. Rúmil has been instructed to pass along that you shall be allowed to rest for the rest of this day and all of the next. On the following morn however, the Grey Company will need to set out at the first light of morning if it is to have the chance to meet up with it's Captain with enough time to speak of pressing matters and needed reminders and warnings.

"Also, this is where Marcaunon and myself will be needing to part ways with the Company. The Lord and Lady are expecting us and wish to speak with the two of us yet this very evening."

Halbarad smiled faintly as he stretched out his hand and tightly clasped Glorfindel's proffered arm. The two of them had been invaluable: Glorfindel for his millennia of experience and Marcaunon for his wonderful healing abilities. But Halbarad had known that this time was coming and so made not even a token protest at losing the two elves.

"Elin hal-i mên," Halbarad solemnly spoke, offering the two a traditional parting. Though he was not the best speaker of the elvish language, he had at least some familiarity with the proper forms.

"Elin hal-i mên," Glorfindel murmured in return.

"Amdir ah gell pada- hûn," Marcaunon responded with, before switching back over to common. "Please see to the care and handing of my beloved Gwilwileth for today and on the morrow, someone will come to collect her and bring her to where I will be staying. But for now, she has already been put up and I am loathe to see her disturbed for so minor a thing as carrying me the last bit of distance needed."
Halbarad gave a sharp nod of his head, one that was almost a bow, to the small, kind, soft-spoken healer. While many who didn't know better would dismiss the tiny elf as unimportant and not worth spending any time with, such as almost every dwarf that came to the history making meeting back in Rivendell had done when the little one tried to hold speech with them, Halbarad had never done so, and never would. Not only was the little one trained under the greatest living healer, Lord Elrond, but now Halbarad had a more personal connection to the extremely petite elf: it was his cousin that Marcaunon had treated a bare handful of days past when Ondoher's mount lost its footing and was swept downstream, only the combination of luck and skill keeping Ondoher from doing the same.

Rúmil, seeing the Dúnedain had slipped into a bit of a mental daze and attributing such to the exhaustion of the journey, as well as the stress it must have imparted to those that undertook such a trip, held back his own farewell to the man and merely took a moment to quietly bid each of Elrond's sons a pleasant evening and a good hunt, Glorfindel doing the same. Marcaunon's parting from the two took a touch longer, but that was because the troublesome duo each insisted on swooping the tiny male into a tight hug.

"Good hunting, sweet water, and light laughter until next we meet," Marcaunon quietly whispered once he was set back down, before turning about and gliding out of the clearing on silent feet after Rúmil, with Glorfindel close behind and leading Asfolath. The next few hours were spent quietly talking as they shared information between the three of them, dissecting it into little pieces as they worked to extract every iota of knowledge that they could from their shared pool of news. The entire time, Rúmil led the way deeper into the forest as the unseen sun gradually set, leaving the forest in a deep, dark state until, at last, they arrived in the heart of the Mallorn trees.

Marcaunon looked up the trunks of the great trees when they had finally halted, taking in the sight of the lights of Caras Galadhon soaring far, far overhead; amazed and left speechless just like the first time, and every time since then, that he had seen something so wondrous. While Imladris was peaceful beyond words and sang of home to his senses and his self, and his visits to both Mithlond and the Mountains of Mirkword were filled with joy and knowledge, there was truly something magical about Lothlórien and coming to this forest always left him with a feeling that he was visiting a place out of time and space: that it did not belong to the same world that Marcaunon dwelt in on a daily basis. And if he, an elf, felt that way, it was really no wonder to him that mortals were kept far from the heart of the kingdom with only a choice few ever being granted permission to enter.
Marcaunon was jarred from his thoughts by a hand gently grabbing ahold of his elbow. Turning his head and looking up, Marcaunon met the amused gaze of his love looking down at him. Smiling up at the tall, blond elf, Marcaunon twisted his arm about until his hand was lightly resting on top of Glorfindel's fore-arm, right near his wrist, allowing Marcaunon's fingers to come to rest on the back of Glorfindel's hand.

"Seron, will you do me the honor of escorting me?"

"Nîn bain mîr, it would be my joy and privilege," Glorfindel responded in the same light tone that Marcaunon had queried him with.

As they ascended, it became more and more dreamlike; the descending darkness of night having much to do with this fact as the lanterns were lit to throw back the encroaching darkness, lighting up the nearby areas with a surreal glow and, if one looked off into the distance, giving the impression of walking into a bank of stars, something that Marcaunon particularly enjoyed. Normally, or at least normal for the two times that Marcaunon had journeyed to Lothlórien before, the air would be resonating with the sounds of many songs, some with accompanying instruments and some sung a cappella; the medley of voices and instruments, instead of sounding discordant, somehow making a harmonious symphony of music. But it seemed that such was not the case this evening, for the air was silent except for a solo voice, singing a song of great sorrow and loss in a haunting soprano.

Marcaunon could feel tears gathering in his eyes as he listened to the lone singer, her voice echoing amongst the trees, and tightened his hold on Glorfindel, seeking comfort and easily finding it when Glorfindel flipped his hand over and entwined his long fingers with Marcaunon's much daintier ones. The lone singer finished her song long before the trio reached the top of the ramp, leaving their ears almost ringing in the silence as they continued to climb higher. It wasn't until they were almost near the top that the heavy silence was finally broken by the more familiar, to Marcaunon at least, sounds of many voices, at which point, Glorfindel spoke up just loudly enough to be heard by the two nearest him, especially Rúmil, their guide.

"How many spirits have been sent to the Halls of Waiting, under the eyes of the Lord Mandos, since that foul wraith has dared to lay claim to Amon Lane?"
"Far too many, my friend," Rúmil quietly answered as they continued to wind their way higher still. "Less harm was done, if you may believe it, in the duration that the Necromancer dwelt there-in, after the loss of Amon Lanc, then has been done within the last year. Though I am sure that that is due more to a desire to seem less in our collective eyes so as to not draw our attention there before time, than any true desire on His part."

"Indeed," chimed in an ageless voice that thrummed with power and that had all three elves snapping their heads forward and up. "If He had been stronger, we would have seen much greater grief far sooner than what has been brought to our doorstep before now."

"My Lady. My Lord."
"Lady Galadriel."
"Lord Celeborn."

The three elves bowed their heads to the rulers of Caras Galadhon as they murmured a greeting, not letting surprise delay them from showing the proper deference to the powerful duo immediately upon the realization that it was the Lady that had addressed them the moment that they arrived at the top of the spiraling ramp.

"Please rise. There is no need to stand on such formality," Galadriel spoke up, her voice thrumming with power to the knowledgeable ear. "Especially amongst family, such as we are, no matter how distant or convoluted the relationship."

