Bring Out Your Dead

by Grundy

Summary

Tindomiel brought two Finwions out of the Halls who have been there for a while. Things may not run as smoothly as she expects...

Notes

This follows immediately from Breaking Into Mandos, but as the action is likely to be almost exclusively outside the Halls and I expect several chapters yet, it seemed better to put it as a separate story.
“So,” Tindomiel said hopefully, looking around at all three of her kinsmen, “we don’t actually have to mention that part about me being your security to my parents, right? I mean, especially not my dad...”

Glancing from one child to the other, Carnistir noticed Anairon looked a little taken aback.

He looked to his cousin – to the cousin he knew best, that was – and found that Aikanaro didn’t appear to be following the conversation at all, simply staring up into the sky with a bemused look on his face. From his attitude, it was entirely possible he hadn’t even registered Tindomiel’s words at all.

While Carnistir would be the first to admit that he and his uncle Arafînwe’s younger sons clashed as often as not, he still cared about his cousin, and he found his current behavior somewhat worrying.

He sighed.

One problem at a time.

Also, being a grown-up was shaping up to be just as much non-fun in this life as it had been in the last one.

“We will absolutely be mentioning that part to your parents,” he said firmly. “I doubt I would appreciate another adult covering up something so significant about my child if I were in your father’s place.”

Tindomiel’s shoulders sagged, and Carnistir now wondered what the girl had been used to in Endorë that such a request seemed in any way reasonable to her.

“Erestor wouldn’t have done anything so risky in the first place,” she muttered mulishly.

“Who is Erestor?” Carnistir asked, keeping a watchful eye on Aiko.

“Your son!” Tindomiel snapped, crossing her arms and glaring at him.

He blinked.

He had named his only child Mûrinwë, neatly combining his grandparents’ names with a meaning that conveyed his feelings about the child he’d already known at the time of his birth would have to be sent to Cîrdan for his own protection. It had also been pleasantly similar to his own name – much as that had amused his wife, who’d had a good laugh at the idea that he would name his son Mûrinwë Morînoinwion until he had loftily informed her he had thought Carnistirion sounded better.

While he’d had to leave his boy nameless at the Falas – it would be useless trying to spare his son the shame and judgement that would be his lot as a child of the House of Fëanor with a name that clearly marked him as such – he had expected that Cîrdan or whichever of his people ended up fostering the child would give him a sensible name. A good name. A name that didn’t rub it in that he’d been abandoned.

“Who gave him such an awful name?” he asked distractedly, trying to squash down the painful questions the name raised. “Nevermind. Not important right now.”

He could see the girl ready to explode at him, and for all her face was entirely Aunt Anairë, her
attitude was more like Tyelko or Aryo. (He doubted she’d appreciate the comparison. To Tyelko, at least. He had no idea what she knew or thought about Uncle Nolo’s youngest son. Second youngest. Blast. This was going to be confusing.)

Fortunately, he had a slightly more together cousin present.

“Tinwë,” Anairon interrupted quietly before she could actually let fly.

He nodded toward Aikanaro, and she visibly deflated.

“What’s wrong with him?” she asked in an anxious undertone. “He wasn’t like this when I talked to him in the Halls before.”

“Did you warn him you meant to return him to living?” Carnistir asked, recalling some of Ambarussa and Irissë’s ‘plans’, not to mention Tyelko’s. The girl clearly hadn’t inherited Artanis’ natural tendency to think things through before acting.

She shook her head.

“No, I didn’t want him to start arguing about why he should stay in there meditating on love and loss or whatever else he’s been doing with his time while refusing to return.”

Carnistir took a deep breath. Given some of his own mistakes, this one was minor by comparison. And it involved restoring life, not taking it. The child’s heart was in the right place, even if the method had been too abrupt.

“Aikanaro?” he asked gently. “Aiko!”

The two young ones seemed to realize it would be better to let him take the lead.

He had to repeat his cousin’s name several more times before he got any response.

“Moryo?” Aiko replied, sounding confused. “Where are we? How did we get here?”

“We are in Aman, Aiko, somewhere in the northwest. As for how, that’s a question for Tindomiel, if she feels like explaining,” he replied.

She had the grace to blush.

“I brought you out of the Halls,” she said, as if that explained anything at all. “Back to the living. Your parents and brother and sister miss you, you know.”

“My sister is in Endorë,” Aikanaro said, sounding not quite wholly present.

“No, she’s in Tirion,” Anairon told him gently. “With your parents. At least, she was when we left the city. But she’s definitely not in Endorë. Not anymore.”

Aiko appeared to focus properly on the two youngsters for the first time.

“Aryo?” he asked uncertainly, looking at Anairon’s face.

“No, this is Aryo’s little brother,” Carnistir broke in. “Anairon.”

“Oh,” Aiko said. He paused for a moment, then asked, “what do we call him?”

Given how quickly Anairon clapped a hand over Tindomiel’s mouth, she must have had several
interesting suggestions at the ready. Carnistir made a mental note to ask her later, when she’d gotten
over the urge to do damage to him on his son’s behalf.

“I don’t know,” Carnistir replied. “I just met him a few minutes before you did. He only recently
came of age, born after Uncle Nolo left the Halls.”

“These two grew up by themselves?” Aiko asked, looking upset.

“Actually, I wasn’t born in Aman,” Tindomiel clarified. “I only sailed with my parents after Sauron
was defeated for keeps.”

Carnistir suppressed another sigh. He could see that Aiko was even more distressed at the idea of
their youngest cousin growing up alone. Two children on opposite sides of the Sea was so much less
than they had known as grandsons of Finwë.

“We’re the same age, though,” Anairon told them. “She was begotten at the same time as me, just on
the other side of the Sea.”

“She is not your sister?”

Anairon looked to Tindomiel, who had an expression of consternation on her face.

“No,” she said firmly. “I have two brothers of my own, you don’t need to borrow me any. I’m
Tindomiel Celebríaniel, remember? Galadriel’s granddaughter – your grandniece!”

“Galadriel…” Aiko murmured, sounding confused.

Carnistir was beginning to wonder if his cousin’s disorientation was entirely due to lack of warning
about leaving the Halls, or if he had been paying attention to anything beyond his love and loss of
Andreth since his death.

He himself had long hoped to hear something, anything, of his son. Without that to focus on, and his
brothers looking after him, he might well have been just as out of it as Aiko…

No, that wasn’t true. His brothers wouldn’t have allowed it. But Ingo hadn’t stayed to take care of
Aiko, and Ango hadn’t been able to do it alone. Artē had never come to the Halls. He wondered
what she would have to say to her granddaughter.

“Artanis decided she preferred the name her husband gave her, remember?” Carnistir prodded. “She
married Celeborn of Doriath.”

Aiko nodded uncertainly.

“I did not know they had children,” he said, peering intently at Tindomiel.

Carnistir decided this was an encouraging sign.


Now that she finally had his full attention, Aiko seemed keen to place her properly.

“And who is your father?” he asked, his voice growing more certain.

“Elrond Eärendilion,” Tindomiel answered, looking relieved that the conversation seemed to be
improving.
“Elrond is the grandson of Itarillë,” Anairon put in. “I do not think Eärendil her son was begotten before your death, cousin.”

No, he hadn’t been. There hadn’t been any half-elven in Arda at the time of the Sudden Flame – at least, not that anyone knew of. Then again, it was probably best to leave the whole issue of the half-elven until Aiko was more firmly in the world. And perhaps it would be fair to give Ingo fair warning first. He rather doubted Aiko was going to be happy with his older brother when he discovered just how many peredhil there were.

Come to that, Aiko might be a little upset with him when he figured out the connection Tindomiel had already made.

Carnistir was just about to suggest they sit down and eat something when two younger girls came pelting out of the nearby grove, one blonde, the other with blazing red hair.

“You did it – wait, you brought two of them!” the one in the lead said excitedly.

Her companion yelped and pulled her back the second her eyes lit on Carnistir. He had apparently been recognized. It didn’t bode well for how his return to Tirion was going to go – or his reunion with his extended family, for that matter.

“Tinu, are you crazy?” she demanded.

“Finally, a sensible one,” Carnistir muttered.

The redhead glared at him, but the blonde intervened before she could say anything.

“I’m sure Tinu had a good reason for bringing back Cousin Morifinwë,” she said in a tone that was more hope than confidence.

“Of course I had a good reason!” Tindomiel huffed indignantly, looking insulted.

“Moryo, did your parents also have another child?” Aiko asked in confusion.

Tindomiel giggled, Anairon smiled, and the blonde stifled a snicker as the other girl’s glare swung from Carnistir to Aikanaro.

Carnistir easily forgave the ridiculous question, for while the blonde looked like enough to Lauro that he could not tell if she was his daughter or his much younger sister, the redhead would not look out of place at a gathering of his mother’s family.

“I doubt it, Aiko, my father is still in the Halls. And I can’t imagine Amil taking up with anyone else. Maybe she’s a cousin. My mother’s parents and their children all stayed behind.”

“Carnistir, Aikanaro, these are our cousins Tasariel and Califiriel,” Anairon said, his cautious tone indicating he fully expected fireworks at any moment.

“A star shines upon this hour,” Carnistir said politely to the two girls before raising an eyebrow at his youngest cousin. “Anairon, would you care to place them in the family tree for us? You gave them no ielessë.”

“Laurefindiel,” both girls replied in unison before Anairon could say a word.

Carnistir raised a brow at that – he was intensely curious to find out how Laurë came to have a flame-haired daughter. He sincerely hoped the girls weren’t his double cousins – that would be
complicating the family tree a bit much even for the House of Finwë.

“And you were begotten in Aman, or Endorë?” Aiko asked.

“Endorë,” the blonde replied. “In Imladris, not long before the Ring War.”

“When did Lauro marry?” Carnistir asked, seating himself near the campfire.

He suspected the two girls would be more at their ease if he weren’t towering over them – Aiko didn’t seem to worry them nearly as much, but he rather hoped his cousin would sit also. He didn’t look overly steady on his feet. It would also be helpful if Tindomiel or Anairon would make clear which girl answered to which name.

“We hope he will marry soon,” the red-head said, her eyes sparkling with mischief.

“Tas!”

Her sister, Tindomiel, and Anairon had all protested.

“Ok, fine, no gossiping,” Tasariel pouted. “I don’t see why not, though, it’s all family here anyway!”

“Laurefindil of all people begot not one but two children outside of marriage?” Aiko spluttered in shock.

There was a fair bit of uncomfortable shifting around on the part of the younger folk, but Tindomiel’s face was flying warning flags. Remembering how protective Aunt Anairë could be, Carnistir decided it was possible the girl had more than just her looks from her several times great-grandmother.

“You can tell us the long story later,” Carnistir suggested quickly. “Perhaps we should all eat now, and you can tell us a bit about yourselves beyond merely who your parents are. We are all cousins, so it would seem reasonable to get to know each other.”

The girls looked as though they were speaking to each other silently, which was as good as confirmed when Aiko tsk'ed at them reprovingly – not only had the Arafíniwions regularly been admonished for such behavior as elflings by both their father and Indis, Aiko was far more likely than Carnistir to be able to hear what the girls were saying to each other.

Califiriel flushed guiltily, but neither Tindomiel or Tasariel looked all that bothered. They did, however, sit.

The younger girls retrieved the potatoes that had been roasting in the ashes of the fire, while Tindomiel brought out bread, jam, and cold ham. Carnistir noticed that Tindomiel had initially reached for something else in her pack, but changed her mind after a furtive glance at Aikanaro.

Well, after three Ages, it was likely there were more than a few new things that would come as surprises to them. Carnistir was encouraged that the girl had sense enough to hold back. Aiko was already overwhelmed as it was. And if he was honest, he himself wasn’t prepared to have several ages of change dumped on him all at once.

Unless it had to do with his son, of course. When it came to Mírifíniwë, he was willing to hear his entire life story in one night if any of these children knew enough of him to tell it.
Aikanaro looked around the campfire.

The five people he was eating dinner with were cousins all, but there was only one of them he actually knew.

He was still confused as to how he’d ended up alive again. He was sure he had told Lord Namo several times that he did not wish to return to life. If he couldn’t be with his beloved until the Second Music, it didn’t much matter where he waited for it.

He vaguely remembered Tindomiel. At least, he thought he did. He’s seen her – or somebody very like her – in the Halls. He’s not sure how she could be in there when she didn’t seem to have ever died.

She was currently alternating between frustrated and attentive – frustrated seemed to be aimed more at Moryo, fortunately. Aikanaro wasn’t ready to deal with anyone being frustrated with him. Everything was already too loud and too bright as it was. Even the girls speaking to each other had sounded like shouting at first, though Moryo hadn’t heard them. (Lucky him.)

He’s not quite certain why Moryo was back as well, though Tindomiel had said something about him having a son. That was odd, because Aikanaro didn’t remember Moryo ever being married. In fact, he didn’t remember much about Moryo in Beleriand at all beyond him having sent a peace offering and an apology to him and Ango not long before they died.

It seemed a bit silly now to think that they’d been so angry with each other when Morgoth had not yet been defeated.

At least he could trust Moryo to make sure everyone behaved. He was the oldest one now, which ought to please him. He’d almost never been in charge before. Shame, really. He’d been quite good at organizing things when he hadn’t been quarreling with people.

Moryo probably wouldn’t quarrel as much without Tyelko around to put him on edge constantly…

“Who are you?” Aikanaro asked the girl to his right curiously.

The red-head who he still thought might be related to Aunt Nerdanel sighed.

“I’m Tasariel. Laurefindel is my father. And I’m not related to Aunt Nerdanel any more than you are. My mother’s name was Willow and she wasn’t an elf. I’m peredhel. Please try to remember this time?”

The last part was said in a tone that made it sound more like pleading.

“Did I ask you that already?” Aikanaro enquired apologetically.

“Yes,” Tasariel replied.

“Twice, actually,” the girl next to her added. “I’m Califiriel.”

“You are sisters,” he said uncertainly.

He had a vague idea they might have covered this already.
“Yes, we are,” Califiriel said hopefully. “Maybe your memory is starting to work properly again.”

“Willow is your mother,” Aikanaro said, trying to fix the details in his mind.

“Yes,” she agreed.

At the same time, her sister sighed.

_He’s going to be so confused later_, Aikanaro heard her tell her sister and Tindomiel.

_He’s already confused, so it’s best not to add to it right now_, was Tindomiel’s slightly exasperated reply.

“Has no one told you girls that’s rude?” he asked, nettled. _I can hear you._

He and his brothers and sister had been told about it often enough when they were young.

“Grandmother does from time to time,” Tindomiel said blithely. “But my father and Glorfindel don’t hear as well as she and Grandpa Arafínwë do.”

He had to remind himself that ‘Grandmother’ meant his baby sister.

It was a very strange thought, Artanis having not only a daughter but _grandchildren_. And Tindomiel was the youngest of them! He tried not to ask again when Tindomiel’s mother had been begotten, the niece he had never met. He was sure they’d told him already, if they’d told him who Tarariel’s mother was.

_My mother is Celebrian_, Tindomiel offered wryly. _She was begotten early in the Second Age. Grandmother and Grandfather were married in the First Age._

_Yes, that part I remember_, Aikanaro replied.

He was perfectly clear on that. Artanis had married not long before Thingol found out about the Kinslaying.

“And Artanis is in Tirion now.”

“Yes,” the girls chorused.

“We think so, anyway,” the boy who was not Arakano amended. “For all we know, she’s gone to visit Grandmother in Valimar, or your other grandparents in Alqualondë. We’ve been gone from Tirion for more than a month now.”

_He’s Anaïron_, Tindomiel told him helpfully.

_You don’t have to keep reminding me_, Aikanaro said, reluctant to admit that her instinct that he didn’t know had been correct.

_Maybe I don’t have to_, she replied. _But I kind of feel like I should. At least until you’re surer about everything._

Aikanaro gave the girl a look, but she continued chewing cheerfully on a potato, with an innocent expression that might have fooled anyone who didn’t remember Artë as a child.

Moryo, of course, saw right through it.
“So, Tinwë,” he said. “As this was your plan, what comes next?”

“Um, take you both back to Tirion,” she replied after a hasty swallow that made her great-uncle wince.

Quite aside from his worry that Artanis would blame him if her young granddaughter choked to death in his presence, he felt sure Aunt Anairë must be beside herself about the girl’s manners. And speaking of his aunt, he was curious how it was Artanis’ granddaughter ended up looking so like their aunt rather than their mother.

“A sneak you to Gramma Nerdanel’s, hopefully without half of Tirion noticing, take Aikanaro to Grandma Eärwen and Grandpa Arafínwë, hopefully without the other half of Tirion noticing. And then I’m sure there will be a family dinner with everyone at some point.”

Anairon muttered something that sounded suspiciously like ‘good luck with that’, but Tindomiel affected not to hear.

“That plan involved a lot of hopefully,” Moryo pointed out dubiously.

Aikanaro had seen plenty of better thought-out plans go wrong. Plans that didn’t rely on hopefully or so many elves not noticing things. Both of them had.

Actually, since Moryo had lived longer, he’d probably gotten to see more plans go wrong…

“Also, there’s another minor problem with that theory, Tinu,” Tasariel pointed out with a grimace.

“Yes,” Califiriel agreed, looking worried. “You have to get him past Ondolindë without Atto or Cousin Turukano noticing. If you were going to do this, it would have been better to… no, that way wouldn’t work either, would it?”

Aikanaro wasn’t sure what the other option would have been, but he got the distinct impression it involved his grand-uncle Thingol.

You are NOT going to sneak them by Ondolindë. Atto won’t be fooled for one second, he knows you too well. And you know perfectly well your grandparents will all ask why you didn’t stop to visit on the way back!

Califiriel and Tasariel’s mental voices sounded so similar he couldn’t tell which girl had spoken, but if Laurë kept as sharp an eye on Tindomiel as he had on Artanis, the odds of her managing her mischief undetected weren’t good. Not to mention, Laurë now had two little mischiefs of his own to look after. Presumably that had sharpened his already well-honed skills.

“Oh, goody,” Moryo said drily, blithely unaware of the silent addendum. “Just the cousin I want to see first.”

“Hey!” Anairon protested, looking hurt.

Aikanaro frowned, because while the boy didn’t use osanwë as readily as the girls, he could hear some of what was going on under the surface, and it implied all was not well in the house of Nolofínwë. He thought for a moment that he should find Finno to talk to him about it, but then he remembered that Finno was still in the Halls. And given the boy’s thoughts, Turvo wouldn’t be any help.

“Grown cousin,” Moryo hastily amended. “Forgive me, Anairon, but it’s hard to put you in the same group with your older brothers. You’re so young you’re more like a nephew than a cousin. Though I
suppose even little Tyelpë is grown.”

Aikanaro winced as the mental atmosphere abruptly took a very upsetting turn. He had no idea what had become of Tyelpë but it seemed certain it hadn’t been anything good. The expressions on all four children ranged from ‘this is awkward’ to outright horror.

“Let’s cover that topic later,” Tindomiel said slowly. “Focus on the whole ‘getting to Tirion’ thing first.”

*Without Cousin Turukano having a meltdown*, one of Laurefindel’s daughters – he rather thought it had been Califiriel – added.

“I don’t see how you’re going to do it,” Anairon said fretfully. “If Itarillë doesn’t know you’re close by, Elenwë surely will.”

Aikanaro frowned. He would have thought Turvo would have gotten over his grudge against their cousins if he had been released from Mandos. He lived, and more importantly, Elenwë lived, so why would he still be so upset?

Maybe Turvo *was* the problem in the House of Nolofinwë.

*Not completely, but he’s a large part of it,* Tindomiel informed him, sounding rather grumpy about it. *Was he this much of a butt when you were all alive the first time?*

Aikanaro wasn’t quite sure how to answer that.

