### Undying

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Undying

by tanarill

Summary

Elves were immortal, tied to the circles of Arda until the end of time and the Second Music. Only very few ever dared to love humans, whose quick-burning lives ended with a permanent separation - unless something extraordinary occurred. And only one ever dared love a dwarf.

Something extraordinary occurred.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
In Which Legolas Asks For What He Needs

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Gimli’s death nearly killed him; indeed, did kill him for a time. Not for nothing was Estë’s garden one of rest, and not for nothing did the maidens of Estë know the arts of preserving a body without fear. But he could not say where it was he went, save that it was not the Halls of Mandos; and after a year and seven months and two days, he returned, and knew what to do.

This was what was known, of the Children of Ilúvatar. The elves, when they left their hröa, went to the Halls of Mandos, where they might stay and rest. Or, should they so desire, and were judged not unworthy, they might return. Men went, and not even the Valar knew where. But dwarrow went to the Halls of Aulë, which are both part and apart of the Halls of Mandos, and there they remained, waiting for the Second Music.

Well enough. It was odd to go to the Halls of Mandos while still ensconced in hröa, but not forbidden; and, he considered, a great deal of trouble later might have been avoided had a greater one than he remembered that Estë was rest, and Mandos was prison and fortress only for those who attempted unlawfully to leave.

Mandos was there to greet him in the entrance hall, which was surprising to him. Yet he greeted the Vala courteously, as one did a teacher. Only then did he say he was surprised by this turn of events.

"It is surprising," replied Mandos, "only in that of all the ages of Arda and Aman, and all the friendships ever forged between elf and mortal, you are the first to think to walk to these halls."

"I apologize if it is presumption - "

"It is not, but I think that none other among all the peoples of the stars would have thought to make the request even so. Your time among mortals has made you bold."

He thought, then, of the first fortnight he and Gimli spent on the road after the War: of the caves yet unhewn at Aglarond, and of the Forest of Fangorn, and how he almost lost his dwarf before ever having him. He smiled fondly. "My time among mortals has taught me to ask for what I need."

"Do you need him, then?"

"Like trees need the sun," he replied, instantly.

"Well. You understand, of course, that the Halls of Aulë are inhabited only by the Khazâd?"

"Does it matter?"

"Only in that many bear no love for the first children."

He flicked the fingers on his hand, dismissive. "As did I for them, once. I like to think I can outgrow ancient foolishness."

"There are many."

"They are yet fear, are they not?" he replied. "They have aught to harm me but words, and I - have words of my own."
"You are resolved, then. Good. Many turn back at this hall." At his expression, Mandos added, "Although of you, I think, the testing was unnecessary. Loving one of the Khazâd must have tempered your will beyond all measuring."

He smiled again, but said only, "I have your leave, then? To walk these halls, when I should need?"

"You always need," said Mandos, "as a tree needs the earth. Just remember, young one - there are yet those living in Valinor who love you."

The Halls of Aulë were guarded twice: first, by the servants of Mandos, to prevent any escape, and second, at the other end of a wearily long hall, by the Khazâd themselves. He was not entirely sure who they guarded against. Certainly not him, because to the living, the blades of the dead were as mist. What had they to fear?

Yet he halted politely once he was close enough that they could see him, and waited. The challenge was not long in coming.

"An elf?" said one. There were four that he can see easily, and three that he was sure he was not meant to. "Here?"

"I am Legolas Thranduilion, originally of Eryn Lasgalen, but lately of Tol Eressëa. I have come to find my One."

They stared at him, and he carefully let no expression cross his face. It was not often (never) that an elf could challenge the Khazâd in their own tongue. Finally, one said, "You know her name?"

"His, yes - but I will be reassured, before I speak it, that deep names are truely used here."

"Stubborn," said one, in tones of approval.

He said nothing, waiting patiently. They gathered to each other and begin a conversation, which grew louder and more heated.

Finally, one of the ones he wasn't meant to see said, "Strike it. We can't go ask until you give us a name, and you can't expect us to tell you a name!"

"Ah. I had hoped - but I am still an elf - "

"You are alive!" snapped the guard.

He blinked, slowly. "Then would my name be sufficient?"

"To search the entire Halls?"

"I have," says Legolas, "a deep name. It was given to me by the one you name Mahal, shortly after I came upon Tol Eressëa."

This caused another quick, whispered conversation. Finally, the one who had spoken to him first said, "That . . . might work. If your One is in the halls, and he will vouch for you."

Legolas nodded, and said a word. It was really just Legolas, greenleaf, in Khuzdul, except that the green was malachite, and the leaf was dendrite. It was, without a doubt, a deep name; and from their expressions, they were shocked, both that he had it and was willing to share. "If it helps, he is only newly come to these Halls; he died two years and nineteen days ago."
"That is not how it works," said one of the dwarrow, not unkindly. Then she motioned him to sit, on one of the low stone benches, and one of their number went running, and that was really all he could ask at that point.

Elves never needed to sleep much, and since coming to Valinor, he needed less than that. Even so, he settled into peaceful meditation to pass the time before the runner appeared. It took a long time, so long that he might actually have fallen into true sleep, before he heard the noise of dwarf in full armor travelling at speed.

It was not Gimli, he saw when he opened his eyes.

"Apologies for the wait," said the new dwarf. "We have found him, and he sends a message." A parchment was held out to him; it fizzed against his fingers when he first took it. He broke the seal to find the letter in Cirth script, and read it quickly, feeling a smile form upon his face.

Then he came to the end, and found his anger kindled. "I may not see my One, though we have both come to the Halls of Aulë, having exchanged deep names?"

"It is an unusual situation," said the newcomer delicately. "There's almost a battle going on right now, honestly. The forefathers are three and three on whether it may even be done, and Durin is alive right now and cannot tell the idiots it's already been done and they should stop making a wall between One and One."

"You seem to stand close by my side," observed Legolas.

"You would probably know me as Narvi of Khazâd-dûm," said the newcomer. "I have reason to hope for a particular outcome in this, if Celebrimbor is - has been freed of the Halls of Mandos. Of course I offered to take the note, and since it is well-known that I can tolerate the strangenesses of elves . . ." He held out his hands, an eloquent gesture. "And you are strange, Thranduilion Legolas."

"I am told I am the only elf to ever consider coming here," agreed Legolas. "But to be turned back!"

"As I see it," commented Narvi, "you have some choices. You can wait; even the life of Durin is not endless, and you are an elf. You may enter these halls anyway, but - "

"I know dwarrow fortresses," said Legolas. "I'd never find him."

Narvi shrugged. "You might ask aid of your Valar."

Legolas frowned. "Mandos, at least, will not give it. He warned me of the stubbornness of the dead."

"And Mahal?"

"Already gave me a deep name."

"Yes, I heard, Dendritic-malachite." Then Narvi's face gentled. "And last, you might seek to remind your kin that walking these halls is not forbidden."

"Celebrimbor?" said Legolas, wryly.

"Any who were in Hollin," suggested Narvi. "There was friendship, at that time."

"I must at least write a letter in return," said Legolas.
"I brought pen and parchment," assured Narvi.

So his first visit to the Halls of Aulë ended - not in abject failure, but not in success. Still, rightly had Mithrandir, here called Olórin, said that hope was sustenance more important than bread and water.

He went to the Halls of Mandos, and sought Celebrimbor. Narvi hadn't been wrong that there were others, but he did not even know their names, and besides, he didn't begrudge even a new friend his aid.

Celebrimbor was in Mandos, and was surprised to see him, but greeted him courteously enough before asking who he was and why he'd come. The telling of it took nearly no time at all - my beloved is a dwarf, in the Halls of Aulë, and for the mistrust the dwarrow have for elves I am not allowed in - and perhaps he could gain introductions to dwarf-friends of Eregion who have gone out of the Halls of Mandos.

The Ñoldor prince sat back, and said, "Of course I will. I do not know of many who have, though. Most who stayed in Middle-Earth after the Fall of Beleriand did so because the Doom of Mandos still bound us to the East, and even three ages of the world are not enough to wipe the blood of kinslaying from our hands."

"You regret it?"

"I regretted it while I was doing it," said Celebrimbor bitterly. "What does that matter? I still did it."

"Did you ever ask forgiveness?"

"After the fall of Morgoth. I was given a measure of peace, and yet - the West was denied. I went to Eregion."

Legolas snickered, and Celebrimbor looked askance of him. "In Middle-Earth, among the Men of Rohan, the law for a thief is this: he must return all that he has stolen, and one-fifth besides, and then his name is clear."

"So?"

"What did you steal from the Valar?"

Celebrimbor blinked.

"Anyway," said Legolas. "I have a letter here from Narvi. He greatly desires to see you again; but failing that, after I go to meet the dwarf-friends of Eregion, I will return to the Halls of Aulë."

"You have time to bide a while?" asked Celebrimbor.

"I can stay," said Legolas.

Celebrimbor had not lied when he said that precious few of the Ñoldor who had founded Eregion had gone forth from the Halls of Mandos. But that kingdom had stood for eight hundred years, and only in the first century could most of the inhabitants have been accounted as Ñoldor who had crossed the Belegaer. The rest had been craftsmen, and entirely helpless against the armies of Sauron when they attacked; and they had long since left Mandos.
They'd built a colony in the south, on the borders between the Pastures of Yavanna and the Woods of Oromë; they called it Telerys, and they welcomed him with joyful song. For a while, he refreshed himself in the warm sun and glad breeze of that gentle land. It was not good to spend too much time among the dead.

Then he began to search for the recipients of the letters he bore. Most were astonished and more than astonished to learn that, while the denizens of Mandos might not pass into the Halls of Aulë, not so were the living forbidden. Many were ready to set off that very night, to see friends thought long lost. Legolas counselled that only a few go at a time, so as not to overwhelm the Khazâd; for never before now had the elves gone to visit.

"And you, Greenleaf?" asked a wood-shaper. "For you have told us that your love walks those halls, and you are not entirely without motive."

"I will stay here a time," replied Legolas. "I am still new-come to Valinor, and these pastures are a marvel to me."

It was weeks, even by horse and elf-road, to the Halls, and weeks again returning; and he settled in to the flets by day and walked the pastures by night, and learned new songs, and didn't worry overmuch.

Thus he was surprised, one evening, after having thanked his hosts of the day and descended the tree, to find a young mallorn-tree. It had not been there the previous evening, but now it seemed to have been growing there for decades at least. He paused, and then said, "Greetings, my lady Kementári."

The tree stood up, revealing itself to be closer in form and nature to the Onodrim. "Greetings, young one. Will you walk with me?"

"I am honored," said Legolas, and meant it.

They walked for several hours, through the woods and gardens. Legolas was becoming more accustomed to these wonders, but still sang in wonderment at many things; and since his lady was near, asked her questions, and received answers. It was well past midnight before Legolas noted that he would have to turn back to make the woods and friendly flets before daybreak, and that as she must know such, she was clearly leading him elsewhere.

He shrugged to himself, and kept walking.

It was very nearly dawn before they emerged onto a hill, tall enough to see the green pastures for some distance around, and the Pelóri in the East. On its crown there was a single massive tree, which Legolas climbed immediately. This wouldn't be an unpleasant place to spend the day.

"I find myself wondering," said Yavanna, suddenly, "what should give one as young as you such courage."

"Is it courage to follow my beloved teacher in her land?" asked Legolas. "I am quite safe."

"Mm. And to seek out the judge?"

"I am not entirely innocent, and my flaws are my own; but I had rather be told and repair them than remain ignorant."

"To speak to the craftsman of the rings of the laws of Men?"
"I was making a point, or trying to."

"What if he was meant to come to that conclusion on his own?"

"It has been seven thousand years," said Legolas. "Even if it was not my place, I could not see him in his penance and feel nothing. I could not let it stand; even Morgoth was only imprisoned three ages, and he did not repent."

"Your compassion does you credit."

"If I am wrong, tell me."

"You are . . . different. Different than any Eldar who ever walked beneath the stars, or in the light of the Trees, or beneath the Sun and the Moon. Something new is come among the Eldar, but it is a thing comprising love which knows no bounds, and we can raise no hand against it. Yet we will be watching."

He laughed, and then said, "I have been watched before, and by one who bore me and all of Arda unending malice. It will be a pleasant change, to have other eyes upon me."

The laughter of Yavanna was like that of all green and growing things: silent, and joyful, and deafening. "Sleep, little one," she said, fondly.

He slept.

When he woke, he was again in Telerys, with the elves from Eregion. He went down from the flet to join in their song, and it was just time to begin the first meal when the sound of riders at ease reached them. It was the travelers to Mandos, returning, and a new song was raised to them.

Only once the horses were turned free and the elves were fed did they begin to tell their tales. On the whole, they brought surprising good news: they could not be allowed freely into the Halls of Aulë, where deep names were used. Well, they had taken letters along. But the Khazâd of Khazâd-dûm of the Second Age could go wherever they wished, in the Halls of Aulë, and so when they wished to go to the entrance hall, none could stop them.

"It is a large hall," said Curulaer, a musician.

"I remember," said Legolas. "Is it a hall of meeting?"

"Is it now," said Curulaer with no small satisfaction. "We have letters here; it seems that half of Khazâd-dûm wishes to see old friends. And no small number for you, Legolas."

This was an understatement. The parchment of the dead had little real weight, and yet nearly half of a horse was laden only with missives. For the most part, they were letters of thanks, from dwarrow dead long before his birth. Even ones whose friends of old had not visited yet - even they had cause for gladness, and told him of it. Then there was one from Narvi, asking him if Celebrimbor was yet in Mandos. Finally, one from Gimli.

The next day, he and what seemed to be half of Telerys rode out. In truth, Legolas was not sad, for it was a pleasant journey in company. He shared his stories with the craftelves of Telerys, and they in turn taught him simple skills. The whole column sang on the road.

Again this time Mandos met him in the hall. "You surprise me, little one."
"Do I?"

At this Mandos smiled. "No, perhaps not. Never before have so many come here of their own wills."

"And is a thing wrong because it has never been done before?"

"Indeed not." And he motioned them all to pass within.

The long hall, the entrance of Aulë, had been grand and somber the last time his footsteps had passed this way. Now it was grand and in the midst of construction, as only dwarrows could. A runner had gone off at the moment of their arrival, and all of them were invited to sit in what might have been a pavilion, if not inside. Legolas smiled.

He was still smiling, a span later, when Gimli said, "Trust you, Dendritic-malachite, to react to failure to see one dwarf in friendship by releasing on us a plague of all elves to ever have borne us love."

"Hello, mellon-nin," said Legolas.

Chapter End Notes

So here we are, in a different fandom entirely! This is the behemoth that got me through the dark months when my first thesis project fell apart, along with the wonderful Sansûkh. It starts slow, but I hope that won't drive you away. I'm planning on posting one chapter every Friday until I reach the end of this book.

As usual, if you spot any typos or grammatically incorrect fragments, please inform me. Also, if you are a Silmarillion nerd, any wrong accents that you find. Finally, for all my mobile peeps, please let me know if my chunks are getting too big for your devices' RAM, and I'll adjust downward again.
In Which There Are Reunions, Old Wounds, and New Friendships

Chapter Notes

Made some minor typo and grammar fixes to the last chapter. Khudzul is an adjective, it turns out; the noun form is Khazâd. Khazâd is unpronounceable in English, because English doesn't have the correct sounds. Listen to a German pronounce achtung, or a Scotsman pronounce loch, and you'll get a sense of the guttural sound that kh is meant to represent. The vowels are both the long A, as in father. I assume Tolkien intended the diacritic to indicate the difference between the long and short Semitic A, but I learned Hebrew from actual Israelis and I still can't hear the difference. We will assume it isn't going to be audible or pronounceable to native English speakers.

Cúegnass is pronounced coo-egg-nass.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They talked for a long time, as they hadn't been able for years - since Gimli had not been physically capable of for years. Gimli, it turned out, was enjoying being dead tremendously. "It's restful," he said. "Nothing to do but what I decide to, and if that means lie abed all day, then I may. Practicing crafts under the tutelage of the seven fathers, under those who learned from Mahal himself - "

"I had understood that Durin is currently alive."

"Indeed; they are retaking Khazâd-dûm. With the balrog dead and the might of Erebor and Aglarond behind the expedition this time. Balin will be avenged. Although," added Gimli, "he is not particularly in need of avenging."

"I am glad you found your relatives."

"Aye," said Gimli, and, "Have you found yours?"

"I have been mostly busy."

"Legolas."

"I did not go looking."

"Legolas. I'm dead."

"I know. I don't plan to spend all my time here. Just - I had need."

"You had need," repeated Gimli. "Well. You have been making friends."

"Do I detect a note of censure?"

"Hah! These elves from Hollin, I like them. They are craftsmen to make a heart glad. But you are a wood-elf, Legolas. Have you been among trees at all since last we parted?"

"I walked by the side of the Mistress of All Green herself."
"Oh? And what did she say?"

"That I am strange, even for an elf, but in a good way."

"I could have told you that."

"Have," said Legolas, and then laughed. "Oh, Gimli, but I did miss you."

"Aye, and I you."

Narvi found them still talking, hours later. Gimli noted him first, and went quiet; and then Legolas turned, and said, "Oh."

"So the news is bad," said Narvi. "I feared such."

"Perhaps not as bad as all that," said Legolas, digging about in his pack. "I have a letter for you."

"He is in Mandos. How can the news be good?"

"I was able to point out to him why he is still in Mandos, which he had not been able to see for himself in an age of Arda. Perhaps his time of penance is soon to end." Legolas paused, and added, "But I am being very rude. Beloved, let me make known to you the one called Narvi, son of Nar - "

"We met," said Gimli. "You are not the only one who has been making friends."

"Friend Gimli is a tribute to the line of Durin," agreed Narvi, taking the letter. "Will you give me time to read this, and pen a response? Although it is not your duty to ferry letters around for the dead . . ."

"Duty, no," agreed Legolas. "But for my friends?"

He left the Halls of Aulë feeling lighter than he had since probably before he'd begun building his little grey ship. As promised, he went to go find Celebrimbor. Then he stood quietly for a little while, trying not to laugh.

"You can laugh," said Celebrimbor. "I am aware I am a disaster at present." He had splotches of ink everywhere, and his hands were near black with it.

"I said nothing," said Legolas.

"You were thinking it," groused Celebrimbor. "Even so, I am grateful you returned. I worried you wouldn't. I have been failing to write letters of apology." He motioned to the drifts of wadded up paper, piled up and overflowing the rubbish bin.

Legolas retrieved one, unfolded it, and read it. Finally he said, "There is nothing lacking in your emotions."

"My words, however, are clumsy."

"That is not what I meant; better to have ugly words from the heart than polished empty ones."

Celebrimbor paused, and then sighed. "Well do I know it. But you are right. If I may continue to be a burden to you - would you deliver some few of these?"
"I have not yet visited in Alqualondë from one sunset to the next," mused Legolas out loud. "Although I have certain orders, from my beloved, that I am not to set foot in these halls again before I seek out my living kin. It may be some time before you get a response."

"You mean you - haven't gone to see your antecedents?"

"When I left Middle-Earth, my father Thranduil was still king in Eryn Lasgalen. My mother came here by the short road some seven centuries ago, and since I arrived, I had no time to spend on anything but making great memories. And then all this riding about, of course."

"Legolas. My letters can wait; go see your mother."

"I can take one or two."

"Not a single one," said Celebrimbor. "Even here in Mandos, I can see my father whenever I want. You will not live your life serving the dead. Go!"

"Ai, I am defeated. I go!"

He laughed all the way out, though.

Careful questioning of the Telerys elves on the whereabouts of one Cúegnass got a surprisingly immediate result.

"That one," said Thavron. "She joined the company of Oromë first thing out of the halls, and she's one of the last really wild elves in Valinor. Why?"

He smiled. "She's my mother."

Thavron sputtered. "Your mother? She is married?"

"To my father Thranduil." Legolas grinned. "Although, it must be said, she is not so much married to him as he is married to her."

"Hah, yes. Did she trap him in a net and drag him off to unite beneath the stars?"

"Nothing so dramatic. They met while he toured with his father Oropher, and," he shrugged, "they knew. She told me she never planned to find a husband before; but when Ilúvatar is kind enough to offer your husband like that, it is rude to reject the gift."

Thavron smiled wryly. "That's one way to put it. Will you be leaving us at the woods, then?"

"It will be good to see my mother again," said Legolas.

He repeated the words, two weeks later, when he found himself suddenly upside down in a tree across from the nis who'd given him his wiry strength and dark hair. "Sloppy, Friendly. Very sloppy."

"Mother. We are in Valinor." But he curled up so he could begin sawing away at the snare around his ankle.

"No reason to be sloppy. And what's this I hear about you and some dwarf?"

"When Ilúvatar is kind enough to send you off to save the world with your best friend and your true
husband, it is rude to reject the gift."

"Hah! Well said. And your father?"

"Was well last I saw him, shortly before I sailed. Still drinks too much wine. Still composes terrible poetry in your honor." He finished cutting through the snare, and held the frayed end tightly so that he ended up mostly righted. "Still can't handle a bow."

At that, Cúegnass finally smiled. "I hear that's not so much a problem these days; the shadow has finally passed from Taur-e-Ndaedelos."

"Eryn Lasgalen now. Dol Guldur was torn down."

"Good. Is he - do you think he plans to take the sea-road?"

"I hope so," said Legolas. "I think he will not leave until the last spiders have been defeated, and even then, he would shepherd everyone else out before taking ship himself."

"It makes him a good king," agreed Cúegnass. "Come along. My lord is hunting today, and I'd introduce you."

"Mother -!"

He was introduced to Oromë anyway. "So this is the young one who has been causing so much trouble at Mandos. Of course he is your son, Cúegnass."

Cúegnass bowed, only a little mocking.

"I did not mean to be trouble," said Legolas. "Only to find again my husband."

"And you have him again, and rekindled a thousand old friendships, and opened the way for a ten thousand new ones - and you speak to Celebrimbor, which few even in Mandos do."

"He was lonely," said Legolas.

"And you have never yet visited the Halls of Nienna." He paused, and then said, "Well! Will you join us on this hunt?"

"What are you hunting?" asked Legolas. Food was one thing, but this was Valinor; and he would not bring undue harm to any living creature.

"Orcs," said Oromë. "In Sinim."

"I have had enough of killing," said Legolas, quickly. "Even the evil things of the world. I wish you good fortune, though."

"Then go in peace, little one," said Oromë, not unkindly, and turned to his hunt in the dark places of Arda.

He went to Alqualondë. The Teleri mariners were his father's distant kin; and, as he'd said, he'd never spent any time in the great port. Besides, although the sea-longing that had driven him from Middle-Earth to Valinor was satisfied, he was no less enchanted by the sea then they. So he went to the swan-haven, and was made welcome, and he learned sea-music and sang his own tales, which were tales of Middle-Earth.
It took some months before his host Ninquiveringë, while demonstrating him the planing technique of the swan-shipwrights, asked, "What is it like? To love outside the Eldar?"

"... much like loving within the Eldar, excepting that when you know that one of you will end - go on to a place the other can't follow - each moment is more precious than all the light of the stars and the trees of Yavanna and the works of Aulë combined."

"He did not go anywhere you cannot follow."

"I didn't know that at the time," said Legolas. "And now I will forever make my home on the road, because my beloved cannot leave Mandos."

"Yet you chose him."

"I chose him," agreed Legolas. "He was kind, even when it pained him; it was his broad heart I loved first, and I could not for anything have denied."

"Your own heart is not small."

"My own heart is young, and not yet weary," corrected Legolas.

"Your husband is in Mandos and cannot yet leave; your friends were Men and have passed beyond you forever. You are older, I think, than many in Valinor will ever be. And you are unwearied."