"And I am overwhelmingly positive that Elrond will be thrilled and delighted when I pass along the news that you think that he is "distant" and "convoluted"," Marcaunon said, mischievousness lightening up the timber of his voice and shining brightly in his jewel-tone eyes as he raised his head up and met the eyes of a startled Lady Galadriel, just before she and her husband, Lord Celeborn, burst out into surprised laughter.
"By the hands of the Valar," Celeborn finally spoke, getting his reaction to Marcaunon's comment under control. "You and your fellow blessed foundling are joys to be around. Always able to light up the gloomiest of times; if not with your quick wits, then just with the joy to be found in the knowledge of your existence.

"Now then," Celeborn continued. "What brings the two of you here. And with such a group as we have been informed that you traveled as a part of? Please, walk with us as you share the answers."

"I shall leave you here in the very capable hands of my Lord and Lady then," Rúmil quietly stated before they moved out. "When you have finished relaying the information requested, please make your way along to the dwelling that you normally stay in Lord Glorfindel. I will go ahead of the both of you and ensure that it is properly aired out, with a good meal waiting for you as well."

Glorfindel and Marcaunon both nodded their heads in assent, before gracefully falling into place along side of Galadriel and Celeborn as the two proceeded to make their way wherever they were originally headed when they stopped to greet the trio, leaving Rúmil to do as he had stated. As the foursome glided forward, Glorfindel took it upon himself to deliver the briefing, with Marcaunon only chiming in now and again when he had something relevant to say that would help flesh out the report. Before the tale had gone too far, however, Glorfindel handed over the scroll that he had been entrusted with by Lord Elrond; Lady Galadriel quietly taking it and reading it as they strolled, keeping half an ear on the conversation occurring even as she took in the information that Elrond sent over.

By the time that the four of them had arrived at their destination, which turned out to be the private dwelling of the Lord and Lady, both rulers had been fully appraised of just who the group that Glorfindel and Marcaunon had traveled with were and exactly what they were planning on accomplishing; although, in truth, it had come as no great surprise to Galadriel as she had foreseen this event already. Lightly tapping the re-rolled scroll against the palm of her hand, Galadriel paused just before the doorway and stared intensely at the travel worn pair before her; causing Marcaunon to shift and fidget under the scrutiny as he was not used to such looks, having only met the Lady four times in just over a hundred years. Once when she visited Imladris shortly after he and Giltass had first arrived in this world, while they were still messing up responding to their new names and were just as likely to call each other "Harry" and "Sirius" as not. Another time, was when he and Giltass had made the journey to meet King Thranduil, and she and Lord Celeborn had made the short trip to the King's court as well. The last two times were when he and Glorfindel had made the journey to Lothlórien together, in the company of Arwen, who wished to spend time with her mother's people, and especially with her grandmother, the Lady Galadriel.
"I think," Galadriel pensively said, "that I shall be taking my dear friend up on his offer and that the two of you shall be invaluable in the very near future. And by very near, I do mean before the month dies."

Glorfindel and Marcaunon said nothing to her statement, merely bowing once again as the Lord and Lady bid the two a good evening and went inside. Once the other two had gone, Marcaunon shot Glorfindel a look, complete with a raised eyebrow and a light pout, that was practically screaming for information. Glorfindel merely shrugged his shoulders elegantly before wrapping an arm about his little one and steering him towards the small, one bedroom building that was waiting for the two of them.

"I cannot say that I have less of an idea about it than you do, Seron, for I feel that we are both equally blind on whatever that was, but I will state that the Lady has probably seen something that only made sense to her once she was given a bit more information. And that it will, most probably, involve us at some point."

Marcaunon scowled, but only very, very lightly as he cuddled into Glorfindel's side as they walked along. There was, after all, nothing that his beloved could do so the two of them would just have to wait it out until the Lady decided to break their ignorance or the events played out without any knowledge beforehand. As they walked along, Marcaunon could feel the exhaustion creeping steadily up on him until the arm wrapped about him for comfort was almost the entire reason that he was still upright and moving forward. It had truly been a grueling trip and Marcaunon couldn't help but feel true relief at the knowledge that he was done with the journey; even as he felt guilt over the fact that the rest of the group still had miles and miles yet to go through enemy infested wilds.

Determined to think of anything else, Marcaunon's tired thoughts took a darker turn as they strayed to those patients he had been overseeing back at Imladris, causing him to scowl fiercely as he remembered the wounds that had crippled several of his charges, though they could be considered fortunate. Marcaunon suddenly blinked back a torrent of tears that ached to escape as he flashed to those that failed to make it back. Now was not the time to think of those left behind, living or dead.
Glorfindel, sensing the turn towards dark thoughts, though *not* what such thoughts entailed, ceased walking and, instead, pulled Marcaunon's slight, trembling form flush against his larger frame, running his hands soothingly up and down Marcaunon's slim back. Glorfindel was rewarded when tense muscles relaxed under his hands and the slight shuddering of Marcaunon's frame halted under his care.

"Better now, my love?" Glorfindel quietly asked, slowly releasing Marcaunon as the two of them resumed their pace.

"Somewhat," Marcaunon just as quietly replied. "As I have been told, on numerous occasions at that, I need to forgo dwelling on thing that I cannot change. I am sure that a good night's slumber, in safety and comfort, as well as a filling meal that *does not* consist of trail rations, will do wonders for me, and my thoughts and spirit."

"Indeed, I think that you will find that not one person who has ever lived through such times as we are facing would dare to disagree with that statement. A place of safety to lay our heads and a filling meal is truly a blessing of untold richness, one that I am greatly looking forward too as well."

They made the rest of the short trip in silence, merely listening to the sounds filling the air around them, until they arrived at the small cabin that had been given over to Glorfindel when it was just himself that accompanied Arwen, and now played host to the two of them as neither saw the need to asked for a larger space. Entering the main, thought still quite tiny, room, both were pleased and grateful to see that the small eating table was laden with several plates full of hot food, as well as a few bowls that sported a wide variety of cold fruits and vegetables. As they drew closer to the meal, Marcaunon was thrilled to discover a plate laden down with fresh baked pastries and immediately snatched one up, devouring it in only a few quick bites and making Glorfindel laugh out loud at his actions.

The two of them spent the rest of the evening making short work of the meal, taking a *very* quick trip to the nearest bathhouse where they both scrubbed harshly at the filth that marred their hides from the frantic journey they had made, before finally changing into night wear and falling into the large, soft bed that took up the majority of their sleeping chambers.
In the morning, the two had a chance to enjoy a leisurely breakfast that consisted of the leftovers of the fruit, vegetables, and pastries from the night previous, before their quiet morning was broken by the sounds of knocking. Marcaunon excused himself back to the bedroom to get dressed in something more than just a sleep shirt that only came down to the tops of his thighs, while Glorfindel, who had pulled on a pair of pants just after rising from the bed that morning, calmly opened the door, revealing Rúmil and his brothers, Orophin and Haldir.

"Please, enter and make yourselves at home," Glorfindel calmly stated, warmth in his voice as he beheld the three at his door.