“I don’t see how you’re going to do it either, Tinu,” Tasariel said flatly. “You know perfectly well Cousin Turukano is like every other grandparent – he wants to see you as often as may be.”

“Turvo is a grandparent?” Aikanaro asked in confusion.

“Turukano is her grandparent,” Califiriel explained quietly, indicating Tindomiel, who was still focused on planning with the other two children.

“Anairon could take you two back,” Tindomiel offered, pointing at Laurefindel’s girls, “and I’ll go the long way around with them. You can tell him I ran into other kin and decided to return to Tirion a different way.”

Anairon snorted.

“Because that will fool anyone,” he said. “They’ll ask why you didn’t come. And they’ll want to know who it was you met.”

“Why not?” Tindomiel demanded. “Everyone will think you mean my father’s uncles or some other Sindarin kinfolk. All you have to do is be vague.”

Tasariel rolled her eyes.

“If you haven’t noticed yet, Tinu, your best friend is a lousy storyteller, even when you’re not asking him to actually lie for you. And the King might not notice, but you can bet Itarillë or Tuor will, and they’ll worm the full story out of him.”

“Not to mention the slight detail that to avoid Cousin Turukano, you’ll have to go through Sindarin lands, and *that* sounds like an even worse idea,” Califiriel added. “If you had to do that with one of Aunt Nerdanel’s sons, you should not have started with Cousin Carnistir.”
It’s not like he’s Celegorm! was Tindomiel’s silent protest, which led Aikanaro to wonder what Tyelko had done to deserve such particular loathing – and what Carnistir had done that he in particular was not a good one to introduce to the Sindar first.

Tindomiel pouted a bit.

“Fine,” she sighed, turning to Anairon. “I’ll be the distraction and you can shepherd these two past without stopping.”

“How will that work?” Moryo asked in bemusement.

Aikanaro didn’t like the way that both Tindomiel and Anarion’s minds radiated certainty that it would.

“It’ll work because my brother won’t raise a fuss about me not stopping to visit him the way he would for her,” Anairon said, his voice determinedly even. “Elenwë and Itarillë may ask after me, but Turukano won’t. He probably won’t even notice I’m not there.”

“No,” Aikanaro said suddenly, deciding he did not like that option any better. “We stay together. And if that means we must go to Turukano’s city first to bring our young kinswomen back to their father, that is what we will do. All of us.”

He glanced to Moryo, hoping his older cousin would back him.

Happily, Moryo’s nod of agreement left none of the children any wiggle room.

“Absolutely right, Aiko,” he agreed. “If Turvo doesn’t like me returning, he can get it out of his system right away.”

“But your mothers-” Tindomiel protested, looking put out.

“Have both waited two ages for our return, so I do not imagine a few days more one way or the other will destroy them,” Moryo cut her off briskly. “Unless you have been foolish enough to tell them what you intended, our coming is unlooked for, so they will not even be aware that they are being deprived of our presence.”

Aikanaro rather suspected his father might already have some inkling of what was going on, and couldn’t imagine Aunt Nerdanel failing to notice the return of the first of her sons, but it didn’t seem helpful to say so when all four children already looked less than enthusiastic about the adults’ plan.

He raised an eyebrow at Tindomiel, who he was sure by now was the one who was most adept at osanwë.

In return, he had the mental impression of a shrug.

It’s your return from the dead. If you want to spend your first days back hearing Turukano rant about kinslayers, that’s on you two, she said flatly.

If he is still ranting all this time later, then perhaps this is needful, Aikanaro reproved her. We are not supposed to be returned to life before we have healed from the hurts of our past. What I have heard does not sound at all as if Turvo is healed.

She snorted.

‘Turvo’ is what we would have called a ‘mess’ in California, Tindomiel said. I was going to let my
sister deal with him whenever she gets here.

There was an undertone to that which suggested Turvo had done something which had upset or possibly hurt her sister, despite there being more than a full Age between his death and her begetting.

Somehow Aikanaro didn’t think that plan was the best way for his cousin to heal.

You call him grandfather, Aikanaro said tentatively.

My father’s father Eärendil is the son of Turukano’s daughter Itarillë, Tindomiel replied immediately. I thought we told you that already.

Maybe you did. My mind is getting clearer, Aikanaro said mildly.

And, um, this might be a sensitive subject, the girl added tentatively.

Aikanaro raised an eyebrow.

We’re peredhil too, she said in a rush that seemed to be born of wanting to get the worst over with. It’s not just Cali and Tas. Me and my siblings and our father and his brother and their parents Eärendil and Elwing.

Aikanaro blinked in surprise. Half-elven? He recalled his cousin Luthien – and remembered hearing in the Halls that his brother had died helping her would-be husband, a…

Man, Tindomiel finished quietly. Luthien’s not the only one. Itarillë married a Man, too.

Aikanaro blinked.

Finderato had been so wrong! He could have married Andreth, they might have had children.

Yeah, my sister dubbed him Finderato Of the Crap Advice, Tindomiel said, somewhere between contrite and nervous. It’s generally agreed that he should not be asked for his opinion on matters of romance or fate. He’s not exactly batting a thousand.

Aikanaro didn’t understand the batting part, but he did grasp that the girl seemed to be sympathetic to his suppressed anger at his oldest brother’s advice.

You can call him that, if you want, Tindomiel offered. He’ll know you heard it from me. He’s a little exasperated by the name, but Grandmother pointed out he can’t really argue about its general accuracy.

Artanis has already taken him to task? Aikanaro asked.

That was something of a relief. If Artë had told him he was in the wrong, Ingo was far more likely to listen than he was if his little brother said it.

Several times. I don’t imagine it helps much, but he does feel really badly about it, Tindomiel said quietly. He also knows there’s no way for either of you to fix it now. So he’s going to be relieved to see you outside the Halls, but probably pretty nervous about what you’re going to say to him.

Aikanaro was a little nervous about what he’d say to his brother as well.

Don’t hold back, Tindomiel advised. No, seriously. Get it all off your chest. I’d be furious if I were you.
Carnistir was somewhat surprised to wake refreshed in the morning, with vague memories of pleasant dreams. Given how he had been returned to life, he hadn’t really expected Lord Irmo to be so kind.

He looked around the campsite.

Aiko, he was relieved to see, was sleeping peacefully. Carnistir meant to keep a close eye on his younger cousin. Aiko had been very thoughtful after dinner last night, but not nearly as distracted as he’d been earlier in the day. He’d kept glancing at the three girls, and every so often sneaking a furtive look at Carnistir as well.

The two younger girls were still asleep as well, curled up next to each other in a way that reminded him of Ambarussa as children.

Tindomiel was nowhere to be seen, which worried him until he recalled that they were home, not in Beleriand. Home was safe, and children could wander here without fear. No orcs, no balrogs, no dragons, no Sauron, no Morgoth.

Young Anairon was toasting some bread and cheese over the fire, and making a good effort at keeping quiet.

He nearly dropped his toast when Carnistir settled next to him.

“Good morning!” he squeaked.

Happy as he was at the chance of life, and of knowing his son, Carnistir couldn’t help thinking that if Tindomiel was so determined to take an active hand in returning her kin from the Halls, she might have done better to start by dragging Aryo out. Anairon needed an older brother – one who was around to be a brother and not wholly absorbed in running his own city.

Or maybe just one who took an interest, Carnistir realized, recalling with a pang how the boy had brightened at his eldest brother’s obvious affection. Finno had always had an open heart. A boy couldn’t ask for a better older brother – well, a boy with Nolofinwë for a father, at least. Carnistir was privately certain that Maitimo was still the best older brother.

“Good morning, Anairon,” Carnistir replied, slicing a bit of bread for himself and spearing it with a stick to toast. “Where is your partner in crime?”

Anairon nodded towards a copse of trees not far distant.

“She went to pick some fruit, so there’d be more for breakfast than just toast or the same as dinner,” he explained.

“Why did you not go with her?” Carnistir asked, seeing that the girl hadn’t even taken a pack. “Surely it would be easier for two to carry enough fruit for all than one.”

“She and Tas and Cali don’t like it when no one’s keeping watch while they sleep,” Anairon explained. “Atto says they’re still not really used to Aman yet. So I stayed.”

Carnistir nodded. He could well understand that. He had seen the caution ingrained in the handful of Sindarin and Nandorin followers he’d eventually won – caution the elves of Beleriand taught their
children from their earliest days. It was only sense that children begotten under the threat of Sauron would feel safer with someone on guard, even here.

“How long have they been in Aman?” he asked, keen to keep the conversation going, and guessing that Anairon left to his own devices would fumble about and let it drop.

“A little over twenty years,” Anairon replied. “So it’s been long enough to learn their way around, but not long enough yet for them to really believe they don’t need to keep watch. Well, Tindomiel might be ok without a watch, but not Tasariel or Califiriel.”

Carnistir nodded as if that made sense to him, even though it really didn’t. He wasn’t sure why Tindomiel would be confident enough without a watch when the two younger girls weren’t.

“They’ll probably sleep a while longer,” Anairon told him. “So there’s plenty of time for us to make breakfast.”

“And for you to tell me something more of yourself than simply that you are the youngest son of Uncle Nolo and Aunt Anairë,” Carnistir suggested lightly.

“There’s really not much to tell,” Anairon shrugged. “I’m not very interesting compared to my brothers and sister. Or you. Or Tinwë.”

Carnistir suspected the boy would have added Tasariel and Califiriel to the list, given the chance - which was why he didn’t allow Anairon the time to do so.

“I already know your older brothers and sister fairly well,” he pointed out. “We grew up together. I only just met you.”

Anairon was silent for a moment, long enough that Carnistir wondered if he would get an answer or not.

“There’s still not a lot to tell,” he began reluctantly. “Atto returned a few years before I was begotten, and told Ammë that my brothers and sister weren’t likely to return anytime soon. Ammë missed them, and missed being a mother, so they begot me. According to Tindomiel I am the most sheltered elfling in the entire history of Arda, and had she known she would have sailed sooner.”

Carnistir managed not to smile at that, but it was a near thing.

“If nothing else, you’ve got a talent for succinct summations,” he snorted. “And for hiding. You told me your life history in three sentences yet absolutely nothing about you.”

Anairon looked startled.

“That was all about me,” he protested.

“No, that was about your parents, and about your best friend,” Carnistir replied. “You told me nothing about yourself. What do you like? What are your interests? Where do you spend your time? What should we call you?”

His younger cousin paused for a moment, then shrugged.

“I’m not sure what I like anymore,” he said slowly. “Before Tinwë arrived, things were different. I spent most of my time at home, and sometimes I went to the academy or to Aunt Nerdanel’s. I’m not the best scholar, nothing like Nelyafinwë or Turukano or Finderato, but I’m not the worst either. I mostly read history.”
“Any particular area of interest?” Carnistir prompted, electing to ignore the boy’s almost reflexive comparison to his older cousins. It sounded as if he could do with some stories of his older kin, brothers and cousins alike, that didn’t make them out to be paragons. Well, most of them – Carnistir rather doubted he was held up for his virtues.

Anairon blushed, and although his answer was quiet, it was still understandable.

“Beleriend and Eriador,” he murmured. “I wanted to know what Atto did, and what my brothers did.”

“That’s nothing to be embarrassed about,” Carnistir assured him with a frown. “Though I would think you could just ask your father.”

Anairon looked down.

“He doesn’t like to talk about a lot of it,” he said, speaking more to the ground than to Carnistir. “And Uncle Ara and Cousin Finderato don’t talk much about Beleriand either. I’ve learned more from listening to Tindomiel than I have from them. She studied the First Age with her brothers and sisters. And she grew up in Eriador, so she’s seen some things. Her brothers and sisters took her places.”

There was a wistfulness in his last words – and a barely concealed longing.

Carnistir had only been in Tindomiel’s company one day, but he already knew she was the baby of a tight-knit family who adored her older siblings, and the feeling was most definitely mutual, for all they were still in Endorë.

Yet Anairon had a brother who was here… if anything, he would have expected it to be the other way around, with Tindomiel wistful and perhaps a touch envious of Anairon and his brother.

“What about Turvo?” he asked.

Anairon shrugged, trying for casual but not quite succeeding.

“Turukano? I don’t see him much.”

Carnistir frowned. That didn’t sound right at all.

“What do you talk about when you do?”

Anairon was once again more interested in the ground.

“Nothing. We don’t really talk. I only see him if I go with Tindomiel to his city. I don’t think he wants another brother,” he admitted quietly. “He was not pleased when he returned and found… me.”

The child sounded miserable just thinking about it.

Carnistir sighed.

He’d been alive again for less than a full day and he already wanted to smack one of his cousins. Somehow he doubted this was making a positive impression on Namo if the Vala was keeping tabs on him. Though to be fair, he’d wanted to smack Turvo before he’d died, too, so it was really more like picking up where he’d left off...

“Maybe he was just startled,” he suggested briskly.
Personally, he doubted it, but the boy didn’t need to know that. This trip to Turvo’s city could be quite interesting.

“Do we need to warn Aiko about any unexpected brothers?”

Anairon looked confused for a moment before he shook his head.

“No.” He paused. “Cousin Finderato has children. And Galadriel has a daughter, but I guess Tindomiel explained that already, since it’s her mother.”

It suddenly occurred to Carnistir that his baby cousin used full names for everyone older than him. He was thrown for a moment until he realized that to the boy, he, his brothers, and his cousins with the exception of Ingo were all people he’d only heard about from others. Even Galadriel was new to him if she had only lately returned.

“What of Angarato?” he asked carefully.

“Still in the Halls,” Anairon shrugged. “Tinwë is hoping he’ll return now that Aikanaro has left.”

Carnistir pondered that.

He suspected Ango wouldn’t be the only one.

Finno should be telling Aryo even now that he was no longer the youngest son. And unlike Turvo, Aryo would be thrilled to have a younger brother. He might have to reconsider his position on how well-thought Tindomiel’s plan had been.

Maybe he should also keep in mind that despite her Noldorin appearance, she was a descendant of Luthien, who’d had no problem beating Sauron on his own turf and robbing Morgoth...

“Good morning!”

The girl herself plopped down on his left.

She brandished a plump peach.

“Fresh picked,” she offered with a grin.

Anairon perked up, and caught the one she tossed him. To Carnistir’s surprise, the boy peeled the peach and proceeded to lightly salt and toast it.

“Oh, good call,” Tindomiel murmured, following suit with a second peach. “We’ve still got honey, right?”

Anairon nodded.

“And cheese,” he said. “If you’ll watch them, I’ll go find some mint, there’s sure to be some down near the stream.”

Carnistir waited.

“You can eat yours fresh if you want,” Tindomiel said cheerfully. “I definitely would if I hadn’t had a peach since the First Age! But after you have the fresh one, you should try one done like this. Anairon discovered the combination when we were camping a couple years ago, and it’s really good.”
Carnistir would have asked Anairon about it, but the boy was already disappearing into a low area he hadn’t noticed the evening before.

“How often do you come here?” he asked.

“This is the first time we brought Tas and Cali,” Tindomiel replied. “But Anairon and I come pretty regularly ever since Gramma Anairë admitted we were old enough to not need someone older with us. Besides the orchards, there’s a bunch of spice groves around here. As long as we make ourselves useful, no one minds.”

“And trips to the groves of Yavanna are a much better explanation for your parents than going to visit the Halls,” Carnistir guessed, wondering just how long she’d been planning this little excursion.

She flushed slightly, but nodded.

“We really do harvest stuff or look after the plants while we’re here,” she assured him. “The last couple times, I went visiting.”

Carnistir decided not to linger on that. He wasn’t sure how she could even do what she did, but this didn’t seem like the time or the place to ask. Particularly not if Aiko happened to wake up in the middle of the conversation. He added another mark to his mental ‘don’t forget she’s a descendant of Luthien’ file, and let it drop.

“So Anairon’s a cook?” he asked.

Tindomiel’s grin was infectious, and Carnistir found himself wondering if his aunt had been like this when she was younger. He couldn’t recall ever seeing Aunt Anairë smile like that.

“He’s really good at putting together new combinations, even if they sound offbeat at first,” she explained. “But don’t make a big deal about it if he does it while you’re with us, he gets really self-conscious.”

“Why?” Carnistir wondered.

If anything, the boy should be proud. He’d be the first in the family with such a talent. All of them were competent cooks, but none of them had been innovators in the kitchen.

Tindomiel shrugged.

“Dunno,” she said. “I don’t always try to figure out his quirks. Sometimes it’s best to just roll with it. I’m kinda hoping he’ll grow out of some of it, like the self-consciousness. I got him to cook last time we went to visit your mom in Formenos, and he’s brilliant at it.”

“Ammë failed to notice his talent?” Carnistir asked with a frown. That didn’t sound like his mother at all.

Tindomiel snickered.

“Oh, she noticed. Anairon tried to say I was responsible.”

That apparently was even funnier.

“I take it that was not particularly believable?” Carnistir ventured.

“Put it this way,” Tindomiel said. “I may not wreck a kitchen like Anariel, but if I cook, everyone makes me promise to stick to the recipes and not improvise. Gramma Nerdanel knows that.”
Carnistir had not watched the wreckage pile up in the wake of Ambarussa, Irissë, and Artanis for years without being able to detect at least one Story being glossed over in front of him. He’d worm out of the girl later why her culinary improv was not to be trusted. Or maybe it would be easier to tackle Anairon or the younger girls…

And in the meantime, he’d approach her cooking with appropriate caution.

“All right,” Tindomiel added in a very good faux casual, “I should probably mention that there’s a bunch of new foods since the last time you were here, and some of them are hot, so um, be careful about trying all the new stuff without checking first. If you’re not sure, ask one of us.”

Definitely a story. Probably multiple, unless Artanis’ granddaughter was considerably tamer than she had been at that age.

“Laurefindil will tell you all about it,” she said blithely. “I pranked him back in Imladris and he’s never gotten over it. He went totally overprotective when I played a completely harmless food-related joke on Anairon when I first arrived.”

“What did you do?” Carnistir asked suspiciously.

“Had him convinced that watermelon seeds could grow in your stomach if you swallow one,” she grinned. “Which they can’t, and he wasn’t nearly as freaked out as Laurefindil was about it anyway.”

That wasn’t what he’d been asking, but it was illuminating all the same. Carnistir tried to look reproving, but honestly, he could see himself pranking Curvo or Ingo similarly given the chance.

“But I’m not such a jerkass that I’d do anything like that to you or Uncle Aikanaro when you’re only just back,” Tindomiel assured him. “Also, I was like fifteen at the time of the prank Laurefindil complains about so much, and it was kind of an accident that it went as far as it did. Neither of which he ever mentions when he tells the story as if I’m still dangerous nowadays.”

Carnistir’s lips quirked, but he didn’t reprove her for language. He felt like that could safely be left to his aunt.
Aikanaro woke from a dream of Andreth. Somehow it had felt much more real than watching her in Vairë’s tapestries ever had, or even reliving his memories. She’d been urging him to do something, but he couldn’t quite remember what it was now.

He took a moment to just stare at the brilliant blue sky above him – until he registered the giggles coming from nearby.

He looked around until he spotted Moryo sitting between his granddaughter Tindomiel and their cousin Anairon, both children laughing madly and elbowing him as he protested good naturedly.

He couldn’t help but smile, as the sight brought back a slew of childhood memories – camping trips, picnics, even days he and his brothers or cousins evaded their tutors and snuck off into the countryside outside Tirion to enjoy a day doing nothing in particular.

He couldn’t remember when he’d last thought on those times…

“Aiko, you lazy slug, come help!” Moryo called.

He joined them to find that the three of them were slicing peaches, and Moryo appeared to be falling behind the other two. He snagged a slice, and savored the first taste of peach in his new life.

The other two girls, Tasariel and Califiriel were sitting opposite, one slicing cheese while the other stripped the leaves off several sprigs of mint, and appeared to be trying not to laugh at their cousins’ antics.

“You’re supposed to be helping, not eating them,” Moryo grumbled.