"Very well then: say rather that I do not believe in despair. Either there is hope, as in the matter of the ring, and it was time to be out in Middle-Earth and doing. Or, as in the case of my Gimli being mortal, there is no hope. Despairing before he was dead would have robbed me of our years together. Despairing after... we first children do not end. An eternity of lamentations? Is that what my beloved would have wished for me?"

"You went to Estë."

"I went to Estë. I did not go to Mandos. Not then, anyway."

"I take your meaning," said Ninquiveringë. "And then, "What is it you are doing now?"

"Making a boat?"

"Fine, I will not ask."

"Thank -"

"But I will accompany you, when next you go to Mandos. I find I quite want to meet someone strong enough to marry you."

Ninquiveringë was a bad traveller. She'd done it by land only once, on the road back from Mandos, and had reason to associate travel with unpleasant memories. Legolas taught her the travelling songs for days with sun, and with sun and clouds, and clouds alone. He taught her the making of safe fires, and of sleeping in trees, and, when she proved to hate that, of sleeping at the roots of trees in watertight cloaks. She was almost approaching adequacy when they arrived at Mandos.

"Legolas of the Long Road," greeted Mandos. "And this is... Ninquiveringë the shipwright?"

"I could not dissuade her coming, lord, so I didn't even try."
"Wisely so." He motioned them through.

"You found your mother," said Gimli. "I hope I can make a good impression on her."

"On - Gimli! Ninquivingë is not my mother!"

"Indeed I'm not," said Ninquivingë. "I have come to see Gimli, son of Glóin, whose heart is big enough to compass Arda."

"Oh," said Gimli, blushing, and bowed. Then he turned to Legolas and said, "I told you to find your mother!"

"I did! She dwells with Oromë in his wood, and spends her days riding in his company and hunting orcs."

"In Valinor?"

"Oromë hunts across all of Arda," said Ninquivingë, amused. "And his host with him."

"Then, I must say, may he soon be successful and cease his hunt! The day that there should be an end of orcs to trouble Middle-Earth cannot come soon enough."

"Well-said, Master Gimli," said Ninquivingë. "And now I will take my leave for a span; I wouldn't want to stand between you and Legolas."

Gimli watched her go. "Why'd she come see me, if she was just going to leave so soon?"

"I recited the matter of the ring to my new friends in Alqualondë. They can go to Nienna to meet Olórin, and Tirion upon Túna to meet Galadriel, and these days Elrond dwells there as well; but of the Nine Walkers, only three remain, and one remains in Mandos."

"You shouldn't be exaggerating me, Dendritic-malachite."

"I give you exactly as much praise as you deserve," said Legolas.

Gimli blushed again, and muttered something in Khuzdul that Legolas was careful not to hear, and then said, "So? Your mother? Alqualondë?"

"I am learning how to make boats," said Legolas.

"Only fifty years too late for it to be of use!"

Legolas smiled.

Ninquivingë returned, hours later. He introduced her properly, as his host who had taken in him and introduced him to the ways of Alqualondë, and his teacher who has showing him how to build a boat. Gimli asked a little about wood-carving, for he'd seen the scrolling on the swan-ships when they docked at Tol Eressëa. She smiled and took out her whittling to show him. Gimli replied in kind, demonstrating some of the Cirth knotwork of his people. By the time they finished their impromptu lesson, they were friends, and he'd learnt perhaps a smidge about scrollwork himself.

"I find myself surprised," she said, as they entered the great atrium.

"Oh?"
"Everything I ever learned about Naugrim - 

"Khazâd," he interrupted. "They are not stunted."

" - Khazâd, thank you, is wrong. Also I wouldn't have expected your husband to be a maker of things."

"Wouldn't you?" he asked.

She tilted her head. "Well, since you mention it, I suppose maybe it isn't so surprising after all. Do we return now to Alqualondë?"

"I - have another to visit," said Legolas.

"Oh?"

"Celebrimbor, son of Curufin," he said, awkwardly.

" . . . why?"

"He was lonely," said Legolas.

"And your heart is great," said Ninquivingë. "All right. Lead on."

Celebrimbor was marginally less a disaster, in that he was wearing clothes that hadn't time to become stained in ink yet. He looked up at Legolas' tread, and then blinked at Ninquivingë. "You brought . . . a friend?"

"Ninquivingë brought herself," said Legolas.

"And I suppose all those fires you lit were for your benefit alone," joked Ninquivingë. She was looking at the piles of paper, and Celebrimbor with a large smudge of ink on his forehead, and how he seemed to grow smaller under her gaze.

"Legolas," he said, pleading.

In the background, Ninquivingë uncrumpled a piece of paper and smoothed it out to read.

"I really did just come to get letters, if any are ready," said Legolas apologetically.

"I'm sorry," said Celebrimbor suddenly. "For participating in the Kinslaying."

"You're sorry?" asked Ninquivingë, her voice oddly strangled. "You?"

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"You killed other elves!"

"I was wrong!"

"You killed me!"

" . . . what can I do, then? How can I repay you what I owe?"

"You can't!"

"I must."
"You can't! The damage to Alqualondë was not too great, and we long since rebuilt our ships, and as we were blameless Mandos let us walk free. What you stole was security. We thought we left violence behind in Middle-Earth, but it turns out our kin can be such monsters!"

"If," said Legolas, suddenly, "the shadow of Morgoth is upon us. And even when it isn't, we can be a great many evil things. We can be petty and unkind and cruel, and we can carry grudges long after their perpetrators repent, or are dead. We can also choose to be better."

"You would have me forgive? Him?"

"Read the letter," instructed Legolas.

She read the letter. Then, slowly, she looked up. Finally she said, "You fought Morgoth in the First Age of the Sun; you fought Sauron in the second."

"I lost both times," said Celebrimor. "I was a bad warrior, and happiest as a craftsman."

"You can be both." Ninquivingë squared her shoulders. "And so can I."

Mandos showed up while she was still testing blades. "Thus do you change Valinor, little one?"

"I really," said Legolas, "really did not mean this to happen."

"No? But you did mean something to happen."

"We should be teaching the martial arts to fewer, not more!"

"Ah," said Mandos. "We thought so too, thought to protect you little children. And then it turns out that if you outlaw blades, then the only ones with blades become outlaws, and only the wolves have teeth. We should have been teaching you things other than how to sing; only we did not understand then what our brother had become."

"Either everyone learns, or no one does," said Legolas, who'd once been appalled to see Gimli, who was never a bully, use all of his strength and hard-earned skill to not only beat but overwhelm a dwarf at the tender age of sixty. "And every day is holy."

"Something new, indeed," said Mandos, with satisfaction.

Chapter End Notes

I have nothing to say in my defense about my OCs. I am just frustrated by the fact that there are about three female elf characters in all of Tolkien's work. Ten if we include elf ladies who have names but don't do much in the story other than marry and/or give birth to a bunch of horrible assholes. So here's Cúegnass, who is very much not a queen except for how she totally is, and here's Ninquivingë, who builds boats and asks hard questions. More ladies as we get to them.

Meanwhile, in real life, my computer has finally died to the point of unuseability. It has been slowly dying for about a year, so it isn't like this was a shock. I am going to wait until tomorrow when it will be sale weekend for us Burger-eating Attack Monkeys, and then buy a new one at (hopefully) a discount.
As per usual, point out to me any lack of spelling or grammar.
Ninquivingé was quiet for hours after leaving Mandos, even though it was a warm day and the birds were singing. Legolas didn't let it bother him; he'd been much the same, after what he had thought was the death of Mithrandir. Finally, and very quietly, she said, "You do not make slow quiet changes, Legolas of the Long Road. You are like the trumpet of Oromë, the sudden sharp wind of a storm at sea. Yet . . . for three ages of the world have I been miserable bearing this burden that I did not know I carried, and now my heart is light and free. Will you stay in Alqualondë, for a time?"

"I haven't finished building my boat," replied Legolas. "Although I doubt I'll ever be much of a shipwright."

"You'll never be anything of a shipwright if you can't learn to plane a plank."

So that was fine.

They passed the Ezellohar quickly, the blackened forms of Laurelin and Telperion still reaching to the sky. Legolas had seen it before, had in fact stopped and stared for hours the first time. Ninquivingé said, "They were beautiful, in life."

"They are still beautiful," said Legolas. "Is it true that Lady Kementári made athelas in an attempt to heal them?"

"It is. Not that it did much good."

"Good enough. I and half my generation would be dead, but for them."

"You are familiar with the unlight?"

Legolas looked back. "Mirkwood was beset by the Shelobin, spiders descended of Shelob, who was herself last and least of the Ungoliantin. I am too familiar with that poison."

"Ah."

They were stopped in Tirion by, of all people, Elrond. And yet it was not Elrond, for Legolas had never known the stern master of Imladris to smile, but there it was. By his side was a small nis of delicate features and hair of the particular sort that was golden by sunlight and silver by all other light. He kneealt, and kissed her hand, and said, "Lady Celebrían."

She smiled. "And you must be Legolas. You have ridden through our city before, but this time we have caught you. Will you not stay a night?"

"I cannot abandon my companion," said Legolas.
"You are both welcome," said Elrond.

"Well, in that case," he said. "Allow me to present Ninquivingé the shipwright, of Alqualondë. Ninquivingé, these are Lord Elrond, prince of Ñoldor and Teleri alike, and his wife the Lady Celebrían."

Ninquivingé blinked. "I am honored to be in such august company."

Celebrían laughed, a deeper sound than her delicate frame would suggest. "No more august than Legolas, hailing as we all do from Middle-Earth!"

Ninquivingé remained unconvinced, and was stiff and formal until she realized that he and Elrond were subtly insulting each other, and smiling for each and every one. Then she relaxed, and soon the crystal of that house was ringing with their merry laughter. They left in the morning much refreshed.

"I didn't know you knew such personages," she commented.

Legolas grinned. "I have told you of the aid given by Lord Elrond, and Lady Galadriel, in the matter of the ring. I am happy he found his wife again - he was always mourning when I knew him in Middle-Earth."

"That isn't quite what I meant."

"What, then?"

"Lords and scions of kings," said Ninquivingé.

"Well, if you want to think about it that way, I was a prince." He made a face. "Sort of. Not a drop of really royal blood anywhere down my family tree. But my grandfather consolidated the elves West of the mountains into a single people, and that saved a great many alive in the Second Age. There's a kind of nobility in serving one's people, I think."

"You're not much of a prince," teased Ninquivingé.

"And thank that Valar for that! I'd rather just be Legolas."

On their return to Alqualondë, Ninquivingé began inviting her friends and former students and acquaintances to come share a meal, and she sang a song of such perfect melancholy that after, no eye could be dry. Finally, she would tell how she sang not of her own accord but out of care for Celebrimbor, repentant kinslayer. The arguments went long into the night; but in the undercurrent of Alqualondë, there was a change.

Legolas' boat was nearing completion when he next felt the need for Gimli, and so he carefully set aside his tools, and informed Ninquivingé where he planned to go, and she said, "Bide a day; we are not all as able to leave with only a moment's notice."

He was confused only until he planned to ride out, and found that there was a column of Falmari waiting. He turned to his teacher. "Ninquivingé, What."

She laughed, and said, "Some number of us want to meet the repentant one. I thought it best we go along with one accustomed to road-travel."

"There must be at least two dozen people!"
"Twenty-seven," replied Ninquivingē. "Including myself."

"What are we going to feed everybody? Nevermind the horses, and the fires, and - "

"Peace, Legolas!" laughed Ninquivingē. "Not everyone is a sudden storm! Some of us can plan ahead. We have lembas for a road twice as long as this, and packed travel-food besides."

"You arranged all of this? Why?"

"Because a quick young one with a great heart showed me a better way."

A column of nearly thirty people, even mounted, moved very much more slowly than two. Still, these were for the most part elves to whom Legolas had been introduced, and they were curious and friendly. He taught them travelling songs, and then, because Sindarin and Quenya were related but not identical, they began reworking them so the melodies and rhythms became beautiful in their tongue. He smiled.

They were welcomed at Tirion upon Túna, the great city of the Calacirya. Galadriel herself rode out to meet them, and brought him to meet her father, the king Arafínwë.

"Hail, Legolas of the Long Road," he said.

"Hail, Arafínwë King of the Ñoldor of Valinor," replied Legolas.

"My daughter tells me that you bring these dozens of riders here in an attempt to heal the kinslaying."

"I bring no one but myself," said Legolas. "Ninquivingē the shipwright organized this; I did not know of it until departing Alqualondë, these days past."

"You deny that you wish to heal the damage?"

"No. But I had thought to carry letters, not lead a walking city!"

"You depreciate yourself too much," said Galadriel. "You, who in Middle-Earth rebuilt the friendship of the Khazâd with the Sindar."

"Not alone!"

"And you are not alone here," said Arafínwë, apparently amused. "I approve of what you wish to do, and give my blessing in hopes that you do it."

"Oh," said Legolas. "My thanks, and I am sure the thanks of everyone who rides with me."

"And now you must be weary, or at least hungry for hot food. Come, we have prepared for you."

Legolas hadn't been particularly weary, but he was used to travel. The mariners of Alqualondë were used to different sorts of trouble; and they enjoyed the welcome of Tirion for two days before they set out again.

"I could have been halfway to Mandos by now," said Legolas, as Túna faded from view behind them.

"You could," agreed Ilindisē, a vintner of Alqualondë who rode a donkey because he kept falling off a horse. "But then what would all of us who stand ready to accept apologies and forgive do?"

"Ninquivingē could lead you."
"Ninquingë the shipwright? Who has ridden to Mandos once, with a half-Silvan elf for a guide? And complains half the morning every morning of sleeping in the leaves?"

"All right, all right," said Legolas. "I only hope he does not hate me for continually arriving with company."

"I don't hate you," said Mandos, eyes twinkling in his stern face. "Even if you bring every elf in Valinor to come visit."

"You say that in jest," said Legolas, darkly.

This time, Celebrimbor was in one of the wide, bowl-shaped rooms of the Halls of Mandos that served the dead for theatres. The living sat on benches, which would anywhere else have been grass, and Celebrimbor . . . apologized. Individually, to each person he had killed in the kinslaying, he apologized. After the first few minutes, Legolas had to leave.

He went to go find Gimli.

"Galadriel's father?"

"What, you thought she just sprang fully-formed from the light of the stars?"

"I didn't think of it at all, I suppose," said Gimli. "And he gave you a blessing?"

"Over this mad quest of mine."

"Why is it mad?"

"It is not like with the ring, where we set off to destroy the cursed thing. It is not like Aglarond and Ithilien, when we each had our goals and our means. It is not even like the flight here by the searoad, where at least I knew where we were going."

"It is . . . I met him because Narvi asked. Then I helped him because he needed help. Ninquingë followed me here to see you and met him by accident. Now she's gone and organized half of Alqualondë to come as well, and meet the ner who killed them before the sun ever rose over Arda. They're all sitting in a room together and crying out three ages of tears. Later, someone is going to thank me, as if I planned it this way all along!"

"But you did plan to do something," said Gimli.

"Yes?"

"What is it that you say? About refusing the gifts you need?"

Legolas was suddenly silent.

"Anyway, elf, you are never so happy as when you have a good task. I imagine this one will take some time."

"Gimli . . ."

"And now let me tell you what I have been learning. Did you ever hear of such a thing as elves living in caves? Because apparently that is what they did, in the First Age! Aye, and proper ones, hewn out by my kin!"

"Tell me about Nargothrond, then, beloved."
Celebrimbor was still talking, hours later. Ninquivingë was standing in the main entrance hall, though, with six others. "Has he not finished?"

"Oh, no," said Lúnasalmë. "That was quick, really, once we saw what he was doing to himself. It's awful. I should have - we all should have done this sooner."

"Better late than not at all," said Legolas. "But if he is done - "

"He wants to know what he can do in recompense. As if there is anything he can do, in these halls or out of them. Not all of us want to learn to use a blade, even for self-defense. I think we're mostly going to have to get him to stop by asking that he make us things, or build in Alqualondë, or teach."

"He made the West Gate of Khazâd-dûm," said Legolas. "And three elven rings. They saved enough lives, including mine, although it would be foolish to kill for any of them. Maybe you could convince him of that."

"... a life for a life. Not mine, but we are all Children of Ilúvatar."

"I am glad to hear you say it," said Legolas, because he was: glad that there lived in Valinor elves who thought first my brother and second, Man.

She went off to return to the gathering.

Legolas waited. Some of the elves joined him. He waited some more. After a while, Lúnasalmë reemerged with her lyre, sat down, and began picking away at the strings.

"It is a long time since music was last heard in these halls," said Mandos.

Lúnasalmë dropped it with a clatter.

"Great judge," said Legolas. "You did that on purpose."

"And never from one so talented," added Mandos. "Please, play something."

"What should I play, my lord?"

"Something happy. I am tired of funeral dirges."

Lúnasalmë taught Mandos one of the new travelling tunes; it was a cheerful, bouncy melody with simple lyrics, which after the first few lines could not be dislodged from the mind with all the pickaxes of every dwarf in Mandos. Mandos joined it at the second chorus; and it was odd, to see the stern judge of the dead singing with a smile on his face, but a right kind of odd. Then Lúnasalmë played a second tune, and a third, and they were singing still when the last of the twenty-seven joined them in the hall.

After that song, but before the elves began to stand and prepare to leave, Mandos spoke with his deep, booming voice. "It has been a glad day, in Mandos. It has been a glad year, that so many are willing to come so far for such a cause. Therefore are you who come blessed; stay, overnight, and then be blessed as you go on your way."

The elves seemed to expect him to respond, so he did. "We thank you, for your blessing and for your kind consideration of those who have moved beyond us and have yet to return. And, by your leave, we will take your kind hospitality."
The trip back to Alqualondë was no shorter than the trip there. Yet the miles seemed to rush past, and the songs of the Falmari were joyful in the sunlight. Even the lifeless forms of Laurelin and Telperion were not enough to silence the song as the rode past, although they did stop for a day in Valmar. The welcome in Tirion was very nearly overwhelming, and this time Legolas was more than grateful for the respite. By comparison, the week to Alqualondë was short.

"I can't help but think we should be able to sail most of the way in a day, though," confided Legolas to Ninquivingë.

"So a trip of a ten days is even shorter?"

"So I might count Tirion as the place to prepare for the road to Mandos, and yet live in Alqualondë with my friends. And also . . . if the friendship between Tirion and Alqualondë had been greater . . ."

"Don't get lost in might-have-beens," advised Ninquivingë. "You have enough to do in the present."

These words turned out to be prophetic, since the morning after their return, Legolas and Ninquivingë and all twenty-six who'd ridden with them to Mandos were invited to dine with Olwë. They went to the great tower, and Legolas was dismayed to find himself seated at the left hand of the king; but he was a king's son himself, so allowed none of it to show.

Olwë waited until the first course was served, and Legolas was eating, before he said, "Thank you, Legolas of Long Road."

Legolas had to swallow before choking, and then said, "I didn't do anything worthy of thanks."

"You go among my people to heal ancient hurts - all the way to Mandos! - and it is not worthy? Look: I have not seen my people so unburdened in ages. Is this nothing?"

"Not nothing; not unworthy," said Legolas. "But nothing requiring thanks. Should the Children of Êlûvatar not aid each other?"

"And will you?"

"What?"

"This task was not set upon you; all that you have done, you have done of your own accord."

"Well," said Legolas. "Ninquivingë did most of the work."

"Ninquivingë the shipwright, who was once accounted the finest of Alqualondë, who once had her pick of hopeful apprentices, and has not taken a new student since the Sun rose over Arda."

Legolas stilled; he hadn't known that. " - I'm not even very good at it."

"I think you are good at something more important than building ships," said Olwë. "So I must ask again: will you aid my people?"

"Forgive me," said Legolas. "I am constantly told I am thick, and by my beloved, so it must be true. I do not take your meaning. What is it that you think I can do for the Falmari?"

"Shepherd them to and from Mandos," he nodded to the tables, "as you did with these twenty-seven."

Legolas blinked. "I am also not very good at that." Valar, once, with mariners, and with someone
else doing all of the planning - and that was enough to know how this wouldn't work. He'd have to
go on foot, with caravans, and build stations along the way . . .

"Ah. Well. Perhaps you would listen to the song that Lúnasalmë composed of your journey?"

"Of course," said Legolas, still distracted. How did the Rohirrim do it?

Lúnasalmë began to sing, and all thoughts were driven from his head. It wasn't that it was bad,
because she was quite a fantastic musician. Nor even that she was untrue, because everything in the
song had actually happened (and he'd like to find out who she'd been talking to, to learn so much of
his journeys about Middle-Earth with Gimli). It was that she made him out to be some kind of hero,
like Olwë pressing on after losing Elwë, like Fëanor making the Silmarils in the Years of the Trees,
and he was just - Legolas, of no place in particular, and not even very old at that.

A cheer went up when she finished. Olwë stood, and the hall quieted. "As always, the music of
Lúnasalmë brings joy to our hearts; but this time, perhaps not quite as much joy as has been brought
by the journey itself?" This gained a smattering of applause. "I can see now, as I have not seen in
ages, what must be done to heal our people. I would begin sending all who wish to go as pilgrims to
Mandos." The hall was silent. "And, as we Falmari are peoples of the sea, I say we need seasoned
travellers of earthen roads to lead us. Is there one here who might serve?"

The cry was deafening. "Legolas!"

"Although we have no right to ask this of you, would you take upon yourself this burden?"

Legolas stood up. "You seem to have some misconception. I am just an elf, and I have no wish to
lead anybody. I will return to Mandos always, for my beloved is there, and is Khazâd, and can never
leave until the Second Music. But as for companions on the road," he added, into the breathless
silence, "even those used to sea-roads, who must learn everything from the beginning? I always
welcome new friends."

The applause shook the tower so much that people were still finding pearls in the streets weeks later.
Also, elf names are meanings, not sounds. In Quenya, "Lady Crowned by Radiant Glory" is Alatariel, so in Valinor, that's what people call her. I've decided to stick with Galadriel for reasons of translation convention. Just know that it's probable Legolas is actually being called Laicalasso by most of these people, because that's how "green leaf" would be pronounced as a masculine name in Quenya.

As usual, please point out any spelling or grammar issues you find.
In Which There is an Interlude With Some Kings

Chapter Notes

Lennon is pronounced exactly like you'd expect, but does not refer either to communists or Beatles.

Ingwe is pronounced Ing-we, not Ing-way. Ingye, likewise, is Ing-yee. They rhyme.

Ingwion is pronounced Ing-we-on, and literally means 'son of Ingw(e)'. I'm sure he has a better after-name, given how much of a nerd he is, but for the sake of clarity I went with what he was called the only time he appeared in the Silmarillion.

Tilion is the name of the Maia (angelic spirit) who is sailing the boat that contains the moon. He's perpetually chasing the Maia on the sun-boat, and often not paying as much attention to the tiller as he should, so Arda has months. Hey, if you're making up mythologies, it's as good an explanation as a wolf chasing the moon!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He sat down to talk to Olwë about what would actually be required, two days later, when everyone's hangovers had finally worn off. It was meant to be a brunch, but Olwë was good at logistics - of course he had to be, to pack the Falmari off onto Tol Eressëa and travel an unknown distance across the sea and have everyone arrive on the other side, safe and sound. He understood Legolas' issues straight away, and only protested when Legolas suggested building a port near Tirion.

"It's sand beaches," he said. "You can't build a decent harbor on sand."

"You can build pontoon harbors," said Legolas.

"What?"

It took him a while to explain the concept. He'd grown up near Dale and, while it existed, Esgaroth had been a pontoon city, but apparently the ingenuity of Men hadn't crossed the Belegaer.