"We thank you," Haldir stated for the three of them as they crossed the threshold and found seats in the small room: Haldir taking the other chair at the table, while Rúmil and Orophin shared the lounge that held pride of place before a tiny fireplace that was just big enough to allow for a bit of careful cooking over the flame when it was in use. Haldir took the opportunity as they all settled into their respective seats, and Glorfindel re-took his at the table, to look about the place.

"I was reliably informed, from a source that I would trust with my life, that Marcaunon was here as well," Haldir ventured, a faint rise on the end of the statement turning it into a bit of a question.

"And you were told correctly," Marcaunon cheekily grinned at the marchwarden, who had startled somewhat at the unexpected response to his statement/question. "I was merely somewhat underdressed for meeting guests and so excused myself to remedy it."

Glorfindel's eyes lit up as he beheld what his beloved had chosen to wear today, grateful for the somewhat full wardrobe that was kept here waiting for them: a pair of tight, black, leather trousers that laced up the sides while leaving a strip of flesh bare under the criss-crossing laces, a pair of black leather boots that only came up to the ankle and had a small heel to them, a long-sleeved, green shirt that had been dyed in such a way that it seemed to ripple through every shade of green, from lightest to darkest, and a black leather vest that mirrored the pants in that it was held tightly to Marcaunon's form with laces that cinched it tight. Hanging off of a wide, emerald-green leather belt that was worn in a low slung manner that had it tightly hugging the slim hips of his beloved, were a plethora of pouches that Glorfindel knew held a wide array of medicines and medical aides. There
were even a few tiny, metal and glass, corked vials hanging from the belt. A beautifully tooled and
worked baldric worn over his vest and shirt held Marcaunon's sword on his back as well as several
tiny throwing daggers all lined up over his chest. He had also taken the time to see to it that his wild
mane of ebony hair was tightly braided and tied off with a pretty, leaf-green, silk ribbon.

All in all, Glorfindel thought that his little love looked breathtaking; both a warrior and a
healer, in one very attractive package.

"Well," Haldir began. "You do look ready for the day."

Marcaunon shrugged his shoulders and dismissively waved his hand, a sheepish smile gracing
his petite, fine-boned features.

"I had no idea what might be on the agenda for today, and so I decided to dress accordingly."

"Truly, a good thought," Orophin finally spoke up. "One that will stand you in good stead as
there is much to be done, for our Lord and Lady, as well as King Thranduil, have decided that it will
soon be our time to deliver the finishing blow onto the foul usurper that dares lay claim to Amon
Lanc. We have held off on taking the fight to him as we wished to attempt to both keep him pinned
in a known location as well as attempt to keep the Dark Lord guessing as to where his beloved ring
might be and under whose power it might be found. Now though, thanks in no small part to the news
that the two of you brought, combined with the knowledge of our Lady, it has been revealed, just
this morning, that the time has come at last to tear down Dol Guldur. Plans are being made even now
and the two of you have been requested to attend the meetings."

Glorfindel and Marcaunon looked startled at the news, then thoughtful, before the two of them
shared a look and nodded their heads sharply in assent.
"If you will give me but a moment," Glorfindel politely excused himself as he rose from the table. As he slid past Marcaunon, he took the opportunity to gently press a brief kiss to the petal soft lips of his beloved, before entering the bedroom to find appropriate wear for himself. While he was dressing, Marcaunon took control of both Glorfindel's former seat at the table and the conversation, the four of them passing the time sharing what news had failed to be passed along the night before while speaking to Rúmil, which was, truthfully, not that much. Once a fully dressed Glorfindel rejoined them, the group quickly swept out of the small dwelling.

As they did so, Marcaunon took the opportunity to place a hand onto Haldir's arm, lightly holding him back from immediately following the others.

"How are you holding up?" Marcaunon gently queried the much older elf, who looked weary and grief-laden to his searching eyes in the light streaming in from the open doorway. "I know that you received the news about what occurred several months ago, and, while the two of you were not as close as say, myself and Glorfindel, I had been reliably informed that a, hmm...accommodation, had been reached between the two of you, as well as told that you held my informant in great affection."

Haldir took a moment to wave away the other three elves who were looking back at them with questions burning in their eyes, "We will catch you up. Just allow us a moment or so."

Once the others had turned and were on their way, Haldir slumped against the door jamb, letting it support a great deal of his weight. Rubbing a hand roughly over his face, the tall, stocky, blond elf met the concerned gaze of Marcaunon with a wry, self-deprecating smile.

"I will not lie to you and say that it was easy to accept the news about Gîltass when I finally received it, but thanks in no small part to my brothers, the grief such news raised within me has become a more manageable burden."

"I am glad to hear that," Marcaunon firmly stated. "Now then, we have places to go and a battle to plan, so more on this subject can wait for a better time."
Haldir nodded firmly, then swept the tiny elf up in his arms and placed a firm kiss to the other's crown, before setting the spluttering elf down and leading the way, content in the knowledge that Marcaunon would quickly regain control of himself and follow after.

The next few weeks passed in a frenzy of planning and activities as the entire forest came alive in the push to attack Dol Guldur on the 27 of March. Glorfindel joined in on the daily planning meetings, pouring over maps and querying the scouts for the most up-to-date knowledge of the area that they would be waging battle in, for he had not visited the area formerly known as Amon Lanc in several millennia since its fall near the year T.A. 1000 and was woefully lost on what changes had occurred within the accursed woods since the Necromancer took refuge within. Marcaunon had none of the skills needed to assist in war planning and so took himself off during the day to harvest what he could of the useful plants in the woods under the watchful eyes of Orophin and Rúmil. What early season plants he was able to harvest, Marcaunon would immediately set about using when he arrived back at Caras Galadhon early in the afternoon so that he had the time to see to them; either drying them, using them in a balm or paste, or steeping them and reducing the resulting liquid into a concentrated tisane.

On occasion, Haldir would join him and the day would be spent, after Haldir had chased off his brothers, sharing tales and memories of Gîltass as the two of them rolled finely woven, linen wraps and assembled small, emergency healer kits that were immediately sent out with the ever exhausted scouts.

Both Glorfindel and Marcaunon made sure to take the time in the evenings to spend with one another; seeking and receiving comfort, both emotional and physical, as the two ensured that their relationship was not neglected in the hustle and bustle as it so easily could have. From time to time, the two of them would seek each other out during the day as well and have a light spar; not that Marcaunon was any where near to Glorfindel's skills and usually ended up bruised and falling asleep over the evening meal afterwards, while Glorfindel would chuckle merrily at him and brightly inquire as to when the spar would get going. Marcaunon promised himself that when everything was finally over and finished, Glorfindel would feel his wrath!