“Like you haven’t already had an entire one,” Tindomiel snickered. “Uncle Aikanaro should get to enjoy some too before we put him to work.”

“Enough!” Moryo protested, as Aiko grinned and snagged a whole peach.

“What?” Anairon asked, puzzled.

“You young ones can’t keep calling everyone by their full names. It’s ridiculous. Right, Aiko?”

Aikanaro blinked, but nodded.

He was only Aikanaro when things were serious or someone was angry. Otherwise he was Aiko, or Aegnor if they were speaking Sindarin. (He’d been Ambo in his youth, until Ambarussa came along and that became too confusing for the babies.)

“I’m Moryo,” his cousin continued, pointing firmly at himself. “If you’ve all been politely and properly waiting for permission to use my familiar name, you have it. And if you haven’t been waiting for permission, stop being so stuffy.”

It took some effort not to laugh at Anairon’s wide eyes, as his baby cousin looked from Moryo to him.

“As you’ve said several times yourselves, we’re all family here,” Aikanaro shrugged.

“Anairon, your oldest brother is Finno to his family,” Moryo went on. “And I can assure you he’d be
very upset to discover he’s been Findekano to you all this time. Turvo can stay Turukano if he’s
determined to be awkward, but your other brother is Aryo to everyone, but most particularly to you.”

Anairon nodded obediently.

“So you’re Uncle Moryo and he’s Uncle Aiko?” Tindomiel asked,

“Exactly,” Moryo said firmly. “And while we’re at it, Aiko, how should we shorten them?”

“I’m Tinu in the Sindarin and Tinwë if we’re Quenya,” Tindomiel volunteered immediately. “Well,
to everyone but Grandmother Indis and Grandmother Miriel, who have decided I’m Tindyë.”

Aikanaro doubted anyone was going to second guess that – certainly not him or Moryo.

“Fine, Tinwë,” Aikanaro agreed. “The other girls already have their short forms, Tas and Cali.”

He forebore to mention that both sounded slightly odd to ears accustomed to Quenya, and while Tas
might pass for Sindarin, Cali didn’t sound like any elvish tongue he recognized.

“As for Anairon…”

Aikanaro paused for thought.

“He can be Airo,” he decided. “It’s not so close to my name as to mix anyone up, and it has a good
sound to it.”

Moryo nodded.

“That will do.”

“Who else has short names?” Tas asked curiously.

“Everyone,” Aikanaro replied in some astonishment. Did the children think their elders had nothing
but their full names from their families constantly? “Well, everyone but Irissë, because her name was
so short to begin with.”

Rissë was not a particularly good name for a little girl, and Issë was too generic, so his cousin had
been Irissë to all and sundry. His sister, on the other hand, had been Artë to her brothers and cousins.

Moryo nodded.

“My oldest brother is Nelyo to our father and his brothers, but he’s Maitimo to the rest of us. The
others are Kano, Tyelko, Curvo, and Ambarussa – or Pityo and Telvo if you like.”

A slight wrinkle of Tindomiel’s nose suggested she’d be waiting for Maitimo himself to tell her what
she should call him, but Anairon looked cheered at the idea that he was being treated like one of the
family, despite the Ages between him and his cousins.

“Ingó, Angó, and Artë,” Aikanaro offered, before any of the children could ask. “Though I suppose
if she prefers Galadriel now, she might also want us to shorten that rather than Artanis…”

“It’s a bit late to try to convince us she’s not Artë now,” Moryo snorted.

“That’s ok, I don’t think I’m going to be using Grandmother’s nickname anytime soon,” Tindomiel
said wryly. “Anairon’s free to try if he likes.”
At Anairon’s look of barely suppressed panic, she just barely managed not to laugh. Moryo didn’t hold back.

“Right,” Tindomiel sighed. “We’ll leave that for the twins when they get here. If they’re feeling daring.”

_And maybe have a running head start_, she added silently, for his benefit. _Or they can put Anariel up to it. After dragons and balrogs, she’s got nothing to worry about from relatives. Well, except maybe rampant matchmaking. Besides, Grandmother’s so happy she didn’t get herself killed in the Ring War she can probably get away with just about anything for the next couple yeni._

_My sister can’t have gotten so fearsome that she doesn’t want her young kin at ease around her_, Aikanaro protested.

_Maybe Anairon can get away with calling her Artë_, she replied, with a mental undertone that suggested she’d be delighted to see him try it. _He’s her cousin. I’m her granddaughter. I’ll stick with Grandmother!_

Aikanaro shook his head fondly. The girl was mostly being silly, but she really didn’t think it was appropriate for her to use _Artë._

“What are we doing with all this?” he asked, looking at the peaches and the mint, not to mention the slices of cheese that had been laid out.

“Making roasted peaches,” Anairon said happily, beginning to assemble them to his satisfaction. “We can carry a few fresh peaches, but we can carry them more easily like _this_. Once they’re roasted, we can wrap them in leaves and not have to worry about bruising them like we would fresh ones. And they’re still good once they’ve cooled, so they’ll make for a nice lunch without having to stop to make a fire.”

“Airo is quite the cook,” Moryo informed him. “We’ll eat as well with him as we would with Grandfather’s chefs.”

“Not quite _that_ good,” Anairon mumbled, blushing.

“Only cause you haven’t had as many years at it yet,” Tasariel said blithely, arranging the peaches he had already assembled so they could begin roasting while he finished the others. “You’re only just of age. Give it a few yeni, and that will be truth instead of just Cousin Moryo – or should I make you Uncle Moryo? – being nice.”

“Either will do,” Moryo shrugged. “You would do best to check with your father, he might have an opinion.”

“Cousin unless Atto says otherwise?” Califiriel suggested to her sister.

Tasariel nodded.

“Yes, I like Cousin. It sounds less like he’s lots older than us.”

“He _is_ lots older than us,” Tindomiel pointed out, though without any apparent concern. “He was born in the Years of the Trees.”

“Begotten,” Moryo interjected, not that any of the children paid much attention to the correction.

A quick brush against Tindomiel’s mind told Aikanaro that the three youngsters who had started
their lives in Endorë tended to use *born* and *begotten* interchangeably, and Anairon had given up quibbling over the distinction fairly quickly.

“Yes, but it depends on how we count it,” Anairon said reasonably. “By year of begetting, he’s much older. But if we go by time alive, he’s younger than Aunt Findis’ daughters or even Finderato’s – I mean Ingo’s – oldest son. Sons?”

Anairon looked to be trying to figure ages as he handed the last peaches off to Tasariel.

“Aunt Findis has daughters?” Aikanaro asked. “And when were my nephews begotten?”

Moryo snorted.

“I imagine we have quite a bit of catching up to do,” he said drily. “New cousins and nephews will be the least of it.”

“Which of my nephews are older than I am?” Aikanaro demanded plaintively.

He really wanted to know!

Tindomiel and Anairon traded frowns, and Tindomiel’s fingers flicked as if she was using them for calculations.

“Uncle Gildor definitely,” Tindomiel said. “I think you’ve actually met him?”

“The baby Ingo adopted? I saw him once or twice, but I really only knew him as a child,” Aikanaro replied, trying to imagine what the charming little boy he remembered from visits to Nargothrond would look like now.

Tindomiel obligingly flashed him a glimpse of her ‘uncle’, along with three others – all of them like enough to each other that it took no particular intuition to guess that they were siblings.

“I don’t think any of the others are old enough to outdo all those Tree years,” she said thoughtfully. “But Aunt Findis’ daughters were begotten in the Second Age, so they’re older. Oh, Nana, too. And…”

“I say we let the grownups thrash who’s how old,” Tasariel cut her cousin off. “Especially since they still argue about Anariel’s age from time to time.”

Moryo frowned.

“Why would they argue about her age?” he asked.

All four children glanced at one another, and Anairon turned to focusing on the roasting peaches with a single-minded intensity that silently conveyed he was removing himself from the discussion.

“It’s complicated,” Tindomiel offered after a moment or two of the younger girls looking to her to handle the question. “How ‘bout we save that topic for another day?”

“Fine,” Aikanaro agreed, before Moryo could protest. “Just so long as that isn’t your answer to everything.”

Tindomiel’s smirk said it might not be the answer to everything, but it would most definitely crop up from time to time.

Aikanaro sighed inwardly and tried to gauge just how like his sister her granddaughter might be.
Artë with that particular expression hadn’t meant trouble exactly, and yet…

*It is generally agreed that I’m the least troublesome of my parents’ children,* Tindomiel informed him helpfully.

She suddenly brightened.

“My *brothers* are older than you,” she announced gleefully. “They were born early enough in the Third Age! They’re going to love it when they hear.”

“Can we go back to me having nephews, plural?” Aikanaro asked plaintively. He thought about it again. “And go over your siblings, as well.”

“Cousin Ingo has four children,” Tasariel piped up helpfully. “Gildor you know about, and Gilrod, Arador, and Artalissë were all begotten in the Third Age. They are younger than Tinu’s brothers and her oldest sister.”

“You know about Uncle Angarato, um, I mean, Ango’s son Orodreth, right?” Tindomiel asked.

“Artaresto, who we called Resto,” he nodded.

“Right… I might wait til he says ‘ok’ on that one, too,” Tindomiel said thoughtfully. “Anyway, he and Aunt Merelin had Finduilas and Gil-galad in the First Age, although I guess you know about them since they ended up in the Halls. But Gil-galad made it all the way to the end of the Second Age, which honestly seems pretty good considering…”

He suspected she meant something along the lines of ‘considering how many of our family didn’t make it through the First Age.’

“And Aunt Galadriel and Uncle Celeborn begot Celebrian, who is Tindomiel’s mother, early in the Second Age,” Califiel finished. “She married Elrond at the beginning of the Third Age. Their other children are Elrohir, Elladan, Arwen, and Anariel.”

“Arwen is the one who has married an adan,” Aikanaro said tentatively. He thought they might have covered this at some point yesterday, but while his mind and memory were both much clearer today, much of the day before was still hazy.

Tindomiel nodded, although she looked less enthused about this part of the conversation.

“That’s another discussion for later,” Anairon said with unexpected firmness, drawing a relieved look from Tindomiel.

Aikanaro wasn’t sure why that should be a sore subject, given that everyone present except Anairon either had married an adaneth, had wanted to marry an adaneth, or was the child or descendant of a union between an elf and an adan or adaneth. But he was content to save that discussion as asked.

“Furthermore, the peaches are done,” Anairon continued. “If everyone will help me wrap them, we can be on our way.”

Moryo looked at him dubiously.

“I thought you meant to roast them through,” he said carefully.

“I could do that,” Anairon agreed. “But if I wrap them tightly while they’re still warm like this, they will continue to cook for some time while we walk. They’ll be done just right and cooling by the
time we’re ready for lunch.”

“Which means,” Tasariel said cheerfully, “if some of us pack up the rest of the stuff and some of us help wrap peaches, we can get going.”
Finding His Feet

The sun was kissing the horizon behind them before they stopped. Not that Carnistir really minded – calling even their fastest pace over the course of the day ‘strenuous’ would have been ridiculous. Much of the time it had been little more than an amble.

All four children had taken detours to supplement Anairon’s peaches with berries, nuts, or other edibles growing nearby – and they had apparently decided it was ok to start introducing them to some of the new foods they’d held back the first night. ‘Blueberries’, despite their wholly uncreative name were quite tasty. (His rather sarcastic comment on the name had gotten a smile from Tinwē, and an eyeroll from Aiko.)

The four young ones set up their camp quickly, but Carnistir could see that the younger girls didn’t quite match the practiced efficiency of Tinwē and Airo, whose only sticking point appeared to be how to allocate the sleep rolls and pillows now that they had to divvy them up among more people than expected.

He raised an eyebrow at Tindomiel. She might not be Artē – and thank the Valar for that – but she was definitely the ringleader of this little band.

He couldn’t help wondering if she and Anairon were this generation’s Irissē and Artanis as the younger girls had suggested with great amusement, pointing out the coincidence in their begetting dates, or if they were more Ingo and Turvo without Curvo.

Airo had the more even temper of his mother than his sister or his father - if he hadn’t known better, Carnistir would have thought he was one of Uncle Ara’s, not Uncle Nolo’s. Oddly enough, he had a feeling Airo would have been Irissē’s darling if she were around. He found himself regretting that the boy had missed being spoiled (and probably confused) by his free-spirited older sister.

Tinwē, on the other hand, might appear mercurial at first glance, but there was an underlying method to her madness. Dragging him and Aiko out of Mandos was not quite on par with Irissē’s wilder moments. Yet he couldn’t quite square such a spur of the moment plan with Artē either.

*You might try just thinking of them as Airo and Tinwē, a quiet voice suggested. Rather than trying to figure out who they’re most like.*

He looked over to find Aiko looking at him reprovingly.

“So much for the vaunted manners of the Arafinswions,” Carnistir muttered quietly.

“The girls do it constantly,” Aiko shrugged. “It would appear that manners may also have changed somewhat in three ages.”

“Or they’re just trying whatever they think they can get away with, as children will,” Carnistir suggested wryly. “They probably figure us for soft touches.”

He suspected he himself would prove to be a rather indulgent uncle/older cousin, particularly in the face of children who didn’t have any expectations of him, and he knew Aiko would be.

Aiko’s grin betrayed that he’d heard that as well, and not minded.

“Quite likely,” he replied cheerfully. “But I suspect we can be excused spoiling them after missing out on spoiling most of the others.”
Carnistir ruefully agreed.

Aiko had at least gotten to see Gildor from time to time, and known Resto as a both a child and a young man. He had probably even gotten to see Resto’s daughter from time to time, if not the son. Carnistir had missed out most of Tyelpê’s childhood, and all but a few years of his own son’s as well. None of his older brothers had begotten children before he died. (Or ‘taken in’, which seemed to be Maitimo’s preferred wording for what had happened with Eärendil Itarillion’s sons.) As far as children of the younger generations of his house went, Tindomiel was the first he’d seen as a young adult, and it wouldn’t take very long for her to be the one he’d spent the most time with.

He’d just have to trust Artë to not let him ruin her youngest grandchild with overindulgence.

“Good luck with that,” Tinwë said cheerfully, popping up at his elbow.

“You heard that?” Carnistir asked, somewhat disturbed. He hadn’t been trying to share his thought.

“I was mostly listening for Uncle Aiko, but I heard you that time,” she replied, not looking at all bothered by it.

“Why ‘good luck with that’?” he asked.

She shrugged.

“Everyone was expecting my parents to bring their children with them when they sailed, plural, but I’m the only one that turned up,” she said. “There’s a lot of grandparents taking an intense interest. I don’t see how an extra uncle or two can make things much worse.”

No, not if the girl was so level-headed about it. And that also put her rambling about Aman with Anairon from time to time in a slightly different light – so much determined attention from one’s elders might well get smothering.

“You’re actually hoping it makes things better, aren’t you?” Carnistir mused.

She smiled, but it was a more cautious expression.

“Maybe,” she allowed.

“That’s all you’re willing to give me?” he snorted.

“All right, fine, I am,” she muttered.

Carnistir waited. It took slightly longer than it would have with Artë, but she did eventually give in.

“it’s just that things are so obviously not all right, and the First Age is so bloody long ago that it’s ridiculous!” she burst out. “I thought before we got here that everyone would be back by now, but two Ages later, Grandma Eärwen is still missing half her kids, Grandmom Anairë only has two of five, and Gramma Nerdanel is missing all of hers, and it’s not right! This is Aman. It’s one thing for Namo to say everyone heals in their own time, but he doesn’t exactly understand everything about elves.”

Carnistir could hear in her voice a reverse echo of the shock he and his kin had experienced in Beleriand. Where their imaginations (and inexperience, he could admit now) had made the Hither Shores easier to reach and rule than they had actually been, his grandniece seemed to have imagined Aman as more amazing and restorative than it was. Elves were still elves, on either side of the Sea.
But she did have a bit of a point about Namo, one he would never have dared to raise. He couldn’t help glancing at his Arafínwion cousin, walking quite cheerfully arm in arm with the two younger girls.

For someone who had apparently been quite insistent for two full Ages that he had no desire to return to life, Aiko was taking considerable interest in his young kin now that he was face to face with them.

“Exactly,” Tinwë said solemnly. “For him to heal, he needed to see a reason he should, and he never would have in there. But Namo was never going to understand the cause and effect. He knows a lot about the Music, but not much about how us Children work.”

“And me?” he asked lightly.

“More a spur of the moment thing,” she said thoughtfully. “I already told you it was more for Erestor than for you, and it was a bit for Gramma Nerdanel too. But you’re kind of growing on me. I don’t see what good you staying in there was going to do anyway. You can only sit in time out for so long before it’s just annoying.”

Carnistir snorted. She sounded like she spoke from experience. Then again, having sat in timeout as far east as one could get while still being in Beleriand for a significant chunk of the First Age, he rather agreed.

“Anyway, that wasn’t what I meant to tell you. We’re trying to decide on dinner. If you two want something besides what we had last night, we’ll need to hunt. Well, ‘we’ meaning ‘me’.”

Aiko looked slightly guilty.

“You don’t have to be responsible for the hunt alone,” he said. “Moryo and I are more than capable.”

“What, you don’t trust me?” Tinwë demanded, all wide-eyed indignance.

“Don’t the others hunt?” Carnistir asked.

He had no idea how skilled these children might be in such matters. He also was not certain how much of her huff was genuine and how much was just for show.

She shook her head.

“I can hit targets, as in stationary objects,” Anairon spoke up from where he was starting a fire.

From the sounds of it, he wasn’t about to embarrass himself in front of his older cousins by claiming any more competence than he was absolutely certain of. As Tyelko’s first younger brother, Carnistir was familiar with the logic – it was better to admit not being able to hit a moving target than to say you could and risk a miss.

“We’re only just learning to shoot,” Cali announced equably, apparently speaking for her sister as well as herself.

“We are only just fifty-two,” Tas added slightly defensively.

“Doesn’t matter,” Tinwë announced briskly. “I’m oldest, the hunt is my responsibility.”

Glancing toward Anairon, Carnistir wasn’t surprised to find him making a face at her. Which of the two of them was older was not quite the topic of debate her older sister’s age apparently was, but
they did often joke about it and had traded seniority seemingly at whim more than once. They’d done it often enough that he wasn’t actually sure which one of them was the older one. (He suspected that asking about it outright would just encourage them.)

“By that logic, I should go,” Carnistir spoke up. “I’m older than any of you.”

“You can come along you want,” she shrugged. “You don’t have to.”

“Neither do you,” he replied.

“Right, hunting. We’ll be back soon,” Tinwë told the others. “Uncle Aiko, what were you hoping for?”

“Whatever is the least trouble,” Aiko answered, that slightly guilty look making a reappearance. “You really don’t need to—”

“We might have gone hunting tonight anyway,” she cut him off. “It’s not a big deal, seriously. And I’m not sure which of my older siblings would be more insulted by you acting like I shouldn’t be able to handle this – the twins going all protective big brother, or Arwen and Anariel getting upset that you don’t think they were competent teachers.”

Carnistir gave her a minute, then pointed out the obvious.

“Dinner tonight should be an adequate demonstration of your skills,” he said drily. “You’ll be doing most of the actual hunting. It will be rather difficult for me to shoot anything without a bow. I’m reliably informed mine is underwater these days.”

Anairon gaped at him, but Tindomiel’s sense of the ridiculous got the better of her – she burst out laughing at the reminder that Beleriand was beneath the wave, and by implication most of his former possessions with it.

Once Tinwë got herself under control, she nudged Airo, and a minute later Carnistir found himself being handed a bow. It was somewhat smaller and lighter than he preferred, but he could make do. He’d had to manage with far worse than a learner’s bow on the retreat from Thargelion... no, better not to think about that.

“We’ll get the rest going while you two terrorize the local wildlife,” Anairon announced.