"Floating harbors? That kind of defeats the meaning of the word harbor, doesn't it?"

"And allows you to build safe haven for boats on any coast. Out of old wine casks."

"Very well; we will try pontoons. And?"

Legolas grinned wryly. "Food."

"That is not such a problem; surely the lembas -"

"Do you want to eat lembas, and nothing but lembas, each day for weeks of the journey?"

"... true."

"So the best thing to do is to move more slowly, but bring more supplies."

"Pack animals?"
"Land ships."

"What."

"They are really wagons covered over in canvas awnings, and pulled by draft beasts. But from a distance, amid fields of green, all you see is the awning, so," he shrugged, "land ships. The Men of Rohan live out of them."

"Like a house?" asked Olwē, incredulous.

"No. They just keep their clothing and utensils and food stores and such in them. They live under the open sky, on foot, and in a very few cities."

"Oh."

"My point is that it might be a longer trip to walk, but providing for a hundred people and a dozen donkeys is still easier than providing for a hundred people and a hundred horses. Especially," he added, "for those who have never ridden."

"Or only ridden the sea-roads, yes," said Olwē. "But that will bring another problem. Land ships, correct me if I am wrong, need either untrammelled grass or good roads."

"You are not wrong," replied Legolas. "The high road to the Trees is well enough. The road to Mandos . . . "

"Is the business of Ingwē."

"Ai! Next you'll take me off to Taniquentil to break bread with the high king of all elves!"

"It's funny," said Olwē, "because you say that in jest."

They went to Taniquetil.

Well, no. Legolas finished his boat, and he and some Teleri he knew went sailing in it, and got blown off course by a sudden squall. They ended up spending six days on Tol Eressēa with a couple of the elves who still lived there, and Legolas learned how dive for oysters. Then they limped back to Alqualendë to find that they were thought lost at sea, and Ninquivingē yelled at him for not sending a message.

And set his boat on fire.

He stared at it, then looked up to her.

"It was matchsticks anyway."

She was right, of course. Still. "We could have taken it to pieces first. And used it in the kitchen."

A few months later Olwē sent word that the first part of the pontoon harbor had been built, and they could go the next day. He'd been right, in that it was only a day and a half with the wind. They arrived at Tirion-upon-Tūna in the evening, where Arafínwē and Ėarwen met Olwē. Galadriel, Celeborn, Celebrían, and Elrond greeted him.

"I just don't get it," complained Legolas to his friends. "Did you hear what they are calling me now? 'Legolas of the Long Road!' I just wanted to go see Gimli!"
"It was given to you by Mandos," said Celeborn, and it was so unusual to hear him speak unprompted that Legolas quieted and thought about it.

"He pronounced a doom on me!"

"Well - "

"Without telling me!"

There was a pause. Then Galadriel said, "Most people would be more concerned about the doom."

"It's a good doom," said Legolas, "for one such as me. You know I was called Legolas Lennon in Ithilien. But why wouldn't he tell me?"

"Most of us here remember the Doom of Mandos, the Dispossession of Fëanor," explained Galadriel. "Happier dooms are few and far between."

"I have to ask him," said Legolas.

Then they went on to Taniquetil. The Vanyar there seemed much impressed to see Olwë and his retinue, and he said as much.

"Me? Legolas, the Vanyar do not flood the streets to see a king."

This was true, as it turned out when one of the Vanyar sidled up to Olwë's horse, caught the bridle, and said, "I was wondering when you were going to come, you old sea-horse."

"Yes, yes, nice to see you too. Legolas of the Long Road, I make you known to Ingwë Ingweron. Ingwë, Legolas."

Legolas nearly fell off his horse in shock. It was true that high king Ingwë was fair and radiant, but most of the Vanyar were fair and radiant. Past that, he was short, and there were callouses on his hands.

"Nice to meet you," said Ingwë, politely ignoring his flailing.

"An honor, lord," said Legolas, and slid down.

"Come," said Ingwë. "Walk with me."

The Vanyar completely ignored them, the high king and the sea-king and Legolas walking through the holy city of Taniquetil. Or, not ignoring, because every few minutes one of them would come up to him and say a few words and receive a few words and then leave again. But they didn't treat a king leading a horse around as extraordinary.

"What is it that you need?" asked Ingwë.

"Who says I need anything?" replied Legolas.

"Not you. Olwë never comes to visit us here unless he needs something. Too mesmerised by the seagulls, or something."

"I'm hurt," said Olwë, who clearly wasn't. "It's about Legolas' pilgrims."

"My pil - "
"The pilgrims who will accompany you when you visit Mandos, then," said Olwë. "The pilgrims who, although completely unused to travel by earthen roads, you're going to shepherd across Valinor. The pilgrims, unless I am very wrong about you, that you are going to spend days shouting at and nights fretting over. You might as well accept it, youngling: your pilgrims."

Legolas huffed, but said nothing. Olwë continued. "Pilgrims need certain things. Food they can take along, and wood they can forage along the way, but they will need good roads. And for Mandos, there is very nearly no road at all."

"Ah," said Ingwë. "You need me to extend the high road. All right."

"Just like that?" asked Legolas.

"It's a good road to build in any case," said Ingwë, "but for the purpose you mean to enact, it becomes essential for all of us here in Valinor."

They turned a corner, and there was a feast laid out on trestle tables on a broad lawn. Ingwë let the horses go, and they walked over to begin munching on the clover. "We'll start working on the details tomorrow," said Olwë. "Today, I want to talk to my friends."

Olwë and Ingwë began talking about 'the details' at breakfast the next morning. After about twenty minutes, Legolas politely excused himself, and spent the rest of the morning wandering about the city and ignoring the stares of the Vanyar. He was just beginning to consider if he should look for lunch when an elf-maid walked up to him and said, "Are you Legolas, of the Long Road?"

"People seem to be calling me that lately," said Legolas.

"Oh, good. We're having a concert lunch up the hill a little, and thought you might like to join us."

"A concert lunch?"

"We take turns sharing food and singing songs."

"Ah. I can't say I've gained any proficiency at the songs of Alqualondë - "

"Alqualondë! You know songs of Men, from Middle-Earth!"

"Well," said Legolas, but went along, and turned out to enjoy himself immensely. The songs of the Vanyar were completely new to him, and had an unusual melodic quality. They, in turn, loved the clear, sweet songs of Gondor, even though he had to sing them once in Westron and then recite a translation in Quenya. Then he switched over to horse-chants from Rohan, and soon the entire circle of them were clapping and repeating the chorus properly, at the top of their lungs. And then it was nearing sunset.

"I should go back; my lords Olwë and Ingwë will be missing me," he said.

"Are you sure? In a little while the true musicians will arrive, and then there will be dancing."

"Perhaps tomorrow," said Legolas. "But I wouldn't want to make the high king worry on my behalf."

In fact, he looked up from cutting onions when Legolas entered. He and his wife, Ingyë, had a house together, halfway up one of the foothills of Taniquetil and no larger or more impressive than any of
the other houses in the whole city. "Welcome back," he said. "Come, help hull these peas. Did you enjoy yourself?"

"Yes," said Legolas. "You have a beautiful city, like a work of art."

"You are welcome whenever your road comes through here," said Ingwë.

"My thanks. And your day?"

"Long," said Ingwë. "Building a road across half of Valinor might be straightforward, but it's no small task. My people will be happy to provide food and labor, but we'll need the mines of Formenos and skilled stone-shapers from Tirion and a road just to get the supplies to the high road - "

"And you will stop worrying now," said Ingwë. "It is time for friendship, and food, and singing."

"Apologies," said Legolas.

"No; it is necessary. Besides, what would you know of road-building?"

"Not nearly as much as any of the other Walkers, save perhaps Olórin," said Legolas. "He was never much interested in roads."

"What?"

"Olórin?"

"The other Walkers. Your - Khazâd knows the building of roads?"

"... there was a road to Hornburg when he came, but I remember he spent years digging it up and planting it again. It never looked much different to me."

"But it never sank in the mud in spring again, did it? Grading. How many Khazâd did he have?"

"I don't know," replied Legolas, confused. "I was more concerned with Ithilien. Khuzdul cities are villages compared to the cities of Men; I think there were a few thousand in Aglarond when we left, but they are mostly miners and smiths and craftsmen."

Ingwë paused. "Perhaps - "

"No," said Ingwë.

" - I should make pilgrimage myself," finished Ingwë.

"No."

Legolas went to explore the city again the next morning, and was accosted by someone who turned out to be Ingwion. Like his father, he didn't present much of an air of nobility. "I thought you might like to see the library," he said. "It is one of the wonders of Valinor."

It was. There were books from all over Arda: Valinor, yes, but also Doriath and Gondolin and the first Minas Tirith; Númenor; all throughout Eriador and Gondor and even a few rare books from Rohan. And, it turned out -

"Mordor? There were books written in Mordor?"
"Yes? Why wouldn't there be?"

"Because they're orcs! What would they have to write about?"

"The breeding of plants, and the forging of steel. Did you know they developed methods to make a hundred and fifty thousand tons of steel at once?"

"No," said Legolas, and tried not to think of Orthanc, burnt and bare. A hundred and fifty thousand. . .

Ingwion, perhaps sensing his distress, led him on into the Hall of Records. "The genealogy of every elf who reached Valinor by the Great Journey, and as many others as we could reconstruct from later arrivals, or the Tapestries of Vairë."

"Oh."

"I can probably find your ancestors, if you want."

"It's all right," said Legolas.

"It's no trouble - "

"No!" The word rang. "I am sorry, my friend. But I am Legolas of the Long Road. Who my ancestors were doesn't matter so much. We can't all have such impressive lineages as Ingwion of Taniquetil."

"... let me show you the hall of art."

Legolas was a bit worried about that, but it turned out to be a hall of secret skills. He himself only knew a little: calling light, listening to olvar and kelvar, and an unusually strong kinship with horses. Ingwion showed him the beginnings of water-calling, and didn't seem to mind being utterly soaked at his repeated failures.

"Thank you," said Legolas, as Ingwion walked him back. "I enjoyed that."

"Really? I thought you - "

"I killed forty orcs at Helm's Deep," said Legolas quietly. "I don't know how many I killed at Pelennor. That they could think, I did not doubt. That they could write - that they could write about the growing of green things, know it, and still lay Orthanc to waste - " Legolas took a deep breath. "I am sorry to have snapped at you. Will you accept my apology?"

"No; for there is nothing to forgive," assured Ingwion. "Ah - are you dancing tonight?"

"Ai! I had forgotten. And now I am all wet."

Ingwion smiled, and stepped close, and said a few words that called all the water from both their clothes into a ball. He threw it harmlessly at a nearby tree, and said, "I have ruined your excuse."

"So you have. I suppose you had better lead me to the green, then."

Later that evening, after he'd danced with Ingwion and Minyellon and Altarmë and two dozen others, and after he'd perhaps had more than his fair share of the excellent Vanyarin wine, he found himself sitting on a grassy knoll and looking up at the waning moon.
"He's wandering tonight," said someone off to the left. "Tilion."

"And a good thing he does," said Legolas. "Because then some nights the moon is bright enough to mark the wilder paths, and some nights it is completely hidden, and we can remember the glory of a sky with stars, as at Cuiviénen."

"I hadn't thought of it that way," admitted the stranger. "You are Legolas. I saw you dancing."

"I think everyone saw me tripping over my own feet," said Legolas.

"Don't worry; none of us know Shire dances, so for all we know, it was deliberate."

"You know."

"I won't tell."

Legolas smiled, and lay back.

"I wanted to ask you a question."

Legolas waved a hand; ask.

"Mandos himself gave you your after-name. You don't seem to treasure it much."

"If you wish to be technical, Legolas is already my after-name. I was called Lennon in Ithilen for an after-after-name. When I arrived on Tol Eressëa with my beloved, Aulë gave me another to be my deep name. So I had two after-names already, plus one gifted by a Vala. Some people treasure names and titles, but I just seem to collect them. It matters little, anyway. I am still Legolas, no matter what people happen to be calling me at the time."

"Then who is Legolas?"

"A child of Ilúvatar. Perhaps more fond of travel than most, or maybe just more curious. I gave my heart to my dwarf, and received one ten times greater in return. When friends seek aid, I hope I stand ready to give it."

"You make friends with everyone you meet."

Legolas thought of Gríma, of Denethor, of all the dwarrow who'd ever seen him with Gimli and turned their eyes in disgust. "Not everyone."

They were quiet, for a little after that. Legolas thought about Gimli, how almost before meeting him he'd judged naug, and only later learned that there was nothing stunted about him. The gentle strains of music came up from the green, and the stars splashed gloriously across the sky. The cold breeze coming off the mountain tickled his hair. "I think," he said, "that it's time for me to go back to Mandos."

Chapter End Notes

My new computer has arrived! \o/ It does not have the ability to make tap zones on the touch pad, which annoys me. I like being able to tap back/forward in the browser. It is also missing page up/page down buttons. I am playing Dwarf Fortress to get myself
used to the new keyboard and check the CPU. So far, doing pretty good.

The mountains near where I live are on fire! 😢 I am in California, so this is not perhaps an unreasonable thing, but it is still alarming. I am hoping the weather stays cool and wet and unwindy, which has been helping the fire-fighting efforts. The forecast, however, says it is going to get windier tomorrow and push the fire towards houses. I'm packed and ready to evacuate if necessary, but I really hope it isn't. Keep your fingers crossed!

As usual, please inform me of any spelling or grammatical errors.
He told the kings in the morning. Olwe looked surprised; Ingwe said, "Could you wait a few hours? I'd like to write a letter to your Khazâd who knows how to build roads."

Legolas shrugged; a few hours wouldn't make much of a difference. But, "Can word be sent along to Tirion and Alqualondë? I can meet up with a group of pilgrims at Túna, if Ninquivingë's got them prepared to go."

"I thought you wanted caravans," said Olwe.

"I do want caravans," said Legolas. "But it will be years before the road is builded, and I'm not going to stop going to Mandos in the meantime."

"And what makes you think Ninquivingë has been organizing anything?" asked Olwe.

"Hasn't she?" asked Legolas innocently.

"I think he has you figured out," said Ingwe to Olwe.

So he rode to Tirion. On his own, he was able to make the trip in a little over a ten days; and, as promised, there was another group of pilgrims waiting when he arrived. Eleven, and with himself and Ninquivingë, thirteen.

Only it turned out, she wasn't coming.

"What? Why not?"

"I don't need to go see a ner flay himself open like that; the first time was bad enough. Besides, you ought to learn how to do this on your own, and we'll definitely be sending smaller groups now. Twenty-six! What was I thinking?"

"I have no idea," said Legolas, looking at his charges. Like most elves born in lands populated by Men, he'd learned to count ten-and-ten. The Amanyar, however, counted twelve-and-twelve, so this would have been to Ninquivingë a nice, round number. "Maybe you can introduce me?"

There were introductions, and a rudimentary lesson in horse-kinship for those who didn't know it already, and they set out.

It was apparent almost immediately that Ninquivingë had put some thought into this group. They were mariners through and though, true, but they each had another skill: freshwater fishing, snare-hunting, fire-calling, and so on. And they learned quickly, and didn't complain; by the fifth day out, they could make and break camp in under an hour.

The journey went swiftly, all the way to Valmar. Legolas still hadn't spent much time in the ancient capital; he was always passing through. Lalalia demanded that they spend at least a few days there, though. It wasn't unpleasant in any case, for the like the Vanyar of Taniquetil, those of Valmar spent
their days in song and their nights in dance.

They moved on after a week, solemnly past the black hill Ezellohar, and less heavily on toward Mandos. At least, Legolas relaxed. The Falmari were less pleased with the heavily forested countryside, until they became accustomed to the song of a wood beneath the stars.

It was raining the day the twelve of them reached their destination, so they were all glad to see the grey halls. They were welcomed with warm food and hot baths, and Mandos came to talk a little with each of them as they ate.

"Do you personally greet every one of your guests?" asked Legolas, when it was his turn.

"I have so few."

Legolas chewed his bread, and swallowed, and then said, "Am I to bring every elf in Valinor to visit, then?"

"If you like," said Mandos.

"You laid one doom on me without telling me."

"... yes, and no. I pronounced what already is."

Legolas inclined his head. "Why?"

"I was asked. And, I admit, since I cannot make your road shorter, I thought I might make it - less arduous."

He thought of the welcome he'd had at Alqualondë, Tirion, Taniquetil. Of Ingwë, and the letter he carried. Of the new Lutulondë-on-the-Waves, as Olwë had already named it. Then he nodded. "It was a thoughtful gift," he said. "Thank you."

"You are welcome. I... if you would, please, call me Námo."

He stilled, then said, "If you ask it, then it cannot be presumption; and any who say it is, I will direct to you."

"So shall it be," said Námo, mirth all about him.

He went to see Gimli.

"I thought I'd be seeing you again soon," said his dwarf.

"Been missing me?"

"Aye."

"Well. I am here."

"Not that," said Gimli. "I can't sit between your legs while you braid my hair anymore."

Legolas felt the tips of his ears blushing. "Gimli, I -"

"I know, Dendritic-malachite." And then, slightly less melancholy, "No friends this time?"

"They are forgiving. It is more difficult now. Everyone knows faces, and hardly any know names.
Matching the two . . .

"You could ask," said Gimli. "The Weaver-woman."

"What?" asked Legolas, confused.

"We see her around sometimes, putting up tapestries. Mostly we in the Halls of Aulë carve our own history into the rock, but she'll put tapestries of the truth over it if someone dares to lie. She's - she's not an elf, is she? She's like Mahal?"

"Oh. Yes. We call her Vairë. All of history is in her tapestries."

"That's my point. She'll know the names to go with your faces."

"She will," said Legolas, and, "Forgive me, Gimli. I have to -"

"Come back when you're done," said Gimli, gently.

Legolas went looking for his pilgrims first, and explained it to them. "Of course, if we can find the correct tapestries, it's almost as good, but -" There was probably a kind of logic to the way Vairë decided on tapestry placement. Probably. " - they can't speak."

They twelve of them split up. The Halls of Mandos were massive, and an army of twelve thousand shouldn't have been able to search them. But the inside wasn't quite real, in the same way the straight road from Arda to Aman wasn't quite real; distances were compressed, or simply not there. The halls rearranged themselves to get visitors where they wanted to go. He had no doubt one of them would be able to find Vairë.

Legolas turned a corner, and was suddenly in a familiar corridor. Oh, well. It couldn't hurt to stop in on a friend, especially if the Halls had brought him here.

The ink stains and parchment were gone, at least, but Celebrimbor looked almost worse than when they had first met. "Are you alright?"

"No," said the prone figure on the bed.

"Tell me?"

Celebrimbor sat up. "I. I had hoped that once I'd apologized to everyone, I might be allowed to go. And yet," he shrugged, "here I am."

"Hold," said Legolas. "Those twenty-six were -"

"You didn't know? Yes, all those I murdered at the Kinslaying. My friend, why does it matter? I am still unforgiven, though they swear - swear! - by Mandos himself that they do."

"And yourself?"

"What?"

"The wisest Man I ever knew," said Legolas, sitting gently on the bed, "told me that forgiveness is threefold. You must get it from those who have been wronged, which you have. You must get it from Ilúvatar, and this I believe you also have. And you must get it from yourself."

"Oh," said Celebrimbor, in a very small voice indeed.
"Should I go?" asked Legolas.

"No, stay. Please. I - your words are truth, but in my heart I don't know if I can."

Legolas nodded. "My mother, Cúegnass, taught me to hunt," he said. "Once, when I was a boy of perhaps twenty, I shot down a doe with a following fawn. She went down and caught up the fawn and brought it home with us. My punishment was thus: each day, to milk our goats, and then feed the fawn on my fingers until it would take grass. Then I was to teach it the secret paths through the forest, and the kelvar of deer, until it could live an equal among its kin. Finally, I was to set him free in the herd, with no watch or distinguishing mark, that I'd know that someday someone might hunt my friend, and so learn what I took. I was careful of taking only lawful prey, after that."

"Ah?"

Legolas sighed. "You made a mistake. You have done what you can to fix it. Are you going to do it again?"

"No! Never! Not in Doriath, not at Sirion, never!"

"Then?"

"It is . . . habit, I suppose. To know myself unworthy."

"Habit can be changed."

Celebrimbor didn't speak again immediately, and when he did, he said, "I wish there were something I could do for you. For all your help."

"I don't need payment," said Legolas, and then - "If you happen to know where Vairë is, I was looking for her."

"She's in the welcoming hall," said Celebrimbor.

"Ai! One of the others must have found her, and I am late!"

"Go, then. And be well."

"Fare you well also, Celebrimbor!" he called back, on his way out the door.

Vairë was indeed in the entrance hall, along with most of the other pilgrims. She was sitting calmly and tying little knots in threads, so the whole thing spiralled out. "Ah. Elvellon. Will you tell me why it is that I am here?"

"You didn't tell her?" asked Legolas.

"It is meet?" asked Yavaldë. "To ask anything of the Valar?"

"It is less polite than that to keep her waiting," said Legolas. "Vairë, you know who we are and why we come. Yet, for the most part, those here now and the people I will guide know only the faces of they who slew them, and sometimes less than that. You know; will you tell?"

"For no other cause would I open my lips and lay bare secret histories," said Vairë. "But for this? It was dark night, the Kinslaying of Alqualondë, of dark deeds, and yet we will reveal and repeal them."

Legolas smiled, and motioned to Yavaldë to come forward. She did, and Vairë whispered something
in her ear. She bowed, and turned again to the Halls of Mandos.

So it went, each of them but him stepping forward and, in turn, receiving what was presumably a name. Then they were all away, and it was him and Vairë. He said, "Although it isn't my place, I still thank you. Ah . . ."

"Yes," she said, smiling. "I have no secret name for you, that you don't already know. Go to your dwarf."

They conversed, as usual, for hours. Gimli did not have the sort of news as he did, and spoke mostly of the crafts he now had leisure to learn. He seemed to be concentrating on, of all things, cooking.

"Cooking?"

"What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing," said Legolas. "I just have a hard time imagining you with a kitchen knife." Also, he didn't say, Gimli was dead. What need had he of food, and where was he getting food to cook, and how?

"It's not so different from axe-work," said Gimli. "Anyone knows how to spit a hare, Legolas, but the making of cheese is an art unto itself."

"I can't say I ever tried," remarked Legolas.

Gimli was not at all surprised that he'd managed to make himself responsible for regular trips right through Aman. He was astonished that the Falmari didn't know how to make pontoons. He stared at Legolas for a time after Legolas talked about how his ship had fared, and it took him far too long to figure out why.

"It's fine, my beloved," he said in the low, comforting Khuzdul tones. "I have done nothing wrong; Námo would not have held me here."

"Don't do it again," said Gimli.

"I can't. Ninquivingë burned it."

"I knew I liked her."

Then Legolas got the part about actually going to Taniquetil, and the nature of the high king of all elves. "Which reminds me. I have a letter for you."

Gimli read the tengwar quickly, and then said, "He can't be serious."

"He chops his own onions," said Legolas, carefully. "He grows his own onions, has callouses from carrying buckets of water around, and he wrote the book on water-calling. I think he is quite serious."

"I'm a dwarf."

"He doesn't hold it against you."

"I'm dead."

"That's why he sent a letter."
Gimli glared at him. "How important is this road?"

"He said it is essential."

"Legolas."

". . . it will make it easier. To come to you."

"Oh. Yes. There is that."

"Will you do it?"

"Let me get some paper."

While Gimli was scribbling out what looked to be a novel, Narvi appeared. He looked like he'd been running quite fast, and was still a little out of breath when he reached the curtained-off alcove. "There you are. You are as slippery as a cave-fish, and wriggled away on your last visit."