Finally, the day came, and everyone was lined up just inside the border of the woods, waiting on the signal to march forth.
Marcaunon stood off to the side and back with the second wave of fighters, which consisted
mainly of those going along in a support function of some sort: the healers, the cooks, the
weponsmiths, the odd but necessary craftsmen. All of those that were needed for the smooth
running of such a large army, but had no business being on the front lines where they would be a
liability. His stomach was in knots and he was light-headed. For all that he, back more than a
hundred years ago before falling into this world, had been in several fights and had come out
victorious, if battered, bloody, and ill-used, there were truly a great number of firsts either occurring,
or about to occur in the very near future. He had never fought in a war before, which is really what
this was all about: a large battle that was a part of the war against the Dark Lord in Mordor. He had
never healed wounds in the quantity he was sure to receive; even with the few other healers in the
ranks, it would be over whelming to all involved in the ancient calling. The wounds that he would
soon be seeing, he had truly only read about or been given verbal instruction in treating minus a
small handful of times that the scouts at Imladris had fallen afoul of something. He would also be
forced to watch and wait, not participate, as his loved ones did battle without him; he knew his skills
were nowhere near the level that would be needed on the front lines and that he would only get in
the way of the more experienced fighters.

But he didn't have to like it, even one little bit, and all that he could think about was the horror
of not knowing what would happen to them; dreading seeing them cut, bloodied, and severely
injured and laying before him as they screamed in pain while he treated their wounds. In truth, he
was torn about that; for if they were laying before him, seeking aid, he would at least have
knowledge of where they were, rather than the absolute fear he felt crawling up his spine at the
knowledge that once the army started moving, he would have no way of knowing where Glorfindel,
Haldir, Orophin and Rūmil were, other than "near the front". It was small comfort to him that they
were kept in good company by traveling with the Lord Celeborn and the Lady Galadriel who were
also marching off to war and would be meeting King Thranduil and his forces who were also part of
the assault. It was also of little comfort to Marcaunon that the Lady had thrice thrown back the forces
Khamûl and his three lieutenants, a trio of unknown, unnamed Nazgûl, had brought to bare on the
outer-most sections of the forest.

Still, Marcaunon knew that this battle would be, must be, fought, and so he had taken especial
care with his parting from Glorfindel; making love the night before till the candles had burned
completely away, and sharing words of love with him before the two were forced apart by their
duties this morning.

Suddenly, the large gathering before him began to move, drawing him from his gentle
memories of the night previous that had begun to lightly relax him, and thrusting his worries back to
the forefront of his mind once again. Taking a deep breath, Marcaunon held it for a count of twenty,
released it slowly, then did it once again; forcing away all of his nervous tension as he did so. There
was nothing more that he could do, other than his job, and so that was what he would do, to the best
of his ability. Marcaunon spun about on his feet and briskly strode over to the wagon that he was assigned to.

While the woods supplied much, especially with a tiny garden plot here and a fruit tree there, and those within were able to trade with other settlements of elves for what little they were unable to grow, hunt, or forage for, pasture land was, sadly, in very short supply; so the horses that many other warriors would traditionally ride off to do battle on were strictly regulated according to the most good that they would do. In this case, it was for the betterment of all that the few horses kept within the woods were being used to pull: a double handful of supply wagons, a wagon for all of the Healers and their needed tools of their trade, which was where Marcaunon would be spending all of his time marching alongside of, and a truly clever, portable blacksmith forge that was pulled by two pair of the largest horses that Marcaunon had ever seen.

Once they began to move, however, the slow pace of the second line as they were forced to keep the pace set by horses drawing heavily laden wagons quickly became apparent and meant that the first line warriors, who were all obviously on foot as well minus a small number such as far-riding scouts and those who were leading the host, quickly outpaced them. Marcaunon found himself completely confused as he watched those who were to be the soldiers speed away. How could Lord Celeborn and Lady Galadriel even think about leaving behind their Healers, if nothing else, when going off to fight. When he voiced that very question to one of the older Healers walking near him in a very puzzled tone, Marcaunon was happily given the answer by the much more experienced elf.

"It has to do with pacing, and loads, and resting. There will be no plan to fight until we have closed in on the chosen battle field. Not saying that an ambush is not possible regardless of the scout's efforts, but just that no planned battle will take place. And the reason that they don't wait for the second line is that we, who are not fighting, can and will maintain a steady pace over the entire course of the day without needing the kinds of rest breaks that they, who are wearing heavy armor and multiple weapons, will need to take to ensure that they are at full strength before fighting. While the fighters could certainly march the entire day, there is no great need for them to do such at this time and tire themselves out before the major battle. As for us, we in the second line will just keep moving steadily forward without the need for the longer rest stops, and by tonight, we will all meet up at about the same time even with the different rates of march."

Marcaunon politely thanked the other Healer for the answer, then spent a good bit of time thinking over what he was told. It was a fascinating logistics puzzle and kept him well occupied until the very brief stop for lunch, where several casks of fresh water were broached and Lembas passed around. After the lunch stop, Marcaunon spent the rest of the day walking alongside of the Healer that had answered his earlier question, taking the opportunity to learn more about his craft from
someone far more experienced in it than he, as he had only decades of practice versus the millennia of practical experience that the other, whom Marcaunon learned was named Ithilglaw, had.

Night had fallen and the light of Ithil was casting its clear light down upon the small army by the time the second line had caught up to the first line. And it had worked out pretty much as Ithilglaw had informed him it would, give or take a bit of time on either side. Once the two lines had rejoined, and camp was truly made for the night with the supply wagons being emptied of blankets, water casks, and Lembas, Marcaunon wearily made his own bed under the wagon he had traveled beside during the day alongside the other Healers. While he would have much preferred to bed down with Glorfindel, it simply wasn't a feasible idea in an army going off to battle. Glorfindel was needed near the front with the rest of those in charge and Marcaunon's place was with the Healers.

It took two more days to finally reach the southernmost tip of the great Mirkwood forest, all of which were repeats of the first day, minus a brief scuffle late at night on the second day out when the evening patrols ran into a small party of enemy scouts. There were, fortunately, no fatalities on the elvish side of things, but several elves had been injured in the fight and were brought back to be treated by the Healers. All those treated were back on their feet the next day with no lingering problems except for one unfortunate skirmisher who had taken a dagger deep to his gut and was now riding within the Healer's wagon until the wound had fully healed. Marcaunon had happily made himself useful by brewing and mixing up the needed medicines, even as he watched and listened to everything going on around him in an attempt to learn more.

On the dawn on the fourth day from setting out, the time had finally come to launch the planned for attack on the enemy's forest stronghold. The elves held no illusions that they had not been seen at this point, and just the fact that a patrol would have come up missing should have tipped Khamûl and his lieutenants off, and so everyone was extremely cautious when entering the gloomy and diseased looking woods.