“Try not to shoot each other,” Aiko added helpfully, with a pointed look at Carnistir. “I’d hate to have to explain accidents to anyone’s older siblings who taught them how to shoot.”

Carnistir had a feeling he was more than matching Tindomiel’s glare, since she evidently thought the remark was directed at her instead of him. And really, it was highly unnecessary of Aiko.

The only person he’d ever shot on a hunt had been Tyelkormo. It had been non-fatal – minor, really – and more importantly, entirely intentional. (His idiot brother had fully deserved it.) But Tyelko would take it very badly if he pulled such a trick on anyone else, let alone one of his youngest kin. He had always looked out for the ‘babies’, whoever that happened to be at the moment, and had evidently taken a shine to Kano’s young granddaughter.

What’s more, it didn’t bear thinking on what Maitimo’s reaction would be if anything befell Tindomiel in his presence. Or Kano’s, for that matter. Everyone seemed to forget that Fëanor and Nerdanel’s second son had a temper.

The two of them didn’t say anything as they wandered into the woods. He followed Tindomiel’s
lead, since if he’d ever been here before, it had been several ages ago. But she appeared to have a fair idea where she was.

“What are we after?” Carnistir asked, trying not to be too obviously gleeful that he was in a forest in Aman. That he was hunting with his grandniece didn’t exactly help him keep his cool.

“Whatever we come across that isn’t too large,” she shrugged. “I think Uncle Aiko would prefer a bird, but if we spot a rabbit or two, I’ll take it.”

“Squirrel?” Carnistir suggested.

Deer would be too much for such a small group, but unless the land had altered greatly from his youth, squirrel would be plentiful and easy to find.

She wrinkled her nose.

“Too much work. There’s six of us. That’s a lot of squirrels to clean.”

He couldn’t argue with that.

Nor could he argue with Tindomiel’s skills – just a few minutes later, she got a grouse before it could even get off the ground.

“That ought to do,” she grinned. “And since I did the shooting, you get to do the field dressing.”

“I see now how this is going to go,” Carnistir grumbled, but without any real irritation.

“File it under ‘spoiling me’,” she suggested brightly.

Carnistir shook his head, but bent to his task and tried not to be unnerved at the intent way the songbirds in the trees around him seemed to be staring at him.

“Quit being creepy,” Tindomiel ordered suddenly.

He looked up, and found her speaking not to him but to the offending birds. One of them cocked a head at her, whether in reproach or confusion, he couldn’t tell.

“You can go on back. I’m fine,” she continued. “We’re all fine here. Tell whoever’s fretting that I’ve got two older kinsman fussing over me right here on the scene.”

One of the birds trilled something that definitely sounded like a question, but Carnistir wasn’t Tyelko or Pityo, so he had no idea what it was asking.

“No, we’re going to Gondolin. It was his choice.”

That drew the most dubious look Carnistir had ever seen on a bird, but there was a flurry of wings as they took flight.

“My grandmother,” Tindomiel explained glumly.

“You’re telling me Artë’s figured out how to make birds do her bidding?” Carnistir demanded in consternation.

She’d been menace enough without a flock of feathered minions.

“Grandmother Melian,” she clarified.
Carnistir swallowed hard and focused on finishing up with the gamebird.

He didn’t imagine Melian the maia was overly thrilled about the idea of her youngest descendant wandering around with him. She’d know perfectly well who he was, him and his brothers…

Tindomiel snickered.

“You just heard me tell the birds we’re all fine here,” she pointed out.

“I doubt your grandmother believes that under the circumstances,” he snorted.

“Why shouldn’t she?” Tindomiel said brightly. “I have you, I have Uncle Aiko…”

“You do remember where I died, right?” he asked darkly. “I’m sure she does.”

Tindomiel snorted.

“Yeah, I do. And even if she wasn’t there for it, she knows how, too.”

Carnistir blinked.

“But…” he trailed off.

He’d assumed his reputation with the Sindar was just as low as Tyelko or Curvo’s – and Tindomiel’s attitude toward them was strong evidence how poorly they were thought of. (Carnistir estimated that they were somewhere lower than dirt – dirt at least had its uses.)

She crossed her arms over her chest.

“And even if she wasn’t there for it, she knows how, too.”

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She crossed her arms over her chest.

“Just how dumb do you think we are?” she demanded.

“We?” he asked, confused.

“We. Thingol’s people. The Lindar of Beleriand. Sindar. Whatever you want to call us, as long as it’s not something insulting.”

He was a little thrown by her classing herself with them, even if she was Elwing Dioriel’s granddaughter.

“Don’t change the subject,” she instructed crossly.

That really just made it worse.

“I really am not like you or Aiko when it comes to osanwê,” he pointed out, doing his best to keep his voice even.

“Fine, whatever. General point: people can tell the difference between someone coming at them with a weapon trying to kill them and someone just walking into their own death with no resistance. In California, they’d have called what you did suicide by Sindar.”

He needed a minute to process all of what she’d said. The first part was the easiest, so he focused on that.

“They knew?” he asked in surprise.

He decided on the spot not to tell her that her ‘this is the dumbest thing I’ve heard today’ eyeroll was
an inheritance from Turukano. He might mention it to his cousin. Assuming, of course, they managed to get past the wanting to slap or possibly kill each other any time soon.

“Yes, they knew. Which is why Butthead Junior and Even My Dog Thinks I Make Bad Choices are the worst elves in the world but you might grudgingly be fed if you showed up to a picnic.”

He probably should be reproving her about the name calling, but he kind of liked the one that’s obviously Tyelko. He might even use it, if his brother was ever allowed out of the Halls. From a safe distance, of course.

“The worst elves in the world? Really?”

“You’ve got any more obvious candidates?” she retorted.

He thought about it, but the only other ones he could think to offer were his father – who had been at one less kinslaying than he or his brothers, so probably not the best choice – or Irissë’s boy if some of what he heard in the Halls was correct. But he’s never been the type to get out of trouble by dumping it on younger ones, particularly younger ones not present to defend themselves.

“I guess not,” he conceded.

“Well then,” she said, with an air of ‘that’s that.’

“Suicide by Sindar?” he asked cautiously. “And what’s California?”

Tindomiel flushed, and he suspected she was mentally kicking herself for mentioning something she hadn’t meant to bring up.

“It’s a place.” She paused. “A complicated place. Could we leave it until later?”

“A place where people use other people to kill themselves?” he asked with a frown.

“Yeah…”

Tindomiel sounded less than enthused about it, not that he blamed her. California sounded very strange indeed.

“What an odd land,” he said, more because he didn’t have anything else sensible to say to such a bizarre practice.

“You have no idea,” she muttered.

“You can tell me some other time,” Carnistir said, shaking his head. “This was the other option the four of you were trying so hard not to argue about? Gondolin or Doriath?”

“It’s not called Doriath here,” she told him briskly. “No protected border. Kind of unnecessary without Morgoth and Sauron around. But yeah, between taking you to new Gondolin and Grandpa Turukano popping a cork or risking Grandfather Thingol glaring at you the whole time and then ripping me a new one next time I visit, I would have picked the latter.”

“Glaring at me and ripping you a new one?” Carnistir said with a frown. “Isn’t that backwards?”

“He’s not going to throw a tantrum in front of you, and I’m not Anariel,” Tindomiel shrugged.

“You’re going to have to explain that,” Carnistir told her patiently.
“He’s not going to flip out in front of a Noldo,” Tindomiel clarified, “and unlike my sister who can do no wrong in Sindarin eyes, I’d definitely hear about bringing one of you to visit. Given the fit Thranduil pitched over haru right before the Ring War got real, I’m guessing Thingol’s thoughts about me showing up with you would be epic.”

Carnistir scowled.

He really didn’t like the idea that Tinwë was going to be given a hard time by her kin for retrieving him, aside from the unavoidable family outrage when they discovered her previously unknown ability to wander in and out of the Halls as she wished. That at least was somewhat deserved.

Tindomiel glanced at the bird he’d just finished cleaning with a frown.

“One won’t be enough,” she said thoughtfully. “Another two, do you think? Or can we get away with just one more?”

Carnistir had to suppress a laugh. He was one of seven brothers, which meant however much Tinwë thought she knew about mischief, trouble, avoiding the same, and making excuses, he knew a bit more.

“One more will do,” Carnistir replied, “and don’t think I’m fooled by the sudden change of subject. If Thingol’s reaction would be ‘epic’ but you preferred that to Turukano, how badly do you expect he will behave?”

Tindomiel shrugged.

“Hunting and talking usually don’t go well together,” she pointed out. “Shouldn’t we get on the ‘one more bird’ thing?”

Carnistir crossed his arms and waited.

She sighed.

“I’m not sure how bad it will be. I just know it has potential to be ugly, and unlike Thingol, who will keep his cool in front of outsiders, in Gondolin, we’re all family, which means no holds barred.”

Yes, there was that.

“Does Thingol count Aiko as an outsider?” he asked cautiously.

All four Arafinwions had been booted from Doriath when Thingol learned about the Kinslaying (at that time, the only one, so not yet requiring any qualifier to demarcate which.) As such, he wasn’t entirely sure where Aiko stood in this.

Tindomiel frowned.

“Don’t know. It hasn’t really come up yet. Uncle Fin- I mean, Uncle Ingo – and Grandmother have both visited and he treats them as family, so Uncle Aiko should be the same, I guess. But you and Anairon and Tas and Cali are all Noldor.”

Carnistir suspected Thingol would probably term them golodhrim, but he couldn’t see any point to arguing. Besides…

“Aren’t the two girls also Vanyarin? Laurefindil’s father is a Vanya.”

That drew a very unconcerned shrug.
“I’m not sure Thingol actually thinks that highly of the Vanyar either,” she grinned. “I mean, yeah, they’re not kinslayers, so there is that, but it wouldn’t help much.”

“Thingol doesn’t like the Vanyar? Perhaps I’ve been too harsh on him,” Carnistir mused.

“All kidding aside, I’m still dubious about this whole visiting Grandpa Turukano plan,” Tindomiel added bluntly. “I haven’t been exaggerating. Given how he rants about kinslayers when there aren’t any right in front of him…”

“I didn’t think you were exaggerating,” Carnistir said reassuringly. “Your idea about bringing us back is working – certainly much better than I thought it would when we first emerged from the Halls. So give us a chance with our idea. Aiko and I know Turvo, too. And while we may not have seen him as recently as you, we knew him a bit longer.”

Carnistir didn’t mention that he might also know a thing or two she didn’t, and he made sure it was nowhere near the top of his mind. If Turvo really did ‘pop a cork’, he happened to be in possession of an excellent comeback.

But he didn’t plan on mentioning any of that in front of Tinwë or the other children. If there’s one thing he’d learned from his own childhood and early adulthood, it was that quarrels among grownups shouldn’t be allowed to spill over to the young ones.
Aikanaro was surprised at how easily everything was coming back to him.

While his grandniece went off hunting with Moryo, he set about making up the fire. (He’d seen the look on Tinwë’s face and it strongly suggested Moryo wouldn’t get a chance to shoot a thing. It was reminiscent of when anyone had implied Artë might not be able to do something, whether it was because she was the baby, or worse, because she was a girl.)

The two younger girls brought out something that he’d initially thought was grain but turned out to be more like noodles. Airo fetched water from a nearby stream, set it to boil, and then had a quiet discussion with the girls, who headed off in different directions.

By the time Tinwë and Moryo came back with a brace of grouse – already cleaned – there were herbs and roots simmering, greens at the ready, and Tas and Cali were chopping mushrooms. Aikanaro wasn’t very fond of mushrooms – it hadn’t been a common taste among the Noldor in Beleriand, who had tended to regard them as works of Morgoth. But as nothing his young cousin had served so far had been distasteful, he had to trust that Airo knew what he was about with mushrooms as well.

It was no surprise to see that Airo set about removing the meat from the first carcass as soon as it was handed over – it would cook in small chunks quicker than whole birds would roast, and any gamey taste could be balanced out by the rest of the stew.

Aikanaro would have happily helped out, had only he had a knife of his own. Moryo, having been handed Airo’s hunting things, was at no such disadvantage. He and Tinwë split the remaining bird and it was rather impressive how quickly they stripped it. The meat was in the pot in short order, and at that point it was clear that the rest of dinner was Airo’s domain.

It left Aikanaro with little to do but observe – or talk.

Tindomiel was lounging against a tree, cheerfully needling Moryo about something or other that had happened during the hunt. It was rather amusing when Moryo finally threw his hands in the air and stalked over to the fire.

“Trade!” he ordered gruffly.

Aikanaro grinned.

Moryo wasn’t nearly as disgruntled as he was pretending to be. But Aikanaro didn’t argue. He was too curious about Artë’s young granddaughter. Youngest granddaughter. He was still having trouble with the notion of his little sister not only being a grandmother, but a grandmother to five. She hadn’t even had a child when he had least seen her.

He left Moryo to quiz Airo about the preparation of dinner, and dropped down next to Tindomiel, who was smiling, evidently pleased at the reaction she’d gotten from Moryo.

“You were baiting him,” Aiko said quietly.

He’d tried for reproachful, but he didn’t think it had worked. He hadn’t ever been much good at scolding Resto or Findë, so it was probably a lost cause with Tinwë.

“Only a little,” she replied brightly. “It’s ok, he’s enjoying it.”
Yes, he was, Aikanaro reflected.

He hadn’t seen Moryo this cheerful since… since before he left for Formenos. Maybe longer than that, even. While the younger girls had initially been somewhat standoffish, all four youngsters seemed at ease with him now. Having younger kin looking up to him and happy in his company was good for him. He’d been the odd man out too often in Tirion, with no cousin his own age and at odds with Tyelko and Curvo as often as not.

Aikanaro cast about for something to discuss with his grandniece.

“Tell me more of Turvo’s city,” he suggested, before she could decide to bring up anything else.

She glanced at him in surprise.

“All the things we could talk about and that’s what you want to know?” she asked.

“I never saw anything of his lands in Beleriand,” Aikanaro shrugged. “I was busy in Doriath and Tol Sirion in the early years, so I never went to Nevrast, and once he vanished with his people, none of us knew where he was to go visiting.”

“Fair point,” Tindomiel sighed. “I keep forgetting that even though we know where it was doesn’t mean anyone back then did. It’s kind of weird to think that he could hide so completely from everyone.”

“You could have gone visiting,” she added after a slight hesitation. “He wasn’t that far from you, actually.”

Aikanaro blinked. If anyone had mentioned in the Halls where Turvo’s hidden stronghold had been, he didn’t remember it.

“Tumladen was in the middle of the mountains between Anach and the Vale of Sirion.”

She frowned, and smoothed a patch of dirt to sketch on with a stick. The map she drew was crude but easy enough to recognize.

His older cousin had been so close Aikanaro could have sent those of his people who weren’t fighters to Turvo had he but known. They might have found safety there, as he doubted they could have anywhere in Dorthonion. He swallowed hard and tried not to wonder what had become of them. Most must have perished. That bothered him far more than his own death.

“New Ondolindë is different than the one in Beleriand was,” Tinwë continued. “That one was trying to be Tirion, this one is something they built here, knowing it was safe and they had space to spread out. Plus there wasn’t much incentive for them to try to copy Tirion anymore – it would be kind of silly when you can ride there in a day and a half if you really want to, or a bit longer if you’re not in a hurry.”

She paused.

“I think this one is more like what they might have done in Beleriand if it had been safe. And if they hadn’t been missing home so much.”

Aikanaro nodded.

He didn’t need to see Turvo’s city for that to make sense. The idea of Beleriand and the reality of it had been very different things. Regret had eventually set in for nearly everyone.
Tinwë managed to condense the history of the city into a five minute overview, covering the houses, Aunt Irimë and Laurefindil ending up there, Turvo coming forth for the great battle that had later become known as the Nırnaeth Arnoediad, Idril marrying the mortal Tuor, and the fall of the city. That gave him some idea of the history most living elves knew by now before she spoke more about the city Turukano’s people had made here in Aman.

“They’ve rebuilt all twelve houses,” Tindomiel explained, “which isn’t surprising since almost all the lords were back by the time they started talking about building their own city. Supposedly they felt like Tirion was too crowded, but for all I know, there were other reasons. I’m still young enough I don’t always get told the whole story.”

She made a face that reflected what she thought of that before plowing on.

“They started it way before Turukano returned himself. I’m not sure, but I think Gramma Itarillë took the lead. It sounds like she was a little frustrated during the War of Wrath, and it only got worse in the Second Age. Anyway, by the time Grandpa Turukano finally came back, it was all done, and he could pretty much just pick up where he left off except with Gran Elenwë there with him. The other lords take it in turns to look out for the Moles, since no one knows anything about Mae- about Lomion.”

Aikanaro wasn’t entirely sure who Lomion was. But he noted that the Sindarin name came more naturally to Tinwë, though she had been speaking Quenya. He thought she had said she was born in Ennor, but she and Airo both sounded like they’d grown up in Tirion. From what he could recall, little Findë had had a more obvious accent...

“What was your cradle tongue?” he asked curiously. “Sindarin?”

If Tinwë was in any way thrown by the question, it didn’t show.

“Um, actually, I learned California first, but I was still really young when I was introduced to Sindarin,” she replied. “Which was late Third Age Sindarin, not what you were speaking in Dorthonion. Ours is based more on Falathrin, plus a scattering of Doriathin thrown in. I think you would have probably been speaking the northern dialect the Mithrim used, except when you were in Doriath. Third Age Sindarin also has lots of Noldorin loan words.”

Aikanaro tried his best to keep up, and to not show that this might be too much information for him to take in at once. He knew Tindomiel meant to be helpful with her explanations.

“Do you speak other languages as well?” he asked, trying to make sense of a mini-lecture that wouldn’t have been out of place from his uncle.

“Of course,” she nodded. “Did I mention I got inducted into the Lambengolmor? Once I got good enough at Sindarin, Erestor – that’s Uncle Moryo’s son – started me on Quenya, and then I started bugging him about Vanyarin and Amanyar Lindarin. Grandfather taught me the Lindarin dialects of Ennor – well, not just me, all five of us, Anariel included even if she’s only ever used it to tattle on Arwen. I also sat in with Estel for his lessons on the tongues of Men, we worked backwards from Westron to Adunaic and then to the original tongues they used in the First Age…”

He got the feeling the list could keep going for some time. It was lost on him, though – Uncle Fëanaro was really the one she should be listing them all for. Assuming, of course, he wasn’t too insulted that she had been deemed a loremaster at such a young age…

Tindomiel giggled, which meant she’d heard that thought.
“I guess we’ll find out about that eventually,” she snickered. “I wonder if that’ll be before or after he gets into the most interesting shouting match Aman has seen since the Years of the Trees with my sister.”

“You’ve mentioned California several times,” Aiko noted, diverting her from tongues he’s never heard of and leaving for the time being that she apparently expected her sister to pick up right about where Uncle Nolo had left off. “Do you mean to explain it at some point?”

“Eventually,” she sighed. “But not right now. It’s complicated.”

And upsetting, he gleaned from her thoughts. She didn’t expect he’d be happy about it, and preferred to save it for when he had more kin around.

He wasn’t sure what could be more upsetting than Beleriand, but if there was, he was more than happy to wait until it wasn’t just him, Moryo, and their youngest cousins on their own to find out about it.

“Very well,” he agreed. “So long as there will be an explanation at some point.”

She nodded, but showed no particular enthusiasm on the subject.

Aikanaro cast about for something she would be more willing to talk about.

“What about Laurë?” he asked.

At her slightly confused look, he was forced to elaborate.

“Laurefindil. He’s Laurë, and his father is Uncle Lauro.”

“Oh,” she said. “What do you want to know about?”

“You said he died in Gondolin,” Aikanaro said hesitantly.

Tindomiel nodded.