"I apologize," said Legolas, and would have said more, but was preempted.

"Hey. You helped with the Western Road, no?" asked Gimli. "Take a look at this."

Narvi looked at his scribbled plans and said, "Why are you planning a road?"

Gimli shoved Ingwē's letter over to him, and kept scribbling. Narvi read the letter, and then read it again, and then said, "What."

"I know. But it is a good project."

"How does he expect you to be chief architect from the wrong side of the continent?" asked Narvi.

"I have no idea, don't ask me," said Gimli.

Narvi picked up one of the other sheets. Then, a moment later, he picked up a pen and began marking it.

"What are you doing?" cried Gimli.

"Here," Narvi tapped at his marks. "This is better."

"It isn't."

"Well, no, not for us it wouldn't be. But these are elves." He said elves the same way Ninquivingē said 'apprentices.'

"Ah, true," said Gimli. "Here, look at these - "

Legolas watched in fascination as they switched over to Khuzdul, and then began talking so quickly he couldn't follow it. The general gist seemed to be how to get Khuzdul techniques down on paper, in such a way that elves could understand. For a time there was an argument about trees and hills, and then they settled it out and went right back to their quick talk.

"Ah - Master Narvi?" said Legolas gently. "You came to say something?"

"Yes. About Celebrimbor."

"Oh. I think he can leave these Halls as soon as he believes he can. If that makes sense."
Narvi sighed. "Then I will be waiting forever. Stubborn idiot. Still. You did far more that one could reasonably hope, and for that - "

Legolas held up a hand. "Don't thank me, and don't mourn. I think he will yet surprise you."

"As you say," said Narvi, who clearly didn't quite believe this.

"Ah, have hope," said Gimli. "The dark ones are gone from the world. It can only be better days ahead. Legolas - no more boating."

"Even with an actual mariner?"

"Mm. If Ninquivingë wants to take you on the sea, or some other skilled person. But you don't do it alone. I will not lose you again.

"No, you won't," agreed Legolas. "Gi melin."

"Men lananubukhs menu."

The other eleven were waiting in the main hall. He took one look before saying, "What happened?"

What happened was that not all of the Ñoldor were ready to admit that they'd been wrong. Melimë had gone to talk to Úrurril, and he'd shouted about how it was her own fault for not just giving them the boats, and there had been a huge argument before Melimë had thrown it in his face that she was free to leave. And demonstrated it by walking out on him.

"I don't see it is your fault that he still has his head in a cave," said Legolas. "Let's stay the night. It's been a busy day. I will go talk to him in the morning."

"Why?" asked Melimë. "What can you do?"

"I don't know," said Legolas. "That's why I have to go talk."

It was just as good anyway, since the day dawned grey and drizzly. He went to go find Úrurril's suite, which turned out not to be so hard. Then he knocked on the door.

"Go away."

"Why?" asked Legolas.

There was a thump, and then the door opened. "You're not - I mean, who are you?"

"Legolas, lately of the Long Road. I am a friend of Melimë."

The eye hardened. "I don't want to talk to you."

"I know you don't, and I can't force you to. But I will say this, and this only: when Maedhros and Maglor, at the end, finally did manage to win back the two Silmarils - the Silmarils would not have them. Theirs hands were burnt where they grasped the gems, and they brought such pain that Maedhros threw himself into a volcano to escape it. Maglor went mad. Do you think three kinslayings were worth that reward?"

"... go away."

"I go, I go!" said Legolas, and went.
"Nothing?" asked Lalalia when he returned.

"Well, I don't think he knew about what happened to the Silmarils, and he does now, so not nothing. Not what we were hoping for, though."

"What, then?" asked Melimë.

"We'll go back to Alqualondë, and wait fifty years to try again."

"It has been seven thousand," said Melimë.

"True; and in that time how many kinslayers walked free?"

"You really think they can?" asked Néncalar.

"I know I saw Celebrimbor flay himself open for the kin he wronged. I know that Námo has given this endeavor his blessing. Yes, I think in fifty years enough of those who were kinslayers will walk out that he may see merit in repentance."

"I hope so," said Melimë.

They set out the next morning, with all the warmth Námo could send. It was, at least, no longer raining. They were all still upset, but such a thing had to have happened, sooner or later. Why would there have been a second kinslaying at Doriath, and a third at Sirion, if some of those who followed Fëanor and his sons didn't believe they were in the right? Still, Melimë, who was gentle and sweet, shouldn't have had to bear it.

"Were the Silmarils really that wonderful?" Legolas asked.

"Not - they were not just physical objects, like Mandos is not really a place. I think they were actually made of quartz. But the light of the Trees was in them, and to see them was to look upon the great wisdom of the Valar. Stars, Legolas. We forget how young you are."

"I am young," agreed Legolas. "Moriquendi am I. But it seems to me the true light of Valinor is in the Valar, and they are not lost."

"Well can you say that, Legolas of the Long Road, when you simply walk up the Valar and speak. We are not so bold."

"Why is it boldness to ask for what one needs?" The strange reticence of the Valinori to take advantage of the Valar, who were after all there to protect and guide them, greatly confused him. "To be sure, I would not pester Tulkas to teach me arms, or Nessa to teach me dancing. But for my beloved, I am bold enough to ask of Námo; and for my friends, of Vairë."

"And of Yavanna?"

"I never asked - well, no. When we walked in her pastures I asked after the fruits and flowers which I did not know. But she came unasked, and bade me walk with her."

"She came to you?" asked Rauminco. "Why?"

"I am not entirely sure. At least in part because I am doing something new." He shrugged. "Does it bother you?"

"Not bother, but . . . it is true that the Valar dwell here, but there are millions of elves. It's not common to meet even one of them. Here you are, having stepped off the boat from Arda not even a
century years ago, and having met more Valar than I in my entire life."

"Then I have been fortunate. But I count myself more fortunate still in having friends for the road. It would be very lonely, else."

"And we thank you for your care," said Néncalar. "Although I personally still prefer the sea-road."

The conversation turned after that to the merits of the sea over the land or land over sea, but Legolas was thoughtful. He hadn't much thought about how unusual he was, but of course they were right. Most Sindar who had crossed the ocean stayed in Alqualondë and did not even ventured so far as Tirion. But he would not stop now even if he could, so the only way on was forward.

Chapter End Notes

The fire is very nearly contained, except on the South side. Guess which side I am on?

I headcannon that hair-care is, for elves, a very close and familiar thing to do. It isn't sexual, but they still wouldn't do it to someone outside of immediate family or extremely close friends. Gimli found this very weird at first, and then got to like being able to putting complex dwarven love-braids in Legolas' hair. He doesn't have the patience for taming his own, so these days it's pretty messy. That is not why he misses having Legolas do it.

As usual, please let me know of any spelling or grammar issues you find.
Chapter Notes

I dedicate the terrible, terrible English/Sindarin pun in this chapter to arrogantemu. Terrible bilingual puns are their jam.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The trip back to Alqualondë took a little more than two months, mostly because of the rain, which continued to fall on and off past Valmar. Legolas didn't mind some rain, but this was a miserable heavy grey drizzle that leached the heat from their bones. On those days they hunkered down, turned the horses free in a nearby field, and settled in to wait. To pass the time, they told each other stories: Legolas the great tales of Beleriand in the First Age, and the pilgrims stories of the Great Journey and Valinor.

Alqualondë threw a party. Legolas wondered if this was going to be the usual reaction to them making it back, and if so, when could he start ignoring them? He filched a bottle of wine, and went outside to look at the stars. Ninquivingë found him on the roof a while later. "Didn't feel like celebrating?"

"Mm." He took a sip of the wine, and said, "Are they going to do this every time we get back?"

"Get back? You mean no one told you?" asked Ninquivingë.

"Told me what?"

"We're celebrating because a grey ship has arrived."

"Oh." That was a much better reason to smile. "How big?"

Ninquivingë shrugged. "Small. Two dozen."

Legolas blinked. "Did you celebrate my arrival?" He and Gimli had come in a tiny, two-person sloop. But if they were willing to celebrate for two dozen, why not just two?

"You were . . . odd. Lady Galadriel came to greet you, long before the watchers in the Tower could ever have seen you. We knew when you were coming, and also that you wouldn't leave the island for some years, so we did not celebrate then; and after, it is not meet to rejoice upon a death."

Legolas closed his eyes for a moment. "Thank you. I think I'll wait to greet them, though; there aren't such cities as Alqualondë in Middle-Earth, at least not of elves, and so many people must be overwhelming."

Ninquivingë tilted her head in assent. "Remember to drink water before sleeping."

Legolas rolled his eyes, but it was after all her way of showing concern.

In the morning, he went down to the House of Joyous Arrivals, and got a pleasant surprise: these were elves he knew, from Eryn Lasgalen: Laerorn, and Tirnel, and Merilinel who had once been his lover before they both were wed, and others. They kissed, and embraced, and finally they settled...
"Look at you!" said Rusgon. "Grown like a cedar! The West has been kind to you."

"The West is kind to everyone," said Legolas.

"We were worried, though. Coming to these undying lands with Gimli. What if they didn't let him in?"

"Well, they didn't exactly," said Legolas. "I stayed on Tol Eressëa until he died, and now I go to Mandos."

Tirnel said, "You go to Mandos?"

"There turned out to be a loophole." He shrugged. "I can still see him."

Merilinel said, "No, Legolas. You don't get to do that. Come on, tell."

Legolas laughed a little. "The living can visit the Halls of Mandos, and the Halls of Aulë lie within. Those dead can't meet each other, but we -" he gestured to all of them "- can visit both."

"And Mandos allows this?"

"Námo - is as kind as he may be. If he could let Gimli free to me, I think he would." Legolas shrugged. "But enough of me. How are you?"

"How is Thranduil forest-king, you mean," said Laerorn. "He's fine. Perhaps a bit more melancholy than he was, now that all his family has gone West. Or maybe not." He made a face. "Given how he always seems to mourn, even in such happy times as this."

Legolas smiled. "He thinks it makes him look dignified. I told him it just makes him constipated, but who ever listens to Legolas?"

"No one with any sense, certainly."

Legolas smiled, both at the joke and at the unintentional irony. "Truly, my friends, I would hear how you have fared."

"Well," and here Merilinel smiled shyly, and said, as thought it were not obvious, "I'm pregnant."

She and Rusgon had been trying for a child for two centuries and more, and mourned each miscarriage. "That's wonderful news!"

"Yes. We decided to come here. Ah, but - this city is so big. We were discussing moving to the island."

"It is pleasant," agreed Legolas. The sea was never too far away, and the island did have forests, old ones, enough that they could build flets and live happily. "I think your child might prefer the city, though. As least, there are children enough to have friends their own age."

"Oh," said Rusgon. "That's true, isn't it? Although there are no trees."

Legolas spread his hands apologetically. "We can plant some, but they won't be half grown before you child is adult. And of course, Telerys is far from the sea."

"Telerys?"
"Some elves from Hollin-that-was live there," explain Legolas. "And the Kementári walks there on occasion." He paused, considering, and then said, "I suppose you could ask her to grow some trees near Alqualondë."

"Would she do such a thing?" asked Laerorn, dubiously.

"I don't see why not," said Tirnel. "One of us should go ask, anyway."

"I'll go," said Rusgon and Laerorn simultaneously.

"You should stay here," said Laerorn. "With your wife."

"It's my request."

"It's everyone's request," said Tirnel. "I for one would quite like a homely forest by the sea. Those coming from Eryn Lasgalen - "

"There are more?" Legolas asked.

"If Thranduil forest-king has anything to say about it, there will be," confirmed Merilinel.

"Mother will be happy to hear that," said Legolas.

Laerorn looked alarmed. "Cúegnass forest-queen is here?"

"No; she hunts now in the company of Oromë. I went to see her, and she snared me and strung me up in a tree." Legolas smiled fondly.

"Exactly the same as ever, then."

Legolas shrugged, and then said, "I just arrived back in the city last night. Give me a few weeks, and then I'll guide you to Yavanna's pastures. Although I am not sure she will be there," he added, "or easily found if she is."

"Knowing the way is not nothing," said Rusgon.

In the next few weeks, therefore, Legolas spent his time mostly in the new houses further inland and uphill of the main city. Alqualondë was a city of almost three million, staggering for an elfin population. It had been built on a natural harbor, and spread along the wide arms of the valley, then up the gently sloping hills. Soon - in another five hundred or a thousand years - it would overflow the great valley. But then, soon there would be Lutulondë-on-the-Waves, and with the Teleri no longer confined to natural harbors . . .

 Anyway, there were unoccupied houses built up the hill, and his friends planned to move into some of these. However, they were unfurnished as well as unoccupied, so Legolas spent many happy hours in song, making them ready for one expectant couple, and friends he hadn't seen in nearly two centuries. It was pleasant, joking and laughing and pretending to be angry when one of them called him 'Friendly.'

After they were mostly finished, at least enough that those who were staying could move out of the guest house for new arrivals, he began planning a trip. Laerorn and Tirnel, he thought, and he'd trample over any attempts by Rusgon to join them. Once he'd acquired the necessary supplies, he announced it at dinner.

As anticipated, Rusgon tried to go; and also as anticipated, the rest of them told him that it was not
happening, in no uncertain terms. So it was that, in the end, Legolas rode out with Tirnel. Laerorn had elected not to come, possibly because they would ride through the Woods of Oromë on the way.

They sailed to Tirion. Lutulondë was not nearly complete, but the basic form of the eventual pontoon city was taking shape, and ships sailed daily between the two harbors. Overnight, they stayed in the house of Arafíñwë, with Galadriel and Celeborn; and they set out in the morning.

Tirnel waited until midmorning to ask, "Galadriel?"

"We met in Lothlórien, on the Quest of the Ring," said Legolas. "She has been - kind."

Tirnel appeared to accept this. At least until he said, "And what about the Lay of Legolas of the Long Road?"

"She did not," moaned Legolas.

"Lúnasalmë is a most skilled musician," said Tirnel. "When were you planning on telling us?"

"Telling you what? That I, as an adult, am capable of asking for things I need? So can you. That is why we are going to the Pastures."

Tirnel rolled his eyes. "The part where you decided to - to undo the kinslaying of Alqualondë!"

"That song makes it sound like there was a great deal more forethought put into it than there actually was."

"Which means . . . any at all?" At his glare, Tirnel said, "I know you, Legolas. This is another one of those grand, world-changing quests that you stumble into by accident; but come wind or fire or water, you will see it through. Tell me I'm wrong."

Legolas sighed. "You're . . . not wrong."

"Keep talking."

"I have to go to Mandos anyway, and so do they whether they know it or not. It only makes sense to travel together."

"And Ingwë?"

"Ingwë is - impossible. The songs don't do him justice, and at the same time completely fail to touch on what makes him a great king. When I went to Taniquetil to ask that he extend the high road, he agreed immediately. After I mentioned that Gimli rebuilt the Great Western Road past Hornburg, he wrote a letter asking Gimli to be the chief architect." Legolas shook his head. "I have no idea how he plans to make that work, but he will."

"And you are so humble that you refuse to accept thanks. You."

"I won't accept thanks," said Legolas. " . . . I'll accept help, though."

"Of course you will." Tirnel paused, and then added, "You need more road guides?"

"I wouldn't want to take you away from the sea."

"Shut it. You need more road guides. It takes, what, a few months to make the round trip? I think I can survive being away from the sea that long, thanks for the vote of confidence in my sanity."
"You're welcome." A smile was tugging at Legolas' lips.

"Friendly. Shut up."

They made good time to Telerys, where he was welcomed with joy by friends from his stay there. Tirnel, for his part, made admiring noises on the beauty of their forest and the richness of their flets. So they got on well there, and rested before continuing into the Pastures of Yavanna.

The Pastures were, well, not pastures in the sense that Men meant them. They were fields upon fields of Yavanna's experiments, everything green and reaching for the sun, while swarms of bees industriously flew from flower to flower and beetles and dragonflies danced overhead. This land needed no tilling to produce rich crops year after year, for here it was that Kementári made her home. Thanks to his previous visit, Legolas was able to answer many of Tirnel's questions; many, but not all. Amid this, they wandered around for a few weeks before Tirnel vanished.

Legolas spent the first few hours panicking, and searching in the country about their small camp. Then a cool sort of logic set in. One, they were in Valinor, where foul things had dared not encroach even at the height of Morgoth's power. Two, they were in the pastures of Yavanna. Three, as Legolas knew personally, Yavanna was known to suddenly make off with elves in the night. And four, they had come seeking her. Even if she couldn't help, she would do no harm.

He returned to camp, and waited. It took four days, evening to evening, from the time Legolas had first woken to find Tirnel gone. Then he reappeared just as suddenly, walking out of the long grass and into camp and sitting down heavily on his sleeping roll. Legolas built up the fire and brewed and handed him a cup of strong mint tea. He drank it gratefully, and then a cup of fresh water, and then said, "Well. That's done."

"Yes?"

"Not even the lady of green things can grow trees from seed to ancient in one day," said Tirnel. "So she said. But if they agree, she may move them, root and crown. The forests of Oromë contain such, and of Fangorn, and even Lothlórien and Eryn Lasgalen. We may soon have Eryn Laergael."

"But?"

"But nothing. I asked for a lesson. She gave one." He took another sip. "I don't think I will ask for another anytime soon."

"Ah."

"It is an odd thing, though. To learn why leaves are green, which even you do not know, Legolas."

"You might tell me."

"I might, but it would make no sense without everything else she taught. Say only - if leaves were not green, they would be black; but plants gave that up willingly, that forests may be restful and full of life, rather than cool and still like a cave."

Legolas nodded. "We should stay here another day," so you can recover, he didn't add, "and then go back to Alqualondë. If our lady is successful, our friends will know how we fared well before we arrive."

Tirnel lay down to rest, and closed his eyes.
They headed back towards Alqualondë; only, as it turned out, there was a message from Ingwë waiting in Tirion with Elrond. It requested that he go to Taniquetil. He turned to Tirnel and said, "Did you want to meet the high king?"

"Just like that?" asked Tirnel.

"Ingwë likes meeting his subjects; it won't be any burden."

"And who will carry the word to Alqualondë?"

"We can go to the east market, and ask a mariner. They sail daily."

"I remember," said Tirnel. "Well, and why not? If nothing else, it will make Laerorn sorry she did not come."

The road to Taniquetil was well maintained, and also populated. They were invited to a different campsite each night, and Legolas allowed Tirnel to tell stories of Middle-Earth. After the one time he made the mistake of introducing himself as Legolas, they decided he should be called 'Lennon,' which wasn't a lie since it was really his name. One of his names.

They arrived at Taniquetil midmorning of a windy, overcast day, and had literally just rang the bell on Ingwë's house when the skies opened. Ingyë opened the door, took one look, and said, "Inside."

"My thanks," said Tirnel, as he toweled off. "Lady . . . ?"

"High Queen Ingyë," said Legolas. "May I make known to you Tirnel, late of Eryn Lasgalen, and my longtime friend?"

"You may, but only if you're helping. Today I'm making bread."

Tirnel blinked. "Lembas?"

"No, just bread. Though the way you hear other kindreds, you'd almost think the Valar had prohibited ner learning the skill!"

"It is not usual, true," said Tirnel, "but I am always open to learning new things."

Legolas let out a breath. Tirnel could be diplomatic. When he wanted.

"Well. Finish drying, drink your tea, and then we'll begin."

They were kneading the dough together when Ingyë said, "So you got my husband's message."

"Eventually," said Legolas.

"You were looking for Yavanna?"

"Found," said Tirnel. "Eventually. The lady was most willing to help, once she understood our need."

"Good," said Ingyë. "And your beloved is well."

"He remains dead, yes," said Legolas. "In Mandos."

"That is what my husband wished to speak to you about," said Ingyë.
"Where is he?" asked Tirnel.

"At the library. Ingwion has been researching and experimenting nonstop since you visited. We knew it was possible to do, since it has been, multiple times already. But Fëanor took the secret with him, so they've been busy recreating the art from first principles." She smiled fondly. "I honestly don't think I've seen either of them having this much fun since Ingwion decided to learn pottery."

"What?" asked Legolas.

"The making of palantíri," said Ingyë.

Tirnel whistled. "He doesn't do things by halves, does he?"

"No he does not," agreed Legolas. "But, even when he succeeds - the dead can't use palantíri."

"Come now," chided Ingyë. "Is that such an insurmountable obstacle?"

... no." Not if someone were willing to live at Mandos for the duration of the construction, anyway. But that one was not him.

"Here, these are done," said Ingyë. "We'll put them up, and begin the next batch."

In the end, they made six batches, and then the first batch had risen enough to knead again. Then they formed the bread into little round loaves, and began baking while they filled tray after tray. The whole house smelled of it by the time they sat down to wait for the last few batches, and Ingwë finally appeared.

"Smells good," he said, walking over to kiss his wife. "Legolas. You brought a friend."

"Tirnel," said Tirnel, staring.


"Yes. It's been slow going, but we've almost found it. I thought you might not mind taking it, and word of it, to Mandos. If it might sweeten the pot."

Legolas laughed. "You needn't; Gimli was hard at work when I left."

Ingwë blinked. "I have received no letter."

"Working, I said, not done; and who else goes to Mandos?"


"You are so lazy when you're working on a different project," said Ingyë, going to the pantry for vegetables.

"A person can only do so many things at once!" protested Ingwë.

"I'll help," said Legolas. "I can chop vegetables as well as the next pair of hands."

"And I," said Tirnel. "Although my arms may be jelly from all that bread."

"Such is the strength of ner," said Ingyë, gently mocking. "I will carry water, since you are so tired."
"Ai! I think I have made a most grievous enemy!"

"She rather likes you." Ingwë smiled, and went to go do things near the stove. In short order, the pasta was boiling and the pink sauce simmering with vegetables cooking gently inside. They sat down to eat, and it was a happy dinner full of good food and conversation. But they didn't speak of palantíri or the high road again that night.

The next morning, Ingwë took Legolas and Tirnel to the library with him. Ingwion was also in the room of art, and a collection of stone spheres of various sizes. Some of them were cracked into many pieces. Tirnel asked, "Unfinished palantíri?"

"We thought they were gems, or stones, into which art had been poured like a jug. But it is not so. The stone is of a single part with the art, and must be made with it." Ingwion gestured to the broken spheres. "Or they break."

"You make stone?" asked Tirnel.

"We make glass," said Ingwion. "Molten glass responds oddly, but you can get a lot more art in, and it stays there as the glass cools. We think what goes into the melt matters a lot, though, and we haven't hit on quite the right combination to hold what we need."

"The palantíri of old were black," said Legolas. "What makes glass black?"

"Many things," said Ingwë.

"What makes glass black that Fëanor would have used?" asked Tirnel.

Ingwë looked up, and met his son's eyes. "Iron," they said in unison.

"But he must have -"

" - yes, I know, sea-ash -"

" - sea-ash! -"

" - we'll have to try lead -"

" - copper might stabilize it -"

" - copper? You mean cobalt -"

" - fine, fine, we try both."

"Glad to be of help," said Tirnel, sounding almost dazed.

Legolas rolled his eyes. "Did you want us for anything else?"

"This is going to take some time," said Ingwion. "Longer than a couple of days, anyway."

"I'll send you a message when we figure it out, though," added Ingwë. "Sorry to have called you off the road. I thought we'd be closer."

"It's no problem; I try not to have a plan too far ahead, these days. I'm sure Tirnel liked meeting you."

"Indeed," said Tirnel dryly.
"Stop back at home. Ingwë will at least give you some travel food. Not lembas."

Tirnel perked up. "My thanks."

"You glutton," joked Legolas. "All right, we'll go now. I'll expect your letter."