As it was, only the warriors entered the forest, leaving the secondary line to make a secure camp just under the eaves of the seemingly diseased trees with the aid of half the scouts and a small assortment of actual warriors. Marcaunon spent the day mindlessly grinding out herbs and mixing up several of the tisanes and herbal brews that would most definitely be needed, but had no true shelf life: lasting for only 24 hours at a maximum before losing their effectiveness. Every once in a while, Ithilglaw would pull him aside and force food and drink on him. Although Marcaunon's nerves were leaving him feeling stretched and tense and really not at all hungry, Ithilglaw refused to take Marcaunon's politely worded, though extremely short, negative replies as the correct answer and merely pushed pieces of Lembas into Marcaunon's mouth every time it was opened, serenely ignoring the much younger elf's sputtering and scowls.
By late afternoon, when Marcaunon's nerves were completely stretched to the breaking point and nothing Ithilglaw was able to do could get him to relax any part of himself, the first bits of news finally drifted back from the front line of attack, along with the first wave of casualties. While earlier in the day, those kept waiting at the camp had far too little to do that would truly keep their minds occupied while their hands worked, it was now just the opposite as waves of wounded flooded into the camp, swamping the member of the second line and threatening to overwhelm the system in place that was set up to support the troops. Those in a support position were being rushed off their feet with very little time given over to rational thought: it was now a time for the ease of habit to take control of hands, leaving minds focused on tending to the needs of the broken bodies returning out from the dismal forest.

Evening crept up without much notice being given over to it, only the need to light the lanterns drawing any attention to the fact that darkness had finally fallen. The wounded kept making their way back from the battle either under their own power, the lucky ones, or by other means, meaning someone else carried them, until, suddenly, they weren't. Marcaunon lifted his head from the last warrior he had been treating, letting her compatriots lift her from his table and carry her away to her rest and looked about him with weary eyes, the blood from his latest patient dripping obscenely off of his dainty hands to fall onto a patch of ground that was no better than a churned mire at this point from the combination of bleeding patients and the treated water that he had been using generously to sterilize his hands, arms, patients, and work area. Seeing no more elves waiting for him by the light of the lanterns and the few fires that had been started, Marcaunon could no longer hold back the exhaustion he was battling. Staggering a bit on his feet, Marcaunon fell lightly against the side of his work table; the foldable, portable table not even swaying a fraction under his slight weight.

How long he stood there, dazed and lost as his mind replayed the screams and blood and smells of the day, Marcaunon would never be able to say, forever lost in the horrors and sorrows of the aftermath of his first major battle. He was so completely out of it in fact that the gentle touch to his elbow failed to register with him; neither did the much loved face gazing down at him with worry and distress burning in his eyes as he was led away by Glorfindel. It wasn't until the two of them were laying down in a puddle of shadows near the center of the camp that Marcaunon came back, somewhat, to himself. And even then all he did, upon looking up and finally registering that Glorfindel was laying beside him, was to roll himself up and over top of Glorfindel's long, lean body, burying his finely featured face into Glorfindel's chest as he began to sob harshly, never hearing the murmurs of love and support Glorfindel whispered to him, even as Glorfindel's hands began to gently and lightly rub up and down his slim, toned back while the much older, more experienced elf released his own tears.
Chapter End Notes

Elin hal-i mên - stars light the path

Amdir ah gell pada-hûn - hope and joy walk into your heart

Seron - friend, lover

Nín bain mîr - my beautiful treasure/jewel

glaw [gloe] name radiance, brilliance

Ithil [ithil] name moon

Mithlond - Grey Havens

t.a.3019

march 3 - battle of the hornbrg (helm's deep) begins

march 6 - aragorn over taken by the dunedain, sets out later for harrowdale

march 8 - aragorn takes the path of the dead at daybreak, arrives at erech at midnight

March 25 - the one ring falls into the cracks of doom

march 27 - celeborn crosses anduin, destruction of dol guldur begun

april 6 - meeting of celeborn and thranduil.

april 8 - the ring bearers are honored on the fields of cormallen

may 1 - king elessar crowned; elrond and arwen set out from rivendell

may 8 - eomer and eowyn depart for rohan with the sons of elrond

may 20- elrond and arwen come to lorien

may 27 - the escort of arwen leaves lorien

june 14 - the sons of elrond meet up with the escort and bring arwen to edoras

june 16 - they set out for gondor

june 25 - king elessar finds the sapling of the white tree

1 lithe - arwen comes to the city

mid-year's day - wedding of arwen and elessar
july 19 - the funeral escort of king theoden sets out

august 27 - they come to isenguard; they take leave of the king of the west at sunset

all dates and information were taken from Appendix B of the book "The Return of the King"
I do hope that you've all enjoyed my foray into LoTR with this crossover, which
became NOTHING like what I had envisioned for my story, as I had thought to keep
Harry and Sirius as Harry and Sirius, just with less wizarding tricks up their sleeves.
How my idea became this... well, if anyone can figure it out, please feel free to let me
know. I do plan on at LEAST one bonus chapter for this story and wish to thank
everyone who has fav'd, follow'd, and/or taken just a moment or two to say anything in
a review: it has meant a lot! to me.

And with that said: here is the last, planned, chapter. One year after posting the first one.

Two months.

It had been two months since the Battle of Dol Guldur and the many scars the fight had carved
into the woodlands, the bodies of those that had fought, and the souls of those left behind to recover
in the aftermath were only just beginning to soften around the edges. But it was time and more to
move on, and so Marcaunon refrained from twisting about in his saddle in an attempt to grab one last
look at Lothlórien. He was aided in this minor battle by a very attention grabbing Gîltass riding along
at his side, chattering a mile a minute to all and sundry while gesturing wildly with the hand that had
been left unrestrained by the ornate sling that bound his now useless arm to his body.

Marcaunon smiled fondly at his Godfather as he retold the story about how he had come to
lose the use of his left arm to a whole new audience; making sure to cast himself in the role of the
hero and painting a larger than life image of his efforts in the fight. While he had heard the story
before from all of those that had made it back from that disastrous mission, and in a more realistic
manner that failed to gloss over the losses that were taken that day, Marcaunon was pleased to listen
to, as well as watch, the exuberance that Gîltass was displaying: it meant that his beloved Godfather
was finally snapping out of the severe depression that had fallen over him in the aftermath of the fight
and the fact that one of his fellow scouts died, and one was still listed as missing for no trace of her
remains had ever been found and the worst was feared, that she had been snatched and hidden away
by several of the orcs early in the battle. There were also the three members of the scout mission that
had returned with a permanent disability: Gîltass himself, with an arm that was expected to regain no more than fifty percent of normal mobility in the shoulder due to the repeated trauma, and then poison, inflicted in the same area, Merilin who had lost her eye in an absolutely horrific facial injury, but had managed to pull through and live, though with terrible, deep scars marring her features, and Sadronial, who had the lightest injury of them all and would merely have a long scar and a barely noticeable limp to show for his sliced thigh muscle.

Over all, the scouts in that ill-fated mission had come out ahead against over-whelming odds and could count themselves blessed. Those to whom the scouts had returned to certainly did, even while in mourning for the two who did not.