“He killed a balrog, but it pulled him down off a cliff when it died,” she explained. “Thus becoming an object lesson to all would-be balrog slayers – by which I mean my sister, because I don’t think anyone else ever went looking for them on purpose – about putting up their hair in addition to wearing proper protective equipment.”

Aikanaro blinked. That wouldn’t have been his takeaway, but apparently the younger generation viewed things differently.

“Anariel took detailed notes,” Tindomiel said wryly.

“But you speak of Laurë as being present for your youth,” he said with some confusion.

“Yeah,” she nodded. “He came back. I’m not sure when it was exactly. Sometime in the Second Age, around the time my parents founded Imladris, I think. Or maybe a little later?”

Aikanaro looked reprovingly at her, but she only shrugged.

“I wasn’t really into Second Age history, aside from the bits that related directly to my parents getting together. Second Age is more Arwen’s thing. And Anariel’s, of course.”

His puzzlement must have shown on his face, because Tinwë laughed.
“There was a war, so of course she took an interest – if it involves battles, Anariel wants to know everything about it. She could probably tell you the exact date Laurefindil showed up, since it was war-related. She’ll also be an excellent audience for anything you care to tell her about the Sudden Flame, just so you know. She’ll listen to the gory details, or at least as gory as you care to make it. Just don’t indulge her in front of my mother. Nana’s not so enthusiastic about her knowing all there is to know about every fight ever.”

Aikanaro frowned.

“Why should that matter? By the time I can talk to her, she will be here in Aman, where there are no fights to be had.”

Tinwë sighed.

“Anariel likes to be prepared for any eventuality, and the last time anyone told her about stuff they thought was harmless she was actually gathering information and prepping for her balrog hunting expedition. So Nana’s a little touchy about anyone encouraging her bad ideas.”

“What says Artë to all this?” Aikanaro asked.

“Grandmother?” Tindomiel snickered. “Aside from wanting to rip Grandpa Turukano a new one, because it turned out the balrog thing was actually his fault, she didn’t really say much.”

That didn’t sound much like his sister, so Aikanaro could only conclude that whatever Artë actually had to say on the matter hadn’t been for the ears of young ones. He also wanted to ask Turvo how it was that young Anariel’s Third Age balrog hunt could be construed as his fault.
All four children seemed rather nervous the next morning, but Carnistir couldn’t tell if it was because they were drawing close to Turvo’s city, or because the young ones expected some other snag.

In contrast to previous days, he got the distinct impression they were dawdling as they broke camp. Once they finally got underway, their progress was noticeably slower, with more frequent and lengthier side excursions.

He’d seen behavior like this often enough – and indulged in it a time or two himself – to recognize it for what it was. The young ones were trying to stall.

He finally caught Tindomiel on her own mid-morning, ostensibly gathering a few herbs to add to the cold meat wrapped in flatbread that would be their lunch.

She didn’t try to dodge the question – nor did he even need to actually ask.

“It’s not too late to change your minds, you know,” she told him not quite hopefully. “There’s other paths we could take— a lot of ways to get to Tirion from here.”

From the sound of it, she already knew what the answer would be, but was willing to try one more time anyway.

“You do realize that putting off the inevitable won’t make it any better when it does finally happen?” he asked.

He had plenty of experience in that area, and with a much harsher ‘inevitable’ than Turukano in a snit.

“Yeah, but…”

Her expression was glum.

“There’s knowing things will go badly and actually being there when they do. And honestly, the closer we get, the more I’d rather go the Grandpa Thingol route. I mean, sure, I’d hear about it for the next yen or so, and there would probably be some irritated remarks about Noldorin looks, Noldorin logic, but he’d get over it eventually.”

“You get trouble from Thingol about your looks?” Carnistir demanded, frowning.

He’d heard enough about his red face in his younger days to have an automatic reaction to anyone being teased about their appearance. And that was by their contemporaries, never mind being twitted by their elders.

Tindomiel sighed.

“It’s pretty well established that aside from my hair and complexion, my looks come mainly from Grandma Anairë,” she said with a sigh. “Which is way too Noldorin for Grandpa Thingol’s comfort. For all he apparently used to be besties with Grandfather Finwë, he generally prefers to pretend you guys don’t exist as much as possible these days. Unfortunately, that doesn’t work so well with me. And unlike Anariel, I don’t come with the bonus of being the biggest ass-kicker since Eärendil. Figuratively speaking, I mean. She’s actually pretty small…”
"I don’t see how that matters. You said she’s got Vanyarin hair," Carnistir muttered. "And she expects to get Kano back, which I’m sure will irritate Thingol."

_Irritate_ was almost certainly an understatement, given what his brother had told them in the Halls of Thranduil’s reaction to him. Oropher’s son had barely been an adolescent when Thingol picked a fight with the dwarves, and might not even have been considered an adult by the time of the Kinslaying.

“Yes, but he doesn’t know that yet,” Tindomiel pointed out brightly. “I mean, he knows about the blonde cause there’s really no hiding that, but I think when people say she’s like Luthien, he imagines that means she just gets feisty when there’s balrogs or dragons or Sauron or something.”

“I take it that’s not the case?” Carnistir asked wryly.

Tindomiel snickered.

“They compare her to Luthien cause she does her own thing without worrying about other people’s ideas of sensible or strategy. And she’s got a temperament that the Noldor and the Sindar will probably spend at _least_ an Age pointing fingers at each other for. Don’t spoil the surprise, ok?”

Put like that, Carnistir was rather looking forward to meeting her.

“What are your sister’s ideas of sensible or strategy?” Carnistir asked as they ambled back closer to the others.

Tindomiel grinned.

“Hey, Anairon,” she called. “Have I told you the story yet about the time Anariel was living among Men for a while and decided it was a great idea to go hiking in Mordor?”

Anairon was not the only male in the group to do a spit-take.

The next hour or so passed with Tindomiel cheerfully telling them all about Anariel’s ‘excellent adventure’, or at least all the parts of it she knew about – which Carnistir suspected was more than she would have known had her sister been the one to tell her the tale. Their mortal sister Anya had apparently been rather more forthcoming, which was how Tindomiel knew about Anariel having to wear orc clothing for two whole weeks, falling into a latrine, and several other incidents he couldn’t imagine any older sibling voluntarily sharing with an impressionable younger one.

There was also a gleam in the girl’s eye more than once which suggested she was holding some details back from the ‘grownups’ that she intended to share with Anairon later – assuming, of course, she could convince him to keep them to himself.

The story came to an abrupt halt when Tindomiel stopped mid-sentence.

“Oh, great, we have a welcoming committee,” she muttered. “Everyone hold onto your butts.”

Carnistir had no idea why he needed to hold onto his behind, but he didn’t have a chance to ask before Tindomiel’s ‘welcoming committee’ came into sight.

Itarillë and Laurefindil he recognized – the latter with ease, the former after a moment to process that she was now grown. But he didn’t know the other two neri, one dark haired, the other as golden as Laurë or Rillë. All four appeared to be rather thrown by the appearance of two grown elves with their younger kin.
Laurë was likely the only one who recognized both him and Aiko. Carnistir doubted Itarillë was old enough to have clear memories of him prior to the Ice, and he hadn’t seen much of her in Mithrim before he’d been sent to Thargelion – Turvo had kept her close, and if she wasn’t with him, she was with her aunt or grandfather.

And was that… a Man? In Aman? Surely not – it was impossible! And yet, the golden-haired unknown was definitely sporting a beard.

“Hi, Atto!” Laurefindil’s girls chorused.

The look on his cousin’s face said that Laurefindil was in no way fooled by his girls’ would-be innocent countenance. Carnistir could have told them that wouldn’t work – Laurë had dealt with Artë, Irissë, and Ambarussa in their youth. (At the same time. While he could tell that these four were more mischief-makers than not, he doubted they matched the Fearsome Foursome. Which was just as well, given that it sounded like Anariel managed worse on her own than all Four combined.)

Tindomiel was no less determinedly cheerful with her “Grandma! Pop-pop!”

‘Grandma’ had to be Itarillë, and Pop-pop appeared to be directed to the blonde Man.

*Yes. That’s my grandfather Tuor,* Tindomiel clarified. *I’ll explain later.*

That left the dark-haired elf the only mystery.

“We missed you too, Ecthelion,” Cali added warmly. “And we have lots to tell you!”

“Obviously,” Ecthelion replied drily. “I rejoice to see you once again among the living, Prince Aikanaro. Welcome back, Prince Morifinwë.”

Carnistir tried not to take it personally that there was no rejoicing or even his preferred name for him.

Tinwë rolled her eyes.

“If you didn’t tell people it was your preferred name, you can’t very well grump over them not using it,” she snorted. “Ecthelion, Uncle Moryo prefers Carnistir.”

Both Ecthelion and Tuor blinked. Itarillë looked to be if anything more uncertain now that she knew who he was – and possibly a bit disconcerted to find her granddaughter on a familiar basis with him.

“Uncle Aiko, this is…”

“Unexpected?” Aiko offered gently. “Indeed, pitya. I do not think it is only the children who have much to tell.”

_Could we please not tell on me right away, grownups?_ Tindomiel asked plaintively. _It really will not improve anything! Not only are they not my parents, these are not the relatives I was worried about!_

Carnistir found himself reluctantly agreeing. If Laurë’s reaction was anything to go by, this might be every bit as unpleasant as Tindomiel had feared.

Itarillë was giving her great-granddaughter a reproachful look.

“Darling, of course we’re pleased that your uncles have returned,” she began.

Carnistir noted sardonically that there had been not only a slight pause before uncle – Rillë probably needed a moment to work out Aiko’s relation to Tindomiel. There had also been another pause
before ‘uncle’ had turned into the plural.

“But wouldn’t it have been better to have let them go directly to Tirion?” Itarillë finished. “I’m sure you’re all quite excited, but Aunt Nerdanel and Aunt Eärwen will want to see their sons…”

Carnistir made sure to stifle his amusement.

Tinwë was stuck – there was no arguing with the grandmotherly reproach, given that she couldn’t admit that he and Aiko had not returned in the normal way, which presumably would have made ‘directly to Tirion’ possible and passing by Gondolin less than sensible.

“Ah, but they did try to tell us not to delay over them. It was our feeling that we had to see our youngest cousins home,” Aiko broke in smoothly before Tindomiel could say anything. “Old habits, you know. And, of course, I was curious to see Cousin Turvo’s new city.”

Itarillë had not been deterred, and was still looking to Tinwë – as, Carnistir noticed, were Lauro and Ecthelion. Tuor, on the other hand, appeared to find the situation humorous and was simply watching the show.

“Don’t everyone look at me!” Tindomiel protested indignantly. “This was their idea! I told them we should go home through Neldoreth!”

“I sincerely doubt Thingol would have been much better, pumpkin,” Tuor chuckled.

“Wanna bet?” Tindomiel muttered darkly.

“Come on, no use grousing about it now,” Tuor replied, extending an arm to his granddaughter. “It doesn’t much matter whose decision it was, you’ve made your bed – all of you.”

It sounded a bit like he might be including Carnistir and Aiko in that.

“Yes, as to beds,” Itarillë said, trying to regain control of the conversation, though the segue was not quite as graceful as she probably would have liked. “I think you’d better stay with us in the Wing tonight, my little star. Our uncles will no doubt be invited to stay with Atto and Ammë in the House of the King.”

Tindomiel made no argument, but she didn’t look pleased with the arrangement. Despite that, she was clearly not averse to the comforting arm Tuor slung around her shoulder, or to being steered to walk between him and Itarillë.

Itarillë, to her credit, managed not to look nervous as she looked expectantly to Carnistir, who took the hint, and courteously offered his young kinswoman his arm.

Aiko joined Laurë and Ecthelion, who was handling the rapid-fire recounting of the past few weeks from Laurefindil’s girls with an ease that told Carnistir Laurë was not the only one spending a good deal of time with them.

The walk to the city was not long – it had only been out of sight because Tindomiel had chosen to approach from behind a line of hills. (Carnistir was certain that had been intentional.)

Rillë, who had been grown since the First Age, was more than capable of making small talk without allowing anyone the opportunity to take offense – or give it without being truly determined to do so. Unsurprisingly, she settled on telling him about the city. He could hear the pride in her voice as she spoke, which reinforced Tindomiel’s hazy notion of her involvement in its founding and early days.
New Gondolin was not as compact as any of the Noldorin settlements in Beleriand had been, spreading out in a way that would not have been thinkable when they had not been able to ignore defensibility. There were walls around the city, no doubt more for the peace of mind of the Ondolindrim who remembered Beleriand than anything else. Though they looked far more functional than the walls of Tirion, Carnistir would have hated to try to actually defend them. As long as the perimeter was, the number required would be likely equal the population of Lake Heleworm at its height, never mind how many more would be needed to keep them supplied.

By the time they reached the gate, Carnistir knew enough to pick out several of the key landmarks, and to hazard a guess at where the other principal gates were. Either Rillë had no common sense whatsoever – which seemed doubtful, given that he knew her to be one of the few in the family to have survived Beleriand – or she had decided to accept her granddaughter’s assessment of him for the time being.

Or, Carnistir hastily amended as they entered the city proper and he got a good look at what was behind the walls, Turvo’s daughter had decided to trust that one son of Fëanaro with no followers at his back didn’t stand much chance of successfully making trouble in her father’s city. He was just a little outnumbered here.

Strangely, he wasn’t nervous about it. The only person in this city he knew to have any quarrel with him was his cousin Turukano. (While he could imagine Turvo’s followers might share his general distaste for him and his brothers, he suspected most of them had more pressing concerns once they reached Beleriand, and had in all likelihood largely forgotten about him once he went east.) It made for a nice change.

His thoughts were quite neatly derailed by the approach of someone he hadn’t seen since the days of the Trees.

“Emya,” Itarillë began, abruptly sounding younger and more worried than Carnistir imagined she generally preferred to be seen as. “What-”

“I heard my granddaughter brought visitors, dearest,” Elenwë said with a smile. “I wished to greet them.”

“I rejoice to see you once again among the living, cousin,” Carnistir offered, borrowing what had sounded like an accepted formula when Ecthelion had said it, but putting real feeling behind the words.

He didn’t give a damn what Laurë or Rillë or their mates thought, he meant it.

Elenwë had always been kind to him, and understood his need for quiet and order surprisingly well. He’d been genuinely sorry to hear of her death, no matter how much of a pain in the ass Turvo might have been in Beleriand.

“And I you, Moryo,” Elenwë replied. “I think we’d better make you my guest tonight, not Rillë’s. Aiko, did you wish to stay in the House of the King, or are you determined to add to the adult supervision of Tinwë?”

Tindomiel looked ready to explode at the notion that she needed more elders keeping an eye on her, but Aiko shook his head with a smile.

“I trust she is in good hands, even if I am having a bit of trouble accustoming myself to the notion of Rillë as anyone’s grandmother.”
To everyone’s surprise, Laurefindil cleared his throat.

“You would be welcome to stay with us in the Golden Flower if you wished, cousin,” he offered.

“I thank you, Laurê, but I confess I’m curious to hear Turvo’s tale of Beleriand. I had not seen him for some years before the Sudden Flame.”

Elenwë’s smile held, though it dimmed a bit.

“I’m sure it wouldn’t hurt to have you stay with us,” she murmured.

“Dinner, Emya?” Itarillë asked with some concern. “Normally we have the representatives of all twelve houses dine with the king when someone is newly returned…”

“No, just family tonight,” Elenwë said thoughtfully. “After all, it would hardly be proper to have the lords of Gondolin dining with Moryo and Aiko before they’ve even seen their parents…”

Carnistir smothered a smirk at Tindomiel’s just audible and extremely sarcastic ‘oh, goody’.

“Anairon, dear, you won’t take it amiss if I ask you to stay in the Wing with Itarillë and Tuor?” Elenwë continued, serenely ignoring her youngest descendant’s lack of enthusiasm.

Given the obvious relief on the boy’s face, Carnistir decided Anairon had actually been hoping for such an offer. He did not at all mind being elsewhere for whatever explosion the children were expecting.

“Laurê, Ehtelê?”

Elenwë’s words were less a question than an implicit command, and Carnistir could see by his younger cousin’s sigh that they had been heard as such.

“Of course we’ll be happy to join you for dinner, Elenwë,” Laurê said, though not entirely hiding his reluctance.

“Bring the girls, too,” she suggested.

Carnistir shot Elenwë a look, but the glint in her eyes said that she knew perfectly well what she was about, and he was in no position to argue. She doubtless had a better idea than he did of how her husband would react to his unexpected dinner guests.

Laurefindil looked even less pleased at being told to bring his daughters, but nodded all the same.

“In that case, we’d better take them off to unpack, bathe, and dress,” he said with a bow.

Carnistir couldn’t imagine that would take the entire time between the present and a reasonable hour for the evening meal, especially seeing as the two girls had very little to unpack. He concluded that there was also an unspoken ‘and get the story of just what exactly these four have been up to from them.’

Come to think of it, Rillë probably had something similar in mind for Tinwë. (And possibly Anairon. Who was, he suddenly realized, actually Rillë’s uncle. Finwë’s family tree had some very interestingly structured branches these days.)

As all four children trailed after the adults in charge of them, it occurred to Carnistir that he also had something that needed to be done before dinner.
“Elenwē, most wonderful of cousins, as excited as I am to see everyone,” he began.

“You’d quite like to not wear Anairon’s tunic to dinner?” she finished wryly.

He blinked.

“I do spend time with him now and again, Moryo. I recognize it. And the one Aiko’s wearing.”

“I think it suits me,” Aiko shrugged.

“Perhaps, but it doesn’t fit very well, so you’re getting new clothes all the same,” Elenwē said firmly. “We’ll stop in at the Heavenly Arch on the way home.”
A Little Unsteady

Aikanaro escaped into the street with a sigh of relief.

He had never been terribly concerned about his clothes, not even back in the Tirion days when dressing properly had mattered – or at least, they had thought it did. So the rapid fire of questions as to color, cut, style, fabric and so forth that the tailors of the Heavenly Arch had begun peppering him with almost immediately would likely have been too much even if this wasn’t the first day since his return to life that he’d had more than just a handful of cousins around him.

Fortunately, Moryo had been in his element in the workshops of the Heavenly Arch. His detailed and rather opinionated discussion of sartorial matters had drawn out the lord of the house, who had been so delighted to meet a fellow craftsman that it was entirely possible they’d have to forcibly pry Moryo out of Egalmoth’s atelier in time to bathe and dress for the evening meal.

Between Moryo and Lord Egalmoth, Aikanaro knew he’d be dressed more than well enough for a family dinner. (Moryo knew what colors he wouldn’t – or according to Moryo, shouldn’t - wear, and that he found linen itchy. He could be trusted to settle everything else. Judging by how things had been going just before Aikanaro left, Moryo was perfectly happy to do so.)

His relief at having escaped the Heavenly Arch lasted approximately three seconds. That was how long it took him to realize he had no idea where he was or where he should go, and that there were far more people outside the House of the Heavenly Arch than in it. More than a few of them were looking at him.

He closed his eyes and tried to clear his mind. Too many people, too many conversations, too many thoughts…

He jumped when a slim hand found his arm. Had this been Beleriand, he’d have drawn his sword, or at least a knife.

“Aiko?”

He’d all but forgotten Elenwë.

He opened his eyes to find her smiling wryly.

“Shall I give you a tour of the city, or would you rather we just go directly home?”

Aikanaro looked around at the bewildering maze of streets and the number of people. It was all too loud and too much.

“Directly home, please,” he said firmly, hoping he sounded less unsettled than he felt. He had fought battles, for Nienna’s sake, and not just the one he’d died in. An elven city shouldn’t be more than he could handle!

Elenwë’s smile was understanding as she guided him up the street.

“I thought you might. You seem a little less ready to be out and about than Moryo,” she said sympathetically. “You probably could have done with another few days in Lorien before they let you make your way home.”