"Many thanks," said Ingwë, and then turned back to the discussion with his son.

Later, on the road, with premeasured packets of lentil stew, Tirnel said, "He's . . . "

"Yes," agreed Legolas. "He certainly is."

Chapter End Notes

Not much this chapter, except a couple more characters and some chemistry. Iron really does make glass black, depending on the oxidation state it's in. Leaves are green because of the chlorophyll, as any sufficiently interested schoolchild can explain.

The mountains have more or less stopped being on fire! \o/ The fire never got near me after all. What a relief.

If you spot any spelling or grammar errors, please let me know.
In Which Legolas is Teased by Friends and Begins a Course of Study, and There Is an Engagement

Chapter Summary

Noleven is pronounced NOL-even, and rhymes with eleven.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

They arrived back in Alqualondë long enough after they had planned that they could easily see from a distance that the hilltops and nearby valleys were no longer bare. It wasn't really a forest yet, but the beginnings were there. So were their friends, when they disembarked and climbed all the way up the hills.

"Legolas!" cried Merilinel. "Tirnel! You did it!"

"Tirnel did it," said Legolas. "I was only accessory to the fact."

"Only, though you guided me halfway across Valinor."

"I did it alone and without guidance," said Legolas. "You could have. That you did not have to made it faster, not less possible."

"Legolas. Take the thanks."

"I'm not accepting thanks right now," sing-songed Legolas.

"You are the most impossible - "

"And did you go to Taniquetil?" asked Laerorn, interrupting.

"We did," said Tirnel, willing to be distracted. "I met the high king."

"You - are joking," said Laerorn.

"He isn't," said Legolas.

Laerorn sat back heavily. "Truly?"

Tirnel nodded. "Our friend is Legolas of the Long Road now. He is advisor to kings."

"That's not so different from the Friendly we knew," pointed out Rusgon.

"True. He's still buying himself impossible quests, and finishing them out of sheer stubbornness - but he's not unchanged, either."

"I am right here," said Legolas.

"It's not a bad change," said Tirnel mildly.
"Thank you." Legolas paused, then said, "Are we building flets?"

"We are," said Merilinel. "You can help, but you won't be here long enough, often enough, that it would make any sense for you to have one of your own."

". . . true." Legolas stood, stretching. "So? Let's get started."

Flets, at least very simple ones, were quick to build but not very durable. Light reed-basket rooms were woven about branches, and roofed over with leaf-thatch. The elves from Eryn Lasgalen had put those up practically the first day the trees had begun appearing. The stronger, homey flets that could stand up to two or three decades of hard use by a young child were reinforced, floors and walls, with dead wood, and insulated with layers of straw batting. They didn't have time for the best kind, the kind where living branches were woven together until they grew together. They were beginning those too, of course, and perhaps their second or third child would grow up in one.

Legolas spent the next few weeks making cordage and braiding together houses for his friends. They'd chosen broadleafs, oaks and maples; although some mallorn of Lothlorien had consented to come, such trees were unfamiliar. It took five rooms before Rusgon was satisfied, and then they set to furnishings. These were thick woven-mat mattresses, many stackable baskets, and as many pillows and blankets as they could lay hands upon. Also they carved wooden plates, bowls, and spoons. Laerorn went looking in the city, however, and couldn't find any of the specially designed copper braziers that were used for domestic flame in what was, after all, a highly flammable house.

"We can have someone make them," suggested Rusgon, dubiously. There were not many smiths, of any variety, in Alqualondë.

"Draw plans out," said Legolas. "I'll find someone to make it in Tirion on the way out, and they should be ready by the time I come back."

"When are you going?" asked Timel.

Legolas shrugged. "When the need next takes me. I can stay and help until then."

"Help with what?" asked Laerorn. "Our homes are well-built, and we can find all else we might need in the city. Besides, you might not need to go to Mandos yet, but the next group of pilgrims is eager for the road."

This was true, he found, when he asked Ninquivingë. "They're waiting on you. Didn't you know?"

"No. How many are there?"

"I have three thousand lined up, although mostly I'm just sorting them into groups at this point. But you will have companions for the road as long as you continue to take it."

"Three thousand?"

"More than twenty times that number were sent to Mandos in the Kinslaying. As I said, you will not lack companions on the road."

"I was waiting for a summons from Ingwë," admitted Legolas. "He had wanted me to take a palantír to Mandos."

"A palantír? I thought they were corrupted."

"They were." Legolas took a sip of his tea. "He and Ingwion are working out how they were made.
Glass and art, apparently."

"And they won't interact with the previous ones?"

Legolas spread his hands and shrugged to show his total ignorance of the subject. "I could go to Taniquetil, I suppose. Now that Timel's been, Laerorn is asking constantly."

"You have good friends."

Legolas looked up, surprised at her tone. "And you don't?"

"Not like you," said Ninquivingë. "Oh, don't look so sad! I don't like horses, either, whereas you can do headstands on them. I did not grow up with my friends the way you did; of course it would be very different. I'm just wishing I had."

"But there are plenty of children in Alqualondë!"

"I was not born in Alqualondë. There were children, in Beleriand before the sun, but not many. We saw each other infrequently at best."

"Oh. In Mirkwood, most families with young ones moved close to the capitol," Legolas explained. "For safety, so we could be barricaded in the fortress if need be. What children there were, were together."

"Mn. Stay here with them a while longer, and then take your friend to Taniquetil. To Mandos, too, if he wants to go. We have waited three Ages; we can wait a few weeks more."

"Well, that's another thing. Mostly we're finished, and only need to make clothing. There aren't any deer yet, and wool is no good for clothing that's going to be against the skin. Where might I find flax?"

"Flax plants?" Ninquivingë blinked. "It's shipped in bulk. You can get it down at the dock market."

He could, and did. Getting linen from flax plants was long process, good for passing days in song with friends. And they were happy days, no doubt of that, filled with recipes he hadn't realized he was missing, and Sindarin rather than Quenya, but . . . He was restless, waiting, and the work of his hands was only barely holding him tethered.

It was relief when the message did arrive. He set out with Laerorn to Taniquetil the next morning. Almost as soon as they were on the ship, the feeling went away. Laerorn waited until the next day to comment.

"Legolas of the Long Road is not a misnomer, is it?"

Legolas looked at her sidelong. "It is not."

"You shouldn't stay in one place so long. Not if that is how it twists you up inside."

"Laerorn - "

"You did not yet wish to go to Taniquetil," said Laerorn. "Fine. You ought to have gone somewhere else, somewhere you hadn't been. We are your friends. We don't want to become your jailors."

"You're not!" protested Legolas.

"Then?"
"I am standing too close," said Legolas. "As usual."

"Oh," said Laerorn, and then laughed. "Of course. And I am blind, or I'd have seen it sooner!"

Legolas snickered. "Then we can be blind together."

"I will throw you out of the flet myself, when I see you so stupid again."

"I will let you," agreed Legolas. "Come; to Taniquetil."

Laerorn loved Taniquetil from the first moment. It was not so much the construction, which although made of beautiful shifting sandstone was nothing to match the lofty crystalline towers of Tirion. Rather, Taniquetil was a city of song, like Mirkwood-that-was but in two hundred thousand voices. He explained about the concert lunches and the dancing on the green, and prepared himself to lose her for the duration of her stay.

Ingwë was at home when they arrived, and Ingwion. The high king stood up personally to greet them; Laerorn took his hand shyly, and laughed when he kissed her first on one cheek and then the other, in the fashion of the Vanyar. "You seem to always travel with company, now," said Ingwë.

"He gets into too much trouble if we let him travel alone," said Laerorn. "And since good Master Gimli is now confined to Mandos . . ."

Ingwë laughed. "Yes, I see. Well, let us show you."

The new palantíri were not black, but rather deep turquoise, like stil forest pools. "Iron works," explained Ingwion, "but so does copper. It took us some time to perfect it."

"Some," agreed Laerorn. "Legolas was climbing the walls!"

"Everyone was climbing the walls," said Legolas, and then to explain, "We were building flets."

"You have made flets?" asked Ingwion, interested. "I have heard about them, but I'd like to see for myself."

"These are too new," said Laerorn. "It takes a few decades to grow really good ones. Wait, or - Legolas, what was that place?"

"Telerys," said Legolas. "On the edge where the Wood of Oromë meets the Pastures of Yavanna. They have mature flets, and fine ones. Ñoldorin wood-elves!" He then gestured to the glass spheres. "All of these for Mandos?"

"No, no!" Ingwion laughed. "One for Mandos. One to move with the road-builders. One each for this city, Tirion, and Alqualondë. The keystone in Valmar. We were debating if we ought to make more for the Halls of Nienna and the Mansions of Aulë."

"Yes," replied Legolas immediately. "I'd say one for each of the Valar, but they do not all have such permanent homes. For the ones who make themselves so available, though." He paused, then added, "And Formenos?"

". . . yes. And Formenos," said Ingwë. "It is good that I called you here. I had not even considered it."

"Legolas is good for that," agreed Laerorn. "Except of himself."

"Should we go, then?" asked Legolas.
"At least stay a night!" protested Ingwë. "If you do not mind, take the palantír for Tirion as well. If you are going back there?"

"We are," confirmed Legolas.

"Then we'll see you off tomorrow."

In fact they didn't. Laerorn was dancing on the green, and Legolas was talking quietly with Minyellon, when he happened to look up just in time to see it. Laerorn stilled, and across from her so did the nis moving into position to be her partner, and then an applause went up. It happened that way sometimes - it had happened to his parents that way - two elves met each other and just knew. The Vanya led Laerorn off the green, presumably to go to her home, and - talk.


"Good for Laerorn," said Legolas, raising his wine glass in silent toast.

But it meant that the next morning, he couldn't leave. Who abandoned a friend in a strange city? And, since he didn't know where she was, it meant he had to wait.

Ingwion said, "Good. You can come to the library. I suppose it's too much to ask that you've been practicing water-calling in the meantime?"

"I was supposed to practice?"

"I'm teaching you. You could at least make an effort to learn."

"All right, all right," laughed Legolas, and allowed himself to be led to the door.

Two hours later, he asked, "Do we have to use cold water?"

"Er," said Ingwion. "I don't understand. Most Teleri have at least a little water affinity."

"It's not that I don't," said Legolas. "I just spent an entire generation denying the sea-longing."

Ingwion looked startled. "Why?"

"Because my friends were Men, and once they go, they are gone." He'd done his mourning, but being asked by someone who'd never met one of the second children . . . "I have only memories now. At the time, making those memories was important. Also, Gimli was - I thought I'd sail only after he died."

"I'm sorry," said Ingwion after an awkward pause. "I am pressing this upon you too quickly. You can't call water when you've trained yourself to push it away."

"So," Legolas shrugged. "Pick a different element."

"Air, or fire?" asked Ingwion.

"I'm not sure I'm ready for air," said Legolas, cognizant that of the three, air was widely regarded as the most difficult, and the most subtle.

"Fire, then. Here, let's see how small you can make this flame without putting it out."

He turned out to be really good at fire. It wasn't that there wasn't effort, because there was. It was just that he'd lived in Mirkwood, which like all healthy forests burned every decade or so. He'd known
all about how deadly it could be, and how beautiful the new life after was. He'd learned to coax smokeless fire out of green wood, and tiny fires out of dry grass, centuries even before he'd met Gimli. And Gimli was, of course, Glóin's son.

It translated to being able to light fires across the room with the strength of his fea alone. Ingwion, at least, was impressed. "Most people are too afraid of fire to use it well, at least to begin," he explained.

"You just have to respect it," said Legolas.

"Indeed. You keep practicing with that, and next time we meet, we might even be able to start you on feanár."

"Fëanor?" Legolas wondered what the king who had started the war of wrath had to do with this.

"It's like fire," said Ingwion, "only without the fire."

Legolas sat down for a while after that, and Ingwion brought lunch for both of them. "Do you mind if I ask some personal questions?"

"If they are too personal, I simply will not answer," said Legolas.

"When - did you know you loved him?"

Legolas smiled, faintly. That was an old one. "After Helm's Deep. He took a scalp wound, and those aren't usually dangerous but they bleed - " Ingwion nodded. "So. We'd lost each other in the fighting, and I didn't find him again until after, waiting for the healers and face red in his own dried blood. I thought, 'I could have lost you.' And I knew."

"And when did you know he loved you back?"

"Ah," Legolas ducked his head, "that is actually a funny tale. Dwarrow have different customs, of course. I'd made my intentions what I thought was clear, and after the war, when we traveled North, we went by way of Hornburg and then the Fangorn Wood. It would have been time to reject me or accept me, but he did neither. It took me nearly a fortnight to work up the courage to ask."

Ingwion nodded; it was rude to press, but usually such answers were instantaneous.

"Well. Dwarrow love once and only one; and there is no word in Khuzdul for lover. They have had to borrow it from Westron. That is what he thought I wanted, and - he was honorable enough not to demand eternity from me, if I couldn't give it."

"Ah."

"Indeed. He'd said nothing until then, and taken every extra moment in my company. He answered when I asked, though. After that, I never had to doubt that he loved me. Although I did learn to ask after Khuzdul customs. Many of them are as lovely as our own, in their way. And before you ask, no, I will not tell. They were taught me in strictest confidence, and I can't betray that trust."

Ingwion was plainly disappointed, but he said, "All right. Is it rude to ask about your wedding?"

"Oh Valar. Which one?"

"What?"

"We married under the stars, because I thought my father would never approve, and we married
under the stone for the same reason." Legolas gestured eloquently. "His father didn't approve, so he was right there, but Mizim - she's my mother-at-law - knows what love is, and demanded a true dwarrow wedding for us. Beat it out of King Thorin Stonehelm, in fact. And then my father was not to be outdone. So we had four weddings, and I think now we are the most thoroughly married couple in the history of Arda."

Ingwion chuckled. "That wasn't in the tale."

"Don't you dare tell Lúnasalmē."

"You can't stop me," teased the Vanya.

"- don't. It's private."

Ingwion stopped smiling. "Oh. I - of course not, Legolas, forgive me. Only I have trouble discerning when you are playing, and when you are serious."

"It's true," said Legolas, smiling to show his forgiveness. "Not everyone wears his heart on his sleeve. And, or so my friends say, mine is hidden more than is healthy."

"I don't think so," said Ingwion mildly.

"No?"

"No."

"Mm." Legolas made as if to lie back on the couch; as he did so, a light flashed off a facet of the crystalline pattern on the vaulted ceiling. He sat straight up.

"Legolas?"

"Nothing is wrong. I just keep forgetting to ask you while I'm here, and now I remembered - do you know how the Rohirrim make their land-ships?"

"Oh. No. There should be a book on it. No, you stay down, and let this be a reminder to me that just because you have a knack doesn't mean I should let you overexert yourself . . . I'll go see if I can find it."

Legolas woke up some hours later, when the sun was slanting honey-yellow through the room, to the sound of pages rustling. There was an odd feeling, as if he should have been sore, that part of him was sore, but it wasn't his muscles. He sat up. "Did I sleep the whole afternoon?"

"Only three hours," replied Ingwion. "In the future, when you get tired, you will tell me."

"I've never done work like that," protested Legolas. "It's not at all like being tired after knife practice. Now that I know, I'll avoid it."

That seemed to satisfy Ingwion. "Well, come have a look at this."

'This' turned out to be a cramped, handwritten journal, in the tengwar derivative of Gondor. Beside it, Ingwion was translating and writing it out longhand. Legolas picked up the new copy, and began to read. It was, indeed, a record of how a land-ship was made, although described by someone who clearly wasn't any kind of carpenter. Ingwion had little scribbly drawings on many pieces of paper as he tried to work out what was being said. He'd copied down what were probably the correct ones.

"It seems complicated," said Legolas, at last.
"In comparison to a ship?" asked Ingwion. "I think it is not beyond the skill of the shipwrights of Alqualondë. Once I finish translating, of course."

"You mean to do this all by yourself?"

"I'm almost done, really. The original is a travelogue of a Gondorin scholar among the Rohirrim; he only spent this one chapter on the land-ships. It was the closest I could find to instructions. The Rohirrim don't write this sort of thing down." He shrugged. "And it isn't like we can go and ask."

"Well, not go," said Legolas.

Ingwion made a questioning noise.

"The palantíri of Avallónë and Orthanc still function; and even if the denizens of Treegarth don't know, the forest is in Rohan. Surely there must be traders."

"With the Onodrim?" Ingwion sounded perplexed.

"No, with the elves. And Men, I suppose. Didn't you know? Fangorn allowed quick young ones to come to Treegarth to learn. There's a Silvan colony, and although I think mostly the Men stick to the tower, they too are learning the ways of Yavanna."

"Oh. But one must still go to Tol Eressëa, to ask."

"Such a burden, for a latecomer." Legolas rolled his eyes. "Although obviously not immediately. Do we know how Laerorn and - Nóleven? - are?"

"It's the only thing anyone in the city is talking about today, so yes, actually, we do. They're fine. I think they are planning to hold the betrothal as soon as they can, assuming Laerorn can find someone to stand for her parents. Did any of her family come West?"

"By the fast road," said Legolas, and then sighed. "Still, I found my mother. We'll find some kin."

'We,' as it turned out the next morning, included Nóleven. They'd both shown up in traveling gear and with horses and lembas. Legolas stared. "Shouldn't you two still be celebrating?"

"We were done with that after the first night," said Nóleven. Laerorn blushed right up her ears. "Now it's time to be doing. I want my beloved in matrimony, and the sooner we find her family, the sooner that happens. You were riding to Mandos anyway."

Which was true, so Legolas graciously conceded defeat and made his farewells to Ingwë and Ingyë and Ingwion.

They were well on the road before Nóleven said, apropos of nothing, "Thank you, friend Legolas. I've ridden most of Aman, and I'd nearly given up finding my Laerorn."

"Don't thank me," said Legolas. "Laerorn brought herself."

"She wouldn't have been traveling if not for you," argued Nóleven.

"It's true," cut in Laerorn. "You did offer to introduce me to the high king. I found someone much better. You have both our thanks."

"I'd rather have both your friendships," quipped Legolas.

"He really doesn't accept thanks," said Nóleven, sotto voce to Laerorn. "I thought it was songs being
"songs."

"Oh, no, it's all him. He never used to do it, before coming West, either. It's really irritating."

"I am right here," said Legolas, amused.

"This habit of not accepting thanks, even for things you actually did, is really irritating," said Laerorn. "You should change it immediately."

"I'll accept thanks when the job is done," said Legolas.

"In ten centuries?" asked Nóleven.

"If ten centuries is what it takes." He smiled. "I figure by then I might have enough good will to get the Alqualondi to build me a palace entirely of pearls, and the Ñoldor to furnish it with clever toys."

"Ah, your dastardly plan is revealed!" Laerorn pointed a dramatically accusing finger at him.

"It's not very dastardly," said Nóleven. "But I quite like it, even if I don't believe it. Legolas of the Long Road."

Legolas laughed. "I am found out."

"Fine. What would make you most happy?"

"Most?" He sighed. "If I could again touch my husband."

"I would have thought you'd ask for his freedom," said Laerorn.

"He's happy where he is," said Legolas, "with kin, doing work with his hands. Even if he could leave the Halls of Aulë, what reason has he? I see no reason to ask something for myself that he does not necessarily want. But we both want to hold each other again, so that's what I'd ask, if I thought it might be granted."

"I thought Ingwion had agreed to teach you art?" asked Nóleven, apparently confused.

"He's teaching me fire," said Legolas. "Does it matter?"

"- ah. It is an easier to way to come at the issue, although . . . fire. Most Teleri start with water."

Legolas grinned ruefully. "We tried. It didn't work."

"Ah?" asked Laerorn.

"I can call it, but not hold it. It is a good thing the Room of Art has stone-tile floors."

"Why do you think it was built that way?" quipped Nóleven.

"You know the elements?" asked Laerorn.

Nóleven made a dismissive gesture. "I know a few tricks, but I am not good at any of them."

"And I know none."

"You can learn," said Nóleven, in tones of deep appreciation. "We'll have time."

Nóleven was a good companion for the road. She'd spent a lot of time traveling, the way Vanyar
typically didn't, and she knew how to make a neat camp. Legolas was grateful, because it meant he could disappear for an hour or two to go hunting and leave the two of them alone together. Much of the time, he even managed to bring back meat for the pot.

They made Tirion in good time, and were directed to -

"When did you build this?" Legolas asked Celebrían, looking at the field, on the Western side of this city, where a large, inviting building now stood. It was a simple way station, both like and unlike the ones that could be found on the old forest road through Mirkwood, all the way West across the mountains and into the Shire. It was populated, if that was the right word, with twenty-two pilgrims.

"While you have been running about," said Celebrían warmly. "This one is temporary, of course. We'll build the final compound in Tirion crystal."

"Compound?"

"Legolas . . . the long road might be built because of your pilgrims, but it is going to be the river on which all the trade of Valinor flows. My grandfather thought it best that we lay out a large caravan depot now, ahead of need. We built the pilgrims' quarters first because you're already taking them, but there will be wagoners and warehouses and a bulk goods market and fields for all the animals."

Legolas blinked. "I would think actual rivers would be better for that."

"And they are." She smiled. "Where the rivers flow in useful directions. The Rilyasirë is half the path of goods to and from Formenos. But in the absence of rivers, we build roads; and roads require way stations."

"So you built one."

"Yes."

Legolas tilted his head. "It is well done, although I would not have thought of it. I have a gift for Tirion, from High King Ingwë."

"Yes?"

He removed the palantír from the clothing he'd used to pad it, and held it out to her.

She took it, and gasped. "A palantír? But Finwe - "

" - did create the first ones. Ingwë and Ingwion have rediscovered the secret. They sent this one with me."

Celebrían turned to face south and a little west, and then broke into a wide smile. "We shall house it in the Mindon Eldaliéva, I am sure. Come; my grandfather will wish to speak to you."

Arafinwë, in fact, was more interested in the palantír. "It is good. And I can give Ingwë my thanks directly!"

"Should I go?"

"Are you so eager to be gone?"

"I don't know what further use I can be," said Legolas honestly.

"I do not welcome you in my home because you are useful, Legolas of the Long Road," said
"Arafinwë. "Although you are. Stay. I will not be long in communication with Ingwë, and the night is yet young."

It didn't: he just stared at the palantîr for a while. Then he sat back and said, "I'd forgotten how that is. Ugh."

"Problem?" asked Galadriel.

"No. He's just strong."

Galadriel looked thoughtful.

"No," preempted Legolas.

"Agreed," said Celeborn.

Galadriel pouted. "Ruin my fun."

"Yes," said Elrond. "Fëa sparring with the high king. This must be some new and interesting definition of the word 'fun.'"

"Speaking of, I hear you're finally learning the use of fëa."

"You," said Legolas, "have been gossiping."

"It's not true?" asked Arafinwë.

"Oh, no, it is. I'm just pointing out that one afternoon spent failing with water, months ago, does not learning make; and I know for a fact that neither Galadriel nor Elrond could have already found out about more recent developments without cheating."

"I asked my daughter," said Galadriel.

"I asked the Vanya. Nóleven," said Celebrian.

Galadriel shrugged as if to say that there was no secret conspiracy, which was only true in the sense that the conspiracy was not secret. "I find it interesting that you pick fire."

"You and everyone else," said Legolas.

"Because Olórin was the bearer of Narya," continued Galadriel unhindered.

That gave Legolas pause. Finally, he said, "What does fire do? Aside from burn, I think that one is pretty obvious."

"Ignite," said Celeborn.

Once again, and because it was Celeborn who said it, he considered the answer carefully. Then he said, "This is one of those fire-without-the-fire things, isn't it?"

"You're already on elemental fëa?" asked Elrond.