It was truly something else though if you listened to the wild fairytale that Gîltass was so happily spinning beside him as they rode out of Lothlórien with the rest of the party from Imladris and those that had joined the riders from their other stops. Marcaunon cocked an eyebrow and raised a hand to his mouth as he attempted to smother the giggle that tried to escape at the mention of a flight of dragons of all things in Gîltass' wild claims. Catching the sparkling eyes of Haldir who was riding just on the other side of Gîltass and laughing quietly at the outrageousness that was Gîltass as he gave the first positive signs of the recovery to his spirit, Marcaunon gestured at himself then waved his hands up towards the front of the caravan. Haldir nodded in acknowledgement and Marcaunon wasted no more time in moving up to the front of the cavalcade, finding Arwen, and reigning in to ride beside her.

Looking at the elleth now riding beside him out of the corner of his eyes, Marcaunon was forcibly struck once again by her beauty. A beauty that had only become more radiant after her near death and her return to good health: in fact, the only possible word that could be used to describe her was glowing.

Upon thinking that, a tiny, devious smirk curled up the edges of Marcaunon's lips and he turned to more fully face Arwen, making sure that he made eye contact with her so that she could see his facial expression. After turning and getting a good look at him, Arwen focused her attention back to the vista before her; but Marcaunon could see, as he still rode facing her, that she kept shooting him looks that grew ever more irritated.

"What!??" Arwen huffed as she finally cracked under his gaze.
"Oh, nothing much," Marcaunon nonchalantly drawled, the smirk still playing about the corners of his mouth. "It just came to me, as I pulled in along side of you, how exquisitely beautiful you are, and that you can truly be said to be glowing."

"Why, thank you," Arwen quietly said, blushingfetchingly. However, before she could continue, Marcaunon glanced about him then leaned towards her, gesturing her closer as well. Intrigued, she did as he wordlessly requested.

"That little fact, that you're glowing, should be a lot of fun on your bonding night," Marcaunon smugly said, waggling his eyebrows suggestively at her.

"Marcaunon!" Arwen squealed as she reared back, blushing profusely as she fanned at her heated face.

"Just thought that should be pointed out," he said, still waggling his eyebrows outrageously at her even as he started to make loud smacking, kissing noises at her when he finished speaking.

"You! You...you!" Arwen spluttered, groping futilely for a word that would perfectly describe the brat riding beside her and who was making more and greater outrageous noises and gestures the longer she went without managing to shut him up.

Finally deciding that enough was enough, and certain that she could not anymore withstand the assault of blood that had rushed to her face and refused to recede thanks to Marcaunon's actions, Arwen quickly cued her mare into a sidestep, placing her much, much closer to the brat, and reached out, giving him a harsh, sharp shove and causing the small male to flail about as he almost fell off the side of his horse.
"Hah!" Arwen triumphantly cried out. "Looks like someone had forgotten much of the skills Glaureithel tried to pound into his head about mounted manoeuvres. I would truly be remiss in my duties to a kinsman if I failed to report such a shocking lapse as I have no wish to be the cause of said kinsman coming to harm. I am quite sure that Glaureithel would be overjoyed to see to some one-on-one lessons."

Marcaunon blanched at the threat Arwen was leveling at him. He had zero desire to be put through any form of training from that elf ever again! Wet, cold, and muddy had been the least of the horrors that had come out of that nightmare-ish experience. Pouting at Arwen, Marcaunon made his eyes go as big as he could and let the slight wind they were riding against dry and irritate his eyes until they began to water, even as he pulled in his shoulders and hunched down to make himself look smaller than he already was.

"You wouldn't do something that horrible to me, would you?" Marcaunon asked in a little voice, making sure it wobbled just the tiniest bit as though fighting back tears.

Arwen looked him over and sighed gustily. Cueing her horse once again to sidle over, as Marcaunon's flailing had pulled his horse away from hers, Arwen reached out a hand and stroked it lightly over the top of Marcaunon's head and down what she could reach of his long, dark braid.

"No, I suppose I wouldn't," she fondly stated. "But mind your teasing please, you little brat."

Marcaunon immediately straightened in his saddle and looked smug.

"Yeah, I suppose I could do that. But...," Marcaunon said liltingly. "I do seem to recall, on my bonding night no less, several, hmm...how should I phrase this? several very interesting things occurring that kept threatening to interrupt what Glorfindel and I were attempting to do to one another as well as with one another."
Arwen blushed again, although much lighter than previously, before coughing lightly to clear her throat.

"Well, yes," she began, looking everywhere around her but keeping her gaze from the elf riding easily at her side. "Those brothers of mine! Such a troublesome pair they are and so prone to playing pranks."

"Hmm...," Marcaunon merely hummed in response, pasting a bland expression and a polite smile on his face. "Yes, those twins. My, my. And they do such an incredible impersonation of your voice and looks! Why, someone who didn't know any better would swear to the Valar that the person they heard and saw just outside their garden entrance on their bonding night was you! But isn't it a wonderful thing that both Glorfindel and myself know better about such things."

"Oh, why yes. Yes it is much better!" Arwen cheerfully agreed, still not making eye contact as she gazed serenely up at the few clouds floating overhead in the crisp-looking, blue sky. "Much, much better! Because it would be a horrible thing, if someone who didn't know better, were to confuse me with those terrible pranksters, especially with my own bonding coming up so quickly and all. Why who knows the terrible, horrible things that could happen."

"Yes, indeed," Marcaunon blandly stated, his eyes narrowing slightly though as he spoke. "Horrible and terrible. Just as you've stated. Several times in fact."

"Yes, yes."

The two rode in silence for only a handful of moments before Arwen made the mistake of catching Marcaunon's eye, then they both burst out in bright peals of laughter. It took several miles before the two of them finally stuttered to a halt, as every time they looked at one another, another round of happy laughter rang forth.
Finally,

"I still cannot believe that you did that to us that night," Marcaunon laughingly wheezed out.

"Yes, well," Arwen embarrassingly began, lightly twitching the heavy fabric of her split, riding skirt. "I did not think it out very well or I would never have done such at that time of night. But in my defense, you and Glorfindel had only just retired and I thought that at most, I would caused a minor delay in your evening's activities, not...well, what I did cause to occur."

The two of them trailed off into a companionable silence, neither feeling any need to speak any further on the subject as they rode steadily onwards.

Eventually, Marcaunon broke the silence as the sun began to gently sink into the horizon.

"You do know that I love you and will miss you greatly, but I am so incredibly happy for you at the same time," Marcaunon said just loudly enough to be heard over the pounding of hooves hitting against the hard ground. "You and Estel have worked hard towards, and prayed desperately for, this outcome. I truly couldn't be happier for the two of you and I know that you will both reign in graciousness and splendor, as though the kings of old have once again returned to rule over Gondor, and will usher in a new age. One that will be better than the bitter dregs that are the remnants of this one."