Lorien? Was that how people usually returned? Aikanaro tried not to let his expression give away
that he hadn’t seen Lorien since Treelight.

Elenwë stopped to look at him.

“You didn’t let Moryo talk you into leaving sooner than you should, did you? Just because he was ready to leave didn’t mean you had to.”

Aikanaro shook his head.

“Moryo had nothing to do with it. I think my return actually came as a surprise to him.”

Elenwë nodded, but Aikanaro could feel the certainty emanating from her that there was more to the story as they resumed walking.

“Perhaps someone other than Moryo, then?” she suggested shrewdly.

Aikanaro hid his wince and made no answer, choosing to focus instead on the impressive fountain they were passing. The carvings and the stonework were more intricate than any he’d seen in Tirion, though he couldn’t help thinking his mother’s people would find it overly complicated.

“You needn’t cover for that granddaughter of mine,” Elenwë sighed. “She’s a sweet girl, but Tinwë hasn’t quite grown out of a child’s impulsive ways just yet.”

Aikanaro didn’t have any intention of explaining the matter more fully. Particularly not when he himself still hadn’t understood how Tindomiel had managed to do whatever it was she had done, much less why Lord Namo had allowed it. Besides, if she was at all like Artë, she was more than capable of getting herself out of most trouble without any assistance from him. If she wanted help, she’d say so.

“I suspect Tinwë is more than capable of doing whatever covering she might require all on her own,” he snorted. “She doesn’t need any help from me for that.”

“She can certainly try,” Elenwë replied with a laugh. “But unfortunately, with so many grandparents about, she’s finding it a bit more difficult to cover up mischief than it may have been in Imladris! There she had four older siblings, three of whom were often seen as likely candidates for whatever blame was coming her way.”

“From the stories Tinwë tells, with Anariel around, there couldn’t have been much covering up required,” Aikanaro mused. “All she had to do was sit back, keep quiet, and let everyone focus on whatever her older sister had done.”

“Yes, well…”

Elenwë’s voice held that mix of concern and exasperation that he remembered hearing from his mother so often when she’d been fretting about Artë.

“Let us talk about that some other time. You’re newly returned, it’s hardly the moment to be burdening you with my worries,” Elenwë sighed. “Especially when it may be that I’m simply fretting. There will be time enough for that once you’ve found your feet. Mind the steps.”

She had steered them through the streets with ease, bringing them to what could only be Turvo’s house surprisingly quickly.

Outside, the house was reminiscent of their grandfather’s palace, though on a smaller scale. But inside, once beyond the public rooms, Aikanaro discovered a soothing blend of Uncle Nolo’s house
and what he remembered of Turvo’s own house in Tirion, with a few Vanyarin touches scattered here and there.

“I decorated with Turvo in mind,” Elenwë confessed. “Not that he was around at that time to give his opinion. But making a house that felt like he lived in it made his absence a bit easier to bear.”

Aikanaro looked at her curiously. Had they not returned together?

“I was released from Mandos early in the Second Age,” Elenwë explained absently as they climbed the stairs. “Not long after Rillë’s grandson died. She needed me. Turvo only returned recently – not long after Anairon and Tindomiel were born, in fact.”

“He went to Tirion first?” Aikanaro asked.

“Oh, yes, of course,” Elenwë nodded. “He was eager to see his parents. I had been summoned to Lorien for his return, and we went directly to Tirion as soon as he was ready to travel. Rillë and her husband joined us there. Though once Rillë told Turvo that she had built a new Gondolin here, he could hardly wait to see it. I know his mother was disappointed he didn’t want to stay there longer…”

Aikanaro frowned.

Even without what he’d observed so far, the idea that Turvo had moved to his own city almost at once despite a baby brother who was otherwise alone would have led him to think that all was not well with his cousin. And while he was sure Aunt Anairë’s disappointment would have been most obvious, his uncle and his grandmother would have been no less upset.

Elenwë led him down the hall to a guest bedroom that was clearly reserved for family.

“We usually save this one for Turvo’s parents, but as they’re not here and not expected...”

She waved a hand to indicate he should make himself comfortable.

“You have your own bathroom, and if the soaps and oils aren’t to your liking, I can send out for others.”

“If they’ll do for Uncle, I’m sure I can manage,” Aikanaro said wryly.

Elenwë nodded.

“There’s more than enough time for you to have a good long soak and a nap before dinner,” she suggested. “I remember my first few days back – even the normalest of things felt like it might make me break down crying. Resting more than usual helped.”

“Oh,” Aikanaro said, suddenly understanding why she was being so very careful with him. “This is not unusual, then?”

Elenwë laughed.

“I’m not sure anyone could actually say – I’m told it’s different for everyone. Some come back bursting with energy and eager for everything, others the complete opposite. Many of us from the Ice find the first few days very intense – the last thing we knew was that vast colorless cold, and suddenly there we are in the Gardens. The colors, the sounds, the warmth, the life... Estë’s people have us rest a lot. They try to sort of ease us back into the world. I think I did almost nothing but sleep and look cautiously out the window for the first three or four days. It took a few weeks before I
was ready to leave, and even then, I was really only prepared to see my parents and Rillë.”

She didn’t have to explain that wandering through a city would have been far too much.

Aikanaro still felt a bit silly, needing to rest after doing nothing more than walking half a mile.

“I’ll leave you to it, then,” Elenwë said. “I’d best make sure there’s a room ready for Moryo as well – do you suppose he’d mind terribly being put in my parents’ usual room? It may be too Vanyarin for him, but I’d prefer to save Tinwë and Anairon’s rooms for them, just in case…”

She didn’t specify in case of what, and Aikanaro wasn’t sure why the pair of them would suddenly shift from staying with Rillë, who evidently had her own establishment, to this house.

She frowned in concern.

“I doubt Moryo will be at all fussy about his room,” Aikanaro assured her, trying not to laugh.

With all her experience of returning, it had been easy to forget that Elenwë had never actually reached Beleriand. But he couldn’t imagine anyone who had experience life on the Hither Shores would have asked such a question. None of them had been fussy about where they slept by the end. As long as there was a moderately comfortable horizontal surface, a pillow, and a towel, Moryo would be perfectly satisfied.

Besides, they’ve been sleeping on the ground for the past several days, not that he would tell Elenwë that.

“You think so?” she asked, brightening. “That would make things a bit easier.”

Aikanaro was lost at this point, but nodded firmly.

“If he doesn’t like it, tell him he can blame me. But I really don’t see why he’d be bothered.”

Elenwë smiled, and shooed him toward the bathroom.

“You’ll feel better after a soothing soak,” she said briskly. “I’ll look in later to make sure you’re awake in time to dress.”

She closed the door behind her, and he heard her footsteps echoing back down the hallway as she went.

He probably should take a bath – there was more than a little sense to what Elenwë had said, after all.

But even if he couldn’t quite take being out in it, he was still curious about his cousin’s city.

The windows had a good view, probably so Turvo could both reassure his parents and show off a bit to them. He’d always liked having a chance to shine, but it was tough to find opportunities given he had generally been competing for attention against brothers and cousins every bit as intelligent and talented as he was.

Turvo’s house was on the central square, and from here you could see a good chunk of the city. It was a Noldorin city, definitely, but not the sort of city they would have built in the Years of the Trees. The Sindarin touches were plain enough to anyone who had spent time among them.

A river meandered through, with a number of graceful bridges connecting the banks. Each bridge was in a different style, most complementing the buildings to either side of it. There were parks
dotted about here and there. A few buildings flew brightly colored flags, but most were adorned with flowers or shrubs, and a good number had fountains.

He wished he’d gotten Tinwë to explain more about this Gondolin, rather than the one that had been destroyed. It would be good to know what the flags meant – golden flower, fountain, harp, swallow, blacksmith’s hammer…

He wondered where Turvo was that he hadn’t come to greet him yet. He must be busy elsewhere, or he’d have been in here already, no doubt full of questions.

Did Elenwë intend to surprise her husband at dinner? He couldn’t see where that would improve matters.

He sighed and turned to the bathroom. Elenwë was right, a bath and a nap would probably help his state of mind. He needed to be calm tonight, given that it was anyone’s guess whether Moryo would keep his cool and all but certain that Turvo wouldn’t.
Carnistir couldn’t remember clearly when he’d last felt like this.

Alive wasn’t the right word for it, though alive was certainly a considerable part of it. But this was alive as he hadn’t known it since crossing the Sea, or possibly longer.

He’d spent several hours pursuing his craft, largely for the sheer joy of it – something he hadn’t done since Tirion. On the rare occasions he’d had the chance in Beleriand, there had always been immediate practical reasons for what he was doing that had to take precedence over ‘improving his craft’ or even just ‘enjoying himself’.

He could easily have gone on with Elenwë and Aiko and let the tailors of the Heavenly Arch make new clothes for him and his cousin. They were all perfectly competent at the least, and there were enough of them that tunics would have been ready in time, particularly with their queen all but commanding them to make it happen.

But where would the fun have been in that?

Instead, he had quietly spoken to the master in charge when they’d entered, one thing led to another, and before long Lord Egalmoth himself had appeared.

The resulting debate about cut, style, colors, and fabrics had been glorious.

Carnistir had prevailed in the end, of course – even aside from the whole ‘prince’ thing, which he hadn’t relied on but Egalmoth was reluctant to drop, it was difficult enough for a tailor to insist that the person who was going to wear the clothes was wrong under normal circumstances. It became pretty much impossible when that person was another master of the craft. (It also didn’t help Egalmoth’s position that Carnistir couldn’t share with him the full scope of what he was trying to achieve. The last thing he wanted was for word to go around that the House of Finwë were revisiting all their old quarrels.)

He’d decided to go with similar colors for both of them. Much as he might be enjoying himself, it didn’t mean he couldn’t also be practical. It would help to style himself and Aiko similarly, to present a united front.

He had settled on grey as the main color even before he’d learned that was what the newly returned were generally sent out from Lorien wearing. He’d insisted on white and silver accents for both of them, where Egalmoth would have been more conventional and gone with their house colors.

But the shades of grey were slightly different, he’d been quite specific in his choices, and he had given Aiko splashes of green where he had a few glimpses of red here and there – enough that no one could construe him as being ashamed of his father or his house, but not so much as to reflect in his face and leave an easy opening for rude remarks whenever the inevitable fight with Turvo happened.

Carnistir was more or less taking it as a given they would end up fighting, and determined to keep it to words only for his part. (Hopefully Aiko and Laurë could be relied on to make sure Turvo would do the same. He certainly didn’t trust Turvo to exercise such restraint on his own.)

Had time allowed, he would have completed everything himself. But given that they had only a few hours to finish, he gratefully accepted all the help the House of the Heavenly Arch could give him, from a small swarm of fellow tailors to help with the cutting and sewing, to the boots, socks, and
underclothes that appeared without him so much as asking for them.

The true surprise was when someone introduced as Enerdhil of the Mole arrived with a selection of circlets and other accessories. Carnistir had taken some pleasure in declining any circlet for himself but selecting one for Aiko. (It was absolutely because Turvo would probably see any circlet on him as a provocation, and definitely not because he did not at all regret the excellent opportunity to not bother. Being an adult did have a few advantages.) He assuaged Enerdhil’s worries that anyone might think the Moles had been anything less than helpful by accepting a set of silver hair clasps instead.

It was at that point that Itarillë had arrived with one slightly sulky young adult (Tindomiel) and one slightly nervous one (Anairon) in tow. All three were carrying garment cases, which seemed to indicate they would be changing at Turvo’s.

“We’re trying not to draw too much attention to you and Aiko,” Itarillë explained. “So if you don’t mind, Uncle?”

Egalmoth whisked the newly completed garments away to be packed before Carnistir could possibly muster any reasonable objection had he been inclined to try. He supposed that was only to be expected. He might be a prince of the Noldor, but Itarillë was the princess of Gondolin. The elves of this city would follow her lead, not his.

He accepted the pair of bags Egalmoth presented him with graciously, and made sure to thank not only the Lord of the Heavenly Arch, but every single craftsperson who had assisted. Little things like that mattered, he had found over the years.

He also took charge of everyone else’s bags once he was done. Given Tinwë’s mood, he suspected hers had only just missed being dragged on the ground on the way over. He had never yet encountered clothing that was improved by such treatment.

“That’s very kind of you,” Rillë trilled.

Her sideways glance at her granddaughter said to Carnistir that she’d considered prompting Tindomiel to say ‘thank you’ but thought better of it. That was probably for the best. He knew perfectly well Tinwë wasn’t out of sorts with him, but he also knew that pushing her or treating her like a child wouldn’t improve matters.

Anairon had evidently decided that he was staying out of it, and was happy to keep to Carnistir’s other side for the walk to Turvo’s.

Carnistir had expected a quiet walk. Artanis was very good at the silent treatment when she was well and truly angry. (Her brothers maintained that was because she could plot revenge much better if she didn’t have to keep up a conversation at the same time. They also maintained a safe distance from her whenever they said it.) But Tindomiel surprised him by keeping up a running commentary of the sights.

“So obviously the Wing is back the way we came from, I’ll show you that later – that’s the House that was made for Pop-pop. Technically I’m a Princess of the Wing when I’m around here, but that’s only when people are being stuffy. It’s going to be really interesting when anyone tries to address Anariel that way.”

Carnistir stifled a snort of laughter. He had a feeling Rillë wouldn’t appreciate it.

“That’s the House of the Golden Flower, in case the flag and the front being covered in celandine
and sunflowers was too subtle. Laurefindil spends most of his time here. Aunt Irimë and Uncle Lauro mostly split theirs between Valimar and Tirion but they also stay here from time to time. Tas and Cali visit them sometimes, too.”

“Oh, that’s Ecthelion’s fountain. Well, the main one, anyway. The fountain in Beleriand Gondolin was bigger and deeper, but here they put up so many fountains all over the place and have the river besides that he decided this one was just going to be super fancypants instead. The base is the history of old Gondolin, and the center part is what Ecthelion considers the House of the Fountain’s finest moments.”

Carnistir noted that most of those moments had nothing whatsoever to do with fighting. It made him like Ecthelion slightly better than he had a few hours ago.

Tindomiel didn’t actually seem to expect any answer from him, and her constant chatter meant Rillë couldn’t get a word in without interrupting. (Which might have been part if not most of the point of it. Carnistir wasn’t about to underestimate Artanis’ – and Luthien’s – granddaughter again.)

It was only when they arrived at Turvo’s that Rillë wedged her way into the conversation.

“That house may look a bit familiar to you, Uncle,” she said.

That was an understatement. It was a smaller, more refined version of Grandfather’s house in Tirion.

“I built very close to what I remembered from Ondolindë – I hadn’t realized until I came to Aman that was Atto building what he remembered.”

Carnistir smiled.

“I can see why he would,” he replied, covering that it actually made him a bit uneasy.

They had all missed Tirion, but trying to recreate it in Beleriand hadn’t seemed like it would help anything. At least, not to him or his brothers, or so far as he knew to Uncle Nolo, Finno, or Ingo. They’d all understood the need to build something appropriate for the way they had been living at that point – and the need to not exacerbate their people’s homesickness.

He also noted that Rillë said ‘came’, not ‘came back’, though she’d been begotten and born in Tirion. That didn’t concern him nearly as much as Turvo, but it did throw him a bit.

Elenwë greeted them inside and led them toward the stairs to the family level.

“Ah, wonderful, you’re here,” she said. “I just woke Aikanaro – be sure not to startle him, please, Moryo.”

The look she levelled at Tindomiel would have given even Ambarussa pause.

“Your uncles will be dressing without your assistance, Tinwë. Take yourself to your own room and get yourself ready. You too, if you please, Anairon.”

To his surprise, neither of the two children argued, just meekly collected their dinner clothes from him and headed upstairs.

To his even bigger surprise, Elenwë wasn’t finished yet.

“You as well, Rillë. Off you go.”

“But Ammë—”
“Hop, pitya.”

It was harder not to laugh at Itarillë’s pout than Tindomiel’s – particularly since it was the first time he could recall seeing it. (It really didn’t help when he realized it was a carbon copy of Turvo’s.)

He handed the last garment bag that wasn’t from the Heavenly Arch over to her and did not so much as snicker as Elenwë’s daughter pointedly did not stomp on the stairs.

Then he looked expectantly at Elenwë.

“Aiko is having a rough time,” she told him bluntly. “He should not have left Lorien so soon.”

It was easy enough to hear the reproof she was biting her tongue on – ‘if he didn’t have the sense to see it, you ought to have said something.’ He supposed it would have been fair had they returned in the usual way.

“He has been fine while we were travelling,” Carnistir reassured her, though in truth he was trying not to panic, picturing Aiko back to the state he’d been in for the first day or so after Tindomiel had brought them out of Mandos.

“Perhaps he was. I assume that was only the six of you?” Elenwë asked.

Carnistir nodded.

“Small groups and familiar people are not as difficult. It’s better to ease into things. Coming to a city entirely new to him was not the best of plans.”

“We’ve no one but ourselves to blame for that,” Carnistir said ruefully. “The children’s idea was to take us directly to Tirion, to our parents. Aiko and I overruled them.”

“Did neither of you listen to Estë’s people?” Elenwë sighed in exasperation. “Or did you listen but think that because you’re princes of the Noldor their warnings would somehow not apply? You might be one of those who came back eager for everything, but Aiko plainly needs to take things slower.”

“You can stop with the scolding,” Carnistir told her evenly, forbearing to mention that it was a bit ridiculous for her to even attempt it. He’d been nearly an adult by the time she had been begotten. And while she’d been alive considerably longer, it had nearly all been in Aman, and in peace. “If I’d thought that Aiko coming here would be so difficult for him, we wouldn’t have done it. But we didn’t know, and it’s a bit late now to tell us about what we should have done.”

Elenwë did the disappointed look nearly as well as his mother or his wife.

“We won’t do it again,” he offered with a cheeky grin that had sometimes worked on Haleth.

“You’re impossible, all of you!” Elenwë exclaimed.

That was nothing he hadn’t heard before. He’s pretty sure it’s been said to every single grandchild of Finwë at least once. He wondered if Tindomiel was included in that ‘all’.

“We are,” Carnistir agreed. “But we’re not unreasonable. I’ll make certain Aiko’s up to dinner before I bring him down. If he’s not, I’ll see to it he stays in his room.”

Privately he doubted his cousin would agree to skip dinner, so he could only hope that Aiko’s mental state was better than Elenwë made it sound.
“Very well,” Elenwë sniffed. “And no winding the children up, either, please. It’s going to be challenging enough to keep dinner peaceful as it is.”

Carnistir snorted.

“I suspect the only reason Tinwë is out of sorts is because someone’s been reproaching her for not keeping us away from here, when it was Aiko and I who insisted on it,” he told her. “Or am I wrong in thinking that Rillë tried giving her a talking-to while I was at the Heavenly Arch?”

Elenwë’s look of consternation was as good as a confirmation.

“Moryo, you and Aiko both seem quite determined not to explain her role in all this, but I know her well enough to be sure there was one,” she said quietly.

“If there’s anything she’s done that she shouldn’t have, Aiko and I will discuss it with her parents,” he said firmly, putting a slight emphasis on the last word. “We’ve already told her as much. And I intend to follow through on that.”

“Elrond-”

“Is her father,” Carnistir interrupted smoothly, before Elenwë could say anything about his nephew that might spark his temper. “That means he is the one who should discipline her if he considers it necessary.”

He had here there, and he knew it. By Noldorin standards, what he’d said was on par with saying the sky was blue. But just in case…

“And if you don’t think Elrond will be severe enough about whatever it is you think she’s done, console yourself with the thought that there’s always Artë and Uncle Ara, who will both definitely take an interest.”

In Tindomiel’s shoes he’d be more worried about Uncle Ara than her father. Uncle was bound to be curious about his son’s apparent change of heart on the subject of returning to life, and he would sooner or later winkle the full story out. Tindomiel’s chances of that not happening were worse than the chances of a snowball surviving the noonday sun in Tirion at midsummer.