"Not yet," said Legolas. "The next time I'm in Taniquetil, if I've improved enough. I've been practicing, but lighting a campfire honestly isn't a whole lot of effort. I didn't think attempting it on horseback was a good idea."
Arafinwë smiled. "No, it wouldn't be." He walked over to a glass-fronted cabinet, which held what Legolas had assumed were decorative sculpture, and removed one. "Have you seen one of these yet?"

"Well. Here."

Arafinwë laughed. "It's called a Fëanorin lamp. When you fill the reservoir, it seals off the fire chamber. Getting it to light is easy, but after only a few minutes the air inside is all used and goes stale. Getting it to stay lit after that is the challenge. It's an oil fire so there isn't much smoke anyway, but even that is trapped inside until you empty the reservoir. These are safe, because if you lose concentration for any reason, the fire just goes out. You can take one for practice."

"I can't take this," protested Legolas.

"It's a gift," said Arafinwë.

"No, I mean I can't take this one. It's pretty, but - isn't it fragile? I travel."

"He has you there, grandfather," said Celebrían. "Give him an iron one."

"You won't be able to see inside an iron one," said Arafinwë, turning back to the cabinet and removing one the smaller, less ornate lamps. "That's a kind of training, too."

The conversation moved on after that. They talked a little about Galadriel's mastery of water, then Arafinwë, who like most Ñoldor had mastered fire and was not unfamiliar with air. It was useful, he explained, for many crafts. Thence followed a discussion of the practical applications of elements, and then of crafts Arafinwë knew. Legolas spoke a little of himself, but mostly of Gimli, happily learning dwarrow skills in their greatest and most final of fortresses.

It was a good thing they were going directly to Mandos anyway, he thought. Otherwise, he'd have to abandon his friends old and new to head that way alone.

Chapter End Notes

Longer chapter this time; I couldn't find a great place to break, which is Unfortunate. But here we have Legolas getting serious about magic. And other things too, of course.

Meanwhile summer session is over and I now have many finals to grade. Oy!

I am a little frazzled and a day lat posting this, and I still don't think I caught all the spelling/grammar/accent issues. Please point them out to me as you spot them.
Morning dawned overcast, but the pilgrims all said that rain was unlikely, so they rode out. Legolas got his introductions on the road, and spent a little time talking to each of them, in groups of two or three. On the whole, they were both more and less prepared for the road than the last ones. More, in that they had clearly been studying useful skills. Less, in that they could only have been studying a few months at best, and none of them were actually very useful yet. They were happy to be on the road, though, so Legolas supposed they’d learn under necessity.

He stopped early, the first day, so he and Laerorn and Nóleven could demonstrate all the things necessary to make a camp. After, he held a small lesson in horse-kinship. One of them likened it to learning how to hear what the sea and air were saying, although it was more difficult because horses were living beings.

"Is it easier, then? On the water?"

"You came West by the Straight Road."

"I did," acknowledged Legolas, ducking his head. "I have been on the water once since, and that ended - poorly."

"Hah, yes." No one in Alqualondë had not heard the tale of Ninquivingë burning a ship. "Well. Like any other thing, water speaks. It is easier because there is also Uinen."

"Oh. I suppose."

"Is there something wrong?" asked Telpenen.

"I was overly short with her, I expect, when we met."

"Ho! Legolas is an elf after all. But why would you be rude to lovely Uinen?"

"I did not particularly enjoy the sea-longing," explained Legolas. "Not when it drove me to leave my friends and family and beloved across the Belegaer."

"Ah? But your friends and family will all come here sooner or later, and I thought you brought your beloved along. He is why you ride, no?"

"Many of my friends were Men," said Legolas sharply.

"... I did not mean to offend."

Legolas sighed. "It seems I am short with many. I apologize."

"And I. I didn't know, but I should have at least considered."

"You have only ever lived in the West; how were you to remember the second children, who has never met one?" Legolas waited only a moment and then said, "Come, now, you must tell me: what gift should I give that I might apologize to Uinen?"

"Oh, she loves songs of all things," said Silmel, who had been riding and listening but saying
nothing.

Legolas brightened. "There has been much singing, and new songs, and old songs made new again, as of late. Perhaps I should ask Lúnasalmë for advice. I should certainly require that she add a verse to truthfully tell my injustices with regards to Uinen. Maybe then people will stop acting as though I am faultless!"

"I don't think you're faultless," said Laerorn. "Just give it time; more people will learn you better, and start becoming as annoyed with you as you properly deserve. Then you'll yearn for a time when they thought you noble."

"... it is good to have you here with me, my friend," said Legolas.

He practiced with the Fëanorin lamp. Arafínnë and Celeborn had told him to keep it lit as long as possible, but only make the attempt once in a day. That way, he could build his strength naturally. Today he cheated a little, lighting and snuffing the flame again and again, just to make sure he knew what it felt like when he could not see it. Then he settled in to keeping it lit.

It was not even a quarter-hour later when it went out. He looked at it, a little iron box in his hands, then sighed and put it away in its oil-skin pouch.

He lasted almost twenty minutes the next day. Not being distracted was the easy part; it simply became exponentially more difficult to keep the thing lit once the air ran out. He managed to keep it lit longer and longer, but often the improvement was less than a minute each day. Still, as Gimli would say, improvement was improvement. He could last almost half an hour by the time they reached Valmar.

"I've never been to Valmar," remarked Súrípilu as they rode towards it.

"I have noted that," said Legolas, "as a major flaw of we first children."

His pilgrims looked startled. "What is?"

"If you tell a city of a hundred thousand Men that there is a wide green land, with space to grow food and for their children to grow strong, a tithe will take to their feet. Among the Khazâd the number is even greater, although they seek after beauty in the stone. Among us... a full third were Avari to leave Cuiviénen, and were lost. Even I never left Mirkwood-that-was, with all its dangers, until the Battle of Five Armies."

"And after that you never came home," said Laerorn.

"Am I not Legolas of the Long Road?" he asked. "Valinor is a beautiful country. It is a shame we huddle in our cities and towns, each separate, and do not go out to see it, or each other."

"You have never huddled in your life," said Alyaven wryly. "And you will drag the rest of us, kicking and screaming, onto the road as well."

Legolas ducked his head, embarrassed.

He was even more embarrassed, six days later, when they left Valmar and two more Vanyar had joined them. They were Nóleven's kin, distant cousins by the names of Amarië and Ingoldo; they took to the road because Nóleven had said she did not wish to be outnumbered by the family of Laerorn, when they found the family of Laerorn. Legolas saw rather how they rode along their new kinswoman and laughed.
"Your thoughts are a deep maze," he said.

"Do you object?" asked Nóleven.

"How can I object to love?" asked Legolas. "It did not take much convincing to set them alongside us, I would wager."

"No one would be stupid enough to take that," said Nóleven.

"Why, then?"

"When we woke, at Cuivienen," said Nóleven, "we woke six by six. Six and twelve and eighteen and twenty-four and thirty-six and forty-eight were we. And yet we broke ourselves: two and twelve, two and eighteen and thirty-six, two and twenty-four and forty-eight. I think it was wrong of us, for all of the first among the first children were brothers and sisters, and not at all separate. We should be one kindred, not three."

"Were you happy, then, that Laerorn is Teleri?"

"I am happy that I am finally given my spouse, no matter who she is. She has spoken to me of the beauty of the flets on Eryn Lasgalen, and though I have never been a student of the Lady Kementári, I find I yearn now for the music of rain upon a roof of leaves."

"Do you plan to come away and live in Alqualondë, then? Or do you plant mallorn on Taniquetil?"

"Neither," said Nóleven, but after she would not explain what she meant. Laerorn simply laughed at him when he asked. He shrugged, and rode on.

When they arrived at Mandos Námo greeted them warmly. For the first time, Vairë was there also, and she too spent time walking among the guests.

"You return to us at last," she said to him.

"It has not been so very long," replied Legolas.

"Longer than before. Gimli was worried. I comforted him regarding your safety, at least."

"I hear you, great queen," said Legolas, standing to go.

Vairë smiled.

Gimli said, "You are here late, elf."

"I am sorry, Gimli. But see, I am here, and well."

"And you won't do it again."

"Well," said Legolas, "it ought to be impossible, in the future. Ingwë has solved the puzzle of how he plans to make you road-builder. See here."

Gimli stared at the palantír. "Is that what I think it is?"

"Depends. Do you think it a palantír? There will be one in Alqualondë, and already I have delivered one to Tirion. Also the chief will be in Valmar, and one moving with the road as it is built. It will never been further than two weeks by horse between the two, and a little longer when I am moving in a caravan."
"And you will use them." Gimli sounded relieved.

"Am I forgiven, then?"

"You will be," said Gimli. "I have made ready an elf-size bed. I'd have you stay, tonight. I will watch you."

"Do the dead now guard the living?"

"This one does," said Gimli, and, "Come. To sleep."

He did, since he was perfectly safe there, as any place in Mandos. In the morning, Gimli chased him off to, "go see to his ducklings!" Legolas thought that uncharitable, but he could not deny when twenty-four travellers mobbed him and asked where he'd spent the night, that it wasn't precisely untrue. He sat down to eat with them and answer their question.

"In bed with - but surely, you can't - "

"We can't," agreed Legolas easily. "However I wish it otherwise. That wasn't why he arranged to have the bed made, or placed there. I'll sleep there now, I think, whenever I am in Mandos."

"Among the dead! Doesn't it give you chills?"

"The dead have never done me more harm than the living," said Legolas. "Once, they very probably carried a war. Besides, Gimli would never harm me."

"You are an odd one," said Telpenen.

"I have heard that before." He shrugged. "But come now. Are we not here in Mandos, and after all this time?"

"We are. I have a name; I go to chase it. Will you - "

"I will visit Celebrimbor, and then I will visit Gimli. If I am absent both those places, then ask the great judge. Only when he does not know should you worry."

Telpenen smiled at the joke, and then left. Legolas, as promised, went to find Celebrimbor.

Only, he found, he couldn't. The Halls refused to take him, twisting about like knotwork. He tried getting to Úrurril, and finding this or that pilgrim, and that worked. To Celebrimbor's chambers only was he not allowed. After an hour or so, he went back to the main hall and looked for Námo. When he couldn't find Námo either, he went back to the Halls of Aulë.

Gimli was there, of course, and Narvi with him. Also were several unfamiliar dwarrow, quickly introduced to him as Narfi, Eled, Fáim and Gáim, and Baran. "They wish to have a part in the building of this road," explained Gimli. "I had not the heart to refuse, although without proper surveying, I don't even know what is to be done!"

"High King Ingwë is not one to discriminate, at least on the basis of Khazâd or not Khazâd," said Legolas. "I am sure he will accept whatever help you see fit to give."

"What help we can give from here," rumbled Baran. "Although young Gimli has told us of a palantír, so that gives hope. We have each written a letter, if you will carry them."

"Of course I will."
"Then we take our leave," said Eled, getting up and bowing.

Narvi stayed. "I suppose it is too much to ask that there is news?"

"Well - " said Legolas, and told him of the unusual twisting which had prevented him visiting Celebrimbor. "I went to ask Námo, but could not find him. I don't know what it means."

"I must convince myself it is good," said Narvi. "At least, I have never heard of worse befalling anyone after they have already come here."

"I hope so," said Legolas, who hadn't considered it that way.

"Then I give you thanks," said the mason, before leaving.

Gimli watched him go, and said, "I am glad we acted before we died."

"Long before," said Legolas. Before Gimli could turn melancholy, he said, "Oh! And I have been learning a new skill. Lay a fire, and I will show you."

Gimli did, and then sat back, looking at him curiously. Legolas lit it with a thought and the tiniest push of his fëa. Even that was a bit much, it turned out, for the wood and kindling of the dead; it burst into a ball of flame that nearly singed off Gimli's eyebrows, and actually managed to produce enough real heat that he felt it. Gimli shot out of his chair, and then stood there staring for a moment before he said, "That's... quite a skill."

"It doesn't do that with real wood," said Legolas ruefully. "Just sets it on fire."

"Ah." Gimli righted his chair, and then sat. "So you're becoming a wizard now."

Legolas laughed. "About as easily as I can become a dwarf. Gimli, I have told you before, Maiar are Ainur. I'm not becoming a power."

"Looked like magic to me."

"Magic," said Legolas. "The word we use is art. Like making cheese, it's a skill and nothing more. I don't deal with water at all, it turns out. But after all you taught me, fire came easily."

"After all I taught you," said Gimli. "Well, there's a thing. Have you given up on building ships, then?"

"Yes; they're entirely useless on the road, anyway. And I suppose you have given up cheese."

"I can make edible curds, let's say, and leave it at that. I have been learning pies. They come out tasting better than they look. You wouldn't know it, but making a pretty crust is as difficult as carving sand!"

"It will surprise you to know," said Legolas, amused, "that the Falmari make sand carvings for fun. The trick is to dampen the sand so it sticks together."

"You are not half as amusing as you think you are," said Gimli.

"And yet," said Legolas. "You love me."

That was where Nóleven found him, later. Gimli nodded to her politely. "The ducklings are done, then?"
"Ducklings . . . ? No. I came to tell you that we found where Laerorn's parents are - a Sindarin settlement in the more northern woods - and that we're leaving to go find them."

"Go see them off," said Gimli, making shooing motions.

So he did, kissing his friend and her soon-to-be fiancée, and then quietly telling Laerorn's horse that it was time to go for a nice sprint. She shrieked with laughter as it carried her away. Nóleven gave him a look of utter amusement, and then followed.

"That's very cute," said Silmel, standing next to him. "We're, ah - well, I'm done."

"Did it help?" asked Legolas.

"It was miserable. Uinen sank the boat he was on about ten minutes later. He would not even have been in Alqualondë if Fëanor hadn't been pushing with such speed, and he's regretted it since then. We talked, we cried . . . we laughed. I think we can heal now."

"Then I'm glad."

"I'll stay in the main hall and drag you out later. You go back to the Halls of Aulë."

Legolas nodded and went back inside.

True to her word, Silmel found him there hours later, with a tray full of lunch "Here. I brought this." She was trying not to stare at Gimli too blatantly, and for the most part failing.

"It's fine, lass. Look if you are going to."

"It's a little rude," said Silmel.

"Well, yes and no. You are curious about what kind of person married Legolas. You came to see that more than you came to stare at the Naug." He spat the word. "And also, you brought lunch, which is good. Legolas never eats enough."

"I eat perfectly well, for an elf."

Gimli looked at Silmel. "Has he eaten anything but lembas in the last two weeks?"

". . . I know he had bread pudding and venison last night, because that is what Mandos served. Before that, I can't say that I was really paying attention."

"So no, then."

"I'll make sure he eats better on the way back," offered Silmel. "And - I don't know anything about Khazâd, but I think it's cruel that you two are apart like this."

Gimli watched her go. "I like that. Elves without preconceptions about Khazâd. Who taught her that word, anyway?"

"Lúnasalmë wrote a lay." Legolas blushed. "I didn't tell her anything. I think she asked as many people who were actually there as she could, and you know how Galadriel is."

Gimli blinked. "Another thing for which I owe the great Lady, then."

"I'm surprised Lúnasalmë didn't come see you while she was here, actually," said Legolas.
"Not too surprising," said Gimli. "Seeing how you stay a day or two and then ride off again."

"Does it bother you, my love?"

"Not the riding around. You were never one for inaction."

"But?"

"These pilgrims are not you. You press them hard, for peaceful mariners." He paused, then added, "And I can be honest: I want more time with you."

"I don't have that much to talk about," said Legolas.

"I remember long evenings before a fire, while I worked away at a gem and you did whatever it is you do with arrows." Legolas snorted; Gimli had once demanded he teach the art of arrow-making, and then worked at it until the arrows he produced were not less fine than Legolas' own. "And neither of us would say a word all that evening, or the next morning, or the entire day." It was true. After a while, the words had become superfluous. "That is something I think we could still have, even as we are now."

"Ai, I am foolish. You are right, of course, and I have been abandoning you!"

"Abandoning me would be dying. Abandoning me would be never coming at all. You've just been distracted." Gimli sighed. "And, to be honest, ovens are not quite practical to just carry about. I didn't think of it either, until you showed me your new trick."

Legolas smiled, rueful. "Should I go tell them that we'll be staying a couple more days?"

"Aye, and I'll go get a bit of stone."

Silmel was still in the hall when he went out to explain the change in plans. She looked surprised, but also understanding. "I will let everyone know. You'll be staying there again tonight?"

"As many nights until we leave. Ah - how many are there, this time, whose - who would not admit that there was anything to forgive?"

"Two so far."

Legolas nodded. "I'll go talk to them in the morning." And Úrurril, he promised silently.

Úrurril, when he visited, opened the door and then stepped back when he saw who it was. He motioned Legolas to sit, and then without preamble said, "I went to visit Maedhros."

"Ah?" said Legolas, because it didn't seem polite to ask if that sort of thing was allowed.

"He's not my prince," said Úrurril. "He's not even lucid. Maglor is not here to ask, and Fëanor is pretending that the world doesn't exist! I can't - I know in my heart that our cause was just, still, and yet - "

"Your cause was just," agreed Legolas.

"Then - "

"And your actions, undefendable."

"What would you have had me do, then? Betray my oath to my liege?"
"Was he?" asked Legolas.

"What do you mean?" asked Úrurril.

"Would the one you swore to, would he have ordered the Kinslaying? Would he have locked away the Silmarils in a room of iron? Would he, in the most base of cases, have been jealous against Ñolofinwë and Arafinwë his brothers?"

"Half-brothers."

Legolas flicked his ears to dismiss the idea. "Brothers, and had he not been blinded by Morgoth, he too would have known it. Was that ner your liege?"

"I - I cannot. Go, please."

The other two went about as well as Úrurril had the first time, and then he found himself sitting across from Námo at luncheon. "I missed you, yesterday."

Námo shrugged. "I was talking with Eru."

Legolas startled; of course Námo was a Vala, one of the greater Ainur, but to hear him speak the name so casually was still a shock. "Ah. May I ask now if Celebrimbor is well?"

"He will be," said Námo. "He has passed to a place you cannot go, and he is likely to be there some time yet." Apparently he saw Legolas' distress, because he quickly added, "Do not worry. He has not become a Man, that he will now be forever beyond you. It is just something the dead do, on occasion, before they return."

Legolas relaxed. "Thank you for telling me. And for opening your halls to all who come, for as long as we come."

"To be honest," said Námo, "I was wondering what was driving you so hard. It wasn't me."

"Ai," Legolas ducked his head, embarrassed. "It was the work. I'd grown accustomed to urgency, in Ithilien. Besides, those of us from Eryn Lasgalen have always been overly hasty."

"Not overly, I think," said Námo, and stood to go.

He stayed for another three days. During the first two Gimli cut and polished the stone into a cabochon. At this point, Legolas realized that it was in fact a dendritic malachite, and had to smile. He didn't particularly love the stone, but Gimli liked to make things in it for him. It was a common enough habit in the Halls of Aulë, he understood, at least for dwarrows whose deep names were stones or metals of any kind. Gimli's own deep name precluded such a thing, so he spent his enthusiasm on Legolas instead. It didn't seem to matter to him that they evaporated a few months out of Mandos, since he always made more.

It was raining the third day. Legolas took one look at the downpour and said, "We're waiting."

He spent it making arrows. Gimli made some kind of savoury stew, which he claimed he'd learned from the Stonefoots. Strange spices tickled Legolas' nose, and to Gimli it must have been nearly overpowering. "That's the point," said Gimli. "As they'd say, it isn't real food if it doesn't make your eyeballs sweat."

"Gimli, that's disgusting."
"It grows on you," replied his husband. "I wish you could at least taste it."

"I'd try it," promised Legolas.

The fourth day dawned bright but muggy. Still, it wasn't intolerable, so they went.

Súripilu spoke up, a few days out. "I . . . wasn't entirely sure about this. If I should come, I mean. It's all very well for Celebrimbor, but we know for every one like him there will equally be an Úrurril."

"What convinced you?"

"I was ready to let it go, I think. Regardless of what the Ñoldo in question thought about it." He paused, and then added, "And apparently Mandos doesn't doom everyone who comes this way."

"Not everyone," replied Legolas with a grin.

"I'm happy I did come, though," said Súripilu. "She was of Ñolofinwё's folk, and you know how they fared."

Legolas nodded.

"Still. I liked her. I wish we had met, either time, in better circumstances."

"Doesn't everybody?"

They arrived at Tirion on a cool, blustery day. Inside the dormitory of the pilgrim's compound, however, it was warm and welcoming. A number of someones had been very busy, for where the walls had been bare before, they were now covered in thick tapestries. Legolas marvelled at the choice only a moment; this building was to be temporary, and tapestries would well insulate the eventual stone. Then he sat down by one of the braziers.

"Well, Legolas?"

"Well, what?"

"We have completed our pilgrimage, and can return to Alqualondë from here. Are you joining us?"

"Probably not," said Legolas. "I have letters for King Ingwё."

"Letters?"

"Well. More like books," said Legolas, because they were, written out in cirth runes and instructing elves how to go about making and using what Gimli and his fellows called 'proper surveying equipment.' "Poor Aren, making him carry them around, along with a palantír and an elf actively practising on a Fëanorin lamp!"

"Books from Mandos?" asked Saminden.

"Why not? Those dead still have knowledge, and we may yet learn from them."

"And that is why you are Legolas of the Long Road. Can you use your Fëanorin tricks to make these any hotter?"

He rode with them to Lutulondë and saw them off before turning around. It was dark by the time he got to Tirion, so he stopped for the night. Or rather, Celebrían melted out of the shadows while he was deciding what to do, and told him to come back for the night. "You'll catch a cold," she said,
"and no one likes a miserable elf."

It was true, so Legolas stayed overnight at the home she and Elrond had built. It reminded him of Imladris, all stone latticework overgrown with carefully trained vines. They had hot cooked food, bread and meat. After that Elrond played music on one of the Western lutes, and Celebrían, with his permission, sang a song of sleep which carried him peacefully off to the realms of Irmo.

Chapter End Notes

And then tanarill was in Pennsylvania. It is my summer vacation. I miss living places where it rains, so hopefully it will rain while I am here.

As usual, please poke me if the accents are in the wrong places, or if I spelled things wrong, or if I spelled things right but used the wrong homophone.
He left the next morning. After so much time in company, it felt a little odd to be riding alone. Very odd, and he terribly missed the weight of his dwarf behind him.

He arrived at Taniquetil to find that someone had sent word ahead by palantír, and therefore two elves were waiting to meet him. They were Nóleven’s parents, and they wanted to know what had become of their daughter. He explained what he knew, and they invited him to their home for the noon meal. Then he went to find Ingwë, who was turning soil over in his garden.

"I can help with that," said Legolas, amused.

"That would defeat the purpose of the exercise." He looked up, squinting against the sky. "It's good to see you again."

"It's nice to be off the road," said Legolas, slyly. "I have rather more than a letter for you, from Gimli."

"Let me finish this, and we can go inside."

"I'm going inside now. I believe there is tea for me."

Ingyë had, indeed, made tea. He sat gratefully and drank it and then said, "What aid can I give today, my queen?"

Ingyë laughed. "Today is laundry. You have two strong arms, you can help wring it out."

"You know," said Legolas, as he twisted out another shirt, "there are devices so you don't have to work so hard at this. To help wring out the clothes, and such. They are common, in Middle-Earth."

"I know," said Ingyë, and then nothing else.

When the laundry was outside and drying on the line, they poured the rest of the water out onto the garden. Ingwë joined them inside. Legolas handed over the five letters and said, "Apparently Gimli has been recruiting."