Arwen turned slightly in her saddle, easily matching her movements to those of her mount, and met Marcaunon's slightly watery eyes with her own, offering up a wavering smile to the slight elf.

"I...thank you," Arwen quietly replied, fighting back tears. "It is a hard thing I do: even if my choice was made out of love and for love, I have had to give up the family of my childhood to grasp at the hope of making a new family with the one I love. I thank you greatly for the kind words and well-wishes and I beg this boon of you: please watch over my children, and their children. And the rest of our line for as long as you and your beloved yet roam these lands."
"I would beg this favor of my father, and not seek to place such a burden on your shoulders; however, my father is tired and heart sick, and I am fully aware that he is intending to seek respite from his cares and woes over the sea."

Marcaunon made sure that he held her eyes as he gave as graceful a bow as he was capable of from the back of a horse: wordlessly reassuring Arwen that he would see to her request, no matter the difficulties it might present. He knew that he certainly held no interest in sailing to the West yet as he was quite young and still wished to see and experience much more of this new world now that he was considered old enough to leave the safety of Imladris. Also, Glorfindel had been sent back by the Valar and so was probably not able to return to the Undying Lands until such time as he was actually called for.

This time, when silence once again fell over them, it remained completely unbroken by either and the two of them rode onwards in the midst of legends and persons of great power quietly until the time came to once again set up a camp for the evening. Pulling up their mounts, Marcaunon leaned dangerously across the gap and hugged Arwen tightly around her slim shoulders, before peeling away and gently riding Gwilwileth around the outside of the halted company.

As he carefully walked Gwilwileth, Marcaunon kept his attention focused on those he was riding with until he finally saw who he was looking for. Nudging Gwilwileth lightly with his heels and giving her a little tug on one reign, Marcaunon quickly found himself dismounted and standing easily beside Glorfindel. Dropping the reins, and trusting to Gwilwileth's excellent training to keep her ground tied, Marcaunon flung himself at Glorfindel, burying his face tightly against the much taller elf's chest as he wrapped his arms around that tall, muscular body.

"What troubles you so, pîn meleth?" Glorfindel quietly murmured into Marcaunon's braided raven locks.

Marcaunon pulled back just enough so that when he tilted his head upwards, their eyes could meet.
"I rode beside Arwen today, which I am sure that you noticed, and we starting talking. And at first, it was just like always...," Marcaunon trailed off briefly, before regaining his mental fortitude and continuing, tears gathering at the corners of his jewel bright eyes and anguish spiking his tone as he relayed Arwen's request and finished with, "I'm just going to miss her! So much."

Glorfindel said nothing to that, merely wrapping his arms tighter around Marcaunon and burying his face in the thick braid: wordlessly offering some comfort to the distressed elf. They only stood like that for a moment or two before Glorfindel reluctantly release Marcaunon, having felt the other begin to pull away slightly. Marcaunon offered up a smile that was really nothing more than a quirk of his lips, but seeing it made Glorfindel feel somewhat better at least.

"Come," Marcaunon resolutely stated. "We must see to the needs of Gwilwileth and Asfaloth. We may not have ridden hard this day, especially compared to what they were put through several months ago, but they too deserve their rest. And to be pampered in as much a manner as we can contrive."

"Indeed," Glorfindel easily replied. "I have in fact already seen to Asfaloth's comfort and care, but I would be more than pleased to lend you a hand as well as escort you to where the nearest pen has been set up for the horses care."

"Please and thank you!" Marcaunon smiled more fully before grabbing ahold of Gwilwileth's reins.

Ignoring the gesture Marcaunon gave to indicate his desire for Glorfindel to lead the way, Glorfindel instead reached out and snagged a tight hold of the delicate hand, tucking the dainty appendage into the corner of his arm as he proceeded fall into place alongside of his beloved. He counted himself extremely well-rewarded when a slight blush spread over Marcaunon's exquisite features at the romantic gesture. His sensitive hearing also picked up the slightest hitch in Marcaunon's breathing, which set Glorfindel's mind into overdrive as he frantically thought of a way to guarantee a bit of privacy during the night, even as his feet lead the way to the nearest horse pen.
Marcaunon was slightly puzzled by the silence they walked in, but choose to ignore it and simply enjoyed being in able to bask in Glorfindel's presence without the need to worry about anything more troublesome than tending to his mare's needs. The whirlwind of events that occurred over the last eight months had truly pushed him to his limits and almost beyond: and he hadn't even been on the front lines! Marcaunon couldn't even begin to imagine what many of the others felt like and really didn't want too. His work as a Healer was wonderful and satisfying, and he had no greater desires than might lead him into danger at the forefront of an enemy engagement.

Giving his head a swift shake to clear it of his wayward thoughts, Marcuanon swiftly saw to the needs of Gwîthwîleth with the ease of familiarity, gave a bit of attention and pampering to Asfaloth, and used a tiny burst of his gifts to ensure that the grass that had been cordoned off in this particular pen was especially filling and nutritious for the steeds held in it. He gave a decisive nod of his head when he saw that he was finished and that everything was completed to his satisfaction and her comfort, before grabbing a hold of Glorfindel and pulling him back to where the two of them had met up, pausing only long enough to snatch up his saddle bags and blanket roll from on the ground where he had dumped his gear before tending to his mare.

Once back from the pen, Marcaunon re-dumped his stuff on the ground beside Glorfindel's belongings, and with far less care given to them than was obvious that Glorfindel had bestowed upon his own things as they were obviously placed just so on the green grass. Marcaunon's lips twisted slightly as he stared down at the difference in the two piles before giving an elegant roll of his shoulders that plainly indicated his lack of interest, then, still holding tightly to Glorfindel, led the way over to where a small fire had been started.

Once they reached the tiny circle of flames, Marcaunon dropped to the ground, pulling lightly at Glorfindel's hand as he did so but taking care to not pull so hard that Glorfindel was given no choice in the matter. Not that it mattered in the slightest as Glorfindel immediately followed suit by gracefully settling onto the grass, sitting so close that their legs lightly rubbed up against one another. Marcaunon took advantage of this closeness to rest his head against Glorfindel's broad shoulders and sneak one slight hand to gently rest on the extremely close leg, even as he kept his gaze on the dancing and quivering flames as they were put to work heating up a stew pot that had been hung on a tripod over the tiny fire.

The crackling and popping of the fire paired pleasantly with the drone of their fellow travelers preparing for the evening after a long, hard day, creating a soothing white noise that easily lulled
Marcaunon into a light trance; the occasional burst of laughter or singing that rose above the general murmur, and the much closer noises of the stew pot being stirred or someone calling out directions on what to add to the stew or what else should be prepared suppler the only things that kept Marcaunon from falling into a true slumber. He, and all of those who also were called upon to heal, had been run ragged in the last couple of months in the aftermath of the Battle of Dol Guldur.