Besides, whatever it was Elenwë and Itarillë had concluded Tindomiel was responsible for was almost certainly wrong. He didn’t see how they could possibly have hit on the truth when even Anairon, her best friend, hadn’t known in advance that she could do what she had.

He was expecting it to be one hell of a conversation whenever he finally met Elrond. ‘Hello, I’m your uncle from the slightly murderous side of the family, did you know your youngest daughter can walk in and out of Mandos any time she pleases?’

He sighed as he followed Elenwë up the stairs. One difficult conversation at a time – and it didn’t require any foresight to know that there were plenty of them coming.
Aikanaro felt much better when he woke from his nap. He had no sense of how long he’d been asleep, but the city seemed much more bearable now – or maybe that was just because he knew he didn’t need to be out in it.

There was a discrete knock on his door, followed almost at once by Moryo slipping into the room.

He had changed already, his new tunic and trousers crisp and unmarred by any sign of wear. The grey, silver, and white scheme suited him, and there was only the merest hint of his house colors. For any of his brothers, the outfit would be unthinkably restrained. But Moryo hadn’t generally wanted to be the center of attention.

“You look quite dashing,” Aikanaro offered.

“It is to be hoped you’ll look just as dashing,” Moryo replied, eying him closely. “That is, if you’re well enough to go down to dinner. If you don’t feel up to it, you’d best stay where you are and rest, or Elenwë may have both our hides. Particularly as I’ve confessed it was our idea to come here, not Tinwë’s.”

Aikanaro frowned.

“I thought I told her that already,” he said. “But she needn’t worry. I’m well. It was just a bit much earlier, is all. The last time I saw so many people, I was in my own fortress in Dorthonion.”

It probably didn’t help that at the time, he’d been trying to evacuate those he could from the fortress ahead of the fires sweeping down on them from the north. Many of his people had died long before the balrogs or dragons arrived. But he saw no point to sharing that.

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“Dinner with my kin is certainly not beyond me,” he added, seeing Moryo’s slightly dubious look at the mention of Dorthonion.

He’d mention later that his sleep had been troubled by dreams of fire. He knew them for memories – no doubt the sort of thing one was meant to have healed in Mandos before returning to life. But he hadn’t intended to return, so he’d made little to no effort to heal. He didn’t feel it right for anyone to blame that on young Tinwë, though.

He also didn’t feel like he needed to be treated like he was made of glass. He’d done his part in Beleriand the same as the rest of them. After facing all Morgoth could throw at him, dinner with a pair of quarreling cousins wasn’t as daunting as it might have been in the Tirion days. In fact, it sounded downright refreshing.

“I thought you’d say that,” Moryo replied briskly, and began laying out clothes for him.

They were to dress similarly, Aikanaro noted, the main difference being that his clothes had splashes green, and more of it, where Moryo’s had red. And, of course…

“Why do I get stuck with a circlet when you’ve skipped it?” Aikanaro demanded indignantly. “This is no formal occasion!”

“Figured the added authority couldn’t hurt,” Moryo shrugged. “You’re older than Laurë, which makes you a better referee when Turvo loses his temper.”
“You don’t know for certain that he will,” Aikanaro pointed out as he began to change, though he had to admit it was quite likely. “Besides, Turvo’s not going to listen to me if he won’t listen to Laurë. We’re his younger cousins. You’re the eldest one here.”

Moryo made no reply to that – at least, not in words. His face suggested that Aikanaro might need a longer nap but he wasn’t going to say it.

“Does everything fit properly? I used the measurements I remembered for you, but it’s been some time since I last saw you…”

“Properly? Perfectly might be more accurate,” Aikanaro smiled. “Thank you.”

He was actually delighted by how soft and soothing both the tunic and trousers were against his skin. It was typical of Moryo to make such a gesture without saying a word about it.

“Good,” Moryo replied. “We’ll be wearing these not only to dinner tonight, but when we arrive home as well, grey being the traditional color for the newly returned.”

Aikanaro nodded as he pulled his boots on, taking the subtle cue that this was information he should know if they didn’t intend to drop Tindomiel in it. And the way everyone was behaving about Turvo, he was beginning to understand why she’d rather save sharing her unusual abilities with her parents.

After a moment’s thought, he decided to do his hair in the same way he’d worn it for patrols or battle in Dorthonion. Turvo wouldn’t know the difference – it wasn’t as if he knew anything of day to day life outside his hideaway – so he couldn’t take offense. The style was practically second nature to him, he’d done it so many times his hands knew what to do without any need for him to look.

“I should warn you our grandniece is out of sorts,” Moryo told him in an undertone. “Her grandmothers may not have any clear idea what she did, but they’ve concluded she did something.”

Aikanaro smiled as he checked his handiwork in the mirror.

“I wish them luck scolding her. I can’t imagine it goes any better than taking Artë to task.”

“Probably not, but they tried. It doesn’t seem to have worked very well. Hopefully she’ll have cheered up before dinner.”

Aikanaro didn’t think that was very likely. They could only hope that Tinwë’s temperament was not the same as her grandmother’s – Artë at that age would have been looking to even the score.

There was a knock on the door – somewhat tentative, but less subtle than Moryo’s had been.

Anairon poked his head in the door.

“Tell them to hurry up!” Tindomiel said firmly from somewhere out of sight behind him. “We need to be downstairs before Grandpa Turukano!”

Her voice carried an echo of the reaction he knew from the Sindar encountering Noldorin mores – a tinge of frustration coupled with exasperated amusement.

“Message received,” Aikanaro laughed. “We’re ready.”

Tindomiel and Anairon were waiting in the corridor, both clad in Nolofinwean colors. Aikanaro wasn’t sure if Tindomiel’s residual cross look was about being in trouble for the wrong thing, or
about the delicate cirlet on her head. She might still be young enough to protest it, particularly since Moryo had skipped his. But young Anairon was also wearing one this evening…

The overall effect of the matching outfits and the two young ones’ resemblance to Uncle Nolo and Aunt Anairë made them look brother and sister. With any luck, that would put Turvo in a good mood – it would be a bit like looking at Irissë and Aryo, who so far as he knew were still in the Halls.

*Yes, they’re still in there. But I look nothing like Aunt Irissë,* Tindomiel protested.

That was true enough – Irissë took after her father. Turvo was the one who looked more like his mother.

*I’m also nowhere near as much trouble,* she continued airily.

Aikanaro glanced at her out of the corner of his eye. That part he wasn’t so sure about, but he didn’t think this was the time or place to discuss it.

*Let’s go down to dinner and all behave ourselves,* he suggested.

*I like that you’re including yourself in that* she snickered.

Happily, their exchange served to lift the last vestiges of Tindomiel’s sulk, so Itarillë met four cheerful people at the foot of the stairs.

“Atto is just back, he’ll be down as soon as he’s changed,” she told them. “Tuor’s changing as well.”

Aikanaro was amused to see she looked nearly as nervous as the children had been that morning. Tinwë, on the other hand, was now at ease.

As, he noted, were Tasariel and Califiriel, who were just arriving with Laurefindil and Ecthelion. They wore shimmery pale blue robes embroidered with golden flowers, and matching gold pendants he felt certain were a gift from Aunt Irimë and Uncle Lauro.

“Oh, look, Cousin Aiko and Cousin Moryo got new clothes!” Tasariel exclaimed.

“Very elegant,” Califiriel observed.

“Yes, they do look better wearing things that fit,” Ecthelion agreed. “Good evening, Prince Aikanaro, Prince Carnistir, Prince Anairon, Princess Tindomiel.”

That got eyerolls from all three girls and a slight smile from Anairon.

“Ecthelion, it’s a family dinner for pity’s sake,” Tindomiel sighed. “You could just use our names.”

Ecthelion gave them a look that suggested he’d be staying formal.

Laurefindil sighed.

“Not now, please, Tinu?” he said in a voice that just missed pleading. “You know perfectly well your grandfather-”

That was when Turvo chose to make his entrance.

“I hear my granddaughter is visiting! Where is she?”
He strode in, clearly ready to play the doting grandfather, only to stop short as he caught sight of Moryo, smile sliding off his face.

Aikanaro cleared his throat. Clearly Tindomiel had known exactly what she was talking about when she predicted this would go badly. He hoped for Turvo’s sake to forestall any outbursts until after dinner, when the children could be safely sent off to bed.

“It is a joy to see you again after so long, cousin,” he said, hoping to divert Turvo’s attention from Moryo, whose smirk was very much not helping.

It worked better than he had hoped. His older cousin’s jaw dropped.

“Aiko?”

Turvo looked stunned.

“But I thought…” He trailed off, only to pull himself together. “It is wonderful to see you again, cousin, all the more so for it being a surprise.”

Oh, right. Any of his relatives who had also returned from the Halls would know he’d repeatedly turned down offers from Lord Namo to restore him to life. Turvo hadn’t been back all that long, and had asked Aikanaro to consider returning with him when he had left.

“Unexpected pleasures are often the most enjoyable,” Tuor spoke up from behind Turvo.

He was also dressed as befit a prince of the Noldor, in a sky blue that set off his eyes and a motif of white wings on his tunic.

Turvo’s expression went from one of barely concealed confusion, to indulgent fondness as Tindomiel slipped around her uncles to dispense hugs to both her grandfathers. He kept one arm around her as he led them all into the dining room, where they found Elenwë putting the finishing touches on the table.

“So, little star, what mischief have you been into this time?” Turvo asked pleasantly.

“Absolutely none,” Tindomiel replied airily.

Aikanaro was certain none of the adults in the room believed that, not even Turvo - he and Moryo due to knowing exactly what mischief she’d been into, and the others due to knowing Tindomiel.

He was amused to note that as Elenwë had them dining informally, there were no set places. That meant there was something of a dance as everyone angled for seats.

Elenwë and Itarillë had apparently failed to coordinate in advance, so while they clearly agreed that leaving Tinwë on one side of Turvo was vital, they hadn’t agreed which of them would be best to sit on his other side and each appeared to think the other should take that place. (Aikanaro personally suspected Elenwë would be the better choice, and was relieved that Rillë won the silent debate on that point.)

Tuor had developed a momentary case of blindness that prevented him seeing that both his wife and law-mother clearly wanted him on Tinwë’s other side, leaving Anairon to claim the seat.

Turvo would have been happy to have the four children grouped together, and was to all appearances nearly as fond of Tasariel and Califiriel as he was of his own progeny – which made his apparent disinterest in his younger brother all the odder – but Laurefindil intervened to maneuver his
daughters farther away.

Aikanaro couldn’t tell if that was due to conviction that the four young ones seated together was a recipe for trouble (which seemed a reasonable conclusion to him) or because Laurë wanted them closer to the door so Ecthelion could whisk them out the moment things threatened to get out of hand. Perhaps it was both.

Ecthelion had sensibly claimed the seat nearest to the door – and furthest from Turvo. That left Aikanaro with Tuor on one side and Moryo on the other. To his amusement, he realized that he and Moryo had ended up more or less opposite Turvo.

Aikanaro smiled pleasantly as if it were perfectly normal for family dinners to begin with this kind of jockeying for position. (In all honesty, the only reason they generally hadn’t was that it was usually only him and Ango, and occasionally Ingo, in Dorthonion. If they’d ever tried to sit the whole family around one table, it probably would have ended in the very least in a shouting match, and more likely in fisticuffs.)

Seeing the dark look Turvo was giving Moryo, Aikanaro decided he’d better intervene. No sense starting the bickering before they’d even had a chance to eat.

The trouble was, he had no idea what to say to divert Turvo.

He didn’t want to slight Anairon by making any remark about this being the first proper dinner he’d had since Beleriand – he had a feeling the boy was too sensitive to hear the qualifier. He also had no idea what they’d be eating, so he couldn’t say something trivial about looking forward to any particular dish. The weather was too trivial, enquiring about the health of his parents was silly when there was every reason to expect he’d see Aunt Anairë and Uncle Nolo in only a few days…

“Tindomiel has been telling me all about your city, cousin. From what I’ve seen, it’s lovely. But I confess I’m actually quite curious about the one you built in Beleriand.”
Carnistir gave Elenwë an appreciative smile as he savored his dessert. He didn’t want to say anything out loud – not when the adults at the table seemed to have arrived at an unspoken agreement to keep Turukano more or less calm until the children could be dismissed.

Aiko had managed to engage Turvo in a detailed explanation of not only the design of his city, but the building and how he’d managed to get his people moved into the valley of Tumladen without being noticed by friend or foe. Carnistir had to admit that last bit had been rather impressive, not that Turvo would want to hear it from him.

Indeed, his cousin shot him dire looks from time to time – just often enough to make it clear that he was still quietly fuming at the presence of a Fëanorion – but mainly focused on dinner and conversation with Aiko and the children, who’d had plenty of questions of their own. (To Carnistir, that suggested that normally everyone avoided the subject of Beleriand with Turvo. It didn’t sound very healthy to him.)

Turvo occasionally aimed a barbed little comment in his direction, but Carnistir knew better than to take the bait. He’d watched his father and his uncle pull the same trick on each other often enough to know that whoever lost their temper first would lose more than that.

Starting a conversation with Elenwë, however unobjectionable to a neutral observer, would be much like poking a dragon. But Carnistir knew perfectly well that she had been responsible for the menu this evening, and he wanted to show his appreciation. (All the more so considering he was well aware his presence meant more work for her.)

He’d always liked cheesecake, and this one had the most interesting flavor, one he’d never encountered before. He supposed this might be one of those ‘new’ things the children had been holding back on so as not to overwhelm him and Aiko. They were certainly enthusiastic about it.

“What do you think?”

Tindomiel’s question seemed to be directed at him and Aiko equally.

“You say it’s called ‘chocolate’?” Aiko asked thoughtfully.

“Yes, isn’t it good?” Tasariel said cheerfully. “If you like the cake, you should try this!”

She pushed a small dish of some other form of chocolate to where Aiko could try some. Tindomiel helpfully directed another to Carnistir. All four youngsters seemed to be eager to observe their reactions.

He took a bite.

To his surprise, it was cold – cold enough that he got the slightly painful tingly sensation in his head that he recalled from the shaved ice they’d sometimes had as treats on summer visits to Formenos.

“I like the flavor, but that’s too cold for me, thank you,” he said when the feeling receded. “I’ll stick to the cake.”

He looked up at the strangled sound from Turvo’s direction to find his cousin was gripping the arms of his chair so hard his knuckles had gone white.
He had no idea what possible offense his cousin could have found in an innocuous remark about desserts.

“What would *you* know about *cold*?” Turvo demanded.

His voice carried all the chill of the Ice, and he completely failed to register Elenwë’s would-be comforting (or possibly restraining) hand on his.

“You sailed on your stolen ships – cold was for the rest of us! You don’t know even the *half* of what you abandoned us to, not that any of you *cared.*”

Carnistir deliberately held his tongue, for he could see that Laurë was not happy that Turvo hadn’t the decency to wait until the children were excused. And at this point, anything he said, no matter what it was, would only inflame the situation.

But he was nowhere near as unaware as his cousin might like to think. His eldest brother had ordered him to make himself familiar with Uncle Nolo’s losses on the Ice while they were still in Mithrim; Curvo had later passed on a few choice thoughts on the subject that could only have come from Artanis. If Turvo really thought he and his brothers had remained ignorant or unaffected by what they’d been party to, he needed to remove his head from his nether regions.

“I think we’d best say our good nights,” Ecthelion announced, his tone making it clear to all four children that it was not up for debate. “Girls?”

Tasariel and Califiriel obediently bobbed quick curtsies in Turvo’s direction before heading for the door with alacrity. He couldn’t be sure about Tasariel, but Califiriel looked to be relieved at the chance to escape the imminent explosion.

Anairon didn’t need to be told by anyone - he was already following Laurë’s girls. Privately, Carnistir thought that demonstrated better survival instincts that any of his older siblings, Turukano included. (He did recognize that might be slightly unfair to Arvo, who had after all died in a battle not of his own making.)

“You too, Tinwë,” Rillë prompted, steel in her voice.

“Aw-”

“Let’s go, pumpkin,” Tuor said, extending a hand to help her up.

“But *Pop-Pop* -!”

“You can argue about it all the way to your room,” Tuor offered cheerfully, boosting his granddaughter effortlessly from her chair and steering her toward the exit.

Carnistir was not surprised that there was no ‘good night’ or formal farewell from any of them before Rillë shut the door firmly behind them. (From the sound of it, Tindomiel had taken Tuor at his word.)

Elenwë sighed, and removed her napkin from her lap.

“Really, Turukano,” she said, the disapproval clear in her tone. “We came so close to a pleasant meal with your cousins.”

Judging by Aiko’s sudden fascination with the empty plate in front of him, Elenwë must have added something more on another level.
Carnistir winced internally. He was sure Elenwē hadn’t meant to make things worse…

All three grandsons of Finwē reflexively rose from their own seats as she stood.

“I think I should help Rillë,” she told them. “Tinwē is a bit of a handful when she’s riled. I’m not sure whether she gets it from Thingol or your side of the family, Moryo.”

Elenwē moved briskly enough that the door was nearly closed before Turvo completely blew his top.

“My granddaughter does not get anything from Kinslayers!!”

Now that they no longer had an impressionable audience, Carnistir was no longer bound hold back.

“Are you including yourself in that, little cousin?” he asked with a wicked smile.

Aiko’s eyes widened, and he opened his mouth to intervene.

“No, let him speak for himself, Aiko,” Carnistir continued, cutting off whatever protest his younger cousin might have made. “I’m curious to hear why it is Turvo thinks he’s any different.”

“I. Am. No. Kinslayer.”

Turukano had gone from loud to almost unnaturally calm, enunciating every word so sharply they could have been blades.

“Really?” Carnistir snorted. “Care to explain how your law-brother died, then? I was told he was executed – killed on your orders. Or does that somehow not count since you only told others to slay your kin for you, rather than doing it yourself?”

Turvo’s face was turning a truly impressive shade of red.

“Who told you that?” he demanded.

“Your nephew,” Carnistir shot back, utterly remorseless. “Not that it should matter, given how all Endōrē has heard the story.”

“Lomion?” Honest surprise dampened the flames of Turvo’s anger considerably. “When did you speak to him? In the Halls?”

Carnistir shook his head, somewhat puzzled by the almost hopeful look on Turvo’s face.

“Before the battle that became known as the Unnumbered Tears,” he replied evenly. “You brought him, remember? We all fusséd over him at dinner, and then when you decided to behave badly, Finno sent Curvo with him to check his armor. He confided in Curvo.”

Turvo snorted dismissively.

“As if I’d believe anything your brother had to say.”

“Believe it or not as you like, all I know is if he’d run into you after speaking to young Maeglin, you’d have been in the Halls before your city had a chance to fall. I’ve never seen Curvo so livid before or since. So go on, Turvo, tell me all about how clean your hands are!”

“Yes, I had that sick dark elf killed!” Turvo snapped. “He murdered Irissē!”

Carnistir rolled his eyes. As excuses went, it had good shock value, but if Curvo – who had once
been Turukano’s best friend – believed Maeglin over Turvo…

“Really.”

“You weren’t there,” Turvo hissed. “I was! He put his hands on either side of her head and…”

The pain behind the words made Carnistir wince in sympathy, even through his anger. He’d seen what the Sindar called ‘mercy’ often enough to recognize it, even if Turvo hadn’t. A swift, sharp twist of the hands just so, and the recipient walked with Lord Namo, safely beyond the reach of orcs or their masters.

The question was why.

Irissë should have been as safe as it was possible to be in Beleriand in her brother’s hidden city. Doubly so, given what Maeglin had said of his father. Mercy was only ever given as a last resort, to spare a friend or kinsperson worse. The Sindar didn’t leave any to Morgoth or his creatures if they could help it, even if the only help they could give was a quick and clean death.