Ingwë read the letters while Legolas made the fire flick on and off. At least, he did until Ingyë said, "Stop that," and enforced it with enough art that Legolas simply couldn't compete. "You can do that in your own home, but not in mine."

Ingwë said, "This is good news."

Legolas nodded. "I thought so." Then he placed the manual that Gimli and Narvi has written
together on the table. It landed without the satisfying thunk that a real book of that size would have made. "And this is from Gimli."

Ingwë looked at it, and then back up to Legolas. "I think," he said, "That we should go to the library."

It had to wait for the next day, because by then it was already time to start cooking. Finwe did something complicated to flour and butter and vegetables and eggs, and then there was an egg pie. Legolas ate and then helped clean up.

Ingwion met them at the library. Legolas rolled his eyes and said, "Do you live here?"

Ingwion blinked. "Yes."

"... really? You don't have a home in the city? A wife? Children?"

"My wife remains mostly in the company of Kementári. She is a tree just now."

"A tree," said Legolas flatly. "Yavanna does that?"

"Only if you ask very nicely," said Ingwion.

Ingwë added, "It was a peaceful decade, until you arrived."

Legolas rolled his eyes. "And children?"

"Grown, and with children of their own. They don't need either of us to take care of them. Besides, most of them stayed in Valmar."

"Why didn't you?" asked Legolas.

"I never wanted to rule," said Ingwion. "That's what they would have had me do, if I had stayed. I had to leave. None of my sisters came when we founded Taniquetil, and of my children, only Sailingwë and Tulcarmë followed." He shrugged. "And Tulcarmë has since left. Her art is prized in many places, but she places the challenge of finding her before any who would be her student."

Legolas tilted his head. "Art, or art?"

Ingwë grinned. "This library is also Ingwion's child."

"Our own books are simple enough to get," agreed Ingwion, "but convincing our brethren across the sea to bring along books from Middle-Earth, when it's almost impossible to simply send a message..."

"I haven't gone to Tol Eressëa since we last spoke." Legolas smiled. "Although Arafinwë-king gave me a Fëanorin lamp for practice, so maybe my art will be sufficient to reach across the Belegaer."

"I should have thought of it," said Ingwion ruefully. "Ah well. What have you brought?"

Legolas held out the book. "This is from Gimli."

"How to build a road?"

"No, this is just for surveying. Roads come later, apparently."

Ingwion looked at the book, then to his father. Ingwë shrugged.
"You should copy it all down before it fades," added Legolas.

They had to break the book apart from its bindings to get it to enough people to copy it out before it did fade. A least four hundred people answered Ingwion's call for help, and even though few of them could read cirth, the script wasn't hard to copy as shapes. It ended up taking a little over two weeks, and would have been even shorter but for the fact that the library wasn't meant to hold that many people at once.

Legolas took his turn too, of course, but on the second day Ingwion called him out to the Room of Art and demanded to watch him with the Fëanorín lamp. After it sputtered, more than an hour later, he flatly said, "All that in two months?"

"Closer to three," replied Legolas judiciously.

"I've known people who couldn't learn that in three centuries," said Ingwion.

"There are people who figure it out in three weeks," said Legolas. "I asked. This is something they teach to children in Tirion. The easiest thing they teach children in Tirion."

"I don't deny the art gets more difficult as you learn more. Here, give me that."

Legolas handed him the lamp. He took it over to the basin of water they'd used for water-calling, and dropped it in. Immediately, a cloud of steam rose with a hiss. "You probably didn't even notice that it was hot, did you?"

"It felt warm," said Legolas. "But not hot enough to do that, no."

"And that is because your hröa was barely touching the lamp. Mostly, it was fëa." He handed back the now-cool iron. "Yours, and the fire's. Art is all based in the manipulation of fëa, directly or indirectly."

Legolas looked at the lamp, not really seeing it. "Fëanàr?"

"Yes, exactly," said Ingwion. "You have been learning to use your fëa to feed that of the fire, and thus sustain the hröanàr long after it should have been extinguished. However, as you rightly say, it's a simple use of the skill."

"If that were true," argued Legolas, "then becoming a master of any element would not be so noteworthy."

Ingwion smiled. "No indeed. Mastery is the difference between using a knife as a tool, and using it as an extension of your own arm. Just being able to light a fire by fëa alone is not difficult. Rather, consider the difficulty of using fëanàr without actually creating any physical fire."

Legolas imagined it, or tried to. It was - not difficult, but slippery, as though he were trying to catch a fish in his hands. Finally, he said, "What's the use?"

"You can warm yourself without blankets or even clothes. You can pick up red-hot metal in your hands. If you get good enough, you can use those same hands to heat the metal, or anything else you might want to - "

"Ingwion."

"I - Legolas, it doesn't just become difficult; it becomes dangerous. Start with the easier tasks, and build your strength. You can decide to take that risk, or not, when you are ready for it."
Legolas thought of Gimli, waiting patiently for more than a year while he went somewhere that wasn't Mandos. "All right."

Ingwion showed him how to deal with heat. It was basically the reverse of feeding a fire except there was, as promised, no fire. He spent some time looking at Ingwion's glass furnace, and then asked, "How big a fire can you put out this way?"

"I don't know. I don't make a habit of setting ever-larger and more uncontrollable fires to see if I can control them."

Legolas laughed. "Fair enough. Idle speculation. It isn't good to prevent a forest from burning anyway."

He rode out a few days after that. Ingwion and Ingwē were spending time with the craftsmen of Taniquetil, making the surveying gear. There was nothing that said they had to be made of metal, or wood; nothing that said they had to be pretty. Nevertheless, as was the style of the Valinor, they were both functional and beautiful. Legolas distracted himself with watching them being made before he realized that there was really no reason to stay.

He did not go back to Tirion, or Alqualondë, or even Tol Eressēa. Instead, he took to his feet and went West, overland. Most of Valinor was unsettled, wild forests and plains interspersed with rare cities and less uncommonly, towns. He travelled by way of deer-runs through forests whose trees were a match for those of Fangorn Wood. When the Onodrim finally did find their wives and come West, he thought, they'd like it there.

He was so busy exploring the woods that he didn't quite notice the unseasonal growth. Of course, part of it was also that he'd lived most of his life in northern climes, and these more tropical plants didn't lose their foliage to sleep through the cooler months. But it didn't really forgive him for not marking on the fact that he was walking into spring, as though it were a location rather than a season. This was how he stumbled, quite accidentally, on Vána.

The Valië was hard at work, or as hard at work as Valar ever were. That was to say, there was a wooden box, and Vána had the top off and was gently brushing the bees aside so she could peer inside. He stood for a while, watching her slow motions as she hummed to the bees, then closed the box in apparent satisfaction. Then, and only then, did she look up.

"Oh," said the Ever-young, "it's you."

Legolas blinked. "I can go if - "

Vána laughed. "You just got here; why would I want you to leave? Come, I'll show you my insects."

So Legolas walked beside her for a little while as the forest put forth spring around them. Every so often Vána would lean over a bush or root or branch, and pick out an insect, holding it gently but firmly so that it could not fly and was not hurt. Some of them were familiar, but mostly they were not. He nodded politely as each one was held out for inspection, and after a while asked, carefully, "Why insects, though?"

Vána turned back to him. "Well, most of all animals are ants alone, and when you add in all the other kinds, you children are all outnumbered millions to one. But mostly because of the flowers."

"Flowers?"

"It took me a long time to figure out flowers. My sister was content with a hundred million years of ferns. Ferns! It took me so long because I did not at the first understand that flowers are there to
attract insects. Insects are there to be attracted to flowers." She made a face. "And rotting meat, but I prefer flowers. There are so many different kinds, so much beauty in the world. Even the ones that just eat dead things must do so, or there'd be no soil anywhere. I love them all."

"Ah," said Legolas, who was beginning to see why she was called 'ever-young.' "I admit, I have never cared much about the creeping things as long as they were not in my food. Except in the case of giant spiders, which - "

" - should not be, yes," agreed Vána. "In which case it is very nice of you to follow me around like this. Most people don't after they see the flowers blooming."

"You were talking to the bees," explained Legolas.

"You want to know how?"

"No; the Beornings know it well, and will teach it if asked. It is just that they are considered odd and often frightening by other Men, and even some elves. Yet they don't leave out poisoned grain for the mice, and their ponies don't fear them no matter what skin they wear, and the world is a better place for their presence." He smiled a little. "I don't think I should like to live in a world without flowers and fruit."

Vána said, "You have a silver tongue."

"My husband has a silver tongue," said Legolas. "I may have learned how to say a truth politely, but nothing more."

"You weren't even looking for me, were you?"

"Not particularly, although I must be blind not to have seen the signs."

"I think it is good. You would have avoided me if you had noticed. What were you looking for?"

Legolas paused for a moment. "Peace, I think. This task is not larger than I can bear, but I am still Legolas. Sometimes I need to walk beneath the canopy."

"You are truly one of my sister's." Legolas wondered if that were a bad thing until she added, "Be welcome in these woods, then, until you are ready to return to your brethren."

Legolas inclined his head. "Thank you, lady."

He stayed a score of days. There was plenty of small game, and fruits and flowers. He could have lived there easily, but that Gimli was not with him, and had never loved the forests anyway. But he did achieve some measure of peace, and then struck north. He emerged into the farmland no more than a few day's march from Valmar, which was further West than he'd thought he was. Still, if Valmar was where we was needed, than that was where he'd go.

They stared at him when he showed up at the city walls. Then they let him in.

"What?" he asked, as someone led him toward the great central tower.

"You vanished. We - feared the worst."

"There is no Black Rider in Valinor," said Legolas, confused.

"Nothing binds you to your task. Not the commands of Eldar, nor even Valar. And it is difficult."
"It is. Sometimes I must take my rest under the living trees for a span; but once refreshed, I return."

"You went to Lórien?"

"What need had I of Lórien?" He shrugged. "I went under the leaves. Now I return. Has Alqualondë caught fire since I went?"

"Not in a literal sense," replied his guide.

Once inside the Mindon Valar, Legolas caught his breath. At the center of the second level was an enormous copper stand, holding an equally enormous palantír. Also there was Galadriel, standing to the west and looking out to the sea. She turned, and the said, "Legolas! You're all right?"

"Yes?" he asked. "I did say I was going exploring. You needn't have worried."

"The Falmari are not the elves of Eryn Lasgalen," said Galadriel, in gentle reproof. "You worried them." She didn't say, you worried me. He heard it anyway, when her next words were, "I came here to try and find you, using this master palantír."

"Ai!"

She smiled. "Just so. Did you know Olwë was getting ready to send out searchers? And he did not lack for volunteers."

"I understand," said Legolas. "No need to keep hammering!"

"I am unsure you really do, Legolas," said Galadriel, softly.

Legolas' lips quirked. "You sound like my father. 'Uphold the dignity of our house.' 'A prince must be held to a higher standard.' 'You must be more responsible.' One of my favorite things about Valinor: I am not even nobility, here."

"If it makes you happy to think so."

"But I do understand." He smiled softly. "I must remember that there are those in Valinor who love me."

"There are those in Valinor who follow you into death," said Galadriel. "And more remarkably, back out of it. Do not make us worry."

Legolas paused, then, remembering that she'd lost all of her siblings and cousins before the end of the First Age. "I won't, mellon-nin. I apologize."

"Well. Good." Then, "Did you learn anything interesting?"

"I learned the secret nature of beetles," said Legolas.

"And what is the nature of beetles?"

Legolas considered, and then said, "To drink from flowers."

"That is no secret!" laughed Galadriel.

"It is," said Legolas. "Just because the whole world knows doesn't make it less a secret. I'd say it were more, in fact: only a very good secret could be kept by so many people." That earned him a laugh, so he continued, "Will you send word to Tirion, and Alqualondë?"
"Of course I will, but all will wish to see you safe just the same."

"Then I suppose we had better ride for Tirion tomorrow."

Travel with Galadriel was different than he'd expected. He couldn't have said quite what he had expected, except that it wasn't just the two of them and the road, mile after mile, for days. It wasn't her hands as competent as his at setting out the bedrolls, laying a fire, hunting fruits in the gloaming dusk.

"There never used to be stars above Valinor," said Galadriel quietly, one evening.

"None at all?"

"Say rather, in the time of the Trees, there was twilight but never true darkness. Only beyond the Pelóri was there night enough to see them."

"But we are Eldar!" cried Legolas in dismay.

"We are. I think, sometimes, that all of it was worth it, for a starlit night on the Helcaraxë."

"And the rest of the time?"

"The rest of the time . . . go to sleep, Legolas. Morning will come soon enough."

Legolas said, "I'm sorry," and went to sleep.

Tirion didn't look any different than it ever did, and Galadriel rode straight ahead to the Mindon Eldaliéva and the palace at its base. Legolas tried to ignore the stares of the Ñoldor as he passed. It didn't really work, but he was soon distracted by Celebrían and Ninquivingë.

"What are you doing here?" he asked numbly.

"As if I wouldn't come to thump your foolish head," said Ninquivingë. She suited actions to words and gave him a reasonably hard slap across the back of his head. "Besides, it is nice to see Lady Celebrían again."

"I did not mean for anyone to worry. Anyone in Eryn Lasgalen might have taken the road under leaves for a while, and caused no such panic!"

"Not everyone here is from a woodland realm," said Celebrían gently. "What you or I might do as easily as breathing is passing strange, to Amanyar eyes."

"More than 'passing,'" snorted Ninquivingë.

Legolas frowned. He'd been about to protest that it wasn't difficult, but it was. He remembered one summer, learning to climb, and breaking one limb after another. His father had threatened to lock him in, but he'd learned in the end - and just soon enough for the ice to start making climbing really interesting. So instead he said, "I apologize. I was not thinking."

Ninquivingë gave him an odd look. "Just like that?"

"Well, I have a difficult request, so now you're going to hate me," said Legolas.

Ninquivingë sighed. "Out with it."

"Many people make songs for Uinen, but I think Námo likes music as well. All he ever gets are
dirges. Can you arrange for each group to have a musician? He's doing more than he must for each and every one of us, and I'd like to - thank him."

Ninquivingē said, "You have a broad heart."

Chapter End Notes

Still in Pennsylvania. Currently there is ALL THE RAIN :D

Only two more chapters after this one, and the next one is a bit short. So this is your two-week warning, I suppose.

As per usual, inform me if I make an mistakes! Last week a big one in the chapter title was caught, so you guys are on the ball for sure.
They were welcomed back to Alqualonde with, if not a parade, than a palpable air of celebration. Legolas was all set to go find some wine and sit on the roof again, except that Tirnel found him first. "Come on, Thranduilion. There's a baby you need to meet, and you can't meet her if you're sitting with a skin and staring at the stars and moping."

"I'm not moping," said Legolas.

"'Oh, woe is me, I'm a great hero to my people'. " Tirnel broke off laughing as Legolas punched him half-heartedly. "Seriously, Friendly. We told them not to worry, but these city-elves . . . let them have their party. Come home."

Home was Merilinel and her parents and sister and sister's husband, and Rusgon and his parents, and tiny, perfectly formed Sainur, blinking up at him with huge blue eyes. She made an uncoordinated baby-grab for his hair. He cut off a lock and made her a bracelet, braiding it quickly and trying it on to her wrist. She kept shaking her fist, looking at it.

"I think she likes her gift," said Merilinel, amused.

"Let me know when she destroys it, and I'll make another," said Legolas, because he didn't know how to say she's beautiful and thank you for letting me be part of her life.

"Of course," said Rusgon. "You're family."

He stayed a few days, mostly in Tirnel's flet, before seeking out Lúnasalmë. She was sitting in one of the carefully protected gardens, playing fitfully. She looked up even at his soft tread. "Legolas?"

"I need two songs," he said without preamble.

"And you think songs are so easy to compose that you can just say 'I need two' and have them?"

Legolas sat, chagrined. "Rather, you are still writing the Lay of Legolas of the Long Road?"

"Of course; that story is not yet finished."

He nodded. "I want you to add a verse about my perfectly unfair treatment of Uinen on the way here." Quickly he explained what he'd said and done, and why. "So you see that if I am to apologize, and properly, I must have the truth known. I thought of you right away."

Lúnasalmë hummed, a few bars of the tune that went with the lay. "I understand. And I suppose your second song will be for Uinen."

"I know what I want to say," said Legolas, "but I have little gift for music."
"I find that most people have more than they know."

Legolas nodded. "Will you help me? I will repay you, in hunting or - "

"Repay me?" Lúnasalmë sounded astonished. "Legolas, with what you are doing - "

"I'm not doing it for a reward," said Legolas quickly. "I can't accept anything for it."

Lúnasalmë looked at him for a long moment, and then nodded her head, sharply. "I understand. In that case, my price is this: tell me about your husband. Tell me about the Khazâd who broke six millennia of hate in a single year, who caught with his love Legolas of the Long Road. Tell me about Gimli."

Legolas blinked. "I can only tell you things that are not Khuzdul secrets."

"Of course."

"Then . . . you know how we met. There are many lies about Aulë's children in Middle-Earth, and it is to my shame that I believed them. Lies that they have no true hearts, and can only feel for gold and gems. That not even the bonds of kinship mean aught to them." He shook his head. "And then there was Khazâd-dûm, called Moria by elves who don't understand that it meant the same to them as - as the Ezellohar means to us. Almost exactly the same, in fact."

"Ah."

"We walked in on the skeletons of dwarrow who'd been his playmates as children, his friends. His cousin; members of the Company of Erebor. They'd fought and they'd died and he went a little mad. Like we do, when the grief is too much." Those who take the fast road to go after their loves, he meant. "He fought like one possessed, with no care for his own safety. We might not have made it at all, but for that."

"After, in Lothlórien, we all mourned for Mithrandir - Olórin - but he was mourning for more. And even then, he comforted me." Legolas smiled a little at the memory. "He said he couldn't stand watching me mope around. He told me these ridiculous children's stories. Mostly they don't make sense to someone who isn't Khazâd, but he didn't stop telling them until he found one to make me laugh."

"What was the story?"

"It's - this little rhyme about how to carve a teacup for a queen." Legolas shrugged. "It's not funny in Quenya, you lose the puns in translation. It just got me to laugh, and then I laughed until I cried, and cried until I could sing again.

"People . . . I know people think I have a broad heart, but it's nothing compared to him, who would comfort someone who wasn't really even a friend, and who had been cruel besides, just because he did not know how to grieve. So. That's my Gimli. My heart."

Lúnasalmë nodded. "Thank you. Now you must tell me what song you wish for Uinen."

"Gimli said that Aglarond was formed by water. I want a song about the beauty of stone and water together: the gemmed caverns carved out by the music of water dripping through it."

"Ye-es," said Lúnasalmë. "That is something new." She pulled her lyre over, began picking at it. "Do you have words?"
The song wasn't even a real skeleton by nightfall; it took another week to shape into something halfway decent. Then Lúnasalmë informed him that a corvette was making a supply run to Tol Eressëa and if he wanted to be on it, he ought to pack himself up and head down to the harbor. The captain was not surprised to see him.

"Legolas of the Long Road," he said, dismissively. "I hear you can't sail for all the gems in Formenos."

"It's not a skill I know very well, no," replied Legolas. "I have promised not to venture upon the water unless it is in the hands of a skilled pilot."

"Hm. And I suppose you expect free passage."

"Not really." He shrugged. "I know a little of carpentry, and a lot of knotwork. I can repair sailcloth and netting, if you need, and I've been braiding rope my whole life."

That got him a sharp look. "You help load and unload."

Legolas nodded.

"Then I suppose you had better come aboard."

The trip to Avallónë was four days. By distance alone it should have been two, but the Pelóri backbone, underwater as it was on this part of the range, made for some tricky reefs. Legolas was content to spend the days making ropes and tying knots and mending sail and whatever else two unskilled hands could do. Then he helped unload the supplies, which were by and large metal goods. Tol Eressëa was large enough to provide for itself in most things, but the Ñoldor had ever been the Aulë's.

Avallónë was a tithe of what it had once been, and as it hadn't been built in stone then, this was mostly invisible. Bilbo's house-under-hill, which had been Frodo's in turn, and then Sam's, and then Gimli's, was buried under a layer of dust years thick. Legolas went to visit the stonework room at the back where Gimli's body lay, and deposited the little malachite beads there. Then he went to the city.

The Mindon Avallónë was tall and white, faced in alabaster. The master palantír was on the ground level, in the center of the large room. A map on the floor told one where to stand, so he did, looking East and North toward Orthanc. Then he placed his hands on the smooth glass, and reached out and across the water as it flared to life.

There was no reply. He hadn't expected one, really. Someone had to be handling both palantíri, and as far as he knew the palantír of Orthanc had simply been put away. Still, the infrequency of ships from Alqualondë meant he had a fortnight, so he returned the next day, and the day after that.

He got his response nine days in. It was a Man, quite clearly terrified for no reason Legolas could discern, and his jumbled thoughts resolved into a request to know who this was.

"Legolas," he replied aloud. "Legolas Thranduilion, of Ithilien before I left Middle-Earth; I am in Avallónë now. Yourself?"
The reply was long moments in coming. The Man, it seemed, was a woman, and her name was Heregyth, and she didn't quite believe him. Even if it was impossible to lie by palantír, it was possible to not tell the truth. Legolas she knew, at least as well as anyone yet living could know one of the Walkers, and of course he had gone West two generations ago. But it seemed odd that he should decide to send his thought back East now.

"It's not very odd," he said, bemused. "I was asked to send a message, and since I am here anyway, I thought perhaps I could ask after my father. Mother sends her love."

The bonds of family, conceded Heregyth, do hold forever. What message did he have?

"I am to request that elves coming West now carry a few books when they do - the rarer, the better. We're stocking a library, apparently."

There was a pause, along with a sense of are-you-jesting. Then a clear thought, that there were elves in Treegarth, some from Greenwood, and she could bring one to talk to him the next day.

"If they want," said Legolas.

The next day, he went again, and was greeted by an elf named Callant, who was at Treegarth to learn from the Onodrim and as ambassador from Thranduil. More importantly, Legolas knew him, had known him centuries ago in Mirkwood, when he'd consistently won at the archery butts. He startled when he understood it really was Legolas, and he was healthy in the West, and sending a message home. He was more willing to understand the messages, at least, and promised to send a letter South to Gondor in addition to taking one North to Eryn Lasgalen. Also, he wanted to know, how was Legolas?

Legolas didn't tell him everything, but he did say that he was fine and Gimli was dead but fine in the Halls of Aulë at Mandos, and they were as happy as could be expected. And the West was perhaps diminished from the Time of the Trees, but it didn't seem so to this Moriquendi, who looked about and only saw wonder upon wonder. He left the tower that day feeling good, and it lasted until he was back in Alqualondë weeks later.

Ninquivingë noticed. "Success?"

"Success," said Legolas. "I've asked for books for Ingwion, and sent news to my father. I couldn't stay to hear back from him, but - he'll know, at least. That I'm here, and safe, and happy."

"Are you?" asked Ninquivingë.

"I could be happier," admitted Legolas. "But I'm not miserable, and that's more than I expected."

"Are you ready to go back to Mandos?"

"Yes."

He set out three days later. Once again, this group was meant to have been twelve, and once again, it wasn't. Tirnel showed up to help lead the mariners on the road, and then, unexpectedly, so did Lûnasalmë.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Coming with you." Her tone brooked no argument and no further questions.

So it was fourteen of them who set out to Mandos. The sail to Lutulondë was was cheerful and full
of song, and the ride to Tirion hardly less so. They didn't encounter trouble until the storm hit, when
they were a week out and almost perfectly spaced between Tirion and Valmar. Legolas and Tirnel
showed them how to weave together branches to make a sort of thatch hut, and between the fourteen
of them they had a large one in a few hours. Then they made as big a fire as they would risk, and this
was quite big because Legolas was keeping an artful eye on it, and huddled together to get warm.