Glorfindel smiled faintly at his sleepy beloved as Marcaunon's head rested more heavily upon his shoulder. With careful maneuvering and much patience on his part, Glorfindel was able to re-position the two of them, letting Marcaunon lay stretched out on the new Spring grass with his head cushioned by laying on Glorfindel's leg, where he was able to lightly run his fingers over the braided, ebon locks and up and over the delicately pointed ears. Hearing a light snort, Glorfindel glanced up and met the laughing eyes of Gîltass, who was being assisted to the ground near them by a pleased looking Haldir, who was, in turn, being closely followed by his brothers bearing all of their gear.

"Good evening," Glorfindel quietly stated, bowing his head slightly towards the new-comers; all the while, continuing his light stroking over Marcaunon's head.

"It is a rather nice evening, isn't it?" Gîltass smartly replied, keeping his voice down as he did so. Turning to face Rúmil, Gîltass changed the subject, "In my largest saddle bag is a small teapot. If you could please fill it up half and half with water and wine, then place it to heat near the fire, I would most appreciative."

Gîltass answered the unvoiced question he could easily read on Glorfindel's face when he turned back around.

"It is for the medications I must take: one is a little something to take the edge off of the pain because several nerves were damaged permanently and now send odd signals to my brain, the second is to relax my muscles, both because of the long ride today as well as the fact that I am required to do an hour of prescribed exercises every day without fail that will hopefully increase the range of motion and function in my shoulder, and the third batch is to help boost my immune system. Whatever foul glop was coated onto that arrow that pierced me was truly tenacious and has left me susceptible to ill-vapors and catching chills. The medicines given me are most effective if dissolved in heated wine, but, having to take three of them every night as well as a dose of the pain medication in the morning, I had no desire to try and carry that much wine with me on this little journey and there was no way I was going to let myself be left behind for such an occasion."
Glorfindel's face lit up in understanding of the answer. He then swiftly turned the subject to something completely different as he felt Marcaunon tense slightly under his roaming hand, knowing that his little love was still upset over the wounds Gîltass still suffered from and had clearly heard somewhat of the conversation. Gîltass smiled faintly at him, gave a infinitesimal nod of his head to the almost sleeping Marcaunon, and allowed him to steer the conversation towards something completely harmless and light, such as the fact that Elrond was known to be carrying around a small bag that his sons had requested him to bring along, thus causing much worry in the bride-to-be as Lord Elrond had made no secret of whose bag it was.

And that was how the time passed, in simple conversation and light gossip which would erupt into happy laughter at times, until finally being informed that the evening meal was ready to be eaten; at which point, Glorfindel calmly roused Marcaunon, saw to it that he ate and participated somewhat in the conversation, before excusing themselves to the small group and leading Marcaunon back to their equipment drop.

Looking down at the petite elf almost hanging off of his arm in weariness, even after a short nap and a hot, filling meal, Glorfindel valiantly refrained from sighing loudly. He had had such hopes for the evening after the responsiveness of his beloved earlier, but such was life and he had more desire to see to the comfort of Marcaunon than to keep him up late, wringing every bit of pleasure from that lithe, tiny body that he could.

'Well,' Glorfindel thought lightly as he re-thought over that last impulse, 'perhaps, in truth, I would greatly prefer doing the latter, but as a good bond mate, I shall see to the former. And after all, there is always the option of an early start to the day.'

Smiling brightly now at the turn of his thoughts, Glorfindel assisted Marcaunon down to the patch of grass the two of them had claimed for their own, steadying him with a hand to the elbow as Glorfindel made short work of shaking out and spreading one set of their bedrolls over the ground. Glorfindel then eased Marcaunon into laying supine upon the bedding before either loosening or removing several items of apparel that would have made slumber uncomfortable. Grabbing the other set of their bedding, Glorfindel unrolled it and tossed it lightly over Marcaunon. He then quickly saw to the removal of his own bits of uncomfortable items before sliding in between the layers and latching onto Marcaunon's relaxed body, pulling gently until the two of them were laying tightly wound around one another.
Marcaunon sighed gently, then snuggled his head further forwards until it was resting fully upon Glorfindel's chest, tucked just under his chin, his already relaxed body somehow becoming more so as the heat from another body joined with his under the blankets and let him fall gracefully into a full slumber.

Just before true sleep crept up to claim him though, Marcaunon was able to slur one last thought out to share with Glorfindel.

"M'happy f'r Arw'n an' Est'l an' I wans'em ta have lotsa lotsa b'bies 'cause I wanna see Arw'n waddle!"

Glorfindel mentally laughed at his little bondmate even as he raised his head up just enough to place a loving kiss to the top of the head that was nestled so closely to his lips. Laying back down, Glorfindel settled in for a night of star-gazing as he held tightly to his slumbering beloved. As he beheld the splendor of the heavens shining like the finest of jewels resting on a bed of the blackest velvet, Glorfindel spied a star shooting across the night sky. Seeing it, and remembering the old children's rede about wishing upon a shooting star for one's heart's desire, Glorfindel felt a profound wave of love and gratefulness.

Lifting his head up ever so slightly once again, Glorfindel placed another kiss upon Marcaunon's precious head and gave wordless thanks and praise to the Valar for bringing the two of them together across worlds and through Death and out the other side of a terrible, eons long war as they stepped out into the new days of a long-promised peace to face whatever may come: together, forever.

Chapter End Notes
pîn [pîn] adj. little

glaur [gloer] name golden light

eithel [eithil] name issue of water, spring, well

love name meleth [melith]

t.a.3019

March 3 - battle of the hornbrg (helm's deep) begins

March 6 - aragorn over taken by the dunedain, sets out later for harrowdale

March 8 - aragorn takes the path of the dead at daybreak, arrives at erech at midnight

March 25 - the one ring falls into the cracks of doom

March 27 - celeborn crosses anduin, destruction of dol guldur begun

April 6 - meeting of celeborn and thranduil.

April 8 - the ring bearers are honored on the fields of cormallen

May 1 - king elessar crowned; elrond and arwen set out from rivendell

May 8 - eomer and eowyn depart for rohan with the sons of elrond

May 20 - elrond and arwen come to lorien

May 27 - the escort of arwen leaves lorien

June 14 - the sons of elrond meet up with the escort and bring arwen to edoras

June 16 - they set out for gondor

June 25 - king elessar finds the sapling of the white tree

1 lithe - arwen comes to the city

Mid-year's day - wedding of arwen and elessar

July 19 - the funeral escort of king theoden sets out

August 27 - they come to isenguard; they take leave of the king of the west at sunset

All dates and information were taken from Appendix B of the book "The Return of the King"
Based on a line in the Silmarillion

* But Celegorm's servants had thrown Dior's twin sons, Elwing's brothers, into the wild woods outside Menegroth to die…

One of the brothers repented of the abandoning of the twin boys, but when he went back to collect them, they were no where to be found. So I thought that it would be interesting if they had somehow made their way into Harry's world.

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