“Start at the beginning, please, Turvo.”

They had both forgotten Aiko’s presence. But his calm request seemed to work – Turvo’s hands relaxed, and he didn’t answer with something rude or sarcastic as he would have if Carnistir had said it.

“Irissë returned with her boy, and her… husband trailing after her. It was plain enough she had enough of him, why else would she have returned? I’m sure she would have come sooner had he only let her – he made no secret of the fact that she shunned her kin at his command!”

Carnistir held his tongue. He’d heard Maeglin’s version from Curvo. If he listened to Turvo’s version, between the two, he might get at something that made more sense. (That didn’t make it easy to refrain from pointing out to Turvo that the idea of Irissë consistently obeying a command from anyone was enough to strain credulity all on its own.)

“I welcomed them, and introduced the boy to Rillë. They were both very excited to meet each other, and she took him to show him around the city while I spoke with Irissë and him.”

That part of the story was accurate as far as Carnistir knew.

“Once the children were away, I asked the dark elf why he had come armed into my city. The weapons were all plain enough to see – bow, axe, and knives.”

It was only with difficulty that Carnistir held his tongue – while there had been a brief period during the Watchful Peace when they might have made such a mistake, by the time of Irissë’s death no one outside of Turvo’s hidden valley or Thingol’s protected borders had travelled unarmed. Certainly not any of the Sindar. What’s more…

“You didn’t, by any chance, call him dark elf to his face, did you, Turvo?” Carnistir asked quietly.

That term was a surefire way to incite Sindarin tempers.

The flush on Turvo’s cheeks answered the question quite clearly.

“So you riled him up to the absolute best of your ability. I still don’t see how it turned out fatal for Irissë,” Carnistir said reasonably. “If anyone ended up dead, I would have expected it to be you. What happened?”
Turvo shifted about uncomfortably, which was as good as saying out loud that he hadn’t told anyone this next part.

“I took one of his knives from him, and told him carrying weapons wasn’t permitted in my city, except by those on guard duty – those I trusted.”

Not the most diplomatic move, but Carnistir still didn’t see how that ended with one cousin dead.

“He grabbed for it back, but I kept hold of it. Then Irissë tried to intervene, saying we were both behaving foolishly.”

Turvo stopped for long enough that Carnistir looked to Aiko, expecting they would have to prompt him to continue. But -

“It was only a scratch!” Turvo burst out. “She would have been fine. But he killed her for it!”

Carnistir looked at Aiko, and found that both of them were thinking the same thing – Turvo might have had Sindarin followers in his city, but he hadn’t known how the Sindar outside of it behaved. At all.

Carnistir opened his mouth, but Aiko shook his head.

“Turukano,” Aiko said gently, “you did know that it wasn’t unheard of for the Sindar to carry poisoned blades, didn’t you?”

Turvo looked as gobsmacked as if Aiko had casually announced the Sindar could fly.

“They used some pretty nasty stuff,” Carnistir added. “The idea was to make sure no orcs lived to tell their masters where they’d found elves, even if the elves weren’t going to make it home either. I don’t think they particularly worried about how unpleasant the effects would be for the orc.”

“But-” Turvo began to protest.

“Might explain why an elf who was according to his son absolutely smitten with his wife would choose to end her life quickly and painlessly.”

“Even if your ridiculous theory is right, there could have been an antidote!” Turvo snapped irritably. “He didn’t even try.”

“I suspect your granddaughter would know more, but from what I understood, the practice was to choose substances with antidotes that were difficult or impossible to find outside territory the Sindar controlled,” Aiko said grimly. “Which means any antidote would have been far enough beyond his reach to be of no use.”

Turvo looked like he would like to list all the other reasons why his law-brother’s actions had been unreasonable, unwarranted, or unjustified, if only he could think of any.

“Leave it, Turvo,” Aiko suggested gently. “Call it a misunderstanding. Was Irissë angry with you when you saw her in the Halls?”

Turvo once again looked uncomfortable.

“We didn’t really talk much,” he said quietly. “She asked for news of her son, mostly.”

“She might have been just a little put out about you having her husband killed,” Carnistir suggested.
Aiko glared at him, but Carnistir saw no point in sugaring it. Turvo had not only killed, but slandered his law-brother, to the point that the rest of the Noldor of Beleriand held him to be the worst of elves. (What the Sindar thought, he had no idea. He wondered if Tindomiel would know – and whether she would tell them if she did.)

Turvo looked mulish, but Carnistir cut him off before he could say anything foolish.

“No, Turvo, no excuses. Just stop and think about what you did,” he said sternly. “You fume endlessly about what my brothers and I did, and I don’t recall you ever being willing to hear any justification from us! I spent a lot of time in the Halls apologizing to Teleri and Noldor alike – I even apologized to your wife. Are you going to try to convince us you told Eöl you were sorry?”

The look on Turvo’s face at such a concept was downright comical.

“Didn’t think so,” Carnistir snorted. “What exactly did you do in there? Aside from talk to Irissë about her boy and brood?”

“I served my penance for my rebellion, and for my hubris in not heeding the warning Ulmo sent,” Turvo said morosely. “And Irissë was not the only one seeking news of Lomion. We all were!”

“Why did Namo let you out?” Aiko asked curiously.

“Let? He practically shoved me out the door!” Turvo snapped. “I was in no hurry to return! I accomplished nothing, saved nothing, what right did I have to return when so many others were still there? I didn’t know the fates of all my people. I didn’t even know what had become of my nephew, my daughter, or my grandson!”

Aiko looked at Carnistir with an expression that plainly asked ‘what now?’

Carnistir rolled his eyes.

“Sounds like Namo didn’t know what to do with you any more than he knew what to do with Aiko.”

_*Sounds like he went for a similar solution, too, just minus Tindomiel.*_

“That still doesn’t explain why you see so little of your family,” Aiko observed.

“I spend plenty of time with my family!” Turvo protested. “Elenwë and Itarillë are right here.”

“I think he was talking about your parents and your baby brother,” Carnistir pointed out. “You know, the one who’s alive.”

“He’s here, isn’t he?” Turvo sniffed, with a wave of his hand.

“Oh, yes, he’s here,” Carnistir agreed. “He’s here because Tindomiel’s here. He’s so firmly convinced that the best he can hope for from you is indifference that he was prepared to escort us to Tirion while she stopped here with Laurë’s girls – he had every expectation that you wouldn’t even notice he was missing.”

He bit his tongue before he could blurt out the part where Anairon had visibly perked up at Finno’s obvious and affectionate interest. That would be a low blow, even for a fight like this.

“What do you mean, the _best_ he can hope for?” Turvo demanded indignantly. “And what would you know about it anyway?”
“The boy seems to think you would rather he not exist,” Carnistir shot back, well beyond caring about sparing Turvo’s feelings by now. “And I know plenty about being an older brother, thank you. I have three little brothers – you might remember them, one of them used to be your best friend until you decided you were too good to speak to him. Funnily enough, none of them ever thought for a moment that I seriously wished they hadn’t been begotten. I don’t think your baby brother can say the same with any honesty.”
For a long moment Carnistir’s statement hung in the air between them. Judging by the look on Turvo’s face, it might be unforgivable.

Aikanaro decided he’d better intervene. Lancing the metaphorical boil was one thing; amputating the entire limb and cauterizing the stump was going too far.

“The boy did seem unusually happy to have older kinsmen spending time with him,” Aiko said mildly.

“Keep away from my little brother!” Turvo snarled at Carnistir.

For a split second, it looked as if he might revert to childhood and launch himself across the table at his older cousin. (Aikanaro was too young to have witnessed any such incidents, but he’d heard some of the stories. It had always been funny to see how Turvo and Tyelko reacted to the inevitable comparisons between them at the end of those anecdotes.)

“Why should I?” Carnistir laughed. “It’s not like you’re taking any notice of him! And someone ought to – do you realize that until Tindomiel arrived, he didn’t have any friends?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, of course he had friends,” Turvo muttered, looked uncomfortable.

“You wouldn’t know, though, would you?” Carnistir demanded, irritation written all over his face. “You don’t know the first thing about him. Name one thing he likes aside from Tindomiel – one single, solitary thing!”

Aikanaro winced at the sight of Turvo glaring furiously, his jaw working uselessly as he sought for a comeback and found he had none that he was sure enough of to use.

Carnistir didn’t let him stew very long.

“See? You can’t!” Carnistir continued. “Which is all the stupider considering you seem to have plenty of time for Laurefindil’s girls. You know your young cousins better than your own brother!”

“Tasariel and Califiriel live here!” Turvo protested. “I see them more often than not most days!”

“Anairon could bloody well live here for a while if that’s what it takes!”

“Not that it isn’t very like old times to see the two of you shouting at each other, it brings back many memories of the early years in Mithrim, but don’t you two think you should both calm down?” Aikanaro suggested reasonably. “Please let’s remember we’re back in Aman, and try to put the old quarrels behind us. Turvo, you may only say whatever is on the tip of your tongue if it doesn’t include any insults or the word ‘kinslayer’ in any form.”

Turvo gave him a remarkably sour look, but didn’t argue.

“I’m not the only one who doesn’t know things. You’re only just back, or you’d know that Mother rarely lets Anairon out of her sight – and who can blame her, given what happened to the rest of us?” he snapped. “Having him here has been out of the question until he came of age – and that’s only just recently! She never granted permission for any visit, no matter what conditions I offered, and I did ask! Not that I think it will do him much good in Tirion to associate more with me.”
“What do you mean ‘won’t do him much good in Tirion’? What’s that got to do with the price of fish in Alqualondë?” Moryo demanded irritably.

“Plenty of the Noldor who stayed look dimly on those of us who left,” Turvo snapped. “Regardless of how we went about it!”

“Oh, you mean they look at you the way you look at us? What a shame they couldn’t see the gaping moral distinction between us from such a distance.”

“Enough, Moryo!”

Aikanaro couldn’t see how re-opening the debate about Alqualondë would end well, even assuming Turvo had accepted that he too classed among the kinslayers.

“But I can’t say I follow your thinking, Turvo,” Aikanaro sighed. “If your idea is that staying away from him is better for Anairon, it makes little sense to me. Assuming what you say is accurate, anyone who would think less of young Anairon for associating with you probably doesn’t think very well of your father either. And Anairon is very definitely your father’s son. No one could look at him and think otherwise.”

Or listen to him, for that matter – anyone who had interacted with Uncle Nolo in anything more than a superficial public capacity would recognize quite a bit of him in his youngest child.

But he wasn’t so sure that Turukano was being realistic about attitudes in Tirion – neither Tindomiel nor Anairon (who Aikanaro suspected would be able to give the most accurate description of the current political landscape of Tirion) had mentioned any such thing.

“Which is what I told my parents when I discovered they’d been so thoughtless,” Turvo said morosely. “How could they bring another child into such a mess? Especially when none of it is his fault! He shouldn’t have to suffer for what we did.”

Carnistir pinched the bridge of his nose as if looking pained by Turvo’s singular brand of logic.

Aikanaro didn’t usually in such tense situations, but he risked a quick brush against Moryo’s mind. Trust Turvo to pick the most asinine possible way of showing concern for his baby brother.

He tried not to sigh.

He supposed keeping away from Anairon did make a sort of twisted sense – much the same sort of sense that had led Turvo to conclude that hiding himself and his people away would keep them safe. Unfortunately, given that Moryo had just rather effectively driven home to Turvo the point that he was just as guilty of kinslaying as any Fëanorion, he suspected talking Turvo out of his odd ‘logic’ wasn’t going to be easy. Without meaning to, they’d given him another reason to stay away.

“Turvo,” he began cautiously. “Don’t you think that’s just a little unreasonable? In any case, you have a younger brother who needed you. You might have stayed in Tirion until he was a bit older.”

“I would have like to. But Rillë and Elenwë had put so much work into building this city, and everyone was expecting me here… Besides, Ingo was there, and Ingo was the most blameless of us. The only slaying Ingo did was things we were meant to be slaying in the first place – orcs and werewolves and such. It’s why he was returned to life so quickly.”

“Ingo is not Anairon’s brother, you great lunkhead!” Carnistir snapped. “I’m beginning to think you left your brain in Beleriand. Did you run this nonsense past Ingo, or just sneak off and hope he’d
work out that you were expecting him to step in for you?”

*I will bet every bloody jewel your brother trekked across the thrice bedamned Ice he didn’t – Ingo would have done him a favor and told him how ridiculous he sounded! Or is he on the outs with Ingo as well as Curvo now?*

“I do not sneak!”

“Moryo, please?” Aikanaro said patiently, unsure how to respond to both the spoken and the unspoken at once.

He found himself deliberately imitating Ingo’s trick of growing calmer the more unreasonable everyone around him got.

“Turvo, I grant he’s rude about it, but the gist of what Moryo’s saying is right – Anairon needed a brother, not a cousin. Particularly not a cousin who seems to spend a good deal of time elsewhere from what Tindomiel says.”

“I’ll spend more time with him! It’s easier now in any case – he’s of age, he can come and go as he likes. I don’t need to persuade Mother anymore. I can invite Anairon directly and he’ll come if he wants to.”

Turvo didn’t seem in any way put out, only puzzled why they were making such a fuss.

“It’s not going to do Anairon any good if it looks like you’re doing this out of duty,” Moryo told him waringly. “If he thinks you’re only paying attention because we told you to, you’ll make everything worse.”

Foremost in Moryo’s mind was how painful it had been to see how surprised and heart-breakingly eager Anairon had been at the attention from his eldest brother.

“Enough,” Aikanaro said firmly. “Turvo will try his best. We can’t ask more than that.”

Turvo nodded, though he was still glaring at Moryo.

“And the Kinslaying?” Moryo demanded.

“What do you expect me to do?” Turvo growled. “Announce to all Aman you think I’m a Kinslayer?”

“Tell all Aman the truth,” Moryo shot back. “I can’t see where you have much choice about it, really. Irissë and her husband will return sooner or later. How do you think she’ll take finding out that you never bothered to set the record straight? Not only have you been lying to everyone all this time, have you thought at all about what an awkward position your cock and bull story puts Tindomiel and her family in?”

Turvo was so surprised that he dropped the glare.

“How do you mean?” he asked in confusion.

“Eöl was related to Thingol, wasn’t he? That makes him kin to Tindomiel through both her parents,” Moryo replied in a tone that said it should have been obvious.

“He has a point,” Aikanaro confirmed. “Her father is a descendant of Luthien. Her mother is Celeborn’s daughter. Eöl would be some degree of cousin to both of them.”
“I wonder what Thingol’s people make of your story?” Moryo wondered. “I mean, I know he wasn’t on good terms with the man, but Curvo pegged Eöl as competent and well-liked by his own people. I imagine at least a few of them would be in a position to know how he treated his wife…”

“For that matter, wouldn’t Artë have some idea?” Aikanaro asked, having only just realized it himself. “She was in Doriath all those years. She might well have visited Irissë in Nan Elmoth.”

“Or Irissë might have visited her in Doriath,” Moryo added. “Thingol banned us Noldor, but she married one of his kin. It would be a bit rude to tell his nephew or grand-nephew or whatever he was he couldn’t bring his wife to get-togethers, surely?”

“But…” Turvo looked crestfallen.

“It’s not as bad as you think, telling everyone you screwed up,” Moryo told him kindly. “Once you’ve admitted it to yourself, it’s not so hard to say it to other people. Especially if they already know anyway.”

Some of the spark returned to Turvo.

“Easy for you to say.”

“I’m not sure what part of taking responsibility for my mistakes you think was easy,” Moryo said, raising an eyebrow.

“You don’t have a child or grandchildren,” Turvo said morosely. “You don’t have to see the look on their face when you tell them.”

Aikanaro glanced at Moryo, but to his surprise, for once Moryo didn’t seem inclined to correct Turvo.

“He has a son.”

All three of them jumped at the somewhat peevish correction.

Turning, Aikanaro could just catch Tindomiel out of the corner of his eye, folded into a comfortable sitting position next to the sideboard - which put her low enough not to be obvious until they looked. He started to wonder how she’d managed to slip back in so quietly before he realized that if she could walk through walls in Mandos, normal walls probably didn’t present much of a challenge. He didn’t imagine Turvo wanted to start the truth-telling process with his young granddaughter.

“Tindomiel, come out from under there,” Turvo said, for once not the jolly, indulgent grandfather. “You are supposed to be in the House of the Wing.”

“Gran Itarillë and Pop-Pop said I had to go there, they didn’t say I had to stay there,” Tindomiel pointed out reasonably.

She didn’t need to add the glaringly obvious ‘so I didn’t.’

“How long have you been listening in?” Aikanaro asked, beginning to feel like he was talking to a more incorrigible version of his little sister.

“Long enough to hear that there’s a reason the part of the history books about Uncle Eöl and Aunt Aredhel was so confusing,” Tindomiel replied with a slight frown. “I mean, no one from Doriath would have routinely carried javelins, but poisoned knives kinda makes sense.”
“Do they still use them?” Moryo asked.

Tindomiel shrugged.

“I don’t think so,” she said slowly. “Most of what I know comes from my brothers and sisters, and Anariel wouldn’t have bothered with anything like that. She doesn’t need it. But I don’t think anyone else does either. Orcs weren’t much of a problem for the first half of the Third Age, and by the time they were, there weren’t nearly as many elves around.”

“Meaning what?” Aikanaro asked, not seeing the connection.

“Meaning there was a shift in tactics, on both sides. Sauron more or less knew where all the elven realms were, there weren’t really hidden kingdoms anymore. And pretty much no one travelled alone – elves moved in groups, usually with trained scouts and trackers. So the knives of last resort weren’t as useful anymore, and definitely weren’t worth the risk. I mean, Aunt Aredhel can’t have been the only one to have a fatal oopsie.”

Moryo visibly winced at the girl casually describing Irissë’s death ‘a fatal oopsie’, but Turvo appeared to take it in stride.

“You heard the story. Do you think Irissë will forgive me?” Turvo asked his granddaughter.

Aikanaro was fairly sure Moryo was as curious as he was what she would say – this was a prime opportunity to reveal that she could speak to Irissë…

Tindomiel shrugged.

“I don’t know. I’m not her. But I don’t think I could be too mad at my brothers if they reacted badly to somebody killing me in front of them. Losing people is hard, and shock or grief can make you do things you normally wouldn’t.”

Aikanaro was startled at the girl’s surprisingly mature understanding, until he remembered that she had been begotten and spent most of her life on the Hither Shores. Despite her youth, she might well speak from experience.

“Even if they killed your husband in retaliation?” Turvo asked wryly.

“I’m not married, so I don’t know an answer to that either,” Tindomiel replied after a moment. “But I think it would depend a lot on whether or not they were sorry and weren’t going to do something so incredibly dumb again.”

Turvo nodded, taking the not so subtle hint – as well as accepting the judgement. Tindomiel’s analysis would carry more weight with him than nearly any other. (The only others whose verdict might matter as much were all in her family line.)

Aiko gave Tindomiel a look.

She shrugged almost imperceptibly.

*My brothers wouldn’t kill another elf, except maybe the way Eöl did. The way they were raised, the taboo on kinslaying is too strong. So it’s kind of a weird thought exercise in the first place. But I don’t think he needs to hear that.*

Aikanaro almost let it drop, but he realized one thing…
What about your sister? he asked.

Tindomiel’s lips twitched, but whether to smile or to grimace, he wasn’t sure.

Anariel’s not just another story, she’s in a completely different section of the library. Save that thought for another time.

“So,” Tindomiel asked out loud, “does that mean you’re going to come with us to Tirion, Grandpa? Since we’re definitely going there as soon as possible to take Uncle Aiko and Uncle Moryo to see their parents?”

Between the hopeful way she’d said it and the suddenly huge puppydog eyes she turned on him, there was really only one answer Turukano could possibly give.

“I believe I will,” Turvo replied.

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