"You know," said Lúnasalmë, "I like this."

"Being wet and miserable in a leaf tent?" asked Helwaro.

"No. The music of the rain on the forest. The scent of green things and freshwater." She tucked her
feet as close to the fire as she dared. "And wood-smoke that's more than a tiny galley-fire."

"Have I made myself a permanent road companion, then?" teased Legolas.

"We'll see how these land-ships of yours turn out."

Legolas looked over, and then sat up straight when he saw that she was serious. "I - your home is in
Alqualondë - "

"And I will always have a home in Alqualondë. The music there is nice. But the road has returned to
me inspiration as I have not felt in long centuries. Besides, isn't it nice to journey and return home
again?"

"The you that returns is never the same one that left," cautioned Tirnel. "We found when Friendly
started travelling. Went away to take note that our prisoner had escaped, came back more than a year
later a great hero and married to Master Gimli. And it's a good thing too, because else he'd have been
beating off suitors with a stick."

"Tirnel - "

"Let him speak the truth." That was a sweet, round-faced woman named Solorwen. "If you weren't
married, I would have given you flower garlands." That was a common statement of informal
interest, hröa rather than fёa.

It wasn't that Legolas hadn't been physically attractive, even by elven standards, before the matter of
the ring. It had just always paled before the idea of the prince, which was who a lot of his potential
lovers really wanted. After the first disastrous affair, he'd confined himself to lovers who were friends
first and knew him. "I'd refuse anyway. I always liked having friends more than having lovers."

Solorwen nodded. "You can never have enough friends."

The storm lasted another day, while they sat in their long hut and told stories and sang songs.
Legolas slept but a little, while he coaxed the wet wood into giving off more heat than smoke.
Finally, the storm blew off to the East, and they were able to continue. Even so, they were glad when
they got to Valmar, which had actual beds that were not wet.

"Land-ships," said Lúnasalmë.

"Tents," said Tirnel. "Oilcloth tents. Valinor is just so nice usually, and those are reasonably heavy.
It wouldn't be fair to burden our horses unless we actually needed to."

Legolas sighed.

Three days after leaving Valmar, they unexpectedly met up with Ingwion, who was leading the
surveying crew. "I thought you'd be along. Come, stop for the day. We have a nice camp."

Legolas chuckled, but called the halt. "And you? I hadn't imagined to see you out of Taniquetil."

Ingwion waved a hand. "It was necessary. They'd have had us start at the sea, but there at least we have an advantage. Between art and math, we'll get this done."

"And that?" asked Legolas, pointing at a . . . device, and the pair of elves walking around it.

"Core samples. They want to know what the soil is like to a depth of fifty feet or bedrock, whichever is closest. It took us the most time to figure those out, honestly. A hollow drill."

Legolas looked over the crew. "You're having good fortune?"

"Some. I have notes for you to take with you."

They only stayed with the surveyors that evening. The rest of the trip to Mandos passed without anything worse than a few showers. Legolas found that being able to move just heat around was a valuable skill, and ended up warming up his companions more than once with a hand and a moment of skillfully applied art.

"I feel like I have been cheated," said Tirnel. "Why didn't your father like this? He likes massages well enough, and a masseuse with this skill - "

"Doriath," said Legolas.

"Oh for - just because the Ñoldor brought it with them doesn't mean it's an inherently Ñoldorin art! He just likes holding grudges."

"Well," said Legolas, who didn't disagree.

As usual, Námo greeted them in the hall. It was actually nearer to noon than evening, so Legolas suggested they should relax the rest of the day and face their slayers on a full night's sleep. He got a sandwich for lunch and went to find Gimli.

His Khazâd was in the long hall of Aulë, arguing with Narvi and Narfî and Celebrimbor. Legolas dropped his plate, barely registering the way it shattered on the polished stone. They all looked up, and the Narfî looked away and Gimli stood to come nearer and Narvi smiled and Celebrimbor - Celebrimbor said, "Hello, mellon-nin."

Chapter End Notes

No longer in Pennsylvania. I was supposed to spend thirteen hours travelling, which is a long day by any measure, but Unexpected Airplane Delays (for which I never got any explanation) resulted in the single day being nineteen hours long, most of it spent either in an airport or on a plane. >:\

Meanwhile, please let me know if you have any spelling or grammar remarks to make.

One more chapter to go.
"You are," said Legolas dumbly.

"Well," said Celebrimbor. "I'd developed a bad habit, but you were right: habits can change." He held out a hand to Legolas. Legolas pulled him into a hug. He froze for a moment before returning it, and then stepped back. "It's good to be here. Thank you, Legolas."

"You did the most work," said Legolas automatically.

Narvi rolled his eyes. "He dug out the mountain. You showed him how to use a pick. Both were important. And I . . . " He trailed off, eyes flicking quickly to and from Narfi.

"Ah," said Legolas, in deeply sympathetic understanding.

"Yes," said Narvi. "Celebrimbor has been helping us plan this road. Apparently he has some practical experience with the geography of Aman."

"That's one way to put it," said Celebrimbor, where he was busy picking up pieces of ceramic and sandwich off the floor. "I'm happy to help."

"Going to demand the high king let you in on the project, you mean," said Narvi.

Legolas laughed. "As if he is going to refuse."

"That was my thinking as well. There, I think that's as good as I can get it without a broom. I'll go get us some lunch, hm? It is that time."

"There are pilgrims in the hall," blurted out Legolas.

Celebrimbor tilted his head. "They do tend to come with you."

"Will you be all right?"

"Oh," Celebrimbor smiled. "Yes. I will be fine. Perhaps you should come along and make introductions, though. Just in case."

Legolas looked to Gimli, who made shooing motions. "I should. Come on, then."

The hall quieted when Legolas appeared with Celebrimbor, and they sat down. Lúnasalmē broke the silence by saying, "You did it, then. Good."

"I did it," said Celebrimbor, "with some help from my friends."

"Is that - " began Tirnel.

"Yes," said Legolas. "I'd like to propose a toast: to Celebrimbor, first of the kinslayers repentant, for proving to all of us that we can bring our brothers and sisters out of these halls."

"And that we will," said Lúnasalmē, softly but firmly.
"Hear!" shouted Tirnel, and knocked back a mug of wine.

Lunch was a loud affair. All of the pilgrims aside from Lúnasalmé were curious about Celebrimbor. He was willing to answer their questions, but only at the cost of news from Valinor. They chatted happily all the way through the meal. Legolas watched in satisfaction until a change in the air caused him to look up. "Great judge," he said.

"You did a good job there," said Námo, softly. "And don't argue that you did nothing. You cared enough to extend a hand to him."

Legolas looked at him, and then said, "It's no less than I would do for anyone in your halls."

"I know," said Námo. He seemed to be about to say something else, but then didn't.

Legolas looked after him.

He took dinner with Gimli and Narvi and Celebrimbor. The dwarrow were eating another rice-and-sauce concoction that tickled Legolas' throat. He and Celebrimbor ate normal food, a rich fish-vegetable stew. Legolas was prepared to start discussion on the road, but Narvi hushed him. "Better to do it in the morning, when we are all here," he said, which made good sense. Instead they spent dinner talking quietly about Celebrimbor's experiences with road-building, but mostly just being there, with each other.

It was after dinner that Celebrimbor asked him for a quiet word. He was a little surprised to be led out of the Halls of Aulë, to the entrance of Mandos, just before the great doors. They were open to allow the cool night air in. The crickets chirped. Legolas breathed, and waited patiently.

"I had thought," said Celebrimbor. "You spoke of being married to your Gimli, and Narvi's letters . . . . I had thought that perhaps we were not too late after all. Too foolish. And yet he will not be alone with me! I am not blind, I can see the way he looks at me, or thought I could. Am I imagining things? And if not, what is wrong?"

"Oh," said Legolas, in sudden understanding. "No, you are not blind yet. We marry under the sky; Khazâd, when they wed, do so in natural caverns of stone. It is especially romantic to find a new one, but any unshaped stone will do."

"And?" Celebrimbor prompted him to get to the point.

"And the place where the Halls of Aulë meet Mandos are not unhewn." Legolas shrugged. "Unless I am blind and a fool, he asked Gimli also, but there are no stars here. He'd rather not hurt you with might-have-beens, I think."

"Oh," said Celebrimbor, deflating.

"However," said Legolas, considering aloud. "They don't call upon Ilúvatar, as the One did not make them. Gimli, for my sake, called upon the Smith. I believe you studied under him once?"

Celebrimbor blinked. "Do I have a right to ask anything of the Valar?"

"I don't know," said Legolas. "Do you?"

Celebrimbor laughed. "Never change, Legolas. Come, let's go back."

They went back. Gimli was talking in Khuzdul with Narvi, both of their voices low and rumbling, but they stopped immediately when the elves returned. Legolas rolled his eyes. "I," he announced,
"am exhausted. Gimli, our bed?"

"In a bit - we're still talking."

Legolas nodded, and headed towards their bed in their alcove in the great Hall of Friendship. They had compromised on Mannish beds a few years into their marriage. Dwarven beds were little more than rock-cut holes, well-lined with thick woolen ticking, padded with linen and down comforters, and perfectly ridiculous to try and stuff an elf into. Elf beds, at least of the sort Legolas used, were just wooden slats with maybe a little padding. It was impressive, then, that Gimli had found someone in the Halls of Aulë not only to make one for him, but make one scaled to an elf. They settled down, Legolas' slight weight making almost no dent. Gimli's insubstantial weight made none at all, but it was still hours before he felt his husband join him.

"Gimli, mellin, what have I done wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Then?"

Gimli sighed. "We married four times. Narvi never married once. Celebrimbor was not so willing to ignore tradition."

"I know," said Legolas. "But he's willing now."

"Now is too late. I would not have Narvi hurting so. He has been a good friend to me."

"Ah," said Legolas. "I don't think it's too late."

"Not too -"

"This is Valinor." Legolas shrugged. "I wasn't born Dendritic-malachite."

"You have a point," said Gimli. "I will tell Narvi that there is yet hope. You?"

"Celebrimbor did not quite understand the problem, but understood the solution well enough when I explained. Still, I will drag him to the Mansions of Aulë myself if I have to."

At that, Gimli finally chuckled. "You are making a name for your willingness to drag your friends across a continent."

"I?" asked Legolas, mock-affronted. "I was merely a Walker, one of nine."

"Elf. Go to sleep."

Breakfast the next morning was toast and honey and orange juice. Oranges were something Legolas had never even known about before coming West, and he felt it was selfish of the Valar to keep them in Valinor. Ninquivingë had laughed at him for five solid minutes before explaining that there were oranges in Middle-Earth, but they only grew in more southerly regions; the Haradrim ate them, but the elves of Mirkwood necessarily couldn't.

After breakfast, Lúnasalmë followed him to the Halls of Aulë. The dwarrow stared at her before Baran said, "More elves?"

"I am Lúnasalmë," said Lúnasalmë. "A musician."

"All right," said Baran, after a long pause. "And you're here why?"
"There have been many lies told about your people, and even more half-truths. It makes understanding and friendship needlessly complicated. I am here to learn the truth."

All of the dwarrows stared at her. So did Legolas. "Lûnasalmë?"

"Also, it is something new. New things are rare in Valinor."

"We won't tell you any of our secrets," said Narfi, coolly.

"I didn't expect any. Yet, as an example, one lie says that there are no she-Khazâd, and younglings are carved out of rock; but I don't believe it."

There was a pause, and then Gáim laughed. "Does anyone actually believe that?"

Lûnasalmë shrugged. "He who made you had less practical experience with living things, although not as little as - he who reigns here, for example. And are there not the stone giants, after all?"

Gáim tugged his beard, thoughtfully. "That's true. And you have come to learn?"

Lûnasalmë nodded. "I plan to make a song refuting all the lies; and I plan to sing it from here to Taniquetil. It is said by those who know that Ilúvatar adopted the Khazâd to be his children; we have been poor elder siblings, this long time."

Most of the dwarrows stared at her, small for an elf and silver-haired and wearing her travelling leathers. Narfi's eyes flicked between her and Gimli. Then he said, "Fine. If change can happen in an age then let it happen."

"Thank you," said Lûnasalmë. "I would speak and ask questions of those who will answer, if one of you might relay that I am here."

Narvi said, "I'll go," and was gone before anyone could protest.

Narfi watched him go, then said, "And what do we do now?"

"We wait," said Gimli. "Perhaps you talk to my One. Or perhaps not."

Narfi eyed Legolas. "Will he?"

"Will I what?" asked Legolas.

"Talk to me."

Legolas shrugged. "If you want."

"I don't want," said Narfi. "But I think I must. We can go to one of the smaller alcoves."

But once they'd gone to the alcove, Narfi didn't quite seem to know what to say. Then, after a long moment during which Legolas sat down, the words seemed to come in a jumble. "All my life I knew that elves could be good craftsmen, but also terrible enemies. I taught that to my children, and I was proud when my son and his elf friend made our West Gate, proud that they'd worked stone and magic together. But I couldn't imagine - and now I see you and young Gimli together, and I can't deny you are One and One, even though I can't see how. And I see that my son wants - what do I do?" This last came out as an anguished wail.

Legolas waited, and then said, "I cannot tell you, but . . . I know something of disapproving fathers. When we decided to bind ourselves together, we each had one."
"Aye, and you made a life together despite it. I have been spending many hours with Glóin, as of late. That's not," he broke off, made a sound of frustration. "He can't tell me the things I want to know. How do elves know when they have found their One?"

"Oh," said Legolas, understanding. "It is different for each person. My parents saw each other and knew just like that; but that's relatively rare. More usually we must spend time with each other until we know enough to see a little of each other's soul, and then we can determine if this is the one for whom we we made or not."

"Not different from Khazâd, then," said Narfi.

"Not really," said Legolas. "But it must be said - I nearly missed seeing Gimli, so blinded was I by ancient prejudice. It is thanks entirely to the kindesses of hobbits and the wisdom of Maiar that I did not. And there were no Maiar in Hollin."

"Not to mention these strange, happy people called hobbits," said Narfi, taking his point clearly. Then he said, "I had another question. Is there any reason that an elf, having found their One, might not pursue it?"

"Like dwarrowsmiths, you mean?" said Legolas, frowning. "If it had just been for his own sake, I don't think Celebrimbor would have let it rest. But Narvi was and is a dwarf, and it is not like he could have brought an elf home with him."

There was long moment, and then Narfi sighed and said, "Aye. But Gimli dared do it."

"I can't tell you his motives, or your son's, or Celebrimbor's." Legolas smiled. "I can tell you, Gimli didn't act on what I thought were perfectly clear signals, because he didn't see them. It was no one's fault, but it . . . delayed things until almost too late."

"And it is too late for them."

"Well," said Legolas, because he didn't want to get anyone's hopes up for something that might not pan out in the end. "It's only too late for kissing, I think. I didn't suddenly stop being married to Gimli when his hröa died."

Narfi gave him a long stare. "If - when - you're here, and I have further questions - "

"Of course you can ask," replied Legolas. "Lúnasalmë was right; there has been enough failure to talk on both sides."

They went back to the main room, where Gimli and the others were poring over the notes Ingwion had sent. Sort of.

"Silt!" shouted Baran. "The entire continent is silt!"

"That's not true," said Celebrimbor. "The forests all sit on loam, and the Pelóri mountains are iron at the core."

"That's hundreds of miles from where this road is going to start," said Fáim. "Face it, dwarrow: it's going to have to be floated on silt."

"Damn," said Baran, Gimli, Gáim, and Narfi in unison.

"I'll . . . leave you to it?" said Legolas.
Gimli looked up sharply. "We'll only work until noon. Go see to your ducklings, and come back then."

My ducklings, thought Legolas, and went.

He didn't really have to see to them; they were perfectly fine on their own. He had to see to Úrurril.

Úrurril took one look at who was on the other side of the door, and stepped back to let him in. He waited until they were seated before he said, without preamble, "I need to know more."

"What more do you need to know?" asked Legolas, curious.

"More of those gifts of spirit which only the Ainur can teach. I need to know when it is permissible to allow compassion to override duty."

"Always," replied Legolas, immediately.

"You seem sure of that."

Legolas hesitated, and then said, "You - know the matter of the ring?"

"I know that it happened," replied Úrurril cautiously. "That Melkor's servant may no longer clothe himself in hröa until the second music."

Legolas nodded. "There was a prisoner in Mirkwood, under my care; I originally went to Imladris to report that, in my compassion, I'd let slip my duty and allowed the poor creature to escape. Later, it crossed paths with Frodo ring-bearer and Samwise, and led them around the forces of Sauron and up the Cirith Ungol rather than into the teeth of the Morannon. Led them all the way to Orodruin, in fact, when all Middle-Earth would have fallen without it. When is the time for compassion to override duty? Any time your duty requires that you forget compassion."

Úrurril stared at him.

"Besides," he said, "what honest duty requires that you forget compassion?"

"The duty of the lord of these halls, for one," said Úrurril.

"Is that what you think?" asked Legolas, tilting his head.

Úrurril looked away first. "This kind of compassion hurts."

"So does healing a broken bone," said Legolas. "We still do it."

"That pain is only physical," said Úrurril.

Legolas sighed. "What do you want me to say? Fëar are more enduring than hröar. Things that can injure fëar must, logically, be worse than things that can injure hröar. Even more so things that leave lasting wounds. The healing of them . . ."

"I hear you," said Úrurril, then made a face. "Digging around in old wounds is not the most enjoyable."

Of the two others who'd refused to repent, one wouldn't open the door for him and the other spent an hour arguing the sovereign right of Fëanor to go retrieve his lost Silmarils. He didn't seem to understand that Legolas wasn't saying Fëanor hadn't had that right, only that stealing Alqualondë's wings to do it was entirely and unrepentantly hypocritical. Finally he retired for lunch, to find it
already midafternoon and half his charges done.

"Have you eaten since breakfast?" asked Gimli, clucking over him.

"No, dearest," said Legolas, spreading butter on a piece of bread. "I hadn't realized it was so late."

"Just like you. Always needed a keeper."

Legolas smiled fondly. "Yes. You seem to be coopting half of Valinor to look after me."

"I did nothing," said Gimli, with the peculiar liveliness to his eyes that spoke to the twin facts that, one, Gimli knew he was lying blatantly, and two, he was very amused.

"Fine, fine. I had a thought, though."

"Indeed?"

"Well, I can't eat the food of the dead, but you seem to be perfectly capable of lifting real food, when it's in these halls. If I brought ingredients, you might be able to make me some of that fireball stew."

"Hmm," said Gimli. "Well."

"You don't want to?"

"No, it's not that. I'm just not sure if you'd be able to find the ingredients. They didn't grow in our part of Middle-Earth."

"Then there's no harm in asking," said Legolas. "Unless you're afraid your new skill with eye-melting stew isn't up to the challenge."

Gimli just gave him a look, one that said, 'I know you're just trying to get me to do this by challenging me, and it's not going to work, but I will do what you asked anyway because I love you.'

"As long as you are prepared for my mistakes as well as my successes."

"Always, beloved."

Lúnasalmë came around dinner-time, bringing along food for herself, Legolas, and Celebrimbor. She waited until they were sitting and chewing before she said, "I am staying."

Legolas breathed bread, or at least tried to, and then began coughing. Lúnasalmë helpfully pounded his back, and clarified, "Not forever; just until you next come this way, Legolas. But I came here to learn, and there is so much - a few days is not nearly enough. So I will sojourn, for a time."

"And what is it that I am to tell Olwë Teleri-king, when I return to Alqualondë?"

Lúnasalmë shrugged. "The truth: I have found a music new to me, and I stayed to learn it. Besides, you will have Celebrimbor with you, and before that my brief absence will be nothing."

Legolas raised an eyebrow. "Weren't you going to see a certain Vala?"

"I will, also, go see my teacher. But in this case, I feel it more important that I first pay my debt. After that will be time to see him."

Legolas nodded; there was nothing much he could say to that, after all. "It's a good plan. Just be prepared; they're going to throw a party at every city we pass along the way."
Lúnasalmë laughed. "You sound so irritated. A *party* to celebrate when the impossible is accomplished."

Gimli chuckled, and so did Celebrimbor. Legolas, nonplussed, said, "Obviously it wasn't impossible."

This made his companions laugh more, but when they quieted, Celebrimbor said, "Legolas. If there is some way to thank you . . . ?

"Pay it forward," replied Legolas immediately. "We will need you and your aid, to get all of our kin from these halls."

"*My* aid?"

"You. To show that the dream of forgiveness is not an empty one. There is a ner in these halls right now, Úrurril; he at first refused to repent, and now does not know how. I can't show him. Will you speak to him?"

"Of course," said Celebrimbor. "But I would anyway. I meant is there something I can do *for you*?"

Gimli caught Legolas' eye. "Can you make it possible for me to touch my Gimli, here?"

Celebrimbor looked, from him to Gimli and back. "... you who do the impossible, do not know how to even consider a thing that has been done before." He sighed. "Not directly, I can't. But I might be able to give you more than you have now. Let me bide on it a while."

Legolas nodded; he hadn't expected an affirmative. "Well. We'll stay another handful of days, and then head for Valmar."

Celebrimbor said, "Very well. In the meantime, you can tell me about these kinslayers unrepentant."

On their last evening at Mandos, two days later, he sat before one of the great fires in the first Hall of Aulë fletching arrows, Gimli said, "I think I could make real beads."

"As opposed to... fake ones?"

Gimli rolled his eyes, Legolas knew, even concentrating as he was on his arrow. "I mean beads made of real stones, from outside these halls."

"Yes," agreed Legolas, because it stood to reason. "Is there a particular type of stone you'd prefer?"

"As though you'd be able to get them for me even if I ask."

"Not true! Tirion is built of rock-cut crystal; there must be a mine about. Taniquetil is all golden sandstone. And I haven't even been to Formenos yet, which covers a dozen mines for ores and gems."

Gimli said nothing for a moment, but it was a long enough moment.

"Dendritic malachite, of course," said Legolas, answering his own question. "Gimli, are you sure I can't bring you anything *for yourself*?"

"I have as many supplies as I need in here," said Gimli. "And as many people to give the crafts to, as well. But of real stone, there's only one thing I desire." There was a pause, and then he added, "Maybe two, but I am not sure Lúnasalmë has ever thought about stone."
"Dendritic malachite and some Tirion crystal. If nothing else, you can make her a comb. There. Does that look right?" When they'd first become friends, and then something more, Gimli hadn't known anything about arrows. That had changed.

"It's fine, elf. Stop worrying. Come to bed."

Legolas laughed, but put away his fletching readily enough, and climbed up to join his dwarf.

The weather dawned clear the next day, warm and sunny but with a brisk breeze that prevented it being too hot. In the East, the light of the Silmaril that hung from the prow of Éarendil's ship glimmered, and further up the sky Tilion waxed half-full.

"That's as good an omen as we can wish, I think," said Celebrimbor, standing just inside the threshold of Mandos, and looking out past the portico. "A new day to throw away our chains."

"Come then, mellon-nin," said Legolas, offering a hand.

Celebrimbor took it, and together with him, stepped out into the bright sunlight.

Chapter End Notes

And that's a wrap! Yes, I'm aware that there are many plot threads left hanging. It's not like the history of Arda ends here; I just got to a place that seemed like a good place to stop, and stopped. There will be more, later, but now I have to leave for about a year and get my doctorate. Wish me luck!

End Notes

As a reminder, the useful Tolkien Gateway and very useful and hilariously named One Wiki to Rule Them All are things that exist. Please don't think you have to actually have read the Silmarillion. I didn't. The wikis keep things organized for me.

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